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THE POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF DIFFERENCE

The purpose of this essay is to analyse politics from a special point of view which will be called *the political organisation of political, economic and cultural difference* (cf. Koenis 1997).¹ The political organization of difference can be considered as a special case of any social organization of difference (cf. Barth 1969), a case in which the political is defined by the central role of *state institutions* in the organization of difference within the context of a *society*.

Nevertheless, despite the recognition of the salience of the state institutions, politics is not being considered as a sphere or a sector but rather, in an Aristotelian-Arendtian manner as *a special form of activity* which is directly related to the human condition of plurality and diversity (cf. Arendt 1998). The political organization of difference is, in turn, not a state of affairs or a special content in politics. Rather, it can be conceived as an inevitable and never-ending process the limits of which could be presented as follows: the political organization of difference comes to an end where physical violence starts (the end of politics), and where *anarchy* or *laissez-faire* prevails (the end of organization).

This essay is devoted to the theoretical and conceptual exploration of what the political organisation of difference means, what are its key concepts and to some suggestions how national cases can be analysed and evaluated empirically. Our aim is not to provide the reader with a sophisticated theory on the political organization of difference but rather to offer analytical tools for empirical analysis of modern Western societies. The main objective is to mark out the limits of the political organization of difference and to demonstrate the main components and fields of action. In the end, some illustrations are made by referring to the political organization of difference in Finland.

Political, Economic and Cultural Differences

The political organisation of political, economic and cultural differences has always been a principal task in any society. A society is a territorially demarcated large social unit which demands developed power structures in order to function as a whole. These power structures, in turn, mean that even in a democratic society, there are *political differences* between those who have a better access to power positions and those who lack full power resources. Furthermore, societies contain *economic differences* between those who have control over the means of production and who are well-off in a more general sense and those who are without or wanting material resources and welfare. Finally, societies are *culturally heterogenous* because it is practically unavoidable for a society not to contain any cultural cleavages whether they are defined linguistically, religiously, or in a sociological-anthropological sense as values, norms, habits or ideals.

The differences within a society can be assumed to become politically relevant when they are socially organized. The social organization of difference takes place when relatively stable and permanent social groups and categories are being formed on the basis of differences which unite the members of the group or category and distinguish them from others. In other words, the political organization of difference becomes necessary when social and collective identities are constituted on differences in politics, economy or culture.

A *society* is thus an internally heterogeneous social unit, in contrast to *communities* which can be considered as (relatively) homogeneous groups. Here we are following John Rawls, for whom a community is characterized by comprehensive views, conceptions of “the good life”, whereas a society is by definition diverse (Rawls 1993; cf. Margalit 1998). From this point of view, it is important to point out that many local settings often referred to as “communities” are in fact societies because of their inherent multicultural character, complex system of administration and advanced division of labour. London is definitely a society whereas Iceland could be considered a community. The so-called international community is, needless to say, a *contradictio in terminis*.

Furthermore, the differences within a society can be divided between major and minor ones. *Major political differences* mean, in an extreme case, that an individual, a group or a social category has absolute power to decide on public matters whereas the rest of population lacks all public power. We can, however, think ourselves major political differences also in a less polarized system. This can be the case, for example, if the power relations within a society are clearly biased and if the ruled are not able to change the rulers without overthrowing the whole political system. A democracy, in turn, is a political system which is supposed to contain only *minor political differences*. That is, the political decision-makers are restricted by the rule of law, the limits of public power are constitutionally defined and the ruled have an opportunity to replace the rulers in free and genuine elections. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to consider public power as equally divided among all citizens even in a democracy. Furthermore, the distance in terms of power between the rulers and the ruled can increase or decrease as a result of domestic or international development or of intentional action or unintended consequences.

Major economic differences can be imagined to exist especially in circumstances where the means of production are very centralized or if some social groups or categories are excluded from the right to own the means of production. No doubt, the distribution of wealth in a society can also be characterized as producing major differences if some members of the society are immensely rich whereas some others are living in poverty or even in starvation without any hope

for the better. Again, in modern Western societies, the economic differences are expected to be *of the minor type*: everyone has the right to own capital and means of production, the freedom to decide what she or he does with his/her material and economic resources and the opportunity for social mobility upwards on the social-economic ladder. Nevertheless, the differences, i.e. social-economic inequalities are ubiquitous, and the economic relations differ both from country to country and from time to time.

