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Chapter 8

Creating a National Brand for Finland: “Consider **I**t Solved!”

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Editors’ Note

Branding of an organization is a challenging pursuit. Raised to the level of branding a nation, it requires a coordinating central authority as well as citizens’ involvement and support. This case study illustrates how Finland marshaled these forces to forge a national brand with sufficient differentiation to generate new recognition and approval internationally.

Finland is one of the Nordic countries, located in Northern Europe between Sweden, Norway, and Russia. With a population of 5.4 million, Finland is Europe’s eighth largest country and is part of the European Union. Since World War **II**, Finland has been best known for its clean environment, rapid technological development, Nobel Peace Prize winner Martti Ahtisaari, being an extensive Nordic-style welfare state, and having the best educational system in Europe.

Despite its strengths, Finland was ranked only 18th on the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index (2008). Also, the 2008 report on Building Finland's Country Brand (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2008) found that Finland's image abroad was unclear and weak, clearly worse than the image of neighboring Sweden. Finland was considered a cold and sparsely populated country in the north inhabited by a quiet people; a coherent image of Finland, let alone a strong brand, did not exist. The problems were obvious: The country's values were unclear, and its external messages were not coordinated because there was no single body responsible for the Finland image. Messages were random without focusing on specific markets or themes. To meet this need for brand unification, a Country Brand Delegation was established and, together with British country branding expert Simon Anholt, it branded Finland as the "Fix-it" country. Finland's country brand ranking improved; the country gained high visibility and even received the *Newsweek* (2010) nomination for "The Best Country in the World."

Background

Previous Branding Attempts

Although the concept of branding was not yet used, a first modern-era country branding process was initiated in Finland in 1988 by the KANTINE committee (advisory board on international communications) working under the press and information department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its goal was to improve the country's brand for trade and commerce (The KANTINE Report, 1990). The KANTINE Report (1990) noted that the cold war had cast a black shadow on the perception of Finland because it was a neighbor of the Soviet Union, and that the image of Finland would

improve if its fundamental values could be projected. Values chosen were excellent education, sustainable environmental development, and creativity; the aim was for Finland to be seen as a country “with high industrial, technological, and cultural knowledge, based on a strong and well-adjusted economy, freedom of trade and competitive commerce, and care for nature” (The KANTINE Report, 2008).

Exhibitions

In world fairs from Paris in 1862 to Shanghai in 2011, Finland has been represented through its culture and quality of life. The exhibitions also have contributed to "nation-building" after the wars, and to evolving economic, political, and national development. Brand-building slogans of the exhibitions included “Creative Finland” and “The Brave New Finn,” enhancing traditional values of simplicity and the well-known Finnish “sisu” (endurance). Later fairs and exhibitions abroad have highlighted Finnish design, such as that of the mobile phone giant Nokia, the textiles innovator Marimekko, and glassware and jewelry designer Iittala. Recent themes have included Finnish CleanTech and the Rovio brand of Angry Birds.

Tourism

The Finnish Tourist Board, responsible for Finland’s tourism country brand, formulated the key “promise” for that brand based on “The Four Cs”: credible, contrasting, creative, and cool. “Visit Finland” was the basic message created from these four characteristics. As a whole, “Visit Finland” is seen as a challenger brand in tourism markets, and Finland is seen as an “indie” tourist country different from the mainstream.

Key Players in the Branding Process

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The ministry responsible for Finland's foreign affairs is run by three politically elected ministers (Foreign Affairs, European Affairs & Foreign Trade, and International Development) and a permanent staff. The ministry contributed to the operating expenses of the Country Brand Delegation's meetings and provided a "face" (Minister Alexander Stubb, European Affairs & Foreign Trade) for the [delegation](#).

MEK (Visit Finland)

MEK (Matkailun Edistämiskeskus, [or](#) the Finnish Tourist Board) works under the Ministry of Employment and the Economy and actively promotes Finnish tourism. The [board](#) works closely with ministries, travel businesses, transport companies, and other Finnish entities on research, product development, and marketing. Abroad, the agency works under the title "Visit Finland" and its key target countries include the United Kingdom, Russia, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United States, China, and Japan. The "Visit Finland" conceptual identity is derived from the previously identified "Four Cs." MEK also supports individual efforts to promote Finland abroad such as the Maailmalle.fi website created by young Finns living abroad.

