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# Godparenthood Defined by Location, Occupation, Social Class, Kinship and Strategy in the Finnish countryside in the period 1810–1914<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

On the basis of two case studies of artisans from the Finnish countryside, this paper presents five major factors that affected normal godparent relations. It argues that in some cases (especially among the highest echelons of the local society) godparenting strategies aiming at social advancement, which have received much attention in the research, may have had some significance, but for the majority of the population locality, occupation, social class and kinship were more important factors. In fact, most of these were highly intertwined in the pre-modern Finnish society of estates, and this is very visible in godparent networks. Thus this paper will serve researchers of godparenthood as an important reminder of how multi-faceted the phenomenon itself was. It also shows how persistent old social and godparenting structures were in the Finnish countryside. Despite a general European trend that favoured almost exclusively kinsmen in the selection of godparents from the 18th and 19th centuries on, no similar trend is evident in the sources used for this study, even in the first decades of the 20th century. This paper is based on a detailed prosopographic study of artisans in the rural parish of Hollola and the whole population of the ironworks community of Strömfors. The databases compiled for these communities contain data on the places of residence, kinship ties and occupational positions of their members. These data are then corroborated with information available about the socio-economic status of the individuals studied. On the basis of these data, godparent networks are reconstructed and compared in order to analyze the defining factors behind the different godparent patterns that are found. The importance of this study is emphasized by the exceptionally good quality of the source material available in Finland, which makes it possible to compile and compare extensive databases for virtually the whole population. Also noteworthy is available time scale, which extends to a later period than is usually the case in studies of godparenthood.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on and uses data more elaborately analyzed and presented in Marttila 2010; Uotila 2013.

## Introduction

In various fields historical research there has lately been growing interest in godparenthood both as a phenomenon in its own right and as a way of studying social networks and how they were used. For a long time, the emphasis in studies of these networks has been on families and kinship-based groups. Recent years have seen studies that have brought to light not only other factors that impacted on social networks but also – more importantly – methods for discovering them –.

Godparents have been one of main objects of this new wave of research, which aims to deepen our understanding of how social networks functioned and how they were used.<sup>2</sup> Since the selection of godparents was less regulated than that of spouses and trust played a notable part in this relationship, the study of godparenting has proved to be a fruitful new opening in that it expands the range of the networks that can be studied.

Studies of godparent networks have often followed in the footsteps of research on marriage connections and strategies in an effort to find a more suitable research method for mapping social connections. This has resulted in viewing relationships and networks based on godparent connections as instrumental, and there has been considerable discussion on different godparenting strategies.<sup>3</sup> These studies have also often focused on the upper echelons of society as social status has been regarded as a vital component of these strategies. Moreover, the sources are often most extensive for elite groups. This paper aims to broaden the view we have of godparent connections by bringing into focus other attributes affecting these relations, attributes that have remained in the background in studies that emphasize the strategic aspect of godparent selection. By examining godparenthood over a long period in the Finnish countryside with an emphasis on artisans, we will show that. Despite the existence of some undeniably strategic behaviour and the pragmatic use of godparent connections as a resource,<sup>4</sup> godparenthood was a multifaceted phenomenon. Especially in the lower echelons of society, geographical location, localness, kinship ties and the connection between social status and occupation all played vital roles in the selection of godparents. Thus, in many cases, godparenthood in fact manifested and reinforced existing social connections rather than aimed at creating new ones. This paper does not aim to provide a complete picture of Finnish godparenting structures. The converging evidence obtained from these

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<sup>2</sup> For some examples of the latest studies, see Marttila 2010; Alfani & Gourdon 2011; Alfani & Gourdon 2012; Keskinen 2012; Kotilainen 2012; Piilahti 2012.

<sup>3</sup> On godparent strategies, see Alfani 2006; on both marriage and godparent strategies, see Piilahti, 2007; Alfani & Gourdon 2011; Alfani & Gourdon 2012; Kotilainen 2012; Piilahti 2012; on marriage strategies, see for example, Padgett & Ansell 1993; Houston 1983; Jiménez & Valverde 2002. On family strategies and the problems revolving around them in the academic debate, see for example Engelen, Knotter, Kok, & Paping 2002.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Piilahti 2007.

two cases aims to produce an understanding of the number of different elements that affected godparenthood in Finland and to provide a foundation for future studies of the subject.

## Researching Finnish (Lutheran) godparent networks

This paper examines the Finnish Lutheran godparenting system.<sup>5</sup> When such systems are used in studies of networking, one of the most intriguing features of the Finnish godparenthood institution is that there were few regulations that limited the choice of godparents: a godparent had to be Lutheran, over the age of consent, respectable and devout.<sup>6</sup> As virtually the whole population of Finland was Lutheran,<sup>7</sup> this enabled an almost free choice among the adult population, including kinsfolk.<sup>8</sup> Children were required by law to be baptized. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a child had to be baptized within eight days, although in practice this usually happened sooner, and this factor to some extent limited the range of available godparents. From the 1860's on, this rule was abolished, and thus the selection became even freer.<sup>9</sup> There had to be at least two godparents, but otherwise the number of godparents was not limited. In older days, at least one of the godparents had to be woman, who held the child during the ceremony.<sup>10</sup> Because families often had large numbers of children, a family might have multiple godparent connections, possibly far exceeding the number of marriage connections and networks (which have been the object of much research). The value of these godparenting connections as tools of research is emphasized by the fact, established in previous research, that a request to be a godparent was rarely refused as it was considered to be a token of trust.<sup>11</sup> There was also a popular belief that a godchild inherited some of the valued qualities of the godparents, like diligence or special skills.<sup>12</sup> The people of the time also saw godparent connections as economic safeguards for the children<sup>13</sup> as well as a means to create new and maintain existing contacts between families, and to bring the children themselves into these contact networks.<sup>14</sup> These aspects of Lutheran godparenthood

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<sup>5</sup> On the history of the Finnish baptismal institution in general, Lempiäinen 1965.

