

Moving to Helsinki
Exploring the Diverse Experiences of Non-Finnish Speaking Foreigners

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<p>Helsinki on kansainvälistynyt nopeasti. Vuoden 2016 alussa 14,3 prosenttia Helsingin väestöstä oli ulkomaalaistaustaisia ja 83 prosenttia heistä oli syntynyt ulkomailla. Tutkielmani käsittelee suomea puhumattomien ulkomaalaisten kokemuksia Helsinkiin muuttamisesta ja kaupungissa asumisesta. Tutkielmani on rajattu alueellisesti pääkaupunkiseutuun, josta puhutaan Helsingissä.</p> <p>Aineisto kerättiin keväällä 2018 haastattelemalla englanniksi 14 Facebookin <i>Finland IESAF</i> ja <i>International Jobseekers in Helsinki</i> -ryhmien kautta tavoitettua 22–35-vuotiasta henkilöä, jotka olivat muuttaneet Helsinkiin erilaisista syistä viimeisen kolmen vuoden aikana haastattelujen ajankohdasta katsottuna. 12 haastattelusta nauhoitettiin ja litteroitiin ja kaksi haastattelua tehtiin sähköpostin välityksellä. Kaikki haastatellut käyttävät arkikielensä englantia, ja kukaan heistä ei sanonut kommunikoidensa sujuvasti suomeksi. Kaikki heistä asuivat aineiston keräämisen aikaan Helsingissä, Espoossa tai Vantaalla.</p> <p>Maahanmuuttotutkimus Suomessa käsittelee usein samoista etnisistä tai kansallisista taustoista tulevia yhteisöjä. Tutkielmani laajentaa tätä keskustelua syventyen erilaisista taustoista tulevien ja erilaisissa elämäntilanteissa olevien yksilöiden kokemuksiin. Kaikki haastatellut edustavat eri kansallisuuksia, eivätkä he ole ryhmänä yksiselitteisesti määriteltävissä. Yhdistäviä tekijöitä ovat ulkomaalaisuus, toistaiseksi lyhytaikainen asuminen Helsingissä ja englannin kielen käyttö arjessa. Yksilöiden kokemusten moninaisuutta painottava tutkielmani on poikkeusteellinen ja pohjaa teoreettisesti tutkimukseen maahanmuutosta, kansainvälisestä liikkuvuudesta ja identiteeteistä.</p> <p>Tutkielmassa haastatteluaineistoa käsitellään diskurssianalyysin metodein ja se sisältää kolme temaattisesti jaoteltua käsittelylukua: Helsinki ja paikalliset ihmiset, arjen haasteet ja syrjinnän kokemukset sekä sosiaalisten verkostojen rakentaminen ja uuteen kaupunkiin kotiutuminen. Kaikkia käsiteltäviä aiheita läpileikkaava teema on kielen merkitys ihmisten arjessa, vastoinkäymisissä ja kuuluvuuden tunteessa. Haastateltujen odotukset ja kokemukset Helsingistä kaupunkina ja kohtaamisista ihmisten kanssa vertautuvat aiempiin kansainvälisiin kokemuksiin tai asumiseen muualla Suomessa. Näkemykset omasta identifioutumisesta uudessa ympäristössä linkittyvät erityisesti Suomen ja Euroopan suhteeseen. Kuvatut syrjinnän kokemukset yhdistyvät etenkin haastavaan työmarkkinatilanteeseen ja suomen kielen käyttöön. Sosiaalisten verkostojen muodostumisessa korostuu paikallisuus globaalin ulottuvuuden rinnalla ja tunne kodikkuudesta osoittautuu sopeutumisen kannalta tärkeäksi.</p> <p>Tutkielmani osoittaa yksilön kokemuksen tärkeyden tutkittaessa maahanmuuttoa ilmiönä. Jokaisella henkilöllä on maahan muuttaessaan oma tarinansa, identiteettinsä ja kokemuksensa, joista kaikki vaikuttavat yksilön elämään uudessa kaupunkiympäristössä.</p>			
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1 Introduction

It is easy to notice the diversity of people in Helsinki on a daily basis, whether it is an overheard conversation in a foreign language on public transport, or someone serving you in English at the many restaurants hiring non-Finnish speakers. Helsinki's population is undeniably becoming more and more international.¹ Based on the research publication *Population with foreign background in Helsinki 2016*, by the Urban Research and Statistics Unit of the City of Helsinki, the number of people with a foreign background has grown by almost 58,000 people in the 21st century. In this report, people with a foreign background were defined as persons whose both parents were born abroad. At the beginning of 2016, there were 89,878 residents with a foreign background in Helsinki, which comprised 14.3 percent of the city's population. 83 percent of them had been born abroad themselves, and a little bit over half of this population had a European background. The number of foreign nationals in Helsinki was 57,607.²

People's movement across national borders, and settlement in a new country, is hardly anything new in the history of human kind. Freedom of movement is considered a fundamental human right³, and is also one of the values mentioned by the European Union as "an integral part of our European way of life"⁴. Migration and mobility seem to have become increasingly important concepts in the globalised world, both in terms of government policy and academic research. Since the establishment of nation-states, social mobility has been conceived as migration within or across national borders. Thus, movement of people is seen as something that can be restricted as well as regulated.⁵ There are a number of ways to categorise migrants that are usually based on legal status, employment, family relations, educational qualification, temporality and so on. The boundaries between migration and tourism are also getting blurred, and new forms of mobility are emerging as people migrate repeatedly, for new lifestyles or retirement.⁶ What many of the definitions seem to ignore, however, are the characteristics of

¹ In addition, today the Finnish population growth is mainly due to immigration, as the percentage of native Finnish, compared to the whole population, has been dropping for two years prior to 2017. Looking at native language speakers (Finnish, Swedish and Sámi) the percentage has been dropping for already three years. Helminen 2017, 57–58.

² Hiekkavuo 2017, 3.

³ United Nations 1984. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR): Article 13.

⁴ European Union, 2018. It is good to note that these idealistic sentiments are not a reality for everyone. There are many people who are affected by external influences and do not have a choice when it comes to their mobility or sedentarism. Essentially, their human rights are being violated.

⁵ Nowicka 2006, 15.

⁶ Castles 2014, 7.

internationally minded adults, who might not see their place of residence as permanent but rather a home that can be set anywhere in the world. This is why qualitative research into individual experiences is a necessary addition to the overall discussion on the topic of immigration.

In my research, I will focus on the personal experiences of those who have moved to Finland from abroad and have started a new chapter in their lives in Helsinki. How does it feel to move to another country that speaks a foreign language and has a foreign culture? Looking at the statistics of migration patterns and categorising people based on the context of their migration might be useful for establishing certain global trends. However, the statistics show aggregates, and the migrations they reflect are stories unique to the individuals making the journey. Data does not factor in the personal experiences of settling in a new environment, which in the case of my study, is Helsinki. I believe that a number of factors have contributed to the increasing appeal of moving abroad to people from various backgrounds. These include the relative ease and affordability of travel, the expansion of intercultural relationships, the progress of communication technology, as well as the status of English as a lingua franca. Therefore, my research will focus on the often-overlooked group of adults who have made the decision to jump to the unknown and experience living in another country.

1.1 Research Question

My research attempts to explore non-Finnish speaking foreign nationals' experiences in moving to Finland, and more specifically to Helsinki and the capital region. The goal is to gain insight into the diverse lived experiences of these individuals. I have conducted 12 face-to-face interviews, and received two written answers to a questionnaire via email from 22 to 35 year-old foreign nationals. All of my interview subjects moved to Helsinki less than three years prior to the interviews (2018). All of them were residing in either Espoo, Vantaa, or Helsinki. In my research, unless further specified, I will use 'Helsinki' to refer to the capital region, including Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa, as it is often understood in this way in everyday language. My research is primarily interested in topics such as living and working in Helsinki; forming one's social networks; encounters and interaction with Finnish people; and communication and the use of languages in their daily lives. What brought these people to Finland, and how would they describe their experience in moving to Helsinki? How have previous experiences of travel or international encounters affected their attitudes toward facing a culturally novel environment

and culturally different people? What are the main issues regarding language? How have people built their social networks, and what is the value of information technology or friends and family ‘back home’?

It has been argued that international migration can be analysed as a spectrum of individuals’ freedom to make personal choices when it comes to their mobility.⁷ In my research, I will focus on legal (in contrast to undocumented), voluntary (in contrast to forced) and international (in contrast to internal) immigration to Helsinki.⁸ It is safe to say that my interviewees have had various reasons for moving to Helsinki and come from various backgrounds. As I am aware of the fact that everybody has their own personal experience, I do not intend to find any conclusive answer to the question of what it feels like to move to Helsinki. I will rather pay attention to the similarities in people’s experiences regarding topics mentioned above and the things that come up in relation to Helsinki and its people, languages, work and social networking. I will concentrate on my interviewees’ perceptions of life in Finland, how they have settled and anything that has been relevant to each individual in their experience. I will look into their notions of the capital city, their plans for the future and how they feel about their integration into Finnish society. I will also touch upon topics of identity and belonging as part of the experience of feeling at home somewhere. What does it mean to someone personally, to live in Helsinki?

1.2 Material and Methods

To gather material for my research I conducted semi-structured, focused interviews surrounding themes that I chose as core concepts in my research: the experience of moving to Helsinki, languages and communication, as well as formation of social networks. This method gave me the opportunity to find out my subjects’ personal experiences, feelings and thoughts. Also, it allowed them to answer more in depth, interpret the questions from their own perspective, and focus on matters that are meaningful to them personally.⁹ This way, I was able to avoid exclusively addressing issues that I found interesting, but instead concentrate on subjects that my interviewees brought up. My understanding of this topic is informed by my own experiences of travelling and living abroad, as well as encounters with different people and cultures.

⁷ Koikkalainen 2013, 88–89.

⁸ These distinctions are adopted from Samers & Collyer 2017, 9–11.

⁹ Hirsjärvi 2011, 35, 47–48.

Furthermore, my own experience is the reason for choosing to focus on broader themes of moving abroad, languages of communication as well as building one's social network in a new and foreign place.

Altogether, my material is based on 14 interviews with 22 to 35 year-old foreign nationals who, at the time of the interviews, had moved to Helsinki less than three years ago. I recorded and transcribed 12 face-to-face interviews, and received two written answers for interview questions via email. All of the interviews were conducted in English. None of my interviewees would have described themselves as fluent in Finnish, and generally use English when communicating with Finnish people. Some of them had lived elsewhere in Finland as well, which gives them a valuable perspective of Helsinki compared to other places in the country. They are also from diverse backgrounds, each having different nationalities and various reasons for moving to Helsinki. The recordings of the interviews range from 12 minutes and 34 seconds to 1 hour 14 minutes and 7 seconds. All of the interviews were conducted in cafes around the city of Helsinki, primarily for convenience. The time frame from first to the last interview took place within one month, from 13 March to 5 April in the Spring of 2018. The written answers were received on 23 March and 19 April 2018.

I found my interviewees through two Facebook groups: *Finland IESAF*¹⁰ and *International Jobseekers in Helsinki*¹¹. The first one had 10,505 members and the second one 15,862 members.¹² With prior approval from the administrators of both groups, I posted in the first public group on 7 March 2018 and reposted my call for interviewees on 26 March 2018. In the latter, closed group, I posted on 28 March 2018. My initial target group was to find 20 to 35 year-old non-Finnish speakers, who had moved to Helsinki within the last two years. In my post, I encouraged people to send me a private message on Facebook to register their interest in participating in my study. In general, my research received more interest from members of the second group. This might be explained by the nature of the group being a jobseeker platform, as well as the fact that *Finland IESAF* covers all of Finland. I continued by asking people for an interview based on my set premise, and had a short conversation on Facebook Messenger to determine whether they fitted the profile. I had to reject some interested candidates for reasons of them having moved to Helsinki more than two years ago, or being older than 35. Yet this

¹⁰ Finland IESAF, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/iesaf/>.

¹¹ International Jobseekers in Helsinki, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/jobsinhelsinki/>.

¹² Checked on 24 April 2018.

was not a flawless method of measuring how long people had been living in Helsinki. I discovered, during the interviews, that some of them had already lived in Helsinki for more than two years. Nonetheless, I was aware that my interviewees had been living in Helsinki for different lengths of time, such that I do not see this as problematic for my research, but as something to consider when analysing people's experiences. Further, due to time constraints, I was unable to interview everyone who had contacted me and was in my target group, as initially planned. In conclusion, I reached eight people from the first group and six from the second one. The written answers came from members of different groups.

In order to maintain my interviewees' anonymity, I have chosen to use a pseudonym for each person, all listed in the references. With these names, I have tried to preserve the particularities of the participants' real names when considering the Finnish context. Since gender is not in the centre of my research, and has not been discussed with the interviewees, the names I have chosen are in line with the assumed gender representation of each interviewee and I will be using pronouns accordingly. I recognise the problematic nature of using this binary division, but feel that it will make my research easier for the reader to follow. Also, to define where someone is 'from' is a question of self-identification and belonging, which in my opinion can be determined only by the persons themselves. The country someone has been born in might not mean as much to them as the country where they have grown up in or even moved to as an adult. As anthropologist Liisa Malkki concludes: "To plot only 'places of birth' and degrees of nativeness is to blind oneself to the multiplicity of attachments that people form to places through living in, remembering, and imagining them."¹³ This is why I will not be listing the nationalities or 'origins' of my interviewees but will rather come back to these questions when applicable in my analysis. I will be using direct quotations from the interviews, but given the nature of conversational spoken language and the fact that most of my subjects have been using a non-native language, myself included, I have edited these quotes to correspond to correct, written English. I do not insist that these quotes will make my subjects' voices conclusively heard, since they are still picked and interpreted by myself, but I hope they will give enough substance to my overall aim of showing the diverse experiences of moving to Helsinki.

Language is a central theme in my thesis both as a study subject but also as a means of communication. It provides me a good base to reflect on my own position with respect to my

¹³ Malkki 1992, 38.

interviewees and analyse the material attentively. When focusing on discourses, it is good to understand that they are speech and thought practices, providing a definition for a topic or a subject. Therefore, discourses both reflect as well as influence social interaction.¹⁴ Meanings, on the other hand, are comprised of representations. The way we talk about something or the way we feel about something is a way of giving meaning and value to things by producing representations. Meanings are produced and presented through various media, as well as exchanged and negotiated in every social interaction. Therefore languages, as a means of communication, are thought of as an integral part of conveying meanings. Individuals need competencies to represent their ideas and feelings within these languages, and in order to understand messages when interacting with someone, it is necessary for the participants to share enough cultural codes to be able to interpret meanings similarly.¹⁵ This is something to keep in mind, for example, when considering the encounters with myself and my interviewees. As it is impossible to fully remove one's own perspective from the conversation, it is important to be aware of one's assumptions and pre-dispositions, and especially how they might affect interactions and communication. It is necessary to be conscious of, and actively understand, how people use language to construct their reality and express lived experiences. However, even in intercultural encounters with people from different backgrounds, it is possible to find a common understanding. In my interviews for example, our ability to communicate verbally in English was supported by relying on non-verbal cues, which provided a mutually consistent form of interaction, and by relating to their experiences 'culturally' through my own experiences. Also, we share a mutual understanding of the structural reality of Helsinki as a city we live in, even if seen from different perspectives.

As is typical in Area and Cultural Studies, my research will be interdisciplinary. Using resources across diverse disciplines, such as cultural studies, sociology and anthropology, gives me an opportunity to consider multiple aspects of my interviewees' experiences and build a more holistic perception on how they view themselves and their new home city, Helsinki. I am approaching my research primarily from a cultural studies perspective in which social reality is understood as a dynamic and complex construction where meanings are produced and reproduced in order to make sense of the world. This is especially interesting in terms of mobile people who are navigating various cultural spheres simultaneously and negotiating their own place in both the global and local space. Utilising discourse analysis as a theoretical starting

¹⁴ Hall 1999, 105.

¹⁵ Hall 1997, 3–5.

point, I will focus on how my interviewees construct their own realities, ranging from personal experiences and identity to their surroundings.¹⁶ I will analyse and contextualise my material through three main themes: settling in a new country, languages and communication, as well as intercultural encounters and transnational relations. These will be further discussed within the frameworks of Helsinki as a place as well as its European connections and experiences of discrimination as well as belonging. Primarily, my study will be qualitative, and my aim is to find similarities, differences and trends in the experiences of my interviewees.

1.3 Key Concepts and Earlier Research

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines migration as: “[t]he movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border, or within a State”¹⁷. In other words, this means that any kind of human mobility can be considered migration, regardless of the length of stay, the causes, or legal status of the individual, within or across borders. Immigration, defined by IOM as “[a] process by which non-nationals move into a country for the purpose of settlement”¹⁸ provides a good starting point for my research. However, from the perspective of my interviewees, even this is not a fully suitable definition. All of my interviewees came to Helsinki with the intention of staying, or at least trying to stay, for a longer period of time (from 6 months onwards), but most were not sure as to how long it would eventually be. There is no common term to categorise people who have personally experienced living in a foreign country, but do not necessarily fit in to established categories of mobility based on, for example, legality or length of stay. These definitions do not factor in the personal situations and experiences of individuals, when ‘things do not work out’, or ‘plans change’, or when living abroad is more about a short-term experience, for instance, something to ‘try out’. This is one of the reasons why classifying immigrants based on “the purpose of settlement” is not applicable in every case. In this study, I will use the concept of immigrant to simply mean someone, who as a non-national has moved to Finland.

My research is centred around the complex concept of human experience, which I feel is valid in its diversity. As I am aware of the subjectivity of everyone’s personal experiences, my analysis will take a critical approach to examining the manifold discourses. The scope is

¹⁶ Jokinen et al. 2016, 21–22.

¹⁷ IOM 2011, 62–63.

¹⁸ IOM 2011, 49.

narrowed to focus on the subjective and individual experiences, and on what can be understood from them. The subject's own personal beliefs, feelings and perspectives remain as the core findings. However, I recognise that one must be cautious to not take subjective experiences at face value. Therefore, it is necessary to also consider the context of individual statements. Knowing something about my interviewees' background is important for analysing their experiences. Further, given possible cultural differences between myself and my interviewees, I will caveat these in my analysis when necessary.

Experience is commonly defined in two ways: It is considered to be something that can grow over time as 'life experience' or it can be a singular meaningful incident. For example, elderly people are often said to be experienced based on their mature age, but also a memorable trip, or reading a book can be defined as a new, unpleasant or eventful experience. It is neither knowledge nor a skill, but rather one can learn from experience.¹⁹ I will consider both of these aspects of experience in my research: I will focus on the experience of moving to Helsinki, encountering a new culture and managing life in a foreign environment which can all be affected by previous travels, and movements, as well as previously attained international competencies such as language skills. However, I will broaden this idea of experience to include the various ways in which people perceive and process moments in their lives, form multiple attachments to different places and express this understanding when making their experiences meaningful. In other words, experiences are also felt and distinguished as part of one's own story.