The same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for cultural differences, even though a bit more specification is necessary here. *Linguistically*, major differences exist when people cannot communicate verbally with each other, whereas minor differences can be observed between dialects and languages close to each other. *In terms of religion and morals*, we can also speak of major differences between religions where the concept of God or the conception of the good life are clearly different, as is, for example, between Christian and Hindu religions. Minor differences then exist between denominations within the same religion as between the Catholic and the Protestant Christianity or between Shiite and Sunnite Muslims. Certainly, the demarcation lines between major and minor differences are always difficult to draw, and probably nowhere is this more apparent than when culture is at stake. Nevertheless, the division is practical as an analytical device.

All sources of social difference can contribute to the production of *social inequality*. This is most obvious in the fields of political and economic difference, albeit it is possible to think that a difference does not yet mean serious structural inequality, for example, if the differences are small enough or if the positions can turn over in a reasonable time. On the other hand, even cultural differences can produce inequality. This is the case, firstly, if the system of meanings within a culture contains conceptions which put members of one cultural community clearly in favour of another causing, for example, humiliation or other social mistreatment on grounds of ethnic or cultural difference.

The second point is probably even more relevant for our purposes. Cultural differences form a part of structural inequality when cultural categories coincide with political and/or economic difference, thus producing a stratified society. In extreme cases, there can be a culturally unified power elite which differs from the rest of population po-

lity, economically and culturally or there can be cultural minorities which are politically marginalised and socioeconomically deprived.

In principle, we may suppose that major differences are more likely to produce inequality and, in turn, social instability and political tensions rather than minor ones but, in practice, the relationship is not quite as clear. Especially when considering cultural differences, history provides us with lots of cases where fine differences have led to strong commitment among members and persistent confrontations between adversaries. In addition to the above mentioned mutual links between various dimensions of difference and the specific characteristics in local settings and histories, the subjective perception and judgment also have to be taken into account. Thus, inequalities indeed exist if people perceive it so, to paraphrase W.I. Thomas, irrespective of if the differences in wealth, for instance, could be considered as minor ones in a larger international comparison.

The Levels and Dimensions of the Political Organization of Difference

As mentioned above, the political organization of difference can be considered as one of the main tasks in any society. It has indeed been one of the classical questions in political theory, at least from Plato onwards: how to manage and control the social problems, tensions and conflicts which arise from the fact that some have more power than others, some are more prosperous than others and not everyone understands each other or otherwise does not belong to the same ethnic or national community.

Therefore, any large and internally divided human group has to solve, one way or another, which structures of difference and their manifestations are tolerated, which are favoured or supported and which are restricted or prohibited and how the problems, tensions and conflicts that emanate from structural differences are negotiated or otherwise managed. The history of political thought is full of different, more radical or more moderate proposals about how to organize diversity and plurality and political history is, in turn, full of examples about how these ideas have been put into practice.

The range of possibilities in the political organization of difference reaches from utopian and revolutionary forms of political theory and practice (like the communist, national socialist and religious fundamentalist ideological literature and totalitarian political systems) through more moderate means and objectives in modern Western circumstances (like the ideas on liberal democracy or multiculturalism or the construction of a Nordic welfare state, the Swiss and Belgian federal systems and the decision upon the British devolution) and to piecemeal or incrementalist policies to increase or decrease popular participation in political decision-making, to strive for social equality, to organize the relations between cultural groupings or to relieve restrictions upon immigration, just to mention a few.

Even though state institutions have been put at the centre of the political organization of difference, an exclusively state-centred institutional analysis would not produce a sufficient picture of the situation within the society as a whole. We shall here enlarge the focus by adding the *collective and individual levels of political action* in order to take the civil society and the citizens' relationship to the state into account. In a representative democracy, political leadership is at least partly determined by democratic elections where citizens have a chance to change the rulers. Political activity is, in turn, for the most part channelled into the so-called political forces: parties, trade organizations, market forces, the media and many kinds of voluntary organizations which play a role in the political organization of difference.

Furthermore, we shall complement *the traditional focus* on political processes within political institutions by paying attention to the *symbolic dimension* of organization of difference within a society (cf. Cohen 1985). The notion of a society that political decision-making is based on cannot be taken for granted as knowledge shared without objection by everyone. In fact, ideas on the nature of the society, on its internal structure, its external differentiation and its history, in short, on its identity, are always contested even in the most consensual society.

