CHAPTER 4

Ruptures in National Consensus: Economic versus Political Openness in the Globalization Debate in Finland

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There is a strong belief in Finland, expressed in academic texts and the wider public debate, that consensual decision making and consensus-oriented public debate are central features of Finnish political culture. Along with the other Nordic countries, Austria, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, Finland has been categorized as one of Europe’s small consensual states (Becker 2003). The globalization debate at the turn of the millennium marks a break in this tradition of consensus and an attempt at remaking it.

We will show that in comparison with the media debates on globalization in other countries, two features of the Finnish debate stand out. First, in Finland the Global Justice Movement (gjm) got exceptional attention in the debate. Second, in Finland the debate went on longer and got new dimensions. Elsewhere, the peak of the globalization debate coincided with mass demonstrations of the gjm, especially at the Seattle World Trade Organization (wto) meeting in 1999. The use of the word ‘globalization’ steadily declined after this peak (for the US, see Rauch et al. 2007; for France, India, and Bolivia, see Beyeler and Kriesi 2005; for the Associated Press global coverage, see Marks, Kalaitzandonakes, and Konduru 2006). In Finland, a second, even more heated phase of the debate occurred in 2004 and 2005. Here, national elites, divided into a pro-regulation camp and a pro-competitiveness camp, engaged in a debate over appropriate national political responses to globalization.

Paradoxically, the economic elite that promoted further increasing economic openness had a tendency to suggest that open public debate on globalization should be contained in the national interest. They focussed their argumentation on forging consensus around the idea of national competitiveness, a concept that has been more influential in Finland than in the other Nordic countries. Instead of open debate, this segment of the elite called for strong leaders who would rely on experts and not pay too much attention to public opinion.

In some ways Finland, like the other Nordic countries, has been an open society both in economic and political terms for most of the post-war period (Katzenstein 1985). However, until the neoliberal turn of the late 1980s, economic openness was limited to trade openness and politically a ‘regulated
openness’ prevailed. Starting in the 1980s economic openness increasingly favoured the structural power of global capital. Up to that point economic openness had concerned only the trade of goods, while capital and services were provided domestically, often by the state. Now foreign ownership was first deregulated and then strongly encouraged, and trade in services opened up to global competition. The role of the state in both sectors diminished. As a consequence, the leverage that the political system and trade unions had held over business interests decreased, for better and for worse.

Politically, up to this turn, a kind of regulated openness had prevailed. In international comparison, citizens had relatively strong institutional channels of political influence. This influence was organized through civic associations that had wide memberships, hierarchical structures from the national to the local levels, and internal systems of democratic decision making. In this sense, associations represented citizens towards the state, to which they had relatively open access through institutions like the state committees (Ylä-Anttila 2011). Political openness in terms of open contestation in the public sphere, on the other hand, was rather limited. A silent consensus prevailed according to which certain things about the opposing blocs of the Cold War and Finland’s position in relation to them were better left unsaid for the sake of national unity and security. Journalists maintained close relationships with politicians and civic associations tended to wield political influence through the regulated channels behind the scenes rather than by engaging in open public contestation (Kantola 2011).

Our argument is that the globalization debate at the turn of the millennium reveals a tension between the new economic openness that had become established by that time, and a new form of political openness. The GJM initially succeeded in open public contestation of what they saw as threats to democracy and justice as a consequence of the new economic openness. The business elite, while advocating increased economic openness, still upheld the idea of consensus about shared national interest and saw open public debate on economic matters as a threat to this consensus. For them, the appropriate response to economic openness was a kind of political closure.

The present analysis of the globalization debate in Finland is based on the 1,826 articles mentioning the word ‘globalization’ in the newspaper Helsingin Sanomat (HS) between 1992 and 2004. HS is the biggest newspaper in the Nordic countries, with a circulation of about 340,000 in a country of 5.4 million inhabitants. For example, the well-known French daily Le Monde’s circulation is smaller than that of HS, while the second largest paper in Finland, Aamulehti, has a circulation of about 120,000 copies. HS is also widely read by the elite and is a powerful agenda
setter of public debate in Finland. It sets standards and gives direction to other media. When acting in defence of consensual values it serves as a forum for powerful actors who need to communicate in the public and also legitimate their actions. The tendency of the paper to back those in power has been strong. However, in the course of the globalization debate, the public sphere opened up and dissident voices began to be heard. Even if this was only a phase in the debate, it did shake the foundations of consensus and caused the elites to show marked differences of opinion publicly. This could be taken as a sign of change in the Finnish culture of public debate.

