

MAGAZINE

OF HEINRICH HEINE UNIVERSITY DÜSSELDORF



HOW DOES SUGAR ARRIVE IN THE CELL?

Humboldt Professor Wolf B. Frommer
investigates transport molecules

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OF KNOWLEDGE:**
Launch conference
at University House

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THE BREXIT:**
What are the
consequences?

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Photo: Jochen Müller

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Editorial team:
Rolf Willhardt (head), Dr. Victoria Meinschäfer,
Susanne Dopheide

Editorial assistance:
Dr. Arne Claussen, Carolin Grape

Translation:
Sharon Oranski, www.oranski.de

Editorial



Dear Reader

I am very pleased to be able to present to you what is meanwhile the sixth issue of our HHU Magazine with exciting reports on current projects and developments at Heinrich Heine University.

Since this year, HHU is a member of the global network “Scholars at Risk” (SAR). This is an international network within which over 400 universities, research institutions and other academic organisations in 39 countries are working together to protect threatened scholars and strengthen values such as academic freedom (www.scholarsatrisk.org). Above all against the background of the current political situation, academic and personal freedom is one of our special concerns. This is reflected, for example, in the setting up of the Refugee Law Clinic, an initiative launched by students at the Faculty of Law, the goal of which is to offer free legal advice for refugees and asylum seekers. But HHU is also tackling other serious problems to do with refugees, as is clear from the conference on care for torture victims.

In order to make it easier for incoming international students to settle down at HHU, over the last years we have established a buddy programme at our university which attracts considerable interest. In this issue, you can learn more about this programme with the slogan “Learn about other cultures and make friends from around the world” which is called Mate for You and allocates incoming international students a German student for a semester.

We are very happy to be able since the 2017 summer semester to welcome Professor Wolf B. Frommer, who was

previously at the Carnegie Institution for Science in Stanford (USA), as the first Alexander-von-Humboldt Professor at our university. In his opinion Düsseldorf is just as attractive as Stanford, even if it has no ocean!

180 stakeholders from academia, culture, business and politics also recognised this appeal when they met at the Launch Conference of the initiative “Düsseldorf Region of Knowledge”. The delegates discussed how they could work together better in future in order to anchor knowledge and research more firmly in our region and its capital city.

One of Düsseldorf’s special features is the largest Japanese community in mainland Europe which is at home here. Yet the neighbouring Ruhr area with its collieries plays a special historical role in German-Japanese relations, as you can read on Page 12.

Dear Reader, you can read all about what else has been happening in the faculties over the past months on the following pages of our HHU Magazine. Topics range from gardens, transport molecules and the important role of a referee to Brexit! I wish you an enjoyable read and all of us continued productive cooperation at international level!

Yours sincerely

Professor Andrea von Hülsen-Esch
Vice-President for International Relations

Email: Prorektorin.Internationales@hhu.de

Launch Conference: Kick-off for “Düsseldorf Region of Knowledge”

Close cooperation means better networking opportunities for everyone

BY CAROLIN GRAPE

180 stakeholders from science, business, politics and culture gathered on 13 February at University House to discuss challenges and visions for a future region of knowledge. The leading question was: How can we work together more efficiently in future in order to anchor knowledge and research more firmly in our region and its capital city?

In the contest for the most talented minds and knowledge-based businesses, bundled knowledge is a key location factor. In order to use the potential available in the greater Düsseldorf area in an optimum way, Heinrich Heine University (HHU) has triggered a process, the objective of which is long-term networking and cooperation

between all stakeholders actively involved in knowledge-related issues.

The kick-off took place – in cooperation with the City of Düsseldorf, the administrative districts of Mettmann and Neuss and other important partners, including Düsseldorf University of Applied Sciences, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Stadtparkasse Düsseldorf savings bank as well as the Federal Employment Agency – at the Launch Conference “Düsseldorf Region of Knowledge”.

The speech by Dr. Thomas Grünewald, State Secretary in NRW’s Ministry of Innovation, Science and Research, was an inspiring start. On the basis of an entertaining analysis of the interrelationship between higher education and



► At the Launch Conference of the initiative “Düsseldorf Region of Knowledge” (from left to right): Professor Anja Steinbeck (President of Heinrich Heine University), Professor Brigitte Grass (President of Düsseldorf University of Applied Sciences), Thomas Geisel (Lord Mayor of the City of Düsseldorf), Dr. Thomas Grünewald (State Secretary in the NRW’s Ministry of Innovation, Science and Research)



▶ The first panel's topic was "What's the status quo of Düsseldorf Region of Knowledge?" Participants from left to right: Jutta Zülow (Zülow AG, Neuss), Hans-Jürgen Petruschke (Chief Administrator of the Rhineland Administrative District of Neuss), HSD President Professor Brigitte Grass, Lord Mayor Thomas Geisel. On the far right is presenter Jürgen Wiebicke (WDR).



◀ Stakeholders from academia, business and politics from the Düsseldorf region networked during the Launch Conference "Düsseldorf Region of Knowledge" on 13 February at University House.

the region, he illustrated the factors which influence the shift from "I" to "we", that is, the formation of knowledge alliances in regional economic areas. He encouraged the participants to further pursue their projects and warned that: "A house is built on foundations. We don't start with the wallpaper first! Topics are needed around which we can build cooperative structures

Lectures and workshops

which can by all means be temporary. In any case, they require an agreed agenda in order to have a greater impact than just a joint public appearance. And they need organic development and patience."

Another highlight of the event was an interview with Rolf Schrömgens, founder of Trivago, who has just launched his company on the US stock exchange. The special focus here was the expectations of a digital-based enterprise on a region of knowledge. In a discussion with Jürgen Wiebicke (TV journalist at WDR), Schrömgens told of his approach when recruiting personnel: "When I employ someone, I look less at his CV or what he trained as. In a world which is constantly changing thanks to digital transformation, it's far more important to find staff who can adapt quickly and adjust creatively to new patterns!" He said that Düsseldorf was an important location for him especially because of its infrastructure and that he appreciated the city's internationality.

In the afternoon, the participants convened in eight working groups and discussed the



- 1: HHU President Professor Anja Steinbeck: "We don't want to leave it at just one conference."
- 2: State Secretary Dr. Thomas Grünewald represented NRW's Ministry of Science. Theme of his keynote speech was: "From 'I' to 'we' in the Region of Knowledge".
- 3: Entrepreneur Rolf Schrömgens (Trivago) praised Düsseldorf and spoke in favour of greater communication with HHU and HSD. "A close relationship ought not to be underestimated."
- 4: Lord Mayor Thomas Geisel argued strongly for a "Düsseldorf Region of Knowledge" network.

following topics: transition phases in knowledge acquisition, interaction between business and science, digitalisation, infrastructure, art and culture. The results and the possibilities for

Interaction of business and academia

cooperation developed were then presented in a plenary session. These included, for example, the idea of a joint housing cooperative for students and apprentices which could ensure "intellectual accessibility", that is, break down prejudices and encourage a sense of community.

All working groups expressed the common desire for more platforms, events and networking opportunities.

What happens next? "The intention is to set up an association which defines priorities and pursues the topic further", said Professor Anja Steinbeck, HHU President, at the end of the event. "Of course not everything can be done at once. But in the long term we can change our region by working together in this way."

