Exploring Risk Governance in the Nordic Context: Finnish Juvenile Crime and Child Welfare

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Abstract

The article briefly describes the regime of welfare policy derived in the Nordic welfare ethos emerging from the 1960s. Certain ways of seeing and thinking, specific ways of acting and intervening, evolved from this ethos thus forming 'subjects' within juvenile criminal justice. The article then considers the changes in ways of governing during and after the 1990s deep economic recession. This brought a gradual move to a new type of governance and this transformation will be analysed. Of particular significance will be the impact of these changes on juvenile crime and child protection institutions. The article concludes with consideration of the significance and consequences of these changes on policy and practice within Finland.

Introduction

Focusing on Finland, this article discusses the governance of children, young people and families with children in the Nordic context. It considers how the social and political context of governance has changed and how shifts in social relationships have influenced institutionalised societal strategies and state policy. Regarding the contemporary juvenile crime debate, it describes how it is positioned in these strategies, in other words *regimes* (e.g. Garland 2001; Parton 2006).

In answering the question of how we govern and are governed within different regimes Mitchell Dean (1999) suggests four significant dimensions for exploration. First, the characteristic *forms of visibility, ways of seeing and perceiving* require analysis. Second, the *distinctive ways of thinking and questioning, relying on definite vocabularies and procedures for the production of truth* (e.g. those derived from the social, human and behavioural sciences) should be considered. Third, are *specific ways of acting, intervening and directing, made up of particular types of practical rationality* (expertise and know-

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how) that rely *upon definite mechanisms, techniques and technologies*. Fourth, it is necessary to identify how *subjects, selves, persons, actors or agents* are formed. Dean highlights that axes of visibilities, knowledge, techniques and practices, and identities are co-existent within each regime of practices, each constituting a line of continual transformation and variation. Regimes of practices can be identified whenever relatively stable correlations of visibilities, mentalities, technologies and agencies exist. They constitute taken-for granted points of reference for all forms of problematisation (Dean 1999:23-27).

This is the starting point for this article. By employing the method of *comparative reconstruction* (Ojakangas 1997) two regimes of governing children, young people and families with children will be reconstructed. Whereas *the regime of welfare policy* was pre-eminent from the late 1960s to the early 1990s, a new type of governance, best represented as *the regime of risk politics*, has appeared and prevailed since the late 1990s. However, these contrasting regimes should not be considered exclusive. More appropriately, they are represented as sedimentary cultural layers constantly vying for dominant status involving hegemonic concepts, discourses, tactics, professional 'experts' and practices.

The Nordic Welfare Ethos and the Politics of Childhood

Together the Nordic countries are located within geographically and culturally homogenous territory. The countries share significant common history as their boundaries have shifted over several centuries. Within social policy studies the Nordic States – Finland included – enjoy a common reputation for the social democratic welfare regimes in which each state accepts primary responsibility for ensuring welfare and social security for its citizens, including children. The core ethos of the Nordic welfare model consists of universalism, equality and public responsibility. The aim is to avoid structural material inequality by a relatively high level of decommodification, taxation and income redistribution. State service provision is universal and directed towards all citizens. In the welfare literature, the model of the Nordic Welfare State has been best exemplified by Sweden, embodying the following core features: full employment; solidarity in wage policy; the promotion of social equality; Keynesian counter-cyclical policy of economics (Eydal & Satka 2004; Harrikari 2004b; Satka et al 2007).

Understanding 'childhood' and providing appropriate interventions for children have been included in the Nordic welfare state regime. Since its inception, the underlying idea of Nordic child welfare policy has been *the structural prevention of social problems* and *shared social responsibility of children's well-being and equality* (Satka et al 2007). In Finland, the principle of structural prevention was at the strongest in the 1970s and 1980s. Social inequality was regarded as a key factor leading to social problems, including juvenile crime. The goal was to develop comprehensive systems of state subsidies and social services to prevent complex social problems in families with children. Policies were based on increasing income transfers for families with children and public funding for child welfare services, with criminal justice and social welfare systems strictly separated. All social services were purged of regulation and compulsion, with access and provision based on voluntarism (Harrikari 2006a, 2008; Satka et al 2007).