Background and Inception of the Globalization Debate

The context in which the public debate on globalization developed in Finland in the new millennium is defined by a few key economic and political developments in the prior two decades. Following a global trend, the liberalization of the capital markets in Finland began in the 1980s. This rapid and largely uncontrollable liberalization led to a speculative bubble that burst at the same time bilateral trade with the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, plunging the Finnish economy into the most severe depression since World War II. The political response to these events resulting from failures related to increasing economic openness was what we may term the consensus of the 1990s. Dramatic cuts in government spending were made. Rather than calling for open public discussion to find solutions, the elite saw it necessary to act swiftly and in unison. As a result, the adoption of neoliberal policy reforms in line with the global trend was more rapid and thorough in Finland than in most other European countries. The Nordic welfare state model was quickly being replaced by the model of the ‘competition state’ (Alasuutari 2006; Kantola 2006). Thus, the consensus of the 1990s marked a kind of closure of the public and political arena in the name of acting in unison in an emergency situation. This consensus remained through the 1990s despite the change of government leadership from the Centre Party to the Social Democratic Party (Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue, SDP) in 1995.

In the meantime, the concept of globalization slowly began to make its way from academic debate to the mainstream public sphere. Until the end of 1998, however, it had little impact. The term globalization was mentioned 159 times in HS in the years 1992 to 1998. In 1999, the concept became the object of an intense debate and was highly politicized as a result. A dispute over economic policy making that had long been characterized by a relative lack of public discussion was opened and the 1990s consensus challenged.
In Finland and around the world, public debate on globalization began with the mass demonstrations known as ‘the Battle of Seattle’ around the meeting of the WTO in 1999. The coalition of trade unions and various civil society organizations from consumer NGOs to environmentalists that effectively stopped the WTO meeting soon became known as the Global Justice Movement (Della Porta 2007). It appeared under various names and forms in different countries. In Finland, as elsewhere, it was initially referred to as the globalisaation vastainen liike (Anti-Globalization Movement), but soon the term globalisaatiokrittinen liike (critics of globalization), following the German Globalisierungskritik and Swedish globaliseringskritiska rörelsen, was adopted.

Figure 4.1 shows the two phases of the debate and nine key events that stand out as monthly peaks in the coverage of HS. The first phase ran from 1999 to 2002 and was mainly centred on the GJM. The second phase, 2004 to 2005, was characterized by conflict between two national elite groups, one supporting and one opposing the ideas introduced by the GJM. The following sections describe the unfolding of these two phases and the two features of the Finnish debate that stand out: the strength of the GJM and the renewal of debate because of elite conflict.

The Initial Role of the GJM

During the four years of the first debate 1999 to 2002, altogether 1,116 occurrences of ‘globalization’ were found in HS. This is seven times the amount that

![Figure 4.1 Monthly occurrences of term ‘globalization’ in Helsingin Sanomat and key events of globalization debate.](image-url)
appeared in the press coverage over the previous decade. In the peak year of 2001, globalization was mentioned in 419 articles (Lounasmeri 2010, 69). This can be traced to three key events: a) the founding of the national chapter of the French gjm organization, Attac,\(^1\) in Finland; b) demonstrations at the eu summit in Gothenburg; and, c) demonstrations at the Genoa Group of Eight (G8) meeting. Although the second World Social Forum and the World Economic Forum in 2002 occasioned less debate than the events of 2001, they still constituted the high point of that year and kept the talk about globalization at levels well above Seattle.

In describing the intense debate that preceded the founding of Attac Finland, HS asserted: “There is excitement and idealism in the air again: heated public debate has returned. The magic word is globalization” (HS, 1 May 2001). The initial strength of the gjm in Finland was shown by its high media visibility, the number of members and allies it attracted, and the spread of the idea that economic regulation can serve the ideal of global justice. The comparison with Germany, a country where the gjm was quite successful (Rucht, Teune, and Yang 2007) illustrates the movement’s strong start in Finland. In Germany, Attac, the most important organization of the movement in that country, attracted one thousand members during its first month of existence in a country of 82 million people. Der Spiegel, a news magazine known as an agenda setter in the German public sphere, gave the movement broad coverage. In Finland, the start was much stronger: In a country of 5.4 million, more than 2,500 people signed up immediately for Attac, and HS mentioned it in 34 stories before it was even launched.

By the time of the demonstrations at the Gothenburg eu summit in 2001, the gjm had become a powerful force. Many top level politicians, journalists, and experts seemed to share this view. The ministers of Finland’s rainbow coalition government, from members of the conservative National Coalition Party to the Left Alliance, called for dialogue with the activists. This does not, of course, imply that they would necessarily agree with the movement’s demands – but they did feel they could not ignore them either.

The movement quickly gathered influential allies. An Attac chapter was founded within the Finnish parliament in conjunction with the establishment of Attac Finland. Every fifth parliamentarian joined, including Erkki Tuomioja (sdp), the minister of foreign affairs. In a poll in 2001, Attac’s demand, a currency transaction tax, was supported by seventy per cent of Finnish parliamentarians.

\(^1\) Association pour la taxation des transactions financières et pour l’action citoyenne (Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and for Citizens’ Action).
By 2004, when the second phase of the debate took place, the GJM was no longer very visible. Instead, its arguments were taken up by a part of the political elite, led by President Tarja Halonen (SDP) and the minister of foreign affairs. Two events spurred this adoption of the idea of global social justice. The first was the publication of *A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for All*, a report produced by the International Labour Organization (ILO) World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, chaired by the President of Finland together with the President of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa (Revolutionary State Party, RSP) (World Commission 2004). At the press conference Halonen stated “It is clear that globalization must change its course. Its present form is unsustainable, both ethically and politically” (*HS*, 25 February 2004). The report demanded globalization governed by more democratic institutions, more equal distribution of wealth, decent work for all, and commitment to the UN millennium development goals.

