

Section C

The Nordic Countries

This section addresses the Nordic countries: the two old kingdoms of Denmark (in the chapter by Per Grau Møller) and Sweden (in that by Anders Lindström), along with the countries that were dominated by them at various points in time – Norway (dealt with in the chapter by Jan Erik Grindheim), Finland (covered in the one by Anita Niemi-Lilahti and Jari Stenvall), and Iceland (in Gunnar Helgi Kristinsson's contribution).

The historical and cultural links between these countries have always been very strong. Norway came under Danish rule as early as 1380 and then, under the Danish crown, became part of the Kalmar Union, in 1397, with Denmark and Sweden (as did Finland, which was under Swedish rule at the time). The link between Norway and Denmark became stronger in the fifteenth century, when Sweden left that union. The Treaty of Bergen granted Norway formal independence from Danish administration. After the Treaty of Kiel (1814), it was transferred from Denmark to Sweden. The Faeroes, Iceland, and Greenland, however, remained with Denmark. Even though Norway stayed relatively independent within the union with Sweden, it achieved full independence only in 1905.

Sweden controlled the Finnish territories from the twelfth century until the nineteenth, when as a grand duchy it came under the control of the Russian Empire. Iceland was first under Norwegian rule (1262–1379) and then subject to the Danish crown, from 1380 until 1944.

Given these strong and lasting ties between the countries, one should not be surprised that their territorial and administrative structures have a great deal in common (with the exception of Denmark). Similarly to the Napoleonic model, in the Scandinavian or Nordic system of local government the central government has a given amount of control over communes and meso-level affairs. Local government, however, adheres more to the Anglo-Saxon model, found in the United Kingdom: it is based on collegiality in which councils act autonomously with collective responsibility. Also, the use of administering committees is a distinctive feature of the Nordic countries; while they are similar to their Anglo-Saxon analogue, there is a chief executive who chairs the executive board.

For various reasons linked to the fragmented territory and difficult communications, alongside the existence of former ecclesiastical communes, this system developed mainly in Norway and Sweden (and then expanded to Denmark and Iceland, on one hand, and Finland, on the other).

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JARI STENVALL, PÄIVIKKI KUOPPAKANGAS, AND ANTTI TALONEN

STATE FORMATION

Finland is a constitutional republic and a unitary state with 5.5 million inhabitants and 338,000 km² of territory. Finland represents the Nordic tradition of parliamentarism. The era of the Finnish political system as a sovereign state started in 1917, when Finland received full independence. The roots of its state formation and the regional structures, however, can be traced back to earlier centuries.

9.1.1 Swedish rule, 1150–1809

For more than 600 years, Finland belonged to the Kingdom of Sweden. In the beginning, it was just a large undefined eastern region within Sweden. In those years, Finland was a remote developing entity that reached a population of one million only as the eighteenth century gave way to the nineteenth. Finland adopted the premises of Nordic democracy and rule during the Swedish era. The Swedish Instrument of Government of 1634 established Sweden's central and provincial administration, also forming new territorial units in Finland. Four provinces were established as general administrative units under state level, and the number increased to 6 in 1775. The reform of 1634, establishing a system of administrative provinces run by civil officials, is considered to mark the founding of the modern system of provincial administration in its current form. During Swedish rule, Finland was never a unified political or administrative entity with national institutions but a territory with six provinces among, in all, the kingdom's 28 provinces. All government responsibilities were concentrated in Stockholm (Tiihonen & Tiihonen 1983, 167–177).

At the local level, the first towns were developing around lively marketplaces in the twelfth century. In 1350 and 1619, acts were issued that addressed the economic privileges of the towns. In urban areas, the Church independently took care of nursing care and relief for the poor, while primitive parishes in the countryside handled local affairs until the fourteenth century. Through to the 1800s, the parishes, in co-operation with the Church, evolved toward more fully developed local self-government handling education, nursing, and looking after the poor.

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The autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland, connected with Tsarist Russia, 1809–1917

The great turning point in the development of Finland's state formation came in 1809 when Finland was separated from Sweden and annexed to the Russian Empire. From 1809 to the achievement of full political independence in 1917, Finland had an autonomous position, as a grand duchy fairly loosely connected with Tsarist Russia. The Russian Emperor, who was also Grand Duke of Finland, governed his new territory with the aid of Russia's Governor-General, who also had the role of Finnish State Secretary, and with assistance from the Finnish Governing Council (as of 1816, the Senate). The Governor-General exercised supreme executive authority in Finland.

