

Icons Becoming Brands, How can brands emerge as the  
result of culture  
Case Sauna as the Iconic Brand of Finland

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Katariina Helaniemi  
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## Objectives

This research is essentially about branding. The main objectives were to find out how brands can emerge organically without the ownership or involvement from a company or an organization and to research how cultural icons can turn into brands. The research was conducted in the context of Finnish Sauna. Based on Douglas Holt's definition of "a brand being a culture that has been formed around a product", Sauna could be defined as a strong brand. The background of this study is in cultural branding and companies creating iconic brands by connecting them to national cultures and managing them accordingly. This research focuses on studying how cultural branding can happen organically and cause a brand to emerge from within a society, without the management of a company. The research contributes to consumer culture theory, branding theory and the theory of cultural branding.

## Methods

The research was interpretive and qualitative in nature. The data was gathered via eleven semi structured in-depth interviews conducted to Sauna enthusiasts and different professionals from the field of Sauna. Additionally several historical documents were studied and used as material for the research, to get the best understanding about how the brand of Sauna has emerged.

## Findings

The findings of this study expressed that in certain environments and when certain prerequisites are filled, brands can emerge organically. The defined prerequisites supporting the emergence of the brand of Sauna were the Finnish culture of uniformity, sauna's close history with Finland and the mental and physical fit with the Finnish society. The factors that made Sauna develop into a brand were the ability to develop with the society, the nature of Sauna addressing the cultural contradictions, Sauna's strong position in the society feeding itself and the Finns' need to create something that they could be proud of. Based on the research these factors have resulted to the emergence of a strong and meaningful brand, which is managed through a shared ownership by a culture. The concept of a brand emerging from within a society without the management by a company was defined as Emergent Cultural Branding. The findings emphasize that the culture and the context in which a brand is created is highly important for the construction of a brand and the role of culture should thus be taken into consideration in the theory of branding.

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**Keywords:** Branding, Cultural Branding, Sauna, Culture, Emergent Cultural Branding

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## Acknowledgements

The idea of this thesis arose in Stockholm during my CEMS exchange in Handelshögskolan. During those months in the home of finance, I understood the importance of branding as one of the defining factors for the success of a company. I got intrigued about the topic and after several iterations I focused the research to one of the most mythical and great brands that ever came from Finland. I believe that the understanding of brands emerging organically within cultures is something that will change our perception of business and the importance of communities and cultures during the coming years.

I want to send my special thanks to two communities who already know the importance of culture in communities. First of all, super big thanks to my dear friends at Slush. Along with Sauna, Slush is a great brand that has emerged from within a society. You have really made me understand the power of community, and make my every day. Thank you so much for believing in the crazy ideas and making them happen, working with you is super. Second of all, a very big thanks to the whole gang at Demos, who first made me realize how interesting the topic of Sauna is and made me fall in love with doing research. You welcomed my topic with the overwhelming enthusiasm, with which you approach everything in life. Do not change – you are super.

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Löyly, Helsinki

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# 1 Introduction

Branding is generally understood as an act conducted by companies, in order to promote products or services or to position them in the market. Brands are created as results of specific actions that are repeated in a certain order by marketing departments and branding agencies. For decades branding has been seen as the right and responsibility of companies but lately also the consumers' role in creating brands and affecting the ways in which they develop, has been recognized. Arguably consumers have had the role all along the way, but with the appearance of social media, both researchers and companies have finally had to pay attention to that, and acknowledge the power that consumers have in influencing, developing and creating brands (Fournier & Avery, 2011). If that is the case, it might indicate that the role between companies and consumers is not always equally shared. Then, consumers may in some cases have a stronger hand in brand creation than companies do, if companies for example neglect their brands. A question can be raised; if a company is absent, couldn't consumers be the sole creators of a brand and what would that look like?

Despite the increasing tendency to acknowledge the power that consumers have in developing brands, branding is still, with few exceptions, usually seen as a firm oriented action. Due to this, the branding theory and literature have focused on how companies build brands.

However, not all brands are created by companies but in some cases the ownership and therefore the creation of a brand can be shared, or even decentralized between different quarters. This possibility is nowadays acknowledged also in the branding literature as the role that customers, brand communities and for example social media users have in influencing the brand is admitted (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995, Fournier & Avery, 2011, Holt, 2004,). Place branding is a great example of shared brand ownership (Aitken & Campelo, 2011). Several places have strong independent brands, which are managed by the national officials of a city or a state, but which have strongly emerged from within a culture and are therefore owned communally by both, citizens and officials.



Cultural branding theory (Holt, 2004) says that proper management of a brand can turn it into a cultural icon. However, there are cultural icons that exist without cultural branding. How do we account for brands that exist without cultural branding or active branding of any kind? Is there a process allowing brands to emerge organically from within a culture or a society, without the co-operation between an organization and the people? The theoretical research around this phenomenon of brands emerging without company orientation is very limited. Brand theory does not recognize cultural icons that are not created by organizations as brands, if they are not created by companies. Therefore the concept of brands being created without company actions has not been taken into consideration in the literature.

Even though not covered widely in the literature, the topic of brands being created organically is relevant. Researching brands that are born as a result of a culture or in a community, gives us information about the ways in which brands emerge. Therefore this research is useful and interesting for all companies and everyone who is working with branding, as it helps us to understand how brands are born. This can help both individuals and corporations to shed light and to better understand branding. In the following study this approach to brands that emerge without the management from an organization, will be called emergent cultural branding.

The idea of brands emerging and being created organically can be compared to the development of the theory of consumption ideologies. Marketers used to dominate the creation of consumption ideologies, defining the ways in which people consumed. This was the situation until the postmodern times, when the proliferation of consumption styles emerged from the culture and changed our understanding of how consumption practices emerge (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). The new perspective changed the marketers' dominance and the understanding of the creation of consumption ideologies broadened to include also the consumers in the process (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). In a similar way, branding has been perceived as an act conducted solely by companies, but the situation has changed and the effect that culture has to brand creation should no longer be ignored.

In this research I aim to explore the organic emerge of brands in the Finnish society and in the context of Sauna as a cultural artifact. Sauna is a cultural icon and an essential part of the

Finnish culture. Sauna also has a clear role and a brand in the society. Saturday as a Sauna day is embedded in Finnish legislation (Collective labor agreement, Ahtausalan teknisten toimihenkilöiden työehtosopimus, p. 6.), and Sauna is the only Finnish word that is globally known in all other languages except Swedish and Russian (Taskinen, 2011). However, the brand of Sauna is not owned by anybody, nor managed by any specific person or entity, but the whole culture of being Finnish. The brand of Sauna has been created within the culture and it can be stated that it is managed by an entire culture.

In this research I will go through the ways in which the role of Sauna has transformed in the society, along with the transformation of the consumer culture and the social changes in Finland during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The transformation of the role of Sauna will be tied into the change of the society, in order to provide a broad understanding about how the brand of Sauna has been born within the society, without any specific part managing it. The research is based on interviews conducted to several Sauna users, several owners of public and private Saunas, journalists who have done research around Sauna, members of Sauna communities and Sauna enthusiasts. Several historical documents, including articles, interviews, books and photographs have been gone through to understand how the brand of Sauna has been created.

## **1.1 Background**

### **1.1.1 Background and the focus of the research**

The focus of this research will be in brands emerging and developing without any actions from companies or without any other entities owning the brands. I will research the ways in which brands develop in this kind of situations and through what kinds of actions do they become brands without management by a company. This topic will be approached in the context of Sauna, as an example of a brand that has emerged organically from within a culture.

I have personally been interested in branding for several years and I find the discussion about the lack of branding skills in Finland (HS, 24.8.2014, HS, 26.8.2014) intriguing. Several reasons can be defined for branding not being in the core of business in Finland. The large number of practical engineers in the top management of the biggest companies of Finland is one reason

explaining the lack of resources allocated to marketing. Also the industrial structure of Finland has historically not included many consumer product companies who would have had the need to focus on branding. Finland is a relatively young nation with not too much experience of business, nor too many resources to be spent on marketing. All of the previous lead to the focus of business being somewhere else than in branding. However, some great brands have been created in Finland without the involvement of companies. I am highly interested in understanding, what are the factors allowing the Finnish culture to create iconic brands without management by a company.

In Finland everyone knows the brand and the story of Sauna. This is not due to branding efforts of some company but due to communal experiences and common culture in the society, that has provided the consumers with common experiences about Sauna. Sauna has become an icon within a society that has a strong culture of uniformity, a culture that emphasizes the importance of common experiences. In Finland Sauna is an essential part of consumer culture and there is a common understanding of the brand of Sauna, even though the notion of Sauna is never advertised and only rarely explained. The understanding of Sauna is something that develops with the generations and every Finn has a general understanding about it through the cultural experiences and the culture of uniformity that has been solid in Finland until these days. This understanding has been created within the Finnish culture and has successfully turned into a brand.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

This study seeks to find the ways in which brands can emerge organically without the ownership or actions of an organization. Traditionally brand building has always been considered as an action conducted and guided by a company. This thesis will focus on how brands can emerge organically as results of a culture.

## **1.3 Research Questions and objectives**

One of the main objectives of this research is to find out how brands can emerge organically without the ownership or involvement from a company or an organization. I will research how

the brand of Sauna has been born and has developed further and how people use it and what are the meanings connected to it. The objective of the research is to focus on how cultures can produce brands.

### **The research question**

How can iconic brands emerge from within a society and a culture without the ownership of any authority but as a creation of a society?

### **Sub-questions**

How has the history of Finland affected the development of the brand of Sauna in Finland?  
Which factors are significant in the brand of Sauna emerging without the involvement or ownership of companies?

## **1.4 Definitions**

The following definitions need to be defined in connection to this research:

### *Brand*

The American Marketing Association defines a brand as “a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers” (AMA Dictionary). To broaden this perspective into a more modern one, this research will also use Douglas Holt’s definition of a brand as “the culture of the product” (Holt, 2002) widening the perspective to include culture as an integral part of a brand.

### *Sauna*

According to Merriam Webster dictionary, Sauna is “a Finnish steam bath in which the steam is provided by water thrown on hot stones” (Merriam Webster). This research will focus on the Finnish Sauna, as a cultural artifact and a national icon.

### *Culture*

Georg Hoffstede has defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another” (Hoffstede, 1984). Center for Advanced research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) has defined culture with a

wider perspective, as “the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization. These shared patterns identify the members of a culture group while also distinguishing those of another group” (CARLA). Clifford Geertz’s definition however is the most interesting in terms of this research as he has defined the concept of culture as “webs of significance derived from public systems of meanings constructed and owned collectively by a group of people” (Geertz, 1973).

## **1.5 Limitations of the study**

The historical nature of the study sets certain limitations to the research. Despite the wide amount of data and information gathered, the historical nature of the study limits the possibilities to research the ways in which people have perceived Sauna historically. Additionally the current status of Sauna can affect the perception of how the brand of Sauna has developed during the years. Some historical information may not have remained and can therefore not be covered in the research.

This research is limited to how people inside Finland perceive Sauna, as they are part of the society that has formed the notion of Sauna. This is a limiting factor, lining out all the foreigners and people who are looking at the Finnish Sauna from the outside. The perception of Finnish Sauna could be somewhat different if asked solely from non-Finnish people but this framing was chosen in order to best understand that the culture and environment in which the brand of Sauna has been born has been somewhat closed and homogeneous. The people interviewed are also gathered mostly from urban areas and the capital district of Finland, as the Sauna culture is most vibrant in Helsinki. This might set limitations in terms of generalizing the perspective of how Sauna is perceived around Finland.

## **1.6 Outline of the thesis**

This thesis consists of six separate parts. In the first part, Introduction, the focus of the research is presented, together with the research questions and the research objective. The

main concepts and limitations of this study will be presented and the structure of the thesis will be outlined.

The second section, the Literature Review, focuses on providing the reader with a broad vision of the theoretical framework of the research. It will present the current understanding of branding, including different definitions of brand and different approaches concerning the implementation of branding. The Literature Review will present also the research gap that exists in the theory and therefore is reason to the execution of this study. The third part of the thesis, the Research Design, presents the context of the research and the reasoning for why this specific context has been chosen for this research. Also the research methods, including data gathering and analyzing methods, will be introduced and explained in this part.

The fourth section will present the findings of the research. It will provide a clear link between the research question and the findings and provide the reader with a broad understanding about the findings and the context of the study. The fifth part is analysis and discussion where the findings are analyzed and their meaning to the theory is disclosed. The last and final part is The Conclusion, concluding the research and the findings of this thesis, laying out managerial implications and stating directions for possible future research.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 What is a brand?

When Harley Procter, one of the founders of Procter & Gamble, created his first branded soaps in the end of 19th century, brands did not yet have a similar role in business as they have today (Aaker, 1991). Brands have been used since the early days of human civilization, but it was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that they became important in terms of being a differentiating factor for the companies (Aaker, 1991). Later brands have also evolved into pieces around which consumers create their identities (Holt, 2004, Berthon, Holbrook, Hulbert, 2003).

In the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia and Greece the merchants used certain markers to tell the consumers what they were selling and to identify their offerings. This was convenient as literacy was rare and signs were therefore more informative than writing (de Chernatony, 2010, Maurya & Misra, 2012). Back then the signs provided the consumers with information and served as logos for the business. There is also evidence from the early sixteenth century that brands or certain marks were used when exporting abroad the bottles including alcoholic beverages. These brands were there to guarantee the legal rights of whiskey producers and to reduce the consumer's risk and to convince the customer about the quality of the products (Aaker, 1991). In the new world of North America, the owners of livestock burned their marks into their own animals to differentiate their own offering from other owners' kettle (de Chernatony, 2010). This habit resulted to the word "brand", deriving from an old Nordic word "brandr", which means "to burn" (Maurya & Misra, 2012).

Back in the early days, brands were very functional. Today they are much more than just logos, differentiators or legal instruments, and depending on the level of abstraction, they can even be rather independent from the products, like for example Virgin Group, who is doing business with airplanes, music and several other things (Berthon & al., 2003). Due to the complex nature of the concept of a brand, brand literature provides the reader with several different definitions for what a brand actually is. There is an acknowledged problematic of creating an accurate definition for a brand in the literature (Maurya & Misra, 2012), leading to twelve categories of brand definitions (Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998).

This categorization includes the definitions of brand as; a logo, a legal instrument, a company, a shorthand, a risk reducer, an identity system, an image in consumer's minds, a value system, a personality, a relationship, as adding value and as an evolving entity (de Chernatony & Dall'Olmo, 1998). The concept and the notion of a brand has also changed a lot since the early years, with the change in the notion of marketing and the change in understanding the ownership of a brand (Aitken, Campelo, 2011).

### 2.1.1 Different definitions of a brand

The traditional definition of the primary roles of a brand portrays a brand as something that distinct and differentiates the product from another (Kotler & Keller, 1972, American Marketing Association, 1960, Keller & Lehman, 2006) in terms of competition. Based on this, the American marketing association has defined a brand as "a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers" (AMA Dictionary).

