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# The capital as symbol and meaning. Helsinki as a constructed and lived space.

An analysis of the structures in Helsinki which convey meaning to both outsiders and to those who live there must be based on the history of the town, and on the capital as an incarnation of the country itself. Historically, Finland was part of Sweden until 1809, and between that and 1917 it was part of Russia. During that period, in 1812, Helsinki was proclaimed the capital of the Grand Duchy of Finland. In the latter part of the 19th century, many national institutions were established in the capital. The independent national era began in 1917.

Meanwhile, the daily life of the people and their interpretations of the town form another cornerstone of the history of the city. I would thus want to stress the picture the local residents of Helsinki have of their home town and the meanings they give to the symbols that are thought to constitute Helsinki. Through these memories Helsinki can be seen as the scene for everyday life. The urban elements (the architecture and city life), the impact of nature (the sea, the four seasons), the monuments, the multiculturalism of the 1950th (Finnish, Swedish, Russian, Jewish) are the cornerstones providing a base for a positive story on which the identity can be based. Much of what was written down as answers to my questions was based on the memory of the inhabitants, of how they remembered their childhood town after the Second World War and what they thought about it today.

We can thus point to the historical roots in Helsinki in different ways, and we can also look at the formation of its identity and the inhabitants' identities on a symbolic plane. I will start with a brief introduction to more general standpoints and concentrate then on how the ordinary townsman formulates his or her local identity, and what its foundations could be.

The debate on the feeling of identity of the Finns has frequently been focussed on their agrarian background and, more recently, even pagan features such as shamanism have come to the fore. The search has been for something that transcends the language and the country. At the same time, it has been maintained that the Finns have always had to define themselves in a negative manner, as not Swedish and not Russian, belonging neither to the West nor to the East; the folklore specialist Pertti Anttonen argues for this thought. He points out that such a definition, based on negation, has not allowed any positive history or positive narration to evolve. There is no heroic history, but throughout the history of the country, external threats have provided the uniting factor (Anttonen 1996). The Kalevala epic, and a small farmers' mentality have of course been stressed, and equally, the lack of a "European" finesse and an inability to play at different abstract levels (Apo 1995). But a negative identity must perforce be uncertain. In what ways can an urban dimension alter this picture?

**The Cathedral on the Senate Square constitute the premier landmark. Helsinki City Museum**



As far as the identity of the capital and the Helsinki townspeople are concerned, there are nevertheless features pointing in the opposite direction, at a tenacious - possibly even spasmodic - striving for self-esteem, and this reflects both national and international goals. Helsinki's identity could be regarded as having become crystallized in opposing the negative features, in various synthesizing and thus more favourable straits, and also in various efforts of securing a national security and identity. The townspeople themselves also participate in this identity-building by means of their local identifications.

I base my discussion on Herman Bausinger, who says that one has an identity insofar as one is sure of oneself and is capable of tying one's past in with one's future, and one is fully accepted by the others. In a transposed sense, a person may then be said to have a home region, that is, a place or locality in which he or she feels a deep confidence, and this place is, in the last instance, not only the basis of the personal identity but in fact its very essence (Bausinger 1985, 89). The individual identities are a result of interaction with others but also of interaction with a place or in some way of "producing the place".

As far as the town Helsinki is concerned,

its position as the capital of Finland is the result of a conscious goal-oriented process during almost two hundred years. During this period, the town has been endowed with its national buildings reflecting symbolic values: the university, the Cathedral, the government palace, all in the early 19th century, the Bank of Finland, the House of the Estates, in the late 19th century, and the Railway Station and the Parliament building in the first and second decade of independence, and many others. All these are incarnations and symbols of the nation's road towards the independence and its stabilization. The buildings in themselves are active efforts to represent the nation as something positive and permanent.

On the other hand, Helsinki has also remains of both the Swedish and Russian era. In the course of its history Helsinki has not been especially keen on removing signs of the foreign rulers. The fortress Sveaborg is still a reminder of the Swedish era although it was renamed Suomenlinna (The Fortress of Finland) in the 1920s. The Russian era is symbolized by the orthodox church, and a statue of Tzar Alexander the first and a monument of tzarevna Maria. The names of many streets still bear the name of relatives of the czar's families (Alexander-, Dagmar-, Elisabeth-, Anne-, Catharinastreet etc.) The names Wladimir- and Andréstreets have nevertheless been changed to Kaleva- and Lönnrotstreet, national names per se. But altogether one could say that the forementioned cultural threats have been woven into the history of the city. The names of the streets are still in both Finnish and Swedish - the Russian names were however excluded after 1917. Officially Helsinki has still two names: Helsinki and Helsingfors.

