

HUMBOLDT KOSMOS

Research - Diplomacy -  Internationality

DEUTSCHE
VERSION:
BITTE
WENDEN

Typical!

Germany from the outside

EXPECTED

How cultural conditioning defines our perceptions

UNEXPECTED

Why German bureaucracy is better than its reputation

WILLKOMMEN



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ABOVE IT ALL

That's me on the climbing wall at the 2018 Paraclimbing World Championships in Innsbruck. For the second time in succession, I took the world title in the AL-2 category. This stands for "athletes with an amputated leg or leg deficiency". Just a few weeks ago, I was able to defend my title in Briançon. It was quite overwhelming! I fight the wall just as I previously fought cancer. And I beat the wall just as I beat cancer. Thanks to climbing and my own biography, I've become someone who never gives up, wants to be right up at the top and enjoys every moment of life.

I come from the small French commune of Monflanquin in Nouvelle-Aquitaine, some 160 kilometres south-east of Bordeaux. Before I was diagnosed with bone cancer at the age of fifteen and had to have my left leg amputated above the knee, I was a swimmer. I only started climbing six years or so ago. When I moved to Paris to take a Master's, I met lots of new people, including the chairman of a climbing club. He encouraged me to go to the climbing centre and simply have a go. Even with one leg. So, I did have a go and was immediately hooked. In Paris, just three years later in 2016, I became the paraclimbing world champion for the first time.

If you survive cancer you grow up very quickly. Before I got ill, I wanted to be a pharmacist and help people by selling them medicine. But then I had to spend a long time in hospital and talked to many people – doctors, nurses,

caregivers – about my choice of profession. They were very important, revealing conversations because they helped me realise that I was actually more interested in research, that I wanted to develop drugs to improve people's health. That was the moment I decided to become a chemist.

I worked long and hard to prepare for the World Championships. After working 10 to 12 hours in the lab, I'd spend another four hours at the climbing centre. When things really heated up before the event, I went there for five or six times a week. That meant pretty long days, but I didn't mind. I love science and I love my sport. They are my life!

If at all possible, I dream of taking part in the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris. And of winning a medal. ●

Recorded by **MAREIKE ILSEMANN**

The French pharmaceutical scientist **DR LUCIE JARRIGE** is a Humboldt Research Fellow at Philipps-University Marburg. She investigates how light can help to transform molecules without producing harmful side effects. Green chemistry is close to Lucie Jarrige's heart.

Photo: Humboldt Foundation / David Ausserhofer



Dear readers,

Progressive, science-friendly, tolerant, with a sense of humour, no less – that is how the Humboldt Foundation’s fellows experience Germany. In this edition, we present the results of a survey conducted over the last six years involving 1,800 visiting researchers from abroad.

The German research landscape can hold its own internationally. The freedom and material opportunities in Germany spark an enthusiastic response from our sponsorship recipients. But there are points of criticism, about bureaucracy, language barriers and the way we promote junior researchers. And social integration leaves quite a lot to be desired, too, they note, despite the hospitality they experience.

Much has to do with where people come from and their own perspectives. How do visiting researchers rate Germany when they compare conditions here with their own countries? Are the working hours better than in Japan and the United States? Is it easier to have a successful career in Germany than in the UK? How do postdocs from China or Arab countries experience the hierarchies at German universities and labs; what do they expect from their professors? And how do expectations and cultural habits shape people’s judgement? We tackle these latter issues here as well.

Happy reading!

GEORG SCHOLL

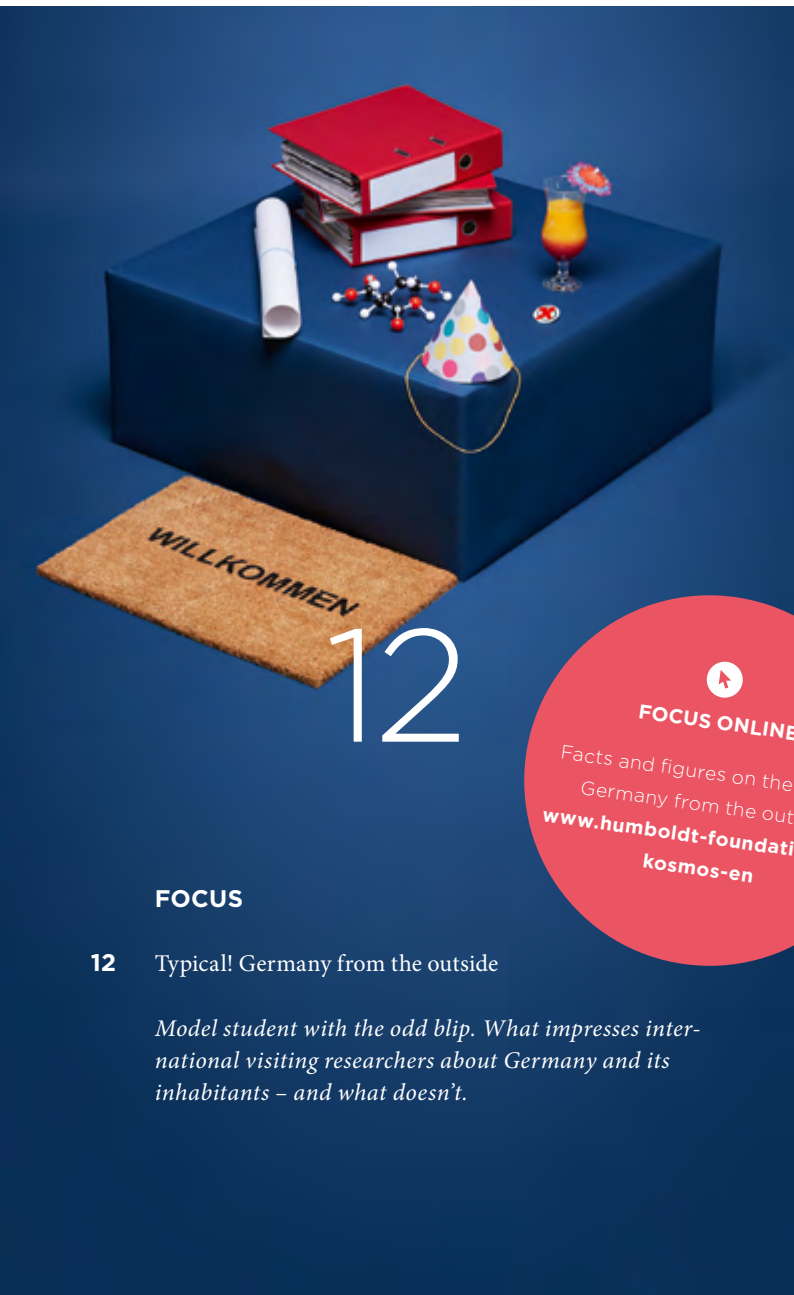
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Photo: Humboldt Foundation / Constantin Mirbach



WHICH TREE HAS THE GREATEST COOLING EFFECT IN SUMMER, MR RAHMAN?

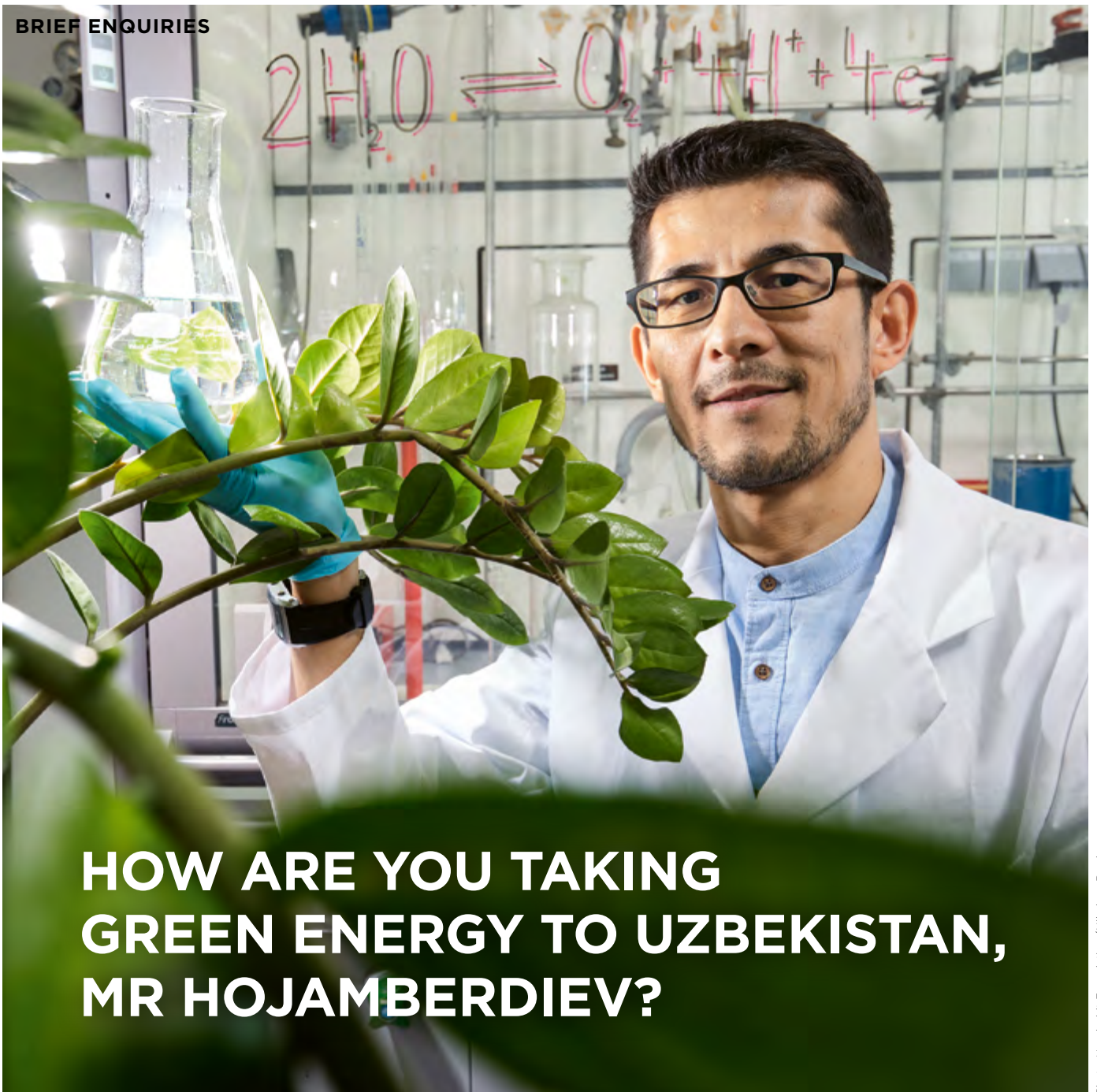
When it gets too hot in street canyons in summer, many city dwellers head for the parks. No wonder: it can be up to five degrees cooler there than in the concrete jungle. The greenery works like air conditioning. But which trees have the greatest cooling effect? Plant ecologist Mohammad Rahman is in Munich trying to find out.

Trees could play an important role in preparing cities for global warming. Which tree has the greatest cooling effect is, however, difficult to determine, according to Rahman. “It depends on the surroundings.” Essentially, the tree’s water requirements are decisive. Rahman’s team investigated this by focusing on two tree species; both are common in German cities, but one is much thirstier than the other: the small-leaved lime and the black locust. Whilst the lime has a dense crown with large leaves and a correspondingly high water requirement, the black locust with its smaller leaves and thinner crown manages on half to a fifth of the same amount.

