



**MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE**

FOR COMPARATIVE PUBLIC LAW  
AND INTERNATIONAL LAW



# **INTERNATIONAL LAW AND EMOTIONS: RECOVERING UNIVERSALITY?**

**Max Planck Institute  
for Comparative Public Law  
and International Law,  
Heidelberg**

**26 – 27 February 2026**



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Conference Webpage

2

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# INTERNATIONAL LAW AND EMOTIONS: RECOVERING UNIVERSALITY?

3

## **Conveners**

[Prof. Dr Anne Peters](#)

[Dr Elia Alexiou](#)

[Bernadette Lumbela](#)

[Caroline Schaeffer](#)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Conference Theme .....	5
Programme .....	6
List of Speakers .....	8
Short Biographies of Speakers .....	9
Abstracts of Speakers .....	16
List of Engaged Listeners .....	24
Workshop of Engaged Listeners.....	25
General Information (with Map) .....	26



## CONFERENCE THEME

# INTERNATIONAL LAW AND EMOTIONS: RECOVERING UNIVERSALITY?

The current international order is in a turmoil. Resistance against breaches of international law is weak, not the least because of widespread contempt for this law. At the same time, the use and manipulation of emotions by political leaders is growing, as are their attacks on international law. This subversion concerns especially the aspiration for a law that is not only applied across the globe but also shared by all populations and is in that sense "universal".

The conference seeks to explore how, whose, and which emotions contribute to the current erosion of effectiveness and credibility of international law.

How is the construction of emotions shaped across time, place, and culture? Can we identify emotions that contribute to strengthening and weakening international law's claim to universality?

The conference seeks to develop "International Law and Emotions" as a new research field: International law is a law in "e-motion"; a legal system and a legal discipline oscillating between the fears of "coexistence", the hopes of "cooperation", and the "sense of belonging" in a universal global society.

***Please note that photos will be taken during the event for our reporting and communication with the public.***

# PROGRAMME

Thursday, 26 February 2026

Conference Day 1

Venue: Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law (MPIL), Heidelberg, Room 037/038

Time	Format	Speaker(s)	Topic	Session Moderator
8:30-9:00	Registration			
09:00-09:15	Welcome	<b>Prof. Anne Peters</b> <b>Dr Elia Alexiou</b> MPIL	International Law and Emotions: Remarks on Research Questions	
09:15-09:30	Report	tba	Engaged Listeners' Workshop	
<b>Session I: Towards Defining, Identifying and Measuring Emotions in the Legal Process: Inputs from Relevant Disciplines</b>				
09:30-09:55	Talk (25 min)	<b>Prof. Arno Villringer</b> MPI for Cognitive and Brain Sciences	Body, Emotions, and their Impact on Cognition and Decision-Making	<b>Prof. Joshua Uyheng</b> Ateneo de Manila University
09:55	Discussion (15 min)			
10:10-10:35	Talk (25 min)	<b>Prof. Simon Koschut</b> Zeppelin University	Naming, Shaming, and Feeling: Emotions as Drivers of International Norms	
10:35	Discussion (15 min)			
10:50	Coffee break (20 min)			
11:10-11:35	Talk (25 min)	<b>Prof. Emily Kidd White</b> Osgoode Hall Law School	On the Philosophy of Emotions in the Study of International Law	
11:35	Discussion (15 min)			
11:50-12:15	Talk (25 min)	<b>Prof. Kelebogile Zvobgo</b> William & Mary	Public Reactions to International Courts: Between Mistrust, Ambivalence, and Hope	
12:15	Discussion (15 min)			
12:30	General Discussion (30 min)			
13:00	Lunch break (60 min)			
<b>Session II: Emotions in International Law: Research Methods</b>				
14:00-14:25	Talk (25 min)	<b>Prof. Tilmann Altwicker</b> University of Zurich	The Unemotional Court? Emotion Classification of Judgments by the International Court of Justice	<b>Prof. Alexander Mehler</b> Goethe University Frankfurt
14:25	Discussion (15 min)			
14:40-15:05	Talk (25 min)	<b>Prof. Anna Spain Bradley</b> University of California	Judicial Emotion at the International Court of Justice	
15:05	Discussion (15 min)			
15:20	Coffee break (20 min)			
15:40-16:05	Talk (25 min)	<b>Prof. Christoph Engel</b> MPI for Research on Collective Goods	The Suing Paradox: Inferring Applicants' Motives from the Decisions of the ECtHR on Freedom of Assembly	
16:05	Discussion (15 min)			
16:20-16:45	Talk (25 min)	<b>Prof. Emiliano Buis</b> University of Buenos Aires	Affective Normativity and Arms Regulation in IL: Weapon Control Treaties as Emotional Technologies	
16:45	Discussion (15 min)			
17:00-17:30		<b>Erik Tuchtfield</b> MPIL	Rapporteur – Conference Day 1 Discussion	
18:00	Reception			
19:00	Conference Dinner (upon invitation) – Presentation 'Collisions: A refugee perspective on well-founded fears and hopes' <b>Ismail Noh and Jason Noh</b> (refugee artists); <b>Dr Elia Alexiou</b> (MPIL)			

## Friday, 27 February 2026

## Conference Day 2

Venue: Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law (MPIL), Heidelberg, Room 037/038

