



Official bilingualism in a multilingual city: case Helsinki

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Conference

The Politics of Multilingualism: Possibilities and Challenges

Workshop

The Politics of Multilingualism in Complex Urban Settings

Amsterdam 22-24 May 2017



Structure of the presentation

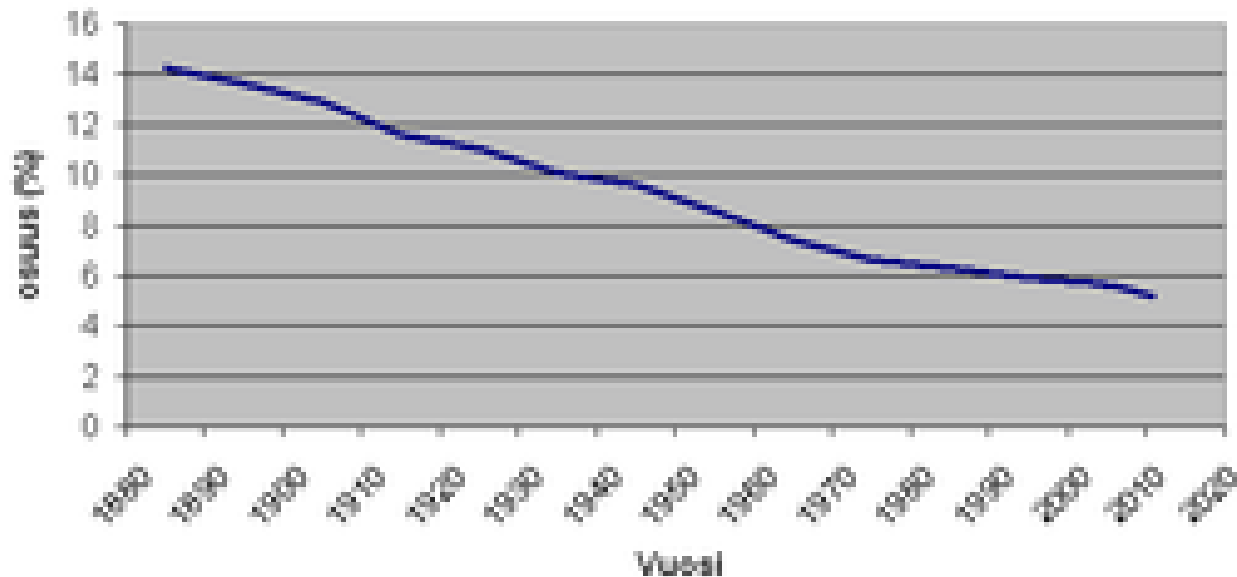
- Finland as a multilingual country
 - Finnish multilingualism: society
 - Finnish official bilingualism
 - Finnish official multilingualism
 - Evaluation of Finnish bilingualism and multilingualism
- Helsinki as a multilingual city
 - Demography
 - City bilingualism: basic principles
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 - City multilingualism: basic principles
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- Conclusion: what is the linguistic future of Helsinki?

Finland is a multilingual society with a large Finnish language majority

- Finnish population register includes information about the mother tongue of all residents. The population register does not recognize individual bilingualism or multilingualism.*
- The overwhelming majority of people are Finnish speakers, 88.3% in 2016.
- Swedish speakers constitute 5.3% of the population, mainly located in the coastal areas of Southern, Western and South-Western Finland.
- Speakers of other languages make about 6.5% of the population. The largest groups are Russian speakers (about 75.000) and Estonian speakers (about 49.000).
- There are about 2.000 registered Sami speakers (altogether three Sami languages).

Share of Swedish speakers of the population has been decreasing in 1880-2010

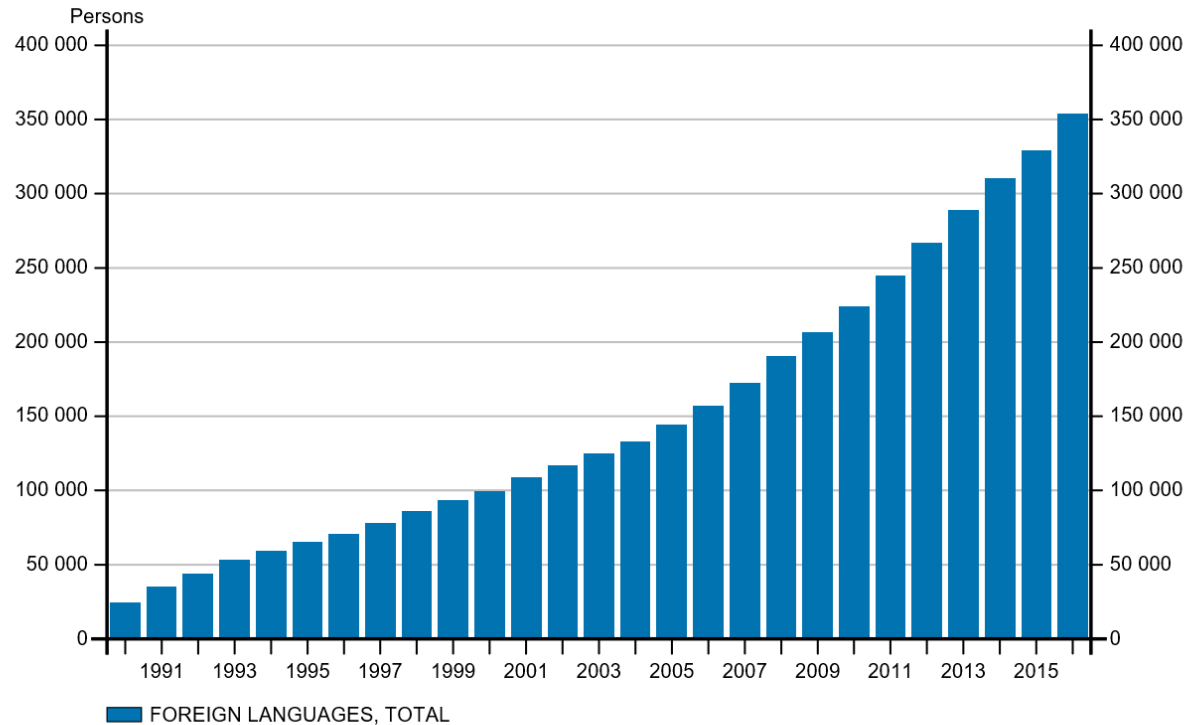
Ruotsinkielisten suhteellinen osuus Suomen väestöstä