On the *family and individual levels*, the established biological determinist models within criminology pre-eminent before the Second World War gradually eroded during the late 1950s and the early 1960s. 'Crime' or criminal acts were not regarded as problems but understood within the context of 'social maladjustment'. The status of maternal deprivation theory became influential in explaining causes for juvenile crime. Children who 'offended'

came to be defined and treated as the 'disturbed' or 'maladjusted'. Crime was considered a symptom, reflecting deeper societal, familial or individual problems. A range of influential welfare professionals – including social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, kindergarten teachers and youth leaders – adopted this position and their emphases became central in responding to the challenges of childhood and youth (Harrikari 2004a, 2006a, 2008; Lappi-Seppälä 2006).

The roots of Nordic uniqueness are identifiable in the late 19th century as the first child welfare acts were implemented in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Current Nordic juvenile justice systems are consistent within what can be described as a Nordic 'welfare model'. The age of criminal liability is 15 in all Nordic States. Juvenile courts do not exist and a range of specific principles and provisions governing youth justice procedures and sanctions are enforced within the criminal justice system (up to the age of 21). The institutions of child protection and criminal justice function side by side. The primary role of local child welfare boards, child protection institutions and social work professionals regarding juvenile crime are defining characteristics of the Nordic model (see Harrikari 2007; Jansson 2004; Kyvsgaard 2004).

From the 1960s juvenile crime was addressed in the context of generic social policy and the policy sectors – criminal justice, welfare, health, education – were interconnected. General principles of social policy were then applied to each state institution. In general, early interventionist welfare policies were regarded as the best instruments to prevent offences and juvenile crime. The principles of supporting stability, minimum intervention and avoiding stigmatisation were emphasised, as direct and palpable reactive interventions were dismissed as labelling child and young offenders, thus increasing juvenile crime. Thus in many ways a societal and cultural climate was created in which tolerant and supporting child and family policies developed and consolidated (Harrikari 2006a, 2008). In the 1990s, however, the situation changed significantly.

Changing Social Policy since the 1990s

The 1990s brought a significant turning-point in Nordic welfare regimes including child policy. Due to significant shifts in the socio-economic and political spheres guiding principles of the Nordic approach to welfare policy and provision were challenged. After the 'golden era' of the welfare state in the 1980s, various phenomena – the impacts of the global economy and market instability, demographic shifts, increased individualism, globalisation and new kinds of risks – put pressure on internal socio-economic policies and welfare arrangements. The strengthening of neoliberal ideologies, especially in economic discourse and the imported neoliberal governance and managerialism began to undermine the Nordic welfare state model (Alanen et al 2004:147; Satka et al 2007).

The early 1990s was an exceptional period in the Nordic states. All the states went through an unprecedented, deep economic recession. Finland and Sweden suffered the most; Denmark, Iceland and Norway less so. The differences in intensity of recession between states became increasingly evident in Nordic children's living circumstances. Finland went through a significant banking crisis followed by marked changes in the public sector. Under the guidance of the 1991 conservative government cabinet, a monetarist and downstream cyclical economic policy was implemented replacing a Keynesian, counter-cyclical economic policy (Harrikari 2004b; Satka et al 2004). Consequently child and family policy, as a part of general social policy, was taken in a new direction (Bardy et al 2001).

Several Finnish studies demonstrate that the impact of economic depression coupled with policy changes were exceptionally harsh towards families with children (Sauli et al 2002). The status of children and the structure of families with children changed. There was an increase in single parent families and blended stepfamilies alongside traditional two-generation nuclear families (Jallinoja 2006). The proportion of poor and low-income families increased. Welfare benefits to families with children were cut while low-income families with children became increasingly dependent on welfare. A quarter of all family allowances were removed and basic social services, intended for families with children, declined across the board, ranging from maternity clinics to youth work (Bardy et al 2001). Since the late 1990s, however, the economic situation of families with children has improved. The flip-side of this otherwise positive economic trend has been a clear weakening of the economic situation of single-parent families and families with many children. The evidence shows that the relative number of children living under the poverty line trebled between 1990 and 2004 (Moisio 2006).

