

Moved towards midnight's sun – The Italian community in Turku



Paolo Di Toro Mammarella

In Turku, southern Finland, they have sunset around midnight, during summertime. It looks like a strange wonder, for Italian tourists hanging around up here. But if we forget about temporary visitors' impressions, we may try to imagine as, after many years, probably even the long-term Italian residents haven't got such familiar with that one yet. It's surely a beloved thing, no doubt, same way as they appreciate the high standard of life conditions in town. But Italian sun, for most of them, has never been forgotten, anyway.

In front of the main entrance of "Trattoria Romana" restaurant, owned by Ulderico De Sanctis, all visitors can see the figure of a fatty man, smiling, surrounded by the three-colored Italian flag, indicating with a funny face towards the inside tables. Founded in December 2000, with 15 employees

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working in there, in such few years "Trattoria Romana" flew to be one of the most popular place in town, offering to the increasing number of visitors the typical courses of Italian cuisine. Mister De Sanctis, living in Turku since 1985, after managing for many years another restaurant, with this one has finally made his life-time dream come true, "marking" his definitive integration in a place that gave him two children and many other satisfactions as well. But this is just a simple view of that little "piece" of Italy transplanted in the extreme north of Europe, so far from the traditional destinations of migration.

After the economic crisis of early 1990's, Finland – whose territory is a bit larger than Italy's but whose population corresponds only to the 9% - had a great restoration mainly thanks to the driving force of flourishing forest industries and, above all, to the highly advanced technological companies. Nowadays the whole country looks to work so fine in reducing to world minimal rates the social marginalization problems.

After Helsinki, second main town of the country is just Turku, the former Finnish capital. Turku is a very old cultural center, representing a good pole of attraction

thanks to its highly developed tertiary and commercial sectors. But if we go examining the municipality archives, we see that among 7540 foreigners living permanently in town, Italians are only around 120. Even being such a modest number, it had a significant increase (more than 50%) after Finnish joining to European Union. In this sense, the Turku's case reflected the whole country's tendency, where we observe that Italian residents increased from 546 in 1996 up to 1545 in 2005 (*Statistics Finland*). The most of them, actually, are concentrated in the Helsinki area, that looks to be the most attractive place for job opportunities.

First signs of Italian emigration in Finland can be found already at the end of 16th century, when there are many traces of the presence of Italian mercenaries among Swedish troupes (Luigi de Anna, "Storia degli Italiani in Finlandia – Il Seicento", Il Circolo, 1995). But the long run war between Lutherans and Catholics brought a lot of these soldiers serving the Swedish Kingdom to hide their origin, often modifying surnames just to make it harder any possible discrimination for their Catholic background. This, of course, made it much more complicated the nowadays research of historians. During 18th

century, after religious conflicts conclusion and after the loosening of contrasts among Lutherans and Catholics, the "Great North" routes were opened back again. Despite the magnificent Court of Stockholm was the most favored one by all sorts of immigrant, even Finland and (mostly) Turku were quite popular. The prestigious Academy of Turku, founded in 1640, started to be a growing destination for a long list of Italian Masters and Architects, followed by peddlers and craftsmen (Luigi de Anna, "*La Vecchia Accademia di Turku. Un luogo di incontro tra la cultura italiana e quella finlandese*", Settecentrione, 1989). During 19th century we observe a significant increase of Italians in Finland. Even if it's impossible to speak about a relevant flux of people, anyway, we can underline the constant growth of this flow, which reached its peak at the end of the century (J. Suolahti, "*Le relazioni culturali tra l'Italia e la Finlandia*", in "*Finlandia*", 1969).

The most important happening in this century for Finns was the passage from the Swedish Kingdom to Russia, whose huge dominion was extended to Finland in 1809. Being a part of the immense Empire of Tsars, Finland was involved into the impressive traffics of Russia, becoming a popular destination for lots of traders, artists and craftsmen, a lot of which were Italians. Many persons started to look at Turku as an important stop on the Saint Petersburg destination, the great capital of the Empire. The migratory flux was slow but progressive, laying on the Stockholm-Saint Petersburg route: it was never such popular

as the great moves of Italians towards Germany or South America, but anyway it went through a gradual consolidation during the new 20th century (Luigi de Anna, "*Storia degli italiani in Finlandia – Il XIX Secolo*", Il Circolo, 1996). Thanks to some important families as Tanzi-Albi, Battilana and Casagrande, Italians were able to introduce in the Finnish market some new products, as the nowadays' ice cream. These families moved in with original commercial ideas, destined to become an important part of the economical structure of the town.

