

## TRANSNATIONAL POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF THE SWEDISH FINN YOUTH ORGANIZATION

### Abstract

This article looks at the Swedish Finn Youth Organization's transnational political activities, and how they have developed. In the beginning, the youth organization modelled itself after its mother organization and joined the Finnish Expatriate Parliament (FEP), which made its participation in transnational practices easy. The case study of the Swedish Finn Youth Organization in Stockholm, Sweden, demonstrates that if the younger generation is given an opportunity to establish and govern their own associations, new forms of organization can be expected. The younger generation has distinguished itself from the older generation's associations by cooperating with other minorities and taking more account of the multicultural nature of the Swedish society. Their transnational political practices have been developed through a more direct approach towards the Finnish government.

### Keywords

Transnationalism • younger generation • migrant associations • the Finnish Expatriate Parliament • strategic action field

Received 11 August 2015; Accepted 18 November 2016

### Introduction

There is a substantial amount of literature available today about the migrants' transnational political activities. This literature stresses the notions about citizenship, democracy and identity (e.g., Guarnizo, Portes & Haller 2003; Khagram & Levitt 2008; Lafleur 2011; Miller 2011; Morales & Giugni 2011). The migrants' political transnationalism typically refers to the wide range of fields, activities and practices which connect migrants with the political sphere of their countries of origin (Morales & Morariu 2011). Narrowly defined, this can indicate membership in parties, or associations, or political actions, crossing borders with regard to organized groups or networks of individuals (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Portes, Guarnizo & Landolt 1999).

In this article, transnational refers to the expatriate Finns' connection through associational activities to the political sphere of Finland. Political activities refer to mobilizations and practices in the strategic action field (SAF). Practices generally exhibit certain regularities over time and thus, they are repeated and socially recognized (Adler & Pouliot 2011: 7). Mobilization refers to organized action, which may occur randomly once or repeatedly.

The strategic action field is defined as "a constructed mesolevel social order in which actors (who can be an individual or a collective) are attuned to and interact with one another on the basis of shared (which is not to say consensual) understandings about the purposes of the field, relationships to others in the field (including who has power and why) and the rules governing legitimate action in the field"

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(Fligstein & McAdam 2012: 9). Fligstein and McAdam (2012) assert that mobilizations emerge when the SAF is under turbulence, offering the challenger groups opportunities to improve their position and to even change the rules of the game. In order to develop practices, which Adler and Pouliot (2011) define as socially meaningful patterns of action embedded in particular organized context, the SAF has to be stable. Strategic actors aim to maintain the stable SAF, or try to restore it if it has been shaken.

Fligstein and McAdam (2012) see that all fields are embedded in complex webs of other fields. Those are further distinguished between state and non-state fields. In this article, the interactions between local, transnational and state fields are viewed from the Swedish Finn Youth Organization's perspective. This setting sheds some light onto the question of how the younger generation's transnational political activities develop and are maintained in the SAF, and whether they look similar to the activities of the older generation.

Previously published literature argues that transnational political activities of the descendants of the first-generation are not yet sufficiently understood (Lee 2008; Vertovec 2001). Research on transnational political activities of the younger generation is mostly categorized as second-generation transnationalism (Lee 2008; Vertovec 2001). Certain assumptions are still prevalent, such as the belief that there cannot be strong transnational connections because the second-generation's contacts to their parents' countries of origin are weaker than those of their parents (Lee 2008). However, Levitt's (2001) study has indicated that the children of parents who are

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active in transnational organizations are more likely to remain active in the countries of their parents' origin. Therefore, I propose that transnational political activities of the descendants of first-generation migrants do exist if they have a possibility to organize (i.e., resources and sufficient membership) and the organizational structure is already in place (associational culture).

First-generation migrants' transnational political practices have been treated as a response to exclusionary citizenship regimes in the settlement countries where the migrants' access to the political community is limited (Koopmans et al. 2005; Mügge 2012). Also, obstacles to integration and the denial of acculturation are seen to foster more transnational practices (Faist 2000). On the positive side, research also indicates that transnational practices can provide the migrants alternative resources, contributing to migrants' social mobility in the country of settlement (Portes, Guarnizo & Landolt 1999).

