



# Uses of local ethnic television: *Finland Calling* (1962–2015) and Michigan's Upper Peninsula

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## Abstract

*Finland Calling* was a bilingual Sunday morning television program targeting Finnish Americans and airing on WLUC-TV, a local commercial station in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The show ran from 1962 to 2015, just over 50 years. This article uses it as a case study to argue that if we look beyond prime-time network programming, we can see that US television has not always promoted a homogeneous national culture; rather, it has at times been a resource for the development of distinctive local and ethnic cultures. Based on an analysis of *Finland Calling* episodes and written sources about the show, the article demonstrates that while the show's primary target audience was the local Finnish American community, it also resonated with broader conceptions of Upper Peninsula culture, participated in Finnish American cultural activities at the North American level, and emphasized transnational connections between the Upper Peninsula and Finland.

## Keywords

ethnic television, Finnish Americans, immigration, local television, Michigan's Upper Peninsula, TV hosts, US television history

*Suomi Kutsuu – Finland Calling* (WLUC-TV) addressed Finnish American television viewers in Michigan's Upper Peninsula on Sunday mornings for more than 50 years. Broadcast from the small town of Negaunee, *Finland Calling* first aired in 1962 and continued until the retirement of its long-time host, Carl Pellonpaa, in 2015. The bilingual show featured Finnish music, videos about Finland, interviews with local and

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Finnish guests, information about community events, and messages from viewers. The program's opening theme was an orchestral version of the song 'Kotimaani omi Suomi' ('Finland Is My Homeland'), written in the late 19th century by Finnish American Jooseppi Riippa. The studio setting remained largely unchanged for decades: the homely decor included a sofa, table, Finnish and American flags, and knick-knacks, such as pottery and plastic flowers. As a reference to the colors of the Finnish flag, Pellonpaa typically wore a pale blue suit with a blue and white tie.

*Finland Calling* was made with modest resources, but it is nevertheless an exceptional program in US television history: few if any other ethnic television programs have survived for over 50 years. Television programs in languages other than English have been offered on specialized Hispanic networks (Beck, 2010; Rodriguez, 1999), local ethnic television stations catering to immigrant communities in large cities (Naficy, 1993), and on local public television as specialized programs serving ethnic minorities (Browne, 2007: 128, note 19). In this context, *Finland Calling* was exceptional as a bilingual program on predominantly English-language local commercial television, addressing a European ethnic group outside major cities and celebrating a foreign national culture.

Historical research on US television has largely concentrated on network television, highlighting its role in constructing national culture through the formation of values concerning family, the home, and consumer culture (e.g. Gomery, 2008; Lipsitz, 1990; Spigel, 1992). Amanda Lotz (2014: 3) characterizes the prevalent understanding of "television as we knew it" as a "mass medium offering programs that reached a broad, heterogeneous audience and spoke to the culture as a whole." This understanding of television was established during the so-called network era (early 1950s to 1970s), when "networks spoke to the country en masse and played a significant role in articulating postwar American identity" (Lotz, 2014: 22). Since the 1980s, the amount of available television channels has grown, the medium has moved to address niche audiences, content has spread to different platforms, and audiences have fragmented (Lotz, 2014). However, if we consider a local television program like *Finland Calling*, it is clear that "television as we knew it" may have meant very different things in different places and at different times. *Finland Calling* was a steady part of the local television landscape in the Upper Peninsula throughout its life, but it had little in common with network programming that targeted a large heterogeneous audience. If we examine local television programming, we see that even during the network era, television offered room for different kinds of audiences. Hence, studying local, non-network programming outside prime time can offer new perspectives to the history of US television.

In this article, I ask what kinds of audiences *Finland Calling* addressed and what kinds of engagements with the local, ethnic, and transnational the program enabled. My aim is to use *Finland Calling* as a case study to explore how local television can help broaden our understanding of US television history. *Finland Calling* catered to a specific, linguistically defined local audience, but I argue that it also reached beyond it, resonating with broader aspects of Upper Peninsula culture, building transnational connections between Michigan and Finland and contributing to Finnish American culture in North America. Over the years, *Finland Calling* seemed to forge a particularly strong relationship with older viewers who may have followed the program for decades. The show

offers a specific case study, but as an exceptionally long-lived local program, it also offers an opportunity to explore aspects of US television culture left out of more macro-level accounts. The program stayed on air through many transformations in the US television landscape, highlighting change and continuity in television culture.

