Experimenting on nature – a debate
Moderator: Martin Thurau

The role of gene technology in agriculture is the subject of passionate debate. In a Research Focus organized by LMU’s Center for Advanced Studies, experts in various disciplines sought common ground. In insightLMU, plant biologist Jürgen Soll and sociologist Bernhard Gill revisit their positions.
For the complete article, see www.en.lmu.de/news/insightlmu/2012/03_01.pdf

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by David Lohmann
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More news on LMU Munich at www.en.lmu.de/news
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Professor Volker Klauß is never far from his sun-helmet. From 1978 to 1985 he lived in Nairobi with his family, while serving as Senior Lecturer in Ophthalmology at the University in the Kenyan capital. When he first visited the country, it had two practicing ophthalmologists for a population of 12 million. This prompted Klauß to look for a local institution where he could help to train colleagues in his own specialist discipline. The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) put him in touch with the University of Nairobi.

A sea change in patient care

In every year since then, one or two LMU ophthalmologists have had long-term lecturing posts in Nairobi. Together they have helped to train more than 180 ophthalmologists from various African countries. “In terms of its duration and intensity, this partnership is unique for LMU,” says Klauß, who is now 70. In fact the exchange program has served as a model for ten other eye hospitals at German universities. – And Kenya now has more than 80 practicing eye specialists.

For Klauß, it all began with the general movement towards independence in East Africa in the 1960s. From 1970 to 1972, the young eye doctor was a medical jack-of-all-trades and health educator in a district hospital in Uganda. “My experiences there in the early Seventies made a lasting impression on me,” he says, and he knew he would come back – to teach medicine.

Klauß returned to Africa as Chairman of the Ophthalmology Department in Nairobi, with a microscope donated by Professor Otto-Erich Lund (then Director of the Eye Clinic at the Medical Center of the University of Munich) and funding from various aid organizations. Over the years, he succeeded in effecting a sea change in the quality of medical education there.

Cataracts are the commonest cause of blindness in African countries. The condition, which is effectively treatable by routine surgery in Europe, results in progressive deterioration of vision due to clouding of the eye-lens. “Nowadays,” Klauß points out, “some 20,000 cataract operations per year are performed in Kenya, and patient care has markedly improved.”

In future, “imported” LMU lecturers will spend less time in Nairobi. Klauß is pleased that so many still participate in the exchange program, but he detects a certain loss of motivation among young doctors over the past 20 years. “The training of young doctors is not just a chore,” he says, “it is the noblest part of a university physician’s calling.”

Both sides benefit

His own life’s work has greatly benefited from the support of his wife Claudia. During their time in Kenya, she worked in a mission clinic in a Nairobi suburb, and treated thousands of patients for eye diseases. “You need the right partner for it,” Klauß says. “I had the good fortune to have a wife who is also inspired and fascinated by ophthalmology.” In 2008, Klauß joined his wife in her practice in the Munich suburb of Solln. The premises shared by the two LMU alumni are decorated in the African style.

A taste for adventure seems to run in the family. Their son, who now lives in Canada, was the manager of a hotel in Syria until the outbreak of the civil war there.

Translation: Paul Hardy
Anonymous online gamers enable scientific study
by Elizabeth Willoughby

Traditional science fieldwork has empirical foundations, where singular informants are selected based on predetermined criteria. LMU’s Play4Science, however, is using crowd sourcing instead. How are anonymous online gamers providing valuable scientific data?

Three years ago, Professor Thomas Krefeld of LMU’s Romance Philology Department was asked to join Play4Science, a three-year project funded by German Research Foundation (DFG) to develop game platforms that could obtain information important for sciences. Krefeld was hesitant.

At the time, History of Fine Arts’ Professor Hubertus Kohle, with the help of LMU’s Informatics Professor François Bry, had created an online game to improve search results, which use text, for images on the web. Players in Hubertus Kohle’s game, Artigo, suggest tags to apply to the millions of fine art reproductions so they can be found online more easily.

Such anonymous crowd sourcing research flies in the face of traditional practices, but when Thomas Krefeld saw Artigo, he understood its potential and set to work to create a linguistics game along similar lines.

A new game is born

Launched in mid-August, Metropolitalia aims to study if and how much Italy’s largest cities disseminate and enforce “neostandard” forms of Italian. It does this by gathering primary data (linguistic examples) as well as metadata (region, age range, education level and gender associations that belong to the linguistic examples). A player is given a phrase in a regional dialect from the game’s library, and a translation of it in standard Italian if she or he wants, and earns points by suggesting where in Italy the word is used, down even to a specific village if possible, and specifying other attributes such as if it is spoken only by young people. Players should also submit regionally specific words to the game’s growing library.

