

Yhteiskuntaoppi

Social studies in Finland. A country report

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- Social studies has recently got the status of independent school subject in Finland, and it has also got more teaching resources which suggests decision-makers consider it important.
- Social studies does not have a clear epistemological homebase, like school subjects history or physics, for example, which poses challenges when defining what academic studies are the most pertinent to a social studies teacher.
- The promises and challenges of social studies as a school subject crystallize in primary school social studies that was introduced in 2016.

Purpose: This country report aims to provide a view of the current state and recent developments of the school subject social studies in Finland.

Approach: This report draws from research in social studies education that has been done in Finland in the last 20 years, and it also presents selected highlights from the national core curricula and the matriculation exam.

Findings: Social studies has recently got the status of independent school subject and it has got more teaching resources which suggests decision-makers consider it important. It does not have a clear epistemological homebase, as school subjects like history or physics, for example, which poses challenges when defining what kind of academic studies are the most pertinent to a social studies teacher, for example

1 INTRODUCTION: RISING TIDE FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

In Finnish schools the subject where questions of citizenship, society, politics, economy and law are addressed, is social studies. The name of the subject – in Finnish, yhteiskuntaoppi ('study of society'), and in Swedish, samhällslära ('study of society') – is the same in all school grades, from primary school to lower and upper secondary school. Although social studies classes are the foremost context of civic and citizenship education at school, civic skills are taught also in other subjects, like maantieto (geography) and kotitalous (home economics), and learnt in the activities of student councils. (Mehtäläinen et al., 2017, p. 12–17, 67–78.)

In Finland primary school are grades 1–6, and lower secondary school grades 7–9. Upper secondary school is years I–III, but the student may extend his/her studies one more year. Opetushallitus (The National Agency of Education) has recommended that in primary school social studies should be taught in grade 4 where pupils are 10–11 years old, but the education

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providers – usually they are municipalities – may also decide to place social studies classes in any of the grades 4–6. In lower secondary school social studies is usually taught in grade 9, but the education providers may also decide to place social studies classes in any of the grades 7–9. In upper secondary school, students can design their study plan by themselves. In social studies, learning new knowledge and new skills is not cumulative to the same degree it is in mathematics or in foreign languages where some courses need to be taken in a particular order. In social studies students may freely choose in what order, and when, they take the obligatory and – in case they take any – optional social studies courses. However, the school-specific study program may guide students to take social studies courses in a particular order or at a certain point in their studies.

For closer information on the Finnish educational system, see the homepage of The National Agency of Education, <https://www.oph.fi/english>

Social studies subject matter was introduced in Finnish schools in the early 20th century. It was part of the history syllabus, and it was not until in 1963 that social studies was for the first time mentioned as a distinct entity in the national core curriculum (Arola, 2001). Also then it remained part of a dual subject, called *historia ja yhteiskuntaoppi* ('history and social studies'). Qualification to teach social studies could only be obtained in connection with a history teacher's qualification, and social studies was history teacher's 'second' subject. The dual subject was divided into two in the early years of the 2000's. Qualification to teach social studies can now be combined with qualification to teach any other subject, not only history, and social studies can also be the teacher's 'first' teaching subject. Social studies and history still remain closely connected, however: they are often taught by the same teacher, and the pedagogical association continues to bear the name, The Association for Teachers of History and Social Studies in Finland.

in Finnish, *Historian ja yhteiskuntaopin opettajien liitto HYOL ry*; in Swedish, *Förbundet för lärarna i historia och samhällslära FLHS rf*; for closer information on the association, see www.hyol.fi

Teaching hours in social studies have more than doubled in basic education and in upper secondary school in the last 20 years. Currently social studies is taught in primary school approximately 76 classes, and in lower secondary school approximately 114 classes (a class is here 45 minutes). In upper secondary school the current number of obligatory social studies classes is 114 classes (45 minutes). In upper secondary school the social studies syllabus is organised in clearly defined courses, each of them 38 classes (45 minutes), whereas in primary and in lower secondary school the classes are scheduled more flexibly. In principle they could be scheduled so that the student has one social studies class per week every year in the grades 5–9, but in reality the number of classes per week varies between the grades and within the academic year. Thus periods of more intensive studying of social studies mix with periods with no social studies classes at all. It may be added that all the more often a lecture, or a class, is 75 and not 45 minutes long, and accordingly the number of social studies classes is lower than above.