Studying the history of local television can be challenging, as its programming has not been systematically preserved in US public archives. Much early live local television has not survived, and local television produced outside major coastal cities has been especially poorly archived (Hutchison and Birley, 2008). Likewise, early live episodes of *Finland Calling* have not been preserved. However, the Migration Institute of Finland holds a large collection of episodes broadcast between 1989 and 2015. For this study, I selected a sample of these episodes, including both regular and special episodes (such as the 50th anniversary episode in 2012).<sup>1</sup> A 20-episode sample offers a good impression of the program's typical features and development, although not all its variations are included. My discussion of the early history of *Finland Calling* is based on written sources: Pellonpää's (2011) published memoir (*Suomi Kutsuu a.k.a. "Finland Calling: A Lively Autobiography by the Host of Television's Longest-running Variety Program*), an archived oral history interview with Eugene Sinervo (the program's co-host in the early 1960s), and media coverage of *Finland Calling*, including from the Finnish American newspaper *Amerikan Uutiset (News of America)*.<sup>2</sup>

## A Finnish American program for local commercial television

The Michigan Upper Peninsula has an exceptionally large Finnish American population, which made a commercial television program in Finnish possible. Migration from Finland peaked between the 1870s and the First World War, when about 300,000 Finns emigrated to North America (Kero, 1996: 54–8). While Finnish migrants formed a tiny part of the US population, in certain regions of the Upper Midwest, they were a significant segment. Michigan's Upper Peninsula, situated north-east of Wisconsin and surrounded by Lake Superior, Lake Michigan, and Lake Huron, attracted many Finnish immigrants who found work in the mining industry. Today, the Upper Peninsula has the largest proportion of people with Finnish ancestry in the United States. The region is relatively sparsely populated, constituting roughly a third of Michigan but only around 3% of the state's population. Thanks to the large immigrant population and the region's relative isolation, Finnish has remained in use for generations (Remlinger, 2016: 168–9, 171–2 and 2017: 38, 45–8).

*Finland Calling* belongs to a tradition of special programs for European ethnic groups in US broadcasting. Beginning in the 1920s, radio stations in some cities broadcast weekly shows dedicated to various European audiences, featuring a host in the native language, "music from the 'homeland'" and information about community events (Browne, 2007: 108). Radio stations could fill broadcasting time by selling commercially problematic time slots to immigrant producers who were responsible for acquiring sponsors. America Rodriguez (1999: 359) notes that, in the 1920s and early 1930s, minority language programming was very much "shaped within the immigrant enclave,"

with producers engaging community sponsors face to face. In the 1950s, as immigration from Europe slowed down and immigrants became assimilated into the English-language mainstream, radio broadcasting in European languages declined (Rodriguez, 1999: 363). On television, local stations hosted ethnic European shows, such as “European themed polka-parties” (Hutchison, 2015: 1176), with performers from different countries showcasing their national dances and costumes to provide “difference as local color” (Anderson and Curtin, 1997: 298–9). In the sparsely populated Upper Peninsula, radio and television programming for a particular European ethnic group could survive longer than was typical in cities.

The Upper Peninsula has a long history of Finnish American media production, with the first Finnish-language newspapers published in the 1870s (Holmio, 2001: 367–75). By 1930, with the arrival of radio, pastors and the Finnish American Suomi College in Hancock were the first to broadcast in Finnish. Several radio stations in the Upper Peninsula broadcast news in Finnish from 1937 onwards. For example, WHDF in Calumet broadcast a half-hour news program six days a week during the Second World War, relating news of European events in Finnish (Holmio, 2001: 377–8). Hancock radio station WMPL broadcast a Finnish program called *Kestikievari (The Inn)* with Finnish news, music, interviews, and commercials every weekday for several decades after 1937 (Kero, 1997: 285–7). Additionally, a bilingual program about Finnish and Finnish American cultural history with Finnish music was broadcast for about a decade beginning in 1958 (Holmio, 2001: 378).

Building on this tradition, *Finland Calling* was created as a new kind of program for local commercial television. For WLUC-TV, at the time a primary CBS affiliate, local programming was valuable in creating a distinct station identity and connecting with local communities and businesses. *Finland Calling*’s original co-host, Eugene Sinervo, narrated the program’s origins in an oral history interview in the 1970s. Sinervo started working at WLUC-TV as a studio artist in 1956, rising to a managerial position. He recalled that his desire to broadcast a Finnish program became something of a joke to station management. *Hawaii Calls* – a long-running weekly radio program showcasing Hawaiian music and performers and transmitted widely to stations across mainland America (Wynne, 2014) – eventually provided Sinervo with a model:

I says, “That shouldn’t be Hawaii Calling [sic]. Not up here in the U.P. [Upper Peninsula]. That should be Finland Calling or better yet, Suomi Kutsu[u], you know, like they say in Finnish.” And right away, well, then I remembered well who was sponsoring this Hawaii Calling . . . it was travel agencies and airlines and this type of thing. (Sinervo, 1975)<sup>3</sup>

The main lesson from *Hawaii Calls* was the idea that travel agencies could be drawn to sponsoring a program showcasing ethnic culture. According to Sinervo, WLUC-TV’s general manager promised that the station would start a Finnish program if Sinervo found a sponsor. Sinervo contacted an Upper Peninsula travel agency owner who agreed to sponsor the program: “He says, ‘All the Finlanders in the U.P. want to go back to Finland and you can sell them all a ticket’” (Sinervo, 1975). Pellonpaa’s (2011: 83–4) later account suggests that the idea for *Finland Calling* originated with the travel agency. Regardless of which story is correct, both accounts highlight that sponsorship was essential to getting a Finnish program on air.

