

Kathy Wilkes at the Inter-University Centre Dubrovnik: Philosophy, Courage, and much more

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The text presents the activities of Dr. Kathleen Vaughan Wilkes, a philosopher from the University of Oxford in the Inter-University Centre Dubrovnik (IUC) from the beginning of the 1980s to the end of the millennium. Dr. Wilkes was co-directing the longest standing IUC course Philosophy of Science, but she also initiated other IUC academic programmes. As a member of the IUC governing bodies, she was highly engaged in securing scholarships for participants from Central and East Europe in IUC programmes, mostly through Open Society Foundation. Dr. Wilkes played a crucial role in spreading information from the city of Dubrovnik during the attacks of the Yugoslav People's Army in 1991 and during Croatian's struggle for independence, for which she was awarded honorary citizenship and posthumously one of the squares was named after her.

Keywords: Kathy Wilkes; Inter-University Centre (IUC); Philosophy of Science; Open Society Foundation; Central and East-European scholars; dissemination of information.

It is no wonder that Kathy Wilkes found her way to the Inter-University Centre Dubrovnik (IUC).¹ Dr. Kathleen Vaughan Wilkes, a Tutor and Fellow in Philosophy at Oxford's St. Hilda's College was passionate not only about philosophy but also about social changes. She was initiated to the IUC by her Oxford colleague Dr. William Newton-Smith, who invited her to take part in the IUC *Philosophy of Science* course in

¹ In the text, Dr. Wilkes would mostly be referred with the less formal version of the name—as Kathy, as her friends, colleagues and later on citizens of Dubrovnik called her.

April of 1981. The theme of the course that year was “Theories and Explanations.” Kathy Wilkes came as a resource person and held a lecture on reductionism. From that year on, she never missed this April course, which she had already started co-directing in 1984.²

In the early 80s, the IUC operated for almost ten years as an independent international institution for advanced studies. It was envisioned and launched between 1970 and 1972 by Prof. Ivan Supek, at that time Rector of the University of Zagreb, to offer the academic community a free platform to develop international cooperation independent of governmental control and national constraints. Supek’s idea was that by “preparing the ground for the present day scientific revolution, the university community has also prepared the ground for a better world, the world of human understanding and peace” and to address urgent world problems, new organisational structures needed to be offered (Supek 1971: 1). Dubrovnik was chosen as a seat of this new institution so that its centuries-long history of an independent city republic between East and West, North and South, using diplomacy to secure freedom and economic stability, would inspire contemporary scientists to explore current social developments. Another political fact contributed to the convenient location of the Centre in the world divided by an Iron Curtain. Former Yugoslavia, although a communist state, was among the leaders of the Non-aligned Movement which meant that people from Eastern and Western blocks could come there and the IUC became a meeting place of scholars along the division line. As Prof. James Robert Brown, Dr. Wilkes’s colleague and co-director of the *Philosophy of Science* course wrote, Dubrovnik “was liberal-minded and cosmopolitan, and it easily accommodated the tensions of the cold war” (Brown 2010: 36). The IUC and Dubrovnik soon became Kathy Wilkes’s second home.

1. *Academic activities*

Philosophy of Science, also initiated by Ivan Supek, is one of the first programmes that started after the establishment of the IUC. The first course took place at the end of 1974 under the title *Philosophy of Science and Humanism: Foundations of Science and Theory of Knowledge* and one of the lecturers was the Nobel prize laureate Werner Heisenberg. From the very beginning participants in these courses were coming from Western European countries, USA and Canada, countries within the Eastern block and of course from former Yugoslavia. The first courses lasted almost a month, but due to organisational issues, they were held for two weeks, and later on, only one. When Kathy Wilkes started co-directing it in 1984, her colleague organisers were Lars Bergström from the University of Uppsala, Władysław Krajewski from the University of Warsaw, Srđan Lelas from the University of Zagreb,

² Data from the Inter-University Centre Dubrovnik archive.

