



This map showing Helsinki in its new location on the Vironniemi (Estnäs) isthmus was drawn after a survey made in 1696. It is an important source of information on 17th century Helsinki, which was destroyed in 1713, during the Great Northern War (1700–1721).

Original map 155 x 134 cm, Swedish National Archives.

A Historical Atlas for Helsinki

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In 1878, Helsinki received a new town plan, drawn by C. Kjerrström. The map holds much information including properties, buildings (wooden or stone) and the rail yard. The track to St. Petersburg was completed in 1870. With industrialisation in the late 19th century, Helsinki developed rapidly: 23,000 inhabitants in 1875 and 80,000 in 1900. In this process, Finnish replaced Swedish as the language of the majority. The city also had Russian and German minorities. This map published in 1878 won an award in Paris the same year. Helsinki City Museum and other archives.

A Historical Atlas for Helsinki has recently been compiled by the Helsinki City Archives in cooperation with other units of Helsinki City Urban Facts, the City Surveying Office, and The City Museum of Helsinki, to be published in 2006.

The Helsinki Atlas is part of a European project of national historic town atlases, which began in 1955 on the initiative of the International Commission for the History of Towns in the spirit of reconciliation in the aftermath of the devastation of European towns during the Second World War. The initial idea behind this European project was to foster a better understanding of our common European roots, and the means was to promote comparative studies of the topography of pre-modern towns in Europe.

Town atlases

The centrepiece of the historic town atlas is the town plan seen as a historical document. According to professors Anngret Simms from Dublin and Ferdinand Opll from Vienna, who have compiled a list of atlases of historical towns published in Europe and who share the chairmanship of the Editorial Group for Historic Town Atlases in the Commission for the History of Towns. The atlases are not only compiled for the academic sector to serve as source material for urban history: they can provide guidelines for planners, they can strengthen the local identity of city residents by showing them to the roots of their neighbourhood, and, very importantly too, the atlases are a gold mine for local historians.



A map from the mid-17th century shows where Helsinki was founded in 1550 and also the block structure of the town in its new location on the Vironniemi (Estnäs) isthmus. This plan was never applied. The map also shows the highway between Turku (Åbo) and Vyborg (Viipuri/Viborg) as well as sailing fairways and many local names. Original map 30 x 40 cm, Swedish National Archives.



In 1713, during the Great Northern War (1700–1721), a large Russian fleet sailed to Helsinki. When the Russian marines, overwhelming in number, attacked the town, its defenders set fire to it and withdrew. The town was completely destroyed.

At first, the intention of the International Commission for the History of Towns was to give the atlases a uniform concept. The establishment of strict guidelines ensured that the different national atlases all cover important common ground. However, it was only at the meeting in Oxford in 1968 that a generally acceptable cartographic scheme was adopted.

According to this scheme, a Historical Atlas should include

1. A map from pre-industrial time (cadastral map) on a scale of 1:2500, preferably in colour and showing individual property plots.
2. A map from that same time showing the town's surroundings on a scale somewhere between 1:25 000 and 1:100 000.
3. A modern map of the town on the scale of 1:25 000.

A fourth map could be an interpretative map, preferably different than, yet based on, the above-mentioned pre-industrial map and showing the topographical development of the town, on the scale of 1:5000 or 1:2500.

The first atlas of this conception was issued in Great Britain in 1969. It was followed by the first volumes of the Rheinischer Städteatlas and the Deutscher Städteatlas. By 1998, a total of 312 atlases (Anngret Simms – Ferdinand Oppl, *Historic Town Atlases. Urban History through maps*) had been published, and today the number is close to 400. In the 1990s, Polish and Czech members of the Commission published many atlases. From Scandinavian towns there are 11 atlases altogether, of which four from Denmark, three from Finland, one from Iceland (the Atlas of Reykjavik) and three Atlases from Sweden, but none yet from Norway.



