Universität Münster

Twelve months, twelve people
Portraits 2025

J F M A M J J A S O N D

living.knowledge

Foreword

Dear Readers,

A university is far more than its buildings, statutes or organigrams. It lives from the people who fill it every day with their ideas, their curiosity and their engagement. At the University of Münster, there are 41,000 students and 8,000 staff, and they form a community whose diversity and energy make the campus a place which experiences lively exchanges of thoughts, ideas and opinions. Everyone who learns, teaches, researches or works here shapes the identity of our University, each in their own particular way.

In other words, what makes up the character of our University is far less the formal structures than the achievements and attitudes of our people here: through academic excellence just as much as through social responsibility, perseverance, creativity – and the courage to tread new paths. Or, to quote Albert Einstein: “Personalities are not formed by what is heard and said but by labor and activity”.

The series entitled “12 months – 12 people” focuses precisely on such personalities. We present portraits of twelve people who last year made an impression in various ways: a mineralogist who received an award for her research, an internationally acclaimed battery researcher or a student who campaigns doggedly for affordable housing in Münster. Their stories show how multifaceted engagement is lived out at our University – and also how closely linked academic work and social impact can be.

I am certain that these portraits not only provide information but are also a source of inspiration. They give insights into the breadth and depth of what makes up our University, and they invite us all to take a closer look at the people in its midst.

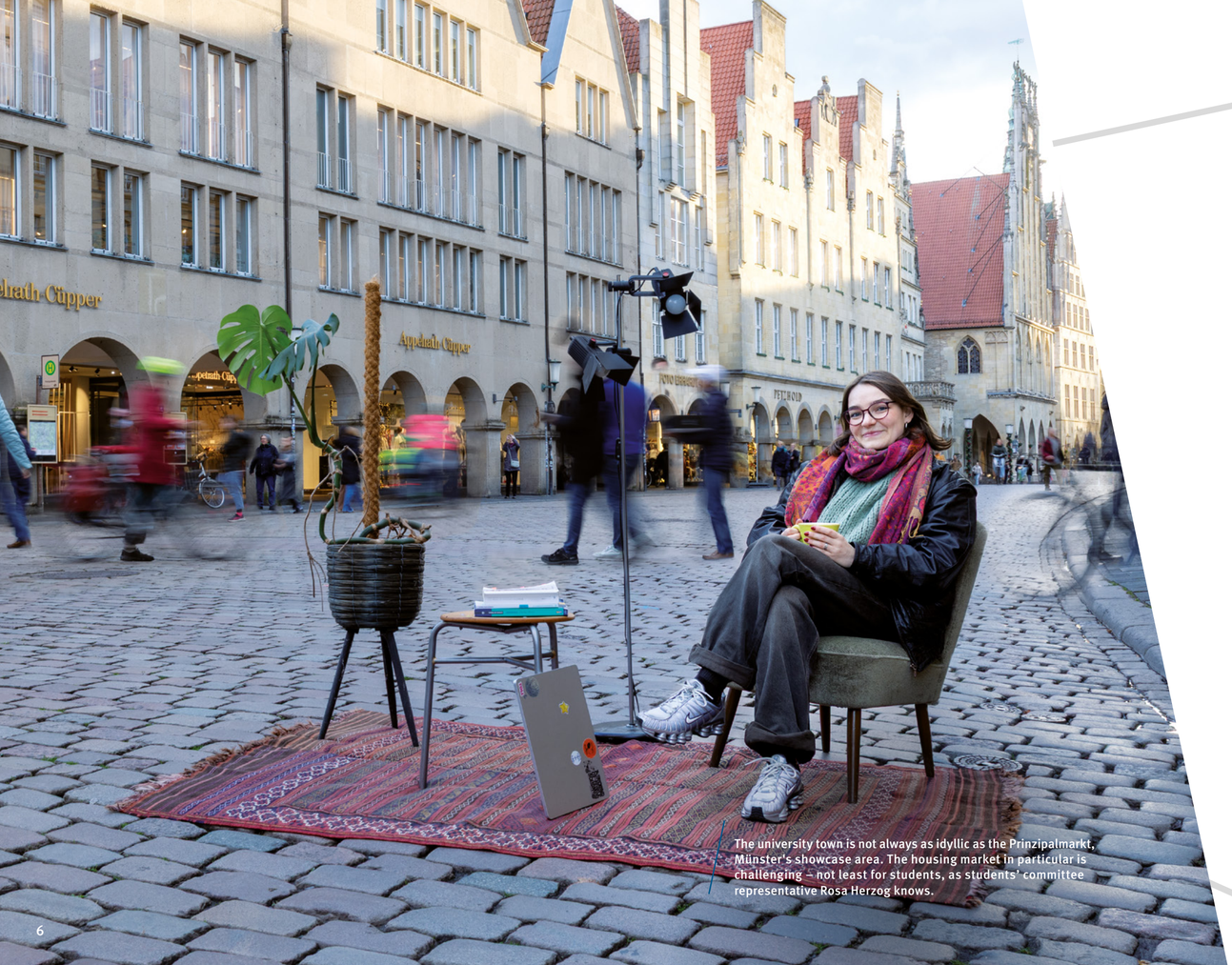
I do hope you find this Yearbook a stimulating and inspiring read!

Sincerely,

Prof. Johannes Wessels
Rector of the University of Münster

Contents

Portraits 2025 as PDF
uni.ms/portraits



The university town is not always as idyllic as the Prinzipalmarkt, Münster's showcase area. The housing market in particular is challenging – not least for students, as students' committee representative Rosa Herzog knows.

Compassion and a fighting spirit

Rosa Herzog's engagement on behalf of students is rewarded in January with the Rectorate's Student Prize. The difficult situation regarding student housing has been given much publicity by the Social Affairs and Student Accommodation department of the General Students' Committee (AStA). *André Bednarz*

Rosa Herzog has a big heart, and she shows it when she fights for other people's interests. Although only 21 years old, she is the longest-serving member of the General Students' Committee (AStA) – heading the Social Affairs and Student Accommodation department – and leading any fight on behalf of people and against grievances.

It's important to her, though, that the focus is not only on her. "I'm glad that our work is being seen – but all the others who work at least as hard as I do would have deserved the award just as much," she says. As the co-organiser of the "Homeless Freshers" camp in October 2024 she was in demand with local, regional and national media, all wanting to know why the AStA had transformed a sports hall into a dormitory for freshers. "Every day we recited our demands for better accommodation." She knows what it's like to suddenly be without a roof over her head. As a 13-year-old, she and her parents had to find somewhere to live in the highly competitive Berlin housing market after their landlord told them he needed their flat for his own use.

After a year of voluntary work in Israel, Herzog moved from Berlin to Münster – and was lucky: "A girlfriend I met during my voluntary work had been offered a place at the University of Applied Sciences earlier than most other people, and she found a place in an HMO. I was also able to live there after my semester began," she recalls. And another stroke of luck: in the introductory week she became friends with a student who soon got involved in the AStA and became its chair – and she recruited Rosa.

Rosa Herzog has been fighting for students' interests for almost two years now. Why? "Injustice and inconsistencies are a driving force," she says. "When politicians claim young people don't do anything, I have to disagree: every day I see students who spend 50 hours and more on their studies, part-time jobs, caring for family members, and commuting. It breaks my heart to see how studying and finding accommodation have become a privilege." There are no easy answers to the problem of housing, she says, and she knows that the initiative in the sports hall was only tackling the symptoms. "We wanted, and want, to fulfil our responsibility and offer help. It's frustrating that nothing much changes overall," she says. To ward off any resignation, she thinks with pleasure of the praise from freshers who, because of the opportunity to use the sports hall, missed neither the introductory week nor, therefore, contacts with other students.

For the first sports hall camp, and for a protest camp, Rosa Herzog and her then colleague Till Pauly were awarded the Rectorate's Student Prize on behalf of the whole team in January 2025. "We're delighted that the University has recognised this engagement," says Herzog, who is studying Politics and Law. "But the University and the city shouldn't just try and attract people – they must also help solve the problems," she says with feeling. She attracted the attention of the German public broadcaster ZDF, which invited Rosa and Co. to Berlin to take part in a discussion programme with politicians just before the elections to the Bundestag. "After the phone call from ZDF we ran round the flat whooping our heads off," she recalls. With millions of viewers watching, one of the students from the freshers' camp put a question to Chancellor Olaf Scholz on the housing crisis.

