Wisdom is a topic of growing interest in current psychology, probably due to an increasing interest in positive aspects of aging in the face of current demographic developments. To date, psychological work on wisdom has focused on (a) studying laypeople's conceptions of wisdom and (b) developing standardized wisdom measures. Few studies have investigated wisdom in the context of individual lives: How does wisdom develop - which predispositions, experiences, and ways of reflecting about experiences are conducive to becoming wise? And how does wisdom actually manifest in real-life situations - how do wise people deal with difficult life problems such as traumatic events or interpersonal conflicts? Studying these questions may yield important insights both about wisdom as a construct and ways to foster wisdom, and may offer new paths to measuring wisdom in a more ecologically valid way.

In this project, we propose four interrelated resources that are crucial both to the development and the manifestation of wisdom in individual lives: openness to experience, emotion regulation, a sense of mastery, and a reflective attitude. We want to test this model and evaluate a new measurement approach by studying individuals who are wise according to judgments by others and current standards of wisdom measurement. These wise persons, as well as one age-matched and one young control group, will be interviewed about their life story and about a difficult conflict in their life.

The life-story part of the project focuses on fundamental life changes, (i.e., events that had major impact on participants' life situation and life priorities. We do not necessarily expect wise participants to report more such events than control individuals. However, we expect them to report different ways of dealing with those events and different ways of later integrating them into their life stories. Specifically, we expect wise individuals to show more openness to life changes, more successful emotion regulation, a higher sense of mastery in dealing with life changes, and more reflection during and after the event than control participants. We also expect them to show more indications of learning and growth through difficult life events.

The conflict-narrative part of the project is aimed both at studying how wise people deal with interpersonal conflicts and at evaluating conflict narratives as a possible new way to measuring wisdom. Current measurement approaches are either based on self-report, which is subject to a number of biases, or on performance with fictitious life problems, which do not involve participants emotionally. Thus, non-cognitive aspects of wisdom, such as emotion regulation, are not well-covered by these measures. Narratives of actual conflicts from participants' lives centrally include emotional and interpersonal components of wisdom and can be coded both with respect to wisdom criteria derived from existing wisdom models and with respect to our four wisdom resources. We expect wisdom scores obtained through conflict narratives to be in better accordance with predictions about wisdom suggested by implicit theory studies, e.g., old age as a typical characteristic of wise individuals, than scores based on existing wisdom models.