Since 2016 social studies is taught also in primary school. Still in the early 2000's teaching hours in civic education in primary education were few in Finland, compared with the other OECD countries (Berg & Löfström, 2011, p. 79). That social studies teaching has got more resources can be seen as a reflection of the decision-makers' concern that Finnish young people may not have interest in participation in civic life or adequate skills to manage their private economy (Löfström et al., 2017, p. 83–84). In a number of state-initiated projects on civic education at school and in teacher education in the last 20 years it has been emphasised that social studies teaching should encourage students' participation and democratic citizenship (Demokratiakasvatusselvitys, 2011; Hansén & Rantala 2009; Rautiainen et al., 2014). In accordance with this, the social studies curricula and pedagogy have developed in a more dynamic direction, as is explained in the following. In vocational education, however, social studies remains in a marginal position which is a problem, considering that half of every age cohort goes to vocational education. The students in vocational education also judge that they obtain less experience of learning skills of civic participation at school, compared to students in upper secondary school (Tenojoki et al., 2017).

2 AIMING AT STUDENT'S CRITICAL CIVIC AWARENESS

Social studies was traditionally geared towards transmitting to students factual knowledge about the structure and political and economic institutions of Finnish society. There was little emphasis on developing student's skills in critical analysis and judgment of societal, political or economic issues (Löfström, 2002). In the last 20 years, however, learning objectives connecting with political and economic literacy have got more attention in the curricula. This is visible when comparing, for example, the objectives in the course Economics, in the core curricula for upper secondary schools in 2003 and 2015. The two curricula describe the objectives as follows:

National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools, 2003 (p. 189):

- 'The objectives of the [Economics] course are for students to
- acquaint themselves with the most important foundations, concepts and theories of the national economy;
- acquaint themselves with the current state and future prospects of the Finnish and international economies;
- obtain skills to make everyday economic decisions and also examine economic issues from an ethical point of view;
- be aware of the significance of work and entrepreneurship to the national economy.'

National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools, 2015 (p. 188):

'The objective of the [Economics] course is that the student

- is able to make economic decisions, manage his or her personal finances, and consider economic questions also from an ethical viewpoint with understanding of how Finland is connected to the global economy
- understands the significance of work and entrepreneurship in the economy and society
- is familiar with the basics and key concepts and theories of the national economy as well as understands the structures and operating principles of economic life
- is able to evaluate critically the arguments presented in a discussion on economics
- is able to examine different alternatives for economic policy solutions and to analyse their backgrounds and impacts.'

Learning objectives that focus on more advanced cognitive operations, 'evaluating' and 'analysing', are explicitly mentioned in the core curriculum in 2015, unlike in 2003. The last two bullets in the 2015 core curriculum also highlight that claims regarding economics and economic policy are open to critical scrutiny and they are questions where different groups in society may have different, and also opposing interests. They draw attention to that students should be acquainted with the basic principles of producing and evaluating social scientific knowledge. These points may have been raised in social studies classes also before, but it is noteworthy that they have now been introduced in the formal curriculum text. They are also included in the newest core curriculum for upper secondary schools, released in November 2019 (National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools, 2019, p. 294).

That social studies learning objectives have become more ambitious in terms of cognitive operations that they involve, is visible also in the social studies exams in the matriculation examination, at the end of upper secondary school. Social studies is one of the exams in the humanities and natural sciences subjects that can be taken in the matriculation exam. Separate exams in the humanities and natural sciences subjects were introduced in 2006, the new system replacing the old 'realia' exam where the humanities and natural sciences subjects were all included in one single exam. After the reform, the social studies exam has become one of the most popular exams in humanities and natural sciences subjects (https://www.ylioppilastutkinto.fi/ext/stat/FS2019A2010_T2010.pdf; Kupiainen et al., 2018, p. 49–50). Explanations for its popularity may be complex and difficult to confirm. In this context it is important to note that

cognitively more demanding questions have got a more prominent place in the exam where, after the 2006 reform, the number of questions a student may answer in the six-hour long exam has been first six and is currently five. An example of the kind of questions where the student is asked to analyse and evaluate is the following, in the social studies matriculation exam, in autumn 2018 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Question number 10, in the social studies exam in autumn 2018 (original format)