The many participants in the launch conference confirm the high level of interest and also the demand for this initiative. Anyone can join in who wants to show dedication and actively build up, position and shape the knowledge of region.



Partners in the joint initiative
 Heinrich Heine University as initiator, City of Düsseldorf, Stadtsparkasse Düsseldorf savings bank, Administrative District of Mettmann, Rhineland Administrative District of Neuss, Düsseldorf University of Applied Sciences, Robert Schumann School of Music and Media, Max Planck Institute for Iron Research, North Rhine-Westphalian Academy of Sciences, Humanities and the Arts, Düsseldorf Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Düsseldorf Student Services, Düsseldorf branch of the Federal Employment Agency, Ministry of Innovation, Science and Research of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia.
wissensregion-duesseldorf.de

Learn about other cultures and make friends from around the world

May we introduce: the “Mate-For-You” buddy programme

Is a “buddy programme” some kind of mentoring scheme? “No”, says Dr. Anne Gellert, Director of the International Office at Heinrich Heine University. “A buddy programme is a relationship between two equal partners who are mates in the sense of colleagues. They stay together for at least a semester.”

In HHU’s “Mate-For-You” buddy programme there are Home Mates, that is, Germans at an advanced stage of their studies, and international guests, generally first-semester students, who are known as World Mates. Dr. Gellert: “Our buddy programme is part of iQu, HHU’s ‘Integrated Quality Initiative for Teaching and Studies’. Our goal is to help students from abroad find their feet better at our university. At the same time, we want to give our German students an opportunity to find foreign friends and gather intercultural experience.” The advantages for the Home Mates from Düsseldorf: They

Dr. Gellert: “Our buddy scheme counts towards the ‘International Commitment’ part of HHU’s General Studies programme.” Participants write down all the activities they undertake together on what is called an ‘Activity Sheet’. “At the end and if they want, everyone is entitled to a very representative and official certificate issued by the University, which documents their ‘intercultural

training’ in the framework of the General Studies programme and which they can then later include in their application portfolios, for example.” And the benefits for the World Mates: They get to know the University of Düsseldorf and Germany, can spend their free time with new friends and practise German in depth and in a natural and relaxed environment at the same time.

Friends from around the world

learn about other cultures, have the chance to make friends from around the world, improve their language proficiency and acquire intercultural skills.



Photos: Ivo Mayr

“THE BUDDY PROGRAMME ENDS THIS ISOLATION THROUGH THE CLOSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PARTNERS. OUR EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN NOTHING BUT POSITIVE.”

Dr. Anne Gellert, Director of HHU's International Office

How do the “mates” come together? There is an online registration procedure for which students can apply prior to the start of each semester. They can enter their preferences on the form, for example gender, special interests or hobbies. The International Office then matches the partners. At the beginning

Internationalisation at home

of the semester a first meeting is then staged at which the partners get to know each other. The programme also includes several group events, for example an Intercultural Dinner where the international guests dish up culinary specialities from their home countries. And – very German – there is a ‘Stammtisch’, a regulars’ table where the “mates” can meet up once a month during the semester. And of course the obligatory

Christmas Party. The buddy programme was launched in the 2013/2014 winter semester. “At that time we brought 30 pairs together straight away”, recalls Dr. Gellert. Last winter semester it was almost 100, “interest has continued to grow”. The World Mates came from 18 different countries. “For our Home Mates, the programme benefits all those students who are not planning to go abroad during their studies – or cannot afford to”, says Dr. Gellert. “This is then something like ‘internationalisation at home’, a term which has meanwhile established itself at universities. Think of US-American universities, for example, where students rarely go abroad. Close contacts and exchange between our Home Mates and their fellow students from other countries are thus the ideal way to get to know other cultures and mentalities without studying abroad.”

The Director of the International Office mentions another aspect of the buddy

programme. The phenomenon exists that international students often stay in a group and withdraw into their shells, whether they want to or not. “The buddy programme ends this isolation through the close relationship between the partners. Our experience has been nothing but positive.”

By the way, a Home Mate from Düsseldorf does not have to be a local student who has been enrolled at HHU from the outset. Dr. Gellert: “We have had several cases where World Mates have studied for a number of semesters at HHU and then been able as Home Mates to share their knowledge with new World Mates.” R. W.

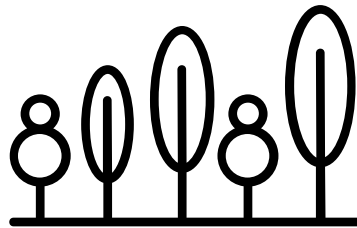
Further information on the International Office's website:

- ▶ www.uni-duesseldorf.de/home/internationales.html
- ▶ www.uni-duesseldorf.de/home/internationales/interkulturell-aktiv/mate-for-you.html



Through the buddy programme, students learn about other cultures and make friends from around the world.

“What appears humorous and playful is sometimes meant very seriously!”



How the Third Reich’s “A People at Work” exhibition became Düsseldorf’s North Park

BY VICTORIA MEINSCHÄFER

Are gardens designed with a specific ideology in mind? Can a park express a political direction? Do not just aesthetic but also ideological aspects play a role in landscaping? Questions which Dr. Christof Baier, Düsseldorf art historian and assistant professor, answers in the affirmative. He is dealing with the topic of “Denazification and Americanisation of Gardens”.

Baier makes it quite clear: “Such keywords are, of course, very difficult to apply to gardens. Garden art and National Socialism are entangled at very different levels.” From a purely formal perspective it is very difficult to confirm, but obviously many of the leading garden landscapers at that time were members of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party. What is more interesting, however, is how landscaping became ideologically charged. Those in power wanted to create “Teutonic Landscapes” and Heinrich Wiepking-Jürgensmann, “Special Representative for Landscaping Questions in the East”, wrote in the “Landscaping Manual” (Landschaftsfibel) published in 1941: “The landscape is always a form, an expression and a marker of the people living within it. It can be the noble face of its spirit and its soul as well as the demon’s grimace, the grimace of human and spiritual corruption”. This was the ‘official’ approach up until 1945.

But what happened after the end of the war to the ‘landscapes’ designed like that? An example is Düsseldorf’s North Park (Nordpark), which was part of the Third Reich’s “A People at Work” (“Schaffendes Volk”) exhibition in 1937. The park was dominated by a monumental axial structure with a very stringent design. When the grounds, which had been confiscated by the British Army of the Rhine after the war, were handed over first in parts in 1953 and then finally in 1957 to the City of Düsseldorf, the city became the owner of an overgrown and dilapidated park, but one in which traces of the Nazis’ exhibition and their propaganda were still clearly visible. Düsseldorf’s Parks Director Ulrich Wolf, according to Baier “a social democrat through and through”, began together

Systematic denazification

with Georg Penker (who incidentally was responsible for designing the grounds of Heinrich Heine University) to “denazify” the park systematically: the basic structure with the large axes was preserved but interrupted by many snaking paths. “Everything that until then had been straight was now curved”, summarises Baier. In addition, the monumental avenues

“STRONG NEW DESIGN ELEMENTS DISTURB AND CONTRADICT THE ORIGINAL SHAPES.”

Assistant Professor Dr. Christof Baier

were broken up with small items of playground equipment and the pergola in Fountain Square made less bombastic through a coat of paint and more randomly placed plants.