Jürgen Mittelstrass from University of Konstanz, William Newton-Smith and Rom Harré from Oxford University. In 1984 William Newton-Smith and Kathy Wilkes edited papers deriving from the course in the journal *Ratio*, to be published the following year. The success of this publication led them to establish the journal *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science*: “to promote the discussion of issues in the philosophy of science by those of differing philosophical, cultural and political backgrounds” (Newton-Smith and Wilkes 1986: 2). The journal was planned to be biannual and in these two issues, it was to cover themes from the course. The first edition emerged in 1986 and contained historical studies covering the period from Galileo to Newton. Editors attempted to search for a wide range of countries to ensure the international exchange of ideas. Soon, the journal started including book reviews as well. From 1990 on, the journal had three annual issues, while in 1992, the editorial board was joined by dr. Riccardo Viale from Istituto di Metodologia della Scientia e della Tecnologia from Torino. After ten years of continuous work, the editorial position of the journal has been taken over by another co-director of the *Philosophy of Science* course, Prof. James Robert Brown, from University of Toronto.³

Besides extensive work on *Philosophy of Science*, Kathy Wilkes also co-directed other programmes within the IUC. Already in March 1983, along with David Charles, Timothy Williamson, Aleksandar Pavković, David Brown, and Neven Sesardić, she co-organised the course *Contemporary Issues in the Philosophy of Mind: Functionalism and Explanation* where she held a lecture on “Varieties of Functionalism.” The following year in fall the same group of scholars organised the programme *Truth and Knowledge*. Soon, Živan Lazović and Miloš Arsenijević from the University of Belgrade also joined this group and the programme was held until the beginning of the 1990s. Also, in the mid 1980s, together with William Newton-Smith and other colleagues from the region, under the auspices of and sponsored by the Soros Foundation from New York, she helped organise programmes *The Culture of Central and Eastern Europe* that soon became the programme *Central and Eastern Europe in Transformation*. These course series included topics on historical events and fiction, transition from dictatorship to freedom, economic sociology in comparative perspectives, political technology of reforms, the cultural history of central Europe and many others.⁴ The

³ The current editorial board of the *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science* is still encouraging participation in the annual *Philosophy of Science* conference at the IUC and publishing accepted papers deriving from this programme. From 2010 it consists of 4 yearly issues.

⁴ Steering committee of this programme through different years consisted of Pavel Cmorej from Bratislava, Ladislav Hojdánek and Jan Havranek from Prague, Imre Hronszky and Tibor Vamos from Budapest, Dejan Kjurjanov from Sofia, Carl E. Levitin, Yuri Afanasiev and Boris Raushenbakh from Moscow and Andrzej Ziabickiand, Klemens Szaniawski and Włodzimierz Siwinski from Warsaw, and Ante Stamać from Zagreb.

programme was in 1990 held, but by 1991, despite announcements, former Yugoslavia was transforming in a way that war activities prevented the regular implementation of IUC events.

But one of the features of the IUC programmes, as participants always testify and work schedules also confirm, is that additional inspiration for the academic discussion, for the exchange of knowledge and ideas is received from gatherings outside the classroom, in the buildings' courtyard, in nearby restaurants, beaches or during different social or extracurricular activities.⁵ Being a warm and approachable person, Kathy was equally fond of these social gatherings that helped her create a strong network of colleagues and friends.

2. Member of the IUC Executive Committee to secure grants

At the 8th Meeting of the IUC Council, in August 1985, Kathy Wilkes was elected to the IUC governing bodies as a member of the Executive Committee. Right away she widened her engagement beyond her philosophical courses. One of her main activities was ensuring that scholars from the Eastern bloc countries could come and participate in the IUC international programmes, a task that she easily took upon herself but that was far from easy.

When Kathy Wilkes started coming to the IUC Dubrovnik, she had a rich experience cooperating with dissident philosophers in Central and East Europe. In 1979, she accepted an invitation from Czech philosopher Julius Tomin and traveled to Prague to hold informal philosophical seminars organised in his home. These meetings were under the surveillance of the police and participants were often intimidated. Kathy Wilkes was not to be intimidated. She made three trips to Prague until she was denied a visa. However, she continued supporting philosophers behind the Iron curtain. Through the Jan Hus Educational Foundation, she helped to organise other colleagues from Oxford to travel to Prague and kept sending books. Later, she started going to other East European countries: Poland and Bulgaria. So, at the IUC, Kathy just continued her mission.

