

21 Efforts to establish an imam-training programme in Finland

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Abstract

This chapter describes the process of creating an imam-training programme in Finland. Finnish Muslims and Finnish Muslim NGOs took the initiative to establish imam-training programmes after conducting a survey of imams' religious and societal training needs. It turned out that the majority of imams in Finland have some Islamic training, but it is still very basic. The imams indicated that they would welcome a Finnish training programme that would enhance their ability to work in local mosque organizations. After the survey, a limited training programme has already started, aiming mainly at enhancing imams' leadership and societal skills.

Keywords: Islam in Finland, imam training programmes, Tatars, Church State relations, NGO's

1 Introduction

Finland is unique among the Nordic countries in being the home of a small Tatar Muslim community since the 1870s; Muslims have only settled in numbers in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden since the late 1960s. The situation in Finland has, however, changed since the beginning of the 1990s, when immigration began to grow rapidly, new Muslim communities began to emerge, and pan-European debates and policy developments concerning Islam also came onto the scene. Whereas the historical Tatar Muslim community had generally not relied on external help but had organized its affairs internally, there is now an increasing number of external influences being exerted on the new Muslim communities (Martikainen, 2013b).

Muslims in Finland are at a crossroads, with different agendas being put forward by a variety of actors. Besides the issue of transnational Islamic movements, particularly in Europe, there are other key developments such as state interventions into Muslim affairs and interreligious activities with other religious traditions. As has been argued elsewhere (Martikainen, 2013b, 2014), two significant features of many of the processes concerning Islam and Muslims in Finland are the new set of actors that have only recently become interested in Islam-related topics and the changing organizational environment in which this is taking place. There is little in this new environment that can be understood through the historical relations between church and state; instead, a new constellation of religious, civil society, and state organizations and networks has emerged. In the current academic literature similar developments have been noted in other Western countries with Muslim communities (e.g., Laurence, 2012).

The aim of this chapter is to present an outline of the ongoing efforts to establish imam-training programmes in Finland. The chapter starts with a brief history and overview of Muslims in Finland. Then it presents the background, methodology, and results of a study conducted on imams in Finland in 2012–2013. This is followed by a description of developments until the spring of 2017. The chapter ends with a discussion of the possibilities of an eventual imam-training programme in the Finnish context.

2 Muslims in Finland

The history of Finland shares much with its neighbouring countries of Sweden and Russia. Finland was an eastern province of Sweden from the thirteenth century to 1809, when it was annexed into the Russian Empire as a Grand Duchy. Finland remained part of Russia until 1917, when it declared independence in the aftermath of the October Revolution. Whereas there are only individual mentions of encounters with Muslims during the Swedish period, this changed during the Russian era. The Russian Empire was a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state, and its subjects were often dispersed across different regions through military, administrative, and commercial activities. The first Muslims to arrive in Finland in any great numbers came as part of the military. While historical records are incomplete, it is known that there were military imams serving soldiers from at least the 1830s onwards. It is also likely that they occasionally permitted Muslim civilians to participate in their religious activities (Halén and Martikainen, 2016).

The first records of more permanently settled Muslim civilians date from the 1870s, when Tatar Muslims from the Nizhni Novgorod region southeast of Moscow started to seek commercial opportunities in the Grand Duchy. The community gradually grew and, though numbering only in the hundreds, spread to several Finnish localities during the latter part of the nineteenth century with the help of an evolving railway network. Initially military imams also served the Tatar community, but in time they started to take care of their own religious activities. The October Revolution and Finland's subsequent independence from Russia in 1917, combined with the increasingly closed borders between Finland and Russia's successor Soviet Union from the 1920s onwards, led to the end of Tatar immigration to the country. After Finland liberalized its religious policies in its new constitution (1919) and passed the Act of Religious Freedom (1922) that made it possible for any religion to apply for state recognition, the Tatar Muslim community applied for recognition and received it in 1925. Over the first half of the twentieth century the Tatars created an effective infrastructure for the support of their own identity and the transmission of their culture, the Islamic faith, and the Tatar language. Their imams came from either within their own ranks or abroad, particularly from Turkey and Tatarstan. Since the 1970s, and especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Finnish Tatars have sought to revive their relationship with their ancestral roots (Halén and Martikainen, 2016). The main characteristics and developments of the Tatars have been well documented and there is a rich body of literature on them in both the Tatar and Finnish languages (Bedretdin, 2011).