The second event was the Helsinki Conference on Globalization and Democracy, chaired by Foreign Minister Tuomioja and his Tanzanian counterpart, Jakaya Kikwete (RSP). It was the final conference of the Helsinki Process on Globalization and Democracy that had gathered representatives of governments, civil society, and businesses from all over the world since 2002. The stated objective was to bring together the civil society organizations associated with the World Social Forum and the business leaders associated with the World Economic Forum to discuss proposed reforms of global governance (Helsinki Process 2005).

There was a strong global dimension in both of the above events. Solutions to global problems were sought in processes conducted in cooperation with countries of the Global South. Tanzania co-chaired the Helsinki Process, and participants came from dozens of different countries. Events were organized in Dar es Salaam and Mumbai, among other places. International institutions also participated. Central terms of reference for the process were the UN millennium development goals. The report by Halonen and Mkapa was commissioned by the ILO and unveiled at an event held in London.

The adoption of the movement’s arguments was a step toward a more activist Finnish foreign policy on the part of long-standing social democratic politicians. The identification of Finland as a possible moral leader on the world stage accorded with the vision of Finnish politicians who were critical of economic globalization, but not those in favour of more *Realpolitik* who demanded national consensus on competitiveness.

The Finnish Social Democrats were not alone among European centre-left parties in adopting some of the GJM’s arguments. The head of the British Labour Party, Prime Minister Tony Blair, raised Africa’s problems as the number one
issue of the Gleneagles G8 meeting in 2005 (Anheier, Glasius, and Kaldor 2005, 10), which seemed to sustain the globalization debate in Finland as well. The practical importance of the massive media attention to the accompanying Live 8 concerts and the limited debt cancellation decided upon at the meeting can be debated, but their symbolic value was indisputable.

Nevertheless, the GJM also encountered significant opposition. Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen (SDP) called members of the group ‘street terrorists’; one conservative MP demanded the revocation of support from the ministry of environment to Friends of the Earth Finland because they participated in the Gothenburg demonstrations; and the Minister for Trade and Industry Kimmo Sasi (National Coalition Party), fiercely opposed the movement’s claims publicly. Moreover, despite the fact that HS did recognize the GJM as newsworthy, the newspaper’s editorial team remained firmly committed to free market ideas combined with notions of consensual national unity, as we shall see below.

What is remarkable about the GJM, then, is not that it managed to turn everything around; but that it did manage to challenge the political closure represented by the consensus of the 1990s and politicize the question of globalization. A debate on the consequences of increasing economic openness, now termed ‘globalization’, began.

The Success of the Global Justice Movement and Its Allies

There are at least two factors explaining the initial success of the GJM, and both have a national and global element. The first success factor was the Finnish political context at the emergence of the movement, and the second was the movement’s repertoire of action that matched the habits of Finnish political culture very well in some ways, while at the same time challenging it in others. The spending cuts and austerity measures of the 1990s had been passed under emergency conditions and were not subject to much debate. The GJM’s slogan ‘Another world is possible’ fell on fertile ground. Explicitly formulated to counter the idea that politics can only follow market forces and not control them (memorably expressed by Margaret Thatcher as TINA, ‘There is no alternative’) the GJM slogan was what many of those dissatisfied with the consensus of the 1990s were waiting for. The sense that something exciting was happening in the world and that these events were now finding their way to Finland was evident.

The GJM took the opportunity to challenge the prevailing consensus. Their combination of expertise with media-friendly direct action was very effective
in Finland. However, neither of these components alone would have sufficed. Expertise is highly valued in the Finnish political culture (Luhtakallio 2010). Globally recognized expert authority was provided by economist and Nobel laureate James Tobin (who distanced himself from the GJM). The movement chose the currency transaction tax developed by Tobin in the 1970s as its number one demand wishing to curb what it saw as excessive use of power in globally transferring capital in contravention of democratic decision making by states. The stance taken in support of the GJM by the respected paper, Le Monde diplomatique, probably convinced many that this was not just a group of random activists. For several years, the movement also had organized counter-summits to coincide with the meetings of international institutions and provide a forum for those experts who disagreed with mainstream economic and political thought. Attac France had a scientific council that supplied the movement with research information.

Academics in Finland also took part in the movement. GJM was built on networks of associations promoting solidarity with the Global South that had been engaged in advocacy, but also worked on the ground in developing countries together with local civil society organizations. Its members, therefore, had first-hand experience of the local conditions of those countries where the failure of structural adjustment programmes introduced by international financial institutions had done the most damage.

