



Alumni Interview

✓ Please introduce yourself in a few sentences and tell us what your thesis topic was.

My name is Verena Bull, and since October 2024 I have been Head of the Government Library at the Salzburg State Archives. Before that, I worked at Salzburg University Library, where I most recently managed the Freisaal Branch Library serving the Faculties of Natural and Life Sciences as well as Digital and Analytical Sciences. During my fellowship at the IEG, I examined Pope Pius XI's relationship to the idea of Europe as part of the DFG Research Training Group "The Christian Churches and the Challenge of Europe".

✓ What inspired you to choose your research topic?

I have always been fascinated by the idea of European unity, having grown up with the freedoms and opportunities of the European Union. In my studies of Church History, I became interested in how the Catholic Church engaged with this idea. Since the Research Training Group already included a project on Benedict XV, it was a natural step to focus on his successor, Pius XI, whose pontificate (1922–1939) coincided with both emerging European movements and the rise of nationalism.

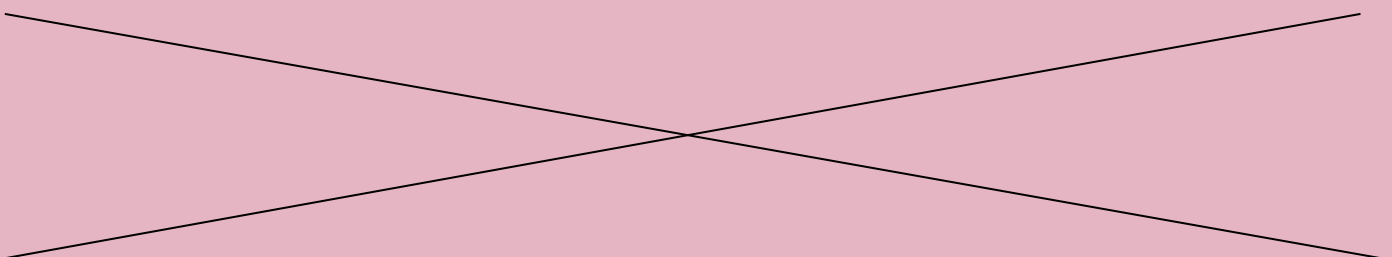
✓ How did you first hear about the IEG and what made you decide to apply?

I first learned about the IEG through fellowship announcements at my university in Salzburg. What attracted me most was the chance to pursue my research not in isolation, but within a vibrant community of scholars and in an atmosphere of exchange.

✓ What was your biggest fear before starting the fellowship and how did it play out?

I had no major fears before starting. At times I wondered whether I had chosen the right methodological path, but discussions with colleagues and the diverse academic events at the IEG quickly gave me confidence and new perspectives.

✓ What would you say to someone considering applying to the IEG?





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Did your research at the IEG ever lead to personal insight that surprised you?

My time at the IEG offered both rich academic learning and inspiring encounters. A lasting surprise was my first exposure to the then still emerging field of Digital Humanities – an experience that influenced not only my research but also my later career path.



What did a typical day at the IEG look like for you?

No two days were alike, but typically I spent the mornings at the university library reading, writing, or searching for literature, often with a coffee in hand. Lunch with colleagues was followed by more work in the afternoon, and in the evenings I enjoyed the many stimulating lectures at the IEG.



What was your go-to spot/activity in Mainz for unwinding after a day of research?

I loved unwinding with walks along the Rhine, or by meeting friends for coffee or a glass of wine in one of Mainz's cosy wine taverns. I often rented a meinRad bike to explore the local surroundings, such as the fascinating dunes of the Mainzer Sand, while trips to Frankfurt for museums or shopping were just a short train ride away. I also enjoyed the wide range of sports activities offered by the university.



What do you still talk about today when you tell other people about the IEG?

I often reflect on my time at the IEG as a period of stimulating research in a lively city, with opportunities to exchange ideas with scholars from around the world. It was a valuable and enriching experience, and the fellowship provided strong foundations and contacts for what came next, even though it was also a transitional phase.



How did your time at the IEG influence your current career path?

At the IEG, I explored new research questions and methods, including the emerging field of Digital Humanities and science communication. The experience, knowledge, and network I gained in Mainz are highly relevant to my current work as a librarian, where I help people find, assess, and use information, while making research results more accessible – especially in areas like Open Access, including Open Educational and Governmental Resources, and AI.