

Laudatio for Professor Lothar Wondraczek

Dear Rector, distinguished members of the Academic Senate and Scientific Board, esteemed colleagues, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is both a great honour and a deeply personal privilege to present this laudatio on the occasion of conferring the honorary degree *Doctor Honoris Causa* of Alexander Dubček University of Trenčín upon Professor Dr.-Ing. Lothar Wondraczek.

There are scientists who advance a discipline through outstanding discoveries. There are others who create entirely new directions in research. And then there are those rare individuals who not only expand knowledge but also inspire institutions, build international communities, and help shape the careers of generations of young scientists. Lothar belongs to this exceptional group.

Born in Jena, Germany, Lothar Wondraczek demonstrated extraordinary talent from the very beginning of his academic journey. After graduating with distinction in Materials Science from Clausthal University of Technology, he completed his doctoral studies in 2003, also with distinction, focusing on innovative spectroscopic methods for monitoring industrial glass production. He subsequently joined Corning's European Technology Center in France before embarking on an academic career that quickly established him among the leading glass scientists of his generation. At the age when many researchers are only beginning to establish their independence, Lothar was already appointed professor at Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg, becoming the youngest professor in materials science in Germany in history. Since 2012, he has held the Chair of Glass Chemistry at Friedrich Schiller University Jena, where he also serves as Director of the Otto Schott Institute of Materials Research and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Chemistry and Earth Sciences.

Lothar's scientific achievements place him among the world's foremost authorities in glass science.

His research spans an extraordinary breadth of topics, from the atomic-scale structure of glass and the origin of its mechanical behavior to advanced optical materials, smart windows, photonic devices, hybrid glasses, mechanoluminescent materials, and data-driven materials design. Throughout his career, he has consistently combined deep fundamental understanding with technological relevance, demonstrating that the most impactful innovation grows from a solid foundation of basic science.

His scientific output is remarkable: more than 330 scientific publications, approximately 20 patents, over 14,000 citations, and an h-index exceeding 60. Particularly impressive is the quality of his work. His publications appear regularly in the most prestigious journals worldwide, including *Nature Materials*, *Nature Communications*, *Nature Chemistry*, *Nature Physics*, *Advanced Materials*, *Advanced Science*, and *Science*. Many of these

papers have fundamentally influenced how we understand the structure, mechanics, and functionality of glasses and amorphous materials.

The international scientific community has repeatedly recognised these achievements. Professor Wondraczek is the recipient of the prestigious Gottardi Prize of the International Commission on Glass, the Woldemar A. Weyl International Glass Science Award, the Zachariassen Award for Excellence in Glass Research, and, most recently, the Dalton Horizon Prize of the Royal Society of Chemistry for pioneering work in hybrid glass research. He is also a recipient of a highly competitive European Research Council Consolidator Grant and a subsequent ERC Proof-of-Concept award.

Yet, distinguished colleagues, statistics, awards, and publications tell only part of the story.

What makes Lothar truly exceptional is his ability to create scientific environments in which people flourish. Over the years, he has mentored more than thirty doctoral graduates, dozens of master's students and postdoctoral researchers, many of whom now occupy leading positions in academia and industry. His research group in Jena has become one of the most vibrant and internationally recognised centres of glass science in the world.

For us in Trenčín, however, Lothar is not only a distinguished scientist. He is a trusted friend and an indispensable partner.

When the vision of establishing a world-class centre for glass research in Slovakia was taking shape, Lothar immediately understood its significance. He recognised that scientific excellence can emerge anywhere when talent is combined with opportunity, commitment, and international collaboration. From the earliest stages of the Teaming initiative that eventually became the FunGlass Centre for Functional and Surface Functionalized Glass, he offered his support, expertise, and reputation to help transform a bold idea into reality.

His contribution to the development of FunGlass cannot be overstated.

Through his active involvement, FunGlass gained access to one of Europe's strongest glass research networks. His collaboration helped establish internationally competitive research directions in glass structure, optical materials, photonic glasses, surface strengthening, mechanical performance of glass, luminescent materials, and, more recently, hybrid and metal-organic framework glasses. Numerous joint publications, projects, student exchanges, and scientific achievements stand as evidence of this enduring partnership and support.

Equally important has been his role in education.

Professor Wondraczek was instrumental in establishing the joint doctoral programme between Alexander Dubček University of Trenčín and Friedrich Schiller University Jena.

Through this programme, many young researchers have benefited from access to world-class laboratories, international mentoring, and invaluable scientific experience. He has supervised joint doctoral students, including recent graduates under cotutelle arrangements between Jena and Trenčín, and has consistently supported the development of young Slovak scientists as if they were members of his own group.

What I admire most about Lothar, however, is not found in publication lists or citation databases.

It is his intellectual curiosity. His generosity. His openness to new ideas. His willingness to discuss science at any hour, whether in a laboratory, a conference hall, or over a glass of wine after a long day. It is his ability to ask questions that challenge assumptions while encouraging those around him to think bigger and aim higher.

Over many years of collaboration, I have come to value not only his scientific insight but also his friendship. He has supported our successes, shared our challenges, and celebrated our achievements. He has never treated collaboration as a transaction, but as a partnership built on trust, mutual respect, and a shared passion for science.

Dear Lothar,

Today we honour a scientist of exceptional international stature. We honour a pioneering researcher whose work has deepened our understanding of glass and expanded its applications far beyond traditional boundaries. We honour an educator, a mentor, and a visionary leader.

But we also honour a friend.

On behalf of the entire academic community of Alexander Dubček University of Trenčín and the researchers, students, and staff of the FunGlass Centre, I wish to express our profound gratitude for your invaluable contribution to our university, to our scientific community, and to the development of glass science in Slovakia and throughout Europe.

As we confer upon you the honorary degree *Doctor Honoris Causa*, we do so in recognition not only of your scientific excellence, but also of your friendship, your mentorship, and your unwavering belief in the power of international collaboration.

Congratulations, dear Lothar.