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## Civic Participation of Estonian Immigrants in Finland

### ABSTRACT

Citizens of Estonia are the largest and the fastest growing group of foreign permanent residents in Finland (in 2015, their number was 50,367). There is also an unknown number of people whose residence in practice has become permanent, but who are registered as temporary residents or not registered at all. The article deals with the Estonian immigrants' participation in civil society organizations. It provides an overview of Estonian related associations in Finland, based on data from the Finnish Patent and Registry Office. They include friendship, ethnic, contact and charitable associations. Another research material analysed was gathered in 2011 and consists of an electronic survey (N = 336) and five group interviews (N = 25). The Estonian immigrants tend to preserve close contacts with their country of origin. At the same time, their integration, even assimilation with the majority is relatively fast. They have no dense network of ethnic organisations. Finnish-Estonian friendship associations initiated by native Finns are however numerous, and reach many of the Estonian immigrants also. The group is internally heterogeneous; membership in voluntary associations grows more frequent with age, education and time of residence in Finland. The group is also illustrative of a recent change of migration patterns in Europe, which include less permanent residency and more circulatory movement by transnational migrants. These and other reasons for the relative absence of ethnic-cultural organising are discussed.

# Civic Participation of Estonian Immigrants in Finland

## Introduction

Estonians are the largest, and since the 2000s, the fastest growing group of foreign citizens with registered permanent residence in Finland.<sup>1</sup> Since Estonia's membership in the European Union 2004 and the opening of the Finnish labour market for people from Estonia in 2006, work has become the most important reason for their immigration (Sisäasiainministeriö 2010:15-16). By 2015, the number of permanently resident Estonian citizens had reached 50,367 (cf. also Lagerspetz 2014); the growth from 10,839 in 2000 was nearly five-fold. Additionally, 6,180 naturalised Finnish citizens are former Estonian citizens or have a double citizenship (according to information from Statistics Finland, [http://www.stat.fi/index\\_en.html](http://www.stat.fi/index_en.html)). However, there are also an unknown number of people whose residence in practice has become permanent, but who are still registered as temporary residents or not as residents at all (Helander & al. 2016; Alastalo & al. 2016, 76-77).

In comparison with the size of the populations of both countries, the figures above are already fairly dramatic as such (and even more so considering the short time period). However, even other, much larger numbers are sometimes suggested. In 2012 Rain Ots, chairperson of the Estonians' Union in Finland (*Soome Eestlaste Liit*) estimated the real number of Estonians in Finland close to 100,000. In his written opinion to the Finnish Ministry of Justice's inquiry regarding the realization of immigrants' linguistic rights, he points out, that... (Ots 2012, my translation)

[t]he Estonians' employment contracts are often temporary, and many work without written contract and live for years in a dormitory accommodation provided by the employer. [...] Often, a permanent employment contract is a condition for becoming registered as a permanent resident by the magistrate. Also, the payment required for the registration is considered high by many of those who have recently moved to Finland and who do not perceive that it brings them any concrete benefits.

Developing further the issue of linguistic rights he argues, that...

Estonian speakers should be guaranteed the same kinds of possibilities to participate in society and decision making as enjoyed by the Roma and the Sámi speakers. Ideally, the Estonian speakers would have a national representative body whose opinion would be taken into account on issues concerned with them. [...] Whether [the second generation of Estonians in Finland] will become marginalised or develop into a successful, respected and self-confident minority such as the Swedish speaking Finns, is much dependent on the respect and attention they receive from the Finnish society.

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<sup>1</sup> Finland had in 2015 the total of 230,000 permanent residents with foreign citizenship. In addition, 95,658 people held dual citizenship. In Finnish population statistics, people are classified by citizenship, place of birth, and recorded mother tongue – not by, e.g., ethnicity. The figures in the text refer to citizenship, and differ from those on mother tongue and place of birth. Many Estonian citizens' mother tongue is Russian, and not all immigrants arriving from Estonia are Estonian citizens. The largest group of residents with other registered mother tongue than Finnish or Swedish are the Russian speakers (in 2015, their number was 72,436. The number of people with Estonian as registered mother tongue was 48,087).

Here, the Estonian immigrant activist refers to Finland's "old" minorities as self-evident examples to follow.<sup>2</sup> The vision is compatible with a multiculturalist model, which has deep roots in Finland. The possibility of expanding some cultural rights now enjoyed by the autochthonous minorities to cover immigrant minorities too is in fact, since the early 2000s, a part of Finland's official immigrant integration policies (Finland s.a.).

