The low percentage of immigrant workers in the strong Finnish economy - an anomaly that challenges the main theories of migration?

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Introduction

An employer of labour will always have economical incentives to argue for import of immigrant workers, to be used as a more cheap and flexible labour-force. This argument is strengthened by the historical fact that nearly all wealthy capitalist economies have made use of foreign labour to enhance their growth. Further strengthened through theoretical perspectives, the employer's argument has become widely accepted, and labour import is accordingly often understood as a necessary consequence of growing capitalist economies.

Finland seems to comprise an anomaly to this pattern, regarding its strong economy, but the absence of a high percentage of immigrant workers. Bartram (2005 a) holds that this anomaly challenges some of the main theories of migration on the point that labour migration is a feature that is intrinsic to fast-growing capitalist economies. He wants to introduce policy-makers, and their relation of power with the employers, as an important variable in the theories of migration. This essay argues that Finland's labour-market history differs significantly from other European countries, and on these grounds I question whether Finland should be used as an empirical case to back Bartram's theories.

I first present the view that labour-migration is a necessary consequence of a fast-growing capitalist economy. Based on Bartram's (2005 a) article, the Neo-classical and Dual Labour Market-theories are chosen to represent this view. I then proceed to present Bartram's view of Finland as an anomaly, and thus a challenge, to these theories. The aim of the essay is to question Bartram's use of the Finnish labour-market as an empirical case to back his theories. This is done through an analysis of the Finnish labour-market history. In order to make my arguments clear, I briefly compare this history with those of Germany and Sweden, as examples of fast-growing capitalist economies. Germany because it is a prime example of a labour-importing country, through its large-scale *Gastarbeiter*-programs in the 1960's and early 70's. Sweden because it has a labour-market model that is quite similar to the Finnish one, but a far higher representation of immigrants in the labour-force.

I argue that the Finnish history of migration and unemployment is significantly different to those of Germany and Sweden, and that these differences is a strong factor in explaining Finland as an anomaly. When explaining the anomaly through these economic factors, as a significant complement to Bartram's structural explanations, I suggest that the case of Finland has not yet constituted an anomaly that fundamentally challenges the existing theories of migration.

Through the contemporary labour-shortages though, the Finnish labour-market is currently facing the challenge I have argued that is necessary for it to be an adequate empirical case. Will the occurring labour-shortage in Finland lead to labour-import, or will the future labour-market in Finland still constitute an anomaly that will be a useful empirical example to test Bartram's case? The last section of this essay contains some suggested answers to this question.

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Labour import as a natural consequence of economical growth

The positive externalities of labour migration are many. For the receiving countries, the movement of workers is beneficial because its companies gain access to cheap and flexible labour (Kindleberger 1967). It '…reduces wage-push inflationary pressure, helps fuller unitization of productive capital, and thus boosts economic growth, including exports' (Gosh 2005: 3). For the sending countries, movement is beneficial because it reduces pressure from unemployment, the economical gains from remittances, and the possibility for returning skills. The migrant workers gain economically from the higher wages of the host-country. History provides us with numerous examples of how imported labour has been a vital factor in the growth of capitalist economies. From early slave-trade, through the vast emigration from Europe to America in the nineteenth-, and early twentieth century, to more contemporary examples of the strong west-European economies actively importing labour through large-scale *Gastarbeiter*-programs in the 1960's and early 70's (Boyle et al. 1998, Castles and Miller 2003, King 1996).

Scholars trying to foresee and explain migration are naturally influenced by these historical facts, and they are incorporated into the theories:

Neo-classical economists explain migration as occurring because of differences in income and possibilities, and that the individual actor (labourer) will choose to migrate to obtain better standards of living. As long as there are differences in income and possibilities, migration will necessarily continue from the less-to the more prosperous countries, and thus leading to a process of equilibrium. The theory assumes that when workers move from labour-surplus, low-wage countries, to capital-rich, high-wage countries, the inter-country differences are reduced and eventually leveled out (Boyle et. al. 1998: 61-63).