Time	Format	Speaker(s)	Talk / Paper	Session Moderator
8:30-9:00	Registration			
<b>Session III: Individual and Collective Emotions in the International Legal Order</b>				
09:00-09:25	Talk (25 min)	<b>Prof. Matthias Mahlmann</b> University of Zurich	Sentiments and Human Rights	<b>Prof. Tatjana Papić</b> Union University Belgrade
09:25	Discussion (15 min)			
09:40-10:05	Talk (25 min)	<b>Prof. Nanying Tao</b> Shanghai University of Finance and Economics	Sense and Sensibility: Nationalist Sentiment in China's Attitude towards the South China Sea Arbitration	
10:05	Discussion (15 min)			
10:20	Coffee break (20 min)			
10:40-11:05	Talk (25 min)	<b>Prof. Moshe Hirsch</b> Hebrew University of Jerusalem	Collective Traumas and the Emotional Dimension of ECtHR Jurisprudence on Memory Laws	
11:05	Discussion (15 min)			
11:20-11:45	Talk (25 min)	<b>Prof. Seda Gürkan</b> Leiden University	How do "Emotional Communities" React to Contestation of Human Rights? Insights from the European Parliamentary Debates on Hungary and Turkey (2014-2019)	
11:45	Discussion (15 min)			
12:00	General Discussion (30 min)			
12:30	Lunch break (60 min)			
<b>Session IV: International Law and the Universality of Emotions</b>				
13:30-13:55	Talk (25 min)	<b>Prof. Bradley Irish</b> Arizona State University	The Universality of Emotion: Background for International Law	<b>Prof. Valérie Rosoux</b> University of Louvain
13:55	Discussion (15 min)			
14:10-14:35	Talk (25 min)	<b>Prof. Anne van Aaken</b> University of Hamburg	The Situated Universality of Emotions, Cognition, and International Law: A Biocultural Analogy	
14:35	Discussion (15 min)			
14:50	Coffee break (20 min)			
15:10-15:35	Talk (25 min)	<b>Prof. Tomer Broude</b> Hebrew University of Jerusalem	Just a little bit: Respect, International Law, and Universality through the Lens of Intangible Cultural Heritage	
15:35	Discussion (15 min)			
15:50-16:15	Talk (25 min)	<b>Prof. Andrea Bianchi</b> <b>Kiana Daryabeigi Balvardi</b> Geneva Graduate Institute	Navigating through the Universe of Emotions: Challenges and Prospects	
16:15	Discussion (15 min)			
16:30-17:00		<b>Dr Elif Askin</b> University of Zurich	Rapporteur - Conference Day 2 Discussion	
17:00-17:30	Closing Remarks			

# LIST OF SPEAKERS

**Prof. Tilmann Altwicker**

**Dr Elif Askin**

**Prof. Jonas Bens**

**Prof. Andrea Bianchi**

**Prof. Tomer Broude**

**Prof. Emiliano Buis**

**Ms Kiana Daryabeigi Balvardi**

**Prof. Christoph Engel**

**Dr Seda Gürkan**

**Prof. Moshe Hirsch**

**Prof. Bradley Irish**

**Prof Emily Kidd White**

**Prof. Simon Koschut**

**Prof. Matthias Mahlmann**

**Prof. Terry Maroney**

**Prof. Alexander Mehler**

**Prof. Tatjana Papić**

**Prof. Valérie Rosoux**

**Prof. Anna Spain Bradley**

**Prof. Nanying Tao**

**Mr Erik Tuchtfield**

**Prof. Joshua Uyheng**

**Prof. Anne van Aaken**

**Prof. Arno Villringer**

**Prof. Kelebogile Zvobgo**

# SHORT BIOGRAPHIES OF SPEAKERS

## PROF. TILMANN ALTWICKER

University of Zurich



Tilmann Altwicker is Associate Professor of Legal Data Science and Public Law at the University of Zurich. As chair of the Center for Legal Data Science (CLDS), together with his team, he explores how statistics and machine learning can uncover patterns in legal data, advance evidence-based legal research, and rethink law in the digital age.

## DR ELIF ASKIN

University of Zurich



Elif Askin is a Senior Researcher and Lecturer at the Faculty of Law of the University of Zurich and a lecturer at the Europa-Institut, Saarland University. She specializes in public international law and human rights law and currently works on a project exploring the role of emotions in constitutional law.

## PROF. JONAS BENS

University of Hamburg



Jonas Bens is Heisenberg Professor of Anthropology at the University of Hamburg. His research examines conflicts within plural normative orders, focusing on colonialism and capitalism through ethnographic and comparative analysis. He is author of *The Indigenous Paradox* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020) and *The Sentimental Court* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

## PROF. ANDREA BIANCHI

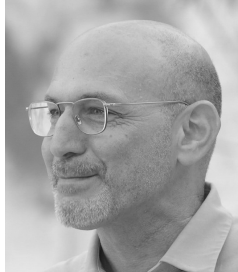
Geneva Graduate Institute



Andrea Bianchi, PhD (Milan); LL.M. (Harvard), Professor of International Law, Geneva Graduate Institute, Switzerland. His research interests lie in treaty interpretation, the production of knowledge, as well as the 'unsaid' and the 'unseen' in international law. His recent books include: *Demystifying Treaty Interpretation* (co-authored with Fuad Zarbiyev, CUP, 2024); *International Law's Invisible Frames – Social Cognition and Knowledge Production in International Legal Processes* (co-edited with Moshe Hirsch, OUP, 2021).

## PROF. TOMER BROUDE

Hebrew University of Jerusalem



Tomer Broude is Dean of the Faculty of Law at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and Bessie and Michael Greenblatt Chair in Public and International Law at the Faculty of Law and Department of International Relations. He specializes in public international law and international economic law, human rights and cultural heritage.

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## PROF. EMILIANO BUIS

University of Buenos Aires



Emiliano J. Buis is Chair of Public International Law at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) Law School and UNICEN and Senior Researcher at Argentina's National Research Council (CONICET). Head of the UBA Observatory of International Humanitarian Law and Director of the Postgraduate Diploma in Nuclear Law.

## MS KIANA DARYABEIGI BALVARDI

Geneva Graduate Institute

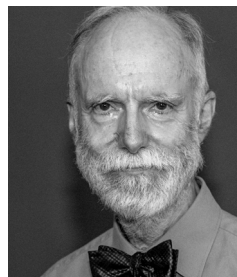


Kiana Daryabeigi is a Teaching Assistant at the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights and a PhD candidate at the University of Geneva, where she conducts research on the role of aesthetics in constructing people's identity in international law. Her research focuses on the aesthetics of international law and the role of cognitive sensibility in shaping legal thought and practice. She has gained professional experience with the UNESCO Chair for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy, as well as through various research initiatives.

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## PROF. CHRISTOPH ENGEL

MPI for Research of Collective Goods



Christoph Engel is Professor Emeritus and founding Director of the Bonn Max Planck Institute. He holds honorary doctorates from Jerusalem and Copenhagen. He examines the behavioral foundations of law, which he interprets as a tool for governing society. He is fascinated by the potential of LLMs for legal research.

## PROF. SEDA GÜRKAN

Leiden University



Seda Gürkan is Assistant Professor of International Relations and European Studies at Leiden University's Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA). She is also a Visiting Professor at the College of Europe, Bruges.

She currently leads a Starter Grant on the role of emotions in EU foreign policy.

