

# Co-Operation in Welfare?

## Inter-Organizational Relationships between Church-Based Welfare Agents and the Welfare State at the Local Level in Norway and Finland

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The aim of this article is to study interrelationships between church-based welfare agents and the welfare state at the local level in Norway and Finland, and specifically the patterns of co-operation. The article addresses the significance of religion in welfare state theory and theoretical models of relations between the welfare state and the voluntary sector. Norway and Finland are characterized by the same category in Esping-Andersen's theory of welfare regimes and in Anheier's corresponding models of the voluntary sector in the welfare state. We found clear similarities in terms of relations between the public sector and church-based welfare agents at the local level in the Norwegian and Finnish cases. However, there were also striking differences. We argue that one of the reasons for the differences in the relations is religious differences between Norway and Finland, even though the Lutheran religious heritage is dominant in both countries. The findings in the article support those who claim that religion is a significant factor for the understanding of patterns of welfare state models in Europe.

**Keywords:** welfare state, welfare regime, religion, majority church, Lutheranism, social democracy, interorganisational relationships, Norway, Finland, voluntary sector.

### Introduction

The aim of this article is to study interrelationships between church-based welfare agents and the welfare state at the local level in Norway and Finland, patterns of co-operation and how the patterns, similarities and differences, may be understood and explained, particularly in terms of economic, political and religious conditions. Data for the article are based on empirical material from a European research project, Welfare and values in a European context, dealing with the role of majority churches in welfare provision (see paragraph on methods).

The Nordic countries are usually perceived as “state-friendly” societies in which government is viewed as a necessity and not an evil<sup>1</sup>. This is closely

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1 Kramer, R. M. (1992), ‘The Roles of Voluntary Service Organizations in Four European States: Policies and Trends in England, the Netherlands, Italy and Norway’, in P. Selle/S.

connected with Lutheran theology, especially the doctrine of the “two kingdoms” whereby God rules the world. The doctrine assigns responsibility for the provision of welfare benefits and services to the state. It has served as an ideological underpinning for the Nordic majority churches, as a common heritage, to be strong supporters of a comprehensive state welfare system<sup>2</sup>. The role of the voluntary sector is not built into the models of such significant welfare state theorists as Titmuss<sup>3</sup> and Esping-Andersen<sup>4</sup>. State-friendliness usually involves the expectation that the voluntary sector will be of little importance, quantitatively speaking, in the provision of welfare services<sup>5</sup>. On the whole, the Nordic countries have a comprehensive voluntary sector and Nordic societies are among the most thoroughly organized in the world<sup>6</sup>, in combination with a strong welfare state system. On the other hand, research shows that the significance of the health and social sector within the voluntary sector as a whole is less than elsewhere in Europe, especially in Norway and Sweden<sup>7</sup>. Anheier claims that in a type of welfare state like the Nordic, the voluntary sector performs another function than in other types of welfare state with less extensive state involvement in material and social welfare, “as a very substantial network of volunteer-based advocacy, recreational and hobby organizations”<sup>8</sup>. The research literature does not associate the relative contribution of the voluntary sector with the proclivity of the voluntary and the public sector to co-operate in matters of welfare,

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Kuhnle (ed.), *Government and Voluntary Organizations: A Relational Perspective*, Aldershot: Avebury.

- 2 Martin, D. (1978), *A General Theory of Secularization*, Oxford.
- 3 Titmuss, R. M. (1974), *Social Policy: An Introduction*, London.
- 4 Esping-Andersen, G. (1990), *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Cambridge.
- 5 Kuhnle, S./Selle, P. (1992), ‘Government and Voluntary Organizations: A Relational Perspective’, in S. Kuhnle/P. Selle (ed.), *Government and Voluntary Organizations: A Relational Perspective*, Aldershot: Avebury; Lundström, T./Svedberg, L. (2003), *The Voluntary Sector in a Social Democratic Welfare State – the Case of Sweden*, *Journal of social policy*, 32, 217 – 238; Salamon, L. M./Anheier, H. K. (1998), *Social Origins of Civil Society: Explaining the Nonprofit Sector Cross-Nationally*, *Voluntas*, 9, 213 – 248; Sivesind, K. H./Selle, P. (2004), *Is There a Social Democratic Civil Society Regime in the Welfare Field?* *International Society for Third-Sector Research Conference*, 11 – 14 July 2004, Toronto; Weisbrod, B. A. (1977), *The Voluntary Nonprofit Sector: An Economic Analysis*, Lexington, Mass
- 6 Henriksen, L. S. (1996), *Lokal frivillig organisering i nye omgivelser*, Aalborg: ALFUFF, 66; Selle, P./Øymyr, B. (1995), *Frivillig organisering og demokrati: det frivillige organisasjonssamfunnet endrer seg 1940 – 1990*, Oslo, 53.
- 7 Helander, V./Sivesind, K. H. (2001), ‘Frivilligsektorns betydelse i Norden’, in L. Skov Henriksen/B. Ibsen (ed.), *Frivillighedens udfordringer: nordisk forskning om frivilligt arbejde og frivillige organisationer*, Odense; Sivesind/Selle: 2004
- 8 Anheier, H. K. (2004) ‘Third Sector – Third Way: Comparative Perspectives and Policy Reflections’, in J. Lewis/R. Surender (ed.), *Welfare State Change: Towards a Third Way?* Oxford, 124.

perhaps because no simple relationship between relative size and degree of co-operation is to be expected.