Statistics Finland

The number of speakers of other languages than Finnish or Swedish has been increasing in 1990-2016

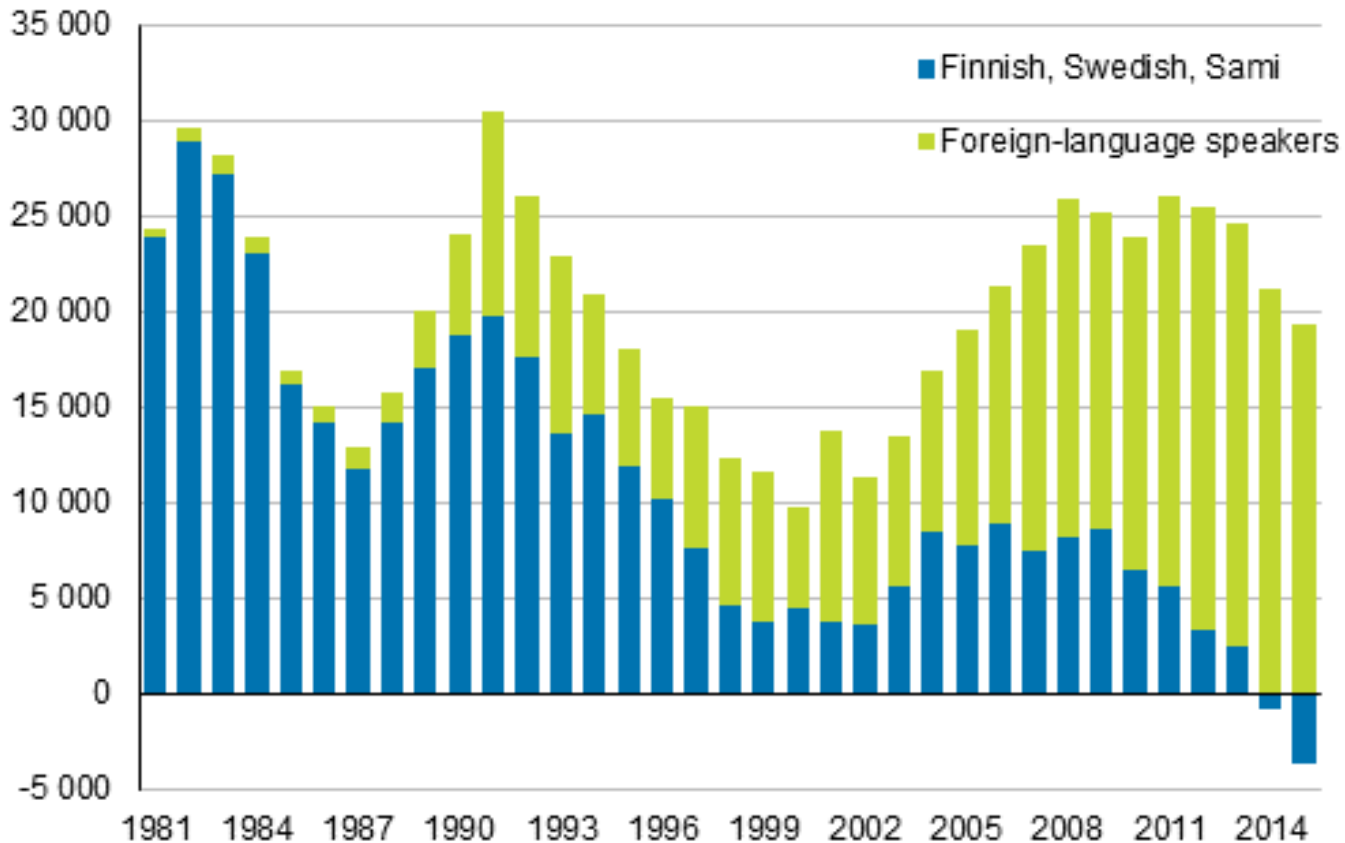
Population by language 1990-2016
FOREIGN LANGUAGES, TOTAL



