Understanding GLOBAL CULTURES

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METAPHORICAL JOURNEYS THROUGH 34 NATIONS, CLUSTERS OF NATIONS, CONTINENTS, & DIVERSITY

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CHAPTER 8

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The Finnish Sauna

If sauna, tar, or alcohol doesn't help, you are sick to die.

—Finnish adage

What draws the Finns to the tango? "It's a bit melancholy," she said. "And that's the way we are."

Note. There are over 2,000 Tango Clubs in this small nation, where the tango and tango festivals are very popular, as explained by John Tagliabue of *The New York Times* (2013)

Finns are reverential about the sauna. In the glow of the softly lit wood-lined space, they chat jovially or fall into a comfortable silence. The heat makes one welcome a dip in ice-cold water or a roll in the snow, as improbable as that sounds. Food and drink afterward never tasted so delicious. There is etiquette which has to do with practical and safety questions, but generous Finns will walk you through it. As is their method of rearing children, it's a window to the Finnish psyche.

—Anonymous Finn (quoted in Kaiser & Perkins, 2005)

Finland is located between Sweden and Russia on the Baltic Sea and has a population of 5.4 million. There are 16.0 people per square kilometer in comparison to 33.4 in the United States. The gross national product (GNP) per head is US$48,810, compared to a U.S. GNP of $48,110. On the Index of Economic Freedom, which combines 10 sub-measures such as level of corruption and respect for property rights, Finland ranks 16 out of 179 nations, which means it is a very good place in which to do business. With 2 million saunas in Finland, the sauna density is clearly greater than that of any other country in the world. Most of the saunas are in the countryside, where 70% of the land surrounding the 60,000 lakes is forested. Finland also extends beyond mainland Finland into the Archipelago Sea with its 80,000 islands, which include the

self-governing, Swedish-speaking Åland Islands province. Throughout Finland both Finnish and Swedish are official languages. However, most mainland Finnish-speaking Finns, who have taken obligatory Swedish courses in school, have only limited competence in that language.

The sauna began in the forests as a hole in the ground with hot stones and evolved into a small log cabin. The sauna metaphor is functionally and symbolically related to local and nature-focused values and customs. Over time Finns have moved from an agricultural environment next to the forests into urban environments. Urban living became significant only in the 1950s. As Finland has moved from an agrarian to an urban base, the countryside has remained not far away and more like a backyard down the road for many Finns. The recent administrative change from 415 municipalities to 336 municipalities has not affected the relative location of towns and cities: 67 urban, 74 semiurban, and 274 rural. Helsinki is the largest city with a population of 591,112. Four other cities have a population close to 200,000 each, and 14 have more than 40,000 each. The Finnish government is currently integrating small towns into larger urban units to provide an economic base for improving social services.

The manifest or seemingly obvious functional roles of the sauna as a place of birth and physical cleaning during life and after death belongs to history, but the sauna's latent or hidden or symbolic roles have become an integrated part of most urban living units. Finns in urban places have easy access to saunas, which are frequently attached to homes or businesses. Small apartments are even integrating a modern "box" sauna into their limited living space. However, the dream and actuality of returning every summer to the sauna in a summer cottage have remained a key part of Finnish reality.

Saunas are located almost everywhere and play a role in the local social context, for example, as a family weekly ritual and as a gathering place for friends to discuss the local gossip and politics. The sauna is also used as a place both to relax and do business. As an illustration, Finnish businesspeople may well have a beer as they cool off after a sauna and then call clients to finalize business deals. Or they may discuss important business issues that they have had difficulty resolving during the regular workday. There are saunas in other nations such as Sweden and Ireland. However, the distinction between the manifest or apparent functional roles and the latent, hidden, or symbolic roles of saunas in Finland is distinctive, if not unique, and beyond comparison.

In this chapter, we employ the sauna as a cultural metaphor for Finnish values and practices. Using the sauna opens the door to an integrative discussion involving history, nature, the economy, social class structure, manager-subordinate relationships, communication norms, and so on. The three major themes associated with the sauna that we explore in this chapter are the transition from survival despite a harsh environment to political and economic success; apparent meanings and symbolic functions, that is, a secular "holy" place of equality; and communication and comfort with quietude.

As a Nordic and Scandinavian country, the Finnish welfare state overlaps with the Swedish metaphoric example focusing on the *stuga*. Finland has high taxes, universal health care, speeding fines related to income level, free education, and so on (see Chapter 7). Also, as equality-matching or egalitarian nations, Scandinavian nations have high scores in comparative rankings of nations on individualism and gender equality as well as low scores on power distance (see Hofstede, 2001; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). Hence this chapter focuses on those aspects of Finnish culture that differ from those of other Scandinavian cultures.

