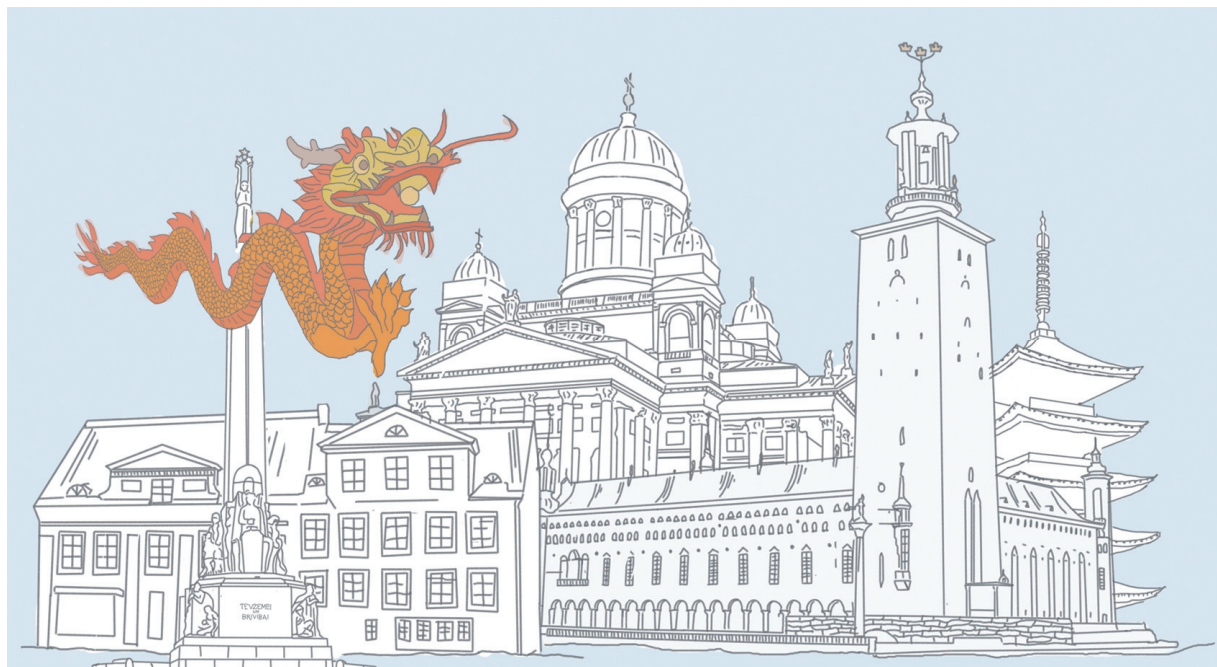


# BASAAR Project

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Baltic Sea – Asia Agenda for Regions in a Globalizing World



## Asian students and Professionals in the Baltic Sea Region WP2 Knowledge Society Final Report

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City Of Helsinki Urban Facts, Finland  
Helsinki, 25 November 2010



CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013



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## Asian Students and Professional in the Baltic Sea Region

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<b>Project Number</b> CB3
<b>Project Title</b> Baltic Sea – Asia Agenda for Regions in a Globalising World
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<b>Work-package contributing to the Deliverable</b> WP2 Knowledge Society
<b>Author(s)</b> Maija Merimaa – Iina Oilinki
<b>Abstract</b> <p>This report is an outcome of a joint EU-project “<i>Basaar - Baltic Sea and the Asian Agenda Regions in a Globalizing World</i>” by six regions around the Baltic Sea. The project was focused on researching and developing the Asian connections of the Baltic Sea region. This report is one of the five research reports published within the Project.</p> <p>The report is the deliverable of the WP2 “Knowledge society. It assesses the presence of Chinese and Indian knowledge-society actors, namely highly skilled employees and students in the Central Baltic Sea region. Special interest has been given to statistical bench marking of the project regions and to the work and living conditions, expectations and plans for the future, professional and academic aims.</p> <p>The report includes the policy recommendations that aim towards increasing the attractiveness of the region from the perspective of highly skilled Chinese and Indian migrants.</p>
<b>Keywords</b> BASAAR, Globalization, Asia, Central Baltic Sea region, Knowledge Society

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### 1 Foreword

This report is one in a series produced by the project “Baltic Sea – Asia Agenda for Regions in a Globalising World” (hereinafter – BASAAR). The BASAAR project was co-funded by EU’s Central Baltic INTERREG IV A Programme 2007–2013 under the priority 2 “Economically Competitive and Innovative Region”. This priority focuses on enhancing the overall economic development and competitiveness of the programme area. It emphasises innovations and broad, qualitative co-operation. Moreover, the development of connections to facilitate cross-border co-operation and a better flow of goods and people is another focus, together with the utilisation of the labour force and the development of the tourism sector<sup>1</sup>.

One of the main aims of the BASAAR project is to improve the capacity of the Central Baltic region to adjust to globalization, with special focus on how the developing Asian economies will affect the Central Baltic Sea region. The project was organised around three main themes: 1) Knowledge society, 2) Resource inventory and 3) Networks and flows. The findings related to the three themes were complemented by a scenario study presenting four long-term scenarios for the region and its relation to Asia. To get an independent view, Asian experts were invited to comment on the scenarios.

The project results are presented in a set of three independent reports providing benchmark results, analysis and action recommendations related to each of the three project themes, an executive summary of all recommendations and the scenario report. Project reports are mainly intended to serve as background papers for planners involved in regional planning processes of the project partners and other organisations. All reports can be downloaded from the websites of the project partners.

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<sup>1</sup> Central Baltic INTERREG IV A Programme 2007–2013, p. 56; <http://www.centralbaltic.eu/programme>, accessed on 30.01.2010

The BASAAR project partners:

- City of Helsinki Urban Facts, Finland
- City of Stockholm, Sweden
- City of Uppsala, Sweden
- Harju County Government, Estonia
- Office of Regional Planning, Stockholm County Council, Sweden
- Regional Council of Southwest Finland, Finland
- Riga City Council, Latvia
- Riga Planning Region, Latvia
- Tallinn City Office, Estonia
- Turku Science Park Ltd., Finland
- Uusimaa Regional Council, Finland (Lead Partner)

## 2 Introduction

This report is an outcome of a joint EU-project "*Basaar - Baltic Sea and the Asian Agenda Regions in a Globalizing World*" by six regions around the Baltic Sea. The regions are Uusimaa and Southwest Finland in Finland, Stockholm and Uppsala regions in Sweden, Riga region in Latvia and Harju County in Estonia. The project is funded by Central Baltic Interreg 2007–2013 IV A programme and the main partner is Uusimaa Regional Council from Finland.

One of the main aims of BASAAR is to improve the capacity of Central Baltic regions to use cross-border cooperation as a way to adjust to globalization, with the focus on the development of Asia relations of the region. The project consists of three different research oriented work packages: 1) Knowledge society, 2) Resource inventory and 3) Networks and flows. The themes were brought together in scenario work, where the research findings were used basis for four different future scenarios.

This is the final report of the work package "Knowledge Society". The purpose of this work package has been to assess the presence of Asian knowledge-society actors, namely highly skilled employees and students in the Central Baltic Sea region. Special interest has been given to their work and living conditions, expectations and plans for the future, professional and academic aims.

The report is based on statistical data on Asian populations of the project regions and on interviews with skilled Chinese and Indian immigrants who reside in the region. The partner responsible for the package has been City of Helsinki Urban Facts.

### 3 Perspectives on highly skilled migration

The increased global mobility has accelerated the global competition for talent and the Western countries are actively taking political measures to liberalize labor mobility in order to prevent the forthcoming labor shortage in the societies struggling with aging populations. The highly skilled immigrants of whom the competition is the fiercest are not, however primarily wanted to fill the forthcoming labor shortage, but to boost the economic competitiveness of the regions. (Lavenex 2007.)

The economic benefits of highly skilled immigration are usually explained by two concepts, brain gain and brain circulation. The first is the older of the two, and it approaches highly skilled migration as a permanent one-way process directed from “less developed” to the “more developed” countries. Here the benefits of the highly skilled immigration is seen to result from the contribution of the immigrants at the labor market, and from increased innovativeness achieved by having people with different backgrounds work together. (Kepsu & al. 2009, Raunio 2005)

However, the brain gain approach that treats countries as closed containers is nowadays considered too simplistic to explain the consequences of highly skilled immigration in the globally interconnected world. The concept is being replaced by brain circulation, which acknowledges the possibly temporary nature of migration, and emphasizes the significance of economic connections and knowledge networks that the highly skilled immigrants create between regions. (Saxenian 2005)

In the discussion on highly skilled immigration, the vastly populous China and India with growing middle classes seeking education and working experience abroad are often seen as potential reserves of talent. The countries, however, are trying to prohibit brain drain, and while they both strive policies encouraging acquiring studying and working experience abroad, various policy measures have also been implemented to encourage the return of the highly skilled (Zhang 2003).

The returning migrants do not return only with networks, but also with knowhow on Western education and innovation models, which they help to introduce and adapt into Chinese and Indian societies. As the birth of mutually profitable economic networks depends highly on the economic structures of both sending and hosting societies, the implications of the return migration for Western countries might be more complex than the supposed brain circulation theory (see Walton-Roberts 2009).

### 4 Description of the data

The research part of this report covers three different topics: 1) Statistical overview of the Asian population in the project regions, 2) the connections between the Baltic Sea region and Asia as perceived by local experts and 3) the experiences and opinions about the Baltic Sea region of the Chinese and Indian students and professionals residing in the region.

The statistical data on the Asian population in general and on students in particular was gathered from all partners both on national and regional level. Statistical data on Asian professionals was also requested. However such statistics were not available, and therefore students represent skilled immigration in the statistical overview.

The statistics were used to benchmark the regions. However, most of the data was available only from Finland and Sweden and only at the national level. Therefore the benchmarking is focused on Sweden and Finland, and Estonia and Latvia are taken into account only when possible. All in all, there were serious shortcomings on the statistical data of the Asian populations on the Baltic Sea region, and, due to these shortcomings no proper benchmarking could be done.

The interviews with local experts included interviews with officials both at city and state level, with university representatives and with the institutions promoting foreign investments in the Central Baltic Sea region. The aim of the expert interviews was to obtain an overall conception of the Asia – Baltic Sea Region relationship and of the main plans on concerning developing the relation. The expert interviews were also used to identify central knowledge gaps regarding the skilled Asian immigration to the region.

