

The dawn of a consumption society: The case of Finland in a comparative perspective 1890-1928

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Introduction

Consumption studies very often concentrate only on recent times, and neglect the fact that very interesting – both theoretically and empirically - studies on consumption have been conducted already hundred and more years ago. Thus, the topic of this paper is to present the most important early Finnish consumption studies.

The beginning of modern manufacturing in Finland is usually placed in the 1860s and 1870s, almost a hundred years later than that of Great Britain, and a couple of decades later than that of Sweden. An important criterion of the beginning was the proliferation of steam engines (e.g. Alho 1949). The development was strongly backed up by freedom of occupation. A new type labour force was rapidly increasing. The living of this new labour force was based on wage, and it could move both from place to place and from occupation to occupation. However, at the change of the 20th century, the biggest industry in Finland was agriculture and forestry. Altogether 70 % of the economically active population was employed by agriculture and forestry. But the growth of the economically active population in manufacturing and constructing grew almost 300 % between 1880 and 1910. (Suomen taloushistoria 3, Table 1.11).

The supply of consumption goods increased strongly or by over 70 % between the years 1890 and 1910 (Karisto-Takala-Haapola 1998, 40). The economic situation of industrial workers did not improve at the same pace as the

production of building and manufacturing industries. At the same time, agriculture moved towards mechanization, and the agricultural labour force diminished. In fact, according to a study conducted by the workers' association of Helsinki the condition of workers deteriorated at the end of 19th century (Kettunen 1994, 58). The relative surplus population (unemployed and temporarily employed) depressed wages, and evidently, we can without a doubt interpret in Marxist terms the social development of that time. The first study in Finland on working class conditions with a sample of considerable size (n=418) and representativity was conducted 1891 and published 1897. The author of the article stressed the importance of consumption studies: by stating that the most important question of this century is the social question which must be explored by living standard studies of the working class (Groundstroem 1897, 92)).

In this article we concentrate on the first four statistical consumption studies in Finland from a comparative perspective. These are the study of Oscar Groundstroem, referred to above, living standard studies from years 1920-1921 (FOS XXXII, 5) and 1928 (FOS XXXII, 14A and 14B), and especially the study of Vera Hjelt concerning the condition of skilled and semi-skilled workers in the years 1908-1909 (Hjelt 1912).

1 Studies before Hjelt

Although the representativity of Groundstroem's study was quite reasonable, it also had considerable defaults. Firstly, the information was not taken from household budget diaries. Instead, interviewees tried to remember which were their daily earnings and consumption expenditure in the previous year. The earnings could be calculated quite reliably from hourly wages but the estimation of expenditure was somewhat less reliable although the research assistants tried to explore rents, market prices of food, clothing etc. The second fault was that the informants were only from Helsinki, and it may have been so that conditions in Helsinki were better than in some other places with large working class population. In any case, one of the central results was that almost one half of the expenditure was expenditure on food. (109).

However, perhaps the most striking result was the proportion of total expenditure on stimulants (alcohol, coffee, and tobacco) which was among the unmarried and the highest income group was even 18 %. It was of the same magnitude as that devoted to housing and clothing. The consumption of

stimulants also seems to be very elastic. Taking into account the price relations and the fact that it is impossible to increase tobacco and coffee consumption disproportionately as incomes increase, we can suppose that only alcohol consumption was elastic. This is the highest figure ever registered in Finland, and supposedly not very often in any other country. The result is probably due to two factors. Firstly, the number of pubs was very large and the working class really drank very heavily over a hundred years ago. Secondly, the interviewers belonged to the same social environment – they were active members of workers' associations – and therefore people perhaps dared to speak more frankly about their bad habits. In any case, Groundstroem comments: "Such a man who can devote from any hundred marks of his expenditure 10-20 marks to stimulants, is not obliged to suffer from hunger" (112).