From Survival to Political and Economic Success

We begin with Finland's historical roots, which evolved into a Finnish Scandinavian society, and then turn to different aspects of Finnish culture where the sauna is often important. The roots of identity that are still active in the Finnish mind and culture are clearly the sauna, nature/forests, and survival, the last of which means that Finland has created political and economic competencies to achieve successful relations with both the neighboring countries that once ruled its territory and the globalizing world.

Whereas more than 90% of the world's nations are multiethnic, Finland is a relatively homogeneous country united by shared history, language, and religion. Finnish development has evolved via moving from "living at the mercy" of both nature and being politically dominated by other nations toward "living in harmony" with nature and a changing political reality.

This nation has experienced historical periods during which both a harsh natural environment and political domination by other countries, especially by Russia and Sweden, challenged it. It has turned these challenges into living in harmony with both nature and international political realities. Finland is a welfare society in which economic development has been a long-term process, bringing Finland to top international rankings as a very competitive, highly educated, and ethically outstanding society with a very low level of corruption. Its unique political history has evolved out of keeping the best from a centuries-long period of Swedish domination. For example, Finland maintained the Swedish legal system when it became part of the Russian Empire in 1809 as an autonomous region. It operated in a relatively independent fashion until it became a fully independent nation in 1917. During World War II, Finland defended itself against Soviet invaders, remained independent, and developed a postwar diplomatic rapprochement with its Soviet neighbor that allowed it to remain an integral part of Western capitalism and democracy.

History and Nature

To understand the roots of Finnish reality, it is important to begin with the relationship between "at the mercy of" and "in harmony with" nature. According to the mythic origins of the Finnish people, Väinämöinen, the poet eternal of the classic *Kalevala* songs, stood upon a barren island and asked Pellervoinen, the god of fields, to do the planting, sow the seeds, and sow them thickly in the treeless land (Friberg, 1988). The trees grew into forests. In the forest lived ancient Finnish tribes led by men and women alike. Historically the forest and nature have been the foundation of life for Finns. Finns are well aware of the saying "At the mercy of nature." They clearly recognize both the inherent limits and opportunities of living in harmony with nature. Over time the traditional myths related to the forest have become less influential, but the dream of most Finns is to have time in nature and to sauna close to a lake at least every summer.

Out of the forest grew the sauna and a nation of sturdy farmers and crofters or landless farmers who worked the land owned by someone else who were also "freemen"—in contrast to Russian serfs. They kept their noses to the grindstone, struggling against an arctic frontier and a difficult geopolitical-cultural frontier in which Russia was dominant. As children of the forest, Finns gradually carved out a zone of comfort by processing raw materials from the forest to sell on foreign markets—first tar and timber to European naval powers and later paper to European and American newspapers. Today Finland is a leader both in the paper and shipbuilding industries, and Finns build every fourth big cruise ship in the world.

Prior to the mid-1800s, the forest was easily interpreted as a primitive area with limited hope for economic development. However, technological innovations capable of turning natural resources such as wood into exportable products played a key role in Finnish economic evolution starting in the mid-1800s. These innovations also created a high demand for the resources that Finnish forests can produce, which has led to expanding Finnish paper-related production technology abroad. Being in harmony with nature—recognizing limits and opportunities—opened the door to long-term technical and economic development beyond reliance on nature-produced resources, even if organic agriculture is becoming more important in Finland.

If the forest represented the basis for and symbolism of innovation for a century and a half, the multinational, cutting-edge, high-technology Finnish firm Nokia created a symbolic message throughout Finland at the turn of the 21st century: Without innovation, there is no hope for economic success in a globalizing world for a small nation such as Finland. However, as noted below, Nokia has been experiencing great difficulty in recent years. Still, the message is clear: Living in harmony with nature now requires benefiting from the development of both Finnish human resources and technology.

History and Foreign Control

Finland has a long history of both living at the mercy of foreign domination and developing competence to create a successful degree of diplomatic harmony with other nations. The Swedes came from the west in the 12th century and gradually turned Finnish tribes into a subordinated part of Sweden for 700 years. After the Napoleonic wars in the early 1800s, the European powers redrew the map of Europe and transferred Finland from Sweden to Russia. Unlike other parts of the Russian Empire, Finland benefited from an autonomous status as a grand duchy and retained the laws and Protestant religion from the Swedish era, which differed from Russian feudalism and Russian Orthodox Christianity.

During this period of autonomy in the Russian Empire, Finns developed their own culture and political institutions in the land where they had always lived. In essence, they created a Finnish—neither Swedish nor Russian—identity. The Finnish parliament gave every Finnish adult (male and female) the right to vote and, if elected, to be a member of Parliament during the period of "Russification"—Russian attempts to reduce Finland's autonomy at the turn of the 20th century. This movement toward egalitarian democracy, which occurred here before it appeared in any other country, supported Finnish determination to keep its autonomous rights to govern local issues. "Before this reform 70% of all adult people were outside suffrage," Professor Borg, formerly of Finland's Tampere University and a member of Parliament in the 1970s, told BBC News (Smith-Spark, 2006).

