

ousing policy, architecture l the everyday

Riitta Nikula

"When the Housing Foundation began to build Tapiola there wasn't yet any sewer system in Espoo, no water pipes, no electricity connections – nothing at all that today is considered necessary in a developed society."

"And the municipality fathers explained in all seriousness that they do not want such finery in the future either: 'We in Espoo have for almost five hundred years followed the principle that each house has its own well and an institution at the back of the yard called a privy. The system has worked excellently for hundreds of years and will work this way in the future, too.'"

"This is how the matter was explained to the representatives of the Housing Foundation in the negotiations with the representatives of the municipality in regards to the problems of the building of the garden city. But the municipality fathers continued: 'You can, of course, build a garden city here, we won't oppose it as long as you pay for it all yourself. You must build the streets, the sewer systems, the sanitation department, the water pipes, the street lighting. It's excellent that you will do all of this. You are allowed to do it, but you won't get a penny from the municipality.' This is how the development of urban habitation began in Espoo."¹

It was thus that Heikki von Hertzen encapsulated the birth of Tapiola in spring 1983 in an angry article to the *Helsingin Sanomat* newspaper against the plans for the expansion of the Län-siväylä motor way. He continued:

"When the Housing Foundation in 1952 began to build the garden city of Tapiola, Espoo was still a complete rural parish. There were about 25,000 inhabitants. The community was directed mainly by landed gentry and the larger landowners. Today almost 140,000 inhabitants live in Espoo and the city fathers are happy to emphasise that it is the fourth largest city in Finland. In fact Espoo is still spiritually the largest rural community in Finland. Herein lies the core of its problem."

At the beginning of the 1950s the conservative Swedish-speaking rural parish of Espoo was going through a change. People came to live there from Karelia and Porkkala. In 1944, the year the Continuation War ended, the population of 14,000 grew by almost 4000, and in 1950 there were already almost 23,000 inhabitants. In the 1953 elections the Left, that is, the traditionally urban political parties, won the majority of seats in the municipal council. The decision to move Helsinki University of Technology from the centre of Helsinki to Otaniemi in Espoo initiated the building of



The laying of the foundation stone of the Tapiola Garden City, 5.9.1953.
Housing Foundation postcard



An aerial view of the eastern residential area.
Photo Housing Foundation

the student campus already in 1950, even though the move itself didn't take place until the 1960s. When, just after this, in 1951, the Housing Foundation was founded and began to plan a whole garden city, it was clear that there considerable conflicts existed in the small rural municipality. Espoo didn't want Tapiola, nor did the inhabitants of Tapiola want Espoo. Tapiola tried to free itself from the rural parish and become an independent town. According to Uolevi Itkonen, at least 93% of the inhabitants of Tapiola supported independence. The process with its many stages ended with the state wrapping all the problems into one package, and Espoo in its entirety was made a non-chartered borough at the beginning of 1963. Nine years later it became a city.²

It is still hard today for many to perceive Espoo as a city. The second largest city in Finland is, in fact, a composition of suburbs scattered around a seashore, and which, despite continuous planning, never seems to settle into a unity. The monumental Länsiväylä motorway ties the southern concentrations together, but in north Espoo orienting is a necessary skill.

It is hard to define the characteristics of Espoo due to the existence of strong contrasts, conflicts and paradoxes. Within the boundaries of the city, between the impressive southern seashore and the northern lake district, all post-war housing ideals converge as varied sized patches amidst the historical agricultural landscape and remnants of forest nature.

In the book *Espoo. Totuus Suomesta* [Espoo. The truth about Finland] (2000) edited by Tuomas Nevanlinna and Jukka Relander, many of the contributors testify to the special qualities of Espoo. The editors state in the preface:

"It is easy to draw up a long list of the things that Espoo is not: it is not a city, it is not the countryside, it is not a locality, it is not a community. It has no centre, no past, no identity. From

the uniqueness of Espoo follows that being an inhabitant of Espoo is based on paradoxes: for an inhabitant of Espoo, the past is specifically 'pastlessness', its identity is the lack of identity and the experience of localness is mainly the distance measured in kilometres or minutes from Kamppi [Helsinki bus station] or the railway station square."³

In the patchwork quilt that is Espoo, Tapiola is not only the most well-known patch but also the most defined one. I would argue that Tapiola is, despite Espoo, an urban locality and community. Tapiola has a centre and a strong identity, which today is already interesting because of its past.

The founding of the Housing Foundation in 1951, only six years after the end of the war, was a unique, historic event. Through its six founding organisations, it had from the beginning a firm place in Finnish society and its "discretionally ideological"⁴ law-graduate director Heikki von Hertzen was a leading figure in Finnish housing politics.⁵ The success story of the Tapiola garden city after the difficulties during the initial stages and the establishment of its international fame was presented in the book *Raportti kaupungin rakentamisesta. Tapiolan arkea ja juhlaa. Asuntosäätiö 1951-1981* [A report on the building of a city. The everyday and the festive in Tapiola] by von Hertzen and Uolevi Itkonen, published in 1985.

The ideological background and the architectural whole are to a large extent explained through two books: Heikki von Hertzen's *Koti vaiko kasarmi lapsillemme* [A home or barracks for our children?] (1946) and Otto-I. Meurman's *Asemakaavaoppi* [The theory of town planning] (1947) have indeed been well-thumbed through by all those who have given thought to the special quality of Tapiola.