The "Engel's law" was known to Groundstroem. According to this law, the lower the consumption expenditure, the higher the proportion spent on food. This law was also reliable on the basis of Groundstroem's study. This law was supported more among people without a family than among those with family; evidently among the latter group incomes of other family members equalized income differences between households. It is worth mentioning that Engel's essay "Die Lebenskosten belgischer Arbeiter-Familien" was published only two years before (1895) Groundstroem's article (Stigler 1954, 100). Thus, Finnish scholars were already at that time well in touch with new developments in economics.

Another very interesting study is that of Karl Willgren (1907) on the progress of working class conditions between 1876 and 1905. It was based only on secondary data but included some very fine insights. The main object of this study was real incomes, i.e. the changes in wages were compared to changes in prices. At that time, there was no price index of goods and services, but the researcher had to construct the index on the basis of his own solutions. The prices of foodstuffs and to some extent the prices of clothes were available from market-place statistics, but market-price statistics did not tell anything, for instance, on housing costs. Therefore, Willgren filled in his price information by using the time series on daily costs of a prisoner. According to Willgren's study, some enhancement in working class conditions had taken place.

2 Study on condition of skilled and semi-skilled workers in 1908-09

This study (1912), conducted by Vera Hjelt, can be regarded as a seminal work in the Finnish consumption studies. The study was not based on some

individual interests but was commissioned by Imperial the Finish Senate to the inspector of working conditions, Vera Hjelt (1857—1947).

2.1 Outline of Vera Hjelt's life

Vera's father was rector of a secondary school. Thus, Vera had an upper class background, and the house in which Vera was born can be seen in several countries on TV on Christmas Eve afternoon in the context of the declaration of Christmas peace from the middle of old Turku. Vera's studies were many-sided but she had no formal training in doing research. She had studied sculpture and music but by profession she was a teacher specialized in a male craft which was of course very unusual for a woman of her time. For her specialization she made numerous study journeys to foreign countries which was also very rare for a woman. However, she left the teaching profession and established a firm called "The joinery shop and steam saw mill of Vera Hjelt". (Hjelt-Cajanus 1948, 46-95.)

Hjelt's professional career continued to rise and she was appointed the first female inspector of working conditions in Finland in 1903. In the second democratic parliamentary election in Finland (1908) Hjelt became a member of parliament (Swedish Party). Thus, she was a member of parliament at the same time as she conducted her study. But perhaps the most important fact behind Vera's commission was that she had conducted a study on the working conditions of factory seamstresses which was published 1908. According to Hjelt-Cajanus (the author of Vera Hjelt's biography), the study achieved high recognition among economists, statisticians, and "also among such kinds of ordinary people who were interested in the life of their fellows because living portrayals from real life in addition to boring tables and figures are presented" (198). Probably, that success of the seamstress study was the reason why Vera Hjelt was commissioned to carry out an even more demanding research task. The living conditions/consumption study of 1908-1909 marked the peak of Vera's literary career. After that, she wrote only short and very practical articles on working conditions, some fairy tales for children and so on

2.2 The structure and data of Hjelt's study

The research is divided into the text part and table part as is usual in statistical publications. But what is unusual that the text consists of 255 quite large pages. Tablepart is also extensive and consists of 213 pages. The longest chapter "Family studies" consists of 162 pages, and contains more or less detailed stories about ten families' history, consumption and way of life.

The number of consumption items in book-keeping form was very limited in comparison with modern consumption expenditure studies. The number of main expenditure classes was 11. In addition, “Foodstuffs” was divided into 17 subclasses, and “Expenditure on culture and social activities etc.” into eight subclasses. In modern household budget forms there can be several hundreds of items. Partly, this was of course due to the fact that the number of existing items was much lower than today. But the information was not only based on forms; many types of additional information on family life were collected. In fact, just the use of this additional information gives the study a very interesting and even humorous flavour.

The data consisted of the households of skilled and semi-skilled workers whose incomes could be estimated not to exceed 3 000 marks per year. However, all the heads of the selected households were not workers. There were, for instance, a conductor, a customs officer, and a shipping pilot among heads of households. It is interesting that already at that time such lower officials seemed to earn less than, for instance, skilled metal workers.

