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## Nordic Classicism and Helsinki's Housing – Agencies of the Individual Housing Companies and Architects on the Grand Tour in the Post-Civil War Period

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Aino and Alvar Aalto designed both the left-wing Workers' Club (1924–1925) and the right-wing paramilitary White Guards' House (1926–1929) in Jyväskylä (Fig. 1). They designed the two buildings in the classical style. Both clients had been bitter enemies less than a decade earlier, in the 1918 Finnish Civil War between the 'Whites' and the 'Reds'. However, both sides served in parliament during the interwar period, even though the far-left Communist Party (SKP) was outlawed in 1930. The far-right Patriotic People's Movement (IKL) would, after several unsuccessful coups, be barred from politics by the same legislation that had initially targeted the communists. Since 1907, both those on the political left and right had used colourful classical rhetoric in parliament, quoting Cato's *Carthago delenda est* against each other to the dismay of the speaker of the house. Even though Alvar Aalto served on the White side in the civil war, his later apolitical stance served him



*Fig 1. Left: White Guard's House in Jyväskylä, built by the Aaltos. Picture: unknown, 1929. The Museum of Central Finland Archives (KSM); Right: Worker's Club in Jyväskylä, designed by the Aaltos. Picture: Valokuvaamo Päijänne, 1925. KSM.*

<sup>1</sup> This article has greatly benefitted from Professor Kirsi Saarikangas's seminar, Adjunct Professor Renja Suominen-Kokkonen, architect Mikko Lindqvist and the excellent personnel at the Museum of Finnish Architecture archives.



well. After WWII, he designed buildings both for the communists (House of Culture, Helsinki, 1958) and the right-wing bankers and industrialists, terming his designs '*palaces for the Medicis of our time*'.<sup>2</sup> Both Aalto buildings in Jyväskylä encapsulate the architects' classical education, interest in classical antiquity and long trips to Italy. Moreover, both are products of Nordic Classicism and the close relations between Nordic architects at the time. In the interwar period, the individual *housing companies*, were quite varied. This capitalist model of joint-stock ownership for the purposes of housing development and design and the joint ownership of real estate served both those on the left and right.

Nordic Classicism, sometimes called 1920s classicism, refers to architecture and design standards dominant in the Nordic countries from around the 1910s until the 1930s. Classicism emerged in the wake of the National Romantic style (or *Art Nouveau, Jugend, Liberty*) in the Nordic countries, as architects searched for a more sober style based on the design ideals of the late 18th century. In Finland, architects looked particularly to the early 19th century, or the so-called *Empire* style, which followed the Swedish Gustavian style.

The style, which only lasted for a brief period in Helsinki, derived from the close-knit Nordic cooperation between architects and Finnish architects' excursions to Italy. In the 1920s, young architects were the second generation of Finnish architects to travel to Italy instead of just reading about it. The Grand Tour brought a whole new perspective to their views of Italian architecture. Instead of idolising just the Renaissance, many Italian *architettura minore* influences shaped 1920s architecture through the travel sketches made by the young architects. Interestingly, this new version of classical architecture occurred in parallel with the state-building process in the Nordic countries. Clients favoured classical architecture, from the workers' joint building ventures to the more affluent and luxurious housing companies. In contrast to other Nordic countries, Finland was a new republic that desired closer links with the other Nordic countries and the West after the Russian Revolution. The classical style was soon replaced by German and Dutch functionalism. People in the young republic quickly forgot that in 1918, politicians had wanted Finland to become a monarchy under a 'borrowed' king, Väinö I, or Wilhelm II's brother-in-law, Prince Friedrich Karl von Hessen-Kassel. Prince Friedrich renounced the throne within nine weeks on 14 December 1918, after Germany had lost WWI. The 'White' monarchists quickly became the presidential republican party.

The new sober and ascetic co-Nordic style, which reinterpreted the classical language of architecture, was a stylistic counterattack against the free-flowing and organic style of *Art Nouveau*. Such counterattacks are always to be expected from the next generation of contrarian architects. Some press material indeed describes the

<sup>2</sup> Göran Schildt, *Salpausselkä-veistos: Reliäfi ja sen taustaa*. Oy Pohjoismaiden Yhdyspankki, Helsinki 1967, 12.

new buildings as an attempt to link Finland to the West through the already familiar classical language of architecture. The new Parliament House of Helsinki (J. S. Sirén, 1930) was one example.