Nobody has yet calculated how many published leaflets, picture books and newspaper articles there are about Tapiola, not even those

kept in the Housing Foundation archives. There is plenty of material to be analysed from many different angles, even though Riitta Hurme already elaborated in her doctoral thesis from 1991, *Suomalainen lähtiö Tapiolasta Pihlajamäkeen*⁶ [The Finnish Suburb. From Tapiola to Pihlajamäki], the main aspects of the history of Tapiola and its place in Finnish town planning. *Tapiola. A History and Architectural Guide* (1992) by Timo Tuomi listed not only the work of the architects in the planning of Tapiola but also gave an account of its place in the discourse of modern architecture.⁷ In the debates regarding its architecture, town-planning principles and housing Tapiola has, however, over time turned into a cliché, a single-minded value for which it is hard to find justification in the planned and built reality.⁸ The construction of Tapiola and its myth are still awaiting their researchers. In the following article I attempt to highlight certain aspects of Tapiola as a living environment.

Home-ownership city

"Tapiola has purposefully been founded as a small 'cross-section society', where the Finnish labourer and university professor could live side by side and also enjoy doing so without yearning for the joys of a class society. So far this has been successful. When the second stage was completed, 24% of those requiring a dwelling belonged to the first social group, 34% to the second and 43% to the third/fourth (skilled and unskilled workers). From a socio-political viewpoint, it is very interesting that also specifically people from the last two social groups wanted to reserve and acquire their own dwelling as soon as the developer gave them the secure opportunity to do so."⁹

In emphasising the importance of the variety of social backgrounds of the inhabitants of Tapiola, von Hertzen wrote: "It is not difficult to build a beautiful and elegant rich man's city district. It

is an altogether different matter to aim for these same goals when building – hampered by the existing legislation – a modern city for every man. This is the very thing that has made the planning of Tapiola interesting."¹⁰

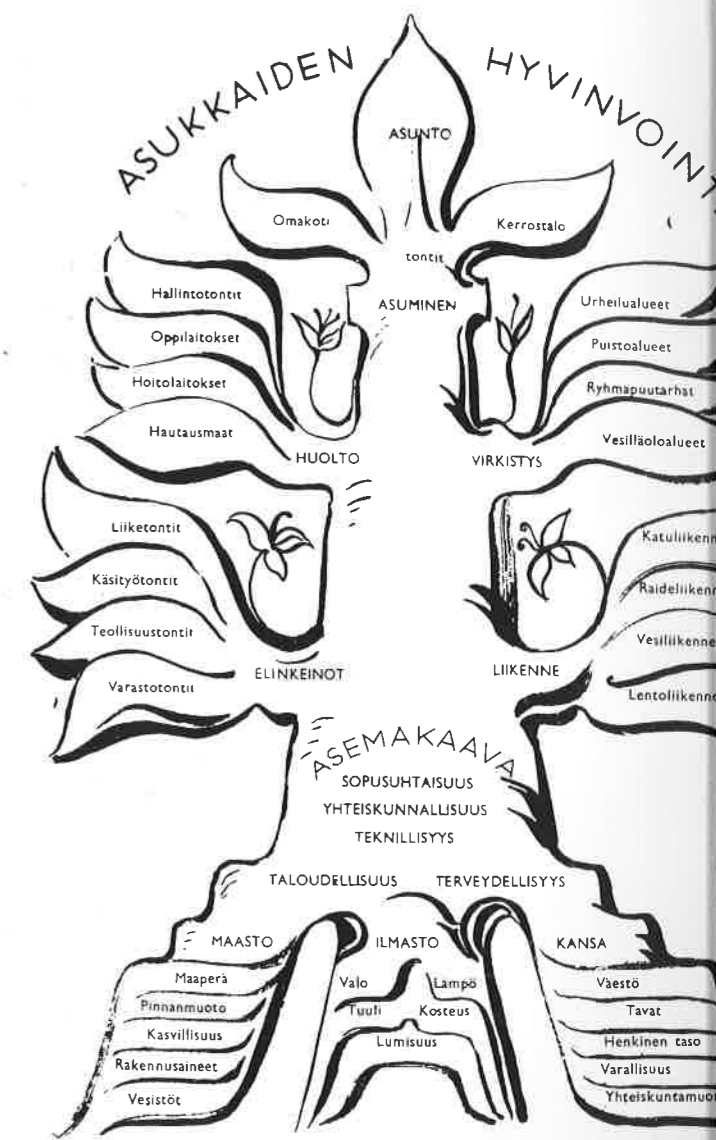
The Housing Foundation began to build the garden city of Tapiola in 1953 in a situation where the new state legislation on housing production turned Finland into a nation of home-owners. The state support, the so-called Arava legislation, was aimed specifically at home-buyers, not municipalities or other public bodies intending to produce tenant housing, as happened, for instance, in Sweden, which in many other ways qualifies as a model. At the beginning of his study *Omat kodit ja vuokrahuoneet* [Owned homes and tenant rooms] (1993) concerning the years 1920–1950, Hannu Ruonavaara has interestingly set out the historical convergence of Finnish housing policy and home-ownership in the post-war situation. In 1950 just over one-quarter of the dwellings in the cities were owner-occupied and in the 1985 census that figure had risen to already two-thirds. At the same time as Finland was rapidly becoming urbanised, home ownership was increasing. Ruonavaara states: "Just as one can talk about a home-ownership society one can also talk about a home-ownership city."¹¹ This opens an important viewpoint on Tapiola.

