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## **The Initiation of State Control of Poor Relief in Finland and Sweden, 1880–1920**

**Abstract:** This article explores the initiation of state control of poor relief in Finland and Sweden at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Special attention is paid to communication between individual reformers in Finland and Sweden as well as to their possibilities to influence decisions in their home countries. The differences between the development of state control of poor relief in the neighbouring countries reveal the two preconditions essential for the initiation of this major administrative reform: a favourable socio-political climate and a reformer – an individual or a group – who is recognised and accepted by decision-makers. The article discusses how the balance between these preconditions varied in Finland and in Sweden over time, and how the individual reformers were either supported or suppressed by the socio-political climate. The article suggests that because of these variations, a similar end was achieved by different means and within a different timeframe in Finland and Sweden.

**Keywords:** poor relief, state control, Nordic context.

## Introduction

The passing of a new Poor Law of 1834 in England initiated a wave of poor relief reforms, which reached the Nordic countries in the 1860–70s. The main goal of the reforms was to reduce the costs to ratepayers by excluding the able-bodied poor from the right of poor relief and by promoting the workhouse or the poorhouse as the primary method of relief. Previous research has shown that the poor relief reform in Finland was strongly influenced by similar reforms in the other Nordic countries and Sweden in particular: the Finnish Poor Relief Act of 1879 was given on the Swedish model, and the poorhouse system was established in resemblance to the Swedish and Danish ones.<sup>1</sup> However, by analysing the construction of state control of poor relief in Finland and Sweden, this article suggests that the exchange of ideas between the neighbouring countries was not a one-way process but a more complicated pattern of interaction.

The starting point is the fact that Finland was the first one of the Nordic countries to introduce a supervisory state official, Inspector of Poor Relief, in 1888. The establishment of the Inspectorate was preceded by a couple of years' preparative work, which was based on originally Swedish ideas on state control of poor relief. A similar office was established in Sweden as late as in 1918, after three decades of discussion in which the Finnish model in turn played a key part. To analyse the development in the two countries, the article suggests that there are two preconditions for this major administrative reform: a favourable socio-political climate and a reformer (an individual or a group) who is recognised by decision-makers.<sup>2</sup> The article shows that a similar end was achieved by different means and within a different timeframe in Finland and Sweden because of variation in the balance between these two preconditions.

The main protagonist of the article is *Gustaf Adolf Helsingius* (1855–1934), the first Inspector of Poor Relief in Finland. As the highest authority of poor relief, Helsingius was responsible for ensuring that the existing poor relief and health legislations were observed in the municipalities. If the municipalities refused to take action to remedy any

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<sup>1</sup> Veikko Piirainen, *Kylänkierrolta kunnalliskotiin: Savon ja Pohjois-Karjalan maaseudun vaivaishoitotoiminta vaivaishoidon murroskautena 1800-luvun jälkipuoliskolla (Poor Relief in Savo and Northern Carelia in the Late 19th Century)* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura SHS, 1958), 155–156; Jouko Jaakkola, 'Vaivaisten holhouksesta köyhäinhoitoon (From the Care for Paupers to Poor Relief)' in Jouko Jaakkola, Panu Pulma, Mirja Satka & Kyösti Urponen (eds.), *Armeliaisuus, yhteisöapu, sosiaaliturva: suomalaisen sosiaalisen turvan historia (Almsgiving, Community Help, Social Security System: the History of Social Security in Finland)* (Jyväskylä: Sosiaaliturvan Keskusliitto, 1994), 113–116; Pirjo Markkola, 'Changing Patterns of Welfare: Finland in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries' in Steven King & John Stewart (eds.), *Welfare Peripheries. The Development of Welfare States in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2007), 218–219; Johanna Annola, *Äiti, emäntä, virkanainen, vartija: köyhäintalojen johtajattaret ja yhteiskunnallinen äitiys 1880–1918 (Mother, Matron, Civil Servant, Guardian: Female Poorhouse Directors and Social Motherhood, 1880–1918)* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura SKS, 2011), 32, 36, 40–41.

<sup>2</sup> The notion of the two preconditions for the initiation of an administrative reform bears resemblance to Bo Rothstein's perception of a "formative moment". According to Rothstein, a formative moment is a period of time when the existing political circumstances become dysfunctional because of new social and economic conditions. The formative moments open up new opportunities for individual actors to participate in the formation of new structures and policies. Bo Rothstein, *Den korporativa staten: intresseorganisationer och statsförvaltning i svensk politik (The Corporatist State: Interest Groups and State Administration in Swedish Politics)* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1992), 17.

perceived shortcomings, he was to report to the Governor of the province in question.<sup>3</sup> Because of his dedication and commitment to his office throughout his long career (1889–1915), Helsingius can be characterised as the founding father of state-controlled poor relief, and also as the greatest advocate of poorhouse system in Finland.<sup>4</sup> For the majority of poor relief reformers in other countries, Helsingius was the Finnish key contact. The discussion with the Swedish reformers was particularly easy for Helsingius, because he was Swedish-speaking.

The article discusses three Swedish contacts of Helsingius. The first one of them is Reverend *Henrik Germund Blumenberg* (1848–1902), who tried to initiate public discussion on the state control of poor relief in the 1890s and failed. The pioneering but isolate work of Blumenberg has been largely ignored by Swedish researchers, who tend to focus on the swift development that took place in the early 1900s. This development has been characterised as the “breaking up of ice period” on Sweden’s route to modern social policy.<sup>5</sup> The other two contacts of Helsingius, Reverend *Olof Bäckström* (1862–1939) and *Gerhard Halfred von Koch* (1872–1948), were active during this period of transition, which is why they come up more often in the Swedish discussion. Bäckström was assigned as the first Swedish Instructor of Poor Relief in 1908 by *Svenska Fattigvårdsförbundet* (SF), a central organ for the different voluntary organisations within the field of poor relief in Sweden. Von Koch, who was the editor of two major poor relief related journals<sup>6</sup>, was appointed as the first state Inspector of Poor Relief in Sweden in 1918.

Lennart Lundquist places Bäckström and von Koch among the core figures of a group he calls “the poor relief people”.<sup>7</sup> According to Lundquist, the core of the group consisted of mostly Liberal-minded, Stockholm-based upper-class citizens, who were active in a number of voluntary associations such as *Centralförbundet för Socialt Arbete* (CSA) and the SF. They were formulating theories about social work, launching information campaigns in order to get people to understand the extent of the social problems, and trying to influence the political decision-makers directly and indirectly to achieve a more comprehensive social legislation.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Panu Pulma, ‘Köyhästäkö kansalainen? Köyhyys 1800-luvun poliittisena ongelmana’ (‘A Pauper – a Citizen? Poverty as a 19th-century Political Problem’), in Pertti Haapala (ed.), *Talous, valta ja valtio: tutkimuksia 1800-luvun Suomesta (Economy, Power and the State in 19th-century Finland)* (Tampere: Vastapaino, 1990), 178; Jouko Jaakkola 1994, 116–117; Panu Pulma, ‘Valtio, vaivaiset ja kuntien itsehallinto: G. A. Helsingius valtion ja kuntien välisen suhteen muokkaajana’ (‘The State, the Poor and Municipal Self-government: G. A. Helsingius as a Constructor of the State–Municipality Relationship’) in Seppo Tiihonen (ed.), *Virkanyrkit ja muita hallintohistorian tutkielmia (The Bureaucrats and Other Studies on Administrative History)* (Helsinki: Painatuskeskus, 1995), 106–107.

