

## **Breaking the ice with Bread and Salt – how Polish people adapt to Finnish society**

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<p>Moving abroad and starting one's life in an unknown culture is never an easy decision. It is a life-changing process of learning, adapting and understanding nuances of everyday life. The objective of this thesis is to present to Polish people who move to Finland possible challenges and difficulties related to cultural differences, their origin, and suggestions how to make the adaptation process easier.</p> <p>Cultural theories by Geert Hofstede and Edward T. Hall are used as a benchmark for the theoretical comparison of Polish and Finnish society, to identify main issues that could possibly from the culture clash and major differences that place these countries on the opposite ends of the scale. Together with theoretical framework, personal observations were included.</p> <p>To validate the theoretical analysis further, interviews with Polish people living in Finland were conducted and later compared to theoretical findings. Results and conclusions show that theory does not reflect practice in every case, and possible areas for further and more detailed research have been found. This thesis provides information on what an individual moving from Poland to Finland might find the most challenging and how to prepare themselves for the possible culture shock and adjustment period.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> Cultural dimensions, culture shock, emigration, national culture, adaptation, cultural contexts, intercultural communication	

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# **1 Introduction**

According to the records kept by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2017), over 2,8 million Polish people live abroad, and the number is continuously increasing. Among the most popular choices, being UK, Germany, Netherlands and Ireland, Finland is becoming a possible migration destination for Polish people. Poles have been migrating for years, but Finland is still considered exotic, distant and different. I used the term “bread and salt” in the title of my thesis to mention the Old-Polish custom of welcoming guests with bread and salt that was a representation of famous Polish hospitality. Adapting to Finnish society might be challenging and with this thesis, I want to show what to expect and what might be the most challenging for immigrants for Poland to make their adaptation process easier.

## **1.1 Objective**

The objective of this research-based thesis is to prepare Polish people who consider moving to Finland, to make their transition process smooth and easy. Using theoretical culture models by Gert Hofstede and Edward Hall, I will compare Poland and Finland to see what in theory could be the biggest challenge.

## **1.2 Research methods and interview questions**

After going through cultural theories, I will conclude them and add my personal observations to the results. To ensure validity of my research results and test the theory in practice, I will conduct an interview with a test group consisting of Polish people living in Finland.

During the interview, I will focus on the biggest differences that showed up after analysing the theories, and wherever applicable I will ask about generic and work-life specific differences that the interviewees have experienced.

## **1.3 Research question**

The main research objective of this thesis is to determine what are the specific problems related to cultural differences that Polish people face when living in Finland, and how to overcome them. I will not consider immigration, law or issues related to entering labour market – I am focusing on strictly cultural and social point of view.

## **2 Polish diaspora in Finland over the years**

The settlement of the Polish people in Finland goes as far as to the times of the partitions of Poland. Most of them came to Finland from the areas of Poland annexed by Imperial Russia, and the majority of them – against their will. Significant number of Polish people, around 4000 people, lived in Finland during the years from 1912 until 1917, serving in the army of tsar. Most of them left Finland in the second half of 1918. In the inter-war period, the wave of migrants from Poland went to France. In 1930, there was less than 500 Polish citizens left in Finland (Embassy of Poland in Helsinki 2012).

Today's Polish diaspora in Finland comes mostly from the post-war migration period. Finland has never been considered a migration destination for political reasons. Neither for financial ones – because of difficult economic situation after the war, on top of language barrier and harsh climate. Since the beginning of the 60's, only 25 to 50 Polish citizens per year moved to Finland, most of them being people in relationship with a Finn or coming to Finland because of work contract. However, recent years show significant increase in Polish migration to Finland, especially in construction and metal industry (Embassy of Poland in Helsinki 2012).

Depending on criteria for estimating the number of Polish population in Finland, there is around 4000 Polish people – including second and third generation of immigrants and children from mixed Polish-Finnish marriages – living in Finland nowadays. At least the same amount visits Finland every year, mostly because of seasonal employment and student exchange. According to Statistics Finland (Tilastokeskus 2017), in 2016 Polish as first language was registered by 5081 people. More than half of Polish citizens live in Helsinki metropolitan area.

The factor that distinguishes Polish diaspora in Finland from other migrant groups is that most of them have higher education or vocational qualifications, which has significantly increased the pace of adapting to foreign environment and finding job (Embassy of Poland in Helsinki 2012).

### 3 The concept of national culture

“National culture” is the term used to describe everything that makes the people of one nation different to those from another one. It includes everything that we as members of the society learn from the cradle. Polish proverb “*wyssać coś z mlekiem matki*” – “*to take something in with one's mother's milk*” – beautifully describes how deeply the national culture is rooted within people. From the very beginning people are, figuratively speaking, submerged in their country's customs, traditions, mentality, ways of thinking. All of it has a strong impact on how people see the world as family members, members of the society, the nation, and even as the citizens of the world.

Traveling around the world is not a privilege reserved for the rich anymore. It has become a relatively easily accessible leisure, flying is cheap and buying tickets is a matter of a few clicks. We are exposed to different cultures whether by meeting tourists, being a tourist, or working in international organizations. We meet people that are different from us in every way possible to imagine. What is amazing about human beings is that no matter how different we are from one another, we can find a way to communicate and learn to understand each other.

The world becoming a “global village” has given us the opportunity to learn, expand our horizons and open our minds. People who travel a lot unanimously say that traveling and experiencing other cultures is enriching and gives a new perspective to things that they considered unquestionable. The key to efficient cross-cultural communication is empathy. It includes certain emotional and intellectual challenges but in time, it pays off with experience, knowledge, and the feeling that the world is indeed at our fingertips.

#### 3.1 Intercultural communication difficulties

Human nature makes us prone to stereotypes, misinterpretation and drawing conclusions based on previous experiences and concepts that we are familiar with. This approach towards intercultural communication might be extremely misleading and cause unpleasant situations, where higher cultural awareness would have solved the problem. Many people, who have not experienced “culture clash” might be surprised that most of the times good intentions or simply being friendly is not enough.

In his article on intercultural communication (Barna 1994), LaRay M. Barna talks about 6 areas of potential cross-cultural communication barriers. He explains that while encountering cultural differences, people should see the difference between observation and interpretation. Instead trying to understand other person's behaviour based on what we consider “natural” or “normal”, we should take our time to observe and get to know the people, culture and history of the country better.

First of the Barna's stumbling blocks of communication between cultures is **false assumption that we are similar to one another**. People suppose that the mere fact of being a human being and having the same basic needs is enough of a similarity, or that, to put it bluntly, "people are people". However, when it comes to communication, there is no universal human nature, nor universal body language to help us understand each other. We have to understand that the environment we grow up plays a big role in shaping us, and each person has to be treated as an individual case (Barna 1994).

Another, rather self-explanatory barrier that people encounter, is the **language**. Usually people are aware of this obstacle, and find the ways to overcome it, whether by learning the language or finding an interpreter. However, there is a lot more to the language than just the bare minimum of the basic communication. The essence is to know what to say in a specific situation, understand the context and connotation, because a seemingly obvious case of "yes" and "no" may be troublesome (Barna 1994).

**Nonverbal communication** is another example of problematic areas. Posture, gestures, and other ways of using our body to show our thoughts and intentions are automatic, we rarely control them, and they often have their source in the culture. A simple hand gesture or a nod can be interpreted in many different ways, and usually not in a way that we intended. To overcome this obstacle, we have to become aware of our own manners of nonverbal expression, never assume that we understand what others mean by their gestures unless we have already familiarized ourselves with the culture, and not take anything as a personal insult (Barna 1994).