Anneli Juntto has in her study *Asuntokysymys Suomessa Topeliuksesta tulopolitiikkaan* [The housing question in Finland. From Topelius to income policy] discussed why in the post-war situation there was a concentration on providing loans for home ownership. She also argues that home-saving promoted old traditions of philanthropic self-help and moral upbringing that made the formation of political consensus easier. Through home-saving people with a low income were given the opportunity for social upward mobility. Juntto quotes Kauko Sipponen from 1954: "The

well-being of society depends on its ability to raise independent and self-reliant personalities. These characteristics are developed particularly by the aim to acquire a home of one's own."¹²

Home-saving had an important meaning in the economic growth of post-war Finland: it could be described as a state religion. When von Hertzen was asked in an international congress in 1963 what people will use their money for when they have paid for their homes he replied "For an even higher culture of housing and the home. After all, is there anything better, more essential, more an important part of our everyday well-being and standard of living than the immediate living environment, dwelling and home? It is important to make our dwellings more spacious and above all the surroundings of our dwellings, both the building plot as well as the overall milieu of the whole residential city district, must become many times better and more spacious, and even biologically correct. And this, specifically this, we can afford, and we must be able to afford, as the living standard rises. But of course we must be prepared to sacrifice more resources for the good of a higher dwelling culture – and not less than previously, as has been propagated already for decades."¹³

Eighty percent of the dwellings in Tapiola were built to be sold as state-subsidised (Arava) dwellings.¹⁴ The Arava loans gave people from different social backgrounds an opportunity to live specifically in a home they owned themselves. The importance of this as the core characteristic of the Tapiola community can hardly be exaggerated. People who had moved to Tapiola did not move to Espoo but were committed through strict saving to being inhabitants of a new, strongly unique community, one even marketed as a utopian enterprise. This concerned both the person saving to buy a small flat in a multi-storey building and the one who had managed to acquire a detached house. The communality propagated in Tapiola was realised through ownership.

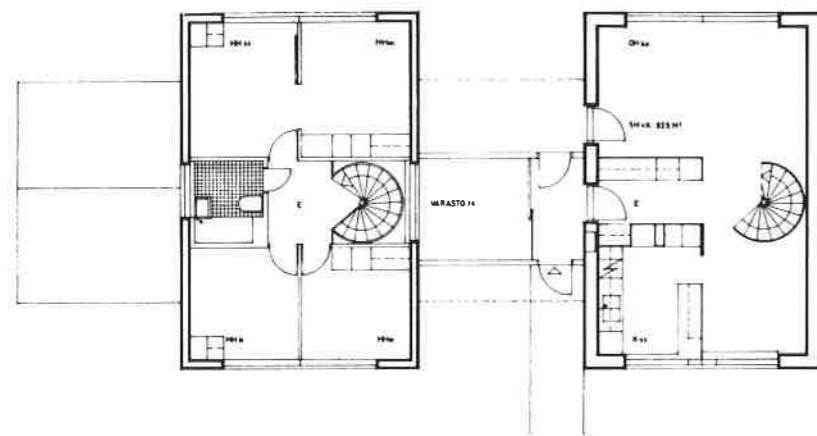


Asemakaava, sen perusteet, elimet ja päämäärä.

"The Residents' Well-being": A tree-like growth of town planning element resulting in the well-being of residents. Otto-I. Meurman's organic urban planning. Otto-I. Meurman, *Asemakaavaoppi* [The Theory of Town Planning], 1947.

ASUNTO - OSAKEYHTIÖ KEHRÄÄJÄ

Valmistumisvuosi	1960	Talotyyppi	ketjutalo
Asunto, tyyppi	5 h+k	Arkkitehti	Kaija ja Heikki Siren
ala m ²	99,0		
Huoneiston keskimääräinen hankinta-arvo			49.050,— nmk
Huoneiston luovutushinta (oma osuus)			11.906,— nmk
Keskim. vastikkeet, ensimmäinen	3,23 nmk/m ²	yht.	320,— nmk
Keskim. vastikkeet, vuonna 1965	3,64 nmk/m ²	yht.	360,— nmk



Kaija and Heikki Siren: The Kehräjä row houses (1960). A page from the Housing Foundation 'green leaflet', *Tapiolan puutarhakaupunki - Tietoja suosituimmista asuntotyypeistä ja asumiskustannuksista* [The Garden City of Tapiola - Information about the most popular dwelling types and living costs] 1965.

Homes in the bosom of nature

"The most important insight regarding the new planning methods followed in Tapiola - as also judged internationally - is the mixed placement of high-rise and low-rise housing in both a methodical fashion and following the topography. Almost everywhere in the world the earlier procedure was for high-rise housing to be located in its own areas and low-rise housing correspondingly in special areas of single-family houses. The result has been bad residential areas and bad city districts - either a too high density in the high-rise areas or bad services in the areas of single-family houses. And what's worse, two kinds of sterility and monotony were created (...) The Housing Foundation had another reason, too, for concentrating all their power on developing single-family houses. Numerous surveys indicated that living in a single-family house and low-rise housing in general was by far the most popular choice. Despite this, the citizens' almost unanimous wish had been realised rarely in urban conditions. The house types were old-fashioned and completely unsuited for prefabricated production. It was therefore decided that different single-family house solutions were going to be carried out. Between 1952 and 1965 prefabricated single-family houses - terraced, 'chain' and atrium house solutions - were realised based on new design principles. There is hardly another place in the world which has an equally large selection of different single-family house dwelling types as Tapiola has."¹⁵

In 1965 64.5% of the total number of buildings in Tapiola were residential buildings, with a total volume of 1,200,000m³ and divided between the different dwelling types as follows: blocks of flats approximately 940,000m³, terraced housing approximately 182,000m³, and single-family houses approximately 78,000m³. The number of inhabitants in the area was calculated to be under 16,000,

which meant an average density of 57 persons per hectare.¹⁶ According to Ossi Hiisiö, the Tapiola of the Housing Foundation had about 4600 dwellings, 130 of them in single-family houses, 500 in terraced houses and the rest in blocks of flats.¹⁷

Both Meurman and von Hertzen wrote endlessly in favour of low density and low-rise housing. The magazine published by the Housing Foundation from 1950 onwards called *Asuntopolitiikka* [Housing Policy] spread a new consciously anti-urban city concept around the whole country. Free copies of the magazine were given to Members of Parliament, city and town council members, architects throughout the country as well as all those officials and employees in the population centres holding positions that had anything to do with housing policies.¹⁸ Tapiola was continuously highlighted as a good example, and high-rise areas with even slightly higher densities met with severe criticism. Meurman, however, did not see his organic city model as being in opposition to all things old. Even though Meurman resigned from his position in the planning of Tapiola and the board of the Housing Foundation in 1954 because he could not accept seven-storey blocks of flats,¹⁹ his later assessment of Tapiola contains a critique also of the other direction: "Such an old spirit urbanism could to some extent have its place."²⁰ In von Hertzen's writings, however, the superiority of low-rise housing is endlessly highlighted. As a family home, the block of flats was merely an interim stage in the career of a home-saver.

