

Speech Ludger Birthday Celebration and "Farewell Lecture" on July 1, 2023.

Dear family and friends, dear colleagues!

I would like to welcome you all to this VESPER, which is somewhat unusual as a mixture of private **birthday party** and university **farewell lecture**. I will explain in a moment why I think it is nevertheless appropriate. So you will have to be patient with the buffet! But first of all I have to explain to you why I call the whole thing VESPER.

When I retired from active professorship at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the end of September 2021, there could be no farewell lecture because of Corona. However, my department team gave me such a great farewell party with my own newspaper and a live feed from many friends and colleagues that I really wanted to return the favor. Now, this year, I will also be celebrating my birthday, and I have decided to celebrate both together.

For me, this event is above all a **celebration of thanks**. I look back on 70 exciting, fulfilling and never boring years of life and on more than two decades of interesting collegial cooperation in the chair team and in our faculty. I thank you all for the time we spent together, for sharing a piece of life's journey with me! With my siblings it is now up to seven decades, with my own family and friends over forty years, with most of the colleagues present here several decades.

If this were a normal **farewell lecture**, I would probably take stock of my **scientific** career. If this were a **birthday celebration** with family only, I would review my **personal** life with the many beautiful moments and deep relationships with my wife, children and friends.

But this is, after all, a **mixed celebration of thanks**, and I am looking back on a life. And this life of Ludger Pries includes many beautiful countries and landscapes, many interesting international meetings and faculty events, but above all many beautiful moments with my wife, our children, extended family and many friends. After all, my life consists above all of the social relationships with **you** and with many more people who cannot or can no longer be with us today! In the South African Zulu and **Sotho-Ubuntu** tradition it is said: "**A person is a person through other people**"!

For me, this is a profoundly sociological perspective on the world. Everything that we are as persons, we are with and through the people with whom we are connected in social relationships. Most of what makes Ludger Pries is present here through you. This does not mean that we all have to share our wallets and credit cards now. The Ubuntu principle rather means that it is a **mixture of my merit and your doing**, if today I can look back on seventy filled years of life and on 22 working years at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

In the following I would like to show that such an **Ubuntu perspective** is appropriate for us as individuals, but also for organizations like the Ruhr-University Bochum and its Faculty of Social Sciences. One could say "A faculty is a faculty **because of** its people" or "A faculty is a faculty **through** its members". Like all organizations - large companies, small craft enterprises or administrations - faculties do not mainly consist of buildings or rules of conduct, but of the **shared social actions of** their members, of the **lived social norms** and patterns of order.

I experienced the cooperation in our faculty - also in comparison to other universities - as very **collegial, open and goal-oriented**. Of course, there were sometimes intense discussions or conflicts. But a fact-oriented and calm cooperation always prevailed. I experienced this as a dean, but also in my efforts to establish a collaborative research center on transnationalization. I am very **grateful for** that! The fierce competition in the scientific community may make it seem more effective in the short term and on an individual basis to focus on **individual activities** such as article and book publications, expert opinions or individual projects. But doesn't the Ubuntu principle also apply here: "A faculty is a faculty **through the joint** commitment of its members"? I recently participated in the walk-through for the establishment of a graduate college and also critically accompanied the application for a collaborative research center here in the region. I am firmly convinced that **joint efforts by and in faculties** in the sense of the Ubuntu principle will be the only right way to succeed in the long run.

In my opinion, this idea of community orientation instead of individual orientation applies to our personal-private life as well as to our professional life. I would like to underpin this in the following with my **VESPER model**. I hope it fits into this mix of birthday celebration and farewell lecture as thanksgiving. Because the VESPER model also explains why I owe so much to you. Even if it becomes a bit sociological now, I promise you, after the presentation of the VESPER model we can go straight to the VESPER buffet!

Theories about human behavior are often based on assumptions about predispositions, drives or characteristics that are supposedly "in the nature" of human beings. Some then say "Man is naturally good and socially minded". Others assume that man is man's wolf, naturally selfish and evil. Also, most theories treat man as a self-contained individual with constant characteristics, as *homo clausus*, as the sociologist Norbert Elias criticized. If, on the other hand, one follows the ubuntu principle, then **man appears as a thoroughly social being. Everything we are, we are through our relationships with other people.**

It is true that **basic needs of** all humans can be identified - not least by comparison with (other) animals. This was done, for example, by Abraham Maslow, a Jewish-Ukrainian immigrant to the USA, who founded the so-called humanistic psychology in the 1930s, not least on the basis of his scientific comparisons of the development of apes and human children.¹ Maslow distinguished 5 basic needs of all humans: 1. the purely physical need for food, warmth, sleep and sexuality, 2. the need for security from pain and fear as well as for predictability of one's own living conditions, 3. the need for affiliation and associated with this for experiences of love, security and sociality, 4. the need for respect, striving for achievement and strength as well as for validity and recognition and finally 5. the need for self-actualization and creativity.