The main research findings of this report are related to the interviews with Asian students and professionals. The previously held expert interviews were used as background information for these interviews and enabled focusing the interviews with the skilled immigrants on issues relevant from the expert perspective. All in all, interview sessions with Indians were organized in Finland and with Chinese in Finland in Sweden. Due to the very small number of Asian students and professionals in the Baltic States no interview sessions were held in either Latvia or Estonia.

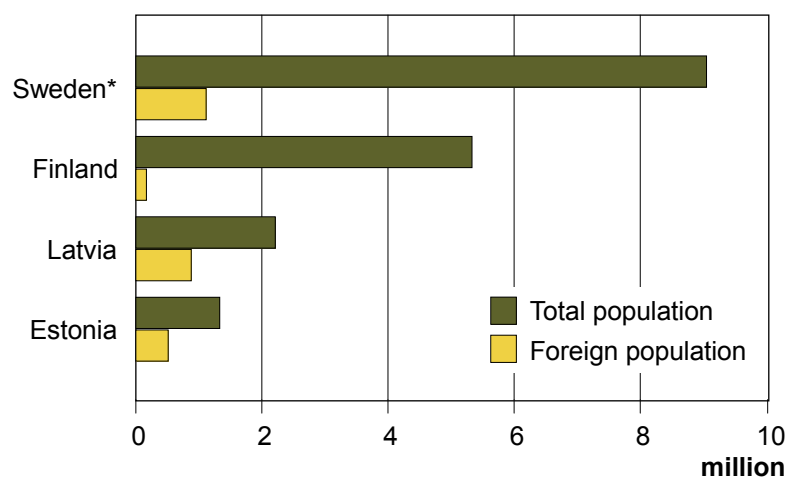


## 5 Asian populations of the Baltic Sea region

The Basaar project focuses on the Asian connections of six regions in four countries by the Baltic Sea. They are Stockholm and Uppsala regions in Sweden, Uusimaa and Southwest Finland in Finland, Harju County in Estonia and Riga region in Latvia. Apart from Uppsala and Southwest Finland these regions are capital regions of their countries.

Sweden is biggest of the project countries, and it has by far the largest foreign population, exceeding one million. On the other hand in the two smallest countries, Estonia and Latvia, the share of people with foreign mother tongue is remarkably high, between 30–40 per cent. However, vast majority of the foreign population are Russians reminiscent of the Soviet period. Although Finland has the smallest share of foreign population of the project countries – less than 200 000 people or 2,7 per cent with foreign mother tongue in 2008 – it is still notably more international than the Baltic States.

**Graph 1. Total population and the population with foreign mother tongue in the Baltic Sea region countries in 2008**



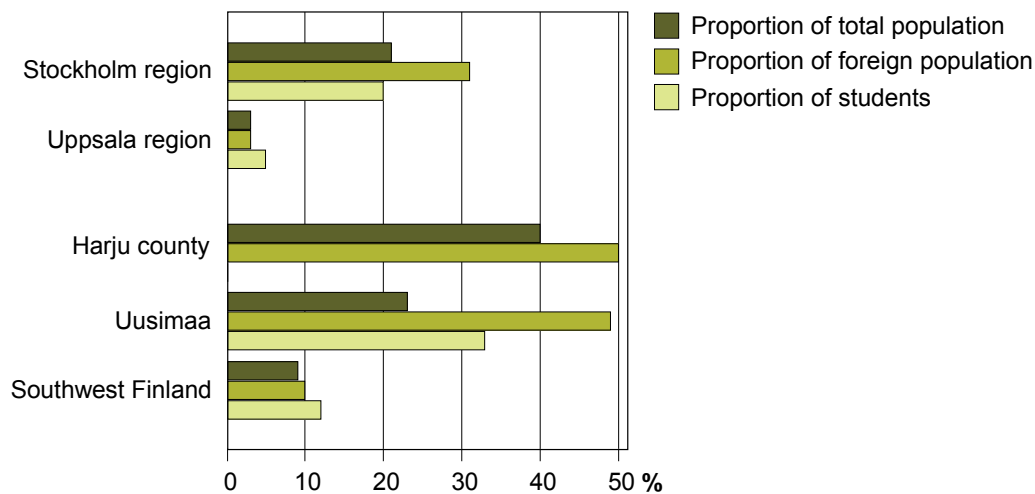
\*Data from 2005

Significant proportions of both the foreigners and of the students in these Baltic Sea region countries are concentrated in the project regions. The capital regions' proportion of foreigners are particularly high, ranging between 30–50 per cent of the total foreign populations of the countries. On the other hand the importance of the non-capital regions in this regard – especially that of Uppsala – lies more in their significance as student cities.

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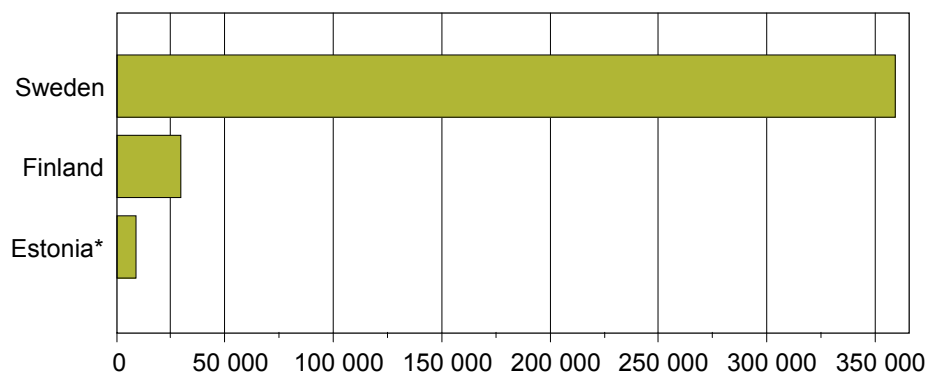
## Asian Students and Professional in the Baltic Sea Region

**Graph 2. Proportion of the national population, national foreign population and of national student population at the project regions**



The Asian population has been growing in both Sweden and Finland during the 2000s. Currently the proportion of Asians of the foreign population falls slightly below 30% in Sweden and rises slightly above 20% in Finland. However, while the Asian population of Sweden is counted in hundreds of thousands and that of Finland in tens of thousands, the Asian populations of Estonia and Latvia are too small to be even compiled in statistics as their own group. Actually, not counting the population with nine most common foreign mother tongues reduces the size of the foreign population of Estonia to less than 10 000 individuals.

**Graph 3. The Asian populations of Sweden, Finland and Estonia in 2008**



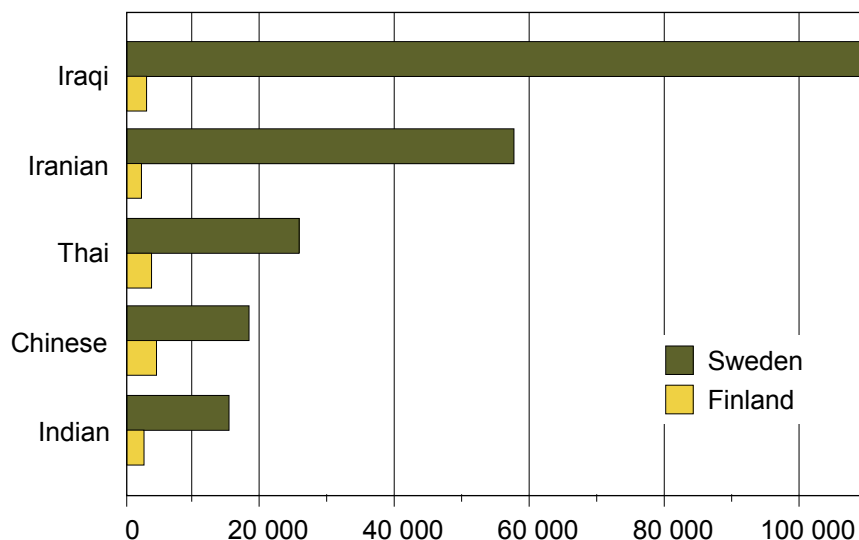
\*the total population with foreign mother tongue except the speakers of Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Finnish, Tatar, Latvian, Polish, Jewish, Lithuanian and German.

Iraqis, Iranians and Thais are the biggest Asian populations of Sweden and Chinese, Iraqis and Thais that of Finland. However, when the focus is turned to the student population the Chinese, Indians and other nationalities from Indian peninsula make are presented more than the Iraqi, Iranians and Thai people.

Nationality specific statistics are not available for either Estonia or Latvia. However, according to the Estonian statistics the immigration from Asia to

Estonia has increased from 38 individual immigrants in 2004 to 150 in 2007, but the information on the specific origin of the immigrants is lacking. Some indication of the size of Chinese and Indian immigration can be obtained from the Latvian immigration statics which show that the number of Chinese and Indian immigrants varied between 0–25 per year during the 2000s. As can be seen, these are very small figures compared to those of Sweden, for example.

**Graph 4. Asian populations of Sweden and Finland in 2008**

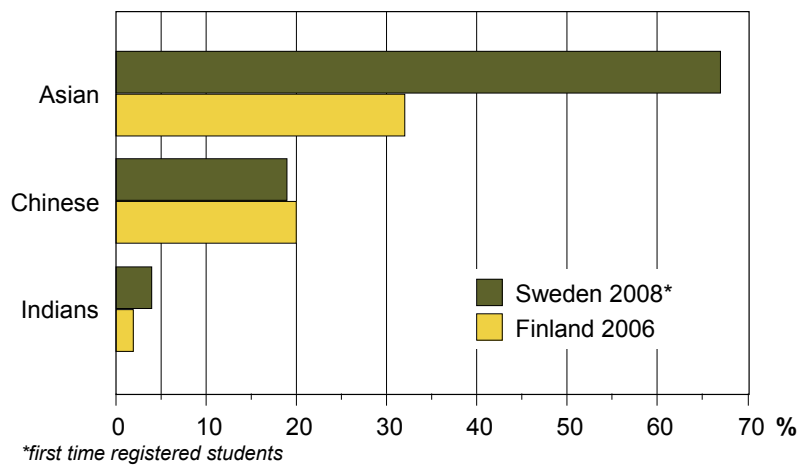


The increase in the number of Asian students has been notable both in Sweden and in Finland in the 2000s. In Sweden about one fifth of all degree students are international students, and in 2008 already two thirds of the first-time-registered foreign students were Asian. In Finland the share of foreign students is only 4%, Asian students making a third of them.

In absolute numbers this equals almost 8000 first time registered Asian university students in Sweden in 2008. On the other hand, in Finland the total number of Asian tertiary degree students is about 3700. Regarding the nationalities of the Asian students, the Chinese form both in Sweden in Finland by far the biggest group of foreign students. Actually as many as every other Chinese in Finland is registered as a student on tertiary degree.

