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**Safe & Sound: Finland's Contemporary Tourism Identity in
Times of Polycrises**

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Abstract

This thesis examines political speeches and tourism campaigns as co-creators of the modern Finnish country image and brand. The study frames Finland as an adjacent country — one affected by crisis but not directly involved in it. The thesis focuses on the crisis of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its political implications.

The research is guided by one main question and three sub-questions. The main question asks how Finnish tourism campaigns and political leadership narratives co-construct Finland's nation brand around happiness and resilience following 2022. The sub-questions address each channel separately and the relationship between them.

The thesis applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), drawing on Fairclough, Wodak, Van Dijk, and Slemon on silence-as-data. The corpus consists of 55 source texts and 127 coded passages, covering Visit Finland and Business Finland campaigns, governmental strategy documents, international press coverage, and speeches of political figureheads — Presidents Sauli Niinistö and Alexander Stubb and former Prime Minister Sanna Marin. A five-claim coding scheme (happiness, safety/silence, *sisu*, continuity, World Happiness Report ranking) was applied across three Faircloughian levels.

The major finding is the identification of an asymmetric two-channel mechanism, in which the tourism channel maintains strategic silence on insecurity while the political channel openly carries the security register, with vocabulary running one-directionally from tourism into political speech. Without convergence between the channels, this asymmetry is what allows the Finnish brand to cohere through the post-2022 era.

Keywords: nation branding, Finland, critical discourse analysis, soft power, tourism branding, political discourse

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Chapter 1 · Introduction

§1.1 Background

It all started with the feeling that I have been seeing Alexander Stubb — the President of the Republic of Finland — everywhere and all at once. Feeling like Finland had never been mentioned like this before in any kind of global discourse, there was a surprise, an intrigue, and quite a happy feeling to see the little country I call my home on global news so often. At first, it was quite thrilling and interesting, because ever since my teenage years there had been a habit of consuming lots of media about Finland's geopolitics and geography. But these days, the more interviews watched, the more tiresome it would get to hear the talking heads say things again, so much so it started to become familiar, almost a pattern. In a while, it felt more as if the heads were sort of a music band or movie stars, promoting their freshly released project. For a while, I stopped engaging with this content and it went somewhere to the back of my mind. Some months later, as it was time to bring about the early concepts of my graduation thesis work, a light bulb appeared — bringing back all these thoughts and ideas to the front, and an intuition that it all must somehow be tied to tourism. This feeling was worthy to chase, since, after all, for the entirety of six years of tourism studies, one thing had always been certain: our industry is heavily reliant on outside triggers. This was proven again, once the thesis was already at the polishing stage, when yet another war broke out in the Middle East. Dubai, once a sight of one's happy spring break time, was no longer such.

At its core, this thesis is orchestrated by words and feelings those words evoke. The strangest feeling came when deep into the research. Some convictions were already in place (due to studies, familiarity with Russian-speaking media), but the feeling was some sort of dichotomy that could not be put into words; it came across most obviously when going through Bloomberg online media articles on Finland. One of those was Bloomberg Tourism — focusing on tourism publications; the other, Bloomberg Opinion — focusing on news and politics. One was full of ideas like nature, escape, forest imagery; the latter featured a picture of two men roughly my age. They are conscripts, with white face paint and striking blue eyes, in the same kind of backdrop that all the jolly media campaigns use to attract tourists, a few clicks before. These almost parallel messages about the same place

put chills up the spine and raised the burning question once more: how do these two realities exist in one? And how does one imagine a place to be nothing but peace and happiness, when many news headlines speaking of the place do not shy away from using military-heavy language. Ready and armed — in the face of a young conscript gazing through the screen as words and headings of this thesis are jotted down.

The phenomenon this thesis studies is the discursive co-existence, in post-2022 Finland, of two simultaneous national-brand registers. On one side, Finland is internationally circulated as the "world's happiest country". That is a designation the World Happiness Report has assigned annually since 2018, and one the Finnish state and its tourism agencies have actively built campaigns and brand strategy around. Visit Finland's *Rent a Finn*, *Chill Like a Finn*, *Masterclass of Happiness*, and the Finnish Government's 2026 Country Brand Strategy all foreground happiness as a teachable Finnish asset. On the other side, since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and Finland's accession to NATO in 2023, Finnish political leadership has openly carried a military register. This found itself in speeches and interviews in which Finland has articulated itself as a strategically ready frontier at the edge of a war. The country occupying roughly 1,340 kilometres of European Union border with the Russian Federation is, at the same time, marketed as the world's calmest and happiest destination and articulated by its presidents as a NATO frontline. That duality of existence is the object and essence of this study.

The "post-2022" period referred to throughout — i.e., after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 — is the analytical window for this thesis. The Russia–Ukraine war is the structural condition under which Finland's brand has had to operate.

§1.2 Literature

The way that how a destination communicates a stable identity of happiness while simultaneously being articulated by its political leadership as a NATO frontline at the edge of an active war, is the problem this thesis picks up.

This thesis is not the first to notice this problem, as scholarship across nation branding and political-discourse analysis has approached it before from several sides.

Nation branding theory frames states as actors that strategically manage their international image: Anholt (2007) through six attributes under one umbrella, Aronczyk (2013) through the work of state leaders as brand performers, Valaskivi (2016) through the fashion-like cycles by which countries imitate one another's branding moves. Yet this literature is limited in scope when it comes to the inter-communication of channels within a single brand — what happens between tourism and political speech when they carry different content under one nation.

Within tourism research specifically, the question of how destinations communicate during periods of geopolitical instability has been addressed primarily through image-restoration and crisis-marketing models (Avraham & Ketter, 2008; Ritchie, 2009), which cover destinations affected directly by terrorism or war, and through critical discourse approaches that read tourism texts as ideological constructions (Hannam & Knox, 2005). Closer to the Finnish case, Nordic tourism scholarship has examined Lapland and Arctic branding as the production of a deterministic Arctic imaginary. The images of idealised wilderness and strong nature-as-escape positioning are strong (Varnajot & Saarinen, 2022; Gibson, 2023; Haukeland et al., 2021). What this tourism-research literature has not extensively examined is the specific configuration this thesis takes up: a Nordic destination adjacent to active armed conflict but not directly damaged by it, whose tourism channel maintains continuity-as-stillness while its political channel openly performs security work. The closest parallel cases in tourism studies are destinations affected directly by terrorism or war on home territory; the *adjacent-but-undamaged* condition has, to my knowledge, not been theorised as a distinct branding scenario.

Scholarship on Nordic and Finnish identity presents the region's selfhood as a long-running project of Western alignment and model-nation pedagogy — Browning (2007) on how Nordic countries export themselves as standards to be learned from, Browning and Lehti (2010) on Finland's positioning within the Western community of values across decades, and Valaskivi (2016) on how the Finnish brand absorbs and repackages national-identity content for international audiences. This literature predates the 2022 rupture and was written before the Finnish brand had to accommodate a wartime political register alongside its pre-existing happiness register.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) provides the tools for reading discourse as a site of ideological work — Fairclough (2013) on the dialectical relationship between text and social structure, and Wodak (2009) on the analyst's non-neutral position. Silence is also important, as seen in Van Dijk (1993) on omission as a meaning-making strategy — of which silence is a part — and in Slemon (2025) on how silence is operationalised, how absence becomes an analysable dataset.

What is interesting about silence in our case is that CDA treats absence as mostly a data piece when it comes to single discursive fields. Unlike that, the question presented here asks how these channels are interconnected and talk to one another — how silence in one channel (tourism) co-operates with naming in another (political speech), and both end up producing a single coherent national brand.

Some scholars argue that tourism and political communication represent ways through which countries can demonstrate their soft power. Nye (2004) argues that when people are thinking positively of a particular country, this represents soft power. Van Ham (2001) argues that countries have become brands in the current world. Similarly, Fan (2010) suggests that creating brand names for states is a means through which states can develop soft power without resorting to coercion. Grix and Houlihan (2014) suggest that sporting events and tourism events are other forms of soft power employed by states.

This literature treats tourism and political speech as parallel applications of the same logic. This thesis analyses them as a co-constructive system in which one channel's silence does work for the other channel's naming.

Across these five fields, no prior study assembles the full question this thesis poses. Crisis-branding literature covers destinations whose territory is directly damaged. Nordic branding literature covers Finland's longer-arc Western positioning but predates the 2022 rupture. CDA treats absence as data within single discursive fields. Soft-power scholarship treats tourism and political speech as cognate channels but does not analyse them as a co-constructive system in which absence in one channel is doing work for presence in the other. No prior study, to my knowledge, has examined how a nearby-but-undamaged destination — a country affected by crisis but not in it — manages this discursive split

between a tourism channel that maintains strategic silence and a political channel that openly carries the security register. This is the gap this thesis fills.

§1.3 Research approach

The gap identified above is addressed through one main research question and three sub-questions:

Main research question: How do Finnish tourism campaigns and political leadership narratives co-construct Finland's nation brand around happiness and resilience following 2022?

SQ1: How do post-2022 Finnish tourism campaigns represent Finland's "happiest nation" identity alongside themes of safety and resilience?

SQ2: How does Finnish political leadership discourse frame national identity through happiness, safety, and resilience in the context of the Russia–Ukraine war and NATO accession?

SQ3: How do tourism and political representations relate to each other in shaping Finland's contemporary destination identity?

The thesis answers these through critical discourse analysis (CDA) applied to 55 publicly available source texts between 2019 and 2026. Throughout this thesis, there is a separation of channels in discourse. *Tourism channel* - the communicative register of Visit Finland, Business Finland, and government brand-strategy materials. *Political channel* refers to the speeches, interviews, podcasts and parliamentary addresses of the three Finnish leaders studied; the two are treated as separable yet related sites of nation-brand production. The choice of method and corpus (body of empirical materials) is justified in full in Chapter 3. Two further choices shaping this thesis are addressed below: the use of the first person and the public register.

This thesis approaches the gap identified above through critical discourse analysis (CDA) applied to a total of 55 source texts drawn from publicly available texts. Those include tourism campaigns, political speech/interviews, and policy documents across 2022–2026.

The choice of method and corpus is justified in full in Chapter 3. Below is the justification for two further important choices shaping this thesis: the use of the first person and the publicistic register.

I write in the first person where methodological agency is at stake. The avoidance of “I” in academic prose is argued to be a nineteenth-century invention by Evans, Gruba, and Zobel (2014), who note that hiding agency behind passive constructions (“data were collected”, “interviews were conducted”) might be dishonest as it hides away the knowledge: who did the choosing, who did the coding, and — when the raw data is out — who is the interpreter. An argument to be made is that in interpretive social science, naming the analyst becomes a part of methodology. The third person clarifies — describes the corpus, summarises prior work — and I use it; alas, where the analytical move is mine, I say so.

This thesis is written the way a publicist or a New York Times opinion contributor would write an essay. It applies the tools of a magazine columnist to make its point as a methodological choice that expands further than the rigidity required from a thesis (Sword, 2012; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). I feel about this thesis and its rather loose definition of academic tone as a genre-bending text (Frow, 2014). A lived example of this would be a musical album by Beyoncé, an American hip-hop artist who released her album titled *Cowboy Carter* some time ago. A Grammy-winning album, it spans across genres of country and hip-hop, even has Italian in it, and addresses themes of racial and political turbulences of American history and society — a literal heteroglossia, in Bakhtin’s (1981) sense, of voices, registers and languages held in tension within a single work. In a sense, it not only touches upon those themes in the content of songs and texts of those, but it also becomes a point of racial and political discussion itself. The lyrics of a song are text, and as text they function as political statements no less than the speeches of politicians or the columns of media commentators (Nærland, 2014; Storey, 2018); this was made institutionally explicit when Kendrick Lamar’s *DAMN.* was awarded the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Music, an act of canonical recognition that reclassified a hip-hop album as a legitimate object of the same critical seriousness historically reserved for political and literary discourse.