In addition to serving as a marker for the firm's offering and differentiating the products from others, brand also reflects the feelings and the complete experience that the consumer has about the product and reminds the people of the mental connections that they have to the product in question. A definition of brand as "an impression perceived in a client's mind of a product or a service" (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009, p.6) is linked to this experience-based perspective. This impression reduces the need to think about other factors, when choosing between brands and therefore it can cause people to buy the products without thinking too much (Jacoby et al., 1977). From this perspective brand is perceived as a "chunk of information" that includes all the feelings and features into which the customer associates the brand (Jacoby et al., 1977). This set of associations forms brand equity that consists of the feelings and values that customers link to the brand, the brand recognition, the experiences that the customers have with the brand and the financial value (Keller & Lehmann, 2006).

#### *Brand as a culture*

Brands and therefore brand equity do not appear from out of nowhere. Before something can be called as a brand, consumers need to have shared experiences with the brand, creating



the meanings for it. A company can have all the external artifacts such as name, logo, packaging and other specific features, but until the artifacts and material markers are connected to experiences and feelings that create meanings for consumers, the brand does not have a real brand value and does therefore not really exist (Holt, 2004). Thus, brand significance is dependent on broad social and cultural connotation that frame the consumer's experience. The markers need to be filled with consumer experiences that create socio-cultural meanings to the brand. Based on these common features creating the brand, Holt has defined brand as *the culture of the product* (Holt, 2002). He sees a brand as a culture that has been created around a product, during the years when the brand has acquired meanings from its surroundings. This definition can be backed up with the understanding of brands being born as a result of collective experience. This understanding is based on the thought of branding being a strategic act, and a key for creating and maintaining competitive advantage (Holt, 2002).

Holt has also described brands as “cultures that circulate in society as conventional stories” (Holt, 2002). He sees brands as carriers of conventional meanings that are widely accepted in the society and understood as likes of a culture. Understanding that brands are communally created, shifts the brand development perspective completely from company-centric decision making into empowering the consumers and co-creating with them (Aitken & Campelo, 2011). This understanding is closely connected to ownership of brands, understanding of which is changing with the new practices of branding. This topic will be covered more in detail in the following part.

### 2.1.2 Why brands exist?

From the perspectives of different disciplines, brands are seen to have different roles in the society (Holt, 2006, Maurya & Misra, 2012). From the economic viewpoint brands include information about the products, their quality and reliability, as mentioned already in connection to the medieval customers of whiskey. Through the lenses of sociology, brands provide a trust component for the consumers guaranteeing the service that the customer gets. From psychological perspective brands can be seen as markers that make it easier for the consumers to purchase things. In cultural disciplines brands are seen as symbols, and

intermediaries of meanings (Holt, 2006). Over-all, strong brands facilitate the repeat purchases, which again provide the company with better revenue and better profits (Berthon & al., 2007).

Depending on the product and the industry, different aspects of branding are considered important. Choosing the right perspective to make the most out of the brand, is dependent on the industry and the product itself. For example for a consumer brand to succeed it can be critical to gain identity value, whereas to a technical product or to a business-to-business product, this can be of less value (Holt, 2006). Identity value refers to a brand creating value to the customer in terms of identity, and the brand being seen as a certain kind of status symbol. In corporate setting brands are perceived as financial assets and can be used to measure the effectiveness of marketing activities (Keller, Lehmann, 2006). Additionally, they help companies to measure brand loyalty and customer satisfaction.

## 2.2 Branding

During the last decades, branding has become one of the company's top management team's key priorities, due to the realization that brands are one of the most valuable intangible assets that the company has (Keller, Lehmann, 2006). Branding has also become one of the "most important aspects of business strategy" although it is sometimes considered as merely a marketing function (Holt, 2002) instead of being a set of strategic actions. Branding serves multiple functions and as mentioned previously, its role and definition depends on the context and the company. Traditionally branding has been based on creating a constant positioning to a brand, by developing a stable unchanging brand DNA and a brand promise. Based on this, the brand management decisions have usually included things like developing brand positioning, integrating brand marketing, assessing brand performance, growing brands and strategically managing the brand (Keller, Lehmann, 2006).

This chapter will first present the general, traditional approaches to branding and then lay the focus on Cultural Branding and Place branding, as both of them offer a new perspective on how brands are created. In addition to this, these theories add to the traditional perspectives, in terms of how the ownership of the brand has been divided. They both work as starting points for the theory of how cultures can organically produce brands, as they take the surrounding world into account in the creation of brands.

### 2.2.1 Different approaches to implementing branding

Douglas B. Holt (Holt, 2004) divided the traditional branding approaches into three in 2004, based on the ways that branding is conducted. The first approach was the cognitive model of branding, also called as mind-share branding (Holt, 2004, p.15). Mind-share branding emerged in the 1970's and is based on the idea of every brand having a certain positioning in consumers' minds. The positioning is structured around the brand DNA or brand identity, which creates value to the customers and should stay stable over times. The second approach is called emotional branding which is an extension of mind share branding, defining how the principles of mind-share branding should be communicated to consumers (Holt, 2004, p.21). This approach became popular in the 1990's and is based on the idea of still focusing on the brand identity but including a more emotional and experiential perspective to it. The third

wave of branding is called viral branding, providing the consumers with the power and the responsibility of conducting branding. Viral branding became a buzz word in the beginning of 2000's (Holt, 2004, p.28) and is based on the idea of consumers, instead of companies, having a significant influence on the creation of brands. However, despite the role that consumers have in viral branding companies are considered as the creators and owners of the brand.

With the Internet becoming more common and accessible for everyone, viral branding and the co-creation of brand meanings has become a normal part of brand development. Consumer empowerment is done through Word of Mouth (WOM), consumer's brand associations and the growing consciousness of consumer rights (Aitken & Campello, 2011). The opportunities that new technical innovations have provided consumers with, allow them to affect the brands and have co-ownership of the brands. This can give birth to new kind of brand communities and increase the brands unlike never before. At the same time, it provides the consumers with bigger power than ever before, as it shifts the brand ownership from the companies to the consumers who can make the companies to reposition their products, and stay liable for their promises (Aitken & Campello, 2011).

Until lately, the creation of a brand has been seen as a result of the perception of an individual, but currently we have started to see the collective nature of these interactions as the defining factor for the existence of a brand (Holt, 2004, p. 3). Therefore a more collective perspective on branding has emerged. Based on this perspective, strong brands are built by creating collectively shared meanings to material markers (Holt, 2004) and the collective nature of the perceptions is what makes the brand strong.

The change of branding has happened hand in hand with the change of the dominant logic of marketing (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Until the 1990's marketing in general was strongly connected to commodities, marketing institutions and marketing functions. The end of the 21th century was the time for the advent of the new dominant logic of marketing (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), shifting the paradigm to intangibles, competences, dynamics and relationships. This meant also a change in the importance of tangible assets for the company, as the intangible assets became much more important than ever before, including soft assets such as the company brand. In recent years the gap between the book value and the market value

of certain companies has increased significantly, which is mostly linked to the increase in intangible assets and the importance of the brand value (Berthon & al, 2007).

Naturally, this shift is visible also in branding, as the relationships were brought to the focus and the importance of two way communication between the consumer and the brand was emphasized. This created a whole new role for the consumers and created a favorable platform for new approaches to branding. The importance of co-operation between different parties in terms of branding was understood, however branding was still seen as an act conducted by companies.

In the following chapters I will focus on the traits of cultural branding and place branding, as these two theoretical frameworks provide us with different perspectives on how brands are built and owned. The theory of cultural branding is based on the idea that by managing brands properly, they can be made into cultural icons. Understanding the theory and the steps, through which cultural branding creates iconic brands, can help us further understand how brands that exist without cultural branding or brand management can be born. The Place branding theory on the other hand looks at cities and inhabitants managing the brand of a place in co-operation. It takes into account the shared cultural meanings that people who are anchored in one place have about the place. Place branding requires co-operation with people, and is therefore one step closer to the brand management done by a culture or a community. Place branding exists in a space between managing and not managing a brand.

Compared to the traditional models of branding, both of the aforementioned branding theories strongly acknowledge the influence of culture, and can therefore help us understand the research question of how brands could emerge organically within a culture.

### **2.2.1.1 Cultural branding**

Cultural branding presents another perspective to branding, emphasizing the importance of brands developing with the society and their environment. Cultural branding, (Holt, 2004), is based on the thought of brands gathering and developing identity value during decades, by changing and evolving with the society. Therefore the greatest, most successful brands that

are integrated within the culture are not created with any of the three aforementioned approaches, but with Cultural Branding (Holt, 2004).

Instead of focusing in positioning, Cultural Branding focuses on the identities of the brands and provides the customers with identity myths, through which the customers can express their identity desires (Holt, 2004, p. 218). The theory of cultural branding is based on capturing the current national ideologies of a society, and to understanding the cultural contradictions they cause. In the focus of cultural branding theory is the necessity of the brands reinventing their myths when the society changes. This is crucial in order for the brands to stay relevant for the consumers (Humphreys, Thompson, 2014).

This kind of brands that can answer customer's identity desires and are able to stay relevant during the years, are called iconic brands. Iconic brands are cultural icons that people identify themselves with due to the meanings that they create and formalize. Iconic brands help people to express the features that they would like to have or be in their life. This allows the brands to gain the popular status and to become successful. Contradictory to all the traditional branding models presented above, cultural branding takes into account the identity myths that the brands have captured and underlines their importance in brand building (Holt, 2004). Cultural branding is based on the idea of providing customers with myths instead of entertainment or specific product features that create a specific brand DNA. By identifying to the brand's identity myths the customers can address the anxieties that the social contradictions have caused for them (Holt, 2004).

Based on the theory, Cultural branding is done by finding the cultural contradictions that a brand's target market currently has, and creating a brand myth that addresses these anxieties by providing a new cultural resource that the customers can identify with.

### **Axioms of Cultural Branding**

In order to explain how Iconic brands function, and to differ them from traditional brands, Holt has defined seven axioms of cultural branding (Holt, 2004, p.8). The first axiom is that Iconic brands address acute contradictions in the society. Due to this, they can bring special

identity value to customers as they address the common anxieties and desires that the people and the nation has. The second axiom is closely connected to this one, stating that iconic brands perform identity myths that address these desires and anxieties. This explains the reason of these brands becoming icons, as by performing identity myths the brands address people's aspirations and dreams, and provide customers with ways of expressing these desired identities. By drinking Corona beer one could feel that he or she is living the easy life in a Mexican beach or by driving a Volkswagen Beetle the consumer can connect him- or herself to the artistic bohemian lifestyle that the car has come to identify.

The third axiom is that “Identity myths reside in the brand, which consumers experience and share via ritual action” (Holt, 2004). Rituals are connected to people's identity myths, and are therefore highly powerful. By conducting rituals people feel like part of the myth and by repeatedly doing this they fill the brand with meanings in people's heads and in the common understanding of a society. With these experiences of fulfilling the identity myths customers can feel that the contradictions in their lives have been addressed and it has been enabled by a certain product or a brand, which develops a deep connection with the brand. According to the fourth axiom “the identity myths are set in populist worlds”. Locating the myths in more mythic surroundings, where people motivate their actions by intrinsic interest, creates a credible environment for the myth. The fifth axiom is that “Iconic brands perform as activists, leading culture”. The most successful myths are not connected to existing ideologies or identity myths but to new and upcoming identity desires, making people to see themselves differently than they have expected or have used to see themselves. By addressing the edges of the cultural change the brands can hit something that has not been experienced by the consumers previously. The sixth axiom is that “Iconic brands rely on breakthrough performances rather than consistent communications”. According to this principle, the brands become icons by a handful of memorable performances that hit the perfect myth, rather than by repeatedly pushing some messages. The last, seventh axiom is that “Iconic brands enjoy a cultural halo effect”, meaning that when one aspect of the brand enjoys the iconic status, also the other aspects benefit from it as people have a more positive attitude towards them as well.

## Cultural Branding in practice

Cultural branding has not been strategically guided but rather conducted by the gut feelings of the artistic directors, brand managers and whoever has been allowed to create the creative campaigns for the brands (Holt, 2004). In order to capture this process, Holt has created a cultural branding strategy for creating and sustaining an identity brand (Holt, 2004, p.218). The cultural branding strategy consists of four phases; targeting the most appropriate myth market, composing the identity myth, extending the identity myth and reinventing the identity myth. The phases will be discussed more in detail in the following paragraphs.

First of all the myth markets that already exist or are emerging in the chosen region must be examined in order to find the most suitable myth for a certain brand. Choosing and understanding the myth markets can be challenging as they are not stable but change with the society, and are often destabilized by cultural disruptions (Holt, 2004, p.39). It is important to understand that the myth markets themselves are not usually created by the brands but by the mass media and other actors outside the firms (Holt, 2006). The myth markets consist of three parts; national ideologies, cultural contradictions and populist worlds. National ideologies are common moral consensuses, national truths that are shared among majority of the nation. If the real life however does not match with the national ideologies, for example due to an emerging counter culture, Cultural Contradictions will arise. The bigger the difference between the reality and the national ideology, the bigger the tensions and anxieties will be in people's minds. This distinction and the contradictions increase the demand for symbolic solutions or resolutions. According to cultural branding these solutions can be provided by identity brands, to address the cultural contradictions and to symbolize something that the customers would like to be, despite the fact that they cannot reach the national ideology. The solutions provided to the cultural contradictions can be expressed with the help of populist worlds. Populist worlds can be folk cultures or “other groups whose activities are intrinsically motivated, not by commercial or political ideologies” (Holt, 2004, p. 58). These worlds are needed as source material and possible environments for expressing the identity myths that can solve or ease the cultural contradictions for consumers.



After having defined the current myth markets, the second phase of the cultural branding strategy is choosing and composing the identity myth around a specific brand. This requires choosing the synopsis of the myth and the populist world in which the myth will take place. To sustain credibility, the myth must be somehow targeted to the insiders of the populist world in order to gain acceptance from them, and the esthetic appearance of the identity myth must be credible in the populist world.

When the myth has been created, the third phase is to extend it and to keep it alive by connecting it to popular culture. However, no matter how good the identity myth, it must be updated every now and then. The fourth phase of the cultural branding strategy is therefore reinventing the identity myth when the national identities and cultural contradictions have changed due to cultural disruptions so that the identity myths are no longer valid (Holt, 2004, p.219).

### **Who implements cultural branding?**

Thompson & Humphrey (2014) have divided cultural branding into three research streams, based on the actors who are connecting the brand to the myth. According to the division, the actors are companies, individuals and media & the society. Holt still separates the third group into two, to popular culture and influencers (Holt, 2002). Despite the different divisions and the different factors affecting the branding, all three streams are based on the assumption that brands are originally created and owned by the companies and other actors are just giving their contribution into building the icons and affecting the brands with their actions.

### **Cultural Branding streams by Holt & Cameron**

The first stream (Holt & Cameron, 2010) is based on the thought of firms and their brand strategists being the ones assisting the connections between the brands and the myths, mainly via advertising. The actions presented in the previous chapter were describing this perspective where the creation of the brand image is dependent on the company and can be mostly guided by the brand strategists, as long as they are aware of the current cultural ideologies.

