

# 招待報告

## Invited Report

# TELEWORK IN FINLAND

**Reima Suomi**

University of Turku

**ABSTRACT:** This article summarizes the intellectual, practical and academic development of telework in Finland during the last 20 years. It is not based on any own primarily data collection for this article, but rather rests on the long activity of the writer in telework research in Finland. It is summarized that telework has never been a hype in Finland, but that Finns do teleworking rather actively. The whole concept is at risk, as working at home has become a standard way of working for almost all knowledge workers.

### Introduction

Telework in Finland has never been a big trendy issue, neither in practice or academic research. Nowadays, however, most knowledge workers in Finland recognize the phenomenon. The established Finnish word is “etätyö”, also closer to distance work than telework, sometimes the word “joustotyö”, also flexible work is also used.

In Europe, a rather limiting and traditional definition of telework is used:

*Telework is a form of organizing and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract/relationship, where work, which could also be performed at the employer's premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis.*

Also, telework always includes the component of using information technology, and it always has the kind of alternative flavor: it could also be performed at the employer's premises. Still to note is that casual working away from employer's premises is not counted as telework: it is rather normal working.

The last comprehensive European-wide statistics on telework is from year 2005. In Table 1, top twelve teleworking countries in Europe are identified.

From the table, one can see that telework in Finland and other countries are rather usual, but full-time telework is at a rather low level (as compared for example with Austria, UK or Poland).

Table 1 Teleworking in European countries (the group of top 12 countries) (Eurofound 2011)

	% involved in telework at least a quarter of the time or more	% involved in telework almost all of the time
Czech Republic (CZ)	15.2	9.0
Denmark (DK)	14.4	2.6
Belgium (BE)	13.0	2.2
Latvia (LV)	12.2	1.8
Netherlands (NL)	12.0	1.9
Estonia (EE)	11.8	1.4
Finland (FI)	10.6	1.6
Poland (PL)	10.3	2.3
Norway (NO)	9.7	1.3
Sweden (SE)	9.4	0.4
Austria (AT)	8.6	3.2
United Kingdom (UK)	8.1	2.5

### **The Finnish culture, environment and workplace culture as background factors for telework**

In Finland, we have always been proud to have the society operating all year round, even in heavy cold and snow of the winter (modernization and digitalization of railways has anyway taken away a part of this dream, railways seem nowadays to be very dependent on weather conditions in Finland, which has gained a lot of critic). We always keep wondering how the dream of the American kids is to have enough snow coming, so that one would not have to go to school. In Finland, we are used and educated to go to school every day, come it show or not, and if needed, even with skis on your feet. This kind of thinking is in the backbone of much of at least of the elderly population in Finland: a working place is where you must go daily, no matter what the conditions are.

One issue connected to work travel is that of profitability and costs of public transportation. For many places, one daily bus tour carrying workers to work and back is about the only public transportation offering. In the case this turns unprofitable because of

people turning into telework, the only or sparse connections might be lost. However, one must remember that private cars are a dominant mode of transport in Finland: some 80% of work travel is performed with private cars.

Distances in Finland are relatively long as compared with most other countries, and the country is sparsely populated. Traffic jams might come out in Helsinki region and occasionally in some other cities, but traffic is relatively calm and fluent. Avoiding traffic jams is no real reason for doing telework for anyone, expect maybe some special cases.

As it comes to average length of working travel, pressures towards telework are on the increase. Steadily the average length of working travel is growing, and is at the moment 13 km on the average one direction (see Figure 1). The average length of working travel has almost doubled in twenty years. This is because of three factors:

1. specialization of working places
2. larger working areas
3. increased amount of working trips between working areas.

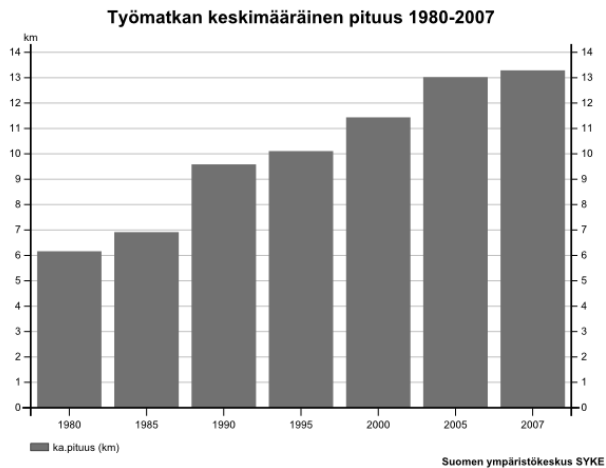


Figure 1 Average working travel direction in Finland 1980-2007 in kilometers (one direction, real distance) (Findikaattori 2011)

Finland is situated safely in the locus of the Asian-European platform, and earthquakes have not happened so far in any remarkable scale. Heavy storms coming from the Atlantic have usually already lost their wildest fury when they reach Finland, and so not even storms do not remarkably harm the Finnish society. Natural catastrophes have also not taught us to do telework.