However, some more recent developments can be seen as challenging the multiculturalist model. The example of the Estonians working in Finland is also illustrative of fundamental changes of migration patterns in Europe especially since the EU's eastward enlargements of the 2000s. The previously dominating permanent one-way migration is being replaced by short-term, circulatory movement across borders – forwards, backwards, and towards next destinations (Wallace 2002, 604). Cross-border mobility has become less predictable and also more difficult to monitor by state agencies. Instead of permanent settlement followed by integration and a degree of cultural assimilation, more complex and transitional patterns of mobility have emerged. Engbersen, Snel and de Boom (2010) call these patterns "liquid migration", paraphrasing a term coined by Zygmunt Bauman in 1999. The Estonian immigrants tend to preserve close contacts with their country of origin, as shown by patterns of media and cultural consumption (Lagerspetz 2011).

The two quotations above from an immigrant activist set the tenor of this article. Are the Estonians in Finland on their way of developing into an established ethnic or linguistic minority – in the way presupposed by the multiculturalist model of integration? Do they participate in civil society organizations (CSOs) in order to make their voice heard? Or, given the transitional character of the position of many of them in Finnish society, is it plausible that they do? Is it even desired by them? Obviously, these questions are relevant from the perspectives of both integration and democracy.

The present article focuses Estonians in Finland as an "ethnic" group, i.e., as persons who are the potential targets of "minority building" on the basis of their subjectively perceived ethnicity. Most of them are Estonian citizens whose mother tongue is Estonian; however, the group also includes Finnish citizens with Estonian mother tongue or with close family ties to Estonia; and also many of those who have registered their mother tongue as Finnish but have emigrated from Estonia.<sup>3</sup> However, Russian speaking immigrants from Estonia – be they Estonian citizens, Russian or other citizens, or stateless – are in many ways in a different situation, and are mostly not included in the group (cf. Anniste & Tammaru 2014). The issues at stake are addressed with the help of the Finnish Patent and Registry Office's data on organizations, an online survey (N = 336) and five group interviews (N = 25) conducted in 2011.

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<sup>2</sup> Constitutionally, the Sámi and Roma are treated as minorities, but the Swedish speakers as part of the majority, who speak one of the two national languages. Statistically, the Swedish speakers are a minority of around 6% of the population.

<sup>3</sup> See fn. 4 below!

## **Immigrants' participation in civil society organizations**

Civil Society – a much-debated concept in Western social thought – is sometimes, but not always, seen as equivalent with the “Third Sector”, i.e., a sphere of non-governmental, non-profit associations, separate from both the government, the businesses, and the family. Another view of the concept is wider, almost equalling it with democracy. In any case, the legally secured existence of such a sphere is a precondition of Civil Society in the wider sense, as it functions as a guarantee against the domination of government or business interests over the rest of society (Gellner 1994/1996, esp. 5-12; 189; 193). Independently of any theoretical dispute, we can state that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are a precondition of Civil Society. Historically, the organisations have in Western Europe taken the forms of foundations and voluntary associations. To which extent citizens participate in them, and who does and who does not, can be signs of both the ability of democratic rule to function (Putnam 1993), and of the social capital of different population groups.

In Western Europe, immigrants' participation in CSOs is generally on a lower level than it is among the majority population (Vogel 2008, 17). Factors possibly influencing their activity range from those on the individual level (such as personality, resources and networks) to the opportunity structures of the host society (both general and immigrant specific) (ibid., 24). Also cultural factors play a role, when participation in formal organizations is no common practice in their countries of origin. Immigrants may instead prefer informal local networking (Mantovan 2006) or participation in internet based transnational communities (e.g., Juntunen 2009).

In Finland and Scandinavia, the registered association is the most common form of CSOs; associations are many, membership is frequent, and they enjoy a well-established position in society (Alapuro 2010, 13). Previous research has not found dramatic differences in organizational membership between the majority population and immigrants who have lived in Finland for 3 to 5 years. Among the immigrants surveyed by the Immigrant Barometer of the Ministry of the Interior (Sisäasiainministeriö 2010, 33-34), 49% were members of at least one association or organization, corresponding to 52% among the whole population. However, there were differences between immigrants and the whole population as to the types of organization in which they participated. While 23% of the whole population participated in sports associations – the most popular type of associations in Finland –, only 7% of the responding immigrants did so. 14% were members of an immigrant association or an association concerned with the culture of their country of origin. There are also clear differences between immigrants of different nationalities. A comparison between 20 to 64 year-old residents of Somali, Russian, Estonian and Vietnamese origin in the Helsinki metropolitan area (Joronen 2009, 92) showed that the Somalis were the group who most frequently participated in hobby activities organized by their co-nationals, while the Estonians were the ones who most often participated in those organized by the majority population.

