

English-Language Newspapers in Finland: The Advantages and Disadvantages for Immigrant Integration

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As with the rest of Scandinavia, increasing numbers of foreigners have come to live in Finland in recent years, whether as workers, students or asylum-seekers. One of the changes heralded by this migration has been the development of news sources in Finland, either specifically aimed at immigrants or, at least, of appeal to them. While such new sources are well-established in countries such as Norway and Denmark, they are relatively new in Finland. This article will examine the different news sources aimed at immigrants in Finland and their relative advantages and disadvantages for immigrants, especially with regard to assimilation.

As stated, other Scandinavian countries have long established newspapers which appeal to foreigners such as *The Norway Post* and *The Copenhagen Post*. These are written in English, as it is widely accepted that this is the world's

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lingua franca and immigrants would be very likely to speak this, even if they did not speak the vernacular.¹ Both newspapers are also written by natives of the country in question. These newspapers, ostensibly at least, report their own country's, or their own city's, news but in English. The articles are not slanted in any way towards the perceived interests of foreigners. For example the headline of one edition of *The Copenhagen Post* was simply, 'Brewery Bids Copenhagen Adieu,'² and this would be fairly typical. The same is true of *The Norway Post*.³ However, in both cases, the 'classifieds' tend to be aimed at or written by foreigners as in, 'My name is Mary and I am a 24 year old Veterinary student from the Caribbean . . .'⁴ The simple advantage of such newspapers, in terms of integration, is that it is easier for foreigners, who might not speak the vernacular, to understand what is happening in the country in which they live. Precisely because these newspapers are in English, it might be argued that they make the foreigner feel welcome in the country. They are evidence of an attempt, by the host country, to accommodate the needs of the foreigner. As such, according to various research

projects in this field, the immigrant may be more inclined to want to integrate, learn the language and so forth.⁵ Thus, the argument that such a newspaper, by being in English, is a disincentive to learn the vernacular can be countered, at least to some extent.

The two English-language newspapers in Finland are somewhat different from those in Norway and Denmark, and are also very different from each other. The larger of the two is *Six Degrees*. This is published in Helsinki but is available, free of charge, in other relatively large Finnish cities such as Turku, Tampere and Oulu. It tends to be given away in libraries and cheaper restaurants such as *Hesburger*. The editor of this monthly is Alexis Kouros, a journalist and film-maker and the magazine is ostensibly funded by substantial advertising. Unlike the other Nordic examples, the newspaper has a number of Non-Finnish writers and advertises for 'native English speakers' to write articles free-lance. However, the staff-writers are mainly Finnish. *Six Degrees* is overtly aimed at foreigners. It openly claims to be a 'multicultural' 'discussion forum,' to create dialogue between Finns and foreigners. It carries a

section entitled 'Cultural Bemusement,' in which foreigners swap amusing anecdotes about Finnish life. And it is, in general, interested in articles that relate to the benefits of a multicultural society in Finland and more broadly. Thus, unlike *The Copenhagen Post*, it is a clearly political newspaper with a fairly clear political agenda. To provide just a few examples, the February 2004 issue carried an article entitled 'Style Despite the Veil,' which encouraged the wearing of the Hijab amongst Finnish Muslims, examining it as a fashion item. The November 2005 issue carried an article entitled 'Racist Pack Design,' criticising apparently racist packaging of chocolate in Finland.⁶ Indeed, in general, the issue of racism in Finland occupies some space in *Six Degrees*. In the February 2006 issue, there was an article entitled, 'Racist Attacks . . . but in Karleby (Kokkola)' and this is not unrepresentative of the kind of article that it publishes. It also published articles criticising the publication of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed.⁷

Certainly, there are advantages to this kind of magazine. In theory, at least, it brings foreigners in Finland together and attempts to advise them on how to find work. Thus, it could be seen to assist in 'immigrant morale,' an important factor when work is difficult to find and a language difficult to learn.⁸ The disadvantage, with regard to integration, is that such a magazine, by placing noticeable emphasis on racism in Finland, could compound the negative views that foreigners might develop about Finns or cause them to develop such views. It could

thus hinder integration. Certainly, the magazine has been fiercely attacked on politically far right, 'nationalist' discussion forums, with one member claiming that:

Six Degrees has a constant theme that it's always hammering home: Finns are ignorant, stupid, ugly, evil and racist, and the only way they can ever be accepted by the rest of the world is to open the borders for everyone to come here (although, of course, Finland is such an awful country and the Finns are such racist bigots that no-one would want to come here anyway, which is why we must welcome the thousands or hundreds of thousands clamouring to come here).⁹

The magazine has also been criticised on the Finnish cultural blog FinlandForThought.net. Criticism was specifically aimed at one of its regular writers, Dr Johanna Maula, who it accused of being a 'race baiter' – one who tries to bring out racism in people in order to discredit them.¹⁰

Moreover, the way in which *Six Degrees* allows foreigners to share perhaps unpleasant, racist experiences could be seen to assist in developing a sense of 'immigrant solidarity.' I do not wish to claim that this is objectively negative, but it might be seen to contribute to a situation in which, for foreigners, Finns become 'other' and distant. This, indeed, is often the starting-point of ghettoisation and separate identity.¹¹ However, this normally develops in relation to specific ethnic groups rather than a broad a group who happen to not to speak the vernacular, or not speak it well, but share a lingua franca.

