

Social, Historical and Archival Aspects of the Finnish Immigration to Michigan

Three aspects can be seen in the migration (and immigration) process. In this connection the social, regional and individual dimensions can be separated.

Figure 1. The dimensions of migration

Dimensions	Migration from Finland to USA (1880-1914)	Migration from Finland to Sweden (1950-1970)
1. Social dimension	Industrialization	Urbanization
2. Regional dimension	Ostrobothnia	Espec. North Finland
3. Individual dimension	Young tenant farmers	Baby-boom age groups

Above-mentioned dimensions are firmly related to the different historical time periods. This is very important to remember when we look at the Finnish emigration during the last century.

The Finnish emigration which has happened after 1880 can be divided into two periods: that is, the emigration before and after World War II. During the first period, the most important goal for emigrants was North America, especially the USA. Altogether about 420,000 migrants were involved in this overseas movement. In Finland one of



This article is based on a paper presented on May 20, 1987 by Ismo Söderling at the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, where he has been a visiting scholar for a year.

the most important factors in this connection was the change in the social structure caused by industrialization. Of course, the American pull factors were also needed; there was a great demand of labor here at the same time.

The emigration from Finland to Sweden had its peak in 1960's, and the main reason

for this immigration wave was the urbanization of our society. The Finnish society could not provide work to all young people, and therefore, the emigration from Finland to Sweden was extensive and uncontrolled. The majority of this youth emigration consisted of so called baby-boom age groups: after WW II the fertility was almost double in Finland. The places of origin of this emigration were concentrated mostly in the Northern and Eastern parts of Finland.

The Finnish immigration to the USA.

The immigration peaks in most European countries took place during short time intervals, which were connected to the industrialization processes of these countries. Since this process reached Sweden about 20 years earlier than Finland, the peak of Swedish immigration to the USA took place appr. 1880 and from Finland around the turn of the century. If we take a closer look at this Finnish-American migration, the following social, regional and individual aspects are to be found.

- The Finnish forest industry was founded in the late 19th century. It means that the landowners got better profits from growing forest than renting land to tenant farmers. Emigration offered a possibility for better level of living for those people who could not get work in the Finnish industry.
- Our industrialization did not take place in the same way in all of Finland: the western part of our country, Ostrobothnia, did not have water power or forests, that is why this part of the country was outside the industrialization process. However, Ostrobothnia had traditionally, during the 19th century, been a wealthy part of our country, and therefore, the emigration gave a good opportunity to keep the former level of living or even improve it.
- During the industrialization, the fertility

of Finnish population was still high, and because the mortality was declining all the time, some rural areas were soon overcrowded. Emigration (immigration from the US point of view) provided also in such cases a splendid way to solve to some degree this overpopulation problem.

