The strategy to be pursued by the Max Weber Foundation – German Humanities Institutes Abroad up to the year 2020

(adopted by the Board of Trustees on 18 November 2016)

Summary:

- The Max Weber Foundation maintains research institutes abroad. Their research is independent, it is committed to meeting the highest standards of quality and it promotes understanding with the host countries.
- The Max Weber Foundation engages in a purposeful expansion of its global network structure to new regions in order to open up new work areas and contexts for the German humanities and social sciences and enter into new partnerships.
- The Max Weber Foundation is also expanding the transnational research group model which enables individual institutes to work on new projects with external partners for a limited time.
- The Max Weber Foundation offers its institutes a platform to mesh their joint interests and work on themes which are of academic and societal interest in Germany.
- The Max Weber Foundation creates attractive international career paths for young academics. When modifying and developing its funding models, it also makes use of the host country’s knowledge, which it gains through its institutes.
- The Max Weber Foundation will use the advantages of decentralised locations and continue to expand its important role in digital humanities and in modern academic communication.

The mission of the Max Weber Foundation – German Humanities Institutes Abroad is to promote research in humanities and social sciences and foster understanding between Germany and selected countries. The Max Weber Foundation is the only German academic organisation which does research exclusively abroad – integrated in those countries’ academic landscapes. It provides Germany with very special regional knowledge and academic expertise and in this way it can support the internationalisation strategy pursued by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and open up new fields of activity. Against this background the foundation has developed itself further over the past years and initiated co-operations in new countries.

The internationalisation of German research into humanities and social sciences is a key priority for the Max Weber Foundation. It is served by its institutes’ global network structure, which makes it possible for academics to do research in the best possible environment in the respective host country and also beyond it. The foundation therefore remains committed to the approach of institutional funding of research; this is because of its history and also because it knows that in order to cultivate bilateral and multilateral academic and cultural relations abroad in particular, it is essential to have enduring and reliable structures. In essence, it always proceeds from knowledge-guided basic research. It is aware that project funding is an important element in the academic system and that in many regions it is indispensable for opening up new prospects and research fields for German humanities and social sciences.

The Max Weber Foundation will continue to develop the institutionalised funding of
research in the three spheres of activity “Research and Academic Exchange”, “Young Academics” and “Infrastructures” up to 2020 and provide specific models for them. While still affording due consideration to its institutes’ academic autonomy, it fulfils its special role for the German humanities and social sciences and sustainably contributes to their internationalisation.

RESEARCH AND ACADEMIC EXCHANGE

Growth in the Max Weber Foundation institutes’ presence in the selected countries was linked to historical reasons and following the Second World War it was at first especially oriented towards the European neighbouring countries. When it was set up in the year 2002, the foundation and its newly created Central Office in Bonn consisted of just six German Historical Institutes, some of which had already been in existence for many years. These were the institutes in London, Paris, Rome, Warsaw and Washington and the German Institute for Japanese studies in Tokyo. Thanks to its open structure it was possible even just one year later to include the Orient-Institute (OI) in Beirut. By 2009 the foundation had founded the German Historical Institute in Moscow and taken on other institutes, namely the German Forum for Art History in Paris and the OI Istanbul, which had originally developed out of a department in the OI Beirut.

Independent research profiles allow the institutes to do basic research into the humanities and social sciences and address topical research themes. Due to their permanent presence abroad they have unique possibilities to engage in cross-border research, which is the starting point and benchmark of their activity. Over the years they have built up a level of trust with their partners which even withstands times of adverse political or inter-state economic conditions – a factor which has become significantly more important in the last years in particular and which is indispensable for the sustainability of good academic relations.

By engaging in sustainable and inter-disciplinary co-operations, the Max Weber Foundation strives to deepen and expand its global network. These can be institutes in the form maintained up to now, which is the most sustainable form of academic co-operation with a host country; however, college structures and networks and facilities under bi-national or European sponsorship are also conceivable. It is not mandatory in every case to have an institute as the organisational form or to have a physical presence in the form of a building with an extensive library. However, it is clear that even network structures which are more fluid also need an institutional basis and that in the long term institutions can emerge from them – depending on the local circumstances. The foundation’s strategy is especially oriented towards funding models which are sustainable throughout the course of building academic relations and which promise excellent results through in-depth research co-operation.

Particular importance is accorded to the selection of the countries in which the Max Weber Foundation is active. It arises out of the history of the institute foundations so far and depends on the German discipline’s academic interest in the respective destination region. The beginnings of new infrastructures were created over the past years in regions of the world that are important for academic policy, in Cairo, Delhi, Hong Kong and Peking. This meant that the foundation extended its activities beyond the European area and also expanded the breadth of content of the humanities and social science disciplines being
represented.
This network expansion will be consistently pursued over the coming years. Special
importance will be attached here to the instrument of the Transnational Research Group,
with which the Max Weber Foundation promotes its institute’s innovative projects in the
competitive process and so already sets new points of emphasis in South Asia (India) and in
the sub-Saharan Africa (Senegal). Starting with the pilot scheme decided by the Board of
Trustees, they will also check by 2020 if India, China and the west coast of the US can be
host countries or locations for the Max Weber Foundation for an indefinite time. By including
regions which had not been considered up to then and pursuing regional co-operations in all
directions beyond bilateral partnerships, it ensures the dynamics of a global network in order
to contribute durably and reliably to the internationalisation of university location Germany.

Project co-operation, in particular with the transregional studies forum, also offers new
forms of encounter between the institutes’ academics and members of universities from
Germany and third countries. Over the coming years, they are to facilitate discourse between
what are referred to the “systematic” disciplines on the one hand and the “regionally working”
disciplines on the other hand and in this way stimulate academic discipline cultures
throughout the German University system. The themes developed here create innovative
research approaches and can combine the interests of several institutes in variable
constellations.