9. Eduskuntapuolueiden ääniosuus vuoden 2015 eduskuntavaaleissa vaalipiireittäin (30 p.)

Taulukossa (aineisto 9.A) on suurimpien eduskuntapuolueiden ääniosuus prosentteina eräissä vaalipiireissä vuoden 2015 eduskuntavaaleissa.

9.A Taulukko: Puolueiden kannatus eduskuntavaaleissa vuonna 2015

	Kes- kusta	Perus- suomalaiset	Kokoo- mus	Sosiaali- demokraatit	Vasem- mistoliitto	Vihreä liitto	Ruotsalainen kansanpuolue	Kristillis- demokraatit
Helsinki	7,2	11,3	26,0	15,5	9,8	18,8	6,8	1,8
Uusimaa	11,5	18,0	24,0	16,6	4,4	10,0	10,2	2,6
Sata- kunta	20,6	25,0	15,0	22,6	9,6	2,7	0,3	2,9
Häme	17,8	19,5	21,5	22,1	6,0	5,1	-	6,1
Savo- Karjala	32,5	19,7	11,5	16,0	5,9	6,7	-	6,3
Vaasa	27,4	15,9	11,9	11,8	2,9	2,5	20,7	5,7
Oulu	42,7	16,2	10,9	9,0	11,8	6,2	0,6	1,1
Lappi	42,9	16,5	10,1	10,8	13,7	2,6	0,5	1,1

Lähde: Tilastokeskus: vaalitulostot 2015. www.tilastokeskus.fi. Viitattu 19.4.2016. Muokkaus: YTL.

9.1 Miten Vasemmistoliiton ja Vihreän liiton kannatus vaihteli vaalipiireittäin (aineisto 9.A)? (4 p.)

9.2 Vertaile eri vaalipiirien vaalitulosten olennaisia piirteitä (aineisto 9.A). (8 p.)

9.3 Pohdi syitä puolueiden vaalimenestyksen alueellisiin eroihin vuoden 2015 vaaleissa. (10 p.)

9.4 Esitä perusteltu arvio väitteestä, että Suomi on jakautunut puoluepoliittisesti kahtia. (8 p.)

The material given in the question is a table, showing the percentage of votes that the major political parties got in each electoral district in the parliamentary elections in Finland, in 2015. There were four parts in the question, following the principle that they are more extensive or cognitively more demanding towards the end:

9.1. How did support for two of the parties, Vasemmistoliitto (in English, 'Left Alliance') and Vihreä liitto (in English, 'The Greens'), vary between the electoral districts? (max. 4 points)

9.2. Compare the different electoral districts for their essential features regarding the result in the elections. (max. 8 points)

9.3. Discuss (in this context equal with 'analyse') causes to the regional differences in the political parties' support in the elections, in 2015. (max. 10 points)

9.4. Make a well-weighted assessment of the claim that Finland is divided in two, in terms of support to political parties. (max. 8 points)

Questions where student's economic or political literacy is assessed have become all the more common in the social studies exams in the 2010's. Also questions where students are asked to create or design something, using the data provided in the question, like a municipal strategic development plan based on authentic demographic and economic data, nowadays feature in the exam whereas in the 2000's they did not (see, Ahvenisto et al., 2013). More often than before students are also asked to analyse and

discuss topical and controversial issues, and in these questions they may also make use of knowledge they have obtained from following of the media, as in question 9.4. above.