Meanwhile, Rosa Herzog carries on with her work. Every day she wakes up with new ideas, she says. However, such a degree of engagement leaves its mark. She remarks, probably unconsciously, that "she also studies on the side". But it is not only the workload. She and her team have to deal with difficult situations such as when students need emergency financial help or psychological counselling. Quietly, and a little despondently, she talks about the limits to her work. "I see the problems every day, but I can't let 30 people sleep in my living room. Sometimes I have to look after my own mental health." Despite the challenges, she wants to continue working at the AStA for a while. "There's still more work to do", she says. She also wants to complete her bachelor's course and become a lawyer so that she can continue to fight against injustice and for other people's interests.

A life at interfaces

In February, the European Association of Geochemistry awards the Werner Stumm Medal to Dr. Christine Putnis. The award of the medal is in recognition of important, innovative breakthroughs in geochemical research.

Dr. Kathrin Kottke

Anyone who wants to know how to manage a large family and pursue a scientific career at the same time should ask Dr. Christine Putnis how it is done. The Australian geochemist, who works as an adjunct professor at the Institute of Mineralogy, calmly gives a short answer: "Just get on with it!" But this laconic motto conceals a long, convoluted history: no straightforward success from start to finishing line, but hard-won compromises, setbacks and – again and again – renewed courage.

As a young woman, Christine Putnis already had a burning desire to understand the hidden stories of the Earth: what rocks were there below the surface? What are the forces that form continents? That she would become one of the leading international experts on crystal growth and dissolution was something she would hardly have imagined after graduating from the University of Newcastle in Australia.

In the early 1970s she and her husband, likewise a scientist, moved to England, where she first worked as a chemistry teacher at state schools in London and Cambridge. "Originally, we only wanted to go there for a holiday – and ended up staying for 25 years," she recounts with a smile which bears testimony to the surprising twists and turns that life can take. During this time, her family grew – with six children being born. "It was an exciting time, but stressful too," she says. "Luckily, I had a reliable network of friends. I wouldn't have managed otherwise."

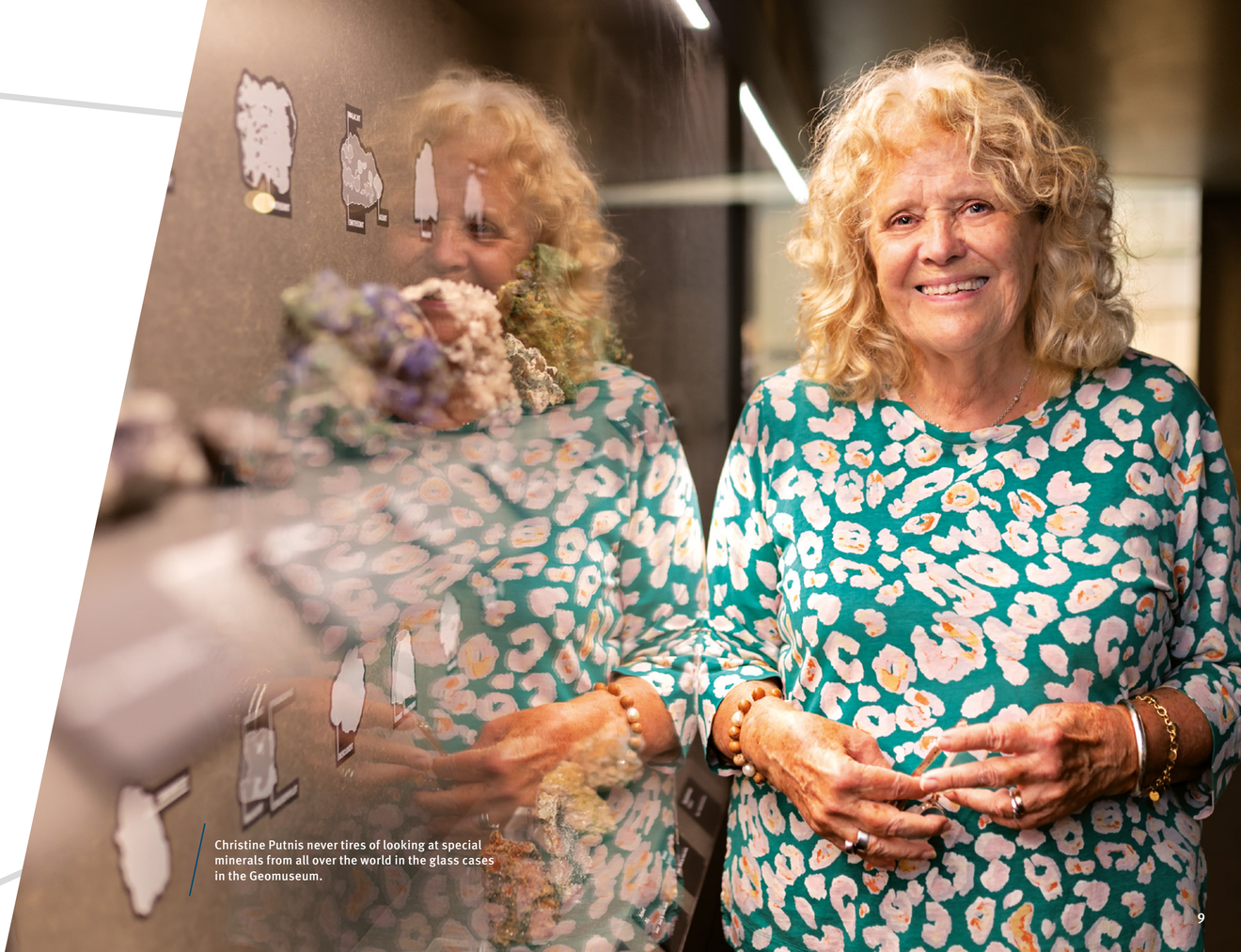
At the end of the 1980s Christine Putnis was engaged as a research associate at the University of Cambridge. However, the job was way below her potential. "At that time, there were hardly any women in my field of research – nor were they really wanted there. There was no support or recognition for them," she says. Nevertheless, she found a way of combining what was most important to her: scientific curiosity and her family.

When her husband was appointed to a professorship at the University of Münster in 1995, new horizons opened up for her: she got the opportunity to do a doctorate in mineralogy. This led to some pioneering work: studies on nanoscale processes at mineral surfaces which attracted international attention. Her most important instrument is the atomic force microscope which she uses to observe how minerals grow, dissolve and are transformed in aqueous environments.

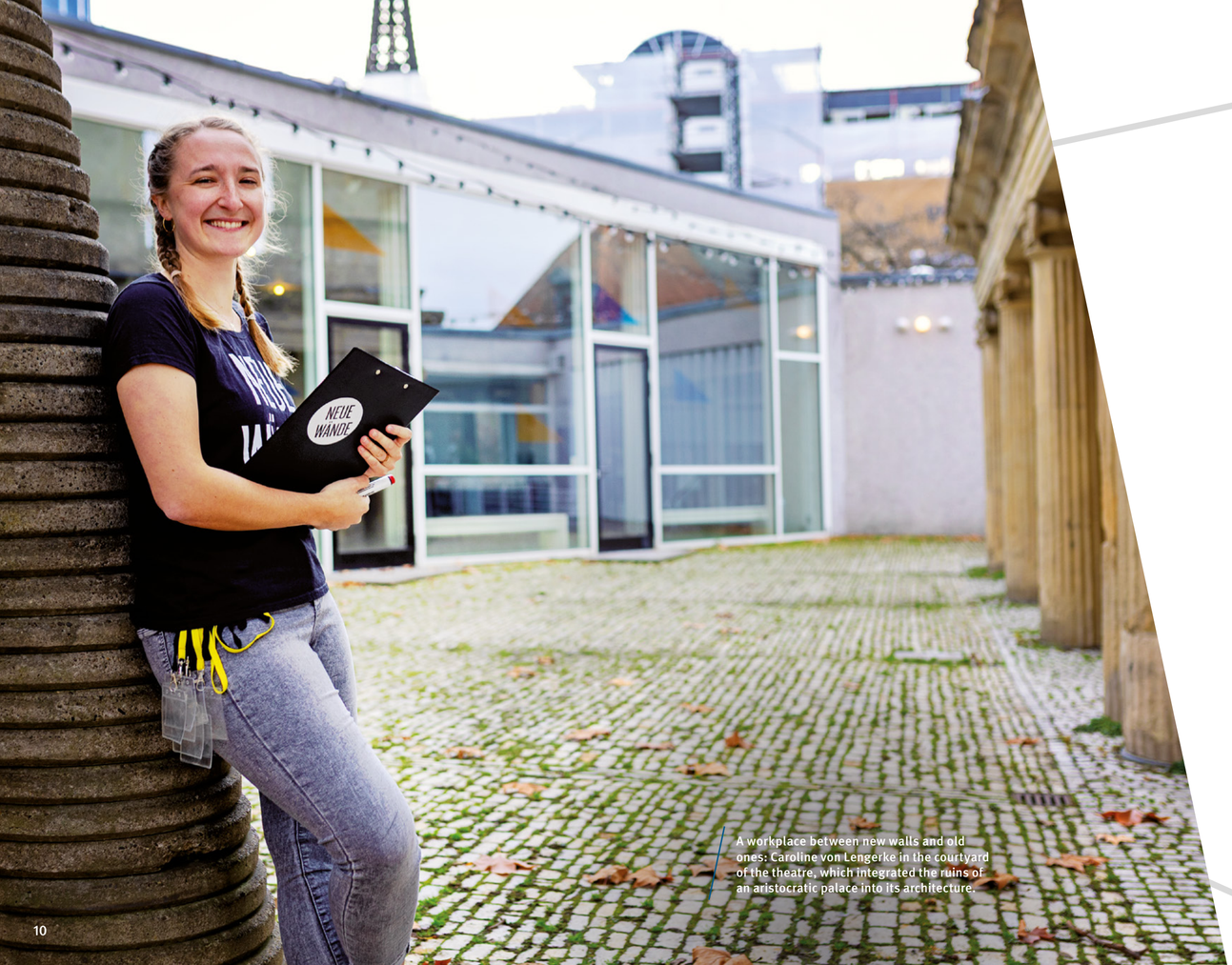
Researchers all over the world seek contact with Christine Putnis because her work on fluid chemistry – i.e. on how organic molecules and reaction kinetics control mineral transformations – deliver fundamental insights. These insights are important not only for science but also for environmental issues and for our understanding of the Earth's history. Her career was therefore less a straight line than a determined, dogged climb upwards: resistances led to findings, obstacles led to new paths.