## PROF. BRADLEY J. IRISH

Arizona State University



Bradley J. Irish is an associate professor of English at Arizona State University, with a particular interest in the literary and cultural history of emotion. He is the author of 5 monographs, including *The Universal-*

*ity of Emotion: Perspectives from the Sciences and Humanities* (2025).

## PROF. MOSHE HIRSCH

University of Jerusalem



Moshe Hirsch is the Von Hofmannsthal Professor of Law at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Law Faculty and Department of International Relations) and Co-director of the International Law Forum at the Hebrew

University. A significant part of his publications involves theoretical and interdisciplinary research that draws, inter alia, on sociological literature, social-cognition studies, political economy, and international relations theory.

## PROF. EMILY KIDD WHITE

Osgoode Hall Law School Toronto



Emily Kidd White is an Associate Professor at Osgoode Hall Law School in Toronto. She holds a J.S.D. and an LL.M. from New York University School of Law. Dr. Kidd White writes on public law, international public

law, and legal philosophy with a particular interest on the roles emotions play in legal reasoning. She is the author of *Emotions and Dignity in Legal Reasoning* (Oxford University Press, Legal Philosophy Series, forthcoming), and, along with Susan Bandes, Jody Madeira, and Kathryn Temple, she co-edited the *Research Handbook on Law and Emotion* (Edward Elgar, 2021).

## PROF. SIMON KOSCHUT

Zeppelin University Friedrichshafen



Simon Koschut is Professor of International Security at Zeppelin University Friedrichshafen. His research focuses on the interplay of emotions, norms, and conflict in international politics, examining how affective processes shape norm compliance, human rights enforcement, and transnational governance. He has published widely on emotions in international relations and global security studies

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## PROF. MATTHIAS MAHLMANN

University of Zurich



Matthias Mahlmann is a University Professor and the Chair of Philosophy and Theory of Law, Legal Sociology and International Public Law at the Faculty of Law of the University of Zurich, Switzerland. His recent publications include: *Mind and Rights. The History, Ethics, Law and Psychology of Human Rights*, (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

## PROF. TERRY A. MARONEY

Vanderbilt University, Nashville



Terry A. Maroney is the Robert S. and Theresa L. Reder Professor of Law at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, and Professor of Medicine, Health, and Society. She researches the intersection of law and emotion. She is also a scholar of criminal law, with specialisations in wrongful convictions and in juvenile justice. Her work on the role of emotion in judicial behaviour and decision-making forms the backbone of her scholarly focus. Weaving legal analysis together with the psychology, sociology, and philosophy of emotion, her work illuminates how emotional experiences, dynamics, and their management interact with the constraints and demands of varied judicial roles, with deep implications for judges and the public they serve.

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## PROF. ALEXANDER MEHLER

Goethe University, Frankfurt



Alexander Mehler is Professor of Computational Humanities/Text Technology at Goethe University Frankfurt, where he heads the Text Technology Lab (TTLab). He has served on the executive committee of the German Society for Computational Linguistics and Language Technology, chairing its research group on Quantitative Corpus Linguistics. He also led the research group on Computational Semiotics of the German Society of Semiotics and served on the

executive committee of the LOEWE Priority Program Digital Humanities. In addition, he was a member of the executive committee of the Center for Digital Research in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Education Sciences (CEDIFOR). He is a founding member of the German Society for Network Research (DGNet) and a Programme Committee member of the DFG-funded SPP New Data Spaces for the Social Sciences. His research interests include the quantitative analysis, simulative synthesis, and formal modeling of textual units in spoken and written communication. This work encompasses the study of linguistic networks in contemporary and historical languages, informed by models of language evolution. A current focus of his research concerns 4D text technologies involving Virtual Reality (VR) and multimodal computing.

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## PROF. TATJANA PAPIĆ

University of Belgrade Law School



Tatjana Papić is Professor of Law at the Union University Belgrade Law School, and International and Comparative Law Research Scholar at the University of Michigan Law School. She is also Visiting Research

Fellow at the University of Reading School of Law. She has worked on topics related to international responsibility, human rights, and the interactions between international law and domestic politics. Her current research explores the impact of affective narratives on international law.

## PROF. VALERIE ROSOUX

Belgian Fund for Scientific Research



Valérie Rosoux is a Research Director at the Belgian Fund for Scientific Research (FNRS). She teaches International Negotiation, Politics of Memory, and Transitional Justice at UCLouvain (Belgium).

She has a Licence in Philosophy and a Ph.D. in Political Sciences. She is a member of the Belgian Royal Academy. Since 2021, she is a Max Planck Law Fellow. Her research interests focus on post-war reconciliation and the uses of memory in international relations. In 2010-2011, she was a Senior Fellow at the United States Institute of Peace (Washington DC). In the past twenty years she trained diplomats, NGO workers, military officers, and students in Europe, Africa and the USA.

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## PROF. ANNA SPAIN BRADLEY

University of California



Anna Spain Bradley is a Professor of Law and Faculty Director of The Promise Institute for Human Rights at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). A former UN Legal Expert, she is the author of

*Global Racism: A Challenge for the World* (OUP, 2026), *Human Choice in International Law* (CUP, 2021), *International Dispute Resolution* (CAP 2021, co-editor), and many law review articles including *Human Rights Racism* (2019) and the recipient of the 2014 ASIL Francis Lieber Award, *The U.N. Security Council's Duty to Decide* (2013).

## PROF. NANYING TAO

Shanghai University of Finance and Economics



Nanying Tao is an Assistant Professor at the Law School of the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics. She received her PhD from McGill University under the supervision of Prof. Andrea Kay Bjorklund.

Her research covers international legal theories, international legal history, international adjudication and international economic law, with a concentration on China's approach to international law, where she has published several papers. In 2023 Nanying Tao embarked a research project on the evolution of China's view of international adjudication, funded by the National Social Science Fund of China (NSSFC).

## PROF. JOSHUA UYHENG

Ateneo de Manila University



Joshua Uyheng is Director of the Political Psychology of Democratization Laboratory and Assistant Professor at the Department of Psychology at the Ateneo de Manila University. His research examines questions of

collective meaning and action in contexts of political and technological change. He received his PhD in Societal Computing from Carnegie Mellon University.

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## PROF. ANNE VAN AAKEN

University of Hamburg



Anne van Aaken (Dr. iur. and MA Economics) is Chair for Law and Economics, Legal Theory, Public International Law and European Law, University of Hamburg (2018-2023 Alexander von Humboldt Profes-

sor). Anne was Vice-President of ESIL and chaired the EUI Research Council and is Distinguished Fellow of Hebrew University.

