# The New Educational Idea and its Practice in Finland

# The Rudolf Steiner School of Lahti and its new building

THE RUDOLF STEINER schools form a complete whole everywhere in the world; they realize the same pedagogical ideas. These schools work in different environments and they have their own history.

We can understand the special character of the Steiner schools seen from Rudolf Steiner's calling and throughout the course of his life. A part of the schools use the name "Waldorf school" from the first model school in Stuttgart. Both names mean the same kind of pedagogy.

We can take The Rudolf Steiner school of Lahti also as a part of the international Steiner movement and a member of the Steiner schools in Finland, at the same time.

### The life of Rudolf Steiner

RUDOLF STEINER'S career rose from the environment and the experiences of his childhood and his youth. He was born in Kraljevec, in the Hungarian part of Austria in 1861. His parents were from the north side of the Danube. His father worked as a telegrapher for a private railway company and the family moved with him.

When Rudolf turned two years, his family moved to Pottschach near the border of Steiermark. The small village was full of opposites. The snow capped Alps and the wonderful nature surrounded Steiner on one hand and on the other hand was the new technology. The modern railway and the station, linked the village to the great outside world. Rudolf was greatly influenced by both these elements. The family lived in a wing of the train station. He learned to read and write in the safety of his father's study, while his mother was taking care of the modest household.

When Rudolf Steiner was seven, the family moved again, now to Neudörfl, near Wiener-Neustadt, to the Hungarian side of Austria. Beautiful woodlands enclosed the village. Rudolf began his formal education in the small village school. Rudolf was taught by an assistant teacher, who led him to the world of music and drawing. Rudolf Steiner told in his autobiography that his geometry book gave him the greatest happiness. He found the base for his experience of consciousness and thinking, the inner spiritual life along side the sensible world.

Rudolf lived in Neudörfl within the sphere of influence of the Roman Catholic Church. He was baptized Catholic as a newborn, but his father was a free thinker and he was not confirmed. Despite this, Rudolf was allowed to help at Mass at the local church. The Latin language and the solemn rituals influenced deeply the boy's moods. He said later that transcendental met reality at Mass.

Rudolf grew into a diligent, serious thinker. There were no children's games in his life. Instead, he discussed much with adults. Rudolf got his first taste of German literature from a doctor in Wiener-Neustadt. This man told him about Lessing, Goethe and Schiller and their works, unknown to his home and his school. At the age of eleven, it was time to go to the secondary school. His father decided on the "Realschule" and hoped that in due course Rudolf would become a railway engineer. This meant daily journeys to Wiener-Neustadt from the autumn 1872. The noisy modern city bewildered the boy, and for the first year at school he did poorly. Then, he began to adjust. His mind was full of vast complex questions. He bought a copy of Philosophy classic *The Critique of Pure Reason* by Immanuel Kant and began to master its arguments.

Steiner began teaching already during his Realschule years and this work continued throughout his life. He started to give private lessons to his classmates. These lessons gave him the opportunity to explain the facts himself, in his own way, while make a living from what he had learnt at school. He also realised to know the different kinds of learners. He embraced the Latin and Creek languages, even though they did not belong to the Realschule curriculum.

Rudolf Steiner continued his studies at the Technical High School of Vienna in 1879. It was in here that he met a man who was to exercise a decisive influence on his future: Karl Julius Schröer, professor of the history of German literature at the Technical High School. Steiner found his lectures on Goethe and Schiller a revelation. Steiner read *Faust* for the first time and found it magnificent. Schröer was a protestant. Steiner kept company also with the Catholic intelligentsia who did not value Goethe. He was in between great opposites once again.

Karl Schröer recommended Steiner as a tutor to the family of Ladislaus and Pauline Specht, 1884-1890. They had four boys, the youngest of whom, aged ten, was mentally retarded. Steiner had spectacular success with the youngest child. Supporting and strengthening Steiner's fundamental belief that the health of the body depends on the health of the mind.

In 1883, Schröer had performed another important service for Steiner; he urged an editor named Joseph Kürschner to allow the 22 year old Steiner to edit Johann Wilhelm Goethe's scientific writings. It was a part of the *German National Literatur* with 221 volumes. Goethe's work Die Metamorphose der Planzen was admired by Steiner. Goethe says:

"The Life can be divided into it's primary factors, but it is not possible toput these pieces together again or to make them alive."