Finland Promotion Board

The Finland Promotion Board was established in 2006 as a special body combining public and private organizations working with advocates for tourism, trade, and innovations. The organizations included the Ministry for [Foreign Affairs](#), the Finnish Tourist Board, the [Ministry of Employment and the Economy](#), Finnair, Finpro,

Finnfacts/TAT, the Finnish Forest Foundation, and Tekes (the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation).¹

The Country Brand Delegation

The Country Brand Delegation was appointed by Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb in September 2008 to create a unified team to build a strategy for Finland and to brand Finland as a great place to live, work, and visit. The delegation consisted of influential public figures such as well-known businesspeople, designers, politicians, consultants, professors, and artists. The delegation was chaired by Jorma Ollila, a leading business executive. The delegation saw nation branding as a holistic, long-term process of building awareness of the country and its reputation.

Simon Anholt and the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index (NBI)

The Country Brand Delegation retained the British country brand expert Simon Anholt. Anholt had assisted several governments in country branding processes and, together with the research institute GfK Roper, is the publisher of The Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index (NBI) of most influential nation brands.

Demos Helsinki Think Tank

Another ally, the Demos Helsinki think tank, is a research-focused nonprofit organization that helps organizations bring about systemic change and forecasts futures. Its previous clients included companies, cities, governments, and communities.

Methodology

Combining several qualitative research methods, this case study was constructed via desk research, interviews of key players, and a review of materials published both online and offline during the branding process by the organizations involved. Nation Brand literature also was visited to understand the phenomena. As the project contained public sector funding, reliable records were available on the budget and choices made from the organizations involved. This secondary research was supplemented by primary action research-type involvement of key players: discussion with the director general of the Finnish Tourist Board, which also commented on earlier drafts of the study, and personal reflection of one of the authors who was herself involved in the branding process (Kolbe).

Situation Analysis

Despite its achievements in technology, welfare, and education, the image of Finland abroad was not as good as desired. A 2008 report on Building Finland's Country Brand (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2008) found Finland lacked appeal and did not stand out in country brand comparisons. Residents of its neighboring countries had a more positive image of Finland through direct experiences, but countries farther away had only vague impressions. Finland was considered a cold northern country, but beyond that a clear national brand did not exist. Moreover, the country's values were unclear, and although the overall tone of foreigners' impressions was positive, those positive impressions were not exploited in promotional efforts. A central problem was the lack of coordination of the messages because they were distributed by a variety of players. Overall, in 2008 Finland left a "satisfactory impression rather than an outstanding one" (Moilanen &

Rainisto, 2008). The Country Brand Delegation started constructing a strategic brand for Finland, working with Anholt beginning in 2008.

Strengths

- Finland's commitment to basic Nordic values, such as freedom, equality, and human rights, contributed to the country's reputation as being one of the most stable and best functioning democracies. Its environmental policy, respect for human rights, and fair treatment of citizens were especially highly praised.
- The previous rankings of an independent brand index (The Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index) revealed that the general attitude toward Finland abroad was positive. People were willing to give Finland the benefit of the doubt: Many assumed something positive about Finland and the Finns, despite their lack of direct knowledge or experiences of the country or its people. Still, two-thirds of the respondents from 50 countries ranked Finland higher than the average level for their own country.
- Finland was recognized as having the best education system in the world (World Audit, 2013; OECD, 2010) so it could apply this in its brand building.
- Finland is seen as the world's third-most competitive country and the European Union's most competitive country (2013), according to the World Competitiveness Index of the World Economic Forum.
- The Finnish environment is unpolluted and clean, and the country is known for its thousands of lakes and wild forests, making it a natural attraction for environmentally aware and concerned people.

- Overall, the Finnish people are proud of their country and have a positive attitude toward making Finland stand out abroad.
- Although Finland is not famous for its cultural heritage, the number of talented, individual performers—ranging from Formula One race car drivers to architects and orchestra conductors—at the top of their chosen fields is exceptionally large in relation to the population.

