



Dr hab. Karol Derwich

IN MEMORY OF PROFESSOR KAROL DERWICH

On 19th May 2022, Karol Derwich, Jagiellonian University Professor, head of the Department of Latin America and of the Mexican Center at the Institute of American Studies and Polish Diaspora at this university, passed away. The Polish academia lost an excellent researcher, the most outstanding contemporary Polish specialist in Mexican studies, an excellent teacher and a passionate scholar. His untimely death has deprived us, fellow members of the Department of Latin America, of a wonderful supervisor and, above all, a kind mentor and dear friend.

Karol Derwich was born on 3rd April 1979 in Glogow, western Poland. He spent his youth in Lower Silesia and Krakow, where he studied at the Jagiellonian University. In 2003, he graduated in Political Science from the Institute of Political Science and International Relations, presenting his master's thesis *Free Trade Area of the Americas*. Karol's interest in Latin American and inter-American affairs drove him to the University of Warsaw, at the time the only university in Poland offering cultural studies on Latin America. In 2004, he graduated from the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Warsaw, where he prepared a thesis on the Ronald Reagan administration's policy toward the conflicts in Central America. After receiving his master's degree at the University of Warsaw, Karol returned to Krakow, where he began his doctoral studies under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Andrzej Mania. In 2007, on the basis of his dissertation *Instruments of US Foreign Policy toward Latin American Countries, 1945-2000*, he was awarded a doctorate in Political Science.

After defending his PhD thesis, Karol Derwich began working at the Department of Latin America of the Institute of American Studies and Polish Diaspora, where he stayed until his very last days, going through the positions of a teaching assistant, assistant professor, university professor and, as of 2019, head of the Department. Karol's work in the Department of Latin America clearly affected his scientific activities, which began to shift from inter-American relations toward contemporary political

transformations in the Latin American region, as well as the topic he is most strongly associated with: issues related to Mexican politics and history. The results of Karol's research include numerous papers, chapters in edited books and monographs prepared in Polish, Spanish and English. Two of his books are worthy of particular mention: *In the Country of Quetzalcoatl: History of Mexico since the Conquest to the Present* (Krakow 2014) is a comprehensive study on the history of Mexico and an outcome of the Author's affection for this North American country. In his habilitation book entitled *Mexico: Between Democracy and Dysfunction* (Krakow 2017), he presented the findings of a cutting-edge study on the phenomenon of state dysfunctionality. This work, as well as the degree obtained on its basis, established Karol as Poland's leading political researcher on the topic of Mexico.

Of tremendous value in Karol Derwich's academic activities was his emphasis on international cooperation. Few Polish researchers could claim to have so many international contacts in Latin America. In the course of his work, Karol made countless research and teaching visits to Mexico, the US, South American countries and Western Europe. Notably, the contacts he made during his travels translated into a true internationalization of our university. It was Karol who was the main initiator of the Krakow Latin American Studies Conferences: regular academic events that attract foreign researchers working on Latin American issues. Also thanks to his initiative, we began organizing domestic and international Latin American Seminars at the Institute of American Studies and Polish Diaspora. Conferences, seminars and scientific publications arising from these events were at the core of the Department of Latin America activity. Karol Derwich may safely be called the *spiritus movens* of Krakow's Latin Americanist community.

The last project we managed under Karol's guidance was the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Department of Latin America on 31st March 2022, combined with the 6th edition of the Krakow Latin American Studies Conference. These events would not have happened if it had not been for the tremendous work of Karol, who committed himself unreservedly to their organization – regardless of his deteriorating health. We did not know at the time that the speech he gave then at the anniversary would be his last public appearance.

Great dedication, creativity and passion for research were not the only merits that distinguished Karol among other members of the academia. In his activities, he clearly placed the benefit of the community (the Department, the Institute, the scientific community) above personal success. He was an exceptionally humble person with a rare ability to bring people together and create a positive environment. Much of this was due to his extraordinary sense of humor and his natural cordiality.

As a supervisor and colleague at the Institute, Karol also showed that the life of a scholar is not just about work. The balance he maintained between his professional and private spheres was admirable and particularly inspiring. He enjoyed every moment spent with his wife Anna, sons Filip and Dawid, and dogs Baca and Alex. Karol was a big fan of rock music, which often transpired in his outfits. Attending concerts with his loved ones was a great joy for him and the subject of many stories. In his spare

time, he also enjoyed running, and had completed marathons and half-marathons multiple times.

The spirit of an athlete and the will to fight accompanied Karol until his final lap. Until the end, he remained cheerful, fulfilled his duties and planned his next activities. It is often said that there are no irreplaceable people, but Karol's death has shown us that this is not true. Polish Latin American Studies has lost a man who is one of a kind. In addition to his rich intellectual legacy, however, Karol also left us sure beacons. We promise to follow the path he set out with confidence and a smile brought about by the most beautiful memories.

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