Humbly, I do not compare the quality of my own writing to the quality of these albums; alas, I feel that someone reading this text might be baffled and confused at this text not being academic enough, just like the musical critics claiming that the Beyoncé album was not “country” enough — a reaction that is itself an instance of genre operating as a gatekeeping device rather than a neutral category (Frow, 2014; Hebdige, 1979). To her, writing and parading a country album as a Black woman was a point of return to her roots, as country music historically was heavily influenced by slaves arriving to the States from Africa (Hall, 1997). To me, writing this thesis in an image-heavy way, mentioning popular culture, too signifies a cycle that had a beginning and an end. I mentioned popular culture and my passion for the Arctic when I applied for the programme that this thesis is written at the end of, and I want to close this circle by producing a piece of literature that would still reflect this drive for contemporary culture and the Arctic as much as my first writing — a motivation letter — reflected approximately two years ago. Some parts are in first person; some parts are image-led; the wording carries rhythm and sound; there is a deliberate, arguably pretentious use of foreign-derived English words, a Shakespearean flourish here and there, and an abundance of ridiculously long sentences. In other sciences this could not be argued for. In a thesis within social scientific approach on tourism, research that touches politically sensitive subjects — a field in which the object of analysis, nation branding, is itself constituted across convergent media, popular culture and political communication (Aronczyk, 2013; Jenkins, 2006; Kaneva, 2011) — I believe it can. As the owner of this intellectual property and labour, I want to keep the right to stand out in the vast sea of neutered academic language. The methodological point, however, is the one Wodak (2009) makes about how soft-power discourse works: it lures the reader in (Nye, 2004). This thesis does not try to be seductive through neutrality and distance from its subject. Set against the brand-safe language of the ad-campaign excerpt or the political-speech cut-out, an outspoken thesis is able to point out the political politeness of the texts it analyses. Could the analysis be done without this register? Yes. Does this register do an excellent job of highlighting the “safe talk”? Also yes. Foreign and French wordings — *politik*, *touristique*, *à présent* — are part of this. I ask the reader to keep this in mind from here on.

§1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis proceeds in six further chapters. Chapter 2 sets out the theoretical framework: nation branding scholarship, happiness and destination-image research, soft-power and political communication literature. It studies those before naming the framework this thesis applies. Chapter 3 explains the methodology — the choice of CDA, the construction of the 55-text corpus across tourism and political channels, the coding procedure, and the research ethics applied for the study. Chapters 4 and 5 are the analysis: Chapter 4 reads the tourism channel and Chapter 5 reads the political channel, examining how three Finnish leaders — President Sauli Niinistö, President Alexander Stubb, and former Prime Minister Sanna Marin — construct Finland for international audiences. Chapter 6 brings the two analyses together, arguing that the channels operate as an asymmetric co-constructive system, and places the finding in conversation with prior literature. Chapter 7 concludes: main findings, evaluation of the research, directions for future work, and a closing reflection.

Chapter 2 · Theoretical Framework

§2.1 Nation Branding in Crisis

Tourism, exports, policy, investment, culture, and people are six attributes managed by states under a coherent national strategy. This is how Anholt (2007) understands nation branding. He adds: the brand is the amalgamation of these six channels. This only works, and does not mellow itself down into propaganda, because it is also supported by a shared sense of national purpose. The brand is the strategy made visible. Valaskivi (2016) extends nation branding theory in a different direction. She names branding as a fashion-like activity — countries brand because others do, and they imitate each other's moves more than they respond to their own conditions. The branding cycle therefore often runs unsynced with reality: Denmark, in the wake of the 2005 religious cartoon controversy, attempted to “de-rightwing-ify” its brand through liberal-values events. The “paint it in rainbow” and move on logic, such as the World Outgames 2009 that focused heavily on inclusion and equality, failed. The rebrand failed to repair the Nations Brand Index ranking damage from within (Valaskivi, 2016). Japan, in the 2011–2012 Triple Disaster Recovery

period, moved away from anime and zeitgeist alike toward “core” Japanese values. Valaskivi reads both as cases where the brand was active and unsynced with the present, the country managing the gap between what was happening and what the brand wanted to say. For Finland, no such recalibration was needed: the core identity of the place held even as the border tensed.

Browning (2015) extends Anholt’s account of nation branding in a more theoretical direction. He argues that nation branding is also about the country’s existential self-esteem and ontological security as much as it is about economic competitiveness.

Ontological security, according to Browning, is the country’s capacity to tell a stable, continuous story about who it is. Its self-esteem is the need to feel itself recognised as worthy by others — country to country, peer to peer. Both are forms of being-in-the-world that countries pursue alongside, and sometimes instead of, material gain. When the world shifts, when the reality as it is collapses, when Russia progresses with a full-scale invasion of once-ally Ukraine, when the Cold War ends, when NATO accession is on the table, when a war breaks out at the border — the country’s story is destabilised, and branding becomes the tool through which the story is steadied and re-narrated. In an earlier paper, Browning (2007) names a particular Nordic version of this work: Nordic countries position themselves as models to be learned from as they project themselves onto the world. Peace, social democracy, equality, education: yes, these are attributes the Nordics possess. They are also things the Nordics teach. There is a certain pedagogical tone to everything. “Learn from us, be like us, look at how we do things, here in the north” — this is an important part of the brand, this is the brand. There is, however, a cost. Browning (2015) notes that when citizens of a nation are recruited to “live the brand,” the brand can become disciplinary: it commodifies what counts as legitimate national identity into a performance act. Disobedience to the bit, dissent from the brand, can read as disloyalty. The Finnish teacher quoted in Colston and Michaels (2023) — “I wouldn’t say that I consider us very happy... I’m a little suspicious of that word, actually” — is precisely this kind of dissenting voice. Read this with Browning in mind, and that quote is the symptom of a brand operating undemocratically — the brand tells Finns that they have no choice but to be “happy.”

The theoretical apparatus of nation branding is now in place. Its mechanism (Anholt), its fashion cycles (Valaskivi), and its work on national self-esteem and pedagogical positioning (Browning) are covered. Coming back to Finland — what does Finland’s brand actually contain? The next section addresses the “happy” question. Happiness is the brand’s primary discursive material, and the bridge between the country’s destination image and its political self-presentation.

§2.2 Happiness, Wellbeing, Destination Image

“Since 2018, Finland has been ranked at the top of the World Happiness Report... Being profiled as happy is a strong message” (OF-004, Finland Promotion Board, 2023). In the words of the promotion board itself, happiness is the message. It is the feeling turned product — a feeling co-produced by the prolific welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990). As Smith and Diekmann (2017) state, the commodified subjective state of the “happy” sells itself later. When happiness — something you cannot reliably define — is a number, a place on a list, a rank, it might as well be a brand asset to be marketed. This created a cycle: the state built conditions to make happiness flourish, and the nation sells that happiness now, as equally it uses it for soft power. Browning, in *Branding Nordicity*, explains how Nordic nations’ standards — the models they embody — become an export, as this “teaching,” the pedagogical, is built into Browning’s definition of the Nordic brand (Browning, 2007). Later on, we can see the confirmations of this in both tourism campaigns and in the Finnish case of the political speeches.

Stepping back, it is helpful to take a glance at the greater Nordic/Arctic destinations’ framing, as those sit at the core of Finnish branding too. Flooding the escapism fantasies with idealistic portrayal of environments pristine (Haukeland et al., 2021), the depiction of these regions is joined also with wilderness that gets as reminiscent and nostalgic as Kaurismäki’s latest motion picture. Referring back to the CDA’s “omitted” logic — it is clear what is left out in the promotions from Visit Finland campaigns — but what does constitute a core northern experience: remoteness in the snow-ridden lands, far from novelty of centrums (Gibson, 2023).

When it comes to Arctification, coined by Alix Varnajot and Jarkko Saarinen, who analyse the tension between marketed images and lived conditions, the major tourism campaigns of recent years on a country level do not seem to strongly feed into this narrative. In *Emerging post-Arctic tourism in the age of the Anthropocene: case Finnish Lapland*, they argue that such representations create a “deterministic” and “reductionist” Arctic (Varnajot & Saarinen, 2022). However, it could also be argued that the issue works differently. Portraying Finland, Lapland, and the Arctic as a peaceful land of snow — something one escapes to from the southern lakelands — creates a selective image that borders on dishonesty.

Before the Russian war, the Finnish rise to happiness might have been left unquestioned and left alone. But no longer is this the case. The irony is seen in select few reporting pieces on the ground: Hansen: “I wouldn’t say that I consider us very happy... I’m a little suspicious of that word, actually” (SK-001, NYT, 2023). How does the “happy” brand evolve, how does it expand when faced by the challenge of addressing the “bear” in the room? The answer comes in following chapters, synthesised by the close analysis of the speech politik and touristique.

§2.3 Soft Power, Political Communication, and Tourism

As Nye (2004) distinguishes, the power “soft” should be distinguished from the power “hard” — one asserts its place with militia and force, the other through happy people and the auroras. This was the domain within which Finland’s power operated, until it organically had to switch to a rhetoric bit muddier than soft and hard.

Nation branding, mentioned multiple times throughout, on its own might seem to be just a marketing ploy, or a collective imagination at first glance. Instead, scholars across journals suggest that nation branding should and must be regarded as the extension of soft power. Fan (2010) calls it an instrument of the latter; Anholt (2013) treats it as a strategic asset. The consensus globale on soft power demands that it is applied by all, in a transnational policy manner — this is the contribution of Valaskivi (2016), on the understanding of nation branding as a part of the greater soft power narrative.

A country can extend its influence only so far — one of the tools of such influence spread are the tourism campaigns, that within our literature paradigm, should be considered to be tools. Tools that use nation-belonging concepts — for example, in the case of Finland, *sisu* (a Finnish cultural concept of perseverance, endurance, and quiet resolve in adversity), that is covered later. A manifestation of this logic — inviting people over to tell and show, to yield the soft power — is understood by Grix and Houlihan (2014) in their demonstration of how this is done with the case of sport mega-events. On a smaller scale, in the Finnish case, this is the mastermind idea behind some of the recent Visit Finland campaigns observed: Masterclass of Happiness, or Chill Like a Finn — they contain a cultural package, conceived and imagined for the gaze of the international. Soft power resources are, hereby, *sisu* — from a national spirit identified centuries ago, to a Visit Finland campaign buzzword.

Browning and Lehti (2010) call Finland small and its ambitions in soft power grand. Valaskivi (2016) observes how the Finnish brand, met with questions of an existential kind, kept on running as is, despite the politics of the country shifting towards harder notes on power. This found its reflections in the observed materials — soft power works, and it does so by two parallel mindfully constructed narrative lanes. The symmetry and lack thereof between these two lanes grows into the analytical framework of this thesis.

§2.4 Theoretical Framework Synthesis

If the touristic messaging could be figured out in one main concept — given we have to boil it down — then the selling point of it, across campaigns and media, would be the wording of the “happy.” It is supported by other code words too, yes, but the principal pillar is still traced back to the appropriated idea of the happy. The discursiveness aimed at the recipient, as Valaskivi (2016) puts it, is the structural ground for tourism and political discourse to fulfil their respective aims. On the other side — safety is the message being transferred via the talk politik. Do they contradict? At the beginning of this study, an argument may have been made — yes, maybe? Or at least, such argument could have been a valid point of a raised eyebrow, as in, how would happiness be equally paraded around alongside safety, amidst the context of war — where war is the assumed, omitted, through the CDA lens? The findings assume no. Both are part of the bigger picture — a strong

message of the free and strong Finland. The macro goal here, as defined by Nye (2004), is the most optimal look on Finland, the goal of any effort aimed at proliferating soft power; identity of the nation is the resource towards which both work (Anholt, 2013).

The finding of such analysis is the junction of said and unsaid, targeted and thrown aimlessly — the things that one path takes from the other. Touristic imagery, in the analysis of politicians' assumed stoicism and *sisu*, stays resilient by ignoring the obvious — no politics to be found, no wars to be feared. This *sisu* and stillness — akin to Finnish nature, so beautifully shot on promotional materials — is not the asset of the land anymore, nor is it the asset of only the discourse *touristique* — it is a part of the discourse *politik* too. Wodak explains this by the *identité nationale* constructed via multiple sources (Wodak, 2009); Fairclough's (2013) CDA takes the mask from the trivial — in CDA, *sisu*, arching its meaning in between, is the deliberate choice of the brand crafters.

