

The Great Conductor

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There are people you meet and never forget throughout your life, no matter how often or how long you interact. You just feel fortunate that fate brought you together with such individuals, allowing you to work with them and share the fruits of your labor. One such person was Prof. Aleksander Guterch. Regardless of the numerous academic degrees, titles and awards he held, his works, scientific ideas, along with the courage required to undertake sometimes very risky projects and, not least, the conditions and environment he used to work left the greatest impression. I am referring here to a decade of research in the Arctic and Antarctica.

When we first met, this romantic period was over, but the preparation of the newly launched EUROPROBE program for complex geological and geophysical studies has started. We met at a scientific conference in the Danish town of Nykobing Falster, devoted to the planning of this program. The participants were invited to submit proposals for the Deep Seismic Sounding (DSS) projects, in particular, the target areas and regions. I proposed conducting deep seismic sounding between the shields of Fennoscandia and Ukraine, aiming to determine the lithospheric structure in this little-explored area. The profile bridged both shields, from Sweden, across the Baltic Sea, through Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. Hence the name I came up with – “Bridge”.

However, it was just a theoretical idea since, at that time, Lithuania lacked both the equipment and the experience required for such work. The audience knew this, so my proposal did not receive much attention. However, someone noticed and appreciated it. During a break between sessions, Aleksander approached me, introduced himself and said that he supported my proposal. Immediately, he began naming the countries whose scientists could participate in this work, how much and what kind of equipment they could bring and what was needed for the successful implementation of the project from our side.

At that time, I was the director of the Lithuanian Geological Survey and could answer such questions specifically and reliably. After this short conversation, the project already seemed quite feasible; although many unresolved issues remained, they were no longer crucial.

I shared my meeting with Aleksander with Svetlana Bogdanova, one of the leaders of EUROPROBE, known for her excellent organizational skills and a sense of humor, among other qualities. She immediately declared that if Aleksander Guterch is involved, it's serious, and

eventually became an active participant of the project and its leader on the geological interpretation stage. Another leader of the program, the renowned Swedish geologist, Roland Gorbachev, known as a man of few words, upon learning that Aleksander Guterch would participate in the project, did not see the need to comment and only suggested renaming it to Eurobridge, thus connecting it with the EUROPROBE program. Finally, the Eurobridge was successfully performed and was one of the key projects of the entire program.

Our collaboration did not end on this project. Aleksander and his staff continued to generate ideas and lead us further. Next, the DSS project POLONAISE'97 was designed, consisting of five profiles. The longest profile, P4, extended from Germany across Poland into Lithuania, where the final shot point was just about 20 km north of Vilnius.

As soon as the last explosion shook the ground, we called Toruń, where the experiment headquarter was located, to report that everything was successful and heard Aleksander's calm voice on the other end saying: "We already know, congratulations". The seismic wave outpaced our call.

Our final joint project was the passive seismic experiment – PASSEQ, during which hundreds of seismic stations worked in a non-stop regime for more than a year, registering teleseismic events from the big deal of the globe. The responsibility to organize this project has already been entrusted to the younger generation of researchers.

Observing the professor's work during the experiments and his attitude toward the involved colleagues creates an impression that you see a well-coordinated orchestra of which you are also a member. Each orchestra participant masterfully handles their instrument, knows their part well and the conductor achieves harmony in this orchestra just with a slight hand movement. The essential difference in this comparison is that this orchestra does not perform music written by someone long ago but creates new opuses which enrich the entire scientific world. "The Great Conductor" is perhaps the most accurate description of Prof. Aleksander Guterch as a scientist and as a person.

The research initiated, organized or supported by Aleksander Guterch is indeed of a continental scale. Taking alone the Lithuanian geology, the knowledge obtained is a tremendous contribution, which provided impetus for the development of geophysics and new geological research.

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