

Finland from inside and out

Promoting sustainable development has become an inseparable part of research. Nowadays, both universities and funders expect researchers to be committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. For example, the Academy of Finland expects researchers applying for funding to name one or several of the 17 goals the proposed project will contribute to. Applying this perspective to this year's volume of the Finnish Journal of Social Research reveals that this kind of multi-disciplinary journal in social sciences can promote a wide range of sustainable objectives. The contribution of disciplines under social sciences have often been dismissed, given that the general discussion on sustainability most often revolves around ecological sustainability. By covering such themes as health care systems, metagovernance, corruption and the education system, the articles in this volume not only contribute to such goals typical in social sciences as 'no poverty' (UN goal 1), 'good health and wellbeing' (UN goal 3) and 'reduced inequalities' (UN goal 10), but also to 'quality education' (UN goal 4) and 'peace, justice and strong institutions' (UN goal 16) (UNDP, 2021).

In addition, all of the articles take a comparative perspective to Finland. This type of perspective has been typical of articles published in *Research on Finnish Society*, and this tradition now continues in the *Finnish Journal of Social Research*. This year's volume also brings together several topics and societal areas central to Finnish society (education, health care system, corruption and governance) which can, however, be inspected in a new light if one knows how to do so, as shown by the articles in this volume.

The Finnish education system has received a great deal of positive attention over the past decades due to two features that have been highlighted by the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) run by the OECD. These two are the high mean levels of students' skills and overall low inequality therein. However, more recently the situation has changed and neither of these two are necessarily the case any more. So can Finland remain an example for other countries and in what ways?

Ratih Adiputri discusses the Finnish education system from an Indonesian perspective, drawing on her experience and expertise as an Indonesian scholar who has been living in Finland for over 10 years and is in the process of writing her second book on Finnish education. Adiputri highlights how the Finnish education system not only stresses flexibility, a broad understanding of knowledge and trust in teachers' professionalism, but also celebrates diversity, democracy and equity. She identifies a focus on general life skills, and—compared to Indonesia—a healthy balance between life and study, which is also evident in the way PISA tests are handled at Finnish schools. Instead of sweating too much about the PISA, Finnish students take the PISA exams without special preparation in advance, much like a usual school class test.

Another feature that Finland is known for is low levels of corruption. However, top spots in international rankings of lowest corruption levels may not guarantee the nonexistence of corruption problems, as it has been argued corruption may take more indiscreet forms than what traditional measurements of corruption levels can capture. Catharina Groop analyses conflicting discourses on the meaning of corruption and its prevalence in Finland, focusing on commentaries on the draft for the new Finnish anti-corruption strategy. Discourses in favour of adopting a wider definition of corruption and those that see corruption as

Kilpi-Jakonen, Kukkonen & Sarpila (University of Turku). Corresponding author's e-mail: finnresearch@utu.fi. © Author(s) 2021. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0). ISSN 2736-9749 (print), 2490-0958 (electronic).

widespread tend to perceive corruption as deeply entrenched in the structures of Finnish society. Instead, actors who question a wider definition of corruption and downplay its prevalence in Finland often draw on national discourses that highlight Finland as a beacon of openness, trust and good governance.

In terms of health care, Moolla, Hiilamo and Kouvo examine classifications of health care systems based on a number of different dimensions. Although their article doesn't focus on Finland as such, their results suggest that in terms of outcomes, Finland is classified together with countries that have the best health outcomes measured by maternal mortality, cancer death rates, measles-vaccine coverage, and life expectancy as well as gender inequality in life expectancy. In terms of access to care and the organization of health services, Finland is classified together with countries that have relatively high levels of gatekeeping (i.e. need for referrals and/or additional payments to access specialist health care), a high number of doctors but low number of hospital beds, average levels of coverage for essential health services, and where primary health services are mainly organized in the public sector or in both the public and private sectors. Finally in terms of financing, Finland is classified together with countries with high levels of expenditure on health care, and which is to a large extent financed by the government rather than privately.

Finland has been affected by COVID-19 to a much lesser extent than many other countries. It is difficult to disentangle all the factors that are behind this. To be sure, Finland has benefited from a slightly secluded location and lower population density. This has meant that Finland has been able to make decisions based on how the situation has unfolded in other countries. It is also possible that Finland has benefited from the comparatively high levels of trust in other people and in institutions that exist in Finland (Kouvo, 2011). These are likely to lead to high rates of compliance with recommendations and to a willingness to take necessary precautions to protect others.

Might governance play a role in Finland's somewhat successful handling of the COVID situation, maybe even so-called metagovernance? Sundqvist compares metagovernance in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden. Although the article does not analyse metagovernance under the COVID situation per se, it suggests that metagovernance is faced with different challenges in Finland and Denmark compared to Sweden. Regional councils have minimal formal power in Finland compared to Sweden in particular, making it difficult for the representatives of the councils to metagovern regional development. The article shows that institutional differences even between the three Nordic countries affect the possibilities to exercise metagovernance.

This is the first issue of *Finnish Journal of Social Research*, the journal which was formerly called *Research on Finnish Society*. In addition to the name, we also have a new "look" in terms of our front cover and with a shift to a new website, including the manuscript submission system. All our articles also now have permanent digital object identifiers (DOI). The scope of the journal remains the same though, but with the new name we want to highlight that we welcome research that doesn't just concern Finland.

The year 2021 has been difficult. The challenges academics have faced both in their personal and professional lives during the pandemic, has put a great strain on the whole academic publishing system. Therefore, we would like to express our gratitude to both authors and reviewers of this volume. To you and our readers, we would like to wish you a very happy and healthy year 2022.

Elina Kilpi-Jakonen, Iida Kukkonen & Outi Sarpila

References

- Kouvo, A. (2011). The sources of generalized trust and institutional confidence in Europe. *Research on Finnish Society*, 4(1), 29–40.
- UNDP. (2021). *The STGS in action*. United Nations Development Programme. Retrieved December 20, 2021, from <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>