BIGSSS 2023/24

Biennal Report

Advancing Research, Fostering Community:

2 Years at our Graduate School

BIGSSS 2023/24 Biennial Report

2023

Feb

Mar
- Arrival of 10 new PhD Fellows, among them the second cohort of the RTG Self program. (pp. 16–23, 31, 34)

Apr
- Hosting of Dr. Adekunle Adedeji and Jyoti Sharma as our new Visiting Fellows. (p. 46)

May
- Michael Richter and Jelisaveta Belić win the BIGSSS Best Paper Award 2023. (p. 66)

Jun
- New Faculty Members Wiebke Rabe, Thomas Kern, Sebastian Fehrler, Philipp Schulz, and Gisela Febel join the BIGSSS Faculty. (pp. 54–58)

Jul
- Noha Mahmoud is the new BIGSSS Admissions and Administration Officer, Monika Liorentaite-Rossdeutscher will be the Coordination Officer. (pp. 50–51)

Aug
- Former BIGSSS Fellow Dr. Lara Minkus returns as a Visiting Postdoc for the summer term 2023. (p. 46)

Sep
- Emilly Schuch Martins joins BIGSSS as new Visiting PhD Fellow. (p. 46)

Oct
- New cohort of 6 PhD Fellows: Among them two regular PhD Fellows in the BIGSSS-DAAD program GSPSC. (pp. 26–27, 31–35)

Nov

Dec

2024

Feb

Mar

Apr
- The Winners of the BIGSSS Best Paper Award 2024 are Gonzalo Arévalo Iglesias and Henriette Bering. (p. 67)

May
- New Faculty Members Sophia Hunger, Sarah Berens, and Soahib Hassan join the BIGSSS Faculty. (pp. 60–62)

Jun
- For the 3rd time, BIGSSS has secured DAAD funding for its CoPoDi program for four PhD scholarships for up to 48 months each. (p. 78)
- Interdisciplinary BIGSSS Summer Retreat at Gut Angelohe. (p. 76)

Jul
- Jessica Maczuga starts as the Senior Coordinator of the Deans' Office. (p. 52)

Aug
- Wealth Data Science Summer/Winter School 2024 organized by Prof. Dr. Jan Lorenz and Prof. Dr. Hilke Brockmann. (p. 84)

Sep
- Start of the 2024 cohort of Fellows (2 DAAD Fellows, 8 Affiliated Fellows and 1 Adjunct Fellow). (pp. 28–29, 37–45)

Oct
- BIGSSS Fellow Gonzalo Arévalo Iglesias receives the ESPAnet Doctoral Researcher Prize 2024 for his paper on Intergenerational Cohabitation and Welfare Attitudes.

Nov
- Visiting PhD Fellow Anisha Elama joins BIGSSS for 6 months. (p. 46)

Dec
- New Faculty Member Alisha Heinemann joins the BIGSSS Faculty. (p. 63)

BIGSSS is an interuniversity cooperation between

Universität Bremen

CONSTRUCTOR UNIVERSITY

Foreword & Acknowledgements

Dr. Christian Peters, March 2025

Dear Fellows, Alumni, Colleagues, and Friends of BIGSSS,

Welcome to our 2023/2024 report. Reflecting on these past two years, I am genuinely proud of what we have achieved together and deeply appreciative of how we have supported each other during times of considerable uncertainty and change. After navigating the unprecedented disruptions brought by the pandemic, it is heartening to see that we have not only regained our footing but have emerged even stronger and more resilient.

Yet, we remain conscious of the many challenges that continue to shape our work and lives. The war in Ukraine, the concerning backsliding of democratic institutions across the globe, and a worrying increase in anti-scientific sentiments are troubling reminders of the fragility of the freedoms we often take for granted. Especially alarming is witnessing how countries traditionally viewed as strongholds of academic freedom, have come under severe strain due to increasingly illiberal and anti-science attitudes propagated by new political administrations. This development

> “I look forward to interdisciplinary collaborations and gaining professional experience to further my academic career while paving the way for a long-term academic journey.” Rida Bano, Second cohort RTG SELF

not only hampers scientific progress but particularly threatens the life plans, career trajectories, and personal security of early-career researchers.

In this context, it remains – and will always remain – a central pillar of BIGSSS' mission to defend academic freedom, promote critical thinking, and provide a nurturing, stable environment for emerging scholars. Our community's collective resolve in tackling these political, cultural, and social challenges is inspiring. Whether through rigorous social analysis, innovative interdisciplinary research, or fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment, our priority continues to be safeguarding the freedoms and mindsets that empower meaningful, positive change both locally and globally.

Thank you all for your hard work, dedication, and courage over these past two years. I hope this report provides you with a clear picture of our accomplishments and our path forward. Let us continue to stand together, supporting one another and passionately pursuing a shared vision of academic excellence and impactful social engagement.

With gratitude and warm regards

Dr. Christian Peters, BIGSSS Managing Director

About BIGSSS

The Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences (BIGSSS) is one of Germany's leading schools of doctoral training in the social sciences. Having started with just a handful of fellows in 2002, our school now hosts more than 80 international PhD Fellows.

BIGSSS' PhD program, in a nutshell, provides close supervision of dissertation work accompanied by demand-tailored education. A large network of research institutions located at the public University of Bremen and the private Constructor University Bremen enables us to support our fellows academically, financially, and logistically.

BIGSSS brings together different doctoral training programs under one roof. The Regular program is a full-time PhD program in which fellows commit themselves to their own dissertation projects and the entire academic program of the BIGSSS curriculum. Our Regular PhD Fellows receive tailored theoretical and methodological training, acquire teaching experience in small seminars, and complete their top-notch dissertations in a timely manner.

The availability of the Regular PhD program depends primarily on the support from third-party funding agencies (DFG, DAAD, EU MSCA, etc.). BIGSSS was acknowledged twice by an international board of reviewers in the German Excellence Initiative in 2007 and 2012, respectively and by the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation COFUND program. Currently, BIGSSS hosts a DAAD fellowship program, and the DFG-funded Research Training Group "Social Dynamics of the Self".

In addition, BIGSSS has an Affiliated and an Adjunct PhD program. At different levels of institutional integration, both programs offer doctoral candidates working in the social sciences at the University of Bremen or Constructor University the chance to benefit from structured PhD education, including a wide range of excellent seminars and workshops. The programs adhere to BIGSSS's doctoral education standards and quality principles.

A Word with the Deans

Prof. Dr. Patrick Sachweh & Prof. Dr. Adalbert Wilhelm, March 2025

We are living in challenging times, marked by disruptions and dynamic changes worldwide. It is therefore even more worthwhile to emphasize that BIGSSS has reached a rather stable state after the restructuring process that began following the end of the Excellence Initiative funding.

The RTG "Social Dynamics of the Self", which has constituted the nucleus of Regular Fellows over the past four years, is now up for prolongation. In a great team effort, the continuation proposal has been developed, reshaped, improved, and submitted on time, and on-site visit by the expert panel has succesfully taken place as these lines go to print. We are all optimistic about the evaluation and keep our fingers crossed that the Research Training Group will be positively assessed. A successful evaluation would ensure DFG funding to support another two cohorts of PhD Fellows in developing their research ideas and realizing their projects at the intersection of social psychology, sociology, and political science.

Beyond the RTG, a total of eight additional Regular Fellows from the DAAD Graduate School Scholarship Programme have joined BIGSSS over the past years, and we will hire another four fellows in the current and the upcoming year. As this program is aimed particularly at fellows from the Global South, it plays a crucial role not only in furthering our internationalization efforts but also in bringing fresh academic and intellectual perspectives. Unfortunately, the DAAD has decided to discontinue this funding line, which makes us even happier to have been successful in securing this funding three times in a row.

Another source of internationalization at BIGSSS comes from the Collaborative Research Center "Global Dynamics of Social Policy", for which the continuation proposal for the third phase is currently being prepared. If this initiative is successful (and we keep our fingers crossed once again!), we will welcome a third cohort of Affiliate Fellows from the CRC in fall/winter 2026. Additionally, individual PhD researchers from the vast Bremen Social Science research landscape continue to enrich our interdisciplinary Graduate School. We are happy to have them all on board

and enjoy the stimulating and fruitful discussions with them in seminars and colloquia.

Changes at the level of our faculty members are also a source of personal and intellectual renewal. Due to recent hirings at both institutions, we were fortunate to welcome new faculty members to BIGSSS, strengthening our scientific standing and broadening our theoretical, methodological, and substantive perspectives. Esteemed colleagues are reaching retirement age, and we are thankful for their valuable contributions and appreciate their efforts and involvement beyond retirement—after all, excellent scholarship has no age limit.

Institutionally, the end of 2025 requires us to renew the collaboration agreement between the University of Bremen and Constructor University. In last year's board meeting, there was unanimous agreement to continue BIGSSS in its current form and to prepare the necessary paperwork.

But of course, all work and no play is no fun. Therefore, we are looking forward to our Graduation Ceremony in fall 2025, for which preparations are already underway, where we will celebrate the achievements of our fellows.

We are happy to contribute our part to the continued development of this institution and sincerely thank all our fellows, colleagues, and staff members for the trust they have placed in us as deans of this wonderful institution.

Best regards,

Prof. Dr. Patrick Sachweh, Dean BIGSSS, University of Bremen

Prof. Dr. Patrick Sachweh
Patrick Sachweh has been a Professor of Comparative Sociology at the University of Bremen since 2019. He is familiar with Bremen as he has received his PhD from BIGSSS back in 2009. Patrick has spent the 10 years in between as postdoctoral "Wanderjahre" at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne, at Goethe University Frankfurt, and with a short excursion into more applied work at the Federal Institute for Population Research. His current research revolves around questions of social inequality and social cohesion and employs quantitative as well as qualitative methods.

Prof. Dr. Adalbert Wilhelm
Adalbert Wilhelm started his "Bremen life" in September 2001 at the former International University Bremen and has witnessed various student cohorts, presidents, and changes and developments at the institution now called Constructor University. He holds a professorship in statistics and has participated in the university's self-governance in various capacities. He has been the Interim Dean of the School of Business, Social and Decision Sciences since November 2024. In addition to teaching data science (which sounds far sexier than statistics), he conducts research (when time permits) on statistical visualization, exploratory data analysis, statistical learning, and data mining. He has been a visiting professor at George Mason University, Fairfax, VA and at Università degli Studi di Cagliari, Italy. He loves hiking and skiing, which in addition to family ties, have kept him commuting on a weekly basis from Bavaria to Bremen for now more than 20 years.

Prof. Dr. Adalbert Wilhelm, Vice Dean BIGSSS, Constructor University

"During my time at BIGSSS, I look forward to broadening my understanding of diverse social science perspectives, theoretical frameworks, and research methodologies – especially qualitative methods – which I believe will steer my research interests in an interdisciplinary direction and help me develop more flexible, diverse methodological approaches.

In addition, I am excited to engage with scholars from various cultural and disciplinary backgrounds, from whom I hope to learn, experience, and be inspired by different attitudes and insights toward academic research."

Xugang Nie, 2024 Affiliated PhD Fellow

BIGSSS People

New Fellows & their PhD Programs in 2023 & 2024

In 2023, a total of 16 new fellows joined BIGSSS. Among them were eight Regular PhD Fellows in the RTG SELF program, who started in March 2023, as well as two Affiliated PhD Fellows. In September, two Regular PhD Fellows in the BIGSSS-DAAD program GSPSC began their PhD projects, along with three Affiliated PhD Fellows and one Adjunct Fellow.

In 2024, eleven new fellows started their PhD journey at BIGSSS. This cohort includes two Regular PhD Fellows in the BIGSSS-DAAD program GSPSC, eight Affiliated PhD Fellows, and one Adjunct PhD Fellow.

The Regular PhD Program
The Regular PhD Program is the BIGSSS in-house full-time program for structured doctoral training. Fellows commit themselves to their own dissertation projects and the full academic program of the BIGSSS curriculum. They receive demand-tailored theoretical and methodological training, complete several milestones, and benefit from close supervision by a committee from our diverse faculty and an external academic member.