The editing of Goethe's works led Steiner to a new demanding task at the Goethe-Schiller Archive in Weimar from 1890 until 1897.

It was a big change in Steiner's life to move to Weimar, to the heart of German culture. He started to prepare his doctoral thesis, which was approved in Rostock and he was promoted Doctor of Philosophy 1891. He did not aim for an academic career; he wanted to be thought of as a philosopher, who has his own mission. He worked with new ideas, which became the heart of the anthroposophy later. His key work is said to be *Die Philosophie der Freiheit*.

After the period in Weimar, Steiner moved to Berlin. He became the editor of *Magazin für Literatur*. The magazine was also associated with an independent 'Drama Society'. Steiner was spending his time sitting around in the cafés and leading a Bohemian life. The College of the Workers' Educational Association needed a lecturer on history and Steiner agreed to give the course of lectures. The workers view of history was completely materialistic; which was the opposite of Steiner's, making the situation was paradoxical. For the Gutenberg anniversary, he addressed an audience of seven thousand in the Berlin circus. Steiner's lessons were unusual for the day, his audience asked questions and joined in the discussion.

Steiner's reputation was spreading by word of mouth. He founded the Berlin Theosophical Society and he started to lecture in its library. The Anthroposophy Society became his final spiritual home from 1905 until his death in 1925. Steiner developed anthroposophy as a spiritual, artistic and social sphere of activities.

Rudolf Steiner appeared in public lecturing all over Europe from the beginning of the 20th century, with his second wife, Marie von Sievers, by his side. They had a common interest in advancing the dramatic art. Steiner wrote mystery dramas, symbolic spiritual plays from the year 1910 on. The mystery dramas were performed in Munich, Germany's artistic capital, and they were well received. But at this time there was also opposition to Steiner. He started to seek a new place for his mystery dramas. A Swiss man, Dr Emil Grossheintz, had purchased a hill from Dornach in Switzerland, near Basel to the Anthroposophy movement. Steiner decided immediately

that he would build his theatre at Dornach. Steiner designed the building himself 1913 and it was called Goetheanum.

Dornach became Rudolf and Maria Steiner's home to the rest of their lives. The World War affected Steiner and his community deeply. He participated in the curing the aftermath of the war. He expounded social solutions, which were mostly rejected. The lasting innovations were education, medicine and natural agriculture. Also, the Christian community was born on the Christian rituals.

The immense upheaval of Steiner's last years was the disastrous fire at Goetheanum on New Year's Eve 1922–1923. Most believe that the fire was due to arson. Building a new Goetheanum began immediately. The new building was to be very different from the previous one. The new building was built completely of concrete and the layout was altered. Steiner's last years were full of hectic activities; visits, lecturing, writings and discussions. He became seriously ill in the autumn of 1924 and died in March 1925.

# The founding of the Waldorf School and Steiner's pedagogical theory

THE WALDORF SCHOOL was founded in Stuttgart, Germany 1919. It was one of Steiner's social reforms during his last years. Steiner kept people around him, who wanted reforms and were willing to help. As far as is known, a worker at Waldorf-Astoria Tobacco factory said to Steiner:

"I see what you meant. But it is too late for us. Could you do something, so that our children would get a human education?"

The director of the factory, Emil Molt, commercial counsellor lead the school project and bore the economic responsibility. He was a follower of Steiner's. The workers were cared for in Molt's factory. They had their own newspaper and a kindergarten, which was not common in those days. Rudolf Steiner visited the Waldorf School often and had meetings with the teachers.

Rudolf Steiner had been a pedagogue since the young age of fifteen. He was a very experienced teacher and he had been also a family tutor. His conviction was that you should help the children to grow up whole human beings. Steiner held fifteen series of lectures about education in Germany, England and Holland in the years 1919–1925.

The Steiner schools all over the world have the same principles with national variations. The Steiner school is complete with twelve grades. The Anthroposophy is not taught but the ideal is the focus in the human education. Boys and girls are taught together, since the very beginning. There is no possibility to repeat a grade or to separate the gifted pupils from the others. The individual rhythm of the pupils' development is respected. The subjects are not divided but the instruction happens periodically. A single class teacher is responsible for the class from first through eighth grade. The foreign language classes begin already in the first year.