*Finland Calling* seems to have fulfilled the sponsor's and station's initial expectations. According to Sinervo (1975), the first episode was half an hour long, but "the mail was so fantastic from the first week's show" that the program was immediately extended to an hour and eventually, for a while, to two hours, as "we had more sponsors than we could handle. Everybody wanted to climb on the wagon then and be part of that 'Finlanders' show [. . .]." *Amerikan Uutiset* reported that so many local businesses wanted to advertise on *Finland Calling* that there were not enough commercial slots available. According to the paper, some businesses outside the region were interested in buying the program, but the station did not want to sever the connection to smaller local sponsors (Davidson, 1962). Although these accounts may be exaggerated, the fact that the program's run time was extended suggests that it attracted advertising. However, WLUC-TV was clearly cautious about where to schedule a minority language program: *Finland Calling* was initially placed in a marginal time slot: 8:00 or 8:30 a.m. on Sunday morning. In the early 1960s, other local stations did not broadcast anything so early on Sunday mornings.<sup>4</sup> Later on, *Finland Calling* was broadcast at varying times and as late as 11:00 a.m., with more competition from entertainment programs on other channels.

As a way of addressing its Finnish American audience, the Finnish language was always an integral element of *Finland Calling*. The program was hosted initially in Finnish, with some English interjected when the hosts did not know how to say something in Finnish. However, the program's creators soon realized that not all viewers understood Finnish, and *Finland Calling* became bilingual (Pellonpaa, 2011: 117). In the archived episodes, Pellonpaa typically opened the program with a greeting in Finnish before introducing the day's topics in both languages. He interviewed Finnish guests in Finnish, often with a shorter reprise in English. Local guests from the Upper Peninsula were typically interviewed in English, but some spoke Finnish. Pellonpaa read birthday and anniversary greetings from viewers mainly in English and announcements of local events in both languages. English became somewhat more prevalent over time. Whereas the earliest archived episodes (4 April 1989; 28 May 1989) were almost entirely in Finnish, the Christmas episode of 26 December 2010, was presented mostly in English, and with many songs in English as well. The increasing reliance on English most likely reflected the falling number of Finnish speakers in the local Finnish American audience. At the same time, the use of English made *Finland Calling* available to non-Finnish American viewers.

In the archived episodes of 1989 and 1990 that included commercials, advertisers were local businesses, such as hardware stores and car dealerships. There were some commercials in Finnish, indicating that Finnish speakers were still considered a viable audience. Pellonpaa hosted tours to Finland and Scandinavia, which suggests that *Finland Calling* could have provided a platform for reaching a wider Nordic American audience as well. It appears that, later, *Finland Calling* needed some support from viewers to continue. Pellonpaa would thank supporters of the show and read out names of people who had donated money to join the *Finland Calling* 100 Dollar Club (21 June 2009). In this way, the audience was also invited to help keep the program running. In sum, that *Finland Calling* was able to function within the logic of local commercial television for such a long time depended on the demographics of the Upper Peninsula and, to a great extent, on Pellonpaa's efforts to maintain a connection with his audience.

## Carl Pellonpaa as an Upper Peninsula television personality

*Finland Calling* began at a time when many old Finnish American cultural institutions, such as churches, cooperatives, and newspapers, were closing down (Kero, 1997: 254–5, 258–9, 276–8). As a continuation of this tradition of Finnish-language cultural activities, *Finland Calling* already seemed somewhat anachronistic when it started. Pellonpaa, who was born in 1930 and passed away in 2018, later reflected that the program’s creators expected *Finland Calling* to soon come to an end as the “old Finns” died (Maki, 2015: 6). At the time, he could not foresee the growing cultural visibility of white ethnicity that would develop in the 1970s in different cultural fields, from Hollywood cinema to the introduction of the national Ethnic Heritage Studies Program (Jacobson, 2006). On network television, white ethnic characters proliferated in the 1970s on shows such as *All in the Family*, *Welcome Back, Kotter*, and *Rhoda*. The so-called ethnic revival questioned the American melting pot myth and fostered interest in the immigrant past. The revival offered a resource for both progressives and conservatives; Matthew Frye Jacobson (2006: 8–9) argues that the vision of the United States as a “hyphen nation” worked to prioritize the white immigrant experience at the expense of African Americans in particular. Yet, in the Upper Peninsula, consciousness of immigrant roots and ethnic cultures seemed to offer a way of forging a positive identity for a sparsely populated, peripheral region. For example, Hilary Joy Virtanen (2012: 79–80) of Finlandia University’s Finnish American Heritage Center in Hancock argues that Upper Peninsula culture is characterized by the multiculturalism of ethnic groups that have maintained some of their traditions and a strong sense of regional pride. Accordingly, while addressing a Finnish American audience, *Finland Calling* also reflected more widely shared ideas about the region’s identity.

