



## Perttu Vartiainen

\* 17.5.1953 † 30.7.2017

**PERTTU VARTIAINEN**, professor of human geography at the University of Eastern Finland and long-term university rector, passed away on 30th July 2017 in Joensuu at the age of 64 years. He became a member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 2002. Vartiainen was a dedicated renovator who profoundly influenced the advancement of geography, regional policy and university re-organization.

Vartiainen had been actively participating in the promotion of geographical rethinking in Finland since the late 1970s, his early inspiration having originated both from within the Nordic circles of critical geography (*kritisk samhällsgeografi*) and the studies of industrial capitalism advanced by geographers in Western Germany. In addition, initiatives launched by British colleagues studying spatial divisions of labour and entrepreneurial restructuring did much to stimulate this orientation in his research. In the context of Nordic critical geography Vartiainen served as one of the coordinators and leading methodologists.

Perttu Vartiainen developed his theoretical-methodological and empirical research skills systematically and reciprocally. Studies of regional migration and

community restructuring in North Karelia and Joensuu were supported by the upgrading of related regional theory. During the early 1980s, as part of his doctoral research, he identified and specified changes in the societal division of labour and the daily routines of individuals as the main generators of transformations in local communities. This approach soon gained support from the renewal of the branch of British geography focusing on the potentials of the new regional geography and locality studies.

Moreover, Vartiainen contributed to the upgrading of humanity-nature research in Finnish geography. He was already arguing in the late 1970s for a physical geography that could include in its research programmes those societal forces lying behind the accelerated modification of nature. This rethinking gradually resulted in research initiatives aimed at clarifying how particular environmental and natural resource concerns turn into physical assemblies of nature and how these assemblies become materialized in the form of meaningful regional landscapes. Later, in the early 1990s, these initiatives were gathered together under the heading of ecological geography.

Perttu Vartiainen gained the chair in applied geography of planning (*suunnittelumaantiede*) at the University of Helsinki in 1993, a position that allowed him to elaborate on planning issues as part of a broader system of regional and territorial dynamics, and consequently to interpret local development questions in the context of international and global dependencies. His research into the interdependencies between local and global phenomena continued when he returned to Joensuu in 1994, having been invited to take up the chair in human geography (*yh-teiskuntamaantiede*) at the University of Joensuu. It was now city regions and inter-city networks that came to the forefront.

Vartiainen became well-known for his skills in initiating and participating in debates on the renewal of geography. He directed discussions in both Finnish and Nordic forums with the help of his supreme command of human geography, supported by the precision of his verbal expression: his argumentation was sharp, his concepts were well-defined and his message often opened up fresh angles of research and new tasks.

During the 1990s Perttu Vartiainen focused more intensively on the processes and practices of regional development. He was crucial in inspiring the transformation of Finnish regional policy thinking from the old top-down pattern towards a more bottom-up approach. As a researcher he had gained considerable empirical and theoretical expertise in regional development, which he skilfully utilized in his role as a regional policy developer and designer.

Perttu Vartiainen's regional policy thinking was based on two key concepts: urban region and urban network. The for-

mer was based on empirical findings of how city regions in different parts of Finland had become core areas for regional development in the 1970s, while the latter referred to the interactive process by which settlement systems developed as Finland entered the era of the information society in the 1990s.

Based on these concepts Vartiainen outlined a new form of regional development which became the core framework for Finnish urban and innovation policies. The concepts fitted well with the new regional policy paradigm which put emphasis on local initiatives and territorial resources. The most important policy solutions included two nation-wide programmes: the Finnish Centre of Expertise Programme and the Regional Centre Programme. The idea in both cases was to rely on regional resources and distribute growth to different parts of the country.

Perttu Vartiainen acted as rector of his university for four successive terms of office. He was fast at adopting new, broad categories of affairs, and he was also adept at noticing early signs of future developments and had special skills of strategic foresight. He was inquisitive and talkative, and he read a lot. He led the university in a spirit of deep human concern and quickly gained the confidence of its staff. The most challenging task for him was to plan and implement the merging of the universities of Kuopio and Joensuu.

During his long career as rector, he developed an excellent understanding of the different scientific and disciplinary sub-cultures, which gave him a specific position as an expert in both international and national science policy. Consequently, he became a member of a great number of organizations and was elected

to numerous prestigious positions. In addition, he gained several international, national and regional awards and honours in the fields of regional development, urban planning, university co-operation and societal activities.

Perttu Vartiainen grew up in the countryside, but close to a city, in a neighbourhood that later became increasingly urban, and which thus served for him as both a laboratory for studying changing urban systems and a source of conceptual inspiration. After the early death of his father, the farm on which the family lived became oriented towards small-scale tourism, which provided unusual perspectives and possibilities for internationalization.

Even as a young scholar, Vartiainen challenged the old professors of the discipline. His doctoral dissertation marked out the road towards a change of paradigm in human geography as a social sci-

ence in Finland, and he went on to apply this learning to the renewal of approaches towards regional policy. In the early 1990s he also became one of the early initiators of international masters' degree programmes in Finland - in the field of human geography, of course.

Vartiainen's career as a reformer culminated in the formation of the new University of Eastern Finland, accompanied simultaneously by a renewal of his own knowledge and thinking. From a radical geographer, he became an innovative regional developer and an elder statesman in Academia. Nevertheless, the heritage of his home community of Ylämylly in Liperi sustained him throughout his life, leading him to emphasize the human scale in urban development and shaping him into a pleasant person and, most of all, a family man: a loving father, grandfather and husband.

*Obituary by Jarmo Kortelainen,  
Ari Lehtinen and Ilkka Pyy*