

THE VACILLATING SOURCES OF AUTHORITY – THE CASE OF THE OLD TOWN IN TURKU, FINLAND

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INTRODUCTION

Heritage forms a highly complex part of urban planning. It is also historically conditioned, meaning that history, and therefore culture, is a pre-requisite for its existence. Heritage is also one of several creative forces which, sometimes clashing and sometimes consonant, shape urban space. These forces can be construed of in terms of power and of the authorities controlling that power.

In this article, the concept of *authority* is used to refer to the ability to make decisions regarding the cityscape. Such authority is considered to be communally invested, meaning that it is conferred by the mutual consent of the society in question. In this way, authorities may include the city's administrative, cultural, and financial institutions, as well as various interest groups. Authorities are also created by the everyday actions of urban residents and visitors, when these become routine or almost automatic. The authorities affecting urban space can become established as administrative institutions and thus remain apparently unaltered for long stretches of time. Even these, nevertheless, can be reshaped by changes in legislation and policy, or by fluctuations in the economy, in public opinion, or in social values. In this article, we pose the question of how heritage acquires authority and affects urban planning, and what role heritage can play at a time when the established and traditional authorities of urban space are in flux. The article is based on the research project 'The Heritage of the Old Town of Turku as Dreams, Conflicts, and Urban Space' funded by the Turku Urban Research Programme.

From a historical perspective, cities and especially city centres are frequently designed and built to materialise authority. This includes constructing monumental architecture and designing the city layout. As suggested by Michel de Certeau, the very manner in which cities are organised can be considered authoritarian.¹ The twentieth-century's high-modernist approach to urban planning is an extreme expression of such attempts to institute a built-in authority within urban space.² In the early twenty-first century, by contrast, the modern foundations of authority are being re-evaluated, as the late modern era's consumer culture, globalisation and environmental crisis continue to corrode the fabric of national states.³ Sources of authority have thus become increasingly multi-temporal and diffuse, and do not always manifest themselves in the same manner within different urban communities.

Among the authorities under scrutiny in the twenty-first century are modern heritage institutions. Heritage can be seen as a discourse that carries authoritative power. This allows communities to

organise around and attach themselves to heritage, while simultaneously investing heritage with significance. To function in this way, however, heritage requires authorities and respective institutions to shape and actualise this discourse.⁴ In some quarters of society, this role is primarily filled by museums and heritage professionals, while in other quarters of society, these do not hold the same importance. Through the analysis of such disparities, the study of urban heritage can reveal major shifts in the contemporary sources of urban authority.

Our research project focuses on Turku and how its heritage has emerged as a field shaped by the dynamics of power and authority. Turku is a coastal city of 192,000 inhabitants located at the south-western corner Finland. Founded in around 1300, it is the oldest town in the country, and served as the country's capital and seat of political authority before this was shifted to Helsinki. Turku's city plan is divided in two by the Aurajoki River, which provides the city centre with a scenic setting (Figure 1). In 2017, the Turku Centre 2050 vision group work, commissioned by the City of Turku, published its conclusions in a book entitled *Towards New Turku: Vision for the City Centre 2050*.⁵ The group introduced a new concept, that of the 'Old Town'. This comprises of the oldest quarters in the city, and serves to emphasise the city's international character, setting Turku on a par with other Nordic cities that possess historical centres. Importantly, the 'Old Town' has also been a feature used in the city's advertising and tourism industry. Using diverse sources – including local histories, archaeological and architectural texts, photographs and other representations of the urban environment, as well as interviews with professionals and residents – we will now examine how the Old Town of Turku has come to be considered as heritage and, as such, invested with authority.



Figure 1. The Aurajoki River provides the Old Town of Turku with a visually pleasing environment.
Photo by Visa Immonen.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL RESERVE

Among the institutional strategies that determine power within an urban structure is the definition and control of *value*, i.e., identifying something as significant or useful. Value requires a process by which it is both recognised and constituted. This process can be termed *value creation*. Value has different modalities, like 'economic', 'environmental', and 'social', with elements of the urban environment accorded various types and degrees of value and treated accordingly.⁶ One of these modalities of

value is ‘historical value’. This term, along with that of ‘culture historical value’, is a catchword frequently utilised within urban heritage management.