<sup>4</sup> Pulma 1995, passim; Annola 2011, 44–49.

<sup>5</sup> Originally “islossning”. Karl Höjer, *Svensk socialpolitisk historia (The History of Swedish Social Policy)* (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Söners Förlag, 1952), 54. See also Per-Gunnar Edebalk & Björn Lindgren, ‘Från bortauktionering till köp-sälj-system: svensk äldreomsorg under 1900-talet’ (‘Care for the Elderly in Sweden in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century’) in Rosmari Eliasson (ed.), *Omsorgens skifningar: begreppet, vardagen, politiken, forskningen (Changes in Care: Concept, Practice, Policy, Research)* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1996), 139–140.

<sup>6</sup> *Social Tidskrift* and *Svenska fattigvårdsförbundets tidskrift*.

<sup>7</sup> Originally ‘fattigvårdsfolket’. Lennart Lundquist, *Fattigvårdsfolket : ett nätverk i den sociala frågan 1900–1920 (The Poor Relief People: a Network and the Social Question, 1900–1920)* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1997), 153–174. Thus Bäckström and von Koch knew each other. As Blumenberg and Bäckström were clergymen both working in Uppsala Diocese near Stockholm, it is likely that they were acquainted as well.

<sup>8</sup> Lundquist 1997, 86, 149–151, 199, 372, 393.

Lundquist suggest that the group was especially successful in both incorporating its theories into the new Swedish poor law of 1918, and in forming the essential parts of the new poor relief infrastructure to the point where it can be claimed that the infrastructure of municipal poor relief was created by a voluntary organisation.<sup>9</sup> One of the many issues the group promoted successfully was the question of organising the state control of poor relief.<sup>10</sup> However, the direct influence of the Finnish state control of poor relief on the Swedish one remains unmentioned by Lundquist.

This article presents the birth of the Swedish state control of poor relief as a development propelled by communication between the reformers in the two neighbouring countries. It started as what could be called a one-man crusade, continued as a semi-official effort made by the representatives of a voluntary network of “the poor relief people”, and ended up becoming a part of the official infrastructure of Swedish public sector poor relief. The primary source material of the article is the existing correspondence between Helsingius and the Swedish reformers, consisting of 74 letters from the years 1887–1930. The correspondence is stored in Gustaf Adolf Helsingius’ Collection in Åbo Akademi University Library Archives.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Initiation of State Control of Poor Relief in Finland**

In Finland, the establishment of the Inspectorate was a process in which G. A. Helsingius’ personal interests were met by a favourable socio-political climate. Three crucial factors intertwined in the process.

First, in early 1880s, the Finnish Senate was keen on finding a fast way to help the municipalities cope with their obligations dictated by the Poor Relief Act of 1879. These included both giving relief to the infirm poor and building workhouses for the able-bodied poor who resorted to poor relief despite their ability to work. The cost of poor relief to municipal ratepayers kept increasing as the number of people with limited economic means was growing steadily towards the end of the century.<sup>12</sup> The difficult situation created an opening for the young G. A. Helsingius, who had graduated from an engineering school a couple of years earlier. Alongside with his day job as a supervisor on a railway construction site in Northern Finland, Helsingius participated keenly in the public debate on a poor relief reform in the newspapers. His writings did not go unnoticed: in 1886 he was appointed by the Senate and sent on a mission of finding out how poor relief was organised elsewhere in Northern Europe. For Helsingius the study trip marked a beginning of a new career path.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Lundquist 1997, 370, 397–398.

<sup>10</sup> Lundquist 1997, 206, 218.

<sup>11</sup> The correspondence between G. A. Helsingius and H. G. Blumenberg (1887–1901) consists of 31 letters by Blumenberg and 2 drafts by Helsingius. The correspondence between G. A. Helsingius and O. Bäckström (1903–1910) consists of 14 letters by Bäckström and 2 drafts by Helsingius. In terms of mutuality, the correspondence between G. A. Helsingius and H. G. von Koch (1907–1930) is the most complete, consisting of 15 letters by von Koch and 11 drafts by Helsingius.

<sup>12</sup> For analyses on poverty in Finland at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Jaakkola 1994, 85–90; Panu Pulma, ‘Vaivaisten valtakunta’ (‘The Realm of Paupers’) in Jaakkola, Pulma *et al.*, 1994), 67–68.

<sup>13</sup> G. A. Helsingius, *Fattigvårdens nydaning i Finland under tre årtionden (The Reformation of Poor Relief in Finland: Three Decades)* (Helsingfors: Schildts, 1918), 13; G. A. Helsingius, *Hågkomster (Recollections)* (Helsingfors: Söderström & Co, 1927), 212; Jaakkola 1994, 115; Pulma 1995, 103.

Second, the establishment of the Inspectorate was bound to the outcome of Helsingius' study trip. He was convinced that the problems of poor relief could be solved by introducing a poorhouse system and establishing a supervisory state office. In his account to the Senate in 1887, Helsingius explained that poorhouses were to accommodate *both* the infirm poor and the able-bodied poor, which would eventually result into savings. The new official – an Inspector or an Instructor – was to guide the municipalities into an era of institutionalised poor relief. According to Helsingius, both ideas originated from Sweden, albeit no supervisory office had yet been established there.<sup>14</sup> To validate his argument, Helsingius referred to studies on Swedish poor relief published by Reverend H. G. Blumenberg, and to a statement given by the treasurer of poor relief board in Gothenburg, Sweden. According to Helsingius, both men were of the opinion that as efficient as the Swedish poor relief system was, it nevertheless lacked a state official, who would monitor the municipalities.<sup>15</sup> By introducing these writers as long-term authorities within the Swedish field of poor relief, Helsingius stressed their experience and thus implied that if Finland was to follow Sweden, there were things that could be done even better from the beginning.

