

Max Weber  
Stiftung

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Deutsche  
Geisteswissenschaftliche  
Institute im Ausland

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# MWWS 2030

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The Strategy of the  
Max Weber Foundation

# Opening address



Dear Readers,  
The Max Weber Foundation – German Humanities Institutes Abroad [Max Weber Stiftung – Deutsche Geisteswissenschaftliche Institute im Ausland, MWS] is the only institution in the Federal Republic of Germany that conducts basic research exclusively abroad. Internationality is the core profile of the MWS, whose institutes have developed research infrastructures and instruments to promote academic cooperation and social understanding across political and cultural borders.

The institutes of the MWS serve the humanities and social sciences (HSS) in Germany and in their respective host countries as places of research, academic qualification and international academic exchange. As internationally cooperating Centres of Excellence, they reflect and promote the high-performance work of the German HSS abroad. On account of their structural anchoring, they establish and cultivate sustainable networks between Germany and the respective host country or major regions abroad. This is also of particular value in politically and culturally difficult constellations, such as in post-colonial, authoritarian and semi-authoritarian environments or in regions where the German violent crimes in World War II are present on a long-term basis. Being anchored locally and having the associated precise knowledge of regional conditions and research cultures lets the MWS institutes build and consolidate trust – the most important resource in international cooperation.

If academic topics are defined independently by the institutes, this opens up the opportunity to develop research agendas in the host countries together with international partners. The universally comparative orientation of the scholar after whom the foundation is named serves as both motivation and an impetus: Max Weber's work makes it clear that analyses and theories of any scope can only be developed with the inclusion and in intensive examination of the research and scientific debates from other parts of the world, including countries of the so-called global south. This requires permanent academic core competencies locally at the locations with the corresponding language skills, and for this purpose it is necessary to secure or form an appropriate infrastructure and reasonable institutional basis.

With the Strategy 2030, the MWS will continue to develop its competencies and contribute its expertise even more to the debate on socially relevant topics such as migration and mobility, violence and war or religion and radicalization.

Hans van Ess  
President of the MWS



# Inspiring Ideas and Creating Spaces for the German Humanities and Social Sciences

## The Strategy 2030

### Profile and positioning

The Max Weber Foundation – German Humanities Institutes Abroad [Max Weber Stiftung – Deutsche Geisteswissenschaftliche Institute im Ausland, MWS] is the only German academic institution that is based in Germany but generally conducts research abroad. The institutes abroad that are part of the MWS pursue and promote cutting-edge research in the humanities and social sciences (HSS) with a focus on history and regional studies and including “small disciplines”. The institutes define their research programme independently within the framework of their respective statutes. Research projects are often multidisciplinary and internationally comparative, and are also increasingly framed transnationally, transregionally and globally. Cooperation with the German academic system is ensured by the (temporary) appointment of directors, by academic posts and advisory councils, by programmes to promote academic careers in Germany and by academic activities that institutes pursue together with researchers in Germany.



As unique multipliers of the German HSS abroad, the MWS institutes are active in research, the promotion of junior academics as well as cross-cultural communication. In the future, they will strengthen their relationships with the HSS at German universities and bring contacts from their host countries back to Germany. They will offer the junior academics in Germany excellent working conditions and funding formats as well as related career opportunities in the area of international research. In this sense, they will promote further internationalization on two interrelated levels: On the one hand, they will act as important bridge-builders and representatives of German academia in their host regions, even under constantly changing framework conditions; and, on the other, they will communicate methods and concepts in both directions. This gives academics from Germany the best possible access to local research resources as well as opportunities for partnerships in the host countries, along the lines of the principle “research with” rather than “research on”.

Long-term relationships based on mutual respect and trust are invaluable, especially in places where political tension threatens academic freedom or a troubled past makes dialogue difficult.

The MWS is younger than almost all of the institutes under its authority. It is committed to the principle of “cooperation in and through diversity”. In an intensive dialogue on the specific implementation of this principle, organs of the Foundation have prepared this Strategy 2030 and will use it to significantly advance the objectives of the last decade (“MWS 2020”).