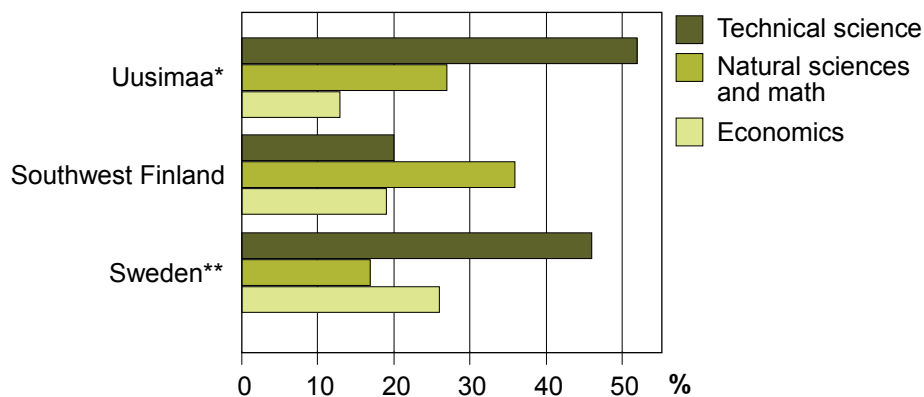
In Estonia there are almost 200 Asian students, two thirds of whom are Chinese. However, in Latvia – where the procedure for obtaining a visa is rather complicated – the numbers of Chinese and Indian students vary yearly from 1–13.

**Graph 5. Share of Asians, Chinese and Indians of foreign tertiary degree students in Finland and in Sweden**



Asian students are not equally represented in all disciplines. On the contrary, 46% of Asian students in Sweden and 52% in Finland in the Uusimaa region study technical sciences. Even in Southwest Finland, where there is no separate university of technology, 20% of Asian students study technical sciences and 36% natural sciences or math. In addition to technical and natural sciences, business studies are popular among Asians. Similar data is not available for Estonia or Latvia.

**Graph 6. Asian students by disciplines (% of Asian students of the region study the discipline) in 2008**



\* Natural sciences and math refers to the total of Asian students at the multidisciplinary university of Helsinki

\*\* The group economics includes also social sciences and law students.

## **6 Background for the stakeholder workshops – interviews with regional experts**

Six interviews with experts were held in Helsinki during spring 2009. The interviewees include two representatives from City of Helsinki departments (Immigration and Economic Development), representatives from a regional development agency, from a regional promotion company, from City of Vantaa and the director of the Helsinki Research and Education Area (HERA).

The interview themes were basically the same for all the interviewees but their own expertise guided the structure, as well. They were asked about:

- International relations (and relative importance of different world areas to the city administrations)
- Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Area
- The importance of Asia in the international strategies and policies
- Strategies, policy opening and measures concerning Asian people in Helsinki/region
- Focus of future plans
- Marketing for Asia (investment /people)
- Phenomena (happenings, international schools, ethnic culture etc)

Here is a short summary of the answers that are interesting in regard to the stakeholder workshops.

### **Nature of Immigration**

1. “The new Argonauts” It’s an accepted state of affairs that many Asians come here because of studies or work and do not plan to stay for a long time. They often move on to the US, Australia, Canada or go back to China or India. The wish of the of the public officials in their regard is that they could act as kinds of ambassadors for Helsinki (region/Finland)
2. While they are here the city provides services for immigrants based on an equality principle that they get the same services as Finnish citizens. There are various mechanisms to help immigrants get the services they are entitled to, for example guidance and online services.
  - a. In order to cater for the enlarging Chinese population in the city there is now a school that provides education in Chinese language
  - b. The city is also interested in supporting ethnic cultural events, for example the Chinese New Year.

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3. The city encourages immigrants to become entrepreneurs

### **Asian Investment and marketing to Asia**

1. Finland, along with the Helsinki region is seeking investments from Asia. This is done in many different ways: through direct state visits and contacts, through companies and through research. Greater Helsinki Promotion, a regional promotion company works together with Tekes, the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation and companies to promote Finnish research in Asia.
2. Finland brands itself with the Baltic area and wants to promote the area together with the other Baltic states

### **Research and studying in Finland**

1. Finnish research institutes are one key factor, along with companies like Nokia, in attracting Asian investment. The high quality of research makes Finland an interesting place to do product development and research
2. One example of this are the companies located in Helsinki because of the EU chemical agency in Helsinki
3. The universities and research institutes are looking for the best possible researchers, to them nationalities have no significance whatsoever and Finnish language skills are not needed. The same situation is in big companies like Nokia.
4. What will happen if tuition has to be paid? Discouraging examples from Denmark
5. Universities are trying to provide better services to foreign students.
6. Better housing possibilities (this is also a state priority)
7. Better marketing of Finnish universities
8. There are problems with Finnish language teaching which does not prioritize spoken language and everyday skills
9. The state is planning an export program of education, including marketing of Finnish universities. One wish is to broaden the fields of study Asians now choose in Finland.
10. Chinese students tend to have more variation in their majors, whereas Indians are mainly choosing technical fields. (positive PISA results, for example, seem to generate interest in the field of education)

## **7 Findings from Helsinki region**

The following chapter is based on findings from the interviews with 29 Chinese and Indian students and professionals living in Helsinki region. Altogether 14 Chinese (9 males and 5 females) and 15 Indians (14 males and 1 female) participated in the 15 interviews. The eight group interviews of 2–4 people and seven private interviews that took place in August-September 2009. The private interviews were organized for three Indians, who could not to make it to the group meetings and for four Chinese who requested a private interview.

The interviewees were divided into groups by their nationalities, so that Chinese and Indians were interviewed separately. The topics covered in the interviews were: reasons for arriving to Helsinki region, experiences on studying, working and using services in Helsinki region and the future plans of the interviewees. The interviews lasted 1,5–2,5 h and two researchers were present in each interview.

The interviews were loosely structured thematic interviews. The reason for interviewing the immigrants in groups was the hope of arousing discussion between the interviewees. This worked fairly well, especially with Indians, who are used to a debating and to confronting other people's opinions. The three Indians who were interviewed privately were even slightly disappointed that they did not get to hear other people's opinions and experiences.

The Chinese interviewees were little bit more reserved and most of the time the interviewees limited themselves into answering the questions and did not comment on the other people's responses. The Chinese who had requested private interviews questioned strongly group interviews as a method for interviewing Chinese people. In Chinese culture it is extremely important not to lose face in front of other people. In addition opposing other people can be considered impolite and criticizing something might be interpreted as sign of a personal failure.

The main findings of the interviews are presented in the following chapter in six different subchapters. The subchapters are 1) Arriving to Helsinki region 2) Studying in Finland 3) Working life, 4) Services, 5) Life in Helsinki region and 6) Future plans.

### 7.1 Highly skilled migration from China and India

“To migrate or not to migrate” had never even been a question for the interviewed Chinese and Indians. Both China and India are emerging economies, where education and working experience abroad are highly appreciated. Therefore, international experience together with studies at the highly exclusive national top universities was considered the best way to obtain a decent position at the highly competitive labour markets of China and India.

However, despite certain similarities, China and India are positioned differently in the global sphere. China has only recently begun to opening up, and while subsidiaries of Indian companies have half a century of experience of managing subsidiaries abroad, the Chinese companies are only beginning to establish branches in the Western world. Therefore, the highly skilled migration is built within the Indian system, but for Chinese the global mobility in its current scale and form is fairly new (Biao 2007).<sup>2</sup> The different histories and current positions of the countries influence the patterns of highly skilled migration, such as who migrates and where.

The Chinese highly skilled immigration has increased rapidly following the opening up of China. Even that the first option is often USA, the Chinese students are globally dispersed and they form biggest group of foreign students in the world.(Atlas of Student Mobility). However, although student migration has expanded during the last decade, there are no proper structures to support the migration of professionals, and their mobility has remained low. (Zhang 2003)

The migration of Indian students, on the other hand, is heavily focused on English-speaking countries (Atlas of Student Mobility.) However, the Indian companies having subsidiaries abroad offer plenty of job opportunities for Indian engineers. Therefore, migrating for work either in an Indian or an international IT-company is common for Indian engineers who master English fluently. In addition, a noteworthy part of the highly skilled Indian migration consists of educated Indian wives, who following an arranged marriage join their husband abroad. (see Gola and Martikainen 2007).

Based on statistics, it seems that the immigration of Chinese and Indians to Finland corresponds fairly well to the global patterns of Chinese and Indian highly skilled migration. Chinese form the biggest group of foreign degree students in Finland, and according to the statistics every other Chinese in Finland is registered as a student on tertiary degree. All in all the number of

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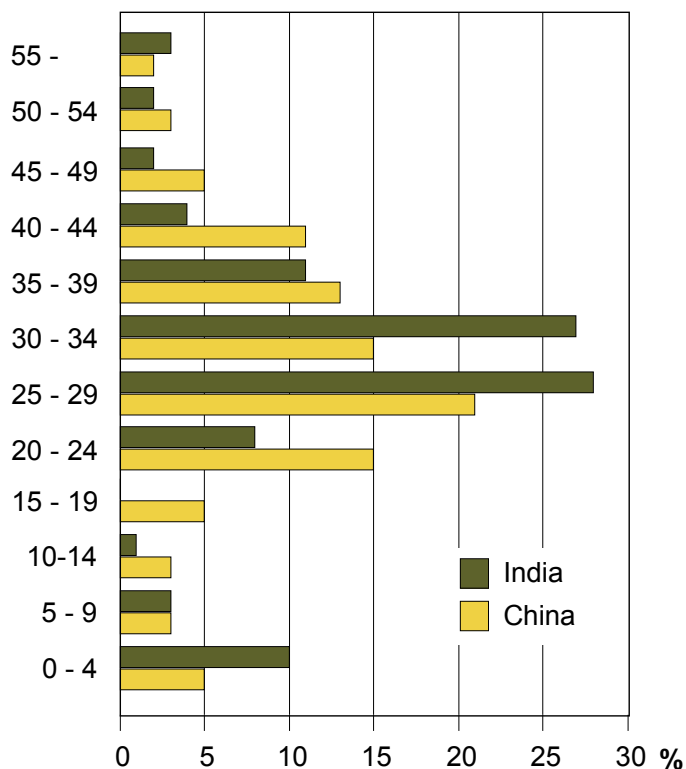
<sup>2</sup> Biao 2007,



Chinese students slightly exceeds the number of Chinese aged 20-29 living in Finland.

In comparison to 1677 Chinese degree students studying in Finland in 2006, the 197 Indian students were only a small group, and the students corresponded only to one tenth of Indians living in Finland. However, not only the share of students, but also the share of 20–24 year olds is considerably less among the Indian than the Chinese population. This reflects the different phase of migration among Chinese and Indians.