As faith-based welfare agents, church-based actors may deserve special attention. The secular welfare state has in some periods been sceptical about voluntary welfare agency in general, and faith-based activities in particular<sup>9</sup>. This attitude reflected a traditional general scepticism in the social-democratic movement towards the church, especially the institutionalized majority church, as well as a widespread ideology of value neutrality inherent in the ideology of the social democratic welfare state with a corresponding critical attitude to welfare agents that based their agency on a religious ideology<sup>10</sup>.

Contemporary welfare state theory has been little interested in the significance of religion. Philip Manow<sup>11</sup> is among those who have criticized Esping-Andersen for neglecting the religious dimension in his theoretical work. Manow has shown that religion is significant in accounting for differences connected with Esping-Andersen's three types of welfare regime. In addition to the Catholic – Protestant dimension he introduces a distinction within Protestantism, the difference between Lutheranism and reformed Protestantism and its significance for understanding welfare state development in Europe. Manow gives less attention to Lutheranism and the social democratic welfare state model than the other welfare regimes in Esping-Andersen's typology. In this article, studying the role of religion in welfare relations in two countries where the Lutheran tradition is dominant, we will relate the "religious factor" to general welfare state theory within our particular Nordic context.

## Theoretical Framework

Relations between church and state may be of different kinds, some involving direct communication between agents, others not. There are several ways in which voluntary agents may be integrated with the public sector. What we may call formal integration, the public legal regulation of voluntary

9 See e.g. Seip, A.-L. (1983), 'Omsorgsansvar og samfunn – et historisk tilbakeblikk', *Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning*, 24, 107 – 122.

10 See e.g. Angell, O. H. (1994), *Misjon eller terapi i rusmiddelomsorga? Tradisjon og modernitet i religiøse behandlingstilstander*, Oslo; Angell, O. H. (2007), 'Church-Based Welfare and Public Religion', *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, 20, 179 – 193; Midttun, J. (1995), *Sosialdemokrati og Folkekirke: Det norske arbeiderpartis forhold til kirke og religion*, Oslo: Norges forskningsråd.

11 Manow, P. (2002), "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly": Esping-Andersens Sozialstaats-Typologie Und Die Konfessionellen Wurzeln Des Westlichen Wohlfahrtsstaats, *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 54, 203 – 225.

sector activities, does not necessarily involve direct interaction between the parties<sup>12</sup>.

Modes of interaction between organizations may be classified in different ways, not all of which would reasonably be categorized as co-operation. One way of classifying interorganizational relationships by level of interaction and commitment may be the following<sup>13</sup>:

- One-way information
- Mutual information
- Dialogue – communication about and discussions on issues important to the parties
- Mutual influence and participation in decision-making
- Commitment of the parties to long-term contract-based interaction.

The first two categories may simply be called loose forms of contact, since they may involve sporadic or more regular interaction. The last three may be called modes of co-operation, or weak and strong forms of “working together”.

Kuhnle and Selle’s typology of relationships between government and voluntary welfare service organizations<sup>14</sup> has inspired voluntary agency research in Scandinavia<sup>15</sup>. The typology rests on the introduction of two analytical dimensions, one related to how close contacts and communication are between voluntary organizations and the state, the other to the degree to which the organizations are dependent on the state in terms of funding and control. In our context the dependence dimension is interesting because it directs attention to the extent of the power aspect of the relations between the state or public agents, and the church-based agents. The nearness-distance dimension makes the interaction aspect topical. On the basis of the two dimensions, a typology of four categories may be constructed as shown in the Figure 1 below.

Kuhnle and Selle make the point that in the definition of the dependence dimension, the inclusion of both financing and control aspects is problematic<sup>16</sup>. The typology does not capture the more diverse practical situations in which degrees of public financing and control do not correlate. To associate nearness with the term integration (though only the verb form is used in the typology) may be confusing. “Integration” is often used in

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12 Cf. Anheier, H. K. (2005), *Nonprofit Organizations: Theory, Management, Policy*, London, 283 ff.

13 Cf. Nordahl, T. (2007), *Hjem og skole: hvordan skape et bedre samarbeid?*, Oslo.

14 Kuhnle, S./Selle, P. (1990b), ‘Meeting Needs in a Welfare State: Relations between Government and Voluntary Organizations in Norway’, in A. Ware/R. E. Goodin (ed.), *Needs and Welfare*, London; Kuhnle/Selle: 1992

15 See e.g. Henriksen: 1996

16 Kuhnle/Selle: 1992, 29, 31

connection with dependence in the sense Kuhnle and Selle specify the term, though not restricted to financing and (formal) control<sup>17</sup>. The terms “integrated dependence”, and especially “integrated autonomy”, may thus have other connotations – the latter may even be a bit confusing as a term – than those intended by the authors. In this paper we will apply Kuhnle and Selles’s analytic dimensions, but not their categories characterizing the relations.

Figure 1. Relations between the Voluntary Sector and the State

|              | Nearness              | Distance            |
|--------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Dependence   | Integrated dependence | Separate dependence |
| Independence | Integrated autonomy   | Separate autonomy   |

Source: Kuhnle and Selle<sup>18</sup>.