During the 20th century Helsinki has been changed to a more homogenous ethnic town at the same time as the industrial features has given way to high tech. The influx of people and the growth of the population figure has, by and by, made Helsinki

TABLE 1. POPULATION OF HELSINKI IN INNER AND OUTER REGIONS 1946-1998

	1946	1950	1960	1970	1995
Inner city *	243.116	247.140	212.387	171.046	115.534
Old suburban areas**	43.380	48.357	56.325	49.932	42.446
Suburbs***	<u>51.054</u>	<u>62.631</u>	<u>164.813</u>	<u>286.069</u>	<u>346.651</u>
	337.550	358.128	433.525	507.047	489.212
Övrig befolkning	<u>4.013</u>	<u>12.834</u>	<u>14.790</u>	<u>16.630</u>	<u>11.134</u>
S:a	341.563	370.962	448.315	523.677	515.765

The inner city and the old suburban areas are called Inner city

\*city districts 1-15

\*\*city districts 16-27, 52-53

\*\*\*city districts 28-51,54

change, from a small town to the only real city in Finland, with half a million inhabitants. This fast development may also be a source of naive pride - especially when acceptance is looked for elsewhere. Helsinki has also changed remarkably with regard to its linguistic distribution: still in the 1870s, the majority of the population spoke Swedish, whereas in the 1990s, the Swedish-speaking Finns were only about 7%, due to the vast immigration of Finns. Some of the old minorities, Jews, Russians, Tatars and Gypsies, have received additional influxes, mainly in the 1990s of completely new ethnic groups. The new immigrants now constitute 3,2 % of the population. Although the town is now mostly Finnish-speaking, neither the municipal authorities nor the old inhabitants in general will exclude Swedish as the second language.

The expression "the Helsinki spirit" was coined during the first SALT meetings in 1969 between American and Russian delegates, to denote a relaxed atmosphere, in which they met. In the course of the numerous meetings - the U.S. and the Russian Presidents have met twice in Helsinki -, a joint diplomatic chronology has eventually been created. This could also be seen as one expression of a wish to bring about a positive, neutral diplomatic

"history", a narration of a kind. At the same time, the Finns have striven to launch Helsinki as an attractive city for all kinds of international conferences. Thus, the intentions of the national leaders, townplanners and the tourist leaflets as a mediating forum, produce different ways of pushing and presenting the town, of creating an image which brings out the positive features. There is nothing remarkable in this. Similar efforts are made by almost all European and other cities trying to distinguish themselves. The result is pictures for the outsiders. What is remarkable is the effort - or slowness to react - that leads to incorporation even of foreign or even in some senses negative traits. Today we still have a Leninpark and a somewhat grotesque statue of peace and freedom presented as a gift from the Soviet Union in the 1980s. An historical awareness represents on the other hand the failure of an anachronistic effort to install a Lenin monument in 1999. In this way Helsinki has not forgotten its history and compared to many other cities this history can still be seen in its monuments.

### The voices of the townspeople

One of my points is thus that the city perhaps naively and perhaps unconsciously has worked to develop and synthetize a

number of symbols and that the politicians have worked to give a positive image of the city internationally - but my main point will be that the citizens themselves have also taken the symbolic dimensions to their hearts in a deeply personal way and they have in their narratives also produced "places of their own".

During the mid-1990s, I have collected a material consisting of about 500 narratives, where Helsinki townspeople describe their surroundings, their everyday life and their opinions of the town. These narratives are replies to four different letters of enquiry and they can be looked upon as outcomes of what Henri Lefebvre calls *lived space*. Lefebvre is also of the opinion that this kind of space, e.g. the lived one, can be expressed only in art - but I would argue that we have not been listening and questioning the ordinary citizen, he and she can also express him- or herself.

Looking at the different aspects dealt with in the texts, we may apply David Harvey's "grid of spatial practices" to the material. This narrows down to the townspeople's descriptions of personal space and mental maps of *occupied space*, or descriptions of familiarity, *open places* and places of popular spectacle, that is, streets, squares and markets. On the other hand, the narratives of the townspeople also include *official places*, for instance monumental spaces and constructed places of ritual, i.e. just those places that tourist brochures have a predilection for (Harvey 1989, 220-221). Helge Gerndt mentions four kinds of symbols or markers in urban settings: urban space and buildings, symbols of the social situation, symbols of the geographic position and the climate, and symbols of everyday life. In the narratives they mingle together, but I would like to threat them in two blocks - the more material first and the more social later - just for the sake of clarity (Gerndt 1985).

Moreover, in contrast to the official

pictures which at most stress *history*, there is a vantage-point in the personal *memories* and in the *process of recalling* the town. All informants refer to their own experiences and memories of the town of bygone days. Only individuals can have memories and base their ideas of the town on them whereas institutions produce only museums and archives (cf. Eriksen 1997, 130). In the memories of the Helsinki residents, the place as such has great importance (Åström 1997). The place becomes equal to roots. This is explained with rare lucidity by one of the informants:

*Helsinki, to me, means "roots". In life, a person may feel at home anywhere, but those pictures which were built into our brains in childhood follow us and remain alive throughout our lives. These are sights, atmospheres, human relations, various experiences communicated by our senses. They come into our minds as short glimpses or as entire series of events. Time changes them. For each one of us, they are unique. To me, as I am born in Helsinki, the town is the sum of the images of my childhood. IV:16, 1*

### **Urban space, buildings and the geographic position**

I will now look for general, symbolically important elements and study how attitudes are developed as personal standpoints and as part of the personal histories of the townspeople. Another very lucid passage of this same informant is the following:

*As I grew older, Helsinki was the scene for my growing independence and for widening the sphere of the world. Adventurous tours around the town, to the Suomenlinna fortress and to newly incorporated areas at the end stops of the blue buses, were part of both my own development and of the expanding picture of my home town and its many different*

faces. Even then I could already guess that being a Helsinki inhabitant could be approached from many different angles, from Kaivopuisto (the diplomats' area), from Kallio (a workers' area), from Maunula (a suburb), and all these pictures would be different, but true. There were workers, gentlefolks, rural immigrants, and all from Helsinki. I was not sure about my own place: at times I wanted to come from one kind of place, and at other times from another. Master of Arts, IV:16, 3

Helsinki as a vast area, containing of different districts with different social stamp is obvious as well as the dynamic of the city in the formative years of the 1950s and 1960s. The entity of the Helsinki stories is on the whole created by the mixture of descriptive parts containing important urban elements, and other parts where the feelings of freedom, security - and insecurity - and beauty are verbalized. Sometimes criticism of the development of the town is expressed. Also the geographical position comes out as references to the weather, the differences between winter and summer and the fact that Helsinki lies on a peninsula with many islands and inlets. The sea, and the town as seen from the sea with the silhouette against the sky, are perhaps the strongest element in the positive pictures. I quote two descriptions of the same phenomenon:

*The most important element for me is the proximity to the sea. The sea shore -the Kaivopuisto shores. The image of the town itself: the seaway into the harbour. The silhouette of the town with the Cathedral and other towers and familiar buildings. There is no sight to equal this in beauty. It is like being embraced, wrapped into strong arms.* MA, author, born in 1935, IV:24

*As I arrive in Helsinki by boat from the sea, the morning mist will at first only let*



**The city's social heterogeneity, the mix of old and new and Finnish and Russian; Enso's head quarter designed by Alvar Aalto and the Uspenski Cathedral in the background. Helsinki City Museum.**

*one see the tower of the Cathedral. It comes out, takes form, you can see it from far away, it shines. This is always heart-stirring to me, I am coming home, I am coming to Helsinki.* Author, born in 1954, IV:32

The town is thus by these literary open persons seen as beautiful and inviting, and even as the symbol of home-coming. The built environment of the market square is meeting the natural elements as the boat moves into the inlet harbour. The sea as a natural element also comes up as references to childrens playing at the shore or moving dangerously on the ice floes. Another frequently occurring mention is the shores as experienced by walking along them. They have become familiar to the informants during walks at various stages in life. Some also talk about walks on the sunlit ice and about skiing to islands off the coast. Summertime is on the other hand depicted with a lazy tone, as hot asphalt and again trips to the outshore islands.

The architecture in itself is seen as beautiful, especially around the Senate Square, with the Cathedral. The center of the city is described as exciting. The fact that buildings listed in contemporary tourist brochures have a real meaning for the townspeople is revealed by the long lists of

buildings which are mentioned as incarnating the town:

*The most important impressive houses are, to my mind, the Senate Square with the surrounding buildings, the Uspenski cathedral, the Railway Station, the National Theatre, the art museum Ateneum, the Parliament Building and the National Museum. The Temppeliaukio church is impressive in its own way. In Eira, there are many beautiful houses, and also in Kruunuhaka. The Suomenlinna fortress is an impressive sight. Also, the wooden house areas in Vallila and Käpylä illustrate the times when they were built. The Glass Palace, the bus station building and the Tennis Hall are part of the picture. Maybe this is where you can see the Helsinki spirit. But this spirit also includes the main market on the south harbour and the Kappeli outdoor restaurant, the Hakaniementori square and Työväentalo (the workers' house), and the townspeople, the tramcars and the buses. Labour safety worker born in 1941, IV:41, 4*

Like in tourist brochures the informant also mentions the town dwellers themselves but in a more initiated manner. He knows the places and he has made up his opinions of them. In the lists of buildings, we thus frequently have stress on the same buildings as in the tourist brochures, but the places and buildings have been worn into the minds in the course of long lives. How the central areas in town were appropriated may also have to do with the first workplace of the person:

*I moved around the centre quite a lot with my work: first I was a bicycle messenger, and then I worked in a restaurant, travelling to and from work. What comes to my mind is the Railway Station, the Central Post Office, the Hankkija building, the Bus Station, the "Sausage house" (christened because of an architectural feature), the*

*Aleksi (slang for the Aleksanterinkatu street), the Kaivohuone building and the centre of Helsinki at night... The picture of the town consists of the buildings, the traffic, the streets and the people. Unemployed, born in 1941, IV:14, 7*

The environment as a totality made up of urban elements is strongly. We are still witnessing a city where traffic is a main element everywhere (Benjamin 1990, 93). But also a city that is captured by bicycle, an occupation that was the fate of many young in the 1950s and 1960s. A young person of today, just moved in and quickly rooted, will start in the opposite way:

*Is there anything good in Helsinki? Well yes, definitely! A beautiful and active lazy summer can be spent in many ways in the Kaivopuisto park. As a matter of fact I "move out" there every summer. There is park gymnastics, Roller blading, picnics and chess. The stairs to the Cathedral and its surroundings are a real "living-room" for the Helsinki townspeople...*