Nor are these notions invariable, but in a constant process of reproduction. This reproduction takes place in the form of a wide range of textual and visual representations of the social reality ranging from literature to documentary films and scientific reports. In the symbolic representation of a society, reality is always being fabricated: one makes choices what to present and how, one makes interpretations, com-

ments, explains, evaluates and so on. It is this imperfect, man-made nature of representation that gives the symbolic dimension in the organization of difference a clear political function (cf. Leerssen 1991).

In the formation of a collective identity, there is also power involved, for example, in the setting of criteria for who belongs to the group (inclusion/exclusion) and who does not, in the production of structures of expectations concerning normality and traditionality and in the constitution of grounds and arguments for social hierarchy. All these, in turn, get extra strength in the context of a society from the connection with state institutions. (Cf. Anttonen 1996.)

As a result, the political organization of difference can be considered as taking place on six fields: on two dimensions, traditional and symbolic, each divided into three levels (Table 1). Firstly, on the *systemic or macro level* (Field 1), the political institutions of the state affect the structures of difference by legislation, through the distribution of resources and through targeted administrative, economic or cultural policies. Secondly, on the *collective or meso level* (Field 2), the political forces within the civil society (parties, interest organizations, NGO's, media) reflect the structures of difference and also as social actors aim at influencing the structures of difference and the state policies. Thirdly, on the *individual or micro level* (Field 3), the political culture consists of orientations towards and predispositions to (conceptions, values, attitudes and ideals) the structures of difference and the political organization of difference (cf. Kavanagh 1972).

The fourth, fifth and sixth fields of the political organization of difference belong to the *symbolic* (or cultural) activity which can be conceptually situated under the denominator of a *nation-state identity* (cf. Saukkonen 1999). The nation-state identity is here understood as a system of meanings which makes a state a nation-state, reflecting both the structural basis of a society and the hopes and expectations concerning the social structure. On the *systemic or macro level*, the nation-state identity is represented by the state identity and its institutional production under the auspices of state authorities (Field 4). Furthermore, the identity of the nation as a social group and the various conceptions of the nation within the civil society are located on the *collective or meso level* (Field 5). Finally, the identification of an individual to his/her nation and state coincides with the *micro level of individual thinking and doing* (Field 6).

	Traditional dimension	Symbolic dimension
Systemic level	<p>Field 1. State institutions – create, maintain and change the social structures of difference and their reciprocal relations through legislation, targeted policies and the distribution of economic resources.</p>	<p>Field 4. Identity of the state – reflects the structures of difference and the values, attitudes and ideals concerning those structures in representations of the state, nation and society produced, subsidized or authorized by the state.</p>
Collective level	<p>Field 2. Political forces of the civil society – reflect the structures of difference and try to affect those structures – both react to the political organization of difference by the state institutions and respond to the hopes, expectations and claims from the grassroots level.</p>	<p>Field 5. Identity of the nation – contains conceptions and descriptions of the national (or ethnic) community and its relation to the state produced directly or indirectly by the collective actors in the civil society: e.g. political parties, voluntary associations, cultural communities.</p>
Individual level	<p>Field 3. Political culture – contains orientations towards and predispositions to the structures of difference and the political organization of difference by state authorities and civil society actors.</p>	<p>Field 6. Individual's national identification – contains cognitive, affective and evaluative relations between the individual and the national community (nation) and the political unit (state).</p>

Table 1. The dimensions, levels and fields of the political organisation of difference

We can also supplement the conceptualization by understanding it as a political system. In practice, the political organization of difference consists of a chain of events and actions, in which individual, collective and institutional actors react to the prevailing structural conditions, changes in those conditions and activities on the same or other fields of levels of the society. Furthermore, on the whole we can assume that the political organization of difference within a society is partly determined by the relations to the most relevant external actors like neighbouring states, and, in turn, changes in those relations or in the whole international system affect the political organization of difference within a society.

In the case of a Western nation-state, the state institutions can be thought of as organizing plurality from a top-down perspective with intentional objectives and using the repertoire of political instruments to execute political plans and programs (“outputs”). The individual-based political culture, in turn, produces “bottom-up” hopes, demands, claims and expectations (“inputs”), which find their direct expression in the electoral process when citizens have a chance to choose on the political market between different conceptions of reality and action proposals for the future.

