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For the Environment, Against Bureaucracy

Soft Values and the Work of Synchronization in Finnish Political Debate during the 1980s

Martin Pettersson

Abstract

The relationship between economic activity and environmental protection was hotly debated in Finland in the 1980s. Contemporaries conceived of themselves as existing on the verge of a knowledge society, and when rhetorically presenting contesting economic and ecological futures for this novel society, they used new, short-lived concepts. This article argues that one such concept, *soft values*, highlights a clash between futures. In one possible future, environmental equilibrium was a new model for economic activity, while in another, environmental protection would take place as a result of the current economic model. The former was quickly synchronized into the latter. *Soft values* were thus used to harmonize environmental protection with notions of efficiency and national competitiveness under a linear temporality based on a belief in the necessity of economic growth.

Keywords: values, bureaucracy, competitiveness, economic growth, efficiency, environmentalism, flexibility, knowledge

Contemporaries often see their times as periods of great change. In what Ronald Ingleheart in his 1977 book *The Silent Revolution* called the "Western publics," values had changed from material to "post-material." No longer did people worry as much about how to secure food for themselves, but more about how to achieve a good quality of life, or so the story went.[1] For many Finnish members of Parliament, political influencers, newspaper editors, and various visionaries in the late 1970s and early 1980s, this shift took the form of a step into the unknown "knowledge society" (variously translated into Finnish as *tietoyhteiskunta, informaatioyhteiskunta,* and *kommunikaatioyhteiskunta*).[2] In this context the future dynamic between economy and ecology was subject to speculation. How could Finland remain competitive in this apparently new, less materialistic setting, where competition, as one book on education in 1984 put it, was no longer marked by "struggle against nature" or "industry's competition against nature" but primarily by "interaction between humans"?[3] And what

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1. Ronald Inglehart, The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics, Princeton Legacy Library (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); see also Ronald Inglehart, Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

2. All English translations are my own.

3. Sirkka Hirsjärvi and Pirkko Remes, *Koulutus ja tietoyhteiskunta: Opetushenkilöstön tulevaisuudenkuvat,* Kasvatustieteiden tutkimuslaitoksen julkaisuja 345/1983 [Education and the

ecological repercussions would economic activity have in the knowledge society? Was production now truly of an immaterial rather than a traditional material kind? Ever since roughly the 1960s, environmental degradation had been a subject for parliamentary debate, and in the 1980s this resulted in, among other things, the environmental movement gaining parliamentary mandates (1983), and later forming the Green League (Finnish *Vihreä liitto*, 1987).[4] In their attempts to conceptualize the temporal tension between the wonders of a coming knowledge society and the peril of a looming environmental crisis, contemporaries took to numerous neologisms, one of which was *soft values* (Finnish *pehmeät arvot*).

In this article, I analyze the contestation of this particular concept in Finnish parliamentary and political discussions in the 1980s, with a primary focus on how it briefly became a conceptual nexus for visions of possible harmonious ecological and economic futures around the parliamentary elections of 1983. This was also when the concept was most strongly contested by two asymmetric groups: the comparatively small, but politically active, Greens of the environmental movement on the one hand, and the more traditional parties, as well as certain private sector interests on the other. The two groups employed *soft values* differently, and I have heuristically discerned two sets of definitions. The first set, seen in the Green rhetoric, linked *soft values* to a pacifist, environmentally sound, Rousseau-esque "return to nature" third-way policy between socialism and capitalism. The second set stressed how *soft values* were the basis for

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Information Society: Future Images of the Teaching Staff, Publications of the Institute of Educational Sciences 345/1983] (Jyväskylä: Kasvatustieteiden tutkimuslaitos, 1984), 56.

4. When referring to actors within the parliamentary group of the party from 1987 and in the prior movement, I hereafter use the term "Greens" to delineate these from those environmental activists who were not tied to the group that formed the Green League.

economic policy in the coming knowledge society. The concept was a way to denote a belief in individual creativity and potential.

Importantly, the two sets also overlapped. Pauli Kettunen has noted how society (Finnish *yhteiskunta*) in the Finnish context often has been conceptually separated from the state (Finnish *valtio*) and put to use as a way of describing "prevailing current circumstances, paths of development, or . . . goals" through the addition of specifications, such as the terms for the knowledge society, which all indeed were based on the word *yhteiskunta*.[5] I argue that this division between state and society was imperative as a common denominator between the contesting uses of *soft values*. All actors using the concept positioned themselves in support of society in an anti-statist manner. Through the fuzziness of *soft values*, they created different future visions for what society would achieve, if let loose from the shackles of the state's bureaucratic rule.

Soft values were applied in Finnish debates both in arguments for environmental protection and in arguments for maintaining national competitiveness. The concept was first used in parliamentary debates in 1982 and in the Finnish press during the late 1970s. However, it never seemed to gain any substantial foothold in Finnish political language, which, somewhat paradoxically, is why it is worth studying. The concept of soft values gives perspectives on the possible futures inherent in early 1980s Finnish political language, precisely because it is so temporally confined to that period. Kari Palonen has theorized that there are "temporal

5. Pauli Kettunen, "Yhteiskunta," in *Käsitteet liikkeessä: Suomen poliittisen kulttuurin käsitehistoria* [Concepts in Motion: Conceptual History of Finnish Political Culture], ed. Matti Hyvärinen, Jussi Kurunmäki, Kari Palonen, Tuija Pulkkinen & Henrik Stenius (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2003), 205–206.

opportunities" in the concepts of politicization and policy. Politicization "names a share of power" and opens up possible futures for it, while policy becomes a normative way forward in time, deciding what is to be "realized among possible futures."[6] I argue that for the Greens, *soft values* were a way of naming environmental issues for politicization. By contesting the meaning of the concept, other actors used it to argue for and realize an existing economic policy of efficiency, national competitiveness and economic growth in the new knowledge society. In the terminology of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, *soft values* were a slogan (*Schlagwort*) that contained some elements of a "core concept with a claim to the status of theory."[7] When entering Finnish political language, *soft values* was a slogan especially for the Greens, but also for others wanting to define greenness in their rhetoric. The concept was, furthermore, applied to articulate a supposedly new ideological basis that enabled a novel horizon of (especially economic and ecological) expectations through policies based around notions of individual potential in society.[8] However, borrowing from Juhan Saharov, *soft values* ended up being a "temporary and

6. Kari Palonen, "Four Times of Politics: Policy, Polity, Politicking, and Politicization," *Alternatives* 28, no. 2 (2003): 171–186, here 175, https://doi.org/10.1177/030437540302800202.