In general, since the birth of the nation-state in 1917, there has been a long bio-political project, in which the Finnish state promoted increasing birth rates, qualified motherhood, improving welfare for families with children, and children's health to strengthen the presence of the nation-state in international competition including war through the 1930s and 1940s (Harrikari 2004a; Satka & Eydal 2004; Satka 1995). This period culminated in the 1970s and 1980s and ended in the 1990s. To put it bluntly, instead of being a national resource, the child population became a financial burden within the public economy, which then had to be minimised as it threatened the credibility of the state in 'the eyes of the global markets' (Harrikari 2004b:102-103).

Following these developments there were calls for the introduction of new concepts and discourses in child and family policy, juvenile crime institutions and child welfare. These concepts, discourses, lessons and techniques have spread quickly and extensively throughout public discourse and political programmes related to children, young people and families with children, eventually guiding the work of professionals in the field. They have challenged the Nordic principle of universalism, and the Nordic understanding of childhood; this led to a revision of strategies, provision and practices for dealing with children and families with children, as well as forms of social control (Eydal & Satka 2006; Satka & Harrikari 2008).

The Ontology of Concern: A Conservative Backlash and a Reversal of Tradition

Beyond recession years, since the mid-1990s, a conservative movement in child and family policy emerged within political institutions and civil society. The impulses of conservatism were at their strongest at the turn of the 20th century bringing a significant increase in government initiatives regarding children, young people and families with children. In contrast to the 1970s and 1980s, there was a distinct, identifiable qualitative change in the focus, targets and objectives of initiatives. These concerned juvenile crime, child protection, mental ill-health, pornography, paedophilia, school discipline, bullying and drug abuse – indicating a growing sense of concern and fear, even moral panic. This moral concern could be explained partly by right-wing and conservative politicians intensifying their interest in child and family policy. Between 1997 and 2004 right-wing and conservative parliamentarians presented 13 initiatives either to lower the age of criminal responsibility or abolish it, and to harden criminal justice sanctions directed against children and young people. Conservatives with a policing background were in the vanguard

of these efforts. Further, the emerging moral panic related to an ageing parliament increased the probability of decreased tolerance and harsher responses towards the behaviour of children and young people (Harrikari 2008).

In addition to parliament, the media contributed to and amplified reactionary debates, reflecting a post-recession conservative shift in popular discourse. Commentaries indicated a growing intolerance towards children, young people and families with children. Riitta Jallinoja (2006) analysed the leading Finnish newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, from 1999 to 2003. Her analysis shows at the outset of the 2000s the emergence in popular discourse of a 'trance-like state', with key themes of concern and fear encapsulated as 'the escalation of evil'. The media highlighted and amplified the most extreme cases – like homicides – in a manner that gave the appearance that the entire population of children and young people were out of control. Youth offending, drug abuse and school truancy were located in familial dysfunction, such as problems of parents combining work and family life, 'sickness of families' and 'lost parenthood'. The 'defenders' of 'family values' called for a return to joint community values and practices of the 1950s believed as a solution to contemporary ills. The primary principles of these activated middle-class mothers include e.g., a new emphasis on the quality of motherhood and parenting as well as choosing a familial care instead of an institutional one for small children (see also Satka et al 2007).

Within a broader perspective, media coverage reflected growing social and economic inequality resulting in a new type of polarisation among families with children. Public concern about children was raised in a form that drew distinctions between 'good' family values of those who were able to regain their economic footing after the recession and those in which parents 'don't know how to parent' where 'children are at risk' and 'young people are exhibiting unprecedented levels of bad and delinquent behaviour' (Jallinoja 2006). Concerns about children and young people of 'not-so-good-families' (Parton 2006), the moralisation of parents and calls for stronger and more effective social intervention aimed at families by middle class community campaigns and media portrayals have developed hand-in-hand with increases in the registered number of child welfare cases and in the psychological problems of children and young people (Harrikari 2008; Satka et al 2007).

