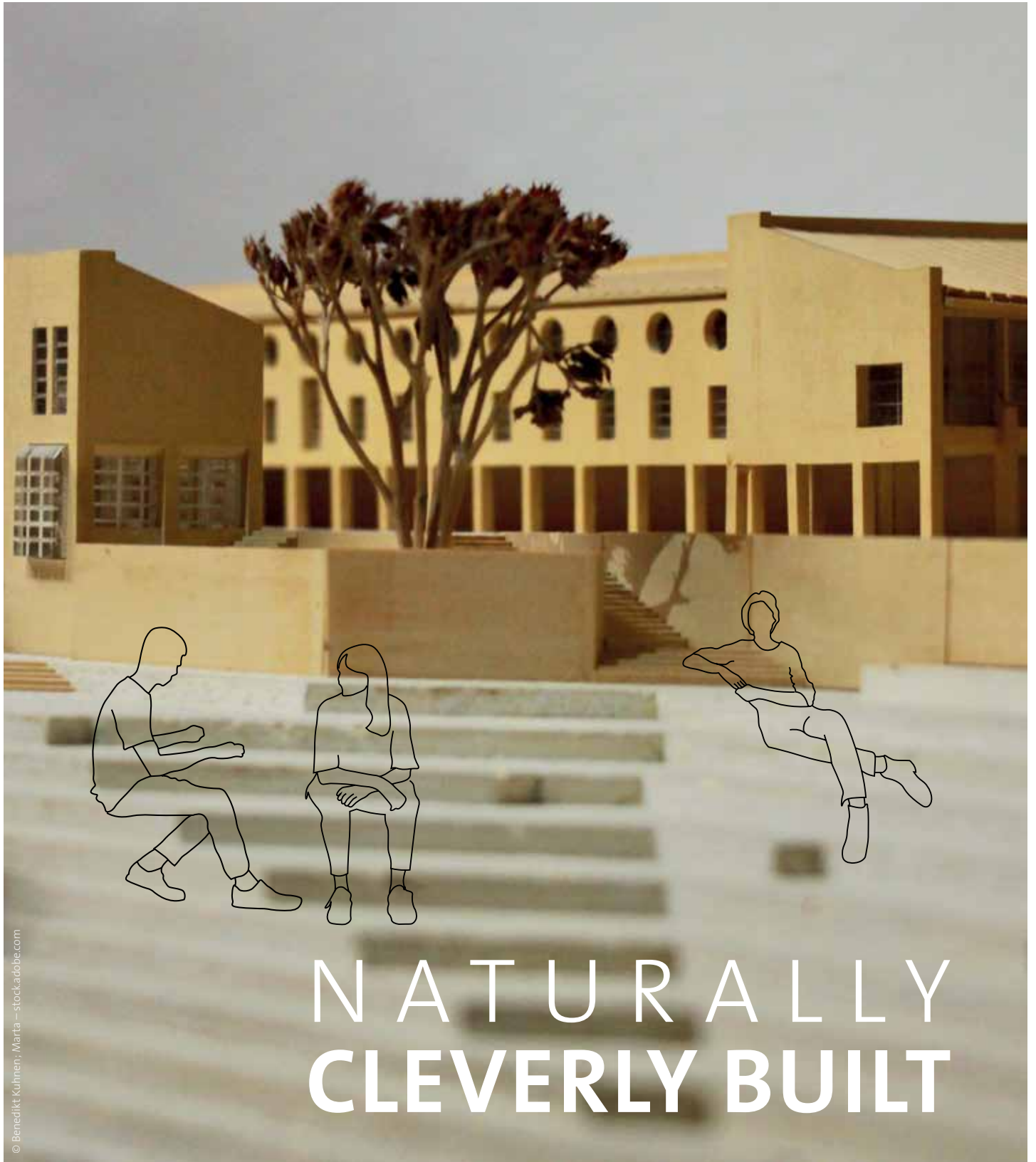


the university magazine 02 | 2024



campus

passau



NATURALLY
CLEVERLY BUILT

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Dear reader,

Universities communicate internally and externally through their buildings: On the campus of the University of Passau, the buildings and all other built structures provide a common roof for teaching and research, academic ideas and student life. Last but not least, they also create a sense of identity. The buildings continue the architecture of Passau's historic town centre in a modern design language whilst harmonising with the natural surroundings. Anyone who – like me – is lucky enough to cycle or walk to university along the Inn river will agree with me that it's hard to imagine a more beautiful way to work.

With the construction of the International Centre for Scholarship and Science (IWZ), the largest expansion project of the University of Passau since its opening in 1978, the existing buildings will be enriched in the coming years in the spirit of sustainability, and the university will be given a new “gateway to the town”.

In view of the lead article in this issue, “Naturally Cleverly Built”, I am pleased and grateful that architect Michael Rosner and engineer Ludwig Zistler accepted our invitation to talk to us, as both of them have had a significant influence on the architecture and building technology of our university. The sophisticated and well-designed concept finds itself in the details and isn't always immediately obvious. Dr Alexandra Binder also writes about this in her guest article about our campus.

As we present this issue, we wish to pay special tribute to our colleague, Professor Jörg Trempler, who passed away on 8 November. Thanks to his work, we have been given a fresh perspective of the University of Passau campus and remain very much in his debt.

Naturally cleverly built are not only the buildings on our campus; we are also getting our university ready for the future by establishing sustainable internal structures, such as the Hubs and the reorganisation of the former Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

The vision of a sustainable university was only made possible thanks to the support from so many people and the fruitful collaboration of all those involved. With this in mind, let's keep working together on the idea of a sustainable and international university. I wish you an exciting and insightful read.

Professor Ulrich Bartosch
President of the University of Passau

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ulrich Bartosch". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

content

3
Editorial

6
CampusNews
6 What's New at the University of Passau

10
CampusPictures
10 The University Captured
on Camera

14

CampusLead

Naturally Cleverly Built

- 14 **Built on Nature**
President Ulrich Bartosch in conversation with architect Michael Rosner and engineer Ludwig Zistler
- 18 **Campus Expansion**
Overview of current construction projects at the University of Passau
- 20 **Building a Sustainable University**
Guest article by architect and urban planner Alexandra Binder
- 24 **Flood-ready**
How the University protects itself against flooding
- 26 **“The positive energy was palpable everywhere”**
Dorothea Will, co-organiser of the “Passau tidies up” campaign talks about the Flood of the Century in 2013
- 28 **Platforms for Interdisciplinary Research**
Three hubs cover the key themes of Digitalisation, Sustainability and Europe
- 30 **Turning Four Into Five**
For the past year and a half, the University has had five faculties. An initial assessment.
- 32 **Part of a Worldwide Network**
Partner universities and international study programmes
- 34 **INDIGO Network celebrates its 10th anniversary**
Six East-Bavarian universities are pooling their expertise on the internet and digitalisation

36

CampusResearch

- 36 **Spotlight on Ongoing Research Projects**

40

CampusNetworks

- 40 **News from Neuburger Gesprächskreis, AlumniClub and the Kuwi Network**

42

CampusPeople

- 42 **A Safe Space for Mutual Exchange**
Luca Ienco, co-founder of open student self-help groups at the University, in portrait
- 44 **The educators, learners and researchers that make us who we are**



From left to right: Chairman of the Senate Professor Tomas Sauer, Walter Keilbart and University President Professor Ulrich Bartosch.

HONORARY SENATORSHIP FOR WALTER KEILBART

The University of Passau has bestowed upon Walter Keilbart, former managing director of the Chamber of Industry and Commerce for Lower Bavaria in Passau, the title of Honorary Senator in recognition of his outstanding services to the University. Mr Keilbart was a long-standing member of the University Council and served as its chairman from 2019 to 2023. He retired in December 2017, but maintains close ties with the University. “I am deeply grateful to Walter Keilbart for his faithful support for the university, which has benefited in many ways from his experience and commitment: from the preservation of the Innsteg Auditorium to his work on the University Council and personal mentoring for students”, said University President Professor Ulrich Bartosch at the award ceremony. Mr Keilbart is a bearer of the Federal Cross of Merit and the State Medal for Special Services to the Bavarian Economy.

INTERNATIONAL RANKING SUCCESSES

Since its first participation in the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Ranking, the University of Passau has always been in the leading quarter of universities worldwide. This is all the more gratifying because the number of participating universities continues to grow dynamically and this year comprises 2,092 universities (up from last year’s 1,907). In the current 2025 THE World University Ranking, the University of Passau is ranked 501-600. “The University of Passau is among the top 25 percent worldwide for the eighth time in a row, and we are very pleased about this consistently strong result. This is the result of our joint work in the areas of research, teaching and knowledge transfer. Our internationalisation strategy is an important success factor for the future of the University and at the same time a strategic priority”, said University President Professor Ulrich Bartosch.

Moreover, in 2024, the University was among the top 10 percent of all young universities (founded less than 50 years ago) worldwide for the seventh time in a row. Within Germany, Passau took 4th place in the THE Young Universities Ranking.

The University of Passau is also going strong in other international rankings in fields such as sustainability. After entering the GreenMetric Ranking in 2021 as the best newcomer worldwide, the University continued to perform excellently – most recently in 2023 – and remains among the leading 15 percent of international higher education institutions. In the latest GreenMetric Ranking, Passau secured 134th place among the 1,183 participating universities. A non-profit initiative of the University of Indonesia, the GreenMetric Ranking has been conducted annually since 2010. It tracks a comprehensive range of sustainability activities and parameters of international universities and other higher education institutions.

Read more about the rankings:
www.timeshighereducation.com
<https://greenmetric.ui.ac.id>

INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

The research project DeepMBT: New paths to software quality with model-based testing and artificial intelligence, led by Professor Gordon Fraser (Chair of Software Engineering II), was selected for an international funding programme with which the Free State of Bavaria is supporting Bavarian-Czech research projects with a total of 3.5 million euros. The researchers from Passau and Prague are investigating how artificial intelligence methods can be used to find software errors more effectively and automatically.

Passau mathematician Professor Stefan Glock was accepted into the renowned Emmy Noether Programme for outstanding young researchers by the German Research Foundation (DFG). In the research project Structure and Randomness in Extremal Combinatorics, which started in October 2024, Glock and his team are researching the mathematical foundations of structures that, among other things, form the basis for the digital world: network structures that go to infinity.

