



Olavi Riihinen

* 9.4.1930 † 16.5.2022

Professor of Social Policy at the University of Helsinki Olavi Riihinen died of a sudden attack of illness on 16 May 2022 in Helsinki. He was 92 years old, born in Pielavesi on 9 April 1930.

Riihinen grew up on a farm in Karstula and matriculated from the Jyväskylän Lyceum. He also did sports during his school years and won the Finnish championship in javelin throw in the 17-year-old age group in 1947.

Riihinen first studied ethnology at the University of Helsinki under Professor Kustaa Vilkuna, but Professor of Social Policy Heikki Waris managed to persuade him to transfer to the Faculty of Social Sciences to study sociology and social policy and to work as his assistant.

Riihinen earned his doctorate in political science in 1965 with a study on regional change, the same topic on which he had written his master's thesis (1956). The title of his doctoral thesis was *Teollistuvan yhteiskunnan alueellinen erilaistuneisuus* ("Regional differentiation of the industrial society") and it applied the method of factor analysis, which was popular at the time. The thesis was extremely thorough and demonstrated the basic dimensions of Finland's regional develop-

ment, such as the early development of the service society. After defending his thesis, Riihinen went on to work under an ASLA scholarship in the United States, at the University of California, Berkeley. He was appointed Professor of Regional Development Studies at the Tampere University in 1968, but did not remain in this post for very long before transferring to the University of Helsinki.

In 1969 Olavi Riihinen was elected Professor of Social Policy as the successor of Heikki Waris and he remained in this position for 25 years. As a new professor and head of the department, he was immediately put to the test in the turmoil of a radical student movement, and the growing flood of students combined with insufficient teaching resources did not make the situation any easier. Back then, there was very little time left over from teaching and administrative duties for research.

Despite this, Riihinen contributed to several research projects and wrote articles on current issues in social policy. During his era, the resources of the department also increased manifold. By the time he retired, the department had no less than three professors and a number of other teachers.

One of the most notable studies from this period to which Riihinen contributed was *Rautatieläisten Liiton historia I-II* (“History of the Railway Workers’ Union I-II”, 1975). He also continued studying regional policy from a social perspective and, as new topics, family policy and welfare issues. Already back then, Riihinen was concerned about the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots. He also paid attention to ecological questions early on. It is worth mentioning that his doctoral study was replicated already in 1984 (Juha Kärkkäinen), by which time the regional structure of Finnish society had changed quite dramatically.

In the 1990s, Riihinen edited two major works, *Suomi 2017* (“Finland 2017”, 1990) and *Sosiaalipolitiikka 2017* (“Social policy 2017”, 1992), which upon publication did not receive the attention they deserved. In the latter work, Riihinen presents a perceptive and concerned prediction of the development of Finnish society and the welfare state. He himself remained an advocate of the welfare state until the end.

During his years in retirement, he remained fairly active in research and a productive writer, contributing to the writing of *Sosiaalipoliittisen yhdistyksen historia* (“History of the Social Policy Association in Finland”, 2009), among others.

Riihinen held many positions of trust, one of the most significant of which was his long-standing chairmanship of the Finnish National Committee of the International

Council on Social Welfare (ICSW). Olavi Riihinen was invited to become a member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 1981.

Riihinen was humble by nature and never put himself on a pedestal, but he could still be assertive as head of the Department of Social Policy and later as dean of the faculty when he defended the interests of his discipline when dealing with disputes within the university. His academic approach was benevolent and tolerant, albeit also critical, when necessary. During conversations, he always tried to express himself clearly and would sometimes load his words with intellectual irony.

One explanation for Riihinen’s old age and good health was probably the exercise he had enjoyed since a young age, especially playing tennis and skiing. Even in his old age, Riihinen could often be seen in the winter skiing near his home on the tracks of Pirkkola and Paloheinä.

Olavi Riihinen spent his last years living with his wife Eeva-Kaarina in a retirement home in Helsinki where he continued to attentively follow the debate on social issues.

Riihinen’s brother Päiviö (1926–2013) was also a professor at the University of Helsinki, in forest economics. The brothers influenced each other’s research in many ways, especially methodically in the application of factor analysis.

Riihinen’s immediate circle included the family of his daughter Taina-Mari.

Keijo Rahkonen and J.P.Roos

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