**Graph 7. The age structures of the Chinese and Indian population in Finland (% of the population per age group)**



**Source: Statistics Finland**

The interviews support the findings: while the interviewees themselves had usually arrived to Finland as students, Indians confirmed that there are also plenty of Indian engineers who have been recruited to Helsinki by Nokia or by an Indian subsidiary. Also, interestingly, all Indian interviewees had completed at least their bachelors’ degree before migrating to Finland. As a result, they knew fairly well what they were looking for, and had analyzed different options thoroughly before deciding where to go.

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*“When I started looking for place where I could do my masters, US first of course. I didn’t look at any places in UK or Australia, ’cause they don’t do much mobile stuff. So there was Nokia and Ericsson. So I applied to the US, Stockholm and here. I got accepted to a lot of places and then I did a kind of SWOT-analysis. Then I realized maybe the risk is highest here, but then maybe the benefits are also quite high.”* (Indian male)

Chinese interviewees were younger, and it was common for them to have migrated right after high school to pursue a bachelor’s degree in a Finnish university of applied sciences located outside of the metropolitan region. After finishing their BA, these students usually continued their studies in a master’s program at a university in Helsinki region. The path to the Finnish labor market was formed during the studies: unlike the Indians, the Chinese interviewees strongly doubted that any Chinese professional would move to Finland for work without having previously studied in the country.

Chinese seemed more unfamiliar with the mechanisms of global mobility, and one interviewee even questioned the whole concept of “choosing the destination” telling that Chinese go wherever they can. Accordingly, some Chinese interviewees had simply grasped the first opportunity available without having a proper conception of where they were heading to. However, the more recently the Chinese had migrated, the more s/he had reflected different options. Still, the preparations beforehand were sometimes insufficient, and for example the difference between a university and a university of applied sciences had become as an unpleasant surprise to some interviewees.

*“I came as an exchange student. I stayed two years in Mikkeli, I finalized my studies there and then realized that we mean different things by the word polytechnic. My university is called the Beijing University of Polytechnic, and polytechnic means industrial. And here polytechnic means like a lower level compared to the university. When I realized this I was a little bit pissed off.”* (Chinese male)

## 7.2 Arriving to Helsinki region

No-one knows the exact figures or the migration of highly skilled Chinese and Indians, but there are already hundreds of thousands Chinese and Indian students overseas (Atlas of Student mobility 2010). Therefore, although the Asians are the biggest group of foreign degree students in the Baltic Sea region, from the Asian point of the few thousand students from merely a trickle of the flow. As a result, the Baltic Sea Region is indisputably a minor player in the competition for Asian talent, and according to the interviewees the region is hardly regarded as a destination for its own sake.

The interviewees considered migrating as a means to advance their careers by acquiring international experience. Apart from the few interviewees who had moved to Finland to join their spouse, the destination of the interviewees had not been Helsinki or Finland, but instead a certain study program, a research group or a position in an internationally known company. Academic research groups lured by their high quality and availability of funding, while the excellent reputation working with and for Finns had within Indian company made recruiting skilled engineers to the company's Helsinki subsidiary easy.

*“I have not joined this research group because it's a Finnish research group. I have joined this research group because it's a good research group.” (Indian male)*

Chinese and Indians with no specific connections to Finland know only little of the quality of Finnish research or of the Finnish ways of working. Instead the main pull factor of Finland had been the reputation of Nokia and the interviewees interested in communications technology considered Nokia a guarantee of the high level of education. Other appealing factors were informative descriptions of interesting and flexible degree programs at the universities' websites and student exchange opportunities.

*“So I had to first to look at Nokia and then look from the CV's of CEO's where they studied. Fortunately, all of them they are from Helsinki University of Technology.” (Indian male)*

However, Finland is not the only country with attracting study programs, good quality research groups or headquarters of an internationally renowned company. Quite the contrary, the interviewees acknowledged that Helsinki was an exceptional choice and even they themselves considered studying in an unknown university of an unknown country a risk.

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The decisive factors that had encouraged them to take the risk had usually been the lack of tuition fees and availability of PhD funding, good feedback from friends, fast responses from the universities, simple immigration procedure and the lure of exoticism. Interviewees had commonly resorted to university ranking lists before deciding their destination, and a few reported that the Scandinavian welfare state and the overall safety of the country had favored their choice.

*“My parents they choose Finland because they think it is really has a good economic situation and it is safe and it is not like they send me out where ever I want they also care about what is good for me.”  
(Chinese female)*

In comparison to all of Finland, the special strengths of the Helsinki region were the wider variety of study and work opportunities as well as higher ranked universities. Also, although the living environment had been all but irrelevant in the choice of the destination, the setting for the daily life grew in importance after the arrival. Several interviewees had experienced living in other regions in Finland, but had relocated to Helsinki region in search of a more metropolitan and cosmopolitan atmosphere.

The career opportunities served as the initial push to migrate, but they also formed the main preoccupation of the interviewees. Although Finland is well-known in the field of mobile technology, a graduation certificate from a Finnish university was hardly considered sufficient to guarantee a successful return to the highly competitive labor markets of China and India. Therefore the interviewed students considered working experience at least as important as the degree.

*“When we go back, it is more important what work experience you have had. Because I think none of the schools are very well recognized in China. In my opinion TKK is better university in compared to UCLA: but everyone knows UCLA. Very few people know Helsinki University of Technology.” (Chinese male)*

However, Finland is not an English speaking country and already prior to their arrival the interviewees had been skeptical regarding their possibilities at the Finnish labor market. The idea of learning a new language on the side of a profession was not found exactly appealing, and the English speaking societies were often considered an easier option.

Several interviewees also recalled their decision to move to Finland encountering strong opposition from their relatives, who could not understand why to move to an unfamiliar country with strange language and cold dark winters. The relatives would have preferred them to choose a

familiar location with a strong community of Chinese or Indian compatriots, some of whom would preferably be relatives.

Despite the opposition of the relatives, the interviewees themselves were mostly satisfied with their decision to come to Helsinki region, but they identified the lack of brand name a major disadvantage. The lack of brand name erased the region from the list of options and, as Finnish universities or companies evoke no associations among Chinese or Indian employers, the actual benefits of studying and working in Finland remained ambiguous.

*“It might be, of course the experience will be very useful, but the brand names. Because in India everything boils down to where are you from, where have you done you masters and PhD. If you say you come from US, then people say ok, it must be something good. I don’t know how people will react, when they see I’m coming from Finland.” (Indian male)*

Therefore, in order to enhance its stances in the global race for talent, the interviewees suggested that Helsinki universities could be made better known by marketing road shows, student exchange programs and grants distributed for well-performing students. It was stressed that the student masses of both China and India are huge and of that the quality of the student material varies considerably within the countries. Therefore, to achieve the best results, marketing should be focused on first and second tier of universities.

In addition, increasing the overall awareness Finland by for example travel advertising, state visits and appearances in a variety of media were seen as ways to strengthen the vague country profile. Growing middle classes in both China and India are showing increasing interest towards travelling, and direct flights and the visibility of the country as a tourist destination might turn the oddity into a more familiar and less frightening option.

*“We can notice there is a huge gap between Finland and China regarding the education so in Finland the average education is quite high, which means these are very good value for you to export it to China and at the moment our government has a lot of money so these could attract investment on the industrial in Finland.” (Chinese male)*

*“They are trying their best, cause in the last years Finnair has started flying to India. At least my parents tell that, also I think that the president of Finland has been to India twice. Since she has been there, prime minister has been there for once, and the ex-president has been there once. So there is at least some in initiative.” (Indian male)*

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**Summary table: arriving to Finland**

Pull factors	Push factors	Improvement ideas
Specific study program or research group	Strange language	Road show marketing at Indian/Chinese universities
Scandinavian welfare state considered to be an appealing model for society	Finland is unknown and doesn't have similar brand as US or other well known places. Therefore a "risk".	Exchange and internship programs for students of Chinese/Indian universities
Exchange program with home university	No job security after studies	Scholarships for talented students
Nokia and other international brands	No Chinese/Indian community, not an international place	Not marketing just universities, but building Finland as a brand
University rankings used as quality guarantees	Dark and cold country far away from everything	
Financial issues: no tuition fee, funding for PhD quite well available.		
Personal connections to Finland		
Exotic, no risk of ending up in a closed community of fellow countrymen		
Information available in English and fast responses from the universities.		

### 7.3 Studies in Finland

Education system in both China and India is structured and rigid: the students are given a ready-made curriculum which they are expected to follow in a certain scope of time. Therefore, the Finnish study system, where students are responsible for planning their studies themselves, where almost every course is negotiable and there are no permanent student groups to rely on, was alien for the interviewed students.

The guidance the interviewees received from the universities was insufficient, and many had lost the first semester in getting accustomed to the system. However, despite the initial difficulties, the interviewees were strongly in favor of the flexibility of the Finnish studies. The students appraised especially the freedom to modify their study programs to fit their personal interests, and the possibility of attending courses at other Finnish universities was found unique.

All in all, the quality of Finnish universities was found to be excellent: exercises were challenging and encouraged independent thinking, course material were up-to date and the 24h computer labs enabled studying at any hour. A special feature much appraised by the interviewees was the link between the universities and industry: the studies were seen to match the needs of the labor market, the flexibility studies enabled to combine studying with working, and it was even possible and quite common to do the master's thesis for a company.

*“Here you have to plan it for yourself. You can adjust your plan according to your personal things. That is an important skill to learn. Back in China we were just told what to do. I think this is one of the reasons why we have this shock, because no-one tells us what to do now. (Chinese male)*

*“I can even choose to attend Helsinki school of economics, to take an economics course. It might not be directly related to what I study, but if I am interested there is the option of doing it. I don't think this kind of flexibility is available in any other place. ( Indian male)*

Although the Finnish universities were considered almost perfect in theory, they were not found as perfect in practice. The main problem was entangled in the language question: teaching in English was limited, lecturers' English language skills varied considerably, course materials in English were less than in Finnish and the emails from the university written only in Finnish excluded foreign students. Lack of student participation during the classes had surprised Indians; however, unlike the Indians thought, the explanation might not be the language but the rather reserved Finnish culture.

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Due to the limited availability of courses in English, the foreign students considered they had to spend too much of their studying time reading books in the libraries, which was lonely and did not correspond to their image of good quality teaching. Loneliness was considered a drawback of the Finnish university system in general: as each course was attended by a different group of students getting acquainted became difficult.