As a next step we will introduce a framework for explaining the relations. In our case, why would the church want a functional relationship with the public sector and vice versa? Hall and Tolbert<sup>19</sup> distinguish three aspects of such relationships: environmental conditions, situational factors and reasons for the relationship to exist or be established. *Environmental characteristics* promoting, supporting or preventing co-operation may refer to technological, legal, political, economic, demographic, ecological, or cultural conditions. Cultural (ideological and political) conditions may relate to things like domain definitions and acceptance<sup>20</sup>. Domain refers to task differentiation between organizations in a particular field and more specifically the claims an organization makes “with respect to products and services provided and populations served”<sup>21</sup>. Generally, it is important for an organization that the members of its relevant organizational environment accept the organization’s domain definition. The domain issue may involve ideological considerations such as compatibility of goals, conformity in treatment ideologies, and compatibility in understanding the nature of the issues involved<sup>22</sup>. It may influence degree of mutual trust and legitimacy. A relevant

17 See e.g. Angell: 1994; Lorentzen, H. (1994), *Frivillighetens integrasjon: staten og de frivillige velferdsproducentene*, Oslo.

18 Kuhnle/Selle: 1992, 30

19 Hall, R. H./Tolbert, P. S. (2005), *Organizations: Structures, Processes, and Outcomes*, Upper Saddle River, N.J.

20 Cf. Knudsen, H. (2004) ‘Samarbeid på tvers av organisasjonsgrenser’, in P. Repstad (ed.), *Dugnadsånd og forsvarsverker: tverretattlig samarbeid i teori og praksis*, 2 ed., Oslo.

21 Scott, W. R. (2003), *Organizations: Rational, Natural, and Open Systems*, Upper Saddle River, N.J., 124.

22 Hall/Tolbert: 2005; Najam, A. (2000), *The Four C’s of Third Sector-Government Relations*, *Nonprofit management and leadership*, 10, 375 – 397.

*situational factor* is awareness, which means the organization's recognition of the organizational field around it and its representative's recognition of its interdependence with other organizations in the field.

In Norwegian legislation, a weak formulation of mandated relationship<sup>23</sup> between the public sector and voluntary organizations is found in the Act relating to social services<sup>24</sup>:

The social service *should* cooperate with user group organizations and with voluntary organizations, which are engaged in the same tasks as the social service.<sup>25</sup>

There is a parallel in the health service legislation, in the Act relating to the municipal health services<sup>26</sup>, but the mandatedness is weaker in the latter than in the former. In the first case, "should" means that the agency's judgement is not free. If the public agency chooses not to cooperate, the reasons should be stated. Alternatively, if parish-based welfare activities are perceived as part of the public sector, the mandated basis for co-operation between the parties is stronger, as both these acts require co-operation to take place. In Finnish legislation in general, there is no obligation to co-operate. However, municipal agents are obliged by the Social Welfare Act (1982/710) to co-operate with "those agents whose activities are involved with the municipal tasks in welfare". In addition, municipal agents are expected to "promote mutual co-operation among the local agents in welfare"<sup>27</sup>.

The majority churches in Norway and Finland are not like any other voluntary organizations in the two societies. This is especially true in Norway where the majority church is at the same time a state church. Both churches are main organizational expressions of the religious institution in society and may be perceived as more closely connected with the state than other organizations. As a consequence, the mandatedness referred to above may not be perceived as applying to agents that are part of the church organization, by the public authorities that are supposed to put the mandates into practice.

23 Cf. Anheier: 2005, 283

24 Sosialtjenesteloven (1991), Lov om sosiale tjenester m.v. av 13. desember 1991 Nr. 81, (section 3 – 3).

25 Italics by the authors.

26 Kommunehelsetjenesteloven (1982), Lov om helsetjenesten i kommunene av 19. november 1982, (section 1 – 4).

27 See Kallunki, V. (2008), Kunta-seurakuntayhteistyö kunnan näkökulmasta Kunnallistieteellinen aikakauskirja, Forthcoming.

## Methods and Material

The data source for this article is mainly a study on the role of majority churches in welfare provision in the European, “Welfare and Religion in a European Perspective” research project (WREP). The project was methodologically based on a case study of one medium-sized town in each of the eight participant countries in Europe. The basic approach of the project was sociological, focussing on the church as an organization with particular functions in society.

Data were collected on interactions and relationships between the public authorities and the majority church at the local level, as well as the corresponding party’s perception of and attitude to the other as an agent in the field of welfare. Information was collected in 2004–2005 mainly by interviewing representatives of the two parties (clergy at parish and deanery level, parish deacons, parish council leaders and leading administrative staff, organizational leaders; mid-level and top-level managers in the municipality and members of the municipal council) and representatives of the local people (focus group interviews). The selected locality in Finland was Lahti, in Norway, Drammen. The data include 117 interviews all in all: nine focus group interviews with local people (three in Norway, six in Finland) and 105 individual interviews, of which 26 were with local public authorities (14 in Norway, 12 in Finland) and 41 with church representatives (12 in Norway, 29 in Finland). Additionally, a survey (N=100) was conducted among the Lahti Parish Union personnel as part of the Finnish study.

## Findings

### The Norwegian Case – Dependence, Nearness and Distance, and Varying Degrees of Co-Operation

In Drammen, there are two main types of collective agents acting as church-based providers of welfare services, parishes and organizations and associations not formally linked to the parishes, examples of which are the Blue Cross and the YMCA/YWCA. Those that have welfare (social and health) work as one of their main goals are few. A common domain of activity may be characterized as social (re)integration.

To judge by how the parishes describe their own welfare activities, their orientation may be characterized as traditional. The activities most frequently mentioned are directed towards children, youth, and elderly people. Some activities are run by employed staff. In Drammen, this applies above all to kindergartens. Moreover, a deacon, usually a social worker or registered nurse, is the formal leader of the welfare work of the parishes. Most of the

activities are based on the involvement of volunteers, i. e., unpaid workers. Parish activities are financed by the parishes themselves; often in part through offerings and private donations.

