
RESEARCH

Immigration in the Strategies of Municipalities in Finland

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This study explores the relationship between immigration and strategic planning in Finnish municipalities and examines how these municipalities understand and plan for pluralism. The empirical data is drawn from a comprehensive survey distributed to all the Finnish municipalities and interviews with selected key stakeholders from those municipalities. All the rural and urban municipalities anticipate that immigration would increase substantially in the next ten years. Despite this expectation, the municipalities' strategies inadequately address immigration. The main reasons for municipalities overlooking immigration in their strategic planning are the lack of a future-focused outlook and negative attitudes towards immigration. Immigration is rarely considered in depth, and local municipalities plan inadequately for pluralism.

Keywords: Immigration; Strategic planning; Local government; Finland; Future

Introduction

The increase in immigration has generated new topics in management and governance for municipalities of Nordic countries to consider (Righard, Johansson & Salonen 2015). In recent years, the importance of local-level planning for immigration has attracted growing interest (Bernt 2019; Caponio & Scholten 2017; Kühn 2018; Zapata-Barrero, Caponio & Scholaten 2017). To plan, develop, and govern urban areas, local governments need to consider a variety of cultures and increasing ethnic diversity (Gressgård & Jensen 2016; Kühn 2018); therefore, immigration is becoming a significant issue in the strategic planning of local governments (Bernt 2019; Kühn 2018), but immigration is a disputed and/or neglected topic in local policy-making.

In Finland, both the absolute (402,619 people) and relative (7.3% of the total population) numbers of foreign-born residents are smaller than in most Western European countries, yet the immigrant population is growing rapidly (Eurostat 2019; Tilastokeskus 2019a). Most studies on immigration in the Nordic context have focused on the current situation and the recent past, with few studies examining municipalities' immigration projections or strategies for addressing the increasing number of immigrants (Bernt 2019: 56–57; Gressgård & Jensen 2016: 1; Kühn 2018: 1748). Furthermore, small towns and rural municipalities are under-researched.

This study aims to answer three research questions:

1. How do urban, semi-urban, and rural municipalities in Finland anticipate immigration flows in the next ten years?
2. How do those municipalities consider immigration in their municipal strategies?
3. Do those municipalities plan and execute strategies that address pluralism?

To answer these questions, this study analyses the quantitative and qualitative migration and population data for all the municipalities in Finland, collected from a survey of all the municipalities in Finland and interviews with key stakeholders from urban, semi-urban, and rural municipalities. The study offers important insights into Finnish municipal strategic planning, reveals attitudes towards immigration in municipalities, and discusses their planning for pluralism.

Municipal strategic planning and pluralism

Strategic planning is currently a common practice in many types of organisations, and extensive literature has indicated the importance of strategic planning for public administration organisations, such as municipalities (Boyne & Walker 2010; Bryson 2010; Bryson, Berry & Yang 2010; Johnsen 2015; Rahman 2016; Steinberg 2005). A strategy is useful for helping an organisation and its personnel to deal with present and future scenarios. Increasingly, participatory approaches have emphasised the importance of participation in strategic planning. (Arkesteijn & Volker 2013; Bryson, Berry & Yang 2010: 505; Ketokivi & Castañer 2004: 342). The involvement of municipal employees, inhabitants, and other local actors in strategy development increases the understanding of the municipal strategy and its goals. A clear focus allows organisations to make strategic choices and to create an institutional culture that responds to contingencies more effectively (Salkeld 2013: 686). The strategic urban planning literature has highlighted that a flexible strategy formulation process is needed for managing future uncertainties (Rahman 2016: 17; Steinberg 2005: 70). In addition, a long-term perspective and systematic evaluation of the future have proved to be beneficial for strategy development (Rijkens-Klomp & Van Der Duin 2014: 22).

In general, immigration affects local socio-economic conditions and the spaces of everyday life that municipalities should consider in their long-term strategies; however, the immigration component of strategic planning has been poorly studied (Bernt 2019). The 'local turn' in immigration studies implies that the local level has growing importance (Kühn 2018; Zapata-Barrero, Caponio & Scholten 2017); yet strategic planning has not been the focus of the studied policy fields (Bernt 2019: 56–57; Kühn 2018: 1748). Kühn (2018) listed the driving factors for including immigration in municipal strategies; for example, the diminishing and aging population, local pro-growth policies, and a shift from a problem-centred view of immigration to a potentiality-focused perspective. Conversely, according to Bernt (2019), significant factors constrain the inclusion of immigration in municipal strategies due to the municipalities' dependence on external resources, their inability to steer immigration, and the opposing perceptions of immigrants as a 'problem' or a 'solution'. Furthermore, several types of misperceptions of immigration influence discussions and attitudes at the local level (Herda 2015).

The increasing numbers of immigrants in municipalities and the legal requirements for participatory planning necessitate municipalities' consideration and encouragement of immigrant participation in their strategic planning (Maununaho 2016). Furthermore, municipalities should engage in planning for pluralism. The concept of pluralism in the academic discourse covers various categories, such as differences, diversity, multiplicity, and mixing (Gressgård & Jensen 2016: 3–4). These definitions have different epistemological and methodological

approaches for addressing pluralism, and different ontological questions regarding the opportunity and right to categorise people, which underpins ethnic and cultural pluralism. This conceptual complexity increases the challenges for municipalities in implementing planning for pluralism. The municipalities aim to respond to growing urban ethnic diversity by planning more multi-cultural public spaces, locating different types of people in socially mixed housing, and commercialising the ethnical diversity of shops, restaurants, and other services (Amin 2002; Andersson, Bråmås & Holmqvist 2010; Fincher et al. 2014).

