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PALGRAVE STUDIES IN THE HISTORY
OF EXPERIENCE

Experiencing Society and the Lived Welfare State

Edited by Pertti Haapala
Minna Harjula · Heikki Kokko

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This series, a collaboration between Palgrave Macmillan and the Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence in the History of Experience (HEX) at Tampere University, will publish works on the histories of experience across historical time and global space. History of experience means, for the series, individual, social, and collective experiences as historically conditioned phenomena. 'Experience' refers here to a theoretically and methodologically conceptualized study of human experiences in the past, not to any study of 'authentic' or 'essentialist' experiences. More precisely, the series will offer a forum for the historical study of human experiencing, i.e. of the varying preconditions, factors, and possibilities shaping past experiences. Furthermore, the series will study the human institutions, communities, and the systems of belief, knowledge, and meaning as based on accumulated (and often conflicting) experiences.

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Minna Harjula
Pertti Haapala
Heikki Kokko

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Pertti Haapala, Minna Harjula, and Heikki Kokko

IDEA OF THE BOOK

The welfare state has been a central societal experience not only in Western countries but in various other parts of the world since the mid-twentieth century. Despite the growing manifold criticism and the alleged crisis of the welfare state since the 1970s, it still has a reputation as a desired model for social development. In particular, the challenges caused by numerous global crises in the 2000s have made the welfare state a strong option again.¹

¹ For example, Laenen, T., Meuleman, B. and van Oorschot, W. eds.) (2020). *Welfare state legitimacy in times of crisis and austerity: Between continuity and change*. Edward Elgar; Taylor-Gooby, P. and Lerut, B. (eds.) (2018). *Attitudes, aspirations and welfare: Social policy directions in uncertain times*. Palgrave Macmillan; Svallfors, S. (ed.) (2012). *Contested welfare states: Welfare attitudes in Europe and beyond*. Stanford University Press; Lindert, P. (2004). *Growing public: Social spending and economic growth since the eighteenth century*. Cambridge University Press; Koivunen, A., Ojala, J. and Holmén, J. (eds.) (2021). *The Nordic economic, social and political model: Challenges in the 21st century*. Routledge; Hänninen, S., Lehtelä, K.-M. and Saikkonen, P. (eds.) (2019). *The relational Nordic welfare state: between utopia and ideology*. Edward Elgar.

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This collection introduces the history of experiences as an approach to the analysis of the welfare state. The title, *Experiencing Society*, crystallizes our approach to how a particular relationship between the individual and society is *lived*. *Experiencing Society* introduces new theoretical, methodological and empirical insights for bridging the from-below analysis of daily life and the macro analysis of societal structures to explain how societies are constructed and constituted in everyday life and by citizens themselves.

The concept of the *lived welfare state* provides a new way to understand and explain the history and current challenges of the welfare state in different contexts. The lived welfare state is both a methodological concept and an empirical object/subject of study. Methodologically it looks at the welfare state as an idea and practice that has become an integral part of living in a modern society. Empirically the prefix *lived* means that we explore the welfare state as an everyday experience and examine how it is connected to overarching social issues, such as equality, trust, and collective and individual agency. Thus, our collection aims to offer new perspectives on the larger question of the construction and legitimation of society.

We apply a long-term perspective from the mid-nineteenth century to the 2020s to analyse the experience of society that made the building of the welfare state possible and made the welfare state a resilient model of social order. To elaborate on the changing national variations, this collection goes beyond the mainstream focus on welfare states usually limited to Western democracies. We provide a more varied look by broadening the focus from the Nordic welfare states (Denmark and Finland) to mid-twentieth-century authoritarian Southern Europe, colonial Asia and post-colonial South America. The global dimension, with case studies from Portugal, Chile and Singapore, enriches our approach by providing a different contextual frame for the lived welfare state.

We use the case of Finland to deepen the temporal analysis of the experience of society in its historical context. The focus on one country allows us to capture long-term historical continuity, discontinuity and change. It allows for the linking of large- and small-scale realities with diverse but entangled logic and opens up a perspective to ponder the formation of the modern individual–society relationship.

After the introductory chapter, the collection consists of five parts. *Theoretical and Methodological Approaches* (Part I) introduces a socio-historical framework for analysing experiences as a societal phenomenon and a narrative-theoretical approach to the welfare state. Parts II and III

focus on the welfare state as a lived social security system. *Experiences from Welfare Systems* (Part II) amplifies the early initiatives for building social security from the perspective of the social workers and civil servants in various contexts on three continents. *Agency and Experience “from below”* (Part III) turns the focus onto the recipients of the benefits and their lived encounters with the welfare institutions. The final two parts look beyond the institutional settings of social benefits and social services to explore *Space, Age and Class as Experience* (Part IV) and *Experience of Equality and Fairness* (Part V) within a broader societal frame.

EXPERIENCING SOCIETY: AN APPROACH TO THE WELFARE STATE

In recent welfare state historiography, cultural history has made the daily practices of the welfare state the focus of analysis, and conceptual history has pointed out the need to analyse the shifting and varied key terminology—such as *society*—in the meaning-making of the welfare state. Within the transnational comparative approach, one of the latest interpretative models has emphasized the multilayered historicity of welfare state institutions and discourses. All these fields have opened up and called for reflections on everyday experiences.²

This collection opens a view to how the elaborated concept of experience can enhance the analysis of the welfare state. In this collection, *experiencing society* is the shared starting point for approaching the welfare state across time and place. *Experiencing Society* analyses the *lived* relationship between the individual and society: how people experience the

²van Oorschot, W., Opielka, M. and Pfau-Effinger, B. (eds.) (2008). *Culture and welfare state: Values and social policy in comparative perspective*. Edward Elgar; Autto, J. and Nygård, M. (eds.) (2015). *Hyvinvointivaltion kulttuurintutkimus*. Lapland University Press; Crane, J. and Hand, J. (eds.) (2022). *Posters, protests, and prescriptions: Cultural histories of the National Health Service in Britain*. Manchester University Press; Bude, H. (2003). Generation: Elemente einer Erfahrungsgeschichte des Wohlfahrtsstaates. In S. Lessenich (ed.), *Wohlfahrtsstaatliche Grundbegriffe: Historische und aktuelle Diskurse*. Campus Verlag; Béland, D. and Petersen, K. (eds.) (2015). *Analysing social policy concepts and language: Comparative and transnational perspectives*. Policy Press; Edling, N. (ed.) (2019). *The Changing meanings of the welfare state: Histories of a key concept in the Nordic countries*. Berghahn Books; Kettunen, P. and Petersen, K. (eds.) (2011). *Beyond welfare state models: Transnational historical perspectives on social policy*. Edward Elgar; Ebbinhaus, B. and Naumann, E. (eds.) (2018). *Welfare state reforms seen from below: Comparing public attitudes and organized interests in Britain and Germany*. Palgrave Macmillan.

intangibly abstract and holistic entity as a structure in which they live, have membership or identify. It is about how people understand their rights and responsibilities within such a frame, and how they feel society meets their needs and expectations. *Experiencing Society* consists of the manifold everyday societal practices that are constantly present in one's life by setting limits to and preconditions for life-chances. How people experience society with its requirements and options in their daily life deeply relates to the experienced legitimization of society. Thus, the analytic result of our approach, the *experience of society*, captures the two-way experiential influence between the individual and society. It opens a perspective to individual agency by explaining societal development through experiential change.

In the experience of society, a temporal dimension is always present. In his classic work, C. Wright Mills emphasized how the interactive basis of an individual–society relationship extends from past generations to the future:

Every individual lives, from one generation to the next, in some society (...)
By the fact of his living he contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of its history, even as he is made by society and by its historical push and shove.³

The generational view concretizes the multilayered historicity of experiencing society. The experiences of past generations shape the structures that the next generation faces as the institutions, traditions, prerequisites and possibilities in their lives. Thus, the experience of society is an interface of the past generations' experiences, the current meaning-making and the future horizons of the ideal society. Significant for the analysis is that the experience of society is not only expressed in thoughts and words, but it results in the changing acts and social practices that historically construct and reshape society. This perspective, explored in Kokko and Harjula's theoretical-methodological approach in Chap. 2, points out one central dimension in the historical analysis of experiences: experiences not only reflect the social reality but are crucial constructive elements of it. Kokko and Harjula introduce *layers*, *scenes* and *sediments of experience* as analytic tools for approaching experiences in socio-historical research.

³ Mills, C. Wright (1959). *The Sociological imagination*. Oxford University Press, 6.

The book explores the experience of society in the welfare state through its variations and similarities around the globe. In John B. Thompson's terms, an overarching feature in the development of modern societies is "a complex reordering" of experiences. According to Thompson, modern societies have removed certain experiences—such as death, disease and starvation—"from the locales of everyday life" and made them rarely encountered daily by creating an institutional setting of social security systems.⁴ Following this idea, we could argue that the welfare state as a societal framework has especially made these experiences rare in daily life. From this perspective, our collection recognizes, addresses and analyses the reordering of experiences as the shared feature in modern welfare states.

Ideally, modern welfare states can be characterized as societies that aim to protect their citizens from extreme experiences. The key concept of the mid-twentieth-century welfare state, *social security*, captured the increased predictability and decreased uncertainty of life as the main aim and achievement of the welfare state.⁵ As Pauli Kettunen and Klaus Petersen have emphasized, the welfare state regulates the uncertainty of the future with concepts such as risk and insurance.⁶ This means that difficulties in human life—such as diseases or inability to work—are no longer seen as a result of sin or as personal hardships to be solved by the individuals themselves. Instead, they are perceived as social problems, caused by social risks that anyone could face and that society has a collective responsibility to jointly prevent and relieve. Such an interpretation regulated the social and

⁴ Thompson, J. B. (1995). *Media and modernity: A social theory of the media*. Polity Press, 226–227.

⁵ Haapala, P. and Lloyd, C. (2018). Johdanto: Rakennehistoria ja historian rakenteet. In P. Haapala (ed.), *Suomen rakennehistoria: Näkökulmia muutokseen ja jatkuvuuteen (1940–2000)*, 23–25. Lister, R. (2021). *Poverty*. Polity, 4–11. On stability and predictability as the goal of the welfare state: Moisio, P. (2021). Attitudinal change to the welfare state: From compensating social risks to creating opportunities. THL. Retrieved 28 April 2022, from <https://thl.fi/en/web/social-welfare-and-health-care-reform/finances/optimi-articles-on-health-and-social-economics/attitudinal-change-to-the-welfare-state-from-compensating-social-risks-to-creating-opportunities>. On the connection between the welfare state and well-being and health, for example Chung, H. and Muntaner, C. (2007). Welfare state matters: A typological multilevel analysis of wealthy countries. *Health Policy* 80(2), 328–339; Lundberg, O. et. al. (2008). The role of welfare state principles and generosity in social policy programs for public health: An international comparative study. *Lancet* 372(9650), 1633–1640. Bergqvist, K. and Yngwe, M. Å. and Lundberg, O. (2013). Understanding the role of welfare state characteristics for health and inequalities: An analytical review. *BMC Public Health* 13 (1234).

⁶ Kettunen and Petersen (2011), 8.

reframed the experience of society—and the entire social reality—in a new way, which can be seen as a basic experiential character of the welfare state.⁷ The joint social responsibility both presumed and produced experiences of loyalty, solidarity, inclusion, communality and belonging. Furthermore, the aim to minimize social risks shaped new expectations of equality and equity. In the ideal case, both the individual and societal aims of the welfare state pursued a positive vision for the future with progress, prosperity, integration, trust and confidence.

From the perspective of modernization, the dilemma between the individual and collective in a welfare state involves a paradox, as the acceptance of the joint social responsibility that incorporates hardships not as personal and individual but as social, collective and general seems to be contradictory to the general trend towards individualization.⁸ To explore how such an experience of the individual–society relationship emerged, took shape or failed as a part of the reordering of experiences, a look at the everyday life and lived practices is needed.

Within the framework of the welfare state, society is often understood as a national entity, as the nation state in which the individual–society relationship is defined as the relationship between the citizen and the state. In the globalizing world of the twenty-first century, where people's social worlds extend beyond national borders, the transnational approach has questioned the methodological nationalism of confining society as a social world to the nation state only.⁹ The focus on *experiencing society* points

⁷Steinmetz points out, based on van Stolk and Wouters, that regulating the social in a welfare state results in a changing “emotional ground-tone of everyday life”. Steinmetz, G. (1993). *Regulating the social: The welfare state and local politics in imperial Germany*. Princeton University Press, 1, 223; Schultz-Forsberg, H. (2012). Welfare State. In H. K. Anheier, M. Juergensmeyer and V. Faessel (eds.). *Encyclopedia of Global Studies*. SAGE Reference Online. SAGE, 1–6.

⁸On the dilemma between the traditional and the modern in the welfare state: Kettunen, P. (2011). The transnational construction of national challenges: The ambiguous Nordic model of welfare and competitiveness. In P. Kettunen and K. Petersen (eds.), *Beyond welfare state models: Transnational historical perspectives on social policy*, Edward Elgar, 19–20. Beck, U. and Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002). *Individualization: Institutionalized individualism and its social and political consequences*. SAGE Publications Ltd., 26–44; Rautakivi, T, Siriprasertchok, R. and Melin, H. (2022). *A critical evaluation of individualism, collectivism and collective action*. Tampere University Press.

⁹For example, Kettunen, P., Pellander, S. and Tervonen, M. (eds.) (2022). *Nationalism and democracy in the welfare state*. Edward Elgar; Couldry, N., and Hepp, A. (2017). *The mediated construction of reality*. Polity Press, 17–21; Conrad, C. (2011). Social policy after the transnational turn. In P. Kettunen & K. Petersen (eds.) (2011), *Beyond welfare state models: Transnational historical perspectives on social policy*, Edward Elgar, 218–240.

out how the national frame itself is historically not at all a taken-for-granted experience but a complex and gradual process of belonging and membership that was built, strengthened or undermined in daily life. The collection indicates how the special relationship between the individual and society—or the citizen and state—was mainly constructed locally. This means that experiencing the nation state as society took place within local institutions, and the shared meaning of society and citizenship was shaped within families and the social neighborhood.

This collection provides insights into the interlinked processes of nation state and welfare state building. Both Denmark and Finland are examples of how Nordic small-state nationalism legitimated the welfare state. In her analysis of the agency of poor relief recipients in mid-nineteenth-century Denmark, Leonora Lottrup Rasmussen (Chap. 7) points out how the experiences of local citizenship that were negotiated in the town administration preceded the national experience of social rights. By international comparison, Denmark turns out to be an exceptionally early laboratory of modern social citizenship. The case studies on Finland (Chaps. 8, 10, 13, 14 and 16) show how the idea of a modern society that could give all citizens access to social rights was adopted only gradually in the 1940s to 1960s as part of a rapid structural change from an agrarian latecomer to industrialized society. The case studies reveal the local variation in the experience of society. Ville Erkkilä (Chap. 13) and Kirsi Saarikangas, Veera Moll and Matti O. Hannikainen (Chap. 10) indicate how the rural and suburban experiences of 1950s to 1970s Finland represented two different and clashing lived social realities. Rural underdevelopment and injustice were contrasted with the modernity and progress represented by new suburban areas.

In their analysis of postcolonial Chile, Maricela González and Paula Caffarena (Chap. 4) indicate how social workers as the first representatives of the emerging social security system and as the “female face of the state” started to build the experience of society from the 1920s.¹⁰ Ho Chi Tim’s study of postcolonial Singapore after World War II (Chap. 6) points out that the new idea of the “state as the community”, which was responsible

¹⁰ On social development in Chile since the Pinochet dictatorship: Calderón, F. and Castells, M. (2014). Development, democracy, and social change in Chile. In M. Castells and P. Himanen (eds.), *Reconceptualizing development in the global information age*. Oxford University Press, 175–204.

for the social welfare of “the community as individual citizens”, was only gradually constructed without any local precedent.

The nation-based societal frame for the welfare state is often linked to democracy, and the Danish case especially illustrates how even the poorest could have their say in negotiating the practices that regulated the social.¹¹ Similarly, in Denmark and Finland (Chaps. 7 and 8), the inclusion of poor relief recipients into political citizenship with voting rights was a slow process that framed their agency until the 1960s and 1970s. The Singaporean case points out how communal centres that integrated social, educational and recreational aims were built as training grounds for democracy in the mid-1950s. By contrast, Ana Carina Azevedo’s analysis of the exclusive and authoritarian welfare solution in the Portuguese dictatorship (Chap. 5) indicates how the *Previdência Social* was used as a tool to produce obedience and hierarchies by creating privileges instead of equality.

Comparisons with other, either more or less advanced societies were central in the media narratives and political discourse that shaped and mediated the experience of society in a welfare state. Heidi Kurvinen (Chap. 11) indicates how the Global South was used as a comparison to the ideal presentation of Finland as a more advanced, child-friendly welfare state in the late 1970s. Jussi Lahtinen (Chap. 12) analyses the mediated popular narratives of the working class in the changing contexts of the Western “affluent society” when working-class identification was blurred by the new middle-class lifestyle.

THE LIVED WELFARE STATE: FACING EVERYDAY COMPLEXITIES

The concept of the *lived welfare state* allows us to understand and explain the history and current challenges of the welfare state as a part of daily life in modern societies. In this collection, the analytic concept broadens and nuances the scope of welfare state research in two ways. First, in Parts II and III, the concept turns the focus to everyday experiences within the institutional frameworks of the welfare state. By exploring how the emerging and established welfare state is lived out by the recipients of social benefits and social services and by the professionals who work in various welfare state institutions, these chapters present a from-below perspective of the making of the welfare state as a social security system. This

¹¹ Kettunen, Pellander and Tervonen (2022).

perspective emphasizes the meaning of individual agency in the construction of the system.

Furthermore, Parts IV and V look beyond the social security system and ask how the welfare state as a general societal experience has been lived out since the mid-twentieth century. In these chapters, the welfare state is analysed as the societal framework for suburban planning, the working class and childhood, and for experiences of equality and fairness. The dual contents of the concept amplify how the welfare state is lived both as a mosaic-like institution consisting of various social services and benefits—which date back to different decades and which each may carry and produce slightly different experiences of society—and as more general, pervasive experience of society. Besides traditional historical data, like legislation and political, academic and professional discussion, a variety of research material—letters to welfare institutions, memoirs, biographies, interviews, buildings, photos, newspapers, TV series and social media discussions—is utilized to trace everyday experience.

As the concept of the *lived welfare state* brings concrete daily life into focus as an experience of society, it differs from the more abstract concept of the *welfare state*. Even though people may identify their countries as welfare states and even express this self-understanding with pride,¹² the concept of *welfare state* does not always resonate with everyday life. For example, since the adoption of the concept of *welfare state* in the Finnish language in the early 1950s, it has not been generally used either by common people or by staff at social security institutions, but it remained in the discourse of politics and research.¹³ Instead, people usually refer either generally to “society” or the “state”, or to the specific institutions they encounter—such as the social office, employment office, maternity and child welfare clinic, or school—when talking about their daily experiences. As Juho Saari indicates in Chap. 15, the welfare state experience as a general attitude measured in opinion polls is a complex phenomenon. It

¹²For example, Edling, N. (2019a). Introduction. In N. Edling (ed.), *The changing meanings of the welfare state: Histories of a key concept in the Nordic countries*. Berghahn Books, 6; Edling, N. (2019b). Conclusion. In N. Edling (ed.), *The changing meanings of the welfare state: Histories of a key concept in the Nordic countries*. Berghahn Books, 326; van Kersbergen, K. (2016), The welfare state in Europe. In D. Acemoglu et al. (eds.), *The search for Europe: Contrasting approaches*. Fundación BBVA, 269–286.

¹³Kettunen, P. (2019). The conceptual history of the welfare state in Finland. In N. Edling (ed.), *The changing meanings of the welfare state: Histories of a key concept in the Nordic countries*. Berghahn Books, 225–275.

reveals trends in the support for and legitimacy of the societal framework, but because of its abstract and ambiguous character, it leaves room for narratives that emphasize both fairness and inequality.

It is telling that in the conceptual history of the welfare state in the Nordic countries, Nils Edling asked, “was ‘the welfare state’ a description of the contemporary state, a concept encapsulating historical experiences, or a future-oriented political objective, a concept filled with expectations and promises?”¹⁴ Pertti Haapala (Chap. 16) points out how the success story that characterizes the national self-understanding of Finnish modern history as a welfare state intermixes all these aspects. However, compared to the United Kingdom, where the National Health Services (1948) rapidly became the symbol of the established national welfare state, the welfare state remained a non-dominant and contested future goal in Finland in the 1950s. Sophy Bergenheim (Chap. 14) distinguishes how the temporal perspectives of the recent past and near future expanded to long-term trajectories within the planning optimism of the 1960s. By the late 1980s, the Finnish welfare state had turned into a past achievement that needed to be defended.¹⁵ As the idea of a ready, everlasting welfare state was short-lived, this made the present society an experience of the “not-yet-a-welfare state” or “not-any-longer-a-welfare state”. Such a concept of welfare state emphasizes normative expectations rather than serving as a description of empirical everyday life.¹⁶ The unnarrativeness and untellability of the twenty-first-century welfare state, analysed by Maria Mäkelä (Chap. 3), is associated with the process. Mäkelä points out how as an implicit script, the master narrative of a functional welfare state generally materializes only when it is countered with personal stories of its failure.

The aim of this book is not to categorize the welfare state by defining a certain period when it “appeared” as a lived experience. Instead, this collection considers how the small, everyday face-to-face encounters with the representatives of the emerging welfare institutions were significant for the experience of society that gradually brought the ideals of the welfare state to life. Case studies from Denmark, Chile, Singapore and Finland each point out how encounters where individual worries and misery were

¹⁴ Edling (2019a), 4.

¹⁵ van Kersbergen (2016), 270; Crane & Hand (eds.) (2022); Kettunen (2019), 260–261; Kettunen, P. (2015). Hyvinvointivaltion yhteiskunta. In J. Autto & M. Nygård (eds.), *Hyvinvointivaltion kulttuurintutkimus*. Lapland University Press, 71–109.

¹⁶ Kettunen (2015), 82–83.

recognized and feelings of insecurity were relieved paved the way for trust and membership and strengthened the welfare state as institution. Such a societal relationship of recognition—as Anna Metteri has phrased it—was the central promise of the emerging welfare state.¹⁷ This underlines the crucial meaning of the commitment of street-level professionals in building the individual–society relationship that made the welfare state possible.

In his seminal essay *Citizenship and social class* (1950), T. H. Marshall emphasized how the process of receiving social benefits in cash produced a new common experience of citizenship in a welfare state:

All learn what it means to have an insurance card that must be regularly stamped (...) or to collect children's allowances or pension from the post office.¹⁸

Even more importantly, he stressed how equal social services, such as health services and an undivided educational system, could produce experiences that undermined social differentiation and constructed community membership and belonging.¹⁹

Besides these positive experiences of an emerging welfare state, Marshall's perceptive notion of the "superstructure of legitimate expectations" pointed out one challenge of the welfare state. As the standard and quality citizens expect from the social services (and benefits) rises, "as it inevitably must in a progressive society", as Marshall argued, "the target is perpetually moving forward".²⁰ The contradiction between the recipients' rising expectations and the reluctance of the ageing social workers to adopt the new ideals of the 1960s and 1970s Finnish social legislation that embraced individual rights is illustrated by Minna Harjula in Chap. 8. As a result, the legacy of previous poor relief policies still survived in the welfare state practices that framed the everyday encounters with clients.

The generational view of the welfare state highlights that in many countries the post-war baby-boomer generation has shaped the growth of the welfare state by its very existence. At the same time, the baby boomers have experienced the rise of the welfare state as an integral part of growing

¹⁷ Metteri, A. (2012). *Hyvinvointivaltion lupaukset, kohtuuttomat tapaukset ja sosiaalityö*. University of Tampere, 192.

¹⁸ Marshall, T.H. (1987). *Citizenship and social class*. In T. H. Marshall and T. Bottomore, *Citizenship and social class*. Pluto Press, 33 (original work published 1950).

¹⁹ Marshall (1987), 33–34.

²⁰ Marshall (1987), 34–35.

up, as they have encountered the various new welfare state services—such as child welfare clinics, day care, schools and health care—and social benefits (for studying, housing, maternity leave, unemployment, sickness, disability and old age). As Pertti Haapala emphasizes in Chap. 16, for the baby-boomer generation, the experience of the welfare state is a part of their life course, whereas for the older generation, the welfare state is an accomplishment and achievement that is made through work, and for the younger generations it is a self-evident structure.²¹

In Chap. 11, Heidi Kurvinen indicates how children's voices in the media are filtered and defined by an adult interpretation of childhood in a welfare state. Besides age and generation, also the intersections of race, gender and class, among others, have had profound yet varied consequences for the individual's agency and experience of the welfare state. For example, Jussi Lahtinen explores how the class experience of the working class, which originated in the local communities at the turn of the twentieth century, has become an ongoing globally mediatized process of narrativization. This has complex political implications for the lived welfare state (Chap. 12).

One dilemma of the lived welfare state is that the ways in which the welfare state balances between individual and societal aims and structures peoples' lives can produce unintended experiences, too. The practice of welfare institutions, such as applying or receiving social benefits or services, may cause both individual insecurity—shame, neglect, abuse or loss of freedom—and experiences of social exclusion or social inequality. More broadly, the welfare state as a societal framework can produce unplanned dependencies. As two thirds of the population of Finland in the late twentieth century either worked for the public sector or lived on income transfers, any change in the institutional structure or in the coverage or level of social benefits had profound impacts on the lives of these people.²² Anna Sofia Salonen's analysis of Finns who live on the breadline (Chap. 9) points out a striking paradox of the 2020s welfare state: In comparison to the faceless, complicated and computerized public services that leave people in absurd situations, the service users feel that they receive more human respect, recognition and care in charity breadlines.

²¹ Haapala, P. (1998). The fate of the welfare state. *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja/ Historical Journal* 96(2), 142–149; Worth, E. (2021). The welfare state generation: Women, agency and class in Britain since 1945. Bloomsbury.

²² Haapala (1998), 142–143.

Pertti Haapala's reading of Finnish public documents and discussions on the welfare state from the 1960s to 2020s ends the book by synthesizing how societal change can be explained by relating the experiences of society to societal structures, ideas of society and the resulting actions. Haapala points out legitimacy and trust as the structural mega-experiences for the welfare state.

Throughout this book, the focus on experiences emphasizes the classic starting point of a societal analysis: people themselves make their society. This message has implications when anticipating the future of welfare states. First, to understand the development of society, one must understand people's experiences. Second, even though the legitimization of the welfare state seems to be fading along with global development, it is useful to note that the future is always anticipated as linear, but history has never followed such patterns. The global information technology of the twenty-first century is inevitably transforming the boundaries of the social world beyond the societies of nation states. Nevertheless, the basic experiential idea of a democratic welfare state in regulating individual risks and protecting citizens against extreme experiences will be a desirable recipe for the good society also in the future.

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PART I

Theoretical and Methodological
Approaches



CHAPTER 2

Social History of Experiences: A Theoretical-Methodological Approach

Heikki Kokko and Minna Harjula

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines a historical-theoretical approach to experiences as socially shared phenomena.¹ This makes the relationship between human beings and the social world—and the individual–society relationship as a specific historical variation of it²—the focus of our study. We first explore

¹We are grateful to Pertti Haapala for his comments, support and inspiration in writing this chapter.

²In our text, the concept of *social* refers to interaction between human beings and the social world; see Fig. 2.1. *Social* is the reality that is constantly constructed by human beings in the present, while—as an analytic counterpart to nature—*culture* is understood as a tradition that includes humanity and its products from the beginning of time. *Societal* refers to social structures institutionalized as society wherein humans interact. *Society* as the social world connected to a nation state is a variation of a certain historical context only, not a universal phenomenon. Such a broad and ahistorical usage of society has been seen as methodological nationalism; see Couldry, N. and Hepp, A. (2017). *The mediated construction of reality*. Polity Press, 17–21.

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how experiences are socially constructed and how experiences themselves construct the historically changing social reality. Besides this theoretically grounded aim, we introduce methodological tools for tracing and analysing experiences as they can be found in research material.

Instead of approaching experiences as phenomena that refer to the internal world of the human being, our focus is on experiences as societal phenomena. Rather than cognitive sciences or psychology—which have gained ground in recent historical scholarship on emotions, senses and experiences—we anchor our approach to social sciences and to social history, which we closely relate to the history of society and social science history (SSH).³ Thus, we share the interest of the early 1980s paradigm of the history of emotions that leaned on sociology and emphasized sociality and social interaction in the construction of “emotional communities”.⁴

³ On social science history (SSH), the history of society and social history: Lloyd, C. (2013, October 16). *From interdisciplinarity to social science history and beyond: A radical view*. Keynote Lecture to 10th Anniversary Seminar, Institute for Advanced Social Research, Tampere University; Haapala, P. (1989). *Sosiaalihistoria: Johdatus tutkimukseen*. SHS; Stearns, P. N. (2003). Social history present and future. *Journal of Social History* 37(1), 9–19; Haapala, P. and Lloyd, C. (2018). Johdanto: Rakennehistoria ja historian rakenteet. In P. Haapala (ed.), *Suomen rakennehistoria: Näkökulmia muutokseen ja jatkuvuuteen*. Vastapaino, 6–30. Various recent approaches to experiences and emotions: Boddice, R. (2018). *The history of emotions*. Manchester University Press; Tepora, T. (2018). Kiihkeä historia: Tunteet historian tutkimuksessa. In M.O. Hannikainen, M. Danielsbacka and T. Tepora (eds.), *Menneisyyden rakentajat: Teoriat historian tutkimuksessa*. Gaudeamus, 77–93; J. Annola, V. Kivimäki and A. Malinen (eds.) (2019). *Eletty historia: Kokemus näkökulmana menneisyyteen*. Vastapaino; Boddice, R. and Smith, M. (2020). *Emotion, Sense, Experience*. Cambridge University Press; Kivimäki, V., Suodenjoki, S. and Vahtikari, T. (eds.) (2021). *Lived nation as the history of experiences and emotions in Finland, 1800–2000*. Palgrave Macmillan; Katajala-Peltomaa, S. and Toivo, R. M. (2021). *Lived religion and gender in late medieval and early modern Europe*. Routledge 2021; Katajala-Peltomaa, S. and Toivo, R. (eds.) (2022). *Histories of experience in the world of lived religion*. Palgrave Macmillan; Eiranen, R. et al. (2022). Narrative and experience: Interdisciplinary methodologies between history and narratology. *Scandinavian Journal of History* 47(1), 1–15. On critical views: Gangl, G. (2020). *The history of experience: a history like anything else?* Retrieved 25 May 2022, from <https://www.oulu.fi/en/blogs/philosophy-history-now/history-experience-history-anything-else>; Väyrynen, K. (2021). History culture of living experience (Erlebnis): Dangers and possibilities for historiography in the era of ‘Experience Society’ (Erlebnissgesellschaft). *Faravid* 52.

⁴ Stearns, P. N. and Stearns, C. Z. (1985). Emotionology: Clarifying the history of emotions and emotional standards. *The American Historical Review*, 90(4), 813–836; Rosenwein, B.H. (2002). Worrying about emotions in history. *The American Historical Review*, 107(3), 821–845; Rosenwein, B.H. (2021) Emotions: Some historical observations. *History of Psychology* 24(2), 107–111.

We apply similar theoretical starting points to the early German approach of the *history of experience*,⁵ which was also inspired by the social constructionism of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) and the temporalities of experience by Reinhardt Koselleck (1979).⁶ The framework that the German tradition applied to the empirical analysis of war experiences also opens a basis for broader theoretical reflections.⁷ We seek to develop the theoretical approach further to enable a historical analysis of social structures and social change and to elaborate practical analytical tools for empirical research.

We outline a holistic theoretical framework that forms the basis for our methodologic tools. By combining Koselleck's reflections on historical time and space and Berger and Luckmann's social construction of reality, we bring systematic social theory to the historical theory of the former and historicity to the social theory of the latter. We suggest that this is fruitful for the history of experiences, as it explains the construction and change of society as a social structure via the circulation of experiential knowledge in the social world. The circulation of knowledge is a concept of the new discipline called *history of knowledge*, which addresses questions similar to those of Berger and Luckmann, whose approach is called the *sociology of knowledge*.⁸ Although we share an interest in the history of knowledge that explores "knowledge in society and in people's life", our focus extends to experiences, and our target is social reality and social change as a process that is fuelled by experiential change.⁹

⁵ Buschmann, N. and Carl, H. (eds.) (2001). *Die Erfahrung des Krieges: Erfahrungsgeschichtliche Perspektiven von der Französischen Revolution bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Paderborn; Schild, G. and Schindling, A (eds.) (2009). *Kriegserfahrungen—Krieg und Gesellschaft in der Neuzeit: Neue Horizonte der Forschung*. Paderborn.

⁶ Berger, P. L. and Luckmann, T. (1991) [1966]. *The social construction of reality*. Penguin; Koselleck, R. (2004). *Futures past: On the semantics of historical time*. MIT Press; Koselleck, R. (2018). *Sediments of time: On possible histories*. Stanford University Press.

⁷ Buschmann and Carl (2001); Schind and Schindling (2009); Kivimäki V. (2013). *Battled nerves: Finnish soldiers' war experience, trauma, and military psychiatry 1941–44*. Åbo Akademi, esp. 52–59.

⁸ Berger and Luckmann (1991), 26. Cf. Burke, P. (2016). *What is the history of knowledge?* Polity 2016, esp. 9–12.

⁹ See Östling, J. and Larsson Heidenblad, D. (2020). Fulfilling the promise of the history of knowledge: Key approaches for the 2020s. *Journal for the History of Knowledge* 1 (1): 3; Lässig, S. (2016). The history of knowledge and the expansion of the historical research agenda. *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 59, 29–58; Nilsson Hammar, A. (2018). Theoria, praxis, and poiesis: Theoretical considerations on the circulation of knowledge in everyday life. In J. Östling et al. (eds.), *Circulation of knowledge: Explorations in the history of knowledge*, Nordic Academic Press, 107–124.

For the history of experiences, the major idea of Berger and Luckmann is that experiences not only reflect reality, but they serve as the constructive units of social reality. Berger and Luckmann do not explicitly theorize experience in their seminal work, even though *everyday experience* is the starting point and an integral component in their analysis of the social construction of reality.¹⁰ Our application aims to develop their theory towards the *social history of experience*.¹¹

The approach enables us to bridge the dichotomy of individual and collective experience and to analyse the process of sharing experiences.¹² Significantly, this framework rejects the idea of universal, ahistorical human experience and sees also the structures of human experiencing as historical and social. We contribute to the current emphasis on the bioculturality and historical plasticity of the human being in the history of emotions and experiences by outlining an approach that highlights the fundamental role of human sociality.¹³

¹⁰Berger and Luckmann (1991) talk about *everyday experience* and *experience of everyday life*. See also Schutz, A. and Luckmann, T. (1973). *The Structures of the Life-World*. Volume 1. Northwestern University Press, 99–118.

¹¹For our early theoretical and empirical applications, see Kokko, H. (2016). *Kuviteltu minuu: Ihmiskäsityksen murros suomenkielisen kansanosan kulttuurissa 1800-luvun puolivälissä*. Tampere University. Kokko, H. (2019). Kosminen kokemus: Hengellisen ja maallisen dualismi 1800-luvun puolivälin suomenkielisessä kansanomaisessa ajattelussa. In J. Annola, V. Kivimäki and A. Malinen (eds.), *Eletty historia: Kokemus näkökulmana menneisyyteen*. Vastapaino, 113–146; Kokko, H. (2021). Temporalization of experiencing: First-hand experience of the nation in mid-nineteenth century Finland. In V. Kivimäki, S. Suodenjoki and T. Vahtikari (eds.), *Lived nation as the history of experiences and emotions in Finland, 1800–2000*, Palgrave Macmillan, 109–133; Harjula, M. (2020). Eletty sosiaalityö kahden työntekijäpolven murroskokemuksena 1940–2000. In J. Moilanen, J. Annola and M. Satka (eds.), *Sosiaalityön käänneet*. SopHi, 47–75; Harjula, M. (2021). Perhelisä yhteiskuntakokemuksen raamittajana: suomalainen sosiaaliturva uuden ja vanhan välillä 1940-luvulla. *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* 119(3), 302–316.

¹²On individual and collective experiences, for example von Scheve, C. and Salmela, M. (2014). *Collective emotions: Perspectives from psychology, philosophy, and sociology*. Oxford University Press; Nowosadtko, J., Erfahrung als Methode und als Gegenstand wissenschaftlicher Erkenntnis: Der Begriff der Erfahrung in der Soziologie. In N. Buschmann and H. Carl (eds.) (2001), *Die Erfahrung des Krieges: Erfahrungsgeschichtliche Perspektiven von der Französischen Revolution bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Paderborn, 27–50.

¹³Boddice and Smith (2020); Tepora, T. (2020). What, if anything, can the history of emotions learn from the neurosciences? *Cultural History* 9(1), 96–98.

We first present our theoretical conceptualization of experience as the social construction of reality. After theorizing the process of *sedimentation* and *institutionalization* as the mechanism that makes experiences socially mediated, we focus on developing analytic tools for approaching experiences in historical research. In the methodological part of our chapter, we conceptualize the temporal and spatial structures of experience as *layers of experience* and *scenes of experience*, and indicate how they can be traced by exploring the *sediments*—shared meanings of experience—that are stored in different sign systems in a given historical context. We conclude by reflecting on what the social history of experiences contributes to the discussion of the character of historical science.

EXPERIENCE AS THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

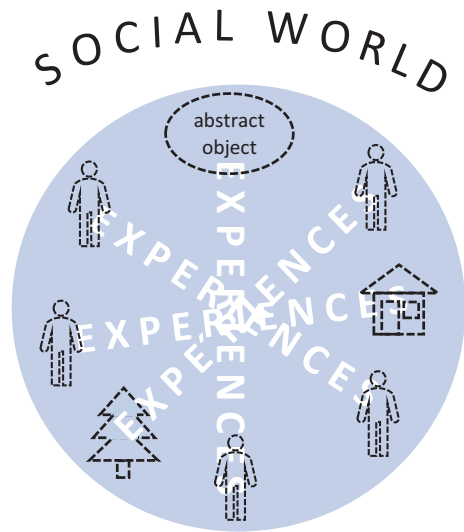
Experience is often conceptualized by using a multitude of interlinked and contested dichotomies, such as individual-collective, subjective-shared, authentic-mediated, lived-narrated, inner-outer, conscious-unconscious and body-mind.¹⁴ For example, the German project on war experiences introduced the division between *Erlebnis* as a subjective, immediate, non-discursive and pre-narrated form of experience and *Erfahrung* as an accumulated, reflected and socially shared one.¹⁵ From the perspective of social constructionism, the division between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* carries two problematic assumptions: the idea of unmediated authenticity often linked to *Erlebnis* and the dichotomy between subjective and social. As we follow the premise of social constructionism, there is neither any “authentic” experience outside the social and the mediated, nor any experiencing outside the social world. By tearing down the dichotomies, social constructionism emphasizes the sociality of experiences in the following multiple ways.

¹⁴ On various analytical and historical conceptualizations and categorizations, see Jay, M. (2005). *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European variations on a universal theme*. University of California Press; Throop, J. C. (2003). Articulating experience. *Anthropological Theory* 3(2), 219–241. On Cartesian dualisms, Taylor, C. (1988). *Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity*. Cambridge University Press, 143–158.

¹⁵ Buschmann, N. and Horst, C. (2001). Zugänge zur Erfahrungsgeschichte des Krieges Forschung, Theorie, Fragestellung. In N. Buschmann and H. Carl (eds.), *Die Erfahrung des Krieges: Erfahrungsgeschichtliche Perspektiven von der Französischen Revolution bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Paderborn, 14–15, 19–20.

First, experiences are not seen as either something we human beings “have” or something in the essence of the objects we experience. Rather, our contact with objects—including other human beings—formulates experiences. Thus, *experiences are in the social world between us and the objects* (Fig. 2.1).¹⁶ Following Sara Ahmed’s theorization of emotions, we suggest that it is this specific in-between location of experiences that creates “the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place”.¹⁷ Studies on the Western history of the human self have indicated the historicity of this boundary-making, by pointing it out as a result of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Scientific Revolution.¹⁸

Fig. 2.1 Experiences in the social world



¹⁶ Besides experiences, the social world includes both human beings and the objects. Berger and Luckmann (1991), 78–79.

¹⁷ Ahmed, S. (2014). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh University Press, 5–10.

¹⁸ Taylor (1988), 185–198. Empirical studies on the modern self indicate that the circulation of this idea to all strata of societies took several centuries in the Western world; see Wahrman, D. (2004). *The Making of the modern self: identity and culture in eighteenth-century England*. Yale University Press, 274–278; Kokko 2016, 426–442.

Second, experiences are *socially constructed in social interaction*, and the social interaction as the linkage of human biology and the social world starts already in the womb. This does not mean denying the individuality of one's experience.¹⁹ It rather suggests that although all human beings perceive the world by themselves, even the individuality of one's experience is constructed by the ingredients of the social world that are mediated by biocultural human beings and the structures that human beings of the past have constructed. Quite similarly, anthropologist Clifford Geertz—who has developed his empirical cultural approach sharing comparable starting points²⁰—has emphasized how “all experience is construed experience” and how experience is not found “between the ears” but in “the world of social action and cultural symbols”.²¹

Third, experiences are *socially mediated and shared by sign systems*. This emphasis of Berger and Luckmann bears a close resemblance to Geertz's idea of systems of signs as cultural webs of significance.²² Despite the central role of language in mediating and shaping societal, transgenerational experiences in Berger and Luckmann's theory, it should not be confused with approaches that emphasize the omnipotence of language and discourses.²³ Besides language, people have countless different ways to express experiences, many of which are unconsciously acquired in the socialization process: people can talk or be silent, express an emotion, gesture or keep social distance. In a wider sense, even architecture, industrial design or institutional practices can be seen as expressions of experiences. It is essential for historical research to look at these different expressions of experiences in the research material as signs that formulate sign systems to mediate the experiences.²⁴ Based on this idea, we approach

¹⁹ Berger and Luckmann (1991), 201–204.

²⁰ Micheelsen, A. and Geertz, C. (2002). “I don't do systems”: An interview with Clifford Geertz. *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 14(1), 2–20.

²¹ Geertz's theory summarized by Throop (2003), 224–226.

²² Throop (2003), 225.

²³ Sewell, W.H. Jr. (2005). *Logics of history. Social theory and social transformation*. The University of Chicago press, 356–362; Heiskala, R. (1994). Sosiaalinen konstruktionismi. In R. Heiskala (ed.), *Sosiologisen teorian nykysuuntauksia*. Gaudeamus; Pfadenhauer, M. and Knoblauch, H. (eds.) (2019). *Social Constructivism as Paradigm? The Legacy of The Social Construction of Reality*. Routledge.

²⁴ Berger and Luckmann (1991), 50–51.

the expressions of emotions as one of the sign systems mediating experiences. Thus, this starting point differs from both the usage of the concepts of emotions and experiences interchangeably, and from the conceptualization of experience as a subcategory of emotion.

Fourth, not only experiences but the *meta-structures for experiencing are socially constructed and mediated*. The concept of *meta-structure*, as we use it here, refers to the framework of the basic categories—such as time, space, nature, culture—people use in perception and in giving meaning to the world.²⁵ For example, an individual who lives in a modern Western culture acquires the structures of linear time—past, present and future—and the idea of progress within social interaction. In comparison with an individual who adopts the structures of cyclical time and the presence of the hereafter, their experiences are divergently structured.²⁶ The notion of different meta-structures in experiencing not only challenges the assumption of universal, ahistorical human experience, but ultimately leads to the conclusion that even the most fundamental categories that structure the perception of the social reality—such as nature and culture or inner and outer—are social constructs themselves, historical human products that have no empirical status outside human experiencing.²⁷

Fifth, as already mentioned, *socialization is the process* where a human being adopts the sign systems and the meta-structures for experiencing. The socialization process is mostly unconscious. This means that a human being seldom recognizes the frameworks that influence the experiencing.²⁸ As part of the socialization process, human experiencing as the social construction of reality begins anew in each human being. The socialization process makes the past generations' socially shared experiences present through the sign systems. At the same time, social interaction with contemporaries in sharing the experiences makes the construction of reality a continuous socialization process. Berger and Luckmann described the process with the concepts of *externalization* and *internalization*, but emphasized that the concepts are interlinked: A human being externalizes his or her

²⁵ Berger and Luckmann (1991), 69–70, 78–79.

²⁶ Koselleck (2004), 263–275; Kokko (2021).

²⁷ Berger and Luckmann (1991), 69–70, 78–79.

²⁸ Berger and Luckmann (1991), 33–42, 85.

experiences to the social reality through the structures adopted in socialization. At the same time, the human being internalizes the social reality as subjectively meaningful through the same filtering structures. In this process, the human being projects his or her “own meanings into reality”.²⁹

Sixth, when *experiences are approached as the social construction of reality*—not just as the observation of reality—this emphasizes the two-way linkage between experiences and social reality. Experiences both shape the social reality and are shaped by it. This dialectic premise of Berger and Luckmann is nowadays discussed across the borderlines of disciplines, but the process of social construction is usually taken for granted without explicit theorization.³⁰ According to Berger and Luckmann, “in this same dialectic man produces reality and thereby produces himself”.³¹ The ongoing dynamic dialectics between a human being and his/her socio-historical situation continue during the lifespan. It makes the human being a biocultural creature who generates, maintains and modifies reality through social interaction.

Finally, experiencing as a social process is the core of *the dialectics between nature and the social world*,³² which even changes the human organism itself. Berger and Luckmann characterize the human being’s relationship to the environment by using the concept of *world-openness*. The concept indicates the interconnectedness of the “inner” and “outer” and deconstructs the inward–outward dichotomy, as the human inward is seen as a part of the social world.³³ World-openness points to the conclusion that a human being is not a prisoner of the biological organism but open to the world and its varying socio-cultural environments.³⁴ This capability ultimately results in the plasticity of the human organism. This idea not only breaks away from the body–mind dichotomy but also

²⁹ Berger and Luckmann (1991), 146, 169, 192.

³⁰ This should not be confused with the dialectic of Marxism. Berger and Luckmann (1991), 208–209, 233. On the reception of Berger and Luckmann’s theory: Hector, V. (2016), *Rebuilding a classic: The social construction of reality at 50. Cultural Sociology* 10(1), 3–20; Friedman, A. M. (2016). Perceptual construction: Rereading the social construction of reality through the sociology of the senses. *Cultural Sociology* 10(1), 77–78.

³¹ Berger and Luckmann (1991), 204.

³² Berger and Luckmann (1991), 201–204.

³³ Berger and Luckmann (1991), 146, 169, 192.

³⁴ For the difference between animals and human beings, Berger and Luckmann (1991), 65–70.

strengthens the denial of the assumption of a universal, ahistorical human experience. By emphasizing human sociality as the factor that makes the human being a changing biocultural creature, it responds to the recent conceptualizations of human biocultural plasticity and world–body–brain dynamics, which are based on new findings in neuroscience.³⁵

In summary, the sociality of human experiencing is always a blend of the cultural and biological. Experiencing is a holistic, continuous human process in which the social reality is dialectically externalized and internalized. Experiences are the concealed products of this process. The analysis of sign systems makes socially shared experiences reachable for research. Moreover, the social history of experiences is focused on the structures that frame both experiencing and experiences. Social constructionism starts from the premise that human beings have made and make together these structures. Ultimately, this means that the social history of experiences relates to the social construction of reality in the past.

HOW EXPERIENCES CONSTRUCT SOCIAL STRUCTURES: SEDIMENTATION AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION

How do human experiences create the social structures as a part of the social reality? Recent structural history has emphasized the linkage between structure and agency and underlined that all structures result from human action. The basic idea is that as human beings construct the structures of their social reality (and themselves), they become a part of the structure.³⁶ By connecting the macro analysis of social structures to a micro analysis of everyday experiences, our approach offers a more detailed view of this process.

For Berger and Luckmann, *social sedimentation* refers to the process of sharing experiences socially, through different kinds of (conscious and unconscious) expressions. In this process, experiences are stored in *signs*—for example, words, gestures or material artefacts—which form *sign*

³⁵ Reddy, W. M. (1997). Against constructivism: The historical ethnography of emotions. *Current Anthropology* 38(3), 327–351; Boddice (2018), 132–167; Boddice and Smith (2020). Tepora (2020). Asia M. Friedman (2016) argues that Berger and Luckmann see sensory perception as biological, not as socially significant or culturally conditioned. This interpretation bypasses their premise of dialectics, which leads to the conclusion that all perception is socially shaped. On cultural impact on the biological basis of senses, for example Pernau, M. and Rajamani, I. (2016). Emotional Translations. *History and Theory* 55, 64.

³⁶ Sewell (2005), 139–145, 151; Haapala and Lloyd (2018), 6–30.

systems, such as language, gesticulatory systems or architecture.³⁷ The process of sedimentation is a part of the broader social process of *institutionalization*.

To put it simply, sedimentation means that experiences are stored, and institutionalization means that sedimented experiences become constructed as (either concrete or abstract) institutions. Compared to everyday language, the concept of *institution* is here understood broadly. Institutionalization occurs when repeating habitual human actions and practices form experiences that in social interaction become socially shared and typified as “predefined patterns of conduct”. Any result of such a process of institutionalization can be called an institution.³⁸

All human-made institutions—from the handshake to society and the welfare state—can be seen as products of the sedimentation and institutionalization of experiences. These processes are preconditions for each other; they are deeply interconnected and hardly separable in everyday life. Figure 2.2 schematizes how these processes make experiences societal and also produce the structures that construct human reality in the social world.

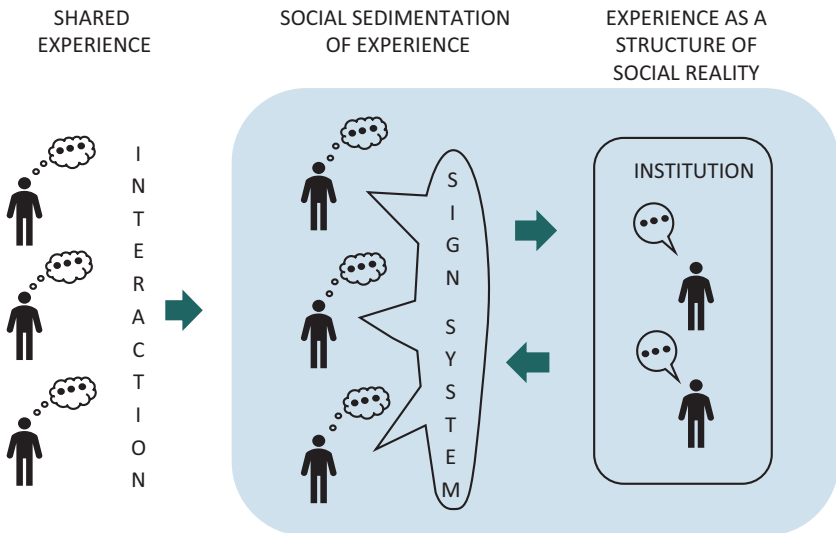


Fig. 2.2 Institutionalization of experience

³⁷ Berger and Luckmann (1991), 85–89, 115.

³⁸ Berger and Luckmann (1991), 72.

The simplified schema in Fig. 2.2 can be widened to a societal scale. When two or more human beings in the same historical context interact with each other, they may create a new sign for a similar kind of experience they share or attach this experience to the meaning of an existing sign. They can, for example, begin to refer to this experience with a specific word or a gesture or build a monument that celebrates this experience. For example, when two people share the experience of a concern for the subsistence of the sick and orphans in their community, they could begin to refer to this experience with the new concept of “poor relief” in their interaction with each other. Their experience becomes sedimented in the concept of poor relief. Via the signs in sign systems, the experience is anonymized and objectivated, detached from the original context and transferred to other people who have no face-to-face connection to the original experience.³⁹

In daily life, institutionalized objectivated experiences become visible as acts that form practices. When these people began to organize aid for the sick and orphaned, the institution of poor relief is established. The signs that refer to an institution and the mere existence of an institution legitimate the experience and give it the potential to become a part of the socially shared and transgenerational stock of knowledge. For the next generation, the existence of the poor relief institution is a self-evident fact of their social reality. However, this does not mean that the next generation cannot change the institution. They may have shared experiences of the need to support other people too, besides the sick and orphaned. At this stage, their experience—which extends beyond the established poor relief institution—can become sedimented as a new meaning of the sign “poor relief” and result in new kinds of practices that become included in the institution.

This simplified anthropological schema for outlining the construction of the institution does not reach the diversity of different institutionalized experiences in everyday life. All historical moments are loaded up with different institutions and sign systems that influence each other. In daily life, the experience resulting in the institution of poor relief does not emerge “out of thin air” but as a reflection of other existing or earlier institutions. For example, poor relief is connected to the institutionalization of a

³⁹ Berger and Luckmann (1991), 49–61.

specific idea of society. In the case of Finland, society as a translocal entity, as an imagined community beyond local face-to-face communication, was conceptualized in the Finnish language for the first time in the mid-nineteenth century. At the same time, poor relief as a concept and practice was established as a nationwide phenomenon in Finland.⁴⁰ This example illuminates how—as a result of the interrelated processes of sedimentation and institutionalization—socially shared human experiences construct the complex net of social structures as a part of the social reality.

SEDIMENTS: ANALYSING EXPRESSIONS OF EXPERIENCES FROM SIGN SYSTEMS

A historian has no direct access to experiences in the past, but the sign systems that are found in the materials available serve as a means to reach expressions of past experiences. Sign systems are the key to the social history of experiences in two ways. First, they open up access to the structures of the past that not only mediate the experiences for contemporary people (and the next generations) but also objectify and legitimize the social institutions that these experiences construct. Thus, the sign systems make experiences that are stored in them societal and give them social representativeness. Second, the signs in sign systems provide a means to analyse the shared meanings of experiences in the past.

We use the concept of *sediment of experience* to analyse the expressions of experiences that are stored up in signs in different sign systems in the sedimentation process. The signs and sign systems convey experiences of the era during which they have been expressed and retain a *temporally changing strata of meanings* as traces of the socially shared experiences. Thus, by analysing the expressions of experience in signs, it is possible to reveal the change of shared meanings.

Historical research material opens a variety of different sign systems for the analysis of sediments in signs. For the social history of experiences, language is the most important sign system. As language can anonymize experiences and transfer the sedimented experiences from one generation or collective to another, it enables the societal circulation of knowledge and the social construction of reality beyond face-to-face interaction. Language outlines and typifies human experiencing in a way that

⁴⁰ Kokko, H. (forthcoming). The construction of modern social citizenship: The lived institution of poor relief in the mid-1800s Finland. In J. Annola, P. Markkola and H. Lindberg (eds.), *Lived institutions as History of Experience*. Palgrave Macmillan.

ultimately causes the anonymization of experiences. This is because as a repository of experiences, language as a system is already objective in the sense that a human being must follow its patterns. Furthermore, the words in language are fully objectivated signs: they are detachable “from the immediate expressions of subjectivity” of the human being who experiences, and they go beyond “the expression of subjective intentions ‘here and now’”. Therefore, language can “make present [...] a variety of objects that are spatially, temporally and socially absent from” the present situation.⁴¹ For example, in our schema, the meaning of the words “poor relief” became detachable from the original context and were shared by other contemporaries and the following generations.

Compared to language, the degree to which signs in other sign systems can be detached from the original face-to-face experience varies.⁴² For example, a spontaneous expression of an emotion, such as weeping, can be seen as a sign, and the norms—that are often unconsciously adopted in socialization—prescribing how these kinds of affects should be expressed can be seen as a sign system.⁴³ However, in comparison to a word, crying is not a fully objectivated sign. As biocultural subjectivity is more present, it is not completely detachable from the subjectivity of the human being who experiences it. Norms prescribing such expressions lack the capability of language to circulate knowledge across time and space. For historical research, they do not formulate as clear sediments of experience as language does. Thus, as a sign this kind of expression is not as societally representative as a word. It is more context- and institution-specific than language, which has the capability to go beyond these borderlines.

However, institution-specific signs and sign systems have an important role in the social history of experiences. Practices such as how to dress or how to behave can either become sedimented in language or become adopted and learned in daily encounters through tacit knowledge. The sediments of such experiences can be found, for example, in photographs, buildings, furniture and other material objects, as well as in visual art. Usually, the best results can be achieved by combining several sign systems in the historical analysis of experiences.

An inevitable challenge for historical research is that the sediments of the past must be met with the sign systems and sediments of the historian’s own

⁴¹ Berger and Luckmann (1991), 51–54.

⁴² Berger and Luckmann (1991), 53–54, 72.

⁴³ Stearns and Stearns (1985), 813, 828–836; Wetherell, M. (2012). *Affect and emotion: A new social science understanding*. Sage, 51–76.

era. Not only the signs but even the sign systems as the contexts of sediments change over time. Tracking the sediments of experience is especially demanding when only the meaning of the sign changes, but the external form of the sign remains unchanged. Our above example pointed out one such case, as the meaning of the sign “poor relief” was broadened from the sick and orphaned to cover other poor people too. A concrete example is the changing national varieties in the meaning of the concept of *society*.⁴⁴

In the case of words and language, the analysis of sediments comes close to the discipline of conceptual history, as long as it is understood in the Koselleckian sense—primarily not as the history of the words, but as the experiences behind the changing meaning of concepts.⁴⁵ Because this approach includes other sign systems besides language, methodologically it could be described as the “history of signs” that widens the scope to the analysis of various traces of human action in research material.

LAYER OF EXPERIENCE: TEMPORAL ANALYSIS OF SOCIETAL CHANGE

To broaden the analysis from the expressions of experience to the societal level, we employ the concept of *layer of experience*. This concept bridges socially shared experiences and the social construction of reality. In practice, layer of experience is a tool to catch and analyse socially shared experiences that have been institutionalized as the structures of the social world in a certain historical era. More precisely, the layer is a tool for a temporal analysis of the social structures to trace the shared experience behind these structures (Fig. 2.3).

The layer of experience is developed by combining Berger and Luckmann’s sedimentation process of experiences with Koselleck’s theory

⁴⁴ Béland, K. and Petersen, K. (eds.) (2014). *Analysing social policy concepts and language: Comparative and transnational perspectives*. Policy Press; N. Edling (ed.) (2019). *The Changing meanings of the welfare state: Histories of a key concept in the Nordic countries*. Berghahn Books; Kettunen, P. (2003). Yhteiskunta. In M. Hyvärinen et al. (eds.), *Käsitteet liikkeessä: Suomen poliittisen kulttuurin käsitehistoria*. Vastapaino, 176–203.

⁴⁵ Koselleck, R. (2002). Social history and conceptual history. In R. Koselleck, *The practice of conceptual history: Timing history, spacing concepts*. Stanford University Press, 35–37. Koselleck, R. (1996). A response to comments on the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. In H. Lehmann and M. Richter (eds.), *The meaning of historical terms and concepts*. German Historical Institute, 59–70; Hyrkkänen, M. (2002). *Aatehistorian mieli*. Vastapaino, 112–113, 117. More broadly, Koselleck (2004), 75–92.

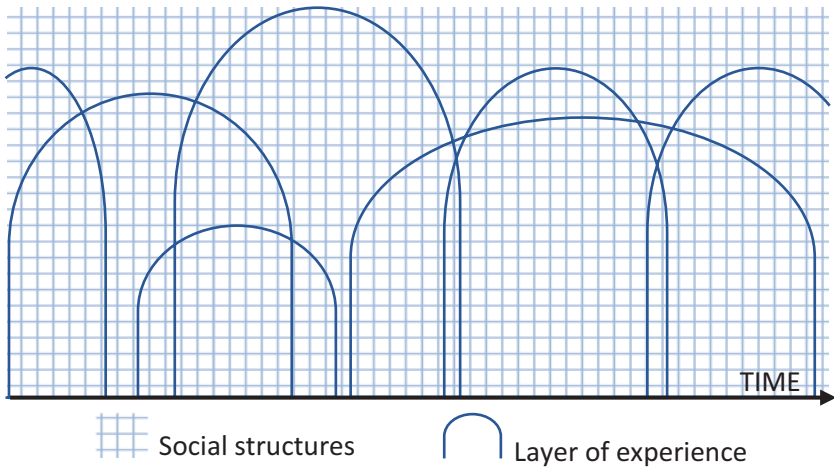


Fig. 2.3 The social structures and the layers of experience

of multi-layered temporalities of experience. In Koselleck's theory, the "gathering, building up, and solidifying into layers of experiences" is a central metaphor for the analysis of temporalities.⁴⁶ In his conceptualization, the layer of experience refers to the presence of the past in the experiencing process of the individual. For Koselleck, experience is a phenomenon where "many layers of earlier times are simultaneously present".⁴⁷ In our approach, this highlights the deep historicity of human experience which, based on the socialization process, circulates the experiences of past generations.

The layer of experience is especially suitable for tracing and analysing historical social change that occurs through experiential change. From the perspective of human experiences, social change is linked to expectations. According to Koselleck, expectations are present assumptions directed toward the future. Therefore, while experience is the presence of the past in the present, expectations are the future made present. For Koselleck, the variety of possible experiences available to a human being in the

⁴⁶ Both layer and sediment have been used as English synonyms for Koselleck's German concept of *Schichte*, but we use them differently here. Hoffmann, S-L. and Franzel, S. (2018). Introduction: Translating Koselleck. In Koselleck, R., *Sediments of time: On possible histories*. Stanford University Press, XIII, XIV.

⁴⁷ Koselleck (2004), 259–275. Citation p. 260.

present moment of the specific time era forms the *space of experience*, which is dependent on the current social structures. The space of experience is a temporal-spatial framework, out of which “every human being and every human community (...) acts, in which past things are present or can be remembered (...) with reference to specific horizons of expectation”.⁴⁸ The variety of possibilities available for the future in a specific moment is the *horizon of expectation*. Thus, the experiential change is shaped by the tension between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation.⁴⁹

In everyday life, the shared future expectations maintain socially shared experiences (see Fig. 2.4a). However, because the social reality is socially constructed, at some point the experienced reality no longer meets the shared expectations of the future. This makes the expectations penetrate through the horizon of expectation (b) and form a new one (c). This is the moment when the establishment of a new layer of experience is possible. In some cases, the social change and the transformation of social reality is so significant that a totally new institution is established.

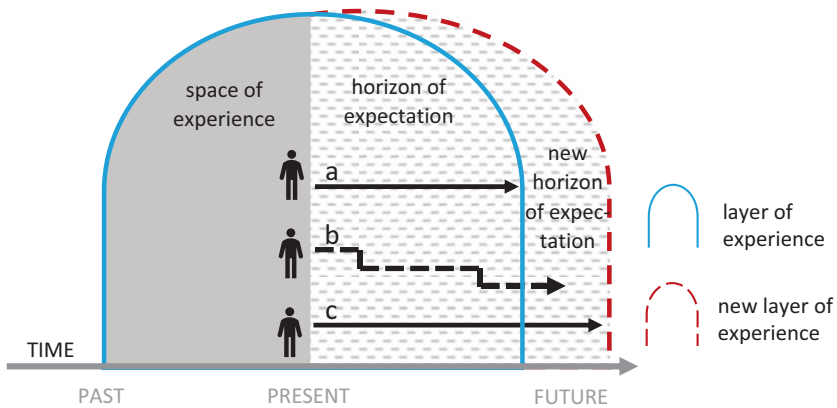


Fig. 2.4 The layer of experience and the horizon of expectations

⁴⁸ Koselleck, R. (2002). Time and history. In R. Koselleck, *The practice of conceptual history: Timing history, spacing concepts*. Stanford University Press, 111.

⁴⁹ Koselleck (2004), 259–275.

To return to our previous example, the early poor relief institution with the objectified sediment of “poor relief” can be interpreted as the first layer of experience. The second layer of experience was formed when the next generation broadened the meaning of the concept and new practices were developed. To follow Koselleck’s idea, a new layer took shape when new horizons of expectation broke out as a result of the tension between experiences and expectations. This reshaped the shared experience of society, social responsibilities and social belonging.

The analysis of layers opens a view to how the social reality consists of a multitude of overlapping and interlinked layers of experiences. Behind every new layer there are the earlier ones, and every new layer of experience is mediated, objectified and legitimated by multiple shared experiences of different institutions that are sedimented in different sign systems.

It must be emphasized that the defining and periodization of the layers is a result of the research process. The study of the shared social experience behind the “institution of poor relief” consists of a basic social historical analysis. By combining and comparing different sediments of experience found in documents—such as population registers and newspapers acknowledging the orphaned children and sick people in a new way, or using the concept of poor relief with new meanings—the historian can identify the temporal layers. Contextualization of the social structures of the era is needed to track societal and experiential change. As the analytic tool of the layer enables the reading of experiences through social structures, it makes it possible and calls for a more detailed analysis of experiences in their temporal-spatial contexts.

SCENE OF EXPERIENCE: A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Experience is always situational. Therefore, the temporal analysis must be linked to the study of the micro-level spatial frames for experiences. Like many scholars of experience, Berger and Luckmann point out the meaning of spatiality in structuring everyday life, but they do not focus on it deeply in their theory.⁵⁰ We apply and develop the analytic term *scene of experience*

⁵⁰ Berger and Luckmann (1991), 40. In their later work, Schutz and Luckmann (1973), 99–118, address the topic.

to conceptualize the concrete frames for the situation of experience in a particular temporal-spatial context.⁵¹

In the scene of experience, Koselleck's concept of space of experience is developed further in the framework of social constructionism. The scene turns the gaze to concrete situational occasions that exist within the space of experience. Figure 2.5 illustrates how the scene of experience is the

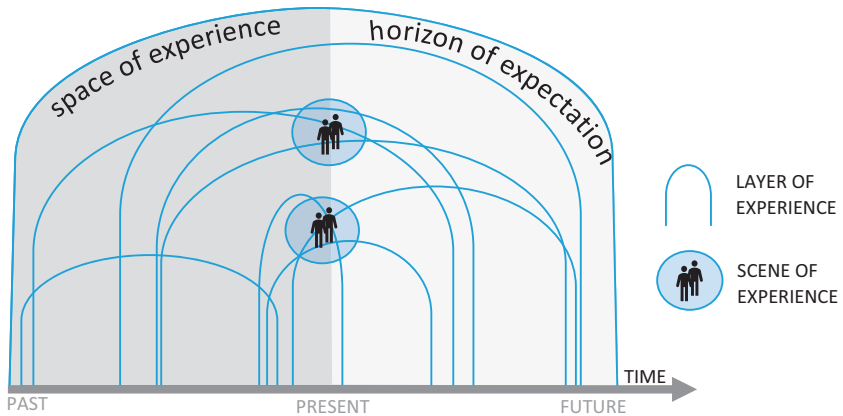


Fig. 2.5 Scene of experience as an analytic tool

⁵¹The concept *scene of experience* has been used in language, poetry and film studies, for example Firbas, J. (1981). Scene and perspective. *Brno studies in English* 14, 37–79. Retrieved 24 January 2022, from <http://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/118096>; Kelly, M. G. (2008). *Strands of utopia: Spaces of poetic work in twentieth-century France*. Modern Humanities Research Association and Taylor & Francis; Girgus, S. B. (2010). *Levinas and the Cinema of Redemption: Time, Ethics, and the Feminine*. Columbia University Press. In the analysis of user experience in design, see Jääskö, V., Mattelmäki, T. and Ylirisku, S. (2003). *The scene of experiences*. In L. Haddon, E. Mante-Meijer, B. Sapio, K.-H. Kommonen, L. Fortunati and A. Kant (eds.), *The Good the Bad and the Irrelevant*. Media Lab UIAH, 341–346. Our first applications of *scene of experience* at HEX conferences 2019 and 2020. Retrieved 20 June 2022, from https://www.academia.edu/81880968/Lived_welfare_state_approaching_the_experience_of_social_security_institutions and https://www.academia.edu/86960801/Harjula_Minna_and_Kokko_Heikki_Experience_as_social_construction_towards_structural_approach_Abstract_for_HEX_conference_2020; Harjula, M. (2019, August 8). Kun kansalainen kohtasi Kelan virkailijan: Hyvinvointivaltio kokemushistoriana. *Alusta*. Retrieved 22 January 2022, from <https://www.tuni.fi/alustalehti/2019/08/08/kun-kansalainen-kohtasi-kelan-virkailijan-hyvinvointivaltio-kokemushistoriana/>. P. Markkola uses the concept in Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo (eds.) (2022), see the eBook version, June 2022. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-92140-8_12.

concrete interface linking the space of experience and horizon of expectation.

The scene is an interface where social structures meet the moment of experience. It consists of the institutionalized shared experiences—layers of experience—which are carried by the human beings in the scene and by the sociomaterial environment as the site of the scene. Thus, as the setting of the present interaction, the scene of experience also carries the earlier societal layers of experience. Due to the continuous process of social sedimentation and institutionalization of experiences, the scene of experience can be seen both as a crystallization of the societal layers of experience and as the place where new societal layers and sediments of experience take shape.

Analytically, the scene of experience can be seen as a temporal-spatial “frozen moment” that at the micro level captures the social structures as layers of experience. This does not mean that the scene of experience is a frozen frame that dictates the experience. Instead, it is the situational context within which the active “framing” of the social reality takes place as the tension between experiences and expectations.⁵² Thus, the framing can be understood as the situational social agency in the scene.

For the social history of experiences, the scene of experience opens a from-below approach to experiences and adds social agency to the analysis. It combines the micro-level social processes of experience and the macro structures of society. It connects the social frameworks, the mediating structures and the human subject to explore how the social reality is constructed in a particular situation. Besides an analysis of everyday life, the scene can produce a from-below approach to social change, as it is a tool to analyse the specific moment and space when a social change is experienced.

Quite similar analytic concepts have been recently developed within the history of emotion and the history of knowledge. Compared to Mark Seymour’s *emotional arena*, which signifies how given social spatial arenas stage and shape the generation, expression and performing of emotions,⁵³

⁵²The idea of framing leans on Persson’s combination of Koselleck’s theory and Erving Goffman’s classic concept of frame. Persson, A. (2019). *Framing social interaction: Continuities and cracks in Goffman’s frame analysis*. Routledge.

⁵³Seymour, M. (2020). *Emotional arenas: Life, love, and death in 1870s Italy*. Oxford University Press; Seymour, M. (2012). Emotional arenas: From provincial circus to national courtroom in late nineteenth-century Italy. *Rethinking History* 16(2), 177–197.

or Johan Östling's *arena of knowledge* as a platform that offers the opportunity and sets the limits for certain forms of knowledge circulation,⁵⁴ the scene of experience is broader. Besides *location*, the scene includes the meanings of *context*, *incident* and *section*, and with the sense of *view* and *panorama*, the concept scene is complementary to Koselleck's visual metaphors and to the social theory based on Berger and Luckmann.⁵⁵

Instead of focusing on personal variations in experiences, the scene of experience allows the structural analysis of the encounters between the individual and the social world by defining the societal limits for the experience. First, the sociomaterial environment for the situational occasion—such as home, factory, outdoor market, maternity clinic, polling station, church—sets limits for the experience. Our previous example included various environments to be analysed as scenes, from the first temporal-spatial moment when the individuals experienced the need to help the poor to the different institutional settings of poor relief. As social institutions carrying earlier layers of experience, the different environments follow divergent conceptual and procedural practices and “predefined patterns of human conduct” for the situational occasions.⁵⁶ Similarly to Mark Seymour's arena, the concept of scene of experience is not restricted to concrete places or face-to-face situations only, but also allows for the analysis of virtual environments, such as newspapers as the mass media of the nineteenth century or the Internet in the late twentieth century.⁵⁷

Second, as a part of the scene of experience, the social interaction and the agency of human beings in the encounter is structured by biocultural and social factors, such as age, gender, generation, language, ethnicity, education and social class. Koselleck saw such factors as common shared

⁵⁴ Östling, J. (2020). Circulation, arenas, and the quest for public knowledge: historiographical currents and analytical frameworks. *History and Theory* 59(4), 111–126.

⁵⁵ Oxford English Dictionary Online. Oxford University Press. Retrieved 16 January 2022, from <https://www.oed.com>.

⁵⁶ Berger and Luckmann (1991), 72. In the sociological and organizational analysis of institutions, concepts such as institutional logic, moral and political logic and moral economy are used to reflect the linkage between the structure of institution and people's views of the institution. For example, Larsen, C. A. (2006). *The institutional logic of welfare attitudes: How welfare regimes influence public support*. Ashgate; Mau, S. (2003). *The moral economy of welfare states: Britain and Germany compared*. London: Routledge; Rothstein, B. (1998). *Just institutions matter: The moral and political logic of the universal welfare state*. Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁷ Seymour (2020), 16–17.

preconditions or *pregivens* (Vorgaben),⁵⁸ which as filters create collective “conditions of different chances for experience”.⁵⁹ According to him, generations live in the same space of experience, but due to the *pregivens*, their experiences differ.⁶⁰ Similarly, Berger and Luckmann point out how the social world is “filtered” to the individual through the selectivity absorbed during life.⁶¹ In our approach, these *pregivens* are not analysed as individual inner variations but as social factors indicated by structural history. For example, a generational approach to a scene opens up a view of the tensions between the experiences and expectations of different age groups in situated encounters (Chap. 8).

Fanny Broton has rephrased Koselleck’s idea of a “grid of historically *pregiven* possibilities of experience”⁶² as the “context of possibilities” for experience.⁶³ As this formulation points out, contextualization is the key to tracing the situational social possibilities for experience in a scene of experience. To find the limits of possible experience, the analysis of the scene combines the exploration of the sediments from different sign systems in the situation with the social preconditions of the participants and the historical context, including other social institutions that structure the scene.

When reading the sources to analyse the scene of experience, the researcher faces multi-layered temporalities in historical research. Especially when using oral history collections, it is necessary to differentiate between the “scene of remembering the experience” and the “scene(s) of the remembered experience”. The more time goes by, the slimmer the chances that the individual who remembers and the scene he or she remembers are within the same layer of experience or mediated by the same sediments of experience. The same applies to the historian, as the “scene of researching” adds another temporal-spatial structure to the research setting.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Hoffman and Franzel (2018), XI; Koselleck (2018), 207–213.

⁵⁹ Koselleck (2018), 209–213, citation p. 211.

⁶⁰ Koselleck (2004), 269.

⁶¹ Berger and Luckmann (1991), 151.

⁶² Koselleck (2018), 213.

⁶³ Boddice and Smith (2020), 29 and 50, cite Brotons, Fanny H. (2017). *The Experience of cancer illness: Spain and beyond during the second half of the nineteenth century*. PhD Thesis, Carlos III University, Madrid.

⁶⁴ The idea is based on the differentiation between “Time remembered”, “Time of remembering” and “Time of researching” in Taavetti, R. (2018). *Queer politics of memory: Undisciplined sexualities as glimpses and fragments in Finnish and Estonian pasts*. University of Helsinki.

CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a socio-historical approach to experiences. As an application of the social theory of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, combined with the conceptualizations of changing temporal structures of experiencing by Reinhart Koselleck, our approach emphasizes how both experiences and experiencing are socially and historically constructed. Experiences are crucial elements of human history because they not only reflect reality but are also the constructive units of social reality.

We introduce the analytical concepts of sediment, layer and scene of experience as methodological tools for exploring how the social construction of reality occurs through human experiencing, which is always based on social interaction. Sediment refers to a temporal stratum of meanings in the expressions of experiences that are stored up and mediated by sign systems. The layer of experience is a temporal stratum of the social institution that clusters the shared experience in the social world. The scene of experience is the situational frame in which the socially shared experiences emerge.

These analytical concepts enable an approach to the shared experiences by considering the limitations that the inevitably assorted and incomplete research material set on the historical study. The three concepts reveal and reflect how human experience is stored in the social world as:

1. the expressions of experience that can be found in research material: sign systems and sediments of experience;
2. the social structures that are constructed by the shared experiences: social institutions and layers of experience;
3. the contextualized particular temporal-spatial situations in which the social experiences emerge: scenes of experience.

This approach clarifies the frameworks for experiencing in a certain situation in a particular society in a specific historical era. As it covers the social frameworks, the mediating structures, the human subject, and the particular situation of experience, it can be scaled from micro analysis to macro-level societal studies of shared experience. Furthermore, by focusing on the transformation of the sign systems and social structures, this approach can trace social change from the perspective of experiences. Thus, it can deepen the understanding of change, which is a primary subject of social science.

The emphasis on social change links our approach to the field of the history of society, which sees the making of society as the research focus

instead of the past itself. As every human experience conveys the multi-layered experiences of the past, there is no way a historian could escape or mute the transgenerational experiences between her/him and the object of the study. Therefore, as the history of society, the social history of experiences is always an analysis of the present-day social world that is approached via the reflection that extends from the past to the present and the future.⁶⁵ This means that—in addition to the past—a historian must also seek to handle the present social world and the temporal gap between them. To analyse the experience of society in the past, a historian needs to explore both the layers and sediments of experiences that are temporally between the researcher and the research material.

⁶⁵ Haapala (1989); Haapala, P. (1990), *Sosiaalishistorian lupaus*. In P. Ahtiainen et al. (eds.), *Historia nyt: Näkemyksiä suomalaisesta historian tutkimuksesta*. WSOY, 67–92. Haapala, P. (2021) Lived historiography: national history as a script to the past. In V. Kivimäki, S. Suodenjoki & T. Vahtikari (eds.), *Lived nation as the history of experiences and emotions in Finland, 1800–2000*. Palgrave Macmillan, 29–56. On the relationship between temporality and the self-understanding of the historical discipline, see Koselleck (2004), 259–275.

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CHAPTER 3

The Challenges of Narrating the Welfare State in the Age of Social Media: A Narrative-Theoretical Approach

Maria Mäkelä

INTRODUCTION

The television miniseries “Indoor Air” (*Sisäilmaa*)¹ by YLE, the Finnish National Broadcast Company, received its airing and an enthusiastic reception at the beginning of 2021. The show’s heroes are public employment service officials struggling with dystopian bureaucratic reforms that increase the already ridiculous workload of both officials and jobseekers, with negligible results that massage the statistics at most. The emotions of extreme helplessness and frustration shared by the office staff are voiced

¹ *Sisäilmaa*, aired on January 4–6, 2021 on YLE TV1 and was released on the *Yle Areena* streaming service on January 1, 2021. Director Tiina Lymi, screenplay by Tiina Lymi & Juha Lehtola. All translations from the series are mine.

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with a sudden pang of rage by service manager Anneli Tiainen, who is being interviewed on a live talk show. The host lets the audience know that Anneli has something to say about “society” and asks her to “crystallize” her message. The push to be clear and concise about the matter is a trigger:

Listen, for fuck’s sake, my apologies if this is a bit difficult to follow, but you see, these are difficult issues, and we should all try to be interested in this stuff even if it’s a little bit boring!

Indeed, how to “crystallize” *society*? Or *welfare*? Independence Day orations in the Nordic Countries frequently celebrate the “success story of the welfare society,” but in the light of contemporary narrative theory, the story of the well-functioning welfare machinery humming in the background of one’s everyday life is all but *untellable*.² This untellability can be traced back to the prototype elements of narrative as outlined by the first-wave cognitive narratologists at the turn of the millennium: A representation most readily recognized as a narrative by the receiver’s cognition conveys a causal succession of events with storyworld particulars and, most importantly, an experiencing individual at the center. One of the most pivotal theoretical innovations at the crux of the paradigm shift from classical to postclassical narratology was the recognition of the centrality of *mediated human experientiality*³ for narrative form; moreover, today cognitive narratologists, sociolinguists and researchers in narrative psychology agree that *storyworld disruption*⁴ or *breach*⁵ experienced by the protagonist enhances significantly narrativity and tellability as well as empathetic engagement.

In sum, business as usual, supra-individual issues lacking relatable detail, and complex phenomena possessing non-individual agency and indirect causality pose a challenge to storytellers. A prototypical narrative, highlighting “what it’s like” (*qualia*)⁶ from an individualized and embodied

² Mäkelä, M. (2020). Through the cracks in the safety net: Narratives of personal experience countering the welfare system in social media and human interest journalism. In K. Lueg & M. Wolff Lundholt (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Counter-Narratives*. Routledge, 389–401.

³ Fludernik, M. (1996). *Towards a “natural” narratology*. Routledge, 26.

⁴ Herman, D. (2009). *Basic elements of narrative*. Wiley, 14.

⁵ Bruner, J. (1991). The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry* 18(1), 1–21.

⁶ Herman (2009), 143–147.

perspective to live through a transformative experience, is thus poorly suited to representing societal structures—their supra-individual logic and manifestations, their complexity, and in the case of welfare mechanisms, their essential task of *alleviating* breaches and world disruptions in citizens' lives. Then again, as the television series “Indoor Air” as a bureaucratic dystopia suggests, also the downfall of the welfare state is beyond narrative sense. Arguably one of the reasons for Anneli's outburst is her not being situated within the storytelling industry where consultants teach influencers and executives how to “crystallize” their message. While unable to deliver an easily digestible sound bite that would encapsulate the complexity of governmental employment policies, Anneli is however able to convey an *emotion* that turns out to be shareable: Her tirade goes viral on social media, and she becomes a national hero, channeling the collective feelings of frustration and resistance of hundreds of thousands of the unemployed. In twenty-first-century social media-fueled narrative environments, if one wishes to become the ultimate storyteller, going viral is the way to go. As I will argue in the following, this story logic only very rarely serves the preservation of governmental welfare mechanisms.

This chapter presents narrative-theoretical methods for the analysis of the narrativization of the welfare state in the narrative environments of the digital era, particularly in the written forms of social media, journalism, institutional communication and fiction. I argue that attention paid to the forms of narrativizing the welfare state by different actors—institutions, politicians, artists, journalists, social welfare officials, healthcare professionals and citizens—provides us with an elaborate qualitative research perspective on the *experience of society and the welfare state*. Narrative theories of the twenty-first century that highlight the experiential facet in all storytelling provide the interdisciplinary research community with a conceptual framework with which to tackle both personal and collective experience, and their sometimes problematic relation. The methods used in this chapter are derived from theories of narrative complexity and viral social media storytelling, cognitive and rhetorical narratology, narrative hermeneutics, and the sociolinguistic and sociological study of narrative.

My main hypothesis, tentatively probed in previous qualitative analyses,⁷ is that the contemporary *masterplots* (as cultural blueprints for shareable

⁷ Mäkelä (2020); Mäkelä, M., Björninen, S., Karttunen, L., Nurminen, M., Raipola, J. & Rantanen T. (2021). Dangers of narrative: A critical approach to narratives of personal experience in contemporary story economy. *Narrative* 28(2), 139–159.

stories) favored by social media tend to challenge rather than support the established mechanisms of the welfare state. Viral stories of withheld welfare checks or indifferent officials emerge as compelling *counter-narratives* that challenge the alleged *master narrative* of a well-functioning welfare system. The *affordances* of narrative form are shown to support stories of disruptive individual experience, and therefore stereotypically compelling narratives gaining visibility in social media may even threaten the future of the welfare state. I demonstrate the applicability of the presented concepts and methods with short analyses of stories of Finnish welfare: (1) a social media campaign with the hashtag #IWouldntBeHere (*#EnOlisiTässä*) celebrating the Finnish welfare state and anticipating Finland's centenary year in 2017; (2) journalistic stories of personal experience concerning welfare benefits and the functioning of the social insurance institution published on the news website of the national broadcasting company, YLE; (3) a viral Facebook post by an outraged citizen condemning the entire child welfare system based on her personal experience; (4) and finally, a closer look at the "Indoor Air" series as an innovative example of narrativizing welfare with the help of fictionality. The main reason for delimiting my examples to Finnish material is that they are derived from the corpus of the *Dangers of Narrative* research project (2017–2020), where we crowdsourced from Finnish social media examples of instrumental storytelling emblematic of the contemporary storytelling boom that forces everyone—from individuals to corporations—to transform themselves into goal-directed storytellers.⁸ It is precisely the early twenty-first-century cultural dominance of instrumental storytelling that renders the critical analysis of the narrative(s) of the welfare society so topical.

THE WEAK NARRATIVITY OF BUSINESS AS USUAL: THE #IWOULDNTBEHERE SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Anticipating the 2017 centennial of Finland's independence, novelist and theatrical director Aino Kivi launched a social media campaign with a hashtag #IWouldntBeHere (*#EnOlisiTässä*) in 2016, prompting users to share their stories of how the welfare state had made them who they are. The point was to highlight the importance of government safety nets for different life situations and histories, but the project partly backfired and partly just failed to go viral, and in the following I will use

⁸ See Mäkelä et al. (2021).

narrative-theoretical concepts and ideas to explain why this was the case. The key concepts introduced here are (weak) narrativity, tellability, narrative agency and complexity vis-à-vis narrative form.

The campaign prompt was straightforward in giving guidelines for telling:

The point of the campaign is to tell about the support that you have received from society. About support without which you wouldn't be here. You may tell as much or as little as you want: about free education, library, swimming halls, child benefit, student allowance, unemployment benefit, health care, anything you want.⁹

Not surprisingly, #IWouldntBeHere stories tended to be poor in experientiality and particularity, mostly listing infrastructures and benefits the updaters had used in the course of their lives. Most importantly, they didn't introduce any experiential rupture or other form of complication that would give rise to narrative qualia—the vicarious, immersive experience that could moreover generate feelings of empathy for the story's protagonist: “The government has warranted my student loan and I have received a tax deduction for the interest I paid. My salary is paid from public funds. Thank you, welfare state.”¹⁰ As such, the stories posted with the campaign hashtag present us with perfect examples of *weak narrativity*. Contemporary narrative theory does not usually categorize representations as straightforwardly narrative or non-narrative, but rather treats narrativity as a scalar quality;¹¹ albeit a whole different ball game, the #IWouldntBeHere stories chime with Brian McHale's description of weak narrativity as he analyses its manifestations in avant-garde narrative poems: “We intuit that we are in the presence of narrativity. But at the same time that our sense of narrative is being solicited, it is also being frustrated.”¹² Twitter as the favored platform for #IWouldntBeHere stories is curiously

⁹ The web sources for the campaign had ceased to exist at the time of writing this chapter, but the campaign prompt can be found, for example, in the critical response by Heikki Pursiainen. See Pursiainen, H. (2016). Ilman valtiota en olisi mitään. Blog post on *libera.fi*, Dec 11. All translations from Pursiainen's text are mine.