The Affiliated PhD Program
The BIGSSS Affiliated PhD Program is designed for doctoral candidates who already work in third-party funded or professorial research projects in the social sciences at the University of Bremen or Constructor University. Affiliated Fellows benefit from a reduced structured BIGSSS curriculum in which they participate and complete several milestones on their way towards a PhD degree.

The Adjunct PhD Program
BIGSSS' Adjunct PhD Program addresses doctoral candidates who are supervised by BIGSSS faculty members, but who only selectively participate in our courses and academic events. As an excellent Graduate School of the Social Sciences, it is our primary interest to ensure a high-quality doctoral training program for all of our fellows. Accordingly, the principles of close supervision as developed at BIGSSS also apply to Adjunct Fellows.

PhD Fellows

Alice Cimenti **16**
Aya Alwais **17**
Borbála Greskovics **18**
Mastewal Bitew **19**
Kabir Ghosh **20**
Katharina Schiffer **21**
Rida Bano **22**
Sophia Landzettel **23**
Ernest Ayumu **26**
Samitha Udayanga **27**
Tatiana Chalaya **28**
Darsana Varier **29**

Affiliated PhD Fellows

Nelson Sindze Wembe **31**
David Onen Ongwech **32**
Zeynep Pinar Erdem **33**
Daoyuan Ji **34**
Sophia Roppertz **35**
Timo Wiesner **37**
Marija Cubalevska **38**
Xugang Nie **39**
Hamidreza Farhat **40**
Tim-Frederik Hahn **41**
Svenja Oltmanns **42**
Alexander Reik **43**
Florian König **44**

Adjunct Fellows

Julian Götsch **45**
Anton Bochert **45**

The second cohort of the RTG SELF (from left to right: Alice Cimenti, Daoyuan Ji (Affiliated Fellow), Aya Alwais, Mastewal Bitew, Sophia Landzettel, Kabir Ghosh, Borbála Greskovics).

"I hope that my time at BIGSSS will help me develop a strong research foundation in social psychology while also allowing me to explore interdisciplinary approaches to study moral judgment. I look forward to contributing to cross-cultural research and expanding my academic and professional network."

Kabir Ghosh, Second cohort RTG SELF

BIGSSS RTG Social Dynamics of the Self (SELF)

In March 2023, the second cohort of eight fellows began their PhD journey in the DFG Research Training Group (RTG) Social Dynamics of the Self (SELF). With their arrival, the RTG now consists of two cohorts of 14 PhD Fellows alltogether.

The new fellows – Alice Cimenti, Aya Alwais, Borbála Greskovics, Katharina Schiffer, Kabir Ghosh, Mastewal Bitew, Rida Bano, and Sophia Landzettel – explore how identity develops and adapts across different cultural and social contexts.

RTG SELF provides a structured curriculum, joint supervision, and international networking opportunities, fostering a dynamic research environment. The RTG focuses on investigating the interactions between individuals and their social environment, providing a platform for early-career researchers from various social science disciplines to study the self's embeddedness in diverse social systems, ranging in complexity and dynamically changing over time. The research program is characterized by interdisciplinarity, combining research perspectives particularly from psychology, sociology, and political science.

Alice Cimenti

Regular PhD Fellow

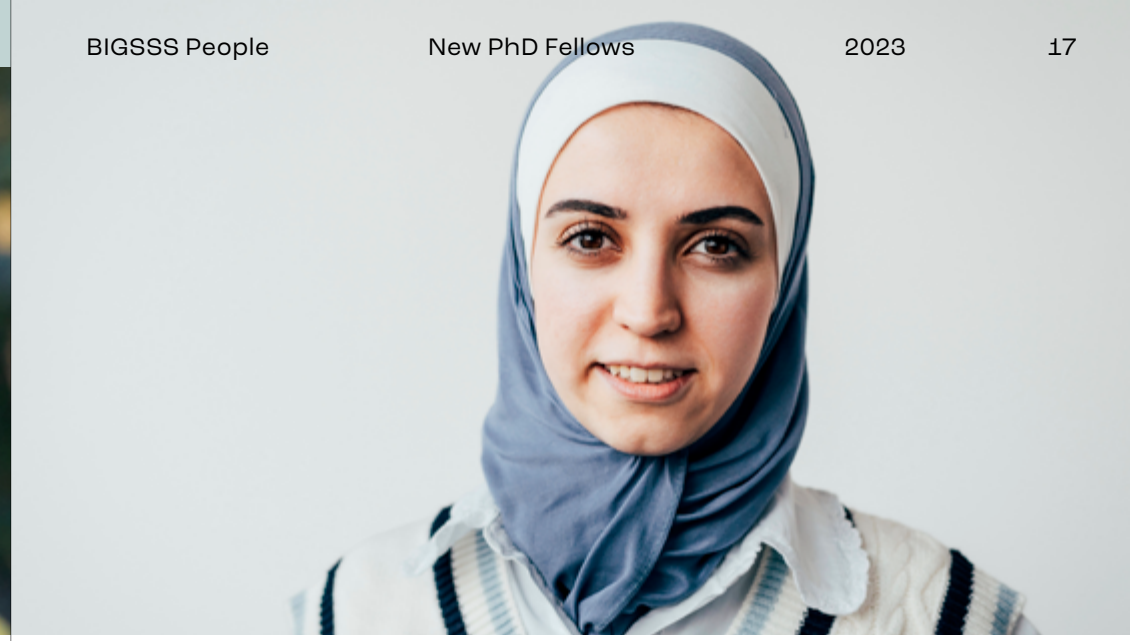
Research Training Group SELF

Dissertation working title: The Openness to Diversity of Adolescents in Italy

Supervisors:
Prof. Dr. Klaus Boehnke
Dr. Mandy Boehnke

Alice's dissertation project explores the orientation of adolescents living in Italy toward societal diversity. Compared to other countries, in fact, Italy has only recently been witnessing an increase in its society's diversity, as a result of both immigration and profound societal changes. In this research project, Alice examines various predictors of adolescents' openness to diversity, at both the individual and contextual levels.

At the individual level, the project investigates openness to diversity in relation to empathy, while at the contextual level, the role of primary and secondary socialization agents – such as the family, the school, peers, and social media – is explored. Moreover, the project investigates potential similarities or differences in adolescents' openness to diversity between those living in northern and southern Italy, two macro-regions with significant economic, social, political, and cultural differences.



Aya Alwais

Regular PhD Fellow

Research Training Group SELF

Dissertation working title: Identity Development of Syrian Refugees in Germany and Turkey: Role of Digital Media Usage, Social Contacts, and Perceived Behaviours

Supervisors:
Prof. Dr. Klaus Boehnke
Dr. Mandy Boehnke

Aya is currently working on a significant and highly relevant topic in Germany – migration and integration. Specifically, she is researching the identity development of Syrian refugees in Germany and Turkey. Her dissertation explores how Syrians maintain their ethnic identity while also identifying with Germany or Turkey, using the identity status model as a framework. The study examines identity development in relation to various factors that influence this process, including Syrians' perceptions of migration policies, discrimination, tolerance, and cultural distance (differences in morals, beliefs, and lifestyle). Furthermore, the dissertation investigates Syrians' social contacts – both within their own community (in-group) and with the host society (intergroup) – as well as their use of digital media to integrate into Germany and Turkey while preserving their cultural heritage.

Aya previously worked as a research assistant at the Leibniz Institute for Media Research – Hans-Bredow-Institut (HBI) and the Centre for Media, Communication, and Information Research (ZeMKI) during her master's studies in Digital Media and Society. Aya was a Fellow Representative for the year 2024, striving to represent her fellow researchers and their aspirations at BIGSSS.

Borbála Greskovics

Regular PhD Fellow

Research Training Group SELF

Dissertation working title: Interactions Between Economic and Gender Inequality in Various Contexts in Europe and Latin America

Supervisors:
Prof. Dr. Simone Schenger
Prof. Sonja Drobnič (PhD)

Borbála's research focuses on the relationship between economic inequalities among genders and households, with special attention to families with children, a specific group at high risk of poverty. She conducts a quasi-longitudinal quantitative analysis of the changes in Europe and Latin America over the last 20 years, covering several countries.

She is passionate about fighting for justice and believes that reducing inequalities should be a priority for welfare states. She also believes that the same result cannot be achieved by transferring policies from the Western world without adapting them to a different environment. Therefore, she studies changes in inequality trends and tries to identify their main drivers and the impact of family policies on them.

Borbála's professional background is in policy analysis, she has worked as a policy analyst at a think tank in Budapest for seven years, focusing on social, labor and family policies. Before becoming a policy analyst, she completed her MSc in Survey Methodology and Statistics, and then obtained a degree in Political Sciences at the Central European University.

Mastewal Bitew

Regular PhD Fellow

Research Training Group SELF

Dissertation working title: Bicultural Identity Integration of Ethiopian Jews of the Falasha Mura: A Moderated-Mediation Analysis

Supervisors:
Prof. Dr. Klaus Boehnke
Prof. Sonja Drobnič (PhD)

Mastewal has a special research interest in the identity development of migrants and ethnic minorities in various contexts. In his PhD, he seeks to understand the bicultural identity integration of ethiopian jews of the Falasha Mura in Ethiopia. He aims to examine the interaction of various intergroup factors and personality traits in shaping the negotiation of ethnic and mainstream cultural identities and their subsequent psychological outcomes. Migrants and ethnic minorities are expected to develop a range of bicultural identities when they engage with diverse multicultural contexts, which can vary from blended to compartmentalized or from harmony to conflict.

Mastewal plans to employ a mixed-methods research approach to address his central research questions, having already collected both quantitative and qualitative data from Ethiopia in 2024. After completing his joint master's degree in Transnational Migration from the Free University of Brussels in 2021, he continued working as a teaching assistant at the University of Gondar in Ethiopia until he began pursuing his PhD at BIGSSS-RTG SELF in 2023.

Mastewal is part of the Community Fund at BIGSSS, University of Bremen.

Kabir Ghosh

Regular PhD Fellow

Research Training Group SELF

Dissertation working title: Mapping Culture to Morality: The Honor-Utility and Dignity-Deontology Connection

Supervisors:
Prof. Dr. Ulrich Kühnen
Prof. Dr. em. Johannes Huinink

Kabir Ghosh is a PhD Fellow at BIGSSS, investigating the tension between honor and dignity norms in moral judgment. His research examines how cultural differences influence moral decision-making, focusing on whether the endorsement of honor norms aligns with utilitarian judgments and the endorsement of dignity norms aligns with deontological judgments. His work involves a cross-cultural comparison between Germany and India, employing moral dilemmas, social perception tasks, and trust games to explore the underlying cognitive and cultural mechanisms.

Before joining BIGSSS, Kabir earned a bachelor's degree in engineering and a master's in cognitive science. His academic journey has been shaped by interdisciplinary interests spanning social psychology, philosophy of mind, and cognitive neuroscience. Outside academia, he has a deep appreciation for the arts and has previously considered a career in filmmaking. He enjoys creative brainstorming and is passionate about understanding how people perceive and navigate moral conflicts in different cultural contexts.