Over the decades, *Finland Calling* came to be identified strongly with Carl Pellonpaa. His persona suited local understandings of typical Upper Peninsula people, which have drawn on working-class and ethnic identities (Remlinger, 2017: 29–31, 42–4). Pellonpaa grew up in a bilingual home; both his parents had emigrated from Finland in the early 20th century. He served in the military and spent several years working in an iron mine before beginning his media career in 1959 as a morning DJ at WJPD radio in Ishpeming (Pellonpaa, 2011). With his local background, working-class roots, and Finnish American family, Pellonpaa appeared as an ordinary Upper Peninsula man of his generation. Moreover, his life story followed the cultural narrative of upward mobility associated with the immigrant experience of the 20th century (Lipsitz, 1990: 39–75), as he moved from a modest childhood home and manual labor to a middle-class occupation in television.

“Ordinariness, intimacy and authenticity” are qualities of successful television personalities (Bennett, 2011: 3). While it may seem that these qualities come naturally to certain personalities, James Bennett (2011: 3) emphasizes that constructing a credible television persona requires “various forms of skill and labour.” Equally, Pellonpaa drew on a range of skills in hosting *Finland Calling*. Bennett differentiates between televisual, vocational, and vernacular skill; televisual skill refers to the particular skills required for performance on television, while vocational skill refers to expertise in a given field, such as cooking for a cookery show. Vernacular skill refers to “everyday practices of cultural

production” outside the regimes of either the high- or commercial-cultural industries; this skill set is drawn upon when so-called ordinary people become celebrities (Bennett, 2011: 18–24). In the case of *Finland Calling*, we might add ethnic skill – the ability to perform ethnic identity through language and cultural references – as a sub-category of vernacular skill, since Pellonpaa’s Finnish American identity was key to his ability to host the show and become a local television personality.

The variety of skills required to host *Finland Calling* could be heard in Pellonpaa’s different styles of speaking English and Finnish. As he introduced the program or relayed information about local events in English, his speech had the measured rhythm of an experienced broadcaster – Pellonpaa also worked in news and current affairs (Pellonpaa, 2011: 110) and was accustomed to clear delivery and careful emphasis on key words. In Finnish, his tone was less formal and measured, his grammar imperfect. Thus, in hosting *Finland Calling*, Pellonpaa drew on both professional broadcasting skills and the ethnic skills of a Finnish American. Speaking Finnish fluently but not perfectly gave his performance a sense of authenticity (Remlinger, 2016). Although his English did not have the strong Finnish accent associated with stereotypical Yooper (derived from the Upper Peninsula acronym UP) speech, he did use some expressions seen as typical of the regional dialect, such as the exclamation “Holy wah!” (e.g. 21 June 2009; Pellonpaa 2011, 70; Remlinger, 2017: 76–7). Thus, by combining professional broadcasting speech with accented Finnish and Upper Peninsula expressions, Pellonpaa crafted a persona that could represent both the Finnish American community and the Upper Peninsula.

The impression of ordinariness also relied on Pellonpaa’s intimate performance style (Murray, 2005: 50–3). The potential for creating a sense of intimacy is heightened on local television, which offers more possibilities for communication between hosts and audiences than network television (Hutchison, 2015: 1181). On *Finland Calling*, Pellonpaa involved viewers by acknowledging musical requests and birthday and anniversary greetings as well as illnesses and deaths in the community. His way of addressing the audience could be quite intimate, as when he wished individuals a good recovery from surgery. Interviews with Finnish visitors could have the air of a casual conversation, covering travel arrangements, impressions of the Upper Peninsula, and relatives in the region. A retired Finnish couple visiting the program had lived in Ähtäri, Pellonpaa’s father’s area of origin, which led to a conversation about Pellonpaa’s relatives:

- CP:** Then Pellonpää is a familiar name there.
- Guest 1:** Very well, very familiar. I knew Vilho very well and the man who was a farmer.
- CP:** Santeri.
- Guest 1:** Santeri Pellonpää. I have visited them many times.
- CP:** And Terttu, you said you have been with Saima.
- Guest 2:** Yes, I worked in the same place at the Ähtäri social services after the war. (Episode 30, April 1989, translation by author)

The Pellonpaa relatives under discussion were not further introduced to the viewer, as if they were already familiar. A sense of familiarity also grew from the way Pellonpaa made his family a part *Finland Calling*. In the same 1989 episode, for instance, he

announced the birth a new grandchild, informing viewers of the baby's name, birth weight and height, and promising that in the next Christmas episode, he would have four grandchildren in the studio. For years, the opening and closing credits featured a voiceover greeting from Pellonpaa's wife: "This is Doris Pellonpaa inviting you to join my husband Carl for today's program" (22 July 2001). Thus, *Finland Calling* created a sense that viewers could get to know Pellonpaa personally, with no divide between his public and private personas.