7. Reinhart Koselleck, "Introduction and Prefaces to the Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe," trans. Michaela Richter, *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6, no. 1 (2011): 1–37, here 8, https://doi.org/10.3167/choc.2011.060102.

8. Material of the Finnish parliament was accessed online through https://avoindata.eduskunta.fi/#/fi/digitoidut/. It can be word searched or downloaded in pdf files. I refer to it according to the abbreviation in the file name (for example PTK for the minutes of the plenary sessions) and Roman numeral (also visible in the file name) followed by plenary year and page in the document: PTK-I, 1983, 683.

replaceable"[9] concept, which did not become cemented as the key, core, or basic concept certain actors made it out to be at the time. I second Saharov's argument that it is worth looking at these concepts to gain a better understanding of a tumultuous period.

The material studied is disparate in form, but chronologically homogeneous. It can be roughly divided into three groups: (1) parliamentary records, (2) newspapers, and (3) party-affiliated publications, such as newspapers and journals, as well as the publications of politicians and political organizations. The overwhelming majority of the material used stems from the 1980s, focusing on the first half of the decade due to increased polemics as parties prepared for or referred to the parliamentary elections of 1983. This chronological delimitation is chosen because the concept of soft values was used most frequently during this period, which enables the study of contestation about its meaning. It is worth stressing again that *soft values* was by no means a very frequently used concept, neither in parliamentary nor in public discussions, but that its emergence was symptomatic of a moment of temporal uncertainty.[10] Meanings pertaining to economic and ecological futures met in the concept, but due to necessary conceptual ambiguities, *soft values* had other layers of meaning related to those studied here.[11] Apart from its links to the

9. Juhan Saharov, "From an Economic Term to a Political Concept: The Conceptual Innovation of 'Self-Management' in Soviet Estonia," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 16, no. 1 (2021): 116–140, here 118, https://doi.org/10.3167/choc.2021.160106.

10. The Finnish national library database (digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi) of digitized newspapers shows a spike in the frequency of *soft values* in 1983–1985, with between 85 (1984) and 125 (1983) page hits in 74,005 and 79,448 pages respectively. After this period the frequency of hits is always lower. A similar trend can be noted in the parliamentary material, with a slight delay.

11. Koselleck, "Introduction and Prefaces to the Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe," 20.

economy and environment, the concept also sometimes had a gendering role in debates on equality as well as being brought up in connection to family policy.[12]

Methodologically this study is based on a qualitative reading of the material with a focus on semasiology. I am interested in how *soft values* were applied rhetorically in speech acts, but also in the temporalities found in the concept. I therefore find it fruitful to combine speech act theory with rather basic *Begriffsgeschichte* claims about the temporal qualities of modern concepts. Arguably, speech acts gain some of their perlocutionary force by containing a rhetorically potent horizon of expectations.[13]

A key argument made in this study is that *soft values* were used to create harmony between the idea of environmental protection and notions linked to economic growth, such as increased competitiveness and efficiency; two future paths which even contemporaries perceived as diverging or even contradictory political goals. To explain this phenomenon in the source material, I draw on theoretical scholarship on temporalities, and especially on the idea of "futures past"; Koselleck's claim that concepts are contested because, due to their ambiguous meanings, they can be used to argue for the realization of different and even conflicting futures.[14]

For the Greens, the current notion of progress would mean that the past hardness, which included things like a focus on material well-being, planning, economic growth, and violence

12. See for instance PTK-V, 1993, 5355; PTK-III, 1989, 2827.

13. Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics, Regarding Method,* vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 98, 104–105; Koselleck, "Introduction and Prefaces to the Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe," 15.

14. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past on the Semantics of Historical Time*, 2nd English ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

would continue into the future and lead to destruction. Instead, the Greens used *soft values* to order time in such a way that this hardness was a thing of the past, and the future would become softer, stressing therapeutic notions of personal growth, mental well-being, harmony with nature, and pacifism. The Greens thus used *soft values* as a concept of movement into an alternative future.

However, François Hartog's notion of a "presentist" temporal regime taking hold during this period also partly fits the Greens. Presentism, in Hartog's rendition, means that belief in the future has been replaced by a belief in the present, and actors no longer strive for a progressively better future, but rather try to defend the present against threats to it. *Soft values* in the Greens' rhetoric were more than a way to achieve an alternative future. The concept contained meanings pertaining to flexibility and adaption, signaling a way to deal with volatile times ahead, and a critique of the belief in progress. Through *soft values* one could *avoid* certain unfavorable futures rather than blindly "progress" into them.

Hartog sees the shift from a future-oriented temporality to a presentist "temporal regime" as essentially epochal. Aleida Assman shares this idea of a temporal shift, but for her the shift is not as clearly *into* something as *away* from the modern notion of progress, although she still stresses the symbiotic relationship between memory and future expectations.[15] For the empirical

15. Aleida Assmann, *Is Time out of Joint?: On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime*, trans. Sarah Clift, Signale (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020), https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501742446, for a critique of Hartog's (and others') notion of presentism, see especially 175–200. I agree with Assmann that, although he says otherwise in the later foreword (Regimes of History, xvii), Hartog's thesis is at times unnecessarily normative and does contain a certain element of nostalgia for an objective history writing that has never

case at hand, the idea of a shift from one temporality to another works only in part. I will therefore rely more on Helge Jordheim's idea of synchronization. He has argued that the modern notion of progress has been challenged ever since its inception.[16] Indeed, multiple temporalities are present at all times. Because of power relations, some just become more dominating than others. This is what Jordheim terms the "work of synchronization," the process whereby multiple, diverging temporalities are conformed and molded into one. The break from the current path into the future proposed by the Greens in the 1980s can thus be read as one of these diverging times gaining momentum and challenging a current hegemonic temporality. By contesting the Greens' meaning of *soft values*, other actors sought, and succeeded, to appropriate the concept and synchronize it into the hegemonic temporality of linear progress. In what follows, I intend to show that the use of *soft values* is an example of how environmental issues became conceptualized mainly as a future end goal of economic activity, rather than, as the Greens' had proposed, a starting point for a novel economic system.

