

What I've learned about Finnish lifestyle, culture, history, society and communication.

During the class and my time here in Finland I have learned lots of new things about the Finnish culture. The first thing one probably recognizes when coming to Finland and also one of the first things we discussed in class is the silence and introvert communication style compared to most other cultures. Giving and having free personal space is a very important part in the Finnish culture. No matter if in the bus, on the street or at lunch, most Finnish people prefer to stay silent and not to interact with others, especially not with strangers.

The next thing we discussed was the cultural dimension test by the Hofstede Center. Very interesting here is the very low power distance: You can address even professors by their first name and the polite "you" form is very uncommon in Finnish. Surprisingly for me Germany has about the same value for power distance and Austria even has a lower value. Overall the Hofstede comparison states that Finland and Germany are very similar except masculinity and pragmatism. At least with the masculinity I can totally agree. Finland is definitely more feminine in the areas I've seen. The school system is a good example for that. The German school system is very competition driven with separation after only 4 years in three school levels (at least in Bavaria). The Finnish system much more focuses on giving best education for everyone.

After an insight into the Finnish history (which I found very interesting!) we also learned something about the Finnish design, art, music and literature. I am not very fond of (modern) art in general, so the pictures didn't delight me so much. Also the Finnish music is not my favorite, but at least the architecture is quite ok. The Finnish design on the other hand can be really good! I've always liked the design of the NOKIA phones for example, even though this was no topic during the lecture. ;-)

My observation and analysis

A very Finnish experience for me was when I took part in the hockey practice of the SIK-KIK guilds. It was just very quiet all the time: When I first came nobody really talked to me, when we built the teams we did it without talking, when somebody scored nobody was cheering, when we finished playing nobody talked in the dressing room.

I think this is a typical example of the silence of Finns. It's nothing personal, they also talk little between themselves and the when I had a question everybody was very helpful and nice. So it is just in the culture to be ok with silence. Also the loud celebration of goals and so on is maybe more common in extrovert and masculine cultures. When I went to play floorball it was a similar experience but there was one Italian guy and he was cheering and shouting loudly, so very stereotypical experience ;-).

In the contrary the Finnish people I've met at parties are very talkative. When drunk the Finns probably talk about as much as everywhere else, but because they are so quiet when sober it feels like they are totally changed. So I would conclude that the by far easiest way to get to know Finnish people is by drinking with them 😊