Political parties have a prominent role in this process as an intermediary level between the state and the citizens functioning both upwards and downwards. Nevertheless, various other organizations, associations, corporations, social networks, media and public mass events are also important in the political organization of difference. These collective actors and events receive and compile claims and expectations from below and articulate them to the state level. Conversely, they filter and sometimes even execute political decisions at the basic level of social life.

Outline of the Historical Development

As mentioned above, the political organization of difference can be considered as a classic problem in social and political theory. We shall now briefly pay attention to the development of structures of difference within the Western European states and to the political thinking related to that development.

The political-administrative system in *premodern Europe* consisted of numerous overlapping authorities and regions without the juridical conceptions of territorial governance, sovereignty or citizenship in the contemporary meaning. The political entities lacked clear borders and the arrival and departure of people was practically unhindered – even though in practice mobility among lay people was scarce with the exception of migration waves due to catastrophes like famine or the settlement policies by the ruler. Latin was the lingua franca among the educated class irrespective of their place of origin or nationality. Social status was based on a divine order which dictated for everybody his and her place and role and rights and duties in the totality. Catholic Christianity was the only accepted religion, heretics were persecuted and heathens were converted.

This complex but still relatively stable system started to crumble in Western Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. Simultaneously, the modern notion of a state as a territorially defined public space began to emerge with Thomas Hobbes as the most prominent political philosopher. The rulers tried to incorporate their possessions and to extend their authority to the whole territory and the people inhabiting it.

The notion of *territoriality* began to emphasize contiguity, effective authority, defined limits and public space. Furthermore, the territory started to gain sanctity which it had previously lacked whereas the divine basis of political rule gave way to more rationalistic and secular argumentation of the sources and foundations of social hierarchy and political power. The territorial definition of a state also brought about the modern concept of citizenship, because, thanks to borders and the notion of nationality, those who belonged to the state and to the ruler could now be much more effectively separated from those who did not. Economic development brought about the rise of the bourgeoisie as a social class which, in turn, increased the attention paid to civic rights and duties, economic relations and political liberties. In political philosophy, most apparently in Locke, this showed itself as a quest for the optimal political system to guarantee the greatest possible freedom for individuals to pursue their interests and to protect them from the harm caused by mutual competition.

The development of a territorially organized national state thus increased the relevance of the political organization of difference because the population under political rule became more precisely defined than previously was the case and because the bulk of population grew in importance economically and militarily.

A third element which also reached new heights in the modern era was the increase in cultural difference as the *Reformation* destroyed the unchallenged supremacy and unity of the Catholic church and also brought about the rise of vernacular languages as the main media of communication instead of Latin as a *lingua franca* in Protestant regions. The Augsburg Treaty (1555) declared the ruler had the right to decide upon religious freedom or its absence in his territory (*cuius regio, eius religio*) which also means that the emphasis of the political organization of religious difference shifted from the church to the secular government.

Nationalism, in turn, stressed the importance of cultural, especially linguistic unity. In the established states, nationalism mainly took the form of a top-down (*staatsnationaal*) ideology which strengthened the relationship between the citizens and the dominant national culture of the state through education and other media, with history, geography, linguistics and the arts at its core. This process was assisted by the overall modernization of societies which increased mobility within the national territory thanks to new vehicles as the train; the knowledge and consciousness of the nation as a social entity thanks to such modern media as the newspaper and consolidated the state-individual relation thanks to systematic taxation of property and income and a conscripted army. Contrary to that state-led nationalism, for the state-seeking nationalism which aspired for the establishment of an independent state, the nation-to-come had to be defined. This definition was usually made on the grounds of language which also accentuated the need for cultural unity within a political unit thus producing a *volksnationaal* concept of the nation.

During the political turmoils related to the First World War, the Russian, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires collapsed almost simultaneously producing a large number of new states mainly in Central Europe. Since then, and especially when nationalism had been discredited as an ideology after the Second World War, most attention in political theory turned to the political and economic

dimensions of organizing difference. According to Sven-Erik Liedman (1977, 234), the political debate concentrated on two themes: on the organization of political life, that is, on the question of state form, and on the relationship between economic and social development. Instead of organizing a multitude of differences, politics seemed to be reduced to a rather limited range of issues and spheres of activity.

