

The passing of our mentor, Professor Maria Cieślak – memories¹

Ireneusz Kuroпка,^a Joanna Krupowicz^b



© Wrocław University of Economics and Business

On Sunday, 23 April 2023, we received very sad news that Professor Maria Cieślak had passed away.

‘Our Professor Cieślak’ is gone. She was ‘our Professor’, because for many of us she was a thesis advisor or reviewer of doctoral dissertations, and she supported us in our further scientific careers. She was our teacher and mentor, and showed us the beauty and secrets of science.

Maria Łucja Cieślak was born on 13 December 1933 in Barchlin (Wielkopolskie Voivodship). She graduated high school in Leszno, where her reliability, meticulous work ‘from start to finish’, honesty and respect for the truth developed. In 1951, she studied at the University of Economics in Katowice. She then moved to Wrocław, where she enrolled at the Faculty of Industry of the then Higher School of Economics. It was that university (now the Wrocław University of Economics and Business) that she connected her professional life with and where she pursued her

¹ The text uses the farewell speeches given by Prof. Elżbieta Gołata and Prof. Irena E. Kotowska at the funeral of Prof. Maria Cieślak.

^a Wrocław University of Economics and Business, Faculty of Economics and Finance, ul. Komandorska 118/120, 54-345 Wrocław, e-mail: ireneusz.kuroпка@ue.wroc.pl, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0382-6620>.

^b Wrocław University of Economics and Business, Faculty of Economics and Finance, ul. Komandorska 118/120, 54-345 Wrocław, e-mail: joanna.krupowicz@ue.wroc.pl, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6843-5081>.

scientific career. In 1956, she earned her master's degree in economics in the field of statistics. Professor Jan Falewicz, the first head of the Department of Statistics of the Higher School of Trade (Wyższa Szkoła Handlowa) in Wrocław (the precursor of the Wrocław University of Economics and Business), influenced her scientific interests. Her outstanding scientific achievements earned her a proposal to work at the University, which she accepted, starting her career in the Department of Statistics, later transferring to the Department of Econometrics.

In 1964, Professor Maria Cieślak defended her doctoral thesis entitled 'Statistical issues relating to working standards' and earned a doctorate in economic sciences. In 1974, at the initiative of Professor Zdzisław Hellwig, the Department of Forecasting and Theory of Demography was established at the Institute of Economic Cybernetics of the Faculty of National Economy. The management of the department was entrusted to Maria Cieślak. In the same year, in the course of her long-term cooperation with the Institute of Scientific Policy in Warsaw, her monograph entitled 'Models of needs for qualified staff' was published. This was the main achievement for which she obtained her postdoctoral degree in economic sciences. That work, under the modified title of 'Models of demand for qualified staff' was published by PWN (Polish Scientific Publishers) in 1976. Five years later, Maria Cieślak became a professor at the University of Economics. In 1981, the Department of Forecasting and Theory of Demography was transformed into the Chair of Forecasting and Theory of Demography, and in 1995 into the Chair of Forecasting and Economic Analysis. With breaks, the professor was head of these units until 2003. In 1988, Professor Maria Cieślak received the title of full professor.

In addition to the function of the Head of the Chair of Forecasting and Economic Analysis, Professor Maria Cieślak also held other important positions at the University. In those particularly difficult times, she always worked with a sense of responsibility and service to the University's academic community. In the years 1979–1981, she was the vice-dean of the Faculty of National Economy and in 1981–1982 she was the vice-rector for didactics. Due to her perseverance and courage, respect for fundamental values, her openness to others and the changing world, she became an inspiration for many at the time.

In recognition of her distinguished service to the University, on 26 September 2007, the Senate of the Wrocław University of Economics and Business awarded Maria Cieślak the title of honorary professor.

Professor Cieślak's scientific and organisational activity was not limited to the University. She was a demographer and statistician, and a valued scientific authority. From 1975, for several terms of office she was a member of the Committee of Demographic Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences and in 1978 she started

serving on the Committee of Statistics and Econometrics of the Polish Academy of Sciences. After 1985, she was appointed member of the Government Population Council. She was also a member of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (from 1978). Professor Cieślak was active in the scientific community until her very last days. In 2022, she actively participated in the work of a team appointed by the Bureau of the Polish Academy of Sciences to evaluate the proposal for a demographic strategy prepared by the Ministry of Family and Social Policy.

Due to her established position in the scientific community and her conscientiousness in fulfilling her duties, she was often invited to participate in the activities of various bodies responsible for publishing scientific journals. At her home university, Professor Maria Cieślak chaired the Senate's publishing committee for 11 years. Throughout her career, she was the editor-in-chief of *Argumenta Oeconomica* and *Wrocławski Biuletyn Gospodarczy* (Polish Economic Society, Wrocław Branch), as well as member of the editorial committee of *Studia Demograficzne* and the editorial board of *Przegląd Statystyczny*, *Studia Demograficzne*, *Badania Operacyjne i Decyzje* and *Przegląd Statystyczny Śląska Dolnego i Opolskiego*.

For her outstanding achievements, Professor Maria Cieślak received many awards and distinctions from the state, the scientific community and other institutions. Professor Maria Cieślak was distinguished with the Knight's Cross and Officer's Cross of the Order of Rebirth of Poland, and the Golden Cross of Merit. She also received the Medal of the Committee on National Education and the Badge of the Distinguished Teacher. In 1993, the President of Statistics Poland awarded Professor Cieślak with the Golden Honorary Badge 'For Distinguished Service to the Statistics of the Republic of Poland'. Moreover, she received the following regional awards: a Golden Badge 'For Distinguished Service to Lower Silesia' and a Silver Badge of the Builder of the Legnica-Głogów Copper District.