Movement toward egalitarian universal suffrage was a critical way to develop a sense of national unity to defend Finnish autonomous rights. Johan Sibelius, the most famous Finnish classical composer, reinforced Finnish identity by employing nature-focused motifs and patriotism to bring home these points. His symphonic poem, *Finlandia*, is the major symbol of Finnish determination to resist Russification.

Independence

Finland finally became an independent nation in 1917 after the collapse of the Russian Empire and the rise of the Soviet Union. The Finnish Parliament declared its independence on December

6, 1917, and the Soviet government recognized Finland's independence on December 18. However, Finland was politically unstable, and a civil war occurred between the "**Reds**" representing the ideology of communism and the "**Whites**" representing the ideology of conservatism in the first half of 1918. The sharp and conflict-laden split between Reds and Whites also occurred in Russia. This civil war pitting Finns against Finns remains **the most controversial and emotionally loaded event** in the history of modern Finland.

After the civil war, the existence of a Soviet neighbor and possible revival of leftist extremism led to the **distribution of part of privately owned land to landless rural inhabitants**. At that time, the government believed that redistribution of farmland property was essential for preventing the growth of communism in Finland. One of the **unique** aspects of Finnish history is this **partial** land redistribution by conservatives, **in marked contrast** to outright land transfer and confiscation in communist countries to gain leftist support. Today many, if not all, **economists believe that widespread ownership of property is a key determinant** of successful economic development. Hernando de Soto (2000) titled his path-breaking exploration of owning property *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else*. Finland was decades ahead of many other nations because of land distribution to the landless.

After becoming independent in 1917, Finland slowly developed an economic infrastructure that made it possible to sell paper to the *New York Times*, which enabled Finland to be the only European country that paid its debts to the United States during the 1930s. The Finnish image of financial prudence was so powerful that one American newspaper published a picture of a man responding to a bill collector with the following question: "Who do you think I am, Finland?" (Berry, 1990, p. 53).

Just prior to World War II, Hitler "gave" the Soviet Union permission to "have" Finland. During the war, Finland claimed neutrality but was in fact allied with Germany and involved in the invasion of the Soviet Union. However, the Russian army defeated the Finnish army and confiscated some Finnish land, forcing 400,000 Finns or 11% of the population to move rather than be part of Russia. Still, Finland remained independent.

Against great odds Finland remained an independent country on the postwar Soviet border. It implemented a "**harmony with political reality**" strategy to move cautiously from "survival to success" (Jakobson, 1987, p. 7). The nation moved toward the West by emphasizing cautious "**sauna diplomacy**," sometimes even using the sauna as a place to find relaxation, goodwill, and some degree of equality between Soviet and Finnish diplomatic negotiators. For example, Kekkonen invited his Soviet counterpart to sauna where the two national leaders could free themselves, to some extent, from outside concerns. They discussed and sweated out problems in the sauna so that the Soviet Union and Finland would be in harmony, at least to some extent. The Soviet Union was **eventually ready in 1973** to accept Finnish membership in the European Economic Community. This was the predecessor to the European Union (EU), which Finland joined in 1995.

During the Finnish presidency of the EU in 2006, the concept of sauna diplomacy was still active: The Finnish minister of foreign affairs was encouraged to invite the Greek and Turkish sides of the Cyprus issue to negotiate in a Finnish sauna.

These descriptions might suggest that the sauna serves multiple functions, and it does. As noted elsewhere in the chapter, businesspeople finish a sauna with a beer and simultaneously conduct business over their mobile phones at the end of a workday. Further, it is hard to imagine the Russians and Finns negotiating in the sauna without at least consuming some alcohol.

Ironically, Finland has strict limits on the consumption of alcohol and tax it very heavily. As a result, taking an overnight ship to consume and buy large quantities of alcohol in nearby Estonia is quite popular (see Chapter 32). Thus there are several paradoxes centered on the sauna, namely that it can be a scalding but ultimately very relaxing experience, it can involve copious amounts of alcohol when businesspeople are finishing their work but the government discourages consumption, it can be a secular holy place of quietude but also a place for loud and boisterous fun, and so on.

The Strength of People

Throughout its history, Finland has been like a prickly juniper that bent when necessary but refused to break. Finland's strength has been in its people, particularly in their ability to accept limits when necessary and to maximize opportunity and cautiously move beyond those limits when possible. Shared survival against external political threats contributed to the creation of a social welfare society, successful economic development, a high degree of market competition, and a welfare state stressing social equality. In market-pricing cultures (for example, the United States and Great Britain), social welfare cohesion and competition are often believed to be a counterproductive combination. In contrast, an integration of social welfare cohesion and governmental policies stressing competitiveness has become the basis for Finnish success against external political challenges and international competition. Such success is distinctive in a nation with such a small population.