Statistics Finland / Population structure

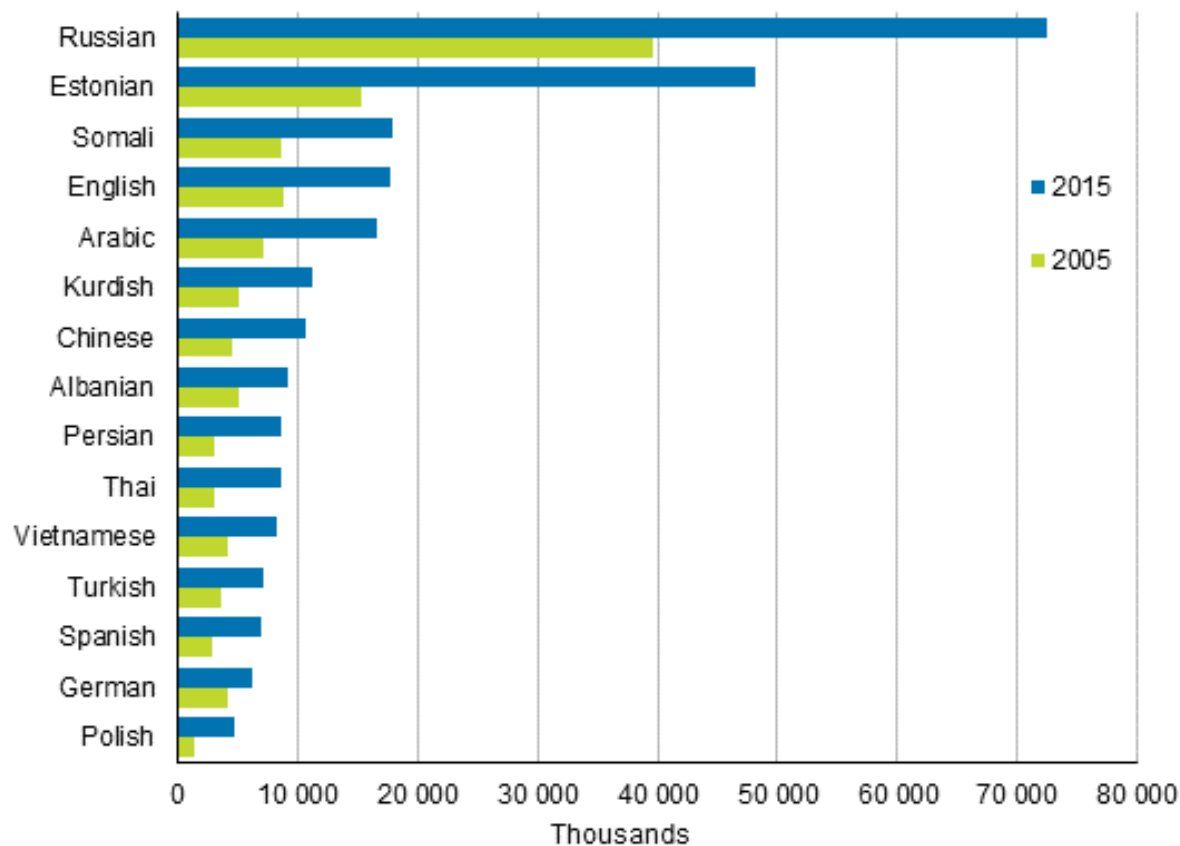


Annual change in population by mother tongue in 1981-2015: little or no population growth without immigration



Statistics Finland

Speakers of foreign languages in Finland: two groups by far larger than others



Statistics Finland



The judicial framework of Finnish bilingualism

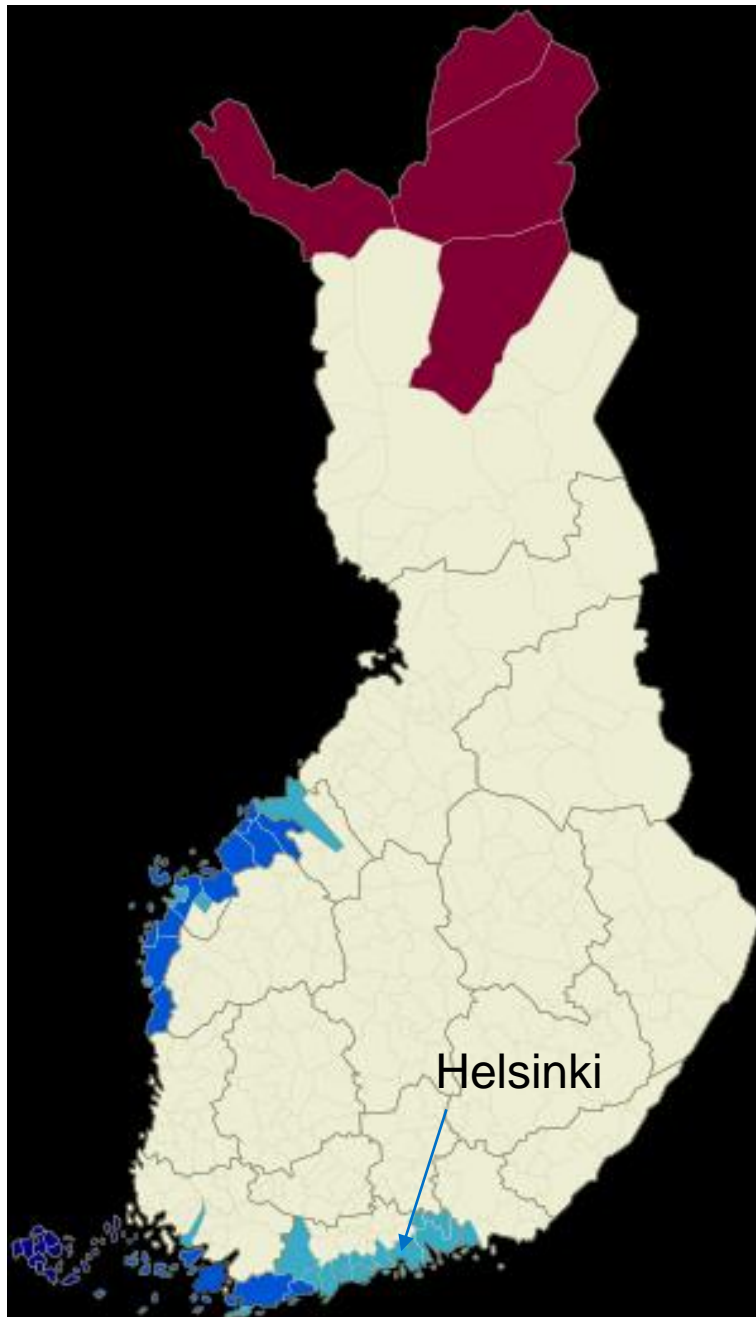
- Finnish and Swedish are both constitutionally recognized as national, i.e. official, languages.
- Public authorities shall provide for the cultural and societal needs of both language groups on an equal basis. A citizen of Finland has the right to use his or her own language, Finnish or Swedish, before courts and administrative authorities everywhere in the country, with the exception of Åland province which is declared unilingual (Swedish).
- Finnish municipalities (and administrative regions) are either officially unilingual or bilingual, depending of the size of minority language community.* In a bilingual municipality, the speakers of the minority group have the right to use their own language and to get service in that language according to certain rules and regulations.
- As a consequence, Finnish bilingualism combines both person-based (linguistic rights everywhere in Finland) and territory-based principles.



