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Abstract for a Presentation in the 2003 Spring Research Forum

Church and Civil Society in Finland

The Role of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Promoting Social Welfare and Social Capital

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is an abstract for a presentation. More detailed information will be provided in the presentation in March 2003. The paper includes results that have/will be published as three academic articles. My aim is not to confuse a reader with the multifaceted content, but hopefully instead, to offer a general view of a European case (Finland) of faith-based social welfare.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church plays a central role in promoting societal cohesion and combating social exclusion in Finland. It forms a central element of the Finnish civil society and an essential factor of the identity of the Finns. The social work of the church has for centuries been a central element of the Finnish welfare system. At the present stage, Europe is undergoing significant economic and social changes. The role of the church social work, both in paid work and volunteering, is an acute question concerning the Finnish welfare system. The viewpoint of this paper includes both the societal level and the level of individual volunteers in church social work.

2. THE CASE OF FINLAND

What makes Finland a relevant European case for study, not just on a European scale, but also within the larger perspective? The Finnish religious environment is interestingly homogenous: 84.8% of Finns are members of the Evangelical Lutheran church. This national church has high number of paid employees (4.4 million members, 19,300 staff) (Salonen et al. 2001). Finland has somewhat high levels of private religiosity (e.g. private prayer and belief in God), yet only a small minority (8 %) are monthly churchgoers. This is lower than in most European countries (Niemelä 2002; Salonen et al. 2001) Curiously enough, Finland has been described as the “promised land of associations” (Pohjola 1999, 62) and the Finnish history of associational life has a lengthy and dynamic history, also within a church context (Heikkilä 1979). Today, there is an average of one association-per-50 citizens, and the typical Finn is a member of three foundations or associations (Helander & Laaksonen 1999).

The Finnish welfare state was challenged by significant social and economic changes especially during the 1990s. The social and voluntary work carried out by the church has for the last decade been a more-and-more central component in the Finnish social welfare system. During the 1990s, when Finland was recovering from a severe economic recession, the number of volunteers in church social work increased by 29% (Niemelä 2002, Yeung 2003a). According to a recent qualitative interview study (Yeung 2001), religiosity plays a visible role in Finnish volunteer motivation, and furthermore, survey results indicate (Yeung 2002, Yeung 2003c) that every sixth Finn volunteers primarily in the voluntary work of a church or other religious institution.

3. THE CHURCH SOCIAL WORK AS AN INDICATOR OF THE CHURCH STATUS

This chapter includes the main findings of an article (Yeung 2003c) exploring the changes in the status of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland during the 19th and 20th centuries. The article utilizes historical documents and previous research on church social work. The article analyses the role of the social work of the church and its associations as an indicator of the societal status of the

church. The theoretical framework of the article includes secularisation and postsecularisation (sacralisation) theories. Different from most previous postsecularisation studies, the level of analysis in the article is organisational and societal. The results indicate that the direction has been toward church social work having rising importance especially in recent years (see Figure 1.).

Figure 1. The roles of the public sector and the church context in social work

	THE PUBLIC SECTOR (State and municipalities)	THE CHURCH CONTEXT	
		THE CHURCH	THE CHURCH ASSOCIATIONS
18 th and early 19 th century	Insubstantial	Moderate	-
Late 19 th century	Strengthening	Diminishing	Strong
Early 20 th century	Strengthening	Strengthening	Diminishing
1940s and 1950s	Strong	Strengthening	Marginal
1960s	Strong	Diminishing	Further diminishing
1970s and 1980s	Strong	Marginal	Strengthening
1990s and early 21 st	Diminishing	(Strongly) strengthening	Diminishing

In Finland, the economic recession of the 1990s was more severe than in any other country with a developed market economy since the Second World War. (Kiander & Vartia 1998, 112-114) The recession caused difficulties and criticism over the public sector social policy. Budget cuts were abruptly initiated. The non-profit sector, voluntary work and Christian social work became very timely issues. They were recognized on a larger scale as a chance to fill the gaps in services created by the budget cuts in the public sector. (Helander & Laaksonen 1999: 83) The church reacted quickly. It set up funds to help the over-indebted, provided meals, and started to organize meeting places and activities for the unemployed. Employees helped mental-health patients who had been moved to out-patient care. Also the co-operation between the municipalities, congregations and associations increased. (Heino et al. 1997: 81, 154) Altogether, the church invested significant resources in social work (e.g. in 1994 50 million euros in social work). The recession caused a significant change in the

content of the church social work, the emphasis shifting from the work with the elderly and handicapped to those of working age and experiencing economic or mental problems. The need for the social responsibilities of the church has continued even in the late 1990s and early 21st century. This new central role in social care has proved meaningful but also difficult for the church. Tensions have risen within the church, and its employees have been divided into two groups: those who adapted to the increased work load and those who criticized the situation. (Iivari & Karjalainen 1999: 20-21)

