In Memoriam
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In memoriam: Professor Diana Stolac (26 January 1956 – 23 November 2025)

Professor Diana Stolac was a linguist well known not only in Croatia and across Europe but also in Australia and New Zealand. Perhaps her date of birth was an omen of her connectedness to the Antipodes – 26 January is *Australia Day*, a national holiday in that country. I first met Diana in Australia nearly 20 years ago, and this obituary of her has a distinctly 'Down Under' perspective, including me referring to her by her first name, Diana, in line with Australian English pragmatics.

Diana was born in post-WWII Zagreb as the younger daughter in a family where at least two dialects were spoken: her mother, from Hrvatsko zagorje, spoke Kajkavian, and her father, from Dalmatia, spoke Štokavian Ikavica. Although her mother died when she was still a teenager, Diana's intimate knowledge of and love for her mother's dialect were to play a major role in her subsequent career as a linguist.

After completing secondary school, she enrolled in an Arts degree at the University of Zagreb, studying South Slavic languages and literatures, and general linguistics. One of her subjects was an introduction to linguistics. This subject was new and innovative, and very different from anything she had studied before. Despite her enthusiasm, her marks were not what she expected, and she sought advice from her professors. Fortunately for her, they spent time with her, pointing out her shortcomings and suggesting ways in which she could improve. This proved to be a 'double' lesson for her: her marks improved greatly, and she learnt that in life it's important to give others a second chance. Or, in her words, *Dajem ljudima drugu pa i treću šansu* 'I give people a second or even a third chance'.

Diana went on to complete a Master of Arts in linguistics, followed by a PhD focusing on the history of the Croatian language at the University of Zagreb before being appointed language instructor at the famous Charles University in Prague in 1980. There she deepened her knowledge of Czech and West Slavic languages and gained her first experience in teaching Croatian to foreigners. After returning to Zagreb, she was appointed research assistant at the University of Rijeka. Born and raised in Zagreb, Diana was very much a *Zagrepčanka*, and was initially unsure about moving to Rijeka. The University of Rijeka was a comparatively new university at the time, which can be advantageous for a young, up-coming academic from elsewhere. Rijeka quickly became her new home, and Diana excelled in her academic career. She advanced from research assistant to junior lecturer and then to associate professor and was appointed to a full professorship in 2011.

She was based in the Department of Croatian Studies at the University of Rijeka, where she taught subjects such as historical linguistics, Croatian syntax, sociolinguistics and comparative Slavic philology. In addition to her home faculty, however, she also taught in the Education Faculties in Rijeka and Gospić, as well as at other universities, including the University of Pula, the University of Split and the University of Zagreb. In terms of her research output and publications, Diana was highly productive, publishing some 200 works ranging from (co-)authored and (co-)edited books to research articles in scientific journals, and from book chapters to conference proceedings. The range of fields in which she published was equally broad, including terminology, historical linguistics, grammar, syntax, codification, standardisation, Kajkavian, the language of advertising, linguistic landscapes and Croatian spoken abroad. For example, despite hailing from an inland city, her first book was a dictionary of Croatian maritime and nautical terms. This demonstrated her enthusiasm for and dedication to topic areas new to her. This obituary cannot do justice to her tremendous publication record. The interested reader is referred to her Croatian Research Information System homepage: https://www.croris.hr/osobe/profil/16052

Her formidable track record as a researcher was matched by her openness as a speaker and public intellectual. She was firmly committed to popularising language-related issues in Croatian public life and appeared countless times in local and national radio and television programs. Diana was a regular contributor in Croatia's print media and organised many

'outward-focused' activities, including public exhibitions, public readings, roundtable discussions and school visits.

Her support for her students, whether undergraduate or post-graduate, and for her colleagues of all ages, was immeasurable. She played an active role in the Croatian Applied Linguistics Society and hosted numerous annual conferences attended by hundreds of linguists, both young and old, and she co-edited many volumes of conference proceedings providing many younger linguists with their first opportunity to publish an academic article. She showed the same commitment to the journal of her home faculty *Fluminensia* as its main editor for a number of years and as a long-time member of the editorial board.