**Preconceptions and stereotypes** have a lot of power when we create a vision of other cultures. Stereotypes' role as a social phenomenon lies in a human need of decreasing the threat by fitting it into familiar patterns. It gives people a false impression of safety when navigating through strange, different culture. For example, if we believe in a stereotype that people of a Culture X are friendly, we will interpret their behaviour as such. Same applies to the opposite situation: if our perception of Nation Y is that they are distant and unfriendly, it will cause prejudice and lack of trust in a situation when a member of said nation is friendly to us. Stereotypes impact our ability to stay objective in unknown environment (Barna 1994).

Fifth stumbling block is our **tendency to evaluate**. We are subject to cultural bias, fall into a trap of black and white thinking and seeing the world in terms of extremes. We agree or disagree, decide what is good and what is bad, and tend to be judgemental because of what we are used to. There is rarely any room left for questioning things, finding answers, or looking for causes of certain cultural behaviours. One should realise that it's impossible to change the culture, but a little bit of empathy rather than judgement goes a long way (Barna 1994).

The high number of **uncertainty** present when entering a new culture causes anxiety and stress. It is the sixth of the cross-cultural communication barriers. When we find ourselves tense, and it is not related to a positively stimulating situation, we need to relieve the accumulated stress. It often presents itself in withdrawal, hostility and defensive attitude. The snowball effect continues onto creating preconceptions, stereotypes and distorted perception. Feeling vulnerable in unknown situation causes us to turn into defence mechanisms and is it a serious threat to successful cross-cultural communication (Barna 1994).

### **3.2 Culture shock**

Culture shock is a specific state of frustration a person experiences when immersed in a foreign culture for prolonged period (Hofstede, Pedersen & Hofstede 2002, 20). It is a process of adjusting to a different culture and everyone experiences it differently. Even though it is a very personal experience and each case has to be viewed individually, there are certain stages of culture shock that everyone who experienced it at some point in their lives can easily recognize.

To determine whether one is experiencing culture shock, there are at least six indicators that can help recognize it:

- 1) Behaviour patterns that the person is used to are missing or their meaning has changed
- 2) Familiar value system does not apply anymore
- 3) Feelings of disorientation, anxiety and loneliness
- 4) Disapproval towards foreign values and behaviour patterns
- 5) Social skills do not work anymore
- 6) Impression that this awful feeling of culture shock will never disappear

### **3.3 Stages of culture shock**

As mentioned before, everyone experiences culture shock differently. To make this difficult experience easier to go through, it is divided to five individual stages that can be used as reference points (table 1).



Table 1. Five stages of culture shock and their characteristics (Hofstede, Pedersen & Hofstede 2002).

Honeymoon	The excitement about the new culture is the strongest feeling. The person's identity is still back in their home country, but they are open and curious about the culture of the country that they are in.
Disorientation	This is the moment when one realizes that almost everything that they are familiar with, does not work out in the new culture. The number of stimuli and expectations of the new culture can be overwhelming and lead to the feeling of not belonging and alienation, often accompanied by self-blame.
Irritability and hostility	In this stage, one tends to be angry at the new culture for being so unfamiliar and making it difficult to adapt.
Adjustment and integration	The strongest phase of the culture shock is slowly fading away and a person starts to see good and bad aspects of both cultures. The person is now able to be more realistic, subjective and it gets gradually easier to navigate in a new environment.
Biculturality	The final stage of culture shock. In this phase, the person is finally able to be comfortable in both cultures. It is however a controversial statement, because it is not known whether a person can actually get to that point.

## 4 Hofstede's cultural dimensions

To be able to talk about cultural differences, we need a benchmark that will let us compare one culture's characteristics opposed to the other. In this chapter I will compare Polish and Finnish culture according to Geert Hofstede's dimensions of culture. After describing the concept of cultural dimensions, I will reflect on their validity by sharing my own experiences and observations.

Geert Hofstede is a Dutch social psychologist who became famous for his research on relationship between organizational and national culture. Based on his intensive research between late sixties and early seventies, he developed the idea of dimensions of culture. Cultural dimensions have undergone many changes to function in the form we know today, and instead of original four, there are now six cultural dimensions. They describe basic problems and subjects that society has to face to become a strong, well-functioning community. Each dimension is expressed on a scale from 1 to 100 (Hofstede & Hofstede 2016).

### 4.1 The essence of cultural dimensions

**Power Distance** is "the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede 2014). It is used to measure the level of inequality between the members of a society. According to Hofstede, this dimension applies mostly to the people on the bottom of the social hierarchy ladder. People want to climb up, but to do it, they have to meet the acceptance of the ones on the bottom. For example, in large power distance countries, the inequalities are a norm and are expected and desired, while in small power distance countries, any kind of inequality is considered wrong and should be minimized.

**Uncertainty avoidance** describes the extent to which the members of the society are afraid of unknown or uncertain situations. The uncertainty avoiding society sees the unknown as a threat, and people are generally more stressed and anxious. On the other hand, the uncertainty accepting society welcomes life the way it is and as a result, shows less stress and anxiety.

**Individualism vs collectivism** is a dimension describing ties between members of the society. In individualistic society, everyone is expected to look after themselves and only the immediate family. Collectivist society consists of in-groups, to which the members belong from the moment they are born.

**Masculinity – Femininity** dimension should not be understood as "male" or "female", but instead, "man-like" and "female-like". It tells about the role division between the genders

and focuses on emotional gender rather than social gender. Feminine society values the balance between life and work, while masculine society sees work as the top priority and even accepts it as an excuse to neglect the other aspects of life.

**Long-term orientation** defines a society that is oriented on future, persistence, saving and adapting to changes. Short-term orientation is characteristic to societies that praise the past, value national pride and respect tradition.

**Indulgence** is the most recent of Hofstede's dimensions. Indulgent society allows basic human desires, enjoying and having fun. On the other side of spectrum, restraint society has strict social norms and people tend to be less happy.

## 4.2 Poland and Finland in 6 Dimensions

Using "Compare Countries" tool from Hofstede Insights website, I compared Poland and Finland in the 6 Dimensions.

