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Tatar language preservation and educational activities in Finland

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Tatar language preservation and educational activities in Finland

- Gölten Bedretdin, Finnish Islamic Congregation
- Sabira Stahlberg, independent scholar

ACTIVITIES

Abstract: *The Tatar community in Finland has for more than a century organised regular activities and education in Tatar language. These activities support and encourage the Tatar speakers from early childhood to old age to learn, use and transmit their language. Today the Islamic congregations in Helsinki and Tampere and the cultural and sports associations gather speakers from all age groups for many kinds of events and projects. For instance a kindergarten, weekend school, summer camps, sports and cultural gatherings, online meetings and a club for pensioners bring together Tatars not only from the Helsinki area but also from other parts of Finland and abroad. Earlier activities include a choir and theatre group; music and drama are still important elements in all Tatar events in Finland. The Tatar community further publishes learning materials, books and a magazine, Mähallä Habärläre 'Community News'.*

The Tatars in Finland have always followed very closely national and international social and technical developments, adapting their language preservation and support activities to a changing world; for instance, during the Covid-19 pandemic many events and activities moved into the internet. Present challenges reflect the tendencies both globally and in the Finnish society: securing the continuation of events and activities; developing and making Tatar events and materials more attractive to children, teenagers and young adults; providing interesting books and texts for reading and learning; and using new technologies to transmit the language to the following generations. This article, based on an in-depth interview with Gölten Bedretdin, chairwoman of the Finnish Islamic Congregation with several decades of experience in organisational work for the Tatar community in Finland, presents a general

overview of the current situation of the Tatar language preservation and educational activities in Finland. The topic and current period have until now been little documented.

Keywords: *Finnish Tatars, Finland, language support, language preservation, minority language, cultural activities, education, language transmission*

Finlandiya'daki Tatar dilinin korunması ve eğitim faaliyetleri

Özet: *Finlandiya'daki Tatar topluluğu, bir yüzyıldan fazla bir süredir Tatar dilinde düzenli faaliyetler düzenlemekte ve eğitim vermektedir. Bu etkinlikler, Tatarca konuşanların daha erken çocukluk döneminden itibaren dillerini öğrenmelerini, geliştirmelerini ve aktarmalarını desteklemektedir. Bugün Helsinki ve Tampere'deki İslami cemaatler, kültürel dernekler ve spor organizasyonları, çok çeşitli ortak etkinlikler ve projeler için tüm yaş gruplarından konuşmacıları bir araya getirmektedir. Örneğin bir anaokulu, hafta sonu okulu, yaz kampı, spor ve kültür toplantıları, edebiyat tartışma grubu ve emekliler kulübü, hem ağırlıklı olarak Helsinki bölgesinden hem de Finlandiya'nın diğer bölgelerinden ve yurtdışından Tatarları bir araya getirmektedir. Yapılan faaliyetler arasında bir koro ve tiyatro grubu bulunmaktadır; müzik ve drama, Finlandiya'daki tüm Tatar etkinliklerinin hala önemli bir parçasıdır. Tatar topluluğu ayrıca öğrenme materyalleri, kitaplar ve Mähallä Habärläre 'Cemiyet Haberleri' adlı bir dergi yayınlamaktadır.*

Finlandiya'daki Tatarlar, hem Finlandiya'daki hem de dünyadaki sosyal ve teknik gelişmeleri yakından takip ederek dili koruma ve destekleme faaliyetlerini değişen dünyaya uyarlamışlardır; Covid-19 pandemisi süresince etkinlikler çevrimiçi olarak düzenlenmiştir. Mevcut zorluklar Finlandiya'da ve dünyadaki genel eğilimlerle paralel gitmektedir: etkinliklerin ve faaliyetlerin devamının sağlanması, geliştirilmesi ve gençler ve genç yetişkinler için daha çekici hale getirilmesi, daha fazla okuma materyali sağlanması ve dili gelecek nesillere aktarmak için yeni teknolojilerin kullanılması. Farklı organizasyonlarda onlarca yıllık deneyime sahip ve Tatar topluluğu için çalışan Gölten Bedretdin ile yapılan derinlemesine görüşmeye ve ayrıca edebî kaynaklara dayanan bu makale, şimdiye kadar çok az çalışılmış bir konu olan Finlandiya'daki Tatar dili faaliyetlerinin mevcut durumuna genel bir bakış sunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Finlandiya'daki Tatarlar, Finlandiya, dil desteği, dilin korunması, diaspora dili, kültürel faaliyetler, dil eğitimi, dil aktarımı*

