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**Business and Culture – Time of Great Changes
in the 1980's in Finland, Lahti as an Example**

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Business and Culture – Time of Great Changes in the 1980's in Finland, Lahti as an Example

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Abstract

Finland had a strong economic boom in the 1980's. The citizen became a consumer. Everybody wanted to enjoy life and its possibilities. The American origin term 'shoppailu', shopping, was taken in. Also culture was moved to consumer goods, and it slowly became commercialized, maybe plain, too. On the crest of the boom Finland built, no more department stores but hypermarkets and malls, no more public swimming pools but spas, no more playing fields but recreation centers and multipurpose halls. The town and the whole life was a stage. From the 1970's onwards the Lahti city center began to be enlarged on the place of the Paavola area which was an old garden suburb from the 1920's. The policy-makers dreamed of a new commercial area and culture center. The new Paavola represented new architecture: marketplaces, squares, plazas, towers, gates, pavilions, bridges, glass roofs. This was the new architecture of the 1980's which was based on the new city actions such as all kinds of spectacles like graffiti, big polterabends, flea markets, happenings and 24-hour boat cruises, typical to this era. Paavola turned the old city hierarchy upside down, too. The silhouette of Lahti had been ruled by the traditional European elements, the church and the town hall, under whose realm the business and culture buildings submitted. Paavola was based on a new kind of low zone structure where different functions revolved each other. The market zone was built next to the city center, and the culture zone was behind that. An open parking field became the basic unit of town fabric. A new landmark of Paavola was a glass tower of a shopping center with representation rooms and a terrace of a bank high up in the skies. What a symbol for the era of the consuming party!

Keywords: City planning, Culture buildings, Supermarkets, 1980's.

Introduction

Lahti is a rather big town in Southern Finland. In the beginning of the 1980's there was about 95,000 inhabitants in Lahti, and it was the seventh biggest town in Finland.

At that time the architects of the town planning office of Lahti were interested in making different theoretic accounts, visions and memorandums concerning the future growth directions of the city, traffic and ways to use the city. They began to see the city as a big puzzle, playground or laboratory. The dreams seemed to be able to get wings because the 1980's were an era of economic growth, unshakeable faith in the good future, but also an era of irresponsible social development. Finally it ended to depression and problems that still are under reparation in Finland.

The analyses and plans of the city planning office give excellent starting points to study the ideology and ideals of the great change of urban development in the 1980's. As a background of these materials I have used researches, lately made in Finland, about the architecture after the Second World War and community planning. Their very own spices to this article give the surveys of the changes in Finnish consuming habits that began slowly in the 1950's and accelerated in the 1980's under the pressure of global trends.

As an example of these social processes I have chosen the Paavola area in Lahti. Paavola was born in the late 1920's as a workers' area and a garden suburb. It was an illustrative stage of the great urban spectacle of the 1980's.

Finland in the 1980's

Finland lived an era of huge changes in the 1980's. The 25 years long era of President Urho Kekkonen ended in 1981 and his nearly dictator-like figure left the Finnish politics, culture and social stage. Also the impact of the Soviet Union began to diminish in Finland.

There was also a strong economic boom in the 1980's. The Finns wanted their country to become the new Japan. The citizen turned to be a consumer. Investing was a new concept for an ordinary Finn. The American origin term 'shoppailu', shopping, was taken in. Shopping became a new hobby, a way to spend leisure time. This global trend was copied to the Finnish way of living in the 1980's. Also culture was moved into consumer goods, and it slowly became commercialized, maybe plain, too. The high culture and the popular culture began to come closer to each other.¹

¹ Zukin 1998, 187-188; Mäenpää 2004, 294, 305; von Bagh 2008, 407, 470; Mattila & Ilmavirta 2013, 348-350.

Figure 1. *Koskikeskus Shopping Centre, Tampere, 1988*



Source: finna.fi.

On the crest of the boom Finland built, no more public swimming pools but spas, no more playing fields but recreation centers and multipurpose halls, no more department stores but hypermarkets and malls. The American style commercial centers reminded of a small city without the unpleasant factors such as ugly weather: you could walk along the light shining corridors listening soft to some music while staying inside (Figure 1). The town and life in general was a stage.²

At the same time new residential areas were erected among old town structures. This was the first time to build one-sided elements, districts meant only for habitation, to city centers.³ This was a small paradox compared to the tendency of lively street life. On the one hand privacy increased. On the other hand a kind of a sense of community was growing. This meant a new kind of urbanism in Finland.

The 1980's has been called the years of plenty.⁴ The new urban architecture was a total cornucopia: marketplaces, squares, plazas, towers, gates, pavilions, bridges, glass roofs. The architectural language was phenomenal and incredible, and it answered to the yearning for modern, technical and at the same time historical forms (Figure 1). This blazing

² Mäenpää 2004, 305; Koho 2002, 44-48.

³ Saarikangas 2007, 10.