Katharina Schiffer

Regular PhD Fellow

Research Training Group SELF

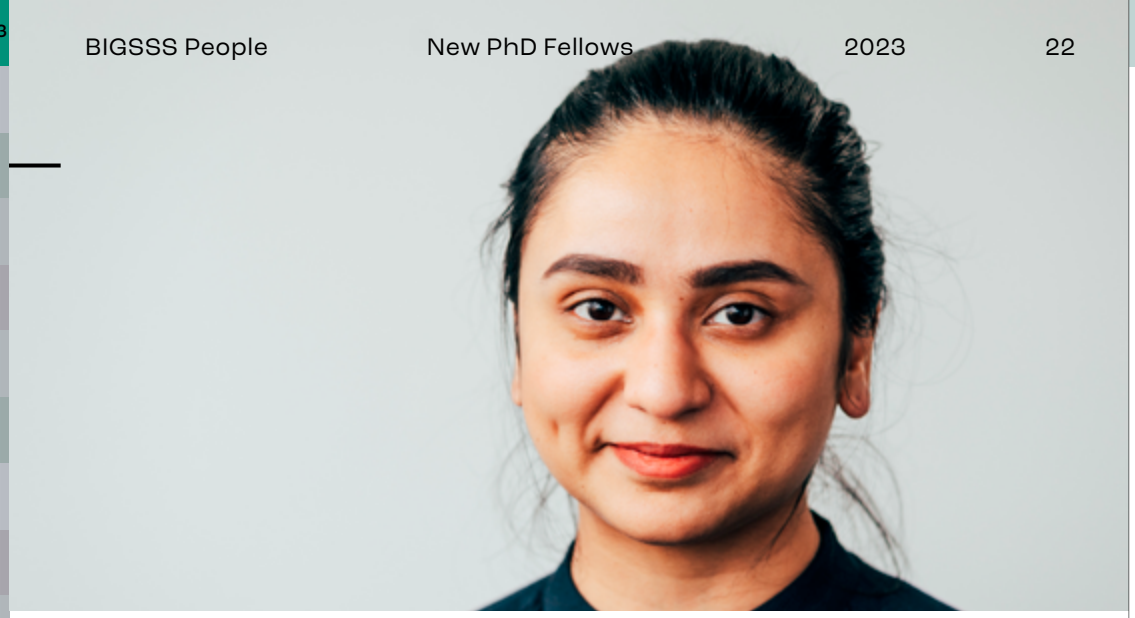
Dissertation working title: Sustainable Practice for Healthcare Professionals in German Psychiatric - Psychosomatic Clinics

Supervisors:
Prof. Dr. Sonia Lippke
Prof. Dr. Jan Lorenz

Katharina specializes in occupational health and well-being in healthcare settings. She is particularly interested in the working conditions of healthcare professionals in psychiatric and psychosomatic clinics, where high workloads and stress levels are common. Her research investigates how job demands and resources affect job satisfaction, turnover intention, and service quality, with a focus on burnout and engagement. She aims to develop strategies for more sustainable work environments together with those affected.

Katharina's research combines psychological theories with quantitative and qualitative methods, including a survey, agent-based computer modeling, and workshops with healthcare professionals.

Before joining BIGSSS, Katharina studied psychology and gained practical experience in clinical settings. She is passionate about mental health, both in research and practice. In addition to her academic work, she is training as a psychological psychotherapist in cognitive behavioral therapy.



Rida Bano

Regular PhD Fellow

Research Traning Group SELF

Dissertation working title: Religiosity, Religious Fundamentalism and Endorsement of Honor Codes in Shaping Gender Norms in the Muslim Population of Pakistan

Supervisors:
Prof. Dr. Ulrich Kühnen
Prof. Dr. em. Johannes Huinink

Rida Bano is a PhD Fellow at BIGSSS, where she studies how religiosity, religious fundamentalism, and honor codes influence gender norms in Pakistan. Her research examines how these factors relate to ambivalent sexism, rape myth acceptance (RMA), and progressive gender values across urban and rural contexts. Her study investigates the sociocultural mechanisms that sustain or challenge traditional gender hierarchies. She employs a cross-sectional quantitative design and utilizes Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to analyze these relationships.

Before joining BIGSSS, Rida earned her Master's in Development Studies from the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Islamabad, where she developed a keen interest in cultural and gender studies. Building on this foundation, she pursued her PhD with a focus on the culture of honor, exploring its influence on gender norms and societal structures. Beyond academia, she enjoys listening to classical as well as Sufi devotional music, appreciating their soothing melodies and the deep meaning of self-growth, healing, and love. She is passionate about traveling, especially to the mountains, and enjoys exploring diverse cultures shaped by unique landscapes and terrains.

Sophia Landzettel

Regular PhD Fellow

Research Training Group SELF

Dissertation working title: The Deservingness of Families: What Is the Perception of the Deservingness of Families to Receive Social Support in Modern Welfare States?

Supervisors:
Prof. Dr. Simone Scherger
Dr. Franziska Deutsch

Sophia's dissertation is about welfare attitudes and redistributive preferences with a focus on families. She is interested in the complexity of public support for families, as they play a central role in society regarding their function as private social security networks as well as distinct recipients of social spending in welfare states. Applying the concept of "deservingness opinion" to families as a target group of social policy support, she investigates which factors have an impact on the formation of opinions about families receiving state support. Sophia is especially interested in the explanation of public support for family and social policies in modern welfare states. She started her research project with a systematic literature analysis and plans to build on this with a survey experiment in different European welfare states.

Before joining BIGSSS as a Fellow, Sophia completed her Master's in "Professional Public Decision Making" at the University of Bremen and worked for two years as a research assistant in a school project. Sophia was a member of the Fellow Representatives from 2023 to 2024.

Regular PhD Fellows of the BIGSSS-DAAD PhD program GSPSC (from left to right: Samitha Udayanga, Darsana Varier, Tatiana Chalaya, Ernest Ayumu)

“Participation in BIGSSS provides a unique opportunity to be part of an international community, gain invaluable experience through interaction with experienced researchers, and acquire connections that are useful for a future academic career.”

Tatiana Chalaya, 2024 PhD Fellow

BIGSSS-DAAD Graduate School Schoolarship Programme GSPSC

The program Global Dynamics of Social Policy and Social Cohesion (GSPSC) is the second of our three DAAD Graduate School Scholarship Programmes (GSSP). With the arrival of our two newest fellows, Tatiana Chalaya and Darsana Varier, in September 2024, this program is now complete. Samitha Udayanga and Ernest Ayumu began their doctoral studies in September 2023.

The four fellows’ dissertation projects explore a diverse range of topics, including discourses of vulnerability and anti-feminism in the Global South, the role of socially oriented NGOs in Russia’s health sector, gender inequality and happiness among highly educated immigrants, and shadow care infrastructures in Ghana.

Ernest Ayumu

Regular PhD Fellow

BIGSSS-DAAD Program
GSPSC

Dissertation working title: Housing the Urban Poor: Exploring the Shadow Care Infrastructures in Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA)

Supervisors:
Prof. Dr. Olaf Groh-Samberg
Prof. Dr. Michael Windzio
Prof. Austin Dziwornu Ablo

Ernest's research examines the housing deprivation experiences and strategies of the urban poor in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area. He explores the support systems, resource sharing, and norms of mutual aid that sustain their housing needs and trajectories. Ernest utilizes a mixed-methods approach through Grounded Theory. His findings highlights the pivotal role of informal support networks, community-based initiatives, and policy interventions in addressing the housing challenge. His contribution toward understanding how poor urban households cope and maintain their resilience increases knowledge relevant to broader discourses about sustainable urban development and equitable housing in developing countries. Before BIGSSS, Ernest worked as a research assistant on different research projects and as a Training Officer at Sambus Geospatial Limited in Ghana, where he was in charge of executing all GIS workflows and training needs for client organizations and their end-users.

Ernest loves to play and watch football matches. He also loves to listen and dance to music when he's in a good mood. Ernest is part of the team of Fellow Representatives.

Samitha Udayanga

Regular PhD Fellow

BIGSSS-DAAD Program
GSPSC

Dissertation working title: Gender Inequality, and Happiness Trajectories of Highly Educated Immigrants

Supervisors:
Prof. Dr. Hilke Brockmann
Prof. Dr. Wiebke Schulz

Samitha's research broadly examines the complex relationships between education, subjective well-being, gender inequality, and immigrant integration in OECD countries. Immigrant integration in many high-income countries presents a paradox: contrary to expectations, highly educated immigrants tend to be less integrated and less happy compared to their less educated peers. Samitha focuses on this education-integration-happiness puzzle using a mixed-methods research approach. He aims to understand how gender differences influence the realization of subjective well-being and why highly educated immigrants experience lower levels of integration and happiness.

Samitha's contributions will be both substantive and policy-oriented. His research aims to assist national and international authorities in developing immigrant integration policies that mainstream subjective well-being. Before joining BIGSSS, Samitha worked as a lecturer at the University of Ruhuna and the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. Outside his academic pursuits, he enjoys mobile photography.

Samitha is currently a member of the Fellow Representatives.

Tatiana Chalaya

Regular PhD Fellow

BIGSSS-DAAD Program
GSPSC

Dissertation working title: Social Cohesion and Socially Oriented NGOs in Russia

Supervisor:
Dr. Mandi Larsen

Tatiana's research focuses on the role of NGOs that provide social services in shaping social cohesion under a non-democratic regime. The study employs both quantitative and qualitative methods, including comparisons across different regions of Russia. For many years, Tatiana worked in NGOs in Russia, so she is very interested in how NGOs can influence the formation of trust, the perception of fairness, and other dimensions of social cohesion, especially under difficult conditions, including crises.

For Tatiana, BIGSSS provides a unique opportunity to be part of an international community, gain invaluable experience through interaction with experienced researchers, and acquire connections that are useful for a future academic career.

Darsana Varier

Regular PhD Fellow

BIGSSS-DAAD Program
GSPSC

Dissertation working title: Discursive Frames of Anti-Feminist Groups of the Global South and their Influence on Social Policy

Supervisors:
Prof. Dr. Sebastian Haunss
Dr. Mandi Larsen

Darsana is a PhD Fellow in the Graduate School Scholarship Programme focusing on emerging discursive frames of anti-feminist groups specifically in the Global South context and their influence on social and legal policy. Her project is organized around cultivating an understanding of antifeminism as a social movement that has its own principles of action and cohesion in its own situated histories and realities, and how they can have effects on the achievement of gender equality in these contexts.

Before joining BIGSSS, Darsana was a Master's student at the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar, India (2021–23) with an interest in interdisciplinary social sciences. Her Master's thesis focused on the affective activism of men's rights groups in Kerala, India and their expression of victimhood and vulnerability.

Outside of work, she enjoys crocheting and spending hours in art supply stores.

Nelson Sindze Wembe

Affiliated PhD Fellow

Worlds of Contradiction, University of Bremen

Dissertation working title: Longing and Belonging in Black African Diasporic Literature Written in French and Spanish

Supervisors:
Prof. Dr. Gisela Febel
Prof. Dr. Martin Nonhoff

Nelson's research focuses on a qualitative analysis of longing and belonging in Black African diasporic narratives written in French and Spanish. The aim is to examine how the longing for the Other (understood here as a geographic space, the Self, and the alien), the longing to belong, and the politics of belonging motivate migration and also contribute to the construction of subjectivity among migrants and their descendants.

Nelson also engages in philosophical discussions on the Self and the Other, and enjoys taking long walks in forests, exchanging ideas on interculturality, and languages in contact. He appreciates dancing and listening to African and Afro-Latino music genres.

David Onen Ongwech

Affiliated PhD Fellow

Institute of Intercultural and International Studies (InIIS), University of Bremen

Dissertation working title: Exploring the Political Agency of Forced Migrants with Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Expressions, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) Amidst Homophobia and Xenophobia in Uganda

Supervisors:
Dr. Philipp Schulz
Prof. Dr. Klaus Schlichte

Whereas scholarship has slowly evolved and attended to the visibility and lived realities of forced migrants with diverse SOGIESC, critical engagement with the scholarship shows a 'vulnerability-centric' perspective, with a heavy focus on violence and suffering. While necessary and urgently required, such a narrow focus often does a disservice to forced migrants with diverse SOGIESC, whose vast experiences this study seeks to explore by using three interrelated questions: a) How do forced migrants with diverse SOGIESC exercise agency? b) How do the forms of agency exercised by forced migrants with diverse SOGIESC intersect with and relate to their vulnerabilities? and c) How do wider structural elements shape these experiences? The study is theoretically and disciplinarily situated at the intersections of critical international relations, forced migration, and queer feminist theories. It adopts an in-depth single-case analysis of Uganda, utilizes a qualitative approach, and uses ethnography, and relational approach by conducting research with, rather than, on forced migrants with diverse SOGIESC.