Associations targeting an immigrant group of a specific ethnicity or immigrants in general, have in Finland been researched upon by, e.g., Pyykkönen (2007) and Saksela-Bergholm (2009; Saksela 2003). Pyykkönen (2007, 20-21, my translation) characterizes the first type of associations as ones “making claims on an immigrant's right to acknowledged cultural membership in his or her ethnic community, and on the right to collective membership in the

enviroming society of the culture it represents”. Comparing the sizes of different immigrant groups and the number of associations created by each group he notes, that such activity by those who have entered the country as refugees, such as the Somalis, is several times higher than by labour migrants (ibid, 72). Similarly, Saksela (2003, 252) identifies the Somalis as the immigrant group with the highest density of ethnic organizations. The activists of immigrant organizations interviewed by Pyykkönen (2007, 72) offer two kinds of explanations for the activity of refugees in establishing associations. Partly, there are often easily recognizable differences between them and the majority population as to their culture and even to their visual appearance, which contributes to a feeling of otherness and estrangement; also, it reduces their access to existing networks (which, possibly, points at discriminatory practices by the majority population). Ethnic organizations offer a safe haven and a substitute for other networks unavailable; we could call this the compensatory function of such organizations. Another explanation refers to the fact that many of the refugees have become that exactly because they are organizationally active, and had been it already in their country of origin.

In contrast, those immigrating either for work or for family reasons possess an entry into the Finnish society already at their arrival, be it through family relations or through employment. An interesting intermediate case are the so-called return migrants, the Ingrian Finns<sup>4</sup> who arrived to Finland in the early 1990s from Estonia and Russia, after that their Finnish ancestry had been recognized by authorities as the kind of “specific bond with Finland” to be taken into account when granting residence permits (cf. Forsander 1999). Despite their official status as foreign-born ethnic Finns, their actual command of Finnish was often poor, and the residence permit did not bring along with it any prospect of employment. Both Saksela-Bergholm and Pyykkönen mention the Ingrian Finns as a group prone to establish ethnic associations.

For the labour and family migrants, ethnic organizations are less needed for their “compensatory function”, at least after the initial period of their stay in Finland. However, the organizations also provide a space for contacts with people with the same cultural and linguistic background, and for the affirmation and active development of a cultural identity – i.e., the functions necessary for the “minority building” referred to in the previous section, and in the quotation in the introduction to this paper.

### **Estonian related civil society organizations in Finland**

The Finnish Patent and Registry Office maintains excellent records on voluntary associations. The first entries in the registry date back to 1919 (Siisiäinen, 2002: 9), and it has functioned uninterrupted until today. Presently, around 135,000 organizations are registered as active. A registered association, unlike an unregistered or informal one, is a legal entity allowed to make economic transactions and to enter contractual relations with, e.g., other associations, businesses, a municipality or the state. The process of legal registration includes scrutiny of the association’s goals and by-laws as to their conformity with the law, and with “good manners” (26.5.1989/503, §1). Consequently, the registered association is also treated as a responsible actor which can be

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<sup>4</sup> The Ingrian Finns are descendants of 17th century settlers from Finland to the area which later became the St. Petersburg region. According to border treaties with Russia in 1920 and later, due to evacuation and forced resettlement during and after the Second World War, many of them came to live in Estonia.

consulted when making decisions on a specific area of interest. In his study on immigrant organizing in the Finnish cities of Tampere and Jyväskylä, Pyykkönen (2007, 33f.) identified 29 and 34 immigrant associations, respectively, out of which 27 and 26, respectively, were registered. Although it is possible to function as an association without being registered, there are several practical reasons for filing a registration – especially if the goals of the association reach beyond mere leisure activities.

In the Association Registry, immigrant organizations or those related to a specific country are not classified separately. Nevertheless, the registry's website ([www.prh.fi](http://www.prh.fi)) enables searches based on the association's name, location, date of registering, registry status, etc. With the help of prior knowledge, information from umbrella organizations' websites, and name searches<sup>5</sup> from the registry, I have been able to trace down 145 voluntary associations focusing Estonia or Estonians. However, at least 58 of them appear to be disbanded, or in the process of becoming that (November 2016). They had either started the registering procedure but not fulfilled it; filed a statement of disbandment; were included in the Announcement by the Patent and Registry Office of 10 August, 2016 on prospective compulsory disbandment of inactive associations (Oikeusrekisterikeskus 2016); or were inactive by the following criteria (cf. Sundblom 2016): they had not filed any announcement to the Registry after 1997 (on matters such as changes of Board members, by-laws, address etc.), and had not either any activity traceable in the internet during the 2010s. The total number of presently active associations identified by this method is 87; the activity of some might be minimal, but on the other hand, some additional ones may have fallen out of the scope my searches.