Helsingius' suggestions can be placed to the context of national efficiency movement, which was gaining ground in Great Britain and other industrialised countries.<sup>16</sup> To Helsingius, a state-controlled poorhouse system was a step on Finland's way from backwardness to modernity, because it was a model developed in the more advanced parts of Europe.<sup>17</sup> In this Helsingius joined the Finnish intelligentsia for a search for foreign models that could be used to develop the home country. According to Pauli Kettunen, the quest took the shape of numerous study trips abroad, the purpose of which was to collect information on science, technology and socio-political currents. Kettunen points out that the travellers were usually not entirely altruistic in their pursuit, because many of them used their knowledge to ascend to relevant positions in Finland.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> G. A. Helsingius, *Matkakertomus (A Travel Account)* (Helsinki, 1887), 14–20, 23–26.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, 24–25; H. G. Blumenberg, *Om fattiggårdar (On Poorhouses)* (Linköping: Hasse W. Tullberg, 1884); H. G. Blumenberg, 'Rundresan till svenska fattiggårdar' ('A Round Trip to Swedish Poorhouses') *Tidning för Wenersborgs stad och län (The Newspaper for the City and County of Wenersborg)*, 20.9.1889. Originally published in the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* in Sweden the same year.

<sup>16</sup> For the connection between national efficiency movement and social policy in Finland, see Minna Harjula, *Vaillinaisuudella vaivatut: vammaisuuden tulkinnat suomalaisessa huoltokeskustelussa 1800-luvun lopulta 1930-luvun lopulle (Troubled by Disability: Interpretations of Disability in the Finnish Welfare Discourse from the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century to the late 1930s)* (Helsinki: SHS, 1996), 61–65; Markku Mattila, *Kansamme parhaaksi: rotuhygieniä Suomessa vuoden 1935 sterilointilakiin asti (In Our Nation's Best Interest: Eugenics in Finland until the Promulgation of the Sterilization Law of 1935)* (Helsinki: SKS, 1999), 33–34. In Sweden, see Mikael Sjögren, *Fattigvård och folkuppfostran: liberal fattigvårdspolitik 1903–1918 (Poor Relief and Education: Liberal Poor Relief Politics, 1903–1918)* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1997), 36–38; Marjaana Niemi, *Public Health and Municipal Policy Making: Britain and Sweden, 1900–1940* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 65, 116.

<sup>17</sup> For Helsingius' thoughts on efficiency, see G. A. Helsingius, 'Finlands näringar' ('Industries in Finland'), *Wasa Tidning*, 3.3., 21.3., 24.3., 28.3., 31.3., 6.4., 11.4., 18.4., 21.4., 2.5., 5.5.1882; 'Vårt fattiga Finland, framåtskridandet och näringsskolor' ('Our Poor Finland, Progress and Industrial Schools'), *Nya Pressen*, 7.7., 8.7., 16.7.1884 (c); G. A. Helsingius, 'Slöjdundervisning med ekonomiskt syftemål' ('Crafts Education with an Economic Purpose'), *Nya Pressen*, 6.12.1885.

<sup>18</sup> Pauli Kettunen, 'The Power of International Comparison: a Perspective on the Making and Challenging of the Nordic Welfare' in Niels Finn Christiansen (ed.), *The Nordic Model of Welfare: a Historical Reappraisal*, (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2006), 37–38. For Helsingius' personal motives for promoting the new office, see Helsingius 1887, 21–22, 43–46; Piirainen 1958, 189–192; Maarit Hermansson, 'G. A. Helsingiuksen muotokuva Juhani Ahon lastussa 'Oman onnensa seppä'' (The Portrait of G. A. Helsingius in the Short Story 'To Forge One's Own Destiny' by Juhani Aho'), *Sosiaaliturva*, vol. 80, no. 22 (1992), 8–9; Mirja

Third, it is likely that the Inspectorate was established because the Governor General<sup>19</sup> took personal interest in the question of reforming the Finnish poor relief. As Finland was an autonomous Grand Duchy within the Russian Empire between 1809–1917, and as the Governor General was the Emperor's representative in Finland, the Finnish Senators could not ignore an issue he found interesting.<sup>20</sup> Although Helsingius' proposal divided the Senate, the office of Inspector of Poor Relief was nevertheless established under the Civil Department in the Senate in 1888 – and by four votes against three, Helsingius was appointed to the task. As the office was re-established as a permanent post in 1894, he was called to the office without an application process. In 1902, the state machinery was complemented by appointing three Instructors, who reported to the Inspector.<sup>21</sup>

### **A Failed Swedish Campaign for State Control of Poor Relief**

Helsingius relied on the expertise of the Swedish H. G. Blumenberg in his account to the Senate in 1887. He contacted Blumenberg personally the same year.<sup>22</sup> Blumenberg was very excited to hear about Helsingius' plans for an Inspectorate: according to him, Sweden did not have proper control over municipal poor relief, because no-one had considered it necessary to organise a thorough investigation on the matter.<sup>23</sup> It appears that Blumenberg found the situation so alarming that he decided to take action himself by launching a campaign for state control of poor relief in Sweden. According to a letter dated May 1890, he was up to promoting the Finnish Inspectorate in the Swedish press as well as introducing the matter to individuals “who might take an interest in it and advance it somehow.”<sup>24</sup> However, Blumenberg's newspaper article did not give rise to any public debate,<sup>25</sup> and in the end his campaign failed altogether. In this chapter, Blumenberg's campaign is being discussed in the light of the letters he sent to Helsingius between the years 1890–1901.

There were four major reasons why Blumenberg's campaign failed. First, the failure was a result of the fact that state control was not introduced hand in hand with the poorhouse system. The first poorhouses had emerged as early as in the 1860s,<sup>26</sup> without a

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Satka, *Making Social Citizenship: Conceptual Practices from the Finnish Poor Law to Professional Social Work* (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylä University Printing House, 1995), 35–37; Annola 2011, 42–44.

<sup>19</sup> Frederic Maurice van Heiden (in Russian: Feodor Logginovich Heiden) served as Governor General in 1881–1898. Markku Tyynilä, 'Feodor Logginovich Heiden' in Matti Klinge *et al.* (eds.), *Suomen kansallisbiografia III (The National Biography of Finland III)* (Helsinki: SKS, 2004), 638–641.

<sup>20</sup> A letter from T. J. Aminoff to G. A. Helsingius, 28.2.1929, G. A. Helsingius' Letters I, G. A. Helsingius' Collection, Åbo Akademi University Library (ÅAUL) Archives.

<sup>21</sup> Piirainen 1958, 188–189, 192–212.

<sup>22</sup> A journal entry, written by G. A. Helsingius, 7.3.1887, G. A. Helsingius' travel accounts, journals and notebooks C:1, G. A. Helsingius' Collection, ÅAUL Archives; a letter from H. G. Blumenberg to G. A. Helsingius, 20.3.1887, G. A. Helsingius' Letters I, G. A. Helsingius' Collection, ÅAUL Archives. 'Letters I' includes all letters from Blumenberg to Helsingius as well as Helsingius' drafts to Blumenberg, which is why detailed information is not repeated below.

<sup>23</sup> Blumenberg to Helsingius, 20.3.1887, Helsingius to Blumenberg (draft), 3.4.1887.