Renewed success for Passau computer scientist Stefan Klessinger and economist Dr Manuela Fritz. Klessinger, who had secured first place in the ACM Student Research Competition at the International Conference on Management of Data (SIGMOD) in Seattle in 2023, won the Grand Finals for doctoral students in July 2024. Fritz received the KfW Development Bank's award for practice-relevant development research for her work on the prevention of chronic diseases in South-East Asia.

GROW YOUR OWN ALGAE

The Entrepreneurship Award 2024 went to Philine Schaefer, Elisabeth Steinbach, Ben Schwedhelm and Yannic Lott for their start-up MySpirulina. It was presented during the Passau Entrepreneurship Day. The young founders' idea for a concept for cultivating algae was well-received by the jury composed of professors, company representatives and sponsors. The team designed a system that allows people to grow microalgae on their windowsill at home, with the purpose of mitigating the excessive CO₂ balance of conventional algae production.

For further information visit <https://my-spirulina.de/en>



SABINE WIENDL APPOINTED DEPUTY HEAD OF ADMINISTRATION

Since 15 October 2024, Sabine Wiendl has been Deputy Head of Administration of the University of Passau. She succeeds Thomas Werrlein, who had held this office since 2001. Sabine Wiendl studied law in Passau and passed her first and state examinations for law. She also gained a Diploma in Legal Studies at King's College London. Previously, Ms Wiendl headed the Research Services Division and was Deputy Head of the Student and Legal Affairs Division. In future, she will be in charge of the latter, while Dr Kerstin Theis will take over the reins in the Research Services Division. "I'm looking forward to helping shape the future of the University as deputy head of administration – a position that serves as a link between the University Executive and administration", said Wiendl.



The MySpirulina team: (from right to left) Yannic Lott, Ben Schwedhelm, Sara Farzaneh Nejad and Jan Thode.
© MySpirulina

PASSAU LEGAL EXPERT APPOINTED TO THE GERMAN ETHICS COUNCIL



Professor Hans-Georg Dederer

With effect from 10 October, Bärbel Bas, the president of the Bundestag (the lower house of the German parliament) appointed the members of the German Ethics Council for the new term of office. Among the new appointees is legal scholar, Professor Hans-Georg Dederer, who has held the Chair of Constitutional and Administrative Law, Public International Law, European and International Economic Law since 2009. For many years, Professor Dederer's research interests have included legal issues raised by new technologies, particularly in the fields of biology and medicine (e.g. genetic, stem-cell and reproductive technologies). He has been a member of the German Research Foundation's (DFG) Permanent Senate Commission on Genetic Research since 2018, and since 2023 a member of the National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina's Standing Committee on Life Sciences.

The German Ethics Council is tasked with monitoring the ethical, social, scientific, medical and legal issues and the likely consequences for individuals and society that arise in connection with research and developments, particularly in the field of life sciences and their application to humans.

KANT YOUNG TALENT AWARD FOR PASSAU PHILOSOPHER

Karoline Reinhardt, Professor of Applied Ethics at the University of Passau, received the Kant-Nachwuchspreis (Kant Young Talent Award) for her commitment to research on Immanuel Kant at the international Kant Congress, which took place in 2024 under the title "Kants Projekt der Aufklärung" ("Kant's enlightenment project"). In her book "Migration und Weltbürgerrecht: zur Aktualität eines Theoriestücks der politischen Philosophie Kants" ("Migration and World Citizenship: On the Topicality of a Theoretical Piece of Kant's Political Philosophy"), she proved that Immanuel Kant and his philosophy are still highly relevant with regard to human migration – a problem that is even more contentious today than it was in Kant's time. Where Kant takes a different approach from current trends, the resulting friction could lead to new insights into the questions raised by temporary or permanent immigration, displacement and other migratory patterns.



Professor Karoline Reinhardt

NEW VICE PRESIDENT FOR KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AND SUSTAINABILITY

The University Council appointed Professor Werner Gamerith as Vice President of the University of Passau effective 1 July 2024. Together with Vice Presidents Christina Hansen, Harald Kosch, Bettina Noltenius and Jan H. Schumann, he supports the University Executive around president Professor Ulrich Bartosch and has the portfolio “Transfer and Internal Integration with the Cross-Functional Task of Sustainability”. Gamerith, who has been Professor of Regional Geography with a special focus on urban geography, social geography, population geography and cultural geography since April 2004, also heads up the University’s Sustainability Hub. In 2005 he founded Geographische Gesellschaft Passau (Passau geographical society, or GeoComPass for short), and ten years later, GeoComPass Salzburg. From 2014 to 2021, Werner Gamerith was president of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Geografie (German geographical society, DGfG).



Professor Werner Gamerith

NEWS ABOUT THE DEGREE PROGRAMMES

Together with the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, the University of Passau has established the digital bachelor’s degree programme in Catholic Theology, which aims to teach the fundamentals of Catholic theology in a modern way.

Professor Christian Handschuh from the University of Passau designed the degree programme, which can be completed full-time (six semesters) or part-time (twelve semesters), together with Professor Bernward Schmidt, who holds the Chair of Medieval and Modern Church History at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt. It is aimed in particular at professionals who have not received theological training and wish to enter church professions.

Details: www.ku.de/studienangebot/theologie-digital

Another new degree programme will be launched in winter semester 2025–26: The Master’s in Pastoral Work, a joint degree programme of the Department of Catholic Theology and the Diocese of Passau. It is intended not only for students but also for all those who wish to further their education in the pastoral field and qualify for a pastoral career. Professor Bernhard Bleyer emphasised the special focus on people who want to complete a degree while working, stating that “this programme is unique in its form in the Catholic theological landscape of the German-speaking world.”

Details: <https://www.ktf.uni-passau.de/studienmoeglichkeiten/master-pastorale-arbeit>

The M.Sc. Business Administration and M.A. Governance and Public Policy have a new teaching language. From summer semester 2025 onwards, the M.Sc. Business Administration programme will be taught entirely in English; German-taught modules will only be offered in the compulsory elective area. The same applies to the M.A. Governance and Public Policy, which will also be fully English-taught from winter semester 2025–26. However, with the exception of one module area, it will still be possible to study the latter degree programme in German. Finally, the LL.M. Legal Informatics programme added a second starting date this year, and now commences every April and October.

A closer look at forests

Our forests are truly multi-talented when it comes to climate protection. In the international Erasmus+ project BEST-NATURE under the direction of Professor Christine Schmitt (Chair of Physical Geography with a focus on Human-Environment Research), students are researching the role forests play in biodiversity, how nature conservation is realised in Europe and what national parks are supposed to accomplish. An excursion in summer 2024 took the researchers to a primeval beech forest in Pollino National Park in Italy, which has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is home to the oldest known beech tree in Europe, which is 620 years old. Next up are excursions to the Austrian Limestone Alps and the Bavarian Forest.

Systematic storage

More than 100,000 student files, a good 7,500 personnel files and plenty of other documents are stored in the University's archives using a sophisticated filing system. According to university archivist Mario Puhane, a grand total of 4.5 kilometres of documents are stored in boxes and crates, bags or stacks. Before the papers get there, they go through a long process: after arriving, usually in folders, they are removed from the folders, then "de-ironed" (i.e. all rust-prone iron is removed), before being recorded in Excel spreadsheets and filed away in acid-free archival boxes and finally transported to one of the 14 storage locations.



Getting creative with artificial intelligence

“Discover the future of creative work” was the motto of a workshop organised by the moreBNE team of the University for pupils from a Passau secondary school. The workshop was part of a project day on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The focus was not only on the responsible use of AI technologies but also on data protection issues and the laws and regulations governing the use of AI systems. The AI-generated images on the topic of sustainability were then made available as an Open Educational Resource.



Off to a tasty start

As every year at the start of the winter semester in October, all students – new and returning – were invited to the Leberkäs welcome reception. The atmosphere was great, and the refectory staff made sure nobody went hungry. Leberkäs is a traditional southern-German sandwich meat, often served in a bread roll. But despite the name of the reception, there were non-meat alternatives to be had, such as Emmentaler cheese or tofu. This year, the latter vegan soya product proved more popular than the cheese option, with a total of 13 kilograms of tofu consumed, compared to 10 kilograms of cheese. But weighing in at 130 kilograms, Leberkäs is and remains the clear favourite.

BUILT ON

NATURE

University President Professor Ulrich Bartosch invited two people who have had a significant influence on the University's architecture and building technology to talk about the campus: architect Michael Rosner and engineer Ludwig Zistler.



Professor Ulrich Bartosch: What makes the Passau campus special to you?

Michael Rosner: One key aspect is the connection to the Old Town and how it is embedded in the distinctive river landscape. When the campus buildings were constructed, an attempt was made to carry on the architecture of the old town in a modern, contemporary language and to incorporate the landscape, the slopes and the natural features.

What are the special technical features?

Ludwig Zistler: My vision was to create a building technology that enabled students to find optimal climatic conditions and see nothing of the technology itself. This means that everything had to be integrated into the interior design as far as possible. In the business/economics library, for example, we integrated the air outlets into the shelves. This was a novel concept. Fresh, cold or warm air now circulated everywhere from the shelves. Around 80 seats were regained because this eliminated any draught.

When you look back at the years when the buildings were being constructed, what were the special conditions at the time, what opportunities offered themselves, what resistance did you encounter?

Michael Rosner: I have been involved in the planning of the University since early 1970, first at the Oberste Baubehörde (supreme building authority) at the Bavarian State Ministry of the Interior, later in Passau at the Staatliches Bauamt (the state building authority). I was a member and managing director of the university construction working group, in which the department heads of the Bavarian universities' construction offices were represented. Together, we sounded out what was possible in terms of university construction in Bavaria. Money was tight back then, even more so than today. But what was particularly difficult were the political questions. There was much debate about whether we even needed another university at all, and why it should be built in Passau. At times, progress in university construction was slow, but there was always support from various different corners.

What were the technical difficulties?

