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From Backyard to Light: Urban environment, nature and children in a Finnish short film from the 1940s

Abstract

This paper focuses on an urban environment, nature and children as visualised and presented in the Finnish short film *From Backyard to Light* (1940). The film depicts children's play and playgrounds that a city's Child Welfare Committee implemented in the surroundings of the capital city, Helsinki. This paper concentrates on how the film constructs the imagery of children in an urban environment and the representations of urban green spaces, e.g. parks and playgrounds, intended for children's well-being. The third aim of this paper is to discuss the representations of children's play and the gendered nature of sports and play.

Keywords: visual sources, urban environment, nature, children, playgrounds, gender

Title: *Takapihalta valoon* (*From Backyard to Light*)

Release: 1940, 15.27 minutes, black and white

Release format: Short film

Manuscript: Reino Tenkanen

Producer: Suomen Filmitööstö (The Finnish Film Industry)

Distribution: The Finnish Temperance Societies, non-commercial distribution¹

Current availability: This short film production by Suomen Filmitööstö (The Finnish Film Industry) is owned by Yleisradio (The Finnish Broadcasting Company, YLE); the short film is available to the public through the open access archive Ylen Elävä arkisto.²

¹Elonet database. The Finnish filmography. The National Audiovisual Institute. <https://www.elonet.fi/fi/elokuva/104338>

² <https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2006/09/08/takapihoilta-valoon>

Introduction

This paper focuses on an urban environment, nature and children, as visualised and presented in the Finnish short film *From Backyard to Light* (1940). The film depicts children's play and playgrounds that the city's Child Welfare Committee and charitable organisations implemented in authentic surroundings in the capital city, Helsinki. Previous studies argue that visual sources, e.g. documentary films, can facilitate understanding of the past by offering multiple perspectives and possibilities for interpretation³ and that physical space provides unique perspectives on childhood as an ideal imagined by adults⁴. This paper concentrates on how the film constructs the imagery of children in an urban environment and the representations of urban green spaces⁵, e.g. parks and playgrounds, intended for children's well-being. The third aim of this paper is to discuss representations of children's play and the gendered nature of sports and play.

The paper employs the concepts of physical, social and mental/cultural space when addressing the short film's representations. While physical space refers to concrete and solid material reality, social space alludes to the social practices of people embodied in social actions and interactions. Mental/cultural space exists through concepts, representations and ideas and is tightly attached to physical and social space.⁶

³ Paul Warmington, Angelo Van Gorp, and Ian Grosvenor, "Education in Motion: Uses of Documentary Film in Educational Research", *Paedagogica Historica* 47, no. 4 (2011): 457-72. See also, e.g. Inés Dussel, and Karin Priem, "The Visual in Histories of Education: A Reappraisal", *Paedagogica Historica* 53, no. 6 (2017): 641-49; Lynn Fendler, "Apertures of Documentation: Reading Images in Educational History", *Paedagogica Historica* 53, no. 6 (2017): 751-62; Catharina Martins, Helena Cabeleira, and Jorge Ramos do Ó, "The Other and the Same: Images of Rescue and Salvation in the Portuguese Documentary Film 'Children's Parks (1945)'", *Paedagogica Historica* 47, no. 4 (2011): 491-505.

⁴ Marta Gutman, "The Physical Spaces of Childhood", in *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World* ed. Paula S. Fass (New York: Routledge, 2013), 249-66.

⁵ The concept of green space reflects the prevailing idea of nature as constructed and controlled by people. Many scholars refer to nature as one of the most controversial terms due to its biased emphasis on culture. A key point is that changing societal views toward nature are reflected in the layouts of cities as well as the uses of green spaces. [Matti O. Hannikainen, *The Greening of London: The Development of Public Green Spaces in Camden and Southwark from the mid-1920s to the late 1990s*. Historical Studies from the University of Helsinki XXXV (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2014), 27; Katri Lento, "The Role of Nature in the City: Green Space in Helsinki, 1917-60". *The European City and Green Space: London, Stockholm, Helsinki and St Petersburg, 1850-2000*, ed. Peter Clarke (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 188-206.]

⁶ Victoria A. Cook and Peter J. Hemming, "Education Spaces: Embodied Dimensions and Dynamics", *Social & Cultural Geography* 12, no. 1 (2011): 1-8.; Taina Sillanpää, "Muistetun lapsuuden maantiede – Päiväkotimuistot lapsuuden maantieteen ja muistitietotutkimuksen leikkauspinnassa", ["Geography of Reminisced Childhood – Kindergarten Memories in the Cross-Section of the Geography of

Children's places and spaces in the urban environment have been debated since the end of the 19th century when urbanisation, industrialisation and new ideas about the values of childhood and children elicited questions concerning children and their well-being.⁷ One consequence of this debate was the development of initiatives by private organisations and cities that intended to improve children's lives by giving them opportunities to be outdoors and play. Gutman notes how architectural outcomes invited the use of play and play spaces as tools for socialisation and enculturation.⁸ For example, in the United States, the modest beginnings of the playground movement entailed providing sandboxes for poor children in the 1880s but grew rapidly into a network of public parks that reached most cities by the dawn of the 20th century. At first, the focus was on the poor, reflecting concerns that immigrants and working-class children were endangered by the hazards of the streets. Gradually, the movement broadened its objectives and interest to encompass children from all social classes. The same phenomenon happened in Europe. In Britain, middle-class reformers were proponents of urban playgrounds and play centres; in France, church and secular educators organised summer camps for children,⁹; and

Childhood and Oral History"] *Kasvatus & Aika [Education & Time]* 11, no. 3 (2017): 70-9; Marjo Nieminen and Minna Vuorio-Lehti, "Menneisyyden kasvatustodellisuuden lähetysmistapoja ja tulkintamahdollisuuksia", ["Approaches and Interpretations of the Education of the Past"] in *Kasvatushistoria nyt. Makro- ja mikrotutkimuksesta marginaalisuuden, sukupuolen ja tilan analyysiin, [History of Education Now. From Macro- and Microhistory to the Analysis of Margins, Gender and Space]* ed. Minna Vuorio-Lehti and Marjo Nieminen (Turku: Finnish Educational Research Association, 2003), 11-34.

⁷ Marta Gutman, "The Physical Spaces of Childhood", 249-66; Gary Cross, "Play, Games and Toys", in *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*, ed. Paula S. Fass (New York: Routledge, 2013), 267-82; Ning de Coninck-Smith and Marta Gutman, "Children and Youth in Public: Making Places, Learning Lessons, Claiming Territories", *Childhood* 11, no. 2 (2004): 131-41. See also, e.g. Sarah Mills and Peter Kraftl, "Introduction: Geographies, Histories and Practices of Informal Education" in *Informal Education, Childhood and Youth: Geographies, Histories, Practices* ed. Sarah Mills and Peter Kraftl (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1-18; Simon Bradford, "Managing the Spaces of Freedom: Mid-twentieth-century Youth Work" in *Informal Education, Childhood and Youth: Geographies, Histories, Practices* ed. Sarah Mills and Peter Kraftl (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 184-96; Sarah Mills, "'A Powerful Educational Instrument': The Woodcraft Folk and Indoor/Outdoor 'Nature', 1925-75" in *Informal Education, Childhood and Youth : Geographies, Histories, Practices* ed. Sarah Mills and Peter Kraftl (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 65-78.

