



Multicultural Marriages and Their Dynamics in Finland

**Elli Heikkilä
Institute of Migration
Finland**

**The 4th International Conference on Population
Geographies 10-13 July 2007, Hong Kong
Love and Mobility in the Time of Globalization**

- Newly-created social links between people across national borders due to international migration and tourism are some of the most notable features of globalization
- Increased intercultural communication is the increased incidence of multicultural marriages
- Multicultural marriage may eventually function as a "bridge between different cultures" (source: Lauth Bacas, 2002)
- The population of foreigners married to citizens of a destination country constitutes a particular element of settlement migration. Such foreigners are usually privileged in the sense that they are given legal rights to entry which other potential migrants may not receive. (source: Górný & Kepinska, 2004)

Statistics of Multicultural Marriages

- Multicultural marriages in Finland are defined as marriages between a foreigner and a permanently residing citizen of Finland
- Of all foreigners living in Finland who are married, 47 % have a Finnish spouse

Marriages

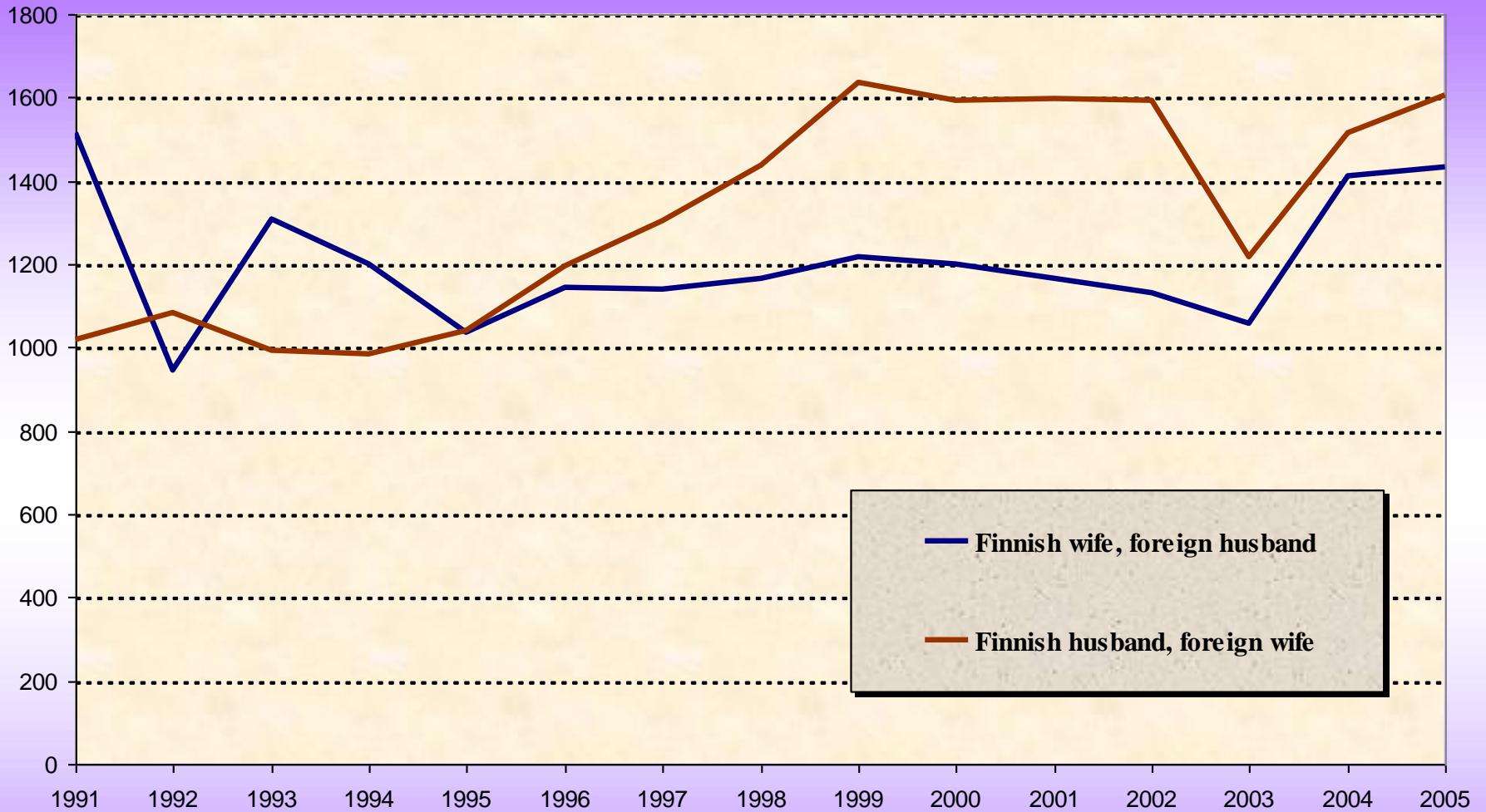


Figure 1. Marriages of Finnish citizens with foreign citizens in 1991 - 2005 (Statistics Finland 2006)

- Among the Finnish men their wives are most often Russian or Estonian citizens (Table 1)
- The next most frequent marriages have involved Thai or Former Soviet citizens.
- Of the Western wives' countries of origin, Sweden and the United States are frequent

- Of the Finnish men who have married foreigners, those with the highest average level of education have Chinese wives
- The next highest average level of education is found in the case of men whose wives are French, Hungarian, and Japanese