For Maslow, these were 5 levels of needs **building on** each other. Today we know that it is a bit more complicated. In which mixture these needs are weighted by us humans and converted into social action depends on many factors. A musician or an actor strives above all for self-fulfillment and creativity and tends to put the need for economic security on the back burner - although, according to Maslow's theory, it should actually be the other way around.

¹ Cf. Maslow, Abraham. 1943. A Theory of Human Motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), pp. 370-396.

Karin and I did the same thing when we turned down well-paid job offers in the 1990s to get to know Mexico better. Those who are now defending their country as soldiers in Ukraine don't put their need for security ahead of pain and fear either. So what do we base our existence and actions in the world on? This is where my VESPER model comes into play.

The **word vespers** can mean evening, supper, snack or evening prayer. I use it here as **an abbreviation for 6 dimensions that** influence and structure our existence² and social action in the world: V for connections, E for experiences, S for socialization, P for preferences, E for expectations, and R for resources. From an evolutionary perspective, we humans differ from animals precisely because of these 6 dimensions.³ I would like to briefly outline these VESPER dimensions:

First, social connection, rootedness and interconnectedness:

No human being is an isolated individual. From birth, we are all - at first without our doing - thrown into the social interweaving contexts of our parents' homes. Later - and this is what distinguishes us from animals - we develop our own specific social circles of peer groups, school and study friendships, sports clubs, etc.⁴ For our experience of the world, it makes a big difference in which social circles we grow up and later live by our own decisions. I grew up on a farm with seven siblings in Westphalia and initially did not feel rooted at all at the municipal high school in Warendorf. Later, my social involvement in Maoist groups was so close that I subsequently reacted allergically to any form of party presidency and group pressure. Perhaps that's why I later needed the expanse of social entanglements as far away as Mexico. Today I feel rooted locally, nationally, European and transnationally. And all of you here are an essential part of it!

As second dimension the E in VESPER stands for experiences: We humans are characterized by the fact that we mentally process our experience of the world in experiences and store them as stratifications of experience⁵; experiences are not objective data like files, but are recalled and reconstructed differently depending on the action situation. We have all experienced that we can remember vacation experiences very differently in the short term than after many years. Psychological research shows that our memories are usually positively distorted, because this allows us to protect and strengthen ourselves.⁶ Sociology emphasizes that experiences are processed less individually than in social interactions. Two well-known

² Martin Heidegger calls it our *being-in-the-world*. "Dasein" for Heidegger is characterized by what he calls "Hinfälligkeit" and "Geworfensein," for instance, insofar as the possibilities toward which Dasein designs itself are not merely self-selected: "Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself or it has been born into them or has ever already grown up in them" (<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dasein>).

³ Cf. chapter 6 in Pries, Ludger. 2021. *understanding cooperation*. Frankfurt/M.: Campus.

⁴ (Other) animals also live in group contexts, but they can hardly select these themselves and help shape them in such a comprehensive way as we humans can. What distinguishes humans from (other) animals is discussed in detail in Pries 2021 (footnote 2).

⁵ Cf. already the work of Karl Mannheim, e.g. in the text "The Problem of Generations" from 1928 (reprinted in: Sighard Neckel, Ana Mijic, Christian von Scheve and Monica Tilton (eds.) *Sternstunden der Soziologie. Pioneering theoretical models of sociological thought*. Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus, pp. 137-160. 1928.

⁶ See, e.g., Adler, Orly & Pansky, Aina. 2020. a "rosy view" of the past: positive memory biases. In Aue, Tatjana & Okon-Singer, Hadas (eds.), *Cognitive Biases in Health and Psychiatric Disorders*. Cambridge/MA: Academic Press, pp. 139-171.

sociologists, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann emphasize the importance of processing experience through communication: "The most necessary vehicle of reality maintenance is conversation. Man's everyday life is like the rattling of a conversation machine that incessantly guarantees, modifies, and reconstructs his subjective reality. [...] the "conversation machine" chimes into reality as we "talk through" various elements of **experience** and place them in a fixed place in the real world." (Berger/Luckmann 1969: 163f). This then leads to the fact that what is ultimately effective for our behavior in the world is what we consider to be real.⁷ The big difference between real reality and perceived reality will quickly be experienced by anyone who blindly follows his navigation system onto a river bridge that no longer exists - this has actually already happened to some people.

Research also shows that positive memories of experiences become stronger with age. This is probably also true for me. For I feel - despite all the crises and wars in this world - gratitude for what I was able to experience and learn. That is by no means a matter of course, because there are also downward spirals of life experiences that are not always easy to escape.

