

Under one roof

The integration of international students

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to describe the integration of students from different countries with different ethnic backgrounds. Their first year experiences of living with other students in Finland. A country which has different community arrangement which is not as where many have come from. Living under one roof and studying in the same school most of them also happen to be in the same class. House activities were quite many and varied, Movie evenings this happened either in our own home or going to a cinema, home discussions, choosing what kind of food stuffs and things we should be buying and using together like dish washer liquid or powder, laundry powder, rice. We decided to have our own way of welcoming visitors those who were able to visit the residence for over a night or just passing for a moment.

The other aim for this report could be also to provide guidance for other house leaders who have been employed as care takers for these kind of homes as it is an ongoing project. Even when I graduate or move out to somewhere else I would like others to learn, benefit and continue to develop from this point.

## 2. INTEGRATION

The growth in the number of foreigners living in Finland shows how the country has integrated into Europe as well as the rest of the world. However the percentage of foreign nationals in Finland is still one of the lowest among Western European countries. 2.9%. The largest groups of foreigners living in Finland in 2009 were Russians (28,210), Estonians (25,510), Swedes (8,506), Somalis (5,570) and Chinese (5,180). Most of the people have moved to Finland to seek

jobs or because of marriage to a Finn. ( Centre for European Studies 2012,429 & 430.) Despite the statistics showing only two sides of the

Immigration purposes mostly focusing on marriage and employment seekers, there are also more other reasons why other groups of people migrated to Finland, Seeking refuge or studies as in my case and the students who are the target group of this project. In living reality I noticed they are not so many integration activities catered for international students and the other question that came to my mind is that are the international students not considered to be part of the now existing society.

According to the sociology definition of social integration is the movement of refugee and the underprivileged into the main stream societies. Some of the International students moving to here are under privileged for I feel they needed to have more intergration services but I somehow decided to learn and try to reason with Paul Scheffer reasoning in the next statements. There has been too much avoidance on the part of the receiving society, and it goes some way to explain the current impasse. The twentieth century was marked by attempt to reduce social equality and bridge cultural divides, No issue has disturbed European public life so much as the effort to elevate the all range of population group so that the full citizenship would be available to everyone. This determination to achieve equality of opportunity arose out of a fear of social unrest but it was also inspired by moral conviction (Scheffer 2011, 28).

Yet on the other hand I totally agree with the (Sainsbury, 2012, 91) Which clearly talks of the immigrant policies which changed to integration policy. The 1990s reception led to growing differences in the economic well-being of non-citizens and citizens, and the decision makers began to consider immigrant policies, concluding that policy changes were necessary to meet the challenge on rising inequality. In the mid-1990s immigrant policies were redefined as integration policies and the focus shifted to introductory and anti-discrimination measures.

Introductory measures were aimed at the newly arrived immigrants during their first five years to improve their prospect of employment and participation in the society. In addition to Swedish language instruction. The introduction program included individual plans, complementary education, vocational training and other active labor market measures. The scope of participants were expanded from refugees and their family members to include other new comers who would benefit from the program (Sainsbury 2012,91).

This would somehow perfectly help the integration process for the new students, as the studies program they come for lasts for three and half years. Labour market is another thing as they also get time to work as it is allowed for full time students to work for twenty five hours per week. They are not exception to tax payment as well.

## 2.1 Methodology

Researchers repeatedly demonstrated that response patterns, generally attributed to underlying forces could be induced, eliminated and reinstated simply by varying external sources of influence. These impressive findings led many psychologist, especially proponents of radical forms of behaviorism, to the view that cause behavior are found not in the organism but in the environmental forces. The idea that man's action are under the external guide their actions, they can solve problem symbolically without having to enact the other alternatives and they can foresee the probable consequences of different actions and alter their behavior accordingly. These higher mental processes permit both insightful and foresightful behavior.

A third distinguishing feature of a man is that he is capable to creating a self-regulative influence. By managing the stimulus determinants of given activities and producing consequences of their own actions, people are able to control their own behavior to some degree. (Bandura, 1971, 2.) When I was approached to take up this employment by both the Young Men Christian Association and Diaconial University of Applied Sciences, to be a care taker and a student tutor for the new coming students. I asked of my duties both as a care taker and a student tutor from my employers then I thought of coming up with a program or a work plan which I needed so it would facilitate my work process and also integration with the new students. When the tenants/students came during the first house meetings I invited them to take part and make some of the house rules together despite having made few already.

