

Residents mostly pleased – but public services could be closer

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Recycled wood in Eko-Viikki.
Photo: Magnus Gräsbeck.



The new ecological development Eko-Viikki offers village-like housing in a countryside setting near the public services of the city – and near people’s workplaces. The area was planned to become a new kind of housing area that would meet the criteria of sustainable development. In line with recent trends, the buildings are low, and they lie close to each other. They face the south, which helps save energy.

In Eko-Viikki, many experimental ecological solutions were implemented such as natural gravitation ventilation in the dwellings, solar energy, use of surface waters, etc. A survey in August 2003 sounded out residents to establish how they felt about these experimental solutions and other characteristics of the area. It collected the thoughts and ideas of residents on everything from the completion of the constructions and the social atmosphere of the area to the ecological ideals and the shape of the yards.

Facts and figures on the Eko-Viikki ecological development in 2004:

Population:	1,800
Households:	750
Mean size of households:	2.4 people
Single households:	33%
	(48% in Helsinki total)
Households with 3+ members:	40%
	(20% in Helsinki total)

Ecology in everyday life

- “I am more conscious of ecological matters now.”
- “I am not too convinced our house is very ecological. For example, the ceiling fan must be on all the time to keep the air fresh.”
- “The solar energy system has not been used properly. Its technology is too sophisticated. They should have taught somebody to use it.”

Figure 1. Age group percentages in Helsinki and the Eko-Viikki development in 2003

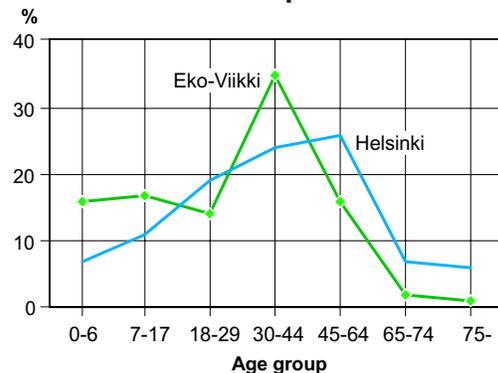
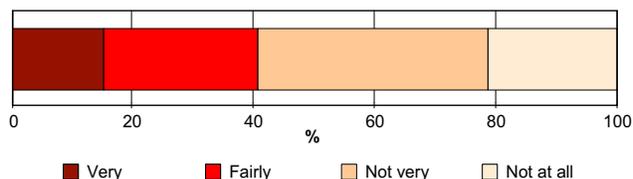


Figure 2. How important was the ecological aspect for settling in Eko-Viikki



These were some of the comments given on the ecological principles and solutions applied in Eko-Viikki. A key intention with the whole development was to learn and collect data about how the solutions applied could be developed and how they could be used in new contexts.

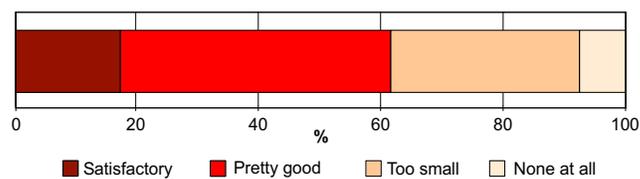
The old truth “No one is born a master”, was confirmed in Eko-Viikki, and there have clearly been flaws in the practical implementation of many of the solutions. Both planners, builders and residents alike have been learners in the project. In houses with gravitation ventilation and solar panels, the residents need separate guidance to be able to live in the house and to make the most of the ecological opportunities it provides.

Partly for the same reasons as respondents said they needed more information about the ecological solutions, some of these solutions were criticised. Neither their functionality nor their ecological properties had convinced all the residents. Responses also revealed slight planning errors and neglect in the finish.

Despite criticism, the general ecological image of the development is, however, almost exclusively seen as something positive. Many residents reported they had a higher appreciation of nature and a better awareness of environmental issues now than before they moved to Eko-Viikki. Many said they paid much more attention to their consumption of energy and water, and that recycling had become a daily routine.

On the other hand, though, some inhabitants that had a high awareness of environmental issues before they moved to the area said they were a bit disappointed with the opportunities offered by the neigh-

Figure 3. Perceived provision of information on ecological solutions in dwellings



bourhood. For example, improvements were called for in the recycling of glass and metal.

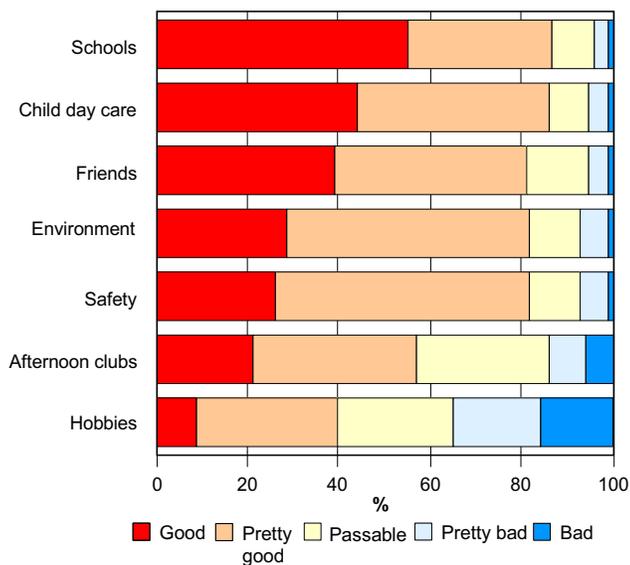
At the Eko-Viikki Seminar on 24 August 2004, planners, architects and constructors expressed their views on the practical difficulties that the project had run into, and what conclusions had been drawn. The new ecological solutions had not been easy to adapt to traditional construction planning, and creative imagination had often been needed. The general conclusion was that experiences gained should now be passed on to future projects, lest a key idea behind the whole project be neglected.

