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Press Release

ERC Grant for Mannheim Sociologist Lars Leszczensky for Research on the Future of Social Interaction

The European Research Council (ERC) has awarded a prestigious ERC Starting Grant to Mannheim Sociologist Dr. Lars Leszczensky. The researcher will receive approx. 1.5 million euros to analyze how the social contacts of children influence those of their parents, and vice versa. Six researchers of the University of Mannheim are currently holding an ERC Grant; three of them are researchers at the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research.

Societies in Europe are becoming more diverse, for example in ethnicity and religion. However, from childhood until adulthood most people are friends with people of the same group. How will social divisions change over time? Are the social contacts of children similar to those of their parents – although they grow up in more diverse societies? As the diversity in the daily life of children increases, does this also influence the social contacts of their parents?

Dr. Lars Leszczensky, a 38-years old sociologist at the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research, has been researching social integration and inter group relations for more than ten years. The Research Council of the European Union (ERC) has now awarded an ERC Starting Grant to Leszczensky.

The President of the University of Mannheim, Professor Thomas Puhl, is happy about the award: “In the past three years, Mannheim social scientists have been awarded three ERC Grants. This shows that the University of Mannheim belongs to the best research institutions for social sciences in Europe.”

New chances for social cohesion?

With the ERC project, Leszczensky wants to find out how the social contacts of children influence their parents’ social contacts, and vice versa. “Children today are growing up in more diverse societies than their parents. Almost automatically, they have more diverse social interactions. This is a chance to increase social cohesion and social permeability in the parents’ generation”, Leszczensky explains.

The common view is that social integration is a top-to-bottom process: “Parents do not only influence their children’s views, prejudices, and values but also who their children meet and who they become friends with”, the sociologist says. But the common view was too shortsighted: “No one disputes that parents influence their children. But this is a two-way street: Today, children meet other children of the most diverse backgrounds, for example, in kindergarten, in school, or during after-school activities. Sooner or later, many parents get to know the friends of their children and their parents and this is an opportunity to expand the parents’ social contacts as well.”

Are children helping to integrating their parents into the society of tomorrow? Leszczensky has five years and a budget of approx. 1.5 million euros to find out if this is the case and, if it proves to be true, how it could happen.

First, the researcher will develop an expansive theoretical model to analyze the mutual influence of the social contacts of children and their parents. Leszczensky then wants to empirically test the model - which requires a huge effort. “It is relatively easy to determine who has contact with whom. But we also want to know why people are in contact with each other and how these contacts change over time. And we want to have this information for children and their parents. But longitudinal studies analyzing the social contacts of children and their parents over time do not yet exist.” This means that the research team headed by Leszczensky must collect complex data. The scientist plans to conduct a survey among approx. 2,500 children in kindergarten and school and their parents. The survey will take place every year for three years. The outstanding feature is that we will interview all parents and children of the same year. “This way, we can retrace individual developments and also analyze if and how the social contacts of children influence those of their parents, and vice versa”, says Leszczensky.

About the European Research Council (ERC)

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The European Research Council (ERC) is an institution established by the European Commission to fund basic research. The ERC Starting Grants are part of the research and innovation program of the EU, Horizon 2020 and fund the research projects of and the formation of research groups by promising early-stage researchers. The ERC supports ground-breaking and visionary research that breaks down the barriers between basic and applied research, between traditional disciplines and between research and technology. In the latest round, a total of 636 million euros were awarded to 408 top researchers across 26 countries.

Ten ERC Grants for the University of Mannheim

Since the European Research Council was founded, ten scientists of the University of Mannheim have been awarded an ERC Grant. Five researchers have been awarded an ERC Starting Grant and five an ERC Consolidator Grant. Four of these projects have already been completed and six are still on-going. Two other research projects at the MZES are currently funded by ERC Grants: Professor Dr. Irena Kogan, a sociologist, works on the research project “Partnership Formation in the Context of Recent Refugee Migration” (PARFORM) and Professor Dr. Jochen Gebauer, a psychologist, on the “Agency Communion Theory” (ACT)

project.

Click here to read the press release by the ERC: <https://erc.europa.eu/news-events/news/starting-grants-2022-call-results>.

A press photo can be downloaded here: www.uni-mannheim.de/newsroom/presse/pressefotos

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