<sup>6</sup> Lempiäinen 1965: 186–187.

<sup>7</sup> There existed an Eastern Orthodox minority, mostly in eastern Finland, but it played no role in the researched areas.

<sup>8</sup> In the parish of Valkeala in south-east Finland in the period 1630–1750, 29% of godparents were kinsfolk. Piilahti 2007: 252. In the town of Pori, 16 % of burgher's children's godparents were relatives. Keskinen 2012: 149. In Sweden, the figures in the mid-nineteenth century were 15–20%. Ericsson 1989: 233.

<sup>9</sup> Lempiäinen 2004: 30.

<sup>10</sup> So it was possible that all the godparents were women. Fagerlund 1999: 221; Fagerlund 2000: 348–349; Uotila 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Piilahti 2007: 236.

<sup>12</sup> Similä 1939: 176; Bringéus 1971: 68; Fagerlund 1999: 220; Fagerlund 2000: 354; Piilahti 2007: 239. Fagerlund emphasizes the attributes of female godparents.

<sup>13</sup> Godparents were supposed to provide for the child in case of the parents' premature death. However, there is no direct evidence in the dataset at hand that godparent's wealth was any major criterion when choosing ones godparents. Couriol 2012: 135; Piilahti 2012: 218–220, 225; Keskinen 2012: 143.

<sup>14</sup> Bringéus 1971: 70; Fagerlund 2002: 32; Häggman 1994: 108–109.

should be borne in mind in comparing it to the Catholic practice, which places more emphasis on guidance in a relationship of “spiritual kinship”, limits the number of godparents and excludes relatives.<sup>15</sup>

Studies of the social connections stemming from marriage or more recently from godparenthood often emphasize the instrumental value of these ties and the conscious strategies behind them.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, economic considerations especially with regard to the transmission of human capital and also to both conscious and unconscious social reproduction and advancement may have been motives in certain cases in Strömfors and Hollola.<sup>17</sup> However, the networks formed by godparent connections are regarded in this paper as normally representing more general social contacts between people. These contacts arose for different reasons and were manifested in the ceremony of baptism. They might have represented conscious strategies, but more important factors could be friendship, work, localness, existing social status and kinship or even coincidental or occasional choosing of godparents<sup>18</sup>, all individually present in the same networks on fairly equal terms. Thus the concept ‘network’ in this study is a wider social construct than for example ‘class’ as it is used in some family historical studies of godparenthood. The mapping of these networks and the detailed analysis of their composition can reveal the social reality of the community of the time, the rationale behind the social connections in it and their relative importance. It also enables a more in-depth analysis of godparenthood itself.

Apart from Lempiäinen’s research on whole institution of baptism, there have been virtually no Finnish studies concentrating on godparenthood in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially from the perspective of its nature as a network or its use as a resource. The first works on the subject that adopted such an approach were some studies by Swedish scholars in the 1990s. A pioneering work in the up-and-coming wave of research on godparenthood was Solveig Fagerlund’s study of the Swedish town of Helsingborg in the period 1680–1709. Fagerlund uses godparent connections to

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<sup>15</sup> Despite the disparities, Catholic godparent connections have also been used in social network analysis. On godparent customs in Catholic countries, see for example Alfani 2007; Alfani & Gordon 2012.

<sup>16</sup> On godparent strategies, see Alfani 2006; on both marriage and godparent strategies, see Alfani & Gourdon 2011; Piilahti, 2007; on marriage strategies, see for example, Padgett & Ansell 1993; Houston 1983; Jiménez & Valverde 2002. On family strategies and the problems revolving around them in the academic debate, see for example Engelen, Knotter, Kok, & Paping 2002.

<sup>17</sup> See also Piilahti on so-called “status godparents”. Piilahti suggests that the acquisition of social standing was the rationale behind a connection when a godparent from a higher social group did not have a previous blood or marital tie with the family of the child. Piilahti 2007: 258; Piilahti 2012: 218-222.

<sup>18</sup> Occasional godparents happened to be at the present when child was baptized. They were usually employees of the church or persons attending a christening of another child. In emergency baptisms also midwives were marked as godparent. Piilahti 2012, 222-223.

recreate the town's social structure, but its gender perspective, time frame and quite different environment limit its value for the subject of this article.<sup>19</sup>

Another Swedish scholar who extensively studied godparent connections is Tom Ericsson, who examined them in relation to occupation. His study offers highly important insights on methodology and analysis techniques: for example, he points out that bundling people together into broader occupational categories makes it possible to investigate what kind of networks existed. This categorization by occupation – or social status as these were entwined and inseparable in the Nordic society of estates – was also the starting point for our present study. Ericsson demonstrated that his method was able to challenge traditional explanations of the social hierarchy since godparent connections showed that the social relations between different groups were complex.<sup>20</sup> However, his study would have offered a lot more for the history of the family and research on godparenthood if he had included kinship as a factor in his analysis. Ericsson also had to exclude the whole female population because the registers often only record the civil status of women but not their occupation.<sup>21</sup> In our approach, we have aimed to identify the strengths of Ericsson's methods and take them as our starting point and then expand the scope of our research to include kinship and the female population by applying more a suitable categorization based on criteria that include but are not limited to occupation.