*“If you compare the course material the Finnish material is quite more informative than the English material. I don’t blame for that, it’s the native language, but I think it will take some time to change to the English language.” (Indian male)*

*“I find a huge difference between Finnish university and Chinese university, because we have some kind of class in every university so that makes it very easy to know each other. In Finland we find the freedom, but actually you need to connect people yourself.” (Chinese female).*

Another major drawback was the limited selection of business studies in English at the MA level in Helsinki, and Stockholm was found to offer a wider variety of possibilities to focus on different field of economics. Even the engineering students were unsatisfied with the actual availability of business classes: in theory they could take business classes from the Helsinki School of Economics, but in practice no basic courses were taught in English.

In this respect high hopes were based on the merging of Helsinki University of Technology, Helsinki School of Economics and Helsinki University of Art and Design into a multidisciplinary Aalto University. The rare combination was considered an appealing venture also in other ways: most Chinese and Indian students going abroad study engineering, biosciences, business or medicine. Therefore, the interviewees figured that the Aalto University together with Scandinavia’s reputation as the forerunner in the all the growing field of green technology might become the major study attractions of the Helsinki region.

*“When the economy growth slows down this kind of green technology, green economy will become mainstream. From what I heard, the government is really providing funding for developed technology for corporations, which advanced countries like Finland have.” (Chinese male)*

*“Currently business, engineering, medical. These are the ever popular fields of studies in India. Anybody who is not doing that is considered a failure, unfortunately. And these are the people who go abroad to get their MA and PhD.” (Indian male)*



Comments regarding PhD studies were fairly similar as those regarding MA degree, although the language related problems were less at the higher stage of studies. In general, the quality of Finnish PHD was found excellent and although the studies take a longer time than in most countries, they were seen to provide a good basis and necessary contacts for a future academic career. However, the PhD students for whom the PhD was rather a stepping stone in the business world than a pathway to academia, considered the requirements too strict.

*“Bad part is it takes more time. Here it is very natural to complete your PhD at 33–34 and I have noticed that there 27 year old post doc fellows from US and Germany (...) He doesn’t have almost any publication. His experience is less, everything is less, but his more paid than you just for the reason that he has got a doctor before his name.”* (Indian male)

**Summary table: Studies in Finland**

Strengths	Weaknesses
Flexibility of studies, freedom to choose courses	Study possibilities – both courses and materials – in English limited
High quality of education, up to date course material and good university resources (labs, computers etc.)	Lectures are not inspiring
Independent thinking encouraged instead of competition for grades	Opportunities for business studies do not meet the level of technology studies
Aalto considered an interesting combination	Study system is difficult to adjust at first
Possibility to study and work at the same time	Studies take long time, demands especially for a PhD are high in comparison
Labor market connections appreciated	The difference between polytechnic and the university should be made more clear
Finland is considered a forerunner in environmental technology	Studying is lonely

### 7.4 Working life

Most of the interviewees had migrated to Finland for a certain well-defined purpose: to advance their careers. However, a degree from a remote university was not a guarantee for an ascending career and the interviewees regarded working experience a prerequisite in order to succeed in the return to the labor market at home.

*“If you have studied abroad and if you don’t have work experience in that country, it is even harder for them to go to their home country and to get a job over there. Because they’ll treat them as they would not be good enough to find a job there.” (Indian male)*

The smooth labor market, however, was not described as a major asset of Finland. Although the opportunities for IT-people and especially for the ones specialized in mobile technology were considered fairly good, the ones without a technical background encountered an almost impermeable wall. The culprit behind the limited job opportunities was identified as the lack of Finnish language skills.

Even if job announcements are posted in English, the employers tend to consider Finnish language skills a necessary qualification, and the interviewees had experienced that Finland-centric companies were practically out of their reach. The best job opportunities outside of academia were found in international companies, which operate globally and where the common working language is English. Also globally minded start-ups were found promising, but the immigrants with only little Finnish contacts were often excluded from their network-based recruiting practices.

The interviewees had tried several recruitment channels, and the one they labeled best were job fairs at the universities. The direct contacts with the employers combined with the possibility of making the master’s thesis for a company provided an accessible path to the labor market. Employment agencies, on the other hand, were found quite useless and their consultancy services for highly skilled foreigners were considered inadequate.

*“I think they get a lot of applicants and then they went through the selection so they will choose the one who can speak decent Finnish, even that most people are saying that the business language is English.” (Chinese female)*

*“Employment office, I think if you are educated, you are a white collar worker, employment agencies are useless. I have experienced twice there, but just to get the unemployment money. (Indian male)*

The working life itself was found much better than the labor market: independency, challenging tasks and flat hierarchies were found pleasant and Finns were considered fair and trustworthy colleagues and partners. Both the highly skilled individuals and the foreign companies interviewed considered Finnish people and companies very easy to work with.

Despite that language barrier sometimes excluded the foreign employees from informal conversations and from some parts of general communication, the Finnish companies were generally found fair towards foreigners. The fair treatment combined with the gender equality resulted in Chinese women estimating that their career prospects in Finland might exceed those in China. However, not all shared the view of Finland as an equal country, and some interviewees considered that foreigners had fewer opportunities than Finns, that they are exploited and paid less than Finns.

The interviewees had not been surprised only by the independency of Finnish working culture, but also by the calm working pace and lack of competition at the work places. The uncompetitive atmosphere was found strange at first but agreeable in the long run, and the possibilities to combine work and private life were found superior in comparison to the highly competitive home countries. However, slowing down one's own rhythm did not come easy, and some interviewees had been frustrated on the slowness of Finnish organizations.

Even more frustrating was the feeling that Finnish working culture is exaggerating the equality on the expense of hard-working employees. In Finland, everyone in the team is paid almost the same, the taxation is relatively high and the employees have only little possibility to influence their salaries. As a result, some interviewees concluded that working in Finland is unrewarding. Not all of the interviewees shared the view, and especially researchers found the compensation for their work fairly good in the international comparison.

*“People are very hard-working, very honest, extremely honest people, the word carries a lot of weight. If someone says something, that is final. You don't have to worry that word wouldn't be honored. And that way I think we can vouch the Finnish way of work being probably the best I have seen.” (Indian male)*

*“To highly skilled white collar like engineers or some managers I think that Finland might not be so attractive to them. I believe that US will be better choice, because they can get almost the same level of salary in China and with low cost of living in China.” (Chinese male)*

Entrepreneurship was a common dream among the interviewees. China and India are both emerging economies, and therefore they both offer plenty of opportunities for new companies, especially for the ones cooperating globally.

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However, the working visa being tied to a job turned entrepreneurship in Finland into a risky business. On the other hand, by the time the interviewees had lived in Finland long enough to have a permanent residency, they were past their youth, might have family commitments, be willing to return or simply be used to having a safe job and lost their enthusiasm towards entrepreneurialism.

The ones who would take the risk of entrepreneurship encountered another kind of challenge: having a successful company requires networks. Due to the limited number of connections the immigrants themselves had obtaining the network was often synonymous with having a Finnish partner. However, finding a partner was not that easy. Although the interviewees were aware of business associations operating in Helsinki, they found their focus is too general and considered that Helsinki still lacked a proper agora, where like-minded Finnish and foreign future entrepreneurs could mingle with each other.

*“In order for us to stay you need to have a job, so forget about your own business. If you run your business, and you fail you have to leave. So it is actually quite a scary factor for entrepreneurs.” (Chinese male)*

*“Now that the reason that the company is running is that I have a partner, a Finnish guy who is a dropout from TKK. But if I don't have a Finnish partner, I've seen many Indians starting a company here and failing to get contract and you know, projects and this.” (Indian male)*

### Summary table: working life

Strengths	Weaknesses
Labor market for IT and other technical people ok	Job possibilities people with non technical background are scarce
Helsinki University of Technology's job fairs function well	Labor market services for foreigners are lacking
Relaxed working culture with flat hierarchy and independent working tasks	Labor market limited for people without Finnish language skills
Not racist	Residency permits make entrepreneurship difficult
Women have equal job opportunities	Salaries are small and hard-working people are not financially rewarded

Researcher position is good	Pace at work can be frustratingly slow
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### 7.5 Public services

The Chinese and Indian immigrants had only vague perceptions of the Finnish society prior to their arrival. However, although the destination of the interviewees had been the specific location called “a university” or “a company” rather than the society, they landed in both. At the moment of their arrival the Chinese and Indian immigrants became inhabitants of Finland, and part of the Finnish society.

The Finnish society differs greatly from China or India, and the first challenge for the interviewees was to learn what services and bureaucracy they should be aware of. However, there is no welcoming pack for newly arrived immigrants and the quality and accessibility of relocation services varied considerably: companies had their own practices, undergraduate students depended on their tutors and the PhD students were left on their own.

Therefore Internet was a central information channel, but most interviewees were unfamiliar with the information site for Immigrants by the City of Helsinki, “Infobank”. Instead the interviewees relied on websites maintained by immigrants themselves which, suffer from sometimes unreliable and the possibly outdated information. As a result, finding of initial information was actually found more challenging than dealing with the relatively smooth bureaucracy itself.

The second major problem of the Finnish bureaucratic system was the language barrier. Although information is increasingly available in English, the information in English is still less than in Finnish. Outside of the web the situation is worse: the letters the immigrants received from KELA<sup>3</sup>, tax office or even university or private companies were usually in Finnish. After receiving such, a non-Finnish speaking person had only three alternatives: to ask a Finn to translate, to visit the service provider’s office or to resort to Google translate.

Apart from the problem of finding out about the services and finding information on them in English, the Finnish bureaucratic system was found well-functioning and the social security services were considered excellent. The amount of paperwork was remarkably less than in China and Indian, and it was easy to access the personnel when needed. The rules and following of them were found very strict, but on the other hand the bureaucratic system was fair and well functioning.

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<sup>3</sup> KELA is the provider of Finnish social security

*“The thing is that after you know there is KELA, it is very easy to get KELA. The point is if you don’t know. Someone has to tell you that KELA exists and it exists for foreigners, that these are the scenarios you apply for it.” (Indian male)*

*“When I first came to school, I had a tutor. She showed us how to open a bank account, and she also took me to the student housing agency to check what I should be careful with in the apartment, because in China we don’t usually use that kind of stow. If they didn’t tell me, I probably I wouldn’t know how to take care of that kind of a thing, because we don’t use that in most of the Asian countries.” (Chinese female)*

Handling the overall bureaucracy such as work and residency permits, tax offices and social security is only part of the Finnish service system. All in all, the discussion on services covered topics as diverse as Finnish language courses, health care and social services, day care and schools and spare time services. The services had different functions: acquiring language skills helps integration, health services produce feeling of security, availability of good quality day care and schooling services is crucial for families and spare time services made life more interesting. However, all services could still be improved.