A tree’s cooling effect has two components: the shade it gives and the cooling produced by evaporation into the air. The lime provides more shade and produces more evaporation chill than the black locust, but it also draws a lot of water from the surrounding soil, leaving less for the grass in the park which, in turn, also has a cooling effect. As Rahman’s studies show, under the same water conditions, the tree will transpire less than the grass. So, when it comes to the microclimate, that is, creating shade for people and asphalted areas, his recommendation for urban planners is to choose the lime. In parks, on the other hand, where the trees are surrounded by grass, the combination of grass and black locust generates greater cooling. The same is true of other very thirsty tree species like the horse chestnut tree and the beech or less thirsty ones like the oak. ●

Text JAN BERNDORFF

Until March 2018, **DR MOHAMMAD RAHMAN** from Bangladesh was a Humboldt Research Fellow at the Technical University of Munich and is now continuing his research there at the Chair for Strategic Landscape Planning and Management.



HOW ARE YOU TAKING GREEN ENERGY TO UZBEKISTAN, MR HOJAMBERDIEV?

Photo: Humboldt Foundation/Nikolaus Brade

Uzbekistan wants to establish renewable energies. But the country is short on expertise. Materials researcher Mirabbos Hojamberdiev has the knowledge required: he develops promising solar technologies which could become a model for other places, too.

With more than 300 days of sunshine per year, Uzbekistan is predestined for solar energy. So far, approximately 90 percent of its energy needs are covered by fossil fuels. This is now supposed to change: by 2030, the government intends to set up solar plants that will generate enough power to meet more than a tenth of the nation's energy needs.

But the sun is not just supposed to deliver power. Hojamberdiev investigates methods for photocatalytic water splitting, a technique that employs sunlight to divide water into hydrogen and oxygen with the help of special oxynitride materials. Electricity – indispensable in standard electrolysis – is rendered dispensable. This makes it possible

to produce hydrogen from renewable sources and use it as an energy carrier. And, in addition, the technique can be used to clean up the environment. Together with researchers and students at the University of Dar es Salaam, Hojamberdiev demonstrated this in Tanzania at the end of 2017. “We managed to remove organic pollutants from the waters of a river near Arusha.” They are now looking to eliminate inorganic pollutants, too. “I hope my work will help to solve the world's energy and environmental problems and build a sustainable society.” ●

Text JAN BERNDORFF

DR MIRABBOS HOJAMBERDIEV, former Humboldt Research Fellow, from Turin Polytechnic University in Tashkent received the Humboldt Foundation's Georg Forster Research Award in 2017. He is currently pursuing his research at Technische Universität Berlin.

WHAT DOES A CAVE BEAR'S JAWBONE TELL US, MS VAN HETEREN?



Photo: Humboldt Foundation / Constantin Mirbach

Anneke van Heteren has a penchant for skeletons. She studies bones to investigate the lifestyle of extinct mammals. Cave bears, which lived more than 25,000 years ago, are the palaeontologist's special field. She thinks the bears were herbivorous.

During the Late Pleistocene, a warm period was followed by an ice age. At the time, two species of bear were living in Europe: the omnivorous brown bear and the now-extinct cave bear. Ever since the first cave bear fossils were discovered, researchers have been debating what the animals fed on. In order to answer this question, Anneke van Heteren has been measuring the jawbones and skulls of cave bears and living bears today and comparing the data. Known as geometric morphometrics, this method has shown that the lower jaw of cave bears and pandas developed quite similarly in the course of evolution. "This suggests that cave bears had the

same kind of diet as pandas, and that they were vegetarians," says van Heteren.

"Knowing what cave bears ate is important if you want to understand why they became extinct," she says. It was probably not just a lack of plant food but human beings in combination with climate change. This kind of knowledge, she believes, helps us to take action against today's species extinction. "We can't change the panda's nutrition," says the palaeontologist, "but we can influence the causes that are induced by the climate and humans." ● Text **KRISTIN HÜTTMANN**

From 2013 to 2015, **DR ANNEKE VAN HETEREN** was a Humboldt Research Fellow at the University of Bonn. She is now in charge of the section Mammalogy at the Bavarian State Collection of Zoology in Munich.

HOW CAN YOU SENSITISE SIRI, MS GAŠIĆ?



Photo: Humboldt Foundation/Mats Karlsson

Thanks to modern dialogue systems like Alexa and Siri, computers have become our everyday helpers: on voice command they deliver information, operate stereo equipment, switch the lights on and even tell jokes. But they do it without a trace of emotion – a normal conversation is impossible. Milica Gašić from Serbia wants to change that.

“Siri, who is Helene Fischer for heaven’s sake?” The response from the digital assistant in our smartphone is quite prosaic: a German pop singer. She ignores the underlying irritation in our voice. Irony, sadness and enthusiasm are also lost on her. Nor is she a dab hand at deep conversation.

Because that requires empathy – the conversation partner must be able to sense emotions and respond to them. “A system could recognise emotions by the sound of the voice or choice of words,” says Milica Gašić.

To deduce emotions from the choice of words – this is what Gašić wants to teach the systems: apart from encyclopaedic knowledge, the AI researcher feeds in recordings of conversations between real people. A statistical model evaluates the connections between choice of words and the interlocutor’s response. This enables the system to develop answers that are emotionally appropriate. “Conversations should become more human; the systems shouldn’t only provide information but also impart a positive feeling,” says Gašić. ●

Text JAN BERNDORFF

The Sofja Kovalevskaja Award Winner **PROFESSOR MILICA GAŠIĆ** spent three months working at Saarland University and now holds the Chair in Dialog Systems and Machine Learning at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf.

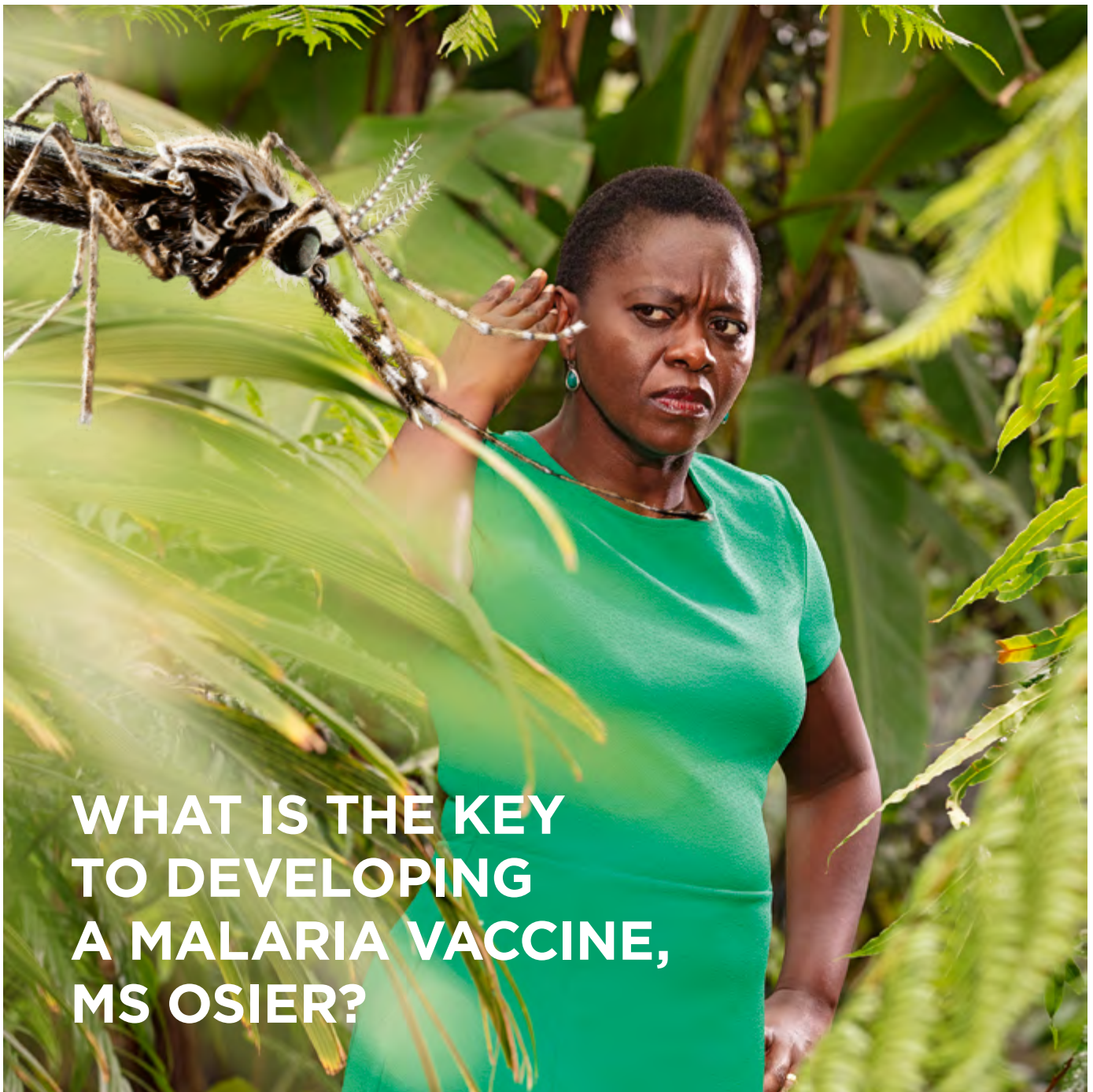


Photo: Humboldt Foundation / David Spaeth

WHAT IS THE KEY TO DEVELOPING A MALARIA VACCINE, MS OSIER?

Very early on, the Kenyan Faith Osier dreamt of developing a vaccine to combat malaria. Every year in Africa, more than 400,000 people die of the infectious disease, which is caused by single-cell parasites and transmitted by mosquitos.

The focus of Faith Osier's research is the natural immunity to malaria that people can develop. That is why she and her team in seven African countries examine the blood and antibody response of test subjects who, having contracted malaria once, never suffer from it again.

The researchers also study malaria parasites during the various phases of their development. They have identified numerous proteins in the protozoa which malaria researchers had not yet considered. Now they want to investigate in detail how antibodies help to combat these proteins.

One thing is already clear: the malaria parasite is a particularly tough opponent because different proteins are active in every phase of its life. They offer many potential points of attack for the body's own immune system. Specialists speak of antigens. "We have to put various antigens in an effective vaccine," says Osier, "so that our bodies use these antigens to form appropriate antibodies that can fight the parasite."

It will still take quite a while before the first vaccines can be manufactured. "But we are making progress and are really hopeful." ●

Text KRISTIN HÜTTMANN

DR FAITH H. A. OSIER is a Sofja Kovalevskaja Award Winner heading a research group at the German Centre for Infection Research at Heidelberg University Hospital.

**RIND-
FLEISCH-
ETIKETTIERUNGS-
ÜBERWACHUNGS-
AUFGABEN-
ÜBERTRAGUNGS-
GESETZ**

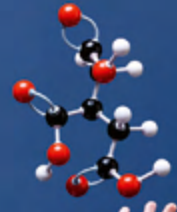


sense of humour

progressive

tolerant & democratic

gender equitable



science-friendly

language barrier

doesn't work excessive hours

child-friendly

bureaucratic



hospitable, but not very open



WILLKOMMEN

GERMANY FROM THE OUTSIDE

The place, the people and academic life: after their stay, Humboldt Fellows complete an evaluation sheet. Read about the marks they award Germany.

If you are granted a Humboldt Fellowship and spend time working on research in Germany, you are bound to form an opinion about the way academia works at German universities and research institutes, and you will also get to know the country and its people: How open and tolerant are Germans towards their guests? What about their sense of humour? Are people here progressive, bureaucratic, hospitable? How well-equipped are the labs and the libraries? And what about working hours, childcare and junior researchers' career prospects?

These are the questions the Humboldt Foundation asks its sponsorship recipients at the end of their fellowship. Researchers from all over the world assess how they and their families have experienced the 18 months the average fellow spends here during their research stay. The survey invites open comments, not least on how Germany compares with the fellow's own country.