In spite of national variations, the Western European model of the political organization of difference seemed to have found a final solution. This solution combined the sovereignty of the people understood as representative democracy, the market economy together with advanced social security arrangements and the national state, supplemented with the protection of minorities.

For some, the development seemed to make political imagination superfluous. Daniel Bell's *End of Ideology* was published as early as in 1960 and the years to come witnessed a lot of books analysing political life after the Utopia. When the state-socialist system collapsed after the newest European *annus mirabilis*, in 1989, the victory of liberal democracy seemed final and global. In 1992, Francis Fukuyama presented his thesis on the end of history understood as the end of ideological conflict, as a remarkable consensus had developed in the world concerning the legitimacy and viability of liberal democracy which remains, along with market principles, the only truly world historically significant course of development.

The last few years have, however, activated the classical questions anew. The reality is full of new problems which seem to need urgent solutions. Politically, the emergence of supranational institutions, with the European Union as the primary example, has generated political reorganization in the post-state context where decision-making has shifted both upwards and downwards from the more or less democratically ruled national institutions. Economically, the neoliberal reforms in the 1980's and 1990's have altered the relationship between politics and economy, and the economic inequality between the rich and the poor has increased as well as the consciousness of this inequality which manifests itself both on the global scale and on the local scale in European cities and heartlands. The literature dealing with these issues seems to be blooming, witnessing that at least until now intellectual life does not resemble that self-satisfied "dog's life" which Fukuyama had envisioned.

From the point of view of the political organization of difference, however, the most essential change has been the return of culture and identity to the focus of political considerations. There are many reasons for this of which suffice it to mention the general fragmentation and individualisation of post-industrial societies, the demands of traditional minorities for more recognition, autonomy and resources, the new immigrant communities as a result of guest workers' permanent residence and the seemingly uncontrollable migrations of refugees.

Some authors have even proposed that culture, instead of politics or economy, will be the main source of social conflict in the future. According to the much debated thesis of Samuel P. Huntington (1993, 22), "the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural". Even though his main ideas have been quite efficiently rejected as overly simplistic, he has also been credited for paving the way for the development of a more sophisticated and politically sensitive cultural analysis (cf. Heiskanen 2000a; 2000b).

In our approach, culture will be taken seriously as a factor influencing social and political life but not as an inevitable source of problems and conflicts. As the starting point of the analysis is that all modern societies are unavoidably multi-cultural by nature, it would be futile, indeed very pessimistic, to see culture in that light only – quite as useless as the notion of cultural pluralism as an exclusively positive feature. We stress the importance of analysing more carefully the cultural structures of difference and the political organization of those structures in different national settings in order to draw lessons of good practice as well as of bad experiences. More specifically, attention should be paid to the transition from difference to inequality and particularly to the cases where cultural cleavages are being reinforced by political and economic divisions. In this essay, we have endeavoured at developing a modest conceptual tool kit for empirical analyses. This project will now be continued below.

Descriptive and Evaluative Analysis

The concepts presented above (the dimensions, levels and fields of the political organization of difference) make a systematic descriptive analysis of different national cases possible. The analysis can, for example, start by focussing on the examination of the existing structures of difference and their historical development. Secondly, the relations between political, economic and cultural differences can be more carefully analysed. Thirdly, the analysis can be focused on the above mentioned six fields of the political organization of difference and the relationship between different fields. (Cf. McRae 1984; 1986; 1999.)

This stepwise analysis of national cases enables comparative studies between states and also examinations of the pressures generated by new challenges to traditional forms of the political organization of difference. All national models are historically and culturally developed under specific conditions and over a long period of time. No two countries are alike in terms of social structures and political institutions even within the relatively homogenous category of Western democracies. Therefore, it can be expected that there exists a diversity of national experiences and that nations are unevenly equipped to face new tasks and challenges. Furthermore, it needs to be accentuated that it is difficult to imagine a theoretical model which would consist of positive features and consequences only and which could be exported and applied to other societies without much adjustment.

In sum, descriptive analyses on the political organization of difference, especially in a comparative setting, can be imagined to produce valuable information for contemporary discourses on historical nation-building and the emergence of the multicultural society, for example. However, our analysis also strives at reaching an evaluative level by pointing out the most important advantages and disadvantages in the national models (cf. Kymlicka & Norman 2000, 15). Below, we shall present some conceptual instruments for the evaluation of the political organization of difference. These should nevertheless be considered only as preliminary findings of a research just started rather than as final achievements.