Kathy Wilkes and William Newton-Smith had a strong connection with George Soros and his foundation, which was opened in Hungary in 1984 but later also in other countries with an incentive to help spread information in Eastern European countries and Russia. This led to the establishment of the Open Society foundations network. Through them, Wilkes and Newton-Smith secured funds for the participation in IUC programmes. The fund was called "Grants for younger scholars"

⁵ For example, a football match "Yugoslavia against the rest of the World" was organised for the course *Contemporary Issues in the Philosophy of Mind* with the score 1:1, while for example Polish/Russian vodka party was organized for the *Philosophy of Science* course in April 1988.

(OSF support). It was intended for scholars under 40 years of age from the countries of Central and East Europe. The scholarship covered full board and accommodation in Dubrovnik during the course, excluding travel. Each year the IUC announced the list of eligible courses for the OSF support, which were in the humanities and social sciences. Courses in medicine or natural sciences were not financially supported.

The IUC archive is full of documents from the second half of the 80s of Kathy's engaged correspondence with programme coordinators of the Soros Foundation in Budapest, discussing different aspects of the scheme and eligibility criteria.⁶ Occasionally, she contacted George Soros as well advocating different solutions. The grants were sometimes difficult to administer since participants from different countries applied either to foundations in their local countries—as soon as they were established (SSSR, Poland, Hungary)—or directly to Kathy Wilkes (Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Romania, Yugoslavia). The “Younger Scholars” grant scheme was highly successful. From 37 grants administered in the year 1987/88 to 233 grants for the year 1989/90 with approximately 1500 applications. In her reports, Kathy Wilkes always paid attention to the distribution of grants according to countries urging the IUC to encourage universities from the under-represented areas to join, in order to make this possibility available to their scholars as well.

But besides the cooperation with OSF and administering this scholarship, Kathy Wilkes additionally initiated and secured the support to young Eastern European scholars from the New York Foundation. The IUC received 5000 USD in 1986 and few consecutive years from this source. Kathy just did everything in her power to find a way to bring people together. The longstanding Executive Secretary of the IUC Ms. Berta Dragičević testified that Kathy was “immensely brave. Since the IUC could not have an account for foreign currency, she would bring money in her purse. Then, she would divide it to people from East and Middle Europe, later from China. Kathy was a cosmopolitan who wholeheartedly worked on connecting philosophers from East and West” (Rudež 2017: 56–57).

In 1990 all East European countries were undergoing political and social changes and the Open Society Foundation/IUC scheme administered through Oxford was no longer in operation. All former communist countries started having their home foundations and in her report to the IUC Executive Committee in October 1990, Kathy testified about visiting Bulgarian, Czechoslovak and Romanian Foundations and shared their determination to set aside funds for their citizens taking part in the IUC programmes. Kathy Wilkes concluded in her report: “I am relieved that the ‘OSF/IUC’ scheme is no longer needed. It pro-

⁶ She argued that the age limit for grant applicants should be raised from 35 to 40 or 45, attempted to secure more funds and paid attention that the IUC course fees were covered as well.

duced splendid results, and was necessary at the time, but its popularity led to an inordinate amount of work” (Wilkes 1990). Yugoslav foundation was to be opened in June 1991, but by then, the country was to fall apart in military aggression and war.⁷ Slowly, IUC courses were to be canceled. But not all. *The Philosophy of Science* conference continued to meet, even during the siege of Dubrovnik.

