EVERYTHING UNDER CONTROL
The psychology of self-restraint

THE POWER OF SCIENCE
An interview with Germany’s Foreign Minister

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Well, that’s a fine mess I’ve made. Even my redoubtable colleague Werner Gruber (on the right in the photo) has involuntarily taken a step back to avoid getting Diet Coke on his clothes – not something I have to worry about in my yellow coverall. We’re on stage at the Rabenhof Theatre in Vienna; our audience is yelling and clapping enthusiastically. And after an initial moment of shock, we two physicists are also pretty happy with the success of our experiment. I just dropped a few Mentos mints into the two large Diet Coke bottles, which promptly ejected torrents of brown liquid several metres into the air. There’s a scientific explanation for this effect, and when our third man, Martin Puntigam, appears on stage a moment later to quiz us, we’ll explain it all to him – and of course to our audience.

Werner Gruber is a physicist and, in his day job, the director of the Vienna Observatory. Martin Puntigam is a well-known Austrian cabaret artist. I’m a retired physics professor and together we’re the science cabaret act “Science Busters”. When we started out in 2007, we never imagined we’d be this successful. Today we have our own TV show with the Austrian state broadcaster ORF, our books and audio-books are bestsellers and we frequently present our act in theatres. We cover topics such as brain research, climate change or extraterrestrial life, always focusing on making science entertaining and easy to understand. We want the audience to have fun – and we don’t mind if it’s sometimes at our expense.

“Those who know nothing must believe everything” – we’ve chosen this sentence by the wonderful Austrian writer Marie von Ebner- Eschenbach as our motto. We want to help our audiences overcome their unfounded fear of science and inspire them to think for themselves. For example when it comes to homoeopathy, which we consider a load of magical mumbo jumbo that we love to dissect. But there’s no wizardry to the Coke-Mentos experiment: when the mints are immersed in the beverage, they create vast amounts of foam that explodes upwards. It has nothing to do with the sugar in the sweets; the cause is the microscopic irregularities on their surface. These irregularities serve as nucleation sites for millions of carbon dioxide bubbles that are dissolved out from the fluid and shoot up. It’s pure physics, and also works with pumice instead of Mentos and champagne instead of coke. The experiment is child’s play – but we do recommend protective clothing.

**PROFESSOR DR HEINZ OBERHUMMER** was a Humboldt Research Fellow at the University of Tübingen in the 1980s and became professor emeritus at the Vienna University of Technology in 2007.
Dear readers,

When was the last time you lost control and gave in to a temptation you actually meant to resist? Spent the evening munching nachos in front of the TV, for example, when you’d intended to go to the gym? Or bought a new smartphone although there was absolutely nothing wrong with your old one? You’ll probably have no trouble thinking of your own examples. Why exactly do we find it so hard to stick to our resolutions? Why do so many people’s histories of resistance against chocolate bars, wine or cigarettes resemble chronicles of regular defeat?

Our cover story on US psychologist Kathleen Vohs offers some consolation. Her experiments show that loss of control is not an individual failing: sooner or later we all succumb to our baser instincts. Self-control is not an unlimited resource. But it can be trained like a muscle, and there are psychological tricks to help you bolster your resolve. Why not experiment on yourself and share your experiences in our online network Humboldt Life? I would enjoy hearing from you.

Whether exploring the human mind, developing new methods of producing drinking water or researching and tackling conflict, the Humboldtians in this issue are changing the world and making it a little better through their work. Our Focus section introduces some of them, and we also speak with Federal Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier about researchers whose work makes them both diplomats and bridge-builders, across borders and competing interests.

Happy reading!

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BRIEF ENQUIRIES

Photo: Humboldt Foundation / Nikolaus Rhede
In comparison with earlier models, modern fridges and freezers use far less energy. But they are still some of the biggest power-guzzlers in our homes. Little can be done about this on the basis of existing technology – its potential for savings has largely been exhausted.

However, a completely novel type of refrigeration technology could shake up future markets. It manages without any environmentally-harmful refrigerants – all it needs is water. It is also quiet and uses only half as much electricity as today’s top-end models. Eco-fridges of this kind are based on magnetic shape-memory alloys – special metals that Sanjay Singh has been studying for years.

The Indian physicist is currently tinkering with new, affordable material mixtures which require minimum power input to produce maximum cooling efficiency. Alloys of nickel, manganese and gallium, for example, cool very well, but use too much electricity. Sanjay Singh is now searching for a further additive to offset this disadvantage.

The technology employed to test the composites may well find its way into future magnetic fridges: a disc coated with the alloy spins through a magnetic field and heats up. If the magnetic field is switched off, the temperature of the disc drops to its original level. Water flowing past it cools down so significantly that butter, milk and the like are kept fresh. When will the first commercial products hit the market? “Lots of labs are working on it,” says Sanjay Singh, “it won’t take very long.”

Humboldt Research Fellow DR SANJAY SINGH plans to stay in Germany until 2016. He divides his time between the University of Duisburg-Essen and the Max Planck Institute for Chemical Physics of Solids in Dresden.

Text LILO BERG
HOW DO YOUR MOLECULAR SCISSORS WORK, MS CHARPENTIER?

Nowadays, they are a standard feature of labs all over the world: so-called molecular scissors. They can be used to cleave DNA strands and introduce new gene sequences at the points where the incisions are made. The molecular biologist, Emmanuelle Charpentier, effectively discovered her own version of genome editing by chance.

Originally, she and her team were looking for new approaches to antibiotics research, and happened upon the enzyme Cas9 in various types of bacteria. When a virus attacks a bacterium, Cas9 recognises its DNA, cuts it up into pieces and thus repels the attack. Charpentier and her team discovered how this mechanism functions: two RNA molecules form a double strand which guides an endonuclease – a protein – to cleave the DNA of the target virus. “We soon realised that this mechanism had great potential as a new molecular biological tool,” the 46-year-old explains. Her molecular scissors use precisely this mechanism.

Charpentier’s vision is that, one day, the technology will be used in patient therapy and to treat hereditary diseases. As it was, she discovered the application without specifically searching for it. “This just shows how essential basic research can be,” she says. Charpentier intends to continue along this path. “The fascinating thing about microbiology is that it still holds a lot of mysteries for us to uncover.”