After the Peace of Uusikaupunki (Nystad) in 1721, Helsinki was rebuilt again. The construction of the fortress Viapori (Sveaborg, today also Suomenlinna), which started in 1748, was a strong impetus for Helsinki's growth and prosperity. This hand-drawn map by Carl P. Hagström dates back to 1776–77. Helsinki City Museum.



After being part of Sweden, Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire in 1809, after a war between Sweden and Russia. Helsinki became capital of the Grand Duchy in 1812. A new town plan was immediately drawn up, and a new city was built up again. Town plans for Helsinki can be found in several archives including the City Archives of Helsinki.

It should be noted that there are great differences of size between European town atlases. While many French atlases are just a few pages thick, Italian atlases can be very informative, and Belgian atlases may have a distinct character of their own. Certain atlases, among which some in Italy, have been published in digital form, and this trend seems to continue.

The main function of a town atlas is to describe the historical development of the town by means of maps, statistical tables and diagrams, as well as texts. The main content in all European Atlases features historical town plans and topographical maps. The location of important services and institutions such as churches, monasteries, town halls, market-places, and hospitals in different periods are presented.

The Helsinki Atlas

In the early stages of our work, we consulted Professor Anngret Simms especially, because we found the town atlases compiled in Ireland under her direction were excellent. However, we also wanted to penetrate deeper and study finer details the way German geographer Dietrich Denecke has done for German cities. *Wege der historischen Geographie und Kulturlandschaftsforschung. Ausgewählte Beiträge von Dietrich Denecke, Hrsg. von Klaus Fehn und Anngret Simms, Stuttgart 2005*

Helsinki (founded only in 1550) is younger than the majority of European cities. In central and southern Europe the main emphasis of historical atlases has lain on the Middle Ages, but in Helsinki, the situation is different. In the Middle Ages the area today covered by the city consisted of only small villages in the Helsinge parish, for which no town plans had been made, nor many maps drawn. For this reason the Helsinki Atlas starts with later centuries.

For the thematic maps of the Helsinki Atlas, we collected material not only on public services but on private services, too, such as grocery stores, bakeries and printing houses in certain city blocks for three cross section years (1850, 1900, 1939). This type of analysis cannot be found in most other atlases, where the main focus lies on earlier periods, or where the size of the city is too large to allow this kind of analysis.

We chose Aleksanterinkatu, the main business street of Helsinki, to serve as the case target of a micro analysis of the historical development of a street. The analysis concerned changes over time in its industrial structure, demographic structure and property ownership. We studied Aleksanterinkatu in the years 1850, 1900, 1939, 1945, 1970, 2000.

This street has had a central position in the history of Helsinki. In the town plans of this fairly young city, it has been on the same place since the mid 17th cen-