Until the 1980s, the Tatars were the only Muslim group in Finland that had mosques and mosque associations. Arabs living in Finland as professionals, students, and the spouses of Finnish women founded the first non-Tatar Islamic society in 1986. The situation started to change quickly after the beginning of the 1990s, with the increase of immigration to Finland. The reasons for this increased immigration were mainly external to Finland, and were related to changes on the world political scene and post-Cold War migration flows. The main migration flow has been that of UNHCR-quota refugees and asylum seekers, and associated family reunifications. To a lesser degree, international students, marriage migrants, and professionals have also played a role in the growth of Muslims in Finland, as have conversions. Tatars, who were the dominant Muslim group until the 1980s, are today a small minority of some 600 individuals compared to the estimated 60,000-65,000 Muslims living in the country in the early 2010s (Pauha and Martikainen, 2014).

Thus the majority of Muslims in Finland are first-generation migrants, often with a refugee background, who arrived during the 1990s and 2000s, and increasingly their Finland-born children, the second generation. The first non-Tatar mosque community – the Islamic Society of Finland (*Suomen Islamilainen Yhdyskunta*) – was founded in 1986; today there is a nationwide network of some sixty mosque associations, and many other Islamic associations that cater for the religious needs of the Finnish Muslim population. The most notable representative association, the Islamic Council of Finland (*Suomen Islamilainen Neuvosto*), was founded in 2006 as an umbrella organization to represent a collective Muslim voice (Pauha and Martikainen, 2014).

The Finnish Muslim population is diverse in its ethnic composition. The largest group is Somalis, who numbered 16,000 in 2013; Arabs (mainly from Iraq), Kurds, Turks, Kosovo Albanians, Iranians, and Bosnians all have constituencies in the thousands. As with immigrants in general, the majority of Finland's Muslim population lives in the Helsinki metropolitan area and in a few larger cities. The population has a youthful demographic structure and higher than average fertility, which in combination with continuing immigration implies that their share of the total Finnish population will gradually grow. People of Muslim background constituted a little more than 1 per cent of the Finnish population of 5.5 million in 2013 (Pauha and Martikainen, 2014).

Issues related to the growing presence of Muslims in Finland have emerged in the national political arena in the 2010s to a greater degree, as there has been new political mobilization against the rise in immigration and the related increase in cultural and religious diversity. In the parliamentary elections of 2011, several candidates known for having anti-Islamic views, particularly candidates from the ranks of the *Perussuomalaiset* (the Finns Party, also known as the 'True Finns'), were elected to the Finnish parliament. After the parliamentary elections of 2015, the Finns Party is also included in the coalition government. In the Nordic context, Islam is still a relatively minor political issue, but due to some Finnish Muslims having joined the ranks of Islamic State in the conflict in Syria it is becoming increasingly controversial (Pauha, 2015).

3 The imam-training survey

The Finnish civil society organization *Kulttuuri- ja uskontofoorumi FOKUS* (Forum for Culture and Religion, FOKUS),¹ conducted a study of imams

1 FOKUS is an ecumenical civil society organization that supports and promotes peaceful dialogue between religions and cultures by providing information and creating open forums for

in Finland from June 2012 to March 2013 in cooperation with two Muslim umbrella organizations, Visioforum and the Finnish Muslim Union. The results of the study were published as a report *Imaamit Suomessa: Imaamikoulutusselvitys 2013* (Imams in Finland: Imam Training Report 2013) in June 2013 (Latvio, Mustonen, and Rantakari, 2013). The aim of the report was to assess the educational background of imams working in Finland and their needs for further training. The study was based on a questionnaire and personal interviews conducted with the chairpersons of mosque associations and imams in these associations. To provide a background to the public debate, the report also included information about the role of imams and their education in some Muslim and European countries. The report was the first stage of a project aiming to improve imams' vocational skills and functioning in Finnish society. As the report has been published only in Finnish and is therefore not accessible to international readers, the key content of the report is summarized in this chapter.

3.1 Background

The immigration of Muslims is a significant aspect of the growing religious diversity in Finland over the past three decades. Together with the increasing politicization of certain religious questions that are often, but not only, related to Islam, has made the Finnish government, public authorities, and other significant actors more attentive to religious questions (Martikainen, 2013b). The challenges posed by migrant religious groups have been seen in Finland in the light of both pan-European debates on religion and immigration and national experiences. This has led to the gradually increasing recognition of the particular needs of migrant religious communities. One particular initiative worthy of mention is the Dialogue for Integration: the Engaging Religious Communities (DIRECT) project, which was run by the Helsinki Regional Office of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), an intergovernmental body, in 2010-2011. The DIRECT project mapped out research on the role of religion in migrant integration; it also conducted brief seminars for religious leaders, and legitimated a religion-specific focus on immigrant integration. It was one of the several networks that brought

ecumenical and interfaith encounters via discussions, exhibitions, art, and publications. It has pursued contacts and cooperation with international organizations such as Religions for Peace, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), and the Anna Lindh Foundation. FOKUS coordinates a network of actors that jointly organize the celebrations of UN World Interfaith Harmony Week in Finland. For more information on FOKUS, see <http://www.kulttuurifoorum.fi>.