PROFESSOR DR EMMANUELLE CHARPENTIER has been an Alexander von Humboldt Professor at Hannover Medical School and the Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research in Braunschweig since 2014. Here she works to promote more intensive collaboration between basic researchers and physicians.

Text TERESA HAVLICEK
Drinking water is already a valuable natural resource. It is about to become precious: according to the United Nations, in 2030, half the world’s population could be suffering from water shortages. Desalination plants, which convert seawater into drinking water, could be a remedy.

“Unfortunately, the systems we employ today use too much energy and pollute the environment,” says process engineer Matthias Wessling. The plants work on the principle of reverse osmosis, using enormous pressure to push the seawater through a membrane and hold back the salt. The energy required is usually generated by oil, gas or coal.

Wessling and his team are currently working in the lab to find a more sustainable technology. They are developing an electrochemical process that uses positive and negative carbon electrodes to bind the salt ions in the water and thus extract them from the water. This method requires far less energy and is much more efficient than reverse osmosis, says Wessling. “The latter produces 60 litres of drinking water per 100 litres of salt water – with our method we can produce at least 90 litres.”

An industrial consortium has already expressed an interest in the idea and Wessling has applied for public funding to drive developments. “As soon as the finances are sorted,” says Matthias Wessling, “we could build a prototype within the next three years.”

**PROFESSOR DR MATTHIAS WESSLING** conducts research on chemical process engineering at RWTH Aachen University. In 2010 he was awarded an Alexander von Humboldt Professorship.

*Text Lilo Berg*
WHERE DO THE BEST CONQUERORS COME FROM, MS BRISKI?

It smuggles its way in everywhere, and when it arrives it makes an almighty nuisance of itself: the zebra mussel is one of the most dreaded invasive species to establish itself in foreign ecosystems – often at the cost of indigenous species and to the detriment of the infrastructure. “It can paralyse entire power stations by reproducing in the water pipes and blocking them up,” says the Croatian-Canadian ecologist Elizabeta Briski.

At GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research in Kiel, the 41-year-old scientist is tracing the wanderings of the zebra mussel and other non-native species. Many of these invaders originate in the Black and Caspian Seas, make their way to the Baltic and the North Sea via rivers and canals and finally cross the Atlantic to infiltrate the Great Lakes of North America.

They hitch a ride in the ballast water of empty cargo vessels, which is taken on board at the beginning of a journey to ensure stability and discharged again at the end. Elizabeta Briski now wants to discover what it is in particular that makes these species from the area known as the Ponto-Caspian region able to conquer such far-flung habitats. She suspects that the adaptability required is something peculiar to the Black and Caspian Seas: both contain salt and fresh water. If you can survive in that environment, you can apparently take on the world.

DR ELIZABETA BRISKI received the Sofja Kovalevskaja Award in 2014. For the next five years, she will head the junior research group for experimental ecology she is currently setting up in Kiel.

Text LILO BERG
How can you sort a pile of pancakes so that the biggest is at the bottom and the smallest at the top? Easy? Not if you are only allowed to remove and turn over several pancakes at a time – just like inserting a pancake turner somewhere in the stack and flipping over all the pancakes lying on top of it. And the prize question is: how many manoeuvres of this kind are required to transform a random heap into an orderly pile?

Scientists have been searching for appropriate algorithms to address the pancake sorting problem for decades. The young French researcher Laurent Bulteau has now put an end to their travails. In his dissertation on the problem, which is so complex that it is almost impossible for non-specialists to comprehend, the 28-year-old was able to demonstrate that there is never likely to be a practicable algorithm. The pancake problem is so demanding in terms of computing time and memory capacity that even future generations of computers will be forced to capitulate, Bulteau predicts.

The theoretical computer scientist now wants to find out whether this also holds true for other problems his fellow researchers have been grappling with over the years. It is certainly a task Laurent Bulteau intends to tackle with self-confidence. “Demonstrating the things computers can’t do is my speciality.”

DR LAURENT BULTEAU spent a year at Technische Universität Berlin as a Humboldt Research Fellow. He is now back in France, searching for new algorithms for bioinformatics at the Université de Lyon 1.

Text LILO BERG
They strengthen the spirit of freedom in Egypt, mediate in Colombia’s civil war or protect the climate in the United States. They are spread across the entire world, work in a wide range of capacities and have one thing in common: they all are Humboldtians and thus part of a global community that creates mutual trust. Its members have distinguished themselves through outstanding achievements in science and research. Their paths may later take them in other directions, for example into politics, the arts or business, but they stay Humboldtians for life.

Alexander von Humboldt, the eminent naturalist and namesake of the Foundation, left Germany two centuries ago to explore the world. Humboldtians take the opposite route: they come to Germany from more than 140 countries, alone or with their families, to spend time conducting research here with the greatest possible autonomy. For some it’s a decisive leap in their careers, for others a welcome opportunity to take stock; many work in laboratories, quite a few write a book. When they return home, they all take a little bit of Germany with them. This creates an often lifelong bond that can barely be overestimated. Humboldtians enrich Germany and are among the country’s best ambassadors abroad.