After the students get admissions from their respective countries to come and study in Finland, accommodation arrangement is one of the following required thing to consider or to be done. In Finland there is a form of accommodation arrangement and student recruitment that has been working between different schools and the housing authorities. I was working with Young Men Christian Association (YMCA). It was in the spring and summer of 2013 this mostly happened immediately after I did my practical study with one of the places where Young Men Christian Association was conducting an after school project for young people and teenagers 09 Helsinki Human Rights (09HHR). This project there for teenagers and every young persons living in finland no matter their ethnic background to go there and have sport or dancing activities for free especially after their school hours, I was based in Malmi Siemenkuja 3.

The decision was announced that our school Diaconia University of applied sciences had to relocate all then on students to one premise in sturenkatu 2. We were advised to apply for accommodation in Helsinki region as the following semester we were to be studying in Helsinki. My boss from YMCA approached

me and asked me if I was willing to be a care taker for the dormitory which was to be opened in the fall for new students.

The guidance will not only tell of my personal experience of how I was tutored and helped get along with the students community .Despite not living in a dormitory in the past years but it is also to inform about the integration process of the care taker and the students. Problem solving and also working together how it can benefit a larger number than just few individuals and space too .Challenges and how we found solutions to some problems.

For Anthropologists and social scientist, participation observation is a method in which researchers takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of a group of people as one of the meaning of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture, within this formal definition “explicit” culture is part of what people are able to articulate about themselves “Explicit culture makes part of what we know, a level of knowledge people can communicate about with relative ease”( Spradley,1980,7) in contrast “tacit” aspects of culture largely remain outside our awareness or consciousness .It is the feeling of discomfort we have for example, when someone stands too close to us or touches us in a way that seems too familiar

These were the words of (Kathleen M and Billie R DeWalt 2011,1&2) All became somehow familiar because I noticed some my thoughts then through some of the actions of the new tenants, not all but some I believe another aspect was that one of the tenants came from the same country of origin as me. As my main focus was on observation I did not take part in their daily personal activities because they varied and also the target group was not already an existing community but it was just at the formation stage.

On this research I used different forms of data collection on the students living in Neulansylma Myllypuro. I decided to use the observation method and not in-

interviews, also ask for permission of everyone if the information would be shared to the participants as well and they will be able to have a look and confirm if the data is well processed before publication.

Most of the data collection I have been collecting it by observing and also participating in some the activities. I have been conducting house meetings every Sunday evening from 20:00 hours. The Sunday meeting I arranged with them for three purposes. First, Information flow from the house owners to the tenants. Secondly for problem solving and thirdly for interaction purposes .Most of my notes I did collect during the Sunday evening meetings .This means I participated in Fifty two Sunday meetings and I also participated in Eleven cleaning weeks of the house because. I also happen to be living in the same resident not occupying big space, having different responsibilities from them but also being able to do some things with them as well .We have been working on the house cleaning and shopping together, using the same laundry machine and space also the cooking utensils, making the house budget of the things we have been sharing or commonly using. Sunday evening meeting and outings, we normally have this gathering to transfer the weekly responsibilities from two individuals to the other two and these responsibilities are cleaning of the house, doing the shopping for the food and other house necessities like cleaning chemicals and utensils. When cooking together, they were some days when we had decided to have dinner together and this was done by everyone cooking their traditional home made meals and then share or eat at the same table.



### 3. RECRUITMENT

In Myllypuro there is a place called Neulansilma which is the place of residence. The landlord of the place where the Young Men Christian Association in collaboration with Helsinki Churches who are in charge of several homes. Diaconia University of Applied Sciences head of study unit was involved in the process of recruitment of the international students. I went to live there as a student from Diaconia University of Applied Science because our study unit was moving from Järvenpää campus to Helsinki campus. This also facilitated my collection of information. The tenants in this place all happen to be only students despite receiving many applications from married couples and working class people who wanted to live there. I was told that the place was meant only for international students. As a student and a tutor I was responsible to go and receive the students from the airport and to show the new students where school was, To help them with registration in school, also with any question they had pertaining school related matters

“Could you please spare me a vacant room there, if there is still many more it should not be too expensive but spacious and affordable because where I am staying or living now there is no one to talk to and in the house there is no furniture except only a table. No one goes to the same college as me. The rentals are too high and I cannot afford it. Coming to live there with other students will make me happy and at least will have people to talk to and go to the same school with” these were the words of one of the first year student who had an accommodation arranged for her by someone else before moving to Finland.