But she continues with the same references to symbolically important buildings, but mentions also important meeting places for the inhabitants:

*As a town for representation, Helsinki is unnecessarily shy. I would like some more life and movement. The symbols of the town are the Railway Station, the Cathedral and the Uspenski cathedral. Also, the (new modern art museum) Kiasma and the house of Parliament, and the Stadion with its tower. For the local people, the symbols are the clock outside the Stockmann department store and the compass at the main Railway Station. The town derives its character from the sea, the embassies and representations, the tipping stations in Hakaniemi-Kallio and the cafes where you can have beer. The spirit of Helsinki is best condensed in the*



**Helsinki with Suomenlinna in the background. Here is Helsinki's most popular walking thoroughfare. Helsinki City Museum.**

*Kaivopuisto park on a sunny summer's day, with many people, events, things to do, cliques. A kiosk vendor born in 1971, IV:43, 2,6*

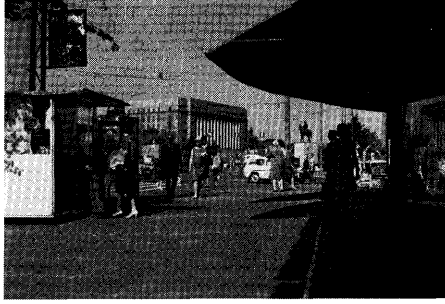
In many narratives the parks, both those opening to the sea and those lying in the centre, and the three different markets for greens and vegetables are said to contribute to a sense of homeliness and belonging. One narrative takes us to all parks with the same pride as in all former narratives:

*The parks, the lungs of the city, where of utter importance for our wellbeing. In my opinion also large green areas belong to the parks; Kaivopuisto, Alppipuisto, Seurasaari and the other islands as well as the graveyards. With the children we used to go to the Sinebrychoff park and also the graveyard of Hietaniemi was a superb place. There you could sit and feed the wild ducks and the squirrels and enjoy the landscape and the vegetation. Of course every*

*town dweller (stadilainen) admires the flowerbeds at the Esplanad. Informatian b. 1931, III:29, 3*

But negative phenomena are also mentioned: the noise and the pollution, the graffiti, the drugs, the roadworks and the destruction. Some regard the change, with the extinction of local shops, as particularly unhappy, whereas others rejoice that the city area has become so attractive, with new cafes and a generally more open atmosphere. Some speak up against the drunkenness in the streets, the ugly language used and the misplaced architecture.

Especially the innovations of the 1960s, with a department store and an inbuilt parking house facing the respectable Railway Station, and a main office block designed by Alvar Aalto in the centre of the South Harbour area, irritate some townspeople. Again, some looked forward with trust and curiosity to



the new possibilities offered by the modern arts museum Kiasma next to the Main Post Office, whereas others abhor this building. All phenomena are part of everyday experiences of the citizens, former experiences mingled with experiences of the city of today.

Also, the “stonetown” itself, consisting of blocks and of stone, is mentioned. These mentionings take the stonetown as granted, but fill them with the life they used to witness, in this earlier stage, only one street is here depicted:

*On the Iso Roobertinkatu street there was this milkbar Valio, with its “pirtelö”, nowadays called milkshake. There was also a shop for rubber wares... and at least three cinema theatres... and in the vicinity there were still many more, Gloria, Edison, Merano and Alice on Fredrikinkatu. Iso Roobertinkatu has stayed in my memory as a colourful distinctive street... At that street there was also a second hand bookshop, where we used to spend hours after school. Economist, born 135. III:45,4*

The fact that it has a somewhat old-fashioned and traditional imprint in the central part is appreciated. One informant says that no skyscrapers are needed. The human format, the public transports, the social services and the limited city area all contribute to the feeling of security. Even the townspeople themselves are said to

enrich the town. Are they the missing heroes?

### **Symbols of social situations and everyday life**

We are now already moving with descriptions that illuminate also the social side of the the everyday life. What makes these lists and descriptions more than a kind of vote for beautiful and less beautiful values is the perspective that the informants have. They pronounce their opinions on a town which they mostly know since childhood, the buildings and places they mention are things that they say mean much to them personally. The question “is there a special Helsinki spirit” is very rarely associated with the diplomatic sense of the expression. Instead the search for the Helsinki spirit often leads the thoughts to something more timeless and permanent:

*I think that the best-known symbol of the town is the Havis Amanda statue. There are so many who want to be photographed next to it. The Helsinki spirit is concentrated in my mind as I enter the Esplanaadi park, there I have reason to remember... Helsinki has many great things, but there is also peace. Foreman born in 1925, IV:18*

The informants describe both the changes in the outlook of the town and the permanent features. The styles used, which are sometimes literary, give the narratives a tone of recognition and of identification with the town. The informants refer to types of behaviour that have remained the same for several years. A Swedish-speaking elderly woman from the workers’ district relates of Helsinki as a place for visitors and events:

*The main market was something that absolutely had to be visited during the fish market days, since every year, one simply had to taste the black bread from the Åland islands... Every New Year’s night, the whole*



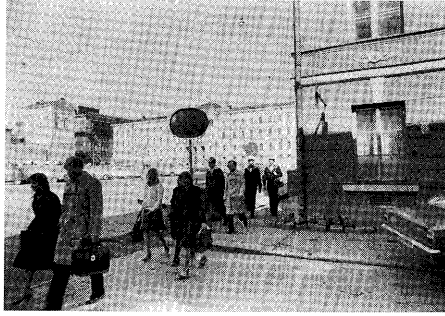
family would walk to the Senate square to listen to the Mayor's speech. There was no tram, but we walked in the cold and the wind from Hermannin along all of the Hämeentie street and up the Unioninkatu street. Book-keeper, born in 1915, IV:6,1

Many of the informants revert to the days of their childhood in the 1950s and describe their impression of the town of these days, not paying attention to the official or modern image:

*My Helsinki is from the time when I was a child, when the courtyards were alive with street singers, trash bin divers, potato sellers, long lines of washing and angry caretakers. We, the children, lived all this and saw all kinds of things. We became tolerant but perhaps a bit hard. The Swedish language was also definitely part of my Helsinki, as were the grocery shops, the meat shops, the milk shops and the paper shops. I loved the library in the Ludviginkatu street, and the swimming hall in the Yrjönkatu street. I learnt the basic rules for living close to one another. I loved the shop windows, because at that time they were beautiful and offered a child visual pleasures. The Helsinki of my youth offered... art exhibitions on Sunday mornings, movies, the marvellous homes of friends in personal blocks of flats, the tram trips, the hurry to catch the last bus, the spring evenings in the Kaivopuisto park, and the sea, the sea. Lecturer, born in 1945, IV:9, 1*

The home district as parts of the town is characterized in various ways:

*I loved Katajanokka and its smell of asphalt on a hot day, the echoes of children's clear voices in the pitlike inner courtyards, strictly separated from one another by high walls; the mysterious lofts and basement cellars; the din from the harbour; the architectural details and the familiar people moving around our own*



**The street as the town dwellers living room with nationally important buildings in the background: here the Parliament, and on the previous page the Government Palace on the Senate Square. Helsinki City Museum.**

*courtyard. I could not understand that one of my aunts used to expound on my "ill fate to have to grow up in a stone desert like this one". Was she unable to see the rich stimulating environment that I lived in? I:55, 13*

*An everyday greyness, densely populated small dwellings, crowds of children, adults at work, life being more of everyday routines than celebration. No lustre, but as seen from the present day, alive with the gold of memories. That was Kallio of my childhood and youth, where I took root as a slow-growing rowan tree in a tiny nook of the Vesilintu hill. In those days, like today, Helsinki is to me the town. I:70, 10*

*So I lived in the old Rööperi area. Our block lay between the streets Sepänkatu, Albertinkatu, Pursiniemenkatu and Laivurinkatu. Actually, "home" was not just the dwelling, but to me, "home" was the whole building with the yard and Sepänkatu street as an outer yard. We spent much time there. But the borders of my area went further. They included Punavuori, Eira, Kaivopuisto, Tähtitorninmäki, Ullanlinna. Since we spent much time out of doors, in those days, those were the areas where we walked. The streets, the people were familiar.. There also lay my school, my hobbies.. We knew a few of the "kings of the street".. To me, the sea also belonged to us. We often made trips to the shores by*

**A characteristic place in the town: The Pentagon (in Swedish Femkanten) on the border of Punavuori and Ullanlinna, the district cinemas also constitute dear "place for memory", in the picture cinema Merano. Helsinki City Museum.**



*Kaivari, and to the little island Uunisaari. This marine imprint distinguished our area from so many others. I:41, 4, 6*

Stone in itself - or nature - are phenomenons to relate to. Only tree glimpses of the lists of the citizens of ones own house will show how the social situation is imprinted in the memory:

*The building was mainly inhabited by working people. Family fathers and most mothers were working outside the home. I cannot remember anyone unemployed living there at the time. They were decent and quiet workers: drivers, workers especially from the Kone lift factory, tram drivers and ticket collectors, tramway track cleaners, night watchmen and people working at a printer's. The women worked either in factories or in nearby shops. There were also some manual workers such as a dental technician, who had a car as early as the '50s, seamstresses and a tailor. The other car was owned by a family who had*

*a service station. The caretaker with his family lived by the other staircase. His sister Iita kept order in the whole building and especially among the children. I:73a, 2*

*Our building had quite many people with academic degrees: a meteorologist, a forester, a professor of history, a master of languages, a high-school engineer, a master of business sciences, and so on. But there were also shift workers, a night watchman, an entrepreneur, one-parent families, pensioners. Actress Ruth Snellman made a special impression on me, and so did the European boxing champion Eelis Ask; both lived by our staircase. Actually, the only uniting factor was the children in the building who were diligently cruising from one home to another, thereby also making their parents acquainted with one another. I:42, 2*

