
CONFERENCES

The Legacies of Professor Ilmar Talve

Seminar at the University of Turku, 6–7 September 2019

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An international scientific seminar was organised to honour the 100th anniversary of the birth of Ilmar Talve, an Estonian-born ethnologist and the first Professor of Ethnology at the University of Turku from 1960 to 1986. His contributions in the fields of science and art were significant, but there is hardly any research on his contribution to ethnology. Therefore, the focus of the seminar was on Talve's scientific legacy in ethnology. The impacts of his work are still visible in the field and, moreover, they are still developing, as pointed out in the welcoming words of Helena Ruotsala, Professor of European Ethnology at the University of Turku.

The seminar was opened by Jaakko Suominen, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Professor of Digital Culture at the University of Turku. The organisers of the seminar were the discipline of European Ethnology at the University of Turku, Ethnos and the Seurasaari Foundation. The two-day seminar with 80 participants was held at the Sirkkala Campus of the University of Turku. The invited keynote speakers were Art Leete, Professor of Ethnology at the University of Tartu; Pekka Leimu, Professor Emeritus of European Ethnology at the University of Turku; Karin Gustafsson, Head of Department of the Folk Life Archive at Lund University; Hanna Snellman, Professor of Ethnology and Vice Rector of the University of Helsinki; and Dr Marleen Metslaid from the Estonian National Museum. The seminar included a very informative poster exhibition describing the history of the Institute of Ethnology and Ilmar Talve as a professor. The exhibition was organised by students of Ethnology at the University of Turku.

In his keynote, Professor Art Leete discussed the early years and studies of Ilmar Talve. Talve was born on 17 January 1919 in Mga, Ingria, near St. Petersburg, but spend his childhood in the Estonian town of Tapa. Later, he had returned there after 48 years of absence and had noticed that the town was not the town of his childhood. In his memoirs, he called it a 'lost city' and, among other things, he recalled a frightening person, the headmaster of his school, whose principle was 'all that is not allowed is forbidden'. When Talve studied ethnology in Tartu, data collection through field work was central to the teaching. In his memoirs, he wished to show the emotions and amusement behind the rationality of this work. He described his relation to one of

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his field work companions, Paul Ariste, an Estonian linguist, as a continuous 'joking relationship'.

Professor Emeritus Pekka Leimu brought in front of us Talve as a middle-aged man, a single father of three children, a professor of ethnology, a teacher and a supervisor. It had not been easy for an Estonian to become a professor at a state university in Finland during Urho Kekkonen's presidency. Perhaps Talve received some help from his acquaintances Esko Aaltonen, Professor of Sociology at the University of Turku, and Niilo Valonen, an ethnologist and Professor of Ethnology at the University of Helsinki. After defending his doctoral thesis in Stockholm in 1960, Talve was able to apply for the Professorship of Ethnology. As the professor, his first tasks were to make a workplan for Ethnology, organise funding for interviews and collect a library. He conducted questionnaires concerning various topics and established a publication series, *Scripta Ethnologica*. He participated in international conferences and developed a network of colleagues and friends.

In her keynote, PhD Karin Gustafsson showed how important the scientific impact of Sigurd Erixon, Professor of Ethnology at the University of Stockholm, was for Ilmar Talve. Talve came to the university from a refugee camp in 1945. He had already studied ethnology in Estonia and wanted to continue his studies in Sweden. Erixon paid attention to him and wanted him to join his workshop for advanced students. When writing his doctoral thesis, Talve was supervised by John Granlund, who became Professor of Ethnology after Erixon retired in 1955. Another important teacher was Gustav Ränk, the first Professor of Ethnology at the University of Tartu and one of the emigrated Estonian ethnologists at the University of Stockholm. After Erixon passed away, the perspective in Ethnology changed from rescuing the past rural lifestyle to researching working people. The empirical focus also moved from the countryside to towns and cities.

