

2<sup>nd</sup> day of research seminar

**AFFORDABLE SOCIAL HOUSING 1910s-1930s  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY**



**scientific promoter**

*Aino Niskanen*

**coordinators of the Nordic Node** *Antonello Alici  
Chiara Monterumisi  
Johan Mårtelius*

**25  
May  
2022**

Aalto University  
Bachelor Centre, Otakaari 1X, Espoo  
Lecture hall A1  
in presence and on Teams link

**10.00-10.10**

**opening addresses**

**HELENI PORFYRIOU**

*Coordinator of the GUDesign Network (Genealogy of Urban Design)*

*CNR National Research Council, ISPC - Institute of Heritage Sciences*

**AINO NISKANEN**

*Promoter of the Thematic Seminar*

*Professor Emerita, Aalto University*

**10.10-10.30**

**introduction**

**JOHAN MÅRTELIUS**

*Professor Emeritus, KTH Royal Institute of Technology*

**Nordic connections in 1920s housing**

**10.30-11.00**

**MONICA ANDERSSON**

*Chairman of Samfundet S:t Erik, Senior lecturer in Political Science, Stockholm University*

**Hallman in Stockholm – Garden City Movement in Artistic Town-Planning for working Class Families**

**abstract**

The first state regulation of the development of cities in Sweden goes back to the 1874 building code. In 1907 a Housing Act, site-leasehold rights with low rents and an urban planning law were introduced. The praxis that followed was characterized by garden cities and large courtyard housing blocks. The streets and the buildings were often adapted to the grounds in artistic urban plans inspired by Camillo Sitte, introduced by urban planning architect Per O. Hallman in Stockholm. Site-leasehold rights was introduced as a tool for the municipality to stop speculation in land and make it possible for poor families to move into modern housing with green space and to build their own homes with a garden. Tenants received the rights to participate in the fulfillment of regulations founded in 1920 and built their own organization in 1923. They created a cooperative movement, HSB 1923-1924, which was successful to build artistic housing in Per O. Hallmans townplans with large courtyard housing with the help of generous loans with low rates.

Simplicity and moderation in housing-designs was typical for the period. The greatest architects designed housing for workers. Stockholm city's housing committee produced design-plans for houses that were rationally built with subsidized loans from Stockholm city's site-leasehold cashier's office. In 1926 Stockholm city founded a cottage-bureau, SMÅA, guiding workers to build their own homes with their own hands, with factory-built units. SMÅA contributed with organization, materials and instructors.

### **biographical notes**

Senior lecturer at Stockholm University. She obtained the PhD in Social Sciences in 2009 with a dissertation on modernist influence on Politics and Urban Planning Legislation in Sweden, where she found modernist influence in accordance with functional partitioning on the building code 1931. She is also Chairman of the Samfundet S:t Erik Stockholm and member of the ArkDes observation board. Former MP, Commissioner in Stockholm on Real Estate and Urban Planning, Under-Secretary of State in the Department of Health and Social Affairs and Director-General of the National Rail Administration.

11.00-11.30

### **MARTIN SØBERG**

*Associate Professor, Royal Danish Academy, PhD, Architect*

### **Kay Fisker and Social Housing in Denmark c. 1920–1940**

#### **abstract**

As in many other European countries, the construction of social housing in Denmark grew significantly during the interwar period c. 1920–1940. This paper discusses this development through a closer look at key social housing projects by the Danish architect Kay Fisker (1893–1965). Following a housing crisis during the 1910s, state funding was introduced in Denmark in 1918, operated during the period 1922–28 by the State Housing Foundation. This allowed for the construction of urban housing at a new scale, featuring new amenities including increasing amounts of greenspace in relation to the estates. Traditional perimeter blocks became larger and were opened to allow for more sunlight. Later, new urban typologies including parallel blocks were introduced, partly inspired by German examples. Kay Fisker was a significant figure in this process. Key projects include the Copenhagen housing estates Hornbækhus (1920–22), Jagtgaarden (1924–25), Gullfosshus (1927) and Nürnberggaarden (1931), as well as rowhouse projects, including Brønsparken (1937). Furthermore, Fisker published a survey of contemporary housing projects, "Copenhagen Building Types" in 1936, based on typological studies conducted at the Royal Danish Academy of Fines Arts' School of Architecture, where Fisker was teaching. While these projects contributed to significantly to improving the living conditions of the working class, Fisker was not explicitly driven by political ideals. If anything, he insisted on balancing the means of architecture, paying equal attention to functions and forms.