The information provided by the interviewees, suggests that generally, there is little co-operation between the parishes and the public sector in the sense the concept is used in this article. Several interviewees representing parishes in Drammen report interrelationships in the form of one-way and mutual information. One of the few areas in which regular co-operation between church and public sector is institutionalized is in care for the bereaved ("*sorggrupper*"). A somewhat related space for co-operation is the municipal crisis team. Such teams are common at a municipal level around the country and the church is regularly represented in the team.<sup>28</sup> The crisis team is called on in cases of major accidents and comparable incidents in the community.

Another area of co-operation is care for the elderly. The extent to which the church and the municipality interact in Drammen varies among the parishes. In some, there is a tradition for the parish to co-operate with the municipal home-based care services, while in others no such tradition exists. The co-operation of the church is usually sought for religious reasons, for instance, when religious services are called for. It is sought for social reasons, because of the church's potential for mobilizing volunteers providing social contact with people who may otherwise tend to be socially isolated, and because the church provides spiritual guidance and, more generally, someone for people to talk with in times of grief and suffering. In addition to the institutionalized teamwork described, church-based agents have contacts with several public care facilities through their visiting services.

There seems to be little mutuality in the relationships. The relationships between parishes and the public authorities in some cases exemplify weak forms of co-operation, in other cases strong forms. In most cases contact between public sector and church-based agents seems to be initiated by the latter. One of the church-based interviewees stated, "it is sometimes a bit tiring to be the one who has to take all the initiatives".

In terms of Kuhnle and Selle's typology<sup>29</sup> the relations between the public sector and the parishes may be characterized by independence and varying degrees of nearness and distance. The general situation seems to show signs of little awareness among representatives of the public authorities of what the parishes do in terms of welfare activities. To the extent that relationships should be characterized as co-operation, they seem to be based mainly on

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28 For the situation at the national level, see Angell, O. H./Selbekk, A. S. (2005), *Kirke og helse: Kartlegging av diakonalt helsearbeid innen Den norske kirke*, Oslo.

29 Kuhnle/Selle: 1992

initiatives from the parishes, but also on the recognition and acceptance by the public authorities of the relevance of what the parishes have to offer.

The activities of the other church-based organizations are more varied. The two presented here exemplify somewhat different relations with the public sector. They are not meant to represent the whole variety of types of relations. Of the two organizations already mentioned, the Blue Cross<sup>30</sup> in Drammen comprises a membership organization and an in-patient treatment centre (owned by the membership organization). The running of the centre is funded by the state. The rehabilitation centre is integrated with the corresponding state-run undertakings as part of the rehabilitation services offered by the state at the regional level, and co-operates with the public sector through a formal agreement. Interrelations with public welfare agencies at the municipal level are also important and mandated. The co-operation, which has a long history, involves exchange of resources for a common purpose and is based on mutual respect and recognition (legitimacy).

Another church-based organization works in the same area of welfare, helping and supporting those who struggle with substance abuse problems, though more at the street level. Funding consists of grants from the municipality (close to 50 %), private donations and offerings. The interrelationship between the organization and the local public authorities is characterized in this way by its leader: "We have a good dialogue with parts of the municipal system". The relations involve various forms of partnership related to specific projects, and in some cases relationships are formalized. Although it receives a significant part of its income from the municipality, the organization is not subject to close control and regulation from the public sector. Other church-based organizations not part of the formal church organization are in a similar situation. The relationship with the public sector may be characterized as independent nearness. Exchange of resources for common purposes and forming a coalition for political purposes are for both parties reasons for co-operation<sup>31</sup>.

Public sector representatives in Drammen expressed no strong opinions on how the church should contribute to local welfare provision, but a centrally-placed public official criticized the church for being too oriented towards implementing its own ideas and too little interested in connecting it to the work done by the public sector.

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30 The Blue Cross is formally an interdenominational organization. Thus, strictly speaking it is not affiliated with the Church of Norway. Nevertheless, we include it in our case here because it exemplifies a type of religion-based organization and a relationship with the public sector that is common in the Church of Norway as well.

31 Angell, O. H. (2008), *From Market to State Networking: Strategies for Acquiring Public Legitimacy and Financial Resources in a Norwegian Voluntary Organization*, *Voluntas*, 19, 296–315.

If the church or church-based organizations came to us and said ‘We would like to do something’ it would be all right. What I find is that they will do what they have already decided for themselves. If they want money it must be to do what we think there is a need for. We cannot come up with money just like that. It seems difficult for them to understand.<sup>32</sup>

It is reasonable to see this statement as an expression of public sector rationality in a situation where the state holds a dominant position in welfare provision, but it may not be the most fertile ground for co-operation, as perceived by the church-based agents and agencies. The view expressed in the quotation is not representative of the views of the public authorities interviewed.

Another interviewee, a leading politician at the local level, described the co-operation between the public authorities and the voluntary sector, and church-based agents as part of it, and their roles in the following way:

Some of the tasks the municipality takes on are imposed by law. Of course, we have to carry out those tasks. But a municipality will limit its activities as much as possible to operate within the boundaries imposed by the financial resources. What the voluntary organizations do is to contribute where the municipality stops ... It is a question of co-operation. We discuss the problem with them [i.e., the voluntary organizations and other church-based agents] and say: ‘This is as far as we are able to go. Are you willing to add the little that remains?’ It happens today.