3. *Attacks on Dubrovnik*

At the end of the summer of 1991 Dubrovnik and its surroundings (as other parts of Croatia even before) started being attacked by Yugoslav People's Army, by then deprived of Slovenian and Croatian leadership since these countries had already held referendums and declared their independence from former Yugoslavia. These events caught Kathy Wilkes on site as the Chair of the Executive Committee (EC), the position she was elected to in August 1988. She decided not to return to her home in Oxford, but to stay in Dubrovnik since suddenly there was new work to be done. The situation became graver and graver. Bombs from the air, land and sea were falling on the city and its surroundings, the city was under blockade, without running water or electricity, and hotels that accommodated tourists until recently accepted refugees from the neighboring villages. While communication channels at the IUC were in function, she was working with the IUC staff from the IUC office, sending out faxes and letters and making phone calls daily. Soon, as the telephone and fax lines became functioning less, on the request of the Dubrovnik mayor, Mr. Pero Poljanić, she and Berta Dragičević moved to the fort of St. John and later to the municipality office and used one of the three satellite connections in the city to continue sharing information from Dubrovnik (Dragičević 2017: 75–82). As soon as the direct bombing of the city started, Kathy contacted the BBC and reported on the situation, the task she would continue almost daily during the city's siege. She also worked as a personal assistant to the Mayor Poljanić, translating his numerous appeals that she later learned had reached both Margaret Thatcher and Prince Charles (Dedo 2021: 10–11). Kathy also wrote her letters to different magazines: *The Times*, *Independent*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, *Sunday Times*, *Sunday Telegraph*, *Financial Times*, and *New York Times*. With the same energy she had to establish connections along the Iron Curtain, she now used her contacts in the British and world politics to spread a word of what was really going on in Dubrovnik and in Croatia. She approached President Vaclav Havel, whom she knew from their dissident days in Prague, George Soros, Lord Carrington (a family relation), Sir Alec Douglas Hume and many others, asking them to use their influence to stop the war in Croatia (Dragičević 2017: 75–82). As a foreigner and a distinguished Oxford philosopher, her testimonies were considered trustworthy, they helped in sharing the truth.

⁷ OSF Croatia was established in 1992.

Besides writing to the world, Kathy also started writing to citizens of Dubrovnik; after all, she became one of them in the city under the blockade. From the 8th of November 1991 until the 6th of January 1992, a daily bulletin was printed in the city called *The Voice from Dubrovnik* (*Glas iz Dubrovnika*). It was a simple edition of news and texts printed in Croatian and English, distributed to Dubrovnik citizens and sent abroad to spread the information from the city. For 67 editions, Kathy Wilkes wrote 28 different texts commenting current situation, informing about letters sent from the city to the world by the mayor or herself or just observing and analysing the current situation and reflecting on human nature or the nature of the war. She was always oriented toward the future. Even very early on, in mid-November 1991, she reminded her fellow citizens that new kind of courage would be needed to rebuild relationships because “whatever the atrocities perpetrated upon Croatia in general and Dubrovnik in particular, it is impossible to pick up the country and move it elsewhere...it will take every last drop of the internationalism for which Dubrovnik has for so long been famous, to repair relationships there. But, somehow, it will have to be done” (Wilkes 1991a). And she never stopped being analytical. In another letter, she referred to rumours advising, “let us be more sceptical, pausing and checking before jumping to conclusions and then passing them on. And that goes for the newsmen too” (Wilkes 1991b).

Her activities during the war did not stop behind the typing machine and telephone sets. With Dr. Slobodan Lang on the 6th of November 1991, she co-organised the IUC conference on the *Quality of Life and Human Rights of Refugees in Dubrovnik*. She also left the city under siege to arrive in Mokošica, the occupied suburb area of Dubrovnik and spent a day with the Red Cross wanting to find out what kind of humanitarian aid to send.⁸ On the 6th of December, the IUC building was hit by incendiary shells and it burnt down. Ten days later, Kathy Wilkes and Berta Dragičević sent letters to IUC friends and colleagues describing the destruction and asking for help with words: “For we had a dream in 1971: the project of uniting the world in Dubrovnik...This dream is now in ashes, not metaphorically but literally. We now have to start dreaming again; ... we trust that we will have as many of you as possible sharing this new dream” (Øyen and Dragičević 2002: 15).

Kathy Wilkes continued working on the dream. She would leave the city only briefly to organise help.⁹ At the beginning of January 1992, she left Dubrovnik, where the situation was improving, to return to her teaching position in Oxford. But again, she acted in different directions. She organised visits of Dubrovnik mayor to the University and the city of Oxford. As a Chair of the IUC EC, she took part in meetings in Vienna, Hamburg, Santa Barbara, Oxford and Zagreb to ensure the

⁸ Based on the memory of Vesna Gamulin in Obradović Mojaš (forthcoming).