Prior to his PhD pursuit, David worked with forced migrants in Uganda on issues related to prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence.

Zeynep Pinar Erdem

Affiliated PhD Fellow

Institute of Intercultural and International Studies (InIIS), University of Bremen

Dissertation working title: Lived Realities of Lesbian, Bisexual, and Trans (LBT) Forced Migrant Women in Turkey and Lebanon: Vulnerabilities, (In) visibility and Agency

Supervisors:
Dr. Philipp Schulz
Prof. Dr. Klaus Schlichte

In recent years, the lived realities of forced migrants with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) have slowly gained attention in research and policy-making on gender, conflict, and security. However, there are shortcomings and risks involved in their inclusion in the discourse. Many of these debates unfold through a violation-centric lens, focusing on their vulnerabilities rather than their agency. Moreover, they are often treated as a homogeneous group, glossing over intersectional differences. Furthermore, the focus mainly remains on the experiences of men with diverse SOGIESC.

This project examines the lived realities of lesbian, bisexual, and trans (LBT) forced migrant women in Turkey and Lebanon, which host significant numbers of forced migrants. The study particularly focuses on their experiences of (in)visibility to better understand how (in)visibility creates vulnerabilities but also possibilities for agency. It explores how LBT women who are forcibly displaced in these two countries experience not only different layers of gendered vulnerabilities, but also how they navigate these vulnerabilities and exercise different forms of agency in an environment where anti-LGBT and anti-refugee rhetoric is on the rise.

> "As a BIGSSS Fellow, I expect to grow as a qualitative researcher and future academic by gaining new insights on how to approach my research analysis, both theoretically and methodologically. [...]"

Zeynep Pinar Erdem, 2023 Affiliated PhD Fellow

Daoyuan Ji

Affiliated PhD Fellow

Constructor Universiy

Dissertation working title: Pharmaceutical Policy Reforms in China: 1979–2019

Supervisors:
Prof. Dr. Tobias ten Brink
Dr. Armin Müller

My research is dedicated to analyzing China's pharmaceutical policy in the context of healthcare reform. The study aims to help us understand how policymakers in different political environments navigate the complex balance between ensuring access to medicines, maintaining financial sustainability, and incentivizing innovation within the constraints of available public resources. Employing Michael Howlett's framework for public policy analysis, the research traces the causal mechanisms that have driven reforms from the 1980s to recent transformative episodes in 2009 and 2015. By analyzing agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation, the study aims to reveal why and how these shifts occurred.

Outside of his research, he enjoys reading – an activity that feeds his curiosity about social welfare changes across Asia. Before joining BIGSSS, he built his skills in policy analysis, developing a background that informs his understanding of government reforms. His passion for exploring the intricate relationship between public policy and social equity motivates him to contribute valuable insights into the evolving landscape of Asian social welfare.

Sophia Roppertz

Affiliated PhD Fellow

SOCIUM Research Center on Inequality and Social Policy, University of Bremen

Dissertation working title: (Digital) Waves of Change? The Impact of Machine Learning on Social Science Knowledge Production

Supervisors:
Prof. Dr. Sophia Hunger
Prof. Dr. Sebastian Haunss

Sophia's research focuses on exploring emerging research practices enabled by methods such as machine learning. Central questions guiding her work include: (1) the extent to which the integration of machine learning advances or changes our understanding within the social sciences, and (2) the implications of this integration for knowledge production in the field. This research is situated within a broad interdisciplinary framework, drawing on insights from the sociology of knowledge, the science of science, and computer science.

In addition to her dissertation work, she takes great pleasure in teaching statistics courses for undergraduate students at the University of Bremen.

Timo Wiesner

Affiliated PhD Fellow

SOCIUM Research Center on Inequality and Social Policy, University of Bremen

Dissertation working title: The Role of Objective Conditions and Subjective Perceptions in Shaping Inequality Preferences

Supervisor:
Prof. Dr. Patrick Sachweh

Timo's dissertation project revolves around the apparent lack of public response to rising income inequality. He is investigating how the public (cognitively) perceives and (normatively) evaluates inequality, how this translates into social policy preferences, and how inequality might play a role in shaping the social contexts in which these perceptions and evaluations are formed. To this end, he uses a comparative longitudinal approach to analyze large-scale survey data and integrates theoretical perspectives from social justice theory, moral, and political economy.

During his time at BIGSSS, he aims to benefit from the academic program and the opportunity to meet and learn from diverse individuals with similar goals, offered by the institutional structures of BIGSSS.

Timo is currently part of the BIGSSS Fellow Representatives.

Marija Cubalevska

Affiliated PhD Fellow

Institute Technology and Education, University of Bremen

Dissertation working title: Teaching in Transit: Practices, Potentials and Problems in Language Programmes for (Forced) Migrants in Southeastern Europe

Supervisors:
Prof. Dr. Alisha Heinemann
Prof. Dr. Hannes Schweiger

Marija's PhD project explores language education programs organized by civil society in Skopje and Sofia, both of which are located in so-called transit countries for involuntary migration. Specifically, she is interested in how teachers and learners navigate and engage with the multilingual reality inside the language classroom.

To investigate this, she conducts an ethnographic field study, combining different methods such as classroom observation, semi-guided qualitative interviews and ethnographic field notes. Marija studied German Philology (BA) and German as a Foreign and Second Language (MA) at the University of Vienna. Currently she holds a doctoral scholarship awarded by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation.

Xugang Nie

Affiliated PhD Fellow

Constructor University

Dissertation working title: Cross-Cultural Measurement Equivalence of Self-Regulation Motivational Strategies: Insights from Cross-Cultural Educational Assessment Programs

Supervisor:
Prof. Dr. Ulrich Kühnen

Growing up during China's most transformative era of reform and opening-up, and as a first-generation college student transitioning from a rural background to urban life and other cultures, Xugang experienced countless shifts and conflicts in identity. It is precisely these experiences that have sparked his interest in exploring the role of self-construal in linking the individual with the broader social environment. Xugang's research focuses on the self's role in behavior regulation and how social contexts shape the self. He combines the Interdependent and Independent Self-Construal theory with the Expectancy-Value Theory to explore cultural differences in motivation. His work particularly examines the cross-cultural measurement equivalence of self-regulatory motivational traits – such as self-efficacy, perceived competence, and learning interest – using data from international educational assessments like PISA and TIMSS and employing methods such as multilevel linear modeling.

Before joining BIGSSS, Xugang earned his master's degree in Educational Statistics and Measurement from Beijing Normal University and worked as a researcher in social psychology at Curtin University in Australia. In his free time, he enjoys hiking, reading, playing badminton, and exploring and learning to make various cuisines.

Hamidreza Farhat

Affiliated PhD Fellow

SOCIUM Research Center on Inequality and Social Policy, University of Bremen

Dissertation working title: Political Content and Networks on Instagram: A study of verified and Non-official Accounts during the US Presidential Elections

Supervisor:
Prof. Dr. Sophia Hunger

Hamidreza is an assistant researcher at SOCIUM, where his work delves into the intricate dynamics of political content and networks on Instagram. His current research aims to uncover the mechanisms of propaganda, negative campaigning, and networking during political campaigns.

With a background in visual media, cinema, and adaptation studies, Hamidreza previously explored the effects of real-life events on the portrayal of post-apocalyptic films. His transition to social media and media productions has led him to focus on the digital political landscape. By analyzing shared content on Instagram, he seeks to identify effective patterns and tactics in digital political communication.

His research also emphasizes the importance of understanding connections between political actors and high-impact influencers, mapping the flow of information and influence within these networks. With his work he aims to provide insights into public reactions and engagement, ultimately assessing the effectiveness of political content and its impact on voter behavior.

Tim-Frederik Hahn

Affiliated PhD Fellow

Institute of Intercultural and International Studies (InIIS), University of Bremen

Dissertation working title: The Debate of Deep-Sea Mining in the European Union and the Global Race for Raw Materials

Supervisor:
Prof. Dr. Wiebke Rabe

Tim's research focuses on the European debate on deep-sea mining. He analyzes how positions on deep-sea mining in the European Union have emerged. In particular, he is investigating why environmental and marine protection interests have so far prevailed over supposed economic and security interests. A particular focus is on the different interests, ideas, and institutions involved in the debate. Tim works with qualitative methods such as thematic analysis and process tracing.

Before joining BIGSSS, Tim completed a double-degree program in political science at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich and Stockholm University. He was a scholarship holder of the Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes and spent time abroad at the University of Bergen and Sciences Po Paris.

In his spare time, he enjoys traveling, playing the trumpet, and reading good books.

Tim has been a Fellow Representative at BIGSSS since November 2024.

Svenja Oltmanns

Affiliated PhD Fellow

Research Institute Social Cohesion (RISC)

Dissertation working title: Spatial Clustering of Political Attitudes and Values

Supervisor:
Prof. Dr. Olaf Groh-Samberg

Svenja joined BIGSSS as a doctoral researcher at the Research Institute Social Cohesion (RISC) working for the Research Data Center on monitoring social cohesion in Germany. In her PhD project, she explores the relationships between places, their unique characteristics, and the political attitudes and values of their residents. Her main research interest therefore is why certain groups in different places vary in their viewpoints, values, and behavior. Utilizing geocoded data from the German Social Cohesion Panel, her research aims to analyze these connections and their significance for social cohesion.

Before starting her PhD, Svenja studied Sociology and Social Research at the University of Bremen, as well as Social Theatre and Dramaturgy in Germany and North Macedonia and worked as an educator on international exchange projects.

Alexander Reik

Affiliated PhD Fellow

Constructor University

Dissertation working title: Innovation, Fragmentation and Centralization in China's Economic Engagement with Southeast Asia

Supervisor:
Prof. Dr. Tobias ten Brink

Alexander's research focuses on Chinese innovation, trade, and foreign investment policy. His dissertation project, in particular, explores the changing ways the country engages with Southeast Asia in light of China's emergence as an indispensable leader in key green technologies required for the energy transition, such as batteries, electric vehicles, and photovoltaics.

Alexander holds degrees in political science and Chinese studies from the Universities of Bamberg and Tübingen and has studied for extended periods in both mainland China and Taiwan. He hopes to contribute to a growing literature that examines China's engagement with the world from a nuanced and multifaceted perspective. Working within a broadly qualitative methodology, he also seeks new ways to study China and Chinese politics in an age of increasingly restricted access. In his spare time, he likes to hike, cycle through the Blockland, and read books.

Florian König

Affiliated PhD Fellow

Dissertation working title: Understanding Racial Inequality in Financial Access

Supervisors:
Prof. Dr. Betina Hollstein
Prof. Dr. Mario Small

Florian's dissertation examines how financial service providers decide where to establish branches and the broader implications for racial disparities in financial access. Traditional banks and credit unions often avoid low-income, majority Black and Latino neighborhoods, while alternative financial institutions (AFIs), such as check cashers and payday lenders, are disproportionately concentrated in these areas. The presence of AFIs increases chronic reliance on their services, potentially limiting financial mobility and deepening economic inequalities.

While most research on financial service location decisions relies on quantitative methods, Florian's employs qualitative interviews with managers and senior executives of financial service firms. By exploring how these decision-makers perceive markets and customers, his research uncovers the underlying logics that shape financial access along racial lines. This dissertation contributes to the understanding of how economic and racial structures intertwine, highlighting the ways in which financial institutions reinforce spatial and economic inequalities.

Florian teaches methods and theory at the University of Bremen. He also holds various political positions, including serving as a Fellow Representative at BIGSSS and as a board member of the Rosa-Luxemburg Foundation in Bremen.

