

Obituary of Olav Eikeland

Hans Christian Garmann Johnsen and Richard Ennals

It is with great sadness that we received the news that Olav Eikeland, colleague, working life researcher, philosopher and professor, has passed away. He would soon have turned 68. Olav was born on 10 October 1955, died on Friday 1 September 2023. He lived all his life in Oslo, but his interest and influence went far beyond the city limits. With him Norway have lost one of its most knowledgeable and reflective social scientists.

Olav was educated in philosophy and sociology, and was employed at the Work Research Institute (AFI) from 1985 to 2008, as a researcher and later head of research. In 1993 he became Dr. philos. in Philosophy at the University of Oslo, with the thesis “Experience, Dialogics and Politics: a conceptual historical and philosophical contribution to the reconstruction of empirical social science”. The work was inspired by the philosophy of Aristotle.

In 2008, he became a Professor at the then Akershus University College. At the time of his death, he was Professor of Pedagogy and Work Research at OsloMet. There he was connected to the Faculty of Teacher Education and International Studies, Department of Vocational Teacher Education. In that capacity, he was, among other things, involved in what the university describe as “the development of organizational theoretical, didactic models for co-operation between educational institutions and fields of practice”. He was also a Visiting Professor for periods and giving lectures at other institutions, among others, NTNU and Aalborg University, as well as Sabanci University in Istanbul.

Olav’s academic focus, even early on when he worked at AFI, implied a deep involvement in the relationship between theory and practice. This brought him to his engagement with Aristotle. His book “The Ways of Aristotle” from 2008 was a further development of his PhD work. Richard Ennals often used the phrase “Olav and his friend Aristotle”. In fact, one could say that the relationship developed into a real friendship. Olav dwelled into *Corpus Aristotelicum*. He learned Old Greek in order to get closer to Aristotle, but more importantly, as a friend, Olav tried to see through the more superficially, predictable and stereotypical view of Aristotle, looking beyond Aristotle’s mistakes and ignoring the mistaken ways in which Aristotle has been misunderstood, in order to get closer to what Aristotle wanted to say.

His latest book “På sporet av en syvende forfatning: Aristoteles og den norske samarbeidsmodellen – makt, dialog og organisasjonslæring” (On the trail of a seventh constitution; Aristotle and the Norwegian collaborative model – power, dialogue and organizational learning) was published in Norwegian in 2022 and summarised to a large extent the way Olav thought that Aristotle can still inspire us.

Olav was determined to reduce the gap between theory and practice. At the same time, Olav was uncompromising when it came to scientific quality. He wanted to overcome superficiality and the simple, partially misunderstood, use of concepts and theories. That led him into some dilemmas. Even though he wanted to have a dialogue with praxis, his approach became something that had to be expressed thoroughly. So, his latest book, where he expresses these thoughts, is, unsurprisingly, more than 500 closely spaced pages in length!

The problem is not that little happens in our everyday conversation with our fellow citizen, the problem is that too much happens in our everyday conversation with our fellow citizen, too much that we tend to ignore, and that Olav made us aware of. Furthermore, what goes on is essential for the further development of society.

Olav leaves a void for all who were close to him. He also leaves behind an insight and understanding of the basic social and knowledge conditions for our modern life in his books and articles. *Έργο του Eikeland* will be a rich reservoir of thinking and reflections that will inspire future generations of scholars and practitioners.