Steiner's pedagogy emphasizes the importance of arts and Eurhythmy is held in special regard. The students have frequent arts and crafts classes. The learning materials are self-made in the Steiner schools and the children's periods of life are taken into account, especially the important milestones of age seven and fourteen. The Finnish professor and philosopher, Reijo Wilenius writes: "The child's development to adultness means the sequences of 'rebirths'."

Many of the Steiner's pedagogical features written above have later been adopted in the Finnish school system. These themes have been the introduction of class periods, early language instruction, the children's own growing rhythm and art subjects.

### The Steiner Schools as architectural environments

ARCHITECTURE IS an essential part of Rudolf Steiner's pedagogic thinking. The architectonic school environment is an artistic combination, Integration der Künste, which falls together with the

pedagogic work, following it and supporting it. Life itself demands wholeness. Ernst Weissert has called Waldorf schools "the building school movement", "bauende Schulbewegung". Die Freie Waldorfschule of Stuttgart was the pioneer school. There was first Steiner's idea for the factory school and then the solution was begun so quickly that there was no school building ready. The teachers and pupils gathered together in Stuttgart on a hill called Uhlandshöhe and there in a former coffee house, which then became their school in autumn 1919. It soon became apparent that the school was needed also for other children, whose parents were not workers of Waldorf-Astoria. The social variety of the pupils was much wider than normal.

The first Waldorf school began in a building, which was not planned to be a school. To get more room, temporary solutions were used and later there were larger permanent construction and a range of extensions. Many of the other Steiner schools have been built under similar circumstances with local variations. Steiner called the first Waldorf School as an inspiring example, a model school, 'Musterschule'. He also said that the school reform is needed everywhere in the world. Steiner's goal was to have a total of one hundred Steiner schools founded throughout the world.

Rudolf Steiner had beliefs about the school architecture. In 1924, he said:

"The school building is an artistically designed utility building, Ein Schulbau ist ein künstlerisch gestalteter Utilitätsbau".

The functional character of the school architecture was the first point before other interpretations. When Rudolf Steiner died in 1925, there were two Waldorf schools in Germany, also England and Holland both had one school. Steiner schools were founded twenty-six in different countries of Europe and one school in U.S.A. by 1939.

The pioneer period lasted until 1939 and was a great fight for existence. The pupils' parents paid the expenses. Also, the teachers and parents repaired and painted the temporary buildings themselves. Very few architects were working on design during the pioneer time.

De Vrije School in Den Haag in Holland 1928 and Michael House School in England 1937 were good exceptions; they provided buildings using Steiner's principles.

The Second World War cut the development of the Steiner Schools. However, soon after the war, the schools began again in temporary rooms, in Stuttgart, in the autumn of 1945. Die Freie Waldorfschule Uhlandshöhe was able to move into a new building in 1953. The first school building designed completely by architects was erected in Rendsburg, Schleswig-Holstein beginning in 1950. The general aim was to join together pedagogy and architecture, like a kernel and a husk matching and protecting each other also in unfavourable situations of the 1950's on.

Steiner based his use of colours on J. W. Goethe's colour theory. Goethe had studied colours in a new way, his vast theory was published 1790–1807. Goethe's idea of colours was joined together in a colour circle, in a wholeness, which contained all the colours and where it was possible to move from one colour to another continuously. The first design for interior colours by Rudolf Steiner was made for the Stuttgart Waldorfschule in 1919. All eight classrooms were bluish lilac. He later broadened the colour scale for the expansion of the school. The colours varied from green through to turquoise and from blue to violet in classrooms 4–11. Next was the Goethe school in Hamburg, the colour scale started from red. Rex Raab, an architect is specialized as a planner of Steiner schools. He says that there is no rigid pattern for the colours. It depends on country, people, climate, cardinal points, seasons etc., what colours are used. Also the pictures and materials must be chosen uniquely.

# The organic architecture and the Steiner School buildings

THE STEINER SCHOOLS can be valued also from a wider architectonic point of view, as a part of the organic architecture. Different from Jugendstil, functionalistic and deconstructivistic styles of the

20th century, organic architecture had not been thought of as a specific style, even though examples of it could be found in several very famous architects work, such as Frank Lloyd Wright and the Finnish master Alvar Aalto. The group of organic architects has been very diverse. Living nature and the spiritual human being have been a very important starting point and a source of inspiration for the architects. It has not been a question of how to imitate nature, but it is to be an architectural style that is in harmony with the human mind and at the same time, in balance with the natural environment.

