

A photograph of a person with short brown hair, wearing a light blue t-shirt and dark blue jeans, performing a backbend against a white wall. The person's head is touching their knees, and their feet are on the ground. The background is a plain white wall with a dark baseboard. The lighting is bright, suggesting an outdoor or well-lit indoor setting.

## promoting climate research

Work-life balance and Slow Science – a talk with Professors Beate Ratter of the Institute of Geography and Michael Köhl of the Institute for World Forestry, who are responsible for gender questions at the Cluster of Excellence.

## Career or calling?

### Working and living in research

**Is working in science your dream job, Ms. Ratter?**

**Ratter:** Yes it is! I can decide for myself how to organize my work, have a lot of variety in the work I do, and I enjoy teaching. But there is a darker side, especially the heavy workload, external pressure and a great deal of administrative work.

**Expeditions, conferences and field trips – you spend a lot of time on the road. What does your family think about that, Mr. Köhl?**

**Köhl:** My wife works, too. We've done a good job of timing our careers and private lives, and made a strong network. But there are still unpredictable things that throw off your daily routine, like unplanned meetings or when our daughters have special plans. Traveling takes the most planning; we either have to ask one of our neighbors to look after things or fly my mother-in-law in.

**Do you sometimes wish you had a quieter life?**

**Köhl:** New research projects, advising students, meetings with colleagues and staff – it all keeps me pretty busy. But I also worked a while in the industry, and it was much less interesting.

**Ratter:** I wouldn't mind having less external stress. Being bombarded with emails can be exhausting.

#### Papa, just chill out!

**Do you have a personal strategy for fighting stress?**

**Ratter:** This year I've made it my goal to only work five days a week.

**Köhl:** My daughters have a great time reminding me: Papa, just chill out!

**Young researchers have to first establish themselves. Can they afford to just take things easy every now and then?**

**Ratter:** Well, it's a double-edged sword. Three of my doctoral candidates left university after completing their PhDs because they didn't want to work like me. Two of the three are now housewives and mothers.

**ClISAP has roughly the same number of male and female PhD candidates. But when it comes to the upper ranks, the ratio of men to women is 3 to 1. Why is that?**

**Köhl:** On the one hand it's a residual effect of a time when only very few women kept working in science after graduating. That's why at ClISAP we work to create balanced conditions as early as the PhD phase. On the other, this is the time in life when people often become parents for the first time, and it still tends to be the women who take time off. The balancing act between career and family is practically impossible. Social pressures are also ➤



## Slow Science – moving away from fast publishing, finding more time for reflection.

► part of it – working mothers are still stigmatized, there aren't enough child-care options ...

**Ratter:** ... and too much "old boys" networking between old college buddies. Further, there are unfortunately still not enough women in the natural science disciplines of climate research.

**So women call it quits while men simply build their careers.**

**Köhl:** Which is ultimately also a problem for men: This imbalance can put a serious strain on relationships.

**Ratter:** Maybe, but not all men suffer when their partners give up their careers. When I read the forewords of our doctoral dissertations, I still often come across things like: I want to thank my wife, who was always there to support me ...

**Will we outgrow this lack of women as a result of the generational shift?**

**Ratter:** No, not until people's mindsets change. Social stigmatization, the desire to start a family, and the dog-eat-dog world of universities keep many women from pursuing an academic career. I haven't seen any radical change in this regard, merely a few more promising examples than before.

**Köhl:** It's frightening how many young

men still hold traditional views on the roles of men and women. That has to change.

**There's a tremendous amount of pressure, for example to publish as many findings as possible. Are we talking about a conflict between quantity and quality?**

**Ratter:** We should learn that it's okay to publish less. Since 2011, the German

Prof. Dr. Beate Ratter's research focuses on the socioeconomics of coastal regions.



Prof. Dr. Michael Köhl heads the research group "Forest and Climate."



Research Foundation has changed its policy so that it demands only five publications per applicant.

This marks an important step, because it promotes a change of attitude with a greater focus on quality. In Geography we have a working group on "Slow Science" – moving away from fast publications and instead reflecting and discussing more. Nevertheless, we're all still part of the system: Those who publish less are bound to suffer for it.

**Young researchers are also under pressure when it comes to job security. No other field has as many limited-term positions as we do in research.**

**Ratter:** Of course that's a burden for young researchers. But giving PhD candidates lifetime contracts isn't the answer. Then it would be too tempting to just put your feet up and do the bare minimum. But you really do have to be an idealist if you want to stay in academics.

**Köhl:** ... and take a look at fields to your left and right every now and then. Those who only focus on one topic are going to have a hard time finding a job after their PhD. Making your way to the top is where the battle really begins – and where stubbornness often sets in. It's not a good development.

**Junior professors assume leadership positions early on. How are they prepared for it?**

**Ratter:** They aren't. Even though they just finished their education, these young academics are suddenly supposed



## Have children when you're studying; that's the best time to do it.

to be professors, delivering the same performance but without a permanent contract or the rights of a professor.

**What could we change?**

**Köhl:** For one thing, a "tenure-track" system for junior professors, like they have in the USA; it's like a trial period that qualifies professors for permanent positions. For six years junior professors have to give it their all, so they then receive a permanent contract. But then they really don't have any time left in those six years to start a family.

**Then when should academics have children?**

**Ratter:** Have children when you're studying; that's the best time to do it. When you're a student, you have more time and can be more flexible.

**Köhl:** But then your child will go to

school when your real career starts. Unfortunately our educational system is set up in such a way that most children only succeed if they are supported at home.

**Ratter:** All I can say to that is: The university reflects the rest of society. Parents who work at a factory all day have exactly the same problem.

