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In Memoriam Grzegorz (Gregory) Kersten



Grzegorz Kersten passed away unexpectedly, on 26 May 2020. He was 70 years old. He graduated from SGPiS* in 1973 (econometrics), and became doctor in economic sciences (operational research) in 1981. His promoters were Professor Wiesław Grabowski and Professor Janusz Buga. After the university studies he worked in the then Management Organisation and Executive Development Institute, where he headed the Quantitative Methods Laboratory. At the same time, he participated in scientific projects at the Warsaw School of Economics (still referred to at that time as SGPiS) and the University of Warsaw, regarding, inter alia, goal optimisation and macroeconomic planning. He took part in seminars on operational research, conducted by Professor Ireneusz Nykowski in the 1980s at SGPiS. The seminar gathered a large part of the community of scientists and researchers specialising in operational studies. This is where I met him.

He lived in Canada for over 30 years, from 1985, with interruptions for scientific visits. He worked first at the School of Business (currently Sprott School of Business) at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. From 1999 onwards in the Department of Decision Sciences and Management Information Systems in John Molson School of Business at Concordia University in Montreal, holding the position of honour of the Senior Concordia University Research Chair and Adjunct Research Professor at Carleton University.

*The oldest Polish school of economics, Warsaw School of Economics, original Polish name: Szkoła Główna Handlowa (Main School of Commerce), abbreviation: SGH, was renamed in the socialist period to Szkoła Główna Planowania i Statystyki (Main School of Planning and Statistics, abbreviated SGPiS). Nowadays the School uses in Polish its traditional name and abbreviation, SGH, while in English – SGH Warsaw School of Economics.

He was Paul Desmarais/Power Corporation Professor at the School of Management, University of Ottawa (2004/2005), and also Senior Research Scholar in the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis in Laxenburg near Vienna in Austria, intended to be the European Princeton. He was a visiting professor at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, in the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey in California, the National Sun Yat-Sen University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan, and many other Universities worldwide.

His scientific interests underwent natural evolution from Operations Research applications for decision making methods in economic and management problems, through Multiple Criteria Decision Making and Group Decisions, to Negotiations. He was one of the pioneers in computer supported negotiation systems. The Negoplan system, developed by Grzegorz and his research partners, is one of the first intelligent negotiation support systems. The Negoplan attracted great interest at many conferences in multicriteria optimisation and later inspired numerous studies on the impact of culture on negotiation interactions, also in virtual negotiation support systems.

Acceptance of the position of Research Chair at Concordia University resulted in the founding of the InterNeg Research Centre. The concept of the InterNeg Centre originated from brainstorming, inspired by Grzegorz at international conferences, and led to establishing the informal group of researchers, funding of projects, developing software and interactive website. The Centre became promptly the source of inspiration for researchers investigating electronic negotiations problems. In effect of cooperation with students and colleagues from around the world the INVITE platform was developed under the guidance of Grzegorz, for the construction of virtual negotiation systems and the system INSPIRE, which was used at many universities in the world for teaching and studies.

Grzegorz wrote more than 300 articles, published in excellent scientific periodicals and frequently quoted. He was the beneficiary of many grants with very high budgets. He was an esteemed reviewer for highly recognized scientific periodicals. Starting with 2016 he was also the Editor in Chief of the journal on Group Decision and Negotiation, placed in the upper quartile of business, management and accounting periodicals in the world, with close to 80 thousand downloaded articles in only 2019. His responsibilities included academic supervision, addressing articles to editors of divisions, making final decisions on the acceptance for printing, as well as relations with publishing houses and agencies financing the periodical.

