

ZiF

Ipke Wachsmuth

The ZiF (*Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Forschung*/Center for Interdisciplinary Research) of Bielefeld University is an internationally operating institute for advanced study which supports and houses interdisciplinary research projects from all fields across the natural and social sciences, engineering and the humanities. ZiF's aim is to promote and realize interdisciplinary basic research by offering residential fellowships, grants and conference services to scholars and scientists from all fields and from all over the world.

Five principles frame all ZiF projects: interdisciplinarity, internationality, topic-orientation in the choice of projects and fellows, open application procedures, and scientific excellence of the projects, ensured by peer reviewing of all proposals. Any member of the international scientific community may propose a topic to ZiF, throughout all fields of science and the humanities. Applications are decided upon by the board of directors after external reviewing and—for longer-term projects—a hearing before the scientific advisory council. Support by the ZiF comprises financial assistance as well as providing its infrastructure. Languages of communication and correspondence at the ZiF are German and English. The 'ZiF *Mitteilungen*' newsletter comes out in four German-English issues per year.

ZiF is the oldest institute for advanced study in Germany and has been a model for numerous similar centers elsewhere in Europe. Renowned scientists and scholars, as for instance the later Nobel laureate for economics Reinhard Selten, have worked at the ZiF. One of the most famous ZiF fellows certainly was Norbert Elias, who, after being rediscovered by a new generation of scholars in the 1970s and eventually becoming one of the most influential sociologists in the history of the field, worked and lived at the ZiF from 1978 to 1984.

The founding of the ZiF in 1968 preceded, but was directly related to, the creation of the University of Bielefeld in Northrhine-Westphalia, which itself was founded in 1969. In this process a central idea from the very inception was to reinsert philosophical-humanistic ideals in the setting of a modern university, with the ZiF being the seed institute and intellectual center. Its principal design was laid out by the prominent German sociologist Helmut Schelsky who became the first Director of ZiF (1968–71). ZiF came to emphasize the role of thematically coherent research groups but it insisted that all fields of knowledge should be included. These features have been characteristic of ZiF until the present day.

Usually running from October through August or September of the following year, ZiF research groups are the primary format to support long-term interdisciplinary collaboration. For several months, up to a year, the fellows reside at the ZiF and work together on a broader research theme. To name but a few recent ones: 'E pluribus unum?—ethnic identities in processes of transnational integration in the Americas' (2008–9), 'Control of violence' (2007–8), 'Science in the context of application' (2006–7), 'Embodied communication in humans and machines' (2005–6), or 'Emotions as bio-cultural processes' (2004–5). About two-thirds of the ZiF fellows come from outside Germany.

Besides the research years, ZiF workshops support interdisciplinary collaborations on a short-term basis. They range from invitational colloquia on specific topics to larger-scale conferences on a variety of themes. More than a thousand scholars come to visit the center every year this way, giving ample evidence for ZiF's great attraction as a meeting place for interdisciplinary exchange. The ZiF Author's Colloquia are a special type of workshop featuring a distinguished scholar; they create a platform for discussion and critique by selected experts. To trigger new

developments in the research landscape, the ZiF network of young scientists was founded in 2002. Also started in 2002 and convening smaller-size interdisciplinary research collaborations, ZiF cooperation groups offer the opportunity of inviting fellows to the ZiF for up to 6 months.

Located in the west of Bielefeld in northwest Germany, the ZiF campus is situated on the edge of the Teutoburg Forest. ZiF's main building houses a spacious plenary hall, five conference rooms, and foyers for casual meetings. A satellite of the university library system, the ZiF library offers individual support to all fellows and moreover provides a comprehensive resource of literature on interdisciplinary research. More than 20 staff employees help create comfortable conditions for working and living. Situated on the park-like campus, apartments of various sizes and an indoor swimming pool with sauna are available to the fellows and their families. The proximity of the university campus facilitates contacts among scholars beyond their collaboration at the ZiF.

By no means an ivory tower, the ZiF regularly opens its doors to the interested public. Once or twice a year scientists give public evening lectures to a wide audience, and well-known authors from Germany or abroad are invited to read from their work. Adding to the inspiring atmosphere of the place, ZiF hosts six art exhibitions per year which are, like the public lectures and author's readings, often connected to ongoing research themes.

In October 2008, ZiF celebrated its 40th anniversary—a development highly appreciated by Bielefeld University of which the ZiF is an integral part and whose international reputation the ZiF has contributed to decisively. The center also plays an important strategic role, as an incubation center and scope for development enhancing the university's stature in the German Excellence Initiative.