⁸ Gutman, "The Physical Spaces of Childhood", 249-66.

⁹ Cross, "Play, Games and Toys", 267-82; Kevin Brehony, "A 'Socially Civilising Influence'? Play and the Urban 'Degenerate'", *Paedagogica Historica* 39, no. 1 (2003), 87-106; Open-air education, see, e.g. Hester Barron, "'Little Prisoners of City Streets': London Elementary Schools and the School Journey Movement, 1918-1939", *History of Education* 42, no. 2 (2013), 166-81; Geert Thyssen, "The 'Trotter' Open-Air School, Milan (1922-1977): a City of Youth or Risky Business?", *Paedagogica Historica* 45, no. 1-2 (2009): 157-70.

in Germany, the urban childhood and environment were targets of development by social reformists and urban pedagogics (Großstadtpädagogik).¹⁰

Finnish child welfare and charitable organisations started to organise activities for underprivileged children during the summers toward the end of the 19th century. The interest in children had manifold roots—from philanthropic and religious objectives to the development of ‘child sciences’ within medical, health and educational sciences. The settings for physical spaces designed especially for children bore meanings and embodied values of good childhoods and social and political purposes. Parks, playgrounds and playing fields were viewed as demarcating special nature spaces where children could play freely. As in other countries, play and other summer activities were regarded as fostering children’s mental and physical health as well as protecting them from the dangers and hazards of urban environments. The shift toward child-centred play and children’s own spaces frequently emphasised contrasts with the built environment.¹¹

In the beginning, volunteer elementary teachers, kindergarten teachers and some charitable organisations arranged school gardening, summer colonies and trips to the countryside for indigent schoolchildren. The focus broadened when the first playgrounds were established in the city in 1914, and by the time of World War II, for example, associations of gymnastics teachers, the Child Welfare Committee of Helsinki and the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare (Mannerheimin lastensuojeluliitto) had joined the operation. The idea was not just to help urban children experience life in the countryside, but to bring a sense of rural life into the city. Parks, playgrounds and outdoor activities, such as playing, singing, sports, swimming and camping, were the main vehicles used to pursue these goals. Along with the paid employees of these organisations, children's playground attendants (‘park aunties’) worked as private entrepreneurs in children’s playgrounds during the summers. In addition, all these actions taken by the city and charitable associations to create organised sports and leisure were important for the image of green, healthy Finland that the country aimed to cultivate between world wars.¹²

¹⁰ Håkan Forsell, “Die Großstädtische Kindheit”, in *Kindheiten in der Moderne. Eine Geschichte der Sorge*, ed. Meike S. Baader, Florian Eßer and Wolfgang Schröer (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2014), 190-225.

¹¹ Aimo Halila, *Helsingin kaupungin sosiaalitoimen historia [History of Helsinki's Social Service]* (Helsinki: Helsingin kaupunki, 1977), 185-86; Lento, “The Role of the Nature in the City”, 188-206.

¹² Halila, *Helsingin kaupungin sosiaalitoimen historia*, 185-86, 208; Lento, “The Role of the Nature in the City”, 188-206; Sari Näre, “Nuorisotoiminta sodan aikana”, [“Youth Work During the War”] in *Sodassa koettua. Uhrattu nuoruus [Experienced in the War. Sacrificed Youth]*, in *Sodassa koettua*.

One of the organisations involved in the playgrounds and summer activities for children was the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, which is the largest non-governmental child organisation in Finland.¹³ Its work was influenced by the development of child protection and the medical sciences, especially paediatrics and prenatal care. The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare organised health clinics for children and prenatal clinics for expectant mothers and its work included school health care (including free school meals and medical care and dental care for children) as well as child and youth welfare (including agricultural clubs for children and youth, girls' and boys' clubs in urban areas, sports, leisure activities in summers and swimming lessons). The League's one form of activity in the field of child and youth welfare was to train children's playground attendants (park aunties), arranged by a select committee whose members included Counsellor Erik Mandelin (who had previously worked in the National Board of Education and, in since 1925, began to work full-time in the League's central office), Impi-Liisa Kilpeläinen (the League's leader of club activities), Counsellor Richard Malmberg and Anni Collan (the National Board of Education and Physical Education (PE) teacher who considerably influenced women's gymnastics and girls' PE in schools). By 1939, the League had trained 595 children's playground attendants.¹⁴

In 1940, the city council of Helsinki approved an appropriation for the Child Welfare Committee of Helsinki (i.e. the city's local governmental office)¹⁵ with its child welfare office to arrange children's playgrounds. The Child Welfare Committee was led by E. Kilpi (social democrat), and the child welfare office's youth branch by the Reverend K.F. Palomäki. In the city's child welfare, the playgrounds were considered to be preventive actions for the protection of children and young people. Altogether, 2,331 children were enrolled in the summer of 1940, and each playground had trained playground attendants leading children's play. A report from

Uhrattu nuoruus [Experienced in the War. Sacrificed Youth], ed. Sari Näre (Helsinki: Weilin + Göös, (2008), 40-63.

Katri Lento notes that although Finland was still a very rural country at the beginning of the 20th century, the local government of Helsinki and voluntary associations saw a growing problem in the urban environment, especially concerning children's spaces.

¹³ The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare was established in 1920 by Sophie Mannerheim (General C. G. E. Mannerheim's sister, a head nurse in the surgical hospital in Helsinki, who studied nursing in the famous British St. Thomas hospital in London), Counsellor Erik Mandelin of the National Board of Education and paediatrician, professor Arvo Ylppö (whose work significantly decreased child mortality), General C.G.E. Mannerheim and twelve other influential members of the social and charitable fields.

¹⁴ Aura Korppi-Tommola, *Terve lapsi – kansan huomen. The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare as a builder of society 1920-1990* [Healthy Child – People's Tomorrow] (Helsinki: Mannerheimin lastensuojeluliitto, 1990), 58-83.

¹⁵ The city's child welfare was mainly concentrated on orphans and children who were taken into care.

the local government of Helsinki in 1940 described playgrounds arranged for children with various singing and sports games, sport exercises, swimming trips, camping and storytelling moments.¹⁶

The short film as a historical source and an object of study

Warmington, Van Gorp and Grosvenor point out that the technologies of production and distribution and the conventions of a genre shape the visual and aural construction of films.¹⁷ The film *From Backyard to Light* (*Takapihalta valoon*, 1940) was influenced by the cinematic techniques of the Finnish short film tradition and the educational objectives of domestic short film productions. The film was made in 1940, during a period (1933-1964) when the production of short films was very popular in Finland due to tax reductions offered to producers of domestic films. The objective of these tax reductions was to promote national film production to increase the educational and cultural value of movie productions. *From Backyard to Light* was made by Suomen Filmitölkki (The Finnish Film Industry),¹⁸ whose principal output was long feature films¹⁹, and the film was distributed by Finnish Temperance Societies for a non-commercial release²⁰. The Finnish Temperance Societies were an umbrella organisation for different societies in the field of temperance. The work with children and youth was part of its preventive actions.

The cinematographer of the film was Felix Forsman, who previously worked at Finland's largest short film company, Suomi-Filmi (The Finnish Film Company) and who, during the

¹⁶ *Kertomus Helsingin kaupungin kunnallishallinnosta 1940* [Report on the Local Government of Helsinki 1940] (Helsinki: Helsingin kaupungin tilastotoimisto, 1943), 89-108; Halila, *Helsingin kaupungin sosiaalitoimen historia*, 128, 185-86, 208.

