

Immigrant organisations in Nordic countries with special focus on Finland

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by

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## Introduction

The purpose with this presentation is to focus on immigrant organisations in the Nordic countries. I will give a special attention to immigrant women's organisations, which is also the issue of my PhD study.

Immigrant women should be seen as a valuable resource for the Finnish society. So far there have only been few studies made about the integration of immigrants – especially of immigrant women's integration into the civil society and political life in Finland. This is an important aspect to take into consideration when discussing an effective integration of immigrants. Building a new home, a place to stay requires not only knowledge of the Finnish language and a stable working place but also of an opportunity to find a place in the society consisting of contacts with both the host society and the person's own ethnic group. No matter how important labour power immigrants might be, it is wrong expect them to stay in a country if it does no offer any feeling of belongingness.

Immigrant women's participation in activities organised by their own ethnic group or a multicultural organisation may be one way to enforce immigrant women's inclusion and to help them to get heard. Furthermore these organisations may have a mobilizing effect by stimulating the immigrant women to participate in activities, which strengthen their ethnic identity. In this study the object is to explore the participative possibilities and means of expression among immigrant women's organisations in Finland and if this will lead to a possible ethnic mobilization. Therefore both the structure of these organisations and forms of participation will be studied.

To find an answer for what the existing 'means of incorporation and mobilisation' of immigrant women's organisations<sup>2</sup> in the Finnish society are the attention will be on three kinds of questions. Firstly, the focus is on the structure of the immigrant women's organisations. Here the intention is to find an answer to the ideological purpose, as well as aims and goals of the organisations. Secondly, the aim is to explore the resources of the organisations. In other words, to explore questions regarding the existing forms of activities and their development and allocation of members, financial means etc. Thirdly, to look at what kind of cooperation forms there exist between these organisations and authorities, other (immigrant) organisations and NGOs at local and national level. Also the possible transnational contacts will be taken into account.

## Conceptual tools of the study

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<sup>2</sup> Information gathered so far has proven that only some of the immigrant women's organisations are registered. That's why it is of significance to take into account also the informal ones.

The concept integration is perhaps the one, which is most frequently used in the Finnish immigration policy and research although it has various interpretations. According to the Finnish integration law from 1999 (Act 493/1999) integration underlines the importance of an integration-program for refugees and immigrants for three years, who do not have a working place with the aim of 'personal development of immigrants, aimed at participation in work life and the functioning of society while preserving their language and culture'. Social scientist prefer to talk about integration as a 'process', without a permanent position (Forsander 2001:39 see also Valtonen 1997, Wahlbeck 1999, Lepola 2000, Helne 2002). The integration process is more a progressive course of action where the immigrants get adapted to the host society. This process should be seen as a dual act between the immigrants and the members of the host society. In this study the dual act will take place between the institutional and organisational levels, in other words between the authorities and the immigrant women's organisations.

Because of the broad meaning and various interpretation of the integration concept more attention will be paid on the participation and interaction. To aloud a two dimensional perspective of the integration process the forms of participation and interaction will be explored not only from the view of the immigrant women's organisation (bottom-up view), but also from the perspective of the authorities (top-down view). These two dimensions will work as a frame in the analysis of the immigrant women's participatory activities with their contact partners, as well as assist in the exploration of possible ethnic mobilization.

To give you a more profound picture of the importance of organisational activities in the integration of immigrants I will highlight some of the main results of a joint project of immigrant organisations in Nordic countries and point out some of the characteristics of immigrant organisations in Finland. These features are important in order to understand the current situation of immigrant women's position in the Finnish society.

## Immigrant organisations in the Nordic countries

Nordic welfare states are not only known for their social system but also for their civil societies, which encourages collective forms of action and organisation. Also, in the integration of immigrants the welfare societies try to develop multicultural contacts both in the labour market and the civil society. Here immigrant and other multicultural organisations can play an important role. So far only few studies have been conducted of immigrant organisations in the Nordic countries.

During the last years, social scientists have become interested of ethnic associations and immigrant organisations. Social and political scientists are focusing on of the role of these organisations in the integrations process and their influence on the ethnic mobilization. There are several studies made of voluntary associations in Finland (see e.g. Siisiäinen 1991 Stenius 1987) still there are no previous studies done in the area of immigrant organisations, although there are some on the way.