The Family Federation of Finland (henceforth FFF), founded in 1941, drove single-mindedly for a population policy. As they saw it, the core of society was the family with children. Already ten years before the Tapiola project, the FFF proposed that every family should have at least four children just so that the population of Finland would remain the same, while the ideal family should



Jorma Järvi: An interior view in one of the detached houses at Aarnivalkea (1956–58).
Photo Housing Foundation (Pietinen)

have six children.²¹ After the war the number of marriages and births grew rapidly. There was a strong demand for family-centred social planning.

In her (above-mentioned) doctoral thesis Riitta Hurme analysed Tapiola and in particular the appearance of the first eastern residential area from a town planning point of view. She shows how important it was for the Tapiola milieu that the borders of the buildings had not been strictly defined in the town plan. The fact that the architects of the buildings were given the task of taking care of the details of the plan solution gave the milieu its particular aesthetic.²² In the plans for the planting the relationship of the buildings to the roads and the pedestrian routes was softened. In regards to several modest rows of houses, the passer-by perceives that the plantings are the most important facade.

When Tapiola is studied from the viewpoint of housing and living, the placement of the buildings in relation to one another is emphasised. The multi-storey buildings form a spacious framework for the area on which the compositions of the terraced and 'chain' houses rest. The nature, which is experienced as something free and common to all, dominates the views from the rooms of every home in Tapiola. The work of the landscape architects in the natural landscape varied from detailed embankments and the protection of old trees to colourful modernist selection of plantings. The importance of landscape planning in supporting the architecture began to dawn on the inhabitants of Tapiola only when the vegetation aged and with disagreements arising from the confusion of individual tree-fellings.

Kirsi Saarikangas has astutely studied the cultural meanings of Finnish residential architecture. In her book *Asunnon muodonmuutoksia. Puhtauden estetiikka ja sukupuoli modernissa arkkitehtuurissa* [Transformations of the home. The aesthetics of

cleanliness and gender in modern architecture] (2002) she pays attention also to the special character of Tapiola: "In the spatial continuum the relationship between the interior and exterior spaces, the home, the courtyard and the common public space is porous and the borders between them move and are unclear."²³ I see this as a factor that most clearly separates Tapiola as a living environment from all other places. It is, however, not easy to grasp this from the material published about Tapiola.

Trees, bushes and lawns are indeed dominant in the published photographs of Tapiola, but it was generally not the custom to allow people in architectural photographs. That is why the publications give a contradictory view of the garden city. The pictures generally do not follow von Herten's own rhetoric. The ideals of architectural photography and housing policy do not converge.

The 'green leaflet' published by the Housing Foundation in 1965 titled *Tapiolan puutarhakaupunki – Tietoja suosituimmista asuntotyypeistä ja asumiskustannuksista* [The garden city of Tapiola – Information about the most popular dwelling types and living costs] gives basic information about the most important housing types in words, pictures and drawings; but a picture of a couple of children playing does not tell much about everyday life in Tapiola. The leaflet does not include a single interior picture, and only one car reminds us about that particular form of transport. Living, homes and the everyday routines are left to the imagination. It is possible that the strict emphasis on architecture was a working strategy in marketing the dwellings.

It is possible to interpret from the floor plans in the 'green leaflet' how people have lived in Tapiola. Apart from the detached houses of Mäntyviita, all dwellings have considerably large windows in proportion to the floor area. From the one-room



Aulis Blomstedt: The Ketju row houses (1954) in October 1991.
Photo Riitta Nikula

flats in Mäntytorni tower to the largest (99.5m²) detached houses of Hiidenkiventie Road, all dwellings are oriented to look from the interior out into nature. As regards the shape of rooms, the architects aimed for solutions which are as near to a square as possible. Thus the basic idea of old inner city housing, that is, the protection of man's privacy and everyday routines from the environment and gazes from one's surroundings has been inverted. In the homes of Tapiola it is believed that everyone at every opportunity happily looks out into the landscape and reciprocally can withstand the gaze from the surroundings.²⁴