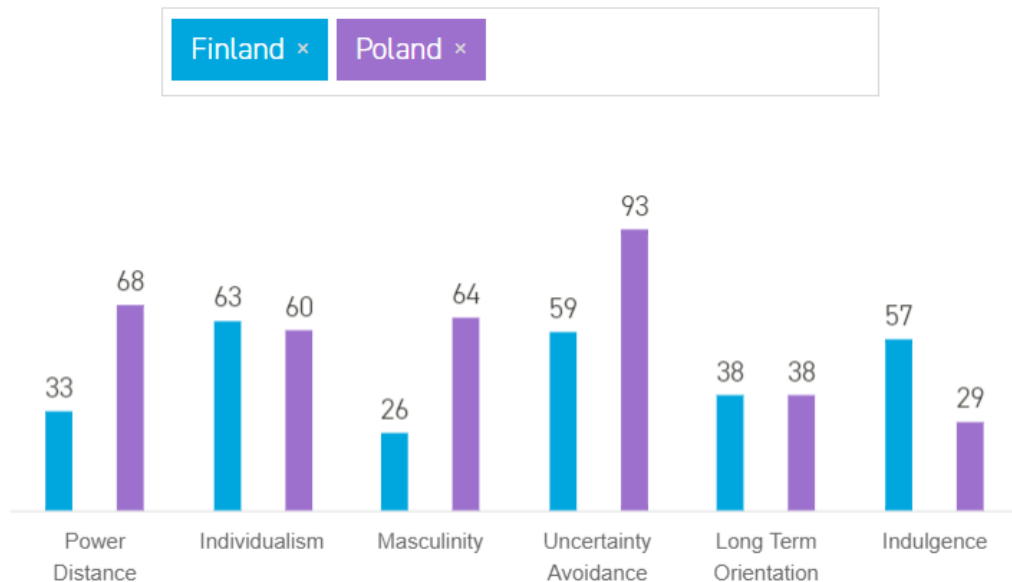


Figure 1. The comparison of scores for Finland and Poland on 1-100 points scale in Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede Insights 2018)

### 4.2.1 Power Distance

With the score of 68 points, Poland is a country of relatively high power distance. In practice it means that every member of the society knows their role and place, and usually doesn't feel the need to question it. In large power distance countries, one of the first things taught to children is to show respect, while on the other end of the scale, it's independence that is the first thing being taught. I have noticed this difference by observing the school-age children in Finland. It's nothing uncommon to see a primary

school kid – for example on the bus – alone. In Poland, this would be considered very irresponsible of the parent and highly frowned upon. The emphasis put on respect in Polish culture can be clearly seen in the language – the polite form of “you” (“*pan*” – literally “mister” or “gentleman” when talking to a man, and “*pani*” – “madam” or “lady”, when talking to a woman) is used on a daily basis and in every social situation where two people don’t know each other. A good example of this cultural difference between Poland and Finland is student-teacher relationship. In Poland, teachers are referred to as “Pan/Pani Profesor” (whether they are professors or not), and in Finland it’s perfectly fine to call the lecturer by his or her name. When I started my studies in Finland, the lack of student-teacher distance in this matter was very disturbing and I thought I was being disrespectful.

Another example would be the employee-employer relationship. In Finland, supervisor is approachable and, in many ways, equal to other employees. In large power distance countries such as Poland, employees want to be told what to do and stick to their tasks, while in small power distance countries, employees prefer independence and consultation instead of being given orders. In Poland, the boss is seen as the one who “pulls the strings” and should be treated with due respect. Even in everyday social situations, the conditions that have to be met to start being with somebody on a first-name basis are strict, and one has to know when the right moment is to do that. Calling someone by their name without the person suggesting it first is considered extremely rude. To someone who comes from Poland to Finland, this transition from distance and respect to very informal approach, independence and equality can be surprising and at first difficult.

#### **4.2.2 Individualism**

When it comes to individualism, both countries scored similar points – 63 for Finland and 60 for Poland. However, Polish society, even though being individualistic in general, has a strong need of maintaining hierarchy and order as mentioned in the first dimension comparison. According to the Hofstede Insights tool, this combination might cause tension in specific types of relationships, such as manager-subordinate.

Collectivist societies are characterized by strong ties not only to the immediate family, but also extended family, village, or tribe they belong to. Family ties in Poland are extremely important, even with the extended family, however, this doesn’t apply to other relationships – colleagues, neighbours, or even towards strangers. The Polish are a very suspicious nation. Only 12% of them think that “most people can be trusted”. People suffer from the lack of trust towards the government, but also to each other (Grzesiak 2015). This lack of trust is seen in every aspect of everyday life, from media sharing only negative news, through teachers reminding students of negative consequences of failing

the test instead of motivating them, to parents encouraging distrust in their children – “if you don’t behave nicely, a bad man will take you”.

In Poland, people are unlikely to join any organization or movement to improve the community. As much as the desire and will to join social initiatives and activities aiming to help others highly depends on a person’s education and social status, Polish people are socially passive and would rather not participate in acts. They don’t know how to get organized as a group, unless it’s a strike or a demonstration. There is no know-how of social activities and visible lack of civil skills (Sulek 2013).

What needs to be mentioned here is the communication style. Collectivist societies are more likely to have high-context communication style, which means that many things are obvious and do not require more explanation, because the members of the society are familiar with the context. In individualist societies, everything must be delivered “in black and white”. Communication is more detailed and specific, but also wordier (Hall 1976). The concept of high-context communication will be introduced and explained in more detail in further chapters.

#### **4.2.3 Masculinity versus Femininity**

Poland, with the score of 64 points, is a masculine country. In work life, to succeed it is important whom you know, how can you “sell” yourself and competition is encouraged. It is seen already in kindergarten – the one who solves the exercise first, gets to choose the best toys to play with. Later on, in primary school, it doesn’t matter what are your preferences – whether you like to write stories but can’t stand memorizing parts of a plant or enjoy doing chemical experiments but can’t remember a thing from the last book you had to read – you have to be the best at everything. Usually, girls suffer from it the most.

Grades scale in Polish schools goes from 1 being the worst to 5 being the best (or even 6 for an outstanding performance). A boy is praised for getting a 3 or 4, because boys have so many other things to think about than school: climbing trees, playing with other kids or even fighting with them in case of a dispute. At the same time, it’s expected of a girl to be quiet, well-mannered and no less than an “all-fives” student. The race never ends, and it is present throughout the studies and professional career. Achievements and “the end justifies means”-attitude are what define a person’s success and status. Finland scored only 26/100 points in this category, which mean it is a feminine society. Quality of life is a high priority and it is more important to do what you really like, than pressuring yourself to be the best.

Hofstede explains that he is talking about emotional gender roles, being “what you should feel being born as a boy or being born as a girl”. From the young age, boys in typically masculine countries such as Poland, are being taught to be tough, strong, and that

expressing emotions is feminine, since “boys don’t cry”. Girl’s role is to be the guardian of *hearth and home*, the one that keeps the family together, and focuses on the quality of life. Father is the serious, down-to-earth figure dealing with facts, while the mother deals with emotions and feelings. In feminine countries, both parents are responsible for facts and feelings, and take equal part in the child’s upbringing. Big and easily noticeable difference between Poland and Finland, is that fathers – or men in general – are taking care of the child together with the mother, they are present and involved. Seeing men with strollers in parks and playing with kids on playgrounds is nothing unusual in Finland. In Poland, in most cases it’s the mother who takes kids out to play – father is more in the background. Same with kindergartens and primary schools. Male kindergarten teachers are not unusual in Finland, while in Poland such case is extremely rare, even considered a taboo, often filled with suspicions and unfair stereotypes. However, only the parents seem to have a problem with it, not the children. The profession of a male kindergarten teacher is dominated by women to the extent that there is a problem to find an appropriate masculine equivalent of it in Polish language (Hannolainen 2016).

Even though this dimension focuses strictly on emotional gender, it’s worth mentioning that Polish society clearly defines the social gender and roles of men and women. Again, language comes as a tool that gives some light on the masculinity-femininity dimension of Polish society. In colloquial language, the expression “don’t be a woman”, indicates that someone is unable to make a decision, hesitant, and on the verge of giving up. Names of some professions are feminine (“pielęgniarka” – nurse, the “-ka” ending indicates feminine grammatical gender) or masculine (“prawnik” – lawyer, noun ending in consonant indicating masculine grammatical gender) in their basic form, and feminization (or masculinization) of the noun sounds unnatural, and even has sarcastic repercussion – the abovementioned example of a “male kindergarten teacher” is not an isolated incident. However, the times are changing, and people are, too. Polish society and language specialists are trying to introduce the nouns changing in accordance to gender, without negative connotation. In Finland, where the language is already genderless, turning names of professions that suggest the gender of the person into gender-neutral is becoming common (Grönros 2007).

