

Propaganda rebranded? Finland's international communication from the Kantine committee to the Mission for Finland report

Working title: Image policy re-branded? Finland's international communication from the 1980s 'Kantine' committee to the 2011 Mission for Finland report.

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Abstract

This joint article looks at nation branding as a context and path dependent activity through the example of Finland's image building activities between 1988 and 2011. Despite changes in tone and methods, the 2011 *Mission for Finland* and the 1990 *Kantine* reports were both parts of a continuum in Finland's image policy practices. In an effort to contribute to studies drawing historical comparisons between image crafting policies, we would like to suggest that different contexts in fact produced different patterns of the same phenomenon, different expressions of the same urge to present Finland to the world. On this basis, our article suggests a series of variables with which to organise differences and similarities between Finland's 1980s-1990s public diplomacy efforts and its 2008-2011 branding committee.

Keywords: nation branding, Finland, history, path dependency, public diplomacy, *Kantine*, *Mission for Finland*

Introduction

As it emerged in the late 1990s, the literature on nation branding mostly expressed the point of view of practitioners. It aimed for the most part at convincing governments to adopt nation branding in order to increase competitiveness, economic growth, visibility, and attractiveness (Kaneva 2011). Branding was presented as an efficient, value-free way of implementing the lessons of corporate public relations into the communication of nation-states (Anholt 1998; Porter 1998; Moilanen & Rainisto 2009). However, new approaches to the phenomenon have gradually emerged (e.g. van Ham 2001), framing nation branding in the corporatisation and marketization of neo-liberal public collective practices (Kaneva 2007; Jansen 2008; Brown 2015; Chandler & Julian 2016; Aronczyk 2013; Browning 2013).

However suggestive of trends in the way nation branding has recently developed, these approaches have also presented it as a uniquely contemporary and global phenomenon, linked to the developments of neo-liberalism and the globalisation of practices. This assumption has been recently criticised from at least two directions. On the one hand, James Pamment (2014) has called for a more nuanced understanding of the local policy processes recent nation branding initiatives were embedded in. Others (e.g. Clerc, Glover & Jordan 2015) have insisted on the necessity of looking at nation branding in historical depth and as the “domestication” of global trends in national contexts (Valaskivi 2016a; 2016b; Alasuutari & Qadir 2013). For both authors, local efforts at nation branding would be best understood in the continuity of past practices as “...*historically specific forms of producing images of the nation*” (Bolin & Ståhlberg 2010, 79).

Building on these reflections, this joint article assumes that various nation branding practices emerging around the world have locally grounded histories, in which they merge with past efforts at producing coordinated images of nations. Our purpose is to suggest a way of looking at nation branding as context and path dependent using a specific case: Finland’s national image building from 1988 to 2011. The Nordic Countries have been avid early adopters of nation branding (Pamment 2014), and they have provided researchers with a rich field from which to draw comparisons over the long term and look at the way old practices have merged into nation branding. Merkelsen and Rasmussen (2015), for example, have analysed the conceptual foundation of Danish nation branding, describing it as the relabelling of existing trade and foreign policy initiatives. National budgetary authorities appeared to be especially sensitive to the corporatisation of public practices and discourses, forcing foreign policy administrators to relabel and re-organise their image-crafting activities in order to secure funding and legitimise their efforts.

In the Finnish case, debates about nation branding have seen protagonists’ accounts (Clerc, Kivioja & Kleemola 2015, 253-330) and only little academic research. Hytönen (2012) has insisted on the influence of foreign models, the Foreign Ministry’s role in planning and the effect of a specific cultural background. Anna Salmia has presented the role of development aid as a discursive element emphasised by the Finnish authorities, and has insisted on the need for studies looking at the administrative and political processes resulting in branding practices (Salmia 2012, 26-27). Our intention in this short piece is to do just that, by focusing on both historical continuities specific to Finland and the weight of new elements of context, new forms of communication, and new forms of governance.

The material gathered for this short essay originates mostly from the Finnish authorities and more specifically from the Finnish Foreign Ministry. This is a reflection of the central role played by the Ministry in the coordination and

implementation of efforts aiming at defining and spreading a certain image of Finland to foreign audiences. The Ministry's archives concerning the late 1980s *Kantine* committee are freely available to researchers and have been used by the authors¹. To study later processes, particularly the elaboration of the 2011 nation branding report, the authors have used documents made available to the public, interviews, and first-hand experience from participation in the national image making process². For the purpose of this short essay, both co-authors have also used their previous articles and publications, to which the reader is invited to refer for more references to primary sources. Methodologically, this essay is grounded in political and historical research, merging nation branding into historical continuities and local political processes (cf. Kaneva 2011, 124-126).

