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ESTABLISHMENT OF FINNISH IDENTITY

The paper considers historical and geographical preconditions for establishment of Finnish identity on the basis of cultural analysis. It is shown that in different historical periods, establishment of Finnish identity developed in a number of ways. When Finland merged in the Russian Empire, the main focus was on establishing language and cultural identity. After declaring independence, most attention was paid to economic and political aspects, which form Finnish identity. Establishment of Finnish identity in the 20th century can be divided into seven periods. In the modern context the main focus is on the so-called “Finnish model of information society”, which provides for the existing features of Finnish ethnic identity. The References include 12 items. Refs 12.

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The establishment of Finnish national identity began in the early 19th century, after the country had gained autonomy as part of the Russian Empire [1]. This fact induced the Finns to think about uniting the people, preserving historical and cultural roots of the nation. This issue became especially important in 1917 after the country had declared political independence.

During the 19th and 20th centuries the most important development trend in Finland was the establishment of Finnish national identity, which implies awareness of belonging to the same national community with common historical, cultural and social characteristics.

The Finnish nation should be studied in both its geographical and historical aspects. Finland has strong dual cultural and geographical identity. It occurs geographically under the concepts of Western and Eastern influence. The country can be defined as an outpost of Western Europe or as the westernmost country of Eastern Europe. As Finland is located between Sweden and Russia, the country’s history has been affected by proximity to these strong nations of Northern Europe. Finland is to be defined under the political concepts of the North, West and East.

The country’s development of the country has been affected by all the wars and crises, social upheavals and revolutions, which have occurred in Europe [2]. In times of peace, the establishment of Finnish identity has been related to growing self-consciousness, search for its own ethnos in social and cultural life.

Establishment of Finnish identity is significantly different from that of other ethnic groups. Despite the long history of the Finnish ethnos, the Finns remained a minority

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within the limits of a governing state: from the 12th till the beginning of the 19th century Finland was part of Sweden, from 1809 it became an autonomous duchy within the Russian Empire. A long period of Swedish rule significantly affected Finnish culture while the influence of Russia has also been considerable [3].

Under these conditions, the Finns identified themselves as a minority. The need to establish ethnic consciousness was vividly expressed by historian and publicist Adolf Ivar Arwidsson (1791–1858). He is believed to be the author of the phrase “Swedes we are no longer, Russians we do not want to become, let us therefore be Finns!” However, these words do not belong to him; the phrase was actually coined in 1861 by professor Johan Snellman (1806–1881) as recognition of Arwidsson’s political activity [4].

The 19th century saw the beginnings of the nation and national Finnish culture. National self-consciousness of the Finns was formed primarily due to assimilation of the national language and culture. Strong government administration was also important. The internal structure of Finland resembled that of western countries. The governmental structure was based on the Scandinavian model, which includes principles of social and democratic development. The Finns neither experienced serfdom nor had a developed system of local government even when the Grand Duchy of Finland was part of the Russian Empire [5, 6].

An important factor in establishment of Finnish identity was the national epic of Karelia and Finland “Kalevala”, compiled by Elias Lönnrot (1802–1884). The epic consists of the runes he collected and combined into an epic work of literature. The first edition of the “Kalevala” was published in 1835. The epic became a cornerstone of Finnish literature and had enormous influence on Finnish culture. The epic work had a great impact on all the life spheres of Finnish society. The country experienced an unprecedented growth in literature, music, architecture and painting. After the epic was published, many enthusiasts took up studying Finnish folklore.

Artists and writers tried to find ways to engender a distinctive development of Finnish identity. They saw the roots in the East, in Karelia. Interest in this region started to grow in the 1890s, and it was no accident. People believed it was Karelia where the Kalevala’s way of life had been preserved and thought Finnish art could only be created on its basis. This tendency in the history of culture was called “Karelianism” [7].

Establishment of Finnish identity in the 20th century can be roughly divided into seven periods [8]. The first period dates back to independence, in 1917, until 1939. It was marked by relatively favorable conditions for economic development of the country and society’s orientation towards agriculture. A distinctive feature of this period was establishment of a traditional national society.

The second period was related to military activities. These began with the Winter War between the Soviet Union and Finland in the years 1939–1940 and terminated with the end of the Second World War. Its main feature was a significant change in the ideas of national identity related to the military actions. This period was characterized by development of military patriotism and, to a certain degree, even nationalism against the eastern neighbor. According to I. M. Solomeshch, during the military conflicts, the most popular image was a patriot on one side and the enemy on the other. “The image of the enemy was not only a ‘spontaneous’ phenomenon, which naturally appeared in collective consciousness. It was often formed intentionally as a psychological attitude which performed certain functions in society” [9].