Defuse landscapes with simple interventions

Overall an attempt was made – for financial reasons too – to defuse the landscape through simple interventions: “The strong new design elements were always developed in opposition to the original shapes. They disturb and contradict them”, says Baier. The park’s transformation accomplished in this way was at that time a consciously calculated impertinence, a targeted and intentional provocation which was seen exactly as such by the general public.

Baier points out that characterising the park’s redesign from 1953 onwards as “an adaptation to the approach to design and attitude towards life of the after-war period” is too shortsighted. “The interventions of Wolf and Penker which appear so playful and humorous were meant very seriously indeed.”

The same can be observed in Cologne, for example, where the Maifeld, a parade ground created in 1937/38, was chosen

after the end of the war as the place for a rubble tip. “Why was precisely this spot selected for collecting rubble?” asks Baier and arrives, having analysed the plans from the time, at the following conclusion: “Something was buried here. The Maifeld was dumped along with the rubble”. That the landscaping of the rubble tip and its design as an urban park were undertaken according to plans by Guido Erxleben, who worked as a landscape lawyer (Landschaftsanwalt) in the Münster region prior to 1945, shows once more how complex the issue is.

Living space for soldiers’ families

After the decision had fallen to make Bonn the capital city of the Federal Republic and for that reason also to transfer the American High Commission there, a lot of accommodation was needed for the American soldiers’ families within a short space of time and three new building sites emerged in the university city on the Rhine: one for American personnel and two for German personnel. In the housing district still known today as the American Residential Estate (Amerikanische Siedlung), the basic idea of a self-sufficient complex with about 500 homes was put into practice. The horseshoe-shaped



Photo: Düsseldorf City Archive 005-168-007



Georg Penker: Draft sketch of the Summer Flower Garden, around 1956

1: North Park, the Summer Flower Garden, end of the 1960s.

2 + 3: In 1937 the design of the exhibition grounds was very stringent



Photo: Disseldorf City Archive 005-102-039

complex has a school, nursery school and a shopping centre as meeting points. This basic structure – broad ring-shaped roads, two or three-storey buildings grouped randomly in the grounds, generous green spaces, curved paths – was developed in the USA in the 1920s as “neighbourhood units”. From the 1930s onwards, this type of urban planning was common everywhere in the USA and such estates were designed along the same lines in Great Britain and Scandinavia. And last but not least in the 1940s in Germany too – with the major difference that the meeting point in the neighbourhood unit was not the school as in the case of the American estates but the office block of the local branch of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party.

German style of planning before 1945, German style of planning after 1945 and American style of planning – they are all united by the “scarcely comprehensible concept of ‘landscapeness’”. They all want to create “urban landscapes”

in which a “socio-political, ideal, balanced state of “I” and “we” should be achieved in each case”, says Baier. In this respect it is questionable whether it is fair to speak of “Americanisation”

Concept of landscapeness

in landscaping. For Baier, the concept of ‘landscapeness’, which is so difficult to understand, has crystallised as a central aspect when dealing with denazification and Americanisation. “The topic stretches from the mythically charged ‘primeval Germanic landscape’ to urban landscapes to furniture landscapes. It could be said that the concept of ‘landscape’ is for garden architects, urban planners and interior designers that which for politicians, philosophers and writers is the concept of ‘the Occident’.”

Nippon's sons in the Ruhr's coalmines

Topic in research and teaching: Japanese miners in the Ruhr region

“59 miners have come from Japan and said ‘Glückauf’, the traditional miner’s greeting, for the first time,” read the headline of the Dortmund Ruhr-Nachrichten newspaper on 22 January 1957. “White and red carnations for Nippon’s sons,” wrote the Düsseldorf newspaper Rheinische Post and the Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung ran the title “‘Glückauf’ already sounded perfect”.

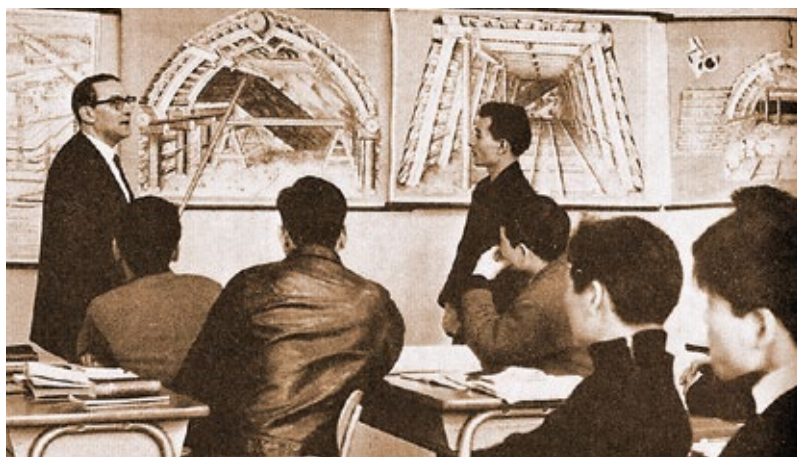
BY ROLF WILLHARDT

The group had started its journey on a special SAS flight from Tokyo on 19 January. The route: Manila, Bangkok, Rangoon, Calcutta, Karachi, Kuwait, Athens, Rome. The propeller airplane landed at Düsseldorf Airport on 21 January and the miners were welcomed like important guests of state by staff of the Japanese Embassy, high-ranking German government officials and representatives of Ruhrbergbau, the association of the Ruhr’s mining companies. A chapter in joint German-Japanese history began which today is more or less unknown.

But which is nevertheless a topic in research and teaching at the Department of Japanese Studies of Heinrich Heine University. Cultural sociologist Shingo Shimada (59), at HHU since 2005, is co-publisher of an anthology which deals with oriental miners in the Ruhr region.

When thinking about the Japanese in Germany, in particular in North Rhine-Westphalia, associating them with Düsseldorf is inevitable. Almost 7,000 Japanese live in the state’s capital city – the largest Japanese community in continental Europe. Numerous multinationals and other companies have their headquarters in Düsseldorf, Japanese restaurants and shops shape the cityscape around Oststrasse. Apple Maps even calls this district “Little Tokyo”.

Japanese miners in the classroom.



Early phase of labour migration

But the businessmen and white-collar workers who came to Düsseldorf in the 1960s were in fact not the first Japanese to arrive in West Germany. It was the workers from the mines in Hokkaido and Kyushu. Mining and the mining industry played an important role in German-



Photos: "Unser Platz", Consolidation Colliery company newsletter, Gelsenkirchen 1960

Japanese miners from the Consolidation Colliery in Gelsenkirchen in front of their hostel.

Japanese relations, reports Professor Shimada. In the course of its general modernisation in the 19th century, Japan followed the example of Germany, in mining engineering too. "Glückauf", the German-language mining journal, was regularly translated into Japanese.

Strong focus on Germany

In the 1950s, Japan regarded the young Federal Republic of Germany as one of the leading modern industrial nations "whilst Japan still had the status of a developing country", says Shimada. Although it was nonetheless undertaking tremendous efforts at modernisation in order to catch up with western role models such as the USA (and the FRG). "During this period, in which the economies of both countries were developing rapidly, there was a massive labour shortage above all in the German mining industry."