Architecture was changing during the 19th century. The natural sciences and technology with its new possibilities and individual thinking conquered previous methods. Man, nature and religion had lost the connection to each other. The Jugendstil sought strong impressions from nature, and on the other hand, the functionalists strived for practicality and focused on function, the meaning and the action.

Rudolf Steiner also belonged to the group seeking new architecture. As the other pioneers, he turned against the Art Nouveau style. Even though he was not educated as an artist or an architect, he was still experimentally planning new buildings between 1907 and 1925. He agreed with Louis Sullivan's thoughts '...the form follows the function' and Frank Lloyd Wright's principles that the building and its surroundings belong together the same way as the elements of the building go together in completeness.

The Metamorphosis, originated by J.W.Goethe, was characteristic for Steiner's architecture. It means the inner relation of periodic forms, a bridge between the perceptible life and the spiritual existence. Steiner emphasizes that Goethe did not study only the exceptions of nature but he wanted always see the whole combination. For example, a stone was a part of the landscape to him. Goethe devised that there is a main motive which is changing and adapting but it remains invisible itself. We can see the metamorphosis in the growth of a leaf, for example. Goethe named the starting point with a term

"Urpflanze", "original plant" and also "offenbares Geheimnis", "obvious secret". Science and the arts were very close to each other in Goethe's thinking. Steiner underlines that the spiritual world should not be touched through the symbols but through the artistic experiences, forms and colours. On the other hand, we can find for instance seven columns in Steiner's early plans.

The first Goetheanum was a great Steinerian creation. The bigger of its two domes symbolizes the world of the senses and the smaller dome represents spiritual reality. The building was symmetric and it contained seven double columns. Goetheanum was a holistic piece of art; it was not bounded by an aesthetic idea but by a spiritual one. It resembled a temple but yet it was erected for a modern human being.

The planning of the second Goetheanum began immediately after the fire 1923. At this time, concrete was a new building material and it had not yet been used for artistic purposes. Steiner used concrete softly, demonstrating that he sought not only idealistic and practical forming, but also the material aspect, the effective forces of the building materials.

The second Goetheanum got a new shape. Steiner wanted to show the carrying and pressing forces. The building is more angular than the previous one. The main hall is in the shape of a trapezoid and the stage forms a rectangle. Outside the shapes vary greatly; roundness on the west side and very stern, simple and straight, like outer walls on the east. It was also new to integrate the building's design with the surrounding hilly countryside; we can easily notice this in the appearance of the roof. The building was not ready when Steiner died in 1925. The work was continued in the 1950's. Christian Hitsch led the redesigning from 1996 until 1998.

The primary element in Steiner's architecture is symmetry, as man's right and left, and the difference between the front and the back of the house is different, like a man again.

# Idea Function ← FORM → Surroundings Material and structure

The form was not the starting point for Steiner, it was the result. He emphasized that the design work can reveal things which otherwise could remain unnoticed. After Steiner's death, school buildings around the world, have been designed according to his organic architecture. Most of these schools can be found in Middle Europe, England and the Nordic countries. We can mention here the Kristofferskolan in Stockholm, Sweden, designed by Erik Asmussen (1913-1998), a Danish-Swedish architect. Another example is the Rudolf Steiner Seminarium in Järna. There is a Rudolf Steiner skolas Barnehage in Bergen, Norway, built in 1981. It is a small kindergarten building and it is has been adapted very well to the surrounding arctic mountainous terrain and it is shaped as a fish. The architect is Espen Tharaldsen.

### The Steiner Schools in Finland

THE BEGINNING OF the Steiner schools in Finland reminds us of the initial circumstances of the Steiner school movement, in both cases, it was a time of new direction and spiritual rebuilding after World War II. Steiner schools came to Finland in the 1950's, when the standard of living was rising. The Finnish school system had a parallel school system, the primary school and the secondary school; both were long established and traditional. The comprehensive school had not yet founded.

The first Steiner school was founded in Helsinki in 1955. One of the first teachers was a young Ilse Römer, who received her Steiner education in Dornach. She worked at the Helsinki school until 1961. This school followed the Waldorf school model. It had a short starting-up time; the new school building of their own was ready in the summer of 1958. The Helsinki Steiner School was a private school and it had a curriculum of its own.