The second research stream researches the different processes through which the individuals connect the brands to the myths, by making the brands significant for themselves. This stream focuses on consumers as individuals affecting the ways in which the brand is perceived and connected to the myth. It is also trying to find insights to how consumers' socio cultural position shapes understanding of brands and the ways they can co-create branded social movements (Humphreys & Thompson, 2014).

The processes can include for example subcultures affiliating with a brand and taking it as their own, or people choosing certain brand to express a certain status in their minds. Consumers can even try to protect iconic brands from popular identity myths in order to protect their identity investments (Arsel & Thompson, 2010). Consumers can find a marketplace myth, an ideology, becoming a general trend which will decrease the value of their identity investments by making it more generic and less unique. This connects also to gender bending brands. Some brands are closely gender related and bending the gender can be painful for the fans or users of the brand. Gender as a sociocultural construction seems to be an important organizing construct in branding (Avery, 2012).

The third stream explores construction of brand meanings, in a broader context, including all the other actors into the picture, in addition to the company and the individuals. In this stream the research acknowledges the importance that other actors and other similar brands' reputation have for the development of a brand. Similarly, connotations between two brands or similar events happening to two companies can affect both brands, even though the other would not be linked to the other in any way (Humphreys & Thompson, 2014). As mentioned previously, the actors who tell the brand stories, can be divided into four different groups; companies, culture industries, intermediaries such as sales people and critics, and consumers (Holt, 2004). In addition to these actors there can be other authors contributing to the cultural branding and to the birth of iconic brands. These people may be of underestimated importance, as the coauthors of the myths can have significant roles in building the identity myths for the brands. According to Douglas Holt (2004), for example Ronald Reagan, being the president of the United States, had a big role in the creation the myth of Harley Davidson. Reagan pictured the motorcycle as a "symbol of the revitalization of the US's economic power" (Holt, 2004), after Harley Davidson had recovered from a financial crisis with a tariff

set by the president. Reagan made Harley Davidson the symbol of American “men-of-action” gunfighters, who were there for America (Holt, 2004, p. 175). Developing or strengthening this myth was beneficial for Reagan, as it gave American men the example of standing up for one’s country. Simultaneously, Reagan’s actions enforced Harley Davidson’s road to become a mythical creature, and played an important part in making Harley Davidson an iconic brand, symbolizing American values.

### **2.2.1.2 Place branding**

#### **What is it?**

The domain of place branding is still a new field, even though the academic interest towards this topic is growing as the application of branding techniques to different nations and places is increasing (Dinnie, 2003). Place branding includes managing and controlling the brands that affect the image of a certain area or region, and it has been connected for example to branding tourism destinations (Gnoth, 2002) and branding certain products that could benefit from being from certain regions or areas. Place branding is often conducted in order to attract more tourists, factories, companies and talented people to the specific areas being branded (Dinnie, 2003).

Place branding differs from traditional branding in terms of implementation, as the brand managers do not have the ownership of the brand, not even to that extent that they usually do, due to the nature of the branded objects. Place brands are strongly connected to the relationships that people have with the places, and their rights, roles and responsibilities all affect the sense of place that the people experience (Aitken & Campelo, 2011). The personal experiences that people have from the region are highly important and most likely affect their perception of a place much more than other branding efforts (Aitken & Campelo 2011, Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002). As Aitken wrote, “brands play an integrative role when related to places, because the core of the brand is the culture and the people who live and create it” (Aitken, 2011). Referring to this, Papadopoulos & Heslop (2002) have stated that every place has an image and unlike companies, those of nations and other places are not directly under the marketer's control. They see that in the same way as brand names,

countries are multifaceted, and brand images carry a lot of both real information and different perceptions.

### **Why is it done?**

In addition to attracting more tourists, companies and inhabitants to the area, place branding is done as brand value works both ways. The image from the country gives certain feeling to the product that is originated in the area, and the product manufactured or designed in certain country tells a story about the country (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002). This kind of marketing for products is increasing with the global competition. As areas have stronger brand images, they will be used more, resulting in a cycle of branding products based on the image of a region, which is defined by the products made in the region. This increases the attractiveness of the products and will therefore increase sales. The area of Champagne is a great example of great place branding, resulting into the perception of the finest sparkling wine in the world coming from one specific area in France.

Managing and controlling a country brand can be challenging, as the shared meanings that the inhabitants have, and the culture of the place affect the place brand. However, cities and nations are still putting emphasis and effort on it. According to Olins, identity management is currently seen as a normal act by national or public institutions and a good national brand is seen as a key national asset (Olins, 1999). An example of this was Jorma Ollila's working committee structuring the country brand of Finland in 2010 (SK, 2010).

### **Place Branding in practice:**

The techniques of place branding are somewhat similar to branding a company (Olins, 2001). However, a variety of approaches is used (Aitken & Campelo, 2011). The perception of branding in place branding include a “coordinated process” instead of a “managed activity” (Hankinson 2004, 2009, p. 112) and linking place branding to co-creation and seeing it as a “holistic process” (Rainisto, 2003).

In practice place branding is often conducted from top down, under the leadership of governments or their media offices or agencies (Aitken & Campelo, 2011). This way the

connection to real life and the accuracy of the brand often stays low, as the local community has not been involved, even though their practical understanding of the values, the strengths and the weaknesses of the area would be the real content around which the brand should be built. It also seems that the semantics of the word *brand* cause difficulties to several people. Almost every nation has reinvented themselves when the cultures and the surrounding world has changed during the years. However, some people feel that re-branding is something that is appropriate for products, but not for states, as nations are perceived as too “valuable” for rebranding (Olins, 2001). Company brands are often related to washing powders and other everyday products and commodities, which for some receivers make the word *brand* superficial and unworthy of the national idea. Today’s anti-branding movement reflects the opposition towards the large corporations that have traditionally been associated with branding. The concept of place branding is not always welcomed with joy from people, and doing branding in co-operation with the people has its challenges.

The common ownership of the place brands brings up several questions when implementing the branding in practice. Ownership of the history, ideas, images and all kinds of factors, that are part of people’s image of themselves, are very delicate matters. As so many external things affect it, country brand is hard to control. Sports is one of the big factors affecting how people relate to a certain nation, how they feel about their own identity and which traits are connected to certain nations (Dinnie, 2003).

## **2.3 Brand Ownership**

In the traditional branding theory the company owns the brand and can therefore guide it to the wanted direction. In viral branding and ultimately always when there is interaction with the consumers, the consumers have the power to affect the brand through Internet and word of mouth, in several ways (Fournier, Avery, 2011).

This has created brand communities that become so close with the brand that they start to own the brand. Similar things are happening with place branding, with the difference that the “brand communities” around the places usually consist of people who live on the area and therefore are a given, when reforming or managing the place brand. Hence, a place brand can

never be completely owned by the organization doing the branding but the ownership of it is by default shared. Brand ownership has traditionally been considered as the asset of a company and this is permanently changing with the era of social media.

## **2.4 Research Gap / Summary**

This research is essentially on branding. Holt (2004) describes cultural branding as the management strategy that turns brand into a cultural icon for consumer culture. Consumer culture research has a distributed view of culture based on the spread of neoliberalism and the overlapping cultural groupings it makes within the global marketplace. In contrast, place branding looks at culture as collectively shared meanings and ways of life shared by members of society that are geographically anchored in a place. The present study attempts to bridge the gap between these two literatures by examining the historical transformation of Sauna as a Finnish cultural icon anchored in the Finnish society, and its influence on consumer culture. Through this case this research will focus on investigating how brands can emerge without the ownership from an institution or an organization and how cultural icons can become iconic brands within a society or a culture, without the initiative, leadership or ownership of the brand from any authority, except from the culture and the society. In this study I will focus on how brands can emerge organically as a result of a culture.

## 3 Research Design

This section will present the research context, research approach and the methodology behind the data analysis. Also the interviewees will be introduced.

### 3.1 Research Context: Finnish Sauna

#### 3.1.1 Sauna as an iconic brand of Finland

This study will research the organic emerge of a brand in the context of Finnish Sauna. The purpose of this study is to find out how brands can emerge organically within a culture, without the ownership of an organization or a company. Finnish Sauna is a cultural icon and a brand, and is thus an interesting case example of emergent cultural branding without brand management or brand ownership from a company. Implications of emergent cultural branding will be introduced in the final sections, based on the findings of how the brand and the Iconic status of Sauna have been born within the culture of being Finnish.

As mentioned earlier, Sauna is not originally Finnish, but has been branded as a Finnish innovation (Vuorenjuuri 1967, Edelsward 1991). Finns have successfully branded Sauna to be a place of peace and calmness, despite the fact that Sauna has previously been also a place for prostitution and drinking (Malmberg, 2015). During the years it has also become one of the core functions of being Finnish, even though there has been Saunas all around Europe since the early days of our civilization (Vuorenjuuri, 1967).

Saunas have been part of the Finnish culture for centuries and Sauna has been a key symbol of “Finnishness” since the beginning of 20th century and the early days of the nationalist movement (Edelsward, 1991, p.179).

Based on Holt’s definition of a *brand being a culture that has been formed around a product*, Sauna can be defined as a strong brand. Any company or any organization does not own the concept of Sauna, but there is a very strong culture, e.g. the brand, around Sauna, which is collectively understood in the Finnish society. Producing and selling Sauna buildings and stoves is also a profitable business and a real industry, but the Sauna companies have not created the brand of Sauna, they have born to benefit from the lively Sauna culture. People share the culture further, tell the stories and teach the habits to each other and new

generations, as they do with brands. Hence it can be defined that the brand of Sauna is commonly owned and managed by the Finnish society.

Sauna has developed and reshaped with the Finnish society during the years, changing constantly, in order to sustain its central role in the society. Therefore its development can be linked to the development of Finnish culture and the consumer culture in Finland. As Holt's theory of iconic brands defines, iconic brands are born as a result of cultural management (Holt, 2004). Even though Holt's definition is based on the management being conducted by a company, this definition really makes Sauna an iconic brand. As it, however, has not been managed by a company, it is an interesting research topic.

### **3.2 Research approach: Interpretive Study, Sociocultural research**

This research was conducted as a qualitative and interpretive study in order to understand which factors within the culture have made Sauna an iconic brand in Finland. The research design was structured in the form of an emergent study, which is often used in qualitative studies (Spiggle, 1994). As the topic of organic branding is very recent, relevant literature concerning the topic or the context does not exist and this lack of a priori themes therefore justified the emergent design of the study. Based on the same reason, interviews were chosen as the main source of data. I structured the findings from the interviews based on Spiggle's system of analysis and interpretation of qualitative data in consumer research (Spiggle, 1994), to consist of categorization, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalization, integration, iteration and refutation in a non-defined order.

According to the basics of interpretative practices, the interpretative case studies are generalizable to theoretical proportion (Yin, 1995, pp.21). Therefore this study does not claim that what happened with Sauna could be generalized into other cases, but the case study can be generalized in the theoretical level, meaning that if the brand of Sauna has been organically created, this is possible in other similar cases as well.

### **3.3 Methodology**

#### **3.3.1 Data Collection Method**

The data for this qualitative study was collected through eleven semi structured in-depth interviews. Interviews were chosen as the primary data collection method, in order to access



other people's interpretations about the facts that affect their perception about Sauna (Walsham, 1995). The interviews lasted approximately one hour and they were recorded in order to be able to go through them and get back to them when needed. The interviews were conducted in this way in order to be able to study human interpretations about the meanings that Sauna culture has had during the years. According to Walsham it is through interviews that researchers can best access the interpretations that participants have regarding the actions and events that are taking place (Walsham, 1995). Interviews were guided with initial questions about the interviewees' experiences about Sauna, but Walsham's statement of interviewer not being supposed to direct the interview too closely was also taken in consideration (Walsham, 1995). In addition to the interviews, several historical documents were studied in order to gain understanding about the different roles that public Saunas have had in the Finnish society during times, and to understand how the social values and ideologies have changed in general.

### 3.3.2 Interviews

The goal with the interviews was to gain as broad understanding as possible, about the ways in which people perceive Sauna and about the facts that affect the development of Sauna's role during times. The creation and the formation of the brand of Sauna was examined based on these interviews.

Among the interviewees there were owners of the most legendary public Saunas in Finland, an artist who has been studying public Saunas, founders of the new urban Saunas, casual Sauna visitors, Sauna enthusiasts, a journalist who has been writing about public Saunas and people who have been using public Saunas or working in them during decades. Also younger users of public Saunas were interviewed in order to gain the perspective of different generations. The interviews were conducted in cafés and offices but also at the Sauna locations, which gave the interviews an authentic perspective and made them a complete experience, showing how Saunas are still today used for different purposes. When conducting the interviews the possibility of interviewees' not reporting facts but their own interpretations about what has happened, was taken into consideration (Walsham, 1995).

### **3.3.2.1 Interviewees**

The first interviewee was Aleksi Neuvonen, a 40-year-old frequent Sauna user who has been using public and private Saunas since the end of the 1990's. Aleksi goes to different Saunas based on the feeling, and usually meets friends in public Saunas. Aleksi has written several articles about Finnish Sauna and was chosen as an interviewee based on his enthusiasm towards Sauna and his wide experience about Sauna culture from Finland and abroad.

Kimmo Helistö is the 55-year-old owner and the host of the Arla Sauna. His childhood memories of Sauna were connected to summer cottage and cottage Saunas, as his family did not use public Saunas. He got interested in Sauna when working in Lepakko, an underground radio station in Helsinki. Homeless alcoholics had built a Sauna into the building. This Sauna became an attraction at the underground club and functioned regularly during four years. This experience led Kimmo to the world of Saunas. With some friends he brought a Sauna all the way to New York, where it was present and open for people for four years in a row on a rooftop terrace. After that they brought a Sauna party package to festivals around Europe, including three visits to Cannes. In 2006 he ran into Arla Sauna and ended up as the owner and the host. Sauna culture is blooming again and Arla Sauna currently has a regular clientele visiting the sauna weekly.

Aapo Mattila is a non-professional photographer, who started taking photos of his friends in Sauna around three to five years ago. Aapo's Sauna experiences are strongly connected to a group of friends and he usually goes to Sauna at a friend's place, as he has several friends who enjoy going to Sauna together. When studying at Lahti Aapo often went to Sauna with foreign exchange students, who were thrilled by the excitement of going to Sauna naked. Aapo has had his Sauna pictures exposed in New York, and the reactions of Americans have been really encouraging, even though the culture of nakedness is somewhat awkward for Americans. The practice of men and women going to sauna together and the communality of Sauna culture is very new for Americans.

Seppo Heikkilä is a journalist working for the Finnish National Broadcasting Company. He has done reports and researched the topic of public saunas in Finland, their history and current situation. He visited public Sauna for the first time in Helsinki on midsummer 1984, when he did an article to radio news about public Saunas. He started going to Saunas regularly in the end of 1990's and had a web page called Saunahut.net (sauna rumours.net) for a while.