The changes in the social work raise the question of whether the central role of the social work affected the status of the church in society. Influences can be found both at the institutional and individual levels. The rise in church social services was widely reported by the media. With the increasing social services during the recession, the church attained a very visible, public role in Finnish society in the 1990s. At the individual level, the active role played by the church during the recession resulted in a more positive image in the eyes of the public, Finns' trust in central institutions plummeting during the economic recession as their trust in the church increased (Heino et al. 1997, 25, 59-60). Its active social work took the church into spheres that were then considered to be part of the public sector. This clearly demonstrates what Beyer's analysis of differentiated societies calls the 'performance of religion': 'religion relating to other social systems', and 'applied religious communication' (Beyer 1994:79-80). Building on Luhmann's view on society and communication, Beyer separates this from the 'function of religion' which means 'religion relating to the society as a whole', that is, pure religious communication. The recession and the increased social work of the church made religious communication more acceptable in the Finnish society. In my view this increasing involvement has strengthened the public status of the Finnish church. This has not, however, taken place at the expense of its functions. Perhaps it has been quite otherwise, as Beyer (1994: 80) has noted, performance can help religion against the pressure of

privatisation by offering effective (communicational) applications for religion. On a larger scale, the active role of the Finnish church as a welfare producer reflects major changes in society. These changes clearly indicate welfare pluralism, which emphasises the dynamic interaction between societal sectors.

What do these recent changes reflect about the axle of privatisation-deprivatisation of religion? According to Casanova, deprivatisation refers to ways in which traditional religions refuse to accept their marginal roles. This is exemplified in religions and religious social movements entering the public sector and challenging the legitimacy of the secular spheres, state and market economy. Furthermore, religions enter the public arenas not only to defend their territories, but to take part in the very debates on the boundaries between the public and the private. Casanova names three instances in which deprivatisation of religion can be justified: religion entering the public sphere to protect all modern freedoms, religion questioning the autonomy of secular spheres, and religion aiming to protect the traditional life-world. (Casanova 1994: 5-6, 57-58, 228-229) This article raises the question of whether or not religion taking increasing responsibility for work considered to belong to other institutions could be added to the list of deprivatisation models. The Finnish case is a clear example of this. There is one further point that makes this notion even more interesting. Casanova pays very little attention to the state churches of northern Europe. In the context of privatised religiosity, it is these very churches that find it hardest to come to terms with the pressure of modernisation. In this, the homogenous Finnish society and its state church represent a rather unusual example. The case of the Finnish church demonstrates how a traditional state church of a privatised, modern society can continue to play a dynamic role in a society.

5. INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEERS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

5.1. Findings of a survey data

This chapter reviews part of the findings reported in an article (Yeung 2003b). Using a survey data (World Values Survey 2000, Finnish data, $N=1,038$), I created four groups of analysis for the article: 1) church-related volunteers, 2) volunteers in both the church and other contexts, 3) people who volunteer outside of a church context, and 4) non-volunteers. My objective was to explore the ways in which these four groups differ from each other concerning religiosity and social capital. The theoretical background as well as the independent and dependent variables are presented in detail in the article.

The results indicate that the correlation between religiosity and voluntarism varies significantly among different churches. Religious contexts and volunteering were also shown to be related to different types of social capital. My findings demonstrated that Pentecostals and Jehovah Witnesses, in contrast with the members of the Lutheran national church, seldom take part in other-than-church voluntarism – however, they are extremely active in church volunteerism per se. The high proportion of church volunteers strictly interacting during their leisure time with other church-members, particularly among Pentecostals and Jehovah Witnesses, is a clear illustration of bonding social capital. The members of the Lutheran national church are definitively divided as regards their activeness in volunteering: on the one hand, many of the members do not volunteer at all, while, on the other hand, several take part in voluntarism *outside* the church. The latter indicates potentiality for bridging social capital, but the role of religiosity in its motivation remains to be investigated in future researches. The outside-of-church volunteers view religions most flexibly and are the most eager to explore religious traditions outside Lutheranism. They, together with the volunteers of church-and-other organizations, spend a lot of time with their workmates and acquaintances from hobbies and other associations. Outside-of-church volunteers also noticeably trust several central institutions more than the average Finn does. They are predominantly Lutherans. This group includes the ones who seem to relate the easiest (of the four groups) to wider social circles, and thus, they seem to maintain a state of high bridging social capital.

My results illustrate the fact that social capital is often unequally distributed to the people who have higher human capital, a notion also made by Putnam (2002) and Musick et al. (2000). As the unequal distribution of social capital also seems to concern Finland, which is a culturally homogeneous country that enjoys a very high overall average of education, my findings highlight the need for future studies of the links between human capital and social capital, as well as their societal distribution.

