



Family Business and Locality

Grahn, Maarit 2014. *Perheyhtiö ja paikallisuus*. A. Ahlström Osakeyhtiön historian perintö Noormarkussa. (English Summary: Family Business and Locality. The historical heritage of A. Ahlström Corporation in Noormarkku.) *Annales Universitatis Turkuensis C* 374. Turku: Turun yliopisto. 299 pp. Diss. III. Maps. ISBN 978-951-29-5600-5 (print). ISBN 978-951-29-5601-2 (electronic). ISSN 0082-6995. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-29-5601-2>.

What kind of a role does history and heritage play in the identity and corporate image of companies? In other words, what is the role of history management in the activities, strategies and images of companies? How and why can companies be studied as communities of cultural heritage? These questions are discussed and analysed in Maarit Grahn's doctoral dissertation *Perheyhtiö ja paikallisuus*. A. Ahlström Osakeyhtiön historian perintö Noormarkussa.

Grahn's study gives an interesting insight into the diversity and multifaceted nature of company policy and strategies from a cultural heritage and family business perspective, and argues that it is closely linked to locality and domicile. The study focuses on the Finnish company A. Ahlström Osakeyhtiö and the Noormarkku ironworks, which are located in western Finland. A. Ahlström Osakeyhtiö, founded in 1851, is one of the oldest family run businesses in Finland. The company started as a sawmill and grew into an international company specialising in the fields of chemical and mechanical forest industry. The company also developed and managed machinery and glassworks industries. For the most part, the company's operations concentrated on eastern and southern Finland.

Noormarkku still bears traces of the ironworks in the form of both private and public buildings intended for the owner and founder Antti Ahlström's family as well as buildings for employees and workers. The public buildings likewise

bare traces of the old ironworks and the development of the company during its existence. The company was managed from Noormarkku until the 1960s. According to the company's websites, the company nowadays has production facilities in more than 20 countries and all together 5,700 employees on six continents.

In the study, Grahn examines the role of cultural heritage as a factor in creating a corporate culture, identity and image. She also discusses the ways in which historical consciousness affects the management and activities of the company and of companies in general. The intriguing part of the study deals with the consequences of business expansion and globalisation and their effects on a local level. The study also focuses on describing how the companies utilise their cultural heritage in times of change. The study covers the time period from the end of the nineteenth century to the early twenty first century.

Grahn approaches her research questions and her field of study using a qualitative and cross-disciplinary approach. It is fascinating to see how the approaches of history studies, cultural heritage studies and business studies are intertwined with the research questions. Concepts of cultural heritage, places of memory and the company as a material and immaterial entity are discussed in relation to previous studies in the field. Grahn's results and outcomes are influenced by the cross-disciplinary approaches, giving the study a comprehensive and multifaceted picture of the company and company culture.

The main sources of data are the company records from 1900-1970. In addition to these records, Grahn has also used staff journals, annual reports of the ironworks, newspapers and company publications dealing with the history of the company. Grahn also conducted interviews and made personal observations in addition to the written data. Grahn obviously wants to come close with her object of study, and having been an entrepreneur herself, the intensity with which

she throws herself into the different dimensions of the study is impressive.

The book is divided into eight chapters. The chapters examine the companies and their socio-economic aspects with respect to the past but also with obvious connections to the present and future. I personally enjoyed the diversity of the material, research questions, methods and the outcomes that Grahn's study is built around. The book is an example of Grahn's ability to combine sources and approaches into a comprehensive study of family business culture. Grahn's study also highlights the fact that history and traditions can be both valuable assets for companies and also barriers to future development. Grahn's discussions of what it means when a company shifts from being a family-managed company to being a family-owned company makes for interesting reading, and it is precisely in these changes that the historical connections either play a bigger or smaller role.

According to Grahn's study, A. Ahlström Osakeyhtiö is a typical example of the way in which a company uses history to highlight its existence and company image. Ahlström has utilised museums, exhibitions and publications when constructing a historical corporate image. For the company, the ties to the actual place, Noormarkku, have been meaningful both in reality and symbolically. In the twenty-first century, the choice of combining business and tourism has kept Noormarkku relevant and interesting, and its historical roots to the ironworks have remained visible and alive.

One of the most interesting findings in Grahn's research is that the Ahlström company has actively used history and company traditions to consolidate its legitimacy. Grahn acknowledges that cultural heritage is a part of the company's symbolic capital. The use of company history, buildings and events in building up the symbolic legitimacy of the company is not a phenomenon only used by Ahlström; it is a strategy widely used by a number of companies. A historical background built on solid and long lasting traditions is considered to be an asset for a company. According to Grahn, companies seek to portray themselves as reliable agents and business partners with the aim of creating long-term busi-

ness relationships and a reliable company image. Grahn highlights a monumental and antiquarian use of history with respect to how companies choose to tap into cultural heritage. The monumental makes the historical connections visible, whereas the antiquarian expresses continuity within the company.

Grahn also found that representations of the past form the foundation by which the company engages with cultural heritage. The ways of collecting and representing a company's collective memory are diverse, and Grahn distinguishes at least two types of collecting and sharing: written and oral heritage found in documents, and more personal memories and experiences. Uncovering the personal stories of the company's past gives this study an intimate touch, one that reaches beyond official documents and statements.

As an ethnologist, I would have wished to hear more about those personal experiences and memories of the company. Personal stories and insights into the company both in the past and in the present would have made the study even more interesting and versatile.

One of the highlights of Grahn's study, on the other hand, are the discussions around and about cultural heritage in relation to A. Ahlström Osakeyhtiö and companies in general. Grahn shows that each moment in time, each generation and each decision produces potentially new ways to restore and transfer cultural heritage. Company museums are one way of constructing and reinforcing a company's identity and image. A. Ahlström Osakeyhtiö established its first museums on production sites in different parts of Finland already in the 1960s. Later, ownership of the museums shifted to the public sector as a consequence of the rationalisation process and strategic reforms within the company.

The history and traditions of a company with such a historical background are not just kept alive in documents and stories, but also in the surrounding environments and buildings. Old factory environments become places of memory, and according to Grahn, the Noormarkku ironworks tell us about the past and about the period of industrialisation but most of all about the ways in which the family business has interpreted and

understood its own history. The emotional attachment to place is visible in the family-owned company; place becomes much more than just a physical location of business. It becomes the place and space of lived experiences and memories, thereby shaping the way the locality presents the past in new ways. The silent and immateri-

al dimensions of the company and its locations can only be reached via an ethnographic method. Grahn has showed us that companies can be studied as communities of cultural heritage with a corporal image in mind.

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