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**Author(s):** Kortetmäki, Teea; Silvasti, Tiina

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## **Charitable Food Aid in a Nordic Welfare State: A Case for Environmental and Social Injustice**

### **Introduction**

The role and acceptability of charitable poverty relief is increasing not only in Finland but also in many other developed countries (Riches and Silvasti 2014). Especially food aid is often justified and defended by arguments drawn on ecological grounds, and the fight against food waste is used as a strong reason to promote donating expiring food to charities which distribute them to poor people. Food waste is a real problem and should be handled seriously. Yet, equally serious is the question of whether charitable food aid as a form of poverty relief is part of the solution or part of the problem in the context of the wealthy western world.

Finland identifies itself as a Nordic welfare state. The framework of the Nordic welfare regime has relied on the principle of welfare state universalism: according to this principle, the state is accountable for the social protection of those people who cannot take care of themselves or who lack a sufficiently supportive and resourceful social network of their own; nobody should be left to rely on charity. However, in the beginning of the 1990s Finland suffered an exceptionally deep economic recession. Since then, charitable food aid mainly based on donated food has become an established way of patching the holes in the social safety net of the most vulnerable people – i.e., people who receive all the last-resort social benefits they are eligible for – in Finland. (Silvasti 2014, 2015.)

Charitable food aid is delivered primarily by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF), other faith-based organizations, and some socially interested NGOs such as the associations for unemployed people. In practice the distribution of food is often done by diaconal workers acting within the ELCF and by volunteers working for the ELCF or for the NGOs in food banks, bread lines and in public cafeterias offering low-price meals prepared wholly or partly from donated food. The entrenchment of charitable food aid as a permanent support for the most vulnerable people in society indicates the radical long-term insufficiency of the last-resort social benefits and public welfare services. It also inevitably disconnects Finland from the traditional ideal of Nordic welfare universalism and violates the human right to food affirmed in the United Nations' Universal

Declaration of Human Rights (Riches and Silvasti 2014, Silvasti and Karjalainen 2014.).

When explored from the viewpoint of the Nordic welfare ethos, it is problematic that internationally food charities often have two apparently worthy goals: environmental protection by preventing food waste and poverty relief by delivering otherwise wasted food as charity to people in need (see Poppendieck 1999: 123, FEBA 2015). From the ecosocial point of view, these goals may at first sight appear perfectly compatible. The fight against food waste is becoming an increasingly significant justifier for increasing the role of charity food distribution as a means of poverty policy. In France, for example, big supermarkets will be banned (starting from July 2016) from throwing away or destroying unsold but edible food. Instead, they have to donate the food to charities to be distributed to the poor or, alternatively, for use as animal feed. The rationale behind the legislation is to tackle the huge amounts of food waste produced in the prevailing food system alongside persistent food poverty in French society (Chrisafis 2015). The founding father of the idea, Arash Derambarsh, aims to convince more countries of the benefits of the legislation and to introduce the obligatory food donation law globally (Willsher 2015).

This chapter focuses on ethical tensions between the ethos of Nordic welfare universalism, the human right to food, and charity food distribution in the context of the environmental goal of reducing food waste by distributing surpluses as charity. The chapter begins with a short introduction to the ethos of Nordic welfare as well as the human right to food perspective, which sets the background for the analysis. The relationship between food aid and food waste is also explained. After setting the background, the analysis reveals the connections between food charity and waste issues and both social and environmental justice. Utilizing theories of justice, Finnish food charity and its connection to food waste is analyzed. The analysis will demonstrate that although the ‘narrow’ paradigms of justice are insufficient for addressing all aspects of waste-based food charity issues, the broad view of justice provides more fruitful tools for contextualizing the problems related to using food waste for food aid. Further, locating the problem primarily in the unsustainability of the current practices helps to evaluate what kind of food aid can be considered as promoting justice as well as ecosocial transition.

## **The Ethos of Nordic Welfare and the Human Right to Food**

### *Charity in the Context of Nordic Welfare*

The ethos of Nordic welfare refers to the public responsibility of society and its citizens based on strong democracy, the determination to reduce poverty, inequality and vulnerability based on the principle of equality, as well as recognizing the basic rights of all citizens and explicating them in the spirit of universalism (Hänninen 2010). Universalism, again, refers to the equal rights and responsibilities of all citizens. The principle of universalism argues that in order to be able to treat all citizens equally it is necessary to bolster the situation of the most vulnerable. The basic aim is to strive for a common good, which also indicates that social and welfare services should be available to all citizens in a similar fashion.