All this historical development required *sisu*—a combination of guts, determination, and optimistic realism with moments of pessimism to survive against great odds. Morrison and Conaway (2006) indicate that this word is extremely difficult to translate but is sometimes translated as "never say die" (p. 162). *Sisu* has served Finland well with its traditional collective meaning, but the current meaning of the term has changed, referring more to individual will and determination as, for example, when a Finn wins an Olympic gold medal after falling down during the race. The current meaning of the term has also broadened to include brand names ranging from powerful trucks to one Finnish candy product labeled *sisu*.

Finland is one of the few euro countries with an AAA rating. Nevertheless, Finland is currently experiencing some economic and political challenges related to both the great global recession that began in 2008 and the EU's efforts to prevent the economic collapse of some euro members. In the 2011 elections, a populist party increased its representation from 2.5% to 19.5%, and its platform included a call for an antieuro Finnish policy and less openness to immigrants. This party feels that the nation's money would be better spent on protecting Finnish social welfare. Nevertheless, the majority of the Finnish parliament is committed to the euro and willing to support other euro countries—but only if those countries accept stricter economic accountability and the private financial sectors carry a larger part of the burden. In contrast to Finland, some EU nations such as Great Britain and Sweden have retained their own currencies, refused to support fully the euro-crisis countries, and are not under the pressure common to nations that use the euro as their currency. Finns justifiably believe that within the limits imposed by climatic, economic, and geopolitical realities, they have historically done it all on their own, and they have performed spectacularly.

Given the Finnish communication norm that modesty brings respect, Finns will rarely make this explicit when communicating with people from other cultures. Pride must remain active but

under the surface. The Finnish saying "If you run away from a wolf, you will run into a bear" (Berry, 1994) resonates well with the deeply held Finnish value of finding ways to resolve seemingly impossible problems as soon as they appear and then to move forward. This fits in with Finland's new brand mission's focus on convincing Finns that they should become aware of and more actively communicate the strengths of Finland's culture to others, while remaining realistic about future challenges at home and abroad.

The Social Welfare State

An egalitarian sauna approach to diplomacy was integrated into the development of a social welfare state after World War II. Finland needed more children, healthy adults to work, attractive employment opportunities and wages to minimize the size of the small Communist Party in Finland, better education tied to future development, and a supportive governmental role in economic development. Today the differences between Finland and the other Scandinavian countries related to gender and social class equality are small. Still, there are other variations among equality-matching or egalitarian nations, including Canada and Germany (see Part IV). The GLOBE study (House et al., 2004) and the Hofstede study (2001) come to a similar conclusion about the uniqueness of the Scandinavian nations.

In 1871, writer and historian Zachris Topelius succinctly summarized the Finnish political objective, given its small size, harsh winters, and the desire to be independent of other nations: "To be neutral, to be self-sufficient, to have the freedom to look after one's own" (quoted in Mead, 1989, p. 15). Topelius's goals have been realized, as confirmed by international rankings of nations in terms of multiple indicators. Finland has consistently ranked at or near the top on each of them, for example, environmental sustainability; competitiveness; a low level of corruption; and the scores of 15-year-old students in mathematics, science, and reading.

The sauna, found around every corner, allows the Finns to relax briefly and build up energy among friends and fellow citizens before moving forward quickly once again to overcome almost overwhelming problems, which they have historically attacked with patience and vigor. As a result, the economy did not develop in terms of short-term responses to "quarter-to-quarter" stock market pressures. In the United States, small groups make decisions in a quick huddle and act on the basis of their best guess (see Chapter 15); in Finland the decision-making process is longer and more deliberative. Finland's president Tarja Halonen (2007) summarizes the Finnish innovative version of a "Nordic welfare society model": "In order to exploit the real benefits of research, we need to be patient and far-sighted and to invest in a sustained manner equally in education, science and technological development."

Sauna: A Secular "Holy" Place of Equality

Entering a sauna is often similar to entering a holy place full of the spirituality of nature. A Finnish proverb is that people should behave in the sauna as they do in church. The ideal associated with the sauna is a nonreligious cleansing of body and soul. Entering the sauna signifies leaving secular burdens and controversies behind, relaxing, and cleaning more than the surface of oneself. The sauna is, in effect, a secular holy place of equality. There is often a combination of privacy and togetherness that is taken for granted by Finns while being difficult for non-Finns to understand.

