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Using Images of Multicultural Communities

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Abstract

In Finland the multiculturalism is a quite new phenomenon. In this situation both the Finnish people and the new nationalities in our country have to learn all our life the situation. We have to create new methods to understand us and the new nationalities and their thinking. This paper includes 1) a short presentation about the Finnish multiculturalism, 2) a way of the humanistic geography to understand the places and different people on it and 3) a method by images to awake for example in Helsinki (Finland) into perceive the new multicultural situation in Finland.

Multiculturalism has become a reality in the Finnish society during the past 20 years. In 1990, there were 26 255 ‘foreigners’ in Finland, and by the end of 2009 the number had increased to 155 705 out of a population is 5 351 427 (2009; Statistics Finland <http://stat.fi>). Because of its low immigration rate, Finland is often referenced as being relatively homogenous in its ethno-cultural variations. The similarities in Finnish national features are stressed more than the differences, ninety per cent of Finnish people speak Finnish as a mother tongue; over eighty per cent are members of the Lutheran state church. Finnish and Swedish are the official languages of the country.

However, immigration is not a new phenomenon in Finland. Finland has a long history of connection with Sweden and Russia with associated movement of people. Sweden lost Finland 1809 to Russia and the autonomous Finland got independence from Russia in 1917. After World War II during the cold war Finland resettled 400 000 Karelian people and Finnish soldiers. People who had to leave their home behind the Russian border used to look back to the views they used to have. Quite often the resettled people had difficulties to find the identity in the new area. At that time and long after, Finland did not consider it necessary to take more immigrants from other countries (Lahti, 2007; Hämynen and Lahti, 1983). More recently, Finland has taken more refugees and asylum seekers from faraway countries than many other European countries. Finland has been a member of the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) since its establishment in 1951, and the first national refugee policy was introduced at the end of 1990s. Displacement poses particular challenges: it is a long and intricate process, with no fixed end. It is particularly difficult for refugees from male dominated cultures, and multi-generation family entities, to get used to gender roles and the differences between generations in Finland, their new home country. Women’s status is more reinforced when they go to study, work and have access to your own money, which was not always possible in their home country. Men are often find themselves in trouble, because many do not have a job and have difficulty adapting to a changing family

system. (Pentikäinen, 2005). This places particular imperative on the education system to address its new multicultural reality.

As with the Finnish immigrants after the World War II, thinking within same communities might be different from the Finnish culture in the same places. This presents educational opportunity within humanistic geography with regard to peoples thinking in and on place. Important to this is understanding that we can create our own geography: 'I on the globe and the globe in me.' (Olsson, 1997; 2003).

Concern in this paper is how to activate people to lifelong learning about the changing multicultural Finland? What kind methods might be useful? With respect to this, one suggested pedagogical activity is suggested that was presented as a poster in the CiCe conference in Barcelona in May 2010, and offers potential for teaching and learning in human geography.

For the poster I took photos of people in Helsinki city centre and reflected on my thinking of these people in this place. This focus forced me to reflect on my own perceptions and I was initially surprised by the multicultural make-up of the place. I tried to create a mind map of my own thinking in this situation and tried to imagine their mind maps. I asked myself questions such as where they are from, do they live here, work here, are they tourists? One image was of a young woman with a pram which led me to ask further questions such as: What does the lady in the picture think? What is her social position in the European community? What kind contacts does she have, local and global? What does she think on this place? What kind contacts might she have on her mind on this place?

Such images that reflect a multicultural reality can be used with children to stimulate thinking about people and place and to challenge stereotyping of people and places. Children might for example, select an image and ask questions such as: What are they thinking? What kind everyday lifestyle he/she might have? Activities such as these help stimulate enquiry-based learning and reflection on the dynamic nature of place. It also helps children to consider their role in the world at different scales and think about 'I on the globe and the globe in me.'

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