Third, the S in VESPER stands for socialization: Human behavior in the world is not determined by unchanging instincts and drives. Rather, our worldviews, needs, values, social roles, and norms of action are acquired and negotiated through socialization. Socialization is also expressed in habitus, the way we express ourselves, dress, and behave. Socialization occurs through social interaction with others, as a process of negotiation. Primary socialization in childhood strongly shapes us; in my case it was probably a Catholic-rural-Westphalian-humanist imprint. But socialization as the acquisition of world views and norms of action never ends. For example, I now have to practice the grandpa role and the slowed-down work as a senior professor.

The fourth letter P stands for preferences: In social interdependence contexts, we form preferences through experience and socialization, but - contrary to many economic theory models - these preferences are not stable, but change in space and time. People who define freedom primarily as the possibility of speeding down the highway at 250 kilometers per hour will have corresponding preferences when buying cars and voting for political parties. Young people have a preference for trying things out rather than maintaining their own long-term health. This can manifest itself, for example, in excessive drinking binges - I can confirm this from my own experience of my high school days! As a rule, one's own health only becomes a significant preference with increasing age.

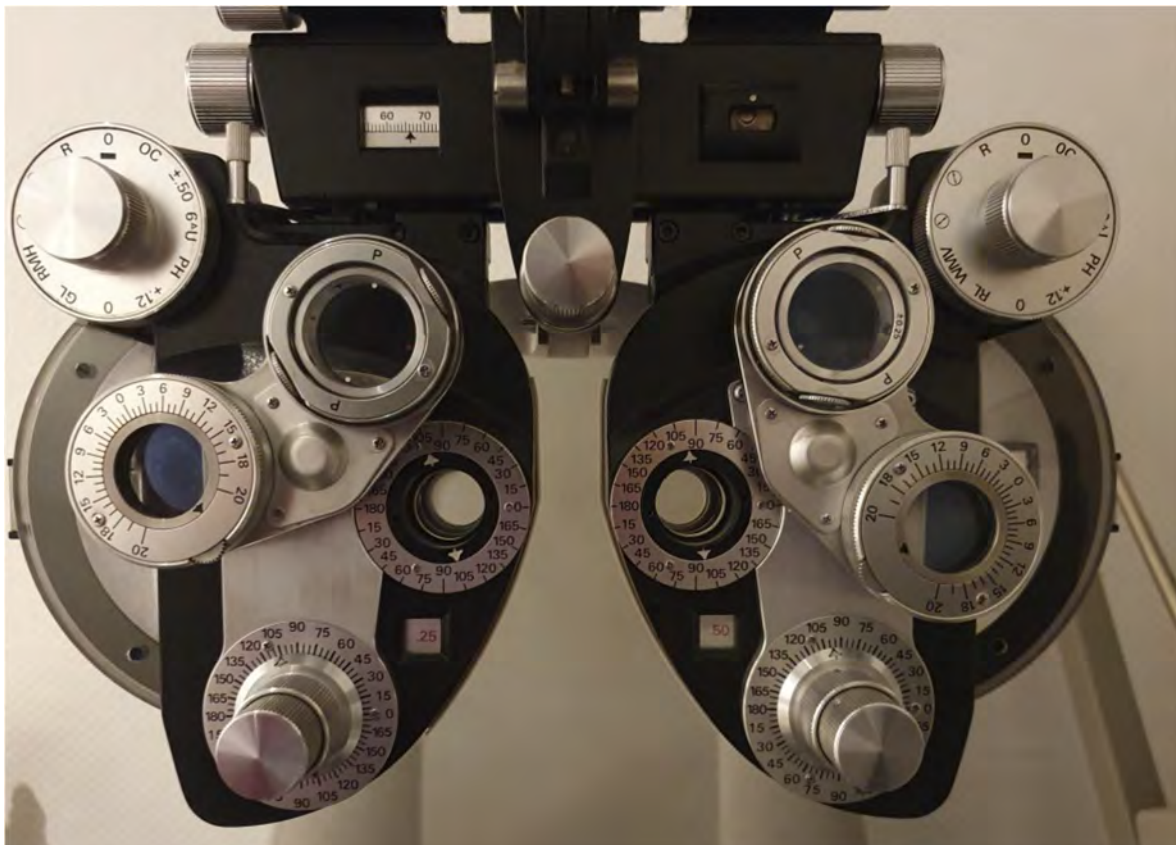
A fifth dimension is expectations: We humans always orient our experience of the world to the three time frames of past, present and future. Therefore, assumptions about future events and about the possible actions of other people are part of the basic repertoire of our existence. Those who actually expect a strong change in the global and local climate in the next decades are more inclined to adapt their way of life to this expectation. **My** expectations for this life have largely been fulfilled, both privately and professionally. How can this be? Did I used to set my expectations so low that they were easily met? Actually, I don't

⁷ Cf. the famous Thomas theorem: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences. (Thomas, Dorothy S./Thomas, William I. 1928. *The Child in America. Behavior Problems and Programs*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, p. 572).

think so, because I lived more along the lines of, "If you always know exactly what you're doing, you're living below your means." In the course of my life, did I simply adjust my expectations to what I experienced? It is certain that my expectations have developed in communication with concrete other people, especially with you.