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## MR ERIK TUCHTFELD

MPIL



Erik Tuchtfield is a research fellow at the MPIL and heads the humanet3 group, located at the Center for Humans and Machines, Max Planck Institute for Human Development. His main research fields are plat-

form regulation, the protection of freedom of expression and the right to privacy in the digital realm.

## PROF. ARNO VILLRINGER

MPI for Human Cognitive and Brain  
Sciences, Leipzig



Professor Arno Villringer is a Director at the Department of Neurology at the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences in Leipzig. His research focuses on brain-body interactions and their impact on cognition, behaviour and the development of neurological disorders.

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## PROF. KELEBOGILE ZVOBGO

William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia



Kelebogile Zvobgo is the Mansfield Associate Professor of Government at William & Mary and Director of the International Justice Lab. Her research centers on human rights, transitional justice, and international law and courts. She is the author of *Governing Truth: NGOs and the Politics of Transitional Justice* (Oxford University Press). She has published articles in *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *Journal of Human Rights*, and *Journal of Politics*, among others. She has also written for policy and mainstream outlets like *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Brookings Institution*, where she is a nonresident senior fellow.

# ABSTRACTS OF SPEAKERS

## TILMANN ALTWICKER/ MAJA GWOZDZ/UNA SCHAMBERGER

### The Unemotional Court? Emotion Classification of Judgments by the International Court of Justice

ICJ reasoning is best characterized by a stable baseline of affective density combined with strong, decision-specific heterogeneity. Most emotion categories are selective registers concentrated in subsets of cases rather than general stylistic features. Two categories appear structurally salient for the institution's justificatory practice: Support/endorsement as a routine authority- and continuity-producing register, and Regret as a persistent background register with episodic intensification.

empirically tested criteria. Sometimes experiments conducted with students or volunteers hardly allow for being used as a standard reference for how legal operators would operate in a real professional settings. Along similar lines, the diversification of professional and cultural biases might not be easy to spot, let alone assessed in a comparative fashion. There might be even ethical difficulties in collecting and using personal data in order to study and evaluate the role that the emotions of individuals can play in given circumstances. Emotions can play out very differently in single individuals and groups. Fear experienced by an individual can conduct to a state of stillness and paralysis, whereas fear instilled in a group can generate reckless or violent action.

The challenges should not cast a shadow on the prospects of using productively the study of emotions in international law. The latter has become a highly sophisticated domain of analysis for interdisciplinary studies. Lawyers, cognitive sociologists and psychologists, neuroscientists (to mention just a few specialists) have recently shed light from their respective perspectives on the role of emotions in activities (not only decision-making) that are relevant to legal processes. The inherently interdisciplinary texture of any sound approach to the study of emotions feeds into a more general trend in contemporary international legal scholarship to acknowledge the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration to provide answer to legal queries. The awareness of how emotions play out in legal processes, and how implicit biases can be spotted and dealt with should inject novel insights into legal training and practice, together with the acknowledgment that awareness can also be used to manipulate the perception of legal issues and solutions thereto.

Ultimately, navigating through the universe of emotions represents not only a challenge but an incredible opportunity for international lawyers to

## ANDREA BIANCHI/ KIANA DARYABEIGI

### Navigating through the Universe of Emotions: Challenges and Prospects

The study of emotions in international legal processes has gained traction lately, but fundamental challenges remain as to what a research agenda in this area might look like as well as what methodologies should be used in the pursuit of such an investigation. The aim of the paper is to foreground some of the main challenges in developing this relatively new field of international legal scholarship, as well as the main prospects for moving it productively forward. To look for universality in a field usually characterized as culture-dependent and highly subjective may be counterintuitive. Be that as it may, the problem remains how to identify emotions which are lived, felt and experienced in different cultures and possibly compare them or even measure them on the basis of objective and

overcome the narrow boundaries of classical jurisprudence and to provide a better explanation of how international legal processes actually take place.

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## TOMER BROUDE

### [Just a Little Bit: Respect, International Law and Universality, through the Lens of Intangible Cultural Heritage](#)

This paper examines “respect” in international legal contexts, not in the traditional sense of a formal legal obligation or normative principle, but as an emotion, discussing its role and formation, among states and other actors, and between them and the law. Drawing on interdisciplinary research from social psychology, moral psychology, and other fields, the analysis reconceptualizes respect as a complex emotional phenomenon involving both cognitive appraisals and affective responses that develop through relational interactions over time.

UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) framework serves as the primary case study, providing a laboratory for examining respect formation due to its cultural sensitivity requirements, multiple stakeholder involvement, evident power imbalances between communities, states, and international institutions, aspirational universality. Through analysis of nomination processes, expert committee deliberations, and implementation mechanisms, the research discusses how respectful relationships develop between communities and states, among international experts, and between different nations collaborating on shared heritage projects.

## EMILIANO BUIS

### [Affective Normativity and Arms Regulation in IL: Weapon Control Treaties as Emotional Technologies](#)

My proposal explores the affective dimensions that underpin international weapon control treaties, suggesting that emotions are not peripheral but constitutive of their normative force. While international law is often portrayed as a domain of rational calculation and technical expertise, the history and practice of arms regulation reveal how deeply entangled it is with collective affect. From fear of nuclear annihilation to moral disgust at chemical warfare and compassion for the victims of landmines, these treaties encode, mobilize, and institutionalize particular emotional registers and scripts that serve as the affective foundations of their legitimacy.

I claim that weapon control treaties can be read as “emotional technologies” that transform diffuse sentiments into binding legal obligations. The Chemical Weapons Convention rests on a longstanding cultural revulsion at poison as dishonourable and inhumane. The Ottawa Treaty harnessed global empathy toward civilian casualties and the spectacle of maimed children to delegitimize landmines. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, in turn, has recently drawn on intergenerational fear and trauma, particularly the lived testimonies of Hibakusha, to expand the normative taboo around nuclear use. These emotional dynamics do not merely accompany negotiations but shape the very boundaries of what counts as lawful or unlawful weaponry. Despite the fact that affective normativity can be unstable—feelings are historically contingent and culturally variable—the plasticity of emotion opens space for new humanitarian campaigns that cultivate fresh forms of indignation and empathy.