From *Kantine* to the EU: 1988-1995

The creation in October 1988 in the Finnish Foreign Ministry of a committee to reflect on Finland's "official international communication" has to be set into a wider context. As a comparatively wealthy, developed small nation and Northern European welfare state, Finland has been a part of Europe's political and economic turbulences linked to the end of the Cold War. Mikhail Gorbachev's policies, the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 cast anew the country's geopolitical environment and the main premises of a foreign and trade policy based on its close relation with the Soviet Union (cf. Meinander 2011; Lavery 2006, 150-171). Those were followed by a period of economic crisis from which both Finland's domestic policy and economic structures emerged profoundly transformed (Aunesluoma 2011). Simultaneously, the country was engaged in intense debates regarding its international position. These debates saw President Mauno Koivisto and Prime Minister Esko Aho conduct accession negotiations with the European Union (EU). A membership referendum organised in October 1994 gave a short majority to the country's accession to the EU, which became effective in January 1995. EU accession strengthened Finland's recovery from the 1991-1993 economic crisis.

Before these trends unravelled in the 1990s, the previous decade had been a mix of old and new, a balancing act between the necessities of Finland's relationship with the Soviet Union and the demands of a growing economy increasingly linked to Western markets through the 1973 free-trade treaty with the European Communities (EC). In the early 1980s, the Finnish polity also found itself in flux

¹ Finland adheres to a 25-year rule for the release of government documents, and *Kantine's* papers were released to the public in 2010 following these normal archival regulations (Finnish Foreign Ministry's Archives, archive group 19, *Kantine* records).

² Katja Valaskivi was the director of the Finnish Institute in Japan (2002-2005). At that time, the Institute, together with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, organised a campaign called Feel Finland (2003). This was a time when professional, marketing oriented ways of producing events for national image building were becoming a trend in the Nordic countries, and Finland launched its own programme for 'cultural exports'. Feel Finland was inspired by the campaign Swedish Style, organised in Tokyo a couple of years earlier. Later Valaskivi was an expert member of the Finland Promotion Board (2014-2018).

due to political evolutions and the resignation in 1982 of Urho Kaleva Kekkonen, the long-term president of the country. Concerns spread amongst business leaders about the need to seek out new export markets, attract investment, tourists and students (Korhonen 2017). The 1980s also saw ongoing discussions regarding the contours of Finland's nationhood, with a strong urge to get out of what many considered as the stuffiness of the Cold War years. Concerns for the competitiveness of Finnish companies in a liberalised European market, technological innovation, internationalisation, and liberalisation formed a new context the Finns tried to adapt to by emphasising national competitiveness on the world scene (Kantola 2006, 165–168; Niemi & Pernaa 2005, 265–282).

At the heart of most of these discussions were worries about the image of the country abroad and the economic, cultural, or political consequences of its international reputation for a small country. These concerns were not new, and the “management of Finland's image abroad” had been one of the Foreign Ministry's main duties since the early 1960s³. In 1983, when Ralf Friberg became head of the Ministry's Press Bureau, he was eager to assert the Ministry's control over activities linked to Finland's official communication abroad (Clerc 2014). When a report commissioned by the Ministry of Trade and Industry demanded a wide reflection on Finland's image policy, the Foreign Ministry seized the initiative: in October 1988, an ordinance of the Finnish government created a Committee for International Communication (*Kantine*, for *Kansainvälisen tiedottamisen neuvottelukunta*), to be coordinated by the Foreign Ministry.