I conducted a mapping of immigrant organisations in Finland in 2002. This was part of a joint Nordic project of immigrant organisations and was partly financed by the Nordic Council of Ministries. The study proved that immigrants' organisational participation can strengthen the belongingness of the immigrants to the civil and political sphere of the Nordic societies (Mikkelsen, 2003).

Tabel 1 Amount of persons with birthplace abroad and with foreign citizenship

Country	Year of registration of information	Citezens in millions	Abroad born per thousand	Abroad born %	Foreign citizenship per thousand	Foreign citizenship %
Belgium	1996	10,6	...	...	911,9	9,0
France	1990	56,6	...	...	3596,9	6,4
The Neatherlands	1995	15,4	1407,1	9,1	757,1	4,9
Great Brittain	1991	54,9	3746,1	6,8	1791,0	3,3
Germany	1996	81,7	...	...	7314,0	9,0
Sweden	1996	8,8	943,8	10,7	526,6	6,0
Denmark	1996	5,2	259,2	5,0	237,7	4,5
Norway	1996	4,4	246,9	5,6	157,5	3,6
Finland	1996	5,1	103,3	2,0	68,6	1,3

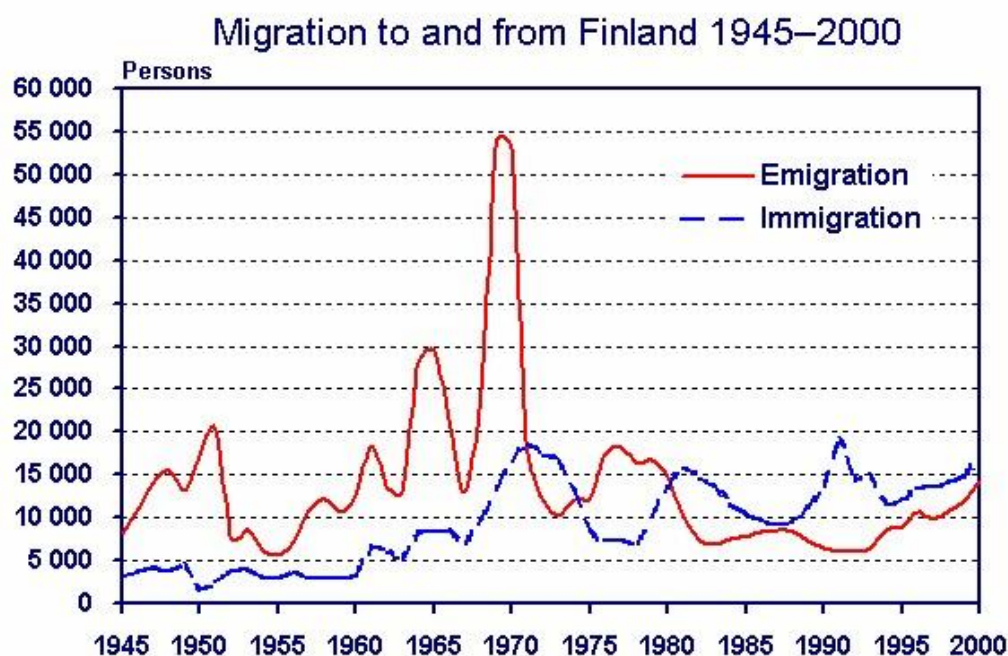
Kilder: Coleman (1999) tabel 2.2: Jouni Korkiasaari (Väestörakennetilastot/Statistikcentralen)  
Source: Mikkelsen in Invandreorganisationer i Norden 2003:12.

The number of immigrant organisations in most of the Nordic countries is still quite small. Reasons to this has to do with that the number of labour migrants have been smaller in Nordic countries then in other Western European countries although the number of foreigners has steadily grown up in all Nordic countries since the 1970's (see table 1). This has also to do with the growing number of refugees.

In comparison to other Nordic countries Finland has fairly recent turned from emigration to immigration country. This took place in the end of 1980's (see Graf 1). Many Finns, who had emigrated to Sweden in the 1970's due to economic recession returned back in the mid of 1980's. Another significant wave of return immigrants are the Ingrians from the former Soviet Union in the beginning of 1990's.