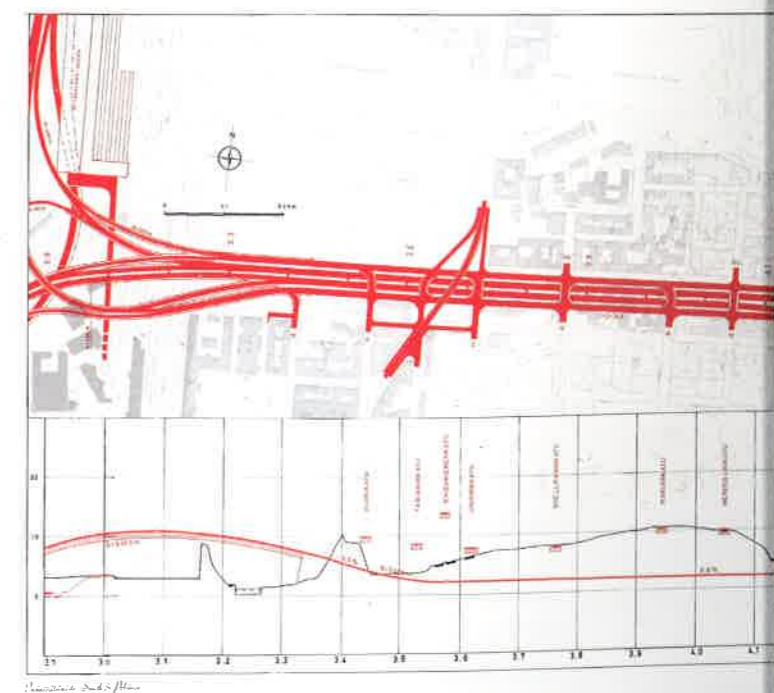
In Tapiola, more than in any other urban neighbourhood, people live amidst nature. Taking care of the yards and gardens is still an important hobby for only a part of the inhabitants. The most important thing in the connection to nature is probably, apart from the presence of the scenery,

the safety of the immediate vicinity for families with children and the possibilities afforded for adult outdoor activities.

The lightness and openness that the pioneers of Modernist architecture called for at the end of the 1920s was realised in the dwellings and whole surroundings of Tapiola. The floor plans of all the dwellings, ranging from one to five rooms, are similar in spirit and thoroughly modern. Early photographs of the homes show interior design in a similar spirit: light new furniture, no heavy sofa groups, and a couple of peasant objects or wall-hangings to symbolise Finnishness. With the passing of time, however, living styles have become differentiated.

Ossi Hiisiö's book *Tapiola – parempien ihmisten kylä* [Tapiola – The Village of Better People] (1970) looked critically at the programme and reality of the garden city. His abundant interview material

Engineers Smith & Polvinen: Plan for a Ruoholahti – Kruununhaka motorway, Helsinki (1968).
Wilbur Smith & Associates, Engineers Pentti Polvinen, *Helsinki City Traffic Study, Part II. General Plan*. Helsinki 1968.





Kaija and Heikki Siren: The Kehräjä row houses (1960).
The streetside in October 1984.
Photo Riitta Nikula

strongly emphasises, however, how the closeness to nature was still generally experienced as a positive characteristic of Tapiola. On the other hand, the young families who enjoyed being in nature easily envisaged moving even further away from Helsinki. Hiisiö paid particular attention to the lack of cultural services and communality. It seems today that this point of view was the obsession of the time. In Tapiola, as in other urban societies, children bring parents of a similar age together, making them acquaintances, but the people in Tapiola do not specifically aim to make friends with their neighbours any more than people generally in cities. In that sense, I would argue that Tapiola has a particularly urban-like character.

A story from Tapiola

My own family moved to Tapiola in spring 1972. We would have wanted to stay in Kruunuhaka

in the centre of Helsinki, but we also wanted children. It was impossible to buy a large enough flat in the centre of Helsinki. It was very difficult to arrange any children's day-care. There was no maternity leave or day-care legislation; everyone had to arrange the care of their children as best they could if they wanted to keep their job. The urban environment spurned children. Traffic was a real hazard.

In the beginning of the 1970s the utopias and realities had reached an acute stage. Young architects dreamed of a brave new urbanism, a historical centre teeming with people and new compact, methodically built suburbs. There was a huge appreciation for living in the city centre. In town planning, however, the traditional modernism still dominated the development of Helsinki. Increasing the amount of traffic and densities pushed aside in a terrible way the values of the historical blocks, as the engineering office of

Kaija and Heikki Siren: The Kehräjä row houses (1960).
The yardside in autumn 1989.
Photo Riitta Nikula



Wilbur Smith & Polvinen planned motorways to strangle the historical blocks of Helsinki. Internal courtyards were taken over by cars, the trend of turning residential buildings into offices continued, children were not taken into account anywhere.

For about half a year we searched the suburbs of Helsinki looking for a new home. We took the bus to the end stops and walked the courtyards and school-paths, and pondered where we might settle down and what we could afford. Finally in Tapiola, in a quiet area with good bus connections, we found a reasonably priced terraced house with sufficient rooms for the parents to write at home and to rear the bunch of children we wished to have. The price of the house was undoubtedly due to the fact that at that time the popularity of Tapiola was at its lowest.

For the young intellectuals the title 'forest city' had come to mean everything that quickly had to

be rejected: residential buildings scattered sparsely within a virgin landscape, free-form compositions which, according to the new aesthetical views, could not in any way be considered as an aesthetically mastered urban fabric. Tapiola looked just like this in the beginning of the 1970s. Von Hertzen's anti-urban propaganda had reached its antithesis. We were embarrassed to move to Tapiola and Espoo, but the everyday realities won.

We immediately discovered a lot of good in Tapiola. The centre of the western residential area, the small Oravannahkatori Square, was linked with so frequent bus connections that we thought we would be able to manage without a car for the rest of our life. There were two large food stores, Elanto and Talouskauppa, a bookstore, a cosmetics shop, a post-office, a cafe, a hairdressers and a kiosk. Iltaruskontie Road, where we lived, was a cul-de-sac lined with spruces, birches, rowans and even a couple of oaks, and it was possible to



reach the school without having to cross a single road. The road and the gardens of the courtyards seamlessly joined the beautiful small forest, just as the children's play area did to the impressive rock outcrops upon which one could climb. In the birch copse between our house and the sports field there were more birds than we ever learned to recognise. The spring call of the black bird and the masterly music of the nightingale competed for attention with the music practice sessions of the legendary music family of Erkki Pohjola living in the same street.