On the other hand, direct action and civil disobedience is a form of activity rarely seen in Finland since the violent civil war of 1918 in which around 37,000 people died. Instead, it has been historically typical for new movements to quickly institutionalize themselves as formal associations and use their relatively open access to the state to exert influence. This being the case, the new carnivalesque repertoire of action imported by the GJM was seen as provocative in public. The then President of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, had a pie thrown in his face when giving a talk in Finland; activists dressed up as the leaders of the G8 countries danced around, playing ball with a globe in a carnivval procession across Helsinki; and others in Robin Hood costumes campaigned for the currency transaction tax.

The practice of dressing up in heavily padded white overalls and pushing against the lines of riot police, originally developed to defend squatters in buildings in Italy, produced spectacular visual news material: riot police in heavy black armour on one side and citizens demanding justice and democracy in their white overalls, on the other. A unique event in Finland was the appearance of the white overalls in front of the presidential palace on Independence Day, hijacking what has been considered as the holy day of Finnish nationalism, and turning it into a stage show for global justice. Since
the Independence Day reception hosted by the president and transmitted live by the Finnish Broadcasting Corporation is still the most viewed TV programme of the year in Finland, media attention was guaranteed. Although not all of this attention was positive, for the first few years this event known as 'the citizens' gate crashing party', it called journalists' attention to the movement (Lindström 2010).

Later, the protest activity that had guaranteed the movement's visibility became an obstacle. As demonstrations at the global summits began to turn violent and following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, forceful police measures were used to oppose or criminalize protesters (Tarrow and Hadden 2007) causing some participants and allies in Finland to turn away from the movement. This was especially true of the trade unions, some of which had quietly expressed support for the movement behind the scenes. Although no violent demonstrations ever occurred in Finland, the unions were frightened away and no real alliance was ever formed. Perhaps this can be explained by the caution of Nordic unions and their effort to hold on to the power they still have in their countries.

The same was true in Sweden, which had strong unions that were accustomed to influencing policy makers through institutional channels, rather than on the streets (Sörbom 2006). The situation was in contrast with countries where unions are less powerful, such as Brazil or the US, where key events of the GJM like the Seattle demonstrations and the World Social Forums were the product of an alliance between the unions and the new social movements.

A further reason for the GJM's success in Finland may have been that some members of the political elite, after having lost ground in the 1990s, saw this as an opportunity to gain political momentum for their ideas. Particularly the globally-minded left wing of the SDP was involved, but also people from the Left Alliance, the Greens, and even the peripheral Communist Party. The 1990s had seen SDP following the trend of 'third wave social democracy' that brought parties starting from Tony Blair's New Labour from the left towards the political centre to compete for swing voters. This move towards the right was eagerly embraced by the party leader Paavo Lipponen, who led the two rainbow coalition governments that cemented the 1990s consensus, and was a strong supporter of economic globalization during the debate. When Attac Finland was formed, globally minded social democrats, including parliamentarians and staff from organizations like the Workers' Educational Association (Työväen Sivistysliitto, TSL) and the Service Centre for Development Cooperation (Kehitysyhteistyön palvelukeskus, KEPA) were elected to the Attac board. The support given by President Halonen and the minister of foreign affairs, Tuomioja, to the idea of global justice, and the more active role they wanted
Finland to play in promoting this idea in world politics was not much appreciated in the media debate. Moreover, the President’s position was often questioned during her term in office by the pro-competitiveness camp.

The Business Elite Responds with Support from Helsingin Sanomat

In 2004, a few months after Halonen’s ILO report had restarted the globalization debate, economic elites struck back with reports of their own on globalization. These were presented as national survival strategies for Finland in the face of increasing competition in the global marketplace. The first report was produced in 2004 by the business think tank Elinkeinoelämän valtuuskunta (EVA), founded in 1974 by business organizations to develop cooperation between politicians, representatives of business, academics, and specialists in different sectors (Jakobson 1992, 123). The organization has since sought to influence the development of Finnish society and it has taken an active role in public discussion. The report, entitled Suomen menestyksen evätä (A Recipe for Finland’s Success), set the competitiveness of Finland in the global marketplace as the country’s number one goal. The means to achieve this goal, it was argued, was to increase the market-driven character of domestic policy. Lower taxes, less government spending, incentives for businesses, and strong leadership unswayed by public opinion were seen as elements of success. “It is not enough to follow the polls. Politicians must be willing to make decisions even if they are unpalatable to the public,” as the editor of the EVA report, Tapani Ruokanen, told HS (6 October 2004). Since the report was based on interviews with Finnish business leaders, it may be said to reflect the opinions of that sector more generally.

The second report, For a Skilful, Open, and Changing Finland, was commissioned by the new centrist-conservative Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen (Centre Party). The formula was similar to the one proposed earlier by EVA, although more moderate. The word ‘open’ in the title referred to economic openness of Finland towards the world: attempting to attract more foreign capital and foreign expert workers by tax breaks and like means. How open the Finnish society is, or should be, in terms of political participation and public deliberation, was not discussed.