Professor Luigi de Anna, living in Turku since 1973, is the head of Italian language and culture department at the local University, which took in 1920 the inheritance of the ancient Academy. De Anna distinguishes among the first traditional flux of Italians, familiar blocks immigrated at the beginning of 20th century and able to keep a strong connection with original language and culture, to a second flux, moved in Finland after the Second World War. If in the first case there were entire blocks of family coming and bringing with them all their long time traditions, in the second case the most were individuals arriving alone and going to create a new family context only after marrying a Finnish citizen. In this case we have the constitution of multicultural families, with bilingual children. Comparing to mono-cultural blocks of pioneers, it was much easier to integrate in the local context, learning the language faster for everyday life issues. The last flux of Italian immigrants, according to De Anna, is represented by people

(mostly young ones) coming after the mid of 1990's, later than Finnish access to EU. After moving in for studying or working, some of them decided to stay permanently. Even in this case the decisive element to determine an effective introduction in the local context was the fact of marrying a Finnish citizen.

De Anna identifies just in the good integration of Italians of Turku the main reason of the weak cohesion among Italians themselves living up there. The Catholic Church, whose local parish was founded in 1926, for many years played this important role, favoring cooperation among first generations of Italian immigrants and helping them to conserve strong bonds with their traditions as well. After the Second World War, following the same tendency observed in Italy, Catholic Church gradually started to lose this social function, and this provoked a gradual separation of second generation of Italian immigrants from their native land. In this way, except that some language, food traditions and old grandfather's memories, very few has been left about Italy to second and third generations. The absence of real meeting points for Italians of Turku represents a further confirmation about that lack of cohesion.

Because of the absence of a great migration flux from Italy to Turku, the presence of Italians never followed a specific scheme, bringing to a good integration with locals and to the lack of relevant cases of prejudice and discrimination. Except that particular figure that De Anna defines "transitional Italians": people usually working for Italian companies, mainly in the boatyards, that stay in Finland

only for short periods, without being interested in understanding local language and habits. In these cases, even if it was quite rare anyway, they had some critical episodes with locals. But the figure of "transitional Italian" generally is so far away from such cases as Stefano Glorioso's one, owner of a small gastronomy at Turun Kauppahalli. 46 years old, living

in Turku since 1991, Stefano's history reflects for many ways the typical Italian path at this latitudes: moved in to follow his Finnish girlfriend, only after a couple of years, and mainly thanks to the highly flexible local bureaucracy, he was able to start a new commercial activity that assured new and unexpected ways out in this town. For Stefano, Ulderico and many

others, Turku has brought wealth, job, new families, defining a "sui generis" pattern of emigration, almost untouched by all troubles that affected Italians all around the world. A happy and satisfying immigration, we can say, even if, we guess, also the "oldest" Italians of Turku still need to keep an eye on that strange wonder of midnight sun.

Kysely sukujuurista:

Hyvä lukija,

Olen kehittelemässä projektia, jossa yriitetään DNA-tutkimusta hyväksi käyttäen selvittää 1600-luvulla Delawaren alueelle Uuteen Ruotsiin muutaneiden sukuyhteyksiä nykypäivän ihmisiin, niin Suomessa kuin Pohjois-Amerikassa. Samalla tämä liittyy yhden tunnetun vanhan suvun, johon itsenäisyysjulistuksen allekirjoittaja John Morton kuului (Marttinen, Mårtensson) sukuyhteyksiin. Pyydän ystävällisesti asiasta kiinnostuneita ottamaan yhteyttä allekirjoittaneeseen. Erityisesti olen kiinnostunut tapauksestanne silloin kun teistä tai perheenjäsenistä on olemassa DNA-testi, varsinkin jos tiedätte itse kuuluvanne johonkin Delaware-ajalta olevaan sukuun. Myös tapaus, että tiedätte jonkin tällaisen vanhan suvun jäseniä, auttaisi merkittävästi tutkimustani. Kaikki antamanne tieto on luottamuksellista, vain sukuhistorian selvitykseen, eikä tietoja luovuteta kenellekään ulkopuoliselle. Vastaukset mieluummin allaolevaan sähköpostiosoitteeseen.

Inquiry on the family roots:

Dear reader,

I am planning a research project, which utilizes the DNA study methods to find out information on the relationship between the old 1600's Delaware colonists in New Sweden and the present Finnish Americans and Finns in general. This project also deals with the family roots of the famous John Morton, the signer of the Declaration of independence in 1776, who had the Delaware colonist ancestry (Marttinen, Mårtensson). Especially, if you already know your DNA markers, I am interested on your contact. Would you be so kind and write to me if you are a member of any of the old colonist families and their descendant. Also, if you know someone who might belong to these families, would you please tell their address. All the information you deliver to me is strictly confidential and only for genealogy research purposes, not available for any outsider.

Avusta kiittäen,

Thank you,

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See also:

Department page: <http://www.utu.fi/hum/historia/yh/english/index.htm>

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