Two Finnish afternoon papers, *Ilta-Sanomat* and *Iltalehti*, have been the most influential actors in rising public concern and fear towards children, young people and families with children. Since the beginning of the 1980s the intensity of front-page reporting of violence has increased considerably and between 1998 and 2002, as there was a significant increase in the number of juvenile homicides, negative reporting was virtually a daily event. Tabloid reports of violence and the fear of crime increased significantly regardless of the actual number of cases of violent crime and there was a clear divergence in trends of reporting violent crimes and actual acts of violence. Further, the age of offenders and victims of the most reported crimes were significantly younger than offenders and victims of most actual and typical homicides (Kivivuori et al 2002). These trends continued into the mid-2000s.

In general, in the post-recession period the changes indicate strong tendencies towards more conservative policies targeted at children and families. They amount to a notable political shift. The visible, amplified concern – fear and a sense of social malaise expressed by these conservative political factions with their decreasing levels of tolerance – has permeated throughout society. It has become a shared, common public moral panic fed by the media, particularly the emphasis on stories about violent crimes committed by children and young people. Further, the developments in 'ways of seeing', particularly calls for a return to 'basic values', have been presented through new vocabularies demanding new agendas and more punitive interventions in youth justice and child welfare institutions.

Controlling Increasing Anxiety: The Epistemology of Risk and Securitising Juvenile Crime

Whereas international, particularly Anglo-American, analyses constantly have provided information about increasing intolerance, punitiveness and control of children and young people (see: Scraton, Giroux, this issue), Finnish researchers have become interested in whether similar developments can be found in Finland. Consistent with Finnish criminological studies of young people's offending or deviant beaviour, there has been no significant need for increasing control or hardening sanctions. On the contrary, the Finnish Self-Reported Delinquency Survey (FSDR) studies suggest that the Finnish youth has become more law-abiding during the last decade. Conformity has become more prevalent as the number of young people who have refrained from offending has increased markedly. Involvement in property crimes has decreased and the number of violent and drug offences has been comparatively stable. However, the FSDR studies suggest that while there is less offending behaviour among the majority of children and young people, there is a relatively small but increasing proportion of children suffering from a lack of economic resources and deprivation connected to non-conforming and antisocial behaviour (Kivivuori & Honkatukia 2006).

The Anglo-American punitive shift bringing more criminal sanctions directed towards children and young people does not appear to match the Finnish context. According to Matti Marttunen (2006) children and young people in conflict with the law receive less severe penalties than adult offenders: penal dispositions are less severe and the duration and scale of penalties are shorter and smaller. According to statistics, over the last 15 years sentencing of young offenders has not become more severe. Compared with the early 1990s, the number of offences handled by courts has decreased approximately by one half. Some three quarters of penalties imposed on young offenders are issued outside the courts, through summary penal proceedings. In legal proceedings, a fine (70 per cent) and conditional imprisonment (20 per cent) are the most common penalties issued. Unconditional imprisonment and community sanctions are used very rarely and then only for the most serious offences. They are a very small proportion of sentences rendered by courts. Compared with the late 1980s the number of prison sentences imposed on juvenile offenders has decreased to approximately 10 per cent of all court sentences (Marttunen 2006).

Thus, analyses of sanctions within the criminal justice system suggest that sanctions against young people have become more lenient and, at the same time, young people have become more conforming, supporting the view that Finland has avoided a punitive turn (see Lappi-Seppälä 2006). I suggest that this is only partly evident. If only the criminal sanctions system is explored, the broader trends of punitiveness are not visible. From the governance viewpoint, explorations of 'crime trends' or the 'criminal sanctions system' provide a relatively narrow perspective to overall change. In fact, the most important changes have occurred elsewhere, outside the courts and institutional legal proceedings. Moreover, the most significant changes cannot be identified in the shifts between the institutional settings such as the relationship between the criminal justice system and child protection. Such changes have been happening relatively quickly and within an area seemingly beyond the theoretical questioning and methodological inquiry of the criminological analysis.

In this respect I am alluding to a paradigmatic change from crime prevention to a broad, security orientation that now permeates throughout society (see Virta 2006). An early 'monument' of the Finnish securitising work was the National Crime Prevention Programme (WTSC 1999) through which a range of international influences were adopted.

The tradition of The National Crime Prevention Programme was complemented by the Programme for Inner Security (ISP 2004) and initiatives to prevent the marginalisation of children and the young (DIM 2007).