For her achievements, the Australian scientist was awarded the Werner Stumm Medal – a distinction she had not expected. "There are so many outstanding scientists. That I of all people should receive this award was a big surprise," she says, visibly touched and self-effacing. Modesty is part of her nature. But there is also quiet pride in her eyes when she talks about her six children and 16 grandchildren, her husband, her twin sister and her many nieces and nephews. "Most of my family live in England and Australia. My husband and I try to visit them as often as possible."

Because she loves being with people, she has in Münster her – as she calls it – "party house" in the Kreuzviertel which offers space not only for celebrations and festivities but also for lively scientific discussions. Undergraduates, PhD students and visiting academics regularly visit the Putnis couple to cook and discuss together. "These discussions are the foundation of successful scientific work," she stresses. She hopes that her research and her career can be an example to young people.



Christine Putnis never tires of looking at special minerals from all over the world in the glass cases in the Geomuseum.



A workplace between new walls and old ones: Caroline von Lengerke in the courtyard of the theatre, which integrated the ruins of an aristocratic palace into its architecture.

Solving crises and kindling fires

During her teacher training, Caroline von Lengerke falls in love with the cultural scene. She has been active as management assistant at the NEUE WÄNDE (NEW WALLS) Festival since 2018. In March, the Münster Universitätsgesellschaft decides to support the event as a lighthouse project. *Hanna Dieckmann*

Caroline von Lengerke remembers how, when she was young, she and three elder siblings always heard the same thing from their parents: "You can train for a job, go to university or do whatever else – but please do it somewhere south of the River Elbe." The family lived out in the country near Bad Segeberg, in Germany's northernmost state of Schleswig-Holstein, and for the parents it was important that their children should get to know a different kind of world.

Caroline von Lengerke took this advice to heart. After her Abitur she went to Münster to do a Voluntary Social Year. While she was working for the non-profit foundation "Bürger für Münster" ("Citizens for Münster"), she met the actress Cornelia Kupferschmid, who is responsible for the Stadtensemble Münster and is the Artistic Director of the "Neue Wände" Festival. For Caroline von Lengerke (26), this contact was her introduction to the world of the arts. Today, she looks after the social media channels at the Stadtensemble, acts as assistant to the Festival management, and works as a student assistant in the University of Münster's Cultural Office.

It's easy to forget that she is a student in the 4th semester of her master's course, training to be a teacher of music and Latin. "I always wanted to study music and a language. This passion for cultural affairs was unexpected," she says. It's clear to see that working on the Festival is what excites her most. Every three years, the event provides a stage for around 600 creative artists. Anyone connected in some way to Münster's universities can take part. Since March 2025 the Universitätsgesellschaft Münster has been sponsoring Germany's largest festival of university culture.

Caroline von Lengerke joined the team of organisers in 2018. Her work covers everything that takes place behind the scenes at Münster Theatre, the Festival's home: fitting musical, theatrical and dance items into a three-day programme; repeatedly solving "minor crises" – for example, drawing up dressing-room plans or putting up signposts for artists who easily lose their way behind the stage. "Many of them have never stood on a stage before or been behind the scenes in a theatre." she says. Seeing people's eyes light up, she adds, shows her that culture can kindle a fire. "What makes me happy is when different art forms get to know and appreciate one another." Quite spontaneously, she remembers a typical situation: "In 2023 we had four solo artists – piano, voice, percussion and guitar. They all wanted to take part but didn't know in what form." In the end they got together and worked with a dance troupe. "They're still in contact with one another today and want to perform together at the next Festival."

Since she has been working with the Festival, she has become calmer in difficult situations: "We always find a solution." Sometimes it is just a different one from what was planned. She needs this resilience to stress to successfully manage her studies and her cultural and voluntary work. "It does me good to be involved in several things at the same time." She doesn't brush aside the question of whether she really does want to be a teacher after she graduates – or would rather stay in the cultural world. "It wouldn't be credible if I were to say that I'm not toying with the idea of staying in the cultural scene," she admits. But she knows about the other side of the business: during the Covid pandemic she had contact with freelance artists. "I was impressed to see how people threw themselves into finding solutions. But do I feel the same, to the same extent?" Perhaps juggling with a variety of activities is just the right preparation for school with its different classes, projects and needs, she says.

Caroline von Lengerke still has a lot of things on the go. Just recently she resumed an activity from her voluntary social year: once a month she makes music in an old people's home. "My parents set us an example with their voluntary work. It's so lovely, singing with elderly people." She's not worried about finishing her studies. "The semester of practical training showed me that I have a need for regularity." And who knows: being a teacher needn't mean the end of her passion for culture. "If it functions at university, it can function at school too."

Information systems: making the world a better place

In April the members of the Association for Information Systems (AIS), the global organisation representing research and teaching in information systems, elect Prof. Jan vom Brocke as its next president. He will now be heading the organisation for three years. *Brigitte Heeke*

When Prof. Jan vom Brocke was an undergraduate at the University of Münster in the 1990s, his own subject was still very new. Today he heads the global association of his trade. However, information systems was not a foregone conclusion for him. "I found lots of subjects interesting: economics, law, medicine," he recalls. "A lot of people also recommended me to become a teacher. Although information systems was seen as a demanding subject, people were already saying that it offered a lot of creative opportunities. I always wanted to do my own thing, and that still affects my research today."

