

FINLANDIA FOUNDATION  
SUOMI CHAPTER

# FINNOVATIONS

PROMOTING FINNISH HERITAGE FROM THE  
EVERGREEN STATE TO THE GOLDEN STATE



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## In This Issue:

The European Viper - Pg. 3  
Virtual Tourism Comes to Finland - Pg. 4  
Finland & Parental Leave - Pg. 5  
Shipbuilding in Ostrobothnia - Pg. 6-9  
Nothing Can Keep Finns From Their Coffee - Pg. 9  
Sisu in the Time of Coronavirus - Pg. 10-13  
Poem: The Threshold -Pg. 13  
Kalla Church - Pg. 14  
Membership Form - Pg. 14

*Cover Photo and below: Birch trees line a peaceful lake in Finland during summer time. Photos by Tapio Holma.*



## Editor's Column: Sami, Then and Now

Saami languages in English (also rendered as *Sami*) are a group of Uralic Languages spoken by the Sami people in Northern Europe (northern Finland, Norway, Sweden and extreme north-western Russia). So to speak, the early Finns.



During the Middle Ages and early modern period, now extinct Sami languages were also spoken in the central and southern part of Finland, Karelia and in a wider area on the Scandinavian Peninsula. Many of these Sami languages, however, became extinct later under the wave of Finno-Karelian agricultural expansion.

The pro-Samic language is believed to have formed in the vicinity of the Gulf of Finland between 1000 BC to 700 AD, deriving from a common Proto Sami Finnic language. Compare this to Native American languages spoken before the arrival of European settlers.

Today there are many Sami Rap singers, who have brought the Sami language to life. One of these rappers, Aihu Valle (pictured below) picks up words from Sami literature, including from the internationally acclaimed poet Nils Aslak Valkeapää, whose epic "Beaivi Abcazan" (The Sun, My Father) is an intimate and melodic voyage through thousands of years of Sami history.



Today there is also a Sami Radio Station on the Norwegian side of Lapland and the language is allowed to be taught in schools, which was not possible in the 60's

By Tapi Holma

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#### From Asko:

"When growing up in Parikkala, we saw *kyy* (European viper) quite often. I remember very well a *kuolemanjuoksu* (death run) when I was 7-8 years old. We were fishing at a nearby lake when Esko got bitten by a snake. We ran for almost a km to our neighbor's house and they called a taxi to go to the hospital. My (now late) brother survived, but that was one of the most terrifying events from my childhood.

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## European Viper's Zig-Zag Pattern Provides Three-In-One Protection

Scientists at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland have shown that the simple zig-zag pattern on the back of the European viper serves three different purposes; it helps it avoid detection; warns predators off if noticed; and can hide the snake's movement if it has to flee.

According to the team, the pattern helps to hide the viper from detection. However, once detected, the pattern serves as a warning that the snake has a poisonous bite, so stay away. Then, if the snake legs it, in a manner of speaking, the zig-zag produces a flicker rate that is faster than the mammalian eye can process, causing it to appear as a confusing solid shape like the spokes of a spinning wheel.

Submitted by Asko Hamalainen  
Adapted from an article on [newatlas.com](http://newatlas.com)



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## Finland Hops on the Virtual Tourism Bandwagon

Finnish tourism destinations are turning to virtual tourism to get around travel restrictions imposed by the coronavirus pandemic.

