The other important change that helped dramatically and reduced cardiovascular disease was the move to encourage more exercise. The Finns even invented a new form of exercise - Nordic walking - that involves using a set of poles to help each stride.

Persistent renewal and the creation of new schemes has ensured that fitness remains in the public consciousness and that gains do not slide away once the ball is back in the shed or the skis hung up for the season.

Over the past decade or so, hundreds of local schemes have been set up across Finland, drawing previously inactive people into cycling, Nordic walking, cross-country skiing and ball games, all of which were either free or substantially subsidised to ensure no one was excluded.

Knowledge economy

Finland showed in the 1990s how knowledge can drive economic growth and transformation. In a less than a decade the country became the most ICT (Information and Communication Technology) specialised economy in the world.

Since the start of the 21st century Finland has topped the World Economic Forum's (WEF) competitiveness rankings three times. It has also reaped rewards for educational achievement, coming first in the OECD's PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) rankings of youth learning skills and educational attainment. No doubt, developing information and communication infrastructure, and increasing public and private investment in research and development, has contributed to the industrial transformation of the country.

Education is, however, key. Educational attainment in Finland increased significantly throughout the 1990s. Enrolments in universities and other higher education rose significantly, and today younger generations are among the highest educated by any standards. The country was showing extraordinary dynamism and high social cohesion at the same time. By the beginning of the new millennium it was among the top performers by almost any economic and knowledge economy indicator.

The Finnish economy is highly open, specialised, and networked. Networking and cooperation in both society and business and particularly between industry and universities have proven important in developing new information and communication technologies.

The core of the Finnish knowledge economy is the Nokia-driven ICT cluster. This cluster comprises about 6000 firms, including 300 first-tier subcontractors of Nokia, responsible for digital content provision and packing via network infrastructure, equipment manufacturing and operation to end-user terminals and portals.