Fincher et al. (2014: 47) stated that the creation of everyday pluralism is a common task for planners and inhabitants in cities and other municipalities; however, according to Gressgård and Jensen (2016: 2), with the rise of immigration, planning for pluralism has often become a means to secure social order. Planning for pluralism is used to re-establish the municipality as an apparently socially cohesive whole. In local administration, this is often fostered by a simplistic and fixed understanding of ethnicity, by which people in a municipality are deemed to be different when they have a different country of origin. This assumption means that people with the same ethnic background are considered to be rather similar, so municipal responses to planning for pluralism (e.g., through social mixing) tend to operationalise simple and straight-forward categorisation of the local population according to people's country of origin and mother tongue. Local policy planning for pluralism—if a municipality has any—does not deeply address what constitutes pluralism. This creates representation problems concerning the participation of different ethnic groups and immigrants in strategic planning projects (Maununaho 2016: 61), and the inclusion of different people in the development of municipal strategies, beyond simplistic 'pluralism in planning' (see also Gressgård & Jensen 2016: 2–3).

In Finland, strategic planning at the municipal level has become common in the twenty-first century and has been mandatory since 2017. All the municipalities in Finland are obliged to have municipal strategies, which must address the significant current and future issues of the respective municipalities (Local Government Act 410/2015 37§). Strategies guide the enhancement of the welfare, service provision, and economic activities of the municipalities and, ultimately, politically elected municipal councils accept the strategies. Nevertheless, strategy development has often been regarded as an extra, unnecessary task in Finnish municipalities (Strandman 2010: 446–447), with local administration strategies often being too simplistic and mechanistic, failing to identify local differences. Public administration organisations, such as municipalities, vary enormously and operate in diverse socio-economic environments, yet their strategies focus more on internal municipal issues than on the broader, turbulent socio-economic context (Möttönen & Kettunen 2015: 136). Municipalities commonly follow the same path and use the same solutions, even if the contexts are different (Brorström & Parment 2016: 81–82); for example, rural municipalities often implement the same approaches to immigration as urban municipalities, even though the number and proportion of immigrants varies significantly across municipalities.

Immigration in Finland

The net migration to Finland has been increasing since the beginning of the 1980s but was relatively modest until the early twenty-first century, being around or less than 5,000 people annually or 0.1% of the total population. However, in two decades, the net migration to Finland has increased fivefold (**Figure 1**). In 2016, 34,905 people migrated from abroad to Finland, and without this immigration, the total population would shrink due to the ageing and the low fertility rate of the Finnish population. In fact, 2016 was the first year when the number of deaths exceeded births in Finland (**Figure 1**), so immigration is a nationally significant issue.

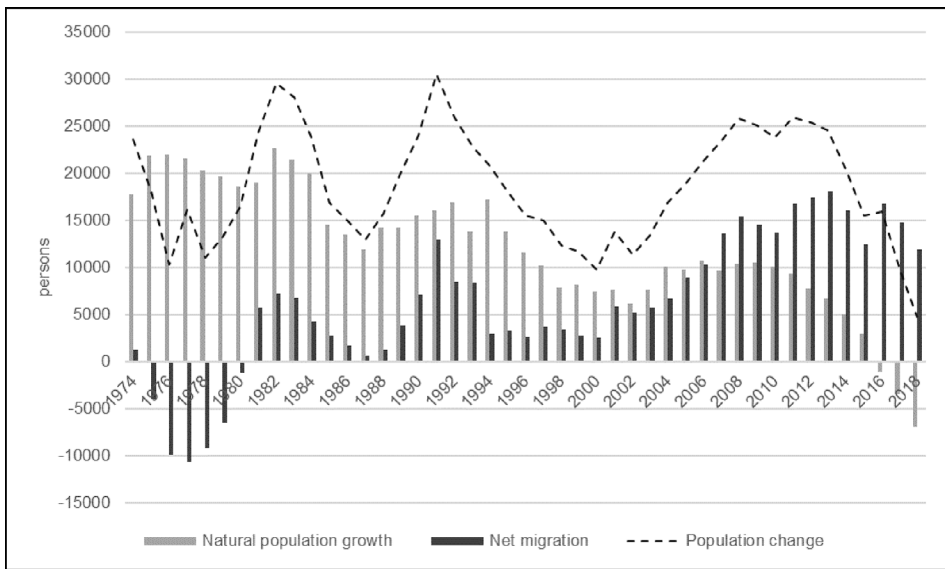


Figure 1: Population and migration development in Finland, 1974–2018 (Tilastokeskus 2019b).

Immigration is influenced by changes in the country's asylum seeker and refugee policies. On average, Finland provides residence permits to 1,000–2,000 asylum seekers each year. In 2015, over 32,000 asylum seekers arrived in Finland, representing an eightfold increase and the largest relative change in a European Union country's number of asylum seekers compared to the previous year, although, in 2016 and 2017, the number of asylum seekers fell to the level of previous years (Finnish Immigration Service 2018). The global migration crisis led to growing numbers of people aiming to immigrate to Europe (Cummings *et al.* 2015: 16–23; OECD 2017), which in turn led, in 2015, to a fierce public discussion regarding local and national immigration.