Professor Shimada: "In addition, the Japanese mining industry was in the process of being reorganised and many medium-sized mining companies were obliged to close their collieries. These issues led to the Japanese Ministry of Labour's idea to dispatch Japanese miners to Germany. Against this background, a German-Japanese programme came about, through which a total of 436 Japanese miners were sent as labourers to the Ruhr region between 1957 and 1965." This programme certainly played a special role in the 150-year German-

Japanese history. "It's the only case of official labour migration from Japan to Germany", says Shimada, "through which a first intercultural encounter took place at everyday level too. Everyday intercultural relations and exchange, which nowadays have become perfectly natural in a city like Düsseldorf, historically speaking began with this programme. In this early phase of labour migration to the Federal Republic of Germany, the Japanese were 'guest workers' too from Germany's perspective".

The first miners from Japan were young, strong, well-trained and highly motivated workers, "an elite, so to speak", says Shimada. They stayed for three years at collieries in Duisburg-Hamborn, Gelsenkirchen and Castrop-Rauxel and were guaranteed a job when they returned to Japan. The second part of the programme was, however, ultimately a job creation scheme for Japanese miners. At the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s, mass closures of the collieries had begun in the land of the rising sun because Japan was no longer staking its bets on coal for energy generation but instead backing oil and above all nuclear power, like its important US-American model.

The programme ended in March 1965 and was not renewed. 32 Japanese remained in Germany and some married a German and started a family. Most of those who returned home kept in touch with each other in Japan too and in 1964 had already set up an association of former miners in Germany. Its name? How could it be otherwise: "Glückauf" – the German miner's greeting!



A. Kataoka, R. Mathias, P.-T. Meid, W. Pascha, S. Shimada (Publ.): "Japanische Bergleute im Ruhrgebiet", Klartext-Verlag, Essen 2012, 318 pages, € 22.95

“Düsseldorf is just as attractive as Stanford – I’ll only miss the sea!”

Interview with Wolf B. Frommer, Alexander von Humboldt Professor

BY ARNE CLAUSSEN

MAGAZINE: Professor Frommer, you’re coming from sunny Stanford to the Rhine. You started your research here on 1 April. What will you miss most in Düsseldorf?

Wolf B. Frommer: As beautiful as the Rhine is, I’ll miss the Pacific Ocean and the beach right close by to my home and institute! But I’ll feel at home nonetheless, since many of my staff in California – who in turn are from all over the world – are coming to Germany with me.

MAGAZINE: Stanford is one of the world’s top-class locations for research. Now you’re leaving California and starting afresh in Germany. What inspired you to accept the Alexander von Humboldt Professorship at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf as well as in Cologne and Jülich?

W. B. Frommer: In 2003, I left Tübingen for the USA to try something new. And the past 15 years there were extraordinarily exciting, especially since I got to know a very different research system and organisational structures. Carnegie Science, my main employer in Stanford, is more or less a holding with its central administration in Washington. The various institutes were mostly independent, which meant there was a wonderful and productive working atmosphere in Stanford. That’s not necessarily the case at even a large university in the USA! I’ve felt a fantastic atmosphere again here at the University of Düsseldorf and the Max Planck Institute in Cologne. All the people at the top want to make the University successful. It was really good fun working together with the University’s management as well as with people at all other levels in order to make the Humboldt Professorship happen.

Changes to the research priorities in the USA played an important role in my decision to return to Germany. In the last years, funding for basic research shrunk dramatically and the focus shifted strongly in the direction of ‘applied research’,

something I would call ‘engineering’. But in order to engineer something, you require profound knowledge, yet we still know little about how a living creature functions, thus we’re still a long way away from that. At present, most applications arise from basic research by chance: We discover something unexpected which turns miraculously utilitarian.

MAGAZINE: With the DFG (German Research Foundation), the ERC (European Research Council) and the American NSF (National Science Foundation) you’re familiar with very different systems for research funding and support...

W. B. Frommer: Yes, it’s quite amusing: When I was still in Germany, everyone looked up to the NSF. Many of my colleagues said that the German Research Foundation should be organised according to the American model. To them the US system seemed like an El Dorado and to a certain extent it was. I myself benefited greatly from NSF funding. But when the US government withdraws more and more money from an organisation and the funding ratio drops to a minimum then it’s no longer an El Dorado. DFG, ERC – these are the international models nowadays for independent funding of basic research! State-controlled research doesn’t work because research cannot be directed for the reasons I gave above. It thrives on curiosity and creativity and spectacular results emerge during the process itself, frequently by chance.

MAGAZINE: Did your decision also have something to do with the US government’s new and more restrictive politics?

W. B. Frommer: What’s happening today contradicts the way I experienced the USA at the start of my time there. I came as a foreigner and was readily accepted. At my naturalisation ceremony the speaker said: “The USA is a country which is undertaking an enormous experiment. We invite



Photo: Sebastian Wagner – Humboldt-Foundation/Elbmoion

“RESEARCH NEEDS SPACE TO TAKE SCIENTIFIC RISKS AND TACKLE LONG-TERM PROJECTS AND THEREFORE LESS RESTRICTIONS.”

Professor Wolf B. Frommer

Photos: Sebastian Wagner – Humboldt-Foundation/Elbmotion



Wolf B. Frommer: “There are three major interrelated challenges for our planet: feeding the world’s population, climate mitigation and peace. Research is a global activity which contributes to all three. Europe is an unbelievable achievement, just as is the peace which resulted from it. I hope to come back to a Europe which sees peace as its top priority and plays an integrating role worldwide.”

people from around the world to work together with us on our experiment.” This internationality is so tremendously important for science and has made US research so successful. I myself once had 13 staff from 11 countries. That’s one aspect that made my work in Stanford so exciting.

MAGAZINE: Despite all praise for the German system, what weaknesses do you see here?

W. B. Frommer: In a nutshell: What the USA doesn’t have enough of, Germany has too much! In the USA you can spend your whole life as a researcher in post-doc jobs. I know a lot of researchers who want just that, who don’t need a title, don’t want to deal with administration, do a little bit of teaching and achieve fantastic things in their research field and are amongst the most eminent authorities in the world. Since the posts in Germany for academic advisors, senior lecturers and directors – independent mid-level academic appointments –

Protective mechanisms miss the point as far as research is concerned

have become less and less, such careers at German universities have become rare. Instead, the “Wissenschaftszeitvertrags-gesetz”, the German law on temporary employment contracts, has placed tight constraints on young researchers: ‘If you haven’t got a permanent post after the fixed term or are not a professor then that’s the end of your career in the public sector.’ Often in the middle of a successful career because the

maximum of twelve years after qualifying has been reached. Such a rule can be frightening for early career researchers and that during a phase when they are at their most creative and should be investing all their energy in their work. Of course behind the German rule there’s also a protective mechanism, but this completely misses the point as far as the reality of research is concerned. Research needs space to take scientific risks and tackle long-term projects and therefore less restrictions.

MAGAZINE: Let’s talk now about your intended research work here in Düsseldorf. The CEPLAS Cluster of Excellence wants to improve important crops in order to achieve a higher yield with as low an input of resources as possible because crops are the basis for feeding a growing global population and at the same time deliver important raw materials. What contribution do you want to make in this context?

W. B. Frommer: First and foremost: I’m involved in basic research. This is not aimed at applicable results but instead attempts to understand how organisms function – a fascinating and complicated world. Naturally I was always interested in what influences yield, namely: How do sugars – the key substances determining yield – travel from the place where photosynthesis takes place to other areas in the plant, for example the seeds? Because if we’re familiar with these transport mechanisms and how they are regulated then it might be possible to influence how the sugar is distributed. Crops have many archaic properties which helped them in their natural environment in the past but which are rather more a disadvantage in agriculture. So getting rid of what’s not useful anymore could be a good way to engineer better crops.