Finally, our experience and actions in the world are also tied to resources: These include talents as well as inheritances or income opportunities that result from working life. While some parents may be delighted when their child goes on a stimulating class trip to which they are expected to contribute 100 euros, for other parents this can be a challenge that is almost impossible to overcome. We base our actions on perceived resources. It is hard for me as a private person to bear how unequally people in the world are endowed with resources and how this social inequality is becoming ever greater - even if I can generally understand and explain it as a sociologist. My resource endowment through the parental home consisted less of economic capital than of cultural capital, a socialization experienced as very good despite all challenges. I am very grateful to my parents and also to my siblings for this.

So much for the 6 VESPER dimensions in a nutshell - you see what a sociology professor means by brevity. But please do not criticize sociology for the fact that our social world is so complicated! It is not different with the natural world, with which e.g. biologists and physicists deal. For my VESPER model it is now true that in our existence in the world and in our concrete everyday action situations all six dimensions are in play - even if we are mostly not aware of it. I would like to illustrate this with the example of the optician's refractor.



We all know this device with which the ophthalmologist or optometrist measures our vision. In the process, after all, various lenses are moved back and forth in front of each eye until we can clearly recognize the projected letters or numbers. In a similar way we can imagine our **everyday self-assurance in the world** according to the VESPER model. Without consciously and accurately checking it, we match given social interweaving situations with our experiences, our socialization, our preferences, expectations and resources.

It should have become clear that my VESPER model in the Ubuntu sense is based on a community orientation rather than an individual orientation. Accordingly, I am serious when I speak of a **speech of gratitude**. I am aware, with contented gratitude and grateful contentment, that my life is determined by social **interconnections**. This includes my family, my friends and my colleagues, in other words, all of you! I do not want to single out individual groups or names. But there are two people I must mention. The most important social bond in my life for more than 45 years now has been the living community with **Karin** - I can't thank you enough for that! In my work at the university, **Mrs. Axt has** accompanied me for more than two decades with an incomparable mixture of energy and efficiency, dedication and care for the entire team - thank you for that!

I would probably not have chosen a career as a scientist if, after graduating from high school and serving in the German Armed Forces as a toolmaker, I had not experienced that Maoist politics is no way to make humanity happy. Nevertheless, my catholic-humanistic **socialization** already gave me the life drive to contribute to making this world a little better. In addition to my **experience** as a toolmaker, taking things very precisely and measuring and working in thousandths, scientific **socialization** came primarily through my professors at the time, Friedrich Fürstenberg, Werner Mangold and Gert Schmidt. This was complemented by my later socialization at our Faculty of Social Sciences. This taught me to understand science as a profession in the sense of Max Weber and to pursue it with the following **preferences**: with passion and precision, committed and unagitated; without dogmatic theory housings and with the willingness to be constantly surprised by social reality and to further develop theories and methods. My **expectations** of this profession have never been disappointed; I still see myself as a passionate sociologist who, despite all the criticism, burns for his subject, can look at himself in the mirror every morning and feel that he has at least not made the world worse. And all this with thoroughly good **resources**!

The VESPER model can help to better understand and explain not only my own life path, but also the faculty in which I have been involved for so many years. After all, our faculty lives with and from its **social interdependencies**, both internally and externally. As in the private sector, its quality stands and falls with the efforts and resources we all invest in it together. This applies to the level of the professorships as well as to the faculty as a whole. The **experiences** we all have in the faculty also depend on our own behavior and the construction of shared memories. In this regard, debate about the supporting elements of **socialization in the faculty** is essential: what action-structuring values, norms, and roles do we aspire to? This, in turn, is closely related to the definition of short- and medium-term **preferences**. Where does the faculty actually want to be in ten years? What can we learn from other faculties and comparable institutions? Closely related to this is the question of **expectations**: Who actually expects what from the faculty? The internal and external stakeholders range

from the general and Bochum city society to the rectorate, other faculties, employees and students. Dealing with these questions is ultimately also important in order to clarify which **resources** the faculty can count on and which it can mobilize. Direct material resources in the form of funding and staffing are only one aspect. At least as important are the motivation and energy with which the faculty members set out to pursue the jointly defined preferences.

I conclude: With great satisfaction I look back on a full life, in which my connections, my experiences as well as my socialization, my preferences and expectations and also my resources constantly evolved. I thank all of you, colleagues, friends and family, for contributing in one way or another to the VESPER of my life and continuing to do so! So, now I've talked enough about the VESPER, let's move on to the real dinner - the buffet is open!