

Finnish Views on Nature

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1. Summary

Finland is often described as a land of a thousand lakes. The actual number of lakes is however almost 200,000,¹ while all inland water account for 10% of the country's geographical area. Furthermore, three-fourths of the country is covered by forests.² When taking into consideration the facts that geographically speaking the country is large, around 300,000 km², but the population is small, 5.4 million (2011), it is obvious that the Finnish society is surrounded by nature.³ This closeness of nature has resulted in a culture of dependency but on the other hand, also in high respect and protection of nature.

This paper aims at examining Finnish views on nature. The traditional views are discussed parallel with ones of the current society to examine the roots of the views on nature and the prevailing environmental philosophy in Finland. To sum up, nature has always been an important factor for the survival of the Finnish providing food and protection. Before Christian influences in the 12th century AD, people used to practice their natural religion of worshipping divine creatures of nature. Christianity instead, promoted the anthropocentric worldview and the human-centered mindset is still rather predominant as regards to environment. However, the respect for nature has remained the same and environmental values are regarded high in the society. Finland maintains high standards in environmental protection and is among the most eco-friendly countries in the world.

Alongside with the views of the majority of people living in Finland, there are a few examples given about the indigenous population, Sami people. Sami people are the only indigenous population in Europe and they live in the Northern parts of Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia.⁴ In Finland, the section of Sami people of the whole population is less than 0.2 %⁵ but their status as an indigenous population is guaranteed by the Finnish constitution.⁶ Especially in the past, the Sami views on nature have been quite different from the ones of the rest of the Finnish population. In general, the views of indigenous people living in the Arctic areas are also given more and more attention because for global warming threatens their living surrounding and traditional ways of living.

2. What is the broader framework that influences ethics among the people?

Traditionally, Finns have been referred as 'forest people' because of their physical connection to nature as well as their preference for silence. The relationship between people and nature was not only a utilitarian one by nature but also had more spiritual features. Until the Christian influences in 12th century, and also parallel to them till 16th to 20th centuries,⁷ most Finns

¹ Suomen järvet. Valtion ympäristöhallinnon verkkopalvelu (The website of Finland's environmental administration). <http://www.ymparisto.fi/default.asp?node=8103&lan=fi>

² Euroopan metsäisin maa. METLA (Finnish Forest Research Institute). <http://www.metla.fi/suomen-metsat/index.htm>

³ Tilastokeskus (Statistics Finland). http://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto.html#bruttokansantuote

⁴ Saamelaiset Suomessa. Saamelaiskäräjät. Kalevaprint 2008. <http://www.saariselka.fi/sisalto/saamelaiset-suomessa>

⁵ Saamelaisuus. Oppiminen YLE (YLE Learning online). <http://oppiminen.yle.fi/saamelaisuus>

⁶ 17 § Finnish Constitution 11.6.1999/731.

⁷ Kristinuskon tulo Suomeen. UE5 – Mihin suomalainen usko? Internetix opinnot.

http://opinnot.internetix.fi/fi/materiaalit/ue/ue5/02_kristinuskon_tulo_suomeen/2.1_kristinuskon_tulo_suomeen?C:D=gjyJ.e8P0&m:selres=gjyJ.e8P0

believed in divine creatures, such as fairies, pixies and other mythological creatures of nature.⁸ The historical practice of worshipping natural figures that would nowadays be considered as paganism, affected the historical ethics and values of the Finnish. The respect for nature and forests has prevailed until these days – only the forms of showing it have changed. Pagan worship has transformed into high standards of natural protection.

The first influences of a formal religion, Christianity, were seen in Finland in the 11th century.⁹ The fundamental Christian values such as family, love and honesty, have affected strongly the formation of the state and are still present. One of the most radical changes occurring in the society in terms of ethics was the human image of Christianity. The religion highlights the belief that human being is superior to any other creature on Earth: God created us as an image of Him. This mindset has also been one of the main causes resulting in a utilitarian worldview seeing nature only as material that is meant to serve the needs of humans.¹⁰ The historically influential state church used to also set guidelines for people in moral issues.