Softness: From Uncertainty to Flexibility

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existed. However, if Hartog's presentism is used less as an all-encompassing temporal regime that touches us all and more as an analytical concept to pinpoint specific actors' or groups of actors' portrayal of their current times as expressed in, for instance, their political rhetoric, it is useful.

16. Helge Jordheim, "Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization," *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History* 53, no. 4 (2014): 498–518, https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.10728.

To understand how soft values came to be a concept used in political language, we need to be aware of the general change in how "softness" was conceptualized in Finnish political language. This cannot be done without reference to more widespread changes in language use in the later twentieth century.

To give one example, political actors from different political camps spoke critically about the state. During the period studied, this critique gained an explicit element of antibureaucracy. The argument was that the state machinery, in its current form, hampered Finnish national competitiveness, people's well-being, and societal cohesion, when it ideally should improve these aspects. In scholarly literature about other Nordic countries, this type of critique has often been linked to a more generally spread ideology of neoliberalism or described using neoliberalism as an analytical concept.[17] In Finland, just as in the accounts of the other Nordic countries, the formulation of the antibureaucratic critique did not directly correlate with party political affiliations.

17. Ola Innset, *Markedsvendingen: nyliberalismens historie i Norge* [The Market Turn: The History of Neoliberalism in Norway] (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2020), esp. 18–19; Søren Kolstrup, *Forandringens Årti, Mellem Velfaerd Og Nyliberalisme 1990–2001* [The Decade of Change, Between Welfare and Neoliberalism 1990–2001] (Copenhagen: Frydenlund, 2022); Stephanie L. Mudge, *Leftism Reinvented: Western Parties from Socialism to Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674984837; Jenny Andersson, *Between Growth and Security: Swedish Social Democracy from a Strong Society to a Third Way*, trans. Mireille L. Key, Critical Labour Movement Studies (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

The change in critique of the state and the introduction of antibureaucratic sentiment makes it easier to see reasons for change in the conceptualization of softness. Softness was conceptualized in the Finnish parliamentary debates of 1907–60 in two primary ways: in descriptions of materials and in making negative statements about political opponents. The former is not the main area of interest here, as it concerns things like the pricing of soft bread, the maintenance of soft road edges, and the like. However, in some cases, this material aspect was used metaphorically, to refer to the latter of the two conceptions, that of making negative statements. The government (or the wealthy elite in general) were either using "too soft gloves" when dealing with certain issues, or in a more anti-elitist fashion, sleeping on "soft featherbeds" and thus being unaware of the struggles of "the people." Softness was thus not something that policy should be based on.[18]

The important observation is that in addition to the anterior state of affairs, softness gained a positive layer of meaning from roughly the 1960s onward. This was the result of a plethora of shifts, processes, and developments—too many for one article. I will, therefore, focus on the temporal factor in this layering. Softness had previously been mostly linked to the temporal attributes of uncertainty and indecisiveness, but from the 1960s onward, these were joined by connotations closer to flexibility and adaption, making it fit the critique of the rigid bureaucracy of the patronizing state machinery.

I have found the first instances of these novel temporal attributes of softness in the 1960s. For instance, in December 1967, MP Arne Berner of the Liberal People's Party (LKP), criticized

18. PTK-II, 1925, 2260, one MP uses the "soft gloves" reference to criticize how the government has handled a group of officers that according to him had been subordinate, saying that the officers had been let off too easily; see also PTK-IV, 1907, 2647.

the government's method of adjusting the value of the Finnish mark, with reference to the then-typical Finnish financial policy of boosting exports by devaluating the currency. In a debate on the change in commodity prices as a consequence of the devaluation, Berner stated that "there was no successful soft descent" for the Finnish mark. Instead, "it was knocked down"[19] so hard that it lost a third of its value. With a "softer descent," the inflation spiral could have been kept in check better. Berner thus proposed that a softer, more flexible approach was to be preferred. This is one of the first cases of softness implying a positive horizon of expectations.

This trend became more visible toward the end of the 1970s, when softness was frequently used as an adjective modifier for different nouns. On top of values, a non-exhaustive list of concepts that emerged in parliamentary debates from 1978 to 1984 with the adjective modifier "soft" includes technology, society, politics, education, investments, development, and money.[20] In one way or another, these were all concepts that stressed a less rigid way of dealing with things. For instance, the notion of "soft technology" (Finnish *pehmeä teknologia*) became something of a buzzword, as environmental activists started promoting new forms of energy production, farming, and housing that would rely more on small-scale, local efforts.[21] Here too, the underlying idea was that, first, this "soft technology"—be it a new type of greenhouse or a natural insulation material—would spring forth from society, and not through state intervention.

19. PTK-II, 1967, 1903.

20. PTK-2, 1978, 1310; PTK-III, 1979, 2490; PTK-I, 1982, 122; PTK-V, 1982, 4776, 4871, 4918, 5195; PTK-III, 1983, 2452; PTK-I, 1984, 339, 352, 354.

21. Juhani Tenhunen and Juha Savander, eds., *Pehmeä teknologia, pehmeän teknologian symposium 1.4.1978, Helsinki* [Soft Technology, Soft Technology Symposium 1 April 1978, Helsinki], 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Helsinki: Pehmeän teknologian seuran julkaisuja, 1980).

Second, it was a way to adapt to both the coming global environmental disaster, which would in any case make the past "hard technology" useless, and the local environmental limits. What worked in Finland as soft technology did not necessarily work elsewhere.