The historically first associations related to Estonia seem to have been registered in the 1930s, but the seven pre-WWII organizations mentioned by the registry were all disbanded after the war. In the early 1960s, the Finnish-Soviet friendship society (SNS) established a branch in charge of relations with Estonia (Lehtonen 2013) – obviously the same that in 1981 filed a registration application as Finland-Estonia Association (*Suomi-Eesti yhdistys*) and is now among the ones to be disbanded as inactive. The next registry announcement filed was that in 1982 by the Tuglas Society (*Tuglas-Seura*), which has since played an important and well-recognised role in the cultural and, before Estonia's independence, even the political relations between the two countries (Rausmaa 2013). The next two registry entries are from 1988, and they are the first in a wave of new associational activity. Simultaneously with Estonia's Singing Revolution of 1987-1991 and its first years of renewed independence, organizations mushroomed. A total of 17 organizations were registered already during the 1980s, and a further 72 in the 1990s. Since then, the pace has slowed down, with the registration of 28 new organizations initiated in the 2000s and 21 in the 2010s (see Table 1a-b).

Saksela (2003) makes a distinction between *ethnic organizations*, which unite persons of the same ethnic origin; and multicultural, friendship, and solidarity associations. Multicultural and solidarity associations unite people with different cultural backgrounds and provide support for the immigrants. Rather than on the immigrants, *friendship associations* focus on furthering cultural contacts between two countries (ibid, 280, fn. 4). In the present screening of associations focusing Estonia or Estonians in Finland, both friendship and ethnic associations are clearly

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<sup>5</sup> The search words used were: baltia, baltikum, eesti, eestla(ne/sed), estland, estonia, selts, ühing, viro, and the names of major Estonian cities. Hits with no obvious connection to Estonia were omitted.

distinguishable. For a classification of the remaining ones, two other types are suggested: *contact associations* – those mediating contacts and information between the two countries on a specific field (such as commerce, postage stamps or Baroque music); and *charitable* ones – those organizing humanitarian aid (to orphanages, hospitals etc.). No clear-cut borders between the types exist – an association can fulfil several functions, and they may change over time. Each organization was classified in some of the four categories on the basis of information available on its website or other sites in the internet; or, that lacking, by its name. Table 1a-b shows the types of associations founded and presently active, by the year of their filing of registry application (mostly (but not always) later followed by registration).

**Table 1. Estonian-related associations which have filed a registration application to the Patent and Registry Office, all associations and those active in 2016**

**a) All associations, by type and year of application**

Association type	Founded					Total, all associations
	< 1980	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-2009	2010-2016	
ethnic	3	-	4	8	10	25
friendship	2	11	44	11	7	75
contact	2	4	13	3	2	24
charitable	-	2	11	6	2	21
Total	7	17	72	28	21	145

**b) Associations active in 2016, by type and year of application**

Association type	Founded					Total, surviving associations	% of survival
	< 1980	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-2009	2010-2016		
ethnic	-	-	1	7	8	16	64
friendship	-	9	30	5	7	51	68
contact	-	1	9	2	1	13	54
charitable	-	1	2	3	1	7	33
Total	-	11	42	17	15	87	60

Two associations claim the status of umbrella organizations: the Union of Finnish-Estonian Friendship Societies (*Suomen Viro-yhdistysten liitto; SVYL*), and the Union of Estonians in Finland (*Suomen virolaisten liitto; Soome Eestlaste Liit, SEL*). However, the majority of existing associations are members in none of them. The Union of Estonians in Finland attempts to unite what we call ethnic organizations. The Union explicitly states on its website, that the members should be “Estonians living in Finland” (SEL 2016), but it gives no list of the member organizations. The SVYL counts 35 friendship associations as its members (SVYL 2016).

The ethnic, or immigrant associations mostly signal their target group by their name, or by providing information mainly in Estonian. Nine former ethnic associations have been effectively disbanded. Of the 16 currently active Estonian ethnic organizations, one (*Eesti Selts* in



Lappeenranta) was established in 1993, seven in the 2000s, and a further eight in the 2010s. Eight are active in Helsinki, and the rest in other cities.

A majority (51) of all presently active associations consists, however, of friendship associations (a further 24 have ended their activities). Even if 19 of them are registered in Helsinki, the remaining ones are spread over all parts of the country – cities, towns, and even some rural municipalities. The real number of those active rurally is probably somewhat larger, as some of them deal primarily with relations between certain friendship municipalities and congregations, and their names were not reached by the registry searches for this article. A typical friendship society addresses all those interested in Estonia, its culture and language, and living in a certain locality. The Boards, judged on the basis of their members' names, consist of predominantly or exclusively of native Finns. Among the friendship societies, the Tuglas Society mentioned above is the most well established, with around 3,000 fee-paying members (Salokannel 2012). The society receives financial support from the government and employs four full-time and one part-time staff, in addition to language teachers working on temporary contracts. The society is the first tenant in the Estonian cultural centre that functions in Helsinki since 2010. The Estonian Cultural Institute, the foundation Enterprise Estonia, and the SVYL are located in the centre as subtenants. The yearly event *Mardilaat* (St. Martin's Fair) presenting Estonian culture and handicraft in Helsinki is organized by the Tuglas Society. In 2011, it received 19,000 guests (Salokannel 2012).

