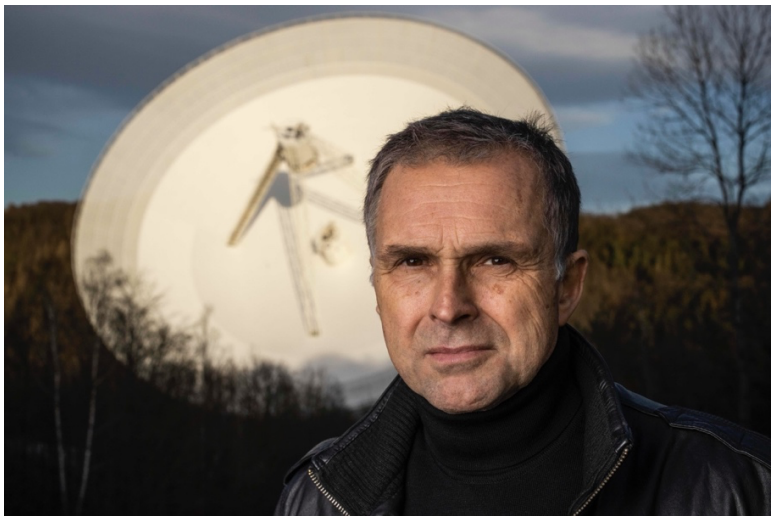
CURRICULUM VITÆ OF PROF. J. ANTON ZENSUS



Professor J. Anton Zensus is an astrophysicist whose work has enabled some of the most detailed astronomical observations ever achieved. He has played a central role in advancing Very Long Baseline Interferometry (VLBI) for over four decades. VLBI links radio telescopes around the world — and even in space — to function as a single, Earth-sized instrument. His research has provided new insights into the structure and physics of active galaxies and their central black holes.

As Director of the Max Planck Institute for Radio Astronomy, Zensus pursued a two-pronged strategy to push VLBI to its physical limits: one based on millimetre-wavelength observations from the ground, and the other using satellite-based VLBI to extend the effective baseline beyond Earth's diameter. He made significant scientific and organizational contributions to the Japanese VSOP and Russian RadioAstron missions, demonstrating how space VLBI can overcome the resolution limitations of ground-based systems.

In parallel, he led the development of an advanced global VLBI network that achieved some of the finest angular resolutions in observational science. These efforts directly supported the breakthrough results of the Event Horizon Telescope (EHT), which produced the first image of a black hole in the M87 galaxy in 2019, and of a black hole in our own Milky Way galaxy in 2022. Zensus served as the founding chair of the EHT collaboration, playing a pivotal role in establishing its international framework, and his group made crucial scientific contributions to this research.

His earlier research provided foundational insights into the dynamics of relativistic jets — streams of plasma launched from the vicinity of black holes — and revealed extreme conditions, such as brightness temperatures exceeding theoretical limits. In recognition of his research achievements, he received several prestigious awards, including a European Research Council Advanced Grant to study magnetic fields near supermassive black holes.

Beyond his research, Zensus has played a significant part in developing the infrastructure of modern European and global radio astronomy. He has led international coordination efforts and contributed to the planning of next-generation observatories such as the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) and the Next Generation VLA (ngVLA). He has also trained a generation of young scientists at the International Max Planck Research School in Bonn, which he founded.

J. Anton Zensus

Life and Career

1958	February 1, born in Bremerhaven, German Citizen
1976-1984	Study of Physics and Astronomy in Cologne, Münster and Bonn
1982	Diploma in Physics at the University of Münster
1984	Doctorate at the University of Münster
1985-1988	Postdoctoral Fellow at the California Institute of Technology
1988-1991	Jansky Postdoctoral Fellow at the US National Radio Astronomy Observatory NRAO
1991-1997	Basic Research Staff Scientist at the NRAO (in 1996 tenured from Associated Universities Inc.)
1995-1997	Research Professor University of Virginia
1997-	Scientific Member of the Max-Planck Society and Director at the Max-Planck Institute for Radio Astronomy
2001-	Adjunct Scientist at the NRAO
2005-	Professor hon. at the University of Köln
1982-1984	Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes Promotion

Honors - selected

Chinese Academy of Science President's International Distinguished Scientists Fellowship 2025
Karl-Schwarzschild Medal of the German Astronomische Gesellschaft 2024
Tycho Brahe Medal of the European Astronomical Society 2023
European Research Council Advanced Grant 2021
Named Founding Chair of the Board of the Event Horizon Telescope Collaboration 2020

As a member of the EHT collaboration: Frontiers of Science Award 2025; Group Achievement Award of the Royal Astronomical Society 2021; Bruno Rossi Group Award of the American Astronomical Society 2020; Einstein Medal of the Swiss Albert Einstein Society 2019; Breakthrough Prize for Fundamental Physics 2019; NSF Diamond Award 2019

KASI Institute Korea – Distinguished Scholar 2015
Golden Medal of the Institute of Applied Astronomy in St. Petersburg 2013
RadioAstron Bronze Medal 2012
Max Planck Forschungspreis für Internationale Kooperation 1999
Alexander von Humboldt Forschungspreis 1994

Committees - selected

Max Planck Society Advisor to the President on Transatlantic Cooperation
Max Planck Society Roundtable North America (Chair)
Max Planck Society China Council
Max Planck Society Roundtable Europe
Max Planck Academy Scientific Advisory Council
University of Bonn - Scientific Advisory Council
G6 European Research Organizations - Task Force on Research Infrastructures
Associated Universities Inc. AUI - Astronomy Committee
Coordinating Office EU of German Science Organizations KoWi - Scientific Advisory Council

Leading Functions- selected

Executive Director at the MPIfR 2002-2008, 2016-2018, 2023-2025
Founding Chair of the Event Horizon Telescope Board
Coordinator of the EU Program RadioNet/FP7 2012, and RadioNet/Horizon 2017
Scientific Coordinator EU Program OPTICON-RadioNet Pilot ORP 2021
Founder and Speaker of the International Max-Planck-Research School for Astronomy and Astrophysics at the Universities of Bonn and Cologne since 2002
Member of the Council of the Joint Institute for VLBI ERIC, past (pre-ERIC) chair of the Board
European VLBI Network: Board of Directors (chair 2013/15)
RadioAstron International Science Council
VSOP International Science Council (past Chair)
SKA Science and Engineering Council SKA Site Selection Group (2011/2012)
German Long Wavelength Consortium Board (founding chair)

Teaching, Training, Mentoring

Speaker of the International Max-Planck-Research School for Astronomy and Astrophysics
Mentor in the Elisabeth-Schiemann-Kolleg for outstanding female research group leaders (2019-)
Mentor in the Alexander von Humboldt German mentoring network
Systemic supervision: trained and certified (2021, 2023, INeKO Institute at Univ. of Cologne)
Training and Seminars at the University of Köln (hon. professorial appointment since 2005)

ADS List of Scientific Publications: https://tinyurl.com/4777yuua