Antero Vartia is a 35-year old entrepreneur, who has now opened a new public Sauna called Löyly to the seaside of Helsinki. His Sauna experiences are mostly from a summer cottage in his childhood, but he is very intrigued about the new Sauna culture that is blooming in Helsinki. Antero believes that there is demand for a new Sauna, even though he himself has not been a fan of public Saunas before. Antero, along with his business partner, has invested several millions of euros into the new Sauna and is looking forward to create urban history with the building.

Erika Haavisto is a 28-year-old filmmaker and a regular Sauna user from Helsinki, one of whose favorite ways to relax is to go to the steam of Kulttuurisauna in Hakaniemi. Erika's first memories are from an old rural Sauna, where she used to go together with her grandmother. Back then she was fascinated about being allowed to piss on the floor of the Sauna, a fact that made the experience even more cleaning and healing.

Joha Grönvall is an urban activist and one of the members of Sompasauna, the wood burning public self-service Sauna in the middle of urban Helsinki. Sompasauna has been torn down by the officials several times, but it has always been rebuilt by the citizens. Joha believes that Sauna is not just for Finns, but has seen at Sompasauna how people from different countries fall in love with the Finnish Sauna and swimming.

Timo is a 66-year-old Sauna veteran, who is hosting an old tent Sauna from the Russian Army, which can accommodate up to 50 people at once. Timo used to go to public Saunas already in his childhood in Alppila, and has enjoyed going to Sauna ever since.

Katariina Styrman is the Operating Officer of The Finnish Sauna Club (Saunaseura). The Finnish Sauna Club was founded in 1937 and has since then worked to promote and represent Finnish Sauna both in Finland and abroad. The Sauna Club has 4200 members, and a Sauna complex in Lauttasaari consisting of 6 Saunas; three smoke Saunas, two normal Saunas and one electric Sauna.

Jussi Niemelä is the Vice President of The Finnish Sauna Club (Saunaseura), who has a habit of ending his workweek in the steam of Sauna with a familiar group of people. Jussi goes to Sauna regularly and has taught his children to love Sauna as well.

Risto Elomaa is a well-known and acknowledged Sauna veteran, who has been involved in the Finnish Sauna Club for decades and is currently the President of the International Sauna

Association. Risto was first brought to Sauna by his grandmother when he was one month old. Since then he has been enjoying Saunas around the world and sharing his knowledge about Sauna in countries from China to Africa.

### **3.3.2.2 Data Analysis Method**

Different analytical techniques, such as categorization, abstraction, dimensionalization and integration were used; in order to build a data based theory about the brand creation within a culture (Spiggle, 1994).

When conducting the interviews, no a priori hypotheses were set, in order to sustain a considerable amount of openness towards the field data (Walsham, 1995). Based on this, no hypothesis about the final results was conducted but the interviews were implemented with an iterative process of data collection and analysis. As mentioned, interviews were recorded and notes were taken during the interviews.

The data analysis of the interviews was conducted according to the system of Susan Spiggle (Spiggle, 1994). Highlighting the themes that occurred repeatedly in the interviews started the analysis. The themes were then categorized by giving labels to phenomenon found in the data (Spiggle, 1994). The contents of the interviews were compared to the historical data that was acquired from old newspapers, radio programs and books, in order to gain a perspective as wide as possible on how the role of Sauna has developed. They were also compared in order to see, whether the same themes that were brought up in the interviews occurred in other materials as well. The data gathered from these sources was equally categorized, after which the previously identified classes were grouped under more abstract constructs. These abstractions and categories were then compared in order to find out whether they belonged under the same category and whether the categories were relevant. The data was then laid on different dimensions and the relationships were defined. The findings were constructed based on iterations of this system and data formed during the iteration rounds.

Based on Spiggle (1994) the integration of the themes required mapping the relationships between the elements, in order to see how things are related to each other. Iteration was done constantly in order to see whether the right and relevant data was gathered and chosen and to evaluate whether subjective perspectives had affected the research.

## 4 Findings

In this chapter the findings of the study, gathered from the interviews and the data collected, will be presented. The historical analysis will explain the role of Sauna in Finnish culture and how it has become anchored in a geographic place that it was not earlier part of. The data gathered from the interviews will explain how the market understands this cultural icon.

To provide the reader with as clear understanding of the findings as possible, the findings of this study will be divided into two. First I shall present the histories of Sauna and the Finnish society, as the environment where the brand of Sauna has emerged from. This part presents the findings connected to the first sub question about how the history of Finland has affected the development of the brand of Sauna.

Then I will go through the categorizations that were structured based on the interviews. This part is examining the second sub question about why the brand of Sauna has been born in these surroundings.

The aim of the study is to find out how the brand of Sauna has developed within a culture, without the involvement or the ownership of companies. It also looks at the social factors supporting and making it possible. Understanding the context, the culture and the surroundings in which the brand of Sauna has been born helps us to understand the development of the brand of Finnish Sauna. In the following chapter I will tie the findings in the history of the Finnish society and to the history of Finnish Sauna to see how they can be linked to the development of the brand of Sauna.

### 4.1 Overview of the history of the Finnish society, culture and the essence of being Finnish

The history of Finland can be closely tied to the history of the neighboring countries, since the very early days of population in 850 BCE. Finnish culture, self-image and national identity have been strongly affected by the fact that the country has been ruled by the two neighboring countries Sweden and Russia, for significant periods of time. Finland was part of Sweden from the 13<sup>th</sup> century until the 19<sup>th</sup> century and that time-period was very noteworthy in terms of the formation of a national Finnish self-image (Peltonen, 2000). After having been ruled by

Sweden over five centennials, the majority of the Finnish territory became part of Russia in 1809 and turned into the Grand Duchy of Finland, ruled by the tsar of Russia. Finland declared independence on December 6th in 1917, resulting to a scattered society, which led to a civil war in 1918.

The image and the notion of being Finnish was largely built during the first decades of the 20th century. The Finnish language became dominant and a new identity of “Finnishness” was formed (Peltonen, 2000). Back then Finland was very rural and in the end of 19th century over 90% of Finns lived in the countryside (Kohi & al., 2012).

From the 1920’s to the 1940’s Finland was strongly divided between the laborers and the bourgeoisie and there was a constant dichotomy in the society. However, the politics of defragmenting and the growing economy slowly united the Finns again, and the differences between the social classes became smaller (Kohi, 2012). Migration to cities was strong and in end of 1930’s around 30% of Finns lived in the cities (Kohi & al. 2012, p. 161). The events of the Second World War, when Finland fought twice against Soviet Union’s occupation attempts between 1939 and 1944, united the nation but left the country poor and destroyed. At the time of the Olympic Games in Helsinki in 1952, Finland had recovered from the World War II and the rebuilding of the nation was going on. Finnish Armi Kuusela won the Miss Universum prize in 1952. This had already improved the self-esteem of a small young nation, and Helsinki hosting the Olympic Games the same year lifted the Finns’ spirit to new levels. This spirit was even strengthened in 1955 when Finland became part of the Nordic Council and the United Nations. Finland was politically tied to co-operation with the Soviet Union and in 1956 Urho Kekkonen became the president of Finland (Kohi, 2012, p.139).

The sixties and the seventies were a time of urbanization, building the welfare state and strong political activity. Migration to the cities was intense and the suburbs were born with industrialism and the increase in the amount of industrial jobs in the cities. People’s wealth increased and purchasing home appliances and summer cottages became more popular (Kohi, 2012, p. 140). A public primary school system was introduced, resulting to a more equal and uniform society. In the 1980’s the economy started blooming, Finland became more international and open, and the role of popular culture became stronger. In 1995, after a national referendum, Finland became part of the EU. That can be defined as a beginning of a

new era, as Finland had survived from the economic depression of the early nineties and opened up into the west.

In the 2000's Nokia's tremendous success connected people and took Finland to the world map, giving Finns something to be proud of internationally. The success of Nokia increased wealth and wellbeing in Finland significantly and could be seen as something that lifted Finns to the group of nations that are acknowledged as wealthy and successful. During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Finland has kept on opening up and the globalization has continued in the interconnected world.

### **Culture of Uniformity and the Finnish mindset**

When discussing the Finnish culture and mindset, the culture of uniformity is often brought into focus as one of the defining factors. Finland has always been a small nation among the big ones, with low hierarchy and relatively low differences in social levels, with very homogenic inhabitants. In Finland the culture of the people has been culture of the masses and therefore also the culture of the nation. As an example of this the language of the people became the official language, whereas in almost every other country the masses were forced to learn the language of the elite. This tells about Finland as a highly equal country with a very low level of hierarchy. The notion of equality was enhanced especially during the last five decades of the 1900's, after the war had united the nation. The war payments had decreased the difference between the social groups and the nationwide primary school system was introduced to the whole of Finland. Equal possibilities were offered to everyone, no matter their assets or background. Finnish people have historically been equally poor or equally rich, allowing them to shift between social classes within one generation (Korkman, 2014). This has resulted to the lifestyles of people having been relatively similar among the nation since urbanization in the 1950's.

The Culture of uniformity was probably best visible in the seventies and eighties, when there was only two TV channels in Finland, people ate the same food and most importantly, all the children were brought up in a unified schooling system. This strongly affected the future of the nation. The culture of uniformity is a highly relevant factor when studying the Finnish society. This explains the mindset of Finnish people being relatively homogenous.

Despite the strong common culture during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there has been increasing discussion about whether the culture of uniformity still exists in Finland (Itkonen, 2015). Different sub cultures are rising as a result of globalization and internationalization, Internet, social media and the general connectivity. However, despite the increasing multiculturalism, there are still several artifacts and habits that still prevail strongly in the Finnish society. Political views have always varied within the nation, people have had different backgrounds and done different things. We can answer the question of whether there still exists a common culture, based on the artifacts and habits that are common for the whole nation.

This has been a short introduction to the history of Finnish society. It helps the reader to understand the environment where the brand of Sauna has been formed and to reflect the Finnish mindset. In the following chapter the history of Sauna will be presented more in detail.

## **4.2 Sauna**

Sauna's role in the society and in peoples' minds has changed significantly during the years. Sauna can be understood as a network of meanings, tying together things and meanings from different areas of life. As Edelsward (1991) wrote: "Sauna is highly embedded to the Finnish culture and understanding Sauna implies understanding the culture as well". For example the traditional Arla Sauna in Helsinki and the "self-built" Sompasauna, both of which are located in the middle of the city and have a distinct brand, are images of very different times in Finland and both add up to the almost mythical brand of Sauna.

Sauna is an ancient innovation, which has been mentioned already in the oldest Russian history book, book of Nestor, in the tales of the Vikings and in the book of Kalevala (Taskinen, 2011, p.7). The first notions of Sauna are already from the ancient Greece (Vuorenjuuri, 1967). Based on this it has been argued that Sauna is not a Finnish innovation but has originated from the ancient cultures of Turkey and Rome and could be compared to Hammam and Steam rooms. However, the travel diary of and Arabic traveler Ibn Dasta tells the tale of people of Finnish breed sitting in hot tents, sweating and throwing water to hot stones already during the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Särkikoski, 2012). Either way, the Nordic breed of Finns has open heartedly made Sauna their own and the oldest existing plans of Finnish Sauna buildings date back to 1699 (Taskinen, 2011). In the Middle Ages Saunas were spread around Europe, and there were Saunas even in Northern Italy and in the United Kingdom. (Taskinen, 2011). Researchers



have assumed that Sauna arrived to other European & Scandinavian countries via the Turkish and Roman route, but the Finns learned to use Sauna from the ancient nations related to the Finns (Särkikoski, 2012).

The Finns took Sauna as their own already during the early years, which can be seen in the fact that Sauna is called with its Finnish name in all other languages except for Russian and Swedish (Taskinen, 2011). Based on its etymology the word Sauna is not a loan word but a very ancient Finnish word that has entered the Finnish language with the hunters and gatherers already before the migration to the Finnish peninsula (Edelsward, 1991). The etymology of Sauna has also strengthened the assumption of Sauna being at least 1000 years old. The old word *Sauna* meant a “hut in the ground”, and was used to describe the ancient constructions where people both lived and washed up while it was heated (Särkikoski, 2012).

However, Sauna as the symbol of national identity is shown to have been a political construction of the nineteenth century nationalist movement in Finland (Edelsward 1991, Särkikoski 2012). Poems and paintings that expressed the Finnish habit of going to Sauna built the national feeling and created a mythical foundation to the notion of being Finnish and connected these two to each other (Särkikoski, 2012).

The culture and the notion of Sauna is strong in Finland and there are currently three million Saunas in the land of five million people (Taskinen, 2011). Sauna is definitely one of the things that are common artifacts for the whole society, and the myths connected to Sauna have travelled from generation to generation. Certain elements are integral parts of the Finnish Sauna experience. A traditional Finnish Sauna is usually a wooden room, where the heater, topped with stones, is located on the same wall with the door. The design of the Sauna room is usually rather simple, but accessories such as the bath whisk, the bowl for “Löyly” (water to be thrown into the stones of the heater) and the seat covers can bring a difference to the decor of the Sauna. Nowadays lightning and other design solutions are also used more to build more unconventional Sauna rooms (Taskinen, 2011).

As Finns have adopted Sauna to be a central part of the Finnish culture, Sauna and the notion of Sauna has also developed with Finland. Even though Finns perceive Sauna as an unchanged concept (Edelsward, 1991), the meaning and the role of Sauna has changed several times during the years and therefore it is impossible for us to define for example the relationship

that the ancestors of the current Finns had with Sauna (Edelsward, 1991, p. 181). However, we can see how the role of Sauna has developed during the modern times, and research how Sauna's role has changed with the values and the cultural contradictions of Finland. In the following chapter the major changes in Sauna's role in the society during the modern times will be gone through.

#### 4.2.1 History and the development of Finnish Sauna

##### **Primitive Sauna**

Keijo Taskinen (Taskinen, 2011) has divided the development of Finnish Sauna into five time periods, which present the development of Finnish Sauna culture. First Finnish Saunas date back to 10 000 years ago. At that time Saunas were only holes dug into the ground and covered with animal skins, serving both the role of spaces where people lived and cleaned up (Särkikoski, 2012). According to current research, there have been Saunas in Finland since the Stone Age (Taskinen, 2011).

The second phase in the history of Finnish Sauna (Taskinen, 2011) started when people settled to one place and Saunas could be built permanently into the ground. These primitive versions of Sauna had three walls in the ground and one wall built out of wood. Third phase in the development of Sauna meant the beginning of smoke Saunas, and the first time that Saunas were built above the ground. These Saunas were heated from the outside by once before entering the room, and became highly popular. Still in the 1930's half of the Finnish Saunas were this kind of old smoke Saunas that kept the smoke inside the room during the heating, until the door was opened to go in when the Sauna was ready. From these days, all the way to the 1950's, Sauna was the place for giving birth, washing the dead, drying food, washing clothes and cleaning up in most of Finland (Taskinen, 2011). This affected strongly the perception that Finns have had of Sauna almost until these days, as Sauna was very naturally the place where almost all the most important tasks were conducted.



Picture 1, *In the Sauna* by Akseli Gallén Kallela, 1889

The fourth phase of Saunas was connected to the innovation of chimney. This was an innovation that allowed the smoke to be guided out from the Sauna. This made Saunas more fire safe and increased their number rapidly, starting from Western Finland, where Saunas were largely used to dry the grain (Taskinen, 2011).