Kantine began as a wide attempt to “gather opinions on improving knowledge about Finland abroad, make proposals based on these views, examine the current dispositions, consider the size and allocation of resources, and instigate new projects”⁴. Friberg extended recruitment beyond diplomats and civil servants into a varied set of business leaders, public intellectuals, civil servants, and civil society figures. The sense of common purpose of a small state's elite, while not guaranteeing unanimity, did make participation in such a state-led round-table a natural reflex for prominent public personalities. While some of its members had solid experience in media relations and were from the private sector, the committee retained a generalist feel and was mostly under the responsibility of civil servants. *Kantine* was clearly inscribed in a Finnish tradition of broad-based, consensus-seeking, multi-party seminars reflecting on great social, political, strategic and economic issues, and preparing decisions for government officials

³ In 1961, a “committee on information activities” gathered in the Foreign Ministry and concluded its work by emphasising that “*information activities are an essential part of the country's foreign policy*”. The report specified that the crafting and spreading of Finland's national image for foreign consumption had to be coordinated by state authorities, and especially by the Foreign Ministry (Anonymous 1961, 1-9). For decades, this report functioned as the blueprint of Finland's “information activities abroad” (cf. Clerc, Glover, Jordan 2015, 145-171).

⁴ Finnish Foreign Ministry's Archives, *Kantine* papers, Box 3, *Esittelylista valtioneuvoston yleiseen istuntoon* (List of items to be examined during a general session of government), 27th October 1988, signed by Ralf Friberg.

(Rainio-Niemi 2010). Its initial goal was to find ways to improve Finland's national image abroad. The private sector was associated with the project, although it remained within the Foreign Ministry's remit in administrative and budgetary terms.

During *Kantine's* first months, two central notions emerged from the debates: first, that Finland's image was still pulled down by negative features;⁵ second, that the committee's task ought to be much wider than that written in its governmental brief. Finland had to adapt to a new world in order to change its image, and the committee issued a wide-ranging list of policy proposals aimed at making Finland a truly Nordic society, at extracting it from the Cold War, and at emphasising culture, environment, and education in its future policies (Kantine 1990). A modernising, normative ethos ran through the report, seen as particularly important at a time when Finland and its environment were on the verge of important changes.

Something worth noting from *Kantine's* debates is the insistence on trade promotion and on the need to build an efficient "national trademark" on the part of the private sector and the Ministry for Industry and Trade.⁶ The Ministry of Education, although in milder terms, also expressed concern over the Foreign Ministry's coordinating tendencies (Autio 1997, 261–263). *Kantine* indeed represented a strong statement by the Foreign Ministry's Press and Culture Department of its centrality in image management, and of the importance of diplomats as overseers of a country's foreign relations.

From Kantine to Public Diplomacy: 1995-2005

While *Kantine's* report was published to great fanfare in 1990, the economic crisis starting in 1991 robbed it of most of its momentum. *Kantine* however can be seen as the blueprint for Finland's later reflections on image management, public diplomacy, and nation branding. Things moved quickly from the mid-1990s: the times were dominated by the country's accession to the EU, a process that anchored Finland in a commercial and political block, also giving it a clearer focus in terms of national identity and international reputation (Moisio & Harle 2000; Haukkala 2012). However, the early 2000s brought new global developments that pushed the Finnish government to consider the image of the country abroad in a new context of perceived increased international competition, an economic crisis starting in 2008 and political instability within the EU.

⁵ The committee conducted a series of interviews with Finnish diplomats, whose testimonies convinced the members that Finland was either ignored or had a bad reputation. The Embassy in Denmark, for example, signalled that most Danes would associate Finland primarily with heavy drinking and the Soviet Union (see Finnish Foreign Ministry's Archives, *Kantine* papers, Box 6, telex, Copenhagen, 14th November 1988).

⁶ In March 1989, the committee created a "commercial-economic sub-committee" in order to discuss elements of "trademark Finland". Cf. Finnish Foreign Ministry's Archives, *Kantine* papers, Box 1, *Pöytäkirja* (transcription of debates), 8th March 1989 meeting.

Debates regarding Finland's image abroad started again in Finnish governmental circles when a programme to strengthen "cultural exports" was launched in the autumn of 2003 by the Ministry for Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Foreign Ministry⁷. Following that, there was emphasis in the Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen's 2007 governmental programme⁸ on "*strengthening the image of Finland*" (Vanhanen II hallituksen ohjelma 2007). This corresponded with the arrival to governmental responsibility of new political figures located within a neo-liberal right intent on public sector reforms and emphasising the methods and ethos of the private sector. Both Alexander Stubb, who became Foreign Minister in 2008, and Jyrki Katainen, who became Prime Minister in 2011, showed a keen interest in the international trend of nation branding and saw the Foreign Ministry's image policy as an economic and commercial process that would be best managed through corporate methods of communication.