This major change, though not specially desired from the Finnish point of view, brought positive development – from complete domination by the Swedish king to relatively extensive autonomy within the Russian Empire. The stepwise construction of a national entity had begun. In the 1860s–1970s, Finland obtained its own parliament, currency, basic education system, and legal institutions. However, in a situation that is rare, even exceptional, from an international perspective (Aarnio 2002, 2), old Swedish laws were still followed also in the Grand Duchy of Finland. A parliamentary system existed ideologically, but it was not functioning in the way we expect a parliamentary system to work today. The senators were nominated by the Emperor and, therefore, did not necessarily work directly for the people. A true parliamentary system was not developed until independence, in 1917 (Nousiainen 1998, 237).

Finnish autonomy blossomed most from 1863 to the beginning of the repressive times at the turn of the century. After the 1869 Parliament Act, construction of Finnish central government administration and its subsidiary administrative structures started. It was essential to create new central government structures to manage important public functions such as Customs, the postal service, the land survey, public auditing, and basic education. All of these were provided with their own offices. It was social development that led to rapid expansion of the state into areas that had traditionally been the purview of the Church, universities, or private individuals and organisations (Selovuori 1999, 46–47, 120; Temmes & Salminen 1994). In 1892, the administration underlying the Senate consisted of nine ministries with their central agencies. At the sub-national level, eight provincial offices and sector-specific district offices, whose number varied, were implementing national policies. The authorities and offices of central administration were situated either in the capital of the Grand Duchy of Finland itself, initially in Turku and later in Helsinki, or in the imperial capital, St Petersburg.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the harmonious development came under threat and attempts to reduce Finland's autonomy increased. The final years of Russian rule saw repeated strain brought by Russification measures. World War I and Russia's confused political conditions resulted in serious political problems in Finland. The first democratically elected Finnish parliament was assembled in 1906. This was based on universal suffrage, inclusive of women. In March 1917, after an era of political confusion, the parliament decided to strive for full independence in place of autonomy.

The Republic of Finland, 1917–

Finland declared its independence on 6 December 1917. However, Kerensky's provisional government was not willing to concede Finnish independence. This, coupled with broader political problems and an uncertain environment, resulted in a three-month civil war breaking out in January 1918.

A proposal for a republican constitution had been under preparation by a constitutional commission appointed in spring 1917. The unfinished work of developing a constitutional framework for Finland resumed after the civil war, and the republican Constitution of Finland was accepted in 1919 (Selovuori 1999, 16–18). Finland's governmental system was a mixture of several theories of the state, but its main features were the parliament, representing the will of the people as supreme political authority, and, at the same time, a strong president, as the highest executive officer of state. The Council of State, or the government of Finland, formerly the economic division of the Senate, comprised 11 ministries and the Prime Minister's office. Only minor adjustments have since been made in the structure of the Council of State, with the number of ministries alongside the Prime Minister's office being 12 today.

The Constitution of 1919 also stated that the administration of municipalities shall be based on local self-government of the citizens in accordance with specific acts of parliament on this matter. It was specified in addition that the manner and extent of the application of self-government by the citizens to administrative districts larger than the municipalities shall likewise be prescribed by law. However, regional institutions with elected assemblies were never constructed.

For the independent Finland, a major threat to state formation arose with the outbreak of the Winter War, in autumn 1939. The peace treaty bringing an end to the war was signed in Moscow in March 1940. Finland was forced to surrender a tenth of its territory to the Soviet Union, and the Soviet border was moved 150 km westward from Leningrad. The inhabitants of the ceded areas (Karelia and the city of Viipuri, now Vyborg), who amounted to 11% of the total Finnish population, moved to the Finnish side of the new boundary. This defeat was taken very hard in Finland, and the restlessness and the demands from the Soviet government did not end with the peace treaty. A new war, the Continuation War, began in 1941 and lasted till armistice negotiations were completed in Moscow on 19 September 1944 (Jutikkala & Pirinen 1996, 440–441). In addition to the areas in Karelia, the Finnish harbour of Petsamo with the surrounding territory was ceded to the Soviet Union. All of these areas are Russian territory today.