## Strategic objectives, fields of action and formats

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Geopolitical, socio-economic and technological upheavals pose profound challenges to societies worldwide. Global crises such as the corona epidemic that broke out in 2019/20 have the potential to reinforce nationalist tendencies. In this context, the HSS are more important than ever. The MWS is ready to assume the academic and socio-political responsibility arising from this.

As seismographs for new developments, the institutes of the MWS bring together specific regional findings and perspectives from different parts of the world to an even greater extent than before. Supported by effective academic communication, their research results enrich social debates on the self and alterity (other) by providing an orientation with academically based knowledge and contributing to the differentiation and reflection of complex issues.

In the context of the foundation as a whole, the institutes dedicate themselves to numerous research questions of high relevance and approach them from a historical and contemporary perspective. This includes cultural heritage and memory, migration and mobility, inequality and social cohesion, violence and war, infrastructure and environment, resilience and innovation, religion and radicalization, information and knowledge, technological and social upheavals, and media and digital transformations.

The institutional federal funding of the MWS and its institutes enables the operation and development of sustainable, cross-border research infrastructures. Innovative, high-risk research areas that go beyond this are also made possible through projects funded by third parties.

The overriding goal of strategic further development is to provide and expand on the top performances in research and promote careers. The strengths of diversity, which result from the autonomy of the institutes and their different work contexts, are to be consistently encouraged, while systematically using the synergies and innovation potential that can be achieved through closer networking between the institutes. The MWS ensures the high quality of its work through the academic advisory councils of the institutes and also through external evaluations at regular intervals. In pursuit of these objectives, the MWS will focus on five strategic fields of action over the next ten years: internationalization, digital transformation, career promotion, academic communication and internal networking.





## 1.

### Internationalization: networking regions and actors, expanding fields of research, crossing borders

Using the locations to date and current debates in the disciplines as a starting point, the MWS institutes will include new regions of the world in their concepts and increasingly look for international comparisons, transregional connections and global framings. To this end, they cultivate established networks and co-operations with partners in dynamic academic regions that have been examined less by the German HSS. They strengthen networking within the MWS and with research institutions in Germany. Both established and newly developed research partnerships are intended for the humanities and social science communities, with the institutes abroad providing important research infrastructures for these communities. As a result, these partnerships will become increasingly attractive for partners in Germany who have not yet collaborated with the MWS.

New partnerships are to be tested in a flexible way, with different time horizons and organizational forms determined by the scope, objectives and priorities of the given partnership serving as the basis. Particularly in politically sensitive locations, a transparent and conscious approach to cultural differences and different opinions is required. One of the basic principles of the MWS is the worldwide advocacy of academic freedom, while another is understanding the importance of

internationally compatible research. Specifically, the internationalization strategy of the MWS distinguishes between two basic formats:

- A. new research infrastructures designed for the long term and established at a selected location. Over the next five years, priority will be given to the New Delhi and Beijing locations as well as the branch office of the German Historical Institute Washington in Berkeley, which is currently in the evaluation process.
- B. temporary and mobile projects, possibly with an option to establish a longer-term research infrastructure at a new location. This is intended in part to establish a new Transnational Research Group (TRG) in 2022.

On this basis, the MWS prioritizes its location policy according to the following criteria:

- the long-term strategic research potential of the region for German universities and the HSS;
- a clear connection to the profile of MWS and its strategic objectives;
- a sustainable balance between project-based and structure-building formats;
- a sensible addition to existing funding formats and locations outside the MWS;
- resources and feasibility.

## 2.

### Digital transformation: developing infrastructures and new methods

In the near future, academic development will be determined not only by the increasingly global orientation of cutting-edge research, but above all by digitization and the strategic expansion of research infrastructures. The foundation's presence at excellent academic locations abroad makes it an actor that can build on many years of experience and handle the demands posed by the shift toward digitization (digital humanities, DH) to identify, assess and take up international developments at an early stage. This lets the foundation enrich relevant initiatives at German universities and, in return, transfer seminal findings and projects from Germany to foreign academic systems. In the coming years, the MWS will take up and introduce new inspiring ideas, in particular by participating in the relevant consortia of the national research data infrastructure (Nationale Forschungsdateninfrastruktur) and in cooperation with (non-European) DH initiatives.