Recent years have also seen a surge in Finnish studies of godparenthood. The first initiative came as a part of Kari-Matti Piilahti's 2007 dissertation.<sup>22</sup> Piilahti makes an important contribution by placing godparent connections and networks in their context as part of a larger group of social relations and seeing them as resources that were used by households. Although the time frame of Piilahti's research (1630-1750) differs from that of our study, he makes an important point by noting that even if there was certain intentionality in establishing contacts, it is misleading to see local connections almost exclusively as a game of strategy.<sup>23</sup> Piilahti's studies have been followed by articles by the present authors, Juuso Marttila. Most recent arrival on Finnish godparent studies is doctoral thesis on merchants of town Pori by Jarkko Keskinen. His focal message concerning godparent system is that role of women as individual agents should be emphasize, that there was

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<sup>19</sup> Fagerlund, 2002.

<sup>20</sup> Ericsson 1989: 234–235, 237; Ericsson 2000: 283–284. See also Ericsson 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Ericsson also makes the point that in spite of the general class distinction between them journeymen and apprentices, who were classified as working-class, still had contacts and cultural links with their masters, who were classified as middle-class. Ericsson 1989: 232; Ericsson 2000: 276, 284. By basing itself on the concept of family networks instead of class, this study sidesteps both the problem of wives and the role of artisans and apprentices in class theories.

<sup>22</sup> His main findings are also now available in English, see Piilahti 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Piilahti 2007: 282. Here Piilahti criticizes Sabeau 1990.

also so called social kinship and all in all the godparenthood was really multifaceted phenomenon.<sup>24</sup> In overall Keskinen's approach is prominently close to the approach of this article.

Our aim is to broaden our knowledge of godparenthood, particularly in Finland, by extensively examining godparent connections between families in order to establish some understanding of how location, kinship, localness and the interconnection between social status and occupation affected and was manifested in these relations. To this end, we have employed a prosopographic method. The classical definition by Lawrence Stone defines prosopography as the "*investigation of the common background characteristics of a group of actors in history by means of collective study of their lives*".<sup>25</sup> In a more recent definition, prosopography has been seen basically as "*a historical research technique based on the systematic analysis of biographical data of a selected group of historical agents*".<sup>26</sup> We see prosopography as essentially an attempt to bring together relevant biographical data about groups of persons in a systematic and stereotypical way. In other words, prosopography is a set of simple but well-ordered routines, especially with regard to the compilation and ordering of the data. In its analytical stage prosopography makes use of a range of other techniques – in our case the study of connections and the kinds of networks that they form.

There are two distinct stages in executing prosopographical research; the collection of data concerning the target population (from a wide range of sources) and the analysis of the compiled data. This procedure is needed in order to study the attributes of godparent relations as we need as extensive data as possible on the family ties, occupational and social status, etc. of the persons involved in these connections. The accumulated data are then organized into one or more databases, which are by no means the final stage of the prosopographical investigation but rather serve merely as an instrument for the analysis.<sup>27</sup> Prosopographical databases are used as a tool for dealing with wide-ranging data from various sources. However, the construction of a database involves more than just the management of the data; organizing the data into databases provides access to a wider range of analytical tools, for example, statistical presentations. Additionally, it already constitutes one stage in the processing of the information.

Our databases on godparenthood have been created from the registers of births stored in Finnish parish archives.<sup>28</sup> The basic unit is the baptismal record, from which we have collected information on dates, parents and godparents as well as about their occupation and place of residence. This

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<sup>24</sup> Keskinen 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Stone 1971.

<sup>26</sup> Verboven, Carlier & Dumolyn 2007: 69.

<sup>27</sup> Keats-Rohan 2007: 5–7.

<sup>28</sup> Hollola Parish, registers of births 1810-1840, parish registers 1808-1840; Strömfors Parish, registers of births 1880-1920, communion books 1880-1920.

information is supplemented by notes on kinship connections or other previous relationships (for example, of marriage) between the persons involved. In addition to the production of the database itself, in order to be able to use it effectively, it is necessary to have an understanding of the context of the communities that these people lived in. As case studies, we have chosen the ironworks community of Strömfors and the rural artisans of Hollola. Artisans are especially interesting because they formed a clearly separate social group in the society of estates – the Finnish equivalent of the *ancien régime* – and they thus constitute an interesting group when set in the context of the countryside where they lived. The ironworks community, for its part, offers a compact unit that can be exhaustively analyzed. Moreover, the borders between social groups in ironworks communities were perhaps even more pronounced than elsewhere. The presence of similar occupational groups, especially smiths, in different periods of time helps us to trace possible changes over the long run. As these cases studied are intended to complement each other, the presentation of overlapping data is intentionally avoided, e.g. the role of kinship is discussed only in the case of Strömfors, while the study of the Hollola artisans focuses on the importance of geographical location and localness.

There are approximately 7000 records of births in Hollola between 1810 and 1840, but only cases where the child's parents were artisans or one of the godparents was an artisan are included (See table 1). This means that approx 1000 cases have been subjected to a closer examination. The database for Strömfors includes altogether 411 children and approx. 800 godparents (or godparent couples<sup>29</sup>) for the period 1880–1914. The number of persons in this *complete census* of Strömfors (every child born in the community is included in the database) is enough to permit a quantitative analysis, while the population still is manageable enough for a more qualitative analysis that enables us to discern and explain exceptions and turn them into resources rather than obstacles in this study. The annual numbers for each category are still low, and a single baptism may cause considerable deviation and exceptions to the results of the quantitative analysis, in which a greater number of godparents were involved. Accordingly, qualitative analysis plays a significant part in our research on Strömfors in particular.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> If the godparent entry is in the form "N.N. with his wife", this is counted as one connection in the Strömfors database. Although they were two separate godparents, they represented only one connection between the families. In the quantitative analysis, individual godparents and married godparent couples are considered equivalent although this article recognizes that they might not have been so from the parents' point of view in individual cases. This is important to bear in mind in comparing this research with other godparent studies.