After these events, Finnish society and the state were fundamentally the same as they were before the wars. However, huge problems had to be solved. On the political-administrative agenda were issues such as foreign policy related to the Soviet Union, the payment of war indemnities, resettlement of the 407,000 Karelians, and social and economic security for the families of the 80,000 soldiers killed in the war (Tiihonen & Tiihonen 1983, 231). Active reconstruction dominated

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the years following 1950. In less than four decades, a modern welfare state based on a solid public sector was developed. Public administration at the central level (ministries and central agencies), regional level (provinces and sector-specific district agencies), and the local self-government level (municipalities and joint municipal authorities) grew in their number of units, professional staff counts, and expenditure.

In parallel with the internal progress, the international status of Finland became stronger, step by step, and in 1955, Finland joined both the Nordic Council and the United Nations. Forty years later, in 1995, it acceded to the European Union. In the negotiations prior to joining, the main focus from the Finnish point of view was on agricultural and regional issues. The year 2000 brought a new Constitution of Finland, with the aim of the reform being to codify Finland's Constitutional law, ensure uniform and modernised normative structures, and revise the arrangements for separation of powers. The reform did not extend to the foundations of the political system; instead, it was of a limited nature, building on the continuity of the old traditions.

LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

The framework of Finland's current administrative system was created in the late nineteenth century. A tier of collegial central bureaux subordinate to the Senate gradually took shape. The Senate departments began to resemble today's government in terms of distribution of administrative spheres, and the procedures introduced in the war years led to adoption of a ministerial system of administration. Between 1940 and 1980, there was rapid development in the central government structures.

The highest organs of government are the parliament, the Council of State, and the president of the republic. The government is a body headed by the Prime Minister and composed of ministers, who settle matters in a plenary session, while judicial powers are exercised by independent courts of law. The administrative system for central government is divided into administration sectors handled by a ministry and central administration units. Subordinate to them, regional and local state administration units are responsible for the implementation of the decisions and for production of goods and services.

Grounded in the Constitution, local self-government with elected assemblies is exercised in the municipalities, whereas the regions represent a 'semi-self-government' model. Below, the development of Finland's internal territorial structure is presented separately for the territorial state administrative units (see Table 1), which are agents of the central government, and self-governing bodies (see Table 2) with elected assemblies and executives, acting rather more as partners of that government.

Territorial state administrative units

Major changes to the levels and numbers of territorial units in Finland in the grand duchy era (1809–1917) and in the Republic of Finland (from 1917 on) are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Territorial state administrative units at the sub-national level, 1809–2019

	PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION	DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • general administration, supervisory authority • police, rescue service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sector-specific entities • implementation of national policies
Grand duchy, 1809–1917	1809: 6 provinces 1812: 7 provinces 1831: 8 provinces	1880s – the beginning of active construction of district agencies
Republic of Finland, 1917–	1917: 8 provinces 1919: 8+1 provinces ¹ 1938: 9+1 provinces 1944: 10+1 provinces 1960: 11+1 provinces	1930s – tasks moving from the provinces to district administration Up to 1990 – a complex system of district administration consisting of agencies in 10 sectors, with the number of districts per sector varying within the range 4–33 1995: 13 environment centres 1997–2010 – 15 regional

¹ The province of Åland has been both a province and a self-governing region since 1920. The Åland Islands enjoy constitutionally and internationally recognised home rule.

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	1997–2010: 5+1 provinces	employment and economic development centres
	2010–present: Regional State Administrative Agencies	2010–present: 15 ELY Centres

Provinces

The territory of the grand duchy covered the six provinces of Turku and Pori, Uusimaa and Häme, Kymenkartano, Savo-Karelia, Vaasa, and Oulu. In 1812, the Grand Duchy of Finland was expanded by the addition of Old Finland: the areas that had been ceded to Russia in the treaties of Uusikaupunki (1721) and Turku (1743). These now formed the province of Viipuri. In constitutional terms, a Finnish political and geographical entity was created that showed the first even vague correspondence with the traditional areas of ethnic Finnish settlement. The number of provinces rose to 8 when the province of Uusimaa and Häme in 1831 was divided in two. The geographical structure of provincial administration changed little after the 1830s, notwithstanding suggestions of establishing new provinces, and the number of provinces remained at 8 until 1917 (Selovuori 1999, 147–148).

