



# **Cultural Adaptation - How to Make the Most of Your Stay?**

Kirsi Konttinen  
International Mobility Services  
2 Sept 2025



# Aims for This Session

- Trying to understand yourself
- Trying to understand Finland and its systems



# Topics for This Session

- Aims and expectations
- Culture and intercultural challenges
- Finnish values and characteristics
- Adaptation process
- Practical tips



# Your Aims?

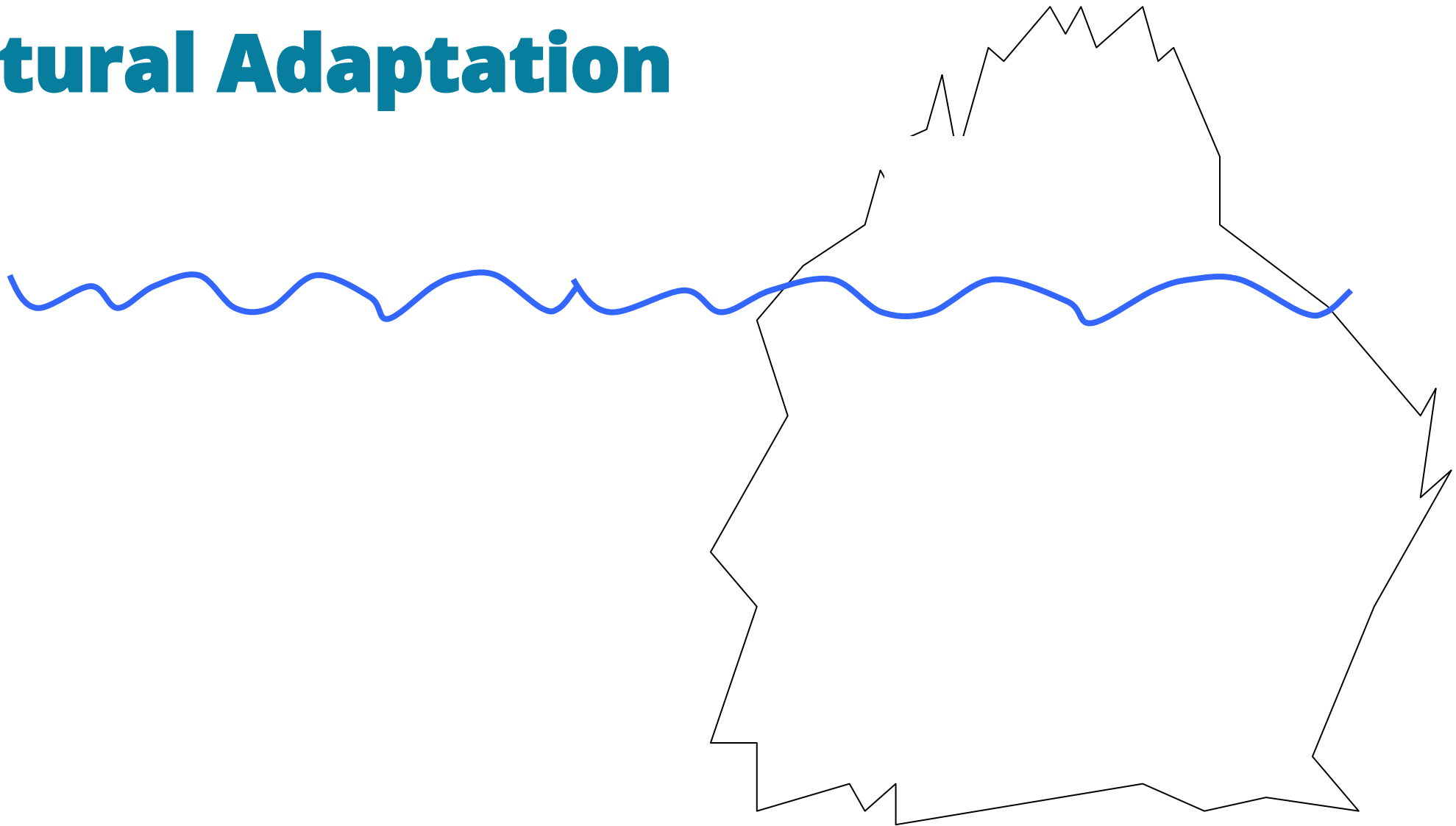
- Why do you want to study at UEF? 😊
- What are your aims?
- How can you achieve your goals?
- How much effort are you willing to put into achieving them?
- Are you able to adjust your actions and thinking?