**Is it possible to be a part-time researcher?**

**Köhl:** Part-time or full-time doesn't matter – all that counts are publications, research projects and attending conferences. That has to change.

**Ratter:** If we're free to imagine: Why not create part-time professors? With half as many teaching hours and half as many publications and conference papers.

**Köhl:** That would definitely create more flexibility. But there are two ways to block academic careers for women: chaining them to the oven, or sticking them in committees and commissions. If women make up only 15 to 20 percent of the professors but legally have to fill half of the positions, then they'll spend all their time in committee meetings – while their careers go nowhere.

**So women still have to choose between family and career?**

**Köhl:** Actually, at universities we have good options for counteracting that, because equal opportunity and work-life balance still count for something. But in the corporate world it's often very different.

**Ratter:** It's a question of attitude ►

### Taking your baby to conferences

"When I went to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Cambridge, USA), our son was only six weeks old and my husband had just gotten an exciting job in Hamburg. Together we decided: We'll try to do both; that's the only way to find out if it will work. So I flew with our son to the USA. We had to 'commute' back and forth for a little over a year before my husband could take parental leave and come join us.

We've both been working and living in Hamburg for four years now, and now have two children. From my own experience I can say: Doing academic work and having children takes organization. Not every plan works out, and there are many things you can't predict, but some things do work out: Before my current position was even advertised, I checked out the local kindergartens – but only those that also took infants. A year later I received the invitation from Hamburg and got pregnant.

My husband and I take turns picking up the children and work to support each other. We do our best to avoid both having important dates at the same time, so we can respond flexibly if something unexpected comes up. My family often comes with me to conferences: When my kids were still very young, they heard presentations instead of a lullaby. Now they use the poster stands at conferences as their soccer goalposts. I'm curious to see what it will be like once they're older – so far we've faced every challenge with a kind of academic ambition: Every problem has a solution if you look hard enough."

#### Johanna Baehr, 36

Since 2009 the oceanographer has led the ClISAP research group "Data Assimilation in the Climate System." Following her PhD at the University of Hamburg, she spent two years working in the USA. She is married, her two children are in kindergarten.



### Compromises instead of solutions

"When we first moved here three years ago, it was supposed to be an experiment; if it didn't feel right after a time, we would move back to Berlin. But now we've settled in, our son now has a sister, and I enjoy the work I'm doing. My girlfriend and I do about the same amount of work – including taking care of the kids and around the house.

On the one hand, academic life and family are a good fit, because my job gives me a lot of flexibility. But on the other, the workload, together with time spent at conferences and stays abroad, is hard to reconcile with family life. And that means I can't always be around. If I have to go on a business trip, my mother often has to come up from Franconia, or we have to ask friends to help out. In the end there is no perfect solution, just compromises.

But people in other jobs are familiar with the same problems. In Germany the model "double-income family, partners with equal rights and children" hasn't yet established itself, even though things are currently changing. Taking time out for your family is still not only something you have to explain and justify, but can also put the brakes on your career. But academics could be positive role models, setting new social norms: Our private lives become political!"



#### Andreas Schmidt, 33

Since 2010 the sociologist has been working on his PhD in the ClISAP research group "Media Constructions of Climate Change." He previously studied in Bremen and Berlin and now lives with his partner and two small children in Hamburg.

### Maybe email-free Sundays would help.



#### Valerio Lucarini, 36

Since 2011 the physicist and meteorologist has served as a Professor of Theoretical Meteorology at the University of Hamburg. This follows research stays in Russia, Finland, the USA and England. His wife, who like Lucarini is also Italian, is a social scientist working in the research group "Climate Change and Security" at the KlimaCampus.

### Parallel careers

"Emails at three o'clock in the morning; that's how my wife and I managed to overcome the distance between various cities in Europe, Asia and the USA. For academics, reconciling career and family is a huge challenge. Deadlines, conferences, projects, and having to be 'present' both at your home university and internationally – the workload is barely manageable. And for limited-term contracts, we always have to get used to a new environment. It can be very inspiring, but it also costs time and energy.

Since we're both academics, we're both in the same situation – that helps in everyday life. And since we now work together in Hamburg, we can concentrate more on our research. For couples in the academic world, it's important that you have prospects for both partners together. Thanks to ClISAP's Dual Career Program, we were able to make a new start in Hamburg. The Hamburg Welcome Center also gave us great support – because dealing with the government offices is a science of its own."

> and willpower. People don't have to be reachable around the clock, and we shouldn't demand that from our staff.

### But who can break this system?

**Köhl:** We "old pros" have to more intensively support young academics. This starts with small things, like noticing when an employee is on the wrong track and letting them know. Further, stronger networks among young researchers can help them to overcome problems like finding the right daycare options, and allow them to better support one another.

**Ratter:** We need these solidarity-based communities as a counterweight to the old boys networks. Maybe email-free Sundays would help, too. Or we could make it a rule that meetings can't end later than 4 pm. Especially since we



Meetings that have to be over by 4 pm improve discipline. Once they're done, there's still time to shop or pick up the kids.

hold permanent positions, we should do more to consider the needs of young researchers. Meetings should also have predefined time frames, agendas and minutes; these steps encourage discipline and help to avoid lengthy and repetitive discussions. Those of us who still need to go grocery shopping or to pick their children up from school or daycare have to keep an eye on the time.

**Köhl:** Most of the time meetings drag on because even though everything important has been said, it hasn't been said by everyone yet. ClISAP could serve as a role model for gender mainstreaming. The vast majority of our staff support this equal opportunity strategy, and with a Gender Task Force we could work to remedy deficits in its practical implementation. ■