

Tapani Valkonen

Professor of Demography

The first Finnish professorship in demography was established in 1974 as part of the national program for the World Population Year. The permanent chair was located at the Department of Sociology of the University of Helsinki as a professorship in sociology, but with a specific focus on demography. After an initial temporary arrangement, the vacancy was filled in 1977 by the appointment of Dr. Tapani Valkonen to the chair. In 1999, a temporary five-year post of a professor of urban studies was established at the same department, and its field was specified as the study of demographic and social changes in urban communities. On leave from his permanent position, Professor Valkonen currently occupies this urban studies professorship.

Education and academic career

Tapani Valkonen was born on December 26, 1941. He began school already before the age of six, eventually matriculating from his secondary school of the Lappeenranta Lyceum in 1958 at the age of 16, with excellent marks.

At the University of Helsinki, Tapani Valkonen majored in sociology while also studying statistics, mathematics and economics. In 1963, he graduated as Master of Social Sciences. He completed a Licentiate in Social Sciences in 1966, and became a Doctor of Social Sciences in 1970. Valkonen furthered his academic studies in the United States on two occasions: in 1967–68 at the Johns Hopkins University and the University of California at Berkeley, and in 1972–73 at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

Apart from an early interlude as a media designer for an advertising agency, Tapani Valkonen has held exclusively academic posts. He had an assistant position at the University of Helsinki's Department of Sociology in 1963–70, and worked as docent of sociology in 1970–77, holding the position of acting associate professor and professor of sociology for a period of 12 months between 1968 and 1971. At the Helsinki School of Economics, he was associate professor of sociology in 1971–77. Since then, Valkonen has held the chair of demography at the University of Helsinki's Department of Sociology. In 1991–96, on leave from his teaching chair, he held the esteemed post as research professor of the Academy of Finland. Since 2000, he has been on leave from his demography professorship and has held the professor of urban studies appointment, with the exception of the 2000–2001 academic year, when he served the Academy of Finland as senior research fellow. The University of Tampere appointed him docent of demography in 1980.

Research activities

In the early part of his research career, Tapani Valkonen mostly focused on topics of general sociology and methodology. Hence, his dissertation *Yhteisön vaikutukset yksilöön ja niiden kvantitatiivinen tutkiminen* (The impacts of community on the individual, and their quantitative study, in Finnish, 1970), which consisted of six articles and a summary, was contextual analysis. *Haastattelu- ja kyselyaineiston analyysi* (Analysis of interview and survey data in social research, in Finnish, 1971) was designed as a course book.

Valkonen made a start in population studies in 1967 by drawing up a sociological projection for the province of Uusimaa in Finland. The study included projections of the size and structure of the area's population up to the year 2000. Its methodological grasp made the study remarkable; unlike standard demographic projections, it was neither mechanically nor routinely crafted. As he was preparing the projections, Valkonen tried to take into consideration how they might be used as a tool in social planning. His projections on actual population development were, however, no more successful than standard projections, perhaps even on the contrary.

In his study *Economic Development and Regional Population Redistribution: A Comparative Study of Finland, Norway, Sweden and Wisconsin 1900-1970* (1975), Valkonen concluded that social policy and social administration have very little impact on regional population development, which is much more dependent on market forces. In the study, he successfully sought and interpreted the connections between demographic factors and other social processes.

Finland's high mortality and, in particular, the significant excess male mortality inspired Valkonen to compare differences between Finland and the other Nordic countries. In his study *Elintaso, kaupungistuminen ja alueelliset kuolleisuuserot Suomessa, Ruotsissa ja Norjassa* (Living standards, urbanization and regional differences in mortality in Finland, Sweden and Norway, in Finnish, 1975) he found that there were significant regional differences in mortality in each country, which could not be explained through the differences observed in living standards, urbanization or health-care services. This study, which Valkonen conducted to qualify for the demography professorship, seems to have played quite a role in guiding him toward his special interest in mortality.

Aside from teaching duties as professor of demography, Tapani Valkonen has led several extensive research projects. Typically, the findings derived from these studies have been published, at least in part, jointly with other researchers. Of these, one can mention a project carried out in the early 1980s, which dealt with internal migration in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The findings were reported in a joint publication by Tapani Valkonen, Tuija Martelin and Hilikka Summa, as *Muuttoliike*

ja asunnonvaihdot pääkaupunkiseudulla (Migration and residential mobility in the Helsinki metropolitan area, in Finnish, 1984). Using the same material, Valkonen and Martelin published the article *Influence of Household and Area Characteristics on the Residential Mobility of Households* (Yearbook of Population Research in Finland 1986). Valkonen also headed an extensive research project that looked into changes in Finnish communities and presented the main findings together with Marie Reijo – for example, in their article *Population Development and the Changes in the Economic Structure of Finnish Urban Areas* (Yearbook of Population Research in Finland 1993).

In a collection of articles entitled *Suomalaiset* (The Finns, by Tapani Valkonen, Risto Alapuro, Riitta Jallinoja & Tom Sandlund, in Finnish, 1980), Valkonen compared population development in Finland, Sweden, Norway and all of Europe, detailing the time differences of population changes. In addition, he analyzed regional differences in population development in Finland from 1950 to 1980. The work deserves particular praise because it is easily understood also by laymen. Valkonen has examined long-term population trends in Finland also in other connections, for example in the extensive article collection *Suomi 2017* (Finland 2017, in Finnish, 1990).