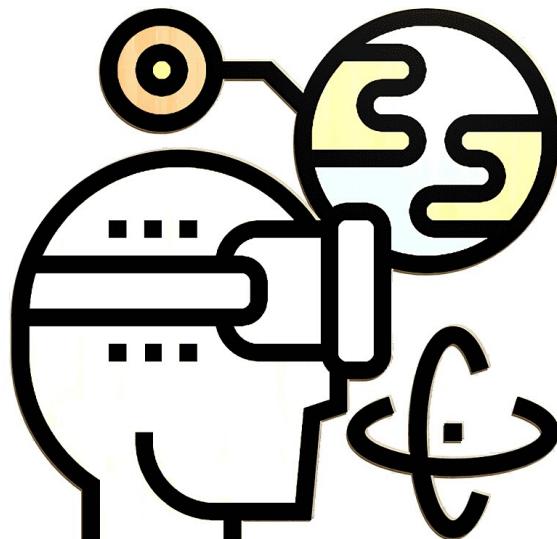
The first virtual tourists from Japan are already set to visit the Savonlinna region in eastern Finland in June. The same group of about 20 people will then head to the Saimaa region, also in the east.

None of the travelers will in reality be anywhere near these destinations — instead, they will participate from their homes via a video link and will harness the wonders of livestreams, 360-degree videos and photographs to enjoy their travel experiences.

Japanese entrepreneur Yukie Tonuma of Eco Conscious Japan and Finnish business owner Mari Pennanen of SaimaLife collaborated to organize the virtual trips.

“The journey will last two hours but it will cover two days and one night in Saimaa,” Pennanen said. The groups will take a virtual flight from Japan to Finland before continuing by train to Saimaa. Although they will have a packed programme in Savonlinna and Punkaharju, there will also be some down time, Pennanen said.

Research director Juho Pesonen of the University of Eastern Finland’s business school said that virtual tours provide a new way to explore cultures, places and people. “People don’t need to leave their homes so it is an environmentally-friendly way to get



to know new places,” he said. He hoped the coronavirus crisis could provide a much-needed spark to get the virtual travel business off the ground. He noted that up to now, they had mostly been used as a marketing tool to encourage people to visit destinations.

He believes that a live connection is a welcome development because social interaction is important on virtual tours. Guides, locals and visitors form a close relationship for the course of the journey.

“If this coronavirus epidemic continues, then this could become something major,” Pesonen said.

**Adapted From an Article on YLE.com**

## **Parental Leave in Finland**

Finland has one of the lowest infant mortality rates (5th) in the world. Prenatal care is the main reason for this. After birth, one can choose a baby box (championed here by our Suomi Chapter), or a monetary stipend. Every child gets a monthly payment from the government until age 17. Currently, paid family leave in Finland is 4 months for mothers, and 2 months for fathers. In Europe, Sweden has the best paid leave at 8 months. In comparison, US has big fat zero parental leave, the only industrialized nation in the world with none.

Equality between sexes has been quite good in Finland. Almost 20 years ago, all 3 top officials were women: the president, the prime minister, and the speaker of the Parliament (eduskunta). Only 2 countries in the world have had 3 women leaders over that time: New Zealand and Finland. Today's prime ministers make it 3. Today, out of 12 ministers, 5 are women, and 4 are younger than 40 years old.

The current government, led by the youngest (34 years old) prime minister in the world, has proposed to eliminate gender-based inequality, by increasing the leave to 7 months for BOTH parents. The mother-to-be can also receive 1 month of pregnancy allowance. Minister of Health and Social Affairs Aino-Kaisa Pekonen said that the goal of this "radical reform" is to improve gender equality and to boost the declining birth rate.

The number of babies born has been declining for the past 9 years. In 2019, about 46,600 babies were born, the lowest number since the 1860's!

Earlier this year, prime minister Sanna Marin told The Washington Post that while every country's situation and political atmosphere are different, the Finnish social policies could serve as a model for the U.S. "I feel that the American Dream can be achieved best in the Nordic countries, where every child, no matter what their and their family's background, can become anything, because we have a very good education system. We have a good health-care and social welfare programs, which allow anybody to achieve their goal. This is probably one of the reasons why Finland has been ranked the happiest country in the world for the last 3 years."

Personal musings: Forty years ago, when Michael was born, I told the University of Washington, that I would not be working for the next 6 months. All my colleagues thought that I was totally crazy by not advancing my career (the sad thing is, they were all "right"). It was by far my best decision!! Before and after the birth, I was very active in my new (and scary) role: to be a father. Even today, my decision to be a very active father is my proudest accomplishment!!!