Ludwig Zistler: The original master plan did not provide for a chimney anywhere on the entire campus. Electricity was very cheap at the time and the intention was to heat the entire university with heat pumps. But there were technical limits. Over time, new technologies were developed that we were able to use, such as heat recovery with a fixed storage tank, which was something almost no-one had heard of at the time. As it turned out, the rapidly growing student numbers in the first few years posed a challenge. The ventilation systems were not designed for



such a large number of students in the lecture theatres – there was too much CO₂ in the air and that meant we had to install new systems. Disassembling these large appliances and getting them through the doors proved difficult. We solved this through our own planning and coordination and dared to try something new in the course of the renovation: We reversed the air flow in the lecture and reading rooms. The air flows in at the bottom, creating a lake of fresh air, and the stale air is extracted at the top. It was a sensation at the time – and it revitalises, refreshes and still works today.

What can you say about your interactions with the university and the public authorities?

Ludwig Zistler: I was lucky to have direct connections to the building authority, the government of Lower Bavaria and the Oberste Baubehörde. All of these authorities were staffed by people I knew and who I could call if I had any questions. They looked at what I had to say and made a lot of things possible.

Michael Rosner: In all areas, not just in building technology, the University has benefited greatly from the direct line we had to those responsible in the authorities. And since university representatives were involved in the planning and decision-making processes, we were often able to get decisions fairly quickly.

Our claim is that we are a “green” university.

Were issues such as the energy crisis already relevant in the early days?

Ludwig Zistler: I was already interested in solar and heat-pump technology during my time as a student. In 1979, my professor

put me on a mission to promote technologies such as solar energy and heat pumps and to get heating engineers behind the concept. We wanted to prevent the glaciers from melting. The Nikolakoster Building was heated and cooled by two air-to-water heat pumps as early as 1978. When planning the other buildings, the building authority kept the option of heat pumps utilising the Inn river as an energy source open. But in the end, it was decided to connect the university buildings to the nearby hospital’s district heating system.

Michael Rosner: These building technology issues were already extensively addressed prior to planning with the Oberste Baubehörde. Many of the people at the building authority were highly committed and innovative and scrutinised every new technology. Of course, pragmatic and financial considerations also played a role in planning and construction. The connection to the hospital was one such pragmatic decision.

What makes the University’s location special? How important is the connection between the campus and town centre?

Michael Rosner: This connection was fundamental right from the start. It also played a major role in the evaluation of the submissions to the first architecture and ideas competition in 1972, which was setting new standards in building and landscaping. The University is situated between the Inn river and the Innstrasse and is flanked by a topographically varied slope zone. In addition to this landscape element, there is also a connection and permeability to the town. The sight lines are noticeable everywhere on the campus. (NJ)



About Ludwig Zistler

Ludwig Zistler was Head of the Technical Services Section at the University of Passau for many years. He is an engineer, inventor and a visionary and has developed the University's building technology into one of the most effective and energy-efficient heating systems of all Bavarian higher education institutions.

In 2022, he was honoured by the University of Passau for his life's work and his outstanding efforts for climate-neutral energy technology.



About Michael Rosner

Michael Rosner is an architect and, from 1974 to 2000, was Director of Construction at the Passau State Building Authority. He was responsible for the structural development, planning and construction of the University of Passau.

Michael Rosner was made an honorary citizen of the University in 1995 and continues to follow the development of the University of Passau's campus with keen interest. In 2018, the Technical University of Munich, his alma mater, awarded him the Golden Jubilee Award.

CAMPUS EXPANSION

Whether in Passau's town centre, on the university campus or in the forest – there's plenty of construction work going on, creating new rooms for science and more space for child care. The new multimedia lecture theatre for the Lower-Bavarian Medical Campus is being built near the central bus station, while the International Centre for Scholarship and Science is soon to tower above the Klostergarten square, and the University's new forest kindergarten has found a home in Neuburg Forest.



INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR SCHOLARSHIP AND SCIENCE (IWZ)

The IWZ project represents the largest expansion in the history of the University of Passau. Over the coming months and years, the IWZ will be built on the construction site below the Löwenbrauerei brewery.

Designed by Linz-based architects Riepl Riepl, this building is intended to become a gateway to the town and a place where science and society meet. It will house offices, seminar rooms, meeting and work areas, a cafeteria, an inner courtyard and, as its centrepiece, a concert-capable lecture theatre with around 800 seats plus a large foyer.

At the end of August, the last row of houses on the construction site and the Leybrandthaus on the corner of Dr.-Hans-Kapfinger-Strasse were demolished.

From now on, with the demolition work out of the way, we will gradually be seeing the construction work happen.

The IWZ will cost around 170 million euros to build and is funded by the Free State of Bavaria through the Bavarian High-Tech Agenda innovation drive. You can read and see more about the IWZ in our Spitzberg blog at: <https://spitzberg.uni-passau.de/>



Property developer representative, Rudolf Ramelsberger, and Under-Secretary, Dr Rolf-Dieter Jungk

LOWER-BAVARIAN MEDICAL CAMPUS (MCN)

In Erhardstrasse, just behind Quartier Mitte, the construction of two new university buildings, where medicine will play the leading role, is in full swing. These will be home to six new chairs who will act as profile professorships for the Lower-Bavarian Medical Campus, as well as a multimedia lecture theatre and seminar rooms, reading rooms and a specialist library.

The lecture theatre is an important part of the MCN, a cooperation between the University of Regensburg, the University of Passau and the Deggendorf Institute of Technology as well as clinics and hospitals in the Lower-Bavarian region. It will be the

heart of the future Centre for Digital Medical Education (ZeDiMA), where digital teaching formats can be implemented as part of medical studies in Passau.

In the 2024–25 winter semester, 110 students began their medical studies at the MCN in Regensburg. The first medical students are expected in Passau in the 2027–28 winter semester.

Unlike the IWZ, the buildings will not be owned by the Free State, but by a private property developer who will lease the premises to the University of Passau.

FOREST KINDERGARTEN

For children aged three and above, the University has set up a new forest kindergarten in collaboration with a number of stakeholders and sponsors. In summer, the large tepee with a diameter of seven metres, complete with fire pit, was erected in a clearing in the Neuburg Forest, on land belonging to the municipality of Neuburg am Inn and owned by the Bavarian state forestry commission. The tepee and the clearing are the main places where the children and their carers will spend their time. A large, heated kindergarten wagon with a self-sufficient water and electricity supply using roof-mounted solar panels will soon be delivered. This will serve as the “base station” of the forest kindergarten and will be located about ten minutes’ walk from the tepee site, in the gravel car park in Ingling.

The forest kindergarten – or nature education childcare centre, to give its official designation – is a joint project of the University Executive and the Caritas Association of the Diocese of Passau and represents an important building block for improving the family and study/work life balance at the University of Passau.



True to the motto “There is life in, on and under the earth”, learning with and through nature takes centre stage in the forest kindergarten.

More information, including registration, at: www.uni-passau.de/en/family/studying-and-working-as-a-parent/caritas-forest-kindergarten-at-the-university-of-passau

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE UNIVERSITY



Architecture shapes our lives and our identity. It's worth taking a closer look at the spaces, buildings and landscapes in which we move every day. Only then do special qualities, such as their sustainability, become evident. This is also the case on Passau's university campus.

by Alexandra Binder

A walk through the university campus reveals the sustainable facets of the architecture on the Passau campus: meandering organic paths, the nature of the Inn floodplains extending between the university buildings, greenery growing up the façades. The buildings lie loosely and partly turned towards each other like fingers in the landscape, and yet they are connected to each other by a central path lined with glass passages. Their construction is reminiscent of the so-called Inn-Salzach style of Passau's Old Town with plastered, perforated façades and raised gable walls. Nevertheless, they speak their own abstract, architectural language between lightness, transparency and solidity. The view from up above is also worthwhile, as it reveals one of the best examples of the sustainable side of university architecture: There is no chimney to be found on any of the roofs.

Where did the idea of Passau's campus as an urban link between the town and its natural environment come from? Why are no combustion plants needed on the entire site? Why weren't the buildings constructed in concrete on a brutalist grid, as was the case with other newly built universities in the region? Where does this sustainable university building culture originate?

From architectural competition to built reality on campus

Sustainable construction has been a fixture for some time in the education sector, particularly at universities. Architectural competitions are often used as a regulating instrument before the actual construction work begins. In the field of architectural history, however, this topic has not received a great deal of in-depth attention thus far. Little is known to the public about the sustainable construction methods at the Passau campus in particular, which was first created in the 1970s based on an urban planning ideas and building competition and is constantly being expanded.

Closing this information gap and answering the question of how architectural competitions in general can favour a sustainable building culture for universities or even establish it through the guiding ideas found in the procedures is the goal I have set myself in my research at the Chair of Art History and Visual Culture Studies. Researching the architectural history of the University of Passau as a case study fits in ideally with this goal. Its exemplary and trailblazing development is now being documented, analysed, contextualised and critically discussed for the first time under the paradigm of sustainability, as both a forward-looking and topical issue.

The strong local connection and the interweaving of Passau's campus architecture with its surroundings is one of its greatest sustainability factors.