On a very general level, we can agree with Colin H. Williams (1998, 207) who has defined the watchwords of open society as redistributive social justice, participatory democracy and mutual tolerance. This definition is not, however, very practical for comparative empirical purposes. On the one hand, it is still too vague and would require much conceptual elaboration. On the other hand, it can be easily taken as a remote ideal, but none of the historical or contemporary national cases fulfill its criteria in a strict sense.

Here, we shall apply another approach which focuses on the negative side-effects or consequences of the political organization of difference rather than on the positive outcomes – without renouncing the basic idea that all models have at least some favourable implications for some members of the society. It is, nevertheless, easy to agree with Avishai Margalit (1998, 4) who has said that: "... there is a weighty asymmetry between eradicating evil and promoting good. It is much more urgent to remove painful evils than to create enjoyable benefits."

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that in the case of complex contemporary societies, a single-minded aspiration for some theoretical ideal only could be fatal for another field of activity or even for the foundation for the existence or functioning of the society. The political organization of difference is, as any politics, essentially like sailing between Scylla and Charybdis. A modern state should be able to maintain and enhance, in political terms, democratic participation while sustaining effectively functioning decision-making institutions. In economic terms, it should avoid both strident social injustice and the loss of competitive productivity. And culturally, while the human suffering that derives from intolerance and persecution should, of course, be evaded, the lack of social cohesion and solidarity may in some circumstances form a real threat for the society.

We can divide the evaluative focus into three specific target areas: pain spots, problem areas and internal tensions (Table 2). With *pain spots* we mean the situation where two or more dimensions of difference become entangled, and particularly when the result is some kind of a cultural division of labour or politics. In an extreme case at the top-level, the pain spot may contain a Marxist "*ruling class*" or a Millsian "*power elite*" when a political or economic elite can be con-

sidered as culturally or ethnically homogeneous and excluding large parts of the society. At the bottom-level, the pain spot may consist of a “*fourth world*” within a society, in an extreme case of a group or groups which are politically marginalised, economically pauperized and culturally isolated and despised.

With *problem areas* we mean the difficulties the society is facing in the political organization of one or more dimensions of difference, either political, economic or cultural. Firstly, there might be political problems which in the one extreme manifest as a *participation deficit* when a smaller or larger amount of the members of the society are voluntarily or involuntarily excluded from political participation, and in the other extreme as a *functional deficit* when the decision-making capacity of the political system becomes endangered because of over-participation and the lack or disability of coordinating power. Secondly, there might be economic problems which in the one end contain an *equality deficit*: great inequalities between the prosperous and the poor, and in the other end, an *efficiency deficit*: weak economic productivity because of the absence of personal and collective incentives to improve one’s situation. Thirdly, there might be cultural problems which, on the one hand, can be characterized as an *inclusion deficit* when one or more ethnic or cultural groups are not practically recognized as full members of a society, and on the other hand, as a *cohesion deficit* when the pursuit for autonomy among the members of cultural communities is greater than their solidarity towards the society as a whole.

With *internal tensions* we are referring to the imbalance or lack of congruence between the societal areas of the political organization of difference, i.e. between the state institutions, the civil society, the political culture and the nation-state identity. An imbalance may in principle occur in several forms, of which here it suffices to mention three examples which can be considered as most important in modern Western societies. Firstly, we can speak of a *symbolic problem* if the political organization of difference otherwise functions in a satisfactory manner but the nation-state identity is culturally exclusive. This tension easily produces a dual citizenship: the formal one which is attained through the judicial process and the symbolic one which is much more difficult to reach if one does not belong to one or more of the ethnic or cultural communities which are counted as corner-

stones of the national identity. Strange as it might seem, the contrary is also possible. The concept of the nation and notions of national identity may emphasize tolerance and openness while the criteria for official citizenship can be relatively restrictive.

Secondly, a *representation problem* appears when the civil society does not properly reflect the structures of difference within a society or the claims and expectations existing in the political culture. Because democracy in Western countries mainly works through organized representation, groups and communities which are not represented easily get marginalised from the political decision-making process. A representation problem is likely to have two special manifestations in contemporary societies. On the one hand, the move towards the ideological middle among the established parties during the last decades has meant that many citizens, probably those who would prefer more radical solutions to social problems in particular, do not find an advocate to promote their ideas in the political system. On the other hand, it always takes time before new immigrant communities are mobilized and find their own organizational forms through which to participate in the political system.