In my research, I will use the concept of culture to mean the everyday way of life for people as individuals and as part of different groups. Culture is anthropologically defined as the tangible and intangible customs, values and practices that are shared within a people. Cultures consist of distinctive characteristics and are thus seen as separate from other cultures.²⁰ It is, however, important to remember that cultures cannot be understood as clearly divided and separate units. It is typical for cultures to change, borrow and adopt new insights. Finnish culture should also be understood as a compilation of different cultural influences.²¹ Culture is a process within a group or a society, where meanings are produced and exchanged to interpret the world. Cultures are comprised of the ways in which people understand and communicate those meanings, and

¹⁹ Kotkavirta 2002, 15–16.

²⁰ Hall 1997, 2; Martikainen et al. 2006; 12; Huttunen et al. 2005, 26.

²¹ Huttunen et al. 2005, 29.

they influence and guide people's social behaviour despite the inevitable diversity of meanings. There is a sense of shared understanding and awareness within cultures.²² It can be said that society lives by cultural structures, such as language and customs, and these also shape our way of life. This means that culture is a productive as well as reproductive process.²³ It is also important to note that culture has traditionally been used as a colloquial term, with reference to both 'popular' and 'high' culture, to describe various art forms and institutions built around them.²⁴ However, in my research, culture is to be understood through its dynamic nature of negotiated meanings and everyday practices shared by people.

As my thesis will focus on the experiences of culturally diverse people, the locational context, Helsinki, will undoubtedly be seen as a multicultural setting. My interviewees live their everyday lives in Helsinki having daily encounters with cultural diversity. It is important to note that multiculturalism in Finland, or even in Helsinki, is not the same as it would be in other European countries. This is due to history and the components of which the Finnish multicultural society consists of.²⁵ Multiculturalism has been used on many occasions to mean two things: firstly, the coexistence of culturally different groups; and secondly, the core values of some social and state policies. Therefore, multiculturalism in the latter sense has an ideological dimension, where it reflects an ideal situation expected of society. Since the 1990s, multicultural societies have been seen as the context for continuing debates over diverse identities, where meanings are formed by questions of who *I* am and who *we* are as members of a group.²⁶ Since there does not seem to be much research on foreigners in Helsinki with respect to voluntary, deliberate immigration for various personal reasons, I feel that it is necessary to address the diversity of personal experiences without generalisations or efforts to make people fit into categories. Even if I will be making a regional division to limit my research to foreigners living in the capital region, Helsinki will not be considered as a clearly confined area, but rather a space where dynamic cross-border activities and transnational relationships are part of people's everyday lives.

My objective is to emphasise the multiplicity of individual and unique experiences that compose the complex portrait of Helsinki. This is illustrated through how my interviewees

²² Hall 1997, 2–3; Martikainen et al. 2006, 13; Hautaniemi 2001, 14.

²³ Sabour 1999, 223.

²⁴ Hall 1997, 2; Martikainen et al. 2006, 12.

²⁵ Huttunen et al. 2005, 22.

²⁶ Martikainen et al. 2006, 14–15.

conceptualise the city from their personal perspectives. The next chapter focuses on my interviewees' experiences of Helsinki as a city and their encounters with its people. I expand on this by examining their reflections on the similarities and differences between a new environment and previous experiences of other locations. The third chapter will interrogate the realities of everyday life and its challenges my interviewees face in Helsinki. The focus will be on experiences of finding their place in society in Helsinki, a European capital, and on their views of perceived discrimination. In the fourth chapter, I will explore some of the foundations of settling into life in a new city, through building one's social network in Helsinki, and through what it means to 'feel at home'.

2 Expectations and Experiences of Helsinki

In this chapter, I will analyse my interviewees' spatial and temporal notions of Helsinki as a place. This will be in reference to the city compared to other places in Finland or Europe, as well as comments about the city itself. I will also explore my interviewees' thoughts on communication and languages, in relation to their experiences with people in Helsinki. I intend to reflect on the complex personal experiences, feelings and notions of my interviewees who have different backgrounds and opinions. It has been suggested that immigrants in Finland can be roughly divided into three categories: people who have moved from Western countries; from former Soviet Union or Eastern European countries (the largest group); and other immigrants.²⁷ As mentioned before however, the participants in this research do not represent any specific category but constitute a more diverse group. It is important to note that although immigrants are treated as a concise group in public discourse, or more precisely, as occupational immigrants or asylum seekers, immigration is a more complex phenomenon. In practice, immigrants include a variety of people from children and spouses, students and retirees, to illegal immigrants and victims of human trafficking. Even occupational immigration can include, for example, experts, seasonal workers and international trainees.²⁸ It is therefore clear that generalised assumptions are often inaccurate or even misleading.

It can be argued that all modern societies are culturally plural, which means that individuals from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds live in the same society.²⁹ Due to historical, geographical and economic reasons however, Finland has remained fairly ethno-culturally homogeneous. The majority of its 5.5 million inhabitants are ethnically Finnish.³⁰ The question of multiculturalism is thus multifaceted: different cultures have always existed in Finland, for example with the Sámi and the Roma as established historical minorities, or even the Swedish-speaking population as a linguistic minority, but the way multiculturalism has been talked about or understood has not always considered these aspects of cultural differences and diversity. Increasing immigration since the 1990s brought up new issues for the social debates on multiculturalism, which dominated public attention. These included concerns for Finland's readiness and ability to accommodate foreigners, from concrete solutions for education and

²⁷ The public debate on immigrants in Finland is often focused on the last category, mainly consisting of refugees, asylum seekers and people who have arrived due to family reunification. Martikainen et al. 2006, 31.

²⁸ Saukkonen et al. 2007, 7.

²⁹ Berry 2011, 2.2; Sam 2006, 20.

³⁰ Pitkänen & Kouki 2002, 103; Sabour 1999, 219.

translation services, to challenging society's and individuals' pre-existing thought and speech patterns. This also affected the ways in which 'being Finnish' is understood.³¹ With its growing foreign population, Helsinki has been represented and promoted as the multicultural and open capital city of Finland.³² However, empirical observations often reveal a discord between the realities and lived experiences of immigrants and the imagined construction of Helsinki's multicultural nature. Therefore, my interest is in the perceptions of Helsinki, understood through the experiences and interpretations of my interviewees. In the following chapters 2.1 and 2.2, I will analyse their thoughts about Helsinki and comments on their interactions with its people.

2.1 Views of the City: Similarities and Differences

There are many reasons for people to move to cities. In this chapter, I will examine some of my interviewees' personal reasons for moving to Helsinki as well as notions of the city itself. What kind of expectations did they have and how do they experience the city? It is difficult to categorise or summarise my interviewees as a whole, which demonstrates the diversity of life stories, experiences and motives people have. The participants in this research do not form a unified group of any cultural, ethnic or national background. The only common feature connecting them is the fact that they have moved to Finland from somewhere beyond the national borders, and do not have Finnish nationality. In this sense, with the most plain and simple definition, they are immigrants as well as foreigners in Helsinki.³³ Whether they would identify themselves with these terms, is a more complex question which I will explore in chapter 3.1. The rationales for moving to Finland also vary amongst my interviewees, and some reasons mentioned are: for university studies or exchange, a Finnish partner, a job or a partner's job. One particular interviewee listed "opportunities"³⁴ to describe the reason for the move. As such, there are different reasons for why people have stayed, returned or moved to Helsinki. Six of them had lived elsewhere in Finland before moving to the capital region. Their plans on whether to stay in Finland varied significantly too, and were connected to the interviewees' personal experiences and situation in life.

³¹ Huttunen et al. 2005, 16–17, Sabour 1999, 221.

³² Vanolo 2008, 243–244.

³³ See Martikainen et al. 2006, 25.

³⁴ Ben 5.4.2018.

Statistics Finland reported that the country's total population reached about 5.5 million people by the end of 2017, with almost 21% of the population living in Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa.³⁵ Following global changes, the world's population is rapidly urbanising with already more than 55 percent of the population living in urban areas. According to the United Nations' *World Urbanization Prospects 2018*, 74.5 percent of Europe's population is already considered urban, whereas this number has reached 85.4 percent in Finland. The Finnish population is expected to be 90 percent urban by the year 2050.³⁶ Of course, such predictions are speculative statements, but they can offer valuable insights on how the world may appear in the future. Urban conditions also vary substantially, from settlements of less than 500,000 inhabitants, to megacities of 10 million inhabitants, offering great diversity in urban environmental traits.³⁷ The city of Helsinki, with a population of 643,272³⁸, is clearly situated towards the lower end of the global urban population spectrum. With the inclusion of Espoo and Vantaa however, the capital region reaches more than a million inhabitants.³⁹ Helsinki, as the most populated city in Finland, clearly indicates the scale at which urbanisation is discussed in the country compared with others.

There have been many factors that have brought my interviewees to Helsinki, ranging from personal relationships, to various opportunities. These reasons also varied between those who moved from other parts of Finland to Helsinki, and those who moved to Helsinki from abroad. For some participants, moving to Helsinki from somewhere else within Finland was motivated by the specific location's features, rather than by personal motives of their original move to Finland. For example, Carlos moved to Finland to study, but moving to Helsinki was about his longing for life in a bigger city:

...at the beginning I was in Jyväskylä, but then I moved as soon as I could. I moved to the city [Helsinki], because Jyväskylä is quite small... I prefer Helsinki, I like big cities, because I myself am, I come from a big city. I miss the traffic, the people you know, and I like it here.⁴⁰

³⁵ Statistics Finland 2018a.

³⁶ United Nations DESA/Population Division 2018.

³⁷ United Nations 2014, 2.

³⁸ By the end of 2017.

³⁹ Statistics Finland 2018a.

⁴⁰ Carlos 26.3.2018.

It is clear that Carlos wanted to move specifically to Helsinki after studying in a smaller city. Although Helsinki does not compare in size or population to his native city of Bogotá, Colombia, he found that Helsinki offered something close to the things he was missing.

The way one sees the size of a city is very personal and subjective. Depending on earlier experiences, living in a big city can be something to yearn for, something to be excited about, or something that makes one feel nervous. For Ada, the prospect of moving to the capital city was a fairly different experience compared to Carlos'. Having lived in smaller cities earlier in her native Hungary as well as in Finland, she explained how moving to Helsinki was a significant change:

I lived in small towns and villages before, so a capital city was intimidating in the beginning, that there are so many people here. But, I was also hoping that I might find a circle of people that I can get along with... But it was intimidating, because I didn't know anyone from here, I had no friends here...⁴¹

For Ada, then, moving to Helsinki was a new experience. Having had no prior experience of living in such a big city, the unknown was something she was not familiar with. It is also easy to notice, that the unease is due to the lack of a support network of friends in Helsinki. There is, however, another more positive aspect which she was focused on: a bigger city offers more diversity. For Ada, this meant the opportunity of possibly finding people she would “get along with”. Bigger cities have more people with diverging interests resulting in a better chance of finding groups of people enjoying similar, even marginal, activities.

In relation to Ada's expectations of a bigger city offering more variety and opportunities, it has been argued that most innovation as well as wealth creation occur in metropolitan regions. Creativity and economic growth thrive in territorially organised centres. This means, for example, that more jobs, educational opportunities, urban comforts and recreational activities can be found in urban areas. Such an evolution is happening at the national and global level, creating a worldwide network that is linked via effective information technology and fast transportation systems.⁴² Predictions for 2025 estimate that 63 percent of the Finnish population will reside in Southern Finland and Uusimaa regions, while Northern Finland would only

⁴¹ Ada 28.3.2018.

⁴² Castells & Himanen 2002, 104.

account for little over 10 percent. It is possible to notice a historical trend towards spatial concentration around Helsinki, leading to a growing marginality of rural areas in the centre-periphery division. This trajectory indicates possible difficulties for non-urban places to stay connected to the rest of the country and follow its progress in the future.⁴³

The specific location, however, does not always play a major role in the decision when one considers moving abroad. In her study of mobile professionals, sociologist Magdalena Nowicka found that for employees of an international organisation division in the United Nations, mobility was more about taking opportunities. Making short term plans, being open to change and not having one's future set in stone were some of the qualities these mobile people shared.⁴⁴ This relates to some of the answers I got from my interviewees. While some of the participants in my study had come specifically to Finland instead of another country, some responses were consistent with Nowicka's findings: the location was secondary to the opportunity. Stefano, for example, mentioned that he knew some people from Finland, but his choice in moving to Helsinki was primarily motivated by professional growth in his career: "the type of research that I do, there are few places all over the world, and Helsinki, Finland was one of them"⁴⁵. Nataliya also explained her family's decision, describing how she and her husband thought about living somewhere outside of Ukraine, but not necessarily in Finland. The opportunity for change came with her husband's job prospect as well as her three-year maternity leave. It meant that she would even be able to return to her "rather good job"⁴⁶ in Kiev if something were to go wrong, or they did not want to stay in Helsinki:

...we weren't sure whether we want to come to Finland exactly, well we had an idea that would be nice to try and live somewhere else, maybe some warmer country... But as far as for now, it seems that it's fine here and even the long, long winter was fine.⁴⁷

For many people coming to Finland, winter is an emotional subject. Some of my interviewees shared this sentiment with Nataliya, who even emphasised that "the main thing that was scaring

⁴³ Castells & Himanen 2002, 106–108, 114.

⁴⁴ Nowicka 2007, 75.

⁴⁵ Stefano 3.4.2018.

⁴⁶ Nataliya 31.3.2018.

⁴⁷ Nataliya 31.3.2018.

us was climate, how we will survive this long and dark winter”⁴⁸. She had an idea of how Finland was, based on her family living in the country for a few years when she was three years old. This was before the Soviet Union collapsed, and although with scarce memories of her own, she drew upon the experiences of her parents. Nonetheless, Nataliya continued to say that it may still be easier to spend the winter in Helsinki than in Ukraine, since Helsinki offers comparably more diverse opportunities to spend time with kids both outdoors and indoors. This is also evident from the above quote, as she feels that so far, the winter was fine. As time goes on however, she may potentially reconsider these feelings, as the novelty of a new city gradually diminishes into the regular monotony of yearly cycles for her family.

It is important to distinguish between people’s actual engagement with their environment, and culturally mediated perceptions of places. Images of a certain place act as a guide for future encounters, as well as a framework for reconstructing one’s memories.⁴⁹ As shown above, Nataliya’s actual experience of winter in Helsinki was different to her expectation. Sociologist Rob Shields has argued that “[n]o understanding can be ‘pre-suppositionless’ but occurs through and with the mediation of past human experience...”⁵⁰, by which he elaborates the contextual nature of meaning: understanding comes from meaning that is given by a person, and reflects their previous knowledge and experiences. In these terms, it is interesting to observe my interviewees’ accounts of winter in Helsinki, and other notions of the city.

According to Shields, the social construction of a place consists of social imagination as collective mythologies and interventions in the landscape, thus entailing both cultural and concrete dimensions of the spatial. This social construction is most visible in spatial practices and associations people make in everyday discourse. Cultural images of a place are therefore produced by over-simplifying, stereotyping and labelling, which means that descriptions of places are often reduced to metaphors and connotations that are not explored further.⁵¹ The challenge of withstanding winter in Helsinki may be understood as a culturally mediated image that plays into the collective myths constructed of the North. Aino’s expectations and prior knowledge of Helsinki were about the weather as well, as she said “I knew it was going to be cold, and I knew there was going to be snow, and I knew it was going to be dark”⁵². However,

⁴⁸ Nataliya 31.3.2018.

⁴⁹ Shields 1991, 14.

⁵⁰ Shields 1991, 15.

⁵¹ Shields 1991, 31, 47.

⁵² Aino 3.4.2018.

she explained that it was only the extended darkness which took a while for her to adjust to. Aino said that when she initially came for her university exchange in Helsinki in January 2015 her native United States of America was comparably colder and snowier. In her case, after all, the winter in Helsinki was not exceptionally difficult.

Elena, however, had recently moved to Helsinki in September, so she had not yet experienced all four seasons, when I interviewed her. When discussing her situation and how she felt about Helsinki, she explained that she was not yet ready to completely decide whether she enjoyed the city. She had not experienced summer which appeared to be a valid reason to stay for slightly longer:

Especially the climate here the weather with [these] dark nights, dark evenings in November December are not very attractive... maybe I should wait for the summer, and see if the summer is so good that, okay, let's suffer during the winter, it's worth it...⁵³

These comments about the weather are very descriptive, despite seeming banal. Changing seasons are obviously part of a person's lived experience, so it will be on their mind especially if they are not otherwise familiar with the place they are entering. It has been said that people build mental images of places they have never visited, and these are often associated with positive or negative sentiments. In other words, external images and representations of Helsinki relate strongly to the perceived image of the city.⁵⁴ The idea that summer makes winter bearable, something that many Finnish people would most likely relate to, is also interestingly evident in Elena's comment. Again, we might note that it is part of the cultural narrative of the seasonal cycle in Helsinki. As my interviews were conducted during spring, this may have also been a factor in my interviewees mentioning the winter. The weather seems to be an easy discussion topic, and although everybody has their own experience, it is something that connects people.

Some of my interviewees sought connecting points with their earlier experiences in other cities. It is natural to think in terms of what one knows: familiar aspects and divisive differences. Those who came to Helsinki for the first time had some interesting comments to make about

⁵³ Elena 13.3.2018.

⁵⁴ Vanolo 2008, 230.

the city, its architecture and structure. Stefano compared it with other capital cities he had visited in Europe:

...the city is a bit strange in the sense that, let's say it's a capital, [but] it does not feel like a huge metropolis compared to at least other capitals that I've visited in Europe... The other thing that immediately was striking, was that there is a good integration between, say, the amount of nature and the amount of human density...⁵⁵

In Stefano's opinion, Helsinki does not compare in size to other European capitals, which highlights some aspects of the city's uniqueness. However, it is important to add that the diversity of Europe's capitals is notable. The subjective views of a city depend on a person's past as well as conceptions of Europe. Although not specified in the interview, the capitals Stefano refers to might represent only a fraction of European cities. He even points out that, architecturally speaking, Helsinki seems like a place that is "sort of between, like, east and west"⁵⁶. The city has been promoting this idea to enhance its image as internationally significant and culturally interesting.⁵⁷ This observation may fall under the mediated imaginary of the city, but it is unclear whether Stefano arrived at this conclusion on his own or whether the marketing campaign successfully contributed to building this image. Further, other participants in my research paid attention to the size of the city. However, opinions differ depending on the perspective. Elena mentioned that she "was expecting it to be a huge city"⁵⁸, while Ada on the other hand said that "it's kind of too big for me"⁵⁹. Again, we can notice the differences in personal views based on prior knowledge and experiences.

Another aspect to point out in Stefano's comment is the prevalence of nature in Helsinki. This came up in some of my other interviews as well, for example, Daniela from Slovakia talked about how she likes the city's connection to nature and location on the shore of the Gulf of Finland:

⁵⁵ Stefano 3.4.2018.