Weaknesses

- Foreign understanding of Finland's specific attributes and themes was lacking, mainly because image cultivation had been random and undertaken by multiple parties.
- Finland had no distinguishable, internationally known cultural buildings or monuments to attract and impress visitors.
- Previous programs and events that had built the brand Finland were merely temporary, and no ongoing effort was established to extend the reputational gains.
- The Finland Promotion Board established in 2006 had worked to develop a country brand for Finland but the board was a collection of actors with no single body responsible for coordinating its work, especially its messages. There had not been a comprehensive investment in the country brand nor special resources allocated for developing one (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2008).

Threats

- At first, Finnish citizens showed adverse reactions to the need for a branding process, especially its funding through the public sector budget.

- Without a central, dedicated organization responsible for the country brand, the efforts of the Country Brand Delegation could end up as another one-off attempt with no long-term positive consequences.
- The branding process would be hollow without genuine citizen input, so citizen engagement had to be integrated into the process.
- The results of a good branding process would remain worthless if the international media did not adequately cover the topic and its results.
- Brand building requires caution: Promising something that cannot be delivered, or something that could conflict with positive existing images of the nation, would reduce trust and generate backlash.

Opportunities

- There was an exceptionally good opportunity for building the Finnish brand, in that the country's recent performance and products were excellent and could stand up well in an international comparison.
- There had been an ongoing "Finland Boom" since 2003 that could resonate in a stronger brand.
- Problems with the previous branding process were linked to a poor country profile, not the product Finland itself, hence making the new branding process opportune.
- The well-established and free press in Finland could be an effective communication channel to address citizen expectations and concerns.
- The positive attitude of the citizens toward their nation could be used as a basis for greater citizen engagement in the branding process.

Core Opportunity

“The functionality of Finnish society, our close relationship with nature, and a system of basic education that is among the best in the world are not just something to be proud of. If used properly, they can also be efficient ‘tools’” ([Demos Helsinki](#), 2010). As global challenges arose, Finland could be known as the world’s problem solver. The key message regarding Finland would be “Consider it solved!”

Goals

- Overarching goal: Capture the Finnish lifestyle and export it globally through a unified effort among officials, companies, and civic organizations.
- Global goal: By example and analogy, make Finland known as “the world’s problem solver.”
- National goal: Strengthen the Finnish identity by achieving understanding of the nation’s strengths.
- Individual goal: Enhance an individual’s experience of living, working, or visiting Finland.
- Communication goals:
 - a. To engage citizens in the branding process
 - b. To ensure trust in the campaign by focusing on the genuine strengths of the country
 - c. To provoke and sustain interest in Finland abroad

Objectives

Six overall objectives were set for the development of the country brand:

- [Increasing the appreciation of the fruits of Finnish creativity and labor, and promoting the export of Finnish products and services](#)
- [Promoting international investment in Finland](#)
- [Promoting inbound tourism to Finland](#)
- [Promoting the international status of the Finnish State](#)
- [Promoting the appeal of Finland among international professionals](#)
- [Raising the national self-esteem of Finns](#)

Public Relations Objectives

- To make Finnish citizens into credible brand ambassadors by imbuing the Finnish people with the necessary trust in the branding campaign and a willingness to share their good experiences
- To have Finland's strengths presented with one voice through unified communication efforts by as many actors as possible
- To disseminate information about the branding process, thereby ensuring transparency, and therefore also the goodwill and collaboration of Finnish citizens

Output Objective

The branding process should consist of two-way communication (meetings, hearings, online discussions) where different institutions, organizations, experts, and individual citizens construct a realistic brand they personally can relate to. Meetings with citizens were arranged on various relevant topics and in selected areas in Finland; and the Finnish media were engaged as an avenue for news of the branding process. Because the

branding campaign was publicly funded, a high priority was put on ensuring its transparency.