The common denominator of the softness word pairs was the dualistic way they were used when referring to the future. On the one hand, they were ways to talk about and deal with inevitable futures, such as in the case of the knowledge society. *Soft values* enabled adaption to the inevitable arrival of the knowledge society, which was temporally situated on the threshold between the present and the future. "The knowledge society is coming" or "Finland is becoming a knowledge society" are examples of this situatedness as predestined, yet begun.[22]

On the other hand, softness concepts were also of use when exploring visions of open-ended futures. They were important in conceptualizing the new forms that competition could take in the knowledge society and the new requirements this might imply for keeping Finland competitive. Concepts linked to maintaining national competitiveness have had strong rhetorical force in the Finnish context. Staying competitive was the prerequisite for Finland "keeping up" with the rest of the modern world.[23] As contemporaries in the 1980s clearly perceived immaterial

22. PTK-II, 1984, 2003; E-II, 1983, 1113.

23. Anu Kantola, "Unholy Alliances: Competitiveness as a Domestic Strategy," in *National Policy-Making, Domestication of Global Trends*, ed. Pertti Alasuutari and Ali Qadir, Routledge Advances in Sociology 117 (Oxon: Routledge, 2014): 44–60, here 48–52; Johannes Kananen, *The Nordic Welfare State in Three Eras: From Emancipation to Discipline* (Abingdon: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2014), 139–161; Pauli Kettunen, "Globaalin talouskilpailun nationalismi" [The Nationalism of Global Economic Competition], in *Nationalismit*, ed. Jussi Pakkasvirta and Pasi Saukkonen (Helsinki: Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö, 2005): 436–452, here 443–445. There is a

knowledge work as increasingly important, since more traditional industry jobs were lost to automation and cheaper labor elsewhere, it comes as no surprise that concepts stressing the role of human interaction gained a layer of meaning pertaining to national competitiveness. Further research would be needed to prove it, but it is plausible that softness concepts in general could be used to synchronize the new, disparate forms of competitiveness factors into a slightly more uniform vision of progress.

Softly Carving Out Political Space for the Greens

In an interview in 1983, the former member of the LKP but now soon-to-be Green MP, Ville Komsi, defined what he saw as the meaning of *soft values*. According to him, the Green candidates' "value and thought world could best be described as soft. This consists of both protection of nature and the environment and a responsibility for the living conditions of future generations."[24] However, Green actors quickly stopped describing themselves as holding *soft values* and instead became described as promoters of *soft values* by others. This shift can be detected already in the same year, when Osmo Soininvaara, another former LKP-politician

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long tradition in Nordic countries, not only within economics, of accepting one's peripheral position and trying to keep up with the centers of the world, see Stefan Nygård and Johan Strang, "Facing Asymmetry: Nordic Intellectuals and Center–Periphery Dynamics," in *Decentering European Intellectual Space*, ed. Marja Jalava, Stefan Nygård, and Johan Strang, European Studies : An Interdisciplinary Series in European Culture, History and Politics, vol. 35 (Leiden: Brill, 2018): 19–42, here esp. 19–20.

24. Osmo Soininvaara, *Vihreää valoa: kirja Suomen muuttamisesta* [Green Light: A Book about Changing Finland] (Helsinki: Perusta ry, 1983).

turned Green, and MP from 1987, published a pamphlet about the way forward for the Greens. In a passage discussing how the "national economic cake" should be divided between capital income, labor income and "other points of view," he defined these other points as "environmental values, communitarian values and others, mostly 'soft' values."[25] Here, Soininvaara was clearly referring to the Green "third way" forward, which would be neither capitalism nor socialism, but his use of inverted commas around the word "soft" showcases a certain distancing from it and separation of it from the semantic field surrounding environmental protection. The reasons for this distancing become clearer when analysing the context in which the Greens used the concept.

Sari Aalto has posited that the environmental movement, just like many other alternative movements emerging in the 1970s, was necessarily based on a fundamentally different vision of society's future than that of existing political parties. For the Greens, this took the form of a critique of the consensus, perceived over-bureaucratization and interventionist aspects of the Finnish welfare state and politics. The Green vision also contained elements of criticism for the current economic system with its focus on competition and consumption, which drew heavily on Norwegian "ecosophers" like Arne Naess and Sigmund Kvaløy. In practice, the Greens tried to carve out a political space for themselves by criticizing parties on both the left and right of Finnish politics.[26] In a 1983 interview with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) newspaper

25. Soininvaara, *Vihreää valoa,* 54.

26. Sari Aalto, *Vaihtoehtopuolue: vihreän liikkeen tie puolueeksi* [The Alternative Party: The Green Movement's Path to Becoming a Party] (Helsinki: Into kustannus, 2018), 22. Aalto also mentions that "[The Greens] searched for a new direction from the cultural transformation of soft values and developed their own solutions in the different areas of life."

Suomen Sosialidemokraatti, the newly elected, and only two, Green MPs, Kalle Könkkölä and Komsi, expressed the view that their "group should be given a new definition on the party map, the current socialist–non-socialist, does not . . . work." With an apparent hint of irony, they said they would solve this issue by calling themselves "maybe-socialists."[27] Aalto has argued that the Greens attempted to redefine the left–right political axis into one along the lines of "ecological and soft, and non-ecological and hard politics."[28]

This thinking was in line with ecosophy: Sigmund Kvaløy, for instance, was of the opinion that even the Soviet Union upheld the values of the Western "technocapitalist" system, ergo, the current left–right division was unable to deal with the problems posed by the environmentalists. Indeed, Kvaløy put forward the argument that the values of Western societies had to change if the coming environmental disasters were to be avoided. Instead of endless economic growth, the aim should be to maintain equilibrium, conceptualized as a harmony between humans and nature.[29]

In the Greens' vision, this equilibrium could be found in a society based on cooperation and co-responsibility. To formulate this vision, actors like Komsi and Könkkölä criticized both

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27. U.T., "Ville Komsi: Pehmeys toi vihreille kovan äänimärän", [Ville Komsi: Softness brought the Greens a Hefty Amount of Votes", *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti* 57 / 1983; Könkkölä built a similar argument in an interview with the National Coalition's party magazine, see *Nykypäivä* 13 / 31 March 1983.