The house was formed or arranged to accommodate first year students both from within and outside Finland. The process of recruitment mostly started upon the acceptance of a student or when given a study place. School would suggest a housing idea to them and if they happen to be interested they would apply for

it. upon admission I decided to get in touch with student from their country of origin through email and phone contact. I was already living in the place they were coming to sometimes address would not easily work for them just as it did not work for me to find places here in Finland , we would call and communicate what time the flight of the person was so I would arrange to go and get the person from the airport. but if not they would not, this is so because some students were already living in Finland and had accommodation which was comfortable for them. To those interested to move in they would get online and do the application. This accommodation had a good price for rentals and space too especially in the region of Helsinki as the trend of prices were considered to be a bit high than other places around Finland. The rentals were also catering for other necessities like electricity and water bills not to mention other things which the house was providing for the tenants which are

Basic furniture, pillow, blanket, bed cover, basic dishes, living room, corporate balcony, washing machine and small store room. All this was just included in the room, in my view this is the better way to start with. Despite the square

Meters of rooms being different but they is an equal access to all the things provided for the house to all the tenants.

The house was not fully occupied according to the number of students who were expected, the students who did not report to school on time hence they lost their study place .The accommodation then was also offered to the second year students who did not manage to acquire any accommodation from the city housing authority from the time the decision was made and announced that all the Diak students would move to Helsinki region. This offer also went to the exchange students who were coming from different countries as well.

A well known rule of house rental deposit is another thing which was not being asked from the tenants who decide to reside in this home. For many places be-

fore a tenant would acquire a place to live in there is mostly a demand of deposit which would be a maximum of one or two month's rents of a tenants house or room price .I would affirm this is a good way to start for a new student as when I came to do my studies in 2010 it was not like this.

#### 4. RESPONSIBILITY

My responsibilities were to see that the house is well kept by making sure the equipment are well kept and used for the benefit of every tenant that not others having more rights than the other ones despite the difference in the rentals prices. Help the tenants to understand some of the few house regulations that works in this country, like keeping noise low by ten pm 22:00hours they should not play loud music or talk too loud, no laundry after ten pm 22:00hours.

Respect other tenant's privacy no is permitted just enter into another tenant's room without the owner's permission. No one is allowed to smoke inside the house be it in your own room, respecting each other when using television, radio or stove. My other responsibility as a student tutor was to show the new students places where they could also access some services and what needed to be done by them to facilitate their process of integration in the new society they have come to live and study. Help with few academic requirements like how to access school time table online and other activities.

#### 4.1 From the Airport to home

Welcoming the students from the airport and bring them to the place of residence of accommodation, most of the times I was using my own money for their bus fare, but other times I was given by my supervisor to pay for their transportation. It happened that as many students were coming they had no idea of currency usage they were only assuming they would change money upon arrival.

#### 4.2 First day at school

It was my duty as a student tutor to take the students to school on their first day in Sturenkatu 2 Helsinki. To report and to collect their admission forms, register and also get few things for starters like, school key, meal card and paper to present to the transport authorities so they could be given a student discount. I did not collect these things in advance because some of the academic regulations does not allow a stranger to collect some documents for other unless the person appears in his/her physical presence. Showing the students how to travel from home to school and also the way back home. The kind of transport was to connect from different station to another and there was no bus, tram or metro that was moving straight from the place of residence to the school premises

#### 4.3 Social Security number or Identity number

The basic information of people residing in Finland is recorded in the population information system. Registered information includes name, date of birth, nationality, familiar relationships and address. A Finnish home municipality is registered for a foreigner who has moved to Finland, if he or she plans to remain in Finland and has a residence permit for at least a period of one year. Citizens of the Nordic countries do not need to have a residence permit. Under the law, a foreigner needs is required to submit the same information for registration as a

Finnish citizen if he or she resides in Finland for at least one year .The registration take place at the local register office .Registered information is used amongst other things, in the organization of elections for taxation ,health care ,judicial administration and statistical purposes. (Local Register Office Registration for foreigners, [www.maistraatti.fi](http://www.maistraatti.fi)). This is another important place because there is a requirement of filling the forms which contains the required information about the immigrant so they would qualify for the social security number. That needs some translations to make the new person who have no idea or does not understand Finnish language and the process of registration.

#### 4.4 Transport system

Getting a bus card for Helsinki region and also sticker for train has been another duty for the students. Those who are above thirty years of age they are not given any discount unless with the study grant from the Kela office. Going to the Kela office they have also some obligations to be met. Then whenever the student does not have any employment contract ,he or she is not given any discount at all, if they have the employment contract is they are told to apply for kela card first and if the decision comes negative they end up paying the adult price all the way. This was a surprise to me because I went to the financial aid for foreign students.