**Submitted by Asko Hamalainen**

# Shipbuilding in Ostrobothnia

In the 1800s, southern Ostrobothnia became the center of shipbuilding and tall ship merchant fleet trading worldwide.

Ships have been built in Finland since early times, especially in Ostrobothnia. As the eastern half of the Swedish Kingdom from the 11th century until 1809, Finland was essentially an island with all trade and travel directed to Sweden. The Gulf of Bothnia and the Baltic connected both halves of the realm. It was easy to transport everything in ships across the sea, and inland by boat along rivers and lakes. Finland was covered with a dense primeval forest that divided rather than connected. The only land transportation means was on horseback or on carts pulled by horses or oxen along primitive roads built to connect fortresses in southern Finland, from Turku to Hämeenlinna Castle (Tavastehus) and the King's Road (Kuninkaantie -Kungsvägen) from Turku to Viipuri Castle.



Kristinestad harbor in the 1840's. Pencil drawing by Johan Knutsson.

## Ships Built for Trade Near and Far

Various kinds of ships for use in trade were built along the coast. The forests offered tall pines for boards and masts for ships, and tar essential for sealing and caulking the wooden ships. In the era of world-wide need for tar for wooden ships, especially for Great Britain's extensive navy, tar became the main export which created wealth for the traders and shipping industry.



The Brig Trofast of Kaskö in Port of Naples  
12/3/1795.

Since the 1600's, small sailboats were built to be used for trade to Stockholm, Sweden-Finland's capital and largest city. In the 1700's, the trade from Finland extended from the Baltic to the North Sea and the Mediterranean. Now, taller ships like schooners and brigantines were built, and eventually barques and frigates for trade worldwide until the tall ship era ended in the late 1800's. From the 1850's on, wood was gradually replaced by iron and steel.

Steam, instead of moving air, became the mode of propelling the ships.

### A Thriving Shipbuilding Industry

Kurt Gullberg's book regarding shipbuilding and shipping in Southern Ostrobothnia, "Skeppsbyggarland," lists almost 500 wooden ships built in the 1800's, ranging from full square-rigged frigates, tobarques, barquentines, schooners, caravels, and sloops.

The shipbuilders were local carpenters who in most cases even designed the ships themselves. The masters of the smaller ships were often farmers and fishermen trading local agricultural and forestry products in Stockholm and the Baltic. The Ostrobothnians also built ships for sale to Sweden and beyond.

### Consequences of Trading With England in the Napoleonic Era

Incidentally, the export to England was the main reason for Imperial Russia to annex Finland from Sweden in 1809. During the Napoleonic wars when Napoleon and Tsar Alexander I were still allies after the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807, Napoleon demanded that Sweden join his Continental Blockade against Great Britain. The King of Sweden-Finland, Gustav IV Adolf refused, because the trade with England was extremely important. Napoleon asked Russia to seize the eastern

half of Sweden, Finland, as punishment. And the rest is history. At the Treaty of Hamina (Fredrikshamn) in 1809, Sweden handed over Finland, the eastern half of Sweden for 600+ years, to Russia.



*The Barque Alma under Captain AW Starck passing the Cliffs of Dover in the English Channel in 1890.*

### Shipping Opportunities Open Up Globally for the Finnish Merchant Fleet

Finnish shipping interests during the Swedish era were shackled by trade barriers and restrictions both national and international. After Finland became part of the Tsarist Russian Empire in 1809, as the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland, the new master's interest in Finnish shipping was radically different from that of the old motherland, Sweden. Most of the protectionist laws with which the rich nations protected their own shipping interests were re-evaluated and abolished. The free global freight market was established in the 1840's, and the Grand Duchy's merchant fleet grew in pace with world trade.