Nowadays, the influence of the church is not as strong anymore and people are rather encouraged to think themselves instead of blindly following the religious worldviews. Consequently, one of the most fundamental ideologies prevailing in Finnish society is individualism. According to individualism, individuals have the right to and they are even expected to pursue their own benefits.¹¹ The society has evolved into a rather secular state pursuing unspiritual theories common to most Western societies. One of the dominant phenomena is utilitarianism that is often closely related to humans' relation to other species. Alongside with utilizing varying natural resources, it is believed that technological improvements result in increasing production and accordingly, contributes to the welfare of the society.¹² In general, it is the aim of economic growth that governs the state policies at a large scale.

In the 21st century, Finland is a modernized Western democracy located in the Northern Europe. It is a contracting party of many international conventions and has adopted the so-called international norms both at the level of the state policies and in the minds of individuals. Great value is given to concepts such as human rights, equality and liberalism. As Finland's political system is strongly relying on the model of representative democracy, political decision making occurs through democratic consensus. People choose their representative by voting for the candidates they believe will work for their own political and social interests. However, democracy is not merely a form of governing but it is seen to have an absolute value itself – it is a fundamental principle set at the level of human rights. A decision made through genuinely democratic venues, as regulated by the Finnish constitution, can be criticized but its authenticity cannot be questioned.

Since national policies and views are formed through democratic consensus, there is a potential risk that the majority of people will start neglecting environmental issues for the sake of other issues they value more important. In practice however, green values are regarded high among political parties as well as normal citizens. A certain level of environmental protection is guaranteed by law and in addition, Finland is committed to follow the regulations of several international agreements it has signed. Actually, Finland is often seen as a pioneer and an example to follow in environmental issues. Regardless of the changes to traditional views brought by globalization and the so called cultural evolution,¹³ nature has maintained its importance in the Finnish society. The

⁸ Pekka Elo, Tommi Paalanen. Ihmisen suhde luontoon. Kasvit – elävää kulttuuriamme. Suomen Tammi: Elävää kulttuuriperintöä. http://www03.edu.fi/oppimateriaalit/kasvikulttuuri/artikkelit/05_ihminen.htm

⁹ Kristinuskon tulo Suomeen. Internetix opinnot.

¹⁰ Elo, Paalanen.

¹¹ Elo, Paalanen.

¹² Pertti Sillanpää. Ihminen ja luonto – ympäristöeettisiä pohdintoja. Oulun seudun ammattikorkeakoulu, sosiaalialan yksikkö. <http://www.oamk.fi/~pesillan/hailuoto.html>

¹³ Jukka Pennanen. Suomalaisuuden muuttuvat perusteet – elämänmuodon irtautuminen luontosidonnaisuudesta. A lecture given in Jyväskylä 8.4.1999. Finnica. <http://www.finnica.fi/seminaari/99/luennot/pennanen.htm>

concept of ethics has expanded to include environmental issues as well, which makes individuals morally – and at a certain level even legally – responsible for preserving their natural surroundings.

3. What is the broader outlook of the environmental concepts within the tradition?

First people settled in the area of Finland in the Stone Age, 8000 BC to 6000 BC.¹⁴ It was actually Sami people who first arrived in Finland after the Ice Age.¹⁵ During this prehistoric period, people were closely connected to and dependent on nature. Living in connection to nature was a precondition of survival: hunting, fishing and picking berries and mushrooms was the only source of livelihood. However, the relationship between Finns and nature was not only a one-way utilitarian one, but the closeness of nature actually shaped the whole worldview of the people. People believed in divine, mythical creatures living in the nature. They worshipped a variety of natural objects and aimed at maintaining the balance between humans and nature.¹⁶ In the Sami culture, the religious beliefs in natural objects seem to have been even stronger than the ones of other Finns. They have had many myths concerning especially animals such as reindeer and bear. For example, by reading the signs of certain animals and other natural objects, one could possibly see signs of the future.¹⁷

Apart from the prehistoric religion of nature, throughout the history, Finns have had a close relationship especially to forests, which is also said to characterize the Finnish mentality in general. It can be claimed that nature and especially forests have been the base of the Finnish culture. In ancient times hunting, fishing and picking wild berries was a precondition of survival. Later, people started discovering and developing further different forms of farming. To date, forestry and wood industry have had a significant role in forming a modern welfare state.¹⁸ On the other hand, forests have also offered protection against any external threat facing the Finnish. For example during the Winter War 1939-1940, Finland fought against the Soviet invasion regarding forests and harsh winter as its allies while the natural conditions were actually hindering the tactics of the Soviets.