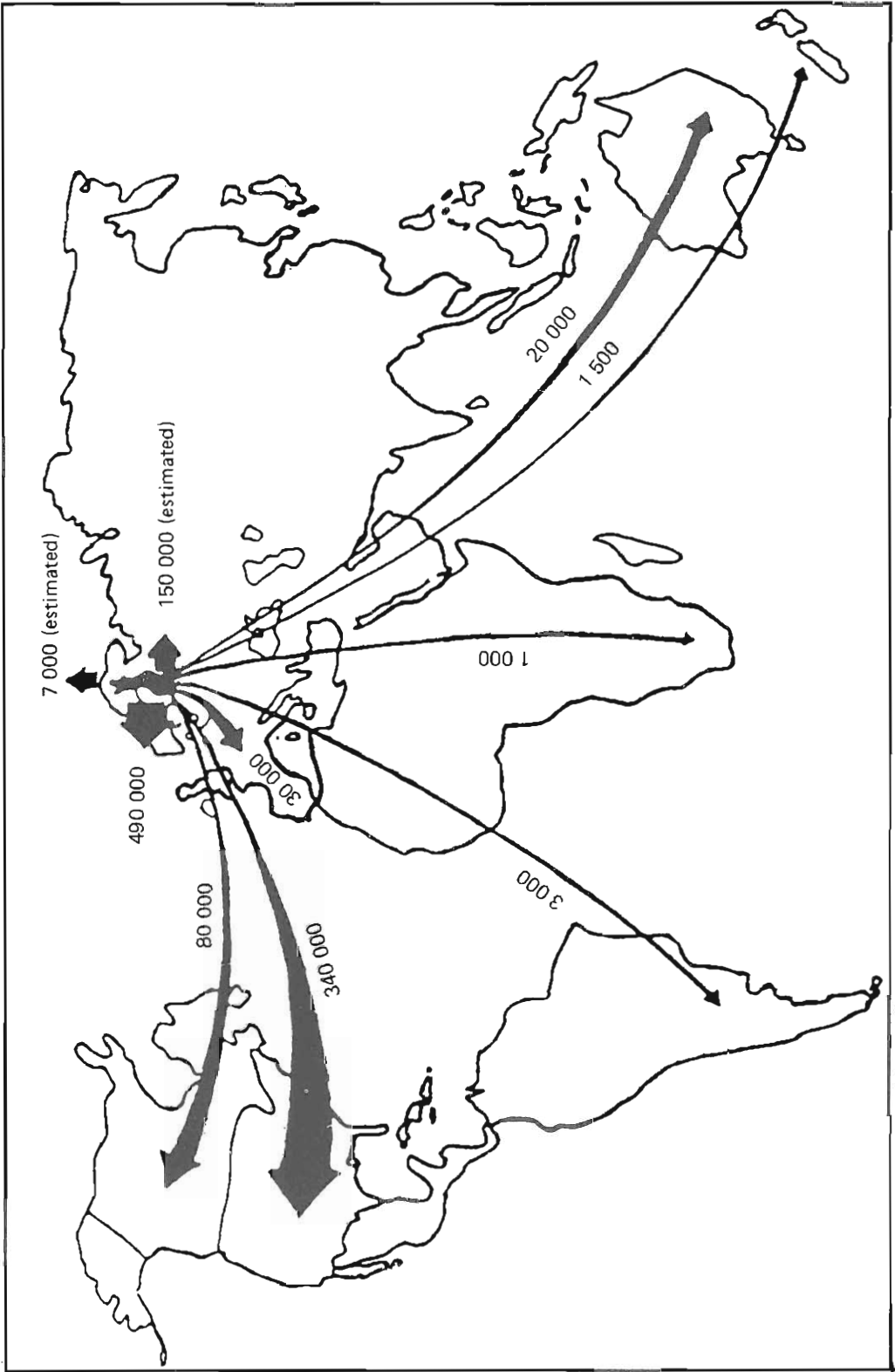
- The individual reasons for migration are highly related to the before mentioned social and regional dimensions. Of course there existed also individual migration, which was hardly connected to this kind of dimensional thinking. For example, in the beginning of this century thousands of young men left Finland, because they didn't want to be drafted into the Russian army.

The places of origin of immigration were concentrated, as mentioned earlier, in the same provinces of Finland, mostly in Ostrobothnia. This kind of local centralization is to be seen also in American side. For example, Mass City, Ironwood, Marquette etc. got their Finnish settlers from very restricted areas in Finland. Michigan was the most important state in the US for Finnish immigration: about 70 000 Finns came here during 1880-1914. The Swedish immigration had a different geographical goals: it happened about 20 years earlier and during those days, there was still a lot of good farming land left, for example, in the Minnesota valley. Also the development of New York and Chicago was attracting many Swedes to these cities. During the Finnish immigration flows, the best farming areas and industrial works were not at hand anymore.

The polarization of the Finnish immigrants in USA

The majority of the Finnish settlers located in the underdeveloped and isolated mining areas of Michigan. These socio-geographical phenomena connected to the heavy mining works were also the beginning of the Finnish

EMIGRATION FROM FINLAND UNTIL 1982



Source: Siirtolaisuusinstituutin tutkimuspoliittinen ohjelma vuosille 1986-1990. Tutkimuksia no 2/1984, s. 12.

radicalism in this state. The role of the Finns as strikers and rioters in Upper Michigan in the beginning of this century is well known. Afterwards, the reasons of these phenomena are easy to understand. This state was not the promised land to all Finnish settlers: work for 10-11 hours per day, for six days a week in hot and dangerous mines made many Finns very open to socialistic and socialdemocratic ideas. There are, of course, also other reasons for this political radicalism: Finland was at that time a part of Russia, and all kinds of political movements were illegal there. That is why there were many political refugees who left Finland for America for a while. These people had a big effect on the Finnish society.

It has to be remembered that there was also opposition to radicalism. Almost 95 % of the Finnish population were and are Lutherans. The Finnish Lutheran Church had their representatives in the immigration areas. Often these priests represented the most conservative part of the Finnish Lutheran Church. Generally, the Finnish society, especially here in Michigan, was highly divided into political radicalism and religious conservatism. In some local areas this split is still disturbing the relations of 3rd and 4th generation Finns.