<sup>30</sup> In following sections, the data on godparent connections are based on these databases, and thus original sources are not cited.



## Hollola

The first research area of this study is a parish called Hollola in central southern Finland, a purely agricultural area with no noteworthy industrial activity during the nineteenth century except for a couple of small artisan manufactures. There were approx. 6600 inhabitants in Hollola at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the population, who lived in compact villages, was expanding despite a few serious epidemics that momentarily slowed down the population growth.<sup>31</sup> Hollola was situated in the province of Tavastia (Finnish: Häme), and although it was a rural area it was not peripheral in the Finnish context; the parish was an old one, and it was accessible by means of a good road network, although the closest towns lay more than 60 to 100 kilometres away from it. Thus its economic life and local artisans, who are here under scrutiny, were not affected by the existence of urban artisans.

The careers of nearly 300 rural artisans<sup>32</sup> who worked between 1810 and 1840 have been closely analyzed. They were smiths, shoemakers, tailors and some more specialized artisans consisting of tanners and carpenters, to mention just the most common occupations in the countryside. However, the rural artisans were by no means a homogenous group, and their wide heterogeneity makes them an interesting group to study with regard to godparenting networks. In addition, their status varied: some craftsmen were official parish artisans (*sockne hantverkare*), who in most of the sources were designated by their craft title; others were unofficial craftsmen who acquired at least part of their income from artisanal work but did not pay craft taxes or have a craftsman's licence as the parish artisans did. In the tax registers, unofficial artisans were listed as farmhands (*dräng*) or tenant farmers (*landbonde* or *torpare*)<sup>33</sup> or landless agrarian workers (*inhysning*)<sup>34</sup>, but not given any artisanal title. These provincial artisans differed in many ways from town artisans – who have often been the focus in studies of artisan. Contemporaries, too, regarded the prestige and skills of the two groups as different: urban craftsmen were regarded as better trained, and they enjoyed a higher social standing than their rural counterparts. Even so, rural artisans were esteemed locally.

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<sup>31</sup> In 1830s, the number of inhabitants was close to 8000, but it never exceeded that figure. Kuusi 1937: 73–80.

<sup>32</sup> Artisans are here defined as persons who made handicraft goods for the local populace. This leaves cottage industry (and proto-industrialism) outside this study because their production was aimed at more remote markets.

<sup>33</sup> The sources designate them as *torpare* or *landbonde*, the difference being that a *torpare* rented part of a farm while a *landbonde* rented an entire farm. The title *dräng* means a hired help who was employed for one year at a time to perform agricultural labour.

<sup>34</sup> In the records, members of the last-mentioned group are mostly designated by the title *inhysning* (or the corresponding abbreviation), which means that they were self-sufficient and not in anybody's full service. Often they did not have an occupation as such but did casual jobs in order to earn a living. In the rural society of the time, everybody had to have some occupational designation.

The first thing to note about nineteenth-century Hollola is that the selection of godparents was governed by geographical location, and especially localness.<sup>35</sup> Generally speaking, godparent networks were created chiefly among neighbours in the local village environment apart from local gentry, whose godparent patterns differ from other groups. The importance of locality is emphasized by the local artisans' godparenting structures, since artisans have been usually found to form highly endogenous networks.<sup>36</sup> In Hollola, an average artisan chose his children's godparents - whose number typically ranges from 3 to four - from his neighbourhood. The neighbourhood was mainly populated by non-artisans, and especially from among the farm-owning peasants and their sons or sons-in-law. Other groups, namely tenant farmers, hired hands and various kinds of agricultural labourers, were also represented but not to the same extent. Correspondingly, artisans and especially smiths, were often asked to be godparents by other inhabitants of the neighbourhood. It is no revelation that it was the local social networks that governed the selection of godparents because the rural way of life was based on the village community in this part of the Finland. Here godparenthood was clearly governed more by locality than anything else, including strategies and occupation.

In addition to locality, status too mattered as the popularity of artisans as godparents already indicates. Even if the proportion of artisans in the population was only 1 to 1.5 percent and their children accounted for only five per cent of the baptisms, artisans were present as parties in at least an average nine per cent of baptisms. Thus artisans were clearly over-represented as godparents. When we examine those families who asked artisans to be their children's godparents, the predominance of smiths is obvious. In some years, over the half of the godparents who can be identified<sup>37</sup> as artisans were blacksmiths, although the proportion of smiths to all artisans was only about one third. In addition, most of the smiths (66 percent) had godchildren. This reveals how status mattered since the social importance and status of smiths were notable compared with those attached to other artisanal occupations: smithery was generally recognised as the most important artisanal occupation in rural areas because of the smiths' ability to make and repair objects needed in farming and everyday life. Also the status of the godchild's family was significant, as can be seen from Table 1, which confirms that smiths were more often godparents to better-off landed

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<sup>35</sup> Overall the numbers of out-of-town godparents were yearly 0-11 in Hollola parish.

<sup>36</sup> Many artisan networks were at least socially doubly knit as both a guild (occupation) and kinship (inheritance of occupation and intermarriage) were involved. For example, Lipp mentions that this was especially true in the case of better-off artisans, citing smiths as an example. Lipp also provides sound evidence for the fact that the voting behaviour of artisans was based much more on the guild than on the family or kinship. Lipp 2005: 358-362. It was also customary, for example in the world of merchants, that godparent ties were "horizontal", i.e. between social peers. Alfani & Gourdon 2011: 9.

<sup>37</sup> They are listed as artisans or are otherwise recognizable by name. This means that the numbers here are only minimum figures because on some occasions an artisan's title is omitted or just forgotten in the records for various reasons.

peasants' children, while the occupational distribution of the families of the less esteemed tailors' and shoemakers' godchildren was far more evenly spread.