While Halonen’s ILO commission and the Helsinki Process were global undertakings whose participants came from countries around the world as well as international institutions, the economic globalization reports were a national affair. International institutions, however, did legitimise these reports. The competitiveness reviews of the World Economic Forum were often referred
to, and EVA's report was supported by a similar one from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The latter report was also based on interviews with Finnish business leaders and came to similar conclusions. The editorial team of HS strongly supported the EVA report:

It is easy to agree with the report's basic message: a successful business sector is what creates the necessary means for income redistribution. [...] The most important thing is that doing business in Finland should be made as simple and unencumbered as possible. Corporate taxation must be unequivocal and set to a level that makes Finland an appealing country for businesses.

*HS*, 6 October 2004

In fact, so many editorials, op-eds, quotations from other newspaper editorials, and commentaries by journalists were published in support of these two reports that journalists became the largest group of voices during this part of the globalization debate. The views of the business elite were expressed more strongly by journalists (particularly the editorial team of HS) than by themselves.

**Free Markets and National Consensus according to HS Editors**

As we have seen, GJM was initially given much space on the pages of HS. However, while the legitimacy of the movement's claims was recognized by the editorial team with regard to the democratic deficit of global institutions, the newspaper's position was clear: free trade was good for all countries, especially for export-oriented economies such as Finland's. Those arguing otherwise were seen as perhaps well-intentioned, but emotional; they were described as not necessarily representing the opinion of the world's poor and not always understanding the complex workings of globalization:

Those demonstrating on the streets of Washington want to deny the poor the same method which made themselves rich; well meaning but silly people try to protect the poor from the same development that led to their own prosperity. While doing what they believe to be right, they cause a lot of harm.

*HS*, 20 April 2000

Defenders of the ideas of global justice and democracy did get their say, but no editorials or columns by journalists supported their views. When presidents
Halonen and Mkapa published an op-ed highlighting the results of their report for the ILO, Risto E.J. Penttilä, chairman of EVA, responded:

The actions of the president in restructuring the debts of developing countries might make Finland more appreciated in those countries and increase Halonen’s popularity among the NGOs, but the effects are quite different in those capitals of importance for Finland – Washington and Moscow.  

HS, 25 April 2004

News reporters did give a voice to Halonen, Mkapa and their supporters. Two front page items reported a minister for environment and a professor of international politics denouncing Penttilä’s critique of the president. A long interview entitled “A Fair Trade President” in the Sunday section gave Halonen herself a voice, and the paper also commissioned a debate defending Halonen. The exchange between EVA and some academics who supported the president continued for a while. At the same time, the newspaper’s editorial team continued to oppose Halonen’s world political response to globalization, advocating the national advantage of Finland first: “Instead of embracing the whole world, what is needed is good old style foreign politics – concentrating on those issues most essential to the nation” (HS, 14 December 2004).

The editorial team used two strategies to promote its position. On the one hand it presented globalization as inevitable, and on the other it advocated for the notion of a single national interest that must be built by consensus. The argument about the inevitability of globalization was often paired with the view that small countries have no choice but to adapt: political action to change global processes can only be undertaken by big players. This small country argument has been a significant building block of national consensus in Finland, much as in Austria, another small country that has made great efforts toward consensus building (Rainio-Niemi 2008). Finns have often been called to adapt to changes with the warning: we will have a crisis if we do not act swiftly. Thus the editorial team of HS suggested:

What is now needed is simply political commitment to the reforms and change. In reality there are no great differences of opinion about the direction to be taken among experts and decision makers. The more time passes by without decisions, the greater the crisis Finland will face. Every year we spend quarrelling among ourselves will make adapting to the major changes in the world economy more difficult. Waiting too long will only make the coming decisions harder.  

HS, 10 November 2004
The editorials in *HS* conveyed the impression that the paper had taken upon itself the task of morally rounding up the nation and telling it to work together to solve its problems. This line of rhetoric has been typical of Finnish political culture as part of building consensus (Kantola 2002a; 2002b). The paper took a political stance, but at the same time tried to appear neutral. It also presented its own position as the only ‘reasonable’ alternative. Consensus was regarded as the highest good and political alternatives dismissed as not viable. This relegated conflicting views on globalization to a less legitimate position (Lounasmeri 2010, 153). Thus, the stance of the *HS* lent political support to the core argument of the pro-globalization elites; namely, that the only way Finland could retain its national sovereignty in the face of corporate globalization would be – quite paradoxically – to give it up. In the editorials, globalization was depicted as inevitable, not as a political choice but as a kind of natural process to which nations must adapt.

The *GJM*’s critical views on globalization could have been pursued as a new kind of awakening of civil society. Instead, the reporting concentrated on describing activists as engaged in a spectacle. When parliamentarians from the leftist parties and the Greens tried to take a stand with the civic movement, or expressed views in conflict with globalization policies, their judgment was questioned by the editors. The demonstrations and other civil actions were not seen by the newspaper as relevant to the nature of a democratic system. The paper’s policy, instead, was to emphasize the representative nature of democracy. Elites were seen as fundamentally different from the general public: they were well informed, far sighted, and acted reasonably for the common good, while the populace was seen more as ill informed, short sighted, selfish, and guided by emotions (Büchi 2006, 10f). Commenting on civic action, the paper’s statements reflect the historical role of the Finnish media: educating and civilizing the people (Nieminen 2006).

