

**Nordic Civiness revisited
in the Age of Association**
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The influence of the Finnish foreign policy to the voluntary associations' contacts with their Scandinavian and Baltic counterparts during the interwar period

Associations as a support to the national state

A great issue is the relation of voluntary associations and the state, which can differ greatly from country to country (certainly one of the starting points of the whole EVA research network).

In Finland popular movements and other voluntary organizations have been a central actor in the nation building, as will be told in other presentations of this seminar. There is a difference even to Sweden, where at least the great popular movements (labour, temperance, free churches) from the turn of the 20th century are seen as counter-movements towards the traditional elites¹. In Anglo-Saxon countries voluntary associations are in many cases seen as an opposite or counterweight to the state. In Finland they have rather been a means to mobilize the citizens for good purposes, in cooperation with the public administration and the political elite.

I am preparing a dissertation with the title *Balticum or Norden? Finnish Pan-identities and Togetherness with Neighbour Nations during the Interwar Period*. The actors in my study are nationwide Finnish associations. How did they describe and motivate their cooperation with the Western neighbours, Scandinavia and the Southern neighbours, the Baltic countries? The main argument used, togetherness or "natural ties", I call pan-identity. It could also be called regional identity. The research plan includes several aspects of which I here raise the associations' loyalty towards the national foreign policy.

Two studies have especially inspired me. Jorma Kalela in *Grannar på skilda vägar* (1971) points out that although Finland and Sweden had great problems in the "high" politics in 1921-1923, it did not disturb cooperation on the lower, functional level. Timo Soikkanen in his dissertation (1984) about the interaction between Finnish foreign and domestic policy 1933-1939 describes how the so-called Nordic orientation was introduced by the leading politicians also through political parties and mass organizations. The action was taken in silence, by personal contacts, and its ultimate goal was to get political and military support from Scandinavia in case of a European conflict. Such a conflict was feared especially after

¹ See eg. Torkel Jansson, *Samhällsförändring och sammanslutningsformer*. Uppsala 1982.

In Finland the labour movement of course was an opposition but in the early 1900s even it could be seen as a part of a kind of national opposition towards the tsarist regime, thus a part of the nation building. After Finland became independent the situation changed. The labour movement developed an own alternative to nearly every form of bourgeois civic activities. The double organizational system will not be discussed here.

Hitler had taken the power in Germany.

Situations where professional colleagues from different countries or people interested in the same ideologies or hobbies meet each others in associational contacts, are of course different from purely political foreign matters. They meet as people working with same issues, may it be surgery, botanics, milk trade, choir singing, skiing or bank rent policy. At the same time they are nationals of their states, maybe even politicians. The possible double role of the political elite members could make them also behave in double roles – as always when personal sympathies and political pressures are not in harmony.² Altogether – we can not completely separate “the state” and “the civil society” at least not in such a small country as Finland

South and West as alternatives

The study by Timo Soikkanen tells about the latter half of the 1930s. There had also been an earlier attempt to find allies for Finland: In the early 1920s Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland negotiated about a mutual treaty that would help in case Soviet Union would attack these countries which had just got independent from Russia. The alliance did however not realize. The idea was called Border State policy.

At the same time the official relations between Finland and Sweden were bad, especially because of the Åland islands -question. The relations were complicated further by the language rivalry in Finland: the Finnish language of the majority was getting hegemony over the traditionally hegemonial Swedish. The Swedish speaking minority looked for support from Sweden, with success and sometimes with arguments which the Finnish speakers regarded as false. Besides, the memories of year 1918 were mutually awkward.

There were several other reasons, too, why the opposite direction, the South, was an interesting alternative, also for voluntary associations, especially shared experiences under the tsarist Russia and in the independence process. With Estonians Finnish-speaking Finns shared languages that resemble each other. This bond was also considered as a race bond or rather as kinship. (Unfortunately the English word has not the quite the same tone as the Finnish and Estonian words ‘heimo’ and ‘hóim’.) The Scandinavians and Swedish speakers in Finland again tended to exclude the Finns from their brotherhood.

New Finnish-Baltic contacts were quickly established. Even some Finno-Baltic organizations were established. The most well known was probably SELL, the student organization for Suomi, Eesti, Latvija and Lietuva. Agronomists from the four countries had an organization and journalists, medical doctors and botanists had – if not an organization - at least circulating Fenno-Baltic meetings. Some professions, not only linguistics, started Finnish – Estonian – Hungarian contacts.

² In J.K. Paasikivi’s diaries we can read how he in the same Nordic meeting of national economists participated in language-political protests, but in the dinner discussed in great confidence with Swedish colleagues about industrial wages etc. – J.K. Paasikiven päiväkirjoja 1914-1934. Kansallisarkiston ystävä – Riksarkkivets vänner 1999. P. 193-194.

Both Finnish- Estonian /Latvian and Finnish-Baltic getting together –occasions were often celebrated in almost euphoric spirit.

[Appendix 1. Some examples of texts telling about visits to Estonia and Latvia will be translated]

I would be very interested to learn how the civil society the contacts between Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians were reported and described?

I also would be interested to know, whether there were any associations for the three Baltic nationalities?³

At the same time civil and administrative cooperation between Finland and Sweden continued in spite of the tension between these two. Already Jorma Kalela (mentioned above) has pointed out how in spite of the political tension so called functional relations between Finnish and Swedish authorities went on without problems. Even relations between various associations continued and new contacts were started, in many cases in Nordic setting. It was usual, that Finland joined cooperation that had started for a few years earlier by Swedish, Norwegian and Danish associations or other organizations.

[Appendix 2. Figures about contacts with Scandinavian / Baltic counterparts from one month in 1922 will be shown.]