During the expansion of the welfare state in the 1970s and 1980s, people in Finland became accustomed to the idea that the basic needs of all citizens would be satisfied. Food poverty was unimaginable. However, an exceptionally deep economic recession at the beginning of the 1990s ended the expansion of the welfare state, leading Finland little by little away from the Nordic welfare regime in the direction of the Anglo-Saxon model, entailing more means-testing for welfare benefits. Simultaneously, measures engendering increased income inequality stemming from a focus on supporting economic growth and international competitiveness were strengthened (Taimio 2010) with the result that income differentials, as measured by the Gini coefficient, increased from 22.2 in 1995 to 27.2 in 2012 (Statistics Finland 2013). Research across OECD countries showed that, from the mid-1990s up to the financial crisis in 2008, growth in inequality was faster in Finland than in any other OECD country (Ruotsalainen 2011).

These social policy developments increasingly left people with insufficient income to meet their basic needs. Moreover, minimum supplementary benefits have repeatedly been proved to be too low to support an acceptable level of welfare (THL 2011). Under these circumstances, the income level of people relying on welfare benefits lags significantly behind that of other Finns, and the poverty rate among benefit recipients has increased (Ahola and Hiilamo 2013: 18). Thus, benefits are not always sufficient for satisfying basic needs like rent, gas, electricity, medicines and food. Of these necessities, food is usually the most elastic part of the household budget and people living in vulnerable economic positions fairly easily find themselves in situations where they simply cannot afford to buy enough healthy, good quality food once they have paid for the other essentials (Riches 1997: 10).

The generation, promotion and maintenance of charitable food aid delivery practices were responses to emerging food poverty during the economic recession in the mid-1990s. The recession was over by the end of the decade, but food poverty and emergency food aid seem to be in Finland

to stay. According to the latest systematic welfare survey produced by the National Institute of Health and Welfare, 20 per cent of people who live on income support – considered a marginal form of social welfare in the Nordic context – also replied that they had relied on food aid. This figure was under two per cent among other respondents (Lehtelä and Kestilä 2014). These figures prove that changes in social policies have resulted in the social security system now failing to guarantee food security to the most vulnerable people in Finland.

There is no official estimate of the numbers of people dependent on charitable food aid and estimates vary widely. For example the ELCF, the largest distributor of food aid, calculates that the number exceeds tens of thousands of people (out of a population of 5.5 million) per year (Kirkkopalvelut 2014). In research covering eleven urban areas in Finland, it was estimated that during one year 12 600 people receive food aid regularly and another 9 500 occasionally (Ohisalo & Saari 2014: 17-19). This distances Finland from the ideal of universalism, which has traditionally been essential in the Nordic welfare state regime, leading to the situation where disadvantaged people increasingly depend on church and charity organizations. At the same time, the state and public sector refuse to engage adequately in concrete action to eradicate poverty, indicating the unwillingness of society to challenge increasing social inequality.

### *The Human Right to Food Perspective*

In the context of international law, the right to food is a fundamental right. It is derived from the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights which proclaims that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. Sufficient food (guaranteeing well-being, health and activity) is a fundamental prerequisite for human dignity. The right to food is laid out precisely in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which came into effect in Finland in 1976. Commitment to the right to food obligates governments to ensure freedom from hunger. It is fundamentally a question of rights and accountability – not a basic human need to be fulfilled through charity (Ziegler et al. 2011: 20). This is to say that all governments that have ratified the ICESCR are required to act domestically in compliance with their obligations under international law to ensure food security in their own countries.

Consequently, the right to food approach implies a framework of national law which moves beyond benevolence and policy guidelines to legislative action. Charitable food aid is not a sustainable solution to food poverty. Instead, the circumstances and resources of the most vulnerable should be

assessed in a realistic fashion and the supplementary benefits available to the most disadvantaged should be increased to meet their needs. The reason for the growing demand for food aid originates in deepening inequality and poverty. Updating the basic income security system is the right solution for poverty relief as it ensures people the capacity to feed themselves with dignity. Sometimes the ability of an individual to acquire food is weakened because of, for example, substance abuse or mental illness. In such a situation access to treatment and services should be available to address those problems and, consequently, to improve food security.