Research on changes over time and bridging theory and praxis

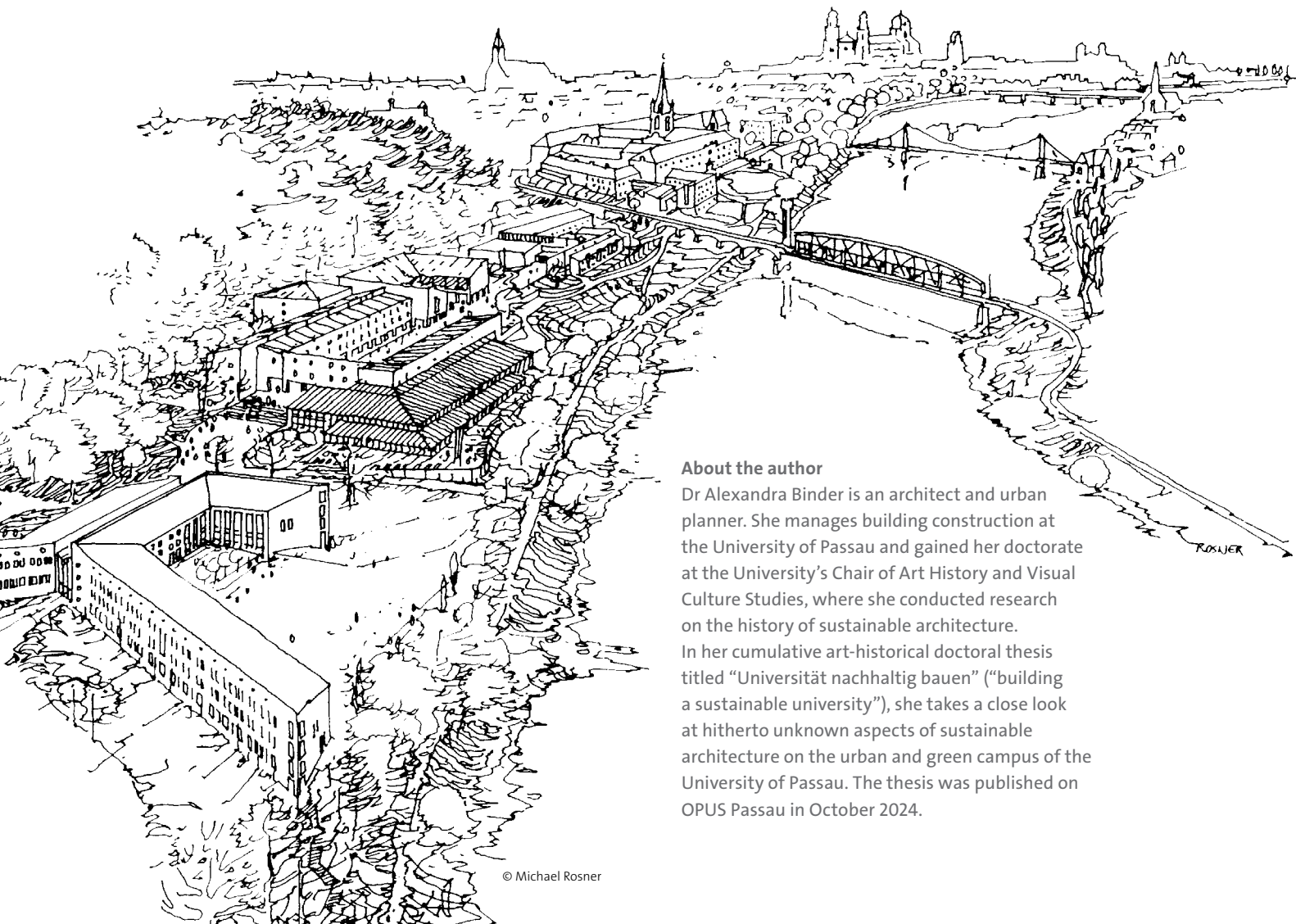
The contrasts between the past and present are particularly exciting in this research work. This is because it examines the period from the founding of the University – based on the analysis of the corresponding architectural competitions – all the way to the current process for the imminent construction of the International Centre for Scholarship and Science (IWZ). Another special feature is the bridging of architectural theory and praxis, as this is where insights into planned and built reality flow together.

Passau: best practice example in sustainable university construction

My research findings are that the Passau campus is a prime example of sustainable university construction. Architect Michael Rosner's innovative approach for the 1970s, with a focus on environmental protection, underpins his status as a pioneer. The strong local connection and the interweaving of Passau's campus architecture with its surroundings is one of its greatest

sustainability factors, as is the underlying idea of sustainable building technology. In addition, others, such as landscape architect Günther Grzimek and architect Jürgen Krug (Business/Economics Building), who had already been involved in the design of the Olympic Park, also came to Passau. Their concepts and ideas can still be seen today in the architecture and landscape design of the University.

International influences such as those of Aldo Rossi, one of the greatest urbanists of the 20th century, and his site-specific theories on the plans of architects Werner Fauser (Philosophicum Building) and Peter Riepl (IWZ) were also identified. These and comparable findings, which enrich sustainability research and the existing architectural discourse whilst opening up new avenues for research, are now being made accessible to the general public for the first time. They can serve as an example for sustainable planning in the future.



About the author

Dr Alexandra Binder is an architect and urban planner. She manages building construction at the University of Passau and gained her doctorate at the University's Chair of Art History and Visual Culture Studies, where she conducted research on the history of sustainable architecture. In her cumulative art-historical doctoral thesis titled "Universität nachhaltig bauen" ("building a sustainable university"), she takes a close look at hitherto unknown aspects of sustainable architecture on the urban and green campus of the University of Passau. The thesis was published on OPUS Passau in October 2024.

FLOOD-READY

Due to its location on the Inn river, the University of Passau is constantly exposed to the dangers of flooding. But how exactly is the campus protected against flooding and what happens if the worst comes to the worst?

Flood protection is an ever-present issue in the day-to-day work of Josef Köberl, head of the University's Facilities Management Division. Compared to the Old Town, the campus is less at risk due to its higher elevation, but planning for potential flood hazards has always been front and centre since the founding of the University. "Right from the start, all buildings were positioned in such a way that the sensitive areas were above the 50-year peak flood level", Köberl explained. "We also have mobile flood barriers, for example in the Centre for Media and Communication, the underground car park and the Philosophicum Building, which can be placed for additional flood protection."

Emergency processes and structures

If a critical situation does arise, the University, and above all its head of administration, Dr Achim Dilling, is in constant contact with the emergency services, such as the fire brigade and the police. Just like Josef Köberl and several other university staff, Dilling himself is an active member of the fire brigade. "We benefit from this because it means we can recognise the early warning signs, which puts us in a position where we can react very rapidly", said Dilling. The two-day forecasts are now so good that the risks to the campus can be accurately assessed in advance. "Things start to get critical when the water mark reaches seven metres at the Marienbrücke reporting point – that's data that everyone has in their head", he said. When trouble looms, Dilling and Köberl agree together on the required measures. The University has well-practised and documented processes, including emergency-management lists, where it is noted precisely when each building must be evacuated, as well as other measures that need to be taken.

University operations during a crisis

In all exceptional situations, such as extreme weather events, the covid-19 pandemic or a politically volatile situation, a crisis team is formed that includes the heads of key university divisions. This crisis team advises the University Executive on how university operations can be maintained. It also liaises with the relevant authorities and emergency services and informs lecturers about the technical requirements and possibilities for online teaching. "If the university operations are suspended, the University Executive must be involved and the ministry informed", explained Dilling. A bulletin is subsequently issued to all students and staff by the University's communication division. In a crisis situation, the team convenes in rapid succession – every two days or every day, if necessary – in order to adapt the University's response to the changing situation. Once the crisis is over, the crisis management activities and processes are always reviewed and evaluated, so that the University can draw lessons from them and be even better prepared for any future incidents. "We are grateful to our staff and students, who always pull together

in such events – as demonstrated during the covid-19 crisis and the 2013 'Flood of the Century', when the student initiative 'Passau ties up' sprang into action and provided valuable help to us on campus and to the general population in the town", said Köberl.

Flood-proof architecture on the campus

The University is constantly working with the State Building Authority to ensure that the buildings are state-of-the-art – not only to be prepared for the consequences of climate change, but also to remain as energy-efficient and sustainable as possible. On the Passau campus, the IT-Centre Building is particularly well-equipped in terms of flood protection and energy efficiency. It stands on nine-metre-high, reinforced concrete columns, has an underground car park that can be flooded in a controlled manner, and all of its technology is housed on the roof. In the event of flooding, the University supports the City of Passau, for example by making available the infrastructure of the IT Centre. Thus, for example, the City of Passau was able to install special sensors on the building's roof to detect heavy rainfall events.



Continuous development

According to Dilling, however, the biggest challenge for the built environment in the future will not be river flooding but spontaneous heavy rainfall events. "The problem here is not the river, but the fact that the sewerage system can't absorb such large quantities of water in such a short time", he explained. Nowadays, there are wastewater systems for buildings that can absorb almost twice the amount of wastewater that has to be processed in normal weather conditions. The University would also like to incorporate such solutions into future structural developments. Passau is used to flooding. It happens almost every year and those responsible for flood mitigation, e.g. in the fire brigade, in the City of Passau or at the University, are used to dealing with it. "We have built up a certain resilience for living next to the river. In this respect, both we and the emergency services are so well-trained that everyone knows exactly what to do in an emergency." (SvS)

“THE POSITIVE ENERGY WAS PALPABLE EVERYWHERE”



Dorothea Will, Head of the Executive Support Unit for Competency Development in Study and Teaching

Dorothea Will remembers the 2013 Flood of the Century, when she launched the “Passau tidies up” campaign together with students.

Dorothea Will, the “Passau tidies up” campaign quickly grew into one of the largest aid campaigns Passau has seen. Do you remember how all this came about?

The whole thing was an extreme situation for all of us. It had rained incessantly from mid-May, and by the time the peak wave reached Passau at the beginning of June, half of the Old Town was submerged. We all felt pretty powerless. But we were also unanimous in that something had to be done. First we started an e-mail distribution list to contact students and find out where, exactly, help was needed. Almost immediately, the distribution list took on a life of its own, and several hundred helpers registered, all of whom turned up at the University the next morning to clean up. Today we would probably say the whole thing went viral!

This was the worst flooding in Passau in living memory. How was the campaign organised and coordinated?

The City of Passau was not yet prepared for the clean-up at the time. The THW [Federal Agency for Technical Relief], the water rescue service and the fire brigade needed some time to get started because the water was receding faster than expected. We had to steer the huge wave of offers to help and the volunteers’ zest for action in the right direction. We started on campus and cleared the Innsteg Auditorium on the first day – feet clad in bin bags and with no more than the tools that were around, or even our bare hands. But from hour to hour we grew more professional, quickly linked up with the municipal administration, and were able to integrate the spare help capacity into the overall planning of the City of Passau.



We developed a system of scouts and coordination centres that allowed us to determine how much support and what equipment was needed for the clean-up work.

Facebook was the medium of choice at the time. There, we pre-organised the areas in which our helpers were deployed on a daily basis and also sent out appeals for donations to the public when, for example, equipment such as shovels and rubber boots or food was needed.

Thinking about flooding in Passau in general – what comes to your mind?

On the one hand, I think about the fact that it always poses an immediate danger to the town, to people's property and unfortunately also to their health. On the other hand, there are also many positive feelings and memories of this enormous team spirit. It's impressive what people can achieve when they pull together.