**Table 1: The family status of artisans' godchildren in Hollola, 1810–1840**

	Gentry	Landed peasants	Tenant farmers	Agrarian workers	Artisans	Illegitimate children	Unknown	total
Smiths	0	173	85	45	20	24	6	353
Tailors	2	36	37	28	9	15	2	129
Shoemakers	4	52	30	25	19	10	2	142
Specialised artisans	5	40	31	14	36	17	0	143
total	11	301	183	112	84	66	10	767

Even in the case of smiths, locality was important, although the status of both the godparents and godchildren's parents also mattered. For example, a smith called Johan Sarlund had as many as 18 godchildren, but even so they were mostly from the same large Lumiala-Viitaila twin-village locality where Sarlund lived and worked. Similar circumstances can also be found in connection with other smiths; it was quite unusual for godparents to live in a different village than their godchildren. Sometimes they may have lived in neighbouring villages, but it was rare for parish boundaries to be crossed. Another good example is the case of a smith called Anders Göös, whose only child's godparents were two pairs who were his neighbours, one a peasant together with his wife and the other a peasant and his daughter. Thus Göös established ties between his family and his everyday contacts, who were also his customers.<sup>38</sup> In this way, his work relations expanded to become part of his family's social networks. Nor did Göös choose his only daughter's godparents from persons in his own occupational group. There were no other smiths – or other artisans for that matter – in his home village, but he could have asked smiths in neighbouring villages to be witnesses on this important occasion if that had been the custom. A lack of mobility, time or spatial distance would have not posed an obstacle since the villages were situated quite close to each other and connected by roads and pathways. Obviously, it was more important to reinforce one's contacts in one's home village than to create occupational alliances with potential competitors. Likewise, the above-mentioned smith, Sarlund, had no godparent connections with other artisans, even though there were a lot of other craftsmen in his home village. In addition, all four of Göös's own godchildren were from his home village and numbered among its peasant population, which indicates the reciprocal nature of godparenting relations in the countryside in contrast to the more

<sup>38</sup> However, it must be acknowledged that Göös did not have any relatives living in the immediate vicinity. This was not exceptional, since artisans often had no close relatives living nearby because many artisans were not native-born. Otherwise, the kinship ties seem to be weak or not easily definable. There are some kinship ties in artisans' godparent relations, but they are not by any means dominant.

hierarchical aspects described in studies that have concentrated on the upper classes and their godparenting strategies.<sup>39</sup>

**Table 2: Godparents of artisan children in Hollola 1810-1840**

	Gentry	Landed peasants	Tenant farmers	Agrarian workers	Artisans	Unknown
Smiths	28	230	30	26	32	155
Tailors	19	140	7	20	11	103
Shoemakers	36	162	21	33	19	109
Specialised artisans	81	44	10	8	27	41
Total number	164	576	68	87	89	408

As seen in Table 2, smiths occasionally also asked tenant farmers to be their children's godparents but not nearly to the same extent as landed peasants, so the principle of reciprocity extended only to persons of a comparable status. When compared to Table 1, the proportional differences are considerable. One obvious reason for this was that there were not that many tenant farms in Hollola, but also the fact that the position of tenant farmers was usually considered lower has to be taken into account. As far as hired hands and other labourers are concerned, the links were similarly more biased since upward connections were favoured. However, it must be acknowledged that the second largest group consist of persons whose position is not identifiable, most of them being recorded merely as wife (*hustru*) without telling whose wife was in question. In these cases "wife" was more of social determinant comparable to occupation and it is very probable that most of these persons were of peasant rank, which emphasizes the significance of peasants as godparents of artisans' children.

The second and third largest artisanal groups in the countryside were usually tailors and shoemakers. In Hollola between 1810 and 1840, the second largest group of artisans consisted of shoemakers and the third of tailors.<sup>40</sup> Their position as godparents was not as good as that of smiths, and individually they usually had fewer godchildren, who were evenly distributed over all social classes, apart from the gentry. Among these groups, too, godparenthood was a very local phenomenon; both parties usually lived in the same village. This is very interesting as shoemakers and tailors led an itinerant way of work life, often going from one customer to another and moving around from one villager to another. Hence their work-based relationships often covered wider

<sup>39</sup> In this paper "gentry" refers to local better-off people, not to members of the nobility. Typical members of this group were clergymen, civil servants, officers, owners of manufactories, the young ladies of these families, etc, the latter being the most popular ones when choosing godparents from this group.

<sup>40</sup> The common people of the countryside could make ordinary clothes and shoes, but tailors made men's clothes and fine attire for women. Likewise shoemakers made finer shoes. The rising standard of living and expanding consumption increased the number of tailors and shoemakers. In the period of this research, especially the number of shoemakers was on the increase.

areas than those of smiths, who were tied to their forges. However, the shoemakers' and tailors' work relations did not materialize into social relationships except in their home villages, or at least they were not important enough to be manifested in the form of godparent connections.

Interestingly, among artisans the expected endogamous godparent networks within the same occupational group were not found. Only 16 per cent of artisans' children had other artisans as godparents. Moreover, these connections were not with practitioners of the same craft but rather with persons who belonged to the social class of artisans generally.<sup>41</sup> In this sense, rural artisans were not a particularly exclusive group. There were, however, a few exceptions. Especially the specialised artisans exhibited more occupational solidarity within the group, and in their case occupation had a major impact on their godparent connections. Their mutual solidarity was evident in the fact that specialised craftsmen composed the second largest group of artisan godparents, even though their total number was the lowest. The group of specialized artisans in Hollola consisted of weavers, hatters, tanners, glaziers, dyers, goldsmiths, carpenters and masons. There was usually only a handful of representatives in each group. Typically, they had trained in towns and were not locally-born. Another reason for the solidarity of this group was the fact that they were concentrated in two different areas, one around the vicarage and another which can be described as a "manufactory village". Specialist artisans tended to live in a central area because they usually served the whole parish. In Hollola, artisans living in villages near the parish church formed their own social networks, which in addition to other artisans included godparent connections with the middle class or the local gentry. It is apparent that these connections were often reciprocal, although there were some exceptions as a number of artisans were for one reason or another unable to establish themselves among their peers.