The third phase in establishment of Finnish identity referred to the years 1944–1960 and was defined by the “Red Scare” and reconstruction processes in the society after the war. The government of Finland, represented by the president Juho Kusti Paasikivi and Urho Kaleva Kekkonen, met both the interests of the country’s population and of its eastern neighbor. The government tried to create favorable conditions to develop democratic principles in establishing Finnish identity. An important point in its establishment was unification of the entire population of Finland in an advance payment of reparations in the amount of 300 million dollars to the Soviet Union [10].

The fourth period, the 1960s–1970s, was marked by the first major wave of migration from rural areas to cities and towns and the resulting transition of Finnish society from agricultural to industrial. A distinctive feature of this period was changing values due to the influence of television and international communications.

The fifth phase refers to the 1970s–1990s. In this period the economic life of Finnish society changed a great deal. The economy was more focused on the services market rather than on the production of goods. A concept of a welfare state appeared. The welfare state system reached a new level: education, culture and education became the leading spheres.

The next period was related to the recession in the first half of the nineties and was characterized by an unprecedented unemployment rate, which reached 20 %, and bankruptcy of many enterprises. The worsening economic situation resulted in growing distrust of society in political institutions. The recession provided the conditions for Finland’s accession to the European Union. This brought about harmonization, stabilization and growth of the country’s economy. At the same time a process of weakening national identity started and ideas of Eurocentrism began to strengthen.

The seventh phase, starting from the middle of the nineties, is characterized by the country’s growing economic opportunities.

In general, these are the phases of establishment of Finnish identity in the 20th century. As for the current development of Finnish society, it can be defined as an information society. The Finnish model of information society reflects the historical and cultural features of the country and is interconnected with Finnish ethnic identity.

Without any significant material resources, Finland has drastically changed its economic policy by the early 1990s. The focus was on the development of new information technology, providing rapid production growth. The Finnish government managed to introduce and pursue a policy aimed at explaining to the masses the benefits of information society. This policy received the full support of the country’s population.

The idea of an information society is closely connected to a cultural policy, which focuses on preserving cultural heritage, development and maintenance of Finnish identity by means of new information technology. The priority areas of the cultural policy have become art, public libraries, museums, cultural heritage issues, protection of copyright, media and cultural institutions.

In the difficult years of economic crises in the early 21st century, Finland was able not only to keep financing social and cultural programs but even expand them. An example of such a policy is free high quality education guaranteed by the state from nursery to university. In addition, the indicator for admission to universities is one of the highest in the world.

An important direction in cultural heritage preservation, its exploration and development in terms of establishment of Finnish identity is a wide use of network technology

[11]. Full-scale activities in this direction have contributed to cultural and national revival in Finland. Examples of such activities are educational institutions and libraries. They are combined into a network, which allows not only operating information efficiently, but also adopting and developing innovative proposals. At present, an experiment is conducted aimed at creating a virtual university, uniting twenty Finnish universities. Such a policy provides integration of information technology in the learning process. Examples include online tutorials, remote lab exercises, use of virtual stands for experiments.

Finland has a system which provides network education for all the segments of population. In particular, a system of measures has been introduced to ensure application of the advantages of new information technology for the older age groups through a single service center. A single network system of cultural centers has been set up.

Spread of information culture is considered in Finland to be an essential component of the comprehensive project of Finnish national revival. At the first stages of social informatization there were frequent problems related to rejection and even fear of the computer. This is especially common for elderly and senior citizens. Problems with information technology arose in the some areas, for example, in Northern Karelia, where the traditional occupation of the locals has been agriculture. Due to the collaboration of regional governmental bodies an informatization project for the region was launched. With the governmental support there was created a system of so-called network kiosks in libraries, youth centers, clubs for the unemployed, local banks and shops, providing free public access to the Internet. The project included a free social network, where the region locals could communicate, hold discussions and propose innovative ideas. Within two years, 25 % of the population registered in the local network and set up their local network culture.

The above trends in establishment of Finnish identity reveal three components: cultural, economic, and informational [12]. The cultural element refers to the early and the mid 19th century. It was the one which saw the beginnings of Finnish identity: development and strengthening of the Finnish language, creation of the Karelian and Finnish epics, subsequent development of literature, music and arts.

In the 20th century the economic aspect played a major role. Development and strengthening of Finnish economy, overcoming the crises and establishment of a welfare state contributed to successful positioning of Finland in the international community and growing feeling of belonging to the Finnish ethnic group.

Since the end of the 20th century, the process of social informatization has had a crucial role in the establishment of Finnish identity, as well as a unique, separate way of transiting from an industrial to post-industrial society. The so-called “Finnish model of information society” has revealed the existing features of Finnish ethnic identity and continues to strengthen the Finnish ethnos.

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