The solidarity and willingness to help among students and university members was enormous at the time. What's your most vivid memory?

There was an incredible sense of cohesion and the positive energy was palpable everywhere. Everyone greeted each other and smiled at each other because it was clear that we were all in the town for the same reason. This is still present today, eleven years later.

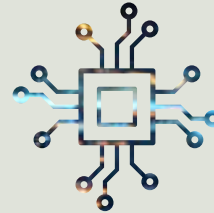
How long did the campaign last in the end?

About two weeks. After that, there was still a huge amount of work to be done, but in most cases professionals had to get involved because, for example, heavy machinery, expertise or psychologically trained people were needed. Many were back to work and for our students, everyday university life had started up again. At the same time, after two weeks full of vigour and very little sleep, fatigue had naturally set in. Before, we had all just been working and now we needed time to sort out our own feelings and reflect on what had happened during the previous days. We transferred our scout and coordination centre system to an app, which continued to run for a few weeks.

The "Passau tidies up" campaign really changed the relationship between students and Passau residents; the students were seen as part of the town, much more than usual. How do you feel about this today, has anything remained of it?

This dynamic was actually very exciting to observe. For students, Passau is of course their second home. However, as most of them were not as badly affected as the citizens of Passau, the situation and experience was different for the students. They were torn out of their everyday university life and suddenly had to take on a role that was vital to the survival of the town. This forged a bond between them and with their town. The people of Passau were incredibly grateful for the solidarity and help of the students. They realised that the students are ready to help them out in an emergency. I think that everyone has taken something away from that – students and local residents. Svenja Schindler conducted the interview.

PLATFORMS FOR INTERDISC



Three overarching themes combine cross-faculty and interdisciplinary research, teaching and knowledge transfer at the University of Passau: digitalisation, sustainability and Europe.

Organised as so-called Hubs – one for each theme – these central platforms support academic work through integrated research forums and promote exchange and cooperation between the faculties.

DIGITALISATION HUB

“Digitalisation and artificial intelligence are currently affecting all areas of society, business, science and education. The University of Passau conducts research into the methodological and technical foundations of artificial intelligence, the legal and business frameworks for its use and the many challenges it poses for society.” Professor Harald Kosch

DIRECTOR Professor Harald Kosch, Vice President for Academic Infrastructure and IT

OBJECTIVE The Digitalisation Hub is the centre of interdisciplinary digitalisation research at the University of Passau. The research forum in the digitalisation hub serves as a central platform where researchers from various disciplines (computer science, business and economics, law, humanities and cultural studies, education and social sciences) can discuss and jointly advance their research on digitalisation. As a node point, it connects actors from science, business and society.

ORGANISATION

- Regular research forums are held within the Digitalisation Hub, where current projects and findings are presented and discussed. These offer academics an interdisciplinary exchange platform on current research in the field of digitalisation and open up the possibility of interdisciplinary and cross-faculty collaboration.
- As its managing director, Stefan Schröder directs and coordinates the operational fortunes of the hub. He is responsible for the implementation of projects and the bundling of activities relating to digitalisation.

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH



SUSTAINABILITY HUB

“Conservation of resources and sustainability have been part of the University of Passau’s DNA since its founding in 1978. We see it as our obligation and responsibility to preserve this heritage, which has now existed for more than four decades, and to carefully develop the campus in a sustainable manner.”

Professor Werner Gamerith

DIRECTOR Professor Werner Gamerith, Vice President for Transfer and Internal Networking with the Cross-sectional Task of Sustainability

OBJECTIVE The Sustainability Hub is the organisational centre of the Sustainable Campus, which the University of Passau has established in the spirit of human responsibility for the protection of the environment as well as mutual coexistence and cooperation based on understanding and respect. It supports the sustainable operation of the campus, promotes student activities and advances the University’s interfaculty research on sustainability.

ORGANISATION

- The Sustainability Hub, managed by Stefan Schröder, is the central point of contact for questions relating to sustainability at the University of Passau.
- Its remit includes organising regular research forums that bring together academics from numerous disciplines and representatives from business and society to discuss current issues and projects in the field of sustainability with the aim of generating new ideas and approaches.
- Climate Action Manager Angie Schüppel coordinates the sustainable operation of the campus and is responsible for the University’s climate protection management together with the Facilities Management Division.
- The Sustainability Hub also supports and coordinates sustainability-related lecture series and student activities.

SCIENCE HUB FOR EUROPE (SHE)

“The Science Hub for Europe seeks to make the existing strengths of strategic partnerships between higher education institutions across the EU with the University of Passau – as well as the engagement with Europe of the region as a whole – more visible and ‘tangible’. Within SHE, we wish to facilitate new forms of even closer cooperation.”

Professor Christina Hansen

DIRECTOR Professor Christina Hansen, Vice President for International Affairs and Diversity

OBJECTIVE Europe is a cornerstone of the University of Passau. The Science Hub for Europe (SHE) is the University’s central organisational unit tasked with raising its European profile and promoting networking at the European level. The aim of the forum is to strengthen the European focus, utilise internal synergies and promote cooperation with European universities in the areas of research, teaching and knowledge transfer.

ORGANISATION

- The SHE consists of a research forum, a European Campus and a Europe Office.
- Its research forum (EFF) offers researchers a space for discussion and networking and supports joint research projects. In cooperation with the University’s Research Services Division, it strategically bundles scientific activities on the topic of Europe across faculties and disciplines.
- The European Campus encompasses everything that takes place on campus concerning the topic of Europe, for example in the form of events or activities.
- The Europe Office, headed by Florence Ertel, manages the development and implementation of the University’s Europe strategy. All initiatives of the SHE are coordinated here. The SHE’s core remit is to promote linkages with external, European networks as well as national and local actors whose work is centred on the topic of Europe. (NJ, TB)



SUBJECTS AND STUDENTS

The SoBi and GeKu faculties together count roughly 5,800 students, about 1,100 at the SoBi faculty and 2,400 at the GeKu faculty, and some 2,300 students in the teacher education programmes.

Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences:

- Bachelor's programmes: B.A. Governance and Public Policy, B.A. Journalism and Strategic Communication, and B.Ed. Secondary Education
- Master's programmes: M.A. Teaching and Learning Processes, M.A. Development Studies, M.A. Geography, M.A. Governance and Public Policy, and M.A. Communication in Digital Societies
- Teacher Education Programmes for primary and secondary education (Mittelschule, Realschule and Gymnasium), including Catholic religious education

Faculty of Humanities and Cultural Studies:

- Bachelor's programmes: B.A. European Studies, B.A. European Studies Major, B.A. Historical Sciences, B.A. International Cultural and Business Studies, B.A. Media and Communication, B.A. Language and Text Sciences, and B.A. Catholic Theology
- Master's programmes: M.A. Charity Studies and Values-based Management, M.A. European Studies, M.A. History and Society, M.A. International Cultural and Business Studies, M.A. Semiotics of Texts and Culture, and M.A. Bildwissenschaft



Professor Maximilian Sailer



Professor Jan Oliver Decker
© Decker

TURNING FOUR INTO FIVE

Four faculties at the University of Passau became five in May 2023, when two new faculties joined the ranks of the Faculty of Law, the School of Business, Economics and Information Systems and the Faculty of Computer Science and Mathematics: the Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences (SoBi) and the Faculty of Humanities and Cultural Studies (GeKu).

“The establishment of two new faculties represents quite an extraordinary point in the history of a university, and one that will be of lasting significance for our university”, said University President Professor Ulrich Bartosch, describing the significance of the reorganisation of the former Faculty of Arts and Humanities. The founding of the new faculties was preceded by a two-and-a-half-year process, which was led by the founding deans, Professor Malte Rehbein (GeKu) and Professor Maximilian Sailer (SoBi), and involved colleagues from the former Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Head of Administration Dr Achim Dilling, the University Council and the University Administration.

Clear profiles and strong networks

The reason for the reorganisation was the desire for more flexibility, a clearer profile and more dynamic networking of the two new faculties within the University. The reorganisation made it possible to establish new structures and develop new ideas, said the founding deans at an academic ceremony in May 2023.

After one-and-a-half years in the new structure, the Dean of the SoBi faculty, Professor Maximilian Sailer, takes stock: “The founding of the Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences was a labour-intensive but meaningful process and has already proven to be a valuable decision to strengthen the profile of the faculty and consolidate its position within the University.” The faculty was able to define its profile within a short time and successfully launched a process to redevelop, modernise and raise the profile of its degree programmes. SoBi is home to the teacher education programmes and has successfully revamped both the M.A. Governance and Public Policy and the M.A. Communication in Digital Societies degree programmes. “In addition, we are developing new degree programmes, including a bachelor’s and master’s of education”, said Sailer. Health is another topic that plays a role in the further development of our portfolio of degree programmes as part of the Lower-Bavarian Medical Campus.” Moreover, the faculty is planning to develop a focus on social-scientific research methods in the various departments.

Professor Jan-Oliver Decker, who took the reins as Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Cultural Studies in early 2023, said:

“Since then, the Faculty of Humanities and Cultural Studies has been growing together and positioning itself in the German and international university landscape with a teaching and research profile that is genuinely humanities- and cultural studies-centred. The reorganisation has made it necessary to carry out an elaborate process of evaluation, revision and realignment of internal structures and procedures. This is already showing positive results.” He said that the faculty had doubled its external third-party funding in the previous year through a wide range of research projects, and that it had also achieved important milestones in the advancement of early career researchers.

Looking ahead

Both SoBi and GeKu have set development priorities for the coming years. For GeKu, Decker singles out two goals as being particularly important: seeing through the extensive structural reforms to the degree programme portfolio, and redoubling the faculty’s internationalisation efforts. “In winter semester 2023–24, the reformed B.A. Media and Communication degree programme was launched with around 200 new students, and this winter semester saw the start of the first digital B.A. Catholic Theology programme in cooperation with the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, which proved highly successful”, summarised Decker. Additional new, topical degree programmes are in the pipeline, including an English-taught master’s, a master’s in media and cultural studies and another master’s in language in a social context, which will be offered as a joint degree with Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg.

