

Maria Kopp (1942-2012)



Maria passed away all of a sudden, in her sleep, unexpectedly – as if she had had no time to hesitate about the issue of death, the natural part of life. She had been characterised by an amazingly abundant energy until the very last day of her life. There is such vast emptiness due to her departure that those who are left behind can hardly grasp. Two months ago we celebrated her 70th birthday anniversary in the frame of a scientific day organised in her honour at the Semmelweis University. Age had no importance in her case, she lived and talked with the vigour of a young scientist at the beginning of her career. She was ageless and indestructible – yet destiny had a final say.

Less than three years ago her husband and partner in creativity, Árpád Skrabski, passed away. She never really recovered from it. She worked even more, maybe trying to work also on behalf of Árpád. It was impossible to keep pace with her: she had several research, educational and public life activities running parallelly, and all along she proved a lovely person; a great personality who treated freshman researchers and cleaning ladies as equals. She had an unbelievable talent to motivate and inspire, she managed to win people over to good causes.

In 1968 she graduated from the Semmelweis Medical University with „summa cum laude”, thereafter she completed her psychology studies, then she became a clinical psychologist. She qualified in person-centred psychotherapy, thereafter in cognitive behavioural therapy, and in treating panic patients she achieved significant results internationally as well. She was the founder of the Institute of Behavioural Sciences at Semmelweis University, acting as the director of the institute for 14 years, thereafter as research director. Her research career, that culminated in becoming a Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1999, included the research fields of psychosomatics and behaviour epidemiology, in which she was internationally acknowledged. It is her merit that the Institute of Behavioural Sciences founded by her is renowned in all parts of the world. Her interest in the Hungarian state of

mind was inspired by Pál Juhász, her professor at the Department of Psychiatry, and the consecutive national representative studies called Hungarostudy are of great importance and their data bases are a gold mine to be further explored.

Their value is underlined by the words of Professor Emőke Bagdy, fellow researcher:

”If one day an overview analysis about the most valuable Hungarian research studies will see the light, surely the present important and invaluable sequence of Hungarostudies conducted with womanly perseverance and love will be on the top.”

Her scientific work includes nearly 300 publications. She published several books that now are considered fundamental works. She founded the Hungarian Psychophysiology and Health Psychology Society and the Végeken Health Psychology Foundation. She was the Hungarian representative and executive committee member of many international societies and editorial board member for many national and international scientific journals.

As tutor she was very popular and inspiring. She was the leader of a doctoral program, and she established a research school of high standards. Apart from education, the treatment of clients was of great importance for her. When she set up the Institute of Behavioural Sciences, she insisted on including treatment and healing among the main tasks of the Institute, and she developed a nationwide psychosomatic outpatient department. Few people are aware that she had a substantial role in founding the Péter Pázmány Catholic University as well.

In her last decade vital issues related to the nation’s destiny became increasingly important: demographic questions, the battle against suicide, and researching happiness. She initiated and established the Demographic Round Table, the Three Prince, Three Princesses movement; she actively participated in European collaborations, and she was very open towards the most recent research trends integrating the disciplines of biology, neurosciences and psychology. She recognized every novelty of great value and she could motivate us with her fascinating professional devotion.

Her grand lifework has been acknowledged by many distinguished awards. The most important ones were: Gyula Nyíró Award granted twice by the Hungarian Psychiatric Association, Albert Szent-Györgyi Award, ”For a Civic Hungary” award, Prima Primissima award, Hungarian Heritage Award, Stephanus award, honorary citizen of Budapest, and two weeks before her passing away: the Commander’s Cross with the Star, order of merit of Hungary (civilian division).

What will we do without her? We will need to grow up – we have been challenged to do that now. We cannot substitute her, yet it is our obligation to cherish her memory with dignity. Without exaggeration: the obligation of the university and the whole country.

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