The second Finnish Steiner school was the Rudolf Steiner School of Lahti, which was founded in 1970 and the third was the Steiner School of Tampere founded in 1971. The school in Lahti was the 88th Steiner school to be founded in the world. The situation of all three Finnish Steiner schools became clearer in 1977. The Finnish Parliament passed The Steiner School Act (1977/417) and The Steiner School Enactment (1977/625). The number of Steiner schools was limited to three. The comprehensive school reform was just being carried out and the Steiner schools were the largest member in the group of alternative pedagogical schools.

The number of the Finnish Steiner schools has grown continuously. The difficult situation of private schools in Finland is being discussed again now in March 2004. The Act of Basic Education in Finland of 1999, did not aid in the founding of new private schools, but just the opposite happened. The Government and the Minister of Education have repeatedly rejected the new applications for additional Steiner schools. Presently there are 66 private schools in Finland, and almost one third of them are Steiner schools, making 20 all together.

# The Rudolf Steiner School of Lahti and its new building

THE EARLY STAGES of The Rudolf Steiner School of Lahti were 'a time of wandering'". These are Ilse Witters's words. She had returned to Finland from Germany with his husband Reinald Witters in 1970. The Steiner School of Lahti began with three teachers, the Witters family and Tuuli Pesonen, who was responsible for the preschool.

A group of parents and teachers were inspired by the pedagogical idea. They sought facilities for the school's first pupils during the summer of 1970. At first, the school was held in the Secondary School of Mukkula. The school relocated three more times before it moved in 1974, to Jalkaranta, the part of the town where it is still situated today. The school first used rooms of a former nursing home

and then it moved again to the previous public school in 1977. A cabin was built in the schoolyard a year later. The pupils' parents and the teachers were repairing the buildings during all the wandering period. The school was permitted to use vacant and discarded buildings, however, all of these rooms old, unusable and they did not answer the pedagogic purposes.

A very important landmark in the life of The Steiner School of Lahti happened on 23.12.1977, when the school received it's official operation license. The school had a registered supporter's association, which later became the builder of the new school building. The planning and design of a school building of their own started in a small working group, the pedagogic research group in 1981. Pirjo Kinnunen, Pauli Lindström and Jorma Vesanen were the architects and Ilse and Reinald Witters and Kristina Englund were the teachers. The group grew larger in the beginning of 1982 and it became the building committee. The financial basis was laid on the lease of land with the city of Lahti. It demanded the new school building to be built by the year 1990.

The plans and decisions of the planning group were debated in common meetings. It was important that the pedagogy and the architectonic questions were both dealt with and discussed openly. Reinald Witters remembers how the shape of the home classes brought about great discussion. The different options were considered. Each homeroom should be unique in size, shape and colour. This would be ideal for the child's developmental stage. On the other hand, it was well known from experience that the homerooms often had to be changed temporarily and the pupils should have ended up in very strange environments. Therefore, groups of classrooms became the key. There are three groups: 2–5, 6–8 and 10–12 grades. The homerooms for the 1st and the 9th grades were the only exceptions.

The small but beautiful site on the slope of a ridge, near the lake Vesijärvi gave the framework for the designs. The site had pine trees on the top of the slope and birch grove towards the bottom. The architects knew the ideas of Rudolf Steiner. Pauli Lindström had studied in Austria and Germany. His teachers were Josef Klose and Hubert Hoffman, professors of architecture. Lindström was very familiar with the principles of the organic architecture and did much for the school. The architects decided in the very beginning that the utility building and the idea were put together.

Pauli Lindström explained hat the designs began from "the image of love with round shaped symbols, which changed into the shape of the building like a metamorphose". But how to fit the building on the small grounds? As the sun is to the south, the building should open towards the upper slope. But because socialisation is also important Steinerism, the building was planned to open to the north, towards the roads. The building holds the pupils in her arms and opens to the birch grove.

The next thing to decide was the location of the pupils and of their homerooms. It was an organic solution to place the homerooms on an arch form in order, from the first grade to the last one in a row. Lindström says that the pupils have "a dream of the adulthood", they want to look forward in development. The pupils' groupings arrange the area both the homerooms and the outside yard. The schoolyard is shaped like a three-leaved clover.

Mostly wood and concrete were used to building the buildings exterior walls. Lindström explains:

"Where the pupils are in contact with the building, the nature of the material is soft, which means wood and where the building is in contact with the traffic, its nature is hard, like a castle and the material used is concrete."