Professor Grzegorz Kersten was an extremely strong role model and influential person in contacts at all levels. His own conference presentations contained inspiring results at all times, but were also unique intellectual confessions from observations and questions, which laid foundations of those studies. He listened

carefully to all delivered papers and shared immediately his appreciation for what he heard. He pronounced his doubts in the friendly manner, often with valuable hints. He became the mentor for many, who are today outstanding scientist, and was a highly appreciated collaborator and a scientist, editor and conference arranger and organizer. And, of course, an unfailing friend. His way of living transpired over to social contacts and sports as well as his relation with nature.



Professors Grzegorz Kersten, Marc Kilgour, Mel Shakun and Tomasz Szapiro at the opening of the conference GDN 2015 by SGH Professor Bogumi Kamiński, Head of the Decision Support and Analysis Institute, SGH (Photographs: courtesy of SGH Warsaw School of Economics website)

While living more than half of his life abroad, Professor Grzegorz Kersten always manifested live interest in Poland and the Polish university community, in which he grew up. His colleagues from other centres, whom he met, were invited to scientific cooperation. Still before he left Poland, during the martial law, established in December 1981, he guaranteed access to underground papers, distributed within SGPiS. Later, in the 1990s, he co-organised the project, under which the most promising young researchers from Polish universities had opportunities to benefit from several weeks long study visits to Canadian universities and master the organisation and management of MBA studies. These

were the origins of CEMBA (Canadian Executive MBA) developed at SGH after a couple of years, and then after the next more than decade – its offspring MBA SGH, whose program has its own history and successes marked now by other names.

In 2000, already recognised scientist in the word, he delivered one of guest lectures at SGH during the conference "Operational studies at the beginning of the 21st century", dedicated to Professor Ireneusz Nykowski, mentioned earlier. I also have the picture and the draft of the presentation, delivered during the seminar at the request from the scores of students of Students Research Association at Decision Analysis and Support Unit at Warsaw School of Economics in 2005. He told students then: Negotiation support systems will be useless so long as they are based on models, which do not take into consideration the context; and do not account for the fact that people are different. He taught us to take into account both context and diversity. In July 2010 Grzegorz took part in the very selective Interdisciplinary Seminar Networks in Actions and Actions in Networks: technology, education, economy organised by SGH Decision Support and Analysis Unit in cooperation with the Institute of Contemporary Civilisation Problems, named after M. Dietrich, and the Mobile Open Society through Wireless Technology (MOST) Foundation under the grant from the Foundation for Polish Science. During the conference in 2014 we took action for awarding the Warsaw School of Economy with the organization of the GDN 2015 conference of the world association INFORMS (The Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences), the worlds biggest association of professionals in operational studies, decision support and analysis. The conference was a success, with an important benefit for the international image of SGH. We owe most of the success to Grzegorz, his contacts and experience. The effect of the conference were scientific contacts and ensuing animated scientific cooperation of SGH employees with colleagues at Canadian universities, conducted nowadays by the SGH Professor Bogumił Kamiński.

We have been friends for 40 years and we were regularly in touch on many platforms. Over that period of time, I cooperated intensively with Grzegorz in science on two occasions. In the middle of the 1980s we published some articles, proposing the replacement of the Multiattribute Utility Theory approach with Multicriteria Optimisation methods in the modelling of negotiations. After 20 years we were reunited in scientific cooperation on the procedure for multicriteria analysis of the reverse auctions. I was then absorbed in the matters of the Warsaw School of Economics and Grzegorz continued this work with his collaborators. Invitation by Grzegorz for cooperation and its outcome opened my path to scientific maturity and independence, which I have always cherished and will always cherish. But even if I am writing those words in my own name, such words were addressed to him many times by colleagues from Poland and other countries. This is whom Grzegorz Kersten was: insightful, sincere, people friendly, contagious with scientific passion and always ready to help with great

subtlety. And now that we are writing memories, recalling his exceptional accomplishments, we are struck by one more of his features: he was very modest. I remember that Grzegorz did not like pompous declarations, he simply structured with his own life an answer, addressed also to us, to the question, how to be a scientist.

Tomasz Szapiro
SGH Rector in 2012-2016