Introduction

For the Tatars in Finland the language is the basis for both individual and collective identities, “being Tatar”, and for all activities related to Tatars. The majority of the Tatars are proud of their language and the fact that this minority has kept its language for so many generations. There are already five or six generations born in Finland. Knowledge of the language is a prerequisite for participation in the community. All events and activities occur in Tatar and a good command of the language is needed to understand and participate in them. This has not changed much for the past century, ever since the first generation began organising education for their children and religious, cultural, sports and other events in Finland. The members of the Finnish Islamic Congregation in Helsinki and Tampere Tatar Congregation together number today less than a thousand persons. Many young Tatars marry outside the community, a trend which creates new challenges for transmitting the language and culture. At the same time modern technology and internet-based communication can offer previously unknown opportunities.

This article focuses on the current language preservation and educational activities which so far have been very little studied and documented. It is structured along the life cycle of a Tatar in Finland, from birth to adulthood and old age. This general overview with historical retrospections is by no means exhaustive in details – a full description would require a book. Language comes with culture, religion, traditions and a community, and these aspects must be taken into account in any research about the Tatars. Many more studies should be carried out to cover the field of their activities both in history and today. Earlier research about Tatars in Finland chiefly concerns the history, origins and formation of the community. The present has received less attention (see Belyaev 2017; Halén & Martikainen 2016; Baibulat 2004; Leitzinger 1996 and 2006; Bedretdin 2011). Further, the question of how much the surrounding society and global developments have influenced the development of Tatar activities in Finland should be studied. In addition to activities created by the Tatars themselves, many activities have been inspired by or received impulses from outside and several have been carried out with the help of individuals or groups who do not belong to the Tatar community. The dialogue between the Tatar community, the Finnish society and global networks and developments still awaits description.

The article is based on Gölten Bedretdin’s experience with Tatar activities in Finland, first as board member and now president of the Finnish Islamic Congregation in Helsinki (founded in 1925), her earlier work as president of the cultural association FTB and the sports club Yolduz, and a lifetime of Tatar language activities. The information was provided in an in-depth interview. Fazile Nasretdin and Shamil Nasretdin kindly checked facts and contributed additional information and photographs, for which the authors are very grateful.

I. Early childhood

Language support for Tatar children in Finland begins immediately when the child is born. The Finnish Islamic Congregation in Helsinki provides since 2008 the parents of a newborn child with a package containing literature for children, CDs with Tatar music and other Tatar language materials, pictures, games, religious literature, etc. The model for the *Sabıylar sandığı* 'Baby box' comes from the Finnish social security system. It donates a "maternity package" with baby clothes, bedding, care products and other materials to expectant mothers. The Tatar box supports not only the language but also the transmission of traditions, culture and religion.



The contents of the "Baby box" for Tatar children

Kindergarten

A Tatar kindergarten gathers every week on Saturdays in Helsinki. Kindergarten activities exist at least since the beginning of the 1950s. The children are aged 3–6 and they take part for three or four hours in a multitude of activities. Each week the pedagogical and playful programme is different. Mothers and young women from the community are the main teachers, but lately also the Tatar language teacher is present; a minimum of two adults teach every time. During this common Tatar language time the children have the opportunity to meet others of a similar age who speak the same language. It is very important for the children to understand that Tatar language is not only their grandparents' or parents' language, but that it is spoken by other children, too.

Communicating in Tatar in this informal setting encourages the children to talk and have fun together, both important activities which support the development of their Tatar language skills. Tatar-speaking children often live in different parts of the city or outside it. Because of the geographical distances

they have less opportunities to play and meet with other Tatar children. In their surroundings and daily life the main languages are Finnish and Swedish and often also English or some other language. Most children who visit the kindergarten nowadays are multilingual and able to use at least three languages. Playing together raises interest in the Tatar language and motivates the children to speak and use more Tatar. They also gain self-confidence when using the language together with others of the same age (peer learning). The children create lifelong friendships, feel that they belong to the Tatar group and thus they become socialised in the community from a very early age.

The day programme varies, but it usually starts with a more active part like games. Then the children use their hands and creative skills, for instance for painting and drawing or handicrafts. Then a very important part follows: the interactive fairy tale reading. The story is read aloud by the adults and the children join in the telling by commenting on the story, asking and answering questions. Music, singing and dancing are also present in the programme every week. Finally the children eat together, an act of commensality and sharing (for commensality in the Tatar context, see Svanberg et al. 2020). At the end of the day the children again have free time for playing and games.

