

Action for Inclusion in Europe City Working Groups

Cohesion and Belonging

Inclusion as a Tool for Deeper
Integration – How to Prepare
Migrant Communities for Civic
Participation and Local Elections

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The Migrant Council of the city of Tampere, February 2016. Photo: Sirpa Koivu

City Background

Tampere, Finland, is the largest inland city in the Nordic countries and a traditional centre of Finnish industry. Currently there are 225433 (31.12.2015) inhabitants in the city, and close to half a million inhabitants in Tampere Region, which is comprised of Tampere and its neighbouring municipalities.

Out of the inhabitants of Tampere (225,433), 15,266 speak a language other than Finnish or Swedish as their mother tongue (6,8 % of the total population). The number is increasing (in 2014 by 627). Most common of the foreign languages are Russian, Arabic, Persian, Estonian and English. The largest groups of these are in Hervanta, Kaukajärvi and Härmälä areas. There are no extreme concentrations of migrant population; the most dense migrant population is in Hervanta (19,1%, 4737 persons in total).

According to the Integration Act (2010), all municipalities are obliged to draw up an integration plan every four years. The plan has to be linked to the city budget and be

accepted in the City Council. Tampere accepted its Integration Plan in November 2014.¹

Tampere City has also signed the Eurocities Charter on Integrating Cities in 2010. In accordance with it, Tampere is committed to the following principles in its integration programme:

- **As policy-makers we will** actively communicate our commitment to equal opportunities for everyone living in the city and ensure equal access and non-discrimination across all our policies. And also facilitate engagement from immigrant communities in our policy-making processes and remove barriers to participation.
- **As service providers we will** support equal access for immigrants to services to which they are entitled, particularly access to language learning, housing, employment, health, social care and education and ensure that immigrants' needs are understood and met by service providers.
- **As employers we will** take steps where required to reflect our city's diversity in the composition of our workforce across all staffing levels. We will ensure that all staff, including staff with an immigrant background, experience fair and equal treatment by their managers and colleagues. Help staff members understand and respect diversity and equality issues in the work place.
- **As buyers of goods and services we will** apply principles of equality and diversity in procurement and tendering. We will promote principles of equality and diversity amongst our contractors and as well we will promote principles of equality and diversity amongst our suppliers.

The Project

Our main interest was to find means and new inclusive methods how to involve our migrant population into the mainstream community participation mechanisms.

So far the Migrant Council of Tampere (elected biannually) had only dealt with issues directly concerning the migrant population. We wanted to have migrants attending in all the inclusive participation possibilities that there are (f. ex commenting on the city budget planning and its process).

Tampere also has other target group councils in addition to the Migrant Council, namely an elderly council, a council of the handicapped, a youth council and a children's parliament.

Improving the participation of residents with a migrant background is closely linked to the other development processes of the City of Tampere. In the name of our strategy, 'working

¹ The Plan can be found from the link
<http://www.tampere.fi/liitteet/i/64s38oj80/integrationprogramme.pdf>

together' emphasises the role of each person; this is our city and we are all building it together.

In Finland, elections are proportional. This system ensures opportunities for success also for small parties or groups. In proportional elections each party or other group gains seats in relation to the votes cast for it compared with the votes cast for other groups

The Development of Participation

The City of Tampere has been a forerunner in developing municipal operational models in Finland. Through renewal in the early 2000s, Tampere was better able to meet the increasing challenges in the operating environment, such as changes in service needs and the tightening financial situation.

The operational model of the City of Tampere then had three main pillars:

1. development of public participation,
2. multiple-provider model of governance and
3. the model of mayors.

Public participation was thus highly prioritised in the city. Development of public participation was the responsibility of the city council, the mayors, and, therefore, the whole organisation. At the core of public participation in Tampere is the possibility for residents to take part in the decision-making process. The residents are seen as important co-operation partners in service planning. Customer feedback is systematically collected and new means for participation and influencing are actively developed.

Participation of migrants is also mentioned in the Integration Plan (2014) as one of the commitments: Facilitate engagement from immigrant communities in our policy-making processes and remove barriers to participation.

