

Multicultural Finland Association

ANNUAL REPORT 2008

(English version)

www.multiculturalfinland.com

Multicultural Finland r.f.

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Background

As an intercultural association and assistant organization to SFP, (The Swedish People's Party), Multicultural Finland (MF) works for an open dialogue and inclusive attitude regarding integration work and policies. By producing seminars and panel debates on integration related issues and by being active in programmes and happenings concerning immigration MF aims on making the growing multicultural society more functional.

During the past year Multicultural Finland could, thanks to renewed and increased financial support from Svenska kulturfonden, (The Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland), carry out several public events and programmes covering the integration process and its development in Finland. Multicultural Finland also functioned as an informant from and on the field of immigrants trying to make their living in this nation. The languages of the association are Swedish and English.

Activities 2008

Two formal public seminars were held as panel debates. 2008 MF attended seven association meetings and was represented in several integration related programmes, the party meeting in June and was heard in radio and seen on television.

Since 2008 was a municipal election year, MF chose to market some of the candidates we have worked with and that struggled for more structure within the integration field. The association did so by marketing these candidates in Helsinki Times and Six Degrees. There was also print material produced by MF, covering the association's goals for the upcoming election in October 2008.

During the spring Multicultural Finland carried out the event "100,000 immigrants in ten years, how will we create platforms to make integration work?", with a board consisting of experts on the integration field; Astrid Thors, Johanna Suurpää, Börje Mattsson and the MF represent ant Michael Hutchinson-Reis.

In the late spring four members of Multicultural Finland attended the SFP (The Swedish People's Party) party days in Turku.

During late summer MF held a large international and intercultural picnic for the association and its friends.

In the autumn MF produced and hosted the event "Who's my candidate" in connection with the municipal election. The association invited a candidate and representative from each of one of the parties within the Finnish Parliament.

During the winter Multicultural Finland held two get-togethers with other immigrant organisations to present ones work and discuss cooperation.

Since there are very few associations, in the integration field, working also in Swedish in the capital region, the demand on meeting other partners is large.

By meeting and discussing around a current topic makes the distances smaller for future cooperation.

During the year many of the board members have held presentations and lectures, participated events and workshops and aimed on facilitating the integrations process. Thus making Finland an even better place.

Events 2008

By the end of May the minister Astrid Thors invited us to a discussion forum at the Parliament to present our work, and give advice on the forming of the new law on immigration.

Represented, except MF, was I-Fisk (International Finland-Swedish cultural forum) and Sap's (The Swedish People's Party) committee on integration.

In February and November MF association held cultural meetings with representatives from other immigrant associations working with integration. Multicultural Finland also became acquaintance with the Luckan project Bridge, where parts of MF has taken part during 2008 as think tank members.

Promoting Public Discussion and Furthering the Debate on Multicultural Issues in Finland

Multicultural Finland organized two seminars during 2008 to provide an opportunity for people to discuss their views and opinions on multicultural Finland with a variety of politicians and professionals.

On the 22nd.of May 2008 MF invited;

Astrid Thors, Finnish Government Minister for Migration and European Affairs

Johanna Suurpää, Finland's Ombudsman for minorities

Börje Mattsson, President of Etnokult

Michael Hutchinson-Reis, Lecturer at Laurea University of Applied Sciences,

To initiate a panel introduction and audience discussion addressing the proposal that Finland accept "100,000 immigrants in ten years" and the question, "How will we create platforms to make integration work?"

The event was well and widely publicized before the meeting. The seminar took place at the Luckan centre in central Helsinki and was well attended by a variety of people of both Finnish and immigrant origin who actively participated in the debate.

During the meeting the Minister for Migration and European Affairs repeatedly confirmed her commitment to supporting and working towards a genuinely multicultural Finland based on an acceptance of diversity and the reality that Finland's economy and culture needed immigration and will benefit from the positive participation and integration of immigrants into all sectors of our society.