Book-keeping forms were distributed in 11 industrial towns and population centres, so the regional representativity can be considered to have been good. The sample consisted of 953 households including one person households, but only 380 or 40 % of the budget forms were accepted for the final analysis. However, the number is surprisingly high, if we take into account that incomes and expenditure should be written down every day during the year. The reward for book-keeping was not high, only 12—15 mark. The loss of the original sample was also due to political reasons, because the study was distrusted by some political agitators, who argued that “it is better for the working class not to reveal their economic situation”. “However, this inquiry has been planned with a very positive meaning”, writes Hjelt (12). There were also research assistants (very often schoolmistresses) who visited the families and gave advice in problematic situations.

2.3 Results

The results were presented not only as direct distributions but also as cross-tabulations (by occupation, income, number of members in household, and place of residence). Hjelt does not mention anything about the technical tools which were used in the analyses, although it is known that the Central Statistical Office of Finland had simple calculators (Luther 1993, 125), and it is not known which kind of operations they were able to perform. In any case,

the analysis of 380 household budgets must have been a tedious task, and that is perhaps why the book was published four years after the data were collected.

A surprising element which was considerably in advance of its time was that tables were constructed in a way which made it possible to make international comparisons (15). In the study several consumption studies from various countries (England, Germany, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, and United States) were also presented. In the text part, there were summary tables, and they were detailed tables in table part of the book. "Detailed tables" means that the incomes and expenditure of every household were presented.

According to the calculations, the percentage of foodstuffs of total consumption expenditure (taxes included¹) was 55.4 %. There were regional differences in this percentage. In Helsinki where the average income level was highest, the percentage was 49.7 % but in Oulu in Northern Finland the highest or 63.1 %. Hjelt also knew the Engel's law, which thus seemed to be supported also in her study. However, Hjelt also understood that Engel's law was a statistical law and commented that in each concrete family the food percentage varies a lot depending on the living costs of the place of residence, the age of family members and other corresponding things. (Hjelt 33-34.)

The percentage of alcohol expenditure seemed to be only 0.6 %. Hjelt was dubious about this figure. Interesting that Hjelt gives the reasons for the underestimation of alcohol consumption which can be considered valid even today. Firstly, the temperance movement and public opinion stigmatize alcohol use as a vice.² Secondly, people drink more heavily outside the home than at home, and the amount of wasted money is also difficult to estimate. Thirdly, families who could keep a budget book for a full year lead a more decent life than average families (34—35). We can also guess that the social position of the research assistants which was then mostly that of a female teacher had an impact on the estimate of alcohol expenditure.

Expenditure to clothing was 11.8 %. In this context Hjelt presented a very interesting hypothesis according to which occupation is the most important regulator of expenditure on clothing on the contrary to expenditure on food which is regulated by income. According to Hjelt, the type of occupation can

¹ Taxes were generally included (also internationally) in consumption expenditure until the 1950s, but the share of taxes among working class families was very small between 0-10 %.

² It is worth mentioning that twenty years earlier in the 1890s when Groundstroem collected his data drinking was an usual and more or less acceptable way to spend leisure time among the working class.

be such that it needs expensive clothing, even at the expense of food. For instance, a typographer can not dress in the same way as an outdoor worker (37). Unfortunately, Hjelt did not try to verify this hypothesis empirically.

The average percentage of housing expenditure (including heat and light) was 16.3. However, the variation between towns was remarkable. In Helsinki the percentage was 21.4, whereas in a small town in southern Finland it was 8.7. In absolute terms, the difference in housing expenditures between these two towns was almost fourfold (38-39). Thus, the expensiveness of housing in the capital area is a very old phenomenon. Dwelling was very confined. For instance, in Viborg (town in Karelian Isthmus), even 29 % of households lived in dwellings where there was less than 10 m³ per person. Tightness was increased by the fact that many households had to rent some nook to outsiders to earn a little more.

