

# WHEN FORMAL EQUALITY MEETS UNEQUAL REALITY – IMMIGRANTS' ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN FINLAND

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# INTRODUCTION

- The aim of this presentation is to describe **Finnish HE policy focusing on the immigrants' view**
- And to introduce a **preparatory course for immigrants to promote** their opportunities to study in a University of Applied Sciences in Finland
- **Häme** University of Applied Sciences, **Helsinki** **Metropolia** University of Applied Sciences, **Lahti** University of Applied Sciences, **Laurea** University of Applied Sciences



# CURRENT PROJECTS (1/2)

- **HERA Competence 2010-2012**
  - Metropolia UAS + partners: Häme UAS, Lahti UAS and Laurea UAS
  - Funded by Ministry of Education and Culture
  - Preparatory course pilots in technology, business, social services, teacher education, tourism and catering



# CURRENT PROJECTS (2/2)

- **VOIMAA 2009-2011**
- Metropolia UAS and Häme UAS
- Funded by European Social Fund
- 3 pilots of preparation courses (teacher education & general course, culture, ICT)
- All the project documented as wiki pages
- <http://voimaa.metropolia.fi/>



# CONTENTS OF THE PRESENTATION

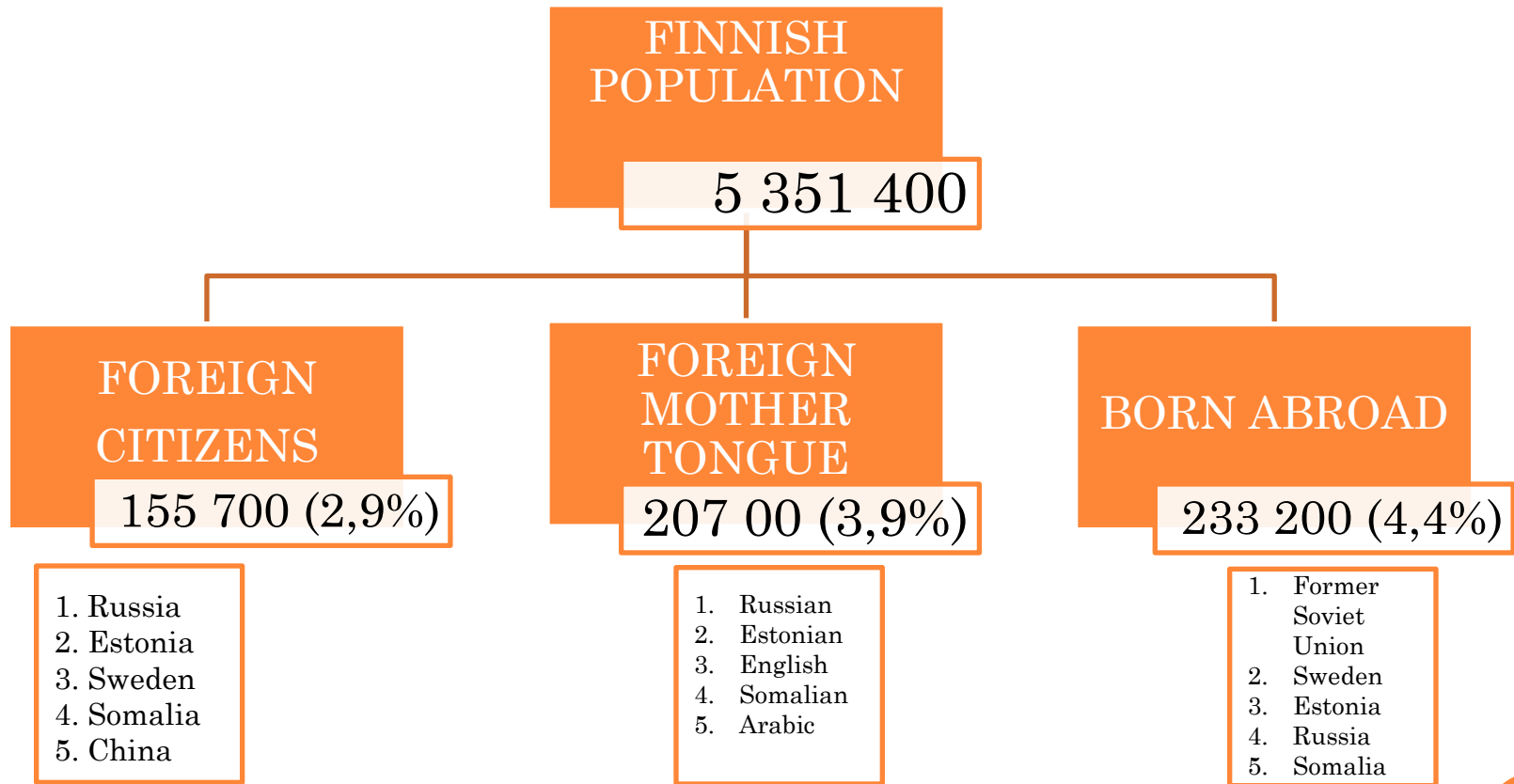
1. Three policy challenges in immigrants' access to HE in Finland (Isoaho)
2. Background theories concerning the immigrants integration to a new society. (Metsänen)
3. The preparatory course for immigrants to access HEI. (Metsänen)
4. Further challenges. (Isoaho & Metsänen)