In her presentation, Professor Hanna Snellman discussed Ilmar Talve's legacy. At first, she advised us to take a look at Talve's inaugural speech, then his publications, but also the scientific community in which he was active. In scientific work, there is also a hidden agenda, the references. Having stepped into the professorship, Talve needed to begin the process of selecting and evaluating candidates for professorships in different universities. His own dissertation was very traditional, but at the same time he had discovered new ways of doing ethnological research. He shifted the focus of research to data collection but did not determine the methods of analysis. He was also very demanding and wanted his students and researchers to address different themes in their theses and articles. Referring to Talve's publications, Hanna Snellman stated that Talve remained a positivist to the end by preferring this philosophical

tradition of science. As a teacher, he was inspirational, but he did not actively discuss such themes as trade unions, political labour movements or civil war.

The last keynote lecture was given by Dr Marleen Metslaid. Her dissertation discussed the history of Estonian ethnology, and she has also studied the careers of emigrated Estonian ethnologists who studied in Sweden at the same time with Ilmar Talve, including Professor Gustav Ränk, Eerik Laid and Helmut Hagar. In her presentation, she asked what the exile meant to them, what kinds of strategies they used and what their impact on ethnology as a national science was.

The impacts of Talve's scientific work were visible in the themes of the four workshops of the seminar. Their goals were to study Talve's legacies from different perspectives of ethnology and find similarities with contemporary topics, such as different processes of cultural and social transformation including urban studies, ongoing changes in communal structures and different large-scale changes in rural life, but also changes caused by digitalisation and technologisation. The workshop *Urban ethnology*, chaired by Lic.Ph., Senior Lecturer Timo J. Virtanen, discussed the urban environment as a sensory and experienced landscape. The different angles taken to urban life included subjects like minorities, newcomers, religious groups and sexual minorities, as well as new methodological openings, such as photographic interviews or analysing an amateur's film from the perspective of the person behind the camera.

The workshop *Rural and environmental ethnology*, chaired by Doctoral Student Maija Lundgren, discussed the contribution of environmental ethnological research to village research, the historic countryside as a milieu of living and economy, the present-day changes in Finnish agricultural production and the food market, village school buildings and collecting local knowledge. Especially interesting from the point of view of the seminar was the presentation by Eeva Uusitalo. She analysed Ilmar Talve's field work excursion in remote Lapland. Her conclusion was that his field work told more about him than the actual place.

In the third workshop, *Work and everyday life*, led by Doctoral Student Maija Mäki, the presentations scrutinised the gradual and abrupt transformation of everyday work, addressing, for example, the transformation of knitting from a civic skill into a hobby, craftsmanship related to custom culture, the frameworks of product development, memories about the transformation of working life and the consequences these transformations have had on the structures and services of the welfare society.

The fourth workshop, *Museums and archives*, chaired by PhD, University Teacher Hanneleena Hieta, discussed questions of both intangible and material culture as well as the connections between archives and museums and

changes caused by digitalisation and technologisation. Other topics addressed included encountering the perspectives of ethnological research and archival science and using special archive materials, such as private diaries and letters, as research material, the life cycle of field diaries and notes, and the meaning of local archives in museum work as mediators of local cultural heritage.

The seminar presentations formed a picture of Ilmar Talve as an actor, a reformer who brought to Turku new ideas that were already being applied in Sweden and other European countries. He also saw opportunities to advance science in a more modern direction by defining concepts and introducing new research topics. The topics he chose are still relevant in ethnological studies in Turku, e.g. urban ethnology, different processes of development and societal ethnology. I was personally surprised to realise how multi-faceted present-day ethnology is, and how different themes have been broadened and made to respond to the modern world after 1981, when I was finishing my studies in Ethnology at the University of Turku. Data collection through field work is still relevant; however, the concept of field work nowadays also includes digitally made interviews or questionnaires. We now have the possibility to choose between different theoretical frames and methods of analysis and bring our personal experiences and interpretations to the research. However, attention to epistemological and ethical questions is more important than ever before. I am convinced that the seminar gave a good picture of the history of ethnology and helped us to understand present research emphases and focus on future possibilities.

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