Welfare nationalism strongly influences how asylum seekers and non-Western migrants are treated in Finnish politics (Keskinen 2016: 365). In the rhetoric of welfare nationalism, the role of immigration is dichotomous: it can potentially have benefits for the economy, but also it can be a burden for the welfare state. The national immigration strategy for 2013–2020 stresses the need for active and anticipatory immigration policy and the need to attract particularly highly skilled immigrants (Sisäasiainministeriö 2013), so the application process for a work permit was eased to facilitate this goal (Sisäasiainministeriö 2017). Such a focus follows the general development pattern of immigration policy in Finland in the early twenty-first century (Sagne, Saksela & Wilhelmsson 2007), but the government restricted the issue of asylum-related residence permits after 2015; for example, humanitarian reasons for issuing residence permits no longer apply and the permit conditions for family reunification were tightened.

National strategies and policies allude to selective immigration. The national immigration strategy encourages municipalities to acknowledge detrimental demographic change, increased mobility, and the need for pluralism in their own strategies (Sisäasiainministeriö 2013). Municipalities are autonomous regarding their developmental decisions and whether they include immigration in their strategies; they must consider all the national strategies, but a decoupling of national and local strategies can nevertheless occur (Zapata-Barrero, Caponio & Scholten 2017). National-level discussions influence the local level, yet local

politics may also oppose national aims (Fincher *et al.* 2014: 5, 7). Previous studies have demonstrated that attitudes towards immigrants are more hostile in the less-educated population and among supporters of right-wing political ideologies (Jaakkola 2009: 58–60), affecting local decision-making.

Immigrants are unevenly distributed across Finland, but as in many countries, the regional capital is the most popular place for immigrants to live. In 2018, 26% of all immigrants in Finland lived in the capital city (Tilastokeskus 2019a). In the larger urban areas of Finland, it is common for residents to have backgrounds from more than 100 countries. Besides already having a larger concentration of immigrants, the capital is also better prepared for immigration and has formulated its own plans and prognosis (Helsingin kaupungin tietokeskus 2016). In fact, Espoo was, in 2017, the first municipality in Finland to proclaim English as one of its official language, because its foreign-born population was increasing and many of those people were skilled workers (YLE 2017). The proportion of the foreign-born population in Helsinki was 16% in 2018 (Tilastokeskus 2019a) but still small compared to the populations of many European capital cities (De Genova 2015: 4). The capital city expects an increase from over 200,000 immigrants to 360,000 by 2030 (Helsingin kaupungin tietokeskus 2016). Outside the capital city, the next largest concentrations of foreign-background people are in Turku, with 22,499 people (12%), and Tampere, with 18,220 people (8%) (Tilastokeskus 2019a). By contrast, in most rural municipalities in Finland, immigrants make up less than 1% of the total population.

In general, municipalities on the coast and in the south have larger proportions of immigrants. The largest proportion of foreign-background people (19%) lives in Mariehamn, which is located on Åland Island, between Finland and Sweden. The reason for this higher proportion might be language, because Swedish is the language on Åland Island and in many coastal municipalities, but economic reasons for migration may also count; for example, the high proportion (16%) of immigrants in the small municipality of Närpes, on the west coast, is due to the municipality's large agricultural sector and active labour-oriented immigration policy, which was introduced in the 1980s (Mattila & Björklund 2013).

Data and Methods

The data for this study was collected using a semi-structured web-based questionnaire consisting of 48 questions. The questionnaire was sent to all 313 Finnish municipalities in autumn 2016. The survey was aimed at the person responsible for immigration issues in each municipality. Only a few of the municipalities had an immigration coordinator, so the municipal manager or mayor was often asked to answer the questions or forward the questionnaire to the correct person. The questionnaire was written in Finnish, and for the 38 municipalities in which Swedish was the language of the majority, the questionnaire was also written in Swedish. Before distributing the questionnaire, a notification email was sent to the respondents. After the first data collection phase, three reminder emails were despatched. In total, answers were received from 194 municipalities, thus generating a response rate of 62%. The sample is representative, comprising a good selection of different types of municipalities from all regions of Finland.

Statistics Finland divides the country's municipalities into three groups: urban municipalities (18% of all municipalities; 71% of the total population in Finland), semi-urban municipalities (20%; 15%), and rural municipalities (61%; 14%) (Tilastokeskus 2015). 68% of the urban municipalities, 67% of the semi-urban municipalities and 60% of the rural municipalities answered to the questionnaire. These categories are used for the study. The questionnaires are analysed using the classification and cross-tabulation functions of SPSS® software. The analysed variables are the expected growth in immigration, how municipal strategies

accounted for immigration, what kind of impact immigration is perceived to have in the municipalities, and what concrete actions are carried out to address these possible impacts.

To answer in-depth questions regarding immigration and planning for pluralism, the questionnaire is supplemented with interviews with representatives from two urban, two semi-urban, and two rural municipalities. The pairs are similar types of municipalities but with different foreign-background populations. The existence of a reception centre for asylum seekers in one municipality of each pair is also a justification for the selection. These centres increase the diversity of immigrants in municipalities where the number of immigrants is otherwise low. The six interviewees are officials responsible for immigration issues in their respective municipalities and have already answered the questionnaire. Thematic and open-ended interview questions clarify how the municipalities implement their strategies, their general attitudes towards immigration, how they see the future of immigration in their municipalities, and how they understand and implement planning for pluralism. Each telephone interview took around 30 minutes and notes were taken. The interviews were analysed using applied thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen & Namey 2012). In addition, the municipal strategies, available on the websites of the six municipalities, were examined to understand how immigration and immigrants are represented in the documents and how immigration is articulated.