Debora Francione, an Italian PhD student at LMU, plays Metropolitalia regularly. Pleased to be able to contribute to research on her own language, Debora says, “I’m astonished at how many dialects exist in my country and how much they can vary in close proximity. I have learned some area specific expressions that I would otherwise never have known.”

All about numbers

Unconventional science study it is, but Professor Krefeld is convinced that it will work as long as there are enough players. Linguist student Katharina Jakob, who has assisted in the fine tunings of Metropolitalia, is now tasked with its marketing – online, naturally. Thomas Krefeld is hoping for at least 10 thousand players: “Without echo, it would be dead, but this you can’t control.”

One special feature – a search function that reveals all the statistics gathered about a word thus far – was designed into the game so that it can be used by other scientists as well, say for a psychological study on aggressiveness that is linguistically founded or a study of the linguistic distance between generations.

Professor Krefeld sees applications for Metropolitalia outside of the science sphere as well, like for an Italian to confirm if a common word in one region is considered shocking in another, or a language teacher who wants to teach regional Italian instead of textbook Italian. Plus, the game could be replicated to study other languages.

Katharina Jakob views such games as important contributions to the “e-humanities” and wants to see new digital methods become established and developed. “You don’t have to study informatics, you just have to collaborate between the different institutions and disciplines.”

“During this last year of the project, we hope our colleagues in other disciplines will go in the same direction,” says Professor Krefeld. “I would like to see crowd sourcing games develop into every area of scientific study, to see web-based research as a new kind of empirical foundation for social sciences. Economics could be interesting to learn how stock exchanges are seen, social psychology, scientists who work with stereotypes. The tools are available to the scientific community.”

http://www.metropolitalia.org
http://www.artigo.org
Palaeontology

The Patagonian puzzle
by Hubert Filser

Oliver Rauhut is a rare bird. As a dinosaur expert, he visits the most remote areas on Earth to look for fossils, hoping to work out what made his favorite animals so successful for so long.

For the complete article, see www.en.lmu.de/news/insightlmu/2012/03_02.pdf

Economic sociology

“Readers trust other readers”
by Martin Thurau

What makes a bestseller? The publishers who recently gathered in Frankfurt for this year’s Book Fair would love to know the answer. LMU’s Marc Keuschnigg has teased out some of the factors behind the concentrations of consumer demand that give rise to bestsellers.

For the complete article, see www.en.lmu.de/news/insightlmu/2012/03_03.pdf

Contemporary history

A European solution for the European crisis
Interview by Maximilian G. Burkhart and Martin Thurau

“The euro isn’t just a medium of exchange,” says historian Andreas Wirsching, who traces the long lines of development within the contemporary history of Europe. Further integration will bring the present crisis under control – and generate new ones.

For the complete article, see www.en.lmu.de/news/insightlmu/2012/03_04.pdf
Miss Pini’s feeling for goals
by David Lohmann

At 14, Carolina Pini was playing in the First Division of the Italian Women’s Football League. In 2008 FC Bayern München snapped her up. A fixture on the Italian team, her footballing talent has taken her far and wide – and she is studying for her Master’s degree in Italian at LMU.

By the time her fellow-students arrive for the first lecture of the day, Carolina Pini has already been through her first training session, picking up tips from Bayern stars like Franck Ribéry.

Born in Florence, Pini’s fascination with football began very early – her talent was first spotted at the age of 6. A few years later, the exceptionally gifted youngster was jetting to international matches with the Italian U-14 team. Her move to Munich was prompted by frustrated ambition: “We always lost our games against the Germans, and I wanted to understand why,” she says, laughing and playing with her pretzel earrings.

She quickly learned to speak German fluently, and enrolled at LMU. Last September the 24-year-old Pini began a Master’s degree in Italian Studies. “My mother is from Munich, but we always spoke only Italian at home,” she remarks.

Women are the future of football

There was a time when 300 spectators at most came to see FC Bayern’s women’s team play, but since the Women’s World Cup was held in Germany in 2011 this figure has gone up to 3,000, and attendance at matches in the German Women’s League has increased by 40 per cent. One of Pini’s “goals” is to get more people interested in women’s football. “Women are technically and tactically better than the men, because they have to compensate for their lack of shooting power,” she insists. “Even FIFA President Michel Platini has said that women are the future of football.”

