

Finns In Poland – A Contemporary Analysis



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Despite the vast research on Finnish emigration, little is known about Finns' emigration to Poland. The present study contributes to the underdeveloped areas of study on Finnish expatriation to the Slavic countries. Regardless of Poland's difficult history, or economic and cultural differences, more than 200 Finns have decided to settle in Poland. The number is even bigger when counting temporary immigrants. The study concentrates on some of the historical perspectives, as well as on contemporary analysis through qualitative interviews with 31 Finns living in Poland. Respondents were asked mainly about their reasons for migrating and attitude toward Poland as the destination country. Detailed investigation into the social cohesion of the Finnish minority in Poland is needed. Especially important is further study to determine the post-accession trends in Finnish migration to Poland, especially in the context of the first census since 2002.

Words: Migration, Poland, Finns abroad, Survey,

The history

There was no huge wave of Finnish emigration to Poland during the 19th or 20th centuries. Instead, Finns followed Swedes and traveled to the United States, Canada or Australia. After the Second World War, Finns headed for Sweden. Additionally, we can find a Finnish presence in places like Argentina, South Africa and Cuba. But very seldom did Finnish citizens choose to emigrate to Poland. The reason could be, in

part, because of the long and turbulent history of Poland, which only stabilized in 1989. Moreover, Poland has not generally been perceived as the destination country of choice, not just vis-à-vis Finns. Poland still is one of the few homogenous countries in Europe, with more than 96 % of its residents of Polish origin and the vast majority Catholic (GUS 2008). Ethnic minorities in Poland are mainly immigrants from neighbouring countries, including Ukraine, Belarus and Germany.

During the first years after the country regained its independence, only individual Finns lived in Poland, mainly in Warsaw. Finnish presence in Poland was more or less isolated. In fact, the number was so small that Finns were not even included in the statistics. Documents which have been preserved show that only about 2 % of the population of Warsaw in the 1930s was Lutheran or Calvinist (Pullat 1998, 22). Even though the number was small, there were notable Finns who had a distinct impact on Poland in the 1920s and 1930s. Their presence in Poland, however, cannot be understood as permanent migration. For example, Kaarlo Kurko, along with at least 80 other Finns, fought side by side with Polish forces against Soviet Russia in the War of 1920 (Kurko 2010, 149). Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim, who was stationed in Poland for almost seven years, is still fondly remembered as a friend of Poland and the Polish people. Karl Walter Boris Gyllenbögél was chosen as the first commissioner of Finland in Warsaw, and then later as the first ambassador in independent Poland.

This was also a time of closer contact between Poland and Finland, both culturally and economically. Between 1932–1936, 40 Finnish students and members of the Finnish Federation of Students went to Poland to study. At that time, scholarships to study in Poland were granted to Johannes Vieno Sukselainen, Prime Minister of Finland, and later to the future

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CEO of the Bank of Finland, Klaus Waris. Since 1936, cultural relations blossomed thanks to the new periodical “Przegląd Polsko-Fińsko-Estoński” (Cieślak 1983, 269).

After the war, even though Poland was set apart on the eastern edge of the Iron Curtain, relations between the two countries remained very fruitful. Although for Finns Poland has always been a seemingly far-off country with a different culture, it eventually became more appealing.

In 1950, regular maritime links between Poland and Finland were restored. Finns were employed to expand the airport in Warsaw and Finnish companies equipped machines to pulp and paper plants in Świecko and Ostrołęka. Finnish literature was translated into Polish. Partnership agreements were conducted between Gdańsk and Turku, Łódź and Tampere, and also Gdynia and Kotka.

In the 1960s, many Poles, mainly musicians, went to Finland to work. Rarely did they decide to return to Poland, either alone or with their Finnish spouse. It should be noted that Polish-Finnish couples tended to remain in Finland, not only because of the political situation in Poland at the time, but primarily for economic reasons. The Central Statistical Office in Poland puts the number of emigrants from Finland for the period of 1973–1989 at 65 (GUS 2010).

The political situation changed drastically after 1989. The number of Finnish citizens living in Poland at that time was not remarkable. However, according to some sources, at the end of 1990s the number of Finns in Poland may have reached almost 600 people (Björklund and Koivukangas 2008, 398). In fact, according to the Central Statistical Office of Poland, during the next 15 years (1989–2004), around 109 Finns emigrated to Poland. According to Polish statistics, only 72 people declared Finnish nationality in the 2002 census. In a survey, only six other nations out of the total of 72 declared were less represented in Poland. The statistics were surprising: there were more Zulu people, Kurds and Libyans in Poland. The

Table 1: Finnish students at Polish universities (Erasmus Project)

University	Academic year						
	2004– 2005	2005– 2006	2006– 2007	2007– 2008	2008– 2009	2009– 2010	2010– 2011
Jagiellonian University in Cracow	12	5	4	5	7	1	3
University of Warsaw	-	9	3	6	3	2	-
University of Gdańsk	-	1	-	2	-	1	-
Warsaw University of Technology	-	-	-	-	-	36	-
Total	12	15	7	13	11	40	3

Source: Erasmus Offices in Cracow, Gdańsk and Warsaw

number of Finnish citizens in Poland is increasing every year, particularly in the last five to six years. It is certainly a consequence of the improved economic conditions, resulting mostly from Polish membership in the European Union. From 2004 to 2008, 43 Finns came to Poland (GUS 2010). Moreover, more than 300 Finnish companies were registered on the Polish market in 2008. Many Finns came to Poland encouraged by their employers. The number of Finnish students at Polish universities has been also growing since 2004, but rather irregularly.