With the religious reformation Sauna turned also into a place where to become clean and wash up before going to church on a Sunday. Despite the connections that Sauna had to the shaman's magical incarnations, the church did not ban Saunas but connected the notion of Sauna to several Christian associations (Edelsward, 1991, p. 180). Interestingly, at this point

the culture of Sauna died in most of the European countries, as Sauna was perceived as barbaric. In Finland however, the notion of Sauna was very strong, and church's take on Sauna was rather positive, resulting into Sauna becoming even more strongly a place connected to cleaning up.

Due to its cleaning concept, Sauna has for long been perceived as a place for new beginnings. In addition to giving birth and washing the deceased in Sauna, new brides have also been made ready for the marriage through bridal Sauna. Sauna has also performed as the place for healing and doing spells (Taskinen, 2011) and as a source of meditation. Several Finnish sayings such as "If Sauna, alcohol and tar do not help, the illness will be deadly" and "Sauna should be visited like a church – quietly and in peace", explain the relationship that Finns have with Sauna as a healing place.

### **Sauna as a tool for constructing the Finnish identity**

As stated, Sauna has been part of the Finnish culture since the very beginning. The thought of Sauna being part of the Finnish identity started to get foothold in 1831, when the Finnish Literature Club (Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura) was founded, and they started to structure the base and foundation of Finnish identity (Särkikoski, 2012). National poems and art pieces

naturally affected the identity formation strongly. The national poems that Elias Lönnroth had collected to Kalevala created a mythical base for both national identity and the friends of Sauna, supporting the status of Sauna as the symbol of being Finnish (Särkikoski, 2012). The heroes of Kalevala, as well as the fellows of the “Seven brothers” of Aleksis Kivi admired sauna. These national eposes were some of the first art pieces to describe ideal Finns, resulting into their ideologies becoming the ideologies of the nation.

Also the poet Carl Axel Gottlund was involved in making Sauna a mythical place. He arrived to Värmland in 1817, and directly understood the meaning of Sauna for the Finns. He wrote a story about the poet’s paradise, one of its heroines being the goddess of Sauna, “Saunatar” (Särkikoski, 2012). This might have been one of the first times that Sauna received a mythical place in literature.

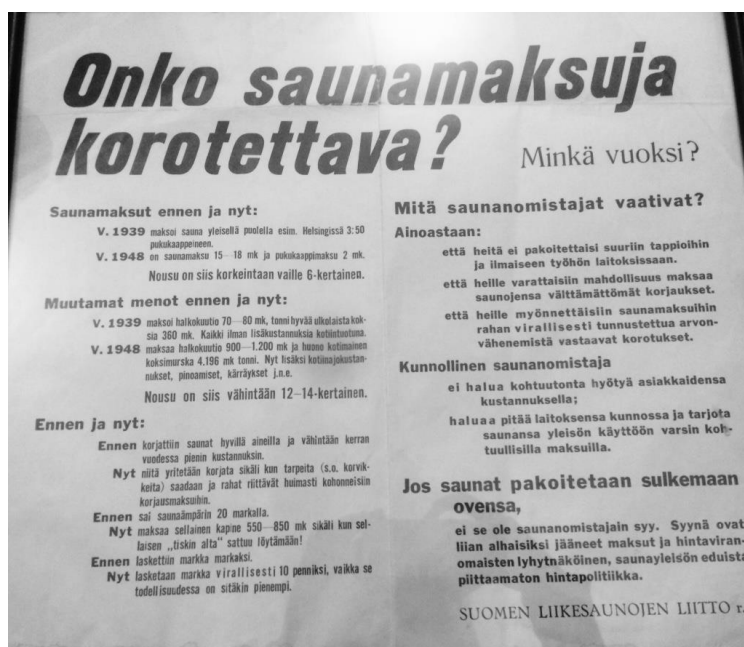
Sauna had been part of the Finnish culture for hundreds of years, but it was not until being mentioned in literature, when Sauna started to receive a certain mythical status in the Finnish society and its’ way towards becoming a brand started. It seems that through a couple of well-positioned pieces, Sauna has been made a cultural icon.

### **Place to wash up when moving to cities**

Due to development of fire safety, Saunas became a normal part of urban buildings in the 17th and 18th century. The invention of Saunas that could be heated from the inside while using the Sauna, marked the fifth phase in the history of Finnish Saunas (Taskinen, 2011) and made it possible to keep on heating the Sauna while being inside it. A large part of Finnish Saunas still remain from the fifth period.

The masses started to move to cities in the end of the 19th century. As a result of this people lived in high density in the urban areas. Wooden homes, which usually had their own Saunas in the backyard, were soon replaced with stone houses, with one common Sauna in every block (Heikkinen, 2014). Homes did not have warm water in the apartments and common Saunas were built to provide the people living in the cities with a place to wash up (Heikkinen, 2014). The number of public Saunas increased rapidly in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as it was a normal Finnish custom to build Saunas as places to wash up. In Helsinki for example there were 3 public Saunas in the 1850’s, whereas 30 years later in the 1880’s the number was 70 Saunas (Heikkinen, 2014).

Originally public Saunas were built to apartment houses in the city, as the apartments did not have running water, or at least not hot water for showering. Saunas were places for washing up in the city and almost every block had their own Sauna, into which the inhabitants often queued on Saturday evenings (Heikkinen, 2014). Going to Sauna was a hygienic act that was not necessarily a pleasant experience. Saunas were often full and on Saturday's the queues could come all the way out from the Saunas to the street. When someone came out, the next customer could go in. The existence of public Saunas in the city could be compared to the existence of barbers and going to Sauna was a similar hygienic act as cutting one's hair. Based on the stories of an old Sauna owner, Sauna was an essential part of the hygiene network still in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Helistö interview). Due to this, also the prices of Sauna were regulated by the state at least until 1965, in order to keep public Saunas available for everyone (Picture 1, Suomen Liikesaunojen liitto).



Picture 2, Picture 2, Announcement about price regulation concerning public Saunas

This led to the popularity of public Saunas, but did not help keeping the Saunas clean and nice. Some of them were rather dirty and unpleasant, as due to the regulated prices the owners could not provide keeping them up (Helistö interview). However, as hot water was regulated after the war, public Saunas were the only place for many people, where they could wash up properly (Heikkinen, 2014).

The urban public Saunas were often very small but there was a wide variety of them. Usually these Saunas had separate Sauna rooms for female and male and some of the big ones had

even “family rooms”, signifying private Saunas. Couples were allowed to join the “family Saunas” but there were strict rules that non-married couples had to go to separate sides. This evoked a concept of “Sauna-rigs” that made the youngsters borrow marital rings, in order to show the Sauna owners that they were married (Heikkinen interview, Heikkinen, 2014). In addition to sexuality, also alcohol caused some problems in public Saunas at the time and was therefore often banned from Saunas. For example in the Arla Sauna, the men’s side was switched to the second floor, as the people smuggled alcohol to the Sauna through the first floor window (Helistö interview, 2016). In to the Savo Sauna that was in Hakaniemi, back then a working class area of Helsinki, guests had brought in apples marinated and soaked in alcohol, when bringing bottles of alcohol was not allowed (Heikkinen, 2014).

All the members of the society used public Saunas and they existed all around the city. However, the citizens in higher social classes started to have bathrooms and preferred going to the spa’s, already in the beginning of 20th century due to which public Saunas remained more active in the working-class areas (Madetoja in Heikkinen, 2014).

The 1940’s were the golden times of public Saunas and there used to more than 120 public Saunas in Helsinki alone (BBC, Helistö interview, Heikkinen, 2014). This time period underlines the meaning of Sauna as a place of washing up in the urban society. The number of public Saunas started to decrease in the mid-50’s as renovating the buildings led to the arrival of hot running water in the apartments and signified the end of public Saunas as they had been, but public Saunas still remained a place to wash up long until 1970’s (Heikkilä interview, Helistö interview).

The last public Sauna was built in 1952 to Maunula (Heikkinen, 2014). In 1963 there were still 80 public Saunas in Helsinki, whereas in 1977 the number was only 25. From the up to 120 Saunas that there used to be in the center of Helsinki, only three remain today in public use; Arlan Sauna, Kotiharjun Sauna and Sauna Hermanni, in addition to the new public saunas such as Kulttuurisauna & Löyly.





*Picture 3, Children bathing in Sauna in the 1950's*

While public Saunas were introduced and became very popular in the cities in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the rural areas everybody still had their own Saunas. People lived with low density in rural areas, which made it understandable that every house had their own Sauna for the important services such as giving birth and cleaning up. Slowly while the rural Finland developed further, also the homes away from the cities started to have bathrooms, Saunas lost their status as multifunctional places, and the focus shifted to just washing up. However, still in the 1950's it was a common custom to give birth in the Sauna.

### **Steamy and dark political arena**

Along with all the other roles that Sauna has had as a cleaning and healing space, one of the most important roles is Sauna's role as the arena of big political decisions and deep discussions. There are countless stories of decisions, both political and business related that have been made in the Sauna. The Nazis were fans of Sauna and the "brotherhood of Sauna" between the Finns and the Germans lasted for around ten years, from the Olympic Games in 1936, where German photographer Leni Riefenstahl took pictures of the brave Sauna bathers, until the surrender of Germany (Malmberg, 2015). The Germans were also otherwise very interested in the concept of Sauna and cleanliness and especially Herman Goering was an enthusiastic sauna user (Elomaa interview). The king of Belgium was so intrigued about Finnish Sauna that he wanted to build one inside his Royal garden in Laeken. The architectural drawings were requested from Finland and in addition to sending the drawings the Finns provided the king with a set of detailed explanations in terms of how Sauna should be used (Vuojolainen, 2011).

Before World War II, Finnish Sauna was still a foreign thing that was considered weird by the few people who had experienced it. After the war the situation slowly started to change, as

Finnish embassies around the world started to build Saunas and to invite foreign colleagues to them (Vuojolainen, 2011).

During the period of Kekkonen's presidency, between 1956 and 1981, when the political environment in Finland was such that most of the decisions were made in cabinets, Sauna often replaced meeting rooms as the place of negotiations. Kekkonen used to bring all his guests to Sauna and invited also the leader of Soviet Union, Nikita Hrustsov, to join him in Sauna (Fjodorov, 2001). According to the stories Hrustsov was hesitant to represent his country naked in a Sauna, with the companion of a foreign leader, but he was too curious to say no, resulting in the two presidents enjoying Sauna together (Fjodorov, 2001). There are similar stories about other foreign representatives being confused about this costume, but being too polite to decline (Vuojolainen, 2011). President Kekkonen gained credibility concerning Sauna also in other connections, for example at the opening ceremony of the Sauna in the Embassy of Soviet Union in Helsinki, where he told the guests that the water should be thrown into the stove like "the lamb would be piing". At the same event the ambassador himself burned his back while going to Sauna, and soon was transferred back to Soviet Union. President Kekkonen is also famous for postponing the discussion about the war training between Finland and the Soviet Union by sending the leaders of Soviet Union to shower or to Sauna always when the discussion was about to get to the point and be heated up (Vuojolainen, 2011).



*Picture 4, Foreign Minister Karjalainen and Martti Ahtisaari in Sauna in East Africa in 1974*

The controversy of Sauna is that even though excluding others from making the decisions was clearly an act of exclusivity, going to Sauna together made all the participants equal in the heat of the steam. Kekkonen has stated that "Sauna creates equality as in the Sauna there is no minister, councilor, workman or a dude, there are just Sauna friends" (Malmberg,

2015). Still today, there is a Finnish Sauna Club in Washington, whose members consist of politicians, lobbyists, journalists and other political influencers (Taskinen, 2011).



Despite the notion of equality, Sauna was generally for only one sex, as in public occasions males and females never went to Sauna together. Decision making in the cabinets and exclusive Sauna meetings was criticized in the society, leading to companies giving up their Sauna spaces. Coming to the 1990's, several big companies turned their old Sauna spaces into offices or other event spaces as the equality and gender issues become relevant topics in the society. The period of Sauna as the stage for decision-making thus came to its end. However, Sauna is still considered as the place to discuss important deep matters (Steam of life, 2010), even though the old Finnish Sauna rules state that politics, sports, sex and religion are not to be discussed at Sauna (Timo, 2016).

### **Taking Sauna abroad**

Political relationships and ambassadors representing Finland abroad were some of the main reasons, why Sauna became internationally well known. In Scandinavia Sauna was a part of everyday life until the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Then the notion of Sauna changed in Sweden and Norway, as it became a "notorious" place in peoples' minds, hosting prostitutes and allowing the citizens to do unethical things (Särkikoski, 2012). At this point a law was placed in Norway and Sweden that forbade public saunas (Elomaa interview). In connection to this there was a discussion also in Finland about whether Sauna was a positive or a negative thing. However, the nationalistic movement had tied Sauna very strongly to the essence of being Finnish. This, alongside with the fact that Sauna was the only place for most Finns to wash up, made Finland avoid the destiny of Sweden and Norway abolishing Sauna (Styrman interview, Särkikoski 2012). The health effects of Sauna were significant in the Finnish society and in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also the Swedes and the Norwegians realized these effects. Both of these countries had strong traditions of going to Sauna but these traditions had died in the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the ban of public Sauna. As the officials realized the effects that Sauna had to the health and hygiene of the whole nation, they put effort on bringing back the Sauna culture to these countries. Despite the efforts, Sauna never received the same status in these countries that it had had before (Särkikoski, 2012).

Internalization of Sauna continued via interesting ways during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1912, after Finland had won several medallions in the Olympic Games, a discussion around the effects of Sauna on the endurance and success of the athletes was started (Särkikoski, 2012). Lauri Tahko Pihkala, who is considered the father of Finnish baseball, contributed to the discussion

with a text in an American *Outing* magazine stating “Sauna is a national Finnish institution which has been followed throughout all parts of the country for centuries. Even the smallest farmhouses have their bathhouse (Sauna as they call it) and all the family, old and young, strong and weak, men, women, children, and even babies, take their steam bath at least once a week throughout the year” (Särkikoski 2012, p. 40). This writing can be considered as one of the starting points for the global brand and as an acknowledgement of the Finnish Sauna. After the war, the Olympic Games in Paris in 1924 were the first ones where the Finns built their own Saunas. As the weather was already very warm, the hot Finnish Sauna and the people who dared to go in, received an almost heroic status during the games (Särkikoski, 2012). Finns built Saunas to the following Olympic games as well (Amsterdam 1928, Los Angeles 1932 and Berlin 1936), and the Finnish Sauna became a well-known thing that was connected to the endurance and success of the Finnish athletes (Särkikoski, 2012). During this time also many Finns started to connect Sauna with physical strength and perseverance (Särkikoski, 2012). At this time Sauna was in general perceived strongly in connection to health as a factor of social hygiene (Särkikoski, 2012).

