



# Book Review of Kettunen, Pekka (ed.) 2022. *Näkökulmia maahanmuuttaneiden poliittiseen osallistumiseen Suomessa*. Turku: Siirtolaisuusinstituutti.

## BOOK REVIEW

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In 2015, Finland, as well as other European Union member states, witnessed one of the biggest amounts of asylum seekers in its history. The state confronted new challenges with migration policies. In this book, *Näkökulmia maahanmuuttaneiden poliittiseen osallistumiseen Suomessa* 160 pp<sup>1</sup>. The researchers comprehensively investigate diverse views of immigrants' political participation in a Finnish migration context.

In the first chapter, Pekka Kettunen and Josefina Sipinen present the introduction by focusing on political participation as a part of integration. On the one hand, they argue how the increasing amount of immigrants in Finland and their integration is a political matter. On the other hand, they highlight how the importance of political participation as a part of the integration process is still inadequately addressed in public discourses.

One of the significant points raised by the contributions in this book is the traditional understanding of integration. Political participation as an important part of integration has been sometimes ignored and Kettunen and Sipinen criticise that the public debate of integration focuses only on language and employment (p. 7). Moreover, immigrants' political integration has different dimensions and outcomes. Kettunen and Sipinen raise questions of 'bonding and bridging of social capital' when considering political integration. The bonding of social capital refers to immigrants creating their own social networks based on common language, culture, and religion. Immigrants' interactions remain within an intragroup. Political participation requires the bridging of social capital, creating ties between different groups (p. 8).

Nevertheless, an immigrant's background and intergroup conflicts in origin countries might influence their political participation in Finland (Lőrincz & Németh 2022). Most of the immigrant groups in Finland have Middle Eastern background and do not have experience with democratic values in their political participation in the home country. Thus, intragroup conflicts might transfer to the host country, and this will reflect on

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1 Title in English: Perspectives on Immigrants' Political Participation in Finland.

their integration. These conflicts might restrict internalising democratic values and may undermine the bridging ties between different immigrant groups. These are key research questions for distinguishing between political participation and political integration in Finland.

Kettunen and Sipilén assume that immigrants' political participation could be directed both to their home countries from where they flee and to the host countries where they migrate (p. 9). In practice, they assume that, due to persecution in their home countries, immigrants are often unwilling to be involved in the new political environment (p. 10).

In the second chapter, Päivi Pirkkalainen uses qualitative methods to investigate integration in terms of a broad understanding of participation. The contribution includes interviews with 18 participants, 10 from Iraq and eight from Afghanistan. The chapter presents how participation in civil society and voluntary work are important. However, the main outcome of this study is how the illegal status of immigrants constrains the civil and voluntary involvement of those who are still waiting for a decision on their asylum applications or have received negative decisions. The study in this chapter concludes that illegal status complicates an immigrant's participation by losing a sense of belonging to Finland, unsure whether they can remain in the country and feeling unwelcome.

Erna Bodström, Camilla Haavisto and Salla-Maaria Laaksonen, in the third chapter, study a demonstration in the city centre of Helsinki as a first situation of immigrants' participation after 2015. In 2017, asylum seekers protested against increasing the amount of negative decisions to asylum applications. The chapter highlights the motivation for free expression in Finland compared with the non-democratic countries where the demonstrators came from. The authors reveal that abject cosmopolitanism was a common feeling motivating free expression and demonstration. However, cosmopolitanism is a way of revising notions of identity and national borders. The spatiotemporal cosmopolitanism, discussed narrowly as such, has various uses according to context and discipline, and immigrants are playing a role in both processes of cosmopolitanism and counter-cosmopolitanism (Närhi 2016).

In the sixth chapter, Pekka Kettunen distinguishes between two important types of political participation. First, identifying integration (*identifioiva kotoutuminen*), in which immigrants begin to experience themselves as full and equal members in the new home country. The second, structured integration (*rakenteellisen kotoutumisen*), refers to various relations between society and immigrants, including participation by voting and electoral influence. Notably, in this chapter, Kettunen demonstrates that there are significant differences in political participation according to immigrants' integration based on their local municipalities in Finland. The dataset used in this study highlights the average number of immigrant candidates in Turku, Salo, Loimaa, Parainen, Uusikaupunki for both the 2017 and 2021 elections (p. 79).

In the last chapter, Rauli Mickelsson presents insightful viewpoints. It focuses on the programmes of political parties during the elections and how the agendas play a role in the political participation of immigrants. Each political party describes their political identity and political attitudes through their party programme. According to Mickelsson's theoretical framework, the political programmes of the parties open up key questions of collective identity in the agendas by including immigrants' issues in Finland in ways that other organisations and civil movements cannot address.

Mickelsson classifies the political parties based on their programmes. Fundamentally, the programmes seem similar, but there are differences in the ways they formulate their arguments. In addition, the political parties are not eager to renew their programmes, or they do so very rarely. For instance, in the last 10 years, the term migration has appeared at the top of discussions in the Finns Party. Its political discourse has been opposite to the humanitarian migration (*humanitääristä maahanmuuttoa*) policies, the core of the argument has been based on nationalism. Whereas both the Centre Party and National Coalition Party use economic arguments as a basis for tightening migration policy (p. 106).

In the same context, Mickelsson discusses the usage of the word 'immigrant' in political and social discourses. Critically, on one hand, using the word immigrant (*maahanmuuttaja*) has a vague meaning in relation to identifying individuals according to their cultural background and educational qualifications. On the other hand, immigrants might have different reasons for their resident permits, such as asylum seeking, working, studying or reunifying with family. Moreover, the chapter explains common stereotypes and attitudes towards Estonian and Russian immigrants when compared to Middle Eastern immigrants in Finland.

Nevertheless, Mickelsson examines the municipal election party programmes of 2021. He conducts a content analysis using NVivo. The results show that none of the political programmes considered migration issues directly or included the word 'immigrants' referring to those who move to Finland as asylum seekers (*maahanmuuttajia*), with one exception using the term '*ulkomailta*' as it was referring to those who moved to Finland from abroad in general, regardless of the reason for their move. It comes in the National Coalition Party programme's discourse as '*jokainen*' which, according to Mickelsson's point of view, indirectly means everyone, including immigrants (p. 107).

The study reveals the vital ratio of the term 'immigrants' in political discourses at the time of elections in Finland. In the Finns Party programme, the results showed that the term immigrants (*maahanmuuttajia*) was the most prominent word, used in 12% of the programme's text in the municipalities' elections. The Greens party's programme included the same term in 3% of the text, referring to immigrants directly. In addition, the programme of the Left Alliance used the term 'immigrant' in 1.25% of the text and the Christian Democrats party programme in 1.6% of the text. Moreover, Mickelsson explains the differences between using the terms illegal (*laiton*) and undocumented (*paperiton*) in the political discourses in describing those who have received a negative decision on their asylum application in Finland (p. 117).

The book presents pioneer contributions investigating immigrants' political participation in Finland. Nevertheless, political participation has not yet been included as part of immigrant integration in public discourses in Finland, considering that integration goes beyond immigrants' expression of political identity and values in the new country. Renewing migration policy to encompass a broader understanding of integration helps from a psychological perspective in embodying democratic values when acculturating from a collectivistic to an individualistic culture (Moghaddam 2016).

The book contains valuable contributions on immigrants' political participation and their integration in Finland. I would recommend this book for academics in migration studies, political and social sciences, as well as non-academic audiences.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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