First, although the highly skilled immigrants could manage their work and studies mostly in English, the lack of Finnish language skills was a major inconveniency in everyday life. However, apart from very slow “once a week” -classes, there were practically no Finnish language courses organized outside working hours and hiring a private teacher was found to be very expensive. Therefore, despite the fact not all immigrants are willing to put effort in learning Finnish there would be demand for intensive, affordable and flexible courses for employed people.

*“I think it is basic courtesy. I feel very helpless, that I don’t even know the basic words to ask someone at the grocery store that does this have this ingredient etc. So I think it is personally frustrating that I haven’t bothered to spend more time learning the language. Otherwise, I think that in 5 years I haven’t really needed the language.” (Indian male)*

Finland, as a Scandinavian welfare state, has a reputation of offering good quality public services, including healthcare. This was considered important, because although the employed immigrants are usually entitled to occupational health services, they do not cover all issues and neither do they cover the health care of spouses who might be unemployed. In general, the interviewees praised the maternity services offered by Finnish hospitals. Otherwise, however, the long queues at the public health care did not convince skilled Indians used to consulting immediately available private doctors in their home country.

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*“The wife was having some kind of thing with her stomach. She was having huge pain, she couldn’t even move. So they said they could operate after three months. So they decided to go back just because of this and then they decided not to go back to Finland because this is really something that affects the security feeling.” (Indian male)*

Third, there were issues regarding having a family. Maternal services at the hospitals, the Finnish maternity leaves, possibility to work shorter day after having kids and the kindergartens were found excellent. However, most interviewees did not want their children to lose touch with their culture and language, and the questions related to bringing up a child became the more complex the older the children grew.

Most interviewees had not decided to settle permanently in Finland, and the smooth transition from one school system to another was an essential issue. Therefore, the preference was strongly towards English language schools. However, even these were not found sufficient, because school in Finland starts at a later age than in China or India. The interviewees were also worried whether a child who would have started his/her school in Finland, could later get accustomed to the more competitive Chinese or Indian school system.

*“Raising a kid here is much easier than in China. But I’m little bit worried about the kids education. I don’t want my children to not to have the ability to speak Chinese, to lose the touch with the Chinese society, because it’s a growing economy...I want my children to be able to survive in that as well” (Chinese male)*

Last in the list were the spare time services. The advantage of Helsinki is that information on events can be found pretty well in English, movies are not dubbed and *“there is enough things to see and to do”*. However, Finland is only becoming multicultural, and the cultural sensitivity regarding the service production is still lacking. For example Indians lacked places to organize their festivities and finding of hobby courses – such as riding lessons – in English language was considered troublesome.

*“For if they are looking for a Buddhist temple, in Helsinki they don’t have anything. We want to build something here, where we can visit in the weekends or for example naming ceremonies. Like you have baptism and that kind of things after the baby is born, but we have nothing.” (Indian female)*

However, Helsinki has taken steps towards more multicultural spare time service production, both by launching events and by establishing a multicultural center and an international social organization. The Chinese New Year organized by the city received special appraisal, but the multicultural center, Caisa, was seen



to focus in “ethnic” culture and the interviewees did not consider themselves among the target group. On the other-hand, the international social organization, Jolly Dragon, was found slightly Western-minded and too party oriented. Although both Caisa and JD were seen to struggle with balancing between ethnofeticism and cultural sensitivity, the interviewees considered the services important in the creation of more international Helsinki.

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Summary table: services in Finland

Service	Strengths	Weaknesses
<b>In general</b>	Strong welfare state one of the attractions of Finland	Temporary immigrants pay high taxes due to services they don't use.
	Chinese forum a good source of information	The services in English have serious shortcomings
	Not too much bureaucracy, things work	No place to get initial information on services
		Sometimes bureaucracy very slow, especially VISA renewing
<b>Relocation services</b>	Companies have good relocation services	Relocation services differentiate people
"Introduction to the new system is a necessity"	Good tutors appreciated	PhD students get no help at all when moving to Finland
<b>Language courses</b>	Employment agency courses efficient	Availability of courses for working people poor.
	"Lack of Finnish skills major inconveniency"	Teaching too theory-oriented
<b>Health care</b>	Good maternity services	Long queues
	"Central issue, affects the feeling of personal safety"	Student health care is fine "Bad news travel fast", trust lacking
<b>Children's services</b>	Good kinder gardens and maternity services	Too few English speaking schools
	"Children's education has an important role when considering where to live"	Quality of education is good Schooling starts too late
		Worry about losing touch with own culture
<b>Spare time services</b>	Helsinki has enough things to see and to do	Hobby groups in English limited
	"Makes Helsinki more attracting than other Finnish cities, but not a major issue"	Interest towards their culture, such as Chinese New Year Doesn't have a suitable place for holding Indian ceremonies

## 7.6 Life in the Helsinki region

In the original decision to move to Finland, the interviewees had hardly paid any attention to the society or the place where they would move. Their life in Finland was considered a temporary phase, and living in abroad general in was perceived more as an investment than a value in itself. However, once the immigrants had reached Finland, the setting in which their everyday life took place grew in importance.

Social inequality is present everywhere in China and India, and the Finnish society provided striking contrast with the home countries. The Scandinavian welfare society with high social security was described as a “paradise” and several interviewees identified the social equality as the major attraction of Finland.

Other appealing factors of life in Finland were the high quality of living, well-maintained infrastructure both in- and outdoors and reliability of the services. Social tensions between people were considered low, racism was encountered seldom and the overall safety – both social security and personal safety - was considered a major asset of the region.

*“I think for a living standard, Finland and other northern European countries like Sweden, they are like paradise because you have very good social welfare system and from that point of view Finland is much better viewed by Chinese students than US or UK or something, maybe only Canada can share the same reputation.”  
(Chinese male)*

*“And the political aspect is so attractive — maybe to people from India, the fact that Finland is socialistic type of country, lot of people would actually agree with that world view. I mean equality and stuff.”  
(Indian female)*

The interviewees strongly preferred Helsinki over other Finnish cities which were considered too small, somewhat boring and lacking international community. Even Helsinki is not the best place for someone looking for a buzzing metropolis life, but the city’s relaxed and peaceful atmosphere combined with safety and clean environment was found pleasant. Being a bigger city, Stockholm was found to be more fascinating than Helsinki, and therefore, it can be concluded that the preference regarding the cities was “the bigger the better” – at least within the Scandinavian scale.

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The small size of the international community of Helsinki was found both a disadvantage and an advantage. Some interviewees missed the company of their compatriots as well as the more international and multicultural atmosphere in general. However, others considered the tiny international circles an advantage: local people were often somewhat curious about foreigners, and the risk of being trapped within “the Chinese” or the “Indian” community was small. Therefore, some interviewees told that their relatives in United States are being surrounded by compatriots, while they were having a real multicultural experience in Helsinki.

*“Yes there was - - I think I took one entrance exam in Beijing before I came. But that one was easy, it wasn't very difficult. Then I went to Jyväskylä and I lived there for one year. Then I was like it is too small city for me, I need to go somewhere else. So then I came to Helsinki”  
(Chinese female)*

*“The attraction in Stockholm. First of all, it is the diversity. The cosmopolitan Stockholm itself. And Stockholm again, it has a great legacy of academic things, science and physics and math.” (Indian male)*

The main problem regarding the life in Helsinki region was a feeling of loneliness and lack of social contacts. Making friends was found difficult: Finnish people respect privacy and tend to keep their professional and private life quite separate, and the interviewees found themselves unable to make friends at class or at work. Hobby clubs provided no solution: the hobby clubs in Finland are just hobby clubs and not places for creating friendships.

Cultural differences widened the gap. Alcohol plays an important role in the Finnish social life, and several Indian people found being a vegetarian and not drinking excluded from Finnish activities. Some had tried to become accustomed to the Finnish habits, and in general Indians, whose culture is more outward-oriented and whose English is fluent, had managed better in creating social networks than the more inward-oriented Chinese with diverse English skills. Chinese acknowledged their difficulties themselves and recalled that the loneliness was hard to bear, because other nationalities seemed to blend in more easily.

The feeling of social exclusion was strengthened by the language barrier. In company Finnish people often resorted to Finnish language, which made participation difficult. The exclusion was not taking place only in social situations: Helsinki does not have a proper English newspaper, and although main Finnish media have English websites, the information on them is less than on Finnish sites, and the foreigners felt being left out of what is going on around them.

*“Because I’m not able to make friends at class, what I have done is that I have tried to improve Finland I never drank beer, alcohol, anything. I started doing that, I started smoking cigarettes. It’s a very good ice-breaker actually. I mean you offer someone a cigarette and then you start a conversation, it is really silly, I admit, but it helps.” (Indian male)*

*“I have my local Chinese friends and during the weekend what we can do is playing cards, shopping and watching movies. If I want something exciting then I have to go with my Finnish colleagues. They have the resources and they know where to go.” (Chinese male)*

All in all, the interviewees were satisfied with the quality of life in Helsinki. It was not the buzzing metropolis, nor did it offer a continuous thrill, but life was convenient, the apartments and infrastructure were of good quality and doing things was easy. Apart from the major problem of loneliness, the interviewees were quite satisfied with the calm setting of their everyday life.

**Summary table: Life in Helsinki region**

Strengths	Weaknesses
Everything works: water comes from the tap, streets are clean	Somewhat small if looking for metropolis life
Safe and honest	Not a good place for travelling
International community is sufficient and growing	Indian/Chinese community small
Enough things to see and do	Dark and cold
Clean and beautiful nature	English news limited
Finns are friendly and interested in foreign cultures	Social life is very different from one back home
Relaxed tempo	Finns are shy and social network is difficult to build
	Lacks socialization structures
	Outsider life

### 7.7 Future plans

The interviewees had been in Finland between 1 to and 15 years and their career and life paths had not always turned out as straightforward as they had planned. Most had foreseen their stay in Finland as quite short period, and they had come here only to graduate from university, gather some years of relevant working experience and save money before either returning home or continuing ahead. However, many admitted that stay in Finland had stretched from what they had expected: studies had taken a longer than planned, they had enrolled in yet to another program to pursue a master's or a PhD degree, the working experience and the savings were less than they had expected and they had gradually become used to their life in Helsinki region

Despite the schedules having stretched and that the interviewees becoming quite accustomed to their life in the Helsinki region, they seldom considered the region their final repository. Instead, most interviewees held up to their original plan of returning home at some point, either straight from the Helsinki region or via other locations. The time span of the plans was vague, but the year when children start school, the moment when they have saved enough money and the time when their parents grew old and needed their children to take care of them were mentioned as milestones which might define the actual moment of return.