Between the year of independence and the mid-1990s, there were several changes in the division of the geographical areas of the provinces. The predominant trend was an increase in the number of provinces in tandem with development of the welfare state. A radical change occurred when ‘regional administration reform 2000’ reduced the number of provinces to 6 (five provinces on the continent and the Åland Islands).

The tasks of regional administration too have changed, from the late twentieth century through the dawn of the twenty-first. Until the 1970s rolled in, the structures of regional administration dealt with and resolved administrative questions primarily within their own sector and raised regional needs for national-level decision-making. Then, with the development of the welfare state, social development policy gained ground in the operative roles of the regional administrative organisations. Provincial offices had a central role in the planning and implementation of public-welfare services and social, health-care, and education operations. This meant ensuring that the tasks of the welfare state were carried out by the municipalities, following principles as coherent and just as possible. A detailed and comprehensive state subsidiary system served as an effective control instrument facing the municipalities. In addition to the welfare service functions, the regional level answered for the implementation of industrial policies aimed at balancing out regional differences.

In addition to Provincial State Offices, the time starting in the 1880s saw state district administration built in a growing number of areas, such as commerce and industry, agriculture, the railways, postal services, Customs, and education. State district administration was functioning alongside the provincial administration at the intermediate level. District offices acted as regional agencies of ministries and

central agencies. The growing number of district agencies brought heterogeneity to the regional administration.

After several reforms, together constituting the above-mentioned regional administration reform 2000 and implemented in regional administration in the 1990s, the most prominent authorities of the state regional administration are the state provincial offices (6), employment and economic development centres (15), regional environment centres (13), and road districts (9). The geographical territories of the authorities vary, but the division into 19 regions (carried out in 1994 and referring to regional self-government) is the overall arrangement of Finnish state regional administration. All the above authorities comprise one or more entire regions. Furthermore, numerous district authorities work in their particular fields within various branches of administration. The division into state local districts is the fundamental arrangement of the state's regional divisions at the local level.

The starting point taken in the regional administration reform for 2000 was the idea that a society thrives through building competitive regional centres. New administrative capacity was created via structural reforms carried out by rationalising and consolidating the formerly sector-based regional administration. Accordingly, the 15 regional employment and economic development centres and 13 regional environment centres were established. At the same time, the quantity of state provinces was reduced from 12 to five. The new regional authorities began drawing up strategies for management of operations in line with the success factors identified. Among the other fundamental concepts were regional spontaneity, networking, and management of operations on the basis of selected programmes (Niemi-Iilähti, Stenvall, & Ståhlberg 2002).

There are now six Regional State Administrative Agencies in Finland. These work in close collaboration with local authorities. The agencies' mission is to promote regions' equality by carrying out executive, steering, and supervisory tasks laid down in the law. To this end, they aim to strengthen implementation of fundamental rights and their legal protection, access to basic public services, environmental protection, environmental sustainability, and public safety and also to provide a safe and healthy living and work environment in the respective regions.

The Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY Centres) are responsible for the regional implementation and development operations of the central government. Finland has a total of 15 ELY Centres, which are tasked with promoting regional competitiveness, well-being, and sustainable development and for curbing climate change. ELY Centres have three areas of responsibility: 1) business and industry, the labour force, competence, and cultural activities; 2) transport and infrastructure; and 3) the environment and natural resources. Not all ELY Centres deal with all three of these areas, though, as they can also manage duties on each other's behalf. These centres steer and supervise the activities of the Employment and Economic Development Offices (TE Offices).

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In 2015, regional development was further enhanced, with the integration of health and social services into the provincial reform, with the goal of establishing autonomous regions. The rationale behind the integrated reform stemmed from the increasing average age of the Finnish population in combination with the shrinking of the working population and a clearly declining birth rate. In addition, there is inequality of access to services across Finland with respect to rural vs. urban areas. If actualised as planned, this reform stands to be the most sweeping one yet in Finnish public administration. Should it be fully implemented, its impacts will extend to administration at all levels, both nationally and regionally. It has been estimated that 425 organisations and 190 distinct designated authorities in regional and local governance will be drawn together in 18 newly established regional organisations (Ranta et al. 2019).