The goal of the National Crime Prevention Programme was 'to create a common policy for action in the prevention of crime and in the promotion of security, so that the impact of measures on crime is taken into consideration in all public decision-making'. Within the programme descriptions of childhood and youth were conservative. They were constructed and represented as 'becomings' and consequently a whole range of 'risks' were identified as inherent in the process development and coming of age. 'Minors' were especially regarded as subject to risks and positioned as 'children or the young in a danger of marginalisation'. Risk indicators were poor home environment, alcoholic parents, poor parenting skills, child abuse, difficulties in concentrating while at school. These early years indicators were adopted as 'risk factors' with the potential for predicting future criminality. The programme initiated a scenario through which the 'criminal classes', permanently outside working life and the other social systems that provide the individual with a stake in lawful society, were identified as an emergent threat (WTSC 1999:2-4; see also Harrikari & Hoikkala 2008).

With regard to children and young people, this risk assessment based vision defined the key objective as the intensification of control, based on stricter supervision of adults. Parental responsibility and stronger forms of control at home, new teacher training techniques for managing classroom environments and new strategies for intervening in bullying and truancy were developed. To secure early intervention new measures in child welfare with a low threshold for intervention were constructed. Collectively this range of measures represented the foundation of a broader strategy emphasising 'early intervention' to prevent crime (WTSC 16, 19-20, 36-37; see also Harrikari & Hoikkala 2008).

By 2003, virtually all municipalities in Finland had drafted local crime prevention programmes based on the national model. Under the expert guidance of local police, half of these local programmes set crime prevention and security, related to the risks associated with young people, as their main goal. Youth crime, marginalisation and intoxicant misuse were presented as the most central problems in the local programmes. The problems of young people – unemployment, drugs, crimes – and problems related to 'being young' – selling beer and cigarettes to minors, shoplifting, school discipline – were included in the majority of local security programmes. Preventing and inhibiting antisocial behaviour (78 per cent), drug crimes or misuse (68 per cent) and school bullying and violence by young people were priority preventive measures described in the programmes (Tt 2003:38-39, 48-50; see also Harrikari & Hoikkala 2008; Satka & Harrikari 2008).

Crime prevention and securitising work – relying on Wilson and Kelling's 'broken windows' thesis and US-styled 'zero tolerance' interventions – were linked as part of other locally based activities and provision. Local crime prevention programmes targeting children and young people were connected to a range of communitarian civic movements, many of which were guided by a conservative and religion-based pedagogical discourse embracing Hillary Clinton's idea that 'It takes a village to raise a child'. Such community-based models aiming at strengthening parenthood, restoring 'basic values', respecting parents and adults as well as correcting mischievous behaviour spread across the country. At the end of the 1990s some 80 such projects had been initiated in Finland (Jallinoja 2006:154-159). A curious feature of these imagined villages is that children are absent from their everyday operations, only appearing as the objects of adult activities and priorities (Alanen et al 2004:164). These policies have consolidated in such a way that children's and

young people's agency is conspicuous by its absence and the public debate about the implementation of youth curfews is a clear case in point (Tt 2003:68-70; see also Satka et al 2007; Satka & Harrikari 2008).

Within the new regime of risk politics, the concept of 'prevention' has been given new meanings. Using a paradigm of 'security' it is used to imply and justify the surveillance of public places and the control of antisocial behaviour (see Hughes et al 2006). It is used also to refer to the prevention and diffusion of a range of activities and behaviours. The increased focus on case-by-case prevention and the priority of incapacitation manifested in the increased use of surveillance cameras, private security services and police patrols in public places (Zimring & Hawkins 1995; Satka & Harrikari 2008), are revealed by recent studies exploring a tightening of the control of young people (Kivivuori & Honkatukia 2006; Harrikari 2008). In addition to 'zero tolerance', new kinds of regulatory interventions have emerged in Finland over the past decade, including the introduction of public curfews (O'Neil 2002; Muncie & Goldson 2006). Yet, currently no legislation exists in Finland relating to curfews and only 6 per cent of municipalities in southern Finland have curfews for children and minors (Harrikari 2006b).