Due to the strict immigration policy in Finland, has the granting of work and residence permits been very limited. Therefore the number of social-economic immigrants and refugees has been very low. Finnish immigration history is not marked by labour immigrants, but mostly by return migration and refugees. The number of refugees has been very small in Finland. The first real refugee group came in the 1970s from Chile and a bigger one later on from Vietnam. Today the most significant refugee group is the Somalis, who number about 5000, including those with Finnish citizenship. A third reason for immigration to Finland has been marriages between foreigners and Finns.

Graf 1 Migration to and from Finland 1945-2000



Source: Statistics Finland; Figure: Jouni Korkiasaari, Institute of Migration 2001

This explains also partly why there are still quite few immigrant organisations. Today there are 563 registered multicultural and immigrant organisations of which the majority are in the capital area (see Table 2). The number is still relative high when we take into consideration that most of these organisations are established in the mid of 1990's or later. Immigrant organisations can be seen as a new type of organisations in Finland.

Table 2. Immigrant and multicultural organisations in the 14 biggest cities in Finland

Ethnic organisations	H	B	Jo	Jy	Ko	Ku	L	Tre	O	V	Lap	T	Totally
Albanian	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	7
Other African	8	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	10
Roma	7	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	2	11
Iranian/Iraqi	4	-	-	2	-	1	-	3	-	-	-	2	12
Asiatic	6	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	3	-	-	3	14
Latin American*	17	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	18
Kurdish	13	-	-	3	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	3	21
Russian	8	1	2	-	2	2	2	2	2	-	1	6	28
Islamic/ Arabic.*	12	-	1	1	-	1	2	3	3	1	1	4	29
Somali	34	-	-	-	1	-	-	2	-	1	-	2	40
Ingrian/ Baltic.	13	2	1	1	2	1	2	6	1	-	3	8	40
<i>Totally</i>	<i>127</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>230</i>
Multicultural	13	1	-	4	-	-	3	11	-	1	-	6	39
Friendship assoc.	66	2	2		-	2	1	6	2	1	1	5	88
Solidarity	18	-	-	5	2	1	7	11	1	-	5	13	63
Other	46	4	4	10	1	5	8	20	11	5	3	35	152
<i>Totally</i>	<i>143</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>342</i>
<b>Totally</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>563</b>

Abbreviations:

H	Capital area: Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa	Tre	Tampere
P	Pori	O	Oulu
Jo	Joensuu	V	Vaasa
Jy	Jyväskylä	Lap	Lappeenranta
Ko	Kotka	T	Turku
Ku	Kuopio		
L	Lahti		

Source: Saksela 2003:252

It makes sense to talk both of multicultural and immigrant organisations because their activities for immigrants are more than often organised by those ones consisting of several ethnic groups with diverse forms of cultural activities. We have also to remember that the number organisations is only tentative since there are several which are not registered and others, which exist but do not currently have any kind of active form of organisation.

## The importance of immigrant organisations

The results of the mapping of immigrant organisations in the Nordic countries, as well as previous studies proved that immigrant organisations can be an important resource in the integration process. Immigrant organisations can influence on the members social and political participation (e.g. demonstrations) in the society by building contact networks with their voluntary organisations and with the municipalities.

Participation can also strengthen the members' ethnic identity. The immigrants can exchange and receive information of their cultures by participating in immigrant organisation activities. These activities give often a possibility for the immigrants to speak their mother tongue.

There is also a risk for a negative form of ethnic organisation. In some countries host states play an important role in the division of financial support but also in the control of organisational activities. For example many immigrant organisations will get subsidies for integrative activities like language education, consultancy and other collective activities, which will support the interest of the corporative states like Sweden and the Neatherlands (Layton-Henri 1990:105, see also van Heelsum 1999 and Winborg 1999). The dependence of the subsidies received from institutional level can direct the organisation of activities among the immigrants (Soysal1994:86, Irland 1994:8-11).