### **Industrialism and the habit of a society**

When people moved to cities in the 50’s and the 60’s, the Saunas soon followed them inside the houses. Technology made electric Saunas possible and from 1970’s onwards, private Saunas have been a normal commodity in apartment houses (Taskinen, 2011). Individuals built Saunas inside the houses, after which the big construction companies started making them as well (Neuvonen interview). “Lauantai-Sauna” (Saturday-Sauna), was a strong institution in Finland until the 90’s. Going to Sauna on a Saturday night has been so closely linked to the social values that the extra payments to the employees in the pulp industry for working on a weekend, are generally called as “Sauna-lisät” meaning “Sauna allowances”.

As an indication of the Culture of Uniformity concerning Sauna, there was a recent study of *Veikkaus*, showing that 1/3 of Finns still go to Sauna every Saturday (Veikkaus, 2016). This research can be backed up by the experience of one of the Finnish television channels, MTV3, receiving a huge number of feedbacks in the end of the 90’s, when they changed the time of one of their most popular TV-show’s to start one hour earlier on Saturday evenings. This program, *BumtsiBum*, was highly popular, and broadcasting it earlier made it interfere with the Saturday Saunas of the people (Styrman interview). This caused a storm of complaints,

most of which were related to disturbing the Sauna experience. This tells the tale of a rather uniform culture in terms of behavior, still in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### 4.2.2 4.2.2. The modern days of Sauna

##### **The role of Sauna adapting to the urban culture and to the change of lifestyle.**

With globalization and urbanization, the society has become more work oriented, individualist and connected, and there is a trend of growing need for relaxation. Simultaneously, as cities have become more urban, the need for community has grown. In Finland more than one million people live alone (HS, 16.4.2016) resulting to a need for urban city culture and places where to meet other people. With this change people see friends outside their home more than before. This has created a demand for restaurants and cafés, and also the role of Sauna has developed.

##### **Urbanization, identity creation and the sense of community**

During 1980's-1990's public Saunas remained an activity and a hobby of a few Sauna enthusiasts, who visited the Saunas despite the rather negative image that they had. Based on their former role, public Saunas were still widely considered as places targeted to people who could not afford to wash up at home. In 1999-2000 Kotiharjun Sauna was renovated and repaired in the advent of Helsinki's year as the Culture Capital of the world. This time period marked the beginning of urban culture and more lively use of restaurants, clubs, and cafes. It can also be seen as the starting point of a new Sauna culture. With the words of Kimmo Helistö, the owner of Arla Sauna; "people started doing publicly the things that they were used to doing in their living rooms". This also meant a shift in the approach towards public Saunas. The function of public Saunas changed from washing up and getting in and out as quickly as possible, into meeting people, spending time together, relaxing and having a moment of quietness (Heikkilä, 2014).

Today a rising culture of communalism and a longing for urban city culture has made public Saunas urban meeting points. It has also given birth to concepts such as Sompasauna. Sompasauna is a public self-made Sauna in an empty old industrial area in the middle of Helsinki, which is re-built every year. The municipalities have taken it down already five years in a row (Malmberg, 2015), but it has always been built again through co-operation of volunteers. Sompasauna can be seen as a form of fighting against the bureaucracy, creating

urban city culture, taking the ownership of the city to the people and increasing a sense of community. According to the legend, Sompassauna was originally built by three Helsinki-born men, who had found a stove (Grönvall interview). A community quickly formed around it. In 2013 the community founded an association for Sompassauna and made it official in order to prevent the city from tearing the Sauna down during the summer (Grönvall interview). Perceiving Saunas as common gathering grounds and meeting points can be seen as an ideal of a new generation, who has never experienced Sauna as just a place to wash up (Neuvonen interview). For many kinds of groups Saunas might have answered to the lack of common gathering grounds and they might have been the meeting points for certain subcultures (Neuvonen interview).



*Picture 5, Sompassauna*

In addition to public Saunas and private Saunas, there are also choices between public and private. Housing associations have Saunas with weekly Sauna turns for the residents. These weekly gatherings have been social events with the neighbors, filling the need for social intercourse within the community (Haavisto interview). As watching reality series on television today fills our needs of adapting to ones' role and being part of a community, Sauna has been the place where the women who live in an apartment house go together and meet each other to hear the rumors and to keep up the community (Haavisto interview). Children used to participate in these weekly Sauna events, and sit in buckets full of water on the lower benches, while the adults sat on the upper ones (Haavisto interview). Meeting people in Saunas has slowly become one of the core functions of Sauna, with the concept of relaxation, instead of just cleaning and washing up. In Finland almost all of the public swimming halls and

sports clubs and athletic halls have Saunas. Going to Sauna is very democratic in Finland, as it is easy to go to Sauna even without having a Sauna in one's building.

Being part of a Sauna community can be a way of identity creation while using sauna. This has led to places such as Sompasauna, with urban communities, as well as to the rise of other public Saunas (Helistö interview). Arla Sauna has organized separate sauna shifts to immigrants, where the participants have had the possibility to go to sauna with their swimwear on (Helistö interview, Elomaa interview, HS, 13.1.2016). This grows the sauna culture and brings new people to the world of Sauna. The common initiatives enhance the brand of Sauna by giving people different experiences. Also the Sauna Club, Saunaseura, where several people go every week to meet the same Sauna friends they have met there for decades. This, even though private, is an example of an urban community built around Sauna.

Public Saunas that have formed this kind of communities around them are still rare in other Finnish cities than Helsinki. Helsinki is the home of a new wave of urban culture in Finland (Neuvonen interview). In the 1980's there was no culture of public Saunas. With the citizens expecting the city to be available for their use, also the role of Sauna is changing (Neuvonen interview). Several of the interviewees feel that with the new urban culture and people moving from their living rooms into streets and parks and restaurants to do the things they used to do in their apartments, also Sauna becomes more communal (Helistö interview, Neuvonen interview, Grönvall interview).

The popularity of public Saunas is growing again with the increase of communal values and Sauna becoming a branded business and a way of expressing oneself. A concrete example of the growing interest and growing demand is the opening of new public Saunas. Simple and



*Picture 6, Arla Sauna*

artistic Kulttuurisauna was established in 2013 in Hakaniemi, Helsinki, and two new public Saunas, Löyly and Allas, are about to be opened in Helsinki in the summer of 2016. Nowadays the customers in Arla's Sauna consist mostly of 30-40 year old urban people, who come to Sauna either on their own or with some company. People come to Sauna to relax, to enjoy the warmth and to spend time together. Public Saunas are not usually places for heavy alcohol consumption but for washing up and relaxing, and having an urban moment in a good company. Even though most of the public Saunas can also be reserved, pre-ordered Saunas are often more connected to corporate events or drinking nights.

### **Relaxation, healing and an attractive place to cool down**

With the increase in the number of different Saunas, going to Sauna has become a way of identity creation. It is also strongly connected into relaxation and healing, as well as to services and consumption. Back in the days as warm water and bathrooms became available in Finnish households, the culture of public Saunas slowly died (Helistö interview). The use of Sauna was reserved to summer cottage Saunas, often located right next to the lake. Sauna was connected to summer and enjoying oneself more than to washing up. Today, possibly building on the connotation of summer cottage Saunas, the notion of Sauna has changed to people enjoying the silence and relaxation and the soothing, healing and cleaning effects that Sauna has (Haavisto interview, Neuvonen interview). It seems that even though the notion of Sauna is generally understood in Finland as a place to wash up, the majority of Finns use Sauna for relaxation. Going to Sauna, private or public, can be about pampering and relaxation, in addition to possibly being a social act. This perspective is most likely affected by the increasing interest in wellbeing in the society but also by the change in the society into a more hectic one. Associations to a Sauna as a healing place in one's childhood still affect Finns' perception about sauna (Haavisto interview, Elomaa interview).

Sauna is simultaneously a place where one can sit quietly in the steam, and a place where people can say and open up about how they feel (Steam of life, 2010). The Finnish Sauna has usually been a place to be visited naked, and previously both genders used Sauna together, without it being a romantic or a sexual place. In a way Sauna can be seen as a symbol of the Finnish society, where people are all equal. Being naked in the Sauna removes all roles and puts everyone to an equal position. As well the leading ladies as workingmen are naked and



equal in the steam of Sauna. People are not expected to speak much and are not validated by their appearance.

With the culture of consumption, Sauna has also become an attraction. Two new public Saunas, Löyly and Allas will be opened in Helsinki in the summer of 2016. Based on the interview with the founder of Löyly, the new Sauna built into the same building with a restaurant will be used as an attraction that will distinct the restaurant from other places on the area (Vartia interview). The owners feel that the brand of a Sauna including the relaxing element, can work as an attraction factor. Relaxation and healing connected to the exoticism of sauna and unique architecture will hopefully bring both tourists and local people to the restaurant (Vartia interview).

### **Sauna as business and a stable part of the Finnish consumer culture**

As discussed, Sauna is a cultural artifact and a mythological place that is connected to several traditions. However, it is also an integral part of consumer culture in Finland and the Sauna industry is indeed a business industry. As mentioned earlier, there are over 3 million Saunas in Finland (Suomen Saunaseura, Styrman interview), with the amount being higher than the one of registered cars in Finland (Trafic, 2016). This comparison is a great indicator showing the importance of Sauna in the consumer culture in Finland.

Wooden Saunas do not usually require any permanent investments after they are built and the stove is installed, except for buying a new stove time to time (Elomaa interview). The wood can be cut from the woods and the water is often served from the lake. However, in the urban areas the Saunas are usually heated up with electricity. Based on the calculations of Motiva (Yle, 2011), heating up a continuously heating stove in a private apartment takes around 1,5 hours and will require 2500 kWh of electricity, resulting into a cost of around 400 euros annually (Yle, 2011). Having a traditional stove that is heated by once requires less electricity and is therefore a little cheaper; in case the Sauna is heated up weekly, the price will be around 200 euros a year, depending on the price of electricity (Yle, 2011). Based on these calculations the price of a Sauna visit is around 1,5 euros a week for a Finn. This can be backed up with the fact that the Finnish electricity consumption is on its highest on Saturdays.

The Sauna industry is a growing business especially in the eastern countries such as China, but the Finns have not lately been very successful in commercializing sauna abroad (Elomaa

interview, HS., 29.11.2015). Categories connected to Sauna business can be divided into three; Stoves, Sauna products and Sauna services (Elomaa interview). Concerning the first one, there are several big Finnish stove companies, such as Harvia and Helo Group Ltd on the market. Harvia was a small forging company founded in 1950 by Tapani Harvia, which has turned into the leading stove manufacturing company in the world (Harvia, 2016). Helo Group Ltd was initially founded in 1919 in Vyborg, which is currently a part of Russia, but used to belong to Finland. The first prototype of an electric Sauna was built in 1949 and in the 1960's the company was moved to Hanko, where it still operates. During the 1990's Helo acquired the largest manufacturer of Sauna spaces, the German Knollwald Sauna GmbH, along with purchasing an American and a Swedish competitor. Currently Helo Sauna is the largest Sauna product producer, whose products are sold in 80 countries (Helo, 2016).



Picture 7, An advertisement of Harvia's Cilindro stove

The second category consists of products related to Sauna. Sauna from Finland, an organization connecting companies working around Finnish Sauna, has more than 100 member companies who do products and services related to Sauna. Their products vary from Sauna sheets and Sauna lights all the way to stove stones, Sauna yoga and other Sauna services.

In terms of Sauna services there are different services on the market in Finland. In addition to couple of public Saunas and several Saunas that can be reserved, there is a new market for websites offering and comparing different Sauna spaces that can be rented out. Sites such as Saunaonline.fi, Saunatilat.fi, Saunat.co and others are providing people with opportunities to rent out Saunas. Some of them are non-profit communities such as Saunat.co, and some are



making profitable business by being Sauna realtors. Saunas are part of spa experiences in different sauna locations.

It is important to note that based on the research, despite the Sauna industry being a business, the brand of Sauna has not been born through the companies but through the culture. The companies have had the role of providing the consumers with the Sauna products but the stories and the myths that have built the brand have been created within the community. This mythical role that Sauna has in Finland has potentially affected also the Sauna business. Sauna manufacturers have not learned to promote their Saunas as everybody in Finland has been familiar with the concept of Sauna. Thus the manufacturers have not marketed or communicated about the myth abroad either, resulting to them not reaching the full potential in terms of Sauna sales abroad (Elomaa interview).

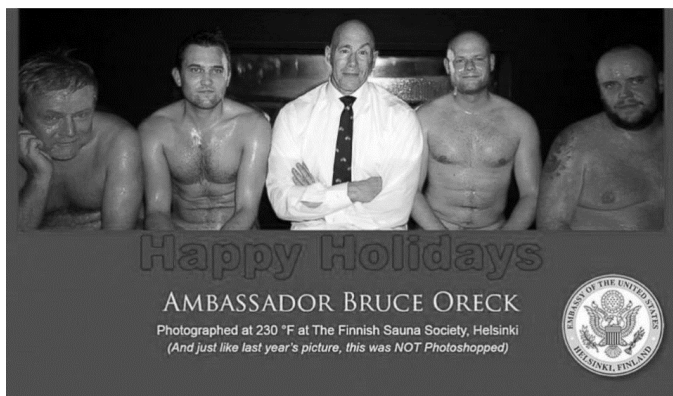
### **The current brand of Sauna**

Based on the interviews and the ethnographic research, it seems that the brand of Sauna is currently very alive and doing well. Sauna is still a focal part of Finnish society. The young generations are taking it as their own and are developing Sauna further and seem to be doing so in the future as well. “The situation with Sauna can be compared to the situation of cottage traditions in Finland. The young generation experiences cottage trips somewhat differently than the older ones, but they still do go to the cottages and to sauna frequently” (Styrman interview). Based on the interviews and the data collected, Sauna is still an essential part of the consumer culture in Finland.

The current Sauna culture in Finland seems to be very easygoing, open, inclusive and fun. Things like Sompassauna and Sauna day, a day during which people open their private Saunas to foreigners for them to join them, organized for the first time in the spring 2016 (Helsingin Uutiset, 2016) are indicators of this. Also the attempt of the engineering students in Aalto University in Helsinki trying to build the largest Sauna in the world, for the First of May in 2016, resulting to host more than 300 people in the Sauna at once in the University campus in Otaniemi (Yle news 2016), is a good example of fun and inclusive culture that is forming around Sauna. It seems that Finnish Sauna culture is alive and well, taking the brand of Sauna further.

It is visible that the Sauna culture is clearly developing with the culture of Finland. For example these three initiatives, Sompasauna, Sauna Day and trying to build the largest Sauna in the world express a certain level of growing urban culture and sense of community. They do not require any ownership for the brand of Sauna but affect the ways in which people perceive Sauna.

In terms of ownership of the brand, it has been very interesting to see that there is a variety of different authors affecting the development of the brand of Sauna. The kind of initiatives and events such as Sauna day and building world's largest Sauna are significant factors



Picture 8, Season's Greetings from the US Ambassador Bruce Oreck

affecting the brand of Sauna. Based on the interviews every persons own experiences are highly important and for most people the most important factor in defining how they experience Sauna. There is no one specific organization – as there is no company, managing the brand of Sauna, but several influencers who can be described as authors, affect the image

with their actions. These people are considered as leaders whose positive or negative opinion about Sauna can shape people's image of Sauna. For example the former Ambassador of US in Finland, Bruce Oreck is a well-known Sauna enthusiast, who sent his official post cards with the images of him sitting in the Sauna (abcnews). People building new Saunas, commenting, and doing things related to Sauna affect the notion of Sauna. This is very normal as Sauna is such a consistent part of the Finnish culture.