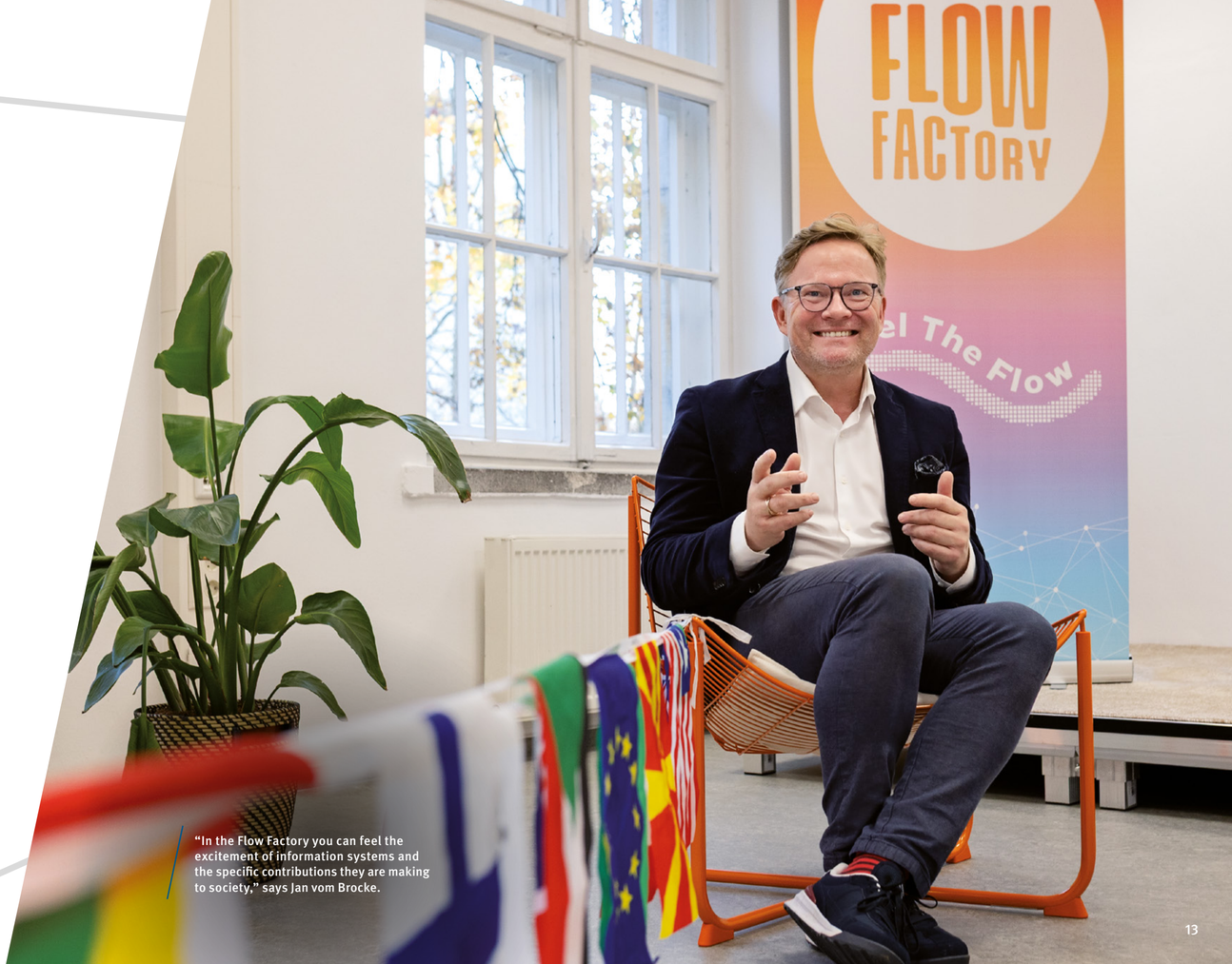
After graduation there followed a PhD and habilitation at the European Research Center for Information Systems (ERCIS), of which he is today the Director. The focus of his research is on change. So-called "process science" analyses digital traces in all areas of life and work in order to point up new possibilities for action – in particular through innovative technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI). The view it takes goes beyond business profits, and it looks just as much at new standards for ecological and social action. "What we do should have value for society," Jan vom Brocke says.

After stays at the Universities of Liechtenstein and St. Gallen, as well as at MIT in Boston, Jan vom Brocke returned to his alma mater two years ago. For me it was a moving moment, he says: "In my wildest dreams as a student I would never have thought that I myself would be able to continue developing the exciting work being done here." There is, in any case, a link to the city in his biography: "I met my dear wife while I was a student, and we got married in St Peter's Church here." Nowadays the family lives on a farm near Wolbeck. From here he commutes by bicycle to the Leonardo Campus, where the new rooms of the "Flow Factory" have just been completed. The research lab at ERCIS, sponsored by the Sparkasse (Savings Bank) Finance Group, examines AI-assisted innovation for transforming processes in the finance sector. "Students, researchers and people working in the sector draw up solutions for the future, and with this concept we have already attracted many outstanding talents to the University of Münster," he explains. Handling AI in a responsible way is important to him.

A sense of responsibility infuses his interdisciplinary projects. "I have a certain humility in this respect. As a student I was very impressed by disciplines which, for example, saved lives, or by awareness-raising work which was very important for society," he says. "Today, in information systems, we have an opportunity to do precisely that." He gives two examples: a project with Münster University Hospital in which data help to improve reanimation processes; and the project entitled "The Vatican and the Persecution of the Jews in Europe". Working together with colleagues from the Faculty of Catholic Theology, he uses AI to track down decision-making processes which were hitherto hidden.

Whether it was the opening of the Flow Factory, being elected as president, the International Information Systems Conference held at the University of Münster, or the Research Prize and the Teaching Prize awarded by the School of Business and Economics: 2025 was a special year for Jan vom Brocke. What it means in practice to be the president of a global organisation is something which he notices in his working life: "On Mondays, for example, I always have a leadership call with Australia and the USA – from 10 to 10:30 in the evening."

"It's an intensive time," is his résumé, "but totally inspiring." He learns about different approaches, he says – for example from Singapore, Saudi-Arabia and Brazil. "A global organisation doesn't live only from international standards, but also – especially – from regional differences. And it is precisely these which have so much potential for innovation." The work done by the Association deals with the strategic and academic development of information systems. "Our lives and the world of work are digital. That means we can help everywhere to make them better." Many strings making this possible currently come together on the Leonardo Campus. "I can feel the specialists all looking to Münster."



"In the Flow Factory you can feel the excitement of information systems and the specific contributions they are making to society," says Jan vom Brocke.

Hendrik Weber in the Common Room of the Cluster of Excellence Mathematics Münster: Here the members of the Cluster discuss their latest research approaches.

Breaking down barriers

The good news arrives in May: another seven years of Excellence funding for Mathematics at the University of Münster! Prof. Hendrik Weber is involved in the success story as a "bridge builder". *Victoria Liesche*

No, the panoramic view of the San Francisco Bay Area, with the Golden Gate Bridge in the background, is no wallpaper photo. Hendrik Weber is currently at the University of California in Berkeley as a visiting academic when he switches on for the video interview. But it is not only the phenomenal view from his office window which has put a smile on his face: Weber, a mathematician, can look back on a successful year.

It began with the Simons Laufer Mathematical Sciences Institute awarding him the Clay Senior Scholarship and inviting him to spend four months in the USA. In May, there followed the good news that the national and regional state governments in Germany would be providing funding of around 40 million euros for the Cluster of Excellence Mathematics Münster for a further seven years. "This means that we can keep the positive dynamics of the first funding period going and can continue to raise the international visibility of Münster as a centre of research," says a delighted Hendrik Weber, 44, who is involved in the Cluster as a project leader.

A lot of work was necessary before the champagne bottles could be opened. For three years the researchers at the Cluster met repeatedly to write the application for an extension of the funding. "Our aim," says Weber, "was a new research programme that continued to break down the barriers between mathematical disciplines." The reason for this was that, over the past few years, combining concepts and techniques from a variety of fields to find new solutions had proved to be a very fruitful approach.

"The first drafts we produced for the application were pretty wild," he recalls. "But we adopted a process of first putting all our ideas onto the table and then thinking, all together, about what the main lines were to be – and that was extremely valuable." Gradually, a coherent whole was produced – coordinated by Cluster spokespersons Prof. Thomas Nikolaus and Prof. Mario Ohlberger – which everyone was able to support, displaying the necessary spark of enthusiasm to the reviewers. This enthusiasm and a spirit of optimism were what persuaded Weber to move to the University of Münster in 2022: since then he has held a so-called Bridging-the-Gaps Professorship of Stochastic Analysis: his research builds bridges between various fields – in his case, between probability theory and analysis. This branch of mathematics deals with functions and their properties and provides tools to precisely describe changes and connections, for example in the natural sciences.

While still at school in Leverkusen, Weber was fascinated by the mathematics behind chemistry and physics. He studied in Heidelberg, Paris and Bonn. After completing his PhD, he made a career in the UK – from postdoc at the University of Warwick to professor at the University of Bath.

The move to Münster was a good decision, he says. Münster, he adds, has outstanding conditions for pioneering research in mathematics – with the Cluster, the newly established Research Training Group in Stochastics, the Collaborative Research Centre in Geometry, and the future "Centre for Mathematics Münster".

And what is he looking forward to most in the next Cluster funding period? "Doing some really cool mathematics. We planned for so long what we wanted to do – now's the time to find proofs for a few theorems!"

Weber is involved in the new research programme as a "bridge builder" in various thematic fields. In one project he is working closely with Prof. Raimar Wulkenhaar, an expert on mathematical physics. The background to their work is that many models in physics are based on quantum field theory – for example the standard model of particle physics which describes how all elementary particles interact with one another. From a mathematical point of view, many questions have remained unanswered since the 1950s. "We have drawn up a joint approach for investigating one of the problems in this theory and, ideally, we would like to contribute to a rigorous mathematical basis," Weber explains. To this end, they are combining different techniques of their specialist fields. "The mathematical level of difficulty of this project seems to be very good: we need to work hard, but we're optimistic that we can achieve interesting results."

