

START and Wittgenstein Prizes 2000

Press communication at the award ceremony

Wittgenstein Prizes 2000 awarded to the Anthropologist Gingrich and the Mathematician Markowich

5 START Prizes for outstanding young researchers

On Monday (3 July) Austrian Science Minister Gehrler will award this year's START and Wittgenstein Prizes. The anthropologist and ethnologist Andre Gingrich and the mathematician Peter Markowich, both from the University of Vienna, will each receive 20 million ATS for their future research. The Wittgenstein Prize is the most prestigious and financially the highest recognition for Austrian scientists. In addition, five young researchers will be awarded START prizes, receiving financial support for six years at a level of between 2.0 and 2.5 million ATS per year.

The two Wittgenstein Prizes will be awarded to:

Andre Gingrich (University of Vienna) works in the field of comparative anthropology. His field studies have in the past been concentrated primarily on Asia (various Islamic states, Armenia, Tibet and Mongolia) and have addressed issues such as ethnicity, "extended family relationships and power" and "ritual and religion". In addition he is interested in gender studies. With the prize money Gingrich intends to make comparisons between Asia and Europe based on various case studies.

Peter Markowich (University of Vienna) is researching in applied mathematics. The equations he is studying, which use the "language" of the fundamental work of Leibnitz, Newton and Maxwell, describe dynamic physical processes from atomic to galactic levels. Markowich is working on basic methods as well as on concrete modelling problems and computer simulation of physical phenomena. He has taught and researched abroad for many years and returned to Austria two years ago. He hopes to use his prize money to establish Vienna as an internationally recognized centre for applied mathematics.

The five START Prize winners and their projects are:

The physicist Thomas Brabec (Vienna University of Technology) is working in one of the world's leading groups, the work of which involves the generation of extremely short pulses of light. He is a theoretician and is investigating the interactions between light and matter with the aim of better understanding the production of X-rays.

The legal expert Susanne Kalss (Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration) is studying the effect on company laws and laws relating to limited companies of the recent decision of the European Court of Justice to allow the formation of companies limited by share without observance of the peremptory minimum reserve regulations of the country in which the company is formed.

The physicist Dietrich Leibfried (University of Innsbruck) is planning to develop components for future quantum computers. To this end he is working on procedures to trap, cool and store individual ions.

The medical expert Herbert Strobl (University of Vienna) is investigating particular cells of the immune system. The so-called dendritic cells have an important function, for example in the development of autoimmune diseases, allergies, infectious diseases or cancer.

The medical engineer Bernhard Tilg (Technical University Graz) is developing procedures for the spatial display of electrocardiograms. His work could enable the imaging of premature heartbeats, tachycardia, flutter, fibrillation and infarction.

The prizes are being awarded this year for the fifth time. The decisions were taken by an international jury made up of 13 renowned experts. The jury includes such prominent scientists as its chairman, the Germanic studies scholar Wolfgang Frühwald, until recently President of the German Research Council, and the American physicist Mildred Dresselhaus, whom President Clinton nominated a month ago for one of the most influential positions in American research policy (Director of the Office of Science at the Department for Energy).

START and Wittgenstein prizes are open to applicants from any scientific discipline. The prize money may be used solely for research. The Ministry of Science has entrusted the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) with the administration of the programmes.

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Wittgenstein Prize
Area of Research: Cultural and Social Anthropologie

To date the ethnologist Andre Gingrich has primarily been studying asiatic cultures in Arabia and the Himalayas. In addition he is working on systematic comparisons of cultures and on interactions between European and non-European social and cultural development. One focus of his work lies in the area of mental, intellectual and cognitive descriptions of the world. A further focus relates to the investigation of relationships between the sexes in different cultural and intercultural contexts.

Gingrich plans to use the Wittgenstein prize money to consolidate and expand this particular research area, placing particular emphasis on the promotion of women and of young scientists. In addition he feels responsible for the development of an inter- and transdisciplinary perspective, in which the growing importance of cultural and social anthropology (ethnology) will be combined with the gradual dissolution of the concept of "humanities" in favour of an up-to-date priority for cultural and social studies.