Celebrations

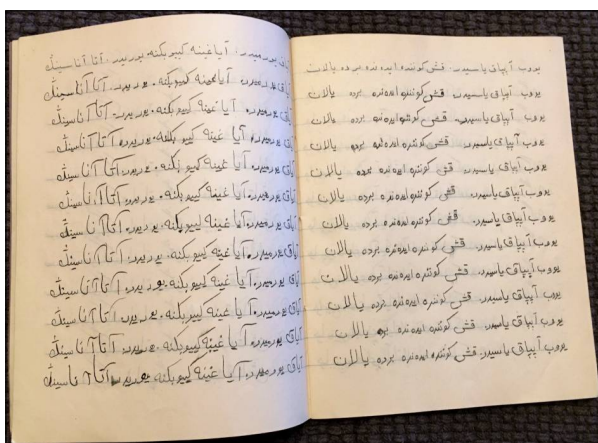
Once a year in the spring, usually to commemorate the birthday of the Tatar poet Abdulla Tukay (1886–1913) in April, a festivity is organised for the Tatar community in Helsinki, *Balalar B y r me* ‘Children’s Celebration’ or *Balalar K   se* ‘Children’s Evening’. During the evening the children in the Tatar school and also the children from the kindergarten present their own programmes, for instance a song, reciting a poem, telling a story or something else.

All children from the kindergarten are required to perform from a very early age before an audience. The goal is to help them gain the experience and self-confidence to stand up and talk or sing before others already before school age. This is very important for their future: performing before family and friends in the Tatar community is a secure way for the children to acquire the necessary experience for developing their presentation skills. Today such skills, and also good communication skills and a stable self-confidence are required both in higher education and work life not only in Finland but in many other countries as well. Providing this kind of training already in the kindergarten gives the children the chance for better job opportunities in the future.

II. School and education

A positive attitude to education existed already among the Mishar Tatars before they migrated from the Sergach region in Nizhny Novgorod province, Russia, to the Grand Duchy of Finland at the end of the nineteenth century (for their history and migration see Halén & Martikainen 2016). Learning was encouraged for both boys and girls. Teaching children in Tatar in Finland was arranged already before the establishment of the Republic of Finland in 1917. Formal education began however only in 1948 in Helsinki with the so called Turkish Elementary School, *Türk Halık Mektebi*. This school received the official status of an elementary school. In the 1950s there would be even 15–20 children in one class only, but the school had to close in 1969 due to a lack of pupils. Since then extracurricular education is arranged once a week to teach children of school age the Tatar language and Islam. When Tatar-speaking children start going to elementary school at age seven in Finland they also participate in the language and religious lessons organised by the Finnish Islamic Congregation.

Today each age group gathers just a handful of children born in the same year and sometimes groups must be combined into a joint class. The reasons are partly demographic: in the post-World War II period there were many more children everywhere in Europe and also in Finland. Now the population is ageing and shrinking. Another reason is that due to their many hobbies, modern children in Finland are very occupied. Less strict parents might also allow the children not to attend class if the children do not wish to. Missing studies has a high potential of backfiring, however: when the children grow up and realise that their language skills are lower than other Tatar speakers', they often blame their parents for not being persuasive enough (compare Stahlberg 2020: 22–23).



*Habibü Sadik's school notebook
for training the Arabic script in the 1930s*

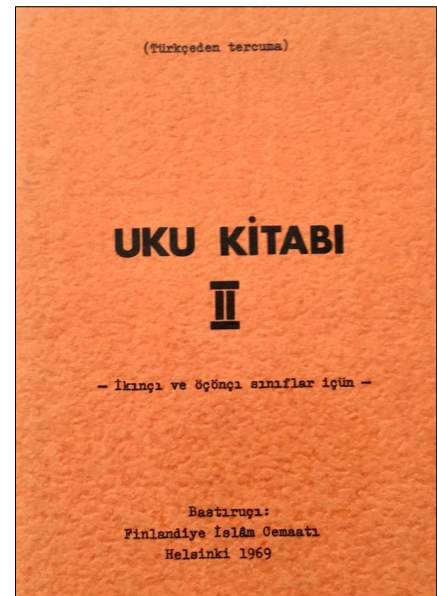
In Tampere, the teaching also started at the beginning of the twentieth century, but formal Tatar language courses were launched by the teacher Gibadulla Murtasin (1895–1968). He taught among others Tatar and Islam between 1923 and 1941. The teaching took place three evenings per week. Six years provided a full education. After Murtasin other teachers took over and in the 1950s the courses gathered around thirty students who studied the Tatar language both in Arabic and Latin letters. The school years ended usually with a celebration and “exams” when adult community members

asked questions of the children, thus testing their knowledge. Also summer courses were organised. Today there are few children in Tampere and they participate mostly in the summer camps arranged by the congregation in Helsinki (see below).