At the macro level, all these concepts that are presumed to be Finnish — safety or *sisu* — are constructed to be Finnish through text and meaning. They are used and said in widely different connotations and contexts, which becomes the driving force for them to build the complete picture (Fairclough, 2013).

This three-level relationship is visualised in Figure 1 (see appendix or supplementary materials); the soft power builds the macro level through discrepancy. All the concepts of the definitive Finnishness come together at the macro level of soft power, where the discourse asymmetry contributes to the cause.

The theoretical framework this thesis applies extends three threads of the literature reviewed above. First, it extends Slemon (2025) on silence-as-data: where Slemon establishes absence as an analysable discursive category, this thesis operationalises absence through a competent-reader test, tagging passages silent-on-insecurity where a reader of the context would reasonably expect the naming of threat and that naming is absent. Across the corpus (55 text material, in this thesis, body of empirical materials), 14 passages are tagged this way — equal in number to the corpus's explicit safety passages, which suggests that silence and naming function as parallel discursive strategies. Second, the framework extends Browning (2007) on the Nordic pedagogical register. Where Browning treats the

register as unified across the Nordic brand, this thesis finds the register split across two channels in the Finnish case: tourism teaches happiness, politics teaches resilience, and the brand coheres precisely because the two teachings do not occupy the same channel. Third, the framework extends Aronczyk (2013) on heads of state as brand performers, by specifying the direction of register borrowing: political speakers in this corpus actively borrow tourism's vocabulary of happiness, calm, and the "happiest nation" claim, while tourism materials do not borrow the political channel's vocabulary of threat or readiness back. The borrowing is one-directional. This asymmetry is the brand mechanism's distinctive feature and the central theoretical claim this thesis advances.

Chapter 3 · Methodology

§3.1 Research Philosophy

All that went into examination for this thesis should start with an introduction on ideas theorising on perception of the truth — our *donnée* of the currents as we know it. Putting this reality in the words, as did Berger and Luckmann (1966), would mean that we reconcile with two baseline realities everything else should be built upon: (a) meaning in all its manifestations that would entail to the reader is fabricated via social activity and discourse; (b) the objective truth — "our *donnée* of the currents" — is the result of accumulated *pratique du social*; (c) the language as the tool of manifesting convictions makes sense of the shared experiences by categorisation.

In relation to our study subjects, let us say the concepts of *sisu*/resilience or happiness shall be treated as parts of the contemporary Finnish morale and beyond that, as constructions that are manufactured via context and speech/text.

Wodak (2009) understands the analyst — me, as the narrator of this thesis — to be not neutral, and in control of one's own prejudices where the meaning is heavily contested and is dependent on the context. Regardless, the interpretivist outlook positions my role as an observer here as the one of analyst, looking for meanings and patterns to be interpreted.

This interpretation, according to Fairclough (2013), moves between the text analysed and the structures far beyond behind it. And as the analyst continues with the interpretation, CDA allows to analyse the non-existent, things left unsaid and meanings assumed, making CDA the appropriate method for this epistemological position.

§3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA is the primary analytical tool applied throughout this thesis. When approaching CDA, Fairclough among other scholars brings in a junction of social practice and discursive practices, of which text — spoken, written — becomes an important aspect too (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). De Cillia et al. (1999) provide an understanding of a dialectical relationship. This presents the spoken as a natural element that has the ability to both reinforce and establish societal identity.

In order to understand the appropriate use of CDA for this thesis, as an observer, one has to move themselves swiftly in between the understanding of three pillars: micro, meso, and macro levels of linguistic analysis. The intervention of these forms the ideological-discursive and power relations standing at the core of social structures.

The micro level looks at vocabulary and syntax; moving on, we continue on the meso, where practices look at how language is used as a social actor: how it is produced, distributed, and for whom it is intended. The macro level takes this into the widest institutional and societal context and acknowledges that the fabric of the social is constantly shepherded and constituted by the discursive (De Cillia et al., 1999).

The main argument on why it is ever so appropriate to think of nation branding through CDA is that the latter treats nations not, let us say, as a flag or colour. CDA treats nations as De Cillia et al. (1999) say: “imagined political communities.” As follows, the planning and construction of those narratives is indeed strategic. It is reproduced and produced — it does not exist in its own cocoon. Politicians and media play a great role in this transformation, as they are part of semiotic signalling, both by choice and virtue.

In an attempt of narrating a certain perception through cultural representations, as De Cillia et al. (1999) argue, nation branding helps to present a nation’s past and current via

narratives. CDA, on the other hand, can let us peek into how the construction is done by analysing the branding; it highlights how the “intra-national sameness” and unequal power relations all contribute to country image and simultaneously establish its difference and distinctiveness from other collectives of nations, which also can be found in marketing representation.

In relation to Marin’s, or Stubb’s, talks, as is to be revealed later on, CDA offers a negative unsaid space, as Slemon (2025) frames it: the absence of things said should be treated as equally important, since the speakers and narratives created do an active choice of what the discourse should centre, and what to leave out — the unsaid carries weight.

If approached with full transparency, although CDA is a useful tool, its limitations are still present in suggested “interpretive subjectivity,” as Baker et al. (2008) note. The listener-researcher does have bias due to their positionality and personality that might give meaning to something that was never meant to be analysed or tagged in the first place — speech, thoughts, texts, remarks (Baker et al., 2008). As this thesis is highly political, it is relevant to identify how Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) point out how CDA holds onto the bias morale attached to leftist political ideologies, leading to data being computed and cherry-picked to prove a point of the producer’s political notions or goals (Stubbs, 1994, 1997; Baker et al., 2008). The methodology is also frequently accused of “bias morale,” with critics arguing it is too closely attached to left-wing viewpoints, which can lead to over-interpretation of data to suit the analyst’s preconceived political goals (Koller & Mautner, 2004; Stubbs, 1994, 1997). The next section, namely covering Fairclough’s framework, that operates across text, discursive practice, and social practice, serves as the methodology bridge that ties discourse into something tangible and structured. This analytical procedure brings in its evidence in §3.4.

§3.3 Corpus

In this thesis, *corpus* refers to the systematically assembled body of empirical materials on which the analysis is performed: 55 source texts — tourism campaign materials, political speeches, interviews, and official policy documents. These are produced between 2019 and 2026 and gathered against the selection criteria set out in §3.3.3. The term is used in the

sense established in corpus-informed discourse analysis (Baker, 2006; Baker et al., 2008), where a corpus is a deliberately bounded collection of texts chosen so that patterns of language use across them can be read systematically. Two sub-corpora are distinguished here — a tourism corpus (§3.3.1) and a political corpus (§3.3.2) — because the asymmetric two-channel question this thesis asks requires the two registers to be readable both separately and in relation.

§3.3.1 Tourism Corpus

At first, non-scholarly glance, the urge to study tourism promotional materials might seem unnecessary — after all, these are aimed at tourists and function primarily as promotion, right? Dinnie (2008) offers a framework that justifies taking the promotional more seriously than a mere advertisement. As governments engage in nation branding, Dinnie specifies, they pursue three core objectives: attracting tourists, attracting investors, and improving their standing in the eyes of other countries. Applying this logic to an ad published by Visit Finland, aimed at the first of the three, it becomes clear that in these campaigns the country actively performs its national identity in the format of outward marketing — making it an important object of study.

A second dimension that raises the analytical importance of these materials is what Dinnie (2008) identifies as the attempt to distil a nation's cultural richness — its entire intellectual and historical inheritance — into packaged, bite-sized narratives.

Finland becomes happiness. It becomes *sisu*. It becomes calm. These are not arbitrary slogans; they are narrative concepts grounded in real cultural values, compressed into communicable form for an international audience. That compression is precisely the analytical object of this study.

Anholt (2007, 2013) adds a further warrant: tourism campaigns, even within the broader context of nation branding, remain fundamentally product-driven — designed for a market, with financially measurable outcomes. For a CDA analyst, this is an asset rather than a limitation. The identity claims embedded in these materials are explicit, packaged, and legible — which makes them among the cleaner sites for discourse analysis.

§3.3.2 Political Corpus

Politicians are, arguably, the most visible face of Finland to people outside of it — for someone who has never been to Finland, the president or a globally recognised Prime Minister is more often than not the most accessible source of what Finland “is,” what it looks like, and what it stands for. Van Ham (2001) frames this shift precisely: political leaders have moved away from the traditional essence of diplomacy and rapprochement, and have become, in effect, brand ambassadors tasked with managing the national brand asset. Aronczyk (2013) extends this further, arguing that identifying the country’s proper marketing niche has become one of the primary functions of state leaders — rendering their public speech branding data, and positioning politicians themselves as mediators between what the nation is and what it appears to be.

The choice of each individual politician for the analysis carries its own rationale.

President Sauli Niinistö, who served as President of Finland from 2012 to 2024, represents the definitive accession-era presidential voice in this corpus. His New Year’s speeches — admittedly aimed not exclusively at international audiences, but dense with signalling as the analysis will reveal — alongside the NATO application press conference co-held with former Prime Minister Sanna Marin, and interviews spanning January 2022 to January 2024, constitute the core of his contribution. This period matters most: it covers both the accession decision and the formal entry into NATO.

Marin presents a different figure entirely — she was not the president but the Prime Minister, and more importantly, internationally prominent (Nierenberg, 2025; Reynolds, 2019).

Her inclusion requires a brief structural note: under the Finnish constitutional framework, the President leads foreign policy and national security in cooperation with the Government, while the Prime Minister governs inward, responsible for domestic policy and inter-ministerial coordination (presidentti.fi; U.S. State Department, 2009). Despite her domestic mandate, Marin played a significant role in NATO membership — co-leading, alongside Niinistö, Finland’s decisive response to the invasion. Serving from December 10, 2019, to June 20, 2023, she simultaneously embodied the convictions of progressive

Nordic Finland while managing successive crises — COVID-19 and NATO accession — with notable international visibility (Reynolds, 2019; Nierenberg, 2025).

Nye (2004) speaks to precisely this dynamic: leaders with attractive personalities and moral authority generate soft power through attraction rather than coercion, with the persona becoming the national asset. At the time of her tenure, Marin was the world's youngest sitting head of government (Reynolds, 2019), and for many outside Finland — particularly younger audiences and those from marginalised communities — she was Finland.

As an analyst who strives for neutrality — a position the methodology acknowledges is never fully achievable — describing President Alexander Stubb as omnipresent may invite scrutiny. The characterisation, however, carries no negative connotation; it is empirically supported. Stubb yields the largest single-speaker passage count in this corpus: 43 entries across April 2022 to April 2026. This thesis's scope does not permit a full theoretical analysis of why — variously suggested explanations include personal style, strategic positioning, and active enforcement of soft power, none of which this study fully unpacks. What remains clear is that whenever a major international news event broke, Stubb appeared: navigating between Trump and European allies (Yle, 2025), representing Finland as a serious yet approachable NATO partner. In the post-Marin phase of NATO consolidation, when Trumpism introduced significant friction into Western allyship, Stubb maintained personal diplomatic engagement, redefining Finland's westernisation on a geopolitical scale. Browning and Lehti (2010) define this mode of identity formation as the “politics of speaking and representing” — which Stubb enacts with particular consistency and reach.

The predominance of venues such as Davos, Bloomberg studios, CNN, the UN General Assembly, and the Brookings Institution across the corpus is not incidental — it is the selection logic. At Davos, Marin delivered her address; later, the same forum hosted Stubb. These are not domestic stages. Nye (2004) argues that soft power operates through elite exchanges in international arenas — spaces where stories are told, alliances are built, and where a nation's narrative is consolidated or contested. It is in precisely these spaces that Finland's identity and positioning are stipulated and expanded by its political leaders,

aimed outward at allies, critics, and everyone in between. The outward orientation of every speech and interview selected is what makes them valid corpus material for this study.

In unity, these otherwise contextually different texts construct what Finland is to an outside observer — as presented in Table 1.