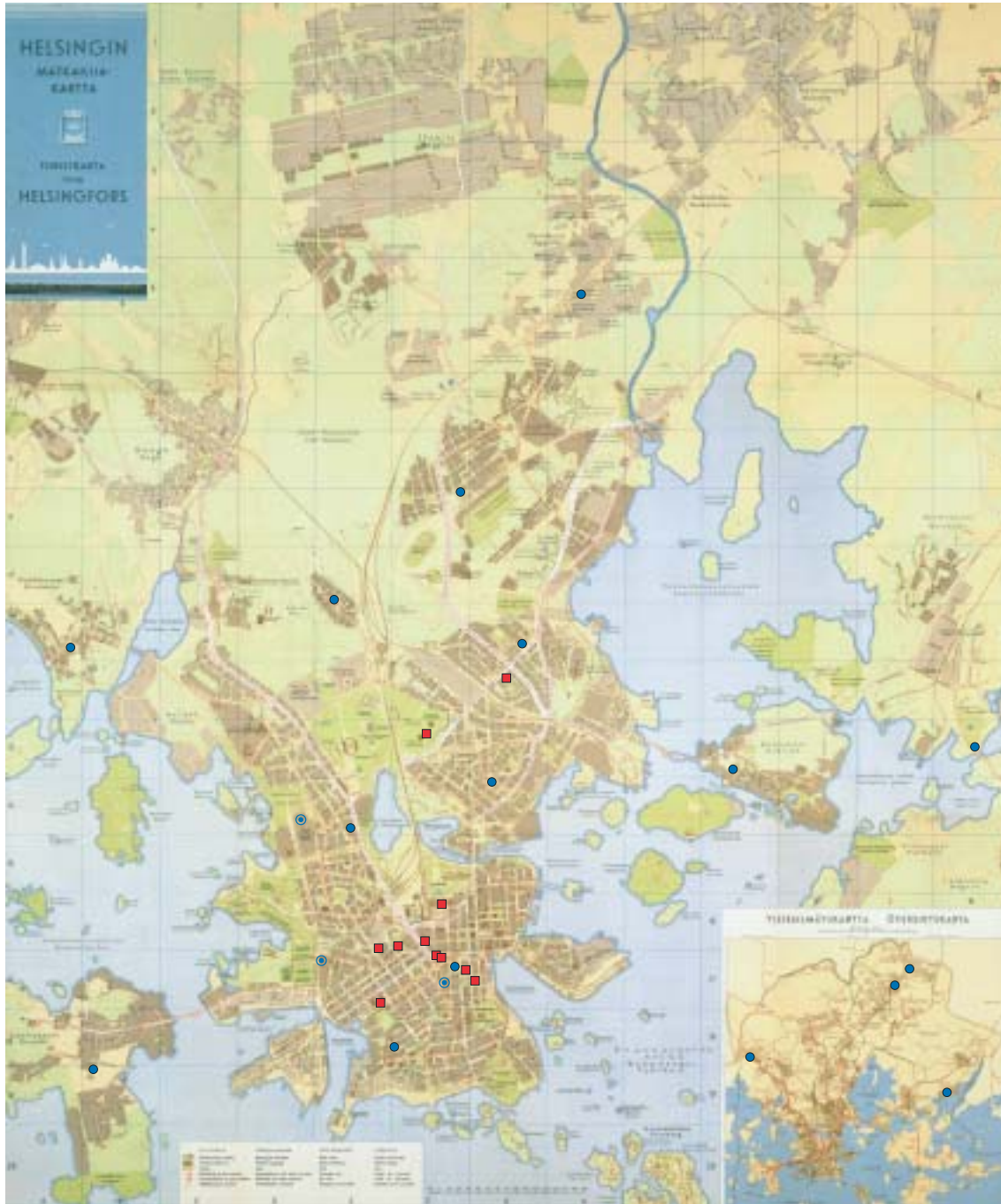


The historical atlas of Helsinki shows the number and location of schools, hospitals, libraries, etc. in certain cross-section years. This map shows kindergartens in Helsinki in 1900: those for Finnish- and Swedish-speaking children as well as three German, two French and one Russian-language kindergarten. Map: Helsinki City Archives.

ture, the time when Helsinki was moved to its present location.

Through the changes in property ownership, population structure and trade structure, we have attempted to explain the tremendous change that has taken place in the heart of Helsinki over the last 150 years. This change has been influenced not least by physical manipulation of the area, such as the filling of the shallow cove Kluuvinlahti and the construction of the Main Railway Station.

With the construction of the department stores Stockmann and Tallberg in the western end of Aleksanterinkatu, the point of gravity of the commercial centre of Helsinki moved westwards. And whereas in 1850, as many as 1,225 people lived in the street, only 37 did in 1970. In 2000, only ten people had Aleksanterinkatu as their home address.



Thematic cross-section map (1950) from the Helsinki Atlas. Theatres (marked in red) and the city's own public libraries. The map also shows the city's libraries in hospitals and other public service institutions. In 1950, Helsinki had 370,000 inhabitants. With the huge incorporations of adjacent land areas in 1946, the area of the city grew manifold, and at the same time, when evacuees from the areas ceded to the Soviet Union were resettled, tens of thousands of former Vyborg (Viipuri/Viborg) citizens and other evacuees settled in Helsinki. Map: Helsinki City Archives.