The aforementioned development is also reflected in social studies textbooks. Social studies textbooks have traditionally been written so that they transmit a lot of factual and conceptual knowledge, but exercises in analysing written, visual or numerical material and controversial political and economic issues have become more frequent in textbooks. School textbooks in Finland are produced by commercial publishers – the most important in the field are Otava, SanomaPro, Edukustannus, and Edita, for textbooks in Finnish, and Schildts & Söderströms, for textbooks in Swedish. Since 1992, textbooks do not need official approval by educational authorities. Authors are mostly experienced teachers or researchers. Finnish teachers have a lot of freedom in planning and implementing their teaching and assessing learning outcomes, but they commonly use textbooks, and these may easily become the syllabus, especially in primary school (Heinonen, 2005).

Introducing social studies in primary school resulted in new learning materials and textbooks, the picture showing two of them: Bruun, J., Hieta, P., Kokkonen, O. Laurila, M. & Mälkönen, S. (2017), *Vaikuttaja I* (in English, 'Influence-maker, I', SanomaPro), and Van den Berg, M, Palmqvist, R. & Rantala, J. (2017), *Me nyt I* (in English, 'We now, I', Edukustannus, 2017).

Picture 1:



3 NOVELTIES IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES SYLLABUS IN BASIC EDUCATION

In primary school social studies teaching the emphasis is on developing pupils' participatory skills, democratic orientation and understanding of principles of managing one's own private economy. In lower secondary school these skills are developed further, and the political, economic and legal system in Finland and the demographical aspects of the Finnish society are studied more closely. Also topics like welfare services system, the media, and security politics are addressed.

The national core curricula and their local versions at the municipal and school level allow Finnish teachers a wide space to decide on the course content and pedagogical solutions, in basic education especially. For example, the 2014 social studies core curriculum in basic education prescribes the content of social studies in grades 7–9 with few general headings (C1–4) and brief descriptions as to what kind of perspectives and questions should be raised under those headings (National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2014, p. 451):

'C1 Daily life and personal life-management:

- The pupils familiarize themselves with the responsibilities, obligations, rights of the individual and the management of personal life and finances. The pupils learn about different opportunities for planning their future by familiarizing themselves with working life and industries. The promotion of the well-being and security of the pupils and their communities, such as families, is discussed.

C2 Democratic society:

- The pupils explore the principles and practices of the society and the constitutional state. They become familiarized with human rights and international conventions related to them. Social structures and exercise of authority are included in the contents of the instruction. The pupils also examine how opinions are channeled into actions and decision-making by the individual, organisations, the media, and public authority in Finland and internationally.

C3: Active citizenship and involvement:

- The pupils familiarize themselves with different channels and means of involvement. The development of skills needed in civic involvement, working life and economic activity is supported by providing the pupils with authentic opportunities for active, responsible, and constructive cooperation and involvement both in the daily school life and with actors outside of school.

C4 Economic activity:

- The pupils familiarize themselves with the basic concepts, phenomena, and key actors of the economy and also examine the economy from the viewpoints of sustainable development and different economic actors. They also become acquainted with economic and welfare issues, for example through work, professions, and entrepreneurship. Local and global viewpoints are taken into account in the examination of economic phenomena.'

In the heyday of de-regulation in the 1990's the prescriptions in the core curricula were even more sparse, but also in the 2000's and 2010's the policy has been that the core curricula do not regulate contents very much but they rather describe the learning objectives and criteria for assessment more closely. For example, in the 2014 social studies core curriculum in basic education there are nine objectives in grades 4–6 and nine in grades 7–9. Below is part of the table of objectives for grades 4–6 (Table 1). The objectives are named objectives of teacher's instruction, but they actually are objectives of students' learning.