Government programme (Sipilä I, 2015-)

- Finland is one of the world's best countries in which to live. We have rich linguistic and cultural heritage and we foster a bilingual Finland in accordance with our Constitution and values.

Unilingual and bilingual municipalities in Finland in 2017



Light grey: Unilingually Finnish municipalities

Light blue: Bilingual municipalities with Finnish as the majority language

Blue: Bilingual municipalities with Swedish as the majority language

Dark blue: Unilingual Swedish speaking municipalities (Åland)

Red: Bilingual municipalities with Finnish as majority language, Sami as minority language



Judicial framework of Finnish multilingualism

- Constitution, §17: The Sámi, as an indigenous people, have linguistic and cultural autonomy in the Sámi homeland.
 - For the tasks relating to cultural autonomy the Sámi elect from among themselves a Sámi Parliament. The Sámi Language Act ensures the constitutional right of the Sámi to maintain and develop their own language and culture, contains provisions on the right of the Sámi to use their own language before the courts and other public authorities, as well as on the duty of the authorities to enforce and promote the linguistic rights of the Sámi.
- In addition to the Sámi, the Roma and other groups*, have the constitutional right to maintain and develop their own language and culture. Finland does not, however, have a list of legally recognized minority languages or linguistic groups. In the context of the Council of Europe**, Finland recognizes, in addition to Swedish and Sámi: Yiddish, Tatar, Russian, Roma and Carelian languages, and the Finnish Sign language.
- The Finnish integration policy understands integration as a process where immigrants have the right to maintain own language and culture. Public authorities provide immigrants with support in the realization of this right. Immigrants can also choose between Finnish or Swedish language integration paths.



Evaluation of Finnish bilingualism

- Strategy for national languages, 2012
 - Language legislation in Finland is in principle in order. There are, however, problems in implementation: Swedish speakers can not count on the availability of services in their mother tongue and can not always use their own language while communicating with authorities.
- Language report on the implementation of language legislation, 2013*
 - The biggest problem is the lack of personnel proficient in Swedish.
 - Problems in the realization of linguistic rights are related with the share of minority speakers in the municipality. In the Finnish capital region, services are often not available, despite of the large Swedish speaking community in absolute terms.
- Language barometer, 2016**
 - Swedish speakers were more satisfied with the services provided with the municipality than with those provided by the state.

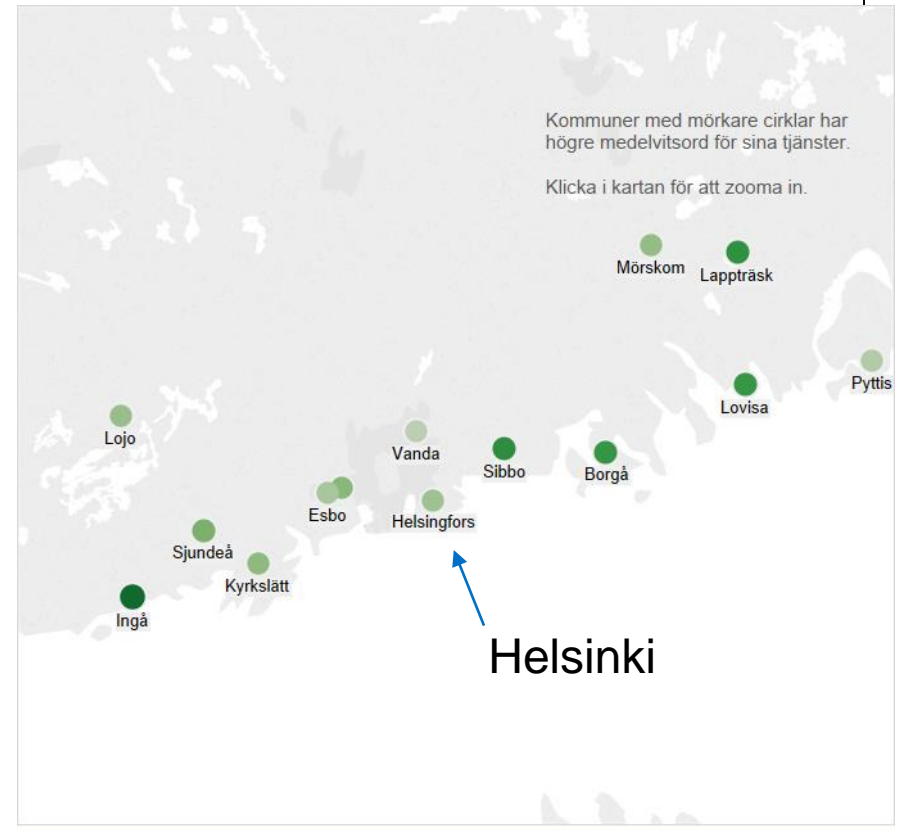
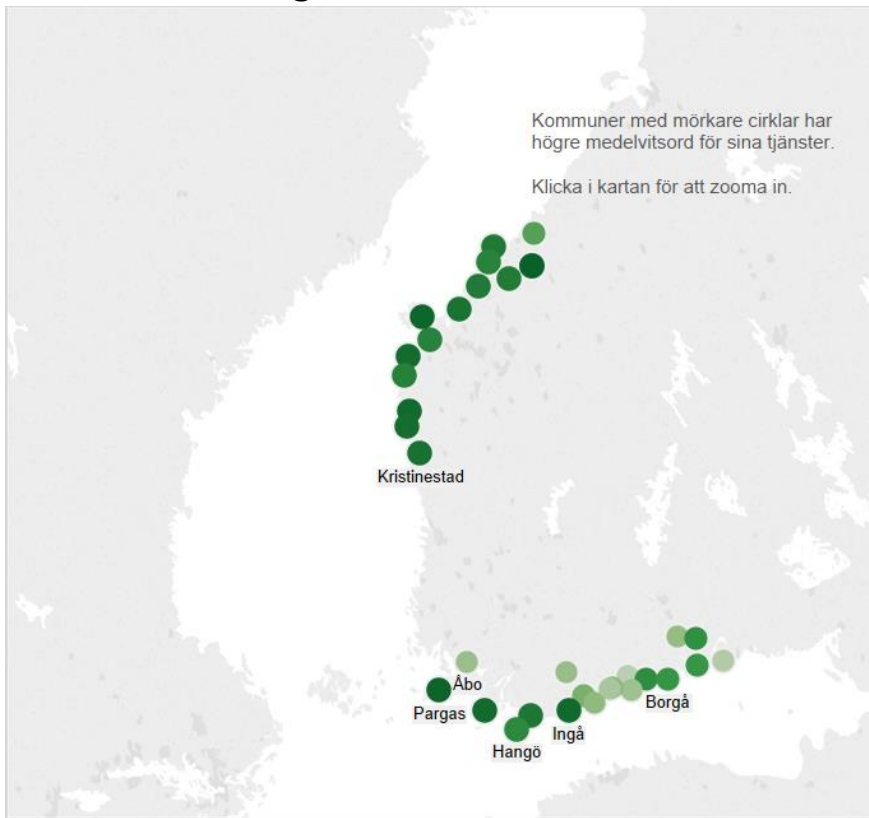