In sum, by foregrounding the role of affect in weapon control treaties, I will argue that emotions are not irrational residues but normative engines within international law. Recognizing this

dimension illuminates both the strength and fragility of these regimes: their power lies in translating collective feelings into shared prohibitions, yet their endurance depends on the ongoing renewal of the emotional grounds that sustain them.

The example of the successes and failures of arms regulation can show that, in times of global crisis, reactivating common emotions—fear for humanity’s survival, compassion for civilian suffering, and moral revulsion at indiscriminate violence—can operate as a shared affective basis on which international legal universality can be reimagined and sustained.

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## CHRISTOPH ENGEL

### The Suing Paradox: Inferring Applicants’ Motives from the Decisions of the ECtHR on Freedom of Assembly

Justitia is supposed to wear her blindfold. One interpretation is: she should only be guided by the general principles of the law, not by her sympathy with one of the parties. But is she? There are three levels of the analysis: the competent court itself is emotional. The court uses the emotions of the parties for the justification of its decision. From the way how the court reports the motions of the parties it can be inferred that the court noticed their emotional involvement. Only years ago, assessing the relevance of these layers of emotional overlay in the argument of the court would have been an uphill battle. But with the advent of ever more powerful large language models, this has become a meaningful research question.

In this project, I am exploiting that, for another empirical project, I have scraped the entire jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights on freedom of assembly. Arguably this freedom is a good candidate for emotional involvement, as it is motivated by the unquenchable urge of a group of people to express their dissatisfaction with an actual or potential political decision.

The reasons a court gives for its decision are part of the context of representation, not of the context of discovery. With this exercise, I am therefore not in a position to identify whether the court has truly been moved: by its own emotions, or by the emotions of the parties. But I can check whether the court seems to believe that disclosing its own emotions, or reporting the emotions of the parties, increases the persuasive force of its argument. If the court itself is transparently emotional (and does not simultaneously express its will not to be influenced), this suggests that it expects the emotion to be instrumental in garnering support for its decision. If, however, the court only reports on the emotions of one of the parties, I must check: is the language that the court uses to report on the emotions of the parties dismissive, neutral or supportive?

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## SEDA GÜRKAN

### How do “Emotional Communities” React to Contestation of Human Rights? Insights from the European Parliamentary Debates on Hungary and Turkey (2014-2019)

The promotion of pro-democracy norms and human rights is one of the main self-assigned objectives of the EU. And among the EU institutions, the European Parliament (EP) has emerged as the flagbearer of democracy and human rights norms. However, in the last decade, these norms, once accepted to be universal, have been contested by rising alternative governance models, and have compelled the EU and its institutions to react. The paper approaches the role of the EP in the promotion and protection of pro-democracy norms and human rights from a social psychology perspective and seeks to understand the role of “emotion culture”, i.e. ideas about how people/entities ought to feel in a given situation, in determining the EP’s conception, framing and reaction to the violation of these norms. In particular, the paper draws on Hoshschild’s concept of feeling rules and investigates how the EP ‘feels’ and experiences in the cases of growing contestation to pro-democracy and human rights norms; and whether there is a

shared emotion culture on these norms at EP-level across nationalities and political groups. The paper does so by comparing the (emotional) discourse of the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) when they address the contestation of these values in an illiberal non-EU country (Turkey) and in an increasingly autocratizing EU member state (Hungary). It seeks to answer: (1) how (through what discursive strategies) the MEPs criticize norm violations in different contexts (insider/EU member vs outsider/non-EU country)?; (2) how far nationality and ideology play a role in the MEPs' stance in defending human rights internally and externally. The data come from the Emotion Discourse Analysis (EDA) of the MEPs' interventions in the plenary debates as well as the Resolutions adopted on Hungary and Turkey during the eight legislative term of the European Parliament (2014-2019), when the contestation of human rights and pro-democracy norms peaked in both countries.

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## MOSHE HIRSCH

### Collective Traumas and the Emotional Dimension of ECtHR Jurisprudence on Memory Laws

The paper will explore the role of emotions in 'memory laws' that commonly respond to collective traumas and the ECtHR's approach to such emotions when examining the legality of these laws under the ECHR (mainly Article 10).

Psychological studies highlight the individual dimension of emotions; prominently, subjective experience and reflexive behavioural response. Sociological literature challenges the individualistic-reflexive approach and emphasizes the 'social regulation of emotions'; from this perspective cultures guide and constrain the ways people experience, interpret and express emotions in distinct social settings.

Collective traumas generate intense and long-lasting emotions, and they frequently give rise to 'taboos', i.e., strong social prohibitions, including

the avoidance of the discussions of certain topics or the expression of some views (which are considered immoral or dangerous). Breaking a taboo often elicits strong social reactions, including criminal sanctions. Memory laws that ban the denial, praise or justification of certain traumatic events, or the display of symbols evoking such events, are infused with emotions. Sociological studies of these laws emphasize the concepts of collective memory, social identity, collective trauma and social control. The implementation of restrictive memory laws raises concerns regarding their employment as a tool to suppress political opponents and brings to the fore questions regarding their consistency with freedom of expression under ECHR Article 10. States defending such criminal prohibitions before the ECtHR have frequently argued that these restrictive measures are aimed at avoiding harm to collective emotions, including indignation, offended dignity, insult, and anxiety, as well as preventing the spread of hatred.

Encountering such emotionally-charged arguments, the ECtHR has primarily examined whether the specific circumstances point to the existence of a 'pressing social need' (a key component of the 'necessary in a democratic society' exception) under the Court's jurisprudence. The ECtHR's case law in this sphere foregrounds the collective dimension of emotions, underlining group emotions, especially those of communities that endured historical trauma (such as the mass atrocities committed by the Nazis or widespread human rights violations perpetrated by totalitarian communist regimes). In some cases, the Court has also noted the significant role these events play in the construction of the community's distinct identity. Generally, the ECtHR is inclined to accept arguments regarding a 'pressing social need' where the restrictive measures seek to prevent inter-group hatred, and particularly where the protected group is an ethnic or religious group.

The paper will analyse the ECtHR's approach to emotionally related arguments in this field. An initial (and partial) examination indicates that while the Court grants certain weight to long-lasting

emotional effects of collective traumas (alongside additional factors), their influence and credibility vary across different socio-historical settings. For example, while in one case the ECtHR was receptive to the identity-emotional arguments and recognized the ‘taboo function’ of the legal restrictions, in another case it downplayed the significance of emotionally-charged arguments by stating that the relevant emotions ‘cannot be regarded as rational fears’. The paper will seek to identify some socio-historical factors that may explain this disparity in the Court’s receptiveness to specific emotionally-charged arguments in this field.