This gender roles definition reflects on relationships. Old-fashioned gallantry and chivalry are still valued both by women and men in Poland, and not following the courteousness is considered “unmanly”. Women in Poland will hardly ever pay for themselves if they are in a restaurant with a man. Still common, however slowly going out of fashion and becoming undesirable, is the practice of kissing woman’s hand upon meeting her for the first time. There is however the other side of the coin – as a masculine society, where the man holds

the primary role in many aspects of life, the woman's role comes down to be a 24/7 housewife.

The religious aspect of masculine-feminine dimension also gives an interesting example in Poland-Finland comparison. In Roman Catholic religion, which is practiced by nearly 90% of the Polish population (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2016), the focus is on God, The Father. Only men are allowed to be priests and fulfil high functions in church hierarchy. In Evangelical Lutheran religion, the main religion of Finland, both men and women can be priests. Seeing a woman priest conducting a mass for the first time, was a very surprising experience to me, to say the least.

#### **4.2.4 Uncertainty Avoidance**

On this dimension, Poland scored high 93 points which makes it a country of a very high preference to avoid the uncertain. Even though Finland scored 59 points, which also belongs to a high score on the scale, there is a visible difference between the two countries. By definition, the country with a high preference to avoid uncertainty has specific rules of belief and behaviour and doesn't accept anything that is unconventional. There is no acceptance to anything that is different from the norm, because "different is dangerous" (Hofstede 2014).

Same thing applies to technological advance. In uncertainty avoiding countries, introducing new technologies, automation and digitalization of everyday processes takes time and is significantly slower than in countries that accept uncertainty. It was one of the first big differences I noticed as a Polish person moving to Finland. Most of the processes I would have to do on paper, in person in Poland, I could do in front of my computer in Finland. Queuing numbers in post offices, libraries and health stations were a novelty to me, and I certainly found them a very convenient way to keep order in place.

People in uncertainty avoiding countries rarely change their job and often work in the same position for 40+ years. Since changing job is a huge uncertainty, they rather keep what they already have, even though there could be something better in sight. In Poland, it's very common to keep one's job throughout their life, slightly changing responsibilities and tasks within one company. If a person of age 40 and more loses their job, the chance to find something new with steady income and benefits, are very unlikely.

Countries avoiding uncertainty are afraid of people who look, act and behave differently than the majority. Bullying because of looks at school is not unusual, and people are very judgemental towards people who stand out in any way. Xenophobia and to certain extent racism are present phenomena in Poland, and during last few years physical expressions of xenophobia have increased in the country. Attacks on foreign students and even foreign people who have lived in Poland for years are relatively common. The fear of the

different is strong and visible. Even though some part of Polish society is open-minded, welcoming and ready to see the world differently, the voice of majority seems to be stronger.

Finland, especially Helsinki, is very multi-national, multi-cultural and welcoming for everyone. It's nothing unusual to see people from different parts of the world around you and hear different languages, and for someone from a very homogenous country, it might be challenging to adapt. What I have noticed in Finland, which has higher uncertainty avoidance in comparison to some other Nordic countries (Sweden 29 points, Denmark 23 points), it is common to see people with unique clothing style or unusual hairstyles, and nobody seems to pay attention. Everyone has a right and is given the space to be themselves in every aspect, and the society is open for that.

#### **4.2.5 Long Term Orientation**

In this dimension, Poland and Finland scored equally 38 points, which places both countries somewhere in-between short and long term orientation. Long term oriented countries see good and evil as being relative and can change in time. They are not absolute and can only exist in comparison to something else, which in practice means that the rules and norms depend on the circumstances they apply to. On the short term side, good and evil are "absolute and always the same" (Hofstede 2014). The norms are fixed and they are never flexible.

Long term oriented societies appreciate humbleness and modesty, as opposed to short term societies who seek positive reinforcement and praise. Countries on the long term side want to learn from other countries, while short term oriented countries are known for the national pride and patriotism. Traditions in long term countries can be changed, which is not possible on the other side of the scale. Last but not least, long term orientation sees common sense as a main tool in problem solving and aims to achieve win-win situation. Short term side exhibits more fundamentalism and tends to choose the extreme. It can show itself in religious, ideological or political aspect.

While both countries scored the same amount of points in the Country Comparison Tool, there are certain deviations towards each end of the scale for both countries. Double standards and flexing the rules depending on the situation and who is involved in it are common in Poland, which is a characteristic of long term orientation societies. However, the national pride, from the other side of the scale, is strong and present in many situations.

When it comes to religious aspect, Poland is a catholic country where religion is present in every part of life. According to Social Diagnosis report, over 20% of all the people actively participating in organizational activities, belong to religious organizations. Baptism, First



Communion and Confirmation are commonly practiced sacraments, even among the majority of atheist families who consider them a tradition and something that simply has to be done. One example of being bound to tradition could be the church law of abstaining from eating meat on Christmas Eve, which has been abolished since 1983. The tradition however is rooted so deeply in Polish people that they can't imagine seeing meat on the Christmas dinner table – to me, personally, Finnish Christmas Ham was slightly surprising. The tradition of vegetarian (allowing fish) Christmas dinner in Poland lives until this day. Holy Mass for students and teachers is the essential part of the beginning of the academic year celebrations, as well as any other official events or national holidays.

#### **4.2.6 Indulgence versus Restraint**

Poland scored 29 points on Restraint-Indulgence scale, which makes it a restraint culture. Finland however, as opposed to the popular stereotype of Finns being pessimistic and cynical, scored much higher and ended up with 57 points, making it an indulgent society. The dimension focuses on the subjective perception of happiness and sadness, control of life, and general enjoyment. Indulgent societies enjoy life, fulfil their desires and allow themselves to have fun. The people are in general healthier and happier, and feel like they have more control over their personal life. They appreciate and make the best out of their leisure time.

On the other hand, restraint societies have strict social norms that regulate everyday life and thus limit the freedom of expressing needs and emotions. People from restraint societies tend to blame whatever happens in their life on someone else, or other circumstances. They are pessimistic and cynical, and for the most part, their lives revolve around work. It is often said – mostly by the Poles themselves – that the national characteristic of Polish people is complaining. The mentality could be summed up in one sentence: “life is miserable, nothing makes me happy and everyone wants to take advantage of me – and it's never my fault”.

Already mentioned stereotype of Finnish people seems to be very far from truth in comparison to the Indulgence vs Restraint dimension. Even though Finns can't be named the world's most cheerful nation, they sure know how to balance work life and personal life. One of the things I noticed about Finns is that they love to travel. Nearly everyone has visited foreign countries at least once in their life, and summer holidays in warmer regions inside and outside Europe are nothing unusual. Finnish people see traveling as a possibility to see other cultures, educate themselves and they know they deserve a proper vacation after many weeks of hard work. In Poland however, for many years traveling abroad for holidays was seen an unnecessary treat and a waste of money. Many people don't have passports and have never been abroad. In Finland, recreational sport is a big part of everyday life. People of all ages are seen doing different kind of sports in any

weather. Children in kindergartens are playing outside nearly every day. One of my Finnish friends once told me: "There is no such thing as bad weather – only bad clothing".