Language barometer 2016: linguistic atmosphere

- Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers in minority position in bilingual municipalities have experienced deterioration in linguistic atmosphere in their local community during the last years.
- One in two Swedish speakers has experienced harassment related to language (20% of Finnish speakers).
- Finnish speakers were more critical towards the relations between language groups than Swedish speakers (in bilingual communities). However, Swedish speakers more often made the judgment that the situation has become worse.

Satisfaction among Swedish speakers with services in bilingual communities: Helsinki in the lower end

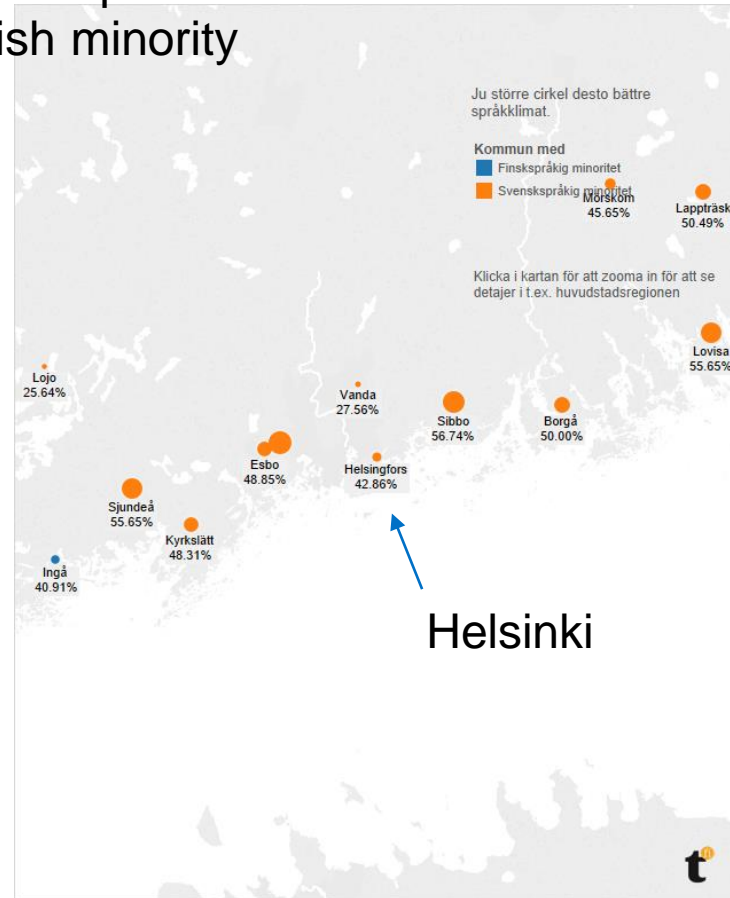
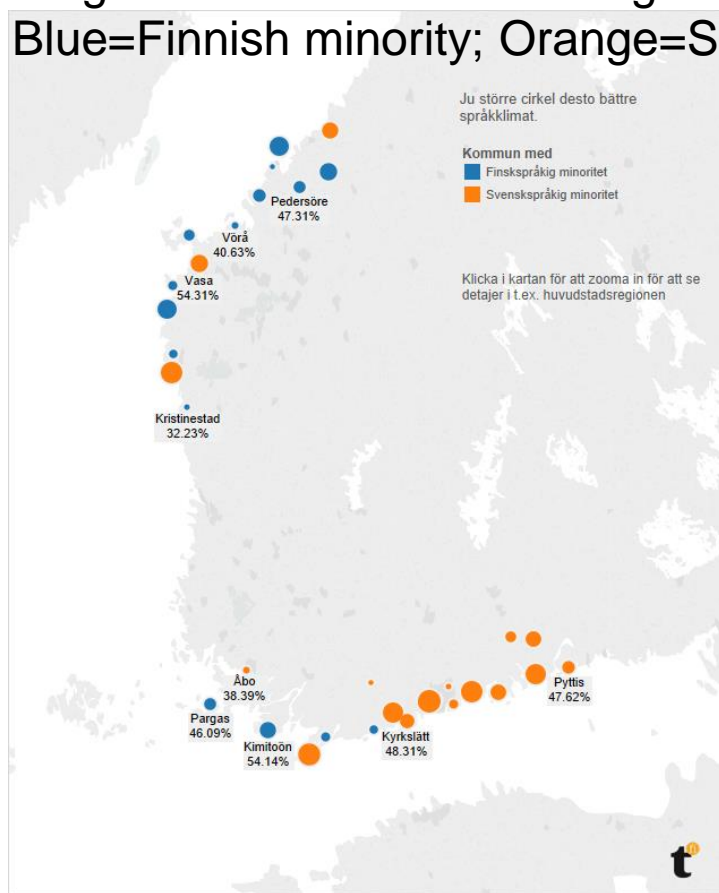
Darker green indicates more satisfaction with services.