*The people living in the building were quite colourful: downstairs the Jews, whose boys we were teasing, and the Jews on our floor who had beautiful dark-haired daughters, the upstairs Jewish ballet dancer, Mother "rälläkkä" (a Salvation Army officer with an adopted son), Värtsilä engineers (the building may have been owned by the Värtsilä company), the genteel family of the manager of the building, families with children my own age, whose workplaces I was ignorant of. The father of my friend was a painter, their home was one room, a kitchen and a toilet, and four children. There were few spacious dwellings. I:22, 1*

The social, linguistic and ethnic cultures of the town, and the dichotomies, recur as a background element, but sometimes also find articulation, first a bourgeois view, then a worker:

*In the same way it must be said that the Helsinki of my youth was the bourgeois town, which was only spiced by the*

# Stadin stailein skuru skulaa taas.

Helsingin hienoin raitiovaunu kulkee taas.

## Se stannaa steissillä tasatunnein.

Se pysähtyy Rautatientorilla tasatunnein.

## Stikkaa ittes ineen.

Käy sisään.



HOK\*

Spårakoff vie taas pitkälle. Rautatientorilla tasatunnein 11-15 ja 17-22 joka arkipäivä ja lauantaisin 11-17; Oopperatalolta varittia yli ja Kauppatorilta puolelta. Spårakoff on tilattavissa yksityisajoon. Soita 040-548 0175 tai La Tour myyntiasasto 684 07420.

HUOM! Yksityisajoa ei perjantaisin, lauantaisin eikä ajalla 21.6.-31.7.

workers' quarters in Rööperi (slang for Punavuori). The other workers' areas, Kallio, Vallila, Hermanni and Toukola, were in fact unknown to me, foreign districts which, in my early youth, were even slightly frightening... The landscape of my youth was the centre of Helsinki, the cafes and the streets. Development manager born in 1952, IV:20, 5, 6

Perhaps the occurrence of the Swedish language and Swedish people in Helsinki has lowered the threshold to meeting foreigners, regardless of their skin colour. I do not think there were ever any problems in this respect in Hesa (slang for Helsinki)... The basic ideas of my life were reflected in the Stadi (slang for the town, meaning Helsinki) and its variety. A bilingual town, where the mastery of the second national language was approximately centered where the "gentlefolks" lived. Also, the strong division by the Pitkäsilta bridge, where this north side was the workers'

quarters, is very strong in my memories. Here, you learnt to understand that everyone did not have the same starting point, and that some had more than others. This was easy to accept, since the whole of the area where I lived was similar, so this is part of being a townsperson. Unemployed restaurant worker born in 1941, IV:14, 2

However, what the informants say really belongs to them is neither the public face of the city nor the atmosphere of the centre, and not even the quarters of the childhood scene but more specific spots, such places as "daddy's house in the Punavuori area" (IV:24), "my uncle's and aunt's record shop on the Viiskulma square" (IV:9), the cemeteries (IV:10, IV:14, IV:23), a crevice at the south end of the Seurasaari outdoor museum (IV:31), and various places with a view (the Kallio church, IV:13; the Observatory hill, IV:23). These are places where the informants felt

Advertisement for Sinebrychoffs tram, which function as a pub. The text says: The city's most stylish tram runs again. It stops at the (railway)station every hour. Drop in!

safe as children, places where there is a strong feeling of the continuity of the family, places where the town can be viewed and embraced, and places where one can be quietly alone.

For those who move out from the centre of the city, there is one way of maintaining contact with that which is felt to be important:

*When I long for the proximity of the sea, we drive along the shore lane in Kaivopuisto, or walk there. The wonderful autumn storms in particular will take us to the shore of the Kaivari (slang for Kai-vopuisto), and there, the wind tears at us and blows our lungs full of oxygen, and the waves break and splash us with salty drops. We visit the herring market almost every autumn, and on Mayday we will naturally walk in the throng of people and go to the Esplanaadi Kappeli restaurant for a beer. The Stockmann department store is the main place where I have always bought clothes and special items.* Researcher born in 1938, IV:5, 7

There is a noticeable element of sensations experienced in cultural life, consumption and luxury, but also with nature; this is wholly compatible with the international trend in uniting local identity with the consumption of culture, goods and events (cf. Andersson 1997, 110). Important local aspects such as the traditional department store and the two carnivals of the town, that is, *Mayday* and *the fish market*, occur in most of the narratives. The carnivals are experienced as rites in the sense that people feel “obliged” to take part; they are also calendary festivities: on Mayday, summer-Helsinki wakes up to life, and with the fish market, the townspeople say farewell to the previous summer. At that time, the tourists have already left the town, which means that the fish market is a festivity for the townspe-

ople themselves (cf. Åström 1994). There are also mentions of more recent festivities and festivals. Since the 1980s there have been new mass events, such as rock concerts, the Night of the Arts, the Ladies’ Ten Kilometres, and the Helsinki Marathon; and also a number of other happenings for the townspeople, which have been accepted and appropriated, and this comes out in the narratives of the informants. That things happen in town is generally regarded as something positive and new: old borders are transgressed.