In Poland, the trend of healthy lifestyle is relatively new, and it started in the first place mostly thanks to famous people popularizing healthy lifestyle and "rising stars" of fitness in social media. People only recently started to exercise, go jogging and make healthy food choices, and it is still seen mostly among young people. For most people, sport is something you watch other people do on TV. When it comes to introvert-extrovert scale, Polish people are somewhere in between, and it highly depends on a person. As a nation, the Polish are very hospitable and like to host parties and social gatherings. Family relationships are very important. Even the most distant family members are being invited to family gatherings and big events like weddings or funerals. An old-polish proverb says "*Gość w dom - Bóg w dom*", which translates to "*A guest in the house means God in the house*". The host's duty is to make their guests as comfortable as possible.

## 5 Edward T. Hall's cultural dimensions

Edward Twitchell Hall was an American ethnologist and anthropologist. His ground-breaking research on intercultural communication and personal space created new fields and possible areas of social studies (Rogers, Hart & Miike 2002). Hall's theory of cultural factors focuses on three dimensions: context, time, and space. They represent cultural differences in interpersonal communication (verbal and non-verbal), personal space, and the individual perception of time.

The idea of context is divided to two aspects: high context and low context culture. High-context cultures are the ones where to understand the message, one must know how to read "between the lines". The message is never straight-forward and is not supposed to be understood literally. It is crucial to know the cultural nuances and background, the social norms as well as the language connotations, to be able to understand the message that the other person conveys. Asian and Middle-Eastern cultures belong to the high-context group. Low-context cultures are the ones where people communicate openly and directly – what has been said is what counts. This group includes countries of Western Europe and North America.

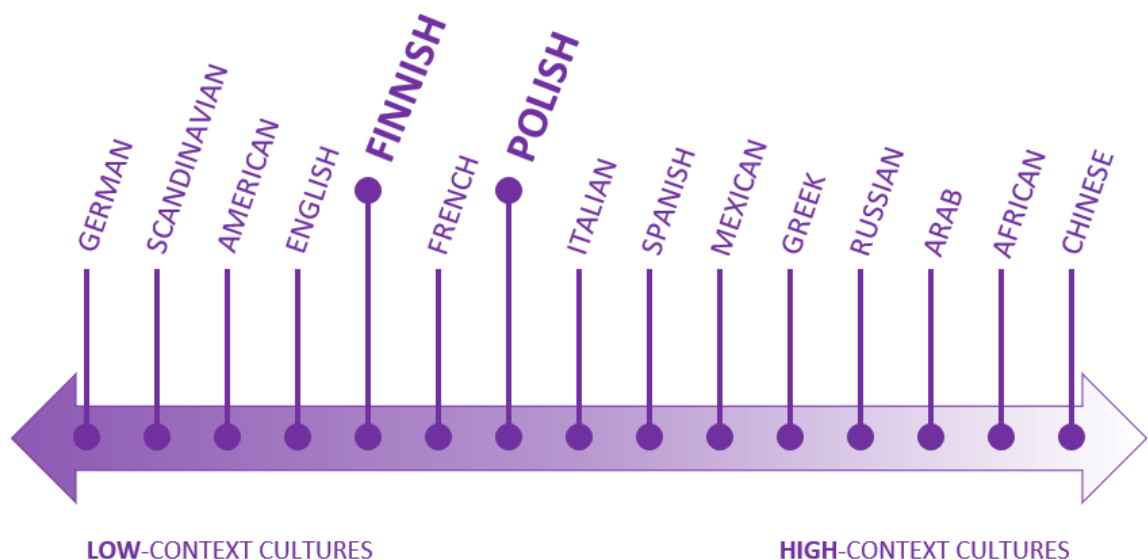


Figure 2. Visual representation of low- and high-context cultures adapted from Hall's theories and graph by Southeastern University Online (2016).

### 5.1 High-context cultures

In high-context cultures, the emphasis is put on indirect and nonverbal communication. It is nearly impossible to understand the message without extensive background information. When talking with an individual from a high-context background, one is

expected to know what is on this person's mind. They will mention many other issues during the conversation, carefully omitting the crucial one. Giving a direct message is seen as a violation of interlocutor's individuality and an insult (Hall 1976, 113).

Relationships of the countries belonging to high-context culture depend on trust and stability. They build up slowly and there is clear distinction between people from inside and outside of one's social circle. Getting projects done depends on the level of relationship between people, their attention to the cause and productivity. People who were raised in high-context culture have more expectations towards other people than those from low-context cultures. A person's identity is deeply rooted in their family, cultural circle, or work environment. In organizations based in high-context countries, the main responsibility of all the employees' and subordinates' actions lies in the hands of the person of the highest authority (Hall 1976).

High-context communication is characterized by use of many nonverbal elements, tone of voice, gestures, facial expressions and eye movement. All of these nonverbal signs carry the meaning highly significant to the conversation. Situation, people involved, and gesticulation are of higher value than words. Conflict is seen as a personal threat – it must be either solved before next steps are taken or avoided by all means (Hall 1976).

The sense of personal space is very weak. People usually share the same space, stand close to each other and the space is seen as a common asset.

Time is seen as a process and is flexible. It does not belong to the individual – it belongs to others and to nature. Plans change until the last minute and the plans for future are never solid. It is more important that an activity is done, than how it is done (Hall 1976).

## **5.2 Low-context cultures**

Low-context cultures rely on straightforward communication and transparent messages. The information is clear, defined and to the point.

In low-context cultures, the concept of one's social circle is very broad. People don't see others as insiders or outsiders, there are no definite boundaries, people join and leave one's social circle throughout the years. Relationships begin and end rather quickly. When working on a project, it is important to follow the procedures and focus on the goal. Personal identity doesn't have its roots in family or culture, but within oneself and their accomplishments and achievements. In low-context culture, the responsibility is evenly spread throughout the institution and is not centralized at the top (Hall 1976).

Words are more important in getting the message across than the context or nonverbal cues. Nonverbal elements are used rarely, things are being spelled out exactly as they are without a deeper or hidden meaning. The process of communication is seen as way to exchange ideas, opinions and information between two or more parties. Disagreement is

allowed, expected and is not taken personally. Finding a rational solution to the conflict is the most important, and no attention is paid to a personal factor. It is acceptable to give honest feedback and express disappointment if needed (Hall 1976).

Personal space is valued and important. People tend to be farther apart from each other and keep things to themselves. They appreciate their own right for privacy, and respect others' (Hall 1976).

Time is linear and extends to the future and the past. Time can be saved, spent, wasted, lost, crawling, running out etc (Hall 1976, 19). Such expressions used when talking about time in low-context cultures are a great indicator of how the time is perceived – it is a foundation and a frame around which the life revolves, and this concept is deeply rooted in people's consciousness. Time is the system that gives order to life. Things are bound to specific schedules and timetables and efficient manner of work is emphasized (Hall 1976).

### **5.3 Poland and Finland in context**

Even though both Poland and Finland can be placed among the low-context continuum, noticeable changes in behaviour are still present. Both countries however show similarities with both low- and high-context cultures, depending on the aspect. In this part I will use my personal observations to highlight behaviours of both Polish and Finnish society and how they reflect on the theory of cultural contexts.