together different actors in the field, such as academics, civil servants, and the representatives of religious organizations in Finland (Martikainen, 2013a). According to the DIRECT project report, religion may play a positive role in the integration of immigrants. Religious communities and societies guide and help immigrants in matters such as employment, education, civil rights, language training, the schooling of children, and family life. Counselling and guidance that is available immediately on arrival in the new home country may promote a sense of belonging and the assumption of an active role as a citizen. The recommendations of the report include recognizing migrant religious communities as integration facilitators by providing them with political and institutional visibility and offering them better resources for information-sharing, referral, and capacity-building services (IOM, 2011).

In addition to such external pressures, in the interviews conducted for the report many Finnish Muslims also expressed their concern about securing well-trained imams and other religious personnel who are also familiar with the Finnish societal circumstances and legislation. Most of the imams are self-taught and work in challenging multilingual and multicultural communities. They are often recent immigrants themselves with only limited knowledge of Finnish society and culture. Finnish Muslims, just like the members of other religious communities, aspire to a wide variety of high-quality religious services that would enable them to deal with challenges arising in their social context. There have also been appeals in the media for imam-training programmes from political and religious leaders, who argue that a good command of the Finnish language and a working knowledge of the regulations of the surrounding society – in addition to those of one's own religious tradition – are also necessary from the point of view of integration and good ethnic relations. Moreover, as the state-sponsored training of elementary and secondary schoolteachers of Islam was already initiated by the University of Helsinki in 2007 (see Sakaranaho and Martikainen, 2015), having a publicly recognized imam-training programme in Finland also seemed plausible and possible.

The survey itself was the result of two seminars held in Helsinki in 2011 and 2012 during the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week.² These seminars discussed the situation of Muslim communities in Finland and the role and education of imams in both the European and Finnish contexts. The need for a comprehensive survey among Finnish mosque associations was acknowledged during the second seminar, since there was no

2 <http://www.worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com>.

systematic information available on the educational background of Finnish imams or on their needs for supplementary training. After consultations with different organizations it was decided that FOKUS would undertake the study in cooperation with the Finnish Muslim Union and Visioforum. The project received financial support from the Anna Lindh Foundation³ and was supervised by a steering group.⁴ Riitta Latvio from FOKUS was commissioned to conduct the empirical study and draft the report.

The starting point of the project was to look into the need for an imam-training programme in Finland as well as its various aspects and possible implementation. The emphasis was on charting the present situation and the needs and wants of mosque associations, and on how these requirements might be fulfilled even in the short term. In this task the first step was to gather information about the role of the imam in these associations, their responsibilities with regard to co-believers and society in general, and the educational background of the people who act as imams in present-day Finland. Another aim was to raise public awareness of what being an imam means in general and in Finland in particular. Finally, the project strove to initiate a discussion about training Muslim faith workers in Finland to not only improve their competence in answering the needs of their faith community, but also develop their communication resources and skills for engaging in dialogue with the surrounding society.

3.2 The survey

The main research questions in the imam survey were: How are imams trained elsewhere in Europe and in Muslim-majority countries? What kind of training do the imams who are active in Finland have, and where did they obtain it? Do they require more training, for example more in-depth

3 This was the Common Project Action 'Do We Need Imam Training in Finland?' (2012-2013) of the Finnish Anna Lindh Network.

4 The steering group was chaired by Ambassador Ilari Rantakari (Chairman of FOKUS and Finland's UNAOC Focal Point), with representatives from the Finnish Muslim associations Abdessalam Jardi (the Finnish Muslim Union) and Pia Jardi (Visioforum and the Islamic Council in Finland); two imams (Tariq al Hidaya Imam Walid Hammoud and Imam Ramil Belyaev from the Finnish Islamic Congregation); two experts on education, Professor Tuula Sakaranaho (University of Helsinki) and Pekka Iivonen (the Finnish National Board of Education); and the executive director of FOKUS, Mrs. Satu Mustonen. This steering group was responsible for informing the Muslim community about the survey and providing contact information for the associations. It also commented on the research plan, questionnaire, and interview questions, the seminar preparations, and the draft of the report as well as the list of consulted authorities, organizations, and scholars.

theological study of Islam or more knowledge about Finnish culture, language, and society? If so, how could imam training be feasibly arranged in Finland? The study was carried out among the associations that have either registered as religious Muslim associations in Finland or have a mosque or prayer house at their disposal, around 60 in all in 2012.