Dual labour market-theorists (Brox 2005, Piore 1979) emphasise demand-led character of import, as opposed to the supply-led explanations of the neoclassical theory (Boyle et. al. 1998: 69). The employers will always want to make use of cheap and exploitable labour, and import will always be the preferred means for employers, since immigrants from less wealthy economies will be willing to work for less, and will not be as able to form unions or interest-groups working for higher social security for the workers. It describes a process where the power of the employers is used in a way that creates a labour market divided between

- The capital-intensive primary sector, where the unions are relatively stronger, the wages are higher, the social security systems more encompassing
- The labour-intensive secondary sector, where the import of labour from poor countries has made it possible for the employers to pay lower salaries than the national standards, and where the workers are generally deprived of social security rights and career opportunities

The secondary sector will cease to be attractive for the national population, who will search for work in the primary sector, or use the welfare-system in states with a well-developed one, such as Finland. Thus the secondary sector becomes fully dependant on immigrant workers, and would collapse unless the continuous possibility to import labour is held open for the employers.

The historical patterns, together with theories of migration, draw a picture where import of cheap migrant labour. David Bartram (2005 a) has recently written an article that presents Finland as an anomaly to this picture. I will now turn to a presentation of his views on the case of Finland.

Finland as anomaly: a contemporary perspective

With one of the strongest and most competitive economies in the world, it is surprising to find that only 1.5 percent of the Finnish labour force are of foreign origin[1]. Bartram wants to challenge the existing theories of migrations on their suggestion that the growth of capitalist economies necessarily leads to labour-import. In a structural analysis of the Finnish industrial relations, he emphasises the special power-relations of the Finnish labour-market, in what he describes as a 'developmental state' (Bartram 2005 a: 13). In a developmental state, the policy-makers (politicians and civil servants) have a high level of power and independency in relation to the employers. The politicians are more independent from the em-

ployers, and the professional civil servants are relatively stronger in relation to the politicians, than what is the case in a neo-liberal form of regulation, or 'bourgeois-clientist state'. Bartram introduces the policy-makers as significant actors, that in certain structural environments have the power to significantly influence the actual flow of immigrant labour into the national labour-markets.

With the possibility of importing cheap labour cut off by rules and regulations, the employers have to be inventive in order to be competitive in the market. If labour is kept expensive, the employers have to find a way to utilize their workers in a more efficient way, thus striving for technological development and efficiency. The government cannot only cut off the employers' possibilities for cheap labour, without trying to support their competitiveness through other channels. Finland is the world's third largest investor in Research and Development (Sengenberger 2002), and excessively makes use of prefabrication and other technological means to utilize the workers more efficiently. Thus the maintaining of relatively high wages is supported by higher efficiency, and therefore is not merely inflationary (Bartram 2005 a: 12).

Bartram uses the Finnish anomaly in order to challenge the migration-theories' absence of sensitivity towards borders and policies, asking the question 'How might we have to revise our theories to account for the Finnish case?' (Bartram 2005 a: 7).

I will now turn to an analysis of the Finnish labour-market history, arguing that the particular power-relations that Bartram describes is partly shaped by the strength of the economy and the rates of unemployment. I thereby ask the question whether the current absence of immigrant workers in Finland really is an anomaly that challenges the theories of migration?

Finland as anomaly: a historical perspective

Finnish migration history has largely been a history of emigration (Korkiasaari and Söderling 2004, Heikkilä and Korhonen 2002). During the last one hundred years, more than one million Finns have moved abroad. This is a significant number out of a population numbering between 2,7 millions in 1900 and 5, 2 millions in 2004 (Statistics Finland 2004). Before the war, the majority of the emigrants moved to North America, and after the war about 75 per cent went to Sweden (Korkiasaari and Söderling 2004: 1). In the 1960's and early 70's, the heydays of *Gastarbeiter*-programs in the rapid-growing economies of Western Europe, Finland still had a significant net emigration of workers. Only in the period between 1968-70, 100.000 Finns emigrated to Sweden.

In the beginning of the 1980's, there was a short period of domestic labour-shortage, but returning Finnish migrants from Sweden largely filled in these gaps. Indeed, Finland has got a comparatively high percentage of return-migration, with approximately half of the emigrants returning. Until the end of the 1980's, 85% of all immigration to Finland was actually return-migration (Korkiasaari and Söderling 2004). The economic recession from the late 1980's again put the Finnish labour-market in a situation of a large domestic surplus of workers. In the beginning of the 1990's the number of the unemployed in Finland numbered half a million, or almost 20 % of the labour force.

Not until the late 1990's has there occurred a consistent period of labour-shortage in many fields of business (Heikkilä and Korhonen 2002: 4, Tanner 2004).