Historical value is primarily associated with the past. Among its gatekeepers, therefore, are disciplines and professionals examining the past. When the findings of historical enquiries and scholarship, or historical fiction related to the urban environment, are presented as texts, visualisations, or other media, these become sources of *historiographical reserve*. The concept of historiographical reserve refers to an intellectual and cultural repository of multiple possible meanings and explanations given to local history. This is also essential to the value creation of any built urban environment. Through the concept of historiographical reserve, historical value creation and urban heritage are powered not only by the writing of historical works but also by the process of reading and learning from them.⁷

The translation of historiographical reserve into historical and heritage value is particularly apparent in such urban environments as *old towns*. In her study, Anna Sivula scrutinises the historiographical reserve of the Old Town of Turku and explores its chronological layers. She does this by selecting historical publications available in the public libraries of Turku, including works of non-fiction and of fiction. From these texts, Sivula then picks out historiographical samples and analyses how the past built environment is textually constructed and identified in these. In particular, she asks how the Old Town of Turku has previously been documented and represented.

Among the conclusions of Sivula’s analysis is that the affective style of these historical texts varies greatly. Travel accounts of Turku written by individual tourists, as well as texts written by antiquarians and collectors from the early twentieth century, appear highly emotional, whereas the attitude of historical studies from the 1960s to 1980s appears critical and subdued. This is in clear contrast with the emotional tone of post-modern neo-monumental texts of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Lastly, the most recent historiographical layer, from the 2010s, reveals that some present-day authors revisit critical and antiquarian approaches from the past in their texts. In all, the launch of the Old Town of Turku in 2017 draws, perhaps inadvertently, on a repository of historical writings, and this historiographical reserve is vigorously utilised in the historical and heritage value creation processes.

ADMINISTRATIVE TENSIONS

The value of urban heritage can vary for the different actors in the cityscape, even among the professionals working in its administration. If these conflicting attitudes and values are examined comparatively, heritage can offer a lens through which to visualise the interconnected problems of urban space, and see it shaped by contemporary authorities. An historical example of this is explored by Tiina Männistö-Funk’s study of the paradigm change in value assigned to heritage by urban planning in Turku and how this took place after the mid-twentieth century.

In around the mid- twentieth century, technocratic modernism was a powerful ideal shared by architects, planners, and politicians alike. Olavi Laisaari (1907–1982) was one of the first architects to specialise in urban design in Finland. He was responsible for designing zoning plans for several cities, including Turku.⁸ Laisaari was a vehemently functionalist planner, inspired by the planning of American car cities. He saw traffic planning as the key solution to urban problems. This necessitated the radical reform of city centres, essentially the demolition of old buildings to create space for an unfettered flow of urban traffic.⁹

Laisaari’s plan for the redevelopment of Turku would eventually clash with the emerging interests of urban conservation. Laisaari’s main opponent, the archaeologist and art historian Carl Jacob Gardberg (1926–2010), personified the authority of heritage professionals. Gardberg worked at the Historical Museum of Turku, compiling in 1955 the very first listing of buildings marked for conservation in

Turku. This triggered a dispute between him and Laisaari. Their public conflict showed of how the rediscovery of historical Turku as an idea challenged and questioned the international urban renewal regime of the 1950s.¹⁰ The case also demonstrates that the authority of heritage conservation was weak and forced to define itself under pressure from modernist planning and development projects. Since there was no applicable legislation, the only way to challenge the planning authority was to launch public discussions and raise public opposition. Eventually as many as 25 of the 63 culturally important buildings on Gardberg's list were demolished.¹¹ Despite the poor success of these early attempts of heritage conservation, the heartfelt need to express such concerns and actively negotiate with city authorities was nevertheless a formative stimulus, giving birth to a public discourse that gained authority in later decades.¹² Similarly, the idea of protecting Turku's urban milieu was formulated in response to the threat of redevelopment in the 1950s. In Turku, milieu protection radiated from the Old Town, which Gardberg saw as an entity comprising the street network and buildings around the cathedral, and the streets along the riverside leading from the cathedral towards the sea.¹³

URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY - FROM UNDERGROUND TO PROMINENCE

Archaeologists have been active in the cityscape of Turku since the early years of the twentieth century. It was around this time that urban archaeology emerged as a material practice, drawing on the historiographical reserve accumulated in previous centuries, and began to shape the urban environment. In addition to conducting fieldwork, archaeologists in Turku have actively created concepts and shaped narratives for archaeological heritage to be recognised as something valuable, in order to support their own efforts. According to Visa Immonen's analysis, archaeology in Turku has established itself as an authority in urban space, first, by making archaeological heritage a matter of scholarly concern in the early twentieth century, and secondly, since the 1980s, by making archaeological heritage visibly available for public engagement within the urban environment.