⁵⁶ Stefano 3.4.2018.

⁵⁷ Vanolo 2008, 244.

⁵⁸ Elena 13.3.2018.

⁵⁹ Ada 28.3.2018.

I really like especially the connection with the nature, for me it's really great to just go for a one-day trip to another island by a public boat... I quite miss some kind of historical city centre because the main city in Slovakia, Bratislava... we have a very nice old historical city centre...⁶⁰

Although Daniela enjoyed the fact that some of the islands in the archipelago of Helsinki are publicly accessible, for her, the material city does not exhibit the same historical depth embedded in its architecture that she was used to. This means that Helsinki does not have a similar structure compared to the 'old towns' she is referring to. It is interesting to notice the reference to the 'historical', as in this context it seems to imply medieval and early modern architecture and city structures, rather than more recent history. This is where it becomes especially important to consider one's perspective. Helsinki's Senate Square, Torikorttelit, and Market Square would usually be considered by locals as the 'historical' centre. However, it does not display the similar design era to what Daniela refers to. She notes, "but then Tallinn is quite near"⁶¹, as the more familiar old historical city centre that she yearns for is only a short ferry ride to the Estonian capital.

It was not only Daniela who had remarks regarding architecture. In Eleonore's written responses to my interview questions, she mentioned that she "didn't like the feel of the city: it is not architectonically pretty like the other places I have lived in so far"⁶², referring to her native country Germany and cities in the United Kingdom. Some of my interviewees seemed to share a common dislike for the architectural styles represented in Helsinki, which would include the Jugend and Functionalist architecture prevalent across the city. Their reactions to Helsinki's architecture would presumably be predicated upon their own sense of beauty that is likely based on a preference for medieval, Baroque and classical styles of many other European cities. Nataliya was on the same track with Eleonore, noting that:

I maybe was expecting a bit more of the architectural beauty, I don't think it's too beautiful but what I like is, not like the city as for tourists but for the city as for residents... these neighbourhoods, I love this place where we live and I like that all the smaller neighbourhoods are very well equipped with everything you

⁶⁰ Daniela 4.4.2018.

⁶¹ Daniela 4.4.2018.

⁶² Eleonore 23.3.2018.

basically need... it's very, very big amount of nature as well, because we have a big park just across the street and the very big forest on the island... I don't think there is much to see here, but just to experience living here...⁶³

Nataliya makes a distinction between the city as a beautiful and attractive tourist destination, which she does not think Helsinki is, and as a place for residents, which she thinks Helsinki is good for. Thus, for Nataliya, living somewhere does not necessarily require aesthetic beauty as long as the city accommodates its residents well. A recent study recognised and explored the importance of neighbourhoods for parents on parental leave in Helsinki. Having a child while living in the inner city changed parents' relationships to their immediate environment as they spent more time in the family's local neighbourhood.⁶⁴ This is evident from Nataliya's comment, as she considers that living in Helsinki is easy and comfortable, and she appreciates how all the neighbourhoods provide the required basic amenities. The extent to which this is true, however, may be disputed. Recent policy debates show that the quality of care sector services has been a discernible topic, and certain services have become less available in some areas of Helsinki.⁶⁵ Again however, nature plays a big part in Nataliya's positive feelings. She also mentioned public transportation in her interview, which she thought was very good and "totally adapted for kids and for strollers"⁶⁶ praising the fact that she can travel for free when she has a stroller. This has obviously been a big factor in making it more convenient for her to move around the city with her daughter.

Thinking about Helsinki as a tourist destination, Carlos said that although he enjoyed the city the first time he visited as a tourist, he emphasised that "I got bored really fast, the first day I saw basically everything"⁶⁷. This is arguably a common case for tourists, as 'things to do' are measured by the number of attractions, sights and museums to visit and see. While Helsinki offers many activities, tourist guides generally list sights and activities in the southern part of the city, where the distances are small and it is fairly quick and convenient to travel between sites. Therefore, it makes one feel that it is easy to see 'everything' within few days. However, Carlos continued explaining that:

⁶³ Nataliya 31.3.2018.

⁶⁴ Lilius 2017, 109–110.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Helsingin Sanomat articles: Kuokkanen 2019; Aalto 2019; Rajamäki 2019.

⁶⁶ Nataliya 31.3.2018.

⁶⁷ Carlos 26.3.2018.

...but then when I moved, I found out that once you live here, and once you have an apartment here, there are a lot of things to do you know, like cafes, restaurants, these things... my whole idea changed, like oh, this city is not as boring as to my first time I saw it, and still to this date, I really like it. And, I think every day I like it more...⁶⁸

Again, we can see that visiting Helsinki as a tourist contrasts significantly to living in the city. This may not be a unique phenomenon to Helsinki, but the case for many other cities as well. As Carlos mentions, there is plenty to do in the city, and he has warmed up to it. The things he refers to, however, are often more familiar to residents than tourists. Tourists typically spend a limited amount of time in the city, and focus on its highlights, but omit to explore the corners and hidden alleys. By paying attention to blockbuster attractions, one foregoes the in-depth and intimate experience of neighbourhoods that a local would have. Therefore, the more one experiences a city, the more one learns about the opportunities and options on offer.

Since Aino had lived outside of Helsinki while working as an au pair, she said that she liked living in Helsinki a lot more than her former place of residence in Tuusula. She noted that “there’s a lot more to do”⁶⁹, and that “it’s so nice being able to get public transport everywhere”⁷⁰. Living in a dense urban environment, compared to Tuusula, brought a myriad of opportunities and easily accessible activities. Evidenced by Nataliya’s comment, having a well-functioning and convenient public transport system seemed to be a very big plus in Helsinki. Ada explained to me how she had expected something different:

...I expected the public transportation to be more difficult or take more time, but again in Hungary, the public transportation is not that good like in Finland, so, that was a very pleasant surprise, how beautifully things go here...⁷¹

As we can see, drawing on previous experiences with public transportation in her native Hungary, Ada expected Helsinki’s system to be difficult and travel to be time-consuming. Since she found the city to be comparably larger than other cities she had lived in, this may have

⁶⁸ Carlos 26.3.2018.

⁶⁹ Aino 3.4.2018.

⁷⁰ Aino 3.4.2018.

⁷¹ Ada 28.3.2018.

influenced her initial thoughts. However, public transport in Helsinki had turned out to be a positive surprise for Ada.

This chapter has traced my interviewees' impressions on Helsinki, exploring both positive and negative aspects of their experience. Many of the topics discussed regarding Helsinki were based on almost stereotypical characteristics of the city. These included subjects such as size, architecture, nature, public transport efficiency and residency as seen through the eyes of migrants. However, they also construct an image that emphasises Helsinki's uniqueness and its inhabitants' complex relationships with the city. There are various possible experiences of Helsinki, as evidenced above, and many are influenced by the individual's personal history and feelings of familiarity. The next section will explore my interviewees' use of languages, and their encounters with Finnish people. It will analyse Helsinki and its people under the framework of languages, and build upon the established conception of the city.

2.2 People and Communication

This chapter will focus on languages used to communicate in everyday interactions through the lens of my interviewees' experiences. Most of them said that speaking English was sufficient for communicating with Finnish people, especially in Helsinki. Nonetheless, the relative ease of using this 'lingua franca' has implications when it comes to the Finnish language. Rather than measuring Helsinki's population by foreign background, an alternative perspective would be to look at the languages spoken in the city. To begin with, Finland is a bilingual country with Swedish and Finnish as official languages. Finnish will be referred to as the local language in this research, since it is how I framed my interview questions. This was a conscious choice due to the fact that Finnish is spoken as the mother tongue by a clear majority of the population in Finland, over 4.8 million people in 2017.⁷² In Helsinki, Finnish only became the majority language over Swedish at the turn of the 20th century as the city was originally established in a Swedish-speaking area.⁷³ According to an annually published *Facts about Helsinki 2017* by the City of Helsinki's Urban Research and Statistics Unit, Swedish speakers constituted 5.7% of

⁷² Statistics Finland 2018b.

⁷³ Paunonen 1993, 14.

the total population in Helsinki.⁷⁴ In practice, especially in urban areas, most Swedish speakers are bilingual, whereas native Finnish speakers learn Swedish as a foreign language.⁷⁵

Almost half of the foreign-language population in Finland resides in the capital region. It is estimated that in 2035 one in four of the residents in Greater Helsinki will be a non-native Finnish speaker.⁷⁶ By the beginning of 2016, 88,132 (14.3%) of residents in Helsinki spoke languages other than Finnish, Swedish or Sámi as their mother tongue. The most common foreign native language at the time was Russian.⁷⁷ This, however, is just a statistical point of view, and might not tell the whole story of the everyday languages people use when communicating with others. In Finland, the influence of English is constant and comes in different forms through media, education, international mobility and cultural changes.⁷⁸ This was affirmed by my interviewees, as they mostly used English when communicating with Finnish people. Some interviewees also noted that they rarely used their native language unless speaking with family members via Internet-based communication channels. One example of how statistics do not always reflect reality came from Elena's response when asked what languages she uses:

...English, even though [my] mother tongue is Russian, like here...when I'm applying for this Kela stuff and different stuff, they ask: 'What is the mother tongue?', well it's Russian but I never use it, except for my mum, so, it's not relevant anymore...⁷⁹

For Elena, her everyday language of communication is English and she feels that having Russian as her mother tongue seems irrelevant. Therefore, official documents requiring a registered mother tongue do not always reflect a person's entire abilities or practical use of languages. As Elena explained, her most fluent and frequently used language is actually English.

While some interviewees who previously lived beyond the capital region in Finland had varying experiences, their arguments shared a common theme that painted Helsinki as a more

⁷⁴ Urban Research and Statistics Unit of the City of Helsinki 2017, 6.

⁷⁵ Taavitsainen & Pahta 2003, 4–5.

⁷⁶ Greater Helsinki includes the capital region and surrounding municipalities. Helsingin kaupunginkanslia 2019, 9, 18.

⁷⁷ Hiekkavuo 2017, 10.

⁷⁸ Taavitsainen & Pahta 2003, 4.

⁷⁹ Elena 13.3.2018.

international city than their former places of residence in Finland. Patrick, for example, explained about his expectations and experiences:

Helsinki is really different to say, when you leave the HSL zone, then it's like no one speaks English, or at least they don't want to, and here it's much more international, there's more stuff going on... I thought I would be a little bit more, like, alienated but it's quite international.⁸⁰

According to Patrick's experience after living in Hyvinkää, Helsinki felt more active and international. He added that "I think they see a lot more international people and not just tourists as like, just lots of different people here"⁸¹, referring to the growing population of foreign background residents in Helsinki. Patrick's comment also relates to the earlier notion that cities offer more opportunities and urban activities. He also mentioned the decrease in English proficiency outside of Helsinki, which can significantly impact one's adjustment to a new environment. As Patrick was comfortable using English and was in a more international environment, he did not feel isolated in Helsinki. This, however, can be based on a fairly subjective experience of the location, the people encountered, and the circumstances. It is worth remembering that there are significant regional divergences in Finland. For example, local proficiency in or the desire to speak English may vary tremendously across large university towns and urban centres, popular tourist destinations in Lapland and rural areas. Irina, who lived in Porvoo before moving to Helsinki, had a different experience to Patrick's:

Porvoo is a much smaller and less international [place] but I, or, with everyone I could speak English, with everyone because Finns, like, are good at English.⁸²

Since Irina feels that Finns speak English well, not knowing Finnish both outside of and in Helsinki has not been a problem for her. Ben had similar feelings, saying that "it's been smooth so far, it's like everyone speaks English in Helsinki"⁸³, noting that he has not had problems

⁸⁰ Patrick 3.4.2018.

⁸¹ Patrick 3.4.2018. See also Pekkarinen & Myllyniemi 2019, 46–49 on young people's attitudes towards immigrants. Positive attitudes are higher among young in the capital region supporting research that's found increased contact between local and immigrant population to diminish prejudice.

⁸² Irina 30.3.2018.

⁸³ Ben 5.4.2018.

using English with Finnish people. Daniela reaffirmed this in telling me that “I was really surprised that let’s say, everybody here speaks English very well”⁸⁴.

The reasons for Finnish people’s English proficiency, especially in Helsinki, can be attributed to global influences, internationally inclined attitudes and education. English has a strong presence in Finnish people’s lives, even though they would not be directly connected to international activities. English is consumed through mass media and entertainment, where everything is broadcast on television or shown in cinemas with Finnish subtitles and original audio. This exposure to the language is also tangible in popular culture, and English has become part of everyday life in many ways. Finnish people are also highly conscious of the value of speaking foreign languages in facilitating international and intercultural communication. Most children start learning a foreign language by the age of nine, and are increasingly learning even earlier. As all pupils study at least two languages other than their mother tongue, English is the most popular first foreign language.⁸⁵

In 2007, a nation-wide survey examined Finnish people’s uses of, attitudes to and perceptions of English, and confirmed the language’s widespread presence in Finland. The growing significance of English in recent decades also indicates the society’s increasing level of multilingualism. However, it differs from other languages, in that its increase is not due to immigration, but instead characterises more significant changes to the societal and cultural language situation.⁸⁶ Attitudes towards early education relate to the practical side of language skills. Although people feel very differently towards the predominance of one language, ranging from negative to positive attitudes and various concerns, their perspectives remain pragmatic: whether knowing this language is needed for one’s future.⁸⁷ One demonstration of this is that, of the respondents in the national survey, 97.2% agreed that youngsters need to know English. Further, 80% of respondents agreed that people of working age need to know English.⁸⁸ Even though these results show a positive attitude towards English amongst Finnish people, the everyday reality might be different for some foreigners coming to Finland. Eleonore, originally from Germany, moved to Helsinki from the United Kingdom where she lived for around six years, and said that “I miss being able to understand everything that is written and

⁸⁴ Daniela 4.4.2018.

⁸⁵ Taavitsainen & Pahta 2003, 5–6; see also Leppänen et al. 2009.

⁸⁶ Leppänen et al. 2009, 15.

⁸⁷ McArthur 2003, 55.

⁸⁸ Leppänen et al. 2009, 65–66.

said around me”⁸⁹. It is clear that, because of her lack of Finnish language skills, she does not have this sense of linguistic familiarity in Helsinki. She also described her experience of moving to Helsinki by saying:

I had completely underestimated, how different it would be from moving to an English-speaking country, where new connections can be made at every street corner.⁹⁰

For Eleonore, language is intertwined with the overall perceived characteristics of Finnish and English speakers. This is a cultural difference that is experienced in diverse ways. Obviously, it is not to say that all Finns are quieter, but to immigrants coming from various cultural backgrounds, the majority of Finns may appear less social. To demonstrate this, some of my interviewees described Finnish people as “silent and reserved”⁹¹, “cold”⁹² and “shy”⁹³. This can have various connections to cultural behaviour, as Finns may not conform to the same social customs of native English speakers. It can also be that speaking in a foreign language makes a person present oneself differently than when using their native language. For example, humour does not always translate, is linguistically complex and requires speed, all of which might make one less likely to use anecdotes and make jokes.

One aspect of Finnish people’s perceived social demeanour might also come from differing practices in the service industry. This is something most people would face even without having personal contact with Finns. Elena brought this up as she said she was “shocked about the service in places that you have to do this self-order like in cafes or restaurants”⁹⁴. She was referring to the often-customary practice of ordering at the counter, possibly picking up that order from the counter, and sometimes even cleaning after yourself. These are typical in many Finnish cafes and restaurants. This self-service minimises interaction with staff and any real interaction is usually pleasant but brief. In conclusion, although a strong stereotype, there is most likely some truth to Finnish people being thought of as reserved. It is important to note

⁸⁹ Eleonore 23.3.2018.

⁹⁰ Eleonore 23.3.2018.

⁹¹ Kaneila 19.4.2018.

⁹² Ben 5.4.2018.

⁹³ Fahim 27.3.2018, Aino 3.4.2018.

⁹⁴ Elena 13.3.2018.

however, that these descriptions were not stable, and some interviewees' perceptions had changed through positive interactions.

Daniela, for example, said she expected Finns to be closed off and cold, stating that "in general about Finns, is saying that you are very closed and I don't know, cold"⁹⁵. Yet this had changed when she arrived in Helsinki: "I met with very nice people, open minded people mostly and yeah [my perception] changed..."⁹⁶. She referred to Helsinki becoming a multicultural city, which supports a more divergent view of Finns. The multicultural environment also helps migrant integration into society in Helsinki, as explored above in regards to Patrick's comment. When I asked Nataliya what languages she uses when speaking with Finnish people, she answered:

Here, English. Everyone is speaking English perfectly here. I only met, I don't know, maybe 10 to 20 percent of people who don't speak English from the ones I needed to contact for some reason. Really, everyone is very easily, like, changing for English.⁹⁷

Again, In Nataliya's experience, it is easy to communicate in English because of the native population's proficiency with the language. Having only encountered a small portion of people who did not speak English, she confirmed that people usually switch to English easily. According to the 2007 survey, 43.7% of respondents thought that they knew English well enough, while 82.4% said they would like to learn more. Within cities, the number of people who thought of their English skills as good was significantly higher.⁹⁸ The value seen in interculturality and the attitudes towards learning languages can have an effect on the culture and people's openness to welcoming new residents. This reflects Nataliya's account that many Finns, especially in Helsinki, would switch to English when faced with a situation where others do not know Finnish. Interestingly however, this can frustrate those immigrants who would like to learn Finnish, but are not given the opportunity because of the local population's readiness to change into English.

⁹⁵ Daniela 4.4.2018.

⁹⁶ Daniela 4.4.2018.

⁹⁷ Nataliya 31.3.2018.

⁹⁸ Leppänen et al. 2009, 83–84.

Kaneila, for example, said that she uses English when speaking with Finnish people. Despite her attempts to speak Finnish, her conversation partners would switch to speaking English. She added, however, that sometimes people encouraged her to speak in Finnish as well:

I use English with them [Finnish people]. Many times, I have tried to speak in Finnish but my conversation partner will switch it in English. But yes, there are people who always encourage me to speak in Finnish...⁹⁹

Finnish is usually perceived as hard to learn by foreigners, and also acknowledged as such by Finnish people. So, it does not help that native speakers switch to English so quickly, as it takes the practising opportunities away from those willing to learn Finnish. For Aino, being with a group of Finnish speaking friends would appear as an opportunity to follow the conversation and learn more of the language. However, she explained to me how there are times when things do not go according to her preference:

I'm fine with them speaking in Finnish, but then sometimes I have a hard time jumping into the conversation, because I don't know if I've heard it correctly, or I don't know how to say something in Finnish, and then I'll say it in English and then they'll switch into English...¹⁰⁰

Aino is expressing some frustration with how easily Finnish people seem to change into English. She also explained that despite knowing her friends do not mind speaking English, she would still feel bad in situations where she is the reason for her friends switching to English, being the only non-Finnish speaker in the group. My material shows that there is a sense of self-awareness related to being the one person who does not speak Finnish. Similarly, although Nataliya has not encountered problems speaking English with Finnish people, she would refer to her personal thoughts saying: "I'm feeling embarrassed that I'm living here and I'm not trying to speak [the] local language, it's like a sign of respect, I think"¹⁰¹. Thus, knowing Finnish may not be as much about needing to know it, but rather about internal feelings towards the role language plays in one's social relationships and position in a larger community.