The years 2005-2010 also saw a reshuffle of the language and organisation of the Foreign Ministry's Press and Culture Department. Several reports written between 2001 and 2006 for the Finnish Parliament defined "public diplomacy" (*julkisuusdiplomatia*) as one of the main tasks of the Ministry, linking it to the national image, the promotion of national culture abroad and the improvement of general knowledge about Finland abroad (Ulkoasiainministeriö 2001; 2006). Inside the Ministry, one of the main organisers of *Kantine*, Petri Tuomi-Nikula, became the head of the Press and Culture Department in 2005 and a Public Diplomacy unit was created in the late 2000s (Clerc, Kivioja & Kleemola 2015, 253-330). The avowed goal was to move from committee work to a long-term strategy on the question of national images, and to take into account the new world that had opened up for Finland: a world of EU membership and Nokia success, Pisa results and Japanese tourists in Lapland, Erasmus students, migrants, and foreign workers.

Despite this new parlance, work documents set public Diplomacy firmly within "normal diplomacy", the emphasis remaining on efforts to influence certain groups and spreading a positive image of Finland. The audiences aimed at by these efforts were still rather narrowly defined as influential (elites) or potentially influential (the youth). Documents reminded the reader of the importance of Finland's public diplomacy in developing its public image abroad but also in influencing what foreign leaders thought of Finland (Valaskivi 2016a; 2016b). If one compares these reports with the British Foreign Office 1999 Foresight report (cf. Pamment 2018), public diplomacy was understood in Finland mostly to mean

⁷ <http://www.formin.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=60114&contentlan=1&culture=fi-FI> (Accessed May 5, 2017).

⁸ Finnish governments are almost systematically coalition governments, which start their term by a round of negotiations in order to establish a governmental programme for their mandate. These programmes are approved in Parliament and used as political roadmaps for the legislative term.

communication methods towards foreign audiences with which the Ministry could “*support Finland’s interests abroad*” (Ulkoasiainministeriö 2001, 9). It was mostly seen as a new arm of classical diplomacy, to be wielded in the new competition for attention and influence happening between states in a global setting. It existed in the continuity of previous efforts, with the same insistence on long-term and strategically applied communication, coordination of various private and public actors, an emphasis on informal networks and on action towards limited and influential groups.

Stubb, whose entire public and political personality was built around a business-friendly, neo-liberal, modern and international image, was obviously the perfect candidate to pick up branding as a way to organise Finland’s image policy: his ideas of cooperation with the private sector and an obvious taste for the vocabulary and methods of business certainly pushed him to turn to branding as a set of practices and a legitimisation discourse for official efforts towards developing a coordinated image of Finland abroad. 2007-2008 can thus be seen as an evolution in tone, methods, and organisational framework relabelling Finland’s image policy (Valaskivi 2016a, 2016b). “Branding” was understood as boiling down Finland’s image to a few core notions suitable to be presented and efficiently “sold” through public relations channels – and to be embraced by the population. Finnish politicians, civil servants and country brand delegation members often repeated the “truth” taught by international branding consultants: “*Every country already has a brand. It would be irresponsible of a government not to take action in defining this brand consciously*”⁹.

The Mission for Finland report: 2008-2011

Before 2008, branding methods had been used explicitly by the Tourist Board *Visit Finland* with a Finnish tourism brand launched in 2005 (Valaskivi 2016a). The tourism brand strategy identified four national strengths, called the “four C’s” (creative, contrasting, credible, and cool). The Foreign Ministry aimed to pursue this streamlining of Finland’s brand at the national level and to develop a nation brand along the same lines. According to the consultants writing background texts and doing research for the tourism brand project, the process of building a credible national brand was planned in parallel to the Vanhanen 2007 governmental programme as a 10–20-year effort (Moilanen & Rainisto 2009). The Foreign Ministry based most of its reflection on the work of Teemu Moilanen and Seppo Rainisto, who had worked on place branding since the early 2000s (Clerc, Kivioja & Kleemola 2015, 253-330).

⁹ An oft-used quote by Simon Anholt, the British nation branding consultant and developer of the Nation Brands Index. It was repeated in interviews by several civil servants and has also been used in public by both Jorma Ollila and Alexander Stubb (Valaskivi 2016a).