The protection of children and the young has been a central rationale presented in the public discussion regarding the implementation of curfew legislation. Yet this fundamental principle of child welfare practice in the Nordic countries – the right of every child to be protected – has been threatened by a rationale adopting various external forces and actors instead of self-understanding of child protection work and professionals (Harrikari 2006b; Hollander & Tärnfalk 2007). This new way of thinking about security – aiming at protecting and ensuring the security of society as a whole by attempting to control behaviours such as illicit drug abuse by surveillance, control and prevention – has reconfigured the role of welfare professionals. The expectation is that they accept responsibility for the early detection of 'risky' behaviour such as drugs and alcohol use that might lead to future criminal behaviour (ISP 2004:17, 23, 25; see also Satka & Harrikari 2008).

This new paradigm of security has also brought new ways of thinking about the position of children and young people in society. A clear objective of local crime prevention programmes is to put children and young people 'in their place' as obedient, compliant and firmly under adult control. As recent as the 1980s some children were referred to still as 'disturbed' and some young adults as 'maladjusted'. These classifications assumed that children who had trouble interacting at a young age would have a higher probability of becoming those likely to experience problems interacting with their peers and others later in their lives. Classifying children as 'disturbed' and 'maladjusted', still prevalent during the 1990s, has been replaced by new forms of classification: 'risk groups' and 'young people at risk of marginalization' (Harrikari 2006a).

Child Protection, Risk Screening and the Tactics of Early Intervention

The perspectives and practices of the new politics of risk have permeated through multi-professional and multi-agency cooperation – a key post-economic recession tactic. Discourses and practices adopted among these 'battlefields for professional hegemony' show evidence of high-level consensus regarding the risk politics regime. Heterogeneity of concepts and discourses has disappeared as the cooperative professions together put risk politics into practice (Satka & Harrikari 2008). Moreover, the hierarchy of professional definers has shifted considerably as a consequence of the new 'risk' agendas. Risk politics has impacted on the status of children and young people and as the 'crime problem' has

been reconstructed as a 'security problem' the police has become a key institution in defining childhood and family policy. It is a significant change when compared to the debates of the 1970s and 1980s when the professional skills of the police were regarded as insufficient and inappropriate for work with children and police regulation and control was excluded from social situations whenever possible (DIM 2007:23-26; Harrikari 2006a, 2008).

On the contrary, the status of social work, especially child protection work, has been under critical review. The number of children who are clients of child protection services has trebled over the past 15 years (Lastensuojelu 2005). Information and advice services, financial support and therapies used by child welfare professionals have been criticised as inefficient and costly. Consistent with FSDR studies, child welfare and health studies suggest that the child population is experiencing polarisation. While a higher percentage of Finnish children are materially better off, a small but increasing number of children suffers from a lack of economic resources and deprivation (Bardy et al 2001; Moisio 2006; Rimpelä et al 2006).

Early intervention strategies and techniques were key elements in securing improved services for child protection. The concept of early intervention made its way to Finland through the implementation of the national crime prevention programme and spread throughout social services from maternity clinics to geriatric wards, becoming a defining reference point for social work. It was a concept that encouraged practical application, providing a rationale for interventions in a climate where 'economic necessities' and 'the scarcity of public resources' were the foundations for public debate and starting points for policy-making. In contrast the progressive but expensive priorities of structural welfare interventions, such as raising income transfers and increasing social services for families with children, was considered incompatible with those of the new regime. The arguments in favour of early intervention, presented in political programmes over the past decade, tend to be morally-based although there has been an attempt to reduce public spending (ISP 2004:64; see also Harrikari & Satka 2006).

As the crime prevention perspective is a dominant element in risk politics and risk management, child protection has been identified as an essential element among other crime prevention activities. Recent Finnish studies provide evidence of how child protection professions have been incorporated in mobilising and realising the crime prevention programme and strategies designed by the police. The objectives of crime prevention and cutting public expenditure have transferred surreptitiously into the discourses and practices of child protection professionals working within early intervention projects (Harrikari 2008; Satka et al 2007). In addition, multi-agency networks have bound social work and youth work to an 'ethos of intervention' in 'direct intervention' and 'zero tolerance' projects (Harrikari 2008; Törrönen & Korander 2004).