Table 1: Learning objectives in social studies, grades 4–6 (National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2014, p. 279)

OBJECTIVES OF INSTRUCTION
Significance, values, and attitudes
O1 to guide the pupil to become interested in the surrounding society and social studies as a field of knowledge
O2 to support the pupil in practising his or her ethical evaluation skills related to different human, societal, and economic questions
Adopting knowledge and skills needed in the society and societal understanding
O3 to guide the pupil to become aware of himself or herself as an individual and a member of different communities, to understand the importance of human rights and equality, and to perceive the judicial principles of society
O4 to guide the pupil to reflect on the role and significance of the media in his or her everyday life and in the society
O5 to guide the pupil to perceive the importance of working and entrepreneurship in his or her local community
O6 to support the pupil in understanding that the societal information produced by different actors is affected by different values, perspectives, and motives
Using and applying societal knowledge
O7 to encourage the pupil to practice the basic skills of democratic involvement and to discuss different views constructively
O8 to support the pupil in understanding the basics of managing his or her personal finances and consumer choices as well as in practising the related skills
O9 to encourage the pupil to participate in the activities of different communities and to practice using the media safely and with social awareness

In the core curriculum this table is followed by another where it is described what the criteria for assessment are like and what performance is expected of a student at the level 'Good', at the end of grade 6 and at the end of basic education. For example, in Table 2 are the criteria for learning objectives O3 and O4 in grades 4–6, in the core curriculum in 2014. The column in the right describes what a student should achieve in order to reach the level 'Good'.

Table 2: Learning objectives O3 and O4 in social studies in grades 4–6 in basic education, and their criteria for assessment (National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2014, p. 281)

Objectives of instruction	Criteria for assessment
O3 to guide the pupil to become aware of himself or herself as an individual and a member of different communities, to understand the importance of human rights and equality, and to perceive the judicial principles of society	The pupil is able to explain the significance of common rules and act in accordance with them. The pupil is able to argue why human rights are important and explain what the judicial system is needed for.
O4 to guide the pupil to reflect on the role and significance of the media in his or her everyday life and in the society	The pupil is able to describe what the significance of the media is in his or her life and how different media can be used as tools for involvement

The criteria for assessment are currently (2019) being revised so that they describe student's performance also at the levels passable, satisfactory, and very good. Research has shown that teachers in different schools have different standards, when assessing student's performance (Ouakrim-Soivio & Kuusela, 2012). This is a problem because students apply to vocational and upper secondary school on the basis of the grades in their school diploma. In the National Agency of Education it has been considered that the most sustainable strategy towards solving this problem is to refine the criteria for assessment and educate teachers in using them, rather than go for test-like solutions where narrow

factual and conceptual knowledge is measured. It is considered that this strategy can better help improve the reliability of assessment without jeopardizing its validity.

4 SOCIAL STUDIES SYLLABUS IN UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL

In upper secondary school society, politics and economy are studied in a more system-orientated way than in basic education. In upper secondary school there are currently three obligatory courses in social studies, 38 classes (45 minutes) each. One course focuses on Finnish society and its political system, one on economy, and one on international politics. There is also an optional course that all upper secondary schools are obliged to offer, and it focuses on everyday legal issues, for example in matters relating to consumer protection, employment and housing. Like in basic education, there can be also school-specific optional courses, like entrepreneurial education.

The social studies core curriculum for upper secondary schools is more detailed in its description of the content than the core curriculum for basic education. For example, below is the core content of the course Economics, in the new National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools, 2019 (p. 294, unofficial translation by the author):

'National economy and its actors

- basic economic concepts and the nature and formation of knowledge about economy
- the circular flow of economy and the interaction between households, enterprises, and the national economy
- management of personal finances: saving, consumption and debt

The market, economic trends, and economic life

- free competition and pricing in the market
- work, entrepreneurship and enterprises

Finland as part of global economy

- financial market, saving, investment, and risk management
- economic disturbance, economic cycles, their background and consequences

Economic policy

- the basis, benefits and problems of economic growth
- public finances and balance in it
- the actors, means and challenges of economic policy.

To give another example, the core content of the obligatory course, Finland, Europe, and the Changing World, in the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools, 2019 (p. 295, unofficial translation by the author), is following:

'Global challenges, globalisation and networks

- environment, climate change, population and sustainable future
- actors and possibilities in international cooperation
- Finland and the Nordic countries as part of the global networks
- citizenship and participation in Europe and globally

Being a European and the European integration

- European identity, values and the diversity of societies
- Finland as part of decision-making in the EU
- the EU economic and regional policy
- the EU as a global actor

Security in the changing environment

- local and national security
- security policy of Finland and the EU
- changing security threats and possibilities to tackle them'.