In order to understand the way the paper framed the public debate on globalization one must look at the role of this particular newspaper in Finnish society. *HS*, first established under the name *Päivälehti* in 1889, has a long tradition as a liberal paper that has engaged in nation building and encouraged public discussion, but always in the spirit of cultivating unity and finding consensus. During the course of societal upheavals, crises, and wars the paper has had a policy of trying to keep the country together by constructing national cohesion, building bridges between different social groups, emphasizing legality and parliamentary government. (Rytkönen 1940; 1946; Juva 1966; Klemola 1981; Kulha 1989; Tommila and Salokangas 1998; Manninen and Salokangas 2009). *HS* has always advocated stable social development and refrained from stirring up conflict (Klemola 1981; Pietilä and Sondermann 1994; Lounasmeri 2010).
The editorial staff of *HS* has long had close ties to decision makers and leaders in Finnish society. As a result, the paper has remained well informed on everything going on within the country and its foreign policy (Kulha 1989, 212, 238, 438). In a recent study, *HS* represented one of the three most important media in the eyes of Finland's decision makers. Their links to prominent journalists, who were considered part of the elite, were solid, even if their interaction with journalists did not aim at common political goals (Kunelius, Noppari, and Reunanen 2009).

The role of editorials has changed in mainstream Finnish newspapers as they have relinquished direct political affiliations. A paper's policies used to reflect those of a political party or ideological orientation, but today the nature of editorials is much more unclear in the Finnish context. Still, the form and positioning of editorials do give them a special weight. Finnish decision makers interviewed by Risto Kunelius, Elina Noppari, and Esa Reunanen stated that they continue to feel a strong connection between the editorial line and the rest of the paper. They also said Finnish newspapers may publish one or two opinions that differ from their own agenda, but a vigorous discussion of contradicting viewpoints is not favoured (Kunelius, Noppari, and Reunanen 2009, 297f).

The Regulation Camp versus the Competitiveness Camp

Although the globalization debate was a conflict between two opposing camps, it would be an oversimplification to label these groups anti- and pro-globalization. The GJM, clearly, is not against all forms of globalization. It probably has more global links than any other movement before it, and it advocates for more democratic global governance. The same holds true for the representatives of the Finnish elite who supported the movement. They also called for stronger global governance and worked together with international institutions such as the ILO, and the UN, as well as with governments and NGOs from different parts of the world. From the early stages of the debate, the GJM and its supporters professed themselves not as anti-globalization, but as the supporters of an alternative globalization. It would also be misleading to label the business elites and the paper's editorial team who opposed the GJM simply as pro-globalization. Although they promoted the benefits of economic globalization, the speakers were exclusively Finnish and the focus of their argument was Finland's national interest and the importance of consensus around the objective of competitiveness (cf. Kettunen 2008, 65). The dividing line is rather between those who advocate more political regulation of the global economy
and those who want less of it. These two opposing camps in the globalization debate may be termed the regulation camp and the competitiveness camp. In the following, we shall discuss the main arguments of each.

With the rise of the GJM, those who considered unregulated global economy harmful to economic equality and denounced the undemocratic character of the institutions of global economic governance (the WTO, World Bank, IMF) gained support. These arguments escalated to a demand that global markets need ‘rules of the game’ that are democratically agreed upon. The expression ‘rules of the game’ then became the focal point for different parties trying to find common ground. It was adopted by politicians sympathetic to the GJM, and in 2001, when the GJM was at its strongest, also by some on the opposite side, such as the business lobby International Chamber of Commerce:

> Businesses do not want to see deregulation leading to savage markets [...] the liberalization of world trade must continue, but in an internationally regulated and controlled manner. The WTO and UN are examples of institutions which can develop common rules of the game.


The disagreement at the time seemed to be over who should set the rules and what they should be, rather than whether there should be more rules or less. As Green Party MP Heidi Hautala said from her perspective, “Our goal is to create global rules of the game that curb the restless movements of capital and the unemployment and insecurity that these movements create” (**HS**, 26 September 1999).

The regulation camp consisted of the GJM; the two leading figures of the internationally-oriented wing of the SDP, President Halonen and Foreign Minister Tuomioja, Social Democratic, Green, and Left MPs; some state officials, primarily from the ministries of labour and environment; the trade unions (although they remain marginal in this discourse); and social scientists. The competitiveness camp, on the other hand, consisted of several cabinet ministers from the right-wing National Coalition Party and the formerly agrarian Centre Party; and some more right-leaning Social Democrats; politicians from right-wing parties; leading state officials in Finland and the EU; and businesses, think tanks, and employers’ organizations. The main argument of this camp was paradoxically a nationalist response to economic globalization as well as the crisis in the Finnish consensus that the GJM had provoked.