28. Aalto, Vaihtoehtopuolue, 389.

29. Sigmund Kvaløy, *Ekologisk kris: natur och människa, en inledning i eko-filosofi och eko-politik* [Ecological Crisis: Nature and Man, An Introduction to Eco-philosophy and Eco-politics] (Vimmerby: LTs förlag & By och Bygd, 1976), 84, 90; Aalto, *Vaihtoehtopuolue,* 24.

state-controlled bureaucratic intervention, and capitalist, multinational corporations. The rhetorical strategy was to point out common denominators that united the current parliamentary parties, and imply that these were also visible in Finnish society at large. For instance, that a set of shared "technocapitalist" values were maintained in society, and that *soft values* represented an alternative set. When interviewed for a newspaper article just before being elected MP, Könkkölä, who was also active in various disability rights organizations, said that *soft values* were "important for people with disabilities, because in the so-called hard society the weakest suffer." The idea furthered by Könkkölä and his wife and fellow parliamentary candidate Maija Könkkölä was that current "hard" progress into the future quite simply left some behind. The article's headline, following a quote by Maija, "Away with Tutelage and Let Individuals (Finnish *ihminen*) Take Responsibility for Themselves,"[30] highlighted how the Könkköläs conceptualized "hard" society as too subservient to governmental control. This was a clear indication of critique of the state.

The critique of competition was more explicitly formulated in the program of 1988, where it was stated that "the competition society (Finnish *kilpailuyhteiskunta*) should be replaced with a society of cooperation."[31] Society should be freed from the constraints of competition. According to the mantra of *soft values* there was no need for free market competition because society could take collective responsibility through cooperation. The ideals of maximizing profit

30. Hannu Toivonen, "Könkkölät uuden ihmisluokan asialla, 'Holhous pois ja ihmiselle vastuu itsestään'", [The Könkköläs on a New Class of People's Behalf, 'Away with Tutelage and Let People Take Responsibility for Themselves'"], *Uusi Suomi*, 27 February 1983.

31. Vihreän liiton yleisohjelma, [The General Program of the Green League], 7 February 1988, § 10.

would become irrelevant in a world where economic growth was not necessary for survival, but economic equilibrium was the goal. In such a society, competition was detrimental, because it could create imbalances.

Komsi's and the Könkköläs' interviews taken together point to how Kvaløy's idea of a shift in values was expressed explicitly through the concept of soft values. Especially Komsi's idea that Green values were centered around "protection of nature and the environment and a responsibility for the living conditions of future generations" could rightly be read as a certain presentist mode of thought in line with Hartog's thesis. Komsi's talk of "protection" and "responsibility" for future generations indicates a significant slowing of time and preserving of the present for the future. Environmental disasters were inevitable if one continued on the current path; all one could do was adapt by adhering to a new set of values. However, it is worth nuancing this reading by noting that preservation was framed as an open-ended project. Although the prospect of environmental disaster made him doubt his belief in endless progress, Komsi also said that he had his sights on "the year 2000" and thus did not have to be so "hysterically wrapped up in the squabbles of those who cannot see past the year [19]85."[32] In other words, he was playing the long game, while political opponents were stuck in the near future, only interested in election cycles.

In parliamentary debates and the press, *soft values* would initially be mostly connected to environmental protection and the Greens, such as in a 1984 speech by the Center Party (Finnish *Keskusta*) MP Hannu Kemppainen when he stated, "Now, greenness and soft values, and in

32. Kaarina Laine, "Vihreät purkavat karsina-ajattelua, 'pelatkoon muut omaa peliänsä'",[The Greens Think Outside the Box, 'Let Others Play their Own Game'" Etelä-Suomen Sanomat, 3 March 1983.

general natural things have even become fashionable."[33] On the surface, this would seem to be a logical development, considering the Greens' recent popularity and their being heralded as a movement of *soft values* in the press. Later, Green internal documents also discussed having "soft values as a basis for the Green ideology."[34]

However, while the Greens described themselves as adhering to *soft values* in interviews, they seldom used the concept in a parliamentary setting. Obviously, there is an imbalance in the source material, as they only had two out of two hundred seats in Parliament, but I have only been able to locate one explicit and one implicit mention of *soft values* by their parliamentary group in the 1980s.[35] It would thus seem that other parliamentary actors, such as Kemppainen, described the Greens as having *soft values* rather than the Greens using the concept to self-describe. Why was this? One important factor was that other actors started supplying new definitions of *soft values*, thereby appropriating it for a different type of rhetoric.

Soft Values for the (Business) Environment

When the Green MPs-in-waiting tried to show they were an alternative to the other parties' candidates, they were still drawn into the same rhetorical tropes as their opponents. Whether they wanted to or not, their language still mimicked that of other parties' candidates when diagnosing

33. PTK-III, 1984, 2287.

34. Vihreä Liitto ry (1986–1987), Vaihtoehtoliikkeiden kokoelma, The National Archive of Finland.

35. PTK-I, 1984, 560; F-II, 1986, KK nro 320.

the ails of society.[36] For instance, when Green actors envisioned the shift away from the left–right political division through cooperation and co-responsibility and highlighted the role of society, they applied terminology that, at the time, was filled with antibureaucratic layers of meaning. This led to *soft values* being sucked into a semantic field centered around notions of efficiency, competition, and paradoxically, economic growth.

A prime example of the Green predicament was an anecdote Komsi related in the interview quoted earlier referring to unemployment. According to Komsi, the main problem of unemployed people in Finland was not hunger but "the absence of purpose in life (Finnish *elämän sisältö*, lit. content in life) and dignity." However, society could not guarantee all citizens this purpose as individuals had to find this themselves through cooperation: "This might sound harsh, but it is actually a completely optimistic thing. I would hope that we would see more actions of the kind happening in Sicily, where the unemployed on their own initiative started renovating buildings, since they had surplus time to do so."[37]

The main point was that individual creativity and a free, responsible society would solve societal problems. Komsi's stress on quality of life mirrors international theories by the likes of Daniel Bell and Inglehart in the early 1970s—the values of the world were changing from

36. Scholars have already pointed out how the origins of antibureaucratic, or neoliberal, tendencies were not to be found solely on the right of the political spectrum. For an empirical study of the US case, see Reuel Schiller, "The Curious Origins of Airline Deregulation: Economic Deregulation and the American Left," *Business History Review* 93, no. 4 (2019): 729–753, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007680519001247.