The evaluation "Germany from the outside" collates the results of the surveys conducted in the last six years from 2013 to 2018 and evaluates the responses of a total of more than 1,800 Humboldt visiting researchers from over 140 countries. The results show that Germany and its science system are largely perceived very positively and also hold their own internationally.

Depending on where the respondents come from, however, there are points of criticism. ●

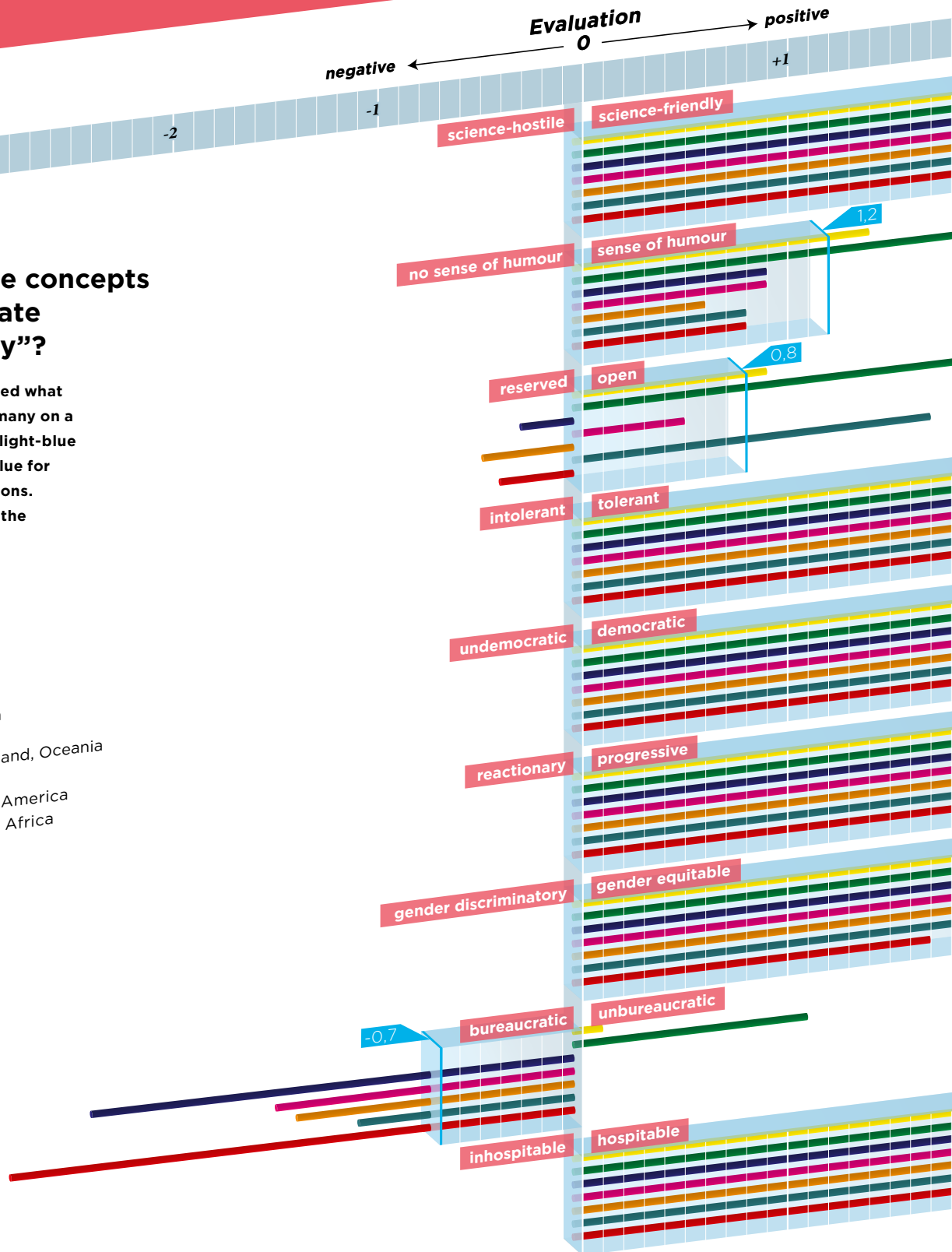
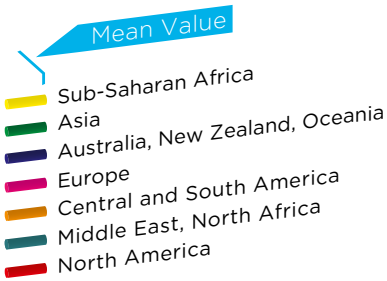
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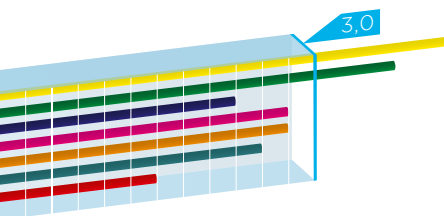
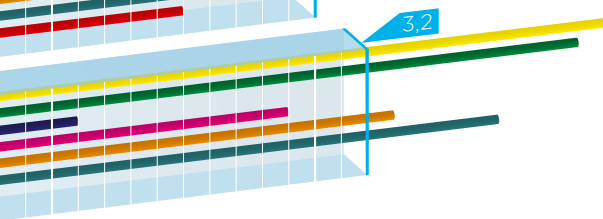
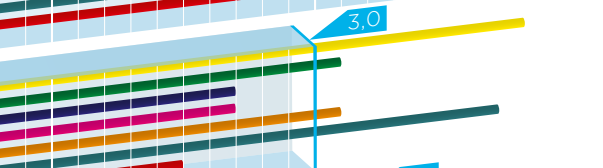
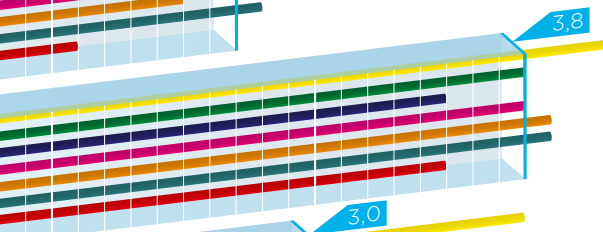
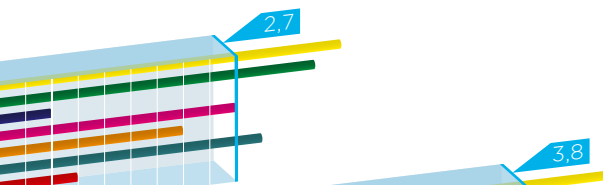
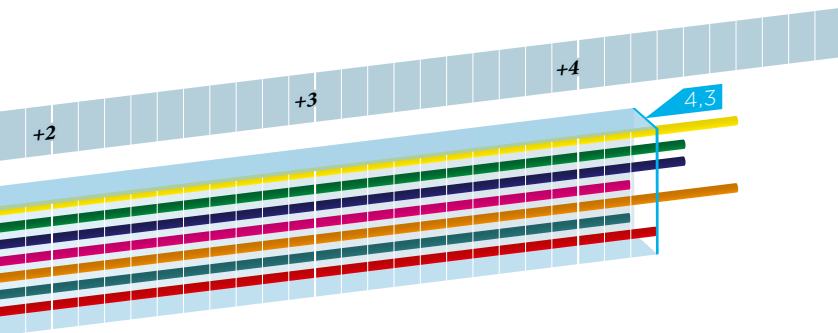
At the end of the fellowship period, the Foundation asks its sponsorship recipients to provide feedback on their research stay in Germany online. They evaluate various aspects of their stay on a given scale and, in some cases, are able to add free comments, as well. All responses are anonymised for the purpose and the comments are evaluated using qualitative content analysis. Over 95 percent of those sponsored in the last six years completed the survey. The results thus reflect a comprehensive, representative picture of Germany as seen through the eyes of the Foundation's fellows.

Germany: Pro science, progressive, tolerant and even humorous. If only it weren't for the bureaucracy.

Which of these concepts do you associate with "Germany"?

The participants evaluated what they associate with Germany on a scale from +5 to -5. The light-blue base shows the mean value for evaluations from all regions. The coloured bars show the ratings by region.





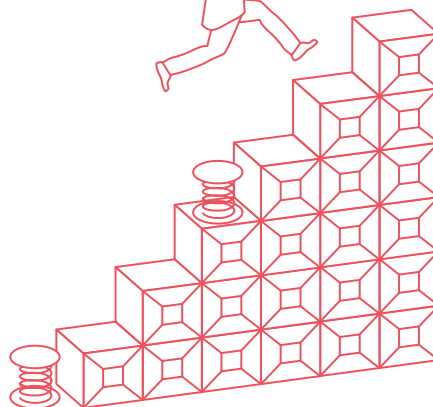
I'm very impressed by the openness of the university landscape in Germany. Education and science have a high standing. The fact that German science and the universities are largely uncommercialised is very pleasant."

(m / Australia)



Good facilities and funding in Germany. It was instrumental in my career progression and opened up many opportunities for me and my partner (in publishing) for which I shall be ever grateful."

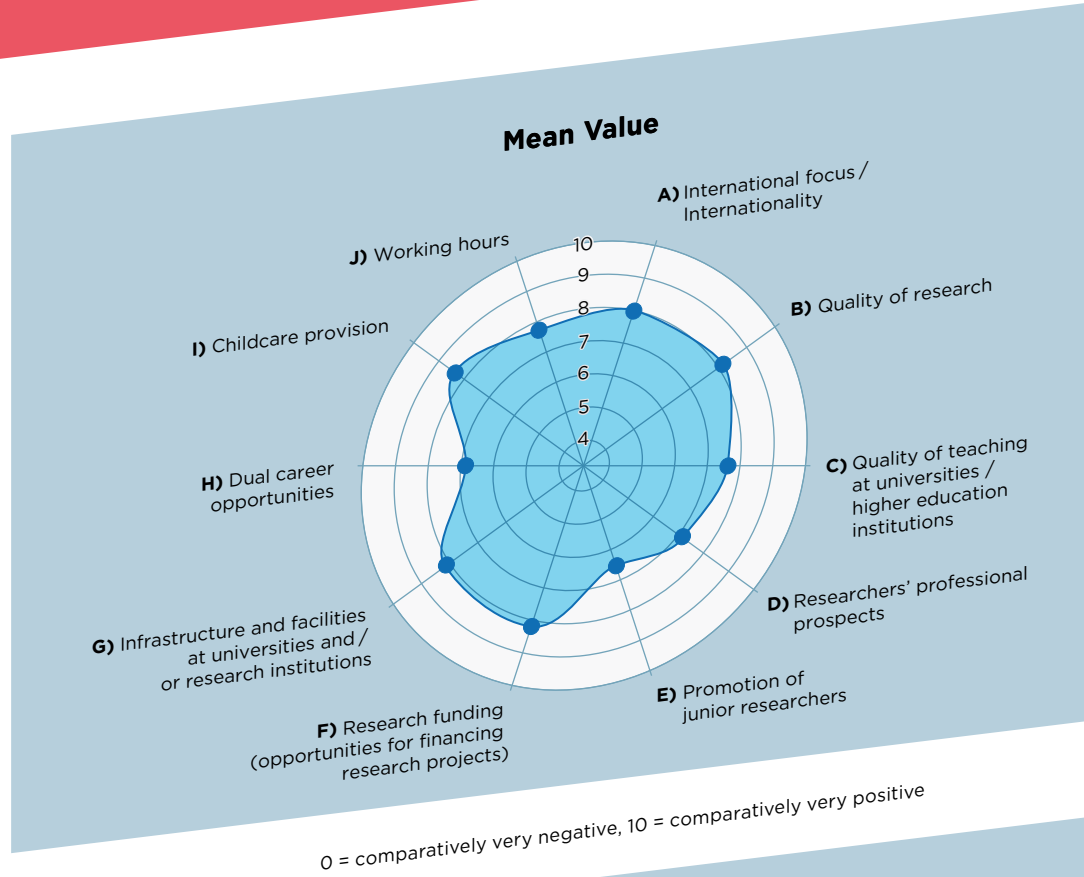
(m / UK)



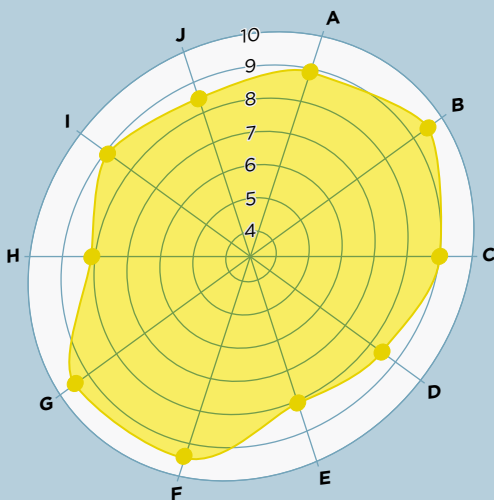
Research: Quality and financing: top! But who takes care of young talents?