These PhD Fellows have also started their PhD journey at BIGSSS in 2023 and 2024:

2023

Julian Götsch

SOCIUM Research Center on Inequality and Social Policy and CRC 1342 "Global Dynamics of Social Policy", University of Bremen

Dissertation working title: The Colonial Legacy in Healthcare Policy: The Influence of Colonial Path Dependencies in Institutions, Transnational Actor Networks and the Political Economy on Developments in Healthcare in Post-Colonial Kenya and Nigeria

2024

Anton Bochert

Research Institute Social Cohesion (RISC)

Dissertation working title: Heterogeneity of Social Networks and the Development of Societal Values

BIGSSS Visiting Fellows in 2023 and 2024:

2023

Dr. Lara Minkus
Visiting Postdoc Fellow
March–Sep 23

University of Flensburg

Jyoti Sharma
Visiting PhD Fellow
April–May 2023

Dr. Ram Manohar Lohiya National Law University
Lucknow, India

Dr. Adekunle Adedji
Visiting Postdoc Fellow
April–Dez 23

Feodor Lynen Return Fellow, Constructor University Bremen and Research Associate University of Applied Sciences Hamburg

Emilly Schuch Martins
Visiting PhD Fellow
July 23–Dec 23

Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

2024

Anisha Elama
Visiting PhD Fellow
Sep 24– Feb 25

Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, India

New Staff

Monika Liorentaite-Rossdeutscher 50
Noha Mahmoud 51
Jessica Maczuga 52

Monika Liorentaite-Rossdeutscher

Coordination Officer

Monika Liorentaite-Rossdeutscher started working as the Coordination Officer at BIGSSS in February 2023. However, she was already familiar with the Graduate School, as she had first joined BIGSSS in July 2020 as an Admissions and Administration Officer. In her position as Coordination Officer, Monika is responsible for supporting the Research Training Group SELF in its academic management. In addition, she assists all BIGSSS PhD Fellows with course registration, as the administration of CampusNet remains one of her responsibilities.

Towards the end of the PhD journey, fellows have the opportunity to meet Monika again as she assists the Director of Studies with the preparation of curriculum completion forms and transcripts, issues BIGSSS PhD certificates, and is responsible for managing the BIGSSS alumni database.

Monika is originally from Lithuania. Before moving to Bremen in 2017, she worked at the Lithuanian Embassy in Berlin, where she gained valuable experience in international relations and diplomacy. With an academic background in development and international relations, Monika enjoys working at BIGSSS with its dynamic and international culture.

Noha Mahmoud

Admissions and Administration Officer

Noha started her work as an Admissions and Administration Officer at BIGSSS in April 2023. In her role, she manages the admissions process, assists prospective students, and handles administrative tasks to ensure the smooth running of operations. She has excellent communication, organizational, and problem-solving skills, which help her provide effective support to fellows and staff members.

Working at BIGSSS has had a significant impact on her, providing invaluable opportunities to develop her professional skills and expand her knowledge of admissions and administration. The collaborative environment at BIGSSS has allowed her to work closely with a diverse group of colleagues and fellows, fostering a deeper understanding of different perspectives and cultures. Overall, her experience at BIGSSS has been incredibly rewarding, both personally and professionally.

She is passionate about supporting prospective students and fellows through the application and enrollment process, ensuring they have a smooth and positive experience. She looks forward to continuing her work in this rewarding field.

Jessica Maczuga

Senior Coordinator of the Deans' Office

Jessica is the newest addition to the staff at BIGSSS and started working as the Senior Coordinator of the Deans' Office at BIGSSS in July 2024. Having completed both her bachelor's degree in Political Science and master's degree in Professional Public Decision Making at the University of Bremen, she was already familiar with BIGSSS and the Bremen Social Sciences. Before joining BIGSSS, Jessica worked at the organization Brand New Bundestag in Berlin and later at the Statistical Office in Bremen, where her work largerly revolved around elections in Germany and Europe.

At BIGSSS, Jessica is responsible for overseeing internal and external communications, such as the Biennial Report, the BIGSSS website, and social media. She also organizes key events like Graduation Day, supports administrative processes, and helps ensure the smooth running of the graduate school.

Jessica feels right at home in the lively and welcoming BIGSSS community, where she enjoys working with fellows, faculty, and colleagues. She values the inspiring exchange within the social sciences and is always happy to connect. Whether you have a question or just want to stop by for a quick coffee, her door is always open!

New Faculty

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Prof. Dr. Sebastian Fehrler **55**
Prof. Dr. Thomas Kern **56**
Prof. Dr. Gisela Febel **57**
Dr. Philipp Schulz **58**
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Prof. Dr. Sohaib S. Hassan **62**
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Prof. Dr. Wiebke Rabe

Assistant Professor of International Relations, Institute of Intercultural and International Studies (InIIS)

Wiebke Rabe is Assistant Professor of International Relations, specializing in the politics of global resources at the Institute of Intercultural and International Studies (InIIS) at the University of Bremen. Her research and teaching focuses on the global distribution of natural resources and related interdependencies and conflicts as well as on international politics of digital data as an economic resource. A special focus lies on the role of China in international affairs and related domestic political processes and interests under central-local relations. Before joining the InIIS, Wiebke was an Assistant Professor at the Department of China Studies at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, Suzhou, and a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Institute for Chinese Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. She holds a doctorate in political science from the Hertie School and is author of the book "China's Provinces Go Global: Internationalization under Guided Autonomy" (2023, Routledge). Her research has appeared in journals such as Energy Policy, the Review of International Political Economy, The China Quarterly and the Journal of Contemporary Asia. Wiebke covers a range of methodological approaches which include fieldwork, surveys and documentary analysis.

Prof. Dr. Sebastian Fehrler

Professor of Economics of Social Policy, SOCIUM Research Center on Inequality and Social Policy, University of Bremen

Sebastian Fehrler has always admired the rigor of mathematics and experiments in the natural sciences, while at the same time being intrigued by questions about human social behavior. He had the privilege of learning the nuts and bolts of Applied Economics at a place that was, and continues to be, world-leading in this area, the University of Zurich. Later, he had the opportunity to visit New York University on a scholarship which opened his eyes to the power of combining game-theoretic modeling with empirical work. So, he became an economist working both (game-)theoretically and experimentally on collective decision-making, human-algorithm interaction, and social policy evaluation with a focus on the Global South.

Before joining the University of Bremen in 2020, Sebastian was an Assistant Professor for Behavioral Economics at the University of Konstanz and a Principal Investigator (PI) at the Cluster of Excellence "The Politics of Inequality". Currently, he is a PI at the CRC 1342, a DIFIS Fellow, and co-speaker of SOCIUM.

Prof. Dr. Thomas Kern

Professor of Sociological Theory, University of Bremen

Thomas Kern is a Professor of Sociological Theory at the University of Bremen, a position he has held since 2022. Before that, he was a Professor of Sociology at the Universities of Heidelberg, Chemnitz, and Bamberg from 2009 to 2022.

His research focuses on the stability and transformation of social orders, particularly in an international comparative perspective. He is interested in why societies remain relatively stable despite deep political and religious tensions and how these tensions contribute to social change. In his work, he pays special attention to the role of media, civil society actors, and protest movements in shaping and challenging existing social structures.

His expertise spans sociological theory, the sociology of religion, social movements, and political sociology. At the University of Bremen, he contributes to interdisciplinary research and engages with students and doctoral candidates exploring questions of societal stability and transformation.

Prof. Dr. Gisela Febel

Professor Emerita of Romance Literatures and Cultural Theory, University of Bremen

Gisela Febel is a Professor Emerita of Romance Literatures and Cultural Theory at the University of Bremen, Germany. She is a founding member and former director of INPUTS (Institute of Postcolonial and Transcultural Studies) and the interdisciplinary research platform WoC (Worlds of Contradiction). She is, among other activities, a member of the faculty of the DFG-funded Research Training Group on Contradiction Studies at the University of Bremen and a member of the research labs Digital Diaspora – Imagined Communities in Cyberspace and Pluriversal Memory Cultures.

Her research focuses include postcolonial literatures, diaspora studies, contemporary novels and poetry, literatures of the early modern period, theories of modernity, the relations between literature, society, and philosophy, transcultural studies, and transmedial questions of aesthetics and discourse. In 2009, she was awarded the Order of the French State for Cultural Merit: Chevalier de l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques.

Dr. Philipp Schulz

Postdoctoral Researcher, Institute of Intercultural and International Studies (InIIS), University of Bremen

Philipp Schulz is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Institute of Intercultural and International Studies (InIIS) at the University of Bremen, where he currently leads two research projects. His research is animated by a curiosity about how people and communities affected by armed conflicts remake worlds in the wake of violence and displacement, and, in particular how these processes are shaped by gender. His current research projects focus on the roles of love and care in the face of violence and loss, and on the lived realities of forced migrants with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Methodologically, Philipp's work draws on ethnographic research with violence-affected communities in Uganda, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia and Germany. He is particularly committed to relational and participatory research approaches, and constantly seeks to center reflexivity and reciprocity in his research.

At BIGSSS, Philipp has the pleasure of supervising two brilliant PhD candidates, as Affiliated Fellows – Zeynep Pinar Erdem and Onen Davind Ongwech. Learning and exploring alongside curious minds is among the greatest treats of this work.

"I look forward to receiving training that equips me to conduct cutting-edge research, contributing to a deeper understanding of our society."

Sophia Roppertz, 2023 Affiliated PhD Fellow

Prof. Dr. Sarah Berens

Professor of Global Social Policy, SOCIUM Research Center on Inequality and Social Policy, University of Bremen

Sarah Berens is a Professor of Global Social Policy at SOCIUM at the University of Bremen in the fields of Political Economy and Comparative Politics. She received her doctoral training at the graduate school of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies and the University of Cologne. She was a Visiting Researcher at Columbia University, Cornell University, Vanderbilt University, UC Riverside, University of Miami, the IADB in Washington D.C. and Queensland University, among others.

Her research focuses on the micro-foundations of social policy in developing economies, making use of survey experiments and quantitative analyses. She is interested in understanding individual preferences for redistribution and social policies, the willingness to pay taxes, or the likelihood of working in the informal economy, taking into account institutional variation and contextual factors such as criminal violence or migration. She has a regional focus on Latin America, but her work also covers high-income economies and Sub-Saharan Africa. Her research has been published in international peer-reviewed journals such as Comparative Political Studies, Political Behavior, Socio-Economic Review, the Journal of Peace Research and field journals such as Latin American Politics & Society.

Prof. Dr. Sophia Hunger

Assistant Professor of Computational Social Science, University of Bremen

Sophia Hunger is an Assistant Professor of Computational Social Science at the University of Bremen. Prior to her current role, she was a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Center for Civil Society Research, situated at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center, where she contiues to be associated as a Guest Researcher. She received her doctorate from the European University Institute in 2020.

Sophia's research interests focus on protest movements, political engagement, party competition, political communication, and applied quantitative methods, particularly quantitative text analysis and automated event extraction. She also has an interest in developing new methods to measure positions, polarization, and resonance in political communication and public debate. Her work has been published in journals such as Political Science Research and Methods, European Political Science Review, Swiss Political Science Review, Political Research Exchange, and Mobilization.

Sophia actively engages in public debates on protest and electoral behavior, contributing her expert opinion to numerous media outlets, including ARD, ZDF, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Deutschlandfunk, Berliner Tagesspiegel, France24, El País, NDR, rbb, and others.

Prof. Dr. Sohaib S. Hassan

Professor of Management Science and Business Analytics, School of Business, Social & Decision Sciences, Constructor University Bremen

Prof. Dr. Hassan specializes in strategic management and decision-making related to innovation, digitalization, and resilience. His academic pursuits focus on employing econometric and data analytic methods to study and empirically explore the dynamics of organizations, industries, and regions. Through his research, he aims to uncover practical insights that inform the development of successful strategies and effective policies.

As a faculty member at BIGSSS, Prof. Dr. Hassan plays an important role in mentoring doctoral candidates, guiding them in applying econometric and data analytic methods to study organizational, industry, and regional dynamics – key elements of the social fabric. He actively engages with the graduate school by contributing to interdisciplinary research and fostering collaborations that bridge theory and practice in strategic management, social science, and governance in an era of rapid digitalization. His expertise enhances the school's research output and policy impact, while the school's academic environment provides him with opportunities for intellectual exchange, collaboration, and advancing empirical studies that address real-world challenges.

