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**How to Save the Memory –
The Case of the Round Tower in
Vyborg**

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How to Save the Memory – The Case of the Round Tower in Vyborg

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Abstract

Vyborg is a town behind the present Finnish eastern border. During the centuries it has sometimes been a part of Sweden, sometimes of Russia. When Finland got free from the Russian regime in 1917 Vyborg soon became the second biggest town in Finland.

In the 16th century the Swedish king ordered to reinforce the medieval fortifications of Vyborg. A round cannon tower was built to protect the main gate of the town. The defensive meaning of the tower decreased during the centuries, and in the 1860's the fortifications were began to pull down. Also the tower was ordered to be demolished but it was saved, maybe because it was useful as a storehouse.

In the beginning of the 1920's the local architect Uno Ullberg realized his dream to change the tower into a restaurant. He wanted to open the closed place to the citizens and make them love their history.¹

The Renaissance style restaurant was opened in 1923. The Round Tower gained enormous success. It was immortalized in innumerable photographs, paintings and songs. The Round Tower became the symbol of Vyborg.

In the Second World War Finland lost parts of its eastern areas. The evacuees from Vyborg were ordered to settle in Lahti, a small town in southern Finland.

The lost home became a keen object of longing for the evacuees. They began to record its history sincerely. In 1979 they got an idea to build The Round Tower in Lahti.² This was never realized but the virtual building produced a wide polemic.

Key words:

Corresponding Author:

¹Ullberg 1924, 5.

²'Viipurin henkeä kaivataan nytkin'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, April 9, 1979.

To build The Round Tower in Lahti aroused an enormous enthusiasm among the evacuees. They began to gather the societies from the lost Karelia area around Vyborg city to carry out the idea. Among other things they built a small copy of The Round Tower to the market square of Lahti in the summer 1982. It became very popular as a café.¹

However, making a copy of The Round Tower began soon to provoke indignation. That is why the Karelians started to develop their plan on the new basis. They told that their target is an original, architecturally and functionally high quality building which reflected sources from Vyborg generally, not only The Round Tower but also the Vyborg castle, the art museum and the bastion below the museum. The building was called The Karelia House.² The art museum of Vyborg was one of the earliest art museums in Finland and the house with its location was very beloved.

Figure 1. *The Round Tower in Vyborg in the 1930's. Photo Lahti City Museum Photograph Archives*



The plans were made by a local architect, Jorma Salmenkivi. He was chosen because he was a pupil of Otto-Iivari Meurman who had worked as a planner in Vyborg in the 1920's and 1930's. Meurman became later the first professor in town planning in Finland.³ Salmenkivi told also that the tower could not be copied but the architecture of The Karelia House should be more universal.⁴

Salmenkivi planned a three storey building. On the ground floor there were two exhibition halls, on the first floor a restaurant and on the second floor

¹Teuvo Kuparinen's oral information, February 13, 2013.