The Tatar community in Tampere has not only published educational materials and books but also collected Tatar and Islamic literature from different countries. This caused the teacher and Jadidist (reformist Islamic) scholar Musa Bigi (Bigeev) already at the beginning of the twentieth century to call Tampere a “Muslim library in Finland” (see Baibulat 2004: 69–77).

Language and religion

Children attend the language and religious classes until they are 16 years old.¹ The Tatar language teacher and the imam of the Finnish Islamic Congregation are the main teachers. From time to time also members from the congregation participate as extra teachers. In the Finnish school system religious or ethics education is obligatory. Those pupils who belong to the Lutheran Church receive Christian education at school, but everybody else must either receive teaching in their religion outside school or participate in ethics or “life stance” classes (Finnish *elämäkatsomus*, Swedish *livsåskådning*) arranged by their school. The Tatar pupils attending the Islamic education at the congregation once a week do not need to be present at the ordinary school lessons for religion or ethics, because the teaching they receive compensates for these classes.



Tatar language reader, Finnish Islamic Congregation, published in 1969

The Finnish school system is still focused on Lutheranism as the main religion in society. This attitude is seen as too traditional and conservative to increasing numbers of Finnish citizens.² The society has changed much in the past few decades and any citizen in Finland encounters today many other faiths they need to gain at least some understanding about. To acquire a broader perspective and knowledge not only about other religions but also about ethics,

1 Until recently, the year when the young person turns 17 was the end of compulsory education. From autumn 2021 compulsory education in Finland is extended until the student turns 18 years old.

2 A Finnish website for those who want to leave the Lutheran Church, <https://eroakirkosta.fi/> informs that between 2000 and 2020 close to a million Finnish citizens have resigned from the Church.

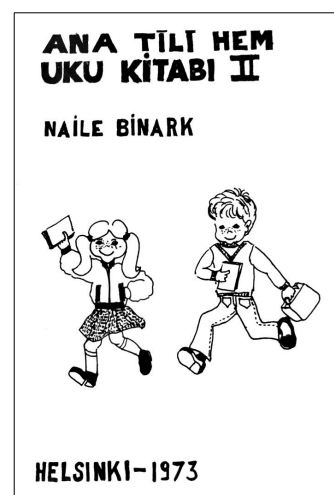
moral issues, etc., all children should receive at least some basic teaching in other ways of thinking and perceiving the world. In the Tatar community awareness is rising that Tatar children must learn not only about Islam but about other religions, too, in order to understand Finnish society and the globalised world we are living in.

Schoolbooks and educational literature

The Tatar congregations in Helsinki and Tampere have published a large amount of schoolbooks and created dozens of educational materials for the courses in Tatar and religion during the past century. When necessary materials are missing, the teachers prepare educational materials themselves. In the early decades of the twentieth century Arabic script was used, but from the 1930s also Latin script was taught until the latter replaced the Arabic script in the 1960s in the education. The Cyrillic script used in Tatarstan and among Tatars in Russia is not used in Finland, and only some individuals of the Finnish Tatar community are able to read Tatar texts in Cyrillic script.

Books printed in Tatarstan are also used in Finland and several have been adapted to the local needs and conditions. The modern books are mostly multilingual. The Finnish Islamic Congregation in Helsinki has published a six-part language learning series recently, *Ana tele* 'Mother tongue' 1–6 (2016–2020). The latest book, *Äkiyätlär ilendä* 'In the fairy tale land' (Alis et al. 2020), was published in Tatar, Finnish and English. Most schoolbooks and educational materials are created in Finland, however, often by the teachers themselves. For instance Derya Samaletdin's workbooks *Künegüler* 'Exercises' are used for language and word learning especially during the summer camps.

