

Jari Ojala

Professor Jari Ojala is an internationally recognized and versatile historian who is at present professor of comparative business history at the University of Jyväskylä. He is also a member of the Centre of Excellence in Historical Research funded by the Academy of Finland and of the Finnish-Swedish joint project “Driving Forces of Democracy 1890–2020”.

He began his research career in the 1990s with a history of shipping companies in Central Ostrobothnia, which provided the topic for his doctoral thesis in 1999. He has in fact published a large number of papers in international journals that are concerned with shipping, but in more recent times he has extended his interests to include in particular long-term global changes in the forest industries, economic networks and the importance of communications for economic activity. He has been a central figure in establishing the position of the new institutional economic history and business history in the sphere of academic research in Finland.

Professor Ojala's research has involved combining methodologies, theories and material from different fields of study, e.g. economics and economic history, and this has enabled him to develop an ability to form effective research teams. His efforts in this direction have borne fruit, even though the approach is an exceptional one for Finnish historians, who are accustomed to working doggedly on their own.

Especially notable among Professor Ojala's written works is *The Road to Prosperity. An Economic History of Finland* (2006), which he wrote and edited together with colleagues. The book is a basic work in English on Finnish economic history and was immediately distributed to delegates attending the 14th International Economic History Congress in Helsinki in that same year. It was also used for PR purposes during Finland's presidency of the EU and has been distributed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through its embassies. Similarly it is known to be used as a textbook in a number of universities abroad.

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Professor Ojala's attitude to science is summed up well in his statement that "For me, science is a way of looking at the world. I understand the world through science."

At the present moment Ojala is considering how the economic history perspective could be extended very much further back in time. The need for this arises from the fact that economic growth has been very rapid during the industrial age, but now that slow growth seems to be a permanent state of affairs we need a perspective from those times in the past when growth was slow. This would mean extending the time frame back to the 18th century at least.

Admittedly, when we go back that far we find a familiar figure, Anders Chydenius, whose economic thinking in the remote town of Kokkola in the mid-1700s has a

modern ring about it: it defends liberal economic values and is essentially practical in nature. Ojala has been involved in editing a new collection of Chydenius' works.

Given that our social discourse is currently weighted towards economic matters, this will inevitably be reflected in a general interest in economic history, and economic history in turn comprises four approaches, through history, the social sciences, economics or, the most rapidly expanding approach of all, business history. "The various approaches emphasize slightly different things. Economic history cuts across a number of traditional disciplines, and thus it offers us an opportunity to perceive and understand the past and present in a slightly different way from the traditional approaches adopted by history, the social sciences or economics," Ojala explains.

Eino Jutikkala History Prize is awarded every three years for distinguished scholarly work in the field of historical research.