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## BRADLEY J. IRISH

### The Universality of Emotion: Background for International Law

Before we can assess how emotions contribute to the universality of international law, we must first consider the extent to which human emotions themselves might be considered to have some universal quality. In virtually every academic discipline that considers emotion, the universality issue has been extensively debated over the last half-century, with partisans fiercely arguing that either human emotionality should be seen as relatively constant and stable, or that it should be primarily viewed in terms of cross-cultural and cross-historical variability and change. This talk will offer a broad overview of this intense scholarly divide, to provide an intellectual framework for thinking about the potential universality of emotion in the context of international law. Most importantly, it will pay particular attention to recent attempts to reconcile the universalist and anti-universalist positions, as such hybrid models are perhaps the most promising for legal scholars.

## EMILY KIDD WHITE

### On the Philosophy of Emotions in the Study of International Law

Talk of the emotional or affective turn in international law is relatively recent though it tracks and echoes several other critical methods movements, including the turn to history, in the study of international law and, so too, a two-decade long wave of law and emotions research in several domestic legal systems. The affective turn in international law in several instances aims to critique a post-Cold War optimism that held out the promise that a rules and reason-based international order would work to abate war, and secure peace, prosperity and efficient capital flows. Against this backdrop promise, the focus on emotions and affect in the study of international law stands to offer, via different manners and modes of analysis, critical appraisals of the convincing-or-not performances of this cosmopolitan liberal, legal formalism that rooted (and continues to root) the teaching and practice of international law as a ‘disembodied, disarticulated discipline’ in this so declared post-Cold War era. This paper takes up the broad challenge of thinking about emotions in the history of international law by speaking to the ways that philosophical conceptions of time set the backdrop for certain emotions appearing apt within a particular political era, and so too, how by considering how moralised philosophies of mind and action, which set up a hierarchy between emotions and reason, come to pervade historical thinking, including, historical thinking about international law.

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## SIMON KOSCHUT

### Naming, Shaming, and Feeling: Emotions as Drivers of International Norms

This paper explores the link between emotions and international norms through the lens of shaming practices. Drawing on Samantha Power’s 2016 UN speech on Aleppo, it shows how naming and shaming mobilizes moral emotions to enforce human

rights norms. Compliance depends on actors' capacity to feel guilt, shame, or moral discomfort, whereas absence of emotional resonance can explain norm violations, exemplified by the U.S. response to torture allegations in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. By highlighting the affective dimension of norm enforcement, the paper emphasizes that norms are not only cognitively interpreted but also emotionally experienced. Understanding these emotional mechanisms offers insights into both the success and limits of international law and human rights practices.

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## MATTHIAS MAHLMANN

### Sentiments and Human Rights

The talk discusses the various ways in which emotions are relevant for the law - e.g., as subtle and not so subtle influences, as objects of regulation, as elements of a theory of just law and as powerful forces endangering the foundations of the rule of law. Human rights serve as a paradigmatic example. In light of the analysis of the important roles that emotions play in legal orders, the talk explores the possibility of a critical universalist, epistemologically sound theory of human rights.

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## ANNA SPAIN BRADLEY

### Judicial Emotion at the International Court of Justice

This chapter names and examines the presence and evolution of "judicial emotion" at the International Court of Justice. Rejecting the premise attributed to Aristotle, that "the law is reason unaffected by desire," the chapter begins with an articulation of emotion in human choice as understood through neuroscience. It then evaluates examples of ICJ jurisprudence that reveal a sense of judicial emotion, noting that the ICJ is increasingly called upon to resolve international disputes involving complex cases of human suffering. Recent cases require ICJ judges to make determinations of law

and fact about armed conflict, climate change, genocide, and racial discrimination, subjects that often evoke emotion and go to the very heart of human behavior and the human condition, raising core questions about law's role in promoting core universal values of peace and human rights. This chapter questions if such conditions have impacted the development of judicial emotion in ICJ jurisprudence. It concludes with a discussion of broader implications for scholarly and public discourse about the role of emotion in the project of international law.

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## NANYING TAO

### Sense and Sensibility: Nationalist Sentiment in China's Attitude towards the South China Sea Arbitration

International adjudication is conventionally theorized as a rational construct, emanating from the interstate pursuit of legal and pacific dispute settlement. This paper, however, contends that the ostensibly state-centric domain of international law is inherently permeated by human factors, notably sentiment, which can engender emotionally charged state perceptions of legal processes. Focusing on the potent force of nationalist sentiment, this article interrogates its impact on China's engagement with international adjudication. Using the South China Sea Arbitration as a critical case study, the analysis demonstrates how nationalism significantly shaped China's motivation and its subsequent rejection of the arbitral proceedings. To deconstruct this dynamic, the paper proposes and applies a tripartite 'Individual – State – International Community' analytical framework. The Arbitration is thus situated within broader patterns of resurgent nationalism challenging the authority of international institutions and the liberal global order. By examining the Chinese experience, this study extrapolates broader theoretical reflections on the complex interplay between nationalism and international law in the contemporary global era.

## ANNE VAN AAKEN/ BETÜL SIMSEK

### The Situated Universality of Emotions, Cognition, and International Law: A Biocultural Analogy

Debates about universality lie at the heart of both affective science and international law. In psychology and neuroscience, scholars ask whether emotions are innate and universal or culturally constructed. In international law, a parallel question arises: are legal norms universal principles binding on all, or contingent products of specific histories and cultures? This article argues that insights from the emotion–cognition nexus can illuminate the universality debate in international law. Neuroscience shows that emotions are not discrete, immutable entities but biocultural phenomena: shared affective tendencies elaborated through cognitive and cultural processes. International law functions similarly. It channels universal emotional reactions—fear of aggression, compassion for suffering, indignation at injustice—into cognitively framed and legally codified norms, such as the prohibition on genocide, refugee protections, or the rules governing self-defense. Legal decision-makers, like human agents generally, are influenced by the interplay of emotion and cognition: outrage fuels norm creation, fear can narrow legal interpretations, empathy shapes judgments of legitimacy and fairness perceptions can enhance or impede cooperation. International law's universality is therefore best understood as a situated universality: grounded in common emotional-cognitive responses to human problems, but expressed through historically and culturally specific legal forms.