The statistical data here is drawn from the same year as the survey. The case urban municipalities are Turku (187,604 inhabitants) and Tampere (228,274 inhabitants). Both have universities, international enterprises, and excellent land and air transport connections; Turku also has an international harbour. The population is growing in both of these municipalities. Compared to Tampere, Turku has a longer-established foreign-background population, and 10.9% of Turku's population (20,500 people) have a foreign background. In Tampere, 7.3% (16,555 people) have a foreign background (Tilastokeskus 2019a). Both municipalities have reception centres for asylum seekers, and the immigrants in both municipalities include refugees.

The case semi-urban municipalities are Sastamala (25,062 inhabitants) and Kurikka (21,501 inhabitants). The population is declining in both of these municipalities, and they both have fairly good road transport connections. In both municipalities, the service sector employs the majority of the workforce. The foreign-background population, as a proportion of the total population in Sastamala, is 2.5% (631 people) and in Kurikka it is 1.7% (366 people) (Tilastokeskus 2019a). Sastamala hosts a reception centre for asylum seekers, but Kurikka does not.

The case rural municipalities are Joutsa (4,673 inhabitants) and Urjala (4,858 inhabitants). The population is declining in both municipalities, and both have fairly good transport connections, with a major highway. The foreign-background population, as a proportion of the total population in Urjala, is 2.4% (117 people), and in Joutsa it is 2.2% (102 people) (Tilastokeskus 2019a). There was a temporary reception centre for asylum seekers in Joutsa from 2015 to 2016 but no such centre in Urjala.

Immigration expectations compared with previous development

The number of immigrants has been growing steadily in Finland during the past decade. From 2000 to 2015, the growth in the foreign-background population for the entire country was 200.2%. This was a large change for Finland, although the absolute number was still low compared to many other countries; for example, the growth of the foreign-background population in 2000–2015 was 69.8% in Sweden, 170.4% in Norway, and 73.9% in Denmark (Statistics Denmark 2017; Statistics Norway 2017; Statistics Sweden 2017; Tilastokeskus 2019a). The relative growth in Finland was quite similar for all types of municipalities.

The absolute change was especially evident in urban municipalities, where the foreign-background population in 2000 was already much higher than in other types of municipalities. In 2000, there were 99,530 people with a foreign background living in urban municipalities in Finland; by 2015, the number had risen to 300,465. These absolute increases were much smaller in other municipalities: namely, from 7,049 in 2000 to 20,735 in 2015 in semi-urban municipalities and from 6,666 to 18,725 in rural municipalities (Tilastokeskus 2019a).

The survey respondents anticipate changes in the foreign-born populations of their respective municipalities over the next ten years. Six out of seven municipalities (85%) expect that immigration will increase, with a projected increase of 60%, on average, from 2016 to 2026. Divided according to the municipality types, the future growth rate is 58% for urban municipalities, 98% for semi-urban municipalities, and 77% for rural municipalities. Although the growth rate in semi-urban municipalities appears overwhelming, the change is plausible, because the absolute number of foreign-born people is still low in semi-urban and rural municipalities; however, the expected growth rate in urban municipalities will have a greater impact.

Based on the survey responses, it is estimated that the foreign-background population will be 474,000 people in urban municipalities by 2026. The forecast increase of 174,000 people indicates a major need for additional infrastructure and services that should be acknowledged in the strategic plans of urban municipalities as well as at the national level (Bernt 2019; Gressgård & Jensen 2016; Kühn 2018). In semi-urban municipalities, the absolute increase from 2016 to 2026 is estimated to be 20,000 foreign-background people, with the relative number of immigrants doubling, but the proportion of the population remaining under 5% until 2026. Nevertheless, the semi-urban municipalities may become more appealing for immigrants, especially compared to the capital city and the largest towns, because the housing and living costs are much lower in semi-urban municipalities; thus, employment opportunities for immigrants should feature prominently in local strategies (Kühn 2018).

In rural municipalities, the estimated growth from 2016 to 2026 is modest in terms of absolute numbers. The rural municipalities anticipate that the foreign-background population will grow to 15,000 people, thus keeping their relative proportions well under 5%. The majority of Finnish municipalities are rural, and many suffer from depopulation and lack of resources, so immigration is seen as a potential solution for some of these municipalities (Kühn 2018). Nevertheless, they need a promotional factor included in their municipal strategies and efficient practices for implementation to benefit from immigration (Mattila & Björklund 2013). In absolute terms, immigration is likely to remain an urban phenomenon, even though it occurs in all types of municipalities (**Figure 2**).

When the anticipated growth rates of the three municipal types are compared with the yearly growth rates of the previous decade, some variation is observed. Urban municipalities estimate that the growth rate will slow down in the future (e.g., from 7.6% per year in 2000–2015 to 4.7% per year in 2016–2026 for urban municipalities). For semi-urban municipalities, the growth is expected to be similar for the next ten-year period as it has been for the last ten-year period (7.5% vs. 7.1%), but rural municipalities expect a slight decrease in the growth rate (7.1% vs. 5.9%).