### **biographical notes**

Martin Søberg, PhD, is a Danish art historian and Associate Professor at the Institute of Architecture and Culture at the Royal Danish Academy in Copenhagen. His field of research includes architectural theory, artistic research, and poetics. He is author of the research-based monograph *Kay Fisker: Works and Ideas in Danish Modern Architecture* (Bloomsbury, 2021), co-editor of several books including *Architectures of Dismantling and Restructuring: Spaces of Danish Welfare, 1970–Present* (Lars Müller Publishers, 2022) and *The Artful Plan: Architectural Drawing Reconfigured* (Birkhäuser, 2020) and editor

of the thematic issues "Spaces of Welfare" of the journal *Architecture and Culture* (2022) and "Forming Welfare" of *Nordic Journal of Architecture* (2015).

## 11.30-12.00

### MARKUS LÄHTEENMÄKI

University of Helsinki, PhD art historian

#### Leningrad: New Landscapes – Leningrad workers' housing 1924–1930s

##### abstract

This paper exhibits the housing projects built in Soviet Leningrad in the 1920s and 1930s analysing their architecture and sources of their formal and material means of expression. It focuses on the first sizeable workers housing projects following the October revolution and the Soviet Civil War, designed and built by the Leningrad building commission (Stroikom) in the city's Southern suburbs in 1924-1926. It also shows other projects by the same commission spanning to mid-1930s. Analysing the designs for the housing projects, the paper shows how there is a deliberate attempt in some of them to rethink and reconfigure the classical, Imperial codes and languages of the city and its architecture, and through architectural forms translate and adapt them into the new era. The paper shows that the sources for such reconfigurations came from Western models of housing, but also from other sources, such as the ideology of the fledgling Soviet state, vernacular Russian architecture and new Modernist tendencies in visual arts. The paper furthermore displays visual urban imagery of the early Soviet period and Leningrad in particular showing how the new workers housing projects as well as the public buildings and green spaces that were built alongside them became an essential part of the iconography of the new state, and more than that, an important part of the process of rebuilding the Imperial state and city as a Socialist one.

##### biographical notes

Markus Lähteenmäki is a historian and curator of art and architecture. He recently defended his doctoral thesis titled "*The History that is Made In the Streets': Architecture and Images of Public Space in Revolutionary Russia*" done under the supervision of professors Maarten Delbeke and Jean-Louis Cohen at ETH Zurich, where he worked 2017-2021. Currently he is a postdoc fellow at University of Helsinki where he is working to turn his thesis into a book. His recent publications include articles "Lines of Action and Readymade Stones: Lev Rudnev's Monument to Victims of the Revolution" in *AR, Architecture Research* (2021), "Learning to Look with Brodsky" in *Log* (Spring, 2021) and "Superstudio: Perspective against architecture" in *Architecture Through Drawing* (Lund Humphries, 2019). His most recent curated exhibition was *Planetarium: Oleg Kudryashov, Peter Märkli, Alexander Brodsky* (gta Exhibitions, 2019). Previously he worked as a curator of Drawing Matter collections in the UK.

## 12.00-12.30

### discussions on the presentations

## 12.30-13.00

### lunch break

13.00-13.30

**AINO NISKANEN**

*Professor Emerita, Aalto University*

**On early affordable housing in Helsinki**

**abstract**

The squalor of urban housing emerged as a social issue in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. At the early 20<sup>th</sup> century urban planner and theorist Ebenezer Howard suggested an alternative to the urban metropolis, the Garden city. Its model spread from England to Germany and the Nordic countries. The first Finnish examples of garden cities suited the middle class but were out of reach for others.

In Helsinki industrialization led to the emergency of rental barracks on the fringes of the city. Some groups of enlightened workers in Helsinki forced corporations for themselves. Universal suffrage brought women to the Finnish parliament in 1917 and the new Municipal Law 1917 allowed workers to have a say in local government. The Housing Reform Association was set up in 1910 and it promoted public housing. Housing conferences in Berlin, Vienna and Ghent were followed keenly. The first national housing conference was held in 1917. It advocated harmony of the townscape and green yards. Finnish town plans of the period reveal international models, especially Swedish. Swedish designs for standardized small scale housing were models for the development of type-design in Finland. The design and construction of the Käpylä district was postponed by the war, the years of instability and the Civil war in spring 1918. The People's Housing of Helsinki was founded in 1919 and Käpylä's plan was finished 1920. Four-or two -apartments timber houses were a huge improvement to rental barracks. Käpylä was not completely independent but a garden suburb with a few shops and a tramline to city center. The church was the only public building for a time. The district was constructed 1920-25 in four phases. Its town plan and architecture have stylist variety. Unity was established by wood in the exteriors, warm colors and green surrounds.