Transnational political activities of the descendants of first-generation migrants could not be related to difficulties of integration or the issue of social mobility. Also, younger people do not have as many resources or even experience in the organizing process in comparison to the older generation. Transnational political practices are argued to stem from the activities of first-generation migrants who have established large and wealthy organizations in the settlement countries (Morales & Jorba 2010). Haikkola's (2011) study showed that second-generation children replicated and interpreted their parents' transnational practices as a part of their local lives at home. Hence, it should not be expected that the younger generation will simply continue the older generation's practices and values, but that they will create something new on that foundation.

In this article, the term 'younger generation' refers to the first-, second- and third-generations used in migration studies. The first-generation was born in Finland, but the second-generation was born in Sweden. The fieldwork in Stockholm, Sweden, in one of the member associations of the FEP, the Swedish Finn Youth Organization, has demonstrated that the younger generation's active organizing process brings together at least the first- and the second-generations, regardless of where they were born. Häkkinen (2013) calls those who were born after 1971 the 'urban generation', which differs from all the earlier generations due to its members' independent world views, multicultural ideas, and higher level of education. It is significant to note that there are differences within migrant populations in regards to life cycles and age (Anthias 2012). The 'older generation', in this article, refers to Häkkinen's (2013) 'nationalistic generation' (born between 1911 and 1940) and 'network generation' (born between 1941 and 1970).

The older generation established the Finnish Expatriate Parliament (FEP) in 1997, offering a transnational link between Finland and the settlement countries where expatriate Finns have established associations. Finland is a small country of 5.4 million people, which has suffered mass waves of emigration to the USA (from the 1900s to the 1930s), Canada (from the 1920s to the 1970s), Australia (from the 1960s to the 1970s) and Sweden (from the 1960s to the 1980s) (Korkiasaari 1992). North American countries and Australia have attracted working class men and women with little or no education beyond compulsory schooling into forestry, mining and housekeeping jobs. Sweden, however, had plenty of jobs in the manufacturing industry. After the Second World War, and especially between the 1960s and 1980s, it is estimated that as many as 490,000 Finns emigrated to Sweden for work.

After the 1990s, the pattern of migration has changed, and more middle-class educated Finns left for high-skilled jobs, for higher

education, or simply seeking adventure (Heikkilä 2011). Sweden has remained the most attractive country for Finns, and as many as 26.2 per cent of all emigrants still choose to move to Sweden (Heikkilä 2011). Today, Finns and their descendants make up 1.6 million people abroad, and they have established about 1,500 associations (Finnish Expatriate Parliament 2016). A third of these associations are members of the FEP.

The FEP acts as a platform for the expatriate Finns' associations to cooperate, and to discuss their grievances and hopes, but most importantly, it functions as a mediator between expatriate Finns and the Finnish government authorities. Only associations are accepted as members. The FEP is an example of transnational political practices, since they are structured, repeated, socially meaningful and socially recognized (see Adler & Pouliot 2011). The FEP's full parliamentary sessions are held in Helsinki every two and a half years.

This article looks at the Swedish Finn Youth Organization's transnational political practices via the Finnish Expatriate Parliament (FEP) and other transnational activities. The example of the organization process of young people in Sweden differs from that of other young people of Finnish descent in other countries because of the minority status of Sweden Finns. The government of Sweden adopted a new immigration policy in the 1970s, which allowed minorities to preserve and develop their language and culture in a manner equal to the native population in Sweden, raising Sweden Finns' political awareness (Korkiasaari & Tarkiainen 2000: 217). Nowhere else in the world have Finns acquired a minority position. In Sweden, along with Tornedalens (i.e., the people living in the northern part of Sweden, speaking Meänkieli), Roma people, Jews and Sami people, the Sweden Finns have special rights which other migrant groups do not enjoy. Minority status is the main motivational element in the migrants' organizing process emphasizing the significance of the preservation of Finnish language and culture. However, it also provides an opportunity to observe whether these rights guaranteed by the government are fulfilled by the municipalities. Simultaneously, any possible gaps that the law should cover are easier to spot.

The data from the FEP<sup>1</sup> is derived from its Minute Books from 1997 to 2013. The FEP's two stable committees – the Youth Committee and the Education and Training Issues Committee – deal with issues that concern the younger generation. However, the Education and Training Committee is represented mostly by teachers. Hence, only the initiatives, resolutions and speeches of the Youth Committee truly reflect the voices of the younger generation itself, and offer a less filtered picture of their hopes and grievances. Observations of the 2010 and 2012 full parliamentary sessions also guide this study.