- A lower average level of education is observed among men whose wives are Estonian or Russian citizens

Table 1. Marriages between Finnish men and foreign citizens, 1992-2003.

(Source: SVT 2004).

Wife's country of citizenship	1992		1995		2000		2003		1992-2003	
		%		%		%		%		%
Russia	-	-	381	36.6	614	39.0	391	32.1	5,245	33.5
Estonia	173	16.0	168	16.1	208	13.2	125	10.3	2,308	14.8
Thailand	75	6.9	74	7.1	150	9.5	151	12.4	1,376	8.8
Former U.S.S.R.	427	39.4	18	1.7	5	0.3	4	0.3	612	3.9
Sweden	49	4.5	52	5.0	54	3.4	37	3.0	512	3.3
U.S.A.	44	4.1	41	4.0	36	2.3	26	2.1	425	2.7
Philippines	19	1.8	30	2.9	25	1.6	18	1.5	347	2.2
Other	296	27.3	277	26.6	484	30.7	466	38.3	4,827	30.8
Total	1,083	100.0	1,041	100.0	1,576	100.0	1,218	100.0	15,652	100.0

- Among Finnish women the majority of spouses came from the United States, Turkey, Great Britain, Sweden, Germany and Morocco (Table 2.)
- In contrast with Finnish men, for Finnish women foreign spouses are most often Western.

Table 2. Marriages between Finnish women and foreign citizens, 1992-2003
(Source: SVT 2004).

Husband's country of citizenship	1992	%	1995	%	2000	%	2003	%	1992-2003	%
U.S.A.	68	7.2	118	11.4	122	10.3	82	7.8	1,408	10.3
Turkey	110	11.6	84	8.1	90	7.6	96	9.1	1,243	9.0
Great Britain	53	5.6	70	6.8	116	9.8	108	10.2	1,044	7.6
Sweden	61	6.5	62	6.0	91	7.7	80	7.6	959	7.0
Germany	47	5.0	63	6.1	69	5.8	71	6.7	800	5.9
Morocco	64	6.8	34	3.3	52	4.4	18	1.7	589	4.3
Russia	-	-	31	3.0	39	3.3	29	2.7	394	2.9
Italy	33	3.5	23	2.2	21	1.7	20	1.9	331	2.4
France	22	2.3	15	1.5	19	1.6	32	3.0	342	2.5
Canada	14	1.5	23	2.2	21	1.7	28	2.7	254	1.9
Switzerland	9	1.0	21	2.0	20	1.7	10	0.9	230	1.7
Estonia	12	1.3	20	1.9	26	2.2	17	1.6	243	1.7
Egypt	27	2.9	21	2.0	12	1.0	8	0.8	211	1.6
Bangladesh	23	2.4	12	1.2	9	0.8	10	0.9	207	1.5
Yugoslavia	9	0.9	22	2.1	10	0.8	19	1.8	196	1.4
Other	392	41.5	417	40.2	470	39.6	429	40.6	5,239	38.3
Total	944	100.0	1,036	100.0	1,187	100.0	1,057	100.0	13,690	100.0