A comparison between the histories of Finland, Germany and Sweden

As we have seen, Bartram explains the Finnish anomaly by pointing to their special labour-market mode and independent civil servants. Why is it then that Sweden, with an equally high degree of regulation and independent civil servants (Dølvik et. al. 2005), did have a period of labour import, and currently has an immigrant population of more than five percent (Wallenius 2001: 61). In order to answer this question, I will now turn to a short comparison between the labour market histories of Finland, Germany and Sweden. Germany is incorporated because it is a prime example of a labour-importing country, through its large-scale *Gastarbeiter*-programs in the 1960's and early 70's.

Korkiasaari and Söderling (2004) describes a situation of disparities in economic structures, income levels and social security systems within the Nordic coun-

tries in the 1950's and 60's. In particular, the level of economic development was much lower in Finland than in the other Scandinavian countries. The Swedish labour market was oiled by the car-manufacturing industry that demanded a great number of low-skilled labourers. Moreover, there were no legal barriers to moving because of the Nordic Common Labour Market.

Korkiasaari and Söderling (2004[2]) also points to the unemployment rates in Finland as an explanation to the high emigration. As the Finnish level of unemployment is central to the discussion of this essay, an elaboration on this topic is needed. If one looks at the unemployment statistics alone, it can seem surprising that the Finnish researchers emphasise the unemployment as an important reason for emigration, because the statistics does not tell a story of particularly high unemployment (Figure 1).

From figure 1, we can see that the average unemployment in the period 1960-1979 sure enough was significantly higher than in the cases of Germany and Sweden, but still not higher than just above 3%. But together with the significant out-migration from Finland in the same period, the situation changes character. There was a major emigration-wave from the mid-1960's, and as mentioned above, in the period between 1968-70 alone, a total of 100.000 Finns emigrated to Sweden, most of whom were young people moving for better employment-opportunities. 100.000 workers would be around 5% of the Finnish work-force at the time, and therefore comprised a significant ease on the unemployment in Finland. In the same period, Sweden had an average inflow of just below 40.000 immigrants annually (Statistics Sweden 2005), most of whom were labour-migrants incorporated into the labour-force. The employers in West-Germany experienced a persistent labour-shortage at the time. Kindleberger (1967: 35) describes a situation in West Germany were the percentage of 'firms stating that production was hindered by a lack of labour' averaged approximately half of the firms in the period between 1960-1970. These numbers tells the story that the situation in the Finnish labour market in the period was significantly different from that of Sweden and Germany. The numbers of unemployment and emigration put together also explains how Korkiasaari and Söderling (2004) can use the "…widespread unemployment…" as an important factor in explaining the high out-migration of the period.

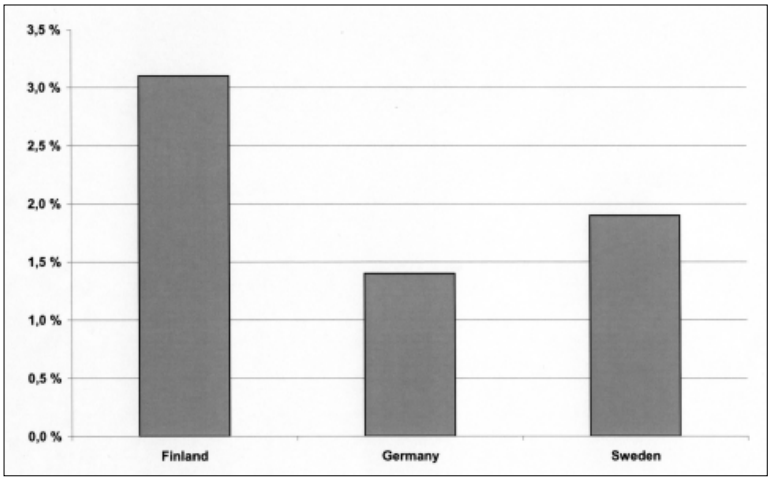

Figure 1. Average unemployment 1960-1979, Eurostat definition. (European Commision 2005)

A structural, or a historical perspective to explain the case of Finland?

Bartram introduces the special power-structures of the 'developmental state' of Finland when explaining the low import of labour. On the grounds of the historical comparison above, I will now return to the question why Sweden, with a similar labour-market structure, has nevertheless chosen (or been forced) to import labour?