Enough public services today and in future?

- “School is the only reason we moved here. We had to move 400 metres within the Viikki district to get inside the catchment area of our child’s school.”
- “They promised lots of public services, but there isn’t even an ATM, and the public health station is going to be closed.”
- “The present public health centre provides the best services I’ve ever had.”

The greatest problem perceived by residents was insufficient public services. Above all, residents felt worried about the future of these public services. And at present, there are no banking or postal services in the area, and only one grocery store, which cannot meet the demands of a population of almost 2,000. The situation is not helped by public transport in the area, which consists of only one bus line to the city centre. According to residents, the bus is too slow and too crowded during rush hours.

Figure 4. Eko-Viikki from the children's point of view



Sustainable development fridge: a "ground cellar" of the traditional Scandinavian type in Eko-Viikki.
Photo: Magnus Gräsbeck.

Thus, a life without a car had become too complicated for many residents, even for many of those who would have otherwise preferred to do without one. Consequently many have considered buying or have even bought a car. Obviously, such a situation is not in harmony with the goals and the basic idea of the eco-village project. It was also pointed out that sustainable development would require public services near the inhabitants and flexible public transport.

The situation will improve with the completion of the entire Viikki area. A shopping centre will be built near Eko-Viikki, featuring the most important public services – although not quite within easy reach for all pedestrians.

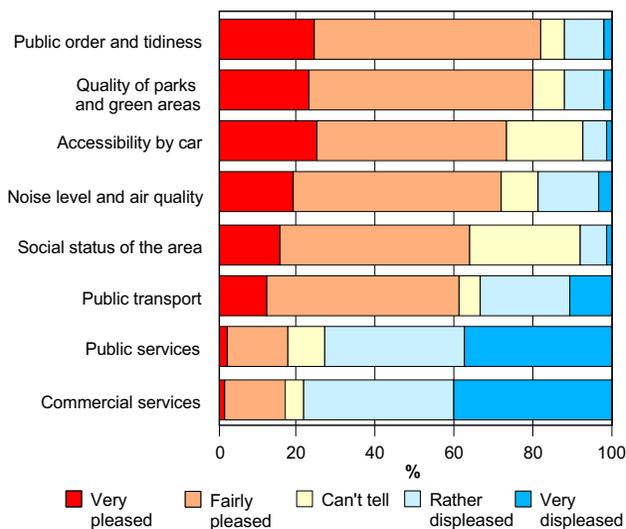
Another brighter side of life in Eko-Viikki is that conditions are very favourable for families with children. A kindergarten and a school can be found in the neighbourhood. Parents need not transport their children to the kindergarten by car, and the school day of school children is not prolonged by bus travel. Judging from responses, the residents truly seem to appreciate these conditions.

The proportion of families with children among the population of the locality is 40 per cent, i.e. twice as great as in the city as a whole.

"Our village. Peace and quiet – and nature."

- "The good social climate of the neighbourhood and the strong sense of community are good for everyone in Viikki."
- "There are plenty of children and playgrounds, and the garden plots are nice, too, especially the discussions you can have with those on the neighbouring plot."
- "A lovely little brook, green grass, garden plots and the University's experimental farm with all the animals are important ingredients of the neighbourhood. We hope they won't build too much more in it."

Figure 5. Opinions about various factors in Eko-Viikki



Although residents express their concern or even disappointment with certain phenomena, an unambiguous result of the survey was that the great majority of residents very much like living in their new neighbourhood. The calm and unique milieu is the foremost reason. For the majority, the proximity of nature and the excellent opportunities for outdoor exercise had been key factors for moving to Eko-Viikki.

Judging from responses, residents have also developed a good-humoured social climate, which quite obviously is an important factor for well-being, too. People have found new friends among their neighbours; and shared activities are common. One reason are the *talkoos*, which are perhaps the most common form of traditional socialising in Finland, during which people work together sweeping leaves or shovelling snow, for example, and having a good time. The sense of community sought in the project seems to have been realised, at least to some extent

In this article, we have seen some key issues highlighted by the residents. Responses, which are mostly very positive, do contain criticism, too, which is natural because, obviously, there's always room for improvement. The majority of residents had moved to their homes before the work on yards, lawns, etc. was completed, and their expectations were high due to attractive advertisements.

Time will tell how well people get along in their experimental neighbourhood in the future, and what value the adjacent university premises will add to the area – and whether the public services promised will be provided. Besides giving answers, our survey raised quite a number of questions, and obviously, it will be a matter of continuous interest to follow how Eko-Viikki evolves in the future. We will need more facts to assess whether the goals set for the project have been achieved.

The survey was conducted in August-September 2003. All the 753 households then resident in the Eko-Viikki area received a questionnaire. 508 forms were completed and returned before the deadline. The analysis was made in accordance with adequate statistical methods. Among those responses arriving too late, only the freely formulated answers were heeded. The response rate almost reached 70 per cent. The findings of the survey are presented comprehensively in Helsinki City Urban Facts' series "*Tutkimuskatsauskia*."