To sum up, I will quote a somewhat more critical and ironic analysis of Helsinki:

*A small city or a big town. Helsinki. Sometimes the soul is bigger than the body, sometimes it gets pompous. Something of Engel and of Aalto stills hovers over the town, there is some megalomania, something of a banana republic. The museums are oversized in relation to the population, the operas, churches and culture centres are oversized. Maybe this is a feature typical of a young country fighting for its place, its identity. But Helsinki is no Paris, no Rome, no Vienna, and will never be. Nor is this what I am looking for or have sought. In Helsinki there is something else, difficult to define, difficult to catch, volatile. Perhaps it is the proximity to the sea, or the short distance to St. Petersburg, or perhaps it is ourselves.* IV:28, 3

### **The way of reliving your town**

The ways of finding one’s own identity in a small city are manifold, but they all reflect the locality. The message contained in the verbalizations of the feelings of the townspeople quoted here seems to be that the place has put its imprint on the people. These quotes, I think, display part of a positive history of how the informants have experienced their town. A positive answer to the question “Who are we?” can itself

be seen in the fact that people want to express these experiences. The glimpses that we have had here of the full picture delimits the town in accordance with central symbolic areas, and at the same time, the picture forms the background to the personal identities of the informants. The symbolic elements in these pictures have been united with the townspeople's practices. The sea and the architecture of the imperial period, the parks and the core city, the islands with fortifications, zoo and bathing, the national monuments, e.g., the contrasts between the built and the natural environment is what the local people themselves set value on. The street as a home area and the salty sea breeze, the freezing cold and the intimate cafes, the difficult process of uniting the self-sufficient "original" culture with the previous agrarian lives of 20th century immigrants, the stressed town dweller's dream of a better world are difficult phenomena to outline. It seems however that the ordinary townspeople has been able to catch them while looking nostalgically back at the blocks where he or she lived in the past.

It also seems as if the different Helsinki informants would not yet be fully conscious of the "split in the urban space and the castration of the post-modern city, or the re-evaluation of old symbolic landscapes" as postmodernist researches define the cities of today (Andersson 1997, 108-109). The built environment with various national and local elements, and the interaction with nature, as well as the cultural fabric created by all the different people in the town, and the collective experiences of the town is still the history or text that all townsmen can continue to build on.

### **New dichotomies, new ways of dividing the town and the townspeople**

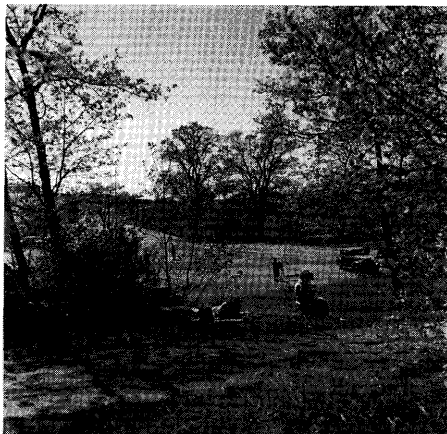
A way of exposing a positive history is thus

by means of self-definition, the way we speak of ourselves and of our town in relation to others. But even a positive story about "us and them" will always remain ambivalent. The "home districts" of the informants are often minutely described. We may thus regard the narratives as one way of outlining the informants relationships to their home districts (Heimat). Nevertheless, the writers seldom expressly use these words - the urban vocabulary shies away from them.

On the other hand, two frequently occurring words are *Stadi* (the slang expression for Helsinki) and *paljasjalkainen* (barefoot, i.e. born in town), and I will close by discussing them. The word *Stadi*, from the Swedish *stad*, is a nickname for Helsinki which has, during the last few years, occurred with increasing frequency both in the press and in daily parlance. The use of this word also means that the memory of an urban lifestyle is recalled to mind, a lifestyle that is felt to characterize Helsinki. At the same time, there is an effort to convey the meaning of the word to future townspeople. The word is intimately related to the local slang, which is called *Stadin kieli*, and consequently to those who used this language, primarily in the workers' districts and in gangs all over the old stone town and the earliest after-war suburbs. The use of slang occurred in a kind of "street boys' society".

Different parts of Helsinki also have nicknames in this slang, which is a mixture of Finnish and Swedish and which was, even at an early date, abhorred by the Finnish-speaking and the Swedish-speaking bourgeoisie alike. Nobody has denied, or now denies, that this was a genuine Helsinki feature. In the 20th century, interest in this language and in the style of life that it reflects, and the use of the word *Stadi* in many secondary meanings has increased tremendously. A slang exposition in the city exhibition hall, with

**The Esplanade  
Park is an  
oasis. Helsinki  
City museum.**



old photographs and texts written in Stadin kieli, attracted as many as 72,000 visitors, which is quite considerable. Primarily, old Helsinki people visited the exhibition. It was as if their subjective personal memories were thus reflected in public, so that the joint collective memories opened a channel. The remembering process could then be shared with others (cf. Eriksen 1997, 131).

The memories, which are also social in character, are thus based in the social reality where the informants lived. There are many who maintain that the old dichotomy, the division into workers' Helsinki areas and bourgeois Helsinki areas, today no longer exists. The previous sharp limits were so strong that they actually formed a constituting element in all the townspeople's ideas about the town.