In Finland many of the subsidies of the immigrant organisations are bound to the financial support mainly from state level, like the Ministry of Education<sup>3</sup>. At the same time Finland highlights the role of the municipalities in the integration of immigrants. Based on integration act of 1999 (Act 493/1999) a more effective cooperation between authorities and immigrant organisations is to be expected, but so far the power in the integration process has been overwhelmingly on subsidies from the state, which influence the work of each municipality. Therefore it is interesting to study how much and in what way the state and communal

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<sup>3</sup> Another important donator is the Finnish Raha-automaatti yhdistys - RAY, (Finland's Slot Machine Association).

institutions influence the activities arranged by immigrant women's organisations. Still it is good to remember that especially, immigrants own social networks and contacts partners play often a significant role.

To gain a more complete picture of how immigrant women's organisations work it is important to focus on the forms of action in their organisations. Especially political one can give a rise to ethnic mobilization, which is often explored in collective, ethnic organisations (see e.g. Allardt 1979, Barany 1998). These can be of multicultural nature, like immigrant women's organisations with members from different ethnic groups or they can represent only one ethnic group. The political activity is about creation of "*collective memory*" and construction of "*new citizenship*" (*'nouvelle citoyenneté*) (Soysal 1994:106). For that reason it is crucial to study the role the members' knowledge based on experiences of gender and ethnicity and their use of their collective resources. These can consist of social, cultural and political activities, which should be seen as the key to the participation in the civil society and political system of the host society. In this study the object is to analyse the ethnic mobilisation by exploring the participation of the members in the organisational activities as well as to study the allocation of collective resources (see also Barany 1998:310).

The analysis if transnational contacts<sup>4</sup> can give additionally importance for this study. The immigrant women's organisations can create transnational contacts between the organizations from the members' home countries. Another likely way is the immigrant women's organisations' function as facilitator of information and contacts to municipalities in Finland. For example there are some organisations, which have worked as bridge builders between local educational institutions from Estonia and Russia and the Ministry of Education. Here the role of the organisation is more to act as a facilitator between the two institutions. The number of organisation's transnational contacts might be very few, but their importance can be very dominating to the ideological aims of the organisations.

My assumption is that these theoretical models can give an outline of how the organisations' structure looks like. Furthermore, they may explain the role of the social, ethnic and psychological phenomena, which take place in the integration process, as well as help to explain how the participation in political life takes place. It will also be interesting to see if and why some of these theoretical approaches will be more fruitful than other ones. Additionally, to see if there are new theoretical approaches that grows out of the results of the empirical research.

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<sup>4</sup> These are reciprocal, enduring contacts created and maintained by the members of immigrant organisations together with members of organisations or other institutions from their home countries for exchange of material, as well as non-material means. Members of the organisations or transmigrants are the ones who produce forms of transnationalism (economic, political and socio-cultural) (see also Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999, Basch, Glick Schiller, Szanton 1995).



## Immigrant women heading toward collective form of organisation

Both previous studies and experiences from organisational activities have proven that immigrant (women's) organisations have an important place in many immigrant women's lives (Sudbury 2001, **Korteweg and Ray 1999**, Jaakkola 1987). Immigrant women can construct a more realistic image of them and of their ethnicity and gender by participating in activities and events organised by these organisations. Women are often the prime mover in the families by taking care of family members well being.

So far I have participated in seminars and workshops organised for immigrant women and NGOs. I have also conducted some interviews with members of immigrant women's organisations and with persons who are working with immigrant women. I prefer to talk in more general terms of the needs and goals that have received attention in the interviews and seminars because I am still collecting material both from immigrant women's organisations and authorities.

Many of the immigrant women have come to Finland through marriage or have a Finnish background. Labour migration among women can be seen as a secondary reason. Therefore there are many immigrant women who lack knowledge of the Finnish society and language. If they lack the tools to participate in the society the risk is of depression and becoming marginalized is high, (which in it turn may have a negative effect on their family members). This is especially alarming in cases where a woman must obey her husband and lacks knowledge of the society, as well as of the language. In these kinds of cases ethnic organisations consisting only of women can offer a place where immigrant women can talk about their problems, change ideas and get information both of the host society as well as of their own ethnic culture.

At the moment communities and Ministry of Labour are both mapping out best practices for a better integration of immigrants as well as building contact networks, between consulting bodies working with immigrants, including immigrant organisations. I am also participating in a study coordinated by the cities of Espoo, Vantaa and Helsinki. The purpose with the study is to explore the welfare of immigrants in various sectors of the society like demography, housing, internal migration and participation in the civil society. My purpose is to study to examine the cooperation forms between local authorities and immigrant organisations, as well as what these three communities mean by their integrative aims. The outcome of this study will later on also be valuable for my PhD study.