This view and the dialogue situation it refers to, was not reflected in the interviews with the representatives of the church-based agents and the public sector at the operational level. The reason may be that it refers to an intentional rather than the operative level, or, with a more suspicious perspective, that it only refers to what is considered socially and politically desirable. The two quotations express expectations on church-based agents in welfare provision in Drammen more clearly than usual in the interviews. They define the role of voluntary organizations and the church fulfilling complementary and supplementary functions in welfare provision, the municipality defining the terms.

There were few expectations of the church by the public representatives as to its contributions to providing welfare. This may reflect lack of knowledge and/or awareness of the work of the parishes on the part of the municipality. One of the public employees expressed it like this: “You feel that the church is a bit invisible [...] We know it’s there, but you don’t know what it has to offer if you have no knowledge of it.” One of the reasons supported by the data is lack of interest on the part of the public sector in co-operating with other types of welfare agents. It is striking that no traces of reference to the legal basis for co-operation between the public and the voluntary sector were

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32 All interview quotations in the article are translated by the authors.

found in the statements made by the interviewees. It seems to be beyond the notice of all agents and agencies, public as well as church-based.

A special challenge for the public sector and the church-based agents in their cooperative efforts is the religious or spiritual nature of the latter. One dividing line may be drawn between church-based agents integrated into public welfare schemes (dependency) and other more independent agents, typically, parish-based agents. The legal framework regulating the operations of the former – and the public funding of their service operations – restrict the scope for religious action in such organizations. Co-operation between the partners are sought primarily for social reasons, not religious. The religious character of the parish-based agents did not appear as an issue in the interviews with the local authorities. Other Norwegian research indicates that the issue may be handled informally and that the church-based agents adapt smoothly in their interrelations with the public sector<sup>33</sup>.

### The Finnish Case – Independence and Nearness, and Various Forms of Co-Operation

The Lahti parishes have a long tradition of engaging in social work, and in co-operation with the municipality. The core task of the parish union social work is to “promote Christian faith-based justice, participation, and neighbourly love in the lives of individuals and the society, as well as globally”. Like other congregations in Finland, the Lahti parishes were particularly active in their response to the harsh economic recession of the early 1990 s. At present, Lahti church social work includes activities ranging over various fields, such as mental health care and crisis work, material aid, as well as support and activities for the elderly, the unemployed, the handicapped, immigrants, and for intoxicant over-users and criminals. Lahti parish union employs 36 staff in social welfare activities. The main source of revenue for the Lahti parish union is taxes (both membership tax and community tax), and most income is spent on estates and property (15 %), administration, general parish work, and church social work (each 12 %)<sup>34</sup>.

Both survey and interview material illustrated the close-knit, active co-operative networks involving public and church-based agents in Lahti. There are various forms of contact ranging from informal person-to-person net-

33 Repstad, P. (ed.) (1998), *Den lokale velferdsblanding: når offentlige og frivillige skal samarbeide*, Oslo.

34 Lahden seurakuntayhtymä (2001), *Lahden seurakuntayhtymän toimintakertomus ja tilinpäätös: Tasekirja 2001*, Lahti; *Lahden Seurakuntayhtymä (2003), Lahden seurakuntayhtymä, katsaus vuoden 2003 toimintaan*, Lahti, <http://www.evl.fi/lahti/> (accessed 24.4 2004); *Lahden seurakuntayhtymä (2004), Diakonia – ja yhteiskuntatyön toimintakertomus 2004*, Lahti.

works to the “town-church forum” where the heads of both administration and welfare in the local church and municipality meet regularly, to co-operation related to particular tasks or activities and outsourcing service contracts (e.g., children’s after school clubs). Co-operation encompasses various activities; for instance, family counselling, organizing baby-sitters, crisis work, and support for criminals (e.g., prison visits). Both municipal and church representatives view these municipality-church networks positively, and as needed. The trend in recent years has been toward increasing co-operation. Both parties also underscore that in the joint projects the parties get to know each other much better which, in turn, lowers the barriers between them, and diminishes prejudices – it is a positive cycle.

The degree of the co-operation varies, however, especially with the profession of the church representatives. Such co-operation seems to be an integrated part of the work of clergy (including counselling in hospitals, family counselling and education), church social workers (diaconal workers), and education workers (such as youth workers). The co-operation varies also in content: for priests, it mostly involves sharing information and shared responsibility for education. Education workers mention “helping” as a typical form of co-operation (e.g., assisting a marginalized young person together with municipal social workers). Social workers have a variety of forms of interaction with the municipal representatives, particularly in helping the same clients and sharing information. All in all, to use the typology presented earlier (p. ), the forms of contact clearly illustrate mutual information and dialogue as the most common, and also to some extent commitment in long-term contract-based interaction.

What societal processes underlie this increase in co-operation in Lahti? Three factors can be identified from the data. First, the resource factor; co-operation is needed in order to meet the challenges to the welfare system. Interestingly, however, the co-operation was not depicted as having begun during the economic recession of the early 1990 s, but more recently, at the turn of the millennium. The interviewees, especially the church representatives, said that during the recession all welfare agents shared a spirit of competition. In their view, the municipality particularly still believed in its ability to undertake the full burden of local welfare during the recession. Another reason given to explain this delay was that during the recession the lack of welfare resources was so massive that everyone settled for less. The higher demands, resulting in the need for co-operation, have come only since the level of welfare has increased.

The second factor is the permeation of the idea of welfare pluralism in the form of a mixed economy of care, recognizing and mobilizing various welfare agents to manage welfare needs. The interviewees specifically mentioned EU-funded projects as having spurred co-operation between public and private/church-based welfare agents. The third factor, typically mentioned

by the local authorities, was the increased status of and trust in the church, based not least on experiences of the welfare work of the local church in the difficult times during the recession:

We have to have some control. If we cooperate with the church and the parishes we can generally say that we know the content, we know what we get. With all these volunteer organizations, ideological non-profit organizations, other churches, if you were to cooperate with them you should first find out more about them. The church is sort of in between the public and the third sector (Head of office, welfare and health).

