

Multiculturalism also touches on universities

Member of Parliament **Olli Immonen** has written on Facebook of the nightmare of multiculturalism and the mythical utopia of a nationalistic state and has stirred up a storm of objections. Kauppalehti, the largest financial newspaper in Finland, replied with an article stating that multiculturalism is the driving force behind the huge success of Silicon Valley, while also making a statement demanding in plain words a stop to this kind of propagandist writing that is harmful to the business world.

It is not only a question of Finland needing a new workforce to keep the wheels of the economy rolling as Finns retire at a rapid pace, but also about the fact that you cannot survive on the international market in these times of globalisation unless you can utilise international know-how, whether the people with the know-how come from your home country or from abroad.

Indeed, Finnish universities and polytechnics have risen to the challenge of internationalisation. There are around 20,000 foreign students in Finland, which is not at all a large share of a total of 300,000 students. However, this has been a sufficient reason to modify teaching towards the English language, and to otherwise better meet the challenges of the global economy.

A learning environment has been established for Finnish students, where one can grow naturally into an international mindset during one's studies. At the same time, in some sectors international students make up for the lack of demand for education compared to the demand for competence on the labour market. Information technology (IT) is one of these sectors. This sector's products are mostly created directly for the global market, and they require top-grade competence and an understanding of the operating and cognition models of the users, no matter where around the globe the users come from. The example of Silicon Valley proves that making it in this sector requires a multicultural workforce. American companies rule supreme on the software and Internet market (*Microsoft, Apple, Google, Facebook* etc.)

The first success stories that were largely created by foreigners who studied in Finland have already been told: *Tuxera* and *Boxmedia* who have created multimedia software and solutions, are excellent examples. Although the education has been free, the universities have clearly been doing the right things: we have begun to apply the recipe of success of Silicon Valley in Finland.

The criticism against multiculturalism by Immonen's ilk stems from a nationalistic ideology and a utopia of a homogeneous nation. A majority of Finns understand perfectly well that this utopia is not of this world. In the same breath, it is only fair to state that the naive idea of multiculturalism that has been implemented in many Western countries over the last decades has enabled the ghettoization of new ethnic and religious minorities, which has acted as a Petri dish for inborn terrorism in, for instance, the Netherlands and France.

Naive multiculturalism stems from the idea that all cultures are equally good. Forced marriages of young girls, female circumcision, 'honour killings' and acts of terror are, however, things that indicate a less than harmonious coexistence of different cultures. The practical implementation as well as the 'theory' of multiculturalism has thus received justified criticism.

In my opinion, **Ayaan Hirsi Ali**, a former member of the Dutch parliament, has in her books *Infidel* and *Nomad* laudably brought up the points that (a) cultures are not equal, and that (b) the harmonious coexistence of cultures is only possible if it is based on the human rights elevated by the Enlightenment and included in the constitutions of most Western countries, such as freedom (including freedom of speech) and equality (including equality between the sexes).

I guess, however, that nobody has a finished recipe for how to realise these values in multicultural everyday life. For this reason, these universal values that can form the foundation for social harmony must be constantly discussed. Every sensible person will happily agree with the wisdom stated in many languages: 'a thin agreement is better than a fat quarrel'. Once we accept this starting point, we can begin to deepen this agreement.

Here in the Western countries, we have every reason to leave aside the criticisms of multiculturalism based on nationalistic utopias and concentrate on realising and defending universal human rights as the foundation of harmonious coexistence. This is naturally more challenging politically than indulging in cheap populism of the Immonen sort. Universities are implementing an approach based on common values following ethical guidelines that apply to all members of the community regardless of their backgrounds. We can also participate in the wider discussion by bringing up good experiences of internationalisation and multiculturalism.

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