Summarized, Finnish labour market history has been one of unemployment and high rates of emigration. I will argue that a continuous situation of emigration and unemployment will lead to a political climate where the employers' arguments for labour-import are weaker and more easily opposed by the public opinion. This because the workers' and trade unions' demands to protect the domestic labour-market are reflecting the views of a more numerous and politically influential group. Bartram touches on the high unemployment-rates as

well, but dismisses this as a valid counter-argument when saying that "…it is not at all uncommon for countries with high unemployment to host foreign workers" (Batram 2005: 7). An example to back this statement would be Germany today (my example). As already mentioned (p 3-4), the dual labour market-theory gives a description of a process leading to a continuous need for imported cheap labour, even in times of domestic unemployment (Brox 2005). But this is a situation that exists *after* a labour market has imported labour for some time. The gist is that, in contrast to Finland, Germany and Sweden did have a significant and persistent labour-shortage *in the days of the implementation* of the *Gastarbeiter*-programs. I argue that without this persistent labour-shortage, there would not have been a political climate in Germany or Sweden that would allow the government to make the deals of importing labour.

Bartram describes a situation in Finland where the policy makers have been able to withstand the employers' demand for labour-import because of their position of relatively high power and independency of the employers. I argue here, that these relations of power between employers and policy-makers are not static, but that it changes according to the strength of the economy and the pressure on the labour-market. Labour-shortages and low levels of unemployment will lead to a situation where the employers arguments for labour import are not as easily opposed by the public opinion, and are thus weighing more heavily.

Following this argument, I would claim that in his quest to challenge the theories of migration, Bartram presents Finland as an anomaly without fully recognizing the specific history of its labour market. I therefore find his critique of the theories to be, in some respects, slightly misleading.

When criticizing neo-classical theories for their insensitivity towards border policies, he leaves out that fact that the theory regards high unemployment-rates in the receiving country to strongly affect the pull-factor in a negative sense. The theory thus contains one possible answer to the apparent anomaly of Finland, even without incorporating border-policies as a variable.

Also when criticizing the dual labour-market theory, I suggest that Bartram's explanations should be complemented with a historical analysis. The Finnish case shows us that the developmental state can withstand the pressure for labour-import under certain economical and demographical conditions. The case of Sweden suggests that when the economy is challenged with persistent labour-shortages, the employers' argument for labour-import becomes too convincing to withstand. I therefore agree with Bartram on the point that policies may have put restrictions on import of labour to Finland, but I still argue that the strength of policy-making as a determining factor of immigration is not adequately tested before the economy has faced a persistent period of labour-shortages. As we have seen, it is not until the late 1990's that there has been a consistent period of labour-shortage in many fields of business in Finland. I hold that this new situation of labour-shortage is the first real test of whether Finland actually could be used as an anomaly that seriously challenges the existing theories of migration.

This essay is not intended to criticize the full scope of Bartram's theoretical quest, but rather to argue that his use of the empirical case of Finland has to be complemented and refined by an historical analysis, if one wants to understand the absence of foreign workers in the particular case of Finland. A full-scale critique of his theories would necessarily incorporate an analysis also of the cases of Japan and Israel, which are the two other empirical cases he uses to back his theories (Bartram 2005 b). Such a task is way beyond the limits of this essay. Further, I do not hold that Bartram's theories will never fit the Finnish reality, but simply that they have not yet been adequately empirically tested. I acknowledge the uniqueness of the Scandinavian labour-market model, with its high degree of regulation and strong unions. I find Bartram's point of the strong and independent civil servants to be an interesting additional specificity of these labour-markets. I further agree with Bartram that policy-makers have had some impact on the labour-import to Finland, but I question the strength of this explanation when properly tested in a situation wit labour-shortages.

This is the situation Finland faces today, and I will now turn to a short discussion of whether the case of Finland could be expected to be an adequate empirical

case for Bartram's theories in the future.

Finland as empirical case in the future?