In the last 20 years, the description of the contents of the social studies courses in the core curriculum has become gradually less detailed, also when it remains detailed in comparison to the core curriculum for basic education. The justification behind this development is that it is considered important, to give teachers the message that more emphasis should be placed on teaching skills, rather than only factual and conceptual knowledge. Skills are traditionally mentioned in the learning objectives, and these have gradually become more ambitious, as was seen in the example in section 2, in this article.

Unlike in the core curriculum for basic education, in the core curriculum for upper secondary schools there has been no explicit criteria for assessment that could highlight the importance of skills as learning objectives. It may have been assumed that upper secondary school teachers self-evidently know to pay attention to skills, but this may not always be the case. Matriculation examination may often have served as a reference point for teachers in student assessment in upper secondary schools, but the explicit criteria for assessment that have been used in the matriculation exams have traditionally focused on the factual content in student essays. The exam constructors in the Board of Matriculation Examination have only recently, in 2017, designed matrices for the purpose of making explicit to students, and also to teachers, what qualitative features in the essays are relevant in assessment (the matrix can be accessed in: www.hyol.fi/assets/files/HYOL/Löfström_Svenska.pdf). The teachers make a preliminary assessment of matriculation exam essays at school, and the final assessment is made by censors who are experienced teachers and university teachers and researchers. The exam constructors, censors and teachers in the field have afterwards occasions to discuss exam questions and the assessment of students' essays, and these occasions can be seen as an opportunity to generate a better consensus on the objectives and assessment.

Matriculation examination results in general have importance to student's access to higher education, hence students and their teachers in upper secondary school are usually keen to follow the signals that exam questions give, on what cognitive skills are assessed in exams, and how. Hence exam constructors – university lecturers and professors in history and in social studies education – can wield considerable power in pushing schools to endorse particular interpretations of the core curricula prescriptions. This is the case in social studies especially, because the form of knowledge in social studies is not as clear as in many other subjects, including history. Hence social studies teachers may have felt insecure at what they should teach and assess. This may partly explain why the variation between schools, in how the basic education students' grades and their performance in national assessment coincide, has been bigger than in history, for example (Löfström et al., 2010; Ouakrim-Soivio & Kuusela, 2012).

The principles of constructing the social studies exam are not tied with any particular theory of learning or teaching, but the exam questions, like the example given in section 2, can easily be classified in the categories of the Bloom-Kratwohl-Anderson taxonomy of cognitive skills. The Board of Matriculation Examination presented this taxonomy in the preparatory material to schools before the 2006 exam reform, as an example of classifying different types of exam questions, but it is a technical support in the exam construction, not its mandatory framework (https://www.ylioppilastutkinto.fi/images/sivuston_tiedostot/Sahkoinen_tutkinto/fi_sahkoinen_reaali.pdf).

5 SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS

Social studies teachers in lower and upper secondary schools in Finland are subject teachers who, in most cases, have social studies as their second subject by the side of some other subject(s), usually history. The number of subject teachers with social studies as their first subject is small. Exact figures are not available but in the surveys carried out by the Tilastokeskus (Statistics Finland) among teachers in basic education and in upper secondary schools, it can be seen that for every teacher with social studies

as his/her primary subject there was six teachers with history as their primary subject in 2013, and four teachers with history as their primary subject in 2016 (Kumpulainen, 2014, p. 92, 104; Kumpulainen, 2017, p. 81). This change probably reflects the increased amount of teaching hours that have been given to social studies.

