



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?





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.