Similarly, people interviewed affiliated with the church, who had experienced working in both church and other third sector contexts, noted that in the communication with the municipality its representatives took them more seriously when they represented the church. Thus, the picture appearing in the data is that the increasing and capable engagement of the local church in social work in Lahti has increased the municipal agencies' trust in the church. This situation is also reflected in various national-level statistics, both with political agents and with citizens. The church still seems to form part of what can be called "political power"; defence forces, police, church, justice systems are all highly trusted in Finland<sup>35</sup>.

Related to these notions of trust, interviewees interestingly often even talk about "our state church"; the church and the state, or municipality, seem still to be seen as partners even if no state church exists any longer. The interviewees considered that in co-operation networks the church of Finland does not need to gain public confidence like smaller associations might have to. Even if the link between the state and the church in Finland is more independent than it was – and more independent than in Norway – these findings show that the church is still respected and trusted by Finns.

Altogether the situation in Finland – and in Lahti – resembles a situation of independence and nearness<sup>36</sup> characterizing the relations between the state and the church in local welfare service provision; the parties are relatively close to each other with respect to contacts and communication, but basically financially and administratively independent. Financial independence may be explained by the relative affluence of the church. However, it must also be noted that the lack of resources in welfare and the heavy demand may actually impose co-operation, a relationship of mutual dependence, as expressed by the municipality representatives when they em-

35 Borg, S. (2007) 'Suomalaisten luottamus yhteiskunnallisiin instituutioihin', in S. Borg/K. Ketola/K. Kääriäinen/K. Niemelä/P. Suhonen (ed.), *Uskonto, arvot ja instituutiot. Suomalaiset World Values -Tutkimuksissa 1981 – 2005*, Tampere; Nurme, S./Pehkonen, J./Sänkiah, R. (1997) 'Viiltoja suomalaisen yhteiskuntaan', in J. Kiander (ed.), *Suomen Tulevaisuus – Taloudesta Arvoihin* Helsinki.

36 Kuhnle/Selle: 1992

phasize the need for the church's actions, for instance. In terms of environmental conditions<sup>37</sup>, the core question is economic need, which also has much to do with demographic characteristics in the local context (e.g., the rapid ageing of the total population in Lahti). It concerns procurement and allocation of resources rather than formation of coalitions or aiming to achieve organizational legitimacy.

Notwithstanding the fact that basically all the individual interviewees saw the co-operation as positive, putting the individual perspectives together revealed three particular challenges. First, are the parties in co-operation considered as equal? The public authorities underscored particularly that they view the church as "an equal partner". Still, the written documents of the municipality hardly ever mention the church institution; the church is literally almost invisible. We are tempted to interpret the rhetoric about equal partnership as just that, rhetoric. As was emphasized in the Norwegian case (p. ), what characterizes the Nordic welfare states is the dominant position of the state in welfare provision. On that basis, it is not to be expected, either by the political authorities, or by the church, that the church be "an equal partner".

A second challenge concerns the level(s) of the municipality at which cooperation with the church takes place, or should do. Among public authorities, as well as church related interviewees, there were those who emphasized the activeness of the co-operation networks, but also those who saw the co-operation as concerning only the highest levels of bureaucracy. The latter wished for further co-operation. In addition, one elected official in the church noted that the church has not worked enough at the grass-roots level:

The co-operation is more authority-to-authority cooperation, not so much concerning the local citizens. The church should come down more, closer to its people [...] They could organize; e.g., patio church meetings, garden meetings, etc. More small than big! More every-day life than festivals! Away from high towers, away from inside the stone. They should start moving!

Thirdly, the challenge posed by the spiritual dimension of the church in its relationship with the secular public sector. None of the municipal representatives had ever experienced conflict in co-operation because of the spirituality of the church. However, there were those who noted that even though they themselves did not hold anything against the church's spirituality in co-operation networks, they knew that some of their municipal colleagues (both officers and elected officials) saw the church somewhat negatively or suspiciously because of its spiritual emphasis. All in all, on the one hand, the interviewees noted that the spiritual emphasis must not be visible and "loud" in co-operation projects. On the other hand, spirituality

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37 Cf. Hall/Tolbert: 2005

and the value basis of the church are viewed by the majority of the public authority interviewees as the church's assets; the church exemplifies the value of caring in particular. The church indeed meets with mixed expectations; its spirituality and values are viewed as fundamental and highly appreciated, but should not be too obvious in co-operation networks.

## Discussion

The data show that interrelationships between the public sector and social actors within the majority church vary within and between the cases. Such varieties are ever more timely as a topic today as the world is facing a global economic recession – and as public authorities and smaller agents in different parts of the world are turning (also) to church-based agents in seeking support in welfare provision.

In terms of Kuhnle and Selle's typology<sup>38</sup>, the Finnish case is overall characterized by independence and nearness, while the Norwegian case represents a mixture of relationships, primarily dependent nearness and independent distance. A change seems to have taken place in Finland over the last 15–20 years, from distance to nearness, while the church has maintained its independence. The pattern of relationships becomes simpler if we distinguish the two main types of church-based actor involved and presented, parishes or parish-based actors, and voluntary organizations. Since only the Norwegian case comprises and presents the latter, we will restrict our comparison and discussion, to parishes and parish-based organizations and their interrelations with the public sector. Overall, the Finnish and Norwegian cases differ with regard to the degree of nearness/distance in their relations with the public sector. There is a tendency for the church-based agents in the Finnish case to have a closer relationship with the public authorities than their Norwegian equivalents.

