

Strengthening Well-Being and Belonging at a Bilingual Campus Event

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In Finnish: **Hyvinvointia ja yhteenkuuluvuutta vahvistettiin kaksikielisessä tapahtumassa kampuksella**

On December 3, 2024, the international event *Life in Finland: Your Journey to Well-being and Belonging* brought together 100 participants from around the globe who have made Seinäjoki and its surrounding areas their new home. This unique event was organized through the collaboration of Sedu, the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia, the City of Seinäjoki, and the South Ostrobothnia Welfare Area.

The event celebrated inclusion, offered practical tips for daily life in Finland, and emphasized the importance of participating in community activities. Additionally, Etelä-Pohjanmaan Wiise contributed by producing accessible and meaningful content about the Finnish labor market.

The Significance of Multiculturalism in South Ostrobothnia

The event highlighted various aspects of Finnish culture in daily life, communication, and professional settings, while also underscoring the positive impact of multiculturalism in enriching communities. People from diverse backgrounds not only bring fresh perspectives but also help foster an open and inclusive environment for everyone.

A central goal of the event was to create a foundation for genuine inclusion. This focus was reflected in both the event planning process and the panel discussions, which prominently featured the voices of immigrants. Moreover a sense of inclusion and belonging is a significant aid in learning the local language (Intke-Hernandez, 2020; 2021).

Discussions and Opportunities to Influence in South Ostrobothnia

The Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia presented its operations and vision for the region's future, offering participants a direct opportunity to contribute to strategic planning. Attendees received a link through which they could share their perspectives on the future of South Ostrobothnia.

Panel discussions provided a platform for participants to share their experiences of living in Seinäjoki, including challenges, moments of joy, and areas for development. The audience actively joined the conversation, asking questions and sharing ideas for strengthening belonging and improving local practices.

The panel included influential local leaders, such as Jaakko Kiiskilä, Mayor of Seinäjoki; Anna-Kaisa Pusa, Mayor of Kurikka; Miisa Lamminen from Järjestötalo; and Aki Ruotsala, Director of Employment Region Kymppi. Sedu and SeAMK students Olena Nikitova and Jennylyn Carlos brought fresh perspectives, highlighting the role of education and the experiences of immigrants in supporting integration and community involvement.

Volunteering and Participation: Building Bridges

One of the event's central themes was the significance of volunteering and active participation. Local organizations shared insights into how volunteering not only enriches communities but also helps individuals build meaningful connections and find their place in their new environment.

"Volunteering has helped me not only improve my language skills but also make lifelong friends and feel truly part of the local culture," shared one participant, illustrating the profound impact of such activities.

The event also showcased various opportunities for hobbies and community participation, inspiring attendees to explore ways to get involved and make meaningful contributions in their free time.

Practical Advice and Genuine Connections

The program included practical advice for navigating life in Finland, covering topics such as navigating the job market, understanding social interactions, and accessing various services. Stories and presentations about the balance between Finnish work and everyday life offered valuable insights for those settling in the area.

More than 20 local organizations and stakeholders presented their initiatives and services. The vibrant atmosphere in the hall reflected the enthusiasm as participants and organizations connected and shared ideas on topics ranging from sports and libraries to volunteering and cultural events. The event also sparked the idea that new associations could emerge, driven by global citizens settling in Seinäjoki and South Ostrobothnia.

The warm and welcoming atmosphere of the event received particular praise. The use of two languages kept language barriers low, ensuring full participation for everyone.

Looking Ahead: A Commitment to Inclusion and Belonging

Life in Finland: Your Journey to Well-being and Belonging marked a significant step toward enhancing inclusion and belonging in Seinäjoki. Meeting new residents and acknowledging their experiences are vital for advancing both the city community and the broader life in South Ostrobothnia.

The organizers extend their heartfelt thanks to all participants, speakers, and partners who made the event possible. Together, we can continue building bridges and creating a thriving, inclusive community.

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Kinossalo is an inclusion expert at SeAMK and is working on a doctoral dissertation in education. Her research focuses on the construction of narrative identity, practices that promote reciprocal inclusion and inclusivity, and the development of multilingual literacy. She coordinates projects that support integration initiatives.

References

Intke-Hernandez, M. (2020). Maahanmuuttajaäitien arjen kielitarinat: Etnografinen tutkimus kieliyhteisöön sosiaalistumisesta [Migrant mothers' language stories in their everyday life: An ethnographic study in language socialization]. [Doctoral dissertation, Universityof Helsinki.]. Helda Digital Repository. http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-51-6838-2

Intke-Hernandez, M. (2021). Kielenoppija tarvitsee tuekseen kielitietoisuutta ja yhteisiä tekoja. *Kieli, koulutus ja yhteiskunta*, 12(6).
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Participating Organizations

- Etelä-Pohjanmaan Wiise
- Seinäjoki Rugby ry
- Seinäjoen Suomalais-Japanilainen yhdistys ry
- Soroptimist International Seinäjoki
- Etelä-Pohjanmaan Naisklubi ry
- MIELI Lakeuden mielenterveys ry
- MIELI Crisis Center Seinäjoki
- Kokemus- ja vertaistoimijat ry
- Seinäjoen Seudun Suomi-Puola-yhdistys SAC
- Seinäjoki African Community ry
- MLL Pohjanmaan piiri
- Seinäjoki Adult Education Center
- Seinäjoki Museums
- Nurmon Jymy Volleyball
- Seinäjoki City Library
- Jenna ry
- City of Seinäjoki Recreation Services
- Järjestötalo / Yhteisöjen Yhdistys ry
- South Ostrobothnia Welfare Area
- Finnish Red Cross, Western Finland District + Local Chapter
- EU Info Centre of South Ostrobothnia