For example, Finns often share comfort with quietude in the sauna, but at other times they also talk about private matters or humorously joke among themselves in a good-spirited fashion. In short, Finns are people comfortable with both quietness and with talking in different ways. Taking an argument into the sauna corresponds to taking one into a church service, which Finns regard negatively. However, discussing the matter as equals in a nonemotional manner, either after sauna or during it, is acceptable and frequently leads to successful resolutions. In some cultures, nudity is associated primarily with sex. In a Finnish sauna, by contrast, nudity has nothing to do with sex but with relaxation and the cleaning of the body inside and on the surface.

The word *sauna* is the only Finnish word that is used throughout the world. It moved into the German language after publication of a sauna advertisement: "If you want to experience heaven and hell simultaneously, go to a Finnish sauna" (Laaksonen, 1999, p. 279). For a moment, one can be at the mercy of too much water thrown on very hot stones but also feel in harmony with the relaxation that follows. During a summer tour of Finland, Robert G. Kaiser and Lucian Perkins (2005) of the *Washington Post* wrote about the sauna in an article titled "Finland Diary" and presented an unqualified positive viewpoint: "This, our first sauna experience, was everything promised: We finished feeling refreshed and invigorated. The wrinkles and bumps caused by days of hard travelling quickly disappeared from our bodies." A description of the sauna does not end, however, with reference to throwing water on hot rocks to send steam throughout the sauna. The sauna is associated not only with roots in history and a secular "holy" place of equality but also with the expression of values that exist throughout Finnish society.

Sauna Practice

Many families grow up in the sauna. A weekly ritual tends to reinforce togetherness. All members of the family are together until the children are teenagers. Sauna is more than just a time together; it is also a time during which everyone learns to enjoy respecting the quiet of others, even if some would prefer to talk, and to have something nice to eat and drink after the sauna. Whenever the children return home as adults, it is common that the sauna is ready for them, especially in rural areas where it is heated with wood rather than electricity.

Sauna is a weekly ritual for many and even a daily ritual for some Finns, and it is an essential ritual for Christmas and midsummer when the sun is visible between 20 and 24 hours each day. To have a midsummer celebration with family and close friends beside a lake in the forest without a sauna is incomprehensible. Even if most families live in urban areas with access to sauna, bringing sauna and nature together is the decided preference for summer vacations. Vacations outside of Finland occur usually in the dark autumn and winter.

All people are equal when they enter the sauna, and there are no visible symbols of social status. In business, there is a de-emphasis of social status, and everyone sits where they want to sit, whether a janitor or a CEO. Moments of egalitarian relaxation contribute to better superior-subordinate and human relationships. There is also an implicit link between the concept of equality in sauna and the responsibility to carry one's weight at work. As a consequence, there is an emphasis at work on the autonomy of subordinates. Once assigned a task, the subordinates become "self-bossed," possess individual responsibility to perform quality work, and contact the superior only when a problem arises. Such a participative managerial hierarchy with a "bottom-up" dimension facilitates autonomous development and allows Finns to create a vision for the future shared by all.

As suggested earlier, Finland shares its emphasis on equality with other Scandinavian nations. For example, fines for legal infractions are related to income levels, because the assumption is that those receiving high incomes must suffer as much as those receiving low incomes. In one situation, a Nokia executive was fined $71,400 for driving 18 miles over the speed limit. A low-income person might receive a fine only of $50 for the same infraction (Stecklow, 2001).

There are different interpretations of what it means to be Finnish. An American interpretation is aptly illustrated in the following incident. During a training session for three groups—Americans, Finns, and Swedes in a Finnish subsidiary in the United States—an American came to the consultant during the first coffee break and mentioned that there were problems with the Finns because they didn't talk much, if at all. This American didn't know what the Finns were thinking or hiding, if they ever thought independently, or whether they were interested during group discussions. In contrast, he said, the Swedes were easy to deal with because they talked, even if not as much as Americans. During the afternoon coffee break, the same American told the consultant that the Swedes were difficult because, after a decision had been made, they kept discussing whether it should be modified. In contrast, the American now felt that the Finns were easy to work with because they focused on the goal and, once a decision had been made, implemented it quickly.

The following day, the Americans politely raised a question about Finnish inability to make decisions, and the Finns politely responded that they felt the Americans also had a problem. The consultant then asked if there was perhaps a difference between "let's get the ball rolling" (which from a Finnish perspective might not be a good decision) and "let's plan carefully before the ball gets rolling" (which from an American perspective might prevent the ball from ever rolling). During the discussion, the American response was the following:

> For years we have been misunderstanding each other. Maybe long-term planning is what the Finns and Swedes have in common, but the Swedes just keep discussing after a decision has been made and the Finns seem to be silent during the planning process, yet there is no silence when they act on a decision. (Berry, 2009b, pp. 93–94)

This interpretation is consistent with the discussion in the next section of this chapter, "Communication: Comfort With Quietude," of the importance of Finnish active silence, which is often invisible to others. Active silence is when Finns are respecting and listening to others as they reflect while waiting their turn to talk. This active silence leads to creativity among the Finns. Even if talking is expected, Finns would say, it should be done at appropriate times, which Finnish culture often defines differently than other national cultures. For example, the Martti Ahtisaari–led Finnish team that participated in the United Nations discussion about ways to solve the bitter and costly Kosovo conflict in the late 1990s was the last to talk, not only about their own ideas but also about those of others in the negotiation. Ahtisaari won the Nobel Peace award in 2008 for his activities in Africa, Asia, and Kosovo because of his approach, which directly reflects Finnish culture.