The only other entirely English language newspaper published in Finland is *65 Degrees North*, which is online.¹² This is entirely run by foreigners, the editor is Ata Bos, who is Dutch and it was established in 2005. The newspaper, also monthly, is ostensibly aimed at English-speaking foreigners living in Oulu, northern Finland. In contrast to *Six Degrees*, writers are mainly foreign; from many different countries such as Romania, Germany and New Zealand and it is sub-edited by native English-speakers. Unlike *Six Degrees*, *65DN* attempts, to a far greater extent, to be an objective source of news, if only about Oulu. However, the articles tend to be heavily slanted towards the interests of foreigners. Thus, some representative examples include discussions of what to do before you come on an Erasmus term¹³, how a foreigner can survive financially in Oulu¹⁴ or what it is like to live in a certain district of Oulu.¹⁵ Like many local papers, it includes national news but with a local edge as in, 'Bird Flu on its way through Europe.'¹⁶ Most articles relate to Oulu to some way. However, it has published no articles focussing on racism in Finland or, indeed, articles that might be seen, in some respect, to criticise Finnish cultural life. Again, in integration terms, there are advantages and disadvantages to its approach. Oulu, as a city, has fewer immigrants than Helsinki, for example. Thus, it would be very easy for immigrants to feel alone and thus, like *Six Degrees*, *65DN* can assist with issues of morale. As with *Six Degrees*, it can also assist with making foreigners feel welcome as it is primarily a

project of Oulu City Council. But the most important advantage that it has over Six Degrees, is that it is not overtly political and certainly does not concentrate on racism. Thus, it does not compound negative views that foreigners might develop about Finns. Indeed, it is very positive about Finland, carrying articles that tend to explain the quirks of Finnish culture in a light-hearted way. In this sense, it could be seen to assist integration. The disadvantage, quite apart from its exclusive concentration on Oulu, is that it carries 'Finnish news' to an even lesser extent than Six Degrees. Thus, it leaves foreigners who do not speak Finnish excluded from what is happening in Finland in a way that, to their credit, newspapers such as The Copenhagen Post do not. Helsingin Sanomat carries an English-language section which does, like its Scandinavian counterparts, report national news in English.¹⁷ However, it is relatively small, carrying only one article from each section of the newspaper, and it is exclusively in the online edition.

Indeed, the fact that 65DN is exclusively online is perhaps another difficulty and one that it shares with Helsingin Sanomat's 'English Pages.' It is likely to only be read by Oulu immigrants with internet access. Thus, without meaning to generalise about income, it is probably more likely to be read by the educated foreigner, who perhaps works for Nokia, than an asylum-seeker from Somalia, who is probably less likely to have the internet. 65DN's online status may, of course, be a matter of finance rather than design. But, certainly, Six Degrees, despite its

highly political nature, is easily accessible to all foreigners in the cities in which it is distributed.¹⁸

Perhaps the most useful kind of newspaper, with regard to integration and foreigners in Finland, would carefully combine aspects of all three kinds assessed. The big advantage of The Copenhagen Post is that it conveys the news to foreigners. However, there is little that is specifically aimed at foreigners or allows them to discuss their experiences in the country. This is the advantage of the two Finnish newspapers but, it might be submitted, that Six Degrees' highly political nature and concentration apparent 'Finnish racism' does not necessarily assist integration. Time will tell, as more foreigners arrive, whether such a newspaper develops. But currently, in Finland, there are certainly some interesting and even politically controversial foundations to build upon.

Notes

¹ For further discussion see e.g.: Julianne House, (2003), 'English as a Lingua Franca: A Threat to Multilingualism?' in *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 7:4.

² 'Brewery Bids Copenhagen Adieu,' in *Copenhagen Post*, (23rd February 2006).

³ For example, 'Royal Baptism on Saturday' in *Norway Post*, (1st March 2006).

⁴ 'Classifieds,' in *Norway Post*, (1st March 2006).

⁵ For example, Aoife Collins, (March 2002), *The Needs of Asylum Seekers in Cork*, NASC.

⁶ Nigel Watson, (Nov 2005),

'Racist Pack Design' in *Six Degrees*.

⁷ Alexis Kouros, (February 2006), 'Caricaturing Freedom' in *Six Degrees*. Their publication was supported by both The Copenhagen Post and The Norway Post.

⁸ This point is made, for example, by: Louis Wroth, (Nov. 1941), 'Morale and Minority Groups' in *American Journal of Sociology*, 47:3.

⁹ Stormfront.org, ('White nationalist' discussion website). Of course, such groups are small and cannot be seen as representative of Finnish opinion.

¹⁰ FinlandForThought.net. (3rd May 2005), 'Johanna Maula – Race Baiter.' Again, it should be emphasised that almost nothing has been written on Six Degrees in the mainstream Finnish media.

