



Evaluation der Forschungspreis-Programme der Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung

Endbericht an die
Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung (AvH)
Jean-Paul-Str. 12
53173 Bonn

Anton Geyer (inspire research)
Simon Pohn-Weidinger (convelop)
Karin Grasenick (convelop)

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inspire research
Beratungsgesellschaft m.b.H.
Lange Gasse 65/16, 1080 Wien
Österreich
Tel. +43 1 353 04 51
E-Mail: office@inspire-research.at
www.inspire-research.at

convelop
cooperative knowledge design gmbh
Bürgergasse 8-10/I, 8010 Graz
Österreich
Tel. +43 316 720813-11
E-Mail: office@convelop.at
www.convelop.at

Executive Summary

The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH) has been awarding Humboldt Research Awards since 1972. The award is granted to highly renowned academic researchers from abroad for their overall life-time research achievements. Since 2001, the Humboldt Foundation has also been awarding Wilhelm Friedrich Bessel Research Awards to younger academic researchers who completed their doctorates no longer than 18 years ago and who are already perceived as “upcoming stars” in their fields of research. Candidates for the research awards are nominated by researchers in Germany. In addition to the award of the prize and the prize money, the award winners are invited to a research stay of up to one year in Germany to carry out a self-chosen research project in collaboration with a host at a German research institution and with other researchers in Germany.

Aims and objectives of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to examine the extent to which the Humboldt Foundation has succeeded in achieving the three objectives of the research award programmes:

- Firstly, the programmes aim to strengthen the German research landscape by promoting research collaborations between excellent researchers from abroad and researchers in Germany.
- Secondly, by establishing and deepening the personal networks of the award winners with researchers in Germany (and with other members of the Humboldt Network), the programme aims to create lasting personal bonds among the academic elites abroad and in Germany.
- Thirdly, the research award programmes shall contribute to convey and disseminate a modern and differentiated image of Germany.

The research award programmes were already evaluated once in 2009. This second evaluation takes into account the results and recommendations of the 2009 evaluation exercise. The current evaluation focuses on those aspects of the programme that were identified as fields of action in the first evaluation. The evaluation examines the effectiveness of the measures taken by the Humboldt Foundation in response of the 2009 evaluation results. The evaluation focusses in particular on

- the participation of female researchers in the programme and the assessment of the measures taken by the Humboldt Foundation to promote equal opportunities;
- the participation of humanities scholars and social science researchers;
- changes in the national and international programme environment that impact on the attractiveness of the research award programmes;
- the networking effects and the sustainability of the contacts established through the award winners' stays in Germany;
- the experience gained with the Bonn Humboldt Award Winners' Forum, launched in 2011, as a specific instrument for integrating award winners more closely into the Humboldt network and making them more visible;
- the experience of the award winners during their research stays in Germany and the contribution of the research stays for conveying a modern image of Germany.

Design and implementation of the evaluation

In order to answer the evaluation questions set out in the Terms of Reference, the evaluation concept agreed with the Humboldt Foundation provided for a broad mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. Empirical data and information were to be collected, analysed and related to the core topics of the evaluation from as many different perspectives as possible. In addition to the analyses of data and documents provided by the Humboldt Foundation, the evaluation drew on interviews with award winners, hosts, members of the Humboldt research award selection committee, representatives of the funding ministries, other experts and staff of the Humboldt Foundation. With an online questionnaire survey the award winners and hosts were asked about their experience with and the scientific and personal impact of the research awards. The evaluation team conducted on-site interviews with participants of the Humboldt Award Winners Forum 2018 in Bonn and additional telephone interviews with participants of the 2016 and 2017 Humboldt Award Winners Forums respectively. A bibliometric analysis of the publication activities of the award winners and the non-selected nominees in the years before and after the selection decision with partners in Germany supplemented the analysis.

Results

The results of the evaluation show that as a whole the research award programmes are very successful in achieving their objectives. In particular, the research award programmes substantially contribute to establishing, strengthening and sustaining research collaborations between the award winners and researchers in Germany.