Outcome Objectives

- To build a stronger country brand and a good reputation abroad
- To empower the Finnish people to become brand ambassadors

Key Publics

Internal Publics

- The 5.4 million Finnish residents
- The 600,000 first- and second-generation Finns living abroad
- More than 100 “Finnish identity players” ranging from ministries and local authorities to businesses and civil society organizations
- The Finnish media

Global Publics

- Governments and potential investors globally (potential collaboration and business)
- Citizens of other countries with interest in, or potential interest in, Finland (potential tourists)
- Educators and researchers (potential research and training collaboration)
- International media (brand visibility abroad)
- International tourism associations and agencies (potential revenue)

Key Messages as “Missions”

The Country Brand Delegation established Finland's brand identity with three core themes:

1. The functionality of Finnish society
2. Finns' close relationship with nature
3. A Finnish propensity for educational excellence ([Demos Helsinki](#), 2010)

Two traits of the Finnish brand character were further highlighted: dependability and limited hierarchy, and the intrinsic traits that make Finland not only a pleasant environment but also a useful partner for addressing global problems.

The key messages can be better understood through the "missions" the delegation gave to each of the more than 100 "identity players" ([Demos Helsinki](#), 2010):

- For politicians and government officials: Ensure that schools receive adequate funding, as education is the font of all societal benefits.
- For school children: Involve the quietest children in the class. Engaging everyone will create a culture of belonging and increase well-being.
- For neighborhoods: Organize events to build social cohesion and celebrate successes of joint efforts.
- For the media: Focus on important issues and popularize science to generate new knowledge for your audiences.

- For employers: Promote teamwork and collaboration to foster a sense of belonging and community.
- For the tourism industry: Building and marketing holiday packets around the ideas of “silence and peace” in Finland, [using](#) the lack of noise pollution in the Finnish forests.
- For the public sector: Become “warriors” of an open information society by increasing the transparency of information on society and citizens worldwide.

Other missions included enlarging organic food production to half of the country’s overall agricultural output by the year 2030; purifying lake water to drinkable purity; and establishing a peace mediation convention dedicated to the Finnish Nobel [Peace Prize](#) laureate Ahtisaari. Overall, these additional missions would continue to develop Finland’s strengths while offering potential solutions to global problems such as climate change.

Strategies

Branding work was seen as an effort to develop a Finland that would, ultimately, offer all Finns an even better place to live and work. The branding process aimed to be transparent and engaging for all key publics, and to be a holistic and long-term process of building awareness of the country and its reputation. The branding commitment had to support investment in developing a general and genuine country brand over the long term that would be beneficial to Finns in many respects.

The strategy was to establish and build on potential differentiating factors that distinguished Finland from similar country brands ([Demos Helsinki](#), 2010):

- Global governance: Finland had the potential to create—and present—a more effective way for helping to solve problems in the world.
- Products: It would be natural for Finland to concentrate on developing truly efficient and sustainable products and services.
- Society and security: Make Finnish society and its sectors into a marketable “product.”
- Education: Capitalize internationally on the high quality of Finnish high-level basic education.
- Wired society: Promote Finnish communication technology and its impact on social development.
- Nature: The Finns’ unique relationship with nature is emotionally appealing in that it results in impressive environmental progress, much of it applicable globally.

Tactics

The likelihood of citizen motivation increased due to counsel from an outside expert well known in the branding community (Simon Anholt). The delegation was an active player from the beginning, initiating discussion and pitching news stories to the national media. To achieve one central voice, a new kind of coordination and public support became a priority.

To give the process a human touch and to make it approachable, Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb appeared in various media as the “face” of the branding process.

Specific tactics included [the following](#):

- Finnish corporations were invited to collaborate, which resulted in increased visibility. Sponsored outlets (such as the customer magazine of the national airline, Finnair) contributed to heightened visibility.
- The Brand Delegation was divided into four “working groups,” each responsible for a share of the branding process. The entire [delegation](#) convened only eight times.
- Delegation members were encouraged to come up with their own suggestions and ideas.
- Expert sessions and hearings took place to brief the [delegation](#) on current trends, issues, and the newest research findings; approximately 200 experts from various sectors participated in the sessions and hearings.
- Government support was ensured through special meetings with members of the government and other social decision-makers ([Demos Helsinki](#), 2010).
- The reputations of most Nordic countries were higher than that of Finland; therefore, Finland’s association with being a “Nordic country” was emphasized.
- High visibility and transparency in Finland, important for the project’s success and for public engagement, were emphasized throughout the campaign.
- Additional transparency was built into media relations with all members of the [delegation](#) being available for media coverage.