The plan in progress for the regional government reform and encompassing health and social services will not only establish these new regions but also change the structure, services, and funding of health-care and social services, including a transfer of new duties to the regions. Consequently, three-tier public administration is to be established, with central government, autonomous regions, and local government. The new regional division (18 regions) will be based on the current regional delineation, with each of the new regions arranging the public health-care and social services within the respective area. In addition, the ELY Centres, Regional State Administrative Agencies, Regional Councils, and municipalities and joint municipal authorities will transfer some of their duties to the new autonomous regions (Ministry of Finance of Finland 2019; Ranta et al. 2019).

The aim behind this new reform and the co-ordination it entails is to simplify the state's regional and provincial administration. Moving the provincial administration tasks into the structures envisioned may increase efficiency and productivity in performing regional and provincial administration tasks. Among the other targets of the reform work is to tackle the sustainability gap in general government finances (Ministry of Finance 2019). A further objective is to establish a level playing field for delivering public services to citizens and address the differences visible in health and social services while also giving clients greater freedom of choice. Moreover, since the state will be responsible for regional financing and the multi-channel funding resources (at least in their current form), financing will thus be rendered simpler (Ministry of Finance 2019; Nyholm et al. 2016; Ranta et al. 2019).

Finland's state regional administration does not, *per se*, include any public organisations with directly elected political representatives. When Finland became independent, the Constitution set forth the principle of separation between administration and politics (Stenvall 2000, 98–113): administration carried out by the authorities should be subordinate to political institutions, and its agents should be chosen for their expertise. However, in the course of history, many of the higher positions in particular have come to require both expertise and support by a ruling party. Political commitment was a particularly important condition for appointment to such office in the 1970s. The Finnish system can, indeed, be called representational bureaucracy. At the turn of the millennium, however, the emphasis on results once again inspired an increase in the importance of expertise in such

appointments. A system with elected political representatives has materialised in those sectors whose tasks fall within municipal self-government. That said, full implementation of the reforms described above would bring an end to this.

Local and regional self-government

The evolution of local and regional self-government from the middle of the nineteenth century to the early twenty-first is presented in Table 2. Finnish local self-government with strong traditions reaching back to the eleventh century experienced institutionalisation in the late nineteenth century – the era of ‘modern local self-government’ in Finland started when the Local Government Act of 1865 (for rural areas) and of 1871 (for towns and cities) stipulated certain judicial, democratic, administrative, and economic premises for local self-government. The reform separated ecclesiastical administration from administration of secular affairs.

Table 2 The structure of local self-government in 1809–2019

	Municipalities (cities, towns, and rural municipalities)	Municipal co-operation (joint authorities)
Grand duchy, 1809–1917	The first acts for ‘modern local self-government’, in 1865 and 1871 Number of municipalities 1875: 496 1880: 500 1910: 524	Occasional voluntary co-operation of local governments
Republic of Finland, 1917–	1917: 532 1937: 602 1950: 547 1960: 548	1932 act on local government co-operation The 1930s to 1940s as an active era for establishing joint municipal authorities Number of voluntary joint authorities for hospitals, vocational schools, etc.

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	1970: 518	and associations for regional planning:
	1980: 464	1987: 377
	1990: 460	1990: 346
	2000: 446	2000: 246
	2004: 444	2003: 236
	2009: 348	1994: 19 regional councils
	2019: 311	2017: 18 regional councils
		1992: 21 compulsory joint municipal authorities for hospitals (hospital districts)

Although Finland was a grand duchy of Russia, the Finnish Local Government Acts followed the Swedish model of local self-government (under the LG Act 1861). In one respect, however, Finland deviated from Sweden, as it still does from Sweden and other Nordic countries: regional self-government with an elected body was never established in Finland. Finland does not know any larger autonomous territories than the municipality. An important exception, the Åland Islands enjoy both internationally and constitutionally recognised home rule. The issue of regional self-government was placed on the political agenda on several occasions, but political consensus on a commonly acceptable decision-making model and geographic areas was never reached. Instead, municipalities established voluntary joint authorities to manage hospitals and other service institutions, and for other inter-municipality co-operation.