<sup>24</sup> Originally 'svenskar som möjligen kunde ha intresse för något liknande här samt något verka för dess åstadkommande'. Blumenberg to Helsingius, 22.5.1890.

<sup>25</sup> The article was published in the newspaper *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*. Blumenberg to Helsingius, 23.6.1890.

<sup>26</sup> Gunnel Swedner, *Traditioner som fångslar: en studie av det sociala arbetets motiv och framträdelseformer i Göteborg under tiden 1790–1918 (A Study on the Motives and Forms of Social Work in Gothenburg, 1790–1918)* (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 1993).

mention of state control. Thus by the 1890s, the Swedish poor relief system had already taken a certain shape, and introducing state control at this mature stage was difficult. The situation was different in Finland, where modernisation of poor relief came to equal intensified state control, as the Inspectorate and the poorhouses were introduced almost simultaneously in the late 1880s.

Because the Swedish poor relief system was considered as sufficient as it was, there was no significant public interest in intensified state control of poor relief. The majority of political decision-makers considered other topics more important. In the summer of 1890, Blumenberg and his co-operator Robert Themptander<sup>27</sup> approached Minister of Education (*ecklesiastikminister*).<sup>28</sup> They were proposing for an Instructor's office, not an Inspector's, because they considered the latter term as too aggressive for the Swedish political context. At Blumenberg's request, Helsingius took an active part in formulating the proposal and commenting on the final version before it was presented to Minister of Education. However, the Minister showed no interest in proposing a motion at Parliament. According to Blumenberg, the Minister and his successor found neither time nor funding for a new state office of poor relief, because they were occupied with planning a major educational reform.<sup>29</sup>

Second, Blumenberg's campaign was hindered by the way in which the decisions on the organisation of poor relief were made in Sweden. In Finland, the Senators had put the matter of establishing a new state office on the vote among themselves. In Sweden, the decision had to be made by the Parliament, which was far more complicated and time-consuming. After being turned down Minister of Education, Blumenberg could only wish that one of the members of Parliament would submit a motion of state official for poor relief.<sup>30</sup>

In 1892 two Liberal-minded representatives did indeed submit two different motions, both proposing for *Inspection* of poor relief. Blumenberg was deeply unhappy with the motions, because he felt that the topic had been brought out in a wrong form and by wrong people. According to him, the motions would not pass, because the Conservative Agrarian majority in the Second Chamber was generally afraid of increasing the costs to ratepayers and thus unwilling to touch the existing poor relief system. The fact that both motions of 1892 came from "representatives who belonged to the hard left" was not likely to make the Agrarian majority more favourable to the cause but to politicise the matter instead.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Blumenberg had managed to find a relatively influential co-operator: Robert Themptander was the former Prime Minister of Sweden and the Governor of Stockholm Province. Th. Westrin *et al.* (eds.), *Nordisk familjebok 28: Syrten-vikarna–Tidsbestämning (The Nordic Encyclopedia for Families 28: The Syrten Bays – Fixing of the Time)* (Stockholm: Nordisk familjeboks förlags aktiebolag, 1919), 1067–1069.

<sup>28</sup> Gunnar Wennerberg served as Minister of Education in 1890. He was followed by Gustaf Gilljam in 1891. Th. Westrin *et al.* (eds.), *Nordisk familjebok 31: Ural–Vertex (The Nordic Encyclopedia for Families 31: Ural–Vertex)* (Stockholm, Nordisk familjeboks förlags aktiebolag, 1921), 1156–1164.

<sup>29</sup> Blumenberg to Helsingius, 23.6.1890, 6.8.1890, 16.9.1890, 26.9.1890, 30.9.1890, 23.6.1891, 12.2.1892, 13.4.1892. In Sweden, Minister of Education was responsible for both educational affairs and poor relief related issues. In that sense, the organisation of the Swedish Government differed from that of the Finnish Senate. In Finland, educational affairs were managed by the Ecclesiastical Department, and poor relief related issues were taken care of by the Civil Department of the Senate, under which the Inspector of Poor Relief also worked.

<sup>30</sup> Blumenberg to Helsingius, 20.6.1891, 23.6.1891, 10.1.1892.

<sup>31</sup> Originally 'representanter tillhörande yttersta vänstern'. Blumenberg to Helsingius, 4.2.1893. The representatives in question were Christian Bülow and Anton Hahn. See also Urban Lundberg & Klas Åmark,

Blumenberg tried to save the situation by building up a counter-motion for *Instruction* of poor relief. He went around from one representative to another, offering his ready proposal to be presented at Parliament, but no-one would adopt the cause. According to Blumenberg, the representatives did not want to submit any motions against the opinion of the Agrarian majority. This shows that he was late already – the question of poor relief reform was rapidly becoming political. As the Liberal motions failed, just as Blumenberg had predicted, the parliamentary route to a poor relief reform was barred.<sup>32</sup>

The third reason for the failure of Blumenberg's campaign was the lack of proper funding. This shortcoming became apparent in 1892, as Blumenberg and Themptander tried to introduce Helsingius' model blueprints of a rural poorhouse in Sweden. Their plan was to distribute the blueprints to every Swedish municipality as a free gift. At the same time it was to be made known via newspapers that questions related to the blueprints should be addressed to Blumenberg.<sup>33</sup> However, the blueprints could not be published, because the newspapers considered it too expensive and Blumenberg was unable to find financial support for having the blueprints printed independently. The major voluntary charity organisations and private benefactors, too, failed to express their interest in the state control of poor relief.<sup>34</sup>

Blumenberg's attempt to become a self-appointed Instructor of Poor Relief bears resemblance to Helsingius' proceedings back in 1887. In trying to convince the Finnish Senate of the necessity of a new office, Helsingius referred to the numerous requests for guidance he had received from the municipalities. He did not mention that he had fuelled the process himself by publishing a newspaper advertisement in which he expressed his willingness to help the municipal decision-makers who were planning to establish a poorhouse.<sup>35</sup> Thus the cries for help did not arrive entirely spontaneously but were, in a way, ordered in advance. It remains unclear whether Helsingius actually advised Blumenberg to make a similar move. In either case, an advertisement was published, and in half a year, 21 municipalities turned to Blumenberg with poorhouse related problems.<sup>36</sup> The references show that there was indeed some need for instruction, but not enough to arouse the decision-makers' interest.

The fact that Blumenberg took Finland for his model can be considered as the fourth reason for his failure. In the 1890s, the Swedish decision-makers did not regard Finland as the best source for new ideas. This became apparent in 1891 as Blumenberg applied for a state grant for a study trip to Finland but was rejected by Minister of Education. Blumenberg

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'Social Rights and Social Security: the Swedish Welfare State, 1900–2000', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, vol. 26, no. 3 (2001), 157.

<sup>32</sup> Blumenberg to Helsingius, 11.4.1893, 19.10.1893. Blumenberg's experiences resemble with Lennart Lundquist's notion of the difficulty of political influencing in the underdeveloped Swedish parliamentary system at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Lundquist, 1997, 27–31.