The first stage of the project involved the development of a questionnaire that was sent to both the chairs of the mosque associations and their imams. The chairs were asked to provide background information about the association, such as its year of foundation, the size of its membership, and how many imams it had; what kind of training the imams had had in the past; and whether the association wanted to become involved in developing imam training in Finland. In subsequent interviews with the chairs of the Muslim organizations, the current practices of recruiting and educating imams were further surveyed, including the chairs' views about the kind of education that would best cater to the needs of their communities. The purpose was to gather views on the present situation and future needs, particularly about arranging basic or supplementary imam-training programmes in Finland. The questionnaire for imams comprised questions about the responsibilities and role of imams in Finnish Muslim societies, the current levels of education – both religious and secular – of the imams, their experience as imams both in Finland and elsewhere, their language skills in Finnish, their labour market status, the needs of the associations, and the views of the imams themselves about what kind of training would best serve them and their associations. Thirteen chairpersons answered the questionnaire and fifteen chairs were interviewed, representing in all nineteen different mosque associations as some chairs participated both in the questionnaire and interview. Twenty-two imams answered the questionnaire, representing nineteen different mosque associations. Some questionnaires were not answered in full. Information was obtained from twenty (i.e., one-third) of the Finnish mosque associations.

3.3 Results of the survey

Of the mosque associations that participated in the survey, four had an educated and experienced imam from the time of the association's foundation, but most (at least ten out of nineteen) mosque associations have a history of using self-taught imams. Additionally, mosque associations indicated a practice of calling trained visiting imams from Muslim countries for teaching, consultation, and to conduct ceremonies, especially during Ramadan. Five of the mosque associations reported that it had not been

as much a question of choosing an imam as of persuading those with the greatest proficiency in the Arabic language and thorough knowledge of Islam to fill the role. Later on, two of these five mosque associations had been able to choose an imam with some education from among the youngsters who had gone to study abroad in Islamic countries.

Seven of the interviewed chairpersons made clear that education and knowledge of the Islamic sciences alone are not sufficient criteria for being elected as an imam in their community: the individual's personality, views, and conduct also matter. They preferred imams with strong morals and devotion to Islam and with moderate values, rather than either extremely conservative or liberal ones.

With regard to the required level of knowledge of Islam, the chairs prioritized a good knowledge of the Quran and Islamic law. The chairs commonly held that where Islamic and Finnish law were in conflict, imams should teach the members of the faith to live according to the regulations of the Finnish legal system.

Of the imams that participated in the survey, five had worked as an imam elsewhere before coming to Finland. Some had attended courses given by visiting imams and scholars in the Finnish mosques (six out of nineteen), but did not have a coherent religious training. Twelve imams claimed that they had the requisite educational training to work as an imam, but of those two stated that they had acquired that training by participating in lectures in their own mosque. Three answered that they did not have proper training, but had attended some courses offered by their mosque and seminars in Finland or abroad, or had taken correspondence courses. Hence most of the imams (ten out of nineteen) either did not have a coherent theological training or were self-taught. One third had an academic education in one field or another, and some had acquired this education in Finland.

Ten of the imams had lived and worked as an imam in Finland for over ten years. The majority (fourteen) had another occupation to live on; four were full-time students. All but one imam worked unpaid and irregular hours for the mosque – some for only a couple of hours, but most (thirteen) for over twenty hours per week. Twenty of the imams thought they would be able to find some free time to attend a training programme, but because of other commitments would not be able to engage in full-time study.

Only two imams expressed doubts about a possible Finnish imam-training programme, of whom one suspected that qualified teachers could not be found; the rest liked the idea. The most popular topics for possible supplementary training programmes were academic Islamic studies and Finnish law (74 per cent), followed by courses in Finnish history and society, family

consultation, and leadership training (68 per cent). They also prioritized studies in Finnish and communication skills (63 per cent), for instance to be able to deliver a *khuṭba* (Friday sermon) in Finnish or to better represent their community in public. Nearly all (nineteen) asked for the courses to be organized by a tertiary education provider. It was suggested that concerns about the legitimacy of the training in the eyes of future generations could be resolved by using imported scholars, especially if Muslims themselves chose them. Three imams felt that the tasks performed by an imam towards his brethren should not be remunerated, because being an imam is not seen as a job, but as an act of devotion, religious duty, and service to God. However, two others emphasized that it should be a position in which it was possible to earn a living for oneself and one's family, and which would thus be a full-time appointment.

