

IRIDeS faculty member received the Gambrinus Fellowship for research and teaching at Technische Universität Dortmund (2025/6/23 – 2026/4/15)

Topic : Visiting Research, International Collaboration, Disaster Memory, Memory Studies

Place : Technische Universität Dortmund, Germany

As part of the Gambrinus Fellowship Program, IRIDeS Associate Professor Julia Gerster (Disaster Memory Studies Lab) was invited to undertake a research and teaching stay at Technische Universität Dortmund, Germany. Since 1994, TU Dortmund University has awarded Gambrinus Fellowships annually to internationally renowned scholars from abroad. The program aims to strengthen international cooperation in research and teaching while providing students with opportunities to engage directly with leading academics from around the world.

Preparations for the fellowship, including research exchange with Professor Lothar Wigger, a specialist in disaster education, began in Japan and culminated in a stay at TU Dortmund from 4 to 15 December 2025. During her visit, Gerster taught the block seminar *Remembering and Forgetting: An Introduction to Memory Studies* in German as part of the Bachelor's program in Educational Science and Pedagogy. The seminar introduced students to key theories and concepts in memory studies and explored the social, cultural, and political dimensions of remembering and forgetting. Forty-two students registered for the seminar, and Gerster administered and supervised 12 final module exams until mid-April 2026.

As part of her research stay, Gerster also delivered a public lecture in German on 10 December 2025 at the Internationales Begegnungszentrum (IBZ), titled *“Remembering Natural (?) Disasters: On the Social Construction of Disaster Memories.”* Beginning with a critical examination of the concept of “natural disasters,” she discussed the triple disaster of 11 March 2011 in northeastern Japan, focusing on the disaster memorials established in its aftermath and their role in shaping collective memory.

Drawing on extensive empirical research, Gerster highlighted the gendered dimensions of disaster experiences and recovery, paying particular attention to the underrepresentation of women's voices and perspectives in Japanese disaster memorial sites. The lecture attracted a large audience, including students and members of the public, and was followed by a lively discussion. A recurring theme throughout both the discussion and Gerster's visit more broadly was the comparison between disaster museums and war and peace museums. Participants explored shared challenges related to remembrance, representation, education, and the transmission of difficult histories to future generations.

At the conclusion of the visit, possibilities for financial support for joint research and further prospects for cooperation were discussed. One result was the Japanese-German workshop on “disaster education” that took place on March 16, 2026, at IRIDeS and included Prof. Lothar Wigger as an invited speaker, and a joint visit to the disaster memorial facility Arahama Elementary School and the Arai in Sendai on March 17, 2026.

Assoc. Prof. Gerster would like to thank TU Dortmund, Prof. Tessa Flatten, Prof. Lothar Wigger, and Dr. Barbara Platzer for their support and for making this exchange possible.

Text: Julia Gerster (Disaster Memory Studies Lab)
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Assoc. Prof. Julia Gerster (the fourth person from the right) and TU Dortmund faculty after her public lecture on *“Remembering Natural (?) Disasters: On the Social Construction of Disaster Memories”* on December 10, 2025. Picture taken by Heidi Wigger.