3.1. Anthropocentrism

Anthropocentrism refers to the idea of the human species' moral and ethical superiority over the rest of the nature. Accordingly, people may rightfully pursue their own interests and needs at the cost of other living species.¹⁹ As already illustrated above, nature has historically been the lifeline of the Finnish society providing people both protection and a significant source of food. Regardless of the people's beliefs in mythical creatures and the way they stood in awe of nature, Finns have been utilizing their environment throughout the history of the nation. However, even though humans have been making use of the non-human world for their survival ever since their existence, at the early stage of the Finnish society people, did not really exploit the surrounding environment but rather had a high respect for it and lived in harmony with it. Still, Finns as well as the human species in general can be seen to have followed more or less an anthropocentric worldview for thousands of years.²⁰

¹⁴ Suomalainen kansanusko. Internetix opinnot.

¹⁵ Saamelaiskäräjät 2008.

¹⁶ Suomalainen kansanusko. Internetix opinnot.

¹⁷ Saamelaisten uskonto ja identiteetti. Suvaitsevaisuus Länsi-Euroopassa.

<http://www.lyseo.edu.ouka.fi/suvaitsevaisuus/vahemmis/saamel/uskoiden.html#13>

¹⁸ Pennanen.

¹⁹ Suzanne C. Beckmann, William E. Kilbourne, Ynte van Dam, Mercedes Pard. Anthropocentrism, Value Systems, and Environmental Attitudes: A Multi-National Comparison. 1997.

[http://www.uc3m.es/portal/page/portal/grupos_investigacion/sociologia_cambio_climatico/Pardo%20-%20Anthropocentrism%20Environmental%20Values%20\(ENG\).pdf](http://www.uc3m.es/portal/page/portal/grupos_investigacion/sociologia_cambio_climatico/Pardo%20-%20Anthropocentrism%20Environmental%20Values%20(ENG).pdf)

²⁰ Markku Oksanen & Marjo Rauhala-Hayes . Ympäristöfilosofia – Kirjoituksia ympäristönsuojelun eettisistä perusteista. Gaudeamus. Helsinki 1999. p. 15-20.

Along with the development of farming and more sophisticated forms of agriculture, purely utilitarian views strengthened their position in the society. The industrial revolution landed in Finland a little later than in many other countries in Europe, at the end of 19th century. Industrialization soon gave rise to production and demand, which resulted in turn a growing use of natural resources. Especially wood and paper industry had a lot of weight within the growing economy of Finland and it is still an important factor of the industry. Forest industry accounts for approximately 20% of Finnish exports and is estimated to be more important to Finland than any other country in the world.²¹ Interesting is also the fact that every fifth Finn owns some forest, while one-third of the total forest area is owned by the State. Still, the amount of forests is not declining but rather increasing in Finland.²²

Anthropocentrism and the predominant utilitarian mindset have their roots deeply in the Judaic-Christian tradition, as well as in individualism adopted in the New Age. Christianity gives great value for the human species above any other species.²³ Finns have literally adopted the verse Genesis 1:26 of the Bible explicitly justifying the superiority of the human race: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” Also in Finland, the view was adopted that because of humans’ superiority, nature was created to serve “the master species”. The official state religion did not have quite as strong effect on Sami people as some others, and they maintained the traditional people’s nature-related beliefs as a separate religion.²⁴

Although the state religion has lost a lot of its grip during the last decades, the anthropocentric philosophy of viewing the relationship between human beings and nature remains predominant in Finland as in most Western societies. The utilitarian view measures the value of nature with the benefit it causes to people, for example food and money. Accordingly, the utmost purpose of the environment is to contribute to the development and welfare of human beings. To achieve that aim people exploit the nature and believe they have the right to use natural resources the way they want to.²⁵ This human-centered mindset can be easily criticized for ethical reasons.