In 1890, Finland's municipalities numbered 507, with the average population being 4,600 and their area averaging 700 km² (Soikkanen 1966, 285). There were suggestions to divide some municipalities in two, with the main argument being that Finnish municipalities were too big in comparison to municipalities in Sweden and Central Europe. On the other hand, some saw bigger municipalities as more effective. No relevant changes came to pass in the number of municipalities, and it rose only after independence. The Winter War peace treaty signed with the Russians in 1944, however, reduced the number considerably: 44 of them were lost to Russia. Since the war years, their number has steadily but gradually become smaller in consequence of municipal amalgamations. The aim of these consolidation efforts has been to increase efficiency in welfare-related tasks.

Local self-government developed independently in the nineteenth century and was separate from state administration, with the main features getting inherited from Sweden. In the Swedish era, local activities in Finland were concentrated around the Church. At the heart of local rural administration was religious parish administration. In the first few years of autonomy, the tradition of local government did not change. With 1852, the Poor Relief Act provided a uniform regulatory structure for boards handling relief for the poor and introduced a special poverty-relief tax too, which was the first local government tax in Finland. A fundamental change for local-level rural government came with the municipal reform of 1865 when the Church's parish administration was separated from municipal administration and local tax-collecting powers were confirmed (local government in towns was reformed a few years later, in 1873). Also, special local councils were established to serve as the highest decision-making bodies of local government. (Niemi-Lilahti 1992)

Even today, the municipalities have a central role in the Finnish political-administrative system, and the principle of local self-government is enshrined in the articles of the Finnish Constitution of 1919 and of 2000. Municipalities are the core actors in welfare services' delivery, and they have a wide range of responsibilities, including functions arising from local needs and functions specified in various laws. In addition, municipalities are basic cells of democracy, offering forums for representative and direct, participatory democracy. Since a high degree of local self-government is guaranteed in the Constitution, it can be viewed as confirmation of the right of residents to decide on their own administration and economy. Thus, the municipalities have the power to levy taxes, and, in fact, nearly 50% of municipal revenues consists of local tax revenue. The Finnish municipal system is unified, so urban and rural municipalities fall under the same legislation (Niemi-Lilahti 1999, 28–29). That said, in the event that the planned health, social services, and regional government reform comes to pass, the role of municipalities will change with respect to responsibilities and levying taxes. The regional reform will change the structure, services, and funding connected with both health and social services. It is because new duties will be transferred to the regions in this process (Ranta et al. 2019) that the issue of regions levying taxes has been raised (see also Nyholm et al. 2016).

In the absence of an institutionalised regional self-government level, municipal co-operation had developed already in the nineteenth century. From 1932 on, it was regulated by a specific act, with the 1930s–1940s seeing highly active establishment of voluntary joint authorities for hospitals, vocational schools, and other service institutions.

Preparations for accession to the European Union had their own influence on the administrative system. From the beginning of 1994, Finland's regional policy was brought into line with EU regional policy and regional aid. New regional councils (19 in all) were established and given the role of regional development authorities. The councils operate as regional planning and development authorities and, accordingly, are the units in charge of looking after regional interests and handling regional planning. The planning for a region encompasses a regional scheme, a

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regional plan, and a regional development programme. The core purpose of these councils is, above all, to take advantage of EU structural funds for further implementation of the regional development programmes. This also means in practice that after the incorporation of Finland into the EU the rules for regional funding, Finland aimed at benefitting from the opportunity to establish regional division that consisted on grouping together the wealthier municipalities, separated from the less wealthy ones, thus, these latter ones have benefitted more from the EU structural funding. The current 1,089 billion euro share of the EU funds (716 million of EU regional development funds (ERDF) and European social funds (ESF) 373 million euros) for Finland are divided for the less wealthy regions in eastern and northern Finland receiving 70,9 percent of the EU funds and the richer regions in southern and western Finland receiving 29,1 percent of the EU funds. (Rakenneraho 2020)

Currently, the regional councils are statutory joint municipal authorities following the principles of local self-government. On the basis of municipal democracy, they articulate common regional needs and act to promote the material and cultural well-being of the regions under their jurisdiction. Regional councils are constituted by municipalities and formed from the local level. The decision-making bodies of these councils are determined by the municipalities; therefore, the local electorate do not have any direct influence on this process. Those on of a regional council are, however, elected members of their respective municipal councils (assemblies). Therefore, regional councils can be termed 'semi-self-government'. The indirect democracy was strengthened by transferring regional representation and planning from state provincial offices to regional councils, in that provincial administration represents pure civil-servant-led administration whereas the supreme power in the regional councils belongs to the assembly, whose membership must correspond to the overall percentage of votes of each political group in the whole province. The actual executive and administrative organ of the council is the board elected by the assembly, a board thereby representing the distribution of political power in the area.