MAGAZINE: Can you name a specific example of where these transport processes play a role?

W. B. Frommer: There's a rice bacterium which causes tremendous damage above all in Asia. Small farmers lose their livelihood when their rice field gets infected with this blight bacterium. We've discovered that the bacterium re-programmes the sugar transporters in the rice genome for its own purposes. To be more precise: the bacteria turn on a certain gene in the infected rice cell. This gene encodes a transporter. The bacterium sits outside the cell and in this way manages to release sugar from the host cell by hijacking the rice cell's own transporter. The bacterium finds itself in a land of milk and honey and can reproduce to large numbers – its primary goal!

Bacterium in a land of milk and honey – Change the lock on the sugar chamber

If we can envisage changing the lock to this pantry, we can prevent the bacterium from accessing the sugar resources: if the bacterium's "key" no longer fits the lock, the plant cells are resistant to the pathogen because its food source disappears. With this understanding of the transport mechanisms and funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, we are working together in an international team and have collected over 100 different strains of this particular bacterium. We conditioned our rice plants in such a way that they are now resistant to ALL strains.

MAGAZINE: What transport molecules are you dealing with and what's their function?

W. B. Frommer: We've named this group of transporters SWEETs. That stands for Sugars Will Eventually be Exported Transporters. SWEETs sounded appropriate, which is why this time we invented the acronym first. The SWEETs are key to many important processes in the plant: some members are involved in the formation of nectar, others feed the pollen, transport the sugar out of the depths of the leaf into the capillaries or support the seeds, and some release the sugars to allow the seeds to fill. We've concentrated above all on how the sugar comes from the leaf into the seed.

MAGAZINE: Is knowledge about plants transferable to animal cells and thus ultimately to humans too? Can bacteria be shut off from their food source in the case of humans too in a similar way to the rice bacterium you mentioned?

W. B. Frommer: Sugar transport mechanisms are very similar in almost all organisms, because all multicellular organisms are faced with the same problem of having to transport nutrients from the places where they are produced (or taken up from the food) to the places where they are needed. To be precise: the human body also possesses sugar transporters. They are needed, for example, to carry sugar stored in the liver to the brain as necessary.

We surmise that SWEETs may play a role in transporting nutrients from the intestine into the body. And we also find them in the pancreas: the organ that releases sugar-dependent insulin in order to regulate blood sugar level. This is a topic with possible relevance in diseases such as diabetes. After I

didn't get any funding for such a project in the USA – the evaluators wrote 'He's a plant biologist' – I hope to be able to tackle it in Düsseldorf in cooperation with the German Diabetes Centre at HHU.

MAGAZINE: You've made a name for yourself as an expert in nanosensor technology. What are nanosensors and where are they used?

W. B. Frommer: Imagine that you want to measure the distribution of neurotransmitters in the brain, for example of glutamate. With a modern mass spectrometer it's possible to determine very accurately and to many decimal places which neurotransmitters are present in the brain in which quantities. But this is a global statement which doesn't say much about the way glutamate functions. What we need is the local distribution of the neurotransmitters at the sub-cellular level and its dynamics. We want to know, for example, in what concentration neurotransmitters are released at the synapses when a nerve cell is stimulated and how quickly afterwards how much is reabsorbed in the surrounding cells. Or if we stick with our sugar transporters: How much sugar passes through the cell membrane at what point?

The basis for the nanosensor technology is the pioneering work by Roger Tsien, the Nobel prizewinner who died last year and was a researcher at UCSD. His idea was to use Theodor Förster's resonance energy transfer in nanosensors

that selectively couple fluorescent proteins with calcium-binding proteins. In this way, he could measure quantitatively changes in the protein's form caused by the calcium and thus also measure calcium with the help of colour signals. Remarkably, it was possible for the first time to measure quantitative information with sub-cellular and very high time resolution. In our group, we've adapted Tsien's concept to sugars and neurotransmitters and can also apply them to other interesting molecules such as plant hormones.

Watch cells metabolise

We were able, for example, to measure glutamate secretion at synapses dynamically. Notably, this method can be applied in living cells and we can watch their metabolism take place as it were "live": 'in vivo biochemistry'. We went a step further and are now using similar approaches to watch transporters at work.

With these techniques, we hope to support the plant researchers in CEPLAS as well as membrane research, which is prominently represented at HHU by Collaborative Research Centre 1208 "Identity and Dynamics of Membrane Systems". I'm very much looking forward to collaborations and scientific discussions with my new colleagues!

Vita Professor Wolf B. Frommer



Photo: Sebastian Wagner – Humboldt-Foundation/Elhmoicon

Wolf B. Frommer was born in Bonn. He studied biology at the University of Cologne. After his doctoral degree there he moved to the Institut für Genbiologische Forschung GmbH (IGF) in Berlin. In 1990 he took charge of a group at the IGF and earned his post-doctoral qualification

("Habilitation") in 1994 in Plant Physiology. In 1996 he accepted the call to the Chair of Plant Physiology at the University of Tübingen where he was Founding Director of the Centre for Plant Molecular Biology (ZMBP) in 1997. In 2003 he moved to the Carnegie Institution for Science in Stanford, USA, where he later became Director of the Plant Biology Department up until 2016. In parallel, he held a professorship at Stanford University. In October 2016, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation selected Wolf B. Frommer as a Humboldt professor at the suggestion

of HHU, the MPIPZ in Cologne and Research Centre Jülich. He took up this post on 1 April 2017. Professor Frommer is a researcher with many interests who has a distinguished record both in plant biology as well as human medicine. He is particularly interested in the role of transport proteins and signalling processes. Wolf B. Frommer's list of publications numbers some 300 papers, many of them in renowned journals such as Nature and Science. He has received many prizes and awards for his

Many interests

research work, including a Young Investigator grant from BMBF in 1992, the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize of the German Research Foundation in 1998, the Körber European Science Prize in 2001, a fellowship of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 2003, the Laurence Bogorad Prize and admission to the Leopoldina, the German National Academy of Sciences, in 2015.

“Motivate your colleagues by giving them the right information ...”



Photo: Wilfried Meyer

Right at the beginning of her term of office, Professor Andrea von Hülsen-Esch, Vice-President for International Relations, introduced the idea of bringing a Humboldt professorship to Düsseldorf. In this interview she tells us how it came about.

A. von Hülsen-Esch: The main protagonist is biochemist Professor Andreas Weber. I'd organized a retreat

with the deans' offices just after I assumed office in the spring of 2015 to which a few researchers from all the different faculties were invited and whom I knew were very interested in international cooperation. Dr. Jörg Schneider from the German Research Foundation and Dr. Barbara Sheldon from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation were also there and provided extensive information on what support is available from their foundations in the area of internationalisation. My intention at that time was simply to show what activities I could imagine at international level and to bring together researchers and experts on international cooperation around one table.

MAGAZINE: And then?