Other expenditures were in relative and absolute terms quite small. The expenditure on medical care was 1.4 % of total expenditure, on hygiene 1.1 %, on funerary and sickness funds 1.0 %, and on newspapers and books 0.8 %. However, it was found that almost all families subscribe, either alone or with some other family to a newspaper. Very often, in addition to daily newspaper, families had some periodical (41). This is perhaps a surprising result and shows that, probably, the households under scrutiny were more enlightened than worker households in general. Such kinds of "luxury" expenses as entertainments, theatre, and concerts took 0.3 % of total expenditure. Some households had also expenditure on photography, a boat, and fishing equipment. Thus, it is evident that although the poverty was general among working class households there were households which could afford to something other than necessities.

In the comparison of the Finnish structure of consumption expenditure with other countries and towns (Germany, Berlin, Nuremberg, Denmark, Stockholm, USA) it seems that the Finnish structure was poorer because, in other studies, the proportion of foodstuffs of total expenditure was less than half whereas in Hjelt's study then 55.4 %. Correspondingly, in other countries the percentages of housing and clothing were higher than in Finland. However, according to Hjelt this is not totally due to the poorer consumption type but to the fact that in the Finnish study small population centres were also represented. As mentioned above, in Helsinki housing expenditure was much higher than in other parts of country. In any case, in a later and regionally representative Swedish study from 1913, the percentage of food stuff was 48 % and that of housing 18.0 (Toivonen 1992, 222). This supports the opinion

that the Finnish expenditure structure was, however, poorer than in many other developed countries.

At the beginning of the 20th century the use of *consumption units* was not usual in these kinds of studies, but Hjelt was able to use them. The name of consumption unit was the “Quet” and it refers to the French “social physicist” Adolphe Quetelet. The values of Quets are quite close to modern values: Men are 1.0 units, women 0.8 units (today “the second adult household member”), and the scale decreased so that children under four years old are 0.1 units.

Absolute amounts of different foodstuffs consumed in households at different income levels were quite close to each other, probably because there were not big differences in incomes. However, in the lower income groups, the consumption of, for instance, milk and bread was higher than in higher income groups, whereas higher income groups consumed more cold cuts, sausage, and cheese than lower ones. It is worth mentioning that consumption expenditure on cheese is still today one of the best indicators of social class. In Hjelt’s study, different income groups were closest to each other, both relatively and absolutely, in the cases of consumption of coffee and sugar (75). Many later pauperism studies have revealed that coffee has been drunk in Finland even in those families who could not afford meat and/or butter (eg. Report of a commission 1940:5, 151). Coffee is only a stimulant but it has always been an important part of Finnish consumption, still today Finnish people are among the heaviest coffee drinkers in the world (after Sweden) (SYF 2005, 675).

The most extensive chapter in the text part of the book is called “Family studies”. It contains 10 “special inquiries” which are based not only on the budget books but on stories and notes made by families and partly on discussions with families and “careful observations” of living conditions (93-94). Interestingly, Hjelt used in her study already at that time in collecting her data, *research triangulation* (quantitative, qualitative, and observation) (see e.g. Cresswell 2003)) which has become fashionable in recent decades.

In family studies, no names were mentioned but the identity of the families would have been easy to recognise because the descriptions are very detailed. In each family study there is information on the history, state of health, housing etc. of the family in question. In reality, nobody’s identity was hardly threatened because people who read these kinds of studies belonged to a totally different social environment than the families of the study.

Many had had an austere childhood. For instance, the father of a mason had been a prosperous farmer. The farmer had been a kind-hearted man, but he also had a craving for alcohol and he wasted both his own and others' fortunes. The mother was a busy, saintly woman whose advice and caring guidance in the most dangerous phases of his life the son remembered with warm gratitude. This guidance restrained the son from following the same path as his father. This family was both economically and mentally in a better position than the average family. The family owned, for example, violin and 24 books, some of which were educational. (100.)