How do you rate Germany as a research location in comparison with your home country?

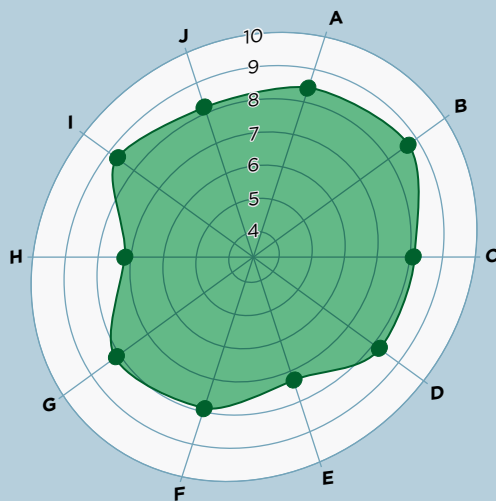
In comparison with other parts of the world, Germany is largely rated positively - with clear differences in some cases depending on whether the respondents come from Africa or North America, for instance. Despite these divergencies, everyone is agreed on the fields in which Germany is strong, such as infrastructure, and weak, such as dual career opportunities and promoting junior researchers.



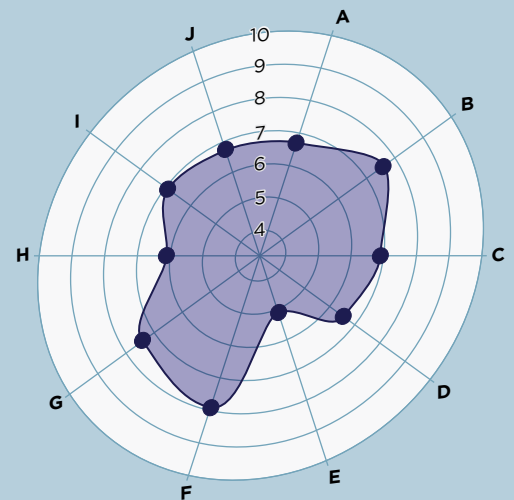
Sub-Saharan Africa



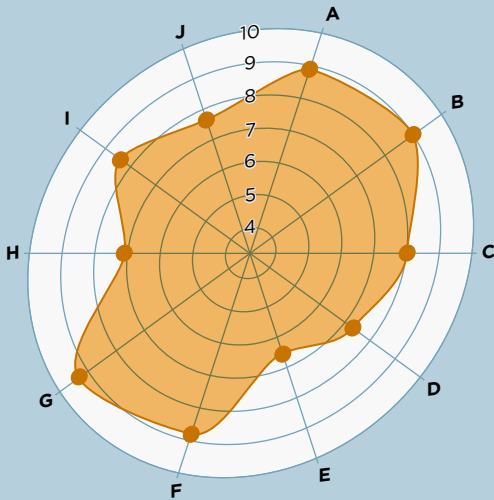
Asia



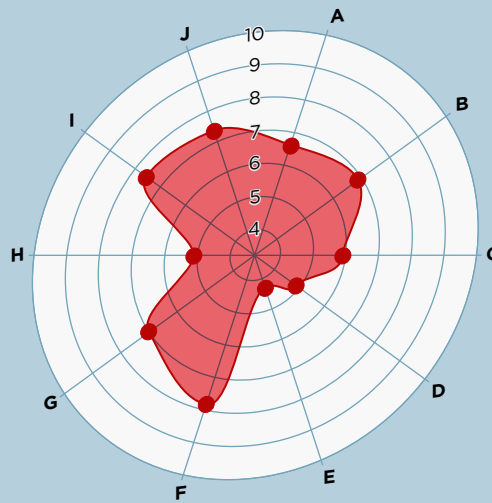
Australia, New Zealand, Oceania



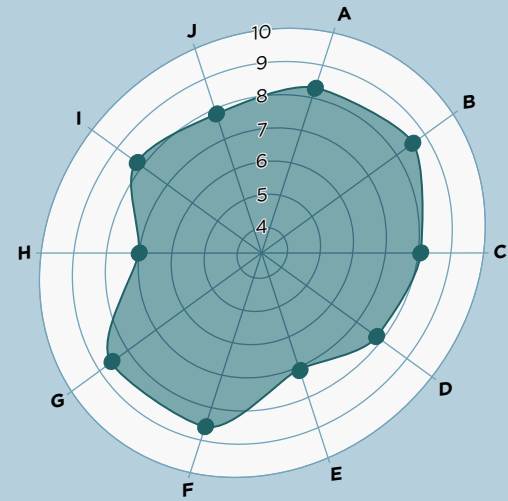
Central and South America



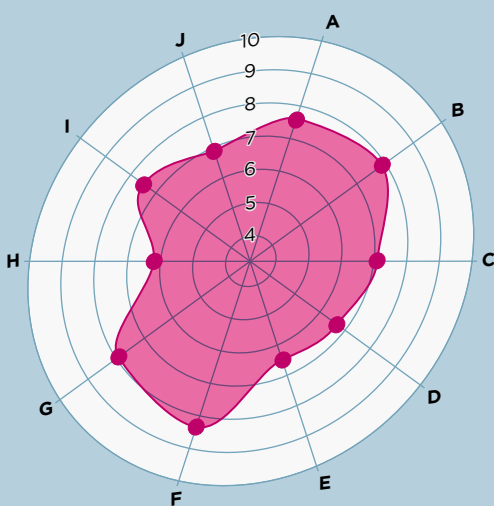
North America



Middle East, North Africa



Europe



“

For the first time, I've had decent work conditions (and realized that I have terrible work conditions in my country). I could focus on my research without worrying if there would be money to keep going in the next month.”



(w/ Brazil)

Careers and workload: A question of perspective.

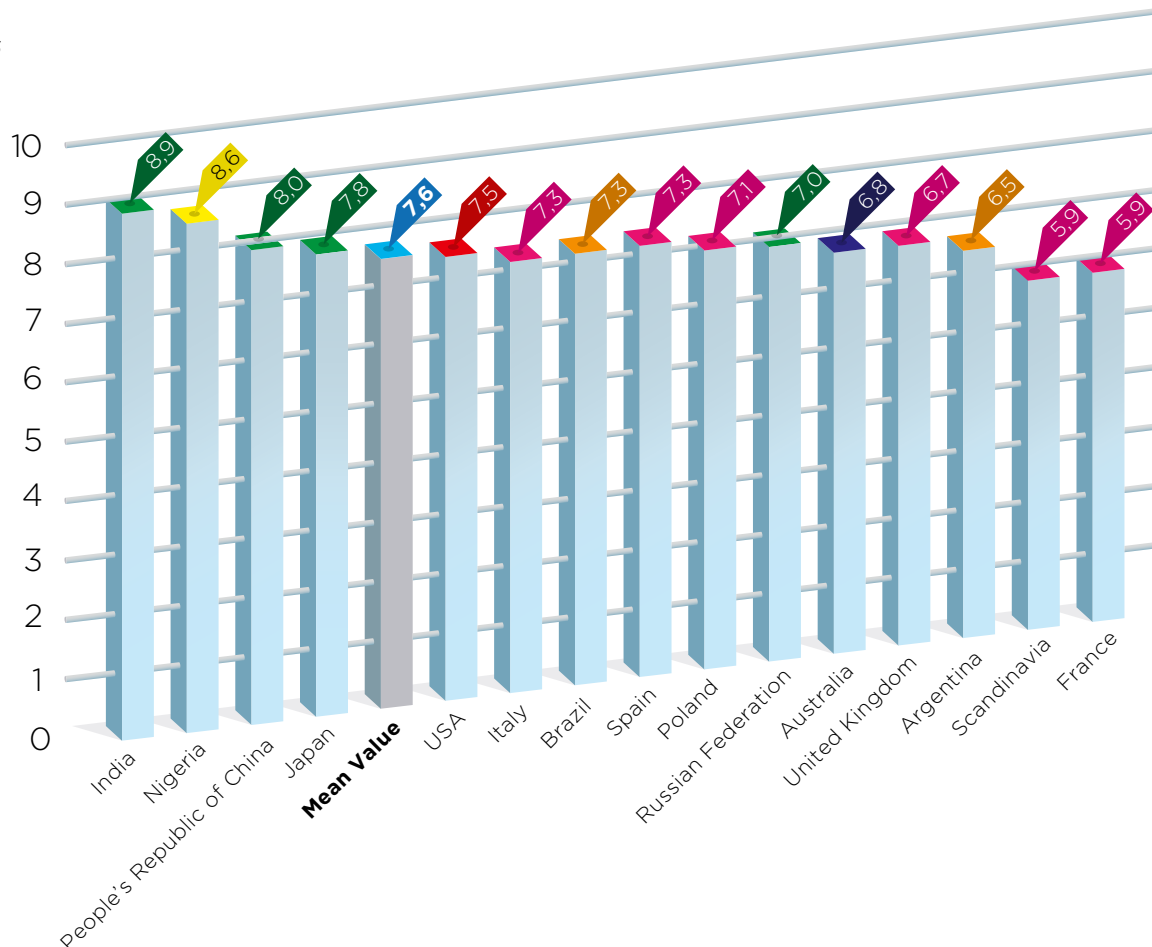
Based on your experiences, how would you rate the following aspects of Germany as a research location compared with your home country?

The answers to this question differ enormously depending on the country of comparison. Japanese and American researchers think working hours are better than at home. French and British researchers consider professional opportunities to be worse here whilst their Chinese and Italian colleagues think they are better. All in all, Germany largely performs favourably, although there is room for improvement in comparison with certain countries.

Working hours

very positive
by comparison

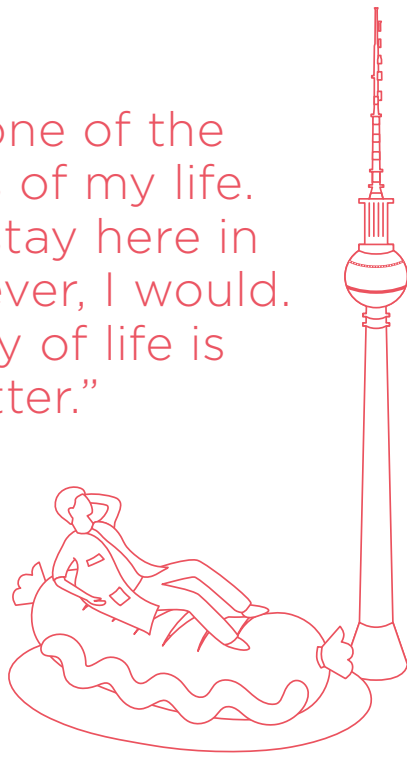
very negative
by comparison



“

This was one of the best years of my life. If I could stay here in Berlin forever, I would. The quality of life is simply better.”

