

Editorial note

Why does Finnish Social Research need an International Journal?

In recent years, many well-known scholars have argued that social science has mowed away from the basics of empirical science and lost its power to answer relevant societal questions. For example, John H. Goldthorpe and Gøsta Esping-Andersen have presented that empirical research has lost its role as the core social scientific practice. This is because the primary interest of contemporary academic discussions appears to focus around theoretical and conceptual issues rather than the study of actual social phenomena. Regarding this, one may even consider that contemporary social sciences favour the kind of social theorising that cannot be tested empirically.

The existing content analyses conducted on research literature seem to support these arguments. In the early 2000s Geoff Payne, Malcolm Williams and their colleagues published several evaluations of output from British sociologists, which indicated that particularly quantitative studies have become less and less frequent both as journal publications and conference presentations. While their concern was most specifically a sociological concern, it was suggested that it extended to most other social science disciplines, with the exception of economics.

While this trend is by no means international, the status of empirical research is particularly problematic in Finland. Jani Erola, Pekka Räsänen and Juho Härkönen have noticed in their recent analyses that the Finnish mainstream social science journals have published mainly theoretical articles during the last decades. Particularly sociological research appears to have a bias against empirically based articles, although the output of qualitative methods has increased considerably in many journals. In our opinion, these observations call for attention to the existing social science practices. Perhaps the power of empirical evidence should be acknowledged more clearly in the current discussions?

On the other hand, research conducted in a small country like Finland may also be neglected because of its marginal global impact – due to the small population of the country alone. It is often the case that small countries cannot provide examples of certain interesting questions to international audiences, at least not simultaneously. For example, in the 1980s when Sweden ‘monopolised’ the welfare state discussions by being the standard example of Nordic countries, the role of Finland and other Scandinavian countries remained often less important.

However, from a broader point of view, Finland can be regarded as a very interesting case both in European as well as in global context. This is because it stands for the prime example for the competitiveness combined with the relatively high levels of social security and equality as well as in terms of efficient educational system. Beside these issues, Finland has often been characterised as one of the leading information societies in the world. In

this sense the question ‘Why Finland?’ may also be changed into the question of ‘Why not Finland?’

We believe that our researchers possess the ability to produce high-quality empirical research that meets any of the international standards. This is one of the main reasons why this journal has been established. The journal is published by the by the Social and Economic Research Association of the Turku Universities and it is targeted at multidisciplinary social scientific audiences. The publisher is an academic origination that aims at bringing together scholars from three local Universities, and across discipline boundaries; from economics, history and social sciences. The journal shares this aim: its purpose is to establish a discussion forum for researchers across the conventional disciplines and academic boundaries.

Naturally, there are already Finnish journals targeted specifically to certain areas of social sciences, such as cultural studies, demographics and economics. The approach adopted in this journal is ‘cross-social scientific’, which means that it is somewhat broader when compared with many existing journals. We do not aim only at wider audiences, but also at providing a better understanding of the explanatory mechanisms shared in social sciences despite the differences within the particular subfields or theoretical orientations.

The articles available to you in this journal deal with a variety of important topics. The first article by Juho Härkönen deals with the obesity gap in female unemployment in Finland. This article focuses on the link between obesity and female unemployment. The second article by Jukka Savolainen examines the family structure as a risk and a protective factor for adolescent victimization. He addresses the empirical implications of prior theories of the stepfamily effect. Riie Heikkilä and Nina Kahma have written the third article of this journal. They investigate the socially constructed concepts of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ taste between the Finnish- and Swedish-speakers.

The following article, written by Antti Honkanen and Pekka Mustonen, pays attention to tourism consumption in contemporary Finland. Their article examines the patterns of consumption on one hand, from postmodern theories point of view and on the other hand, from the point of view of socio-demographic determinants. Finally, there is Jan-Otto Andersson’s discussion article, which deals with the myths and facts behind the Finnish success story. This article compares various indicators concerning the socio-economic competence of Finnish society.

This first issue of *Research on Finnish Society* shows that there is a considerable amount of interesting research conducted in this country. The journal wishes to distribute cross-national or longitudinal research papers that have a Finnish orientation. Perhaps the articles selected to this volume encourage you to share your own research results in the future issues of the journal?

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