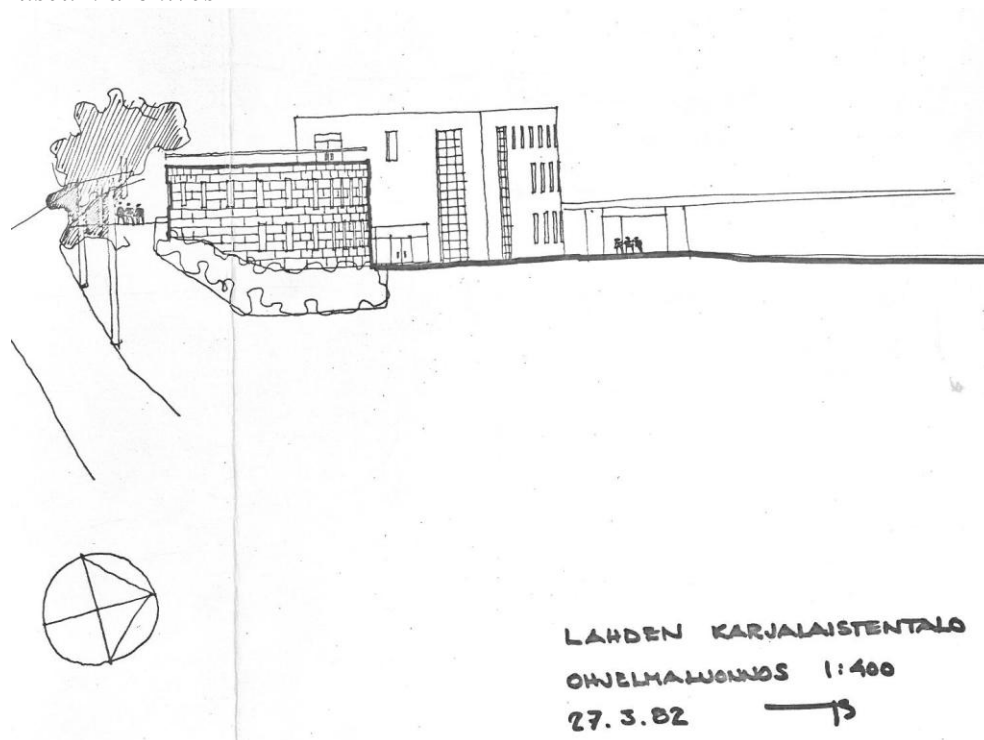
²Kuparinen 2010, 12.

³Teuvo Kuparinen's oral information, February 13, 2013.

⁴Lahteen ei tule Pyöreää tornia vaan Karjala-talo'. *Karjala*, June 10, 1982.

offices and a cabinet.¹ One part resembled The Round Tower with its small window holes and stone structure while the other part was a reflection of the art museum of Vyborg with its huge windowpanes and characteristic gate construction. The architecture of The Karelia House seems also to salute the functionalism of Vyborg in the 1930's. It was in many respects pioneering in Finland the Vyborg library by architect Alvar Aalto as the brightest star.

Figure 2. *The plan of The Karelia House by Jorma Salmenkivi. Lahti City Museum archives*



The Karelia House was intended to be built on the shore of Pikku-Vesijärvi lake beside the city. The house had to be near the city center to be easily reached by the citizens and tourists.² But first of all the place had to resemble Vyborg. Since Vyborg was situated by the junction of the waters the place of The Karelia House should be by the water. And because The Round Tower stood at the end of the park the new house should be built in the green surroundings.³

The leaders of the Karelian societies had political authority. They had ability and skill to steer The Karelia House in the bureaucracy of the city. The city planners accepted the intended place of the house in June 1984.⁴ Around the place there were already many other post-war period Karelian origin buildings and institutions evacuated from Vyborg, for instance the Orthodox

¹Kuparinen 2010, 15.

²Kuparinen 2010, 13.

³Kurki-Suonio, J. (1984). 'Lahden Karjala-talosta'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* March 22.

⁴Kisapuisto sopiva Karjalatalon sijoituspaikaksi'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, June 20, 1984.

Church, the Lahti concert hall and the deaconess hospital. This area had sometimes been nicknamed Little Vyborg.¹

The building, the builders and the intended place of the house aroused a furious discussion in the printed media. And to top it all in the middle of the exchange of views it came out that there already was a copy of The Round Tower in Lahti. The four meter diameter building had been erected to a private plot in 1948. It was a water tower from where the watering came to the garden. The owner was a former Vyborgean who had become very attached to the tower.²

The discussion in the Letters to the Editor of the local newspaper called *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* dealt mainly with copying, the status and history of the builders in Lahti, and the town hierarchy, the value of the intended place of the house.

Among others Otto-Iivari Meurman considered the copying of The Round Tower impossible. He told that the cult could not be built.³ Meurman's opinion carried weight because he was the authority of Finnish city planning, first in its infancy in Vyborg and later elsewhere in Finland.