At her home university, she was a long-time member of its senate, representing the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Her work and contribution to the internal organisation of the university were highly valued – from those junior to her to the most senior of staff including the rector. Her commitment to a spirit of openness, mutual support and collegiality at university was also reflected in her long-standing involvement as an office-bearer for the NSZVO, the Independent Union of Higher Education and Sciences, where she campaigned tirelessly for improved working conditions and fair remuneration for her fellow colleagues.

She represented and raised the profile of the University of Rijeka through her involvement in national committees, such as the National Council for the Croatian Language and the National Council for Higher Education, Science and Technology. Her expertise as a linguist and philologist led to her membership in many other authoritative bodies at local, regional and national levels.

Internationally, she was just as active as at home and gained funding for research stays at universities across Europe. She was a regular presenter at international conferences, often being invited to deliver keynote speeches. Regardless of her own status, she endeavoured to support younger colleagues in their academic pursuits, as well as establishing and strengthening connections between Croatia-based researchers and those abroad. Her efforts and talents did not go unnoticed. Over the years, she received many awards in Croatia, including the *Medal of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences for her work in research and education, philology in general and for advancing humanist thinking in general* (2021), and the *City of Zagreb Award* for her co-authorship of the 6-volume

collection *Povijest hrvatskoga jezika* 'History of the Croatian Language'. She also received awards abroad, such as the *Rector of the University of Banska Bystrica* (Slovakia) *Award for Scientific Achievement.*

Diana's academic focus was Croatian linguistics. Throughout her career, she expanded the scope of her work to include Croatian as a heritage language and the varieties of Croatian spoken by emigrants and their children. It was her love of travelling that led Diana to Australia, where her husband had relatives and where some of her former students had resettled. As a linguist, she was immediately interested in how Croatian emigrants spoke Croatian, and in the English words and influences that became apparent in their speech. Rather than adopting a normative or judgemental opinion towards the way that Croatian can change in a diaspora setting, she approached the topic scientifically, gathering data through recordings and questionnaires to study the patterns, regularities and features that distinguish overseas *heritage Croatian* from *homeland Croatian*. Diana visited Australia five times and New Zealand twice, presenting at four of the international conferences hosted by the Croatian Studies Foundation at Macquarie University.

During one of her visits to Australia, Diana learnt of a research area completely new to her, *linguistic landscapes,* which refers to the study of written signage and publicly visible texts in a particular locality, and the choice of language used. Despite being in her late 50s, an age when most academics do not venture into new areas, Diana was greatly interested in this research area, and took it upon herself to start collecting data on her home city, Rijeka. The result of this research was the publication of a book, *Riječki jezični krajolik* in Croatian, with corresponding versions in English, *A Linguistic Landscape of Rijeka*, and in Italian, *Il paesaggio linguistico Fiumano.*

There is an old saying in English, '*Behind every great man there is a great woman*.' In Diana's case, however, I would rephrase this to, '*Behind every great woman there is a great man*.' In her case, that man was Damir. Diana met Damir in her late 20s after she had moved to Rijeka, and, as she would later on happily recount to others, *Odmah je kliknulo* 'We clicked straight away'.

Damir was a native of Rijeka and perhaps through him, Diana began to feel more at home there. Damir had studied at university, but he was not an academic and had held a number of jobs, his last being in IT. One of the special things about Damir – of which there were many – was the pride

and joy he openly displayed whenever Diana published a research article, edited a book, received a promotion or was awarded a prize. He would share these moments of pride with his colleagues and friends by taking Diana to his workplace, or inviting them around to their house or to the event that Diana had organised. While it is perhaps commonplace for wives to do this for their more famous husbands, it's perhaps not so common for husbands to do this for their more prominent wives, either in Croatia or in most other countries. Damir's sudden death in 2019 was a terrible blow. A source of comfort for Diana were their two children, Dunja and Darko, and the countless number of people who knew both Damir and Diana. Those people are now saddened again.

Like many others, I will miss Diana's open and enthusiastic manner, her fierce work ethic, her genuine interest in and care for her students and colleagues, and her principles and advocacy for a fair, just and egalitarian society. Her passing is a great loss for her children, her many friends and colleagues, for the University of Rijeka and for Croatian academia.

Draga Diana, neka ti je laka hrvatska zemlja.