To be able to peek into the local context, the Swedish Finn Youth Organization was chosen for the case study. It manifests a successful youth federation in Stockholm. The data from the youth organization includes fieldwork at this organization that took place in 2012. The Minute Books, other archival material, discussions with the staff and members filling in the gaps about the issues found in the Minute Books, and observations of their events provide data for this study.

The article commences with the theoretical background of the paper, introducing the main incumbents and challengers in the strategic action field. This is followed by a brief introduction to data and methods. Next, the Finnish Expatriate Parliament is described in more detail. The article then discusses the younger generation's hopes and grievances in the work of the FEP. From there, the article moves to Stockholm to look at the situation of the younger generation in the context of other expatriate Finns' associations. Then it discusses the in-between identity of the youth organization, and how it became a resource and a form of power for the younger generations. Next,

the article looks at the youth organization's development from the transnational political practices to transnational mobilizations. Finally, the article closes with the conclusion.

## Incumbents and challengers in the strategic action field

A generation as a biological concept, is a measurement of historical time in which every individual is seen as a part of the chain (Häkkinen 2013). There are, however, common themes and understandings that touch generations in special ways. Changes in politics and education, wars, social problems, and even media can affect everyone during a certain timeframe. Häkkinen explains that the urban generation, born after 1971, shares experiences of the recession and the expansion of the European Union. Such events have a notable effect on people, especially, the young. The younger generation tends to be more educated and more independent from the traditions and habits than the previous generations. However, every generation is further internally fractured by differences of opportunities and exclusions, gender, class and racialization (Anthias 2012).

A concept of generation is useful when the migrants' associations are examined, in combination with the definition of association which already refers to people with similar interests. Ross (1976: 5) explains that 'a voluntary association is, by its very nature, a human collectivity that stresses an identified purpose and the association of members who seek to achieve it'. The older and younger generations with migrant backgrounds have different ideas of how their ethnic culture should be celebrated, as well as varying access to resources and power needed to establish a certain kind of organizational culture.

While the generation concept shows the differences and preferences in the organizational culture between the older and younger generations, it does not explain the 'game' played in any strategic action field by the different actors. Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) strategic action field approach theorizes how associations cooperate and compete with each other. Boundaries of the strategic action field are flexible, and depend on the definition of the situation and the issues at stake (Fligstein & McAdam 2012). The SAF is either under the condition of emergence, stability, or crisis. The actors aim to maintain stability of the SAF, but because fields are embedded in networks of fields, a change in one close dependent field may cause turbulence in the other. Fligstein and McAdam (2012) discuss the broader field environment. In situations where the SAFs are closely connected and dependent on each other, such as non-state and state fields, this may bring the SAF under the condition of rupture/crisis/resettlement. It provides an opportunity for the challengers to articulate an alternative vision of the strategic action field. Challengers, however, are generally expected to conform to the prevailing order that is maintained by the incumbents (Fligstein & McAdam 2012: 180).

The relationship between the incumbents and the challengers in the same strategic action field is marked by competition for symbolic power, resources and members. Incumbents are traditional players who have had the most power throughout the field's history. Fligstein and McAdam (2012:13) suggest, similarly to Gamson's (1975) concept, that the strategic action field is governed by incumbents. In the case of the expatriate Finns' associations, incumbents are mostly first-generation Finns, belonging to either the nationalistic or network generation.

## Research design

In this article, two strategic action fields are examined. The first transnational strategic action field is formed around the Finnish Expatriate Parliament, which includes all the active member associations around the world. It functions as a channel for the expatriate Finns' transnational political practices, and thus, it is a starting point for looking at the position of the younger generation. Considering their different experiences, it cannot be expected that the younger generation will repeat and mimic the older generation's organizational style. The local SAF of the Swedish Finn Youth Organization, which is a member association of the FEP, offers an opportunity to examine the younger generation's possibilities of engaging in transnational political activities and demonstrates their scope. Boundaries of the SAF are defined by interaction with the associations the Swedish Finn Youth Organization routinely has to take into account when it is organizing its activities. This refers mostly to other expatriate Finns' associations in Stockholm area.