For a subject teacher's qualification is needed a Master's Degree, 60 ECTS points in teachers' pedagogical studies, and 60 or 120 points in substance studies in the subject itself (in lower secondary school 60 points; in upper secondary school 120 points in the first subject and 60 points in other subjects). In most cases a subject teacher in social studies has studied 120 points in history and 60 points in social sciences, but those with social studies as the first subject have studied 120 points in social sciences. Social science faculties at the universities decide on the content of the social scientific studies that are needed for social studies teacher's qualification. There is variation between the universities: in some cases basic studies (c. 25 points) in economy are obligatory and basic studies in sociology or politics are optional. At one university the requirements have included extensive studies in law, which demonstrates the autonomy of the universities to decide on their own requirements. This autonomy can be seen as an advantage, in that in the social studies teachers' community the result may be more variation in teachers' expertise. Subject teachers often have a strong disciplinary orientation, but among social studies teachers it is probably more towards history, their major subject at the university, than social sciences. (Löfström et al. 2017, p. 89–91.) Because of the diversity of the academic disciplinary homebase of the subject, there is less pressure on social studies teachers to stick to a particular structure or content in teaching, compared to the history subject where there is a more established tradition of regarding particular contents and structurations of the content as necessary.

Teachers who teach social studies in primary school are in most cases *luokanopettajia* ('class teachers'), i.e. they are responsible for one school class through primary school, from grade 1 to grade 6, teaching most of the subjects to that class. They have majored in education, and they usually have done a course in social studies didactics. There are also class teachers with social studies subject teacher's qualification, but they are few. As social studies teaching in primary school is very much focused on supporting children's democratic orientation and basic economic literacy, rather than skills of social-scientific analysis, teachers may rely on their general knowledge in societal issues to give the necessary content knowledge. But the entry of social studies in primary school has actualized the question as to what academic studies could best support social studies teachers: should they include the basics in social-scientific disciplines, or cross-disciplinary studies in themes that are relevant to the school social studies curricula? Both options may have their advantages: giving students a solid conceptual tool-box on a disciplinary basis, and providing integrating perspectives on contemporary problems (Löfström, 2002; Löfström, 2014).

Didactics of social studies that teacher students have at the university is very limited. Primary school teacher students may have only some lectures or seminars on the topic, however they may have also lectures and seminars that deal with human rights education and democracy education that are highly relevant, considering the aims of social studies in primary school in particular. Subject teacher students in social studies usually have courses where the didactics of social studies and history are integrated, and the volume of these courses is usually 15–20 ECTS, but the universities are autonomous in designing their curricula, hence the details of the content in these studies can vary. The number of ECTS credits in teachers' pedagogical studies is 60 ECTS, thus subject didactics is one third of the pedagogical studies.

Basic education in Finnish schools is increasingly arranged in units that administratively have primary school and lower secondary school under the same roof, whereas earlier the two were more often both administratively and physically clearly separated from each other. In the new units it is more easily feasible that a social studies subject teacher teaches social studies also in grades 4–6, or a class teacher with qualification in social studies teaches social studies also in grades 7–9.

The Association for Teachers of History and Social Studies in Finland has a two-fold task: it lobbies for the two school subjects and their teachers, and it supports the in-service teachers' pedagogical development, for example by arranging training in collaboration with relevant partners in the academia, politics and economy, supporting the network of local associations, and publishing a quarterly magazine. It is not a labor market organisation.

The Finnish scientific journals in education and pedagogy most relevant to social studies education are *Kasvatus* [Education], *Kasvatus & Aika* [Education & Time], and *Nuorisotutkimus* [Youth Studies]. The Association for Teachers in History and Social Studies in Finland publishes a quarterly magazine, *Kleio* [Clio], with short articles on historical and social-scientific topical questions relevant for history and social studies education, book reviews, and news on pedagogical innovations.

6 STUDENTS' CIVIC KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ORIENTATIONS – WHAT CHALLENGES FOR SOCIAL STUDIES?

What kind of context do Finnish young people's civic knowledge, skills and attitudes give to social studies teaching? Finnish lower secondary school students have repeatedly scored very high in the international surveys that measure civic knowledge and skills among 14-years-old. They have not been interested to participate in civic life, but they have a strong confidence in public institutions, which may explain their meagre interest in civic participation: if they think that public matters are already in good hands, they may conclude that citizens do not need to participate. (Suoninen et al., 2010; Mehtäläinen et al., 2017.)