<sup>33</sup> Blumenberg to Helsingius, 12.2.1892, 26.7.1892. For discussion on Helsingius' blueprints, see Blumenberg to Helsingius, 20.3.1887, Helsingius to Blumenberg, 3.4.1887 (draft); a journal entry, written by G. A. Helsingius, undated, G. A. Helsingius' travel accounts, journals and notebooks C:1, G. A. Helsingius' Collection, ÅAUL Archives; Annola 2011, 61–63.

<sup>34</sup> Blumenberg to Helsingius, 26.7.1892.

<sup>35</sup> Helsingius 1887, 21–22, 43–46; a notebook entry, written by G. A. Helsingius, 24.7.1886, G. A. Helsingius' travel accounts, journals and notebooks C:1, G. A. Helsingius' Collection, ÅAUL Archives; *Kaiku*, 11.8.1886; *Uusi Suometar*, 1.9.1886; *Helsingfors Dagblad*, 2.9.1886.

<sup>36</sup> Blumenberg to Helsingius, 26.7.1892.



found the decision irrational, and communicated his disappointment to Helsingius: “The state has granted a stipendium for a study trip to Germany and England at least twice, but now there is nothing left for a trip to a country so similar to ours.”<sup>37</sup>

Blumenberg’s failed campaign is an example of a situation where the socio-political climate is not favourable for large administrative reforms, and where the reformer lacks the power to change the circumstances.<sup>38</sup> Blumenberg’s failure contrasts with Helsingius’ success, which is why their correspondence does not only reflect the socio-political reality in Sweden at the turn of the century, but also sheds light on the same in Finland. Additionally, the correspondence between Helsingius and Blumenberg illustrates the change in their relationship over time. At first, Blumenberg can be regarded as a mentor to Helsingius, who was entering the field of poor relief as a newcomer in the 1880s. Their roles gradually reversed in the course of the decade that followed. The development was bound to the main topic of their correspondence, the state control of poor relief, in which Helsingius was becoming an expert. The position he assumed vis-à-vis Blumenberg can be regarded as one of the ways in which Helsingius established the expert role, not only in Finland but in the Nordic countries in general.

### **The Swedish “Breaking up of Ice” Period and Finnish Influences**

The development of Swedish public sector poor relief system at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been analysed in detail by Lennart Lundquist and Mikael Sjögren among others.<sup>39</sup> In this article, the focus is on the Finnish contacts of two representatives of the group of “poor relief people”, O. Bäckström and G. H. von Koch. As mentioned earlier, Bäckström became the first Swedish Instructor of Poor Relief in 1908, and von Koch was appointed as the first Swedish Inspector of Poor Relief in 1919. Why did they succeed in what Blumenberg had failed a decade or two earlier?

There are three interconnected reasons for the success of Bäckström and von Koch. First, the breakthrough of state control was made possible by the overall change of socio-political climate in Sweden in the early 1900s. The change was brought about by the increasing public awareness of the inadequacy of the current social policy, and propelled by the rapid economic growth as well as the expansion of political rights to new groups of citizens.<sup>40</sup> The beginning of the new century was the heyday of Liberal politics, which gave momentum to the discussion on poor relief related topics. Thus on a political level, the time was ripe for a poor relief reform.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Originally ‘under det Staten förut åtminstone två gånger beviljat medel till studieresor i Tyskland och England, då finns nu intet för en resa till ett land med förhållanden liknande våra’. Blumenberg to Helsingius, 20.6.1891, 23.6.1891.

<sup>38</sup> See also Lundquist 1997, 228.

<sup>39</sup> Lundquist 1997; Sjögren 1997. See also Marika Hedin, *Ett liberalt dilemma: Ernst Beckman, Emilia Broomé, G. H. von Koch och den sociala frågan 1880–1930 (A Liberal Dilemma: Ernst Beckman, Emilia Broomé, G. H. von Koch and the Social Question, 1880–1930)* (Stockholm & Stenhag: Symposion, 2002).

<sup>40</sup> Edebalk & Lindgren 1996, 139–140.

<sup>41</sup> Lundquist 1997, 31–39; Hedin 2002, 24; Torbjörn Nilsson, ‘Ett försvunnet liberalt dilemma’ (‘A Disappeared Liberal Dilemma’), *Historisk tidskrift*, vol. 124, no. 4 (2004), 851.

Second, unlike in Blumenberg's time, the voluntary charity organisations now took an active part in necessitating a poor relief reform. The smaller voluntary charity organisations clustered into larger central organisations with a strong link to political power. The two most influential new central organisations were the CSA, established in 1903, and the SF, established in 1906.<sup>42</sup> As central figures of this network, Bäckström and von Koch had political resources to pursue their ends.

Third, there was now enough funding for study trips, publications and conferences, all of which increased common knowledge of state control of poor relief and contributed to its breakthrough. In 1904, the CSA was donated a considerable sum of money by a private person for forwarding the poor relief reform. For implementing the task, the CSA established a specific committee, chaired by von Koch.<sup>43</sup> In the years 1905–1907, the CSA poor relief committee worked actively for the poor relief reform by collecting data from local poor relief boards all over the country, and by encouraging study trips abroad. As a result, a considerable amount of small booklets and a final report were published. The SF, in turn, had the economic means for appointing Bäckström as an Instructor for several years (1908–1912), thus providing the Swedish decision-makers with the experience of having someone to guide the municipalities.

The correspondence of Inspector Helsingius sheds light on the question of how the Finnish influences were acquired and utilised by Bäckström and von Koch in the new situation. Helsingius was first contacted in 1903 by Bäckström, who was applying for a Parliament grant for a study trip to Finland. Helsingius helped him plan a tour with a special emphasis on the Finnish inspection system. Bäckström's application was approved by the Swedish Parliament in 1904, and he visited Finland the same summer.<sup>44</sup> His success indicates that Finland was no longer considered as an inappropriate model for Sweden. It is reasonable to assume that the change in the Swedish decision-makers' attitude towards Finland was partly due to Helsingius' strengthening position as the Nordic expert on state control of poor relief.

It is likely that Bäckström's Finnish contacts contributed to the fact that he was appointed as the first Swedish Instructor of Poor Relief in 1908.<sup>45</sup> His work resembled that of

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<sup>42</sup> Gunnar Boalt & Ulla Bergryd, *Centralförbundet för Socialt Arbete: ett kapitel svensk socialpolitik (Centralförbundet för Socialt Arbete: a Chapter of Swedish Social Policy)* (Stockholm: CSA, 1974), 97; Roger Qvarsell, 'Välgörenhet, filantropi och frivilligt socialt arbete: en historisk översikt' ('Charity, Philanthropy and Voluntary Social Work: a Historical Overview'), in Socialtjänstkommittén (ed.), *Frivilligt socialt arbete: kartläggning och kunskapsöversikt (Voluntary Social Work: a Survey and a Review)* (Stockholm: Allmänna förlag, 1993), 227; Sjögren 1997, 46–47.