The Wrocław University of Economics and Business awarded her the title of the Crystal Graduate (Alumnus), as an appreciation for the many years of her scientific and educational achievements and an expression of admiration for her commitment to the academic community.

Professor Maria Cieślak's scientific and research interests focused mainly on two areas: forecasting and demography. She is considered the creator of the Scientific School of Forecasting, developed at the Wrocław University of Economics and Business. The school is known for paying attention to the entire forecasting process, not just the forecasting method. This entails placing emphasis on the formulation of the purpose of the forecasting, the predictive indications, the determination of the assumptions underlying the forecasting methods and the examination of the compatibility of these components of the forecasting procedure with a selection of

forecasting methods. Professor Cieślak devoted a lot of attention to the critical analysis of forecasting methods, formulating proposals for new forecasting methods and building forecasts of economic and social processes. The culmination of her work in these areas was the publication of the 'Economic forecasting. Methods and Application' manual, which was co-written with a team of scientists and which received an award from the Minister of Education in 1994. The publication addresses the entire forecasting process in a comprehensive and in-depth way. The holistic approach presented in the manual made it a publication used at many Polish universities, serving as a guide for a variety of authors of other textbooks in this field.

Professor Maria Cieślak was also the initiator of the regularly organised 'Forecasting in company management' scientific conference. During the event held in 2014, which marked the 20th anniversary of the Chair of Economic Forecasting and Analysis, when sharing her reflections on her 'adventure' with forecasting, she mentioned Alvin Toffler's book 'The Third Wave' as an inspiration for her scientific exploration in this area.

Professor Cieślak's interest in forecasting was also reflected in forecasting demographic phenomena, as demonstrated by her research on the concepts and modelling of demographic development. The Professor devoted a lot of her attention to the search for ever better research tools and for the means of expressing changes observed in population processes, especially those concerning ageing and the labour market. Her approach to the forecasting of demographic processes corresponded to the latest global trends. An excellent example of the above is her method of forecasting based on spatial-temporal analogies. The research on demographic processes resulted in the publication of a book entitled 'Demography. Methods of Analysis and Forecasting' (1982). The Professor was the scientific editor and co-author of the publication, which received a minister's award and had several editions.

Professor Maria Cieślak was the author or co-author of over 100 scientific papers, 16 monographs, and 18 textbooks and academic books. Additionally, she prepared many research reports commissioned by various state institutions and companies.

Professor Cieślak assisted in the writing of numerous doctoral and post-doctoral dissertations as well as professor monographs. She was the supervisor of 13 PhD and eight post-doctoral candidates. Among her PhD students, three went on to receive the title of full professor. She supervised numerous master's degree dissertations. Even after having formally ended her professional activity, Professor Cieślak was always ready to provide help and advice on various issues. She took special care of her students.

She was held in high esteem and recognised by Polish demographers, statisticians and econometricians. Many researchers felt deep respect for her, thus any positive reviews or opinions expressed by Professor Cieślak were particularly significant and valued among the academic community and a testimony to the recognition of one's scientific achievements. That is the reason why she was often invited to become member of various bodies and entrusted with the role of a reviewer. Professor Cieślak reviewed 53 doctoral dissertations, participated in 32 post-doctoral proceedings, and examined 16 applications for the title of professor. She knew how to appreciate another researcher's commitment and effort. Her reviews were highly substantive and written in a kind way, as she always appreciated an individual's achievements and was always willing to make further suggestions as to how to enhance their study. The Professor showed great respect for other researchers, which was particularly evident at conferences: she always listened carefully to the speeches and her comments and proposals were constructive and useful for the authors. After finishing her work at the Wrocław University of Economics and Business in 2003, Professor Cieślak started working at the WSB School of Banking, initially in Poznań and later in Wrocław.

Professor Maria Cieślak was scientifically active throughout her life. Even when she retired, she wrote papers and reviewed various scientific works: studies, doctoral dissertations and post-doctoral monographs. Her last paper was published in a collective study entitled 'Society in the Age of Change - Interdisciplinary Studies' in April 2023.

Professor Cieślak's attitude stemmed from an understanding of the role of a scholar, whose duty is to 'help to understand the world'. However, 'whether we use the results of their investigations and how we use them depends on the quality of the society'. Referring to the concept of social capital, she defined the role of scholars in its creation. In her opinion, scientists have 'special obligations towards the individual, the society and the state. These commitments concern the effective, axiological, and fiduciary aspects of their activities and behaviour. The main goal of scientists (...) is to bring good, not material benefits that exceed ordinary personal needs as well as those resulting from work' (Cieślak 2017, p. 13)².

Despite her great commitment to scientific work, Professor Cieślak had time for her two passions: reading books and contact with nature. Olga Tokarczuk was one of her favourite writers. Trips to the woods and taking care of her plants in her garden gave her the greatest joy.

² Cieślak, M. (2017). Laudacja dla profesor Ireny Elżbiety Kotowskiej. *Studia Demograficzne*, (2), 13–16. <https://econjournals.sgh.waw.pl/SD/article/view/1377/1229>.

On the one hand, we feel sadness and regret about the passing of a person we loved, who has been with us for many years, who has given so much to each of us, whose care we experienced, and whom we were always able to count on. On the other hand, we have a feeling of gratitude to Professor Cieślak for everything we received from her. She set an excellent example of a great scientist and a human being not indifferent to what both the country and other people are experiencing. For that, we will remain forever grateful.

The Polish scientific community has lost an outstanding scholar and educator. An enlightened, open, kind and creative person.

She will forever remain in our grateful memory.