These publications are mainly targeted at younger readers, but also youth and adult learners can benefit from them. A serious challenge today is to produce fiction and literature in other genres for children and especially for teenagers, which they can read also outside the educational context. Encouraging children to create good reading habits in the Finnish majority society, where the numbers of readers and interest towards reading books are decreasing, is an issue also the Tatar language education must solve (for Tatar literary activities in Finland and reading habits in Finland, see article by K. Bedretdin; for new projects, see article by Stahlberg & Nasretdin, in this issue).



Naile Binark's language teaching materials, prepared by the teacher in 1973

Summer camps

Tatar summer camps have been organised for almost a century in different locations, for instance Terijoki in Karelia (now Zelenogorsk, Russia), Järvenpää, Hyvinkää and Mäntsälä (1968–1987), and before 1940 also together with Estonian Tatars (see article by Lepa, in this issue). For thirty years Villa Träskkulla in Kirkkonummi (Kyrkslätt) hosted the summer camps. This educational centre near Helsinki was the property of the congregation until recently. In 2020 Villa Träskkulla was sold and also no summer camp could be arranged due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and in 2021 the camp was arranged at another location.



Gibadulla Murtasin teaches grades III–IV at the Turkish Elementary School in Helsinki in 1959

The early Tatar summer camps gathered children and youth for a complete month. At some point the camps were shortened to two weeks and nowadays the camps last for ten days during the summer holidays. The goal of the summer camps is to bring together young Tatars from Finland and abroad (several participants arrive also from other countries). The programme varies each year, but the main elements remain the same: the Tatar language, Islamic faith, folk music and dance, singing, drama, culture, sports and other activities are traditionally included in the summer camps. The children and youth learn, talk and work together, but there is also enough free time to have fun and to form friendships and connections which will be of use for them in the future. This also strengthens the Tatar community, language and culture in Finland and worldwide.

A special music teacher joins in the camp, in addition to the language teacher and the imam from the Finnish Islamic Congregation, and parents and members of the community act as supervisors and staff. The children and youth attend classes, prepare plays and recitals of *Qur'an* suras, poetry, songs and dances. In these performances at the end of the camp the pupils show what they have learned about the Tatar language, culture, traditions and Islamic religion. They also participate in sports, such as gymnastics, swimming, football etc., and they cook and prepare traditional food together, for instance *peremech* (Tatar pastry). The camp ends with a *Sabantuy* (summer festival) celebration when usually more than a hundred persons, parents, relatives and members of the Tatar community arrive for a day of joint activities. They take part in all kinds of competitions and games and watch the children and youth perform, and enjoy eating and talking together.



After a theatrical play, Tatar pupils performing were photographed in their costumes together with their teacher Halife Husnetdin in 1960

After age 16, the young usually disappear from Tatar community activities. They must discover by themselves and with the help of friends and families different ways of being together using the Tatar language. They must also construct their own identity and life; this is a very busy period for them. A religious scholarship aimed at teenagers has gained quite a lot of attention among the young, but except this there are no activities to attract teenagers and young adults to the Tatar community. They create their own networks within and outside the community, study, find jobs and establish families. Many

young Tatar adults do not appear again until they have children of their own and want to give them the chance to learn the language and enjoy the company of other Tatar children in the kindergarten, weekend schools and camps. Then they often again become interested in Tatar activities.

III. Cultural activities

For adult Tatars there are events organised by the cultural associations and the congregations. The cultural organisation FTB was founded as *Finlandiya Türkleri Birliği r.y. (Suomen turkkilaisten seura, 'Association of Finnish Turks',* today simply FTB) in 1935, a time when the majority of the Tatars in Finland called themselves (Northern) Turks. This organisation was previously more active than today. It had for instance a theatre group of more than thirty actors and a choir with over forty participants. FTB also invited famous lecturers, academicians and musical directors from Finland and Tatarstan for events. Earlier it arranged two or three celebrations each spring and autumn season with more than 200 participants who enjoyed all kinds of cultural programmes. For Tatar plays and musicals the association could even hire the prestigious Swedish Theatre in Helsinki to accommodate the big audience (compare Belyaev 2017: 139–142). The festivities of FTB were usually on Saturday evenings. Afterwards the younger participants often went together to a restaurant and many Tatar couples met for the first time during these informal meetings.

Tampere Türkler Birliği (Tampereen Turkkilainen Yhdistys, 'The Tampere Turkish Society') was also founded in 1935. Like FTB it arranged festivities and activities for preserving the Tatar language, culture and religion. Also youth meetings, folk music, drama, celebrations commemorating the poet

Abdulla Tukay, lectures, singing, handicraft and other creative activities were present in the yearly programme, as well as visitors from other towns in Finland and abroad (Baibulat 2004: 140–160). Today the Tampere Tatar Congregation is responsible for most of the activities in the town.