The other place in Hollola where artisans comprised their own special networks was a village called Messilä, which departed from traditional rural village in that a number of small manufactories were located in it.<sup>42</sup> However, their activities cannot be easily distinguished from traditional crafts. The village was basically concentrated around a few key artisans, namely a saddler, a weaver, two tanners and dyers, who were constantly changing. Their godparenting relations were again very local: basically the children's' godparents were either other artisans or alternatively members of the owners of the manufactories.<sup>43</sup> There was an almost total exclusion of landed peasants or tenant farmers as artisan children's godparents in Messilä. Certainly, artisans

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<sup>41</sup> This is well in line with Farr 2000: 245-247. When examining the marriage patterns of artisans, Farr found out that marriages often connected artisans of different trades rather than being a purely endogenous practice.

<sup>42</sup> This village was composed of two estate-like farms and their several tenant farms. The owners were part of the Finnish upper middle class (landed gentry). There were no traditional peasant farms in the village. Additionally the village was situated a bit apart from the other villages.

<sup>43</sup> Alfani & Gourdon 2011: 15; Alfani & Gourdon 2012: 25, 34.

were asked to be godparents to tenant farmers' children but never the other way round. The godparent relations were linked to status in the community's hierarchy, and a request to be a godparent was made to someone of the same or a higher social rank, not of a lower one. In such an environment, the occupation and the status attached to it were major factors in the formation of a network, as can be seen from the following analysis of the Strömfors Ironworks community.

## Strömfors

Strömfors Ironworks was established in 1695. Its core industries (excluding a broad range of agricultural activities) employed from ten to twenty smiths in forges and a few other tradesmen in a mill, a lumber mill and charcoal production. There were also from twenty to thirty miscellaneous unskilled labourers, most of them employed in the lumber mill. In the 1870's, the ironworks' ownership basis changed from a single paternalistic owner to a corporation, but even so the new leadership maintained the old patriarchal customs. At the turn of the century, the lumber mill became the focus of the management's attention, and at the same time the production of iron goods declined, although not linearly as both World Wars brought about an increase in demand. This also changed the social environment of the Strömfors Ironworks community considerably as the number of labourers in the sawmill increased from a few employees in the 1870's to eighty in the 1920's, thus exceeding the declining number of smiths, who had previously dominated the population of the ironworks community.<sup>44</sup>

Ironworks were traditionally stable hierarchical communities<sup>45</sup> characterized by clear occupation-based social and economic segregation, which had been long maintained by the old guild institution and patriarchal management. They were also isolated and notably different from the agrarian society surrounding them. The unique nature of the work in forges or other industrial workshops was a major life-shaping factor that strongly influenced even such institutions as households and gender roles in the ironworks. Both profession and status were usually transmitted from father to son, and occupational endogamy flourished, which together with the guild institution (abolished in the 1860s) led to the monopolization of skilled occupations by certain families.<sup>46</sup> This kind of environment together with the plethora of source material that ironworks and studies of them have produced enables us to conduct detailed research on

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<sup>44</sup> Sirén 1971.

<sup>45</sup> This article follows Vilkuña's definition, according to which the central ironworks community consisted of people who lived under the factory owner's direct authority in a village that was sited around the central production facilities. Vilkuña 1996: 9. The authorities acknowledged this arrangement, and these communities were treated as separate units in the church records although not in the census lists.

<sup>46</sup> On the occupation of smith and the household, see Rydén 1990; on gender roles Florén 1991. On Finnish ironworks, see Vilkuña 1994. On their social order and everyday life, see Haggrén 2001; Vilkuña 1996. See also Sundin 1989: 273.

godparenting connections and their nature and yields results that supplement the information obtained from Hollola.

In researching godparent connections in Strömfors, the first thing to note is how great a role was played by the location or, more precisely, by belonging to the same community. Of the 797 connections examined in Strömfors in the period 1880–1914, only 6.4 % involved members of both the ironworks and the surrounding rural communities, although the spatial distance between them was by no means insuperable. It is noteworthy that the figure remained the same throughout the period examined here even though people’s mobility increased. Ironworks in general were rather shut off from the countryside, and what migration there was often took place mutually between different ironworks. This is also visible in godparent connections and serves well to remind us how these connections reflect the prevailing social structures. It also enables us to compare godparent connections with the population figures of the ironworks and thus to calculate the expected distribution of godparents among different groups if they were chosen randomly without the influence of factors like kinship, friendship or work relationships.

As occupation and work were crucial factors in the social order of ironworks communities, we decided to use a similar approach to the categorization of the population to that used by Ericsson to examine the role that occupation – and the social status attached to it – played in godparent relations. Godparent connections between occupational groups are presented in Table 3 and Table 4.

**Table 3: Godparent connections between occupational groups 1880–1914**

	Super iors	Smiths	Unskilled labourers	Misc. craftsmen	Misc. workers	Persons involved in agriculture	Unknown	Total
Superiors	50	31	36	8	9	8	12	154
Smiths	31	98	78	31	12	5	15	270
Unskilled labourers	36	78	228	35	37	29	52	495
Misc. tradesmen	8	31	35	6	2	3	4	89
Misc. Workers	9	12	37	2	3	6	3	72

Note: The figures give the total number of godparent connections between the cross-referenced groups and include both a person from group A being a godparent of a child of parents in group B and vice-versa.