- Seminars and workshops engaged citizens, enabling them to participate in the branding process, increasing commitment and public support.

The Branding Process and Team Divisions

During the first stage of the work in 2009, the dlegation concentrated on collecting and analyzing data and initiating communication on the topic nationally. It also analyzed opportunities for future Finnish societal successes and how to promote such progress as part of the emerging brand.

The focus in the second stage, which continued until spring 2010, was selecting and clarifying the most promising themes for a Finnish identity and Finland's brand. In the dlegation's third stage, a management group examined the chosen themes in more detail and turned them into concrete proposals for action.

In practice, the Country Brand Delegation was divided into four working groups. The culture group began by formulating a Finnish identity—defining what it meant to be Finnish. The communication group (public relations) ensured transparency and public engagement during the branding process by organizing four specific workshops around Finland on central topics for citizens' participation. The media group (media relations) was, naturally, responsible for the media relations of the branding process. The business group (business relations) analyzed Finland as a business environment and sought international benchmarks.

Culture

The task of the working group on culture was to define areas for improvement in the Finnish product and brand identity from the perspective of culture. It would identify obstacles and problems and suggest solutions. This working group examined Finnish cultural life in depth; its most tangible outcome was a May 2009 workshop that attracted more than 40 representatives from different cultural fields. It identified two important but partially conflicting aspects of the Finnish identity:

1. A fair society and reliability (equal opportunities and equality)
2. Depth and an “edge” (expertise and “creative madness”)

The main obstacles to Finnish branding success also were defined: inadequate self-esteem, weak “identity marketing” competence, and questionable prioritization of investments and financing. The working group proposed these three main themes for the brand ([Demos Helsinki](#), 2010): nature (environment) and sustainable development, education and well-being, and culture and the creative economy.

Public Relations

The task of the communications (public relations) working group was to develop the Finland brand from the perspective of transparency and outreach, and to engage all stakeholders in the process. The group was responsible for the delegation’s external communication, which mainly involved organizing seminars and workshops in Finland. The group aimed to maximize citizens’ participation in the work of the delegation, and to build and maintain citizen support and enthusiasm for the process ([Demos Helsinki](#), 2010). It created and managed four citizen-centered seminars, with about 350 people participating:

- The Levi Summit, in Kittle, November 2009, was a meeting for business experts to discuss Finland's brand from a commercial and financial perspective.
- Young people were invited to a public seminar in Helsinki, December 2010, on the theme of youth exclusion.
- An environmental workshop for experts arranged in Helsinki, January 2010, was a meeting to discuss proposals for "everyman's environmental obligations."
- The last seminar, in Jyvaskyla in March 2010, addressed educational themes and Finnish teaching and learning.

Public participation online was used to engage citizens. In February 2009 the website www.mitasuomion.fi was established, and it served as a channel for public debate on Finland and Finnish-ness, with more than 1,500 comments posted during the initial commenting phase of a few months. The site existed for the duration of the process, but content was later provided mostly by the organizations involved, not individual citizens.

Media Relations

The main tasks of the working group on media ranged from strategic planning of media relations to organizing interviews and trips for journalists. At the start of its term, the delegation was met with harsh citizen and media criticism, resulting in intensive debate and some disengagement. The branding process was criticized as being elitist, commercial, and "reflecting a caricature of Finnishness" (Browning, [forthcoming](#)). This

challenge was met with transparency and an open invitation to engage; no counterattacks were launched.

After 2009, the media coverage became more positive, largely as a result of the delegation's openness to the public and its work that attracted positive coverage in all of Finland's leading media. Media relations were ongoing throughout the project, mostly through interviews and distribution of campaign information.

More than 200 editorials were written about the process. The summary pamphlet *Mitä Suomi on?* (*What Is Finland?*), a collection of written editorials, was produced for the delegation's online service. Its 15,000 print copies were distributed free of charge to the public via the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Finnish Tourist Board, and libraries, and similar material was available on the project website.