¹⁷ Warmington, Van Gorp and Grosvenor, "Education in Motion", 457-72.

¹⁸ In 1963, the CEO of Suomen Filmitölkki (The Finnish Film Industry) sold the company's feature films and short films to Yleisradio, which still owns the rights to the short films. Kari Uusitalo, *Suomalaisen elokuvan vuosikymmenet. Johdatus kotimaisen elokuvan ja elokuva-alan historiaan 1896-1963* [*The Decades of Finnish Films: Introduction to the History of Domestic Films and Film Productions 1896-1963*] (Helsinki: Otava, 1965), 23, 67; Jari Sedergren and Ilkka Kippola, *Dokumentin utopiat. Suomalaisen dokumentti- ja lyhytelokuvan historia 1944-1989* [*Utopias of Documents: History of Finnish Documentaries and Short Films 1944-1989*] (Helsinki: SKS, 2015), 39.

¹⁹ Jari Sedergren and Ilkka Kippola, *Dokumentin ytimessä. Suomalaisen dokumentti- ja lyhytelokuvan historia 1904-1944* [*In the Core of Documents: History of Finnish Documentaries and Short Films 1904-1944*] (Helsinki: SKS, 2009), 109-13.

²⁰ Elonet database <<https://www.elonet.fi/fi/elokuva/104338>>. The film was also broadcast on television in 2000.

Winter War²¹, belonged to the core film group that was appointed to film the war events. During the Continuation War²², he was a cinematographer at the Military Headquarters and Commander-in-Chief C. G. E. Mannerheim's favourite camera operator.²³ After the war, Forsman worked in long feature films produced by Suomen Filmitoimisto and began his own company, Felix-Filmi (The Felix Film) in 1949. Later in his career, Forsman was a production manager in a company concentrated on advertising films.²⁴

Fendler notes the multiple contexts in which images work, e.g. as representations, agents and symbols.²⁵ The temporal and contextual dimensions can explain why the short film exists, why the particular topic was chosen and why the film employs particular representations.²⁶ *From Backyard to Light* was shot in the summer of 1940, during a brief interim peace period (13.3.1940–24.6.1941) in Finland during WWII.²⁷ During and immediately after the Winter War, short film production had concentrated on documentary reports from the home and war fronts. The emphasis shifted during the interim peace period as films began to focus more on everyday happier subjects.²⁸ Children's play and playgrounds arranged by the Child Welfare Committee offered a suitable bright, light subject that would appeal to the general public. Furthermore, its educational undertones satisfied the requirements for film production tax reductions. Also, the film could be viewed as promoting the idea of an active and healthy childhood and therefore can be categorised as a promotion film, which popularised and stressed the importance of social welfare provisions set up by the various stakeholders.

²¹ The Winter War was a military conflict between the Soviet Union (USSR) and Finland, beginning with a Soviet invasion of Finland on 30 November 1939, three months after the outbreak of World War II, and ended three and a half months later with the Moscow Peace Treaty on 13 March 1940.

²² The Continuation War was a military conflict between Finland and the Soviet Union (USSR) from 1941 to 1944, during World War II. Finland and Nazi Germany were co-belligerents and, for Nazi Germany, was a part of its overall war efforts on the Eastern Front.

²³ Sedergren and Kippola, *Dokumentin ytimessä*, 321, 354, 359, 365, 380-381, 408.

²⁴ Kari Uusitalo, *Ruutia, riitoja ja rakkautta. Suomalaisen elokuvan sotavuodet 1940-1948 [Gun Powder, Quarrels and Love: The War Years of Finnish Films 1940-1948]* (Helsinki: Suomen elokuvasäätiö, 1977), 223, 229, 233, 235, 240, 262, 271, 280; Sedergren and Kippola, *Dokumentin utopiat*, 366–370.

²⁵ Fendler, "Apertures of Documentation", 751-62.

²⁶ See also, e.g. Helena Cabeleira, Catharina Martins and Martin Lawn, "Indisciplines of Inquiry: The Scottish Children's Story, Documentary Film and the Construction of the Viewer", *Paedagogica Historica* 47, no. 4 (2011): 473-90; Paul Warmington and Ian Grosvenor, "A Very Historical Mode of Understanding: Examining Editorial and Ethnographic relations in the Primary (2008)", *Paedagogica Historica* 47, no. 4 (2011): 543-58; Fendler, "Apertures of Documentation", 751-62.

²⁷ Uusitalo, *Ruutia, riitoja ja rakkautta*, 218; Sedergren and Kippola, *Dokumentin ytimessä*, 358-76.

²⁸ Uusitalo, *Ruutia, riitoja ja rakkautta*, 13-17, 213-18.

May points out that when historians of education analyse films in which educational sites and subjects are featured, they can glean important insights into the ways that education has been represented in the past.²⁹ The short film represents the authentic surroundings of Helsinki and spotlights well-known scenery in the capital city area. The images from the children's playgrounds emphasise the nonfictional tone of the film, accompanied by information about children's summer activities implemented by the Child Welfare Committee. The documentary, nonfictional style is interrupted only a few times when the voice-over speaks like a child, making the narration more fictional. Cinematic techniques often employed in long feature films give the film a rhythm.

The cinematic characteristics of this film (camera angle, sound, voice-over, perspective and lighting) were analysed,³⁰ including both a silent viewing of the film and production of a complete transcript of the film's voice-over.³¹ There is only one male voice-over used in the film to describe the events and scenes to viewers. The narration aims for a vernacular tone, and the voice-over occasionally employs dialectal words used in the capital city region, which emphasises the commonness of expression. The narration includes old-fashioned words and sentence structures compared to the present Finnish language. The voice-over mostly comments on children's actions from the perspectives of grown-ups and society when pointing out and warning children about dangerous places in the urban environment or when describing places and actions allowed to children. In two scenes, the voice-over separates himself from the position of an adult observer and places himself in the position of a child represented in the film, narrating the scenes from that perspective or, to be more precise, imagining what a child would feel or think about. On these occasions, the voice-over's articulation changes to resemble a child's speech, with a childish vocabulary and tone. Although there are no strong tensions between the observational dimensions of the film and its editorial voice-over³², the voice-over's occasional attempts to mimic a child create connotations that might have been unintentional. The adult male voice and childish narration (lines) are discordant with each other and seem unsuitable for these scenes.

²⁹ Josephine May, "A Field of Desire: Visions of Education in Selected Australian Silent Films", *Paedagogica Historica* 46, no. 5 (2010): 623-37. See also, e.g. Cunningham, "Moving Images", 289-406.

³⁰ See also, e.g. Peter Cunningham, "Moving Images: Propaganda Film and British Education 1940-45", *Paedagogica Historica* 36, no. 1 (2000): 289-406.

³¹ See Warmington and Grosvenor, "A Very Historical Mode of Understanding", 543-58.