With regard to basic research into DH as well as the digitization of research and research infrastructures, the methodological competence of the MWS is to be strengthened in cooperation with internationally leading centres, through foundation-wide projects and through continuing education and training programmes for the junior academics. Examples are projects on social data in contemporary history (German Historical Institute London), the topic-oriented

preparation of extensive text sources, including non-European ones, with the help of algorithms (German Institute for Japanese Studies Tokyo) and deep learning methods involving civic studies (German Historical Institute Washington) or a Community Building Competence Initiative (Orient Institute Beirut).

Flagship projects at the MWS, which serve the digital preparation, editing and use of important source materials, should be secured over the long term by adapting them to the new standards of digital work. Examples are the preparation and digitization of selected German files in Russian archives (German Historical Institute Moscow), the project German History in Documents and Images (German Historical Institute Washington), the Repertorium Germanicum (German Historical Institute Rome), the Gallia Pontificia (German Historical Institute Paris), the long-term project Corpus Musicae Ottomanicae (Orient Institute Istanbul) or the project Architrave - Art and Architecture in Paris and Versailles in Accounts by Baroque-Era German Travellers (German Forum for Art History Paris).



### 3.

#### Attracting the best minds – promoting career prospects

In close cooperation with the German academic system and the universities there, the MWS institutes offer unique research and working conditions to scholars with an international orientation. The requirements of the modern academic system are particularly taken into account when filling management positions in order to ensure the competitiveness of MWS as an attractive employer.

The prospects that academics and non-academic staff have for obtaining qualifications should be made more permanent. To this end, the MWS working group called “Career paths” has prioritized new funding formats and career models for this purpose:

- improving work-life balance within the framework of the legal options and by adapting to the conditions in the host country and the German research area;
- active support for the careers of academics and non-academic staff following a successful postdoctoral or Habilitation period at the institutes, by the organs of the MWS, the academic advisory councils and cooperating German research institutions.
- Integration of junior academics in networking activities, conferences and research projects and thus support in building an international network that extends beyond contacts in the host country.

### 4.

#### New ways of communicating in academia

The transfer of research work and the dialogue with the public and society are central concerns of the MWS. The foundation sees itself as responsible for contributing its research results and regional expertise even more than before to current discourses in Germany and the host countries. To this end, it is developing a new concept for its academic communication, in which just as much importance is attached to the joint public relations work of the institutes in Germany within the framework of projects involving the entire foundation as it is to the relevant training and continuing education of junior academics.

### 5.

#### Internal networking: exhausting synergies

The multi-perspectivity at the MWS and the regional competencies combined in it hold considerable innovative potential for the discussion of fundamental methodological as well as current academic and socio-political questions. This potential is to be taken advantage of systematically through increasing cooperation between the institutes. The foundation’s annual conferences and joint projects such as the project called “Knowledge Unbound” (2019-2022), which is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research [Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung], along with other initiatives serve this end. While preserving the autonomy of the institutes, academic cooperation concentrates in particular on research topics that can be handled by several institutes using comparative, transregional and global approaches – also in interdisciplinary constellations – and may become the nucleus of international research alliances. The foreign institutes and researchers working there will benefit from a “networking of networks,” as will the HSS at German universities and research institutions. The foundation will continue to expand and sustainably maintain the scholarly networks that have been established, among others with the format of the Transnational Research Groups (TRGs).

The MWS will combine its inter-institute research and funding instruments in a structural and networking fund and refine them through 2030. These measures account for approximately 1.5% of the foundation’s total grant and will increase to 2.5% as of 2021, once the budgetary conditions have been clarified. In the first phase through 2025, the available funds will be used to expand the new locations and then for new strategic formats. For the period from 2026 onward, the MWS will start on the preparation of a concept for subsequent development in 2023.

The advantages of cooperation between the institutes are also to be systematically exhausted in the areas of qualification and communication through joint initiatives in the field of digital transformation, foundation-wide continuing education programmes for junior academics and joint public relations work in Germany. The aim is to systematically intensify the foundation’s internal communication and to mutually exchange personnel and best-practice models in administration and scholarly management between the MWS locations on the one hand and the ministries, foundations, professional associations, etc. on the other (Practitioners Programme).

With its “Strategy 2030,” the MWS aims to strengthen and expand its position as one of the key participants in the internationalization of the German HSS.

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