

# Lost and found

Gabriele Kammerer



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“Another couple reunited after brief separation!” A happy ending amidst all the administrative or academic emails one receives: an email sent from our reception to @all reports the return of a lost glove. A message shortly thereafter reports another successful recovery: “Back where it belongs: The lost scarf is again around its owner’s neck.” Right by the entrance of the WZB you’ll find a poet of everyday life. Herr Stern has been at his post for eight years now. He is a strict poet setting his own conditions. Gloves are handed over without much ado: the twin is enough evidence of former ownership. When it comes to other objects, however, Herr Stern’s emails sound like a whodunnit calling for special clues. As in the case of a found cloth bag – “Content: an apple, a container with nuts and ... ? The owner should be able to complete the list.” Or a bracelet: “Although quite variegated, the beads make for a consistent coloring.”

Some might see this as too much palaver. Herr Stern doesn’t simply ask people to take the correct route through the premises to the bicycle parking stands.

He’ll write a eulogy to a healthy lifestyle: “A short detour through our beautiful building followed by a saunter through the blossoming gardens (spring is here!) to the bicycle parking stands is an experience well worth having. You will cycle home in a much better mood.” And Herr Stern’s reminder to close all windows before New Year’s Eve takes this form: “You will start work in the new year happier, if you find your office in the state in which you left it, with everything at its place and in order. An office devastated by a firecracker is something which nobody would ask for.”

Herr Stern’s messages form a genre of their own. They tell little stories, they arouse our serendipity, they appeal to the spirit of collegiality. We can sense what he and his colleagues at WZB’s reception have to go through regularly when Herr Stern writes: “That’s how it goes when taxis are ordered and people don’t show up or at least don’t inform us at the reception. Then we have to



FROM THE WZB



deal with hotheaded taxi drivers and you need to act calmly and prudently, so that things won't escalate. So here's an urgent request: we gladly order your taxis for you, call us and the order works out to 99.9%; the 0.1% that's missing is then due to traffic jams or roadblocks, but this is very unlikely."

Every email sent by Herr Stern, every portal post tells us in an inimitable manner: Things don't get lost easily at the WZB, and little goes wrong in general. At least as long as Herr Stern is sitting by the entrance, the concierge with a big heart and a yen for wholeness.

*Thanks to Katrin Schwenk for archival assistance.*

*Drawings:  
Nadine Prange*

