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SUM MAR IES!

#KALASATAMA: VISIONS OF NEW HELSINKI

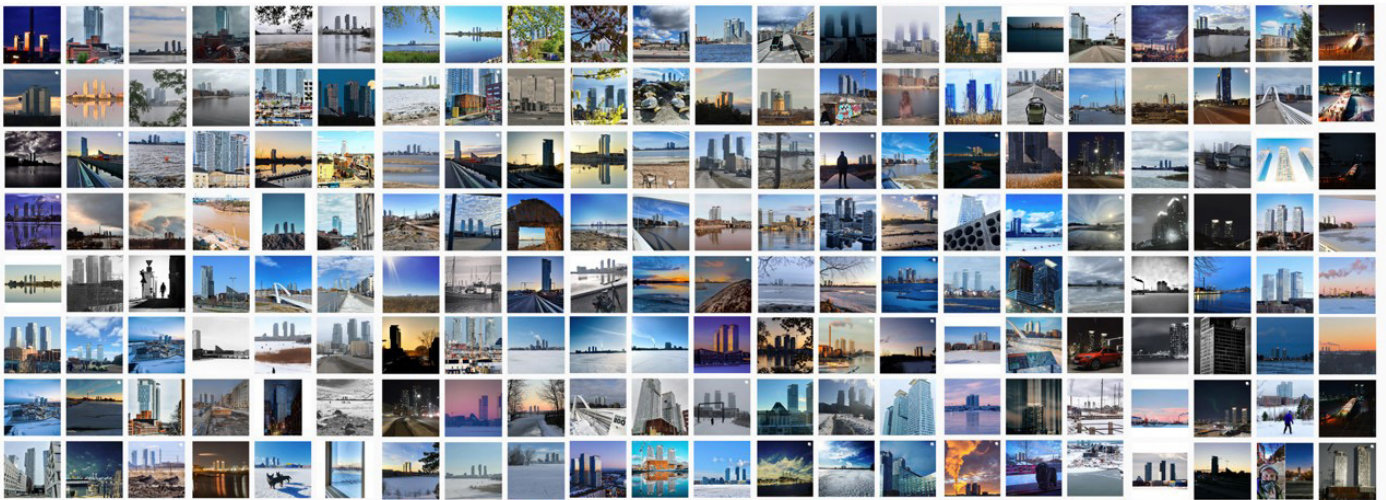
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Urbaria Summary 2024/1

#kalasatama: Visions of New Helsinki

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- Helsinki's landscape, like in most cities, constantly changes. However, recent changes connected to densification and higher buildings are not just having a localised effect on how we perceive the city but also impact the way we engage with Helsinki's newly formed landscape.
- How does our relationship with the smartphone mediate the contemporary Helsinki landscape as part of the everyday social practices of image-making? The screen and camera of the smartphone, now so ubiquitous in our everyday experiences, co-construct our understanding of the new Helsinki landscape.
- Reflecting upon the place of the smartphone in the phenomena of experience and the embeddedness of image-making within contemporary social practices, the research examines how we engage with and think about Helsinki's landscape in the context of the changes wrought on the Helsinki skyline by the construction of the tall towers at Kalasatama. Analysing data from Instagram tagged with #kalasatama demonstrates the increased impact of the towers in Kalasatama on Helsinki city imaginaries.

The Globalised Landscape

The three towers, Lumo, Majakka and Loisto are now among Finland's tallest buildings. A 2011 report by the City of Helsinki's urban planning office (Kaupunkisuunnitteluvirasto) on high buildings in Helsinki emphasised the city's low skyline and its importance as part of the city's international image. However, it also acknowledged that the new projects in the suburbs, including Kalasatama, will "affect the entire cityscape and image of Helsinki" (City of Helsinki Urban Planning Office 2011, 11). Kalasatama is a new suburb to the east of Helsinki's city centre. Formerly an industrial area hosting a small port, it is currently being developed into a commercial and residential space with an envisioned finish date in the late 2030s (City of Helsinki, 2018). The City of Helsinki describes Kalasatama as having an "excellent location, lively urban culture, and a seaside promenade" (City of Helsinki, 2018). The area of Kalasatama is being rebranded as a future commercial and residential space, with the Redi shopping mall at its heart. These changes are very much in line with the global shifts that cities have experienced since the late 1990s, demonstrating that Helsinki is now being reconstructed in the image of a global city. What is the impact of these tall buildings on Helsinki's landscape and how can it be measured?

Landscapes are fragments of our imagination. They are phenomena that are constructed both collectively and personally from our experiences of the land we exist within. The term landscape is indelibly connected to the image, as it was initially used in the late 16th century to describe a painting of the land. Since then, landscape has evolved into an everyday phenomenon. Landscape can exist in many ways; it can be constructed through collective or personal experience, through images, or by physically altering the land. Although landscapes are often thought of as being a result of representation, they are a process that is constantly being reformulated (Ingold 2000, Malpas 2011). Landscapes can be understood as taking an active role in our everyday practices. Rather than thinking about the landscape as something external to our mind-body, we should look at it as being interrelated with the environments we inhabit (Ingold 2000). It is through that interrelatedness that we imbue landscapes with meaning. Therefore, we do not just look at landscapes, but through our observations of them, we construct them on both personal and cultural levels.