¹⁰ Pursiainen (2016).

¹¹ Schmid, W. (2003). Narrativity and eventfulness. In T. Kindt & H.-H. Müller (Eds.), *What Is narratology? Questions and answers regarding the status of a theory*. De Gruyter, 17–34.

¹² McHale, B. (2001). Weak narrativity: The case of avant-garde narrative poetry. *Narrative* 9(2), 164.

both a symptom and a cause: the formulaic and repetitive nature of the stories is conditioned by the radically limited form of 280 characters, whereas viral stories of the *malfunctioning* of welfare institutions typically take full advantage of the unlimited writing space of Facebook or the 2200-character limit of Instagram captions.

Depending on the paradigm, narrativity can be defined in myriad ways. The same is the case with *tellability*, an overlapping concept originating from sociolinguistic research and primarily pointing to the social, situated relevance and appeal of the told (*Why are you telling me this here and now?*), while narrativity refers primarily to the qualities of narrative representation (i.e., which discursive features prompt a narrative interpretation).¹³ However, the narrative environment created by social media supports a very particular understanding of both narrativity and tellability, one coinciding with the cognitive narrative prototype briefly described in the Introduction to this chapter. Our previous research shows that the most likeable and shareable stories of social media are precisely stories of personal, disruptive experience that have immersive storyworld details. In order to fully capture the essence of the shareable and likeable story, this purely cognitive definition should, we argue, be supplemented by sociolinguistic theories of oral storytelling that highlight the importance of moral positioning and exemplarity in narrative communication.¹⁴ Such densely experiential narratives conveying a moral in an immersive form are most likely to go viral, and as such, represent the type of “compelling story” touted as a miracle cure to any communicational challenge by today’s storytelling consultants and coaches. The social media storytelling affordances of liking and sharing support the affordances of the cognitive narrative prototype in ways that I will analyze below in the subchapter entitled “The Viral Exemplum.”

The stories prompted by the #IWouldntBeHere are the opposite of compelling. Surely, they are shared “stories” in the sense trademarked by social media giants Facebook and Instagram, but in their iterativity and lack of rupture and detail they fall short of experiential resonance—which, of course, is paradoxical as the listed benefits and institutions belong more

¹³ See, e.g., Baroni, R. (2011). Tellability. In *Living Handbook of Narratology*, retrieved January 27, 2022 from <https://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/node/30.html>.

¹⁴ E.g., De Fina, A. & Georgakopoulou, A. (2012). *Analyzing narrative: Discourse and sociolinguistic perspectives*. Cambridge University Press, 97–98. On positioning, see, e.g., Hyvärinen, M., Hatavara, M. & Rautajoki, H. (2021). Positioning with master and counter-narratives. *Narrative Inquiry* 31(1), 97–125.

or less to the experiential framework and cultural memory shared by all Finns. From the perspective of research on oral storytelling in sociolinguistics, they would also be weak in tellability. One can, of course, imagine a casual conversation where acquaintances would praise the service they received in public health care, but these are not rhetorically powerful narratives that you could imagine retelling to the next person. For the sake of comparison, in the eminent classic of sociolinguistic narrative studies, William Labov collected “close to death” narratives from the streets of a black neighborhood in the USA in order to model the structure of oral narratives.¹⁵ In Labov’s influential research, the “evaluation” phase toward the end of the narrative, highlighting the point of the story and reflecting the personal meaning of the story for the teller, proved crucial; in the #IWouldntBeHere stories, evaluation is both implied (*welfare society is a good thing*) and banal, shrinking to a feeble “thank you” in the narrative proper.

Arguably resulting from weak narrativity, the campaign was only moderately covered by the mainstream media, while at the same time being sarcastically attacked by right-wing liberals on social media and blogs. The shared “stories” ended up reinforcing the stereotype of social democratic naiveté—citizens expressing their gratitude toward the state while appearing ignorant about the sources of government income. The former head of the right-wing think tank Libera Heikki Pursiainen writes on Libera’s blog:

We the members of society ultimately pay for all. [...] the state doesn’t pay for anything but simply transfers funds from one person to another. [...] The administrators and storytellers of the #IWouldntBeHere campaign are however not at all interested from where these lovely “free of charge” things originate. The writers praise the state for providing healthcare services, income redistribution, swimming halls, free degrees, child allowances, doctoral schools, television series and culture. [...] All those things the writers have received have been paid for by another human being, not the state.¹⁶

From a less politicized perspective, we can easily see that the logic of taxation and income distribution is an element that the storytellers probably just had difficulties with factoring in, when social media prompts the

¹⁵ Labov, W. (1972). *Language in the inner city: Studies in the black English vernacular*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

¹⁶ Pursiainen (2016).

user to foreground personal experience,¹⁷ not an economic-structural analysis. A key problem is that the represented governmental structure does not provide the teller with relevant narrative agency: There is no available role for an active, experiencing protagonist whose choices and actions define the course of events. Instead, the state is constructed as the “helper” (cf. Greimas’ classical model of narrative actants¹⁸), which gives the opportunity for Pursiainen and those like-minded to reconstruct the proverbial “taxpayer” as the hero of the counter-narrative, albeit in an equally passive role as the ultimate, and yet non-individualized, faceless enabler of transfer payments.

From an economic-political perspective, in their urge to create moral positioning and project narrative agency onto individuals, both narratives have it wrong. State economics and public welfare are *complex systems* that can only give rise to *emergent* causality and agency. Roughly, the concept of *emergence* in complexity theories refers to action that is a bottom-up result of various local interactions but cannot be simply reverse-engineered back into those basic actions. Emergent action is thus always more than the sum of its identifiable parts, and it lacks what narrative theorist H. Porter Abbott calls centralized control or authority, such as an author.¹⁹ Typical examples of complex systems are biological evolution, climate change and structural injustice or hereditary disadvantage—they all manifest non-linear causality that cannot be reduced to any one clear-cut cause or agent. Understanding agency in terms of emergence however does not exclude human action, nor does it even foreground non-human action; as recently summarized by Marie-Laure Ryan, “[e]mergence, in its strongest form, is a property of phenomena that we do not fully understand: how the individual elements of a system organize themselves into larger functional patterns without the top-down guidance of a controlling authority.”²⁰

While complex systems theory has been applied in the study of welfare systems,²¹ perhaps welfare does not represent the “strongest form” of

¹⁷ Mäkelä, M. (2019). Literary Facebook narratology: Experientiality, simultaneity, tellability. *Partial Answers* 17(1), 159–182.

¹⁸ Greimas, A. J. (1966). *Sémantique structurale: Recherche de méthode*. Ducrot.

¹⁹ Abbott, H. P. (2008). Narrative and emergent behavior. *Poetics Today* 29(2), 227–244.

²⁰ Ryan, M.-L. (2019). Narrative as/and complex system/s. In M. Grishakova & M. Poulaki (Eds.), *Narrative complexity: Cognition, embodiment, evolution*. University of Nebraska Press, 42.

²¹ Garnsey, E. W. & McGlade, J. (2006). *Complexity and co-evolution: Continuity and change in socio-economic systems*. Edward Elgar.

complexity—examples of that can be found within the natural sciences. Yet emergence and complexity and their proven resistance to narrativization²² to some degree explain the weak narrativity of #IWouldntBeHere and other attempts to storify welfare society. It also explains why the campaign was such an easy target for the proponents of liberal economics. Welfare as a system lacks discernible and personified human interaction and agency, and its consequences for, for example, social equality—and even more pressingly, for national wellbeing and wealth at large—are not explained through simple causal chains.

The case of #IWouldntBeHere raises the question of the ultimate relationship between life as lived and stories as narrated, a problem most thoroughly theorized by narrative hermeneutics. Hermeneutic approaches to storytelling, much favored in historical research, have long argued for the inseparability of experience and its interpretation or articulation as narratives; for a narrative hermeneutist, all experiencing is always already an interpretation, and these interpretations have a strong tendency to be further permeated with cultural story models and cognitive structures of narrative sense making. Hanna Meretoja calls this the “double hermeneutic” of narrative: “It is an *interpretative continuum* that ranges from the basic interpretative structure of sense perception to more complex forms of interpretation, such as narrative (re)interpretations. When we acknowledge that experience itself has an interpretative structure, narrative interpretations can be conceptualized as interpretations of interpretations.”²³

No doubt the welfare society is deeply ingrained in the narrative identity of those who have spent their entire life in Finland. Some of us have the experience of having been supported by this socio-economic structure. Yet, as argued by narrative hermeneutics, storytelling cultures and narrative formulae affect and structure the way we experience things in the first place. This chapter does not provide a diachronic analysis of the *changes* in narrating Finnish welfare, starting from its formation in the early twentieth century. Yet we may rather safely assume that the first private and most certainly collective experiences of welfare services as a *new*

²² Abbott (2008); Walsh, R. & Stepney, S. (Eds.) (2018). *Narrating Complexity*. Springer; Grishakova, M. & Poulaki, M. (Eds.) (2019). *Narrative complexity: Cognition, embodiment, evolution*. University of Nebraska Press.

²³ Meretoja, H. (2020). Life and narrative. In P. Dawson & M. Mäkelä (Eds.), *Routledge Companion to Narrative Theory*. Routledge.

aspect of the everyday²⁴ were much more tellable than the experience of early twenty-first-century welfare customers, for whom the safety net has been there all along—at least for three generations. Today the question of *experiencing welfare society* needs to be asked in the context of information overflow and the consequent instrumentalization of storytelling. In the contemporary story economy, the greatest currency proves to be the personal story of disruptive experience. This development has a neoliberal origin in the celebration of the upwardly mobile individual,²⁵ yet much of the damage it currently does to people’s trust in democratic welfare societies is unsolicited. Again, there are no recognizable narrative agents behind the new cultural dominant of storification, but an emergent logic of action, that of social media.

COUNTERING MASTERPLOTS THAT SURVIVE THE INFORMATION OVERLOAD: HUMAN INTEREST JOURNALISM AND THE “INDIVIDUAL VS. SYSTEM” MASTERPLOT

Now I will move on to journalistic stories of the failure of welfare mechanisms as experienced by individual citizens. My aim is to describe the logic of master and counter-narratives directing the production and reception of stories on welfare, and to introduce the concept of the masterplot in order to capture the essence of the easy shareability and rhetorical dominance of personal stories that, societally speaking, appear to come from the margin and give voice to those silenced by authorities.

One can easily imagine how different the volume, visibility and general compellingness of the #IWouldntBeHere campaign would have been if the prompt were to share experiences of how the welfare society—or as Pursinainen reminds us, more accurately the welfare *state*—has *failed* the storyteller. Stories of citizens “falling through the holes of the safety net” abound in contemporary human-interest journalism, which does its utmost to piggyback on the appeal of the “true stories” of social media. Paradoxically, while such stories rely strongly on particularity, they nevertheless form an easily recognizable and even clichéd story genre that many

²⁴ See, e.g. Harjula, M. (2015). *Hoitoonpääsyn hierarkiat: Terveyskansalaisuus ja terveyspalvelut Suomessa 1900-luvulla*. Tampere University Press, 366.

²⁵ Fernandes, S. (2017). *Curated stories: The uses and misuses of storytelling*. Oxford University Press, 18.

of our followers, prompted by the critical perspective introduced by our project, found both annoying and misleading. In the *Dangers of Narrative* research project, we asked our followers on social media to report to us funny, irritating or troubling examples of instrumental storytelling; from a corpus of approximately one thousand reports and with a clear majority being related to human interest journalism and individuals' "true stories" going viral, we were able to extract five recurrent *masterplots*: The Good Samaritan, The Deserving Poor, Individual vs. System, Illness as the Hero's Journey and The Conversion Story of the Wellness Entrepreneur. All are somehow related to societal structures, but the one most clearly related to welfare is the Individual vs. System masterplot.

We took the concept and definition of masterplot from H. Porter Abbott: "recurrent skeletal stories, belonging to cultures and individuals that play a powerful role in questions of identity, values, and the understanding of life."²⁶ A typical masterplot would be the Cinderella Story—or From Rags to Riches—a portable blueprint for storytelling that travels through ages and cultures yet reflects the dominant values and power structures of each culture and society in which it is appropriated. I have argued elsewhere that the untellability of the welfare state and its mechanisms vis-à-vis the rhetorical valuations of social media-fuelled narrative environments has significantly reinforced the Individual vs. System masterplot that through viral sharing constitutes a considerable counter-narrative to the alleged "story" of the well-functioning welfare state.²⁷ Representatives of this category are easily recognizable already by their proneness to clickbait journalism—a workable overall method of detecting twenty-first-century masterplots is indeed to look at the headlines that take the form of a narrative synopsis:

The Social Insurance Institution gave conflicting advice—without welfare, 18-year-old girl was forced to cancel her graduation party²⁸

Employment agency urged a dead woman to get a job²⁹

²⁶ Abbott, H. P. (2008). *Cambridge introduction to narrative. Second edition*. Cambridge University Press, 236.

²⁷ Mäkelä (2020), 389–401.

²⁸ News webpage of the national broadcasting company *Yle Uutiset* June 6, 2017, retrieved January 28, 2022 from <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-9650476>. My translation.

²⁹ Tabloid *Ilta-Sanomat* November 16, 2017, retrieved January 28, 2022 from <https://www.iltasanomat.fi/kotimaa/a/201711152200534052>. My translation.

Wrong medicine drove a boy to a psychiatric ward for years—at the age of 16, he managed to expose the nationwide oppression and humiliation of children in institutions³⁰

These examples taken from the *Dangers of Narrative* corpus were reported to our project anonymously by welfare and healthcare professionals who pointed out the severe misrepresentation of bureaucratic processes and criticized the straightforward generalizations drawn from stories of personal experience, as such typically resistant to fact-checking.

The discredited professionals in these stories have no narrative way of their own to counter such confrontational representations of their work. Doctors and social workers are not allowed to share stories that would provide an affective ground for social media users and material for “case” and feature journalism. What is more, they are not even able to comment on individual cases in public. These are pragmatic concerns, emblematic of the difficult position where the storytelling boom often puts professionals at a disadvantage due to confidentiality rules. As such, they also reflect a deeper story logic of master and counter-narratives. François Lyotard’s well-known theory of postmodernity as a deconstruction of *les grands récits* of modernity such as religion, or the enlightenment idea of the constant progress of modern societies, is currently being challenged by the celebration of the return of stories in the form of personal storytelling across platforms. The relationship between grand (cultural, collective, norm-setting, omnipresent) narratives and small (local, personal, shared, situated) stories has been reconceptualized as a dialectic or struggle between master and counter-narratives in sociologically inclined narrative research. Originally master narratives were understood as culturally dominant ways of telling about, for example, motherhood or illness, and counter-narratives as coming from the experiential margin and challenging the dominant story formulae by telling differently and introducing a diverging narrative identity.³¹ Recent research has challenged this view by asking whether master narratives need to be told in the first place or if they

³⁰ *Yle Uutiset* September 15, 2018, retrieved January 28, 2022 from <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-10400366#:~:text=L%C3%A4%C3%A4k%C3%A4rit%20kertoivat%20Katjalle%2C%20ett%C3%A4%20Jeren,koko%20perheelle%20vuosien%20pitui%20paina-jainen>. My translation.

³¹ See Bamberg, M. & Andrews, M. (Eds.) (2004). *Considering counter-narratives: Narrating, resisting, making sense*. John Benjamins.

are rather script-like norms taken for granted,³² and whether counter-narratives are always genuinely emancipatory voices from the margin.³³ I have proposed that the master narrative of the well-functioning welfare state that may indeed still dominate in the Nordic countries is precisely such an implicit script that typically materializes only when *countered* with personal stories of its failure. These narratives efficiently position themselves as countering, yet they have a great potential to become easily shareable and replicable masterplots, particularly when boosted by the story logic of social media.³⁴

The relationship of the previously defined masterplot to master and counter-narrative requires further elaboration. While master narratives are indeed more-script like, prescriptive and general carriers of norms and values that are rarely actually uttered or situated (“Finland is a welfare society where the safety net will catch all who fall”), masterplots are instead much more concrete recipes for plot, characters and moral positioning, and their “skeletal” structure can be reverse-engineered from individual narratives. From this follows that also counter-narratives, if successful in becoming replicable, can begin to form a recognizable masterplot that nevertheless preserves the gesture of *countering* (“I fell through the holes in the welfare safety net”). The rhetorical gesture of countering, in turn, requires the erection of a master narrative, even if it were a narrative straw man; a case in point would be the contemporary radical antifeminist online communities who aggressively tell a counter-narrative to challenge the alleged master narrative of feminism as a dominant power structure in western societies.³⁵ The rhetorical force of these counter-narratives, typically taking the form of stories of personal emancipation or trauma, hinges on their positioning as coming from the margin and voicing the previously unsaid, even if the teller is a white Caucasian heterosexual male propagating a return to patriarchal order.

³² Hyvärinen, M. (2020). Toward a theory of counter-narratives: Narrative contestation, cultural canonicity, and tellability. In K. Lueg & M. Wolff Lundholt (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Counter-Narratives*. Routledge 17–29.

³³ Nurminen, M. (2020). “The big bang of chaotic masculine disruption”: A critical narrative analysis of the radical masculinity movement’s counter-narrative strategies. In K. Lueg, K. & M Wolff Lundholt, (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Counter-Narratives*. Routledge, 351–362.

³⁴ Mäkelä (2020).

³⁵ Nurminen (2020).

Popular and viral stories of cracks in the safety net or the corrupted welfare system derive their rhetorical power from the narrative gesture of countering, by projecting an allegedly “authorized” master narrative of the foolproof welfare system. Yet one hardly ever hears this story told. Rhetorically, it lives most vibrantly even if reversely in stories of personal experience countering it.

Yet another illustrative case reported to us via crowdsourcing—in fact by several followers—is a web column with a fair amount of social media shares entitled “My ill friend” and written by a celebrity journalist of the national broadcasting company, YLE. The story consists of a long quotation from the anonymous “friend”, recounting her ample and in every way horrendous experience with public healthcare. The editorial framing by the journalist consists merely of informing the readers about the friend’s condition (type one diabetes) and the given consent to publish the story. The justification to tell the story on the website of the national broadcasting company is by no means journalistic but can be tracked down to the narrative affordances of social media that support a representative and normative reading of an unverified story of personal, disruptive experience. In fact, it is even likely that the text had originally been a Facebook post.

[...] Doctors at the public health-care center are somehow more scatter-brained, not focusing on the patient at all. They don’t have a clue who I am and what’s wrong with me. [...] The same evening, the same physician can be much more competent at the private clinic. Value for money. [...]

I gave my blanket to this old lady, when she was praying for a warmer. I was scolded for doing this because it was forbidden. [...] An angry glare at me, angry yelling at the granny. That’s quite embarrassing, no matter how old or demented you are. [...] ³⁶

The crushing critique of the public welfare system is from time to time interrupted by intensely emotional passages focusing on the teller’s loneliness and fear of death as a person who suffers from several grave illnesses and has no family to support her. The masterplot of Individual vs. System mixes with the masterplot of the Good Samaritan, a story genre that recounts the heroic efforts of a sole individual (the protagonist) saving the day in an exemplary manner while both the “system” and other

³⁶ *Yle Uutiset* June 15, 2015, retrieved January 28, 2022, from <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-8074238>. My translation.

individuals (nurses) turn their backs on the one in need (“the old lady”). The whole is a disturbing mixture of strong normativity, sweeping generalizations and intense subjectivity, yet this is precisely why it evades criticism and falsification. It is difficult to imagine a readerly position from which the teller’s experience could be outright disproved. Details of embodied experience, prompting an affective response in the audience, mix with iterative narration and normative claims, resulting in a story that suggests every visit to public healthcare is a traumatic experience, and not just for the teller but others as well.

THE VIRAL EXEMPLUM: THE FACEBOOK STORY ABOUT THE DECLINE OF THE WELFARE STATE

As Matti Hyvärinen points out, the mere narrative act of countering an alleged master narrative itself introduces a breach in the story and thus renders it more tellable than an established master narrative could ever be.³⁷ In political contexts, this story logic translates into a situation where placing oneself on the margin is in itself a narrative gesture that invites narrative responses.³⁸ When we add the narrative affordances of social media to the equation, we can see their appropriateness in reinforcing the dynamic between situated, “small” counter-narratives and the projected, ultimately intangible master narratives. The countering masterplots that go viral and succeed in questioning entire institutions benefit from the narrative situation of isolated and yet connected users who reach out for a shared affect. It is no coincidence that the masterplots questioning the welfare state in social media typically feature a sole hero-protagonist struggling against the system alone while all else fails around her. As such, the narrative situation is starkly opposed to the ethos of welfare society, encapsulated in recurring slogans such as “leave no man behind” (with this particular trope drawing from the Second World War narrative repertoire that still resonates strongly in the Finnish cultural memory).

An illustrative example is provided by a public Facebook post that received 6300 shares, which by Finnish standards means considerable virality. Already the title of the post, “This is how the Finnish welfare state

³⁷ Hyvärinen (2020).

³⁸ Polletta, F. (2006). *It was like a fever: Storytelling in protest and politics*. The University of Chicago Press.

cares for its youth in Anno Domini 2019”,³⁹ explicitly marks the master narrative to be countered by the personal story. The “evaluation” part of the story⁴⁰ is thus foregrounded, while at the same time the narrative is framed as best fits the genre of a personal Facebook post: It conveys an immediate experience, its “what it’s like” quality. This happens in the very first sentence after the title: “I’m just so confused about the officials’ actions concerning a minor that I really need to tell this to you as well.” The narrative recounts in a detailed manner a one-night episode during which the teller ends up accommodating two teenagers returning from a party, the one having allegedly been kicked out of his/her parents’ house and being a frequent resident in a Red Cross reformatory. First, the teller recounts in a poignantly sarcastic manner her experiences with a Red Cross worker who refuses the teenager shelter due to a curfew. Then the teller moves on to describe in length the interaction with a social services emergency duty officer over the phone:

The duty officer said that all children and youths have a home to go to in Finland. We drifted into a discussion on how this in fact is not the case. This took a long time and really started to stretch my patience. That was after all a social worker on the line, shouldn’t every officer know people have problems? [...]

I asked if the duty officer really didn’t know what to do in this situation. I asked the officer how it was possible not to have a protocol for this and not having experience of similar situations. The duty officer replied, that [s/he] didn’t know how to proceed and had never encountered anything like this.

The phone conversation resulted in the conclusion that the only option was for me to take the youth to stay over. I was wondering how can it go like this? [...]

Just when the teens had gotten into bed, the officer calls me back to inform me that child welfare is working on this. So they are actually calling me at 1 am to let me know that child welfare will be calling me back the same night. I told them that here’s where I’m drawing the line. [...] The duty officer sounded surprised after hearing I wasn’t willing to stay up all night.

³⁹ I will not provide a link to this Facebook post in order to anonymize and protect the writer as she is not a public figure. The analysis of the post is however justified, as the writer is manifestly aware of the publicity of her post, and the story was also noted in one media outlet. Translations from the post are mine.

⁴⁰ Labov (1972).

One more time, to be clear, I tell the officer that I'm just a random innocent aunt, not working a night shift, unlike you guys at the other end of the line. [...]

Anyway, I just wanted to sleep, and now I'm alone responsible for this teen, a stranger, abandoned by the world, in Finland, and it's 2019.

How abandoned can the youth be in this country? [...]

The reader learns that the post has been written on the very night of the narrated events. It ends with an intensely emotional paragraph, switching from a moral register to an experiential one: "I'm so tired I'm crying. [...] If I'm the only adult who a youth can ask help from, I just can't turn my back and sleep. That's for sure." The dramatized narrative situation thus supports the theme of the story: We are ultimately alone in this world, and the safety net we were once promised that would catch us all does not exist; the bureaucrats responsible for the system are inhumane and detached from reality.

The reception of the story was overwhelmingly positive: it received more than 1600 thank you notes in the comments and resulted in a journalistic piece questioning the state of child welfare services in the teller's home city. Moreover, the story prompted other users to recount their own similar experiences, one concluding that the situation is "precisely the same" in eldercare across Finland. In the social media responses to the story, no generalization seemed to be too sweeping as the sharers and commentators took part in the affective chain reaction ignited by this one unverifiable story of personal experience. I tracked down only a couple of shares that were critical, mostly concentrating on the problematic issues of verifiability, caricaturization, misrepresentation of protocols, moral self-positioning, and the case's representativeness vis-à-vis the general state of Finnish child welfare services.

In previous research, we have labeled this story logic the *viral exemplum*: not unlike the premodern exemplum, which did not differentiate factual and fictional narratives but instead foregrounded the "deep truth" and the moral lesson underneath storyworld particulars, a viral social media story of personal experience is prone to claims of representativeness and normativity authorized by likes and shares.⁴¹ An emergent social

⁴¹ Mäkelä et al. (2021); Katajala-Peltomaa, S. & Mäkelä, M. (2022). Conversion as an exemplary experience in the 14th century and today: Narrative-comparative approaches to the exemplum. *Scandinavian Journal of History* 47(1), 16–38.

media authority thus arises from the contribution of individual users—tellers and retellers—to whom no rhetorical or ethical responsibility can be delegated.⁴² “Truths” about the decline of the welfare society generated by this chain reaction from experientiality to representativeness and normativity cannot be countered with statistics or structural analysis, as the nature of such shared truths is experiential at heart. These amplified experiences-cum-countering masterplots constitute a rhetorically powerful challenge to any attempt at telling the “story” of the welfare society.

NARRATING COMPLEXITY WITH THE HELP OF FICTIONALITY: THE TELEVISION SERIES “INDOOR AIR” (*SISÄILMAA*)

A recent example from televised fiction, the miniseries “Indoor Air” discussed briefly at the beginning of this chapter, may however give us some hope of narrative means for representing the welfare state—not in its inherent flawedness or foolproofness, but in its complexity. The series is a probable near-future dystopia where privatization and the late-capitalist business logic of individual reward through competition gradually invade the Finnish public sector. Yet peculiarly, the “realism” of the welfare machinery and its looming doom is *amplified* by fantastic elements that recurringly penetrate the bureaucratic universe. As the nightmarish reformations proceed in the public employment agency where almost all the events of the story are situated, Seppo, a senior member of the staff, develops a severe mold allergy in response to something; it might be mold spreading in the structures of the office building, or it might just as well be the reformations that cause both physical and mental illness among the employment officers.

Black and dripping mold stains on the office walls also start to haunt Anneli, together with the ghost of Eelis, an employee who commits suicide by jumping off the office roof in the first episode. The literary-critical term to describe such narration would be *uncanny*; the interpretation wavers between realism and fantasy, not resolving into either unless at the end of the story, at most. This is what happens in “Indoor Air”, as the ultimate collapse of the welfare state translates metaphorically into the office of the employment agency tumbling down and mold taking over. Yet the analogy between horror, paranoia, mental illness and the invisible

⁴²Dawson, P. & Mäkelä, M. (2020). The story logic of social media: Co-construction and emergent narrative authority. *Style* 54(1), 21–35.

mechanisms (of political and bureaucratic power) causing the downfall of the welfare state prevails.

Metaphoricity and artistic analogies—instead of straightforward and prototypical narrativity—are key to the success of “Indoor Air”; the series succeeds in representing a *structure* instead of mere individuals, as well as the ultimate intangibility and emergent nature of agency and action in a complex societal structure. The building and the mold represent the structure, the haunting and the horror thematize the difficulty of understanding and controlling those forces that threaten the welfare state. During the notorious talk show interview scene, Anneli rages against these invisible hands choking the system for which she herself has sacrificed her life and her mental health:

Is helping some sort of business? I’m serious! Whose shitty idea was this? Now I get it: There is no one! There’s fucking no one. There is no single person, there’s just some shapeless lump somewhere coming up with these shitty ideas that we idiots put into action, like these were some fucking divine messages from God above!

The narrative ethos of “Indoor Air” thus constitutes a remarkable exception in our time of instrumental stories of disruptive personal experience: it does not attempt to invoke empathy in the audience for the unemployed by constructing Victorian tear-jerker stories of the Deserving Poor and Good Samaritans. Individual customers are not treated as individuals but tangibly presented as a mass that is being subjected to various political and bureaucratic measures. The rare glimpses provided into private miseries rather satirically evoke only stereotypes that seem to suggest that the evaluation of individual stories and their compellingness, unlike in social media, is not relevant in the context of welfare:

- You have two minutes.
- Oh, ok. So, um... I’m a qualified elementary teacher but I can only work as a substitute and basically you can’t take those jobs if you’re a single parent and an alcoholic.

That personal stories of disruptive experience are downplayed and any empathetic relating to the stories of the unemployed frustrated does not however result in non-empathetic storytelling derived from emotions. Anneli and her colleagues feel for the structure and the system; the

corruption of that system by the neoliberal logic of competition and privatization makes them both physically and mentally ill. Sometimes this agony intermingles with the difficulty of narrativizing welfare—that is, of identifying the relevant agents and causality. This intermingling happens when Eelis tries to explain his “not feeling well” to Anneli just before his suicide:

– Anneli, it’s like, I can’t do this anymore. I—like, it’s not like we’re helping anyone here. What’s the point in making all these people attend courses, they’ll never get a job. We’re just maintaining these structures here, you and me and all of us, and, and, people going back and forth and and I and—no, and not you, and not, not I and not, not my superior, not your superior, not the Ministry of Employment and Economy, so... And everything’s just getting worse!

– Right... You know, Eelis. Like I’m not exactly following you.

After Eelis kills himself, Anneli becomes obsessed with his last words: “Help me.” Who are the true helpers, and who are the helped, in a faceless system that turns a blind eye to individual suffering? And why is this system worth saving? In the fictional world of “Indoor Air,” the salvation amidst corruption presents itself through the soul and body of Anneli, whom social media now embraces as “Society Anneli”. In the final scene, the ghost of Eelis walks Anneli amongst the crowd of queuing unemployed; Anneli spreads her hands like Christ on the cross, and the crowd of nameless jobseekers wander through her now transparent body. The unquestionably fantastical closing scene highlights the most crucial narrative analogy developed throughout the series, that between protestant Christianity and the well-functioning welfare system placed under threat. Individual deeds or stories do not count, as salvation—unemployment benefit and other services—is possible only through mercy in the form of the non-individuating welfare system.

By way of an analogy between welfare as a structure, the office building and finally Anneli’s living body, the series succeeds in providing the audience with its own artistic definition of the welfare system. At moments this definition is explicitly voiced by a burnt-out middle manager, who keeps referring to the welfare system as “Little Anneli’s window.” From this window—from within the functioning structure—Anneli is able to foresee the looming “desertedness of the soul” that would—*Sisäilmaa* suggests—follow from the downfall of the welfare state.

CONCLUSION

Discussions about the welfare society will always be about emotions, too; no criticism of the popular masterplots of disruptive personal experience will ever change that. Social media may be the most fertile breeding ground for collective affects generated by storytelling, but even the most bureaucratic, technocratic and expressionless political discourse is rooted to affects that guide our action as individual citizens, voters and members of various collectives. The Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin attempted to storify the welfare state in a televised speech during the latest municipal elections in 2021 by simply recounting the predictable life course of a prototypical Finnish citizen from maternity and child healthcare to eldercare. Might this kind of weak, script-like narrative go viral in the future, as storytelling cultures and environments are in constant flux and tear-jerker stories of individual suffering are doubtless bound to lose their charm? As such, the Prime Minister's story-script at least reflects the social democratic ideal of the welfare state truthfully. The structure of this narrative reflects perhaps the most essential experiential element of the welfare state: the predictability of life course.⁴³ Yet in early twenty-first-century storytelling environments, the complexity, boredom and impersonality of societal structures still issue a challenge to anyone wishing to engage audiences. Similar problems have been discovered concerning the European Union; research shows that the lack of experiential point of contact weakens EU citizens' identification with the Union, which in turn may offer a breeding ground for populist nationalism.⁴⁴

On the other side of the coin, research also shows that emotional stories of personal experience, once the most forceful weapon of the Civil Rights movements, rarely change the audiences' political opinions. This is particularly true with structural political issues; as sociologists Francesca Polletta and Nathan Redman argue, it depends on the "background stories and stereotypes" (we could call these master narratives and masterplots) embraced by the audience whether a particular personal story is

⁴³ See Haapala's Chap. 16.

⁴⁴ Carr, N., Dennison, J. & Evans, G. (2018). European but not European enough: An explanation for Brexit. *European Union Politics* 20(2), 282–304; Chopin, T. (2018). Europe and the identity challenge: Who are "we"? *European Issues* no. 466. Foundation Robert Schuman. Retrieved May 22, 2022, from <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0466-europe-and-the-identity-challenge-who-are-we>.

heard “as emotionally touching or as manipulative and inauthentic.”⁴⁵ My reason for concluding this chapter with a brief analysis of narrative experimentation in fiction is to point toward new, innovative means for narrativizing the welfare society that would, in their *narrative* structure, reflect the *represented* societal structure and render it sharable, if not tellable.

This chapter has been an attempt to demonstrate the cruciality of social media in transforming personal stories of disruptive experience into a currency amidst the twenty-first-century information overflow. From the perspective of welfare politics, the twenty-first-century story economy has introduced an unwelcome epistemic and rhetorical bias toward the experiencing individual, while all relevant action remains parliamentary and bureaucratic in essence. Slow, supra-individual structural change is the loser in this contest for citizens’ attention; if one’s political imagination becomes saturated by compelling stories of heroism, survival and victimhood, the ability to comprehend and influence the structures of power and solidarity suffer. Moreover, the more governmental institutions themselves seek out compelling stories in their social media communication with the public, the more they foreground the immediate, individual encounter and consequent easy affective resonance, instead of trying to communicate the collective experiences embedded in welfare structures. My analysis hopefully serves as a reminder for scholars of experience to study not only easily shareable stories of disruptive personal experience, but their contrapuntal and sometimes even antagonistic relationship with the everyday experience of business as usual, or the less verbalized and more implied role of societal structures in shaping experience. This may mean a partial abandoning of narratives (in a prototypical sense) as a primary corpus: Societal structures are complex systems with emergent agency, and therefore they defy narrativization. Nevertheless, they structure our experience, the presence of which, in turn, is the sole prerequisite for something to be worth telling.

⁴⁵ Polletta, F. & Redman, N. (2020). When do stories change our minds? Narrative persuasion about social problems. *Sociology Compass* 14(4), 8.

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PART II

Experiences from Welfare Systems



CHAPTER 4

Stories of Initiates: The Lived Experience of Female Social Workers in the Implementation of the Welfare State in Chile, 1925–1950

Maricela González and Paula Caffarena

INTRODUCTION¹

In 1928, the social worker Raquel Carrasco, who called herself “an initiate in social service”, described her work as “the most transcendental work of physical and moral renewal [taking place] in the darkest atmosphere of

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misery, despair and pain”.² The social worker, in her words, was “a center of strength and light [...] the fruit of the silent and tenacious action of each day, of each hour”, whose “infinite abnegation and love” took advantage of the teachings received and brought into play her resources.³ Carrasco also recognized that the work required altruism and sacrifice. “Digging up misery” involved struggling “with the ignorance of the people, with prejudices of all kinds”, and making one’s way “without looking at obstacles, stumbling blocks, or difficulties”.⁴

The School of Social Service was created in 1925, and Raquel Carrasco had been part of the first generation of students. Social work was a new profession in the country. Its birth was the initiative of a small group of doctors who adopted the idea of training social workers from the United States and Europe. The aspiration was to help the poorest in a “scientific” way, to bring hygienic principles to the people and, above all, to prevent social ills. Social workers were to help those who needed it and carry out a “social diagnosis” in search of the causes of problems.⁵ Social services, a “scientific and modern form of altruism”,⁶ implied that those who performed them should “prepare themselves for this task and carry it out using a generous heart and the desire to help others, and also possessing all the knowledge, experiences and the advances that can be factors of success”.⁷

The new School of Social Service was part of a set of transformations in Chile in the first decades of the twentieth century that forged a new type of state. The post-colonial society that emerged from the independence struggles of 1810–1818 gave way to the rule of an oligarchy that monopolized positions of power and held socio-cultural prestige and economic privileges.⁸ In the late nineteenth century, however, social discontent grew due to the proletarianization of the labour force and the impoverishment of urban life. The middle class had begun to expand, and new social

² Carrasco, R. (1928). Reflexiones de una iniciada en el Servicio Social. *Servicio Social*, II (1), 10.

³ Carrasco (1928), 11.

⁴ Carrasco (1928), 12–13.

⁵ *Monografía de la Escuela de Servicio Social de la Junta de Beneficencia de Santiago de Chile*. (1929). Imprenta Universitaria, 4.

⁶ *Monografía de la Escuela de Servicio Social* (1929), 4.

⁷ *Monografía de la Escuela de Servicio Social* (1929), 10.

⁸ Cariola, C. and Sunkel, O. (1983). *Un siglo de historia económica de Chile 1830–1930: Dos ensayos y una bibliografía*. Ediciones Cultura Hispánica.

actors—political parties, students, intellectuals and professionals—criticized the inferior living conditions of the poorest, which had resulted in a cycle of protest and strikes.⁹

After a political crisis, a middle-class government replaced the oligarchic order, which had shown itself to be decadent in the early years of the twentieth century. This government sought to integrate popular interests and changed the structure of the Chilean state. These processes resulted in what is known as the Chilean welfare state, which was made possible by creating state institutions responsible for implementing the new legislation and creating mechanisms to bring about change. Likewise, professionals played a central role at the managerial level, and different historians have highlighted the role of doctors, lawyers and engineers in designing policies.¹⁰

This chapter aims to examine female social workers as one of the primary agents of the Chilean welfare state, under the premise that they forged its inception, development and consolidation from a perspective that has been hitherto little studied. If the state has commonly been investigated from its political and organizational aspects, approaching it now as a lived experience brings new questions and insights. The social workers' accounts that reflect their experience of the professionalization of their work open a from-below view to analyse the construction of the welfare state in Chile.

The words of Raquel Carrasco reflect the different aspects that we wish to explore. Firstly, the work of the social workers is closely linked to the construction of this new state. The profession was created to implement social policies targeted at the working class, and the orientation of the training of social workers was the same as that of the state apparatus: modernizing, scientific and welfare-oriented. Therefore, the construction of this new social architecture was subject to the ups and downs and complexities inherent to a project of change, an issue that the female social workers also shared on their way to professionalization.

⁹ Cariola and Sunkel (1983).

¹⁰ Vargas, J. E. (2016). Los médicos, entre la clientela particular y los empleos del Estado 1870–1951. *Ars Medica*, 14(2), 47–78; Zárate, M. S. and Campo, A. del (2014). Curar, prevenir y asistir: Medicina y salud en la historia chilena. *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*. Retrieved 22 March 2022, from <https://nuevomundo.revues.org/66805>; Ibáñez, A. (1983). Los ingenieros, el Estado y la política en Chile: del Ministerio de Fomento a la Corporación de Fomento, 1927–1939. *Historia*, 18, 45–102.

Secondly, Raquel Carrasco's experiences reflect the difficulties social workers faced in state-building, given that the state is not reduced to its organizational structure or political objectives but is, above all, a process of permanent construction, reformulation and stabilization.¹¹ In this way, the work of the social workers can be understood as a micro-history that reflects a more extensive process in which illusions, difficulties, obstacles and diverse arrangements were interwoven. It is possible to understand the state as an entity that shapes subjectivities and, at the same time, acquires form through experiences objectified in social processes.¹² In this case, we examine state-building from the particular experiences of women social workers, state agents whose situated existence, in a specific space and temporality, is both an individual and a social reality, where various historical processes and levels interconnect.¹³ As has recently been pointed out, it is a return to the history of individuals but from a different perspective, understanding that abstract categories, such as the state, owe their existence to the historical life experience of people.¹⁴

Finally, the sources used are mainly articles from the *Revista de Trabajo Social*, where social workers and other professionals published academic articles and case studies. However, despite its academic nature, the social workers' accounts included several personal assessments, such as emotions, opinions and anecdotes that were intertwined with strictly professional judgements.¹⁵ Hence, their writings open a new perspective on

¹¹ Bevir, M. and Rhodes, R. (2010). *The state as cultural practice*. Oxford University Press, 1.

¹² Kivimäki, V., Suodenjoki, S. and Vahtikari, T. (eds.) (2021). *Lived nation as the history of experiences and emotions in Finland, 1800–2000*. Palgrave Macmillan.

¹³ Regarding the notion of the welfare state, Moscoso and Zaragoza propose crossing the boundary between the institutional (the state or welfare policies) and the individual (subjective well-being) to arrive at a notion that combines objective and subjective elements. Moscoso, J. and Zaragoza, J. M. (2014). Historias de bienestar: desde la historia de las emociones a las políticas de la experiencia. *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*, 36, 81–82.

¹⁴ Hoegaerts, J. and Olsen, S. (2021). The history of experience: Afterword. In V. Kivimäki, S. Suodenjoki and T. Vahtikari (eds.), *Lived nation as the history of experiences and emotions in Finland, 1800–2000*. Palgrave Macmillan, 378.

¹⁵ The *Revista Servicio Social* was published continuously from 1927 to 1969 in Santiago de Chile. It published academic articles and case studies by lawyers, doctors and social workers.

Chile's social and cultural history, as their accounts imply an exposition of themselves in history, what Peter Goldie calls "the narrative sense of self".¹⁶

In a narrative, we do not just read a sequence of events, but witness the adoption of a perspective, a structured story that carries an evaluative and emotional transmission.¹⁷ Extending the narrative of state action from the feelings, thoughts and opinions experienced by the social actors allows us to establish a link between the micro- and macro-social context. Lived experience does not nullify the possibility of constructing a long-range history. On the contrary, it is viable from the particular and situated experience.

The period of 1925–1950 has been chosen because two processes coincide in those twenty-five years. On the one hand, the professionalization of social services in Chile occurred, and social workers acquired internal consolidation and social recognition. They gradually managed to establish some of the attributes of modern professions,¹⁸ achieving disciplinary autonomy (they directed their own training), developing trade unions,¹⁹ formulating a code of ethics and expanding their influence in Latin America.²⁰

On the other hand, these years also coincided with the formation of the Chilean welfare state. In the following decades, benefits were expanded, and, in 1952, a new cycle began with the creation of two large social institutions, the *Servicio Nacional de Salud* (National Health Service) and the *Servicio de Seguro Social* (Social Security Service), both inspired by the

¹⁶ Goldie, Peter (2012). *The mess inside: Narrative, emotion and the mind*. Oxford University Press, 118.

¹⁷ Goldie (2012), 2.

¹⁸ Wilensky, H. (1964). The professionalization of everyone? *American Journal of Sociology*, 70(2), 138.

¹⁹ Farah, J. (2011). La consolidación de un espíritu gremial: Nacimiento y primeros pasos del Colegio de Asistentes Sociales (1955–1965). In M. González (ed.), *Historias de Trabajo Social en Chile, 1925–2008: Contribución para nuevos relatos*. Ediciones Técnicas de Educación Superior, 73–107.

²⁰ González, M. (2016). Conocer, luchar, enseñar: Avances pioneros de la investigación y la producción intelectual desde el Trabajo Social en Chile, 1925–1973. In P. Vidal (ed.), *Trabajo Social en Chile: Un siglo de Trayectoria*. Editorial RIL, 120–124; González, M. (2014). Vino nuevo en odres viejos: Servicio social de mediados de siglo XX en Chile. La construcción de la consolidación profesional, 1950–1973. In R. Lizana (ed.), *Trabajo social e investigación*. Espacio Editorial, 41.

British welfare state and dissolved with the neoliberal reforms of Augusto Pinochet thirty years later.²¹

ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE CHILEAN WELFARE STATE

Between 1900 and 1973, Chile experienced a growing process of state expansion. The origin of the process was the confluence of two forces: workers' protests demanding better working conditions and denouncing the corruption of the ruling oligarchy; and the poor health and social conditions in which a large part of the population lived, decimated by infectious and contagious diseases, crammed into tiny, unventilated rooms, with a low life expectancy and high infant mortality, poverty and unemployment.²²

Under the existing political regime, only a small elite participated. It was governed by liberal orthodoxy and the major decisions were left in the hands of private companies.²³ Thus, social problems were left to the goodwill of aristocratic families who, while retaining economic, political and cultural privileges for themselves, had established a network of charitable organizations administered by local philanthropists and executed by ladies of high society.²⁴

This socio-political structure underwent a crisis at the end of the nineteenth century. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, several laws were passed on housing, child and maternal protection, and the minimum regulation of working conditions.²⁵ Popular pressure culminated in

²¹ Researchers often approach the Chilean welfare state in these two stages, although the same model of development gradually deepened. It can be seen in Arellano (1985); Larrañaga, O. (2010). *Las nuevas políticas de protección social en perspectiva histórica*. PNUD, 3–8.

²² Gazmuri, C. (1980). *Testimonios de una crisis: Chile 1900–1925*. Editorial Universitaria. De Ramón, A. and Gross, P. (1984). Algunos testimonios de las condiciones de vida en Santiago de Chile, 1888–1918. *EURE*, 11(31), 67–74.

²³ Barros, L. and Vergara, X. (1978). *El modo de ser aristocrático: El caso de la oligarquía chilena hacia 1900*. Editorial Aconcagua.

²⁴ Illanes, M. A. (2007). *Cuerpo y sangre de la política: La construcción histórica de las visadoras sociales en Chile, 1887–1940*. LOM.

²⁵ Grez, S. (2001). El escarpado camino hacia la legislación social: debates, contradicciones y encrucijadas en el movimiento obrero y popular (Chile: 1901–1924). *Cuadernos de Historia*, 21, 120–122; Yáñez, J. C. (1999). Antecedentes y evolución histórica de la legislación social de Chile entre 1906 y 1924. *Revista de Estudios Histórico-Jurídicos*, XXI, 207–209.

a political crisis and, finally, a charismatic leader, Arturo Alessandri Palma, triumphed in the 1920 presidential election.²⁶ He promised profound changes in social and citizens' rights, and despite the instability of his government and pressure from the military, a large legislative package was passed in 1924.

In 1925, a new political constitution was approved that established the separation of state and church, granted more powers to the President of the Republic, and guaranteed health and education as citizens' rights. Social laws were also enacted to protect the conditions of workers and employees, creating a social insurance scheme co-financed by the state, employers and workers. At the same time, labour laws were passed, grouped in the *Labor Code* (1931), and a comprehensive health care system was established for workers and their families, including medical care, disease prevention, maternity benefits, and pregnancy and breastfeeding protection.²⁷

Between approximately 1925 and 1950, Chile completed the construction of its modern state structure. It strengthened the social, welfare and labour intervention plan and expanded the coverage of social programmes to new beneficiaries. It also rebuilt a political and administrative organization that involved creating new ministries and services.²⁸ Finally, the economic depression of 1929 and its devastating effects on the country led to an increase in government control over industry.²⁹

During the 1930s and 1940s, Chile achieved stability through the succession of three alliance governments led by the Radical Party, which was ideologically in the political centre. This stability and a relative economic recovery allowed the incorporation of the demands of the middle class. They mobilized the lower classes, which were able to impose their corporate demands and obtain state benefits. However, Chile was still an impoverished country, and those working in the social sector described the harsh conditions in which working-class and peasant families lived. Salvador Allende, Minister of Health under President Pedro Aguirre Cerda

²⁶ Orrego Vicuña, C. (1979). *7 ensayos sobre Arturo Alessandri Palma*. Instituto Chileno de Estudios Humanísticos; Valdivia, V. (1999). Yo, el León de Tarapacá. Arturo Alessandri Palma, 1915–1932. *Historia* (Santiago), 32, 485–551.

²⁷ Yáñez, J. C. (2008). *La intervención social en Chile, 1907–1932*. RIL editores; Arellano, J. P. (1985). *Políticas sociales y desarrollo: Chile 1924–1984*. CIEPLAN, 21–45.

²⁸ Arias, K. (2012). Ideas, intentos y fracasos en el proceso modernización administrativa entre las dos administraciones de Ibáñez (1927–1958). *Universum*, 1(27), 21.

²⁹ Arias (2012), 15.

(1938–1941), spoke of the very high infant mortality rates and the causes of early adult deaths associated with poverty, poor nutrition and overcrowding.³⁰ The average wage was well below the necessary minimum. About 50 per cent of the population did not consume the primary ratio of calories. The diet lacked protective nutrition, and the dirty and ragged clothing enabled the proliferation of contagious and respiratory diseases.³¹

The 1940s brought new challenges for the Chilean state and for the social services. The country's political stability increased the population's welfare, but new demands also appeared. The middle class, which benefited from social and labour policies, improved its standard of living and broadened its consumption regime, adopting foreign styles and increasing its culture. Urban life became more complex and modernized, public transport improved, entertainment diversified, and employment expanded for new civil servants.

Until Augusto Pinochet's *coup d'état* in 1973, the Chilean state was the main political, social and economic actor.³² In all social sectors, benefits were organized and expanded, and an institutional bureaucracy was set up to guarantee a network of benefits and rights. Public education grew, and primary education coverage reached 95 per cent of the population in 1973.³³ In health, the *Servicio Nacional de Salud* was a robust institution. It achieved great international prestige, providing health care to more than 70 per cent of the population.³⁴

Even though some thought the hiring of high-level employees was politically motivated, authors such as Pilar Romaguera and Jaime Gatica have provided arguments to show that the expansion of the bureaucracy was motivated to cover the provision of social services.³⁵ In 1930, about 80 per cent of the employees worked in the central areas, including the

³⁰ Allende, S. (1939). *La realidad médico-social chilena*. Lathrop, 22–25.

³¹ Allende (1939), 35–53.

³² Valenzuela, A. (1984). Parties, politics, and the State in Chile: The higher civil service. In E. Suleiman (ed.), *Bureaucrats and policy making: A comparative overview*. Holmes and Meier, 243.

³³ Larrañaga, O. (2010–2012). *El Estado de Bienestar en Chile, 1910–2010*. PNUD, 43.

³⁴ Ochoa, F. (1978). *La salud pública en Chile: análisis de su evolución en el periodo 1958–1976*. Tesis de Grado no publicada para optar al Grado de Licenciado en Ciencias Económicas y Administrativas Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Administrativas de la Universidad de Chile, Santiago.

³⁵ Romaguera, P. and Gatica, J. (1979). *Crecimiento y estructura del empleo en el sector público chileno, 1940–1970*. Memoria de Prueba para optar al Grado de Licenciado en Ciencias Económicas Universidad de Chile, Santiago, 104–105.

ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs and Justice. Meanwhile, the administration of social services occupied only 5 per cent of the civil servants. In contrast, by 1967, the central sector had halved (38 per cent), and employees in the social sectors, including health, education, labour and housing, accounted for 45 per cent of state employees.

Within the civil servants' group, social workers played an essential role, especially in the health field, where they accounted for about 30 per cent of all graduates in the mid-1960s.³⁶ They were also employed in schools, childcare services, industries, councils and other welfare organizations. In all these fields, they attended to individual users and worked with groups and communities, covering food, housing, clothing, hygiene and education. They solved social cases, promoted neighbourhood organization, attended urgent needs, handled legal and health procedures, and supported community development.

POVERTY, COMMITMENT AND EMOTIONS IN HOME VISITS

Social workers, a fundamental part of the Chilean welfare state, performed an essential task for the new social policies. This task constituted a mediation between the families of popular sectors³⁷ and the benefits provided by the state. It was also fieldwork, as they were pioneers visiting the homes of the poorest and collecting information that they then handed over to the welfare and health institutions. In addition, they carried out their work with a high level of commitment. They travelled through remote and sometimes dangerous neighbourhoods, late at night, with few resources but a permanent discourse on the importance of vocation, moral integrity and permanent effort.

³⁶ *Recursos Humanos de Salud en Chile*. (1970). Ministerio de Salud Pública-Consejo Nacional Consultivo de Salud, 297.

³⁷ From the late nineteenth century, the term popular sectors was used to refer to workers, but also a group of unemployed and informal workers with low and irregular income. They lived in rented housing or with relatives, had a low level of schooling and professed deeply rooted values, such as superstitious Catholic religiosity, wasteful habits, high alcohol consumption, and attachment to community ties and festive spirit. Their poverty and remoteness from power networks made them the target of intervention by social workers. For more information, see Vitola, V. (2016). El uso del concepto de Sectores Populares en las ciencias sociales. *Revista Conflicto Social*, 9 (5), 158–187. Vitola analyses the origin of the term from the English Marxist tradition and addresses the notion of “social class” beyond its strictly economic-productive meaning, considering how the subaltern sectors receive, appropriate and even offer resistance to the dominant values.

The social survey, considered a “basic working tool”,³⁸ served to systematize the data collected. The visit facilitated acute observation, allowed the detection of falsified information, and provided recommendations for hygiene and savings. Social worker Coralí Lanas summarized the work in this way: “Examining parents and monitoring their health treatment, legalizing marriage, instilling sound morals, giving encouragement and courage to single mothers so that they do not abandon their children, finding work for fathers or mothers who become unemployed: these are all tasks of the social visitor”.³⁹

Within a few years, an increasing number of young people became interested in studying the profession. By 1930, 100 social workers had graduated from the Charity School of Social Service, and more than 80 per cent of them were working.⁴⁰ Luisa Fierro, a graduate of these first generations and a social worker at the San Borja Maternity Hospital, spoke of how “well established” the social service had become and that it was “widely used”.⁴¹ This process of professionalization also included symbolic elements. The use of the grey uniform gave them a specific identity and made it easier for them to be recognized by the users, given that they moved around the city’s poorest neighbourhoods.

The doctors appreciated the family surveys. They had become effective instruments for making so-called social diagnoses and understanding the living conditions of the sick, just as the visits were intended to teach the appropriate dietary regime and monitor compliance with the prescribed treatments.⁴²

The work of female social workers carried an aura of commitment. Their spirit of service, strongly tinged with gender constructions attributed to their femininity, created certain ideal conditions for their work. As the Catholic philanthropist Fernando Rodríguez argued, social workers should renounce their pleasures, giving themselves sacrificially to the poorest:

³⁸ López, R. (1975). Una explicación sociológica del cambio administrativo: Chile, 1812–1970. *Documentación Administrativa*, 168, 74–76.

³⁹ Lanas, C. (1928). En la Gota Baldomera de Torres. *Servicio Social*, II (3), 232.

⁴⁰ Monografía de la Escuela de Servicio Social (1929), 28–29. Las actividades de las visitadoras sociales. *Servicio Social*, III (4), 322–323.

⁴¹ Fierro, L. (1930). Organización del Servicio Social en los hospitales. *Servicio Social*, IV (4), 300.

⁴² Fierro (1930), 300.

What beautiful work you are called to do in our country! What a greater mission than yours, inferior in sacrifice and grandeur only to motherhood! But your mission is also maternal; you are going to fill, on the side of the sad and degraded, the void left empty by a mother who did not know herself, or who, sadder still, did not know how to be a mother, did not understand her mission of forming moral and useful beings.⁴³

Those who best described low-income families and portrayed their own professional experiences were social workers. As Luz Tocornal pointed out, “Our clientele is the poorest, most demoralized and destitute”,⁴⁴ and Marta Ballesteros spoke of “serving the needy directly, solving social cases, remedying misfortunes day by day, fixing difficult situations, that is to say, having direct contact with all the miseries of life”.⁴⁵

Of their many descriptions of urban poverty, the most dramatic came from their home visits, where they observed families living in small, cramped rooms, crammed together in filth and cold. Rebeca and Inés Jarpa, for example, recounted the life of a woman who had come to them because she was in “a desperate situation”. Without work or other resources to support herself, the mother of one young daughter and another who was only 15 years old and pregnant, she lived in a small room where “18 people lived in an easily understandable case of overcrowding”.⁴⁶ Moreover, they pointed out: “We did the home survey, and we were shocked to see a small, dirty room, totally occupied by five beds and with no more light than a candle... how to fix such a sad state of affairs...?”⁴⁷

Similar conditions were reported in various contexts of social intervention. Single mothers, for example, were frequent cases of attention, as they had multiple and complex problems to address. They were also “disowned by those at home”, often finding themselves “totally abandoned”.⁴⁸ The children grew up alone and had to work at an early stage to support

⁴³ Rodríguez, F. (1936). El procedimiento jurídico en relación con el trabajo profesional de las visitadoras sociales. *Servicio Social*, X (1–2), 54.

⁴⁴ Tocornal, L. (1928). Servicio social en las obras de la infancia. *Servicio Social*, II(1), 69.

⁴⁵ Ballesteros, M. (1928). La visitadora social en la administración de la asistencia pública. *Servicio Social*, II(1), 53.

⁴⁶ Jarpa, R. and Jarpa, I. (1928). El servicio social en la Oficina de Informaciones de la Escuela. *Servicio Social*, II(1), 36.

⁴⁷ Jarpa and Jarpa (1928), 36.

⁴⁸ Fabres, L. (1928). El servicio social en la maternidad “Carolina Freire” del Patronato Nacional de la Infancia”. *Servicio Social*, II (1), 50.

themselves. Some of them suffered chronically from contagious diseases and were exposed to violence and rejection.

In hospitals and children's homes, work was done with children abandoned due to the death or neglect of their parents. This was the case of a 10-year-old boy, cared for by Luisa Torres at the Reform School for Children. This illegitimate son of an unknown father and deceased mother lived, together with his six siblings, "in appalling chaos".⁴⁹ In the care of a neighbour, the boy, who worked as a shoeshiner and a grocer, was illiterate and had been "arrested ten times, for theft and drunkenness".⁵⁰ In addition, the woman who looked after him "exploited the child and, when he did not bring home \$6 a day, he was punished and not fed".⁵¹

This spectacle of abandonment aroused strong emotions among the "initiates". Raquel Carrasco said that doing social service was a task aimed at "unearthing misery".⁵² Laura and Blanca San Cristóbal, who worked in the School of Medical Service, said how difficult it was "not to feel discouraged in the presence of so many anomalies, so much calamity".⁵³ For the same reasons, Leo Cordemans, Director of the School of Social Service, stated that the admission of female students was risky because the profession involved "a great drain on physical, cerebral and nervous energy", and the applicants required "cold blood, a spirit of decision and, finally, a dose of understanding and experience of life".⁵⁴ Social services, which was both a science and an art, required aptitude and knowledge: "These aptitudes are generosity, altruism, absolute self-giving to the cause of the unfortunate [...] much patience, gentleness and energy, perseverance and infinite benevolence and understanding".⁵⁵

These social workers were part of a small elite of women who, in the 1920s, were entering professional life. Alongside nurses, midwives and teachers, they were also the "female face" of the state, employed to provide direct care to people. María Lanús, a young social worker who, like

⁴⁹ Torres, L. (1928). El servicio social en la Escuela de Reforma para Niños. *Servicio Social*, II (1), 43.

⁵⁰ Torres (1928), 43.

⁵¹ Torres (1928), 43.

⁵² Carrasco (1928), 13.

⁵³ San Cristóbal, L. and San Cristóbal, B. (1928). Servicio médico y asistencia social en la escuela. *Servicio Social*, II (1), 33.

⁵⁴ Cordemans, L. (1927). Organización general de la Escuela de Servicio Social de Santiago. *Servicio Social*, I (3-4), 114.

⁵⁵ La Escuela de Servicio Social de Santiago de Chile (1927). *Servicio Social*, I (1 y 2), 10.

her colleagues, belonged to a well-to-do middle class who could afford higher education, described her colleagues as "...girls who, perhaps a short time before, knew that poverty existed, but only suspected it, and would never have dreamed that it would touch us in any way".⁵⁶

As well as dealing with their despondency, the social workers had to do hard emotional work.⁵⁷ They often reported how they had to console the sick or poor mothers and listen attentively to the experiences of the most destitute in society. The social worker Marta Trefault said that she tried to approach the users "through advice given with gentleness and firmness, trying to console and alleviate all the sufferings she encountered, spending delicacy and precision to reorganize the homes in cooperation with the assisted, encouraging them because they saw that they were not alone in fighting for life".⁵⁸ Berta Recabarren, for her part, wrote of her work with a hospitalized patient: "The Social Visitor visits him daily, takes note of his ailment, and consoles him if he is in pain. She offers to give him whatever service he needs. She provides him with good reading that he likes and that serves to lift his spirits if he is downcast".⁵⁹

In the same way, Rebeca and Inés Jarpa told of their intervention with the wife of a hospitalized worker. They went through the streets looking for the correct address and found there a woman "of indefinite age, worn out by work and suffering" who bitterly described her financial and family woes. The social worker "had to exhaust her eloquence to calm her nerves, mitigate her legitimate pain" and prevent the situation from escalating. In conclusion, they argued that "the incipient morality of our people [...] obliges us to develop an intense moralizing work", achieved through "prudence and discretion".⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Lanas, M. (1928). La vida en la Escuela de Servicio Social. *Servicio Social*, II(2), 156.

⁵⁷ Hochschild, A. (2012). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. University of California Press.

⁵⁸ Trefault, M. (1928). El Servicio social en el Hospital de Niños. *Servicio Social*, II (3), 233–234.

⁵⁹ Recabarren de Abadie, B. (1928). El servicio social en el establecimiento de la Cía. Minera e Industrial de Chile (Lota). *Servicio Social*, II (2), 118.

⁶⁰ Jarpa and Jarpa (1928), 38.

REACHING THE POOREST: BREAKING DOWN MISTRUST AND SUPPORTING CHANGE

For the social workers, their job was to bring the state closer to families, and they were undoubtedly carrying out a historic task. Although not yet consolidated, this new social policy was based on unknown principles: citizens' rights, scientific reform and social prophylaxis. For the first time, the people acquired a presence in nation-building. They were no longer confined to reform institutions, as classical philanthropy⁶¹ sought to do, nor were they to be isolated on the margins of the city, as the intendant of Santiago, Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, had tried to do at the end of the nineteenth century.⁶² Now the people had acquired a productive value from the point of view of capitalist development.

This different view aimed at a "reform of the people" and used science to find the right paths. The social service itself was conceived as a "scientific and modern form of altruism".⁶³ It was a "new science, a practical sociology, applying to the child, to the family, to the helpless person, the knowledge provided by the progress made in the different branches of human knowledge".⁶⁴

The social workers enforced these scientific and adaptive precepts. The case of Berta Recabarren, who worked with a mining company in Lota, a town in southern Chile, was emblematic of these ideas. She argued, "the great task of the Social Visitor [was] the culture of the people".⁶⁵ She worked in the School for Workers' Children, supporting the formation of the future citizen; she participated in the Women's Centre, encouraging the development of "feminine culture";⁶⁶ and she collaborated with the city's hospital, where her task was "to educate the sick and their families so that they would not resist the treatment they would have to observe during their convalescence when they returned home".⁶⁷ In the conclusion of

⁶¹ Ponce de León, M. (2011). *Gobernar la pobreza: Prácticas de caridad y beneficencia en la ciudad de Santiago, 1830–1890*. DIBAM.

⁶² Leyton, C. and Huertas, R. (2012). Reforma urbana e higiene social en Santiago de Chile: La techno-utopía liberal de Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna (1872–1875). *Dynamis*, 32(1), 21–44.

⁶³ Monografía de la Escuela de Servicio Social (1929), 4.

⁶⁴ La Escuela de Servicio Social de Santiago de Chile (1927), 8.

⁶⁵ Recabarren de Abadie (1928), 113.

⁶⁶ Recabarren de Abadie (1928), 114.

⁶⁷ Recabarren de Abadie (1928), 118.

her article, she stated that social workers should change from “the person who can fix everything, who achieves everything”, to a “messenger of peace, progress and hope, both in the large and small affairs of the working-class families of Lota”.⁶⁸

Achieving such a high standard of performance was difficult, and this was acknowledged by the social workers themselves. Their testimony also reflects the difficulties they encountered in the homes, where they were seen as intruders prying into people’s privacy. Luisa Fabres, who worked at the Carolina Freire Maternity Hospital, reported the case of a woman with four children, pregnant with a fifth, who was diagnosed with tuberculosis. At home, she did not take precautions to prevent infection, and the health visitor had to teach her and make sure she followed the doctor’s instructions. She also persuaded her to give birth to her child in the maternity ward and then move to a tuberculosis asylum with the newborn. She also took care of the children who were left without their mother. However, despite the good results, she noted that she had to make “many visits” and “at first we were not well received, but we gained their trust little by little”.⁶⁹

The social worker Juana Mac-Quade also described the suspicion that her arrival aroused in people and attributed it to the fact that it was a new service, which was “not yet well understood, even by the people who were to use it”.⁷⁰ Thus, Berta Recabarren confirmed, the primary task of a social worker was to inspire confidence until she became “the one who can do everything, their counsellor, the golden bridge to reach their desires”.⁷¹

Besides the suspicion in families, the social workers faced mistrust among other more established professions. The doctors recognized that an effort was needed to make room for social workers in state and private organizations. The pediatrician Luis Calvo McKenna, Director of the Roberto del Río Children’s Hospital, noted having had “a feeling of mistrust and discouragement” when the social service was first introduced in Chile, particularly when observing the experience of European countries and comparing it with “our philanthropic institutions”.⁷² Similarly, Fresia Horst and Berta Guzmán, social workers in the *Seguro Obligatorio*, noted

⁶⁸ Recabarren de Abadie (1928), 119–120.

⁶⁹ Fabres (1928), 51.

⁷⁰ Mac-Quade, J. (1928). El servicio social en el hospital. *Servicio Social*, II(2), 121.

⁷¹ Recabarren (1928), 113.

⁷² Calvo Mackenna, L. (1926). Comentarios sobre asistencia social en los hospitales. *Revista de Beneficencia Pública*, X (2), 71–72.

that social services staff were confronted with “something very new and unknown” and put “countless obstacles” in the way of the social workers. They illustrated this by saying: “The nurses in the hospitals thought we were intruders and tried not to give any explanations or answer our many questions”. In this way, “the social visitor was forced to start her work by convincing the hospital staff that we only wanted to cooperate for the welfare of the insured patients and their families”.⁷³

By the end of the 1930s, the social workers seemed to have overcome these initial obstacles. Raquel Braga and Leo Cordemans proudly claimed that the new profession had enrolled students without interruption in a decade of existence. Social institutions had encouraged “in all fields the development of modern forms of assistance and the improvement of services of a social nature”.⁷⁴ This triumph had been crowned with the opening of new social service schools in Santiago and other cities. Lucio Córdova, a doctor who had defended the creation of the state schools for social workers, spoke of them as an “instrument of moral and economic improvement, of regeneration, of justice and the welfare of the working-class family”.⁷⁵

Social legislation, which had been expanded in this decade, offered new opportunities for action to the social workers. Luz Tocornal reported that the social worker was responsible for “verifying that the employer complied with his obligations and that the beneficiary was aware of the existence of the benefits”.⁷⁶ In that sense, many social workers had to serve as aid coordinators.

The family remained the first concern of the professionals. The social workers had already learned that the best way to reach them was through something “material, concrete and immediate”.⁷⁷ For example, organizing a celebration would bring together the children and, from there, penetrate deeper aspects, such as the composition of the family group, its

⁷³ Horst, F. and Guzmán, B. (1928). La asistencia social en el Seguro Obligatorio Obrero. *Servicio Social*, II(1), 20.

⁷⁴ De Bray, L. and Braga, R. (1935). El servicio social en Chile y su porvenir. *Revista de Asistencia Social*, IV(4), 360.

⁷⁵ Córdova, L. (s.f.). Las nuevas escuelas de Servicio Social de Chile. Asociación Chilena de Asistencia Social, Folleto de Divulgación, Santiago, N°115, 4.

⁷⁶ Tocornal, L. (1941). Orientaciones de la asistencia social en Chile. *Servicio Social*, XV(4), 220.

⁷⁷ Errázuriz, A. (1938). El campesino chileno y la visitadora social. *Servicio Social*, XII(1), 27.

domestic economy, eating habits or salaries. They worked directly with poor women who were taught how to organize their shopping and family budgets. Social workers criticized the habits of male workers, who “squandered” a significant part of their salaries on alcohol and gambling,⁷⁸ and they gave practical advice to housewives to make cash purchases, avoid indebtedness and save to “find a way to avoid squandering what they have earned...”⁷⁹ These women were encouraged to work in their own homes, in “weaving, loom weaving, poultry raising, and others”.⁸⁰

These welfare policies were implemented based on rigid gender stereotypes, with a provider father and a wife who maintained the stability of the group and took care of the children’s upbringing. In this sense, the intervention of social workers was built on gender roles, both in terms of who the users were and what was expected of them.⁸¹

Social workers also progressed professionally. In 1950, social service schools were incorporated into the University of Chile. There were more than 1000 graduates,⁸² and some of them travelled abroad to continue their studies.⁸³ Others were recruited to found social service schools in various Latin American countries. The shared experiences of higher education increased the social workers’ cohesion and identification as a special profession, which presumably further increased their commitment to the work. Thus, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Chilean social service, the First Pan-American Congress of Social Service was held in Chile in 1945, and in 1955, the College of Social Workers was created.

Social complexity and the new demands of the population also brought new problems and challenges. Despite the increase in female graduates, the expansion of state services began to generate a shortage of professionals as early as the 1940s. The most influential organizations in the country, such as the *Caja Del Seguro Obligatorio* (compulsory insurance fund) and the hospital network, recruited more and more staff each year and

⁷⁸ Cabieses (1936), 38.

⁷⁹ Reveli, R. (1933). *Malestar de la familia obrera*. Memoria para optar al Título de Visitadora Social, Escuela de Servicio Social Elvira Matte de Cruchaga, 17.

⁸⁰ Reveli (1933), 18.

⁸¹ Rosemblatt, Karin. (2000). *Gendered compromises: Political cultures & the state in Chile, 1920–1950*. University of North Carolina Press, 49–57.

⁸² Recursos Humanos de Salud en Chile (1970), 297.

⁸³ The Chilean School of Social Service was the first of its kind in Latin America. Chilean social workers were taken to set up schools in El Salvador, Guatemala, Bolivia and Venezuela. They were also hired as advisors in Uruguay, Ecuador and Argentina.

established small corporations that gained strength and identity. By 1952, there were 394 hospital social workers, and the *Caja del Seguro* employed 125. Most of them were scattered across different care centres. However, some of them had taken up supervisory and managerial positions in the various social action units, which involved preparation and training.

Internal regulations had been adopted to establish social workers' functions. The aim was to increase the number of workers and to organize their work according to new needs. The *Federación de Visitadoras de la Caja del Seguro* (Union for the social workers in the compulsory insurance fund), for example, clearly stated the innovations that some leaders had developed: in 1934, Luisa Fierro had set the performance standards for the visitors, and from 1935 onwards, they had begun to count the steps taken (visits, surveys, procedures, among others). In 1937, the Regulations of the Social Visiting Service were approved. In the same year, María Vial Izquierdo, who had studied in Europe, established a plan for the "improvement of social workers" and proposed the "study and creation of the first step in the social service".⁸⁴ Later, in 1939, Ana Mac-Auliffe succeeded in "putting into effect the provisions of the Regulations, specifying the work currently carried out by the social workers in the different Services".⁸⁵

The leadership and self-learning capacity of each social worker was key to improving the work of the organizations. The institutions grew and needed technical skills, which the social workers, being the pioneers in their profession, had no one to learn from. Elena Cortés, Otilia Boza and Rina Vallejo said there were no "specialization courses within the programmes of the existing schools in Santiago", and asked, "How does the social worker acquire the knowledge necessary for the performance of her duties? Only with general classes and in some cases with the stays that she makes as a pupil and supervised by the regular Social Visitor"⁸⁶—that is, by observation and example.

Thus, the social workers' experience meant that the popular sectors recognized the state as part of their lives, first, through the social workers' ability to establish a bond of trust with the families, and second, through contact with the users, particularly with the women with whom they

⁸⁴Federación de Visitadoras y Asistentes Sociales de la Caja de Seguro Obligatorio (1946), 47.

⁸⁵Federación de Visitadoras y Asistentes Sociales de la Caja de Seguro Obligatorio (1946), 48.

⁸⁶Cortés, E., Boza, O. and Vallejo, R. (1949). Observaciones sobre algunos aspectos del servicio social industrial. *Servicio Social*, XXIII (1), 62.

worked closely, preserving their traditional domestic role. The state carried out an intervention constructed from a gender perspective, and the state's intervention was at the service of the prevailing stereotypes.

During this period, social workers also experienced professional growth. Although they felt part of the welfare state services, they sought recognition and better regulation of the practice of the profession.

CONCLUSION

This chapter analyzed the professional development of social workers in Chile between 1925 and 1950, who were the direct executors of the social policies of the period. The emphasis was on unravelling their lived experience, the thoughts, emotions and problems they had to face in the context of the emergence of the Chilean welfare state.

During this period, social workers experienced the state in three ways. Firstly, it was marked by an experience of gender. The social workers were women who occupied a position within a structure with hierarchized roles and status according to the female/male dichotomy. Doctors and lawyers held positions of power, and gave political and technical guidelines, while social workers made decisions and established close links with the users of the services, who were primarily poor women.

Secondly, the social workers experienced and put into practice a series of negotiations through which they built an independent professional project. They took the indications given by the medical and legal authorities, but they did not follow them strictly. They often interpreted them to their advantage and forged their profession with a mixture of conservatism and avant-garde.

The third way was through emotions, which, as recent historiography has shown, are closely linked to experience. In this space of gender articulation, social workers felt free to openly express the emotions involved in the process of social intervention. They had to perform using both their technical attributes and their female sensibility. The doctors who founded the first School of Social Service thought this sensitivity would add closeness and empathy to the relationship between the state and the people. For this reason, emotionality was a professional hallmark of the social workers, and they reflected it in their actions, enriching the understanding that we have of the history of the Chilean welfare state. With their commitment, the social workers produced shared experiences of trust,

belonging and participation with their clients and in this way constructed and strengthened the state.

In a cycle that runs from 1950 and 1973, the Chilean state continued its expansionary process and became a leading actor in political, economic and social construction. Its actions had significant redistributive effects, and at the time of Pinochet's *coup d'état*, Chilean citizens were better educated, healthier and enjoyed greater rights than before 1925. Nevertheless, Chile was still a poor country; its economy was inflationary and domestic demand was insufficient to boost production. It was also a polarized country and the influence of the Cold War and the country's own internal tensions led to the end of the Chilean welfare state. The social workers also suffered under the dictatorship: many were dismissed from state agencies—jobs were lost as the state apparatus was reduced in size—or exiled, and seventeen were murdered. Just as they were once protagonists of the welfare state, they would later become direct victims of the repressive state.

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CHAPTER 5

Previdência Social as an Experience of Society: A Case Study of Civil Servants in the Portuguese New State, 1933–1974

Ana Carina Azevedo

INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyzes the development of the social benefits conferred to civil servants during the New State dictatorship.¹ This authoritarian and corporatist regime ruled Portugal between 1933 and 1974, first under António de Oliveira Salazar (1889–1970) and, from 1968 onwards, under Marcelo Cactano (1906–1980). The investigation into this subject will

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follow two levels of analysis that constantly intertwine. On the one hand is the impact of social benefits in the daily life of the social class and its significance in the definition of the relationship between the individual and the state. On the other hand is the importance of *Previdência Social*² for achieving the objectives of the New State and for its own legitimization.

It is important to note that the term *Previdência Social* does not correspond to the concept of the *welfare state*. *Previdência Social* in the New State was a system of social protection that granted some individuals the opportunity to pay a certain sum in order to receive a number of social benefits. Its organization is similar to a social insurance system, although the New State regarded the latter as an individualistic concept.³ In addition, access to these social benefits was not universal; it depended on several factors.

Previdência Social did not begin with the New State, as the First Republic (1910–1926) already had a very basic system of social insurance. However, the New State tried, at least on the surface, to depart from the republican concept and from some international examples seen as reckless excesses. The corporatist nature of the political regime, suspicious of both liberalism and socialism, sought a social protection system based on the citizen's initiative⁴ and on the professional organization, granting the state a supporting role. Eventually, the New State's Bismarckian logic was bound to get closer to a Beveridgian model.⁵ The *Previdência Social* was broadened, encompassing a larger number of professions and social risks, and—particularly from 1962 onwards—it started to pave the way for the welfare state, characterized by the aim of universal social security and its recognition as a social right. This, however, would only be fully created after 1974, despite the term being present in some legal texts from the late 1950s onwards.⁶

The expansion of the social benefits attributed to civil servants has not yet been the subject of an in-depth study. On the one hand, this is because

² Due to the particularities of the concept and the translation issues, the Portuguese term will be used.

³ Pereira, P. T. (1933). *As ideias do Estado-Novo: Corporações e Previdência Social*. Subsecretariado de Estado das Corporações e Previdência Social, 33.

⁴ Carolo, D. (2006). *A Reforma da Previdência Social de 1962 na institucionalização do Estado-Providência em Portugal*. Instituto Superior de Economia e Gestão, 18.

⁵ Branco, R. (2017). Entre Bismarck e Beveridge: Sociedade Civil e Estado Providência em Portugal (1960–2011). *Análise Social* 52 (224), 553–554.

⁶ Carolo (2006), 18, 122.

it was an exception in the *Previdência Social* system, being the only case where the state—as an employer—has, since the beginning, played an interventional role. On the other hand, the great variety of economic, geographic, and work categories and situations within the civil service creates countless differences in the social benefits made available, which makes an in-depth analysis of the subject rather difficult. In addition, it is also necessary to understand the various contexts that intersect in this process. These include the priorities of a regime which, in an increasingly adverse situation, sought to legitimize itself through the promotion of economic development and the progressive creation of a Social State; the importance of economic planning and the role of the administrative reform project, which, similarly to what happened internationally,⁷ assigned great importance to the improvement of the economic and social situation of the civil servants for the increase of administrative efficiency; and, finally, the problems caused by low wages, the lack of a sound social protection system, and the limitations of the public administration, which was undermined by a growing loss of employees attracted by the private sector's higher wages.

The extension of social benefits to the civil servants also reveals clear economic objectives, appearing as an alternative to raising salaries, a measure which could jeopardize the priority given to financial restructuring—the great motto of the dictator Antônio de Oliveira Salazar. Therefore, the state chose to implement, progressively and with co-funding, social benefits that led to direct improvements in the socio-economic conditions of civil servants. The state recognized the right to child benefit; granted sickness, disability, death, and retirement benefits; developed initiatives in affordable housing; and created *Assistência na Doença aos Servidores Cíveis do Estado* (Assistance in Sickness for Civil Servants). These measures would be responsible for objective improvements in the lives of a significant part of the civil service, creating logics that would eventually be continued after the Revolution of 1974 and which are often understood as solely democratic achievements. However, limited by the financial capacity of the state and its own fragility, these would end up being considered insufficient, with the civil service continuing to lose its ability to attract

⁷ Azevedo, A.C. (2019). Reformar a Administração Pública no novo mundo saído da guerra: Projeto nacional ou dinâmica global? (1950–1970). *Revista de Administração Pública* 53 (5), 960–974.

new employees and seeing increased abandonment of public posts for private sector jobs.

Methodologically, the topic is challenging. The first challenge concerns the diversity of the civil service, which encompasses various categories of employees, from schoolteachers to ministers, as well as diverse realities in terms of *Previdência Social* that would be impossible to fully characterize within the limits of this chapter. As such, this chapter will only analyze the reality of the ministry officials based in Lisbon regarding four types of social support: child benefit, health care, affordable housing, and retirement pensions. In addition, the study of a dictatorship often implies a lack of sources regarding the citizens' experiences. To overcome this difficulty, a varied bibliography, as well as archive documentation, parliamentary debates, statistics, and legislation, will be used. Furthermore, in addition to the top-down sources, the clandestine press and publications of Catholic groups and social sectors will be used. For the development of a bottom-up approach, statistics will be most useful, allowing the interpretation of the relation between social benefits, salaries, and cost of living to draw conclusions about the real impact of *Previdência Social* in daily lives.

THE EVOLUTION OF *PREVIDÊNCIA SOCIAL* IN THE NEW STATE

There is no consensus among authors regarding the beginning of the Providence State in Portugal.⁸ Nevertheless, similarly to other European dictatorships of this time,⁹ the New State ideology incorporated the ideal of *Previdência Social*. Inserted into the corporative organization, it subordinated individual rights to the class and *status quo*, and replaced class struggle with class concordance as the answer to the "Social Question."¹⁰ This doctrine explains how *Previdência Social* would come to develop in

⁸ Guibentif, P. (1997). *La Pratique du Droit International et Communautaire de la Sécurité Sociale: Étude de Sociologie du Droit de la Coordination, à l'exemple du Portugal*. Helbing et Lichtenhahn; Lucena, M. (1976). *A Evolução do Sistema Corporativo Português—O Marcelismo*, volume II. Perspectivas e Realidades; Esping-Andersen, G. (1993). *Orçamentos e Democracia: o Estado-Providência em Espanha e Portugal, 1960–1986*. *Análise Social* 28(122), 589–560; ou Mozzicafreddo, J. (2002). *Estado-Providência e Cidadania em Portugal*. Celta.

⁹ Giorgi, C. (2014). Le Politiche Sociali del Fascismo. *Studi Storici* 1, 93–108.

¹⁰ The influences of the Social Doctrine of the Church are visible. Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum Encyclical* 9, 1891.

the New State. Just like the relationship between the individual and state, so too *Previdência Social* depended on and was mediated by corporative bodies. The social benefits would vary according to the professional sectors and the position of each individual in society and the family, and would be, in some cases, dependent on social and political behavior.

The *Previdência Social* system was, thus, structured into four categories: institutions of *previdência* for corporative bodies; retirement or *previdência* pension funds; associations of mutual help; and institutions of *previdência* for Civil Servants and Administrative Bodies—the *Caixa Geral de Aposentações* (General Retirement Fund) and the *Montepio dos Servidores do Estado* (Civil Servants' Fund).¹¹ In the first years of the New State, this stratified model created deep social rifts, as the coverage of the benefits contrasted with the egalitarian principles gaining strength in Europe. It was based on the primary position of the family as the main caretaker; on the principle of the state as a supporting entity to fulfill basic needs; on individual responsibility; on the subordination of the *previdência* programs to the organized corporation according to economic activities; and on the absence of state financial co-funding.¹² However, the *previdência* of civil servants was an exception to this doctrine, since the state had the duties of an employer.¹³

The model this organization rested upon was, also, altered throughout the years, and it can be subdivided into four main periods.¹⁴ The first one stretches from the 1930s to the end of World War II and is characterized by a nascent and fragmented *Previdência Social* regime, even though direct intervention by the state in the development of the system began in the 1940s.¹⁵ The 1950s would bring a drive for reform, to which the transformations brought about by World War II are connected. Indeed, internationally, the “Glorious Thirty,” referring to 1945–1975, was the

¹¹Pereirinha, J. and Carolo, D. (2006). *Construção do Estado-Providência em Portugal no período do Estado-Novo (1935–1974): Notas sobre a evolução da despesa social*. Instituto Superior de Economia e Gestão, DE Working papers n° 30-2006/DE/CISEP, 9.

¹²Rodrigues, F. (1999). *Assistência Social e Políticas Sociais em Portugal*. ISSScoop/CPIHTS, 158.

¹³Carolo (2006), 23.

¹⁴Pereirinha, J. and Carolo, D. (2008). The origins of the welfare state in Portugal in the Estado Novo period (1935–1974): Structure and trends of social expenditure. *Congreso de la Asociación Española de Historia Económica*, 11.

¹⁵Rodrigues, C. & Carolo, D. (2020). A *Previdência Social*. In J. M. B. Brito and P. B. Santos (eds.), *Os anos sessenta em Portugal: Duas governações, diferentes políticas públicas?* Edições Afrontamento, 149.

heyday of the Social State. In Portugal, it would continue to lag behind Europe. However, the state continued to take on new functions as the promotor of economic and social development, which would influence the growth of *Previdência Social*. This is, therefore, the beginning of a second period that continued up to the 1960s and which was characterized by an extension of the material coverage of the *previdência* system.

These experiences paved the way for the Reform of 1962, which marks the beginning of the third phase of the development of *Previdência Social*. It represented a break with the supporting function of the state, which was forced to become the funding body of the system. Indeed, there was a strong increase in social spending throughout the 1960s, in a logic of greater convergence with the models of the European welfare state.¹⁶ This would also be the development stage of another project that would end up having an impact on, and even assimilating, the development process of *Previdência Social* for civil servants. This is the project for the reform of the public administration, which defended the improvement of the economic and social situation of civil servants as a vehicle to increase administrative efficiency.¹⁷

The replacement of António de Oliveira Salazar with Marcelo Caetano in 1968 would accentuate the previous dynamic, beginning a new stage of the development of *Previdência Social*: the Marcellist Social State. Although it is debatable that the New State effectively constituted a Social State, this is a statement which originates from the political discourse of the time as a form of legitimization of the regime.¹⁸ Nevertheless, an extension of social benefits is visible starting in 1968, both in terms of the introduction of new types and regarding its coverage. This extension was significant considering the negligible levels shown before, but it was modest if compared internationally. In addition, it becomes clear that there was a tendency toward a universalization of the system. It was achieved through a greater connection between *previdência* and assistance,¹⁹ that is, the charitable social protection schemes, also state coordinated, for those who do not have personal means to deal with misfortune or are not covered by social insurance. This greater connection was a step forward in the

¹⁶Rodrigues and Carolo (2020), 157, 169.

¹⁷Azevedo, A. C. (2020). A caminho da reforma administrativa: O Grupo de Trabalho n.º 14 e a criação do Secretariado da Reforma Administrativa (1965–1969). *Revista Portuguesa de História* 51, 223–242.

¹⁸Guibentif (1997), 59.

¹⁹Rodrigues and Carolo (2020), 147, 152, 170.

development of the concept of a universal Social Security,²⁰ which, however, would only be consecrated as a social right in the democratic period.²¹

THE *PREVIDÊNCIA SOCIAL* OF THE CIVIL SERVICE

The *Previdência Social* of civil servants had some particularities. Civil servants were state government employees, and their economic and social situation had a direct impact on the image of the regime and on the efficiency of public administration, so it was essential that civil servants had dignified living conditions and did not need to seek better pay and social perks in the private sector. However, although the administrative elite had always benefited from a relatively high social status, for most citizens, joining the civil service would no longer be understood as a privilege in the late 1940s.²² It is true that some of the social benefits granted to the civil servants, especially retirement pensions, would continue to give it a certain notion of privilege in the early years. Nevertheless, the issue of low salaries in the civil service would be constant throughout the period, and it is only from this problem that both the priorities that marked the development of social benefits and some of the reactions of civil servants to its implementation can be understood.