There is a link between recent history and the expected growth in immigration. Of the 17 municipalities that expect no growth, or even a decrease, in their foreign-background populations, 1 is urban, 2 are semi-urban, and 14 are rural. Most of them are located in Central, Eastern, and Northern Finland, which are the areas with the least immigrants so far. Larger urban regions have typically been the areas in which immigration has increased (Righard, Johansson & Salonen 2015), but the respondents of these areas expect slower growth of immigration in the near future. Semi-urban and rural regions located quite close to urban regions anticipate a significant increase in immigration (**Figure 3**), partly explained by the

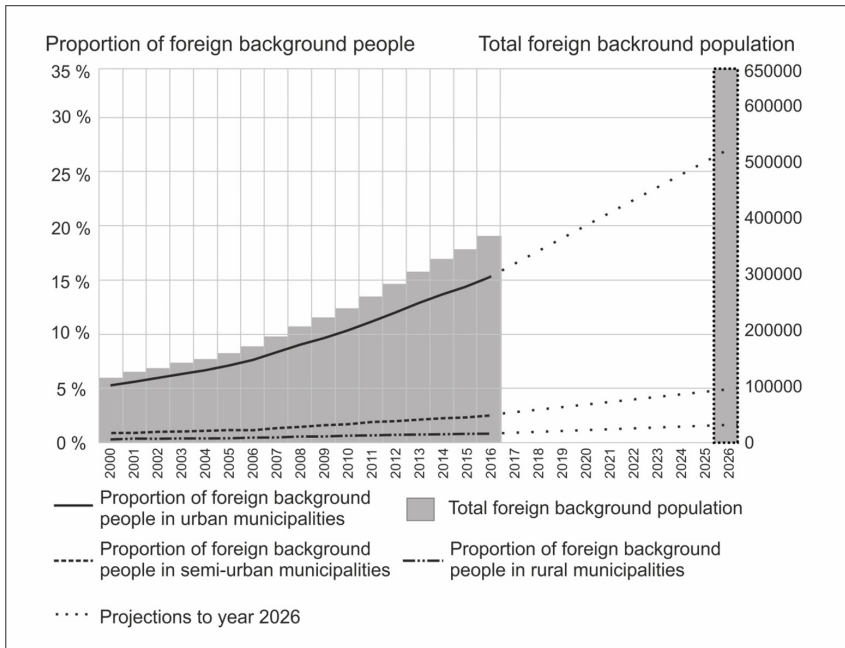


Figure 2: Previous (2000–2016 from Statistics Finland) and expected (2017–2026) foreign-background population in urban, semi-urban, and rural municipalities in Finland.

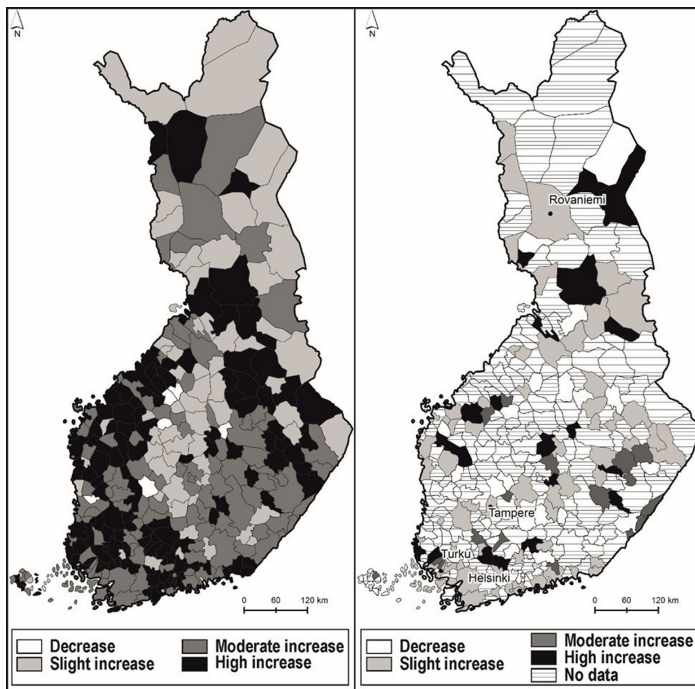


Figure 3: Change in the foreign-background populations (left) of municipalities in Finland, 2000–2015 (Tilastokeskus 2019a), and the projections (right) of municipalities for 2016–2026 (slight increase 1–50%, moderate 51–100%, and high >100%).

absolute numbers. In the municipalities with large foreign-background populations, even a smaller change rate will mean many more people than in other municipalities. In addition, large urban municipalities have more experience of immigration, so their expectations may be more realistic and they may look forward to the future outmigration of immigrants to other municipalities at the urban fringes. Some might expect also that immigrants will value lower living costs and life close to the countryside, although connections to urban centres and means of communication will be vital (Sjöblom-Immala 2012: 107).

Municipal strategies and immigration

Because the survey respondents anticipate a great increase in immigration, it seems likely that the topic would be included in municipal strategies, so respondents are asked whether immigration is included in their municipal strategies. Over half (60%) of the municipalities agree, but very few (6%) state that immigration had a central position in the strategy. This supports earlier findings that immigration is increasingly recognised in strategies but still plays an insignificant role (Bernt 2019). When studying the different groups of municipalities, nearly all (94%) of the urban municipalities state that immigration is included in their strategies. Approximately two-thirds (65%) of the semi-urban municipalities and half (53%) of the rural municipalities consider immigration in their municipal strategies (**Table 1**). Urban municipalities have more experience with immigration and more resources to enable them to prepare for future immigration; whereas, the currently small number of immigrants in rural municipalities probably affects the future considerations in those places. In addition, strategic thinking and planning have a more important role in urban municipalities.