**biographical notes**

Aino Niskanen is MA Architect and was Professor of History of Architecture 2007 – 2018 at HUT/Aalto University, Helsinki. She studied public interior spaces of late 19th century in Munich, and for her PhD (2005) the lifework and networks of a Finnish architect. She has written on co-operative architecture in Finland, Reima Pietilä, Alvar Aalto, concrete in the 1950s, suburbs, the 1960s architecture and preservation of interiors. She has edited several books and took part in writing and editing a book on Käpylä housing area in Helsinki. She has supervised doctoral works and has been involved in international academic teaching projects and organized international conferences at Aalto University. She was a member of board of the Alvar Aalto Foundation 2008-2016 and a member of the Finnish National Council of Architecture and Design 2013-2016.

13.30-14.00

**SIMO PAAVILAINEN**

*Professor Emeritus, Aalto University*

**Wooden Käpylä – its town plan and architecture**

**abstract**

The City of Helsinki founded the semi-municipal limited company Helsingin Kansanasunnot in 1917. Its task was to "build health-friendly and affordable residential buildings".

Wooden Käpylä was designed as a garden city. The town plan of the area is a grid plan designed by the leading names of the era. The houses consisted only of a few different types of dwellings. They surrounded the vast green courtyards needed for residents' vegetable gardens, saunas, washrooms and toilets. The houses had a simple but inventive log element structure with vertical boarding.

Although the conditions for the new residential area were modest and promised monotony, Martti Välikangas, the young architect, showed how to make the area architecturally varied. He drew his inspiration from Italian architecture and old Finnish towns. Välikangas connected the buildings mainly along the streets, but also formed courtyards. He used various roof shapes but only one roofing felt - due to its low cost. The vertical volumes of the houses were enriched by carefully designed porches. The final finish was given by a strong coloring: red or yellow ochre and their various mixtures.

The developers were one limited company and two different housing cooperatives, as well as several private individuals. Construction began in 1920 from the northern part of the region. It progressed towards the south, so that all 165 residential buildings were completed in 1925.

There were 334 households in Helsingin Kansanasunnot. Only 11 of their principals were laborers, but 93 were professionals. There were 65 teachers and civil servants. The majority of the population was therefore rather middle-class.

Wooden Käpylä gives an example of a residential area for a pandemic time when people have to stay home and do telecommuting. The vegetable gardens belonging to each apartment would provide an opportunity to practice gardening and produce their own apples, berries, vegetables and potatoes.

### **biographical notes**

Simo Paavilainen is an architect and professor emeritus (Basics and Theory of Architecture) at the Aalto University. He has specialized in Nordic Classicism, Architecture of 1920's in Nordic countries. He has written articles on this subject for a number of publications, including: Classicism of the 1920's and the classical tradition in Finland in *abacus* 1979 and Alvar Aalto's Viipuri library – the 1927 competition entry in *Acanthus* 1990 (Museum of Finnish Architecture).

He was the architect in charge of design for a Scandinavian touring exhibition entitled "Nordisk Klassicism – Nordic Classicism 1910-1930", the editor of the exhibition catalog and the writer of the texts concerning Finland, in 1982.

He has worked in his own studio of Architecture since 1977 with his wife, architect Käpy Paavilainen. They have designed among others three churches, the main building and library of Vaasa University and also restored and renovated the Finnish Embassy in Tallin.

**14.00-14.30**

### **PEKKA HEIKKINEN**

*Professor, Aalto University*

### **Innovative and sensitive with scarce resources – is it even possible**

#### **abstract**

Wooden Käpylä was built at a juncture when architecture and timber construction were changing. Functionalism was emerging, balloon-frame construction with sawn goods was imminent, and new solutions were needed for working-class housing. Apart from a high-standard residential environment, the goals of building Wooden Käpylä also included affordability. The need to keep costs down could have led to the adoption of conventional and easy solutions, but Akseli Toivonen and Martti Välikangas wanted to bring fresh ideas to timber construction and develop the architecture of small dwellings.



### **biographical notes**

Pekka Heikkinen has worked as the director of Wood Program since 2000 and as the Professor of Wood Architecture in Aalto University since 2008.

During his career he has been working on tens of design projects with wood, written numerous articles in international and national architecture magazines. He has participated in several research and development projects and has supervised several master theses and doctoral theses. His expertise areas are wood construction, natural building materials, eco-efficient building design and architectural design.

He has received prizes in architectural design competitions and international and national awards in the field of wood construction including Schweighofer Innovation Prize, World Architecture News Award and Rose of Construction.

Pekka Heikkinen was the curator and the chair of 12th International Alvar Aalto Symposium "Crafted". In 2017 he was awarded as Knight, First Class, of the Order of the Lion of Finland, by the President of the Republic of Finland proposed by the Association of Finnish Architects SAFA.

**14.30-15.00**

**discussions on the presentations**

**15.00-16.00**

**roundtable and conclusion about next thematic seminar**