<sup>43</sup> Agnes Wirén, *G. H. von Koch: banbrytare i svensk socialvård (G. H. von Koch: a Pioneer of Swedish Social Welfare)* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1980), 135–136.

<sup>44</sup> A letter from O. Bäckström to G. A. Helsingius, 6.11.1903, 6.5.1904; A letter from G. A. Helsingius to O. Bäckström (draft), 12.11.1903, G. A. Helsingius' Letters I, G. A. Helsingius' Collection, ÅAUL Archives. 'Letters I' includes all letters from Bäckström to Helsingius as well as Helsingius' drafts to Bäckström, which is why detailed information is not repeated below.

<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Bäckström had good knowledge about municipal poor relief, because he was a long-standing member of poor relief board in his home parish Lövestabruk. Bäckström had also published a book *Fattigårdarna på landet (Poorhouses in Rural Areas)* in 1907. 'Sveriges förste fattigvårdskonsulent' ('Sweden's First Poor Relief Consultant'), *Stockholms Dagblad*, 15.4.1908; Lundquist, 1997, 163. For Bäckström's trip in Finland, see Bäckström to Helsingius, 6.5.1904, 11.6.1904, 25.8.1904, 7.4.1909; 'Svensk som studerar fattigvård i Finland' ('A Swede Who Studies Poor Relief in Finland'), *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 13.7.1904.

the Finnish Instructors: he visited municipalities according to the requests for assistance, which were in his case mediated by the SF.<sup>46</sup> He was in a good position to spread his opinions on the rational arrangement of municipal poor relief and especially on the proper management of municipal poorhouses.<sup>47</sup> Bäckström's views bear strong resemblance to the ideas propagated by Helsingius and the Finnish Instructors.<sup>48</sup>

Bäckström's observations on the Finnish state inspection of poor relief were imbued in a chain of relevant Swedish publications on the matter between 1906–1915. They were first utilized in a pamphlet published by the CSA in 1906. The argumentation in the pamphlet relied heavily on the same argument Blumenberg had used earlier: because the circumstances were similar in the neighbouring countries and because the intensified state control over municipal poor relief had been regarded as a good solution in Finland, there was no reason why Sweden should not follow the Finnish model by establishing an Inspector's office.<sup>49</sup> The key message of the pamphlet was reintroduced in the final report of the CSA poor relief committee, published in 1907.<sup>50</sup> The final report, in turn, had a significant influence on the work of a state committee, which was established in 1907 for drafting a new Swedish poor law.<sup>51</sup> According to the state committee's proposal, which was published in 1915, state inspection of poor relief should be initiated.<sup>52</sup> While it is obvious that the proposal was a result of a long series of negotiations and that information used in these negotiations was acquired from multiple sources, it can be claimed that Bäckström's observations on the Finnish inspection had a far-reaching impact on the development of the Swedish state control of poor relief.

## **The Swedish Progress and Finnish Stagnation**

Judging by the correspondence of Helsingius, he was contacted by von Koch in the spring of 1907. At that time von Koch had been chairing the CSA poor relief committee for two years, and the committee's final report was on its way. Von Koch was eager to hear Helsingius'

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<sup>46</sup> 'Sveriges förste fattigvårdskonsulent' ('Sweden's First Poor Relief Consultant', *Stockholms Dagblad*, 15.4.1908; Lundquist 1997, 346.

<sup>47</sup> According to Mikael Sjögren, the views of the new Instructor can be regarded as "pervasive". Sjögren, 1997, 112. See also Lundquist 1997, 163.

<sup>48</sup> For similarities, see for example Olof Bäckström, 'Det dagliga lifvet i fattiggården' ('The Everyday Life in a Poorhouse'), *Svenska Fattigvårdsförbundets tidskrift*, no. 2 (1908); G. A. Helsingius, *Handbok i fattigvård (The Guidebook to Poor Relief)* (Helsingfors: J. Simelii arfvingars boktryckeri aktiebolag, 1899), 80–94.

<sup>49</sup> Centralförbundet för Socialt Arbete (ed.), *Fattigvårdsinspektion. Fattigvård och folkförsäkring. Skriftserie utgifven af Centralförbundet för Socialt Arbete (C. S. A:s) fattigvårdskommitté. N:o 10 (Inspection of Poor Relief. Poor Relief and Public Insurance. A Series of Writings Published by the Poor Relief Committee of the Centralförbundet för Socialt Arbete)* (Stockholm: Oskar Eklunds boktryckeri, 1906), 17–20, 26–28, 37–39.

<sup>50</sup> G. H. von Koch et al. (eds.), *Reformlinjer för svensk fattigvårdslagstiftning (Reform Lines for Swedish Poor Relief Legislation)* (Stockholm, Ekman, 1907). See also Axel Hirsch, 'Reformlinjer för svensk fattigvårdslagstiftning' ('Reform Lines for Swedish Poor Relief Legislation'), *Social Tidskrift*, no. 4 (1907); G. H. von Koch et al. (eds.), *Social handbok (Guidebook to Social Questions)* (Stockholm: Aktiebolaget Ljus & Oskar Eklunds boktryckeri, 1908), 119.

<sup>51</sup> Sjögren 1997, 49; Lundquist 1997, 278. Neither Bäckström nor von Koch was selected as members of the state committee, which, according to Mikael Sjögren, was a major disappointment especially for von Koch. Sjögren 1997, 39.

<sup>52</sup> *Fattigvårdslagstiftningen Del 1, Fattigvårdslagstiftningskommittéens betänkanden II, Förslag till lag om fattigvården (Poor Relief Legislation Part 1, Reports of the Poor Relief Legislation Committee II, Proposal for Poor Law)* (Stockholm, 1915), 218, 481.

opinion on the report.<sup>53</sup> Helsingius politely refused the offer. He had been chairing a state committee for drafting a new Finnish poor law since 1904 and preferred not to express his opinions elsewhere prior to the conclusive meeting of the committee, which would take place in the autumn of 1907.<sup>54</sup> In spite of Helsingius' refusal the two men engaged in a long correspondence. Von Koch was interested in hearing more about the Finnish legislation process and poor relief practices in general – and Helsingius was not shy to share his knowledge on these matters. In 1912, von Koch visited Finland in order to acquaint himself with the Finnish Inspectorate.<sup>55</sup>

However, alongside with these topics, another theme surfaced. In 1907, von Koch informed Helsingius of the Swedish plans to establish an association for people working within the field of poor relief. He asked Helsingius whether a similar association already existed in Finland and whether it would be possible to use the constitution of that association as a model for the Swedish counterpart.<sup>56</sup> Helsingius was again compelled to refuse his help, because there was no such association in Finland.<sup>57</sup> The discussion reveals that the field of poor relief was constructed differently in the neighbouring countries. These different systems carried different potential for reforms. In Sweden, a plethora of individuals and groups was involved in planning poor relief and various methods were tried out without actually having a centralised plan.<sup>58</sup> While the overall picture may have been confusing at times, the modernisation of poor relief was nevertheless proceeding on a wide front. In Finland there was an effective Inspectorate for planning and monitoring poor relief but the number of other actors on the field was low and they were poorly organised.<sup>59</sup> The role of Helsingius became absolutely pivotal in the narrow Finnish system.