The connection between expected future immigration and municipal strategies is ambiguous. Every fourth municipality (25% of municipalities) expect immigration to increase, but they disregard immigration in their strategies. In particular, rural municipalities and, to some extent, semi-urban municipalities disregard immigration despite projected substantial growth (**Table 1**). Strategic thinking in these municipalities is clearly neglected, but in many rural municipalities, the absolute number of immigrants is so small that it is easy to ignore them in strategic development. Another explanatory factor for the discrepancy is that the survey respondents are municipal officials, and municipal councils are the decision-making bodies regarding strategy. Furthermore, one interviewee explains that, in the municipal decision-making discussions, the future is very seldom considered; thus, the long-term implications of immigration are not addressed.

When examining the municipal strategies of the case municipalities, clear differences are found. The urban Tampere and Turku municipalities include immigration in their strategies,

Table 1: Expected changes in immigration for the municipalities and the inclusion of immigration in the municipal strategies.

Expected changes in immigration	Immigration is accounted for in the municipal strategy					
	Urban municipalities		Semi-urban municipalities		Rural municipalities	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
No change or decrease	4%	0%	7%	0%	7%	13%
Increase <100%	78%	0%	50%	18%	24%	21%
Increase >100%	13%	4%	14%	11%	25%	11%
Total	96%	4%	71%	29%	56%	44%

but immigration is more clearly articulated in Turku's strategy, which perceives multiculturalism as a local strength; hence, the education, employment, and business connections of immigrants are emphasised. Social sustainability and citizen participation relating to immigration is mentioned in Turku's strategy. In Tampere's strategy, immigration is discussed indirectly, with the strategy mentioning that the city is 'open for all'. Tampere wants to be an international city, and multiculturalism is valued. The interviewee from Tampere municipality confirms that the municipal decision-makers are unwilling to include immigration in the municipal strategy, while the strategies of the semi-urban municipalities, Kurikka and Sastamala, ignore immigration. In Kurikka's strategy, only one sentence (without further elaboration) might allude to immigration: 'Cultural services are actively involved in international activities'. Similarly, Urjala rural municipality's strategy disregards immigration, but Joutsa rural municipality's strategy states that 'immigrants are needed and desired as permanent residents in the municipality'. In that strategy, it is also stated that encouraging the labour migration and integration of asylum seekers is a vital task. The fairly strong pro-immigration motivation in the municipal strategy clearly results from the diminishing and ageing population and pro-growth policies, as in many places in Europe (Kühn 2018). This impression was further reinforced by the hosting of a reception centre for asylum seekers in Joutsa, as the interviewee describes.

Attitudes towards immigration

In general, local attitudes towards immigration vary across Finland and seem to be more favourable in cities, confirming previous studies (Jaakkola 2009: 78). The survey respondents have, overall, more positive than negative expectations regarding immigration. Some respondents from rural municipalities hope to find a solution to their demographic problems by introducing younger immigrants and a new labour force. Increased local vitality and an expanded cultural base are also mentioned as emerging benefits of immigration. The respondents nevertheless fear the increasing juxtaposition of immigrants and native local inhabitants, with racist behaviour and direct action against immigrants being the dreaded responses. Apparently, the success of the anti-immigration political party, The Finns Party, has affected the discussion regarding immigration in municipalities and their councils (Keskinen 2016: 357). A common view held by survey respondents is that co-operation between actors, openness, and investment in integration are important factors for increasing the positive effects of immigration and avoiding negative consequences.

The interviewees themselves seem to be in favour of immigration and agree that immigration is mainly beneficial for their municipalities. However, the interviews reveal that the attitudes of decision-makers and council members towards immigrants and immigration could be negative or ignorant, which is especially indicated by the interviewees from semi-urban municipalities. The interviewee from Kurikka explains that decision-makers have an 'attitude problem', leading to immigration being an issue that is avoided and ignored. The interviewee from Sastamala says that decision-makers are particularly unwilling to accept refugees. Despite the reception centre for asylum seekers in Sastamala, the number of refugees living in the municipality is very low, perhaps indicating tensions in the locality between locals and immigrants. On the other hand, the interviewee from Urjala states: 'We live in our own bubble here', explaining that immigration has no effect on their lives and the issue is rarely considered. The interviewee continued by claiming that the immigrants living in Urjala seem to be accepted by the local community due to the personal relationships they have formed.

Naturally, political ideologies play a role. Because the politically elected council approves the municipal strategy, the omission of immigration from the strategy may have political drivers (Jaakkola 2009: 58–60). The growth of immigration has made immigration a sensitive topic; therefore, politicians might hesitate to include it in municipal strategies. Furthermore,

in Finland, supporting immigration is often incorrectly understood as supporting an influx of refugees and asylum seekers (Mattila & Björklund 2013); thus, adopting a pro-immigration stance in front of perplexed voters can be challenging. Misperceptions are also linked to the 'cultural threat' of immigrants and the way the media discusses immigrants, particularly asylum seekers (Herda 2015). In addition, there is a variance in time spans; because the council members who approve municipal strategies are elected for four years, a four-year development perspective is easily adopted, discouraging municipal officials from considering the long-term demographic development of the municipality.