The Kehräjä housing company houses on Iltaruskontie Road by Kaija and Heikki Siren was '60s state-subsidised (Arava) housing at its best. The 99m² dwellings (the floor area stipulated in the Arava regulations) were skilfully designed. On the ground floor only the kitchen was screened off from the otherwise uninterrupted space opening out onto the back yard. A sinuous sculptural-like black spiral staircase divided the space between living and dining areas. Upstairs there were four small bedrooms and a bathroom. The cramped size of the small rooms was partly alleviated by the gentle sloping ceiling that followed the incline of the roof and by the picture of nature opening up from the beautifully pro-

portioned windows. Everything in the black-and-white cube was small but beautiful.

We lived in Tapiola for 26 good years, and three boys grew into men. We learned to appreciate the original planning principles of the area. The children enjoyed the yard safely from the moment they could stand on their own feet. In the early years the group of neighbourhood boys was so large that they could accomplish not only all the well-known ball games, but the most astonishing imaginative games as well. The parents were most impressed, however, by the two-storey snow castle they built and the crusades led from there. The script was found in *Jokamiehen Maailmanhistoria* [Everyman's world history]; a group of Saracens was discovered in the Mankkaa direction, north of Tapiola.

There was sufficient wild city forest left between the houses dispersed in nature for the children to play in. Building huts was a continuous pastime. Only when an architect living nearby allowed them to freely take timber and rag carpets spoiled in a fire to build a hut did it become so prominent that there was a discernible worry amid the admiration of the older inhabitants. Was there a shanty town in the making amidst the birch copse?

Kaija and Heikki Siren: The Kehräjä row houses (1960). A view from the workroom window in April 1993.
Photo Riitta Nikula



Kaija and Heikki Siren: The Kehräätä row houses (1960). In the yard in 1977.
Photo Riitta Nikula

A small rock outcrop is a mountain for a child, contorted pines are magic monkey trees. The children must be given the opportunity to discover these for themselves. Tapiola was best in this regard. As the children grew so, too, naturally did their territory. Initially they didn't have the need to venture further than where their strength took them. The neighbourhood had supported them tactfully. "Everybody knows to which family boys looking like that should be returned" a neighbour once stated when our third child learnt to walk along our street. When they invented the notion of the residential street for the town plan, a street functioning on the pedestrians' terms, on which cars were allowed access to the houses, Iltaruskontie Road immediately received a sign indicating that it was now a residential street.

The cellular structure of the town plan worked. It was easy to carry out one's everyday routes by foot or bicycle. The children learnt early on to pull home food from the shop in a trolley bag – even though they sometimes complained that other children's mothers brought the things home by car.

◆ Jousenkaari Primary School had the feel of a village school. Everybody knew everybody else and the teachers cared about the children. After six years of primary school it was a welcome expansion of their life circle to move to the comprehensive school situated in the centre of Tapiola. In our experience one should always place one's children in the nearest primary school. A child's life is set on a peaceful track when their friends in the yard and school are the same.

We moved to Tapiola at a time when there were

still many children living there. We got to experience what von Hertzen's pathos-filled talk about the importance of the green environment meant, and at that point we had no wish to remind everybody of the fact that one doesn't remain a child forever. We experienced precisely what Meurman's planning doctrines meant. A spacious environment gave the children an opportunity to grow and become independent. It was easier for the parents to be flexible about their own needs than it was for the children to be flexible about growing up. We learnt how man's life is filled with different stages and needs. Mechanistic reflections about the interrelationship between values and meanings were left to themselves. Even our own tendency for having an opinion on all matters mellowed.

The architecture of Tapiola was studied through the camera lens in all weathers. The uncontrived solutions of Finnish Modernism seemed better with each passing year. Small is indeed beautiful when it is well designed. The delicate placement of buildings in nature and their careful massing, the rhythmic variation of multi-storey buildings and terraced houses, the lively routes in the pedestrian paths, the spacious lawns and the abundance of planting contained lasting aesthetic and practical values. These things don't open up to the tourists who peek at the 'famous garden city' through the window of their bus driving along the main roads.

The fact that Tapiola was not built as an 'ordinary city district' is visible in a surprising number of details. I wonder, for instance, whether a similar situation has arisen elsewhere, as it did on our



"Prepared for the Saracen attack from the direction of Mankkaa" [north Espoo] in winter 1981. Photo Riitta Nikula

road, where in the town plan plot intended for 18 homes only 14 were built in 3 rows because such a composition fitted best into the landscape. The Kehräjä housing company later offered a welcome solution for building extensions which spared us from the pain of having to move. When the company had paid back its Arava loan we made two small extensions to the ground floor of our house, in the place of the original cold storage. The planning of these required, of course, the common consent of all 14 owners and compliance with the wishes of the city building inspector. The process took its time but the end result was good. We got an extra room, a heated storage cellar and a sauna. It would be generally worthwhile to ar-

range the option for building extensions in new housing areas.

I have always loved historical cities, sturdy urban blocks, period layers, and the patina of time. I have studied them, and I have written in defence of their preservation. However, I myself lived for 26 happy years in a forest town and learned new things. I became sensitive to the landscape, where the imprint of man is merely a light touch on the surface of an ancient seashore landscape, where old age is counted in the incomprehensible years of geological time. In the forest city of Tapiola the old is really old, and the new simply new.

The world changes continually, and so does Tapiola. However, I have trouble seeing beauty in

The rock outcrop on Iltaruskontie Road in October 1992. Photo Riitta Nikula



the pretensions of its expanding shopping mall. The inhabitants used to get everything they needed from the now dead shops in the area, as well as from the specialist shops of Tapiontori Square. The disappearance of local services has meant that convenience and common responsibility has disappeared from the everyday life of families with children. It is hard to measure the profound effect of motorization.