The new action plan for integration emphasises the need of programs which are organised in the immigrant women's neighbourhood. In this way, women who have difficulties to leave because of their family could more easily participate in activities like computer and Finnish language courses or events of their own, as well as the Finnish society and culture. A possible outcome of cooperation between immigrant organisations and municipalities can be the immigrant organisations' role as doorkeepers into the society for immigrant women who lack of a supportive social network.

Still these kind of integrative aims do also need initiative from the immigrants themselves. For example an Ingrian organisation in which the majority are women organise also educational courses, but give both consultancy related to social and mental problems. According to the president of the organisation the demand for psychological consultancy is growing. The psychological and social well being was highlighted by both social-workers, members from immigrant women's organisations and by other NGO members. If a person's social background and mental health is not in order then her motivation to work is neither the best.

Therefore it is important to remember that every immigrant women's current position is based on individual life experiences both from her ethnic culture and the Finnish one. The possibility to get social support contacts, as well as to participate in cultural and social activities can be a motivating step toward the Finnish culture without forgetting the person's own cultural background.

## Concluding remarks

The interest of activities depends partly on the ideological goals of the immigrant women's organisations, but possibly also on the influence of the state. As I mentioned earlier state level is one of the major institutions giving subsidies to projects. So far it is too early to draw any conclusions based on reasons for interest and choice of certain kinds of activities because I have not yet made any profound studies of the immigrant women's organisations. The purpose with the figure beneath is to give an idea of possible activity forms in the immigrant women's organisations.

Figure 1. Possible fields of activities

<p>SOCIAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>à Civil and occupational participation in the state and community activities</li> </ul>	<p>POLITICAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>à Inclusion of the gender perspective in the integration program, (gender differences)</li> </ul>	<p>EDUCATIVE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>à Offering seminars and courses (language and computer courses etc.)</li> <li>à Information sharing</li> </ul>
<p>LEGAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>à Maintenance of own culture and traditions</li> <li>à Deconstruction of harmful customs</li> </ul>	<p>OCCUPATIONAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>à Bridge builders</li> <li>à Focus on "gendered migration &amp; outcomes" (skills and needs)</li> </ul>	<p>CULTURAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>à Organising events of significance for immigrants women's culture, ethnicity and religion</li> </ul>
<p>MENTAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>à Information and or consultancy of rehabilitation and therapy programs for victims of violence.</li> </ul>		

My assumption is that a better contact network between immigrant women's organisations and their contact partners at local, national and international level is required to obtain a more fluent development of a multicultural society. Currently there are at formal level several networks between municipalities working with integrative aims. At the same time informal contact networks consisting of immigrant women and their organisations are taking place. Unfortunately the cooperation between these two levels has been so far very weak.

One reason for the weak contacts between municipalities and immigrant women's organisations may be the lack of information. Both municipalities as well as immigrant women are short of information of each others interest and knowledge. To facilitate the cooperation between the informal and formal levels a more effective sharing of information is needed.

Furthermore immigrant organisations could work as a useful asset in the recruitment process. In countries with a more corporatist system, like Sweden and Holland it is quite common to recruit immigrants from their ethnic organisations as advisors or interpreters to enterprises.

It is not alone forms of activities and ideological interest, which are important in the analysis of the role of immigrant women's organisations in the integration process. Other mobilizing resources can also have an influence, for example the members' attribution of collective ethnic identity, available subsidies and a possibility to permanent settings. Additional features of importance in the analysis of the immigrant women's organisations are the members' educational and occupational status as well as their possible involvement in other organisational activities and politics.

In future it will be interesting to see if the Finnish integration system is going more to the corporatist direction as in Sweden or if there are other dominating forms rising. Although immigrant women's organisations can serve as bridge builders between the immigrant women and the Finnish society it is also possible that their form of organisation will lead to segregation from the society. This depends much of the interest and goals of the organisations as well as of the integrative opportunities offered by the host society. A question which remains to be unanswered is "what kind of welfare state do Finland want to present for their new citizens?"

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