This article studies the agency of both architects and their clients in shaping architecture in the 1920s. In the case of the architects, their agency was of an individual nature, especially relating to the Grand Tour, which offered them the chance for new interpretations of classical Italian architecture. The clients in question were the different limited liability housing companies in Helsinki, or *housing companies* for short, comprising a collective agency in the form of a board of the *housing company*. The framework of the study is Nordic Classicism and the interwar political climate.

The article discusses the less well-known select *housing companies* in Helsinki in the 1920s together with their founders and the architects involved. The source material consists of archival material on the *housing companies* and the personal backgrounds of their founders and the architects in the context of the interwar political climate after the 1918 civil war. Did Nordic Classicism differ depending on the left-wing or right-wing background of the clients or architects? Can the agency of individual housing companies, evidenced through their boards and shareholder meetings, be seen in the architecture? Most architects, like the Aaltos, were publicly apolitical and middle class. Whether serving clients from the political left or right, most did a Grand Tour in Italy. With respect to the co-Nordic influence, the Pompeian ruins and hilly Tuscan cities translated into 1920s architectural work by those on both the left and right (Fig. 2).

### **Finnish architects on Grand Tours and travel experiences turned into architecture**

*I don't want to talk about a particular trip, because in my soul there always is a trip to Italy. Perhaps a trip made in the past that always keeps coming back to my memory, a trip on which I am, or maybe a trip I will take. Such a trip is perhaps a conditio sine qua non for my architectural work.*

In this remark, made by Alvar Aalto in an interview with the Italian magazine *Casabella* (1954), he stressed the importance of Italy to his work. This notion applies to many Finnish architects in the first half of the century.<sup>3</sup>

The professor who most influenced many of the Finnish architects discussed in this article was Gustaf Nyström (1856–1917). He also did a Grand Tour in Italy. In

<sup>3</sup> On Finnish architects visiting Italy, see Timo Tuomi, Hildi Hawkins, Nicholas Mayow, Maija Kärkkäinen, Jouko Vanhanen, Maija Kärkkäinen, and Jouko Vanhanen, *Matkalla! Suomalaiset Arkkitehdit Opintiellä – En Route! Finnish Architects' Studies Abroad*. Suomen rakennustaiteen museo, Helsinki 1999.