If you are not a Finnish citizen you may be entitled to financial aid with education in Finland if you are registered as a permanent resident of Finland in the population register system and your purpose for residence in Finland is something other than education. For example work, family ties or return migration. If you are in Finland for express purposes of attending school, you are not eligible for financial aid from Finland. Permanent residence in Finland is determined by

reference to the Municipality Residence Act (Kotikuntalaki/lagen om hemkommun 201,1994).

The purpose of residence in Finland is determined in different ways depending one's nationality (Kela, Financial aid for foreign students).

#### 4.5 Signing house contract

The contract forms were send to them all students through emails immediately upon their admission to the neulansilma residence. Most of the students did not sign because they needed to see the place and to be explained what was exactly requirement for one to get the contract because the contracts were written in finnish language. The students did not also did not understand anything because the contracts were all in Finnish language it took some time for them to be translated into English. All of them came to sign when they were already here.

#### 4.6 Opening of bank accounts

I had to take every student to different banks to hear of their services then he/she may choose from the services they offer and quality they would be comfortable with. Banks also had variety range of requirements which had to be met before a person would have an account with them, some banks asked for the social security number while other banks did not. Other banks needed to know if the student had a contract with any company or not also question the source of income.

#### 4.7 Paying Rentals and Bills

For all the students while they were told to wait for their net banking to be opened, three months was the time almost all of them were given by the banks. I had to help them to pay their house rentals and other online bills. This normally worked when they had money they gave me liquid money to me to go and deposit in my account then pay for him/her. This transaction was done to avoid extra payments because if they deposit their cash in my account they have to be fined an extra amount one bank still fines Six euro's if you deposit money in a any local account which happens not to be yours. This happening continues until now because some do not have the net-banking yet. Coming to the case of the exchange students, one from Germany was not charged much but one from Czech republic if she pays with her account from home the fine is much more than paying through my account.

#### 4.8 Finnish Lessons

I worked with the student from diaconia Kaunianen unit who was doing her practical placement with diaconia university of applied science Helsinki unit in arranging the Finnish language discussion course for the new students at home. Every saturday afternoon and this went on for about some month's it was done during the weekend because the school time table was also intense by then. After she completed her practical placement and does not have time. For my employers from young men Christian association we are still in search for the volunteer who could carry on with the Finnish teaching course on the weekend because most of the places that offer the free finnish courses during the week does not work well with the students school time table.

#### 4.9 Home activities

To study social structure, it is often said one start with social relationships. But what is a social relationship? If we take two people A and B we can see two sides of their “relationship” First there are the ways they interact, the things they do and say in their dealings with one another (Roger M and Andrew J. Strathern 1998,174) .We had planned and decided to have few house activities like birthday parties and also how to welcome and treat visitors who were staying for more than one night. Another thing was the using of internet and paying. I acquired the services form one supplying company in my name and the bills were coming to me but every tenant would contribute equal amount to pay because we decided to use the same one and pay it that way.

#### 5. CHALLENGES

Many challenges have been happening between the students themselves and also between the staff and the students. Being one of the staff representatives I observed one of the challenges of my supervisors had was reaching out to the tenants and the biggest challenge and was language and also time. Communication was a problem and this was mainly caused by the language barrier. First year students most of them do not speak much Finnish and this applied to those who had been in Finland for some time and those who came direct from outside did not speak at all, yet my employers also did not speak much English.

There has been times when a tenant would get two bills for one month with different reference numbers. This in practicality means the tenant did not know



exactly which bills needed to be settled exactly, and when I try to reach out for the solution to the person in charge or supervisor sometimes no response would come and at times the response would come after a long period of time or two months. Between students they have been challenges with communication and also house activities, I have heard some students say it was not easy to have a sleep during day time because people were always walking and talking around the house. Switching off the main lights like in the house corridor was another thing because everyone had a different sleeping time and the corridor lights has one switch and they light up the all house somehow other students have admitted that it is hard for them to sleep when the light is shining in their room. Challenges in cleaning up bathrooms I observed that some other tenant had a different standard of expectation how the bathroom should be cleaned and others did not pay much attention to cleaning it. Talking loud on the phone while other also try to have their different conversations, watching television during the awkward hours while others are trying to sleep. I would say the adjustment process has not been so easy mainly because of the environment set up and inter-cultural adjustment

One hypothesis concerning the development of intercultural adjustment is that adjustment proceeds via challenges and resolution of specific between culture encounters, and that those encounters vary randomly based on the contacts that sojourners experience within a specific host culture. In this case, there would be no predictable sequence of topics. Since the randomness of encounters would over time equalize specific adjustment topics. Given previous measure of topic salience there is no way to disapprove this hypothesis (Ward, Bochner & Furnham 2001, 113).