Based on the available information and approximate calculations by the of Finnish Embassy in Warsaw, we can assume that in early 2011, about 200 Finns were permanently living in Poland. Roughly 50 Finnish citizens are living in Poland temporarily.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire was sent, thanks to the support of the Finnish Embassy in Warsaw, to Finns living in Poland. Because of the strict privacy policy of the embassy, it is unknown how many Finns actually received the questionnaire. Additionally, respondents were also found by social networking services. In total, 31 Finns, including 7 women and 24 men, participated in the questionnaire.

In the first part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked their age, sex, education, nationality and place of residence, both in Finland and Poland. In the

second part, the emphasis was put on obtaining information about the reasons of emigration and the time of their arrival to Poland. It was important to receive information about language skills, occupation and current living situation. Finally, respondents were asked about their plans of returning to Finland.

Results

Among 31 respondents, 17 indicated Warsaw and the surrounding areas as their place of residence. Another five cited Tricity (Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot) as a temporary or permanent home. These results are not surprising, knowing that this is the trend that has persisted since the official Census of 2002. After Warsaw and Tricity, the towns with the next most Finns were Cracow and Poznan. Two people gave two cities as their place of settlement, for example Cracow/Katowice. Nevertheless, none of the respondents had settled in rural areas. Recognizing suburban Konstancin-Jezi-

orna, Piaseczno or Marki as the Warsaw metropolitan area, we can underline that respondents did not indicate any cities with less than 170,000 inhabitants.

These results coincide with the current economic and political situation in Poland, including a lack of opportunities in rural Poland and a general tendency of Finnish people to settle in a city. It should be noted, however, that among the respondents many came to Poland in the 1970s, when both Poland and Finland were mostly agricultural societies.

It is more difficult to determine the Finns' places of departure, compared with the extent of their settlement in Poland. Respondents represented different areas of Finland, including bigger cities such as Helsinki and Turku. Smaller places were also represented, such as Rovaniemi, Mikkeli and Kouvola. Finally, even the smaller domiciles of Hankasalmi and Pirkkala were cited as places of origin.

According to the questionnaire, the biggest group of Finns, numbering 18, came to Poland from 2006 onwards. This is certainly a result of continuous eco-

Table 2: Finns in Poland by voivodship (province).

Voivodship	Number of Finns (respondents)	Number of Finns (official statistics 2002)
Lower Silesian	1	2
Kuyavian-Pomorian	0	1
Lublin	0	0
Lubusz	0	1
Lodz	0	5
Lesser Poland	3	2
Masovian	17	38
Opole	0	2
Subcarpathian	0	0
Podlaskie	1	2
Pomeranian	5	9
Silesian	1	2
Świętokrzyskie	0	0
Warmian-Masurian	0	0
Greater Poland	2	3
West Pomeranian	1	5
Total	31	72

Source: Questionnaire and the official website of Central Statistical Office in Warsaw, Poland (www.stat.gov.pl)

Table 3: Finns in Poland, according to place of departure

City	Number
Helsinki	7
Turku	3
Espoo	3
Oulu	3
Mikkeli	2
Lahti	1
Kuusamo	1
Loimaa	1
Rovaniemi	1
Hankasalmi	1
Vaasa	1
Pirkkala	1
Tampere	1
Padasjoki	1
Kouvola	1
Kirkkonummi	1
Raahe	1
Liekksa	1
Total	31

Source: Questionnaire

conomic growth and Polish accession to the European Union. For many Finnish companies, Poland has become a new market, which has led to a slight increase in labour migration. On the other hand, the second-largest group, which consists of eight people, includes respondents who settled in Poland before 1989. It is interesting that five people pointed to personal reasons in explaining their expatriation, each married to a Polish wife or husband. For the Finns who came to Poland more than 20 years ago, Finland's poor economic situation was a clear reason for leaving the country.

It is not surprising that none of the respondents cited political reasons. Some, especially young respondents, decided to come to Poland not because of political or economical reasons, but, as one respondent pointed out, "I left Finland not because of the money, I just wanted to see the world and Poland was a good place to start".

The economic crisis that struck Finland in the early 1990s was for many Finns the sign to leave their home country and search for a better life elsewhere. The developing Poland was a perfect place for specialists with language skills. Two respondents emphasized this aspect when relating their reasons for migrating: "I had to make a decision whether to stay in Finland without work or look for something else".

Respondents presented an interesting approach in answering why they had chosen Poland as their place of residence: "Poland is beautiful country, but not the best one to start a family in", "Poland is becoming an important state in the EU and a regional leader (...) [Poland] is a country with good prospects for business, convenient geographical location and mild climate".

The issue of language skills is quite complex. In fact, most of the respondents mentioned the importance of speaking in Polish, but only 10 used it at home. The vast majority of the respondents knew the Polish language, at least at the basic level; however, they preferred to speak Finnish or English.

Even though the economic situation in Poland is worse than in Finland, 16 of the respondents found that emigration to Poland had positively changed their standard of living. However, 10 respondents noted that their standard of living had not changed. Naturally, we need to remember that most of the respondents came to Poland to study or soon after finishing their studies in Finland, or were unemployed without

savings. For them, working in Poland brought visible economic improvement.

Surprisingly, 17 of the respondents expressed a wish to leave Poland in the future, despite economic stability. Among them only nine respondents indicated Finland as their desired destination.

Summary

Finnish citizens in Poland can be divided into two distinct groups. One is represented by young, cosmopolitan Finns eager to travel and search for new perspectives and different cultures. The second, much bigger, is represented by the people that chose Poland mostly because of work reassignment or business trips.

During this year, for the first time since Polish accession to the EU, people living in Poland will participate in the census. The results will provide information about the current number of Finns in Poland and their status among other minorities.

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