



European Research Day 2017

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T04 - Dr. Gerald AUER, Postdoc, Austrian JAMSTEC, Dept. of Biogeochemistry

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My research project:

The Indonesian Gateway is the last tropical connection between the Earth's oceans. It connects the Pacific Ocean to the Indian Ocean via surface currents flowing through the Indonesian archipelago, which form the so-called Indonesian Throughflow (ITF). The ITF allows the flow of warm, nutrient poor waters from the warm Western Pacific into the Indian Ocean north of Australia, and forms an important part of the global ocean conveyor belt moving water masses through the oceans. Using samples gathered during International Ocean Discovery Project Expedition 356 we aim to reconstruct the influence of ITF variability on the Indian Ocean around 3.0 - 3.8 million years ago in the Early Pliocene, a time characterized by fundamental changes in the Earth's climate. In particular, the ongoing constriction of the Indonesian Gateway around 4.0 – 3.0 million years ago is a commonly evoked cause for these intense changes. This study aims to provide new insights into the influence of ITF on global climate and fill a critical gap in our knowledge about the climatic evolution of the Indian Ocean.

My career path:

My position in Japan is my first Postdoc after finishing my PhD in Austria. While I thought myself prepared to leave the sheltered environment of my home and alma mater, it is a very exciting experience for sure. Especially since I was successful in getting additional funding here in Japan, which was not possible in Europe. However, doing research requires some interest and a willingness to collaborate on all levels of the institutional hierarchy, which can at times be difficult. Through this, I found that it can be complicated to get in touch with people who can really help you. But once you do, they are always happy to assist. Some hurdles also arise from very different attitudes towards interpersonal interaction, based on both language and cultural attitudes towards hierarchy, leaving you at times lost and isolated. Such differences, however, can certainly be overcome by forging connections and learning the Japanese language and distinctive (research) culture.

My relation to Europe:

I started work in Japan in April 2017 in order to peruse research related to the Indian Ocean and the ITF, which I intend to pursue further, even after my time here ends. Based on its international character, the project is heavily involved with a global team of collaborators, most of them at European institutions from Sweden, Norway, Germany and Austria. While eventually returning to Europe is certainly at the back of my head, and potential opportunities are available, at the moment I am enjoying the experiences a position in Japan offers. Also, considering the current state of academia in Europe, hoping to be able to pick and choose where to go, is essentially a pipe-dream. While external funding provides that opportunity, permanent positions are virtually non-existent. Although switching to the industry sector is certainly an option, at the moment I want to continue in academia, which unfortunately limits the possibilities of a return to Europe in the long-term.