- The most highly educated Finnish women are those whose husbands come from the Netherlands, Great Britain, France, Germany, and the United States
- The least educated women tend to be those whose spouses are from Tunisia, Morocco, Estonia and Japan.

- For a long period of time, Finnish men have had the highest divorce rates from Estonian, Thai and Former Soviet spouses (Figure 2.)

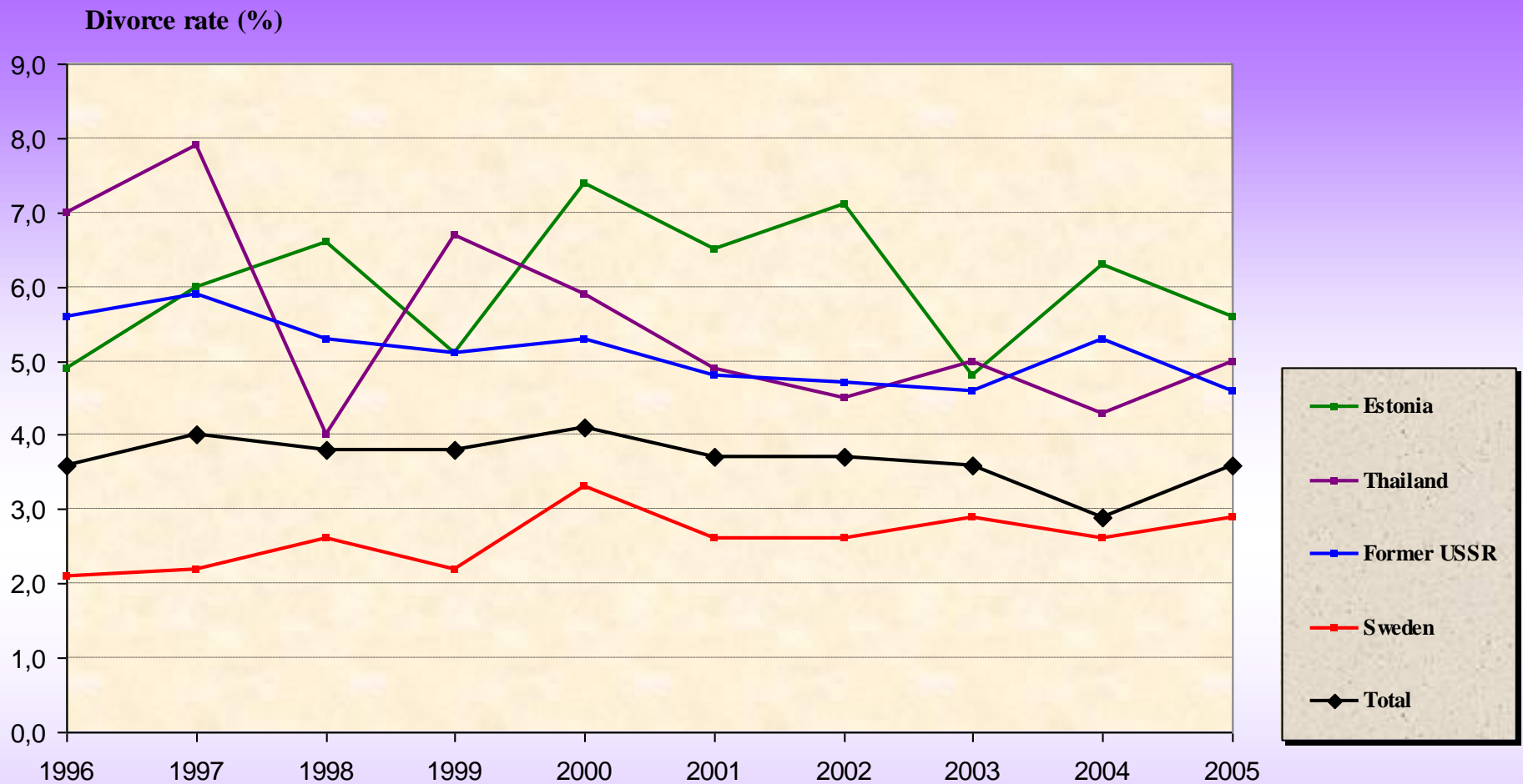


Figure 2. Divorce rates of multicultural marriages (%) for Finnish men, according to wife's country of origin in 1996 - 2005 (Statistics Finland 2006)

- Divorce rate for Finnish women has been the most noticeable in the case of men born in Morocco and Turkey