⁹⁹ Kaneila 19.4.2018.

¹⁰⁰ Aino 3.4.2018.

¹⁰¹ Nataliya 31.3.2018.

On a different note, Aino told me about her experiences with the Finnish language during her time in Tuusula, where “there were more people that didn’t speak English as much”¹⁰², compared to where she is now:

...I would hope within the next five years I could be fluent. I can hold a conversation if I have to, like there was one lady that lived down the street from us in Tuusula that didn’t speak any English. So, I used to love going there because I had to speak Finnish and it forced me, even though it was like, just really little things I would say to her. I’m like: “This is really cool because I can’t switch”, whereas when I speak with my husband, it’s such a mesh of English and Finnish...¹⁰³

Aino’s accounts are compelling examples of how a situation can affect one’s possibility to learn the local language. She thought of her experience with a person that does not speak English as a positive opportunity, where she was forced to speak Finnish. She contrasted this with speaking to her Finnish husband, saying that their conversations mixing English and Finnish were not helping her learn more. Aino is also not alone in thinking that having conversations with a person who does not speak English is a good way to learn Finnish. Fahim told me about his supervisor saying that “she doesn’t know any single word of English, that’s good for me as well”¹⁰⁴, and explained how they communicate slowly in Finnish which has helped him develop his understanding and learn more about the language. Lily, who was working as an au pair, on the other hand, said that even though “there’s no Finnish at home”¹⁰⁵, she would always try speaking in Finnish with other people. Also, she told me about her curiosity towards words she saw on advertisements, guessing their contexts and what they might mean. She wanted to learn the language and therefore made efforts to practice in creative ways outside of home.

Having the motivation to learn Finnish depends on many factors. Understandably, one of the most common arguments against studying it was the uncertainty of one’s length of stay in Helsinki. Ben explained his reasons for quitting a class he had attended for a few months:

¹⁰² Aino 3.4.2018.

¹⁰³ Aino 3.4.2018.

¹⁰⁴ Fahim 27.3.2018.

¹⁰⁵ Lily 27.3.2018.

...it was pretty difficult, and one of the main reasons was that once I got here, I wasn't sure how long I was going to stay here... so Finnish, that's one language I can only speak in Finland. So, if I took all this time to study Finnish and then I decided to move after four years to a different country or back to Kenya, then where else would I use it?¹⁰⁶

On top of finding the language hard to learn, Ben's reasons were pragmatic. He accounted for expected future opportunities to use Finnish. It made no sense to Ben for him to invest effort into learning the language, if he did not see his future in Finland. He would be unable to use his language skills in any other country. When I asked Irina about whether she feels like she would need Finnish, she stated that "of course I would need it if I want to stay in Finland, I would have to speak Finnish"¹⁰⁷, especially with regards to finding work in Helsinki. Similarly, having long term prospects of one's settlement in Finland came up in Stefano's interview as well when he said:

I took a couple of introductory courses offered by Aalto, and so, but it was very much like as a curiosity. Now that I'm getting this more long-term prospect, it's starting to be important for me to actually focus and develop some level of proficiency.¹⁰⁸

For Stefano, studying Finnish was initially driven by a curiosity towards the language. He did not need Finnish at work due to its international environment, even noting that "using Finnish is a bit discouraged"¹⁰⁹. Stefano also told me about the lack of a Finnish scientific vocabulary in his field, so finding translations would be a time-consuming exercise. It has been noted that using English has become increasingly popular in research and science.¹¹⁰ This is partly due to questions surrounding the international competitiveness of Finnish research, and its funding that is fuelled by political encouragement to use English. The predominance of English in research is something that is criticised by researchers and academics themselves, and it is something that this paper is guilty of. However, the value of learning Finnish is not lost to Stefano. With time, he has begun to think of potentially staying longer in Finland, which has

¹⁰⁶ Ben 5.4.2018.

¹⁰⁷ Irina 30.3.2018.

¹⁰⁸ Stefano 3.4.2018.

¹⁰⁹ Stefano 3.4.2018.

¹¹⁰ Taavitsainen & Pahta 2003, 7.

made learning Finnish seem more important despite circumstances at work. This demonstrates that Finnish is still perceived as the primary form of communication to learn, if a new arrival intends to settle in Helsinki. There can also be a sense of belonging that comes from learning the local language which facilitates integrating with the majority.

Before moving to Finland, Patrick thought he would need to learn more Finnish. He had self-taught the language enough to comfortably interact with a non-English speaker. However, he felt that just speaking English was sufficient to live in Helsinki, which was “quite bad”¹¹¹ for his motivation to learn Finnish. As we were discussing the topic he said:

The thing is that, I should, like, I know I need it because I plan to stay here, so there’s no point constantly being like an outsider, because you don’t get the culture if you don’t learn the language...¹¹²

Language can therefore be a barrier that isolates foreigners from locals. A culture’s shared meanings are encoded into its language through collective communicative practices. This forms the basis of how unique cultural patterns are embedded in a language. The culturally specific ways of using a language also project the user’s identity and association with a group.¹¹³ In order to fully understand culturally distinct customs and behaviour, language is a significant factor in interpreting the subtleties of cultural knowledge. Therefore, in Patrick’s opinion, it would not make sense to be “like an outsider”¹¹⁴ by staying in Finland but not learning the language. For him, it seems like it is not as much about needing to learn the language, but rather a way to feel like one belongs to a certain community where a shared language is part of that group’s identity. What belonging means, might therefore seem like being part of a fairly homogenous group of Finnish in the eyes of a foreigner.

Aino, on the other hand, came to Helsinki for the first time as an exchange student to learn more about the country, having always been intrigued by her Finnish heritage. She talks about her experiences while growing up, feeling unique because of her background, and adding that her

¹¹¹ Patrick 3.4.2018.

¹¹² Patrick 3.4.2018.

¹¹³ Philip 2007, 33, 93.

¹¹⁴ Patrick 3.4.2018. This can be compared with the view shared by the majority of young people in Finland on how speaking Finnish or Swedish and adopting Finnish customs is perceived to determine someone’s Finnishness more than their origin. Pekkarinen & Myllykoski 2019, 50.

first name is “a sore thumb in the States, because no one can pronounce it, so I wanted to fit in somewhere”¹¹⁵. This type of statement sheds light on the idea and importance of names, and how they are implicitly attached to a nation state. This implies blood ties and biology persistent in everyday discourse surrounding identity as seen above. Aino, who is now married to a Finn, spoke about how she feels when comparing herself to Finnish people:

...Finns kind of keep to themselves and they're more shy and that's how I've always been, so, I feel more comfortable being like that here, and I don't feel as, like, as such an outsider... I mean language wise I feel like an outsider...¹¹⁶

Even though she feels comfortable in Finland because of the people, as her personality fits with the perceived characteristics of Finns, Aino still feels similarly to Patrick. Both feel like outsiders when it comes to the language. Based on my interviews, language appears to be a persistent separator between the native and the immigrant population. It can create a sense of detachment towards the country of residence, while the desire to learn the local language often changes when one decides to stay long-term or permanently.

In this chapter, I have been examining my interviewees' ideas of Helsinki through the use of languages. This has primarily been in relation to Finnish and English, which tended to be the most relevant languages to my interviewees within the Finnish social context. I have also explored the topic of learning the local language and the intertwined ideas constituting it, such as social inclusion and exclusion and the relevance of Finnish for each individual. This connects with the following chapter, where I will focus on my interviewees' experiences negotiating their place in Helsinki, and how they see themselves in the city. I will first identify some of the ways in which my interviewees construct their surroundings. This will be done by analysing similarities and differences between their prior understanding, as well as by exploring reference points for one's sense of belonging. After, I will turn my focus towards experiences of discrimination, where language plays an important role.

¹¹⁵ Aino 3.4.2018.

¹¹⁶ Aino 3.4.2018.

3 Daily Life and Its Challenges

In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which my interviewees situate themselves in Helsinki, their experiences of discrimination and difficulties of finding a job. In the first subchapter, I will assess how my interviewees see themselves among the Finns, how they handle everyday interactions, and their conceptions of Finland as part of Europe. The second subchapter will focus on my interviewees' experiences of discrimination, especially on its subtle manifestations. These themes relate closely to the identification processes every person continuously performs. Identity, whether from an individual's or group's point of view, cannot be simply defined as self-identification. Identities are always exposed to other people's ideas, and are generally contingent on a perceived difference. Ethnicity is also defined according to context and situation. One can emphasise a certain identity category over others when speaking of themselves, but may accept another form when being defined by someone else. Ethnicity is therefore about situating oneself in terms of belonging and non-belonging, inclusion and exclusion. The dynamics of belonging and inclusion constitute the subjective construction of identity, identification with certain groups and being exposed to labels from the outside.¹¹⁷ For example, my interviewees prescribe certain defining ideas of Europe and Europeans as a whole, despite there being tremendous variety between countries in reality. Meanings can determine who is included and who is not and is therefore a defining factor in what is considered 'normal' or appropriate in a cultural setting. In other words, meanings may sometimes challenge identities and are closely related to positions of power.¹¹⁸

None of my interviewees mentioned any repeated form of explicit discrimination against them. However, they discussed obstacles they faced due to having limited knowledge of Finnish, or the challenges in finding work. Some of my interviewees did not face any upfront discrimination, while others pointed out some isolated incidents. These incidents include verbal abuse from drunk people, or someone unwilling or unable to help when approached in English rather than in Finnish.¹¹⁹ However, most interactions with Finnish people had been positive. To cautiously generalise, the common voice amongst my interviewees seemed to express that it is "not the everyday people, it's people in offices"¹²⁰ that would treat one differently. My

¹¹⁷ Rattansi 2007, 89, 115.

¹¹⁸ Hall 1997, 10.

¹¹⁹ Kaneila 19.4.2018 & Elena 13.3.2018.

¹²⁰ Ada 28.3.2018.

interviewees mentioned, for example, unfriendly attitudes encountered at a bank, the rigid bureaucracy in the Finnish Immigration Services (Migri), the discrimination by potential employers and the exclusive use of Finnish language. These examples demonstrate how discrimination can still be exercised by institutions which hold selective authority over people's rights. These topics did not appear in all of the interviews, however, possibly due to the fact that discrimination was discussed in general terms without specifically defining the type of conduct it entails. My interviewees' personal accounts and expectations of encounters in Helsinki vary significantly, and their stories are often unique to their situations and physical appearance. Discrimination, or the feeling of being discriminated against, might consequently mean different things for different people.

3.1 Finding One's Place in Helsinki

In this chapter, I will examine the dynamics of how Finland is seen within the broader European context. It will be seen from different perspectives of my interviewees that either identify as 'European' or 'non-European'. This has to do with both the structural and material realities of Europe as well as the idea of what Europe means and what it represents to different people. I will also explore self-identification in the global context, as it is reflected in how individuals interact with each other. Intercultural encounters, for example, are generally seen as what guide sentiments of 'Europeanness', meaning that one's sense of belonging is constructed in comparison with something else.¹²¹ I will build on this established context by looking into how my interviewees talk about themselves, and how they create differences and definitions while negotiating diverse group and national identities. To understand these complexities, it is important to note that elements from both within and outside a group contribute to forming the 'us' and 'them' and that the group is never a completely coherent and permanent entity. Identities are shaped through a continuous identification process, and by how the subject imagines they are seen by others. People describe things and generate meanings by making opposing contrasts, which provides clarity in understanding the world. In reality, however, opposing features blend together and are ambiguous.¹²² Defining oneself according to a specific framework will always exclude other possible identifications, regardless of how dynamic and fluid identities may be in reality.

¹²¹ Patel 2013, 23.

¹²² Hall 1999, 39, 82.

Finnish people constitute a multicultural, multilingual and multi-ethnic group that has been further diversified by growing immigration. As noted earlier, however, Finnish people are predominantly perceived as ethno-culturally homogeneous. Ethnicity describes a person's membership of a group with whom they share a set of similar inherited features, which also differs from other groups at the same time.¹²³ At its simplest, ethnicity has to do with culture and descent. It is a social construct that is further developed into an idea of a community.¹²⁴ This understanding can be extended to any group identity. Some of my interviewees revealed that being in Europe is an essential part of the experience of living in Helsinki. On a bigger scale, Helsinki is part of Finland, which is part of the European Union and Europe, which is ultimately part of a global framework. People coming from outside European borders see European culture as especially different, but those who come from or have previously lived within its borders find similarities between the European countries. Of course, a casual conversation will not necessarily reveal a comprehensive definition of 'Europe', but there is a shared understanding of some aspects that make it unique and different from the rest of the world.

Nowicka's research on mobile professionals often refers to infrastructure as something that enables people to feel good in a place. Infrastructure is the basic organisational structure that people take for granted, such as public amenities, restaurants, cinemas, schools or parks. These expand the concept of home to include the surrounding infrastructure that articulates familiarity and security.¹²⁵ Stefano came to Finland from Italy, so his migration was an intra-European move. Although this was his first time living abroad, the experience did not feel significantly different to when he first moved within Italy, away from his parental home:

...this would be the first, the first full experience abroad, yeah. It's still quite, it's very familiar still because being, like, under similar laws and bureaucracies as per European Union, it's easier I would say than just moving as in, or even to the US or so...¹²⁶

¹²³ Hautaniemi 2001, 16–17.

¹²⁴ Fenton 2003, 3.

¹²⁵ Nowicka 2007, 80.

¹²⁶ Stefano 3.4.2018.

As shown in Stefano's comment, he feels that there are more structural similarities between European countries than between any European country and other non-EU countries such as the United States. Finland is part of the same Union as Stefano's native country, so he was comfortable with moving to Helsinki. Both countries share a common underlying 'Europeanness', which also seems to extend to Stefano's European identity. The expectation that laws and bureaucracies will be similar helps to support an easier transition. Carlos, in turn, enjoys a familiarity with the public transportation and walkability of European cities, which he was accustomed to in Germany. Talking about his past experiences with reference to moving to Helsinki, he explained:

...when I was in Frankfurt, I got to get used to the European, you know, to go out, to walk, to take the train, because in the US you drive everywhere... So then, when I moved to Finland I was already used to that, so it's been like little changes...¹²⁷

Carlos sees similarities across European cities in terms of using public transport and travelling by foot. This contrasts significantly with the United States where he habituated to driving everywhere. Interestingly, comments from both Stefano and Carlos portray the US as an infrastructural antithesis of Europe. Carlos also felt that his prior international experiences influenced how he felt about moving to and settling in new places, so that his experience in Helsinki "has been really positive"¹²⁸. Having already lived in various countries and acclimatised to cultural differences, this may have made it easier for him to move to Helsinki. He observes that people in Helsinki do not customarily greet in the morning and has realised to not be offended by this cultural quality. Lily, on the other hand, moved to Finland from Uganda, and did feel a cultural difference:

...the Finnish culture is still something I need to learn because moving from Africa, you come to Europe, that's a whole different mindset... the people, their ways of life, I've noticed they're reserved, they're so reserved: you sit in the train and everyone is minding their own business. So, it's just a whole new different thing for me that I have to get used to.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Carlos 26.3.2018.

¹²⁸ Carlos 26.3.2018.

¹²⁹ Lily 27.3.2018.

Lily generalises Finland as a broadly European location, describing cultural differences through a lens of an Afro-European dichotomy. However, as discussed earlier in chapter 2, Finnish people's reserved nature also strikes other Europeans as something different. At the time of the interview, Lily had not yet travelled to other European countries, so it is uncertain whether seeing other cultural settings in Europe may change her perspective of European diversity. Compared to the African way of life, however, coming to Finland offered quite a different experience.

For Nataliya, her experience was influenced by past travels and seeing her sister live in other parts of Europe. This meant that her family's choice to move to Finland did not seem so radical as she had already witnessed someone else experience living abroad:

My sister lives abroad, since she was 16, and now she's almost like me, 32, so, it was like, the idea was more common to us. We went to visit her, she started to study in Spain and now she's in Brussels, so she moved, and again we were visiting her in Spain, then visiting her in Brussels. It's like we are more open towards Europe.¹³⁰

Nataliya comes from Ukraine, an Eastern European country not part of the EU, and considers herself open towards Europe. This is an interesting political statement considering the geopolitical tensions in the region. Seeing oneself as 'European' is not only about someone's geographical origin, but is also about identifying with the political views and values of a European ideological construct.¹³¹ This also links to the perceived European characteristics and way of life. Aino, from the United States, told me about how she saw herself after being in Finland for a while:

I feel so European now, I can say like I have friends in, like, Germany and Switzerland and all these places whereas at home, it's just like yeah, I have a friend in like another state...¹³²

¹³⁰ Nataliya 31.3.2018.

¹³¹ On the differences of 'European' as a political category related to the EU compared to 'Europeanness', the latter would suggest a more open socially constructed belonging, see for example, Patel 2013, 23, 26.

¹³² Aino 3.4.2018.

To Aino, it seems that knowing people from other countries typifies the idea of Europe and what it is to be European. Contrarily, one is more likely to make interstate connections in the US. This is certainly true since the establishment of the European Union, which actively upholds a range of policies encouraging international co-operation within the Union. The clearest examples are policies allowing ‘free’ travel and movement of labour across borders, and initiatives such as the Erasmus exchange programme. This has likely facilitated the expansion of many people’s social network beyond domestic national boundaries, and contributed to what ‘Europeanness’ looks like. It is clear from the comments above that the European context has an important influence over how people experience life in Helsinki. Europe is often perceived as culturally homogenous both materially and socially, when juxtaposed against other territories and cultural identities of the world.¹³³

It is generally understood that identities come into question when a person is required to think of their belonging in reference to others. Moving abroad can be an important event, as it forces one into a situation that provokes the question: where do I belong?¹³⁴ Regardless of how a person self-identifies, their identity is constantly subjected to what other people expect it ‘is’ or ‘should be’. These demands that are based on assumptions of cultural norms influence the subject as one has to respond to various and contradictory confrontations both well-meaning and malign in nature. Inscribing certain characteristics or traits to oneself is always done in relation to others, as we carve ourselves and produce others by claiming external and internal differences.¹³⁵ Therefore, contextualising ‘Europeanness’ by reference to the ‘other’ is an elusive process, as the ‘others’ exist both within Europe and elsewhere.¹³⁶

Stuart Hall suggests that, for the postmodern subject, identities are fractured and challenge the idea of a coherent subject. A person can embody different identities depending on the context, and the self-identification process is never-ending.¹³⁷ In other words, it is important for people to negotiate the differences between oneself and others while constructing their own identity. This relates to both individual self-identities and group identities. However, clearly distinguishing what separates identities is difficult as people have a very complex approach to

¹³³ See, for example, Nowicka 2006, 173.

