



Egbert Dierker

1941-2023

On the last day of the year 2023 Egbert Dierker, a profound scholar and cherished teacher of economics, passed away, two days before his eighty-third birthday. He was an Emeritus Professor of Economics at the University of Vienna, a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Vienna, a full member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, a Fellow of the Econometric Society, a Fellow of the Society for the Advancement of Economic Theory, and an honorary member of the Vienna Graduate School of Economics.

Dierker was born in Duisburg, Germany, and studied at the University of Heidelberg, first mathematics and then economics. At the beginning of the 1970s a visiting position at the University of Berkeley put him in touch with the group of researchers around Gerard Debreu that was key to the big push forward during the second half of the 20th century: the rise of general equilibrium theory. Dierker's first three papers, all published in *Econometrica*, marked significant steps forward in the development of this theory which is still at the core of economic analysis. For instance, his result that generically the number of equilibria of an exchange economy is odd establishes a remarkable connection between existence and other generic properties of equilibrium. When he moved on to the University of Bonn in the early 1970s general equilibrium theory

stayed with him. There he worked on aggregation in competitive economies where consumer preferences are not necessarily convex.

In 1984 Dierker accepted a professorship at the University of Vienna. He brought to Vienna a new, more modern style that was much more focused on the state of the art and the logic of economic arguments. Generations of students have benefited from his expertise, including myself. His research interests turned to the weak spots in general equilibrium theory: non-convexities in production, incomplete markets, and imperfect competition. In a long and productive collaboration with Birgit Grodal from Copenhagen and his wife Hildegard he started to explore the limits of the theory of general competitive equilibrium by considering firms that possess market power or operate within an incomplete system of markets. The insights produced by this line of research were far ahead of their time and only now, over twenty years later, have begun to impact upon the mainstream of economics.

During the 1990s Dierker started to collaborate with the Institute for Advanced Studies in Vienna, in particular with me. We designed and then organized for over twenty years the “Joint Research Seminar in Economic Theory” that took place every other week with two speakers in a row. This seminar became the “door to the world” for Austrian economists and brought to Vienna some of the most prominent and influential researchers in economics from around the world. More importantly, it provided an opportunity for young economists to experience first-hand how the international profession operates. It thereby shaped the style of a new generation of scholars, and it also won Vienna considerable international recognition.

In 2004 Dierker decided to retire from the University of Vienna, and became a senior fellow at Vienna’s Institute for Advanced Studies. His research agenda was still focused on the theory of the firm in general equilibrium models with incomplete markets or imperfect competition. He continued to publish, but I do recall that occasionally I had to persuade him to submit a paper if it was, in his view, “just an example.” Like many ambitious researchers he always strove for a general theory and tended to underestimate the value of instructive examples. He became a stable part of the Institute’s teaching programs that produced so many internationally recognized economists. If many of these graduates still have a solid grasp of general equilibrium theory, then this is largely thanks to Egbert Dierker’s efforts.

His contributions to economic theory will endure, and not only in general equilibrium. I learned index theory from him and one of my early papers applied this to games in normal form. It turns out that these days a new generation of economic theorists are taking up this lead and are pushing non-cooperative game theory forward by applying index theory. This is the hallmark of a great economist: To advance his field by deep and lasting contributions and to inspire the following generations of researchers. Egbert Dierker perfectly fits that description. He will be dearly missed.

Klaus Ritzberger