It also seems however that the mental structure of the town would still require a basis of a "we and the others" dichotomy. The concept of the genuine town dweller, the "barefoot" one, could then function as an axis to which to affix one's identity, or as a way of pointing out the differences between us and the others. The fact that those who inherited the old Stadi culture now frequently live in the new suburbs and no longer in the blocks where their roots are, does not lessen the attraction of this

"belonging somewhere". As I have pointed out in another connection, this town culture, which used to be a marginal one, possesses many features resembling popular culture in general, such as traditions, ties to a locality, a requirement of authenticity, a language of its own, and now even a reconstructed costume (Åström 1998).

The opposition between the Stadi culture and the bourgeois culture is no longer pointed out, but to the contrary, the Stadi culture can have an attraction even for the inheritors of the old bourgeoisie. In the same way as one is happy to appreciate popular culture, one enjoys that one's childhood dialect in the streets is appreciated. The old social stigma of certain parts of town has now largely disappeared, and a gentrification of the inner town in combination with an intensified city and pleasure life is a fact. Stadi nowadays frequently refers to the whole of Helsinki, although it still mainly refers to the more central parts. Stadilainen refers to a person living in Helsinki, but there are still many old Helsinki people who find it important to make a distinction between genuine "barefoot" Helsinki people and people who have moved in later. In this case the "barefoot" people have higher status.

In this situation, appurtenance to Helsinki becomes something attractive, but also something raising strong feelings. When Helsinki had been selected one of the nine Capitals of European Culture for the year 2000, the special themes of the town were given as science and technology. And in fact, an enormous input in communication technology and science is a marked characteristic in the current development of Finland and Helsinki. In the second half of 1999, Finland held the chairmanship of the European Union. In this international perspective, the old Stadi culture seems to be on a small scale and something genuine, to nostalgically hold on to. But it has also been made attractive and

capable of development for young people, the slang can be taken further, the mundane and tough attitudes of the Stadi culture are well suited as a background to the fast-moving youth culture of today.

So everyone can create his or her picture of a Stadi culture which suits the personality, and an identity which matches or stands in opposition to it. However, the situation is not all that simple. Earlier, the Stadi culture was primarily anti-rural, although there was a relatively high urban tolerance level for other differences between those who were regarded as “from Helsinki”, and this is naturally an expression of the “us and them” mentality. Today the unanimity about the concept Stadi is nothing given, but rather, the word evokes polemics in different quarters.

The fact that the concept “stadilainen” works as a catalyst for many different approaches indicates an ambivalence in the identifications which is more fluctuating than what the town is as an environment. Nevertheless, the catalyst itself is important. With its aid, Helsinki and the people living in Helsinki achieve a social cohesion of another kind than what the town offers as an environment. It also counteracts the internationalization and the strong expected influx into the town. This concept, then, will become a basis for negotiations, providing cohesion between opposite opinions in a matter which *per se* is not unambiguous.

We are discussing different attitudes to what is “genuine” and what it means to “belong”, and this also occurs at the level of bickering. Negative attitudes towards other strangers, the “really other”, are still relatively inarticulate, but it is possible that they are based on negative self-images, both a general hostility to foreigners, and a stressing of the ethnic-national, the genuinely Finnish. I will give an example:

*Refugees and returning emigrants can at a cinch be accepted, if they come here in*

*great distress, honestly and without any crookedness. To behave as people behave here, modestly and satisfied with little, to work. There are too many immigrants and Russian-speaking returning emigrants who have come dishonestly and by crooked means only to take economic advantage, to live for free at our expense. Their demands for special treatment and special arrangements cannot and must not be accepted at the expense of our citizens and our townspeople... The lazy ones, the good-for-nothings, the crooked ones and the profiteers can be sent away from Helsinki and out of the country, no questions asked. Pharmacist, IV:54, 6-7*

This is no marginal voice. Yet against the background of the not too strenuous circumstances of the informants, the collected narratives often are a defence for an immaterial dimension of existence in the city, and is based on satisfaction with the opportunities to “do things” that the town offers, which both are ways of getting rooted in the urban environment. Consumerism is one element here, but only part of the total. Therefore, most of the narratives are stories about various experiences of the town. Such an appropriation and use of urban space as takes place at several levels and is based both on personal histories and on the present, works as a combined process, uniting the past with the present and fortifying the personalities. There are also positive conscious stories about how newcomers shoot out their roots, and these describe the process as a personal appropriation of space.

It remains to be seen if the ways of appropriating urban space in a positive way will stay sufficiently strong and open, so that they can counteract aversion against strangers and, instead, continue to introduce and generate positive self-images for various kinds of townspeople.

In the Proustian way the internal appropriation of a bygone space or world is, while recalling it, given a new and completed form, which also strengthens the identity of the narrator. The time and, here, the space long gone, are thus recovered in an "integral reconstitution of place" (Proust 1982; Mohrmann 1991; Poulet 1977, 66). The fact that the narrators themselves state that the experience of telling their story was gratifying, is a sign that such a mechanism was working.

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