The two remaining types of association – contact and charitable associations – were less numerous, and the share of disbanded and inactive ones was high. Even many of those which are counted here as still existing, have no internet presence from recent years. The present number of existing contact associations is 13, and a further 11 were inactive or disbanded. Their oldest known year of foundation is 1933 (the Finnish Branch of Finnish-Hungarian-Estonian Medical Society, now inactive). The charitable associations started to be founded in the late 1980s, while the 1990s and early 2000s were the peak period. Of the altogether 21 charitable associations founded, only seven have survived.

In comparison, the friendship associations obviously are the most successful type of the CSOs related to Estonia in Finland. Of all associations, they are the most numerous, with the highest survival rate, and possess a nationwide network. It should be remembered however, that they are not immigrant associations, even if they deal with Estonian culture and do in fact function as links between Estonian immigrants, native Finns and the rest of the society.

### **Estonian immigrants' participation in associations in 2011**

In 2011, a research project was conducted which, among other things, addressed resident Estonians' participation in Finnish civil society (see Lagerspetz 2011).<sup>6</sup> Empirical material was gathered by means of an online questionnaire (N = 336) and a series of five group interviews (four in Helsinki and one in Turku, with altogether 25 respondents). Potential respondents were

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<sup>6</sup> **Acknowledgement.** The research project was financed by the Finnish Ministry of Culture and Education and coordinated by the Tuglas Society. Ms Kadri Kaljurand worked as a research assistant in the project and conducted four of the five group interviews.

reached through leaflets handed out at Estonian related events, through e-mail lists,<sup>7</sup> through the internet (including an announcement on the webpage of Tuglas Society, and a specific Facebook page), and an article in the Estonian newspaper *Eesti Päevaleht*. In addition, participants in the group interviews filled the questionnaire on paper. The call for respondents was addressed to “Estonians resident in Finland or Finnish citizens whose mother tongue is Estonian”, while the research project was presented as being about participation in cultural activities and civil society, and about ways of improving the possibilities to participate. The online questionnaire was open from 3 March to 5 April, 2011. The respondents for the group interviews were gathered through the same channels, and the groups were formed so as to include people with differing backgrounds with respect to, e.g., age, life situation, labour market position, and place of residence. The participants were divided into the groups accordingly (see Table 2). The group interviews were conducted from 17 February to 11 April, 2011.

**Table 2. Group interviews and participants**

Description of the group	Locality	No. of participants	Female	Male	Born, median
1. Parents of minor children	Helsinki	5	5	-	1974
2. Students	Helsinki	4	4	-	1985
3. Choir singers	Helsinki	5	4	1	1968
4. Associational activists	Helsinki	6	5	1	1963
5. Residents of the Turku region	Turku	5	5	-	1964
All groups, total	..	25	23	2	1971

The sample of the online questionnaire was based on self-selection and is, thus, not representative of all Estonian immigrants in Finland. Its focus probably induced more answers from those interested in cultural activities. A major part (278, or 83%) of the respondents were women. As to their place of residence, 67% lived in Helsinki and the Uusimaa region (as compared to 63% of all Estonian citizens in Finland, 2011). The oldest respondents were born 1935 and the youngest in 1996 (the minimum age required of the respondents was 15 years); the median year of birth was 1974. Four respondents were born in Finland. For the remaining ones, the median year of moving to Finland was 2006; 31% had arrived in 2009 or later (having at that time lived in Finland less than three years), while 27% had lived in the country since 2001 or earlier (with a residence of ten years or more). Employment was by 39% mentioned as the most important reason for moving to Finland, and marriage or intimate partnership by 24%. Despite non-representativity, some conclusions may be drawn on relationships of associational activity with such variables as age, place of residence, education and length of residence in Finland.