I lived in Tapiola in an uncomplicated way, as if it was a suburb of Helsinki. While the bus connections became more infrequent, the journey time, however, decreased. The extension of the motorway felt stupid compared to the proposal to extend the Helsinki metro to Tapiola, but the

motorway allowed the busses to go faster and operate more efficiently and brought a bicycle path also on its south side. Tapiola is still a good place for families with children, even though probably nobody any longer dreams about a car-free life. We, too, had to acquire a car when it was necessary to get from one place to another even within Espoo. On the other hand, one reads about the car-bound life of Americans, where the children can't be left alone for one moment, let alone be sent on an errand to the shop on their own: one must hope that Finns will become aware in time of such dangers. Now would be the appropriate time to quickly take a few steps backwards in the direction of the ideals of the post-war forest town.



When the children finished their education it was a good time for two older people to return to Kruununhaka. Also, all our children now live in the inner city. It will be interesting to see how the addresses change if their families grow.

The future of Tapiola

During the 50-year history of Tapiola the standard of living in Finland has increased by an incomprehensible amount. The way of life has changed completely and with it the expectations aimed at both the living environment and the spaciousness of dwellings and their plan solutions. On their completion, the dwellings of Tapiola offered many people unprecedented comforts. Hiisiö's aforementioned book *Tapiola – parempien ihmisten kylä* (1970) still captured the feelings of the first inhabitants. Even though the book in its time received attention as the first critical evaluation of the special characteristics of the 'village' brought to world fame, what today's reader finds most important is the view into the everyday life of different Tapiola inhabitants that the interview research opened up. People had moved to the small multi-storey flats from the most squalid one-room abode (with a stove) in the inner city of Helsinki. For many, having their own bathroom and central heating meant that their life became immensely easier. In that respect, von Hertzen's dream was fully realised.

A couple of decades later his black-and-white rhetoric irritated immensely all those who

planned and studied cities and habitation. In the sociologist Hiisiö's research interviews the community thinking and sexual liberation of the beginning of the 1970s were emphasised. From today's vantage point, the texts of both von Hertzen and Hiisiö are important documents of the fact that the world changes continuously, as do the evaluations of it.

Nowadays people want more spaciousness and comfort in their homes than fifty years ago. Common and private space is desired beyond the old Arava norms. The normal hopes include a utility room, a kitchen supplied with a variety of home appliances and a sauna. These do not exist in Tapiola. Many cannot even imagine a car-free life. With the car the children are taken to specialised hobbies and the abundant shopping is taken home. Visiting the shopping mall is no longer about acquiring the necessary items: it is a Saturday's entertainment. Only old people and active singles prefer local shops and will move to live in the centre of Helsinki if they can find a place.

The population of Tapiola has grown older. Many have stayed put. They complain about the decay of the housing units, and perhaps most of all about the disappearance of the original shops. Even though the selection of department stores in the expanded centre of Tapiola is large, it is believed that even this is insufficient, as the majority wants to go by car on ever-new adventures to ever-larger shoppers' paradises.



Viljo Revell: The Kaskenkaatajantie apartment building (1957) in October 1992.
Photo Riitta Nikula

According to the development goals for the capital region, more people must be housed in Tapiola. This is problematic, however, for both general and specific reasons. It is a well-known fact that nobody wants more buildings in their immediate vicinity, and the 'not-in-my-backyard' phenomenon is particularly strong in Tapiola. This is also particularly easy to understand because Tapiola was built as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. It was not built as the initial stage of a new city but specifically as a ready product of one specific type of urban thinking. The milieu values of Tapiola were thought out precisely. Every house was placed in relation to both nature and other buildings, at a detailed level. Every building composition, curve in the road, and green area got its value from the delicate whole.

Tapiola is a cultural environment made (almost) in one go, something which one can like or dislike, but it is very hard to bring anything new into it. It is not possible to touch it without changing it. Therefore, talk about densification strikes a particularly horrible ring for the inhabitants

of Tapiola. Seen the other way around, it is also extremely difficult to bring new elements into the overall composition of Tapiola. Nevertheless, new housing units have been successfully built in the centre of Tapiola, as well as on its borders and in the near-vicinity. The construction of Kalevalantie Road cutting through Tapiola caused outrage, but now it is easy to perceive the Hopealehto area as a natural extension of Tapiola. There is little life, however, in that part of the centre of Tapiola south of Merituulentie Road. The company headquarters and commercial spaces change owners or tenants frequently. People have not learned to appreciate the densely wrinkled form of the blocks of flats. Only water fowl enjoy the murky new water basin.

One could consult, for instance, Meurman's classic book *Asemakaavaoppi* when considering the densification and expansion of Tapiola. The first planner of Tapiola writes in the first chapter about the viewpoints which were not taken into account in von Hertzen's Tapiola:



Viljo Revell: The Kaskenkaatajantie apartment building (1957) in May 1988.
Photo Riitta Nikula



Markus Tavio: The Viisikko apartment blocks (1954) in October 1992.
Photo Riitta Nikula

Markus Tavio: The Viisikko apartment blocks (1954) in May 1993.
Photo Riitta Nikula



"The town plan lives. It should indeed live, because its objective is a living organism, a community, the external visible shell of which it outlines. If the town plan ceases to live and congeals it will before long turn into a straight jacket which also kills the entity it has enclosed. Then the development of the society has come to an end, rigor mortis begins limb by limb to take over the society, suffocating it, eventually completely. One must state here that the town plan must be flexible. The more flexible it is the less need there is for painful radical operations, which would indeed be very much wished for because an operation always puts a strain on the body system."²⁵

Tapiola was not the beginning of a new city, it was a unique building project, the Finnish garden city that one can also call 'forest city'. The energy for the project was based on the fact that von Herten's deep conviction and relentless energy resonated with both the state-subsidised housing loan system as well as the ideals of the architects and that no municipal bureaucracy inhibited it. Therefore, Tapiola became a special achievement and event in the history of city building. Therefore, it also later became a particularly difficult problem from the town planning point of view.