Finally, we can speak of a *systemic problem*, when the political organization of difference at the state level clearly deviates from the ideas, opinions, conceptions etc. prevailing in the civil society and in the political culture. This can probably be the case especially in national contexts where a distance between the political elite and the rest of the society has grown for one reason or another. Seen from a slightly different point of view, it can also be a result of the political elite acting to conform with supranational or international trends, expectations or obligations which are not in harmony with the domestic political will among the electorate.

The Political Organization of Difference in Finland

By way of conclusion, we can illustrate the theoretical and conceptual considerations above by making some remarks on the political organization of difference in Finland.² The historical development

of Finland has been, approached from the political organization of difference perspective, quite interesting in its combinations of continuity and change and cooperation and conflict. In the mid-19th century Finland was still an economically backward estate society with a stratified power-elite which occupied high positions in the state administration and was united by the Swedish language, nobility status, wealth and even family ties.

Through the Civil War in 1918, the language dispute in the 1920's, the crisis of democracy around 1930, the consequences of the Second World War and the rehabilitation of a strong communist movement, the country has become a post-industrial or an information society and a democratic welfare-state with strikingly stable political institutions. According to Max Jakobson (1999, 159), Finland has emerged as a winner from the ordeals of the past 100 years and is "a homogeneous, well-functioning, orderly society, with a civil service that overall is competent and efficient".

Before going to the Finland in 21st century, we shall take a glance to Finland in the mid-1980's. The Finland of that time can be characterized as a "consensus-society". Consensus has normally been used to denote the mutual understanding concerning economic development between the state and the labour market organizations. In this context, consensus can be taken as a more encompassing term to refer to the widespread agreement in a society concerning the basic social, political and cultural structures of the society, the main objectives for future development and the basic means to achieve future goals. In the terms of Dennis Kavanagh (1987, quoted Praag 1993, 152), there was a high degree of both substantial consensus on the main lines of public policy, institutional consensus on the institutional characteristics of the political system and on the rules of the political game and procedural consensus on the way in which disputes and conflicts should be resolved.

Using the previous specification of the fields of the political organization of difference (Table 1), we can fill in the Finnish situation in the mid-1980's as follows (Table 2).

Table 2. The political organization of difference in Finland in the mid-1980's

<p>Field 1. State institutions Main ideologies and policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strong state, representative democracy, municipal autonomy and efforts to increase popular participation - regionally equal social and economic development, controlled construction of the Nordic welfare state - support for the national culture, recognition of the traditional minorities; gradual extension of cultural rights - restrictive immigration policy 	<p>Field 4. Identity of the state Basic components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finland as a neutral country between the East and the West politically, economically and culturally - a strong nation-state identity formed by a tight combination of the state, territory, linguistic community and historical origin - emphasis of internal homogeneity, external difference and historical continuity
<p>Field 2. Political forces Institutional features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a plural system based on the cleavages at the turn of the century - a solid system with small structural changes and stable popular support - consensus on moderate methods to develop Finnish society - radical movements small and marginal 	<p>Field 5. Identity of the nation Main conceptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the Fennoman conception of the nation and of the state as a cultural nation-state shared by the majority of Finnish-speaking political and civic organizations - most other conceptions (Swedish nation, Sami nation etc.) including themselves to the dominant discourse or not challenging it openly
<p>Field 3. Political culture Mass popular support for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the political system (albeit fall in electoral activity) - the social and economic system (market economy and welfare state) - the cultural structure and policies 	<p>Field 6. Individual's national identification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strong and positively valued national identification among the majority of the population (albeit criticism among the intellectual elite) - few expressions of identifications to other nations or countries

That consensus-Finland can also be evaluated by using the above-mentioned dimensions for analysis. Some positive features strike out. For example, the political system is remarkably stable and most political forces, in fact, all nation-wide relevant political actors accept the existing structures and institutions. That civic culture is relatively strong and enjoys popular participation on a high level, even though regarding voter turnout there is already a diminishing tendency since the mid-1960's as well as in party membership. Furthermore, there is a strong agreement on the positive sides of the Nordic welfare state and a widely accepted "super-ideology" to promote social, economic and regional equality. The status of larger traditional minorities, with the Swedish-speaking population in a special position, is legally guaranteed, and the attention paid to the improvement of the position of other minorities is slowly increasing.