Fligstein and McAdam (2012) also articulate methodological considerations for examining the SAFs. The condition of the field - whether it is emerging, stable, or under crisis - has to be initially determined. The transnational field is examined through the Minute Books of the FEP from 1998 to 2012. The initiatives, resolutions and speeches given during the full parliamentary sessions constitute the main data source. These have been categorized by topic and country. The Youth Committee's speeches in the full parliamentary sessions are used, although these only took place in 2002 and 2005.<sup>2</sup> Also, observation of and participation in the work of the Youth Committee in 2010, and observation of the full parliamentary sessions of the FEP in 2010 and 2012 provide more context for the material available in the Minute Books.

Multi-sited ethnography and multi-method research techniques were used to gather more information about the expatriate Finnish associations and the Swedish Finn Youth Organization in Stockholm (Marcus 1995). I was in Stockholm in the spring and fall of 2012, for a total duration of ten weeks. The fieldwork period in Stockholm followed Marcus' (1995) methods of following the people and the conflict. The expatriate Finns' associations and their core activities were initially mapped with the assistance of the Archives of the Sweden Finns. I visited some events organized by the expatriate Finns' associations, and discussed expatriate Finns' activities with the main actors in the field. When I learned that the first- and second-generation young people had become active in the organizing process, the Swedish Finn Youth Organization was chosen as a case study organization. I participated in the events they organized, discussed and interviewed their board members and staff, and sat in on one of the network meetings. Interviews supplemented the data by filling the gaps that occur in written materials. They explained in detail the topics such as the youth organization's role in the SAF and members' backgrounds. The interviews were conducted in Finnish.

A great amount of research material was collected. The first phase of the analysis process was the use of sequence analysis, which also guided the gathering of the data. I began by marking down the important transnational connections and developments in the youth organization's life cycle. The analysis showed that the youth organization had to adjust to changes in the law and the government's attitudes and expectations. Rossteutcher, Medina and Selle (2007) argue that we can observe and demarcate certain historical epochs, which have had an impact on the development of associations. In the case of the youth organization, the most important example affecting both the younger generation and associations was a change in

the Swedish law that meant that the youth organization had to be governed separately from its mother organization.

The sequence analysis revealed that interaction with other associations was also significant for the association's development. Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) theory of fields guided this process further. Multiple varieties of data source are necessary in order to distinguish incumbents and challengers in the SAF. Incumbents and challengers were designated at an early phase of research, and a stable SAF surrounding the youth organization was defined. Fligstein and McAdam's (2012: 166) methodological considerations for observing a stable field also include observations about the power structure, acceptable forms of action, rules, membership, consensus and external state and non-state fields as stabilizing and reproducing the field. In the process of analysing the data and writing, email and telephone were useful tools for filling in the missing information, updating information and receiving feedback and reflections.

## The Finnish Expatriate Parliament as a platform for the transnational political practices

The voluntary associations are, and have been throughout history, the most important actors in the majority of fields in Finnish civil society (Siisiäinen, Kankainen & Salminen 2011). In corporatist systems, such as Sweden and Finland, the state encourages all forms of collective organization and provides some support (Soysal 1994). Wijkström and Zimmer (2011) assert that the funding of associations in the Nordic model is also derived from membership fees. Associations are viewed as representatives of the different segments of the population (Odmalm 2004).

The FEP represents expatriate Finns. It is funded through the Finland Society, which receives a small subsidy from the government (Seppinen 2002). The FEP was established to enhance the expatriate Finns' and their descendants' connection to Finland; thus, making the expatriate Finns' transnational political practices fairly easy. It grants membership to associations interested in maintaining Finnish culture and identity upon ratification of its by-laws. These associations are mostly social clubs (such as Finland Societies), sports clubs, choirs, churches and other non-profit organizations such as retirement homes. Each member association, depending on its size, can send one to three voting representatives to the full parliamentary sessions. Unlike all other expatriate councils or parliaments, representation does not require Finnish citizenship. In total, 512 member associations in 38 countries are represented (Finnish Expatriate Parliament 2016).