Ziegler et al. (2011: 20) emphasize that the obligation to fulfil the right to food ‘imposes duties to the State, such as the duty to promote redistributive taxation and social security.’ The right to food is not directly written into the law in Finland, but according to the Finnish Constitution 19 §, paragraph 1, ‘those who cannot obtain the means necessary for a life of dignity have the right to receive indispensable subsistence and care.’ According to the legally authoritative interpretation, this indispensable subsistence and care required to ensure a life of dignity should be understood as a subjective right. Consequently, to allow situations in which people who lack a sufficient security of living or where people’s ultimate income support is insufficient, are required to rely on charitable food aid, are violations of not only the human right to food but also the Finnish Constitution.

### **Food Aid and Food Waste**

The prevailing food systems, based on globalized markets, are wasting huge amounts of edible food. At the same time, public awareness of the environmental impacts of food waste is growing internationally (Stuart 2009). The contradiction between unrestrained waste, ecological unsustainability and growing food poverty is ethically intolerable. As there is no shortage of food in the wealthy industrialized world, food poverty as a social problem should be easily solved. In fact, agricultural policies in many developed countries have been consistently struggling against over-production for decades. Recently, the idea that charitable food aid could form the bridge between food waste and poverty relief has been gathering strength. The reasoning here is that there has to be a ‘politically correct’ way to recycle food waste. Distributing food that would otherwise be wasted to instead feed poor people is one way of doing it (Poppendieck 2000). A charitable food aid delivery model, using wasted food to feed hungry people, raises significant questions for social policy as well as food policy directed at advancing socially just and environmentally sustainable societies.

In Finland, the level of food waste is moderate by international comparison (Koivupuro et al. 2010: 27) and environmental motives for food aid distribution are seldom clearly expressed. Even so, according to common sense, rescuing edible food from being discarded to feed poor people is a praiseworthy thing to do. Rising awareness of the environmental impacts of wasted food offers a good additional incentive. Accordingly, the Finnish Food Safety Authority recently loosened the regulations governing expired food stocks donated by grocery stores to charities. The rationale behind the new regulations is food waste prevention. The alteration is in accordance with the EU Commission's Communication *Towards a circular economy: A zero waste programme for Europe*. The related legislative proposal to review recycling and other waste targets puts forward objectives for food waste reduction, including a proposal for developing national food waste prevention strategies with the aim of reducing food waste by at least 30 percent by 2025 (European Commission 2015). No assessment of the social impacts of increasing donations to charities was included.

When discussing food waste, one of the burning questions is, at which point does edible food turn into waste? The concept of waste seems to be a social construction which is used in very flexible ways. For example, food that is donated to charities is still edible and safe to eat in food safety terms. At the same time, wealthier consumers do not accept it as 'proper' or 'marketable' food any longer or, alternatively, the stores do not consider it 'marketable' even with a discount. At this point edible food turns into food waste for the 'primary market and customers.' Yet, it is perfectly edible and high enough quality to be delivered as charity – on the 'secondary or charity market' – for the poor.

Nevertheless, waste-based charitable food aid does not meet the ideal of Nordic welfare universalism: charitable food aid is not an entitlement, it is a gift (for more on the entitlement vs. gift debate, see Chapter 17). That is to say that the recipients do not have a legal right to food aid, as charity is not a guaranteed entitlement but rather an occasionally available gift that may or may not provide nutritionally sufficient ingredients for a healthy, active life. The problem here is that both constituents of charity food aid, namely charity and the idea of reducing waste, are difficult to criticize. Who could object to charity, in principle, or activities that help to reduce waste?

Keeping in mind the principles of the Nordic ethos of welfare, we nevertheless argue that a state's failure to provide food security for its least advantaged citizens is a violation of the human right to food and social justice under circumstances where providing food security is possible, as it is in wealthy societies, and under conditions of surplus food production. Moreover, the environmental

aspect of charitable food aid is not as positive seems at first. Consequently, if there are grounds for criticizing waste-based charitable food aid, they should be accordingly found in justice theories. In the following, food aid is related to both social and environmental justice theories. First the links between food, waste and social and environmental justice are explored shortly, showing how the themes are closely interwoven.