In the early years of the New State, entry into the civil service was still an aspiration of the urban petty bourgeoisie, mainly because it provided guarantees of stability and the right to a retirement pension. However, the salaries of most civil servants did not allow them to aspire to more than a meager life. Most salaries were around 500\$00²³ or 600\$00 per month, at a time when the minimum wage necessary to meet the basic subsistence of a family had been set at 1080\$00.²⁴ This situation had obvious impacts on the workers' life projects, making it difficult to start a family, rent a house,

²⁰ Barreto, A. (1995). Portugal na periferia do centro: Mudança social, 1960 a 1995. *Análise Social* 30(134), 847.

²¹ Rodrigues and Carolo (2020), 170.

²² Garrido, A. (2016). *Queremos uma economia nova*. Temas e Debates, 125.

²³ Five hundred *escudos*, the Portuguese currency at the time. In relation to the *escudo*, the US dollar had an exchange rate of 25\$00 in 1939 and 28\$75 in 1949. Between then and the 1970s, the exchange rates were relatively stable. Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações do Centenário da República (2011). *O Escudo: A nova unidade monetária da República*. Imprensa Nacional—Casa da Moeda, 62–63.

²⁴ Rosas, F. (1994). Comerciantes e funcionários. In J. Mattoso (ed.), *História de Portugal: O Estado Novo*. Editorial Estampa, 108.

and pay basic expenses. In addition, the low salaries did not allow for the maintenance of the lifestyle socially required from civil servants, which included limitations on the wife's work or the requirement to undertake further studies for at least one of the sons. The higher-ranking civil servants earned salaries of 1500\$00 or 2000\$00, but this did not mean they had a more comfortable life, since their status implied much higher expenses in terms of housing, clothing, education, medical assistance, culture, and leisure, which they were socially obliged to meet.²⁵

The post-war period would bring important increases in civil service salaries. However, the cost of living also increased, which made improvements in their living conditions difficult.²⁶ In 1957, more than 87,000 civil servants, about 57 percent of the total, earned a monthly salary that did not reach 2000\$00.²⁷ In 1968, the percentage would rise to about 60 percent, out of a total of almost 161,000 civil servants.²⁸ In 1972, 80 percent received less than 2600\$00 per month.²⁹ This context explains the choices made by the state in terms of *Previdência Social*, with some social benefits trying to respond to daily problems or functioning as a wage supplement that would bring civil service salaries closer to the corporatist logic of fair wages.³⁰

But *Previdência Social* was not only a mechanism for wage compensation. By making possible an increase in salaries and bringing the social benefits of civil servants closer to those offered by the private sector, it not only avoided the loss of civil servants, but also decreased their tendency to have more than one job.³¹ Furthermore, *Previdência Social* would also end up including forms of behavioral control. In fact, to access a public office it was necessary that the candidate demonstrated good moral behavior,

²⁵ Rosas (1994), 108–109.

²⁶ In the 1960s, the subsistence minimum for a worker residing in Lisbon and not integrated into any *previdência* system was set at 1495\$00. Ribeiro, M. (1971). *Fixação e Atualização do Salário Mínimo e Problemas Conexos*. Gabinete de Planeamento do Ministério das Corporações e Previdência Social.

²⁷ Diário das Sessões da Assembleia Nacional (DSAN) 46, December 10, 1966, 824.

²⁸ Only ministry officials were accounted for. *Inquérito Inventário dos Servidores do Estado. Continente e ilhas adjacentes. 31 de dezembro de 1968* (1970). Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 13–17.

²⁹ DSAN 172, 21 March 1972, 3431.

³⁰ Seabra, F. (1943). *O Corporativismo e o Problema do Salário*. Centro de Estudos Económicos-Corporativos.

³¹ Contemporary Archive of the Ministry of Finances (ACMF), CIPIE - Grupo de Trabalho n.º 14, Situação e perspetivas da eficiência da administração, 1967.

had a positive report from the political police,³² and, as of 1936, took the anti-communist oath.³³ However, the granting of the social benefits associated with the position depended on keeping up this good moral, social, and political behavior, ultimately functioning as another means to maintain discipline in the civil service.³⁴ In essence, the *Previdência Social* of civil servants was based not so much on the recognition of social rights, but on the achievement of the priorities of the regime.

Nevertheless, its importance was recognized by civil servants. In fact, the right to a retirement pension was one of the factors attracting candidates to the civil service, while the very tendency of civil servants to join the private sector was related to a search for the better social benefits offered there.³⁵ However, social benefits were not always perceived as an advantage, not only due to the limits of their effectiveness but, above all, due to the fact that the employees were responsible for the co-payment of the system. In the context of low salaries, the monthly payments were seen as another element that prevented civil servants from reaching the “level of social decorum compatible with the demands and needs of the hierarchy of the respective functions.”³⁶

EXPERIENCES OF A BETTER LIFE AND FORCED OBEDIENCE

The state recognized that the level of salaries did not allow its civil servants to meet their daily expenses and maintain dignified living conditions. However, it also assumed that the priority given to the reorganization of public finances made it impossible to increase salaries. Instead, the New State used *Previdência Social* as a wage supplement.³⁷ This objective is quite clear in the creation of child benefit in 1942, extended to civil

³² Rosas (1994), 108.

³³ “I declare on my honor that I am integrated in the social order established by the Political Constitution of 1933, actively repudiating communism and all subversive ideas.” Decree-law no. 27003, *Diário do Governo* 216/1936, September 14.

³⁴ Decree-law no. 49373, *Diário do Governo* 264/1969, November 11; Decree-law no. 32659, *Diário do Governo* 32/1943, September 9.

³⁵ ACMF, CIPIE, Situação e perspetivas.

³⁶ DSAN 114, December 14, 1951, 70.

³⁷ Pereirinha, J., Arcanjo, M., and Carolo, D. (2008). Social protection and family policy in the Portuguese corporatism: The creation and development of family allowances in the *Estado-Novo* period. *Congreso de la Asociación Española de Historia Económica*, 7.

servants the following year.³⁸ Portugal was one of the first countries to grant this type of support,³⁹ which contrasts with the relative lag in the development of the welfare state in the country. In fact, it was a response to a context of great social unrest and a high cost of living caused by the indirect effects of World War II on the Portuguese economy. Child benefit was a social policy of the state, with financing programs that implied national solidarity and reinforced public funding, which contrasted with the logic of the *Previdência Social* that advocated the supporting role of the state.⁴⁰

In 1943, child benefit varied, depending on the salary level, between 30\$00 and 70\$00 per month per dependent, progressively increasing until the end of the 1950s.⁴¹ In the early years, this social benefit would end up favoring the maintenance of the status quo because, understanding that consumer spending varied according to the social position of individuals, the amounts of the benefit followed the hierarchy of positions. This situation would only change in 1958, when it came to be considered that the child benefit was intended for meeting basic needs and, as such, should be identical, so the monthly amount was unified at 100\$00 per dependent.⁴² Despite having higher amounts than those established for other professional categories⁴³ and its financing being entirely the responsibility of the state,⁴⁴ child benefit did not solve the problem of low salaries for civil servants. In fact, even after the standardization of the monthly amount to 100\$00 per dependent, a civil servant earning 1500\$00 per month and having two school-age children could only add 200\$00 to his salary, which was clearly insufficient to meet the family's expenses.⁴⁵

The same goal is visible in another of the New State's social projects: the Affordable Housing Program. The low salaries of the civil service, combined with the rising cost of living, made the housing issue one of the

³⁸ Decree-law no. 32192, *Diário do Governo* 188/1942, August 13; Decree-law no. 32688, *Diário do Governo* 41/1943, February 20, 1st supplement.

³⁹ Leal, A. (1983). *Abono de Família*. In *POLIS - Enciclopédia VERBO da Sociedade e do Estado*. Verbo, 5.

⁴⁰ Rodrigues and Carolo (2020), 149, 157.

⁴¹ Decree-law no. 32688, *Diário do Governo* 41/1943; Decree-law no. 39844, *Diário do Governo* 223/1954, October 7, 1954.

⁴² Decree-law no. 42046, *Diário do Governo* 278/1958, 23 December, 1st supplement.

⁴³ *Previdência e Habitação* (1961). Junta da Acção Social, 195.

⁴⁴ Costa, A (2011). *A Evolução da Previdência Social em Perspectiva Comparada: 1935–1974*. Universidade de Aveiro, 42–43.

⁴⁵ DSAN 114, 14 December 1951, 76.

most cited problems in the diagnosis of the economic and social situation of civil servants.⁴⁶ Especially those who worked in Lisbon were faced with house rents that were disproportionate to their resources, which had inevitable consequences for their ability to buy basic products. Often, the option was to rent rooms or parts of a house,⁴⁷ and this did not meet the conditions required for housing a government employee. These issues also posed moral and even hygiene problems caused by cohabitation, in addition to preventing the free development of the family by imposing a limitation on the number of children.

The Affordable Housing Program, promoted by the regime starting in 1933, would try to respond to this situation. The rules that regulated the allocation of houses stipulated that accommodation would be assigned to heads of families, aged between 21 and 40 years old, who were “employees, workers or other salaried employees who were members of the national unions, civil and military public servants, and workers of the permanent staff of state services and municipal councils.”⁴⁸ The payment of monthly installments for 20 or 25 years gave the tenant the right to own the house. Until the late 1950s, the Program created four typologies of affordable housing, distributed according to each family’s income and household size.⁴⁹ The monthly payments were less expensive than the rents in Lisbon, and could not exceed one-third of the household income.⁵⁰ However, the amounts, which in Lisbon could range between 330\$00 and 1280\$00,⁵¹ continued to impede access to lower-income employees. Even so, obtaining affordable housing was seen as a privilege, of which civil servants were the major beneficiaries,⁵² and the program did in fact provide significant improvements in the lives of many state employees.

⁴⁶ Atas da Câmara Corporativa (ACC) 5, 10 December 1957, 30–31.

⁴⁷ Renting of rooms in private houses, with access to common areas.

⁴⁸ Decree-law no. 23052, *Diário do Governo* 217/1933, September 23, 1664.

⁴⁹ Silva, S. and Ramos, R. (2015). Housing, Nationalism and Social Control: The first years of the Portuguese Estado Novo’s Affordable Houses Programme. In J. Leal, M. Maia, and B. Torras (eds.), *Southern Modernisms: From A to Z and back again*. Centro de Estudos Arnaldo Araújo - CESAP/ESAPIHA e Instituto de História da Arte, FCSH-UNL, 260.

⁵⁰ Decree no. 41143, *Diário do Governo* 129/1957, June 4; Decree-law no. 42951, *Diário do Governo* 98/1960, April 27.

⁵¹ A family consisting of a couple and two children would pay around 600\$00 monthly. *Previdência e Habitação* (1961), 337.

⁵² Antunes, G., Lúcio, J., Soares, N., and Julião, R. (2016). Políticas de habitação social precedentes a abril de 1974. *GeoInova* 13, 80.

However, the Affordable Housing Program also posed some constraints on the civil servants' lives, namely regarding the constitution of the family. Having a large family with children of both sexes could be an impediment to the allocation of a house, especially for low-income employees who could not afford larger houses. In addition, the type of house assigned enforced birth control, since the enlargement set out in law did not always allow for accommodating daughters and sons in separate bedrooms. Only after 1947 would the possibility to request a transfer to a larger house become available, and then only if the increase in family size or salary justified it.⁵³ Moreover, the Affordable Housing Program, like child benefit, despite implying a great financial effort by the state, could not encompass the vast majority of civil servants, and ended up being restricted to large cities and a few other urban centers.⁵⁴ Finally, the Affordable Housing Program was more about wage compensation, social control, and the ability to keep civil servants in the service of the state than about recognizing social rights.

The same was true of health care assistance. Under the New State, access to health care was not universal; it varied according to the economic possibilities of each household as well as their place of residence. As such, a situation of illness, besides implying the loss of working days, meant heavy financial burdens that the lowest-ranking civil servants had difficulty bearing.⁵⁵ Until the 1960s, and in contrast to employees in the private sector, civil servants were only entitled to assistance due to an accident at work or tuberculosis.⁵⁶ If they suffered from any other illness, they were only entitled to an allowance for a period of six months, after which unpaid leave of up to 90 days followed, and, if there was no right to retirement, dismissal.⁵⁷ An effective, family-friendly health insurance program was thus an essential measure to improve the economic and social situation of

⁵³ Almeida, P. (2010). *Favor, Recompensa e Controlo Social: os Bairros de Casas Económicas do Porto (1935–1965)*. Universidade do Porto, 47.

⁵⁴ DSAN 69, January 20, 1971, 1406.

⁵⁵ In the 1960s, a doctor's consultation in a normal regime could cost over 200\$00. ACMF, CIPIE, Ofício de Vasco Eça para António de Oliveira Salazar, 1965.

⁵⁶ Ministério das Finanças (1960). *Melhoria das condições económico-sociais do funcionalismo público. Relação das propostas de lei e correspondentes diplomas legais*. Ministério das Finanças, 12.

⁵⁷ Só a unidade de ação conseguirá o aumento para os funcionários públicos (1957). *Avante* 244, 2.

the civil service.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the promotion of social development turned out to be a legitimization tool for the regime—which proved itself to have the capacity to improve the standard of living of the population—as well as to prevent the loss of the best employees to the private sector and to limit the economic impact of lost working days.⁵⁹

Until the 1960s, the social benefits of private sector employees were higher than those granted to civil servants, except for the tuberculosis assistance. Tuberculosis was, in fact, one of the main health problems in Portugal and one of those with the greatest economic impact. Access to the civil service required a health certificate confirming the absence of tuberculosis. However, if the disease developed later, the low salaries of civil servants would not allow them to meet the costs of treatment. As such, as early as 1927, assistance to civil servants suffering from tuberculosis was decreed.⁶⁰

From the 1940s to the 1960s, tuberculosis assistance developed greatly, although the system maintained some compensatory measures that were not always to the liking of civil servants, such as salary discounts and limitations on assistance. As long as they subscribed to the General Retirement Fund or another legally equivalent fund, civil servants became beneficiaries of Tuberculosis Assistance to Civil Servants and Their Families. This allowed access to inpatient and outpatient health care through the payment of contributions ranging from 2\$00 per month for salaries up to 500\$00, to 30\$00 per month for salaries over 5000\$00.⁶¹ Despite the clear benefits, taking advantage of this support meant a further cut in the already meager salaries. In addition, despite being a strong financial effort by the state and allowing civil servants to enjoy health care to which they might not otherwise have access, the tuberculosis assistance program was not always considered sufficient to address the constraints caused by the disease.

The need for access to other medical specialties led to the creation of health services in some ministries, which made the level of illness protection to which civil servants had access depend on the ministry for which

⁵⁸ ACMF, CIPIE, Ofício de Vasco Eça para António de Oliveira Salazar, 1965.

⁵⁹ DSAN 4, December 10, 1957, 98.

⁶⁰ Decree no. 14192, *Diário do Governo* 191/1927, August 31.

⁶¹ Decree-law no. 48359, *Diário do Governo* 101/1968, April 27; Decree-law no. 40365, *Diário do Governo* 236/1955, October 29.

they worked.⁶² To get around this reality, Assistance in Sickness for Civil Servants (ADSE) was created in 1963, “aimed at gradually promoting the provision of assistance in all forms of illness to civil servants of the state.”⁶³ ADSE provided access to home visits and consultations with general practitioners and specialists, auxiliary diagnostic resources, therapeutic resources, hospitalization, and surgical interventions.⁶⁴ ADSE meant a great advance in the state social protection system, demanding an enormous financial effort on the part of the state, and it is seen as a privilege of the civil service even today. However, financial limitations meant that it took a long time to reach the same level as some of the benefit types offered to employees in the private sector,⁶⁵ while its slow and uneven national distribution ended up excluding important portions of the civil service.⁶⁶ In addition, the salary-based co-payment system⁶⁷ created new rifts in the civil service, highlighting relevant differences between the benefit types granted to employees of different categories.⁶⁸

Despite its limitations, the development of *Previdência Social* contributed to the betterment of the living conditions of civil servants. Nevertheless, it also included forms of social control, as well as forms of forced obedience, that had an impact on personal and family dynamics. Taking the example of child benefit, the granting of this social benefit depended on the good moral and professional behavior of the civil servant. In addition, it was also associated with the defense of the family ideal promoted by the New State. This is visible in a decree-law of 1958,⁶⁹ which stated that if a couple did not live together, the benefit would be granted to the head of the household, regardless of whether the dependents were supported by him or her, a rule that had clear implications in cases of separation. Likewise, illegitimate children were not considered in the allocation of the benefit, and legitimized ones would only be considered

⁶² Gato, A. P. (2020). O Estado Novo e a saúde dos pobres. In M. F. Barros and P. Gato (eds.), *Desigualdades*. Cidehus, 11.

⁶³ Decree-law no. 45002, *Diário do Governo* 100/1963, April 27, 429.

⁶⁴ Almeida, A. (2017). *A Saúde no Estado Novo de Salazar (1933–1968): Políticas, Sistemas e Estruturas*. PhD Thesis, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, 348.

⁶⁵ DSAN 111, December 13, 1967, 2111.

⁶⁶ ACMF, CIPIE, Notas explicativas sobre o projeto de revisão do decreto-lei n.º 42800, March 25, 1966.

⁶⁷ Almeida (2017), 348.

⁶⁸ DSAN 4S1, December 10, 1965, 29.

⁶⁹ Decree-law no. 41671, *Diário do Governo* 124/1958, June 11.

if they had been recognized before marriage and provided that the civil servant lived with the legitimate family.⁷⁰ In fact, a decree of 1960 is clear in stating:

Through the system of the benefit, the aim should be [...] to promote the formation of legitimate families, ensuring that they have the necessary stability. Indeed, it is fundamental that the family institution be consolidated and developed, as the 'primary basis for education, discipline and social harmony.'⁷¹

Identical limitations can be seen in health care assistance, which covered only legitimate children or children legitimized before marriage, as long as the civil servant lived with the legitimate family.⁷²

The Affordable Housing Program, a propagandistic project of the New State, presented similar goals, which included forms of social control and the binding of civil servants to the regime. In fact, although the official discourse stated that it was aimed at poor families, the program would end up being used as a reward for a middle class that supported the regime,⁷³ the class the regime intended to control. Civil servants were eligible for affordable housing provided they complied with the rules to which they were bound, especially with regard to the good moral and professional behavior of the entire household. This good behavior had to be proven by the head of service of each civil servant, and then confirmed daily by the neighborhood inspectors.⁷⁴ Accessing affordable housing also implied the acceptance of a series of conditions that, if not followed, resulted in the loss of the property, regardless of the number of installments paid.

Civil servants in the program lived under a permanent threat, which functioned as a form of "preventive violence."⁷⁵ Both they and their families had to maintain good moral behavior, abstain from politics, and

⁷⁰ Decree-law no. 32688, *Diário do Governo* 41/1943; Decree-law no. 39844, *Diário do Governo* 223/1954.

⁷¹ Decree-law no. 17963, *Diário do Governo* 222/1960, September 23, 2065.

⁷² Decree-law no. 42953, *Diário do Governo* 98/1960, 27 April; Decree-law no. 48359, *Diário do Governo* 101/1968.

⁷³ Pereira, V., Queirós, J., Silva, S., and Lemos, T. (2018). Casas económicas e casas desmontáveis: Génese, estruturação e transformação dos primeiros programas habitacionais do Estado Novo. In R. Agarez (ed.), *Habitação: cem anos de políticas públicas em Portugal, 1918/2018*. Instituto da Habitação e da Reabilitação Urbana, 97.

⁷⁴ Pereira, V., Queirós, J., Silva, S., and Lemos, T. (2018), 92.

⁷⁵ Rosas, F. (2012). *Salazar e o Poder: a arte de saber durar*. Tinta da China.

maintain the lifestyle that was imposed on them. More than any other social benefit, the housing support provided by the state had trade-offs that directly touched the daily lives of civil servants, implying an adjustment of behavior in the domestic environment and the surveillance of private space.

THE EMERGING EXPERIENCE OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

In general, the *Providência Social* of civil servants reflects a utilitarian and dependent relationship between the individual and the state. It is utilitarian because, for the state, the attribution of social benefits aimed, above all, to achieve its various objectives, while the individual, in turn, was always seeking to improve their standard of living. This relationship was still defined by dependence, since social benefits depended on the will of the state and on the respect for the New State order. However, from the 1960s onwards, these assumptions gradually began to change because of the development of the concept of the Social State, based on the idea of an interventive role of the state in society and economy. Instead of a supporting role, the state was to develop an interventive approach in order to fulfill basic social needs and guarantee a certain degree of equality between citizens, shortening the social distances resulting from wealth distribution.⁷⁶ However, the ideas of Social Catholicism were important as well, particularly regarding social peace and fair wages. They influenced part of the legislation of that time, which was also created with the support of some technocrats responsible for economic planning and social development.⁷⁷

Although the idea of social support as a salary supplement continues to be found,⁷⁸ social benefits gradually began to be understood not as a consequence of state generosity, but as a social right that was earned after a lifetime of work and contributions, and, as such, could be claimed. The

⁷⁶ Caetano, M. (1974). *Depoimento*. Record, 127.

⁷⁷ Azevedo, A. C. (2021). Das campanhas de produtividade ao trabalho humano: uma evolução tecida nas teias do Estado Novo. In *Da Escravidão ao Trabalho Digno: Nos 150 anos da abolição da escravidão em Portugal e nos 100 anos da criação da OIT*. GEP-MTSSS, 121–134.

⁷⁸ For example, in 1972, the Government provided civil servants with an extra salary as a compensation for not being able to increase the monthly amounts. However, it was only after the Carnation Revolution that it became mandatory. Decree-law no. 457/72, *Diário do Governo* 266/1972, November 15, 1666–1667.

retirement pension is perhaps the social benefit in which this development becomes more visible. In the idea of the civil service, the right to receive a retirement pension—and the future stability it provided—was one of the main reasons that made public careers attractive, especially when this benefit was not yet enjoyed by other workers. In fact, it provided a guarantee of support at the end of one's working life that was intended to compensate for the low levels of salary and the consequent inability to accumulate savings.⁷⁹ As such, for the state, more than a form of justice toward its former employees, retirement pensions were a way to avoid the loss of active employees to the private sector.

Retirement pensions were paid by the General Retirement Fund, created in 1929 within the *Caixa Nacional de Previdência* (Previdência National Fund),⁸⁰ and they were initially seen as a perk of civil servants. However, this idea began to fade as retirement pensions were progressively extended to other professional sectors, while excluding servants who did not receive a “salary or wage paid through funds specifically allocated for personnel in the General State Budget or in those of the administrative bodies or autonomous services and organisms.”⁸¹ In turn, for all those who were in these conditions, access to the retirement pension depended on contributions of 6 percent of monthly remuneration, up to a limit of 1500\$00,⁸² which represented a further blow to low salaries.

The retirement pensions awarded were considered quite low, generally not enough to cover daily expenses. The amounts of the pensions and the fact that, in the beginning, they did not keep up with the rising cost of living became the target of constant criticism that reached the ministries and the National Assembly, where several members warned of the “shadow of misery”⁸³ that hovered over many former state servants. The issue was also mentioned in the national press, with some newspapers running real campaigns to call the Government's attention to the deplorable situation of civil service retirees.⁸⁴ Public opinion demanded that retirement pensions should receive the same increases that were being given to active civil servants. This would be a way to ameliorate the rising cost of living that

⁷⁹DSAN 199, March 22, 1969, 3677.

⁸⁰Decree no. 16667, *Diário do Governo* 70/1929, March 27, 1st supplement.

⁸¹Decree-law no. 36610, *Diário do Governo* 273/1947, November 24, 1174.

⁸²DSAN 5, December 11, 1957, 173.

⁸³DSAN 41, April 23, 1970, 853.

⁸⁴Matos, A. (February 14, 1968). O agradecimento de aposentados. *Diário Popular*, Lisboa.

affected everyone equally and prevented civil servants from maintaining their standard of living after retirement.⁸⁵

These campaigns show a change in citizens' perceptions of *Previdência Social*. No longer considered a state concession, the retirement pension was now understood by society as a right of all of those who had dedicated their lives to public service and found themselves abandoned by the state in their old age. In fact, in 1969, assemblyman António José Brás Regueiro stated in the National Assembly that since the retirement pension was a food subsidy,⁸⁶ it was close to the right to exist itself.⁸⁷ Marcelism would thus end up agreeing to increase the amounts of retirement pensions. In fact, the image of the state as a "person of good" and its ability to attract and keep the best civil servants in its service was also in question. Civil servants had believed that the state they served would protect them in their old age. As such, public exposure of the situation of former civil servants was yet another factor driving them away from the civil service⁸⁸ and, consequently, decreasing its level of efficiency.

CONCLUSION

The lived experience of *Previdência Social* was many things to many people. For the New State, it was a legitimizing tool, an instrument that ensured the maintenance of the regime and its good image, the control of civil servants, and a sound public administration. For the civil servants, it meant better living conditions, at least compared with most of the population, though it also meant the acceptance of several regulations that aimed at controlling their daily lives and family dynamics. As for most of the citizens, the social support for the civil servants was further proof of their privileged condition.

From a broad perspective, *Previdência Social* is another layer of an experience of society based on the dependence of the citizen regarding the state. It is an experience in which inequalities are established, forced obedience is consecrated, and the emergence of social rights is slow. It also shows the utilitarian relationship between the individual and the state, in

⁸⁵ DSAN 136, December 9, 1959, 118.

⁸⁶ Caetano, M. (1980). *Manual de Direito Administrativo*, volume 1. Edições Almedina, 507.

⁸⁷ DSAN 199, March 22, 1969, 3678.

⁸⁸ Os aposentados (November 13, 1967). *Educação Nacional*, Porto.

which social benefits are granted according to the person's capacity to fulfill the objectives of the regime, and its downside is accepted because it grants the chance to achieve a better life.

As such, the development of social benefits during the New State presented relevant differences in relation to European trends. What was at stake, above all, was not the recognition of social rights or a convincing movement toward a Beveridgian model. On the contrary, the major goals were the legitimization of the regime, maintenance of social equilibrium, promotion of economic and social development, increase of the efficiency of public administration, assurance of social control, and promotion of the regime's idea of family. Nevertheless, there was a widening and deepening of the social benefits provided to civil servants that allowed for objective improvements in their standard of living, especially when compared to other professional sectors, such as rural workers, housewives, or the self-employed. The financial effort of the state as a financer of *Previdência Social* also increased greatly from the early 1960s onwards.

However, a bottom-up analysis shows that the impact of the expansion of social benefits to the civil service cannot be analyzed only through the enormous financial strain it represented to the state's treasury. In fact, in a context of rising living costs, this has always been considered insufficient to achieve substantial improvements in the lives of civil servants. Finally, it becomes evident that, progressively, a change in the concept of *Previdência Social* was taking place, being visible throughout the 1960s. Gradually, social benefits began to be understood as social rights that could be claimed and to which the state should respond.

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CHAPTER 6

A Biographical Account of the Social Welfare State in Late Colonial Singapore, 1945–1965

Chi Tim Ho

INTRODUCTION

Singapore does not have a welfare state in the sense of the state guaranteeing a minimum income or managing social insurance programs that cover contingencies at various life stages.¹ Nevertheless, Singapore has a social welfare system that combines elements of the welfare state, such as social security programs that cover retirement, healthcare, housing and education needs (namely the Central Provident Fund and MediShield Life), and social services for both the individual and the family. Conventional presentations of Singapore's social welfare system, usually compiled by

¹ Adapted from definition in Briggs, A. (1961). The welfare state in historical perspective. *European Journal of Sociology* 2(2), 221–258.

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economists, sociologists, and social work academics, focus on the contemporary and the institutional.² In other words, they evaluate current social services and related institutions, policies, and legislation, with brief historical overviews that rarely capture diverse and complex human experiences in requiring, rendering and receiving social welfare. What did it mean to be poor, destitute or in need of welfare assistance? To whom or what can such individuals and families turn? What motivated individuals, community organizations and the state to provide welfare assistance? These questions take on even more historical significance as there was no coordinated approach to social welfare in Singapore until after World War II.

These questions form the basis of this chapter's approach to the early development of Singapore's social welfare system. As the term "biographical account" suggests, I focus on the human experience, specifically that of needing and rendering assistance, which in turn provides an intimate insight into the building of a social welfare system in late colonial Singapore. This is done primarily through the personal letters, oral histories, and biographies of the understated yet critical actors of Singapore's social welfare system. These include the colonial officials who headed Singapore's Social Welfare Department (SWD); the local SWD officers and volunteers who, by carrying out their everyday duties and responsibilities, gave tangibility and meaning to social welfare in post-war Singapore; and, not least, some of the individuals and families—the elderly, women, children, and the sick. Though partial or incomplete, such sources nevertheless provide a platform from which we can better appreciate the diverse range of human emotions and experiences in requiring and rendering assistance, especially in a historical situation where the provision of welfare assistance was not the norm or expected. The biographical approach layers the conventional legislative and institutional histories of the welfare state, allowing us to better comprehend fundamental historical change as experienced by individuals.

Their intimate accounts provide a deeper appreciation of the encounters between individuals and institutions in a late colonial/early

² Lim, L. (1989). Social Welfare. In K. S. Sandhu and P. Wheatley (eds.), *Management of success: The moulding of modern Singapore*. ISEAS, 171–197; Tan, N. (1991). Health and welfare. In E. Chew and E. Lee (eds.), *A history of Singapore*. Oxford University Press, 339–356; Wee, A. (2011). Where we are coming from: Social and welfare interventions when Singapore was a British colony. In A. Wee and K. K. Mehta (eds.), *Social work in the Singapore context*. Pearson Education, 21–72. See also Ho, C. T. and Wee, A. (2016). *Singapore chronicles: Social services*. Institute of Policy Studies and Straits Times Press.

nation-building situation. Such encounters do not necessarily follow conventional historical presentations of Singapore's past, which are usually based on political developments: British colonial rule from 1819 to 1942; the Japanese invasion and occupation from 1942 to 1945; decolonization and the struggle for independence from 1945 to 1963; independence from colonialism through a political merger with Malaya to form Malaysia in 1963; and, after separating politically from Malaysia in 1965, the continuous struggle to remain viable as an independent island nation-state. As such, the memories and perspectives presented in this chapter are valuable, as they allow for a different understanding of Singapore's history beyond events preordained as significant in a triumphalist narrative. These experiences may only be cursory to those political events, but they are no less significant. They give insights into the socio-economic conditions of late colonial Singapore. They capture the satisfaction of resolving a case and ensuring assistance was rendered, and they uncover the complications and frustrations in creating and operating that social welfare state—within a situation where deliberate state interventions into personal spaces were not the norm. These experiences complicate—in a good way—the organized and at times absolute renderings of social welfare by political rhetoric and in some scholarly discourse. The specific case of Singapore not only adds layers to its colonial experience, but it also provides a basis from which comparisons can be made to similar colonial situations.³

BACKDROP: THE COLONIAL SITUATION

Until World War II, social services in colonial Singapore developed in a piecemeal manner, initiated mostly by the community, with rare interventions by the colonial state. This reflected the *laissez-faire* or limited state approach adopted by British colonial authorities ever since they established a trading settlement in Singapore in 1819. The colonial society that subsequently evolved was a plural society, made up of diverse migrants with divergent loyalties and interests, with little to no common social will to see themselves as one community.⁴ As detailed elsewhere, the absence of a common social will resulted in the troubled and uneven development

³ See essays in Midgely, J. and Piachaud, D. (2011). *Colonialism and welfare: social policy and the British imperial legacy*. Edward Elgar.

⁴ Furnivall, J. S. (1948). *Colonial policy and practice: A comparative study of Burma and Netherlands India*. Cambridge University Press, 304–306.

of social services and its related institutions and initiatives.⁵ There was no organized approach to provide relief during moments of need, or a common purpose to aid the vulnerable holistically. For instance, there were varying responses to the economic pressures caused by the 1930s Great Depression.⁶ Take, for instance, the experiences of three workers affected by the Depression: Augustin, a South Asian estate overseer working in British Malaya since the 1920s; Wong, a Chinese working in a motor engineering firm after arriving in Singapore in 1933; and Valentine, a Singapore-born Eurasian clerk. As part of a repatriation policy for Indians, Augustin was sent home to Kerala in 1932.⁷ Wong lost his job barely seven months after he arrived in Singapore, and was forced to become an itinerant hawker.⁸ In contrast, after losing his clerical position, Valentine relied on his family for accommodation and support during the Depression years.⁹

The colonial state was all but absent, but this situation allowed non-state organizations to take the lead. The Salvation Army, for instance, took over existing relief funds when it first arrived in Singapore in 1935. On the eve of World War II, it had established industrial homes, a hostel for discharged prisoners, and a children's home. Sometime after it opened, the female industrial home took in Tan Beng Neo, who ran away from home after a row with her father. She recalled that "after running away from home, I had no money. I had five or six dollars only," and that the Army "gave me a bed."¹⁰ The Army also paid for her midwifery course and in return Beng Neo trained to become a Salvationist. In April 1939, she and six others became the first local officers of the Army.¹¹ The training and experience Beng Neo and others gained from their time in the Army would stand them in good stead in creating and supporting the social welfare system to come.

Elsewhere in the British Empire, events were unfolding that would fundamentally change colonial policy from the previously hands-off approach

⁵ Ho and Wee (2016), 18–25.

⁶ Huff, W. G. (2001). Entitlements, destitution, and emigration in the 1930s Singapore Great Depression. *The Economic History Review* 54(2), 290–323.

⁷ Coelho, M. N. (1958). Old man on public assistance: An intensive case study of two individuals. University of Malaya.

⁸ Chia, C. F. (1954). The place of the hawker in the community: A research paper. University of Malaya.

⁹ Coelho (1958).

¹⁰ National Archives of Singapore (NAS), Oral History Centre (OHC), Tan Beng Neo.

¹¹ Unknown (April 3, 1939). New Salvation Army Officers. *The Straits Times* (ST).

to a more interventionist policy in the area of social welfare. Industrial and social unrest in the British West Indies during the late 1930s led to the Colonial Development and Welfare Act in 1940, whereby metropolitan Britain committed itself financially to the social and economic development of its colonies.¹² Although Singapore was surrendered to the Japanese in February 1942, colonial planning for a post-war future accelerated as the tide of the war turned. From 1943, the Colonial Office helped prepare a series of policy directives to guide post-war rehabilitation in Singapore and other colonies. The social welfare policy directive called for the establishment of a Social Welfare Advisory Committee made up of government officials and non-government representatives with the objective of stimulating and coordinating social welfare work.¹³ It directed that the "Government should appoint a Senior Social Welfare Officer and any Welfare Staff should be under his direction," and that the "efforts of these Officers and Committees should be directed towards improving the general well-being of the community in its widest sense." All agencies and organizations, official and unofficial, were extolled to cooperate and to coordinate their programs in a "general plan for social welfare."¹⁴ There was no clear definition of social welfare, but it was clear in the planners' minds that, as part of a broader social policy, it would help forge a more cohesive colonial society.

After an absence of three and a half years, the British returned to Singapore in September 1945. During the British Military Administration (BMA), the Malayan Welfare Council was created, from which regional committees were established. The committee for Singapore, known as the Singapore Executive, became responsible for coordinating relief efforts such as the provision of food and medical supplies, and services for refugees and displaced persons, and for locating missing persons. The Singapore Executive also initiated a child nutrition program and direct financial assistance, and laid the foundations of a coherent youth policy via the establishment of youth clubs and a juvenile court. When the civilian government was established in April 1946, the new SWD took over most

¹² Ho and Wee (2016), 35.

¹³ NAS, Government Records (GR), BMA(CH) 27/45, Social Welfare Policy Directive, undated.

¹⁴ Ibid.

of the Singapore Executive's services and programs.¹⁵ It is from this point that the building of Singapore's social welfare system began in earnest.

A NEW BEGINNING: TAN BENG NEO AND INSTITUTIONAL CARE

The SWD was more than merely a new government department. It reflected the colonial authorities' intent to shed pre-war *laissez-faire* approaches and to implement a "modern approach to the problems of delinquency, leisure, and want." The SWD was a "new kind of instrument," which was to be at the "disposal of the whole community." In the SWD's first annual report, social welfare was seen "as part of the obligation of the community, as the State, to the community, as individual citizens." Social welfare was no longer going to be palliative or transient, or the domain of private charities, but an "essential public service."¹⁶ Such lofty objectives required skills and expertise previously undeveloped by the government, and hence it had to start from scratch. During the initial years, the SWD benefited from the expertise of Salvation Army officers, some of whom went on to join the former.

Beng Neo was one such officer. During the British Military Administration, she was an investigator for its emergency relief scheme. Beng Neo had to verify the applications by examining the applicant's "living conditions and so on and made [...] my recommendations whether they needed any relief or not."¹⁷ She vividly remembered that it was extremely difficult to locate the given addresses as house numbers were not organized in running order (or any order for that matter). The investigator's senses were assailed by a variety of sights and smells. Beng Neo remembered the stench of pig farms, the wretchedness of desperate poverty, and the heartbreaking sight of families mourning loss—she recalled a family of several women with more than a dozen children, and all its male members were lost during the war. Beng Neo also helped coordinate operations in the People's Restaurants, an integral part of the SWD's

¹⁵ Ho and Wee (2016), 18–25.

¹⁶ Singapore Department of Social Welfare (SWDAR) (1947). *Beginnings: The first report of the Singapore Dept. of Social Welfare, June–Dec. 1946*. Singapore, 247.

¹⁷ NAS OHC, Tan. Unless otherwise stated, information in this section is taken from NAS OHC, Tan.

communal feeding program.¹⁸ She recalled that she “used to go round on my bicycle and go around and see how the food was.... Occasionally I tasted [the food] a bit to see if they’re all right.”

Beng Neo officially joined the SWD in September 1947 as assistant matron at the Girls’ Homecraft Centre (GHC). Originally called the Nantina Home, the GHC was a symbol of a new approach to the rehabilitation of women and young girls at risk (such as orphans and victims of abuse) by deliberately separating them from known prostitutes to avoid the perceived bad influence of the latter. Beng Neo recalled in particular four girls who were sisters, the oldest being about “seven or eight” years old and the youngest three. Their father had disappeared. Their mother “went mental” and was unable to take care of them. The youngest apparently would wet herself and so Beng Neo “had to clean her up, changed her pants, cleaned her up and so on.” Beng Neo’s daily routine was divided between the home and the main office: “Half the day I was there in the morning. I had the little ones. I had to teach them, looked after them, cleaned them up sometimes. And in the afternoon, [...] I had to go to the main office and did investigation work.”¹⁹ Beng Neo’s task was made more challenging by GHC’s bare facilities:

There wasn’t even a blackboard or chairs or anything. So [the girls] used to sit on the sort of platform. [...] Nantina used to be a sort of Japanese hotel [...] they had those types of platforms which were very useful. They didn’t have to sit on the bare floor. The little ones would sit on my lap. I used to give them a bit of love and cuddle. [...] And I just looked after them as if they belonged to me, as if I was their auntie or mother.

In December 1947, Beng Neo was asked to take over Mount Emily Boys’ Home. The home housed just over 100 boys between the ages of six and fifteen. Beng Neo’s first impression was that the place was “filthy, stinks like a zoo. The children, little boys of six and seven had lice on their heads. The bugs were crawling up the walls. They had scabies, red eyes, and chicken pox. [...] And there wasn’t any food. Two jars of salt, that’s all I found in that Home.” While the SWD supplied some food rations, Beng Neo required more. She managed to persuade some “parents to

¹⁸ Ho, C. T. (2013). Communal feeding in post-war Singapore. *BiblioAsia* 9 (3), 2–7.

¹⁹ NAS OHC, Tan.

bring their rice ration. And every day I cooked a huge pot of rice and I got a lot of dehydrated soup mix and boiled these great, big pots.”²⁰

Beng Neo’s problems were compounded by having no budget in her first year, and so she had to make do with what was available. She bartered canvas for temporary shelters supplied by the Red Cross for sewing machines and clothing materials. She enlisted the Fire Brigade to clean and refurbish the old building, organized the children into work parties, and taught the older boys to sew and make clothing. The boys were also sorted into groups for cooking and maintenance around the home. She solicited help from the general public, such as staff from a nearby swimming pool to teach swimming, and a scout to start up a Boy Scout troop. Two girls from the Pasir Panjang Girl’s Home (where rescued juvenile prostitutes resided) were enlisted as cooks. To raise funds, Beng Neo organized a sale of work during Christmas, getting the boys to use the spare Red Cross canvas to make shopping bags and handles. She planned a daily routine that provided elementary lessons, a duty roster of house chores, and sufficient time for play and leisure. Older boys were encouraged to find outside employment, returning to the Home after work. As there were few other full-time SWD staff in the beginning, Beng Neo lived at the Home and became the boys’ surrogate mother. She took her position seriously, at one time confronting one of her former residents for cheating on his wife, long after he had left the Home and was a working adult.

In 1950, Beng Neo took over York Hill Home, a residential home for nearly 200 girls from infancy to school-going age. The residents were a mix of orphans, abuse victims, petty criminals, and those from troubled families. Beng Neo divided them into two groups, one school-going and the other designated as “Home girls.” The latter were mostly “overage girls” who had gotten into various types of trouble, “sometimes involved with men. Some were even pregnant. [...] Sometimes they would run away from home. Sometimes they were ill-treated. You should see some of them with marks all over their body, legs. [...] They had been bashed about. [...] And a few might even be theft cases.” The “Home girls” learned sewing and embroidery work to make clothing “for the younger ones.” They were also involved in the preparation of meals “for the rest of the Home and cooking for the nursery children.” Essentially, they were learning to take care of infants and younger children. The girls would leave York Hill if they found work upon completion of school or if they

²⁰ Ibid.

were to marry. Beng Neo sometimes had to “persuade” the Department to give a “dowry” for the orphaned girls, which she would use to buy the girl

A pair of shoes, a pair of slippers, a comb, a hairbrush, hair oil, a toothbrush and toothpaste, a pair of scissors, powder, lipstick, Eau de Cologne, talcum powder, a mug, a basin, two pieces of scented soap, two suits of pyjamas, three sets of underclothing, three to six dresses, six handkerchiefs and a little sort of suitcase to put all the things in. So that she goes out, at least she has a certain amount of decent things to start life with.²¹

Beng Neo was describing a situation where a girl had no one else to turn to except the Home and the SWD. The items described above are the bare essentials one reasonably expects a person to possess. In retrospect, it is difficult to imagine the type of life these orphaned, abandoned, or troubled girls would have faced without the Home and Beng Neo.

The protection and support afforded by York Hill Home had its limits, however. For some who left, their lives did not immediately get better. Beng Neo remembered girls returning to the Home or asking for help after being abused by their husbands or adoptive parents.²² At the wedding of another girl, Beng Neo recalled confronting the groom’s relatives as they were making snide comments about the absence of the girl’s natural mother. The stigma of the home left Beng Neo feeling helpless. She noted that people did not “understand that the Home is for training” and received girls who had an assortment of problems.²³ One particularly poignant story was of a ten- or eleven-year-old girl who came to York Hill because her father was dead and her mother was hospitalized with tuberculosis.

And I used to take her to the hospital to see the mother. I even left the address and all that but the hospital never informed us when the mother died. It was, I think, a couple of months or when I took the girl back to the hospital that we found that she was dead and already buried. And I had to console the girl.²⁴

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

The presence of Beng Neo was a boon to a fledgling SWD badly in need of trained staff. She could work independently and manage challenging situations with initiative and imagination. In 1951, Beng Neo traveled to England for further education and training. Beng Neo thought that she could have gone earlier, but “staff was not easy to get in those days.” At one stage, she was managing two homes simultaneously. She recalled: “Usually, most of the staff that helped [...] really came from the Salvation Army. You see there was nothing, nobody was trained. Nobody was able to do the work. And to get somebody to take over my job was quite... you know, a task.” She opined that “the jobs that [the SWD] started did not seem to progress until the Salvation Army officers joined them.”²⁵ Beng Neo worked for the SWD until she retired in 1969. Her memories not only capture vividly the experience of pioneering an aspect of Singapore’s modern-day social welfare system, they also provide a window into the experiences of young children and women who needed and received her help.

PAVING THE WAY: DAISY VAITHILINGAM AND MEDICAL SOCIAL SERVICES

The SWD was only one part of Singapore’s social welfare system. Almoners (or medical social workers) also played an important role in building Singapore’s social welfare state, one of whom was especially successful in transforming her personal initiative into sustained social programs and policy. Contemporary policies and programs concerning child welfare, such as the fostering scheme, education for children with disabilities, and public awareness of persons with disabilities, can trace their origins to the endeavors of Daisy Vaithilingam. Inspired by an almoner’s talk, Daisy started out as a student almoner in 1950. One memorable task was to solicit donations for walking aids:

One of the first things I did was to write to people just using the telephone book [...] to ask them to help out patients who needed orthopedic appliances. That means, like crutches or calipers. Some appliances to help them to learn to walk. Many of them were people who had been affected by polio. [...] Every time I opened a letter there would be a check. People we didn’t know. We just looked through the telephone book, [wrote] to companies

²⁵ Ibid.

and said that we had a child, can you help with so much. That was the first time I saw how generous the people in Singapore were, because we would always get checks to help the children.²⁶

After formal training, Daisy officially became an almoner in 1954. In the following year, she became the first local head of Singapore's almoners' service. The service started in 1949. Almoners, named for the alms distributed to needy patients, were the predecessors of the modern-day medical social worker. However, in late colonial Singapore, almoners did more than that. In the context of little to no social support for hospital patients, the almoners of Singapore helped establish services, programs, and organizations—many of which still exist today—to address pressing social needs.²⁷

One pressing issue was the number of unwanted children in the hospital wards, due to a variety of medical conditions. Daisy recalled that in “the children's unit we had lots of children who were mentally handicapped, severely handicapped to an extent that they couldn't walk.”²⁸ There were no institutions dedicated to this particular social need, so like Beng Neo, Daisy made effective use of what was available (and who was willing to help). She noticed several hospital attendants were “very good at looking after these small babies,” and she began organizing them to take the babies home with an allowance. “A lot of them had got quite attached to the children, for they had remained in the ward for a long time. So they were quite happy to take them home.”²⁹ As the scheme expanded, the almoners collaborated with the SWD to ensure potential foster parents were properly assessed. The SWD formally took over the scheme in 1956, which still exists today.³⁰ Daisy also focused on the caregiver, understanding that caring for children with disabilities required additional support. She succeeded in lobbying the SWD for a family allowance to help caregivers who had to give up their jobs to care for the children.

²⁶NAS OHC, Daisy Vaithilingam. Unless otherwise stated, information in this section is taken from NAS OHC, Vaithilingam.

²⁷Goh, S. N. (2021). Development of Social Work in Health Care in Singapore. In S. N. Goh and G. L. Lee (eds.), *Medical social work in Singapore: Context and practice*. World Scientific Publishing, 3–26.

²⁸NAS OHC, Vaithilingam.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid. See also SWDAR 1958, 23.

Daisy also worked directly with the Education Department and schools to ensure that children with physical disabilities were still able to have an education. For those who could not travel, she arranged for teachers to teach on the hospital wards so that the children “would not be at a disadvantage” when they could be discharged. For those who could travel, Daisy and her colleagues arranged for transportation (provided by the SWD) and worked with the schools to ensure accessibility for the children. Daisy recalled a heart-warming example of a school principal ensuring that all classes of a particular level remained on the ground floor so as to allow a child with physical disabilities to continue attending school.

Children with intellectual disabilities held a special place in Daisy’s heart. She was a founding member of a voluntary organization that became known as the Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS), first as Secretary and then later as President. One of the largest and oldest social service in Singapore today, the origins of MINDS can be traced to the collaborative efforts between the almoners, the Singapore Children Society, and the Rotary Club to establish a school or training center dedicated to preparing children with intellectual disabilities for employment and everyday living. Established in 1961, the school was called Towner Chin Pu—the latter two words a direct transliteration from Mandarin for “improvement.” Towner Chin Pu, and the training centers that followed it, laid the foundations for special needs education in Singapore.

SEIZING THE INITIATIVE: CONSTANCE GOH AND FAMILY PLANNING

The Singapore Family Planning Association (SFPA) was established in 1949, the result of volunteers confronting poverty on a daily basis for over two years. The SWD took over the Singapore Executive’s child feeding scheme in 1947. However, lacking sufficient resources, the SWD restricted the program to children of families receiving financial aid, and even then, only to one child per family—usually the youngest. Moreover, the SWD had to rely on volunteers to run the feeding centers. The volunteers, mostly women, were confronted with the daily sight of large numbers of hungry and malnourished children and their inability to feed every one of them. A volunteer recalled, “the older brothers and sisters used to come

along the centers and look longingly at what was being done for the younger children.”³¹

Soon, the volunteers began to realize the root cause of this situation, and from there, the helplessness of the children’s mothers. Another volunteer lamented:

And people were just breeding. [...] [T]hey have so many children in one family, they can’t afford to feed or clothe [or] send them to school. [...] I used to meet these young girls. [...] One moment you see her expecting, and the next moment you see her with the baby. And after a year and soon after, she’s carrying again. And I used to tell her, ‘How can you expect another child?’ She said, ‘What to do,’ she would say.³²

Another volunteer, Constance Goh, also recalled: “Children were running wild; if parents could not feed those they already had, how could they add more to the family?”³³ Soon, Constance and her fellow volunteers had had enough: “It was seeing all [this] poverty [...] that convinced us that something had to be done about family planning. [...] Family planning was [...] to allow women to space and limit the size of their families.”³⁴

Constance practically bullied the then SWD head, Percy McNeice, into becoming the first President of the SFPA—giving the association the semblance of official support.³⁵ She opened the first SFPA clinic in November 1949, on the premises of her doctor-husband’s clinic.³⁶ During the SFPA’s early days, the association’s activities had to be discreet. Constance recalled:

The news spread by word of mouth. Few women could read. And we dared not say too much: we never had any publicity because if it was known we would be accused of trying to thrust something at other women, having nothing to do, or trying to get jobs. That was the attitude of the men, the public. So we worked quietly undercover. It caught on gradually. We wanted

³¹ NAS OHC, Lady Yuen-Peng McNeice.

³² NAS OHC, Gnanasundram Thevathasan.

³³ Huston, P. (1992). *Motherhood by choice: Pioneers in women’s health and family planning*. Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 59.

³⁴ Ibid., 60.

³⁵ McNeice was quoted as saying: “She bullied me into it” in Zhou, M. (1996). *The life of family planning pioneer, Constance Goh: A point of light*. Graham Brash, 142.

³⁶ Unknown (November 5, 1949). First FPA Clinic Is Opened. *ST*.

to create the climate for [the] government to accept us, for people to think that we were doing good things for others.³⁷

Nevertheless, over time, Constance and the SFPA grew in confidence and began publicizing their work. Described as someone who was “absolutely outspoken [with] a sense of social rightness,”³⁸ Constance did not hold back. She shared in an interview that “a woman who had had 22 pregnancies begged the doctors ‘to do something to stop it all’. She had 20 children. Her husband was unemployed.”³⁹ She attacked polygamy, sharing one case where a 41-year-old woman, who had had seventeen children, found out her husband had taken a younger wife—even though he was incapable of supporting his existing family.⁴⁰ She recalled one “particularly off-hand” husband who reassured his wife—already the mother of eight children—that additional children could be given away. There was precedence, as the couple had already given two away.⁴¹ Constance bitingly summed up the men’s general attitude:

It was very difficult to persuade men to use condoms. Most men thought only of their own pleasure. They thought their fun might be spoiled, their health injured. The worship of ancestors influenced their attitudes as well. You must have sons to provide for you in the after-life and to carry on the family name, to serve you. The daughters get married and go away. It is the sons who remain and if you don’t have sons, you must try again and again.⁴²

Opposition also came from the Catholic Church. Constance recalled how a priest would condemn her to hell about “twice a month.”⁴³ Fellow volunteers were also “accused of corrupting the young and scheming to depopulate the earth.”⁴⁴ One volunteer recalled hospital nurses actively working against the SFPA, for instance giving misinformation about the

³⁷ Huston (1992), 61.

³⁸ Ibid., 65.

³⁹ Unknown (May 3, 1950). ‘Desperate’ Mothers Seek Aid. *Singapore Free Press* (SFP).

⁴⁰ Unknown (May 27, 1950). Polygamy is a Problem. *SFP*.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Huston (1992), 61.

⁴³ Huston (1992), 60; Zhou (1996), 133–134.

⁴⁴ Lee, J. (August 15, 2013). Rooted in service: Legacies of a family of old Rafflesians. Retrieved on September 10, 2021 from <https://rafflesiantimes.wordpress.com/2013/08/15/rooted-in-service-legacies-of-a-family-of-old-rafflesians/>.

clinic's opening hours.⁴⁵ The SWD head McNeice also commented that the "nurses who were Roman Catholic were advised by the priests to [...] they mustn't assist in anyway and in fact if they were asked to assist in anyway, they must refuse on moral grounds."⁴⁶ SFPA members worked hard and smart. While preparing for the official launch of the SFAP and anticipating opposition from religious bodies, Constance and her volunteers formed a committee to "look into the teachings of the Bible, the Koran, and the Hindu and Buddhist scriptures." Constance recalled that they found "nothing specific against [the SFPA's] immediate objectives" and that opposition came mainly from the Catholic Church during the organization's early years.⁴⁷ From 1951, the SFPA received a small grant from the government annually. Even so, the volunteers did not take it for granted. Lady McNeice recalled having "to lobby the Legislative Councilors [...] to either support us when this matter was brought up in Council, or, at least, to abstain from voting against us."⁴⁸ That the annual grants increased to a high of \$120,000 in 1958 (from the original grant of \$5000) was a testament to the volunteers' efforts.⁴⁹ The SFPA was not only responsible for arresting and reducing Singapore's fertility rate from 1958,⁵⁰ it was also a regional and international leader. In 1952, the association became a founding member of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, with Singapore acting as its headquarters for Southeast Asia. It acted as a guide and mentor to similar associations from around Southeast Asia, hosting visits and educational workshops for sister branches. The SFPA was ahead of its time. McNeice recalled that the SFPA operated more openly in Singapore compared to its counterpart in England, where even the addresses of its family planning centers were not publicized.⁵¹

Constance and her fellow volunteers in the SPFA were, moreover, part of a broader women's movement during the post-war years that ultimately led to the Women's Charter in 1961, by which polygamy outside of

⁴⁵NAS OHC, Lady McNeice, and Mrs. B (March 24, 1951). F.P.A. Hours at the K.K. Clinic. *ST*.

⁴⁶NAS OHC, Thomas Percy Ferguson McNeice.

⁴⁷Huston (1992), 60.

⁴⁸NAS OHC, Lady McNeice.

⁴⁹Saw, S. H. (2016). *Population policies and programmes in Singapore, 2nd edition*. ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 11.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 115.

⁵¹NAS OHC, Percy McNeice.

religious situations was outlawed and the rights of women, vis-à-vis their husbands and children, were legally enshrined.⁵² Constance and her volunteers not only recognized a root cause of poverty, they took it upon themselves to do something about it. In doing so, their impact was far-reaching, as they laid the foundations for an official state policy on population, enabling family planning to extend beyond the demise of the original SFPA.⁵³

SOCIAL BONDS TO BUILD A NATION

The work of Beng Neo, Daisy, Constance, and their colleagues provided much-needed tangibility and coherence to Singapore's social welfare system during its early years. Within the first decade of a deliberate social welfare policy, individuals and families in need of assistance became increasingly aware, via a plethora of social services and programs, of a social welfare state that accepted responsibility for their well-being. For instance, when Augustin was referred by his almoner to the SWD in 1952, as he was unable to work due to a chronic illness, the SWD gave him 19 dollars every month under the Public Assistance (PA) scheme, the successor to the BMA emergency relief from 1951. This was in contrast to him being repatriated back to India earlier in 1932. By then, Augustin had made Singapore his home, for better or worse. Similarly, Valentine was unable to find work as age and illness caught up with him. His parish priest, familiar with his circumstances, advised him to go to the SWD for help. From 1955, he began receiving 15 dollars every month under the PA scheme. In both cases, we can see the social welfare system in operation, via the almoner and priest referring Augustin and Valentine to the SWD for help.

The reason we are aware of both individuals and their encounters is that the emerging social welfare system needed trained staff to operate the various services and programs. Information about Augustin and Valentine came from a research paper on elderly PA recipients completed by a student from the Social Studies Diploma program. Anticipating that more trained social welfare officers were needed, this program was established in 1952 at the University of Malaya. It was a two-year program that exposed

⁵² Leong, W. K. (2008). Fifty Years and More of the Women's Charter of Singapore. *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies*, 1.

⁵³ Saw (2016), 23–40.

students to subjects such as law, history, sociology, and psychology, as well as attachments to the SWD and social service agencies to provide first-hand experience.⁵⁴ It exists today as the Social Work Department at the National University of Singapore.

In executing their work, Beng Neo, Daisy, Constance, and their colleagues also forged strong bonds with the people to whom they gave assistance. Such bonds could manifest as deep feelings of gratitude. Beng Neo recalled a former York Hill resident insisting on giving her a treat at the restaurant where she worked.⁵⁵ Daisy was gleefully recognized by a graduate from one of the training centers for children with intellectual disabilities she helped set up.⁵⁶ An SWD officer once returned to his motorbike to see a couple of chickens and several bunches of rambutans hanging from the handlebars—ostensibly tokens of appreciation from grateful applicants for assistance—and another received regular visits from his former hostel residents to seek advice about finding work or simply to pass on news about doing well in school.⁵⁷ Social bonds could also manifest as feelings of belonging or loyalty. This was discovered by another SWD officer when she was posted to a youth club located in a “gangster area” part of Chinatown (“People’s Park”). At first wary of the gangsters who loitered nearby, the officer realized after establishing a rapport with them that they were more than willing to assist her, even escorting her to the bus stop whenever she worked late.⁵⁸ A PA recipient felt a sense of gratitude to the SWD for assistance given to him and his family during a testing period when his father died. In 1970, he joined the SWD, beginning a forty-year career in social work as he “wanted to give back to society what [he] gained from it.”⁵⁹ This personal statement exemplifies the raw potential of social welfare to build and buttress a cohesive community via positive relationships between individuals and their government.

This is perhaps where the creation of Singapore’s social welfare system ideally meets the broader policy objective of colonial development and welfare, which was to create a cohesive community out of Singapore’s pre-war plural society. In 1955, an unpublished five-year plan suggested that the SWD “should [...] no longer be concerned with residual needs.”

⁵⁴ Ho and Wee (2016), 57–60.

⁵⁵ NAS OHC, Tan.

⁵⁶ NAS OHC, Vaithilingam.

⁵⁷ NAS OHC, Chia Cheong Fook.

⁵⁸ NAS OHC, Janet Yee.

⁵⁹ NAS OHC, Subramaniam s/o Muniam.

Instead, it “should be concerned with social development and take a positive part in the construction of a society more in harmony with the political, physical and economic environment of today.”⁶⁰ The last colonial head of the SWD, Tom Cromwell, attempted to do this through community development, which was “a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community, with the active participation and, if possible, on the initiative of the Community.”⁶¹ This manifested primarily via the building of community centers, which was described by Cromwell as

[A] building where there is a hall, big enough to play badminton in, with a proper stage for amateur concerts and plays, baby shows, lectures and so on, and rooms in which committees of clubs and societies can meet; provide first aid posts, a telephone, kindergartens (more or less unofficial) and some kind of training for children who can’t get into school, facilities for boys and girls, youth clubs and so on. [...] In short, it is our job to build up a feeling of neighbourliness among people who just happen to be neighbours.⁶²

An internal SWD memo reiterated that the community center catered to all individuals, regardless of “sectional” needs and interests, providing a space for the “pursuit of common interests.” The memo continued:

Neighbourhoodliness does not, of itself, necessarily constitute a social bond; but if, by grouping its leisure activities in a recreational and educational centre, a neighbourhood can develop [sic] into a socially conscious community, learning, by managing the affairs of the Centre, to participate intelligently in the affairs of local and central government, then education for democracy will have made a real advance.⁶³

By the end of 1957, the SWD had built at least eight community centers.⁶⁴ In 1960, the management of all community centers in Singapore was permanently transferred to the People’s Association, a government agency that still exists today.⁶⁵ The potential of community centers was clear to

⁶⁰ NASGR, SWD 328/55, Social Welfare Department Five Year Plan 1957–1962, undated.

⁶¹ SWDAR 1951, 33.

⁶² SOAS Library, Letter from Cromwell to his parents, July 10, 1955. Papers of Tom Pearson Cromwell, PP MS 33.

⁶³ NASGR, SWD 145/57, Community Centres in Singapore, July 1957.

⁶⁴ National University of Singapore Central Library (NUSCL), CO 1030/671–672, Social Welfare Monthly Reports, December 1957.

⁶⁵ SWDAR 1959, 8 and SWDAR 1960, 26.

the pioneering generation of Singaporean political leaders. In clarifying the purpose of the community center, S. Rajaratnam, the then Minister for Culture, echoed the SWD memo: "When the Government introduced Community Centres its main aim was to use them as training grounds for democracy. Democracy does not mean only an elected leader running the country. [...] Democracy means people also learning to do things for themselves; people willing to do service voluntarily for the community."⁶⁶

The community center memo was a clear attempt to connect the SWD and social welfare to nation-building. At its most fundamental, nation-building refers to the efforts to foster a cohesive community within a defined territorial boundary by emphasizing commonalities, such as language, culture, a shared heritage, and a common vision of the future.⁶⁷ The community center was perceived as integral to the "fostering of a spirit of neighbourliness and common citizenship in the present plural society."⁶⁸ The reference to a "common citizenship in the present plural society" is intriguing, as it appears to be a reference to John Furnivall's earlier writings on the problems of the colonial plural society. Furnivall was a former official in the British colonial Indian Civil Service. He worked in Burma from 1902 until his retirement in 1931. He studied at Leiden University from 1933 to 1935, researching colonial policy and administration. In 1948, he published *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India*, which expanded on his earlier studies on the problems of the plural society created by colonialism and their possible solutions.⁶⁹ One suggestion Furnivall made was to have the government play a central role in facilitating the "re-integration of society through Nationalism."⁷⁰ Hence, Cromwell's use of community development appears to build on Furnivall's idea of using nationalism to address the issues posed by Singapore's colonial society then. Cromwell clearly felt a strong government presence was necessary, as "there is no real

⁶⁶ Quoted in Seah C. M. (1973). *Community centres in Singapore: Their political involvement*. Singapore University Press, 59.

⁶⁷ Understanding of nation-building adapted from essays in Wang, G. (ed.) (2005). *Nation-building: Five Southeast Asian histories*. ISEAS.

⁶⁸ NASGR, SWD 328/55, SWD Five Year Plan, undated.

⁶⁹ These include Furnivall J. S. (1939). *Netherlands India: A study of plural economy*. Cambridge University Press, and Furnivall J. S. (1939). *The fashioning of Leviathan*. Zabu Meitswe Pitaka Press.

⁷⁰ Furnivall, J. S. (1941). *Progress and welfare in Southeast Asia: A comparison of colonial policy and practice*. Institute of Pacific Relations, 68.

nationalism in Singapore. [...] People do not feel [themselves] to be Singaporeans.” He commented, rather presciently, that “it is just possible [...] that racial antagonisms may be exacerbated after independence.”⁷¹ He observed:

A natural lack of cooperation between the ‘alien’ Chinese and the local Government, *because they do not feel they belong to it*. They cannot speak any of the recognized languages, and like the Englishman abroad they see no reason to learn them. They are fearful, easily led by their own kind and they have a remarkable sense for joining a majority in semi-passive movements antagonistic to ‘government.’ It is due largely to ignorance of the way Government works and what it does.⁷²

Cromwell’s efforts at rudimentary nation-building were overtaken by events ironically enough initiated by decolonization. His influence and power were reduced, and he was eventually replaced by a local officer. Cromwell’s ideas, however, particularly the use of community centers and the centrality of government in Singapore’s nation-building efforts after independence, remained in practice long after he left.

CONCLUSION: THE VALUE OF LIVED EXPERIENCES

The above is but a brief glimpse into the possibilities of a more intimate, biographical approach to histories of the welfare state and social welfare systems in general. The experiences of individuals, such as SWD officers, almoners, volunteers, and the individuals they assisted, provide a platform from which we are made more aware of, first, the everyday work of creating a social welfare system in a situation where there was little to no local precedent; and second, the basic experience of rendering and receiving aid. These contemporaneous perspectives and memories bestow an intimacy to conventional policy, legislative, and institutional histories by providing personal insights into the rationale behind those policies, legislation, and institutions. In doing so, they illuminate more clearly the historical interactions between the individual, the state, and society at large: in this case, they show how individual action helped foster a more cohesive

⁷¹ SOAS Library, Letter from Cromwell to his parents, November 11, 1956. Cromwell Papers, PP MS 33, Box 8, File 36. Two race riots occurred in Singapore in 1964.

⁷² SOAS Library, Letter from Cromwell to his parents, October 28, 1956. Cromwell Papers, PP MS 33, Box 8, File 36. My italicization.

society in late colonial Singapore, and how that society and the community in general were re-defined to include a more prominent role for the state.

This approach allows us to perceive the welfare state as more than just an abstract or monolithic institution providing social assistance. It encourages us to approach the welfare state as an institution or institutions that are grounded in everyday individual actions, which in turn produce experiences that give meaning to receiving and rendering aid. This also provides a basis to compare Singapore's experiences with other related contexts, be it in how social policy was used in other former colonies to refashion colonial society after World War II, in examining the intensified role of the state and how that continued into the post-colonial period, or in the less prominent but no less significant impact of individual action.

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PART III

Agency and Experience “from below”



CHAPTER 7

Voices of the Poor: Negotiations of Social Rights in Denmark, 1849–1891

Leonora Lottrup Rasmussen

INTRODUCTION

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Denmark enacted three social reforms, which made it possible for people to receive unstigmatized public support. These reforms also supported preventive initiatives to eradicate poverty. As such, existing welfare state research has highlighted these reforms as lines of continuation between nineteenth-century poor relief and the twentieth-century welfare state. This research has emphasized political parties and collective class struggles as decisive factors in shaping the new social policy.¹ In doing so, these studies inevitably prioritized

¹For example, Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Polity Press; Lützen, K. (2013). *Byen tæmmes: Kernefamilie, sociale reformer og velgørenhed i 1800-tallets København*. Hans Reitzel; Petersen, J. H., Petersen K., and Christiansen, N. F. (2011). *Dansk velferdshistorie: Mellem skøn og ret, 1898–1933*. Syddansk Universitetsforlag; Kolstrup, S. (1996). *Velferdsstatens rødder: Fra kommunesocialisme til folkepension*. Selskabet til Forskning i Arbejderbevægelsens Historie.

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institutional considerations over those of their users, as well as organized social movements over non-organized citizen's interactions with the state. Thus, the agency and experiences of the people who depended on the public poor relief system were left out of the equation. This is due mainly to the fact that recipients of poor relief had no formal political organization or official spokespersons, and they were deprived of both key civil and political rights, such as the right to vote.²

Drawing on studies within the fields of citizenship and pauper agency, I wish to demonstrate the ways in which ordinary citizens, armed with pencil and paper, were entering new territory as they questioned the existing social order and pushed for change. My main argument is that the everyday interactions between the actual users of welfare and the people in power played a role in the evolution of social practice. These interactions contained important citizenship negotiations, which questioned the content and the extent of social rights. However, these negotiations can easily be overlooked because they are more subtle and less visible than, for example, public strikes or parliamentary debates. To access them, we must turn our focus toward the municipalities, who were responsible for managing the poor law. My analysis is based on the municipality of Aarhus, where different types of applications provide us with an insight into the lived experiences of the poor and their dealings with the local authorities.

FROM POOR RELIEF TO WELFARE STATE

The question of who and what were the driving forces behind the welfare state depends on the definition of what constitutes a welfare state, as does the question of when to date the welfare state. Thus, it is natural to place the emergence of the Danish welfare state in the postwar period, if one operates with an all-encompassing definition of a welfare state in which the state ensures the social security of its citizens and strives for full employment and economic growth.³ In the postwar period, characteristic welfare benefits—such as the national pension and state-subsidized child-care institutions—saw the light of day.⁴ Scholars who have focused their

² Rasmussen, L. L. (2019). *De Fattiges Ret: Forhandlinger af socialt medborgerskab som status og praksis i stat og kommune, 1849–1892*. Aarhus Universitet.

³ Kolstrup, S. (1994). Forskning i velfærdsstatens rødder: Forskningsstrategier, resultater, huller. *Historisk Tidsskrift* 94(2), 315–336.

⁴ A universal national pension was enacted in 1956, which gave all citizens the right to receive a pension regardless of wealth and income.

attention on this period often highlight the workers' movement and the Social Democrats as the main driving forces.⁵

Other scholars, who operate with a narrower understanding of what constitutes a welfare state, have turned their attention to specific qualitative features, such as state-funded benefits or preventive initiatives. In their desire to trace the history of these features, they have found it meaningful to look further back in time, especially to the time around the turn of the century. In 1891, a new poor law and old-age compensation act were enacted. These laws made it possible to receive support during childbirth and old age, along with support for doctors' visits, funerals, and disabled children without the loss of rights. The following year, a law regarding state-subsidized sickness funds followed.⁶ Several scholars have highlighted that the tax-funded old-age compensation can be seen as an expression of universalism and solidarity, and thus a small step toward the welfare state that would emerge in the twentieth century.⁷ Some have emphasized how the sickness fund laid the foundation for the so-called flexicurity system, a labor market model that combines flexibility for employers and security for workers.⁸ Others have pointed out that the new poor law is the first sign of the emergence of a caring and ameliorative social policy.⁹ Here, forces such as the agrarian movement, the Liberal Party (*Venstre*), and

⁵ For example, Esping Andersen, G. (1983). *Fra fattighjælp til velfærdsstat*. *Tidsskrift for politisk økonomi*; Petersen, K. (1996). Om formuleringen af velfærdsstaten som et politisk projekt i 1950'erne: Et bidrag til den moderne velfærdsstats historie. *Arbejderhistorie*, 62–78; Kolstrup (1996).

⁶ The public poor relief act of April 9, 1891; The old age compensation act of April 9, 1891; The sickness fund of April 12, 1892.

⁷ Baldwin, P. (1990). *The politics of social solidarity: Class bases of the European welfare state 1875–1975*. Cambridge University Press, 76; Petersen, J. H. (2003). Gårdmandsvenstre: Velfærdsstatens far. In K. Petersen (Ed.), *13 Historier om den danske velfærdsstat*. Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 81–93; Petersen, J. H. (1995). *Den danske aldersomsørgelseslovgivnings udvikling, Bind 1: Oprindelsen*. Odense Universitetsforlag; Christiansen, N. F. (2015). Social- og familierpolitikens rolle i den demokratiske inklusion. In A. Borchorst and D. Dahlerup (eds.), *Før og efter stemmeretten: Køn, demokrati og velfærd*, Frydenlund, 39–61.

⁸ Baldwin (1990); Petersen, J. H. (2003).

⁹ Christiansen (2015); Kolstrup, S. (2010). Fattiglovgivningen fra 1803 til 1891. In J. H. Petersen, K. Petersen and N. F. Christiansen (eds.), *Dansk velfærds historie, Bind 1*. Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 159–199.

increasing industrialization have been stressed as key factors in this development.¹⁰

Considerably less attention has been paid to investigating the poor as driving forces. This of course has to do with the judicial and social stigmatization that the recipients of poor relief were placed under. Up until 1891, the legislation on public poor relief in Denmark was based on the Poor Law of 1803, which had been subjected to several alterations during the first half of the century. Some of these alterations deprived the poor relief recipients of key civil rights, for example, the right to marry and the right to private ownership.¹¹ The judicial degradation was further increased with the enactment of the first democratic constitution in 1849. Even though this constitution secured social citizenship, making the right to receive public support a constitutional right, it also excluded recipients of poor relief from political citizenship, along with women and servants.¹² At the same time, poor- and workhouses became increasingly popular in Danish municipalities from the 1860s. In fact, Denmark had the highest number of poor- and workhouses among the Nordic countries. These institutions supported people in need by subjecting them to surveillance, discipline, and control.¹³

So far, existing studies on poor relief in nineteenth-century Denmark have highlighted that the correlation between the constitutional allocation of rights and the municipal administration of the national poor law, with its use of poor- and workhouses, resulted in humiliation, infringement, and an overall stigmatization of recipients of public poor relief.¹⁴ In

¹⁰For example, Baldwin (1990); Mørch, S. (1982). *Den ny Danmarkshistorie 1880–1960*. Gyldendal; Hornemann Møller, I. (1891). *Klassekamp og sociallovgivning 1850–1970*. Socialistiske Økonomers Forlag; Petersen, J. H. (2003).

¹¹According to the Poor Law of 1803, the poor committee gained the right to sell the property of the deceased poor in order to receive compensation for paid relief. In 1808, the poor committee could register the properties of the poor. In 1824, the poor committee was also allowed to refuse citizens who had not yet paid back their relief the right to marry. In 1857, the law was changed so that women were exempted from restrictions on their marital rights, but the intervention remained in force for male citizens until social reform in 1933.

¹²Constitution of June 5, 1849: All men over 30 with an unblemished reputation received the right to vote, unless he was in private service, had received public poor relief, or was unable to manage his own estate.

¹³Kolstrup (2010), 213.

¹⁴For example, Christiansen (2015); Jørgensen, H. (1979). *Studier over det offentlige fattigvæsens historiske udvikling i Danmark i det 19. aarhundrede*. Selskabet for Udgivelse af Kilder til Dansk Historie; Lyngdrup Nørgård, I. (2017). *Beskyt de værdige fattige!: Opfattelser og behandling af fattige i velgørenhed, filantropi og fattigvæsen i København 1770–1874*. Syddansk Universitetsforlag.

addition, several studies have stressed that the political exclusion demoted recipients of poor relief to second-class citizens. Thus, the users of the early welfare state are portrayed as passive victims in an unloving system.¹⁵

However, in several recent citizenship studies, scholars have stressed that citizenship should be viewed not only as something that is allocated, but also something that is done, and thus something that can be done differently. Similarly, studies within the field of pauper agency have stressed the importance of investigating local practice. Even though welfare policies were formally set at the national level, studies have shown how these policies were enacted at the local level, and the ways in which face-to-face negotiations determined their impact.¹⁶ All in all, these studies call for an investigation of the early welfare state that looks beyond the formal status of citizenship and national legislation. What is needed is an investigation that considers the everyday practice of citizenship and the actions and experiences of those citizens who turned to the local administrators in need of help, an investigation that provides a more nuanced understanding of how social benefits were introduced and established.

CITIZENSHIP AND PAUPER AGENCY

In his seminal essay *Citizenship and Social Class* (1949), T. H. Marshall defines citizenship as a “status bestowed on those who are full members of a community.”¹⁷ It is a status that includes civil, political, and social rights and obligations. However, since the 1990s, several citizenship studies have stressed that citizenship should not only be viewed solely as a *formal status*, as Marshall defines it, but also as a *social practice*. For instance, Ruth Lister draws a distinction between two formulations: “to be a citizen” and “to act as a citizen.” *To be a citizen* means enjoying the formal status of citizenship, while *to act as a citizen* involves fulfilling the full potential of that status. For Lister, this distinction is key in deconstructing the conception of women as passive victims, while also acknowledging the discriminatory and oppressive male-dominated institutions that denied them full citizenship.¹⁸

¹⁵Jørgensen (1979); Kolstrup (2010).

¹⁶Lees, L. H. (1998). *The solidarities of strangers: The English poor laws and the people, 1700–1948*. Cambridge University Press.

¹⁷Marshall, T. H. and Bottomore, T. (1996). *Citizenship and social class*. Pluto.

¹⁸Lister, R. (1997). *Engendering citizenship, work and care*. Aalborg University Press, 11–12.

Likewise, Canning and Rose emphasize citizenship as both a judicial status and a set of social practices. By combining the discursive and experiential dimensions of citizenship, Canning and Rose highlight how citizenship functions as a multidimensional discursive framework that provided citizens with the languages, rhetoric, and formal categories for claims-making. Like Lister, Canning and Rose are interested in the ways in which gender has shaped claims-making activities, pointing out that women, along with minorities on the margins of citizenship, often had a leading role in striking these claims.¹⁹

Similarly, Isin describes citizenship as a subject position in constant flux. According to Isin, citizenship can be defined as a “dynamic (political, legal, social and cultural but perhaps also sexual, aesthetic and ethical) institution of domination and empowerment that governs who citizens (insiders), subjects (strangers, outsiders) and abjects (aliens) are and how these actors are to govern themselves and each other in a given body politic.”²⁰ If one operates with this definition, citizenship is not just performed and enacted by citizens, but also by non-citizens. In his effort to uncover the dynamic and porous nature of citizenship, Isin has introduced the concept of *acts of citizenship*,²¹ which “requires a focus on those moments when, regardless of status or substance, subjects constitute themselves as citizens—or, better still, as those to whom the right to have rights is due.”²²

My study builds on these thoughts on citizenship, acknowledging that formal citizenship is not a prerequisite for a political voice. Even though recipients of poor relief did not enjoy the full status of citizenship, I treat them as political actors and investigate the agency that the poor, though stigmatized and degraded, did attain. This aim also corresponds with the research field of pauper agency. Studies within this field have highlighted the local and relational aspects of poor relief and emphasized the different ways that the poor handled and negotiated their poverty, especially during the period from the eighteenth to the

¹⁹ Canning, K. and Rose, S. O. (2011). Gender, citizenship and subjectivity: Some historical and theoretical considerations. *Gender & History* 13(3), 427–443.

²⁰ Isin, E.F. (2009). Citizenship in flux: the figure of the activist citizen. *Subjectivity* 29(1). 367–388.

²¹ Isin and Nielsen (2008).

²² Isin and Nielsen (2008).

twentieth century.²³ For example, Lynn Lees argues that poor relief should be viewed as an active, negotiating process between the poor and the administrator.²⁴ In a similar vein, Marco van Leeuwen stresses the mutual strategic interaction between the recipient and the allocator of relief as defining the ways in which poor relief was distributed. Key to many studies within the field of pauper agency are ego-documents, such as letters, complaints, and applications, which give us an insight into not only the actions of the poor, but also their experiences of being poor.

APPLICATIONS IN AARHUS

Along with other studies on pauper agency, this study is based on ego-documents, in the form of applications written by the poor to the municipality of Aarhus. Aarhus is located on the east coast of the Jutland peninsula and was at the beginning of the nineteenth century a small provincial town. After the expansion of the harbor from 1841 to 1861 and the opening of the railroad in 1862, the city experienced significant economic growth. The population increased from 11,000 inhabitants in 1860 to 52,000 in 1901, and Aarhus became the fastest growing provincial city in Denmark. People moved from the surrounding rural areas to the city center in hopes of finding a job. However, toward the end of the century, the city was increasingly marked by social problems, such as unemployment and pressure on the housing market, and many had to turn to the public poor relief system for help.²⁵

The public poor relief system was managed by the local poor committee. The committee was a part of the elected City Council and provided a mixture of indoor and outdoor relief, in the form of pecuniary and food assistance. The applications, which are at the heart of this study, were addressed either to the poor committee or directly to the City Council.

²³For example, King, S. and Jones, P. (2016). *Testifying for the poor: Epistolary advocates and the negotiation of parochial relief in England, 1800–1834*. Oxford University Press; King, S. (2011). Negotiating the law of poor relief in England, 1800–1840. *History* 96 (324), 410–435; van Leeuwen, M. (2002). Histories of risk and welfare in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In A. Cunningham, R. Jütte and O.P. Grell (eds.), *Health care and poor relief in 18th and 19th Century Northern Europe: History of medicine in context*. Routledge, 32–66. Hansen, P.W. (2013). *Den skjulte fattigdom: Middelstandens fattige i København 1750–1850*. Københavns Universitet, 89.

²⁴Lees (1998), 5–11, 33–37.

²⁵Rasmussen (2019).

The applications vary considerably in form and content. Some are executed beautifully, and are well structured and well written. Others are made in straightforward and informal language, without punctuation and with random capital letters. It is reasonable to assume that at least some of the applications may not have been written by the applicant himself, but either by professional scribes or the people in his personal network, for example, an employer, landlord, or local pastor. As such, it is a type of source material that is entangled in questions of authenticity, authorship, writing skills, performativity, and factuality. While it is important to keep these considerations in mind, the applications still hold significant value in that they provide us with an insight into the strategies put forth by the poor. Even though some may not have been written by the person who signed the application and others consist of some amount of “make-up,” they still show us how the poor used their network to further their position, as well as the intentional performances of the poor.

REGAINING LOST RIGHTS

While the constitution of 1849 excluded recipients from political citizenship, it also contained the possibility to have one's relief canceled and thus regain the lost rights.²⁶ But up until 1891, the national poor legislation did not set any official rules or criteria regulating this paragraph. Instead, it was left to each municipality to decide who should be deemed worthy of having his debt canceled and on what grounds. In Aarhus, recipients of poor relief would send written applications for debt cancellation to the municipality. These types of applications appear frequently from the 1880s onwards. The applications were addressed directly to the City Council, who would usually forward them to the poor committee to give recommendations as to whether the applicant should have his debt canceled. The poor committee then undertook a general investigation of the accounts that were put forward in the applications. Often the poor committee would pay a visit to the applicant's home and conduct an examination, which also ensures some amount of credibility to the applications.

²⁶The Danish Constitution of June 5, 1849, §35.

In July 1890, the City Council received an application for debt cancellation from a factory worker, Martinus Vissing.²⁷ His application is as follows:

As originating from a poor and ill-fated home, I was hospitalized at Aarhus Hospital on 8 September 1880 and later 3 times with different intervals so that my total debt amounts to 175 DKr. and 60ø.

The first time I became a burden on the public system, I was only 19 years old, and I had no idea at the time that I had a moral obligation to repay the sickness benefits or that I by not doing it would lose basic human rights.

This became clear to me at a later stage, but partly because of the sickness—which every time has been rheumatic fever—I have a chronic heart disease that will follow me the rest of my life, which means that I am not always able to work, and partly because I have a poor and blind father, whom I occasionally support, it has so far been impossible for me to repay my debt.

In recent years, I have tried to put aside a small amount of money in order get the debt repaid but so far in vain—The sum is too big for me—it is insurmountable;

In order for me to once again regain my lost social rights, I hereby allow myself with great reverence to address the high council in petition for it to give me its assistance by willingly cancelling two thirds of my debt.

I allow myself to think that this is also in the best interest of the city. A third part of the total amount of 58 Dkr. 53 ø, I can, by continued good health, be able to repay within a shorter or longer period of time—the full amount, on the other hand, probably never.

Aarhus, July 15, 1890,

Respectfully,

Martinus Vissing
Factory-worker.²⁸

In this application, I believe two important factors are at play. First, Vissing argues that his poverty was not the result of a lack of character, but that, through no fault of his own, he was in financial hardship: He describes how as a young man he fell ill and later came to realize his moral obligation to pay back the received relief, but it was now too late. By sharing his personal experiences of sickness and poverty with the local authorities,

²⁷ Regarding the question of authorship, the handwriting suggests that Vissing's application is signed by the same person who wrote the application. Since the municipality treated the application as being submitted by Vissing, I will also treat it as such.

²⁸ Aarhus City Archive, journal number 271–1890.

Vissing tried to make these experiences a matter of public interest. By passing on these personal details to the City Council, the application reflects the underlining notion that the municipality should care about his personal experiences and take them into consideration. Second, Vissing uses the language and laws of citizenship repeatedly throughout his application. This is especially evident in phrases such as “I had no idea at the time that I had a moral obligation to repay the sickness benefits or that I by not doing it would lose basic human rights” and “in order for me to once again regain my lost social rights.” It is clear that Vissing sees himself as a political being “with basic human rights,” and that he was able to articulate these rights.

Several other applicants also referenced the constitution and their citizenship rights. In 1888, weaver Christian Petersen wrote that he would like the City Council to cancel his debt of 24 Kr. because, as he noted, “the loss of civil rights is weighing on me.”²⁹ It should be pointed out that the term *civil rights* in these applications refers to the Marshallian concept of both civil and political rights. The same line of reasoning is reflected in shoemaker J. Jensen’s application from 1889, in which he stated that he would like the City Council to cancel his debt of 14 Dkr, “since I rather not lose my civil rights.”³⁰ Worker Carl Petersen used a similar phrasing in his applications from 1888. Because of an infection in his knee, Petersen had been hospitalized and was left with a debt of 30.40 Dkr. He applied for the cancellation of this debt by stressing that he was not yet able to work, and thus did not see himself as capable of paying back the money he owed, but that he would “rather not lose his civil rights.”³¹ Worker Rasmus Nielsen referred more directly to his voting rights in his application from 1891. Here he explained that due to his wife’s sickness, he now owed the municipality 10 Dkr, but that he wanted his debt canceled because, as he put it, “I would rather not henceforth lose my right to vote.”³²

Based on these applications to the City Council, all five men got either all or parts of their debt canceled. The applications show us that recipients of poor relief were able to use the rhetoric of citizenship to position themselves as political beings. They knew which words to use and how to argue for their rights. By doing so, the applicants used the concept of political

²⁹ Aarhus City Archive, journal number 236–1888.

³⁰ Aarhus City Archive, journal number 73–1889.

³¹ Aarhus City Archive, journal number 204–1888.

³² Aarhus City Archive, journal number 27–1891.

citizenship as a steppingstone to request the cancellation of paid relief. A similar dynamic was also at play in other types of applications.

ALLOTMENTS AND ACTIVE CITIZENS

As mentioned above, the city of Aarhus offered both indoor and outdoor relief. A part of the city's outdoor relief consisted of allotment gardens—small pieces of land that offered aid to the urban poor by providing them with the opportunity to supplement their otherwise sparse income with fruit and vegetables. In 1836, the city owned approximately 36 allotments. By 1884, the number had increased to 140, and by 1891 there were 228 allotments. The allotments were administered by the poor committee and were apportioned free of charge.³³ As the growing number of allotments suggests, these plots of land were very popular. Their popularity stemmed from the fact that the allotments—unlike other types of public poor relief—did not result in any loss of rights, even though the allotments were aimed at helping family fathers, who usually had to give up their political rights in order to receive public support. That the allotments allowed male citizens to exercise both social and political rights is an interesting feature from a citizenship perspective.