When it comes to communication style, Finnish people tend to be more straight-forward and direct in expressing their opinions. It highly depends on a person, but the general impression is as such. Finns tend to keep their affairs to themselves and put high emphasis on individuality, but whenever they decide to express their opinion, they usually do it without hesitation and with full honesty (Finland Promotion Board 2018). For example, in a situation when a Finnish person is asked whether they like the food they are being served, they don't have a problem with saying the truth. In Poland, it is considered appropriate to always say that you like the food, and eat even though you don't like it.

Poland places somewhere in between the high- and low-context culture. It can be seen both figuratively and literally – from geographical point of view, Poland is between Germany and countries of former Soviet Union. Germany is one of the highest placed countries of the low-context scale, while Russia and Eastern Europe belong to high-context dimension (figure 2). Polish people often find German and American (low-context) direct style of communication as intrusive or rude.

In Finland, personal space is highly valued (Finland Promotion Board 2018), but the level of trust towards other people in general seems to be higher than in Poland. It is rare to see fences around yards in Finland, which highly surprised me upon moving here. In Poland, every private possession is fenced, and it is common to see a "Beware of dog"

sign on the gate. On the other hand, Polish people are very expressive when greeting each other. Kissing on the cheek and hugging is very common, while in Finland a simple nod as a sign of acknowledgement of another person's presence and a firm handshake is enough. The expressiveness also applies to contact with strangers. Buses in Finland are usually quiet, people respect each other's space and right to be in peace and silence. In Poland, it is not unusual to see strangers suddenly engaging in a lively conversation in tram, bus stop or when queuing for groceries.

Finland is a country where punctuality and reliable timetables are of highest value. Public transport tends to be reliable and people respect each other's time. Whether it be a doctor appointment or social gathering, it is important to be on time or even a little earlier. Polish people tend to have a complicated relationship with punctuality, but it might be because of cultural and social drawbacks, and individual's reaction to other people's lack of punctuality (Gašior 2012). It is normal and expected for trains in Poland to be late – from 40 minutes to several hours. Why would someone want to be on time, if there surely will be a delay? Public institutions, such as banks, courts or clinics in Poland have rather flexible approach to punctuality and deadlines. Taking care of formalities or administrative matters in institutions usually takes a lot of time and is very frustrating. Meeting a doctor at the arranged appointment time is on the verge of a miracle.

However, the problem is not only in the sluggishness of the officials – it goes deeper to the behaviour of society in general. People expect punctuality not being punctual themselves. It is considered normal to be a little late to work, school, or social gathering. The concept of “academic quarter” is widely popular and practiced. Deadlines are rarely final, and there is always a way to extend them and change the plans. It is especially seen among younger generations – if something can be done later, why doing it now (Gašior 2012).

## **6 Presentation of results**

The goal of theoretical comparison of Poland and Finland was to find what could hypothetically be the biggest cultural differences and areas of possible misunderstanding. Going through the Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the greatest difference appeared to be in Power Distance dimension, Masculinity vs Femininity, and Uncertainty Avoidance. I have also included in my interview description of culture shock and questions related to this phenomenon. To back up my research results further, I have conducted interviews with Polish people living in Finland to hear their opinion and see if the theory reflects itself in real life (see Attachment 1).

### **6.1 Empirical research – interviews and results**

As a focus group for my research, I chose 7 people aged between 20-40 who currently live in Finland, and 5 of them answered (for more details see Appendix 2). The initial plan was to meet in person with whomever possible, but due to schedule differences and sometimes the distance, the questions were sent out by email and sent back to me in the same, written form. The group consisted of both students and people who are already active in work life. One of the interviewees was a person who has moved to Finland from Poland as a child and even though their identity is at the moment more Finnish than Polish, I decided that their answers will add a lot of value to the research overall and give it a slightly different perspective. Most of the interviewees are students, have been students or are about to graduate, so they are familiar with Finnish higher education system from the foreigner's point of view. Those who have not studied in Finland gave more insight to work life and life in Finland in general.

After receiving the answers from my test group, I have read them and compared to theoretical part of my research. My biggest points of interest were the differences, disagreements and the coping methods. One major limitation of the data collection method I used was that I know most of these people personally and have some idea of their social and cultural background, without specifically asking them to describe it in the interview. I did my best however to be as objective in my analysis as possible and describe the results in a trustworthy and valuable way. It was important to me to encourage my test group members to write their opinions openly and honestly without taking into consideration our personal relationship, and I made sure that this was highlighted in the interview as well.

#### **6.1.1 Interview part I – General questions**

First part of my interview focused on general impressions of Finland before and after moving here, without getting into cultural aspects, dimensions and contexts. I asked about

what they miss about Poland while living in Finland and the other way round, existing stereotypes and things that they associate with Finland the most.

The stereotype of Finns being quiet and calm is the one that everyone mentioned, but not everyone agrees with. It might be that in comparison with expressive and loud Poles, Finns appear to be even quieter and distant than they really are. I think this is one very valid point and should be taken into consideration when getting to know Finns. What Polish people miss about Poland the most is food, openness in human interactions and ease of making friends. When in Poland, they miss peace and silence, clean air and nature, equality and freedom of expression.

### **6.1.2 Interview part II – Hofstede's Dimensions and Hall's Contexts in practice**

In this part of the interview I described the concept of cultural dimensions mapped out by Hofstede and asked questions related to them, i.e. do they agree with where Poland and Finland are on the dimensional scale, have they experienced these cultural differences in practice, and what is in their opinion biggest cultural difference between Poland and Finland and how did they cope with it.

Almost all of the interviewees agree that theory reflects itself in practice, and many saw it as unfortunate, especially in Power Distance dimension. This was mentioned particularly by students, who have experienced less stress and fear towards teachers and lecturers than they would have when studying back in Poland. The amount of freedom that they have been given as students has also helped most of them to get through studying process smoothly.

Many aspects of everyday life and culture that belong to Uncertainty Avoidance have been mentioned in the results, especially broadly defined trust, acceptance towards being different, and freedom of making life choices. Tremendous amount of trust from public services towards a customer showing itself in possibility of taking care of official issues via the Internet or phone was mentioned as a major difference. In Poland, most of such errands must be taken care of in person, with physically proving your identity. Finnish honesty and belief that others are as honest as you has however its flaws as well – there is a risk of being taken advantage of by someone who is not culturally adjusted to total honesty and transparency. The way parents trust their children and give them freedom to be who they are and learn about life in their own way was another thing mentioned more than once in the answers. Finnish parents indeed give more freedom to their children and encourage their independence, while in Poland it is often so that parents either put their unfulfilled ambitions on their children or pressure their kids to join the same work field as parents (teachers, doctors, lawyers etc.).



There is more rivalry in pursuing success in Poland than in Finland. Interview answers showed clearly that employees in Finland are respected and trusted, and their rights are taken into consideration. In Poland children are taught from the very young age that they have to be the best and have to know their social role. There is also a problem of young women being under pressure to start the family even if they would prefer to focus on something else, such as career, hobbies or education. Lack of gender equality is a problematic issue, more so in Poland than in Finland, but this topic is so broad and complex I decided to only mention it in my research results – it is too important and too big of an issue nowadays to leave it unmentioned, but it definitely needs its own focus, resources and research.

