MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE
FOR INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS

The Max Planck Institute for Intelligent Systems (MPI-IS) conducts research to understand the principles of perception, action, and learning in systems that successfully interact with complex environments.

The Research Group Embodied Social Interaction at MPI-IS **in Stuttgart** has an open position for

Master's thesis student (f/m/div) for Social Interaction in VR

Imagine noticing that someone is upset: you may understand that they are having a difficult time, yet still hesitate to ask what is wrong, listen further, or offer support. The reason may not be a lack of understanding. Engaging with another person's distress can feel emotionally demanding, time-consuming, or simply difficult to handle. This thesis explores why this gap between understanding and engagement occurs. Using virtual reality, we will examine how people choose to approach, listen to, support, or avoid a distressed person when empathic engagement becomes more or less costly.

Roles & Responsibilities

- Conducting a focused literature review on empathy, perspective-taking, and social VR.
- Contributing to the design and refinement of a controlled VR experiment.
- Supporting participant recruitment and data collection.
- Processing and analyzing questionnaire, behavioral and interaction data.
- Interpreting findings and writing a Master's thesis.

Education & Experience

- Master's student in Human–Computer Interaction, Computer Science, Media Informatics, Interaction Design, Cognitive Science, Psychology, or a related discipline.
- Familiarity with Unity, VR hardware, or interactive prototyping.
- Interested in empirical research on affective computing, social interaction, or VR, and be motivated to work with both experimental data and research participants.
- Good oral and written communication skills in English.
- Ideally have experience with experimental design or user studies.

Our Offer

- An international, multidisciplinary, and highly motivating working environment.
- Extensive mentoring and supervision.
- Access to state-of-the-art lab facilities.

Application

Applications should include a **CV** and an informative **transcript** from your current academic program. **In your email, please describe what interests you in this project, and how your previous experiences have prepared you for it.**

Please send your application to Philipp Müller (mueller@is.mpg.de) and Chang Cao (ccao@is.mpg.de). For any questions regarding the position, please also feel free to contact either of us.