According to Sailer, the SoBi faculty, too, will place a strong focus on further internationalisation, both in research and teaching. In addition, the further development of teacher training, together with the GeKu faculty, remains a central concern in order to meet future requirements in the education sector. “Overall, it can be said that the Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences has created a solid foundation on which it can now continue to grow. We want to promote innovative research and teaching at the highest level, expand international networks and integrate a broad global perspective into our academic activities.” (NJ)

PART OF A WORLDWIDE NETWORK

The University of Passau maintains partnerships with well over 250 universities around the world. This offers students and researchers the opportunity for unforgettable experiences on a personal and academic level. All important information on each individual university is collected in a comprehensive database.

Looking at a map of Germany, Passau sits right on the border; but if you look at the map of Europe, the situation looks quite different. Passau is practically at the geographical centre, so it is only logical that it should set a focus on Europe. There is intensive cooperation with its direct neighbours, Austria and Czechia, and the University of Passau is also involved in many international research consortia.

278 worldwide partner universities

However, international research projects are only one side of the coin; the exchange of students from Passau to the world and from there to Passau is the other. To this end, the University has built up an extensive network of international partner universities. There are currently 291 universities in 62 countries that offer students the opportunity to study abroad in more than 430 different exchange programmes. In Europe, for example, bachelor's and master's students from all faculties can choose from 194 partner universities; further afield there are 26 in Central and South America, 15 in the USA and Canada, 8 in countries of the former Soviet Union (excluding Russia), 8 in the Middle East, 30 in Asia, 9 in African countries and one in Australia.

Two degrees at no extra time

A special form of these partnerships are double degree programmes, which lead to the student gaining a degree from two distinct universities. The University of Passau maintains such programmes with Universidad del Salvador in Argentina and with various universities in France, Italy, Spain, Czechia, Slovenia, Tunisia and Hungary, as well as with the New Jersey Institute of Technology in the USA. "Two degrees at no extra time! Our integrated study programmes across national borders particularly promote students' language skills, flexibility and intercultural competence", said Barbara Zacharias, Head of the International Office and Student Services Division.

Foreign exchange for teaching staff

Broadening their horizons is not just for students; teaching staff, whether professors or lecturers, have similar opportunities. The Erasmus+ programme, for example, subsidises guest lectureships at European partner universities. The aims of the programme

include strengthening the European dimension of the host university, supplementing the courses offered there and imparting expert knowledge to students who do not wish or are unable to study abroad, and of course, furthering the professional and intercultural development of the teaching staff member who is going abroad. "A stay abroad represents great added value for teaching staff, too – both professionally and personally", said Stefanie Dallmeier, Head of the International Office, adding: "We are always more than happy to provide information about the various opportunities!"

Overview and choosing a partner university

"Moveon", the online database of partner universities, provides a good overview of the vast range of exchange opportunities offered by the University. Passau students and doctoral candidates can use it to look up all exchange opportunities available to them from European and worldwide programmes. The system allows them to filter the records by various criteria, including study level, faculty, bachelor's and master's level and, of course, by country. The information on the individual universities and programmes is comprehensive: Not only does it include the relevant contact persons at both institutions, but also the length of stay, available degree programmes and number of places, reviews and much more. "At the beginning of each winter semester, we invite all students and teaching staff to the International Day of the University, where we provide information about the range of study-abroad programmes", said Franziska Hanisch, the Outward Mobility Coordinator at the International Office. "Every year we really look forward to the conversations and the colourful mix of information stands about worldwide programmes and universities."

Open to the world

The University of Passau's international network is a two-way street: It not only offers Passau's students the option to go abroad but brings students and scholars from all the world to Passau. Around 1,700 international students are currently studying and conducting research at our university. Some are here for just one or two semesters, others for the entire duration of their degree programme.



The University of Passau's internationality in figures

- **291 partner universities in 62 countries** (as of August 2024)
- **435 worldwide exchange programmes**
- **25 double degree programmes**
- **1,664 international students** (in SuSe 2024)
- **350 Passau students currently abroad** (in WiSe 2024–25)



Moreover, a good number of young researchers currently working at the University of Passau are funded through exchange or fellowship programmes, such as those offered by the DAAD or the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. “Our international students and visiting scholars enrich our university academically, but that is not all: They are also gatekeepers to the world in many other areas – for example in the cultural and linguistic diversification of the University”, said Professor Christina Hansen, Vice President for International Affairs and Diversity. “This internationality benefits not only us, the university, but the entire region. Every international student who stays here after graduating and takes up employment reduces the shortage of skilled labour in the region.” In addition, international academics who have been in Passau for some time tend to help their newly arrived colleagues settle into life and work here. “Internationalisation therefore delivers a strong impetus for the entire education sector in Passau.” (NJ)

INDIGO NETWORK CELEBRATES ITS TENTH ANNIVERSARY



The East-Bavarian Internet and Digitalisation Network (INDIGO) is a joint effort of six universities in the region who are pooling their scientific expertise in the area of internet and digitalisation. This autumn, INDIGO is celebrating its 10th anniversary.

The vision of the initiators of INDIGO was to create a network in which members pull together to jointly tackle complex scientific questions and engage in knowledge transfer in the field of the internet and digitalisation. “The point of the network was that it would be composed of the East-Bavarian universities of Passau and Regensburg as well as the universities of applied sciences of Amberg-Weiden, Deggendorf, Landshut and Regensburg – each of which has its own unique positioning and strengths. It was clear to us that, by working together, we could better bring our quality and weight to bear. That’s why we wanted to strengthen our collaboration and share our scientific and technical expertise in the field of the internet and digitalisation”, said Professor Burkhard Freitag. Freitag was the main initiator of the network, and at the time was also the president of the University of Passau. This was also based on the conviction that many issues in this field cannot be adequately addressed by individual disciplines working in isolation. INDIGO was established to promote cooperation in basic and applied research as well as knowledge transfer.

The idea at the core of the network has always been to strengthen Eastern Bavaria’s status as an excellent centre of science, but also as a place for successful and high-performing commercial enterprises. “The fact that the network is now firmly established shows how important the trusting cooperation that has developed over the years is to all six universities, not least as a result of the TRIO project. Together we are simply much more visible and in a better position to give the region an offering that is quite unique thanks to the different types of universities involved and the large number of disciplines represented by them. If anything, the registration figures for the TRIOKON conference show quite clearly that this has been recognised in the region”, said Professor Tomas Sauer, spokesperson for the steering committee. The TRIOKON transfer conference takes place annually and is hosted by one of the member universities. The most recent conference, in September 2024, was dedicated to the topic “What is AI really capable of doing?” and was organised by the University of Regensburg.

The 10-year anniversary of the INDIGO Network was also celebrated as part of the conference programme, and the “beginning and future” of the collaboration was highlighted in a moderated discussion between Professors Wolfgang Baier and Burkhard Freitag, both of whom were founding members of the network.

Organisational structure

INDIGO is made up of the six participating universities, who constitute the network’s membership. Its board of directors consists of the presidents of the participating universities. As the network’s highest decision-making body, it is responsible for defining fundamental strategic issues. Its remit includes development planning, strategic orientation and financing of the network as

well as overseeing the work of the steering committee. Professor Ralph Schneider (OTH Regensburg) is the spokesperson for the board of directors. The steering committee is made up of one member and one deputy from each of the participating universities. Its duties include the preparation of annual plans, annual financial planning and the management and further development of the network. The spokesperson for the steering committee is Professor Tomas Sauer. The INDIGO Office, headed by network manager Anne-Kathrin Böhm, is responsible for the operational activities of the network and is located at the University of Passau.

Network activities

“We are proud that INDIGO is so broadly positioned in its activities”, said Anne-Kathrin Böhm. These include the advancement of early career researchers and the support of research collaborations. For both of these, the network places a focus on interdisciplinary cooperation in applied and basic research between the universities. Specifically for the topic of artificial intelligence – which is abbreviated “KI” in German – the KI Campus Ostbayern (KICO) was established in 2020. KICO is a collaborative platform through which the participating universities seek to pool their expertise in the field of AI, strengthen scientific exchange and expand cooperation with industry and society. Exchange, communication and networking are core parameters of the network, which sees itself as a knowledge and information hub for members and cooperation partners.

Continuation of the network

The presidents of the universities and colleges in Eastern Bavaria convened in July 2022 to formally decide the continuation their collaboration in the INDIGO Network. To this end, a framework agreement was concluded between the INDIGO member universities, thus manifesting the good and trusting cooperation within the network. This will lead to an expansion in existing research collaborations as well as joint activities in knowledge and technology transfer and further promote interdisciplinary dialogue between different academic disciplines. Established formats, such as the TRIOKON transfer conference, will also be continued and developed jointly by all member universities and cooperation partners. The INDIGO Network will continue to engage in appropriate networking and communication activities to enhance the visibility of the INDIGO member universities’ wealth of scientific expertise and concerns in business, society and politics. (BW)

SUSTAINABLE FARMING IN INDONESIA

A number of initiatives in Indonesia have been trying for some time to promote sustainable farming methods to increase soil fertility and reduce pesticide residues that pollute food and groundwater. However, the transition to organic farming is slow-going. Professor Michael Grimm, who holds the Chair of Development Economics at the University of Passau, and his former research assistant Dr Nathalie Luck have investigated in various projects over the past few years whether specific training measures and awareness-raising can accelerate this process. Over the course of six years, the researchers have polled more than 1,100 farmers in 60 villages located in three different districts.

From 2018 to 2023, the researchers conducted four waves of data collection. Each time, the focus was on the impact of the training courses designed by Indonesian experts together with the Passau team and implemented locally in randomly selected villages. Comparisons with control villages in which the training was not offered showed that the training was effective. However, wanting to dig deeper, Grimm and Luck carried out two further projects to investigate whether the training had a longer-term effect.

One finding was that the transition to organic farming methods is not linear. Nevertheless, the data also showed that a certain amount of knowledge was built up over time and that the use of sustainable farming methods increased as a result. Participation in training courses also reduced the use of chemical nitrogen fertiliser. When soil tests showed that organic methods improved soil quality, this motivated farmers to continue using them. The study also showed that the impact of the training courses started diminishing after as little as one year. “To have a long-term effect, we need more measures and support from local extension workers, who should also carry out regular soil tests”, concluded Luck. (KH)



An instructor demonstrates how to take soil samples for testing.