Dancing in the dark

In June, Prof. Thorsten Quandt is awarded the second ERC Grant of his career. With his "DANCE" project, Quandt, an expert on online communication, wants to study how toxic online worlds – especially those of young men – arise. Despite the nature of the topic, he retains a sense of humour. *André Bednarz*

On the Internet, light and dark are often just a few clicks apart. On the one hand limitless communication, cat videos and a wealth of information; on the other: hostility, degradation and attacks on democracy. Prof. Thorsten Quandt, an expert on online communication, knows all about this digital duality. Sitting in a darkened room and surrounded by dozens of monitors, he talks about his life, his career and what motivates him. When asked why he has been dealing with online disinformation, cyberbullying and hate all these years, his answer is clear and devoid of resignation: "Someone has to take a look at it – objectively, and without wishing to have their prejudices confirmed."

Thorsten Quandt does indeed take a look. Media were already playing a part early on in the life of the 54-year-old. "I wanted to become a film director, and so I enrolled at Bochum to do the film studies course." In the completely oversubscribed course, he says, he was "one of 1,000 wannabe Steven Spielbergs". This was no good, he thought, and so he switched to Psychology and Journalism. It was to be 16 years before Quandt transferred the centre of his working life from Bochum to Münster. It was, he says, a time marked by "guided coincidences" and he adds with a smile that he was "half-pushed and half-pulled". The years saw him working as a radio journalist, then as a research associate and a PhD student in Ilmenau, Thuringia, followed by a post-doc position in Munich, an associate professorship at the University of Berlin and an appointment as professor at the University of Hohenheim.

Although what he loved most of all as a journalist were discussions over lunch, where a wide range of political opinions frequently clashed and caused much turbulence – as in the case of a local kale lunch he was involved in, which was "my absolutely favourite assignment" – and although in Ilmenau he had a "really exciting and wonderful time, while young and slightly naïve", he finally ended up at Münster, where he has been a professor at the Department of Communication since 2012. He explains in a very matter-of-fact way that you go where the jobs are. With more feeling, he comments on how much he values Münster and the way the city and the university are interlinked. Quandt is no great fan, however, of offices, which he describes as "lifeless places": he is not only an analytical social scientist, and in particular he loves the creativity of his job.

His preference for places full of life and ingenuity bore fruit in June. The European Research Council (ERC) approved his application for an Advanced Grant, which he had written one summer in France. He had already been awarded an ERC Starting Grant in 2010 for his research into the culture of online gaming. This new grant will see him moving between public communication and virtual reality. Tongue in cheek – and because a positive acronym was needed – he called his project "DANCE", standing for "Dark Nerd Communities: A multi-method exploration of toxic degradation in the adolescent technosphere". Its aim is to discover how online groups – young men in particular – function, how their values break down and a toxic, dangerous community is created. One of the topics involved is the so-called Incel movement, in which men aim to reclaim power by degrading women.

For many years now, Thorsten Quandt has demonstrated in his research that he not only has his finger on the pulse of our times, but that sometimes he is also a few steps ahead. He was an early believer in the Internet and guessed that it would stay with us and become a mass medium. This was why he has specialised in studying the digital world by proceeding in a rigorously scientific way. "The objects under investigation are people. The methods employed are taken from the natural sciences," he says. What he is interested in with his latest project, he adds, are "the circumstances beforehand, and the breadth of the phenomena", the rationalities of problematic behaviour, and how political, ideological or economic "entrepreneurs of hate" poison young people. Thorsten Quandt shines a light into another dark area of the Internet – people-oriented, avoiding stereotypes, and helping to preserve democracy. And preferably outside his office.

Thorsten Quandt has been researching for years into digital worlds, including the shady and dark phenomena there. Nevertheless, he retains his optimism and his love of his work.

Martin Winter likes working with young people on joint projects in the MEET Battery Research Centre.

A confident team-player

MEET has developed into one of the world's leading battery research centres – not least thanks to the skills of its Director, Prof. Martin Winter. Winter, a chemist, is a man of many talents and a team-player. In June, the European Academy of Sciences and Arts appoints him as a member. *Norbert Robers*

It is no coincidence that, right at the beginning of our conversation, Martin Winter goes into great detail regarding batteries and their research. Straight away, he starts talking about the Italian Alessandro Volta and the voltaic pile, named after him, of zinc and copper discs stacked on top of each other which he presented to the French Consul, Napoleon Bonaparte, on 7 November 1800. The invention by Volta of the first electric battery represented a decisive step forward in the history of electricity and, incidentally, preserved frogs – whose legs were able to conduct electricity – from extinction. While he was still at school, Winter dreamed of a career as an historian. Things turned out differently, but he still enjoys immersing himself in history. "Almost all of my lectures include an historical background," he says.

It is probably precisely these distinctive communicative skills, combined with his technical knowledge, which have made the 60-year-old chemist one of the world's most successful professors of materials science, energy and electrochemistry. Today, it is no mean feat to be able to keep track of all the honours he has received. Numerous medals and awards, the German Order of Merit 1st Class, two honorary professorships in Taiwan: in thirty years, the Director of the MEET Battery Research Center at the University of Münster and the Münster Helmholtz Institute has collected more than 60 accolades. Just recently, in July 2025, the European Academy of Sciences and Arts appointed him as a member. But no: in spite of the pleasure at every single honour, Winter prefers not to view this form of praise at too personal a level, but more pragmatically. The reason the prizes are so valuable, he stresses, is that "they afford me a degree of freedom and strengthen the subject overall."

However, Winter – who moved from Graz Technical University to Münster in 2008 – is not a person who plays down his achievements. Why should he? "My strength is in organising the overall conditions for scientific excellence," says the native of Osnabrück and father of four. "I can motivate and I can initiate." With a twinkle in his eye, he adds that "you have to blow your own trumpet – and I confess that I'm certainly receptive to praise." This is one side of his personality: that of the confident man of many talents who can nevertheless assert that he is "not an outstanding chemist". The other side shows a convinced team-player who is on first-name terms with everyone at MEET (founded in 2009), who takes a personal interest in PhD students, who attaches importance to "always being approachable and treating people decently", and who is happy to offer advice over a cup of coffee or a glass of wine in the evening.

Despite the "enormous pressure to succeed" – which Winter feels with regard to the energy transition demanded by the politicians and to MEET as a "showcase project" – he plans to work through till the age of 67. Although it all demands a lot of him, he is constantly busy all over the world as a speaker and as an adviser, often working into the early hours of the morning. However, he enjoys working with young people from all over the world, acting largely in a self-determined way, pursuing his own ideas and supporting those of other people, and proceeding in a very goal-oriented manner. "One big advantage we have is that nothing we produce gets thrown away."

Of course, he needs his work/life balance, with time to take a deep breath and relax. For example, with his family or his (almost) daily walk around the 4.6 kilometres of Münster's Promenade. He also enjoys cultural events and likes reading – preferably long articles in newspapers and magazines.

Last but not least, Martin Winter has for many years now had a hobby which provides him with the ideal opportunity to combine what he cares about in addition to his work: discovering art and culture and immersing himself in history. He also collects stamps – in a big way: he has compiled 500 albums, including, naturally enough, some stamps depicting Alessandro Volta. Just how well suited this hobby is to Winter as a scientist and in private is demonstrated by his standards in this field too: "I attach a great deal of importance to accuracy and especially to completeness."

Of people and pixels

Physician Dr. Anna Junga uses digital methods in her teaching. Together with an interdisciplinary research team she is awarded a special prize by the Ulrich Bernath Foundation for Research in Open and Distance Learning in August for virtual reality-assisted competence training for brain death diagnostics. *Dr. Kathrin Kottke*

When Dr. Anna Junga talks about her work, it's all about medical teaching and research and how the two mesh together. Junga, 30, is one of a generation of young scientists who are taking medical training at the University of Münster into the future. Using virtual reality (VR), artificial intelligence and digital teaching methods are a matter of course for her. But there is one thing she makes clear: "No digital tool can, or should, be any substitute for direct contact with patients."