There was close collaboration with the commercial TV channel MTV3. A special program titled *Mission for Finland* featuring delegation members aired in April 2010; it inspired viewers to participate in the branding process. As a result, viewers submitted more than 200 proposals on how to promote Finland's reputation. More than 300,000 people viewed the program.²

Business Relations

The fourth working group examined the Finnish identity from the perspective of Finnish business life. Two characteristics emerged as being essential for the narrative: the country's creativity and its "predictability," the combination of technological skills and a culture that values stability and reliability.

Muotoiltu: suomi

For benchmark comparison, the group identified two countries in which a high level of creativity is combined with a high level of predictability, Sweden and the United States. The working group on business believed that Finland had the potential to be compared with these countries because in the Finnish identity, reliability, and creativity are connected.

The same working group also identified problems in reputation that result not from deeds, but rather from poor communication. By confronting these characteristics, Finland's overall positive image would be improved significantly.

The working group summarized Finland's problem-solving identity in a slogan used previously in the business world: "Consider It Solved" ([Demos Helsinki](#), 2010).

Budget

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its network of embassies carry out public diplomacy in Finland through 97 diplomatic missions. The delegation's work was viewed as a natural contribution to the Ministry's regular affairs. When compared with the annual budget of the key players, the Country Branding process budget was relatively modest.

The delegation's expenses altogether totaled approximately 520,000 € (euro) (.74 Euro = \$1 USD), of which MEK (Visit Finland) paid 300,000€, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs covered the rest. The largest single expense of 150,000 € was Anholt's consultation fees.

Evaluation and Measurement of Results

The results of branding are often long term, and changes in visibility and awareness can best be observed over an extended period of time. However, in the case of

the Finland brand, some major results were visible shortly after the process took root. The

chair of the delegation concluded:

Finland's image must be based on real strengths. Only by developing our strengths in a creative way can we increase Finland's familiarity and appeal to the rest of the world. To my mind, the delegation has succeeded admirably in this creative thought process. (Country Brand Delegation Chair Jorma Ollila, 2013)

A Compendium of Specific Results

- There was strong internal support for the branding process. More than 1,000 Finns took part in the public meetings and contributed by sharing their experiences, commenting, and making specific suggestions for the delegation.
- National media coverage, despite the negative beginning, turned positive and supportive during the process and resulted in substantial public engagement.
- The delegation became the essential central voice for the campaign. And, anticipating the prospect of a fallback after the campaign, discussion began on whether Finland should establish a special institute for the country brand, similar to the Swedish Institute. As of early 2014, this had not yet been done.
- Arguably, the best "stand-alone" visibility came in the form of the overall assessment as "the best place to live" by *Newsweek* magazine. In its article "Finland—World's Best Country" (*Newsweek* Finland, 2012), the magazine gave this assessment:

Despite the long winter, Finland is a pretty great place to be—the best, actually. It ranked the highest overall and also comes in as the best small country, the best high-income country, and the best country for education. Its students scored first in science and second in both reading and math in the 2006 (the most recent one for which data are available) Program for International Student Assessment, a test of 15-year-olds' education skills by the OECD. Finland's school kids enjoy a laid-back and inclusive learning environment where shoes are optional, all teachers have master's degrees, and extra help is the norm: every year about one in three students gets individual time with a tutor.

- In the 2012 Transparency International listings, Finland improved its ranking to share first place with Denmark and New Zealand among the least corrupt countries in the world.
- Finland was ranked number 9 on the Future Brand Country Brand Index (2012).
- Finland also was ranked number one in the 2009 Legatum Institute's Prosperity Index measuring wealth, economic growth, personal well-being, and quality of life.
- Finland was ranked number one in the World Economic Forum Networked Readiness Index (Global Information Technology Report), measuring the capacity of economies to leverage Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for growth and well-being.