The FEP provides a venue where the Finnish government authorities and Finnish expatriates and their descendants can have a dialogue about their wishes and needs. This is accomplished during the full parliamentary session, which commences every two and half years with the opening ceremony in which the Finnish government representatives, including the president, bring their greetings to expatriate Finns. Typically, a government representative such as the Minister for Foreign Affairs takes questions from the audience. Topics discussed concern initiatives previously submitted by the member associations to the secretary of the FEP. The FEP's work is based on these initiatives, which are discussed, voted on and drafted to form resolutions in ten standing committees established by issues, such as citizenship, culture, senior issues, youth and education. After the committees' work, each initiative goes to the full parliamentary session where it is reviewed and voted on again. As a result, a resolution is written. By the year 2015, as many as 492 resolutions have been passed through this process.

## The exclusion of the younger generation

The FEP has established a stable SAF, which is mostly populated by the older generations' associations. The Youth Committee has received about 10% of all initiatives of the FEP. Although student associations are missing, some youth organizations such as the Swedish Finn Youth Organization became a member in the beginning when the FEP was originally established. It separated from its mother federation, the National Association of Finns in Sweden (RSKL)<sup>3</sup>, in 1994 and followed its example of transnational political practices.

The youth organization, along with many other associations, has filed initiatives concerning for example dual citizenship, which was successfully achieved by 2003. Following that, the young people used the FEP platform to address issues relevant to their generation, such as a difficulty to find jobs and get educated in Finland, which they would have preferred. Another problem which has surfaced has been the problem of exclusion of the youth associations from the activities organized by the older generations:

Young people are the future, they say. However, it does not always feel like we are noticed according to this saying... We would like to give a little hint to associations in different countries. We have heard every now and then that young people are not interested in participating. But we are interested in participating in many kinds of activities. That is why we advise that when something is happening in the 'adults' associations' where young people could also fit in, please contact us. (Finnish Expatriate Parliament, Youth Committee 2005)

Resolution number 11/2005 agreed that child and youth work abroad among expatriate Finns was scarce, and the resolution urged its activation for the sake of the younger people, who were, according to the resolution, 'losing their identity by becoming global nomads'. One reason for this statement was the decision of the Finnish government in 2005 to end the financial support for the expatriate youth's activities abroad.

Speakers in the Youth Committee do not refer to the older generation's associations, but they talk about the 'adults' associations'. The fieldwork in Stockholm showed that there is not a subtle line between the first-, second- and third-generations, nor with the concept of who is 'young'. If the average age in one association is 65, for them someone who is 40 is young, especially if this person presents new ideas about the identity and activities of the association.

While the common interest of the expatriate Finns' associations is to maintain and revitalize the Finnish language and culture, the different generations have varying views about it. The older generations' activities and celebrations are seen as foreign from the younger generation's perspective, causing 'feelings of antipathy and boredom' (Youth Committee 2005). The older generation's form of organizing is more traditional, including activities that maintain and revitalize the Finnish cultural traditions and language, featuring: 1) a wish to maintain ties to Finland with respect to language, religion, endogamy and cultural norms; 2) a strong connection to the 'homeland'; 3) and the high levels of social exclusion (see Cohen 1997). These are similar to the characteristics regarding the labour diaspora.

The lack of other alternatives can also bring generations closer to each other, but it often requires young people's assimilation to traditions, norms and values of the older generations. For many it is not acceptable, and they lose their touch with the country of origin of their parents and relatives little by little. Earlier studies about the

descendants of expatriate Finns document similar kinds of situations in which they do not feel 'Finnish enough' to be able to participate in the activities organized by the expatriate Finns' associations in their local communities (Jurva & Jaya 2008: 116; Weckström 2011). Thus, the concept of 'Finnishness' is symbolic because what is 'Finnish' for one may not be for another (Weckström 2011). A proper 'Finnishness' has come to demarcate the lines between generations. When viewed from the perspective of the theory of fields, it also becomes a marker between the incumbents and the challengers.

## The emerging SAF surrounding the Swedish Finn Youth Organization

Although the generation gap between the younger and older generations has been evident for a long time in the organizing process of expatriate Finns, it was slow to develop. A look at the historical development of Stockholm's strategic action field inhabited by Finns' associations shows that the associations have primarily served the network generation's needs. Yläräkkola's (1974: 96) report of the oldest Sweden Finns' association, Stockholm's Finnish Society, shows that it had 1,600 members in the 1950s, from which those who were counted as belonging to the younger generation totalled 1,349 persons. Stockholm in the 1960s and 1970s attracted mostly young expatriates from Finland. By the 1970s, there were about 60,000 young Finnish expatriates in the Greater Stockholm area (Yläräkkola 1974).

