

Finland: National report on future socio-economic trends

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Quality is an innovative, quantitative and qualitative research project that aims to examine how, in an era of major change, European citizens living in different national welfare state regimes evaluate the quality of their lives. The project will analyse international comparative data on the social well-being of citizens and collect new data on social quality in European workplaces in eight strategically selected partner countries: UK, Finland, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Hungary and a candidate country for EU enlargement, Bulgaria.

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1 Introduction

In Finland, the scenario meeting on the future trajectories of quality of work and life was arranged on May 12, 2008. At first we invited all those persons who had commented the national report on socio-economy trends and welfare policies (Deliverable 3.1) in the earlier stage of the project. As a couple of persons were not able to participate, we extended the list of invited people with a few names to increase the number of participants. Eventually, eleven persons including three facilitators from the national research team attended the scenario meeting.

The meeting was organized at the cabinet of Pääposti Restaurant in Helsinki. Helsinki was assumed to be most convenient location for the experts working mainly in the capital region. The meeting was scheduled from 9:00 to 12:00 starting with a breakfast. In addition, a complimentary lunch was offered for the participants after completing the scenarios. The reserved three hours turned out to a rather short period of time to make up the scenarios. Nevertheless, the four scenarios were successfully produced in two separate groups.

The participants represented a range of organizations. Governmental bodies, employee organizations, research and educational organizations and special interest groups were all represented. The experts were divided in two groups, which both produced their own scenarios. Gender distribution and organisational background were of participants considered while making the groups. For instance, two trade union representatives were placed in different groups. From the national research team, two persons (Jouko Nätti and Timo Anttila) led the work of the groups. The third person (Sakari Taipale) acted as an observer following the work of both groups and intervening when procedural issues came up.

The Finnish team decided to focus on the quality of work as far as the scenarios were concerned. It was assumed that due to the experts' in depth experience in work life issues we would benefit the most if the scenarios are limited to the realm of work. Secondly, it was presumed that the most exaggerating uncertainties would be avoided in this way. The quality of life as a wider concept might direct thinking to the very extreme phenomena, which are rather speculative than likely within the next ten years

2 Designing and building scenarios

The session was started off with a concise presentation of current trends. The presentation was kept rather short as the most of the participants had already read the national report on trends and were aware of them because of their expertise. The topic of the scenarios was formulated as follows: "What are the major challenges Finland faces in the next ten years when it comes to the quality of work?"

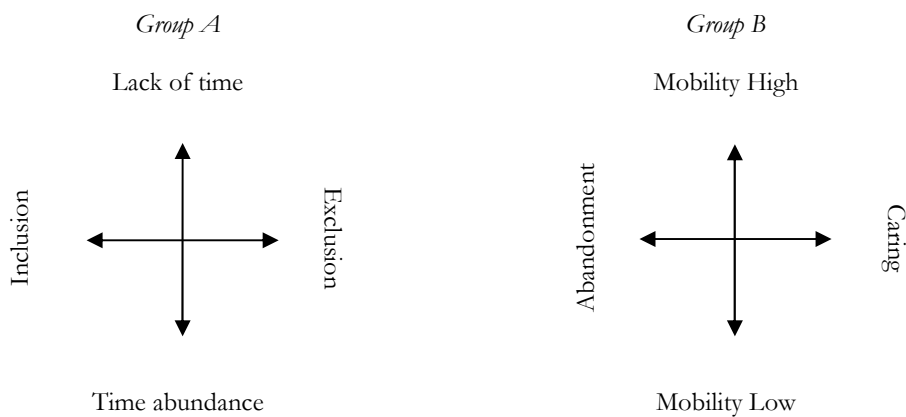
In the next phase, the two groups were asked to list uncertainties basing on their expertise and general understanding. The Group A, head by Jouko Nätti, listed a total of 38 uncertainties. Issues that were considered of having a high impact on quality of work, although being rather unlikely, were such as a the decreasing pressure of work, decline in free time, time prosperity, successful inclusion of immigrants, and a new baby boom which alleviates the lack of labour force. Issues that were seen as certain, with less impact on quality of work, were such as decline of social capital and heightening age of retirement. It was characteristics of this group that the most of uncertainties were considered having high impact on the quality of work.

Group B, facilitated by Timo Anttila, produced a total number of 30 uncertainties. In this group issues that were considered unlikely with great impact on quality of life were such as immigrant employees go in a strike with great negative effect on economy, well-educated young employees move abroad, unskilled Finnish labour move to developing countries to find jobs, nomadisation of work, a subjective right for children day care is terminated and all employees are entitled to a three-year leave for caring close relatives. A drastic decrease in fertility rate and the alleviation of insecurity at work were considered uncertain issues with smaller impact on the quality of work

Group A build their scenarios around two axes that were time abundance vs. lack to time and inclusion vs. exclusion. Two opposite scenarios were selected for further analysis. The first scenario was formed around the lack of time and social inclusion. This scenario was first named as “*Knowledge Society*”, though it was later called also as “People’s Home Capitalism”, derived from a Swedish concept of “Folkhem”, and “Textbook Capitalism”. The second scenario then was built on time abundance and social exclusion. This scenario was termed “*Mass Unemployment Society*” but also called as a class society.