Anna Junga grew up in Recklinghausen and she was the first in her family to take her Abitur. During her time at school she was already fascinated by natural sciences and by the idea of becoming a doctor one day. However, she was sceptical – because the chances of gaining a place to study medicine in Münster were small. But in 2014 she was awarded a place – which she saw as being a "great privilege". She studied human medicine, completed a PhD and became involved in the Institute of Medical Education. As an assistant and member of the "MeDocs" initiative, she recognised the extent to which research and teaching are interlinked. This experience laid the foundations for her work today. Since late 2020 she has been working there as a lecturer and researcher, and today she heads the "Digital Teaching Methods" department. In other words, at an early stage in her career she took on a key role in innovative training.

In August 2025, together with Pascal Kockwelp, Prof. Markus Holling, Prof. Benjamin Risse and Prof. Bernhard Marschall, she was awarded a special prize by the Ulrich Bernath Foundation for Research in Open and Distance Learning – for a project particularly close to her heart: VR-assisted competence training for brain death diagnostics. The team developed a simulation which enables students to practice this procedure in realistic situations. "With the aid of the VR headset," Junga explains, "students immerse themselves in an intensive-care ward or an A&E department. They encounter virtual patients and examine, question and treat them. In this way, they learn to make their own decisions and do so in a safe, realistic and risk-free environment." A short while later there followed another prize for teachers from the Society for Medical Education. Anna Junga is especially proud of this award as it honours personalities and their work.

The prizes and awards are not important for her, though. What motivates her is the teaching itself. "A lot of research questions arise straight from teaching," she says. "We can try out new insights directly in teaching projects." What is important to her is training, which comprises three elements: contact with patients; practical exercises with so-called simulated patients; and a targeted use of VR and artificial intelligence.

Just how important practical work is to her can be seen outside the university environment: in addition to her work in the faculty, Anna Junga works as a urologist in a surgery in the town of Herten. This direct contact with patients is, for her, a valuable counterbalance to her other work, as well as being a constant reminder of "why we're doing all this".

She confesses with a smile that work is often a hobby for her. In the evening she often likes to sit at her desk and write specialist articles. "That may make me sound like a workaholic, but it's fun to create something new with other people," she says. But there are other sides to Anna Junga: she likes knitting and crochet work and also likes renovating. She used to have a Game Boy, but today she is at home in the gaming scene and visits digital exhibitions.

Her motto in life is: "I simply try things out. If they work, all the better. And if not, at least I tried." This approach, coupled with curiosity and perseverance, is a central theme in her career. She is proud of the fact that she studied and did her PhD at the University of Münster and now teaches and researches here. She wants to begin with her habilitation soon. She shows that modern medicine is more than high-tech and algorithms: it lives from people who are passionate about it.

Anna Junga has experienced the growth of the Medical Campus: first as a student, and today as a lecturer and researcher. She will soon be moving into the new study lab at Coesfelder Kreuz. The large learning lounge will be used by students in just a few months' time.

In front of the pyramid by American artist Agnes Denes: after almost 30 years, Gerald Echterhoff returns to the New School for Social Research in New York, where he began his academic career.

Famous predecessors and new research perspectives

A formative place for an academic career: social psychologist Prof. Gerald Echterhoff is the first academic from Münster University to hold the Theodor Heuss professorship at the New School for Social Research in New York. Starting there in September means a return to an old stamping ground. *Kathrin Nolte*

For psychologist Gerald Echterhoff, it is a return to a place which left its mark on him. 30 years ago, he began studying psychology at the New School for Social Research (NSSR) in New York and then wrote his doctoral dissertation there too. His post as a postdoc fellow was also in New York. So it was undoubtedly a special moment for the Professor of Social Psychology when he learned in December 2024 that he would be taking over the Theodor Heuss professorship at the NSSR for two semesters from September 2025. Gerald Echterhoff is the first academic from the University of Münster to hold this prestigious visiting professorship.

Established in 1919, today's NSSR became especially important from the 1930s onwards as a "university in exile" for academics from the social sciences and the humanities fleeing from the Nazi regime. Notable intellectuals such as Hannah Arendt and Erich Fromm taught there. In 1962, the Theodor Heuss professorship – named after the first postwar President of Germany – was set up with the support of the German Government. Philosopher Jürgen Habermas, sociologist Niklas Luhmann, historian Hans Mommsen and other well-known intellectuals taught and researched at the New School.

Gerald Echterhoff is grateful for the honour and immediately thinks back to his time in the city. "My stay there was decisive for my academic career and today it still influences my understanding of what science should be," he says. "The academic atmosphere here is marked by a lively openness and by inspiring creativity." Dialogue and interdisciplinary collaboration have ever since been the hallmarks of his personal philosophy of research and teaching. He sees the transfer of knowledge to society as an important aim of his work.

After positions in Cologne, Bielefeld and Bremen, Echterhoff has been at Münster since 2020, and the main emphases of his work include social and motivational influences on cognition and memory, as well as communication and relationships between groups. He also examines the consequences of forced migration and the integration of refugees. Research into these two topics is what he would especially like to move forward with during his time in New York. "Migration is seen differently in the USA and Europe," says Echterhoff. Whereas countries of origin such as Syria and Afghanistan dominate in Europe, in America it is rather migration from Central and South America. "These experiences and backgrounds open up new perspectives for me." Refugee and migrant activity have always, he says, been embedded in respective history, culture and politics.

Compared to the 1990s, the situation around his return to New York could not be more different: Echterhoff's family also live in the apartment made available to him on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. He was accompanied by his partner, Birgit Neumann, an Anglicist, who likewise has a visiting professorship at the New School which was organised through her chair at the University of Düsseldorf. The two sons, 11 and 15, are also there and they attend a state school.

Gerald Echterhoff gave his first seminars as a lecturer, to a highly motivated group of students, just four days after his arrival in America. Parallel to this, he organises a research colloquium at the University of Münster and continues to supervise undergraduates and doctoral students. "The training in Münster is more structured," he explains. "On the other hand, the number of participants in seminars at the New School is smaller, which makes it possible to have more intensive discussions." At the same time, he adds, he has to provide extra tuition – especially in the theoretical and methodological basics of psychological thought – as the students there all have different educational biographies.

While everyday life in New York has changed rapidly over the past 30 years, coffee in the morning is something that hasn't changed for Gerald Echterhoff. For this, he uses the espresso machine left there by his predecessor, historian Christina Morina from the University of Bielefeld. It is just one of many objects left behind in the apartment on Union Square – such as literature, cups and crockery, which are all mementoes of the history of the Theodor Heuss professorship.

Becoming wiser … with a good laugh

Jens Münchow is a doctoral student, researching into how a protein enabling sperm to penetrate an egg cell can be used to produce a "pill for men". He is happy to give non-specialists insights into his project. In the science slam in October, the audience votes him the west German champion. *Dr. Christina Hoppenbrock*

Jens Münchow likes using comparisons to make facts easier to understand. For example: when a sperm cell swims towards an egg cell, it is similar to Hansel and Gretel with the breadcrumbs. The egg cell secretes an attractant and leaves a trail. This tells the sperm cells which way to go.

Münchow, who is writing his dissertation at the Institute of Pharmaceutical and Medicinal Chemistry, is interested in two questions: How does sperm arrive at the egg cell? And how can this be prevented? In reality, it is much more complicated. A protein acting as a "doorman", allowing the sperm to penetrate the egg cell, plays an important role. And the main point is how knowledge of this molecular mechanism can be used to develop a pill for men. When Münchow, 29, talks about his subject, he makes it easy to understand. Which is no wonder: he has experience in presenting it to non-specialists – because one of his passions is science slams.

In a slam, held on stage, contestants have to give a wide audience brief insights into their own research, and as entertainingly as possible. The audience votes on which presentation was the best. Jens Münchow's first slam presentation was in Münster in 2024. An advertisement in the students' association newsletter for a science slam in Fürstenberghaus under the auspices of the young German Physical Society was a clear signal for him. "I had already been toying with the idea of taking part in a slam … so I applied. I was the winner – and now I had tasted blood," he says with a laugh.

