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Proposal on themes and priority for strategic research 2024

The Strategic Research Council (SRC) established within the Academy of Finland proposes to the Finnish Government two themes for the six-year strategic research programmes to be launched in 2024. In addition, the SRC has prepared a cross-cutting priority that will apply to both programmes.

Theme proposals:

Water for welfare, security and peace

Interactions of immigration, work and wellbeing in future Finland

Priority:

Democracy

Theme 1:

Water for welfare, security and peace

Research under this theme focuses on water and water resources as a societal issue at both national and global level. Water is an essential element in welfare, security of supply and sustainable development, be it surface water, groundwater, inland waters or oceans. Water resources and routes determine the functioning of societies in many ways. Water and aquatic systems also have profound cultural significance and value. Finland has considerable water expertise, which provides a solid foundation for developing new water-related solutions. From a global perspective, water is a critical resource. Water management causes tensions and even conflicts worldwide. Climate change, biodiversity loss and demographics will all challenge international water diplomacy and policy. How can we promote sustainable water management amid rising competition for water? How do we shore up water security against threats to both quantity and quality?

Research under this theme will seek to build a broad understanding and expertise to support water security and sustainable water use in Finland and internationally. Good and fair management of water and aquatic systems is essential for a welfare society. Water and water resources are under pressure from a wide range of sectors, including industry, agriculture, transport, tourism and energy. A large part of Finland's water consumption is indirectly directed outside our borders. A multi- and interdisciplinary approach is essential in addressing the ecological, societal, economic, cultural and technological issues related to water security in a systemic way. The topics of individual research projects may relate to issues at national level or issues in a transnational context. The research can focus on issues such as responsible management of water resources, infrastructures or ecosystems, or on strengthening water diplomacy and preventing water-related crises and conflicts. Water technology and digitalisation can offer up new opportunities for water security, water management, livelihoods and business, and support water use that improves biodiversity and carbon neutrality.

Research under this theme shall improve the capacity to make long-term decisions and to anticipate the challenges and opportunities related to water management and water security. Transparency and inclusion in decision-making, as well as intergenerationality, are essential for good water governance.



Theme 2:

Interactions of immigration, work and wellbeing in future Finland

The favourable development of Finland's welfare society, economy and labour market will require diverse skills and a sufficient number of skilled people. Maintaining welfare requires a critical mass of working-age people that cannot be reached under current demographic trends without labour migration. At an individual level, the most common reasons for migration are work, family and studies, but both people's reasons for moving and the challenges they may face in integrating and building a good life are complex. Large-scale migration also shapes society. Working culture and the labour market are changing, too. Some sectors face chronic labour shortages, others are changing in more fundamental ways. These changes are challenging current migration and labour policies, education systems, social and health services and other institutions, while also opening up new opportunities. Research under this theme shall focus on migration and employment in the future welfare society. How can we support labour migration in a sustainable and ethical way? How do we support various integration paths of people migrating to Finland for work, study, family or protection reasons?

The research shall make use of interdisciplinary approaches to build a broad knowledge base and expertise to support sustainable migration and to explore new research-based solutions to the challenges and opportunities related to migration. The study of different interactions is important for societal development. International comparisons provide perspectives on many of the issues involved. The research projects can be related to areas such as work, welfare and skills, institution creation, strengthening social and local inclusion and preventing segregation. Other theme-relevant issues include the development of structures and services to support work and business, digitalisation and technology, language and cultural issues, and the roles of families and communities. A transdisciplinary and interactive approach and cooperation with different stakeholders are key in addressing the societal, social and cultural issues related to migration in a systemic way.

Research under this theme shall improve the capacity to make long-term decisions and to anticipate the challenges and opportunities related to migration. Strengthening social inclusion, transparency and nondiscrimination are essential for the integration of migrants and for the future of employment and the welfare society.

Cross-cutting priority: Democracy

Democracy is the cross-cutting priority for the 2024 strategic research programmes. Democracy based on ideas of equality and inclusion is the foundation of a welfare society. Future generations can also be seen as stakeholders in decisions concerning the future. Democracy is challenged by various national and international changes, crises and conflicts. On the other hand, democratic societies are founded on transparency, resilience and trust, which are invaluable assets in the face of change. The research to be conducted in the 2024 strategic research programmes shall address key issues related to democracy that are relevant to the chosen research topic.