YOUNG RESEARCHERS

The Max Weber Foundation continues to attach major importance to the qualification levels
of young researchers for the humanities and social sciences. In doing so, they build on the
far-reaching experience gained by the institutes and the international funding models they
have developed. These ensure that younger academics in particular will have the
opportunities and scope to further develop their own theoretical and methodical models in an
open discourse with other academic approaches. The locations are gateways which give the
Max Weber Foundation access to sources and research objects, and to institutions and
people who are indispensable for an in-depth interaction with the respective host country and
the establishment of permanent personal academic networks.

As a rule, academic staff members are employed for three to five years. Most have
completed their thesis and intend to qualify as professors or write a second book. As part of
the institute’s work, they are given the possibility to get to know other career paths in
addition to university positions (e.g. editorial work and public relations, event management,
librarianship). Postdoctoral students and postgraduates can apply for scholarships with
varying terms of up to twelve months. Internships and summer/winter schools, specialist and
archive courses and excursions are available to students.

The foundation in general and the institutes in particular will continue to expand their wide
range of funding possibilities over the coming years and further increase their attractiveness
for junior staff at German universities. The Max Weber Foundation strives to ensure that the
positions will be seen as evidence of academic excellence on a par with or even superior to
conventional career paths in academia. Reflecting the importance of the theme, a
permanent work group will be set up, which is to define special incentives based on the
peculiarities of the institute’s work and the requirements of the German and also international university system. Academic policy knowledge from the Max Weber Foundation’s host countries will be brought into the German discourse.

**INFRASTRUCTURES**

**INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, DIGITAL HUMANITIES AND LIBRARIANSHIP**

The Max Weber Foundation with its institutes has purposefully set new points of emphasis in information technology over the past years and these have enhanced its reputation as an important element in the national and international research infrastructure. Its decentralised set-up and the co-operation with national and international partners allows it to identify the best technical possibilities, use them for its own research and integrate them into the German research infrastructure.

For publishing work and other projects arising out of basic research the Max Weber Foundation institutes create digital solutions (databases and publication frameworks), which are made available to the public in open access and allow world-wide access. The Max Weber Foundation and its institutes, in combination with relevant co-operation partners also, strive to further develop their activities in the area of the digital humanities in conformance to the highest possible standards. Perspectivia.net is a publication platform through which the Max Weber Foundation provides e-publications freely on an open-access basis.

The key component in the infrastructure is the institutes’ libraries, which also occupy the most space in the real-estate properties. Their inventory is built up on the basis of specific policies guided by the institute management’s academic orientation, the equipment of the local partner libraries and the available resources. Due to the confines of space some libraries have started to co-ordinate their acquisition policy with the collection strategies followed by the libraries in their respective locations. While the worldwide utilisation of synergy in physical media is subject to tight limits, this does not apply to the utilisation of electronic media. The institutes in The Max Weber Foundation will reflect common perspectives in a digital library.

**ACADEMIC QUALITY ASSURANCE**

The institutes and the larger projects pursued by the Max Weber Foundation are monitored by the Academic Advisory councils, which are composed of internationally renowned academics. The more than 100 active advisory council members contribute to the Max Weber Foundation’s very active network and are indispensable guarantors of quality assurance. They are a key link to universities in Germany and in this role they also assume responsibility for supporting young academics doing research in the institutes. The inclusion of academics from the host country not only helps to firmly establish the institute in the host country, but also contributes to quality assurance in local work.

Furthermore, the board of trustees allows individual evaluations of the institute by independent experts at seven-yearly intervals. The inspections are conducted in accordance with the customary national and international standards. The first cycle was able to impressively confirm the academic excellence of the institute’s work and the efficacy of the model of having a permanent location in the host countries.

At the end of the new evaluation cycle, the process itself will be subjected to a new critical
inspection and participate in the public discussion on academically sound quality assurance in the non-university humanities and social science research.

PUBLIC RELATIONS/ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION

The Max Weber Foundation’s public relations work is conducted by the institutes on site and by the Central Office in Germany. Their main concern is imparting the institute’s research results to a wide and interested public.

Over the past years the Max Weber Foundation has been gaining a reputation in the area of the academic utilisation of social media. On the de.hypotheses.org blog portal and under the significant influence of the German Historical Institute Paris they moulded a form of communication which enables (digital) exchange with the specialist communities in Germany. The contents integrate the foundation’s original activities into German-language humanities and social science research. The close networking with the portals run by foreign-language communities of experts assure the required international visibility of the institute’s research results. This means that the Max Weber Foundation is a leading force in this area today.

From now until 2020, the Max Weber Foundation will expand its position in national and international academic communication. It will not only throw light on the bilateral relationship between Germany and individual regions for a broad interested public but also enable a dialogue between these communities of experts in which the German academics can engage directly.

ADMINISTRATION

The Max Weber Foundation administration in Bonn and in the institutes’ locations sees itself as a service provider in academia. It differs from the administration in most other academic organisations by its decentralised organisation and its work in various countries.

Within the framework of the statutory introduction of electronic administration it will develop IT-based procedures between now and 2020. This will allow it to achieve the highest degree of synergetic effects while still maintaining its institute’s decentralised competence.

The Max Weber Foundation’s institutes are located at prominent places in the world. Real-estate properties are available to them there that are always maintained at up-to-date levels in terms of construction and technology. Over the coming years, the Max Weber Foundation will develop a property management system which will ensure the preservation and upgrading of the houses.

Particular challenges in human resources management include the varying work conditions of people on secondements and locally employed people and between those with fixed-term and those with open-ended contracts. The Max Weber Foundation will set up a HR development system based on the differing institute structures that are customary in the country.