

AN ITALIAN IN FINLAND

The project Erasmus+KA2 "Ipso Facto" took me to Finland on 7th September 2018, as an exchange student. It all started on a sunny summer day in Italy. Our suitcases (Sara, my schoolmate left with me) were packed and our host families were willing to pick us up at the airport. The landing in Helsinki was nice. Then finally arrived at Mantsala.



I stayed for two months and I met my host mother and her son at the airport. They were very kind and, got home, I met the rest of the the family. At first glance upon my arrival in Finland I began to feel like I

was back in some small part of Calabria and expected the way of life and living to be quite similar to my own in Italy. However, as I looked closer and immersed myself in the different aspects of the culture each day, I began to uncover all about Finnish culture and soon realized what made their way of living so authentic. I want this report to tell you my unique experience and how it has shaped me to see culture differently and remain open minded along the way. While living with my host family, I began to see the Finnish way of life and I have come to the conclusion that Finns tend to live very active and healthy lifestyles.

Almost everyone in Mantsala has a bike, even the elderly. My host family and I walked very often. The food was the biggest surprise. I really had no idea what to expect and was a bit worried I would not like it.

My first Finnish dinner was smoked salmon with potatoes, a typical Finnish dish, I loved it!



I have also noticed that many of the foods tend to have less sugar and fats. My host family explained to me that sweets are not very common or popular in Finland and that many Finns enjoy healthier sweets without the high sugar and the sweet part.

Also, there are many cafes. This explains the coffee addiction that I've been hearing about and it's true.

Something that is quite special in Finland is the unspoiled nature, the air is fresher than anywhere else, the grass is green, the environment is clean.

There are many beautiful parks in the area where people go to get away from city stress and enjoy themselves.

Family is a fundamental value in Finland, family ties are very strong. Finns always find a way to gather the family to spend time together. Parties and festivities are the most common occasions to join all the family together, but one of the most popular tradition to meet all the family is going to the summer cottage. It's usually far away from the place where they live. The summer cottages are often located by lakes or on an island. The Finns go to rest and spend some time with their relatives or friends.

Every summer cottage has to have a sauna because it's such an important part of the Finnish lifestyle. The sauna is definitely something that everyone grows up with, and bathing in it come as natural as speaking. It's a steam room where to sweat, relax and clean; it's a place "without hurry". Often after bathing, sauna evenings continue with lively conversations and drinks.



Attending for two months a Finnish school made me notice some slight differences between Finnish and Italian school system.

The main objective of Finnish education policy is to offer all citizens equal opportunities to receive education.

A child attend Upper Secondary Education at age of 16-19 and it lasts 3 years. The education is free of charge, but students need to pay for the material.

My school day started at 8.25am and usually finished at 2.30pm. Every student has 25 lessons a week. Each lesson is 75 minutes long. Students can personalize their timetables choosing to follow the classes of the subjects in which they are more interested. Students receive a 15-minute break for every 75 minutes of instruction throughout the school day. Besides all students in Finland are provided with free, nutritious meals.

The school year is divided into 5 periods of six weeks each, every period is followed by the exams week. In the exams week students attend only revision classes and take exams.

Teachers in Finland spend fewer hours at school each day and spend less time in classrooms than Italian teachers. They use the extra time to build curriculums and assess their students. Homework is minimal.



Through my own experience, Italian school system feels somehow oriented still to an archaic model, based mostly on behaviour and performances rather than to the students, learning process, environment and atmosphere where the learning happens. Finland puts all the focus on the students and their development, giving them possible choices so to develop responsibility. I believe that grading students with numerical values will make us feel labelled as a good, bad or even worse, stupid student. Also I feel a huge gap between education and working life that schools are only now trying to fill.

I think that the strength of Finnish school is the fact that it's "simple": sensible, independent, modest, playful, low-stress and equitable.

Every country has its own food culture and sometimes it could be difficult to adapt to eating habits that are totally different from those of your country. Honestly, I gained 5 kilos in Finland because I totally changed my eating habits. The first "food culture shock" that I had to face was the meal times, I had lunch at school usually at 11.10am or 11.45am and my dinner was usually between 4.00pm and 5.00pm, very early compared to Italy. Having lunch and dinner so early meant to snack quite often, usually rye bread with butter, cheese and ham.



In their everyday life Finns eat a lot of simple, fresh and healthy dishes such as potatoes, chicken, meat, fish, vegetables and mushrooms.



I had many opportunities to cook and bake with my host family, we made meatballs together and some typical Finnish foods such as korpapuusti (cinnamon rolls) and karjalanpiirakka(savory rice pudding pie) with a glass of cold milk or with a cup of tea, especially when they're still warm.