Pellonpaa also communicated with his audience through *Finland Calling* dances, which he organized throughout the Upper Peninsula starting in 1964 (Pellonpaa, 2011: 120–1). He conceptualized the dances as a way of personally meeting viewers who wrote to him requesting music: "I thought 'I'll never get to meet these people. How can I grab a hand and shake it?'" (Maki, 2015: 6). The parties were popular, especially early on: reportedly, the largest dance attracted more than 800 people in 1966, and the last ever *Finland Calling* dance in 2015 drew a crowd of more than 300 (Maki, 2015). At the parties, a local band would play music similar to that heard on *Finland Calling* but not exclusively Finnish. Footage of the parties was shown on *Finland Calling*, giving participants a chance to appear on television. Pellonpaa made an effort to open the dances beyond the Finnish American population. On the 12 August 1990 episode, he reminded viewers in English that "a Finland Calling dance is not just for those of you who are Finnish and of Finnish descent. It's a dance *everyone* is invited to. I know you'll have a good time if you enjoy music and you enjoy dancing."

Keeping *Finland Calling* on air demanded a lot of work from Pellonpaa, who continued hosting the program long after retiring from his job at WLUC-TV in 1995. He created the program's content largely by himself, recruiting guests, acquiring music and videos, and filming hours of footage at *Finland Calling* dances, then editing it into suitable clips for television (Smith, 2008). On the 50th anniversary episode (25 March 2012), Rudolf Kemppainen – host of the Finnish devotional that had followed *Finland Calling* – emphasized the significance of Pellonpaa's work not only for Finnish Americans but the whole Upper Peninsula:

And what is most impressive is the fact that you have labored as the producer and the master of ceremonies of this program for 50 years, which has involved a tremendous amount of time and preparation and some anxiety, I am sure, in producing this program. But how proud we are of you, Carl, as a Finnish American community, and *I speak for the people of the entire UP* when I say thank you for a job that has been so splendidly done. (italics added)

Here, Pellonpaa's persona as a hardworking and active member of a European ethnic community is described as something that benefited the whole Upper Peninsula.

Through its long run, *Finland Calling* participated in maintaining Finnish American culture in the Upper Peninsula. At the same time, *Finland Calling*'s presence on local television also participated in defining what kind of identities belonged in the region's culture. The exceptionally long life of the program clearly depended on Pellonpaa's dedication both to creating the show and to maintaining connections to the local community. Pellonpaa's cultivation of ethnic skill – accented Finnish and familiarity with Finnish American culture – enabled him to host an ethnic television show. In the context of the



Upper Peninsula, a masculine, working-class Finnish American persona provided a credible basis for a performance of authenticity and intimacy on television. Additionally, Pellonpaa communicated with his audience actively both on and off television. Thus, *Finland Calling* was embedded in local life beyond television. As an example, we can conclude with an episode (12 August 1990) in which Pellonpaa shared footage of his visit to a senior citizens' event held in connection with the 110th anniversary of the town of Crystal Falls. As a local celebrity, Pellonpaa was welcome with a blue and white cake with his name on it, and an accordion band played a selection of songs, including a Finnish folk tune and a song celebrating "Yoooperland," thus highlighting the articulation of Finnish American and Upper Peninsula identities.

## Reaching beyond the local

In addition to addressing an Upper Peninsula audience, *Finland Calling* also reached beyond the local level, building connections to Finland and Finnish American culture outside Michigan. Historically, television in the United States has had a strong national focus. Whereas stations in many European countries, for example, have carried a lot of imported programming, English-language US television has broadcast mostly domestic productions about domestic topics, with the exception of the popularity of British dramas (Hilmes, 2012). *Finland Calling*, however, had an obvious transnational orientation.

*Finland Calling* started in 1962, the same year the Telstar satellite enabled the first television broadcasts across the Atlantic, inspiring excitement about television's potential for creating global connectivity (Schwoch, 2009). In this context, *Finland Calling* offered a very different vision of transnational television. Instead of promising to bring the world to viewers' homes with the help of satellite images, the program relied on material culture (images and records), personal connections, and tourism to create links between the Upper Peninsula and Finland. An example of *Finland Calling's* low-tech approach to creating transnational connectivity was a recurring segment in the mid-1990s in which an elderly man read news from Finnish shortwave radio. The man taped news programs aired by Yleisradio, the Finnish public broadcaster, on a cassette and read a selection in Finnish in the television studio (27 August 1995). For a local television program with modest means, improvisation could be necessary to create transnational connections.

The notion of travel was central to organizing transnational connections on *Finland Calling*. In line with the interests of its original sponsor, *Finland Calling* continued a history of screening touristic images of the homeland to immigrant communities. From lantern slides to silent films, early audiovisual entertainments for immigrant audiences were advertised as a chance to figuratively travel around the homeland (Wallengren, 2014: 110–19). Likewise, images and music from Finland were key attractions of *Finland Calling*. For the first episode, Pellonpaa and Sinervo improvised a way of evoking Finland using the modest resources available. As Pellonpaa recalled:

For program material we had books with photographs of Finland and a few Finnish records. The camera would focus on a photograph while we played a Finnish song. Great care had [to] be taken to make sure that the photo page we were showing was securely anchored so the page wouldn't flip over while the record was playing.