Language barometer 2016

Linguistic atmosphere: Helsinki again in the bottom

Larger dot indicates better linguistic atmosphere.
 Blue=Finnish minority; Orange=Swedish minority



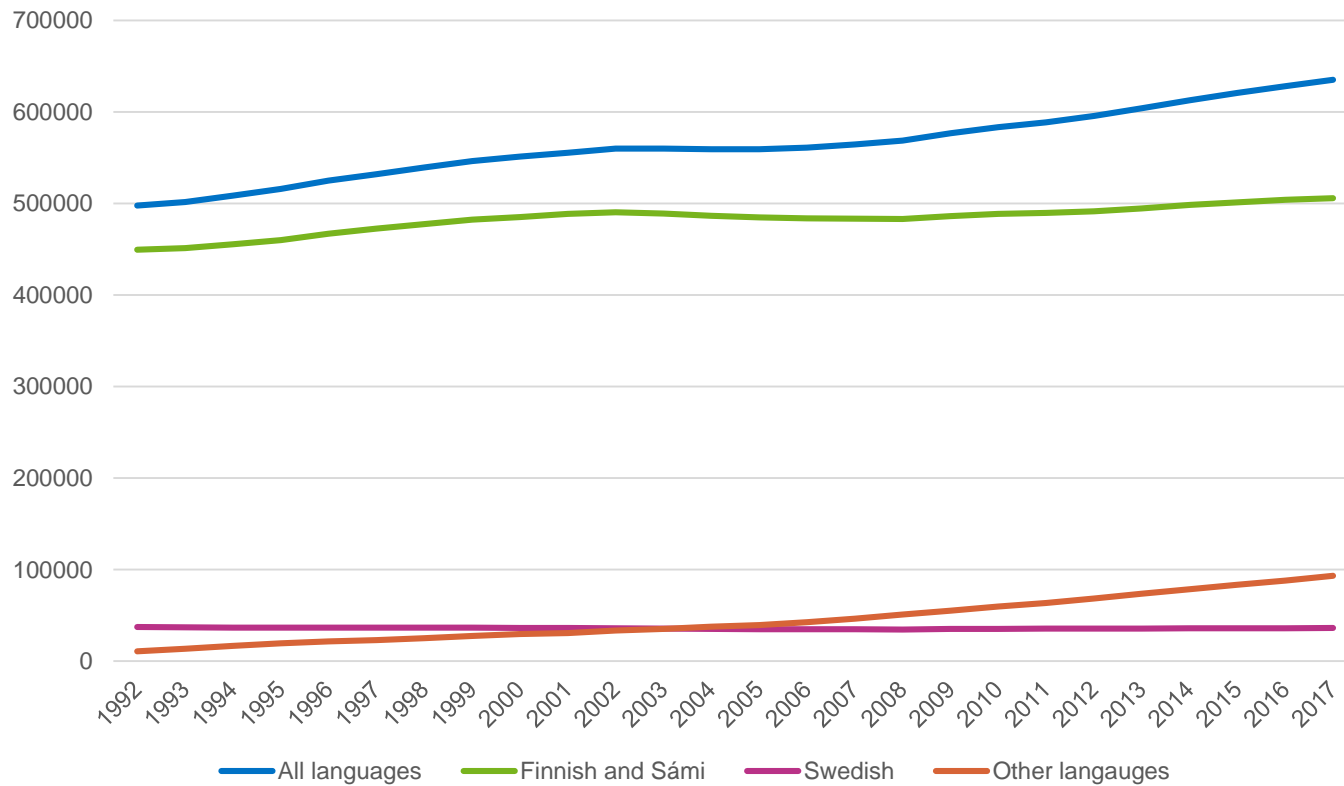


Evaluation of Finnish multilingualism

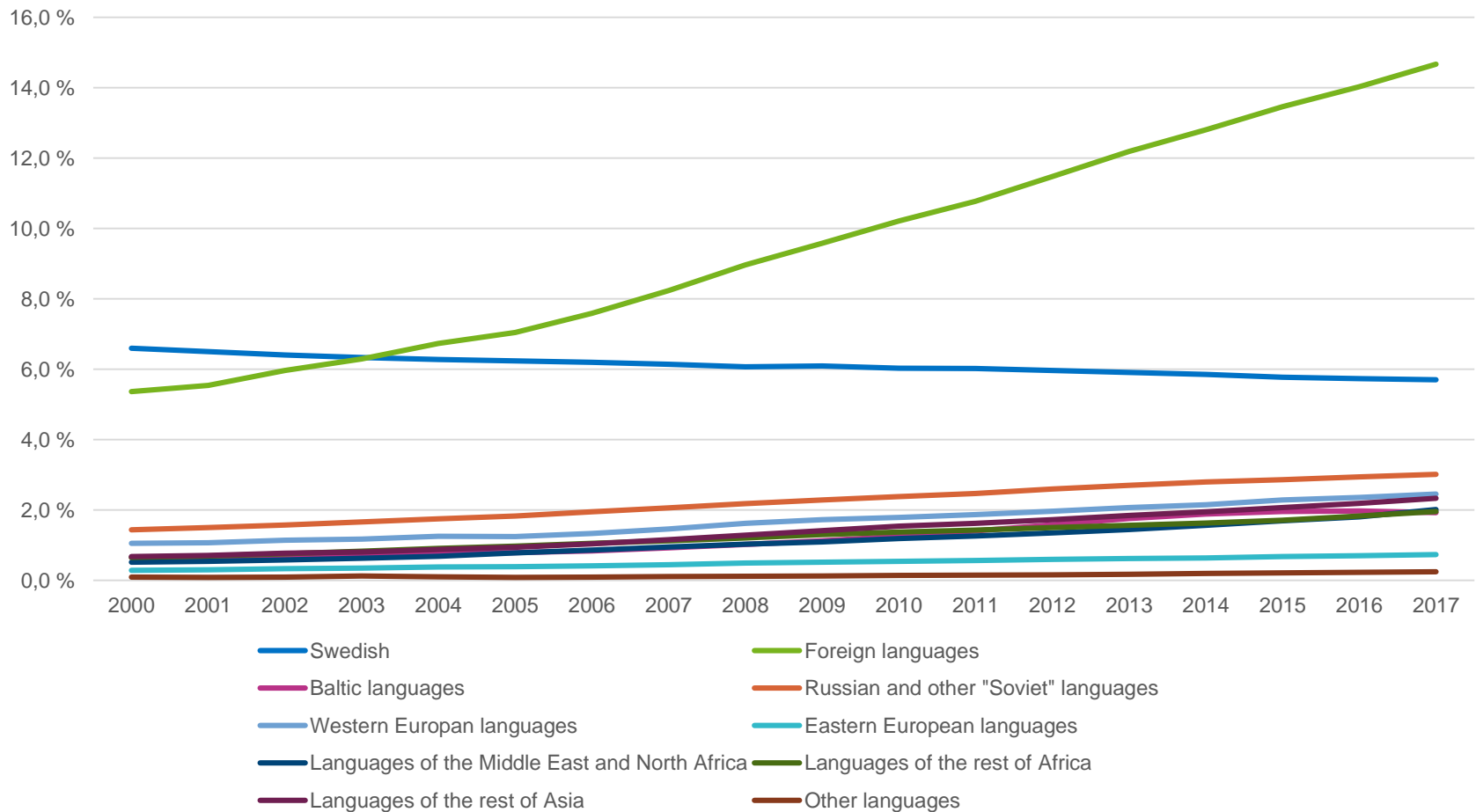
- There is no systematic analysis of Finnish multilingualism. We can, however, conclude that the state has implemented Finnish multilingualism rather half-heartedly.
- The linguistic rights of the Roma and the Sámi have improved during the last decades, but there is still much work to do. Two of the three Sámi languages and the Finnish Roma language are endangered languages.
