

## 10 Years of IZWT – Welcome Address by the Rector

Dear guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Universities, and European universities in particular, are mostly noble old institutions which can look back on a long and eventful history. When these universities celebrate anniversaries, it's likely to be their 100th, 150th or even their 500th birthday. The fact that we are here today to celebrate 10 years of the existence of our "Interdisciplinary Centre for Science and Technology Studies" might therefore not seem such a spectacular achievement.

And yet there are some very good reasons not to wait another 90 years to celebrate, but to do it today, with joy, gratitude and appreciation. Some of the reasons are symbolic in nature and others very real:

As we are about to hear at greater length, the founding of IZWT involved an approach that was almost visionary. In the early 2000s, a root-and-branch restructuring process was underway at the Bergische University, which resulted in a broad readjustment of content. One of the most valuable results of this process, in my view, was the creation of what were known as "Interdisciplinary Centres" – just a handful to start with, with more to follow.

One of the central characteristics of our university today is the fact that all the faculties, departments and subjects work together across boundaries. It is this readiness to encourage our scientists to carry out research which goes beyond the confines of their own disciplines that has vastly increased the range of opportunities to investigate social and natural phenomena.

IZWT is not only one of the first institutions of its kind at the Bergische University, but is also one of the most successful. And bearing in mind its specific organisation, it's probably no exaggeration to say that it has become a pioneering institution in a national context.

From reading the constitution of the IZWT, the programme comes across as extremely demanding: on the basis of the history and philosophy of science, the students are expected to tackle fundamental questions in the fields of science and technology, within an interdisciplinary discourse between the humanities, natural science and technology. The ultimate objective of this methodology is to find new insights and approaches to science.

What comes across in the constitution as being so important, yet not particularly complicated, is a real challenge in day-to-day scientific life. Scientific processes and results are always the

fruit of tried-and-tested language games, viewpoints and methods. These customs are so deeply ingrained in the average scientist that the norm is almost never questioned.

It is the encounter with other disciplines that holds up a mirror to a scientist for the first time. Then comes the understanding that interdisciplinary discourse calls for deconstruction. To go right up to the boundaries of the one's own discipline and beyond takes scientific courage, a particular type of intelligence, methodological innovativeness and, the key to it all, a sense of academic empathy.

Of course, questions which are worth asking need to be defined for these processes. But anybody who has ever taken the first step very quickly realises that the journey itself is part of the destination. What initially seemed like hard work can increasingly bring great satisfaction, even great enjoyment. In this way, interdisciplinary working is a process which strengthens itself.

In my own earlier efforts at interdisciplinary collaboration, I experienced this often enough. And from my observations of events at IZWT, the experiences of those involved seem to be very similar.

And that takes me from the symbolic meaning of our anniversary today to its real significance. In our 10 years of existence, there have been considerable achievements, such as German Research Foundation projects, promising new proposals, interdisciplinary conferences, lecture series and an extremely wide range of international seminar and workshop activities.

Our content has evolved as well, not least to include a broadening of the spectrum towards a social-scientific reflection on science and technology, which I was extremely pleased to see. The bringing together of skills in the fields of the history and philosophy of science, and now also the sociology of science, is part of what gives us our front-running position, in both a national and an international context.

Given this extremely positive stocktaking exercise, I would like to express my hopes to all members and friends of our IZWT that this extremely successful development will be continued with as much dynamism, vigour and enthusiasm as I know it has developed with thus far. And it goes without saying that I also wish you the necessary successes, even though we all know that this is largely down to personal hard work, but which also requires that necessary little bit of luck.

Ad multos annos!