The main reason why recipients of poor relief were excluded from political citizenship in 1849 was that the ability to support oneself was seen as a precondition for suffrage. This meant that political citizenship was not only male-gendered but also built around a particular form of masculine ideal. This allocation of rights placed ultimate authority and responsibility on the male head of the household and made passive social citizenship incompatible with active political rights.³⁴ Since the allocation of allotments did not cause any loss of rights, the act of applying for an allotment can be treated as an “act of citizenship,” because this act called into question the formally defined distinction between social and political rights.

The applications for allotments are interesting because the applicants used the notion of the male political citizen in order to get the opportunity to be both a recipient of poor relief and a political citizen at the same

³³ Aarhus City Council Minutes, 1884; 1891.

³⁴ Koefoed, N. J. (2014). Performing male political citizenship: Local philanthropy as an arena for practicing and negotiating citizenship in late nineteenth-century Denmark. In N. J. Koefoed, K. Cowman & Å. K. Sjøgren (eds.), *Gender in Urban Europe*. Routledge, 162–177.

time. This meant presenting yourself as independent and responsible, which is why many also stressed their role as providers. For example, worker Vilhelm Petersen wrote in his application from 1883: "I, in my position as provider for a wife and 6 children, could benefit from the help such a plot of land would be able to give me."³⁵ In the attached testimony (which all applicants were required to present), Petersen's former employer also emphasized his ability to provide: "Vilhelm Petersen (...) is a nice and decent, sober and diligent man, who arguably will make sure to get something out of it, if the requested allotment is allocated him, and since he has a large family to support, he needs such an additional income."³⁶

Key words such as "sober," "hard-working," "diligent," "trustworthy," "industrious," "respectable," "conscientious," "polite," "independent," "rational," "sensible," and "careful" are repeatedly used to characterize the applicants, either by themselves or by the person giving the testimony.³⁷ These words were all characteristics associated with the role of being a provider and connected to the ideal of the male, political citizen. In the national parliament, the exact same words were being used to describe the deserving poor, who—as many politicians argued—should not be deprived of their political rights. Words such as "lazy" and "drunken" are, on the other hand, used in descriptions of the underserving poor, who were not deemed worthy of political participation.³⁸ By emphasizing their willingness to work and their position as the male head of the household, the applicants deliberately presented themselves as men striving for their family's economic survival and respectability. Through the display of character traits such as being independent and industrious, which was inevitably linked to the conception of political citizenship, the applicants used the ideal of the good citizen as a steppingstone for exercising both their social and political citizenship. This again underlines how citizenship functioned as a discursive framework to make claims about rights.³⁹

In addition, the applications show us that many people applied several times in order to procure an allotment. One of these applicants was worker Søren Møller. The first testimony from Møller is dated May 26, 1879.

³⁵ The Danish National Archives, Sager vedr. Frihaverne 1867–1886.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ For example, the Danish National Archives, Sager vedr. Frihaverne, Jens Jockumsen 1879, Christian Bach 1881, J. B. Møller 1881, Christian Rasmussen 1881.

³⁸ Minutes from the Danish Parliament, Appendix A, 1874–1875, column 1586–1711.

³⁹ Canning and Rose (2001), 431.

However, in this testimony it appears that Møller had previously been in contact with the municipality:

Dear Mayor Schmidten,

Three years ago, I addressed head master Kraiberg with the respect of acquiring an allotment if such became available, since it would be a great help for me and my family and after his request, I submitted briefly thereafter an application with Mr. Editor Mørk's recommendation and signature, and a year ago I submitted once again information on where I lived, but now I have obtained nothing and I have been made known from what I deem a reliable source that last year quite a few plots were available.⁴⁰

Applications such as this demonstrate how industrious, active, and proactive the poor were in their dealings with the local authorities. Møller's arguments, which appear to be well formulated and well founded, display a kind of self-confidence. In addition, his applications show us that he knew how to use his network: Niels Kraiberg, whom Møller mentions he had been in contact with, was a City Council member and part of the poor committee, while Johannes Mørk, from whom Møller had obtained a recommendation, was the editor of the local newspaper and member of the City Council. Thus, Møller showed he was in contact with some of the city's most prominent men. He also showed courage in addressing the mayor in person, while also stating that he knew that the City Council had had the opportunity to give him an allotment but had so far not done so. However, Møller was not allocated an allotment in 1879, and three years later applied again:

Since I have 3 times before applied to be considered for the distribution of allotments and my requests have not yet been successful, and it has now come to my knowledge that there will be a few plots available this spring, I ask to be considered at this distribution.⁴¹

Even though Møller met the formal criteria for the allocation of an allotment, he did not receive one in 1882. Still without an allotment, Møller applied again the following year:

⁴⁰ Aarhus City Archive, Sager vedr. Frihaverne 1867–1886, Søren Møller 1879.

⁴¹ The Danish National Archives, Sager vedr. Frihaverne 1867–1886, Søren Sørensen Møller, 1882.

Since there are some plots of allotments for the use and cultivation of poor people who have not received poor relief available, I would like to ask the Honorable Poor Committee to obtain such a plot as I have a large Family and it would be a big help to me. I have 4 children, the oldest is 11 years old and the next 6 years old and one at 4 years old and one at 2 years old—I am 43 years old and my wife is 40 years old so I believe that there are many who are younger than me who have had a plot for many years.⁴²

Attached to the application were three recommendations in which Møller was described as a “hard-working man who seeks to support his family in the best possible way” and as a “sober, and extremely decent, hard-working and reliable man.” Although Møller, who categorized himself as a “poor worker,” belonged to the lowest rung of society, he did not submit to the decision put forward by the municipality, but had the courage to challenge it. By doing so, Møller performed an “act of citizenship,” which involved an attempt to exercise his social rights not at the expense of but by virtue of his political rights. This also emphasizes that the functioning of poor relief was dependent on cooperation between the elites and the poor, and even though poor relief can be seen as a control strategy, it also presented the poor with a survival strategy.⁴³

A LABORATORY OF MODERNITY

By putting into words how poverty and sickness was felt and experienced, and how public support could help them be good and independent citizens, these applicants contested the constitutional distinction between social and civil rights on the one hand and political rights on the other. As “acts of citizenship,” these contestations shaped the local modality of citizenship, making it more caring and humane than what the national legislation would have us believe.

As mentioned above, the allotment gardens were very popular among the citizens of Aarhus. In 1888, the head of the public poor relief system wrote to the City Council: “it does not go unnoticed, that the population greatly appreciates these gardens, and that every year a number of people apply, of which only a few obtain what is applied for.”⁴⁴ The City Council

⁴²The Danish National Archives, Sager vedr. Frihaverne 1867–1886, Søren Sørensen Møller, 1883.

⁴³Leeuwen (2002), 39.

⁴⁴Extracts from the City Council minutes in Aarhus, 1888.

continuously discussed the possibility of creating new areas with allotment gardens.⁴⁵ In connection with one of these discussions in 1896, the poor committee carried out a study on the functions of the allotment gardens. Here too, the popularity of the gardens was pointed out: “There is a great demand for these gardens, and even qualified applicants must, as a rule, apply for several years before obtaining a garden.”⁴⁶ At the same time, the poor committee emphasized that they had opportunity to see:

...with what interest the allotments are usually cared for, and that many families spend their spare time there. The thing is, that after all it is not just the pecuniary income that has meaning for the family, but also the feeling that it has a place that is its own. The committee must therefore state that these allotment gardens are a good institution.⁴⁷

The quote shows that the municipality recognized that the allotment gardens had a value that extended beyond the tangible material value. The allotment gardens also facilitated a connectedness to the city and its soil. At the same time, working on the allotments and cultivating the land of the city was seen as a fulfilment of an obligation toward Aarhus. In an article published in the local newspaper in 1839, the allotments are linked to the image of the city: “for allotment gardens, the city has laid out plots of land whose users are obliged to improve the appearance of these plots by planting.”⁴⁸ What the article indicates is that, in addition to fulfilling a social purpose, the allotments also served an aesthetic purpose, thereby forming a reciprocal relationship between the city and the citizen. The allotment tenants not only benefited from the city in terms of food crops, but also “gave something back” to the city by cultivating its land and, thereby, improving the city’s image. In the signing of the allotment contracts, the recipient of poor relief—tangibly and figuratively—entered an agreement binding the city and citizen, and, in line with national citizenship, this contract consisted of both rights and obligations.

By focusing on the allotment gardens as a type of public poor relief, it becomes clear that the municipality did not only subject the recipients of poor relief to surveillance, discipline, and control. The municipality also

⁴⁵ See, for example, Aarhus City Archive, jour.nr.: 263–1873; 151–1879; 272–1883; 114–1885; 8–1889.

⁴⁶ Aarhus City Archive, jour.nr.:103–1896.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Aarhus Stiftstidende 1839.

adjusted the public poor system in light of the demands put forth by the poor. By continuously laying out new areas with allotment gardens, the municipality appears responsive and concerned. What also becomes clear is that while the dichotomies of dependency versus independency and passive versus active were central to the notion of male political citizenship at the national level, these dichotomies were negotiated and shaped at the local level. As opposed to the national legislation, the boundaries between social and political rights remained fluid and contested in Aarhus through the second half of the nineteenth century. Since the integration of social and political rights was only partially recognized at the national level with the social reforms of the 1890s, the practice in Aarhus indicates that the local level preceded the national legislation in important aspects. In some cases, it also directly influenced it.

The parliamentary debates from the 1870s onwards show that the local practice of citizenship played a role in the drafting of the new Poor Law in 1891. It is important to note that the Right-Wing Party (*Højre*) was in power in Denmark in the second half of the nineteenth century, and that the parliament was strongly influenced by a constitutional struggle that was finally resolved in 1901, when the Liberal Party came to power. However, during the political negotiations regarding a new Poor Law, both right- and left-wing politicians stressed the importance of the municipal practice regarding the cancellation of paid poor relief. For instance, a member of the Liberal Party emphasized in 1889 that he had noticed that many municipalities—like Aarhus—had begun to cancel the debt of poor relief recipients if the applicant showed independence and trustworthiness. According to him, the problem was that some municipalities did not make use of this paragraph at all, so it was urgent to establish fixed national rules.⁴⁹ The same line of reasoning was expressed by the Right-Wing Party. However, they wanted fixed rules to prevent the municipalities from going too far in their dealings with the poor.⁵⁰ In the end, the Parliament agreed that all citizens had the right to have their debt canceled five years after the debt was incurred, thereby regaining their political citizenship.⁵¹

The political negotiation leading up to the enactment of the right to have one's debt canceled confirms that the local practice played a key role in the way in which this right was motivated, articulated, and criticized. In

⁴⁹ Minutes from the Danish Parliament, 1889–1890, column 806–875.

⁵⁰ Minutes from the Danish Parliament, 1890–1891, column 2597.

⁵¹ Public poor relief act of April 9, 1891, §35.

addition, the local practice also made the issue a more pressing matter at the national level. Across the political spectrum, politicians agreed that they needed fixed guidelines because the municipalities had started practicing their right to cancel the debts of former poor relief recipients. At the same time, the reason why the municipalities had begun cancelling paid relief was that the poor themselves had expressed their wish to regain their civil and political rights. These contestations echoed from the local to the national level, which indicates that the municipalities also functioned as laboratories of modern citizenship and as a point of reference, shaping the content of national citizenship.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have placed the agency and experiences of the poor as the focal point of my analysis. This group has usually been characterized as oppressed, stigmatized, and degraded. Above all, this group has been viewed as holding no responsibility in the enactment of the social reforms that were passed in the early 1890s. Building on newer citizenship studies, this study acknowledges that citizenship should not be treated as an either/or position, but as a dynamic and malleable relation. As Ruth Lister underlines, people “can be, at the same time, both the subordinate objects of hierarchical power and subjects who are agents in their own life, capable of exercising power in the ‘generative’ sense of self-actualization.”⁵² By acknowledging that the actors of citizenship are not necessarily those who held the formal status of citizenship, this study was conducted with the aim of tracing the agency of the users of welfare.

To investigate this type of agency, I turned my focus to the municipality and the local practices of claims-making. Through the analysis of applications for the cancellation of paid relief, as well as applications for allotments, the study has shown that the poor were able to assign meaning to the prescriptions of citizenship, thereby becoming subjects through their encounters with citizenship laws and practices. It shows us that the constitution did not only function as a force of exclusion, by depriving recipients of poor relief of their political rights. It also functioned as a force of inclusion by providing the poor with a language, a rhetoric, and formal categories for claims-making. Through the applications, we can see the poor as

⁵² Lister (1997), 11.

actors who were capable of appropriating a different subject position and, in doing so, redefining the boundaries of citizenship.

In sum, investigating how citizens expressed their experiences as well as the extent to which those experiences gained institutional recognition gives insight into the interactions and everyday negotiations between citizens and the public administration that helped shape a field of public responsibility. These findings indicate that the increased public responsibility and the changes in social citizenship enacted in the 1890s were not only the result of a top-down movement, but also of a bottom-up movement, in which the local administration preceded the national legislation in certain aspects. By focusing on acts and practice, rather than formal status, this study recognizes new forms of agency that have received little attention in earlier research on the development of the Danish welfare state. The chapter has provided an insight into the ways in which formally defined hierarchies were enacted and challenged on a daily basis, which in turn affected the content and the extent of national citizenship.

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CHAPTER 8

Framing the Client's Agency: Generational Layers of Lived Social Work in Finland, 1940–2000

Minna Harjula

INTRODUCTION

This chapter takes a long-term approach to agency-from-below by focusing on the encounter between the social worker and the individual who seeks aid in the local social office in Finland. My starting point is that personal encounters with social workers are significant for the experience of society, as the local public institutions and authorities represent society and the (emerging) welfare state in everyday life.¹ Within these

¹ Kumlin, S. and Rothstein B. (2005). Making and breaking social capital: The impact of welfare state institutions. *Comparative Political Studies* 38(4), 347; Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services*. Russell Sage Foundation.

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encounters, the special relationship between the individual and society becomes concrete as lived citizenship, and the agency of the individual is constructed and shaped.²

In research, welfare state development has usually been conceptualized as a breakaway from the tradition of poor relief. In practice, Finnish poor relief offices were renamed public welfare offices (1937) and social offices (1951) when they were reassigned to implement new legislation on social security. The means-tested poor relief—since 1956 called public assistance—remained as a part of the social workers' daily work at the social office in addition to the expanding social benefits and social services. Thus, social offices became the venues of old and new expectations in the emerging welfare state.³

As research material storing expressions of clients' experiences is fragmented, my focus is on social workers' everyday experiences of their work with clients. By analyzing how the social workers saw the rights, responsibilities, and motivations of the individuals seeking aid and what kind of expectations they had for their clients, it is possible to explore the encounter as the context for the client's agency. I will approach the encounters as a *scene of experience*, which as a socio-spatial setting frames the situated interaction. In addition to the social workers' conceptualizations of their clients' agency, the frames embedded in the material environment and in the practices of social work, as well as the social preconditions of the social workers and clients, will be explored as a part of the scene of experience.⁴

As a scene of experience, the encounter between the social worker and client opens up a view to temporal change. Changing terminology in the social workers' journal points to a major institutional reinterpretation of the relationship between the individual and the worker. Figure 8.1 indicates how the earlier concepts of ward (*hoidokki*) and dependent

² Kallio, K., Wood, B., and Häkli, J. (2020). Lived citizenship: Conceptualising an emerging field. *Citizenship Studies* 24(6): 713–729; Isin, E. and Nielsen, G. (2008). *Acts of citizenship*. Zed Books; Lister, R. et al. (2007). *Gendering citizenship in Western Europe: New challenges for citizenship research in a cross-national context*. Policy Press.

³ Satka, M. (1995). *Making social citizenship: Conceptual practices from the Finnish poor law to professional social work*. University of Jyväskylä; Harjula, M. (2020). Eletty sosiaalityö kahden sukupolven murroskokemuksena 1940–2000. In J. Moilanen, J. Annola, and M. Satka (eds.), *Sosiaalityön käänneet*. SoPhi; AsK (Statutes of Finland) 145/1922; AsK 51/1936; AsK 34/1950; AsK 116/1956.

⁴ For a detailed introduction to *scene of experience*, see Kokko and Harjula, Chap. 2. On clients' agency as the relational and contextual capacity to act, see Lister, R. (2020). *Poverty*. Polity, 123–176.

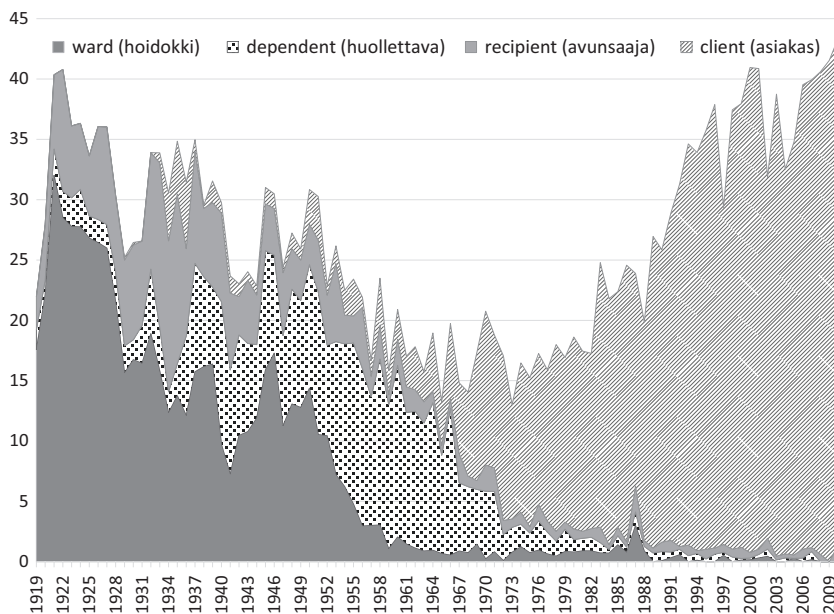


Fig. 8.1 Changing terminology for the persons seeking aid in the professional journal for social workers, 1919–2009, frequency per page (National Library of Finland, Digital Collections)

(*huollettava*) that referred to the individuals who needed aid were replaced by a new concept of client (*asiakas*) in the 1960s–1970s.⁵ By focusing on the scene of experience I will explore how this major change framed the everyday agency of the clients.⁶ In the scene, the societal temporal *layers of experience* that the people and the sociomaterial environment carry in the encounter are present in the framing of the individual–society relationship. Thus, the situational encounter not only crystallizes the existing shared societal layers of experience, but at the same time, it is the moment

⁵ Journals *Huoltaja*, *Sosiaaliturva*, *Sosiaalitiето*. Ward: *hoidokki* and *hoidokas*; Recipient: *avunsaaja*, *-tarvitsija*, *avustettava* and *anoja*. National Library of Finland, Digital Collections. Retrieved January 18, 2022, from <https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/search>

⁶ In my text, I will use the term *client* as a general concept referring to the individuals seeking social assistance.

where new societal layers of experience take shape because of the tension between experiences and new expectations.⁷

I will combine an oral history approach, based on 36 interviews with 60–80-year-old retired social workers and their colleagues⁸ with official material, such as legislation, textbooks, and journals, to obtain a structural framework for my analysis. The use of photos as expressions of past experiences will complement my reading.⁹

The interviews of 22 women and 14 men open a viewpoint on Finnish welfare state development from the 1940s to the 2000s (see Fig. 8.2).¹⁰ The interview collections bring out lived social work in an urban environment, as most interviewees worked in the second largest Finnish city, Tampere.¹¹ In collection 1, social workers who started their career in the 1930s–1950s and retired in the 1970s–1980s were interviewed in 1987–1989, when the construction of the Finnish welfare state was seen to have reached its peak.¹² This collection reflects the everyday of the new profession within the rapidly expanding post-war social legislation. Collection 2 from 2018–2021 contains voices of social workers who entered the profession with an academic degree during the establishment of the welfare state in the 1960s–1970s and retired during the so-called welfare state crisis in the early 2000s. The interview material carries the multiple temporalities of experiences, as the time range covers the time remembered, the time of remembering, and the time of researching. All the different pasts and futures are filtered through these different time levels and are present in the

⁷ On *layer of experience*, see Kokko and Harjula, Chap. 2.

⁸ SHA1–23. Interviews of retired social workers 1987–1989; SHB1–13. Interviews of retired social workers 2018–2021. HEX, Tampere University.

⁹ On *sediments of experience*, see Kokko and Harjula, Chap. 2.

¹⁰ The interviewees who worked for part of their career in the social office are included in Figure 8.2.

¹¹ On the rural social work: Satka, M. (1994). Sosiaalinen työ peräänkatsojamiehestä hoi-vayrittäjäksi. In J. Jaakkola et al., *Armeliaisuus, yhteisöapu, sosiaaliturva: Suomalaisen sosiaalisen turvan historia*. Sosiaaliturvan keskusliitto, 281–283, 291–294, 297, 303; Satka (1995), 122–124.

¹² Kettunen, P. (2001). The Nordic welfare state in Finland. *Scandinavian Journal of History* 26(3), 225–247; Haatanen, P. (1993). Suomalaisen hyvinvointivaltion kehitys. In O. Riihinen (ed.), *Sosiaalipolitiikka 2017*. WSOY, 31–67.

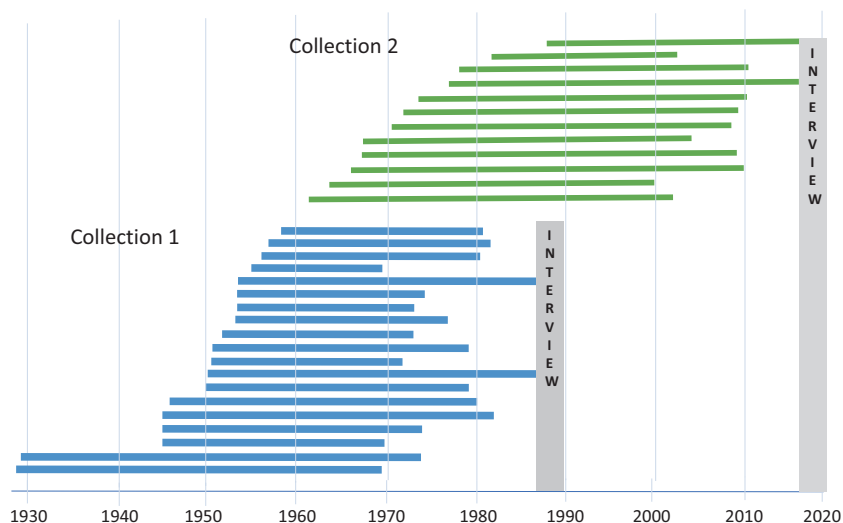


Fig. 8.2 Two collections of interviews: Timeline of social workers' working careers and time of interview

narration and analysis, guiding the selection of meaningful experiences and silences.¹³

My basic finding, based on the close reading of the transcribed recordings, is that the 1960s–1970s was interpreted as the turning point of the *old* and *new* in social work in both collections, but two contradictory and opposed meanings were given to the temporal turning point: For the social workers in the first collection, the turning point was a negative loss, while for those in the second collection the change was a break from an old burden toward a better future. This points to generational differences and makes the generation, as a sociological concept that is related to societal change, my analytic category in tracing the temporal layers of

¹³Taavetti, R. (2018). *Queer politics of memory: Undisciplined sexualities as glimpses and fragments in Finnish and Estonian pasts*. University of Helsinki; Koselleck, R. (1985). *Futures past: On the semantics of historical time*. MIT Press; Koselleck, R. (2018). *Sediments of time: On possible histories*. Stanford University Press. Kettunen, P. and Petersen, K. (2011). Introduction: Rethinking welfare state models. In P. Kettunen and K. Petersen (eds.), *Beyond welfare state models: Transnational historical perspectives on social policy*. Edward Elgar, 1–15.

experience.¹⁴ My starting point is that the two generations of social workers—who even worked as colleagues in the same social office—each had their own shared professional preconditions and key experiences as filters that created “conditions of different chances for experiences” in the encounters with their clients.¹⁵

By analyzing the changing scene of experience, I will argue that—as shared societal experiences and horizons of expectation which were integral for the lived and narrated social work—the two generational layers of experiences carried different interpretations of the individual–society relationship and resulted in divergent expectations toward the clients and their agency. By indicating the meaning of the local-level individual–social worker relationship in defining the agency of the citizen, this chapter nuances and challenges the macro interpretations of welfare state development that are based on the chronology of legislation only.

“THE POOR MUST BE HUMBLE”: LAYER OF POOR LAW IN LIVED SOCIAL WORK

[T]here were very old-fashioned social workers, and the poor relief reared the social workers to think a little differently than those of the present day. (...) In such a developing field of work (...) attitudes change, the worker comes from far behind, and does not accept all the advances in his/her mind.¹⁶

A social worker who started her 33-year career in the social office of Tampere as the first with a professional education in 1947 saw the poor law (1922–1956) as the most significant feature that distinguished the “old” and “new” generation. Similarly, the chief accountant, who joined the office in 1957, recognized the long-term effect of the annulled law:

¹⁴ On the concept of generation: Virtanen, M. (2001). Fennomanian perilliset: Poliittiset traditiot ja sukupolvien dynamiikka. SKS, 15–35; Purhonen, S. (2007). Sukupolvien ongelma: Tutkielmia sukupolven käsitteestä, sukupolvitietoisuudesta ja suurista ikäluokista. Yliopistopaino. On generations in the welfare state: Bude, H. (2003). Generation: Elemente einer Erfahrungsgeschichte des Wohlfahrtsstaates. In S. Lessenich et al. (eds.). *Wohlfahrtsstaatliche Grundbegriffe: Historische und aktuelle Diskurse*. Campus, 287–300; Worth, E. (2021). The welfare state generation: Women, agency and class in Britain since 1945. Bloomsbury.

¹⁵ Koselleck (2018), 210–213, citation p. 211.

¹⁶ SHA20, 9, 11.

[T]he older officers were inculcated with the old baggage of the poor law, and their work was still marked by it (...) at least in their stance toward their clients. And people still clearly felt the poor law was harsher and stricter all around.¹⁷

The first social workers were hired by the largest cities to implement the poor law in the 1920s. As the sphere of poor relief was widened to child protection and the control of alcoholics and vagrants in 1937, a new terminology based on the concept *huolto*, referring to care, support, maintenance, and supply, was introduced. The practice of the institution of *huoltotoimi* (public welfare, literally: welfare affairs) was called *huoltotyö* (welfare work).¹⁸ New national social benefits broadened the field further from the late 1930s onward, and the foreign terms *social work* and *social affairs* were gradually adopted in the 1950s.¹⁹

From 1951, the around 330 towns and rural municipalities with over 4000 inhabitants were obliged to have a paid employee for social affairs, while in the approximately 220 small rural municipalities, laymen who were elected to a position of trust by the social board took care of social worker tasks. Special academic education for social workers was available from 1942, but only 45 percent of the workers had a special education or university degree in the early 1960s. A qualified applicant only needed “sufficient education or experience” to enter the field.²⁰

Although the young profession with its comparatively low salary lacked high esteem, the position of a municipal official, representing the public authority, was traditionally “above the people” in the local social hierarchy.²¹ In the late 1950s, 70 percent of Finnish social workers were women, but especially the higher posts in the offices were dominated by men.²² The background of social workers was heterogenous. In Tampere, working-class men were recruited from municipal party politics and labor

¹⁷ SHA15, 3.

¹⁸ Satka (1994), 267, 292–294. Satka (1995), 62–63.

¹⁹ Tarasti A. and Sipponen, K. (1957). *Sosiaalihuollon lainsäädäntö*. Suomen lakimiesliitto. Search *sosiaalityö, sosiaalityö*. National Library of Finland, Digital Collections. Retrieved December 10, 2021, from <https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/search>.

²⁰ Satka (1994), 306–308, 313–314; *STV Statistical Yearbook of Finland* (1951). Valtioneuvosto, 7, 11; Tarvainen, L., Sosiaalihuollon työvoimakysymys. *Huoltaja* 5/1965, 133–134.

²¹ Jalas, R., Työvoimakysymys huoltoalalla. *Huoltaja* 1–2/1944, 9; Eskola, A., Kunnan viranhaltijaa yleisön kannalta. *Maalaiskunta* 15/1953, 516.

²² Satka (1994), 315.

unions on the basis of their local knowledge, while women usually became qualified after working in the social office as secretaries in the 1940s–1950s. In addition, the separate child welfare office—which was operational only in fewer than ten of the largest cities—hired women whose educational and vocational background was in childcare and nursing. Thus, the working-class family men in their new role with a tie, briefcase, and desk, and the religious, unmarried women with a vocational attitude toward child protection represented two different worlds. The shared childhood experiences of scarcity and the extreme experiences of war in their adult life, however, similarly shortened their social distance to the clients.²³

The early term for social worker, *tarkkaaja*, literally referred to a person who observes and keeps an eye on somebody. The new profession was the “watchful eye” and “information gatherer” of the social board.²⁴ The other early title, *kodeissakävijä* (home visitor), indicated field work at clients’ homes as the main task.²⁵ Each social worker had their own district in the city. After reception hours in the office, the afternoons were usually filled with obligatory home visits (Photos 8.1, 8.4, and 8.5).²⁶

As the venue for the first encounter between the individual and the social worker, the social office carried the stigmatized experiences of poor relief. Still in the late 1950s, the fear of being seen entering the social office was one of the reasons that made seeking aid difficult.²⁷ As there were no booked appointments, long queues were an everyday experience during the office hours in Tampere, which was a rapidly growing industrial city with over 100,000 inhabitants:²⁸

[T]he poor souls sat there on the bench queuing perhaps since the morning, without eating or drinking (...) It was hard for the clients, and when they got in to see the social worker, they were already tired and tried to tell their matters as quickly as possible to get back home, the children probably waited for them.²⁹

²³ Harjula (2020), 52–55.

²⁴ Tarasti, A., Eräitä sosiaalihuollon hallinnon uudistamisen. *Huoltaja* 24/1950, 591.

²⁵ Satka (1994), 293; Kaupunkien huoltotoimihenkilöiden yhdistys. *Huoltaja* 9/1935, 197.

²⁶ Harjula, M. (1990). *Sosiaalitoimen arki Tampereella 1945–1970*. Tampereen yliopisto, 27–40.

²⁷ Piirainen, V. (1963). *Ensikertainen huoltoavun hakeminen: Tutkielma huoltoavunhakijain käyttäytymisestä*. Sosiaalihuollon keskusliitto, 83–86.

²⁸ STV (1951), 10. Cf. Piirainen (1963), 86–87.

²⁹ SHA20, 5.



Photo 8.1 The entrance of Tampere social office. Despite the modern vocabulary based on the concept *social* since the 1950s, the sign *Huoltotoimisto* (public welfare office) dated back to the 1930s and carried the legacy of poor relief (Huoltaja 18/1962, 581. Photographer unknown)

A private conversation was an ideal that was not always met in the offices. Even a booklet, *Choose social welfare for your mission in life* (1949) for those who considered pursuing the career, indicated how the conversation with a client took place at a shared office of two workers. The body language, clothing, and the layout of the furniture construct and maintain the humble status of the client in Photos 8.2 and 8.3.

The receipt of poor relief restricted the client's rights as a citizen. The ideals of poor relief dated back to the nineteenth century, emphasizing the moral responsibilities of the citizen to the nation. Autonomous citizenship



Photo 8.2 A shared office was presented as the norm in a booklet for social workers-to-be in Finland in 1949 (*Valitse sosiaalihuolto elämäntehtäväksesi* (1949). Sosiaaliministeriö, 3. Photographer unknown)

was earned only by one's moral self-control and hard-working behavior.³⁰ Therefore, poor relief was not a benefit but a loan that the receiver or relatives were obliged to pay back. All recipients of poor relief were supervised by the officials, and long-term recipients were under the guardianship of the local board. The board even acquired ownership of the recipient's belongings. Furthermore, long-term receipt of poor relief was grounds for exclusion from universal suffrage in national and local elections until the 1940s.³¹ All these features led the receipt of poor relief to generally be seen as a degrading experience that made the person a second-class citizen.³²

The practices of poor relief narrowed the client's autonomy further. Poor relief was granted either as indoor care mainly in poor houses—called municipal homes from the 1920s³³—or as outdoor care. Instead of

³⁰ Satka (1995), 22–24, 68–101.

³¹ AsK 145/1922; AsK 7/1928, § 6.

³² Piirainen (1963), 16–17.

³³ Satka (1994), 273.



Photo 8.3 A social office described as exceptionally peaceful, light, and spacious in the Finnish social workers' journal in 1954 (Huoltaja 20/1954, 525. Photographer unknown)



Photos 8.4 and 8.5 Social workers with their briefcases making a home visit in Finland in the 1950s (Huoltaja 12–13/1953, 352 and Huoltaja 7/1957, cover. Photographers unknown)

cash, outdoor care was usually products, such as firewood and clothes, or payment commitments to certain shops or medical aid. In Tampere, 40 percent of the outdoor relief recipients were regularly assisted, mainly old and sick people who received their aid monthly in the mid-1940s. Because of new social benefits and social insurance, their share reduced to only 5 percent by 1960, and most clients received temporary aid. In addition to old age and sickness, also unemployment, a large family, or the “husband not supporting the family” were among the accepted reasons for short-term aid.³⁴

The task of the social worker was to investigate the needs and the deservingness of every applicant case by case. Pre- and post-war social work was based on a dichotomic view of clients. *Decent* people deserved to be aided, whereas *indecent* individuals with self-inflicted troubles were placed under a step-by-step tightening control to make them adopt the moral code of a good citizen.³⁵ The social worker had to find out to what group each client belonged: “who is in dire straits, who is faking, who is a decent human being, who is an immoral waster.”³⁶

The truthfulness of the client’s story had to be questioned and confirmed by the social worker. The recurrent home visit formed the core of the investigation. According to the social workers, the home as an environment could give the client confidence and space to talk:

[W]hen a mother comes to ask for poor relief (...), the home visit elucidated the situation so much (...) you could see the environment the family lived in (...) I felt that the client was much more confident to talk about the troubles at home than in the office (...) it is more formal and when there is a queue behind the door, the clients get nervous (...). On a home visit, the atmosphere was different, and shortages (...) were brought out, such as (...) cut-off electricity.³⁷

³⁴ Harjula (1990), 15–19, 52–58, 98–103.

³⁵ Satka (1995), 22, 37–40, 59–63, 80–96.

³⁶ Suhonen, H-M., Huoltotyön “sielutiedettä.” *Huoltaja* 8/1939, 198.

³⁷ SHA20, 5–6.

While especially the regularly assisted lonely old women welcomed the home visitor, for a man under surveillance because of alcoholism, a home visit was a sign of distrust. Even for a mother, the home with the presence of the husband and children could be an awkward place to discuss family matters.³⁸ In any case, the early generation of social workers emphasized the difference between an intrusive home visit that included the checking of rubbish bins and outbuildings and a tactful handling of the situation that indicated professional consideration:

You can do the checking in many ways so that it is not insulting. To go to the home and root around every corner, that is not needed.³⁹

[I] never opened cupboard doors, but you could still see them, they always needed something from the cupboard (...) and when you sat facing it, you saw it.⁴⁰

[I]n extremely rare cases, when someone asked for firewood very often, we suspected whether (...) he would sell it, sometimes we went to the woodshed to see (...) but I would not have forced any door open.⁴¹

Although some social workers avoided dropping in on a home visit in case the client had guests,⁴² the borders of privacy were generally vague. Neighbors and employers were regularly asked about the client's life. Notifications from the local community often started the process of child protection or the control of alcoholics and vagrants.⁴³ For the workers, the tight control was not seen as patronizing but as an unquestioned part of looking after the client.⁴⁴ The concepts of "ward" and "dependent" in the official discourse crystallized the power relation that framed the clients as humble minors and social workers as the experts who knew what was best for them.⁴⁵

³⁸ SHA20, 15; SHA16, 8; SHA14, 5.

³⁹ SHA15, 9.

⁴⁰ SHA14, 17.

⁴¹ SHA20, 5.

⁴² SHA20, 15.

⁴³ Toivola, O., Näkemyksiä sosiaalitarkkaajista. *Huoltaja* 20/1957, 599; SHA13, 2; SHA13, 3, 7; SHA16, 10.

⁴⁴ SHA6, 6; SHA4, 8; SHA19, 9.

⁴⁵ Satka (1994), 300; Satka (1995), 132; SHA22, 4, 7.

The meager policy of giving aid seemed acceptable to the social workers during the post-war reconstruction. As the shortage of goods affected every household, the unquestioned basis was that “you must be within bounds when you ask the municipality for public welfare.”⁴⁶ The regular poor relief recipients were absolutely poor: “so poor that they could not afford to have any friends.”⁴⁷ The basic and humble needs of the client were easily met, which made the encounters satisfactory for the worker:

[E]ven though a poor home, it was a clean home with proper order... Yes, you were happy to give aid to such a family (...) It was such a fine job to give assistance to a grandma or grandpa, get rent, firewood, clothes, doctor, et cetera. Both were happy and you felt that you are doing good work.⁴⁸

In a long-term relationship with a client who was found to be decent and honest, the worker could bend the rules. The worker could utilize the common austerity practice of “giving only half” and double the applied sum when presenting the case for the director. The social worker could even forget the principle of keeping professional distance. Stories of giving one’s old skis to a single mother or cooking a macaroni casserole for the family reflected a familiar relationship.⁴⁹ Despite the rule regarding addressing the clients formally, the working-class male social workers were allowed to be on first-name terms with their male clients and to use the informal language of their early social background.⁵⁰ Even a female social worker accepted a cup of coffee at a home visit when the client expressed it as a sign of her dignity: “don’t I as a poor person have at least the right to offer a guest coffee (...) to show hospitality?”⁵¹

To stay in the frame of the deserving client, the possibility of expressing one’s dissatisfaction was vague. Complaining about the meager assistance and using sarcastic names—the social worker was called a “cop” or “saucepan-lifter” and the social board “the senate of the poor”—were

⁴⁶ SHA15, 9.

⁴⁷ SHA20, 15.

⁴⁸ SHA16, 3.

⁴⁹ SHA16, 10; SHA22, 4; SHB5, 2; Eräsaari, L. (1990), *Nilkin naamio: Sosiaaliraportti*. Tutkijaliitto, 19, 27–36, 107.

⁵⁰ SHB8, 8, 12.

⁵¹ SHA20, 16; SHA23, 5.

common strategies in coping with the situation. However, the workers described openly hostile reactions from their clients as relatively rare:⁵²

[T]he clients try (...) to control themselves and behave smartly, try to fawn over the worker to get the thing right (...) Usually, the attitudes were positive because maybe the client felt themselves at mercy (...) even though the worker under no circumstances would have wanted to act like that, but I'm afraid that many poor felt it humiliating to come [to the office] at least those days (...). is it so that the poor must be humble?⁵³

As the scene of experience, the encounter with the social worker linked together the client's home, their neighborhood, and the crowded social office as a multi-locational setting, which made individual problems visible in the community and maintained the stigmatized and humble status of the client.

THE IDEA OF SOCIAL RIGHTS SHAKES THE CLIENT RELATIONSHIP OF THE FIRST GENERATION

New social benefits opened up new expectations that started to shake the social worker–client relationship. In particular, the child benefit (1948) that was granted to all children under 16 years of age in cash at the post office was seen as revolutionary for lived social work. The social office only distributed and received the application forms, and no control of the usage of the benefit was generally included in the process.⁵⁴ For a female social worker, the new benefit was a turning point:

[I] strongly felt a change in the clients that was, I would argue, moralistically right on the one hand, as the child benefit was given to all children. (...) It was much easier to visit the social office because it had no stigma of poor relief (...) It liberated people (...) we got new clients and younger clients (...) in a way, it made our work more difficult, as we started to have cases that we old-time poor relief workers did not consider to be poor (...) people are more strongly aware of their needs and their rights and hold on to them.⁵⁵

⁵²Tolonen, K., Köyhyys ja savolainen huumori. *Huoltaja* 14/1937, 323–326; SHA23, 3; SHA15, 10.

⁵³SHA20, 16–17.

⁵⁴Ask 541/1948; Ask 547/1948.

⁵⁵SHA20, 8–9, 10.



Photo 8.6 A staged photo of the receipt of poor relief, Finland 1955. The three people at the front of the line are social officials acting as clients (*Huoltaja* 21/1955, 621. Photographer unknown)

The new clientele of social benefits were average families without deep problems, but it was their new rights-conscious attitude that made the encounters difficult for the social workers. Photo 8.6, taken for the social workers' journal in 1955, captures the tension. The first three persons in the queue are social workers, who demonstrate a new practice for delivering the regular poor relief in a small town. The habitus of the fake female clients reveals and repeats the expectations of the humble, shamed, and shabby clients. The third fake person in the queue, a man with a cap and raincoat, presumably aims to represent a new type of client called the *welfare tourist* (*huoltoturisti*). The new concept captured the disapproval provoked by young men who traveled from one locality to another trying to take advantage of the system.⁵⁶ By pure chance, a real client who did not notice the photo session joined the queue as the person on the far right. Even though the cause for his queuing remains unknown, it is his

⁵⁶ Sankari, A., Turussa avustetut huoltoturistit. *Huoltaja* 3/1960, 124–130; Lukijan sana. *Huoltaja* 5/1960, 272–273; Piirainen (1963), 98–100.

shameless and curious behavior and well-dressed appearance that significantly challenged the expected image of the client in the social office.⁵⁷

For the older generation of social workers, the new expectations made the daily work challenging. In the early 1950s, the national social administration pushed for the adoption of “a more human view of the recipients’ rights and status and, above all, the implanting of the attitude that society is responsible for organizing social security for the citizens.”⁵⁸ As the Poor Relief Act was replaced by the Public Welfare Act in 1957, the social workers were advised that the receipt of the aid was a “subjective right” in case the aid seeker could not obtain necessary care and maintenance otherwise. The new act introduced the term “person of limited means,” indicating a break with the idea that only absolute poverty made the applicant eligible for support. The receiver no longer had to pay back the aid that was given because of sickness or unemployment, and only recipients in mental institutions were put under guardianship and lost their right to vote (up until 1970).⁵⁹

The old-time social workers struggled in accepting the right of a person who is “young, healthy, fit but unwilling to work” to receive aid: “in the old days we made more demands on the clients.”⁶⁰ For the low-waged social workers, the rising standards of living and the client’s right to “keep up with the Joneses” challenged their professional identity:

Those days the requirements were smaller, now they are bigger and as they can’t be met, the client experiences it much harder: I don’t have a color TV, I have a black and white one (...) you feel like you are left without so much the neighbors have (...) and this is what the National Board of Social Welfare is pushing for, that a person must have the right, but it may cause contradictions for the long-term workers (...) You should forget yourself and not to compare, that we did not have it earlier and I have not had it (...) The worker does not develop and keep pace with the National Board.⁶¹

In the daily work, home visits became a game of hide and seek, as the clients tried to hide televisions and the social workers snooped around to find them. Similarly, controversial issues were radios, telephones, pets,

⁵⁷ Vilkka, R. “Avustuspussi.” *Huoltaja* 21/1955, 621; Piirainen (1963), 88–108.

⁵⁸ Tarvainen, L., Sosiaalihuoltomme syventäminen. *Huoltaja* 23/1951, 546.

⁵⁹ Asteljoki, A., Huoltoapulakia pykälittäin. *Huoltaja* 10/1956, 256–258; AsK 116/1956.

⁶⁰ SHA20, 18, 19.

⁶¹ SHA20, 10–11.

cars, and part payments. The changing gender roles and family morals—such as drinking mothers and cohabitation—were heated topics that were hard to accept for the aging social workers in the 1960s–1970s.⁶²

Furthermore, as new social legislation—the old-age pension (1956), unemployment benefit (1960s), income-related work pension (1961), and sickness insurance (1963)—was implemented by new social security institutions such as the Social Insurance Institution KELA,⁶³ the clientele of social offices changed. New clients usually had a short-term need for aid when they waited for other social insurances and benefits to be paid by other institutions. In addition to these so-called bank clients, it was severely mentally and socially challenged individuals who entered the social office when they fell through the social legislation safety net. As the social workers had no tools to solve their multiple problems, they felt they merely helped the clients to get by.⁶⁴

In addition to the new clientele, a significant change in the scene of experience was that the social office became the main site of the encounter. As the clients were distributed to each social worker by the alphabetical order of the family name in the early 1970s—instead of by area—office hours with booked appointments replaced home visits.⁶⁵ “Now since people have got more of these rights to social security, they have also apparently got the right to keep the door closed, you don’t have to be resigned.”⁶⁶

As a result, the encounter lost the communal approach and became more individualistic. At the same time, young colleagues entered the field. Many social workers who were nearing retirement age felt the workdays were distressing: “everything was chaotic.”⁶⁷ Their nostalgic look at the former golden days and experience of loss indicates the tension between the individual–society relationship that framed their client relationship and the new expectations that challenged their professional identity.⁶⁸

⁶²SHA20, 9, 11–18; SHA15, 4, 9; SHA23, 6; SHA17, 7; SHA3, 3–4; Eräsaari (1990), 52–53.

⁶³Haatanen (1993); Kettunen (2001).

⁶⁴SHA21, 2–3; SHA20, 10, 14, 18–20.

⁶⁵SHA14, 4; SHA20, 5, 10–11; SHB8, 5, 16.

⁶⁶SHA20, 9;

⁶⁷SHA20, 14; Harjula (2020), 56, 66.

⁶⁸On nostalgia: Knuuttila, S. (1994), *Tyhmän kansan teoria: Näkökulmia menneestä tulevaan*. SKS, 9–14.

THE YOUNG GENERATION AND THE NEW HORIZON OF EXPECTATION

"There was kind of two different worlds," said a social worker who started at the social office with a university degree at the age of 23 in 1971.⁶⁹ According to her, the generational and educational gap between the old and young workers characterized the daily work at the office. By the mid-1980s, 85 percent of social workers had an academic degree.⁷⁰ The professional identity of many newcomers was based on the radical, leftist ideology of the 1960s. Instead of taking part in charity—like many old-school female social workers did—the young generation became interested in so-called progressive civic associations for gender equality and more inclusive social policy toward marginalized groups.⁷¹ With their miniskirts, trousers, and nail polish, the young generation challenged the formal dress code of the social office (Photo 8.7).⁷²

The generational gap became visible in conflicting attitudes toward change. The young worker remembered how the old ones "turned a deaf ear" to her suggestions for developing a practice for helping the clients more systematically.⁷³ From the perspective of an elderly social worker with a career of 25 years, such suggestions were just a waste of time:

I had difficulties to understand how these young, green ones, who had little experience, and whom I could not value much, they were so full of new proposals: 'these documents are so old-fashioned, they must be reformed soon'. Workdays went by while new proposals were made. During that time (...) a lot of work could have been done.⁷⁴

The main tension arose because the old generation took the frames and conditions of their work as self-evident and dedicated themselves to helping the clients within the framework of the organization. In contrast, the newcomers wanted to challenge the tight regulations to acquire more freedom of action for both the workers and clients.

⁶⁹ SHB5, 2.

⁷⁰ Mäntysaari, M (1991). *Sosiaalibyrokraatia asiakkaiden valvojana*. Vastapaino, 156.

⁷¹ SHB9, 3–4; SHB5, 12; B13, 2; B1, 14–15; SHA18, 11; Satka (1994), 303–305.

⁷² SHB5, 2; SHB8, 13; SHB2, 11.

⁷³ SHB5, 3, 7.

⁷⁴ SHA20, 7.



Photo 8.7 A young female social worker and her colleagues from the old generation in Tampere social office, late 1960s (Photograph: Esko Sala)

A male social worker described how a multiple-page form for the youth welfare preliminary inquiry “raised a healthy suspicion toward the system” during his first years in the profession in the 1960s. Family benefit—granted as products instead of cash and controlled via home visits—became a source of his open criticism in the late 1960s.⁷⁵ The meager amount of aid and the patronizing attitude toward the clients were attacked by the young professionals. In the interviews, the younger generation made a break with the earlier one, whom it addressed as the “control gang” or the “municipal administration generation.”⁷⁶ Despite the respect the new generation gave the old generation for its skills in meeting with individuals, it criticized the “old pathos of poor relief”⁷⁷ in the old-timers’ work:

The tension was in the issue that we had a little different view of encountering (...) and respecting the client.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ SHB9, 6, 20.

⁷⁶ SHB8, 6; SHB9, 26.

⁷⁷ SHB1, 15.

⁷⁸ SHB8, 6.

The client did not actually traditionally have any rights, which as such was shameful.⁷⁹

The aid was given in short pieces and the control was tough.⁸⁰

The new director of the Tampere social office—who entered the post at the age of 27 with a university degree, a three-year career in social work, and a leftist party membership card—summarized the dilemma of the new generation in 1974: “is it right (...) to try to get the rebellious person adapted to society or to try to solve such societal problems that produce rebellious citizens?”⁸¹ The old-fashioned practices were seen as “forced helping,” resulting in the loss of autonomy and human rights. The new horizon was to break away from putting the clients in the position of lower-class citizens.⁸² This entailed a change in the social worker’s orientation:

The social worker must not be an official implementing the aims of society, but a person who provides the services citizens need. We must turn the viewpoint from society to the citizen.⁸³

The ultimate aim will be equality. The social workers and researchers together must aim to change the society to reach equality.⁸⁴

Although new social services such as home help (1951) and children’s day care (1973) broadened the service orientation of the social office,⁸⁵ the new ideals were contradictory to the daily practice. At worst, a client had to wait for seven weeks to get a 20-minute appointment with a social worker, who had 40 different forms to complete daily in the 1980s. Because of the obscure social security system, people did not know which

⁷⁹ SHB8, 5.

⁸⁰ SHB11, 3; Tuomi, A., Byrokraattisuus ja kontrolli. *Sosiaaliturva* 10/1996, 20–21.

⁸¹ Sosiaalitoimiston hallintoa. *Huoltaja* 24/1974, 1162; SHB2, 1–3.

⁸² Eriksson, L. (1967). *Pakkoauttajat*. Tammi; Helenius, Y. (1971). *Oma vastuu vai yhteisvastuu: Tutkimus sosiaaliturvaa koskevista asenteista eri tulotasoilla*. WSOY, 104.

⁸³ Vilkka, R., Kunnallisen sosiaalihuollon tarkoituksenmukainen tehtävien jako. *Huoltaja* 8/1967, 246.

⁸⁴ Koskinen, S., Sosiaalityö yhteiskunnan muuttajana ja uudistajana. *Huoltaja* 24/1970, 824.

⁸⁵ L.S., Sosiaalitoimiston hallintoa uudistetaan Tampereella. *Huoltaja* 24/1974, 1161–1163.

service counter to turn to in order to get aid. The client could meet a new social worker in each encounter, as young women's maternity leave, the low status of the profession, and the plentitude of open posts made temporary work contracts common.⁸⁶ The bureaucratic organization and short-sighted policy of aid were sources of frustration and cynicism for both the workers and clients in the 1970s and early 1980s:

There was no systematic, planned assistance. You gave aid once and said goodbye, [the client] came back some time, it was so one-off.⁸⁷

[T]he workers were kind of in their own bubble (...) They took shelter in the bubble and in the official practices. And the client (...) tried to play the cards well to maximize the benefit. (...) The less the worker could articulate and interact with the client, the more it became formal.⁸⁸

[The client] talked about society like it was a chessboard in which he, as a sly old fox, made clever moves.⁸⁹

Leaning on Ruth Lister's categorization of the agency of people in poverty, "getting by" was the traditional poor relief recipient's experience of everyday coping, and a continuing sense of hopelessness about the future. However, new frames of agency could be found in the 1960s and 1970s, as the new social benefits and services opened a way of "getting out" for some clients. Even "getting (back) at" via everyday acts of resistance and opposition was more common than after the war.⁹⁰ An interview of 58 Finnish social workers in 1970 indicated that 60 percent of them had faced difficult encounters with clients.⁹¹ Dissatisfied clients threatened to tell the tabloids of their ill treatment.⁹²

⁸⁶ Mäntysaari (1991), 117–119, 133, 144, 157–158; Karvala, J. (1974). *Sosiaalihuolto-odotukset: Tampereen sosiaalivirastoasiakkaiden sosiaalinen tausta ja sosiaalihuoltoon kohdistuvat odotukset*. Tampereen yliopisto, 35–37; Sosiaalineuvoja työssään Tampereella. *Huoltaja* 24/1975, 1304–1305; Jalkanen, A., Sosiaalitarkkaajan näkemys työstään ja asiakkaistaan. *Huoltaja* 6/1970, 167–168; SHB9, 9.

⁸⁷ SHB5, 3.

⁸⁸ SHB13, 7.

⁸⁹ Tuomi, A., Muutos jatkuu. *Sosiaaliturva* 11/1996, 11.

⁹⁰ Lister (2020), 130–164.

⁹¹ Jalkanen (1970), 169.

⁹² SHB4, 4.

When the first academic research into clients' expectations was conducted at Tampere social office in 1970–1971, elderly men in particular refused to participate because they suspected the office would use the interview against them.⁹³ Although the concept *asiakas*—that could be translated either as client or customer, implying a more equal power relation—became more common in social work (Fig. 8.1), the research showed that the experience of begging and stigma still made clienthood at the social offices different from that at banks and post offices. Two-thirds of the 145 interviewees visited the social office reluctantly.⁹⁴ Even though 73 percent considered the service quite fair and just, half of them felt they should have more say in matters related to themselves.⁹⁵ As a scene of experience, the encounter at the social office was characterized by a growing tension between expectations and experiences in the 1970s and 1980s.

“BECOMING US”: TOWARD A NEW CLIENT–SOCIAL WORKER RELATIONSHIP

An early sign of a more equal relationship between the social worker and client was a campaign for better office premises in Tampere. The move to a new office building with open-plan reception desks—ironically called *pilttuut* (stalls)—and background music was a shock for the workers and clients of the welfare department in 1967:

You could hear everything (...) A glass window all the way down to the floor, the waiting client could stand behind the window and look inside. [A client] rushed into the corner and said that this is awful, you really get stripped naked here.⁹⁶

One client soon wrote an appeal to the social board and demanded a change to make the office “a real place for applying for public welfare,” instead of “an information center” where everything said could be heard by others.⁹⁷ After 16 years in the unsuitable premises, the social workers organized a strike to “demand the clients’ right to talk about their private

⁹³ Karvala (1974), 10.

⁹⁴ Karvala (1974), 32, 35, 78, 48–49; Mikkola, K. (1970). *Mitä odotamme ja saamme sosiaaliturvalta*. Tampereen yliopiston tutkimuslaitos, 4, 83.

⁹⁵ Karvala (1974), 55–56, 66–67.

⁹⁶ SHA20, 13.

⁹⁷ Harjula (1990), 119–120.

matters confidentially” in 1983. The joint action of the clients and social workers was an unheard of case that made local headlines. The radical effort was successful, as the office was finally redesigned with proper office rooms by the mid-1980s.⁹⁸

Terminologically, the change from *public welfare* to *income support* in 1984 was a break from poor relief.⁹⁹ A substantial change was the decentralization of social work in the mid-1980s, which institutionalized the new expectations as a new layer of experience in social work. The large social office with specialized tasks for each social worker was replaced by district offices and a holistic and integrated work approach. Within a national experiment in seven cities in 1985, a new suburb of Tampere—with rental blocks of flats, a high unemployment rate, and a high percentage of children and low-income families—became a field for developing the new approach.¹⁰⁰

Within this new approach, the scene of experience changed. Instead of focusing on individuals only, the new aim was to connect social work to everyday social life as community work: “I liked it that there were these networks, families, groups, et cetera. It was not just individualistic work. Because I thought that it was not enough.”¹⁰¹ Close co-operation with the clients, their social environment, civic organizations, and other public institutions—such as the unemployment office and mental health office—characterized the approach.¹⁰²

The basic change was to look at the client from a new perspective: “we usually only see clients as problems, we don’t see their real needs or especially their resources.”¹⁰³ The new view produced non-traditional practices of partnership and participation: A middle-aged female client was recruited to interview other residents in her apartment block. The simple questions—“What is amiss in your opinion, and how would you like to see it tackled? Could you set up a housing committee and would you like to join

⁹⁸ SHB8, 11; SHB5, 18–20; Historiallinen lakko (1983, March 29). *Tiedonantaja*; Sosiaalikeskus hiljeni (1983, March 26). *Kansan Lehti*; Yllättävä lahja sosiaalityöntekijöille (1984, February 18). *Kansan Lehti*; Mäntysaari (1991), 106.

⁹⁹ Niemelä, H. and Salminen, K. (2006). *Social security in Finland*. Kela, 17, 38–39. Retrieved March 23, 2022, from <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:951-669-707-0>.

¹⁰⁰ Rostila, I. (1988), *Subjektina sosiaalitoimistossa?* Sosiaalihuollituksen julkaisu 7. Sosiaalihuollitus, 200–201.

¹⁰¹ SHB5, 11.

¹⁰² SHB13, 6–8; SHB11, 15; SHB3, 6–7, 16; SHB10, 3–4.

¹⁰³ SHB13, 9.

it?”—resulted in residential co-operation. Similarly, a son of a single mother was asked to make a list of boys who were interested in soccer, and a client with a record of alcohol problems but previous career in the soccer league was recruited as their coach. The social worker remembered a jumble sale for the soccer tournament as a success: The boys who used to pickpocket took good care of the raffle, and a single mother who had been ashamed of her clienthood happily participated by baking and selling pastries.¹⁰⁴ For the social worker, the process of “becoming us” was the key in the success of the communal social work:

I had this thought (...) that in the community, people ‘become us’ and everyone would find a role and connections through that role (...) The residents in the area felt that we are on their side and we felt too that we side with the inhabitants. It resulted in us feeling safe in the office, we did not have to lock the doors (...) and a client could sometimes, when the appointments were a little late, make some coffee on the fly (...) In the collective field, it kind of lost its meaning whether you were a client or not, but you had a functioning role.¹⁰⁵

According to Lister’s categorization of agency, “getting organized” as the strategic collective action was a novelty in Finnish social work in the 1980s. At its best, the communal social work was a combination of official and voluntary action that could provide jobs and connect the clients to their social environment as employees, volunteers, local residents, or soccer team members and create belonging to society. This was a novelty compared to the early poor relief-based social work, in which the communal approach was mainly a source of control. Finding a functioning role for each was crucial in the 1980s, as unsuccessful research-driven efforts for establishing permanent client groups without any special agenda indicated that clienthood in the social office as such was not a source of meaningful activity, positive identification, or belonging to society.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ SHB13, 9–13; Vinnurva, J., Asiakas ja työntekijä yhteistyökumppaneiksi. *Sosiaaliturva* 21/1987, 1183–1186.

¹⁰⁵ SHB13, 13.

¹⁰⁶ Lister (2020), 164–176; Rostila (1988), 176–184, 201–212.

TURN BACK SINCE THE 1990s

The head of the Tampere social office saw the change from economic prosperity to a deep recession in the early 1990s as a sudden brake to the renewal of social work:

During the late '80s (...) we got (...) permission to think and plan (...) and to be enthusiastic (...) Those who remember, talk about 'the spring of the social office' (...) Then comes the recession in '91 (...) everything was reversed (...) 'Better feeling (*olo*) for Tampere residents' was our guiding light (...) Quite a large part of the people were entitled to some social benefits but did not apply for them, we had aimed to market them [the benefits] by saying that this is due to you.¹⁰⁷

Suddenly, the economic recession made cost-saving the guiding light for social policy, while along with high rates of unemployment and bankruptcy, the clients' problems became more severe. Organizationally, the Tampere social office returned to the post-war years: The district offices were abandoned and child welfare and social work for adults were placed in separate buildings. Long queues, increasing haste, and registering with weakening working conditions framed the reminiscences of encounters with clients at the turn of the century:¹⁰⁸

I could no longer bear the massive change, colleagues were changing all the time, whatever system was changed whenever, offices were stuffed here and there, we had to consider using headphones as we could not talk on the phone while a colleague was sitting beside me.¹⁰⁹

Quite similarly to the older generation in the 1970s, frustration with the constant change characterized the experiences of the workers who were nearing their retirement age at the turn of the century. For them, the most frustrating part was seeing the return of the once abandoned principles of giving aid, recalling the earlier layer of poor relief:

Issues of inequality are kind of similar to the '70s, and the awkward similarity in attitude (...), you must have the calculator all the time, is there money

¹⁰⁷ SHB2, 5–6; Holanti, P., Tampereella vauhti päällä. *Sosiaaliturva* 15/1991, 741.

¹⁰⁸ SHB3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 19–20; SHB10, 4–8, 13; Eronen, T., Kirjallisuutta. *Sosiaaliturva* 19/1992, 26.

¹⁰⁹ SHB3, 2.

enough, can we, so you must be cold (...) and say that 'no, you can't have this.'¹¹⁰

The frameworks (...) start to remind me of what was there when I entered the field.¹¹¹

A new feature in the encounters with clients, especially in the case of disputes over child custody, was that the clients arrived with their lawyers to fight for their rights.¹¹² According to the aging social workers, social distance in the encounters was increasing, as in the polarizing society of the 2000s, the new young social workers were raised in a different world compared to their clients. This made the client relationship again more hierarchical, "as helping and dictating from above."¹¹³

CONCLUSION

As a scene of experience, the encounter between the social worker and client in Finnish municipal social work reveals and reflects the wide-ranging societal change between 1940 and 2000. Both the social workers and the clientele changed along with the professionalization of social work and the new legislation on social security. Both the clients' problems and the social workers' resources in assisting to solve them varied across time. Significantly, even the site of the encounter changed. Compared to the home visits with inquiries in the neighborhood and long lines at the social office in the 1940s and 1950s, the prebooked appointments at the office in the 1960s and 1970s made the encounter individualistic—with the exception, however, of the short-lived communal approach in the 1980s and 1990s, when the scene expanded to the social environment.

The change can be conceptualized as two contested generational layers of experience of lived social work between 1940 and 2000. The analysis of two social worker generations indicates that they built their work on different interpretations of the individual–society relationship, which resulted in divergent expectations toward the clients and their agency. For the *old* generation, who started their career by the 1940s and 1950s, poor relief

¹¹⁰ SHB8, 14–15.

¹¹¹ SHB13, 19.

¹¹² SHB5, 13–14; SHB1, 11; SHB11, 13; SHB3, 10.

¹¹³ SHB5, 8; SHB3, 5.

was the key experience that characterized their professional identity and their view of the clients as either ignorant, humble, and deserving or non-deserving and shameless. For them, the acceptance of the new social benefits and the new clientele who demanded their rights was challenging. For the *young* generation, who entered the profession in the 1960s and 1970s, the new horizon of expectation was to be liberated from the burden of poor relief to implement the rights of the citizens.

The collision between old and new in the 1960s and 1970s crystallized the two layers of experience. The main tension was that the interest of society was the guiding principle for the *old* layer of experience. As the social worker represented society, the role of the client was to become a responsible citizen by meeting one's obligations to society. In the *new* layer of experience, it was quite the opposite: It was the responsibility of society and social work to serve the individual. While the old generation accepted the framework of social work and did their best within the given frames, the young generation aimed to renew the societal frames of social work.

The dual view of the clients—as either decent or indecent—in the old layer of experience linked ideal clienthood to experiences of gratitude, submissiveness, and obedience toward society. Rather than a full member of society, the client—called a ward or dependent—was seen as a burden. The chances of escaping clienthood, which restricted membership in society, were improved along with the expanding legislation of income transfers and social services in the 1960s. For some clients, the communal work approach in the mid-1980s to early 1990s entailed empowerment without the experiences of shame or loss of dignity and autonomy. The process of “becoming us,” which was the key expectation in the new layer of lived social work, was lost as the austerity policy changed the framework of the client–social worker relationship in the 1990s. The generational approach indicates how—despite the new legislation and practices—the experienced legacy of previous policies survived in welfare state practices and institutions and framed the everyday encounters with clients.

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CHAPTER 9

Between Gift and Entitlement: Experiencing Public Social Services and Charitable Food Aid in 2020s Finland

Anna Sofia Salonen

INTRODUCTION

In the late twentieth century, Finland was characterized as a Nordic welfare state that relied on the universal coverage of widespread public services, collective, solidarity-based support that helped people to lead an active and independent life, and the fostering of equality against class hierarchies and societal divides.¹ However, with the emergence and proliferation of charitable food aid since the 1990s, Finland's status as a

¹ This work was supported by the Academy of Finland under the project (Im)moderation in everyday food consumption (2018–2021, decision number 316141) at the Tampere University, Finland.

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universalist welfare state has been questioned.² In this chapter, I ask how the ideals of the Finnish welfare state are experienced in 2020s Finland by people who live in weak social and economic situations, and who must rely extensively on social services and recourse to charitable assistance in order to make ends meet.

Although helping the poor by giving them food has a long history,³ the early twenty-first century's food aid system is a relatively new invention. The first cross-national study of food aid in the 1990s identified the phenomenon as characteristic of residual welfare states. According to that study, Northern European welfare states had shown that hunger, and hence charity-based measures to combat it, need not exist. With appropriate social policy actions, people can be lifted from poverty so that they do not have to rely on charity.⁴ However, the late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries witnessed a global expansion of food aid across the affluent world. Studies from various corners of the world show that food aid does not respect the theoretical boundaries of welfare state regimes.⁵ Rather, it epitomizes post-welfare state governance that promotes charity responses to poverty and food insecurity and undermines the public responsibility to secure the right to food for all.⁶

The emergence and proliferation of charitable food aid in Finland challenges the thought that such assistance is not a concern for Nordic welfare states.⁷ From the 1970s until the beginning of the 1990s, the construction of the universalist welfare state with an inclusive social security net had

² Kantola, A. and Kuusela H. (2019). Wealth elite moralities: Wealthy entrepreneurs' moral boundaries. *Sociology* 53(2), 368–384; Silvasti, T. (2015). Food aid: Normalising the abnormal in Finland. *Social Policy and Society*, 14(3), 471.

³ Mäkinen, V. (ed.) (2002). *Lasaruksesta Leipäjonoihin: Köyhyyks kirkon kysymyksenä*. Atena.

⁴ Riches, G. (1997). Hunger, food security and welfare policies: Issues and debates in First World societies. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 56, 63–74.

⁵ Riches, G. and Silvasti, T. (eds.) (2014). *First World hunger revisited: Food charity or the right to food?* 2. edition. Palgrave Macmillan.

⁶ Riches, G. (2018). *Food Bank Nations: Poverty, corporate charity and the right to food*. Routledge.

⁷ The term “food aid” refers here to the Finnish umbrella term *ruoka-apu* that covers activities operated by faith-based and non-governmental organizations that deliver food to people living in weak social and economic positions in affluent countries of the global North. Alternative English terms often used in research and public discussion include “food assistance,” “food banks,” and “breadlines.”

reduced the need for faith- and voluntary-based social protection and charity aid.⁸ Tiina Silvasti describes the welfare state ideals of that time:

Finland identifies itself as a Nordic welfare state. The ethos of Nordic welfare refers to a public responsibility for society and its citizens based on strong democracy, a determination to reduce poverty, inequality and vulnerability based on the principle of equality, as well as recognizing basic rights of all citizens and implementing them in the spirit of universalism [...]. Accordingly, during the expansion of the welfare state in the 1970s and 1980s, people became accustomed to the idea that the basic needs of all citizens would thereby be satisfied. Food insecurity or hunger was unimaginable.⁹

This development took a drastic turn in the early 1990s. Charitable food aid arrived in Finland in the wake of the economic recession in the early 1990s. It was first meant as a provisional response to the immediate consequences of the economic downturn. However, over three decades food aid became a semi-permanent way of helping people who live in precarious positions in Finnish society.¹⁰ There are no comprehensive statistics on the prevalence of food aid in Finland. However, there are food aid outlets throughout the country, and they are estimated to provide food aid for tens of thousands of people (out of a population of 5.5 million) on a weekly basis.¹¹

Charitable food aid and public social services are often seen to represent opposites: they epitomize the unreconciled ideals of the charitable

⁸ Yeung, A. B. (2003). The re-emergence of the church in the Finnish public life? Christian social work as an indicator of the public status of the church. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 18(2), 197–211.

⁹ Silvasti (2015), 471.

¹⁰ Hiilamo, H. (2012). Rethinking the role of church in a socio-democratic welfare state. *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 32(7), 401–414; Karjalainen, J. (2000). Ruokapankkien paikallinen vaikuttavuus. In M. Heikkilä, J. Karjalainen, and M. Malkavaara (eds.), *Kirkonkirjat köyhyydestä*. Kirkkopalvelut, 267–287; Malkavaara, M. (2002). Nälkä ja köyhyys kirkon asiaksi: Näkökulmia laman ja markkinakilpailun aikaan. In V. Mäkinen (ed.), *Lasaruudesta Leipäjonoihin: Köyhyys kirkon kysymyksenä*. Atena, 283–312; Silvasti (2015).

¹¹ Ohisalo, M., Eskelinen, N., Laine, J., Kainulainen, S., and Saari, J. (2013). *Avun tilkkutäkki: Suomalaisen ruoka-apukentän monimuotoisuus*. RAY. Recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has increased the need for food aid, cf. Sosiaalibarometri (2020). SOSTE Suomen sosiaali ja terveys ry. Retrieved May 2, 2022 from <https://www.soste.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/SOSTE-Sosiaalibarometri-2020.pdf>.

ethos versus welfare universalism, or gift versus entitlement.¹² Food aid has been criticized for compromising values such as food security, dignity, and equality, which are at the heart of rights-based social security.¹³ As a reactive aid that is targeted at a selected group of marginalized people, food aid does not address the root causes of food insecurity and poverty. However, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and other organizations providing food aid brought poverty onto the Finnish public agenda in a manner that fostered an ideological change in Finnish social policy from universalism to selectivism.¹⁴

Despite the critique, and with the rise of the anti-poverty approach in Finnish social policy in the early 2000s, food aid persists.¹⁵ It has become a new social fact in affluent societies that is unlikely to fade away anytime soon.¹⁶ Since the early 2000s, food aid has indeed become more and more socially acceptable,¹⁷ and, with the new emphasis on food waste reduction, even desired.¹⁸ This impacts how food aid organizers approach their own work. Simply put, whereas the introduction of the first food banks in the

¹² Salonen, A. S. (2016a). *Food for the soul or the soul for food: Users' perspectives on religiously affiliated food charity in a Finnish city*. Helsingin yliopisto; Malkavaara, M. and Ryökäs, E. (2015). *Diakonia-apu oikeutena: Suomalaisen ajattelutavan kehittyminen. Diakonian Tutkimus*, (2), 107–127; Silvasti (2015), 480.

¹³ Riches and Silvasti (2014); Riches (1997); Poppendieck, J. (1999). *Sweet Charity? Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*. Penguin Books.

¹⁴ Kuivalainen, S. and Niemelä, M. (2010). From universalism to selectivism: The ideological turn of the anti-poverty policies in Finland. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 20(3), 263–276. Because of its official functions and its right to collect taxes, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland can be considered as part of the public sector. However, its social and diaconal work, including food aid, is complementary to the official welfare provision and can therefore be rightly considered to be part of civil society rather than the public sector. Hiilamo (2012, 404); Karjalainen (2000, 268–269).

¹⁵ Kuivalainen and Niemelä (2010).

¹⁶ Lorenz, S. (2012). Socio-ecological consequences of charitable food aid in the affluent society: The German Tafel. *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 32(7/8), 386–400.

¹⁷ Cf. Silvasti (2015), 471.

¹⁸ Salonen, A. S. and Silvasti, T. (2019). Faith-based organizations as actors in the charity economy: A case study of food assistance in Finland. In H. Gaisbauer, G. Schweiger, and C. Sedmak (eds.), *Absolute poverty in Europe. Interdisciplinary perspectives on a hidden phenomenon*. Policy Press, 267–288; Tikka, V. (2019). Charitable food aid in Finland: From a social issue to an environmental solution. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 36(2), 341–352; Salonen, A. S. (2018). Religion, poverty and abundance: A research comment. *Palgrave communications special issue: Religion and Poverty. Palgrave Communications*, 4, 27.

1990s sparked critical debates among aid providers,¹⁹ today's food aid organizers are seeking ever new ways to prove their usefulness and effectiveness to ensure the continuity of their operations.²⁰

The increasing cooperation between the public sector, food aid providers, and food markets reframes the roles and responsibilities of different actors.²¹ This new situation calls for research that moves beyond the stark opposition of public versus charitable services. Further, the situation calls for research that better takes the service users' voices into account. Reaching for insights into the food aid recipients' world provides a rich and nuanced perspective on the Finnish welfare society as it is experienced by people who live in weak social and economic situations. This chapter voices grassroots experiences of people who use services from both charitable and public social service institutions.

THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SERVICE USERS

With the growth of food aid, a growing body of research is targeting food aid recipients in different parts of the affluent world and various welfare state contexts. These studies have so far mainly asked who the recipients are, how they are perceived by others, and to what extent they are reached by the aid organizations.²² Some studies have engaged in the experiences

¹⁹Heikkilä, M. and Karjalainen, J. (2000). Vuotoja hyvinvointivaltion turvaverkossa: Kansalaiskeskustelun merkitys suomalaisessa hyvinvointipolitiikassa. In M. Heikkilä, J. Karjalainen, and M. Malkavaara (eds.), *Kirkonkirjat köyhyydestä*. Kirkkopalvelut, 212–266.

²⁰Cf. Huotari, R. (forthcoming 2022). Osallisuuden monet kasvot kristillisessä ruokavussa. In V. Mäkinen, H. Pesonen, and R. Uro. (eds.), *Pyhä, paha ruoka: Uskonto, etiikka ja syömisen käytännöt*. Gaudeamus.

²¹For example, Karjalainen, J., Hossain-Karhu, R., Marjamäki, P., and Sinkkonen, A. (2021). *Ruoka luo yhteyden: Ruoka-apu hyvinvointivaltiossa*. Socca; Salonen, A. S. and Alppivuori, K. (2021). Kaupungin ja järjestökentän yhteistyö espoolaisen ruoka-avun kentällä koronakriisissä keväällä 2020: Näkökulmia vakiintuvaan ruoka-apuun. *Diakonian tutkimus*, 1, 6–31.

²²For example, Huotari, R. (2021). Osallisuuteen pyrkivä ruoka-apu myrskyn silmässä: Diskurssianalyysi ruoka-apuun liittyvistä verkkokeskusteluista vuosina 2017–2018. *Diakonian tutkimus*, 1, 32–52; Salonen, A. S., Ohisalo, M., and Laihiala, T. (2018). Underserving, disadvantaged, disregarded: Three viewpoints of charity food aid recipients in Finland. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15(12), 2896; Laihiala, T. (2018) *Kokemuksia ja käsityksiä leipäjonoista: Huono-osaisuus, häpeä ja ansaitsevuus*. University of Eastern Finland; Ohisalo, M. (2017) *Murusia hyvinvointivaltion pohjalla: Leipäjonot, koettu hyvinvointi ja huono-osaisuus*. University of Eastern Finland; Loopstra, R. and Tarasuk, V. (2012). The relationship between food banks and household food insecurity among low-income Toronto families. *Canadian Public Policy*, 28(4), 497–514.

of food aid recipients in more detail by asking, for instance, how they feel about the aid and how they perceive their situation.²³

Previous research has well illustrated that food aid recipients are often trapped in difficult life situations and social positions. Food aid has been characterized as “the last hatch in the social security system” and as “the perdition zone” beyond the public social security net.²⁴ However, while in many ways useful, this doomsday imagery obscures the active voice of the food recipients. In addition to the obstacles that food aid recipients face, it is important to analyze the degree to which these constraints leave room for agency.²⁵ So far, little attention has been paid to how food aid recipients experience the society around them. However, my past research with food aid users has shown that these people merit more attention, not as objects of scrutiny, but also as important informants.²⁶

The study draws from qualitative interviews with eighteen people who have used both public social services and charitable food aid. I refer to these people as service users. The interviews were conducted in November and December 2020 in Espoo in the Helsinki metropolitan area. They took place amid the Covid-19 pandemic, which had both increased the need for social benefits and food aid and affected the modes of operation in social services and food aid venues.²⁷ Nevertheless, the interviews reflect service users’ experiences beyond this exceptional period. The questions in the qualitative interview guide were informed by a quantitative survey conducted with over 450 food aid recipients earlier in the same autumn in the same food aid venues.²⁸ In the analysis, I concentrated on finding out how the interviewees experienced public services and charitable aid

²³ For example, Van der Horst, H., Pascucci, S., and Bol, W. (2014). The “dark side” of food banks? Exploring emotional responses of food bank receivers in the Netherlands. *British Food Journal*, 116(9), 1506–1520; Siiki, A. (2008). Myllypuron ruokajono: Esimerkki hyvinvointiköyhydestä. In S. Hänninen, J. Karjalainen, K. Lehtelä, and T. Silvasti (eds.), *Toisten Pankki: Ruoka-apu hyvinvointivaltiossa*. Stakes, 127–161.

²⁴ Hänninen, S. and Karjalainen, J. (2007). Tarve harkinnassa. In S. Hänninen, J. Karjalainen and K. Lehtelä (eds.), *Pääsy Kielletty! Poiskäännyttämisen politiikka ja sosiaaliturva*. Stakes, 157–191; Juntunen, E., Grönlund, H., and Hiilamo, H. (2006). *Viimeisellä luukulla: Tutkimus viimesijaisen sosiaaliturvan aukoista ja diakoniatyön kohdentumisesta*. Kirkkohallitus. Translated by the author.

²⁵ Salonen (2016a), 25.

²⁶ Salonen (2016a).

²⁷ Salonen and Alppivuori (2021).

²⁸ Alppivuori, K. (2021). *Mitä kertovat ruoka-apua hakevat ihmiset: Espoolainen ruoka-apu, avun tarve ja palvelukokemukset ruoka-avun hakijoiden näkökulmasta*. Espoon kaupunki. The data were gathered by Espoo city social service specialist Kristiina Alppivuori, who granted the author exclusive permission to use the interview data for research purposes.

provided in the city, how these services met the interviewees' needs, and how these people envisioned the changes needed in these services. As the analysis below will show, the interviewees also engaged in wider discussions concerning their own life experiences, their ability to cope, and the role and place they envision for themselves in society.

The interviewees were aged from their late twenties to late sixties and split equally between the genders. The interviewees' life histories and current situations varied widely. However, as people who receive food aid in general, they lived in, or had experienced, severely difficult life situations and cumulative deprivation.²⁹ In the following, I do not discuss individuals' life situations in detail, but instead concentrate on how they experienced the welfare system and society that they navigate. Further, I do not aim to evaluate the service users' experiences in relation to their legal rights or moral entitlement to certain services but focus on giving voice to their own interpretations of their situation.

ABSURDITY AND THE LOSS OF HUMANITY VS. RESPECT AND RECOGNITION

The service users interviewed for this study were experts in various public services: They had years of experience in dealing with the benefits system, social services, employment services, health care, addiction services, and so on. Indeed, many of them had experiences of being helped by these services—whether to resolve small, everyday needs, such as food or furniture, or more complex problems, such as combating addiction and severe health concerns. However, many of them also shared experiences of being left without help, neglected or overlooked in their difficult life situations.

A middle-aged woman went to a local office of Kela, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, with the intention to clarify some of her social benefit issues. She was unsure whether the problem she was trying to resolve fell under the purview of housing benefits or income support. Thus, she consulted a staff member, providing information in the lobby of the office, and asked for help. It turned out that the information officer was unable to help the woman with her troubles, but instead advised her to call the Kela service number and ask for instructions on how to proceed with the matter. There she was sitting in the waiting room of the Kela office and lining up for the phone of that very same office's phone service.

²⁹ Salonen et al. (2018).

After 45 minutes of waiting in line, the woman finally got an officer on the phone and, eventually, got her issue sorted out. Now she knew what to do and who to contact next. However, the incident left her perplexed: “I dealt with the matter, but it was nonsensical,” she explained, “so it felt really absurd.”³⁰

Like the woman above, other interviewees also recounted small incidents in their encounters with welfare state institutions that had an absurd overtone. An unemployed man with a physical disability recounted a nonsensical experience with the unemployment office. He was obliged to apply for a job as a truck driver, despite his disability and the fact that he could not even hold a driver’s license due to his health situation. Another man had his dentist appointment unexpectedly canceled. The dentist’s office did not send him a new appointment time to replace the canceled one. However, they did send him a bill concerning the appointment that never took place.

These experiences of small, absurd incidents, as well as being refused assistance when needed, resonate with previous research, which has shown that social service users face unfair situations. The conditions for such incidents arise, for example, when legislation does not fit the service user’s situation, when a service user is unable to request the benefits that they are entitled to, or when the principle of minimizing public expenditure is followed instead of seeking solutions that would benefit both the clients in their acute situation and society and the economy in the long run.³¹

The excerpt that started this section also refers to another issue that the service users often raised: faceless, random, and remote services, and a desire for face-to-face encounters. There was a nostalgic tone to many of the interviewees’ comments about the past and comparisons to the present: Previously, they had received personalized, face-to-face assistance, the system worked well, and they felt that they were cared for. Now, the social service people had been replaced by computers and forms. One must wait for weeks or even months to get access to services that involve a human encounter. A couple in their mid-thirties talked about this change. In their view, “Before, it used to be a more humane activity and you were listened

³⁰The author has translated the interview excerpts from Finnish into English. When needed, excessive words are reduced and missing ones added, and word order and expressions slightly modified to keep the text readable.

³¹Metteri, A. (2012). *Hyvinvointivaltion lupaukset, kohtuuttomat tapaukset ja sosiaalityö*. Tampere University Press.

to, and you sat there and talked, and you received the aid in a different manner than today.” In contrast, today, “all they have is computers and no people at all.” According to these service users, face-to-face interaction had been replaced by computers that cannot evaluate individual situations properly:

Now, when you hit ‘enter’ on the computer, it’s all about paperwork. Humanity has totally lost its value and there is a computer between humans. But I guess it is what it is today. I bet it is to save costs. But before, the help was near.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and concomitant social distancing measures enforced at the time of the interviews, the opportunities for face-to-face services were particularly restricted. However, the experiences of the service users did not only speak about the acute crisis period. They reflected wider patterns of change in the field of welfare provision, such as the centralization and digitalization of services and reductions in service points, which had been initiated already before the pandemic.

The call for face-to-face interaction is not only about demanding rights to a personalized service. The service users wanted to be encountered as persons, not as papers and numbers. They aspired to the ability to represent themselves in a respectful, humane light. One described this vividly: “I do not want to be a faceless voice over a phone, who is always, always, always demanding: ‘give, give.’ I want the person to encounter me as a person. And this has been important to me.”

The experiences of absurdity and facelessness are entwined in the fact that the service users lacked chances to explain their often complex life situation and need for services face to face, thus leading to experiences of misrecognition and rejection.

In Finland, the discussion concerning the welfare system mostly concentrates on its financial basis and stability. The service users, too, noted that the situation that they experience as unfair or absurd is most likely “to save costs.” However, the foundation of the welfare state relies not only on economic rationale, but also on social factors. Indeed, instead of the economy:

More essential for the future of the welfare state is its social foundation, meaning people’s experiences of fairness, equality and reliability of the soci-

ety as well as the welfare state's capability of taking care of the most vulnerable groups of people.³²

The experiences of service users speak about fractures in this social foundation. Based on experiences of being left without help or treated in an absurd manner, many service users expressed tiredness, pessimism, and anger toward the system. Some noted that it is not worth even trying to apply for public social benefits or seek services that they might be entitled to; based on their experience of being rejected in the past, they were convinced that they would not be helped in the future, either. A man noted cynically that he understands why there are so many guards in the social security offices, insinuating the possibility of a violent outbreak because of frustration.

In contrast to these experiences of facelessness, remoteness, and rejection, the service users often characterized their encounters with charitable food aid organizations and their personnel as warm, humane, respectful, and personal. One man described his experiences of food aid thus:

In my view, the food aid workers are wonderful people. They are always in a good mood. Always give me personal attention. And somehow, I feel that, even though they, too, are starting to get older, still somehow, I feel that they remember me. Perhaps they remember me because of my beanie, or something, if I have given ten cents to their fund-raising or something.

The recognition that the service user received from the food aid workers only required that he was seen as a person, not as a faceless, demanding voice.

UNCANNY DEMONSTRATIONS OF AGENCY

This call for recognition is further illustrated in the constraints that people faced when navigating a complex service system. A man in his mid-sixties had experienced severe, cumulative deprivation in his life: he grew up in an orphanage, suffered from substance abuse since childhood, and lived all his life on a minimum income. He had experienced mental illness, injuries, and homelessness. He had been receiving food aid for two or three

³² Saari, J. (ed.) (2017). *Sosiaaliturvariippuvuus: Sosiaalipummit oleskeluyhteiskunnassa?* Tampere University Press, abstract in English.

decades. This man suffered from anxieties that made it impossible for him to travel to the social office independently by public transport. A director of a food aid organization took him there when she could. She also took care of all his bills and applied for all benefits on his behalf. “She is my memory,” the man said of this person. “I give her all my bills. I do not have anything to do with the paperwork.” Thus, when it came to taking care of his welfare service matters, the man was heavily reliant on outside help.

Yet, the man’s dependence on the food aid organization did not mean that he remained passive in his efforts to seek solutions to the problems in his life, only that his means to act were rather unconventional. During his life, his range of activities to cope in problematic situations had included seeking a way into public institutions so that he would have a roof over his head while homeless. He first talked about seeking mental health care with this goal in mind:

The so-called loony bin, I just got my foot in the door, wittingly—just because I did not have an apartment. So, I pretended a little, like ‘where am I?’ [...] So, I went there just because I didn’t have an apartment. Like that is why I went there. At least it’s warm there.

As another example, the interviewee talked about his dramatic effort to find a place to sleep by trying to get himself into an emergency room:

I pushed my left arm under a bus once. When it was sleeting and raining and all. So, I did not have an apartment or anything. [...] It was dark, it was autumn or winter, I don’t know. So, I put my left arm under the front tire, and then rolled over, so that the rear wheel didn’t run over me.

