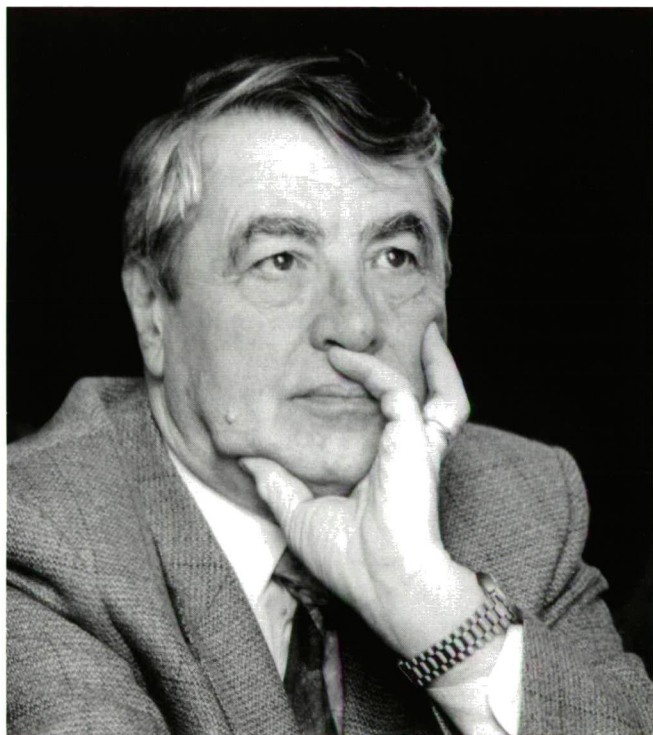


## IN HONOUR OF PROFESSOR TIBOR SZEDERKÉNYI ON THE OCCASION OF HIS 70<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

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### PROF. TIBOR SZEDERKÉNYI, A SHORT BIOGRAPHY



Tibor Szederkényi was born on 14 September, 1934 in Nagybaracska in the Bácska region of Hungary in a simple rural family of Serb origins. His grandfather was killed in WWI, his father grew up as an orphan in Szederkény, and hence he changed his name to Szederkényi later. Tibor Szederkényi went to the elementary school in Mohács, but completed his high school studies in Baja in 1953 on account of his Slav family having been stigmatized as “class-alien” by the communist regime. The once wealthy Szederkényi family was stripped of their properties, his father’s general store was seized, while he escaped expulsion only by fleeing to another county. His recollections tell us how he has never reconciled himself to having had to flee Mohács because of their origins: the multicultural milieu brought along by the

Danubian boatmen and his father’s interest in sciences had created a lively atmosphere there. He admits that it was this time when he decided irrevocably to leave their socially subjugated status behind and to prove his worth as an educated man.

His choice of career was influenced by his father’s interest in sciences as well as by his long-time admiration for chemistry. Stinky distillates and explosives produced in his home-built laboratory play important roles in some of the more scandalous childhood tricks recalled by him. Natural geography and, more specifically, its geological part became his favourite subject in high school. Admittance to a university was out of the question for “class-alien” students in that political situation, thus a good appearance in the “Mátyás Rákosi National Academic Competition” was the only option left for him, as advancing to the national finals meant automatic admittance to universities. And this is how Tibor Szederkényi started his university studies majoring in geology at the Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in 1953.