⁴ Rauske 2008, 122.

architectural inflorescence soon withered away and got some bitter critics afterwards.⁵ For one moment it was the perfect scenery for the new way of urban living. The architecture of the 1980's was also a quite unique phenomenon in the history of Finnish buildings, which has always reflected scarcity of material and economic resources and ideals of modesty and simplicity.⁶

The new architecture of the 1980's was based on the new city actions as all kind of spectacles. The flea markets became very trendy, graffiti, big polterabends and freshmen happenings of the universities were a new kind of youth culture, spas and 24-hour boat cruises became popular among older people and funfairs attracted children (Figure 2). Even the church modernized itself and developed a new music and sociability based service called St. Thomas Mass. The strict Finnish liquor license statutes were loosened, and the Finns being usually so greedy for alcohol tried to get accustomed to drink in a sophisticated European way.⁷ The first McDonalds came to Finland in 1984 with great festivities. The food culture found other tastes from foreign sources as well: many tex-mex restaurants, Irish pubs and Parisian cafes were established in Finland.⁸

Figure 2. *Puuhamaa Funfair, Tervakoski, 1984*



Source: finna.fi.

⁵ See for instance Salokorpi 1990, 67-72.

⁶ Koho 2002, 44.

⁷ Mäenpää 2004, 29-300.

⁸ Mäkelä 2004, 367.

Everybody wanted to enjoy life and its possibilities. Liberty was the word of the time. Nobody knew then that a big collapse in the shape of the deep economic depression would happen after that glorious decade. The green movement began to rise in Finland, and the ominous words of world famous Finnish philosopher Georg Henrik von Wright fell on deaf ears. His prophesy of the destruction of nature, the standardization of the culture and the gradual vanishing of human individuality were proved to be mainly true after a couple of decades.⁹

Lahti in the 1980's

Lahti is a big town in the Finnish scale (figure 3). It has also grown very quickly. It has the status of a town in the year 1905. Between 1905 and 1974 the population of Lahti rose 34-fold. In 1974 the population was 94 000.¹⁰ Immediately after the Second World War the population grew about ten percent per year. Then the growth evened out to a couple of percent until it almost stopped in the middle of the 1970's.¹¹ To build new housing after the war was a heavy task. The residential districts were situated around the city center, in the areas where empty space and cheap land were available. The community structure became quite fragmented.¹² After the Second World War there was also an ideal to save the city center only for business and public buildings.¹³ In the year 1978 the town planners found out that this aim had been realized: the city center was full of offices and the citizens lived on the edge zones.¹⁴ At the same time the suburbs became an object of critical writings. They were described as places of rootless passive people and social problems.¹⁵

⁹ Mäenpää 2004, 307; von Bagh 2008, 469-470; see also von Wright 1984, especially 179-191.

¹⁰ Turpeinen 1980, 28.

¹¹ Niskanen 2012, 8.

¹² Tuomi 1992, 100.

¹³ Laisaari s.a., 19-23; Tuomi 2005, 150.

¹⁴ Niskanen 2012, 9.

¹⁵ Saarikangas 2004, 69-71.

Figure 3. *Lahti in the 1970's*



Source: Lahti City Museum Photograph Archives.

So the time was ripe for regeneration of the city center. The architects began to revive the central areas of the town by planning dwellings, commercial and cultural services. From the 1970's onwards the Lahti city center began to be enlarged to the east, on the place of the Paavola area (Figure 4).¹⁶ Paavola was an old garden suburb from the 1920's, planned by architect Otto-Iivari Meurman (1890-1994), the father of Finnish town planning, as he has been called. By the 1970's this flourishing green village had fallen into decay because of the unstable planning policy of the town. The fate of Paavola had been uncertain for some decades and its inhabitants had not taken care of their houses and plots. It was decided that the houses would be pulled down. The policy-makers dreamed of a new commercial area and culture center in Paavola.¹⁷

¹⁶ Keskustan toimivuuden ja viihtyisyyden kehittäminen 1984, passim; Niskanen 2012, 10.

¹⁷ Kaupunkirakenteen kehitys 1878-1983, 35-36.

Figure 4. *Paavola Garden Suburb in the 1970's*



Source: Lahti City Museum Photograph Archives.

Paavola in the 1980's

The new Paavola represented the new architecture: squares and plazas, glass and steel buildings, glass roofs, arches, bridges and concrete decks with languishing gardens. It was a strong opposite of the old Paavola, created by Meurman who stressed harmonious coexistence of human beings, animals and plants. The aim of his city plans was humanity, greenness and cozy living, as he pointed in his book of city planning, *Asemakaavaoppi* (published in the year 1947), the first work of its kind in Finland.¹⁸

¹⁸ Meurman 1947, 9, 59-61.

Figure 5. *Trio Shopping Centre and Terrace, Lahti, 1987*



Source: Lahti City Museum Photograph Archives.

A new landmark of Paavola was a glass tower of a shopping center with representation rooms and a terrace of a bank high up in the skies (Figure 5). What an apt symbol for the era of consuming party! The typical feature of the 1980's was young businessmen spending time negotiating at luxury food and champagne tables. These were called yuppies. A small terrace of the bank still reminds us of these wonderful times and men.