Speaker / Source	Format	Date Range	N (passages)
Visit Finland / Business Finland	Campaign materials	2019–2026	17
Finnish Government / FPB / MFA	Strategy documents	2023–2026	6
US/UK Media (ABC, Slate, NYT, CBS)	News and documentary	2022–2024	6
Sauli Niinistö	Speeches and press conferences	Jan 2022–Jan 2024	23
Alexander Stubb	Speeches, interviews and podcasts	Apr 2022–Apr 2026	43
Sanna Marin	Speeches and interviews	May 2022–Nov 2025	29
External attribution (Zelensky, Palonen, Tiessalo)	Attributed quotes	2024–2025	3
Total		2019–2026	127

Table 1. Corpus composition. N reflects coded passages extracted from the corpus; the total number of distinct source texts is 55.

§3.3.3 Source-selection criteria

Source texts were selected against three criteria: (a) publicly accessible — campaign materials, broadcast speeches, on-record interviews, official government documents; (b) externally-oriented — produced for international audiences or with substantial international circulation; (c) date-bounded — primarily 2022–2026, with a small set of 2019–2021 sources retained as pre-war baseline. Material was gathered iteratively across the autumn 2025 semester and into early 2026, with a small number of later additions made in mid-to-late 2026 as new material from the analytical window became available. Table 1 above summarises the 55 source texts and their distribution across speakers, formats, and date ranges.

§3.4 Analytical Process

The corpus was assembled in accordance with the selection criteria established in the earlier section, drawing on publicly accessible materials across both the tourism and political registers.

The main ideas were gathered at first glance, as some words and phrases came up more often than others: Ukraine, Peace, Calm, Happy. Initial themes emerged inductively from the texts themselves, before any formal coding scheme was applied (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The coding, later refined by re-visits, was initially established inductively without a scheme in plan. As the same ideas kept coming up again — such as happiness — the idea for five codes came to fruition through C1 to C5, codes that covered happiness, silence, sisu, continuity and change, and the appropriation of the World Happiness Report as brand pillar. Codes were then divided into two to three sub-codes, resulting in 15 direct analytical categories.

After establishing the coding, the passages were sorted according to their tags. Although some tags were absent in the political corpus, they were still present in the tourism corpus, alongside tags that appeared across both. As per CDA, those that were absent were as important to the understanding as those that appeared consistently (Slemon, 2025).

What was initially assumed — that these two narratives might conflict or contradict one another — was challenged by the data itself: between the two corpora, themes repeated, reinforced, and ultimately complemented one another.

Since some passages were denser than others — carrying multiple co-occurring codes — they were analysed at three levels, following Fairclough (2013): (a) the language and text itself, (b) discursive practice — how the text was produced and received, and (c) *pratique du social* — the broader context into which the discourse connects and operates.

The operationalisation of C2c — silence on insecurity — requires a separate methodological note, because absence of language is not self-evident data. Silence cannot simply be observed; it must be demonstrated. C2c was tagged where a competent reader of

the context would reasonably expect the naming of threat, conflict, or geopolitical actors — and that naming was absent. A Visit Finland campaign published in March 2022 that makes no reference to the invasion is not merely apolitical — it is performing apoliticality. That performance is the data. Across the corpus, 14 passages were tagged C2c — equal in number to C2a explicit safety passages — suggesting that silence and naming function as parallel discursive strategies within this dataset.

In fine, the 127 coded passages drawn from 55 texts were brought together and synthesised into findings that address the main research question and SQ1 through SQ3. This procedure yielded 127 coded passages across the 55-item corpus, distributed approximately 80/20 between political and tourism material.

The most frequented codes in the dataset were: C4a — stillness and unchangedness, C2c — silence on current turmoils, C2a — safety. Stability, importantly, finds its face in understanding and assumed security, manifested in silence — the lack of explanation of an idea that should be naturalised: we are safe. We are sound.

The coding scheme was designed to track concepts that CDA treats as discursively significant across three levels (Fairclough, 2013). At the lexical and micro level, the scheme tags explicit vocabulary choices: the language of happiness (C1), of safety (C2a), of *sisu* (C3), of continuity or change (C4), and of the World Happiness Report ranking (C5). At the meso level, it tags discursive moves that operate through positioning rather than naming: implicit safety claims (C2b), and silence on insecurity (C2c). At the macro level, the five claim categories feed Fairclough's three-level analysis of text, discursive practice, and social practice, which is conducted across Chapters 4, 5, and 6. The codes emerged inductively across the first analytical pass and were refined through re-visits to the corpus as the discursive patterns stabilised.

Code	Code	Sub-code label	Description
C1a	Happiness	Explicit happiness	"Happiest nation" slogans, direct happiness claims
C1b	Happiness	Implicit happiness	Mood, imagery, lifestyle cues
C2a	Safety and silence	Explicit safety	Naming of threat, alliance, military readiness
C2b	Safety and silence	Implicit safety	Calm, stability, positioning without naming

C2c	Safety and silence	Silence-on-insecurity	Absence where a competent reader would expect naming
C3a	Sisu	Cultural sisu	Spiritual perseverance, intangible grit (tourism register)
C3b	Sisu	Political-instrumental sisu	Sisu as strategic and geopolitical signifier (political register)
C4a	Continuity and change	Continuity-as-unchangedness	Brand reads as if 2022 had not happened
C4b	Continuity and change	Acknowledged change	Explicit naming of the post-2022 rupture
C5a	World Happiness Report ranking	WHR-as-fact	Ranking treated as legitimising fact
C5b	World Happiness Report ranking	Ranking-as-brand-asset	Ranking deployed explicitly as a brand asset

Table 2. Coding scheme used across Chapters 4–6. Five primary claim categories (C1–C5) subdivided into eleven sub-codes. The scheme operates at three Faircloughian levels: lexical/micro (explicit vocabulary choices: C1a, C2a, C3, C4, C5), meso (positioning: C1b, C2b, C2c, C4b), and macro (the five categories feeding text / discursive-practice / social-practice analysis).

The unit of analysis is the passage. A passage is a clause or short paragraph constituting a complete discursive act — a sentence or sentence-group that performs one identifiable claim or move. Passages are located inside source texts: a single Niinistö speech, for instance, may contain six or seven coded passages, each tagged for the specific discursive work it performs. Co-codes are permitted where a passage operates on multiple registers simultaneously (NN-001, for example, carries both C1a explicit happiness and C5b ranking; ST-001 carries C1a, C2a, and C5b in a single sentence). This allows the analysis to move between the micro-level discursive act and the macro-level brand claim without losing either.

The C2c code — silence on insecurity — requires particular methodological care, since absence is harder to operationalise than presence. C2c is tagged where two conditions are met: (i) a competent reader of the context would reasonably expect the naming of threat, conflict, or geopolitical actors given what the text is about and when it was produced, and (ii) that naming is absent. The Visit Finland March 2022 campaign, for example, was active around the same time as Finland’s NATO application and makes no reference to the invasion that triggered it; this is a passage where the silence is itself the discursive choice. Across the corpus, 14 passages are tagged C2c — equal in number to the C2a explicit-safety passages, which suggests that silence and naming function as parallel discursive strategies rather than as presence and absence of the same discourse (Slemon, 2025).

The corpus surfaces five primary claim categories — happiness (C1), safety and silence (C2), *sisu* (C3), continuity and change (C4), and the World Happiness Report ranking (C5) — each with two or three sub-codes capturing register-specific variants. Chapter 4 analyses how these claims operate in the tourism domain, where happiness (C1) and silence-on-insecurity (C2c) carry most of the discursive load. Chapter 5 analyses the political domain, where explicit safety (C2a), continuity (C4a), and political-instrumental *sisu* (C3b) dominate. Chapter 6 returns to the asymmetric relationship between the two channels, where one channel's silence is doing work for the other channel's naming.

§3.5 Research ethics

§3.5.1 Ethical conduct of the research

This research was conducted in accordance with the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) guidelines, to which the University of Lapland is committed: the Ethical Principles of Research with Human Participants and Ethical Review in the Human Sciences in Finland (TENK, 2019) and the Finnish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (TENK, 2023). The corpus consists entirely of publicly accessible material — campaign documents, broadcast speeches, on-record interviews, official government communications, and press coverage. The subjects of the political analysis — President Sauli Niinistö, President Alexander Stubb, and former Prime Minister Sanna Marin — are public figures speaking in their public capacities, and the materials analysed were produced for international audiences as part of their public roles. No private communications, no unpublished material, and no non-consenting individuals are part of this research. Under TENK (2019) criteria, the research design does not meet any of the conditions that would require ethical review — there is no deviation from informed consent, no intervention in physical integrity, no research with minors under 15, no exceptionally strong stimuli, no risk of mental harm beyond daily life, and no threat to the safety of participants or researcher. Ethical review was therefore neither requested nor required.

A broader ethical context bearing on this research — the empirical violence the analysed discourse is silent about — is taken up in the Afterword. It is held there, rather than in this section, because it is a reflective rather than a procedural ethics question.

§3.5.2 *Researcher positionality*

I write as an international student, maybe an outsider to Finland, maybe not. But as someone who is not an outsider to the kind of country Finland is now presenting itself as. Six years of tourism studies, two of which belong in the Finnish education system, fluency in the Russian-speaking media (not related directly; must be acknowledged regardless) that shapes one side of the Finnish geopolitical horizon, and a non-Finnish first language together form the position from which this corpus is read. This is the lens through which the data acquires the shape it has in Chapters 4 and 5.

What the outsider lens makes visible is the address. Where an insider reads Visit Finland's "happiest country" claim as a familiar national refrain, I read it as a sentence aimed at someone — at me, in fact, as the implied international audience the campaign was designed for. The pedagogical register Browning (2007) names becomes audible from this position because it is being directed outward; the "Masterclass of Happiness" is staged for the visitor, and the visitor is the analytical subject I can occupy with the least translation. The C2c silences in the tourism corpus become visible for the same reason — what the brand does not say to the visitor about the war next door is a choice I notice because I am the visitor.

What this lens makes invisible is, conversely, the interior of Finnish self-understanding. The household register, the generational difference between Niinistö and Stubb as read by Finns who have lived under both, the Finnish-language nuance that translation flattens — these are accessible to me only at one remove, through translated text and through the Finnish reader who verified the translations. Where I rely on this remove, I name it; where the analysis depends on internal Finnish meanings I cannot reach directly, the claim is hedged accordingly.

The limit of the lens is the unsaid that is so deeply normalised it does not register as a choice. The C2c code is partial protection against this — it is designed to catch absences a

competent reader would notice — but it cannot catch the absences that are invisible to the competent reader as well. This is the standpoint tradition's basic claim: all knowledge is situated, and the situated position both enables and constrains what can be seen (Haraway, 1988). I name my position so the reader can weigh the analysis against the place it was made from.

My position with respect to the Russian Federation's war in Ukraine is not neutral, and in the tradition of fair academic practice, this has to be acknowledged. This position shapes what I am able to see in the corpus, and in particular it shapes my reading of silence-on-insecurity (C2c) as a discursive choice with consequences. The broader ethical commitments underlying this lens are set out in the Afterword. Defining this position is vital for understanding the analysis as it is the lens through which the latter is conducted.

§3.5.3 Use of digital tools (AI, web services, editing tools)

This thesis was produced with the assistance of several digital tools, each used within a defined scope. Reference management was handled in Zotero. The coding of the 127 passages across the 55-text corpus was carried out in Excel, with the working file versioned across the analytical phase. Translation of Finnish-language governmental reports and policy documents that were not available in English was assisted by translation software (DeepL and Google Translate), with the outputs verified by a Finnish-speaking native reader before any analytical use. AI tools (large language models) were used for brainstorming and thought mapping, for structural and argumentative review, for the identification of fallacies and inconsistencies in draft material, for editing assistance, and for language and grammatical proofreading. AI tools were not used generatively for the construction of ideas or wording — the analytical claims done by the interpretation of the texts and the rhythmic prose of this thesis are my own. All AI-assisted outputs were rigorously reviewed and verified before being integrated into the final text. This use complies with University of Lapland guidelines on the use of artificial intelligence and digital tools in academic work.