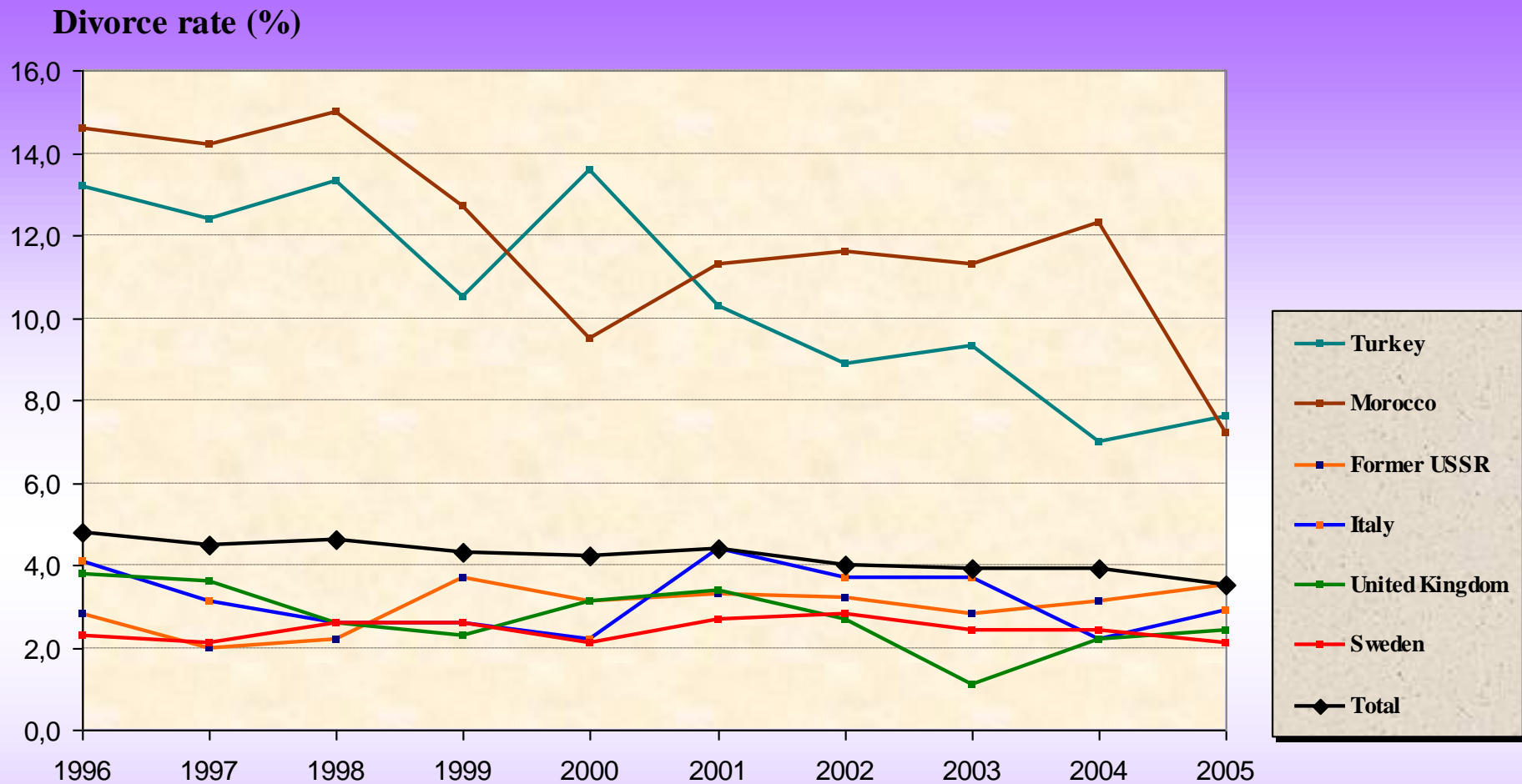


Figure 3. Divorce rates of multicultural marriages (%) for Finnish women, according to husband's country of origin in 1996 - 2005 (Statistics Finland 2006)

- The average number of divorces is clearly greater in the case of multicultural marriages (2003: 3.6 %) than in marriages in which both spouses were born in Finland (2003: 1-3 %)

The Dynamics of Multicultural Marriages

- Four phases within a multicultural marriage
- The beginning consists in an *admiration phase* characterized by a sense of "us" and the falling in love with difference
- This phase of admiration may last longer than usual in a multicultural relationship

- The second, or *active adaptation phase* occurs when a couple's life together begins to seem more ordinary
- All relevant to this phase are conceptions and expectations of roles, the manifestation of power-relations, and the division of responsibilities

- *Re-evaluation phase*, of both the marriage and one's whole life up to the present, constitutes a multicultural marriage's third phase
- Not until this phase will a person be able to consider a spouse against the spouse's cultural background and thus distinguish personal and cultural traits from one another
- Divorces occur most often during the second and third phases

- In the fourth, or the *objective adaptation phase*, comfortable solutions have been found for the most fundamental problems
- The most applicable ethnic characteristics form together an identity of their own and become a "third culture" shared by the couple

In a multicultural marriage, the following topics can be sources of disagreement:

- 1) **Values:** what is or is not acceptable; what is important or less so