Distances and natural conditions anyhow sometimes compel Finns to do telework. In the Archipelago, there might be periods of up to two weeks in spring time, when ice is too thick for ships and too weak for vehicles to go on. During this time people in the archipelago must survive on their own, including working.

Special teleworking public premises or telecottages have never become a success in Finland, if anywhere. Some of them were tried in the 1980s and early 1990s, but the projects ended as soon as external project money ended: there was no real demand for such arrangements. Finnish standard of living is not high as it comes to space at homes, as can be seen in Table 2, where Finland is on the European average, but the

weakest among West European Countries. Still people usually find the room to do telework back at home if needed.

In Finland the old joke goes as this: “What is the difference between an innovation garage in the USA and in Finland? Answer: “In USA, when you open the garage door, half of the world market is in front of you, in Finland, half a meter of snow is in front of you”.

Table 2 Average usable floor sizes in selected European countries and in the USA (UNECE 2011)

Rank	Country	Year	floor space in m <sup>2</sup>
1	<b>United States</b>	2003	<b>165</b>
2	<b>Luxembourg</b>	2001	<b>126</b>
3	<b>Slovenia</b>	2002	<b>114</b>
4	<b>Denmark</b>	2005	<b>111</b>
5	<b>Turkmenistan</b>	2002	<b>98</b>
6	<b>Austria</b>	2004	<b>97</b>
7	<b>Georgia</b>	2002	<b>96</b>
8	<b>Turkey</b>	1994	<b>95</b>
9	<b>Spain</b>	2001	<b>93</b>
10	<b>Italy</b>	2001	<b>92</b>
11	<b>Germany</b>	2002	<b>90</b>
12	<b>France</b>	2002	<b>90</b>
13	<b>United Kingdom</b>	2003	<b>85</b>
14	<b>Czech Republic</b>	2001	<b>84</b>
15	<b>Portugal</b>	2001	<b>83</b>
16	<b>Hungary</b>	2005	<b>78</b>
17	<b>Finland</b>	2000	<b>76</b>
18	<b>Serbia and Montenegro</b>	2004	<b>75</b>
19	<b>The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia</b>	2002	<b>72</b>
20	<b>Croatia</b>	2001	<b>71</b>
21	<b>Poland</b>	2002	<b>69</b>
22	<b>Uzbekistan</b>	1999	<b>66,3</b>
23	<b>Bulgaria</b>	2001	<b>63</b>
24	<b>Republic of Moldova</b>	2004	<b>61</b>
25	<b>Estonia</b>	2000	<b>60</b>
26	<b>Kazakhstan</b>	2004	<b>60</b>
27	<b>Lithuania</b>	2001	<b>60</b>
28	<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	2004	<b>58</b>
29	<b>Latvia</b>	2003	<b>57</b>
30	<b>Slovakia</b>	2001	<b>56,1</b>
31	<b>Belarus</b>	1999	<b>50</b>
32	<b>Romania</b>	2002	<b>45</b>
33	<b>Ukraine</b>	2004	<b>34</b>

## Recent openings

A new phenomenon in the Finnish working life is the national teleworking day, which was celebrated for the first time 16.9.2011, and the next day is scheduled for 21.9.2012. The timing is brilliant: these are the heavy times of early autumn, when really everyone is expected to work, and next to no-one is having holidays. It is refreshing to say at that time that maybe you could stay back at home and do telework. The telework day is marketed mainly in Finland through traffic elimination and resulting CO<sub>2</sub>-emission savings, which are very trendy topics in all of Europe at the moment (see Table 3).



Figure 2 The Finnish logo for the national teleworking day (Kansallinen etätyöpäivä (2011))

Finnish teleoperators now and then remind of their services for teleworkers, and are eager to tell how their own personnel has saved money through telework. Especially they of course nowadays want to sell videoconferencing facilities. Microsoft has always been one marketer and supporter of telework in Finland.

Table3 Savings of the first Finnish telework day as advertised on the www-page of the national teleworking day (Kansallinen etätyöpäivä (2011))

Savings in	
Work travelling (km)	386555
Travelling time (h)	008286
Emissions (kg CO <sub>2</sub> )	050565

## Telework and the official Finland

The political and labor union Finland is having some but not very much activity on Telework. The biggest labor union, SAK (which also has relatively little knowledge workers) has led way in this aspect, and for example participated as the Finnish partner to the EU-project Euro-Telework on telework (Euro-Telework 2011).