When the network generation grew older, the members seen as belonging to the younger generation were decreasing.<sup>4</sup> The National Association of Finns in Sweden (RSKL) reported in 1991 that it was difficult to recruit new members, especially young people, to the activities of expatriate Finns. They established a project called the 'Young 2000',<sup>5</sup> which involved 60 expatriate Finns' associations. The RSKL concluded that 'today's activities should be questioned whether they are sensible and pleasant for the younger people' (Young 2000 Project 1991). This gap between the younger and older generations was not easy to fix.

The young people had a section in the RSKL until the government's subsidy policies radically changed, demanding that youth organizations be independent to obtain any subsidies for their activities (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2003; see also Sveriges Riksdag: SFS Förordning 1994: 641 om statsbidrag till ungdomsorganisationer). In order to be recognized as a youth organization, the organization boards were now required to have at least 60% of their members between age 7 and 25 years (Minute Books of the Swedish Finn Youth Organization 2003). The government of Sweden thus provided an excellent opportunity for the youth to have their own voice and views, but it rolled a rock from the state field to the non-state fields, precipitating a crisis. The Swedish Finn Youth Organization became a registered association and received an organization number in 1994. However, it was stated that the youth organization was established 'as a forced procedure' (Minute Books of the Swedish Finn Youth Organization Fall 2003). As a federation, it became the official representative of the younger generation of Sweden Finns, similar to the RSKL.

In corporatist systems such as Sweden, migrants are assumed to integrate through associations, and compelled to organize under one umbrella federation, which acts as the representative of a migrant group, and also as an advocate for that group's rights (Odmalm 2004; Soysal 1994). This makes the strategic action field hierarchical, because the federation enjoys the best social status in the field with

maximum resources and relations to government officials. The federation receives subsidy from the government and then shares it with its member associations. Fligstein & McAdam (2012: 46) argue that 'the need for meaning is at the basis of people's efforts to get and sustain collective action'. They articulate that the importance of meaning making in group life is connected to instrumental gain, social status and power.

Acting as a federation for the whole migrant group provides the reason for the organization to sustain power in the field. The RSKL has been the dominant representative of Sweden Finns' associations since the 1950s. It has developed great diplomatic relations with the governments of Sweden and Finland. Furthermore, it is an active member of the FEP, practicing transnational political practices mostly through its platform.

For a new federation, sharing space with the RSKL is a challenging task. When a new association emerges, it begins sharing the same strategic action field with other similar associations, and competes with them for resources, members, supporters and social status (Fligstein & McAdam 2012). Thus, a new federation begins from the position of a challenger. In the case of federations of the Sweden Finns in the Stockholm area, the outlook for the new youth federation was not very promising. Other federations that had emerged to compete in the same field with the RSKL lasted only a short time and then disappeared (Pekkala 2007).

In the beginning, the RSKL and the youth organization developed different kinds of cooperation strategies. They could not, however, escape the tension that had begun to build on many issues. The main problem was that the activities of the youth were usually considered as somewhat suspicious by the older generation; thus, the younger generation was under the 'good guidance' (Jokirinne 2012). The Minute Books of the Swedish Finn Youth Organization from February 27, 1999 showed that there were conflicts between the younger and older people in many associations. Competition and cooperation generally existed simultaneously in the strategic action field (Fligstein & McAdam 2012: 14–15). The field in question had, however, become more oriented towards competition; both organizations fought for the same cause but with different strategies.

## Youth organization's in-between identity as its strength

The youth organization had to develop an identity distinct from the mother organization and from other expatriate Finns' associations, in order to convince everyone that it had a special meaning in the field. The new government policy also emphasized that youth organizations should be able to create their own identity separate from their mother organizations (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2003). Whereas the older generation's celebration of 'Finnishness' was quite straightforward referring to traditional Finnish customs, the younger generation's identifications about 'Finnishness' were much larger in scope.