In today’s conflict-ridden, increasingly small world, dialogue and exchange are as important as ever. At stake are freedom, peace and a good life for all – and these are the goals to which Humboldtians around the world are committed. They form networks in Africa to promote academic excellence and counter brain drain; they promote cultural exchange between India and German-speaking countries; they help build free and democratic legal systems in Eastern Europe. Kosmos presents seven examples that prove: researchers want to understand the world; Humboldtians also want to make it better.
When young African researchers embark on the peripatetic phase of their careers, they say goodbye to their continent. “Our postdocs go to the UK, to France and the United States – and many never come back,” says Heather Marco, professor of zoology at the University of Cape Town in South Africa and a Humboldtian. Research stays at African universities aren’t usually a serious option for these young academics, she notes regretfully. But that’s something she wants to change. Marco is a driving force behind the African–German Network of Excellence in Science, or AGNES. The initiative, founded in 2011, aims to strengthen research cooperation between scientists in the region and their German colleagues, and to interest young people in participating. “Africa is in the midst of enormous change”, says Heather Marco, and more research and innovation is urgently required to ensure sustainable development. In a first step, her initiative is now creating a database to make it easier for researchers to connect and exchange information. When it is completed, it will function as a comprehensive directory of the continent’s researchers and universities. So if for example a laboratory in Namibia lacks an expensive instrument that is available in a neighbouring country, the researchers might look into cooperating with their colleagues there. “That isn’t even being considered today”, Marco has observed. But a database alone will not be able to solve the problems. The core issue is the reputation of African universities, which Marco and her companions aim to improve through quality assurance programmes. They are particularly committed to promoting women in science: Heather Marco for example frequently visits schools to interest girls in academic careers. She encourages female students to take on doctorates – and paves the way for them to go to Germany. She says Germany’s status as an excellent science nation is far too little known in Africa. But, she adds, there’s another reason she encourages researchers to go to Germany: “The Humboldt Foundation in particular also sends our best talents back to us.”

**Dr Heather Marco** is associate professor at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, and chairwoman of AGNES, the African–German Network of Excellence in Science. In 2013 she received the Humboldt Alumni Award for her contributions to academic exchange between Africa and Germany. The zoologist was a Humboldt Research Fellow at the University of Hamburg from 2002 to 2003, and later returned to Germany for alumni stays at the University of Osnabrück.
“In ten years”, says Lado Chanturia, “I see Georgia as a prospering member of the European family – with especially close ties to Germany.” With his optimistic prognosis, legal scholar Chanturia, who was appointed Georgian Ambassador to Germany at the beginning of 2014, sums up the hopes of many of his compatriots. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine they feel their country is under threat and are seeking to rapidly join western alliances. But first the small nation by the Black Sea will have to meet the conditions of the treaty of association it concluded with the European Union this summer. That will for example require numerous changes to Georgian laws, which are based on a legal system that was reorganised in a massive effort in the early 1990s. Back then, when the Eastern Bloc collapsed, Lado Chanturia was the proud owner of a brand new, but useless Soviet legal degree. His country needed a new constitution that allowed private property. To learn from Germany’s example, Chanturia went to Göttingen on a fellowship in 1991. After his return he contributed significantly to the new Georgian civil code, advanced to become Justice Minister for his country, took on the judges who were wedded to the old system, ordered all court judgements be published for the first time, and ultimately became President of the Supreme Court. Then, in 2004, he resigned from this high office, returned fully to academia, went to Hamburg as a Humboldt Research Fellow and wrote a textbook there on corporate law. To this day, countries such as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan invite the renowned jurist to serve as an advisor. With its legal system Georgia has meanwhile become an example to the entire post-Soviet area, says Lado Chanturia. His country has come a long way – and its ultimate goal remains Europe.

**PROFESSOR DR DR H.C. LADOCHANTURIA** is the Georgian Ambassador to Germany. As a Humboldt Research Fellow, the legal scholar worked at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative and International Private Law in Hamburg. Lado Chanturia has been teaching private law at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University in Georgia since 1995.

**THE LAW REFORMER**
Ernest Moniz could be leading a quiet life. And yet at the age of 68 he returned to politics – to serve as Secretary of Energy in the cabinet of US President Barack Obama. The distinguished professor of physics took office in the summer of 2013, succeeding Physics Nobel Prize winner Steven Chu, himself a Humboldtian. Moniz has since frequently been asked about his motivations. It’s the impending climate change, he will answer, that drives him, and the conviction that a course correction is urgently needed: “We have to change our fossil fuel based energy system.” Those are strong words that underline the new course of the Obama administration, which has designated climate protection a political priority and aims to make the USA a global pioneer in this field. That role would also strengthen the country’s negotiating position with the newly industrialised nations in Asia and South America, which in international negotiations on more ambitious climate goals have repeatedly insisted on their need to catch up to established economic powers such as the USA. Ernest Moniz is facing a Herculean challenge. The United States are still one of the world’s largest consumers of energy, second only to China. Around 70 percent of the country’s electricity is currently produced from coal, gas and oil. Its native shale gas, mined in ever increasing amounts via fracking – a process that is highly controversial in Germany –, is also a fossil fuel. The natural gas has reduced the country’s need for expensive imports and fuelled a new economic boom; forgoing that upswing in the interests of climate protection would be difficult for America – and the pragmatic secretary of energy isn’t suggesting it should do so. Shale gas does pollute the atmosphere, but nowhere near as heavily as coal, the use of which Moniz wants to make cleaner and ultimately reduce. In contrast to Germany, Moniz, who specialises in nuclear physics, also has no intention of shuttering down nuclear power. But renewable energy sources will become more important for America. They currently account for 13 percent of the country’s electricity generation, and that figure is rising rapidly; Ernest Moniz hopes that it will reach 30 to 40 percent by 2030, making the USA the world leader in renewable energy production.

**PROFESSOR DR ERNEST MONIZ** was appointed Secretary of Energy in 2013. He was previously a Cecil and Ida Green Professor of Physics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge, USA. Moniz was already familiar with the Department of Energy, having served as Under Secretary there from 1997 to 2001 during the Clinton administration. Ernest Moniz won the Humboldt Research Award in 1989 and over the following five years spent regular periods conducting research at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg with the support of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.
Angelika Rettberg was comfortable in the United States. She had just completed her doctorate in political science at Boston University, an attractive job was on the horizon – the young woman of German-Colombian parentage and her husband could have led a refined academic life in North America. But then, in the year 2000, the two returned to crisis-ridden Colombia. “The country was hungry for peace”, says Angelika Rettberg, “and we wanted to do our part to bring it about.” At the Universidad de los Andes in the Colombian capital of Bogotá she has since been using the methods of peace and conflict studies. Here Rettberg examines the root causes of the cartel-fuelled outbreaks of violence between guerrilla groups and government security forces. They have been rocking the country since the 1960s, costing hundreds of thousands of lives. Angelika Rettberg became famous for her interviews with rebels and victims of the civil war. She advises government representatives, organises citizen conferences and participates in public debates. She says that extreme disparities in property ownership are a breeding ground for violence, and demands a more equitable distribution of land and natural resources. “It’s the only way we’ll achieve lasting peace.” The government is attempting to negotiate with the rebels, but many Colombians are in favour of military action to quash them. It’s hard work to convince her compatriots of the non-violent route, says Angelika Rettberg. But these efforts seem to be paying off: President Juan Manuel Santos was re-elected this summer, giving him a mandate to continue peace negotiations with the guerrilla groups. The new Justice Minister, Yesid Reyes Alvarado, – he too a Humboldtian – will also play an important role in this process. His father was shot to death by rebels in the 1980s. For this deeply divided country, where victims and perpetrators often live at close quarters, he could become a symbol of reconciliation.