SAK in its material reminds that a factory floor worker (those that SAK typically represents) seldom has the possibility to enjoy the blessing of telework. This is also supported by the fact that men, classically seen as the stronger gender in labor market, have a better possibility to do telework than women (Bailey - Kurland 2002). In the European study it was found out that about 8.1% of male employees engage in telework, while 5.8% of female employees use this form of work (Eurofound 2011).

In Finland, central labor organizations signed an agreement on the implementation of telework in Finland (Sopimus etätyötä 2005). This agreement has remained quite unknown and without many practical consequences.

One particular activity through which one can kill telework in Finland is to demand a specific agreement on that. First, the model agreements often are long and cumbersome, and might contain unfair conditions. Second, few representatives of the employers have the courage to start writing such contracts. Third, workers also dislike these agreements as they fear that in the agreement are hidden parts that weaken their position.

## Conclusions

To conclude the total situation of telework in Finland, one can conclude that telework has become “business

as usual". Commercialization of ICT, also behavior where you mix work and leisure devices, platforms, services and information has become commonplace and contributed to this trend. When you take a look for example at your Facebook to check out what your friends are doing, simultaneously you take a look at the work- and profession-related Facebook items.

A phenomenon that might be called availability culture has also penetrated Finland. You do not have to work all the time, but you must be available, if your employer, your colleagues or your customers might need you. This can become very mentally burdening over time.

In workplaces where attendance control is not run, quiet acceptance has become a dominant way of performing telework. Telework is seen very much as an management problem in Finland and the Nordic countries. (Suomi - Pekkola 1998; Bergum 2009). People stay back at home for working for a few days weekly, sometimes more, sometimes less, and this is accepted quietly, even though not always liked by employers.

Financial constrains for telecommunication in telework were finally wiped away in Finland as well as in most other countries around year 2009, as Finnish teleoperators began to offer mobile connections with unlimited data transfer. A typical price would be 20-30 euros a month depending on the speed of the connection. However, finally, unlimited mobile surfing and data transfer was available for everyone. There is anyway a lot of discussion on the fear that this business model cannot be sustainable for the teleoperators, and that they must limit the amount of data traffic sooner or later anyway (take for example the scenario that people start transferring HD movies around with this unlimited account).

Academic research on telework in Finland can be found in some institutions. The Finnish telework research classic is the dissertation of Juhani Pekkola (2002), who has also made a long career in the former Finnish ministry of Labor in telework related research. Quite recently, Norwegian Svein Bergum published his telework-related dissertation at Turku School of Economics (nowadays a part of University of Turku).

## References

1. Bailey, Diane – Kurland, Nancy (2002) A review of telework research: findings, new directions, and lessons for the study of modern work. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* Vol. 23 No.4, 383-400.
2. Bergum, Svein (2009) Management of teleworkers – managerial communications at a distance. Doctoral dissertation, Turku School of Economics Publication A-10:2009.
3. Eurofound (The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions) (2011) Telework in the European Union. Available at: [http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/studies/tn0910050s/tn0910050s\\_3.htm](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/studies/tn0910050s/tn0910050s_3.htm), fetched 28.11.2011.
4. Euro-Telework(2011). WWW-site of the Euro-Telework project. Available at <http://www.telework-mirti.org/>, fetched 26.11.2011.
5. Findikaattori (2011). Työmatkan pituus (in Finnish) Original source SYKE and Statistics Finland. Available at: <http://www.findikaattori.fi/70/>, fetched 1.12.2011.
6. Kansallinen etätyöpäivä (2011). WWW-site of the campaign. Available at <http://www.etatyopaiva.fi/fi/etusivu>, fetched 27.11.2011.
7. Pekkola, Juhani (2002) Etätyö Suomessa - fyysiset, virtuaaliset, sosiaaliset ja henkiset työtilat. Doctoral dissertation, Svenska handelshögskolan Publikationer 104.
8. Sopimus etätyötä... (2005) SOPIMUS ETÄTYÖTÄ KOSKEVAN PUITESOPIMUKSEN TÄYTÄNTÖÖNPANOSTa (Agreement on implementing the framework agreement of telework in Finland).
9. Suomi, Reima - Pekkola, Juhani (1998) Inhibitors and motivators for telework: some Finnish experiences. *European Journal of Information Systems* Vol. 7, 221-231.
10. UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) (2011) Average estimated useful floor space of dwellings by number of rooms. Available at: [http://www.unece.org/hlm/prgm/hsstat/Bulletin\\_06.html](http://www.unece.org/hlm/prgm/hsstat/Bulletin_06.html), fetched 1.12.2011.