Chapter 4 · Tourism Analysis

Chapter 4 reads the tourism channel of Finland's contemporary brand. The corpus material analysed across this chapter is the larger half of the 55 source texts: Visit Finland and Business Finland campaigns from 2019 through 2026, the Finnish Government's country brand strategy update, and the international press coverage (US and UK) that has carried these campaigns to the audiences they were built for. Four discursive patterns dominate. Happiness as the brand's primary content (C1) — explicit in slogans, implicit in mood and imagery. Silence on insecurity (C2c) — the systematic non-naming of the war next door across 14 passages produced during the period of active conflict. Continuity and stillness (C4a) — the rhetorical work of keeping the brand reading as if nothing has changed. The World Happiness Report ranking (C5) — the metric the brand has built itself around, treated as legitimising fact, without addressing the methodologically contested measure it is. The analysis begins with the only pre-war campaign in the corpus.

§4.1 Overview

“Rent a Finn” — the only pre-war campaign covered in the selection — pioneers, within the current study, the concepts of happiness and calmness in nature, all of which would be covered later on in all of the campaigns one way or another. The “rent” in this campaign was a mimic of the act of hosting, where real Finns would host the tourists, teaching them things “the Finnish way.” The two other campaigns covered “something to learn” from Finns too — the Chill Like a Finn (7 Day Challenge in Lakeland) and Masterclass of Happiness (2023/2024), both include something to be taught. The peculiarity of the Happiness Masterclass lies in its allure — happiness? It was launched mid-war by Visit Finland on March 13, 2023. Helsinki — the capital city too — uses happiness as their “thing” as an ongoing media campaign as seen on the city webpages. All the roads on the materials covered lead to the kind of a “magnum opus” — the Finnish governmental country brand strategy update. Precisely one of the most important pieces to study — as it is official — states that happiness is indeed a brand asset. Business Finland found a way to monetize the human emotion, or better put, in the language of CDA — the feelings or associations tied to the concept of happiness (Business Finland, 2024, 2026).

What is seen across the campaigns is that the same foundational ideology, seen in only one of the pre-war campaigns covered (Rent a Finn), continued into the later ones — with one of the claims evolving the most: Happiness (C1a, C1b, C5b). In the back, this happiness is supported by other things that can bring about this happiness: nature, calmness. The invasion — an important divergence in the co-construction of the brand — is omitted when it comes to touristic campaigning.

As mentioned with the capitalisation of the happiness discourse, the similar kind of path happens to *sisu*.

§4.2 Happiness Discourse

The vagueness of happiness is almost never properly addressed by any of the campaigns, although it has been drawing criticism: for the use of the “Cantril ladder,” which research has shown primes respondents toward concepts of wealth and power rather than well-being (Nilsson et al., 2024; Lund University, 2024), or for a very specific, tied understanding of tourism, and more. This purposeful omission, when the Finnish promotion boards still do not refrain from referring to the WHR as a legitimate source. The credibility is borrowed, then appropriated: “Finland cultivates an environment in which personal happiness and business success are not at odds but grow out of the same ground” (Business Finland, 2026), and never addressed with all the neutrality that it deserves: “Since 2018, Finland has been ranked at the top of the World Happiness Report... Being profiled as happy is a strong message” (Finland Promotion Board, 2023).

The commodification of happiness — by 2024 Visit Finland was selling “Happiness Masterclasses” (West-Knights, 2025) and the government brand strategy treats happiness as a brand asset (Business Finland, 2026) — has been commented on in media. “Finland has begun to try to capitalize on this accolade. In 2023 and 2024, the tourist board, Visit Finland, invited 14 non-Finns to come to the country and undertake a ‘Happiness Masterclass’” (West-Knights, 2025).

Does this mean that happiness, turned from the unsubstantial to tangible, has a price now? Is that a lesson? Can that lesson be sold? The national characteristic becomes a Masterclass of Happiness — “The Finnish state of mind is not a secret or a mystical innate ability;

rather, it is a skill that can be learned” (Visit Finland, 2023). Happiness also does a good job of selling: as the government suggests “happy” tailor-made itineraries around the places where you can get the “happy,” as Young et al. (2025) report in *The New York Times*.

The materialisation of “the happy” is overt in the government’s own sources. Quote: “It’s important that we are known for the right things. A strong country image creates opportunities for us, and it also provides a degree of protection in an age of information influencing” — Mikko Koivumaa, responsible for communications at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, chair of the Finland Promotion Board (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2023b). In another quote, the government-related source acknowledges the outsider labelling of happiness on the Finns: “The strategy places Finnish life satisfaction at its core. Finland has become widely known for this through the World Happiness Report” (Finnish Government, 2024). Years later, still, happiness — who would be in the middle, if this were a Venn diagram of tourism vs. discourse politik — in co-construction participates still, by politically becoming a protection — the right kind of image, the right kind of positioning, the happy one, wins over and contributes to soft power: “Happiness has become a significant brand asset” (Finnish Government, 2026).

Over the years, different *New York Times* magazine reporters capture the dubiety of the Finn — a nuance much needed for the dramatisation of the arguments presented. It must be admitted: a small-scale interview, published in an American magazine article, cannot be addressed as an authority on the universal feelings of every Finnish person. With that limitation in mind, still, the points that could be drawn from the observations stay solid. Namely, that the happiness brand does not really bother to include the people: they do not rush to claim it — it is externally pushed onto them. “To be honest, Finns don’t seem that happy... It’s really dark outside, and we can be quite gloomy” (Eerikainen, quoted in Colston & Michaels, 2023) or as seen in words such as “I wouldn’t say that I consider us very happy... I’m a little suspicious of that word, actually” (Hansen, quoted in Colston & Michaels, 2023). The amount of years that Finland has topped the rating — enough for happiness to be acknowledged and performed institutionally — has been doubted too: “Four times in a row is too much... There’s definitely something in our history that makes

us have this kind of low self-esteem as a nation, always feeling like an underdog” (Lindstrom, quoted in Gross & Lemola, 2021).

§4.3 Strategic Silence and Resilience

Anytime these touristic campaigns mention stability, they simultaneously exclude naming the aspect that might scare off tourists — no mentions of war. Although the choice to omit war from tourism materials may seem unremarkable on the surface — destinations rarely advertise their proximity to conflict — the systematic nature of the omission across the corpus (14 C2c passages, equal in number to the explicit-safety C2a passages elsewhere) makes the absence itself the analytical object. In the CDA lens, as seen in Van Dijk (1993), the meaning is shaped by the unsaid — Russia — directional omission of the unsaid. *Masterclass of Happiness*, while omitting the war, by not saying it, quietly implies it, as it positions Finland as the getaway from the turmoil, just like does “Chill Like a Finn.” Turmoil, caused by who? And what? The stability, grounds of which are partially in military, is glanced over too, as a thing of its own — in positioning from Business Finland B2B — piling up to a total of zero mentions of the war and consequential events. Van Dijk (1993) argues that the omission leads to the “preferred model” — in our understanding, Finland being “unbothered” by the neighbour. This is what Finland says by silence — a decontextualised offer that includes self-sustained calmness and *sisu*, a “preferred model.”

The faceless threat is mentioned along the lines, and keeps the brand exportable to enjoy.

As part of the campaigns run by Visit Finland, happiness was filmed and promoted on an American network channel at the prime of the wartime actions (ABC News / Visit Finland, 2023–2024) — Russia there, omitted. Russia in the promotional board materials circa 2025 is not, conditionally. On the condition of the mention being the old Russia — a threat no nation faces any longer (Finland Promotion Board, 2025).

Given two facts: Finland was not as affected as the war-torn regions mentioned in Avraham and Ketter (2008) and Ritchie (2009) on destinations needing reputational wipe-out; and that none of the campaigns have made exclusively sharp 180-degree marketing turns, it is safe to assume that silence was the tool — one of perseverance of the image as it is.

§4.4 Summary

The tourism board's explicit attention to the rankings that appropriate the externally labelled happiness onto the Finns, and start presenting happiness as a teachable skill, shows how the "Finn" is being mythologised and sold as a concept. The Finn does not bother himself with war — it is just the turmoils of the world — and the core image of the country stays. The government reports confirm: "there is no change of direction" (Pappi, 2026).

The national product of Finnish happiness has evolved to be one of its spiritual pillars as of 2026. Silence brings no break in the image that was evolving — the brand stayed stable, at its core, on what it wants Finland to look like. Finland, the brand, evolves its concept of happiness in the face of adversity — touristically silencing the sounds of fighter jets, and complemented by the political channel that is not silent on the threat, and is loud on resilience.

Chapter 5 · Political Analysis

§5.1 Context

February 24 was an ordinary day for some, and the most important day in their lives for many. For Finland, a nation sharing an extensive border with Russia, this was the night where the current national branding branched out to a trajectory very few expected but many accepted. The time needed for the nation to process the shockwaves, and once those were over, the will of the people found itself in the May 12, 2022 joint statement of Niinistö — president at the time — and Marin — prime minister at the time (Rauhala & Ryan, 2023; Fella, 2026). The process was finalised on April 4th, 2023, when Finland became the 31st member (Fella, 2026). Although Finland's accession is often viewed on par with Sweden's, for the matters of this thesis the focus will remain primarily on Finland's NATO journey.

The polls throughout the journey to NATO showcase the public task that was expected of the government: support grew from the lowest of 20 percent over the pre-2022 era, to the general consensus of spring 2022, when it bloomed as summer came (53% late February

→ 62% March → 76% May) (Forsberg, 2023; Laine, 2025; Fella, 2026), to its peak of 80% post-accession (Forsberg, 2024). The request was accepted, and answering to the demand, politicians followed the country into the alliance.

The chapter analyses three speakers in sequence: Niinistö (§5.2), Stubb (§5.3), Marin (§5.4), and closes with a cross-speaker pattern (§5.5). Each speaker's sub-section foregrounds the dominant discourse(s) coded across their passages: continuity (C4a) and stability for Niinistö, brand-performer consolidation for Stubb, and register-switching across venue and audience for Marin. §5.5 returns to SQ3 by tracking the moments when political speakers actively borrow tourism's register.

§5.2 President Sauli Niinistö

Change is something that Niinistö did not want to address overtly in his times speaking of Finland's sailings in world politics. The "stillness" and "stability" became some of the most frequently coded patterns when skimming through his speeches: "even as an allied country we are still the same Finland as before — not bigger than itself, but one that holds firmly on to what is ours" (NN-017, Niinistö, 2023a); or "as a foreign policy actor, we are still the same Finland as before, without any epithets" (NN-019, Niinistö, 2024). In his version of Finland, change is treated as if it never happened at all.

Sisu — the national trait laid out in earlier chapters — lands itself in Niinistö's toolbox politik. Either due to military alertness, or due to having to re-conceptualise century-old traits to make sense of current events, sisu, according to Niinistö, becomes an asset, a defence mechanism even: "When the going gets tough, all of us find new skills and qualities in ourselves. This is all about our sisu — the combination of willpower and perseverance" (NN-005, Niinistö, 2023a). Finland's first and foremost line of defence is still located between the ears of the people living here (NN-018, Niinistö, 2023b).

Although Niinistö directly addresses Russia's fault (Niinistö, 2022b), on the day of the announcement, he does not talk much and does not name Mr Putin, the Russian president. In Niinistö's speech, the silence, as per Van Dijk (1993), is an obvious pointer to the elephant in the room, or in our case, the bear.

Stubb, currently serving as the 13th President of Finland, solidifies some of the ideas expressed by Niinistö's Finland. His notion presents the country as one that can be learned from — a pedagogical, at times even righteous, if interpreted negatively, postulate, as expressed in quotes such as: “the Finnish model is now attracting a lot of attention... comprehensive security, Finland's example may actually be a goal worth striving for for many others” (NN-021, Niinistö, 2024). The country, as branded by this president, moves on to become the security frontier — later becoming Stubb's soft power selling point.

§5.3 President Alexander Stubb

Stubb sells. He is overt on what he thinks Finland is: “By various metrics and indicators, Finland is the best country in the world” (ST-002, Stubb, 2024a); and by being open and direct on what he thinks the country he's presenting is, he becomes part of the brand, of the image, as assumed in literature by Aronczyk (2013).