During the interviews, it was always discussed how many young people had grown up in multicultural neighbourhoods; thus, they had friends with different ethnic backgrounds even if they spoke Finnish at home. Finnish students in Sweden identified themselves either as Finns or Finland's Swedes. In Finland, there is a Swedish-speaking minority. One 24-year old Finland's Swede told that Swedes commented that her Swedish was 'very good' not realizing that it was her mother tongue. She commented on it that 'the only thing that connects is Finnish... also Finns who were born in Sweden can be Finnish'. Identifications were complicated as it was also common for young people to identify

themselves as being in-between many cultures. Veera Jokirinne reminded, that 'in many families, there were other languages than Finnish also spoken at home. It was common that many descendants of the Sweden Finns identified with many ethnic backgrounds, and the Finnish identification was not necessarily the primary one that those young people chose to bring forth' (Jokirinne 2012). The concept of cultural diversity thus became the most important factor that began to guide the youth organization's steps.

Young Sweden Finns' in-between identifications also raised the curiosity of the Finnish President Tarja Halonen, who invited Markus Lyyra from the Swedish Finn Youth Organization to Finland on June 23, 2009. The President was interested in the identity and language development of the young people of Finnish descent who had grown up immersed in many cultures (Minute Books of the Swedish Finn Youth Organization August 26, 2009). From the perspective of the younger generation of Sweden Finns, it was significant to be recognized on the governmental level in Finland and to be able to cultivate better diplomatic relations.

In Sweden, the youth organization had actively begun to advocate minority rights. It established cooperation networks with the Sami, Tornedalens and Roma in Sweden. The youth organization was also active in other forums in Europe concerned with minority issues, joining in the networks and forming coalitions with other associations sharing similar interests. It organized political protests and rallies, becoming a recognized actor in Sweden's minority politics. As a result of joint cooperation with the Church of Sweden and other minority associations, *Dare to be Minority: A Report on Minority Rights in Sweden 2012* was published for the Council of Europe. The RSKL was named in this publication supporting the cause, but it soon withdrew in further developments, giving more space for the other actors. It still deemed minority issues important, but the main focus stayed in improving only the rights of Sweden Finns in Sweden.

Around the same time, the Ung Minoritet project gathered together young people who were Sweden Finns, Tornedalians, Sami, Jews and Roma. The focus had been on language, security and practical issues involving their cultural practices. The youth organization has continued to participate in joint projects with other minority associations, and as a result, the publication *Marginalized and Ignored: National Minority Children's Struggle for Language Rights in Sweden 2013* was sent to the Council of Europe. Similarly, the same group of associations<sup>6</sup> published *Human Rights Challenges in Sweden 2014*.

The Swedish government has noticed minority associations' cooperative action and has actively begun to make important changes, although they have been slow to be implemented. The younger generation has also begun to demand more responsibility in the strategic action field of the expatriate Finns' associations. The former Secretary of the Swedish Finn Youth Organization, Markus Lyyra, began a project in fall 2014 to reach out to younger people, urging them to participate in delegation groups of minorities in city councils. Previous research showed that 80% of the delegates are over 50 years old, and only 7% are under 35 years (Hirvonen 2013). The younger generation of Finnish descent has for a long time been absent and invisible in minority politics in Sweden; finally, it has been recognized that they also should have a voice in minority politics.

## From transnational political practices to transnational mobilization

The younger generation's empowerment in minority issues in Sweden and recognition by the President of Finland also made them

stronger and more active transnationally. The opportunity to mobilize emerged when a change in law was passed in the proximate field, in the European Union, which ruled that it would no longer be possible to give preference to students studying abroad on the basis of their nationality (Finnish Expatriate Parliament, Resolution number 20/2010). Hence, expatriate Finnish students advocated that the Ministry of Transport and Communications in Finland should end the unequal treatment of persons studying abroad in terms of train and bus transport. First, a conventional way through the FEP was used. The expatriate Finnish students filed an initiative to the FEP through the Lutheran congregation in Köln, Germany, proposing a student discount to all students, regardless of their nationality, on the basis of an international student card. The full parliamentary session in 2010 accepted it and urged the Ministry of Transport and Communications to grant equal rights for all students traveling in Finland.