With regard to the effects achieved, there are differences between the Humboldt Research Award programme and the Bessel Research Award programme. In the case of Humboldt Research Award winners, who are usually already in an advanced phase of their research careers, the research awards lead to a further intensification of their research collaborations with partners in Germany. The results of the bibliometric analysis suggest that some of the non-selected nominees in the Humboldt Research Award programme will also be working more closely with partners in Germany following the funding decision. For the Bessel Research Award winners, who still have a larger part of their academic career ahead of them, the actual awarding of the prize plays a greater role in focusing international research collaborations on partners in Germany. The sustainability of the established collaborations is also likely to depend more strongly on later career decisions. One finding that does not correspond to the aims and objectives of the Bessel programme is that both the nominees and the award winners often regard the Bessel Research Award as "small Humboldt Research Award" and thus as an award holding lesser prestige.

In recent years, the Humboldt Foundation's "soft-push strategy" has been successful in promoting gender equality in the context of its research award programmes. Throughout the programme implementation procedures, special attention is paid to gender aspects. The selection committee is composed accordingly and committee members are made aware of gender-relevant issues in their tasks. The selection rates of male researchers and female researchers among the nominees are practically identical. However, the results of the survey of the award winners and the results of the bibliometric analysis indicate that the female Humboldt Award winners are still so slightly more scientifically visible than the average male Humboldt Award winner.

At the same time, the results of the evaluation show that, despite a significant increase over the evaluation period, the proportion of female researchers among the nominees and award winners is still low. This also applies in comparison to national and international benchmarks.

The procedure of co-nomination in the research award programmes has not yet led to the desired success in attracting more female researchers to the programme. It is also little known among the programme's addressees.

In the questionnaire survey, the award winners from most geographic regions worldwide, in particular those from North America and Europe, stated that the share of women among established and senior researchers is greater at their home institutions than at the guest institutions in Germany. Award winners also reported comparatively often negative experiences with the provision of childcare and schooling during their research stays in Germany. While from a research point of view the award winners overwhelmingly reported positive experiences with Germany as a research location, there seems to be still considerable room for improvement regarding the framework conditions for research stays in Germany, especially for female researchers among the award winners.

The results of the evaluation show that the low level of participation in the research award programmes in certain subject areas of the humanities and social sciences is probably due to a still ongoing internationalisation process in these subject areas and not the results of programme-specific factors.

The format of the Bonn Humboldt Award Winners' Forum has proved its worth. It makes an important contribution to strengthening and renewing contacts between the members of the Humboldt Network and researchers in Germany.

Recommendations on the Further Development of the research award programmes

The evaluators propose the following priority fields of action for the further development of the research award programmes:

1. The Humboldt Foundation's soft-push strategy to promote equal opportunities for male and female researchers should be consistently pursued.
2. Awareness measures should be taken to significantly increase the number of female researchers that are nominated for research awards. Both women and, in particular, men as nominating researchers should be addressed. The Humboldt Foundation should particularly address those subject areas that have so far had a particularly low share of female researchers (e. g. physics, engineering).
3. The Humboldt Foundation should initiate an internal discussion on benchmarks and targets for the participation of women. National and international benchmark indicators should be documented in the Humboldt Foundation's annual gender monitoring report.
4. In an empirical study, the Humboldt Foundation should determine for its programme portfolio whether and how the programme features and implementations practices support the integration of female researchers into academic research networks, or what effects the integration into the Humboldt network has on women's careers.
5. Subject areas from the humanities and social sciences, which have so far only participated to a limited extent in the research award programmes, should be addressed consistently with awareness measures.
6. The alumni measure "renewed research stays" should be used as flexibly and generously as possible for award winners who are dependent on support from the Humboldt Foundation to sustain research collaborations with Germany. However, a large proportion of the award winners are not dependent on re-invitations by the Humboldt Foundation in order to be able to continue their research collaborations with German partners.

7. The Humboldt Foundation should take measures to ensure that the Bessel Research Award is perceived on an equal footing with the Humboldt Research Award. Additional funding measures to encourage Bessel Research Award winners to collaborate with researchers in Germany in the longer term may be considered.
8. Host institutions should be advised to ensure that the award winners receive adequate support during their stays concerning all aspects of everyday life. This applies in particular to the support of award winners who come to Germany with children so that they are offered appropriate childcare services.
9. A financial offer to the hosts of award winners could make the research award programmes even more attractive for nominees. The design of this offer should make an additional contribution to networking the German research landscape with the Humboldt and Bessel Research Award winners.