In another family the situation was different. The man was an outdoor worker and had moved from the country to the town as had his wife. There were four children in the family, the oldest child was only 12 years old. When the marriage took place the man was still strong and good-looking but he went to the dogs because of laziness and drunkenness. He had been many times sacked through his own fault, but lived at home and incurred expenses. Because this man could not be the breadwinner of the family the wife had to start to selling bread from door to door. The family had only one room and the area was only 9 m². The window was only half a meter above street-level. The furniture was dilapidated. Both spouses could read, and the wife followed with great interest the social and political development of the country by reading a religious workers' newspaper.³ The family never visited places of entertainment or other families because they had no information about their relatives. (119-120.)

Expenditure on food-stuffs in this family was as high as 73 % of total expenditure. Expenditure on housing and clothing was 21 % which means that the percentage of necessary expenditure was as high as 94 %. According to the budget diary expenditure on alcohol was zero although the husband was a drinker. Thus, the money for beer came from somewhere outside the budget diary. The diet of the family was poor and simple. In the morning they ate some bread and drank coffee, for lunch meat and potato soup except once a week porridge. For the evening meal, coffee was drunk and extra bread which the wife could not sell during the day. (119-121.)

The third example was the lone provider family. The widow had four children and she had only temporary jobs. one day she was a washer, another day a cleaner, and she was always worried about tomorrow. The widow had learnt to read only as an adult but her reading ability was so poor that she did not like to

³ The beginning of the 20th century was in Finland a period of great turbulence. Women were enfranchised in 1906 (second in the world), and the working class, as well as independence movements, were rising quickly.

read. However, the oldest daughter (12 years old) was as a trainee in a photo shop and hoped to become an apprentice after one year. After primary school she learned Swedish and book-keeping in a folk high school. She supposed that she needs them in her profession. Family also subscribed to a daily newspaper (114-115.)

From the modern perspective, all 10 families under special scrutiny were very poor. However, it is typical that the situation was not hopeless in any of families, as we saw above. Even in very poor conditions the wife could follow what was happening in politics or the daughter was very enterprising.

2.4. Some evaluation of the study

Perhaps the main defect in Hjelt's data is the fact that it contained only families that earned not more than 3 000 marks per year. It would have been very interesting to compare different social layers. We can imagine that there were at least three reasons for this restriction. The first was that of all the social layers the layer of urban manual workers was growing fastest. And among the ruling elite there was in the background a fear about the hard social conflict. Therefore, the conditions of workers became the most important question in "responsible educated circles" (Hjelt 1).⁴

Secondly, the restriction to urban workers can be due to the fact that in the countryside the providing of some kind of foodstuff for the poor was probably easier than in towns. Thirdly, estimating of expenditure of agrarian labourers would have been practically very tedious. Very many agrarians labourer worked almost without any money wage but they got their food and shelter as fringe benefits, so how could consumption to be measured?

It has also been criticized that the families chosen for the study were in a much better position than ordinary worker families, because in Hjelt's study the average income of industrial workers' families was 1 635 marks. On the basis of wage statistics, the average annual wage of an industrial worker was 888 marks (Nevalainen 1955, 33—34). The comment is hyperbolic, because in Hjelt's study, the income of the main breadwinners from their main job was 1 184 mark including overtime work (Hjelt 55); 1 635 includes all the incomes of a household.

⁴ Despite this interest among enlightened people the Finnish Civil War broke out in January 1918.

At the time of publication of Hjelt's study there were two social science journals in Finland. Hjelt's study was not evaluated, only something about the results and about costs (?) of the study were reported. But, in general journals did not publish empirical studies. Discussions on Marxism, cathedra Socialists, the *verstehende* method etc. dominated the contents (as again in the 1970s!). However, the author of Vera Hjelt's biography mentions that the study cut a dash, and almost every newspaper wrote about it (Hjelt-Cajanus 203). In addition, according to Hjelt-Cajanus, the study was also recognized in foreign countries, and for instance, a French journal (*Journal de la Société de Statistique de Paris*) considered the study especially valuable. This was possibly because the study contains a long French summary, and all the titles and terms of the tables were also published in French.