Comparison of a rice plant leaf with a leaf colour chart, which is used to assess the nutrient content.

ETHICAL ISSUES WITH AI IN EVERYDAY WORKING LIFE

The use of AI is on the rise in all areas of professional life: In job applications it sifts through CVs automatically, and some companies use it as a tool to organise work. However, this relatively new technology is presenting more and more companies with ethical challenges, for example in the area of data protection.

In the AI Ethics In Practice (AIEP) project funded by the Bavarian State Ministry of Science and the Arts (StMWK), a team from the University of Passau led by Karoline Reinhardt, Professor of Applied Ethics, is researching the ethical problems that technicians in companies face when using AI in product development and technologies. Based on these results, the researchers are designing a training programme with a university certificate from the University of Passau.

The fact that AI learns from using real-world data raises many ethical problems. For instance, existing biases can be reinforced by the technology, such as when it sorts out people in application processes based on their name or gender. “There are also problems with the attribution of responsibility”, said Dr Heiner Koch, research associate at the Professorship of Applied Ethics and at AIEP. This is the case in autonomous driving, for example, when AI products are used. In the event of an accident, the question arises who is responsible: “Is it the person who uses the car, the person who produces the car or the person who developed the controlling AI?”

Other questions, of the sensible use of AI in companies and data protection, also arise: “Where does the data come from that is used to train the AI, and what data can it use without violating data protection?”. Questions like these, said Dr Koch, are at the core of the matter.

To address them, the team of researchers are developing a certificate programme for training technicians and engineers in companies in the Passau region. The training programme is intended to go beyond merely conveying knowledge; it should also give participants an opportunity to discuss their own experiences and real-world problems within the group. (PS)



ANTISEMITISM IN NORTH RHINE-WEST- PHALIA

Professor Lars Rensmann, who holds the Chair of Political Science with a focus on Comparative Government, led the study on unreported cases of “Antisemitism North Rhine-Westphalian society in 2024” together with sociologist, Professor Heiko Beyer (Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf).

The study found that antisemitic attitudes and prejudices are widespread in North Rhine-Westphalia. Depending on the question asked, between 8 and 24 percent of those surveyed showed consolidated antisemitic attitudes, with strong variations between the different forms of antisemitism. The study took into account religious antisemitism, modern or “traditional” antisemitism and secondary or “Holocaust-related” antisemitism, as well as Israel-related antisemitism. This study is innovative in that it not only presents a new, comprehensive survey of antisemitic attitudes but also includes experimentation on antisemitic behaviour in various different contexts.

“What’s particularly worrying is the widespread acceptance of antisemitism, and particularly Israel-related antisemitism, among teenagers. Nearly half of the respondents harboured camouflaged antisemitic resentments, especially conspiracy myths and so-called secondary antisemitism related to the memory of the Holocaust. The fight against antisemitism remains a task for society as a whole, and is closely related to the defence of democracy at large. Antisemitism has increasingly become socially accepted or tolerated, especially among young people, and this process of normalisation has to be stopped and reversed”, said Lars Rensmann.

Link to the original study: www.antisemitismusbeauftragte.nrw/sites/default/files/2024-09/Abschlussbericht_Antisemitismus_in_NRW_2024.pdf

IMPROVING ARGUMENTATIVE SKILLS WITH AI

In many degree programmes, students need to acquire subject-specific writing and argumentation skills. These include the ability to learn from texts and to use them as inspiration for their own text production, to adequately express themselves in the written language and to convincingly present subject-specific frames of reference in writing. Can artificial intelligence (AI) help law and business students to improve their writing and argumentation skills? Under the leadership of legal expert Professor Urs Kramer and in close collaboration with economist Professor Johann Graf Lambsdorff and computer scientist Professor Michael Granitzer, researchers at the University of Passau are investigating this question across disciplines.



As part of the BMBF-funded DeepWrite project, researchers will develop an AI-based assistance system that combines domain-specific knowledge graphs with deep language analysis to create a scalable and adaptive learning and teaching programme through interaction with lecturers and students. This system will be geared towards synchronous teaching in face-to-face and online settings as well as asynchronous self-study. On completion of the pilot project, the system can be expanded to include other study programmes, disciplines and universities.

At the University of Passau, lecturers have long been interested in ways to promote student engagement. With DeepWrite they can combine their didactical competencies with cutting-edge information technology. To this end, they can make use of classEX, a program developed by Professors Johann Graf Lambsdorff and Marcus Giamattei of the University of Passau, which is being used throughout the world in synchronised lecturing. This means that the data required to train the AI is collected in a legally compliant manner and interfaces to the assistance system are established. This gives students feedback on the structure and quality of the texts they write, which often lack structure.

CEO HUMOUR

An international study led by economists from the University of Passau has investigated how CEO humour affects the reputation of their company among infomediaries such as journalists or analysts. The research team led by Professor Andreas König (Chair of Strategic Management, Innovation and Entrepreneurship) distinguishes between four types of CEO humour. Two of them are positive: affiliative CEO humour, which puts others in a positive light, and self-elevating CEO humour. The other two types of CEO humour are negative: self-deprecating CEO humour, and aggressive CEO humour, where the CEO disparages others by making fun of them at their expense.

The researchers' core argument is that CEO humour has a direct impact on the mental and emotional states of information intermediaries. Moreover, depending on its type, CEO humour can accommodate or violate deeply rooted role expectations of CEOs. The researchers argue that both forms of positive CEO humour have a positive effect on the company's reputation.

The negative types of humour are particularly exciting: Here the team argues that in the case of CEO humour, both forms have a different effect than previously assumed and normatively desired for the humour of executives. Humour that reveals one's own weaknesses is socially desirable. The practical literature for middle management also advises using this form of humour to create a sense of closeness. But in the case of CEOs, this humour can have a negative effect. "Even though we wish it weren't so: The stock market punishes CEOs who show weakness too often", said Professor Andreas König.

Aggressive CEO humour, on the other hand, contravenes social norms, violates the role model function and demeans the people at the receiving end of the joke. "Nevertheless, we can argue that, sadly, this form of CEO humour pays off – at least for the perception of the company's competitiveness", said Andreas König. "It's unfortunate, but there is still an elbow-like understanding of leadership roles that is rewarded by the capital markets – and the media." (KH)

Article and video in the DFM:

www.digital.uni-passau.de/beitraege/2024/ceo-humor



RESTRUCTURING THE ENERGY SYSTEM

In the cells4.energy project, a team led by Professor Hermann de Meer is investigating whether the energy system can be restructured using regional energy cells. The electricity grid in Europe is undergoing major changes. Renewable, decentralised energy sources are being expanded on a massive scale. As these energy sources are mostly dependent on weather conditions, the number and capacity of storage facilities and controllable loads must be increased. In the past, fossil fuels were used both for power generation and to maintain the grid frequency and voltage. This also needs to be decentralised.

“The massive expansion of renewable energy requires a paradigm shift from centralised to decentralised generation”, said Professor Hermann de Meer, who holds the Chair of Computer Networks and Computer Communications at the University of Passau. “This means that energy no longer only flows from the transmission grid into the local grids, but a significant exchange of energy also takes place within the local grids.” Load balancing is also shifting at least partially to the consumer side.

The team of computer scientists are testing a concept for organising the energy system as system of regional cells. A “multi-energy virtual power plant” is being defined on the basis of these cells. This is an intelligent control system that coordinates consumer-side flexibility, storage and the provision of ancillary services. What is special about this is that the power plant coordinates the sector-coupling as well. “The energy cell concept could facilitate the integration of renewables and at the same time ensure that citizens have better control options”, said Professor Hermann de Meer.

IMPROVING SOFTWARE QUALITY WITH AI

Large language models are changing the process of software development. At the University of Passau, researchers are working with practitioners to explore their potential and develop new tools. In the DeepCode project, for example, Professor Gordon Fraser (Chair of Software Engineering II) is working with the company msg systems ag to investigate AI models that are capable of efficiently analysing source code. The project, which is funded by the Bavarian Research Foundation, utilises various deep learning techniques, a branch of artificial intelligence that works with artificial neural networks. Initial results are now available.

“AI allows us to analyse and improve source code in a way that was previously impossible”, explained Professor Fraser. The potential for improving code quality is enormous, but in order to realise this potential, data, models and tools based on them are needed. The project team have made significant progress in this area over the past year – in the collection of data, the creation of tools to process this data efficiently and the development of various AI models.

The practitioner team tested the developed models in pilot projects – with success: The feedback from the practitioners was positive throughout, particularly with regard to the quality of the proposed code improvements. The team were able to demonstrate an increase in quality of over 20 percent by fine-tuning with data from the company msg.

“The results so far have exceeded our expectations. We see great potential for the application of our software development methods, especially in quality assurance and software maintenance”, said Florian Kandlinger, who co-manages the project at msg systems ag.



NEUBURGER GESPRÄCHSKREIS HIGHLIGHTS IN 2024

For over 40 years, Neuburger Gesprächskreis für Wissenschaft und Praxis e. V. has been a vibrant platform for businesses, friends and alumni who want to get involved with the University of Passau. Counting 220 members, it has acted as a forum for the discussion of topical issues and provided in-depth expertise through a continually shifting country focus.

“We can look back with pride and joy on an exciting and richly filled event year 2024”, said Dr Fritz Audebert, 1st Chairman of the Neuburger Gesprächskreis.

This year’s annual symposium, held on 7 June 2024 in the former Fürstzell Monastery, was dedicated to the particularly multifaceted theme of “Incredible India” and was attended by high-calibre speakers and experts from all over the world, including His Excellency Harish Parvathaneni, Indian Ambassador to Germany, and His Excellency Dr Philipp Ackermann, German Ambassador to the Republic of India. With a total of 160 registrations, this symposium proved the most popular event in the Neuburger Gesprächskreis’s history. The previous evening, the Indian Ambassador, accompanied by the Indian Consul General, met with Indian students at the University of Passau on the initiative of the Neuburger Gesprächskreis. In the context of the symposium, possibilities for more in-depth collaborations were also explored and initiated.