While progressive child welfare discourses and interventions remain, the focus has shifted to the identification, classification and control of groups defined 'at risk' or exhibiting 'risky behaviour'; the process defined as acturialization (see Feeley & Simon 1992; Webb 2006). An underlying and central notion is the new public sector requirement to specify measures and practical solutions to identifiable problems – 'problem solving'. This requires the identification of children assessed as being the most likely to become potential financial burdens on 'society' (ISP 2004:64). Social work practice has experienced a significant, conscious transformation towards using what is referred to as 'evidence-based practice', modelled after its application in healthcare and prison administration (Smith 2006). Child welfare practitioners are conscious of, and interested in,

the dynamics between risk factors and protective and preventive factors (Arthur et al 2002), and are developing formulae for the assessment of clients and their circumstances. There are more established standards for dealing with young people in probation and aftercare, and a commitment to adopting similar procedures in child welfare has been articulated (Satka & Harrikari 2008).

A range of national and local early intervention projects and practices has been implemented. The most well-known is the Varpu Project, coordinated by the Ministry of Social and Health Affairs in 2001-2004. 'Zones of concern' and 'screens of concern', developed by the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health, were utilised in the project. Within child protection, the concept of early intervention has transformed gradually into 'early support' adopting practices that aim to 'intervene by offering support and partnership in a constructive and responsible way'. Phrases such as 'boosted early support' and offering 'support ... early enough' suggest that a discourse of 'support' has more positive connotations than 'intervention' (Harrikari & Hoikkala 2008).

In 2006 the Finnish Child Welfare Act was reformed coming into force on 1st January 2008. In contrast with previous legislation the duty of notification, preventive child welfare measures and the details of open care measures are clearly specified within the 2006 Act. The new objective is to intervene at an earlier stage thus improving the profitability of measures. The scope of authorities' duty of notification is expanded and child protection is identified as responsibility for every authority. Whereas 'early intervention' is intensively written into the reformed Child Welfare Act it remains a matter of some doubt whether the implementation of the Act will reduce registered child protection cases (Harrikari & Hoikkala 2008).

Conclusion: Concern, Risk and Intervention - Towards Late Modernity?

In this article, I have described how since the late 1990s a new cultural layer in governing children and young people - *risk politics* - has emerged in Finland bringing concepts and techniques of risk discourse into political programmes and practices. Most of these concepts – such as early intervention, risk assessment and multi-agency cooperation – were imported and adopted from the Anglo-American initiatives. The background was a liberalisation of markets from the late 1980s and changes of the Nordic welfare states during and after the profound economic recession of the 1990s. The universal utopia weakened and new types of rationalities emerged. It appears that a new regime of governance combines economic new liberalism, political conservatism and social communitarism. With regard to economic new liberalism, a presumption of scarcity in public resources and the requirement for public saving have been the post-recession 'mega-rationalities'. This resulted in the abandonment of the principle of structural prevention as the pre-eminent principle in providing support for families with children.

Cost-saving priorities and parsimony have been complemented by a conservative politics calling for a return to 'basic values' in child and family policies. The economic recession was followed by an emergent conservative movement that appeared at a range of levels within the political system and civil society. Demands made by political conservatives became a dominant discourse and they included increasing control and hardening sanctions. The media, especially the tabloids, played a defining role in constructing ways of seeing children, young people and families with children, thus creating and sustaining popular discourse. Anxieties and fears were heightened, the ingredients of a 'moral panic'. The focus was juvenile delinquency, child protection, mental

ill-health, paedophilia and child pornography, family violence, school bullying and alcohol and drugs misuse. Thus the focus of public debate was set within political institutions and the media. It appears that over the last decade an 'invisible alliance' between political conservatism and the media consolidated bringing a significant change and a range of initiatives. The previous restraints on the stigmatisation of children and young people have been abandoned.

At the turn of the 20th century conservative parliamentarians called for lowering or abolishing the age of criminal responsibility and hardening criminal justice sanctions against children and young people. These demands were successfully resisted and Finnish research suggests that criminal justice sanctions have not hardened over the past 15 years. On the contrary, less young offenders are dealt with by the courts and the number of young prisoners is extremely low. This supports the representation of Finland as a model of tolerance (Lappi-Seppälä 2006). Initiatives to abolish the age of criminal responsibility and to increase the severity of criminal justice sanctions are historically unique (Harrikari 2004a). Key arguments were adopted from England where the age of criminal liability was lowered to 10 years.