By contrast, the interviewee from Joutsa explains that the general atmosphere in Joutsa is extremely positive towards immigration. Initially, the few immigrants in Joutsa moved there for work or marriage, mainly from Estonia and Thailand. The turning point came in 2015, when a reception centre for asylum seekers was opened in Joutsa for a short period, which more than doubled the foreign-background population in the municipality. The interviewee explains that, while the reception centre was operating, local inhabitants very actively volunteered with the Finnish Red Cross to organise language courses, field trips, and similar. In addition, the asylum seekers organised cultural activities that became popular among the local inhabitants. Certainly, the sudden growth in the number of asylum seekers in 2015 affected discussions in all the municipalities. Over 32,000 asylum seekers were quickly settled by 216 reception centres around the country in the autumn of 2015 (Jauhiainen *et al.* 2017), as a result of which, the first direct contact with foreigners occurred in many municipalities. For some decision-makers, this also meant considering immigration and asylum seekers for the first time. In some cases, such as in Joutsa, this direct contact with foreigners made the local attitude towards immigration more positive; in other cases, not so.

Planning for pluralism in the case municipalities

The interviews show the detachment of the municipal strategies on immigration from related practices. Naturally, the policy discourses differ from everyday life experiences (Gressgård & Jensen 2016: 4). In the large urban municipalities, several authorities work with immigrants, and the interviewee from Turku says that, in principle, immigration should be considered in the planning of all municipal activities. Turku has had an immigration coordinator since the 1990s, with only a short break. The city offers several services dedicated to immigrants, and in addition, more than 40 projects linked to immigration have been ongoing in cooperation with other parties, such as NGOs and universities. According to the interviewee, such active cooperation is important for influencing the well-being of immigrants and all local inhabitants. The interviewee states that future immigration is expected to be mainly labour-related, because the local shipyard brings thousands of immigrants to work in Turku. Plans for pluralism are applied through social mixing programmes and by emphasising the participatory approach, especially in cooperative projects.

Similarly, the interviewee from Tampere states that all the city officials are responsible for considering immigrants in their services. Although immigration is only vaguely accounted for in Tampere's strategy, more is done in practice. The interviewee explains that a specific coordination group assists in all municipal operations relating to immigration, with the most important document concerning immigration being the compulsory Integration Programme. Tampere has reserved 200 flats for immigrants, of which some are assigned to refugees. According to the interviewee, the shortage of available housing limits the inflow of immigrants and refugees, even though the readiness to receive asylum seekers has improved. Planning for pluralism is mainly restricted to providing social housing for immigrants; the involvement of immigrants, and active participation in cooperative projects with other sectors, such as described in Turku, seems to be lacking in Tampere. These examples demonstrate that planning for pluralism is challenging for urban municipalities (Gressgård & Jensen

2016) and the tools that municipalities use are limited (Andersson, Bråmås & Holmqvist 2010; Kühn 2018).

The semi-urban municipality of Sastamala experiences mainly family- or labour-related immigration. According to the interviewee, Sastamala participates in an inter-municipal group that deals with immigration issues in the wider region. The updated guidelines of this group constitute the only immigration document in the municipality, indicating a vague understanding of immigration at the municipal level. The interviewee explains that Sastamala tried, some years ago, to attract workers from abroad. A group of Spanish nurses worked in the municipal hospital for a while, but they returned to their home country suddenly, for reasons unknown. Planning for pluralism is unfamiliar in the municipality, so immigration is omitted from discussions and plans.

The interviewee from Kurikka explains that several large greenhouses, farms, and factories in the area employ immigrants. Previously, immigration issues were mainly handled by the municipal social services, which the interviewee explains was problematic because of the language barrier between social workers and immigrants. Later, the regional project helped immigrants with practical matters, such as completing application forms, visiting authorities, and similar. The project workers even wrote the municipality's compulsory Integration Plan. According to the interviewee, an international workforce is increasingly necessary, but this fact is overlooked in all the municipal plans, even though the population is diminishing. The private sector is solely responsible for an active immigration policy. Overall, the political decision-makers do not welcome immigrants to the municipality, thus making public sector-led planning for pluralism impossible. In these two cases of semi-urban municipalities, the major obstacle for planning for pluralism seems to be in their attitudes: it is easy to avoid the controversial topic, because it is being handled in other quarters anyway.

The interviewee from Joutsa states that there was a good deal of interaction between locals and immigrants after the reception centre opened in Joutsa. At the time of the interview, two young people from Afghanistan are members of the Municipal Youth Council. The general opinion in Joutsa is identical with its strategy concerning the need to attract more immigrants as permanent residents. In Joutsa, the planning for pluralism started at the grassroots level, with the volunteers in the reception centre being key players. According to the interviewee, the active participation of the local inhabitants help the immigrants to feel welcome, and their needs and rights are considered appropriately. The depopulation of Joutsa is a strong motivation for the municipal authorities and decision-makers to attract and integrate immigrants.

According to the interviewee from the rural Urjala municipality, immigrants have moved there, mainly for work or family reasons, from Estonia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Cuba. The municipality has no refugees or asylum seekers. Immigration is disregarded in the municipal strategy, and the municipality has done little to assist the arriving immigrants. Although the municipality has a compulsory Integration Plan, the plan has not been applied. At the time of the interview, the municipality had just decided to accept two refugee families. The interviewee says that the immigrants could be accommodated rather easily in empty apartments in the municipality. The children of these immigrants would also be needed as new pupils in the recently built school. The interviewee states that, in principle, all types of immigrants would be welcome, but the issue is mainly undiscussed in the municipality. The municipality disengaged itself from planning for pluralism.