The act of looking: a technologically mediated experience of landscape

With most people now having instant access to a camera, as part of a networked mobile device, how we experience the landscape has changed. The practice of making, sharing, and viewing networked photographs is now embedded in our everyday practices. The growing prevalence of networked landscape photographs tagged with #kalasatama would appear to indicate that the towers in Kalasatama are having an impact on how we engage with and imagine the landscape of contemporary Helsinki. We do not just look at landscapes, but through the practice of making and sharing images from our smartphone camera, we actively construct the landscapes we inhabit. Therefore, examining these practices within a relational context of user—smartphone—landscape can assist in understanding how contemporary landscapes are co-constructed through technological perception. As we view the world through the screen of the smartphone camera it becomes embedded in our experience. The screen withdraws from our attention as we look through it, becoming not an object of experience, but a means by which we experience the world. How then are landscapes constructed through the practice of making, sharing, and viewing images of contemporary Helsinki?

Postphenomenology offers a way to examine our perception of the world through technology. It is a hybrid form of phenomenology that focuses on an established relationship with technology that co-constructs our understanding of the world, rather than an experience that alienates us from a preconceived reality. Developed by Don Ihde and Peter Paul Verbeek, postphenomenology sets out to examine technology not as the object of experience but as a means by which we experience the world (Ihde 2009, Verbeek 2005). Postphenomenology, in combination with the philosophy of technology, helps analyse how the world is present to us, how we are present in it through technology, and how these experiences can be considered authentic in terms of co-constructing our understanding of the world.

Examining a large sample of data from 2015 to 2020 demonstrates that, firstly, there is considerable growth and frequency in the use of '#kalasatama' on images posted and, secondly, interactions through 'likes' with the images posted. From 2015 to 2020 there has been over a 200% rise in the number of images posted to Instagram with '#kalasatama'. A second sample, taken from August 1st to October 6th in 2021, examines landscape images posted using '#kalasatama'. In the period of the second data sample there were 1,243 images shared that contained the tag #kalasatama, which is roughly 33 images posted per day. Within the 1,243 images, 535, or 43%, featured images that focused on landscapes. Landscape images are defined as images that feature the landscape or external spaces of Helsinki and are tagged with #kalasatama. Of the 535 landscape images 311, or 58%, feature the three towers, Lumo, Majakka and Loisto which are now among Finland's tallest buildings. This smaller sample was used to examine the types of images that were made and shared to understand how the new Helsinki landscape influenced the practices of making, sharing, and viewing images.

A landscape co-constructed

The smartphone, as an embodied experience, withdraws from our attention when we use it as part of the practice of making, sharing, and viewing images. As we move through the landscape, it is the relationship between user—smartphone—landscape that shapes our experiences in and of the new Helsinki landscape. How the landscape is there for us and how we are in it has changed due to shifting social practices, our perpetual connectivity, and the reforming of the Helsinki landscape. Landscapes are both materially and immaterially constructed by humans through a process of being endowed "with meaning, memory, and value" (Filippucci 2016). The landscape plays an active role in the practices of making, sharing, and viewing images of new Helsinki. Landscapes shape our understanding of Helsinki as a place and shape the practices of those who inhabit it. Kalasatama's place in the new Helsinki landscape is so dominant that it now forms the backdrop to a multitude of activities, such as the social practices of mid-summer on Mustikkamaa, summer holidays at a cottage in Kivinokka and cross-country skiing in the winter on a frozen Baltic Sea are part of the landscape of Helsinki. Within a practice of making, sharing, and viewing images of these landscapes, Kalasatama now forms an intricate part of how these landscapes are produced as part of the new Helsinki. The process of making, sharing, and viewing images with #kalasatama co-constructs our understanding of the contemporary Helsinki landscape. The experience of landscape, through the emplaced everyday social practices of image-making and -sharing is multi-dimensional. Therefore, the essence of the new Helsinki landscape cannot be confined to one but is, instead, constitutive of the multiple relations that are formed through the practice of making, sharing, and viewing images of the landscape. The towers in Kalasatama play an active role in both how we are in the landscape of new Helsinki and how it is there for us. As we move through the landscape, the multiple constituents of place on offer shape the practices of making and sharing images. Therefore, we can see the formation of a relationship between user—smartphone—landscape as one that co-constructs our understanding of the new Helsinki landscape.

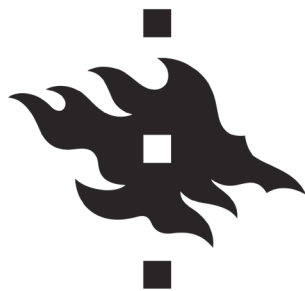
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