...  
Before each photo was displayed we'd explain where in Finland it had been taken, and then we went on to describe the beauty of the place. (Pellonpaa, 2011: 85–6)

Soon, the program's creators acquired 16 mm films about Finland, and when the station began using videotape in 1967, *Finland Calling* could play videos acquired from Finnish television stations or individuals (Pellonpaa, 2011: 97, 117–18). Later, *Finland Calling* relied largely on videos Pellonpaa shot while visiting Finland. These had a tourist-videolike aesthetic, showing lake views, city sights, farmers' markets, midsummer bonfires, street views, and members of the *Finland Calling* travel party. Viewers could follow the videographer's gaze as the video zoomed in on attractive details. As seen on *Finland Calling*, Finland was not a country left by emigrants stuck in the past but a more contemporary land seen through tourists' eyes.

*Finland Calling* concretely promoted travel between the Upper Peninsula and Finland through tours Pellonpaa led. The first *Finland Calling* trip took place in 1962, with the sponsoring travel agency taking care of the arrangements and Sinervo and Pellonpaa acting as trip leaders (Pellonpaa, 2011: 86). All in all, Pellonpaa recalled leading 34 tours to Finland and Scandinavia, the largest with 82 participants (Pellonpaa, 2011: 124). The theme of travel was also central in interviews with *Finland Calling*'s many Finnish guests. Some of the visitors were performing musicians, politicians, and ambassadors, but most were ordinary people, many of them visiting relatives (Pellonpaa, 2011: 93–4, 119). Interviews frequently emphasized how friendly the people were in the Upper Peninsula and how familiar Northern Michigan's nature seemed. Additionally, *Finland Calling* illustrated more formal relations between Finland and the Upper Peninsula when, for instance, the program hosted a delegation from Marquette's Finnish sister city Kajaani; they had come to plan student exchanges with Northern Michigan University (11 August 2002). Over time, *Finland Calling* created a sense of friendly, familiar, and frequent contact between the Upper Peninsula and Finland. The program's image of the Upper Peninsula was not that of an isolated, marginally placed region; rather, it emphasized transnational connectivity.

In addition to travel, music was a central way of signifying Finnish culture on *Finland Calling*. A typical episode featured up to 10 songs, either played from records or performed live in the studio by visiting and local musicians. The music consisted mostly of older dance music, such as polkas and waltzes, folk music, and some more recent popular music from the Finnish *iskelmä* genre. Pellonpaa often played music by the accordionist Veikko Ahvenainen (b. 1929) and popular singers like Tapio Rautavaara (1915–79) and Mauno Kuusisto (1917–2010). In Finland, the Finnish taste in music has been stereotyped as melancholy, with a preference for minor keys (Pajala, 2006: 319–28). In contrast, *Finland Calling* favored a more upbeat image of Finnish music – Pellonpaa enjoyed songs that he described as “lively polkas” (“*reipas polkka*”). This taste in music may reflect connections to other European immigrant cultures in the Upper Peninsula. Thus, *Finland Calling* selected Finnish popular music songs that worked in the local context.

Besides building transnational connections to Finland, *Finland Calling* extended to Finnish Americans beyond the Upper Peninsula. By the 1960s, WLUC-TV's broadcasts reached the Canadian shore of Lake Michigan, where they were relayed by cable (Davidson, 1962). In the 1990s, Pellonpaa could acknowledge a song request from Minneapolis or a letter from Phoenix, Arizona (28 May 1990; 5 August 1990). This shows that people were aware of the program beyond its broadcast area; maybe they were sent videos by friends or relatives in the Upper Peninsula. Later, the internet made it possible to expand the program's audience even farther. For example, in a 2011 episode, Pellonpaa sent greetings to a viewer in Kotka, Finland, who was watching on Facebook. Pellonpaa's wife, Doris, reflected that sometimes it could feel like nobody was watching, but then they got a message from someone in California, Florida, or Alabama saying they were happy to have found online a show their grandmother used to watch (27 March 2011). In this way, *Finland Calling* enabled people across the country to keep in touch with their family memories.

Local television could also be a resource for supporting Finnish American cultural activities beyond the Upper Peninsula. A major North American Finnish event is FinnFest, an annual festival first held in Minneapolis in 1983 (Kero, 1997: 328–34). Pellonpaa used *Finland Calling* to support the event when he chaired its organizing committee in 1996, when the event was held in Marquette. Pellonpaa encouraged viewers to plan a family reunion at FinnFest and used *Finland Calling* to promote merchandise and organize an Upper-Peninsula-wide bake sale, inviting viewers to participate in their own community: "FinnFest USA 96 needs your support" (27 August 1995). In a small-town regional context, FinnFest could become a bigger event than in larger urban centers. FinnFest 1996 had a wide cultural and educational program and attracted a record audience, with more than 6000 registered participants; according to *Amerikan Uutiset*, it was generally described as the largest and best FinnFest to date (Anon., 1996; Isbom, 1996a). *Amerikan Uutiset* particularly admired how Pellonpaa succeeded in attracting the City of Marquette's and local businesses' sponsorships, as it felt like the whole town was welcoming Finnish Americans (Isbom, 1996b). Pellonpaa's existing area connections, forged through his television work, probably helped in acquiring the support of the local community. In 2005, when the Finn Grand Fest was held in Marquette, Pellonpaa hosted live broadcasts from the event on WLUC-TV for five consecutive days (Anon., 2005). In these ways, *Finland Calling* was connected to Finnish American cultural events on a North American level. In contrast to the view of the Upper Peninsula as a remote and isolated region (Remlinger, 2017: 30), *Finland Calling* extended beyond the local in many ways, creating connections to both Finland and the wider Finnish American culture.