3.2. Biocentrism

Biocentrism can be seen as the opposed ideology to the human-centered one. In contrast to the anthropocentric worldview, biocentrism highlights the natural value of all non-human species alongside with human beings. As all life is seen to have an absolute value, biocentrism draws special attention to animal rights and preservation of biodiversity.²⁶ In Finland, as in the world in general, anthropocentric view has been the predominant view ever since the Industrial Revolution. However, in last decades biocentric attitudes have gained attention among several green movements as a counter-ideology for the dominant human-centered worldview.

Historically, Finns have been unquestionably dependent on nature and its utility. This culture of dependence has been especially visible in two things: the annual cycle of nature and the profits of agriculture and forestry. The historical respect for nature reached a high level of appreciation and could accordingly be seen as a form of biocentrism. People aimed at a balance between themselves and the nature surrounding them. In other words, they saw themselves as a part of the natural wholeness. Moreover, the traditional beliefs had also strongly mythical and divine features. Worshipping natural creatures out of fear or in hope of favors set the natural entities in an even

²¹ Suomen metsäteollisuus. Metsäteollisuus ry. 8.5.2012. <http://www.metsateollisuus.fi/Haku/results.aspx?k=a10>

²² Euroopan metsäisin maa. METLA.

²³ Elo, Paalanen.

²⁴ Saamelaiden uskonto ja identiteetti. Suvaitsevaisuus Länsi-Euroopassa.

²⁵ Elo, Paalanen.

²⁶ Ilkka Niiniluoto. Kestävä kehitys aikamme haasteena. 7.4.2011. http://www.muc.fi/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/klo-12.05_Ilkka-Niiniluoto.pdf

higher position than human beings themselves. For example, in Northern parts of Finland people used to worship bears while in Southern parts the religious-alike rituals were directed to elks.²⁷

Nowadays, Finland maintains high standards for environmental protection and nature conservation. High technical skills are a factor contributing to the effective environmental policies. The nature of country is still lowly polluted and many state policies, as well as agendas of several organizations, call for acts to “preserve the diversity of nature in Finland”.²⁸ On the other hand, most environmental acts do not work to merely preserve nature itself but have also human-related aims: they are concerned about the welfare and living conditions of human beings as well,²⁹ which actually is a feature of anthropocentrism. In addition to the state rules and national green movements promoting environmental friendly acts, there have been also some incidents between the government and nature activists with more radical views and aims. For example, in 90s there was a group of people called *kettutyöt* (“fox girls”), considered as radical nature activists, trying to rebel against fur farming by concrete acts such as releasing foxes.

Nature-centered worldview is a significant requirement for preserving the biodiversity and future of the environment surrounding us. However, purely biocentric view as a dominant mindset guiding national policies is hard to achieve in any modern society. That is because if the interests of other species were set at the same level with the ones of humans, it would be practically impossible to maintain the current state of welfare and development within a state. Also in Finland, even though the stage of preserving nature is internationally measured rather high, nature could not possibly reach the moral superiority of human beings.

3.3. Ecocentrism

Ecocentrism is an opposing ideology to the human-centeredness of anthropocentrism. While biocentrism highlights the value of all life, ecocentrism focuses on the importance of all ecological systems. In other words, ecocentrism includes also non-living objects of nature and speaks for the natural entities – that humans are a part of, too.