This effort to injure himself purposefully to obtain a warm place to stay failed. The man was caught and ended up being fined for his action. Further, it turned out that the soft sleet had shielded his hand, so his injuries were not as severe as he had expected. Hence, the man could not get to stay the night in the emergency room. “I was back in the rain, walking,” he said, finishing the story.

Navigating a complex welfare system requires people to have many capacities: material resources such as a computer and mobile phone, enough money to call office numbers or pay for travel to offices and potential service costs, and the ability to use this equipment and these services.

The interviewees in this study noted several challenges in these skills: some felt that they are not competent in filling in the right forms and finding out about potential services, some had difficulties in remembering appointment times and the names of the people and offices, and so forth. Some suffered from physical disabilities and visual impairment, and some from anxieties—for instance caused by the use of public transport—which might make it difficult to seek help. Physical and mental distress caused by poverty lessened their ability to seek help. For many service users, charitable food aid organizations were not only places where they went and sought assistance once the official, public welfare state institutions had failed them. They were also venues where people could get hands-on help in dealing with social services.³³

Facing challenges and having to rely on outside help when seeking services does not mean passivity or a lack of individual agency. When the man above was asked who or what had helped him the most in his life, he mentioned God and himself. At the request of the interviewer, he then clarified his own role:

So ultimately, I have been the one who solves [things], by pushing my hand under the bus, or by going to the loony bin intentionally. Even though I would not need it, mentally. So, I must go there purposely, so that I don't bite the dust. And one must make those decisions, offenses, even be sent up the river, so that at least you get somewhere where it is warm. So, I am the one who makes those decisions. But they are, of course, wrong.

While acknowledging that the propriety of his actions can be questioned, the man nevertheless framed these choices as active efforts to solve the challenges he had faced in life. Like this man, other service users also demonstrated agency from a materially highly constrained social position, even though not always in a way that is expected from them by the welfare system. People used creativity to carve out space for agency within complex public social services.³⁴ What the welfare system considers as harmful and deviant behavior can, from the individual's perspective, be viewed as a means to take initiative in one's own life. The challenge is to recognize

³³ Cf. Jokela, U. (2011). *Diakoniatyön paikka ihmisten arjessa*. Diakoniammattikorkeakoulu, A Tutkimuksia 34. Diak; Juntunen, E. (2011). *Vain hätäapua? Taloudellinen avustaminen diakoniatyön professionaalisen itseymmärryksen ilmentäjänä*. Helsingin yliopisto.

³⁴ Cf. Salonen (2016a), 49.

these forms of self-help that do not always fit neatly with the welfare state institutions' logic.

NAVIGATING SOCIAL HIERARCHY

When talking about their experiences with public and charitable services, the service users also engaged in reflecting on society more broadly. Hierarchical descriptions were common in the interviews. The service users talked about societal layers and dividing lines, and described their position in, and sometimes movement between, these divisions. A woman said that she had "been in a good position" until suddenly her "whole life fell apart." Some had "visited the bottom," and some had risen up, at least "to the first floor."

A man in his fifties reflected on his position in society vis-à-vis what he considers ordinary. In his words, he had "fallen below the ordinary person." Rising through societal layers from that position is not easy. The man noted that "getting back to be an ordinary person is years and years of work." He listed certain qualities that hampered his aspiration to rejoin the ranks of the ordinary people: "When you are unemployed, divorced, a man, over fifty years old, have a bad credit history, it affects everything you do," he summarized.

The man compared his current societal position to his own past: "I do have a background as an ordinary person. Good life, two wonderful children, twenty years of marriage, and so forth. So, this gives me strength to think that I have led a good life. Compared to this, now."

He then moved on to weigh up the positive outcomes of his current life phase: "I would not have met these wonderful people if I had led that middle-class life and so forth. In its own way, this is wealth, too." The man counted all experiences in life—including the difficult ones that have made him fall "below the ordinary person"—as holding value.

The man stated that he was himself responsible for how his life had turned out. "I know that society has not ruined my life, but I have caused it, with my own actions, that a middle-class person has become less privileged," he said. However, he recognized the positive influence that societal institutions can have in fostering an ordinary way of life:

It is like, when you are a small child, you are in nursery, you are at school, you are in middle school, high school, vocational college, get a job, all these. So, all the time, you have things to do. And perhaps, in the end, you still want to stay in work after three years or so.

One of the key ideas behind the welfare state is the power of institutions to support and level people's opportunities to lead an ordinary life and pursue their goals. The interviewee readily acknowledged this. Yet, in his own life, these routines had gradually fallen apart. He developed a mindset that saw work as interfering with rather than supporting his life. He noted that such patterns of thinking are hard to turn around. However, recently, the man had gained positive experiences from occasional work opportunities, which had helped him to change his thinking again:

I could think like an ordinary person needs to think. So that I pay the rent myself, I do not get housing benefit. I pay for my living myself, my bills. And I no longer think that I will lose my unemployment benefit if I take a job. Or that I lose my housing benefit.

This positive experience had infused in him a hope for change. In his words, "the game is not up yet. And I have decided already in the beginning of this year that this year I will get a job, so that I do not have to fill in even one single fuckin' Kela form." Thus, even though the man still positioned himself outside middle-class ordinary life and noted the difficulties of getting back to that life, for him, the possibility of return to the ordinary, the way he sees it, was not totally out of the question. What he aspired to was freedom from those welfare institutions and their practices that signal his position "below" ordinary people.

This man did not blame society for his situation but emphasized his own actions. Yet, in interviews with some other service users, the description of one's position in society grew into a societal critique. A couple in their mid-thirties talked about how they had to give up their entire life due to health- and income-related adversities. They had attempted to receive help from social services but were unsuccessful, and thus they felt that they had been forgotten by the social service system. Due to the way they had been dealt with, they concluded that "we belong to the group of people who the city does not apparently want in the future." Further, they extended this sense of being forgotten to the societal level: "Some people have been forgotten. Some people retreat somewhere, and some end up at the end of their tether. Perhaps it is intended, to make a portion of people go away," one of them said. The other continued: "It feels like we are just papers. Some get ahead, and some are put in the trash bin." They contrasted this situation to the egalitarian ideals of the welfare state with a nostalgic undertone:

Before, people were taken care of. We talked about the welfare society, and how important it is that everyone is well. Today, there is this certain group who is doing well. They are riding high. They laugh and make fun of us. The main thing is that this place looks better. In my view, in five years, there will be only super flat broke and addicted people, and those who prosper. Inequality will become visible, and all people will be divided into their own groups. And I think that it's sad, and it's scary, too. What the future will bring is not perhaps what we have wanted. But this is what we have made from this. We should have thought about it twenty years ago, when we started to build this into a 'Little America.'

Suddenly dropping out from ordinary life with a decent income and good health had let the couple realize the current state of the welfare society.

Alongside this societal division between those who have and those who have not, the service users described the communality between people who share the same fate. Even hardship can bring people together and foster a sense of community.³⁵ Many service users referred to the importance of meeting people who share the same life situation. One woman referred to food aid venues when she said:

So, the social environment is important, because there you don't have to pretend anything. You can be pretty much yourself. Like, I could not be with such people, anymore, who think about nail polish, or the last time they traveled, and like, 'don't you ever travel (laughs) anywhere', and that. Like, people who are in the same situation.

However, the sense of belonging to a group as other people who are socially "in the same boat" is not only positive in character. A man in his fifties, for example, subtly distinguished his own financial deprivation from the deprivation of some other people who he had met in the food aid venue:

Sometimes it might make me wonder a bit that, well, I don't have a terribly low income, but I am in a rather difficult financial situation, nevertheless. So, when you see those other underprivileged people there, so sometimes you might experience like, kind of unpleasant feelings.

³⁵ Salonen, A. S. (2017). Lining up for charity: A study of the social organization and communal qualities of breadlines in a Finnish city. *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 37(3/4), 218–230.

Encounters with other service users caused negative emotions in the man, but he abstained from stating his concerns in detail. When the interviewee tried to find out about the reason behind those unpleasant feelings, the man brusquely answered: “Well, because you note that there is like kind of different, very different kinds of people, too.”

The example highlights that the commonality experienced by people with social and economic difficulties can be negative and burdening. People relate to others with similar experiences, but also differentiate themselves from those who they consider as different, but who outsiders might count as the same social reference group.³⁶

This fear can be grounded in empirical evidence. A recent study analyzed how wealthy Finnish entrepreneurs draw moral boundaries to justify their privileged position. They emphasized their own ordinariness, while considering the lower classes as spoiled, possessing a false sense of entitlement, and having lost their ability to take initiative.³⁷ Other studies have found that the public often views food aid recipients from a distance, as humiliated, spoiled, or undeserving others.³⁸ Identifying as a social service or food aid user involves the risk of being identified as an inferior other.

GETTING ALONG WITH THE WELFARE STATE: GRATITUDE AND SURVIVAL CODES

A woman in her fifties listed the many troubles she had encountered in her life and the many ways in which she had been helped by the welfare state: “I’ve had that addiction problem, single parent, unemployment, long-term unemployment. So, I have received help for that life situation, so that I cope.” She then continued by expressing her gratitude to the welfare system: “I am genuinely thankful. Like, I have somehow understood it, that yeah, that it is not self-evident and that in Finland we have this system, and we really cope because of it.”

³⁶ Hill, R. P. and Stamey, M. (1990). The homeless in America: An examination of possessions and consumption behaviors. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17(3), 303–321; Salonen A. S. (2016b). The Christmas celebration of secondary consumers: Observations from food banks in Finland. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 16(3), 870–886; Salonen (2017).

³⁷ Kantola and Kuusela (2019), 369, 374, 377–378.

³⁸ Laihiala, T. and Ohisalo, M. (2017). Sosiaalipummit leipäjonossa? Kansalaisten käsityksiä huono-osaisten ansaitsevuudesta. In J. Saari (ed.), *Sosiaaliturvariippuvuus: Sosiaalipummit oleskeluyhteiskunnassa?* Tampere University Press, 231–258; Huotari (2021).

The woman expressed contentment with the system that had helped her to navigate a life filled with troubles and acknowledged her privileged position as a member of a society that provides a wide range of social support to people in need.

Further, the same woman describes how her own demeanor had prevented her from utilizing the available aid in the past. She talked about her efforts to “keep up appearances” amid severe drug addiction. Despite her adversity, she had been reluctant to acquiesce to the service system’s requirements. She could not stand “ranting,” as she at that time interpreted the well-intended advice that she received from social workers. The woman described her past attitude: “At least I have noticed that when I was using drugs, sometimes I might have been like, that I was angry and [makes a wailing sound]. And I bashed and I whined and [making a squealing sound] ‘I have been mistreated again,’ and that kind of thing.”

She then noted that a change in her own attitude had enabled her to get help:

But then, when I have been polite and like ‘thank you, thank you, best regards,’ [laughs] dealt with it like that, then I have been treated very well myself, too. And I have noted it. One thing is that when you notice that come on, this is not self-evident. That you just put in an application and write something, then somehow. So at least I have noticed that it is not self-evident that there is enough for everyone. So that you just go and get it. [laughs]

This example shows how the service users noted that their own efforts and attitudes affect their ability to succeed in receiving welfare services. In contrast to keeping up appearances, the trick was to be polite and open to the aid.

In contrast, some service users saw their restrained demeanor as a hindrance in receiving aid. A man said he knew that people sometimes receive certain benefits if they strongly insist on getting them. He then described his own approach:

My behavior is that, if they say that they won’t pay, then the arguing ends there. I do not start to bash them or raise my voice, because I hate it, if in this society you get something by yelling, more than you would by behaving properly. If so, then there is something rotten in this society.

In their efforts to seek help and cope in their life situations, the service users needed to balance reciprocating kindness with demanding rights for services. These dilemmas resonate with past research on food consumption and charitable food aid. Giving thanks for food can serve as a strong political act that communicates acknowledgment of the food's value in a world where waste constantly undermines it.³⁹ However, as I have noted elsewhere, gratitude can be used as a repressive norm that undermines the leverage of choice that people with a limited income have regarding what they eat.⁴⁰ In the context of food aid, service users are often expected to show gratitude and satisfaction with the received benefit, even though their most prevalent emotion would be shame or anger.⁴¹

These arguments can be expanded to welfare services. Gratitude for received benefits and aid can serve as a politically transforming act that reinforces the legitimacy and the social basis of the welfare state. Room for genuine, spontaneous expressions of gratitude makes space for agency for people living in vulnerable societal positions. At the same time, if gratitude becomes a norm that is expected from service users, it can repress and undermine entitlement, and thus risk the foundation of the universalist welfare state.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have analyzed how the ideals of the Finnish welfare state are experienced in 2020s Finland by people who have used both public social services and charitable food aid. At the societal level, the prevalence of the need for charitable food aid symbolizes the failure of affluent societies to ensure food security and the right to food for all.⁴² It indicates that even in the wealthiest countries in the world, some people are unable to

³⁹Wirzba, N. (2019). *Food and faith: A theology of Eating*. 2nd edition. Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁰Salonen, A. S. (2021). "If I could afford an avocado every day": Income differences and ethical food consumption in a world of abundance. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, first published October 15, 2021 in OnlineFirst.

⁴¹van der Horst et al. (2014); Tarasuk, V. and Eakin, J. M. (2003). Charitable food assistance as symbolic gesture: An ethnographic study of food banks in Ontario. *Social Science and Medicine*, 56(7), 1505–1515.

⁴²MacLeod, M. (2018). *Understanding the rise of food aid and its implications for the welfare state: A study of Scotland and Finland*. University of Glasgow; Silvasti (2015); Riches and Silvasti (2014).

meet their food needs in ways that are customary in contemporary consumer culture. Charitable food aid is an illustration of a charity economy that relies on two-tiered food markets and the commodification of welfare. It is a signal of an ethical and societal dilemma where abundant wealth goes hand in hand with persistent food insecurity.⁴³

Individual experiences paint a more complex picture of the situation. The service users' experiences show both continuities and contrasts between charitable aid and public social services. By showing those many sides, these experiences disrupt the dualism between rights-based welfare systems and gift-based charity, and instead provide a more nuanced view of how the welfare state is lived by people who are familiar with both public and charitable services. Recipients of charitable food aid have experiences ranging from gift to entitlement. Their experiences can illuminate the ideals of the Finnish welfare state and its fracture in the twenty-first century.

The service users' experiences highlight both contrasts and connections between food aid and the welfare state institutions. On the one hand, faceless public services are contrasted with personal charitable aid; while gift-based aid undermines equal rights to social protection, it might involve the personal aspect that many service users crave. On the other hand, charitable food aid organizations do not only work in opposition to the public service system ethos; they are an integral, if not officially acknowledged, part of the service system. Beyond bread, they also provide advice, help, and support in navigating services, as well as a venue for peer support.

Further, the service users' accounts highlight social rights as experienced by people living in weak social and economic positions, and the entanglements of these rights with individual agency. The call for respect and recognition is entangled with a call for the ability to voice one's views in difficult situations. An opportunity to display agency in a personalized manner is entangled with the requirement to receive help in a complex social protection system. The recognition of societal hierarchies and their effect on people's everyday lives is entangled with the opportunity to take a critical distance from narrow social and societal positions. The room to

⁴³Salonen and Silvasti (2019); Salonen (2016b); Tarasuk, V. and Eakin, J. M. (2005). Food aid through "surplus" food: Insights from an ethnographic study of food bank work. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 22(2), 177–186; Riches, G. (2002). Food banks and food security: Welfare reform, human rights and social policy. Lessons from Canada? *Social Policy and Administration* 36(6), 648–663.

express gratitude and reciprocate should be safeguarded in a manner that does not undermine universal rights for social protection.

Food aid use reflects services users' societal position on the low end of the societal hierarchy. Pictures of charitable food aid services and their users serve as symbols of poverty and food insecurity in an affluent society and epitomize the failure of the welfare state. When considering food aid use, service users need to reflect their stance vis-à-vis this wider societal, symbolic, and communal issue. Whether in public services or charity aid, people call for room for agency, including expressions of gratitude and recognition of their own efforts in shaping their own lives.

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PART IV

Space, Age, and Class as Experience



CHAPTER 10

Lived, Material and Planned Welfare: Mass-Produced Suburbanity in 1960s and 1970s Metropolitan Finland

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INTRODUCTION

In January 1965, our family moved to Kontula; father, mother, and two-and four-year-old children. Windows showed pines and rocks. On the other side of the house was small woodland and grazing cows. What an idyll! The cow pasture later became a sports field. [...] We felt like settlers. Everything was new, the environment and services still unfinished. Moving to a new home was a moment of celebration. There was space inside and outside, nature between the houses, windows opened onto wide views. Although the houses were high, there was a feeling that we lived amidst nature.¹

¹ Helsinki City Archives, HKA, from now on HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 69.

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The mass-produced suburbs, with their high-quality homes, playgrounds, shopping centers, and forest paths, became key environments in which the emerging welfare state and the peak years of urbanization were lived in the 1960s and the 1970s. The author of the above quote, who moved to Kontula suburb as a young mother in 1965, recalled an experientially and architecturally new kind of urban space 30 years later.² The passage crystallizes several themes shared in the suburbanites' memoirs: the joy of a new dwelling, an optimistic pioneer spirit, and the omnipresence of nature. Indirectly, it discusses experiential relations between inhabitants and their new environment. Kontula was one of the almost 50 suburbs built in the metropolitan Helsinki region in the 1960s and 1970s. When completed in the early 1970s, it was the largest uniformly built residential area in Finland with over 20,000 inhabitants, equaling a contemporary midsized Finnish town.³

Post-war Finland urbanized rapidly through becoming suburbanized, a process which transformed rural and natural landscapes outside the existing urban fabric into a patchwork of new suburbs, literally moving housing into the forest. After the Second World War, the housing shortage was acute, and dwellings in Helsinki were cramped and poorly equipped compared to Western European standards.⁴ New international suburban principles were adapted to the Finnish context as a key solution for the urban housing shortage. The suburban development began in the late 1940s and was most intensive from the 1960s to the mid-1970s, in the epoch of suburban mass-production. During the period of the most intense urbanization and migration (1965–1975) masses of people moved from the northern and eastern countryside to new suburbs in the Helsinki region, other urban centers of southern Finland, and abroad to Sweden. In a few decades, the ratio of the rural and urban populations was turned on its head. In 1945, almost 70 percent of Finland's population lived in the countryside, but by 1980, nearly 60 percent lived in the cities.⁵ By 1980,

² She recorded her memories in the writing competition "Life in the Suburbs" (*Elämää lähiössä*) arranged by the major newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* in 1995–1996. HKA, LS 1995.

³ Kuokkanen-Suomi, L. and Salastie, R. (1995). *Kontula aluerakentamisen mallikohteena*. Helsingin kaupunkisuunnitteluviraston julkaisuja 1995:12. Helsingin kaupunki, 4–5.

⁴ Vihavainen, M. and Kuparinen, V. (2006). *Asuminen Helsingissä 1950–2004*. Helsingin kaupungin tietokeskuksen verkkojulkaisuja 34. Helsingin kaupunki, 14.

⁵ Alestalo, M. (1985). Yhteiskuntaluokat ja sosiaaliset kerrostumat toisen maailmansodan jälkeen. In T. Valkonen et al. (eds.), *Suomalaiset*. WSOY, 102–106.



Photo 10.1 Dramatic contrast of forest and large building blocks in Pihlajamäki, Finland, 1959–1965 (Photograph: Volker von Bonin 1965, Helsinki City Museum)

the suburban high-rise flat had replaced the wooden rural house as the typical Finnish home.⁶ The modes and experiences of habitation and urban planning, urban structure, and the very notion of urbanity changed fundamentally (Photo 10.1).

Our chapter explores new suburbs built in the 1960s and the 1970s in the Helsinki region as lived environments, where built and unbuilt surroundings, planning visions, suburban imagery, and residents come together. With a particular focus on the early years of these suburbs, we concentrate on four socio-spatial locations that were central both in recalled and material environments: homes, yards, neighborhood services, and natural surroundings. How did suburbanites, their life situations and expectations, built suburbs and planning visions meet in the 1960s and 1970s? How did the meanings of suburban environments take shape in these encounters? How did the materialized suburban environments in turn create understandings and experiences of the welfare environment? Our discussion builds on a dialogic analysis of suburbanites' written

⁶ Mäkiö, E. (1994). *Kerrostalot 1960–1975*. Rakennustietosäätiö, 14–15.

memoirs, visual and textual sources, and the on-site inspection of suburbs. The cross-exposure of different perspectives allows us to recognize the plurality and inconsistencies of lived, material, and envisioned suburbs.⁷ Instead of the dichotomy between planners as the active creators of the built environment and the residents as the passive users and experiencers of the finished environment, we suggest that the formation of suburban environments and their meanings was a complex process.

SUBURBS REVISITED

Suburbs, symbolic landscapes of modern, urban Finland, have represented both the future-oriented optimism of rising material welfare and the pessimism of the emptying countryside and post-welfare disappointment.⁸ Until the late 1960s, suburbs embodied the contemporary architectural and social ideals of a new kind of healthy, child-friendly living close to nature in contrast to the densely built city centers. Then both professional and public views on suburbs changed abruptly and condemned the mass-produced suburbs as aesthetic and social failures. Passionate criticism coincided with the most intense period of suburban construction.⁹ The views of suburbs as aesthetically monotonous concrete deserts, “similar despite their locations,”¹⁰ abound in research and the media, portraying suburbanites as mere victims of their passivating environment. However, the suburbanites’ written memoirs collected since the 1990s provide a radically different perspective—at the same time more positive, heterogeneous, and rough—highlighting the so far unrecognized qualities of the suburban environments.

There is no independent existence of the suburbs—or any built environment—without the dwellers inhabiting it. Suburbanites not only experienced but also shaped suburban environments and their meanings through their embodied activities and perceptions. They brought in their

⁷ Lefebvre, H. (1974). *La production de l'espace*. Anthropos, 48–49.

⁸ Miettunen, K.-M. (2009). *Menneisyys ja historiakuva: Suomalainen kuusikymmentäluku muistelijoiden rakentamana ajanjaksona*. SKS, 224–226.

⁹ Roivainen, I. (1999). *Sokeripala metsän keskellä: Lähiö sanomalehden konstruktiona*. Helsingin kaupungin tietokeskus, 60; Saarikangas, K. (2014a). Sandboxes and heavenly dwellings: Gender, agency, and modernity in lived suburban spaces in the Helsinki metropolitan area in the 1950s and 1960s. *Home Cultures* 11(1), 38.

¹⁰ Kervanto Nevanlinna, A. (2005). *Näköaloja kadunkulmalta*. SKS, 23

housing histories and negotiated with the new environment.¹¹ Reciprocally, a built environment is never a mere neutral backdrop of habitation but engenders meanings as an actant itself.¹² Spatial arrangements generate, support, or interfere with socio-spatial practices and provide “pathways for habits.”¹³ More precisely, the lived suburban environments only appeared in those processes of intra-action.¹⁴

A unique body of written memoirs about suburban life in the Helsinki region was collected in writing competitions between 1995 and 2017. It allows us to approach—if not reach—the experiential dimensions of the suburbs. About 200 contributors from different social groups recalled how they lived in the suburbs of the 1960s and 1970s during those decades.¹⁵ The majority of contributors returned to the formative years of their lives. More than half recalled their childhood and youth, while the rest, with a few exceptions, recalled their lives as young mothers or fathers. Three quarters of the authors were women.

A new type of urban space lives and breathes in the memoirs. Contributors revisited their personal places of memory, moving from one affective location to another in the reciprocal relationship between space, sensations, and memory—a characteristic feature of memorial narration.¹⁶ The process of writing re-created suburban environments and evoked affective, corporeal place and sense-memories, and made deeply personal experiences shared by suburban generations. The suburban landscapes unfolded into a palimpsest of invisible, already vanished features of “what

¹¹ de Certeau, M. (1980). *L'invention du quotidien 1. arts de faire*. Gallimard, folio essais, 139–142.

¹² Foucault, M. (1974). *Surveiller et punir : Naissance de la prison*. Gallimard, 174; Latour, B. (2007). *Reassembling the Social*. Oxford UP, 32–33.

¹³ Young, I. M. (1997). *Intersecting voices: Dilemmas of gender, political philosophy, and policy*. Princeton UP, 150.

¹⁴ Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Duke UP, 175–178.

¹⁵ The largest collection, “Life in the Suburbs” by *Helsingin Sanomat* in 1995–1996, covered the entire Helsinki region: 168 of 211 entrants depict life in the 35 suburbs of the 1960s and 1970s during those decades. “Story of Kontula” (*Kontulan tarina*) in 2000 (Archives of the Finnish Literature Society, SKS, KRA Kontula 2000) concentrated on the biggest Finnish suburb of the 1960s. Nineteen of the 32 entrants depict the 1960s and 1970s. “Suburban childhood” (*Lapsuus lähiöissä*) in 2017 covered the whole of Finland (SKS, KRA Lähiö 2017). Sixteen of the 72 entrants depict the Helsinki region’s suburbs in the 1960s and 1970s.

¹⁶ Casey E. S. (1987). *Remembering: A phenomenological study*. Indiana UP, 186–187; Assmann, A. (2011). *Cultural memory and Western civilization: Functions, media, archives*. Cambridge UP, 8.

used to be there.”¹⁷ The accounts often follow the same pattern, starting with the relocation to a new suburb and moving to particular sites and details.

Contributors wrote out their memories in the context of a wider web of cultural meanings and suburban meta-narratives, constructing and reconstructing their own historical pasts. Suburban visions, construction, reputation, and their changes are the frames through which suburbanites of different ages recalled suburban life. They offered counter-narratives from “real people” who lived in the suburbs to those experts who “have not even stepped” in the criticized suburbs, thus challenging their negative reputation.¹⁸ Despite the strikingly positive overall tone, the memoirs do not represent suburbs as unambiguously happy places but portray their drawbacks and rough sides, too. As our chapter will show, suburbs emerged as stratified, multi-sensory environments quintessentially formed in the reciprocity of modern architecture, wider built and unbuilt surroundings, and inhabitants.

MATERIAL AND PLANNED SUBURBAN WELFARE

New residential areas are being created one suburb at a time. A deserted forest island is zoned, machines and builders rush against it and in a couple of years the former forest will be home to thousands of citizens.¹⁹

Suburbanization was both an international and local phenomenon occurring simultaneously in Europe and the United States.²⁰ In Europe, the reconstruction effort created a need for a thorough redesign of the physical urban fabric. The pursuit of improving people’s lives through the improvement of their immediate living environment brought housing to the center of international architectural modernism. A decentralized urban structure and neighborhood units measured by walking distance between homes and schools were rapidly adopted as the key principles for urban

¹⁷ de Certeau (1984), 108; Massey, D. (2005). *For Space*. Sage, 124.

¹⁸ An author who moved from the city center to Jakomäki at the age of six in 1969. HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 107.

¹⁹ Lehtisalo, J. (1963, April 26). Helsinki hiipii sivuun. *Uusi Kuvallehti*, 13.

²⁰ Wakeman, R. (2016). *Practicing utopia: An intellectual history of the new town movement*. The University of Chicago Press, 1–3; Söderqvist, E. (2008). *Att gestalta välfärd: Från ide till byggd miljö*. Forskningsrådet Formas, 20.

planning.²¹ The genealogy of Finnish suburbs synthesized various international planning aspirations for healthy urban living: early twentieth-century Anglo-Saxon garden cities, hygienic minimal dwellings, and the spatial differentiation of inter-war German *Siedlungen*, Le Corbusier's "towers in the park," US socially and spatially defined neighborhood units (C. A. Perry), traffic separation (Radburn), and greenbelts (Greenbelt). The architectural critic Lewis Mumford's ideals of harmonious, green neighborhoods and British *New Towns* outlined in renowned London plans (1943, 1944, P. Abercrombie) were instrumental in bringing these ideas together.²² Suburban theories and Mumfordian ideals translated into a built landscape particularly strongly in Sweden and Finland.²³ The general plans of Stockholm (1944–1952) and Helsinki (1953–1960) and its regions ("Ameba" plan 1959–1961/1968) further developed these ideals. While these plans were not confirmed officially, their visions guided land use planning and the implementation of suburban principles until the early 1970s.

Tapiola (Espoo), established in 1951, was the most ambitious and unique Finnish suburban utopia materializing the views of the most ardent Finnish advocates of suburban ideology—the democratic, nature-rich miniature society by housing reformer Heikki von Hertzen and topographic planning principles emphasizing the harmony of nature and architecture by architect Otto-I. Meurman.²⁴ Together with Stevenage *New Town* in Britain (1946–) and Vällingby (1954–) in Stockholm (Sweden), it became the international poster child of modern urban planning and a showcase of modern Finland. Its fame turned the suburban ideology into a national ideology (Photo 10.2).²⁵

Following the local adaption of new international visions, Finnish suburbs typically combined sparsely arranged medium and high-rise apartment buildings in forestry landscapes, dubbed forest suburbs. The construction of Helsinki region suburbs can be roughly divided into three intermingling phases. In the intimate forest suburbs of the 1950s, roads

²¹ Wakeman (2016), 51–52.

²² Mumford, L. (1938). *The Culture of Cities*; Saarikangas, K. (2002). *Asunnon muodonmuutoksia. Puhtauden estetiikka ja sukupuoli modernissa arkkitehtuurissa*. SKS, 391–394; Wakeman (2016), 79–82.

²³ Söderqvist (2008), 41.

²⁴ von Hertzen, H. (1946). *Koti vaiko kasarmi lapsillemme*. WSOY; Meurman, O-I. (1947) *Asemakaavaoppi*. WSOY.

²⁵ Saarikangas (2002), 398–400.



Photo 10.2 Landscape designers reshaped the old meadow into Tapiola's distinctive and popular open green heart (*Silkkiniitty*). Housing hides in plantings and forest strips (Photograph: Teuvo Kanerva 1966, KAMU Espoo City Museum)

and the placement of buildings followed the shapes of the terrain, with planted and wild nature overlapping seamlessly. In the 1960s, housing production industrialized rapidly and the scale grew monumentally. The forest suburbs of the 1960s continued the sparse topographic layout and the porous continuum of private, semi-public, and public spaces of the 1950s. The repetitive aesthetics favored architectural unity, simplicity, and an industrial outlook. Instead of hiding buildings in nature, big white buildings were contrasted with nature considered original. The following denser compact cities emphasized social encounters instead of nature, relying on the modular grid structure and the ideal of rebuilt,

human-made nature.²⁶ Both forestry-rich environment and reinterpreted grid formula were distinctive features of Finnish mass-produced suburbs. The rapid creation of 60 suburbs in pristine terrain was a new planning experience, allowing designers to realize new aesthetic ideals freely. Planners, journalists, and inhabitants shared the sense of the powerful emergence of a new living environment and growing prosperity in the future-oriented emotional climate.

Suburban development initiated national and urban housing policy, in which the state and municipalities were the key players. State-subsidized, modest-rate Arava loans (1949) were pivotal in combatting the housing shortage. They shifted the focus of housing policy from rural to urban areas for the first time and accelerated the construction of suburbs.²⁷ The long-term housing policy of the emerging welfare state saw the light in the mid-1960s with the onset of the great migration. The Housing Act (1966) that consolidated the duties of the thus far temporary Arava and the housing program (1966–1975), comparable with the Swedish Million Program (1965–1974), produced 500,000 new dwellings of an average size of 70 m².²⁸ Between the 1950s and the 1970s, Arava loans and the accompanying building regulations covered almost half of the housing construction in Helsinki.²⁹

The wellbeing of families with children and the children themselves as future citizens in a pleasant, nature-rich environment became the cornerstones of Finnish suburban planning. While nature was within walking distance even in the center of Helsinki, housing reformers condemned its cramped housing, shady blocks, and lack of proper play spaces as an unsuitable living environment. Instead, they sought to create beautiful and safe

²⁶ Saarikangas, K. (2014b). Lähiötilan kerrokset ja vyöhykkeet: Rakennukset ja ympäristö pääkaupunkiseudun 1950–1970-luvun lähiöissä. In S. Knuutilla and U. Piela (eds.), *Ympäristömytologia*. SKS, 347–351; Hautamäki, R. and Donner, Julia (2019). Representations of nature: The shift from forest town to compact city in Finland. *Bebyggelsehistorisk tidskrift* (76), 44–62; Hautamäki, R. and Donner, J. (2022). Modern living in the forest suburb: Landscape architecture of Finnish forest suburbs in the 1940s–1960s. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 104 (3), 262. Retrieved May 23, 2022, from <https://doi.org/10.1080/04353684.2021.1989320>.

²⁷ Palomäki, A. (2011). *Juoksuhaudoista jälleenrakennukseen*. Tampere UP, 13–23, 413–425.

²⁸ Mäenpää, J. (1968). *Asuntopolitiikkamme ja sen tavoitteet*. Tammi, 50; Juntto, A. (1990). *Asuntokysymys Suomessa: Topeliuksesta tulopolitiikkaan*. Asuntohallitus, 208, 261–270, 408; Hård, M. (2010). The good apartment: The social (democratic) construction of Swedish homes. *Home Cultures* 7(2), 120.

²⁹ Vihavainen and Kuparinen (2006), 16–17.

neighborhoods nurturing the holistic wellbeing of the residents with their generous services and green spaces for healthy outdoor activities, echoing the housing reform discussions about the “curative dwelling” and “curable city” that had been ongoing since the late nineteenth century.³⁰ Suburban protagonists hoped that a new democratic generation would grow up in the village-like neighborhood of the new suburbs in contrast to anonymous masses of industrial cities, producing whole towns “for everyone, where the children of blue-collar workers go to school with the children of white-collar workers.”³¹ The exact meaning of wellbeing remained open, however. A new Finnish term for suburb, *asumalähiö* (literally live close by), introduced by Meurman as a translation of neighborhood unit, combined the function and the location, emphasizing closeness.³² In the 1960s, the abbreviated term *lähiö* became a general term for various spacious apartment building areas outside the city.

In the 1960s, the suburban perimeter expanded to the neighboring rural municipalities of Espoo and Vantaa (until 1972 Helsingi) within a radius of 10–20 kilometers from the center of Helsinki. In two decades, both municipalities transformed from the countryside into towns of suburban clusters. One author recalled his removal to the landscape dotted with suburbs: “Already when we looked at the residential area, we wondered why we had to go so far into the woods, when there were a lot of empty areas along the way.”³³ In the mid-1960s, the modes of constructing residential areas changed. Based on the so-called housing-area development contracts with the municipalities and banks, construction companies bought land and produced entire residential areas from scratch. Espoo and Vantaa became the largest users of such contracts in Finland given their tiny planning organizations. Moreover, private landowners owned most of the land, selling it eagerly to the construction companies.³⁴ While area development contracts gained a bad reputation, they produced

³⁰ Saarikangas (2002), 59–79; Gandy, M. (2002). *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City*. MIT Press, 4–7.

³¹ von Hertzen, H. and Spreiregen, P. D. (1971). *Building a New Town: Finland's New Garden City*. MIT Press, 1; von Hertzen, H. (1956). Tapiolan puutarhakaupungin suunnittelusta. *Arkkitehti* 1–2/1956, 1–2; Saarikangas (2002), 390; Wakeman (2016), 34.

³² Meurman, (1947), 77–79; Meurman, O.-I. (1950). *Asumasolu ja asumalähiö. Asuntopolitiikka* 1950, 6–7.

³³ HKA, LS 1995, Espoo 3. An author who moved from Kontula to Iivisniemi in 1968 as a young father.

³⁴ Maisala, P. (2008). *Espoo – oma lukunsa: Kaupunkisuunnittelun, kaupunkirakentamisen ja kaavoitushallinnon kehitys vuoteen 2000*. Espoon kaupunkisuunnittelukeskus, 66–67; Hankonen, J. (1994). *Lähiöt ja tehokkuuden yhteiskunta*. Gaudeamus, 378–395.



Photo 10.3 Kaivoksela (1961–1967) was both a first apartment building suburb in Vantaa and a pioneer suburb of area development contracts. It combined big buildings with forests and large yards divided into lawns, forest strips, and areas for parking and playing (Photograph: Lauri Leppänen 1965, Vantaa City Museum)

a wide range of residential areas from ascetic to good, down-to-earth living environments, the qualities of which are still largely unexplored and unrecognized (Photo 10.3).

Simultaneously, the aesthetic and social paradigms of suburban planning changed dramatically. Architects, social scientists, and journalists criticized the inefficient land use of forest suburbs as a social utopia. Urban designers reshaped the grid structure of old Finnish wooden towns to the efficient, large-scale suburban frame of compact cities. Welfare and society became closely linked as the focus of housing discussions shifted from citizens to society, and from unmeasurable everyday wellbeing to measurable and equal societal welfare. The features of a good living environment changed from sunshine, fresh air, and greenery to vitality, stimuli, and efficiency, while the scope of discussion broadened from the healthy outdoor life of children to the social contacts of adults.³⁵ Ideally, if not in practice, the entire terrain of compact cities was leveled, pedestrian and

³⁵ *Asuntonäyttely* 1966. Suomen rakennustaitteen museo, Asuntoreformimyhdistys, 36–37.

vehicle traffic strictly separated horizontally and vertically, housing lifted to concrete decks, and nature rebuilt. The town plan frame of Koivukylä (1968–1969) in Vantaa by a multi-professional team exemplified the change. While the ambitious plan was schematically implemented, it was highly influential as a widely used model.³⁶ Moreover, the demand for clear urban space with streets and squares separated private, semi-public, and public spaces visually instead of there being a fluid continuum in the forest suburbs. Planners believed that density in itself would support copious services and generate a vibrant social life by bringing residents, services, and working back close to each other.³⁷ The new design practices and vocabulary demonstrated the change. Teams of a new generation of designers planned larger entities than before. Mass-production required construction processes, site arrangements, and the exact location of buildings to be determined in advance, and the efforts to increase social contacts required the calculation of pedestrian collision points. More importantly, the urban design horizon expanded from town planning to the entire society.³⁸

A LEAP IN THE STANDARDS OF HOUSING

It was like arriving in heaven! We had our own apartment of 45.5 square meters, with two rooms and a kitchenette! We had a bathroom with hot water and our own balcony! There was light and splendid views from the eighth floor. And our very own turn to use the building's sauna on Fridays from 5 to 6:30 pm!³⁹

The joy of modern dwellings is tangible in the memoirs. Compared to the small, crowded apartments in the city of Helsinki, of which 70 percent had no more than one room and a kitchen, 60 percent lacked hot water, and 50 percent lacked bathrooms in the 1950s, the change was significant.⁴⁰ Extensive suburban construction provided affordable, good quality homes, and more space for a large number of people, and it turned

³⁶ *Koivukylä 1: Kaavarunkotyön perusselvitykset* (1968). Helsingin maalaiskunta; *Koivukylä 2: Kaavarunkosuunnitelma* (1969). Helsingin maalaiskunta.

³⁷ *Asunonäyttely 66* (1966), 32–33.

³⁸ *Asunonäyttely 66* (1966), 18–19; Mäenpää, J. (1968), 19.

³⁹ An author who moved to Pihlajamäki as a young mother in 1965. HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 45.

⁴⁰ Vihavainen and Kuparinen (2006), 14.

modern facilities from rarities to self-evident features in three decades. More than 200,000 well-equipped suburban dwellings were constructed in the Helsinki region between 1950 and 1980. In 1980, they housed 550,000 people, which was 75 percent of the region's population.⁴¹

The norm of the functionalist family dwelling of a separate kitchen, living room, and bedroom for the parents and children dictated the layout of apartments.⁴² The model, echoing the ideals of turn-of-the-century housing reformers, was adopted as an international (*Comission du Logement Familial*, 1957) and national goal for family dwellings as in Pekka Kuusi's *Social policy of the '60s* (1961), which directed Finnish welfare thinking.⁴³ The serial production of similar housing types and identical dwellings fitted into the need for efficient construction and the ideals of social equality. Only the size of homes and the number of bedrooms increased, from an average of 50 m² with one bedroom in the 1950s to some 60 m² with two bedrooms in the 1960s and 70 m² with three bedrooms in the 1970s, the largest apartments having four bedrooms.⁴⁴ Given the shrinking size of households, children in the 1970s were increasingly able to enjoy their own room.

Most of those who moved to the modern suburban apartments were young middle- and working-class families with children "hit by suburban fever."⁴⁵ Initially, most families moved from the apartments in the city center considered outdated and unhealthy, a process highlighted in the memoirs: "Almost all the families that I knew had moved into the building from the cramped and poorly equipped apartments of central Helsinki."⁴⁶ In the mid-1960s, new residents started to come from the countryside

⁴¹ Vihavainen and Kuparinen (2006), 7; *Espoon kaupungin tilastollinen vuosikirja 1971* (1972), 3, 23–25; *Espoon kaupungin tilastollinen vuosikirja 1977* (1978), 3–27; *Espoon kaupungin tilastollinen vuosikirja 1981* (1982), 6, 40–44; *Vantaan kaupunki* (1975). *Vantaan tilastollinen vuosikirja 1974* (1975) 15, 24–29; *Vantaan tilastollinen vuosikirja 1980*, (1981), 37–44.

⁴² Saarikangas, K. and Horelli, L. (2018). Modern home, environment, and gender: Built, planned, and lived spaces in post-war Finland. In A. Staub (ed.), *Routledge companion to modernity, space and gender*. Routledge, (2018), 51–55.

⁴³ Kuusi, P. (1961). *60-luvun sosiaalipolitiikka*. WSOY, 136–137, 147–150, 171; Juntto (1990), 243.

⁴⁴ Juntto (1990), 233; Vihavainen and Kuparinen (2006), 11.

⁴⁵ An author who moved from the city center to Hakunila at the age of nine in 1972. HKA, LS 1995, Vantaa 51.

⁴⁶ An author who moved from the city center to Pihlajamäki at the age of three in 1962. HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 46.

and other suburbs.⁴⁷ For them the experience of living in a flat itself was new. Sounds and smells brought neighbors into the home. “I was frightened by the sounds behind the walls. Bumps, dragging, muttering. Somebody walked above. A door opened on the staircase. The balcony was frightening.”⁴⁸

The ownership of a new suburban home was not self-evident, but marked a step ahead in life. Despite intense construction, there was not enough housing for everyone, and loan conditions were strict. As modern representatives of romanticized peasant virtues, contributors achieved suburban homes through hard work, self-denial, and steady saving: “By eating soup, my mother and father saved for a state-subsidized Arava home in Kontula. The studio changed into a three-room apartment.”⁴⁹ Although residents often selected the suburb randomly based on where housing was available, most of them settled down in their new neighborhood (Photo 10.4).

Modern amenities had a radical impact on daily life and were most tangibly lived in the kitchens and bathrooms. Young mothers in particular praised the pleasures of piped water and practical kitchens with gas or electric ranges as “a dream come true.” Refrigerators, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, and other domestic appliances became widespread during the 1960s. Well-equipped homes saved labor, set new standards for clean homes, and created new everyday practices.⁵⁰ Those who moved into the suburbs as children rejoiced at the bathrooms to the degree that they are called the “bathtub generation.”⁵¹ “For us children the bathtub was the best thing of all. We hadn’t had one previously. There were outright fights to decide who would be the first to take a bath, and I think we already took baths on the first day.”⁵²

⁴⁷ Pulma, P. (2000). Kasvun katveessa. *Helsingin historia vuodesta 1945 2*, Helsingin kaupunki, 123–129.

⁴⁸ An author who moved from a wooden house to Pihlajamäki apartment at the age of eight in 1965. HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 41.

⁴⁹ An author who moved from the city center to Kontula at the age of five in 1965. HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 72.

⁵⁰ Saarikangas (2014a), 43–48.

⁵¹ Kesänen, J. (2002). *Siilitien tarinat*. SKS, 12–13.

⁵² An author who moved from the city center to Kontula at the age of 11 in 1966. SKS, KRA, Kontula 2000, 135.



Photo 10.4 Residents moving to Karakallio (Espoo) in December 1965. Well-designed, spacious and practical suburban dwellings democratized housing (Photograph: U. A. Saarinen, The Labour Archives)

The new home was a key motive for moving to the suburbs. However, contributors wrote more about suburban outdoors as homes stretched beyond their physical borders into the yards and nearby nature.

SOCIO-SPATIAL SUBURBAN HUBS

The best thing, however, is that we Kontula people grew up here with the settlement. We saw how this suburb was built up almost out of the blue, and each new building and service point was like a personal gift.⁵³

⁵³ An author who moved from Lauttasaari to Kontula as a young mother in 1965. HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 67.

The first inhabitants moved to the suburbs while they were still under construction. The suburban construction was not just about housing, but about creating an entire living environment. The works took years, services and roads were poor, the terrain was milled, and buses ran rarely. The landscape was changing constantly. Nearby forests and fields gave way as new buildings sprouted before the residents' eyes. Suburban services were designed to support their main function, habitation, and the daily lives of families with children—household care, nurture, education, and outdoor recreation—whereas polluting industry was located outside the suburbs. The range and location of services embodied the gendered and family-centered approach of suburban planning: The more services were needed, the closer they ought to be to homes (Photo 10.5).

A pioneering spirit and a sense of relief when services gradually improved mark the memoirs. Contributors negotiated amid the incompleteness: "We felt like settlers. The environment and services were still incomplete, but I don't remember it ever bothering us. We adjusted our lives according to that. This was indeed only an interim phase."⁵⁴ The most important services were shopping centers, ground-floor stores, schools, kindergartens, churches, playgrounds, sports fields, and parks. Their range varied hugely. Ground-floor stores, common in the early 1960s, usually opened first. Shop, bank, and library buses provided provisional services; schools and churches operated in temporary barracks. The few public buildings were stretched for several purposes. Schools, shopping centers, and cellars offered space for libraries, sports, cinema, parish work, and gatherings, and vice versa, kindergartens, hobbies, and cinemas operated in new kinds of multipurpose churches.⁵⁵ In the 1970s, new welfare policies started to materialize in buildings for municipal services, such as libraries, swimming pools, and day and health care centers.

As important suburban landmarks, public buildings created local suburban identity and pride.⁵⁶ Shopping centers, a new suburban building type, rapidly emerged as the spatial, social, and emotive hearts of suburbs. They were key spaces for the suburban experience of the growing material welfare and consumer culture. With their atrium yards, large display

⁵⁴ An author who moved from the city center to Kontula in 1965 as a young mother. HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 69.

⁵⁵ Ortiz-Nieminen, O. (2021). *Kaikenlaiselle toiminnalle tilaa riittää, kaikenlaisille seurakuntalaisille paikkoja on*. Helsingin yliopisto, 329–334, 363–364.

⁵⁶ Hayden, D. (1995). *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. MIT Press, 11.



Photo 10.5 Iivisniemi suburb rising in the forest in 1967 (Photographer unknown, KAMU Espoo City Museum)

windows shining in the darkened evenings, and new self-service stores, they represented modern life and the freedom of choice (Photo 10.6).

However, everyday life was more complex than the designers had envisioned. Coping with limited services required daily effort and creativity. During the 1960s, only in the most remote suburbs shops were allowed to remain open until 6 pm, supporting gendered domestic practices. One author, who moved away from the abundant services of the city center to Puotila in 1961, recalled:

Even going to the store took a lot of time with the kids. The mothers usually had to take care of that too, as the shops were only open until five in the afternoon and the fathers did not come home until about five or six.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 33.



Photo 10.6 The shopping center of Kontula by architect Aili Laurila-Tandefelt (1967) was located at the mathematical center of the suburb, easily accessible by foot and car. The lively suburban heart was advertised as the largest in the Nordic countries (Photograph: Eeva Rista 1970, Helsinki City Museum)

From the mid-1960s, shopping centers grew in size and started to move from the hearts to the outskirts of suburbs, and from the intersection of daily pedestrian routes close to busy entrance roads. As key shapers of the community structure, central stores favored large shopping centers as opposed to ground-floor stores, also considered unsuitable for prefabricated building frames.⁵⁸ The great visions of street life along the bustling pedestrian promenades of compact cities were thus watered down. Simultaneously, women's increased employment, the five-day working week, growing economic welfare, and the number of cars transformed socio-spatial practices and created new routines. Saturday became the maintenance day of households and shopping day for bigger weekly supplies, and the store could be even further away when accessed by car.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Hankonen (1994), 252–254.

⁵⁹ Lehtonen, T.-K. (1999). *Rahan vallassa*. Tutkijaliitto, 54–56.

Against the common view, suburbs did not lack working places completely. Many women worked from home on a part-time basis in book-keeping, cleaning, or childcare—work that the statistics do not reflect well.⁶⁰ In addition, construction, schools, shopping centers, churches, and traffic brought work into the suburbs. The industrial areas between the suburbs, in turn, were completed only years after the housing. Hence, few suburbanites found work near their home.

Day care was an acute problem until the 1990s. The Day Care Act (1973) required municipalities to provide day care facilities, but their construction proceeded slowly. One author, who moved to Pihlajamäki in 1965 as a young mother, recalled the tight arrangement:

When our younger child was 18 months old, I was offered the opportunity to get an evening job as a telex writer. My husband got permission to leave home half an hour earlier from work. We switched childcare shifts on the fly. Often I was already in the yard ready to leave when he came.⁶¹

Children would spend their days and time after school by themselves “with a key around their necks” before parents returned home from work, and they would even start school early:

I was apparently forced to go to school at the age of six. The previous year, the day care had been arranged so that after longing (alone) at home in the morning, I went to lunch with the upstairs neighbor and waited until the end of the afternoon for my sister to arrive from school.⁶²

Children and adults experienced the incomplete environment differently. Children experienced suburbs as the centers of life, “their own worlds, with joys and sorrows.”⁶³ Everything they needed was close by. They lived with the lack of services in the crowded schools that often operated in temporary barracks and in shifts, and they ate lunch at their school desks. One author, who moved from the city center to Kannelmäki in her early teens in 1960, contrasted her mother’s experience with her own:

⁶⁰ Saarikangas (2014a), 57.

⁶¹ HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 45.

⁶² An author who moved to Karakallio in 1968 at the age of five. HKA, LS 1995, Espoo 7.

⁶³ An author who moved from the city center to Puotinharju at the age of nine in 1963. SKS, KRA 2017, Lähiö 37.

For my mother, the new suburb was like a penal colony. Shops were far away, one always had to take a bus, and the bus stops too were far away. Instead, for me a new life began! [...] On the first day, there was immediately a herd of children asking me out. And what playgrounds were here. The fields of Malminkartano with cows and pigs, with good cross-country ski terrain in winter, and lots of friends.⁶⁴

While her mother felt isolated, the author above enjoyed the yard life and an abundance of friends.

ABUNDANT YARD LIFE

As a child, I never wanted to leave our yard. There was everything one could want: rocks, trees, bushes, crocuses, sandboxes, swings, playhouses, slides and 'the greens.' 'The greens' were a climbing frame (...) Yes, I noticed that our house was not necessarily the most beautiful possible, and building a nine-story house on a high hill was not the best solution for the landscape, but the views for us were stunning. Soukka, our building and its yard, still mean for me my childhood home with all the longing memories. And even now I like gravel more than a lawn.⁶⁵

For children, the yard was important—perhaps the single most important—place of the suburb. In the memoirs, yards appeared as children's paradises and multi-sensory homelike hearts from which to explore and expand the territory. "One never had to be alone. Every time one went to the yard, a pal saw it from the window and came out."⁶⁶ The authors highlighted affectively the sounds, smells, atmospheres, and outdoor mobility in yards and the wider natural surroundings. As several studies on childhood's spatial experiences and reminiscences have pointed out, the multi-sensory perception of the environment and the emergence of place and sense-memories are markedly powerful in childhood, and vice versa, the corporeal and sensory spatial childhood memories are sensitive to unfold.⁶⁷

Young families with children found company among others in a similar life situation. Children provided a bond between adults: "At the shop, my

⁶⁴ HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 29.

⁶⁵ An author who grew up in the Soukka in the 1970s. HKA, LS 1995, Espoo 38.

⁶⁶ An author who was born in Puotinharju in 1966. HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 52.

⁶⁷ Edensor, T. (2005). *Industrial ruins: Space, aesthetics and materiality*. Berg, 144–145; Halldén, G. (2009). Barndomsminnen och naturminnen. In G. Halldén (ed.), *Naturen som symbol för den goda barndomen*. Carlsson Bokförlag, 156.

mother got to know people, who were always the mothers or fathers of someone or other.”⁶⁸ Those who were young mothers depict yards and sandboxes as the locations for informal encounters, neighborliness, and friendship. One author, who moved to Pihlajamäki as a young mother in 1963, wrote: “Mothers socialized with each other next to the sandboxes. There was a good spirit of mutual assistance among the mothers—one could take turns and leave one’s children in someone else’s care if there were things to do in the city.”⁶⁹

In suburban criticism, however, the sandbox became a key symbol of idle suburban housewives. While suburban planning was based on a narrow, heavily gendered view of domesticity, it is obvious that suburban criticism disregarded the agency and social networks of mothers.⁷⁰ The critics failed to recognize the positive aspects of women’s socializing, labeling it “gossiping” around the sandbox.⁷¹ The critics furthermore considered suburbs themselves as less valued, passive, reproductive, and feminine spaces compared to the cities, which were valued as active, productive, and masculine.⁷²

The voices of children created a distinctive suburban soundscape. For children in the yard, mothers often figured in the background. They could be called “to the window,” from where they “dropped dolls and teddy bears and small mats, bananas, cups, and bowls, and cried out advice, warnings, and instructions.”⁷³ Spatial arrangements and practices between the home and yard reinforced and shaped the connection between children, mothers, and the suburban environment envisioned by architects. Balconies and windows often overlooked the yard where small children played, allowing adults—usually mothers—to keep an eye on what was happening from inside the apartment. They joined the indoors and the outdoors, making the home and yard extensions of each other (Photo 10.7). However, children also found the wild yard life scary: “The abundance of children in Kontula was almost frightening. Children flew

⁶⁸ HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 41.

⁶⁹ HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 39.

⁷⁰ Jokinen, E. (1996). *Väsynyt äiti*. Gaudeamus, 183.

⁷¹ Kortteinen, M. (1982). *Lähiö: tutkimus elämäntapojen muutoksesta*. Helsinki, 79–80.

⁷² Saarikangas (2014a), 51–55.

⁷³ An author who moved from nearby Herttoniemi to Vuosaari as a young mother in 1965. HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 98.



Photo 10.7 A generously furnished yard in Kivenlahti, Espoo. The housing surrounds the yards in a semi-closed re-interpreted grid layout, rebuilt and original nature exist side by side, and the intimate space of home and social life in the yards are closely connected (Photograph: Teuvo Kanerva 1975–1980, KAMU Espoo City Museum)

everywhere, everyone had just moved and the place in the circle of friends had to be fought for. My little brother did not dare to go out at all.”⁷⁴

Yard equipment was elementary in marking open spaces as yards. Swings, sandboxes, and climbing frames together with laundry lines, carpet-beating racks, and perhaps benches were their typical equipment. Inhabitants sometimes furnished the somewhat ascetic yards with play and sports equipment, and in the winter froze ice rinks on the yards. Inhabitants perceived the open spaces between the buildings as yards with overlapping zones of entrances, parking lots, and maintenance and play areas. The

⁷⁴ An author who moved from the city center to Kontula at the age of seven in 1966. HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 75.

children viewed them all as playgrounds. The negotiated and experiential boundaries of yards did not follow the official plot boundaries:

Territories were firm from the beginning. Who cared about strict plot boundaries? Our building included fine rocky hills and boulders and were out of bounds to the children of the neighboring building. Using others' swings or cutting across the plot was done at your own risk.⁷⁵

The physical metamorphosis of the yard was perhaps the clearest indication of how suburban planning and living restructured urban space. In the perimeter blocks of the city center, streets and buildings surrounded the courtyards, whereas in the forest suburbs yards surrounded buildings. Even if in the compact cities buildings again surrounded yards, big yards were only semi-closed and spatially and experientially closer to the yards of open forest suburbs than those of the city center.

UNPLANNED AND PLANNED OUTDOORS

The summer suburb was printed on my memory in some scenes, atmospheres, and scents. Heat and dust! Dirty, sweating boys playing football. The urban scent of wet asphalt after the rain, when we got back from the countryside. Cellars, doorways, flat roofs, staircases, parking lots, concrete. But also parks, lawns and thick forest, which was not yet turned into park, and which we at the age of seven called rainforest. Incomplete buildings and a fascinating amount of building materials occupy a central place in my childhood imagery. [...] The smell of timber and cement were telling about thrilling abundance. There was always something new to discover.⁷⁶

For children, playing almost always took place outside and did not stay within the assigned boundaries of yards or official playgrounds. Children did not perceive their environment as an abstract, but through doing it, by climbing, crawling, running, listening, smelling, and tasting.⁷⁷ They took the ambiguous spaces between the buildings, the cliffs, forests, and wastelands in the fringes of habitation as fascinating hideouts and adventure spots. If the open yards formed a kind of panopticon, the woods and

⁷⁵ HKA, LS 1995, Espoo 7.

⁷⁶ HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki, 79. An author who moved to Kontula in the mid-1960s at the age of six.

⁷⁷ Halldén (2009), 155–156.

wastelands provided a shelter away from the watchful eye of the adults. What the forest meant to the children could be a small strip near the home with trees, shrubs, and hiding places. It was not overly maintained, allowing branches to be cut and huts to be built. The spatial and experiential characteristic of both forest suburbs and compact cities made it possible to move in large areas without crossing busy streets, which together with cultural conventions encouraged children to move around on their own (Photo 10.8).⁷⁸

Living close to nature was the *leitmotiv* of post-war suburban planning. Suburban protagonists continued the early twentieth-century views of nature as a place for a good childhood.⁷⁹ However, the planning of the suburban environment was less regulated than that of the dwellings, despite the new emphasis on planned recreation facilities for all as part of the new welfare ideal.⁸⁰ The pattern of suburban outdoors—yards, green areas, play, and sports grounds—echoed the visions of suburban protagonists, but the degree of their design varied.⁸¹

To the disappointment of suburban visionaries, the first detailed national norms on the suburban outdoors concerned the amount of parking spaces (1959) instead of children's play areas.⁸² It was not until 1973 that the Ministry of the Interior published national standards for the size, amount, equipment, and proximity to dwellings of three types of safe and healthy play spaces in yards, suburban blocks, and neighborhoods.⁸³ The Day Care Act (1973) recommended also the reinforcing of the activities of existing municipal and supervised playgrounds to complement day care services. Official play spaces were adult-designed with attention paid to children's scale and their supposed needs and fitted with basic equipment. In the 1970s, the increased planning regulations and the concomitant breakthrough of the play equipment industry began to increase the range

⁷⁸ Moll V. and Kuusi, H. (2021). From city streets to suburban woodlands: The urban planning debate on children's needs, and childhood reminiscences, of 1940s–1970s Helsinki. *Urban History* 48(1), 137.

⁷⁹ Sandell, K. and Sörlin, S. (2008). Naturen som ungdomsfostrare. In S. Sörlin (ed.), *Friluftshistoria*. Carlsson Bokförlag, 27–46.

⁸⁰ Meurman (1947), 361.

⁸¹ Hautamäki and Donner (2019), 16–18; Hautamäki and Donner (2022), 264–265.

⁸² *Rakennusasetus* 266/1959, §56; Meurman, O.-I. (1960). Asemakaavallinen tilanteemme. *Arkkitehti* 4–5/1960, 81–82.

⁸³ *Asetus rakennusasetuksen muuttamisesta* 791/1973; *Leikkialueiden suunnittelu* (1974). Sisäasiainministeriö. Kaavoitus- ja rakennusosasto.



Photo 10.8 The grid pattern of Olari compact city (1968–1973) was adapted to the steep slope in a textbook-like manner. The hierarchic traffic separation supported the children’s wide radius of motion (Photograph: Volker von Bonin 1980, Finnish Heritage Agency)

of playground equipment.⁸⁴ Suburban playgrounds were simultaneously both lived and planned environments and social services with supervised and unsupervised activities. In the suburban landscapes, generously equipped playgrounds became both more visible and more demarcated. Systematic construction and the regulation of playgrounds with increased indoor spaces contributed to the institutionalization of childhood.

⁸⁴ Moll, V. and Jouhki, E. (2021). Leikin paikka: Rakennettujen leikkiympäristöjen kehitys 1970-luvun Helsingissä. *Yhdyskuntasuunnittelu* 59(1), 16–20.

Together with kindergartens and schools, they acted as intermediate domains between homes and society.

Residents of different ages used and gave different meanings to the same suburban environment, but all age groups highlighted the significance of natural surroundings. Those who relocated to the suburbs as teenagers wrote the most negative recollections. One author born in Vuosaari in 1966 summarized the experiences of many: "Life in the suburbs became miserable during adolescence. There was not much organized activity for the youth."⁸⁵ For teenagers, forests and wastelands were often the only places of their own to socialize with each other. They felt that apart from sports grounds, the designers had forgotten them and journalists treated them as a nuisance. Designers regarded children and youth as a unified group, paying most attention to children. School took up the teenagers' time. Outside schools, hobbies relied on parent-volunteering and the rare indoor facilities of parishes to engage in independent and guided hobbies. The first municipal youth houses opened in Haukilahti in 1966. Consequently, teenagers took over the cellars, shopping centers, kiosks, few cinemas, and cafes. The conceptualization and experiences of youth as a separate age changed significantly during the 1950s and 1960s, when suburban children became teenagers. Hanging out in the city center attracted teenagers, for whom the world opened up outside the suburbs.⁸⁶

Despite the overflowing focus on nature by architects, town planners, garden designers, and landscape architects, large areas in yards, between buildings, and in the fringes of habitation were left as they were as untamed wildscapes. Yet undefined natural surroundings and naturecultures beyond the domain of active management repeatedly emerge in the memoirs.

Nature was omnipresent in the lived suburban environments, from the views from windows and small details to scents, sounds, and the overall setting. The interplay between buildings, the trimmed lawns, hedges, rose bushes, and untreated forestry-rich nature brought aesthetic diversity to the environment and divided it experientially into parallel and overlapping zones.⁸⁷ Large buildings often stood in contrast to large plots of undefined land. Hence, green as much as white was the prominent and experiential color of modern suburban life. Designers staged the entire neighborhood

⁸⁵ HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 87. An author born in Vuosaari in 1966.

⁸⁶ Pulma (2000), 249–269.

⁸⁷ Kummala, P. (2016). *Tämä ei ole luontoa! Helsingin yliopisto*, 153–158.

of forest suburbs as an open forest park for recreation, but also in the compact cities nature flowed between buildings and ruled in the fringes of habitation.

Contributors perceived forests and wastelands as the reverse of architecture. As undefined areas beyond the designers' reach, they broke down the architectural uniformity and provided ambiguous spaces to make one's own.⁸⁸ An author who grew up in Pihlajamäki in the 1960s contrasted the ascetic modern architecture with the surrounding forest:

This forest, which is now the Pihlajisto suburb, is one of the most important places in my childhood memories. It had endlessly exciting places where we could play. For us urban children, the forest meant a connection with nature, in contrast to the desert of asphalt and concrete on the other side of the building.⁸⁹

Suburbanites felt at home in the midst of the woods (Photo 10.9). Having nature close by meant having space for secrets, soothing, and socializing. Nature had a different order and pace than the industrially built environment. As new buildings stood still and patinated slowly, nature brought temporality and layers to the new, comprehensively planned, and industrial environment. Old vegetation connected inhabitants with the past of the areas and changed according to the weather and seasons. Nature made it easier to settle into the new neighborhood. Those moving from the center of Helsinki perceived the nature-rich suburbs as a contrast with a city "almost devoid of all original nature,"⁹⁰ whereas those relocating from the countryside emphasized the similarity between the suburban and rural milieus: "The relocation to Helsinki would hardly have been permanent for me if my apartment had not been so close to nature."⁹¹ Moreover, nature compensated for the lack of services and the unfinishedness of the environment. One author who moved from the city center to Kontula in 1966 begins her memoirs with the wonders of the new home, soon moving on to the environment:

⁸⁸ Newman, A. (2015). *Landscape of discontent: Urban sustainability in immigrant Paris*. University of Minnesota Press, 78–83.

⁸⁹ HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 44.

⁹⁰ An author who relocated as a student from the city center to Matinkylä in 1971. HKA, LS 1995, Espoo 31.

⁹¹ An author who moved as a young father from eastern Finland to Kontula in 1965. SKS, KRA. Kontula 2000, 56.



Photo 10.9 Rowing boys in Vuosaari, August 1965. Inhabitants bent the entire hybrid suburban setting for their various activities and recreation (Photograph: Yrjö Lintunen, People's Archives)

There was still chaos in the yard because other buildings were still under construction. The nearest shop was in Myllypuro (the neighboring suburb). But what about those! We had a FOREST. Awesome cliffs from which you could go sledding or cross-country skiing. Forest sounds, nightingale, blackbird, songbird.⁹²

The undefined natural surroundings created variety and possibilities for the agency of the inhabitants. Enacting with nature by evening walks, jogging, walking the dog, picking berries, sitting on the sun-heated rocks and

⁹² HKA, LS 1995, Helsinki 80.

lawns, suburbanites took over their environment as common lands without owning it.⁹³ The amenity use of the environment, suburban access rights, leaves distinct traces in it, but intervenes more subtly than deliberate modification through design, construction, and cultivation. The suburban environments were therefore essentially lived and their meanings shaped by the encounters of inhabitants, the built and unbuilt, the homes and nature, and the constant moving back and forth between them.

CONCLUSION

Suburbs were at the core of welfare thinking in the 1960s and 1970s. Above all, they were people's homes: mental and emotive landscapes where the urban expansion and the formation of the welfare society were lived. Yet planners and inhabitants viewed suburban environments from different perspectives. Planners approached suburbs as the objects of design that could promote the wellbeing of inhabitants, emphasizing parallel and alternating nature, neighborliness, and vibrant urban life.

Suburbanites lived the suburban environments in daily practices and doing, atmospheres and perceptions. By bringing up the qualities they valued in their new environment, they wrote about wellbeing indirectly. The memoirs refer also to the less articulated dimensions of suburban wellbeing that emerged in the distracted perceptions and embodied enactments between suburbanites and the suburbs and were attached to the atmospheres of the multi-sensory suburban environments. Suburbanites widely shared the planners' views of the natural suburban surrounding as a best possible living place for families with children. For the majority of the first-generation suburbanites, the relocation meant that life was moving toward the better, and only a few shared the views of problem-oriented discourse of suburban nowhere.

The built and designed environment was just a strip of lived suburbanity, and its recalled good environment. The myriad combinations of modern architecture, more or less developed green areas, playgrounds, parking lots, forests, and wastelands in-between and on the fringes of habitation, old fields, farmsteads, abandoned houses, and empty plots became a distinctive feature of new suburbs. This kind of hybrid environment of artificial and natural shaped the mental landscapes of the suburban generation

⁹³ Asikainen, E. (2014). *Luontopolitiikka lähiössä: Lähiöluonnon muotoutuminen Tampereen Hervannassa ja Vuoreksessa*. Tampereen yliopisto, 22–23, 43.

and created experiential and environmental diversity: a plethora of suburban localities.

Contributors from both forest suburbs and compact cities valued natural surroundings above all and beyond what the designers intended. The closeness to nature sought by planners and appreciated by the inhabitants connected different suburbs. The “planned unplanned” dimensions of suburban environments—the co-existence of the built and natural environment—became the most important feature of experienced suburban welfare. It might be that nature was what the environment at its best offered. Mediated and unmediated nature softened the unfinishedness of the new environment, bringing beauty and ruptures to the perceived architectural severity and uniformity. Moreover, undefined environments, such as forests and wastelands, were important wildscapes without a pre-defined purpose, enabling inhabitants to enjoy, use, and shape their surroundings as their own.

Despite the efforts to create completed environments and even if the suburbs were finally built relatively fast—in 10 to 15 years—the emergence of entire neighborhoods was slow. Similarly, attachment to a new environment took time. Suburbs did not just receive the inhabitants as completed environments and frozen containers of meanings with a one-way impact on residents. In due course, suburbanites became familiar with their new environment and knew how to move and behave in it, thus making sense of it. The point of view goes beyond the idea that inhabitants learn to live with what they had, making “the best of their situation.” Instead of being passive users, inhabitants enacted their environments by embodied acts of habitation and continuously negotiated with and shaped them, hence turning them into meaningful home districts that allowed them to be their own kind.⁹⁴

Those features that suburbanites depicted as the best and the most important for their wellbeing did not result solely or even primarily from suburban planning, but emerged in the interplay of the planned and unplanned. The lived suburbs are therefore not stagnant, but emerge and change over time, which means that they are open to the future and to various uses. The huge demands of place-bound social life and livelier suburbs than the city center erupted in disappointment and obsessive

⁹⁴ See also Junnilainen, L. (2019). *Lähiökylä: Tutkimus yhteisöllisyydestä ja eriarvoisuudesta*. Vastapaino, 89, 144.

critique. Moreover, the demands for a certain kind of social life shadowed the suburbs' own kind of social encounters.

The suburbs did not become disasters, but ordinary urban environments for numerous people. Since the suburbs were above all made by living there, the result was much more complex than that achieved by conscious planning. The suburbs must be seen in their own right as hybrid spaces where diverse planning visions, construction methods, and environments became entangled and lived. They became their own kinds of urban environments that questioned the polarization of the city and nature on which their planning was based, hence broadening the understandings and experiences of the urban.

Despite the suburbanites' positive memoirs, the perception of boring suburbs remains powerful. Arguably, those whose memories are positive have been most willing to tell their stories. Yet most contributors describe the suburbs as home. We conclude with the words of one author, who moved to Karakallio as a five-year-old child in 1968:

Espoo became my hometown, not just one of its suburbs. I learned to love the multiplicity of Espoo, its different suburbs and the diversity of atmospheres and landscapes. Indeed, I think that people in their thirties who grew up in the suburbs feel the same way.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ HKA, LS 1995, Espoo 5.

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Children and the Mediated Experiences of the Welfare State: The International Year of the Child (1979) in the Finnish Public Sphere

Heidi Kurvinen

INTRODUCTION

In 1979, there were 970,009 children under the age of 15 years in Finland—20.5 percent of the entire population.¹ These children had grown up during the years when the construction of the Finnish welfare state had accelerated and, thus, their childhood looked rather different

¹SVT Official Statistics of Finland (1979). Väestö VI A 144, Table 2, 14.

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from that of earlier generations. An interest in the emotional reconstruction of children as part of social policy was characteristic of all Global North countries during the postwar years,² and economic growth enabled the socio-political decisions that made this possible. In Finland, gender equality, education, and citizenship were placed at the center of the modern society, in which the discussion of children's rights entangled with debates on daycare services and women's right to work, among others.³ The birth control pill and the redefined Abortion Act (1970) diminished the number of unwanted children, and the Daycare Act (1973) allowed women to enter the labor market on a larger scale. Ideals of equality were expanded to include children when the little ones spent their days in professional care and older children's opportunities for education were equalized via school reform.⁴

The building of the Finnish welfare state coincided with the years of the development for improving children's rights led by the United Nations (UN). An important milestone in this process was the year 1979, when the 20th anniversary of the UN's Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) was commemorated with the International Year of the Child (IYC).⁵ In this chapter, the media discussion of the IYC is used as an entry point for an analysis of how the ideals of the welfare state were produced in the media by presenting children's experiences of Finnish society. Using

²Malinen, A. and Vahtikari, T. (2021). Feeling the nation through exploring the city: Urban pedagogy and children's lived experiences in postwar Helsinki. In V. Kivimäki, S. Suodenjoki, and T. Vahtikari (eds.), *Lived nation as the history of experiences and emotions in Finland, 1800–2000*. Palgrave Macmillan, 320, 342. See also Kozlovsky, R. (2015). Architecture, emotions and the history of childhood. In S. Olsen (ed.), *Childhood, youth and emotions in modern history: National, colonial and global perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan, 100–101.

³Kivimäki, V, Suodenjoki, S., and Vahtikari, T. (2021). Lived nation: Histories of experience and emotion in understanding nationalism. In V. Kivimäki, S. Suodenjoki, and T. Vahtikari (eds.), *Lived nation as the history of experiences and emotions in Finland, 1800–2000*. Palgrave Macmillan, 21–22; Julkunen, R. (2017). *Muuttuvat hyvinvointivaltiot: Eurooppalaiset hyvinvointivaltiot reformoitavina*. SoPhi, 41–43.

⁴Julkunen, R. (2010). *Sukupuolen järjestykset ja tasa-arvon paradoksit*. Vastapaino, 89–99; Kotkas, T. (2019). Nordic welfare states, trust and the rights discourse: The history of the children's day care system in Finland. In S. Hänninen et al. (eds.), *The relational Nordic welfare state: Between utopia and ideology*. Edward Elgar.

⁵Woodhead, M. (2010). Foreword. In N. Thomas and B. Percy-Smith (eds.), *A handbook of children and young people's participation: Perspectives from theory and practice*. Routledge, xix–xxi; Musgrove, N., Leahy, C. P., and Moruzi, K. (2019). Hearing children's voices. In K. Moruzi et al. (eds.), *Children's voices from the past*. Palgrave Macmillan, 5.

previous literature on lived experiences as inspiration, the lived welfare state is viewed as “a more multifaceted and ‘messier’ phenomenon” than the mere focus on societal practices and institutional frameworks would show.⁶ The welfare state—a concept under construction—formed one of the categories through which people lived out their everyday lives in the late 1970s, and the institutional development of the society inevitably also framed the experiences of children.⁷ Simultaneously, the “mediated worldliness,” to use Thompson’s concept, shaped these experiences when the accelerating mediatization of the society affected people’s understanding of their place in the world.⁸ Consequently, public discussion reveals the wider societal context in which people’s lived experiences have been constructed, as is the case in this chapter, which focuses on the mediated version of the experiences of Finnish children. I examine how journalists portrayed children’s experiences of society when reporting on the IYC. Was there room for child-specific voices, or were the experiences always mediated by adults? How were children’s mediated experiences of the IYC entangled with the ideals of the welfare state?

Childhood historians have emphasized the importance of studying children’s first-hand experiences instead of relying on adult-authored sources. This chapter agrees with the critique but argues that new insights into children’s experiences can also be gained by analyzing mainstream media texts produced by adult journalists.⁹ In this case, the media texts covering the IYC show how children’s experiences of the welfare state were embedded with the wider societal discussion and defined by an adult’s understanding of what constitutes a good childhood. Furthermore, the manner in which children’s experiences were presented was an adult-defined journalism practice informed by the 1970s realistic and informative emphasis on public discussion. Arlie Russell Hochschild’s understanding of framing rules based on which people “ascribe definitions or meanings to

⁶Kivimäki et al. (2021), 1.

⁷Kivimäki et al. (2021), 12–13; Boddice, R. and Smith, M. (2020). *Emotion, sense, experience*. Cambridge University Press, 32–33; Katajala-Peltomaa, S. and Toivo, R. M. (2021). *Lived Religion and gender in late medieval and early modern Europe*. Routledge, 2–4.

⁸Thompson, J. B. (1995). *The media and modernity: A social theory of the media*. Stanford University Press, 33–35.

⁹For example, Pooley, S. and Taylor, J. (2021). Introduction. In S. Pooley and J. Taylor (eds.), *Children’s experiences of welfare in modern Britain*. University of London Press, 2, 18.

situations” is particularly relevant here.¹⁰ Active citizenship has been viewed as an indication of the decline of the welfare state in neoliberal times,¹¹ but in this chapter, I argue that a socially active citizen—in the way it was understood at that time—formed the framing rule of late 1970s Finland. The citizen was a central player in a society in which the welfare contract was negotiated during the 1960s and 1970s. Resulting from this and the increased social consciousness produced by welfare reforms,¹² the media texts covering the IYC also used active citizenship as their main framing for children. Thus, the socially aware child was included in the understanding of a good childhood.¹³

The chapter will focus on the discussion of the IYC in newspapers and the news and current affairs programs of the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE) in 1979. The practices of digital history have been used in the collection of the research data. The sample of newspaper articles has been gathered from the National Library of Finland’s digital interface by using the search word “year of the child” (*lapsen vuosi*) in its various written forms.¹⁴ These data consist of 1744 news articles from four morning papers that were either politically non-aligned or had right-wing leanings, plus the only tabloid of that time.¹⁵ The sample of articles is not representative, but it nevertheless offers an entry point into the manner in which the print media discussed the IYC. To broaden the scope of the study, the digitized news texts have been complemented by manually collecting

¹⁰Hochschild, A. (2003). *The commercialization of intimate life: Notes from home and work*. University of California Press, 99.

¹¹For example, Verhove, I. and Tonkens, E. (2013). Talking active citizenship: Framing welfare state reform in England and the Netherlands. *Social Policy & Society* 12(3), 415–416.

¹²About the concepts of the welfare state and welfare society, see Rodger, J. J. (2000). *From a welfare state to a welfare society*. Macmillan International Higher Education.

¹³Wagner, J. T. and Einarsdottir, J. (2008). The good childhood: Nordic ideals and educational practice. *International Journal of Educational Research* 47, 265.

¹⁴The spelling of the IYC varied in the media. It was referred to as *lapsen vuosi* (the year of the child) and *lasten vuosi* (the year of the children). Additionally, the words “child” and “year” were either written together or separated (*lapsenvuosi*, *lapsen vuosi*, *lastenvuosi*, *lasten vuosi*).

¹⁵At the time of writing this chapter, the digitized collection did not include all the Finnish newspapers and tabloids from the year 1979. Only five of them were available via the National Library of Finland’s digital interface. These include four morning papers, *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, *Länsi-Savo*, *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*, and *Uusi Suomi*, as well as one tabloid, *Ilta-Sanomat*. The chapter does not discuss the coverage of the IYC in the Finnish-Swedish media or texts in magazines. A comparison between the language groups and different journalism genres might have offered new insights into the topic, but the data would have been too extensive for a single chapter, and it would have needed to have been collected manually.

articles from the main national newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* as well as two political newspapers—the radical left *Kansan Uutiset* and the social democratic *Demari*—all of which are currently excluded from the digitized collections of the National Library of Finland. These papers have not been searched in their entirety, but the articles have been collected from the beginning and end of the year as well as from the papers' weekend editions. Furthermore, the newspaper material has been enriched with metadata from YLE's television and radio programs.¹⁶ Metadata are used instead of the original programs because only a limited number of television and radio programs have been preserved in Finland before 1984.¹⁷ However, a television program titled *A Greeting of the International Year of the Child: A View of Children's Lives* (*Lapsen vuoden tervehdys: Katsaus lasten elämään*) is available via the public interface of YLE's program archive (*Elävä arkisto*), and it has been included in the data.¹⁸

The collected data do not cover the entire public discussion relating to the IYC in Finland, but the representativeness of the analysis has been increased by collecting news articles from both the national and local level as well as from political newspapers. More precisely, the analysis reaches three national media (*Helsingin Sanomat*, *Ilta-Sanomat*, and YLE), four morning papers presenting different sides of the political spectrum (*Demari*, *Kansan Uutiset*, *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*, and *Uusi Suomi*) as well as two local newspapers (*Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* and *Länsi-Savo*). Consequently, the data can also be viewed as indicative of the so-called Nordic media welfare states in which the state and the media system are closely intertwined. More specifically, the state intervened in the media systems through ownership, as was the case with YLE, or through press subsidies, which were introduced in 1967. Simultaneously, the institutional media ideologies reflected the characteristics of the welfare state, such as the enlightenment of citizens and the reduction of social inequalities.¹⁹

¹⁶The programs have been identified in collaboration with YLE's archivist, Eva Andberg.

¹⁷Kannisto, M. and Kauppinen, P. (2019). Kekkonen, euroviisut ja Helsinki: Kansallinen audiovisuaalinen perintö NER-analyysin tunnistamana. *Ennen ja nyt: Historian tietosanomat* 2. Retrieved May 12, 2022, from <https://journal.fi/ennenjanyt/article/view/108929/63921>.

¹⁸The program can be watched at YLE's public interface, <https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2006/10/31/lapsen-vuoden-tervehdys-1979>.

¹⁹Enli, G., Syvertsen, T., and Mjøs, O. J. (2018). The welfare state and the media system. *Scandinavian Journal of History* 43(5), 601–602, 609–612; Syvertsen, T., Enli, E. S., Mjøs, O. J., and Moe, H. (2014). *The media welfare state: Nordic media in the digital era*. University of Michigan Press; Normo, E. (1998). Sanomalehdistön tukeminen Pohjoismaissa. In *Joukkoviestimet: Finnish Mass Media 1998*. Tilastokeskus, 41.

The analysis focuses on the contextual close reading of the media texts, but looking at the relatively large dataset from a distance has helped to identify certain patterns in them.²⁰ These include the official events as hot spots of interest toward the IYC, the emphasis on adult viewpoints of the year, and the societal framing of children's voices that form the main argument of the chapter.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE IYC

The welfare state and human rights were intertwined when the future world was being built in postwar societies. The 1960s social movements in particular awakened an increasing interest in marginalized groups and their equal rights, but it was in the 1970s that human rights entered as a major framing of the discussion of equality between different groups of people throughout the Global North.²¹ Thus, the construction of the Finnish welfare state coincided with the more explicit use of the human rights framework.²² As evidence, the concept of the child's rights (*lapsen oikeudet*) was used in the Finnish-language press somewhat sporadically until 1968, after which it became more common. However, two peaks can be identified in the coverage, as shown in Fig. 11.1. The first one occurred in 1970 and can be explained by the Abortion Act, which was redefined in March that year.²³ It caused an intense media discussion of women's right to make decisions about their own bodies that intertwined with the discussion of children's rights. The second peak can be seen in 1979,²⁴ and

²⁰ About close and distant reading, see, for example, Salmi, H. (2020). *What is Digital History?* Polity.

²¹ van Trigt, P. (2016). Human rights and the welfare state: An exploratory history of social rights in the postwar Netherlands. In S. Agnoletto, B. J. Griffith and C. Palmieri (eds.), *Zapruder World: An International Journal for the History of Social Conflict* 3; Moyn, S. (2014). The Return of the prodigal: The 1970s as a turning point in human rights history. In J. Eckel and S. Moyn (eds.), *The breakthrough: Human rights in the 1970s*. University of Pennsylvania Press; Moyn, S. (2018). *Human rights in an unequal world*. Harvard University Press, 8–9; Baár, M. and van Trigt, P. (2020). Introduction. In M. Baár and P. van Trigt (eds.), *Marginalized groups, inequalities and the post-war welfare state: Whose welfare?* Routledge, 3–4.

²² The increase in the use of the concept of *welfare state* in public speech has been located to the 1970s. Julkunen (2017), 41, 43–44.

²³ Julkunen (2010), 91.

²⁴ See Fig. 11.1, in which the hits have been proportioned with the number of pages from which the analysis has been made. When the search was conducted, the extent of digitized newspaper content from the 1960s and 1970s was considerably lower than the material concerning the immediate postwar decades.

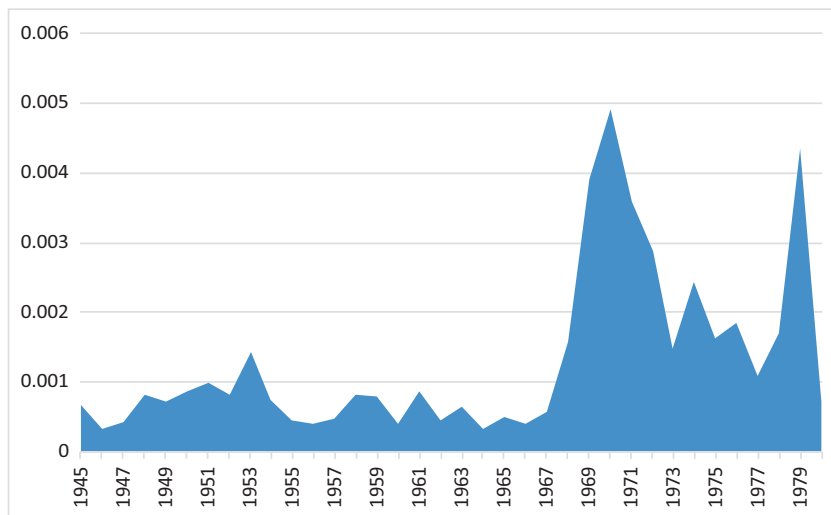


Fig. 11.1 The use of the concept of children's rights in Finnish newspapers during the postwar decades. The hits have been proportioned with the number of pages that are included in the National Library of Finland's digital interface at the time of writing of the article

arguably it was the IYC that made this a special year in terms of children's rights.

The Declaration of the Rights of the Child was used as a main reference point in the education campaigns of the IYC in many countries.²⁵ Similarly, many Finnish journalists used the year 1959 as a starting point for their articles. For instance, Leena Jokinen concluded her article in the tabloid *Ilta-Sanomat* as follows in July 1979:

The 20-year-old Declaration of the Rights of the Child has not lost its topicality. More work needs to be done in order to fulfill its goals. For that we need money. Where could we find it?²⁶

Altogether, 1744 articles on the IYC were published in 1979 in the digitized newspapers used in this chapter. The relatively wide media coverage was not unique to Finland; the IYC received worldwide interest and

²⁵ Black, M. (1986). *The children and the nations*. UNICEF, 374. Retrieved May 12, 2022, from www.unicef.org/about/history/files/Child-Nation-M-Black-Ch15-p353-377-year-or-child.pdf.

²⁶ Jokinen, L. (July 2, 1979). Lapsen oikeuksien juhluvuosi. *Ilta-Sanomat*, 15.

became one of the most successful public relations campaigns of the UN. It followed the previous international years of various human rights issues and marginalized groups highlighted by the UN since 1959.²⁷ These years were a new kind of PR activity that had contradictory results. On the one hand, they advanced awareness of human rights issues in the postwar world, but on the other, they seemed to trivialize them. Nevertheless, the IYC in particular was a successful media phenomenon that adopted the entire package of communication channels typical for the international years—that is, newspaper and magazine articles, photographs, radio and television programs, poster exhibitions, international congresses, mega-concerts, documentaries, and feature films were produced relating to the year.²⁸

In Finland, the news coverage included major articles and short news but also small references and information concerning television and radio programs. Most news focused on official events that were placed at the beginning of the year and around the International Day of the Child on November 20.²⁹ However, the celebration was referred to throughout the year in connection with various local seminars, concerts, and children's

²⁷ The first UN year was the World Refugee Year, which was celebrated in 1959 and 1960.

