



Alumnus Philip Leifeld

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Senior Lecturer in Research Methods
and Director of Postgraduate Research
Training, School of Social and
Political Sciences, University of Glasgow



Philip Leifeld

“Wouldn’t it be great if we could predict the outcome of political debates like we forecast the weather?” Philip Leifeld, now a Senior Lecturer at the University of Glasgow in the School of Social and Political Sciences, has been pursuing this question since his PhD.

He completed his dissertation at the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research and the Max Planck Institute for Research on Collective Goods. The PhD programme was new and designed to bring together graduates from different disciplines. Because they did not have an expert in his field present who could co-supervise him, he collaborated with the University of Konstanz, where he received his PhD in 2011.

Philip Leifeld studied Politics and Public Administration at the University of Konstanz and took courses in policy networks and network analysis, at a time when network analysis was “quite an esoteric subject within political science, a peripheral area!” It was done descriptively then and clearly defined results were rare. But within the last ten years, it all changed, and now statistical methods and modelling are commonly used, which made analysis more reliable. For his PhD, Leifeld taught himself how to write specific software programs, which he needed to visualize the dynamics of political debates as networks. It was then possible to determine how different political actors would form coalitions, how existing coalitions would disappear and how polarisation would emerge in debates. The thesis received two awards and is the foundation of a long-term project in which Philip Leifeld wants to narrow down even further the mechanisms of political debates.

After his PhD, Philip Leifeld applied for a postdoctoral position at Eawag, the water research institute of the ETH Domain in Zurich, in the Department of Environmental Social Sciences. “I thought it would be a bit strange to be at a water research institute, but they asked exactly for my expertise, it was a good fit.” The research group is affiliated both with Eawag and the University of Bern, Institute of Political Science. Policy network research is a part of their research. As a senior researcher, he worked in the Policy Analysis and Environmental Governance group, a perfect match

for his field of research. He felt comfortable having the disciplinary affiliation in Bern because, “keep in mind that if you want to get a professorship, you have to show a clear disciplinary path. It shouldn’t be clouded by too many interdisciplinary stations along the way.”

He got the job, which was temporary for one year with an option for three additional years depending on if he could secure funding for the research projects. So he started to apply for grants. But since the situation was not ideal, he also looked for other career options in case he was unable to secure a grant. “In academia, it is important to have no illusions; you need priorities and plans for your career. If one plan doesn’t work out, try the next one. You really have to be flexible.”

When he saw an advertisement by the Zukunftskolleg for a Postdoctoral Fellowship, he was intrigued: “At first, I didn’t like the idea of returning to my old university, but the offer was very attractive. I would be part of the Zukunftskolleg and have the autonomy from the faculty to pursue my projects.” And then it happened: “Shortly after I got the Fellowship at the Zukunftskolleg, I also received a grant for the projects in Switzerland,” he laughs. Not surprisingly, he wanted to do both projects. Though the administrative part was tricky, it was possible to combine both positions, something for which he was extremely grateful.

He remembers one prominent feature of the Zukunftskolleg, the ***Jour Fixe***, with mixed emotions. Sometimes Philip Leifeld wanted to collaborate with scientists from other disciplines right away, because their subjects were so fascinating. Other times, he felt the urge to explain to other scientists how it’s done, and not in the most diplomatic way! It helped to understand the differences, but also the similarities between scientific fields. After his experiences there, he is sure: “Communication between disciplines is far more challenging than explaining your own research to others from the same field.”

From the many resources the Zukunftskolleg offered, he especially went for the ***Mentorship Programme***. It was not something he planned: “I was convinced I didn’t need a mentor because I was used to finding my way around.” But he had collaborated with Skyler Cranmer from Ohio State University before, and

wanted to finish some joint papers, ideally on site in America. So he applied to the Zukunftskolleg for funds to travel to Ohio. During his stay there, he spent a fair amount of time with his host and indeed a mentorship began! Philip Leifeld thinks it “is best if your mentor isn’t way ahead of you. Just a little bit is perfect, so you learn the most.” Skyler Cranmer also told him a lot about navigating the academic job market, a skill which came in handy when coming to terms with the University of Glasgow, where Philip Leifeld has been a senior lecturer and Director of Postgraduate Research Training since July 2016.



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Curriculum Vitae



Education

- 2011** PhD, Department of Politics and Public Administration, University of Konstanz
“Discourse Networks and German Pension Politics”
- 2007 – 2011** PhD student under Prof. Dr. Volker Schneider, University of Konstanz, and Prof. Dr. Christoph Engel, Max Planck Institute for Research on Collective Goods
- 2007** Master thesis, Department of Politics and Public Administration, University of Konstanz
“Policy Networks: A Citation Analysis of the Quantitative Literature”
- 2002 – 2007** Studies of Politics and Public Administration, University of Konstanz

Scientific career

- since 2016** Senior Lecturer in Research Methods (tenured) and Director of Postgraduate Research Training, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Glasgow
- 2013 – 2015** Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Politics and Public Administration, University of Konstanz
- 2012 – 2016** Postdoctoral Researcher, Eawag (Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology, ETH Domain, Zurich) and University of Bern
- 2011 – 2012** Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Politics and Public Administration, University of Konstanz
- 2008 – 2011** PhD Student, Max Planck Institute for Research on Collective Goods, Bonn
- 2007 – 2008** PhD Student, Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Rostock
- 2007** Researcher, ***Cluster of Excellence*** “Cultural Foundations of Integration”, University of Konstanz

Distinctions and Awards

- 2016** Best Poster Award, Political Networks Conference, St. Louis, USA
- 2013 – 2015** Fellow of the Zukunftskolleg, University of Konstanz
- 2015** Best Conference Paper Award, American Political Science Association (APSA), Section on Political Networks, Washington, USA
- 2014** Best Paper of an Early Scholar Award, European Conference on Social Networks (EUSN), Barcelona, Spain
- 2013** Südwestmetall Award for the Best Dissertation at the University of Konstanz
- 2013** Best Dissertation Award of the Foundation Science and Society at the University of Konstanz
- 2007 – 2011** MaxNetAging Doctoral Fellowship, Max Planck International Research Network on Aging