In Turku, the idea that archaeologists play a valuable role in the examination of urban heritage was introduced in the early years of the twentieth century. The idea was based on the slogan *Underground Turku*, which the archaeologist Hjalmar Appelgren (1853–1937) introduced in an article published in 1902 in both Finnish and Swedish, the former in a local newspaper and the latter in a scholarly series.¹⁴ Appelgren pointed out the historical and cultural potential lying beneath the surface of the city, under the very feet of its inhabitants, and that the city, as it had once existed, was still there to be found. For centuries, the history of the city had been the preserve of historians only, but now, argued Appelgren, the archaeological record could also be recognised as a relevant resource for research, able to reveal Turku's past in a way that other disciplines could not.

The concept of Underground Turku created the image of a treasure trove from the past waiting inside the earth. This, in turn, inspired a desire to secure and acknowledge the scholarly value of this material. Appelgren's idea found some success, and several sites in Turku were archaeologically documented, with the results incorporated into the city's historiographical reserve in the early decades of the twentieth century. However, none of the medieval structures found in these fieldworks were preserved. Instead, they were demolished as part of construction activities.¹⁵

A new kind of interest in the archaeological heritage of Turku emerged in the 1980s, when the narrative around urban archaeology began to emphasise the high standards of modern fieldwork. It was declared that investigations done in the early twentieth century were unreliable, and only now were the very first 'scientific' excavations being conducted in Turku. Reference to the standards and rigour of the natural sciences thus became the leading justification and conceptual framework for archaeology. Even more importantly, a number of the medieval structures unearthed in the city were

not simply removed as a matter of course. Instead, these ruins were intentionally preserved. This development culminated in the 1990s, when medieval structures found in the city centre were transformed into a well-known tourist attraction, the Aboa Vetus Ars Nova Museum, which combines *in situ* remains with exhibitions of contemporary art.¹⁶ In contrast to the early twentieth century, archaeological heritage had emerged from below ground and thus became a visible part of Turku's urban space.

URBAN COMMUNITIES AND INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

As heritage and heritage management have established themselves as authorities with power over urban space, the views of scholars and heritage managers on the character and effects of heritage have started to change in Northern Europe. This development, which has also altered how urban heritage is studied in Turku and how residents are listened to as authorities of their own heritage, is examined by Aura Kivilaakso and Maija Mäki.

Crucial to the emergence of a new heritage paradigm has been the introduction and spread of the concept of *intangible* heritage. This has not only directed attention to heritage phenomena such as customs, stories, and memories, but also demonstrated that there is a fundamental link between intangible and tangible heritage: buildings, museum objects and other forms of tangible heritage require values, meanings and emotions, i.e. intangible heritage, in order to become established as heritage.¹⁷ For instance, when scholars have studied the attitudes and views of members of the public regarding the urban environment in which they live, they have realised that it might in fact be the *stories* that places and buildings prompt in the minds of their audience which are valued, rather than the built structures themselves. The shared stories that circulate around an urban environment are therefore pivotal building blocks of communality, which reveal the importance of communities and their participation in heritage processes.¹⁸

In Finland, heritage management is in the process of adopting the novel perception of heritage as intangible and communally defined,¹⁹ and therefore requiring new kinds of management ideals and values. If heritage professionals want to preserve heritage within the urban environment, platforms for communal engagement and egalitarian discussion are required.²⁰ Creating these, in turn, requires a new kind of scholarship that focuses on heritage communities. In her contribution to our project, Piia Pentti examines everyday engagements of Turku's residents with the city's urban heritage. She conducts her fieldwork by providing a harness and body camera to selected members of the public. These are then requested to take a stroll in the city centre and record places that they personally consider to represent important heritage. The analysis of such rich visual and oral records can therefore reveal how individuals and communities conceptualise and value their heritage environment.

CONCLUSION

Changes in the relationship between urban heritage, heritage authority, and the city's inhabitants have an immediate effect on urban space. Despite their apparent swiftness and novelty, such transformations are the outcomes of long-term historical processes. As we have argued in this article, they include the accumulation of historiographical reserve, as well as the negotiation of the conflicting values attributed to heritage within urban planning. As a result of such processes in Turku, archaeological heritage has been established as a visible urban element, and communal views on heritage have gained increased currency both in heritage management and in scholarship.

In a time of eroding authorities, established heritage institutions still control, to a certain extent, the urban space within the Old Town of Turku. These are challenged, however, by increasingly dissonant voices, both local and global, which reflect different kinds of values and conceptualisations of

heritage. This increasing diversity means that the future of Turku's urban environment is unfolding as an outcome of both professional and communal participation, affected by changing patterns of authority over urban heritage.