There seems however to be a clear difference in the way, how the Finns described their visits and other relations with the Western and with the Southern neighbours in their travelling reports in newspapers and associations' publications.. Telling about South, the tone was emotional, stressing positive feelings, reports from West were practical, maybe without any emotional expressions.⁴

Three motives

I have interpreted the differences through different motives to keep contacts. Contacts with

³ So far my sources about the associational life and cooperation in Balticum are:
Ea Jansen, "Yhdistykset ja organisaatiot", in Viron perinnekulttuuri, Helsinki 1997.
Aili Aarelaid, Kodanikualgatus ja seltsid Eesti muutuval kulturmaastikul. Tallinn 1996.
Georg von Rauch, The Baltic states. The years of independence. London 1974.

⁴ I have described and interpreted the difference in for. ex. Agronomernas skandinaviska kontakter, deras alternativ och betydelsen av bondens nationella roll. In: Civilsamhällets Norden (2004), www.helsinki.fi/hum/nordic/civilsam.pdf. 2006.

Another publication:

Baltia ja Pohjoismaat suomalaisten vaihtoehtoisina pan-identiteettinä maailmansotien välisenä aikana. – In: Itämeren itälaidalla. Näkökulmia identiteetin ja yhteistyön historiaan. Toim. Kari Alenius, Anita Honkala ja Sinikka Wunsch. Pohjois-Suomen historiallinen yhdistys 2006. (Studia historica septentrionalia 48)

Also two unpublished seminar papers in English.

the kinship-brothers, Estonians as well as Hungarians, gave especially emotional value, feelings of togetherness and belonging to a greater group. Similar emotions could especially in the beginning of the independence time be shared with Latvians and Lithuanians. Marko Lehti has written about “fellow-sufferers”⁵.

Practical value was the main motive to keep contacts with Scandinavians. In most fields of life there was more in common with the western neighbours than with the southern, thus there was more useful information to exchange. On the other hand Finns felt themselves as “little brothers” in Scandinavia, especially the Finnish speaking ones. As a compensation one could pretend to be a “big brother” in South – one form of emotional value in foreign contacts.

The third motive is the most relevant from the point of view of this seminar. I call it loyalty to the official foreign policy.

The interest shown by some associations towards the Border States can be seen in my material. Much more evident is however even in the associations the Scandinavian orientation from 1935. The trend described by Soikkanen can be seen especially from the newspapers from the year 1938. One Swedish guest or a whole delegation seems to be a nearby standard element in the national meetings or “days” of national organizations.

[Appendix 3. Figures from 1938 comparable to earlier (1922) to be shown and some translated citations]

The increasing interest towards the Nordic cooperation was imminent in other countries, too. Even the Estonian and Latvian association leaders wished to intensify contacts with the Scandinavian counterparts and the reason for that pursuit probably was more political than practical. In Finland the increasing orientation towards West meant inevitably turning the back towards South. Especially the relation with Estonians, the kinship brothers, caused some bad conscience. On the state level, attempts for cultural exchange were organised, maybe like a substitute for more “hard” matters. One or two Estonians were invited for some Nordic meetings, at least to those which were run in Finland.

Geo- and race politics?

Iver B Neumann has written about regionalization with the case Norden and how it has been explained. Some researches stress cultural phenomenon (language, Lutheranism, mentality...) that make Nordic peoples to feel togetherness and to act together (*inside out*). Other researchers see geopolitics to be the determinant factor (*outside in*); it is the axis Russia – Germany – Britain that with its shifts in balance regulate the cohesion of the Nordic countries - even if the inhabitants and their leaders pretend something else. Neumann does not present the cultural and geopolitical narratives as alternatives but

⁵ Lehti, A Baltic league as a construct of the new Europe. Envisioning a Baltic region and small state sovereignty in the aftermath of the First World War, Frankfurt am Main 1999.

rather as a continuum with two ends. He does not himself take very clear stand but reminds that after the Cold War the significance of the Nordic cooperation has diminished. Thus the geopolitical explanation has some strength.⁶

The lively Nordic cooperation of the civil society in the end of 1930s can clearly be seen as a realization of the “outside in” explanation. But there also is a human side:

For decades there had been a branch of research and discussion: the human races and their differences. In various studies the Finnish speaking Finns had been described as an inferior race compared to their Swedish speaking citizens and Scandinavian neighbours. The facts that they may speak the Scandinavian languages as fluently as the native speakers, had strengthened the big brothers – little brother –feelings on both sides. (Besides other factors, such as the economy.)

In 1920s Rolf Nordenstreng, a Swedish race researcher, made new typologies, that gradually became known by the great public. The “East Baltic Race” that was, according to him, dominant in Finland included members of from both language groups. But according to him, the same race was diffused widely in Northern Europe. Even many prominent Swedes like Harald Hjärne and Selma Lagerlöf bare characteristics of the East Baltic race. Thus the *blood* argument was getting out of fashion, Finns were no more aliens. This might have had more significance for the Nordic cooperation, especially on the civic level, that one would think nowadays.⁷

Even if the race-ideas are forgotten, the different or similar languages are a reality that affect to feelings of togetherness, all round the Baltic area. Or is it still more the axis Moscau – Berlin – London? Or just the practical value?

⁶ Neumann, Iver B., Use of the other. The East in European identity formation. University of Minnesota Press 1999. Chapter Making regions.

⁷ See eg. The comments of J.K. Paasikivi in his diary 1930. He seems to be relieved because of the results of Nordenstreng No difference. Nor in gifts – talents... we all are of the same ground, race...) – J.K. Paasikiven päiväkirjoja 1914-1934. Kansallisarkiston ystävät – Riksarkivets vänner 1999. P. 146.