- Finland's education system was ranked best in the world in The Learning Curve, a global analysis published by the education firm Pearson.
- The nation achieved ninth place among Forbes' "Best Countries for Business."
- Finland ranked second in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) annual Global Gender Gap report; in WEF's 2012 Global Competiveness Report, Finland was number three.
- Finland placed second for dynamic businesses to flourish, according to the Grant Thornton Global Dynamism Index.
- According to *The Economist* Intelligence Unit's annual study, the Finnish capital, Helsinki, is the world's eighth best city in which to live.
- According to the United Nations World Happiness Report, Finland is among the three "happiest" nations in the world (Finland in World Rankings, 2012).
- Despite the year of recession in 2013, Finland climbed from sixth to first in the Save the Children annual State of the World's Mothers Report.
- Finland also is now ranked among the top countries for retirement by Natixis Global Retirement Index, and sixth in the index's more comprehensive listing based on health, material well-being, finances, and quality of life.
- National air carrier Finnair ranked as the world's safest airline in the 2012 JACDEC Safety Index (Finland in World Rankings, 2012).
- Finland also is at the top of the 2013 World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders.
- [There was a 1-point](#) increase on the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index to place 17 (2013).

Such widespread reputational success is—as is all reputational achievement—the result of progressive policy and performance well communicated, and not all of this success can be attributed to this specific branding campaign.

Outcome and Outgrowth: One Voice

To answer the biggest challenge of the branding process that unified performance, voice, and message, the country branding process continues today under the title “Team Finland.” It networks three ministries—the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Education and Culture. Under this team, there also is now a Finland Promotion Board working for country promotion. The Permanent Secretaries’ coordination group, the External Economic Relations Unit in the Prime Minister's Office, and the central government steer the network by establishing a set of overarching priorities for its activities, which are reviewed annually. The “Team Finland” network promotes Finland and its interests abroad, which are the country's brand, its external economic relations, the internationalization of Finnish businesses, and inward investments.

Some 70 Finnish branding teams have been set up in various countries; they bring together all Finnish authorities, publicly funded organizations, and other key parties with ties to Finland. Each team has its own work program and coordinator (Team Finland, 2012).

Future brand strengths lie in the promotion of the quality of life in Finland. Several strong indicators already exist, including gender equality, the low percentage of

people living in poverty, the equality of wealth distribution, the state of the environment, and the proportion of people employed.

Finland's reputation is solid in economic dynamism, [that is](#), the proportion of services and industrial output in GDP, innovations, the ease with which new companies can reach the market, and the scope of the stock market.

When measuring social capital, the quality of political life, democratic freedom, and the proportion of citizens involved in elections and political stability, Finland ranks high.

The remaining central challenge for "Team Finland" is to maintain the brand within the country, to reassure Finns that their country is exceptional even as it communicates that message internationally.

Evaluation in Relation to Public Relations Objectives

The challenge was to maintain national support for the brand building process and to empower Finnish citizens to become brand ambassadors. This was successful, although not to the degree that it could have been, as the approximately 1,000 active participants represent a modest fraction of Finns. On the other hand, the possibility to participate was presented to virtually all citizens, and the choice to engage was left to the individuals.

Trust building and maintenance was successful as the entire branding process remained focused on authentic strengths of the nation, and the targeted publics did not question the contents of the branding process.

Another achieved aim was to increasingly capitalize on the Finnish lifestyle and export it globally through a joint effort by officials, companies, and civic organizations.

The global goal to become known as an exemplar for solving many of the world's problems under the "Consider It Solved!" philosophy will take much more time to measure.

Discussion and Conclusion

Considering this process in light of current branding literature, several insights can be drawn. First, as an intangible asset, the brand and its value ultimately do not belong to the nation or organization conducting the branding, but rather to the public's assessment of it (Forerun-mbrun et al., 2004; [\(ADD TO REFERENCES\) UnAnhoaltlt, 2007\(ADD TO REFERENCES\)](#)). Hence, the measures taken to brand something can never be fully controlled or successful, and the outcomes may surprise the branders. In fact, it has even been said that a nation's brand "exists with or without any conscious efforts" (Fan, 2005, p. 12) through national identity and audience perceptions.