Group B formed the scenarios around the two dimensions that were: society with high mobility vs. small mobility, and society of abandonment vs. caring. Also this group selected two scenarios for further analysis. The first scenario was a society of high mobility and caring. It was named as “*Swedish model*” referring to the Swedish welfare state of the 1980s. The other scenario was called “*Beyond the Solidarity*”, and it was characterized by small mobility and abandonment of people.

Figure 1. The Axes and Extremes in the Scenario Designs of the Two Groups



3 Descriptions of scenarios

In the next phase, both groups were asked to describe the scenarios in terms of their political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental consequences. Even if the chosen strategy was the same in both groups, Group A ended up describing more macro level changes whereas Group B included also rather specific transformations. The scenarios were described as follows:

Group A

“Knowledge Society” (with the lack of time and social inclusion)

- Governmental regulation of inclusion policy
- Successful integration of immigrants
- Economic resources fully/over used
- Individual flexibility
- No time for hobbies
- Fathers take parental leave and half of the care
- “New Nokia of the Poor” will emerge
- Success of biotech industry
- (gold deposits are found)
- Finland as a breadbasket
- Finland as a land of wine production

“Mass Unemployment Society” (with time abundance and social exclusion)

- Inactive upper class
- Accelerated migration
- Political tensions
- Low regulation
- Dual economy
- Low taxes
- Excluded immigrants
- Low-educated women at home
- The industry is moved to abroad
- “Couldn’t Care Less” attitude

Group B

“Swedish Model” (with high mobility and caring)

- Introduction of flexicurity policies
- Success of social democracies
- Model of rich country with high taxes
- Sensitivity of multiculturalism as a resource
- Simplification of regulation
- Introduction of new caring systems
- Harmonized care systems in hospitals etc.

- Technological surveillance of people
- Strengthening of citizenship and multiculturalism
- Taxes are extended to cover new areas of life
- Control of the East Mafia
- Development of construction planning , mosques
- Infrastructure serves caring interests
- Public transportation to guarantee an access to care

“Beyond the Solidarity” (with small mobility and abandonment of people)

- The values of EU are rejected
- Antagonism towards foreigners
- Shortage of foreign investments
- Narrow production structure
- Low taxes (on capital)
- Static labour market
- Increase in security services
- Insurance-based society
- Thin middle class
- Social polarisation
- Increase in social problems
- Caring responsibilities of women may increase
- No innovations, fewer people use and apply them
- Weakening of civic rights
- Ways of managing social problems: prisons
- Disinterest in nature

4 Policy recommendations

Group A made some policy recommendations after the scenario building. The Group B, in turn, produced slightly more detailed scenario descriptions, which took time from the policy recommendations. Regarding “Knowledge Society” scenario, Group A recommended that more attention should be paid on caring, education and family policies. In addition, it was suggested that a new kind of time policy should be introduced. Compared to the current time policies, the policy should be more comprehensive and cover a wider array of challenges related to the lack of time. “Mass Unemployment Society” scenario ended up to suggest a continuation of the current policies. Nevertheless, it was also argued that if the individual’s responsibility of himself is emphasised, there might be need to increase control through private security companies and the police.

In the end, the groups gathered together to discussed about the scenarios and policy recommendations in general. First, it was highlighted that it is unlikely to reach a win-win situation between the employer and the employees in the global capitalism. It was proposed that bottom-up movements, consumerism and boycott campaigns may act as counter forces to the global capitalism and enhance the ideology of corporate social responsibility. Secondly, the experts reflected that the role of government ownership policy. It was accentuated that the government should be able and ready to influence on decisions where

the core field of basic industries are traded abroad. This was particular required in the corporations where the government is a major shareholder. Thirdly, it was suggested that the corporations should be subject to more external evaluation. This was considered as a way to influence employer's right to direct the work, give unilateral orders and instructions.

5 Reflections

The scenario building was considered as an inspiring way of treating the future of quality work. In the beginning, the term uncertainties caused some confusion. The experts highlighted that also positive uncertainties should be kept in mind, and that these may also be unlikely continuums of the known trends, "predetermined". It was also suggested that some kind of definition for the term uncertainties should be given to make the guidelines of the meeting clear.

The scenario building process itself was uncomplicated to carry out. Only one issue considering the procedure was raised after the meeting. It was asked whether the joint sessions between different steps are actually needed. It was considered that these breaks between the steps might disturb the creative process of scenario building.

Lastly, the two groups highlighted interestingly similar issues in their scenarios on the quality of work. The both groups came up with issues of care policies, social inclusion and problems of time. These issues were also tied together in many ways as well as linked with the new global and liberal economy. It was considered alarming if the new global economy will split people into two categories, immigrants and less-educated people are not successfully integrated into the society, and if time becomes a privilege and problem of the few.