²⁸ Baár, M. (2018). Singing and painting global awareness: International years and human rights at the United Nations. In J. Brendebach, M. Herzer, and H. Tworek (eds.), *International organizations and the media in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Exorbitant expectations*. Routledge, 182–184, 188–189.

²⁹ See, for example (January 2, 1979). Lapsen vuosi 1979. *Kansan Uutiset*, 4, editorial; (January 3, 1979). Yliponnistuksen Lapsen Vuosi. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 14; (January 3, 1979). Lapsella oikeus elämään. *Kansan Uutiset*, 8; (January 3, 1979). UKK: Lapsen vuoden viettoon talkoohenkeä. *Demari*, 6; (January 4, 1979). Lapsen vuosi toistaa tuttuja vaatimuksia. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 10; (January 4, 1979). Lyhentämällä työaika annetaan aikaa lapselle. *Demari*, 9; (January 4, 1979). Suomen komitea: Lapsen vuoden tavoiteohjelma. *Kansan Uutiset*, 10; (January 6, 1979). Perheen elatus on lastenkin harteilla. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 20; Vihavainen, R. (January 6, 1979). Suomen pääsihteeri lupaa: Suunnitelmat valmiina, Lapsen vuosi voi alkaa. *Uusi Suomi*, 13; (January 10, 1979). Lapsen vuoden kunnallisten toimikuntien tehtävä. *Kansan Uutiset*, 10; (November 20, 1979). UKK: Lasten ääni kuullut Suomessa. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 10; (November 20, 1979). ”Lapset ovat ihmisiä.” *Helsingin Sanomat*, 15; (November 20, 1979). Kekkonen Lapsen Vuoden juhlassa: Tulevaisuus perustuu suvaitsevaisuudelle. *Länsi-Savo*, 20, 1; (November 20, 1979). UKK teroitti nousevan polven vastuuta. *Demari*, 1, 6; (November 20, 1979). Erkki Aho: Suomen tunnettava vastuunsa kansainvälisessä yhteistyössä. *Demari*, 6; (November 20, 1979). Pakolaisavun lapsenvuoden avustusohjelma on toteutunut hyvin. *Demari*; (November 21, 1979). Lapsen asiat vesittyvät ilman kaikenkattavaa tutkimustyötä. *Demari*, 9; RU. (November 24, 1979). Linja-autopeli opettaa: Turvallisen koulutien voi oppia leikkienkin. *Demari*, 9; (November 20, 1979). Lapsen vuoden huipentuma. *Kansan Uutiset*, 1, 6.

events all around the country.³⁰ Additionally, the IYC was used to advertise a popular soft drink, Jaffa, and IYC bread was sold to collect money for children in less developed countries, among other campaigns.³¹ Furthermore, official statements were given by the local organizing committee to guide the future political work on children's rights in Finland.³² However, children's rights as an explicit viewpoint were not the main framing for the IYC. Instead, the focus was on society and its responsibility to take care of citizens, a typical characteristic for the Nordic welfare states of the 1970s.³³

The UN years were preceded by several years of preparation and consisted of national organization committees that planned most events in individual countries.³⁴ As the above-described list of activities suggests, most of the IYC events in Finland were organized by adults, while children appeared in their media representation as participants or performers. Therefore, when zooming out, the media coverage of the IYC seems to focus on adults. It was the adults' view of children that was portrayed in the media when journalists reported on seminars or other activities that were organized relating to the year. Similarly, the authority to define the status of children in Finland was handed to adults. Arvo Ylppö, the Finnish medical doctor known for his studies on premature children, was one of the household names to be interviewed during the year.³⁵ The

³⁰ For example, Saarivuori, T. (January 3, 1979). Iltapäiväleikit klo 13–16. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 13; Kyllönen, M. (January 8, 1979). Lapsen vuosi avattiin Oulussa: ”Haluamme lisää päätösvaltaa ja lisää yhtä mukavia juhlia.” *Ilta-Sanomat*, 5; (January 22, 1979). Avajaisjuhla Mikkelissä: Lapsi huomioitava joka vuosi. *Länsi-Savo*, 1; (February 27, 1979). Lapsen vuosi 1979: Museo kartuttaa tietoja. *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*, 5; (March 2, 1979); Vikman, H. (March 9, 1979). Lastenannoksiksi muutakin kuin muusia. *Demari*, 13; Saarivuori, T. (March 11, 1979). Aurora viihtyy Aurorassa. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 15; Tervapadat loistivat Jäppilän jääjuhlassa. *Länsi-Savo*, 9; Forsström, R. (April 21, 1979). Viisi tuntia musiikkimaassa. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 17; Kero, E. (May 27, 1979). Lintsillä on tänään lastenjuhlat. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 21; Kettunen, R. (November 12, 1979). Jääkö Lapsen vuosi pelkäksi tietoisuiksi? *Uusi Suomi*, 9.

³¹ For example, Kameleontti (January 6, 1979). Lapsen vuoden leipä maaherralle. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 6; (April 6, 1979). *Apu*, 93.

³² For example (January 4, 1979). Lapsen vuoden komitea: Hallitukselta eduskunnalle perhepoliittinen selonteko. *Länsi-Savo*, 7; (January 4, 1979). Suomen komitea: Lapsen vuoden tavoiteohjelma. *Kansan Uutiset*, 10.

³³ Kotkas (2019), 125.

³⁴ Baár (2018), 183; Black (1986).

³⁵ For example (May 6, 1979). Arkkiatri Arvo Ylppö: Lapsen arvostus ja lastentautiopin kehitys Suomessa. *Länsi-Savo*, 4; Arkkiatri (October 1, 1979). Arvo Ylppö: Huomio lapsen psyykkiseen kehitykseen. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 7.

right-leaning newspaper *Uusi Suomi* launched the year with an interview of a group of adults who were known for their contributions to children's culture and well-being. The journalist was particularly interested in their predictions for the success of the year. This was also used as the main framing in the lead paragraph: "Will the child's status really improve during the Child's year or will it remain plain rhetoric? We asked from those to whom a child is important also otherwise than during the Child's Year."³⁶

The adult-specific viewpoint was also applied in the broadcast media. In television, children were mostly used as visual imagery in news and feature programs in which the IYC was discussed. Television viewers were shown children who performed in the various festivities of the IYC or else images of children playing were used as illustrations.³⁷ In addition, children appeared as assistants in programs that focused on child-related issues. For instance, Commercial Television (*Mainostelevisio*) aired a documentary series on children's rights during the twentieth century in January 1979. The theme was framed by adults, but a group of children was, for example, seen to show the changing children's fashions of the decade.³⁸ The meta-data of YLE's programs indicates a similar interpretation: Children were rarely given an active role in the broadcasts. An exception is a news piece that dealt with a sports event in which local schools could participate.³⁹

Partly, the framing can be explained by the journalism conventions of the time. The 1970s news media relied on an understanding of objective reporting in which expert interviewees were placed at the center.⁴⁰ Objectivity was not viewed as non-partiality per se but as the professional intent to offer a balanced view of the object of the news to media

³⁶ Javanainen, P. (January 6, 1979). Lapsen Vuosi: tositoimia vai sanahelinää. *Uusi Suomi*, 13.

³⁷ For example, metadata for the following programs: Television News (January 3, 1979), (January 7, 1979), and (June 8, 1979).

³⁸ (January 23, 1979). Lapsen vuosisata. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 8.

³⁹ For example (April 19, 1979). Urheiluareena.

⁴⁰ Kurvinen, H. (2013). *"En mä oo mies enkä nainen. Mä oon toimittaja": Sukupuoli ja suomalainen toimittajakunta 1960- ja 1970-luvulla*. University of Oulu.

consumers.⁴¹ This was done by selecting interviewees whose different viewpoints would help construct a multifaceted picture of the topic at hand.⁴² In practice, the professional norms identified some sources as more objective than others. For instance, men were viewed as more rational—and thus objective—than women, and expert viewpoints were favored over the opinions of ordinary citizens. In terms of age, the search for convincing interviewees meant that adults were preferred and children rarely appeared in media texts.⁴³

The professional culture that emphasized objectivity thus explicates why the texts rarely used children as interviewees and the year was mostly addressed by using adults' viewpoints and their definitions of the meanings of the year. This was acknowledged already in 1979. For instance, *Helsingin Sanomat* published a satirical article on the IYC celebrations in an imaginary village called *Yliponnistus*. In the text, children as a group are portrayed as an annoyance to adults, who celebrate the year by launching different commercial IYC products and organizing fancy gala dinners.⁴⁴ Similarly, many of the articles published at the end of the year reflected, mostly critically, on the results of the celebrations.⁴⁵ This kind of self-reflexive manner of commenting on the IYC—which some journalists managed to do—probably illuminates the few articles and programs in which the lived experiences of children were placed at the center, as will be shown next.

⁴¹ Miettinen, J. Kalliomäki, I., and Suominen, E. (1976). *Journalistinen työprosessi*. Gaudeamus, 9–10; Oinonen, P. (2019). *Vain parasta kansalaisille: Yleisradiotoiminta julkisena palveluna*. K&h, 99.

⁴² Miettinen, J. (1984). *Toimitustyö*. Gaudeamus, 107.

⁴³ For example, Franks, S. and Howell, L. (2019). Seeking women's expertise in the UK broadcast news media. In C. Carter, L. Steiner, and S. Allan (eds.), *Journalism, gender and power*. Routledge, 49–62.

⁴⁴ (January 3, 1979). *Yliponnistuksen Lapsen Vuosi*. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 14.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Danielsson, E. (November 12, 1979). Aikuiset keskustelleet lasten päiden yli heistä. *Uusi Suomi*, 9.

CHILDREN AS EXPERT INTERVIEWEES

In November 1979, *Hepskukkuu*, an entertainment television show that satirized current phenomena, presented a sketch, which is depicted as follows in the preserved metadata:

A sketch: 'The Child's Year'. Lauri Kenttä (...) reports from the skating field in Kallio and asks the opinions of children of the children's year, children shout childish comments. Kenttä reports from the same field in the autumn, he asks about the children's year from the children, they respond in a serious manner like adults would do.⁴⁶

To some extent, the description of the sketch indicates the ways in which children's voices were presented in the media when journalists turned to their expertise during the IYC. The child-like banter and child-specific way of viewing the world were replaced by a societal framing that corresponded to the zeitgeist. This was not unique to YLE, but their children's programs can be used as indicative of the broader phenomenon. As Mikko Sihvonen has argued, 1970s "children's programming began to be seen as merely an extension of the child welfare services provided by other public institutions." The programs relied on the pedagogical understanding of 1970s early childhood education, but they were also framed by the company's so-called informative programming policy. Based on this, the tradition of storytelling and fairytales was replaced with more realistic and factual content: Education and information became the primary functions for children's programs, discussing themes such as taxation or the Vietnam war.⁴⁷ Also children's news and current affairs programs were experimented with on television.⁴⁸ However, similarly to adult news, they emphasized fact-based knowledge, as can be seen in the following quote:

The Programming Council demands in its verdict that the 'button news' [a nickname for children's news] pays more attention to delivering fact-based

⁴⁶ Metadata for *Hepskukkuu* (November 1, 1979).

⁴⁷ Sihvonen, M. (2015). "We are more serious": Children's television in Finland and paradigmatic shifts in Yleisradio's children's programming. *Journal of Children and Media* 9(2), 181.

⁴⁸ Suoninen, A. (2007). Mitä me katsottiin ennen kuin oli Pikku Kakkosta? Lastentelevision ensimmäiset vuosikymmenet. In J. Wiio (ed.), *Television viisi vuosikymmentä*. SKS, 490–491; Sihvonen (2015), 181–182.

information. Also news that is targeted at children must fulfil the demands that the Broadcasting Company has placed on its news service.⁴⁹

The basic concept behind the children's news can be viewed as an indication of the pragmatic ethos of the Nordic welfare states of the 1970s and the ideal of active citizenship in particular. In journalism, this meant that rational tones overshadowed the emotional talk of the 1960s.⁵⁰ The informative tendencies of the media were also prevalent in other countries,⁵¹ but the Finnish manner of producing children's programs seems to have been more pragmatic. For instance, the BBC's children's news program titled *Newsround* (launched in 1972) also consisted of so-called adult news, but the selection process of the content of each program included an estimation of children's viewpoints of the newsworthiness of the topics. Additionally, children's voices were included in the stories. The understanding of childhood thus framed the ways in which children's news was produced.⁵² This kind of understanding seems to have been lacking in Finland, where the societal framing pervaded the coverage of the IYC both in the broadcast media and in newspapers. It was particularly eminent in *Helsingin Sanomat's* article series on the IYC that exclusively covered serious themes such as poverty, violence in media programs, and schooling.⁵³

The manner of using the social reform framing when discussing the IYC was not typical only of the media. In February 1979, *Länsi-Savo*—a

⁴⁹ (May 16, 1971). Lasten uutiset tv:ssä uutistoimitukselle. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 6.

⁵⁰ Enli et al. (2018); Saarenmaa, L. (2010). *Intiimin äänet: Julkisuuskulttuurin muutos suomalaisissa ajanvietelehdissä 1961–1975*. Tampere University Press; Kurvinen (2013).

⁵¹ Children's news programs were launched in the United Kingdom (*Newsround*), Sweden (*Barnjournalen*), and the United States (*In the News*, CBS) during the 1970s. Matthews, J. (2009). Negotiating news childhoods: News producers, visualized audiences and the production of the children's news agenda. *Journal of Children and Media* 3(1), 2–18; Rönnerberg, M. (2008). 1970-talets barnjournalen och dagens Lilla Aktuellt: Barnnyheter som public service respektive infotainment. In *Svensk television: en mediehistoria*. Statens ljud- och bildarkiv, 190–222; McSorley, J. G. (1975). A study of the significance of a commercial network television news program for children. MA thesis. Drake University. Retrieved May 12, 2022, from <https://escholarshare.drake.edu/bitstream/handle/2092/878/dt1975jgm.pdf?sequence=1>.

⁵² Matthews (2009), 2–18.

⁵³ (January 14, 1979). Lasten näkemyksiä koulusta: Onnekkään osa ja työpaikan tae. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 18; (January 21, 1979). Köyhyys ja kodittomuus pakottaa itsenäiseen elämään: Katu kieltää lapsuuden. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 22; (February 4, 1979). Elintasojahti vie vanhempien ajan: Lasten viihteenä tv, alkoholi ja väkivalta. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 24.

local newspaper—published short extracts of essays written by 11-year-old 5th graders in Mikkeli. Even though the texts included child-specific concerns, such as disappointment with their parents, who did not play with them, most of the texts referred to social problems either in Finland or in developing countries.⁵⁴ What was typical for the media was, however, the manner of changing the child-specific manner of expression. More specifically, the articles and programs placed children in an expert role, mirroring adult behavior. Correspondingly, the children's world was viewed from the perspective of an adult journalist.⁵⁵ However, there were a few exceptions, one of which was the children's page of the radical left newspaper *Kansan Utiset*. The texts written by members of the local youth organizations of the Finnish People's Democratic Party included a clear societal ethos, but occasionally they also offered glimpses of the child-specific viewpoint. One example is Tuomo's wish for the children's year in January: "A world full of ice cream."⁵⁶ Also, the paper launched a writing competition, encouraging children to talk about what the IYC had meant for them.⁵⁷

Another prominent example was an interview with 8-year-old Anu Vellamo Linkiö, published in *Uusi Suomi* in January 1979. The one-page article on Anu was written by Maarit Niiniluoto, a young female journalist, and it included the interviewee's responses to thematic questions accompanied by six pictures of Anu in her daily activities. The child's viewpoint is clearly present in the text, as Anu's sentences seem to have been printed as they were said. However, the selection of the discussion topics, such as the Finnish president, current affairs, and war, indicates that the child-specific innocence needed to be accompanied by a societal framing. The 1970s socio-political ethos that was intertwined with the construction of society is evident when Anu declares, for instance: "I protect the environment so that it will not become polluted. I am an environmentalist."⁵⁸ Thus, Anu's interview maintained an image of a socially aware child who was in the process of learning the values of the Finnish welfare state.

⁵⁴ (February 11, 1979). Meidän jengi. *Länsi-Savo*, 9.

⁵⁵ For example, Viisi tuntia musiikkimaassa. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 17; Kero, E. (May 27, 1979). Lintsillä on tänään lastenjuhlat. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 21.

⁵⁶ Joukko Jyskän pioneereja. (January 2, 1979). Lapsen vuoden toivomuksia. *Kansan Utiset*, back cover.

⁵⁷ (November 20, 1979). Kirjoituskisa. *Kansan Utiset*, back cover.

⁵⁸ Niiniluoto, M (January 14, 1979). "Aikuiset ei ole niin kivoja kuin lapset..." *Uusi Suomi*, 11.

Child-specific expressions were also used by Ulla-Maija Paavilainen, who contemplated the differences in viewpoints between adults and children when describing her interview with the 9-year-old Ismo, in *Uusi Suomi* in June 1979:

I introduce myself: I am Ismo and I am a human. [...] In our [adult] language, Ismo should introduce himself as follows: – I am Ismo Pylväinen, a 9-year-old schoolboy. I have come to follow the children’s culture seminar of Jyväskylä summer festival with great interest as a child myself. I hope that the results of these days are meaningful. – But Ismo prefers to speak as a human, as a child.⁵⁹

The entire article is an attempt to follow the child-specific view of the world. However, the result is slightly chaotic, as Ismo’s somewhat sporadic observations of the event are complemented by adults’ voices summarizing the content of the seminar from their point of view. The example clearly illustrates the problem of the IYC’s media coverage: The mediated message was mostly spread by using objective language.⁶⁰ Arguably, this—along with other journalism practices—introduced the need to diminish the child-specific framing of the year.

The clearest example of the children’s adult-modeled performance appeared in the YLE’s program titled *Lapsen vuoden tervehdys*.⁶¹ After a few introductory words from a journalist, the program granted a voice to the children. A young, presumably elementary, schoolboy, Petri Ålander, opens the program by saying, “[t]oday we are celebrating a worldwide birthday. It is exactly 20 years since the approval of the International Declaration of the Rights of the Child in the UN, i.e., United Nations.” A closeup shot of Ålander moves on to an archival image of children, after which it returns to Ålander, who is seen sitting behind a desk. The positioning of Ålander reminds one of a news anchor, and his expert status is strengthened by his calm and sober voice. A paper that he occasionally glances at reveals that the introductory speech has been written in advance. It becomes clear that Ålander is the one hosting this program.

Ålander’s anchor position may have been an attempt to humor the audience by emphasizing the reversed roles between adults and children.

⁵⁹ Paavilainen, U-M. (June 30, 1979). Lapsen kanssa Jyväskylän Kesässä: ”Pienikin ihminen voi olla viisas.” *Uusi Suomi*, 9.

⁶⁰ Baár (2018), 185.

⁶¹ See television programs (November 20, 1979). *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 15.

The implicit similarity to adult news seems to have been used to satirize the celebration of the year similarly to the previously mentioned sketch in *Hepskukkuu*. However, the rest of the program supports the interpretation that children's adult-modeled performance was not a joke but a reflection of the 1970s societal emphasis in journalism. In total, five children from different parts of Finland discuss their lives on the program. Additionally, Ålander gives informative introductory speeches between their stories. The viewer learns, for example, that half of the grain used in Finland to bake bread is imported, Saimaa canal is the busiest in Finland, and 3000 Finnish children live in children's homes. The informative tone continues when the camera moves on to follow the interviewed children's everyday lives. Only a few glimpses of a child-specific way of looking at the world are captured in the program, which mostly focuses on presenting the children's schools, friends, hobbies, and families. Even if most of this information is narrated by the children—Mikko, Pasi, Ulla, Mika, and Jari—the manner of approaching the children reminds one of a script that follows the interests of adults. Furthermore, the children are heard to present their concerns about their surroundings, such as a wish to have traffic lights at a certain intersection. The IYC is, thus, intertwined with the narrative of the Finnish welfare state and its shortcomings.

A similar kind of framing was used in another program series in which ordinary children were the focus. The metadata of one of the episodes includes the following information: "Jukka Heino is a 12-year-old school-boy from Tampere. Music is his favorite hobby. Additionally, Jukka likes to ponder things close to life, such as the status of the child during the International Year of the Child."⁶² Even if the program included aspects of child-specific interest, such as hobbies, the way of including the IYC as an example of the things that Jukka liked to ponder reveals the strength of the societal framing. It is most visible when the media texts discuss the status of children in less developed countries, as will be shown next.

THE GLOBAL SOUTH AS A COMPARATIVE ELEMENT

The UN's international years had their peak during the period from the late 1960s until the early 1980s, and during this time, they were consciously framed within the human rights context as well as the decolonization that shaped world politics during those years. In the context of the

⁶² Metadata for Kasvo: Jukka Heino (November 27, 1979).

IYC, similarly to the 1975 International Women's Year, this meant that the status of people living in the Global South raised particular interest in the wealthier parts of the world.⁶³ Traces of this are also visible in the media discussion of the IYC: The texts maintained and reproduced the North–South dichotomy prevailing in the UN activities. More specifically, countries of the Global South were viewed to be on the receiving end of this dynamic: The international years detected “the “problems” in the Global South related to human rights, in particular, but the solutions offered for these problems were based on the experience of the Global North.⁶⁴

In practice, this meant that in many Global North countries, the focus on children's rights in their own countries was complemented by the discussion of the status of children in less developed countries. This was also the case in Finland, where youth in the 1970s had comparatively good living conditions relative to children in less developed countries. In January 1979, the head of the Finnish organizing committee defined the main goals of the IYC celebration in Finland as follows:

Based on the General Meeting of the UN, the attention in Finland will be on the child in less developed countries and in one's own country, his/her surroundings and needs, and those issues requiring correction. Internationally, the year will be celebrated by emphasizing the status of children in developing countries.⁶⁵

An illustrative example is the earlier mentioned article series in *Helsingin Sanomat*, in which the interest in the status of children in the Global South is almost always present.⁶⁶ Refugee children in particular were a focus of the local organizing committee in Finland. Additionally, all Nordic countries had a special interest in educating the children of their counterparts in other areas of the world. The mass media in particular was

⁶³ Baár (2018), 185–186.

⁶⁴ Baár (2018), 186.

⁶⁵ Vihavainen, R. (January 6, 1979). Suomen pääsihteeri lupaa: Suunnitelmat valmiina lapsen vuosi voi alkaa. *Uusi Suomi*, 13.

⁶⁶ For example (January 14, 1979). Lasten näkemyksiä koulusta: Onnekkain osa ja työpäikan tae. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 18; (January 21, 1979). Köyhyys ja kodittomuus pakottaa itsenäiseen elämään: Katu kieltää lapsuuden. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 22; (February 18, 1979). Kehitysmaiden lasten mietteitä jälkikasvusta. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 20; (February 25, 1979). Lasten kuvitelmat uudesta vuosisadasta. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 22.

viewed as the source of a skewed representation of children in less developed countries. To improve the situation, the Nordic UNICEF committees—UNICEF was the main partner of the UN during the IYC—prepared a teacher's kit and other educational material that could be used in schools. In Finland, a multi-media kit was distributed to 8000 schools through the Ministry of Education, and a group of teachers had the opportunity to participate in a UNICEF trip to Sri Lanka, where they followed the development work in action.⁶⁷ The framing of Global North countries as the leaders of children's rights in the world was also repeated in the media. However, a subtle critique of capitalism can be sensed in some of the texts: Less developed countries could offer their children something that industrialized countries had lost. In *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, the IYC was introduced to readers as follows:

In our current world, there are lot of inequalities in the status of children. Children's status in industrialized countries is generally speaking very different from those who live in developing countries, where there is a lack of everyday food, not to mention health care and education. [...] But the status of the child in Finland is not without concerns either. Many parents do not have time and perhaps skills either to give that care and validation to the child that children in poorer countries receive from adults.⁶⁸

It was not only journalists who referred to countries of the Global South; the theme was also presented through children's voices. Arguably, the differences between the children's status in Finland and other countries had been dealt with in schools, an indication of which are the earlier-mentioned school children's essays that *Länsi-Savo* published in February 1979. Juha concluded his essay as follows:

In Finland, children have good living conditions after all. Here we have lots of food and a good standard of living. In Africa, children do not have water and houses are fragile and they do not stand heavy storms. It is good for a child to live and be in Finland.⁶⁹

The manner of contrasting Finland with developing countries was also present in the interviews, even though children such as 13-year-old Pasi

⁶⁷ Black (1986), 356, 358, 360, 362–363.

⁶⁸ (January 2, 1979). Alkanut vuosi on lapsen vuosi. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 8.

⁶⁹ (February 11, 1979). Meidän jengi. *Länsi-Savo*, 9.

Luumi and 9-year-old Satu Viita-aho mentioned the problems that existed in Finland. Satu's interview, in particular, hints that it was the journalist who pushed Satu's experience a little bit further:

I was born in Finland and it is good to live here. People do not have anything wrong here. After thinking a little bit more, Satu remembers that not all people have employment, even though they would like to have it. Then they will receive a pension.⁷⁰

However, a little bit later she returns to the extraordinariness of Finland by using contrasts with less developed countries: "Not all children in the world are as lucky as I am. In Africa, many children suffer from hunger and they cannot go to school."⁷¹ Pasi Luumi's experience is formulated in a more coherent way, implying his more mature way of experiencing the world:

There are things that need to be corrected in children's status also in our country, but the problems are very different from those in developing countries. [...] Quite often there are no indoor activity spaces. And the child has been forgotten also in many other ways.⁷²

A more developed societal understanding is particularly clear in the interview of 13-year-old Jukka Karo. His response to the journalist combines awareness of racial inequalities with concern about nature—both central aspects of the 1970s societal ethos:

All people are equal. I do not understand why there is hate towards black native tribes. [...] In Finland, I would like to fix racism, it exists also here. I would replace the buses with electric ones because other cars cause noise and pollution.⁷³

The interviews indicate that children's experiences were embedded with social concerns that had been issued as a result of the improvements in citizens' welfare. As welfare reforms had improved the daily lives of

⁷⁰ Paavilainen, U-M. (November 13, 1979). Sadun ja Jukan lapsuuden maisemat. *Uusi Suomi*, 12.

⁷¹ Paavilainen (November 13, 1979), 12.

⁷² MA. (December 30, 1979). Teemavuodet hyviä keksintöjä. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 17.

⁷³ Paavilainen (November 13, 1979), 12.

ordinary citizens, space for a more active citizenship had been created. It also included space for the children of the 1970s, who learnt a societal ethos toward the world both at school and through the media.

CONCLUSION

Previous studies have convincingly demonstrated the entanglements between the media systems and the welfare state in Nordic countries. While the state has used considerable power in financial terms, media and communication systems have contributed to the evolution of the welfare state by supporting “stateness.” It has also been pointed out that the ideals of the welfare state have had an effect on professional journalism.⁷⁴ However, less is known about how these influences have been actualized in media texts, which were the focus of this chapter. More specifically, the chapter has analyzed the ways in which children’s experiences of society were mediated in the Finnish media coverage of the International Year of the Child.

As the chapter has shown, the reporting did not give much room for child-specific experiences of living in late 1970s Finland. When children were interviewed, they were placed in the adult-defined position of expert and their experiences were framed by focusing on questions that were at the heart of the newly built welfare society, such as the environment. More specifically, the children’s lived experiences of society were filtered through the 1970s informative ethos. This can be explained by journalism practices that emphasized citizens’ societal interests, offering a blueprint for children’s experiences. By portraying children who voiced their concerns over serious issues such as racism or traffic safety, they placed child-specific ways of experiencing the IYC on the margins. Simultaneously, the mediated experience of the child was entangled with the ideal of the socially active citizen: The child in the media was interested in striving for a better world and was concerned with those less fortunate in life, both within and beyond the nation state. Thus, the chapter shows how children’s lived experiences of the society—similarly to adults’ experiences—are always embedded within the wider societal discussion. Simultaneously, their experiences are defined by adults’ understandings of what makes a good childhood, which makes their experiences particularly sensitive to external influences, such as the questions of a journalist, obfuscating the child-specific viewpoint in the news media.

⁷⁴ Enli et al. (2018); Syvertsen et al. (2014).

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CHAPTER 12

The Making of the Western Affluent Working Class: Class and Affluence Through Postwar Public Discussions and Academic Interpretations

Jussi Lahtinen

INTRODUCTION

The first decades after World War II are often labeled the Golden Age of Western industrial capitalism.¹ The 1970s marked an end of this period of “endless prosperity,”² but the essential phenomena of that time—welfare

¹Judt, T. (2005). *Postwar: A history of Europe since 1945*. Penguin Press, 324–353; Hobsbawm, E. (1995) [1994]. *Age of extremes: The short twentieth century 1914–1991*. Abacus, 257–286.

²Hobsbawm (1995) [1994], 403–432.

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states and rising standards of living—have continued to affect the Western experience ever since. For decades, the unparalleled economic progress has been a topic for vivid public debates, in which contemporaries have analyzed the societal impact of postwar affluence. Some have, for example, promoted the idea of the classless society, while some have emphasized more the stratification and injustices even in the so-called welfare state/affluent society. In this chapter, I analyze Western societal narratives, emphasizing the concept of social class. I ask how general, widely spread public portrayals and academic interpretations of the working class have been constructed, deconstructed or reconstructed since World War II.

As empirical evidence, I use popular sociological interpretations, widespread media narratives, and influential political rhetoric from the 1950s to the 2020s. These are collected mainly from North America, Great Britain, and Finland, but also from France and (West) Germany. Finland—usually seen as a Nordic welfare state—is selected as an empirical case study because of my own academic specializations. These discussions are highlighted from current research paradigms, but I have also revisited the original texts. I claim that selected discussions construct a general narrative for the postwar Western working class, and they both reveal the changes in social positions and occasionally further these changes. Simultaneously, I argue that strong mediatization of the class experience has become one of the dominant features when speaking about contemporary class consciousness.

The key concepts of this chapter are narrative and experience. Here, *experience* does not mean authentic, unproblematized individual experience, but more a culturally and socially constructed mediating category, which is nevertheless still lived through memories and embodied feelings.³ I emphasize the impact of different societal *narratives* conveyed to the public sphere—especially during the contemporary era of mass media.⁴ During the analysis, I follow the basic definition of master narrative and counter-narrative, where the first indicates the normative, even hegemonic state of being and the latter represents the resistance. The individual societal experiences are partly created through both of these forms of

³ Kivimäki, V., Suodenjoki, S., and Vahtikari, T. (2021). Lived nation: Histories of experience and emotion in understanding nationalism. In V. Kivimäki, S. Suodenjoki, and T. Vahtikari (eds.), *Lived nation as the history of experiences and emotions in Finland*. Palgrave Macmillan, 12–13.

⁴ On mass media and experience, see Carr, D. (2014). *Experience and history: Phenomenological perspectives on the historical world*. Oxford University Press, 59–60.

storytelling.⁵ Overall, this study analyzes first and foremost general societal narratives—even generalizations—which are spread through media and can be claimed to have a distinct impact on members of the contemporary working class—especially in a sense of understanding one’s own social position.

Indeed, *working class* is a subject for the selected narratives. Here, it is seen as a general concept covering non-college-educated blue-collar workers and agents with a similar social background outside working life. In other words, it is a concept covering a specific social group based on economic and social positions.⁶ The focus of the study is mainly on the male-dominated manufacturing labor force, because most of the selected public discussions focus on this demographic. However, the diversity of the concept of working class is highlighted at the end of this chapter.

The concept of the *affluent society* provides a context for the analysis. The term was coined by American economist John Kenneth Galbraith in his celebrated book *Affluent Society* (1958). In Galbraith’s grand theory, during the 1950s the United States entered the era of material affluence and abundance, especially in the sense of private consumerism. The book was a highly influential study in the field of economics, where Galbraith developed his Keynesian views on how public spending should be increased in addition to private spending for the sake of national progress.⁷ However, the concept of the affluent society soon detached itself from Galbraith’s theories and took on a life of its own. It became a general term describing the Western societal reality.

It should be noted that the concept of the *welfare state* is connected to the concept of the affluent society. “Welfare State” as a term has been used in political and academic discussions every now and then since the mid-nineteenth century, but it has been an impactful rhetorical tool only since

⁵ Lueg, K., Bager, A. S., and Lundholt, M. W. (2021). Introduction. What counter-narratives are: Dimensions and levels of a theory of middle range. In K. Lueg and M. W. Lundholt (eds.), *Routledge handbook of counter-narratives*. Taylor and Francis, 2–4; Eiranen, R., Hatavara, M., Kivimäki, V., Mäkelä, M., and Toivo, R. M. (2022). Narrative and experience: Interdisciplinary methodologies between history and narratology. *Scandinavian Journal of History* 47(1), 6.

⁶ Class as a social and economic position after the era of Marxian class theory; see Goldthorpe, J. H. and Marshall, G. (1992). The promising future of class analysis: A response to recent critiques. *Sociology* 26(3), 381–400.

⁷ On the impact of Galbraith, see Berry, M. (2013). *The affluent society revisited*. Oxford University Press. See also Holloran, P. C. (2007). Galbraith, John Kenneth. In R. E. Weir (ed.), *Class in America: An encyclopedia, volume 1–3*. Greenwood Press, 289–290.

the 1940s.⁸ Then, it was first associated with the postwar British society and the new progressive social and educational policies of the Labour government, which strongly emphasized rhetoric such as “the equality of opportunities” and “meritocracy over heritocracy.”⁹ In general, the welfare state describes a society wherein the state has a somewhat crucial role in its citizens’ opportunities in the fields of education and social well-being,¹⁰ while affluent society emphasizes material abundance.

In this chapter, I follow a temporal order. Firstly, I construct a general portrayal of the affluent working class using widely influential sociological inquiries from the 1950s and early 1960s. Secondly, I highlight counter-narratives from the “Radical Sixties” that challenge the idea of the affluent society. I also present key elements of the so-called conservative backlash, a political rhetoric questioning the liberal and progressive policies. Simultaneously, I highlight the economic backlashes against the affluent working class from the mid-1970s onwards, and how political conservatism started to attract struggling blue-collar workers. The study is mostly based on Anglo-American discussions, but I argue that the main claims can be applied to most Western industrial societies.

RISE OF THE AFFLUENT WORKING CLASS

Raymond Williams and Eric Hobsbawm have emphasized the changes in British class culture during the postwar era. For them, collective aspects have been the defining characteristics of working-class culture since the nineteenth century, when workers—mobilized by the labor

⁸ Petersen, K. and Petersen, J. H. (2013). Confusion and divergence: Origins and meanings of the term “welfare state” in Germany and Britain, 1840–1940. *Journal of European Social Policy* 23(1), 37–51.

⁹ Briggs, A. (1961). The welfare state in historical perspective. *European Journal of Sociology* 2(2), 221.

¹⁰ See Marshall, T. H. (1950). *Citizenship and social class and other essays*. Cambridge University Press. It should be noted that as a societal narrative—aside from the positive aspects—the welfare state has also been criticized from both sides of the political spectrum. For the right-wing, the welfare state has been seen as a societal structure that weakens an individual’s opportunities to develop his/her human characteristics, but simultaneously strengthens the structures of unwanted corporatism. For the far-left of the Cold War era, the welfare state was a synonym for structures of counter-revolutionary class compromises inside the capitalistic society. For a case study of Finland, see Kettunen, P. (2019). The conceptual history of the welfare state in Finland. In N. Edling (eds.), *The changing meanings of the welfare state: Histories of a key concept in the Nordic countries*. Berghahn Books, 246–253.

movement—embodied a counterculture lifestyle distinct from the “hegemonic culture of the bourgeoisie” or “privatized lifestyle of the middle class.”¹¹ But it was in the 1950s when the relatively closed working-class cultural sphere started to open and change its form, or—as the contemporary Richard Hoggart would argue—it was the period when pure British working-class culture was “corrupted” by mainstream consumerism.¹²

Then, relative affluence among the Western societies inspired the so-called embourgeoisement thesis among sociologists. The thesis and the public discussion around it claimed that during the postwar period, the Western working class had integrated with the middle class to the extent that the historical class conflict had faded from societal reality. During the early 1960s, sociologist Ferdynand Zweig—among others¹³—argued that technological changes, full employment, welfare state policies, and material affluence had produced a brand-new social class—the “New Working Class”—separated from the traditional class of resistance. Zweig claimed that class distinctions would eventually vanish when manual labor blended economically and socially into the white-collar middle class.¹⁴ A vivid example of this was the American suburb, the modern residential area outside the city centers for white- and blue-collar workers. The middle-class lifestyle of the suburb, financed by consumer credit and mortgages, was seen as the last step of working-class embourgeoisement.¹⁵

¹¹ Williams, R. (1960) [1958]. *Culture and Society 1780–1950*. Columbia University Press, 314–358; Hobsbawm, E. (1984). *Worlds of labour: Further studies in the history of labour*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 176–193. See also Neville K. (1991). “Traditional” working-class culture and “the rise of labour”: Some preliminary questions and observations. *Social History* 16(2), 203–216.

¹² Hoggart, R. (1958). *The uses of literacy: Aspects of working class life with special reference to publications and entertainments*. Penguin Books.

¹³ Overview on embourgeoisement thesis, Goldthorpe, J. H., Lockwood, D., Bechhofer, F., and Platt, J. (1969). *The affluent worker in the class structure*. Cambridge University Press, 5–29.

¹⁴ Zweig, F. (1961). *Worker in an affluent society*. Heinemann, 205–212. Revisited in Zweig, F. (1976). *The new acquisitive society*. Barry Rose, 15–19.

¹⁵ On suburbanization and criticism of the embourgeoisement thesis, see Gans, H. J. (1967). *The Levittowners: Ways of life and politics in a new suburban community*. Pantheon Books. See also Reynolds, A. (2007). Suburbia. In R. E. Weir (ed.), *Class in America: An encyclopedia, volume 1–3*. Greenwood Press, 847–849.

During the 1960s, the embourgeoisement thesis was criticized by the renowned British sociologist John Goldthorpe and his affiliates.¹⁶ Goldthorpe claimed that embourgeoisement is an exaggerated hypothesis. However, he did not deny “a process of normative convergence between certain sections of the working and middle classes”—especially in the sense of the privatization of the working-class lifestyle.¹⁷ Indeed, the popular claim was that even though the working class would not merge into the middle class, the modern lifestyle would change the class experience, and the most visible welfare state phenomenon—expanding educational possibilities—would provide youth from a working-class background “endless” possibilities to succeed in the new “society of meritocracy.”¹⁸

The postwar affluence was seen as a phenomenon spreading all around the West. Finland offers an empirical case on how the narrative of affluence has affected one of the smaller nations in the Western cultural sphere. Finland had a relatively small urban working-class population during the first half of the twentieth century. The narrative of the full-scale wage-based society emerges in the public discussion as late as the 1960s. Before that, the heart of the nation was still seen partly in self-sufficient peasantry. Indeed, it was the 1960s and 1970s when the nation experienced the spectacularly rapid urbanization, industrialization, and expansion of welfare state policies.¹⁹

During the 1960s, glimpses of the embourgeoisement thesis also appeared in the Finnish public discussion, even though Finland was still seen as a country just heading toward affluence. Then, it seemed that especially the Communist Party of Finland—one of the most impactful in Europe²⁰—needed to defend the Marxist immiseration theory against the

¹⁶ On the impact of the works of Goldthorpe and Lockwood, see Devine, F. (October 20, 2016). The working class, middle class, assimilation and convergence. *The Sociological Review Magazine*. Retrieved January 30, 2022, from <https://thesociologicalreview.org/journal-collections/past-and-present/the-working-class-middle-class-assimilation-and-convergence/>.

¹⁷ Goldthorpe, J. H. and Lockwood, D. (1963). Affluence and the British class structure. *Sociological Review* 11(2), 155–156. See also Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer, and Platt (1969).

¹⁸ Judt (2005), 391–394. The concept of meritocracy was coined by Michael Young in 1958; see Young, M. (1958). *The rise of the meritocracy 1870–2033: An essay on education and equality*. Thames & Hudson.

¹⁹ On the national grand narrative, see Meinander, H. (2011). *A history of Finland*. Gardners, 213–254.

²⁰ Alapuro, R. (2006). Erik Allardt: Fruitful contradictions. *Acta Sociologica* 49(2), 140–143.

narrative of affluence.²¹ Indeed, communist rhetoric on the economy started to slowly lose its explanatory power and political appeal when European socialist states did not provide similar standards of living for their citizens compared to the Western capitalist states.²² In 1967, sociologist Jouko Siipi emphasized the positive progress in his book *Ryysyrannasta hyvinvointivaltioon* (From Poverty to the Welfare State). The book celebrated Finland's fifty years of independence and at the same time provided a depiction of the societal atmosphere: Finland was above all an upcoming affluent society where poverty affected foremost a shrinking class of smallholders. For Siipi, the great future of the nation lay in the industrial and service sectors—and in the liberal market economy.

By the late 1970s and especially in the 1980s, the narrative of the classless society—or the society of the middle class—reached a somewhat master narrative status in Finland.²³ Especially during the 1980s, some twenty years after the vivid American and British discussion about the affluent worker, Finnish ethnographic and sociological studies noted a strong convergence between social classes.²⁴ The viral phrase of the decade, “to be born in Finland is like winning the lottery,”²⁵ sums up the societal

²¹ For example, see Keskitalo, A. (September 7, 1961). Kurjistumisteoria: Suuri paradoksi [Immiseration theory: A great paradox]. *Suomen sosialidemokraatti*; Nuotta (September 8, 1961). Karl Marxin jäljillä [In the footsteps of Karl Marx]. *Kansan Uutiset*.

²² On the declining electoral success of the far-left parties in Europe during the postwar era, see Delwit, P. (2021). “This is the final call”: An electoral history of European social democracy (1870–2019). *CEVIPOL Working Papers* 2021/1(1), 34–53.

²³ The narrative of the classless society can be highlighted, for example, in the opinion sections of the newspapers. For example, see Silvasti, E. (December 13, 1978). Ylisuuri kuvitelma [Oversized dreams]. *Helsingin Sanomat*; PH. (August 11, 1979). Rajat himmenevät [Distinctions are fading]. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*; Jakobson, M. (May 30, 1981). Meillä menee hyvin [We are doing fine]. *Uusi Suomi*; PH. (June 1, 1982). Keskiluokkaa oomme kaikki? [We are all middle class?]. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*; Leino, E. (May 27, 1988). Onko enää työläisiä? [Are there workers anymore?]. *Apu*. [Collected with the keyword “middle-classification”/“keskiluokkaistuminen” from the digital collections of the National Library of Finland. Retrieved January 30, 2022, from https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/etusivu?set_language=en].

²⁴ For example, see Ahponen, P. and Järvelä, M. (1983). *Maalta kaupunkiin, pientalalta tehtaaseen: Tehdastyöläisten elämäntavan muuttuminen* [From countryside to the city, from farms to the factories]. WSOY; Luokkaprojekti (1984). *Suomalaiset luokkakuvassa* [Finns in class portrayal]. Vastapaino; Kasvio, A. (1982). *Teollisuustyö ja elämäntapa: Tutkimus kahden suuren teollisuuslaitoksen ammattitaitoisten työntekijöiden työn ja työn ulkopuolisen elämän kehityspiirteistä 1980-luvun suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa* [Factory work and the way of life]. University of Tampere; Roos J. P. (1987). *Suomalainen elämä* [The Finnish life]. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.

²⁵ On the origins of the phrase, see Astikainen, A. (July 23, 2000). Kuka keksi lottovoittolaisahduksen? [Who invented the lottery phrase?]. *Helsingin Sanomat*.

atmosphere. In Britain, similar rhetoric can be found in the year 1957, when the Conservative Prime Minister at the time, Harold Macmillan, famously declared: “Most of our people have never had it so good.”²⁶

Overall, the origins of the contemporary narrative of the affluent worker can be located in the postwar discussion about class distinctions, which academic scholars provided and media formats spread throughout the West. There, the profound idea can be understood as an updated version of the “American Dream,” where the freedom of the frontiers was replaced by the concrete dream of conformity, the right for everybody to have equal material wealth to a certain extent.²⁷ The individual societal experience was reflected in this claim, which can be seen as the main ingredient for the postwar master narrative.

THE COUNTER-NARRATIVE ON POVERTY

The affluent worker was not a definite depiction of the postwar labor experience. In many cases, the experience of affluence was relative even within the skilled workers,²⁸ and—above all—the “New Working Class” was a concept describing Caucasian, blue-collar, often unionized men. Part-time and low-paid service sector employees, unskilled workers, migrants, ethnic minorities, and people outside working life did not receive the promise of the above-mentioned master narrative. During the 1960s, their life stories produced counter-narratives that strongly questioned fundamental ideas of affluence.

Still, in the late 1950s John Kenneth Galbraith declared that poverty in America was no longer “a massive affliction [but] more nearly an afterthought.”²⁹ The claim was highly premature, and it has been removed from later editions of the *Affluent Society*, but it depicted the societal atmosphere well. However, during the early 1960s strong

²⁶ Black, L. and Pemberton, H. (2004). Introduction: The uses (and abuses) of affluence. In L. Black and H. Pemberton (eds.), *An affluent society: Britain's postwar “golden age” revisited*. Routledge, 2.

²⁷ On the changing meanings of the concept of the American dream, see Churchwell, S. (2018). *Behold, America: A history of America first and the American dream*. Bloomsbury Publishing. See also Weir, R. E. (2007). American dream. In R. E. Weir (ed.), *Class in America: An encyclopedia, volume 1–3*. Greenwood Press, 23–25.

²⁸ Todd, S. (2014). *The people: The rise and fall of the working class 1910–2010*. John Murray, 252–267.

²⁹ Galbraith, J. K. (1959) [1958]. *The affluent society (fourth impression)*. Hamish Hamilton, 251. See also Macdonald, D. (January 19, 1963). Our invisible poor. *The New Yorker*.

counter-narratives against the idea emerged in the public discussion. One of the most widespread media narratives was a television documentary, *Harvest of Shame* (CBS, 1960), which shocked America with its portrayal of oppressed migrant agricultural workers. Other influential documentation was Michael Harrington's book *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (1962)—a direct attack against the popularized concept of the affluent society.³⁰ It has been said that both of these social documentations affected the agendas for the War on Poverty that was launched by President John F. Kennedy and continued by his successor, President Lyndon B. Johnson.³¹ Indeed, *Harvest of Shame* and *The Other America* have become staples in the American collective memory, and during their notable anniversaries, they are often revisited with the question: Has anything changed?³²

In *The Other America*, Harrington—a well-known democratic socialist—calculated that there were a significant number of poor people—forty to fifty million—in America.³³ Similar observations were also made in Britain during the early 1960s, where the claim was that the postwar welfare state policies had not banished poverty, but the relative poverty rate had rather increased.³⁴ In America, the poor mass included elderly, non-white, single parents, unemployed, underemployed, sick, and residents of rural and urban slums. Harrington's significant conclusion was that the poor form their own social class distinct from the organized working class, and—for the first time in history—this poor population was a minority in a society. Because of its minority status, the modern underclass was relatively invisible to the “middle classes”—the petty bourgeois and affluent workers. The poor experienced the world from their closed living

³⁰ Gronbeck-Tedesco J. A. (2007). The Other America. In R. E. Weir (ed.), *Class in America: An encyclopedia, volume 1–3*. Greenwood Press, 598–599.

³¹ Isserman, M. (2012). Foreword to *The Other America*. In M. Harrington. *The other America (50th anniversary edition)*. Scribner, xiv–xv.

³² For example, see Donovan, B. (1999). *Michael Harrington and today's other America*, documentary. Filmmakers Library; Pitts, B. (2010). *“Harvest of shame” revisited*, documentary. CBS.

³³ Harrington, M. (2012) [1962]. *The other America (50th anniversary edition)*. Scribner, 179–195.

³⁴ Abel-Smith, B. and Townsend, P. (1965). *The poor and the poorest: New analysis of the ministry of labour's family expenditure surveys of 1953–1954 and 1960*. G. Bell & Sons. Revisited in Gazeley, I., Newell, A., Reynolds, K., and Searle, R. (2014). The Poor and the Poorest, Fifty Years On. *IZA Discussion Papers, No. 7909*. Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA).

environments, were unorganized, and often suffered from systems of racial segregation.³⁵ These claims constructed a pure example of a counter-narrative that revealed the oppressive side of the master narrative. It can be claimed that the public portrayals of poverty deconstructed the narrative of affluence.

Harrington also claimed that the welfare state policies—established during the 1930s Rooseveltian New Deal era—had failed the poor and provided a social safety net mostly for “the middle third in the cities, for the organized workers, and for the upper third in the country, for the big market farmers.”³⁶ When analyzing the societal experiences, perhaps the most important concept Harrington popularized in the context of the United States was the culture of poverty—a concept formerly associated with the works of the anthropologist Oscar Lewis.³⁷ For Harrington, the culture of poverty produced communities with a lack of faith in the future and a lack of faith in democracy. In other words, the poor were not attached to society.³⁸

Later, Harrington claimed that during the progressive era of the 1960s, it seemed that the American poor could be politically organized as part of the contemporary New Deal coalition with the civil rights movement, young academic social activists, and labor unions. However, during the dramatic events at the end of the decade (the Vietnam War, the failures of the Johnson administration, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy) the momentum was gone, and the coalition scattered.³⁹ Similar coalitions arose, for example, in France and Italy, when the ambitions of student radicals and organized labor overlapped briefly with progressive programs during the late 1960s.⁴⁰

In 1960s Finland—in the waves of youth radicalism and social movements—the public discussion also pointed out the faults, stratifications, and injustices of rapid modernization. The social rights of alcoholics, the

³⁵ Harrington (2012) [1962], 1–17. See also Harrington, M. (1959, July). Our fifty million poor: Forgotten men of the affluent society. *The Commentary*; cf. Galbraith, J. K. (1998) [1958]. *The affluent society (40th anniversary edition)* [e-book]. Mariner Books, 205–212.

³⁶ Harrington (2012) [1962], 8.

³⁷ Lewis, O. (1961). *The children of Sanchez: Autobiography of a Mexican family*. Random House.

³⁸ Harrington (2012) [1962], 10–11.

³⁹ Schmitt, E. R. (2010). *President of the other America: Robert Kennedy and the politics of poverty*. University of Massachusetts Press, 226.

⁴⁰ Judt (2005), 409–416.

homeless, convicts, and people with mental illness were at the forefront in the struggle against poverty. Poverty was also seen as a problem in the closed, relatively small communities of Romani people and those in old, decayed, working-class quarters.⁴¹ However, the actual pockets of mass poverty were mostly hidden inside the smallholder communities all over the sparsely populated nation. During the latter part of the decade, the crises of ineffective smallholding exploded into the Great Migration from rural areas to the boom towns and abroad, especially to Sweden.⁴² In the grand narrative, the assimilation of hundreds of thousands of rural residents to the urban working class and middle class was a success, even though the rootlessness of the first-generation urbanites was highlighted.⁴³ In the 1980s, Finland was an example of a nation where traditional portrayals of poverty were almost exclusively replaced by deeply individual descriptions of social exclusion in mainstream public discussion.⁴⁴

FALL OF THE WESTERN AFFLUENT WORKING CLASS

The narrative of blue-collar affluence started to change during the mid-1970s, when the Western working class confronted economic backlashes through automatization and early modern globalization.⁴⁵ Indeed, the manufacturing industries started to shrink throughout the West.⁴⁶ The

⁴¹ Popular contemporary record on social activism of the 1960s; see Salo, A. and Ahlfors, B. (1970). *60-luku: Silmäilyä, sormeilua* (The 1960s: Seen and felt). Tammi. Contemporary record on gentrification; see Koskinen, T. and Savisaari, A. (1971). *Onni yksillä – pesä kaikilla: Tutkimus Amurin ja Tammelan saneerauksesta Tampereen kaupungissa* (Renewal of two working-class areas in Tampere city centre). Research Center of University of Tampere, summary in English 154–155.

⁴² Häkkinen, A. and Peltola, J. (2001). On the social history of unemployment and poverty in Finland 1860–2000. In J. Kalela, J. Kiander, U. Kivikuru, H. A. Loikkanen, and J. Simpura (eds.), *Down from the heavens, up from the ashes: The Finnish economic crisis of the 1990s in the light of economic and social research*. Government Institute for Economic Research, 322–327.

⁴³ Haapala, P. (2006). Suomalainen rakennemuutos [The Finnish structural change]. In J. Saari (ed.), *Historiallinen käänne: Jobdatus pitkän aikavälin historian tutkimukseen*, Gaudeamus, 92–93.

⁴⁴ Helne, T. (1994). Erään muodin tarina: 1980-luvun suomalaisesta syrjäytymiskeskustelusta [On 1980s Finnish discussion about social exclusion]. In M. Heikkilä and K. Vähätalo (eds.), *Huono-osaisuus ja hyvinvointivaltion muutos*. Gaudeamus, 32–50. On the decline of traditional types of poverty, see Häkkinen and Peltola (2001), 327–328.

⁴⁵ The concept of globalization was first introduced to the mainstream with the article: Levitt, T. (1983, May). Globalization of the Markets. *Harvard Business Magazine*, 92–102.

⁴⁶ Judt (2005), 458–460.

aftermath of the early 1970s oil crises created a crisis narrative, and the decade was soon seen as a watershed between the Golden Age of industrial capitalism and “something else.”⁴⁷

From an American blue-collar perspective, the decline of the Midwest industrial areas strongly questioned the narrative of the affluent worker. The popular concept of the “Rust Belt” was coined by the Democratic presidential candidate Walter Mondale in 1984, when he announced that “Reagan’s policies are turning our industrial Midwest into a rust bowl.”⁴⁸ An earlier grand moment for the crisis narrative was “Black Monday” in September 1977, when an industrial town in Ohio—Youngstown—suffered enormous industrial layoffs in one day. After the shutdown of the city’s two mills, the master narrative of the affluent worker was strongly challenged: The promise of a secure social position was gone, and it was replaced by the fear that anyone working in manufacturing could lose his/her job.⁴⁹ Gradually “Black Mondays” and “Rust Belts”—not to mention the rise of Japan as an industrial powerhouse and struggles of the automotive industry in Detroit⁵⁰—started to replace the concept of the affluent society in the working-class narrative.

During the early 1980s, especially the concept of deindustrialization was introduced to the public discussion.⁵¹ In addition, Michael Harrington

⁴⁷ Hobsbawm (1995) [1994], 403–432. On the origins of the narrative, see Fourastié, J. (1979). *Les Trente Glorieuses: Ou la révolution invisible de 1946 à 1975* (The glorious thirty: Invisible revolution from 1946 to 1975). Fayard.

⁴⁸ Trubek, A. (April 3, 2018). Our collective ignorance about the Rust Belt is getting dangerous. *Time*.

⁴⁹ Guerrieri, V. (September 19, 2017). On the 40th anniversary of Youngstown’s “Black Monday”: An oral history. *Belt Magazine*. Retrieved January 30, 2022, from <https://belt-mag.com/40th-anniversary-youngstowns-black-monday-oral-history/>. Deindustrialization as a cultural phenomenon; see High, S. (2021). Deindustrialization and its consequences. In M. Fazio, C. Launius, and T. Strangleman (eds.), *Routledge international handbook of working-class studies*. Routledge, 169–179.

⁵⁰ Overview of the narrative of Detroit; see Williamson, M. (December 15, 2014). Detroit: Decline and fall of the motor city. *Engineering & Technology*. Retrieved May 20, 2022, from <https://eandt.theiet.org/content/articles/2014/12/detroit-decline-and-fall-of-the-motor-city/>. Overview of the Western narrative of Japan; see Thierer, A. (June 28, 2021). “Japan Inc.” and other tales of industrial policy apocalypse. *Discourse*. Retrieved May 20, 2022, from <https://www.discoursemagazine.com/culture-and-society/2021/06/28/japan-inc-and-other-theses-of-industrial-policy-apocalypse/>.

⁵¹ Impactful contemporary record to popularize the term; see Bluestone, B. and Harrison, B. (1982). *The deindustrialization of America: Plant closings, community abandonment and the dismantling of basic industry*. Basic Books. On impact of the inquiry, see High (2021), 170.

addressed the topic and highlighted new forms of poverty. In 1985, he pointed out the changing narrative of the affluent worker:

The first, and perhaps most dramatic of the new groups, are the blue collar unionized workers. These are workers, many of them forty to fifty years of age, who have lost their jobs because of plant shutdowns. Three or four years ago, they were making \$30,000 to \$40,000 per year, and yet today they are confronted with a bleak question: Who wants a forty-five year old ex-steelworker? [...] They bought the American dream – lock, stock, and barrel – and they thought that they had it made. Suddenly, these proud people are out of a job, and they find themselves down at the union hall getting a basket of food.⁵²

Indeed, from the 1980s onwards Western manufacturing labor was threatened with the prospect of ending up “on welfare”—a derogatory phrase connected to welfare recipients—as globalization shaped the job markets. Simultaneously, in West Germany the narrative of the “Two-Third Society” emerged. Social Democrat politician Peter Glotz popularized the concept, which was used to describe a nation where one-third of the population is left out from the common lifestyle, mostly due to unemployment and economic structural changes. The narrative claimed that there is a danger that this large minority can never achieve average living standards.⁵³ In America, the so-called neoconservatives—a term coined by Michael Harrington in 1973⁵⁴—used the concept of the culture of poverty to prove the failings of American federal welfare programs, and they intentionally created a conflict between the racialized poor (the “Other America”) and the affluent blue-collar working class.⁵⁵ This conflict started to escalate when the economic backlash against the blue-collar workers actualized. Indeed, the economic backlash did not create a sense of solidarity between the struggling blue-collar working class and the “Other America.” As Michael Harrington claimed, the former assembly line

⁵² Harrington, M. (1985). The New American Poverty. *National Black Law Journal* 9(2), 200. See also Harrington, M. (1984). *The New American Poverty*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

⁵³ Overview of the conversation; see Headey, B., Krause, P., and Habich, R. (1994). Long and short term poverty: Is Germany a two-thirds society? *Social Indicators Research* 31(1), 1–25.

⁵⁴ Harrington, M. (Fall, 1973). The Welfare State and Its Neoconservative Critics. *Dissent*.

⁵⁵ Isserman (2012), xviii–xix.

workers kept their affluent identity, and when asked, they “told you that they were middle class.”⁵⁶

In Finland, the Golden Age of the wage-based society ended only in the early 1990s, when the nation suffered from a breathtaking recession. Then, deindustrialization shaped the national narrative. Long-term unemployment—a class of people living solely on income transfers—highlighted the tragedy of the “’90s recession.”⁵⁷ As in the rest of the West, it was the people without a college degree who suffered severely from the economic restructuring.⁵⁸ However, the Finnish crisis narrative was soon downplayed by the enormous growth of the high-tech industries led by the mobile phone manufacturer Nokia.⁵⁹ The narrative of the “Rust Belt” was truly actualized only after the global economic crash of 2008.⁶⁰ It could be argued that the Finnish counterpart to Youngstown’s “Black Monday” was September 3, 2013, when Nokia announced the sale of its mobile and devices division to Microsoft Corporation. The process that led to the deal together with numerous paper mill shutdowns created the contemporary narrative of declining manufacturing in Finland.⁶¹

Overall, the transition from “affluent worker” to “forgotten people of the Rust Belt” was downplayed in Western public and academic discussion during the 1980s and 1990s.⁶² The concept of the post-industrial society—a term popularized by sociologist Daniel Bell in the 1970s—overshadowed the concept of the industrial society in the mainstream media. Then, the working class was replaced by knowledge workers as the main productive agents in society.⁶³ The revival of the blue-collar working class as a political entity was actualized only during the new millennium, when

⁵⁶ Harrington (1985), 200.

⁵⁷ Häkkinen and Peltola (2001), 334–338.

⁵⁸ Häkkinen and Peltola (2001), 338. For a recent analysis, see Soininvaara, O. (2021). *2020-luvun yhteiskuntapolitiikka* (Social politics of the 2020s). Teos, 63–97.

⁵⁹ Haapala (2006), 94–95.

⁶⁰ Koivuniemi, J. (2018). Tehtaiden Suomi ja deindustrialisaatio 1900–2000 [Finnish deindustrialization 1900–2000]. In P. Haapala (ed.), *Suomen rakennehistoria: Näkökulmia muutokseen ja jatkuvuuteen (1400–2000)*. Vastapaino, 239–242.

⁶¹ Impactful depictions of the crisis narrative; see headline posters in *Iltalehti* (February 12–13, 2011) and *Iltalehti* (February 9, 2012).

⁶² Goldthorpe and Marshall (1992). See also Pakulski, J. and Waters, M. (1996). *The Death of Class*. Sage Publications.

⁶³ Haapala, P. (2001). The rise and fall of industrial society: Perceptions of urban reality. In M. Niemi and V. Vuolanto (eds.), *Reclaiming the city: Innovation, culture, experience*. Suomen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 90–93.

a significant segment of the formerly affluent workers shifted its loyalty from the labor movement to more conservative, even far-right political forces. However, this *conservative backlash* had its roots as far back as the “Radical Sixties.”

NARRATIVE OF WORKING-CLASS CONSERVATISM

Even during the 1950s, the idea of political embourgeoisement emerged every now and then in public debates, especially in Britain. Then, one of the driving forces was the lackluster electoral success of the Labour Party. In survey research, *Must Labour Lose?* (1960), Mark Abrams, Richard Rose, and Rita Hinden claimed that the decline of Labour was connected to the shrinking of the traditional working class. The authors emphasized that the Labour Party needed to attract also the middle class to gain electoral success.⁶⁴

During the 1960s, it appeared that left-wing parties across the West were redeeming their status as the democratic representatives of the working class, and, for example, John Goldthorpe and his affiliates denied the claim that the link between the working-class vote and the Labour Party had vanished.⁶⁵ However, in the United States—as noted earlier—the modern New Deal coalition did not last long. It can be claimed that the final phase of the labor movement as a mass movement in America can be traced to the early 1970s, when a strong wave of strikes swept over the nation—only to be confronted by shocks like Youngstown’s “Black Monday.”⁶⁶

During the late 1960s, the shift toward the new narrative of the working-class conservative appeared in the American public discussion. The US presidential election of 1968 can be seen as a turning point. Disappointments with the phenomena of the “Radical Sixties” (anti-war and civil rights protests, desegregation policies, and riots in different cities) and experiences of the unfairness of welfare policies created a protest atmosphere among white- and blue-collar Caucasian Americans. In 1968,

⁶⁴ Abrams, M., Rose, R., and Hinde, R. 1961. *Must Labour Lose?* Penguin Books. See also Zweig (1961).

⁶⁵ Goldthorpe, J. H., Lockwood, D., Bechhofer, F., and Platt, J. (1967). The affluent worker and the thesis of embourgeoisement: Some preliminary research findings. *Sociology* 1(1), 11–31. See also Delwit (2021), 34–53.

⁶⁶ Cowie, J. (2010). *Stayin’ alive: The 1970s and the last days of the working class*. The New Press, 1–19.

a former Democratic governor of Alabama, George Wallace, entered the presidential race as an independent candidate and flirted with anti-establishment rhetoric and more than borderline racist segregation populism. Wallace gained relatively strong support from the unionized blue-collar workers of the Midwest.⁶⁷ At the same time, the winner of the presidential race, Richard Nixon, underlined the division between “Rioters/Left-wing Radicals” and the “Silent Majority.”⁶⁸ The message was aimed mostly toward the affluent middle-class and working-class suburbanites.

At the turn of the decade, many blue-collar voters for Wallace and Nixon seemed to care more about “Law and Order” rhetoric than traditional economic issues, and for many, the Democratic Party was seen mainly as the party of radicals and minorities.⁶⁹ As contemporary commentators argued, the angst of blue-collar America—actualized through conservative support—was partly aimed at youth radicalism and policies such as affirmative action, but it also reflected the fear of losing a relatively affluent economic and social status.⁷⁰ In 1969, Pete Hamill argued in *New York Magazine*: “The working-class white man is actually in revolt against taxes, joyless work, the double standards and short memories of professional politicians, hypocrisy and what he considers the debasement of the American dream.”⁷¹ This revolt was firstly associated with George Wallace and the 1970s waves of strikes.

A decade later the conservative backlash materialized through general elections. Firstly, Great Britain—after experiencing both Labour and Conservative governments struggling with recessions, cultural conflicts,

⁶⁷ Devinatz, V. G. (2017). Donald Trump, George Wallace, and the white working class. *Labor Studies Journal* 42(3), 233–238.

⁶⁸ Nixon, R. M. (October, 1967). What has happened to America? *The Reader's Digest*; Nixon, R. M. (November 3, 1969). *Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam*. Retrieved January 30, 2022, from <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/november-3-1969-address-nation-war-vietnam>.

⁶⁹ Carter, D. (2000) [1995]. *The politics of rage: George Wallace, the origins of the new conservatism and the transformation of American politics (2nd edition)*. Louisiana State University Press, 379.

⁷⁰ For example, Tyler, G. (1972, Winter). White worker/blue mood. *The Independent*; Silk, L. S. (September 9, 1970). The blue-collar blues. *New York Times*; Hamill, P. (April 14, 1969). The revolt of the white lower middle class. *New York Magazine*; Harrington, M. (Fall, 1974). A Collective Sadness. *Dissent*; Murray, D. (1972). *The Blue Collar Trap*, documentary. NBC. See also Cowie (2010), 1–19.

⁷¹ Hamill (April 14, 1969).

problems in the education sector, and widespread waves of strikes—elected Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1979.⁷² Before the elections, the “Winter of Discontent” created a widespread anti-union atmosphere throughout the nation. The populist narrative—endorsed by tabloid journalism—highlighted the vivid wave of strikes during the 1978/1979 winter as a testament of excessive union influence on democratic society. Thatcher successfully emphasized the “threat of the unions.”⁷³ During the same period, after the struggling presidency of Democrat Jimmy Carter, Americans elected neoconservative idol Ronald Reagan as president and—as historian Kenneth D. Durr has noted—it was “the working whites, who put Reagan in the White House.”⁷⁴

Both Reagan and Thatcher emphasized economic deregulation, nationalistic rhetoric, traditional values, and actions against the organized labor movement and welfare state policies. Also, the narrative of the patriotic working people as the backbone of national glory was strongly highlighted. During their decade-long reign, it seemed that the parties of the left—still affected by the stigma of social radicalism and excessive moral liberalism—could not compete with the charm of modern conservatism in the eyes of a relatively large section of the working class.⁷⁵ Additionally, labor unions were given a militaristic reputation by the media and governments—most famously during the British miner’s strike in 1984–1985. The concept of the “Reagan Democrat” and the British concept of the “Essex man” were popularized as portrayals of the working-class voter who supported conservative leaders.⁷⁶

In Finland—an example of the so-called Nordic welfare state in this study—the traditional labor movement started to lose its countercultural roots during the 1970s. Then, a coalition of communists and socialists sat

⁷² Judt (2005), 537–545.

⁷³ Revisited in Hay, C. (2009). The winter of discontent thirty years on. *The Political Quarterly* 80(4), 545–552. See also Hall, S. (January, 1979). The great moving right show. *Marxism Today*.

⁷⁴ Durr, K. D. (2003). *Behind the backlash: White working-class politics in Baltimore, 1940–1980*. The University of North Carolina Press, 1.

⁷⁵ Caryl, C. (July/August, 2009). The great backlash 1979. *Foreign Policy*.

⁷⁶ On Reagan Democrats, see Weir, R. E. (2007). Reagan democrats. In R. E. Weir (ed.), *Class in America: An encyclopedia, volume 1–3*. Greenwood Press, 682–684. On Essex Man, see Rentoul, J. (October 7, 2020). Essex man is 30 years old today, and about to start a new life somewhere else. *The Independent*. Retrieved March 17, 2022, from <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/essex-man-margaret-thatcher-conservatives-labour-tony-blair-voters-b864291.html>.

in Popular Front governments, the Social Democratic Party was mostly the party of the Prime Minister, labor unions had unquestionable societal and economic impact, almost the whole workforce of the nation was unionized, and the industrial and service sectors provided decent- to well-paid jobs for most of the population. From the early 1970s onwards, most of the establishment of the labor movement was part of the national power structure, which swore by the concept of consensus.⁷⁷

However, it was not the Finnish urban working class who were attracted to populism—it was the struggling smallholders. During the general elections of the 1970s, the agrarian populist *Suomen Maaseudun Puolue* (Finnish Rural Party) with its charismatic leader, Veikko Vennamo, gained strong support among the rural communities. The aggressive rhetoric of Vennamo focused on the concept of *Unohdettu kansa* (The Forgotten People), which resembled the Nixonian “Silent Majority.” The focus for the party was on smallholder communities with conservative and anti-communist values. The populism of Vennamo did not attract the urban working-class masses. The Social Democrats and declining socialist/communist movement received most of the working class vote up until the 2000s.⁷⁸ However, during the 1990s, the premises of left-wing politics changed significantly when the far-left party the Left Alliance abandoned communist traditions and the Social Democrat leadership leaned more toward free market economics. This was partly inspired by the Anglo-American rebranding of moderate liberals.

Indeed, during the 1990s, President Bill Clinton reinvented the American Democratic Party as more pro-globalization, pro-privatization, and anti-big government. The reinvention was successful—as was Tony Blair’s similar rebranding of the Labour Party in the United Kingdom.⁷⁹ It can be said that the late 1950s idea of the middle class as a backbone for social democracy was actualized. As cultural historian Thomas Frank has pointed out, the blue-collar working class was not a priority for the Clinton Democrats. It was seen that the wide range of the educated

⁷⁷ Alapuro, R. (2012). Nordic and Finnish modernity: A comparison. In J. P. Árnason and B. Wittrock (eds.), *Nordic paths to modernity*. Berghahn Books, 202–204.

⁷⁸ Jungar, A. C. (2015). Agrarian populism in Finland: Continuity and change. In D. Strijker, G. Voerman, and I. J. Terluin (eds.), *Rural protest groups and populist political parties*. Wageningen Academic, 217–242.

⁷⁹ Judt (2005), 545–547. For a critical overview of Clinton’s presidency, see Frank, T. (2016). *Listen, liberal. Or, what ever happened to the party of the people?* Metropolitan Books, 62–123.

class—knowledge workers—were the established core for the Clinton coalition.⁸⁰ In his influential book *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (2004), Frank portrays the contemporary working class as a social class with conservative values, but ultimately with a leftist economic understanding.⁸¹ During the 1990s, this class—threatened with globalization—was indeed the forgotten class in the narrative of the meritocratic/post-industrial society. Then, the “American Dream” was also rebranded to focus on education and talent. Those who had the brains for college deserved a better societal status.⁸²

Since the turn of the new millennium, the “Silent Majorities” of the local “Rust Belts” have voted more often for conservatives and right-wing populists throughout the West, while the growing class of knowledge workers has leaned toward the political left. In his book *Capital and Ideology* (French 2019, English 2020), French economist Thomas Piketty emphasizes this phenomenon and claims that “like the left-wing parties in France, the Democratic Party in the United States transitioned over half a century from the workers’ party to the party of the highly educated.”⁸³ Piketty points out that the same transition has also happened in a historical stronghold for social democracy, Sweden, and almost all over the world.⁸⁴ In Finland, working-class conservatism as a serious political entity was actualized during the 2010s with the contemporary political party *Perussuomalaiset* (Finns Party). It was a direct successor of the above-mentioned *Suomen Maaseudun Puolue*, but the party has lately transformed from agrarian populism to far-right populism, combining the narrative of the forgotten people with vicious anti-immigrant policies.⁸⁵

Indeed, during the 2010s and 2020s, the conservative backlash—now rebranded as the *populist backlash*—has opened doors for so-called far-right movements throughout the West. The movements have emphasized

⁸⁰ On the changing narratives of the Democratic party, see Frank (2016).

⁸¹ Frank, T. (2004). *What's the matter with Kansas? How conservatives won the heart of America*. Metropolitan Books, 20–27.

⁸² A critical overview on meritocracy; see Sandell, M. (2020). *The tyranny of merit: What's become of the common good?* Penguin Books. See also Florida, R. (March 1, 2003). The New American dream. *Washington Monthly*; Frank (2016), 68–73.

⁸³ Piketty, T. (2020) [2019]. *Capital and ideology* (Capital et idéologie). The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 812.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ On Finnish voting schemes, see Tiihonen, A. (2022). *The mechanisms of class-party ties among the Finnish working-class voters in the 21st century*. University of Tampere and author.

the “Silent Majorities,” and they have gained strong electoral support from the aging and shrinking blue-collar working class.⁸⁶ For example, in Britain and France, the narrative of the working-class conservative has become an important part of the societal master narrative when analyzing the political identities of the 2020s.⁸⁷ Above all, the blue-collar working class as a social and economic group was recognized again as part of the Western grand narrative in 2016, when it gave significant support to former president Donald Trump and the pro-Brexit vote. Since then, the news media in the West has reported the suffering of the local “Rust Belts,” the realities of deindustrialization, and unequal aspects of meritocracy, among other phenomena, which could explain the rise of populism.⁸⁸ One recent example of the “Rust Belt” rhetoric—and a reprise of labor-oriented moderate left-wing rhetoric—was seen in March 2022, when President Joe Biden declared in the first State of the Union Address of his presidency that “it is time to bury the label ‘Rust Belt.’”⁸⁹

CONCLUSION

During the late 1950s, the “Western worker” reflected on his own living conditions in terms of the widely discussed idea of affluence and embourgeoisement. In the 1960s, strong counter-narratives questioning the affluent society emerged throughout the West in the form of social documentaries, such as *Harvest of Shame* and *The Other America*. The

⁸⁶ For a popular autobiographical interpretation, see Eribon, D. (2018) [2009]. *Returning to Reims* (Retour à Reims). The MIT Press. For popular autobiographical fiction, see Louis, É. (2017) [2014]. *The End of Eddy* (En finir avec Eddy Bellegueule). Harvill Secker.

⁸⁷ For example, see Ball, A. and Coley, T. (April 16, 2020). How Labour lost the working-class. *Red Train, rambling to the left*. Retrieved January 30, 2022, from <http://www.redtrainblog.com/blog/2021/4/how-labour-lost-the-working-class>; Hussey, A. (July 24, 2019). The French elites against the working class. *The New Statesman*. Retrieved January 30, 2022, from <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2019/07/the-french-elites-against-the-working-class>.

⁸⁸ For popular autobiographical interpretations, see Vance, J. D. (2016). *Hillbilly elegy: A memoir of a family and culture in crisis*. Harper; Smarsh, S. (2018). *Heartland: A memoir of working hard and being broke in the richest country on earth*. Scribe Publications. See also Hochschild, A. R. (2016). *Strangers in their own land: Anger and mourning on the American right*. The New Press; Madrick, J. (June 22, 2017). America: The forgotten poor. *The New York Review of Books*.

⁸⁹ Biden, J. R. (March 1, 2022). *State of the Union Address*. Retrieved March 4, 2022, from <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/march-1-2022-state-union-address>.

highly publicized fight for the rights of oppressed minorities was perhaps the most influential part of the 1960s narrative, but at the same time the fierce actions of the labor movement positively affected the living conditions of millions of workers. Briefly, it seemed that conflicts between the Caucasian working class, young radicals, and ethnic minorities would not escalate. It could be claimed that when living standards were vastly improving, it was easier to create a narrative of solidarity between different social groups.

This changed during the late 1960s, when conservative political rhetoric produced an effective counter-narrative against the social phenomena of the radical decade. The conflict between the “hard-working common man” and “welfare state recipients” supported by the “left-wing radicals” was successfully highlighted by the neoconservatives. Together with economic backlashes, this rhetoric resonated among the blue-collar working class. The experience of the political left abandoning the working class—the “Silent Majority”—was and still is widespread. Simultaneously, it can be said that there is no profound lived or embodied welfare state to be found within the master narrative of the affluent working class. The welfare state policies were—especially in the Anglo-American world—represented as something outside the living environments of the workers. In other words, the welfare state was for someone else. Even in the Nordic countries—where the welfare state has been a distinct feature of the national master narrative for decades⁹⁰—there are discussions on the intended recipients of welfare state policies.

It can be claimed that the experience of social class in the affluent society has not been actively realized in living communities or on a daily basis—as was the case with the theories of E. P. Thompson on the birth of nineteenth-century class consciousness.⁹¹ Now, class experience is made mostly through the mediatization of society.⁹² During the early stages of the era of mass media, the platforms were newspapers, widely circulated inquiries, narrative art, and television, while nowadays it is often social media. Public narratives are produced by different authors—for example, sociologists, economists, journalists, literary authors, politicians, and other

⁹⁰For example, in Finland the welfare state was introduced to the national master narrative during the 1980s and especially during the 1990s, when Finland suffered from severe recession. Then, the widely used narrative of the ongoing battle to defend “the structures of the welfare state” was born. Kettunen (2019), 252–253.

⁹¹Thompson E. P. (1963). *The making of the English working class*. Penguin Books, 9–10.

⁹²Carr (2014), 59–60.

public figures. This mediatization, combined with the privatization of the working-class lifestyle, has produced a contemporary field for the class experience where class consciousness is internalized globally from Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, television, radio talk shows, and blogs—not in union hall meetings.

During the twenty-first century, the concept of the working class has been reinvented in the fields of academic and public discussion.⁹³ As seen in this chapter, the traditional narratives have been heavily male and Caucasian. Now, the traditional depiction of the frustrated male worker has been accompanied by new types of class portrayals. The intersectional approach—a term coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in the late 1980s⁹⁴—emphasizes the power structures between class, ethnicity, and gender. The approach helps to reveal the modes of discrimination and privilege in the contemporary societies and, at last, the modern underclass is recognized as part of the working class.⁹⁵ For example, the concept of precarity—the heterogeneous social group of underemployed and low-paid service sector employees—is highlighted as a new working-class formation.⁹⁶ Overall, the blue-collar working class no longer represents the grand narrative of the social class. It has become a “traditional” mode of class positioning, sometimes even antagonistic toward the new class formations. Indeed, the making of the class experience was, is, and will be an ongoing process.

⁹³About working-class studies, see Fazio, M., Launius, C., and Strangleman, T. (eds.) (2021). *Routledge international handbook of working-class studies*. Routledge.

⁹⁴See Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review* 43(6), 1241–1299.

⁹⁵Skeggs, B. (1997). *Formations of class & gender*. Sage Publications; Skeggs, B. (2004). *Class, self, culture*. Routledge.

⁹⁶Roberts, K. (2020). Dealignment: Class in Britain and class in British sociology since 1945. *Societies* 10(4). Retrieved January 30, 2022, from <https://www.mdpi.com/2075-4698/10/4/79/html>.

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PART V

Experience of Equality and Justice



Rural (In)Justice: Smallholding as Social Policy in a Modernizing Finland, from 1945 to the 1960s

Ville Erkkilä

INTRODUCTION¹

The early twentieth-century social and economic history of the small countries between the former Russian and German Empires was characterized by large-scale projects of redistributing landed property. From Finland to the Balkan Peninsula, the newly independent nation states attempted to modernize their societies and redefine their economic

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constitutions by means of land reforms.² After the Second World War, all the countries of the “Green zone” or “fringe regions” implemented yet another massive land redistribution. This time, it was in most cases labeled as a socialist project, although in reality these land reforms had very much to do with resettling the vast number of inner-state refugees and reinstating the structures of peacetime society in a region that had been the eastern warfront of the battle for Europe.³

In the Finnish case, the post-Second World War reconstruction meant building the infrastructure for nationally essential industry and reforming the public administration and legal system to be more in line with its Scandinavian neighbors.⁴ At the same time, it was pivotal to secure a peaceful and predictable societal order and as clearly as possible choose a different path from the socialist regimes of Eastern Europe. However, to carry out the reconstruction project, the Finnish government selected the same set of old tools that were also used in the now-socialist fringe regions: The government once again resettled the landless (and homeless) part of the population on small plots of undeveloped land. The idea was that the people themselves—when necessary—would clear these small plots for cultivation from forest or peat land, which they were more than willing to do.⁵ In total, some 400,000 war veterans and Karelian evacuees were resettled after the Second World War to the mostly agrarian municipalities

² Heaton, H. (1966). *Economic history of Europe*. Harper & Row and John Weatherhill, 472.

³ Swain, N. (2014). Eastern European collectivization campaigns compared, 1945–1962. In A. Bauerkämper and C. Iordachi (eds.), *The collectivization of agriculture in communist Eastern Europe: Comparison and entanglements*. CEU Press; Schwartz M. (2004). *Vertriebene und "Umsiedlerpolitik": Integrationskonflikte in den Deutschen Nachkriegs-Gesellschaften und die Assimilationsstrategien in der SBZ/DDR 1945–1961*. Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag.

⁴ Haaparanta, P., Tamminen, S., Heikkinen, S., Aunesluoma, J., Nilsson-Hakkala, K., Kiviluoto, J., Lavikainen K., and Rissanen A. (2017). *100 vuotta pientä avotaloutta: Suomen ulkomaankaupan kehitys, merkitys ja näkymät*. Valtioneuvosto; Pihlajamäki H. (2018). Jälleenrakennuksen aika 1945–1965. In H. Pihlajamäki (ed.), *Lainkäyttöä läpi vuosisadan: Näkökulmia korkeimman oikeuden historiaan 1918–2018*. Edita, 167.

⁵ See, for example, Kupiainen, H. (2007). *Savotta-Suomen synty, kukoistus ja hajoaminen: Talonpoikaisen maanomistuksen muutos ja elinkeinot Savossa ja Pohjois-Karjalassa 1850–2000*. Joensuun yliopistopaino, 157–158; Rasila, V. (2004). Overview of the history of Finnish agriculture: From prehistory to the 21st century. In P. Markkola (ed.), *Suomen maatalouden historia 3: Suurten muutosten aika – Jälleenrakennuskaudesta EU-Suomeen*. SKS, 503. About the “land hunger” in Finland after the Second World War, see Uljas P. (2014). Demokraattisen pienviljelyvaltion sosiaalipolitiikka toisen maailmansodan jälkeisinä vuosina. In M. Hannikainen (ed.), *Työväestö ja hyvinvointi*. Työväen historian ja perinteen tutkimuksen seura, 73–104.

of Finland. Hence, the massive redistribution of landed property that the government implemented immediately after the Second World War was at the very center of the Finnish reconstruction process.

The land reform in itself was a political and administrative project, but the many unintended consequences of that radical and far-reaching act were dealt with in courtrooms, and it is there where the inevitable clash between the rural lifestyle and the drastic, top-down project of the land reform was verbalized. The state's intention—as laid down in the legislation as well as expressed in the official interpretation of the law—was to modernize the country in a harmonious, restrained way, and at the same time extend its social political imperatives also to issues concerning agricultural production.⁶ Yet with its approach, the state in practice countered the old fundamental conception in which small-scale farming constituted the essence of Finland and allegedly also provided a roadmap for the future development of Finnish society. As a result, there was a continuing contradiction between the rural understanding of justice—the perpetual right to land—and the official endeavor of building a welfare state.

The data for my case study come from the court records of the district of Janakkala in southern Finland from 1945 to the early 1960s.⁷ The chapter scrutinizes the attitudes and sentiments of the rural population that derived from a clear-cut demographic change in post-Second World War Finland. By 1950, the resettled war veterans and evacuees had increased the population of many agrarian municipalities near Janakkala, along with the whole of southern Finland, by 10–15 percent. Yet already in 1960, the small municipalities had lost a good part of their population or barely maintained the same level of inhabitants, whereas small cities in rural areas

⁶ Granberg, L. (2004). Tuotannon kasvun vuosikymmenet. In P. Markkola (ed.), *Suomen maatalouden historia 3: Suurten muutosten aika – Jälleenrakennuskaudesta EU-Suomeen*. SKS, 185–186.

⁷ The national archives in Hämeenlinna (*Janakkalan tuomiokunnan arkisto, Hämeenlinnan maakunta-arkisto*), hereafter dJ NAHa. The archives of the district of Janakkala (dJ), and the municipal courts (*käräjäkunta*) of Loppi (mL) and Hausjärvi (mH). Janakkala had a long history as an agrarian region and it resettled a high number of Karelian refugees. Peltola, J. and Helle, E. (2015). *Pääradan ja kolmostien kunta: Janakkalan historia 1866–2014*. Janakkalan kunta.

had experienced a growth of 30–50 percent in just a decade.⁸ The sudden influx of people into the agricultural municipalities after the war and equally dramatic migration away from them during the 1950s bears witness to a drastic change in the everyday reality of the Finnish countryside that significantly altered the economic and legal circumstances defining the rural experience.

In this study, I will combine a quantitative and qualitative approach for extracting the experience of the rural population. I will outline the framework and structures that affected the people living in the countryside. By concentrating on a few individual court cases within the structural change indicated by the initial quantitative analysis, I am able to deepen my investigation to the level of rural experience. I will argue that the land reform—although an already familiar political practice in Finland for tackling an unprecedented and overwhelming social problem, and in line with the similar endeavors actualized throughout the other Eastern European fringe regions—in the post-Second World War circumstances brought about consequences that effectively separated Finnish society from the Eastern European trajectory.

The land reform started a process in which the previous ideal of a country characterized by a multitude of smallholdings dissolved. Along with demographic and economic development, the conditions that defined the legal relations of the smallholders to the state changed, but at the same time, the land reform significantly affected the revamping of the self-understanding of the regional local courts vis-à-vis state governance. Yet, amid the favorable progress in Finnish society concerning the rule of law and the welfare state, which becomes evident in the larger trends of the changing countryside, for many rural people the land reform in contrast produced experiences of blatant injustice.

⁸Derived from Official Statistics of Finland (1958). *Population Census 1950. Volume VIII. Population by birth-place, educational level, knowledge of languages, congregation, Swedish-speaking population and aliens*. Valtioneuvosto, and Official Statistics of Finland (1965). *General Census of Population 1960. Volume XI. Non-Administrative Urban Settlements and Their Boundaries, etc.* Valtioneuvosto. The major increase in the population in small regional cities by the 1960s was to a large extent due to the high birth rate. The migration from the agrarian municipalities was equally directed to the big cities of southern Finland. Haapala, P. (1986). Väestörakenne. In J. Tuominen, Y-S. Koskimies, R. Luhtavaara, V. Rasila, E. Sarasmo, and O. Vuorinen (eds.), *Hämeen historia. V: Toisen maailmansodan jälkeinen aika*. Hämeen Heimoliitto.

