Lost (and Found?) in the Milky Way:
Navigating My Chaotic Orbit in Research

Leibniz ScienceCampus
Digital Transformation of Research

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About Ania

⋆PhD in astrophysics (3d structure of the Magellanic System with classical pulsators).

⋆Leibniz ScienceCampus *Digital Transformation of Research* (DiTraRe) coordinator.

⋆Postdoctoral researcher at FIZ KA Knowledge-Driven AI (KDAI) group.



Image credit: NASA/Bill Ingalls, Astronomy Picture of the Day (APOD): Liftoff! Returning to the Moon, 2.04.2026

Booster Stage: Liftoff

After a successful PhD, I headed over abroad and started my first postdoc, which was a huge life lesson in humility due to private life serious complications.

Postdoc expectation	My reality check
Independent original research agenda and ideas	*Ideas: yes, realisation: prolonged absences didn't leave much time.*
Publishing	*Delayed articles concluding my PhD – not satisfying.*
Networking and collaboration	*Extremely limited due to the pandemic, e-conferences.*
Editorial/reviewing activity	*Nothing.*
Funding proposals	*Nothing.*
Students supervision	*One student for summer internship – not satisfying.*
Social and outreach roles	*Leading weekly meetings of a topic group.*
Career planning	*Quite stressful: only short-term contracts.*

Which expectations did you experience? Maybe something else than what's on the list?

(Un)Expected Turbulences

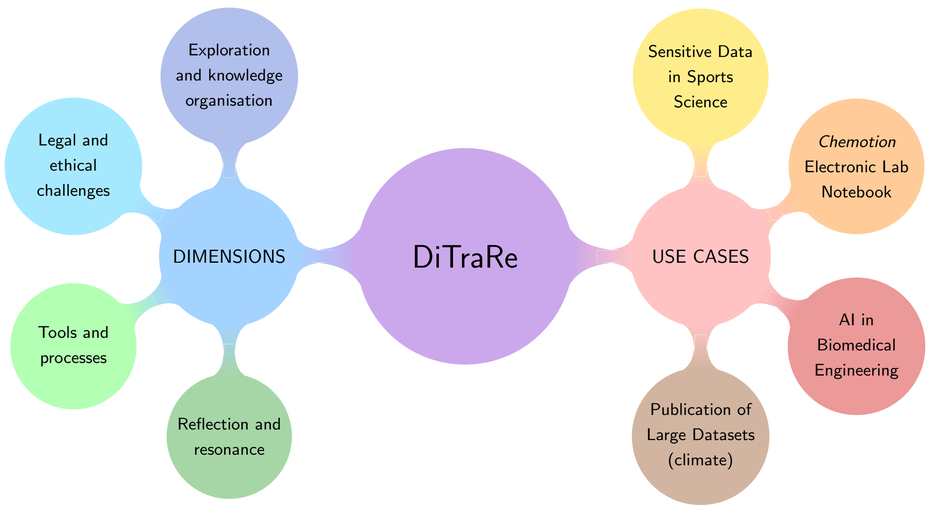
End of funding for the SFB 881 *Milky Way* led me to choose:

1. **Looking for another postdoc in astronomy.**
   - \+ I do what I love and am an expert in.
   - – I have to move to another continent/country.
   - – Time-limited contract again.
   - – Not easy to move as a single mom with two small kids who will need a lot of time to adapt.
2. **Looking for a position outside of astronomy.**
   - \+ No need to move.
   - \+ Very few chairs in astronomy available and many candidates: statistically it makes more sense.
   - \+ Maybe I'll love it too?
   - – Or maybe not...?

Job interviews: *You're overqualified. ⋆ Are you sure that you can work with a manager? ⋆ You'd need to be fluent in German to work in our company. ⋆ You're good in programming but not as good as software developers.*



Image credit: NASA / JPL-Caltech / SwRI / MSSS; Processing & License: Thomas Thomopoulos, Astronomy Picture of the Day (APOD): Jupiter's Clouds in High Definition from Juno, 6.01.2026



Gravity Assist: Interdisciplinarity

⋆Unwittingly, I sent one of the applications to a research group.

⋆**Exciting opportunities**: I got hired as a postdoc, connecting computer scientists to researchers from multiple other disciplines.

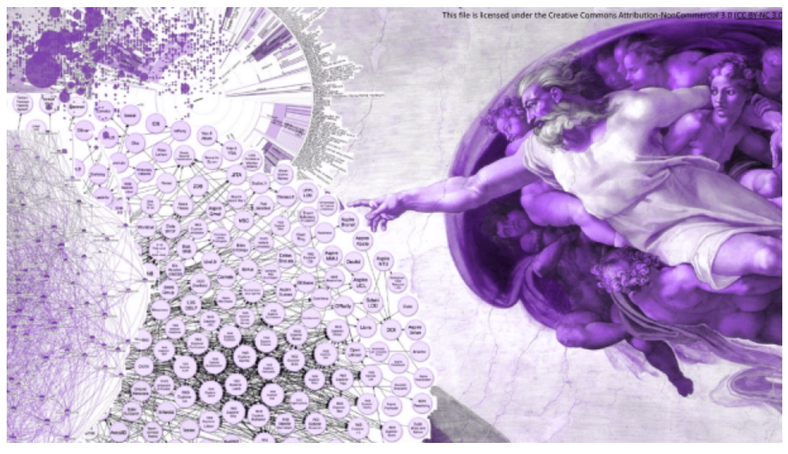
⋆**Unexpectedly challenging**: since 2024 I have also been a coordinator of the Leibniz ScienceCampus DiTraRe.

⋆**Back to being a novice**: I attend computer science conferences and still introduce myself as an astrophysicist.

Stable Orbit: Finding Fulfilment within Unpredictability

Lessons learned (notes to myself):

⋆Be open to changes.
⋆Set goals short and long-distance but be ready to replace them with new ones.
⋆Burnout may be around the corner, be careful, and work towards broadly understood harmony.
⋆Our voice is important. We're professionals and we treat ourselves as such (fight the impostor syndrome).
⋆We have rights to be happy with what we do.
⋆Go "out" and explore exciting career opportunities!



Curious to hear your personal story!

Thank you to my current team lead Prof. Harald Sack for trust and freedom in my career development. Thank you to my PhD supervisors Prof. Igor Soszyński and Prof. Dorota Skowron for never stopping believing in me. Last but not least, thank you to my 1st postdoc supervisor Prof. Eva Grebel for accepting my zero-productivity in the toughest times in my life.

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Check out the Leibniz ScienceCampus **DiTraRe website**!
And find us on: LinkedIn, Mastodon, YouTube, Zenodo.

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