On the Margins of Society: Social Adaptation of Asylum Seekers in Finland

The issue of asylum has been high on both political and media agenda for years. It seems that asylum seekers are seen as economic immigrants who are trying to get the best deal in the European welfare states. European Union and its individual member states have been very keen on introducing stricter asylum practices from 1990s onwards and gradually the number of asylum applications have declined. In 2006, almost two hundred thousand people went through the asylum system in the European Union countries. In Finland the corresponding number was 2,324.

The Finnish context in general is very particular kind. Finland has traditionally been country of outbound immigration and has been affected by the global movement of people only fairly recently. Finland also belongs to a group of Scandinavian welfare states which are characterised by relatively generous levels of state support. This thesis examines the social adaptation of asylum seekers in this context, concentrating on life domains that are controlled by the Finnish reception policies.

Previous research in this field has mainly concentrated on established refugee populations and their integration processes, or simply evaluated the policy developments regarding the reception of asylum seekers. By combining the policy and the social reality that asylum seekers are facing in Finland, this research aims to explore issues that previous studies have not directly addressed.

The qualitative survey data is examined in the light of acculturation, form of cultural change due to a contact with other cultures. Acculturation is a process that leads to a revaluation of cultural practices, values and norms. It is also a two way process, affecting both the resettling persons and the resettlement society and its inhabitants.

Research data suggest that while asylum seekers are integrated into the welfare system they have difficulties in other areas, particularly integrating into the labour market which in turn restricts relations with the Finnish population. The failures of the Finnish resettlement policies and unsuccessful implementation of the legislation have made asylum seekers socially unprivileged and marginalised them from the Finnish society. The future policy developments in this field should aim to overcome the barriers of participation.

### Keywords
- asylum seekers
- social adaptation
- acculturation
- marginalisation

### Säilytyspaikka
- Muita tietoja

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