(m/USA)



“

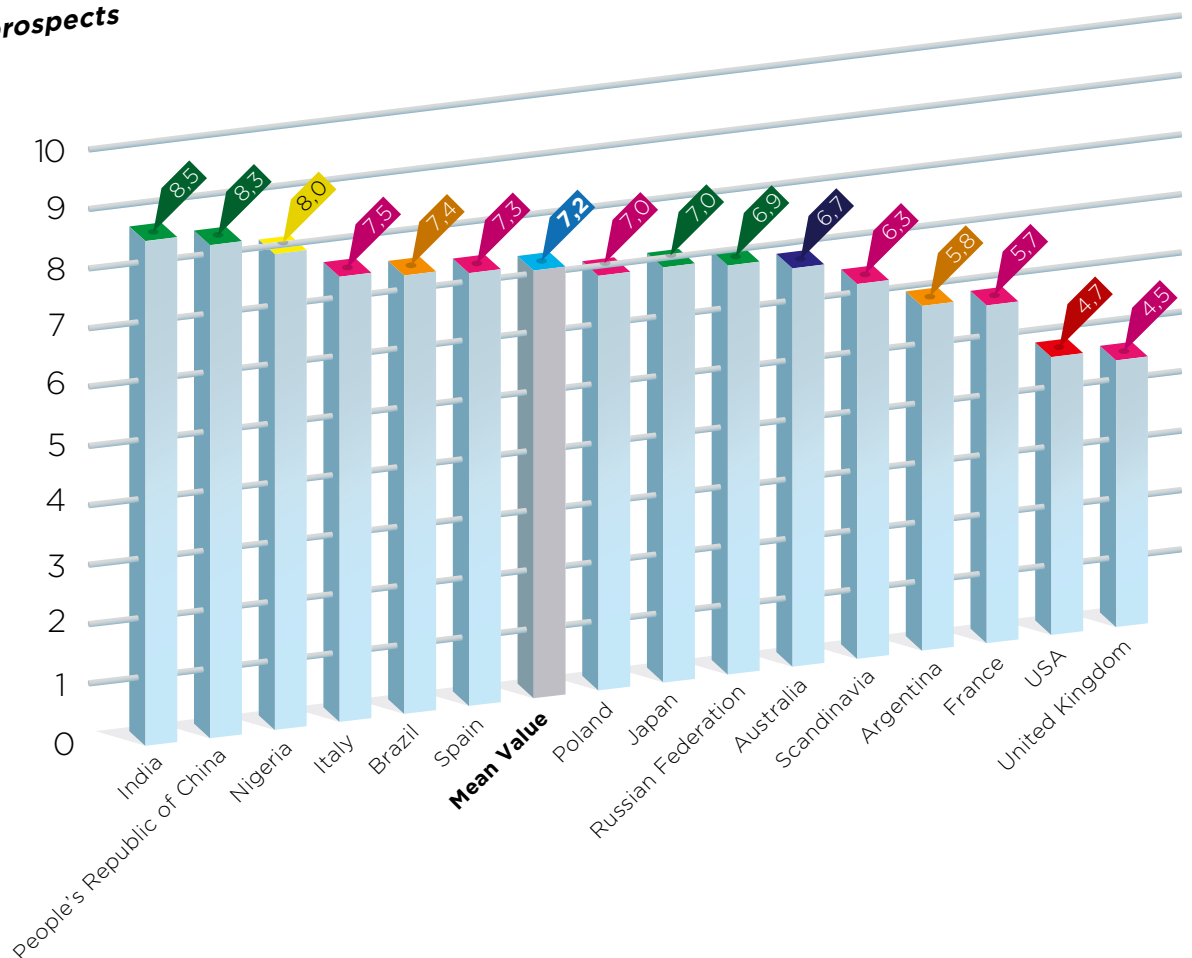
I also could experience how women are less favoured in German science, even though they claim gender equality.”

(w/Brazil)

Professional prospects for academics

very positive by comparison

very negative by comparison



“Because everything is strictly regulated by rules and contracts, everything in the country works pretty perfectly. Chaos kicks in if something unexpected occurs. But only then.”
(M / SPAIN)

“The current political situation in Germany, with the rise of the far right, was a difficult reality to face during this year. I myself faced some racist comments and although I wasn't harmed, I felt rather unsafe in some situations and grew a bit insecure about my place in German society.” (m / Nigeria)

“**AND THE BRATWURST... OH YES! I'M GOING TO MISS BRATWURST ABOVE ALL, I'M NOT SURE HOW I'M GOING TO MANAGE TO CONTINUE MY LIFE WITHOUT THEM.**”
(M / ARGENTINA)

“Also, having lived in the UK before, as a comparison, customer services are poorer in Germany and people make less effort to be polite with customers.” (m / Romania)

“DURING DAILY LIFE, MANY PEOPLE ARE WARM-HEART AND ALSO HELPFUL, ALL OUR COLLEAGUES ARE SO NICE TO US AND HELP US ON EVERY ASPECTS, SO WE ENJOYED OUR LIFE HERE SO MUCH.” (M / CHINA)

“Possibly the worst experience in Germany was the search for the apartment. I spent a whole month of my time doing this.”
(m / Russian Federation)

“I ESPECIALLY LOVED THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN GERMANY - DEUTSCHE BAHN IS THE BEST TRANSPORT IN THE WORLD!”
(m / India)

“

Deutsche Bahn is the best in the world!”

From food and culture via local transport and rents to the atmosphere in society and at universities: what the survey respondents particularly wanted to express. A selection.

“*Children's performance at school depends a lot on parental involvement. In our case, with both parents having such work-intensive jobs, this was a problem, even with a hardworking child.*”
(w / Russian Federation)



“The antimigrant demonstration that takes place regularly near my apartment in Leipzig was a serious source of concern to me as I fear for the safety of my family every time the demonstrations are taking place.” (m / Nigeria)

“The lack of adaptation in the academic system to promote international young group leaders (lack of tenure track positions, lack of hiring early stage international researchers for group leader positions)... in general, the academic system here needs to modernize its structure, it is still highly monarchical, a more horizontal system of science leadership would bring Germany into the 21st century.” (m / USA)

“I truly believe that being a Humboldt Fellow was responsible for much of this success: I had the impression that the people I met were more positive and had higher expectations, because of my AvH Fellowship.”
(m / South Africa)

“I found out that German society is more reserved and cold compared to what I experienced in the US and Switzerland. Although I did not feel discriminated, I did not feel integrated either.” (m / Turkey)

Well cared-for: Germany is comparatively child-friendly

How would you rate childcare provision?

There is a shortage of places in nurseries and day-care centres. Plenty of parents in Germany could write a book about it, but in comparison with other countries, childcare provision seems a lot better. Especially Scandinavians think German childcare provision could be upgraded.



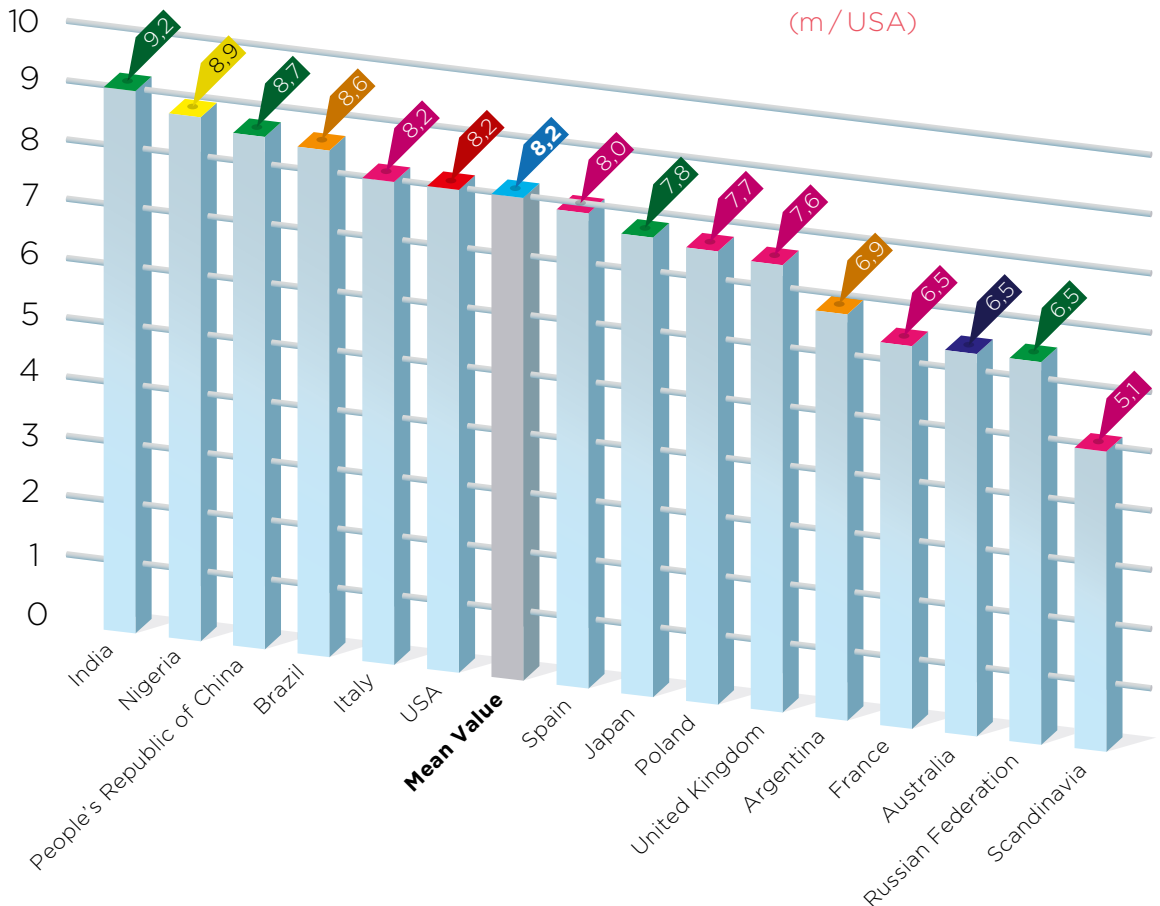
Seeing my son going to kindergarten with a smile.”

(m/USA)

Childcare provision

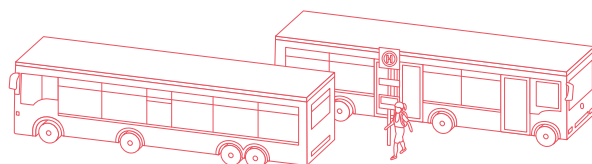
very positive by comparison

very negative by comparison



The lack of childcare (there was no room in any kindergarten in Regensburg for my three-year-old son), the school system for my children (they were separated in different schools and had to take the city bus by themselves).”