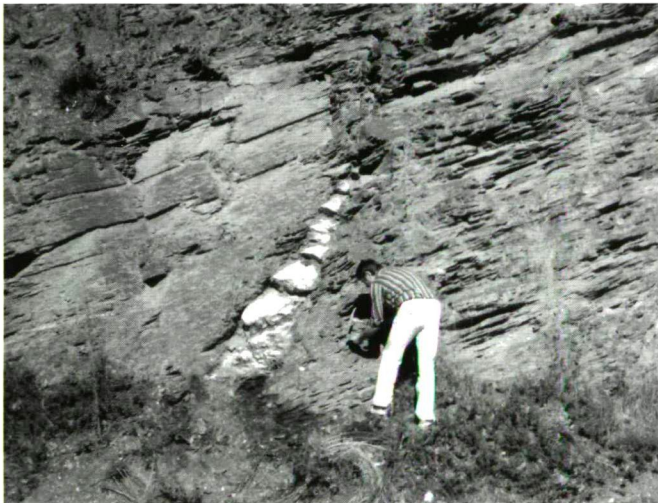
Forced developments in the heavy industry after the war initiated advancements in the education of geology too. Headed by Elemér Vadász five new geological departments were founded at ELTE, with now legendary teachers such as Elemér Szádeczky-Kardoss, Sándor Vitális, Károly Telegdi-Róth, László Egyed, Kálmán Sztrókay. With no hope for a scholarship or board as a “class-alien” Tibor Szederkényi had to provide for himself in the beginning by working after lectures. However, his excellent results draw the attention of his teachers, and he soon obtained a scholarship through the instrumentality of professor Vadász. His career as a researcher has not been interrupted ever since. He got his diploma for his 1958 study „Geological Research around Ófalu”, then – already working in the Hungarian uranium prospecting – he received his doctorate in 1963 for his study „Geological Research in the Southern Foreground of Mecsek” with professors Vadász and Egyed as his examiners.

### AS A GEOLOGIST

With his fresh diploma in his hands, Tibor Szederkényi got the job of a research geologist at the Mecsek Ore Mines Company. He was one of seven young Hungarian researchers responsible for the geological mapping, instrumental and

deep drilling research of the uranium deposit, which remained under Soviet administration and superintendence until 1956. He had several reasons to return to the Mecsek: besides his childhood chaffing, his university mentor Elemér Vadász, – a “Mecsek-fan” himself – charged him with an Eastern Mecsek subject, and Tibor Szederkényi carried out the detailed mapping of the Ófalu Goldgrund-valley, and completed the structural description of the very complex and tectonically disturbed shale-zone.

Raw material research and geological mapping went side by side in Hungary in those times – unfortunately, more often than not, their logical order did not prevail – and Mecsek was all a young geologist could dream of. With the increasing energy needs of the heavy industry the research into the sole coking coal occurrence and its environs became all the more important, while the discovery of the uranium deposit gave new momentum to the research. Although Hungarian fissile-material research had been going on since 1948 with professors Szalay and Földvári as chief researchers in the Eastern Mecsek, the discovery of uranium ore in Kővágószőlős in the Western Mecsek in the early 50's was led by Soviet scientists, who took Soviet analogies in the research and had a systematic approach in searching for higher uranium concentrations in Permian formations. With the discovery of the deposit the deepening of the bore-holes and the preparations for mining in Kővágószőlős shifted to a higher gear from 1952.



After four years of mapping and mine-preparation works the doctorate degree ensured Tibor Szederkényi's position as a research-team leader geologist, and besides organizing winning activities of the Kővágószőlős uranium deposit he became responsible for leading the basic uranium research in, and the geological mapping of, the South-East Transdanubian region. Besides carrying out supply calculations and descriptions of structural relations with the help of the profiles created by what was known from mapping, and from the networked bore-holes drilled in the immediate and greater area of the uranium deposit, Tibor Szederkényi took great part in the 10.000 scale geological mapping of the Western Mecsek. He was awarded the

Outstanding Worker of Uranium Research title in 1965 on account of him designing the 30-year research plan of the deposit. Under the existing conditions of the geological research in Hungary it might seem ironic to recall that this document contains research plans even for 1995. He is also behind a number of structural research and water research drilling as secondary results of uranium research and mining works, including the exploration of the Szigetvár thermal spring, one of Hungary's highest yielding thermal waters.

As a result of the “new economic mechanism” regional geological offices were founded by the end of 1968 with the coordination of the Hungarian Geological Survey. The original aim with founding the regional branches was to provide specific geological advice to local councils and agricultural cooperatives, but their responsibilities widened when they were delegated the functions of an authority in the 70's. Tibor Szederkényi was in charge of leading the South-Transdanubian Regional Office, the first one starting its operation. Besides his everyday work with agro-geology, construction geology, thermal waters research, potable water research and environmental geology his interest gradually shifted towards metamorphic petrology.