The myth of Helsingius as the sole pioneer and as the key figure within the field of poor relief was spread by the writings of Bäckström and von Koch in Sweden.<sup>60</sup> As the Swedish articles were on some occasions quoted in Finnish press,<sup>61</sup> it can be argued that that even though the Swedish reformers certainly used the myth of Helsingius for their own purposes, they also came to contribute to strengthening Helsingius' image in Finland as the

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<sup>53</sup> A letter from G. H. von Koch to G. A. Helsingius, 2.4.1907, G. A. Helsingius' Letters III, G. A. Helsingius' Collection, Åbo Akademi University Library (ÅAUL) Archives. 'Letters III' includes all letters from von Koch to Helsingius as well as Helsingius' drafts to von Koch, which is why detailed information is not repeated below.

<sup>54</sup> Helsingius to von Koch (draft), 3.7.1907.

<sup>55</sup> Von Koch to Helsingius, 20.1.1908, 10.7.1912, 17.7.1912, 6.8.1912; Helsingius to von Koch (draft), 29.1.1908, 3.11.1910, 14.7.1912; 'Erään ruotsalaisen köyhäinhoitomiehen Suomeen tekemä tutkimusmatka' ('A Journey of a Swedish Poor Relief Man in Finland'), *Köyhäinhoitolehti*, no. 1–2 (1913).

<sup>56</sup> Von Koch to Helsingius, spring-summer 1907.

<sup>57</sup> Helsingius to von Koch (draft), 3.8.1907.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Bäckström to Helsingius, 6.11.1903.

<sup>59</sup> In time, small advances were made. The first Finnish congress for poor relief related issues took place in 1909, an association for poor relief people was established in 1910 and the *Köyhäinhoitolehti* journal was established in 1912 – but all these developments were more or less initiated and monitored by the state officials and the Inspector of Poor Relief in particular. Minna Harjula, 'Gustaf Adolf Helsingius' in Klinge *et al.* (eds.) 2004, 749; Annola 2011, 23–24, 224, 230.

<sup>60</sup> *Fattigvårdsinspektion*, 1906, 18; 'Sociala lifsverk. Gustaf Adolf Helsingius', *Social Tidskrift*, no. 6 (1906); G. H. von Koch, 'Fattigvårdsinspektionen i Finland' ('The Inspection of Poor Relief in Finland'), *Svenska fattigvårdsförbundets tidskrift* (1912), 229–238, 297–305. It is likely that the article in *Social Tidskrift* was also written by von Koch, who was the editor of the journal. For von Koch's perception of Helsingius as 'the Nordic pioneer' and the Finnish Inspectorate as an institution Helsingius had built 'stone by stone', see von Koch to Helsingius, 6.8.1912.

<sup>61</sup> See for example 'Erään ruotsalaisen köyhäinhoitomiehen Suomeen tekemä tutkimusmatka', art. cit.

sole founder of modern poor relief. What should be noted, though, is the way the Swedish authors usually emphasised Helsingius' consultative attitude towards municipal decision-makers as if to stress that having an Inspectorate did not mean that the municipalities were run over by the state. This indicates that in the early 1900s there was still a lingering doubt whether an *Inspector* was too aggressive a term for the Swedish political context.

After the early 1910s, the outbreak of the First World War caused a rupture in the relations between Helsingius and his Swedish collaborators.<sup>62</sup> The correspondence with Bäckström seems to have withered altogether, and the next letter from von Koch is dated 1918. This newer correspondence of Helsingius and von Koch reveals, on the one hand, that the modernisation of poor relief had taken big steps forward in Sweden during the war years. In June 1918 von Koch was happy to inform Helsingius that a new poor law had been passed, and in the spring of 1919 Helsingius had a reason to congratulate von Koch, who had been appointed as the first Inspector of Poor Relief in Sweden.<sup>63</sup> In Finland, on the other hand, socio-political climate had rapidly worsened in the 1910s because of the war and a Russification campaign launched by Emperor Nicholas II. As a consequence, the field of poor relief among others had become stagnant. A typical example of the stagnation is the delay in passing a new poor law. The state committee Helsingius had been chairing had failed in 1908, but a new committee was not set up until 1917. The same year Finland gained independence from imperial Russia, but as the polarisation of society led into a bloody civil war in 1918, the new poor law could only be enacted as late as in 1922.

The post-war correspondence of Helsingius and von Koch also sheds light on the weakness of the narrow Finnish system, which was largely based on the input of one man. As all activities were more or less controlled by the Inspector, his vigour certainly played a part in the development of poor relief. In 1915 Helsingius suddenly fell ill. As the Senate refused to grant him a long enough leave of absence, he had no other choice but to resign.<sup>64</sup> He was replaced by a series of Inspectors, all of whom possessed *de jure* the same administrative power than Helsingius, but none of whom seemed to have *de facto* the charisma and insightfulness of their predecessor. Because of the narrowness of the system, there were little opportunities for other reformers to step out. Thus with Helsingius, the modernisation of Finnish poor relief lost a part of its momentum.

The correspondence also hints that Helsingius, who had regained his strength shortly after his unfortunate resignation, had problems accepting his new position as a pensioner. Having remarried at a rather mature age, he now had two minors to support, but finding a new position proved to be difficult. One of the major obstacles was the fact that Helsingius could not speak Finnish well enough to pass as a state official in the new, independent Finland – which is why he turned his search to Sweden instead.<sup>65</sup> In 1918 Helsingius approached von Koch in order to ask whether the SF could hire him as a touring

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<sup>62</sup> Helsingius to von Koch (draft), 5.5.1925.

<sup>63</sup> Von Koch to Helsingius, 20.6.1918; Helsingius to von Koch (draft), 13.4.1919; Ebba Pauli (E. P\_i), G. Lagerheim et al. (eds.), 'Fattigvårdsinspektör' ('The Inspector of Poor Relief') in *Nordisk familjebok 35: Supplement Cambrai–Glis (The Nordic Encyclopedia for Families 35: Supplement Cambrai–Glis)* (Stockholm: Nordisk familjeboks förlags aktiebolag, 1923), 753.

<sup>64</sup> Helsingius to von Koch (draft), 8.1.1918, 13.4.1919, 5.5.1925.