37. Laine, "Vihreät purkavat karsina-ajattelua."

material to post-material.[38] It is also strikingly similar to the ideas of the politically active economist John Kenneth Galbraith, popular in the United States during the 1970s, whose writings were also disseminated in Finland.[39] Lack of fulfillment in life was the clearest sign of poverty in the modern world, not hunger.[40] As Pascal Germann has argued, the concept of quality of life, likely coined by Galbraith, had gained prominence in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) during the 1970s as a way to measure the immaterial aspects of well-being. Arguably, Komsi's rhetoric of prioritizing immaterial over material well-being could draw on and gain some measure of authority from the numerous

38. Inglehart, The Silent Revolution; Daniel Bell, The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

39. Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 77–78. An article by Galbraith was published in Finnish, in which he made an argument about the quality of public services. Thus far the functioning of public services had by both proponents and opponents been measured according to the quantity produced. This, according to Galbraith, did not work anymore. Instead, they should be measured according to the quality of the services produced, and this quality could be increased through especially a "determined and versatile financial policy," which meant increased taxation of the wealthy. See Kenneth Galbraith, "Yksimielisyyden politiikka uudistettava", [The Politics of Consensus must be Reformed] *Sosialistinen Aikakauslehti 3/1981*, trans. Paavo Löppönen, 11–27.

40. "Poverty was the all-pervasive fact of [the] world [of the pre-modern society]. Obviously it is not of ours." John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, 2nd ed. (revised) (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), 2.

OECD reports on the subject.[41] However, as Germann shows, the OECD's focus on quality of life was, paradoxically, founded on "the quantification of the social world," through the idea that one could quantitively measure things like happiness.[42] The Green rhetoric of immaterial well-being was therefore still "stuck" in a world of the quantifiable, meaning that they argued for immaterial, qualitative well-being using concepts that signaled quantity. Representatives of the more established parties, as well as others representing business interests, were quick to latch on to this.

In a book published in 1984, the newly elected MP for the center-right National Coalition (Finnish *Kokoomus*), Martti Tiuri, wrote about what he saw as the problems with the Greens and the environmental movement. Their constant demand for lower consumption, smaller business and higher energy prices conflicted with their own goals. Tiuri argued, that because "efficiency means . . . that things are done with the lowest amount of natural resources and energy," large units of production and use of high technology was needed, as it was a more efficient use of

41. The OECD had since the early 1970s published reports about what they termed "social concerns," see, for instance, "List of Social Concerns Common to Most OECD Countries," *The OECD Social Indicator Development Programme* (Paris: OECD, 1973); "Basic Disaggregations of Main Social Indicators," *The OECD Social Indicator Development Programme, Special Studies* (Paris: OECD, 1977); "Measuring Social Well-Being, A Progress Report on the Development of Social Indicators," *The OECD Social Indicator Development Programme* (Paris: OECD, 1976); "The OECD List of Social Indicators" (Paris: OECD, 1982).

42. Pascal Germann, "The Quality of Life Turn: The Measurement and Politics of Well-Being in the 1970s," *KNOW* 4, no. 2 (2020): 295-324, here 318, https://doi.org/10.1086/710511.

resources and energy than allocating production to smaller businesses.[43] Tiuri's sentiment echoed the argument made by Jukka Tarkka, chair of the business thinktank EVA (Finnish *Elinkeinoelämän Valtuuskunta*),[44] in the National Coalition magazine *Nykypäivä* in 1983. In a polemic speech printed in the magazine entitled "Blending in with Nature Means the Destruction of Soft Values," he stated that the Greens attempted this "blending in." According to Tarkka, only after first securing material well-being efficiently through high technology could humans move on to matters of the soul and talk about soft values.[45] The rhetoric was clear: the Greens' vision for the future was implausible and irrational, because their idea of environmental protection was not based on efficient use of material resources, but rather on notions of immaterial well-being, and therefore could not be realistically implemented. In this rendition, the Greens' understanding of *soft values* was stuck in a romanticized version of a less technologically developed past, not a realistic, materialist understanding of society. The Greens did not, in Tarkka's rhetoric, try to be flexible or adapt to the future, but wanted to return to the

43. Martti Tiuri, *Tulevaisuus alkaa nyt* [The Future Begins Now] (Helsinki: Otava, 1984), 223.

44. See Maiju Wuokko, "Markkinatalouden etujoukot, Elinkeinoelämän valtuuskunta, Teollisuuden keskusliitto ja liike-elämän poliittinen toiminta 1970–1980-lukujen Suomessa" [Vanguards of the market economy, *Elinkeinoelämän valtuuskunta, Teollisuuden keskusliitto* and the political activities of business life in Finland in the 1970s–1980s] (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2016) for an in-depth study on the organization. Although EVA's spokespeople stated that EVA was a strictly non-political organization, Wuokko has argued that the thinktank exerted political influence.

45. Jukka Tarkka, "Ristiriitaista romantiikkaa, Sulautuminen luontoon merkitsee pehmeiden arvojen tuhoa", *Nykypäivä* 26, 7 July 1983.

past. Tarkka's rhetoric was in line with a report published by EVA two years later, in 1985, on prevalent "attitudes" in Finland. The report concluded that more Finnish people than ever were supporting "soft" attitudes. Some "wanted to progress into something new [in the future]" that was different to how society was progressing currently. Others, the "progress pessimists," which were "soft" in a different way, "wanted to return to the old and safe."[46] Tarkka's conceptualization of the Greens fits this second notion: they represented the wrong, backward softness.

