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0 Abstract

As various global networks of culture, economy and communications grow in importance, the relationships between those networks and locally constituted historic places become an issue. Manuel Castells conceptualises the situation as a conflict between 'the space of flows' and 'the space of places' (Castells 1996). Many, especially American, writers discuss the erosion of public space, caused by telematization, loss of functions, privatization, and an increase in fear and control (cf. eg. Sennett 1992; Sorkin 1992; Zukin 1995). In Europe, however, there is a strong intellectual and planning tradition which stresses the historic continuity of urban change and the importance of shared, public space (cf. eg. Moneo 1978, Rossi 1982).

Along with other European cities, Helsinki is striving to become better linked to the networks of economy and cultural exchange. In this inter-urban competition the key actors of Helsinki have taken 'culture' as a tool to promote the city and enhance its image; a major project will be the year 2000 when Helsinki is one of the European Cities of Culture. In this cultural renewal, the historic spaces of Helsinki are an asset because of their symbolic value and beauty, but the very same spaces need also to be developed and changed to meet the expectations of the imagined 'global' clientele. New, planned events play a big role in that cultural-urbanistic effort.

When discussing cultural change, events are theoretically interesting, as a genuine 'event' always incorporates a shift in perception, in the way people look at familiar things, spaces, and symbolisms. Henri Lefebvre (1972) describes this quality as a privileged moment in people's everyday lives; Michel Foucault (1967) uses a spatial metaphor "heterotopia". Events warrant research as their amount and popularity has increased, so that they have become a significant part of city life, and they may, at least temporarily, redefine certain city spaces. Also, new types of event are emerging.

The aim of this paper is to grasp the 'event potential' of urban spaces in Helsinki, to find reasons why different kinds of event are situated in or move in the space as they do. Secondly, we are interested in which spaces might still have potential for new events. Some findings on the latter point may be general. We will start by presenting empirical findings on the everyday use of space. We will then proceed to events and their distribution, and finally we will discuss those in relation to the spatial configuration, represented as an axial map, and the historically constituted symbolic structure of the city. The study area covers the consistently built part of the Helsinki peninsula, an area of approx. 17 sq. km with 163 000 inhabitants (1.1.1997).

Keywords: events, urban potential

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