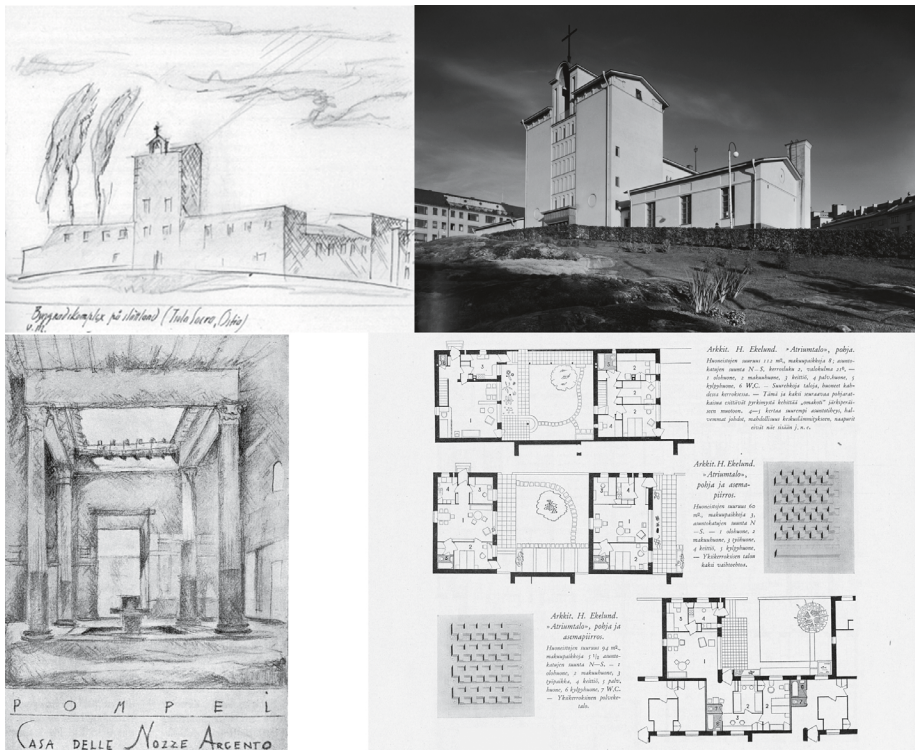


Fig. 2. Left: Töölö Church, built by Hilding Ekelund. Picture: Väinö Aleksi Kannisto, 1940. Helsinki City Museum Archives (HKM); Right: Convent in Isola Sacra, Ostia, Italy, by E. Kuhlefelt-Ekelund, 1922. Museum of Finnish Architecture Archives (MFA); Lower left: Ekelund's sketch of a Pompeian Domus' atrium. Arkkitehti 1.1.1923; Lower right: Ekelund's proposals for atrium rowhouses. Arkkitehti 1.6.1932.

a 1914 letter to a colleague, he urged students to also make a visit, to draw and paint in Italy.<sup>4</sup> Nyström was the most famous architect of the post-neoclassical style in Helsinki, and he considered drawing and measuring the works of classical Italian antiquity and the Renaissance a vital part of solving contemporary architectural problems. For instance, the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century lecture notes of one student, Sigurd Frosterus (1876–1956), kept in the MFA<sup>5</sup> archives, highlight the importance of Italy and the classical period for young architects in Finland. His meticulous technical drawings, done in a squared notebook and showing the ordered columns and Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, represent the quintessential aspects of architectural training in

<sup>4</sup> Ville Lukkariinen, *Classicism and History. Anachronistic Architectural Thinking in Finland at the Turn of the Century: Jac. Ahrenberg and Gustav Nyström*. Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistys, Helsinki 1989, 45.

<sup>5</sup> Museum of Finnish Architecture Archives.





*Fig. 3. Clockwise from top: A sketch of Constantinople, by Väinö Vähäkallio, done in 28.4.1911; Erik Bryggman's sketch of the Pantheon's decoration; Eva Kuhlefelt-Ekelund's sketch of fourth-style wall decorations in Casa dei Vettii, Pompei. All pictures courtesy of MFA.*

the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most of Nyström's other students also followed his advice and filled their sketchbooks with images of the Mediterranean world (Fig. 3).

The Grand Tour of Italy by young Nordic architects was crucial to developments made in post-WWI architecture. The long tradition of travelling to Italy was seen as essential to completing an architect's education, and most Nordic architects made the trip. They included Alvar and Aino Aalto, Erik Bryggman, Hilding Ekelund and Eva Kuhlefelt-Ekelund (1892–1984). The tours resulted in some fine examples of Nordic Classicism architecture, along with hundreds of sketches depicting Italian

*architettura minore*, later to be adapted as designs for churches, schools and apartment buildings throughout Finland.<sup>6</sup>

Hilding Ekelund wrote a poetic rhapsody about his honeymoon in Italy, entitled ‘Italia la Bella’, published in the magazine *Arkkitehti*, in which he eloquently described his feelings for the place, antiquity and Renaissance, feelings probably echoed by many other architects as well:

*It is difficult to define whether the remains of antiquity or the Renaissance arouse greater interest; the Colosseum, Pantheon, Castel Angelo, Cancelleria, each demand their own share of attention. The immediate impulses that are missing in many ancient buildings can be found again in decorative objects of the same age. [– –] There are the temple ruins, which in the mist crown the undulating ridges of the plain. We go there; the scorching sun shines on the columns’ seashell limestone and impossible capitals sunken into the ground. A picture-beautiful goatherd sits on a piece of fallen balustrade, playing his reed pipe; despite the intentionality, describe in one’s mind that he sees in front of him the great Pan and not the little shepherd boy with his shaggy shepherd’s fur playing his lustful tune.<sup>7</sup>*