*“School starts a year later here than in India. Because of the intense competitive environment in India, it is considered very bad socially for your kid to be one year older, in a lower class. It's a completely different. So, the race starts when the kid is born. People relocate for their children's education”. (Indian male)*

The motivation to move abroad had usually been career oriented, and also in the future plans career was often placed before personal preferences. A common approach towards future was to “go wherever the career takes”, a view shared especially by then interviewees working in international companies with subsidiaries in several countries and by researchers open to various post-doc opportunities. However, while younger people were very open to – and even quite eager on – experiencing life yet in a third location, the elder interviewees were more reluctant to start their life again in a new environment.

*“First I was thinking probably six years. After I graduate if I am lucky, I get a job I work two years then I go back to China and I am happy to be with my friends or my parents, but now it seems that it is much longer than that I think. I am not saying I am staying here forever, because I consider myself still young. I mean there are lots of*

*possibilities, but now I am pretty happy about my life.” (Chinese female)*

Regardless that the original plan of return had mostly remained unchanged, certain characteristics of the Helsinki region were pushing the interviewees to move ahead while others were keeping them here. The main push factor was the unrewarding labor market with little possibilities for job mobility and the limited opportunities to start up one’s own company. Several interviewees, who did not consider themselves yet ready to return, were planning to move ahead to an English speaking country, where life would be easier for them.

Secondly, although career played very central role in the future plans, also the personal situation of the interviewees influenced their willingness to stay. The more satisfied the interviewees were with their private life and the more networks they had in Finland, the less tempted they were to move ahead. The interviewees who felt lonely and excluded, were much more eager to return to their family and friends at home.

Third major issue was the question of the spouse. Having a Finnish partner strongly encouraged the interviewees to stay, while marrying a compatriot had often the opposite consequences. The latter situation concerned especially Indians among who arranged marriages are frequent and it is expected that the wife moves with the husband. Indians tend to marry within the same social class, and therefore the wife is usually also an academic graduate. However, finding a job – especially outside of the IT-field – for an Indian woman without Finnish university degree or Finnish language skills is extremely difficult. Therefore, if the wife was unable to get a job or to adjust to life in Finland in general, staying in the region was not a realistic option.

*“My wife is working in Deutsche bank as a manager, she’s got a permanent job. It’s really unfair in my part I think to ask her to leave the job and come down her. So I really cannot, I mean what she is having, I cannot ask her to come down here.” (Indian male)*

*“I’d love to stay in Finland. I even want to marry here, a Finnish girl, and I want to raise my child here, cause I feel free. I wish my child can also grow in this kind of free environment, and also to grasp what s/he want to learn.” (Chinese male).*

The main factors pulling the interviewees back home were the increasing job opportunities in the home countries and the possibility to live in familiar cultural and linguistic environment close to friends and family. Both China and India are rapidly growing economies, and the labor markets of both countries offer plenty of possibilities for highly skilled employees and new businesses. As the salaries

of the engineers might in China already exceed the salaries paid in Finland, the idea of staying in Finland had lost an essential part of its attractiveness.

However, although the interviewees did not plan to stay, the return preoccupied them too: they had become accustomed to the quality of living in Finland, and especially the competitive and hierarchical working environment of their home countries seemed very unappealing. Indians remarked that for them the return might mean return to again a new environment, a city with a foreign language and culture far from their home region. Therefore, despite their vague plans, the interviewees acknowledged they might never return: every year they became a bit more accustomed to Helsinki, and the longer they stayed abroad, the more distant the idea of return became.

*“To be honest staying in Finland is not as attractive as it was. Chinese economy has grown very fast. At least in Beijing, the pay is almost at the same level comparing to Finland if you work for international companies. And staying home with your family, your friends... why not going back.” (Chinese male)*

*“I don’t have any long term plans here. But going back is actually more difficult than going out. You might have different expectations to work, that’s one thing, you might have different expectations... There is a different quality of life experienced here, so we want to have the same kind of thing there.” (Indian male)*

Despite that most interviewees did not plan to stay forever, they were very satisfied with their experience in Helsinki, both career-wise and personally. Also, during the time they had stayed here, they had familiarized themselves with Finnish society and formed connections with Finnish colleagues, fellow students and companies. Many showed interest towards cooperating with Helsinki region after leaving it. However, whether these plans will be realized depends on how Helsinki succeeds in providing structures that facilitate establishing, maintaining and profiting the connections between the immigrants and the region.



**Summary table: Future plans**

<b>Pull factors</b>	<b>Push factors</b>
Contacts created, opportunities in Finland	Growing labor market at home country
Nice working environment, flat hierarchies	Desire to travel and experience new things
Used to Finland, established a life here	Family - parent's, spouses, children
Not anymore willing to start a life from scratch: either Finland or home country	Better career opportunities and salaries elsewhere
Returning might mean a new living environment	Life might be easier in more international environment

### 8 Findings from Sweden and Latvia

City of Helsinki Urban Facts had the main responsibility of the Knowledge Society work package (WP2), and therefore the qualitative data concerns mainly the skilled Asian immigration to Helsinki region. However, project partners in Sweden organized group session with Chinese students and professionals and the project partners both in Sweden and in Latvia with local experts. However, Sweden's expert interviews focused mainly on questions on Asian investments in the region, and the results of these interviews are summarized in the Resource inventory work package report (WP3).

In Sweden, two different methods were used to gather data on the experiences of Chinese students and professionals in Stockholm and Uppsala regions. Firstly, nine Chinese students filled in a small questionnaire concerning their experiences in Stockholm and Uppsala regions. Secondly, the Swedish partners organized interviews about Asian investments in Sweden and, since some of their informants were both skilled expertise in their trades respectively and of Chinese descent, they asked them questions about how they perceive their lives in Stockholm. The findings of the questionnaire and of the interviews are summarized in the following subchapter.

In Latvia the number of Asian immigrants in general is small and the numbers of skilled Asian immigrants even less. For example, in 2008 there were altogether 12 Chinese and 13 Indian students in all Latvian universities. Therefore, it was not possible to organize interview sessions with the skilled Chinese and Indians, and the data collection in Latvia was limited to expert interviews. The findings of the Latvian expert interviews are presented together with and the policy recommendations from Latvia.

## 8.1 Findings from Sweden

By Roland Enqvist

### The idea of going abroad

The informants assert that among the younger generations in China there is a profound interest to go abroad: this generation is well educated, they master several languages, and they wish to find a new sort of platform by going abroad. Additionally, informants point to the fact that there are regional traditions and differences in China, just as in Europe, regarding the interest of going abroad. Culturally, there are huge differences between China and Sweden. A common feature for those who decide to go abroad according to some informants is that they want to cross cultural barriers.

*“In my home region, Guangdong, it is rather common that families have relatives abroad. And our trades are export oriented so it opens up for international connections.”*

*“In Southern China people are generally more taken in by the charms of the outside world, which is not quite the same in the northern parts of the country.”*

*“It is a generation thing [to go abroad for work], to be open for suggestions and possibilities.”*

*“I grew up in Hong Kong in an open minded family with a great interest for the rest of the world and international contacts.”*

### The role of universities

The informants stress that the universities in Sweden have a wide offer of post graduate courses and programmes in English that appeal to Chinese students. Sometimes these students learn about these opportunities when studying elsewhere in Europe. The fact that there still is no tuition fee is also considered to be attractive, several informants mention. Our findings indicate that the universities thus constitute, alongside the large companies, the major attraction force on young and skilled Chinese. There are however also combinations of the first category and personal interests.

*“I wanted to go abroad and applied for scholarships in the UK, the US and Canada. I got a scholarship to a university in Norway. A teacher there got me interested in moving to Stockholm. What made me eventually move was a 1-year course at the university in*

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*Stockholm in my academic field that really appealed to me and that would provide me with the degree that I wanted to obtain.”*

*“My interest for orienteering and a wish to study abroad made me opt for Sweden, but Göteborg or Linköping, not Stockholm, were my first hand choice since it was recommended to me by friends.”*

### **Work and family behind move to Sweden**

Other reasons for coming to Sweden are either through marriage or as a representative of a large Chinese or Swedish company.

*“I married a Scandinavian and moved to Sweden.”*

*“It was not my personal choice to go and work in Scandinavia, it was a decision of my company.”*

### **Pre hand perceptions of Sweden and expectations**

Most informants obtained information about Sweden through friends or family. On the whole, the informants have very few pieces of information to provide on what they expected it to be.

*“I did not know much about Sweden before I came here to work, except that it is expensive to live here and the cold climate.”*

*“I knew nothing about Stockholm before coming here, except that it is a beautiful city.”*

*“I did not think so much about how it would turn out to be before moving here.”*

*“All information about Sweden and my studies I got from friends, nothing from authorities or elsewhere.”*

Given the few expectations that the informants provide, it has not been possible to establish whether these were fulfilled. In the opinion of one informant though, coming to Stockholm has met the expectations. In spite of the cultural differences, no informant says that they experienced a cultural chock, but the helpfulness of Swedes amazed them positively.

*“Sure, coming to Stockholm has on the whole met my expectations. But then, it is always hard to be a newcomer in a country one doesn't know.”*

*"I don't think it has been difficult to settle in. I experienced no cultural shock at all."*

*"In comparison with China, I soon found out that it is very easy to get help here. For instance, the warden, in the house where I lived as a student, was very helpful."*

### **Life quality aspects and social life**

Sweden is described by the informants as a quiet, beautiful and safe place, and the quality of living is very high. For some informants the quietness is a bit too much though, and sometimes the well organised society can be perceived as a social control. The things they miss from home are mainly family and friends.

*"Stockholm offers a lot of life quality, its clean and spacious, a safe society."*

*"It's a very well organised society in all aspects. I once made the mistake to mix up the lanes for pedestrians and bikes. And people corrected me politely how to use them."*

*"The only bad thing about living here is that life is too quiet, and there are not so many people here so it makes life a bit too silent."*

*"It's an adventure to be here, I am not home sick. I miss my friends and the kind of friendship I had back home."*

The issue of friendship is mentioned by several informants.

*"Here, you seem to have a good time and do things with your friends, back home you share everything with your friends and you rely on them."*

*"It's easy to get in contact with Swedes. But I keep my distance, I don't want to impose myself on my Swedish friends."*

*"It is easy to get in contact with people here, but very hard to establish true friendship."*

*"One must constantly remind your friends of your existence. But then, cultural differences make it hard to connect; you discover that you don't have so much in common."*

*"It's hard to get close with Swedes, they are very friendly but also reserved and keep their distance."*

### Professional lives

Swedish working culture differs considerably from the Chinese way of doing things. In comparing the two countries, the informants point, in China people are expected to work very long hours, because it is hierarchical and the entire system incites people to work hard and hardly have time for leisure, and things are expected to move quickly and according to plans. In Sweden, the employees have lots of liberties and rights, and they decide themselves how to plan their work. Swedes are good at team work. Furthermore, one cannot assume that similar markets in Europe also have similar cultures.