The most conspicuous difference between the cases concerns attitudes to and perceptions of the parish-based agents by the public authorities. The differences between these cases are likely to be typical differences between Norway and Finland and not peculiar to the specific cases studied<sup>39</sup>. However, our data, mostly based on interviews, do not allow us to critically evaluate if the positive attitudes and perception of the church conveyed in the interviews are "real" in the sense that they tend to guide action, or if they primarily reflect what is considered socially desirable. In the following we have taken the positive attitudes and perception of the church, especially in the Finnish case, as the "real" situation. To explain the differences between

38 Kuhnle/Selle: 1992

39 For Norway, see, e.g., Angell/Selbekk: 2005

the cases, we will relate them to contextual differences, to three types of explanatory, environmental, factors: economic, religious and political. We will also introduce a situational factor in the analysis. In this way, we try to explain a phenomenon at the meso level by factors on the macro level, without specifying the social mechanisms mediating between the two levels. By so doing, we run the risk of constructing connections between phenomena, which closer studies might prove to be false. Therefore, the following explanations should be taken to be preliminary hypotheses that require further research.

### Economy and Legitimacy

Why would the local church and the municipal authorities want to co-operate in matters of welfare provision? The simplest answer is that in many cases municipal and church-based agents have common goals and would benefit from joining forces. What the data show is that this simple logic seems clearer to the church-based agents than to the public. One reason may be that the Nordic welfare states in normal circumstances are able to handle social problems arising in society fairly well.

During the recession in Finland in the early 1990 s, the Church of Finland demonstrated its practical solidarity in words and deeds, putting substantial resources into providing social welfare for those who suffered. This experience influenced the reputation of the Church in Finnish society, so that as Finns' trust in central institutions plummeted during the recession, their trust in the church increased<sup>40</sup>. It is reasonable to believe that this experience "trickled down" and has manifested itself in increased trust in the Church as a partner in welfare provision by the local authorities, reinforcing the trust based on local experience.

Norway has not experienced anything like the Finnish recession in recent decades, and the Church of Norway has not been challenged to prove its solidarity the way the Church of Finland has; perhaps it would not have stood the test if we base our presumptions on what happened in the situation of unusually high unemployment as experienced in the early 1980 s<sup>41</sup>. After World War Two the Church of Norway came out of the war with a high level of trust among the population, based on its ideological-political role during the war<sup>42</sup>. Only a few years after the war, one of the leading bishops in the Church,

40 Heino, H./Appel, H. (1997), Suomen evankelis-luterilainen kirkko Vuosina 1992 – 1995, Tampere, 25; 59 f.

41 See e.g. Angell Nordeng, O. H. (1983), Kyrkja og arbeidsløysa, Oslo.

42 Cf. Austad, T. (1981) 'Kirkekampen – et intermeso?', in I. Montgomery/K. Lundby (ed.), Statskirke i etterkrigssamfunn: kirkehistoriske og sosiologiske synspunkter på Den norske kirke etter 1945, Oslo.

who had been the leader of the Church's resistance against German and nazi rule during the War, directed harsh criticism against the welfare state as it was being developed by the social democrats. He feared a totalitarian welfare state with no place for private and voluntary welfare agents like the church<sup>43</sup>. His view was far from representative of the church and those involved in social work. However, it illustrates a position, which in consequence did not help create an ideological and political climate conducive to a closer relationship between state and church in matters of welfare as was the case in Finland after the recession.

In the Nordic countries voluntary organizations have always co-operated with the public authorities<sup>44</sup>. In Norway church-related institution-based welfare activities have been for decades – and still are – relevant to the state in its mission to secure a high level of social welfare. More particularly, as illustrated in the Finnish case, “government failure”<sup>45</sup> makes the question of alternative welfare resources topical for the state. The Finnish and Norwegian situations are different at the macro level so far. Generally, if the state is unable to mobilize sufficient welfare resources, such a situation may represent an institutional threat to the legitimacy of the welfare state should it be long-lasting.

For church-based actors, the reasons for co-operation with the public sector agencies were partly resource-related in the sense that they considered that their own objectives were better served by joining forces with the public sector than by “going it alone”, in line with the exchange perspective. We may call this the efficiency argument. The reason for an interrelationship with the public sector was partly the need for organizational legitimacy; interactions with the municipality were seen as a way for the agents to demonstrate their relevance in the community.

## The Awareness Factor

We may relate differences between the two cases to the situational factor of knowledge and awareness<sup>46</sup>. The public authorities interviewed in Lahti seemed to be aware of the church-based welfare agency at the local level and

43 Berggrav, E. (1952), *Stat og kirke i dag etter luthersk syn*, Kirke og Kultur, 449–462; Tønnessen, A. V. (2000), “... Et trygt og godt hjem for alle”? Kirkelederes kritikk av velferdsstaten etter 1945, Trondheim.

44 Cf. Kuhnle, S./Selle, P. (ed.) (1990a), *Frivillig organisert velferd: alternativ til offentlig?*, Bergen.

45 Anheier: 2005; Salamon, L. M. (1987), ‘Partners in Public Service: The Scope and Theory of Government – Nonprofit Relations’, in W. W. Powell (ed.), *The Nonprofit Sector: A Research Handbook*, New Haven.