The copying was resisted by the professionals of building planning, the architects. Otto-Iivari Meurman, the Vyborg authority, and Jorma Salmenkivi, the planner of The Karelia House, thought that copying was inappropriate. In the range of art history the demand of originality and authenticity has always been strong. The meaning of the original building material is essential; unlike for instance in the oriental tradition it cannot be replaced. One reason to the demand of authenticity is also the Western idea of history, in which the historical process is considered to be at the end, and the present and the past are considered separate conceptions. A nostalgia looking back in time has replaced the conception of historical continuity.⁴ The artworks have always been interpreted with the same tools as they were looked at the moment of their birth. It has been difficult to find ways to see the art research as a part of a long chain where the interpretations change and where also the historical continuity is constantly interpreted.⁵ The researcher has his object of research but the past has been lost forever.⁶

Paul Rodaway (1994) has presented an interesting idea of how the visual observation dominates experiencing for instance shopping malls, theme parks and heritage places at the expense of other senses and experiencing. These places are reconstructions and fantasy which hide the important multisensual understanding and experience.⁷ Perhaps the architects understood their relationship with copying from this point of view. The Round Tower in Lahti

¹Niskanen 2005, passim.

²Pyöreä torni tehtiin Lahteen jo vuonna 1948'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* January 18, 1983.

³Teuvo Kuparinen's oral information, February 13, 2013.

⁴Viljo 1999a, 85.

⁵Viljo 1999b, 35.

⁶Holly 2004, 223.

⁷Rodaway 1994, 169,171.

would have been only a mere skin or picture without any taste and smell of life and touch of original materials.

The Round Tower was left in Vyborg in 1945 and it was not acceptable to repeat it in any form, thought the architects. It is true that The Round Tower could not be taken back any more. The question was to visualize the memories and emotions. The term visualize is derived from the medicine. In humanistic sciences it is a conceptual process. Some researchers have used this term to connect the non-existing or immaterial things to empirical and perceptual entities.¹ The Round Tower in Lahti would have been a true copy, but in the first place it would have made the memories and experiences, widely the lost homeland, visible. John Berger (1977) has written that the original task of the images has been to conjure up the appearances of something that is absent.² That's what it was all about in the building of The Round Tower in Lahti.

The laymen did not seem to have been embarrassed by copying The Round Tower, at least there were not this kind of comments in the Letters to the Editor of the local newspaper. One reason is perhaps the enthusiasm which aroused in the beginning of the 1980's in Finland to enrich the built environment with historical forms. Different kinds of bay windows, towers, oriels and miscellaneous multiplicity of styles were welcome after the meager forms of 'the boxes' of the former decades.³ The Finnish version of postmodernism was often only a kind of a banal cavalcade of repetition styles.

The sharpest comments against The Round Tower and The Karelia House in Lahti came from the people who thought the evacuees had once taken the lands of the original population and let them pay their moving expenses. According to the most biting opinion the Lahti citizens now sat frightened in their former play grounds by the lake Pikku-Vesijärvi, the future place of The Karelia House, feeding ducks, because they did not have other resting and recreation areas. They had lost their money to the reimbursements the Karelian evacuees had demanded. Their funds were not sufficient even for The Lahti House which had to be primary to The Karelia House in Lahti.⁴

Both the Vyborg people and the Lahti people had a very personal relation to the intended place of The Karelia House. The real place is situated somewhere between the concrete building and the recollections and experiences come into being there.⁵ As Harry Charrington (1998) puts it: 'Spaces are not, they become'.⁶

The memories of the Lahti people of the former play grounds crystallized into yearning and the building plan of the Vyborg people seemed to threaten an important focal point of the past. This area was not only a beautiful landscape but a personal place. These kinds of experiences do not usually have a

¹Knuuttila 2012, 140.

