

In memoriam Academician Sándor Marosi



On 5th July 2009 the Hungarian and international geographical community lost one of its prominent personalities. Professor Sándor MAROSI, a highly rated researcher of the first generation of physical geographers after World War II, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) passed away in 81st year of his life. He was laid to eternal rest beside his beloved wife, who died ten years before. The Lutheran funeral service in the New Public Cemetery in Budapest on 23 July was attended by the family members, and also by illustrious representatives of the national community of geosciences, well-known personalities of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS), national institutions of learning, including universities, professional and social organizations and a large company of friends. Farewell speeches were held by professors Ferenc

SCHWEITZER, director of the Geographical Research Institute of HAS, Árpád PAPP-VÁRY, president of the Hungarian Geographical Society and Szabolcs LEÉL-ÓSSY, president of the Hungarian Society for Karst and Speleological Research.

MAROSI came from a poor and big family living in a large village on the Danube-Tisza Interfluve, the heart region of Hungary. He was born on 16 May 1929 in Soltvadkert where he spent his childhood. In 1947 he passed final examination in Szilády Áron Reformed Secondary Grammar School in Kiskunhalas and in the same year he was admitted to Pázmány Péter University in Budapest where he received his diploma in 1952 as a teacher of geography and history. Simultaneously he also studied geology. He was a disciple of famous tutors in geography (Béla BULLA, Andor KÉZ, Sándor LÁNG), geology and of the paleontologist of world renown Miklós KRETZOI who all influenced his early development of a researcher.

Thanks to his talent and diligence Sándor MAROSI was involved into research work as a student in the field of hydrogeological mapping in sample areas of Great Hungarian Plain (Alföld). Later his attention was drawn primarily by physical geography, geology, geomorphology and landscape mapping where he achieved his first results in academic research.

Between 1948 and 1951 several scientific research institutions have been reorganised or established by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education in Hungary. Among them a Geographical Library and Map Archive started its activity in close co-operation with the Institute of Geography of the University and with the Institute of History. Later it was renamed into Geographical Research Group and became incorporated into the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS), and in 1967 reorganised into the Geographical Research Institute (GRI) of HAS.

Between 1951 and 1954 the research group was headed by Ferenc KOCH. Among the founders of Research Group was Sándor MAROSI whose scientific career started from that time. He has been a research worker from the very start and first acted as scientific secretary of the institute (1968–1972), later he worked as deputy director (1973–1993) and

the right hand of Professor Márton PÉCSI, director of the Institute between 1967 and 1990. In 1993 professor MAROSI was elected a corresponding member of the HAS, and in 2001 he became its regular member. He was also one of the founders and first editor of Földrajzi Értesítő (Geographical Bulletin), the official scientific periodical of the institute since 1952. From 1972 until 2002 he held the position of editor-in-chief of the journal.

His research activity in the field of landscape geography started in the 1950s in the Mezőföld region (East Transdanubia) and proceeded with studies on the southern shoreline of Lake Balaton. Published with László ÁDÁM and Jenő SZILÁRD *The physical Geography of the Mezőföld* presented a detailed geological and geomorphological survey about the region investigated. He and his colleagues were pioneers in geomorphological mapping based on geological investigations in Hungary. From the early 1960s Sándor MAROSI studied the origin and formation of derasional valleys with different genesis, then his attention turned towards Inner Somogy region (part of Transdanubian Hills), its geomorphic evolution and morphological features.

Still in the early 1960's, together with Pál JAKUCS, he conducted detailed ecological and geocological typological studies completed by micro- and topoclimatic measurements, botanic and pedological surveys. All these gave an impetus to complex geocological investigations. From the end of this decade several dozens of type localities had been selected to carry out detailed agroecological survey and mapping (at 1:2,000 through 1:10,000 scales) which resulted in series of thematic maps furnished by explanatory notes.