In a recent survey among 15–29-years-old Finns, one-third of the interviewed said they had learnt a lot about skills of civic participation in school, whereas one-tenth said they had learnt nothing about these skills in school (Tenojoki et al., 2017). The answers may have been biased by post-school experiences, and social studies teaching and the structures of student participation in schools have developed during the years. Nevertheless the aforementioned data suggest that Finnish young people have good skills in thinking about societal questions and they mostly experience they have learnt about skills of civic participation in school, but they do not have an urge to participate. Moreover, it has been argued that also when students are taught about democracy and participation, they have only little opportunities to participate and exercise democracy in school (Rautiainen & Rähä, 2012; Suutarinen, 2007). Students have felt that relations between teachers and students are pretty good and the classroom climate is mostly supportive of discussing different opinions openly, and these views have actually become more common. But it seems teachers have not very much encouraged debates on political issues, or prioritized skills of political participation as learning objective in social studies (Suoninen et al., 2010; Mehtäläinen et al., 2017). This is not to say teachers object to those aims, but they rather seem to conceive of education to democratic citizenship in terms of developing students' competences in critical and analytic thinking generally.

The National Agency of Education assessed 15-years-old students' knowledge and skills in social studies in 2011. It was a sample-based study, envisaged to be repeated so as to give education authorities a picture of the overall situation and how it develops. The results in 2011 showed that the students handled best the questions where they had to explain concepts of social studies subject matter. The most difficult questions were those where they had to analyse alternative solutions to particular societal problems and consequences of different solutions. These skills were not prominent in the social studies core curriculum of that time, thus it is not surprising that the students did least well in that competence area. The students also had to analyse critically media contents, like graphs and tables. In this competence area there was considerable variation in students' performance. Girls were marginally better than boys in all competence areas. (Ouakrim-Soivio & Kuusela, 2012.) Also in the ICCS surveys Finnish girls have succeeded better than boys, yet girls have had less confidence in their civic efficacy than boys. In the most recent ICCS survey, from 2016, this difference is smaller than before. (Virta & Törmäkangas, 2002; Mehtäläinen et al., 2017.)

So far there is little research on what takes place in social studies classrooms. One example is Johanna Saario's (2012) ethnographical study of literacy practices in a social studies class in grade 9. The focus was on how meanings of subject-typical concepts were constructed in the social studies classroom and how students with other native language than Finnish managed the challenges. The afore mentioned study by The National Agency of Education (Ouakrim-Soivio & Kuusela, 2012) included a section where social studies teachers were asked about their pedagogical practices and use of learning materials. The ICCS surveys have included questions to social studies teachers about their pedagogical practices and their objectives in teaching (Mehtäläinen et al., 2017, 68–78). Research relating to social studies has largely focused on textbooks (for example, Mikander, 2016), students' views of social studies (for

example, Sutela, 2015a; Sutela, 2015b), and the social studies matriculation exams, including analyses of exam questions and students' answers (for example, Löfström et al., 2010; Löfström & van den Berg, 2013; Löfström, 2018). These studies provide snapshots of various facets of the social studies subject, but there have not been more extensive research projects on social studies teaching and learning in Finland, like there has been on history teaching and learning, for example (see, <http://hislit.fi>).

Drawing from these observations, what are the challenges for social studies teaching? The form of knowledge in social studies is less clearly definable than in the subject, history, for example, hence it is more difficult to agree on what concepts and perspectives are the most central in social studies, if the ambition is that the subject is characterised by a critical and analytic approach to knowledge about society. This, however, need not be the only guiding ambition. An other is that social studies should contribute to students becoming interested in societal matters and interested to participate in them as democratic citizens. The results in the ICCS surveys suggest that the pressing challenge lies in the last mentioned field, and not so much in improving Finnish students' knowledge about societal matters. It is a challenge that obviously also other members of school community than social studies teachers should take on, because it relates to how school communities in general could be made more supportive of young people becoming recognized and respected as citizens and autonomous actors in the community. Social studies teachers probably will continue to find themselves in the front row of activities pursuing this objective in schools. The more recent developments in the curricula as well as the introduction of social studies in primary school, with its pronounced objectives in education for democratic citizenship, can be considered to reflect and give further support to a notion of social studies that emphasizes constructive societal engagement and intellectual growth simultaneously.

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