

Network Conference "Religious Memory Cultures in (Central and Eastern) Europe"

University of Passau, May 19 - 22 2025

In recent years, public interest in memory culture, religion, and memory theory has grown significantly. This trend is also reflected in the European research landscape, particularly within the humanities and cultural studies.



Group photo of all participants

Source: University of Passau

From May 19–22, 2025, the PICAIS-funded network conference brought together established scholars and early-career researchers from eleven European countries and fifteen universities in Passau. The aim: to network and present current projects and ideas in the fields of memory, identity, and religion. Joining the nearly 30 researchers were representatives of the University of Passau's research funding team, students participating in a research-based seminar including conference experience, and doctoral candidates from the Protestant and Hussite Theological Faculties of Charles University in Prague as part of the annual Prague–Passau Symposium Series.

Organized by Prof. Dr. Sandra Huebenthal, PD Dr. Benedikt J. Collinet (Chair of Exegesis and Biblical Theology), Prof. Dr. Christian Handschuh (Chair of Church History and Christian Identities), and Prof. Dr. Thomas Wünsch (Chair of Eastern European History and Culture), the conference's primary focus was not on specific content themes, but rather on fostering personal connections among researchers, exploring their respective methodologies and research interests. This approach aims to lay the groundwork for future collaborative projects in research, teaching, and structural development.

Reflecting the diversity of disciplines and areas of study, the conference featured contributions from digital humanities, biblical studies, reconciliation work, memory culture, sites of memory, and more. The event was structured around a chronological thread, guiding participants on a rich and varied journey across Europe. Along the way, it became especially clear how vital mutual awareness is, as approaches to the *visual turn* and *spatial turn* can vary greatly due to cultural and historical contexts — and thus complement one another.

Breaking with traditional conference formats, the event included interactive elements such as a poster exhibition introducing participants, their institutions, and their projects — a key driver for sparking new research collaborations. Additionally, five Open Spaces provided room for discussion of concrete projects and networking opportunities. This flexible format proved to be a great success, offering the kind of open and creative space that is often lacking at academic events, especially in online formats. The active participation of the University of Passau's research support team in the Open Spaces was a game-changer, enabling immediate professional feedback on emerging project ideas.

Beyond the networking aspect, major outcomes of the conference included further development of international academic programs, new project concepts, recognition of Passau as a hub for future collaborations, and the exploration of potential joint initiatives in research and teaching across Europe. Connections formed from Spain to Georgia and from Ireland to Romania underscore the central role of Central Europe in facilitating borderless theological and humanities research. In this way, the conference also served as a contribution to sustainable peacebuilding through cross-cultural cooperation.

Project ideas ranged from oral history research and confessional European identities to classic research projects, summer schools, and partnerships in developing structures and study programs. The University of Passau distinguished itself as a welcoming host and a committed partner in building sustainable research networks. It is therefore no surprise that participants expressed a strong desire for a follow-up conference to celebrate achievements and launch new initiatives.

Benedikt J. Collinet und Sandra Huebenthal



Logo of the networking conference