46 Cf. Hall/Tolbert: 2005, 195f

to know what was going on. The sources of this knowledge and awareness are not clear, but it is reasonable to associate it with the role of the local church and its visibility during the recession in the early 1990 s. The trust the local church enjoys, as conveyed in the interviews, is based on experience of the church's role in welfare provision, and of how its words and deeds correspond. In Drammen, the level of awareness and knowledge of the local welfare work of the church was lower among the public authorities. In Lahti, the church was seen as an important partner in welfare provision while there seemed to be relatively little interest in the (real and potential) contributions of the church in Drammen, except at the rhetorical level.

### The Political Factor

Generally, we would expect the current political and ideological climate to contribute to a positive atmosphere related to co-operation between state and voluntary sectors in welfare provision, and towards the church as part of the voluntary sector. We have drawn attention to the legal framework, which gives the public sector a mandate to co-operate with the voluntary sector in matters of welfare provision. In a wider context, cultural and ideological changes over the past two decades, like the idea of welfare pluralism and New Public Management, have provided a basis for stimulating the state to direct its attention to the voluntary sector and the church as part of it, and to what it has to contribute to welfare in co-operation with the state. Research confirms that the climate for such co-operation has become more positive over the past two or three decades<sup>47</sup>. However, the social democratic welfare state model<sup>48</sup> and the corresponding “non-profit regime”<sup>49</sup> with which the Nordic welfare societies are associated represent an environment in which the voluntary sector and church-based welfare agents as no more than a part of it, have relatively little significance. Church-based agents may be perceived as of minor importance as real and potential partners in co-operation by local public sector welfare agents. It is to be expected that these factors – they do not all work in the same direction – have a bearing on what we have described as the situation at the local level in the two countries.

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47 Lorentzen, H. (1995), ‘Frivillighet i velferdsstaten’, in P. Selle/K. Klaudi Klausen (ed.), *Frivillig organisering i Norden*, Oslo/København; Lundström, T./Wijkström, F. (1997), *The Nonprofit Sector in Sweden*, Manchester.

48 Esping-Andersen: 1990

49 Salamon/Anheier: 1998; but cf. Sivesind/Selle: 2004

## The Religious Factor

Being rooted in the Lutheran theological tradition, it would seem natural that the church should seek co-operation with the public sector in its welfare activities to support a strong welfare state. This is demonstrated in the Norwegian case. Is it also true in the Finnish case? Our data may be interpreted to be less conclusive than in the Norwegian case. The urge by church-based actors in Lahti to have the public sector treat them as equal partners in co-operation may indicate that what the church wants is to play more than just a secondary role in welfare society.

The trust in the Church in Finnish society may be related to Finnish religiousness. If we compare religiousness or rather church religiosity in Finland and Norway, members of the Church of Finland seem to be more attached to the Church than is the case in Norway<sup>50</sup>. Sundback has shown that there is a tendency in the Nordic countries towards an inverse statistical relationship between the level of national religiosity and political power of the Social Democratic Party<sup>51</sup>. In addition, this party has traditionally been sceptical about the Church and church-based welfare organizations<sup>52</sup>. The Social Democratic Party had a stronger political position in Norway than in Finland during the previous century. The greater trust in the Church as a welfare provider and partner in co-operation in Finland than in Norway may partly be understood in this context.

## The Relevance of the Study for Welfare State Theory

In Esping-Andersen's theory of welfare regimes, a political factor distinguishing between the different regimes is the relative strength of social democracy or the political left<sup>53</sup>. Our study shows that this political factor apparently has a bearing on the differences among countries classified as representing the social democratic model from the perspective of co-operation between the public sector and church-based agents of welfare at the local level as well. We have seen that a "religious factor" tends to emphasize

50 Sundback, S. (1994), 'Nation and Gender Reflected in Scandinavian Religiousness', in O. Riis/T. Pettersson (ed.), *Scandinavian Values: Religion and Morality in the Nordic Countries*, Uppsala; Sundback, S. (2000), 'Medlemskapet i de lutherska kyrkorna i Norden', in G. Gustafsson/T. Pettersson (ed.), *Folkkyrkor och religiös pluralism: den nordiska religiösa modellen*, Stockholm.

51 Sundback: 1994

52 Angell, 2007; Lorentzen, H. (2004), *Fellesskapets fundament: sivilsamfunnet og individualismen*, Oslo; Seip, 1983; Selle, P. (1998), 'Organisasjonssamfunnet – ein statsreiskap?', in P. Selle/T. Grønlie (ed.), *Ein stat? Fristillingas fire ansikt*, Oslo.

53 Esping-Andersen: 1990

the differences. We have shown, analyzing interrelationships between the public sector and church-based welfare agents, that overall the role of the latter corresponds to what is to be expected from welfare theory<sup>54</sup>. But there are nuances and interesting differences between Norway and Finland. Their welfare systems are subsumed under the social democratic type of welfare regime, but they are different in some respects. In our analysis we have concentrated on economic, political and religious factors to explain the observed differences in our cases and only in a superficial manner juxtaposed a historical perspective. In this connection we would like to emphasize the significance of religion. In our case, religion may not be an independent mechanism when political factors are taken into consideration. What is especially interesting is the interaction between political and religious factors. This type of interaction may help explain the differences described and analyzed in the study. What we suggest, is that introducing a religious perspective will not only help explain better the differences between the main categories of Esping-Andersen's theory<sup>55</sup>, but also contribute to nuancing the models, in this case the social democratic regime type.

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54 Anheier: 2005; Esping-Andersen, G. (1999), *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies*, Oxford.

55 Manow: 2002