³² *Ibid.*

The voice-over and incidental music were added later in the studio after finishing filming.³³ Throughout the film, the voice-over gives the impression of someone narrating from a distance. Since the voice-over was recorded after filming, the narrator did not always know what was happening during the film. For example, the comment “*It seems that water was mostly coldish last summer*” reveals that the writer of the voice-over was not present when the scene was filmed and that the text was written afterward. Nevertheless, the voice-over guides the viewer’s gaze and attention throughout the film, directing the viewer to observe certain things and disregard others. At the same time, the voice-over gives the viewer concrete interpretations or frames for interpreting and understanding the scenes in the film. Thus, the narration strengthens and creates the representational dimensions of the film.³⁴

The intrinsic historical level (the ‘when’ of the film’s narrative) and the extrinsic historical level (the ‘when’ of the film’s creation)³⁵ are the same in the film. The temporal context of the film explains why the narration includes words and phrases that refer to war or wartime. Word choices, such as ‘dive-bomber’, ‘splinter protection’ and ‘building dugouts’, would sound peculiar in a short film about children’s playgrounds and leisure-time activities unless viewers are aware of the wartime context.

Apart from the voice-over, the director can use music as a technique to guide the attention of viewers and create associations and mental images.³⁶ The incidental music used in the film closely resembles film scores of the long feature films of that time, which leans toward more classical than popular music styles. The scenes that depict dangerous places for children’s play and the boat trip to Korkeasaari lack incidental music. Besides the voice-over and incidental music, only three other sounds are used: the clap of a carpet beater, the creaking of cranes and the wail of a boat’s steam whistle. The music and sounds, or their absence, highlight the visual and emphasise the events in the scenes.

The film includes seven scenes, all of which were analysed: 1) children playing in a backyard, 2) children playing in a front yard of block of flats, 3) children wandering and playing in a harbour site, 4) children camping and swimming on the beach, 5) children going to and

³³ Sedergren and Kippola, *Dokumentin utopiat*, 14.

³⁴ See also, e.g. Marjo Nieminen, “Regulated and Liberated Bodies of Schoolgirls in a Finnish Short Film from the 1950s”, *Paedagogica Historica* 54, nos. 1-2 (2018): 96-113.

³⁵ May, “A Field of Desire”, 623-37.

³⁶ Cabeleira, Martins and Lawn, “Indisciplines of Inquiry”, 473-90; Cunningham, “Moving Images”, 289-406.

wandering in Korkeasaari, 6) children playing in a park and 7) a children's celebration in Kaivopuisto Park. The results of the analysis are presented in the next four sections. First, two sections highlight the representations of children and urban physical spaces: the harms and risks of urban life and the desirable green spaces inside the urban environment. Next, the representations of social spaces and children's gendered sports and play, as well as naturalised gender roles, are discussed. The last section before the conclusion addresses the mental/cultural spaces constructed in the short film using the framework of the 1940s and the interim peace period.

In the results sections, the representations of the film are compared with reminiscences of urban childhood in the 1940s. Memories concerning an urban environment, especially yards, are part of a larger recollection collection gathered in 1995–1998 where residents of Helsinki were asked to reminisce about their town and living environment. The results were published in a study by Anna-Maria Åström and Laura Lolbe, “Kaupunkilaisten Helsinki. Helsingin historia vuodesta 1945” [“The Residents’ Helsinki. History of Helsinki from 1945”], which is employed in this article regarding memories of the 1940s.³⁷ The memories of wartime childhood and youth were studied in a research project led by Sari Näre. The gathered recollection data included interviews collected especially for the research project and sources from the archive of The Finnish Literature Society, the Finnish Social Science Data Archive and the circle of Karelia societies in the Helsinki-Uusimaa Region. The results were published in two volumes: “Sodassa koettua. Haavoitettu lapsuus [Experienced in the War: Wounded Childhood]” and “Sodassa koettua: Uhrattu nuoruus [Experienced in the War: Sacrificed Youth]”, which are utilised in this article.³⁸

Visual representations of urban spaces: unnatural and dangerous places

At the beginning of the film, the visual representations of an urban environment depict unnatural and dangerous surroundings seen as unsuitable for children's play spaces. The first impression for the viewer is the lack of space and gloominess of backyards when, in the first

³⁷ Anna-Maria Åström, ”Helsinkiläisten muistot, paikat ja kiinnekohteet”, [”Reminiscences, Places and Points of Attraction of Residents of Helsinki”], in *Kaupunkilaisten Helsinki. Helsingin historia vuodesta 1945*, [The Residents’ Helsinki. History of Helsinki from 1945], ed. Anna-Maria Åström and Laura Kolbe (Helsinki: SKS, 2016), 13-444.

³⁸ *Sodassa koettua. Haavoitettu lapsuus [Experienced in the War: Wounded Childhood]*, ed. Sari Näre (Helsinki: Weilin + Göös, 2007); *Sodassa koettua: Uhrattu nuoruus [Experienced in the War: Sacrificed Youth]*, ed. Sari Näre (Helsinki: Weilin + Göös, 2008).

scene, the camera angle turns from pictures of roofs to a narrow and dark backyard of a block of flats. The images of roofs concentrate on close-ups of sooty chimneys that emphasise a depiction of the city as an unhealthy place. The voice-over strengthens the feeling when describing “*the narrow abyss of backyards’ stone walls*”. The backyards are narrated sites without sunlight, where completely built environs surround children with the only hint of nature being a weed growing beside trash bins. The camera angles were chosen carefully to stress the unattractiveness of the yard. For example, girls playing hopscotch in one scene look like prisoners when dark shadows cover the entire image from right to left like prison bars. The unhealthy imagery increases when the camera shifts to a carpet-beating housewife on a balcony who is creating a thick dust cloud, while the voice-over comments:

‘And yet, it is not the lack of space and the sunlessness that are the only drawbacks of this play field. The third foe is the never-ending dust’.

In the first scene, dirt, soot, darkness and a restriction on space depict the unsuitability of the environment for children and their activities, employing cinematic elements to repeat and reconstruct old ideas about the unfitness of urban milieus for children.³⁹

The images of the film can be compared with reminiscences about urban yards and children’s play in the 1940s. The backyards were the semi-private spaces of blocks of flats, reserved for maintenance and janitorial services as well as the everyday tasks of residents, such as garbage disposal. The backyards were not made for recreational purposes. On the contrary, their role was functional and practical, eliciting grim and gloomy exteriors.

Nevertheless, from adult perspectives, the yards, unlike the streets, provided sheltered places where children were under the supervision of the neighbourhood. Mostly, the yards were recalled by children as places full of busy activities and games, providing a certain attraction in the eyes of children. However, children could have viewed the yards as desolate, and in some reminiscences, yards were even remembered as restricted areas where children’s play was forbidden.⁴⁰

³⁹ See also, e.g. Juhani Tähtinen, ”Moraali ja terveys kansalais- ja koulukasvatuksen polttopisteessä” [”Morals and Health in the Focus of Popular Education and Schooling”], in *Valistus ja koulunpenkki. Kasvatus ja koulutus Suomessa 1860-luvulta 1960-luvulle*, [Enlightenment and School Bench: Education in Finland from the 1860s to the 1960s] (Helsinki: SKS, 2011), 184-216; Gutman, “The Physical Spaces of Childhood”, 249-66.

⁴⁰ Åström, ”Helsinkiläisten muistot, paikat ja kiinnekohteet”, 63-6.

