

Jaakko Kangasjärvi

* 11.5.1960 † 16.5.2024



Dean, Professor Jaakko Kangasjärvi died at his home in Kirkkonummi on Thursday, 16 May 2024, following a rapidly progressing illness. He was born in Multia on 11 May 1960.

Jaakko Kangasjärvi's scientific career began with a study in which he explored the coping mechanisms of a botanical model species, thale cress, when it comes into contact with the environmental toxin ozone. His research quickly expanded to include the general physiological and genetic adaptation mechanisms of plants to various stress situations. He also led the sequencing of the birch genome and participated in the sequencing of the poplar genome. The groundbreaking scientific publications related to these studies are so widely cited and well-known internationally that Kangasjärvi was one of the few Finnish scientists to make it onto the internationally prestigious list of "Highly Cited Researchers". Jaakko Kangasjärvi's dream was to be published in the prestigious *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of USA*. In the end, he had several publications in the journal and also published his research group's papers in a number of other highly prestigious serials. His most cited original articles were on the

discovery of the SLAC1 ion channel, which regulates the movement of stomatal pores on leaves and is important for plant photosynthesis (Vahisalu et al. 2008 Nature) and the identification of a novel RCD1 gene that regulates plant stress response (Ahlfors et al. 2004 Plant Cell), as well as extensive follow-up work related to these studies.

During his career, Jaakko Kangasjärvi became familiar with almost all botanical research and education institutes in Finland. He obtained his Master's degree from the University of Oulu in 1986 and his PhD in 1991 from the University of Minnesota, USA. Kangasjärvi worked as a teacher, researcher and director both at the University of Kuopio Botanical Garden and at the University of Turku, eventually ending up at the Faculty of Biological and Environmental Sciences at the University of Helsinki. He served as Professor at the university campus in Viikki, Helsinki, from 2003. Professor Jaakko Kangasjärvi became a member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 2012.

The diversity and passion of Kangasjärvi's research career is reflected in the fact that he contributed to no less than four Centres of Excellence of the Research

Council of Finland: the Centre of Excellence in Plant Signal Research, the Centre of Excellence in Plant Molecular Biology and Forest Biotechnology, the Centre of Excellence in Molecular Biology of Primary Producers, and the Centre of Excellence in Tree Biology. These Centres of Excellence enabled long-term funding and further enhanced the collaboration of Jaakko Kangasjärvi and his research team with other Finnish and international researchers. Jaakko never valued research that relied solely on large, expensive equipment but emphasised the researcher's own creative thinking and innovative approach, both in terms of individual researchers and large Centres of Excellence. It is therefore not surprising that several of the researchers he supervised are now professors or research group leaders in Finland or abroad, such as Professor Hannele Tuominen at Umeå University, Professor Hannes Kollist at the University of Tartu and Professor and Director Michael Wrzaczek at the Czech Academy of Sciences in České Budějovice.

Kangasjärvi served one term (2018–2021) as Dean of the Faculty of Biological and Environmental Sciences at the University of Helsinki and had started his second term (2022–). Together with the steering group and Faculty Council, Kangasjärvi succeeded in making the Faculty's research and teaching increasingly international. A determined focus on high academic standards and fairness in HR development led to the Faculty being strengthened not only by the recruitment of Finns but also by several foreign professors. This in turn has contributed to a steady increase in the Faculty's highly competitive research funding.

Building a home garden, planting trees and beautiful flowering shrubs, cars and the visual arts were close to Jaakko's heart. In addition to his spouse Saijaliisa, other special people in Jaakko's life were his two daughters and their spouses, his grandchildren and his spouse's son and his family. Jaakko enjoyed spending time with them, relaxing and enjoying good food and wine.

*Obituary by Kurt Fagerstedt, Yrjö Helariutta
and Ari Pekka Mähönen*

Image: Veikko Somerpuro