

# Introduction to the Award Ceremony for Professor Wolfgang Wahlster at the International Computer Science Institute (ICSI)

March 2023, Berkeley, California

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I'd like to welcome all of you to our celebration of Wolfgang Wahlster's contributions to ICSI as he steps down from the ICSI Board after 20 years of service.

I cherish this occasion, not only in my role as Board Chair, but also because of our long scientific, professional and personal friendship. We have interacted in professional societies and on boards for over 30 years. The quality of Wolfgang's interventions is remarkably high and respectful. I have always found him to be a pleasure to work with.

Wolfgang got his PhD from the University of Hamburg in 1981 and then joined Saarland University, where he became a full professor in 1985.

As you know, the desire of the German government and industry to send visitors to the US was a major impetus for the creation of ICSI, and Germany has sent over 400 visitors to ICSI since its foundation.

Wolfgang was the first of these visitors in 1987.

Upon his return, he was a founder and first Scientific Director of DFKI, the German Research Center for AI, of which he was CEO from 1997 till his recent retirement. DFKI is almost certainly the largest research organization focused on AI in the world, with over 1000 employees. It has launched over 100 successful companies.

Wolfgang was Scientific director of many projects. I'll mention two which supported collaborations with ICSI: Verbmobil on speech-to-speech communication, and Smartkom on multimodal dialog systems.

I have always admired the fact that even while CEO of a large organization, Wolfgang always managed to find time to supervise students. He has had 75 PhD students as primary supervisor over the years.

Wolfgang's distinctions are numerous, and you'll have to go to his web page to see most of them. Let me mention

- Fellow of AAI, EurAI,
- President of IJCAI, EurAI, ACL
- Member of German Academy of Science and Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences
- German Future Prize
- 5 honorary degrees

Wolfgang has been a trustee of ICSI since 2002. During that time, he was essential to maintaining the connection between ICSI and Germany, in particular in leveraging his contacts in the German government and industry to renew German funding for ICSI. Projects he led in Germany sponsored several visitors. His exceptional experience in the management of research organizations and unselfish availability have made him an invaluable resource to Institute Directors since its foundation.

On behalf of the ICSI Board of Trustees, I'd like to thank you for all you have done for us over the years.

Before passing the baton to Damian Borth, I'd like to end with a little story that to me encapsulates some of Wolfgang's best qualities and the good fortune with which he has been blessed. Wolfgang was elected general chair of IJCAI in 1993, which was to be held in Paris. For some reason, that became no longer possible, and the organizers decided to move the conference, which was expecting about 2500 attendees, to Chambéry, a town of 100,000 in the foothills of the Alps that had never hosted a major conference. Chambéry had no big hotels, so the guests were housed in about 30 small hotels in town and over 100 more outside.

At the time, IJCAI was still small enough to have more interesting social events than just a reception. The main social events in Chambéry all took place outdoors. The banquet entertainment included stilt walkers and fireworks around the Castle of the Ducs of Savoie with the townspeople mingling with the attendees. If it had rained, this would have been a disaster, but fortunately the weather gods looked favorably upon Wolfgang and AI and the result was one of the most memorable conferences I've ever attended.