

Marjatta Hietala

THE WINNER of the Academy Award for 2017, Professor emerita Marjatta Hietala (née Puusa), is one of the most outstanding Finnish historians, who has done much to develop the methodology of historical research, extending its field of study in the direction of the social sciences and adopting an active role in the international academic community.

Having obtained her doctorate from the University of Helsinki in 1976, she worked first as an associate professor at that university and as a researcher with the Academy of Finland before moving to the University of Joensuu in 1994 to take up the position of professor of general history. She then became professor of general history at the University of Tampere in 1996, a post which she occupied until 2011, apart from a five-year period as a professor with the Academy of Finland. She has occupied many honorary positions in the academic world both in Finland and internationally.

She herself regards it as having been highly important for her research that she had worked for some time in the Ministry of the Interior and in the planning department of the Prime Minister's Office (taking part in the work of the Devolution Committee and the Growth Centre Committee) before embarking on a university career. It was in these capacities that she first felt that the decisions made at that level were not backed up with sufficiently thoroughgoing information, and so it was that one of her pioneering topics as a scholar came to be urban research, in which she had an extensive international network of collaborators.

"It has been extremely useful as far as my own research has been concerned that I was able to have first-hand experience of decision-making processes and see what kind of background material is needed for this purpose. Studying statistics helped me to understand the sizes of the bodies of material required for making justifiable

Professor emerita Marjatta Hietala is one of the most outstanding Finnish historians



generalizations on various matters," Marjatta Hietala maintains, and she has indeed introduced into the study of history a variety of methods that are typically used in the natural sciences, especially quantitative methods involving the analysis of long time series. She is inclined to be suspicious of the trend for contenting oneself with a small body of material and studying it qualitatively, above all if the intention is to arrive at far-reaching generalizations.

Professor Hietala was responsible for introducing the technique of "oral history" based on interviews into Finland, and it was at her instigation that researchers embarked on a project to interview veteran members of the Finnish parliament. A corpus of interviews with more than 400 members is now available in the Library of Parliament.

"I have always been attracted by the prospect of breaking new ground rather than going over old things and following in other people's tracks," she reminds us.

Thus it is not surprising that one of her interests has been the history of science and innovations. "I began to be interested in how Finland could enjoy access to the very latest scientific knowledge, and what factors could promote this, but it required the collection and analysis of vast amounts of material and a great deal of international cooperation to find the answer."

Her research has indeed stood apart from the mainstream of historical studies in that it has involved participation in international research groups. It is essential to become involved in international comparative research, because success in this field calls for interaction, for give and take. It is all a matter of exchange. The topics of our research should be sufficiently broad that they can be discussed at the international level," she claims.

For Marjatta Hietala, participation in international research projects has also opened the way to membership of the board of the "International Committee of

Historical Sciences”, to which she was elected in 2005. She then became president of the organization for the years 2010-2015, the first and to date the only woman to hold this position. In this and many other respects she has served as a role model for many female academics in Finland and elsewhere.

Professor Marjatta Hietala was elected a member of the Finnish Academy of Sci-

ence and Letters in 1997. She was awarded a prize by the Finnish Cultural Foundation in 2010 and the Theodor Homén Prize by the Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters in 2013. An honorary doctorate was conferred on her by Stockholm University in 2012. She has now become the 83rd recipient of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters Academy Award, the current value of which is 15,000 euros.

The Academy Award highest honour that the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters can confer on a scholar in recognition of his life's work. The Academy has awarded the Academy Award since 1945.

Picture: Niina Stolt / Studio Onni