The GJM defended those who had suffered from economic globalization, seeing no conflict of interest between nations but between the haves and the
have-nots. The response of the business elite, in contrast, strongly relied on the idea of competitiveness of Finland against other nations. Supported by editorials of HS, they argued that the national interest of Finland in the era of globalization was best served by more market-oriented policies at home. The world was increasingly run by market logic, and, according to those defending this view, it was futile to question this trend. As globalization was assumed to have fundamentally altered the playing field, the survival of Finland as a competitive welfare society seemed to require changing old social structures. Thus, the best way to cope would be to adapt.

Finns have repeatedly demonstrated level-headedness and persistence, traits that have raised us to the ranks of the wealthiest nations on earth. In the face of the changes ahead, Finland can, once again, emerge as a winner. But this requires that we can, once again, adapt to the circumstances. HS, 10 November 2004

In the same way that Finland adapted to living under the pressure of the neighbouring Soviet Union during the Cold War, the country now had to adapt to the limitations imposed on domestic policy by global markets. The editorial pages of HS asked for national commitment to reforms that were to be decided on ‘together’ and called upon decision makers to stop arguing over their differences. At the same time an image of Finnish society was created where there were no major confrontations and everyone shared the same interests. Rapid action was needed to reform societal structures and avoid crises, it was argued.

Such argumentation contrasts with the debates in larger countries such as the United States and France. Competitiveness has been an argument in these countries as well, but it has also been legitimate to refer to pure national interest (like the Bush administration did in the US when it rejected the Kyoto Protocol in 2001 and imposed tariffs on imported steel in 2002) and cultural traditions being threatened by globalization, like many farmers’ movements did in France (Ylä-Anttila 2010, 194f). In Finland, arguments for protecting the national interest by tariffs, or arguments referring to cultural traditions, did not seem to work. Perhaps this is because Finland is a small, export-oriented country dependent on its powerful neighbours, in contrast to France and the United States. A discourse emphasizing inevitability and political ‘realism’ has been typical in Finnish discussions of ‘national survival’ in the face of economic recession or security issues.

The globalization phenomenon and the rise of neoliberalism has affected the position of many members of the elite in Finnish society. The elites holding formal power in society were divided: A positive, unquestioning view of global-
ization was typical of those who had a strong institutional position, exercised real power, and felt a need to legitimize their position. Those more critical of globalization were less influential and had less voice in national political decisions. The Global Justice Movement did have important allies – the President and some important figures in the Social Democratic Party. The power of the President in the Finnish political system, however, is increasingly symbolic, and the SDP's leadership at the time of the globalization debate tended to side with the competitiveness camp. Legitimization of power could be seen as one explanatory factor behind the positions different players took in the globalization debate and the support they received from HS. This does not suggest that the paper would not criticize the political elite or government at all. However, the paper's tendency to back those in power has been strongest at times when questions of national interest have been at issue.

Conclusion: The Erosion of Consensus?

We have considered the public debate on globalization in Finland as a process of questioning and rebuilding national consensus. The GJM and its allies challenged the 1990s consensus on neoliberal policy reform by demanding more internal political openness and discussion of alternatives in economic policy. With support from HS, the elite pro-competitiveness camp responded by attempting to formulate a common national interest in order to generate consensus around the idea of competitiveness.

The tradition of consensus politics in Finland has been explained in different ways and varying time frames. Henrik Stenius (2010) traces the roots of consensusalism to Lutheran conformism in the eighteenth century. According to a widely accepted interpretation by Risto Alapuro (1995), the nationalist movement leading up to independence in 1917 needed the wide support of the people and had to show unity in the face of the Russian Empire. The unity thus created and the continuing pressure from the Soviet Union until the 1980s reinforced this unity and discouraged any public signs of discord. Thus, episodes of political violence like the Civil War of 1918 and the fascist Lapua movement of the 1930s, once overcome, reinforced the Finnish somewhat forced unity rather than breaking it. Alapuro suggests that the politically turbulent first decades of independent Finland's existence produced a combination of unity and disagreement (1995, 196). After independence the main dividing line in Finnish society was between the workers and the bourgeoisie – roughly corresponding to the Reds and the Whites of the Finnish Civil War. Unity between the two sides was only found when facing external aggression. The Soviet attack in 1939 brought
about what is still called ‘The Spirit of the Winter War’. The elites continue to appeal to this spirit when calling for a united country. In the public sphere, the peace agreement with the Soviet Union also brought about the phenomenon of self-censorship that the political elite encouraged (Salminen 1996; Lounasmeri 2013). Anything related to the Soviet Union was handled with extreme care. This historical experience, along with the fact that Finland has been ruled by one of the two neighbouring great powers for centuries (by Sweden until 1809 and by Russia from 1809 until independence in 1917) has made the country prone to adapt to external pressure in order to hold on to its sovereignty.

The integration of the communists into the government in 1966, the absorption of the student movement of 1968 by the parliamentary system, and the first general agreement on income distribution and working conditions between trade unions, employers, and the government in 1969 were proof that strong consensualism had developed. It was characterized by agreement on economic policy, especially income levels, and a firm policy of neutrality in foreign affairs. President Urho Kekkonen (1956–1981, Centre Party) kept a firm reign on internal politics and developed confidential relations with Soviet leaders. This produced accusations of Finlandization in Western Europe especially in the 1970s, a decade of considerable self-censorship in Finnish public discussion (Salminen 1996; Lounasmeri 2013).