It came in handy now that, during the Swedish era, the Finns had learned how to build ships. In the beginning the ships were used for shipping tar and timber products from Finland to the continental Europe, England, and various Mediterranean ports. For the return to Finland, ships loaded mainly salt, coffee, sugar and in the case of crop failure, grains. In spring the ships set sail from their home ports as soon as the ice had melted and returned to their home ports as late as possible in the fall before the Baltic froze. Salt was an important item, the main preservative of the time. But the summer journeys yielded little revenue for the investment.

When shipping and trading was opened globally to all nations in the 1840's, it became increasingly common for Finnish merchant vessels to stay on the seven seas in the winter season instead of being frozen in the home ports.. Soon, the Finnish merchant fleet was trading globally, covering all corners of the globe including distant continents such as Australia, the Far East, and South America. In many cases, ships would not see their home ports for several years.

It has been said that it was the Finnish merchant fleet that made the Russian flag famous on the world seas. As Finland was not an independent country, the Finnish merchant fleet flew the Russian white-blue-red flag.

The barque HERCULES from Jakobstad was the first Finnish ship sailing around the world in 1843 - 1845. However, circular navigation was not a form of expedition, but a commercial necessity. It was essential to have as many trips with paying loads and as few ballast journeys as possible. The ships were owned by local merchants in Finland, and the captain was often also part owner. Thus, the captain's incentive was to plan the logistics to maximize revenue.

### Shipping Logistics

Thus, it was up to the ship's master to find opportunities to buy goods to be shipped to some other part of the world and sell them where he could get the best price. For instance, after having received a lucrative cargo from England to Australia, the captain then had to decide on their own to continue the ship's sailing from there.



*Ships waiting for a guano load at the Chinca Island in Peru in the mid 1850's. Waiting times were up to one year.*

They could basically choose between two alternatives, sailing north to India, China, and Japan or across the Pacific to Peru to pick up a shipment of guano for Europe. The latter option automatically led to a journey around the globe.



The first globalization era and with it the role of Finnish tall ships in world trade came to an end in 1914 with the First World War. For one tall ship built in Kristinestad in 1875, ALMA, there was an abrupt end as well. After sailing almost 45 years on the seven seas in global trade, ALMA happened to be at the German port of Warnemünde at the outbreak of the war in August 1914. The German authorities seized it as an enemy ship. The old lady ALMA was subsequently renamed HERRMANN and met its end in a German scrap yard in 1925.

**By Kaj Rekola**

**Sources:**

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**Sjöhistoriska Förening r.f.**

**Norrviik, C: Stad under segel. Staden**

**Kristinestad 1999**

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## Pandemic Fails to Cool Finland's Centuries-Old Passion for Coffee

Since Finns met and fell in love with coffee 300 years ago they have remained faithful to the black brew, including through war and times of scarcity. Major food retailers say they've seen a rise in grocery sales and local coffee experts believe that come this time next year, statistics will show that not even the coronavirus pandemic has been enough to dry up their thirst for the liquid gold.

Yle News checked in with major Finnish retailers, S-Group and Kesko, who jointly control over 80 percent of the grocery trade in Finland, to find out whether Finns were still sold on coffee during the epidemic. Both reported a higher volume of coffee sales at their supermarkets during the high point of the crisis.

Louhivuori is the chair of the Lieto Coffee Museum Association, which in 2013 opened up the small gallery full of memorabilia related to coffee and coffee drinking in Finland. He pointed out that for Finns, while coffee has always been associated with everyday life and with significant milestones, it has played an important role in welcoming others -- through thick or thin.

"Even when it has been scarce, guests have always been offered coffee," he noted.

**Adapted from an article on YLE.fi**

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## What the Finnish Concept of "Sisu," or Inner Strength, Can Teach Us



This pandemic is really tough. But we have the inner strength to get through it. If you doubt that, look to Finland. They know how to prevail through hard times, and they have a word for it: sisu.

