

Ep Köster obituary for Achems

Ep Köster (1931 – 2022)

It is with profound sadness we inform you of the passing of Prof E.P. Köster (emeritus Professor) who was Professor of Fundamental and Applied Research of the Chemical Senses (1971-1993) and of the Psychology of Food Behavior (1993-1996) at Utrecht University. Prof. Köster, also referred to as "Ep" lay the foundation of human chemical senses research in the Netherlands and beyond.

Ep and Howard Moskowitz were the original editors of *Chemical Senses*, the flagship journal of *Achems*. Their first editorial appeared in 1974, in Volume 1 Number 1 of the journal (<https://doi.org/10.1093/chemse/1.1.3>).

Ep was also one of the founders of ECRO, the European Chemoreception Research Organization, in 1970 of which organization he is an honorary member. For more on the history on the foundation of ECRO, and Eps role in that history, please read our obituary on the Ecro website (<https://www.ecro.online/>).

Because of his substantial role as founder of research into the psychology of taste and smell in the Netherlands, we, as members of the NOSE (the Netherlands Olfactory Science Exchange: <https://www.nosenetwork.nl/>) organised a special session at the 2019 meeting of the Dutch Society Of Brain And Cognition (NVP) to honor Ep's contribution to olfactory science. At this meeting he received an "olfactory" award: a perfume specially designed for him by perfumer and neuroscientist, Spyros Drosopoulos. The perfume was inspired by Ep's work, his personality and some of the olfactory notes he used in his work. It was the first-ever award that can only be appreciated through the sense of smell, and the audience attending the session shared the pleasure of sniffing this delightful award that was dispersed across the room.

We remember the first words of Ep in his acceptance speech: 'Ha ha ha ha ha ha!' Ep referred to the fact that some of his colleagues in Experimental Psychology had laughed at him when he - it must have been in the 1970's - announced that he would devote his perception research to the sense of olfaction, not taking him very seriously. However, Ep would continue to become an authority in the field and win worldwide recognition for his work on the sense of smell and beyond.

"Now it is my turn to laugh at THEM."

This story highlights two of Ep's characteristics: a sense of humour, and a perseverance in an area he believed in. Many of us can relate to Ep's sense of humor, sometimes difficult to follow, but always making you smile and think.

Besides to olfaction, Ep has contributed to the fields of sensory analysis and food consumer science. He always favored a strict scientific and methodological approach. Many a study was dismissed by him on grounds of methodological weakness or scientific 'nonsense'. His work with Per Møller and Jos Mojet on the "Misfit" Theory of Spontaneous Conscious Odour Perception (MITSCOP) highlights the importance of ecological validity. Ep believed scientific studies should be about something real, *i.e.* they should address (everyday) behavior. Also telling is Ep's comment that "Fundamental research is difficult, but applied research is even more difficult". Another observation reflects Ep's unrelenting critical attitude towards much consumer research: "In the old days, some 65% of new food products failed on the market, then the market researchers arrived on the scene,... and now it is 85%." A bit exaggerated perhaps, but it clearly highlights his view on consumer food research. His 2003 paper on "The psychology of food

choice: Some often encountered fallacies" is a very well cited paper. Ep started displaying a critical attitude to traditional consumer research long before the now dominant view that many food choices happen automatically and are not easily accessible to conscious elaboration by consumers themselves. Everybody who has ever had a scientific chat with Ep knows how he used to emphasize implicit processes and the unconscious nature of most olfactory perception. In sum, all this makes olfactory as well as food choice research difficult, as well as costly. "Good research is expensive, but cheap research even more so" another great statement from Ep, referring to the fact that it is not uncommon that million-dollar decisions are based on cheap, debatable research.

Besides being a remarkable and visionary scientist, Ep was a brilliant lecturer, who was able to completely captivate his audience and is still remembered by many for this.

Ep laid the foundations for an applied psychology of smell and taste and in doing so he left a legacy. He has inspired many scientists to embark on a career in these areas. They, and their students again, will continue to reap the fruits of Ep's vision, for decades to come.

We remember him fondly,

On behalf on NOSE (Netherlands Olfactory Science Exchange),

Monique Smeets, Caro Verbeek, Garnt Dijksterhuis

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