²Berger 1977, 10.

³Norri 1992, 16.

⁴'Karjala-talo Lahteen'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* March 19, 1984; 'Karjala-talon paikka'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* June 6, 1984.

⁵Karjalainen 1998, 105.

⁶Charrington 1998, 63.

conscious form not to mention words. In the crisis these experiences spring up to the consciousness stronger than any experience actively sought after. The individual stands up for his past by connecting it with the places. These kinds of memories are known to care our fundamental needs to be in safe and taken care of. They mean home to us.¹

This mechanism could be seen opposite in the case of the Vyborg people. They tried to replace the memory of their lost home. They wanted to gather and cure their traumatic experiences by reconstructing their past, to make real the definition of a house and architecture not only as functional constructions but as metaphors of space and time, symbols of existing, as many researchers have put it. Architecture shows the interaction between the world and the individual.²

Those writers who emphasized the tribe boundaries refused with their taxes to take part in the project which they saw to serve only benefits and advantages of one group, the Karelians.³ Among other things they proposed a vote on what to build, The Karelia House or The Lahti House.⁴ The difference between the Lahti people and the Vyborg people, the originals and the newcomers was underlined, and it went without saying that the emigrants came second in this competition.⁵ A request was made that the permanent citizens always do not need to watch at a distance when the evacuees push in and demand the best and the beautiful to themselves.⁶

In the Letters to the Editor The Karelia House was suggested to be built in places that were distant or for instance could be associated with something ugly or dirty as a refuse dump.⁷ There was also a question in the newspaper on how a Bomba House could suit in Lahti.⁸ This referred to the stereotypic image of tawdry Karelian architecture.⁹ A vulgar building and the Finnish lake landscape were a tasteless combination, was the writer's opinion. Two writers suggested that the Finnish autonomous county Ahvenanmaa should be changed into Karelia. The Russians would get Ahvenanmaa and give Karelia back to the Karelians. So the renegades from Ahvenanmaa who did not take part in the common compulsory military service nor pay taxes to Finland could get acquainted with the Russian society system and the Karelians could get to their paradise, as the one of the writers put it down.¹⁰

¹Tuan 1977, 136-137; Porteous 1990, 107, 112.

²Pallasmaa 2012, 104-105.

³Pikku-Vesijärvi'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* March 8, 1984; 'Pikkuvesijärvi'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* June 18, 1984.

⁴Karjala-talo'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* June 18, 1984; 'Karjala- vai Häme-talo'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* June 22, 1984.

⁵Keskustelua Bombasta'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* June 22, 1984.

⁶Karjala-talo'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* June 18, 1984; 'Karjalaiset ja Lahti'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* August 6, 1984.

⁷Juupas – eipäs, Karjala-talo'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* June 28, 1984; 'Lahtelaiset herättää'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* August 14, 1984.

⁸Keskustelua Bombasta'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* June 22, 1984.

⁹See for instance von Bonsdorff 1995, 48.

¹⁰Myytäisiinkö Ahvenanmaa?'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* August 4, 1984; 'Ahvenanmaa ja Karjala'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* August 9, 1984.

‘We’ and ‘the others’ are eternal opposites. The Karelians were used to live by the boarder but the Lahti people were from the safe inland and they had generally not experiences about ‘us’ and ‘those others’ as the Karelians had. Vyborg was said to be the most international town in Finland before the Second World War. There you could sense the centuries old multicultural atmosphere although in the beginning of the 20th Century it was slowly turning into a Finnish town. In the Western Finland people felt the evacuees settling down to the domestic neighborhoods often very threatening. The Karelians had to leave their homes and feel the horrors of the war nearer than other Finns. After the war they had to find a new living and begin to feel at home in strange places. These experiences seem not to have aroused much empathy in the indigenous population but they were reserved and remote. Researches show that the stigma of migration had slowly vanished by the beginning of the 1980’s.¹ Some episodes like the case of The Karelia House however revived it. it.