Despite the neo-liberal vocabulary it was shrouded in, Finland's branding process echoes previous practices: it originated within the Foreign Ministry, gathered networks of people previously known to the Ministry, looked for efficiency and aimed at convincing also the Finnish population to adapt in order to correspond to a certain image – in other terms, to “live the brand”. In September 2008, Stubb nominated a Nation Brand Delegation in order to develop a general, all-inclusive reflection on “Finland” and the best ways to present it to the world, based on the methods and practices of corporate branding. The high-level delegation gathered artists, historians, social scientists, and business leaders around diplomats and former Nokia CEO Jorma Ollila. The project was officially launched by Stubb in September 2008 (Formin 2008), and immediately ran into troubled media waters: the delegation did not respect regulations regarding gender equality (Hautamäki 2008), and the very concept of branding applied to a nation seemed odd to many. “*It turned out*”, a protagonist recalls, “*that the group needed first to brand itself, and only then could it get to work.*” (Valaskivi 2016b)

Despite the negative public reception, the delegation set to work, drawing on different tools, from the *Kantine* report to external consultants. The aims and the task of the delegation were expressed in purely economic terms: to enhance Finnish competitiveness and attractiveness in the eyes of skilled labour, investments and tourists, and to enhance business opportunities for Finnish companies. As branding had been considered the best practice, it seemed logical to call on nation-branding consultant Simon Anholt to facilitate the initial stage of the project: the Delegation invited Anholt to Finland, where he organised five discussions with the brand delegation and produced a country report¹⁰. In his report Anholt, emphasised that the Finns needed to get rid of their inferiority complex, regarding Sweden in particular, and suggested that Finland should rebrand itself as ‘*Bad Scandinavia*’, because of ‘*something dark, almost heathen in its identity and culture*’. Coming as it did in the wake of years of communication based on emphasising Finland's place in “European high culture”, this suggestion triggered lukewarm reactions amongst the Country Brand Delegation members.

In the process, the delegation was divided into four groups: culture, communication, economy, and the coordinating strategy group. The delegation's papers also quite often mention the need to associate the public with the branding and to reach a “societal compact” guaranteeing that various parts of the Finnish society would work together towards strengthening the country's brand. The delegation launched a website, initiated a television programme, and organised three seminars open to the general public.¹¹ These communication efforts were

¹⁰ Simon Anholt, Finland's Competitive Identity – Final Report (Oct 12, 2009)

¹¹ A website was open in order for Finns to describe “their” Finland, from which some parts were then compiled into the book mentioned above (Isokangas 2010).

organised with the help of several private consultants (Country Brand Delegation 2010, 343–355).

In the spring of 2010, as the project was nearing completion, the group enlisted the private think-tank *Demos Helsinki*¹² to write the final report and formulate ‘tasks’ assigned to different groups in Finland. *Mission for Finland* was written by a group of three *Demos Helsinki* consultants on the basis of the brand delegation’s work, with the help of a ‘shovelling group’ consisting of public relations and marketing consultants, civil servants, and a couple of delegation members, including Ollila. The end result was a compromise, and not to the liking of most members of the brand delegation. Hiring Demos had already been a controversial decision, as the think tank had been seen as linked especially to the Finnish Green movement. The final report was also seen by many members of the delegation as corporate PR, a brief re-hashing of old notions and clichés about Finland and omitting important things such as culture and the arts.

At a bit more than 350 pages, *Mission for Finland* identified three national strengths: functionality, clean nature, and excellence in education. Those were cast by the report as essential elements of ‘Finnish culture’, but the creative industries and popular culture received no mention, much to the disappointment of the cultural sector (cf. Melgin 2011). Based on these three themes, the document set goals for the coming years: emphasise functionality, make Finland the world’s next Silicon Valley, ensure the water in Finnish lakes would be drinkable by 2025, develop Finnish education excellence, attract transnational business, etc. As an afterthought that proved one of the few lasting consequences of the exercise, the document suggested that national bodies representing Finland internationally would streamline their communication and form a new type of network under the title ‘House of Finland’ (Country Brand Delegation 2010, 342). (Valaskivi 2016a)

The media response to the report and the dozens of ‘tasks’ it assigned to different demographic groups, NGOs and governmental bodies was less harsh than the initial reaction towards branding itself. Major newspapers seemed to be surprised by the tone of the report, finding it refreshing compared to the administrative language of ordinary committee reports (Monto 2011). However, some articles wondered about the costs associated with a report producing rather classical, well-worn images of the country (Malmberg 2010). Overall, the coverage was biased towards dissecting the proposed ‘tasks’ and evaluating their feasibility: the media focus was mostly on concrete suggestions that made for good stories. The

¹² Demos Helsinki is an independent think tank, founded in 2005. It focuses on projects aiming at sustainability and the democratic development of society. Demos was one of the first amongst a still-continuing boom of think tanks in Finland in the 2000s. Although independent, with its strong emphasis on environmental issues Demos is often seen as being close to the Green movement: <https://www.demoshelsinki.fi/en/>

report can be compared to *Kantine's* report in one more way: it quickly sank out of public view, only to be used by officials in their communication efforts.