Gender Equality

Gender equality is rather high in Scandinavian nations, even if the ideal and reality don't always match. For instance, we encounter a paradox related to sauna and gender equality in business and political contexts: The sauna has traditionally symbolized equality, but typically the sexes do not

sauna together. However, women have significantly increased their leadership roles in business and politics and have assumed major leadership roles in the Finnish parliament. For example, as a result of the 2014 election, there are 9 female and 10 male ministers in the governing body.

Given the egalitarian emphasis in Finland, these results are not surprising. Even stories about ancient Finnish tribes living in the forest refer to leadership by men and women alike. As an autonomous part of the Russian empire, Finland was the second parliament in the world to give women the right to vote (New Zealand was first), and it was the first to give women both the right to vote and to stand for election. Sixty years after World War II, a postage stamp dedicated to the defense of Finland during that conflict focused on the active role of women supporting the Finnish soldiers. Hence the tradition among men of making important decisions without the active involvement of women during sauna negotiations has been reduced significantly.

Egalitarian Education

In contemporary Finnish society, the educational system is unique. It offers egalitarian educational opportunities regardless of the geographic location or the social background of the children. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) conducts regular surveys as part of its Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). Finland consistently ranks at or near the top. Pearson Publishing and the Economist Intelligence Unit took the standard measures or test results in such areas as mathematics, science, and reading but combined them with other criteria such as graduation rates, adult literacy, and the effect of years in school on productivity ("Pisa Envy," 2013). Finland ranked first of 17 nations, and also first on the percent of GNP devoted to education (6.8%). All education in Finland is free up to the doctorate level, school teachers are highly educated, competition to be accepted into the university department of education is very strong, and salaries for teachers are determined at the national level with modifications according to the local costs of living.

This egalitarian focus in education is sometimes criticized for not challenging the most talented students enough. However, it provides a basis for advanced levels of education throughout society. In fact, educators from many nations travel to Finland to see firsthand "What Makes Finnish Kids So Smart" (Gamerman, 2008). According to Gamerman, Finnish teachers still favor traditional methods such as chalkboards rather than PowerPoint® slides and other high-tech approaches, and the classes are somewhat chaotic and unstructured, but an intense focus on achieving high goals combined with strong teacher-student and student-student interactions within small classes are hallmarks of the system. For Finns, in contrast to Americans, "equality of opportunity" comes via "equality of condition" in education and health care.

Communication: Comfort With Quietude

Two Finnish academicians raised the intriguing question "Silence—myth or reality?" and responded: "The terminology [of English] may . . . be highly mis-leading depending on the type of culture that it is applied to" (Sajavaara & Lehtonon, 1997, p. 279). Finland is not a silent culture; it is a culture full of people "comfortable with quietude."

An American television program, CBS's long-running *60 Minutes*, produced a documentary on Finland called "Tango Finlandia." Words used by Finns to describe themselves in "Tango

Finlandia" included *shy, silent, private,* and *brooding,* all of which can be very positive terms when translated back into Finnish. Thus it was startling for Finnish viewers to hear voiceover terms used by the American commentator that included *clinically shy, terminally melancholy, depressed, mourning, brooding,* and *isolated,* as well as the following judgment: "The national mission seemed to be not be noticed, grimly in touch with no one but themselves . . . a difficult time making even the most casual social contact" (Berry, Carbaugh, & Nurmikari-Berry, 2004, p. 267). This American commentary—a mirror rather than a window—epitomizes the incorrect ways many people from other cultures interpret Finnish comfort with quietness.

The Meaning of Active Silence

One of the challenges related to understanding other cultures and explaining one's own cultural ways to others is reliance on a shared international language, English, which carries multiple hidden cultural meanings for people from different cultures. As many Finns have emphasized in private conversations and writings on the subject, silence is not necessarily silence, even if the dictionary tells us so. There are various types of silences connoted by facial expressions, body motions, and even the length of each silence. Each type of silence expresses a particular positive, neutral, or negative meaning to those socialized in this fashion.