(m/Canada)

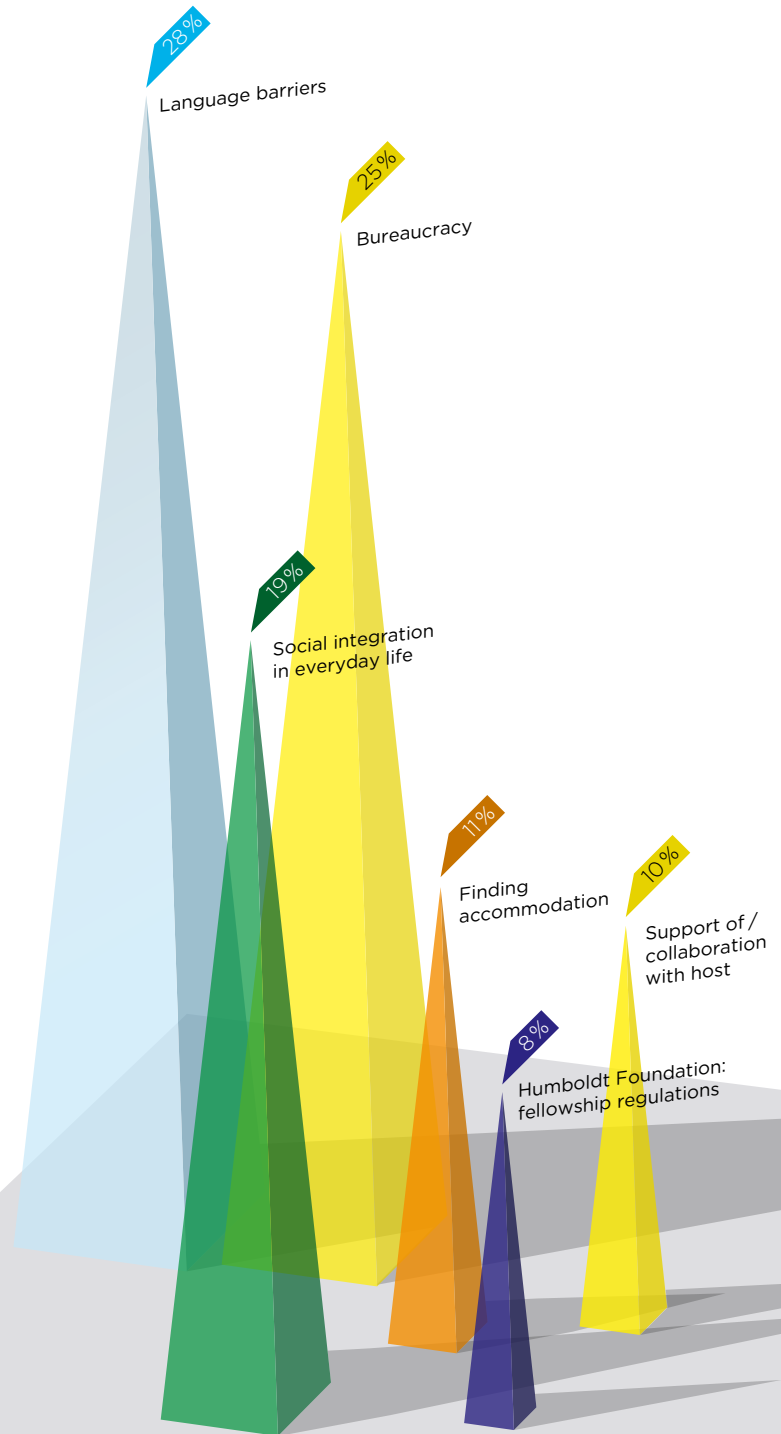


Individual points of criticism:

Language barriers and bureaucracy are the most annoying.

What were the negative aspects of your stay in Germany?

Fellows were asked to comment freely on any aspects or describe personal experiences they perceived negatively. Out of 1,803 respondents, 1,277 answered the open question “What were the negative aspects of your stay in Germany?” appropriately. The most frequent points of criticism were language barriers and bureaucracy.



It is not easy to establish personal contacts with the colleagues at work, people tend to keep work and personal life separate, and this can have both positive and negative aspects.”

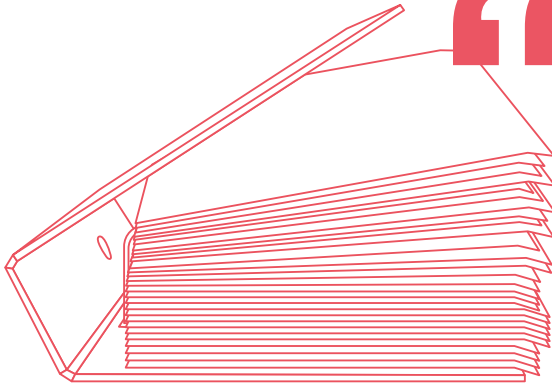
(m/USA)





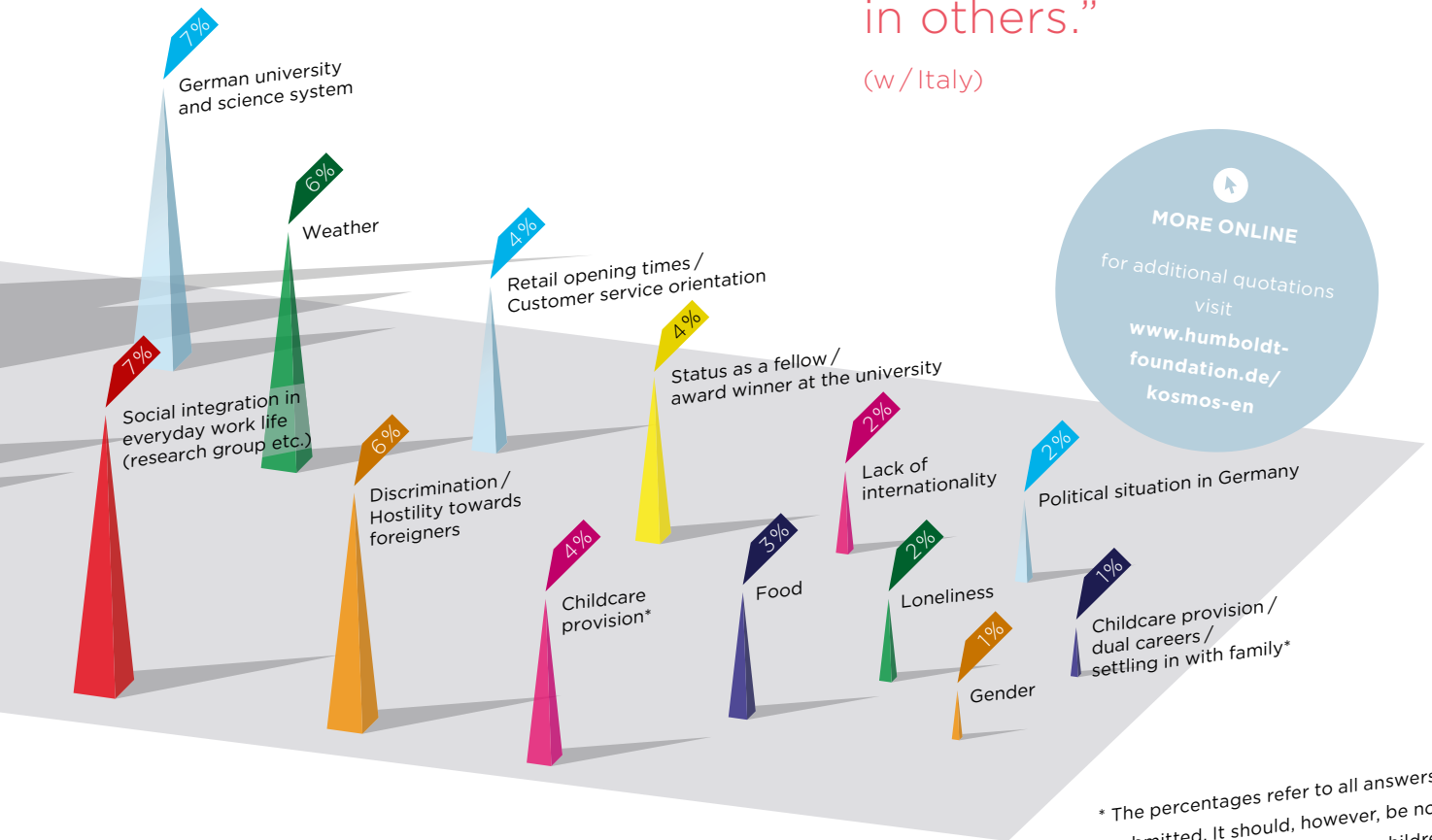
Language is the only barrier to think about for a long term stay in Germany for people who are not fluent in speaking and reading, because even the important contracts as well as bank and health insurance documents come in German language, which makes life difficult.”

(w/India)



Germany is very bureaucratic, everything needs to go through some sort of process to get approved. There is a paper trail for everything, which is good in some cases but terrible in others.”

(w/Italy)



* The percentages refer to all answers submitted. It should, however, be noted that not all respondents have children and addressed these points.

WHY ARE PEOPLE HERE SO PECULIAR?



We're amazed, amused, confused or dumb-founded. Spending time abroad always puts our normal expectations to the test. What are the mechanisms that control our perception when we are immersed in another culture? A look at the research.

Text **SUSANNE DONNER**

It is always a risky undertaking to spend time studying in another country. We set off with a suitcase full of expectations, prejudices and at least two decades of experience in a different cultural environment which often unconsciously shape our behaviour, values and preferences. “An intercultural encounter can thus be extremely enriching, reaching beyond our previous horizons,” says Alexander Thomas, emeritus professor of social psychology at the University of Regensburg. “But it can also lead to confusion and failure.” How we experience a host country and get along there depends on a raft of factors.

Our perception of people and events alone is already much more individualised than we assume. Even fundamentals like colours and forms can be differently perceived, although we all use our retina’s rods and cones to see them; the biology of sensory perception has a universal basis. “But what we see is the result of a brain process which is shaped before we are born and constantly updated by our experiences,” explains Bence Nanay, philosopher at the University of Antwerp.

ONE PERSON SEES FISH, THE OTHER AIR BUBBLES

Just how big the differences in perception can be are demonstrated by comparative cultural experiments. Researchers have discovered, for example, that the Himba – an indigenous population of northern Namibia – perceive the Ebbinghaus Illusion quite differently from the average European. This optical illusion shows two identical circles. One is surrounded by smaller circles, the other by larger circles. The latter appears to be considerably smaller than its twin. But the Himba are not hoodwinked by what is going on round about. They recognise fairly accurately that both central circles have the same radius. And there is an underlying cause for this: in the language of the Himba there is no word for circle. Round objects hardly play any role in their everyday life at all.

As many studies have now shown, the visual perception of Asians and people from

western cultures diverges significantly, too. “Whereas a Westerner just sees a fish in an aquarium and thus merely the central object, Asians also see additional details in the vicinity, such as bubbles rising to the surface and the plants in the water,” as Nanay illustrates. The reason for this holistic perception, according to experts like the American psychologist Richard Nisbett, is their collectivist social system in which “we” is much more important than “I”. Here in Germany, on the other hand, individualism is dominant.

WE LIKE WHAT WE ARE USED TO

“In the course of our lives, people who are close to us influence us. First our parents, then the circle of close contacts gets bigger and what we consider to be normal establishes itself,” Nanay explains. The more often we see, hear or experience something, the more likely it is that we will develop a preference for it. This even happens in a seminar situation: the more often people have met on a course – even if they have never spoken to one another – the more they like each other. Most of all, we like the things we are used to. This connection is so well documented that it is described in countless psychology textbooks as the mere-exposure effect. “The mere-exposure effect leads to a situation in which visiting researchers from abroad may be quite curious and open about our health system, but still miss the familiar structures in their own coun-

“The more often we see, hear or experience something, the more likely it is that we will develop a preference for it.”



PROFESSOR DR BENCE

NANAY was granted the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation’s Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel Research Award in 2016 for his achievements in the philosophy of perception, aesthetics and philosophy of mind. A professor of philosophy at the University of Antwerp, Belgium, he is also co-director of the Centre for Philosophical Psychology. Working at the intersection of philosophy, psychology and cognitive science, Nanay’s special interest focusses on aesthetics as a philosophy of perception.

“ Good as Germany is as a research location, it gets much lower marks on the personal level.”

tries,” analyses Nanay. Before they can begin to really like the particularities of their host country, they go through a phase of acculturation stress. They are forced to keep asking questions and learn to find their way around by having good and bad experiences.