In the short film, the dangerous elements of the urban city are also displayed in two other scenes. The first is located just outside a block of flats where boys are playing football in the street and on the pavement. The boys' football field covers a bit of the road; thus, it seems to a viewer that the boys must control their movements and adapt their play according to the delimited area. The second scene is at the harbour, where children wander through a railway area and loading docks. Hazards are presented in the film by creating scenes where cars pass near the playing boys, interrupting their game, and the railways and cranes near the docks underline the message about places unsuitable for children and their play. The weeds between the rails, a brief peek at the water in the harbour and a seagull flying by are the only glimpses of nature in the visual representations of these two scenes. Once again, the voice-over emphasises the visual element:

'There are dangers and warnings on every corner. Here, the children are coming to the forbidden area. They meet a policeman who raises a warning finger and explains: Now listen, children: Here in the tracks, the wheels of a railway engine are a threat. And look there in the air; you can be injured by the steel loads of cranes. The danger lurks everywhere, but especially here threatens to crush every poor fellow who cannot keep out of the way. Let us leave for safer areas.'

The children in these first three scenes seem happy and smiling, trying to make the best of the day despite their surroundings. Their appearance is neat and tidy, and they look exuberant when playing. The shortage of clothing that growing children particularly experienced during wartime⁴¹ is not visible in the film. In the first scene, the grid for playing hopscotch is drawn with chalk on the asphalt, and the camera angle is high, aiming downward and revealing the whole scene or close-ups of girls' cheerful faces. The representations of the children's joy contrast with the unattractiveness of the milieu—mud puddles, shadows creating images of prison bars, cold-looking stone walls and trash bins. The images of playful, carefree children continue when the football-playing boys are depicted along with the visit to the harbour sites. The voice-over emphasises the visual when describing children as active, being full of life and having plenty of grit. The narration includes descriptions of sports that stress the sporting spirit and health of the children:

"The play is going on. And the young active joy of life bubbles in the narrow abyss of backyards' stone walls. It is definitely not very big, this stadium of the home yard. One can hardly play hopscotch in it. Nevertheless, even under the circumstances like this, a

⁴¹ Sari Näre and Jenni Kirves, "Lapsuus sodan keskellä", ["Childhood in the Middle of the War"], in *Sodassa koettua. Haavoitettu lapsuus [Experienced in the War: Wounded Childhood]*, ed. Sari Näre (Helsinki: Weilin + Göös, 2007), 8-29.

persistent Finnish sportswoman⁴² with her pilchard jar accomplishes – as we see – a difficult task of hopscotch excellently”.

Again, viewers are shown light-hearted children joyfully playing, oblivious to the perils in their midst, thereby reflecting the Romantic definition of childhood as innocent, natural and free.⁴³

In the first three scenes, the film visualises adults from two perspectives: adults causing harm or creating hazards and adults warning about and defining the borders of allowed and forbidden places in the urban environment. When juxtaposed with the images of children, the adults in the film appear only briefly, and the representations of grown-ups are rather dull and strict. No smiling faces or empathetic appearances can be found among the adults; the visualisation of them is narrow and severe at the beginning of the film. The visual imagery of adults can be compared with the circumstances of wartime realities when children were expected to cope independently with an upbringing focused on adaptability, obedience and survival during these harsh conditions. The relationships between parents and children were often distant, and even cold. In reminiscences of wartime children, it was noted that children just grew up while adults concentrated on their own affairs. In reality, the early responsibilities borne during childhood diminished children’s time for free play and hastened the process of growing up.⁴⁴

Cabeleira, Martins and Lawn note that a documentary can be used as a technology of visual persuasion.⁴⁵ In the film, the innocence of children is contrasted with the dirty, hazardous milieu in the first three scenes, constructing a warning message for viewers. On the one hand, the representations provide a clear idea of the hazards and risks to children in the urban environment, including what children should avoid and why. On the other hand, two-thirds of the film visualises surroundings and activities in which the emphasis is on pure and clean natural oases within urban environments where children could play in places framed by nature. The latter part of the film echoes the beliefs that children need special public places, playgrounds and playing fields that include access to nature.⁴⁶

⁴² The voice-over of the film uses an old-fashioned Finnish word (‘urheilijaneit’) that combines two words: athlete and damsel.

⁴³ See also, e.g., Gutman, “The Physical Spaces of Childhood”, 249-66.

⁴⁴ Näre and Kirves, “Lapsuus sodan keskellä”, 8-29.

⁴⁵ Cabeleira, Martins and Lawn, “Indisciplines of Inquiry”, 473-90.

⁴⁶ See Gutman, “The Physical Spaces of Childhood”, 249-66.

Visualised nature inside the urban environment: safe, natural and healthy

When the film proceeds and changes the narration to the summer activities implemented by the Child Welfare Committee of Helsinki, the visual images and tone of the film shift, heading in a brighter direction. The incidental music changes to complement the visual imagery and the viewer is treated to idyllic scenery: a beach surrounded by verdant trees and bushes, with children building a summer camp in the nearby flourishing woods. The elements of the film emphasise the tranquillity and safety of the place. The imagery embodies ideas about particular physical places for children and the role of nature in educating them.

In 1940, when the film was made, there were four playgrounds for children in the capital area: Eläintarha, Vallila, Hietaranta and Vuorimiehenkatu. The history of the social service notes that circumstances for summer activities of children were still quite modest and that children were not given one warm meal daily until 1942.⁴⁷ The film does not pay attention to these minor and simple conditions, but rather vividly and enthusiastically employs visual and aural techniques to create lovely and appealing scenery with children's actions.

The voice-over stresses that the activities were designed for all children in the capital city area, thereby emphasising equality among children:

'However, so that all children of the capital – the children of backyards as well as the offspring of boulevards – have a place in the summer where they would be allowed to play freely and safely and would be allowed to enjoy the sun and their own zest for life; their own playgrounds have been arranged by the Child Welfare Committee of the city of Helsinki for them, with tent camps and with beaches'.

The film does not clarify that the playgrounds and summer camp activities were earlier targeted only to poor urban children.⁴⁸ On the contrary, it points out how *"Language and nationality borders, wealth and poverty all become even on these playgrounds"*. The message of the film underlines the equality among children and the physical space shared by all youngsters in the capital area.

At first, spectators can see children busily organising a camp and pitching tents in the woods behind the beach. Elements of nature, including trees and stones, are part of the project of children. The scene continues to the beach, where children are bathing, swimming and splashing joyfully and the representations of the film display glittering water and children's

⁴⁷ Halila, *Helsingin kaupungin sosiaalitoimen historia*, 185-86.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

merriment and delight. In this scene, water forms both the playing field for children and as part of their play. The elements of nature are visualised as the vital components of desired physical spaces for children and their play.

The merry, light tone of the narration continues when the film depicts children enjoying their packed lunches after the swimming session. Although the wartime food shortage is mentioned in the voice-over narration, the atmosphere is positive, and the lack of food and other wartime difficulties experienced by children are not visible to spectators⁴⁹.

The idyllic scenery continues when the film returns to the waterfront after the children have dressed and finished their packed lunches. The voice-over emphasises the attraction of the water, which children cannot resist: “*Water attracts. Even with clothes still on, one must go and wade there to the side of the big stone. There, it is so nice to float bark boats with their hay sails*”. The scene is comparable to the events at the beginning of the film, when the boys are at the harbour site and float boxes of matches in a mud puddle, formed by rain, on the cover of a dirty barrel. The large barrels sit beside carboys, which the voice-over assumes are full of sulphuric acid. When this image is juxtaposed with the idyllic beach scene, the film underlines the differences between the two urban surroundings, making the health hazards of the docks and the benefits of the beach clear to viewers.