In addition to Tiuri and Tarkka, other actors, especially National Coalition members, contested the Green notion of *soft values* by creating stronger semantic links to individuality. In 1981, the National Coalition had published a new principal program with a strong focus on individual freedoms.[47] As such, it might not be that surprising that National Coalition MP Aino Pohjanoksa attempted to define *soft values* as inherently individualistic through the Finnish word for "human," *ihminen*, which was often used in Finnish linguistic practice as a synonym for individual (Finnish *yksilö*). In 1983, she wrote in an article in *Nykypäivä* entitled "The Most Important Soft Value in Politics Is the Humans Themselves" that "the human should be the starting point of political values. From the human the ring expands toward the environment. We must also view the values of the environment from the human's perspective, not the other way

46. *Murros vai muutos? EVA-raportti suomalaisesta mielipideilmastosta* [Rupture or change? EVA report on the Finnish opinion climate] (Helsinki: EVA, 1985), 40.

47. *Kokoomuksen periaateohjelma,* 1981, Kansallinen kokoomus [Principle program of the National Coalition, 1981, National Coalition].

around."[48] Although Pohjanoksa noted that the individual is at the center of politics, paradoxically, she created a notable before-and-after logic. While "all" political values should emanate from the individual, the individual was a soft value. Following this logic, *soft values* were therefore not political values, but the basis for these. The individual decided which values were political and which were not. The individual, therefore, by being a soft value, existed prior to political values and appeared before the time of politics. Following Palonen, individuals existed prior to politicization, and could be a basis for policy, but must stay depoliticized in relation to environmental questions for these to be politicized.

In essence, Pohjanoksa's rhetoric follows Tiuri's and Tarkka's in ordering time so that environmental questions can be dealt with only after something else. In her case, this something is the freeing of the individual from the sphere of politics. In Tiuri's and Tarkka's visions, technological advances depoliticized some future developments by making them inevitable.[49] Therefore, other future visions either had to conform to these developments, or they were deemed impossible. The path into the future would be marked by technological advances, which

48. Aino Pohjanoksa, "Politiikan tärkein pehmeä arvo on ihminen itse", *Nykypäivä* 30, 4 August 1983.

49. See also Max Jakobsson, executive director of EVA, in Elinkeinoelämän valtuuskunta, ed., *Suomen valinnat 1980-luvulla, Kansainvälisen toimintaympäristömme muutokset, EVA-päivä 1979* [Finland's Choices in the 1980s: Changes in our International Operating Environment, EVA-day 1979 (Helsinki: EVA, 1979), 91–102 for a similar vision. See Ilkka Kärrylä, "The Contested Relationship of Democracy and the Economy: Debates on Economic and Industrial Democracy in Finland and Sweden, 1960s–1990s" (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2019) for an empirical study on depoliticization of the economy in Finland and Sweden.

would make it possible to adapt to the looming environmental problems. Importantly, environmental protection was not excluded from any of the examples presented, but formulated as a later goal. By first securing material well-being through advances in technology, environmental protection could later be guaranteed, because of both efficient use of resources and economic surplus, which could then be invested to decrease pollution and the like.

Therefore, although critique against the Greens was focused on the perceived impossibility of their future vision, it was limited to their solutions to environmental degradation, not the degradation itself. The Greens' success in the election meant that other parties were keen, at least for publicity reasons, to posit their own solutions to environmental problems and contest the meanings of concepts used by the Greens, such as soft values. Indeed, while the Greens' "immaterialism" in relation to the semantic field surrounding environmental protection was criticized as irrational, it was given a new home in another field, centered around the notion of national competitiveness. In the perceived emerging knowledge society, keeping up with other, larger states, was increasingly portrayed as dependent on efficient use of human resources. *Soft values* could be used to deal with these latter, more immaterial, resources.

Mona Mannevuo has convincingly argued that the conceptualization of humans as machines gained ground in Finland directly after World War II. Efforts were made to rationalize the human machine in work through social engineering, thereby increasing efficiency in workplaces.[50] I argue that in the political context of the 1980s, a similar trend is visible, although through using other terminology, and for other reasons. Due to the different spheres—social

50. Mona Mannevuo, *Ihmiskone töissä, Sotienjälkeinen Suomi tehokkuutta tavoittelemassa* [The Human Machine at Work: Postwar Finland Striving for Efficiency] (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2020), 21–26.

engineers and management theorists in Mannevuo's case, and politicians and pundits in this case—what precisely was to be rationalized and identified differed. Mannevuo's focus is on the perceptions of how the workers in a closed system like a factory could be made more efficient, to increase output and thereby rebuild Finland after the war. The actors studied here rhetorically posited the most potent visions for efficient use of human resources for national competitiveness, that is, how to educate, apply, and "invest" the human resources of Finland in the best way.

An example of this dynamic is parliamentary debate surrounding the closures of a cellulose factory in Lievestuore, Central Finland. The factory had several different owners throughout its existence and was commonly known as the Lievestuore cellulose factory. The debates about the future of the factory and its workers are illuminating, as they flared up during different times, making national news. In 1967, the factory was shut down for the first time due to poor profitability, according to the owners. However, a different owner gave it a second chance, and it was back in production from 1971. In 1983, yet another owner got caught for having falsified water tests. A by-product of the cellulose production was sodium hydroxide (lye), which was pumped out into a nearby lake, exceeding pollution limits. Due to various economic setbacks the factory finally closed in 1985.