¹³⁴ Koikkalainen 2013, 87.

¹³⁵ Narayan 2012, 148–151.

¹³⁶ Patel 2013, 25–26.

¹³⁷ Hall 1999, 19, 23.

seeing themselves and others in similar situations. My interviewee Ada, for example, comes from Hungary and recognises that she is different from Finnish people but also tries to distance herself from the ‘immigrant’¹³⁸ group identity. This hints at some potentially undesirable aspects of associating with ‘immigrants’:

...My goal is to get Finnish friends and with them, I try to speak and initiate conversation in Finnish, because I don’t want them to feel like I’m an immigrant who doesn’t speak their language... even when I go to the authorities, any kind of office or bank, I do everything in Finnish. I mean, I don’t want to be the immigrant, who doesn’t want to assimilate, or something...¹³⁹

It appears that Ada implicitly constructs an ‘ideal’ immigrant by contrasting it against certain unwanted features, which she may have derived from public discourse. She does not want to be seen as the ‘wrong’ kind of immigrant. This can be understood in the framework of social representation which emphasises the importance of analysing both the impact of others’ representations on identity as well as one’s own perception of oneself.¹⁴⁰ This is obviously a complex issue since the term ‘immigrant’ is often used neutrally in Finnish with little thought given to its associations and consequences of such labelling.¹⁴¹

Certain social characteristics and cultural differences, such as an unwillingness to assimilate, is sometimes used to justify ultimately xenophobic attitudes towards foreigners.¹⁴² As such, it is not just about defining oneself, but also about defining oneself in relation to ‘others’ or what is perceived as the other. As seen in the above quote, this occurs in people’s ideas about immigrants and what they represent. The ‘immigrant’ group is often seen in a negative light in public debates, so whether one wants to be associated with it can be a source of internal conflict regarding one’s own identity. Identities should therefore be understood as heterogeneous, they can vary by situation and be inconsistent to how one sees themselves at any given time.¹⁴³ The diverse identities Europeans express is illustrative of this, as the perception of being part of a

¹³⁸ See for comparison Koikkalainen 2013, 93: According to a Working in Europe web-survey, only 9% of the Finns living abroad in Europe described themselves as immigrants.

¹³⁹ Ada 28.3.2018.

¹⁴⁰ Sakki & Pirttilä-Backman 2009, 158.

¹⁴¹ For example, Tuuli Kurki’s 2018 dissertation talks about the making of immigrant subjectivities in the context of integration policies and practices.

¹⁴² Delanty et al. 2008, 2.

¹⁴³ Rattansi 2007, 116–117.

larger international community might change as soon as a border is crossed and one's status has altered. It is therefore wrong to assume that all immigrants are the same, and would form an internally consistent and unified group.

Adding to the complexity of self-identification in people, it is possible for one to identify with multiple cultural groups.¹⁴⁴ For Elena, identifying with just one nationality is not simple. She was born in Moldova (when it was still part of the Soviet Union) and lived in Israel for about eight years. In her case, experiences from variety of cross-cultural engagements and environments add complexity to the effect of cultural influences. A person's identity may effectively become a hybrid of different cultural influences due to the multiplicity of intercultural encounters and processes. When Elena first came to Helsinki, she reached out to both Moldovan and Israeli communities to see where she would feel better. Based on her experiences with both groups, she felt more like home with the Israeli. However, her self-identification is not as simple as finding a group she feels more comfortable with. She seemed to feel conflicted with her own identity, as it received strong influences from two different countries. In addition, she also needs to consider external pressures in daily encounters. She explained to me how she handles situations involving new people:

...here, if I'm going to some [of] these kinds of events or meetings or stuff and there is a mixed culture and people are asking me: "Where are you from?" so, I have to really weigh my answer and say, choose, either I'm from Moldova or from Israel. So, if I feel confident I will say yeah, from Israel, I really don't care, but sometimes I really, like, have to be cautious and to say no, I'm from Moldova. It's, no one knows the place, it's a part of Russia in [the] past so then they are like, okay...¹⁴⁵

Elena is obviously very aware of the connotations people have with both her native country, Moldova, as well as Israel, where she moved to Finland from. Because of her complex story, she is sometimes faced with a choice of what to tell people, when asked where she is from. This demonstrates how the human experience and the understanding of identity is not often a singular story. Rather, it is multi-dimensional, with temporal and spatial characteristics that can change over time.

¹⁴⁴ Huttunen et al. 2005, 29.

¹⁴⁵ Elena 13.3.2018.

It has been suggested that social representation should be analysed by considering the historical and social dimension of prejudice.¹⁴⁶ Intercultural interaction between people does not happen in a void, but rather tends to include the image of the other's culture which has been influenced by different discourses. In this sense, encounters are often preconditioned.¹⁴⁷ Europe is especially loaded with cultural, ethnic, historical and political claims as to what it represents and what it is. This means that there can be assumptions and expectations of the 'other' that might affect the conditions of individual interactions. My interviewee, Fahim from Pakistan provides an account similar to Elena's, saying about his experiences in meeting new people:

Sometimes, when I am going to club there is some kind of discrimination in the club, I've seen something like that, people, girls that [are] dancing, when they ask me about "Where are you from?" then I say, "from Pakistan", and they ignore me then. So, I am facing this problem... in Helsinki, people do not trust Islamic people. Sometimes I'm not saying to anyone that I am from Pakistan, sometimes I say I am from India...¹⁴⁸

Fahim faces a problem with whether to tell people he is from Pakistan. He explains how people usually react after saying he is from India rather than Pakistan. People engage in a conversation about places they have visited in India, what they liked about the country and how they liked the food. Although not a common occurrence, he once had a similar response after telling someone he is from Pakistan. However, he states that due to the media representation of Pakistan, people tend to falsely and negatively perceive Pakistan as "an extremist country, promoting terrorism"¹⁴⁹. In addition to media coverage of global events, populist politics promoting anti-immigrant and Islamophobic discourses contribute to portraying Muslim communities as a security threat to European societies.¹⁵⁰ It is easy to see how in the current political climate Fahim finds it difficult to be in a position where he must consider whether to reveal his true nationality. It is the reason he seeks to promote a positive image of his country

¹⁴⁶ Sakki & Pirttilä-Backman 2009, 153.

¹⁴⁷ Dervin & Machart 2015, 3.

¹⁴⁸ Fahim 27.3.2018.

¹⁴⁹ Fahim 27.3.2018.

¹⁵⁰ Rastas 2019, 362.

of origin, saying that “we are very soft, very respectable people, we are very honest people”¹⁵¹. Fahim feels strongly about changing people’s minds about Pakistan.

It appears that in the Finnish context, Elena and Fahim think that some identities are more desirable than others. As they consider their responses to questions such as ‘where are you from’, they are also building an image of the other and the other’s tolerance towards them. Both of the above comments relate to the overall global political climate, international debates and conflicts. These also have an undertone that intertwines with questions of how religion is depicted and perceived. In comparison to other parts of the world, Europe is highly secular. Decline in religion and the tendency towards increased separation of church and state have created a secular trend. However, European modernity carries constant reminders of its Christian background and Christian values. Christianity has also played a role in constructing the European Union.¹⁵² This history has had its effect on today’s world, where people tend to name and identify the ‘other’ against the backdrop of their own cultural landscape. Although secularised in practice, like in Finland for example, the matter is more complex as there still is a state religion and a state church. People might not consider themselves particularly religious, but ‘belonging’ to the church is still customary.

As the European Union continues to promote all Europeans as being “united in diversity”¹⁵³, it begs the question of who are the ‘Europeans’ this sentiment refers to. Mobile individuals from within and outside of Europe have various experiences in Helsinki. Their efforts to fit in are sometimes obstructed by exclusive patterns of thinking, relentless focus on nationality, language differences and even global influences. The European motto of inclusivity is not always reflected in everyday practices. We may also ask, what is the role of non-Europeans or ‘new’ Europeans with diverse backgrounds? In regards to the above quotes, it is clear that irrespective of one’s origin, not everybody has the same starting point when it comes to their own identification and acceptance within Finnish society. It is a far more complex question and, understandably, there are many differences in people’s personalities and experiences that affect their views. In the next chapter, I will analyse how perceived differences affect my interviewees’ experiences. For example, I examine the ways in which insufficient language skills affect one’s

¹⁵¹ Fahim 27.3.2018.

¹⁵² Delanty 2008, 79–80, 86–87.

¹⁵³ European Union, the EU motto.

job opportunities, how there seems to be exclusionary barriers to entering the Finnish labour market, and hidden structures of inequality.

3.2 Experiences of Discrimination

I questioned my interviewees about whether they faced any discrimination in Helsinki. It is an important topic as it has been argued that perceived discrimination can have real and tangible effects on the wellbeing of those discriminated against.¹⁵⁴ I chose to use this word for its general connotations of differential treatment on the basis of a specific trait. Discrimination should thus be considered a subjective assumption of what one believes to be a divisive difference.¹⁵⁵ This means that discrimination is not about the differences per se, but rather about how they are generalised to depict a whole group negatively. Encounters with individual foreigners, for example, are all building a representative image of what becomes seen as typical of all ‘foreigners’.¹⁵⁶ This relates to how an individual is assumed to belong to a certain group, regardless of whether or not they identify themselves as such. It has also been suggested that objective ways of classifying something as discrimination should only subsequently be decided as either morally wrong or unlawful.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, asking about discrimination without strictly defining it, was a way to give room for my interviewees’ own thoughts on their personal experiences.

In the 2015 Eurobarometer, ethnic origin was perceived to be the most widespread basis for discrimination in Finland.¹⁵⁸ Racial discrimination, however, did not come up as something my interviewees had experienced personally, but it did seem to be something that happens to ‘other’ people. It has been argued that new kinds of racism that are not based on ‘traditional’ categories of appearance are increasing in Europe.¹⁵⁹ However, publicly explicit racist rhetoric has grown in populist politics in the Nordics and throughout Europe.¹⁶⁰ In my interviews, I did not mention race or racism, but these terms were brought up by my interviewees themselves. Theoretically speaking, it might be possible to differentiate modern day discrimination from past

¹⁵⁴ Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2007, 224. See also Vartia et al. 2007, 58–59 on the effects of finding a job to immigrants’ wellbeing.

¹⁵⁵ Eidelson 2015, 16–18.

¹⁵⁶ Delanty et al. 2008, 4.

¹⁵⁷ Banton 1994, 1, 91.

¹⁵⁸ European Commission 2015, 1.

¹⁵⁹ Delanty et al. 2008, 1.

¹⁶⁰ Rastas 2019, 361–362.

discrimination, but ethnic categories still seem to support ideas of what is considered ‘European’¹⁶¹. Therefore, ideas of racial differences still exist hidden under a different rhetoric and are available as a resource for arguments over immigration.¹⁶² Lily from Uganda elaborated on her experience of discrimination:

...when I was coming, I came expecting to be racially discriminated, but I reached here, I waited for the racial discrimination, nothing was happening... being racially discriminated, no, I haven’t faced any.¹⁶³

What Lily refers to is specifically racist actions. She casually mentions that even if someone would have said something in Finnish, it would not have affected her since “as long as I don’t understand, I don’t care”¹⁶⁴. Although she found the job-search related bureaucracies in Finland difficult, she did not mention that when asked about discrimination. Here we can see that perspective has much to do with how discrimination is understood. The conception of discriminatory behaviour or structures is thus linked to subjective experiences. If one has never had to think about race in relation to oneself, it is easy to turn to other forms of discrimination, such as the tendency for employers to treat non-Finnish nationals unfavourably, and see the unequal actions in them. However, if one is expecting racially driven discrimination, such an issue may not be perceived as discrimination, but rather considered as another kind of struggle.

Although Lily, or my other interviewees, did not mention facing any racial discrimination in Helsinki or elsewhere in Finland, it is impossible to conclude that there is no racism or racial discrimination.¹⁶⁵ The answers being given in an interview situation constitute an inherently different social dynamic than, for example, when sharing personal stories with a friend. As such, without casting doubt on my interviewees and their experiences, the interview environment may have influenced what they reveal about their experience. My interviewees were essentially talking to a stranger who represents the majority population, and this may affect how people respond to questions on certain topics. Also, some details may have been lost and forgotten if I have not picked up on cues that reveal something more.

¹⁶¹ Patel 2013, 25.

¹⁶² Rattansi 2007, 101. See also Sakki & Pirttilä-Backman 2009, 151–153; Philip 2007, 26.

¹⁶³ Lily 27.3.2018.

¹⁶⁴ Lily 27.3.2018.

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2002; Sabour 1999, 237–239 on immigrants’ experiences with racism in Finland.

The difficult job market situation for non-nationals was brought up in many of my interviews. Research has shown that discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, nationality and language happens in recruitment processes in Finland.¹⁶⁶ Academic research has also recognised this as happening all throughout Europe. Thought patterns in the current labour market in Europe have evolved to emphasise national culture, language and domestic education as superior.¹⁶⁷ This, of course, easily leads to the exclusion of some groups such as immigrants. Therefore, the labour market in Finland has social and cultural aspects that can prevent immigrants' access to advertised jobs. It is often about prevailing attitudes towards non-nationals that become discriminatory in practice.¹⁶⁸

I would argue that there is a relative opacity and vagueness to issues surrounding discrimination in the recruitment process. It is difficult to ascertain what criteria potential employers base their hiring decision on, whether an applicant is rejected for having a foreign name or simply lacking the required skill set. Job applicants are often stereotyped based on easily observed characteristics, such as their name on a CV, and are consequently seen as representatives of a specific group rather than as individuals. The person in question is then labelled with beliefs related to that group, however false the beliefs may be.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, 'institutional' discrimination encompasses structures and practices that are exclusive by nature, and inherently disadvantage certain groups.¹⁷⁰ Institutional discrimination is characterised by subtle ways that people are positioned unequally rather than explicitly expressing resentment towards foreigners. This is likely due to the fact that employers are not liable for recruitment decisions that lead to systematic flaws which are easily disregarded. In other words, no employer is held accountable in their position of power.

Elena, for example, wondered whether her Russian name was contributing to difficulties in finding a job. This occurs despite the fact that people often speak to her in Finnish on the streets because she looks "like a local"¹⁷¹. There is some truth to her speculation, as a field experiment from 2011 found that applicants with a Russian name needed to send twice as many applications

¹⁶⁶ For a concise overview of research on the topic, see Larja et al. 2012, 51–60.

¹⁶⁷ Flam 2008, 192–193. See also Vartia et al. 2007, 61.

¹⁶⁸ Ahmad 2002, 227.

¹⁶⁹ Burns 2008, 161. See, for example, Työnimi campaign commissioned by Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak) in 2018 demonstrating the discrimination faced by Roma job-seekers.

¹⁷⁰ Delanty et al. 2008, 5.

¹⁷¹ Elena 13.3.2018.

as equally qualified applicants with a Finnish name to get an invitation for a job interview.¹⁷² As an educated engineer with many years of work experience in an international company, she explained the ambiguity of discrimination from her point of view:

...it's not so straight forward or like, you don't know what people think about you if they know the name or the background, so you cannot know if they judge you by your knowledge, or accent, your name, your skin colour, whatever, like, I just cannot say if there is, or not, some discrimination...¹⁷³

Elena is describing the tricky nature of discrimination in the job market that does not necessarily appear in explicit ways. Although research points towards discriminatory attitudes, one cannot personally be certain as to why an application was rejected. She elaborates this using an example from Israel, where religious women are forbidden from showing their elbows and knees. If she were to enter a religious store wearing a t-shirt and shorts, she may be asked to leave and the reason would be clear: she was not dressed appropriately. Discrimination in the job market is comparably more obscure and hidden. It can therefore be concluded that discrimination works as a discreet mechanism in the labour market.¹⁷⁴

One of the key issues in studying discrimination is that interpretations and subjective experiences of the hiring process often differ between recruiters and job-seekers.¹⁷⁵ This also applies to experiences in the work place, which makes discrimination hard to recognise. For example, according to Minna Söderqvist's research on employers' views of immigrants in the work place, it seems as if employers do not see problems the same way as immigrants. In her questionnaire, employers admitted that misunderstandings were common, but 43 percent reported no issues with name calling. These results are contradictory to other studies, where immigrants have reported bullying and discrimination in much higher numbers.¹⁷⁶ Are employers unwilling to admit that these problems exist? Or are their attitudes and views inherently discriminatory and racist? This issue is difficult to address, when not admitted by the people themselves.

¹⁷² Larja et al. 2012, 162.

¹⁷³ Elena 13.3.2018.

¹⁷⁴ Hautaniemi 2001, 15.

¹⁷⁵ Koivunen et al. 2015, 6.

¹⁷⁶ Söderqvist 2006, 287–288.

Even though my study is not exclusively focused on experiences in the job market, it is an important aspect in the lives of people within the working age population. On average, the non-native Finnish speakers are younger compared to native-speakers in Helsinki. Most are working age adults, and my interviewees would belong to this group as well. For example, in early 2016 45 percent of non-native speakers in Helsinki were 25 to 44 years old, when within native speakers the same age group consisted altogether less than one third. Almost one-fifth of the overall population in Helsinki within that age group was a non-native speaker.¹⁷⁷ For this reason, it is necessary to look into the job market situation in Finland and more specifically in Helsinki.

Elli Heikkilä and Maria Pikkarainen conducted research exploring immigrants' perceptions and expectations of the Finnish labour market in December 2004. The researchers interviewed 28 immigrants of different nationalities, between the ages of 26 to 55 in the cities Jyväskylä and Turku.¹⁷⁸ Although the location and time are different to the focus of my study, which is more than ten years later and in a different city, the results in Heikkilä and Pikkarainen's research are surprisingly similar to matters my interviewees discussed. To summarise the job market situation as described by the immigrants in their research: It seemed that immigrants are in a different position compared to Finns, and employers were too focused on immigrants' insufficient Finnish language skills. Therefore, immigrants are not given the opportunity to show their professional skills, which seemed to be of secondary importance when applying for jobs. Immigrants felt that there are difficult boundaries to overcome, and negative experiences by employers were thought to ruin chances for all immigrants of the same ethnic background.¹⁷⁹

Many of my interviewees talked about the struggles of finding a job in Helsinki, and it was commonly felt that it is harder for foreigners. Ada from Hungary said about the problems foreigners face when applying for jobs in Finland:

...I do believe that the statistics and all those articles are kind of true. Especially when we attended these CV workshops and job seekers events... and there were experts coming and telling us that if you have a foreign name, or you look foreign, or you are a foreigner, yes, it's more difficult to get a job in Finland...¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Hiekkavuo 2017, 14.

¹⁷⁸ Heikkilä & Pikkarainen 2006, 258.

¹⁷⁹ Heikkilä & Pikkarainen 2006, 266–269.

¹⁸⁰ Ada 28.3.2018.