Van Ham (2001) presents the soft power country of our time as one that bases its brand on good reputation and image — a stark difference to what soft power is presented as in Stubb's rhetoric. When Stubb mentions the jets: “There's a reason why we have general conscription — 1 million men and women who have served in the military out of 5.6 million. There's a reason why we can mobilize 280,000 within weeks. There's a reason why we have over 68 F-18s, why we just bought 64 F-35s... we have the biggest artillery in Europe together with Poland. And that reason is not a worry about Stockholm” (ST-011, Stubb, 2026b), or the precise numbers, he engages in an act of soft power: to him, the hard and soft go hand in hand — Finland's “soft” power lies in its security and safety, backed by Stubb's truthful claims of the country's military might. In the place where a different kind of brand would be projecting fear, Stubb's Finland is projecting a rescue — safety and trust.

Stubb, in his speeches, oftentimes crosses the line between marketing and politics — this becomes apparent when his words are ever so inviting to try the Finnish experience, alluring enough to be put on a banner in a Dutch subway station, advertising yet another peacefulness-centred ad campaign of Visit Finland: “I go to the sauna, I take a nice bath, I make a calculation, and then I call my friends” (ST-014, Stubb, 2026b) — he describes his

governance as if it was suggested by Visit Finland — “come, relax like us, in the sauna, amidst this crazy world.” Stubb says, “Be Finnish. In other words, be cool, calm and collected and have a little bit of that *sisu*” (ST-036, Stubb, 2026b), cementing the sentiments of what, or rather who Finland is and should be to an observer. Browning and Lehti (2010) define this performance of national identity through speech as equally through representation.

What do a shelter and an exhibit have in common? We should ask Stubb, who shares with the audience: “every king and prime minister, president, minister that comes to Finland, we take them to these shelters to show” (ST-025, Stubb, 2025); in this hard power (military) turned into soft power (imagery) revelation, Stubb is signalling: our preparedness is our characteristic that you should be aware of, like an exhibit of its own sort. Following Anholt’s theorising on nation brands, Finland too incorporates new features to encapsulate its changing brand more accurately — the security talk quietly sweeps in, making it amongst the greater picture of the “happy.”

As we drift across the lexicon of the select few of the political elite, before closing the passage on Stubb and moving on to Marin, she deserves to be mentioned briefly. Unlike Stubb, who parades the brand with a grandeur akin to the leaders of The Great, Alexander and alike — Marin’s positioning of Finland is more complicated, at times intimate. Imagery at play for both, as Van Ham (2001) states, is the labourer of power in the brand state. For Stubb, the power is the image, albeit in mixed talks of sauna, he still does talk of things of immediate importance: “I have a big military, but yeah, we have a big economy and we’re the happiest nation in the world” (ST-001, Stubb, 2026b). To Stubb, the image of Finland he presents carries a marketing-flavoured resemblance of the Visit Finland campaigns: “we all strive towards happiness. I mean, that’s kind of an Aristotelian thing to do” (ST-023, Stubb, 2025), an image much more extroverted than that of Marin.

§5.4 Former Prime Minister Sanna Marin

Marin embodied Finland by her mere existence and the goodwill of the people that trusted her to lead the government. She did not parade the concepts Stubb parades to the outer world. She was Finland in a less performative way — a true story of a woman who, despite

all odds, ended up at the top. Marin was raised in what she has called a “rainbow family” by her mother and her mother’s female partner, was the first in her immediate family to finish high school, and at age 34 became the world’s youngest sitting head of government in December 2019 (Reynolds, 2019; Nierenberg, 2025).

It is difficult to talk about Marin’s legacy and leadership without mentioning her fierce response to war and COVID (Forsberg, 2024; Nierenberg, 2025), and the relentless, tsunami-level misogyny aimed at her from all sides — sexist labels such as “lipstick government” and “girl government” used by her opposition, “never-ending” online rape threats she has documented in her own memoir, and a leaked 2022 party-video scandal that the international press read as a clear sexist double standard (Marin, 2025; Saunders & Hannon, 2022; Hinchliffe, 2022).

It is also a limitation of this study that there is simply not enough room to dive deeper into Marin’s time in office. For these reasons, the narrative returns to Fairclough — in an attempt to “pin” the Marin complexity.

Fairclough’s discursive practice theory frames Marin as the code-switching competence of the discursive. When scanning Marin’s talks across years, it becomes visible how vast her topics are, and to whom she says what. On Monday it is about welfare — “we have that network that helps you if life gets tough” (MA-014, Semafor, 2024); on Wednesday, security in her own parliament — “The only country that is threatening Europe’s security and openly waging a war of aggression is Russia” (MA-027, Marin, 2022); and later, on an international stage, the values dear to her — “We won’t give up our values for a 10% tariff” (MA-018, Richmond Forum, 2026). Marin is fluid — she is like a mirrorball, reflecting the audience’s needs back at them.

This idea of Marin being the mirrorball, more academically put, would mean that she is the person attributed those things — progressive and Nordic — although she might not consciously perform those, she is branding the country still, from the outside: Palonen: “She was an icon. This is a country where young women can be in power” (MA-001, 2025), or as seen in Tiessalo: “she has done a good job to promote Nordic values, and boosted Finland’s standing on the world stage” (MA-002, 2025). An argument shall not be

made that Marin was totally oblivious to what she is branding by being the face of Finland — Marin did do magazine shoots where she posed for cameras like male politicians would not — most notably the October 2020 *Trendi* magazine cover in which she wore an open blazer with nothing underneath, sparking the #imwithsanna hashtag that reached an estimated 157 million in international media reach (Westcott, 2020; A-lehdet, 2020). Koivunen (quoted in NZ Herald, 2020), Professor of Gender Studies at Tampere University, read the move as deliberate: “Marin’s actions are done with full cognisance.”

Marin’s sub-corpus resists the reductive readings her public profile invites. Where Niinistö maintains register consistency across venues — always the statesman, always the stable line — and Stubb performs a consolidated brand identity, Marin is a discursive code-switcher: her register tracks venue, audience, and speech-act type. She does not have a single stable focused position. Across the Marin sub-corpus of 29 passages, there is exactly one C2c silence-on-insecurity code — MA-008, the joint press conference announcement of the NATO application decision — and it sits in the same week as her parliamentary justification (MA-027, MA-028, MA-030, MA-031), which is unambiguous C2a, naming Russia six times and Ukraine directly. The silence in MA-008 is the discursive shape of a formal performative announcement at a joint press conference, a genre that suppresses naming for diplomatic reasons. Her happiness register (Semafor 2024: MA-012 through MA-017; Bloomberg 2025: MA-005) is audience-facing and interview-contextual. Her parliamentary or diplomatic speech is not really much about happiness. The Richmond Forum 2026 address (MA-018 through MA-026) carries the security register in full alongside continuity-as-resilience (C4a) and political-instrumental *sisu* (C3b). The finding is that Marin does not hold on to happiness or security as her authentic register. What she does, is that she moves between registers with a fluency the other two speakers previously mentioned do not display with an ease. Where Niinistö is steady and Stubb is consolidated, Marin is fluid in a different sense from the “mirrorball” image above — switching codes to fit speech-act, venue, and audience type. This is itself the most analytically interesting finding in her sub-corpus, and it adds to the asymmetric two-channel claim of §5.5 and §6.1.

Marin the Mockingjay

When it comes to politics and nation branding, or the optics of a leader, whether it be an opposition leader or a ruling party leader, fiction novels often can offer an easy to follow story to explain complex political ideologies. *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1945), *1984* (Orwell, 1949), *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood, 1985), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) — all of these are living and breathing pieces of literature (albeit not scholarly) of political prose. Extending the list, I want to introduce to the list and thesis Suzanne Collins's dystopian young-adult fiction: *The Hunger Games* trilogy. The trilogy (published 2008–2010) is set in Panem, a post-collapse nation on the territory of what was once North America, that keeps its districts (states) in line through an annual televised contest in which children are made to fight each other. The trilogy's protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, is sent in as one of those children and survives, as per the first novel. Then, across the second and third novels she becomes the symbol of an uprising against the regime that nearly killed her: the mockingjay, a hybrid bird that the regime never meant to create. Collins gives this transformation its own arc, as Katniss, who does not embrace the role at the start and is told what to wear and what to say, by the third novel comes to act on the symbol with full consent of her own. Since popular-geopolitics scholarship has taken the trilogy as a serious object of study (Kirby, 2015; Henthorne, 2012), inclusion of it serves a methodological comparative reason. Kirby (2015) reads Katniss through what he names popular-geopolitics 2.0: a frame in which fictional figures and political figures are two species of the same object. Analysis is not separated into two categories — both are bodies that audiences read as carriers of political meaning, regardless of whether those bodies entered the role by choice. The machinery that produces both is similar. Henthorne (2012) names the mechanism more precisely. Katniss does not author her own symbolic significance; she is positioned as the Mockingjay by District 13's propagandists, who use her image to alter what audiences can imagine. The figurehead is aware she is being used. The brand still works.

This claim can be extended beyond authoritarian propaganda specifically, since as a claim, it still holds strong on how figureheads acquire meaning under any system in which representation is professionally managed and internationally circulated. Nation branding is one such system. Marin's sub-corpus belongs in this analytical frame. The nation-brand

machinery (Aronczyk, 2013) recruits figureheads whose register-switching fluency makes them legible across multiple international audiences, and the figurehead's awareness of being recruited does not change the recruitment. Marin performed the brand of a country in transition: the only country that simultaneously narrates itself as the happiest in the world and the newest frontline of NATO. Both the youngest female head of government on the world stage and the face of Finland's NATO application — in the brand's logic, this is the kind of legibility the machinery selects for. Whether the figurehead consents to the selection is a different question from whether the selection occurs. Marin's relationship to the brand she carried shifts across venues and over time — visible in the code-switching pattern analysed earlier in this section — and that shift is itself part of what makes her sub-corpus the most analytically demanding of the three speakers.

§5.5 Cross-speaker Pattern: When the Political Speaks Tourism

The co-creation of the nation brand entails a certain extent of borrowing — this exchange, however, does not happen equally in our case. While politicians use the image to proliferate their own and add to the existing image of the country, strengthen it, and admit to it: “we have been building our welfare societies for a long time... deeper trust within the societies that shows in these different kinds of indexes” (MA-005, Marin, 2025), “I believe that in the future the Nordic brand will bring us even closer together” (NN-016, Niinistö, 2023a), or Stubb's “If you look at all the rankings around the world — not only the happiest country in the world, but about development, about environment, about no corruption, about openness, about press freedom — they all point to democracies, a lot of the Nordic countries” (ST-019, Stubb, 2025), the tourism branding does the mirroring opposite — it presents a void, a quiet abyss, when it covers the nation brand. And why would it? If arguably there is no obvious need for that? The talk *politique* covers whatever the tourism campaigns signal, and amplifies them across multiple international venues — in Stubb's smile.

The brand is held by unequal absorption mechanisms, politics borrowing from tourism, tourism not borrowing from politics.

Chapter 6 · Discussion

§6.1 The Two-Channel Brand and the Asymmetric Mechanism

The “model nation” pedagogical positioning of Finland is what is common across both channels studied. As Browning highlights it even before this thesis does, with tourism’s “The Finnish state of mind is not a secret... it is a skill that can be learned” (Visit Finland, 2023), and politics’ “Finland’s example may actually be a goal worth striving for for many others” (NN-021, Niinistö, 2024). Browning (2007) has mentioned this in the greater Nordic context of righteousness. As Browning puts it, the Nordic brand has stood for “being better than other models” (Browning, 2007, p. 28), positioning Nordic countries as ideological teachers. Teachings differ: happiness for tourism and resilience for the other — the actualisation of these concepts is the instructive brand narrative, according to Aronczyk (2013). The claims to be taught and learned, together create a coalition that is stronger than if viewed separately — as the analysis in Chapters 4 and 5 establishes, security in the political channel (C2a) brings support to the claim of happiness in the tourism channel (C1a), with the happiness register legitimised by the security register’s persistent presence rather than contradicted by it.