It is an open question whether the current combination of a fast-growing capitalist economy together with a small percentage of immigrant workers will persist. Since the late 1990's, Finland has faced the first persistent period of labour-shortage in many fields of business (Heikkilä and Korhonen 2002: 4, Tanner 2004). As most of the West-European countries, also Finland faces the challenge of an ageing population (Wallenius 2001). There is a current debate on how to meet the labour-shortages that will arise as a consequence of the retirement of the baby-boom generation of the post-war period. The Finnish government will draw up a comprehensive immigration policy programme, based on the proposition for the government's immigration policy programme that was submitted this summer (Ministry of Labour 2005). According to this proposition, work-based immigration has to be promoted in order to meet the future scantiness of labour and shortage of know-how. The Ministry of Labour calculates that the number of foreign residents will double between 2000 and 2017, which would put the foreign residents in Finland at four percent of the whole population. By 2030 foreigners are expected to number 260,000, or five percent of the population, and thus equivalent to the comparable immigrant populations of the other Nordic countries (Helsingin Sanomat 2000). Another factor that could strengthen the argument for this scenario is the accession of ten new Member States to the EU of May 2004. Because of Finland's geographical closeness to the Baltic region, where wages are up to ten times lower than the Finnish level (Dølvik et. al 2005: 7), one could expect a large inflow of workers and companies to Finland.

These predictions suggest that Finland is no longer an anomaly after facing the same conditions of labour-shortages as the other fast-growing economies did in the 1960's. Further, since the predictions come from the politicians and civil servants, the very people that Bartram argues to be the hindrances for labour import, the predictions may seem to come true.

Bartram questions whether this scenario will ever occur (2005 a: 18-19). Again, he argues that the strong and independent policy-makers might choose to use the domestic labour force more efficiently instead of importing labour to meet the shortages. I support Bartram's view that Finland may never import large numbers of immigrants, but I suggest that the reasons for this again is to be found in economic factors, in addition to the structural one's that Bartram presents.

As already mentioned, Finland is number 3 in the world in Research and Development-expenditure, and the Finnish economy is largely dependent on the companies specialising in high-tech development and design. One feature of such companies is that they are not bound to one specific geographic place, and can easily outsource the labour-intensive production to low-wage countries. Thus, instead of moving the cheap labour to the production-plant, the production is moved to the cheap labour. Outsourcing has become an option that is increasingly chosen by companies of high-wage countries that faces hard competition. Though it is hard to find statistical data on outsourcing of subcontracts from Finland to low-wage countries[3], the following numbers should give a rough sketch: employment in industry has decreased with approximately 150,000 people the last 20 years. Outsourced services taken into account, industrial employment has remained at the level of the late 1970's (Tekes 2005). The most important company for the Finnish economy, Nokia, has 50.000 employees, only half of whom are Finnish.

While the fast-growing economies in the 1960's mainly acquired low-skilled labour to the manufacturing companies positioned on the national soil, the Finnish contemporary labour-shortage is of a different nature. Many of the work-places for low-skilled workers has already been outsourced to low-wage countries, and the future need for labour is instead for educated professionals, e.g. in the areas of construction works, electronics and electricity (Heikkilä and Korhonen 2002: 4). This need for labour exists concurrently with a high rate of domestic unemployment in Finland, especially among the less educated. This indicates that the traditional labour-import of unskilled workers is not in the interest of the Finnish policy-makers. The highly educated profes-

sionals that the Finnish economy needs is of course of limited supply, also outside of the Finnish borders. Many governments has experienced that it is not easy to attract educated immigrants. I suggest that this will be even harder for the Finnish government, because of the equal distribution of wealth, and therefore lower wages for the highly skilled than in other capitalist economies, the USA among others.

If the Finnish government will have difficulties in filling the labour-shortages with immigrants, other policy-measures may be an easier solution. Among these solutions is the more effective use of the national labour-force that Bartram has described. This kind of employment management has indeed been characteristic in Finland in the 1990s (Heikkilä and Korhonen 2002). The Finnish researchers also holds this kind of effective use of the labour force as the solution on the future labour-shortages: "This also calls for the development of different telecommuting solutions and flexible job settlements as well as the adaptation of the aged labour force into labour markets in a more effective way than today" (Heikkilä and Korhonen 2002: 4).

The researchers outline of historical facts and suggestions for the future may suggest that Finland also in the future will constitute an anomaly with a strong economy without a high percentage of immigrant workers. This could imply that Bartram's challenging of the theories of migration will have an adequate empirical backing in the future. I have suggested here though, that policies on effective use of the national labour-force may not be a *free choice* that the Finnish policy-makers can *opt for*. The tough competition for high-skilled immigrants will be a factor that *pushes* the Finnish policy-makers to make the national labour-force more effective. Along the same lines, I therefore suggest that it is not only because of the policy-makers that the future percentage of immigrant workers may still be low. A parallel explanation will be the economic structure of a need for high-skilled (and thus scarce) labour, while the labour-intensive production is outsourced to low-wage countries.