Membership in at least one voluntary association was reported by 38% of the respondents. Among all respondents, 35% had participated in the activities of at least one Finnish association during the latest 12 months, and in addition, 13% had done so in Estonia and 4% in some other country. There was a clear relationship between associational activity and year of birth so, that 43% of the older respondents (born 1935 to 1964, n=90) but only 29% of the youngest ones (born 1985 to 1996, n=63) reported activity during the latest 12 months. Similarly, the participation rates of the age groups in-between declined consequently from the older (born 1965-1974, n=86)

<sup>7</sup> Eestlased Lapimaal ([www.hot.ee/eestlasedlapimaal](http://www.hot.ee/eestlasedlapimaal)), Tampere Eesti Klubi ([www.eestiklubi.ee](http://www.eestiklubi.ee)), FinEst forum Soomes asuvatele eestlastele (<http://digitv.planet.ee/foorum/index.php>), Eestlased Soomes (<http://eestlasedsoomes.wordpress.com/>), Pereklubi forum ([www.pereklubi.com](http://www.pereklubi.com)).

to the younger (born 1975-1984, n=93) (36% and 32%, respectively). There was none as clear a relationship between year of immigration and membership in just one association, but membership in more than one was positively correlated with the respondent's length of stay in Finland. Those who had immigrated 1993 or before amounted to 17% of the total of all respondents, but to 39% of those who were active in two or more associations. There was also a rather straightforward relationship between education and participating in associational activities in Finland during the latest 12 months. Among those with a university degree (n=107), 47% had done so, while the share was only 14% among those with basic education (n=24).

The respondents were asked to classify the activities of the organizations in which they participate. They had a possibility to mention up to four different associations, and each could be dealing with one or several types of activities. In total, 232 associations were described in this manner (see table 3). Out of the 336 respondents, 129 participated in at least one association, 65 in two, 24 in three, and 14 in four or more associations. On the average, there were 0.7 memberships on one respondent; this can be compared with the average of 1.6 for the whole Finnish population, or with that of 0.6 for Estonia's population (Rose 2004). The average of those respondents who had arrived to Finland in 1993 or earlier was however 1.3, and thus closer to that of the native Finns.

**Table 3. The field of activities of the association(s) in which the respondents participate**

	culture	sports	religion	work	Estonia	other (what?)	Total No. of associations mentioned*
Association 1	64	18	12	17	66	15	129
Association 2	28	7	4	16	29	8	65
Association 3	13	4	1	7	8	6	24
Association 4	5	2	2	8	2	4	14
Times the activity was mentioned, total	110	31	19	48	105	33	232

\* As one association could have several kinds of activities, the total number of activities mentioned is higher than the number of associations.

The activities most often reported were Estonian-related issues and culture. These two categories overlap – participation in associations dealing with Estonia was mentioned 105 times, and 61 of them were also reported as cultural associations. Participation in sports associations and clubs was clearly lower than among the whole Finnish population (cf. also Sisäasiainministeriö 2010: 33 f.). The “other” activities mentioned ranged from trade unionism to dog breeding, environment protection and politics. A separate question was asked about factors that prevent or complicate participation in CSOs. Lack of time and lack of information were both mentioned by 22% of the respondents, while lack of interesting activities, language barriers and too high participation fees were only mentioned by 9, 5 and 1%, respectively.

## Ethnic organising and networking

Membership in an association dealing with Estonian-related issues was, thus, reported altogether 105 times. The answers to another question on participation in Estonians' joint activities show, that the share of those participating was 30% (see Table 4). Lack of information was the most common stated reason for not doing that. In this analysis, not answering the question is also interpreted as signalling non-participation.

*Table 4. Do you participate in joint activities and events of Estonians in Finland?*

	n	%
yes	102	30
no, I have not received any information	62	18
no, there is no such activity where I live	23	7
no, I have no time for it	24	7
no, nothing interesting is available	14	4
no answer	111	33
total	336	100

In Helsinki, the Estonian cultural centre run by the Tuglas Society functions as a major site for activities. The participants of a group interview expressed their astonishment and appreciation of the Finns' interest in Estonian issues:

### **Group interview 2 (students), Helsinki, 2 March 2011**

(R1): The Finns' interest in Estonia becomes especially visible here in the Estonian cultural centre, where Estonia receives praise, and a motor cycle with a sidecar is presented as a unique attraction. [...] It is in fact very rare to find in a foreign country such a house filled with people who are interested in Estonia, the Estonian language, culture and whatever. So maybe (.) the Estonians should also show more interest in Finland. If the Finns are so interested in us, maybe we should be more interested in them. One should, for example, go more often to a theatre and make acquaintance with the Finnish culture and cultural events, not just Estonian events.

Visiting the cultural centre was more difficult for those not living in the Helsinki region. Outside the metropolitan area, joint activities are sparser and more dependent on the initiative of individual persons. This also makes it more difficult to secure continuity. In Turku, the group interview participants regretted the fading out of a previously active association:

### **Group interview 3 (Residents of the Turku region), Turku, 11 April 2011**

(R1): And I can also tell that a reason for why the associational activities ceased was that some Estonians were interested in quite other things, which resulted in gossiping.