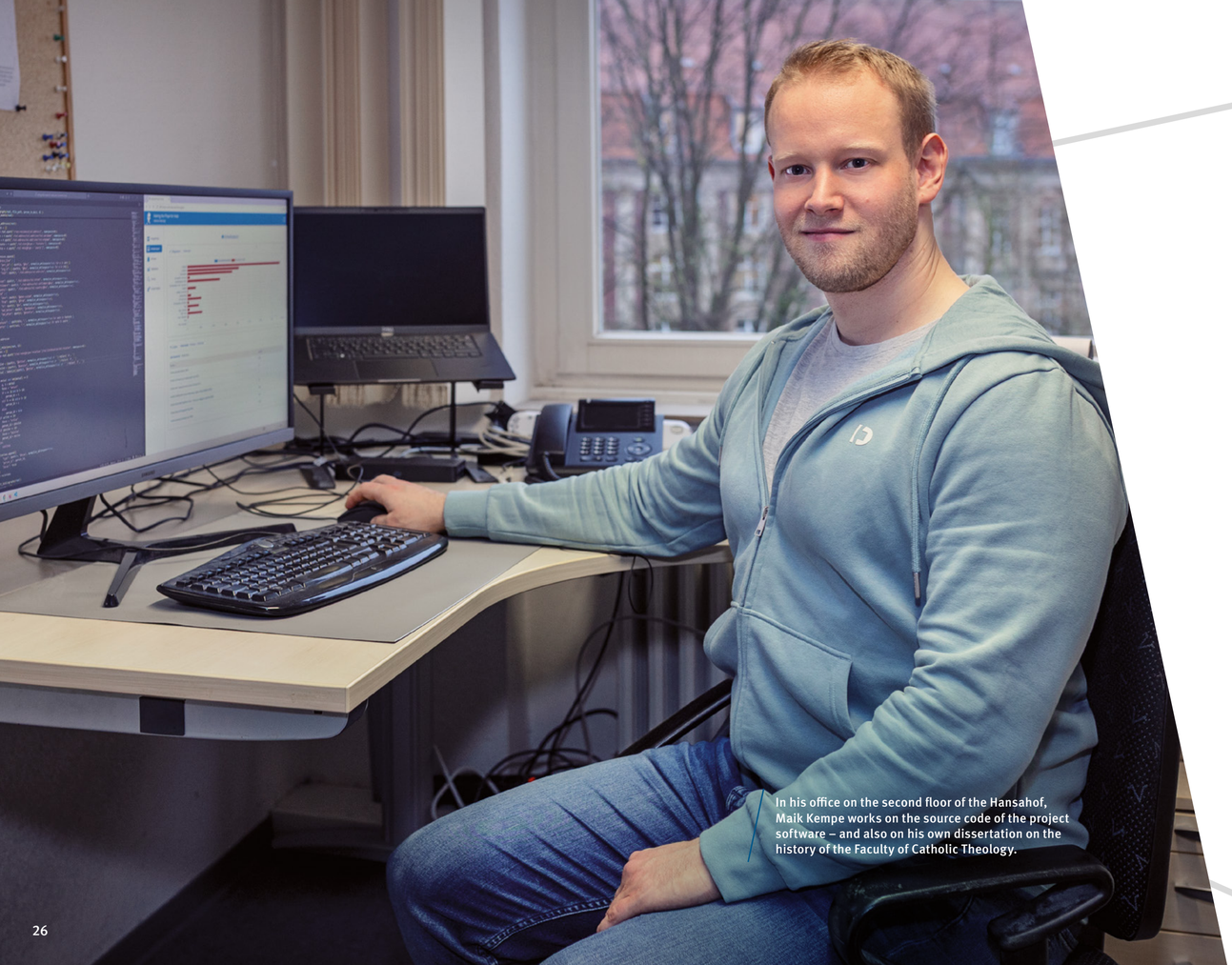
After this successful start, he put his name down on a list of slammers at an events agency. Gigs followed in Osnabrück, Dortmund and Heidelberg. Münchow's stage career was interrupted by a six-month research stay at the University of Loughborough in the UK before it reached a temporary highpoint in October 2025 when he won the title of "West German Champion" at a slam in the Schlachthof cultural centre in Wiesbaden. "That was a special venue for me because I went to my first-ever concert there as a teenager," he remembers. After Wiesbaden came the German Championships in Düsseldorf, in front of an audience of 800, and then a science slam in Bochum.

It isn't the contest which makes him want to stand up on a stage and present the subject of his dissertation. "I'm doing lobbying work for research," he says. "Everyone doing a PhD here has interesting topics, but unfortunately only very few people hear about them." But it's important, he says, that people are properly informed – precisely in times when facts are not the most important thing. He knows his topic is especially suitable for grabbing people's interest. "It's real life, and everyone's familiar with it. It's socially relevant, because a lot of people ask why, 65 years after the invention of the pill for women, we still don't have a pill for men. And: it's guaranteed to raise a laugh." Humour, says Münchow, is an important ingredient in a successful science slam presentation. The audience should leave the event not only wiser than when it came in – it should also, at least once, have a good laugh.

Jens Münchow doesn't have a lot of time currently for another of his passions, cycling. Nevertheless, a few weeks before the West German Championships, he allowed himself the pleasure of setting off on his bike for Amsterdam, 230 kilometres away, and returning by train in the evening. In 2023 he took part in an "ultrarace" in southern Sweden with his mountain bike: 600 kilometres in four days – from Göteborg to Malmö. After his dissertation he plans to travel to Spain, taking his gravel bike with him for the "unknown race": 1,000 kilometres in five days. The first checkpoint is only announced just before the start, and all the riders have to plan their routes themselves.

Talking of planning: When will the pill for men become available? Before the final applause, Jens Münchow gives an answer in his presentation: "Well, it won't be happening today, because I'm finished for now."

As a chemist, Jens Münchow spends a lot of time in the laboratory. But he always likes to get up on the stage, where he can present his research to a wide audience.



In his office on the second floor of the Hansahof, Maik Kempe works on the source code of the project software – and also on his own dissertation on the history of the Faculty of Catholic Theology.

A house with a lot of space

In November the research project entitled “The Vatican and the Persecution of the Jews in Europe” receives long-term funding approval from the Union of German Academies. In the project, headed by church historian Prof. Hubert Wolf, Maik Kempe is responsible for the digital infrastructure. *Brigitte Heeke*

“Developing software is like building houses,” says Maik Kempe. Not until the bare brickwork has been completed do you begin work on installing the electrics. In his job, he says, work begins when you have a concept, drafts, a layout, a lot of team discussions and, last but not least, a solid foundation. Kempe, an historian and theologian, has been working at the Department of Medieval and Modern Church History at the Faculty of Catholic Theology since he graduated. He created his first websites while still at school. He took on more and more work, learned more and, although an outsider, delved into software development. Today, at 34 and with a master’s degree in “Christianity in Culture and Society”, he is responsible for digital humanities at the chair. In his office on the second floor of the Hansahof, he works calmly and methodically on his projects, of which two currently have priority: setting up a database for the project “The Vatican and the Persecution of the Jews in Europe”; and completing his dissertation on the cultural politician Friedrich Althoff, who was responsible for many academic innovations at Münster.

In his dissertation, Kempe reconstructs the steps taken by the Prussian civil servant at the Faculty of Catholic Theology immediately after the *Kulturkampf* between the Catholic Church and Prussia in the 1870s. “Today the bishop can still veto professorial appointments,” Kempe explains. “Formerly, the dioceses looked especially to see that candidates for professorships were loyal to the Pope. In support of his unbureaucratic “authoritarian appointments policy” behind the scenes, Althoff haggled over many an appointment. “Some real horse-trading went on, as can be seen in the formulations, some coded, in his correspondence.” In 1884 five new professors came to Münster who, in the eyes of the Prussian Ministry of Education, were politically reliable. Kempe is working with sources from twenty archives to shed light on these procedures.

A comprehensive convolute from the Vatican archives forms the focus of the Academies project: around 10,000 petitions to the Pope from Jewish people during the Nazi period, plus the related correspondence, will be recorded, transcribed and researched over the next 25 years. The legibility of the approximately 17,000 pages – in at least 17 languages – varies greatly. There are further documents of over 55,000 pages, in twelve languages, on how decisions were made in the Vatican.

The project team led by church historian Prof. Hubert Wolf is working on the texts using a specially programmed input mask, researching everything else that can be discovered – for example, the papers’ state of preservation; information about the petitioners and their fate; and who processed the letters in the Vatican, and how. Not only research associates but also student assistants and citizen scientists collate the data in line with international standards for the digital humanities. To preserve the complex material digitally, a database will be necessary whose architecture will hold up for the entire duration of the project – building on the experience from the preceding project, “Asking the Pope for Help”.

“Anyone working with the completed datasets can glean much about the history behind them,” says Kempe. “What were the specific hardships which people underwent? Were there any major instances of people fleeing from certain regions? What influence did the Vatican bureaucracy have?” The data will be made available online to anyone interested. Two aims of the project are: firstly, to be a memorial to those persecuted and, secondly, to be of service to their descendants.

For Maik Kempe, both the petitions project and his own research are meaningful activities. “I’ll be glad, though, if the dissertation is completed soon,” he confesses. Then he’ll be able, he says, to devote himself entirely to the big “new building” – the database for the Academies project. As a dedicated software architect, Maik Kempe will ensure that the database has enough well-organised space.