### **Waste Food (Aid): Intertwined Social and Environmental Justice**

Social and environmental justice theories differ mainly in their subject of research. Social justice, pairing itself with the practices of social policy, addresses equality issues that arise from societal circumstances: among the most typical topics within the field are different meanings of equality (“equality of what?”), income distribution, and equality of opportunities. Environmental justice, on the other hand, is interested in environment-related equity issues within the human community. Typical topics in environmental justice include the distribution of environmental benefits or resources and harms or risks; yet the approach covers a whole variety of topics from climate change to the rights of indigenous people and nuclear workers (Shrader-Frechette 2002, Schlosberg 2007, 2012). Ecosocial social policy attempts to profoundly connect environmental issues with the practices of social policies.

Food poverty is a typical case of social injustice, a situation in which the society fails to promote equality in the area of basic human needs. There are two possible viewpoints from which to start analyzing the injustice: the focus can be either on the distribution of food itself or on the means to acquire food. Amartya Sen (1981) has argued that the analysis should focus on the access to food. Although Sen discusses developing nations and humanitarian crises, his point applies at least as strongly in countries like Finland: in a wealthy state, the problem lies not in scarcity but rather in access to and utilization of food.

Although usually treated merely as an issue of social justice, food poverty belongs to the category of topics where social and environmental justice overlap. After all, at stake is the right to access particular environmental goods – edible, nutritious and safe food or land where the food can be produced, as well as clean fresh water. Food poverty is also related to sharing environmental risks if the least well-off citizens have to resign themselves to food that carries more environmental risks, i.e., is less safe.

The strategy of addressing food poverty in Finland with waste/charity-based food aid raises multiple environmentally related points:

1. The Finnish food system produces such an amount of edible food waste that it constitutes a significant, although inconstant, base for charity food aid.
2. As the previous point implies, food waste is still edible and safe to eat in food safety terms, but for some reason wealthier consumers do not consider it 'proper' or 'acceptable' food any longer – or stores do not consider it 'acceptable' on their shelves even with a discount. At the same time, some people do not have enough edible food.
3. If not eaten, food waste becomes waste in a more general sense. This waste is an environmental problem in two ways: directly through the immediate environmental effects of dumps and waste treatment and indirectly via, for instance, the greenhouse gas emissions caused by the waste and other slower effects. In addition, the production of food only to waste it consumes huge amounts of environmentally essential agricultural inputs, for example fossil fuels, fresh water resources, fertilizers and pesticides. These environmental effects are often unequally distributed and felt in the population, due to which they constitute cases of environmental injustice.

Waste-based charitable food aid claims to resolve exactly these points: it redistributes the food waste, transforming the 'inedible' – for wealthy and food-secure consumers – back into 'edible' for food-insecure people, and by this process it also helps to reduce waste. Is it plausible to claim, then, that although prevailing charitable food aid indicates failures in the Finnish social safety network, it is otherwise a just and justifiable resolution to the problems of food poverty and food waste? In the following, two different paradigms of justice are used to analyze the situation. It will be shown that narrow approaches of justice find charitable food aid a satisfactory solution, but broad paradigms of justice clearly explicate the problems of prevailing practices. The broad justice approach also helps to explain what is needed for an ecosocial transition that combines ecological sustainability with social justice.

### **Narrow Theories of Justice and Food Waste as a Solution**

Until recently, justice has usually been considered primarily a matter of distribution: other questions may be ethically relevant, but do not belong to the sphere of justice. This can be referred to as the

conventional, narrow paradigm of justice (Schlosberg 2007: 12-13). What counts is the distribution of particular goods and bads such as food and fresh water, or waste and polluted water. The inequality of food poverty lies primarily in the unequal distribution of edible food.

From this viewpoint, the solution offered by charity actors seems justifiable. Goods or here food are more equally distributed while bads or here waste are overall reduced (which in turn reduces the overall amount of bads that might harm those who are least well-off). A remaining point of criticism concerns the inconsistent and haphazard nature of waste-based food aid: there might not always be sufficient amounts of good quality, healthy food available for redistribution through charities. If there were a stable supply of edible waste, however, the problem of fluctuation in supply would be resolved. In that case, the narrow paradigm of justice does not have further points to make against the prevailing practices. The increasing amount of waste would be 'recycled' back into use through hungry mouths, and the increasing amount of it would ensure that hungry people got their needs fulfilled by charity food aid. This conclusion seems disturbing and problematic: is producing more food waste really a good way to promote social and environmental justice? Further, can it be considered justice if needs are met by means that do not respect basic rights (such as the right to food) as real entitlements?