Tatars in Finland have been active especially since the 1970s in making Tatar culture known to the general audience. Among the events are for instance the Tatar Culture Days in Järvenpää just north of Helsinki (1974 and 1993) and a photo exhibition about Tatar culture by Aynur Nisametdin (1993) in Järvenpää. A documentary film about Tatars in three parts was created in 1992 by Aynur Nisametdin and Airi Valkama for the Finnish National Broadcasting Company (YLE) and broadcasted on the national TV. An exhibition of Tatar books was prepared in 2011 by Kadriye Bedretdin for the National Library in Helsinki. Other activities are for example concerts by visiting musicians, and recently a presentation of Tatar haiku poetry and a discussion about the Tatars as a minority in Finland at the Helsinki Book Fair in 2019 organised by Sabira Stahlberg and the multilingual publisher Bokpil.³

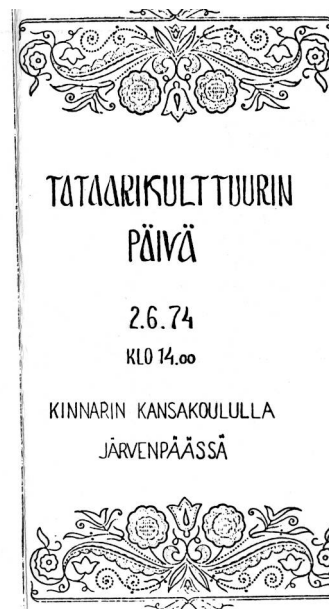


OHJELMASSA MM
 ESITELMÄ SUOMEN TATAAREISTA
 FIL. KAND. H. HALÉN
 ESITELMÄ TATAARIEN MUSIIKISTA
 FIL. YO M-L. MARJAMÄKI
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 KANSANTANSSEJA
 DIA KUVIA
 TEETÄ TATAARILAISTEN LEIVOINAIS-
 TEH KERA
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TUUSULANJÄRVI-TAPAHTUMA

 KERAVA-TUUSULA-JÄRVENPÄÄ



Invitations to the Tatar Culture Days in Järvenpää 1993 (above) and 1974. The programmes contained among others music, folk dances, lecture and presentations, exhibitions of photographs, literature and cultural objects, and tea with traditional sweet pastries. In 1993 also the mosque in Järvenpää was open for visitors.

3 Bokpil: <https://bokpil.eu>

Music, folk dance and cooking

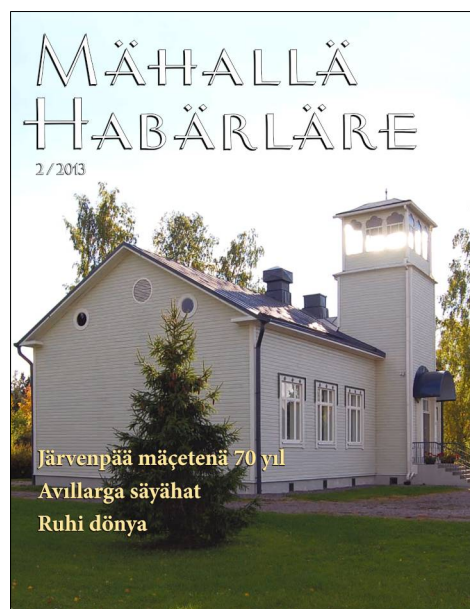
Today FTB usually arranges one or two major celebrations per year. Music and singing are always part of the programme. A recent project is gathering materials for a publication about the association's history. The *Foto-räsem tögäräge* 'Photo circle' has worked for five years collecting and identifying photographs and materials about Tatars in Finland. Sometimes also courses about Tatar culture are organised, among them folk dance and cooking. One of the most popular activities has in fact been a traditional Tatar cuisine cooking course. All age groups including youth have participated in them, and both Tatars and their non-Tatar partners have learned to prepare Tatar dishes.

A Tatar music group, *Başkarma*, was founded in 1985. This group has entertained both Tatars and the general audiences in Finland and abroad for several years. Dina (Abdul) Asis and Betül Hairetdin (vocals), Batu Alkara, Kerim Şakir, Deniz Bedretdin (acoustic guitars) and other members perform contemporary Tatar folk music in Finland. They have published three discs and collected the songs in 2002 on a joint CD called *Mişär Tatar – Halık Köyläre* 'Mishar Tatar – Folk Melodies' (Başkarma 2002). The songs can also be found on the internet.