In Ada's experience, it is a fact that finding employment is harder for foreigners. In November 2016, almost one-fifth of unemployed people in Helsinki were foreign nationals. The situation has remained relatively the same over time, the employment and unemployment rates in 2014 remained approximately the same as in the first years of 2000.¹⁸¹ Of course, it is good to remember again that this group of 'foreign nationals' is highly heterogeneous, comprising of people from various backgrounds. It is therefore important to examine the experiences of diverse individuals to establish discriminatory patterns. A separate research by Heikkilä and Pikkarainen from 2008, focusing on the internationalisation of the Finnish population and workforce, asserts that discriminatory attitudes are a discernible reality, especially in the job market. Long periods of unemployment, and demands for nationality or excellent language skills negatively affect an immigrant's prospects in the job market.¹⁸²

Daniela from Slovakia, who had found a job unexpectedly through her extended social network, was convinced one also needs luck in order to find a job in Helsinki:

I realised that, as a foreigner here, you must have luck... It's almost impossible to find work through some, I don't know, website...¹⁸³

Applying for jobs through online channels is generally felt to be difficult for both locals and foreigners searching for a job. Daniela points out that a vast number of people, both native Finnish and foreign, apply for the same positions that are advertised online. This makes it tough to find a job from public job advertisement sites. Searching for jobs through formal channels can thus be frustrating when one knows that not all open positions are posted online. Again, my interviewees' thoughts on the matter are in line with Heikkilä and Pikkarainen's research from 2004. Their research showed that immigrants felt that job seekers needed to be pro-active and seek positions that were not listed online. They did not think that finding employment would happen fast even with a strong will to become employed.¹⁸⁴ Of course, these sentiments are not limited to non-native job-seekers. Instead, they relate to the prevailing recruitment through networks, and there is a lack of publicly accessible information on vacancies. Foreigners, as

¹⁸¹ Hiekkavuo 2017, 35.

¹⁸² Heikkilä & Pikkarainen 2008, 54.

¹⁸³ Daniela 4.4.2018.

¹⁸⁴ Heikkilä & Pikkarainen 2006, 271.

‘newly arrived’ members of society, generally have fewer social resources and connections with people in professional gatekeeper positions. This consequently creates grounds for systematic exclusion.¹⁸⁵

Lily, who was searching for a job, talked about the catch-22 of finding employment as a foreign national in Finland. In order to obtain a work permit, she first required a work contract, but most companies declined her application on the basis of her not having that permit. Similarly, Daniela told me about her experience when dealing with immigration services Migri. According to her, “they allow me to work here, but it’s impossible to work without this ID social security number, and you can’t get this ID social security number without work”¹⁸⁶. These personal accounts clearly describe a dilemma that has substantial effects. Lily continued to explain that companies do not feel the individual applicant’s frustration with the situation. She hopes to have an opportunity to demonstrate her worth by getting an employment contract required for a work permit. However, she was aware of the way recruitment works in Finland, which mostly occurs through networks:

...the internet shows that 20% of the jobs in Finland are advertised, so the remaining 80% is by word of mouth, and for you to get in to the 80%, you need friends, connections which I don’t have. I’m trying, that’s why I try to attend these things [job related events], try to make as many friends... because on your own, getting to the 20%, the 20% ask for Finnish ...¹⁸⁷

Lily’s argument highlights the difficulty of finding a job through formal channels, especially without Finnish language skills. Studies have also shown that even having sufficient Finnish language skills may not be enough to land a job. This is because closed-off attitudes towards non-nationals still prevail in Finnish society.¹⁸⁸ Jobs are often found through social networks, and for that you need connections that foreigners do not necessarily have in the beginning. So, getting a job is also about developing a social network that can help one find opportunities in the labour market. The social aspect of knowing someone at a work place can be an essential factor for a person to get hired.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ Burns 2008, 158.

¹⁸⁶ Daniela 4.4.2018.

¹⁸⁷ Lily 27.3.2018. See also a similar comment by an interviewee in Vartia et al. 2007, 42.

¹⁸⁸ Ahmad 2002, 236–237; Koivunen et al. 2015, 13.

¹⁸⁹ Ahmad 2002, 239. See also Vartia et al. 2007, 61.

Language is thought to be one of the key competencies limiting one's ability to obtain a job.¹⁹⁰ For example, in a study by Tuija Koivunen, Hanna Ylöstalo and Katri Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta focusing on inequalities in the recruitment practices in Finland, several recruitment consultants detracted from ethnic background issues by stating that language skills were more important for an applicants' success in the recruitment process. In this way, the job applicants themselves are given the burden of responsibility for equal treatment. Job applicants often assume this role since they do not have a choice, and thus accept lower positions than what they are qualified for. In some cases, an immigrant applicant is forced to settle for less, which gives leverage to the employer.¹⁹¹ Also, although my interviewees did not always specify the type of jobs they were applying for, immigrant applicants' chances of being hired are found to be linked to the position's level of face-to-face contact with clients or customers.¹⁹² Employers' recruitment conventions can be guided by what is expected regarding others', such as clients or co-workers, intolerance towards immigrants.¹⁹³ One's construction of 'the other' can therefore result in maintaining discriminatory structures whilst erasing one's responsibility for it. In similar ways to Elena and Fahim's accounts in the previous chapter, the idea of others can have an effect on one's own actions. To protect oneself either physically or in terms of one's image, people need to analyse the risks in relation to the choices they make. When the other is perceived to be less tolerant, one acts accordingly. This may be one of the reasons it is so hard to deconstruct some behavioural patterns.

Although most of my interviewees said they were fine in not knowing Finnish in everyday life, it was often mentioned that knowing the language would be beneficial. My interviewees commented on how language was used in exclusionary ways, including some job advertisements being in Finnish only¹⁹⁴, and Finnish language requirements for jobs which restrict foreigners' access to the job market. This has been considered as one of the most apparent and common ways that institutional discrimination manifests in the labour market.¹⁹⁵ Even if demands for local language competence or work experience within the country in question seem harmless, they have discriminatory effects.¹⁹⁶ Eleonore, who is originally from

¹⁹⁰ Hautaniemi 2001, 15; Heikkilä & Pikkarainen 2006, 269, 271; Vartia et al 2007, 66.

¹⁹¹ Koivunen et al. 2015, 4, 13–14, 16. See also Yle News' 2019 article on immigrants' struggle to find work.

¹⁹² Ahmad 2002, 234.

¹⁹³ Koivunen et al. 2015, 13; Joronen 2005, 76; Vartia et al. 2007, 50.

¹⁹⁴ Irina 30.3.2018.

¹⁹⁵ Burns 2008, 157.

¹⁹⁶ Flam 2008, 189.

Germany, and lived in the UK for about six years before moving to Helsinki, stated in her written answer:

The biggest problem I would say was getting a job. Obviously, I wouldn't be able to get a job where fluent Finnish is needed, but with a background in tourism I had thought it would be easy enough to get something international. But even in tourism jobs, the number one requirement is fluent Finnish AND on top of that fluent Swedish... it seems silly when mainly working with people from abroad.¹⁹⁷

Eleonore now works using her native language, and more so than in the years before moving to Finland. She thought her work experience and educational background in tourism, an industry considered fairly international, should have put her in a good position to find a job in her field, but she says that was not the case. Of course, since her previous experiences were limited to countries where she knew the language, it is hard to say whether this specifically relates to working in Finland. Without devaluing her emotional experience, it might be that she would have encountered similar national language requirements in other countries as well. However, these demands in the Finnish context might also be about the perception of Finnish as a difficult language to learn. Expectations for non-nationals to learn the language might therefore seem particularly upsetting. Finnish language requirements seem persistent in the labour market, and some fields might understandably emphasize these skills more due to the nature of the work. It is sometimes hard to know whether these requirements are justifiable or simply a result of attitudes towards immigrants. However, the issue is also related to the overall societal debates and concerns for the future of the Finnish language.¹⁹⁸

In the 2007 survey on uses and perceptions of English in Finland, 40.5 percent of the Finnish respondents said that they use English at work. This also includes people that only scarcely spoke, read or wrote in English.¹⁹⁹ In terms of language tuition at school, English has increased in prominence. According to the survey, English was the most common language studied in all institutions. This however, can also have negative implications for the future employers needing

¹⁹⁷ Eleonore 23.3.2018.

¹⁹⁸ Heikkinen & Mattila 2011, 25–30. See, for example, a statement issued by the Institute for the Languages of Finland in October 2018 on a need for nationwide language politics due to the weakened status of Finnish with references on changes in the society.

¹⁹⁹ Leppänen et al. 2009, 41–42.

staff with diverse linguistic skills.²⁰⁰ Therefore, immigrants can represent an important resource of knowledge and know-how that are needed in the increasingly international Finnish work life. It has been argued that multilingual and culturally diverse people benefit society by enabling effective activity in a multicultural society and international business.²⁰¹ In the 2016 diversity barometer by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, the increase in new perspectives, ideas and possibilities for innovation were the most commonly cited positive effects of ethnic diversity in the work place. However, differences in communication and interaction or the lack of a mutual language were mentioned as some of the key challenges.²⁰²

One of my interviewees, Stefano who moved from Italy to Helsinki to pursue a career opportunity, could not recall any personal experiences with discrimination. However, he mentioned reading some second-hand accounts that contributed to the pattern of discrimination in the labour market, although emphasising that these complaints were not his own experience and might have been fabricated:

I would say most people are a bit unhappy about the job market situation in the sense that although laws avoid, like really prohibit, any type of discriminatory practices, as you may imagine there is for example use of language restrictions, even for jobs that do not require language. So, this is a gateway method of keeping non-Finnish people out... statistically it's the most common voice of complaint in non-Finnish groups that I read.²⁰³

The covert nature of discrimination is apparent in Stefano's comment. Even if laws explicitly prohibit any kind of discriminatory practices, the reality might still be different. Koivunen, Ylöstalo and Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta discuss how inequality is practised informally in recruitment processes, in other words, the recruitment practices sustaining inequality are not made explicit, the result being that unlawful acts of inequality are circumvented, and those laws promoting equality are not internalised.²⁰⁴ Therefore, as stated before, the socio-cultural nature in the labour market affects the attitudes of people in gatekeeper positions and can prevent

²⁰⁰ Leppänen et al. 2009, 39–41; Heikkinen & Mantila 2011, 51–52.

²⁰¹ Latomaa 2007, 362–363.

²⁰² Bergbom et al. 2016, 23–25. This is also mentioned as one of the key objectives for Finland's Government Integration Programme for 2016–2019. Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö 2016, 26.

²⁰³ Stefano 3.4.2018.

²⁰⁴ Koivunen et al. 2015, 4, 12.

immigrants' access to jobs. The requirements might seem harmless, but they end up having discriminatory consequences.

In addition to the above challenges in the job market, there are other ways in which language is used to an exclusionary effect. While finding a job is already made difficult by advertisements sometimes being solely in Finnish, some of the interviews revealed that this was further hampered by the same language barriers to accessing relevant information online. As Aino from the United States told me:

Some of the websites are really hard, because they have an English page, but then they don't have all the information I need in English, so that can be really difficult. Like, even trying to book a doctor's appointment some of it will be in English, but then when you get into the smaller section of the screen, it's all in Finnish...²⁰⁵

In Aino's experience, she found that although the use of English online was accommodating, it remained incomplete and insufficient. Only some, and not all, of the necessary web-pages were in English, which would leave her feeling unsure of the given information.

So far, I have mainly focused on the kinds of discrimination my interviewees experienced for being foreign in Finland. Nonetheless, it is important to note that people are affected by other kinds of discrimination in their everyday lives. Each individual's personal situation influences the kind of issues they feel close to and care about. For example, when asked about discrimination, Irina mentioned "maybe some point of discrimination because I'm a woman and because it's still a patriarchal world"²⁰⁶. Nataliya from Ukraine, on the other hand, had come to Helsinki for her husband's work, and had so far spent most of her time with their three-year-old daughter. This meant that her interactions had mainly been through children's activities, and she considered this to be an influential factor in her experience. She explained how she had not faced any discrimination so far:

I didn't face any at this stage. Actually, 90 percent of my time is, and what we do is connected to her. So, it's like kids' activities and no problem at all. When people know that I speak Russian, then they try to remember some Russian words to her.

²⁰⁵ Aino 3.4.2018.

²⁰⁶ Irina 30.3.2018.

I would personally think that we would have more problems with it because you know Russian policy at this stage, and I'm trying, like, to let them know that I'm not Russian, I'm Ukrainian, but speak in Russian, but no, not a problem at all.²⁰⁷

Again, we can see that expectations are often based on the imaginary construction of others as being a certain way. Similarly to Lily, who expected to be racially discriminated, Nataliya expected to face difficulties because of her usual language of communication, Russian. Consequently, she felt the need to highlight her Ukrainian origin. However, in reality she had not faced any issues with speaking Russian. Nevertheless, her unique situation may have affected her experiences with discrimination as her life had changed quite a bit after having a child. When asked about whether the move to Helsinki was a big change for her, she replied:

Well yes, but I'm on such a hiatus now, because I'm at home, so, my big change will start when I start doing something for myself...²⁰⁸

From Nataliya's experience, it is clear that life is more complex than just discrete singular events, but instead events in life often blend together and overlap in a continuum. She thought that the change brought by moving to Helsinki would feel more substantial when she would do something "for herself". I assume this would entail activities not involving her child, as Nataliya talked about studying or working. These are activities separate from her current status of being a stay-at-home mother, which is inherently linked to someone else. Therefore, it seems like the experience of moving to Helsinki has been intertwined with Nataliya's life changes in general.

In this chapter, I have looked at the discriminatory patterns and experiences faced by foreigners in Helsinki and especially the more discreet ways in which they manifest. From an academic point of view, institutional discrimination can be seen to comprise of two parts: firstly, discrimination systematically introduced to institutional structures, and secondly, discrimination operated by specific individuals with authority. However, there are multiple ways in which discriminatory and exclusionary actions happen and are inflicted on 'others'.²⁰⁹ This can be seen from the above quotes which do not necessarily account for any explicit segregating actions towards people. Rather, they explain the ways in which foreigners are

²⁰⁷ Nataliya 31.3.2018.

²⁰⁸ Nataliya 31.3.2018.

²⁰⁹ Burns 2008, 153.

systematically put in a disadvantaged position. It is important to realise then that the phenomenon is highly complex. There are various subjective ways of reacting to differential treatment, and the individual accounts of discrimination are diverse.

Public debates often discuss immigration with reference to the labour market's needs, particularly as Finland faces an ageing population and lacks necessary work force. It is also important, however, to observe the conditions in which immigrants arrive to when coming to the country.²¹⁰ Although the poor employment rate amongst immigrants is attributed to refugees and asylum seekers, my interviewees' accounts demonstrate that there are many prevailing attitudes which obstruct immigrants from gaining employment. My research sample is small, but provides important perspectives on the experiences of people who moved to Helsinki for various reasons. Therefore, effectively employing the available foreign workers to meet the labour shortage in Finland requires particular attention to accommodating people's diverse needs. Attracting people to the country and retaining them depends a lot on the amount of difficulties they face. In *Expat Insider 2017*, a survey by InterNations providing insight into expat²¹¹ experiences, Finland was ranked among the bottom 10 of the 65 countries in the categories: 'Ease of Settling In', 'Friendliness' and 'Finding Friends'.²¹² In the next chapter, I will look further into how my interviewees built their social networks, and how they feel at home in Helsinki. The personal and detailed accounts are crucial in building an understanding of the experiences and the challenges immigrants face.

²¹⁰ This has also been discussed in media. See, for example, Muhonen 2019, a *Helsingin Sanomat* article on the Finnish labour market and immigrants.

²¹¹ In this report, expat is used as a general term for migrants of which "some moved for their career, some for love and others just for the adventure". *Expat Insider 2017*, 2. This broad definition consequently covers the participants in my research.

²¹² *Expat Insider 2017*, 35.

4 Building a Life in Helsinki

This chapter will focus on how my interviewees have built their social networks in a foreign city, and explore their transnational connections. Finally, I will tackle questions of belonging and feeling at home in a place. Since mobility has become a key term characterising the modern western world, it has raised new questions about the meaning of time and space. The emergence of globalisation theory can be traced back to the late 20th century. Restructured free market economy, emerging transnationality and advancements in technology have all factored into a new sense of global network and connectivity. Communication is no longer constrained by geographical limitations, and the possibilities extend beyond merely face to face interactions. This has created a need to reconceptualise both time and space.²¹³ According to anthropologist Marc Augé:

Overmodern mobility expresses itself in the movements of population (migrations, tourism, professional mobility), in immediate general communication and in the traffic of products, images, and information. It corresponds to the paradox of a world where we can, at least in theory, make everything without moving and while moving all the time.²¹⁴

Mobility thus includes various aspects: despite all the technological advancements bringing everything a person needs within arm's reach, people still move constantly. This inspires the following questions: Have places lost their significance as somewhere to feel at home? What do local interactions mean to people with many transnational ties? What connects people to each other and to specific places?

With regards to 'home', I mean both the physical space and the associated symbolic ideas as suggested by David Morley in his article on belongings in the contemporary world.²¹⁵ This is consistent with how my interviewees spoke of home and 'feeling at home'. Home can be a physical living space, or a symbolic meaning attached to a specific city or country. It can also consist the affective dimensions of a place or time. There is no academic consensus on how increased mobility has affected people's attachment to places, and how those attachments

²¹³ Savage et al. 2005, 2–4.

²¹⁴ Augé 2012, 5.

²¹⁵ Morley 2001, 425.

matter. For instance, there is not yet a consistent agreement on whether one needs a particular place to feel at home or not. Only chronically mobile people are suggested to have a flexible attitude towards feeling at home. They may find ‘home’ in any generic place, and are not exclusively attached to a particular location. Nonetheless, the idea of feeling at home is unquestionably important.²¹⁶ It is not a matter of where and why people feel at home in a place, but rather how home remains important to the sense of belonging. It is important to note that both ethnic and cultural backgrounds and reasons behind moving can have various effects on a person’s attachment to the local cultural life.²¹⁷

4.1 Local and Transnational Social Networks

It is crucial to understand that the sociocultural reality in which we live is highly complex and dynamic. A variety of different individuals interact with each other in a shared space. This is why some theories of multicultural environments, processes or people seem blatantly oversimplified or deceptively universal. Research on immigrants’ lives has shown that new communities form around people of similar ethnic backgrounds in parallel with the decay of their previous networks.²¹⁸ From an external perspective, it may be easy to assume that immigrants form relationships with others from similar backgrounds. This can lead to a misleading generalisation that all immigrants belong to an ethnic or migrant community. However, it is important to remember that not every immigrant relates to a community of this kind, or would have moved for family connections or communal reasons.

Although immigrants are a notably diverse group, public discourse in Finland often generalises the subject to larger minority groups of the same ethnic or national background.²¹⁹ Finnish research on immigration also follows a similar pattern of focusing on larger groups of minority people that share a common background. This type of research is important for understanding transnational and diasporic relationships, integration and assimilation patterns, and identities in immigrant communities. Yet it often disregards individuals that have moved for more idiosyncratic reasons, these individuals do not have such a communal aspect to their experience. Not everyone is part of an ‘immigrant community’, and they are consequently a blind spot in

²¹⁶ Duyvendak 2011, 11–13, 16.