The English words *silent* and *shy,* which Finns often use to describe themselves to others, are often inaccurate when compared to what they actually mean in the Finnish language. This is especially the case when communicating Finnish comfort with quietude to people from cultures that are uncomfortable with silence. In many other cultures, these two words, *silent* and *shy,* can create negative images and suggest social disconnection. In Finland the words can carry negative meanings, but Finns interpret their active silence positively in terms of the following cultural meanings: communicating without words, listening, thinking, reflecting, pondering before acting or using words in important situations, and being in one's own thoughts and/or respecting the privacy of others even when surrounded by others (Berry, 2012). This positive Finnish interpretation of active silence, which is often difficult for outsiders to understand or even notice, corresponds to the combination of privacy and togetherness in sauna.

Movement back and forth between both comfort with quietness and comfort with talking is a natural Finnish way of being. There is no Finnish comfort with quietness if there isn't also comfort with talking when one has something relevant to say. What others might interpret as a "disconnected social void" can be full of Finnish respect for others, reflection, and a willingness to stand behind one's word. Sauna is a symbol of cleanliness that can be associated with the "cleanness" of society based on the subtle clarity of individual moral and physical responsibilities, for example, concepts of politeness and honesty.

In Finland, people make promises without using the word *promise.* They feel that the idea of pledging to do something is implied by the message itself. Similarly, Finns rarely use the word *please,* since courtesy is implicit. The meanings that are associated with the English words are considered to exist in the statements or requests themselves. As a result, Finns might be puzzled or suspicious when words such as *promise* or *please* are used. Conversely, native speakers of English might be confused or offended when English-speaking Finns fail to use such language.

Respect for privacy, communicating togetherness nonverbally, and being in harmony with a social or physical environment reflect deep Finnish comfort with quietness. For example, a U.S. American was driving a Finnish woman visitor through the Appalachian Mountains to observe

the beautiful fall leaves. She was silent and wrapped up in the enjoyment of the beautiful displays of leaves. Suddenly he stopped and demanded to know what was wrong. By contrast, a Finnish friend would have assumed that her quietness was a sign of deep feeling and reverence for nature. After listening to a recounting of this story, a Frenchman said that silence is like "the angle going away." It was not easy for him to understand that perhaps she was "with the angle" until asked "What is bothering you!" (Berry et al., 2009, pp. 48–49).

The High-Tech Invasion

Finland became well-known as a high-tech nation in large part because of the great success of Nokia cell phones beginning in the early 1990s. At one point Nokia sales were responsible for 4% of GNP, although this company has suffered several setbacks in more recent years. In March 2014, Nokia sold the mobile business to Microsoft but remains strong with a focus on mobile networks, map services, and technology development with traditional patents. Nokia era of mobile phones added a new dimension to the Finnish communication style, even if the basics remain the same. Nokia's "connecting people" message can be interpreted by Finns in both positive and negative ways. One should not talk just to be talking, Finns believe, but a mobile phone call often means that the other person considers it important to talk. Therefore, they have a responsibility to make a full response. There is, however, a Finnish discomfort with the extent to which this modern connecting system invades the traditional desire to enjoy one's privacy. A common solution in many cases is to send a text message if appropriate and to talk when necessary. In this regard, people from other nations who keep their cell and smart phones in their cars and strictly limit their use are probably comparable to their Finnish counterparts.

The sauna is still a place where one relaxes and enjoys harmony with nature. Still, as soon as people are out of the sauna, especially businesspeople, their mobile phones can be polluting the harmony of the relaxing postsauna environment and disconnecting the people who were together in the sauna. The phones not only allow businesspeople to go anywhere at any time but also reinforce the concept that the modern world is not the same as the natural world with which they are most comfortable. On the other hand, Finns who go abroad without access to mobile phone connections can feel very disconnected—not because they feel the need to call often but because of the unease that others can't contact them about something important.

It is not only in the cell phone area that Finland has shone. A little more than a decade ago the government established Aalto University, which has become a cutting-edge world-wide university in the areas of science, technology, and business. It sponsors a "sauna incubator" for technology-focused start-up companies that was begun independently by several Aalto students who visited the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and were motivated to create an incubator similar to the incubators they saw at MIT. Moreover, Finland has been particularly successful in the video game market. Rovio created the very popular game "Angry Birds," and Supercell in 2013 was grossing over $500,000 a day in revenue due to two games, "Clash of Clans" and "Hay Day," with a small workforce of only 34 employees. This amount of daily revenue put this small company into the same category as Electronic Arts, Inc., which distributes over 1,000 games (Grundberg & Rossi, 2013).

Factors other than comfort with quietude influence communication, especially in business. Charismatic leadership, or expecting subordinates to follow leaders out of a blind faith in their exceptional power, can be counterproductive in Finland, even though it is highly valued in

North America and Latin America. Finns value their unique "self-bossed" autonomy related to quality, honesty, equality, autonomy, independence, and responsibility. If leadership actively interferes with the expression of these values, Finns often feel that the possibilities for creativity are being denied. Supercell CEO Ilkka Paananen attributes much of his company's success to such self-bossed autonomy that exists in the small project teams creating its various products.