# **1. THREE POLICY CHALLENGES**



# DEFINITIONS OF THE IMMIGRANTS (2009)



# IMMIGRANTS IN FINLAND

- About 50% of all the immigrants live in Helsinki, Vantaa, Espoo and Kauniainen
- About 10% of the population in Helsinki consist of immigrants (=mother tongue other than Finnish or Swedish)
- By 2025: 25% of population is immigrant-backed
- Biggest groups within the immigrant population: Russians, Estonians, Somalis, Swedes



# CHALLENGE 1: INTERNATIONALISATION OR DOMESTIC ACCESS POLICIES (1/3)

- Strong emphasis on the internationalisation at HEI's since 1990`s
- Multiculturalism, multicultural pedagogy, exchange partners at the stage
- Less emphasis on the access policies concerning real immigrants (= those permanently living in Finland)

# INTERNATIONALISATION OR...(2/3)

- Common misunderstanding 1: immigrants = foreigners/those with a foreign nationality
- Common misunderstanding 2: immigrants access to HEI' as an issue of internationalisation
- Strategical choices of HEI's: international students ("glamour") or immigrants ("social work")?



# DISBALANCE IN ACCESS: EXAMPLE (3/3)

- Case: Metropolia, HAMK, LAMK, Laurea (2010)
- Biggest groups of immigrants in the area:
  - Former Soviet Union/Russians
  - Estonians
  - Swedes
  - Somalis
- Are not widely represented among the students or applicants of Metropolia, HAMK, LAMK or Laurea

# SOLUTIONS

- Defining immigrants as a one of the customer groups of the HEI's (or target groups)
- Linking immigrants' education to the regional task of the HEI



## CHALLENGE 2: STUDENT SELECTION

- Student selection is regulated on the law level
- Criteria and method used must follow *principles of equality*
- Makes the use of the *positive discrimination* challenging, but not impossible
- Aim is to reach *equality de facto*
- **Polytechnic Act versus Law on Equality**
- Law on Equality is still poorly known and understood

# SOLUTIONS

- Concrete institutional access policies, strategies and action plans'
- Legal assistance: juridical surveying on the legal limits (Polytechnic Act versus Law on Equality)
- Preparatory courses and
- their future links to the students selection (at planning stage)
- Quotas and/or tailored degree programmes for the immigrants (at planning stage)

# CHALLENGE 3: MYTH OF EXISTING EQUALITY

- Nordic culture: what is believed to be equal and /or to maintain equality
- Context: post-war welfare state, northern Europe
- "everyone has same opportunities"
- "tuition free higher education"
- "state grants, student health services, students housing"
- "access and success depend on everyones skills"
- **"times of inequality belong to the past"**

## **2. PREPARATORY COURSES: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**





# THEORETICAL BACKGROUND FOR IMMIGRANTS' EDUCATION

- Overall goal for this type of pre-HEI education is to empower immigrants to become **active citizens** in Finnish society by enhancing their competences and opportunities to find employment



## EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES

Sosioconstructivism, critical pedagogy

- Paulo Freire underlines **dialogy** in the teaching and learning process
- The goal of dialogical process is that students **take responsibility** for their lives
- Freire's core concepts of pedagogy of the oppressed are: **awareness and change**



# PAULO FREIRE'S THEORY

- Becoming **aware** of his/her own position in society, an individual also sees him/herself as **an actor** who can **change** that socio-cultural environment where he/she is living
- **Needs and demands** that come from an individual's own life activate and motivate also his/her learning process



## THE GOAL OF THE PREPARATORY COURSES

- Increases immigrants' opportunities to study in UAS
- Empowers immigrant students to take responsibility for their future
- Supports and encourages immigrants' competences e.g. Finnish language skills, learning skills and interaction skills
- Enables assessment of their prior learning and competences that can be transferred to a new environment



### **3. PREPARATORY COURSES: CASE HÄME UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES**



# TARGET GROUP OF THE COURSES

- The immigrants who has required qualifications to study in HE in his/her own country (as in Finland)
- Upper secondary school certificate



# THE CONTENT OF THE PREPARATORY COURSES (1/2)

- The extent of preparatory course is 30 credits
- The content for all students ( 20 credits)
  - Orientation for studies
  - Finnish language skills
  - Learning skills (metacognitive skills)
  - Finnish culture and society
  - Student centered learning approach
  - ICT-skills
  - Interactions and negotiations skills



## PREPARATORY COURSE CONTENT 2/2

- Individual differentiation (10 credits)
- Subject-based studies in students' special interest areas
- Introduction to the employment sector





# THE RESULTS OF THE PREPARATION COURSES

- All the students who studied in the preparatory courses have to take an entrance examination > they do not have any privileges
- In our group, only about 2-3/14 could pass the entrance examination
- What do you think are the reasons?



## TENSIONS AND CHALLENGES

- Tensions: 1) those immigrant students who have already university studies in their home countries, but lack Finnish language skills 2) a large group of immigrants who have low background education
- It's a long way for the adult immigrants to fulfill their basic studies in order to start their HE studies



# REFLECTION

- Finnish language skills of the students, special academic writing skills
- Level of prior learning e.g. mathematic skills
- Individual study counselling and career counselling is needed
- Also teachers need special skills when teaching students coming from teacher-centered learning background
- What are the most effective and motivating methods to teach students who come from a totally different learning approaches?





## 4. CHALLENGES TO DISCUSS

- Institutional change in the spotlight: how to modify student selection processes and strategies?
- How to get a customer and/or target group status to the immigrants?