"Sisu is a word that has been around for hundreds of years, so it's very integral to the Finnish vocabulary and the Finnish cultural vertebrae," said Emilia Lahti, who has pioneered research into a concept that many Finns see as a core element of their cultural identity.

People have described sisu as grit or perseverance, but Lahti clarifies that it's more about "extraordinary perseverance." In other words, it's about enduring in the face of extreme, or beyond ordinary, challenges.

Lahti should know. After surviving a violently abusive relationship, she wanted to learn more about sisu and was surprised that not one peer-reviewed study of the concept existed. She's now completing her PhD dissertation on the subject at Helsinki's Aalto University.

"Sisu is determination and courage in the face of great adversity," said Lahti. "There is something in sisu that is more like when we feel that we've reached the end of our preconceived or assumed amount of energy and you discover a second wind or a spare power tank."

Finns credit their history and location for their sisu. Finland has been independent for only a hundred years, following centuries of rule by Sweden and later Russia. During War II, Finland famously fought off the Soviet Union's winter invasion.

"Finland, being sandwiched between Sweden and the Soviet Union/Russia, there's a long history of having to endure and defend your existence," explained Lahti. "And it also sounds obvious, but I would say weather." A difficult climate, explains Lahti, influences a culture.

"The weather, the cold, the darkness, and we survive in spite of all that," said Rauno Lahtinen, a cultural historian at Finland's University of Turku, on the origins of the concept of sisu. "Originally it was about the idea that we had survived here in these circumstances, no matter what, and that's why we have it."

The key element is not so much that you survive in extreme conditions, but that those conditions demand more from you. Lahti said that when she was training for an ultra-marathon across the length of New Zealand, each time she ran in Finland's cold rain or sleet, it was a deliberate choice or, as she put it, "a self-selected moment of adversity."

Päivikki Koskinen agrees. Koskinen is a freelance journalist and TV reporter who works with Visit Finland on its Virtual Rent a Finn campaign, where you can spend time with someone from Finland to learn how they manage to rank as the happiest people on Earth. "It's really accepting what is," said Koskinen. "Even if the weather is really bad, we are accepting it's really bad but we are still doing what we are planning to do." Koskinen cites her recent choice to swim in an ice-cold lake for a livestream. The event was planned, and Koskinen summoned sisu to get through it.

"It demands sisu to accept that yes, it's not always nice, and I still do it. Be in the moment, accept it, and act," said Koskiinen, emphasizing that it's the notion of taking action — even in the face of seeming obstacles — which sets sisu apart.

"I can do this, I can do what I promised and I want to do what I promised. I want to be trustworthy," is how Koskinen says Finns view their plans or obligations. "It's commitment. Committing to the moment."

In fact, commitment is such a central tenet that Finland is the only country that paid all its debts to other nations after World War II.

Given its association with commitment and integrity, it's no wonder that sisu is so highly regarded in Finland. "I think we use [the term sisu] almost daily. It feels really nice if someone says to me, 'You really have sisu.' It's kind of like an honor to have it," said Koskinen.

Sisu researcher Lahti echoes that idea, "In Finland sisu is very linked to qualities such as integrity, honor." That's also part of what sets sisu apart from, say, grit, a psychological concept that's been much more widely researched.

"Sisu ... gives us a chance to broaden the conversation about human endurance. It's not just that we endure, that we extract that energy and we find it, but it's the quality of how we are enduring," said Lahti. "Is there virtue, is there gracefulness? It's almost like an unwritten rule that you seek to endure, you don't complain about little things," said Lahti.

Yet despite the fact that Finns see sisu as such a uniquely Finnish trait, Lahti believes it's a strength that exists within all of us. "The capacity for sisu is in everyone, and we can cultivate the kind of environment where it's more likely that someone will show sisu," she said.

Lahti concedes it may be easier for Finns to access their sisu because they are already aware they have it, and that self-knowledge is the first step to finding it. "First of all, start with pausing and acknowledging that there is this indestructible, unbreakable life force.