The next scene depicts a boat trip in which the children go to Korkeasaari (Högholmen in Swedish), a little island near the coast of Helsinki that offers a zoo and parks. Nature is heavily present in the scene, and the voice-over again colourfully expresses the loveliness of the place, calling it a “*paradise of nature*”:

‘To Korkeasaari to see bears. Out of the heat of the asphalt streets of the capital. ... Korkeasaari, with its alive bears and all that, it certainly is a paradise of nature which one never would be bored with looking’.

In the latter part of the film, the visualisation of adults and their roles change. The strict, stern grown-ups are replaced by adults who fulfil children’s needs and wishes. The voice-over describes them as “*patient playground attendants who are interested in their work*”. Although these adults played a central role in organising children’s playgrounds and summer activities, the visual narration of them in the film is limited to only a few moments, i.e. the perspective of

⁴⁹ Näre and Kirves, ”Lapsuus sodan keskellä”, 8-29.

children remains at centre stage throughout the film, and the grown-ups only have walk-on roles.

Gendered sports and children's play: naturalised gender roles

Between the world wars, the PE of children had been tied to the educational objectives of being a good citizen and strengthening nationalism. Gymnastics, physical training and sports had tightly been attached to national values: diligence, work ethic, chastity, physical fitness and temperance. The earlier values of the youth association movement—the clean environment of rural, teetotalism and industriousness—also passed the ideology of sports educators.⁵⁰ Also, the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare (Mannerheimin Lastensuojeluliitto) had emphasised the importance of physical training, and in the 1920s, it had begun to arrange sports activities to increase the physical fitness of children and youth.⁵¹ PE and sports were regarded as cultivating mental and physical health as well as consolidating and maintaining communities' sense of solidarity, forging a path to healthy growth for children and youth.⁵²

Sports organisations had been divided politically between the world wars, and both sides had connected physical training with advancing their own political goals. The values of the rightist sport organisations included patriotism, Christianity and local patriotism, while the leftist organisations regarded physical training as a seamless part of the class struggle movement. Nevertheless, differences between these two sides were found in their political messages, not in physical training per se. Both sides shared the same metaphors of bodily health: happiness, light, briskness and cleanliness. On the eve of the Winter War, the sport organisations reached a consensus when the pressure for creating a united front grew.⁵³

Educators in sports perceived the basis of the nation as bodily and physical; thus, it was believed that the vitality of the nation depended on the physical health of each citizen. Bodily health was regarded as a duty for each citizen, and failure in one's obligations meant weakening the moral foundations of the nation. In the minds of sports leaders, the ideal of development and growth was united with the romantic notions of rural Finland, which idealise the

⁵⁰ Jussi Turtiainen, "Liikunta nuorison kasvattajana", ["Physical Education as an Educator of Youth"], in *Sodassa koettua: Uhrattu nuoruus [Experienced in the War: Sacrificed Youth]*, ed. Sari Näre (Helsinki: Weilin + Göös, 2008), 180-211.

⁵¹ Näre, "Nuorisotoiminta sodan aikana", 40-63.

⁵² Turtiainen, "Liikunta nuorison kasvattajana", 180-211.

⁵³ Ibid.

countryside, physical labour, outdoor life and nature. However, women's and men's interests in physical fitness differed, and PE for girls and boys taught them the essential nature of their physical bodies along gender lines.⁵⁴

The film visualises the same phenomenon when it depicts gender roles in children's sports, drawing a distinction between sports regarded as feminine or masculine. When the voice-over compares girls' hopscotch with boys' football play, the emphasis is on children's need for physical exercise and the gendered nature of different sports:

'A similar germ of the yearning of physical exercise: girls' hopscotch and football, which is little boys' second nature. - - - So, now the street marks a green grass mat, and lids serve as goalposts. The post was flattened when the collateral dive-bomber⁵⁵ had crashed there, but that doesn't matter; the people require goals.'

The voice-over describes football playing as a game for boys, i.e. 'little boys' second nature'. Gender segregation was typical in competitive sports, although in neighbourhood communities, girls and boys also played together. The narration of the film adapts the ideas of gender-segregated sports that prevailed in school curricula and competitive sports. The curricula of PE were different at girls' and boys' schools. Boys' schools included football in the curriculum, whereas girls' schools only offered Finnish baseball and basketball. In elementary schools, football had been present since the 1930s but was segregated according to gender, as school diaries of the 1960s revealed. During PE in elementary school, girls played while boys had sports; during the boys' football games, girls served as spectators.⁵⁶

The film's representations of girls' and boys' sports activities visualise masculine sports as physically more demanding, dynamic and energetic. The voice-over narrates the circumstances around boys' play as more dangerous than girls' hopscotch play. The vocabulary of the narration refers to the war, with boys describing playing ball despite traffic hazards in almost

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ The voice-over refers to a car that passes by and interrupts boys playing football in the film.

⁵⁶ Hannu Itkonen, "Nuorisourheilun muuttuvat käytännöt, tavoitteet ja merkitykset", ["Changing Practices, Aims and Meanings of Youth Sports"], in *Nuoruuden vuosisata: Suomalaisen nuorison historia [The Century of Youth: The History of the Finnish Youth]* (Helsinki: SKS, 2003), 327-43; Aimo Halila, *Suomen kansakoululaitoksen historia 4 [History of Finnish Elementary School 4]* (Helsinki: WSOY, 1950), 194-95; Asetus oppikoulujen lukusuunnitelmista sekä valtion oppikoulujen oppiennätykset ja metodiset ohjeet. Oppikoulujen lukusuunnitelmista kesäkuun 13 päivänä 1941 annettu asetus, opetusministeriön valtion oppikouluja varten kesäkuun 19 päivänä 1941 vahvistamat oppiennätykset ja kouluhallituksen kesäkuun 26 päivänä 1941 vahvistamat metodiset ohjeet [Act on the Curriculums for Secondary Schools and Targets for the State Secondary Schools and Methodological Instructions] (Helsinki: Valtioneuvosto, 1944), 133-38.

heroic terms. The girls playing hopscotch are described as the “*persistent Finnish sportswomen*”, giving them a role as active players and the glory of being sportswomen, distancing them from a passive role as mere spectators. The representations of the film entail gender-segregated PE, which aimed to teach boys how to work vigorously and strongly and to teach girls to “exercise necessary caution”.⁵⁷ Although the voice-over’s emphasis is on the Finnish context, gender segregation prevailed in sports internationally. For example, during the interwar period in France, the practice of sport and physical exercise was considered to be a male affair, and cultural resistance to female participants in team sports, such as football, was considerable. Physical fitness and athletics not only continued to be seen as specifically masculine virtues but also as technologies of self-management, which was regarded as essential for the people’s own good as well as the nation’s.⁵⁸

Gender roles are also depicted in children’s play, although in reality, it was common for girls and boys to play together in urban surroundings.⁵⁹ In the film, the voice-over describes girls playing dice and boys floating boats: “*The girls have their children’s games of dice. And young rascals dream and float their matchbox boats in the glimmering basins of the barrels*”. The same representations continue when the film outlines feminine and masculine play, and groups swinging, round games and household play as girls’ entertainments. The narrator even emphasises the gender segregation of play and naturalises gender roles, stressing girls’ more domestic activities:

‘The summer campers’ plays are many and manifold. The girls, of course, have the girls’ play with their own households and their play meals. Might that coffee be quite genuine or even the wartime substitute? Well, it does not matter. The main thing is that there is a lot to talk about when drinking coffee. And eternal femininity, it appears in the form of the parasol here too’.