Another factor influencing communication is that the Finnish norm is to allow other people to finish talking before saying something. Thus [illegible] with one another, which demonstrates both a respect for others and a belief that quiet listening can often be a form of reflection. Hence silence, which is often understood in other cultures as agreement, is not necessarily the case in Finland. Finns might remain quiet if they disagree but don't have a good alternative to put on the table. From childhood, they are taught to never interrupt.

In sum, the government is acutely aware of the importance of high-tech industries in a globalized world and is actively encouraging high-tech entrepreneurship in partnership with business firms and universities. In 2010, the government declared that Finnish citizens have a "legal right" to a broadband connection to communicate its commitment to equality and the Finnish future of high-tech.

Furthermore, Finns tend to stick to their plans, sometimes simply because of stubbornness but often because of the importance they attach to making a decision based on careful planning. To change a person's opinion in Finland, sharing quality information is more effective than using clever communication tactics.

Finns also prefer meetings based on (pre-meeting) preparation rather than brainstorming meetings. Those who talk the most are those who come well prepared. Similarly, listening to different ideas and opinions before speaking is esteemed. Everyone listens to a person who communicates meaningful information but is respectful of others' ideas.

Finnish values of quality can be seen in the sauna, especially when individuals are together but relaxing in their own ways, with the cleaning process going deep below the surface. This link between Finnish values and sauna can also be connected to the Finnish concepts of honesty and trust, which go beyond "don't lie/steal" to mean "stand behind one's words." For example, Finns tend to de-emphasize words such as *promise* or *please,* as discussed previously. The meanings are embedded in communication norms. Thus such words are often missing when Finns speak English. If a Finn has to say *please* or *I promise* in Finnish, everyone assumes that there are hidden problems of which they have not been apprised. Unfortunately, the Finnish reliance on a "grammar" of honesty and nonverbal politeness can easily hide, at least initially, such deep values as independence, responsibility, and politeness from outsiders.

Finnish comfort with quietude is one natural way to be in harmony with nature, one's self, and others. This comfort, which does not deny the importance of talking, frequently masks the complexity of active silence related to creativity and nonverbal communication expressive of both togetherness and respect for others. Initially a short-term visitor can easily be confused, especially when Finns fail to explain that their taken-for-granted active silence is full of respect for others. Similarly Finns might be initially confused when French people interrupt to show interest and Americans ask "How are you?" when walking past without expecting an answer. The more we realize how we (and others) talk about ourselves when talking about others, the more people

"uncomfortable with silence" and people "comfortable with quietness" can begin to move beyond being at the "mercy of intercultural communication discomfort" toward "being in harmony with multiple ways of communicating" (Berry, 2009a, p. 78).

Most Livable Nation

This, then, is Finland, a small nation with spectacular economic and political success that evolved out of a difficult natural and political environment. In 2007, Matthew Kahn, an environmental economist, ranked 141 nations in terms of a livability criterion, and Finland finished first followed by Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Austria; the United States was 25th (Kahn & Lostys, 2007). Other studies have also rated Finland very highly in overall quality of life if not always first. Relatedly, on July 5, 2014, Simon Anholt introduced a new ranking of nations based on several measures that listed Finland as a very close second to Ireland in terms of answering a key question: Which countries do the most good in the world? (see the Ted Talk, www.Ted.com). Such rankings suggest that Finland is a very good place in which to live, despite its renowned poor weather conditions for much of the year.

As this chapter has demonstrated, Finland is similar to other Scandinavian nations regarding many values, but some of the differences are significant. They evolved out of the history and geographical position of the nation. In many countries, people refer to pessimism or optimism. The "Tango Finlandia" commentator from CBS's *60 Minutes* referred to "terminal melancholy" when describing Finns. As one Finnish student explained to exchange students,

> For us Finns *melancholy* means something like yearning, longing or even hope and desire. These are all positive words that live inside every Finn. Melancholy is a national characteristic rather than a symbol of depressed individuals. . . . There may be something like pessimistic streaks in Finnish culture, but the word *pessimism* is too strong. Finns are more like realists rather than optimistic or pessimistic people. We have our feet firmly on the ground, are hard working, and look forward to the future. But we realize that life is full of complexity. We must be prepared for difficult times even if we have hope in our hearts. (Berry et al., 2009, p. 42)

Finland's unique history helps explain why Finns tend to emphasize realism, granted that there have been both very low and very high points over many centuries. And the sauna, which combines aspects of heaven and hell, is a realistic institution rooted in history and nature. It remains central to the Finnish way of life and offers examples of Finnish values related to communication norms, the quality of action, social equality and autonomy, and social and organizational responsibility.