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## Press Release

### **ERC Grant: High EU Funding for Mannheim Psychologist Jochen Gebauer**

**Mannheim psychologist Professor Jochen Gebauer is to receive around EUR 2 million in research funding thanks to a Consolidator Grant from the European Research Council (ERC). His research activities center on the following question: Why do people assess themselves and others primarily on the two personality trait dimensions of agency and communion? In other words, what evolutionary advantage do people gain from evaluating themselves and others primarily on the basis of these so-called “Big Two meta-traits”?**

To assess ourselves and other people, we usually use two primary trait dimensions, known in psychology as *agency* (assertiveness) and *communion* (good nature). In psychology, agency and communion have such significance that they are often referred to as just the “Big Two”.

#### **Why do agency and communion determine how we think about ourselves and others?**

“The fact that the ‘Big Two’ are so incredibly important to us humans when we reflect on ourselves and on other people cannot be a coincidence. There must be an evolutionary advantage for us in paying particular attention to these two dimensions of personality traits,” explains Mannheim psychologist Jochen Gebauer. But what exactly is this advantage? “Whatever it is, we have to assume that the evolutionary advantage must be substantial, otherwise agency and communion would not be so central in human thinking,” Gebauer says.

#### **International and interdisciplinary team to decode the “Big Two”**

To explore this question, the European Research Council has awarded Jochen Gebauer one of the highly competitive and prestigious Consolidator Grants. Together with colleagues from the Universities of Copenhagen (Denmark) and Exeter (UK), Gebauer wants to develop and test a new theory on the “Big Two” over the next five years. To this end, the interdisciplinary research team is planning, among other things, specially developed laboratory experiments, extensive long-term surveys, and the consolidation and analysis of huge amounts of data from official statistics and other sources.

Professor Thomas Puhl, President of the University of Mannheim, congratulated Jochen Gebauer on the approval of his research proposal: “We are very happy that another researcher from our university has been awarded ERC funding. This round, only 12

Consolidator Grants were awarded across Europe in the fields of Social Psychology and Sociology. One of these is the project headed by Professor Gebauer. The award confirms the excellent reputation in the field of Social Sciences that the University of Mannheim enjoys internationally.”

The European Research Council is not the first academic institution that Jochen Gebauer has been able to convince with his research proposals. When the 40-year-old came to the University of Mannheim in 2014, or more precisely to the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES), he had already received an official grant notification from the German Research Foundation (DFG) for an Emmy Noether Junior Research Group. Since then, Gebauer's team at the MZES has been researching the role of self-image in explaining human behavior, especially conformist behavior. In 2017, Gebauer secured a Heisenberg Professorship in Comparative Social and Personality Psychology, also funded by the DFG. He will continue to coordinate his research projects under the new Consolidator Grant at the MZES. “The University of Mannheim and the MZES provide exactly the right working environment for my research activities. This is the right place for me and therefore I am looking forward to many more exciting and fruitful years in Mannheim,” says Gebauer.

#### **About the European Research Council (ERC)**

Funding fundamental pioneering research is a key priority of the European Union. For this purpose, the European Research Council (ERC) was established in 2007. The ERC Consolidator Grants are designed to support outstanding researchers in further consolidating their excellent position in the international research community. The ERC's decision in awarding the highly endowed grants is based on the scientific excellence of the applicants as well as the potentially groundbreaking research question of the research proposal. In the latest round of Consolidator Grants, a total of EUR 632 million were awarded to 313 top researchers across 24 countries. The approval rate was just under 12 percent of the submitted applications.

#### **Latest round in funding brings University of Mannheim's count of ERC grants up to ten**

Since its foundation, the European Research Council has awarded a total of ten ERC grants to researchers of the University of Mannheim. Five of these received an ERC Starting Grant, while the other five were recognized with an ERC Consolidator Grant. Professor Irena Kogan's project “PARFORM - Partnerschaftsbildung von Geflüchteten in Deutschland” (Partnership Building of Refugees in Germany) is another research project at the MZES that is currently funded by the ERC.

Click here to read the press release by the ERC: <https://erc.europa.eu/news/erc-2021-consolidator-grants-results>

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