In the scene, the girls are playing house: sitting on the lawn and talking while playing coffee drinking, with a miniature toy coffee set on a small tray. The representation of the film is merry and joyful. The visual elements create a scene that stresses feminine connotations, which the voice-over strengthens when describing the girls’ parasols as reflecting ‘*eternal femininity*’.

⁵⁷ Asetus oppikoulujen lukusuunnitelmista sekä valtion oppikoulujen oppiennätykset ja metodiset ohjeet, 140-41.

⁵⁸ Joan Tumblety, *Remaking the Male Body. Masculinity and the uses of Physical Culture in Interwar and Vichy France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 99-105.

⁵⁹ Tuomas Tepora, “Sota-ajan leikit ja koulu” [“Play and School during Wartime”] in *Sodassa koettua. Haavoitettu lapsuus [Experienced in the War: Wounded Childhood]*, ed. Sari Näre (Helsinki: Weilin + Göös, 2007), 30-67.

The girls' appearances and manners are attached to femininity, and their play is viewed as something belonging to girlhood.

In the park scene, the boys hold pretend rallies with their wooden trolleys and scooters, imitating real car and motorcycle races arranged in Eläintarha. The imagined racing cars and motorcycles tie the boys to the world of men, gendering their play into masculine amusements. The visual images depict the boys participating in the imaginary rally with all their hearts, with the voice-over narrating their activity in a way that naturalises the event in a masculine sphere:

*'The boys, however, have their own goings-on. The Rally of Eläintarha is full going on here, in spite of the petrol shortage. It seems that there are wood-gas generators there. ... And there seems to be a race series of their own for motorbikes. Who might win that Grand Prix?'*⁶⁰

The only gender-neutral children's play presented in the film, at least visually, is sandpit play with toddlers. When the visual concentrates on the toddlers building sandcastles, the voice-over comments on the play with a wartime vocabulary: *"The audience at the sandpit is very excited during the building of dugouts. Or is it the splinter protection that they might dig?"* The comparison of the toddlers' innocent play in the sandpit and the voice-over's war vocabulary provides a reminder of the proximity of the war, attaching the infants to masculine war efforts. Thus, the visual images of gender-neutral play carry the connotations of the recent war and its masculinity.

The children's play in the short film can be compared with the memories of the children's reality during wartime when it was common for children's play to include play funerals and different war games. The short film omits these and represents sports and play as more common to the period before the war, echoing the traditional gendered roles of games. According to wartime recollections, the everyday practices of play often broke gender roles, although children's play preserved its characteristic features even in the circumstances of war. When playing war games, girls sometimes crossed gender boundaries and participated in play battles side by side with the boys.⁶¹ Although the girls had their own roles as Little Lottas⁶² during the war games, they occasionally enlarged their roles and crawled into play trenches or took part

⁶⁰ The voice-over refers to the rallies, which were arranged in Eläintarha, 1932–1963.

⁶¹ Tepora, "Sota-ajan leikit ja koulu", 30-67.

⁶² The women's patriotic organisation "Lotta Svärd" had an organisation for girls, "Little Lottas", designed for 8- to 16-year-old girls. Being a Little Lotta was a popular play role for girls younger than 8 when children played war games.

in battles with boys. The same kind of crossing over did not occur in boys' roles. Although the changes caused and the emotions evoked by the war influenced children's play, according to their memories, many children felt their play during childhood was happy and ordinary. The war was also recalled as being an exciting and adventurous experience though shadowed by the awareness of a father or brother on the front.⁶³

Wartime memories included recollections of children's funeral play in which children imitated funeral ceremonies for war casualties. Although playing it was considered ominous and forbidden by adults, the game was still very popular among children. The custom of evacuating the fallen to be buried in their home districts meant that the burials of soldiers were a common sight in every municipality and city. Children noticed funerals and burial mounds in churchyards, and they sometimes secretly participated in funeral ceremonies.⁶⁴ For children who belonged to patriotic youth organisations, it was mandatory to assist in the ceremonies.⁶⁵ In wartime memories, the funeral procession repeatedly occurred and was an unforgettable scene. Children's play resembled a real funeral, including songs, speeches and crying. Playing the forbidden play was recalled to cause guiltiness, especially on occasions when children heard the news of their relative having fallen in action. When playing burial and repeating ceremonies, children could process their own losses and sorrows as well as the emotions that the society and adults had experienced. The fatalities of the war echoed in the children's play in very concrete ways, although they were not displayed in the short film. Tepora notes that funeral play with expressions of sorrow—for example, the sorrow of widows—could be regarded as being more girls' than boys' play, and the role of victim was often reserved for boys. The role of the women in the society was attached to childbearing and caring in the sphere of the home, while men were assigned to the public sphere and the defence of the country. From that point of view, when playing burial, girls absorbed the sacrifice of the fallen men on behalf of 'home, religion and nation' and symbolically transformed that expectation into strength, maintaining and consolidating the home nation in the same way as the real burials happened.⁶⁶

⁶³ Tepora, "Sota-ajan leikit ja koulu", 30-67.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Jenni Kirves, "Pikkulottien ja lottatyttöjen vaativat tehtävät", ["Demanding Tasks of Little Lottas and Lottagirls"], in *Sodassa koettua. Uhrattu nuoruus [Experienced in the War: Sacrificed Youth]* ed. Sari Näre (Helsinki: Weilin + Göös, 2008), 89-137; Sari Näre, "Sotilaspojat ja poikasotilaat maansa puolesta", ["Soldierboys and Boysoldiers on Behalf of their Country"] in *Sodassa koettua. Uhrattu nuoruus [Experienced in the War: Sacrificed Youth]*, ed. Sari Näre (Helsinki: Weilin + Göös, 2008), 138-79.

⁶⁶ Tepora, "Sota-ajan leikit ja koulu", 30-67.

Mental/cultural spaces in urban environments

The last scene of the film concentrates on a public festival held in the large urban park, Kaivopuisto. The voice-over comments on the programme when the visual images of tall trees and people sitting on the crest of the rock represent the spirit of the festival. The programme included recitations, speeches and community singing, solidifying culturally appreciated values during the open-air festival. The green space of the urban environment provided a setting for the communal get-together.

At the end of the scene, a ballet performance depicts girls dancing on the lawn. The girls wear garlands, and their dresses are decorated with ornaments resembling flowers. The dancing girls in the verdant park embody the mental/cultural space of the public festival, emphasising the valued ideas of a good childhood in which physical well-being unites with culturally cultivated activities. In the film, nature and its green places in the urban environment are important elements when creating spaces where the ideal childhood can be embodied. The bodies of the children were aestheticised in the imagery of the film, and the visual represents the physical culture in which the emphasis is on a healthy and natural body. Physical culture means the ways and habits of exercise, doing gymnastics and playing sports that a community practices and that are historically changing. In the physical culture, the optimism and progress of the Enlightenment, which aimed to perfect the abilities of the individual, clashed with Romanticism's ideal of going back to nature in which the objective was to be free from the burdens of civilisation. The notions of physical culture had features that resembled the movement of healthy living, where promoting health and preventing diseases through personal exertion were central.⁶⁷

The ending scene and the closing speech of the voice-over crystallise the ideas of child welfare and the national health programme. In the representations of the film, sunlight, clean air and nature are regarded as key elements in promoting children's well-being:

'The children of backyards also have their share from light and air and above all nature. And now, they have the strength to receive a long winter with their schools and also with their other duties. The memories of the summer are as spurs to the work and the healthy red on the cheeks is a proof of the new power given by sports, of the joy of life which has increased and of the still increasing desire of the activeness which during this important time of the reconstruction we need so sorely.'