When asked about the biggest difference between Poland and Finland, the answers revolved around trust and respect. Trust aspect has been described before – it is easier to get things done in Finland, people take up their responsibilities and expect the same from you, and there is no way to go around things – it is all about honesty and transparency. Same applies to respect – freedom of choice, speech, encouraging independence and giving each other space to be who we want to be. In Poland, sometimes expressing your “unpopular” opinion makes you seen as arrogant and full of yourself. In Finland, disagreement is usually a start of interesting conversation. The famous Finnish “obsession” with personal space is seen as something positive and respectful by some of interviewees, but it can also lead to feeling of abandonment and loneliness, which leads us to next topic – the difficulties.

According to Hofstede’s dimensions, Poland and Finland are very close on the Individualism vs Collectivism scale, however when looking at the results of my interviews Polish society should be higher on the Collectivism scale. Over half of the answering people didn’t agree with Poland being an individualistic society. The biggest difficulty, or the hardest aspect of social life to get used to, is lack of human interaction. Polish people tend to make friends and engage in casual chit-chat with anyone, while in Finland it is practically unacceptable – unless one wants to be considered crazy or American (personal experience). From a point of view of a Polish person who just moved to Finland, Finnish people are lacking basic social skills, they are impolite and awkwardly quiet. They also tend to separate themselves from foreigners, which can potentially result in creating groups of Finns versus The Rest. The answers however explain that this is not entirely wrong or bad – it is understandable, but one must put minimum effort to get to know the culture and accept it as it is. There are no shortcuts. The same thing can be said about the language. Finnish is different from Polish in probably every possible way. Even though it is very easy to use English on a daily basis, at some point the lack of language skill can be a big limitation, and while speaking Finnish is considered valuable and even an achievement, it is still not a warranty for better job or higher social acceptance.

The part about Hall's contexts included putting Poland and Finland on a 1 to 5 scale, 1 = low context and 5 = high context. All of the interviewed people answered that in reality, Poland is a lot closer to high context society than in theory. The answer about Finland being a low context was considered rather obvious, because of the privacy, individuality and independence aspects. The test group considers communication in Polish society as "full of understatements" and "not very specific". There were also comments on how it's almost normal to be late in Poland, and the casual approach to timetables and deadlines seen as a flaw of Polish society.

### **6.1.3 Interview part III – Culture shock**

In this part, interviewees were asked to share their experiences related to the process of adjustment to a new culture, and their personal recommendations for Polish people who want to move to Finland.

Culture shock has not been a big of an issue for basically any of the people from my test group. Modern technology such as unlimited access to Internet and communication tools (Skype, Facebook etc.) make it possible to stay in touch with the family and follow the news about Poland. For most of my interviewees, their stay in Finland was related to the possibility of personal and professional development, which outweighed the influence of culture shock and symptoms related to it. The transition from one culture to another went rather well, with some difficulties related to personality, expectations and language barrier, language being the biggest one.

Third stage of culture shock however, irritability and hostility, seems to be the most problematic. In this stage, the lack of language fluency appears to be the most limiting factor. Some interviewees have experienced borderline racist behaviour and exclusion (for example at workplace), fortunately this applies only to a minority of people met.

Test group's recommendations focused on the need to learn Finnish language to at least communicative level. Without that, sooner or later one will not be taken into serious consideration during job search and, in the long run, might be labelled as second-class citizen.

## **6.2 Conclusion and recommendations**

Comparing the results of interviews and the theoretical part of my research, the one big difference that showed up was Finnish individualism vs Polish collectivism. Interview answers, when asked about differences in Power distance dimension included things such as high need of social acceptance, necessity to save face at all costs and worrying about other people's opinion, which are – according to Hofstede's theory – associated with Collectivist society. I see it as an interesting find and maybe an indication that cultural differences between Poland and Finland could be studied further, especially the aspect of

Poland being more collectivist than the theory suggests. There was also a major disagreement with Poland being put on a context scale between high and low. In practice, Poland should be considered more of a high-context country, where communication is not always transparent, and time is seen as something that can be bent and adjusted depending on the circumstances.

Adapting to a new culture and finding your place in a new environment depends entirely on the individual. There is no recipe or manual for social adaptation. There are however issues worth mentioning that everyone can learn something from.

Strong will to get to know the culture and social nuances can get one very far. For Polish people, especially the aspect of social interactions, small talk and personal space might be one of the biggest obstacles. Moderation in judgement and eagerness to learn about the new, different culture and understanding are the key. When we pocket our pride and give ourselves a chance to see the world differently, we open ourselves to new experiences, feelings, life lessons, and everything that makes us unique individuals. My recommendation for Polish people who want to move to Finland would be that they need to understand the value of honesty and transparency if they want to make their adaptation process easier. Another but just as important thing is to not take the lack of social interaction and Finnish "arrogance" personally. Silence is valued and expected, there is no need to force social interactions and being quiet but polite is seen as a virtue.

I think Finland has a potential of being a good choice for students from Poland. The choice of Bachelor studies in English is limited but it could give Polish students a chance to get to know a completely different education system.

## **7 Discussion**

This chapter is dedicated to the analysis of my research results, reflection on the limitations and evaluation of methods I chose. While focusing here on results and self-evaluation, I would also want to use the opportunity to bring personal story about my relationship with Finland and the importance of the topic of cultural differences and adaptation process to me.

### **7.1 Why Finland?**

I have moved to Finland permanently in 2012 after visiting the country regularly since 2010. I spent my first 10 months here as an au-pair of a Finnish family. It was a one of a kind experience that gave me a rare and extremely valuable possibility to get to know the culture, learn the customs, see life in Finland from an insider's perspective and find my way around the new and unknown social rules. Culture shock didn't spare me, obviously. It was there, it was strong, and left me with many questions and doubts. It was a very difficult time but I had a goal, a dream, and a wish to understand Finnish culture.

As of May 2018, I am a Finnish citizen. Each day gives me new perspectives and reasons to appreciate the country I chose to make my home, and also possibilities to enrich Finnish culture with my Polish heritage. It's a process of learning, experiencing, living between two different cultures, but getting the best of both worlds. I wanted to share my experiences, gather other fellow Poles' experiences, and collect them together to give other Polish people planning to move to Finland an idea of what to expect.

### **7.2 Analysis of results**

The results of this research-based thesis, even though the test group consisted of only 5 individuals, already showed interesting differences between theory and practice. Dimension and context where Poland was put either together or very close with Finland, turned out to be not true according to the test group. I see this as an indication of trustworthiness of the results, because both parts where they didn't agree with theory are crucial to the way the society is perceived. Even with expanding the age range, I would expect the results to be similar. Seeing that young people from my test group, living in the age of Internet and social media, still crave human interaction that they were used to back in Poland, shows that age and exposition to technology doesn't play a big role when it comes to socializing. I think that conducting interviews in groups or with more participants would bring to the surface even more interesting issues related to Individualism vs Collectivism and cultural contexts. It would be also interesting to research those specific cultural aspects with focus strictly on business and work life.

Because of the visible incompatibility of the interviewees' answers and Hofstede's theory about Individualism – Collectivism spectrum for Poland, it might indicate that the research

itself is obsolete. The latest, 3rd edition of the most popular of Hofstede's publications *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* was published in 2010, and another one – going into detail about cultural dimensions – *Exploring Culture: Exercises, Stories and Synthetic Cultures*, is from 2002.