Because of the way our specific culture has shaped us, combined with the mere-exposure effect, we always see our host country through the eyes of our own experience. We compare childcare options, professorial supervision and our contacts with other academics with an internalised cultural standard, believes Alexander Thomas. “For someone from China, for instance, the way you are supervised by a professor here would take some getting used to,” he says. “In China, work and personal life are interwoven. A Chinese professor also has a pastoral role and is the go-to person in emotional crisis situations.”

COUNTRY OF DEADLINES AND MILESTONES

Typical German cultural standards can also be distilled from the feedback provided by the various different nationalities, according to Thomas. The world of work here in Germany seems highly structured. Time-planning involving deadlines and milestones plays a major role. Collaboration is governed by many, in some cases unspoken, rules. Politeness norms require communication to be direct and truthful. A member of staff may, for instance, openly adopt a critical attitude to a

professor’s suggestion. In the Arabic speaking world, this would often amount to a defamatory revolt against authority. Only when you spend more time somewhere do you come into contact with different cultural standards. Varying thought and behaviour patterns are then revealed that cause confusion when encountered. “Visiting researchers need to be prepared for unexpected reactions and unforeseen behaviour,” says Thomas, “and they need to come equipped with a good portion of tolerance and empathy in order to gradually settle into the other culture.”

UNCONSCIOUS CODES OF VALUES

In the course of our lives in our own cultural area, we acquire an unconscious code of values. It comprises highly complex, unwritten rules of behaviour and language: a kind of traditional, constantly evolving book of everyday etiquette. We know who to hug when we meet them, how to introduce ourselves and what a doctoral degree ceremony involves. But all foreigners – be they British, French or Spanish – are initially at sea when it comes to the complicated, unwritten code of values in Germany. A French welcome kiss would certainly confuse a German host. To lean over the table to chat to the people at the next table, as happens in Italy, would raise some eyebrows, and to get up and dance at the least suggestion of Spanish music in any bar, with or without a dance-floor, would definitely constitute a minor sensation.

Many fellows regret to note that it is hard to make contact with Germans. Good as Germany is as a research location, it gets much lower marks on the personal level. Which is no surprise, there are the language barrier, the unfamiliar code of values and the German tendency to keep foreigners at arm’s length. A stereotype that Alexander Thomas has often encountered offers some consolation: “Once you have finally managed to make friends with a German, you have a friend for life. This piece of wisdom about us does the rounds in other countries, too.” ●



PROFESSOR (EM.) DR ALEXANDER THOMAS is a Humboldt host and emeritus professor of social and organisational psychology at the University of Regensburg. He is the author of standard textbooks on the cultural standard concept, which he established, and on intercultural competence.

Lots of us remember our school days and the rituals surrounding school reports. There we sat staring cheerfully or apprehensively at our newest grades, usually getting roughly what we had expected. Sometimes a grade was a bit lower than we had hoped. Real surprises – a top mark instead of an average one – were few and far between.

Now, the international visiting researchers sponsored by the Humboldt Foundation have handed us our report. The responses in the survey entitled “Germany from the outside” are more than pleasing. From science-friendliness and tolerance via progressiveness and democracy to gender equality – the marks are all very good. Even our sense of humour, childcare provision and, amazingly, German rail are praised. “Deutsche Bahn is the best in the world,” writes one fellow from India.

Oops, thinks the reader at this point at the latest. Germany is like a model student who, apart from getting the expected top mark in maths, gets a surprisingly high mark in sport, as well. The explanation for this is the regional perspective on Germany: Depending what part of the world researchers come from, certain things do not strike them as negatively as they do when considered from a critical internal standpoint. This can help to put one’s own views into perspective.

Praise and criticism have to be classified according to regional experiences and expectations. Humboldt sponsorship-recipients literally come from all over the world – from more than 140 countries. They judge Germany particularly in comparison with their own countries. Asian Humboldtians find Germans extremely open whilst sponsorship-recipients from South America think Germans tend to be rather reserved. Indian, Chinese and American fellows are positive in their assessment of our childcare provision, Australians and Scandinavians less so.

Insights of this kind can be a valuable guide to the kind of tailored research marketing for defined target groups that emphasises particular strengths by regional compar-

ison. At the same time, they help to identify what needs to be taken into account in order to ensure that guests from specific countries feel at home here.

Irrespective of the survey participants’ regional experiences, very good marks are awarded for research infrastructure, research funding and science-friendliness in general. The same holds true for internationality, which has increased as a result of the Excellence Initiative. This should encourage us to keep pursuing this path. But there are also points of criticism that are cited by the majority

of those surveyed, irrespective of their countries of origin, especially bureaucracy, language barriers, prospects for junior researchers and social integration in everyday life – occasionally, also, the excessively strict hierarchies in German research. And the few, but unmistakable, responses regarding hostility towards foreigners give us pause for thought. The increasing strength of extreme right-wing, populist movements has not passed our guests by unnoticed.

So, this report day is not only a reason to celebrate but also gives us something to think about. We can feel pleased with all the praise we’ve received and our great strengths in the international locational contest. That we can use for promotional purposes! But the criticisms of bureaucracy and the prospects for junior researchers tell us where the model student, Germany, urgently needs to improve. ●

COMMENT

A MODEL STUDENT WITH THE ODD BLIP

by HANS-CHRISTIAN PAPE



PROFESSOR DR HANS-CHRISTIAN PAPE is President of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and head of the Department of Neurophysiology at the University of Münster

OUR ADMINISTRATION IS NOT BLOATED AT ALL

Everyone has cursed them at some stage, though German authorities are better than their reputation according to administrative science specialists Geert Bouckaert and Werner Jann. A conversation about modern administrations, friendly officials and persistent stereotypes.

Interview **MAREIKE ILSEMANN**
 Photo **ROBERT BARTHOLOT**



Professor Bouckaert, Professor Jann, why does everyone complain about bureaucracy?

JANN: That's a difficult question. Part of the problem is that it's not at all clear what people actually mean when they complain about too much bureaucracy. Do they mean there are too many regulations, or that there are superfluous regulations? This then raises the question of what you define as superfluous. And different people – quite rightly – see things very differently.

For example?

JANN: When a federal state government in Germany wanted to relax the standards for nursery schools, there was an outcry from parents precisely because they didn't want to leave certain arrangements to the discretion of the individual providers. When the German government wants to liberalise the fee structure for architects or the regulations governing dispensing chemists, the professional associations concerned invariably protest. But the

number of laws and the degree of intervention is a political issue, not a bureaucratic one. Bureaucracy often gets the blame when in actual fact state intervention is the real culprit.

BOUCKAERT: Another quite different point of criticism is levelled at bureaucratic behaviour, that is unintelligible jargon, unfriendly staff, impersonal attitudes, dogmatism and impenetrable processes. This criticism is valid, or it certainly was, but it is often very stereotyped and no longer reflects reality.

“ I lived in the US for two years and American bureaucracy nearly drove me to distraction.”

Why?

BOUCKAERT: Since the mid-1990s, all over the world – including in Germany, by the way – there has been a considerable push for modernisation, for example through the introduction of modern management methods through e-government services and new options like customer centres. Time and again, empirical studies show that, in the vast majority of cases, direct contact between people or companies and administrations is unproblematic. The stereotype of the slow, unfriendly, inflexible administrative employee is, however, difficult to eradicate.

Where does the impression of a bloated and bureaucratic administration come from?

JANN: Well, to begin with, there is no real evidence of a “bloated” administration in Germany. If you consider public sector employees as a percentage of all employees, we fall below the OECD average. This doesn’t mean that it wouldn’t sometimes be possible to manage with fewer staff. But public demand veers in precisely the opposite direction. People demand more police, more teachers, more judges – in Germany these are all public service positions, but at the same time it is claimed that the public sector is bloated. To be honest, the conversation here is sometimes a bit schizophrenic.

So, administrations don’t actually need to change at all, they just need more staff?

BOUCKAERT: Of course, administrations constantly have to be modernised – just like any other organisation that wants to survive. But at the same time, we mustn’t abandon the achievements of Max Weber’s classic bureaucracy, like predictability, fairness, legal certainty and so on. We can observe such an

interrelationship and joint development in many European countries and have coined the term “Neo-Weberian State” to refer to them. It is the best summary of the consensus in modern administrative science.

In our survey, it is the Americans who are most bothered by the German system. Is bureaucracy in the United States so very different from bureaucracy in Europe?

JANN: Quite honestly, I don’t think German bureaucracy is any worse than American. I lived in the US for two years and some aspects of American bureaucracy nearly drove me to distraction. It starts with the problem of opening a bank account and continues with immigration authorities and visa regulations. In comparison with the IRS, the American tax authority, German tax offices are the embodiment of cooperation and friendliness. The problem seems to be that one knows one’s own bureaucracy and its quirks, but a foreign one seems much more inaccessible.

BOUCKAERT: I can only confirm that. Arguing with American bureaucracy is no picnic. I’ve known German bureaucracy for years and yes, it has its faults, but in the end you can rely on it. ●

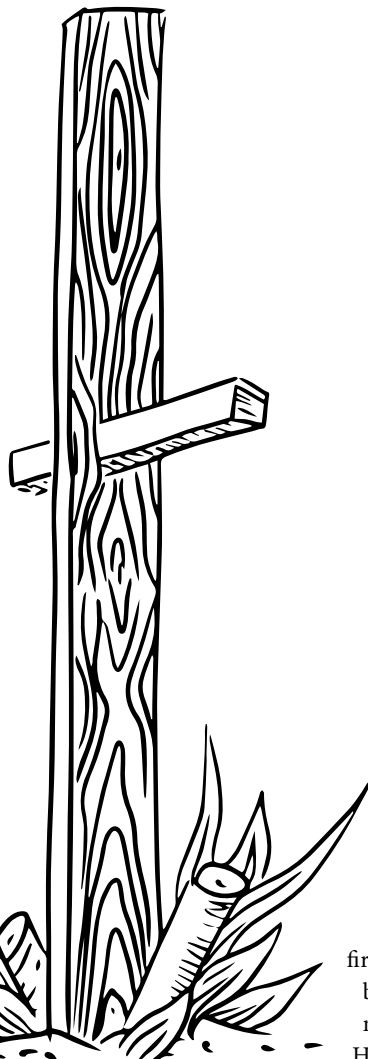


The administrative scientists **PROFESSOR DR GEERT E. C. BOUCKAERT** (right) from the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Belgium and **PROFESSOR (EM.) DR WERNER JANN** from the Potsdam Center for Policy and Management (PCPM) at the University of Potsdam jointly head the European Perspectives for Public Administration project at the PCPM. It is financed through the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation’s Anne-liese Maier Research Award, which Bouckaert was granted in 2014. The project aims to develop a joint European perspective on the process of constant change in public administrations in Europe and looks at how to communicate this in research and teaching.

WITCHES, FASHION FIENDS AND CABINETS OF CURIOSITIES

Ulinka Rublack's book about the astronomer Johannes Kepler, who defended his mother in a witchcraft trial, caused a stir. Drawing on old sources, the historian reconstructs a fascinating image of the Early Modern Era in which superstition meets science.

Text **LILO BERG**



Wolfenbüttel, a rainy afternoon in spring. A handful of researchers sit at long tables in the reading room of the Herzog August Library, leafing through old manuscripts and typing notes on their laptops. In the first row, a woman with long, blonde hair is bent over a leather-bound volume. This must be her: Ulinka Rublack, Professor of History in Cambridge, UK, Reimar Lüst Award Winner and author of the highly praised reconstruction of the witchcraft trial at which the famous astronomer Johannes Kepler defended his mother.