The other speakers also supported these objectives, focusing on both the progress already made and needing to be achieved, as well as the considerable practical, social and political challenges faced by individuals and groups working towards their own and others integration in Finland.

Members of the audience also expressed their similar concerns at how much needed to be done and that the burden of such work should not be left to be borne by immigrants alone. A general theme of these comments was the need for the Finnish parliament and government, together with all its various national and locally based departments, to take a clear and active lead in combating discrimination, hostility and the obstruction of immigrants already in Finland in employment and all other aspects of civil society. Many felt that only if such measures were affected, was there any chance of achieving the target of 100,000 new immigrants in Finland during the next ten years.

On the 7th of October 2008 MF invited candidates from all the official political parties who were campaigning for seats in the local municipal elections at the end of the year to join an open forum discussion organized by MF. The event's title was;

“Who's my candidate?”

This event developed many of the themes identified and addressed in the earlier seminar organized by MF in May. All the parties competing in the elections sent a candidate to the meeting.

The invited panel of political party representatives consisted of;

Maria-Elena Cowell (Kokoomus)

Zarmina Razai (SFP)

Francisco Chamorro (SFP)

Marianne Falck (Keskusta)

Freddy van Wonerghem (Perussuomalaiset)

Mrs Kermen Soitu (Christian Democrats)

Mr Tapio Laakso (Green Party)

Sampo Villanen (Secretary General- Vasemmistoliitto)

Thomas Wallgren (SDP)

They were asked to address the questions; “Why should immigrants or new Finns vote for your party in the forthcoming municipal elections?” and “How does your party picture successful integration?”

The event was again well and widely publicized, taking place at the Luckan centre. The meeting attracted a considerable audience, including a significant number of young people and Finnish as well as foreign students.

Interestingly, the majority of individual candidates from different parties, including the Perus Suomalaiset, were of immigrant origin themselves. After individual introductions and presentations by each candidate, there were challenging and searching questions from the floor. Although the majority of party candidates expressed their own and their party's support for a multicultural Finland and immigration, differences between them did emerge as the discussion progressed.

It seemed that many of the candidates, as well as the audience, welcomed the opportunity to debate the issues identified by MF and recognized their need to be discussed by local politicians within their communities. Another interesting aspect of the debate was that the candidates appealed to the audience or individual questioners directly, but appeared to refrain from challenging each other in an adversarial manner.

Some of the audience clearly suspected that a number of parties and their candidates had perhaps not thought through many of the issues; or that multicultural policies and immigration were not their priority, but merely a marginal "bolt on" rhetorical position in order to maintain a "politically correct" stance. However, despite this, as the discussion developed it began to focus on a number of controversial and difficult questions.

An example of this was the Perus Suomalaiset candidate, who noticeably diverged from the majority of the other candidate's views and opinions. When questioned by the audience, he revealed that his only concern about immigration were the problems it was causing in Finland.

He had stated previously that his sole reason for joining the PS party was that they were the only political party concerned about immigration- i.e. the problems caused by it. He rejected the idea that Finland needed more immigrant workers just because a few bus drivers' jobs were vacant in Helsinki. In response to a later question about what should be done about the "public" display of provocative, if not offensive material, such as a Nazi Swastika in a window, he replied that "it was only a flag". On the same issue, the Green Party candidate suggested that making such displays illegal merely served to provide an attractive opportunity for rebellious posturing and provocative gestures by young people and other disaffected individuals.

At the end of the event it was hoped that MF's modest aim of getting some local candidates and their potential voters to gain a better understanding of each other and encourage improved political awareness and participation in the political processes by immigrants themselves, had taken a small step forward.

Multicultural Finland's Participation in Sap's 2008 Party Congress

The Swedish People's Party (SFP) annual Party Congress for 2008 took place in Åbo at the Hotel Caribia from the 6th-8th of June. Multicultural Finland as a special interest organization for SFP was represented by four of its' members; Michael-Hutchinson Reis, Lisa Granqvist, Fredrika Åkerö (Sec.) and Tobias Pöttsch (Vice-chair).