(R2): One of the reasons was me. I got ill and that put an end to everything.

(R1): Well, X went on telling and making promises on all kinds of new activities, but nothing of that was put into action. People are interested in different things, some really do care about associational activities – the task of an association is really not to organise

drinking parties; that is something I really can't accept. And if you want to apply for financing, you can't tell that the money is needed for a party. That's how I see it.

(R3): You can have parties, too.

(R1): Right, but in addition to other activities, isn't it? But the idea was to start an information centre – as we said previously, information [is needed], and all possible things, even an own journal, and activities for children and language courses and all that. We had lots of good ideas.

[...]

(R2): [The association] will probably recover when we find a new person to lead it.

(R1): That's it, we need new people. Because, Y also got tired. [...] Y really moved out of Turku.

Differences in motivation and interest are probably one of the reasons why no more than 30% of the respondent participated in joint activities. One's expectations may also change during the time of one's stay in Finland. The newly immigrated are interested in discussing their experiences with other Estonians, in finding information about practical issues, and simply in socialising with people using their own language. Along with growing knowledge of Finnish language and society, and with the creation of networks, just meeting other Estonians becomes less important than one's specific areas of interest.

#### **Group interview 4 (associational activists), Helsinki, 10 March 2011**

(R1): I remember that when we came to Finland [the participant arrived in 1991 as a return migrant], there were not many Estonians, but many arrived at the same time. And then it was of course very important to socialise with other Estonians. And the circle of people who met together was really a large one. At that time also the Embassy was into the habit of organising [social events] – Shrovetide, St. Martin's Day, and there were many other things, Estonians did a lot of things together, but sometime in the mid- or late '90s it all faded away. [...] Well, now we have the singing choir and maybe there are again more different activities. But maybe the need to meet other Estonians isn't as big as it was in the beginning. At that time, it was really important. Now I am talking about my own experience.

Those discussants who had lived in Finland for a longer time recognised large changes that had taken place in the society during their stay. Finland had become more open and international, and the number of Estonians had grown visibly. In all group interviews, people told about Estonian born colleagues, clients and about all kinds of everyday meetings with other Estonians:

#### **Group interview 1 (parents of minor children), Helsinki, 17 February 2011**

(R1): I think there really is a huge amount of Estonians. For example, an Estonian friend of mine was escorting his/her mother to the hospital. He/she told that on their way to the hospital, the cab driver was Estonian, there were Estonians in the hospital reception, and in short, everybody she/he met during the way home were also Estonians, including the bus conductor. He/she was her/himself quite astonished finding out that the Estonians really are SO many.

This means that it is easy to find fellow Estonians in order to spend some spare time together, but also that the common background does not necessarily lead to a wish to become more closely

acquainted. Some group interviewees mentioned that they avoided talking in a cell phone in Estonian in public places such as buses, in order not to attract the attention of other Estonians possibly present. Some participants who worked within customer services had experienced embarrassing situations when an Estonian customer, “a so called Estonian construction worker”, had in a familiar way started to ask both personal questions and questions about practicalities that a new immigrant needs to know. On the other hand, another participant described huffily, how a clearly Estonian customer servant had refused to talk Estonian with an Estonian client – had, in other words, “denied his/her origins”. In many discussions, the participants referred to “the Estonian construction worker” who arrives to Finland for seasonal work, works hard and spends his free time drinking in a dormitory and has no interest whatsoever in culture. The researchers were put the sceptical question:

- Do you also make research in the cultural interests of construction workers? Or shop assistants? [laughter]

## Discussion

Almost unnoticed, Finland has become the host country of a new, rapidly growing ethnic group, and also the scene of a new type of transnational migration. As immigrants in Finland, Estonians are specific in many ways which are related to their both geographic and linguistic proximity to Finns. The short geographic distance makes it possible to frequently commute between the countries, indeed to “live in two countries at the same time”. As expressed by one of the respondents to the questionnaire, a woman who at that time had lived in Finland almost twenty years:

**(Answer to the online survey, 2011):** I do not live in Finland, but I work in Finland and live (and also work) in Estonia: I have a job in both countries, my family lives in Estonia, and there I also have my home. In Finland I have just a small hired apartment, a “box”. I nevertheless spend most of the year in Finland and I hence must pay my taxes in Finland.

The migration movement between Estonia and Finland is, among other things, an example of a more general change of migration patterns in Europe, especially after the enlargements of the EU in the 2000s. The basic idea of multiculturalism – that of permanently resident migrants of the same “ethnicity” integrating while preserving their own culture through self-initiated and governmentally supported activities – is less compatible with a situation, where migration is temporary and circulatory, and where transnational communication is regular. Many of the Estonian migrant workers in Finland remain “guest workers”, both legally and mentally.

