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## Konstanz biologists honoured for promoting animal welfare

**Ursula M. Händel Animal Welfare Prize 2020 of the German Research Foundation (DFG) awarded to Professor Marcel Leist (University of Konstanz, Germany) and to Professor Thomas Hartung (University of Konstanz and Johns Hopkins University, USA) in recognition of their lifetime achievement in promoting animal welfare.**

Marcel Leist, Professor of In-Vitro Toxicology and Biomedicine at the University of Konstanz, and Thomas Hartung, Professor of Environmental Health Sciences at the University of Konstanz and Doerenkamp-Zbinden Chair of Evidence-Based Toxicology at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore, have been awarded the Ursula M. Händel Animal Welfare Prize 2020 of the German Research Foundation (DFG).

This is the second time within a period of ten years that University of Konstanz researchers have been awarded the prestigious accolade, previous recipients including molecular toxicologists Professor Alexander Bürkle and Dr Moreno-Villanueva, also based at the University of Konstanz's Department of Biology, who received the prize in 2011.

The Ursula M. Händel Animal Welfare Prize, which is endowed with 80,000 euros, recognises scientists who have made exemplary and sustained efforts to improve the welfare of animals in research, especially through the development of processes contributing to the reduction, refinement and replacement of animal experimentation in accordance with the 3R principle.

The 2020 prize will be awarded during an official ceremony scheduled for 1 October 2020 at the 3R-Zentrum in Gießen (ICAR3R), which will be preceded by a 3R symposium and combine online as well as on-site elements.

### **Recognition for promoting animal welfare**

Unlike previous recipients, Marcel Leist and Thomas Hartung were selected for their lifetime achievement in promoting animal welfare through their research, as the DFG announced – for instance by using artificial intelligence to make inferences about the toxicity of unknown substances or to generate automated predictions from toxicological databases. Both approaches help to avoid or significantly reduce animal testing. The jury showed itself particularly impressed with the researchers' enduring commitment to developing and implementing alternative methods in toxicology and to raising acceptance levels at the local

and international levels both in academia and beyond – especially through their work as co-directors of the Center for Alternatives to Animal Testing in Europe (CAAT-Europe).

CAAT-Europe, a joint venture of the University of Konstanz supported by the Doerenkamp-Zbinden Foundation for animal-free research and the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University, was set up to coordinate transatlantic activities promoting the development of new and improved methods in toxicology, to advise on strategy development, to provide a platform for exchange among various stakeholders in academia, industry and politics and, above all, to support the 3R principle of humane science.

### **Overcoming the validation dilemma**

“I am convinced that working together across sectors is the best – and possibly only – way forward if we want to deliver the best possible outcomes for both humans and animals”, says Leist. “Promoting humane science isn’t just a handy and politically opportune catchphrase: it is a research objective my colleagues and I are invested in deeply”. Throughout their careers, and since CAAT-Europe was founded in 2010, both Leist and Hartung have sought to develop general tools to enhance the implementation and accelerate the broader use of animal-free testing methods, including computational approaches and novel test development strategies.

“One major issue that we seek to address through CAAT-Europe and that regulators from both sides of the Atlantic regularly confirm is insufficient method documentation and data reporting. Both are major drawbacks when it comes to using data generated through in-vitro methods”, explains Thomas Hartung. “Contributions that help resolve this dilemma can have a very broad impact on the overall use and development of alternative methods”.

In the past decades, CAAT-Europe produced 21 extended reviews on specific research problems and gaps in the current knowledge. Potential solutions have come out of its transatlantic toxicology think tank activities, based on the input of more than 250 co-authors from academia, industry, regulatory bodies and non-governmental organisations.

### **About Marcel Leist**

Marcel Leist has been Professor of In-Vitro Toxicology and Biomedicine at the University of Konstanz since 2006, a position that was originally established and endowed by the Doerenkamp-Zbinden Foundation. He studied biochemistry in Tübingen (Germany) and holds a master’s degree in toxicology from the University of Surrey (1989) as well as a doctoral degree in pharmacology from the University of Konstanz (1993). He obtained his Habilitation (postdoctoral qualification) in toxicology/cell biology in 1998. Prior to accepting his current position at Konstanz, Marcel Leist worked for Danish pharmaceutical company H. Lundbeck A/S in Copenhagen.

Leist has received several major animal welfare awards, including the Lush Prize in support of initiatives to end or replace animal testing (2016, alongside Dr Giorgia Pallocca, coordinator and deputy director of CAAT-Europe), the Animal Welfare Research Prize of the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (2015) as well as the Society of Toxicology Enhancement of Animal Welfare Award (2015).

### **About Thomas Hartung**

Thomas Hartung has been Professor of Evidence-Based Toxicology at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore since 2009 and also holds the position of Professor of Environmental Health Sciences at the University of Konstanz. He studied computer science in Hagen as well as biochemistry and medicine in Tübingen, where he also earned his medical doctoral degree in toxicology in 1992. Hartung also earned a biological doctoral degree in biochemical pharmacology from the University of Konstanz. He was CEO of the Steinbeis Technology Transfer Center for In Vitro Pharmacology and Toxicology at the

University of Konstanz from 1996 to 2002 and led the European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods of the European Commission in Ispra (Italy) from 2002 to 2008.

Thomas Hartung has won several awards for his research in the area of animal welfare, including the Russell and Burch Award of the Humane Society of the United States (2009) and the Society of Toxicology Enhancement of Animal Welfare Award (2007).

**Facts:**

- Ursula M. Händel Animal Welfare Prize 2020 awarded to University of Konstanz toxicologists Marcel Leist and Thomas Hartung in recognition of their lifetime achievement in promoting animal welfare through novel approaches in toxicology.
- The recipients, who are co-directors of the Center for Alternatives to Animal Testing in Europe (CAAT-Europe), were selected from a list of nine applicants for their commitment to furthering 3R research, especially in the area of replacement.
- Prize money: 80,000 euros.
- This is the second Ursula M. Händel Animal Welfare Prize to be awarded to University of Konstanz researchers within a period of ten years, previous recipients including Professor Alexander Bürkle and Dr Moreno-Villanueva, also based at the University of Konstanz's Department of Biology, who received the prize in 2011.
- The award will be presented during a ceremony scheduled for 1 October 2020 at the 3R-Zentrum in Gießen (ICAR3R).
- More information about the Center for Alternatives to Animal Testing in Europe (CAAT-Europe): <https://www.biologie.uni-konstanz.de/leist/caat-europe/>

**Note to editors:**

You can download photos of the award winners here:

**Image 1:**

[https://cms.uni-konstanz.de/fileadmin/pi/fileserv.../Bilder/tierschutzpreis\\_marcel\\_leist.jpg](https://cms.uni-konstanz.de/fileadmin/pi/fileserv.../Bilder/tierschutzpreis_marcel_leist.jpg)

Caption: Professor Marcel Leist, Professor of In-Vitro Toxicology and Biomedicine at the University of Konstanz and co-director, alongside Thomas Hartung, of the Center for Alternatives to Animal Testing in Europe (CAAT-Europe)

Image credit: University of Konstanz

**Image 2:**

[https://cms.uni-konstanz.de/fileadmin/pi/fileserv.../Bilder/tierschutzpreis\\_thomas\\_hartung.jpg](https://cms.uni-konstanz.de/fileadmin/pi/fileserv.../Bilder/tierschutzpreis_thomas_hartung.jpg)

Caption: Professor Thomas Hartung, Professor of Environmental Health Sciences at the University of Konstanz and Doerenkamp-Zbinden Chair of Evidence-Based Toxicology at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Image credit: Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

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