## Growing old with television

When *Finland Calling* first started, *Amerikan Uutiset* framed it as a link between the old immigrant generation and younger Finnish Americans. The paper described the new program as pioneering effort of "young Finns" Sinervo and Pellonpaa, concluding with a note to "older Finnish Americans":

don't say: "young people don't" but say: "young people do" give full respect to their roots and make sacrifices, so that even the old immigrant generation gets their own program on television instead of having to be satisfied with sickening "cowboy" and gun-dog shows. (Davidson, 1962; translation by author)

The newspaper welcomed *Finland Calling* as an opportunity to connect generations of Finnish Americans through the youthful, modern medium of television. The author's reference to the concern that young people were forgetting their immigrant roots is not surprising in the context of 1960s television. As George Lipsitz (1990) shows, already in the 1940s and 1950s, situation comedies about urban, ethnic, working-class family life depicted contradictions between the emerging consumer lifestyle and the old and fading values of ethnic communities. Thus, the sitcoms' references to the lifestyle of immigrant communities were permeated with a "sense of memory" of the old way of life (Lipsitz, 1990: 41). Similarly, in the Upper Peninsula in the early 1960s, *Finland Calling* could be seen as mediating relations between the immigrant generation and younger Finnish Americans. Over time, as distance from the immigrant experience grew, *Finland Calling* acquired different uses.

During *Finland Calling*'s run, Pellonpaa grew from a youthful local television pioneer to a senior citizen. While it is impossible to say who the program's early audience was, judging by the birthday and wedding anniversary messages in the archived episodes, elderly people were *Finland Calling*'s core audience during its later decades. Greetings were often sent to people in their 80s and 90s, or couples celebrating 50 years or more of marriage. Perhaps local television had become a medium for older people, as younger people increasingly moved to audiovisual content on platforms other than broadcast television. As an exceptionally long-lived program, *Finland Calling* is an example of a situation in which both the host and viewers grew old with a television program. Hence, themes of memory and commemoration were central to *Finland Calling*.

Indeed, *Finland Calling* offered a platform for memory discourse about the immigrant experience. The Finnish guests were often visiting relatives in the Upper Peninsula, which could lead to reminiscing about the immigrant past. Historically, Finnish immigrant communities were divided into Church Finns and Red Finns based on their affinity to either Christianity or socialism. While this dualism oversimplifies actual experience (Kaunonen, 2009: 58), Finnish American social life in the early 20th century tended to be organized around the alternative centers of the church or the socialist hall, and Finnish Americans were very active in left-wing radical organizations (Kivisto, 1983: 65–7).

Although the distinction between Church Finns and Red Finns faded during the 20th century, it can be said that *Finland Calling* was more aligned with the former group. Pellonpaa often ended the program with a religious song and acknowledged Christian holidays. Moreover, *Finland Calling* was followed by a Finnish devotional delivered by a pastor between 1963 and 1995; according to Sinervo (1975), the devotional was added to placate priests who complained that the program competed with church services. Messages from viewers proudly recalled family-history connections with the Lutheran church. In one episode, for example, Pellonpaa quoted letters from two people whose family members had been Lutheran lay preachers and priests in Michigan (10 June

1990). In contrast, the episodes in my sample did not feature reminiscing about the radical left tradition of Finnish Americans, although there were some references to the harsh working conditions in the mines: a young Finnish man was visiting the Upper Peninsula to look for information about the mining accident that killed his grandfather in the 1920s, and a local musician sang a song about the Finnish American experience with a verse about the hard life of a miner (27 May 1990; 26 December 2010). Thus, memories of the Red Finn tradition found less room on local commercial television than the Church Finn tradition.

Besides immigration history, *Finland Calling* featured reminiscences about the program's own past. "A sense of memory" (Lipsitz, 1990: 41) characterized *Finland Calling* in that the program repeated a lot of material from its own past. Having to produce a weekly program with limited material resources, Pellonpaa played the same videos repeatedly. Typical episodes featured videos that were several years or decades old, which in turn enabled reminiscences. For example, the 28 May 1989 episode featured videos from a Scandinavian tour in 1982, inspiring Pellonpaa to reminisce about the trip and, in the spirit of Memorial Day, pay tribute to members of the travel group who had died. In anniversary episodes, the sense of memory was further heightened. The 4 April 1993 anniversary episode, for example, featured videos from 1965 and 1967 as well as old music, including the song Pellonpaa remembered as the first one ever played on *Finland Calling*. On the 27 March 2011 anniversary episode, Pellonpaa showed footage of a *Finland Calling* dance from the 1960s, with a large crowd of dancers and himself as a young man. Regular viewers would have recognized videos they had seen before. Through the repetition of old videos and music, *Finland Calling* created space for reminiscing about the program's and local community's pasts.