Membership in the EU has introduced new forms of programme-based regional development and co-operation. The aims for the nation's regional policy and the measures taken to actualise them are confirmed in the programme of regional policy objectives accepted by the Government. These include the Centre of Expertise Program (with 11 centres in 1994–1998 and 14 in 1999–2006), the Regional Centre Development Program, sub-regional co-operation (77 sub-regions in 2004), urban policy, rural policy, and development of the island areas. In addition, projects are under way to revise regional legislation and the regional development strategy, to relocate the activities of the state, and to increase the efficiency of business aid.

The structure of Finnish regional administration today is, irrespective of the reforms, heterogeneous and hard to categorise. The reason is that regional administration has been built up over the course of history in each case separately on the basis of the needs of the individual sectors of administration and in response to operative needs. No clear, comprehensive plan on which the regional administrative

structures could be based has existed. At the same time, the regional level has become an arena in which organisations at both municipal and state level operate. Indeed, the greatest challenges for regional administration are structural incorporation and the creation of co-operation among organisations. With the turn of the millennium, regional administration has gained increasing importance from the standpoint of state formation. It seems fair to say that Finland has largely adopted a model of operation in which the society's development relies on the success of its regions.

In its current form, the Finnish governance system has an average level of organisation with regard to political institutions representing direct democracy by citizens. Alongside the state political institutions proper (the parliament, government, and president), strong municipal democracy is manifested at regional level through municipal councils and municipal executive boards and in municipal boards composed of delegates. This affords strong local democracy in Finland, as municipalities are responsible for a significant proportion of the public-service tasks.

In consequence of the institutional solutions, regional administration in Finland displays fairly strong representation of civil-servant-led administration. In addition to provincial offices, even other state organisations represent pure civil-servant administration, with strong expertise emphasised in the operations. On the other hand, the Finnish administrative tradition has included strong central control. This has meant that the state organisations for regional administration have, at least in principle, implemented the will of the state's political institutions within their areas.

On account of EU membership and regional policy obligations, region-level co-operation groups have been established in Finland's various provinces. Their tasks are associated especially strongly with management of the EU's structural funds. The set-up of these groups emphasises democracy. The concept suggests that with the emphasis on representation of political will and organisations alongside civil servants, it is more likely for regional needs to be considered. In addition, the regions' co-operation groups feature particularly strong representation of those institutions, organisations, and companies that participate in the implementation and financing of projects. For preparations related to the various issues, these groups have corresponding secretariats made up of representatives of the regional councils and state officials.

The operation of Finnish regional administration can be considered to be based on strong expertise of civil servants and methods of administrative operation that are rooted in this expertise, where control of these methods has been taken over by organs based on indirect democracy especially since the 1990s (Niemi-Iilahti, Stenvall, & Ståhlberg 2002). This has introduced a rational angle to regional-level operations. In a way, the latter has been a key strength of regional administration. Since Finland's shift in the mid-1990s from operation policies taken up in the 1970s (which were aimed at narrowing social and economic gaps) to a model of regional development, support has been directed to strengthening the various competitive

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factors. The objective of building strong operations by attending to success factors has required a reason-oriented approach based on expertise.

On the other hand, civil servants' expertise and the relatively weak indirect democracy has meant also that it may even be possible to speak of a deficit of democracy in Finnish regional administration (Niemi-Iilahti, Stenvall, & Ståhlberg 2002, 87). The opportunities for indirect organs' influence in imposing pressure with regard to civil servants' expertise are often meagre. On the other hand, there are forces of change at the regional level making the meaning of politics stronger. One of these changes involves strengthening of the boards of Regional Councils. Should the new health, social services, and regional government reform come to pass in full, direct elections would be part of the new form of administrative governance. Drafting of the law for the regional government reform and for reforming health and social services continues on this assumption (Ranta et al. 2019).

It is difficult, however, to determine the content and position of democracy at the regional level in Finland. For instance, the handling of development issues at that level is often implemented through partnerships. In this situation, the participants include both juridical and natural operators. The system could, accordingly, be called a network democracy.

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