New wine, or new bottles?

It has been explicitly stated that the *Mission for Finland*-brand report owed its inspiration to *Kantine's* 1990 report (Koistinen 2009). The images of Finland and the themes emphasised looked alike, both reports originated in public efforts and aimed at reasserting public coordination, both assumed a “reputational gap” weighing down Finland economically and politically, and both were infused with the idea that the domestic audience had to be convinced change was necessary to build a better national image. Despite the corporate tone of the *Mission for Finland* report, many of the institutions and people involved in both projects were the same. Both reports also expressed, in times of geopolitical change and national soul-searching, a regularly surfacing debate about the national identity, the potential economic and political damage of Finland's perceived bad reputation, and the role of the authorities in alleviating the damage.

The authors of this article would like to suggest that two different contexts of crisis (the end of the Cold War, the 2005-2010 political and economic turbulence in Europe) in fact produced two different patterns of the same phenomenon, two expressions of the same urge to present Finland to the world. In order to specify this, we would like to suggest variables along which to organise the differences and similarities between *Kantine* and the 2008-2011 branding committee.

First of all, both *Kantine* and the branding report came as consequences of geopolitics and Finland's international environment, along with the perceptions in Finland of this geopolitical environment. Nikolas Glover suggested (Glover 2013) that “new methods” in image policy are often stop-gap measures to adapt old practices to times of crises. In a small state such as Finland, this is magnified by the importance of external shocks and xenostereotypes (cf. Musiał 2002; Peltonen 1998) in the life of the country and the construction of its national identity. Uncertainties about national identity and pressures from its international environment push the foreign administration of a small country like Finland to dedicate long-term interest to spreading information, refining its image abroad, correcting “mistakes in perceptions” and the like, recognising image as a resource for its foreign policy (Koski 2005). This long-term effort can take various forms according to the best practices and domestic context of the times, manifesting itself through stop-gap solutions to perceived emergencies. Both *Kantine* and the 2008-2010 branding process happened in such situations, with the Foreign Ministry reaching out to “best practices” in order to react to a real or perceived external development: evolutions in the Cold War equilibriums in the late 1980s, escalating economic competition and political instability in 2008. This

element of external crisis was important in order to legitimate the actions of the Ministry and also appears in other national cases.

The management of foreign relations and administrative practices also generated contextual elements influencing both committees' work. While both committees were strongly linked to the Foreign Ministry, the branding delegation was less hierarchical and sidestepped the Ministry, especially in the redaction of the final report. While *Kantine* corresponded both to a tradition of all-encompassing, "national" committees and to new trends towards more involvement of the private sector, the branding committee showed a new emphasis on transparency in the diplomatic process (Neumann 2013, 154; Pamment 2013) as well as a necessity for the diplomatic apparatus to reach out to the private sector and support key economic sectors (Balfour, Carta & Raik 2015, 198).

These changes, however, should not be overplayed. Over the long term, the results and recommendations of the Brand Delegation's work were essentially carried forward by the Foreign Ministry's administration: the 2008-2011 branding experience's main outcomes were thus the provision of a new rhetorical tool to the official organisations representing Finland abroad, and an external incentive provided to renew the Ministry's organisational frame. This was clear in the creation of *Team Finland*, a coordination effort that first was led by the Ministry, then was delegated to the Prime Minister's office and finally transferred to a group of business-related internationalisation organisations under the Ministry of Trade and Industry. In other words, the most concrete consequences of the nation branding process were internal reorganisations among national institutions in the field of representing Finland abroad¹³.

