

## ADAPTATION / INTEGRATION / ASSIMILATION

Lately I've been meditating quite a lot on why some of my friends have not been able to fit here in Finland and left, while I am still here, going on with my life and generally happy with it. Since some of them actually had a Finnish (or half-Finnish background) but spend their formative years abroad, I think we can safely assume that in their cases it was not due to lack of exposure to the language and culture.

I've also been thinking about the immigration debate in Finland, and how the desired state of all commentators (and I'd assume more than a few immigrants) is that newcomers should successfully integrate to Finnish society. However, the question then becomes what does integration actually mean, and how is it achieved. With that in mind, I started to go over my own process while living here, and I have sketched a model for it with 3 different (and grossly oversimplified) stages.

- **Adaptation:** The process of making terms with your new surroundings, including first contact and ways of working with the location, language, culture...
- **Integration:** Now this becomes more of a two-way street. You acquire more traits of your host society, but at the same time are accepted as part of it as well.
- **Assimilation:** When there is no important difference between yourself and the society you live in. Probably you won't achieve it, but your kids might.

Based purely on my own observations (and taking into consideration that I am no social scientist) I am starting to believe that the biggest challenge is making the leap between adaptation and integration. Letting go of your expectations while at the same time holding a grip on your possibilities while understanding your environment better seems to be quite hard. Coming to terms with a language that might be very different, and values and behaviours that might not always correspond to your own, and both learn from and accept such differences requires a certain strength and a support network that not all of us have.

This is of course not helped by the fact that the phenomenon is quite new for the host society as well, which is still coming to terms with it itself.

*<http://www.chivacongelado.com/2009/08/adaptation-integration-assimilation/>*

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