There is a long corridor with glass walls on the inner side of the arch against the yard and it connects the different parts of the building. Part of he corridor is used as a dining room. Reinald Witters tells that there was much pondering about the position of the dining room. The size of all rooms was limited by a normal prize decision. Then an

alternative was found! The space for the dining hall could be situated along the curve of the inner wall as a corridor. Increasing the width of the corridor made the dining room an ample size and created a connection between the ends of the long building.

There is a Geography-Biology class on the ground floor at the end of the arch, which then leads you to the greenhouse with glass walls. Pirjo Kinnunen was one of the architects responsible for the schoolyard. She set up pleasant terraces and steps. The natural look of the grounds has been preserved following the character of the building. The shared space of the building is situated in the middle, where the library and the kitchen are located. The teachers' room and the administration are located on the second floor, away from the pupils. The Eurhythmy hall is also in middle, it is higher than the other rooms.

The homerooms form the skeleton of the building. The shape also serves education in this instance. The classroom itself opens in the direction of the teacher and the symmetry accentuates the learning experience. The first and the ninth grade classrooms are centralized. Both of them are separated from the other classes like symbolizing the borders of development. The first class has a form of a hexagon, which the architect refers to as an "easy form" and the teachers call a "safe space". The ninth class brings to mind a pentagon, which had a special position in the planning. It is said to symbolize the human being. The arts have a positive and harmonizing effect on the pupils and the pentagonal form has also been used in the Eurhythmy hall and in the eastern tower, where the art class is located on the ground floor and just above it is the music hall. Organic forms can be seen in the details, for example the tree motif on the greenhouse window frames.

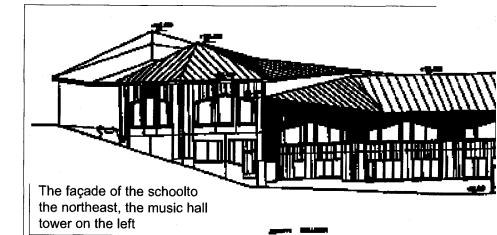
Alongside of placement and form, organic architecture has building material aspects. Here, the architects have chosen natural materials, mostly wood, which they wanted to use more of but the fire regulations limited its use. The architects tell of the décor:

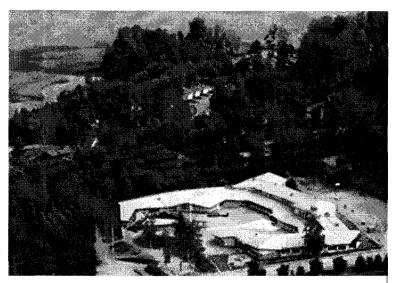
"The interior materials were planned to be of high standard, to get more than 'the usual school building', the pupils' parents helped collect the needed money. The floors are made of birch wood. There are birch parquet floors in the classrooms, the corridors have brick floors, the main hall and it's stairs are made of red granite."

Finally, the colour schemes used are very important in the Steiner schools and each school is free to choose them itself. The common basis is the colour circle formed by Goethe. The architects in Lahti prepared the colouring so that classrooms for grades 1st-2nd were red, grades 3rd-4th orange, 5th grade rooms are yellow, 6th are green, 7th are turquoise, grades 8th-9th are blue, 10th-11th bluish lilac and 12th grade rooms are reddish lilac. The homerooms are distinguished from each other and yet all the colours form a full sequence. The outer colours are equivalent with the inner ones. The pupils live through all of the colours during their school time.

The new school building for The Rudolf Steiner School of Lahti was inaugurated on the 29th of September 1988. There were many guests at the celebrations, including, Arne Klingborg, a Swedish architect. A booklet was published about the school and the new building. A new life began for the school bringing joy and happiness for all.

There is a common goal among the shared principles of all the Steiner schools throughout the world. The goal is to act as a stimulus towards the society. The Rudolf Steiner School of Lahti and its building have already expressed the successful combination of the pedagogic idea and the architecture for sixteen years.





The Steiner School of Lahti was inaugurated on the 29th of September 1988

Pauli Lindström and Jorma Vesanen, Lahti

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Pauli Lindström, Lahti 4.3.2004.

Ilse ja Reinald Witters, Lahti 18.3.2004.

Antti Henttonen Kuvat 2-puoleinen kaikki 3 laitetaan, jos saa skannaamalla kuvat. Kuvat voi sijoittaa sopiviin kohtiin.