

Coming Home with Ideas:

TAKEAWAYS FROM FINLAND, NEARLY 20 YEARS IN THE MAKING



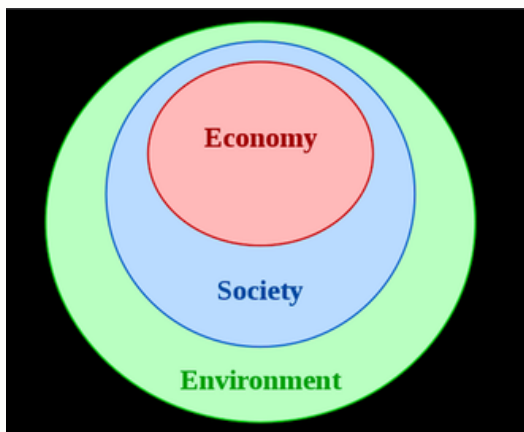
*Commentary by Kathryn Fernholz,
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In April, I visited Joensuu, Finland for the [10th Karelia Symposium](#) nearly two decades after visiting as a participant in the [Seeing the Forest AND the Trees Study Tour](#). Throughout my return, I held three questions in my mind: What Finnish innovations are ready to grow in the U.S. market? How has the sustainability conversation in Finland shifted over time? And what challenges are shaping Finland today? I was grateful to come home with answers and insights for all three.

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In terms of innovations, one clear candidate for greater U.S. adoption is Finland's modern log-construction sector, including technologies for [non-settling logs](#). The CEO of [Kontio](#), the world's largest log home manufacturer, presented at the Symposium. These innovations offer beauty and architectural flexibility that will intrigue U.S. consumers. They blend biogenic materials, precision manufacturing, and contemporary design. As the U.S. markets continue to look for construction and housing solutions that address multiple challenges - efficiency, labor, flexibility, quality, etc - these innovations have a role to play. Furthermore, since the data suggests there is a [need to build a home every second through the end of the decade](#) to meet global demand - construction innovations like this will continue to be in the spotlight.



The answer to the question of evolution in sustainability thinking was equally striking. I was pleased to see reference to the [concentric-circles model](#), which positions Environment as the encompassing system within which Society and Economy operate. Unlike the three-legged stool or Venn diagram for [sustainability](#) - both of which imply proportional equality among the three dimensions or treat sustainability as a narrow area of overlap - the concentric circles model emphasizes

interdependence. This model acknowledges that all living things, including people, exist within and influence the environment. Growth (or contraction) in one circle inevitably interacts with the others, and strengthening environmental health is a strategy for strengthening communities and livelihoods (i.e., nurture the outer circle if you want the inner two to thrive).

In terms of my final question, and given the global nature of forests and forest-based products and services, it is not surprising that some of [Finland's current challenges](#) echo those in the U.S.: workforce, housing, research and innovation needs, and questions about business operating environments. The details differ, but the themes are unmistakably global.

These observations reinforce the value of international collaboration across governments and businesses, and the need for reviving long-standing partnerships, amplifying what works whether it is new or old, and creating space for shared learning and innovation. Some approaches simply need to be dusted off and refreshed; others deserve to be scaled across generations; still others will require new thinking altogether.

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As I reflect on the trip, I return to [three values](#) Dovetail highlighted in a recent annual report: working locally, collaborating broadly, and acting with multiple generations in mind. Finland offered a timely reminder that these principles remain essential guides.



Special thanks to:

[Sandra Lupien](#), Fulbright Finland Scholar and Director, [MasTimber@MSU](#) at Michigan State University

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