Mentioned multiple times earlier, the asymmetry of the patterns spoken is the way the co-constructive mechanism works. Without this asymmetry, the system would crumble to produce the coherent narrative. The asymmetry works like this. When it is needed, politicians borrow touristic campaign claims:

ST-001 (Stubb, 2026b) — “I have a big military, but yeah, we have a big economy and we’re the happiest nation in the world” (C1a explicit happiness; C2a explicit safety, co-coded)

ST-007 (Stubb, 2024a) — “let us invest not only in security but also in mental and physical wellbeing — in other words, in culture, arts and physical exercise”

ST-019 (Stubb, 2025) — “not only the happiest country in the world, but about development, about environment, about no corruption, about openness, about press freedom” (C5a WHR-as-fact; C5b ranking-as-brand-asset)

ST-023 (Stubb, 2025) — “we all strive towards happiness. I mean, that’s kind of an Aristotelian thing to do”

MA-005 (Marin, 2025) — “we have been building our welfare societies for a long time... deeper trust within the societies that shows in these different kinds of indexes”

MA-006 (Marin, 2025) — “Nordic countries always perform quite well... that kind of deep trust within one’s country”

NN-016 (Niinistö, 2023a) — “I believe that in the future the Nordic brand will bring us even closer together” (C4a continuity-as-unchangedness)

ST-002 (Stubb, 2024a) — “By various metrics and indicators, Finland is the best country in the world”

The cross-channel work of *sisu* — present in Niinistö’s “When the going gets tough... *sisu*” (NN-005) and Stubb’s “Be Finnish... have a little bit of that *sisu*” (ST-036), but also surfaced in Visit Finland’s *sisu*-branded campaigns — operates across both channels: (C3a cultural *sisu*, tourism channel; C3b political-instrumental *sisu*, political channel). This is further personified in Stubb — Politico’s “Class of 2026” ranking placed him at #13 among Europe’s most influential figures, naming him “the caddy” in explicit reference to the diplomatic relationship he has built with President Trump through golf-led informal engagement at Mar-a-Lago (Yle, 2025). German press has described him as one of Trump’s closest European advisors (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, cited via Ground News, 2025). In times of post-Marín NATO consolidation, when Trumpism brought havoc to the allyship, Stubb was always there, diplomatically befriending the latter on a personal contact, and redefining the westernisation of Finland on a geopolitical scale. If the symmetry becomes the reality, and the borrowed pattern becomes one that is taken from politics to tourism, the so carefully made construction of silence, so carefully built around tourism campaigns, would crush the nation brand as is.

The most important idea that this whole thesis aimed to study is one explained in the following passage. The research question sought to figure out how and with what messaging political and touristic messages formulate what Finland is. The answer came in

five code-pillars of the Finnish nation brand: happiness, silence/ safety, *sisu*, continuity, World Happiness Report ranking. The signalling of these ideas via the political and touristic domains is done with the mechanism of targeted omission in tourism discourse. This mechanism pushes continuity for the brand, and the brand — touristic — does not have to call things as they are: the political channel will do that for it. This feeling of *sisu*, readiness and fearlessness gets absorbed into the touristic identity, because on the parallel channel — and a greater brand image — those ideas are already being shared with the public. The channels co-built the idea, an idea that could not be achieved by either one of those individually. This co-signalling invites the theory finding: the war has been a catalyst for Finland's image — both as touristic and nation brand — to evolve into something much bigger and more serious than it ever was before.

§6.2 Findings in relation to previous literature

Section 6.1 named Finland's brand mechanism as asymmetric and two-channel. This section places that finding in relation to the academic literature on countries that have managed brand-under-crisis. In relation, the goal is to understand what the Finnish case can confirm and what it extends.

The political openly carries the security register; tourism maintains a strategic silence on insecurity (C2c). The question this section now turns to is comparative: how does this mechanism sit against the academic literature on countries that have managed brand-under-crisis? Browning and Ferraz de Oliveira (2017) identify three logics through which states mobilise their identity for international audiences. First, a cultural logic (educating foreigners, securing recognition); second, a diplomatic logic (positioning in the international system); third, an economic logic (commercial nationalism, selling the nation for growth). Most contemporary brand strategies operate across all three; what differs across cases is the relative weight given to each and the structural relationship between them. The following are two example cases:

(a) Estonia, analysed in depth by Jordan (2011), offers the closest structural analogue. It is a small Northern European country negotiating brand-and-identity work in the long shadow of post-Soviet geopolitics.

(b) Israel, analysed by Avraham (2009), offers a sharp contrast. It is a country branding itself through a lengthy crisis.

With the three-logic frame, all three countries operate across cultural, diplomatic, and economic registers; although, when looked at in detail, what matters is what they do with the convergence or divergence between those registers when the international environment is unstable.

Estonia is structurally close to Finland. It is a small nation with Russia across the fence, still grappling with its post-Soviet identity, as they are a part of both European Union and NATO. Estonia holds a determined “return to Europe” narrative, and a brand strategy that formally launched in 2002 to capitalise on Eurovision-induced visibility. Jordan’s (2011) analysis of the “Welcome to Estonia / Positively Transforming” campaign sees the brand essence as a deliberately unified joint effort. Moving beyond the political foreign-policy rhetoric, efforts expanded to include cultural-diplomatic events and tourism imagery toward the same single message of Europeanisation and modernity. The campaign was top-down, elite-led, internationally consultant-driven (Interbrand handled the design), and — Jordan emphasises — controversial domestically. The reason being: it presented a singular national essence many Estonian citizens did not recognise as their own. Finland’s mechanism, by contrast, does not converge as drastically. Estonia compressed multiple registers into one slogan. Finland’s tourism channel and political channel run in different registers entirely: “Happiest Country” in one, “Frontline of NATO” in the other, with the two rarely co-occurring in the same text. What looks similar at the level of small Northern European states managing brand-during-realignment turns out to operate by an opposite mechanism on closer reading. The Estonian case, compared to the Finnish, highlights findings: convergence is one available solution to brand-during-crisis. One that Finland is not using.

Israel offers the inverse contrast. Avraham (2009) covers the marketing problem faced by a country whose negative image is sustained by media coverage that cannot be ignored. In his formulation, “the intensive coverage of the Israel–Arab conflict in the international media deprives Israel of the option of ignoring the crisis in its marketing campaigns” (Avraham, 2009, p. 211). Israel’s tourism marketers must work with the conflict even when

working against it. Campaigns such as “Come see for yourself” (1990s) and “Why I am in Israel now” (launched in 2000 during the Second Intifada) explicitly invoke the conflict to neutralise it, inviting visitors to witness what the news allegedly — big point on allegedly — distorts. Strategic silence — the C2c mechanism this thesis identifies in Finland’s tourism corpus — is not available to Israel’s marketers, because the international audience already knows. Finland’s silence is operationally possible because the war is not on Finnish soil. The geographic and discursive distance between the brand and the violence is preserved by the border. The brand can perform calm because the violence remains, in the tourism corpus’s logic, somewhere else.

Read together, the three cases sit on a spectrum of structural responses to brand-during-crisis. Estonia converges its channels into one unified message. Israel purposefully engages with the conflict narrative, because it does not have a choice of ignoring it. Finland diverges its channels: the political register absorbs and processes the security material so that the tourism register can remain silent on it. The mechanism is not unique in its components — convergence or divergence. How it is unusual is in its specific structural conditions. Those are: a country adjacent to war but not in it, an already established Nordic pedagogical register, a political channel willing to perform the security work openly. These produce precisely the conditions under which asymmetric two-channel silence becomes viable. This is the central theoretical claim of the thesis, here positioned against the literature it extends.

§6.3 Theoretical Implications and the Soft-Power Contribution

The case of Finland as a destination that has faced a certain level of adversity becomes more interesting when viewed against the usual literature that covers war or troublesome destinations. Most of the literature on the subject of branding post-catastrophe focuses on the countries where these catastrophes happen themselves (Avraham & Ketter, 2008; Ritchie, 2009). There is a certain gap in studies of the nearby affected regions — those being affected by proxy and not directly. Little to no light has been shed on what some of Stubb’s speeches in this corpus address — the hybrid kinds of war, the media warfare, the silent-agent kind of warfare. These notions are omitted when scholars study the places of terror and fear — they do not often settle on a case like the Finnish one, where the obvious

is happening and it is in front of everyone's eyes. If somebody checks the maps without being familiar with the region, they would assume that Finland is in fact in danger — which was not the case for most of the time since the beginning of the war. So what happens when crisis branding does not necessarily have an answer to this? In this case, the findings indicate that silence is the response — the unbothered, the calm, the cool that comes with the silence is the response — and this might need to be studied further, to understand the effect that these kinds of by-proxy crises have on destinations.

The way these narratives achieve coherence as soft power is by allowing two realities to exist at the same time. As demonstrated throughout the evidence presented in this thesis, Finland allows these two registers to speak for one another without overshadowing each other. There is no assumed contradiction between happiness and adversity, nor between national vulnerability and national resilience. One of the core aims of this thesis was to understand how these seemingly contrasting elements are able to coexist and complement one another, and this was ultimately found in the construction of coherence itself. Coherence does not require one singular, concise message communicated through a single channel. It can emerge through multiple parallel narratives which, as long as they remain in dialogue with one another, gradually establish and reinforce a nation brand.

In the Finnish case, this coherence extends beyond tourism and into geopolitics. The appropriation of happiness, alongside the appropriation of the national spirit of *sisu*, demonstrates how something once understood as internal, cultural, and intangible can later be reproduced as political meaning. What begins as a touristic and cultural narrative eventually reappears through political discourse, diplomatic signalling, and state representation. When this signalling is carried through tourism, it is important to note that it often reaches significantly larger audiences than political speeches alone (Nye, 2004; Anholt, 2013).

Further research would therefore benefit from examining how Finland is actually perceived abroad through these campaigns. Are the promoted characteristics interpreted as authentic national truths? Does the repetition of concepts such as *sisu* across both tourism and political discourse increase their credibility, or does political appropriation weaken their perceived authenticity? If an individual encounters *sisu* in a tourism advertisement and

later hears the President invoke the same concept in relation to defence or resilience, does this reinforce the symbolic legitimacy of the term?

What is notable in the findings is that these realities do not compete for attention. Instead, they work together to construct a cohesive national image that would have been difficult to imagine in earlier decades. It would be nearly impossible to fully understand Finland's contemporary soft power without acknowledging the historical context of the Soviet Union, the Winter War, and the broader legacy of geopolitical insecurity (Browning & Lehti, 2010). Without this context, the symbolic force of Finnish resilience and preparedness would appear disconnected from its historical roots. However, through the increasingly overt use of these narratives by political leaders, particularly the President, these concepts begin to evolve into new national characteristics.

Sisu, once largely associated with spirituality, mentality, and intangible perseverance, acquires a different meaning once articulated within political and military discourse. This returns the discussion to Fairclough and the importance of context in discourse: the meaning of a concept changes depending on the setting in which it is invoked. When sisu is discussed alongside military preparedness, national defence, or even references to Ukrainian perseverance — as some Finnish politicians have done (ST-020, Stubb, 2025: “the Ukrainians are showing a lot of sisu, a lot of grit and perseverance”) — it begins to operate not only as a cultural trait, but also as a strategic and geopolitical signifier. The asymmetric two-channel mechanism named in §6.1 is, on this thesis's reading, the central analytical finding of the study. What the analysis reveals is the realisation: the scale at which this has affected the way Finland sees itself is visible across the corpus — across all three speakers and the tourism channel, the brand has absorbed the 2022 rupture without flattening into a single register (the asymmetric mechanism analysed in §6.1). What follows from this is that the paradigm of nation branding as a tool of soft power, contributed to by tourism and simultaneously reinforced by political discourse, creates a coherent image that has, in the corpus reviewed here, survived the 2022 rupture.

Chapter 7 · Conclusion

§7.1 Main findings

Answer to SQ1 — Tourism channel Post-2022 Finnish tourism campaigns construct the “happiest nation” identity primarily through the C1 happiness register and the C5 World Happiness Report ranking, treated as legitimising fact. Across Visit Finland and Business Finland materials produced between 2022 and 2026, happiness is presented as a teachable national asset — the “Masterclass of Happiness” (Visit Finland, 2023), the “Chill Like a Finn” challenge, the government strategy’s formal designation of happiness as “a significant brand asset” (Finnish Government, 2026). Safety and resilience are constructed in this channel not through naming but through silence. Across 14 passages in the tourism corpus during the period of active conflict, the war next door is systematically not mentioned (C2c). The brand does not deny the threat; it does not name it. The destination image performs continuity (C4a) as if 2022 had not happened.