A country's national brand is tied largely to its cultural resources and the perceivers' previous conceptions and impressions. A national brand can be defined as the "unique multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide that nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences" (Dinnie, 2008, p. 15). Stereotypes play a strong role in country brands, and branding something outside a country or discrediting existing cultural stereotypes may prove difficult. Nation branding should therefore build on existing impressions (Fan, 2005). This was acknowledged in the Finland nation branding process, and part of its success can be explained by the research expertly designed and conducted after public hearings held during the process.

The strengths of Finland lie in verifiable areas of functionality, education, and appreciation of nature (see also Kolb, 2014).

For branding to succeed, the brand must be perceived and understood as to how it fits into peoples' experiences and life (Calder, [Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009](#)). Keller ([2009](#)) highlights that customers and publics should be at the center of branding, and that differentiation is key. The Finnish branding process acknowledged this: Finland as a brand had to be unique. Literature suggests that the "customer relationship" with the brand progresses in stages, and branding must develop accordingly. From audience awareness to differentiation, the aim is to achieve positive experiences and establish relationships (Keller, [2009](#)).

The change visible on the [18th](#) on the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index (2013) can be understood as small. Moreover, as the Brand Index was not purchased each year but merely in 2008 and 2013, possible changes may have been overlooked. The brand equity stages can take much time. In the Finnish branding process, the first stages of awareness, differentiation, and positive experiences were established first "at home" at the national level. Reputation studies show that progress inside an organization or nation matters most for long-term improvement in overall reputation and image (Anholt, 2007; Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun [& van Riel, 2004](#); Luoma-aho, 2007). As the *Business Insider* article (Kolb, 2014) sums up: "Finland needs to overcome its best-kept secret syndrome" and more aggressively market abroad. To begin, Kolb suggests better convincing the Finns themselves of their skills and abilities. This suggestion also resonates with this research: the main target group of the branding process remained the Finns themselves. As for being able to involve the Finns, this country brand process was quite successful.

Citizens of the branding nation and their perceptions are central to branding success. As “brand ambassadors,” citizens represent the most credible source for the brand (Dinnie, 2008). Some experts even say that the citizens of a country play the largest role in nation branding (Anholt, 2007). Recent literature on brand and customer engagement defines engagement as the level and intensity of an individual’s “participation in and connection with an organization’s offerings and/or organizational activities” (Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012). Such engagement must be planned, not coincidental, because it occurs as a result of direct experiences (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, 2011; Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013; Calder et al., 2009; Vivek et al., 2012). This was one of the successes of the Finland branding campaign.

In addition, values are at the core of successful national branding (Dinnie, 2008), and the selection of key messages and values for the Finnish process was a lengthy process. Highlighting the three areas of nature (environment), education, and functionality reflected citizens’ values as well as their experiences. This became apparent in the effort to change public opinion by increasing transparency in the branding process.

As the cost of national branding is ultimately borne by taxpayers, the process must be in line with public sector priorities. In Finland, this meant increasing transparency in developing the brand. The fully inclusive stakeholder model (Dinnie, 2008) mandates inclusion of a wide variety of publics and stakeholders in the values process, accomplished in Finland through the citizen meetings, seminars, and workshops. The process managed to overcome the internal challenges and was a good example in involving national citizens.

Recent brand literature has concluded that brand engagement now takes place increasingly online (Calder & Malthouse, 2005; Calder et al., 2009). Team Finland acknowledged this; throughout the campaign, material was available online, and much of the visibility effort continues to be focused on online delivery (see, e.g., Finland.fi: “This Is Finland”). Overall, the Finnish branding process provides an excellent example of how to involve various stakeholders and publics, engage them, and listen to them. Its success was largely due to adherence to these principles.

Endnotes

¹All founding organizations had worked for years to improve the country’s image and provided information for foreign visitors. Finnfacts is owned by the business sector and promotes Finnish expertise around the world online and through the international media. Finnpro is the national trade, internationalization, and investment development organization. Invest in Finland acquires foreign direct investment (FDI) for Finland and assists foreign companies find business opportunities in Finland. More information can be reached through the Internet: Finnfacts, Finnpro, and Invest in Finland.

²The expert jury led by Jorma Ollila chose three proposals from the public during the broadcast, the implementation of which the brand delegation will take forward by finding individuals and organizations to sponsor them.

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