At the same time, international ideas of a more open and competitive economy began to spread to the heavily state-led Finnish system. The Finnish political and business elite adapted to the demands of corporate globalization with relative ease in the 1990s, perhaps as a result of Finland’s handling of the oil crises in the 1970s. Close cooperation between the then newly-formed EVA and the more right-leaning Social Democrats was key to the Korpilampi conference in 1977, where in the name of consensus and national competitiveness, tax cuts on corporations and suspension in pay raises for workers were agreed upon (Saari 2010, 475). An important memo on competitiveness was produced for Korpilampi in 1977 by an official of the Ministry of Finance, the Social Democrat Raimo Sailas, who went on to draft the welfare cuts in the 1990s. Thus, the alliances and concepts that built the 1990s consensus were already established in the 1970s. However, the idea of competitiveness as a common national interest and the basis for the country’s consensus has been part of Finnish politics even longer. Pekka Kosonen has argued that the idea of competitiveness has structured the Finnish welfare state model since the 1950s more strongly than in any other Nordic country (1987, 183–186).

Neither the national survival strategy of the 1970s nor that of the 1990s was a Finnish innovation. Rather, in both cases, Finland followed a world-wide
trend. In the 1990s, this trend was the global Washington Consensus. In the 1970s, it was the move from Keynesian to monetarist economic policy that began in the US and Britain, and was followed—along somewhat differing national paths—by countries as diverse as Chile, Mexico, and France (Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb 2002). In Finland, deregulation coincided with a period of intense economic growth that lasted most of the 1980s and permitted the continuing expansion of the welfare state. But the ideological foundations and the necessary alliances were already in place to carry out the shift from the welfare to the competition state when growth came to a full stop in 1990.

The period of glasnost in the 1980s and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 removed the external reason for setting limits to public debate. Still, the culture of public restraint that had developed over time made it possible to react to the economic difficulties before the new millennium without much public ado and forge the consensus of the 1990s across the political spectrum, especially since socialism no longer seemed a viable alternative.

Another great political change toward supranational political integration took place in 1995 when Finland joined the European Union (EU). But even this move in the direction of political openness was taken with relatively little public discussion, since most of the political elite thought it might hinder the course of the admission process. Heikki Heikkilä states that the prime objective of the political leadership was to sustain national unity and continuity by controlling the public debate (1996, 69). In critical situations conflicting viewpoints were neutralized and potential conflicts were played down. Ullamaija Kivikuru has observed that the ‘new political culture’ remained merely a slogan in emphasizing the significance of the people’s decision making. In the end, the system needed citizens only to vote ‘correctly’ in order to legitimize the exercise of political power (Kivikuru 1996, 172f, 393f). The political closure of the 1990s was primarily one in the public sphere, made possible by the long tradition of Finnish consensual culture. The nationalist response to the demand for more democratic global governance, evidenced in the globalization debate in 2004, was an effort to reinstate this consensual atmosphere.

Pushing for a consensus on how Finland would achieve economic success in the globalized world, an influential part of the business elite did not see open public debate having intrinsic value. The quest for efficiency—highly valued in Finnish political culture—led members of the elite to downplay the value of responsiveness to initiatives from below that might shake the consensus but also bring fresh ideas to the table. For them, the new ways of action and demands of civil society in the globalization debate seemed to represent a threat rather than a revitalized democracy. What, then, has been the role of ‘openness’ in Finnish ideas about globalization? In the discourse of those elites
backing the traditional, consensual ways of doing politics in Finland, it has been about openly embracing and adapting to those economic circumstances affecting the Finns from the outside, rather than actively and openly discussing the different directions for the future of the nation.

As years have passed since the heated debate, many of the ideas that shook the economic consensus of the time have persisted. For one, the global financial crisis that began in 2008 has questioned the wisdom of deregulating financial markets. It has also brought back the Keynesian idea of stimulating the economy through government spending and put new regulatory measures, such as the transaction tax that was promoted by the GJM in the early 2000s, on the agenda of the European Commission, the Group of Twenty (G20), and even conservative governments like those of Nicolas Sarkozy in France and Angela Merkel in Germany. On the political front, more dissent has emerged. A truly anti-globalization movement in the form of the populist Finns Party has gained access to mainstream politics after receiving over 19 per cent of the vote in the 2011 parliamentary elections. They oppose economic as well as cultural integration of Europe and the world. Together, the financial crisis and the rise of the Finns Party make it more difficult for the economic elite to promote a combination of neoliberal economic policies and the rhetoric of national competitiveness in order to forge a national consensus in which this combination is presented as being in the interest of all Finns alike. The long tradition of consensus-minded public communication may be eroding. How this will affect the ways of carrying out political debate in the Finnish public sphere remains to be seen.

References