²¹⁷ Saukkonen et al. 2007, 7.

²¹⁸ Martikainen et al. 2006, 34.

²¹⁹ Martikainen et al. 2006, 32.

immigration research. I therefore think it is important to consider the experiences of individuals that moved without having a predetermined support network in their destination. When I asked about Patrick's feelings on moving to Helsinki, he explained:

...it's really hard, cause it's like you leave your friends and family at home, so it's just completely like 'new' and then there's no support system, so it makes it difficult.²²⁰

Patrick is referring to the spatial detachment from his support network of friends and family back in the United Kingdom. Moving abroad often means leaving behind familiar items that one might have relied on 'back home'. Since Patrick considered himself as "naturally quite okay at socialising"²²¹, he elaborated that he had no problems building his social network. His network consisted of people he met through three different sources: a non-profit sports club that he ran in Helsinki, his Finnish partner, and his workplace. Stefano also discussed the lack of a local support network when moving abroad:

...the biggest change is that you are farther away from the typical support networks socially and this might be meaning like family of course but also the friends that one has in the city you live in...²²²

Thinking about the changes to one's support network, Stefano compared his experience of moving to Helsinki with his earlier move across Italy. He previously moved from his Italian hometown to another city for his university studies. Finding similarities regarding social support, he felt that he was familiar with the experience of building a new social network. He noted one clear difference between these two experiences is his age, and he also stated that "the social aspect in Italy is more familiar of course"²²³. The way in which people interact and form social groups in Finland stood out to Stefano as something different from Italy.

Age can affect someone's experience of building a social network in a new environment. Yet this is a personally unique experience to each individual at different ages, and is also influenced

²²⁰ Patrick 3.4.2018.

²²¹ Patrick 3.4.2018.

²²² Stefano 3.4.2018.

²²³ Stefano 3.4.2018.

by previous experiences. In addition to Stefano's thoughts about the differences between moving for his studies and moving abroad, Ada said, regarding her experience in Helsinki:

...in this age when you move to a new place, it's difficult to get into friends' circles, because people already have their lives, people already have their circle of friends... so squeezing in time for more [people] can be challenging in one's time table...²²⁴

Although Stefano and Ada are not the same age, both feel that age diminishes opportunities to build a new social network. For Ada, this is explained by the assumption that people are relatively entrenched by a certain age, making it difficult to find time for 'new' people. Finding new friends might therefore seem like a daunting task for someone so new to the city. Again, these are subjective statements that are unique to individuals, but add an interesting aspect to the mobile adults' experiences. She continues to say that in her opinion, it is easier to become acquainted with people in similar situations:

...because foreigners who move here for long term plans, they want to make long term friends... people are very open about their interests... they are trying to connect and they are trying to make friends here and at least have these common fields of interests, but these are all foreigners.²²⁵

Ada described how migrants are actively looking to connect with other people and form relationships. She talks about meeting people at integration centre events, and the ease of sharing interests and to find common ground. According to her experience, foreigners are also inclined to do things together, since their social circles are not as established compared to local Finns. Carlos confirmed this idea saying that "usually the first set of friends you make, they're all international"²²⁶, noting that getting to know Finnish people takes time:

...it has not been hard but it's not easy... I think that maybe if I were in another country, like Spain or other, or even the US, the same amount of effort I'm making to networking, I feel that in those countries my network would be bigger, you

²²⁴ Ada 28.3.2018.

²²⁵ Ada 28.3.2018.

²²⁶ Carlos 26.3.2018.

know, but I cannot say like “Oh my god, I’m struggling and every day I go out and I meet people and I don’t have a friend” no, I know that it takes a while...²²⁷

Although Carlos did not find building his social network in Helsinki too challenging, he feels that it would have been bigger in other countries he visited for the same amount of effort. This relates to typical Finnish characteristics explored earlier in chapter 2. Similar to Ada, Stefano emphasised that regarding his experience of building his social network in Helsinki:

Most connections are done very, very intentionally. So, the only thing that sort of happens by itself is work colleagues, but even then, it really depends because people tend to segregate their companies and activities. So, if it is work you interact at work and that’s it... and expats, I think it’s still quite explicit in the sense that the point is that you meet because you need to meet.²²⁸

Stefano clearly thinks that meeting international people is a very deliberate engagement, and also necessary for a foreigner to build their social network. It seems like an easy way to find friends and make connections, since in Stefano’s experience with his work colleagues, he observes a tendency for people to separate work and private life. This segregation may be the result of people socialising differently in different situations. It might also depend on whether people are willing to extend their interactions with colleagues beyond the usual professional environment.

Ben also noticed a difference between prior social encounters outside Finland and socialising with Finnish people. He says that building his social network “was hard at first”²²⁹, and felt that getting to know Finns required some adjustment. He was also conscious of how a situation might make a big difference:

...it will depend on the circumstances, where you meet them and how you meet them. You find that somebody can be cold here but if you meet them somewhere

²²⁷ Carlos 26.3.2018.

²²⁸ Stefano 3.4.2018.

²²⁹ Ben 5.4.2018.

else then they're very lively and ready to talk. Yeah so, once I found out how to mingle with the locals, it's never been so much of a challenge.²³⁰

Since learning how to interact with Finnish people, and becoming aware of how people's behaviour depends on the circumstances, Ben no longer faced challenges in building his social network in Helsinki. Nataliya, on the other hand, thought about her own personality in reference to making friends:

...if I were more easy-going person this would be no problem at all to get new friends because [there are] many, many opportunities as I said, in this expat group.²³¹

Nataliya explicitly mentions opportunities in expat groups, and goes on to say that she is unsure of where she could meet Finnish people. Her difficulties with making friends were not limited to just her experience in Helsinki. Nataliya felt that her social difficulties ultimately began within herself. Although she would like to have more friends to spend time with, socialising and making connections was already difficult back in Kiev. This obviously refers to how differences in personality affect one's social life.

All of my interviewees mentioned their efforts to stay in touch with friends and family outside of Finland. They often did so regularly, and even daily in some cases. Most of them use Internet applications and social media to stay connected with people spread across a wide geographical range. The widespread interconnectedness of the world is clearly visible through the interviews, and this has been noticed in earlier research. Many immigrants maintain regular contact with friends and family in other parts of the world.²³² However, visiting home was not always an option for everyone. Financial limitations were often mentioned as a prohibitive factor preventing my interviewees from travelling to see their families. Financial challenges can emerge while living abroad, especially if one struggles to find a job and this came up in some of my interviews regarding visiting 'back home'.

²³⁰ Ben 5.4.2018.

²³¹ Nataliya 31.3.2018.

²³² Huttunen et al. 2005, 33.

There are also questions to be raised regarding who gets to participate in the globally expansive network. Access to rapid long distance transit is arguably one of the defining experiences of the modern era. Yet it is important to remember that this reality is available to only less than two percent of the global population. Social class, for instance, has a major impact on people's mobility.²³³ It is possible to argue that my research participants are relatively privileged in having the freedom to voluntarily relocate to Helsinki. However, this is not to say that their status would remain the same since being in the city. Thus, insufficient funds can create a sedentary situation, even for 'mobile people', which can be psychologically draining.

More and more people living in Finland have different relationships to places, cultures and people outside the Finnish national borders. State borders have real effects on individuals' opportunities and mobility. They do not however, confine or limit the extent of cultural and social interactions.²³⁴ While cultures were historically considered to be linked to certain places, it is no longer possible to divide today's world into distinctly bounded cultural entities.²³⁵ My interviewees' social networks of friends, colleagues and family members are not confined to a single country. Even with social attachments in many different places, however, significant value was given to having local connections. As shown above, many of my interviewees were seeking to find friends in Helsinki, and it felt easier to befriend people in similar relatable situations. With these factors in mind, my interviewees' social networks could be described as a web of connections to people all over the world.

4.2 Feeling at Home

There is a strong 'common sense' understanding of the links between people and places that identities are connected to nations, and nations are bounded by territories. It is enforced through language and ideas of the national order of the world. The world atlas provides a helpful analogy: each state is colour-coded, territories have clear boundaries, and there are no blurry spaces in between. The thought that nations, people and identities are static entities has become naturalised in our language, and this is exemplified by metaphors such as 'homeland' and 'roots'.²³⁶ Yet this does not reflect in reality, where many people live in the grey areas of nations,

²³³ Morley 2001, 428–429.

²³⁴ Huttunen et al. 2005, 33.

²³⁵ Morley 2001, 428.

²³⁶ Malkki 1992, 26–27.

identities, borders and territories. Changes in mobility have affected our sense of attachment to places, the meanings of places and our perceptions of who ‘belongs’ where.²³⁷ My interviewees’ experiences in Helsinki, for example, are affected by their attachments to multiple places and efforts to feel at home in the city. It is therefore important to understand the complexity of connections when exploring mobile people’s diverse experiences.

‘Feeling at home’ is not a simple phenomenon. Although many people can emotionally appreciate what it is to feel at home, wherein it involves a sense of familiarity, articulating it with precise words is difficult. In addition, not everybody uses the expressions ‘home’, ‘feeling at home’ and ‘belonging’ in an articulated or reflective way.²³⁸ In the interviews, people responded very differently when asked whether they felt like Helsinki was home to them. As sociologist Jan Willem Duyvendak suggests: “this multiplicity is itself meaningful: to ‘feel at home’ is not a singular feeling but a plural and layered sentiment”.²³⁹ This means that there is no one particular universal way to feel at home. For many of my interviewees, their feelings as to why they did or did not feel at home in Helsinki depended on their own personal experiences and situation in life. Therefore, I will not aim to provide a conclusive answer to what makes people feel at home somewhere – the answers are as diverse as the people and their stories. I will instead aim to trace some interesting characteristics on the subject. Again, it is important to note that the concept of ‘home’ was not defined in any way. This was to give my interviewees the freedom to interpret the question independently and answer using their own words.

Home has predominantly encompassed a sense of familiarity, comfort and permanence with a certain place. This connection might seem obvious to the immobile, where home is clearly fixed in place. As goods and people become increasingly mobile however, social landscapes can change, and even the most familiar places can feel less like home to natives. These places may even become ‘foreign’ over time. Therefore, feeling at home has become more dependent on other people sharing the same space.²⁴⁰ Carlos made note of this in his interview, from his perspective:

²³⁷ Duyvendak 2011, 15.

²³⁸ Duyvendak 2011, 26–27.

²³⁹ Duyvendak 2011, 38.

²⁴⁰ Duyvendak 2011, 28–30; see also Morley 2001, 432–433.

When I moved to Helsinki, I remember there were not that many Latin American bars or even music, and now everywhere I go it's reggaeton everywhere, and I'm like, okay well, I feel like home. I see it in every place, like cafes now, they're more international, just comparing two years ago... I've met people that are happy about it, but I've also met people who, that are not happy that the city is becoming very international, and also there's a lot of people that are afraid that the city could become like Paris or like London, like just without control, people from everywhere and losing their identity.²⁴¹

Carlos is witnessing changes that are bringing familiar elements from his native Latin America, which are influencing Helsinki. Yet he is also aware of how local Finnish people view these effects. He has met both people who are happy about the growing 'internationality', as well as people who are concerned by it. Some concerned people are either unhappy with the situation, or even afraid of what it might lead to. Carlos uses vibrant, multicultural cities like London and Paris as examples. In his view, the locals might consider that these constant global influences forebode an undesirable future. Therefore, it can be argued that familiarity is not enough in itself to convey a sense of belonging. Changes to one's surroundings may transform the environment so much that one feels less at home, and more like an outsider in their own city.²⁴² Global influences can have various negative implications for the native locals that are long term residents. They may feel their neighbourhoods becoming unfamiliar and threatened by foreign influence. This can foster in long-term locals a yearning for the past, and the friction between their sentimentality and changes to their environment may feel alienating. Conversely, newcomers and mobile individuals can feel the same alienation due to wilfully entering a different environment.²⁴³

Under certain conditions mobility challenges what home is and how it is understood. In everyday communication however, the term 'home' seems fairly simple: it is the everyday private sanctuary that we settle into, from which we feel sheltered from the outside world. We take for granted the routine of leaving home to go to work in the morning, and coming back home in the evening. Similarly, we go on holidays and return home without questioning the

²⁴¹ Carlos 26.3.2018.

²⁴² Savage et al. 2005, 48.

²⁴³ Duyvendak 2011, 25.

concept of home and what it actually means.²⁴⁴ This way of using the term was also common in the interviews. However, feeling at home in a new place usually does not happen overnight. Instead, it is a gradual process and requires certain conditions to be met before happening. These might be called home-making practices, where home is understood as a constructive process and does not just emerge into existence. Home can therefore be conceptualized as both material and imagined, meaning both the physical location or dwelling, and the associated emotional qualities of belonging. Both the physical space and emotional attachments are inherently related.²⁴⁵

For some of my interviewees, feeling at home is brought about through a long period of settlement in a physical space. It appears that once some sense of ‘roots’ in a place is established, it then starts to feel like home. This means that home is more about the feelings of familiarity and comfort that people attach to places, and these develop over time to make us ‘feel at home’.²⁴⁶ In this sense, ‘home’ becomes the result of home-making practices, since the physical place itself is not immediately endowed with any home-like essence. Home is a dwelling where a sense of belonging emerges through an accumulation of personal artefacts in one’s space. This includes personal belongings curated in a specific way to provide a personal connection to a place. Familiar objects create memories and an environment with personal significance, and eventually develop the meaningful experience of being home.²⁴⁷ Carlos explained to me:

...I just arrived from Germany, and on the way I, well, I felt like I was coming back home, and every time I travel now, it feels more and more like I’m coming back home... I think it was like a year ago that I moved into an apartment with a longer contract. That also helped me to, you know, internalise that okay, this is my home...²⁴⁸

Carlos has lived in Helsinki for more than two years, but he strongly felt that getting a fixed place made him think of the city as ‘home’. In other words, this meant not living with most of

²⁴⁴ Nowicka 2007, 69.

²⁴⁵ Blunt & Dowling 2006, 22–23.

²⁴⁶ Duyvendak 2011, 37.

²⁴⁷ Meier & Frank 2016, 368.

²⁴⁸ Carlos 26.3.2018.

his belongings “still in bags and boxes”²⁴⁹. Elaborating on this topic, he also thought that Helsinki might have felt like home to him earlier, had he not moved around so much because of his short-term contracts. He compared this with previous experiences of living in the United States and Germany, saying that to him “it’s really easy to feel at home, to feel at peace”²⁵⁰ in Helsinki because of the city itself. I would thereby conclude that establishing stable structures can be an important factor for many to feel at home.

Ada was thinking similarly in regards to finding longer term contract for an apartment, making a place her home. Note that ‘home’ is something that is constructed, and requires attentive effort. It is not given, but results from a process of discovering what it means to each individual.²⁵¹ When I asked whether Helsinki felt like home to Ada, she answered:

No, there is a long way to go for that, especially when we had some problems with our flat owner... hopefully we can feel like the next flat is home, because, you know, when you’re in a place and you know that you will have to leave, then you just can’t really make it home... hopefully the next one, where we are planning to write a long-term contract, we can finally make that home.²⁵²

For Ada, permanence and stability are requisite conditions for feeling like a place is ‘home’. She could not feel at home due to some troubles she and her partner had with their landlord and difficulty getting a long-term apartment. Again, we can see the complexity of the word home and the breadth of how it is used. In Ada’s answers, the word home is used to contextualise Helsinki, and is also used to refer to her accommodation. Interestingly, however, Ada said she would still consider Finland home despite saying that it would take a long time for her to see Helsinki as home. She first became attracted to Finnish culture, while working as an au pair in Eastern Finland:

...the family did an outstanding job in immersing me into the Finnish culture and that involved everything that you can imagine, every crazy thing that you guys [the Finnish people] do, I had to do it whether I like it or not.²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Carlos 26.3.2018.

²⁵⁰ Carlos 26.3.2018.

²⁵¹ Nowicka 2006, 143.

²⁵² Ada 28.3.2018.

²⁵³ Ada 28.3.2018.

As discussed in the previous chapter, it is easy to notice the strong reference to Finnish people as ‘the other’ group. In Ada’s view, the Finnish way of life is clearly different, but her earlier experiences in Finland helped her feel at home.

The above comments reflect one of the challenges with the concept of home and how it should be defined. Is home a dwelling, the city or even the whole country one lives in?²⁵⁴ The spatial dimension of homes has been conceptualised over a range of different scales, from the household level to the global. This means that feelings attached to the notion of ‘home’ might be ambiguous.²⁵⁵ The differences in meanings are also hard to distinguish, as they depend on the context.²⁵⁶ As Ada’s first experiences in Finland were so positive, she is clearly fond of the country. This made her return to study, and she now plans on staying. She said in her interview that “despite everything, I love Finland, I love the culture, people, nature and climate, surprisingly”²⁵⁷. While living in Helsinki might take a while to get accustomed to, she is willing to look past the difficulties because of her desire to stay.

Patrick also makes a distinction when it comes to calling Helsinki home. He separates the idea of a ‘homeland’ from the private space of the home location.²⁵⁸ Like Carlos, he points out a time when his perception changed:

I wouldn’t describe Helsinki as home, but then like, my *home*, home here, I would describe as home. Like, if I’m going home. So that’s switched from maybe like last year, where I thought of UK as my home. Now this feels more like home.²⁵⁹

Again, it is possible to notice the casual, everyday way of speaking about home. People can think of ‘home’ broadly, from individual living spaces to entire countries. Patrick, for example, compares his residential home in Helsinki to the United Kingdom. These days, he feels a closer sentimental attachment to his dwelling shared with his partner in a foreign city than he does to his home country. Nowicka points out that, when analysed further, homes cannot be understood

²⁵⁴ Nowicka 2007, 69.

²⁵⁵ Blunt & Dowling 2006, 27–29.

²⁵⁶ Nowicka 2006, 172–173.

²⁵⁷ Ada 28.3.2018.

²⁵⁸ See Nowicka 2007, 79.