- Other language groups often are in uncertainty about their position and linguistic rights in the Finnish society.
- Mother tongue instruction at school is the cornerstone of Finnish multilingualism in the case of smaller groups and immigrants. However, not all children participate in this instruction.



Evolution of language groups in Helsinki 1992-2017



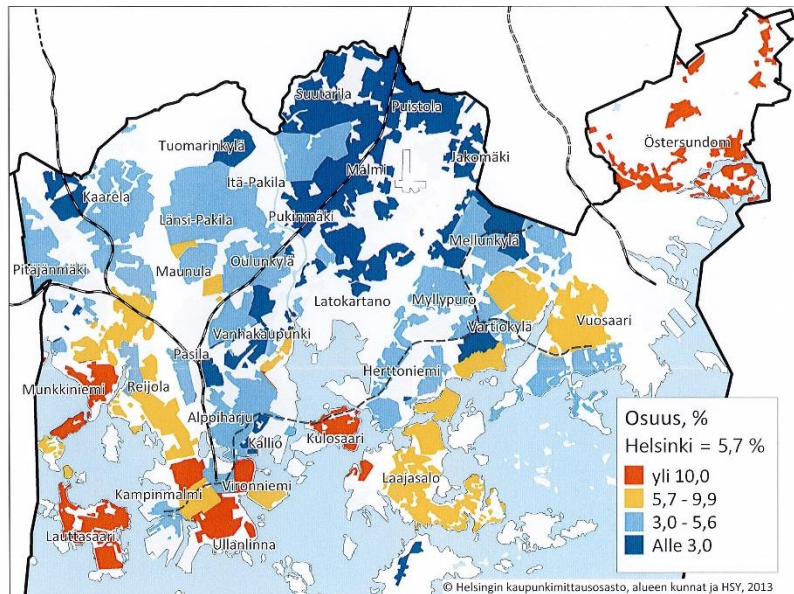
Evolution of the relative size of language groups in Helsinki 2000-2017



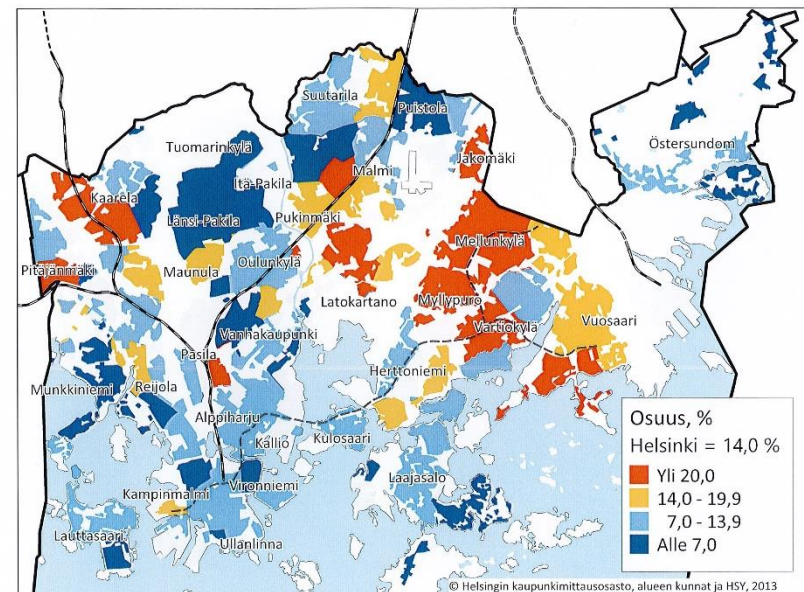
Geographical distribution of multilingualism in Helsinki in 2013