**Table 4: Baptismal data for occupational groups 1880–1914**

	Superiors	Smiths	Unskilled labourers	Misc. craftsmen	Misc. workers
Number of children	45	77	232	26	12
Average number of godparents	2.47	2.23	1.83	2.12	1.92

The classification by occupation also revealed distinctive godparent patterns that clearly confirm the fact that occupation mattered in the formation of local networks. Firstly, the number of godparents varied clearly according to occupation and seems to have been linked to status in the community's hierarchy. The situation becomes even clearer when baptisms in which the number of godparents differed considerably from the group average are analyzed more closely. For example, among the superiors, a foreman called Matti Mattson, who had risen to his position from being a common labourer, had his four children baptized with only one godparent couple present on each occasion; in this he may have been maintaining the traditions of his lower background. Of the three other superiors whose children had only one godparent, all were from the lower end of the group. The case of unskilled labourers is more complicated as there are many more of them. However, even among them a considerable number of baptisms with three or more godparents are linked to persons who were descended from persons in higher occupational categories or were otherwise exceptional individuals<sup>47</sup>. This is consistent with data available about Helsinki and Pori, for example, which indicate that the higher the parent's status the more and higher ranking godparents their children had.<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, and in contradistinction to the other categories, the "superiors" group was geographically a fairly open network. A large number of their connections involved outsiders who came from the higher circles of Finnish and Swedish society generally, many of them living at a considerable distance from Strömfors. This fits with the origins of the group, as no education was available in Strömfors, and thus clerks and managers were seldom locals but had moved there from elsewhere. This can be seen as a way of maintaining their old contacts and possibly gaining new ones as well as of enhancing their social status; this is very much in line with previous studies that have emphasized the strategy approach and is also in line with our findings concerning Hollola.<sup>49</sup>

Locally, there was also a clear tendency to choose godparents from the same occupational group (Table 3). This was especially true in the higher tiers of the hierarchy, notably among the superiors

<sup>47</sup> That is, individuals who succeeded in creating connections with higher ranking groups.

<sup>48</sup> See e.g. Laine 2010.

<sup>49</sup> See also Fagerlund 2002: 32; Lempiäinen 1965: 71, 188, 190.



and the smiths, and it is striking in view of their proportion of the population. As many as 32.5% of the superiors' connections were between two members of their own group, although this group accounted for only about 10% of the total population. Among the smiths, who comprised well under than 20% of the population, the connections within their occupational group amounted to 35.3%. Connections between smiths and miscellaneous craftsmen are also overrepresented as they clearly shared some common occupational identity. On the other hand, people belonging to lower-status occupational categories were generally clearly underrepresented in the connections of these groups. As the number of unskilled labourers in Strömfors increased from the 1890s on, their own networks became more visible and "self-sustaining", and the proportion of godparent connections with people of different occupational backgrounds diminished sharply. Of their connections (excluding godparents with unknown occupations), only 26.5 % were with other labourers in the period 1880-1889, but in the years 1910-1914 the figure rose to 58.5%. One striking feature of their network was the low number of godparents, which may indicate a general lack of internal cohesion, more limited and weaker networks or a very different approach to the institution of godparenthood than was the case with other local networks. Labourers also seem to have actively sought godparents from higher groups in the community, and this aspiration to social ascent might explain the fact that many of the connections extended outside their own group.<sup>50</sup> Occupation was thus definitely a significant factor here, whether because of some conscious strategy or as a manifestation of everyday social relations.

**Table 5: Percentage distribution of godparent connections of smiths and their family members in Strömfors<sup>51</sup>**

Years	Connections with smiths	Connections with labourers	Connections with superiors	Connections with misc. craftsmen	Total number of connections
1880-1884	53.4	22.4	5.2	19.0	58
1885-1889	42.9	28.6	10.7	17.9	28
1890-1894	34.8	34.8	4.3	26.1	23
1895-1899	39.2	30.2	18.6	11.6	43
1900-1904	39.1	41.3	15.2	4.3	46
1905-1909	31.4	45.7	17.1	5.7	35
In average	39.2	36.0	12.4	12.4	

<sup>50</sup> Lempiäinen 1965: 71, 188, 190.

<sup>51</sup> The period from 1910 to 1914 is excluded as an extreme exception that can mostly be explained by its having the lowest number of smiths' children (7) in the period covered by this study. Of these, three were children of a new smith with an exceptional background: he did not have smith ancestors but was from a family of charcoal burners, a group that had traditionally had a large number of connections with labourers. These contacts were maintained even after he became a smith.

**Table 6: Percentage distribution of the population by occupation**

Years	Smiths	Labourers	Superiors	Misc. workers	n
1880	39.1	45.7	8.7	6.5	46
1885	19.7	47.0	19.7	13.6	66
1890	18.1	53.0	19.3	9.6	83
1895	21.0	56.8	11.1	11.1	81
1900	17.6	56.5	17.6	8.2	85
1905	18.6	58.5	13.6	9.3	118
1910	13.6	66.7	10.9	8.8	147
Average	19.2	57.0	14.2	9.6	

Smiths, whose godparent connections can be seen in table 5, represented a considerable proportion of the population (Table 6) and had a clearly separate identity from rest of the community, which was also manifested in endogenous marriage and godparent networks. During the period of this research, which saw intense demographical change in the Strömfors ironworks community, the smiths were clearly over-represented as godparents. Thus their connections with groups other than smiths offer an excellent opportunity to study more closely other factors that affected the selection of godparents and the reciprocity of godparent connectionc.