Of the interviewed chairpersons, all but two expressed a moderate measure of acceptance of the idea of organizing imam-training programmes in Finland. All of the chairs thought that they could participate in the development of a Finnish supplementary training programmes. At the same time, the majority held that the so-called Islamic sciences should also be studied, or even entirely acquired, abroad.

In conclusion, the results of the study show that the surveyed mosque associations would prefer fully trained and qualified imams, and they welcome the idea of educational programmes for imams in Finland. A functioning religious community needs good spiritual leaders, teachers, and counsellors. If the Muslim community is to preserve and continue its practices, there needs to be a sufficient number of people trained in Islamic doctrine, law, and tradition who are able to transmit these to the Muslim community and the generations to come. The surveyed mosque associations attached particular importance to this last aspect of the education. Further, the survey displayed nearly as much demand for training in Finnish language, society, culture, and law as training in Islamic subjects.

3.4 Models for imam-training programmes

The study also looked into existing imam-training programmes in Europe and some Muslim-majority countries and gathered experiences by networking with European experts.⁵ Examples from Egypt, Iran, Morocco, and Turkey

5 Networking with European experts included participation in an international evaluation seminar of the Dutch imam-training programme at the Inholland University of Applied Sciences in Amsterdam, as well as direct contacts with universities that provide imam training and with

were briefly described, noting for instance that there are few educational programmes in Muslim countries dedicated to educating imams only; instead, the most commonly recommended forms of education for imams are Islamic schools and universities, which offer a wide range of Islamic studies. Of the students who graduate with a degree in Islamic studies, only a few end up serving as imams; others take up positions teaching Islam in private or public schools, work within government departments of religious affairs, or advance to become scholars or muftis. A deep knowledge of Islam and classical Arabic is a requirement for Islamic studies at the university level in Muslim countries. In several Muslim countries there are both state-owned and independent mosques, and the functions and requirements for imams at each kind of mosque can vary greatly. The state may specify the selection criteria for imams in the state mosques, while independent mosques can define their own criteria when recruiting an imam. In Turkey and Morocco, the state has developed specific programmes for educating imams (see Borrillo and Hashas, Part I).

Five European countries were chosen as examples of different approaches to providing imam training: state-organized multi-faith training for religious leaders in Norway; state-organized non-theological supplementary training for imams in Sweden and Germany; state-organized vocational and theological imam training in the Netherlands; and private imam training in Islamic seminars with accreditation in universities in the United Kingdom.

Norway. Instead of religion-specific programmes, Norway has opted for a multi-faith training programme for immigrant religious leaders with the aim of offering a more thorough knowledge of Norwegian society and improving their ability to function within it. The training programme is called *Being a Religious Leader in Norwegian Society*,⁶ and it was designed and launched in 2007 by the Faculty of Theology of the University of Oslo. Representatives of various faith communities, the Islamic Council, the Buddhist Association, the Baptist Association, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Council for

scholars who have worked on the topic. We wish to thank Mark Chalil Bodenstein, Ron Geaves, Karin Klausing, Göran Larsson, Oddbjørn Leirvik, Johan Meulemann, Rimke van der Veer, and Kari Vitikainen for helpful comments and for providing research and other material on European imam training. Requests for cooperation with education providers were sent to those countries who are represented by embassies in Finland, i.e., Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia, to gather information about imam training in Islamic or Muslim-majority countries. The countries included in the report are those that responded to this request. In addition, the imam training systems of Turkey and Iran were reported through the help of a colleague, Mr. Kari Vitikainen.

6 <http://www.tf.uio.no/studier/evu/kurs/relleder/english>.

Religious and Life Stance Communities were directly involved in the planning process, at the end of which each faith community was granted a quota and asked to nominate candidates for the first round of the programme.

The training programme takes one-and-a-half years to complete and consists of three modules: (1) Religion, Norwegian legislation, and international human rights; (2) Moral and religious counselling; and (3) Values, religious plurality, and interreligious dialogue. Among the participants, the largest groups were Muslim leaders, most of them imams, and Christian clergy from different denominations. The Norwegian Islamic Council recruits the Muslim participants. The feedback from students has been positive. The Norwegian model is appealing because it treats all of the minority religions equally and as such does not involve the stigmatization of any single religious group through assignment of the training. It also includes many of the subjects that were requested by the Finnish imams in the survey, although it does not provide the required training in the Islamic sciences.