Looking at the later times of house meetings or when making the cleaning list and house activity routines, one would easily notice the difference especially if you look closely at the interaction times if compared to the earlier times when the individuals (students) came or arrived in this country. As I worked more on

creating many encounter possibilities through house activities, shopping common food items. I decided that because of not having enough space we could be buying some things which everyone use together than each person to have his or her own, it worked perfectly well. Movie nights we had some evenings when we invited other friends from different places to join us for movie evenings but sometimes it was just about the students living in the place alone, the more times we met the more familiar almost everyone became so much familiar with each other and communication got easier. Last but not least it is the creation of a facebook page. The page consists only of house tenants and the house leader and also the employers from the Young Men Christian Association (NMKY ry) mostly this was done to create the easy flow of information. This is also to say everything that humans do, they do it because it is adaptive to a particular environment. For one thing people do not just react to environment as given; rather they react to it as they perceive it and different groups of people may perceive the same environment in radically different ways (Haviland 1996,46). Some of the challenges were because some students thought it was a manly or a male duty to do something on the house duties ,but after reasoning and explaining it was clear that everyone could go to shop and exchange the returnable bottles and do shopping for the house despite being male or female.

Some problems until now they have not solved, with only little information past to the tenants which has left them stranded, There has been broken pipes from the roof top of the house in the main common room, the matter was reported in the first week of it happening and the plumbers were notified as well. The repairing company have been to the place only been twice to the place,first to check only and secondly they checked the placed did not do anything more than just removing some ceiling materials and live the place open to expose the electricity pipes which are just beneath the broken water pipes. I observed the

expression of frustration whenever the water leaks no one says anything just look and wait for any volunteer to clean up.

Tenants applied for the sauna to be opened for them so they could use it before and during winter but no reply have come back for them to know whether it will permanently remain off or not. My employers said they will mention it during their meetings and hope to hear what decision will be taken because it is a bit costly and requires too much electricity.

## 6. EVALUATION

Living and working in the neulansilma residence has been very educative and beneficial to me, i see how I felt when I firstly moved to this country and also look back at my experience even where I did not understand at all. I have always been intending to work with people of international communities. This is quite a clear vision of what to expect and experience in future of my work life too especially with the encouragement of community development. I would not like to depend only on my personal experience, iam very much prepared to open my mind even more and understand what other house or dormitory care takers may write about their experience and integration process with the new students or tenants of different ethical background too, this may be with married couples or working class .

Individual information on every student would be much helpful for the new students especially about their age and difference in acquiring the services. More information about living conditions in Finland, especially for those students who are coming from Asia, South America and Africa. The model of living is somehow similar around Europe that is if compared for those who come to do their exchange program and are from within Europe. I noticed that the exchange stu-

dents who came from within Europe did not much challenges in adjusting to the ways living conditions because it was and is somehow similar to their own country of origin. Another important thing is to emphasize on the importance of learning the Finnish language, i believe this does not depend on the student only decisions to be in Finland after their studying period or not because even for the time that they will be here during the period of their study the language plays a major role during their integration process in the society. There should be easy flow of information between the caretaker and the employers to avoid unnecessary communication breakdown for the tenants as well.

## 7. RECOMENDATION AND AREA OF DEVELOPMENT

I would recommend that there is more presence of the supervisors during the tenant and care taker meetings, it is very important for common understanding and information sharing.

Laws and rules of integration be made more clearer to the students who are also the tenants of the same place. This means they should be more cooperation between the Schools and the landlord of the residence.

Let there be enough information for the student so they could know when and where to access some services as immigrants as well as students. Like in this case of Young Men Christian Association who happens to be the somehow the landlord also do have sport clubs and different activities for immigrant as well.

Having enough equipment in the house would also be helpful in the case of managing this kind of accommodation. By this I mean things like cooking utensils it was challenging with the shared ones as they were not enough to give everyone a chance to cook at the same time. They were two stoves each with four plates for cooking while the residence was meant for ten persons, less than seven pots and three frying pans

The housing authorities working with school of admission should be identified to students before they move to Finland, A brochure of house regulations and telling of

Enough detailed information should be given to the caretaker as to the physical status of the admitted and accepted student. This would help the caretaker to be prepared enough to handle their duty. I mention this because working with students who have a physical disability may not be the same. I also had this situation.

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