**PROFESSOR DR ANGELIKA RETTBERG** used her Humboldt Research Fellowship to work at the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg from 2013 to 2014. The daughter of a German-Colombian mother and a German father teaches political science at Universidad de los Andes, a renowned private university in Bogotá, Colombia. The new Justice Minister, **PROFESSOR DR YESID REYES ALVARADO**, also taught at Universidad de los Andes for several years. A criminal law scholar, he spent time in Germany on a Humboldt Research Fellowship between 1990 and 1992.
German language and literature professor Anil Bhatti has been journeying for over forty years: between his home country of India and Europe as well as between the spheres of literature, philosophy and international politics. These are the disciplines he has studied and correlated with one another again and again throughout his academic life. For example in the debate on the modern, culturally diverse societies that are currently arising across the globe. These complex structures can only work, says Bhatti, if people focus more strongly on what connects them, on the similarities between their cultures. “So far we have concentrated too much on the differences.” But that, he says, reinforces distance and promotes the formation of blocs, for example of Christians on the one hand and Muslims on the other – with the constant risk of clashes. The 70-year-old literary scholar believes a possible solution may lie in a communication society that sees its cultural diversity as a boon and in which constantly shifting alliances focus simply on getting along with each other. There’s nothing utopian about that, he says; in port towns, major cities or remote villages it succeeds constantly in everyday life. “Germany and the German-speaking countries of Europe have enormous symbolic capital here”, declares Bhatti. The well-known Goethe expert sees the German classics, but also authors of exile literature such as Kafka, Brecht or Musil as thought leaders for critical-minded co-existence between cultures as equals: “They form an ever-extendable ideal library that is always worth reading and re-reading in our migratory world and imbues German language and literature studies with a new relevance.”

PROFESSOR DR ANIL BHATTI has been part of the Humboldt Family since the mid-1970s. The research fellowship that first brought the literature student from Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi to Germany was the beginning of a long, close collaboration with German academia. Bhatti received the Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm Award in 2001 for his contributions to academic exchange between India and Germany. He was later honoured with the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany and won the Humboldt Research Award in 2011.
When the situation in Tahrir Square began to escalate, Randa Aboubakr took to the streets. The Egyptian revolution of January 2011 was only a few days old, and the old regime had already begun to strike back. “I couldn’t just sit around and do nothing”, says the literature professor at Cairo University looking back. She joined the demonstrators and spent almost three weeks living at the protest camp in Tahrir Square in central Cairo. “I had never known my fellow countrymen to be so tolerant, united and considerate”, Aboubakr still remembers fondly. “For a little while it was an ideal community of people who were finally free to determine their own lives.” In the summer of that year of revolution, she herself was to become a symbol of the Arab Spring. In a free election, the professors of the university’s renowned Faculty of Arts chose her as their new dean. For the first time ever, a woman was to hold this office: the spectacular news was immediately reported around the world. She hadn’t aspired to the post, says Randa Aboubakr. In fact, she was afraid to accept it due to her lack of management experience. In the end, she never took office: the Ministry of Higher Education intervened and her election was declared invalid and another dean appointed. Today, almost four years after the Egyptian revolution, the spirit of change on campus has dissipated, regrets Aboubakr. The professors in particular, whose words carry weight among the people, could do much to promote democratic ideals, she says, but most university lecturers had become indifferent. So the professor of English is placing her hope in the next generation: “I try to nurture the spirit of freedom in my students.” She encourages the young people to explore political issues – in personal discussions and online on her Facebook page, which she has turned into a forum for debate. It will be a long time until her country finds its way to democracy, there will be painful setbacks and maybe even another dictatorship, says Randa Aboubakr: “But I will stay in Egypt and continue to speak my mind.”

PROFESSOR DR RANDA ABOUBAKR teaches English and comparative literature at Cairo University, Egypt. She became world-famous as an activist in the revolution of 2011. As a Humboldt Research Fellow she worked at Freie Universität Berlin and the Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin from 2007 to 2009. She received the Humboldt Alumni Award in 2013.
All research funding organisations focus on excellence, international competition and careers. The Humboldt Foundation is aiming higher. Helmut Schwarz, President of the Foundation, on hospitality, trust and the value of speaking frankly.

Sooner or later, anyone with an interest in the Humboldt Foundation will come across the term “Humboldt Family”. It may sound rather old-fashioned to some readers – isn’t it all about networks these days? And in any case, shouldn’t research funding associations like the Foundation be focusing on things like selecting for excellence, international challenges and competition between research locations? Yes, of course, all that is part of the Humboldt Foundation’s everyday business. Perhaps even more than ever. And yet the idea of the Humboldt Family is far from nostalgic: it describes a way of life.

For example, the Foundation also provides funding for fellows’ families, for the partners and children who accompany them. We do this because we know how important that support is for young researchers – geographically mobile people trying to balance work and family life in a foreign country. The annual Humboldt Meeting in the garden of the Federal President is always also a fun day out for families and children – a global family in miniature. The memory of this warm welcome to Germany stays with many Humboldtians and their families for the rest of their lives. It frequently forms the basis of an enduring connection to Germany and with each other – a connection defined by friendship and respect.