Three different channels for participation were developed.

a) Regional participation

A method of regional participation developed: *ALVARI*. This is a two way channel between local authorities and residents. The City of Tampere has four area *ALVARI* working groups, which normally meet face-to-face. A basic idea is to make it easier for residents to get information concerning their neighborhood and to influence the planning processes of their own environment and services. Many of the issues under discussion are similar in every group. Some local area issues are only discussed and commented on in the particular area. Group members can be residents or spokespersons of local organisations. These groups are also elected biannually by the City Board.

b) e-participation

A method for eParticipation, was also developed, a system called *Valma*, which functions as a digital forum enabling citizens to participate in the city council decision-making process. Via *Valma* it was possible to put items online for residents' comments, publish

the opinions, show all related document and outline procedure, send opinions to officials, planners and politicians. Later, it was possible to introduce also advanced partially free downloadable software,

c) cooperation between representative and direct democracy

Every year in every city area there are Mayors/citizen evenings looking into current issues and plans. In addition to the Mayor, residents are able also to meet council members.

New participation agenda

Our city organization is again renewing, and as a part of this renewal we are creating a new participation agenda. The agenda's main principle is strengthening and widening possibilities for participation and co-creation for citizens – in decision-making but especially in service development. This includes for example using customer panels, enhancing the use of customer feedback and enabling co-production via volunteer work as an enhancement to the city's services. The agenda also puts a focus on new forms of co-operation and co-creation with local NGOs and companies. The agenda assumes finding the right tools for participation for different services, customer segments and situations by experimentations and openly communicating the possibilities to participate.

Elections

Electoral Participation

Immigrants' voter turnout in the local election 2012 in Finland has been researched. The research was funded by the Ministry of Justice, and was based on the electronic voting register, which also is maintained by The Ministry of Justice. It found that electoral participation of immigrants is lower than for native born citizens. The voting enthusiasm of ethnic backgrounded persons is explained partly by the same factors as other Finns. However, they also have some unique characteristics. For instance, previous experience of elections and the degree of democratization of the sending country raises migrants' voting activity; those who are from democratic countries participate in the elections more actively than those who are from non-democratic countries. Also having a Finnish spouse or having many children increases the odds of voting.

The research emphasized on the one hand the importance of structural and social integration and also the importance of supporting measures. Therefore, different kinds of activities related to education can have an important influence on participation. Consequently, this is what we try to do in our project.

The right to vote

Normally, all Finnish citizens 18 years of age have the right to vote. In municipal elections and European Parliament elections citizens of other countries who are resident in Finland

also have the right to vote. Since 1976 nationals from Nordic countries and since 1995 all nationals of European Union countries, Norway or Iceland have had the right to vote in municipal elections by the same criteria as the Finns themselves.

Thus, those entitled to vote in municipal elections in Finland are:

1. Citizens of Finland or another Member State of the European Union as well as of Iceland and Norway who have reached the age of 18 not later than on the day of the election, and whose municipality of residence, as defined by law, is the municipality in question on the 51st day before election day, and
2. Other foreigners who have reached the age of 18 not later than on the day of the election, and whose municipality of residence, as defined by law, is the municipality in question on the 51st day before election day, and who at that time have had a municipality of residence in Finland for an uninterrupted period of two years.

The electoral system in Finland

Finland uses proportional representation in elections. A number of representatives of each party or group is in connection with total number of vote received by the party or group. The so-called d'Hondt method is used to determine the election results. Thus, in the first stage of the calculation the total number of votes of each group, i.e.

- party which does not belong to an electoral alliance,
- electoral alliance,
- joint list, and
- constituency association which does not belong to a joint list,

is counted. Parties which have formed an electoral alliance are thus treated as a single group, as are constituency associations on a joint list. In the second stage of the calculation the candidates in each group are ranked in order of their personal number of votes. In the third stage each candidate is accorded a comparative index, i.e. the candidate who has received most personal votes is accorded an index which equals the total number of votes of the group, the second placed candidate half of that, the third placed a third, the fourth best a fourth, and so on. In the final stage all candidates within the electoral district are listed in order from best to worst according to their comparative index, and the representatives elected from the district are chosen from this list.

Delivering the plan

Our aim is to activate migrant communities to take part in everyday political issues in Tampere as ordinary members of the local communities.

Our starting assumption is that low interest of participation is due to a lack of information. We acknowledge that there might also be other reasons for being passive, such as low income and a weaker position in the labour market, but in this project we mainly aim to activate people through enhancing their knowledge of possibilities.

Our aspiration is migrants attending all the inclusive participation possibilities that there are (e.g. commenting on the city budget planning and its process). We have invited the members of Migrant Council to join a discussion about public transportation with the city lead and *ALVARI* groups in beginning of February. In all these events we try to use the city communications to emphasise the nature of cooperation in the events.

