



# Science as a Profession, Not as a Hobby

Max Planck scientists cooperate with partners in more than 110 countries worldwide. Here they relate their personal experiences and impressions.

Marcin Serafin studied sociology at the University of Warsaw. For his doctoral thesis, he chose to attend an International Max Planck Research School, where he enjoyed the opportunity to concentrate exclusively on his doctoral research – a stark contrast to the usual working conditions of doctoral students in Poland.

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I had already become interested in the social aspects of economic phenomena when I was in high school, and this interest remained with me throughout my master's studies at the Institute of Sociology at the University of Warsaw. At the time, though, I wasn't aware that there was an entire sub-field dedicated to this topic: economic sociology. It wasn't until I spent time at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies that I was able to discover the field and really pursue my interests.

For my doctoral thesis, I researched how various social aspects of the lives of taxi drivers affect their working time. Unlike people working in many other occupations, taxi drivers aren't employees who have fixed working hours. Instead, they are individual entrepreneurs who have the flexibility to decide when they want to work and for how long. As a result, unlike other workers whose working hours are governed by their employment contract, the time they spend working is influenced by a wide range of factors that are often neglected in standard economic models – such as their living conditions, gender and family situation.



**Marcin Serafin**, 31, studied sociology at the University of Warsaw from 2005 to 2010 before joining the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies through the International Max Planck Research School. He is currently an assistant professor at the Institute of Sociology and Philosophy at the Polish Academy of Sciences and has been Leader of the Max Planck Partner Group for the Sociology of Economic Life since April of this year.

Taxi drivers' working hours also reflect the fact that they don't see themselves as workers, but as sole proprietors who are in direct competition with each other. For this reason, it's difficult to mobilize them to act collectively and to motivate them to join a trade union that would represent their interests. Other occupational groups fight for better working conditions and the reduction of their working hours with the help of trade unions.

While doing my doctorate, I received a lot of support from my Institute and my International Max Planck Research School. It was wonderful to be able to focus completely on the task at hand and not have to concern myself with administrative or teaching responsibilities. This is very different from the typical working conditions of doctoral students in the social sciences in Poland. It's difficult to focus exclusively on your doctoral thesis there, as you usually have to take on other jobs to earn a living. As a result, the doctoral research often becomes more of a hobby or an investment in a non-academic career.

Of course, pursuing a career in science is difficult everywhere, particularly in the beginning when you start out as a Research Group Leader. My group being granted Max Planck Partner Group status made life considerably easier for me when I started in this role, and I really wish more people were aware of this possibility. I lead a small and creative team at the Polish Academy of Sciences, and we plan to commute to the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne several times a year. Scientists there will also come to Warsaw, as our kickoff workshop will take place here next year. I think my team will really enjoy this collaboration with the Max Planck Institute.

My team is working on two research projects. The first studies how people's expectations about the future influence their current economic behavior. For example, the decision to take out a mortgage on a house is based on an expectation of how your life will unfold over the next 20 years – something that is very difficult to predict. We're also researching how digital platforms such as Airbnb and Uber are restructuring economic and social life – particularly the working conditions of the members of this new digital economy and their participation in trade unions and different forms of collective action.