NOTES

¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

² James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005); Per Lundin, *Bilsamhället: Ideologi, expertis och regelskapande i efterkrigstidens Sverige* (Stockholm: Stockholmia, 2008).

³ Joel H. Crawford, *Carfree Cities* (Utrecht: International Books, 2000).

⁴ Laurajane Smith, *The Uses of Heritage* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁵ Aleksi Randell, Markku Wilenius, Timo Hintsanen, Riitta Birkstedt, Eero Lundén, Maija Parviainen and Carmen Lee, *Towards New Turku Vision for the City Centre 2050* (Turku: City of Turku, 2017), <https://www.turku.fi/en/development-city-centre/vision-city-centre-turku> (accessed: 06.07.2021).

⁶ On the value of monuments, see Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Origin," *Oppositions* 25 (1982), 20–51. On the process of urban heritage, see Jonathan Stanhope Bell, *The How and Why of Preservation: Protecting Historic Neighborhoods in China* (Los Angeles: UCLA, 2014), 46–48, which draws heavily on Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 3. On the relationship between symbolic value and tangible cultural products, see Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1984), 59. On value generation in general, see Heiko Wieland, Kaisa Koskela-Huotari and Stephen L. Vargo, "Extending Actor Participation in Value Creation: An Institutional View," *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 24 (2016), 210–226.

⁷ Sivula coined the concept of *historiographical reserve* in 2021 to serve the needs of her *historiographical operation analysis*, see Anna Sivula, "Tilaushistoria identiteettinä ja kulttuuriperintöprosessina: Paikallisen historiapolitiikan tarkastelua," *Kulttuuripolitiikan tutkimuksen vuosikirja* 1 (2015), 61–75; Anna Sivula, "Turun Tuomiokirkko historiografisen operaatioanalyysin kohteena," in *Metodikirja*, ed. Rami Mähkä et al. (Turku: Turun Historiallinen Yhdistys, 2021).

⁸ Olavi Laisaari, *Turun yleiskaava ja kaupungin kehittämissuunnitelma* (Turku: Turun kaupunki, 1952).

⁹ Olavi Laisaari, *Tehokas kaupunki – The Smooth-running Town* (Turku: Turun kansallinen kirjakauppa, 1962).

¹⁰ Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).

¹¹ C. J. Gardberg, "Byggnadssydd i Åbo på 1950-talet," in *Rakennettu aika: ICOMOSin Suomen osasto 25 vuotta*, ed. Maija Kairamo et al. (Helsinki: ICOMOS, Suomen osasto, 1993), 57–61.

¹² C. J. Gardberg, "Rakennetun miljöönsuojelu," *Suomen Turku* 1977(4): 11–13.

¹³ Gardberg, "Byggnadssydd i Åbo på 1950-talet".

¹⁴ Hjalmar Appelgren, "Maanalainen Turku," *Uusi Aura*, February 22–March 5, 1902; Hjalmar Appelgren, "Det underjordiska Åbo," *Finskt Museum* 1901 (1902): 49–65.

¹⁵ Jussi-Pekka Taavitsainen, "Piirteitä Turun arkeologian historiasta," in *Kaupunkia pintaa syvemmältä: Arkeologisia näkökulmia Turun historiaan*, ed. Liisa Seppänen (Turku: Suomen keskiajan arkeologian seura, 2003), 9–22.

¹⁶ Minna Sartes, "Rettigin palatsin tontista tuli Aboa Vetus -museo," in *Kaupunkia pintaa syvemmältä: Arkeologisia näkökulmia Turun historiaan*, ed. Liisa Seppänen (Turku: Suomen keskiajan arkeologian seura, 2003), 77–85.

¹⁷ Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*; Laurajane Smith, *Emotional Heritage: Visitor Engagement at Museums and Heritage Sites* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

¹⁸ Eeva Karhunen, *Porin kuudennen osan tarinoista rakennettu kulttuuriperintö* (Turku: Turun yliopisto, 2014); Laurajane Smith and Emma Waterton, *Heritage, Communities and Archaeology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009).

¹⁹ Tanja Vahtikari, Aura Kivilaakso and Pauliina Latvala, “Kaupunki, kulttuuriperintökokemus ja osallisuus,” in *Humanistinen kaupunkitutkimus*, ed. Tanja Vahtikari et al. (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2021), 380–381; cf. Tuuli Lähdesmäki, “Conflicts and Reconciliation in the Postmillennial Heritage-Policy Discourses of the Council of Europe and the European Union,” in *Dissonant Heritages and Memories in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Tuuli Lähdesmäki et al. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 35–40.

²⁰ E.g., Vahtikari, Kivilaakso and Latvala, 365–368.

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