Although criminal justice sanctions have not hardened, other changes, reflecting a tougher climate of regulation and control directed towards children, the young and families with children, has emerged. Crime prevention and securitising programmes intensified control over children and young people, alongside the moral communitarist and adult-led projects across Finnish municipalities. I suggest that the main changes have occurred as 'pre-' or 'sub-crime' initiatives where the vocabulary of 'risk' discourse has become dominant. Due to the securitising trend the police have become the most significant state agency in defining priorities on issues relating to children and young people. Child protection services have internalised the priority of crime prevention, regulation and early intervention. 'Zero tolerance' initiatives and techniques of incapacitation – such as youth curfews – have gradually been put into practice.

In general, there are three central concepts within the Finnish regime of risk politics: concern, risk and early intervention. The fundamental ontological concepts of the emergent control culture are concern and fear. Within the 'concern' discourse, reality surrounding children and young people is typically characterised as unforeseeable and unexpected, even threatening. 'Concern' discourse is clearly evident within child protection institutions and authorities. It mobilises a rhetoric of a deepening social malaise centring on children and an increasing number of families with synchronous and multiple problems. Yet the categories and positions represented within 'concern' discourse may be self-fulfilling, thus sustaining a continuous feeling of crisis. They give the impression that 'normal' interventions are insufficient and 'special' interventions or services are required. Within youth justice debates the 'fear' that is repeatedly expressed is that without tougher interventions future criminal classes will emerge from today's children.

'Risk' is the epistemological eyeglass of the ontology of concern through which the worst and the most probable threats are identified and anticipated. The consequent *assess-mentality* could be seen as the obvious outcome of 'concern screening' within Finnish child welfare authorities alongside 'risk assessment' within the probation service in its responses to young offenders. It appears that established interpretations of social problems and young offending, such as poverty and inequality, are less popular as interventionist attention is redirected towards the identification of children at risk, creating processes of classification and categorisation, regulating antisocial behaviour and programming other technical-minded solutions (Young 1999:130-132). It is characteristic of risk discourse that strategies

and techniques directed towards marginalised children and young people are likely to extend to the entire child population, leading to net-widening and intensifying the control and surveillance of children and young people. Thus it is appropriate to ask whether the epistemology of risk transforms the relation between problems (action) and measures directed towards their solution (re-action).

Through questioning the concepts of 'concern' and 'risk', strategies of 'early intervention' and their related techniques are exposed as typical reactions within the new governance. As such, early identification and intervention and various forms of risk assessment are linked inherently; early identification and intervention are techniques of risk-management, regularly used in conjunction with a particular perceived risk (Furedi 1997). Early intervention arrived in Finland through crime prevention programmes and has spread like wildfire, becoming a defining orientation within a range of professions and authorities. With respect to the late modern thesis, early intervention appears 'neurotic', a responsive and reactive instrument to control late-modern anxiety and enforce public savings without challenging the structural inequalities of wealth and income or committing to cutting welfare services. While there have been discussions in Finland regarding the meaning and application of 'intervention' and 'support', the concept of 'early' has remained unquestioned. Within child welfare practices, however, 'early intervention' has transformed into 'early support', undoubtedly reflecting the Nordic welfare ethos to adopt and mould a seemingly alien concept to its own purposes.

Concerning youth justice and the public debate about children in conflict with the law, a more heterogeneous perspective has evolved from new forms of governance. Juvenile 'crime' and antisocial behaviour have been raised as key topics of public concern due to the moral panic generated by the intolerance of conservatives, the securitisation of work and the new discourses of risk. Thus large-scale institutional changes – lowering the age of criminal liability or increasing criminal sanctions – have not been necessary. As this article shows, significant interventionist change has been introduced through ways of seeing, questioning, conceptualising and mobilising new practical rationalities. This has happened outside courtrooms and within the pre- or sub-crime arena and at the interface of multi-agency cooperation. Yet behind the rhetoric and practice of risk governance lies the Nordic welfare ethos.

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