Prof. Dr. Alisha M.B. Heinemann

Professor of Educational Science, Institute Technology and Education, University of Bremen

Alisha Heinemann specializes in Migration and Refugee Studies and Critical Pedagogy. With a focus on postcolonial theories, she explores the professionalization of teachers with regard to their development of critical diversity literacy. Her expertise extends to German as a second or additional language, multilingual classrooms, learning across the life course, and the transition from school to work. She has conducted extensive research on the intersection of migration, education, and social justice. Her publications delve into the complexities of pedagogical approaches in power-hierarchical settings.

Through her teaching, Professor Heinemann equips educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage with diverse student populations using an anti-discriminatory approach. She emphasizes critical pedagogy, encouraging those who work in pedagogical settings to adopt inclusive practices that create spaces for empowering students from marginalized backgrounds.

Alisha Heinemann is interested in supporting doctoral students who critically examine educational spaces in a society structured by inequalities.

BIGSSS Research & Events

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The BIGSSS Best Paper Awards

Each year, the BIGSSS Best Paper Award is presented at the BIGSSS Meeting of Members in May to recognize outstanding research contributions by our fellows. The award honors exceptional publications in two categories: Single-Authored and Co-Authored Papers. Each winner receives a prize of 500 euros, and their work is celebrated with laudatory speeches during the event.

In 2023 and 2024, four fellows were recognized for their outstanding research contributions across both categories.

2023

Single-authored Best Paper Award 2023

Michael Richter (2022):
The Diversity of Actors in Reform Backsliding and Its Containment in the Ukrainian Hybrid Regime.
In: Politics and Governance 11 (1).

Co-authored Best Paper Award 2023

Jelisaveta Belić, Mandy Boehnke, Klaus Boehnke (2022):
Perceived Value Similarity With Important Others: Well-Being Implications for Emerging Adults.
In: Frontiers in psychology 13, 716952.

Congratulations to all winners!

2024

Single-authored Best Paper Award 2024

Gonzalo Arévalo Iglesias (2024):
Intergenerational cohabitation and welfare attitudes among European young adults.
In: Journal of European Social Policy 35 (1).

Co-authored Best Paper Award 2024

Henriette Bering, Wiebke Schulz (2024):
Can Sports and Music Level the Playing Field? Adolescents' Extracurricular Activities and the Reproduction of Social Inequalities in Cognitive Skills showcased remarkable analytical depth and insight.
In: Research in Social Stratification and Mobility 90,100895.

BIGSSS Research Training Group Social Dynamics of the Self (SELF)

By Prof. Dr. Ulrich Kühnen, March 2025

For the DFG Research Training Group (RTG) Social Dynamics of the Self (SELF) 2023 and 2024 were years of full swing. In this RTG, we study how culture and the individual mind make each other up in an ongoing cycle of mutual constitution. Accordingly, culture and the self need to be studied simultaneously and in concert.

We study how the nature of the self affects agency; i.e., how people manage to be agents of their own life course in society. We focus on the dynamics of the self, i.e., our projects are change sensitive. And we consider different context conditions of human behavior varying in layers of complexity from the immediate life contexts to variations across cultures. Obviously, these goals could never be accomplished by one discipline alone, therefore, dissertation projects were supposed to be interdisciplinary endeavors. Our PhD Fellows' projects integrate insights from psychology, sociology, political science, and computational social sciences. Each fellow is supervised by at least two advisors from different disciplines, ensuring a broad research perspective.

Obviously, studying the self is at the center of our research. We are building on the assumption that human nature evolved to enable culture, simply because life in large and cooperative groups – in cultural groups - has numerous survival advantages. Yet, this way of life requires a degree of coordination and communication that exceeds the requirements of other, often simpler species by far. In our view, it is the self which makes exactly this coordination and communication possible. As our Mercator Fellow Roy Baumeister put it:

> "The self exists at the interface between the physical body and the social system which for humans includes culture."

Cultures develop in exchange with and response to numerous socio-ecological requirements. Once cultural patterns of interaction exist, they become 'behavioral ecologies' which then guide individual socialization. One of the most widely studied set of cultural practices refers to the distinction between a focus on the independent, autonomous versus the interdependent, relational self.

We hired two cohorts of RTG Fellows. The first cohort is nearing completion, with most having defended or about to submit their theses. In addition, we provided one Affiliated Fellow with a six-month contract to finish her dissertation thesis, which she did as well. The second cohort of eight RTG Fellows is currently in the middle of their PhD work.

Beyond research, the program includes a structured curriculum with theory seminars, methods training, and tailored workshops. Highlights include our annual retreats at Gut Ankelohe in Bad Bederkesa and participation in international conferences, such as the International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology congresses in Limerick (2023) and Bali (2024).

Prof. Dr. Ulrich Kühnen,
Spokesperson RTG SELF

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Reflecting on the BIGSSS Forum 2023 & 2024

By Dr. Christian Peters & Jessica Maczuga

Since its launch in 2021, the BIGSSS Forum has grown into a vital gathering place for open discussion, exchange, and institutional development in the BIGSSS community. Much like the Greek agora, it creates a welcoming environment—a physical and communicative space—where fellows, faculty, and staff can freely share ideas. Its participatory setup encourages everyone to take part in a dynamic and constructive dialogue.

Held each year at the end of the calendar, the Forum centers on topics that genuinely matter to our community. Discussions are driven by the participants themselves, with themes put forward by fellows, faculty, and staff alike. A highlight of the Forum is the World Café method, a lively and inclusive tool for sparking productive group conversations.

In 2023 and 2024, the Forum once again provided a valuable platform for feedback, reflection, and institutional growth. The insights we received have clearly guided our graduate school's organizational development. One recurring theme was the ongoing evolution of the BIGSSS curriculum, making sure we meet the changing needs of our fellows. Other major discussion points included methodological and theoretical pluralism, institutional diversity, intercultural sensitivity, and an in-depth look at the role of artificial intelligence in academia, particularly within Bremen's social sciences. Given the frank and insightful feedback at the 2024 meeting, we expect AI to remain a prominent topic in future Forums.

Ultimately, the BIGSSS Forum plays a key role in enhancing doctoral education by helping us quickly respond to new challenges and opportunities. By encouraging open, inclusive discussions and active participation, the Forum reaffirms our dedication to an academic environment that is open, innovative, and responsive to the needs of our community. We look forward to continuing this tradition in the years ahead!

Insights from the IACCP Conferences 2023 & 2024

The International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP) Conference is a key event for researchers exploring the intersection of culture and psychology. Bringing together scholars from around the world, the conference provides a platform to present research, exchange ideas, and engage in discussions on pressing global issues in cross-cultural psychology. In 2023, the IACCP Conference was held in Limerick, Ireland, followed by the 2024 edition in Bali, Indonesia—both featuring a diverse range of presentations, workshops, and networking opportunities.

In the following reports, two BIGSSS Fellows share their experiences from these conferences, reflecting on their key takeaways and the research they presented.

BIGSSS Delegation at IACCP 2024 in Bali.

Gamze Ipek (First Cohort RTG SELF) presenting her research at the IACCP 2024.

My Experience at IACCP Conferences Aug 1–3,2023 Limerick, Irland and Aug 5–9, 2024 Bali, Indonesia

By Gamze Ipek, First cohort RTG SELF, February 2025

I had the privilege of attending both the 2023 Regional Conference of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP) in Limerick, Ireland, and the 2024 International Congress in Bali, Indonesia.

Each event was an immensely valuable experience – not only for the depth of the academic discussions but also for the opportunity to engage with leading figures in the field of cross-cultural psychology. In Limerick, I was fortunate to have Ronald Fischer serve as the discussant for my session, while in Bali, Shinobu Kitayama took on that role.

My primary motivation for attending these conferences was to connect with distinguished researchers who share my passion for cross-cultural studies and to present my own work to them. Engaging with scholars like Fischer and Kitayama broadened my perspectives and deepened my enthusiasm for exploring cultural dimensions in psychology. Presenting to large audiences also helped me develop my public speaking skills.

Additionally, I received valuable feedback that shaped my future studies. The insightful suggestions I gathered allowed me to refine my methodology and incorporate new ideas into my doctoral thesis. Overall, attending these conferences was an enriching experience that not only enhanced my academic and professional growth but also expanded my network within the field.

My Experience at the IACCP Conference August 5–9, 2024 Bali, Indonesia

By Aya Alwais, Second cohort RTG SELF, February 2025

Attending the 2024 IACCP Conference and Summer School was a truly valuable experience. I participated to present my research on Syrians' identity development in Germany and Turkey, receive feedback, and gain inspiration from international scholars. The discussions were insightful, and the networking opportunities allowed me to connect with researchers working on similar topics.

The Summer School offered five content streams, and I participated in two that aligned closely with my research interests. One focused on academic writing and publishing, providing valuable insights into refining scholarly work and navigating the publication process. The other explored strategies for managing international research collaborations, offering practical guidance on coordinating large-scale projects across different countries and cultural contexts.

This experience deepened my understanding of key research challenges, expanded my academic network, and provided me with practical skills for my PhD journey. I am grateful for this opportunity and excited to apply these insights to my work!

"BIGSSS has provided me with opportunities to engage in courses that foster personal development, including the Navigare – Career Coaching for International Women in Science program, which has been incredibly valuable for my growth and career aspirations. The international environment at BIGSSS is exceptional, where diverse people meet, exchange ideas, and have fun together."

Aya Alwais, Second cohort RTG SELF

Aya Alwais at the IACCP 2024 Conference in Bali

Summer Retreat

By Dr. Christian Peters, February 2025

Interdisciplinary exchange and teambuilding at Gut Ankelohe

From June 4 to 6, 2024, the BIGSSS Summer Retreat convened at Gut Ankelohe, uniting 20 doctoral fellows and faculty members for a dynamic blend of scholarly dialogue and companionship. The cohort featured eight RTG SELF-Fellows, four DAAD-GSSP Fellows, and eight Affiliated Fellows. Sunny weather (...at least partly...) set the stage for outdoor pursuits, including an engaged volleyball session with no injuries and the wonderful evening bonfires under these old trees. A particularly memorable moment was the keynote address by Roy Baumeister, our RTG Mercator Fellow, who offered insights from his new work: The Science of Free Will. Expanding on themes introduced in 2022, Baumeister's talk ignited debate on conscious choice and the development of self-control.

Throughout the three-day retreat, participants engaged in proposal discussions, workshops, and informal gatherings, all designed to foster academic collaboration and reciprocal feedback. One highlight was a final workshop by BIGSSS alumna Dr. Nadine Binder, focusing on self-management in the doctoral process. Her session provided practical strategies to help doctoral researchers stay organized, maintain motivation, and effectively navigate the challenges of their PhD journeys. The robust faculty presence – 14 senior academics – ensured thorough advice and guidance in every group session. Culminating on June 6, the event left attendees invigorated and solidified the BIGSSS Summer Retreat's reputation as a cherished tradition, fostering professional growth and strengthening community ties.

"During my time at BIGSSS, I hope to develop a strong international research network, fostering connections with colleagues who will also become friends. [...]"

Sophia Roppertz, 2023 Affiliated PhD Fellow

DAAD Graduate School Scholarship Programme – CoPoDi

We are very proud that BIGSSS has been selected by the DAAD to host a Graduate School Scholarship Programme (GSSP) for the third time. Our new program, Contentious Politics in the Digital Age (CoPoDi), will launch in September 2025 with two fellows, followed by two more in 2026. This brings the total number of DAAD-funded PhD students at BIGSSS to twelve. All fellows receive a four-year scholarship, an annual research allowance, and additional benefits from the DAAD.

CoPoDi explores how digital technology and media shape political activism, social movements, and socio-political conflicts, with a particular emphasis on the Global South. It also evaluates new digital data sources and computational methods for studying political protest and activism.

The program is positioned at the thematic crossroads of several research institutions: the Research Center on Inequality and Social Policy (SOCIUM), the Institute for International and Intercultural Studies (InIIS), and the Center for Media, Communication and Information Research (ZeMKI) – all from the University of Bremen – as well as the School of Business, Social and Decision Sciences at Constructor University. We are especially pleased that with the launch of this new program, several newly appointed professors have joined the BIGSSS faculty.