In Finland, also many non-living entities of nature are highly respected. As mentioned, about a tenth of the country’s geographical area is covered by lakes and rivers.³⁰ The high portion of inland waters has contributed a lot to the national landscapes of Finland. Alongside with its value to national pride, lakes and rivers contribute to leisure activities and businesses such as fishing, swimming and rafting. Traditionally, there have also been myths related to especially lakes. Fishers were believed to get more fish after praying or sacrificing something to the god of water, *Ahti*³¹. Even though the prehistoric beliefs have lost their initial meaning in the society, there are still some traces of the traditions inherited from previous generations. There are for example rhymes asking for better luck with fishing: *Anna Ahti ahvenia, Pekka pieniä kaloja...*

The soil and rocks in Finland are among the oldest ones on the Earth. They were formed due to varying geological circumstances 1500 to 3000 Million years ago. The solid rock has many significant tasks in terms of ecosphere. There are a number of life forms living on the rocks and a portion of certain species of rock is considered endangered.³² Consequently, rocks require a high level of protection. Rocks are also a significant part of the Finnish national landscape.

3.4. Cosmocentrism

²⁷ Suomalainen kansanusko. Internetix opinnot.

²⁸ Finland’s Nature Conservation Act (1096/1996).

²⁹ A Network of Protected Areas Conserves Finland’s Nature. Metsähallitus. 26.11.2010.

<http://www.metsa.fi/sivustot/metsa/en/naturalheritage/protectedareas/Sivut/ANetworkofProtectedAreasConservesFinlandsNature.aspx>

³⁰ Nature conservation. The website of Finland’s environmental administration.

³¹ Suomalainen kansanusko. Internetix opinnot.

³² Soils and bedrock. The website of Finland’s environmental administration.

In prehistoric times, nature defined the view that people living in Finland had on the world and the whole universe. According to their views, the world was a flat circle that was covered with the dome of the sky. They believed that it was North Star held the whole world together and its collapse would be disastrous. The world was divided in three layers: the Earth, the one above the Earth, and the one under it that was where the dead and gnomes were believed to live. The North was the most important point of compass since it was thought to be a cold and hostile place, where also *Tuonelanjoki* (“River of the Underworld”) was located.³³ Nowadays, these historical views are visible in the Finnish society only in the form of stories, especially the national epic, *Kalevala*.

After Christianity became the state religion in Finland, the Finnish worldview changed rather radically. The Christian views of the life after death, Heaven or Hell, are still present in the society. However, scientific development can be seen as a challenging power to the religious worldviews. The rapid advances in science and technology of the last centuries have widened the global worldview and understanding of the universe. In Finland religious and scientific worldviews do not necessarily conflict however, but they can rather complete each other. In other words, a person believing literally in Genesis 1:26 may as well follow the scientific progress in finding evidence on the Big Bang or human evolution.

According to cosmocentric ethics, the universe and everything within it should be reserved as it is without any human attempts to exploit or abuse the environment. There is an overlap between cosmocentric ideas and other ideologies opposing the dominant human-centered views. However, in case of cosmocentrism, the focus of attention could be set at the level of the universe. When considering the Western interest and achievements in space research and technology, the chance of travelling or even residing in another planet in the future does not seem like a utopia. The idea of conquering another planet has been suggested especially in relation to the skeptical views on the environmental future of the Earth. It is likely that as one of the scientific and technological pioneers of the world, Finland will at least contribute to the space research.

4. What are the human–environment relationships?

4.1. Symbiotic

In Finland, the culture of dependency between humans and environment has been traditionally strong and visible especially in prehistoric myths, beliefs and practices. Finns worshipped several different divine creatures of the nature varying among different regions and times. Even though the relationship between people and the natural gods sometimes was characterized by fear, it can still be seen as a religious practice emphasizing the symbiosis of the entities.

The god of water was called *Ahti* and he controlled the water and the amount of fish people could catch. *Tapio* was one of the gods of the forest and he decided on hunting: if one hunted too much, *Tapio* would make him get lost in the forest. The most respected and also feared god was *Ukko Ylijumala* controlling the weather and crops. Nowadays, the impact of these old beliefs is visible only in some proverbs or even ordinary words that have been passed on through the generational memory. For example, thunder is still called *ukkonen* as it was thought to be caused by the angry supreme god *Ukko* throwing arrows or hammering the sky with his axe.