Both as a researcher and as project leader, Valkonen's most significant contributions rest in his research on mortality. Among other things, he has examined mortality trends, conducted international comparisons on the subject, analyzed the factors that affect excess male mortality, mapped out the reasons behind high mortality rates in Eastern Finland, looked into the mortality effects of unemployment and widowhood, and otherwise evaluated the impact of stress factors on mortality. The most important area in his research on mortality, however, has been studying the effects of socioeconomic factors – such as education and occupation-based social groupings – on mortality. During 1991–2001 alone, his list of publications comprises 101 titles, a large number of them published in Finnish and foreign referee journals.

As examples of reports on mortality prepared under Valkonen's leadership, the following deserve to be mentioned: *Inequality in mortality: socioeconomic mortality differences in Finland in 1971–85* (by Tapani Valkonen, Tuija Martelin & Arja Rimpelä, 1991), *Socioeconomic mortality differences in Finland 1981–90* (Tapani Valkonen, Tuija Martelin, Arja Rimpelä, Veijo Notkola & Soili Savela, 1992), *Lama ja ennenaikainen kuolleisuus* (Recession and premature mortality, by Pekka Martikainen & Tapani Valkonen, in Finnish, 1995), *Adult mortality in developed countries: from description to explanation* (ed. by Alan D. Lopez, Graziella Caselli, and Tapani Valkonen, 1995), *The association between unemployment and mortality: causation or selection?* (by Tapani Valkonen & Pekka Martikainen) in: *Adult mortality in developed countries: from description to explanation* (ed. by Alan D.

Lopez, Graziella Caselli, and Tapani Valkonen, 1995), and *Occupational class and suicide: an example of the elaboration of a relationship* (by Tapani Valkonen & Tuija Martelin, Helsinki: University of Helsinki, Dept. of Sociology, Research Reports 222, 1988).

These studies utilized broad and detailed register data. The possibilities of using Finnish register data for population research have been presented in the publication *Rekisteriaineistot yhteiskunta- ja terveystutkimuksessa* (Register materials in social and health-care research, edited by Tapani Valkonen, Seppo Koskinen & Tuija Martelin, in Finnish, 1998).

Valkonen's latest undertaking involves studying the role of community impact on the segregation of individuals, and regional differences in its incidence. In this project, which is connected to urban studies, such phenomena are examined, on the one hand, in the capital Helsinki and in the sub-regions of its metropolitan area, and on the other hand, in various districts of Finland.

In his research activities, Tapani Valkonen has chosen as his particular challenge broad empirical materials and processing them by means of advanced statistical methods. It is characteristic of his working methods to quickly separate the essential from the unessential, as well as to apply caution when drawing conclusions if there is a lack of convincing evidence. According to Valkonen, the most interesting research findings often prove to be errors on the part of the researcher. In the 1970s, in the heyday of the Marxist student movement, he was described as a "common sense sociologist", which is also a fitting characterization of him as a demographer.

Valkonen is an inspiring instructor and research director and a good administrator. During his professorship, population research has expanded in Finland in an unprecedented way. The number of students in the field has increased significantly. Ten or so population researchers have finished their doctorates under his tutorship.

Other activities

Tapani Valkonen has actively promoted cooperation among population researchers both nationally and internationally. He was vice chairman of The Finnish Demographic Society in 1975–96, and its chairman in 1996–99. He acted as vice chairman of The Nordic Demographic Society in 1976–79 and as its chairman in 1979–80. In 1983, Valkonen was one of the founding members of the European Association for Population Studies (EAPS), and was the association's vice chair in 1995–99. Member of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) since 1975, he has served as an invited member of its Committees on Adult Mortality (1989–93) and on Emerging Health Threats (2000–2004). In addition, he has been a member of the organizing committees of numerous international population conferences.

Also in the field of sociology Tapani Valkonen has been active in promoting international cooperation. Together with Krzysztof Ostrowski, he edited the seminar publication *Social structure and change in Finland and Poland: Comparative perspective* (1978). Valkonen was editor-in-chief of the Finnish *Sosiologia* journal in 1980–81.

Valkonen acted as the department head of Helsinki University's Department of Sociology in 1978–90 and 1998–2000. He was Vice Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences in 1984–87, and Dean in 1987–90. Valkonen has been a member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters since 1991. In addition, he has headed the Population Research Unit formed by demographers at the university's Department of Sociology.

Family and personal portrait

The father of Tapani Valkonen, church dean Arvi Valkonen, had an unusual combination of occupations: minister and concert pianist. The family hailed from the part of Karelia that was ceded to the Soviet Union following the Winter War (1939–40). Arvi and Irma Valkonen had seven children. Their fifth child, the son who was born in Loimaa (in Southwestern Finland) on the evacuation trail, was baptized as Yrjö Tapani, but was called Tapani, in accordance with his birth on Boxing Day ('Tapaninpäivä' in Finnish).

Tapani Valkonen married Anne Pöllä, M.A., in 1962. They have three children: Sami was born in 1962, Nina in 1969 and Tatu in 1970.

Tapani Valkonen is known as a very welcoming host and an excellent chef, with a specialty in mushroom dishes. Tracking down mushrooms is even closer to his heart than playing golf. His refined musical tastes are perhaps a heritage from his father.

Altti Majava

Docent

Honorary Chairman of The Finnish Demographic Society