Another reason could have been that there was not enough Polish people involved to give reliable and realistic results. Hofstede worked on development of his cultural dimensions theory between 60's and 70's, when Poland was under a heavy influence of communism and traveling abroad, especially to the West, was extremely difficult. Getting a passport and permission to leave the country was a long and tedious process, and usually required many attempts (WP MEDIA 2010).

The results of this research show that what Polish people moving to Finland might see as a personality difference, is in fact rooted deeply in cultural and social aspects. Learning about high-context and low-context countries, and especially Poland and Finland on that scale, might make it easier to prepare to move to Finland and get the idea of what to expect, and also decide whether a person is ready and willing to adapt to such change.

### **7.3 Self-evaluation**

Anthropology and sociology have always been in my range of interests. I was always fascinated by different cultures, how they shape people as individuals and how people through ages learned to adapt to different social-economic conditions. Because of that, I chose Communication as the major subject of my study programme. Human factor is what I was looking for in business school and it was a good choice. Having an opportunity to write thesis about my own culture finding itself in another culture gave me a whole new view of the topic of national culture.

The thesis writing process started in March and was unfortunately interrupted in the mid-year because of reasons beyond my control. However, with the help of study advisor and thesis coordinator I was able to get back on track and work on content that is valuable for reader and important to me. I wish I could have taken a deeper look into Hofstede's theories which I found especially interesting, but with the time and resources I had I feel like I learned a lot about cultural dimensions and my current knowledge is a very good basis for further learning. It was a very enlightening experience to be able to see the good and the bad of my own culture through scientific point of view, without judgement and prejudice. It raised many questions in me, why are we the way we are, what made us this way, how historical events and experiences shape the whole nation to this day. I've learned a lot about Finland and Finnish people, things that I see every day in society have now a new meaning to me and I'm even more open and curious about this nation.

At this time of the year it was challenging to meet my interviewees in person. Everyone is busy and have their own projects to take care of but by giving a less personal but equally

valuable option of written interview, I see it as a success. People's opinions and experiences are extremely inspiring, and I am very glad that my test group was willing to share theirs with me to make this research valid and important.

Bread and salt alone might not be enough to break the ice of at first sight dark and gloomy Finns, but with a little bit of empathy, understanding and open mind, the ice will melt and reveal an honest, straight-forward and reliable friend for life. We all search for our own El Dorado – I have found mine in the Land of a Thousand Lakes.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview questions in English + 3

I am writing a bachelor's thesis about cultural differences between Poland and Finland and how do Polish people overcome those differences when they move to Finland. As a benchmark, I am using Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory together with Edward T. Hall's cultural concepts theory. Theories and their practical examples are shortly described in this questionnaire.

At this point I would like to highlight, that examples of cultural behaviour while comparing differences between Poland and Finland are THEORETICAL, based on cultural theories that generalize the nations. Not all of them are true for a nation that fits the scale, nor you have to agree with.

Last note before you start writing your answers – there is no wrong answers. Everything that comes to your mind, every experience from school/work/everyday life, is meaningful for this research – full freedom of expression.

#### Part I – General questions

- 1) What are the 3 things that come to your mind when you think about Finland?
- 2) What did you know about Finland before you moved here?
- 3) How has your perception of Finland changed after moving here? Were the stereotypes true?
- 4) What do you miss the most about Poland? How do you cope with it?
- 5) Is there anything that you miss about Finland when you're in Poland?

#### Part II – Theory in practice

##### ❖ Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Geert Hofstede developed cultural dimensions to describe mindsets, behaviours and patterns specific for certain nations.

- Power distance – dimension describing relationships between subordinates and superiors, authorities and citizens, the level of obedience towards parents, superiors and authorities.
- Uncertainty avoidance – fear of the unknown, level of danger felt by the members of society when facing a new, unknown or uncertain situation.
- Collectivism vs Individualism – relationships between the members of the society, acting towards the benefit of the individual or benefit of the group.
- Masculinity vs Femininity – role division between genders; this dimension focuses on gender as EMOTIONAL phenomenon, not strictly social.
- Long-term vs short-term orientation – the future or the tradition, difference between long- and short-term attitude in life.
- Indulgence vs Restraint – dimension describing subjective approach of the nation towards happiness and sadness, pleasure and duties, impulsiveness or controlling the emotions.

## SUMMARY

According to Hofstede's theory, the biggest cultural differences occur in the following dimensions:

- **Power distance**
- **Uncertainty avoidance**
- **Masculinity vs Femininity**

## QUESTIONS:

- 1) After familiarizing yourself with cultural dimensions and their practical explanations, do you agree with them? If not, why? Explain your opinion in a few sentences.
- 2) Focusing on the 3 dimensions with biggest differences, do you think that theory reflects itself in practice? Have you encountered those differences in everyday/school/work life?
- 3) What is, in your opinion, one biggest difference between Poland and Finland?
- 4) What was the biggest cultural obstacle for you and how did you cope with it?

### ❖ Hall's cultural concepts

Hall's theory focuses on 3 aspects of culture: context, time, and space. They describe specific differences in interpersonal communication.

### High context:

- Nonverbal communication
- Closed social circles
- Low need of personal space
- Time seen as flexible, making last-minute plans, being late is expected and socially accepted

### Low context:

- Clear and transparent communication
- Wide social circles
- Respect for privacy and personal space
- Time is the definition and foundation of life, punctuality, deadlines and schedules

## QUESTIONS:

- 1) After familiarizing yourself with cultural contexts, how would you place Poland and Finland on a scale from 1 to 5, if 1 is **low** context and 5 is **high** context? Explain your choice.
- 2) What are your experiences related to cultural contexts? What differences have you noticed, if any?

### **PART III – Culture shock**

**Culture shock** is a group of symptoms that a person experiences when exposed to long-term influence of a new culture.

5 stages of culture shock:

- Honeymoon – excitement about the new culture.
- Disorientation – the number of stimuli is overwhelming, own values lose their meaning in a new culture.
- Irritability and hostility – dominant emotions are anger and irritability, expectations of a new culture are seen as hard to understand or useless; loneliness and abandonment.
- Adjustment and integration – the hardest stage of culture shock is almost over, and the person starts to see both cultures more rationally and subjectively. Navigation in new environment is much easier.
- Biculturality – the last stage of culture shock. The person is completely adjusted both to own culture and the new one. (*This is however a controversial statement – there is no scientific proof that reaching this stage is possible*).

### **QUESTIONS**

- 1) Have you experienced a culture shock? If not, how did your integration process with the new environment go?
- 2) Which stage was the hardest for you and why? How did you go through it?
- 3) Do you think there is some specific cultural difference that could be problematic in the future?
- 4) Is there anything you wish you had known before moving to Finland? What kind of advice would you give to a Polish person who is planning to move to Finland?

### **PART IV – Open discussion**

Here you can add any remarks and own observations that you see as important and have not been mentioned by me.

Examples:

- Have you learned anything new from this research?
- Which information was the most interesting or the most surprising?
- What do you disagree with the most?

## Appendix 2. Information about answerers + 1

	AGE	GENDER	OCCUPATION
<b>Person 1</b>	32	Female	Service advisor
<b>Person 2</b>	33	Female	Doctoral student
<b>Person 3</b>	21	Female	Student, music journalist
<b>Person 4</b>	35	Female	Kindergarten teacher
<b>Person 5</b>	26	Female	Student, marketing specialist