To put it sociologically, families are communities of solidarity and learning. There are many among the over 26,000 Humboldtians around the world today for whom their sponsorship by the Humboldt Foundation was more than just a major step in their professional careers. Our fellowships have kept some fellows out of prison, even saved the lives of others who were threatened for example by junta regimes in South America or repressive governments on other continents. The South African linguist Neville Alexander, an associate and fellow prisoner of Nelson Mandela, may serve as an example. Humboldtians are and always have also been drivers of societal and political change, whether during the Cold War or today in the countries of the Arab world. They act as ambassadors for Germany and are often seismometers for developments in their home countries – and in ours. The reason: in a healthy family, people can be frank with each another. Humboldtians not only let us know what gratifyingly succeeds at German universities and research institutions – they also tell us openly what could or should be improved. So we also hear from them about the sometimes unpleasant reality guests from abroad face when dealing with public authorities, on the street or in their search for accommodation here. Through its initiatives to promote a welcoming culture the Foundation works tirelessly to help its fellows from other countries feel safe and at home in Germany.

We should take to heart writer Max Frisch’s remark from the 1960s – “We called for workers, and it was people who came” – and never forget: Humboldtians are not assistance seekers, they are in demand around the world! Looking at images of our fellows, you’ll see people from all cultures interacting; they are friendly, open and eager to learn more about each other. We experience international understanding every day – and that too is an old-fashioned term. But it’s something we need today more than ever.
Germany’s Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier visits the Gandhi Smriti Memorial in New Delhi in September 2014.
THE POWER OF SCIENCE

Ebola, Ukraine crisis, terror in Syria and Iraq – threats and conflicts are keeping Germany’s Federal Foreign Minister busy. With all that on his plate, does he even have time to think about academic exchange? Frank-Walter Steinmeier on soft power, the Humboldt Network and why he views foreign research policy as anything but a luxury.

Interview GEORG SCHOLL

KOSMOS: Minister Steinmeier, this is the second time you’ve been responsible for academic foreign policy in the Federal Government. What is different today compared to your first period in office ten years ago?

FRANK-WALTER STEINMEIER: A quick look around shows us that the world has changed. We’re dealing with several foreign trouble spots at once. In our neighbourhood, a conflict is raging in Ukraine that has brought the issue of war and peace back to our continent. In the Middle East the ISIS terrorist militia is threatening not only the Iraqi state but the region as whole, and even us here in Europe. And the people of West Africa are battling an invisible enemy with the potential to throw entire states into chaos. Obviously no state alone can cope with crises and conflicts of such magnitude.

What does that mean for German foreign policy?

What it means for us is that we have to focus our attention and our resources, determine our priorities and thoroughly review the instruments in our foreign policy toolkit.

Isn’t academic foreign policy a luxury compared to these challenges?

Quite the opposite. Academic foreign policy is not a luxury; it proves its worth particularly in times of crisis. It contributes to a foreign policy that works towards greater understanding and a peaceful balance. Syria for example is in danger of losing an entire generation of academics, experts and future leaders as a result of the current conflict.

What do you intend to do about that?

Among other things, the Federal Foreign Office has put together a multi-year package of measures for Syrian students that also includes fellowships. We must not allow the conflict in Syria to create a lost generation. Younger Syrians are the very people who will be crucial in rebuilding and managing their country’s future; we want to help ensure that there are prospects for them – and for their country.

Through its intermediary organisations the Federal Foreign Office funds not only young researchers from crisis regions but also experienced researchers from established science nations. How do excellence schemes fit into your strategy?

Here too the parameters have changed. The competition for the brightest minds has become tougher. The Humboldt Foundation contributes significantly to bringing researchers from abroad to Germany, thereby helping Germany maintain its status as a well-respected player in this field on the global stage. Germany is already the third most important host country for foreign students after the USA...
and the UK. Many foreign institutes are entering into collaborations with German research institutions, and more and more international researchers are coming to Germany for research stays.

**Within the Humboldt Family these stays often create life-long connections. What part does this global network play in German foreign policy?**

The many members of the globally networked Humboldt Family are great ambassadors for excellence. And if that’s something people in the respective home country associate with Germany, that contributes significantly to maintaining and strengthening our soft power.

You mean the kind of power that is based on culture and diplomacy, as opposed to hard power that uses economic and military means.

Exactly. That Germany’s academic and research landscape has an excellent reputation around the world contributes significantly to a positive image of Germany. In recent years we have seen impressive results from surveys on Germany’s image, as demonstrated by for example the Anholt Nation Brands Index and various BBC surveys. A study by the McKinsey Global Institute has identified Germany as the world’s best networked country.

That sounds like an easy win for Germany’s brand advertising.

There’s no reason to rest on our laurels. Our goal must remain to support people interested in Germany along the individual’s path: starting with German school and then a DAAD Fellowship and following up with a Humboldt Fellowship and subsequent support from our alumni networks.

Many Humboldtians hold important positions in their home countries, not only in research but often also in politics and society …

… and that’s precisely what makes them such important points of contact for us. Their great advantage is that they are strongly anchored in their countries and thus able to identify and articulate national and regional contexts and relationships, both regarding academic matters and in terms of political and societal issues.

**How do you specifically use the Humboldt Network?**

First of all, the Humboldt Foundation is itself an important interface through which we receive valuable information from within the network. And then our diplomatic missions abroad maintain excellent contacts to local Humboldtians. Humboldtians can provide valuable input in both directions: they convey the mood of their country of origin and of Germany as their host country. They are ambassadors to both worlds, so to speak. On my journeys abroad I like to take the opportunity to meet with Humboldtians. We appreciate this dialogue very highly. Their opinions are important to us, not least because we can sometimes incorporate them directly into our work.

Do you sometimes wish you could do away with the Foundation’s principle of “no quotas for subjects or countries” in order to focus on certain regions according to foreign policy interests, for example to offer more fellowships for regions marked by political crisis?

The principle of excellence is at the very heart of the Humboldt Foundation. It should not be abandoned, as it is one of the Foundation’s most significant features. The Transformation Partnerships special programme established by the Federal Foreign Office to intensify academic ties in the future includes the Humboldt Foundation’s cooperation.