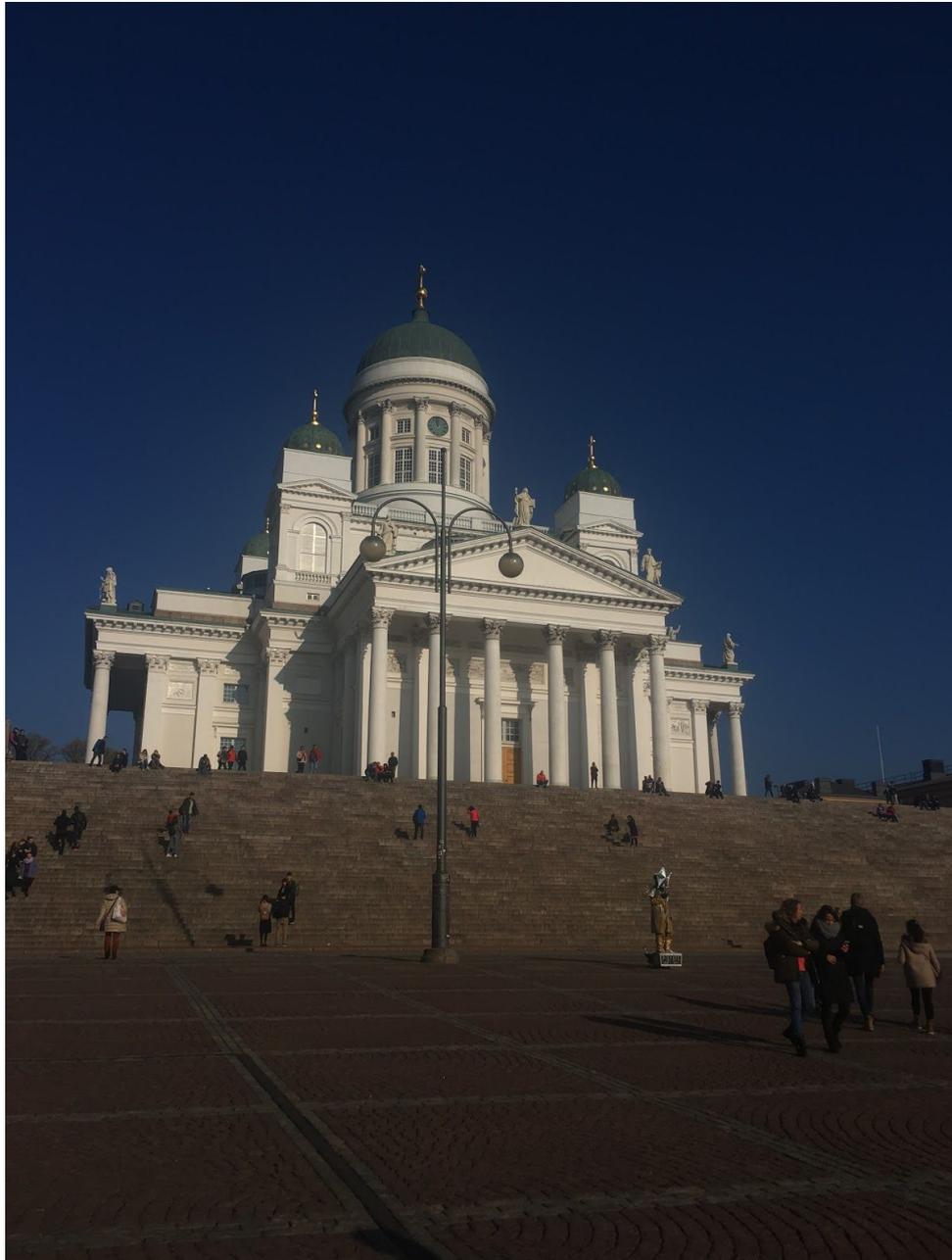


I tried a lot of local dishes as well and, obviously, some dishes I liked more some others less. So if I had to choose between Italian and Finnish cuisine, I would choose the Italian one. I prefer the Italian cuisine only for my personal taste, they can both be healthy or not, it depends on your choices.

When I visited Helsinki, one of the first things I saw was a Muumi store. I guess I have seen this gesture before, but honestly it is not very popular in Italy. In Helsinki they have several stores, where they only sell things with Muumis on papers, cups, plates and even dresses.



Here is a picture of the [Helsinki Cathedral](#), which is among the most prominent building in the city.



I also visited the City Hall which houses the City Council of Helsinki, Uspenski Cathedral, the Old Church and St. John's Church. And my last very surprising fact about Helsinki was that some shopping streets are heated! Very impressive!

I would say Finland has been a wonderful second home to me.

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Of course a big thank you also to the Auramos, for welcoming me into their home- new friends for life!