It is arguable that the solution offered above is both socially dubious and environmentally unsustainable. Prevailing unsustainable production, distribution and consumption patterns produce 'waste' which actually should not be waste. These excessive consumption patterns and the wastage of natural resources are unsustainable. However, recycling the excess for 'secondary markets' (the markets for those who lack the economic resources needed to participate in the markets as they are normally understood) can sweep the visible symptoms of this unsustainability under the rug. For this reason, narrow justice that focuses on the end result of distribution lacks proper tools for criticizing the unsustainability of charitable, waste-based food aid. Moreover, from the viewpoint of ecosocial transition, a narrow paradigm of justice fails to capture the holistic picture that is needed to address the roots of unsustainability rather than treating the symptoms only (cf. Schlosberg 2007: 14–16). To find a theoretical framework that better acknowledges these underlying constituents of unsustainability, we will next turn our attention to a newer model of theorizing justice: broad theories of justice.

### **Broad Social Justice: Recognition and Dignity**

In the recent developments in theorizing justice, the narrow view of justice has been criticized as insufficient, even ‘symptom-oriented.’ Roots of injustice can often be traced deeper, back to participatory inequalities, cultural disrespect, ignorance, and stigmatization of particular people. Distributional inequality is then not the whole story but often a consequence or byproduct of other inequalities. Hence, addressing injustice that is already embedded in the structures of our society requires a broader theory of justice that considers not only distribution but multiple elements as relevant to justice. This argument has been defended especially by contemporary feminist social justice theorists such as Nancy Fraser (1998, 2009) and Iris Young (1990), but it has also been advocated in environmental justice, particularly in relation to indigenous peoples (Whyte 2011) and environmental justice movements (Schlosberg 2007).

There are slightly varying views on what elements constitute justice, if not distribution alone. For the questions presented in this chapter as well as in attempts to develop ecosocial interpretations of charitable food aid, the most useful approach is the three-dimensional view of justice (referred to in the next paragraphs shortly as broad justice), which is probably the most discussed among the different versions (see Fraser 2009, Schlosberg 2007, 2012).

Broad justice identifies three intertwined dimensions or elements in justice: distribution, recognition, and representation. Distribution forms the economic/material dimension of justice, in addition to which some immaterial things like risks can be distributables. Recognition, in turn, concerns the cultural and social dimensions of justice: different forms of (dis)respect or social discrimination are occurrences of recognition injustice. Representation or participation, the third dimension, is about political questions such as inclusion and exclusion in decision-making and (in)equalities in the capacities required for political citizenship. (Fraser 2009.) These dimensions are not substantively different social domains: they should be viewed as different analytical domains or viewpoints through which the same questions can be addressed (Fraser & Honneth 2003: 63). Food poverty related injustice, for instance, can then be examined from different perspectives.

Of the aforementioned three dimensions, recognition is especially helpful in examining food poverty and charitable food aid. As a type of injustice, misrecognition is embedded in cultural hierarchies, many of which have been institutionalized. Typical forms of misrecognition are disrespect, ignorance or invisibility, and domination (Fraser 1998: 7). The recognitional dimension of justice is crucial when a whole welfare state system – especially the strong principle of equality included in the ethos of Nordic welfare – is evaluated. If redistributive policies produce stigmatization and hierarchical valuations, constituting ‘groups of wasted people,’ they are unjust in

terms of recognition even if the originally good intentions succeed in at least partly correcting maldistribution and economic inequalities. This is exactly what happens when charitable food aid corrects some distributional injustices but does it at the expense of the social equality and dignity of food-poor people.

A broad theory of justice views Finnish charity food aid as problematic especially in terms of misrecognition. Misrecognition is present in the forms of stigmatization, lack of entitlement, treatment of customers as passive receivers, and maltreatment, as well as the dichotomy between taxpayers and charity-receivers (Kortetmäki 2015). A welfare society aiming to promote social justice should find other strategies to address the food security of its citizens. This leads to the following recommendations on how to promote Finnish food security as well as poverty relief more justly in terms of recognition:

- Making food an entitlement rather than a gift would reduce the stigmatization sometimes experienced by those who are ‘forced’ to resort to charitable food aid. Basically, this means that there should be no such thing as food *aid* but a more general welfare policy, which some *entitled share of food and other basic necessities* could be a part of.
- Welfare and income support policies, more generally, should be formulated in ways that avoid creating dichotomies such as ‘taxpayers vs. money-receivers.’ Recipients of income support and/or food aid should be treated as active citizens and prospects for their better inclusion in policy planning should be evaluated. This could take the form of, for instance, involving food aid recipients in the planning and execution of distributing food, or establishing ‘dignified soup kitchens’ in which all participate in preparing and enjoying meals (cf. Poppendieck 1999: 245-249).
- The unforgivable wastefulness and resulting inefficiency as well as the social and environmental injustice of the food system cannot be solved by organizing a ‘secondary food market’ or ‘charitable food market’ to distribute residual food for free to citizens defined as residual citizens unfit for the ‘primary market.’ Instead, the primary market and the current food system need to be rationalized, reorganized and made more effective.