In the last municipal elections the voting activity of the inhabitants of Tampere with a migration background was low. It is low also in other municipalities in Finland, about 1/5 of those who has the right to vote. In this project we want to increase knowledge and information of voting. During the project we arrange seminars and sessions to spread information of elections and to in courage migrants to run for the office.

1. The Migrant Council will choose 2-3 issues that concern all of Tampere , not just migrant communities (e.g.e.g. city budget, service model of public services), into which we'll take a deeper look and take a stand in the issue.
2. In order to reach migrant background city dwellers we'll try to organise a citizens' evening for migrant background inhabitants (hopefully with the mayor's office).
3. We'll arrange training and encourage migrant background people to take part in local elections in April 2017 as candidates and/or voters. The aim is to get 4 migrant background members elected to the city council (out of 67 members in total). The Migrant Council will arrange also an evening with migrant candidates from all parties. The emphasis will be in encouraging of voting, the secrecy of the polls and introducing various options and political alternatives to voters.



Members of the Migrant Council taking part in service model planning, October 2015. Photo: Sirpa Koivu

Timing

When we applied for this project, the municipal elections were planned to take place in October 2016. However, the voting was postponed to April 9th 2017, which made our timing schedule go far beyond the 18 month project.

Event	Date	Implemented
Service model, thematic evening for migrants	8.10.2015	yes, lively discussion
Meeting with other councils' officials (elderly, handicapped and ALVARI groups)	18.1. 2016	yes, frames to future cooperation
Participation in the city budget process	March and August 2016	March and August OK
Mayor's evening	29.3.2016	Yes, 50-60

		attendants
Planning of municipal elections training	9.6.2016	13.4. council OK
City Working Group Meeting in Brighton	12.-13.5.2016	OK
Final meeting, Action for Inclusion	June 2016	
Evaluation of Projects	29-09-2016	
Seminar of Migrant Council about electoral system	13.10 or 20.10. 2017	September 2016
Evening with migrant candidates	March 2017	20 March 2017
Municipal elections	9.4.2017	

Achievements and Experiences

We hoped that by activating the Migrant Council (and migrant organisations through the council) to ordinary municipal issues we would get migrants' voices heard in ordinary city issues.

The project was presented to the Migrant Council at its meeting. Members had a lively debate and reacted positively and enthusiastically. The Council appointed its representatives to the first Thematic evenings. The theme of first evening was Service Model. The City of Tampere is arranging its services in a new way and that is why it wants to hear its residents. In this evening the other sub-councils and *ALVARI* working groups also took part.

The widening involvement in ordinary participation activities has led to increasing cooperation between the councils (for example between the elderly council and the Migrant Council). From the city's perspective this means that the city can benefit out of the various groups opinions in its planning and decision making. This is well in line with the city's strategy.

We have now already activated the Migrant Council members on various issues concerning for example the new planned tramway, the service model, and the city budget.

In order to widen participation at city level, the City officers dealing with the *ALVARI* groups and councils produce a written guideline. In it was outlined that the officers would meet two or three times yearly to agree upon the coming issues that will be discussed in all the councils.

Our final achievements will be measured in the municipal elections 2017. In the last municipal elections the voting percentage of foreign nationals in Finland was about 25%. In Tampere it was 22,9 % (the number includes all foreigners not only the immigrant backgrounded). We can estimate after the next elections the increase or decrease of the percentage. In previous elections the parties have been encouraged to put forward migrant background candidates, because this also increases the activity to vote and can also affect the support of a party, a claim we will be better able to assess when the work concludes.

An unplanned “achievement” was to start to write the history on migration in Tampere. We have not documented the developments in a concentrated way before this. This idea was copied from the city of Turin. It will probably increase the self-esteem of migrant population and prove that migration in Tampere is a long term phenomena and has brought to us many good things, e.g. industry.

Finally, cooperation between the two officers, from different departments, in Tampere on this project brought some new openings; we learned a lot from each other.



Photo: Sirpa Koivu

Update: March 2017

As planned, the Migrant Council organised a seminar about the electoral system on 13th of October 2016. We had a lecturer from the University of Tampere, Ms Josefina Sipinen. The purpose of the training was to encourage migrants to take part in the elections, both as voters and as candidates. We had about 25 persons attending the seminar. The evening was a success; the people were very satisfied with the content. Our next event will be 20th of March. We will have a panel for candidates in local elections in Tampere (9th of April). There will also be a chance to join voting in advance, and we'll invite all to join us on March 29th to go together to the voting.



