

What Counts as Social Values in Relation to Digital Competence? A policy perspective

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In global, European, Swedish national and local policy contexts, digital competence has been infused into education as a means to prepare future citizens. Digital competence can be thought of as a highly political concept, originating from economic competition, reflecting ideals about future citizens and societies, and as linked to globalization, modernization and notions of a knowledge society (Ilomäki et al. 2016). Significant for digital competence seems objectives to be prepared for a changing society, deal with global competition, maintain welfare and high standards, social inclusion and successful lives for all (Hällgren et al. 2019).

Digital competence entered the European policy scene in 2006 as one of eight Key Competences for Lifelong learning. In 2018, the key competences from 2006 were reviewed and Digital competence argued an even stronger position. To facilitate the acquisition of key competences “adequate use of digital technologies, in education, training and learning settings” was promoted (EU 2018 p.5). In parallel, the Swedish commission for digitalization launched their first report in 2014. A major part was dedicated to teaching, learning and the educational system. In June 2017 a national strategy for sustainable digital transformation in Sweden followed, aiming for Sweden to become a leading country in advancing the opportunities of digitalization. In the same year a national strategy for digitalization of the school system was presented and the curricula were revised with stronger writings about digital competence. In 2019 the Swedish National Agency for Education and Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL) presented an agenda for implementing a strategy for digitalization of the School system, in which the concept of adequate digital competence is prominent.

Educational policies, frameworks, plans and strategies on digital competence are comprehensive and highly relevant. However, results presented in this paper show that there still are matters calling for attention. This paper extends and deepens results presented in two preceding papers about a discursive gap in the intersection of digital competence, social values and education. Policies on the use of IT, and the competences therefore required, are only partially related to social values, if at all. Continuing explorations of this dilemma, deepening the knowledge about digital competence and social values, this paper also concerns what counts as social values in this context. The empirical foundation is broadened and units of analyses are sampled from policies, frameworks, strategies and action plans, on global, European, Swedish national and local levels.

Digital competence emerges prominently in policy objectives of social inclusion, sustainability and welfare, as part of a digital agenda in human's service, to bring successful lives and a bright future. These objectives are indeed promising and suggest digital competences as not only knowledge and skills but also as competences on values, social relations, matters of identity, what is to exist as human and what technology does to the human condition. But how do these objectives manifest in the very definitions of what digital competence is?