Hjelt also discussed the meaning of her results. She writes that although wages have risen in these times the rise has not been as fast as the rise of foodstuff prices and her conclusion is tight: "This study has incontestably verified that skilled workers can not live even modestly on only the wages they get from their regular work" (82). However, this kind of statement can not be supported by Hjelt's study because the study is by nature cross-sectional. However, according to Hjelt, the solution can not be raising wages because many factories can not afford to raise wages. Therefore, recommendations for families were that they should considerate more carefully when they buy their consumption items. In addition, to reduce expences, families should make joint acquisitions. Hjelt was particularly interested in co-operative kitchens, and reports on experiences from these kinds of experiments from Denmark, England, and even Finland (86). Co-operative kitchens also proliferated in Finland very quickly in the beginning of the last century, as did the co-operative movement in its totality - shops, factories, dairies - but especially co-operative kitchens have now almost completely disappeared.

It was mentioned above that every budget diary was documented in table part of the study. Therefore it would be interesting, if somebody could make the effort and save the data electronically. Then it would be available for secondary analyses with multivariate techniques. Micro history is in fashion although unfortunately, studies conducted have been almost always qualitative.

3 The living standard study from 1920—1921

Finland became independent in 1917, The Civil War was over in 1918, and the World War I ended in 1918. Consumption conditions had changed and,

therefore, a new study was necessary. (OSF XXXII 5). This was conducted by Maija Tudeer (again a female researcher!), but her personal influence on the content of this study was not on the same level as was Vera Hjelt's impact on her own study. But there was clear progress in the budget diary used. First of all, the expenditure was specified in more detail than in Hjelt's study. There were as many as 140 consumption expenditure categories (3). Secondly, the regional representativity was even better and the number of households greater than in Hjelt's study (n = 575). Thirdly, perhaps the most interesting new trait was that the study also covered middle class families such as small shopkeepers and lower public officials.

According to the results, the percentage of foodstuffs of total expenditure was higher among worker families than it had been in Hjelt's study (58.5 % vs. 55.4 %) (62). This result was perhaps due not only to the better representativity but also to the period. Data were gathered shortly after WW 1 and the Finnish Civil War. The higher percentage of foodstuffs expenditure in the beginning of the twenties can be confirmed on the basis of another study (Laurila 185, Table 3b).

As an example of the new items are movies. In absolute terms, the expenditure on movies in middle class families was twice as high as in worker families, but relatively, the expenditure on movies in worker families was a little higher. This is worth mentioning because in other expenditures for educational and cultural purposes (as education of children) differences between classes were huge. Thus, movies were from the beginning mass culture in Finland. The most striking difference was in the case of expenditure on servants. In middle class households, the percentage was 10.8 but in worker families only 0.8 ((39).

It must be mentioned that the consumption study of 1920-21 was more or less a presentation of statistics where the personal approach of the researcher typical of Hjelt is lacking. As such, large disaggregated tables are positive because on the basis of them secondary analyses can be conducted in a flexible manner.

5 Living standard studies of 1928

The following consumption studies were conducted in 1928, and the number of households was even more numerous, consisting of 1 224 cases. Moreover, a new trait was that 270 of them were wage labourers in agrarian industries (agriculture and forestry) (OSF XXXIII 14 A and B). In addition, also middle middle or upper middle class households were included. However, because

peasant families and households of single persons were outside the data collection, the coverage was only half of the total Finnish population. It was mentioned above that the exploration of consumption expenditure of agrarian labourers was an uncertain and tedious task, and therefore also the results were not necessarily reliable. The studies were again conducted by Maija Tudeer.