Down mountainsides and up career ladders

Barely two weeks before Christmas, chemist Prof. Armido Studer gets a phone call from Bonn: the German Research Foundation has awarded him one of the coveted Leibniz Prizes. This "icing on the cake" in his career gives Studer – never one to be shy of risks – undreamt-of flexibility. *André Bednarz*

The paths that a person's life and their career can take are rarely depicted as graphically as in the case of Armido Studer's childhood and teenage years. Looking out of the window of his parents' house in the small Swiss town of Visperterminen, he could see both the Matterhorn and a plant belonging to the Lonza chemicals company. Initially, young Studer made efforts to take the mountain path: every day he skied down the slopes and glaciers and was on his way to taking up skiing professionally. "That was my life!" Studer explains, sitting in his office 40 years later – just before Christmas, but with no sign of any mountains or snow.

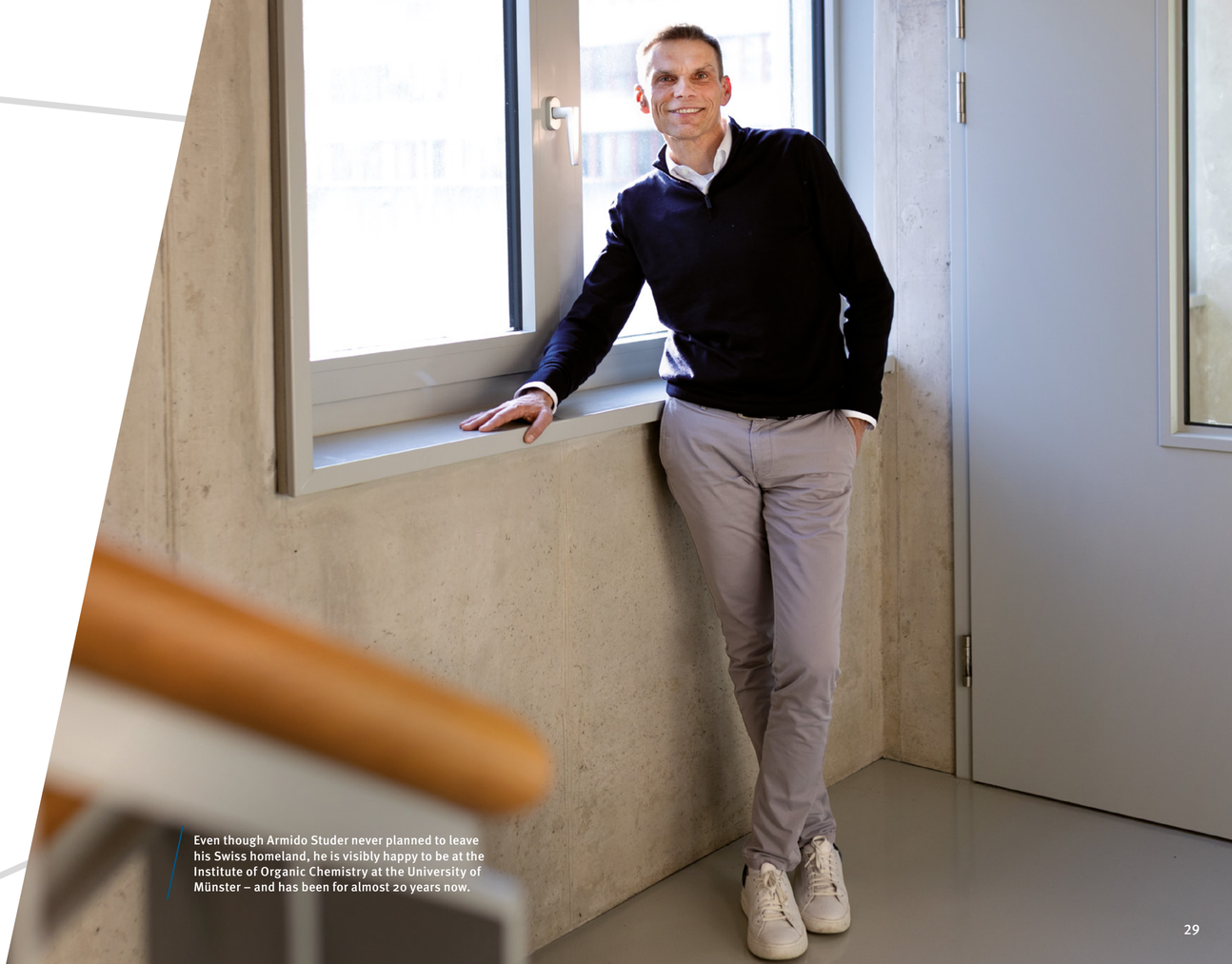
Figuratively speaking, Studer decided against the Matterhorn and for the chemicals plant. He never worked in the plant, but studying chemistry at ETZ Zurich was to prepare him for it. His undergraduate studies, his PhD supervised by Dieter Seebach – "one of the best chemists worldwide", says Studer – and a postdoc position all sparked his fascination for chemistry as well as the ambitious question whether he could make a career at university. Three decades of scientific achievements and honours, and the Leibniz Prize, provide a clear answer.

Due to some outstanding publications, Studer was appointed to a professorship in Marburg, even before his habilitation was published. Four years later, the University of Münster guided him into flatter terrains. Studer's career continued to flourish – for which, he says, he "worked pretty hard" – but what strikes one is that he talks about other people's achievements. He thanks his family, who keep his back free; he raves about the Institute of Organic Chemistry at Münster which, he says, "is among Europe's, maybe even the world's, best"; he trusts implicitly in a member of his team and his secretary to organise his research group, thus leaving him with more time for research.

Studer no longer spends time in the lab – but his eyes light up when he talks about visiting his PhD students there. Full of enthusiasm for his subject and his role as mentor, he enquires about their latest results; the father of two also takes a keen personal interest. "We don't always have to talk about chemistry. The most important thing is to create a good atmosphere," he says. His team is now 35-strong, and he gives them support and looks after them.

When this expert on chemical reactions talks about his "extremely talented" group," it is no coincidence that the word "autocatalysis" is mentioned: success attracts outstanding talent from all over the world, and they in turn advance the group … which then raises the quality again. "This enables me, too, to get better continually and not take things easy," he says. When talking with him, there is no association anyway with taking things easy. He describes himself as being "very structured", he separates what is important from what is not, and he emphasises that "aims should not be set too low". One aim which he has clearly set himself – as someone who dislikes putting off work – is to keep his desk tidy as he completes work speedily, sometimes over-punctually. It is impressive that he succeeds in this without working late in the evening or at night. Spending free time with his wife is important to him.

Something equally important to this specialist in radical chemistry and catalysis is creativity, and he delights in developing ideas. "Occasionally it is said of me that I'm not 'mainstream'," he says with a laugh. The Leibniz Prize, worth 2.5 million euros, can help him, he says, to "dare to do crazy things". In his daily work making applications for funding, he cannot risk all or nothing: often, solid results are needed in advance for any approval, and follow-up applications need to be borne in mind, as does financial security for jobs. Studer wants to use the Leibniz funding to embark on "very high-risk projects": "I've never known this freedom," he declares. With only himself to rely on in the old days whenever he was speeding down the mountainside, he will now know how to use this freedom. Anyway, he adds: "I've managed to get a Leibniz Prize, and my former colleagues have managed to win Olympic gold." He says this without regret and without any self-praise – but with pride and respect for himself and others.



Even though Armido Studer never planned to leave his Swiss homeland, he is visibly happy to be at the Institute of Organic Chemistry at the University of Münster – and has been for almost 20 years now.

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Publisher:
The Rector of the University of Münster, Schlossplatz 2, 48149 Münster

Project management:
Hanna Dieckmann

Editors:
Hanna Dieckmann, Norbert Robers

Texts:
André Bednarz, Hanna Dieckmann, Brigitte Heeke, Dr. Christina Hoppenbrock, Dr. Kathrin Kottke, Victoria Liesche, Kathrin Nolte, Norbert Robers

Design:
goldmarie design

Translation:
Ken Ashton

Photographs:
Nike Gais Fotografie (portrait photos), Kat McDaniel (portrait photo p. 20), Christoph Steinweg (photo p. 1)

Printed by:
Druckhaus Tecklenborg GmbH & Co. KG

Print run:
1,500

This brochure was printed on FSC®-certified paper (Soporset Premium Offset) using eco-inks. The paper used is certified as follows: FSC®, EU Ecolabel

Münster, February 2026