

Mission

The philosophy of the IFK International Research Center for Cultural Studies, University of Art and Design Linz is founded on the principles of clarity, communication and interdisciplinary exchange. The transparency of its organizational structure is not an end in itself, but aims to let visiting scholars and future academics make contact with one other. Centers such as the IFK make it possible to pursue one's own academic projects away from the workaday routine of the university. They offer the opportunity -- seldom available in universities -- of exchanging views in discussion groups and conversations, of developing new ideas and of testing out plans for future projects.

The free exchange of ideas between specialists in different subject areas is, however, not just a prerequisite of innovative research. In the academic world it usually encounters a certain resistance in established disciplines which have developed their own specific terminologies which cannot be easily translated. The success of our center depends on the creation of a communicative milieu in which questions common to diverse disciplines can be exchanged. In this way we can understand, for example, to what degree the pictorial worlds of the natural sciences are governed by aesthetic norms; how the tradition of philosophical anthropology relates to the empirical results of the new biosciences; how currents in globalization precipitate out in town planning and popular culture; or why a different understanding of evidence applies in legal proceedings to that for the observer of photographs. The dynamic of the exchange will ideally create not just new views which extend beyond those one brings from one's own subject area, but also elements of a common language and conceptual framework. When the potential of methods and concepts in contexts which initially appear to be foreign is put to the test, new horizons of knowledge can be created.

Thomas Macho, director of the IFK



History

The Formative Years (1992-1995)

In the early 1990s, the then coalition government of SPÖ and ÖVP – with Erhard Busek as Science Minister – made an executive agreement to establish a center for interdisciplinary research in the humanities.

The center for interdisciplinary research in humanities was thereafter launched under the leadership of Professor Moritz Csáky as the IFK International Research Center for Cultural Studies. Founded as an association in 1992, it began full operation in 1993 at Danhausergasse 1 in Vienna's 4th district.

The founding directorate, which consisted of professor Moritz Csáky, professor Helga Nowotny, professor Dieter A. Binder and professor Manfred Wagner, as well as Dr. Lutz Musner as academic coordinator. Over the course of the next three years, they established an organizational structure for an international and interdisciplinary scholarly lecture course dedicated to interdisciplinary studies in the field of culture.

The primary function of the institution was the provision of an infrastructure for international guest researchers chosen by a scientific advisory board, and the organization of public conferences, workshops, and lectures.

The early focus was on themes such as "Cultural Plurality in Central Europe", "Academic Research" and "History of Art and Cultural History." In keeping with this, some of the first high-profile researchers that were invited included Edward Timms (Karl Kraus), Jean-Pierre Cometti (Ludwig Wittgenstein), and Jacques Le Rider (Viennese Fin-de-Siècle).

The First Decade (1996-2006)

In 1996, Professor Gotthart Wunberg (Tübingen) was appointed as the first director and it was under his aegis that, among other things, the Junior Fellowship Program for Austrian doctoral candidates was introduced.

The successful point of emphasis was the exploration of historical and collective memories. An international advisory board, consisting of renowned scholars such as Aleida Assmann, Lorraine Daston, and Carl E. Schorske chose fellows from the numerous international applications who had submitted thematically-appropriate projects.

The next two points of emphasis were "Metropolises in Change – the Modern City as an Object of Cultural Studies" and the "History of Cultural Studies." The selection of Senior and Research Fellows were chosen by the International Advisory Board (IAB) not on the basis of their project's relation to the current chosen themes but rather on the quality of their applications.

Previous to winter semester 1997/1998 IFK Junior Fellowships had been limited to only a few months, thereafter junior fellows were invited to stay for a full academic year. Despite the limited space at the Danhausergasse site, four PhD students could work on their dissertation at the Centre projects simultaneously.

With the relocation to the present location at Reichsratsstraße 17, 1010 Vienna, the number of Junior Fellow positions was increased to eight. A further ten positions became available for Senior and Research Fellows, which alternate each semester.

The new location also makes it possible to hold regular working seminars for the discussion of current issues and methods in the cultural studies with all fellows in attendance. We were also able to extend the event program to around thirty lectures and eight–ten international conferences and workshops per year.

Gotthart Wunberg's successor Professor Hans Belting (Karlsruhe) placed new emphasis on interdisciplinary art and visual studies, and launched the theme "Cultures of Vision." As a result of these innovations IFK's mainly historical, literary and cultural studies were successfully expand in the direction of media and visual studies.