A. von Hülsen-Esch: Professor Weber already latched on to it when Dr. Sheldon presented the Humboldt professorship and encouraged us to try. Professor Weber asked lots of questions and was very interested. A few months later in February 2016 we hosted the Alexander von Humboldt Network Meeting here. That went hand in hand with a political roundtable with participants from politics and science at which I held the keynote speech.

MAGAZINE: Who took part in the roundtable?

A. von Hülsen-Esch: Dr. Enno Aufderheide, Secretary General of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, chaired the meeting. State Secretary Dr. Thomas Grünwald from NRW's Ministry of Innovation, Science and Research, Düsseldorf's Lord Mayor Thomas Geisel and Professor Dehm, Director of the Max Planck Institute for Iron Research were there, President Steinbeck as well as two researchers from our University who are very interested in international cooperation, physicist Professor Hartmut Löwen and biologist Professor Andreas Weber. The conversation turned during the roundtable to the Humboldt professorship again and Dr. Aufderheide encouraged and challenged us members of HHU simply to try for it. Professor Weber then wrote a perfect application in an incredibly short period of just six weeks. These two events were a source of impetus which Professor Weber followed up and brought to such a fantastic result.

MAGAZINE: Little acorns – big oak trees!

A. von Hülsen-Esch: Yes, in my opinion this shows that you can motivate your colleagues by giving them the right information. I'm also seeing right now how our many activities are attracting considerable attention from the Humboldt Foundation. We're receiving an increasing number of enquiries about whether we'd like to stage events here at the University. And of course historian Professor Eva Schlotheuber has secured the Anneliese Meyer Prize for Professor Hamburger from Harvard and was able through that to bring him to our University for workshops and lectures. In this way we've become a focus of the foundation's attention over the last years and I'm very pleased about that!

V.M.

The Alexander von Humboldt professorship

The Alexander von Humboldt professorship enables German universities to offer top minds from abroad internationally competitive conditions and to hone their own profile in the global contest. The professorship is endowed with up to five million euro and is thus the highest international research award in Germany. The award acknowledges the world's leading researchers in all disciplines who have so far been working abroad. The intention is for them to conduct groundbreaking research at German universities on a long-term basis. The prize money is earmarked for the first five years of research work in Germany. HHU will continue to support the professorship after sponsorship by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation comes to an end.

Also included in the prize is the obligation to offer the new Humboldt professors a long-term perspective for their research work in Germany. The endowment is awarded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and financed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

“Service to the community”

Professor Hartmut Löwen on scientific publishing and the important role of referees

BY ARNE CLAUSSEN

MAGAZINE: Congratulations on your award as Outstanding Referee 2017. We would like to use this occasion to discuss scientific publishing with you. What needs to happen before a research result culminates in a publication – a paper?

Löwen: It’s a long and rocky road until a paper is published. You need to decide first and foremost in which form you want to publish your work: Do you want a short paper of just four pages or a more detailed technical essay with a lot more information? After that you need to choose the right journal for its publication.

Long and rocky road to publication

Not every journal is equally suitable for every topic and many specialise on a particular theme. And you need a journal which is well received by your colleagues in the field. What’s naturally very important is the journal’s reputation as reflected in its “impact factor”.

And once you’ve chosen the medium, you’re faced with the first major hurdle: the publisher or editor.

MAGAZINE: The editor alone decides whether a paper is accepted?

Löwen: The editor is very powerful. Depending

on the journal, up to 95 % of the papers submitted fail due to him or her. That doesn’t necessarily mean the paper was poor, but the authors were unable to make their point sufficiently clearly to the editor. An accompanying letter helps to convince the editor of the paper’s relevance for a broad readership. It’s important that experienced researchers help with these letters; doctoral candidates often find it a struggle.

MAGAZINE: What follows once the “editor hurdle” has been overcome?

Löwen: The editor sends the paper to two or three referees. These write a detailed report on the paper and rate it. Their appraisals can range from “Acceptable as it is” to “Only acceptable if this or that content is improved” to “Reject!”

MAGAZINE: How are the referees selected?

Löwen: This is one of a publisher’s best kept secrets. The editor can in any case access databases in which, for example, individuals are listed who have already published articles in the journal. What’s important for the author is that he or she has the possibility to propose referees and to exclude others on the grounds of conflict of interest. The editor usually goes along with the author’s request for exclusion of certain referees because he or she also wants to guarantee neutrality. But not all nominated referees are ever all on board together.

Photo: Jochen Müller



“It’s very important that referees remain anonymous so that their reviews are objective.”

MAGAZINE: The referees are generally anonymous...

Löwen: ...and that’s very important so that their reports are objective. Of course authors suspect who has written the report on the basis of style and comments. On the other hand, referees know a few tricks to divert attention away from themselves. This game is an art in itself.

MAGAZINE: The reports are then sent back to the authors. What happens next until a paper is finally ripe for publication?

Löwen: The review is an iterative process which can go back and forth several times. The authors normally have all the referees’ answers at their disposal – not least so that the publisher can cover his or her own back. Depending on the journal, the procedure can be launched

Iterative process

from the second stage onwards so that all reports are available to all referees. In that way, a referee can see what his or her colleagues found important. There’s a good chance here for the authors

that the positive referees can nullify the more negative assessments.

The procedure overall, from submitting the paper to its publication, can take between four months, which is very quick, and one year or in extreme cases several years.

MAGAZINE: In a procedure lasting over a year the research results can well have changed, become more accurate or move in a different direction once more data has been analysed...

Löwen: ... and need revising accordingly. With some journals, such as Nature for example, this is even the normal case. The authors are actively called on to adapt their papers to the latest results. And that’s a good thing as long as the quality of the publications continues to rise.

MAGAZINE: What do you think about putting a paper online first, for example on preprint servers such as arXiv.org?

Löwen: Many physics journals allow publication on such archives. However, often only the first version is uploaded and not the iterated stages during the peer review. My working group uses these archives, like perhaps 65 % of my colleagues. Other colleagues fear that originator rights might be violated and results used by

Professor Hartmut Löwen
received an award as
'Outstanding Referee 2017'

“IT’S NOT POSSIBLE TO SAFEGUARD THE QUALITY OF SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS WITHOUT VOLUNTARY REFEREES.”

Professor Hartmut Löwen, Department of Theoretical Physics II

other authors. But since the publication date is on file in the archive I don't share their concerns.

Apart from that there's another new development: Nature Communications, for example, is testing a model whereby at the end of the review process all documents are placed online.

Raising the transparency of the review process

The aim of this is to increase the transparency of the procedure and thus its credibility. But I find this rather tricky, since such complete transparency can mean that referees are not as tough in their assessment as they would have been in the past.

MAGAZINE: Referees play a special role in the quality assurance of scientific publications. The American Physical Society acknowledges this with its “Outstanding Referee” award. How does a referee do justice to this role; according to which standards do you work when you are asked to be a referee?

Löwen: First and foremost I have to weigh up whether I have sufficient expertise in the first

place to be able to assess professionally enough a paper sent to me. That's why I give quite a few papers back and then often recommend other colleagues who in my opinion are more familiar with the topic.