“I ENJOY MEETING HUMBOLDTIANS. THEY ARE AMBASSADORS TO BOTH WORLDS.”
collaboration with Egypt, Tunisia and other Arab countries for example takes this into consideration and has accordingly allocated funding to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for special research fellowships.

A strategy paper issued by your department in 2011 states that fellowships should in future be partly funded by the fellows themselves and/or their countries of origin, and through support from businesses. Are you still considering this approach?

The paper you mention is aimed at seeking greater financial contributions from partners to fund various measures, including fellowships. The point is not to require the fellows themselves to contribute to their funding, but to convince partner governments and internationally operating companies interested in Germany’s academic know-how to co-fund fellowship programmes.

Were you able to find suitable partners?

Absolutely. The Brazilian government has for example set up a programme that provides funding for fellowships abroad; collaborations with German intermediary organisations were initiated as part of that programme. And as you know, the Humboldt Foundation conducts a very successful programme in cooperation with the Brazilian funding institution CAPES.

As a field that has been repeatedly threatened with funding cuts in recent years, how do you see the future of academic foreign policy?

I consider foreign cultural and education policy a major pillar of German foreign policy. When I began my first period in office as Federal Foreign Minister in 2005, foreign cultural and education policy was woefully underfunded: it had a budget of just 546 million EUR. When I left the Federal Foreign Office, its funding had increased to 726 million EUR.

Will that budget continue to grow?

At over 780 million EUR, the amount foreseen in the draft bill we have submitted to parliament for 2015 is the highest ever proposed for this field. In the 2016 and 2017 budgets academic foreign policy will hopefully benefit significantly from the research package negotiated in the coalition agreement. Particularly in an increasingly networked world with no clear order we must use all available tools of diplomacy. That Germany has a good global reputation as a reliable, attractive and strong partner is due also to the work of our intermediary organisations, not least in academia. Our aim must be to further strengthen and build on this excellent foundation.
IN LOVE WITH THE PROVINCES

Berlin and Munich are still the first choices for academics from abroad. But the 2014 Humboldt Rankings also show a growing interest in smaller German university towns. What exactly makes them so attractive to researchers?

Text LILO BERG    Illustration JONAS SCHULTE

Two years ago, when she received word that she had been granted a Humboldt Research Fellowship, Jungnyum Lee’s bags were already packed. She set out on a long journey: from her home town, the bubbling ten-million metropolis of Seoul, to Göttingen in Lower Saxony with its 121,000 inhabitants. “I could have worked in Berlin or Munich, where most people from my country live”, says the 36-year-old legal scholar. But with her research topic in criminal law she felt the best place for her was the Institute of Criminal Law and Justice at the University of Göttingen. She now speaks German very well and enjoys being able to cycle to the institute. The city’s good reputation is well deserved, says Jungnyum Lee: “In Korea, Göttingen is famous as a university town with a high quality of life, a relaxed atmosphere and a great academic tradition.”

Just how popular smaller German university towns like Göttingen are abroad can be seen from the Humboldt Rankings 2014. The list shows how many researchers have come to Germany on a fellowship or an award from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in the past five years and where the majority of their research stays were spent. Universities in the major cities of Berlin and Munich still lead the rankings. But at the same time a new trend is emerging: universities in small and medium-sized German towns are becoming increasingly attractive to researchers from abroad.

A number of these towns have moved up several places compared to the previous rankings, compiled in 2012. Göttingen for example
leapt from ninth place into the top five. Münster has also worked its way up (from 22nd to 15th), as has the university town of Regensburg (from 18th to 16th). The cities of Würzburg and Leipzig have lost some ground compared to 2012 but are still in the top half of the popularity list. We asked Humboldtians why they opted for a research stay away from the major cities.

Nigerian linguist Olurotimi Taiwo chose Münster. As a Humboldt Research Fellow he worked in the English department of the town’s university, examining the communication of job seekers in Nigerian online forums. His project has ended and Olurotimi Taiwo has returned to the renowned Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife in south-western Nigeria. But the 51-year-old English professor still enthuses over the pleasant life he found in leafy, peaceful Münster and the friendly atmosphere at the institute. The main reason he chose this location, however, was his long-standing collaboration with his colleague Ulrike Gut, who has set up a research group for Nigerian English in Münster. Says Olurotimi Taiwo: “A few years ago she was teaching in Augsburg – I would have been just as happy to go there.”

Professional aspects and personal contacts are apparently major factors in deciding where to conduct research stays. They also influenced Moldovan historian Svetlana Suveica’s choice. Following periods at Stanford and London, a Georg Forster Research Fellowship brought her to Regensburg and the city’s Institute for East and Southeast European Studies two years ago to write a book on the turbulent history of her home country after the First World War. She admits she was immediately captivated by the charms of the historic town on the Danube. With her husband and two daughters, seven and seventeen, she lives near the majestic river that also brushes Moldova on its way to the Black Sea. She is happy in her adopted home, says Svetlana Suveica, and her family is doing well: “Regensburg is a wonderful city for children – very safe and with lots of things for them to do, everything close together and plenty of green spaces.”

WONDERFUL PEACE AND QUIET
Egyptologist Mohamed Ismail Khaled is also a fan of small-town Bavaria. At the University of Würzburg’s Institute of Classical Studies the 36-year-old Humboldt Research Fellow is examining how the 5th Dynasty of Ancient Egypt financed the building of its pyramids. “I could have gone to Berlin or Munich instead”, says Mohamed Khaled. “There are many good Egyptian institutes in Germany.” What drew him to Würzburg, he explains, was the prospect of being able to concentrate on his work – “and particularly the peace and quiet”. Something the researcher, who is responsible at the Ministry of State for Antiquities in Egypt for issuing excavation licences for the entire country, especially missed during the upheaval of the revolution in recent years. His wife and three-year-old daughter have also come to appreciate the calm of Würzburg, reports the young researcher: “As soon as we’re back in Egypt, we plan to move to a more quiet apartment.”