⁶⁷ See Turtiainen, "Liikunta nuorison kasvattajana", 180-211.

The narration connects health and an active lifestyle to qualities especially needed during the “*time of the reconstruction*”, referring to the short interim peace period. In the summer of 1940, the emphasis was on rebuilding after the Winter War, and children’s welfare was one of the focused areas.

When the representations of the short film concentrate on certain issues, they demarcate problems and subjects heavily present in the lives of wartime children. The film does not bring up the concrete reality of wartime and how the requirements of war that continued during the period of the interim peace diminished children’s opportunities for play and forced children to take part in war efforts and working life.⁶⁸ The film does not mention that during the Winter War, approximately 9,000 children were evacuated to Sweden and that during the interim peace period, this exodus continued as Finnish children were sent on leisure trips to Sweden.⁶⁹ Nor does the film depict children being evacuated from the Karelia region, which was ceded to the Soviet Union through a peace treaty a few months before the film was made.⁷⁰ Evacuated children reminisced about how important it was to have new playmates and how they were constantly at risk of losing them. Play functioned as a space of transition between safety and oppression and was a way for children to process negative emotions. As Oksanen notes, childhood did not necessarily end during the war, but childhood was during the war.⁷¹

In addition, the situation of war orphans in the Winter War is not included in the imagery of the short film. In the reminiscences of war orphans, it was noted that the experiences of loneliness and lack of consolation cast shadows on their childhood. During wartime, children’s feelings of insecurity grew when they lost a parent(s). The wartime experiences led to the need to secure the right to one’s own existence and redeem acceptance of one’s self in society.⁷² The mental/cultural spaces of the urban environment were influenced by these war events, though the film does not include them visually.

⁶⁸ Tepora, “Sota-ajan leikit ja koulu”, 30-67.

⁶⁹ Aura Korppi-Tommola, “War and Children in Finland during the Second World War”, *Paedagogica Historica* 44, no. 4 (2008): 445-55; Jenni Kirves, “Sotalasten siirretty lapsuus”, [“War Children’s Transferred Childhood”], in *Sodassa koettua. Haavoitettu lapsuus [Experienced in the War: Wounded Childhood]*, ed. Sari Näre (Helsinki: Weilin + Göös, 2007), 102-37.

⁷⁰ Approximately 406,800 people were evacuated from Karelia after the Winter War.

⁷¹ Atte Oksanen, “Evakkolasten kadotettu koti”, [“The Lost Home of Evacuated Children”], in *Sodassa koettua: Haavoitettu lapsuus [Experienced in the War: Wounded Childhood]*, ed. Sari Näre (Helsinki: Weilin + Göös, 2007), 68-101.

⁷² Sari Näre, “Sotaorpojen mykkä ikävä”, [“The Silent Longing of War Orphans”], in *Sodassa koettua. Haavoitettu lapsuus [Experienced in the War: Wounded Childhood]*, ed. Sari Näre (Helsinki: Weilin + Göös, 2007), 138-67.

Conclusion

The analysed short film *From Backyard to Light* was released during the interim peace period, which created an interesting context for the film. During that time, World War II was raging elsewhere, and it is both invisible and present in the film. The film can be seen as part of Finnish preventive children and youth work, which had been organised by the city's child welfare programme together with non-governmental organisations, especially the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare and the Finnish Temperance Societies. The representations of the film were tied up with the ideas of health education and good living conditions for children, promoted by these organisations.⁷³

The representations of the short film depict views of physical spaces for children's play in the urban environment and create lines between allowed and restricted places. The perspective of the film is interesting when it constructs a division inside the urban spaces, but does not stress the differences between urban and rural areas. The film starts with visual images that portray children's spaces as controlled by adults, and the narration emphasises the health hazards of the urban milieu (e.g. polluted air, dirt, railway yards) and the limited and unsuitable spaces for children's play. The imagery at the beginning of the film is contested and compared later in the film when the representations of physical spaces change to images of green spaces. As the international ideas of children's places in an urban environment⁷⁴, Finnish cities' child welfare and non-governmental child organisations stressed environments that supported the growth of body and soul to educate people as civilised citizens⁷⁵, and the film embodies those notions. In the interim peace period, caring for children was one of the focuses, and the need to strengthen a sense of solidarity was highlighted.

In the green spaces of the short film, physical, social and mental/cultural spaces intersect. The scenes visualise the concrete physical spaces of the parks and playgrounds, depicting how these places are transformed into social places when filled with children's play and action. The voice-over's emphasis is on the equal nature of the playgrounds and children's joy in life, which construct the imagery of the innocent and carefree nature of childhood. At the same time, the film materialises the objectives of child welfare and the prevailing ideas of good upbringing

⁷³ Halila, *Helsingin kaupungin sosiaalitoimen historia*, 185-86, 208; Korppi-Tommola, *Terve lapsi – kansan huomen*, 58-83.

⁷⁴ Gutman, "The Physical Spaces of Childhood", 249-66; Cross, "Play, Games and Toys", 267-82.

⁷⁵ Halila, *Helsingin kaupungin sosiaalitoimen historia*, 185-86, 208; Korppi-Tommola, *Terve lapsi – kansan huomen*, 58-83.

and education. Educational and cultural values are tied to the elements of the film, and the narration embodies the mental/cultural spaces of urban environments. Fresh air, clean water and playgrounds designed for bodily exercises are captured in the imagery of the film, and the representations display the educational objectives: healthy and active children and youth.⁷⁶

In the film, physical exercise is encouraged for both genders, but the visual image of girls is a little less demanding and courageous than the image of boys. The representations of children's play are gendered, and the narration divides them into the separate spheres of feminine and masculine, although in reality girls and boys often played together⁷⁷. The narration excludes war games and funeral play, which were popular among children during the war period. Though playing funeral was forbidden by adults and considered ominous, children were able to process their painful experiences and the events of the war while playing.⁷⁸

In the film's representations, wartime difficulties experienced by children are not visible. For example, the circumstances of wounded children and war orphans are not part of the imagery. The concrete reality of wartime is depicted in the voice-over through the use of the vocabulary of warfare, e.g. "splinter protection", and the footage of innocent toddlers playing in a sandpit is described in war-like terms, occasionally cutting through the harmonious atmosphere of the film. The imagery stresses a future-oriented tone, concentrating on positive and encouraging visions. On the one hand, the narration of the film built representations in which childhood itself is viewed as valuable and significant, while on the other hand, the narration represents children as an investment for the future—the hope of the nation.

⁷⁶ See Turtiainen, "Liikunta nuorison kasvattajana", 180-211; Henrik Meinander, *Towards a Bourgeois Manhood: Boys' Physical Education in Nordic Secondary Schools 1880-1940* (Helsinki: Suomen Tiedeseura, 1994); Tähtinen, "Moraali ja terveys kansalais- ja koulukasvatuksen polttopisteessä", 184-216.

⁷⁷ See Tepora, "Sota-ajan leikit ja koulu", 30-67.

⁷⁸ Ibid.