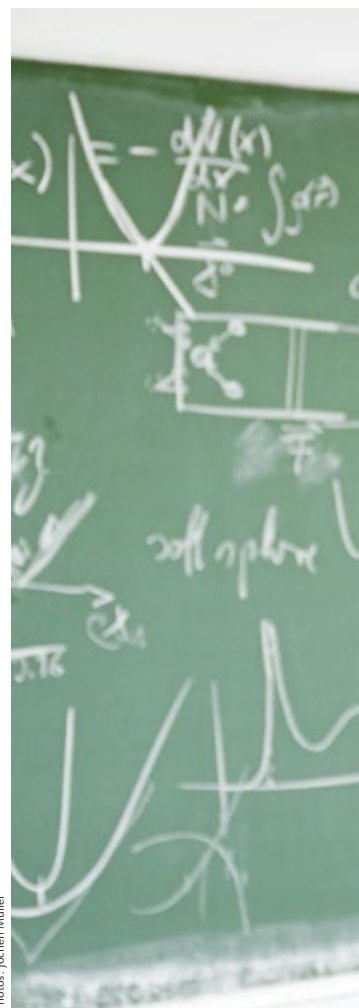
Once I have accepted a paper, I must above all judge the scope of the scientific results. It takes a lot of experience to be able to decide whether the submitted paper will interest the community, whether it deals with topics which have already been discussed over a longer period and for which the paper now offers a solution. If the working methods used are also accurate then that's a strong argument for publishing the paper.

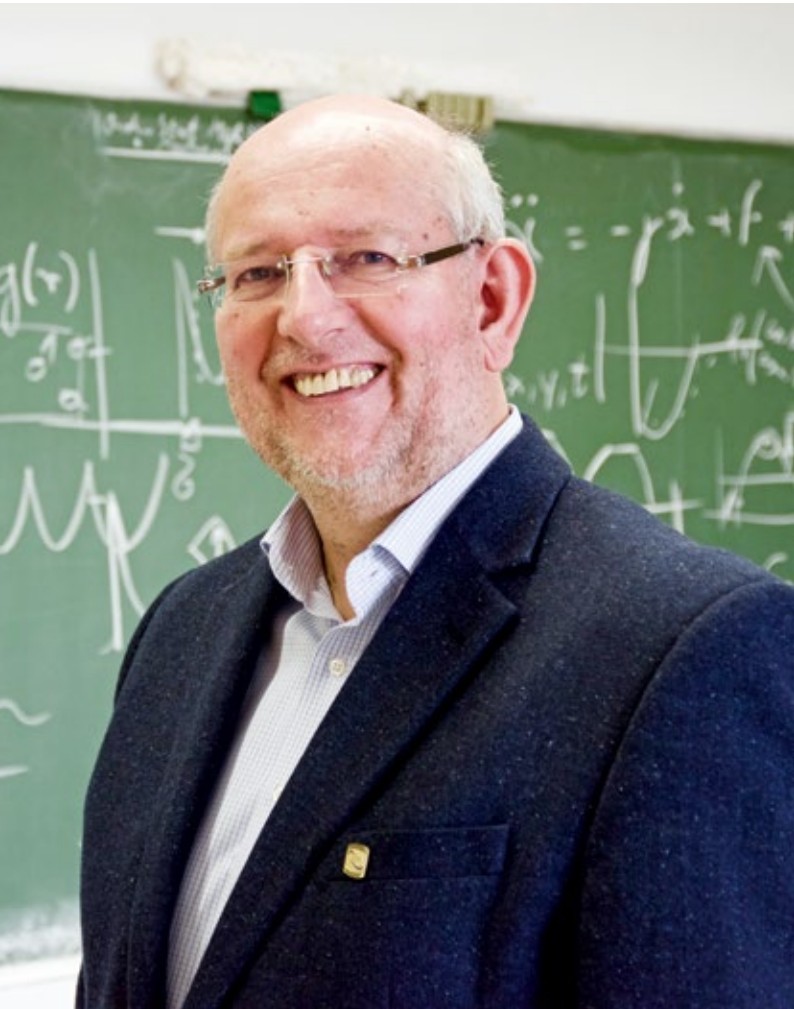
Often papers are submitted where only slightly improved results are presented. This is referred to as incremental research. Whether a journal publishes such papers depends on its quality standards.

MAGAZINE: Do you check the calculations in the case of theoretical papers?

Löwen: On average I accept two papers a week as a referee so I can't follow up all formulae exactly. That would only be possible with purely analytical papers. However, errors mostly stand out because the formulae don't make sense

Photos: Jochen Müller





from a physics perspective. You can see that without calculating each detail all over again.

MAGAZINE: You invest a lot of time and dedication in your work as referee. What's your motivation?

Löwen: First and foremost it's a service to the community for me. It's not possible to safeguard the quality of scientific publications without voluntary referees. The whole subject would otherwise suffer. But the work also sets me thinking and gives me new ideas for my own research.

MAGAZINE: How do you communicate the need to publish scientific papers correctly to budding researchers?

Löwen: At HHU's Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, we impress upon students from a very early stage what it means to work accurately and with academic integrity. There are also special courses for this. The young researchers should document all their data

meticulously. This is a core task for their supervisors. Should it emerge later that a publication is based on unreliable or even manipulated data then that can mean the end of an academic career. We are all keen to prevent that from happening.

Award as „Outstanding Referee 2017“

Each year the American Physical Society (APS) awards the title of "Outstanding Referee" to about 150 researchers. This year it acknowledged in this way Professor Hartmut Löwen of the Department of Theoretical Physics II at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf, together with colleagues from a total of 29 countries. The APS, publisher amongst others of the renowned journal family Physical Review, honours in this way the voluntary work performed by these researchers in the review of scientific papers. Such peer reviews are highly significant for ensuring the quality of scientific publications.

What do victims of torture need and who can do what to help?

Symposium in Düsseldorf on care for torture victims

BY SUSANNE DOPHEIDE

According to Amnesty International, torture is documented in over 140 countries worldwide. Many of the refugees coming to Germany from the world's various crisis regions have been victims of torture in their home countries or whilst fleeing and suffer from the psychological and physical results. Torture can be used to forcibly obtain information or, for example, to humiliate someone.

For medical practices, clinics and the outpatient department for victims of violence at Düsseldorf University Hospital this is a considerable

challenge: If torture had previously been just a news item for many general practitioners, an increasing number of refugees who have experienced torture are now coming to their surgeries.

Coordination of existing care structures

With their first symposium on this explosive topic in Düsseldorf, the organisers (Psychosocial Centre for Refugees Düsseldorf, Alexianer Krefeld GmbH and the Institute of Forensic



Photo: UKD

Welcome address by Barbara Stefens, Minister of Health (2nd from left), pictured here with the organisers: Professor Stefanie Ritz-Timme, Director of the Institute of Forensic Medicine; Professor Benedikt Pannen, Deputy Medical Director of Düsseldorf University Hospital; Professor Robert Bering, Centre for Psychotraumatology, Alexianer Krefeld GmbH; Eva van Keuk, Head of the Psychology/Psychotherapy Team at the Psychosocial Centre for Refugees Düsseldorf (PSZ)



Photos: Amnesty International



“The Stuff of Life” and “Waiting for the Guards” are films produced for Amnesty International UK as part of a campaign against the CIA’s detention and interrogation programmes. AI believes that they contravene Article 3 of the Third Geneva Convention, which prohibits the humiliating and degrading treatment of prisoners of war. The still from “The Stuff of Life” shows simulated waterboarding (above); in “Waiting for the Guards” another simulated torture practice is shown.

Medicine at Düsseldorf University Hospital) have set themselves the objective of making a special contribution to the development of adequate and long-term structures in the region in order to improve care.