⁹ One such trip was to the USA that lasted nine days. It took her three days to go there and three to come back.

continuation of the Inter-University Centre as an institution and to support the rebuilding process.¹⁰ She continued gathering humanitarian aid and drove it in the truck¹¹ to Croatia. She also worked to secure mine removal equipment, being aware that the best way to help is to re-establish everyday life.

To support the academic activity at the IUC, she invited her colleagues to participate in the annual *Philosophy of Science* course, which was to take place in the Music school. It was one of the most memorable events for the IUC participants. Many came to work in the city that was occasionally bombed and testified that they were inspired by their philosophical discussions with music practice from the neighbouring rooms. Kathy Wilkes continued working for the IUC in the years after the war. She was the Chair of the EC until 1996 but continued coming to *Philosophy of Science* until 2003.

4. *Recognitions*

For all she has done for Dubrovnik, Kathleen Vaughan Wilkes was awarded honorary citizenship of Dubrovnik on the day of St. Blaise, the patron of the city, in February 1993 and the portrait of her is permanently placed in the City's Council Hall. Honouring not only her scientific work at the IUC and beyond but also the tremendous help in Croatia's struggle for independence and support for the development of the Croatian academic community, Dr. Wilkes was awarded Doctor Honoris Causa in the field of philosophy by the University of Zagreb on the 22nd of May, 2001.

Unfortunately, as her personal well-being was never her priority, her health was already deteriorating. James Robert Brown wrote that all that she has done "took a great emotional toll on her, but she would not have wanted it any other way" (Brown 2010: 37). She passed away in Oxford on the 21st of August 2003. Following her wishes, her ashes were scattered in the sea, in Dubrovnik Pile area, below the Fort Lovrjenac, which above the entrance has a Latin reminder from the time of the Dubrovnik Republic that says: "Liberty is not to be sold for any gold." With this saying, Kathy was in complete accord. Following her death and upon the initiative of Berta Dragičević in 2011 a small square in Pile area, in front of the church of St. George, with the view to the very same fort was named after her. The ceremony of presenting the memorial plaque organized by the city was held on the 1st of February, 2012.

¹⁰ The first phase of the reconstruction of the IUC building, organised by the University of Zagreb and financed by the Croatian government was over in summer 1993.

¹¹ Prof. James Brown thinks that this might have been an ambulance which she bought in the UK.

5. *Legacy*

The work of Kathy Wilkes was never forgotten among the IUC participants, members of the governing bodies and friends. On many occasions anecdotes are told of her brave undertakings and her vibrant spirit. Nenad Mišćević, Kathy's colleague from the *Philosophy of Science* wrote down "So, what do you say about the character of a physicalist guardian angel like Kathy, who would be offended if told she had a good soul or a great mind? Well, that she had a great heart. That's physicalistic enough" (Mišćević 2010: 86).

During her life, together with William Newton-Smith, she established an Inter-University Foundation to be used to fund participants from former communist countries in the *Philosophy of Science* courses. Since the majority of these countries have eventually joined the EU and the fund was no longer used for that purpose, William Newton-Smith in 2011 secured that the remaining amount would be used in the memory of Kathleen Vaughan Wilkes to refurbish one of the classrooms in the IUC building, still unfinished after the war destruction. The room dedicated to Kathy Wilkes at the IUC now accommodates new generations of students and professors for their vivid discussions.

On April 16–17 2018 Dr. Anita Avramides and Dr. Paul Flather organised the Kathy Wilkes Memorial Conference at St Hilda's College to celebrate Kathy's memory and reflect on her important contributions to philosophy and politics. At this event, inspired by the speaker's enthusiastic reminiscences of Kathy's work, the idea came to establish a new conference series that would take place in her honour. It was then that St. Hilda College, Herbert Simon Society from Turin and Inter-University Centre Dubrovnik initiated a project of hosting conferences on Mind, Philosophy, and Society in the memory of Kathy Wilkes alternately in these three locations. The first conference on the topic of *Re(assessing) Goal-Directed Activity* took place in April 29–30, 2022 at the IUC in Dubrovnik and this volume is derived from that conference.

Kathy Wilkes, as a philosopher, tutor, and intellectual, but utmost as an extraordinary human being, is still inspiring people who were privileged to work with her, know her, or to have learned about her rich life.

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