Answer to SQ2 — Political channel Finnish political leadership discourse frames national identity through three speakers with distinguishable registers. Niinistö operates a continuity-and-stillness register (C4a, NN-017, NN-019), framing Finland as unchanged even after NATO accession: “even as an allied country we are still the same Finland as before” (NN-017, 2023a). Stubb operates as the consolidated brand performer (Aronczyk, 2013), borrowing tourism’s vocabulary into political speech: ST-001 carries C1a explicit happiness, C2a explicit safety, and C5b ranking-as-brand-asset within a single sentence. Marin operates as a discursive code-switcher: her register tracks venue and audience rather than expressing a stable position, with happiness reserved for audience-facing interviews and security carried fully in parliamentary and diplomatic speech. Across all three speakers, the political channel openly carries the security register, the resilience claim, and political-instrumental *sisu* (C3b) — discourses that the tourism channel does not name.

Answer to SQ3 — Relationship between channels The two channels operate as an asymmetric co-constructive system. Borrowing runs in one direction only: political speakers actively reach into tourism’s register for happiness, the WHR ranking, *sisu*, and the “happiest nation” claim, while tourism materials do not borrow the political channel’s

vocabulary of threat, alliance, or readiness back. The brand coheres precisely because of this asymmetry — the political channel absorbs and processes the security material so that the tourism channel can maintain strategic silence (C2c) on it. Without this division of labour, the two registers would contradict each other. With it, they co-construct a single brand across two channels that, viewed in isolation, would be incoherent.

Answer to the main research question Finnish tourism campaigns and political leadership narratives co-construct the nation brand around happiness and resilience through an asymmetric two-channel mechanism specific to the post-2022 period. Tourism carries happiness as the brand's primary content while performing silence on insecurity. Politics carries the security register, resilience, and political-instrumental *sisu* while borrowing tourism's vocabulary of happiness, calm, and international ranking. The mechanism is enabled by Finland's specific structural conditions — a country adjacent to war but not in it, with an already-established Nordic pedagogical register, and a political channel willing to perform the security work openly. The brand's coherence is not balance between two channels but the structural quietness of one that allows the other to carry what it cannot.

§7.2 Evaluation of the research

The strength of this study lies in three places. First, the corpus — 55 source texts, 127 coded passages, drawn across four years of active geopolitical change — is large enough to surface patterns and small enough to read each text closely. Second, the operationalisation of silence (C2c) through a competent-reader test gives empirical traction to a discursive category that CDA scholarship has typically treated as harder to anchor than presence-based codes. Third, the framework extends three named bodies of literature in specific directions — Slemon (2025) on silence-as-data, Browning (2007) on the Nordic pedagogical register, Aronczyk (2013) on heads of state as brand performers — rather than applying them at the surface.

The limitations of the study are several and worth naming directly. The Finnish-language barrier is the first. Finnish-language governmental sources and original-language Finnish press coverage were accessed through translation software (DeepL and Google Translate) verified by a Finnish-speaking reader, but this introduces a remove between the analyst and

the original-language register that no verification fully closes. The second limitation is that this is a single-coder analysis. The C1–C5 scheme emerged inductively across the first analytical pass and was refined through re-visits, but there is no inter-coder reliability check — the coding decisions are mine alone, and the C2c competent-reader test in particular is interpretive rather than mechanical. The third limitation is corpus weighting: Stubb carries 43 passages, Niinistö 23, Marin 29, with three external attributions. The Stubb-weighted distribution reflects his actual prominence in the analytical window (he became president mid-corpus and is by every measure the most internationally vocal of the three), but it does mean the analysis hears one voice more often than the others. The fourth limitation is reception. This study analyses the brand’s production; it does not measure how international audiences actually read what the brand produces. Whether the asymmetric mechanism works on its intended audiences is a question this thesis brackets and the next section names as a research direction. A final note: measuring the exact reach of speeches, advertisements, and interviews would be methodologically difficult, particularly due to the fragmented and duplicated nature of social media circulation, and is a related limitation acknowledged in §6.3.

§7.3 Future research

Six directions follow from this study.

First, reception studies. This thesis analyses how the brand is produced; it does not measure how international audiences read it. A reception study using survey or interview methods could ask whether the asymmetric mechanism is recognised as a structural feature or whether audiences simply experience the two registers as separate.

Second, comparative cases. The thesis identifies asymmetric two-channel branding as Finland’s specific solution to brand-during-crisis. A natural extension is to test the mechanism against other nearby-but-undamaged destinations — Estonia, Poland, Romania, the Baltic states — where the same structural conditions partially obtain.

Third, the domestic-channel question. The Finnish-language brand register (governmental discourse, press, public communication directed at Finns themselves) was outside this study’s scope. A comparative analysis of the outward-facing brand against the domestic-

facing register would clarify whether the asymmetric mechanism is also a feature of the brand's internal coherence or only its external presentation.

Fourth, longitudinal extension. The corpus closes in April 2026, mid-war. A 2026–2030 extension would let the analysis track what happens to the mechanism after the war ends or changes form.

Fifth, channel-mechanism studies in other small-state contexts. The mechanism this thesis identifies — one channel's silence enabling the other channel's voice — is portable as an analytical frame. Other small states with split international audiences (Singapore, Norway, Ireland) may operate variations of the same structure.

Sixth, the happiness claim itself, on multiple registers. Whether the “happiest nation” claim actually attracts tourists — and which tourist segments — is an empirical question this thesis treats as assumed but does not test. How Finland is changing or might change its approach to the happiness brand as the WHR methodology continues to be challenged, and as the brand's saturation increases, is a related research direction. Where the national identity is headed, and how it sits with the post-NATO institutional realignment, is a question of identity-building scholarship beyond the brand-mechanism analysis offered here. And finally — the question this thesis brackets but a reception-side study could address directly — how Finnish people themselves feel about being called happy, and how they feel about their country's name being used the way it is currently used in international branding. The voices of Eerikainen, Hansen, and Lindstrom (Colston & Michaels, 2023; Gross & Lemola, 2021) appear in this corpus as outliers; whether they are outliers or representative is a question that needs Finnish-language survey or interview work to answer.

§7.4 What should be studied further

Beyond the specific projects named in §7.3, this thesis raises broader questions for the field that it cannot itself answer.

The first is whether the asymmetric two-channel mechanism is a generalisable feature of small-state branding under conditions of nearby crisis, or whether it is specific to Finland's

particular structural configuration. The cases compared in §6.2 — Estonia (convergent), Israel (forced engagement), Finland (divergent asymmetric) — sit on a spectrum, but three cases do not establish a typology. Whether asymmetric two-channel branding is a recurring strategy or a one-off requires more cases and a broader comparative frame.

The second is the question of brand durability through transition. This thesis captures the brand mid-rupture. Whether the asymmetric mechanism survives the end of the war, a change in NATO posture, or a Finnish political realignment is a longer-arc empirical question. Brand-during-crisis literature (Avraham & Ketter, 2008; Ritchie, 2009) focuses on countries hit directly; brand-after-crisis in nearby-affected countries is a research gap.

The third is the ethics of strategic silence. The thesis names silence as a discursive choice (C2c) with structural conditions and analytical consequences. It does not adjudicate whether the silence is appropriate, professionally responsible, or ethically defensible given the violence the silence operates within. That adjudication is a normative question that critical-tourism studies, marketing ethics, and political-communication scholarship could take up.

The fourth is the relationship between brand and citizenship under late-modern conditions. Browning (2015) names the risk that nation branding becomes disciplinary — that citizens get recruited to “live the brand,” and dissent from the brand reads as disloyalty. The dissenting voices in the corpus (Eerikainen, Hansen, Lindstrom) are too few to ground a finding on their own, but they raise the question of what happens to the citizen who does not want to be happy on the brand’s terms. This is a research direction that intersects with welfare-state theory, political philosophy, and critical-happiness studies.

§7.5 Closing

This thesis started with a feeling, and it will end with one too. This time, a satisfactory feeling of completion. This dichotomy found its analysis and its discovery of the mechanism. This finding might be as fleeting as the feelings Finland’s image creates — blinking lights, on and off, it might be this, it might be that. What Finland does and works with this duality moving forward, only time will tell.

Afterword — On the silence and the violence

Present is the text that falls outside the formal analytical, academic text of the thesis. This piece is an addition to the academic pieces, expanding on the subject to present a greater picture.

Since 24 February 2022, the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine has verified at least 15,850 civilian deaths and 44,809 civilian injuries — figures the mission itself notes are an undercount (OHCHR, 2026). The Russian Federation's war in Ukraine is, on my reading and on the reading of multiple legal and institutional authorities, unjust and illegal: an act of aggression in violation of Article 2(4) of the Charter of the United Nations (United Nations General Assembly, 2022), involving documented crimes against humanity including the systematic use of torture (Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, 2024), enforced disappearances of civilians (Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, 2025), and the deportation and forcible transfer of Ukrainian children (Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, 2026) — the latter underlying the arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court against Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova (International Criminal Court, 2023). Legal scholarship has framed these acts as a textbook violation of the prohibition on the use of force and of the crime of aggression under international law (Geneuss & Jeßberger, 2022).

This is the empirical context against which Finland's brand of "happiness" and "calm" is being produced and exported. The analytical claim that the tourism channel maintains silence (C2c) is, when read against this context, a claim about what is *not* being said while people are being killed within reach of the brand. I name this here, as a closing reflection rather than as a finding, because to leave it unnamed would let the prose of the analysis carry a neutrality the subject does not deserve. The thesis is what it is — a structural reading of a brand mechanism. The author is who he is — someone unwilling to have the analysis read as if the violence behind the silence were distant and unremarkable.

Afterword — The Greater Nordic example and Iceland visit

Following is the recorded observations from a research visit to Iceland in early 2026. During the trip, the contrast between the Icelandic and Finnish national-brand registers became visible to me in ways that informed and directed the paths of this thesis. These things did not enter formal corpus; I include it here, in the text, because the comparative perspective it offers may be useful to readers thinking about Nordic destination branding more broadly, and because the visit's timing — coinciding with the writing of Chapter 6 — shaped how I came to read the asymmetric two-channel mechanism.

When I first came to Iceland, there was a surprise at how similar and very familiar yet alienated it felt in comparison to Finland, where I had lived for quite some time and worked in tourism. It felt like Iceland was its own universe, its own planet — and the marketing of Iceland was much more outward-pushed and over-marketed. There is a claim to be made about a copy-of-a-copy logic with Iceland: the places, the souvenir shops, the enterprises — they felt like they were heavily implying and insisting on themselves, as if trying to sell you the fantasy of Iceland at Iceland itself. Which is a very different kind of positioning from Finland. Although both countries are quite Nordic, Iceland felt much more isolated in its own thing, and much closer to the American market. It felt — and this was confirmed through informal conversations with professors in Iceland and a visit to the National Museum — that Icelanders were looking at America more. With Iceland being a major hub for Americans travelling to Europe, IcelandAir flights promoting routes to the United States and back, this kind of makes sense on the ground. Although the museum shed a lot of light on authentic Icelandic culture and Viking heritage, the Iceland observed in the streets, the shops and the tours heavily omitted that part. The focus was on nature and souvenir attributes — not the Icelandic spirit, not the characteristic of the nation. There was also not much political discourse or media campaigns from Iceland focusing on nationalistic characteristics of Icelanders — which is a striking comparison to how Finland uses happiness and *sisu* as marketing, carried by grand ambassadors and brand coordinators through major political events and concerns. It felt like Iceland was mostly concerned with Greenland and the alienation of the US (Belfer Center, 2025), rather than the continental European problem of Russia. Because of its historical NATO importance

and not having an army (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2025), the concepts of resilience or preparedness so heavily implied by Finland would obviously fall short in Iceland — there is no army to prepare, no answer being called for. Finland, it feels, is moving in its own direction when it comes to the Nordics. Some commonalities will stay — the nature, the escape, the quiet — those are a shared perspective of the Nordic nation brand. But when it comes to perseverance and *sisu*, Finland is pretty much developing its own thing, stipulating these as national and marketing ideas. It goes in its own direction. It doesn't really bother with what the rest of the Nordic is doing.

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