Sweden. In 2008–2009, the Swedish government commissioned an enquiry on the question of a government-supported training programme for imams (Larsson, 2009). The enquiry concluded that the Swedish state should not support a specific training programme for imams. The chief impediment was that the Swedish state should be confessionally neutral, and therefore a specific training programme should not be required for any single religious group. Furthermore, it was argued that a training programme targeted at imams only might signal that Muslims present a problem for Swedish society and need training more than other religious groups. Other reasons for turning down imam-training programmes arose from the results of the survey: imams were not asking for a specific programme for religious training, but instead mainly for education about tackling social issues and to acquire language skills. There were also misgivings about imams being able to agree on any one imam training programme that would be capable of uniting all branches of Islam (Larsson, 2014).

Consequently the Swedish government has not provided any theological training programme for imams,⁷ although they may avail themselves of already-existing government language training for immigrants. Additionally, folk high schools (colleges) in Sjövik and Kista have provided some supplementary training for imams.⁸ The Ibn Rushd Educational Association⁹

7 This, however, is no longer the case, since Sweden launched a state-funded one-year programme in Islamic theology and leadership in Kista Folk High School in the autumn of 2016.

8 <http://www.sjovik.eu/> and <http://kistafolkhogskola.se>.

9 <http://www.ibnrushd.se>.

also offers courses on Islam in its curriculum. Recently, the Swedish Commission for Government Support for Faith Communities has started short multi-faith leadership courses focusing on social studies, the history of religious communities in Sweden, family law, and youth studies.¹⁰ According to Göran Larsson, most of the Muslim leaders were content with the decision and considered a Swedish imam training programme undesirable (Larsson, 2014). In a personal communication with the author of this chapter, Larsson recommended that, should Swedish (and Finnish) Muslims like to set up a private institution for the training of their leaders, the training of priests in the Swedish free churches might present a viable organizational model. Implementation of that option is still quite a distant prospect, considering the size and economic resources of the Finnish Muslim community (see Larsson, Part I).

Germany. In Germany, Islam – unlike Christianity and Judaism – has not yet achieved the status of ‘a public law corporation’, which would allow for numerous benefits including the teaching of its theology in state-funded universities. The confessional teaching of religion is, however, a legally guaranteed right in Germany and training programmes for teachers of Islam have been instituted in many universities since 2000 onwards. In 2010, the University of Osnabrück started a supplementary training programme for imams and spiritual advisers that included studies in German language, society, history, politics, and law, as well as community pedagogy, immigration sociology, and vocational skills for faith workers.¹¹ In 2010 and 2011, the German Ministry of Education chose four new universities to host a department or institute for Islamic theology: Münster/Osnabrück, Tübingen, Frankfurt/Giessen, and Nürnberg/Erlangen. It is hoped that these new forms of training will fulfil the training needs of German Muslims. The new theological programmes have been very successful, but imam training has still not been professionalized.

The Netherlands. In the Netherlands, where there is quite a large (5 per cent) Muslim minority, the government initiated an imam-training programme with the aim to train imams who can speak both Arabic and Dutch and can take part in interreligious dialogue, working as a bridge between the Muslim community and Dutch society as a whole (Boender, 2013). The Inholland Imam/Islamic Spiritual Worker Training Programme commenced in 2006 and was developed as a joint initiative of three partners:

10 <http://www.sst.a.se/sstsuppdrag/kompetensutvecklingfortrossamfundsledare.4.4c4b074714116bocfa29f60.html>.

11 <http://www.islamische-theologie.uni-osnabrueck.de/studium/lehrprogramme.html>.

In Holland University of Applied Sciences, several mosque umbrella organizations (the Milli Görüs 'National Vision' Turkish diaspora organization, the Netherlands Islamic Federation (NIF), The Islamic Centre Foundation in The Netherlands (SICN), the Union of Moroccan Muslim Organizations in the Netherlands (UMMON), and the World Islamic Mission (WIM)), and, in the background, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The study programme contained the Islamic religious sciences such as the study of the Quran, hadith, and fiqh, units relating to contemporary Western and, in particular, Dutch society, religion and modern society, monotheistic religions and interreligious dialogue, multicultural society and diversity, and training in various professional skills such as communication skills and pastoral counselling. Students could choose between three graduation specializations: imam, Islamic spiritual worker, or Islamic pedagogical worker (Meuleman, 2012).