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## ARNO VILLRINGER

### Body, Emotions, and their Impact on Cognition and Decision-Making

Emotions are highly embodied, affecting the state of the body and being affected by it in turn. Within

a dynamic systems theory framework, we conceptualise emotions as short-lived brain-body microstates. Longer-lasting brain-body mesostates, on the other hand, are the correlates of stress or phases of the menstrual cycle and are largely determined by hormones. These mesostates are also reversible. Macrostates, on the other hand, are structurally entrenched and often irreversible. They may reflect inter-individual differences or diseases such as hypertension or depression. Each of these brain-body states involves brain areas commonly associated with emotions, influencing perception, decision-making and cognition in general. Therefore, it is an open question as to whether a 'purely' rational human mind really exists.

I will present neuroscientific findings on underlying mechanisms of brain-body states and their impact on cognition, as well as an overarching conceptual approach.

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## KELEBOGILE ZVOBGO

### Public Reactions to International Courts: Between Mistrust, Ambivalence, and Hope

The rules-based international order seems moribund if not dead, with major powers regressing to a system based on spheres of influence, material power, and brute force. This development is shocking and alarming. The legal and adjudicative regimes established after World War II – in trade, security, human rights, the environment, and other domains – were hoped to be durable and long lasting, and the support of their architects, including the United States, was assumed to be secure. Sadly, reality has fallen short of expectation, and a growing body of political science research points to a key role for the public in explaining this gap. In many countries, the public has not been, or is no longer, a robust “compliance constituency,” a bottom-up force that encourages decision makers to adhere to international law. This enables states to flout international rules and the institutions that seek to enforce them. This chapter examines public reactions to an especially prominent and

controversial institution, the International Criminal Court, attending to the role that emotions play. With an empirical focus on the United States, the chapter draws on an original public opinion survey to identify many Americans' mistrust of the Court and yet others' hope for a future productive working relationship – opposite attitudes rooted in two important sets of emotions, apprehension and fear and anticipation and joy-happiness. And still others express ambivalence. These findings invite scholars to consider how to shift the public's emotions and resulting attitudes – and, in turn, policy elites' preferences – to support commitment to and compliance with the international criminal legal and adjudicative regime.

# LIST OF ENGAGED LISTENERS

**Prof. Arti Aneja**, University of Delhi, Faculty of Law

**Dr Gürkan Çapar**, Maynooth University

**Prof. Abhipsa Upasana Dash**, Jindal Global Law School

**Dr Otgontuya Davaanyam**, Centre for Human Rights Erlangen-Nürnberg (CHREN), Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU)

**Mr Louis Guibault**, University of Cambridge

**Mr Alexander Koehler**, Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, Pisa

**Dr Francesco Paolo Levantino**, Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, Pisa

**Dr Miha Marcenko**, University of Ljubljana

**Ms Rebecca Militz**, Goethe University Frankfurt

**Ms Simone Mitchell-DaCosta**, Ministry of Justice, Jamaica; University of Portsmouth

**Dr Maria Ossio**, MPI for Social Law and Social Policy, Munich

**Dr Oriola Oyewole**, Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria

**Thivanka Ratnayake**, University of Adelaide, Australia

**Ms Johanna Ritter**, Radboud University Nijmegen, Department of International and European Law

**Ms Lauren Rogers**, University of Edinburgh

**Mr Goran Sandic**, University of Belgrade-Faculty of Political Science

**Ms Eva-Madeleine Schmidt**, MPI for Human Development, Berlin

**Ms Phyllis Schöttler**, Hamburg University

**Dr Alik Semertzi**, Graduate Institute, Geneva

**Ms Zubaidiya Simayi**, Peking University, School of International Studies

**Dr Betül Simsek**, University of Hamburg, Institute of Law and Economics

**Ms Ambre Tissot**, Institut des Sciences sociales du Politique (Ecole Normale Supérieure, Université Paris-Saclay)

**Ms Meng Wang**, Maastricht University

**Ms Kateryna Zakharova**, Strasbourg University

## ***Before the conference***

### **Wednesday, 25 February 2026, 14 – 17.10 h Engaged Listeners' Workshop**

Venue: Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law (MPIL), Heidelberg, Room 014

*open to Engaged Listeners and Speakers at the conference*

<b>Time</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Speaker(s)</b>	<b>Topic</b>
14:00-14:15	Arrival		
14:15-14:30	Welcome	<b>Bernadette Lumbela</b> <b>Caroline Schaeffer</b> MPIL	
<b><i>Session I: Emotions in Context: Culture, Law, and Language</i></b>			
14:30-15:10	Presentation	<b>Ambre Tissot</b> Institut des Sciences Sociales du Politique (École Normale Supérieure, Université Paris-Saclay), France	Cultural Emotions: Challenging the Foundations of International Cultural Heritage Law
	Presentation	<b>Kateryna Zakharova</b> Université de Strasbourg, France	Case Law Terminology of the European Court of Human Rights: Bridging Legal Cultures through Language
	Discussion (20 min)		
15:10	Coffee break (20 min)		
<b><i>Session II: The Emotional Experience of Harm in Human Rights Law and Jurisprudence</i></b>			
15:30-16:10	Presentation	<b>Simone Mitchell-DaCosta</b> University of Portsmouth, Jamaica	Mapping Moral Restoration: An Emerging Jurisprudential Practice in the Inter-American Human Rights System
	Presentation	<b>Dr Otgontuya Davaanyam</b> Centre for Human Rights Erlangen-Nürnberg (CHREN), Germany	Feeling Harm: Emotion, Vulnerability, and the Limits of Corporate Human Rights Due Diligence
	Discussion (20 min)		
16:10	Coffee break (20 min)		
<b><i>Session III: Universality in International Law between Uncertainty and Belonging</i></b>			
16:30-17:10	Presentation	<b>Alexander Köhler</b> Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, Pisa, Italy	We, the Peoples, Belong: Reimagining International Law & Governance as Inclusive Praxis
	Presentation	<b>Dr Alik Semertzi</b> Geneva Graduate Institute, Switzerland	Feeling Uncertain and the Universal Condition of International Law
	Discussion (20 min)		

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### Brochure

This brochure is only available as a pdf file.