The working out the methodology of landscape analysis and evaluation elaborated together with Jenő SZILÁRD was a milestone in his oeuvre during the 1970s. It was a remarkable trend, followed by the relief analysis and complex evaluation of environment which involved the assessment of the environmental components by value ranking. As a result a remarkable contribution (*Landscape and Environment*) had been published in Geographical Bulletin (1981) where the most important aspects of the topic have been summarized.

The evaluation of individual environmental (landscape) components or the assessment of their suitability for various purposes can be integrated into a complex landscape synthesis. The survey and evaluation of landscape potential as a summary of favourable or unfavourable nature endowments for cultivation was rendered as task and subject of the trend of landscape evaluation on the basis of the physical geographical factors. From this definition of landscape evaluation (expressed by MAROSI) it follows its being not merely a new trend within physical geography but a discipline within applied geography. Thus, an economically and socially oriented and also ecologically centred landscape analysis and synthesis evolved in Hungary which contributed to the German school of landscape ecology as early as in the beginning of the 1960's. Extending the notion 'ecotop' taken from landscape ecology to label a homogeneous territorial unit, it was suggested by MAROSI to introduce 'ecopotyp' (an acronym for 'ecological potential type').

In the spirit of this academic school a number of monograph series were published and also studies on macro-, meso and microregions released. MAROSI played a leading role in this process. Under his editorship six volumes of a series entitled *Landscapes of Hungary* were issued. Geological conditions, paleogeography, mineral resources were presented, geomorphic evolution and relief pattern, climate, drainage, natural vegetation and soil cover were tackled in close relation to each other. He was an eager member of the editorial board of *National Atlas of Hungary* (published in 1989 by Cartographia). For his outstanding editorial activities he was awarded by the Széchenyi Prize in 1990.

A considerable editorial work of the *Inventory of 230 physical microregions (micro-landscapes) of Hungary* was led by MAROSI, in co-operation with Sándor SOMOGYI. This more than 1,000 paged scientific book was published in two volumes in 1991 with the involvement of experts from outside and further authors from the Institute. The inventory focused

on the natural components of primary importance. Location, land use, relief, geological conditions, climate, natural and cultivated vegetation, soils and specific landscape properties were presented along with a summary of landscape typology and recommendations of usage. The concise descriptions are supplemented by data and quantitative parameters. The physical factors of the natural resources were treated here in a manner which allows the survey of their spatial distribution and calculation for larger areal units. This work provides an overview of systematised information for land use planning in this way promoting the consideration of natural potentials and resources in their optimal use. The data base of the inventory has created foundations for a larger data bank with options of computer storage and manipulation.

As a mapping geographer MAROSI was the member of the expert teams that created the map of natural landscape divisions of Hungary and the map of landscape types as a synthesis of landscape studies of diverse orientation and at different scales.

As a person respecting traditions and values he permanently took huge efforts to secure Hungarian geography as an element of "national sciences" against attacks from outer bodies or political sides. He was the member, and later secretary and chairman of the Geographical Scientific Committee of the HAS, the member of the National Board of Science Associations where he became the chairman of the Committee of Geography and Meteorology. His oeuvre contains nearly 30 books, 140 articles and book chapters, 25 guide books for excursions, dozens of thematic maps, and nearly hundred other publications (book reviews, chronicles etc.)

It would require a separate paper to describe his activities in the Hungarian Geographical Society, an institution he highly esteemed from 1952 to his death. He was elected president in 1993 and again in 1997. After finishing his second period in 2001 he became a honorary president of the Society. He was a regular participant of annual conferences and field trips of the Society for decades. He did his best to maintain, enlarge and develop the operation of the Society. For these achievements he won the Lajos Lóczy Award in 1982. Professor MAROSI was also the highly appreciated member of the Hungarian Geological Society and the Hungarian Society for Karst and Speleological Research. Based on the life work outlined above it should be stated that Academician Sándor MAROSI was one of the most prominent representatives of the great generation of Hungarian physical geographers and a leading personality of the domestic geography.

His memory will be saved by the Hungarian geographers.

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