Most of the Letters to the Editor dealt with the intended site of The Karelia House. Almost all the writers regarded the shore of Pikku-Vesijärvi as one of the most valuable places in Lahti. The shore and the park near the city center belong to everybody and the place had to be maintained vacant. Any building would have spoiled the unique landscape.² The nature values were emphasized strongly. The place was empty and it was by the lake. In the middle of the urban landscape these qualities were highly appreciated – here can be seen the age-old division between good nature and bad city.³

Figure 3. *The lake Pikku-Vesijärvi. Photo Raimo Niskanen*

¹Sallinen-Gimpl 2005, 20-25, 40.

²‘Pikku-Vesijärvi’. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* March 8, 1984; ‘Karjala-talo’. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* March 26, 1984; ‘Karjalatalon paikka’. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* June 8, 1984; ‘Puiston puolesta’. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* June 21, 1984; ‘Koivuvitsalle’. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* August 8, 1984; ‘Toinenkin ehdotus’. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* August 10, 1984; ‘Karjalatalohankkeesta’. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* August 11, 1984.

³Porteous 1990, 176.



Some writers pointed out that there were very few Karelians anymore who had had to leave their homes, and their children are not any more interested in the experiences of their parents and the fates of the Karelians. The intended building should therefore be left without connections to the past.¹ This is an interesting thought: how would The Round Tower or The Karelia House have seemed when the last evacuee had died? The building would have got many new meanings and values by that. It would have been remembered as an achievement of the evacuees but it would also have represented the memories of new generations and other people than the Karelians. A famous Finnish architect Kirmo Mikkola has taught his pupils: 'Architecture is the interpretation of life by its fundamental essence'.² The special character of the house would probably have faded, its Vyborgean features would have lost their meaning and the house would slowly have become a building of Lahti people and Lahti townscape.

A minority of the Letters to the Editor advised to keep calm and patient, to forget the boundaries, the caste system and tribe quarrels. The fates of the Karelians in the war were hard and they did not voluntarily leave their homes to push their way to strange circumstances. Some writers reminded of the important work during the rebuilding, the companies and factories of the Karelians which were very important to the prosperity of Lahti after the war. These people thought that the Karelians earned a house of their own.³ But they did not get it. Slow actions of the officials and the negative tone of the publicity ruined the dream of The Karelia House.

¹'Lahtelaiset herätäkää!'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* August 5, 1984; 'Onko karjalaisuudesta tullut pakkomielle?'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* August 14, 1984.

²Grotenfelt 1986, 23.

³'Karjala-talon paikka'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* July 15, 1984; 'Perinteen merkitys'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* July 17, 1984; 'Vaihdetaan Karjala Hämeeseen'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* August 10, 1984; 'Aluevaihdot'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* August 12, 1984; 'Onko karjalaisuudesta tullut pakkomielle?'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* August 14, 1984; 'Kastijako'. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* August 14, 1984.

Vyborg with its Round Tower was a mythic place. Their loss was ideal for increasing the myth. Vyborg is like Venice, beyond compare in their beauty, history and memories. Joseph Brodsky (1993), who had been sent into exile from The Soviet Union, wrote about his love to Venice, the town which reminded his hometown St. Petersburg and its canals:

Because the city is static while we are moving. The tear is proof of that. Because we go and beauty stays. Because we are headed for the future, while beauty is the eternal present. The tear is an attempt to remain, to stay behind, to merge with the city. But that's against the rules. The tear is a throwback, a tribute of the future to the past. Or else it is the result of subtracting the greater from the lesser: beauty from man. The same goes for love, because one's love, too, is greater than oneself.¹

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¹Brodsky 1993, 134-135.

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- The Letters to the Editor in *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* have been named in the notes.

Oral Information

- Teuvo Kuparinen, headmaster, pensioner, Lahti. Interview February 13, 2013.