She earned only 400 euros a month in her time with FC Bayern, although the team finished second in the German League and qualified for the Champions’ League. Obviously, this is not enough to live on, so last season she signed for ASD CF Bardolino in the Italian First Division.

Since then, Carolina has had to travel to Italy every weekend. In addition, she puts in seven training sessions from Monday to Friday and, of course, has a match every Saturday during the season. “But I still have enough time for my studies,” she says, “it’s just a matter of organization.” In addition to all that, she also contributes articles on football to the Corriere della Sera, and writes about literature for Italian reviews. Her teachers at LMU are aware of her sporting commitments, and have always tried to accommodate her busy schedule.

Of course, real machos have rather less regard for women’s football. During last year’s Women’s World Cup, even the quality papers in Germany compared women’s football to alcohol-free beer or the state of the men’s game in the 1970s.

“She earned only 400 euros a month in her time with FC Bayern, although the team finished second in the German League and qualified for the Champions’ League. Obviously, this is not enough to live on, so last season she signed for ASD CF Bardolino in the Italian First Division.”

“And it’s even worse in Italy,” Carolina says with a sigh, “there, they don’t even know that women can play football at all.”

Falling down at the drop of a hat

However, when it comes to fouls, the women are in almost the same league as men. Indeed, many experts believe that, in their gestures, general demeanor and brutality on the pitch, the ladies are increasingly taking their cue from the men’s game. Carolina takes a different view: “Now every match is vital, it’s like a battle.” And anyway, the guys are cry-babies and fall over in the penalty area at the drop of a hat …

Most of the students in her class had no idea that they had a top-notch footballer in their midst. Then they came across an article about her in a textbook they had been given to translate. “And I knew nothing about it,” she says. In spite of her sporting fame, Carolina, who goes everywhere on her scooter, does not see her future in professional football – not only because of the poor job prospects after the age of 35. As she points out herself: “My Italian team-mates only talk about football and “Big Brother”, but I get a kick out of poetry too.”

Translation: Paul Hardy
THE Ranking 2012: LMU again best German university

In the latest version of the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Ranking, LMU Munich is placed 48th overall, and is once again rated as the best university in Germany. Among its peers in Europe as a whole, LMU takes the 10th spot and is the only German university to figure in the Top Fifty. In the evaluations of individual disciplines LMU does particularly well in physics (19th), biosciences (37th) and medicine (42nd), outstripping all its German competitors in these subjects.

LMU extends agreement with Tokyo

At a meeting in Tokyo, the President of LMU Munich, Professor Bernd Huber, and the President of Tokyo University (Todai), Professor Junichi Hamada, have agreed to extend for a further 5 years the cooperation agreement signed by the two institutions in 2007. The LMU-Todai Cooperation in the Sciences forms part of LMU’s Institutional Strategy LMUexcellent, and is designed to stimulate further collaborative ventures in research, in particular in the Natural Sciences. The two universities commit themselves to promoting the exchange of research personnel and improving career development programs for young scientists, focusing particularly on physics, chemistry and biology.

Accolade for LMU’s equality concept

LMU Munich has won the Total E-Quality Award for the second time. The accolade, which is awarded in a nationwide competition and funded by the German government is valid for three years, and was conferred on LMU in recognition of the University’s commitment to the promotion of gender equality in the workplace.

In its citation, the jury made particular reference to the University’s “institutionally well anchored policy on gender equality,” and pointed out that the University had succeeded in increasing both the proportion of female professors on its faculty and the number of women on its academic staff. The award is presented to German organizations from the worlds of business, science and administration that have excelled in promoting equal career opportunities for men and women.

LERU signs up to European Research Area

For the past ten years, the League of European Research Universities, of which LMU is a founding member, has actively supported the establishment of a European Research Area (ERA) – by contributing to public debate on the topic and by making its views known to European policymakers.

Recently, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, EU Commissioner for Research, and Professor Bernd Huber, Chairman of LERU and President of LMU Munich, put their names to a Memorandum of Understanding on a number of matters concerning the realization of ERA. In the document, the universities represented in LERU have agreed to promote the implementation, by the end of 2013, of a series of measures in fields such as the structuring of research careers and doctoral training programs, mobility and gender issues.

LERU has signed a second declaration. On the occasion of the presentation by Máire Geoghegan-Quinn of a communique on the progress of the ERA project, the European Commission and several organizations representing European universities issued an agreed statement entitled “On Working in Partnership in Achieving the European Research Area”.

www.leru.org