The Second Decade (2007-2016)

In 2007 Germanist Professor Helmut Lethen (Rostock) became the new director of the IFK. During this time a number of new themes were developed and internationally advertised, some of these included: "Cultures of Evidence. The Reality of Cultural Studies," "The Cultural Paradoxes of Globalisation," "Lost Certainties – Living Worlds and Knowledge in Transition" and "Imaginations of Disorder."

Thanks to the support of the BMWF, the IFK was able to finance an international fellowship program for the Junior Fellows following their stay at the IFK as well annual summer academies for young scholars beginning in the 2000s.

In addition to developing innovative research approaches for the interdisciplinary study of culture, a second important focus for the IFK is the promotion of young researchers, and during this time this was sustainably expanded and qualitatively improved. Our annual career surveys evidence the success of IFK_ "graduates" in their chosen career paths in the fields of science and culture.

Helmut Lethen not only intensified the exchange of the fellows within the internal seminars that had been initiated by Gotthart Wunberg, but also pushed forward with the promotion of future generations, introducing the dissertation workshops in which Junior Fellows present and discuss an exemplary chapter of their doctoral thesis with their IFK colleagues.

The spacious kitchen at the new location Reichsratsstrasse provided another much appreciated forum for exchange. This soon became the center of informal communication for Junior, Research

and Senior Fellows, a hearth for new scientific ideas and contacts.

In addition to the renowned guest researchers and innovative projects presented by Junior Fellows, the proximity of the new location to the humanities and social science departments of the University of Vienna resulted in a jump in IFK events visitors.

Throughout these years the IFK Board continued to play a significant role in, among other things, the appointment of the international advisory board members and in the tendering and / or appointment of the center directors.

The central of the executive board was demonstrated when, in 2010, the future fate of the IFK was uncertain and subject to government decree.

The Minister of Education at that time had ordered the cessation of funding for non-university affiliated research facilities. In light of the indignation and the subsequent mobilization of domestic and foreign researchers, and thanks to the foresight of Reinhard Kannonier who fought for the integration of the IFK into the University of Art and Design Linz, the existence of the IFK at the Vienna location was secured.

The Third Decade (since 2015/16)

Following a transitional four-year period the IFK is now (since January 2015) a full-fledged center affiliated with University of Art and Design Linz , and has been able to continue its work in Vienna.

Conforming with the university structure has led to some fundamental changes in administration and technical infrastructure, but the academic independence and functioning of the IFK has remained unaltered.

The international advisory board continues its work as before, and the former board of trustees has become the Verein der Freunde und Freundinnen des IFK/Association of Friends of the IFK). The IFK's fellowship activities and event program continue to follow the well-established structure.

The innovative and dynamic University of Art and Design with prominent figures involved in its departments, including cultural studies and architecture, provides new and exciting prospects for the IFK:

The university's three research axes are artistic research, intermediality, and spatial strategies. The Ars Electronica Center supports collaboration on several levels. A VALIE EXPORT Center is currently being developed in collaboration with the Lentos Art Museum.

The creative institution in Linz, in which contemporary art, new media, and theoretical considerations on 21st century phenomena are gathered, will benefit from the informal exchange with the international "research satellite" in Vienna, and so will the IFK from the inspiring mother ship just up the Danube.

IFK has been hosting exhibitions of works from Linz-based art courses since 2012, these include:

works from Johannes Wegerbauer's course, works from Ursula Hübner's painting and graphic art course, works from Gilbert Bretterbauer's textile.Kunst.Design course, and works from Tina Frank' the visual design course. Tobias Urban's and Ali Janka's (Gelatin) sculpture course took place at IFK in 2016/17.

On March 1, 2016, Professor Thomas Macho (Berlin), became the first Vienna native to lead the IFK. In the over two decades during which he worked as a professor of cultural history at the Humboldt University Department of Cultural History and Theory in Berlin and founded the the Helmholtz Centre for Cultural Techniques, he helped carve out a conception of cultural studies as a stand alone subject in the German-speaking world. As an experienced curator, he will also guide a new era in our relationship to the University of Art and Design Linz .

Since his appointment, the research focus "Cultures of Translation" has inspired both internationally renowned and young researchers in their work on in the field of cultural studies.