There is this strength within me,” said Lahti.

The next step builds on the first since it focuses on creating your own narrative about personal fortitude. “Secondly, recollecting moments — I would call them stories of sisu from our own life — maybe even doing a writing exercise, writing down one or two or three moments where we overcame something we thought we could not do.”

As Lahti notes, “It’s an assignment that can help us remember what we’ve overcome, and that we do really have this capacity. So far you have overcome 100 percent of all the adversities you have encountered. “Just remember that.”

The third step involves acting on it. Lahti is careful to stress that situations that demand sisu are very individual. “There’s a million ways to be expanded by sisu. For someone it can be a very personal thing, like I need to be courageous and speak the truth in my relationship ... For some it can be a physical thing, like exercise. If you’re someone who is depressed, an act of sisu could be to get up, take a shower, and go for a walk outside.”

The key is that sisu comes from challenges. “What is a chance in my own life that will take me to the edge of my comfort?” is a question Lahti said we should ask ourselves. “There’s a lot of life in the comfort zone and we need to be

there as well, but growth begins at the end of that comfort zone.”

One reason that Finns feel so in tune with sisu, beyond the fact that they’ve grown up with the word, is that it’s an everyday part of life near the Arctic circle. Even in the bitterest winter weather, Finnish school kids are expected to go outside multiple times a day.



These difficult “micro-moments” as Lahti calls them, build up strength over time — toughness that we can transfer into a more demanding situation. “We get to choose to do an uncomfortable thing when it’s not too hard and then when something really happens and we’re invited to ... respond way beyond what we thought we were capable of, there’s this phenomenon of transference.”

Right now, many of us find ourselves outside of our comfort zone. It’s a good time to find that inner strength.

"As a global community, we are together swimming in this lake of sisu, more or less right now," said Lahti. She notes that some people may be suffering with loneliness or depression, while others are facing severe financial consequences from the pandemic.

"We get to recognize our strength, and it also comes with a lot of elevating, amazing stories ... because it is such a human quality to overcome and endure," said Lahti. She is confident we have the capacity to get through this because, she says, "To have sisu is to be human."

**By Noelle Salmi**

[matadornetwork.com](http://matadornetwork.com)

**Submitted by Asko Hamalainen**

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## The Threshold by Viljo Lennart Kajava

*A child sits on the threshold of the cabin,  
Which is old, brown, and smells of smoke.*

*Small finger,  
Small fingernail, thin, convex  
Like a scale of Fool's gold,  
Traces the knot in the threshold.*

*Old threshold,  
The knots are hard, brown, round,  
Dark jewels, smooth as glass.*

*Small finger,  
Small fingernail, thin, convex  
Like a scale of fool's gold,  
Traces the knot in the threshold...*

**Submitted by Tapio Holma**

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### Did you know?

Poet Viljo Lennart Kajava, 1909–1998 was born in Tampere and wrote nearly 40 books. His poems gave a glimpse of Finnish life and nature and many of the poems reflected his pacifistic point of view of the Finnish Civil War.

## Kalla Church, Kalajoki



Kalla Church, Kalajoki, 1780. Built by Simon Jynkka-Silven from the same parish. The wooden octagonal church has a shingle roof and is painted with a mixture of train oil and red ochre. The vaivaisukko beside the door is new, made by a local wood carver, Ville Orell, in 1967. It has unboarded log walls and vaulting. It was built on a

rocky island outside Kalajoki where the annual fishing began.

Around the church are grey huts where the fishermen lived, sometimes with their families. The womenfolk would salt the fish in barrels for the winter. The priest went along and was paid in fresh fish.

The church could be seen from far out at sea and served a landmark.

Apart from Ålands, Kalla is the only place in Finland with limited self-government and decisions are made at village meetings. The decision was made in 1778 to build a new church and anyone who failed to deliver building materials as ordered was "banned for life from this fishing place for being uncooperative and harmful."

**Submitted by Tapi Holma**



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