

Comparative Imagination and the Tensions of Modernity in a Peripheral Nordic Country

Pauli Kettunen

Department of Political and Economic Studies

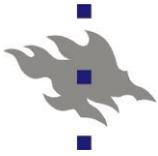
University of Helsinki

pauli.kettunen@helsinki.fi

Modernities Scrutinized: Finland, Japan and Russia in

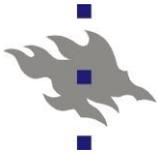
Comparison

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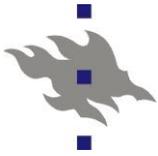
Beyond methodological nationalism

- the popularity of comparisons between "varieties of capitalism" and "models" since the 1980s (e.g. "the Japanese model", "the Nordic model")
- tendency of methodological nationalism in this kind of comparative research
- beyond the comparisons focusing on "national adaptations in global economies" (Gøsta Esping-Andersen)
- "the state adaptability scholarship" and "a reifying of the global as external and the national as internal" (Saskia Sassen).
- transnational economic, political and cultural processes were constitutive of the institutional and discursive construction of national society
- globalisation does not just happen in the external environment of national entities but very much within and through the nation-centred modes of thought and action



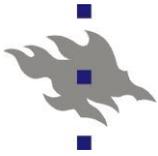
”History matters” (Douglass C. North) – but how?

- beyond the approaches for which “history” is synonymous ...
- ... to national specificities
- ... to the origins of these specificities
- ... to path dependencies
- multi-layered historicity of institutions, discourses and identities
- contingency
- histories and comparisons as political practices



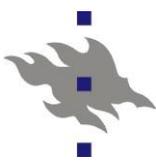
Historical and comparative reflexivity in social practices

- the tension of experience and expectation in modern historical and political consciousness (Reinhart Koselleck)
- historical accounts are inherent in politics as a form of reflexivity
- (cross-national) comparisons are inherent in politics as a form of reflexivity
- “comparative imagination” (Glenda Sluga) in the making of “imagined communities” (Benedict Anderson)



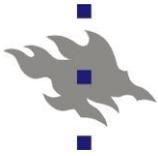
Finland as a case

- Finland as a case for examining the modern notion of nation-state society as the framework of defining social problems, conflicts and solutions
- how were the ideas of historical development and transnational interdependence included in the notion of 'society'
- Finland as a Nordic case
- latecomer in industrialization and urbanization
- specificities of nation building and class conflict in the framework of Russian Empire
- the continuity of Swedish institutions was supported by Russian imperial policies aimed to secure the separation of Finland from Sweden
- the crucial role of the Nordic context for the making of national institutions, interests and identities



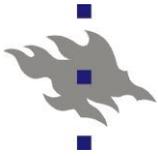
Two faces of the modern and the traditional in imagining the nation

- two faces of the modern: 1) the continuous breaking of existing structures, 2) the continuous making of rational order
- two faces of the traditional: 1) a community dangerously disintegrated by modernity, 2) irrationality to be overcome through modern efficiency and progress
- divergent political ways of relating economic rationalization, social integration and individual disciplination in problem definitions and solutions



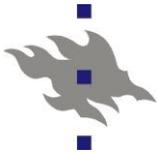
Temporality and spatiality in Nordic notions of 'society'

- a crossing of temporal and spatial dimensions: an anticipatory distinction between centre and the periphery in defining problems and solutions
- peripheral eclectic avant-gardism
- 'society' as a temporalized 'tool for steering the historical movement' (Koselleck)
- *samhälle* (Swedish), *samfund* (Danish), *samfunn* (Norwegian), *samfélag* (Icelandic), *yhteiskunta* (Finnish)
- the modern notion of society: fixed to the nation-state, an integrated entity with its own subjectivity, progress as an inherent code of the future
- society as the framework for 'social question', a normative power and a target of empirical knowledge and policies
- normative society: 1) the interest of the *national economy* above private economic interests, 2) the *social principle* putting limits to economic action, and 3) a Nordic specificity: synonymous to *the state and public power*
- reflected and legitimised the crucial role of the state in the processes through which Europe's Northern periphery was integrated in expanding capitalist economy



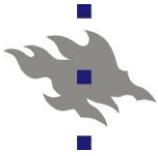
“Nordic society”

- in the 1930s the concept of ‘Nordic’ loosened from its previous references to a periphery of modernization
- ‘Nordic society’ and ‘Nordic democracy’, referring to a model of a nation-state society and contrasting it to backwardness and dictatorship
- ‘Nordic’ as attribute of a transnational historical region, a framework of transfers and comparisons *within* which the distinction of centre and periphery came to play a crucial role
- intra-Nordic centre-periphery mode of thought in the relationships between Finland and Sweden
- in both countries, the empirical reference point for ‘the Nordic society’ was Sweden
- in Finland, Sweden was, from the 1930s, raised to represent the code of a future Finnish society
- this intra-Nordic variant of centre-periphery distinction politically influential until the 1980s



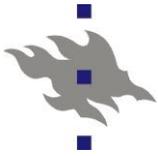
The society of virtuous circles

- since the Nordic class compromises of the 1930s: confidence in positive-sum game between organised economic interests within a national society
- linking three ideological aspects of Nordic modernisation: idealised heritage of the free Nordic peasant; spirit of capitalism; utopia of socialism
- post-war horizon of expectation: the self-reinforcing circle of social equality, economic growth/competitiveness and widening democracy; to be achieved through interest compromises and knowledge-based planning
- a widely shared but all the time contested framework for political conflicts and compromises
- productivistic ethos: individual resources released by means collective and public regulation
- "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." (Pekka Kuusi: *Social Policy for the Sixties – A Plan for Finland*, 1961, in English 1964).



”We are doomed to grow”

- the Finnish welfare state was built up by controversial efforts to manage the very rapid structural change in the 1950s-1970s and to meet the challenge of very large baby boom cohorts
- social policy reforms and the reforms of education system as an integral part of the making of industrialized and urbanized wage work society
- after the immediate post-war time, a national strategy of prosperity based on a high rate of investment and the sacrifices in the form of more moderate growth of consumption
- more pronounced than in other Nordic countries, social policies were assessed from the point of view of the limits of economic resources
- the emphasis on national necessity also in virtuous-circle arguments for social policy as instrumental for economic growth
- Pekka Kuusi 1961: in order to survive between the highly growth-oriented Sweden and the Soviet Union, ”we are doomed to grow”
- a convergence-theoretical depolitization of social policies in the Cold War world



“Nordic model”

- the emergence of the concept of ‘model’ in the 1980s: encounters between national institutions and globalised capitalism, reinforced comparative reflexivity
- facilitated by international organizations (OECD)
- the rivalry between different national institutional settings in globalised capitalism and European integration
- a dualism of “Nordic model”:
 - 1) the notion of “Nordic model” as a target of external challenges
 - 2) the notion of “Nordic model” as a response to external challenges
- incremental change through institutional conversion: welfare-state institutions modified to serve competition-state functions
- nationalism associated with coercive comparisons in global economic competition
- a self-reinforcing circle: defining globalisation as (just) a national (or a European) challenge bound to reinforce the imperatives competitiveness in political agenda setting