Rublack is an expert on Early Modern European History. “The period between the 15th and 18th centuries is one of the great epochs of upheaval,” says the 52-year-old historian, evoking the Reformation and the media revolution unleashed by printing, the burgeoning natural sciences, the great voyages of discovery and early globalisation. It was then that princes set up experimental rooms in their palaces and filled their cabinets of curiosities with corals, crystals and curios from around the world, brought back by art-loving merchants like Philipp Hainhofer from Augsburg. In the first half of the 16th century, Hainhofer helped satisfy the increasing demand for original objects, and it is about him and his vast network across Europe that Ulinka Rublack is writing her next book. That is why she is spending so much time in Wolfenbüttel at present – because it is only in the Augusta, as the famous library is known for short, that the fifty-odd volumes of Hainhofer’s notes dating from around 1600 are available. The art dealer

kept a meticulous record of absolutely everything – from his impressions of journeys to Italy and Pomerania to the stock on sale at trade fairs or his thoughts on the status of painting in the age of chambers of art and curiosities.

“Luckily, most of the books are in legible Gothic script,” says Ulinka Rublack. Unlike Hainhofer’s letters – it can take an entire day to decipher a few pages of the lines he jotted down there. The historian then sits in the library and transcribes large sections of the original manuscript into her own notes. In doing so, she explains, she is tracing the themes that the sources uncover and relating them to her research topics.

This is a method of work she observed her father, a Reformation historian from Tübingen, using. “He was an incredibly tenacious scholar who closely studied sources and was always developing new perspectives on history,” says Rublack, who was born near Tübingen. Later, when she was studying in Hamburg, he sparked and constantly rekindled her interest in Early Modern History – and also when she started working at St John’s College in the mid-1990s and put down roots in Cambridge. “My father knew how to dispense a mix of distance and support,” says Rublack, the mother of two teenage children. “And,” she adds gratefully, “he bolstered my belief in my own originality.”

It is, indeed, the courage with which she adopts her own ways of looking at and addressing her topics that has gained Ulinka Rublack international esteem. She is a Fellow of the British Academy, chairs the German History Society in the UK and received the Reimar Lüst Award in 2018. This award is granted jointly by the Humboldt Foundation and the Fritz Thyssen Foundation in recognition of a life’s work that strengthens cultural and academic relations with Germany. Rublack, who holds British and German nation-

THE HISTORIAN
ULINKA RUBLACK
at work in Wolfenbüttel



“

PRINCES FILLED
THEIR CABINETS OF
CURIOSITIES WITH
CORALS, CRYSTALS
AND CURIOS
FROM AROUND
THE WORLD.”



ality, achieves this by habitually anchoring her three major topics – the Reformation, the history of gender and global history – in German regions and examining micro-historical developments in the context of the larger picture.

KEPLER'S MOTHER WAS IN DANGER OF BEING BURNT AT THE STAKE

Rublack's study of the famous astronomer Johannes Kepler and the time in which he lived exemplifies her approach. In 1615, Kepler's widowed mother, Katharina Kepler, was accused of witchcraft and taken to court. The accusations were made by influential neighbours in Leonberg, Württemberg, who said she was responsible for cases of illness in their families. Katharina, who at 68 had reached what was considered a grand old age at the time, was in danger of being burnt at the stake. This was taking place all over the country: between 1580 and 1650 alone, 25,000 people were executed in this way in the Holy Roman Empire, most of them elderly women. As the case against Katharina Kepler dragged on, even her children turned against her – only her eldest son supported her. Johannes Kepler >



THESE TRIALS WERE
PRIMARILY ABOUT
FAMILIES DEFENDING
THEIR HONOUR.”

was 45, imperial astronomer and – having discovered that planets move in ellipses – a famous man. At the zenith of his creativity, he took a year out to devote himself to his mother’s defence. In the end, the maltreated yet indomitable woman was declared innocent.

LIVELY SCENES AND QUOTATIONS

Ulinka Rublack’s book about this little-known aspect of the great natural researcher appeared in English in 2015, won prizes and was translated into several languages. The German edition, “Der Astronom und die Hexe”, was published in 2018. Reviewers praised the book not just for being a well-researched and gripping account of Kepler’s trial but also for extending our view of a society on the eve of the Thirty Years’ War, caught between magic and scientific thought.

It is a convincing picture that Ulinka Rublack draws, bursting with lively scenes and quotations, background information and analysis. It owes a lot to the unique set of sources on the Kepler case: the Central State Archive in Stuttgart holds two thick volumes about the trial which the historian studied in great detail during visits lasting several weeks. Her conclusion: “These trials weren’t primarily about individuals but about families defending their honour.” Johannes Kepler certainly wanted to save his mother from disgrace, but it was also his own reputation that was at stake.

Although Kepler managed to rescue his own reputation, posterity heaped opprobrium on his mother. In reports, novels and musical theatre – such as Paul Hindemith’s opera “The Harmony of the World” – she is always portrayed as a quarrelsome, jealous old woman. Ulinka Rublack, on the other hand, presents the image of a courageous woman with no formal education who, largely on her own, has to fend for herself and her children in a harsh

world. This is the impression conveyed not only by the book but also by “Kepler’s Trial”, the opera based on it. Premiered in 2016, the piece was created in under a year at Cambridge University as a team production involving mathematicians, astronomers and historians.



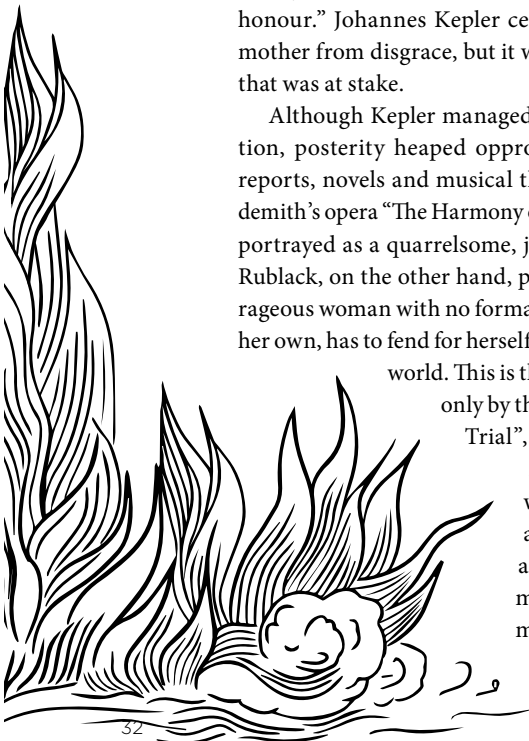
A CONTEMPORARY DRAWING of witch burning

KEPLER’S TRIAL AS AN OPERA

The hour-long opera can be viewed online and Ulinka Rublack occasionally uses some of the passages from it for staged readings for non-specialist audiences. What is it that attracts her to multi-media formats? The historian considers the question for a moment and replies, “For me, it’s all about the moments of intense insight. I love creating moments like that and not just analysing culture, but making it myself.”

Currently, a British film team is working on a cinema version of the Kepler book, scheduled for release in 2021. In the meantime, Ulinka Rublack and her husband, who teaches history in London, will perhaps have come to a decision about staying in the UK or relocating to Germany. The threat of Brexit is already looming large on the horizon, she says, even at elite universities like Cambridge. “We are receiving fewer international applications from professors and students, and it’s becoming more difficult to get funding.”

The historian already has a presence in Germany – not just because of her academic work but also as the co-de-





**THE RUBLACK METHOD:
SOURCES TELL STORIES**

Ulinka Rublack's sources include Matthäus Schwarz's 16th century book of costumes. In Renaissance Augsburg, the fashion-conscious Fugger bookkeeper sat for his portrait in opulent garments. Even then it could be said that clothes make the man. Schwarz's fashion consciousness aided his social advancement. Apart from local history, the historical source implicitly relates the history of globalisation as well, as the materials came from far afield.



signer of an exhibition on the fashion diary of the Fugger bookkeeper, Matthäus Schwarz, in Braunschweig. "Dressed for Success" is the title of the exhibition built around the minutely detailed documentation of the opulent garments that Schwarz – known to his contemporaries as a "fashion fiend" – had tailored for himself in the 16th century. "I never used to think very much about what people wore five hundred years ago," says Ulinka Rublack. But that all changed when she noticed just how much global history was captured in a fashionable outfit, even then. Some materials were specially brought to Europe from India and Indonesia, feather adornments came from America and Africa, whereby this trade had an impact on the social coherence and ecosystems of all the countries involved. Rublack highlights one aspect: "The environmental catastrophe caused by textile production began in the early modern period." The industrious researcher is currently busy tracing all these global connections. The working title of her next book is "The Triumph of Fashion 1300 to 2020" – and it is not likely to suffer from a lack of public interest. ●

PROFESSOR DR ULINKA RUBLACK has been teaching Early Modern European History at St John's College, Cambridge, since 1996. In 2018, she received the Reimar Lüst Award from the Humboldt Foundation and the Fritz Thyssen Foundation. Born in Germany, Rublack is a recognised expert on Reformation history as well as the cultural and gender history of the early modern era. Her reconstruction of the witchcraft trial of the mother of the astronomer Johannes Kepler gained her a wide audience, in Germany as well. For her monograph she was recently awarded the Prize of the Historisches Kolleg in Munich. Rublack is a Fellow of the British Academy.



The Astronomer and the Witch: Johannes Kepler's Fight for his Mother, Oxford: Oxford University Press, October 2015.



THE ROOFTOPS OF BERLIN

Who actually does what at Humboldt headquarters? Who are the people behind the scenes making sure that everything runs smoothly? This page is devoted to the colleagues at the Humboldt Foundation, their lives at work and beyond.


TODAY: EMILY KLEINE.

From the windows of the Humboldt Foundation's offices in the WissenschaftsForum Berlin, I can look directly out onto the German Cathedral and the Concert Hall. I think the Gendarmenmarkt is one of the most attractive squares in Germany. But as a workplace, it has its snags. Sometimes in the lunch hour, you can hardly get out of the building if the police have closed off the roads during a state visit, or you have to fight your way through hordes of tourists.

There are six of us working in the Foundation's Berlin office. Our aim is to facilitate national and international encounters involving academics, politicians and diplomats. I am particularly fond of the Frontiers of Research Symposia which bring together outstanding junior researchers from two or three different countries at a time.

The international aspects of my job are something I really enjoy. I have already had the opportunity to welcome the Ambassador of Botswana, and I organised the annual Thanksgiving celebration with American Humboldt Fellows where the US Ambassador himself carves the turkey.

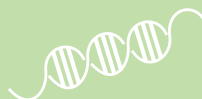
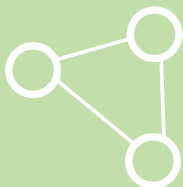
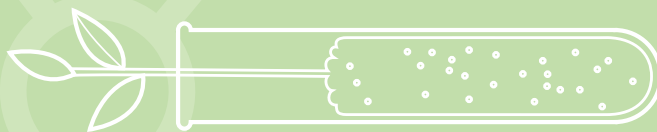
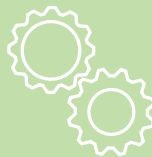
The main focus of my work is organising events. Apart from the New Year's Reception at the start of the year, one of the highlights is the reception we hold together with other science organisations during Berlin's Classic Open Air Festival. Unfortunately, it was there of all places that I, Brazilian by birth, experienced what it means to be pigeon-holed. "And where do you come from?" asked a member of a party newly represented in the Bundestag, scrutinising my name tag. "From Berlin-Zehlendorf," I replied. "And your parents?" he queried. "From Paderborn," I answered honestly. This kind of everyday racism makes me really angry. What, pray, does an Emily Kleine have to look like, I ask myself, in order to be accepted by some people as German? ● *Recorded by MAREIKE ILSEMANN*



THIS IS WHERE THE ENGLISH VERSION FINISHES

BITTE WENDEN SIE DAS HEFT,
UM DIE DEUTSCHE FASSUNG ZU LESEN.

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