Notes

- 1 Heikki von Herten, 'Tuhaako Espoo Länsiväylänsä?' [Is Espoo destroying its Länsiväylä motorway?] *Helsingin Sanomat* 1.5.1983.
- 2 Uolevi Itkonen, *Espookirja* [The Espoo book]. Espoon kaupunki, Espoo 1992, 52–65.
- 3 Tuomas Nevanlinna and Jukka Relander, *Espoo. Totuus Suomesta* [Espoo. The truth about Finland]. Tammi, Helsinki 2000, 11.
- 4 This characterisation is by Uolevi Itkonen, who was 'a trumpet player in the Tapiola Symphony Orchestra' for 20 years.
- 5 For a closer examination of von Herten see Timo Tuomi's article 'Versatility in Town Planning: Heikki von Herten and Tapiola' in the present volume. Even though von Herten (naturally) appears in all research about housing politics from that period, as well as in several architectural studies, a biography about him has yet to be written.
- 6 Riitta Hurme, *Suomalainen lähiö Tapiolasta Pihlajamäkeen* [The Finnish Suburb. From Tapiola to Pihlajamäki]. Bidrag till kännedom av Finlands natur och folk, 142. Societas scientiarum Fennica, Tammsaari 1991.
- 7 Timo Tuomi, *Tapiola. A History and Architectural Guide*. Espoo City Museum, Espoo 1992.
- 8 Only Anja Kervoanto Nevanlinna has aimed to initiate the dismantling of the myth in her article 'Kauas Tapiolat karkaaat' [literally 'Far away the Tapiolas escape' (a pun on the Aki Kaurismäki film 'Kauas pilvet karkaavat', the English title of which is Drifting Clouds)] outlining the different layers of Tapiola. In Nevanlinna and Relander 2000, op. cit. 139–166.
- 9 Heikki von Herten and Uolevi Itkonen, *Raportti kaupungin rakentamisesta. Tapiolan arkea ja juhlaa. Asuntosäätiö 1951–1981* [A report on the building of a city. The everyday and the festive in Tapiola], 1985, 123–124 (original emphasis).
- 10 *Ibid.*, 124.
- 11 Hannu Ruonavaara proposes, following on from Jim Kemeny, that countries can be divided up according to their dwelling systems into 'home-owning societies', and cost-renting societies'. Home-owning societies include USA, UK, Australia and New Zealand, and cost-renting societies include The Netherlands, Sweden, Germany and Switzerland. Hannu Ruonavaara, 'Omat kodit ja vuokrahuoneet. Sosiologinen tutkimus asunnonhallinnan muodoista Suomen asutuskeskuksissa 1920–1950' [Owned homes and tenant rooms. A sociological study of the forms of housing occupancy in Finnish



Aulis Blomstedt: The Ketju row houses (1954) in September 1993.
Photo Riitta Nikula

- population centre between 1920 and 1950]. *Turun yliopisto, Turku* 1993, 3–7.
- 12 Anneli Juntto, *Asuntokysymys Suomessa Topeliuksesta tulopolitiikkaan* [The housing question in Finland. From Topelius to incomes policy]. *Sosiaalipoliittinen Yhdistys, Helsinki* 1990, 253.
- 13 *Asuntopolitiikka* 2/1963, 5.
- 14 Housing Foundation, *Tapiolan puutarhakaupunki – Tietoja suosituimmista asuntotyypeistä ja asunuskustannuksista* [Tapiola garden city – Information about the most popular dwelling types and living costs], [1965], 3.
- 15 Von Hertzen 1985, *op. cit.*, 62.
- 16 Housing Foundation, [1965], *op. cit.*, 2.
- 17 Ossi Hiisiö, *Tapiola – parempien ihmisten kylä* [Tapiola – The Village of Better People]. *Tammi, Helsinki* 1970, 37.
- 18 Von Hertzen 1985, *op. cit.*, 19.
- 19 Hurme 1991, *op. cit.*, 116–117.
- 20 Otto-I. Meurman interviewed by Kirjo Mikkola, 23.5.1974. *Rakennustaitteen seuran haastatteluja* [Finnish Architectural Society interviews] (unpublished document), edited by Tapani Virkkala,



- 130; See Riitta Nikula, 'Housing policy and the urban environment – programme and reality', in *Heroism and the Everyday, Building Finland in the 1950s*. *Museum of Finnish Architecture, Helsinki* 1994, 77–95.
- 21 Juntto 1990, 197.
- 22 Hurme 1991, 107–108.
- 23 Kirsi Saarikangas, *Asunnon muodonmuutoksia. Puhtauden estetiikka ja sukupuoli modernissa arkkitehtuurissa* [Transformations of the home. The aesthetics of cleanliness and gender in modern architecture]. *Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, Helsinki* 2002, 401–402.
- 24 Kirsi Saarikangas discusses the roots and interpretations of this openness and links it to Beatriz Colomina's research into the importance of the relationship between the gaze and movement. It would be worthwhile developing those ideas further in regards to Tapiola.
- 25 Otto-I. Meurman, *Asemakaavaoppi* [The theory of town planning]. *Original emphasis. Rakennuskirja, Helsinki* 1982 [originally published 1947], 10–11.

- 1 The Tapiolan Centre main bus stop in November 1988.
Photo Riitta Nikula
- 2 A view from the Oravannahkatori parking lot in 1993.
Photo Riitta Nikula
- 3 A city view in winter 1993.
Photo Riitta Nikula
- 4 Signposting for the Otso Gallery in March 1995.
Photo Riitta Nikula