



Speech by the President-elect of the Max Planck Society,

Professor Dr. Patrick Cramer,

on the occasion of the completion of his visits to 84 Max Planck Institutes

during the period August 2022 - April 2023,

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at the MPI for Dynamics and Self-Organization in Göttingen

- Check against delivery -

Dear Colleagues and Members of Staff,

A magnificent journey lies behind me. Since August of last year, I have visited 83 Institutes of the Max Planck Society. I have delivered 83 speeches. 83 times I have made myself available to answer questions, and I have met representatives of the various groups of staff. What a privilege it was to learn from all these dedicated researchers and to get to know so many committed individuals across the Max Planck Society!

It was snowing when I hiked up to the gigantic radio telescope in the Eifel and climbed to dizzying heights all the way into the detector capsule. In Greifswald, I stood in sheer amazement in front of the Stellarator, a unique plasma storage facility occupying an entire hall. In Freiburg, I learned why it is that our criminal law is in need of improvement as the so-called "speeder from Kurfürstendamm" is brought to trial. In Dresden, my knees were shaking while I was wearing VR goggles and found myself standing on an infinite digital grid, like the ones you see in the Matrix movies. In front of my eyes, a virtual embryo was developing. And in Florence, our art historians took me on a journey through time beneath the ancient dome of the Baptistery with its thousand-year-old mosaic cycle.

As I'm coming full circle today, the last of my institute visits has taken me just across the road to my neighbouring Institute. In fact, I was really looking forward to this. The MPI for Dynamics and Self-Organization is particularly notable for its combination of experiment and theory, which allows unprecedented insights into nature. Researchers here pursue an interdisciplinary approach to investigate the physical fundamentals of dynamic and self-organized processes.

Moreover, this Institute also plays a pioneering role in climate protection as well as in the transformation of our society towards more sustainability. A solar roof was installed recently. The future of



local transport is currently being put to the test here. Researchers from the Institute climb the Zugspitze to study our climate and cloud formation.

Looking at so many different research topics, methods and approaches - not only here at the Institute, but throughout the MPG as a whole - one cannot help but wonder: Is the Max Planck Society actually pursuing a goal? Which direction are we heading? Is there a common goal that we all share?

The answer I have arrived at for myself is: Yes, it is our goal to bring new knowledge into the world for the benefit of all. It became clear very quickly during the discussions I had at the Institutes that this was the common goal on which we could agree rather quickly. As scientists, I believe we have an obligation to keep society informed about the opportunities and risks associated with our findings, to the extent that these can be foreseen. Transformative research findings, in particular, open up new options for action. Which of these options we then seize, however, is a matter to be debated by society and to be determined by its democratically elected representatives.

So, how can we achieve our goal, again and again, in different places and different fields of research? I am convinced we will succeed in this over and over again as long as we remember three of the core values of the MPG. I wish to take a moment to explain them briefly.

The first of these core values is excellence. If, as a sort of reflex, you are now grasping for your mobile phone out of boredom, please leave it in your pocket. Because this value is of utmost importance at a time when ideology sometimes tends to take precedence over excellence as a criterion, or when excellence is in fact discredited or fundamentally questioned as a value in itself. Scientific excellence is a basic prerequisite for groundbreaking research. And it is true that we aspire to advance to the frontiers of knowledge and to shift these frontiers. It is essential for the Max Planck Society to continue to explore new fields of research and to enter uncharted territory.

But excellence involves more than scientific excellence. How are we treating younger generations of researchers? Are we taking every effort to lead our field of research into the future? Are we taking equal opportunity seriously? Do we approach outstanding female scientists proactively and encourage them to follow their path? For me, excellence also means setting an example and taking responsibility for our society. We should be leading the way in climate and species protection - especially, as those who first described the formation of the hole in the ozone layer or anthropogenic global warming were among our ranks. So, are we ready to transfer our knowledge to society, to politics and to application?



Our particular strategy is the second core value. We never draw up a universal roadmap. That simply wouldn't be possible. Because when we break new ground, there are no paths. Our paths only emerge as we take them. But where do we get orientation from if there are no guiding signs? Our strategy so far has always been, and should continue to be, to attract outstanding individual researchers. That is our key to success. Because such outstanding individuals will attract the best talents and motivate them to give their best. And that's what it's all about nowadays, because we are in a global competition for the most talented researchers.

Not only do we place our trust in these outstanding researchers, but we also support them generously and accompany them on their way. This makes the pursuit of risky research projects in the medium and long term possible and allows for genuine breakthroughs in research. With such a strategy comes a great deal of responsibility. To assume this responsibility is a basic prerequisite for preserving our autonomy as one of the world's leading research organizations.

Finally, the third core value is our sense of "we". And that is a lot more than just a corporate identity. It is fine and proper to be a brand. We can proudly sport the Minerva on our social media channels and certainly also on sweatshirts. Yet all that alone is not enough. More than anything, it's also about learning from each other, helping each other, and standing up for each other. When you arrive at your Institute in the morning, I am sure that most of you will be content or perhaps even happy to be working here. That is wonderful, but it is not enough. Only if we also regard ourselves as part of the Max Planck Society will we achieve that special sense of "we" that is so vital for us.

The Max Planck Society is an association dedicated to the advancement of science. With over 300 Directors, 85 institutions at 38 German locations and five abroad, and a total of over 24,000 staff from over a hundred countries, we are quite a special association. Only together will we be able to defend our place among the best research organizations worldwide in the future. Please take advantage of the opportunities you have to get to know people at other Institutes and to engage in an exchange of ideas. This creates synergy effects and makes work even more enjoyable.

Let me recap: If we use these three core values as a foundation for our actions, then we can achieve our goal of bringing new knowledge into the world. However, we are still missing one ingredient that is essential for success. You certainly all know what I am referring to, right? Exactly: It's curiosity. Let's never stop to marvel like children when they are seeing or experiencing something for the very first time.

One thing is of particular importance to me as I conclude: All of you can contribute to this great goal. Whether you're settling travel expenses in an administrative office, or tweaking a piece of lab equip-



ment in a workshop, or working on your PhD: You can all contribute to optimizing the chances for transformative research findings and changing our world for the better.

My heartfelt thanks go out to all of you for your dedication, and I wish you the best for the future, both personally and for the Institute. Thank you for your attention. As always, I am at your disposal to respond to your questions.