- 2) **Meals:** what type of food and drink to be consumed, its preparation, mealtimes, table manners, and so on
- 3) **Sexuality:** birth control, virginity, family honor, premarital relations
- 4) **Gender roles:** each spouse has his/her own ideas about how the other should behave
- 5) **Friends:** it is recommendable to find friends who are also in multicultural marriages, with whom one can share experiences
- 6) **Relatives and in-laws:** different conceptions of the family, a patriarchal family, etc.
- 7) **The upbringing of children:** upbringing approaches differ according to religion and nationality

(Viertola-Cavallari 2004; Interracial Marriages 2005).

Everyday Experiences Within Multicultural Marriage

- Low-wage jobs or unemployment cause economic dependence on the Finnish spouse
- Moreover, the disorientation experienced in a new environment leads to informational dependence
- The language barrier is another challenge; often in the beginning of a marriage, the couple uses a language foreign to both, such as English or German
- Loneliness and language difference are major problems among women who have come to Finland because of marriage
- Many immigrant wives suffer in silence, nor are they always aware of their options. They may not know when and from whom to seek help

Conclusion

- Development of a so-called "EU-marriage" has been suggested
- Basic language training can begin in the foreign spouse's country of origin, before he or she moves to Finland
- Also, the foreigner should, as soon as possible, become informed about Finnish society and his/her basic rights
- Though there is no formula for the success of a multicultural marriage, adopting an open and realistic attitude from the beginning the relationship will prevent many conflicts and misunderstandings.