Victims need competent contact points which can deal with questions related to the assessment of injuries incurred through torture as well as for medical and psychosocial care. Such contact points already exist in the region. However, to date these facilities and procedures have not been suitably coordinated and care paths scarcely defined, so that today much is still left to chance when dealing with torture victims. In addition, there is no guarantee that victims are able to access assessment and care at all. However, if the results of torture are not recognised and legally documented, victims may suffer disadvantages regarding the asylum procedure and their integration. The 120 delegates of the symposium

“Care Paths for Torture Victims” which was held on 10 – 11 March and headed by Professor Stefanie Ritz-Timme, Director of the Institute of Forensic Medicine, and Eva van Keuk of the Psychosocial Centre for Refugees Düsseldorf, had set themselves the objective of

Identify demand

identifying the actual demand for medical and psychological assessment and care. In addition, legal principles and financing opportunities were elucidated in order to address this demand. Speakers were experts in the fields of medicine, psychology, law, politics and psychosocial topics, the aim being to facilitate as broad a view of the problem as possible. Therapies and questions related to rehab were then discussed in depth in various workshops.

Why not help with legal issues?

Humanitarian aid: Students set up the “Refugee Law Clinic Düsseldorf”

A group of dedicated students has set up the “Refugee Law Clinic” association. Their goal: to offer free legal advice for refugees and asylum seekers.

Are students allowed to give legal advice in the first place? “Yes”, says Lise Känner, HHU law student in her 7th semester, “if they have attended a lecture on asylum law and passed the exam.” That is the case with about 20 young academics (not just law students!) at HHU. Lecturers are lawyers from Düsseldorf who report on their practical experience. “The focus is on refugees’ everyday life, that is, concrete cases and not just theory”, says Lise Känner. Courses are financed from the General Studies budget.

Speaking of finance: the association naturally charges (low) membership fees. But of course it needs funds for running costs and administration. There has been a student assistant post for this since the spring – 10 hours per week – financed from funds provided by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). How did the idea to set up the “Refugee Law Clinic” come about in the first place? “In fact it was dreamed up in the pub”, reports Lise Känner. “A few fellow students were sitting together in the Old Town and talking about the refugee situation. They knew about a project in our Faculty of Medicine where students are helping refugees and asylum seekers when they need to see the doctor or go to hospital. Why not help with legal issues?” That is how the clinic in Düsseldorf started. There have been

“Refugee Law Clinics” at other universities in North Rhine-Westphalia for quite a while, for example in Bochum and Cologne (where the association has an impressive 300 members).

The Düsseldorf students are in close contact with other initiatives in the city which are looking after refugees and asylum seekers. For example they use the premises of the association “Willkommen in Düsseldorf” (Welcome to Düsseldorf), which are located behind the Central Station and just opposite the Immigration Office. The “Refugee Law Clinic Düsseldorf” drew attention to itself by distributing flyers in the numerous refugee accommodation centres. Many contacts are via word of mouth, Facebook and the internet.

Specific help for individual cases

Concrete cases? Lise Känner: “For example the question ‘How do I apply to move from refugee housing into my own apartment?’ Or we can help people deal with a deportation order. Or to prepare for a hearing at the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees.” The association is naturally looking for further members. Not only to provide concrete legal advice but also for general organisation and as interpreters. R. W.

► **Contact:** lise.kaenner@hhu.de, www.rlc-duesseldorf.de



Members of the “Refugee Law Clinic” team who are offering refugees and asylum seekers free legal advice from the start of the summer semester onwards. Lise Känner is on the far right.



Photo: private

Brexit's on its way – that's for sure



Photo: Sergei Lepke

► Jacques Tilly's float at Düsseldorf Carnival presented Brexit as a suicide commando.

On 23 June 2016, the majority of the British population voted in favour of leaving the European Union (EU) – but what are the consequences? What impact will this decision have on Great Britain and the EU? Above all in the field of economics, Brexit is a repeatedly important topic which students also find very interesting.

Professor Dieter Smeets is an economist and holder of the chair for International Economics, which makes him the born contact person, as it were, as far as Brexit is concerned. Yet even he cannot say either when Brexit will take place and how it will look. Only one thing is sure: “The British government has meanwhile decided clearly in favour of leaving the EU, so in favour of Brexit. For the EU as a whole, the economic consequences are rather nebulous. In Great Britain on the other hand – depending on the concrete results of the withdrawal negotiations – the outcome could be a massive decline in growth”. According to Smeets, a hard rather than a soft Brexit seems more likely at the moment and that means there will be major restrictions in the free movement of goods, services, persons and capital between the EU and Great Britain. “The Brexiteers are above all against free movement of persons”, explains Smeets. But in his opinion the EU will not agree to “negotiate separately on individual parts of the Single Market but instead view the Single Market as an overall package which cannot be unravelled.”

At least two years are planned for the negotiations but the deadline can be extended. Some banks have indeed already enquired at BaFin, the Federal Financial Supervisory Authority, about the conditions under which British banks could shift their headquarters from London to Frankfurt. But at the moment everyone is playing for time. “They are waiting to see how the final regulations turn out and whether British

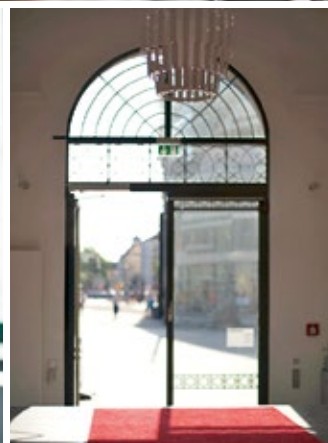
banks might not, after all, be given preferential access to the Single Market”, judges Smeets. However, if they lose their free access to the Single Market then “some banks will move away from London and in the long term there will be a huge slump in the area of financial services”, believes Smeets. “But the outcome is too uncertain so that it's impossible at the moment to make any realistic prediction.” Whilst there is considerable talk about the disadvantages for the British banks, very little is being said about another strongly affected area: agriculture. “It's already the case that the highest remaining customs duties for third countries are incurred on agricultural products”, says Smeets, “and the pressure on British farmers is likely to increase even further after Brexit. The

Pressure on farmers

result will be that Great Britain will not go over to free trade, at least not in this area, but instead continue to impose high customs duties in order to protect its farmers.” And the non-material damage caused by Brexit? Smeets is quite relaxed about that: “Every club gives its members the opportunity to resign if they can no longer identify with its goals so why shouldn't that be the case with the EU too? For me, that's an absolutely normal process which we shouldn't overestimate.”

Economic historian Professor Michael Schneider also points out that both the procedure and the consequences of Brexit are still completely open. However, he is not happy about separating Brexit from other political developments: “The Britons' decision cannot be seen in isolation. It's clear that it's far more part of the general transformation underway in political culture and the media.”

V.M.



University House

University House was placed at the disposal of Heinrich Heine University by the van Meeteren Foundation. Its purpose is to provide information and advice as well as foster an exchange between science, culture and education. In the framework of a large spectrum of events, the University offers local citizens the possibility to experience here cutting-edge research as well as its results and shares university life with the city.

Further information, programme, bookings:

University House
Schadowplatz 14
40212 Düsseldorf
Tel. +49 211 81-10345
Email hdu@hhu.de
www.hdu.hhu.de