The results support a positive correlation between the state of religiosity and various forms of voluntarism. The findings report strong dominance of altruism within Finnish voluntarism and volunteer motivation (both inside and outside church voluntary work). I believe this reflects the homogenous religious and cultural heritage that we may see within the solidarity of the Lutheran national church. My results also indicate that every third Finn trusts the church to provide valid answers to moral dilemmas and everyday-life family problems. Furthermore, my findings demonstrated that every fourth Finn trusts the church to provide answers for social problems. Trust in the church is typically emphasized amongst people who can be considered as maintaining bridging social capital, namely those who perform voluntary work of some sort, and in particular among those who volunteer in both church and other institutions. Loranca-Garcia (2000, 7) has pointed out that when social capital is understood in its widest sense, it includes not only horizontal and vertical social relationships, but formal institutions as well. In fact, institutions play a central role in establishing the social and political atmosphere of a society. Concerning the institutional social capital of the Finnish Lutheran national church, it is my position that its voluntary work does not particularly interest vast groups of people, yet the trust in the national church is in fact rather strong, and it is specifically related to bridging social capital. In future social capital studies, it will no longer be sufficient to restrict our analysis of trust to an individual level. We must instead further examine the role of the churches as sources for constructing as well as sustaining solidarity and trust .

5.2. Findings of qualitative interview data

As Putnam (2002:412) has noted, informal and individualistic societal involvement leaves few traces in surveys. He has also pointed out (2002:414) that most empirical research on social capital has focused on the quantity of social ties, leaving the social distribution of the ties with less attention. The processes of individualization and privatization have in the later half of the 20th century strongly shaped the lives of both individuals and institutions. In my view, these processes highlight the need for further research on the *nature* of civic participation and collaboration, as well as individuals' views on politics, work, and faith. In order to detect possible *contentual* changes, there is a need for studies utilizing qualitative methodology.

I am currently working on an article with which I aim to contribute to qualitative inquiries on social capital. My focus is in the intriguing linkage between religion and social capital. Is the conceptual combination meaningful and productive, and in what sense? I have chosen voluntary work of the church social work to be the context of my empirical research. The data includes 18 in-depth interviews (length app. 2,5 hours) with volunteers. The purpose of the article is two-fold. First (*conceptual analysis*), I will give clarification concerning the question of whether and in what sense social capital is a constructive conceptual tool for analyzing religious institutions and their volunteerism. I will begin by analyzing the most central definitions and theories of social capital. I intend to develop a conceptual analysis tool based on the earlier theories. The tool will illustrate the possible meaning and relevance of the elements of social capital in the context of church-related voluntary work. My second aim (*empirical analysis*) is to explore the elements of social capital in an in-depth interview data concerning church-related voluntary work. In this I will utilize the conceptual tool constructed based on the earlier theories. What elements of social capital can be found in the church volunteerism as regards to the experiences of individual volunteers? Which components of social capital are relevant in the individual-level experiences of church volunteering. At the

moment, I have completed the first part of the research (the conceptual analysis). I have also analyzed the data. Currently, I am writing the analysis and discussion for the article. I wish to be able to summarize the results at the meeting in March 2003.

6. FUTURE OF THE CHURCH SOCIAL WORK IN FINLAND AND EU

During the later part of the 1990s, the economic situation in Finland improved significantly. Yet, church social and voluntary work have continued to be a timely issues. At the present stage, Europe is undergoing significant economic and social changes. The strengthened European and Scandinavian model of social economy places expectations at voluntary social work of non-profit organizations, churches and church associations. EU has emphasized the role of partnership both in the construction of social welfare as well as social capital.

Partnership has been defined in EU documents as:

”a process involving a variety of different players from a variety of sectors coming together in a common purpose to work towards an agreed goal. The process is based on democratic principles, operates with clearly defined support systems, and involves continuous evaluation to produce outcomes which will add value.” (European Commission 1998)

In Finland Christian voluntarism continues to play a role both in supporting the Finnish welfare system and promoting active citizenship and participation. According to the latest studies, a surprisingly large part of the work dealing with social problems of the citizens is covered with voluntary associations and activities. Yet the present challenges are far from simple or evident for the church in Finland. It faces mixed expectations both from outside (e.g. other institutions, agents and citizens) and inside (e.g. teachings and views of workers). At the moment no-one can tell how will the future of the European welfare system and the role of faith-based organizations look like in the future. However, the current changes are closely observed by researches. For example, there has very recently come into existence a comparative study of 10 European Union countries focusing on the role of the churches as welfare providers within the social economy. The project will include years from 2003 to 2006. I am one of the researches and will be happy to report the Independent Sector as well as others on the results.

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