

In memoriam Professor Ellu Saar (08.10.1955 - 02.06.2024)

It is with deep sadness that the Institute of International Social Studies (IISS), Tallinn University announces the passing of Professor Ellu Saar, an esteemed academic, sociologist, tutor and founding member of the IISS.

Professor Ellu Saar served as a Professor of Sociology at the School of Governance, Law and Society (SOGOLAS) at Tallinn University since 2001 and Senior Researcher at the IISS. From 2015 to 2021, she was the head of the sociology programmes at TLU SOGOLAS, and from 2016 to 2023, she led the Centre of Excellence in Life Course Studies at TLU. She was also a member of the steering committee of the European Consortium for Sociological Research (ECSR) and served on the editorial boards of two leading European sociology journals, the *European Sociological Review* and *European Societies*. In 2014, Professor Saar was awarded the Estonian Research Prize in Social Sciences, and in 2022, she was elected a member of the Estonian Academy of Sciences.

Professor Ellu Saar was an eminent sociologist whose research has profoundly impacted both Estonian and international sociology. The focus of Professor Saar's research was on the life course, primarily in the areas of the sociology of education, social stratification and lifelong learning. Her work has contributed to both theoretical debates and practical policy recommendations.

Professor Ellu Saar participated in numerous research projects and international collaborations. An internship at the Max Planck Institute for Educational Research in Berlin in the early 1990s laid the foundations for establishing international contacts and involving Estonian sociologists in comparative research projects. This enabled the IISS to establish itself as a reliable cooperation partner and join international networks. Professor Ellu Saar also assembled and managed the first European Commission Framework Programme project in the social sciences led by an Eastern European partner. Her work inspired many research ideas and projects and led to wider international recognition of Estonian sociology.

In addition to her outstanding research, Professor Ellu Saar was a long-standing lecturer at Tallinn University and devoted her life to mentoring and inspiring students and young researchers. Under her guidance, new generations of sociologists have emerged. Her sensitivity to societal problems, her tireless desire to understand people's lives and the institutions that influence them, and her ability to see the big picture made her a valued and beloved teacher.

Ellu Saar left us in the middle of a busy working life. At the Institute of International Social Studies, her international research projects and the preparation of a new longitudinal study of youth will continue. Her dream was to collect data on a new generation of young people, link it to the PISA survey and registry data, and analyse the impact of attitudes, plans and self-esteem, among other things, on young people's future life trajectories. There are also plans to combine longitudinal data on young people with genetic research to understand whether and to what extent the environment – such as health, education, and career – allows genetic potential to manifest.

Ellu was characterised by generosity, wisdom and commitment. Even in the most difficult moments, she never lost her open mind or hope. She cared deeply about the people around her – colleagues, students and neighbours – and was always proud and happy about their achievements and successes. She was a mentor and an academic mother to many, and her helpfulness, presence, support and inspiration left a deep imprint on everyone she worked with. Her openness to new ideas inspired and supported her colleagues and students. She knew how to work collaboratively, allowing everyone to showcase their strengths so that different talents and personalities could complement each other. She was bright and creative in everything she did, whether it was her work, crafts, gardening, or cooking.

We extend our deepest condolences to Ellu's daughter and loved ones. Professor Ellu Saar's memory will live on in her research, her students, and all others who experienced her wisdom and kindness. We will always remember Ellu as an inspiring scientist, a dedicated teacher and a dear colleague.