When the change did not appear soon enough, a challenger group began to question the FEP's efficiency. The younger generation viewed the FEP as 'the first-generation's traditional type of organizing model that is too slow to react' referring to its hierarchical structure (Lyyra 2012). As a result, Finnish students in Germany, Estonia and Great Britain contacted the British student association called the Finnish Student Society of Great Britain (ISO ry), and the Swedish Finn Youth Organization about the issue. Together, they organized a group consisting of mostly social science and law students, who then travelled to Finland to meet both Minister of Transport and Communications and the director of the VR Group (Finnish National Railway). As a compromise, the student discount was restored for Finnish students studying abroad under the Finnish social security (KELA), similarly to all the students who studied in Finland. Veera Jokirinne stated that 'the main goal, however, was for Finland to adopt Germany's model, in which all students – regardless of citizenship – were able to receive travel discounts on the basis of an international student card' (Jokirinne 2015).

Although the main goal was not attained, there was a successful solution for the Finnish students studying abroad. This process could have taken a long time to establish through the FEP, although they had all the necessary resources and contacts with the government authorities. Again, the younger generation of Finnish descent would have taken all students into the account despite their nationality, but this time it was the business managers in Finland who opposed the implementation of Germany's model in Finland.

## Conclusions

The Swedish Finn Youth Organization separated from its mother federation, the National Association of Finns in Sweden (RSKL), in 1994 as a result of a change in Swedish law that required youth organizations to have at least 60 per cent of their board members aged between 7 and 25 if they wished to obtain any subsidy from the government. For a new federation, sharing the same space with the mother organization was a challenging task. The strategic action field (SAF) of the expatriate Finns' associations is dynamic, and associations struggle to survive. The SAF did not easily allow space for the new youth federation, which became a challenger association.

The youth organization's first transnational political activities mimicked the mother organization. It became a member of the Finnish Expatriate Parliament (FEP) at around the same time as the RSKL. As early as the second full parliamentary session in 2000, the youth organization was already an active participant. This shows that

transnational political practices of the descendants of first-generation migrants do exist if they have a possibility to organize (i.e., resources and sufficient membership), and if the organizational structure is already in place (associational culture). Mobilization, however, took a longer time because it required a strong identity, networks and resources. Also, the youth organization had to wait for an opportunity when the SAF would be shaken or in crisis.

There is an expectation that the younger generation will join the activities of the older generation, and they are expected to assimilate and accept the norms, values and symbols of the preserved 'Finnishness'. The Youth Committee's speeches and initiatives show that the younger generation often feels that they do not 'fit in' to the older generation's activities and celebrations. Hence, the organizing process of expatriate Finns may easily exclude the younger generation. This makes them a disadvantaged group in the strategic action field of the expatriate Finns' associations.

Although the younger expatriate generation has been able to integrate well into their local communities, which is the only home for many, their connections to Finland or the local expatriate Finnish community may be only through their parents. The second-generation young people, especially, are more interested in revitalizing their Finnish language skills and learning about the Finnish youth culture. For this, they need more of their own channels, such as the expatriate Finnish youth associations.

The Swedish Finn Youth Organization is a good example of a youth federation that engages in transnational political activities, but on the young generation's own terms and in their own ways. The younger generation's goal is not to advance and maintain the Finnish culture and language in the same way as the first-generation, but by bringing their own touch to it through their experiences and how they see and feel the Finnish culture. In the Swedish case, the most important factor that distinguishes the younger generation's organization from the rest of the expatriate Finns' organizations is the acknowledgment that the younger generation of Swedish-Finnish descent should cooperate with other minorities, since they are all in the same boat.

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## Notes

1. The work of the Youth Committee of the FEP includes first-, second- and third-generations. There is no age limit as long as initiatives concern children, youth or students.
2. In 2002, it is mentioned that the speech was written by 30 young people from 9 countries, but the 2005 speech does not mention how many people were present. In 2005, the CIMO, an Organization for International Mobility and Cooperation, organized an event for the younger descendants of Finnish expatriates and this speech is drawn based on the discussions there.
3. The RSKL interprets the separation of the youth organization differently. It argues that the government's new funding policy still would have been flexible enough for the youth organization to function as a part of it.
4. In the 1980s, there was a big return migration from Sweden to Finland due to Finland's improved economic situation. Sweden, however, has always been the primary country for expatriate Finns to move to for work and study (Heikkilä 2011).
5. In Finnish, the project was called Nuori 2000-projekti.
6. This group includes the Church of Sweden, Sweden Finnish Delegation, Swedish Finn Youth Organization, National Association of Swedish Tornedalians, Tornedalian Youth Organization, Sami Youth Organization and Swedish Federation for Yiddish.

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