Publishing

The Tatars in Finland have been active publishers of books, magazines and brochures in the Tatar language for more than a century (for a historical overview see K. Bedretdin 2011 and article about Tatar publishing activities, in this issue). The congregations in Helsinki and Tampere have focused on publishing schoolbooks and language teaching materials, while FTB has published several fairy tale books and song books for both children and adults.

The magazine *Mähallä Habärläre* 'Community News' is published by the Finnish Islamic Congregation in Helsinki. It appears again regularly since 2012 after a longer break. The magazine includes articles, interviews, educational materials and news about the community, its events and activities. A history of the Tatars will be published soon by



Cover of Mähalla Häberläre in 2013

the congregation. The aim of the book is to explain Tatar history especially to the younger members, showing the multiple origins and theories about who the Tatars are and where they came from. The book emphasises the international and multicultural aspects of Tatar language, culture and history. Documentary films published by the Finnish Islamic Congregation include *Mäçetkä iltkän yul* 'The way to the mosque' (2011) and *İzge miras* 'Sacred heritage' (2014, prepared by Ramil Belyaev, Fazile and Samil Nasretdin, and Mauri and Sirkku Kalima).

Besides the congregations and associations there are other groups like *SelkoTatar*, who translates and publishes books in Tatar Easy Language (see article about Easy to Read by Stahlberg & Nasretdin, in this issue) and *Yabalak* who publishes books and music. The book *Su anası. Vedenhaltijan kampa* 'The comb of the water spirit', a poem originally written by Abdulla Tukay, was published bilingually in Tatar and Finnish and parallel as an audio book by the Yabalak group (Tukay 2009). The Yabalak group has also published a CD with children's songs, *Äylän-bäylän* 'Ring game' (Yabalak 2007).

Sports

The popular sports club *Yolduz* 'Star' was founded in 1945. The club gathers especially young and adult Tatars for sport activities (see Belyaev 2017: 142–145). Hockey, football, bandy, badminton, tennis, skating, skiing, gymnastics and stretching, dancing and other forms of sports attract many participants. Some courses or activities are arranged once a week while other events are organised once a year, usually a week of multiple sports activities. There has also for instance been a samba course.

For the past forty years a winter sports week is arranged during school holidays in Pajulahti Sports Institute near Lahti, a famous winter sports town. Skiers among the Tatars have joined in a special ski weekend for at least a decade. In the summer the boys play football (European soccer). A football team existed previously and it played in the Finnish football league, but for the past five years the Yolduz team plays in the non-professional Finnish league with a reduced number of team members, as there are not enough players for a full team.

Sports are an important part of Tatar activities in Finland and participation begins already when the children are small with activities such as for instance the Children's Olympics, where both children and their parents participate. Also joint walks are organised, after which the participants go together to a restaurant and share a meal.

Pensioners

The most active members of the Tatar community in Finland are without doubt the pensioners. After working and raising a family, many elderly Tatars again find time to become active in the community. Since some 20–25 years the Nitro Club gathers every second week in the congregation premises in Helsinki. A minimum of thirty and often up to fifty-sixty pensioners turn up for the events. In most cases they just talk and share a lunch and coffee prepared by members. Sometimes there are lectures or discussions, but often the meetings have no topic and usually there is no need for a theme, as the members are very fond of discussing and exchanging news and opinions. The Nitro Club fulfils an important social function: here everybody can speak freely in Tatar. The club also gathers people who often know each other since childhood and have passed through all the phases from kindergarten through Tatar school to cultural activities in adulthood together.

Öyränü bervakıtta da soñ tügel.

It is never too late to learn.

Tatar mäkale / proverb

Online activities

The congregation in Helsinki keeps a multilingual website⁴ with information about Tatars in Finland, Islam and some materials and videos. In 2020 the Finnish Islamic Congregation turned 95, FTB 85 and Yolduz 75 years. These occasions were celebrated online through videos, music, talks, discussions and by providing information about their activities and history. The celebrations were hugely popular and a lot of participants from Finland and abroad followed them.

