

**Prof. Dr. Peter Bella** (\*1984) is a professor in the Faculty of Mathematics at the TU Dortmund University, specializing in applied analysis. Together with his wife Katarina and their three children Helena (\*2012), Daniela (\*2014) and Lukas (\*2018), he has lived in Dortmund since the summer of 2019.



Source: Alena Kardash / TU Dortmund

## The "family-is-important" father

*On a warm Friday morning, Professor Bella arrives in a good mood for the spontaneously arranged interview appointment, which takes place on the premises of the Staff Office for Equal Opportunity, Family and Diversity at Emil-Figge-Strasse 66. After a warm welcome, we take our seats in the meeting room and begin the interview in a relaxed atmosphere.*

## **New start in Dortmund**

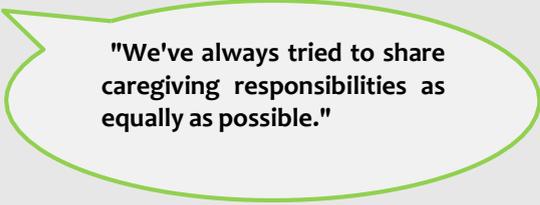
Right at the beginning of the conversation, the mathematician explains that he has only been living in Dortmund with his wife and three children since Tuesday.

Dortmund commute. He made the weekly trip primarily because of his eldest daughter Helena took upon himself, as he reports: "Helena still went to school in Leipzig until the summer, so we decided to wait until the vacations to move to Dortmund. Then she can start here at the elementary school in Dortmund after the vacations and make new contacts there."

About his own new start at TU Dortmund, the family father reports that he is now working as a professor for the first time: "For the last seven years, I have been in Leipzig. First, four years as a research associate at the Max Planck Institute, and then I worked for three years as a professor. at the University of Leipzig as a junior research group leader. Most of the time, I was involved in research and led a group of staff and promoters. In addition, I also gave lectures, because I think it's good to get in touch with the students." The father also reports that his wife also worked as a mathematician at the University of Leipzig. Immediately after the birth of Lukas, she went on parental leave for six months and then both parents worked part-time for five months.

## **Maintaining a balance between family and career**

"It was always important to us that we could both go to work. With many colleagues, it was the case that they worked full time despite the children, because the wife stayed at home and took care of everything. However, we have always We try to divide the caregiving tasks as equally as possible. I can't do the breastfeeding, of course, but I'm very good at swaddling Lukas," the father jokes.



**"We've always tried to share caregiving responsibilities as equally as possible."**

It wasn't until he moved to Dortmund that Peter Bella's wife went back on parental leave, as the father explains: "In our profession, it's difficult to take a longer break, so my wife started working again early with our daughters. With Lukas, we thought, now we are complete, so now we are giving ourselves more time. My wife will probably stay on parental leave until next summer. After that, she would like to work as a mathematician again. I think it would be great if she could also work at the TU Dortmund, because you can be very flexible with your working hours here, which is a great advantage if you have a family.

## A move requires good organization

For the family, the parental leave arrangement is a great relief, especially in the relocation situation, because moving to a new city with three children requires some organizational talent. The tri-fa-  
che father remembers the stressful move a few days ago only too well: "It could always be only one parent had to prepare the move, the other parent had to take care of Lukas, while the two girls were often left alone.

play. Our neighbors in Leipzig have been very supportive and have always looked up to Lukas. fit so that we had time to pack. We had to pack almost the whole night, because the moving company came at seven in the morning before the door," he laughs today.

**"With three children,  
of course, you have to  
organize everything  
well."**

Fortunately, the Bella family did not have to master the move all by themselves, because they received support from their grandparents from Slovakia. As Professor Bella reports, his wife and he are originally from Slovakia and still have family there: "My mother-in-law has a total of eight grandchildren and is therefore always very busy. During the move she for a few days helped to take care of the children. Also my father

came from Slovakia to help us with the move," says the family father, delighted at so much support from his environment.

## New everyday family life in Dortmund

In their new environment, the family found support from the TU Dortmund Family Service: "The family service was very helpful and helped us find a kindergarten place for Daniela. In addition, TU covered the costs of our move," reports the father with satisfaction. The only thing he would have hoped for was more support in finding a new apartment in Dortmund, because it wasn't exactly easy to find a suitable home for a family with three children.



Peter Bella with his three children  
Source:  
private

"When we moved from the USA to Europe with Helena, the MPI helped us find a place to live, which was a great help. This time we had to organize the apartment search ourselves, which was a bit more stressful.

But now we have found something nice. I hope that we will soon have settled into our new home and be able to return to our everyday lives," explains the father confidently.

"We read to our kids a lot."

How a typical everyday life of the family in Leipzig looks like-

Peter Bella describes what he saw and how it could be structured in Dortmund in the future as follows: "I get up around seven o'clock, while my wife usually stays in bed with Lukas until he also wakes up shortly before eight. Since Helena has been going to school since last year, we have breakfast together and I help her get dressed, comb her hair and check her school documents before she leaves. Afterwards, I usually get Daniela ready and then take her to the KiTa. She will be attending the KiTa im Grünen in Dortmund, near campus, starting next Thursday. I will probably take her there by bike and then drive her to work. In Leipzig, the kids had lots of activities in the afternoon."

Dancing on Tuesdays, acrobatics and climbing on Thursdays, and piano lessons one day.

On Mondays and Wednesdays they were free to play. We will see what our children can do here in Dortmund and whether it will be regulated as before. With three children, of course, we have to organize everything well."



*Bella family on ski vacation*

*Source:  
private*

In the evening and in between, the Bella family likes to read aloud, as the father of the family tells us with a smile. "We don't have a TV at the moment, but the children really like it when we read to them. Since they are growing up bilingual, we often read children's books in Slovenian. They like that and listen attentively." Peter Bella often uses his free time to play with the children outside in the garden or to take Lukas for a walk in the stroller.

"Lukas loves to be in the stroller. Then he is always very quiet and observes what is going on around him.

happens around him. You can really tell how attentive he is and always learning something new."

### **Focus on the family**

Despite his new challenges as a university professor, the father of three is still focused on his family for the moment. "When the children are grown up, I'll have I still have enough time to immerse myself further in my work. At some point, my children may no longer want to spend much time with me and will lead their own lives. That's why it's important for me now to make the most of the time with my family."

However, he is critical of one point: "No one will take into account later that you have three children and could therefore invest less time in your work. While colleagues without families have a lot of time for their careers, I have more limited time. However, this is hardly taken into account when applying for a professorship. Nevertheless, I made a conscious decision to have children."

For the coming weeks and months, the father hopes that he and his family will settle in well in Dortmund. "In Leipzig, we always had a lot of contact with our neighbors. Our children were friends with the neighbors' children and we made trips on the weekends. We are also looking forward to Dort-

mund on nice neighbors with children. In any case, there is already a girl in the Dortmund neighborhood who is Helena's age. Maybe the two of them will soon be able to walk to school together in the morning."

The interview was conducted by Rahime Eser on 23.08.2019



*Peter Bella with his family*  
Source:  
private