Both *Kantine* and the *Mission for Finland* branding process were marked by the same organisational elements: the interplay of strong personalities and complex inter-personal networks, essential in a country marked by great porosity along lines of personal affinities between politics, diplomacy, academia, entrepreneurship, and the cultural world (Rainio-Niemi 2008, 187), with strong corporatist poles formed of private and semi-private organisations orbiting around sectorial ministries (Paavonen 2008, 42-44). At both points in time, the Foreign Ministry aimed to achieve coordination by presenting itself as the focus point of a necessary consensus around matters of "national" importance (Rainio-Niemi 2008, 18-19, 94-99, 187-246) – in our case, the national image. In 2008-2011, this coordination effort was conducted along the lines emphasised by Heiskala and Kantola (2010, 137): the welfare state had become a 'coaching state'

¹³ In the time of writing this in 2017 these Team Finland communication functions that focus on business sector were again shifted into the Ministry of Trade and Industry from the Prime Minister's office (https://valtioneuvosto.fi/artikkeli/-/asset_publisher/team-finland-uudistaa-palveluaan-ja-toimintamallejaan?_101_INSTANCE_3wyslLo1Z0ni_groupId=1410877, Accessed Aug. 8, 2018) The idea of all-purpose coordinated communication has been seen as problematic by most actors throughout the process, since different organisations have different aims, purposes, and focus groups (e.g. Larsen 2011).

where the role of the public sector was reduced and the private sector was empowered. The state had to deploy corporate strategies and methods in order to carry on its tasks, and image policy had thus to be partly outsourced in order to be legitimate (cf. Kantola 2014; and for the example of Germany, Varga 2013). Branding came in a context where the state's legitimacy was being questioned, and was used by the Foreign Ministry as a way to regain legitimacy in the definition and coordination of the national image (Valaskivi 2014, 219).

This came quite literally with a cost: interviewees estimate that the branding process cost taxpayers in excess of half a million euros over a period of two years, the costs being mostly associated with outsourced services¹⁴. Managed essentially "in-house" by the Foreign Ministry, *Kantine* had cost a fraction of this price. Especially when one keeps in mind the similarities between the two reports, this discrepancy in cost can only be understood in the context of an ideological reluctance to develop public resources, out of a belief in the superiority of the private sector's methods in the so-called promotional field (Valaskivi 2016b; Kuusela & Ylönen 2013). The Foreign Ministry's personnel embraced this view mostly out of a necessity to speak the day's lingo, to adapt to transnational methods in order to promote their image policy activities inside the Finnish administrative apparatus, attract private actors on board, and legitimate image policy to their budgetary authorities. In that, the Foreign Ministry was successful even if they had to produce a report couched in the typically de-politicised parlance of neo-liberal branding (Valaskivi 2014, 217-218).¹⁵

Finally, these committees varied in terms of the country's identity, cultural, and national development. Finland's international communication was, and still is a stage where national identity is imagined, played and disputed: the Foreign Ministry's goal is also to assemble the defining contours of the nation (nature, education, duty to law and commitments, link with "Europe", etc.), deeply-felt by the public, and mix them with global trends and modernising elements (Alasuutari 2015). Finland's elites present in both committees still saw themselves and the state as national "enlighteners", using committee work or the tools of branding in order to "bring the outside in", that is focusing image-building on features defined as strengths through external recognisability (Valaskivi 2014, 208, 217; Porter 1988; Aronczyk 2013). *Kantine* and the branding process were thus seen as ways to modernise the country at key international junctures by using transnational methods (PR, branding, etc.) in order to project to the domestic audience a modernised version of the national self they should feel compelled to align with. Katja Valaskivi emphasised elsewhere the way in which the branding project was

¹⁴ Interviews conducted under condition of anonymity by Katja Valaskivi, with Visit Finland and Ministry for Foreign Affairs civil servants, 2011.

¹⁵ In one of its most revealing quotes, the 2010 brand report claims that: "Thus, problems are rarely political, let alone moral. [...] Finland is a country where engineering skill provides the answer even to the disposal of nuclear waste. In other countries this would be an ethical problem, here, it is a practical one." (Country Brand Delegation 2010, 82)

conceived as, first and foremost, a domestic project aimed at domestic audiences (Valaskivi 2014, 196). The same can be said of *Kantine's* report. Finland's geopolitical position has had, and continues to have consequences in terms of identity-building (Moisio & Harle 2000, 156-157), the country being stuck between its necessarily intimate relationship with Russia and its Western European, Nordic affiliation. The temptation of isolationism, a "desire for Europe", and relations with the East are thus diplomatic, political, but also cultural phenomena. Finland shares these features with Post-Communist European countries, which were the ground where nation branding consultants and practitioners made their first breakthroughs from the late 1990s onwards (Kaneva 2012).