Share of Swedish speakers, N=35 000

Share of foreign language speakers, N=78 000



Red: > 10%
 Yellow: 5.7-9.9%
 Light blue: 3.0-5.6%
 Dark blue: <3.0%



Red: > 20%
 Yellow: 14.0-19.9%
 Light blue: 7.0-13.9%
 Dark blue: <7.0%

Helsinki bilingualism: basic principles

- The national language legislation provides the city with a normative framework regarding local language policy: Helsinki is officially bilingual.
- City Strategy 2013-2016: commitment to bilingualism
 - “Helsinki is strongly bilingual. In a Nordic welfare city such as Helsinki, bilingualism is a plus. Helsinki must be the best city in the country – in Swedish too. This requires functional service entities and consistent strategic work.”
- City regulations take the judicial framework into account and recognize deficits in the current system
 - The needs of both language groups have to be taken care of in administrative arrangements, in service production and in communication.
 - City units must employ a sufficient amount of personnel competent in Finnish and in Swedish to meet the requirements in the Language Act.
- City units are divided into:
 - Those that provide services in Finnish and in Swedish
 - Those that inform about services in both languages; services usually available in Finnish only.



Helsinki bilingualism: policy practices

- Education sector
 - Schools and day care:
 - a separate administrative section
 - Finnish language and Swedish language day care centres & schools*
 - Local committee for education affairs has a Finnish language and a Swedish language section.
 - Adult education: Finnish and Swedish language education institutes
- Cultural sector & youth work
 - Library: some units have a stronger Swedish language profile than others; esp. in areas with a higher concentration of Swedish speakers.
 - City museum, arts museum, cultural centres: integrated bilingualism
 - Youth work: a Swedish language unit, four Swedish language youth centres



Helsinki bilingualism: policy practices (cont.)

- Social and health services
 - Some Swedish-language services are provided integrally with Finnish-language services
 - Some services are concentrated into certain service units that provide service to Swedish-speakers in the whole city, organised in language-based teams.
 - Swedish-speakers can always choose between the service in the adjacent service unit and the unit for concentrated services.
- City administration and decision making
 - Possibility to use Finnish or Swedish in the decision making organs.
 - Official documentation in both national languages.



Helsinki bilingualism: evaluation

- Bilingual Helsinki Report, 2015
 - Linguistic rights of Swedish-language speakers are not fully realized.
 - Service in own language is not always automatically provided
 - Sometimes there are difficulties also after one has asked for services in the mother tongue one is legally entitled to.
- Many frustrated Swedish-speakers (who are proficient in Finnish) don't even try to get service in Swedish.
- There are differences between service sectors and between areas within the city.
- Recruitment of personnel competent in Swedish is often problematic.

Helsinki multilingualism: basic principles

- Helsinki City Strategy 2013-2016 recognizes multilingual reality:
 - "In its operations, the City creates a basis for functional democracy, the citizens' active participation and wellbeing in a bilingual and multilingual city."
- Helsinki City Integration and Diversity Programme 2013-2016* fosters multilingualism:
 - "Supporting the formation of coherent multicultural and multilingual identities among children is a socially important process that obliges municipal actors, communities and parents."
 - "The multilingual background of children from immigrant families is a significant asset in future working life. Day care, child health clinics and basic education must support multilingual development."
 - "In a city of two small languages, increasing multilingualism should be seen as an attribute of the community that can be an asset in the world of global interconnections."

Helsinki multilingualism: policy practices

- The basic principle is that immigrants and representatives of minorities should use mainstream services that, in turn, are developed to better respond to the needs of a more diverse population.
- There is a possibility to receive voluntary mother tongue instruction (2 hours per week) at school. In Fall 2016, 4.250 children participated in this instruction of altogether 43 languages; Somali and Russian groups being by far the largest.
- There are schools that operate in two languages, Finnish and French, German, English or Russian. At certain schools, there are also classes in Chinese, Estonian and Spanish.
- Infopankki website provides information about Finland to people planning to move to Finland and to immigrants already living in the country. It also helps authorities with multi-language communications. The languages available are Finnish, Swedish, English, Russian, Estonian, French, Somali, Spanish, Turkish, Chinese, Persian and Arabic.
- Virka-info is a free Helsinki City Information service, offering advice and information on immigration issues and Helsinki City services by phone, chat or by visiting the service point. Service languages are Finnish, Swedish, English, Arabic, Russian, Somali, Dari, Farsi, French, Bulgarian and Berber.
- The cultural centre Caisa, established in 1996, promotes the development of Helsinki into a culturally more diverse city. The objective is to involve residents of Helsinki with different backgrounds in experiencing and creating art within the cultural life of the city.
- Immigrants and minority associations can apply for financial assistance at the city (and the state).



Helsinki multilingualism: policy evaluation

- There is no systematic evaluation available concerning the implementation of multilingualism in the city of Helsinki.
- Obviously, also in this case we can conclude that the multilingual practice does not meet the wishes and expectations raised by multilingual policy discourse.
- There has been little willingness to think in concrete terms how to promote multilingualism in the public sphere and in the working places.
- Resources for multilingual activities and for the maintenance of linguistic skills have been modest in comparison with the needs.



Conclusion: what is the linguistic future of Helsinki?

- Finland and Helsinki are multilingual and, on paper, both “bilingualist” and “multilingualist” places.
- The implementation of bilingualism and multilingualism is, however, insufficient, either lacking concrete action completely or fulfilling promises only imperfectly.
- At the moment, individual bilingualism is increasing: Swedish speakers are often also fluent in Finnish; and immigrants and their descendants are learning Finnish (some of them Swedish).
- There is a risk of a diglossic development and of the privatization of mother tongue use. In the long run, this can lead to linguistic assimilation in the overwhelming Finnish language environment.