The points above have shed light on the different ways in which charitable food aid, even with good intentions, is actually very problematic from the perspective of recognition. But the other problematic factor in this case, namely waste, has not yet been discussed. At this point it will be useful to shift the focus from social to environmental justice, in whose sphere the issue belongs.

Broad environmental justice helps us to address two important factors here: first, the way the least advantaged are made ‘secondary citizens’ with regard to their rights to environmental goods, and second, the environmental unsustainability of the current food system and the shortsightedness of waste-based aid as a solution to this problem.

Broad environmental justice theories give the aspect of recognition an important role in bringing attention to ignored or dominated groups, especially vulnerable people and future generations. Showing equal respect and giving fair consideration to these people highlights an important obligation necessary to protect their wellbeing and equality: the obligation of *environmental sustainability*. Following from that, another obligation can be derived in the context of the unsustainable consumption patterns and food system functions, from production to consumption and waste management, of wealthy societies like Finland: the obligation of *moderation*. The argument is that doing justice to vulnerable people and future generations requires a transformation in societal practices (including social policy as well as food policies) in a direction that supports environmental sustainability and moderation in consumption (see Hirvilammi & Helne, Chapter 3 in this book).

The problems related to waste-based food aid are not only failures in the social policy but also in the abundant consumerism, connected to global market capitalism, that help to construct an environmentally unsustainable food system, while waste reduction through charity helps to deflect attention from the real problem of the wasteful nature of the western food market and its environmental effects. The injustices here are threefold: first, a society exercises injustice in supporting wasteful food consumerism while some of its citizens lack access to basic good quality food. By ‘supporting’ we refer here both to the technological and cultural factors, such as underdeveloped warehouse management systems, that make it hard to distribute or sell more cheaply soon-expiring food, as well as to a more general trend in politics and public discourse that encourages consumerist practices in the name of building a welfare state on economic growth and wellbeing (Helne, Hirvilammi & Laatu 2012).

Second, producing (unnecessarily large amounts of) food waste is unjust towards future generations. Exploiting resources – for example fresh water, fertile soil and fossil fuels – in a wasteful way in a world of scarcity is unjust and diminishes the possibilities for future generations’ wellbeing. These consumption patterns are also one contributor to the environmental problems that

decrease the wellbeing of both present and future vulnerable people. Third, increasing food consumption (in terms of either amount or the input intensiveness of the food) increases pressure to produce more food, which in turn increases the environmental impacts of agriculture and advances global environmental change.

Giving these issues serious consideration and accepting the principles of environmental sustainability and moderation would have significant consequences for current food policy and food aid practices. As waste is not the solution but the problem, a shift towards a more just society requires societies to address unsustainable practices and not just clean up their outcomes, like food waste. Some examples of steps in the right direction could be the following:

- The distinction between what is generally considered edible and inedible should change, and the society can help here in two ways: 1) educating about the edibility of food that has passed the best before date, and 2) enhancing the ability of markets to sell or distribute these products to all consumers.
- France has recently forbidden retail stores from throwing any food away (Chrisafis 2015). This kind of regulation might force stores to consider new practices to avoid waste in addition to donating expiring food to charities.
- The excessive buying and consumption of food should be restricted over time. How this could be practically achieved without significantly increased food prices (which would be unjust for the least well-off), is a difficult question that is beyond the scope of this article. Another very sensitive question is how to restrict consumer sovereignty in a capitalist consumer society.
- Utilizing the possibilities offered by new technologies is important: this could mean, for example, intelligent refrigerators helping consumers to plan their grocery shop visits in order to reduce household food waste.
- There is great potential to utilize the advantage of scale and the possibility for public education through a variety of food services such as workplace canteen and school meals, as well as community kitchens.