On the other hand, those who stay in the country for a longer period become easily fluent in Finnish. They tend to integrate, even assimilate with the majority relatively fast (Anniste and Tammaru 2014, 392).<sup>8</sup> Even if their first employment at arrival is often lower than the position they occupied in their home country, they meet less barriers for upward social mobility than many other immigrant groups, and within the course of some years, they tend to achieve positions

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<sup>8</sup> This concerns mainly the Estonian speaking immigrants, while the Russian speakers moving to Finland from Estonia integrate more slowly.

comparable to those that they had held in Estonia (ibid, 395). Obviously, this concerns those immigrants whose residence has become permanent. Their smooth socio-cultural integration is among other things shown by their participation in CSOs, which is frequent in comparison to other immigrant groups. This concerns especially participation in organizations initiated by the majority population.

A screening of the Associations Registry showed that there exist a large number of associations related to Estonia or the Estonian culture; also, many of the questionnaire respondents reported membership in such an association. However, the dominating type of organization is the friendship association, not the ethnic association as defined by Pyykkönen (2007) or Saksela (2003). The friendship associations are active throughout the country, they have a functioning umbrella organization, and the most prominent one, the Tuglas Society, runs the Estonian cultural centre in Helsinki. The Boards of the friendship associations consist predominantly of native Finns who for different reasons are interested in Estonia, its culture and language. The comments of Rain Ots (2012), an activist in an aspiring umbrella organization of ethnic Estonian associations, reflect feelings of frustration:

In the metropolitan area, there is no active associational life in Estonian language. The weak degree of organising can be explained by the fact that most Estonians are actively participating in the labour market and have no time for voluntary activities. There is also no such media that could reach all Estonian speakers. Neither does the Population Registry provide ethnic associations with address information, which makes it difficult for them to reach their target group. [...] There are friendship associations operating in the Finnish language, and they have such umbrella organizations as the Tuglas Society and the Union of Finnish-Estonian Friendship Societies. These Finnish speaking organizations receive government financing – unlike those of the Estonian speakers.

The quotation highlights a degree of competition between associations of the two different types. As is pointed out by organizational ecology (Singh & Lumsden 1990), high density of organizations in a particular niche weakens newcomers' chances of success. They have to compete with the older ones for same resources – in this case, financing, members and social recognition. In a comparison, the friendship associations are generalists who occupy the broad niche of both Finns interested in Estonia, and a smaller number of Estonians who have an interest in associational activities in where they live. The ethnic associations, in turn, invest in a specialist strategy, trying to make use of the narrower niche of Estonians wishing to create social spaces for Estonian speakers; however, they have not been as successful yet.

Unlike refugees and, to some extent, the Ingrian Finnish return migrants of the early 1990s, the Estonian immigrants mostly arrive for employment and, to a lesser degree, for marriage or intimate partnership. This means that they almost immediately at their arrival have access to many already existing networks of the majority population. Pyykkönen's (2007, 72) observation of what I have called the compensatory functions of ethnic organising is applicable to Estonians only at the very beginning of their stay in Finland. Participants in the group interviews commented the same phenomenon, remembering that the need to socialise with other Estonians was more intensive at the initial phase of their stay in Finland. The group discussants also referred to disagreements and differences of interests within ethnic associations. One should keep in mind that the Estonians in Finland are a heterogeneous group as to their social position; many of the discussants openly distanced themselves from the stereotypical image of "the Estonian

construction worker". Rather than at mere difference in occupational status or education, their comments point at differences between the earlier immigrants, now stably settled in Finland, and the new, partly circulatory migrants. As mentioned above, the social positions of newly arrived Estonian immigrants tend to be lower than those occupied by others with a longer history of residence. At the same time, the compensatory functions of ethnic organising are really important only for the newcomers.

A question for the future concerns ethnic organising for a positive cause, rather than for the compensation for limited chances to participate in the majority society. The obvious positive cause is the maintenance of Estonian language and the widening of linguistic rights. Will it attract a larger share than today of those immigrants who have arrived earlier and who by now are well integrated in the Finnish society? Their number is growing, and the emergence of a second generation of Estonians in Finland certainly opens a broader niche for activities guided by such aspirations. At the same time, the number of temporary immigrants and those who migrate repeatedly back and forth between the two countries is likely to remain high also. If and when they participate in CSOs, their needs and expectations will differ from those of the permanent residents, and will be more concerned with practical advice, language learning and compensatory networking. Thus, the functions possible to be fulfilled by civil society organisations are many, and the target groups grow fast. Rather than a flourishing of ethnic associations, the result may however be that the friendship associations will diversify their activities by adopting such functions also.



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