He studied the metamorphic rocks and geothermal conditions around the “alpine fault zone” of New-Zealand in 1972-73 as a contract researcher of the New Zealand Geological Survey, and he took part in deep-sea-trough and coral-reef research too on and around the islands of Kermadec, Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, and Cook, as well as in nickel and gold prospecting in New-Caledonia and in the Hamersley Mountains in Western Australia.

Still doing his geological office job he was given the candidate's degree in 1976. The title of his thesis was: „The Rare Element Content of the South Transdanubia Palaeozoic Formations”. He took part, and held presentations in the 1975-76 UNESCO courses organized by the Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft and the Geological Institute of Hungary in the subjects „Basic Principles and Methods of Engineering Geology” and „Geology and Environmental Potential”.

He admits that his curious and wandering nature could not be satisfied with the office work he had at the regional authority, thus he accepted professor Grasselly's invitation to Szeged in 1977, and became a lecturer at the József Attila University as well as a member of the Szeged Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

#### AS A PROFESSOR

As a lecturer at the Department of Mineralogy, Geochemistry and Petrology, University of Szeged he devoted his time to the general structural description of the crystalline basement and the genetics and metamorphic history of the constituting rocks of the Great Hungarian Plain and South-Transdanubia from 1977, as well as joining the hydrocarbon research in the Great Plain's basement. He was given the Doctor of Earth Sciences title in 1984, the title and subject of his paper was “The Crystalline Basement of the Great Plain and its Geological Connections”. He took part in the 50.000 mapping of North-Labrador (George River Project, Ungava-Project) in 1986 as a guest leading survey geologist and expert of the Québec State Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources.

He took over as head of the Department of Mineralogy, Geochemistry and Petrology, at the University of Szeged in 1986, and held that position until 2000. He taught *Mineralogy, Petrology, Ore geology, Ore mineralogy, Geochemistry, Environmental geology* and he has added new and interesting subjects to the profile of the department by introducing *Volcanology, Environmental radiology, and Impact of space objects*. He was the Vice-Dean of Sciences at the Faculty between 1984 and 1987, and he developed, initiated and led the PhD programmes *Geology* and *Environmental geology* until 2000. As chief editor he has renewed and modernized the Szeged based *Acta Mineralogica-Petrographica* scientific journal, but he has worked also as member of the editorial boards of the periodicals *Acta Geologica Hungarica*, and *Bulletin of the Hungarian Geological Society*. He has been a university professor since 2000 at the University of Pécs, while he is a visiting professor in all Hungarian higher education institutions offering programmes in geology.

His scientific works include more than 150 studies, 3 books, 9 passages in books, a number of geological maps, university textbooks, and research reports. He was rewarded with the *Outstanding Researcher of the Hungarian Geology* honour twice (1973, 1984). Besides being a member of the Hungarian Geological Society he holds memberships in those societies of Canada and New-Zealand, he was president of the Geological Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences between 1992 and 1999. He was president of the Palaeozoic Subcommittee of the Hungarian Stratigraphic Committee from 1980, and until 1996 – he was the Hungarian chief researcher and Eastern European project coordinator of the IGCP 5. and 276. projects, as well as being the president Csongrád County Society for Popular Science since 1990.

An outstanding theoretical and practical mind, Tibor Szederkényi is one of those few experts in Hungarian higher education who is able to pass on theoretical knowledge to, and share personal examples taken from the industry and practical experiences with, his students. With no didactical courses or pedagogy in his background it is his insight into human nature, his enjoyable rhetorical skills and sense of humour that, together with his empathic attitude and humble personality, make him a great teacher. It is the exceptional educator who has the talent to be able to share the most complex and abstract ideas with the students in a simple, understandable, and logical way. A great lecturer, teacher, expert of his field and colleague, Tibor Szederkényi is a true gentleman and idol, who may indeed measure his success in that of his students and followers.

Happy birthday to Tibor Szederkényi and God bless him on his 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

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