Additionally, *Finland Calling*'s long run became an object of commemoration in itself. The earliest archived episodes already emphasized the program's history, with the years "1962–1989" written under the program title and a voiceover introducing the episode:

It's time now for the only regularly scheduled Finnish program featuring scenes of Finland and Scandinavia, Finnish music and interviews with guests from Finland along with a Finnish devotion. Now in its 27th year, this is Suomi Kutsuu with your host Carl Pellonpaa.

In the 2010s, the opening titles featured clips from *Finland Calling*'s history, including highlights such as interviews with Finnish presidents Urho Kekkonen and Tarja Halonen. Additionally, *Finland Calling* celebrated its history in March with an anniversary episode. In this way, *Finland Calling*'s long history became a source of distinction. At the same time, anniversary episodes provided festive occasions for maintaining bonds with viewers; thus, on the 49th anniversary episode, Pellonpaa thanked a woman who maintained a yearly tradition of sending him flowers.

The celebration of *Finland Calling*'s history culminated in the 50th anniversary episode in 2012. The event was held at Marquette Regional History Center with an audience of mainly elderly people following the proceedings with fond smiles. As a representative of the Historical Center, Jim Koski spoke on behalf of a generation who had grown up with *Finland Calling*. The event attracted high-level guests: Michigan Senator Carl

Levin, members of the Michigan House of Representatives and the Michigan Senate, and a representative of the Governor of Michigan came to congratulate Pellonpaa for his achievements. Other guests included the president of Northern Michigan University, mayors of Upper Peninsula towns, and representatives of local businesses. Their speeches described *Finland Calling* as living history and part of Finnish and Upper Peninsula heritage. Levin emphasized the American character of the event: “You know this is a very American celebration. I know it’s a Finnish American celebration but it’s an American celebration. We thrive on our diversity.” The 50th anniversary celebration highlighted the various uses of *Finland Calling* toward the end of the program’s run: first, it was a familiar local show to its largely elderly audience, who could share memories of the program’s long run; second, it had become a novelty, an extraordinarily long-lived ethnic television program that could be celebrated as local, Finnish American, and American heritage.

## Conclusion

*Finland Calling* shows that, outside the realm of prime-time network programming, US television has enabled the targeting of diverse audiences from the network era to the present. While *Finland Calling*’s primary target audience was Finnish Americans in the Upper Peninsula, the program also reflected wider conceptions of Upper Peninsula identity based on highlighting European immigrant roots. In contrast to the national focus of English-language US television, *Finland Calling* emphasized transnational connections between the Upper Peninsula and Finland. While broadcasting for European ethnicities declined from the mid-20th century, in a context such as the Michigan Upper Peninsula, which is far from major cities, local television offered a resource for developing ethnic culture well into the 2010s. *Finland Calling* was able to remain relevant beyond the immigrant era by maintaining an intimate connection with its aging Finnish American audience. Over time, the program was even celebrated as a piece of cultural heritage for Finnish Americans and the Upper Peninsula. The case study of *Finland Calling* shows that if we look beyond prime-time network programming, we can see that US television has not always promoted a homogeneous national culture but has at times been a resource for developing distinctive local and ethnic cultures.

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## Notes

1. The sample consists of the following episodes: 29 May 1989; 30 April 1989; 27 May 1990; 10 June 1990; 5 August 1990; 12 August 1990; 19 August 1990; 9 December 1990; 7 July 1991; 4 April 1993; 27 August 1995; 17 August 1997; 22 July 2001; 11 August 2002; 14 August 2005; 21 October 2007; 21 June 2009; 26 December 2010; 27 March 2011; and 25 March 2012.
2. I have collected material about *Finland Calling* and Carl Pellonpaa in Upper Peninsula newspapers in the database NewspaperArchive in September 2017, in Finnish American publications *Amerikan Uutiset* and the *Finnish American Reporter*, as well as on the internet.

Founded in 1932 as *Minnesotan Uutiset*, *Amerikan Uutiset* is one of the few remaining Finnish-language newspapers in the United States. See <http://www.amuutiset.com/en/home.html> (accessed 30 September 2019).

3. The title *Finland Calling* also has an earlier history in travel advertising, although Sinervo may not have been aware of this. The Finnish Foreign Ministry commissioned a propaganda film called *Finland Calling* to market Finland as a modern Western European nation in the 1930s (Hieta, 2014: 247).
4. See television schedules in e.g. *Escanaba Daily Press*, 4 October 1963.

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