Also certain animals were considered as divine. The bear was worshipped because it was thought to have come down from the sky. After hunting a bear, there was a fest called *karhunpeijaiset* organized to make sure the bear would reincarnate in the forest. After the fest, people took the skull back to the forest and buried it in the biggest pine tree to ensure that the bear will return to the forest as game with no hard feelings.³⁴ Similarly, elks were regarded divine in

³³ Muinaissuomalainen maailmankuva – eränkävijöistä maanviljelykseen. Internetix opinnot.

³⁴ Suomalainen muinaisuskonto. Pälkäneen lukio, RaamattuNET (An upper secondary school in Finland). http://www.lukio.palkane.fi/raamattunet/suom_mui.html

other parts of Finland. Interestingly, the hunting culture has remained strong in Finland and people do still organize feasts for both bears and elks after a successful hunting season. Also, some other traditional feasts have their roots in natural rituals. For example, the Midsummer Feast *Juhannus* was celebrated in the pre-Christian times as the feast of *Ukko* to ask for good and fertile crop.³⁵ The feast is still one of the most important national feasts in Finland and takes place in the lightest time of the year, “nightless night”.

Nowadays, the symbiotic relationship between humans and environment is rather promoted as the ideal one: the human should reach peace with nature again.³⁶ The current environmental philosophy highlights the values of nature and the human relation to it. In other words, it aims at bringing the sacredness of nature back at a new level. Among the ethical values emphasized, the esthetical functions of nature are highly appreciated.

4.2. Integrationist

As defined by ECCAP WG1, the integrationist approach is one of a more humble nature (Rai et al., 2010): humans are an integral part of the cosmos, but not even an essential one. The recognition of the co-existence relationship between the human and nature reflects in the high standards of nature reservation in Finland. One of the biggest threats recognized is the increasing loss of biodiversity. Humans affect the natural mechanisms in a negative way by changing or even destroying the living environment of other species. Finland has adopted a plan of action according to which the aim is to prevent all species taken root in the country from extinction. In some cases preserving the current populations is enough while in others positive measures are needed to revive the endangered species.³⁷

4.3. Apocalyptic

In pre-Christian times, several myths describing the Finnish worldview contained apocalyptic features. Nowadays, apocalyptic beliefs or fears tend to have scientific reasoning as background in addition to the religious ones. In Finland, theories about the end of our planet are not that popular. In general, people do recognize the environmental problems and potential risks but in practice, no one claiming there will be an apocalypse in the near future, is taken seriously. Apocalyptic prophecies are rather a joke fed by tabloids and online pieces. Since there are no major natural disasters occurring in Finland and the nature seems to be still in good condition, Finns can see very few apocalyptic indicators in their surrounding environment. In other words, even if people do have apocalyptic relationship with nature, they assure themselves the disaster is not going to happen in their or the following generations’ time. Of course, there are also skeptical views of the future of the world presented both by scientists and religious groups. As a potential “plan B” is sometimes suggested to Western countries common idea of conquering another planet.

4.4. Managerial

Regardless of the traditional culture of dependence on nature, Finns believe they are managing the surrounding nature – not the inverse. The exhaustive use of natural resources raises however concerns not only about the sufficiency of the resources but also other environmental problems. Consequently, material efficiency is regarded high among both public sector and private enterprises. Material efficiency aims at simply using as little natural resources as possible and also avoiding all kinds of environmental problems occurring during the production process.³⁸ Alongside with the use of tangible natural resources, nature provides people with significant other functions such as its esthetical values and recreational areas.

³⁵Juhannus, miksi ja milloin? Tietopaketti. <http://www.finlit.fi/tietopalvelu/juhlat/juhannus/perinne.htm>

³⁶Ihminen osana luontoa. Internetix opinnot.

³⁷Luonto ja ihminen. <http://www.ymparisto.fi/download.asp?contentid=11308>

³⁸Material efficiency. The website of Finland’s environmental administration.

