

Klaus Pannenbäcker – More Than a Pioneer¹

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Klaus Pannenbäcker (left) with GPM honorary member Hasso Reschke, current GPM president Prof. Dr. Peter Thuy and GPM honorary members Prof. Dr. Reinhard Wagner and Prof. Dr. Nino Grau during the 34th IPMA World Congress in Berlin

I met Klaus Pannenbäcker only once. It was during the IPMA World Congress 2025 in Berlin. He was already well into his nineties and being honored for his lifetime achievements. I watched him on stage in front of hundreds of enthusiastic project management professionals from around the world. I observed him from a distance, knowing only the outline of his remarkable career. What struck me immediately was not his résumé, but his presence. He appeared curious, engaged, humorous and completely at ease among colleagues from all over the world.

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After his passing, I began reading the many messages, memories and tributes shared by people who had known him for decades. As I worked through these recollections, a picture emerged that went far beyond the formal roles of former GPM board member, former IPMA President, certification pioneer or project management expert. What became visible was a human being whose impact was measured not only by institutions and systems, but by relationships.

One detail caught my attention almost immediately. Again and again, people mentioned Klaus traveling by train: Brane Semolič, Slovenian professor, head of the LENS Living Lab and a close friend and collaborator of Klaus for more than four decades, recalled how Klaus regularly traveled from Germany to Slovenia by rail for intensive discussions about the future of project management education. Rajat K. Baisya, Indian professor, management consultant and long-time collaborator of Klaus in project management education and the KM Fest initiative, remembered that Klaus preferred trains even when traveling internationally and described him as someone who seemed constantly in motion.

Perhaps this detail resonated with me because I also enjoy train travel. There is something profoundly human about it. Trains connect places, but they also connect people. Looking back at Klaus' life, the train almost feels like a fitting metaphor. Throughout his career, he connected countries, professional communities, generations and ideas.

His professional achievements are impossible to overlook. As Dr. Reinhard Wagner, former chairman of GPM, project management thought leader and long-time colleague who documented Klaus's contributions to the profession, reminded us in a post on LinkedIn, Klaus was one of the driving forces behind the competence-based approach to project management qualification and certification. He helped create what became the IPMA Four-Level Certification System, based on the IPMA Competence Baseline. Introduced in the late 1990s, this framework influenced how project managers are educated, assessed and certified across the world. For many practitioners today, these standards are simply part of professional life. Yet behind them stood individuals who invested years of thought, debate and development work. Klaus was one of those individuals.

His influence reached far beyond Germany. Former IPMA President Miles Shepherd described him as a stalwart of German project management and recalled meeting him at international congresses around the world. David Pells, who had known Klaus since 1992, called him "a giant in the PM field."

Hiroshi Tanaka, Japanese professor and project management expert, remembered his role in strengthening cooperation between IPMA and the Japanese project management community. Rajat Baisya highlighted Klaus' support for project management development in India, where he was a frequent visitor and contributor.

The geographical reach of these memories is remarkable. From Poland to Japan, from South Africa to India, from the United States to Scandinavia, people remember Klaus not merely as a visitor but as someone who helped build something lasting.

Yet what fascinated me most while reading these tributes was how rarely people focused on his titles. Again and again, they spoke about his personality:

In comments on LinkedIn, Sandra Bartsch-Beuerlein, German project management expert and long-time assessor colleague who worked closely with Klaus in certification activities, remembered his ability to explain complex ideas through simple analogies. Alexander Miskiwi, German project manager who remembers Klaus as a mentor and inspiring personality, described his patience, clarity and unmistakable sense of humor. Dr. Thomas Walenta, German project management professional, PMI Fellow and long-time colleague who knew Klaus through both PMI and GPM, recalled his openness and friendliness.

Werner Schmehr, German project management expert who remained in contact with Klaus until shortly before his passing, remembered a friend and mentor who, even in his final months, was still making plans and developing new ideas.

Joanna Stalewska, Polish project manager, wrote about his unique sense of humor.

Per Frank Povlsen, Danish IPMA assessor and long-time colleague who learned from Klaus through international certification activities, remembered him as someone who was always in a good mood.

The consistency of these recollections is striking. They come from different countries, cultures and generations, yet they describe the same person. A project management pioneer, certainly. But also a mentor. A teacher. A listener. A humanist.

Mladen Vukomanović, President of IPMA, called him one of the true pioneers of modern project management. That statement is undoubtedly correct. Klaus helped shape the profession during a period when project management evolved from a specialized discipline into a globally recognized field. His work influenced standards, certification systems and professional communities around the world.

However, after reading dozens of tributes, I find myself thinking that his greatest achievement may have been something less tangible. Many people contribute to standards. Far fewer contribute to people.

The comments left by colleagues reveal someone who generously shared his knowledge, encouraged younger professionals, supported emerging communities and remained curious until the very end. Numerous contributors described him as a mentor. Others emphasized his optimism, his energy and his genuine interest in those around him.

Perhaps that is why so many of the messages do not read like professional acknowledgements. They read like personal farewells. I only saw Klaus Pannenbäcker

once. Many others knew him for decades. Yet after reading their memories, I feel I understand why his passing has touched so many people around the world. Not because they lost a former president or a certification pioneer. They lost a colleague, a mentor and a friend.

The systems he helped create will endure. The profession he helped shape will continue to evolve. But the lasting impression left by those who knew him best is remarkably simple: Klaus Pannenbäcker was a highly accomplished professional who never stopped being deeply human. That may be the most important legacy of all.

For a little more about Klaus' life, view the tribute to him posted on 11 May at <https://peworldjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/260511-Remembering-klaus-pannenbaecker.pdf>

To view a tribute to Klaus by the German Project Management Association, go to: [Nachruf auf Klaus Pannenbäcker | GPM Deutsche Gesellschaft für Projektmanagement e. V.](#)

To view the tribute to Klaus by the International Project Management Association (IPMA), go to: [In Memory of Klaus Pannenbäcker](#)

About the Author



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Sebastian Wieschowski is an editor at the German Project Management Association (GPM), the national member association of the International Project Management Association (IPMA) in Germany. He is responsible for developing GPM's media relations and serves on the editorial board of PM Aktuell, a quarterly magazine distributed to more than 6,500 GPM members as well as external stakeholders.

Born in 1985 in northern Germany, Wieschowski developed an early fascination with journalism. His formal education began with active contributions to school and local newspapers. He later completed journalistic training at the Cologne Journalism School for Politics and Economics, earned a Master Level Diploma from the School of Journalism at Eichstaett University, and undertook professional training at a regional

newspaper publisher. He also holds a postgraduate M.Sc. degree in Public Health from Hannover Medical School.

In addition to his freelance journalism for national and international outlets, including major German media such as DIE ZEIT, Wieschowski has held senior communications roles since 2012. He first worked as press officer for a private university specializing in social work, then for a psychiatric hospital, and later for an industrial company. In September 2024, he joined GPM's Marketing and Public Relations department, where he focuses on strengthening the visibility and public relevance of project management through editorial formats such as storytelling.

Alongside his professional career, Sebastian Wieschowski is also active as a freelance author in his lifelong passion, numismatics. He writes for both German- and English-language specialist publications, and his work has been recognized three times by the Numismatic Literary Guild, a writers' association based in the USA.

Sebastian is a reporter at heart and enjoys discovering inspiring stories and meet people from around the world, a goal that is particularly easy to pursue in the field of project management. He can be contacted at s.wieschowski@gpm-ipma.de.