However, there are also negative sides, the most striking of which could probably be characterized as a cultural problem area, an inclusion deficit to be more precise. Finland has a long and strong tradition of high esteem for national homogeneity and, in turn, of suspicion towards immigration and internal differences. The immigration policy of Finland had already traditionally been very restrictive, and by the mid 1980's the rules had not been much liberalized. Of the national minorities, the Sami and Roma populations were also still lacking full recognition and financial resources for cultural preservation and political participation. In fact, the situation of the Roma population in particular, could, in the Finnish standards of that time, even be defined as a "fourth world".

As a symbolic problem, one should also mention the strong position of the language-based conception of the Finnish nation, which together with the alleged common ethnic origin of the Finnish-speakers formed a symbolic core national community. This community of "true Finns" was difficult if not impossible to enter for outsiders. The political citizenship did not yet mean membership in the symbolic national community. Even the Swedish-speakers were not considered as being equal members of the nation by everyone.

In the last two decades Finland has changed a lot, probably more than ever before in peace time history in such a short period of time. This change has its origins both in external and internal development and includes, for example, the change in the international en-

vironment since the end of the Cold War, the partial constitutional reforms and the wholesale revision in 2000, the profound reform of public administration, economic liberalization and internationalization, the economic recession in the early 1990's, the rise of information technology, and increased immigration and worker mobility. No doubt, the period has also left its marks to the political organization of difference even though it is risky to give any final interpretations so soon. Nevertheless, some of the consequences for the Finnish political organization of difference can be presented in the table below (Table 3).

<p>State institutions Slow transformation of former ideologies: - pursuit for economic growth more prominent - increased toleration of differences.</p>	<p>Civil society - institutional actor structures unchanged - growth of internal tensions within parties - popular support and activity decreasing.</p>
<p>Nation-state identity - emergence of a more "European" and "future-oriented" nation-state identity in addition to the traditional identity.</p>	<p>Political culture - increased anti-party and anti-political sentiment - growing distance between supportive and resisting attitudes.</p>

Table 3. Changes in the political organization of difference in Finland since the mid-1980's

Basically, there have been no great changes. The continuity can partly be explained by the vocabularies of welfare society and traditional national identity which politicians go on using in spite of policy changes and adjustments. The direction, nevertheless, seems clear as do some tensions which the changes have produced. To overstate the issue a little, Finland is about to move from a country which tolerated hardly any differences to being a country which embraces or at least abides both political, economic and cultural diversity.

The development has also produced a kind of a dualism in many fields of the political organization of difference. As mentioned, in state politics and policies, there is an increased toleration of social,

economic and cultural differences while the welfare society and national unity are still highly valued. In the nation-state identity, the new forward-looking identity emphasizing European roots and culture has become prominent while some parts of the society still hold on tight to the traditional concept and content of national identity. In political attitudes and values, there is a segment which relatively strongly opposes changes in political ideologies and identity construction while others agree with the new objectives for societal development.

However, the field of civil society has remained mostly unaltered. This means, on the one hand, that the changes elsewhere in the political organization of difference have not been produced by demands from new political actors (parties, media etc.) but from the traditional players of the domestic political game. On the other hand, it means that for those critical of the shifts in focus, emphasis and identity there is yet no alternative political party or organization. This means that, at least for the time being the problems in the Finnish political organization of difference are mainly “representational” in nature in addition to the participation deficit which the low voter turnout, for example, imply.³ In the long run, these problems may have serious consequences for political legitimacy and social stability.

Notes

- 1 Due to space limitations, this article contains the necessary references only. For a more extensive version see Saukkonen 2003a, available from the author.
- 2 A more detailed presentation of this analysis can be found in Finnish in Saukkonen 2003b.
- 3 In the parliamentary elections 2003, there were two new parties with an obviously xenophobic programme which, however, did not get candidates into the Finnish Parliament. Nevertheless, a candidate on the list of the True Finns (Perussuomalaiset), Tony Halme, received after a strongly populist campaign 16 390 votes in Helsinki and received a seat in the Parliament.

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