Environmental management is closely related to environmental protection policies that are in Finland “designed to increase well-being and create an ecoefficient society by promoting sustainable development, by actively improving our environment, and by ensuring that natural ecosystems can continue to function well”.³⁹ The main goals set by the Ministry of Environment is environmental responsibility, protection of biodiversity and environment guaranteeing welfare. Finland’s water protection policy is one of the most efficient ones among the fields of environmental protection. Indeed, most of surface waters in Finland are classified to have at least a good – or an excellent – ecological status.⁴⁰ In addition to the governmental programs on water management, Finland follows also the internationally set guidelines such as The European Union Water Framework Directive (2000). The Finnish water management emphasizes also the importance of trans-national areas such as the Baltic Sea and accordingly, the meaning of mutual cooperation.⁴¹

4.5. Apathetic

Unfortunately, an apathetic relationship between the human and environment is one of the predominant ones in Finland. Many people are ignorant or indifferent when it comes to environmental issues even though the awareness of natural concerns is rather high in the society. Everybody has heard for example about climate change or global warming but only few people take it seriously enough to actually change their lifestyles or consuming habits. Regardless of the environment taxes imposed, most people are simply not willing to give up on the welfare they are used to. Of course, some Finns do not even realize the harm they are causing to environment or refuse to believe it. On the other hand, so far there have been no overwhelming natural disasters and the nature appears still clean and preserved so it might be common to stick to the localized level of thinking and figure out that no urgent action is even needed.

However, Finland is actually usually ranked among the most ecofriendly countries in the world. According to OECD Environmental Performance Review of Finland (2009), Finland has met its objectives especially in the areas of air pollutants, noise problems and waste generations. Also, the promotion of sustainable development is considered to be advanced.⁴² Regardless of the governmental policies, it is however the companies that often have the crucial role in relation to environmental concerns. Finland has committed to follow the emission trade policy set by the European Union⁴³ and environmental offences are sanctioned also nationally. A good example of the development in the area of environmental protection is the advanced and highly observed Finnish recycling system.

4.6. Animistic

The prehistoric Finnish worldview with the nature religion contained some obviously animistic features. Basically, everything was believed to have a soul or some kind of spiritual power. Especially in the Sami culture holiness tent to be located in certain natural objects. Often, a holy place seemed to have a high location such as mountains or fells. “Seita” is a concept Sami people use for a holy place. That kind of places are known throughout the whole Sami populated geographic area and they can be either wooden or rock objects.⁴⁴

Among the Finnish majority, there are no clear animistic beliefs prevailing in the society in relation to nature. However, the high respect and appreciation of nature has almost spiritual

³⁹ Environmental management in Finland. http://www.evak.fi/docs/Env.Mang.Finland_esko.pdf

⁴⁰ Water protection. The website of Finland’s environmental administration.

⁴¹ FE570. Finland’s Programme for the Protection of the Baltic Sea

⁴² OECD Environmental Country Reviews. Environmental Performance Review of Finland 2009.

<http://www.oecd.org/env/environmentalcountryreviews/environmentalperformancereviewsfinland2009.htm>

⁴³ Emissions Trading System (EU ETS). Climate Action. European Commission.

http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/ets/index_en.htm

⁴⁴ Saamelaisten uskonto ja identiteetti. Suvaitsevaisuus Länsi-Euroopassa.

shadings. Nature may be for Finnish people the source of peace and spiritual experiences that many people from other cultures experience for example in cathedrals or mosques.⁴⁵

5. Conclusions

Finnish people have always been closely connected to the surrounding nature – both physically and mentally. During prehistoric times, before the Christian influences, people were worshipping divine creature of the nature and believed in different kinds of myths that nowadays exist only in the form of old proverbs and stories. However, many traditional beliefs have lived in the generational memory of the nation. The impacts of Christianity and industrialization gradually transformed the Finnish worldview from an environment-centered one into a human-centered one. Still, the great respect for nature never disappeared and remains.

Finland maintains high standards of environmental protection and is one of the leading countries of the world in the field. The efficient policies result from the advanced technology and investments in research and education but above all, the mindset of people. Regardless of the human-centered façade in the society, Finns do recognize the importance of clean and beautiful nature. The respect for nature is beyond the dependence on natural resources: environment has great value itself.

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