Conclusion

This essay has analysed whether the current Finnish combination of a fast-growing economy concurrent with a low percentage of immigrant workers constitutes a counter-argument to the main theories of migration. It has presented Bartram's explanation of the anomaly, and his suggestion that policy-making should be given a stronger recognition in the theories of migration. While not necessarily disagreeing with Bartram's theories, I have argued, through an analysis of the Finnish labour-market history, that the case of Finland has not yet been a thorough empirical test for his theories. This history differs significantly from other fast-growing capitalist economies, exemplified in this essay by Sweden and Germany. In the 1960's and early 70's, Sweden and Germany had very low unemployment and a concurrent need for unskilled labour. The political climate was therefore positive for the introduction of large labour-import schemes. In the same period, Finland had a comparatively higher degree of unemployment, and the pressure on the labour-market was eased through high rates of emigration.

Later, half of these emigrants have returned, and helped labour-shortages in the early 1980's. I have argued that these differences in domestic needs and supply of labour can explain why Sweden, with a similar labour-market mode to Finland, has still chosen to import labour.

On these grounds, I have argued that Finland may well be an anomaly, but not merely because of the strong and independent policy-makers. Economic factors will affect the power-relations of the industrial relations in a labour-market, and must be seen as strong complementary explanations. The Finnish history of unemployment and high rates of emigration is thus held to be an explanation as important as the structural explanation that Bartram gives. Along the lines of this argument, Finland does not constitute an anomaly that fundamentally challenges the theories of migration, because they contain within them the possible explanations. Neo-classical theory does not predict large-scale immigration to a country without any need for extra labour. Dual labour market theory describes a process leading to the formation of a segmented labour market, because the employers will use their powers to open the borders for labour import. The employers' arguments for import will be far more powerful in times of labour-shortages, and the power-relations of

the Finnish labour-market has not yet been tested in such a climate.

My arguments do not intend to fully falsify Bartram's use of Finland as an empirical example that challenges the theories of migration, but merely to question the strength of the case. I argue that the case of Finland would have been a much challenge to the theories, if it had already faced a persistent period of labour-shortage. Such a situation has not occurred in Finland until the late 1990's, and I therefore argue that the solutions to the current situation is the first real test on whether the Finnish policy-makers and civil servants are capable of withstanding a strong pressure towards import.

The Finnish civil servants themselves have in official prognoses expected that the Finnish immigrant-population will be on level with the Scandinavian countries after 30 years, and thus that Finland will follow the pattern of the other fast-growing economies when facing labour-shortages. Together with Bartram, I have questioned the necessity of this scenario, but in a slightly different way than him. Bartram describes a situation where the Finnish policy-makers can choose between labour-import and more efficient use of the national labour force. I have argued that import of labour may not be a possible solution to Finland's future labour shortages, because they are in shortage of highly skilled immigrants, not the low-skilled ones traditionally needed in fast-growing industrial economies. These high-skilled immigrants are highly attractive also for other economies, and Finland's comparatively low wages for high-skilled personnel may not be attractive for the immigrants. I therefore again suggest that the economical structure is an explanation as powerful as that of the policy-makers actions. If Finland's low percentage of immigrant workers persists into the future, I suggest that this could again be explained by economic factors, and thus that Finland may never become an anomaly that fundamentally challenges the existing theories of migration.

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Footnotes

[1] If including only non-western workers in the cathegory, less than one percent of the Finnish labour-force are 'foreign workers'. For a more comprehensive discussion of these number, see (Bartram 2005 a: 2-5)

[2] This web-report is not page-numbered, and quotes from it will thus not have page-numbers in this essay either.

[3] Finland statistics wrote me in an e-mail on 07.11.2005, saying that they could not provide the data I asked for.

[4] The paper has been published in French: 'Une absence remarquée: Pourquoi si peu de travailleurs étrangers en Finlande?' *Migrations Société* 17-102.

MEV-seminaari Siirtolaisuusinstituutissa

Muuttoliikkeen ja etnisyystutkimuksen (MEV) seminaari pidettiin keskiviikkona 19.4.2006 Siirtolaisuusinstituutissa.
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(Kuva: Jouni Korkiasaari)