AS ATTRACTIVE AS EVER
Academics from abroad who come to Germany with funding from the Humboldt Foundation often have a choice of several locations. But for Andrew Talle it had to be Leipzig: “I have better research conditions here than in most big cities”, says the American music historian and Bach specialist from Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, USA. Funded by a Humboldt Research Fellowship, he is working on his new book “Leipzig in Travelogues 1700–1750” at the Saxon Academy of Science. He hopes to publish the results next year, in time for the city’s millennium celebration. In the early 18th century Leipzig was one of Germany’s most attractive cities, says Andrew Talle. And it has achieved that status again today – not least in academia.

Helmut Schwarz, President of the Foundation, is pleased that increasing numbers of researchers from abroad are leaving the beaten track and choosing research stays away from the major cities: “Our new rankings show just how much confidence is being placed in the quality of German academia as a whole.”
EVERYTHING UNDER CONTROL

Why do we find it so difficult to stick to a diet or take regular exercise? The US psychologist Kathleen Vohs knows the causes and how we can achieve our goals despite them.

Text ANKE BRODMERKEL Photos NIKOLAUS BRADE

WHEN SHE WAS SIXTEEN, says Kathleen Vohs, she made three resolutions: to get a doctorate, to run a marathon and to own a patent.

The US psychologist, who was granted the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation’s Anneliese Maier Research Award this September, has already ticked two of the boxes on her list. In 2000, she completed a Ph.D. at the venerable Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, USA, and she has not just run one marathon over the years, but 16 altogether. Anyone meeting this powerhouse of a woman will be in no doubt whatsoever that she will also achieve her third goal, the patent.

Kathleen Vohs speaks quickly, sometimes almost breathlessly. Every sentence is focussed and to the point. You positively see the cogs turning in her brain – and that she sometimes has to put the brakes on to allow the person she is addressing to keep up.

How people manage to put the brakes on is something Kathleen Vohs probably knows more about than anyone else: the professor of marketing at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis is a world authority on self-regulation. Why do people spend more than they have? Why do they have such difficulty in sticking to a diet or taking regular exercise? These are just a couple of the questions that intrigue the new award winner and that she will be investigating over the next five years together with the Heidelberg social psychologist Klaus Fiedler and his team.

Probably the most important finding Kathleen Vohs has made in the last few years can be summarised as follows: self-control is a limited resource which conse-

In Kathleen Vohs’s experiments, participants have to prove how long they can resist temptation. We recreated one of her set-ups for our photo series.
SELF-CONTROL IS NOT SOMETHING WE ARE BORN WITH – IT HAS TO BE LEARNED.

Intelligently and, to some extent, even economically. So there is absolutely no point in trying to forgo that evening chocolate bar and those online impulse purchases at the same time? “Such an ambitious plan is almost certainly doomed to failure,” says Kathleen Vohs, laughing.

But she does have some good news: a lack of self-control is not a deficiency you are born with. The ability to control your own behaviour and adapt it to new situations is something you can learn. “People who regularly practise self-control in small doses soon realise that it gets easier as you go along,” she says. According to her theory, completing a diet successfully can potentially even help people subsequently learn to handle money more prudently.

MOST IMPORTANT THING – THE SNACKS

Klaus Fiedler, who has known Kathleen Vohs for the last ten years and was the one to nominate her for the Anne- liese Maier Research Award, praises the 40-year-old’s tire- less drive. “I am always impressed by the determination with which she tackles things,” he says. He also appreciates how creative she is when it comes to thinking up new experiments to test her sometimes unusual hypotheses.

For one of her studies, for example, she invited dieters to attend her laboratory individually. Here she set up a sitting room situation with a comfy chair, a table, a sideboard and a television – even plants and candles. “But the most important thing were the snacks,” says Kathleen Vohs. “They had to be very tempting and seriously unhealthy.”

The decisive point about the experiment was that the snacks – sugar-coated chocolate dragees, nachos and salted peanuts – were set out in different places in the room. For the one group, they were easy to reach, so the temptation was great. For the other group, the nibbles were within their line of vision but still some distance away. It thus took a lot less self-control to ignore them.

The test subjects were asked to sit down in the armchair and watch a film. “It was a protracted video about a sheep, with no plot at all,” says Kathleen Vohs. “The object of the procedure was to induce boredom in the test subjects so that, depending on the location of the snacks, a greater or
lesser degree of self-control was required not to distract themselves by nibbling.

It subsequently got even more unfair: All the test subjects were then given a number of tasks to carry out. For example, they were supposed to draw a figure without taking the pen off the paper. What nobody was told was that all the tasks were impossible. “We were able to observe that all the participants who had previously sat near the snacks gave up much more quickly than those who had only been exposed to slight temptation,” Kathleen Vohs reports. “This result supported our theory that self-control is a limited resource.”

The researcher, who has already published several books, has addressed the subject of money more than almost any other psychologist. She became interested in the topic more than ten years ago. “After having to manage on the modest earnings of a postdoc, I got my first assistant professorship at the University of British Columbia in 2003,” Kathleen Vohs remembers. This involved a considerable jump in salary. “And, suddenly, my behaviour changed,” she says. Instead of asking her friends to drive her to the airport, for instance, the young professor went by taxi. She hardly ever wandered around the shops with girlfriends any more, but acquired a personal shopper – a paid consultant who then took over responsibility for her wardrobe. “In a nutshell: I started to live much more independently of the people who really mean something to me,” she explains.

A widely-acclaimed paper published in “Science” in 2006 proved that she had hit on a general response pattern with her observation. She was able to demonstrate, for example, how easy it is for money to make you lonely. “Even just thinking about money causes most people to instinctively put a greater distance between themselves and others,” says the researcher. “They prefer to do things alone instead of asking others for help, and are less helpful themselves.”

Money also plays an important role in her favourite topic, self-control: Kathleen Vohs is not only interested in what money makes of people; she also investigates how they deal with it. In a series of experiments, for instance, she revealed that people are more likely to make uncon- sidered impulse purchases when they had to practise...
discipline in some other way beforehand. "It seems that, to some extent, our brains don't function very differently from a muscle," she notes. "If we make too many demands on it, it stops working at full capacity for a while."

This fact has apparently not escaped the President of the United States. Barack Obama once told a journalist from "Vanity Fair" that he tried to ration his strength carefully in order to be able to make decisions, which was why he wore blue or grey suits. Referring to the relevant research findings, the President explained that he did not want to be forced to make everyday decisions about what to eat or what to wear. He had to make too many decisions in the course of a day as it was and needed all his energy for those.