Here, a notable fact is the number of connections among the upper strata of the ironworks society. Although the superiors are underrepresented in their contacts with the smiths in proportion to their numbers in society, the figure for them was still nearly double that of the labourers.<sup>52</sup> More importantly, the smiths' contacts with superiors were also considerably more reciprocal in nature. Smiths appear as godparents to children of superiors in 17 of the 31 connections. This shows that smiths still held a relatively high position in the hierarchy of the ironworks community and how a craft or profession and social status could be deeply intertwined. On the other hand, as none of the smiths seem to have achieved a higher position in the ironworks community, this also serves as a good reminder of the strongly conservative aspect of local connections (both marital and godparenting), which runs contrary to the general claim that they were motivated by attempts to seek social advancement.

With regard to other connections outside the smiths' network, there were also a large number of connections with labourers, and these increased with each passing year. It must be borne in mind that it was the general custom to ask people from one's own social class or a higher one to act as (status) godparents. Thus connections in which a smith was asked to be a godparent to a labourer's child cannot be regarded as definite signs of real, everyday social networks, at least when no

<sup>52</sup> In the period 1880–1914, 11.5 % of all connections of smiths involved superiors while superiors were involved in only 7.3 % of all the connections of labourers.

preceding relationship can be found in the church registers. Here it is necessary to examine the reciprocity of godparent relations between the two groups more closely, as is done in Table 7.

**Table 7: Smith-labourer godparent connections 1880-1914**

Years	A	B	C	D	Total
1880-1884	0	0	5	4	9
1885-1889	1	1	0	4	6
1890-1894	0	1	2	4	7
1895-1899	4	3	1	4	12
1900-1904	2	3	3	7	15
1905-1909	5	0	7	4	16
1910-1914	4	5	1	3	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>78</b>

A = Labourers who were godparents of smiths' children (previous relationship)

B = Labourers who were godparents of smiths' children (no previous relationship)

C = Smiths who were godparents of labourers' children (previous relationship)

D = Smiths who were godparents of labourers' children (no previous relationship)

Only 37% of all godparent connections between smiths and labourers involved a smith asking a workman to act as a godparent. Also in a clear minority were contacts in which a smith invited a labourer to act as a godparent when the latter had no previous contact with the smiths' network. It is also interesting to note that in the period 1905–1914 there was a steep rise in godparent connections between smiths and labourers in which there existed a previous blood or marital relationship between the families involved. Even here, a considerable part of this rise can be put down to a single instance of a new smith with an unusual (non-smith) background who maintained his previous numerous connections with labourers. Here it can clearly be seen that smiths did not often ask people from the lower strata of society to be godparents. To some extent godparenthood was vertical one-way traffic.

Even so, the number of connections between labourers and smiths is considerable. In fact, though, in at least 25 of these contacts, only three labourers were involved. These three were admitted for reasons unknown to a higher local social network that consisted mostly of smiths and overseers. The ties between smiths and these three exceptional labourers were strengthened with numerous bilateral godparent connections and marital links. This small group could be described as consisting of “able individuals” who, despite their low occupational position, managed to create and maintain numerous bilateral contacts with locals of a higher social position. This, together with nearly equal figures for contacts in situations where a previously existing relationship between networks was involved, suggests that the importance of a craft or profession in the choice

of godparent was considerably lower after a first contact was created. In many cases, the first contact was the establishment of a kinship link between families by marriage. Interestingly, the wives in these marriages seem to explain a clear majority of the godparent connections that involved the crossing of social boundaries as they appear to have regularly brought the new in-laws into the circle of potential godparents. Even if status and prosperity were determined by the occupation of the head of the family, this kind of kinship across occupational boundaries was significant and can be clearly seen in the data. Labourers' wives who came from smith families did not lose their previous contacts with their close kin or even with other members of the smiths' network. As Table 7 suggests, it seems these links gained in significance at the turn of the century and the dominating role occupation had played gradually diminished.

## Conclusions

The two case studies presented here show that Finnish godparenting structures have to be examined in detail and taken as a multifaceted phenomenon. We do not wish to deny that certain groups, especially those involved in complex economic activities, used godparent connections in a very strategic manner. However, this paper offers a sound reminder that especially in the lower echelons of society strategic considerations did not play such a decisive part.

One of most striking features found was the importance that locality and localness played throughout the nineteenth the whole nineteenth century in both areas. Especially in Hollola, it was such a strong factor that it overrode the occupational element, which one might have expected to be decisive in the case of artisans. This may open interesting insights on the identity of these as members of the local community people as opposed to their identity as artisans. This factor also played a part in Strömfors, where connections outside the ironworks community were rare. However, there people identified themselves as ironworkers, not with the surrounding countryside, as was the case in Hollola. Again, locality mattered, but in a slightly different way.

Also socio-economic status – these were inseparably entwined in the society of estates of the nineteenth century – played big part. This was especially visible in the case of smiths, the most affluent local artisans in both localities. Downward connections were avoided, although invitations to act as godparent to children of lower status were still accepted. Here people lived according to the expectations of the society of estates, by socializing with their peers. Exceptions to this trend also revealed other influential mechanisms, most importantly kinship, that played an important role in Strömfors, a role that even grew role at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Despite striking similarities in both areas, there were also some considerable differences that

corroborate our view that the Finnish godparenting system was not monolithic. In Hollola there were no observable differences between the categories in the number of godparents, whereas in Strömfors the difference correlated strongly with social position, as is also indicated in some studies of godparent connections among the Finnish elite. In Hollola, the lack of observed differences is partly due to local customs and the practices of the recording priests affected this.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, the local social environment affected the relative importance of different factors. In the traditionally hierarchical ironworks community, identity as craftsman and the status guaranteed by the occupation was much stronger and resulted in godparent networks of a different kind than in Hollola, where membership of the village community was the crucial determinant.

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<sup>53</sup> Laakso 1974: 140–150; Lempiäinen 1965: 179–185.

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