In addition to recognition, representation is an important concept in the ethical evaluation of Finnish charity food aid. The representational dimension of justice refers to similar issues in both social and environmental justice: it calls for the participatory parity of citizens in a democratic environment

and viewing all citizens as active and autonomous agents. In the context of food insecurity, this entails that the emphasis should be on empowering the people and fostering the capabilities that – in agreement with the right to food perspective – enable them to live a full human life with freedom and dignity (cf. Nussbaum 2011). ‘Forcing’ food insecure people to receive charitable aid in the form of restricted foodstuff collections and through processes in which they have no say deprives them of agency.

Promoting representational justice also means ensuring that the opinions and experiences of those who need income support and food provisions are represented whenever the decisions affecting them are made. Food aid delivery counts on charity as a solution to food poverty rather than empowering sovereign actors to democratically manage their own food production, distribution and consumption (Riches 1997: 9-11). At worst, emergency food aid distribution is deactivating and humiliating to its recipients. Independence is one of the core values in western cultures. People who need help in meeting their basic needs are dependent and dependence is often associated with immaturity (Poppendieck 1999: 240). Promoting representational justice does not require direct democracy but rather making decision-makers more aware of the experiences of people living in poverty, as well as changing public opinion in such a way that these people are not viewed as a passive group unable to manage independently.

## **Conclusions**

According to our analysis, the most important principles of the Nordic ethos of welfare – equality, democracy and universalism – are compatible with both the human right to food perspective and the theories of broad social and environmental justice as well as with new ways to apply the broad version of environmental justice. In contrast, more traditional narrow paradigms of justice do not offer sufficient tools to address sustainability in the social policy analysis of the Nordic welfare regime. The broad theories of justice are better equipped and hence more suitable for evaluating the justice aspects of ecosocial transition and social policies.

Under the Nordic welfare regime, food poverty as such should be impossible. However, permanent demand for food aid together with the establishment of charitable food distribution proves the existence of a hunger problem in Finland. Yet, is charitable food aid, based on donated surplus food, part of the solution or part of the problem as a form of poverty policy in the context of ecosocial transition? The answer given here is guided by the theories of broad social and

environmental justice: charitable food aid is clearly a problem. Firstly, waste-based charitable food aid claims to resolve two problems: it redistributes food waste (expiring food, food in faulty packages) by transforming 'inedible' for wealthy and food secure consumers back into 'edible' for food-poor people. By this process, it helps reduce waste. However, charitable food aid based on donations is always inconsistent and haphazard by nature. The deliverers can distribute only what they have and donations vary according to the market situation. Accordingly, there is not always sufficient good quality, healthy food for redistribution through charities. The disturbing and problematic conclusion here is that, if only there were enough wasted food, there would be enough to deliver. From the environmental viewpoint, producing more food waste to deliver cannot be a solution to food poverty.

Secondly, according to a broad theory of social justice there are three intertwining dimensions in justice: distribution, recognition and representation. Especially recognition but also representation offer constructive perspectives on food poverty and charity. As a type of injustice, misrecognition is embedded in cultural hierarchies, many of which are institutionalized, creating permanent forms of disrespect, ignorance, invisibility and domination of certain groups of people (Fraser 1998: 7). Recognition justice is crucial when the strong principle of equality included in the Nordic welfare ethos is evaluated. If redistributive policies, practiced by the public or third sector, produce stigmatization and hierarchical valuations, constituting 'groups of wasted or surplus people,' it is not just in terms of recognition. A broad theory of social justice views charitable food aid as problematic especially in terms of misrecognition but there are problems also in representation: stigmatization, lack of entitlement, treatment of customers as passive receivers, and maltreatment, as well as the dichotomy between taxpayers and charity-receivers, who can easily be labelled 'second class citizens' as charitable food aid is not a socially acceptable way to acquire food. All of these can be considered as cases of misrecognition or lack of opportunity to participate.

Even though waste-based charitable food aid might seem compatible with ecosocial transition at first glance, as charities often have two symbiotic goals - poverty relief and environmental protection by preventing food waste - this chapter clearly demonstrates that the matter is more complex. By utilizing the theories of broad social and environmental justice in the context of social and environmental sustainability and connecting this analysis with the principles of the Nordic ethos of welfare, we conclude that waste-based charitable food aid promotes both social and environmental injustice and therefore cannot have any justified task or position as a part of poverty relief under an ecosocial Nordic welfare regime.

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