Migration research made in Finland

Migration research is very active in Finland today. Because the main emigration flow from Finland to Sweden took place in the late 1960's, the majority of our research is connected to this phenomenon and often has the nature of social sciences. Because the Finnish-American immigration took place earlier, the historians have made the main part of the research in this field. The other reason for the great proportion of historians is perhaps the low profile of the immigration policy in the US. USA has often been called the melting pot in which ethnicity has not been a very popular political, social or scientific theme of discussions, and this reason has decreased the interest

of Finnish social scientists towards this particular immigration.

The gap between social and historic sciences within migration research is decreasing: historians have learned more and more so called sociological methods. On the other hand, social scientists understand better today, that knowing the future means understanding the past. Such researchers who have broader scientific fields will, of course, also present new challenges to archives. Also the fact that immigration research will be, in the future, based more on larger data materials will present new demands to both the archives and archival staff.

The following research needs connected with the migration between Finland and USA concern archives (this discussion is related only to the Finnish immigration to Michigan).

- The basic immigration process from Finland to the USA is very well known in Finland because of the several theses made at the Turku University. Migration information by state or counties is rare; therefore, we need federal and state census information from the USA. This research task is mainly statistical.
- We don't know enough about the life of the second, third or fourth generation Finns. The most important and interesting questions are: what is the role, position and geographical location of the descendants of the first generation Finns. The need of oral history material and different kinds of organizational records is great.
- Linguistic immigration research has just been started in Finland. This is the field that should be very important in the near future. The number of the first generation Finns is decreasing all the time. It can be estimated, that we have only this decade left for collecting the oral material among these Finns.
- The fourth research need concerning the Finns is related to the modern immigration. The USA has restricted immigration strongly, but despite that, every year about 300-500 people move from Fin-

land to the USA. The character of this immigration is unknown: what are the basic reasons for this migration, the occupations and assimilations processes of migrants etc.

Finnish-American immigration and archives

The governmental administration has longer traditions in Finland, and thus our archival system today is a result of a longer process as compared to the USA. It can also be assumed, that the American discussion concerning the centralization and standardization of archival work is no longer a question of the day in Finland. The most important issue is the function of archives or collections. There are no great differences between our systems; the challenges for future to the archives are common regardless of the archival system in question.

The financial and organizational differences between the archival systems of our countries have led to different methods for collecting and preserving the ethnic heritage. It has been estimated, that about 5 000 organizations perform this kind of work in addition to professional archives here in the US. In Finland the emigration material has been collected mainly by the National Archives and by six provincial archives (which work under the National Archives). Also our main universities and the Institute of Migration have archives on this topic. However, the amount of collections in Finland is proportionally low.

In the US the Finnish immigration collections are mainly concentrated into two archives: Immigration Historical Research Center of St. Paul has maybe the largest and many-sided collections. The Finnish-American Historical Archives in Hancock has also a large collection. The material connected to the farmers and workers are rather limited in Hancock.

Outside the essential immigration archives the Bentley Historical Library has also material on Finnish immigration. This

material forms only a small proportion of its collections. However, though the proportion is small, the quality and quantity of this material is high.

It is to be expected, that the popularity of immigration material in archives will expand in the near future. The following reasons should promote this phenomenon:

- The ethnicity and migration policy have become more important recently, also in the USA. This will evidently attract researchers and students from new sciences. In Michigan it would mean that the interest towards Black, Hispanic and Indian collections should increase. In Finland, for example the refugee questions are becoming more important.
- The Western Countries are just now living in the so-called information age. Producing, transferring and analysing information is becoming more and more important and easier. Today, we can already transmit copies of documents to the other side of the world in a few seconds. This kind of work will become in some years more popular. It helps the national and also international co-operation. It would mean also, that the lower proportion of the archival reference work will be made on reference desk.
- The third factor which will expand the popularity of the immigration collections of the archives is the longer holidays, especially in Nordic Countries. More leisure time gives people a possibility to search for new activities. In Nordic countries the six or even seven week annual vacation is common and the need for meaningful past time is hard to find. Perhaps genealogy therefore, will be one of the fastest growing activities in the Institute of Migration, Turku.

Conclusions

The need for large immigration data bases and computer files is greater in the near future. On the other hand, immigration is

an international phenomenon; it always takes place between two countries. In many cases the researchers should work in both countries. This kind of research work usually needs a lot of time and money. Therefore international co-operation among archives is very important. The Nordic Countries are planning a common immigration research data bank and computer network; this kind of international co-operation is much needed.

Since USA was formerly, especially before WW II, not in favor of ethnic collections, this gap should be filled. For example, the immigration newspapers and oral histories should be important objects of collecting.

If we want to develop effectively the archival contributions made by Finnish-Americans, the old borders between different immigrant groups should be forgotten.