The first two DAAD Graduate School Scholarship Programmes at BIGSSS focus on “Global Inequality, the Middle Classes, and the Welfare State” (GloWel, started in 2021) and “Global Dynamics of Social Policy and Social Cohesion” (GSPSC, started in 2023). The CoPoDi program is coordinated by BIGSSS Academic Coordinator Dr. Judith Vey.

PhD Defenses

We are thrilled to celebrate the achievements of our 21 fellows who have successfully defended their PhD theses in the past two years. Congratulations!

Marlene Seiffarth
Mar 21, 2023
The Perpetuation of the Migrant-in-the-Family Care Model in Italy
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Karin Gottschall, Prof. Dr. Heinz Rothgang

Patricia Zauchner
Apr 20, 2023
Needs Versus Ranks. Can Needs Considerations Reduce the Negative Effect of Rank Reversals on the Acceptance of Redistribution?
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Frank Nullmeier, Prof. Dr. Bernhard Kittel

Anna Fejős
Aug 20, 2023
Professional Trajectories of Roma in Hungary – Claiming Space in Education, Business and the Arts
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Olaf Groh-Samberg, Prof. Dr. Margrit E. Kaufmann

Michael Richter
Aug 29, 2023
Power, Politics, and Anti-Corruption Reforms in Ukraine: The Role of Western Actors
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Michael Rochlitz, Prof. Dr. Heiko Pleines

Juma Kalyegira
Sep 26, 2023
The Role of Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction for the Psychological Wellbeing and Social-Cultural Integration of Refugees in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement, Uganda
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Ulrich Kühnen, Prof. Dr. Klaus Boehnke

Ekaterina Lytkina
Dec 6, 2023
The Impact of Perceived Relative Deprivation and Emotions on Populism
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Arvid Kappas, Dr. Franziska Deutsch

Josephine Assmus
Dec 14, 2023
Free to Move but Unprotected: Cross-Border Cooperation and Enforcement of Mobile Workers' Rights in the EU Single Market
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Susanne K. Schmidt, Prof. Dr. Michael Blauberger

Florian Buchmayr
Jan 19, 2024
Das Politische und das Soziale - Eine empirische Analyse des Verhältnisses zwischen sozialen Lebensbedingungen und ideologischen Positionen
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Olaf Groh-Samberg, Prof. Dr. Patrick Sachweh

Christina Grabbe
Feb 1, 2024
Enfant Terrible of Policy-Makers and Mobile Workers' Porous Safety Net – The Challenges of the EU Coordination of Social Security
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Susanne K. Schmidt, Prof. Michael Blauberger

Anders Martin Paul Hentschel
Feb 19, 2024
Social Policy Coordination within the European Semester: EU Policy Recommendations and Domestic Responses
Supervisors: Prof. em. Dr. Ulrike Liebert, Prof. Caroline de la Porte

Ekaterina Vorobeva
Mar 21, 2024
Central Asian Migrant Entrepreneurship in Russia: Refining the Mixed Embeddedness Approach
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Heiko Pleines, Prof. Dr. Michael Rochlitz

Greta-Marleen Storath
May 13, 2024
Migrant Care Work in Sweden. Sustainable Solution for an Ageing Society or Disruption of the Nordic Welfare State?
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Karin Gottschall, Prof. Dr. Heinz Rothgang

Adio-Adet Tichafara Dinika
Jun 25, 2024
Digital Labour Mirage: Dissecting Utopias in Africa's Gig Economy
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Klaus Schlichte, Dr. Jakob Fruchtmann

Nils Tobias Henschel
Jul 18, 2024
The Negative Secondary Transfer Effect: Underlying Processes and Facilitating Conditions
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Klaus Boehnke, Prof. Dr. Ulrich Kühnen

Ante Malinar
Aug 28, 2024
Influence of International Organisations on Social Policy Making in Vulnerable Countries: The Case of Croatian Healthcare Financing Policy
Supervisors: Dr. Monika Ewa Kaminska, Prof. Dr. Heinz Rothgang

Priya Singh
Oct 25, 2024
Social Protection and the Informal Workers: A Case Study of the Health (In) Security of the Beedi Workers in India
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Karin Gottschall, Prof. Dr. Margrit Schreier

Jessica Nuske
NOV 1, 2024

Sozialwissenschaften in dritter Mission: Transdisziplinarität als Versuch der souveränen Offenheit gegenüber Gesellschaft
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Uwe Schimank, Dr. Holger Backhaus-Maul

Jenny Hahs
Nov 15, 2024

From Geneva to the World? Legal Segmentation and the International Labour Organisation
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Ulrich Mückenberger, Prof. Dr. Irene Dingeldey

Hudu Banikoi
Nov 18, 2024

Towards Sustainability in the Coastal Clue Economy: Navigating Institutional Change for Coastal Resource Co-Management in Ghana
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Achim Schlüter, Prof. Dr. Marco Verweij

Gamze Ipek
Dec 6, 2024

Life Goals and Well-Being: The Role of Work-Family Interference
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Sonia Lippke, Prof. Sonja Drobnič (PhD)

Tanya Keni
Dec 18, 2024

Honor, Dignity, and Migration: Navigating Cultural Norms and Threat Responses among Native Indians, Germans, and Indian Migrants in Germany
Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Ulrich Kühnen, Dr. Mandy Boehnke

Wealth Data Science Summer School at Constructor University Bremen

Wealth Data Science Summer/Winter School 2024

From July 1–12, 2024, the Wealth Data Science Summer/Winter School (WeDSSS) brought together junior researchers and leading experts in a hybrid format across two hemispheres. As a Summer School in Germany and a Winter School in South Africa, the event was held simultaneously at Constructor University in Bremen and the African Centre of Excellence for Inequality Research (ACEIR) at the University of Cape Town. Both campuses formed a joint online learning space for lectures, project work, and academic exchange.

The program welcomed 28 participants, representing diverse academic backgrounds and regions, with 24 fellows in Bremen and four attending the parallel program in Cape Town. The event featured a diverse group of 13 experts, representing leading institutions in economics, sociology, political science, and data science.

Wealth Data Science Summer School at Constructor University Bremen.

Wealth

Global wealth reached a record high of USD 79,952 per capita in 2020 and was “largely immune” to the pandemic. However, not everyone benefits equally from this growth—wealth is spread very unevenly. While a small number of individuals possess staggering levels of property, many societies struggle with declining public resources, growing polarization, and fragile social infrastructures. Wealth itself is not only an economic measure, but a social and political force. It affects individuals’ life chances, shapes the quality of democracy, and determines who has access to decision-making. Yet, many of the mechanisms behind the production, reproduction, and redistribution of wealth remain poorly understood – largely because reliable data is scarce, especially in regions where inequality is most pronounced.

The Wealth Data Science Summer School 2024 addressed this challenge by exploring how digital data can help close knowledge gaps in the study of wealth. Projects provided evidence linking wealth concentration to regional and environmental conditions, based on satellite data analysis. Researchers also gained new insights into family dynamics and intergenerational wealth transfer in the 21st century, drawing on both longitudinal panel data and social media datasets.

Through a combination of keynote lectures, workshops, and hands-on project work, participants jointly worked on topics ranging from satellite-based inequality monitoring to elite networks and tax resistance, and from digital wealth narratives to redistribution under growth regimes.

The WeDSSS 2024 generated substantial scientific outputs in wealth data science by addressing critical questions on wealth accumulation, reproduction, and redistribution. The collaborative research projects utilized advanced computational techniques, including machine learning, natural language processing, and geospatial analysis. Several projects laid the groundwork for future publications. The program was rounded off with social events and, moreover, fostered long-lasting academic connections while highlighting the value of sustainable, globally connected summer school formats.

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Selected Publications by BIGSSS PhD and Postdoctoral Fellows

Arévalo-Iglesias, G. (2025): Intergenerational cohabitation and welfare attitudes among European young adults. In Journal of European Social Policy 35 (1), pp. 4-20.

Bao, F. D. (2024): Education policy in Cambodia: global transformation processes, IOs' influence and cultural spheres. https://doi.org/10.26092/elib/3076.

Bao, F. D. (2024): Singapore: the Metropolitan education empowers the most competitive economy. Education Approach 2024.

Bering, H.; Schulz, W. (2024): Can sports and music level the playing field? Adolescents' extracurricular activities and the reproduction of social inequalities in cognitive skills. In Research in Social Stratification and Mobility (90), 100895.

Chen, Y.; **Speer, A.;** Bruin, B. de; Carpentras, D.; Warncke, P. (2024): A "Broken Egg" of U.S. Political Beliefs: Using Response-Item Network (ResIN) to Measure Ideological Polarization.

Cubalevska, M. (2024): Einfach Rassismus!? Sekundäre Marginalisierung an der Intersektion von Bürgerschaftsstatus und race in Sprachkursen für Geflüchtete in Bulgarien. In Zeitschrift für Deutsch im Kontext von Mehrsprachigkeit 40 (1-2), pp.33–49.

Cubalevska, M.; Kittl-Elhimissi, C. (2023): „Österreichische Werte": Restriktion, Exklusion, mangelnde Reflexion? Lessons to learn für die DaZ-Erwachsenenbildung. In: T. Fritz, B. Sorger, H. Schweiger, S. Reitbrecht (Eds.): IDT 2022: mit.sprache.teilhaben, Sprachenpolitik und Teilhabe. Erich Schmidt Verlag (5), pp.73–84.

Čović, V.; **Cubalevska, M.**; Pfundstein, T. (2023): Desiderat PolizeiMeldeStellen. Eine 1. Erhebung zu Polizeigewalt aus Betroffenenperspektive in Österreich. In Juridikum: Zeitschrift für Kritik, Recht, Gesellschaft (3/2023), pp.297–305.

Druga, E. (2024): Learning in Lending: The World Bank's Organisational Learning Journey in Albanian Health Financing Reform Projects, 1994–2022. In Central European Journal of Public Policy 18 (1), pp. 72–88.

Eaton, S.; **Müller, A.** (2023): Varieties of Chinese Populism: Mapping the Mindsets of Pro- and Anti-System Populists. In: S. Wang (Eds.) (2024): Three Faces of Populism in Asia: Populism as a Multi-faceted Political Practice. London: Routledge, pp. 45–64.

Fischer, J.; **Sternkopf, M.**; Rothgang, H. (2023): Covering a New Social Risk. The Introduction of Long-term Care Systems Around the World. In: I. Mossig, H. Obinger (Ed.), Mapping Global Dynamics of Social Policy, (SOCIUM SFB 1342 Working Papers no. 25). Bremen: Universität Bremen, pp. 32–35. https://doi.org/10.26092/elib/2559.

Ganga-León, C. (2024): Emotion Work of Paid and Unpaid Caregivers of the Elderly in Chile. In International Conference on Gender Research 7 (1), pp. 485-487.

Global Social Policy Digest 24.3 (**Bao, F**): Adopting a gender lens to tackle gender disparities. In Global Social Policy 24 (3), pp. 507-533.

Gottschall, K.; **Noack, K.**; Rothgang, H. (2022): Dependencies of Long-Term Care Policy on East-West Migration: The Case of Germany. In: F. Nullmeier, D. González de Reufels, H. Obinger (Eds.), International Impacts on Social Policy: Short Histories in Global Perspective. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan (1), pp. 515–529.

Groh-Samberg, O.; Schröder, T.; **Speer, A.** (2023): Social milieus and social integration. From theoretical considerations to an empirical model. In KZfSS Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, 1–25.

Ipek, G.; Drobnič, S. Boehnke, K. (2024): Work-family interference and life satisfaction: the role of life goals. In Community, Work & Family 24 (11), pp.1–23.

Lytkina, E.; Reeskens, T. (2024): Rally Around the Government or a Populist Response? How Concerns About COVID-19 and Emotional Responses Relate to Institutional Trust and Support for Right-Wing Populism. In American Behavioral Scientist.