*“In China it’s live to work, in Sweden work to live.”*

*“It’s hard to rush things on a Friday afternoon here to get things done before the week-end.”*

*“In Sweden I have discovered that managers and colleagues encourage you to deliver, but they don’t demand you too as in China.”*

*“In Sweden there are less hierarchies, in the working places, and managers are more accessible, it’s easier to approach colleagues.”*

*“Swedes are quite shy, but also very tolerant towards mistakes; mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn, especially in working life.”*

*“Swedes are cautious and polite. In Norway people are more direct.”  
(business representative)*

### A future in the Stockholm-Uppsala region and careers

Given the fact that we have interviewed highly skilled people, it comes as no surprise that they do not consider Stockholm as a place where they will live for the rest of their lives. For some, there is an attraction in the idea of going back home to China, for others they will probably go to another place in some other country.

*“Right now, Sweden is perfect but in five years from now I will probably move on. It’s the thing to do if you want a global career.”*

*“The only bad thing about living here is that life is too quite, and there are not so many people here.”*

*“It is either China or Stockholm. I would like to live three months in China, and the rest of the time in Stockholm. When I travel, it always feels good to come back to Stockholm.”*

*“I hope that I will be able to stay on here, but it depends on myself, my family and how our business develops.”*

*“I will remain within this company. And I will go where ever they decide for me to go. Personally I’d like to work in China again.”*

*“My company will still be here in 5 years from now, but I don’t think I will be leading it then.”*

The possibility to find another employment in Stockholm is regarded as rather difficult and for some it is not even an option.

*“It is a bit difficult to find another job in Sweden, since I now work for an international company and I lack professional experience from an ordinary Swedish company. But more and more Chinese companies invest here now, and that could open up opportunities.”*

The informants think that overall it has been beneficial for them to come to Stockholm.

*“It would probably have been easier to make money if I had stayed in China, but the life quality is much better here.”*

*“If I could chose again, yes I would definitely chose Stockholm, it’s great here.”*

### **Summary findings on WP2 issues**

- The major reasons for going abroad are connected to work and studies, or, in some cases, marriage.
- Regional and family traditions impact on the interest for going abroad, but it is also a rather new opportunity that presents itself to the current young generations.
- Before coming here expectations of how life will be are fairly undefined.
- The life quality aspects of the Stockholm-Uppsala region are highly rated, but it is hard to make friends with Swedes.

- The informants like it very much here, but few of them think that they will stay on indefinitely.

### 8.2 Findings from Latvia

Asian immigrants in Latvia are few and therefore experts were interviewed instead of immigrants. According to the expert interviews Latvia offers nine study programs in English, has strong tradition of attracting foreign students to the largest program in Sinology in the Baltic States, but is an overall underachiever in attracting Asian students. Main reasons for this were considered to be the lack of brand name in Asia as well as the complicated immigration procedure that requires the applicants to consult Latvian embassy twice – which is quite a lot, especially considering that the closest Latvian embassy for Indians is located in China.

Despite the fact the numbers of Asian students in Latvia are small, there are still a few of them. The students study in various universities, but especially popular has been *Tourism and Hospitality Management* at the School of Business Administration. The students who come to Latvia wish usually to obtain both MA and BA degree, and sometimes even pursue PhD studies. However, the poor knowledge of English of the Chinese students requires extra effort from the universities.

Most Asian students move out from Latvia after finishing their studies, because their possibilities to stay in Latvia are quite limited. Firstly, as the economical situation in Latvia has gone worse, it is extremely difficult for foreigners to find jobs. Secondly, the overall atmosphere of Latvian society is xenophobic and intolerant and does not encourage the Asian students to stay in the region.



## 9 Policy recommendations

The policy recommendations are based on the understanding gathered from the expert and stakeholder interviews. The purpose of the policy recommendations in WP2 (Knowledge Society) is to think about the best measures to be taken so that the Baltic Sea region could improve its possibilities to attract talent to the area. The recommendations are concrete acts or ideas raised from the current situation, from the perspective of highly skilled immigrants already living in the area and experts working in fields that cooperate closely with immigration. The majority of the material is based on interviews made in Helsinki but the material provided by Stockholm provides very similar findings. The Latvian case is different, due to the different history of the country, the current economical situation and the smaller amount of Asian students and employees in Latvia. Therefore the Latvian recommendations are provided separately.

### 9.1 Recommendations from Helsinki

**The first recommendation** is that highly skilled immigrants should not be seen as just as a moving population. Despite that most interviewees considered Helsinki region as a temporary phase in their life, the more accustomed they became to living in Helsinki the more difficult it became for them to leave. Therefore, in the end, some highly skilled immigrants end up staying.

*“There are basically two types of immigrants in a sense. There are basically those who are going to live here a very very long term. Forever, even. And then there are others who are going to use this as a stepping stone for international experience. Five years, six years and then they move on to other country and go back to India, so... Both of them have totally different needs. The short-term ones want to be able to save money and to go back with some experiences, some contacts, some networks. And long term ones, they get adjusted to the whole life system here.”*

In the expert interviews it became clear that highly skilled immigrants are looked at as a group that is only staying for a few years and therefore long term services for them are lacking. There could be several service improvements that could make staying in Finland an easier option for immigrants.

Therefore **the second recommendation** is that Finnish language classes are offered in easier ways. It means more options in the evenings, more integrated

teaching of Finnish language at universities and more flexibility in teaching methods (more emphasis on spoken everyday language).

*“I haven’t found any Finnish courses that targets skilled immigration that already has jobs. So that the courses are flexible, so that I can do it after work hours.”*

**Third recommendation** is related to language as well. Finnish language proficiency is a precondition of real integration. However the possibility to educate children in the English language is very important to some immigrants, especially those from English speaking backgrounds or for those that will not stay forever in Finland and want to start their children’s education in English, so that they can continue in a similar structure somewhere else. They want to be able to give their children more choices about their future and education.

*“So Helsinki, why they don’t open new English speaking schools? There are lots of immigrants like us. Asked one government official about this, why don’t they open English speaking schools, they say that the immigrants are mainly floating population.”*

**The fourth recommendation** is that there should be special services and especially help with employment possibilities provided to the spouses of highly skilled immigrants. If the spouse doesn’t find work, it’s unlikely that the family will stay very long.

**The fifth recommendation** is that services provided by the public sector should be marketed better to the immigrants. In the interviews the question of “How do you know what you need to know” arose often. An integrated online service would greatly benefit the integration process. Infopankki (an online service in Helsinki) is well on its way to become one but it requires more advertising for various immigrant groups to become aware of it.

**The sixth recommendation** is that Finland and its higher education should be promoted and advertised a lot more aggressively internationally. Students choose universities based on recognition and reputation, and although they can offer excellent level of education, Finnish universities are not recognised enough internationally. One way to build up the reputation is to establish side campuses for the universities in China and India.

*“Your graduation certificate is a certificate of your life. For your whole life, that’s why we check this list, when we decide which school we go to.”*

*“If you say you come from US, then people say ok, it must be something good. I don’t know how people will react, when they see I’m coming from Finland.”*

**The seventh recommendation** is that possible tuition fees to universities should be thoroughly thought about. Finland (and Sweden) are not internationally well known for the quality of university education (like the UK and US are) and many students who have come here came especially because of the free education. It's likely that the amounts of applicants will be dramatically smaller if tuition fees are introduced,

**The eight recommendation** is to promote and develop social networking organisations and social activities organized jointly for immigrants and local population. This would be important in overcoming one of the biggest obstacles for staying in the area, loneliness and isolation.

**The Ninth recommendation** is that Universities and other HEI's will develop trainee programs with local companies and other pathways into the labor market to facilitate employment possibilities for foreign students.

## **9.2 Recommendations from Latvia:**

- There is an opportunity to use the cooperation city status: Riga-Suzhou, Riga-Beijing, Daugavpils-Harbin, in order to realize cultural and education exchanges;
- It is necessary to sign an agreement on bilateral diploma recognition between Latvia and China. Latvian universities need to sign cooperation agreements with Asian universities in order to develop the already existing cooperation with Asian countries in the field of education. It is advisable to develop cooperation with Sri Lanka in order to attract medical students;
- Latvia needs to be popularized as a country that provides possibilities to study in English. Chinese students require information in Chinese language because of the generally poor knowledge of English;
- It is necessary to both attract guest lecturers and to support the work of Latvian lecturers in Asian universities. Currently such cooperation is practically non-existent. This would provide a possibility to popularize Latvian universities;
- General entrance examinations of Latvian universities should be organized before the arrival of students in Latvia. This can help to reduce the flow of illegal immigrants in the country;
- Riga should develop itself as a student-friendly city – there exists a hostile attitude towards foreigners, racial attacks, student fraud at places of entertainment in Riga;

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- Contacts among Latvian universities need to be encouraged – foreign students should be given a possibility to come in touch with other international students in other universities;
- Development of joint university programs should be encouraged – this way a student can spend each semester studying in a different country of the Baltic Sea region. This way the various competences could be merged, e.g. Estonians – Japanology, Lithuanians – Indology, Latvians – Sinology;
- Development of an academic research program in Asian commerce. The goal of Latvia is to develop the largest Asian region research center in the Baltic States;
- Development of a summer school program suitable for Asian students by drawing in universities of the Baltic Sea Region.

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Statistics Finland

Statistics Sweden

Swedish Migration Board (Migrationsverket)

Swedish National Agency for Higher Education

Riga CSB

RTK, Befolkning, sysselsättning och ekonomisk tillväxt i östra mellansverige

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The increase of global mobility has resulted in growing flows of highly skilled migrants. At present the flows are mainly directed towards Western countries and China and India are among the main sending countries.

In Western countries the highly skilled migrants are considered a precious resource and the competition for best talents is fierce. This report analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the Baltic Sea region in general and Helsinki region in particular in the global race for Asian talent.

The report is based on interviews with local experts and highly skilled Chinese and immigrants living in the Baltic Sea Region. The report is produced within the project “Baltic Sea – Asia Agenda for Regions in a Globalising World” (BASAAR). The BASAAR project was co-funded by EU’s Central Baltic INTERREG IV A Programme 2007–2013 under the priority 2 “Economically Competitive and Innovative Region.

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