This programme faced challenges related to questions of legitimacy, imam training in a secular context, and the diversity of Dutch society. The most serious question concerned how to combine traditional Islamic sciences with a Western academic educational concept. The programme's adopted background model of Christian theological training was eventually questioned by both students and teachers. Some of the students were also not accustomed to reading and producing academic texts; in consequence, students who had expected confessional studies became demotivated and dropped out of the programme. It was also felt that a period of 3-4 years was not sufficient for learning traditional Islamic sciences as well as other subjects. The graduates had difficulties finding work: having been taught allegedly by the 'orientalists', mosque associations would not readily accept them, while Dutch social praxis demanded multi-religious workers or general spiritual workers only (Boender, 2013).

The international evaluators of the programme felt that partnership with Muslim organizations was not sufficient, and that Inholland University of Applied Sciences should prioritize certain subjects, outsource Islamic studies to Muslim organizations, and introduce branded lectures by respected Muslim scholars as visiting lecturers. For the better employability of the students, major and minor degrees (e.g., major in law and minor in Islamic studies) were also suggested. The programme stopped taking in new students after 2013. The experiences of the Dutch programme make it clear that the training of imams in a European context should not be based on pre-existing Christian models.

United Kingdom. Muslim faith leadership training in the United Kingdom is provided by more than thirty private Darul Uloom (a form of traditional

Islamic school in India; see Ali, Part II) seminars and institutes, which follow a curriculum of *manqūlāt* ('traditional Islamic religious sciences') and *ma'qūlāt* ('rational sciences'). The degree usually also includes study abroad. These seminars have been criticized for being conservative and hindered by strategies of isolation, not being able to cope with the requirements of modern secular British society, and being split along ethnic and theological divisions. The study of theological and spiritual issues should be combined with courses on Islamic pastoral care and counselling and courses for contextualizing Islam in contemporary society (Geaves, 2008). However, many of the seminars are now engaging in partnerships with the British higher education system, leading to the accreditation of their qualifications.¹² An interesting development has been the creation of British Muslim chaplaincy roles in public sector institutions such as hospitals, prisons, universities, and the armed forces, and accordingly the creation of chaplaincy-training programmes (Gilliat-Ray and Ali, 2013; see Ali, Part II).

In comparison with the United Kingdom, the Finnish Muslim community is small and on its own does not have sufficient economic resources to set up private institutes for imam-training programmes. The Muslim population in the United Kingdom is large and long established, but it is split along several ethnic and theological divisions, such as the Deobandi and Berelvi Muslims (both of South Asian origin). This also relates to one of the concerns voiced by Finnish Muslim leaders: they would like to avoid the splitting of the Finnish Muslim community along ethnic lines as a result of the creation of separate training institutes for different ethnic groups sponsored by their countries of origin.

To conclude: European imam training programmes, whether organized by the private or public sector, by the Muslim community itself, or as part of the national system of education, all face challenges of credibility and legitimacy from either within the Muslim community or the authorities – or both –, as well as a lack of career opportunities for the students; all of these factors indicate a lack of sustainability. Countries with old or well-established Muslim minorities, such as the United Kingdom, usually have in-community training, but this training often reflects the views of a particular ethnic or political group or religious sect, and is not accepted by the wider Muslim community. Many Muslim scholars still choose to educate themselves in

12 Examples: The Markfield Institute of Higher Education, Leicestershire, <http://www.mihe.org.uk/mihe/index.php>; The Muslim College, London, <http://www.muslimcollege.ac.uk/>; The Islamic College, London, <http://www.islamic-college.ac.uk/> (Larsson, 2009).

Muslim-majority countries, and many Muslim organizations continue to recruit their imams from those countries.

4 Ongoing preparations for imam-training programmes in Finland

After completion of the survey, a follow-up project involving the same partners looked into the different options available for developing an imam-training programme in Finland. A comprehensive training programme leading to a degree was discussed with the representatives of universities in Finland, but that would be a long-term project requiring years of study and planning. A viable short-term option is the planning of supplementary training for imams and other Islamic faith workers. The approach of this follow-up project has been to plan and prepare for two separate supplementary training programmes: first, a non-denominational training programme concerning the Finnish and European legislative, cultural, and social context in relation to Muslim faith and culture; and second, religious training in the Islamic sciences and spiritual guidance.

The non-denominational component of the supplementary training would comprise a basic knowledge of Finnish history, its social service systems, the role and functioning of the civil society sector, and the Finnish way of life. Study modules would also include tuition in the Finnish language and communication skills, as well as mediation skills, religious counseling, and leadership training. Finnish legislation and international agreements and instruments would constitute a module of its own.