Mamed, G. E.; Tefera, G. M.; **Bitew, M.**; Yu, M. (2024): The overlooked war in Northern Ethiopia: Examining psychological capital, mental distress, and post-traumatic stress disorder among internally displaced people in Amhara region. In International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 1–10.

"I look forward to being part of an international scientific community and engage in theoretical debates as well as learn from each other's concrete research projects."

Marija Cubalevska, 2024 Affiliated PhD Fellow

"I am looking forward to the opportunity that BIGSSS offers me not only to realize my own research project and learn new methods, theories and soft skills, but also to meet people from all over the world and with different professional backgrounds."

Sophia Landzettel, Second cohort RTG SELF

Müller, A. (2024): Cooperation Between Vocational Colleges and Companies. Vocational education, skill mismatches and the turnover problem. In The China Quarterly 2024 (260), pp. 986–1004.

Müller, A; Brink, T. ten (2023): Lesson-drawing under Authoritarianism. Generosity and Cost Control in China's Hospital Payment Reforms. In Asian Politics & Policy 2023 (15), pp. 431–452.

Noack, K.; Bilecen, B. (2024): "Covid has stopped us all": the experiences of migrant care workers in formal care settings in Germany. In Ethnic and Racial Studies (47) 14, pp. 2999–3020.

Noack, K.; Storath, G.-M. (2022): Migrantische Arbeitskräfte in der formellen Altenpflege in Deutschland und Schweden. In WSI Mitteilungen, 75(5), pp. 401–406.

Safuta, A.; **Noack, K.**; Gottschall, K.; Rothgang, H. (2022): Migrants to the Rescue? Care Workforce Migrantisation on the Example of Elder Care in Germany. In: J. Kuhlmann, & F. Nullmeier (Eds.), Causal mechanisms in the Global Development of Social Policies. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 303–334.

Sternkopf, M.; Carvalho, G. de; Fischer, J. (2024): New agendas and old legacies? Comparing international organisations' proposals on health and long-term care systems in Latin America. In Global Social Policy 24 (3), pp. 433 – 455.

Sternkopf, M. (2024): International actors and national policies: the introduction of the national care system in Uruguay. In Policy Sciences 57 (3), pp. 639 – 661.

ten Brink, T.; **Müller, A.**; Chen, H. (2023): Expansion and Dualization: Social Insurance in China. In: I. Mossig, H. Obinger (Eds.): Mapping Global Dynamics of Social Policy. SFB Working Paper Series 35, pp. 64–67.

Selected Publications by BIGSSS Alumni

Bartmann, M.; Halsband, A.; **Schapper, A.** (2023): Climate Justice: Ethical Aspects and Policy Aspects. Baden-Baden: Verlag Karl Alber/Nomos.

Bauer, G.; **Breznau, N.**; Gereke, J.; Höffler, J. H.; Janz, N.; Rahal, R.-M.; Rennstich, J. K.; Soiné, H. (2023): Teaching Constructive Replications with Quantitative Data in the Social and Behavioral Sciences. Teaching of Psychology 51(1), pp.104–109.

Breznau, N.; Heukamp, L.; **Nguyen, H.** H.; Knuf, T. (2024): The Moderating Role of Government Heuristics in Public Preferences for Redistribution. In Journal of European.

Breznau, N.; Kirkpatrick, L. O. (2023): Urban Fiscal Crisis and Local Emergency Management: Tracking the Color Line in Michigan. In Issues in Race and Society: An Interdisciplinary Global Journal 11(1), pp. 9–47.

Daimer, S.; Seus, S.; Weber, M.; Peter, V.; **Wittmann, F.** (2023): Evaluation study on the relevance and internal coherence of Horizon 2020 and its policy mix. European Commission, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, pp. 1–75.

Deutschmann, E.; Drouhot, L. G.; Zuccotti, C. V.; Zagheni, E. (Eds). (2024): Computational Research in Ethnic and Migration Studies. London & New York: Routledge.

Deutschmann, E.; Gabrielli, L.; Recchi, E. (2023): Roads, Rails, and Checkpoints: Assessing the Permeability of Nation-State Borders Worldwide. World Development 164, 106175.

Deutschmann, E.; Recchi, E. (2024): How Global is International Mobility? In: E. Recchi, M. Safi (Eds.): Handbook of Human Mobility and Migration. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp. 94–112.

Drouhot, L. G.; **Deutschmann, E.**; Zuccotti C. V.; Zagheni E. (2023): Computational Approaches to Migration and Integration Research: Promises and Challenges. In Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 49 (2), pp. 389–407.

Edler, J.; **Wittmann, F.** (2024): Technology policy and governance. In: A. Grunwald (Eds.): Handbook of Technology Assessment. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 12–21.

Gauditz, L.; Klages, A.-L.; Kruse, S.; Marr, E.; Mazur, A.; Schwertel, T.; Tietje, O. (Eds.) (2023): Die Situationsanalyse als Forschungsprogramm. Theoretische Implikationen, Forschungspraxis und Anwendungsbeispiele. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachverlag.

Gauditz, L. (2024): Activist burnout in No Borders: The case of a highly diverse movement. In Transcultural Psychiatry 0 (0).

Hickmann, T.; Bexell, M.; **Schapper, A.** (2023): The Interface Between Human Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals - Synergies, Tensions, and Conflicts. In International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics 23, pp. 133–139.

Hummler, A.; Lindner, R.; Posch, D.; Wilts, H.; **Wittmann, F.**; Wurm, D. (2023): Deutschlands zirkuläre Zukunft: Wie Missionen die Transformation zur Circular Economy beschleunigen. In Nachhaltige Soziale Marktwirtschaft, Focus Paper 15, pp. 1–16.

Jackwerth-Rice, T.; Afghani, N.; Daimer, S.; Lindner, R.; **Wittmann, F.** (2023): Public sector organisations as agents of transformations. In Fraunhofer ISI Discussion Papers Innovation Systems and Policy Analysis 80, pp. 1–21.

Klug, K.; Bernhard-Oettel, C.; Sverke, M. (2024): The paradox of job retention schemes: A latent growth curve modeling approach to immediate and prolonged effects of short-time work on job insecurity and employee well-being. In Journal of Happiness Studies 25, pp. 1–32.

Klug, K.; Selenko, E.; van Hootegem, A.; Sverke, M.; De Witte, H. (2024): A lead article to go deeper and broader in job insecurity research: Understanding an individual perception in its social and political context. In Applied Psychology: An International Review 73, pp. 1960–1993.

Klug, K.; Selenko, E.; van Hootegem, A.; Sverke, M.; De Witte, H. (2024): Seeing the forest for the trees: a response to commentaries on job insecurity conceptualization, processes and social context. In Applied Psychology: An International Review, 73 pp. 1417–2292.

Korbmacher, M.; Azevedo, F.; Pennington, C. R.; et al. (2023): The Replication Crisis Has Led to Positive Structural, Procedural and Community Changes. In Communications Psychology 1(3), pp. 1–13.

Koschatzky, K.; Hansmeier, H.; Schnabl, E.; **Wittmann, F.**; Stahlecker, T.; Zenker, A. (2023): Neue politische Impulse für regionalen Strukturwandel und Transformation, pp. 105–126.

Larsen, M.; **Dragolov, G.**; Delhey, J. (2023): Editorial: The COVID-19 pandemic and social cohesion across the globe. In Frontiers in Sociology 8: 1182452.

Lindner, R.; **Wittmann, F.**; Jackwerth-Rice, T.; Daimer, S.; Edler, J.; Posch, D. (2023): Transforming Germany: How mission agencies can pioneer innovative solutions for grand challenges. In Sustainable Social Market Economies, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, pp. 1–34.

Lindner, R.; **Wittmann, F.**; Jackwerth-Rice, T.; Daimer, S.; Edler, J.; Posch, D. (2023): Deutschland transformieren: Missionsagenturen als innovativer Baustein zur Bewältigung gesamtgesellschaftlicher Herausforderungen. In Nachhaltige Soziale Marktwirtschaft, pp. 1–36.

Witte, N. (2023): Die Neubestimmung der sozialen Frage im Licht globaler Migration. Thomas Faist, Exit. Warum Menschen aufbrechen. Globale Migration im 21. Jahrhundert. In Soziologische Revue 46 (2). Oldenburg Wissenschaftsverlag: De Gruyter: pp. 110–119.

Witte, N. (2024): Visualizing the housing cost burden of migrants and natives across the income distribution. Socius 10.

Witte, N.; Deutschmann, E. (2024): Living abroad reduces mobile Europeans' likelihood to vote in European elections: Evidence from German migrants. In SocArXiv Papers.

Witte, N.; Deutschmann, E. (2024): Mobile Europeans love Europe but participate less in European Parliament elections. In LSE-EUROPP.

Witte, N.; Ette, A.; Sander, N. (2023): How do global crises affect privileged migrants? Return migration of German emigrants one year into the Covid-19 pandemic. In Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 50 (10), pp. 2551–2573.

Witte, N.; Schaurer, I.; Schröder, J.; Décieux, J. P.; Ette, A. (2023): Enhancing Participation in Probability-Based Online Panels. Two Incentive Experiments and their Effects on Response and Panel Recruitment. In Social Science Computer Review 41(3), pp. 768–789.

Witte, N.; Stawarz, N.; Netz, N. (2023): Career start abroad: The implications of graduate migration for social inequality. In Research in Social Stratification and Mobility 83.

Wittmann, F. (2024): The dual challenge of distributive politics in multilevel systems: The local allocation of EU funding in Polish Regional Operational Programmes. In Regional & Federal Studies, 34 (4), pp. 597–619.

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Our Team in 2023 and 2024

By Dr. Christian Peters, March 2025

In 2023 and 2024, our team continued to change and grow, as new colleagues came on board and some familiar faces moved on to new chapters in their lives. Through it all, the supportive spirit that defines BIGSSS has remained strong.

Early in 2023, Noha Mahmoud joined us as our new Admissions and Administration Officer. She took over from Monika Liorentaite-Rossdeutscher, who started a new role as the Coordination Officer of the SELF Research Training Group. We're happy that Monika is still around in her new capacity.

In the summer of 2023, we said goodbye to Rena Tecklenburg, who served as the Coordinator of Studies for a year while Dr. Regina Arant was on maternity leave. Rena's time with us was relatively short but left a positive mark, and we're glad she remains in the Bremen Social Sciences, keeping the door open for future collaboration. Meanwhile, Regina has returned and is once again leading the academic side of our Graduate School with her great commitment and expertise.

At the start of 2024, we said farewell to our dear colleague, Arline Rave, who had been our Senior Coordinator of the Deans' Office since March 2021. Arline's almost three years here made a big

"As an early career researcher at BIGSSS I expect to expand my knowledge and research skills, but also to connect with professionals and researchers from different disciplines and areas of expertise." Alice Cimenti, Second cohort RTG SELF

impact, and we're certainly going to miss her. She has moved to Munich for a new phase of life and fresh professional challenges, and we wish her all the best on her journey.

Taking over from Arline in July 2024, Jessica Maczuga has already become a valuable part of our team and without her tireless efforts, you would not be reading this very report. Welcome Jessica – and thank you! You will find a more detailed introduction to her elsewhere in this booklet.

Meanwhile, our long-standing Vice Dean, Prof. Dr. Adalbert Wilhelm, has taken on an additional role as Interim Dean of the School of Business, Social and Decision Sciences at Constructor University. We're very grateful that, despite this new workload, he remains actively involved at BIGSSS.

To everyone who joined or moved on from BIGSSS in 2023 and 2024: thank you for your dedication. Each of you has helped shape who we are, and we look forward to seeing where your contributions – and your futures – take us next.

"I look forward to making full use of the unique opportunities BIGSSS has to offer as an interdisciplinary institution to learn about new and different ways of approaching challenging questions in political science and beyond."

Alexander Reik, New Affiliated PhD Fellow

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New Faculty

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Reflecting on the BIGSSS Forum 2023 & 2024

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The BIGSSS Best Paper Awards

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