Mária Szanyi, ethnographer, educator

She was born on 22nd September 1945, in Jánok (Janík), in East Slovakia. She graduated from the high school of Szepsi (Moldava nad Bodvou) in 1962, and obtained her college degree as a teacher of mathematics and physics from the Faculty of Pedagogy at the University of Nyitra (Nitra), the predecessor of Constantine the Philosopher University, in 1965. She started teaching in Nagytárkány (Veľké Trakany) (1965-1969), but later decided to complete a degree in ethnography at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest (1969-1973). After that, she worked as an ethnographer first at the Mining Museum of Rozsnyó (Rožňava) (1973-1975) and later at the Museum of Homeland Studies in Galánta (Galanta) (1975-1989). As a museologist, she has arranged numerous significant exhibitions, winning her the award of the Ethnographic Society of Slovakia in 1985.

 During her years as a museologist, she led an ethnography study group in both Rozsnyó and Galánta in coordination with the Pioneer youth centres. Her students from both the Slovak and the Hungarian high schools in Galánta saw success at the Students’ Professional Activities (SOČ - Středoškolská odborná činnosť) contest, where they presented their work on the lifestyle and material culture of the Hungarian minority, and the migration from North Slovakia to the Mátyusföld region.

In 1989, she returned to teaching mathematics and physics at a primary level. For 10 years, until 1999, she taught in Nagymácséd (Veľká Mača), then for two years in Hidaskürt (Mostová), and finally in the Zoltán Kodály Primary School in Galánta, from where she retired in 2005. Her students competed successfully in various mathematical and physical competitions, including the National Olympiads.

In the first half of the 1990s, she taught a study group at the Zoltán Kodály High School in Galánta. Her students successfully passed the competition of the Hungarian Ethnographical Society, and their work appeared in print in the booklet *Utánpótlás* (“Resupply”) of the Ethnographical Society of Hungarians in Slovakia.

Ever since its foundation in 1990, Mária Szanyi is an active member of the Hungarian Teachers’ Association in Slovakia. For many years, she was a member of its National Board and the deputy chairman of its Regional Board and the Regional Pedagogical Centre of Galánta, respectively.

She has been campaigning for the further education of teachers in teaching local history from the beginning. To this end, she taught accredited courses, organized workshops and training events. An important innovation in her working method is that the teachers do joint research with their pupils. Teacher and pupil learn the methods of ethnographical data collection and processing the collected data together.

Throughout her career both as a museologist and as an educator she emphasized the importance of nurturing talents. She was the deputy chairman of the National Talent Support Council under the Hungarian Teachers’ Association in Slovakia, and later that of its successor, the Mentor Talent Support Council.

Following her retirement from school teaching, she started the “Kincskeresők” (Treasure seekers) – students in search of local heritage movement in 2006. She works as its coordinator and is the chairman of its scientific committee. The “treasure seekers” give 10-minute digital presentations on their research in local history at the “Kincskeresők” national conference, where they are evaluated by a scientific committee. During the first 14 seasons of the conference, over 600 student projects were presented, covering almost all regions of Slovakia.

As a scientist, Mária Szanyi has published papers in both ethnography and pedagogy. She also served on the editorial board of the pedagogical journal Pedagógusfórum (Pedagogical forum) for many years, for 2 years as the editor-in-chief. Most of her scientific articles in ethnography are survey and popularization papers.

Since a young age, Mária Szanyi actively participated in the events organized by the Csemadok – The Association of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia. In her hometown, she organized literary shows and was a member of the local folk dance and drama groups. Starting during her time in Rozsnyó, she was the chairman of the Ethnographical Committee of the Csemadok (1974-1989). She was for many years in charge of arranging the ethnographical exhibitions relating to the National Folk Art Festival in Zselíz (Želiezocve). Following the Velvet Revolution, she led the Ethnographical Workgroup of the Ethnographical Society of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia.

In the early 1990s, Mária Szanyi led an ethnography seminar as a special course at the Faculty of Pedagogy in Nyitra. As an external consultant, she tutored students who wrote their theses on local history, local dialects and ethnography.

For her achievements as an ethnographer and teacher, she has received several awards, most importantly for the Kincskeresők (Treasure seekers) movement, as an acknowledgement of the important research work carried out by the students who ventured to investigate their local heritage.