The last Sauna trend defined by Keijo Taskinen in the development of Sauna is the mobile Sauna, making it possible to take Sauna almost wherever and whenever (Taskinen, 2011). These are a natural continuation to smart Saunas that already shifted Saunas towards the direction of design products (Taskinen, 2011). Tent Saunas are one example of mobile Saunas (Timo interview). Finns have been taking the mobile Saunas abroad and sharing the story of Sauna to foreigners for several years. A collective of Sauna enthusiasts called "höyryklubi"

meaning the steam club, used to take Sauna to several cities in Europe, USA and other places to show Sauna around (Timo interview, Helistö interview).

Today Sauna is an urban gathering place and a part of urban culture. Several new Saunas are being built into urban settings. This is strongly affected by the global wellbeing movement. The Saunas are natural places where people can relax within the urban surroundings.

### **4.3 Categorizing the data**

In the previous chapter the history of the Finnish Sauna in the Finnish society was presented, based on the historical data and the interviews. Deriving from these findings, and the theory of cultural branding, several themes were identified as factors that have affected the creation of the brand of Sauna. The factors were divided into two explaining why and how the brand of Sauna has been born. First ones indicating the reasons WHY the Finnish society in the first place provided a good platform for Sauna to evolve into a brand, and the second ones connecting it into HOW and through which actions the brand of Sauna has been born.

#### 4.3.1 What has allowed the sauna to evolve into a brand in the Finnish society?

##### **Culture of uniformity allowed the creation of a consistent brand**

As explained previously, Finland has for long been a society with a strong cultural uniformity, with people having similar values and a rather homogenic cultural background. As an indication of this, still in 2014 only 4 % of the population of Finland were foreign citizens and only 5,9 % were born outside Finland (Väestöliitto, The Family Federation of Finland), making Finland the West European country with the least foreign citizens (Väestöliitto, The Family Federation of Finland). This has resulted in large extent to a shared and homogenic understanding of Finnish culture, resulting also to common understanding about Sauna. In the interviews it was repeatedly brought up, how the interviewee's own experiences about Sauna are one of the most important features affecting the ways they feel about Sauna.

As the culture and lifestyle in Finland has been rather similar throughout the nation, also the experiences are similar, resulting to a shared vision about what Sauna is about. Almost all of the interviewees mentioned family and how they learned to go to Sauna already as a child, when asked about their relationship to Sauna. Experiences were closely connected to

summers in the cottage, going to Sauna with parents and grandparents, and sharing relaxed moments in peace.

This uniformity in the society has provided a platform for a consistent brand to be born. Referring to a brand team in a company: when the team has a shared vision and a common understanding about what they want a brand to become, the result is most likely the best. It can be stated that the ownership of the brand of Sauna was divided to all the members of Finnish society. The values and the soul landscape of the Finns were quite similar, including the same myths and the same stories. This can be compared to the culture having only one owner. Thus, the brand of Sauna could develop as a part of “being Finnish”. The brand of Sauna has obviously sourced from the brand of “Finnishness”, as well as affected it as they are so closely connected. This way, the common culture in Finland where most of the Finns live a rather similar life in terms of values, is one of the features that have made the creation of a shared brand of Sauna possible.

The importance of shared stories is big when creating a brand (Randazzo, 2006). Many of the interviewees mentioned their father or mother or grandmother as the one who taught them how to “behave in Sauna”. This way the stories and patterns of behavior have moved from generation to generation, without any bigger disruptions in the close history of Finland. Common cultural historical background of Finland has played a significant role in the emergence of the brand of Sauna, as it has helped to create and share the common myth. Sauna has always been present in the Finnish literature, popular culture, media, news etc., and in the everyday life, where people can experience it themselves. This builds up on the myth, which resonates with the consumers and Sauna users, without them necessarily understanding it.

**Due to practical history, Sauna’s position in the Finnish society is very strong.**

In addition to the culture of uniformity, a factor making the Finnish society a good starting point for the brand of Sauna is the fact that Sauna is really closely tied inside the society. Practical history has made Sauna a part of the everyday life of the people. Still in the 1960’s - 1970’s there were several households in urban areas in Helsinki and other cities in Finland with no running water, neither warm nor cold (Helistö interview). It was highly natural to have Saunas for washing up. This had always been the case in the countryside and still is, in several

summer cottages in Finland. When warm water and bathrooms became popular, the culture of public Saunas slowly died. However, people still enjoyed the silence and relaxation and the soothing and cleansing effects that Sauna has. The focus shifted to summer cottage Saunas, often located right next to the lake and the associations connected to Sauna started to shift to summer, peace, calmness and enjoying oneself.

As Sauna has historically been present in the everyday lives of Finnish people, it has become a custom of the society. Everyone knows the ways to behave and has heard the stories about Sauna. Sauna is the normal way of cleaning up and there is a shared understanding about sauna throughout the country. For centuries and centuries every house had their own Sauna for the most important tasks conducted during the human life; giving birth, washing the dead, drying food, washing up, getting ready for the life changing moments with rituals such as bridal Sauna etc. Due to this, Sauna's position in Finland is very strong, making it an important part of people's lives and connecting emotions into it.

In a same way that the United States of America helped Coca Cola to become a national icon, by subsidizing the costs of the factories and regulating the prices during war (Holt, 2003), Sauna as an institution has received a significant push from the society and the state of Finland. There are several examples of this. Sauna allowances for the employees on Saturday evenings have supported people going to Saunas on Saturday evenings. The president showing off Sauna as the embodiment of "Finnishness", especially during the presidency of Kekkonen, has guided the behavior of the whole nation. The fact that the state considered public Saunas so important that their prices had to be regulated was a direct support for Saunas. The regulations concerning city planning stated until last year that buildings of a certain size need to have common Saunas (HS, Järvinen, 9.4.2015). All these factors show that Sauna has been considered as something very Finnish also from the official side and has been given a substantial role in the society. With the governmental support, all these factors have resulted in Sauna becoming an essential and established part of Finnish lifestyle and society.

### **Mental and physical fit with the society (Mindset and the environment)**

The third factor allowing Sauna to become a brand in Finland, is the mental and physical fit that Sauna has with the nation. Finland has provided a good platform for Sauna to become

an iconic brand as the concept has resonated with the soul landscape of the Finns, both in terms of the geographical environment and the Finnish culture and mindset.

Finnish winters are cold and Sauna is a pleasant place to warm up and relax. During the summer the heat of Sauna is relaxing as well, especially followed by a dip in the lake or the sea. Even though Sauna is popular and relaxing everywhere around the world, many of the people interviewed stated that it fits especially the Finns, due to the Finnish mindset. The mindset of Finnish people connecting well to the mindset in Sauna was also emphasized repeatedly in the interviews (Grönvall interview, Haavisto interview). Finns do not necessarily talk much but are good listeners, regard each other as equal and are perceived as a very honest nation. Finns consider themselves as direct and equal people, who do not pretend to be more than they are. This links naturally to Sauna, as in the Sauna one cannot be anything else than he or she is, and cannot hide anything (Haavisto interview, Grönvall interview, Helistö interview).

The traits that are connected to Finnish Sauna have of course been formed during the decades and centuries, based on the traits of the Finns. These two brands, the brand of being Finnish and the brand of Sauna have become what they are, in interaction with each other and based on the environment in which they have developed. They are certainly a well-connected pair, making Finnish Sauna what it is.

In addition to the mental side, the physical side is important. It is very likely that the geography of Finland has significantly affected our love of Sauna. Finnish custom of having a private summer cabin right next to one of the thousands of lakes, has allowed us to enjoy the heat of the sauna. Finns have loved the lakes and spending time around them, and going to Sauna has offered a good reason for this. Weather and geography are therefore practical reasons why Sauna has received a special place in the heart of Finns. Also the nature aspect is important; Finns were considered as the “people from the woods” already in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, due to our preference for hanging out in the nature (Edelsward, p. 52) and the close connection to nature is certainly one of the reasons that has made Sauna important for the Finns.

#### 4.3.2 Through which actions was the brand of Sauna born in the Finnish society?

In the previous chapters the reasons that have allowed Sauna to turn into an Iconic brand were explained. The culture of uniformity, Sauna’s historical role in the society, mental and physical fit with the society and the connection to nature and the national ideology of the Finns have all been prerequisites for the brand of Sauna to be born in Finland in the first place. In the following chapter, the practical ways and actions through which the brand of Sauna has been developed to what it is today will be examined.

#### **Developing with the society and cultural disruptions - retaining the core ideology during changes**

One of the most interesting things when researching the development of Sauna is the multiple roles that it has had in the society and the ways in which Sauna has changed during the years. In cultural branding the need to change with the changes of the society is essential for brands to survive and become iconic (Holt, 2003). The brand of RMS Titanic is a perfect example of this; the brand has been adaptable to cultural change and has therefore gained a mythical status. A boat, which sank in 1912, was turned into such a myth that it was commemorated with different festivities (movies, musicals, murals, magazines, articles, exhibitions and games) still 100 years later (Brown & al., 2013).

Correspondingly, Sauna has developed and changed during the years, which has assisted its’ way to become iconic. While the understanding of Sauna as a whole has stayed the same, both the concept and the role of Sauna have changed significantly in the society. The concept of Sauna has developed from Sauna being a rural room at the cottage, to an urban gathering space in the middle of the city. Simultaneously Sauna has adapted into a private space inside home, out of which it is again developing to an urban meeting point, as the communal mentality is rising. The life cycle and the existence of public Saunas has developed from Finland having a great number of public Saunas, where people used to wash up once or twice a week, to having an increased number of private in house-Saunas and the number of public Saunas decreasing.

With the change of the society the meaning of Sauna has naturally changed. Sauna has changed from a place to wash up into a place to relax and discuss, and again into a place where to meet up and to a place with which to build one’s identity. The room that used to

be there for washing up once a week has turned into a concept of wellbeing and relaxation with friends or family. This is closely connected to the change in the Finnish society, which has in general become a more service-oriented society, instead of being focused on commodities.

Even though the role of Sauna has changed, the core ideology behind the concept has remained the same. This guarantees the success and the familiarity of Sauna for the future generations as it has for the older Sauna users. Sauna is a shared experience for different generations, out of which everyone can develop a version that is most appealing to them. However, the core has stayed the same. According to the interviews people go to Sauna to relax, leaving everything else out. “Nowadays when we are always online, Sauna is one of the few places in today’s world where there is no phone nor internet. When in Sauna, one will be quiet. It is different than normal being” (Styrman interview). It seems that the role and the concept of Sauna may have shifted but the core meaning has stayed the same. Previously people visited Sauna on Saturdays, and it was a ritual finishing the work week. Nowadays as Saturday is no longer a working day, Friday has become the new sauna day (Niemelä interview, Styrman interview). Referring to cultural branding (Holt, 2004), the brand has by necessity reinvented itself, in order to be able to answer the ever changing cultural contradictions that are caused by national ideologies.

### **Addressing the cultural contradictions - Sauna as the link to the national ideology**

Referring to Holt’s theory of cultural branding, brands that turn into icons succeed in addressing national ideologies and the cultural contradictions that they cause (Holt, 2003). The bases for this were created already in the very beginning, when the national identity of being Finnish was strongly built on top of Sauna as the symbol of “Finnishness” (Särkikoski, 2012). In the interviews it turned out that while Sauna users use public or urban Saunas, they still connect Sauna to the rural setting, nature, the Finnish mindset and the idea of getting back to the woods. It can be stated that even though most Finns nowadays live in urban settings, there is still a national ideology of relaxing in the nature, spending holidays in the cottage without wifi or a cell phone, and resting in peace. Consuming Sauna, even in an urban or public setting somehow connects into this national ideology of being close to nature and being able to relax in the nature. By addressing the cultural contradiction of people not being



able to enjoy the nature in the urban settings, Sauna allowed people to feel closer to the national ideologies and simultaneously created a connection to the users.

### **The self-fulfilling circle of Sauna as a part of the culture**

Sauna and the Finnish society have definitely shaped each other. While Sauna has become part of the Finnish culture, its strong position has fed itself and strengthened in the society even more, resulting into Sauna becoming a fundamental part of being Finnish.

Sauna has been part of the society for so long that the old myths are taken as part of the myth of the essence of being Finnish, which from one part has fed the brand of Sauna as part of the brand of being a proper Finn. In the *Seven Brothers* by Aleksis Kivi, which is one of the most famous items of Finnish literature, Kivi describes with patience the brothers' experience of going to Sauna to soothe their hurting wounds and muscles (Kivi, 1873). The notions of Sauna and the society have affected each other, hand in hand through the experiences of the people and the popular culture. These stories and the old tales about folklore have definitely created the notion of Sauna as a place for healing and enhanced the existence of mythical creatures.

As the brand receives a certain position, it is easier for it to grow and for the message to spread. After the critical mass is influenced, the rest of the nation will be more easily convinced. This is closely connected to the fact that Sauna has been part of the Finnish society for a long time, which I stated as one of the core reasons of the Sauna brand having been able to born. It has become part of the culture which has shaped the notion of Sauna. “It is hard to explain to a foreigner, why a Finn wants to go to Sauna; so many emotions are connected to that. Relaxation and feelings of wellbeing. They result of associating Sauna with relaxation and the good memories that we have about Sauna” (Styrman interview).

### **The need to create something to be proud of – Finns making Sauna their own and taking Sauna abroad**

There has always been big enough crowd that has taken Sauna as its own, guaranteeing the success of Sauna and making sure that the vibrant Sauna culture has stayed alive. The “early-adapters” who have during times made Sauna part of the urban culture, have been significant for the success of Sauna, as they have developed the brand further and helped it to develop, which is essential for the brand to succeed, as mentioned before. The nationalistic Finns who

consciously made Sauna a symbol for being Finnish (Särkikoski, 2012) had a significant role in this at the time. The stories of Sauna were written down and thus made into something that the young nation could be proud of. When the Finnish Sauna Society was established in 1937, the first members included several significant people from different fields of the society (Elomaa interview).

In the later stage the early adapters have been the ones building first Saunas into private apartments and inviting their neighbors to visit, resulting into in-house Saunas, and the ones starting to build public Saunas once again, renewing the brand of Sauna once again to be more connected to pampering and relaxation.

The early adapters played significant role in developing Sauna’s brand. One could ask what has been their motivation, and the answer is closely tied into the previous reasons explaining why and how Sauna has become a brand. While Sauna has during the years become one of the symbols of “Finnishness”, it has been a natural thing to be imported and to be proud of, a choice that has made it even more Finnish. Based on this it can be seen that proudness is an important factor in terms of building the brand within a culture. Sauna has been something sufficiently weird while it is sufficiently general and can invoke everybody’s feelings.

### **Summary**

Based on the categorization of this data it seems that there are a lot of strong confluences between the Finnish society, the Finnish culture and the brand of Sauna, and they have all affected the development of each other.