So we can come to terms with our brains, but we can also outwit them – with glucose tablets, for example. Kathleen Vohs discovered that taking glucose increases our ability to exercise self-control once again, which is not a lot of help to people on a diet, of course. They are much better off employing a different strategy. People who are prone to binge eating should take pause in these situations and focus on their values. Kathleen Vohs suggests: "People should take pause in these situations and focus on their values. Our experiments have shown that calling to mind the things in life that are really important to you can help you stop yourself from engaging in impulsive actions, including buying.

The researcher herself knows clearly what important to her in her life. Right on top of her list of priorities is her work at the University of Minnesota nine years ago. At last, I could be near my parents, siblings, nieces and nephews again," says Vohs, who has already spent some time living in Europe and has travelled across six continents.

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he has essentially approached the topic in terms of cognitive decision-making. Kathleen Vohs, on the other hand, specialises in consumer behaviour. “I think we will complement each other very well and inspire each other’s work,” the social psychologist concludes.

Kathleen Vohs, in the meantime, is not just looking forward to her work in Heidelberg, but also to the local wines, she says with a twinkle in her eye. After all, even a researcher who devotes so much of her time to self-control is not completely immune to a few guilty pleasures: she admits she finds it difficult to walk past a wine shop without stopping and buying the odd bottle.

In her role as a professor of marketing at the University of Minnesota, USA, KATHLEEN VOHS (40) has already investigated the psychology of money and heterosexual sexual relations as predicted by economic principles. However, the focus of her work is our ability to self-regulate. According to Vohs, this is a limited resource which is depleted by use but can be enhanced by training. In summer 2014, she received the Anneliese Maier Research Award for her academic achievements. Together with her host at the University of Heidelberg, she will generate new impetus for the field of motivational psychology.
2014 SOFJA KOVALEVSKAJA AWARDS FOR INTERNATIONAL YOUNG RESEARCHERS

In November, Federal Research Minister Johanna Wanka and Helmut Schwarz, President of the Humboldt Foundation, presented this year’s Sofja Kovalevskaja Awards: eleven research talents will receive funding of up to 1.65 million EUR each.

The three female and eight male award winners are between 29 and 41 years of age and come from nine different countries. They were chosen from a strong field of 79 applicants. They will now spend five years at their German host institutions implementing self-devised research projects and setting up research groups.

"With this award, we place confidence in talented researchers and give them freedom", said Schwarz. "We invest risk capital wisely so that they can head a team at an early stage in their careers and realise their often bold and risky research ideas."

The Sofja Kovalevskaja Award is traditionally presented every two years. However response from abroad has been so strong that it will be awarded again in 2015. "The award enables talented researchers to strike out on new research paths here in Germany", said Minister Wanka.
In 2013, Humboldtians from around the world donated more than 80,000 EUR to mark the 60th anniversary of the Foundation's re-establishment. Donations remain welcome; please see the new Donations section of the Foundation's website for more information.

The funds from the anniversary year will be used to provide additional support for the global Humboldt Network. Funded initiatives include the Neville Alexander Memorial Fund, which was set up in honour of linguist and Humboldttian Neville Alexander, an associate of Nelson Mandela, and enables the Foundation to grant dissertation awards to young researchers from Africa.

The Foundation continues to invite private donations beyond its anniversary year. "The Humboldt Foundation is and will remain an almost entirely state-funded institution. That hasn’t changed in over 60 years", says the Secretary General of the Foundation, Enno Aufderheide. "But private donations allow us additional freedom to test new ideas that we would initially be unable to implement with public funds. This benefits especially younger researchers." To assist potential donors and make donating easier, the Foundation has made information and contacts available on the Internet at:

www.humboldt-foundation.de/giving

HEDWIG AWARD FOR THE HUMBOLDT FOUNDATION

The University of Wroclaw and the City of Wroclaw have recognised the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for its contributions to German-Polish dialogue. The Secretary General of the Foundation, Enno Aufderheide, accepted the Hedwig Award on behalf of the Foundation in October in Wroclaw.

The award was established in 2004 and is presented annually to a German and a Polish personality. Previous winners include Helmut Kohl and Kurt Masur from Germany and Polish politicians Jerzy Buzek and Tadeusz Mazowiecki. With the Humboldt Foundation and the Polish cultural journal "Odra", this was the first year that the award went to institutions rather than individuals.

Since its founding in 1953, the Humboldt Foundation has granted over 1,280 fellowships and awards to researchers from Poland, making Polish researchers the largest group of Humboldt Alumni in Europe.
You may have seen me at one of our events. But not out front in the spotlight with the speakers and guests of honour. When they’re on stage, I’m usually not even in the room, but behind the scenes lining up the next part of the programme. Flawless organisation and satisfied participants are what we strive for in the event team, where I’m responsible for awards ceremonies. Our work starts months in advance. Which hotel do we need? What sort of music will we have, and what wine? What technical equipment is required? Every little detail has to be considered. But once the event starts, often lasting several days and involving hundreds of attendees, things still tend to get really hectic, despite all our planning. A speaker has to drop out unexpectedly, or a busload of guests gets stuck in traffic— and the entire schedule is affected. So you do need a talent for improvisation. After an event I’m usually pretty done for. But happy!

I realised that event management was the perfect job for me when I was working as a production assistant at a film company in Munich. Part of my job there was to organise premieres. Our greatest success was a Bavarian comedy called “Wer früher stirbt ist länger tot” – released as “Grave Decisions” abroad. The film drew enthusiastic audiences across Germany and won several awards. If you haven’t seen it, you should definitely check it out.

By the way, I’m Munich born and bred: I used to hear the cheering from the Olympic Stadium from my parents’ garden when FC Bayern Munich scored a goal. I go to the Oktoberfest with friends and family every year – in a dirndl, of course. But I also like living in Bonn. The folks from the Rhineland are pretty relaxed. That helps when things start getting hectic again.

Recorded by GEORG SCHOLL