How does wisdom develop? Laypeople and wisdom researchers agree that life experience is a crucial factor – but not everyone who accumulates life experience grows wiser. How we deal with our experiences, how we reflect upon them in retrospect, and what we learn from them is essential. In the MORE Life Experience Model (Glück & Bluck, 2013), we proposed five personal resources that enable people to develop wisdom from confronting life challenges: Mastery, Openness, Reflectivity, and Emotion Regulation including Empathy. This project initiated a long-term longitudinal study that investigates the dynamic development of wisdom based on the MORE Life Experience Model. Every year, participants report whether significant events have happened and fill out measures of the MORE resources and wisdom.

The three main goals of this project were (a) to recruit the participants for the long-term study and collect extensive data on their previous life experiences, levels of wisdom, wisdom resources, and other relevant variables, (b) to develop a brief self-report measure of the MORE resources and evaluate the Brief Wisdom Screening Scale (Glück et al., 2013) for use in the longitudinal study, and (c) to conduct a first wave of the longitudinal data collection. A sample of 155 Carinthians, including 19 wisdom nominees, took part in the entry examination (EE). A 25-item measure of the MORE resources was developed (Pöttscher-Gareiss, 2016). As the project was extended, we were able to conduct two longitudinal data collections. In the second wave (LS2), 101 participants returned the questionnaire, and 64 of them reported having experienced at least one significant life event in the past year. We are currently analysing event content in depth, and first results are promising. For example, participants who reported more events at LS2 showed higher levels of wisdom than would be expected from their EE wisdom. Important side findings have brought up a whole new research topic for our group: the role of wisdom for intimate relationships. Auer-Spath (2015; Auer-Spath & Glück, submitted) interviewed participants about what they consider as most important for a good relationship. Wiser participants were more likely to say that it was important to remain appreciative and attentive to both the partner and the relationship and to view relationships as sources of personal growth. Methodologically, we found an unexpectedly strong relationship between interviewer- participant report and participants’ scores in open-ended wisdom measures (Holzer, 2015) and relationships between wisdom and the use of non-dogmatic language (Scherpf, 2016).

This project initiated the first prospective longitudinal study of the development of wisdom. We are expecting to gain highly important insights from the in-depth analysis of the data we have already collected, but especially from longer-term findings. For example, we are going to analyze how participants’ perspective on events changes over time and how long-term personality development can be explained through an interplay of experiences and resources.