It also seems that the findings about how the brand of Sauna has been born, are somewhat similar to the theory of cultural branding and the ways in which cultural brands are created. It is interesting to see how the practice of brand being born organically somewhat follows the theory of cultural branding. This will be discussed more in detail in the following chapter.

## 5 Analysis and Discussion

This section will further discuss and analyze the findings of this study. It will present the ways in which the findings contribute to the existing theory of brand creation.

### 5.1.1 Contribution Statement

This research is essentially about branding. It contributes to consumer research, cultural branding and place branding theory by including the notion of culture as an actor in brand creation. Therefore this research allows us to better understand the role that culture can have in brand creation. Culture's role as the initiator of a brand has not been taken into account in previous research. This research increases our understanding about the ways in which brands can emerge and be created in branding theory. Based on this study we can see that the emergence of a brand can happen organically from within a society, as a creation of a culture. A brand can be created without the management by a company, an example of which is the case of Sauna. We call this emergent cultural branding.

The three main takeaways from this research can be structured to the following groups; First of all, brands can emerge organically, when certain prerequisites in the culture and in the society are filled. Next, brands that are created through emergent cultural branding are not managed by one entity but via a shared ownership from the community. Finally, in order for a brand to emerge organically, it needs to be meaningful for the community as it does not have a specific owner, but all the contributors are responsible of it and affect the development of the brand.

These three factors connected to Emergent cultural branding will be discussed more in detail in the next chapter. Also the factors affecting the creation of a brand in the first place will be gone through more in detail and the effects of brands emerging from within a culture, without a specific owner, will be reviewed. The required meaningfulness in terms of the case of sauna will also be discussed. Managerial implications and implications for future research concerning the topic will also be provided.

## 5.1.2 Discussion and Theoretical Implications

### **5.1.2.1 A brand can emerge organically with certain prerequisites**

Based on this study it has been proved that a brand can emerge organically from within a society. A brand emerging from within a society requires certain elements to start with and some support from different people and institutions but with these prerequisites it is possible. Based on this study, the environment in which the brand formulates, needs to fill certain requirements, in order to allow the brand to become consistent and to gain a certain status within the community. In addition to the starting ground and the environment having to fill certain pre-requisites, some specific actions that are conducted in the society allow the brand to reach the status of a brand and to become iconic. With these prerequisites and these actions, a brand can emerge from within a culture organically, without management by a specific institution.

The factors identified as elements that allowed emergent cultural branding and supported the birth of a brand were the following:

- 1) Culture of uniformity allowing the creation of a consistent brand
- 2) Strong position in the society caused by practical history
- 3) Mental and physical fit with the surrounding society (mindset & environment)

As these factors were covered, the branding itself happened through actions that are familiar from the theory of cultural branding. The brand was to be connected to national ideologies, brought identity value to the people, and most importantly was able to change with the society in order to stay relevant (Holt, 2004). It seems that in the case of Sauna, Sauna and the society have been so closely connected to each other that the change has happened very naturally.

After the brand has been created, there were several factors assisting the product to become an iconic brand. Based on the data the following factors affecting the creation of the brand in practice were identified:

- 1) Developing with the society – Sauna changed with the cultural disruptions
- 2) Addressing the cultural contradictions – Sauna performed as a link to the national ideology
- 3) Strong position feeding itself – Sauna was naturally part of people’s lives

- 4) The need to create something to be proud of – Finns had taken Sauna as their own

This research shows us that with these actions a brand can emerge organically from within a culture and be turned into a brand.

The Emerging cultural branding follows the actions of cultural branding in terms of developing a brand, but the management is not done by any specific institution. Also, the development and the future of the brand is less clear. Usually the brand managers owning the brand take the brand further, often practically much affected by the consumers. However, the brand managers have a vision about the direction of the brand, and to certain amount also the possibility to affect both the way the brand is perceived and the direction into which it is developing. When the ownership of the brand is shared within a whole community, there is a much greater possibility for the brand to become completely scattered. For example in the case of Sauna, the Finnish society has been uniform enough to be able to generate this kind of brand. In a culture of uniformity, one institution has basically had the ownership, as the society is so homogenous. In the case of Sauna, this has also led to Sauna becoming such a commonly understood brand. However, as the society is changing and becoming more diverse and heterogeneous, the common understanding of Sauna can disappear and there is a danger of shared ownership resulting into a scattered brand.

#### **5.1.2.2 Shared ownership of a brand**

The ownership of the brand is one of the key factors differentiating organic branding from for example cultural branding, conducted by corporations and place branding implemented in co-operation by institutions and the citizens. Based on this research, in organic branding the brand is owned by the community, and as long as the community is uniform enough, the brand will stay consistent.

While the community needs to be consistent, it seems that a certain level of disruption is required within the community to encourage the brand to develop. The so-called early adapters, who every now and then shake the field are necessary to keep the brand of Sauna alive and vibrant. These early adapters are the ones who shift the focus of Sauna into a new direction, guiding the rest of the people to build a new kind of culture together. These disruptions are usually based on the development in the society. Therefore the direction of the society; guided by all the members of the society through their actions, elections,

community building, opinions etc. guide also the change of the brand of Sauna. This is the key to emergent cultural branding; it is completely based on the culture in the society and while the society naturally changes, the emergent cultural brand changes as well, as it is so deeply rooted to the culture of the society.

As the brand is born within a community, no specific person or institution has the ownership of the brand. This allows the brand to develop with the culture and the society, but can cause the brand to become fragmented, in case the culture or the society in which the development happens is too heterogenic. Shared ownership also requires the product or thing to be highly meaningful, as the whole community needs to be willing to take care of the brand, without having the formal responsibility.

I have structured the following table to best be able to explain the differences in ownership of the brand between cultural branding, place branding and emergent cultural branding.

	<b>Cultural Branding</b>	<b>Place branding</b>	<b>Emergent cultural branding</b>
<b>Ownership</b>	Brand is owned by the company	Brand is commonly owned by an organization and the users who experience the place.	Brand is owned by the society and the culture.
<b>Role of culture</b>	Culture influences the brand.	Culture is big part of the brand.	Culture has created the brand.
<b>How the brands are born?</b>	The company creates the brand by using the culture.	Brand is created as a combination of the actions of an organization & the culture of the place and the experiences of the people.	The brand is created as a result of the culture and the habits of a society, and is so embedded to the society that it changes with it.

Even though the ownership is shared, there is still a question of authority and authors in emergent cultural branding. Who are the authors affecting the brand, and who are the authorities who make the brand significant and credible. It seems that in the case of Finnish Sauna and emergent cultural branding the authors are the people themselves and their

friends, relatives and people they go to Sauna with, instead of media or advertisements, which is more the case in corporate branding. Cultural myths and habits resulting from the discussions and experiences shared with these authors are very important factors resulting to emergent cultural branding. People create a shared vision about the brand and implement it via their actions.

In terms of authorities, the leaders of the nation and the opinion leaders are very important for emergent cultural branding, like they are in cultural branding, place branding and in general in branding conducted by corporations.

The Finnish society has been a very unified one, which has from its part allowed the brand of Sauna to emerge. However, the situation is changing with globalization, and the European Union and Finland becoming more open and European. It will be very interesting to see how this will affect the brand of Sauna and the culture. A question can be asked, will the less unified culture results into the lack of ownership of the brand?

### **5.1.2.3 *Strong and meaningful brand***

Based on the research it seems that in order for a brand to emerge organically, it needs to be highly meaningful and thus strong among the people who share the myths and meanings that are connected to it. The close connection to the society, the influence by praised leaders and people's own experiences make the brand meaningful and therefore strong in people's minds. Also the values behind it, which in Sauna's case included for example nationalism, healing and the essence of being Finnish, are factors making the brand strong and allow it to have a stable position in the society.

Meaningfulness is closely connected to the prerequisites defined as the first factor allowing the emergent creation of a brand. When there is a mental and physical fit between the society and the product, the brand is naturally meaningful as it fits the culture. In the case of Sauna this was a result of the common history of Sauna and being Finnish, as well as the healing aspects and the traditional stories being closely tied into the culture. Also the strong position and Sauna's history within the society have increased the meaningfulness of the brand and the fact that Finns have been proud of Sauna has caused it to spread and to stay as an essential part of the society. People have several associations and experiences connected to

it, making the brand of Sauna meaningful. When the product has been connected to the society for years, there has been time for the stories to grow and spread.

### 5.1.3 Managerial Implications

There are several managerial implications connected to emergent cultural branding.

#### **Understanding the importance of the primary factors supporting the birth of a brand**

One of the most important implications of this research is that as companies are the ones building the brands, they can learn from communities, where brands are created organically. They can see what would be the most intuitive way for a brand to be created and how they can enhance this with their own actions. The prerequisites for a brand to emerge organically, 1) culture of uniformity 2) strong position in the society and 3) mental and physical fit with the society offer companies already a lot of relevant starting points. They turn into a strong need for a brand team with a shared vision, the product needing to be something that is needed in the society and fitting with the values of the society.

#### **Benefiting from the organic brands via co-operation and partnerships**

Understanding that in the right surroundings brands can emerge organically is essential for brand research. This creates possibilities for companies in terms of enhancing existing brands in national contexts, co-operating and partnering with them and understanding the value that this kind of brands have, is highly important.

#### **Understanding the ways in which brands are formed**

Based on this research the companies should be encouraged to define the ownership for a brand. This is supported by the note of brands needing to develop with the society, in order to stay relevant, in connection to the realization that brands become easily scattered when there is no one owner. As it is in contradiction with the idea of brands emerging with the society, companies should understand that in case a brand is managed, it should be properly owned. Therefore, when a brand is owned by a community, the other benefits are great, exceeding the potential difficulties of a scattered brand. However, as a company building a brand does not enjoy these benefits, it should have a clear vision about the direction of the brand. A brand is very likely to fall apart or become scattered, in case it does not have a clear owner, which can easily result into losing the meaningfulness.



#### 5.1.4 Implications for future research

This research focused solely on Finland and the brand emerging organically in the Finnish setting and the Finnish environment. Future research around emergent cultural branding could cover the topic of organic branding in other environments, different countries and different cultures. It would be interesting to see, how well the findings of this study would be generalizable to another environment. In addition to researching organic branding in different areas and environments, researching also different communities would shed new light into our understanding about the way brands are born. As the society and the sample of study in this study has been highly homogenous, researching brands that have emerged organically in different surroundings would be interesting. Naturally place branding and personal branding are closely connected to this study, researching the ways in which brands are born and created in these contexts.

In this research emergent cultural branding was researched in the context of a nation but a relevant question would be whether another institution or a community has the same advantage that a nation has, of a common national or communal ideology, backed up by someone or something who has the resources and the authority to support this kind of initiative. For example the vibrant startup community that has formed in Helsinki and Finland could be a good topic to be researched in terms of how the startup brand has skyrocketed in certain communities and ethnographic groups since the emerge of the ideology in the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Additionally, it would be interesting to researching how a brand that has emerged from within a culture of Uniformity will develop and sustain, in case the society becomes a less homogenic one.

## 6 Conclusion

The review on the brand literature revealed that there is a gap in the consumer culture research concerning the role of culture in creating brands. Earlier research has studied the effect that culture has in creating brands only from the perspective of company managing the direction, which is the case in cultural branding. In previous research cultural branding and place branding are the branding streams closest to taking the significance of culture to the formation of a brand into account. However, in neither one of these, the possibility of a brand emerging organically, without the management by a company or an organization, was taken into account. This study found that culture is a noteworthy factor affecting the ways brands are created, all the way to the dimension that brands can emerge organically, from within a uniform culture.

The findings of this study expressed that in a certain environment the brands can emerge organically. The required prerequisites supporting emerge of the brand of Sauna in the context of Finland were a culture of uniformity, Sauna’s close history with Finland and the mental and physical traits of Sauna being good fit with the Finnish society. The factors that made Sauna a brand in Finland was the ability to develop with the society, the nature of Sauna addressing the cultural contradictions, the strong position of Sauna in the society feeding itself and the Finns’ need to create something own, something that the Finns could be proud of. Proudness and the people feeling that the brand is their own, along with all the other factors can result into a strong and meaningful brand emerging within the shared ownership managed by a culture. The factors might vary from case to case but the same patterns could be found in other surroundings.

It was also made visible that in the case of a brand being created by a culture, people’s own experiences are a much more important factor affecting their idea about a brand than what is the case with for example cultural branding, or the traditional understanding of branding.

The study also offered interesting insights into the importance of brand ownership, stating that a shared ownership of a brand can work also in the context of branding. This study shows that the culture and the context in which a brand is created is highly important for the construction of a brand. No brand can exist in a vacuum of no culture, and therefore the importance of culture as both, a creator of a brand and an influencer should be

acknowledged. Hence, the importance of culture to the creation of a brand should be better taken into account.

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### 7.1.1 Interviews:

Risto Elomaa, President, International Sauna Association, Helsinki, 31.5.2016

Joha Grönvall, Sauna enthusiast and a community member, Sompasauna, Helsinki, 15.4.2016

Timo, Sauna enthusiast and an owner of a tent Sauna, Helsinki 15.4.2016

Erika Haavisto, filmmaker and a Sauna enthusiast, Helsinki 20.4.2016

Seppo Heikkilä, journalist, Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE, Helsinki, 21.1.2016

Kimmo Helistö, Owner, Arla Sauna, Helsinki, 19.1.2016

Alexi Neuvonen, Sauna enthusiast and researcher, Demos Helsinki, Helsinki, 20.12.2016

Jussi Niemelä, Vice President of the Finnish Sauna Club, Saunaseura, 20.5.2016

Aapo Mattila, Photographer, Helsinki, 18.1.2016

Katariina Styrman, Executive Director, Finnish Sauna Club, Saunaseura, Helsinki, 11.5.2016

Antero Vartia, Owner, Löyly Public Sauna, Helsinki, 25.1.2016



### 7.1.2 Pictures:

Picture 1., Suomen liikesaunojen liitto ry, Onko Saunamaksuja korotettava? Miksi? Photo: Katariina Helaniemi

Picture 2., Finland's Foreign Minister Karjalainen and Martti Ahtisaari in Sauna in East Africa in 1974, Photo: Foreign ministry of Finland, Available at:  
<http://www.finland.de/public/default.aspx?contentid=234016&nodeid=37053&contentlan=1&culture=fi-FI>

Picture 3., Children in Sauna in the 1950's, Photo: HS, Available at:  
<http://www.hs.fi/ihmiset/a1452747477120>

Picture 4. SompaSauna, Photo: Joha Grönvall, Available at:  
[http://www.sompaSauna.fi/?page\\_id=86&paged=2](http://www.sompaSauna.fi/?page_id=86&paged=2)

Picture 5., Arla Sauna, men's side. Photo: Katariina Helaniemi

Picture 6. Harvia stove. Photo: Harvia, available at:  
<http://www.harvia.fi/content/en/1/10004/Main.html>

Picture 7. Seasons Greetings Card from Bruce Oreck, Photo: abc news, Available at:  
<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2013/12/check-out-the-us-ambassador-to-finlands-hilarious-holiday-card>