Both in 1967 and 1985 debates surrounding the factory closure were held in Parliament, and while the temporal and spatial contexts were different, they were centered around the same question: what to do about the workers who were formerly employed at the factory? In the 1967 debates, the employment question was mainly raised in formal oral questions to the government. These were formulated with a stress on how to "secure" employment for those who had, through

no fault of their own, become unemployed. Re-education and moving to other parts of the country to secure employment were among the solutions proposed by the government.[51]

In 1985, the situation was markedly different. Lievestuore was debated not only as a specific case but also as part of a larger discussion on how outdated Finnish factories could uphold international standards. For instance, in a debate on the government's reports on science and technology policies, otherwise unrelated to the situation at the factory, Lievestuore was brought up as an example of how "not even automation" could save factory jobs in Finland in the new knowledge society.[52] Furthermore, Lievestuore was now debated from an ecological perspective. Not only the lost employment was problematic, but also the environmental impact. The 1985 debates surrounding Lievestuore climaxed in an interpellation brought by the leftist Finnish People's Democratic League (SKDL) against the SDP-led government. Just as in many of the debates in 1967, the interpellation was framed as critique against the loss of employment. Here, the response of the minister of trade and industry, Seppo Lindblom (SDP) becomes interesting. According to Lindblom, the factory had to be shut down because of unprofitability: the company was too small to "bear the burden of significant capital and environmental protection expenses and therefore has not been able to stay competitive."[53]

Lindblom went on to state that environmental protection had become increasingly highlighted in socio-political discussions and that the principle of "industry being compelled to equip production facilities with technology with which to stop the continuous degradation of nature" had gained popular support. Lindblom argued that the only way for a company to tackle

51. See, for instance, PTK-I, 1967, 584–586, 648–649, 663.

52. PTK-III, 1985, 2480.

53. PTK-III, 1985, 2932.

environmental challenges and secure environmental protection in the future was through "modern technology and proper profitability."[54] He further stated that "[t]he Lievestuore cellulose factory is an example of a case where one for years has had to weigh so-called soft and hard values against each other in a tangible way." Then—and this is the rhetorically interesting move—he criticized the consistency of the policies promoted by the procurers of the interpellation, the SKDL: "One has in recent times become used to hearing powerful statements from the representatives of SKDL in favor of environmental protection and soft values. . . . Now [SKDL] has . . . posed the question of how continuing the operation in an unprofitable and environmentally problematic production facility could be secured through government measures."[55]

Since the interpellation itself was concerned with the future employment of the now unemployed former factory workers, Lindblom's answer gives an idea of how a bridge was created between environmental protection and competitiveness. The obvious, first observation is that by attributing *soft values* to the rhetoric of SKDL, who now "instead" were interested in how to protect employment in an unprofitable, polluting firm, Lindblom made it sound as if SKDL were hypocritical in their supposed use of *soft values*. If they would truly support *soft values*, they would encourage profitable, efficient firms that could uphold certain standards in environmental protection. Furthermore, Lindblom's use of "hard values" had overlapping meanings. They were the values of both those polluting and destroying the environment and, more importantly, the SKDL in their attempt at preserving jobs when this would be an inefficient use of human resources. Hard values were here framed as futile, environmentally unfriendly

54. PTK-III, 1985, 2933.

55. PTK-III, 1985, 2933.

bureaucracy that aimed only at preserving jobs, no matter the cost. The overlap with Green antibureaucratic rhetoric against the current hard, materialist progress into the future, is notable. Importantly, in Lindblom's answer, human resources were framed as a form of liquid capital, which would naturally improve, if they were applied in the most efficient way. Maintaining employment for employment's sake was an inefficient waste of both material and human capital. Lindblom framed efficiency as the main driver of competitiveness and therefore of environmental protection.

In his usage of *soft values*, Lindblom thus drew on the Greens' notion of the concept, but while keeping the environmental aspect, he reformulated the concept's other meanings. Instead of the Green dichotomy of bureaucratic intervention contra society's cooperation and co-responsibility, Lindblom constructed a dichotomy between bureaucratic intervention and efficiency. Notions of society were rhetorically replaced by efficiency. Environmental protection, by still being semantically linked to *soft values*, thus became part of a rhetorical argument for efficiency and against state intervention.

Conclusion

A common way to separate a hard thing from a soft one is that the hard thing is firm, rigid, and can hold unchanged for a long time. When put under pressure, it either remains almost unchanged or it breaks completely. There is very little middle ground for hard things. Soft things, however, do not display firmness nor rigidity; they might not last very long without succumbing to some sort of change. But under pressure, they bend and reform according to what impacted them; they adapt. Afterward they may still be usable, albeit maybe not in the same way as before. Arguably these notions of physical softness and hardness can be thought of as the basis for how

they work conceptually in political rhetoric about the future. In the perceived turbulence of early 1980s Finnish politics, softness and especially *soft values* became a way to express varying ways of adapting for the future. What they all had in common was an aspiration to create something less rigid than the current society.

I have presented two ways in which past actors used *soft values* rhetorically, which showcase a clash in past futures appearing when a partly presentist challenge by the Greens first diverged from the hegemonic narrative of progress, only to quickly be synchronized into it. The common denominators in the contesting versions of *soft values* were that adhering to them enabled some form of adaption and weakened the state's grip on society. The Greens adhered to a logic of adaption which, through visions of environmental destruction, signaled a rather presentist mode of thought. However, in the Green rhetoric, through their stress on the creative forces in society, *soft values* were also conceptualized as the basis for a new economic future, where not growth, but equilibrium with the environment was the main goal.

In the other rendition, the need to reduce growth to reduce impact on the environment could be circumvented through technological advances. The future worth focusing on would increasingly entail relations to other humans, societies, and states conceptualized as competitors; something *soft values* enabled. This second conceptualization of *soft values* built on arguments that efficiency and competitiveness would protect the environment. Put simply: the original Green rhetoric of decreasing growth and production was deflected by referring to competitive and efficient production as beneficial both for both environmental protection and economic growth. Through efficiency one could outrun and adapt to not only the competitors, but also environmental degradation.

Soft values remain a concept in Finnish to this day, but after the initial contestation, have faded into the background. Arguably this was because the concept's ability to contain different futures was circumscribed. For a short time in the early 1980s, *soft values* had been a way to visualize the ideological foundation of a radically different future in which even the current hegemonic economic system of competition would be overthrown. When the concept became subsumed under said hegemony, it also lost much of its rhetorical force for those who wanted to envision different futures. All the same, *soft values*, like concepts in general, changed the reality of the contemporaries using the concept. *Soft values* gave an environmental, moral righteousness to those who purported to support them, which could then be used as an ideological basis to promote efficiency, national competitiveness, and economic growth.

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