



Interview with EEGA Postdoc Fellow Micha Fiedlschuster

Please present yourself and your research project

I work at the intersection of political science, political sociology and global studies. My research interests include concepts of democracy, in particular in the context of globalization processes; transnational social movements and global civil society; and democracy promotion of the European Union and other international actors. During the fall and winter term 2018/2019, I was a DAAD visiting Postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Politics at York University in Toronto. During this research stay I have worked on the conceptual variety of democracy in the world and its uses and misuses in the case of EU democracy promotion. My most recent publication “Neoliberalism and European Democracy Promotion” was published in The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism (ed. by Immanuel Ness and Zak Cope). I hold a Dr. Phil. in Global Studies from Leipzig University (2017) where I was part of the research training group Critical Junctures of Globalization. My book “Globalization, EU Democracy Assistance and the World Social Forum: Concepts and Practices of Democracy” was published in 2018 in the Palgrave Series European Political Sociology.

During my stay at the EEGA, I will work on a research grant proposal to apply for third party funding for a project on democracy promotion and civil society with a regional focus on two countries within the EU’s Eastern Partnership (Georgia, and Moldova). Focusing, among others, on the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, I aim to understand whether and how civil society organizations become effective actors at the transnational level. Furthermore, I am interested to analyze whether the forum can be considered as a space in which civil society actors can become protagonists of democracy. My aim is to critically examine whether the EU’s governance approach in development cooperation is an obstacle towards realizing the democratic potential of the forum. I am planning to do field work at the transnational level. In addition, I will adopt a comparative perspective on civil society at the country level.

How did you come up with your research project?

The project is an off spring of my PhD thesis. As part of that work, I have analyzed the EU’s policies on democracy assistance in the European Union’s neighborhood. I focused on definitions of democracy and democratization on the one hand, and the role of civil society on the other.

How did you get to know EEGA ScienceCampus?

Since I did my PhD at Leipzig University, I came across the EEGA ScienceCampus as an organizer of events. My PhD supervisor Prof. Helena Flam, who is an active member of the EEGA ScienceCampus, at some point forwarded the Call for Application for the Postdoc scholarship to me. Luckily, I followed her advice to apply for it.

What are the links between your research project and EEGA ScienceCampus?

My research project is located in Research Area 5 “Eastern Europe in Times of Europeanisation and Diffusion,” which sees Eastern Europe as being exposed to global processes but its countries also choose more actively which new ideas, institutions, policies, models etc. they want to adopt. As part of my project, I want to study which civil society traditions get carried over to Eastern Europe and how Eastern European civil society actors adopt or reject them. Furthermore, I want to learn how processes of Europeanization have an impact on the transnational activity of Eastern European civil society organizations.

What is the EEGA ScienceCampus for you?

For me, the ScienceCampus stands for an innovative and interdisciplinary research environment which brings together many different research institutions and researchers.



The benefit of EEGA ScienceCampus to me is ...

First of all, the main benefit is that I can dedicate time to write a proposal for a new research project, which will help me to secure long-term funding. Prof. Dr. Gert Pickel, who supervises my Postdoc stay at the EEGA ScienceCampus, helps me with the comparative aspects of my project and he provides crucial knowledge on grant writing. Second, I can discuss my research project with the colleagues at the member institutions of the EEGA ScienceCampus. For example, I presented my ideas at a colloquium of the Institute for Regional Geographies (IfL). I benefit a lot from the interdisciplinarity of the EEGA ScienceCampus and the intellectual environment at its member institutions. The expertise on Eastern Europe at the GWZO and the IfL is in particular helpful to develop my research ideas further. Last but not least, the other guest researchers contribute to the accommodating atmosphere at the work place.