

What's up with the Finns?

By Wayne Visser

Reflections from my visit to Mikkeli in Finland

This week I returned from Finland, where I was teaching an undergraduate course on sustainability in business for Aalto University in Mikkeli. Since Scandinavia is often held up as a model for sustainability, I have been reflecting on what they seem to get right. Here are the highlights:

1. **Finland looks after its people.** Taxes and living costs are high, but the result is that people enjoy an excellent quality of life. Finland ranks 2nd in the world on the Social Progress Index, based on 68 indicators across basic needs, wellbeing and opportunity.
2. **Finland manages its resources.** On the Environmental Performance Index, Finland ranks 4th in the world. Timber accounts for 20% of exports, so there is an economic incentive to manage their environment sustainably. And despite being a cold country, over 40% of energy and 90% of electricity is already renewable.
3. **Finland takes the moral high ground.** In the culture of Finland, ethics is taken very seriously. They rank 2nd cleanest in the world on the Corruption Perceptions Index and 6th on the Human Rights Index. This goes beyond a belief system; they invest in institutions to enforce these standards.
4. **Finland remains open to the world.** Despite being fairly culturally homogenous and having a unique language, Finland ranks 10th on the Inclusiveness Index, thus welcoming diversity in its workplaces and universities, which was something I also witnessed in the class that I taught.
5. **Finland supports innovation.** On the Global Innovation Index, Finland ranks 7th in the world. As an example, I arranged a guest lecture from StoraEnso, which brands itself as “the renewable materials company”. I learned that they have innovated wood products to be stronger than steel in construction.
6. **Finland prioritises happiness.** According to the World Happiness Report, Finns are the happiest people in the world. Some of the factors in my list above may explain this, but according to The Geography of Bliss, citizen involvement in the arts and community life in Scandinavia could be another factor.

Finland is not perfect, and there are many opportunities for improvement, as a look at Amnesty International’s profile for the country makes clear. Nevertheless, we can learn from their experience. At the heart of their success, I believe, is good governance - a combination of progressive policies, effective enforcement and institutional efficiency. Why do you think they perform so well?

Source:

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