### Coffee Breaks

Coffee, tea, water and vegan and vegetarian snacks are available during the coffee breaks. A water dispenser is located in front of the conference room. You are kindly invited to bring and fill your own bottle. **Please note that it is not allowed to take open glasses or cups with drinks into the conference room.**

### Conference Dinner, 26 February 2026

On Thursday evening speakers and engaged listeners are invited to a conference dinner at [Tati Restaurant](#), Bergheimer Straße 147 (Landfriedgelände), 69115 Heidelberg.

### Conference Room

As we tried to accommodate the maximum of participants in the room, there is no space for bigger bags, luggage or coats. Please use the wardrobe or the lockers located near the reception instead. Due to safety reasons please don't charge your electronic devices in the conference room. A table with sockets is located in the lobby.

### Hotel

During the conference, speakers will be accommodated at [Premier Inn Hotel Heidelberg City Center](#). Kurfürsten-Anlage 23, 69115 Heidelberg (see map next page).

### Internet Access

During the conference, you may access the internet via eduroam using the account of your home institution. Additionally, Wifi vouchers for guests are available at the registration desk.

### Lunch, 26 and 27 February 2026

On Thursday and Friday, a vegetarian and vegan lunch buffet will be available for all participants in the Institute's "Rotunde" (Foyer).

### Online Participation

The conference will be streamed live. For online participation please register [here](#).

### Parking

The MPIL has an own car park and a limited number of parking spaces is available for participants. Please ring the bell at the barrier.

### Photographs / Filming

Taking photos or filming in the conference room is not allowed. Only members of the organising team will be allowed to take photos.

### Public Launch Event at DAI

On Wednesday, 25 February, at 8 p.m., Professor **Terry A. Maroney** (Vanderbilt University, USA) will present an empirically grounded account of how emotions affect both judges and judicial work. The results of her decade-long mixed-methods study of a diversity of judges in the United States animate her forthcoming book, *What Judges Feel: How Emotions Shape Justice*. Drawing on that work and earlier, groundbreaking studies in Australia (Sharyn Roach Anleu and Kathy Mack) and Sweden (Stina Bergman Blix and Åsa Wettergren), Professor Maroney will identify points of commonality and difference, with implications for judges and judiciaries across the globe.

Further information and tickets for participants are available on the DAI [website](#). The DAI is at 10 minutes walking distance from the conference hotel, at Sofienstraße 12, 69115 Heidelberg.

## Public Transport

If you don't want to walk to the institute (2.6 km, 37 minutes from the conference hotel) you can take the tram (20 minutes from the hotel). The stop nearest to the MPIL is "Technologiepark". Stops near to the Premier Inn are "Römerkreis Süd" or "Römerstrasse". Information on public transport is available on [RNV Online](#).

## Social Media

We are happy if you follow us on [LinkedIn](#).

## Taxi Companies

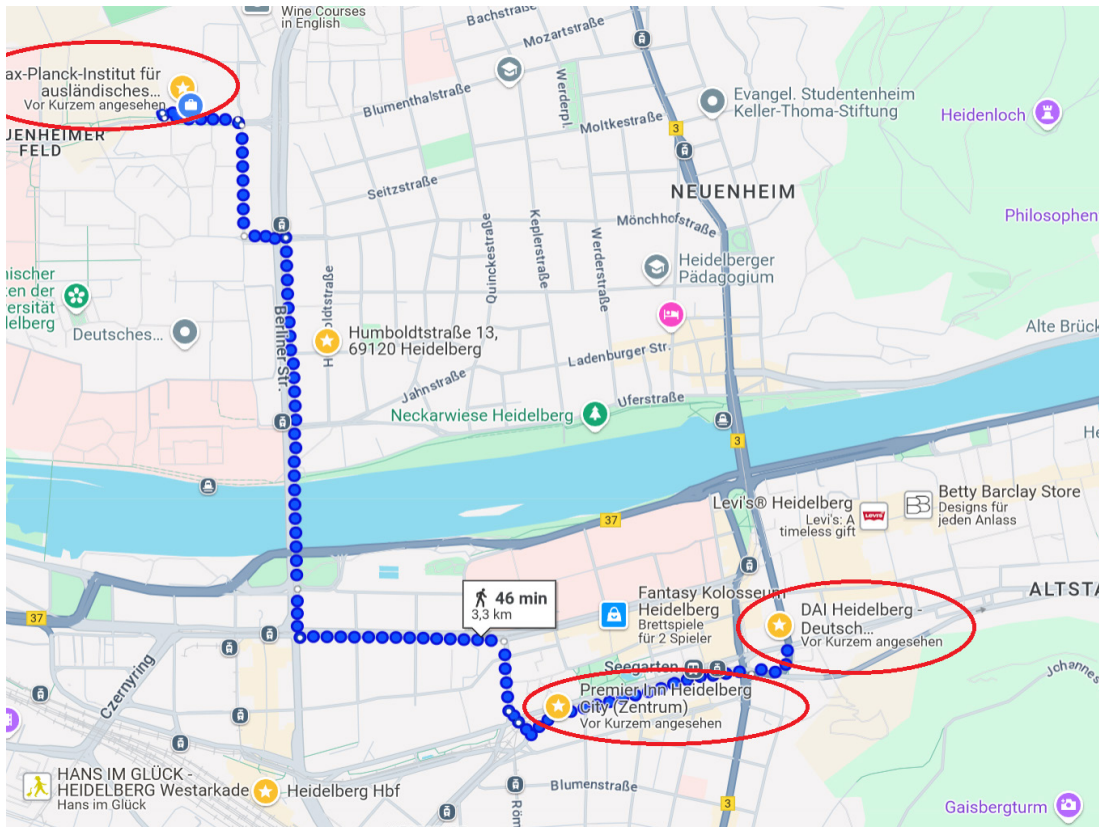
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Taxi HDirekt, phone number: +49 6221/739090

Taxi costs are not reimbursable.

**For any further questions you can turn to the organisation team at any time.**

# MAP





\*Featured Art: Ismail Noh, Collision (detail), 2022

Ismail Noh is a painter and former refugee, currently based in Metz, France. After fleeing persecution in Iraq because of his Yazidi religion, Ismail has lived in a refugee camp in Greece for over a year. Together with his two brothers, Jason and Salam, they started painting on tree leaves in the refugee camp and, later, they founded Brotherly ART in order to create art and raise funds in support of displaced people worldwide.

We especially thank Verena Schaller-Soltau for laying out this brochure.





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