Conclusions

This research studies the future of immigration in Finland: how immigration is expected to increase, how that is reflected in the municipal strategies, and the extent to which municipalities implement dedicated approaches to immigration, such as planning for pluralism.

Considering these issues addresses the research gap between immigration and strategic urban planning in a Nordic context (Gressgård & Jensen 2016) and broadens the research scope from urban to semi-urban and rural municipalities.

Major differences exist between municipalities in Finland, yet the number of immigrants is growing in all types of municipalities. As indicated by several studies, most immigrants are drawn to urban municipalities (Righard, Johansson & Salonen 2015), so municipalities (especially urban ones) are increasingly including immigration in their strategies; nevertheless, some municipalities disregard immigration, and others only briefly allude to it, in their strategies. If a municipality has many immigrants, it is more likely to include immigration in the municipality's strategy, but some municipalities are still reluctant to include it. This is mainly for political reasons, because municipal strategies are documents approved by politically elected municipal councils. Almost none (0.7%) of the municipal council members in Finland have a foreign background themselves (Official Statistics of Finland 2016), which might also explain why immigration is rarely reflected in the municipal strategies. In general, immigration is more frequently discussed in urban municipalities than in semi-urban or rural municipalities in Finland.

The concept of planning for pluralism is still poorly understood in Finnish municipalities, specifically in semi-urban and rural municipalities that have small foreign-background populations. The main topic discussed in the planning for pluralism of urban Finnish municipalities is socially mixed housing; involving immigrants in planning processes is still rare (Maununaho 2016). In urban municipalities, planning for pluralism is often used to foster cohesion and security, rather than to consider the views of the immigrants themselves or to facilitate their broader rights, as discussed by Gressgård and Jensen (2016). A neoliberal trend in planning can be seen in the strategies emphasising the economic benefits brought by immigrants to the municipalities and in use of the 'economic language' that has a strong place in Finnish immigration politics (Keskinen 2016: 365). In many smaller semi-urban and rural municipalities, planning for pluralism is still believed to be unnecessary, which could explain why private enterprises are allowed to stand as the key actors in local immigration issues. The development of planning for pluralism is independent of the size or type of the municipality. The case of Joutsa demonstrates that, in a rural municipality, the inclusion and integration of immigrants can be initiated by local inhabitants and supported by officials. This supports the findings of Fincher et al. (2014: 47), who argued that planning for pluralism is the task of local inhabitants and municipal planners. Smaller municipalities might find inclusion practices easier, because relationships in smaller communities are more personal, allowing the acknowledgment of individual immigrants, rather than ethnic groups. However, rural municipalities need more than goodwill and empty flats to maintain their immigrant populations, as seen in an example from Sweden, where lack of employment opportunities forced immigrants to move from rural areas to bigger cities (Andersson, BråmÅ & Holmqvist 2010).

Finnish municipalities face four major challenges regarding strategic planning for immigration. The first is the general attitude of decision-makers towards immigrants. If immigration is seen more as a problem than a solution, it is unlikely that planning for pluralism will emerge. This challenge has also been recognised by other studies (Bernt 2019; Kühn 2018). In addition, the categories of asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants blend in municipal debates, creating confusion about the local immigration policy and practices. Municipal officials, however, support immigration more often than the politically elected council members do.

The second challenge is maintaining a local perspective in strategic planning. In municipalities, the content of the strategy is too-often mechanistic and similar to that of other municipalities, even if the broader socio-economic context differs (see also Brorström and

Parment 2016; Möttönen and Kettunen 2015). Although immigration, in general, is increasing in Finland, its extent substantially differs between municipalities, and that should be clearly reflected in the strategy of each municipality.

The third challenge for municipalities is to look far enough into the future. Although all municipalities have a compulsory strategy nowadays, many key decisions in municipalities are made without a future-oriented outlook, particularly with regard to immigration-related issues. Planning for the future is vital for all municipalities (Bryson 2010), but the role of strategic thinking and planning differs between municipalities. Especially in smaller municipalities, the future is seldom considered in their decisions. Small municipalities may be more agile, but without a vision for the future, their short-sighted decisions may have unwanted long-term consequences. Larger municipalities use strategic thinking to a greater extent, but their strategies are often rigid and unadaptable (Möttönen & Kettunen 2015). Participatory future research methods (i.e., involving different stakeholder groups to discuss future possibilities in a structured way and to create a common vision for the future) would be a useful approach for strategy formulation (Rijkens-Klomp & Van Der Duin 2014) and planning for pluralism in municipalities.

The fourth challenge is a deeper consideration of planning for pluralism. This requires the more active engagement of immigrants in strategic planning and other development activities in municipalities. It also requires a more careful and insightful consideration of what planning for pluralism involves, such as determining the legitimacy of the current ethnic categorisation of the population and the impact this has on municipal plans for pluralism (e.g., through social mixing). In developing planning for pluralism, municipalities must consider the opportunities that can arise from abandoning simplistic and oppositional generalisations of social groups according to their ethnicity, but this is challenging for them (Gressgård & Jensen 2016). Planning for pluralism connected to immigration is a complex issue for which municipalities (particularly urban ones) must find answers. In view of the growing number of immigrants, further studies on this topic are vitally necessary.

Competing Interests

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