The popular format “Female Power in and out of the University of Passau”, in which successful alumnae in senior leadership positions talked of their careers and activities, took place on 1 February 2024. This year’s guests were Karin Burger (founder and managing director, team karin burger GmbH), Anke Buttler (Group CFO, Schwan Stabilo), Dr Sandra Dembeck (CFO, Zalando), Prof. Annette Hautli-Janisz (Professorship of Computational Rhetoric and Natural Language Processing, University of Passau), Prof. Bettina Noltenius (Vice President for Studies, Teaching, Ethics and Quality Assurance and holder of the Chair of Criminal Law and Procedure, Criminology and Philosophy of Law at the University of Passau), Anja Rauschardt (managing director, RAUSCHARDT PR), Isabel Schmitt-Falckenberg (head of department, Federal Ministry of the Interior and Home Affairs) and Maria Stoy (head of department for Youth Engagement, German Committee for UNICEF).



Signing the Golden Book of the market town of Fürstzell (from left to right): Dr Philipp Ackermann (German Ambassador to India), Dr Fritz Audebert (Chairman of the Neuburger Gesprächskreis), Harish Parvathaneni (Indian Ambassador to Germany), Prof. Ulrich Bartosch (President of the University of Passau) and Manfred Hammer (Mayor of Fürstzell)

Also well-received were Neuburger Gesprächskreis’s regular webinars, in which academic and professional experts discuss “the new normal” in various subject areas. In a total of seven webinars in 2024, some 750 participants debated topics such as artificial intelligence, international trade in goods, climate policy and the Middle East conflict. There were live broadcasts from the Office of the Federal President, from Lebanon, Argentina and the Fiji Islands. This series of events will also be continued in 2025.

“I am delighted that I can already invite everyone to two key events planned for next year: ‘Female Power’ will take place on 13 February 2025, and the annual symposium at Neuburg Castle on 23 May 2025”, said Fritz Audebert.

“PASSAU GRÜNDET – STARTUP STARS OF THE UNIVERSITY – THE EXHIBITION”

Passau and the University are sources of successful entrepreneurship. Many inspiring founders have started here and have turned their expertise into good ideas. At the same time, other teams are constantly developing new ideas and working on their own startups.



Together with Passau – The Entrepreneurial Campus and the kuwi network, the AlumniClub of the University of Passau has snapped exciting photos of these personalities and presented them in a large exhibition from May to July 2024.

The aims of this exhibition were to motivate visitors to pursue their own business ideas and get founding, as



well as to give the successful entrepreneurs greater visibility. “This is a great project involving different areas of the University, which shows very impressively the diversity of ideas that are generated here”, said Doreen Müller-Murr, managing director of the AlumniClub.

The 4th exhibition in this series will be staged in the University Library in May 2025. The pictures are currently on display in the Audimax Building and the Uni Live – Campus Meets Town room.

KUWI NETWORK: SHARING KNOWLEDGE – GROWING TOGETHER

For 30 years, the kuwi network (kuwi netzwerk international e.V.) has been connecting graduates and students of the University’s culture-related degree programmes, including ICBS, European Studies and others. Now counting almost 3,000 members, it is one of the biggest student and alumni networks of interdisciplinary and internationally oriented degree programmes in Germany. “Our kuwi.community is a real treasure trove – our members have unbelievably great life stories and professional profiles. We are very pleased that we were able to recruit the majority of coaches for our webinars from within our network and thereby to pass on the knowledge that lies within our network. This is a great gift and very enriching”, said Martina Brossmann, managing director of the Kuwi Office.

Further information and contact details at www.kuwi.de



Kuwi webinar programme for the first half of 2025


(To register, send an e-mail to seminare@team.kuwi.de. Please note that all webinars are held in German.)

- **Sogni d’oro – How to realise your dreams**
28 January 2025 (18:30–19:30)
Kuwi alumna Heike Anne Dietzel, independent careers counsellor and coach
- **Looking inwards – how parents and children can take their well-being into their own hands**
17 February 2025 (19:30–20:30)
Kuwi alumna Astrid Meinberg, business coach, child and youth coach and self-assertion coach for children
- **Learn about the health-promoting Alexander Technique**
18 March 2025 (18:30–19:30)
Kuwi alumna Theresa Brunnmüller, artist manager and coach
- **Leadership Skills**
1 April 2025 (18:30–19:30)
Kuwi alumnus Walter Feichtner, and Jörg Wunderer, careers coaches
- **Raising awareness for mental illness in the workplace**
13 May 2025 (18:30–19:30)
Kuwi alumna Claudia Stadler, licensed alternative practitioner (limited to the field of psychotherapy) and systemic coach

A SAFE SPACE FOR MUTUAL EXCHANGE



Luca Ienco got the ball rolling for the establishment of open student self-help groups at the University.



Luca Ienco studies the teacher education programme for primary education and has been active in Nightline Passau e.V. – the listening hotline run by and for students – since 2021. Although he is now involved in the management of Nightline and no longer answers the phone himself, his time there made him realise time and again how important it is to talk about mental health and mental illness. “Many callers are just looking for sympathetic ear – especially when they experience less understanding for their situation in their personal environment”, he explained. Being affected by a mental illness himself, Ienco found out during a stay in hospital that it was not only the therapeutic services on offer there that helped him, but also the exchange with other sufferers in an atmosphere characterised less by condemnation and more by mutual understanding and empathy. “Walking around the campus, it’s easy to get the feeling that everyone else has their life in order and that you’re the only one who’s struggling.” But statistics show a different reality, that many people are affected by mental illness or are having a hard time in some other way. “I had the feeling that a self-help group for students could make such things visible and create a safe space for mutual exchange. But there was nothing like this at the University”, said Luca Ienco.

Since 2022, he has been a member of the board of Nightline Passau, which led to him joining the University’s mental health working group. This was set up during the covid-19 period and is headed by the Vice President for Studies, Teaching, Ethics and Quality Assurance, Professor Bettina Noltenius. When he presented his idea for a student self-help group to the working group, it was met with much approval. Then, in February 2024, his idea was put into practice with the support and encouragement of university psychologists, Dr Lisa Huber-Flammersfeld and Maria Zessin, and others.

“There are now in fact two self-help groups, because we thought it made sense to keep them a little smaller. As the participants share very intimate and personal experiences, it was important for us to create an atmosphere of trust. We set common discussion rules and, of course, nothing that is shared leaves the group. Our self-help groups are an open and non-judgemental discussion forum for anyone who is looking to exchange ideas, share their own experiences or hear the perspectives of others”, explained Luca Ienco. For him, it is particularly fulfilling to see how much it benefits many participants to say certain things out loud and be met with mutual understanding. The self-help groups are not restricted to those with a diagnosed condition; anyone who is generally struggling with their mental health during their studies can get in touch by e-mail to join. (SvS)

For further information visit:
www.uni-passau.de/en/psychological-counselling/health-and-well-being



The award-winners of the 2024 Dies academicus

DIES ACADEMICUS 2024

The Dies academicus takes place every autumn to thank all those who have rendered outstanding services to the University of Passau. The award ceremony took place after the traditional keynote speech, which this year was given by Professor Walter Rosenthal, President of the German Rectors' Conference, on the topic of "Academic freedom. Thoughts to mark 75 years of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany".



University President Professor Ulrich Bartosch and keynote speaker Professor Walter Rosenthal

The award-winners are:

- Dr Andrii Mironchenko:
Karl-Heinz-Pollok Memorial Award
- Dr Amelie Zimmermann, Dr Andreas Aigner, Dr Mirjam Dick,
Dr Nicola Schroth:
Doctoral Thesis Award of the University of Passau
- Professor Ralf Hohlfeld:
Best Knowledge Transfer Achievement Award
- Professor Carolin Häussler:
Award for Special Services to Knowledge Transfer
- Johannes Fernando Forck, Katharina Drescher,
Dr Johannes Christian Abel, Dr Stephanie Großmann,
Dr Florian Wobser, Kathrin Schiermeier, Kateřina Milotová:
Award for Good Teaching
- Professor Marina Ortrud Hertrampf:
Award for Services to Internationalisation
- Leo Kilz and Bastian Mogel (KulturtranspOrt Passau initiative):
Special Commitment Award
- Lukas and Julian Grimm
Sports & Health Promotion Award

NEW PROFESSORIAL APPOINTMENTS

- Professor Axinja Hachfeld
Chair of Educational Science with a focus on School Development and Professionalisation Research, appointed on 1 April 2024
- Professor Ulrich Gnewuch
Chair of Explainable AI-based Business Information Systems, appointed on 1 May 2024
- Professor Jin Gerlach
Chair of Data and Information Management, appointed on 1 June 2024
- Professor Markus Weißer
Chair of Dogmatic Theology and Contemporary Theological Questions, appointed on 1 April 2024
- Professor Nora Nahr
Professorship of Legal Informatics with a focus on Natural Language Processing, appointed on 1 July 2024
- Professor Inken Heldt
Professorship of The Political System of the Federal Republic and Civic Education, appointed on 1 May 2024

PROFESSORS WHO HAVE ENTERED RETIREMENT

- Professor Franz Lehner
Chair of Information Systems with a focus on Information and IT Service Management, retired on 1 September 2024

WELCOME RECEPTION FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The University of Passau is currently host to about 1,650 international students from 105 countries. For 235 exchange students, free movers and double-degree students, this is their first semester in Passau. Nationals from Turkey, France, Argentina and Tunisia make up the largest groups among them. As every year in October, the University Executive the International Office team organised a large reception to welcome the international students. As part of the event, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) prize for outstanding performance of international students at German universities was awarded, which this year went to Isha Das from India.



Vice President Professor Christina Hansen and DAAD Award winner Isha Das

FOCUS ON SUSTAINABILITY

On 20 June, the University marked “Sustainability Day” with a festive event. The keynote speaker and journalist Christiane Grefe made a fiery plea in her speech “The grounded society – why sustainability needs a new policy for land and soil” in favour of soil as the basis for human life. The awards for special services to sustainability were also presented during the event. Dr Paul Hamann-Rose of the Chair of English Literature and Culture at the University of Passau was awarded the Award for Research with Sustainability Relevance. The Award for Sustainability Activities on Campus went to the student-founded Innwerk association, an open workshop that actively campaigns against the throwaway society by sharing tools and repairing them together. The Honorary Award for Sustainability Activities on Campus went to the Student Services Association for Lower Bavaria and Upper Palatinate (STWNO).

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