

PART I

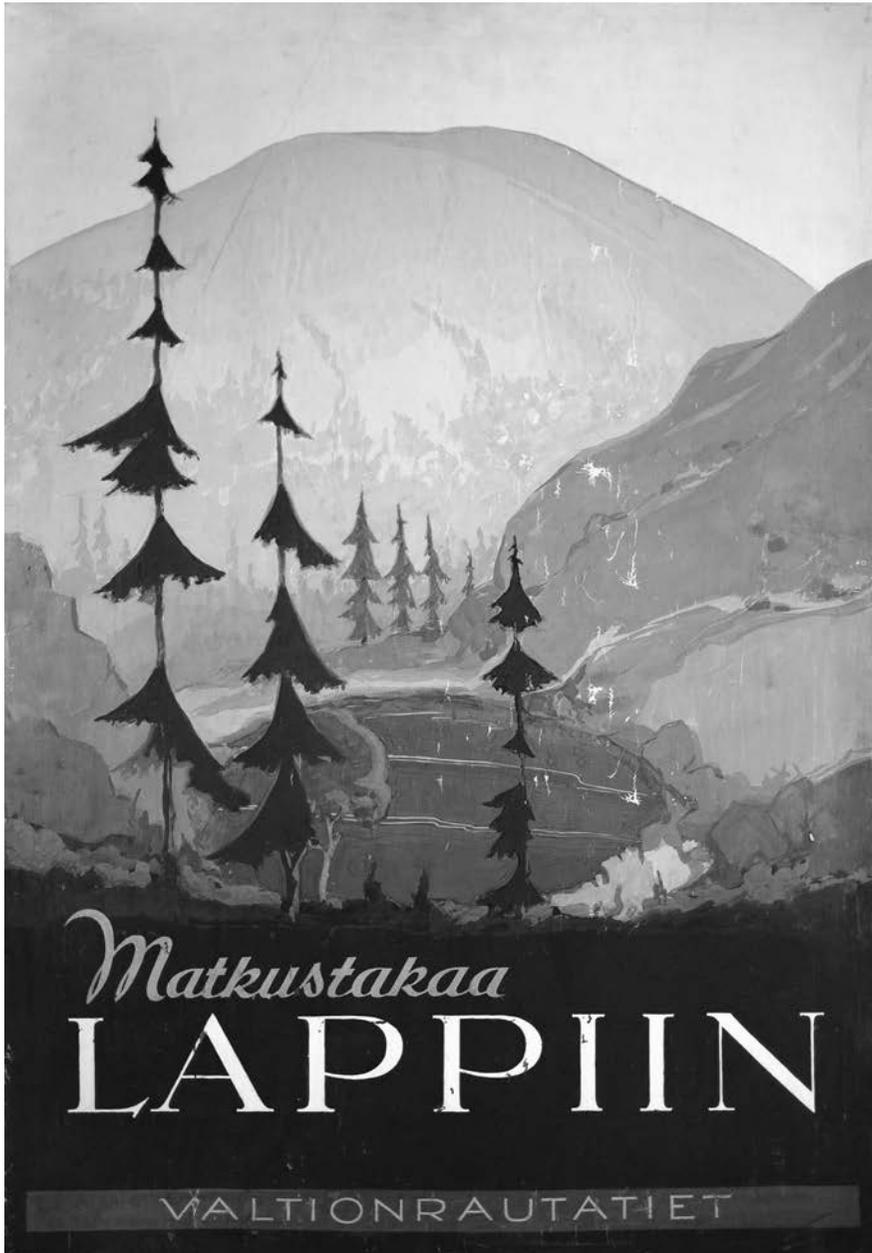
The context

In the following three chapters, we look at the context of Finland's achievements. The first chapter focuses on geography and climate, which are issues that invariably arise early on in any conversation about the country. Finland is often described as remote, but remoteness is relative. It very much depends on where you are looking from, and how much more easily (for the affluent at least) everywhere is now connected to everywhere else as compared to how difficult travel was even in the recent past. We begin the chapter with a map that puts Finland at its centre, showing how a large part of the world's surface looks from that vantage point.

Chapter 1 continues by showing just how warm the summers are in Finland and how cold it can be in winter, but also how clear the skies can be and how clean the air is. Outsiders are rarely aware of the large geographical variations in climate across the country. We end our introductory chapter by describing how ancient Finland is, geologically speaking, and how its landscape of lakes and forest includes places where rare elements are found in abundance. Although Finland is one of the places where the effects of global warming are likely to be the least adverse, it is also one of the countries at the forefront of initiatives to reduce, mitigate and adapt to climate change – including, controversially, the building of new nuclear power plants that are due to begin operation in 2020 (Reuters 2019).

The second chapter in this section considers the history of Finland amid the empires that surrounded it and dominated it for so long. We chart how for centuries it was the poorest of nations, and show how its towns and cities grew along with the development of transportation routes between its countless lakes; we detail its many border changes, and speculate on the impact of Finland's past as a colony on the outlook of Finns today.

