

Editorial note: Social Sciences and the Current Economic Downturn

In 2009, the global monetary system experienced the worst collapse since the 1930s. The efforts to minimise the effects of the economic upheaval began shortly after the first signs for the recession were shown. Just like in the thirties, the process involved political interventions based on suggestions for solutions from the business community and economists. However, although the recession became a global phenomenon, the situation is now quite different from earlier downturns.

In particular, when compared to the “Great Depression” of the thirties, global economies evolve at a different pace. Due to the development of modern information and communication technologies, the crisis grew rapidly. However, for the same reason, the interventions also affected markets equally fast. Also, in contrast to the thirties, as well as the later smaller scale economic crises, it was clearly acknowledged that the national fiscal policies alone were unable to respond to the crises; the solutions worked only because they were implemented globally. What we mean here by globally is that there are no longer national economic policies that can even pretend to work only on the basis of national interest alone.

We all know that the social sciences were established as a distinct academic discipline around the same time as the modern nation states. All the classic thinkers, from *Émile Durkheim* and *Karl Marx* to *Georg Simmel*, witnessed the social consequences of early industrialization and made the process visible in their theories. Remembering this, it is not surprising why social sciences have always stressed the role of state authorities and public opinion when dealing with the actual results of research.

It is obvious that the nation states played an important role in the early 1990s when the last recession was experienced in Finland. This economic downturn, which was considered worse than any since the early thirties, was studied in a huge research program funded by the Academy of Finland. A collaborative project between economists and other social scientists included all the extremes of the different styles of social sciences. The findings of the program were reported in 2001 in “Down from the heavens, up from the ashes”, edited by *Jorma Kalela*, *Jaakko Kiander*, *Ullamaija Kivikuru*, *Heikki A. Loikkanen* and *Jussi Simpura*. This final report included econometric equations as well as thematic interviews and newspaper content analyses.

All in all, the entire project was considered a success. Given this, it is surprising that Finnish academia has

not responded much to the current recession. Naturally, economists working at the research institutes have been interviewed on the television and in printed news media. Additionally, some Economic Professors have been asked about the effects of, and remedies for, the current slump. However, there has been a minimal input to the current discussion from sociologists, social policy researchers and other social scientists.

The question is should we, as social scientists, be worried about this lack of input to the public debate? It might be assumed that our ability to give answers to questions about new social problems is already too limited. Naturally, saying this would be close to acknowledging that most social scientific research does not deal with relevant issues. Another option would be to claim that our answers are something else than what the politicians and the general public wants. Choosing this “professional route” would be arguing that we can understand what is going on, but there is no need for explaining everything to laymen.

We may continue to wonder which of these should be considered as the worst case scenario for social scientists. At the same time, however, we also need to do something to deal with the problems. In order to properly understand contemporary society, as well as to provide possible interpretations of it to broader audiences, we need to encourage sensible and empirically-grounded research projects in the social sciences. The current economic downturn and the social problems it brings with it are connected with aging, unemployment and pensions, poverty, educational expansion, European identity, and technological change. These topics are not really new issues for social sciences and have all been the subject of numerous studies in recent decades.

This issue of Research on Finnish Society (RFS) consists of four interesting research articles dealing with important topics. The first article, by Elias Oikarinen, examines the land value component of housing in the Helsinki area in the early 2000s. The results of this econometric analysis have clear implications for municipal policy makers and other decision makers in Finland. The second article focuses on the two notorious school shootings in Finland. This article is written by Atte Oksanen, Pekka Räsänen, Johanna Nurmi and Kauri Lindström and it offers a community perspective on these tragic incidents.

The third article, by Armi Hartikainen, Timo Anttila, Tomi Oinas and Jouko Nätti, compared job quality indicators between Finland, Scandinavia and other European

countries. The findings of their analysis contradict some of the well-documented findings in existing literature. The issue concludes with a study of life satisfaction with the time devoted to work and leisure in Nordic countries. The article, written by Minna Ylikännö, is based on the latest European Social Survey data set and it offers profound discussion on various difficulties related to combining work and family life.

We would like to wish a warm summer to all our readers. Please keep on submitting your quality research papers to our journal!

Jani Erola and Pekka Räsänen

Editors