The general political program was reserved for Saturday the 7th including a general debate on issues relating to Sap's political program for the following year as well as the presentation of greetings and well wishes from regional and special interest organizations.

The afternoon was devoted to work in special committees that studied motions relevant for inclusion in Sap's political program for 2008-09 which were divided under several umbrella themes; "integration" being one. After internal discussions in committees' motions were altered, rejected or adopted by the committee members and changes were returned for amendments and final voting by party congress delegates. Voting on the adoption of proposed motions including the integration political program and the constellation of the party board took place on Sunday, the 8th of June.

Tobias Pöttsch presented greetings from MF to the Party congress on Saturday which outlined a synopsis of our activities and hopes for continued future cooperation, while Michael-Hutchinson-Reis addressed delegates with a short speech on the need for building a multicultural society and Sap's important role in this process. Fredrika Åkerö was also active in raising the profile of multiculturalism and discussions around integration in her address to the congress and in her work in preparing Sap's integration program in Sap's working group. She further distributed a flyer which included the integration program's main proposals copy to all delegates. Karl Norrbom, MF's treasurer, was instrumental in the printing and design of the flyer. All three representatives then worked in committees which discussed and proposed changes to the integration political program and contributed with suggestions and comments. In the evening the MF's candidates also joined the Gala dinner.

On Sunday, Lisa Granqvist represented MF in discussions and voting on the proposed motions to the party program and elections to the party board.

MF's presence at the congress was well received and contributed to our increased visibility as a special interest group for SFP and thus raised our profile. Especially, our cooperation with Sap's working group responsible for preparing the Integration political program was beneficial and worthwhile, demonstrating that we have a great deal to contribute to the party's future policies on integration and multiculturalism in Finland.

International picnic

On the 30th August 2008 Multicultural Finland organized the annual picnic in Seurasaari, close to the Juhlakentä. The purpose of this event was for those who were interested about our association and members to have a chance to

get together and enjoying a lovely weekend outdoor. Hopefully, it could kick start a new year for our coming activities. There were more than forty participants in this event and people were encouraged to bring some food and drinks coming out of their own culture, though MF did provide food and drinks. Many members came with their family and friends to the event. There was barbecue, salad and different ethnic types of food brought by members and friends. Many issues and plans for the future were discussed. The atmosphere was great and we also played some group games together.

The board and members 2008

The board for Multicultural Finland 2008 consisted of:

Byoma Tamrakar (chair)
Tobias Pöttsch (vice chair)
Lisa Grankvist
Katia Torres-Aivara
Michael Hutchinson-Reis
Karl Norrbom (treasurer)
Wai Sam Chan
Mahdi Abdile
Fredrika Åkerö (secr.)

In addition to the active board there were around fifteen passive members including immigrants and persons working with integration such as decision-makers and informants. Some international students also joined in.
The membership fee 2008 was 10 euros per person.”

Marketing and webpage

Multicultural Finland upholds the webpage www.multiculturalfinland.com with during 2008 was enriched with a society guide for immigrants in Finland. The page has generated questions, which the associations answers after ability or send the matter on to correct authority. The page is hosted at Kulturhuset.

During 2008 MF bought adverts in Helsinki Times, Metro, Six Degrees and HBL (Hufvudstadsbladet).

Proper flyers and posters was created to the events, which gave a good visibility on the field if integration.

During the spring MF created a folder about our aims and goals which also included Sap's (The Swedish People's Party) aims and goals towards the municipal election, and giving a greeting from minister Thors. The folder was printed in two languages, in Swedish and English, and spread in 4 000 copies.

Finances

By receiving an increased financial support from Svenska kulturfonden 2008 the association could enlarge the advertising budget, as well as the event budget. This gave a higher quality of the programmes, generating a more professional look.

The budget for 2008 was around 7 000 euros, and most cost generates from advertising, graphical services and event costs.

Contacts

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