THE LAND REFORM

The Finnish Land Acquisition Act of 1945 was based on the expropriation and resettlement laws drafted in the early 1940s, in the aftermath of the Winter War. The sweeping scale of the post-Second World War reform was not, however, what the resettlement committees of the early 1940s had in mind or could have foreseen.⁹ The vast number of people who needed to be immediately resettled in 1945 grossly exceeded the scenario for which the government had been prepared. The implementation of the Land Acquisition Act was entrusted to the Department of Land Settlement under the Ministry of Agriculture. On the local level, the execution of the law was carried out by land redemption/expropriation boards (147 of them) and settlement boards, which comprised local administrators, agricultural experts, and a few lay members representing both the recipients and surrenders of land.¹⁰ Although, in the last instance, it was possible to appeal to the courts in disputes regarding expropriation or receiving land, very few ultimately did.

That the redistribution of land itself does not surface in the local court records is, however, not a sign of an uncontroversial process. In fact, it reveals more about the administrative nature of the actual redistribution in which the contribution of the judicial system was minor. The reform altered the property regime of the Finnish countryside, and in many municipalities exacerbated and highlighted the problems that generally occur in rural communities. Hence, the land reform was actualized in the lower court records with a delay and, at first, in civil cases: in proceedings dealing with defamation and petty assaults, when quarrels between the newcomers and the native residents got out of hand; in self-help cases, when the natives decided to correct some wrongs of the redistribution process by personally re-confiscating property that once was theirs; and in trials concerning on the one hand the hostility of the natives to relinquish their land to usufruct, and, on the other hand, the exceeding of the

⁹ Pihkala, K. U. (1952). The Land Settlement Program of Finland. *Land Economics* 28(2), 147–159.

¹⁰ Kauhanen R. and Kleemola (2020). Maanlunastukset Lounais-Suomen rannikolla vuosina 1945–1951. *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* 118(1), 33–49; Tepora T. and Roselius A. (2020). *Muukalaisten invaasio: Siirtoväki Suomen ruotsinkielisillä alueilla 1940–1950*. S & S.

newcomers of their commonsense right to use other people's property in order to take care of their own holdings.¹¹

Although the nature of the disputes between the settlers and the natives as well as their reflection in the court records was no different from a "normal" agricultural setting, there is no denying that many felt they had been treated unjustly in the process. By looking at the court records, it is clear that the tensions were real, and especially many of the native residents did not seem to think highly of the evacuees. "I have no problem with letting other people use my road. It is just those people. They destroy and mess up everything," explained a tenant from Hausjärvi on his decision to block his road from other users.¹² But, in the end, the reasons for disputes between the newcomers and the natives were vague, and for the most part people were too busy with their everyday subsistence to take their quarrels to the national level. In that sense, the land reform fulfilled one of its purposes: to provide social tranquility by giving people meaningful work in cultivating their plots.

Despite the fact that the massive land reform did not cause an eruption of immediate social conflicts, in the long run the reform backfired due to (at least) two major reasons: the slow transition of the Finnish national economy toward the market-based European model of agricultural production, and the limits of environmental resilience. The initial plan of smallholding Finland did not come to fruition, but instead it devolved into unpredicted demographic development and rapid urbanization. For some this provided options for climbing the social ladder, while for others it meant debt and narrowed life choices.

The above-mentioned "environmental resilience" refers to the defining character of Finnish agriculture: fighting against the rising water table, or, in other words, draining the swamp. Most of the used arable land in 1945 had been claimed from peatland—by hand—during the late nineteenth century and in the interwar period.¹³ This not only meant that in 1945 the existing arable land was vulnerable to any changes in annual rainfall, but also that the remaining uncultivated land was not ideally fit for agricultural

¹¹ See, for example, court records of the municipal court of Loppi, Ca1:72 and Ca1:73, dJ NAHa; court records of the municipal court of Hausjärvi, Ca2-166, dJ NAHa; renovated court records of district of Janakkala, KO a:86, dJ NAHa.

¹² Renovated court records of district of Janakkala, KO a:86, dJ NAHa.

¹³ Kupiainen (2007), 201–202.

purposes.¹⁴ On average, and in Janakkala, a smallholder used a majority of his working hours for tasks whose purpose was to ensure that the soil was dry enough and hence fertile.¹⁵ However, just one unusually rainy year was enough to undo the hard work of many years of soil improvements. Heavy rain washed the fertilizer (if one could afford it) off the fields and raised the water table, which in turn made the soil too acidic for grain. During the war, most of the soil improvement measures—despite the heroic efforts of the women who were left alone to take care of the farming—were naturally left undone. In addition, 1942 and 1943 were very rainy years.¹⁶

As a result, many of the war veterans returned to a plot that was basically barren. This fit in very badly with the government's rationing program.¹⁷ "It is just plain hopeless," commented a farmer who had sowed 10 hl of seeds on his land and acquired a harvest size of the same 10 hl.¹⁸ Yet, the land—even unfertile land—was one's own, and often any allusions by the officials that a prolonged failure to deliver the goods required by the law on rationing would result in losing one's farm were met with hostility.¹⁹

The technical development of the 1950s and 1960s did ease some aspects: Once tractors became commonplace and the fertilizers more advanced, farmers did not have to spend so much time on the routine

¹⁴The quality of land in new plots allocated to evacuees and war veterans varied widely (with regard to the district of Janakkala, see, for example, Kallenautilio, J. (1976). *Lopen historia kunnallisen itsehallinnon aikana 1*. Hämeen kirjapaino Oy, 233), but in principle in Kanta-Häme and Uusimaa, most of the new smallholdings were on clay soil that required constant drying, and this was especially vulnerable to annual changes in rainfall. The Karelian refugees were not used to the form of cultivation that the soil necessitated. Sallinen-Gimpl, P. (1995). Asutustoiminta ja siirtoväen perinne. In E. Laitinen (ed.), *Rintamalta Raivioille: Sodanjälkeinen asutustoiminta 50 vuotta*. Atena, 286–287.

¹⁵Court records of the municipal court of Loppi, Ca1:72, dJ NAHa.

¹⁶Court records of the municipal court of Loppi, Ca1:70, dJ NAHa.

¹⁷In practice, rationing meant that farmers were required to surrender to the rationing office all their production that exceeded the number of agricultural products that the producer was allowed to use for his/her own consumption according to the national plan. Rantatupa H. (2004). Kansanhuolto toisen maailmansodan aikana 1939–1949. In M. Peltonen (ed.), *Suomen maatalouden historia 2: Kasvun ja kriisien aika 1870-luvulta 1950-luvulle*. SKS, 443–503.

¹⁸Court records of the municipal court of Loppi, Ca1:71, dJ NAHa.

¹⁹Court records of the municipal court of Hausjärvi, Ca2–166; Cf. Sallinen-Gimpl (1995), 275–278.

tasks of keeping the soil dry and fertile.²⁰ This did not mean that the fight was over, however, or that modernization brought only blessings to the smallholders. For example, the farmers in Janakkala were engaged in at least two bitter legal battles against the electric companies. In the 1950s and 1960s, the government assigned both the production of the additional energy that the growing infrastructure necessitated and the drawing of the new power lines to local electric companies operating hydroelectric plants. However, the (small) dams these local electric companies built for producing electricity in effect flooded the fields by the waterways in many places in Janakkala.²¹

The resulting legal battles are illuminating for two reasons. First, even the established farmer families struggled when an unprecedented external factor affected the annual cycle of keeping the land fertile. For the “new farmers” whose plots were located in terrain less favorable for farming, the results were more drastic. Second, the farmers had to resort to the courts in order to get the dam plans canceled and receive some compensation for the damage caused. The public administration—that is, the state—could have regulated the issue in a more determined manner, but it chose not to. This decision estranged the farmers from the state and clearly demonstrated that when larger economic interests collided with the source of livelihood of the smallholders, administrative appeals would not bring forth favorable rulings from the perspective of the rural population.²²

²⁰ Niemelä, J. (2004). Hevosista traktoreihin: Lannasta väkilannoitteisiin. In P. Markkola (ed.), *Suomen maatalouden historia 3: Suurten muutosten aika – Jälleenrakennuskaudesta EU-Suomeen*. SKS, 187–228.

²¹ Court records of the municipal court of Loppi, Ca1:70; renovated court records of district of Janakkala, KO a:91, dJ NAHa.

²² Not only in Janakkala but across Finland the government’s modernization process and especially the accelerated scale of utilization of hydropower and the rising forest industry clashed with agriculture. See, for example, Schönach, P. (2021). Tuhansien vesien maa. In E. Ruuskanen, P. Schönach, and K. Värynen (eds.), *Suomen ympäristöhistoria 1700-luvulta nykyaikaan*. Vastapaino. However, the Centre Party and the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners possessed and exercised significant political power and did so in favor of the rural population.

DASHING HOPES: DEBT, ECONOMIC HARDSHIP, AND BANKRUPTCIES

It was not that the government failed to realize that many of the small plots were unviable. Especially in the eastern parts of the country, the initial idea was that the smallholders would gain only a portion of their income from farming and a good part would be covered by working for the forestry companies. Nevertheless, deliberately or inadvertently, the government did not take into account that the economic conditions for the resettlement policy were completely different from those of the 1920s or 1930s.²³ In short, the demands that the global economic conditions brought to the Finnish project of modernization meant that the days of self-subsistence small plots was over. A cost-effective national agricultural sector would have necessitated more productive methods of farming, beyond what the tiny smallholdings were able to deliver.²⁴

The government's plan to gain an economically sustainable society through some kind of inflated smallholding reserve (and there were rational, although outdated, economic theories that justified the choice) can be explained in several ways, most of which relate to the state of emergency and political conditions.²⁵ Yet, it must have been obvious to the majority of the political and economic elite that the land reform was a maneuver for no more than a couple of decades. The fact alone that most of the smallholdings started with a debt that they could not in any circumstances manage determined this course of life as temporary.

The initial economic principle of the land reform—the capital needed in establishing the new farms was provided or at least guaranteed by the public sector, but in the form of a loan—covered the foundational defects of the reform and postponed the unavoidable outcome to the following decades. In addition to redistributing land to the landless, the government

²³ Pihkala (1952); Oksa, J. and Rannikko, P. (1985). *Kylä yhteiskunnassa*. Joensuun yliopisto, Karjalan tutkimuslaitoksen monisteita, 11.

²⁴ See, for example, Granberg, L. (2004). Maatalouden tulojärjestelmän synty. In P. Markkola (ed.), *Suomen maatalouden historia 3: Suurten muutosten aika – Jälleenrakennuskaudesta EU-Suomeen*. SKS, 93, 111, 170.

²⁵ A clear beneficiary in the Finnish land reform was the foresting industry, whose need for cheap resources was secured for many years to come. Katajamäki, H. (1988). Alueellisen työnjaon muotoutuminen Suomessa. Turun yliopisto, 38–42; Kupiainen, H. and Laitinen, E. (1995). Suomalaisen asutustoiminnan juuret. In E. Laitinen (ed.), *Rintamalta raiviolle: Sodanjälkeinen asutustoiminta 50 vuotta*. Atena, 51.

had provided a “home building loan” (*kodinperustamislaina*) to young couples from 1945 onwards. It was supposed to help (very) young couples to settle down and start a family, which in 1940s public opinion represented the foundation of a healthy nation. However, Finland could not afford a direct government transfer, nor was the idea of an unconditional gift popular in a public atmosphere that demanded sacrifices and a pioneering spirit from young adults. Instead, the benefit materialized in the form of a five-year loan that had to be paid back in the early years of the 1950s (the couples received a year’s extension to the repayment period for each child born after taking out the loan).²⁶

Without a doubt, the loan helped some young couples start their family life, but for some it just postponed the inevitable fact that the countryside and especially the majority of the new smallholdings could not provide an economically viable subsistence. Hence, it is no coincidence that the economic conditions of some single households worsened in the early years of the 1950s. In Janakkala already in 1952, the number of debt cases and defaults was at a high level in comparison to the 1940s and late 1930s, which obviously were not “ordinary” years, but in any case—and especially for the younger generation—the economic challenges were unprecedented.²⁷ Nevertheless, the number of bankruptcies and insolvency cases did not escalate in the district of Janakkala in the early 1950s, although the number of individual debt cases deriving from bonds, shop invoices, rental issues, real estate transactions, and so on was significantly high. This was due to the variety of career and earning options that the slowly modernizing country offered in cities and larger municipalities (*kauppala*), despite the filibustering effect of the land reform.²⁸

The second spike of debt cases was in 1960. This time the increased number of minor defaults was accompanied by a drastic growth in insolvency and bankruptcy proceedings. Paradoxically, the peak of insolvency proceedings can also be tracked back to the government: in the vast

²⁶ Alepaus, E. (1946). Väestöpoliittinen asunto- ja asutuslainsäädäntömme. In *Väestöliiton Vuosikirja. Vol 1. Väestöliitto*, 154–158.

²⁷ For example, in the municipal court of Loppi/Renko, there was on average one debt proceeding per year, and no bankruptcy cases at all in 1945–1949.

²⁸ Despite the fact that postwar Finland was determined to keep the countryside inhabited, already in the late 1950s there was a steady flow of especially young people to the cities and larger municipalities. See, for example, Haapala, P. (2004). Väki vähenee: Maatalousyhteiskunnan hidas häviö 1950–2000. In P. Markkola (ed.), *Suomen maatalouden historia 3: Suurten muutosten aika – Jälleenrakennuskaudesta EU-Suomeen*. SKS, 233–254.

majority of the bankruptcy cases (over 85 percent), the creditor was the state treasury.²⁹ The government's unprecedented willingness to use legal means to collect its receivables, and equally unprecedented reluctance to find creative solutions to prevent its citizens from falling into insolvency, is an indication of a paradigm shift in the ideology of social policy. The government was no longer ready to push forward the idea of the "smallholding-Finland" by whatever means necessary. A visible change in the postwar agricultural support policy—a change that did not, however, dissolve the wider dilemma of economically unviable agriculture—was the 1956 Agricultural Income Act. By means of the new law, the government attempted to support viable farming, which many interpreted as a political decision to abandon the smallholders.³⁰

In the insolvency and debt hearings, the over-indebted smallholders expressed their bitterness toward the "state" and placed their hope in their networks of local people. Most no longer had any belief in the sanctity of the traditional rural lifestyle, if there ever was such a common sentiment. The brighter future—according to the statements—a place where one could possibly grasp a meaningful life again, was to be found in cities, mostly in the nearby towns of Lahti, Hämeenlinna, and Tampere.³¹

LOWER COURTS REGULATING RURAL LIFE: CHANGING RURAL SELF-DETERMINATION

From the perspective of *Rechtsstaat* (or *state-under-law*), pre-Second World War Finland was an agricultural society in many respects similar to the other Eastern European "fringe regions." The Eastern European regimes shared a past as provinces in the early twentieth-century European Empires, an ambiguous relation to Germany, and a national path with a fumbling beginning of civic society, characterized by authoritarian

²⁹ Court records of municipal court of Riihimäki Ca: 200, Ca: 203, dJ NAHa.

³⁰ Granberg (2004), 114–136.

³¹ See, for example, court records of municipal court of Riihimäki Ca: 204, dJ NAHa.

attempts and the weak independence of the judicial system.³² After the Second World War, however, the anti-communist political elite of Finland and the courts had a common enemy: the (alleged) internal division of the nation state. It seemed that the Soviet Union—factually or presumably—would use this internal weakness and rupture Finnish society by dragging Finland into the group of East Central European satellite states loyal to Kremlin dictates.

Hence, Finland used the penal power of the judicial system in conjunction with a redistribution of landed property to pacify the countryside. Paradoxically, Finland shared this quest with the socialist regimes of Central Eastern Europe.³³ Accordingly, the total crime rate in post-Second World War Finland followed a similar pattern to most of the Eastern European regimes: There was a spike in the overall number of crimes immediately after the war, which gradually leveled off during the late 1940s and early 1950s. The rapid increase in criminal activity has been traditionally explained as a symptom of the difficult adaption to peacetime society and as an outcome of the government's tightened grip, which aimed at rooting out any (counter-)revolutionary ideas from the public sphere.³⁴ However, in rural Finland, the intensified and legally pursued control by the state concerned the existing legal norms on rationing and hunting, and the hegemonic interpretation of the criminal law regarding substance use (hereafter Hunting, Rationing, and Substance use cases, i.e.

³² Vares, V. (2010). Suomen paikka Euroopassa maailmansotien välillä. In E. Railo and V. Laamanen (eds.), *Suomi muuttuvassa maailmassa: Ulkosubteiden ja kansallisen itseymmärryksen historiaa*. Kleio, 181–188; Erkkilä, V. (2020). Introduction: Socialist Interpretations of Legal History. In V. Erkkilä and H.-P. Haferkamp (eds.), *Socialism and legal history: The histories and historians of law in socialist East Central Europe*. Routledge. During the interwar period, a common understanding among the Finnish political elite was that the courts were leaning too much toward right-wing authoritarianism and hampered the progressive efforts of the political parties. See, for example, Björne, L. (2018). "Valkoinen korkein oikeus" 1918–1939. In H. Pihlajamäki (ed.), *Lainkäyttöä läpi vuosisadan: Näkökulmia korkeimman oikeuden historiaan 1918–2018*. Edita, 33–69.

³³ Whereas in the GDR, for example, the communist political elite announced that in the coming reconstruction process the "law was a weapon" directed against the disgruntled part of the population, Finns were less outspoken and there was no need to publicly remind the people that under the current conditions national interest ruled over individual rights. See, for example, Benjamin, H. (1951). Grundsätzliches zur Methode und zum Inhalt der Rechtsprechung. In *Neue Justiz* 5, 150–156.

³⁴ Vuorela, M. (2021). Historiallis-vertailevan aikasarjatutkimuksen toteuttaminen. In K. Nieminen and N. Lähtenmäki (eds.), *Empiirinen oikeustutkimus*. Gaudeamus, 313; Millington, R. (2020). State power and "everyday criminality" in the German Democratic Republic, 1961–1989. *German History* 38(3), 440–460.

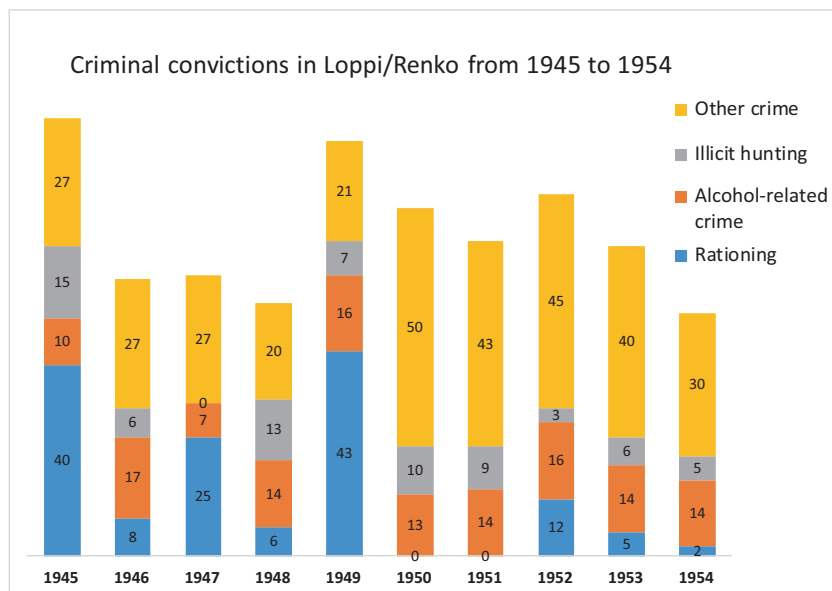


Fig. 13.1 The total number of criminal convictions per year at the municipal court of Loppi/Renko, Finland, in 1945–1954, the number of alcohol-related crimes, offenses involving rationing laws, illicit hunting, and other crimes specified (Archives of the court records of the municipal court of Loppi, Cal:71–76 (1945–1950); archives of the renovated court records of district of Janakkala, KO a:86–91(1951–1956), dJ NAHa)

HRS proceedings). These norms were an extension of the public regulation into a sphere that previously had been considered “private” or at least municipal, and they had their roots in the state-building of the interwar period and in the state of emergency brought about by the war.³⁵

Thus, in Janakkala after the Second World War, as in the rural areas in general, there was no significant spike in “other” forms of criminal activity, which included assault, homicide, and theft (see Fig. 13.1).³⁶ Based on the statistics, it is safe to maintain that the provinces were not especially unsettled. Rather, the number of criminal proceedings derives from the high number of HRS cases. It is also in this sphere—in the further development of the legal policy regarding the HRS crimes—where the parting of ways

³⁵ Cf. Wieacker, F. (1994). *A history of private law in Europe: With particular reference to Germany*. Oxford University Press.

³⁶ Figure extracted by the author from the archival records.

between Finland and other fringe regions is evident. Whereas immediately after the Second World War the number of HRS convictions was approximately two-thirds of all criminal convictions in Janakkala, by the mid-1950s, the share of the HRS cases in the total crime rate was much smaller, at around 40 percent. In addition, in the period 1945–1954, the nature of alcohol-related crime changed significantly. In 1945, the convictions were mostly a consequence of offenses against public order and in connection to “asocial” behavior (*toimettomuus*),³⁷ but in 1954, most of the convictions for “public drunkenness” were linked to traffic offenses.³⁸ The change regarding the phenomenon of HRS crime within just a decade is significant, and it reveals the transformed shape of state control.

In 1945, however, close state control was a matter of fact, and it extended to the administration of justice by the local courts. In the immediate years after the war, judicial power effectively allied with the state in safeguarding the societal order and implementing the aggressive modernization program. Yet, at the same time, it interfered with the very core of the rural experience. For a state trying to survive in the postwar environment, regulating agricultural production, looking after natural resources, and confiscating private property were vital, but the apt justifications did not remove the fact that during the postwar years of *personal* reconstruction, many smallholders felt that the state effectively blocked their prospects of building a rural life. As one smallholder stated in a hearing concerning an offense relating to rationing regulations:

My calves are my future. For now, I don't have what you demand from me. How could I? I have many of them but they are still young and weak. But in a couple of years they will be better, and I can provide everything you ask and more. If I was to surrender the amount of meat the rationing-office requires from me, I would need to slaughter almost all of them, and I would be no farmer anymore, nor could I ever become one again.³⁹

The political aims behind the legislation on HRS cases were pursued by a blunt and penal-centered administration of justice. The lower courts

³⁷ See, for example, Nygård, T. (2001). *Erilaisten historiaa: Marginaaliryhmät Suomessa 1800-luvulla ja 1900-luvun alussa*. Atena.

³⁸ Also, in 1950 the sudden increase in the amount of “other” crime was due to the changed legislation on road safety, and in 1954 traffic offenses comprised the majority in the whole entity of “other” crimes.

³⁹ The archives of the municipal court of Loppi, Ca1: 72, dJ NAHa.

were not officially supposed to investigate cases of non-compliance with the provisions on rationing, but to merely confirm the decisions of the regional rationing offices.⁴⁰ In practice, the system was completely blind to temporal variation, to differences in personal conditions, and to the challenges the war had brought about for the rural population: trauma, sickness, and depression. The fines for alcohol-related offenses were particularly high and accumulated easily. Failure to pay these fines resulted in incarceration. Never were there more fine-defaulters incarcerated in postwar Finland than during the years of reconstruction. In 1960, approximately every fifth prisoner was incarcerated because of unpaid fines.⁴¹ The local forest rangers (*riistapoliisi*) worked particularly meticulously. If the accused had used dynamite for fishing, shot a squirrel, or just taken a walk with a rifle in the forest, a conviction was an inescapable consequence. The forest rangers had the right to shoot unleashed dogs during the closed season, which they often did, many times in the yards of their owners.⁴²

In the regimes across Eastern Europe during the years immediately following the end of the war, the lower courts were quick to interpret that the ambiguous will of the legislator (the state) was equivalent to legal rule in situations and cases where the law was vague or incomplete. This was an understandable exaggeration both from the perspective of keeping society together (Finland) and revolutionizing it (socialist regimes), but for the rural population in both cases, it was less fortunate.⁴³ The Eastern European governments shared a common starting point and faced similar perennial problems in modernizing their rural areas, but the means they adopted later—after the dust had settled—in their respective projects were fundamentally different from each other.

In Finland, the perspective of public governance—the legislation and the adjudication of the courts alike—slowly moved from punitive to preventive and corrective in a more complex manner in the late 1950s and early 1960s.⁴⁴ This “welfaring” of the use of coercive state power meant that social institutions other than courts and penitentiaries—such as social

⁴⁰ Rantatupa (2004).

⁴¹ Lappi-Seppälä, T. (2012). Criminology, crime and criminal justice in Finland. *European Journal of Criminology* 9(2), 206–222, here 208.

⁴² See, for example, court records of the municipal court of Hausjärvi Ca2–164b, dJ NAHa.

⁴³ See, for example, Markovits, I. (2006). *Gerechtigkeit in Lüritz: Eine ostdeutsche Rechtsgeschichte*. C. H. Beck.

⁴⁴ Kivivuori, J. K. A., Aaltonen, M., Näsi, M. J., Suonpää, K. E.-M., and Danielsson, P. M. (2018). *Kriminologia: Rikollisuus ja kontrolli muuttuvassa yhteiskunnassa*. Gaudeamus.

services—were deployed, and rather than using punishments as corrective measures, the emphasis of the disciplinary power of the state slowly moved toward social and medical care and preventive education.⁴⁵ The first steps of that change affected the sphere of rural HRS crime already in the 1950s. Although in Finland the government continued to steer and regulate agricultural production extensively by subsidies for the most part of the twentieth century, in late 1950 there was no more need for a system of comprehensive rationing of agricultural products. The “asocial” ceased to constitute an existential threat in a society with a corporatively regulated labor market. In addition, the administration of natural resources (forests and game) was gradually outsourced to local and rural networks: a key aspect of the subsequent rural identity of relative self-determination and independence. The forestry associations and hunting clubs were an extension of state power while following their own internal rules and watching over local interests.

Nevertheless, from the point of view of this chapter, there is also a second, more prominent reason. The courts distanced themselves from the role assigned to them by the government, and from a self-perception that before the Second World War had defined their place within the nation state.⁴⁶ For example, the municipal court of Loppi took a clear stance against the national regulation on rationing and stretched its own principles on legal certainty and impartiality in a case concerning a rationing offense in 1947. The accused was a woman—who I refer to here as Virtanen—whose smallholder husband had died during the war, leaving the widow as the sole owner of a small plot. In the interrogation report, a local police officer wrote:

4 under-aged kids, the oldest one 7 and the youngest (twins) 6 months. Livelihood looked inadequate. Virtanen had been very sick for about a year, for which reason in hospital 4 times. During those stays other people had taken care of the home, mother and sister had looked after the house whenever they had the chance to do so. [...] No one had helped Virtanen in exchange for money, so she had to pay with the harvest [hay], and give away a lot more than the actual value of the work would have required. Yet, the local men did the harvesting only after they had completed the tasks in their

⁴⁵ In Finland, it was based on the deliberate search for the most lucrative cost/benefit model. Lappi-Seppälä (2012); Kivivuori et al. (2018).

⁴⁶ Björne, L. (2018).

own fields and did not really store the hay. As a result, Virtanen's whole harvest was smaller than the amount she was supposed to surrender.⁴⁷

In its decision, the rationing office had ruled that the value of the surrender, which Virtanen had failed to deliver, was to be confiscated (with interest) from Virtanen. In addition, the office demanded a sanction fee for the non-compliance with the provision of rationing.⁴⁸

The court overruled the decision of the rationing office, acquitted Virtanen of all charges, and publicly lectured an official from the rationing office present at the proceedings. At the beginning of the next assizes, the district prosecutor read a statement in which the district judiciary outlined its new approach on rationing cases: Instead of merely confirming the decisions of the rationing office, the court—like some other district courts before it, the prosecutor emphasized—would in the future concentrate on examining the *intentionality* of the deed (of breaking the regulations on rationing) and then adjudicate accordingly.⁴⁹

The historical meaning of the shift discussed above becomes concrete if we again compare Finland to its early twentieth-century context, the fringe regions of Eastern Europe. In the immediate years of postwar reconstruction, and from the point of view of the rule of law or division of societal power, Finland was not much different from its East Central European cousins. In Finland, the “state of emergency” and the patriotic determination of the reform covered the fact that for a while, political steering displaced all other branches of societal decision-making, and from the individual point of view, that sometimes produced experiences of injustice.

During the period of “reconstruction” in Finland that criminologists place between 1945 and 1960—and in contrast to the development taking place in East Central Europe—the lower courts started to emphasize their position as independent institutions in the national framework. In the context of the post-Second World War reconstruction, this meant that the judicial system steadily distanced itself from contemporary political aims and state power, and instead emphasized its litigating and adjudicating role in society, its authority deriving from legal tradition, and expertise in interpreting fundamental societal norms and agreements. That the Finnish

⁴⁷ Court records of the municipal court of Loppi, Ca1:73, dJ NAHa.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

lower courts deliberately began to fend off any ideas of serving as rubber stamp institutions to political steering is of course due to the fact that the political regime allowed the legal system to distance itself and keep its own independence. Vice versa, in East Central Europe, the lower courts underwent a drastic political “renewal” immediately after the battles had ceased.⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

In the agrarian society of Finland in 1945, building a welfare state was inevitably entangled with agricultural and housing policies. In the Finnish countryside, this reconstruction process with all its legal, economic, and social dimensions was actualized in the transition brought about by the post-Second World War land reform. The land reform was from the very beginning conditioned by the urgency for formative social reforms. The clear motives behind the reform were the aims of pacifying the countryside and providing enough manpower and raw material for the forest industry.

However, the obstacles provided by the ecological resilience of the countryside and the global economy in effect ruined the plan of turning the nation into a safe haven of small plots. The land left from the previous settling campaigns was to a large extent unfit for providing a source of principal livelihood, and the subsistence of many smallholdings was initially tied to additional income provided by forestry. The shaky premises of the new plots were further challenged by a meager national economy that entailed dogmatically enforced austerity measures such as rationing. The vast public projects of modernizing energy production trampled on the smallholders' source of livelihood, and the government's choice of providing initial capital for the new plots by means of individual loans before moving to a policy that supported lucrative farming in the 1950s generated insurmountable obstacles for many smallholders. In practice, the land reform resembled more a quick fix rather than a long-term development project. Many individual life stories consisted of a narrowed horizon of possibilities beset with debt and bitterness against the state.

The outcome of the post-Second World War Finnish land reform is difficult to simplify in black-and-white terms. On the positive side, Finland managed to provide opportunities for upward social mobility for its

⁵⁰ Erkkilä (2020).

citizens—and it did so exceptionally well in comparison to the other former fringe regions, for example. On the negative side, most of the clearing for cultivation was done in vain, and the countryside could not offer a primary source of subsistence for many war veterans and evacuees, or for their children.⁵¹

In 1945, any lived experience of the state looking after, supporting, and taking care of its citizens diminished in the shadow of the experience of the recent Second World War.⁵² The shared memory of the war constituted an imagined community of Finns, and for the most part this reminiscence—an experience of war—was enough to justify the sacrifices the rural people had to make in the 1940s and 1950s.⁵³ The state was unable to fulfill its promise of a steady rural life for most of the evacuees and war veterans, but it did secure a legal way to pursue justice in the changing rural society and labored in providing a safety net for the marginalized—a task too challenging for the rural community alone, as the harsh years of the reconstruction showed. According to the court records used in this study, a grass-roots, slow revolution in the self-understanding of the Finnish courts started to take shape in the final years of the 1940s. The records from Janakkala indicate that the starting point for that development was the stand that the courts took in the legal dilemma regarding the limits of state power in rationing, adjudicating against the state, and siding with the smallholders. The courts prioritized rural experience over the imperative of allowing a wide mandate to the state and its administration.

The generation that appeared in the primary material of this study to a large degree found their place in rural Finland, mostly not in the small municipalities to which the “new farmers” initially were assigned, but in the nearby small towns and their suburbs. Ultimately, it was their children who abandoned rural Finland all together. The smallholdings might have barely provided for a family when the collective was ready to keep the standards of living low, but it was not enough for two or three

⁵¹ See, for example, Haapala (2004); Uljas (2014). E.P. Thompson touches on this duality in his seminal classic: “The process of industrialization is necessarily painful. It must involve the erosion of traditional patterns of life.” Thompson, E. P. (1966). *The Making of the English Working Class*. Vintage Books, 447.

⁵² See, for example, Raninen, T. (1995). Siirtokarjalaisuus muuttuvassa yhteiskunnassa. In E. Laitinen (ed.), *Rintamalta raivioille: Sodanjälkeinen asutustoiminta 50 vuotta*. Atena, 306, 314–315.

⁵³ Kivimäki, V. (2012). Between defeat and victory: Finnish memory culture of the Second World War. *Scandinavian Journal of History* 37(4), 482–504.

generations. Furthermore, the government carried out accelerated modernization by appealing to and leaning on the common denominator among the population: the war experience. For the people who found no promised smallholder haven in rural Finland and instead got into trouble with the tight regulations that characterized Cold War Finnish society, the power of that experience faded away, and there was nothing left that could have connected the loyalties of the people and the national cause.

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From Survival Mode to Utopian Dreams: Conceptions of Society, Social Planning, and Historical Time in 1950s and 1960s Finland

Sophy Bergenheim

INTRODUCTION

During the two decades following the Second World War, Finnish society underwent drastic changes. It evolved from an underdeveloped agrarian society to a post-industrial and urbanized society. The period also marks Finland's social development from a state offering hardly any statutory, national-level social insurance to an internationally recognized Nordic welfare state with comprehensive public social and health care services.

In this chapter, I look at how experiences of the changing Finnish society and social state were reflected in the conceptions and actions of a prominent non-governmental organization, the Finnish Social Policy Association (SPA, in Finnish: *Sosiaalipoliittinen yhdistys*). During the research period, it was an organization specialized in social, economic, and

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labor market policy, with mainly high-level activities in politics and research. The individuals discussed in the text were board members of the SPA who partook in the association's planning debates. They were members of the society's intellectual elite, multifaceted actors in social and public policy with current or previous positions as high-ranking civil servants at the Ministry of Social Affairs, social scientists, ministers, and holders of key roles in social and health policy associations. The material consists of the board members' books and articles targeted at wide audiences, from scholars and students in social sciences, civil servants, and decision-makers, to laypeople. Both the organization and its key people were thus highly influential in defining the scope and direction of national social policies. A particularly well-known demonstration of this impact is the book *Social Policy for the Sixties*,¹ written by Pekka Kuusi and published by the SPA, which has gained a cult-like status in the historical narrative of the Finnish welfare state.

I approach my topic by applying and illustrating the analytical concept *presents past*. It is inspired by Reinhart Koselleck's idea of "futures past," which refers to the shifting experience of time in modernizing societies since the eighteenth century, as ever-accelerating change caused a discrepancy between experiences of the past ("space of experience") and expectations for the future ("horizon of expectation").² *Presents past*, on the other hand, is a more general concept that refers to an actor's experience and understanding of their shared reality in their contemporary present. It can thereby also be used as a tool for exploring and contextualizing historical events as *historical presents* (*lived presents*, if you will), each with their specific situational relationships with the past and the future. This endeavor entails analyzing the intrinsic, taken-for-granted cultural, discursive, and institutional premises of the lived present, as well as the actors' space of experience and horizon of expectation. In other words, it involves the examination of how the past of their present was understood, explained, and given meaning, and what was expected (assumed, feared, or anticipated) of the future—and how these temporal perspectives were related.³

¹ Kuusi, P. (1961). *60-luvun sosiaalipolitiikka*. WSOY.

² Koselleck, R. (2004). *Futures past: On the semantics of historical time*. Columbia University Press.

³ For a similar abstract and general interpretation of Koselleckian historical times, see Jordheim, H. (2012). Against periodization: Koselleck's theory of multiple temporalities. *History and Theory* 51(2), 151–171.

In this chapter, I trace three historical presents. Each represents a specific conception of society reflected in notions of social and economic policy, state intervention, and planning. I tap into the past presents by analyzing the spaces of experience and horizons of expectations, including how conceptions of the past were reflected outlooks on the future. In mapping out past presents and spaces of experience, in particular, I highlight aspects and interpretations of the historical context that are relevant specifically to the actors' ideas and conceptions. In other words, I am not outlining an exhaustive general account of events, developments, and discourses in Finland, but instead point to the facets that were important in the actors' subjective lived present.

In my approach, I also apply conceptual historical analysis by examining meanings attributed to the concepts of society and planning. I pay particular attention to, firstly, expressions that present the past or the future in an explicitly negative or positive light; secondly, normative expressions, that is, "should" and "must" claims about the nature and purpose of policies (e.g., "social policy should be targeted at the working class"); and thirdly, depoliticizing expressions that stifle and obscure alternatives, such as "necessity," "the only way," or "unavoidable."

A note on historical concepts and their translations is also in order. Many Finnish political-institutional terms have precise and explicit conceptual-ideational references. For example, Finnish terminology distinguishes between "societal" (*yhteiskunta-*) and "social" (*sosiaali-*), often denoting a specific hierarchy and/or operating environment. The SPA's actors outlined the role of well-planned social policy within the grander schemes of "societal" policy and planning, entailing two distinct levels and areas of planning and policy, respectively. Such rhetorical references are easily lost in translation, especially with vague or ambiguous blanket terms like "public" or "social," which are not used consistently. The conventional English translation of "societal policy" (*yhteiskuntapolitiikka*) is "*public* policy," whereas "societal planning" (*yhteiskuntasuunnittelu*) usually translates to "*social* planning." The English dual use of "social" obscures the distinction between society and the social sub-realm, making it difficult to denote these distinct levels, for example, distinguishing between "social planning" (*sosiaalisuunnittelu*), related to social policy (*sosiaalipolitiikka*), and "societal planning," which encompasses both social and other forms of public planning. "Public," on the other hand, does away with the spelled out and specific reference to the society (akin to using the ambiguous "public health" as a translation of the Nordic

term, literally “people’s health”⁴). Since such linguistic references are key to analyzing historical concepts and their ideas, I hereinafter use non-established translations in accordance with the original terms in Finnish. In addition to “societal” and “social,” I strive to maintain the original literal references to entities like “state,” “nation,” and “country.” My source material includes one work in English;⁵ direct citations of course follow its original wording.

PRESENT PAST: A POSTWAR SOCIETY WALKING A TIGHTROPE (EARLY 1950s)

Early 1950s Finland—a nation burdened by postwar reconstruction and the other repercussions of the Second World War—was not particularly receptive to planning ideas. Non-socialists in particular were wary of the very concept of planning due to its connotations of planned economy, socialism, and socialization. Attitudes were certainly not softened by the reality of state intervention in a society abiding by postwar rationing policies.⁶ One of the vocal opponents was Nils Meinander, Professor of National Economy and Vice Chair of the SPA, who proclaimed it was “by definition impossible for a planned economy and democracy to work in unison.”⁷

The imbalanced relationship between Finland and Sweden is a prevalent feature in inter-Nordic dynamics: The more developed Sweden paved the way, and the underdeveloped Finland followed along the same path in due course. In principle, this applied to planning as well. In practice, however, since Finland was not under Scandinavian-style social democratic hegemony, planning ideals and models fueled by the ethos of state-led

⁴ Bergenheim, S., Edman, J., Kananen, J., and Wessel, M. (2018). Conceptualising public health: An introduction. In J. Kananen, S. Bergenheim, and M. Wessel (eds.), *Conceptualising public health: Historical and contemporary struggles over key concepts*. Routledge, 1–17.

⁵ Kuusi, P. (1964). *Social policy for the sixties: A plan for Finland*. Finnish Social Policy Association.

⁶ Saloniemi, A. (1996). Suunnitteluoptimistit Suomessa: Näkökohtia tulevaisuuden suunnittelusta sotien jälkeen. In P. Kettunen, R. Parikka, and A. Suoranta (eds.), *Äänekäs kansa*. Työväen historian ja perinteen tutkimuksen seura, 91–103, 91.

⁷ Tiihonen, S. (1985). *Valtioneuvosto koordinoijana: Teoria ja käytäntö vuosina 1939–1956*. Valtiovarainministeriön järjestelyosasto, 232.

social reformism were not as eagerly received. Instead, Finland came to focus only on planning for the immediate postwar transition period.⁸

In the non-socialist past present of the early 1950s, the space of experience was thus colored by a dissonance between neoclassical principles and the reality of controlled economy during and after the war. There was thus not much ideational and political room for planning-oriented ideas and discourses. The war further consolidated this setting, but wartime rationalization also contributed to the foundations for future societal planning ideas. According to Pauli Kettunen, wars served as institutional and legitimating frameworks for constructing specific issues as social problems that needed to be solved in specific ways. He links the rationale of these problem-formulations to the relationship between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation, which were likewise impacted by war. In this context, economic rationalization, efficient organization of labor, social integration, and individual self-discipline were framed as intertwined national necessities and responsibilities. This also legitimized the state's role as coordinator. Maintaining and improving competitiveness through rationalization policies was presented as a national necessity also after the war, which contributed to the relatively stronger position of Finnish employers and companies compared to their Swedish and Norwegian counterparts.⁹ Wartime thus had a paradoxical effect on Finland: The small state came out of it holding even less territory to its name, yet also stronger, better organized, and with more extensive governing powers than ever before.¹⁰

In the early 1950s, the planning gaze was directed first and foremost at the economy. The dominant view in Finland was rooted in neoclassical economics, arguing that state intervention should be kept at a minimum

⁸ Paavonen, T. (2006). Talouden kehitys ja talouspolitiikka hyvinvointivaltion kaudella. In T. Paavonen and O. Kangas, *Eduskunta hyvinvointivaltion rakentajana*. Suomen eduskunta, 9–187, 36.

⁹ Kettunen, P. (2018). Wars, nation and the welfare state in Finland. In H. Obinger, K. Petersen, and P. Starke (eds.), *Warfare and welfare: Military conflict and welfare state development in Western countries*. Oxford University Press, 260–289; Kettunen, P. (1997). *Työjärjestys: Tutkielmia työn ja tiedon poliittisesta historiasta*. Tutkijaliitto, 92–96, 161–165; Kettunen, P. (1994). *Suojelu, suoritus, subjekti: Työsuojelu teollistuvan Suomen yhteiskunnallisissa ajattelu- ja toimintatavoissa*. Suomen Historiallinen Seura. Cf. the Swedish development, see Andersson, J. (2003). *Mellan tillväxt och trygghet: Idéer om produktiv socialpolitik i socialdemokratisk socialpolitisk ideologi under efterkrigstiden*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.

¹⁰ Aunessuoma, J. (2011). *Vapaakaupan tiellä: Suomen kauppa- ja integraatiopolitiikka maailmansodista EU-aikaan*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 142.

and economic policy likewise ought to remain passive. Legitimate state intervention was limited to monetary policy and price and wage regulation. In the early 1950s, neoclassical ideas in the public discourse were gradually challenged by Keynesian ideas on economic policy, advocating economic growth through counter-cyclical fiscal and social policies that maintained full employment. As a comparative shorthand, the ideologies could be characterized as “conservative” and “dynamic,” respectively.¹¹

Comprehensive and counter-cyclical social policy entailed state initiative, which of course was incompatible with conservative economic policy. The latter was instead bedfellows with conservative social policy: narrowly targeted measures designed and implemented within and contingent upon the national economy’s limits, and/or actions for reconciling conflicting interests in the name of the greater—often national—good.¹² The main interest groups in Finnish society had traditionally consisted of the agrarian population (smallholders, in particular) and the working class. In 1940, the central federations of employers’ organizations and trade unions recognized each other as negotiating parties in industrial relations, which facilitated the development of collective bargaining.

In the SPA, the ethos was dominated by conservative ideas. Meinander and fellow board member Niilo Mannio, by day Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Social Affairs, argued that especially a poor state like Finland should give precedence to workers’ social insurance in its social policy. A system encompassing “unproductive citizens” would be unfeasible, as it yielded a slow return but required immediate spending, Meinander claimed. Mannio was discombobulated by universalist policies, such as the recently introduced child and maternal allowances (1948 and 1949, respectively), which he perceived as “theoretical peculiarities.”¹³

Heikki Waris, the SPA’s chair and recently appointed first professor of social policy in Finland, approached the issue from two angles: He stressed that exceeding the limits of the economy was ultimately counterproductive for social policy itself, and he warned against conjuring an image of a “social policy state” with deep pockets.¹⁴

¹¹ Tiihonen (1985), 185, 191.

¹² Kettunen (2018), 25–26.

¹³ Meinander, N. (1951). Sosiaalipolitiikan kansantaloudelliset rajat. *Sosiaalinen aikakauskirja* 34(3), 255–268, quote on p. 266; Mannio, N.A. (1952). Sosiaaliturvajärjestelmämme kehittäminen. *Sosiaalinen aikakauskirja* 35(4), 451–460, quote on pp. 456–457.

¹⁴ Waris, H. (1951). Sosiaalisen tasauksen pyrkimys: Nykyajan sosiaalipolitiikan kehityssuunnasta. *Suomalainen Suomi* 19(8), 453–459, 457–458.

Receiving all these social benefits from the state (or municipality) easily leads to an understanding that the modern social policy state is akin to a benevolent old granny with unlimited funds, who always supports the children without ever demanding anything in return, nor receiving repayment. The emergence of this kind of 'aid mentality' constitutes, at all times, a morally weakening factor in social support systems, and the further this gratis receipt is expanded, the more impending its moral peril becomes.¹⁵

Fairness was a perpetual concern pertaining to comprehensive social policy. Meinander pointed to several interconnected perspectives. Firstly, social spending had to be collected from the incomes of other members of society. Secondly, social policy increased the recipients' purchasing power, which respectively meant curtailing purchasing power elsewhere in order to curb inflation. The legitimacy of social policy would eventually erode, as at some point—"long before attaining perfect balance in income redistribution"—"the opposition to reducing purchasing power becomes insurmountable."¹⁶ According to Waris, this was a cue for science-based knowledge: It should be used for determining not only the economic impact of redistributive measures, but also their scope in relation to "striking a balance between social justice and individual liberties."¹⁷

The economic and hierarchical restraints imposed on social policy were thus justified by its seemingly innate moral pitfalls. Social policy was seen as a society-wide zero-sum game: Reducing social inequalities by improving the wellbeing of some citizens essentially entailed encroaching on the liberties of others. Those who received or needed society's support thereby posed a direct threat to better-off members of society. In this framing, the societal legitimacy of social policy was precarious, to say the least.

Keeping social spending in check was hence both an economic and moral question. This dilemma also made some way for planning, despite its negative connotations. Finding the most cost-effective solutions and avoiding unintentional negative effects (like inflation) were seen as pragmatic necessities; furthermore, maintaining the fragile balance of the legitimacy of social policy was deemed at least equally important. Nevertheless, the same neoclassical principles applied to social policy and social planning. Their potential for serving the common good was cautiously recognized, but state intervention was nonetheless perceived as inevitably

¹⁵ Ibid., 458.

¹⁶ Meinander (1951), 266.

¹⁷ Waris (1951), 459.

infringing on individual autonomy and liberties—a prominent and problematic feature in the postwar space of experience.

After enduring the misery of war, material scarcity, and controlled economy, the horizon of expectation had a narrow and tight focus: Postwar reconstruction and getting Finland back on its feet, both domestically and internationally, was the highest priority. A key objective in this vision was to boost the national economy. Despite the determined focus, the postwar horizon of expectation was fragile, restrained, and restricted to the near future. There was no room for economic or moral risks that could disturb the intertwined and precarious trajectories of reconstruction, economic growth, and social balance.

As the 1940s turned into the 1950s, a light touch of Keynesianism was introduced to the national social policy discourse, namely, a notion that social policy did not necessarily constitute a mere burden for the national economy, but comprehensive social policy could even support economic growth.¹⁸ This was probably partially rooted in the Swedish conception of a strong society, which had dominated the public discourse since the early 1950s.¹⁹ This approach had, however, not been adopted in the SPA. In addition to advocating conservative, targeted social policy, Meinander and Mannio harbored conflicting views on planning. While planned economy was unanimously shunned in the association, long-term plans were nonetheless deemed necessary for curbing social policy's susceptibility to becoming embroiled in opportunistic interest-group politicking. Meinander and Mannio further recognized the importance of the preliminary fiscal assessments of social policy's economic impacts. However, the potential of systematic planning was undermined by cumulative difficult-to-predict impacts and effects, like inflation.²⁰ In accordance with the restricted horizon of expectation, the safest bet was therefore sticking to conservative social policy and avoiding disruptions to economic growth. Granted, ensuring that this principle was indeed implemented required methodical and systematic approaches—however, this was not perceived as planning in and of itself.

¹⁸Tiihonen (1985), 234.

¹⁹See, for example, Andersson (2003), 32–34; Kettunen, P. (2019a). Conflicting interests and science-based planning in the making of the welfare state. In R. Rubens and M. Van Dyck (eds.), *Sartonianana (Volume 32)*. Sarton Chair of History of Sciences, Ghent University, 171–189.

²⁰Mannio (1952); Meinander (1951).

Nevertheless, neither Mannio nor Meinander perceived comprehensive social policy as a categorically undesired development. However, whereas the Swedish confidence in a strong society constructed a symbiotic relationship between economic growth, increased wellbeing, and comprehensive social policy,²¹ Meinander and Mannio perceived the relation as markedly more hierarchical:

[E]fforts to enlarge the cake nowadays yield significantly better results, even if the slices are of rather uneven size, than efforts to distribute it evenly, whereby the primary focus should be on the former.²²

Waris, for his part, believed that comprehensive social policy with universalist features undermined important social and moral virtues, like initiative, self-responsibility, and joint solidarity toward the weakest members of the community. He emphasized the societal importance of instilling *Bildung* and moral qualities in the people, in which voluntary organizations played a key role.²³ Waris' societal conception reflected both professional and personal aspects. His multifaceted role in social policy included activities in several central non-governmental organizations, and the societal role of civic organizations was in flux as statutory public welfare started to expand in the 1940s. Waris was also a devout Lutheran. From the perspective of Lutheranism, disconnecting morality and spirituality from social relations appeared a significant threat.²⁴ The concern was also related to Waris' admonitions against the conceptions of a lavish social state.

According to the somewhat concerned consensus of the SPA, citizens did not possess an unquestioned right to demand services from the state; rather, the state stood at the citizen's service in accordance with its own prerequisites. The state had the right and *responsibility* to prioritize and target its services, and citizens respectively were responsible for

²¹ Andersson (2003), 35.

²² Meinander (1951), 268.

²³ Waris (1951), 458–459.

²⁴ Waris had argued for collective responsibility in a similar vein in his 1950 article "Our society in a period of transition," Waris, H. (1950b). *Murrosajan yhteiskuntamme. Suomalainen Suomi* 18(6), 327–332. On the role of Lutheranism for Waris' social policy views and activities, see Lindberg, H. (2015). *Lutheranism and welfare state expertise: The example of Heikki Waris. Perichoresis* 13(2), 97–113; Jalava, M. and Rainio-Niemi, J. (2018). *European small-state academics and the rise of the United States as an intellectual center: The cases of Halvdan Koht and Heikki Waris*. In M. Jalava, S. Nygård, and J. Strang (eds.), *Decentering European Intellectual Space*. Brill, 165–194.

themselves. State and society nonetheless formed a community, whereby social policy was also a matter of common good. However, there was little leeway, as the gain of one group entailed a loss for another—in economic as well as moral terms.

PRESENT PAST: SOCIETAL CHAOS AND PRE-EMPTIVE SOCIETAL PLANNING (MID-1950s)

In 1954, Heikki Waris held a presentation at the University of Helsinki entitled “Societal planning: To plan or not to plan?” Reflections on the differences, benefits, and harms between planning and not planning were ignited, in particular, by the present time “when a controlled wartime economy and a number of regulations are being dismantled.” According to Waris, refraining from planning implied a liberalist conception of capitalism. The discourse had “gladly and constantly” revolved around an apparatus of “free competition and free price formation,” which automatically and self-correctively sought a natural state of harmony, provided it was not disturbed—particularly by state intervention. The free-market economy continued to be held in high social regard in the “so-called *crème de la crème* of society” and academia, Waris maintained.²⁵

Regardless, Waris deemed that the liberalist notion of free-market equilibrium had been called into question already during the First World War. Non-fiscal factors, like the war economy and technological advances, had increasingly often become decisive factors. Furthermore, along with the expanding trade union movement and the 1930s Depression, the economically invigorating effect of mass unemployment appeared less credible; instead, full employment and social reforms came to the fore. Even capitalist countries had “willingly or unwillingly transitioned to societal planning, to consciously and systematically outlining future developments.” However, this development was not unequivocally positive, Waris maintained. The accelerating technological development spurred by natural sciences had rendered society more dynamic and more difficult to control, which strained societal institutions and social relations. Societal planning based on the empirical social sciences presented itself as a central

²⁵ Waris, H. (1954). Yhteiskunnan suunnittelu: Suunnittelu vai suunnittelemattomuus? *Suomalainen Suomi* 22(1), 13–18, 13.

means for confronting the challenges brought on by the “triumphant march of technology.”²⁶

In the mid- and late 1950s, a societal conception based on broad societal planning began to rival conservative ideas at the SPA. Unintentional and unwanted developments were still the main concern, but in contrast to the latter’s uneasy relation with planning, the newer conception was based on firm confidence in science-based societal planning as the most effective way—if not the only way—to prevent chaos in societal policy.

The new approach was explained by the space of experience—namely, societal unrest in the mid-1950s. State-led economic regulation was dismantled abruptly and unplanned in 1955, which set in motion a chaotic avalanche of events, culminating in a general strike in March 1956. During spring 1956, Parliament also passed a notable pension reform. Its twists and turns were entangled in the same factors as the general strike, and the end result was a radical universalist reform that left all parties involved unhappy—a scheme that tripled expenditure, yet still paid out meager pensions.²⁷

Recession and unemployment continued to burden the economy, and 1957 was dominated by financial crisis. The government in office, in which Meinander held the thankless portfolio of Minister of Finance, attempted to remedy the situation by declaring temporary national insolvency and postponing child allowance payments, though ultimately in vain.²⁸

Rampant social spending was the hot topic of fall 1957. The SPA partook in the public discussion by organizing a debate. The event was kicked off by Pekka Kuusi, an up-and-coming hotshot sociologist and Heikki Waris’ protégé, who promptly addressed the issue in his talk “Can our social expenditure be decreased.” Kuusi’s depoliticizing vocabulary hammered home the message: Social policy was in “undeniable” crisis because social expenditure was not adapted to the economy. The national pension reform and child allowances were represented as cautionary examples and the main culprits. Kuusi posited that increasing the national income was

²⁶ Ibid., quotes on pp. 14 and 17.

²⁷ Bergenheim, S. (2013). *Sosiaalivakuutus politiikan näyttämönä: Sosiaalidemokraattien ja maalaisliiton ristiriidat sosiaalivakuutuksen synnyssä ja kehityksessä 1927–1964*. Master’s Thesis. University of Helsinki, 68–89.

²⁸ Kangas, O. (2006). *Politiikka ja sosiaaliturva Suomessa*. In T. Paavonen and O. Kangas (eds.), *Eduskunta hyvinvointivaltion rakentajana*. Edita, 190–366, 297–298; Uljas, P. (2012). *Hyvinvointivaltion läpimurto*. Into Kustannus, 162–170.

the most “natural” and, in fact, “the only way” to retrench relative social expenditure and, respectively, to expand social policy. Until then, Kuusi resolutely demanded, “Stop the expansion of social policy now!”²⁹

Kuusi’s conception of the relationship between social and economic policy hence resembled the conservative ideas of the SPA and was well received by Mannio and Meinander. Meinander, in particular, perceptibly embittered by the child allowance episode, vocally expressed his stance that swollen social expenses were to blame for the financial crisis. Arguments in favor of child allowances and preventative dynamic social policy were met with snide remarks about “wishful social policy thinking” that overlooked “economic realities.” Meinander claimed there was no escaping the fact that comprehensive social policy was detrimental to the economy and hence irresponsible in the long term. The hierarchy was crystal clear: “Social policy is, after all, merely an important part of economic policy.”³⁰

Kuusi, however, did not agree with Meinander’s formulation, but perceived economic and social policy as distinct aspects of a larger societal whole. Kuusi also differed from the conservative conceptions of the SPA’s veterans in his take on planning, namely, that political gambling and fumbling in the dark resulted from too *little* planning and intervention. He thus echoed the conception of his mentor, Waris—that comprehensive planning was a crucial means for managing social policy and preventing undesired developments—and pointed out that unplanned ad hoc solutions also included measures fueled by a crisis mentality. Instead, Kuusi appealed to the SPA and its responsibility to “set social policy knowledge straight,” which was a prerequisite for long-term planning.³¹

The polemic “retrenchment debate” of 1957 crystallized two differing conceptions of the relationship between social and economic policy. Instead of seeing social policy as a sub-field of economic policy, Kuusi and Waris positioned it as its own policy field. Both views nonetheless shared the basic premise that social policy should function expediently and in harmony with economic policy, and comprehensive social policy was deemed detrimental. In other words, the SPA had still not been influenced by dynamic ideas. Instead, the key difference was planning, as the newer discourse constructed an inherent link between social policy and planning.

²⁹ Kuusi, P. (1958). *Voidaanko sosiaalimenojamme supistaa*. Helsingin yliopisto.

³⁰ Ibid., 13–22, quotes on pp. 14, 17, 21.

³¹ Ibid., 23.

The reserved and conflicted notion of planning was thus complemented by a positivist confidence—or hope—that social policy could become a predictable, manageable, and rational, science-based policy field. While social policy was still perceived as a threat to economic growth, science-based (and -legitimized) state intervention was now presented as a risk management tool in a modernizing society.

The rivaling ideas indicated a change in temporal conceptions, namely, regarding how a looming societal future could be controlled. The planning-oriented approach was not deterred by challenges in assessing impact; on the contrary, it further motivated the production of empirical and systematic knowledge in order to transform the unknown and threatening into the predictable and manageable.

When the rector of the University of Helsinki called for a discussion on the opportunities of “democratic planning” (cf. its socialist counterpart, “total planning”), Kuusi eagerly responded by writing an article entitled “On the opportunities of controlled societal policy” (1956). He made a trenchant remark that excessive planning was not a marked concern, seeing as the entire pension reform process had proven quite the opposite.³² Waris, for his part, saw that the highly dynamic nature of modern society posed a risk for the emerging ethos and praxis of societal planning, as it became increasingly difficult to systematically bridge “the gap between our culture’s technological lead and its social dimension.”³³ The core problem was thus not excessive planning, but fast-paced and imbalanced changes in society. This development and its undesired repercussions called for planning, but the potential of planning itself was also undermined by the intensity and direction of the ongoing change.

In the past present of the mid-1950s, a fear of unpredictability was a central part of the space of experience as well as its horizon of expectation. In other words, fear figured in two roles: fear as the alarmed *anticipation* of the future was based on an *experienced* fear in the past. These notions also framed the role of planning—not as the morally questionable intervention into and infringement of individual liberties, but an essential tool for controlling the future.

The prerequisites for managing future developments were tied to wider-scale changes in social knowledge production. The 1940s and 1950s

³² Kuusi, P. (1956). Hallitun yhteiskuntapolitiikan mahdollisuuksista. *Suomalainen Suomi* 24(5), 329–332.

³³ Waris (1954), 17.

saw a surge in systematic and empirical social scientific knowledge and economic data (e.g., in national economic statistics),³⁴ which were seen to produce new, critical scientific knowledge. The perception was linked to logical empiricism, which emphasized experiential and observational evidence as the foundation for conceptions of reality. The so-called new social sciences were enlivened by a strong positivist ethos that paralleled the social sciences with the natural sciences.³⁵ To Waris and Kuusi, the new (Anglo-American) social sciences epitomized rational and pragmatic thought. Respectively, Kuusi and Waris perceived and represented actors, academic disciplines, and discourses of the past, as well as contemporaries still abiding by these old ideas, as naïve, irrational, and emotional.

Modern-day social scientists have a different attitude than the prophets of past centuries, or utopians who in their mind strive to build a future society in accordance with their personal ideals and beliefs, guided only by their internal visions and inspiration.³⁶

Man has learned to use the mind for controlling nature, yet still attempts to govern people and crowds with the heart rather than the brain, with belief rather than knowledge.³⁷

On the other hand, Waris pointed out that methodological advances had also brought about rational and mature criticism regarding the limitations of research-based predictions. However, this did not imply that planning should be abandoned; on the contrary, a dynamic and changing society needed the support of dynamic social sciences.³⁸ Science-based planning presented itself as a tool for reining in political games and preventing contingent social policy and its consequences. The objective was to scientize society and rationalize social policy by anchoring them in scientific knowledge—ultimately, to strip societal policy of its ideological and political features. Kuusi and Waris had, in other words, adopted a social

³⁴ Paavonen (2006), 53; Saloniemi (1996), 91–92, 97–98.

³⁵ Tiihonen (1985), 258; Saloniemi (1996); Waris (1954), 17.

³⁶ Waris (1954), 17.

³⁷ Kuusi (1956), 330.

³⁸ Waris (1954), 17–18; Kuusi (1956), 330–331.

engineering approach, albeit without the utopian visions commonly associated with a technocratic ideology.³⁹

Confidence in the potential of planning grew stronger during the 1950s, but unlike the Swedish strong society idea, it was not exalted by strong optimism or a belief in progress. The setting for the SPA's discussions on planning and the future consisted of a chaotic space of experience, which colored the horizon of expectation with a fear of undesired, uncontrolled, and sudden developments, looming as imminent threats in the absence of robust and long-term societal planning.

In early 1958, the association responded to Kuusi's plea during the retrenchment debate. It commissioned Kuusi to draft a "master plan for social policy," which was to include "the general knowledge that enables social policy to be systematically developed within the limits set by our national economy."⁴⁰

PRESENT PAST: PROACTIVE PLANNING FOR A MODERN SOCIETY (EARLY 1960s)

For Finland, markedly late to the modernization game, the 1960s entailed a multifaceted transition period. Finnish companies were subjected to international economic competition, but on the other hand, swelling Western currency reserves facilitated the spread of scientific and technological innovations. Consumption opportunities also expanded fast. These changes and their various consequences reinforced one another.⁴¹

³⁹ Marklund, C. (2009). Begriffsgeschichte und Übergriffsgeschichte in the history of social engineering. In T. Etzemüller (ed.), *Die Ordnung der Moderne: Social Engineering im 20. Jahrhundert*. Transcript Verlag, 199–221; Pietikäinen, P. (2017). "Neurosis can still be your comforting friend": Neurosis and maladjustment in twentieth-century medical and intellectual history. In C. Johns (ed.), *The Neurotic turn: Inter-disciplinary correspondences on neurosis*. Repeater Books, 17–55, 21–22.

⁴⁰ National Archives of Finland (NAF), The Finnish Social Policy Association's Archive (FSPAA), folder H4, Pekka Kuusi's memorandum "Drafting a plan for Finland's social policy," December 9, 1957; National Archives of Finland (NAF), The Finnish Social Policy Association's Archive (FSPAA), folder H4, funding application to the Finnish Cultural Foundation, September 21, 1959.

⁴¹ Kalela, J. (2005). Hyvinvointivaltion rakentaminen. In M. K. Niemi and V. Pernaa (eds.), *Suomalaisen yhteiskunnan poliittinen historia*. Edita, 205–224, 213. See also Kalela, J. (1989). *Työttömyys 1900-luvun suomalaisessa yhteiskuntapolitiikassa*. Työvoimaministeriö, 175–176.

The early 1960s was a fruitful environment for so-called planning optimism. It was characterized by a belief in progress, which applied to economic development, the potential of academic research, and rational decision-making. Science-based planning was seen as a means for defining and achieving societal objectives that modernization, industrialization, and economic growth had brought forth as actual possibilities.

Ideas in the SPA also shifted toward planning optimism. In 1961, it published two books: *Social Policy of the Finnish Society*⁴² by Waris, and *Social Policy for the Sixties*⁴³ by Kuusi, which was also published as an English-language version entitled *Social Policy for the Sixties: A Plan for Finland*⁴⁴ in 1964. Kuusi's work became a Finnish bestseller, still hailed today as the Finnish Beveridge Report, the definitive handbook for the Finnish welfare state.

Both Waris and Kuusi present the past in a small but neutral or positive light. Waris' book opens with an introduction in which he mainly describes long-term societal developments, such as industrialization, urbanization, and Finland's general modernization development. Unlike in the mid-1950s, Waris' tone is not one of concern but is rather neutral, at times even positive—Waris thus depicted societal changes as progress. The introduction in Kuusi's book also went over long-term development, but with a more outspokenly positive note. He described the history of the past centuries as “an enormous forward step on the long road of mankind's development,” in which the individual had experienced a rise “first from a subject to a citizen, and then from the prime force behind public policy to its criterion.”⁴⁵ On the more recent past, Kuusi concluded lyrically:

Now, in the 1960's, we can see that the last few decades have been truly exceptional in the long history of mankind. In no period of history was an era so strikingly different from any earlier one. An astronaut orbiting the globe is not sufficient to symbolize our brave era. The symbol of our time is man rising from his poverty.⁴⁶

⁴² Waris, H. (1961). *Suomalaisen yhteiskunnan sosiaalipolitiikka: Johdatus sosiaalipolitiikkaan*. WSOY.

⁴³ Kuusi (1961).

⁴⁴ Kuusi (1964).

⁴⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Kuusi's space of experience had thus shifted from experiencing an almost default-like state of fear regarding unpredictability to an expanded notion of the past in which international and national crises were mere trivial details in the bigger picture: the entire history of humankind proceeding toward a better present and future. He even expressed disgruntled bafflement at the 1950s criticism of social policy and its expansion⁴⁷—in other words, the same debates in which he himself had participated.

The rise of planning optimism was related to a positive space of experience at the turn of the decade. The past was seen in a new, positive light, which reconnected the past, the present, and the future to a long continuum of progress. From this perspective, the “new era” and its many changes appeared first and foremost as opportunities. Structural change and economic growth manifested as rural–urban migration, increasing urban populations, and new factories. Finland's population and industrial development appeared to follow the path of Sweden, albeit with a two-decade lag.⁴⁸ As noted earlier, in the relationship between Finland and Sweden, the latter represented a pioneering epitome of Nordicness and hence also served as Finland's horizon of expectation. Now, it appeared that a welcome modernization development awaited Finland, including free-trade integration and its possibilities for economic growth and development.

In the works of Kuusi and Waris, references to the past were rather scarce, as they both had their gaze fixed, first and foremost, on the optimistic future: a broad horizon of expectation expanded by the positive space of experience.⁴⁹

As the title suggests, the focus of *Social Policy for the Sixties* was set on the future. Kuusi's original task was to outline a plan for systematically developing social policy in relation to the national economy. In early 1959, however, the objective had expanded to “providing an answer to a more general question: what will the status and role of social policy be in a society striving for economic growth[?]”⁵⁰ According to Kuusi, Waris had assumed that *Social Policy for the Sixties* would be a “general description of Finnish social policy that can be used as a textbook.” When he realized this would not be the case, Waris embarked on writing his *Social Policy of the*

⁴⁷ Kuusi (1964), 34–38.

⁴⁸ Paavonen (2006), 15–19, 62.

⁴⁹ See also Chap. 16 by P. Haapala, in which he discusses Kuusi's work and optimistic and future-oriented social policies, among others.

⁵⁰ National Archives of Finland (NAF), The Finnish Social Policy Association's Archive (FSPAA), folder F2, Letter to the Huoltaja Foundation, 16 February 1959.

Finnish Society.⁵¹ However, Kuusi's original task was to derive a comprehensive plan, not a general description. The simultaneous writing and publication of the two books might also have been rooted in the academic rivalry between the authors.

Regardless of behind-the-scenes motivations, the end result was two publications representing similar conceptions on society, social policy, and science. Nevertheless, Waris' book was spectacularly overshadowed by Kuusi's work, both in contemporary debates and in subsequent research literature, not to mention how it was translated into actual policies. Nonetheless, it is particularly surprising that Waris' contribution has been overlooked in literature on the planning discourse in Finland and the history of the SPA. After all, *Social Policy of the Finnish Society* was a book by Waris, Professor of Social Policy and Chair of the SPA, intended to serve "mainly as a textbook in universities and other educational institutions, as well as a guidebook for the numerous organizations whose activities require a comprehensive understanding and current knowledge of Finnish social policy."⁵² The modest formulation conceals an ambitious target audience and impact. As a textbook, the publication would have the potential to influence the ideological basis of future scholars, politicians, and civil servants, and, as a guidebook for social welfare and health organizations, it would have practical implications—and neither of these goals went unrealized, as the book was indeed used as a textbook for decades.

Kuusi and Waris conveyed planning optimistic temporal conceptions, which entailed a broad gaze into the past as well as toward the future. In this past present, the space of experience encompassed decades, centuries, and even millennia, with the passage of history appearing as steady progress toward an ever better future. Respectively, the horizon of expectation reached wide and far: The perceived need to confine national futures to narrow and short-term lanes had been replaced by the task of engineering the future of humankind. It presented itself as an exalted and multifaceted opportunity.

In the present past of the early 1960s, conceptions of the relationship between social and economic policy were also colored by planning optimism and its positive temporal notions, in particular its hopeful outlook on the future. Planning optimism envisioned social policy that encompassed all individuals and societal groups. Kuusi spoke of "man-centered

⁵¹ Tuomioja, E. (1996). *Pekka Kuusi: alkoholipoliitikko, sosiaalipoliitikko, ihmiskuntapolitiikka*. Tammi, 147.

⁵² Waris (1961), v.

public policy” that “places its trust in man” and “rests on the unconditional acceptance of human dignity.” He crystallized the goal of comprehensive social policy into a slogan-like heading: “the good of the citizen—the supreme goal.”⁵³ Waris, for his part, concluded that society had progressed from mitigating class conflicts to furthering “modern social policy,” which encompassed all societal groups.⁵⁴

The new conceptions of social policy as a dynamic and comprehensive whole were interlinked with a new, dynamic view on economic policy, which strived for full employment and counter-cyclical measures. Kuusi and Waris called for a reassessment of the economic effects of social policy: It should be seen as measures that increase welfare and balance spending power, which ultimately support economic growth. Kuusi straightforwardly called the old perception of social policy as mere public expenses “a fallacy”⁵⁵—in other words, he criticized the core premise of the ideas he himself had so vocally advocated only a few years previously. In a similar vein, Waris argued:

Social policy is no longer only seen as ‘costs’ or ‘expenses’, since experience has demonstrated the positive impact of more effective [social] security and improved safety on the national economy as a whole.⁵⁶

Kuusi based his views on Swedish economist and politician Gunnar Myrdal’s ideas of “circular cumulative causation” in society. Myrdal was skeptical of the neoclassical premise of economic equilibrium and saw instead that economic, political, cultural, and other factors formed mutually reinforcing processes. Well-planned societal policy played a crucial role in ensuring that these interactions were transformed into virtuous rather than vicious circles—that is, into a positive feedback loop between redistributive social policy, economic growth, and expanding democracy.⁵⁷

Neither planning optimism nor the idea of virtuous circles assumed that social policy self-evidently supported economic growth. Both Kuusi and Waris maintained that subjecting social policy to economic

⁵³ Kuusi (1964), 30–31, 43.

⁵⁴ Waris (1961), 29.

⁵⁵ Kuusi (1964), 70.

⁵⁶ Waris (1961), 305.

⁵⁷ Kettunen, P. (2019b). The conceptual history of the welfare state in Finland. In N. Edling (ed.), *The changing meanings of the welfare state: Histories of a key concept in the Nordic countries*. Berghahn Books, 225–275; Kettunen (2019a).

development was imperative. In other words, more social policy did not automatically mean more economic growth. In fact, social policy still had all the possibilities to disrupt the national economy and ongoing structural changes. The core task of planning was, indeed, to ensure that social policy progressed at an appropriately moderate pace—in other words, to prevent vicious circles.

The expansion of social income transfers as envisaged by us is not intended to impair the preconditions of our economic growth. [...] The reason for making a plan is precisely to provide against the occurrence of any adjustment difficulties. [...] ‘Slowly but surely’ shall be our slogan.⁵⁸

Kuusi and Waris depicted economic growth and expanding social policy as inherently linked, in that precise order. Furthermore, both policies were seen as parts of a holistic whole labeled “societal policy” (*yhteiskuntapolitiikka*).⁵⁹ A crucial deviation from earlier conceptions was the horizon of expectation. The national economic frame had been transformed from threat and restriction to opportunity. Whereas the horizon of expectation in the late 1950s was characterized by a fear of societal and political chaos, the economic growth of the early 1960s—and the assumption of sustained economic growth⁶⁰—gave the future its signature optimistic flair.

Social policy has latitude. [...] With the ever-broadening outlook of economic growth opening up before us, the Social Policy Association has now embarked on long-term planning.⁶¹

For the first time in history people have begun to believe that poverty can truly be expelled. Democracy, social equalization and economic growth seem to be fortunately interrelated in modern society. Social policy seems to spring from free and growth-oriented human nature.⁶²

⁵⁸ Kuusi (1964), 282, 290.

⁵⁹ See also Kettunen (2019b).

⁶⁰ Kuusi, P. (1963). Sosiaalipolitiikka ja taloudellinen kasvu. In *Kunnallispolitiikkaa 1960-luvulla*. Suomen kaupunkiliitto, Maalaiskuntien liitto & Finlands svenska landskommuners förbund, 105–118, 107.

⁶¹ Waris (1961), 304.

⁶² Kuusi (1964), 34.

On the other hand, economic growth was not perceived merely as an innate and self-evident result of transnational and transhistorical “growth-oriented human nature,” but also as a national necessity in a globalizing and changing world. The horizon of expectation incorporated both aspects: It was about the development of all humankind, and Finland, too, had to get on the bandwagon. It did not exist or develop in an isolated vacuum, but in interaction with and in relation to other national entities—indeed, international comparisons play an important role in constructing nations, national identities, and national collectives.⁶³ Whereas Sweden has typically acted as Finland’s horizon of expectation in its own right, the Soviet Union, on the other hand, not only represented a looming threat, but also a future path to avoid. In a “simultaneously fatalistic and optimistic” proclamation (as characterized by Pauli Kettunen⁶⁴), Kuusi specifically crystallized the mission of Finland by relating it to its neighbors—but now, Sweden and the Soviet Union were, in fact, paralleled as representatives of the same future in the all-encompassing growth-oriented trajectory: “To be able to continue our own life between Sweden and the Soviet Union, our two neighbors willing and able to grow, we ourselves are doomed to grow.”⁶⁵

After the initial shock, the notion of the dynamic relationship between economic and social policy as well as the idea of comprehensive social policy were soon embraced, which has been explained in part by the need to be able to manage the ongoing changes of 1960s society.⁶⁶ However, planning had been seen as a means for controlling change already in the 1950s. Instead, the perception of change had shifted in accordance with the horizon of expectation: In lieu of managing future risks, it was now a matter of proactively engineering future opportunities.

By the early 1960s, the planning conceptions of Waris and Kuusi had developed into an ideology that resembled Scandinavian forms of social engineering, to which I add the strong society ideology.⁶⁷ Common denominators included optimistic confidence in societal and scientific

⁶³ Kettunen, P. (2006). The power of international comparison: A perspective on the making and challenging of the Nordic welfare state. In N. F. Christiansen et al. (eds.), *The Nordic model of welfare: A historical reappraisal*. Museum Tusculanum Press, 31–65, 58–59.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 58–59.

⁶⁵ Kuusi (1964), 59.

⁶⁶ Kalela (2005), 216; Kalela (1989), 177.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Slagstad, R. (2004). Shifting knowledge regimes. *Thesis Eleven* 77(1), 65–83; Andersson (2003), 32–34.

progress. Self-reinforcing socioeconomic processes were seen to generate economic growth, increase security, and improve living conditions. Growth-oriented social policy served as an apparatus that expanded productivity throughout society, and hence an investment in sustaining economic growth. The prevailing positivist view of society was also crystallized in the management of historical time: It sought to explain and rationalize the past, manage the present, and predict, plan, and govern the future. The central objective was the scientization, rationalization, and governance of modern society, as well as managing its historical time.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have sought to demonstrate how the *presents past* approach can be used as an analytical lens for studying microhistorical facets of wider-scale phenomena. By exploring ideas and actions as situational events, it also showcases contradictions and contingent aspects that are easily left out later in outlining long-term developments. In short, the approach taps into the inherent “messiness” of human experience, which is, paradoxically, often muddled and obscured by stylized narratives, neat categorizations, and clearly demarcated periodizations.

This approach is useful in analyzing societal experiences and ideological shifts that cannot be traced back to dichotomies like left–right or internal–external. Unlike the Swedish strong society ideology,⁶⁸ planning ideas in the SPA were not prompted by external conservative criticism. Rather, the SPA’s planning discourses included elements from both conservative and rivaling Swedish views—that is, conservative notions of social and economic policy in the 1950s as well as planning optimism in the early 1960s. Furthermore, scientific progress was not automatically linked to dynamic societal policies. Initially, the planning ideas of Kuusi and Waris were conservatively formulated: In the mid-1950s, they emphasized the importance of scientific knowledge for reining in social policy at risk of running amok. Only in the early 1960s had the shift to planning optimism created striking similarities to the Swedish strong state ideology and progressive social engineering.

A key difference between the planning optimistic present and the presents past of the 1950s was the length and focus of temporal perspectives.

⁶⁸ Andersson (2003), 35.

The previous presents pasts were restricted to short perspectives on the past and future: Their spaces of experience focused on the difficult recent past, and their horizons of expectations were respectively focused on the near future and how to contain it. They were also nationally focused: first on postwar reconstruction and regaining national agency after an international conflict, and then on domestic crises. In the early 1960s, the temporal perspectives had expanded both in terms of the past and the future, and the national focus was intertwined with the more sweeping trajectory of humankind.

Different relationships and tensions between the past and the future, as well as different lengths in temporal perspectives, hence explain, firstly, why some of the association's actors shied away from comprehensive and planned societal policy; secondly, why others perceived planning as a viable option; and thirdly, why views on planning and its potential were eventually seen in an optimistic light. While the SPA eventually embraced planning optimism and utopian visions, the presents past and horizons of expectation during the 1950s were tinted with a much more nuanced balance between hope and fear.

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Welfare State in a Fair Society? Post-Industrial Finland as a Case Study

Juho Saari

INTRODUCTION

Since the late twentieth century, prominent scholars from numerous disciplines and different countries have claimed that *the institutional framework* of the welfare state (WS) is or will be in a state of permanent crisis. In particular, such permanent fiscal, systemic, or legitimacy crises emerged (at least in the literature) in the late 1970s, early 1990s, and late 2000s, and of course, most recently during the Covid-19 pandemic around the early 2020s. Furthermore, there have been numerous analyses *on the transformation of the fabric and dynamics of societies*, claiming major negative trends due to globalization, individualization, or acceleration. Besides the different so-called nightmare *Zeitdiagnoses*, where everything that is relevant to the quality of life of well-embedded and economically secured social groups becomes uncertain, liquid, and/or about to melt or collapse, there have been many more systematic, data-oriented studies. For instance, since the turn of the millennium, systematic analytical attention has been

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devoted to inequalities of different kinds. Consequently, inequalities have gained a firm position in political agendas in most Western countries.

Finland is no different in this respect. Since the mid-1950s, there have been numerous Finnish Welfare State (FWS) crisis assessments in the media, political rhetoric, or academic debates and publications, most of which have focused on crumbling fiscal foundations or vanishing legitimacy (mainly due to welfare dependency but also due to neoliberalism or new public management). In particular, the banking, fiscal, and economic crises of the early 1990s, which were among the most severe ever in the OECD countries,¹ resulted in significant volumes of doomsday welfare state literature, claiming permanent failure and proposing radical solutions. However, follow-up studies and time series show that none of these doomsday scenarios have materialized to a significant extent, at least not before 2021. The same applies, roughly, to inequalities and poverty. Empirical evidence on increasing inequalities is quite limited among 99 percent of the population (the very wealthy are a different story), and most empirical studies also show no changing trends in poverty either in population or those in working life during the period of the last twenty-five years or so. The same applies to the distribution of resources between socioeconomic groups. In short, the FWS has proven to be quite resilient and adaptive, inequalities have been generally stable, and Finns have faced more continuity rather than change in their quality of life.²

However, Finns *experience* these institutional and distributional changes differently. Several studies, some of which I shall return to later, show that Finns, while strongly supporting the FWS and being generally satisfied with their lives, quite collectively also assume that the coalition governments since the 2000s have been intentionally rolling back the FWS, and they are deeply worried about inequalities of different kinds (including those in income, housing, labor markets, districts, and health). In fact, both of these experiences—retrenchment of the FWS and increasing inequalities—have been among the top worries in Finland in recent years. Combining these two strands of subjective evidence, one occasionally

¹ For an overview, see Jonoug, L., Kiander, J., and Vartia, P. (eds.) (2009). *The great financial crisis in Finland and Sweden: The Nordic experience of financial liberalization*. Edward Elgar.

² Kestilä, L. and Karvonen, S. (eds.) (2018). *Suomalaisten hyvinvointi*. THL; Saari, J. and Tynkkynen, L.-K. (2020). Still holding its breath: The Finnish welfare system under reform. In S. Blum, J. Kuhlmann, and K. Schubert (eds.), *Routledge handbook of European welfare systems*. Routledge, 182–201.

witnesses quite a negative *Zeitgeist* in terms of the current FWS state and society. Consequently, several books and numerous articles, including one by the author of this chapter,³ have subtitles like “x in an unequal society,” without a question mark at the end of the title.

In this chapter, I temporarily turn the tables and argue that despite criticism, institutionally the FWS has a strong legitimacy both fiscally and politically (rather than being at the point of collapse), and Finns also experience their society as fair (rather than unequal). This kind of optimistic approach that some readers may find somewhat provocative—given that it contradicts with the mainstream view—is relatively rare in the (F)WS literature. To my knowledge, no socio-political book subtitled “the flourishing welfare state in a fair society” exists, and probably some think that such a book is not worth writing in a democratic society. It indeed is understandable, as the esteemed social policy scholars tend, for a variety of probably well-justified reasons, to focus on challenges in the institutional frameworks of the WSs and social problems in the social fabric, and quite systematically sideline the positive news and results from their analysis as socio-politically irrelevant. However, positive thinking is occasionally useful, as it may open some new, hopefully fruitful perspectives on the FWS and society in general.

I will mainly but briefly draw from the recent literature on the moral and emotional foundations of societies.⁴ The main argument here is that the preferences of prosocial humans also have endogenous components that are linked in positive or negative experiences of repeated encounters with the WS. The empirical focus is mainly the period between the early 2010s and early 2020s. First, I introduce the FWS to the reader not so familiar with its fiscal and institutional components. Second, I analyze how Finns experience the FWS and assess its legitimacy. Third, in a comparative part on fairness, I will investigate how different comparative social justice indexes and perceived fairness fit together comparatively and in Finland. A new dataset has been constructed for this purpose. Finally, in order to update the insights, I share some new perspectives on fairness during the Covid-19 pandemic in Finland. It is clear that this kind of fairness narrative (instead of the inequality narrative) has some consequences for

³ Saari, J. (2020). *Samassa veneessä: Hyvinvointivaltio eriarvoistuneessa yhteiskunnassa*. Docendo.

⁴ Bowles, S. (2016). *The moral economy: Why good incentives are no substitute for good citizens*. Yale University Press.

understanding how people experience their lives in Finnish society. The chapter ends with some conclusions.

FINNISH WELFARE STATE: FRAMEWORK OF EXPERIENCE

Before we enter into the empirical analysis that visualizes and analyzes the experiences, one should have a rough idea what we are precisely talking about when we are discussing the WS. Countless books and articles have been written on this topic. However, only a limited consensus has emerged in this literature as regards the foundations and institutional frameworks of the WS. Regardless, one can claim as a preliminary consensus that fundamentally the WS is about centralized redistribution and the regulation of resources of different kinds (transfers and services) between different groups of individuals facing different politically recognized social risks.⁵ Social risks, in turn, are limited and well-defined (and occasionally repetitive) spells in peoples' lives that burden them and, if not sufficiently buffered and effectively governed, limit their life chances. Political and corporatist actors have first identified and then differentiated social risks from each other over time, and, in later decades, each of the social risks has evolved quite complex and internally incoherent structures of governance.

Classification of these social risks may occasionally vary, and some international agreements have slightly different categories, but one may list ten categories of social risks in advanced welfare states in the following way. The first four categories focus on the population outside the labor markets, including young children, the disabled, the sick, and the elderly, and include large numbers of transfers, services, fringe benefits, subsidies, regulations, and so on. The following four categories interplay with labor markets, including the reconciliation of work and family (including transfers, services, and regulation), housing (including transfers, subsidies, and regulation), unemployment (including transfers, services, and regulation), and transfers supporting education (which for the most part is outside the concept of the redistributive welfare state). The final two categories, excessive personal debts and immigration, have again different social mechanisms, services and transfers, and governance structures.⁶

⁵ See the details in Saari, J. (2012). Double transformation: How to adjust institutional social policy? In G. G. Cohen, B. W. Ansell, J. Gingrich, and R. Cox (eds.), *Social policy in the smaller European Union states*. Berghahn Books, 59–80.

⁶ Saari and Tynkkynen (2020), 182–201.