# Your Expectations?

- What do you expect from your studies at UEF?
  - Academic expectations?
  - Future career?
  - Learning from different cultures?
  - Making new friends?
  - Learning about yourself?
  - Degree seeking students: staying in Finland after graduation?
  - Exchange students: coming back for more?

# Cultural Adaptation

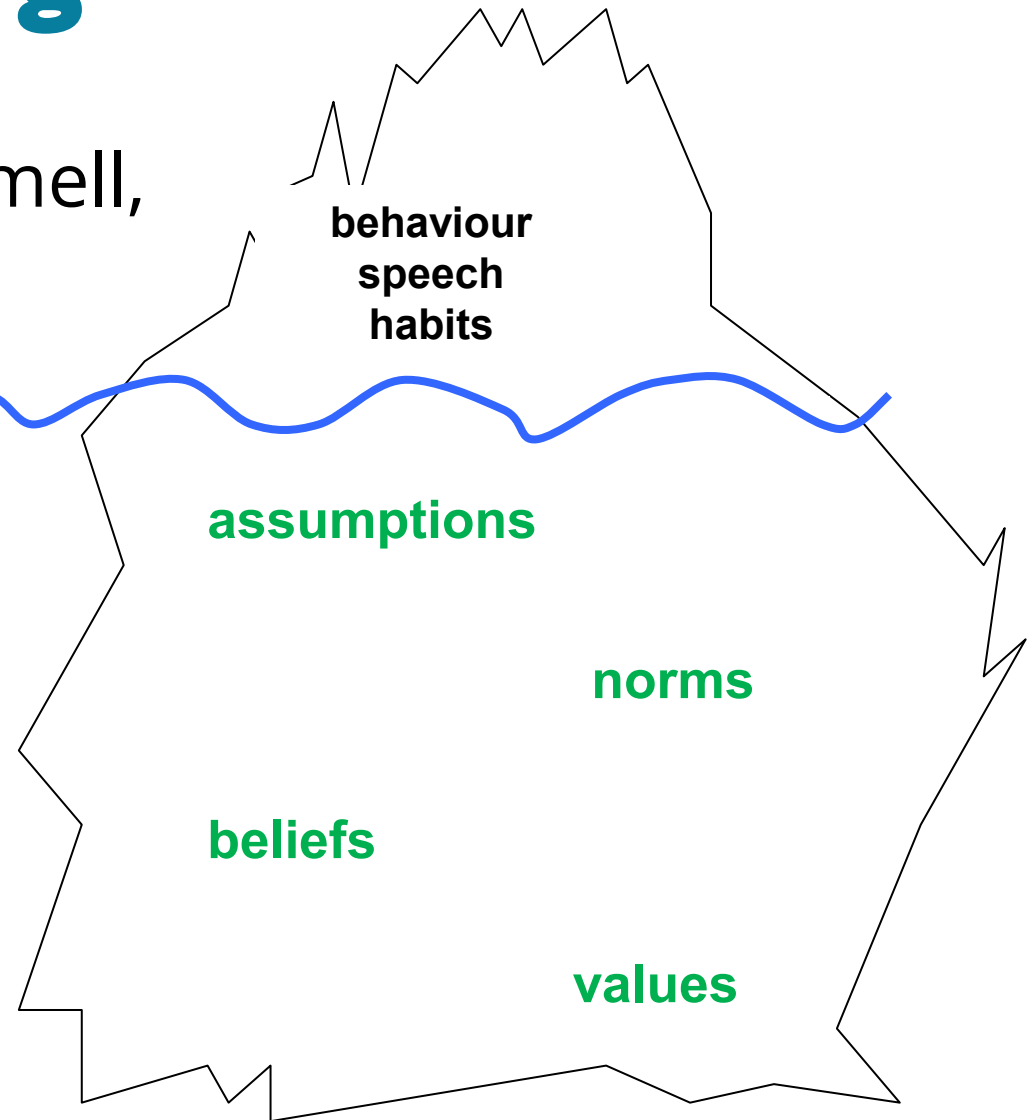


# Culture As an Iceberg

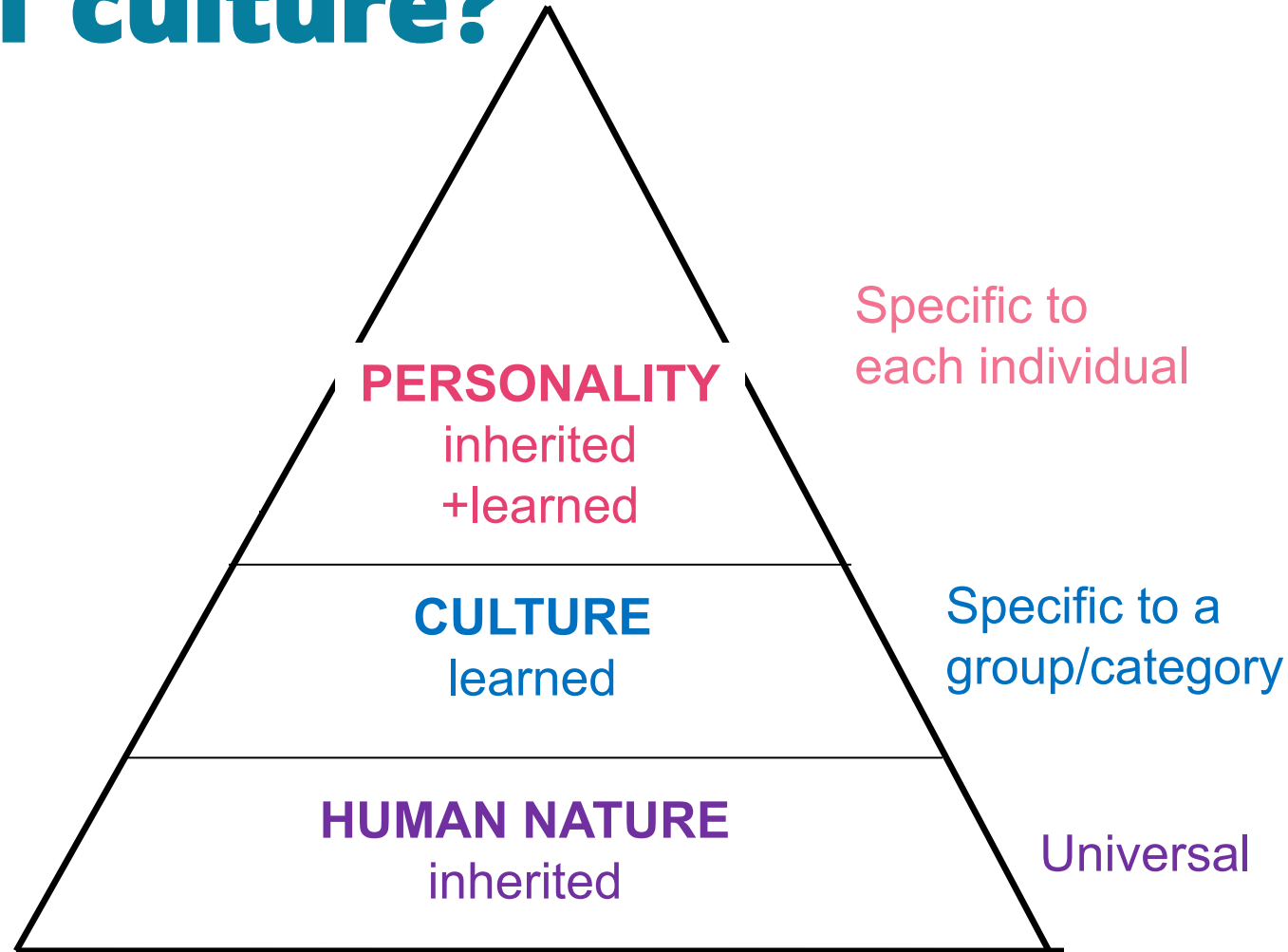
Things that you can see, hear, smell,  
taste, touch

Things which are more difficult  
to observe or notice

Edward T. Hall, 1976



# What is NOT culture?



Geert Hofstede, Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind, 2005



# Intercultural Challenges



- Ethnocentrism

- “I am normal, you are odd, they are crazy!”
- My way is the normal way, your’s is strange.

- Stereotypes

- Can we avoid stereotypes?
- How to become aware of your own stereotypical thinking?

- How to recognise cultural differences?

- And similarities?