Paavola turned the old city hierarchy upside down. The basis of Lahti is a strict square plan from the end of the 1900th century. The silhouette of the town had been ruled by the traditional European elements, the church and the town hall, under whose realm the business and culture buildings submitted. The new Paavola was based on a new kind of low zone structure where different functions revolve each other. The market zone was built next to the city center, and the culture zone was behind it, facing the backsides of the market halls. A large open parking field became a basic unit of town fabric, both around the markets and the culture buildings Figure 6).

Figure 6. *Eka Market in Paavola, Lahti*



Source: Lahti City Museum Photograph Archives.

Many cities built big culture and multipurpose buildings in the 1960's and 1970's. The Finnish state began to finance culture buildings in the 1960's mostly because of the quick urbanization. New kinds of problems aroused when the old Finnish agrarian way of life rapidly began to vanish. The state aimed to cure these troubles by culture. Finland built a modern welfare state.¹⁹ By that time there were very few specified buildings for libraries, theatres, museums and music in Finland.²⁰ The culture center of Paavola in the 1980's in Lahti was a late newcomer of this phenomenon (Figure 7).

¹⁹ Kolbe 2004, 197.

²⁰ Härö 2001, 157-160; Niskanen 2008, 5.

Figure 7. *Paavola Culture Centre*



Source: Lahti City Museum Photograph Archives.

The culture center was built between the years 1983 and 1991. It consisted of a theatre, an adult education center and a library. The original plan also included an art museum and a courthouse but they were not carried out. All the buildings are situated around a large square that is a common element in European city planning. In Finland especially architect Alvar Aalto stressed the importance of the civil square in the connection of cultural buildings.²¹ This composition was a strong symbol of the Western art history since the Antiques. Beside the square there is an old birch alley, a reminder of the lost Paavola.

The theatre building was planned by the nowadays world famous architect Pekka Salminen (b. 1937) who won the architectural competition (Figure 8). He reshaped the traditional forms of the culture buildings to hilarious colorful entity without solemnity and rigidity. The individual house is simple and calm outside, and the old tradition to representativeness was abandoned. It was not built of valuable materials but of concrete. The interiors are intimate, cozy and informal. The foyers are very low, like little

²¹ Härö 2001, 160-161.

nooks. The stairs, the typical elements of the culture buildings, are not huge and festive but small, unexpectedly situated and capriciously turning. The furnishing was planned by an interior decorator Yrjö Kukkapuro (b. 1933). The most significant element of the interior is a chair called Pilvi (Cloud), whose forms are chubby, friendly and inviting. The architect and the interior decorator worked in close collaboration.²²

Figure 8. *Lahti City Theatre by Architect Pekka Salminen, 1983*



Source: Lahti City Museum Photograph Archives.

The adult education center and the library (Figure 9) were planned by architect Arto Sipinen (b. 1936). His monumental buildings in the style of Alvar Aalto were very popular and fashionable in the 1980's when he won very many architectural competitions with this handwriting. Sipinen has been awarded about forty times in competitions, a kind of record in Finland.²³ This was the case in Lahti, too. Sipinen's adult education center and library represents the white cube style of Alvar Aalto with materials typical to culture buildings. The adult education center is made of light marble and glass, and the library is made of travertine. The essential element of these buildings is water in forms of fountains, artificial ponds and pools.²⁴ On the courtyard of the library there is an old apple tree from the garden city times. Some years ago there was a plan to build a parking lot on

²² Niskanen 2012, 89; Niskanen 2015.

²³ Koho 1996, 84-85; Koho 2002, 17.

²⁴ Niskanen 2012, 90-91.

the place and the tree was to be toppled. It proved to be very important for the citizens. They fought desperately for the tree, so it was preserved.

Figure 9. *Lahti City Library by Architect Arto Sipinen, 1991*



Source: Lahti City Museum Photograph Archives.

When the new Paavola was ready in the turn of the 1980's and the 1990's there was a heated discussion whether it is meant for yuppies or for the ordinary people. The worry was groundless. The citizens found both the commercial and the cultural services. The theatre doubled its visitors, the customers of the library increased with a third part of the original amount.²⁵ The center of the city was moved lightly to the east, to Paavola, by these new business and culture palaces of the glorious 1980's.

Conclusions

The town planning of the 1980's changed Lahti permanently. The scale and silhouette of the town grew, open blocks and squares increased, and architecture became more impressive and individual.

The 1980's were actually the last era to try to enlarge the city center and to change its location. The deep depression that began in the end of the 1980's affected strongly the building sector and the marvelous dreams died. The new slogan is concentration – the town grows inside.

²⁵ Niskanen 2015.

New kinds of challenges aroused: climate change, destruction of the nature and the old town structures. These kinds of questions were partly reasons for awakening the protection of nature and built heritage. The upside down phenomenon of the 1980's turned into the upside down phenomenon of the 1990's: the remaining parts of old Paavola were evaluated nationally worthy cultural environments in the beginning of the 2000's.

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