Historically, if one abstracts sufficiently, the FWS first covered the social risks of those outside the labor market, then expanded to cover the interplay of social risks and labor markets. The former wave can roughly be dated to between the 1920s and late 1960s, while the latter dates from the early 1970s until the late 1980s. Fiscally, the former wave is evidently far more important than the latter. Finally, excessive debts in households and immigration were defined as social risks by the government only after the early 1990s recession and EU membership (transition from 1992, full membership in 1995). Overall, it is sufficient to say that over a period of 100 years or so, the FWS has expanded from modest origins to very comprehensive governance structures governing all major social risks and covering most social problems.⁷

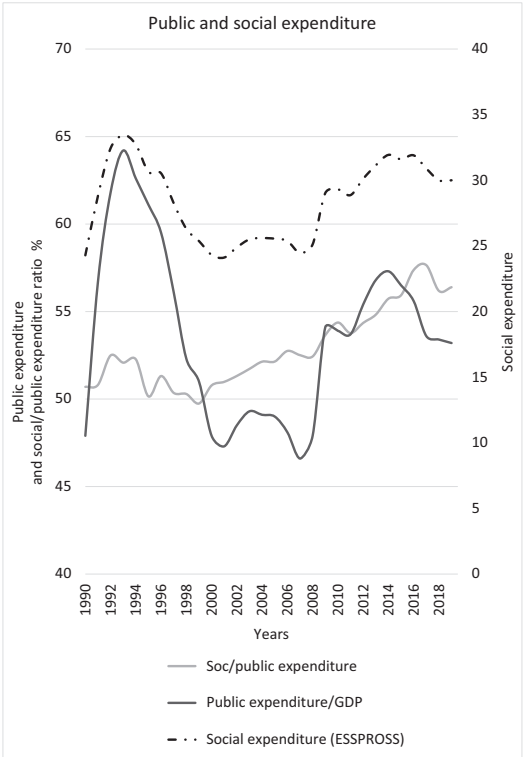
In addition to these ten categories of social risks (and the list is not exhaustive), there exist governance structures for social problems of different kinds. Again, this is a quite complex group of social problems. Some of them have their origins in social order (e.g., services in prisons, shelters, and foster care), while others focus on the causes and consequences of asocial behavior that have negative long-term consequences for the health and well-being of vulnerable individuals. However, they also share certain characteristics, including the non-specific length of use of services and transfers and the wicked nature of the cases and issues.

Approaching the institutional framework of the FWS from this angle has several advantages. First, it integrates transfers, services, and regulations of different kinds into one analytical framework, instead of treating them differently and in a fragmentary manner, and consequently, it treats them as functional substitutes and complementary arrangements related to certain social risks. Second, instead of focusing on institutional changes in certain specific elements, like certain transfers, it is a more comprehensive approach to the institutional changes of the WS that takes into account policy shifts from transfers and societal services (or transfers in kind), and back, and policy substitutes (e.g., education services replace active labor market policy measures) and complementaries (e.g., transfers and services are tightly integrated). As this study (and the book) focuses mainly on the *experiences* of the FSW that do not necessarily rely on so-called informed (well-grounded) preferences, there is no need to further scrutinize any institutional designs of the FWS in a more thorough way.

⁷ Saari and Tynkkynen (2020), 182–201.

Fiscally, Finland’s proportion of social expenditure of GDP and its share of general public expenditure is among the highest in the world. Eurostat’s gross social expenditure statistics indicate that Finland is regularly in the top three, together with France and Denmark, all of which spend around 30 percent of GDP.⁸ An aggregated time series on Finland is given in Fig. 15.1. Again, without going into the details here, it shows that the social expenditure/GDP ratio has increased from 25 to 30 per cent since the turn of the millennium. In real terms, if one excludes fluctuations in expenditure among the services and benefits for the working-age

Fig. 15.1 Social expenditure as a proportion of GDP and as a share of general public expenditure (%), Finland 1990–2019 (National Accounts database, own calculations)



⁸ Net social expenditure data result in somewhat different conclusions, but they are not relevant here.

population that are due to economic and fiscal cycles,⁹ one can identify a steady but accelerating increase in total social expenditure. Figure 15.1 also implies that social expenditure is gradually crowding out other categories of public expenditure, indicating that in the long run there will be major cuts in other components, like education, research, innovation, and development, if the public expenditure/GDP ratio remains stable as planned and economic and employment performance do not significantly and permanently improve.

Within social expenditure, the benefits and services that are related to a steady accelerating demographic change have recently been crowding out other social expenditures and will likely do so in the future. This is quite problematic, as the lower fertility rate may politically require some additional transfers for families with children, although evidence on the positive effects of transfers on fertility is mostly limited and sometimes contradictory. Furthermore, while the FWS has in recent years generated excessive public debt, the actual net costs of the public deficit have been quite modest due to low (and occasionally negative) interest rates; it is also likely to remain so, as Finland tends to have a reputation as a country that pays its debts. Overall, institutionally and fiscally the FWS was on solid ground at least until the Covid-19 pandemic, which will be dealt with later in this chapter.

GOOD NEWS, PART I: THE LEGITIMATE WELFARE STATE

Above, I have presented some preliminary facts on the welfare state that provide initial counter-evidence against the retrenchment theses. Another issue is how Finns have experienced the FWS in recent decades. This is not an irrelevant issue, as the institutional framework of the FWS does not evolve in a vacuum or only in the contexts of fiscal issues and social risks. Rather, it relies on various informal institutions¹⁰ embedded in the fabric of society, like social norms, trust and social capital, and social acceptance of certain kinds of behavior (also known as social production functions). For instance, the same monetary incentive structures but different levels of

⁹Note, however, that after every economic and fiscal cycle, social expenditure in these categories remains at higher levels due to the hysteresis effect.

¹⁰For a more detailed account on the distinction between formal and informal institutions, see North, D. C. (1990). *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance*. Cambridge University Press.

social acceptance of using social benefits and services result in varying amounts and lengths of benefit and service spells, particularly among the working-age population.¹¹ The same applies to active labor market policies, where identical monetary incentives may generate different outcomes in different countries with different social norms and levels of social acceptance. Furthermore, the legitimacy of the institutional framework of the WS also has some consequences for its change. To maintain the FWS in the long run, it is necessary for it to have popular support. Similarly, some common understanding of the state of the social fabric is needed, particularly when the resources available or their quality is in decline.

Another issue is to what extent preferences are endogenous—that is, shaped by repetitive encounters and experiences. This issue has been a hot potato in economics and analytical sociology, as scholars have investigated the impact of market experience on human behavior in different cultures and institutional frameworks. For social policy experts, the issue is simpler. It is obvious that citizens' preferences regarding the FWS (or any WS, for that matter) are to some extent endogenous—that is, living in the welfare state and repeatedly experiencing its transfers and services as a customer and citizen has some impact on the preferences of the person and his/her interpretation of the legitimacy of the FWS. How large “the experience impact” is and how different groups vary in this respect is a matter of debate.¹² However, it is also important to keep in mind that all persons using the same set of transfers and services very rarely experience them similarly.

In socio-political literature, the classic Marshallian (after T. H. Marshall) argument on endogenous preferences is that the shared experience as customers in different institutions of the welfare state replaces class-based status differences by social citizenship.¹³ Marshall's argument follows

¹¹ Extensive theoretical, institutional, and empirical analysis on welfare dependence is available in Saari, J. (ed.). (2017). *Sosiaaliturvariippuvuus*. Tampere University Press.

¹² Some cleverly designed studies on immigrants' attitudes indicate that it may be significant in this respect, showing, for instance, that immigrants tend to have roughly the same level of quality of life as the citizens of their current country of residence (rather than that of their origin), in particular in the Nordic countries. See Kangas, O. (2013). Somewhere over the high seas there is a land of my dreams: Happiness and life satisfaction among immigrants in Europe. In C. Marklund (ed.), *All well in the welfare state? Welfare, well-being and the politics of happiness*. Nordic Centre of Excellence NordWel, 135–167.

¹³ Marshall, T. H. (1963). Citizenship and social class. In T. H. Marshall (ed.), *Sociology at the crossroads and other essays*. Heinemann.

Weber's approach to status as a category of stratification. Indeed, there is also occasional evidence from Finland that citizenship-based entitlement (basically the right to have and to use transfers and services without individual-level administrative needs assessment and discretion) has had at least some consequences for Finns' preferences toward their WS and society.¹⁴ Occasionally people share some collective emotions as they received pensions for the very first time. This evidence, however, is on the founding decades of the welfare state, rather than in recent years. Furthermore, while Finland did have universal basic education and universal compulsory conscription (where all recruits started at the same position regardless of their socioeconomic group or education), within the WS there were (and are) several socially stratified services and transfers, including occupational health services and earnings-related benefits, that discourage the experience of shared social citizenship.

Finally, it is likely that the WS has institutionally become a more integrated part of everyday life. Instead of something political, challenging, novel, and exceptional (and therefore "artificial") to be hotly debated in different social forums, it has become apolitical, unchallenged, and more ordinary (and therefore "natural").¹⁵ As it experience-wise becomes increasingly self-evident, it is likely to generate fewer collective emotions, regardless of the fact that it provides increasingly larger coverage and governance of various social risks. It is like the air people breathe, something that self-evidently exists.

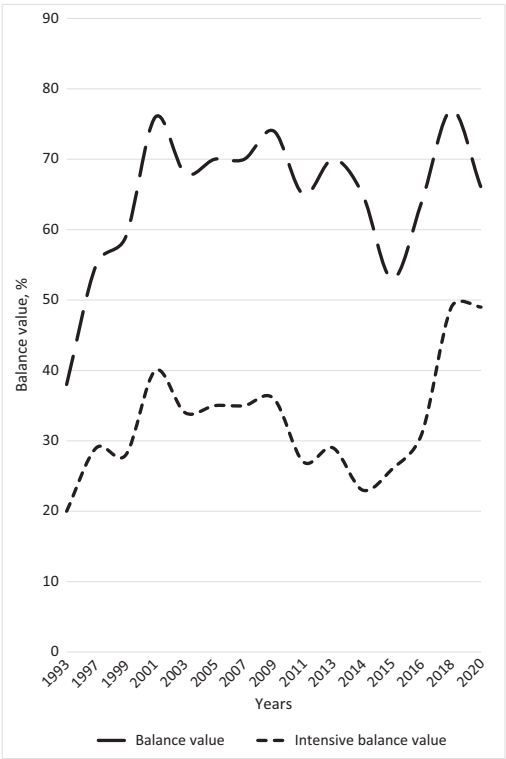
Ultimately, the shared experience of social citizenship is an empirical matter, something that surveys can to some extent illustrate. The survey is not a perfect tool, however. People have in general quite limited knowledge of the different characteristics of the FWS, and their opinions on the state of the WS and society are rarely well informed. There are also several well-known biases and framing effects in opinion polls. Furthermore, these opinion polls highlight certain dimensions of the WS and society while ignoring others. Finally, context has some impact. For instance, if the questionnaire focuses mainly on negative (positive) themes, it has a significant impact on the mood of the respondent, and consequently, on his/her answers.

¹⁴ A classic statement on this is Siipi, J. (1967). *Ryysyrannasta hyvinvointivaltioon: Sosiaalinen kehitys itsenäisessä Suomessa*. Tammi.

¹⁵ Peattie, L. and Rein, M. (1983). *Women's claims: A study in political economy*. Oxford University Press.

Previous opinion polls show that most Finns firmly support the welfare state. Only a limited number have intense preferences on the issue, but among them those who are strongly in favor clearly outnumber those who are strongly against. This is shown in Fig. 15.2, which covers 1993 to 2020. The wording in the questionnaire is quite strongly framed to emphasize both the costs and the importance of the FWS. The balance value is simply those in favor less those against. Intense balance value refers to those with intense preferences in favor of/against the WS. Those individuals who have intense preferences are likely to vote on the basis of their FWS experience (instead of, e.g., environmental policy or immigration). Here again, the formula is simply those intensively in favor less those intensively against the FWS.

Fig. 15.2 Welfare state opinion polls, Finland 1993–2020 (The EVA-microdata-archive, own calculations)



While there have been some minor changes over time that are mainly related to the economic and fiscal cycles, the overall picture is perhaps surprisingly stable over the decades.¹⁶ Public support, and hence the social legitimacy of the FWS, was the highest around the turn of the millennium and again during the late 2010s. It was at its lowest during the great crises of the early 1990s, when the doomsday scenarios and relatively harsh retrenchments de-legitimized the FWS, but it soon recovered. Every survey since the mid-decade crisis of the early 1990s until 2000 indicates the higher social legitimacy of the FWS. Another low point for legitimacy was in 2015, again when economic performance was sluggish and the public economy stagnated, but again the social legitimacy of the FWS recovered as soon as the economic performance improved. More broadly, it seems that after every structural change and economic recession, Finns clearly show their loyalty toward the FWS as a pre-emptive act against the possible stabilizing cuts that are likely under those circumstances.

Clearly, the FWS has not experienced a legitimacy crisis since the mid-1990s. Quite the contrary: Finns have experienced the WS as a worthy public investment. Furthermore, since the late 1960s onward, no political party has promoted major cuts in benefits and services in their electoral campaigns in national elections. To put it bluntly, the road to power in Finland is in most cases paved with promises of better benefits and services. The minor exceptions are parties that have campaigned on other agendas, like national defense in the 1950s or immigration in the 2010s.

However, this shining picture does not tell the full story, and not everyone's preferences are equally endogenous as regards the FWS—that is, not everybody experiences their various encounters with the FWS similarly. Interests and values clearly matter in their mental models. Firstly, a more detailed analysis of the 2020 data shown above reveals that only 20 percent of the conservative National Coalition Party and populist (nationalist, anti-immigrant) Finns Party voters are fully in favor of the FWS: In fact, 14 percent of Finns Party voters strongly disagree with the FWS, which is one of the highest values ever recorded in Finland. Why this is the case remains somewhat unclear, but most likely these voters are small-scale entrepreneurs that find the cost-benefit ratio poor or immigration critics who assess that too large a proportion of expenditure is allocated to

¹⁶Other datasets with different wordings but similar intentions, not shown here, that reach back to the 1970s, show a similar pattern.

immigrants. On the other end of the scale, Social Democrat and Left Alliance voters are strongly in favor of the FWS.

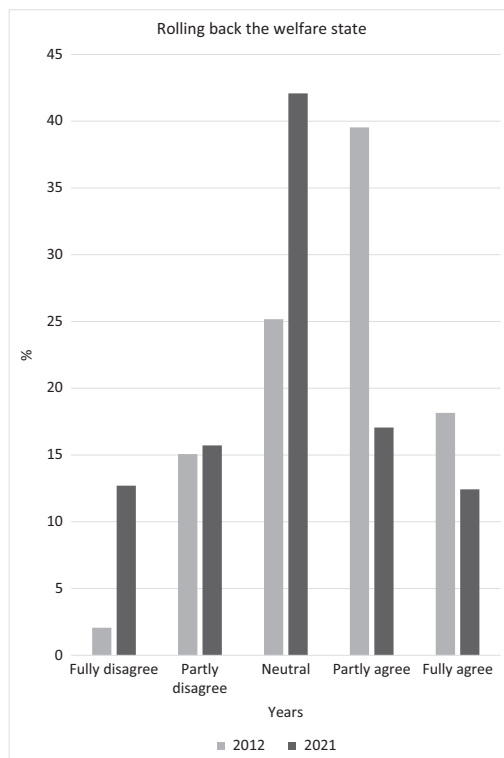
Secondly, the surveys used above and available elsewhere also show that Finland is quite polarized as regards opinions on the dependence effect resulting from the comprehensive social policy. These datasets, for instance Candidates to the Parliament Data 2015 and the European Social Survey 2018, also show that these experiences are politically strongly value loaded. In other words, rather than, for instance, age, gender, income decile, or socioeconomic group, endogenous political values result in a highly polarized picture. Supporters of the right end of the political spectrum (the National Coalition Party, the Finns Party, the Swedish People's Party, and the Centre Party) argue very strongly in favor of the disincentive effect, whereas the left-wing parties (most importantly the Social Democrats, Greens, and Left Alliance) argue the opposite.¹⁷

Consequently, it is quite evident that different coalitions—and Finland always has coalition governments due to the d'Hondt electoral system—have different policy preferences as regards the disincentive effects (e.g., whether the FWS makes people “lazy”). This resulted in a policy shift toward more activating policies in 2015 when three parties on the right end of the political spectrum formed the government, and after their losses in the 2019 national elections, another policy shift toward more rights-based policies. Similarly, in services, the 2015 government tended to perceive the (quasi-)market mechanism in social and health services more positively than the latter governments, which relied more on the chain of command within the public sector.

Furthermore, while in general supporting the FWS, Finns have some doubts. This is illustrated by two nationally representative datasets, collected in 2012 and 2021, with questions on rolling back the welfare state and the unstable foundations of financing (Figs. 15.3 and 15.4). Their historical and contextual situations differ. The former data reflect the experience of social citizens after the 2011 elections that followed the global economic crisis and resulted in the National Coalition-led conservative government with numerous ideas aimed at promoting competitiveness and structural reforms. The distribution of both variables indicates that Finns experienced some serious worries due to the deficit (and more broadly the unsound basis of funding) and assumed that the government was likely making some retrenchments. The latter data were collected in

¹⁷ Saari (ed.) (2017).

Fig. 15.3 Opinion poll on rolling back the welfare state, Finland 2012 and 2021 (WEBE 2012 and 2021 microdata, own calculations)

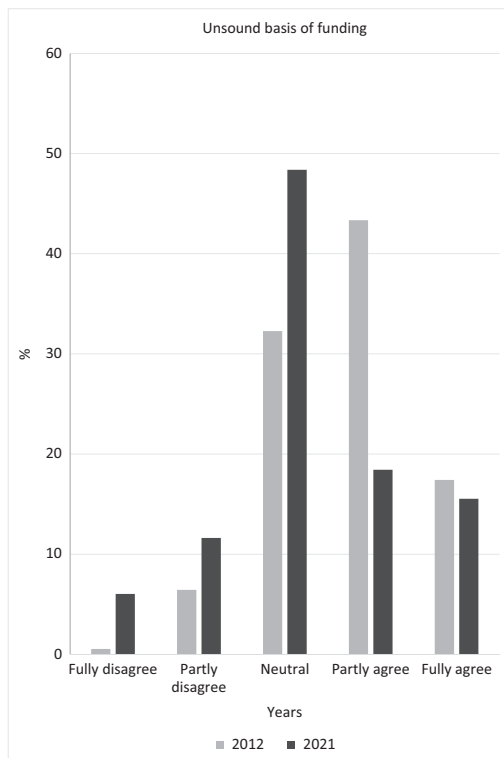


the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, when the Social Democratic-led center-left government (with the National Coalition and Finns parties in opposition) ruled the country with a strong pro-FWS agenda. The latter data point represents a different kind of experience. Finns tended to more strongly believe that the government was not promoting a roll-back of the WS and were more confident regarding its funding. Again, the supporters of different parties had strongly divergent preferences on these questions.

POSITIVE NEWS, PART II: FAIR SOCIETY

Previous opinion poll studies regularly show that Finns have an exceptional “passion for equality”—that is, they highly value equality and are worried about inequalities of various kinds and, furthermore, claim that

Fig. 15.4 Opinion poll on unsound basis of welfare state funding, Finland 2012 and 2021 (WEBE 2012 and 2021 microdata, own calculations)



society is rapidly becoming more unequal. While seriously worried about growing inequality as a trend, they also strongly argue for equality. For instance, in the European Social Survey 2018, roughly 70 percent of Finns agreed with the statement that “For a fair society, differences in people’s standards of living should be small.” The proportion of those in favor of equality was the highest among the structurally already equal countries, but it was somewhat higher in Portugal, Greece, and other more structurally unequal countries that had suffered heavily in recent years.

Rather surprisingly, however, once asked whether they had been in person treated in an unequal manner, the answers were reversed: most Finns claimed they had been personally treated quite fairly. Fair treatment in an unequal society sounds puzzling. Therefore, the issue requires some scrutiny. Justice and fairness are concepts that are notoriously difficult to grasp

and measure. Quite often people have different opinions on them, and even within a nation, people have widely different opinions on what is just. To illustrate this, around 2016 the Ministry of Justice commissioned a study on Finns' sense of criminal justice, as in political debate it was occasionally argued that sentences do not correspond with the public's sense of justice. A survey where the respondents assessed seven different crime cases showed quite clearly that Finns had diverging opinions on the length of the prison sentences, and the framing of the questions had a significant impact on the results. This also applied to violence in public places, sex crimes, domestic violence, driving under the influence, and other similar issues. Clearly, regardless of similar or shared cultural background, Finns do not experience crimes similarly and, consequently, do not judge them in identical ways.¹⁸

To make some progress on assessing whether Finland is a just and fair country, the study should contain some data both on the just distribution of resources and the perceived (subjective) component and on some comparative observations. The best available quantitative study on resource-based justice in society is arguably that of the Bertelsmann Foundation.¹⁹ Their study, which is published annually, is based on a composite index covering different domains of justice, including health, the labor market, education, and income. It is widely used, technically sound, and probably more reliable than any other comparative index on the issue. Furthermore, as all variables included in the index have at least some policy relevance and they also directly integrate into the institutional frameworks of WSs, the social justice index also measures—to some extent at least—the functioning of the WS in that society.

Experienced fairness can be assessed in different ways. Perceived fairness data are available from the European Union in the form of the Eurobarometer on fairness, gathered around 2018. In this survey, there are numerous questions on the experienced fairness of the society.²⁰ Here, a simple statement question with the following wording “My life is mostly

¹⁸ Kääriäinen, J. (2017). *Seitsemän rikostapausta: Käräjätuomareiden arvioima rangaistusikäytännö ja väestön rangaistusvalinnat*. Helsingin yliopisto, Kriminologian ja oikeuspolitiikan instituutti.

¹⁹ Hellmann, T, Schmidt, P., and Helle, S.M. (2019). *Social justice in the EU and OECD: Index Report 2019*. Bertelsmann Foundation.

²⁰ Special Eurobarometer 471: Fairness, inequality and inter-generational mobility (2018). Retrieved January 21, 2022, from http://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2166_88_4_471_ENG.

fair” is applied to assess the fairness of the society. Roughly 75 percent of Finnish respondents agreed either partly or fully with this statement.

Scatter plotting these two variables reveals something about justice and fairness in Finland from a comparative perspective. On the scale, the higher the index score, the higher the level of social justice. Conversely, the lower the value of perceived fairness in the figure, the higher the perceived fairness in the experienced reality (i.e., the scale is reversed). The results shown in Fig. 15.5 are easily understandable. The welfare state proxy (the social justice index of the Bertelsmann Foundation) seems to correlate quite strongly with the fairness experience. Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Austria are among the countries where a high score on the social justice index and experienced fairness intersect. On the other hand, both of them are missing in Greece, where the index score is low and people feel that society is unfair. The results are roughly similar to the other fairness questions (not shown here) included in the questionnaire.

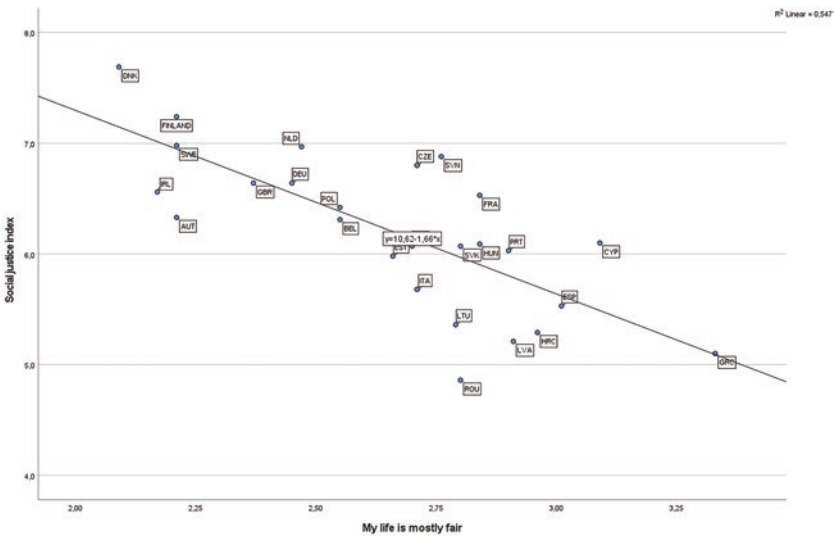


Fig. 15.5 Resource-based and perceived fairness, European countries 2018 (Hellmann, T, Schmidt, P., and Helle, S.M. (2019). Social justice in the EU and OECD: Index Report 2019 Bertelsmann Foundation, and Special Eurobarometer 471, own calculations)

However, before one draws any conclusions, some caveats are required. It is common knowledge that comparative studies including the Nordic countries (Finland and the Scandinavian countries) often end up with confusing results, as all the welfare-related variables available correlate heavily. The quantitative results provided here should mainly (unless stated otherwise) be interpreted as correlations that (in most cases) describe the direction and magnitude of the relationship between the two variables. Albeit often informative and capable of providing useful insights, correlations should not be confused with causal relationships, especially in this kind of situation. For instance, a recent study on happiness in Scandinavia faced this challenge. One may replace any explanatory variable with another or exclude some variables, or add a new variable, and end up with a well-grounded outcome supported by strong correlations.²¹

More interestingly, can we make an educated guess as to the reason for this success story? The classic answer relies on the idea that the so-called costly compromises—that is, contradictions between various structural-political actors (the parties, interest groups, and social partners)—have been regulated by making deals based on comprehensive packages of items. As a part of the package, all actors involved achieved some of their objectives and therefore considered the packages as “fair.” Here, agenda-setting skills play a crucial role. A more recent answer based on this study may rely on the everyday experience of the citizen repeatedly encountering their transfers and services in different phases of life. It works sufficiently well for them; consequently, they find the FWS legitimate or at least they do not actively and collectively imagine any feasible alternative. Therefore, the old saying “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” also applies to the FWS.

²¹ Happiness can be explained by trust, security, income distribution, and so on. Roughly, this also applies to within-country microdata. Martela, F., Greve, B., Rothstein, B., and Saari, J. (2021). The Nordic exceptionalism: What explains why the Nordic countries are constantly among the happiest in the world. In J. F. Helliwell, R. Layard, J. D. Sachs, and J.-E. De Neve (eds.), *World Happiness Report 2020*, 128–146. Retrieved January 21, 2022, from <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2020/the-nordic-exceptionalism-what-explains-why-the-nordic-countries-are-constantly-among-the-happiest-in-the-world/>.

POSITIVE NEWS, PART III: COVID-19 AND THE JUST SOCIETY

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, scholars have assessed its consequences for the WS and societies. Around the time of writing in January 2022, it is clearly too early to make any definitive statements on the future of FWS in a post-pandemic world. Previous crises seem to indicate that it requires roughly a decade's lag to be able to reliably assess such consequences. Furthermore, forward-looking assessments made in the middle of the transition tend to be more negative than backward-looking assessments made ten years later.

Along with many other countries, Finland had an early lockdown in April 2020, which seemed to be efficient. In order to buffer the economic and social costs of the lockdown and other subsequent restrictions, no less than five supplementary budgets were accepted. As time has progressed, assessments on the consequences of the pandemic have turned from depressive and negative to quite positive.

From an FWS institutional perspective and as of the end of 2021, the pandemic has resulted in no significant institutional changes in the FWS. Indeed, in all major indicators relevant to social policy, there was more continuity than disruption during the first eighteen months of the pandemic.²² However, the expenditure levels have escalated, in particular in the state's budget (less so in those of the municipalities and social security funds). As the state's annual budgets have been funded by borrowing, this may have some negative consequences later, assuming significant increases in interest rates. However, this is not an urgent problem in 2022.

Different authorities have systematically monitored different aspects of opinion formation during the pandemic crisis in order to assess how the citizens have experienced the pandemic. Overall, citizens seem to be quite

²² For instance, consider social assistance. In the Finnish institutional framework, social assistance is a benefit that is granted either as a supplementary benefit to add to certain other benefits or alternatively as a full benefit for those without any other income aside from housing assistance. Therefore, it is quite a good indicator of social change. No predicted increases in social expenditure have occurred if one polishes the data from the limited period increase on social assistance granted by the government, who decided to implement the emergency social assistance benefit to compensate for the assumed losses and additional costs of the poorest sections of the society. Such a benefit increase was in fact socio-politically groundless and created poor incentives. It was also technically poorly targeted, as it went to single-person households instead of families, to which it was aimed.

pleased with the policies implemented. Comparatively, Finland scores very well among its peers in the European Union. More broadly, the pandemic—at least its three earliest waves—increased rather than decreased the popular support for the government.

Bi- or tri-monthly results on the perceived fairness of Finnish society are visualized in Fig. 15.6. The results are based on a nationally representative survey collected by Statistics Finland and made available as microdata to researchers. A statement phrased “Finland is a fair/just country” allows answers on a scale of 1–10, where 1 is totally unfair (unjust) and 10 totally fair (just). Note that in the Finnish language the difference between fair and just (or unfair and unjust) is not statistically significant, as the meanings of the words overlap. For the sake of visibility, the 1–10 scale has been merged into five columns in the figure.

Again, the results require only limited numbers of comments, as the figure is mostly self-explanatory. It shows that most Finns have experienced Finland as a fair society during the pandemic. In every bi-monthly

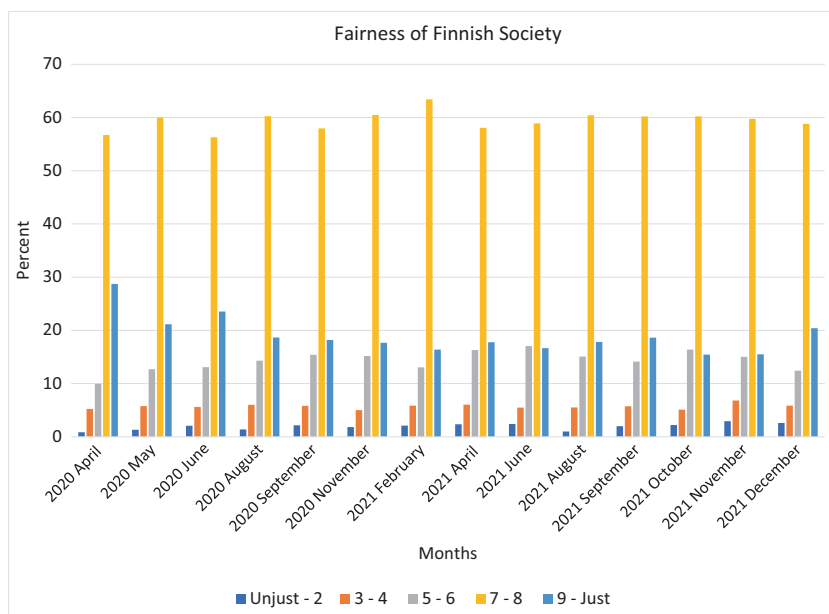


Fig. 15.6 Perceived justice during the Covid-19 pandemic, Finland 2020–21 (Statistics Finland, microdata, own calculations)

sample, the majority of respondents shared this idea. The negative side here is that a minor proportion perceive society as unfair. As no data are available from the pre-pandemic phase, it is not possible to reliably comment on their pre-pandemic proportion. However, my educated guess is that it has remained roughly the same over the decades and the pandemic has had only a limited impact on the proportion.

Even the latest round has a very high mode value and quite good distribution leading toward high values. It indicates that the pandemic did not have a corrosive impact on the social fabric of Finland, at least in the short term. The experience of societal fairness is solid as a rock. In the longer term, it is safe to say that the jury is still out for a decade in this respect. Furthermore, whatever happens in 2022 and 2023 with the pandemic remains to be seen. The famous owl of Minerva is still awaiting the fall of dusk.

DISCUSSION: AN EXCEPTIONAL COUNTRY?

Different theoretical perspectives result in different outcomes. If one is interested in the collapse of the welfare state and the social problems of suffering people, one can find evidence relevant for this position, and if possible, probably gain some political support for reforms aimed at reversing these trends. The same applies if one is interested in finding a successful WS and relatively happy people; however, contrary to the previous position, this “positive position” is not likely to gain political support, as there is no clear political interpretation of this result.

This chapter has focused on the latter approach and underlines the positive experience of Finns and the FWS in recent years. The results here seem to be quite straightforward. As regards the institutional developments of the FWS since the early 1990s, the results indicate that its institutional framework has been quite solid, though it has regularly required some adjustment and its expenditure is crowding out other public expenditure. In terms of experience, Finns experience their welfare state as legitimate and worth the expenditure, and they consider their society relatively just. Comparatively, the social justice index also heavily correlates with the fairness assessments. It is likely that the FWS contributes quite significantly to the experience of the fair society. To some extent, the opposite is also true, as the experience of living in the cradle-to-grave FWS is likely to generate some endogenous preferences that are positive for the FWS. Finally, the data on sense of justice collected bi- or tri-monthly since

the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic also indicate that Finland has not significantly lost its legitimacy as a society. The transitions, if any, are minor.

More broadly, this study quite straightforwardly shows that “the crisis of the welfare state approach” has not gained support in recent FWS reforms, nor does it reflect people’s perceived experience in Finnish society. The institutional framework of the FWS has well-grounded foundations that are not seriously contested by any significant party, although they and their supporters tend to have different opinions on their incentive effects and other side effects. Policy wise, this indicates that no mainstream party will try to abolish the FWS while campaigning. While in office, parties reform the FWS at its margins and gradually within the existing policy paradigm and institutional framework.

The counterargument against the fairness position is also straightforward: The focus on national averages hinders distributive concerns, and people in the different ruts of poverty and exclusion probably do not share these positive results. One may also legitimately argue that some key results are valid only in certain urban areas in Finland, and less so in (at least relatively speaking) regressive agrarian regions. Furthermore, in fact some wealthy zip code areas in urban Finland have higher levels of inequality in resources than many unequal countries. It is also likely that some wealthy regions of large countries with high populations (like the US, Germany, or Canada) may have more positive results in terms of quality of life than Scandinavian countries.

Finally, some results can quite easily be dismissed due to Finnish exceptionalism. One may convincingly argue that Finland and the Scandinavian countries (Norway, Denmark, Sweden) have long had diverging trajectories representing a tiny part (less than one large metropolis) of the world’s population and, while interesting, are unlikely exceptions from more general and, arguably, more negative developments. Indeed, in many ways these small Nordic countries are examples of an outdated nationalism that results in overweighting their positions in comparative data.

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CHAPTER 16

The Experience (and Constitution) of Society in Postwar and Post-Industrial Finland, 1960–2020

Pertti Haapala

INTRODUCTION

This chapter studies the history—that is, the past reality—of the Finnish welfare state from three different angles. The first one is *experience*. The focus is not on individual experiences or life stories but on the *collective experience* of society—in its various meanings.¹ This experience was manifested in public documents and discussions, and reflected in politics and legislation. It concerned the ideas, promises, and difficulties related to the welfare state. It is expected here that those views tell much about the experiences among the citizens—that is, *their* collective experience. The point is not to seek people’s immediate experiences of their conditions or

¹ A relevant distinction between different categories of historical experience, “objective,” “individualist,” and “collectivist,” is presented in Ankersmit, F. (2012). *Meaning, truth, and reference in historical representation*. Cornell University Press, chapters 9–10.

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how they were treated by the authorities but how they (may) have linked their own living and future to a specific model of society called the welfare state.²

The second angle and background for analyzing experience is *structures*—that is, the rapid postwar economic and social change. It was then called “modernization,” which was materialized in the overall and crucial change of society and consequently in peoples’ lives. The welfare state was the political structure built to manage the change. All of this set the *limits of the possible*—that is, the framework for the resources and prospects individuals had, which from their perspective can be called *life-chance*.³ For citizens, the welfare state was not only a system of social security, it was also a promise of the future. Moreover, it was a *national project* for reforming “Finnish society,” a term that was widely cultivated.⁴

The third angle is the *motivation* (idea) behind the politics of the welfare state. The hypothesis here is that the grounding idea was that of *equality* between citizens. Equality—and the experience of it—is the focus of this study because it has been at the core of the societal imagination in Finland since the beginning of the twentieth century and especially from 1960 to 2020. True, it was not any invention, but it was revitalized in the new, postwar context of rising wealth. For most people, it was an appealing answer to the enduring experience of poverty and inequality and to existing class distinctions and political divisions. Until the 1960s, Finland was a semi-agrarian society with a relatively low standard of living. In these conditions, the mere option of new opportunities aroused the aspirations

² In Finnish language the concept of welfare state (*hyvinvointivaltio*) refers explicitly to the state power which provides well-being to its citizens through welfare systems and legislation. In the 1960s the term “welfare society” referred more often to general well-being following J.K. Galbraith’s term “affluent society,” Galbraith, J.K. (1958). *The affluent society*. Houghton Mifflin Company. For the historicity of the concept, see Kettunen, P. (2019). The conceptual history of the welfare state in Finland. In N. Edling (ed.), *The changing meanings of the welfare state: Histories of a key concept in the Nordic countries*. Berghahn Books, 225–275.

³ The concepts here refer to the classical texts: Braudel, F. (1985). *Civilization and capitalism 15th–18th Century, vol I: The structure of everyday life. The Limits of the Possible*. Harper & Row; Giddens, A. (1979). *Central problems in social theory: Action, structure and contradiction in social analysis*. University of California Press.

⁴ Kivimäki, V., Suodenjoki, S., and Vahtikari, T. (2021). Lived nation: Histories of experience and emotion in understanding nationalism. In V. Kivimäki, S. Suodenjoki, and T. Vahtikari (eds.), *Lived nation as the history of experiences and emotions in Finland, 1800–2000*. Palgrave Macmillan, 17–28.

of the citizens, the large majority of whom consisted of the urban and rural working classes and small farmers.⁵

The purpose of the chapter is to demonstrate how experiences of society, societal structures, and ideas of society were related; how they produced actions (like politics); and how these factors explain the change of society. I particularly focus on the explanatory power of experience.⁶

FROM SURVIVAL TO SUCCESS

The master narrative of Finnish society—and modern Finnish history—is the story of a survival that turned into a success story.⁷ The key to the story is the experience of how the nation survived World War II as an independent democracy neighboring the USSR, was modernized rapidly, and was built into a Nordic welfare system. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Finland was regarded as one of the most advanced societies globally, boasting high technology, education, and social equality. No doubt, this is a good achievement for a small country that still lagged far behind other Western societies in the 1930s. Economic historians have explained the development as a “catchup”—that is, a process in which a “latecomer” can benefit from the more advanced societies by following their path of development and adopting their knowledge, technology, markets, and so on. While being a correct explanation, a question remains: How did it actually happen and why do some societies make it, but others do not?⁸

⁵ A wider approach to the history of social structures in Finland; see Haapala, P. (ed.) (2018). *Suomen rakennehistoria: Näkökulmia muutokseen ja jatkuvuuteen (1940–2000)*. Vastapaino.

⁶ About structures, agency and explanation, see Haapala, P. and Lloyd, C. (2018). Johdanto: Rakennehistoria ja historian rakenteet. In P. Haapala (ed.), *Suomen rakennehistoria: Näkökulmia muutokseen ja jatkuvuuteen (1940–2000)*. Vastapaino, 6–30.

⁷ Statistical evidence of the “20th century success” (as discussed in the foreword) is presented in *Suomen vuosisata* (1999). Tilastokeskus. A more critical view is Haapala, P. (2021). Lived historiography: National history as a script to the past. In V. Kivimäki, S. Suodenjoki, and T. Vahtikari (eds.), *Lived nation as the history of experiences and emotions in Finland, 1800–2000*, Palgrave Macmillan, 29–58.

⁸ The interplay between economy and institutions is emphasized in the global context by Acemoglu, D. and Robinson, J. (2012). *Why nations fail: The origins of power, prosperity, and poverty*. Crown Publishing Group. In the case of Finland: Koponen, J. and Saaritsa, S. (eds.) (2018). *Näkökymästä hyvinvointivaltioksi: Suomi kehityksen kiinniottajana*. Gaudeamus.

One answer is simply “good luck”—in this case, a favorable position in the world market and in information flows, and political stability. These are important, of course, but at least one factor must be added: the capacity of the society to utilize the options available. This is very much dependent on institutions like the political system, legislation, and public administration.⁹ In the end, everything depends on how they function and whether they produce wealth, health, security, and so on for the citizens. These functions designate the relationship between the citizens (ordinary people) and the state. In the best case, the relationship is based on mutual interest, trust, commitment, solidarity, and shared identity. That is the case in the ideal democratic society. In real life, however, this has not been the case in most societies, which is why “What makes a good society?” is a good question.¹⁰ By taking the history of Finland here as an example, my intention is not to present it as a model to follow but to demonstrate the multiplicity of factors behind development.

To begin, in the late 1950s and 1960s, following the postwar reconstruction years, people lived in a new situation, between actual shortage and the promise of wealth. At last, there seemed to be new economic and human resources to create a more secure society. The idea was certainly not new, but it was no longer a utopia, as it was in the late nineteenth century when the labor movement launched it. Now in the 1950s, the quest for equal life-chances was living politics and widely supported by various social strata. Furthermore, this was the first time that idealism was shared widely by social scientists and planners, top civil servants, and politicians.

The 1960s saw vivid discussions and debates on equality in all spheres of society. *The principle of equality* became so largely accepted that the debate was only about “how to make it happen.” A more practical and realistic question concerned the role of public authorities, and accordingly what was left to the individuals themselves. There was an ideological dividing line between free-market thinkers and regulation-oriented thinkers. The former emphasized individuals’ opportunities, while the latter preferred security. The political dividing line cut between the right-wing

⁹ Finland in comparison; see also Haapala, P. (2009). Modernisation of Finland 1800–2000. In M. Perkiö (ed.), *Perspectives to global social development*. Tampere University Press, 48–66; Ojala, J., Eloranta, J., and Jalava, J. (eds.) (2006). *The road to prosperity. An economic history of Finland*. Finnish Literary Society; Lloyd, C. and Hannikainen, M. (eds.) (2022). *Social cohesion and welfare states: From fragmentation to social peace*. Routledge.

¹⁰ Haapala (2009); Koponen and Saaritsa (2018).

liberals and the left, of course, but the discussion focused more on practical issues and policies than on the ideological viewpoints on the very nature of the state's role as it was, for instance, in the US.¹¹

Despite the many debates and conflicts, the actual outcome in the 1960s was large and expensive national-level reforms introduced in health care, education, the pension system, regional development, the regulation of wages and prices, and taxation.¹² Finland became a state-run market economy with an increasing level of income redistribution. As a result of this policy, economic, social and educational disparities declined radically between 1960 and 1990. A previously poor society was now regarded as an exceptionally wealthy, equal, and homogenous one, an admired variant of the Nordic Model. Because the system enjoyed wide legitimacy among the citizens when providing benefits to all, political forces from left to right had all become defenders of the welfare state—at least verbally.¹³ The welfare state was ready, and it seemed it would last forever (Fig. 16.1).

BELIEF IN SOCIETY

The case of Finland in the making of the welfare state has been regarded as a success story by international comparison and by most Finns themselves. It is expected—and it is essentially true—that society will meet the needs and expectations of citizens and therefore enjoy their support. This is the major *experience of society*. A positive experience of society and trust is not simply a feeling or conclusion of personal success, it is also a “structural fact” in two senses. First, it becomes a structural fact when society (the state) in its entirety is based on trust and is seen as legitimate. Second,

¹¹ In the American discussion Sweden was often presented as the model of egalitarian society, which was either admired or hated. Still in 1990 John Naisbitt's bestseller began with a harsh critique of Swedish “socialism” (not that of the Soviet Union), a model the Finns wanted to follow. Naisbitt, J. and Aburdene, J. (1990). *Megatrends 2000: Ten new directions for the 1990's*. William Morrow & Co.

¹² A concise history and the future of public policy in Finland; see Riihinen, O. (ed.) (1992). *Sosiaalipolitiikka 2017: Näkökulmia suomalaisen yhteiskunnan kehitykseen ja tulevaisuuteen*. Sitra/WSOY; Hannikainen, M. and Eloranta, J. (2019). *Palveluiden ja tulonsiirtojen yhteiskunta*. In J. Laine, S. Fellman, M. Hannikainen, and J. Ojala (eds.), *Vaurastumisen vuodet: Suomen taloushistoria teollistumisen jälkeen*. Gaudeamus, 16–35.

¹³ Smolander, J. (2000). *Suomalainen oikeisto ja ”kansankoti”* (Summary: *The Finnish Right Wing and ”Folkhemmet”*). Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.

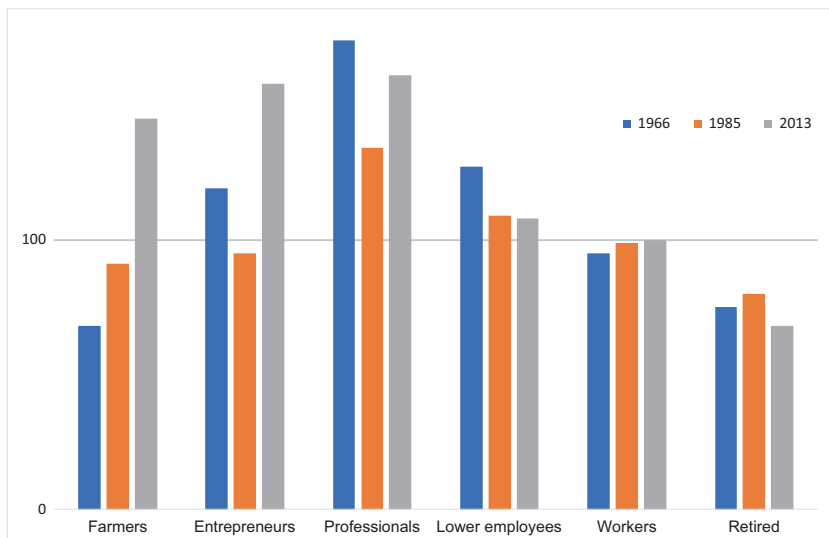


Fig. 16.1 Disposable family income by occupation in Finland, 1966–2013 (average = 100) (*Finnish Statistical Yearbook*). Disposable income is the net revenue from wages and benefits after taxes

there are structural factors that generate trust in society—that is, in what kind of environment one happens to live and when.¹⁴ Among these factors is the value system.

In the Nordic countries, it has become a tradition to emphasize the historical roots of the welfare state: The idea of equality (religious, political, national) is deeply rooted in society as a product of Lutheran belief and the centralized state. Loyalty to authority combined with early democratic institutions, rule of law and small-state nationalism generated the experience of justice and opportunity. The Nordic exceptionalism in state-making can be challenged, of course, but it remains a fact that it has become an identity at least. The belief in society was reasserted in the early twentieth century when social reforms and state interventions (poor relief, schooling, work conditions, health care, civil rights) were introduced

¹⁴ Hannikainen, M. (2018). Rakennemuutos ja hyvinvointivaltio. In P. Haapala (ed.), *Suomen rakennehistoria: Näkökulmia muutokseen ja jatkuvuuteen (1940–2000)*. Vastapaino, 244–267; Hirvilammi, T. (2020). The virtuous circle of sustainable welfare as a transformative policy idea. *Sustainability* 12, 391. See also J. Saari's Chap. 15 in this book.

relatively early. The Swedish model of the integrative nation state called *folkhemmet* (“people’s home”) before World War II was an appealing pole star in the making of the postwar Nordic welfare state, the best-known example of the redistributive state.¹⁵ This responded to the aspirations of the majority of people and their values of national unity and equality, both among conservatives and socialists. Though the public policy was not a harmonious process, this kind of consensus was quite easy to achieve in a relatively advanced and homogenous societies.

In Finland, there were large and politically tempered strikes in 1948 and 1956, but not afterwards, despite the strength of the trade unions. The political balance between the left and right had been quite even since the first elections in 1907, and in 1966 the left won a majority in parliament. The victory launched an era of strong state interventions, a form of politics that never ended despite the leanings of the government. The 1960s became a factual and symbolic turning point in the birth and experience of the welfare state. It succeeded in linking past experiences and the desired future convincingly. However, things did not go as smoothly as wished, and the 1960s was experienced as a rupture in social development, too. Many lost their belief in society, at least temporarily.

A PLAN FOR A SOCIETY

Sometimes a single book becomes an iconic symbol of social development. In Finland, that role has been given to Pekka Kuusi’s *60-luvun sosiaalipolitiikka* (1961).¹⁶ The book is a proposal of how to renew the system of social policy, but it is also an ambitious plan for the wider modernization

¹⁵ Árnason, J. P. and Wittrock, B. (eds.) (2012). *Nordic paths to modernity*. Berghahn. As critics state, the path was not straight but the outcome was unique. See also Kettunen (2019).

¹⁶ Kuusi, P. (1961). *60-luvun sosiaalipolitiikka*. Sosiaalipoliittinen yhdistys. A somewhat revised English version included an introduction to Finnish history by Kuusi’s mentor, Heikki Waris, the first professor of social policy in Finland. He characterized Finnish society by referring to Nordic historic tradition including Protestantism, religious and racial homogeneity, respect for education, rule of law, democracy, nationalism, late industrialization, and the location as small borderland in the north; see Kuusi, P. (1964). *Social policy for the sixties: a plan for Finland*. Finnish Social Policy Association, 13–26. Later analysis of the ideas and impact of the book: Bergholm, T. and Saari, J. (2009). Paradigmat, agendat ja kehitykset: Miten Pekka Kuusen 60-luvun sosiaalipolitiikka on vaikuttanut suomalaisen hyvinvointivaltion kehitykseen? In J. Kananen and J. Saari (eds.), *Ajatuksen voima: Ideat hyvinvointivaltion uudistamisessa*. Minerva, 33–63; Tuomioja, E. (1996). *Pekka Kuusi: alkoholipolitiikka, sosiaalipolitiikka, ihmiskuntapolitiikka*. Tammi. See also S. Bergenheim’s Chap. 14 in this book.

of a whole society. The plan was worked on for four years in collaboration with an advisory team including the highest authorities and top researchers on the topic. The blueprint for the work was the *Beveridge Report* (Social Insurance and Allied Social Services) in Britain from 1942. The outcome was a book that covered all spheres of public policy (work, housing, family, aging, unemployment, health care, social security, and all the legislation and funding arrangements). The book also discussed the economy, demography, and politics, and included a plan and a forecast for further development. The author worked out a long list of precise measures and calculations but was modest enough to say that it was, ultimately, just “an experiment of thought.”

The book was strongly future-oriented and optimistic. A novel idea—in a then poor society—was to launch active social policies that would improve people’s conditions and hence create new human resources, which, in turn, would accelerate economic growth and allow high public investments. All of this required new thinking concerning economic performance, finances, and social policy as an investment, not as a mere cost. The idea looks like a rather typical social democratic vision of state regulation and income leveling. In fact, Kuusi criticized the idea of socialism: State ownership and planned economies forgot the individual and did not make poor people economically active. Kuusi and his colleagues wanted to promote humanity, equality, security, and so on, but they had a deeper modernist idea of *societal efficiency*, which would provide better conditions and opportunities for all. Against conservative thinkers, they defended social policy and higher public expenditure. *Planning* was the keyword, but that did not mean socialism, but instead “social planning” in the framework of the market economy. This was not a novel idea, either, but the interesting point here is how explicit Kuusi’s reform plan was, and how it became a concrete action plan in the coming years in a real society. It gained wide support across party lines, and one motivation, which looks odd now, was the worry that the Soviet Union would compete with the Western societies in economic and social performance.¹⁷ Many of Kuusi’s plans were not fulfilled, but the idea and the legend survived. In a longer perspective from the early 1960s until the early 1990s, the vision became reality, however. Certainly, there were changes which Kuusi or anyone

¹⁷ Kuusi (1961), 27, 34. That was not even close then but the Soviet plans for high growth were seen as realistic.

could predict in the early 1960s (energy supplies, new wars, computing, population growth, the rise of China, the collapse of socialism, etc.).¹⁸

Kuusi linked his plan to a longer historical perspective. He noted how in 1905 the Finns, then living in a poor society, had won general suffrage and achieved “political democracy” as they were formally equal citizens. Now, fifty years later, they were building “social democracy,” a society in which “the citizens’ welfare was the highest priority of the state.” To make that goal a reality, human-oriented (“man-centered”) social policy was needed. The nucleus of that policy was “social equalization,” the foundation of modern social development.¹⁹ Unfortunately, this movement toward higher civilization and better society never takes place automatically or through the altruism of the better-off. Instead, history showed that true social leveling was preceded by experiences of inequality, disappointment, hatred, and social tensions. But now, for the first time in history, mankind had reached a phase where the aspiration for well-being and humanity was within the reach of all. “Democracy, social equalization and economic growth seem to be fortunately interrelated in modern society.” The tool needed was social policy, which was not based on egoism or envy but on “free and growth-oriented human nature.”²⁰

The idea of human social policy may look too idealistic in two senses: in its belief in abstract virtues (like humanity) and in individual rationality. I believe that Kuusi was aware of this, and the trick of the plan was *in combining* practical measures—the hard facts of social and economic reality and humane values.²¹ Emphasis on economic efficiency, growing consumption, and material wealth is not sustainable at all from a twenty-first-century perspective, but it was rational from the perspective of a generation whose roots were in a society characterized by poverty, inequality, and a lack of opportunity. His strong and positive emphasis on modern rationality is equally logical from this perspective. Kuusi represents the classical canon in which two large processes—civilization and modernization—entail man’s liberation from nature and compulsion.

¹⁸ Saari, J. (ed.) (2006). *Suomen malli: Murroksesta menestykseen?* Helsinki University Press, 103–104. The book is a comprehensive collection on the renewal of Finnish social policy since the 1980s.

¹⁹ Kuusi (1961), 8, 29–32.

²⁰ Kuusi (1961), 7–8; Kuusi (1964), 32–34.

²¹ Kuusi later developed his thinking toward rational humanism which saw the dangers of global inequality and ecological limits but relied on reason and technological advancement in solving the problems. See Kuusi, P. (1985). *This World of Man*. Pergamon Press.

Together, these processes were seen as a major shift from the old to the new society, from necessity to freedom. From the perspective of *experiencing society* this meant the following: For centuries, under unequal conditions, society (and the state) was experienced as hostile and alien; in the nineteenth century it was experienced as unfair and closed; and in the twentieth century, it could finally be experienced as justified, reflecting one's own goals in life and as a citizen. At that point, a citizen wants to belong to society, experience *society as one's own*, including trust in society and one's fellow citizens. Here Kuusi comes close to T. H. Marshall's concept of "social citizenship" as a kind of ideal type of twenty-first-century society.²² At this (believed) turning point in social development in the 1950s, when the options of the welfare state were vividly discussed, Finland turned to follow the Nordic path of egalitarianism and not the liberal model of the US and most other nations.²³ In broad terms, this was an ideological choice and marked the emergence of "idealistic social policy" in Finland. It was based on values, though its major proponent Pekka Kuusi emphasized the economic rationality of social policy.

RESTRUCTURING AND EXPERIENCE

Before we can say anything about the experience of society, it is helpful to be aware of the social reality in which people *lived* their society. In other words, there are structural limits and situations in which people experience society in their everyday life. Another crucial aspect to consider are people's expectations. A useful category in analyzing this is *life-chance*, one's understanding of what is possible and how this is supported (or not) in society. Let us take an example: A late nineteenth-century rural girl's only options were to become an agricultural worker or move to town, marry or not, and give birth to two–six children—depending on how long she lived, twenty or sixty years. Most likely she had no long-term plans of any certainty, only hopes for the future. Only after World War II did it become a standard perspective to plan one's life decades ahead, often with heavy economic commitments. There was much variation between individual

²² Marshall, T. H. (1950). *Citizenship and social class and other essays*. Cambridge University Press. Kuusi doesn't mention Marshall but many other leading social scientists of his time like Gunnar and Alva Myrdal, J.K. Galbraith, W. A. Lewis, J. M. Keynes, Harold Laski, and Richard Titmuss.

²³ See Chap. 1 in this book and Kananen, J. and Saari, J. (eds.) (2009). *Ajatuksen voima: Ideat hyvinvointivaltion uudistamisessa*. Minerva.

life-courses due to social class, gender, location, education, and so on, but there were much more equal chances than before. These structural facts and variation can be measured, and the results can be summarized in a single conclusion: Society became much more open and mobile regionally and socially. This meant longer, more predictable, and more varied life-courses—a “richer life,” as people learned to say. This kind of future-oriented perspective became the new “collective experience” of one’s life, at least metaphorically. Likewise, it was the “welfare state,” a new concept then, which enabled this to happen. An analogous mental change was reported at the beginning of the twentieth century when “modern times” shook people’s (traditional) worldviews.²⁴

The experience (or perception) of society was linked to the drastic social changes after World War II. In analyzing this, *generation* is another fruitful category and subject of study. In the case of postwar Finland, the generation who lived through the “Big Change” was the “baby boomers” born in 1945–1955. This generation (cohort) was in numbers almost twice as large as the previous “war generation” or the following “desert generation” born in the 1960s and 1970s. The large size of the boomer generation itself had a strong effect on society from the 1950s until the twenty-first century, when the same people became an “aging problem.” Their childhood comprised the (often poor) years of the reconstruction, while their youth was a time of emerging wealth, migration, and expanding education. The modern welfare state with its new institutions and benefits was built during their best years. Above all, they experienced the benefits of the fast-growing economy, the rise of public sector jobs, and social mobility—and the disappointments as well.²⁵

The major change in Finnish society from the early 1960s until the end of the 1980s was called then and afterwards *rakennemuutos* (“structural

²⁴ Haapala, P. (2007). Kun kaikki alkoi liikkua. In K. Häggman (ed.), *Suomalaisen arjen historia 3: Modernin Suomen synty*. Weilin+Göös, 46–63; Waris, H. (1948). *Suomalaisen yhteiskunnan rakenne*. Otava. Waris reconstructed the early twentieth-century experience *post factum* when explaining the birth of the modern (inclusive) society in Finland and the beginnings of the welfare state.

²⁵ A short overview of that period is Haapala, P. (1998). The fate of the welfare state. *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja/ Historical Journal* 96(2), 142–149. An “official view” on change is *Living Conditions in Finland* (1984). Statistical surveys 74. Central Statistical Office of Finland. A broader analysis of the modernization of living is presented in Karisto, A., Takala, P., and Haapola, I. (1998). *Matkalla nykyaikaan: Elintason, elämäntavan ja sosiaalipolitiikan muutos Suomessa*. WSOY.

change”). This uninspiring term is attributed most often to the changes in population structure, mobility, occupations, social stratification, and so on, but it referred also to changes in the way of life—to urbanization, increased living standards, and the overall “modernization of life,” from television to tourism, to new youth culture and the “generation gap.” All of this was typical of most Western societies a little earlier—Finland was rapidly culturally “Westernized” following the Anglo-American patterns of mass culture. What was perhaps distinct to Finland, however, was the pace of change, as an agrarian conservative society turned so rapidly into an urban and liberal society. As this change happened over two decades and in one generation, it was felt that “everything was changing.” This change can be statistically demonstrated, but it was also a collective experience, especially for the baby boomers but also for their parents (the war generation) and their children (Generation X, who “took everything for granted”).²⁶ The “generational experience” was real and visibly manifested, but not shared by all in similar ways. Experience did not divide people only into distinct generations but also divided them within the generations. The variety has become partly invisible because the cultural memory of the “1960s” has been dominated by the cultural elite, which was hegemonic in its youth and is still hegemonic in politics, media, and cultural life.²⁷ This is likely typical for Finland, but the “losers” have a history, too. The problems of modernization were not invisible at all in their time, but drew much attention in media, fiction, and film.

LOSERS AND WINNERS

Already in the 1960s, the term and experience of “structural change” had two meanings, one depicting optimism and the other expressing disillusionment. The most disillusioned were the war veterans raising large families on small farms. Though encouraged and supported by the state when starting a “new life” after the war, their class almost vanished in the 1960s and 1970s when their farms proved to be too small for a decent living.

²⁶ Karisto, A. (ed.) (2005). *Suuret ikäluokat*. Vastapaino.

²⁷ On the structure of generations, see Alestalo, M. (2007) Rakennemuutokset ja sukupolvet. *Yhteiskuntapolitiikka* 72(2), 146–157. On the variety of life-course as experience, see Roos, J.P. (1987). *Suomalainen elämä: Tutkimus tavallisten suomalaisten elämäntarinoista*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura. On memory politics, see Miettunen, K-M. (2009). *Menneisyys ja historiakuva: Suomalainen kuusikymmentäluku muistelijoiden rakentamana ajanjaksona*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.

Many left the farm for other occupations, emigrated to Sweden, or earned early retirement if they survived long enough.²⁸ The death toll of males from this group was exceptionally high (due to hard work combined with war trauma, poor diet, heavy smoking and drinking, and suicide).²⁹ There is a rich collection of tragic life stories of this kind in fiction and films.³⁰

First the reception of this narrative was mostly respectful to people who survived and tried their best. Then it became a source of visible social critique and led to demands to improve the conditions of the “forgotten people,” a slogan referring to disadvantaged rural people. Although they did not live in absolute poverty, they felt that they had been treated unfairly in a prospering society. Publicity helped, and the problems of rural and distant areas entered the political agenda after the populists’ surprising victory in the 1970 elections. Wide reforms had already been introduced and the “developing areas” began to disappear in the 1970s, but this was too late for hundreds of thousands of rural people, the “settler generation” of the 1950s. The agrarian population decreased from two to one million between 1950 and 1980. The farms, houses, villages, schools, and sports tracks they had built gradually deteriorated.³¹

Another significant group among small farmers who remained more or less on the “losing side” were their children. Many wanted or had to continue farming, or they were employed in forestry or in other related occupations. Some of them succeeded—depending on the locality—in keeping and developing the farm with the help of state-funded subsidies. The number of farms diminished rapidly, however, and when Finland joined the EU in 1995, the number of life-sustaining farms was about half of that

²⁸ Haapala, P. (2006). Suomalainen rakennemuutos. In J. Saari. (ed.) *Historiallinen käänne: Jobdatus pitkän aikavälin historian tutkimukseen*. Gaudeamus, 91–124.

²⁹ Valkonen, T. and Kauppinen, T. (2005). Märkä ja nuorena nukkunut sukupolvi. In A. Karisto (ed.), *Suuret ikäluokat*. Vastapaino, 334–346; Kivimäki, V. (2021). Nocturnal nation: Violence and the nation in dreams during and after World War II. In V. Kivimäki, S. Suodenjoki, and T. Vahtikari (eds.), *Lived nation as the history of experiences and emotions in Finland, 1800–2000*. Palgrave Macmillan, 297–318. On emigrant experience, see Snellman, H. (2003). *Sallan suurin kylä – Göteborg: Tutkimus Ruotsin lappilaista*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.

³⁰ A specific genre called “angst novels” described empathetically the experiences of remote rural communities. The half-documentary film series *Eight Fatal Shots* by Mikko Niskanen in 1972 was a great success and reminder of the other side of modernization.

³¹ Haapala, P. (2004). Väki vähenee: Maatalousyhteiskunnan hidas häviö 1950–2000. In V. Rasilä and P. Markkola (eds.), *Suomen maatalouden historia 3: Suurten muutosten aika – Jälleenrakennuskaudesta EU-Suomeen*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 233–254.

in 1950. Already before this, the workforce on farms had dropped drastically, from around 500,000 in 1960 to 200,000 in 1980.³² A typical stereotype of the time was the jobless farmer sitting with a beer in a rural bar. This image was attributed to the new “liberal alcohol policy,” which allowed the sale of beer in grocery stores and open bars in the countryside in 1969. This was a sign of cultural tolerance and regional equality, and it was welcomed by most, but it also proved to be disastrous for public health in a society that had traditionally strict regulation of alcohol especially in rural areas.³³

In the public discourse—and in people’s minds—“structural change” began to mean the breakdown of the old (good) society, the opposite to all the optimistic promises of modern society. When the public discourse was combined with individual failures and social disappointment, the overall image of the 1960s was not at all positive. In addition to feelings of betrayal by the modernists, there was emotional pressure from the other side, too. There were loud conservative voices against the abandonment of traditional values, summarized in the phrase “Home, Religion, Fatherland,” still valid, though originally from the 1930s.³⁴

Many did well, of course. A large but less notable group among the “winners” were young rural women who found jobs in services nearby. There was not much demand for commercial services in remote areas, but the public sector began to expand rapidly in the late 1960s when new health centers, schools, libraries, sports halls, day-care centers, and nursing homes were built across the country. This expansion continued until the late 1980s. The policy to “Keep the Country Alive,” strongly subsidized by the state, succeeded in saving most rural areas despite their decreasing and aging populations. It is somewhat ironic that almost all rural communities continued to believe that their population would grow in the future

³² Haapala (2004); Siiskonen, P. (2004). Maatila yrityksenä ja viljelijäperheen kotina. In V. Rasila and P. Markkola (eds.) *Suomen maatalouden historia 3: Suurten muutosten aika – jälleenrakennuskaudesta EU-Suomeen*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 289–311.

³³ Beauchamp, D. E. (1981). The Paradox of alcohol policy: The case of the 1969 Alcohol Act in Finland. In M. H. Moore and D. R. Gerstein (eds.), *Alcohol and public policy: Beyond the shadow of prohibition*. National Academy Press, 225–254. Pekka Kuusi was himself the key figure in launching the new and more liberal (“equal”) alcohol policy in Finland.

³⁴ Tuominen, M. (1991). *Me kaikki ollaan sotilaitten lapsia: Sukupolvihegemonian kriisi 1960-luvun suomalaisessa kulttuurissa*. Otava. A discourse analysis of the cultural changes of the postwar Finnish society: Alasuutari, P. (2017). *Tasavalta: Sodanjälkeisen Suomen kaudet ja trendit*. Vastapaino.

due to their active industrial policy and emerging new jobs.³⁵ This did not work anywhere—except for a few localities where big industry happened to invest for their own interest. Still, most rural municipalities, even small ones, survived until the 1990s. But this was only thanks to public policy—that is, legislation which entitled communities to direct state subsidies for local investments. This was an intentional state policy of equalizing regional and social differences. It was paid at the expense of the more advanced and industrialized areas. The driving force behind the policy was the need for political balance, and behind the policy was the strength of the Agrarian Party, and the political left, which was supported by many rural people, too. But essentially, all parties shared the idea that the primary purpose of public policy was “national integration.”³⁶

Winners of the “big change” were those half a million baby boomers who moved from farms to towns in the 1960s. As there was free mobility of the workforce (extending to health care and pensions) between the Nordic countries, around 300,000 Finns moved to Sweden more or less permanently. Most of the emigrants were uneducated youth from remote areas of eastern and northern Finland. For them, a new job in manufacturing or services marked a remarkable rise in their standard of living. A new Volvo became a symbol of success in the eyes of the “poor relatives.” Integration into Swedish society was difficult for many, however, and finally about one third of the emigrants returned to Finland when the conditions were improved and Finland matched its neighbor’s levels of well-being.³⁷ Attitudes to emigration were partly negative—it was unpatriotic or a waste of resources—but it was also evident to all that emigration solved a “population problem” and helped to avoid mass unemployment and social polarization and frustration.

Those who found themselves in the new suburbs of the growing Finnish cities were the most typical members of the baby-boomer generation. They went to school in the 1950s and began working or studying in the 1960s. Many new primary schools were built in small locations, but one had to move to attend higher education. The decade saw a massive increase in the number of students and jobs, all in larger cities. The large cohort

³⁵ Haapala (2004).

³⁶ Kettunen, P. (2019). Eturistiriidat ja suunnittelu Mauno Koiviston yhteiskunta-politiikassa. In *Työväentutkimus Vuosikirja*, 44–50. A broad analysis of “being in the same boat” is Saari, J. (2020). *Samassa veneessä: Hyvinvointivaltio eriarvoistuneessa yhteiskunnassa*. Docendo.

³⁷ Ojala et al. (2006).

itself created new employment, but there was also new demand for labor in manufacturing, services, and the public sector, both for professionals and for unskilled workers. The numbers of the urban working class and middle class increased rapidly, between 1960 and 1980. Still, the country suffered from “structural unemployment” simply because of the size of the cohort. Typically, there were new jobs, but not where people lived. A less fortunate new practice was that the unemployed were often compelled to move to public transfer sites around the country. That provided butter for the bread but caused much anxiety.³⁸ This “adaptation problem,” as scientists called it, was settled thanks to economic growth and people (mostly young families) finding their place in the new environment and becoming satisfied with their new (sub)urban life. For most, this was a clear improvement concerning wages, housing, leisure time, and so on. The perspective of rising living standards, social security, and education options made people believe that life was finally improving, and prosperity (one’s own house or apartment, automobile, vacations) was within the reach of all. Models for modern life were found, among others, from American television series.³⁹

For the first time in Finnish history, upward social mobility was truly both possible and common. In fact, the figures for Finland were the highest in postwar Europe. The trend began in the 1960s and continued into the new millennium.⁴⁰ There were evident structural reasons for this, such as economic and demographic transformations, but also policy actions, like investments in education and universities, social security, and regional development. As the purpose of policies was to diminish social disparities, this was clearly reflected in social positions and division. The largest mobility flows were from small farmers to urban workers—which was then regarded as a social rise—and from workers to the middle class. The social background of the population in 1950 reveals who the baby boomers were by birth. The majority had an agrarian and low social status. This explains much of the social climbing, as from the 1960s, there were increasingly more and better paid jobs in towns. Particularly the

³⁸ Kuusi (1964), 131–143, discussed this issue, too.

³⁹ Ahlqvist, K., Raijas, A., Perrels, A., Simpura, J., and Uusitalo, L. (eds.) (2008). *Kulutuksen pitkä kaari: Niukuudesta yksilöllisiin valintoihin*. Helsinki University Press.

⁴⁰ Pöntinen, S. and Alestalo, M. (1983). *The Finnish mobility survey 1980: Data and first results*. Suomen Gallup Oy; Alestalo (2007); Erola, J. (2009). Social mobility and education of Finnish cohorts born 1936–1975: Succeeding while failing in equality of opportunity? *Acta Sociologica* 52(4), 307–327.

white-collar middle class, which had been rather small in Finland, grew rapidly in number. From the 1980s onwards, their background was truly heterogenous, indicating high mobility. This was the case with the elites, too. Mobility among them was lower, but high in international comparison. People at the top in business, politics, and administration had—and still have—surprisingly agrarian and “proletarian” roots. Between 1950 and 1980, Finland was not among the wealthiest nations and the rural population remained relatively high, but it was a dynamic, mobile, changing, and open society. This is how it was experienced, too, both in individual lives and in the public discourse (Fig. 16.2).⁴¹

Unlike in the American discourse and social imagination, the Finnish “Land of Opportunity” was not based so much on “freedom” and “competition” as on “equal chance.” The major mechanism that produced “social equality” was undoubtedly education: free universal schooling for all at all levels from day-care to the top universities. In addition to statistical evidence, there is the experience of individual success and the “official

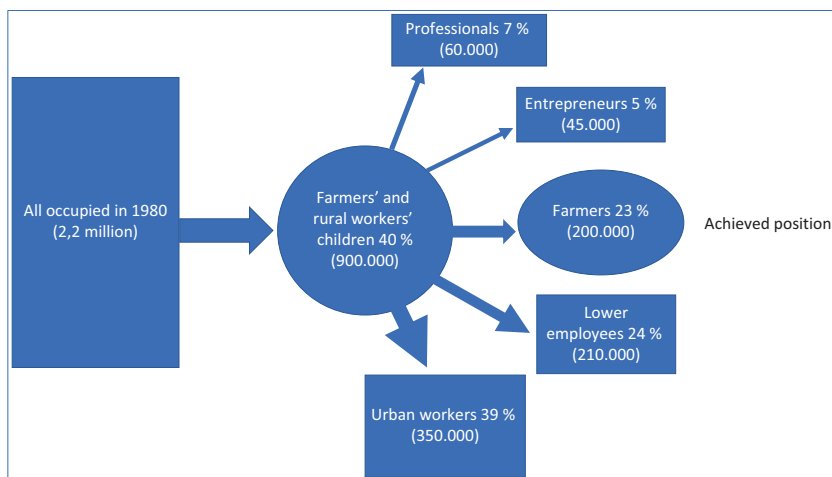


Fig. 16.2 Social mobility in Finland, 1950–1980: Rural population (Pöntinen & Alestalo 1983)

⁴¹ See note 40 and Pesonen, P. and Riihinen, O. (2002). *Dynamic Finland: The political system and the welfare state*. Finnish Literature Society; Ruostetsaari, I. (2014). *Vallan sisäpiirissä*. Vastapaino.

narrative” of the “most educated nation.” In life stories, it is a commonplace to repeat how “I had the chance for a good education and better opportunities than my parents had, who therefore highly appreciated education and were proud of me.” That is not exceptional, but in postwar Finland it happened to so many people that it became a strong and powerful collective experience. As described above, there were specific structural reasons for that experience, like a “low starting level,” but this is no argument to understate the actual change and the importance of how it was lived.

END OF HISTORY?

In the early 1990s, after the collapse of socialism, the victory of liberal democracy, and the market economy, Francis Fukuyama declared the “end of history.”⁴² Fukuyama’s phrase gained attention in Finland, too, because the signs were so evident, even though the idea of US supremacy in world politics was suspect. The socialist neighbor, the Soviet Union, had disappeared, Finland’s links to the Western world were emphasized, and economic policy turned toward neo-liberalism. Deregulation of the economy in the late 1980s led to new business and new wealth, but also to heavy debts in the private sector and finally to a banking crisis and deep depression in the early 1990s. In addition to “self-made” factors, the crisis resulted in the decline of Finnish exports due to the collapse of the Soviet Union. GDP dropped 10 percent, real wages decreased 10 percent, and unemployment jumped to 17 percent in 1994. The recovery took several years. The economy was stimulated by devaluation of the national currency and funded by increasing government debt. The term *austerity policy* entered Finland and began to dominate discussions. The appeal of the welfare state began to fade.⁴³

The recession years changed much. High unemployment, bankruptcies, and revaluations caused a crisis in which hundreds of thousands of people suffered and the large public sector was at risk. This insecurity became the experience of society, just like the wartime or the 1960s were for many. Many social and health problems were reported; around 100,000 people suffered from long-term unemployment until the new millennium.

⁴² Fukuyama, F. (1992). *The end of history and the last man*. Penquin Books.

⁴³ Kiander, J. (2001). *Laman opetukset: Suomen 1990-luvun kriisin syyt ja seuraukset*. Government Institute for Economic Research, 79–130.

Softer methods of survival were early retirement and re-education. Like unemployment benefits, all these measures were funded by the state.⁴⁴

Hence, there was an interesting contradiction regarding the role of the welfare state. It was claimed that it was in crisis but at the same time it was the welfare state that rescued the citizens in the most severe economic downturn since World War II. Many argued this well-being could no longer be afforded and the public sector was too large and heavy for taxpayers and businesses. However, the actual crisis was surpassed in exactly the opposite way: The state saved the banking sector (if not many companies directly), supported export companies by devaluation, subsidized agriculture, and paid unemployment benefits and early retirement. The public sector suffered from cuts, but they remained temporary. Consequently, the state was badly indebted but recovered quite quickly thanks to the rapid growth of the global economy. Luckily, large-scale industries like forestry, “intelligent” manufacturing, and ICT (Nokia) found new and rapidly growing markets, especially in Asia. From 1995 until the financial crisis of 2008, the Finnish economy’s annual growth was four percent on average. The Finnish economy was restructured toward EU membership and globalization, which had been the government objective from the beginning of the 1990s.⁴⁵

The “opening up” to the global economy seemed to benefit Finns, but it was also seen as a challenge to well-being, social equality, and national unity. A solution to conflicting tendencies was to renew the welfare state as a “safety net” against the risks of globalization. The tool was simple and repeated the ideas from the 1960s: By accelerating economic growth, the state could generate more revenue and continue redistributing national wealth. This required a globally competitive private sector, investments in the “knowledge economy,” and other measures to support export companies. Public funds were used to boost the economy in the open market, which would ultimately benefit all. Large companies were availed to stay and pay their taxes in Finland. The components of “national capitalism” included a secure business environment, state support for research and education, and strong state ownership, a remnant from the years of war and reconstruction. The plan seemed to work, and it did until the financial

⁴⁴ Blomberg, H., Hannikainen, M., and Kettunen, P. (eds.) (2002). *Lamakirja: Näkökulmia 1990-luvun talouskriisiin ja sen historiallisiin konteksteihin*. Kirja-Aurora.

⁴⁵ Kiander, J., Pekkarinen, J., Vartia, P., and Ylä-Anttila, P. (2005). *Suomi maailmantaloudessa: Uuden ajan talouspolitiikkaa*. Sitra.

crisis of 2008 when the global—and Finnish—economy began to crumble. The reaction was not to give up but to continue by making the welfare state more “efficient.” The most serious problem was seen as the aging population, and hence the increasing social expenditure and the imbalance of the state budget. Budget cuts were planned to cover the deficit, but in fact the governments solved the problem by increasing national debt. As the interest rates for reliable states like Finland were low, it was calculated that the debt could be paid back by increasing productivity and growth. The welfare system was not diluted, but it had become a hostage of economic growth. In the early 2020s, the vision collapsed when climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic required decisive actions and put high pressure on state funds. The solution was again to increase public expenditure—and hope for the best.⁴⁶

FALL OR RENEWAL

The fate of the welfare state has been discussed since its beginning from two perspectives, that of defending it and that of demanding its retrenchment. In Finland, the critique or talk about the “crisis” had been mild before the recession of 1992–1994. When it began, the major message was that the system had to be “saved”; it was needed for securing equal social development against disintegration, marginalization, and so on. There were good reasons for this perspective. As Finland had just reached most European societies in GDP per capita and it was ranked among the most equal societies (even number one) in the world, why give up now? High taxes were criticized, of course, but most Finns lined up with the phrase “I love taxes,” because they felt that they were paid back, too.⁴⁷

As the traditional safeguarding of the nation state had become problematic in the new era of globalization, academic think tanks, business, and the government introduced a new plan for twenty-first-century Finland called the “Democratic Information Society.” It was a model for a welfare state in the new global and digitally networked world. It included a strong ethical message that the purpose of economic policy must be

⁴⁶This description is based on government programs and day-to-day public discussion on economic policy. See below and Haapala, P. (2017). Suomen tulevaisuuden historia. In N. E. Villstrand and P. Karonen (eds.), *Kulkemattomat polut: Mahdollinen Suomen historia*. Gaudeamus, 204–237.

⁴⁷See J. Saari’s Chap. 15 in this book.

raising the quality of life with all its cultural dimensions. In this sense, it continued the ideas and goals set by Pekka Kuusi for the 1960s and Daniel Bell for the post-industrial society of the 1970s. It was named the “Finnish Model” by the world-famous sociologist Manuel Castells, a theorist of the “network society.”⁴⁸ The basic idea was that *solidarity society* was a realistic path also in the global context, with the help of high education, high technology, high productivity, and high citizen participation. Castells was inspired by Finland, which was technologically advanced (enjoying Nokia’s reputation) but also a small, egalitarian, and open society with a positive national identity. The combination of these elements would make an ideal format for a networked society committed to human dignity.⁴⁹ The work called “Blue Book” was commissioned by the government of Finland. However, it also raised criticism for its “unrealistic” approach and hype for high-tech society.⁵⁰

Despite heavy investments in digitalization in the early twenty-first century, it is still too early to evaluate the outcomes of those “new forms of sociality.” There has been much talk about new opportunities, freedom, and the lowering of barriers, but also about new gaps, bubbles, and divisions. A major concern among social scientists and commentators has been a trend toward marginalization, both in the “digital world” and in the “real world.” It is claimed that the emerging new divisions are no longer (always) related to ownership, wealth, and occupation (and other material and visible factors) but are (often) *symbolic barriers* and enclosures—that is, new kinds of invisible “class borders” based on “cultural capital” or the lack thereof.⁵¹ As these barriers are non-material, experiences (of self-esteem, belonging, disclosure) are the major causal factors (produced in people’s minds) for defining equality or inequality. It is evident that in this situation, society (the state) cannot handle the issue of

⁴⁸ Castells, M. and Himanen, P. (2002). *The information society and the welfare state: The Finnish model*. Oxford University Press. Cf. Bell, D. (1973). *The coming of post-industrial society: A venture in social forecasting*. Basic Books.

⁴⁹ Castells, M. and Himanen, P. (eds.) (2013). *Kestävän kasvun malli: Globaali näkökulma*. Valtioneuvoston kanslia, 279–313. English version: Castells, M. and Himanen, P. (eds.) (2014). *Reconceptualizing development in the global information age*. Oxford University Press. The work was commissioned by the government of Finland.

⁵⁰ Saari, J. (ed.) (2013). *Suomen sillat tulevaisuuteen*. Kuluttajatutkimuskeskus. The collection is a more realistic and empirical plan to “bridge” the ideals of the welfare state to the structural facts of the twenty-first-century world.

⁵¹ Erola, J. (ed.) (2010). *Luokaton Suomi? Yhteiskuntaluokat 2000-luvun Suomessa*. Gaudeamus.

social inequality in traditional ways by providing resources to the non-privileged. One result of this might be that the regulative state as an experience of society—its role in one’s life-course—is no longer relevant at all.

For decades, it had been asked if the welfare state is dead. Social conservatives have offered a positive answer since the 1970s already, because for them the state is the enemy itself. In Finland, the question of the future of the welfare state has been presented mostly from the left as a concern for equality and redistributive politics: If the welfare state is dead, it should be revived. The demands for and against were actualized in the 1990s when it was evident that the economic load for state finances was becoming too high, benefits were cut, and taxes raised. The next wave was the threat of the global economy at the beginning of the new century. The question asked was whether globalization would divide the nation into winners and losers.⁵² A political and ideological compromise was found in the idea of the *Finnish Model*. This enabled globalization to be presented as a positive future, but it should be subordinated to the “national interest.” The fruits of new growth should be shared fairly among all citizens.⁵³

Despite many practical and funding challenges, the welfare state and its regulative and redistributive powers remained, while social policy actions continued and even intensified in the new millennium. Social expenditure and sums for redistribution increased despite the continuing talk of austerity politics. Instead, people were even more dependent on the welfare state, not because of their poverty or marginalization, but as a result of expanding services and income transfers provided by the state. In addition, the traditional class borders, when measured by income distribution, education attendance, or social mobility, were not rising between 2000 and 2020, as was repeatedly noted.⁵⁴

When one looks at the twenty-first-century social policy measures and numbers, there are no signs of the collapse of the system and its legitimacy. “Equalization” (Kuusi) had become a basic structure of social cohesion

⁵² Julkunen, R. (2017). *Muuttuvat hyvinvointivaltiot: Eurooppalaiset hyvinvointivaltiot reformoitavina*. SoPhi.

⁵³ Haapala (2017).

⁵⁴ A brief account of the latest developments of inequality; see Haapala, P., Kaarninen, M., and Häkkinen, A. (2021). Luokka rajana ja identiteettinä. In P. Markkola, M. Niemi, and P. Haapala (eds.), *Suomalaisen yhteiskunnan historia 2*. Vastapaino, 271–276; Saari (2020), 70–101.

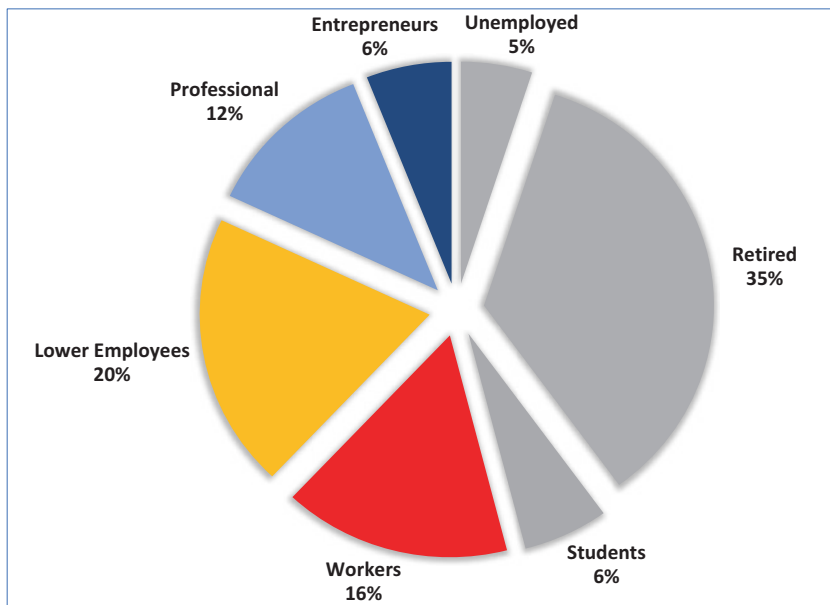


Fig. 16.3 Finnish adult population by source of income, 2017 (*Finnish Statistical Yearbook*.) The livelihoods of most retired people, the unemployed, and students are based on public transfer payments (including pensions)

and the root of political balance in Finland. Political debates, public discourse, and polls verify that most people consider society, and especially the welfare state, as *theirs*. The debates concerning benefits, subsidies, and taxes are often heated, but in fact these fights integrate the citizens around a common cause. Society and politics are seen as an arena of compromise—a shared experience—and hence worth defending (Fig. 16.3).

CONCLUSION

The story of the changes in Finnish society has been sketched out above from two perspectives. The history of the “social structure” describes and explains the trends and variation in people’s conditions and living. The history of experiences, in this case the “collective experience,” tries

to determine the shared experiences—that is, which phenomena were understood as common, unifying, or dividing—and what was the aggregate (general, average, typical) experience. For instance, increasing wealth can be a collective experience that unifies but also divides people. Improving health can be a common experience, but not available to all. In this chapter, I considered how people experience society in a broad sense, with all its institutions, actions, and elements, and how society treats them. Does it support, encourage, and meet expectations, or does it do the opposite? We know—without referring to any specific study—that people have different attitudes, opinions, and good and bad memories of society. These are reflected in public discourse, politics, and other manifestations. Polls with questions like “How should tax money be spent?” can reveal more detailed opinions and beliefs based on experiences of society. All this information together, albeit vague, can reveal much of the overall experience of society, which in turn matters greatly when explaining social development.

In this chapter, my focus was not on individual experiences, or on their sum, but on how collective experiences are related to structural facts and changes. A basic conclusion is that they explain each other when looking at how society meets people’s aspirations and how these aspirations make the society. This is self-evident in the sense that people make their society, of course, but the actual outcome is not self-evident. This depends much on the conditions but also the intentions and goals people have, their ideas of a good society, and their experiences.

In Finland, there is a long continuity in welfare politics from the early twentieth century’s struggle against poverty to the early twenty-first century’s struggle for sustainable development. This continuity stems from two basic elements, the strong role of the state authority and its legitimacy among the citizens, despite many disagreements. The “functionality” and the strength of society can be based only on *trust* between the citizens, and trust between the citizens and society (the polity). In the best case, this produces a constructive collective experience of society, which may lead to a so-called virtuous cycle, when positive factors (education, health, wealth, security, public power, equal participation, ideas, and experiences) nourish one another.

The image of social development presented above may look too rosy in a world of so many uncertainties and divisions. However, from a longer historical perspective, it is an important reminder of what is possible. The example of postwar Finland points out the social dependences of individual lives, their historical context, and the importance of the collective experience as a crucial factor in the *constitution of society*.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Cf. Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. California University Press.

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