# Intercultural Challenges



## ■ Perception risks?

- selective perception: We see things we expect to see. We look for confirmation for our thoughts. We tend to ignore things which would challenge our understanding.
- quick interpretation: We jump into conclusions without noticing it.
- interpretation of others' behaviour in terms of our own culture

# Examining Cultural Differences

(Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory)

Some cultures are more  
**collectivistic...**



some are more  
**individualistic...**



# Finnish Values and Characteristics?

infoFinland.fi: [Finnish customs](#)

- Equality
- Trust
- Individualism (independence)
- Own space
- Honesty and punctuality
- Modesty
- Nature





# Finnish Values and Characteristics?

infoFinland.fi: [Finnish customs](#)

## ■ Equality

- between women and men: taking care of children and home together, women can work even if they have small children (day care for children), parental leaves for mothers and fathers
- public schools from day care to university: 9-year schooling for everybody with the same curriculum
- low hierarchy: professors stand in the same lunch queue as students
- constructive learning: teachers are not all-knowing gurus but the learning is built together with teachers and students



# Finnish Values and Characteristics?

infoFinland.fi: [Finnish customs](#)

- **Trust** [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/drivers-of-trust-in-public-institutions-in-finland\\_52600c9e-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/drivers-of-trust-in-public-institutions-in-finland_52600c9e-en.html)
  - Finnish society is based on trust.
  - trusting other people and authorities
  - working life: flexible working hours, working from home
  - **Honesty** is expected and valued.
  - How does trust show in your studies?





# Finnish Values and Characteristics?

infoFinland.fi: [Finnish customs](#)



## ■ Independence (individualism)

- national independence: Finland's Independence Day 6 Dec is a public holiday.
- personal independence: children at the age of 7 can stay alone at home, young people move out from their childhood homes early
- financial independence: society offers financial support for example for the unemployed, for students, for parents
- in studies: a lot of independent studying, contact teaching is only a small part





# Finnish Values and Characteristics?

infoFinland.fi: [Finnish customs](#)

## ■ Peace, Silence, Personal Space

- Nature is important for Finns.
- 509 000 summer cottages in Finland (5.6 million people)
- An ideal summer cottage is by the lake in the middle of nature, the further away from the neighbours the better.
- Peace, silence and personal space are often appreciated.







# Finnish Values and Characteristics?

## ■ Communication Style?

- Direct way of communicating
  - Directly to the point (may seem rude)
  - Say what you mean and mean what you say (How are you?)
- Not making a number of yourself (modesty)
  - Finns don't use names too often.
- Leaving people alone, let them have their peace and quiet can be considered more polite than talking to them. Especially if you don't know the other.
  - Greeting people?
- Finns speak only if they have something to say?
- Silence can be relaxing and comfortable, not awkward.





# Cultural Differences in Classroom

- How late is “late for class”?
- Can you disagree with your lecturer? Openly?
- What do lecturers expect from students?
- What is an essay?
- What are the exams like?
- Can you walk out of the exam if you don't like the questions?





# Adaptation Process

- Intercultural Communication studies cultures and communication
- Central concepts
  - Identity, stereotypes, verbal and nonverbal communication, communication styles, politeness, perception, time, personal space, individualism/collectivism, hierarchy/power distance, adaptation process



# Cultural Adaption Process U-curve

Honeymoon phase

Adaptation

Feelings ⇅

Time →

Pre-departure  
stress

Frustration  
Crisis  
“Culture shock”



# Some Practical Tips if It Gets Hard

- Keep in mind: perfectly normal reaction and part of adaptation process – no stage lasts for ever!
- Your reactions show that you are adapting.
- The process is different for everybody.
- **Give yourself time to adjust** and don't push yourself too hard.
- Try to see it as a learning experience.
- Think what you have learned already, how much more you understand than you did.
- Sometimes you will understand something only after a long time...
- Remember your own “tried and tested” ways of reducing stress.
- If things are difficult, **talk to someone!**





# Some Practical Tips if It Gets Hard

- Try to do the same things you normally do at home like sports, meeting friends, talking to your fellow students, writing a diary ...
- Or start a new hobby ...
- Activities offered by the student associations (JEIS/SAVO, the Student Union, student associations different clubs): get-togethers, movie nights, parties, meetings, trips
- Outdoor activities (walking or skiing in forests, walking, skiing or skating on lakes) – being or moving in nature lowers blood pressure and heart rate, improves immunity and spirit, helps in relaxing...
- Campus sports: Sykettä Joensuu/Sykettä Kuopio





I hope you will enjoy life and learning at UEF!

Kiitos