<sup>65</sup> Helsingius to von Koch (draft), 8.1.1918, 13.4.1919. For Helsingius' family, see Harjula, 2004, 750; Helsingius, 1927, *passim*.

lecturer in Sweden. The following year he inquired if there were any openings for him in the Swedish Inspectorate.<sup>66</sup> Von Koch was unable to help Helsingius. According to him, the SF did not have enough money for covering the expenses of a lecture tour, and the new career openings within the Inspectorate had been filled long before Helsingius found out about them in the first place. “It would be a pleasure for me to work with You, and if I could find an opening in which we could use your respected experience and strength, I would wish nothing more”, von Koch wrote to Helsingius.<sup>67</sup> The truth between his polite lines was that Helsingius’ time was over – Sweden no longer needed him.

### **The Right Man at the Right Place**

This article explored the initiation of state control of poor relief in Finland and Sweden at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The focus was on the influences exchanged between individual reformers in the two neighbouring countries regarding the establishment of a new state office, the Inspector of Poor Relief. By focusing on the struggles these individuals confronted and on the breakthroughs they achieved in their home countries, it has been possible to highlight the two preconditions that were essential for this administrative reform: a favourable socio-political climate, and a reformer who is recognized and accepted by decision-makers.

The notion resembles with the Swedish historian Birgitta Odén’s discussion on how cultural patterns have influenced the care of the elderly in different time periods. According to her, cultural patterns are always based on both norms and structures, which is why attitudes change in step with structural changes.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, the administrative culture within public sector poor relief could not be altered without a window for reformations, which was opened up by the structural, economic, social and technological changes that took place in society.

In terms of state control of poor relief, such a window opened up at different times in Finland and in Sweden. During these periods, the foreign influences, introduced by individual reformers, were more likely to become accepted. In Finland, the window emerged in the late 1880s, which is why G. A. Helsingius managed to push through an originally Swedish idea of state inspection. In Sweden, the window opened in the early 1900s. Because of the delay, H. G. Blumenberg’s attempt to introduce the Finnish inspection system in Sweden freshly in the early 1890s was doomed to fail, but his successors O. Bäckström and G. H. von Koch were able to convince the Swedish decision-makers of the usefulness of the

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<sup>66</sup> Helsingius to von Koch (draft), 13.4.1919, 15.4.1919.

<sup>67</sup> Originally ‘Det skulle för mig vara särdeles angenämt att samarbeta med Eder och kunde jag finna någon plats för att vi skulle kunna använda oss af edra erfarna och värderade krafter så skulle jag intet hellre önska.’. Von Koch to Helsingius, 5.2.1918, 25.4.1919.

<sup>68</sup> Birgitta Odén, ‘De äldre i samhället – förr. Fem föreläsningar’ (‘The Elderly in Society – Before’) in Birgitta Odén *et al.* (eds.), *Arbetsrapport nr 22 från projektet Äldre i samhället – förr, nu och i framtiden (The Working Report 22 of the Project The Elderly in Society – Before, Now and in the Future)* (Lund, The Institution of History at the University of Lund, 1985); Birgitta Odén, ‘Tidsperspektivet’ (‘The Time Perspective’) in Birgitta Odén & Alvar Svanborg & Lars Tornstam (eds.), *Att åldras i Sverige (To Age in Sweden)* (Stockholm: Natur & Kultur, 1993), 13–15.

Finnish model. Therefore in a way, the article analyses what it means to be the right man at the right place.

The analysis on different reformers in different socio-economic climates poses several interesting questions for further discussion. First, there is a question of the personal motives of the reformers: why were they interested in promoting an administrative reform?

Marika Hedin has emphasised the role of religious conviction in the Swedish reformers' awakening into consciousness of the social problems of their time.<sup>69</sup> Blumenberg and Bäckström were ecclesiastics, and von Koch and Helsingius had a deeply religious background.<sup>70</sup> Therefore it can be claimed that for all four men discussed in this article, helping the needy and fighting against social evils through social reforms may have been one way of living out their Christian calling. However, religious calling may not have been the only motive for becoming a reformer. This is especially true in the case of von Koch and Helsingius, both of whom benefitted career-wise from the administrative reform in their home countries. Both had a background among the upper classes, and the descriptions of their socio-political awakening bear a strong resemblance to one another. Both became exposed to the miserable living conditions the working-class people, which resulted into an inner urge to act for the solution to social problems.<sup>71</sup> Not being ecclesiastics, they had to look elsewhere for a channel for socio-political activity as well as for means to combine their own livelihood with the questions they regarded as important. Thus their entrance into the field of poor relief can be regarded as both a matter of conscience and a personal survival strategy.

Second, there is a question of how Sweden was accepted as a model in Finland, and vice versa. Research has portrayed Emperor Alexander III of Russia as a strict ruler with an intention to reverse the liberalization that had characterized his father's reign. The Governor General, in turn, became known for his proceedings to isolate Finland from her Swedish past.<sup>72</sup> In this context the way Helsingius was encouraged to travel around Scandinavia seems rather unexpected. On the other hand, the Governor General could not ignore the ratepayers' growing dissatisfaction with poor relief in the 1880s. He may have been inclined to reconsider his negative attitude towards Swedish influences, if a Swedish model seemed to promise a solution for the problems of poor relief. In any case the fact that Helsingius did turn to Sweden in his search for models can be regarded as one of the ways the Grand Duchy of Finland turned to Scandinavia and the West instead of Russia.

It has been discussed in the article that the Swedes' overall perception of Finland as a model in regard to the organisation of poor relief changed over a relatively short time period of 10–15 years. It has been suggested that the change was partially bound to the growing expertise of Helsingius within the Nordic framework and to the growing awareness of the similarities between the two countries. However, despite the alleged similarities, the Finnish model was not accepted in Sweden without a debate on both the title of the new official and his place in the Swedish administration system. This is not a surprise – after all,

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<sup>69</sup> Hedin 2002, 65–66, 168

<sup>70</sup> Hedin 2002, 65–66, 166–169; Pulma 1995, 105; Satka 1995, 33–34.

<sup>71</sup> Wirén 1980, 44–45; Sjögren 1997, 38; G. A. Helsingius, 'Kuinka tulin ryhtyneeksi köyhäinhoitotyöhön' ('How I Entered the Field of Poor Relief'), *Köyhäinhoitolehti*, no. 3 (1915); Helsingius 1918, 10–11; Helsingius 1927, 23, 119, 129–131.

<sup>72</sup> Markku Tynnilä, 'Aleksanteri III' (Alexander III), in Matti Klinge *et al.* (eds.) 2003, *Suomen kansallisbiografia I (The National Biography of Finland I)*, 229–235; Tynnilä 2004, 638–641.

the democratized Sweden of 1918 was discussing the implementation of an administrative reform that had been formulated by the conservative political system of the Finland of 1888. What is actually a surprise is the fact that in spite the 30 years' time gap between the inspection systems, the Swedish inspection actually came to resemble the Finnish one.