Our third and final chapter in Part I gives a brief overview of the economy and the welfare system that Finland is so famous for. We document the economic woes and successes of Finland in recent decades; we chart how its current (and increasingly green) economic growth surpasses that of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands and many other similar countries; we show how people in Finland now have the second-lowest risk of poverty in the European Union; and we discuss why all this came about and how it has helped make Finland the happiest country in the world today.



Travel to Lapland (c.1935) by graphic designer Aukusti Tuhka (1895–1973), who worked for the Erva-Latvala Advertising Agency. Copyright ownership of the Archive of Aukusti Tuhka, held by Jyri Lehtonen. Reproduced with kind permission.

PART II

Social policy

In this section there are three chapters that cover the human lifespan, discussing issues that most affect people in their youth, mid-life – which we define as ages 21 to 61 – and old age. We discuss childhood and education in the first chapter, general equality in the second, and health in the final chapter of this section.

We begin by demonstrating how Finland's very high levels of income equality for older people are related to high levels of social mobility for the young; and how schools in Finland further accelerate social mobility. Social mobility is easier when the gap between top and bottom is so much narrower than it is in other countries. We show that Finland is second only to Norway in how little money is spent on private schooling and look at how Finland manages to be a world leader in education without spending more overall than many other countries. We also show how Finland has the lowest variation in school outcomes of any OECD country – which partly explains why its educational results are so good. We end by discussing Finland's work opportunities for the young, youth unemployment and higher education.

In Chapter 5, on the middle years of life, we begin by discussing data that confirm that income inequality in Finland has been low for some time and show how this contributes to high levels of social mobility. Of all the countries in the world, only in Denmark does it matter less who your parents are for your prospects in later life. We show that in the workplace Finnish employees of all grades have much greater flexibility over the hours they work than in all of the 35 other OECD countries for which there is data. This is as true for Finns without formal qualifications as for those with university degrees – employees in Finland are the most trusted to determine their own hours of work. We then discuss the paradox of Finland having one of the lowest proportions of women working in jobs that require science, technology, engineering and mathematics qualifications – despite Finland ranking joint highest on the global index of gender equality, which includes how well girls and women do at school and university in general in Finland. We end the chapter by looking at the taxation that keeps inequality low.

In Chapter 6, on old age and health, we demonstrate how Finland – along with Japan, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands – has the lowest rates of health and social problems in the world today; how Finland, along with France, funds its well-financed public services via conventional taxation; how the numbers of foreign citizens coming to Finland, often to work in public services, have recently increased; and we end by considering how and why life expectancy in Finland is continuing to rise so quickly.



Koulu-aamiainen helsinkiläisessä kansakoulussa – School breakfast in an elementary school, under the former Finnish educational system.

Photograph taken by Hugo Sundström in 1949 or 1950. Used with permission of Helsinki City Museum; photo licensed with CC BY 4.0 licence.

PART III

The future

In this final section of *Finntopia*, we begin with politics and populism, looking at how turnout in elections varies among affluent countries and across the states of the United States. Finland, alongside other more equitable countries, has relatively high voter turnout – and it has been rising in recent years. However, voter participation is still lower than in Norway, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands. Politics in Finland is complex, with coalition governments made up of many political parties, and voter fatigue is common.

As we write, in early 2020, the country is governed by a very new, politically progressive coalition made up of a diverse group of parties. To explain how this happened, in Chapter 7 we have redrawn a complex political-space map originally disseminated by the Finnish state broadcaster Yleisradio Oy (Yle) in April 2019. That political map helped explain the positions of political parties' candidates on a number of issues. We end by mapping the results of the most recent general election over population-space using a population cartogram.

In Chapter 8, we focus on demography and the environment. We begin by depicting how birth and death rates in Finland have varied from 1749 through to the present day, not only highlighting the impacts of famine and war, but also showing how, since 2014, death rates have consistently exceeded birth rates. Next, we consider the fall in fertility over the past century, and then the fall in migration to Finland in the early 1990s and its rise in the twenty-first century. Today net in-migration is the only reason that the population of Finland is not falling. We show where migrants to Finland have come from, and then link all of this to the major environmental challenges being faced by Finland – and the world – today. In matters of environmental action, Finland punches well above its weight.

Chapter 9, on future challenges and success fatigue, begins with the concerns of young people who are suffering or struggling. Mental health is a problem in Finland, but worldwide only Denmark has a smaller percentage of young people who say they are not thriving mentally. Finland is also ranked as the most politically stable country in the world; has the second most trusted press in the world, after that of the Netherlands; and ranks as one of the happiest countries in the world – the ranking in which Finland excelled in both 2018 and 2019 – and again in 2020.

We end by considering long-term trends in the income of Finland's best-off 1 per cent, showing how its share of income shrank in the 1970s to become one of the lowest in the world in the early 1980s, then rose somewhat to peak around the year 2000, fell with the global financial crash of 2008, and is now falling once again. We close with a discussion of Finland's future.



The leaders of Finland's five coalition parties in power in December 2019. This image was widely circulated in a popular tweet, that "went viral" upon Sanna Marin becoming prime minister on 10 December 2019. People around the world immediately commented on all five being women and four being in their early thirties.

Source: Tuomas Niskakangas (2019), Tweet with the caption: "Finland's government is now led by these five party leaders"; <https://twitter.com/hashtag/newgeneration?src=hash> (8 December).