¹¹ The development of such an identity has been discussed in depth in, for example, Stephen Reicher and Nick Hopkins, (2001), *Self and Nation*, London: Sage.

¹² I should mention that I have personally written for 65 Degrees North, but in discussing it in this article, I aim to provide a wholly objective assessment.

¹³ Nina Lah, (25th January 2006), 'Things to do before going on Exchange' in www.65degreesnorth.com

¹⁴ Caroline Liebenow, (Oct 2005), 'Why Pay More? A Guide to Saving Money in Oulu,' in www.65degreesnorth.com

¹⁵ Li Qing, (27th February 2006), 'A Slice of Life: Kempele' in www.65degreesnorth.com

¹⁶ Timo Roth and Antje Neumann, (27th February 2006), 'Bird Flu

on its way through Europe,' in www.65degreesnorth.com

¹⁷ Helsingin Sanomat's English pages can be found at <http://www.hs.fi/english/>

¹⁸ As an aside, it should be mentioned that there is also a monthly Russian-language newspaper in Finland called

Spektr. It carries news on cultural events. As with English language newspapers, it could be seen as welcoming but also a means of maintaining a Russian identity and not assimilating. Indeed, this, unlike an English-language paper, would bolster a specific ethnic identity. Thus, as

with others, it is possible to be fairly ambivalent about its effect on integration. Also assorted English-language information sites have developed such as Virtual Finland from 1995 and also English-language 'Blogs' relating to Finnish life such as FinlandForThought.

Ruotsin Suomalainen - ruotsinsuomalaisten äänitorvi

Ruotsinsuomalaisella lehdistöllä on pitkät perinteet: 1800-luvun lopulta lähtien Ruotsissa on ilmestynyt yli 100 ruotsinsuomalaista lehteä. Monet pienet lehdet ovat kuihtuneet pois, sitä mukaa kuin suomalaiset ovat integroituneet ruotsalaiseen yhteiskuntaan eivätkä esimerkiksi kielisyydestä enää koe ruotsinsuomalaista lehdistöä välttämättömänä. Julkinen tuki lehdille on pientä; pääasiassa ne saavat selvitä tilaus- ja ilmoitustuloilla, ja tämä on koitunut monen ulkosuomalaislehden kompastuskiveksi.

Ensimmäinen joka arkipäivä Ruotsissa ilmestynyt suomenkielinen sanomalehti oli Finn-Sanomat, jota julkaistiin vuosina 1974-1985. Sitten tuli pitkä tauko, kunnes Viikkoviestin perustalle rakennettu Ruotsin Sanomat rupesi ilmestymään päivittäin vuonna 2003. Taloudelliset vaikeudet johtivat lehden konkurssiin jo kahden vuoden päästä.

Ruotsinsuomalainen tilaajakunta ei näytä riittävän suomenkielisen päivälehdessä taloudelliseen ylläpitoon, mutta kerran viikossa ilmestyvä lehti löytää vielä tarpeeksi lukijoita. *Ruotsin Suomalainen* -lehti on onnistunut saavuttamaan vakaan aseman. Sen

perusti Ruotsin suomalaisseurojen keskusliitto vuonna 1964 liiton järjestölehdiksi. Aluksi lehti ilmestyi kuukausittain, ja vuodesta 1972 viikoittain. Samalla se



kehittyi järjestölehdettä yleisanomalehdiksi. Ainoana valtakunnallisena suomenkielisenä lehtenä Ruotsissa siitä tuli nopeasti suosittu.

Ajoittain Ruotsin Suomalainen on ollut taloudellisissa vaikeuksissa. Kun Tapani Kekki vuonna 1998 osti lehden osake-enemmistön, tilaajia oli kolmisentuhatta. Sen jälkeen tilaajakunta on kasvanut no-

peasti. Nyt levikki on noin 9000. Päätoimittajan lisäksi vakituisen henkilökuntaan kuuluu graafikko. Seitsemän henkilöä tekee lehdelle työtä tilausten ja ilmoitusten parissa. Alueitoimittajia on yhdeksällä paikkakunnalla ja muita vakinaisia avustajia ja pakinoitsijoita on parikymmentä, muutama myös Suomessa.

Lehti kirjoittaa laajasti oman maan tapahtumista, jonkin verran uutisista maailmalta ja tietysti Suomen asioista. Joka numerossa on urheiluliite. Ruotsinsuomalaisten omat asiat ovat kuitenkin tärkeimmät, koska niistä ei kirjoiteta Suomen eikä Ruotsin muussa lehdistössä.

Usein vanhempi polvi ei halua turvautua sähköiseen tiedonvälitykseen, vaan haluaa mieluummin lehden omalle pöydälleen. Ruotsin Suomalaisella on nykyisellään ainoan valtakunnallisen ruotsinsuomalaisen lehden tärkeä asema suomalaisen identiteetin ja kulttuurin säilymiselle Ruotsissa, eikä vähiten suomenkielen ylläpitäjänä.

Lehteä voi lukea myös netissä: www.ruotsinsuomalainen.com

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