In any case, on the basis of the results of this study it is evident that the country had become more prosperous in 7-8 years because the average percentage of foodstuff expenditure in worker households was only 47. In lower middle class households it was 37, and in upper middle class households only 27 (SVT XXXIII 14 A, 34). In addition, the living standard study of 1928 reveals dramatically class differences. All the social strata were also divided into three income groups. In the lowest income group of agrarian worker families the percentage of foodstuff expenditure was, on the average, 70, and in the highest income group of the upper middle class the figure was 17 % (Toivonen 1986, 28). It is worth mentioning that the average of all households was below 17 % not earlier than in the middle of 1990 (SYF 2006, Table 436).

The structure of food consumption changed remarkably from 1908-9 to 1928. Traditional Finnish rye bread lost its position to wheat bread, the consumption of eggs increased, as did that of meat, and even fruits and vegetables were also eaten in worker families which were rare at the beginning of the century. But there were also continuities in diets. At the end of 19th century a central foodstuff among poor families had been potatoes especially in the countryside (Heikkinen 1998). Potatoes were still very important in the end of the 1920s because the consumption was as much as 960 litres per year (SVT XXXIII 14 B, 67). However, at the beginning of the consumption study of 1920-21, where the reliability is evaluated, it is a sarcastic remark: "Hopefully, a part of the potato consumption of the countryside is not mixed with the potato consumption of pigs" (3).

It was reported above that relative differences between classes, for instance, in expenditure dedicated to the education of children were huge. At the end of the 1920s the differences were still relatively the same, and thus, it was the middle classes which began to spend more and more on education. Expenditure on servants was still only marginal among worker families but in upper middle class families it was at the same level than expenditure on foodstuffs.

Perhaps the most dramatic change in the structure of consumption over twenty years was the growth of leisure time consumption (books, periodicals, social activities, sports, entertainment alcohol etc.). The percentage rose from 2.5 to

6.8 (Toivonen 1986, 50). We can believe that the proportion of leisure time consumption in 1928 was even higher than 6.8 % because alcohol was not included in consumption items in the studies of 1920-1921 and 1928 because of prohibition. However, from other sources we know that alcohol consumption by no means decreased during prohibition, on the contrary, it probably increased (Kallenautio 1979).

The structure of consumption in Finnish worker households in the 1910s and at the beginning of the 1920s revealed that the worker's living standard lagged behind that of Estonia and Sweden. However, during the 20s the difference between Finland and these two countries greatly diminished (Toivonen 1992).

6 Final words

Between 1928 and the beginning of World War II no "official" consumption studies were conducted in Finland. Finland was at war already in 1939 (the Winter War). During the war, in 1941 the next consumption study was conducted, and it was followed by several other consumption studies during the war. The motif behind these studies was the lack of information on the real nourishment situation among the population. Most foodstuffs were strictly rationed but there was a black market where people who could afford to could buy more and avoid starving. But there were people who could not afford to, and their situation was not easy. These war-time studies were small-scale and concentrated only on foodstuffs.

The following quite large-scale consumption study in Finland was conducted in 1950—1951 (OSF XXXII 21). An important innovation in this study was that the sample of households, which were selected to keep household budget diary, was divided throughout the year and thus one household was only responsible for book-keeping for two-week's period. This of course improved the reliability because now ordinary households, economically less persistent, could supposedly take care of book-keeping more easily than had been the case in the earlier consumption studies. On the other hand, the tables of the study were much more aggregated than the tables in the earlier studies. For instance, households were differentiated only by income, but not by social class, and the idea originated with Hjelt that differences in consumption did not depend only on incomes but also on social class or occupation, and on a way of life connected with class.

It is worth mentioning that in the aftermath of World War II, in the 1950s the percentage of foodstuffs of total expenditure of worker households (44 %) did not exceed the percentage of worker households in 1928 (Toivonen 1986, 64). After that, in the 1950s a rapid rise in living standard began in Finland. Period of the 1920s and 1930s has been called “the pre-stage of the Finnish consumption society” (Heinonen 2005, 10), and it can be said to have continued until the 1950s. Perhaps “the dawn of the consumption society” would be an apt description on the same phenomenon at the beginning of the last century.

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