In the Finnish Islamic Congregation mosque in Helsinki, Friday prayers and Ramadan prayers are held regularly. During the Covid-19 pandemic and the social restrictions, the prayers were moved to the internet. The prayers are conducted in Arabic and the preaching in Tatar by the imam Ramil Belyaev. The congregation also arranges meetings about religious or Tatar-related issues, inviting online guest speakers and listeners from Finland and abroad, especially Russia and Turkey. Social media are also

4 Finnish Islamic Congregation website: <http://tatar.fi/>

used: a literary circle lead by the Tatar language teacher Kamer Yafay Nogmanov is active on the internet. The group reads and discusses books and language on social media.

Other Tatar language activities on the internet include Easy to Read e-books available on the Villa Bokpil website and information about and in Tatar Easy Language on the Bokpil website⁵ (see article by Stahlberg & Nasretidin, in this issue). The Yabalak website⁶ contains a useful dictionary of Finnish-Tatar and Tatar-Finnish prepared by Fazile Nasretidin and Raif Hairulla.

Web activities in Tatar are growing in Finland and also the website of the Finnish Islamic Congregation is being developed to contain more information and include support especially for Tatar-speaking parents. The Tatar community in Finland however needs to take the digital leap into the internet (see article on internet-based resources by Stahlberg, in this issue) in many more ways in order to attract and involve also younger Tatars.

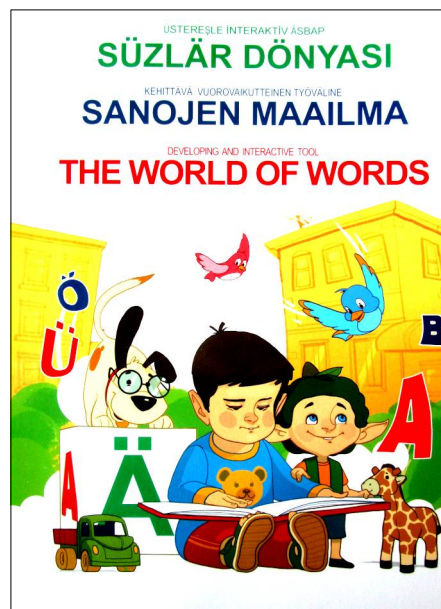
Perspectives

For more than a century and through several generations the Tatars in Finland have been successful in transmitting their language, traditions, culture and religion, but today the Tatar language faces many challenges: decreasing interest in reading among the youth in majority Finnish society, which reflects also on the young Tatars; less interest in traditional activities among the younger generation who prefers digital and social media, and a lack of organisers for events and activities. All work for the language, culture and traditions takes place on a voluntary basis. The younger generations have several other interests and hobbies competing with the Tatar community activities. To create more interest in Tatar language activities, new ideas and ways must be discovered and implemented.

The lack of organisers and today also the problem of few participants at events has become a problem in Finland in general, which traditionally has been a

5 Bokpil: <https://bokpil.eu/tt/> and Villa Bokpil: <https://villa.bokpil.eu/tt/>

6 Yabalak: <https://yabalak.fi/>



country of associations and hobby groups. A lack of time has become a major issue in the society and this reflects also on the Tatar events.

Tatar language is not obligatory at school, which means that children and youth need interesting and modern materials and activities to make the language important and relevant. Today many Tatars marry outside the community. Although non-Tatar spouses and partners often support the Tatar identity and language for the children, and respect and appreciate Tatar culture, it is not enough if there are too few activities and possibilities to use the language. Parents have today many more possibilities to offer reading materials and teaching the language at home than previously, as there are not only books and magazines, but also audiovisual and online materials. Language courses for spouses and partners of Tatars however usually start with five or six persons who are at first very active. After some time, just like in so many other language courses, the interest and the participants disappear.

If the Tatar parent actively teaches the language and the children participate in community activities and education, the next generation will continue to use Tatar in Finland. Previously the children from mixed marriages were not accepted, but presently around 1/3 of the children in the kindergarten and school have a non-Tatar parent. Differences in their language knowledge, compared with the children whose both parents are Tatar, are minimal or non-existent in the cases where the Tatar-speaking parent actively uses the language with the children. Many Tatar parents are conscious about their responsibility and transmit the language naturally to their children by communicating in Tatar from the beginning. For many it remains a family language and the pressure of majority language and foreign languages the children and young learn at school is very strong, but in Finland many young Tatars speak Tatar freely because they see it as their own language and they can use its richness to express themselves.

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**Cide yortniñ telen bel,
cide törle belem bel.
Learning seven languages,
you learn seven knowledges.
*Tatar mäkale / proverb***