

Dear WAPOR friends and colleagues:

I write today with very sad news: Wolfgang Donsbach, former WAPOR president (1996-97), passed away yesterday, 26 July 2015. He was 65.

A colleague of unflagging energy, Wolfgang worked tirelessly on behalf of WAPOR. His legacy includes the elevated reputation of public opinion research around the globe. In a report titled "Who's Afraid of Election Polls?", Wolfgang articulated the normative and empirical arguments for the freedom of preelection polls. He also played a key role in setting up our ongoing worldwide study on the freedom to publish opinion polls. And he spearheaded WAPOR's thematic seminars dealing with Quality Criteria in Survey Research.

Another clear legacy of Wolfgang's efforts can be found in the pages of WAPOR's flagship journal, the International Journal of Public Opinion Research, with which he was involved for over a quarter-century -- first as manager of the editorial office, then managing editor, then editor, and finally as chair of its International Advisory Board. Today IJPOR is an ISI-ranked journal deemed the "one classic mass communication journal" that, true to its name, "could be classified as international."

Wolfgang's efforts to facilitate high-quality research in public opinion and related fields are reflected in other undertakings. In 2008, he co-edited with Michael Traugott "The SAGE Handbook of Public Opinion Research," which brought together state-of-the-art reviews of public opinion theory and methodology. In over 50 chapters, contributors from a dozen countries spoke to the history and philosophy of public opinion and public opinion research; the development of public opinion research; theories of public opinion formation and change; methodological concerns such as design and measurement; and the application, such as marketing research, voter research in campaigns, and the use of surveys as legal evidence. The transnational lens with which this volume was crafted speaks to the potential opportunities and challenges facing public opinion research in different parts of the world. It is no surprise then that a British Politics review of the handbook called it "admirable and expansive" and "a substantial resource."

Also in 2008, working with Wiley-Blackwell and the International Communication Association, Wolfgang launched the "International Encyclopedia of Communication," a 12-volume collection of over 1300 entries defining key concepts, theories, and concerns in the field. In his introduction to the encyclopedia, Wolfgang cited as an overarching goal the creation of a product that represented the plurality of the communication discipline. Crafting this product involved efforts by over 4,000 contributors in nearly 70 countries, representing different epistemologies and methodological approaches in "this fascinating and socially crucial field of communication."

Wolfgang's deep commitment to our field - and its social and political significance - is best-reflected in his presidential address for the International Communication Association. In that 2005 address, he noted how "empirical research without normative goals can easily become arbitrary, random, and irrelevant... A common denominator of all endeavors in communication research could be to strive for research that has the potential to serve such general human and democratic values and norms, that is, 'research in the public interest.'"

Having published 18 books and over 200 articles and book chapters, Wolfgang Donsbach was widely read and highly cited for his research on public opinion, media effects, political communication, and journalism. His passing will be felt in multiple communities: at the Dresden University of Technology, where he was a professor of communication; in WAPOR and the numerous other professional associations with which he was actively engaged; and certainly, in the fields of public opinion and communication.

WAPOR extends its deepest condolences to his wife Eva and his son Thomas.

With best wishes, Patricia