

Ladies and Gentlemen, good afternoon,

it is my great honor and pleasure to introduce the Hans-Günter Schlegel Lecturer of this year, Prof. Michael Wagner from the University of Vienna in Austria. Michael Wagner is one of the most productive and most influential microbiologists and microbial ecologists of our days. And this is not just my perception but it is confirmed by an impressive citation record. Since his studies at the Technical University of Munich in the late 1980s and early 90s, Michael has been interested in the biogeochemical cycling of carbon, nitrogen and sulfur and the microbial diversity and physiology underlying these cycles. In the program booklet of the VAAM conference of 1993 that took place here in Leipzig one finds a poster 430 by Wagner, Amann, Lemmer and Schleifer. It is entitled '**Probing activated sludge with Proteobacteria-specific oligonucleotides**'. A seminal statement comes in the subtitle '**Inadequacy of culture-dependent methods for describing microbial community structure**'. Today this is commonplace but clearly not so 27 years ago.

Since these old days of Poster 430, Michael's research has led to the discovery and characterization of various important players within the mentioned groups of his interest. The discovery and isolation of complete nitrifiers within the genus *Nitrospira*, the so-called comammox organisms is one of the more recent examples – you will hear about in his talk. This finding of comammox dealt a death blow to a hundred year old dogma in microbiology.

A secret of Michael's success – an open secret obviously - has always been the ingenuity with which he developed innovative single cell

tools for the genomic and functional characterization of bacteria and archaea.

I actually came to know Michael Wagner nearly twenty years ago when I considered moving back to Germany and he turned out to be the major obstacle against getting a top position on a short list for a professorship in Germany and surroundings. And I remember that a whole generation of microbiologists sighed with relief when he accepted a full professorship at the University of Vienna in 2003, and cleared the way for everybody else. But I acknowledge without envy that his pole position was fully deserved, since Michi combines the qualities of a brilliant analytical thinker, a gifted communicator and teacher (as you will see in minute) and a committed, supervisor and team-builder, as I have consistently heard from his group members over the years.

It is thus no wonder that Michael Wagner is member of the Austrian Academy of Science and the Leopoldina. He is the past president of the International Society of Microbial Ecology and laureate of the Erwin-Schrödinger, the Wittgenstein and the Tiedje Award, just to name a few of his honors.

Michael Wagner regularly gives public talks about infectious diseases and the importance of vaccination and he has good reasons to be concerned about the present Corona crisis. We therefore understand and respect that he decided to stick to the measures taken at his home University to curb the spread of the disease. That is why he decided not to travel to Leipzig, but to record his lecture and provide it to us. And with this I thank you for your attention and I would like the technician to start the video.