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Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen
Institute for Human Sciences

Neuankommende Visiting Fellows des IWM im März 2026

Das Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen begrüßt diesen Monat neun Gastwissenschaftler:innen, darunter den international führenden KI-Forscher Toby Walsh. Mehr Informationen über die im März ankommenden Fellows und ihre Projekte finden Sie auf unserer Website. Für Interviewanfragen kontaktieren Sie bitte iwm-pr@iwm.at.

Wojciech Engelking
University of Warsaw and Kultura Liberalna, Warsaw
March – June 2026

Philosophical Foundations of American Populism in the 3rd Decade of the 21st Century

During his stay at the IWM, Wojciech Engelking will be working on the philosophical foundations of the latest incarnation of American populism. This political current is not new to study: indeed, during Trump's first term, there was a substantial increase in the number of explanatory models developed. These models generally converged on two fundamental premises: first, the portrayal of the rise of populism as an aberration in the broader trajectory of American political development; and second, the assumption that populism lacks a coherent ideological foundation, functioning instead as an ephemeral oppositional force that defines itself in reaction to progressive political agendas. However, Trump's second electoral victory, along with two interrelated developments, necessitates a critical reassessment of this analytical paradigm.

Vito Laterza
University of Agder
March – May 2026

Un-Making and Re-Making the Nation: The Anti-Democratic Effects of 'Red-Brown' Political Communication in Italy

Drawing from political theory, media and communication studies, and linguistic anthropology, Vito Laterza examines how the Italian "red-brown" movements that developed from anti-lockdown and anti-vaccination protests strategically blend left-wing rhetoric and far-right ideologies. He uses anthropologist Gregory Bateson's theory of schizophrenic communication to analyze how these fringe movements blend contradictory symbols and ideas to generate consensus for far-right policies. The project highlights two effects of this communication: 1) the reframing of exclusionary far-right ideas and policies with messages resembling progressive claims (e.g. claiming that stopping immigration is a way to stop the capitalist exploitation of cheap labor); and 2) the emergence of a kind of "virtual politics" that infiltrates left-wing movements, with the aim of demobilizing effective leftist politics.

Fei Vincent Mo
Central European University, Vienna
March – July 2026

Political Concepts in Chinese International Relations

Vincent Mo's project explores how Chinese scholars of international relations (IR) theorize and present "what China is" and "China's relations with others" through key political concepts: state, civilization, morality, and relationality. Many Chinese IR scholars contribute to current theoretical debates in the field through the prism of ancient Chinese philosophy and political concepts embedded in different historical contexts. For example, the concept of "state" (國) in the Spring and Autumn period (770–481 BC) did not mean sovereign state, and the relationships among those "kingdoms" were not diplomatic relationships between sovereign states. Chinese IR brings those ancient concepts alive. There is, therefore, a hidden gap: how do modern Chinese IR theories re-interpret and re-theorize those concepts from different historical contexts into contemporary IR discussions?

Mary Onguko
Daystar University in Nairobi
March – May 2026

Human-Centered AI: Culturally Responsive AI-Enabled Mobile Applications for Women Micro-Entrepreneurs in Kenya

This project explores how Artificial Intelligence (AI)-enabled mobile applications can better support female micro-entrepreneurs operating in Kenya's informal economy. While mobile technologies have transformed financial access, healthcare, and business across Sub-Saharan Africa, many digital solutions are still designed with assumptions that do not reflect the linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic realities of most Kenyan women. As a result, existing AI business tools often remain inaccessible, underutilized, or mistrusted. The study investigates how women currently use smartphones and AI-driven applications, identifies challenges related to usability, affordability, language, and cultural fit, and co-designs improved mobile application prototypes with women entrepreneurs themselves.

Andrii Portnov
European University Viadrina
March 2026

A Historian With Many Faces: Dmytro Yavornytsky and His Competing Images in 20th and 21st-century Ukraine

One of the brightest avenues of Ukraine, the very central street of the city of Dnipro (previously named after Empress Catherine II and Karl Marx), is named after Dmytro Yavornytsky (1855–1940), a historian who served for almost 30 years as the director of the local museum and wrote the first synthetic history of the city now called Dnipro. Andrii Portnov's research focuses on both the academic perception of Yavornytsky's work and his survival strategies during the regime changes in southern Ukraine, as well as the trajectories of his post-mortem commemorations and competing images. Historical works as well as literary texts, paintings, and films are part of the analysis. Special attention will be paid to the contextualization of the changing Soviet attitude toward Yavornytsky and the logic of his commemorative prominence in contemporary Dnipro.

Aleksandra Tobiasz
The Institute of Civilisation and Culture (ICK), Ljubljana
March – June 2026

(Central) European Self in the (Latin) American and Russian Other: Geopoetic and Sensory Topographies of East-Central Europe

This project's overarching aim is to problematize the concept of (Central) Europe in a transregional, global perspective in relation to (Latin) America, Russia, and Asia, through the phenomenological prism of individual experiences of travel and life in exile (the self as mirrored by the other). Aleksandra Tobiasz's research distances itself from a geopolitical approach to East-Central Europe founded on region-building ideas and identity politics. Instead, she places emphasis on geopoetics and the literary self-identifications of several Central European writers (Czesław Miłosz, Andrzej Bobkowski, Joseph Roth, and Alma Karlin) reshaped by changeable places, cultures, and plural temporalities.

Kia Vahland
Süddeutsche Zeitung, Munich / Ludwig Maximilian University (LMU), Munich / Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin
March – May 2026

How Images Create Politics in the 21st Century

As an art historian, political scientist, and cultural journalist, Kia Vahland focuses on the meaning of images in modern conflicts. What kinds of images are politically potent in the 20th and 21st centuries and capable of convincing a broad audience? Vahland analyzes the visual means of these images, as well as their historical, social, and emotional contexts. Her project will investigate examples from the realms of photojournalism, amateur photography, and art, culminating in a discussion of images from Russia's war against Ukraine.

Toby Walsh
University of New South Wales, Sydney
March 2026

Trustworthy AI and Digital Humanism

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming every aspect of modern life, from how we work and learn to how we govern and connect. Yet these advances come with profound ethical and societal challenges—questions of fairness, transparency, privacy, and accountability that test public trust in technology. Digital Humanism offers a vital framework for meeting this challenge, grounding technology in human rights, democracy, inclusion, and diversity. This one-month project will explore how the principles of Digital Humanism can be concretely embedded in the design and governance of trustworthy AI systems, ensuring that innovation aligns with human values rather than erodes them. The project will culminate in a public talk, "Trustworthy AI through the Lens of Digital Humanism," to share insights with a broad audience and stimulate dialogue about our shared digital future. By uniting technical rigor with ethical reflection and public engagement, this project will help advance a vision of AI that is both trustworthy and deeply human.

Tomasz Wiśniewski
Adam Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań
March – June 2026

Dipesh Chakrabarty and the Postsecular Criticism of Historicity

The project aims to develop a theoretical framework for postsecular interpretations of history. The research is based on the ideas proposed by the Indian historian Dipesh Chakrabarty in his influential work *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and*

Historical Difference (2000). The book had a significant impact on postcolonial studies, while simultaneously opening up a postsecular interpretive framework. In discussing "minority histories" and "subaltern pasts," Chakrabarty attributed historical agency to supernatural beings such as gods and spirits. Tomasz Wiśniewski is interested in examining the ontological premises underlying Chakrabarty's criticism of what he calls "the politics of historicism," and intends to revisit Chakrabarty's arguments within the context of both classical historicism and contemporary theoretical debates.

Rückfragehinweis:
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