Finally, the evolution and diffusion of technological know-how and foreign models also influenced these processes. The rise of Public Relations in Finland, for example, documented in Melgin, Herten and Åberg (2012) is an important evolution that one should not consider only as the introduction of new tools (moving from radio broadcasts to TV shows, for instance), but also in the way best practices are defined and legitimised, and global innovations taken aboard. The evolution from propaganda to PR, if belated in Finland, forms an important background to *Kantine* in that it did influence the goals that were envisaged, the tools used and considered legitimate, and the rhetoric used to explain and justify international communication. Like many small countries, Finland is prone to pick up practices from abroad, whether it is replicating the Swedish legal system or picking up on British public relations companies selling them their branding savoir-faire. Its specific relationship to Great-Britain and the British consultancy world has been emphasised especially by Bruun, Eskelinen, Kauppinen & Kuusela (2009, 20; cf. Lassila 2014, 138). Nation branding practices were thus effectively and consciously imported and domesticated into Finland through international information exchange and the usage of international policy advisors and branding consultants, following already existing channels of communication, especially with the British consulting industry.

Conclusion

Seen from the point of view of the Foreign Ministry, the 2008-2011 developments were generally not unlike what had been done during *Kantine*. The Ministry's search for a long-term image strategy and coordination across private and public networks pushed it to use branding's newspeak in order to create interest and attract private actors. Reflections on branding seem to correspond with long-term goals: branding has centralising, coordinating and disciplinarian effects, and its origins in business and corporate language might ease relations with private actors. The terms, concepts and ideas of Finnish branding were thus lifted from a local literature on place branding, in a wide-ranging attempt to consensually define a communication strategy in geopolitical and domestic changing

environments. The three dimensions (Finland as global problem solver, education, and clear air and water) of the Finnish brand also have a lot in common with what *Kantine* emphasised. Both were concerned with international reputation and economic growth. Despite the novelty of the branding language, one can easily see the branding campaign's continuity with previous efforts: the same variables are at work, albeit in a different context.

The language and practices of the branding process were thus grafted onto old processes: in the context of a neo-liberal moment, state authorities reviewed their methods of coordination and control. The most concrete consequences of the *Mission for Finland* project involved the restructuring of institutions involved in representing Finland abroad. These restructurings would most likely have taken place in any case, but the country brand report provided one platform for the actors involved to go through the negotiation processes and for the formation of the "joint will" necessary for pushing through the changes. What could be a stronger lever and more persuasive way of pressuring people reluctant for change than claiming it to be in the best interest of the country and executed in order to provide for a brighter future, and using top-notch methods from foreign consultants?

Past Finnish image building efforts suggest a number of continuities: the Foreign Ministry's coordination tendencies, the "strategic" mantra, a disciplinarian domestic discourse inviting people to stick to a line, a process aimed at using the vocabulary and tools of the private sector in order to attract private actors in cooperation with the MFA, the origins of the endeavour in Finland's presumed "reputation gap", even the themes chosen by the branding committee. In both cases, the Foreign Ministry carried out its own adaptation of the process and practices according to the interests and needs of the time.

A question worth considering as a conclusion to this piece is the way basic urges for image policy are going to translate into future policies. It seems obvious that a simplified, uni-directional national brand and its communication to the world will bring less and less return in a context where trust is lacking, geopolitical elements move quickly, technology changes, and preformatted neo-liberal discourses have lost their allure. Many of the themes and variables we have observed will remain relevant as imaging practices will adopt new shapes in new domestic and international contexts. As the world and especially regional geopolitics in the Baltic Sea area become more troubled, the Finnish state's imaging practices might come back to be largely dominated by security, hard trade concerns, and diplomacy. With current evolutions, as Pamment and Åkerlund (2018) emphasize, cultural diplomacy and imaging practices are bound to move from being a tool of trade promotion amongst others. Civil servants will adapt their action to a new environment marked by increased geopolitical competition, a more acute perception of hardened security concerns, the re-emergence of information

warfare and weaponized influence tools, and an economic competitive environment marked by new obstacles and features more political in nature, such as the return of tariffs as tools of identity-driven domestic politics. One could witness in the future a new insistence on the national interest and security, as well as an edgier tone in the constant efforts of public agents to harness the multi-faceted world of semi-public or private organisations to the perceived necessities of image policy abroad.

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