²⁵⁹ Patrick 3.4.2018.

simply in terms of confined spaces within ‘four walls’. The concept of home defies these boundaries, and is not just a place. Feeling at home is as much about the objects within one’s home as the surroundings of a place, and the relationships between these different elements.²⁶⁰

It is interesting to see that for Carlos and Patrick, there is a clear transition into thinking of Helsinki as home. They both refer to a moment when their feelings changed. It is also possible that feeling at home never happens in a foreign country, especially if the country continues to be perceived as foreign. An example of this could be taken from Eleonore, who has lived in Helsinki for more than two years now, and would most likely stay for at least the next few years. She opened up about her feelings towards Helsinki:

It does not feel at all like home to me. Helsinki surely is a great city for many people, and it offers a lot, but I cannot connect to it. ...I guess feeling at home somewhere is a very subjective thing and cannot be rationalized.²⁶¹

For Eleonore, she lacks a connection with Helsinki, which makes it impossible for the city to feel like home. There is possibly some degree to which she misses her previous place of residence, as she mentioned many things that she preferred about the UK. She seems to have already found her home there, and this attachment to past experience withholds her from having the same feelings towards Helsinki. She also recognises the abstract nature of ‘feeling at home’, and suggests that it cannot be rationalised. There are many factors that come into play, and personal experiences can greatly affect this feeling. Eleonore, for example, wrote that she hopes to one day move “back to Scotland (not my birth-home but where I feel most at home)”²⁶². This demonstrates the complexity of the concept of ‘home’, and how it is often used in speech. Further, time seems to affect how people see their ‘home’, as a sense of home develops gradually for many people. Eleonore’s experience is potentially comparable to Carlos and Patrick’s experiences. She admitted that her perception may still change, since she heard many immigrants say that they did not feel at home for the first one to three years.

²⁶⁰ Nowicka 2007, 79, 81–82.

²⁶¹ Eleonore 23.3.2018.

²⁶² Eleonore 23.3.2018.

Regarding Aino's experience, she told me "I really can't see myself moving home [to the United States]"²⁶³. Although she says that "I still call the States home"²⁶⁴, she insists that Helsinki feels like the current home to her. How the word 'home' is used in different contexts might be a matter of what comes naturally to each individual. Many of my interviewees used the word both in reference to their 'home countries' and their residence or dwelling in Helsinki. Its meaning is very fluid in some ways, where it depends on the context of its use. In this sense, it has been argued that there is a dualistic understanding of 'home'. It is both an emotional place of origin and a constructed entity. Many people recall a paternal home that is the foundation of their childhood, but have since moved on to build a home of their own.²⁶⁵ Aino's account is relatable to Daniela's explanation, when asked whether she felt like Helsinki is home:

...I'm that kind of person that can have only one home and my home is in Slovakia. But for now, I'm calling [Helsinki] my second home because I wanted to feel comfortable here, so, it's better to get used to that, this is right now my second home and I must enjoy it, so maybe let's call it second home.²⁶⁶

Daniela has a strong emotional attachment to her native Slovakia, but it did not stop her from trying to work around it. In order to feel more settled and comfortable in Helsinki, she accepted the city as her second home. It seems to provide her with some personal meaning for the city, helping her to enjoy it more intimately. This indicates the diversity of personal experiences and how people conceptualise 'home'. As this was her first experience living abroad however, and she aspires to continue living in other countries, I would carefully speculate that her current sentiment might change with future experiences.

On the contrary Nataliya describes herself as a very adaptable person. She has an extensive history of travelling for work and has learnt to easily feel at home anywhere. As long as her basic needs are satisfied and she has a decent accommodation, she can feel at home. She replied to my question on whether Helsinki felt like home:

²⁶³ Aino 3.4.2018.

²⁶⁴ Aino 3.4.2018.

²⁶⁵ Nowicka 2007, 77.

²⁶⁶ Daniela 4.4.2018.

Yes, for now. I'm very easy moving person. I travelled a lot due to my work, it wasn't like staying for longer time, but I had some business trips maybe every couple of months. It was like, when you have everything you need and you have a nice place to stay, okay you are at home, and that's exactly what I feel here.²⁶⁷

It is easy to notice Nataliya's casual attitude towards mobility. Based on how she thinks of Helsinki being home "for now", we can interpret that the potential to move again and live somewhere else is not out of the question for her. For Nataliya, home can be anywhere so long as basic necessities are provided and she feels comfortable. It is of course important to note that this is an external interpretation of what Nataliya means by "everything you need". It may entail anything from family members, personal belongings to familiar goods and services.

There are different factors that can affect someone's willingness to move. For families with children, safety and financial security are especially important. Considerations for children's futures can be a crucial factor that limits people's mobility across transnational space.²⁶⁸ This became apparent in the interview with Nataliya. In spite of her easy attitude towards mobility, the question of whether to stay in Finland or move elsewhere would need to account for her daughter's wellbeing, and how she felt about Helsinki as a place for families with children:

...if we didn't have her [Nataliya's daughter] then it would be easier to move, and now when she starts day care and she starts to learn Finnish, and then again, change something and move to another country, well I don't actually think that we will do it quickly... It is really, very kids-friendly country, and I don't know, I feel absolutely comfortable here regarding what we do every day, where we go and how we feel. I can leave the stroller outside the café and not think that someone will steal it... It's very easy to move around the city with a kid and everybody's saying that the day-cares in Finland are the best in the world...²⁶⁹

Having children has a noticeable impact on how someone perceives the city and their future in it. Nataliya feels that it would be easier for her family to move if they didn't have their daughter. Yet she also seemed very satisfied with their life in Helsinki, where she felt safe and

²⁶⁷ Nataliya 31.3.2018.

²⁶⁸ Huttunen 2006, 62–63.

²⁶⁹ Nataliya 31.3.2018.

comfortable. She elaborated on this with examples of how convenient it is to use public transport compared to Kiev, even when she has a stroller with her.

Living in a foreign country, away from family and friends, can cause one to reflect on how they truly feel about their home country. Consequently, it is not their priority to feel at home in their country of settlement. Relationships with places are therefore dynamic, and interactions with different places inform our view of ‘home’.²⁷⁰ Ben described Helsinki and his relationship with the city:

I think it’s somehow a dead city, it’s a dead city, like there’s no life... there are good people here and I have never had any problems, and everything else just works well, so somehow, I feel it’s home... it’s hard to tell, but somehow, on a scale of one to ten I’d say I feel like six, yeah, it’s slightly above average, I feel at home here.²⁷¹

As the comment shows, whether Helsinki feels like home to Ben is not simply a yes or a no statement. It is a more complex issue that is affected by multiple factors. The social aspect of life in Helsinki appears to be a particularly important factor, as Ben says: “I come from a place where people are quite social and here everyone is in their own space”²⁷². This relates to the common perceptions of Finnish people presented in chapter 2. Interestingly however, a culture of introversion can also draw certain people to appreciate Finland more, as Lily explained:

...I love the personal space, I love it so much... it’s a nice place, very calm, people mind their own business, no one is going to judge you for anything... do your thing, I do my thing, just don’t encroach my personal space...²⁷³

Lily’s comment reveals not only a preference for personal space, but also an appreciation of everyone’s unobtrusive and non-invasive mind set. She gives examples from her native country Uganda, where people judge others over “just about anything, the way you dress: ‘you’re not supposed to dress like that’, ‘women don’t do it, don’t do this’, you know, there are so many

²⁷⁰ Manzo 2003, 52.

²⁷¹ Ben 5.4.2018.

²⁷² Ben 5.4.2018.

²⁷³ Lily 27.3.2018.

judgements”²⁷⁴. On the contrary, she adds about Helsinki that “here no one cares”²⁷⁵. It is apparent that Lily appreciates respect for personal space and privacy, because of her gendered experiences in Uganda. As such, she feels free from other people’s opinions in Finland, which contrasts strongly to her native country. Therefore, individual characteristics of who we are such as gender, age and personality can affect where we feel comfortable. Our identities are shaped by encounters and interactions with our surroundings.²⁷⁶ When asked about how he feels about possibly returning to Kenya, Ben’s answer was clear:

I like it over there, and I think I had to come live here for me to realise that I loved Kenya... right now I feel, I’m so much in touch with Kenya, more than before, and someday I’d love to go back.²⁷⁷

By moving to Finland, Ben realised how much he actually liked his home country. He feels relatively at home in Helsinki, but it may not be his permanent location. Earlier in the interview, he talked about his feelings towards staying in Helsinki, and said regarding learning Finnish that:

...you know, the more you move around, the more you’ll shape your opinions and what you really want and where you really want to stay...²⁷⁸

It has been said that both negative and positive experiences contribute to the idea of ‘home’, and conflicting experiences are a component of personal development and sense of self.²⁷⁹ For Ben, living in and experiencing various locations is essential for figuring out where he wants to stay and what he wants. This is why it is sometimes necessary to see a different side of the world, and observe different countries or cultures. It leads to finding a place worth staying in, or perhaps to subjectively realise what is good about one’s native country. Altogether, mobility is about the possibility of expanding one’s view of what the world has to offer.

²⁷⁴ Lily 27.3.2018.

²⁷⁵ Lily 27.3.2018.

²⁷⁶ Manzo 2003, 54–55.

²⁷⁷ Ben 5.4.2018.

²⁷⁸ Ben 5.4.2018.

²⁷⁹ Manzo 2003, 52–53.

We can see that my interviewees have found their 'home', whether in Helsinki or elsewhere. There is often a clear idea of what or where 'home' is, and this is rarely questioned. Given the multiplicity of answers and the varied descriptions of 'feeling at home', however, it might be helpful to broaden our understanding of the concept. Home is often used metaphorically to describe one's experience. It can be treated as an existential state which is not a physical place in itself, but an intangible feeling of comfort, familiarity and belonging that we take for granted.²⁸⁰ As a subjective experience, each individual defines the limits and scales of their own personal feelings.

²⁸⁰ Manzo 2003, 49.

5 Conclusion

This interdisciplinary research has highlighted the subjective experiences of non-Finnish speaking people after their move to Helsinki. Using discourse analysis, I examined my interviewees' complex and diverse experiences, focusing on multiple aspects of moving to a foreign city. I explored their expectations and experiences of Helsinki and its people, the challenges of living in the city, their social networks and notions of 'home'.

My research has demonstrated some limitations in the terminology used to discuss immigration as a contemporary phenomenon. My interviewees often exist on the margins of different theoretical labels and categories, and do not neatly fit into one box. They arrived to Helsinki for many different reasons, their personal situations vary greatly and so do their lengths of stay in the city. They are not all permanent immigrants, but neither are they tourists, as they live their everyday lives in Helsinki and are not merely passing through for leisure. This mixture of diverse life stories can help us understand the importance of considering the individual experiences that build a nuanced image of Helsinki, as seen through the eyes of non-Finnish speakers. My study is therefore a reminder to pay attention to the diversity of people's experiences, and to look deeper than the statistics and restricted academic discourse on immigration. It demonstrates that the 'immigrant' category does not fully capture the intricacies of the human experience. Individuals are to be seen for their unique stories, rather than as stereotyped representatives of a broadly imagined group.

As evidenced in my research, each individual's experiences are influenced by their past, which emphasises the subjectivity behind their feelings and emotions. The multiplicity of different factors that affect a person's view of Helsinki can be traced by interpreting the subtle details of their previous experiences. Periods spent living abroad, previous travels, and memories of a person's paternal home city all affect how people perceive Helsinki. Similarly, reactions to Helsinki's aesthetics or size seemed to be influenced by preferences built on past experiences. Expectations prior to my interviewees' move, on the other hand, were influenced by culturally mediated stereotypes and imaginaries, which reflects both the connectivity of the modern world and the contextual nature of meanings. Interestingly, the tension between collective imaginaries of the unfamiliar and lived realities was often present in my interviewees' comments. It seems that a person's understanding of their surroundings is continuously re-examined in comparison to their prior knowledge. To apprehend someone's feelings towards a new environment, it is

therefore necessary to reflect on their past experiences and acquired knowledge, as people construct their stories in a continuum.

My interviewees' thoughts often highlighted an underlining 'Europeanness' when it came to discussing Helsinki. Finding similarities and differences compared to previous European and non-European experiences seemed to offer a basis for self-identification. Amongst diverse cultural and geographic realities, constructing a personal understanding of oneself is a dynamic process with multiple variables. This was articulated in my interviewees' comments, as they experienced Helsinki in a global framework. The comments also highlighted some of the difficulties faced when moving to a foreign city. Such changes often result in having to rethink one's personal position in a novel environment, including the considerations of how a person presents themselves. However, one's self-identification does not always align with outside expectations, as the collective representations are influenced by public discourse and global histories. Thus, it is worth addressing the social representations and frameworks that affect people's everyday lived experiences. In public discussion, immigrants are often regarded as a homogenous group, and media projections frequently provide simplistic representations. These are usually produced by people belonging to the majority whom may not have an intimate understanding of the subjects. Conversely, my interviewees' constructed perception of Finnish people often unambiguously represented a fairly monolithic group.

Due to Helsinki's diversity and international orientation, most of my interviewees managed well with using just English. Many also felt that Finns were competent enough that they naturally switch to speaking English, especially in Helsinki. The increasing prevalence of English in Finland is largely because of a social shift and more open attitudes towards this lingua franca. It is, however, a highly debated issue, as the increasing use of English has complicated implications for the Finnish language. For example, social structures increasingly favour using English at universities and for research, and other languages are learnt less and less in schools. The importance of knowing the local language became especially evident in reference to applying for jobs, which reveals a paradox between the realities of daily encounters and society's requirements from immigrants. Language is thus seen as the primary obstacle between individuals and their access to the labour market. Since labour-based immigration dominates the political discourse from time to time, it is important to understand the everyday realities of non-Finnish speakers, as suggested by my research. This requires considering people as individuals, and focusing on strengthening societal structures to support their various needs:

each person coming to Helsinki has their own story, personality, competencies, perspectives and experiences.

My interviewees disclosed conditional motivations for learning Finnish, which demonstrates the individuality of people's aspirations outside the scope of public debates. Learning Finnish was considered more attractive if a person had long term plans for staying in Helsinki. In some instances, where workplaces do not have Finnish language requirements, using only English can consequently become a norm. For those of my interviewees that were eager to learn Finnish, however, the native population's competence in English sometimes hindered the learning process by limiting practice opportunities. Finnish people might switch to English to be polite and helpful, but this may not always be welcomed with delight. Therefore, the local population can greatly influence how a non-Finnish speaker learns the language. I believe that an awareness of language issues in social situations is thus crucial to improving the quality of encounters for immigrants. Having an open discussion about these communication challenges may help people learning Finnish to integrate more effectively into society.

In general, my interviewees reflected positively on their interactions with Finnish locals, despite the perception of them being socially restrained. Based on my interviewees' experiences, Finns in Helsinki were genuinely happy to converse with strangers in English. It may not be very natural for Finnish people to start a conversation with unfamiliar people, but when someone else breaks the ice, they are much more tangibly open. Understandably, this may put a lot of strain on people moving to Helsinki, as the Finnish cultural norms can seem confusing and even exclusionary. I would argue that this cultural stereotype tends to reproduce itself and become embodied by the subjects themselves. It consequently results in Finnish people developing the habit of keeping quiet and minding their own business, which easily creates a perceptively 'closed off' environment. Some of my interviewees enjoyed this about Helsinki, and some found navigating social situations difficult because of it. Of course, a whole range of differences in personalities or other characteristics can significantly affect how comfortably one adjusts to the Finnish cultural environment.

My interviewees' social networks spread across multiple geographical locations, but it seemed valuable to make local connections and find friends in Helsinki. Based on my research, socialising with Finnish people was perceived as distinctly different to socialising with internationals when building a social network locally. Finding friends among foreigners in

similar situations felt comparatively easier than befriending Finnish people, at least in the beginning. This was apparently due to both the perceived Finnish characteristics as well as contextual differences in social circumstances. The situations in which people met each other also significantly affected how invested a person would be in making friends. Regular contact was also kept with friends and family outside the Finnish national borders. Therefore, my findings support earlier research on mobile people's wide social networks where this pattern has been identified. Transnational communication was frequent for my interviewees, and points to the convenience of using Internet-based communications technology and social media in today's world.

The importance of 'feeling at home' and 'belonging' was highlighted by my interviewees' accounts of 'home'. The term was not defined in any special way, and its various scales were interestingly demonstrated by my interviewees' emotional attachments to a dwelling, a city or country. Notably, the abstractness of the word was recognised by my interviewees themselves, and its use varied from person to person and depended on the context. The subjectivity of 'feeling at home' is therefore emphasised by the diversity of descriptions and explanations. The personal attachments to multiple places showcase the complexities of human experiences, which cannot always be simply defined. For some of my interviewees, moving to Helsinki was comfortable, with prospects for long term stay and investments in the future. For others, it brought up feelings of detachment, undesired change in social status, and even some frustration. In light of these experiences, it is clear that people's perspectives of Helsinki and feelings towards Finland varied immensely. As my interviewees shared their stories and emotions with a vulnerable honesty, this reveals the broad heterogeneity among them.

I have explored my interviewees' experiences in Helsinki, but literature has shown that some of the underlining sentiments are general to people's experiences in other similar contexts, regardless of the city or country. These appear to be common phases for people settling in a new environment, and become especially apparent for migrants in novel circumstances. For example, people seem universally affected by the desire to 'feel at home', and belong, and are consequently sensitive to moments when they feel included or excluded by society. Comparing my research findings with other studies of diverse immigrant experiences in various local settings might therefore offer an interesting position for further research. This may contribute to building a more concise picture of the particularities and universalities of immigrants' lived experiences. Although I have not explicitly focused on differences in age, gender or nationality,

some answers implied how these can shape experience. However, it is difficult to isolate the impact of these different factors, as they are deeply intertwined with people's unique personalities, acquired international competencies, and past intercultural encounters.

The themes discussed in this research have provided an overview of my interviewees' experiences and lives in Helsinki. Albeit this is not an exhaustive set, as there are many more unique stories not yet told. The incredibly rich depth of individual experiences, in my interview material, provided a plethora of angles for interesting, detailed, and in-depth analysis. There were many different starting points in my interviewees' comments, from which complex topics may be explored. Yet a focused narrative must be selective, and adhere with the boundaries of my thesis. Interpreting some personal remarks would have required a deeper contextual understanding of my interviewees' realities, which would have been unfeasible given the scope of this research. I have provided some explanations for my interviewees' answers to the best extent possible, but it is important to note that there are many other possible interpretations beyond what is offered in this paper.

I encourage the reader to consider this research as a reflection of how Helsinki looks like to its non-Finnish speaking residents. Note that all accounts presented in my thesis are contextual and tied to a specific time and place. They should be considered as momentary feelings and emotions, and are further diversified by my interviewees' different backgrounds. The accounts are not static or immutable. It is beyond the scope of this study to speculate on the direction in which their lives have taken. Whether someone recently found employment, found a hobby with new friends, decided to learn Finnish, started feeling at home, or discovered new ways to enjoy the city, may only be answered with follow-up interviews. Having such an international experience, however, is without a doubt immensely valuable to my interviewees.

Finally, I would like to thank all of my research participants. I am deeply grateful for their interest in my study, and for taking the initiative to contact me personally to share their experiences with me. For a local resident, it is eye opening to see Helsinki from the point of view of people who do not speak Finnish. I strongly believe that in order to understand the many different perspectives and complex experiences, it is necessary to seek genuine encounters with people from various backgrounds. I would also like to thank everyone who helped me for their useful comments on my work, their patience, and for sparking all the interesting conversations over this topic.

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All names have been changed. Recordings and written answers are in the possession of the author.

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