In planning the religious element of the supplementary training there is a need for a dialogue within the Muslim community to learn the common wishes and needs of its members. It is also important to take into account the diversity of the Muslim community. With the help of international experts in the Islamic sciences, this module's contents could be customized according to the varying needs of the participants. Some modules could also be implemented outside of Finland. Special attention would be given to women, both as part of the Muslim community and as spiritual workers in Muslim societies (i.e., as *murshidāt*, see Borrillo, Part I). The aim of the training would be to enable them to work as guides and educators in their respective communities.

Between 2013 and 2015, work was also done to identify possible education providers and other cooperating partners, including partnerships with universities in Muslim and European countries. These negotiations led to a collaboration with the Helsinki Diaconia College and the moulding of

the non-denominational part of the supplementary imam training into a pilot leadership-training programme for Muslim faith workers that is open to both men and women. Resourcing has been a critical issue and has to some extent delayed the planning and preparations for this training programme, but its implementation got underway when some funding for the non-denominational part of the training was secured from the Finnish Ministry of Education in autumn 2015.

The pilot programme was carried out in the Helsinki Diaconia College during 2016. The goals for the training were to learn about the basic values on which Finnish society, culture, and legislation rest, to strengthen students' knowledge of Finnish cultural practices, and to acquire skills in social, religious, and cultural dialogue and civil society involvement and thus support religious leadership in the Finnish milieu. The nine-month course comprised short periods of tuition (altogether fifteen days) with independent work through web modules, facilitated by tutoring. The contents of the training corresponded with the plan described above, except for the Finnish language classes. Studying through the Finnish language was a challenge to some of the students, but their participation was facilitated by enhanced tutoring and allowing the occasional use of English and Arabic in course assignments. Of the twenty participants enrolled in the course – imams, chairpersons, and active members of mosque societies – ten finished the course, including three women.¹³

The feedback from the students that finished the course was positive; they felt that they could utilize the information and skills gained from the course in their work in the Muslim associations. Of the course contents, information about the structure and service systems of the Finnish society, project planning and other organizational activities, management, and conflict resolution were particularly appreciated. The course also strengthened the networks of future Muslim leaders and their involvement in Finnish society – new skills were appropriated, for example through the development of meeting techniques; and two project ideas formed during the course were turned into concrete partnerships and project applications. State funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture allowed the implementation of the pilot leadership-training programme, but the continuation of the course is an open question. In the project report, Helsinki Diaconia College

13 The course participants were quite heterogeneous in terms of their academic, IT, and language skills. Some participants also faced problems in getting time off from their work or family to attend the training. In the feedback, the participants requested more precise information during the course recruitment process on the nature, contents, and requirements for the course. Testing of the applicants was also suggested, as some would have benefited from a pre-course to update their skills.

recommends turning the course into a multi-faith leadership-training programme in the future. Negotiations carried out with Morocco between 2013 and 2015 regarding the religious part of the proposed supplementary training have not born fruit.

5 Discussion

The study and planning process concerning initiating a programme of imam training in Finland clearly illustrates how a number of religious and civil society organizations have jointly created a platform for empowering Finnish Muslims through leadership education. Whereas the already well-established religious traditions and their various denominations, including the Tatar Muslims, have had effective structures of their own for the education and training of their religious leaders for a long time, the new Muslim communities in Finland do not have any such infrastructure to rely on. As the Finnish State, which otherwise finances and regulates many educational facilities in Finland, has not so far taken an active stance towards providing educational opportunities for Islamic education, there is a demand for other actors to fill the void.

The initiative has instead been taken up by an active civil society organization, FOKUS, which has fostered cooperation with selected Muslim organizations and individuals. A key problem has been finding the resources and a suitable format for the training. While the process is evolving rather slowly, FOKUS has nevertheless been able to conduct the preparatory work that is necessary for the eventual establishment of such a programme. FOKUS possesses a good understanding of how to effectively progress ideas in the context of an administrative environment that requires funding applications, networking, and long-term planning. It also has good societal networks, and its key individuals have valuable connections with the public administration that make the gradual development of their plan possible.

Without the support of FOKUS, or another organization with similar willingness to help, it would be difficult to find the right channels along which to proceed. Whereas the interests of the two different parties – Muslim associations and FOKUS – diverge to some extent, they share the common conviction that an imam-training programme would be beneficial for the Muslim community and for Finnish society at large. It remains to be seen how this initiative will continue to unfold, as it has to some extent been eclipsed by the plans for a grand mosque in Helsinki, but it is certain that in

the process new networks and alliances will be created that may eventually be used in other, as yet unforeseen contexts.

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