

Veijo Virsu

* 9.4.1941 † 25.11.2018



PROFESSOR EMERITUS Veijo Virsu died in Espoo on 25th November 2018. He was born into a farming family in Paavola on 9th April 1941. After high school he studied engineering at the University of Oulu, but soon enrolled to the University of Helsinki, where he received a master's degree in 1965 and a PhD in 1968, both in psychology.

Veijo Virsu was one of Finland's first truly international researchers in psychology. His doctoral thesis on visual illusions already included several research articles published in international peer-reviewed scientific journals and presumably represented the first compilation of published articles to be submitted as a PhD thesis in psychology in Finland. Having completed his doctorate, he visited the University of Michigan in 1968–1970, Stanford University in 1969, and the University of Cambridge in 1970–1971, after which he worked at the Department of Psychology, University of Helsinki, in various Academy of Finland and university positions. He had close international links, one of the most important being with the Max Planck Institute in Göttingen, Germany, which he visited several times in 1975–1982. In 1980 he was appointed to a full professorship in neuropsychology at the University

of Helsinki, a position which he held until his retirement in 2009.

Veijo Virsu's list of publications includes over 100 research articles, most of them in high-quality international journals, including three in *Nature*. His research was focused mainly on visual perception, which he studied by means of an innovative combinations of psychophysics and brain research methods. The cortical magnification factor and its role in visual perception was one of the most important and most cited aspects of his research. Later he became interested in brain plasticity and its role in neuropsychological rehabilitation, and in 1991 he published a book of national significance entitled *Aivojen muotoutuvuus ja kuntoutuminen* ("Brain plasticity and rehabilitation"), in which he also gave a lively description of his own recovery from a cerebral infarction.

Veijo Virsu was a demanding but highly motivating teacher. He supervised 21 doctoral theses and many of his former students ended up in tenured university positions. He also supervised students specializing in clinical neuropsychology and played an important role in developing their scientific and professional identity.

Veijo Virsu was a founding member of the Finnish Brain Research Society and was elected to membership of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 1991 and Academia Europaea in 1995. In 2014

he received the senior research prize of Psykonet, the national university network for psychology, in recognition of his life's work in research, teaching and society in general.

*Obituary by Kimmo Alho and
Heikki Hämäläinen*

*Photo:
Markku Verkasalo*