Although Bryggman’s travel sketches have been published earlier,<sup>8</sup> the unpublished notes that he quickly jotted down in a squared notebook, preserved in the MFA archives, show his interest in antiquity and the Italian Renaissance. Due to the medium, quick sketches done in squared notebooks hold importance as notes and not as individual, autonomous pieces of art. Fake stucco *opus quadratum* in Pompei, the Pantheon’s decorations and measurements of the Spanish Steps would appear in his later works in some form or another (Fig. 3). Even though Alvar Aalto’s Italian sketches have been the most celebrated internationally, Hilding Ekelund and Eva Kuhlefelt-Ekelund’s honeymoon trip through the whole of Italy (1921–1922) yielded the widest array of sketches, in many senses comparable to Robert Adam’s (1728–1792) trip to Italy, where he declared that he had made enough sketches to last the rest of his professional life. Even though, to most people, a honeymoon spent sketching and measuring buildings from antiquity and the Renaissance may not seem an ideal

<sup>6</sup> On the honeymoon trip itself, see Hilding Ekelund, Kim Björklund, and Eva Ekelund, *Italia La Bella. Arkitekterna Hilding Och Eva Ekelunds Resedagbok 1921-1922*. Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, Helsingfors 2004. On Hilding Ekelund’s work and Italian travels, see *Hilding Ekelund (1893–1984)*. *Arkkitehti, Arkitekt, Architect*. Edited by Timo Tuomi. Finlands arkitekturmuseum, Helsingfors 1997.

<sup>7</sup> *Arkkitehti* 1.1.1923, 17–28.

<sup>8</sup> Erik Bryggman, *Erik Bryggman 1891–1955: Arkkitehti. Erik Bryggman 1891–1955: Arkitekt. Erik Bryggman 1891–1955: Architect*. Suomen rakennustaiteen museo, Helsinki 1991.

use of time, the influence of the honeymoon could be seen in their professional work for the rest of their lives.

The extensive research on the Aaltos, Bryggman, and the Ekelunds, as well as the Italian trips, shows that they strongly influenced their bare and moderately decorated works of Nordic classicising architecture and their later turn to functionalism. They mainly stressed the Italian *architettura minore* of the hilly Tuscan towns and cities, showing less interest in the actual classical architecture of Italy or Greece. Nordic Classicism's asymmetrical choices with respect to façades, massing and site plans have traditionally been attributed to medieval-era asymmetry in Italy. It is also essential to note here that even though Roman architecture was especially symmetrical, the ruins were not the least so. In this sense, earlier research might have disregarded the agency of ruins, which was quite evident for the architect's sketching them. This article presents the lesser-known architects working for Helsinki's housing companies, who also made a Grand Tour to Italy; it discusses how the influence of classical antiquity and Italy in general can be seen in their projects as well.

### **The Finnish Limited Liability Housing Company, or *Asunto-osakeyhtiö*, and earlier research**

Though the housing crisis was dire in the 1920s, the City of Helsinki had few or no resources to subsidise housing. It was mainly unwilling to tackle the problem until the postwar period. However, there was much discussion of the issue at the professional level from the 1890s onwards.<sup>9</sup> The Finnish *Asunto-osakeyhtiölaki* (Limited Liability Housing Companies Act, 1926) was in part developed to produce mass housing in the form of limited joint-stock companies that would individually pool the required capital for design and construction. This law replaced the more general 1895 Limited Liability Companies Act, which was also previously used to form jointly owned real estate ventures. The government passed the Act for the purpose of helping interested parties design, build, finance and maintain jointly owned real estate.<sup>10</sup> In short, a *housing company* is a joint-stock company that enables the share owner to own an apartment. It was a revolutionary concept in Europe at the time since, in most countries, no legislation allowed for ownership of a single specified apartment in an apartment house. The housing company could borrow money for designing, building, and maintaining an apartment house because it was a legal person *de jure* and *de facto*.

<sup>9</sup> *Rakentaja* 1.6.1902, 1.12.1903 and 1.10.1904. In 1890, 6 346 one-room households, with 23 735 people living in them.

<sup>10</sup> *Osakeyhtiölaki* (Limited Liability Companies Act) 1895, previously used to form jointly owned real estate ventures before the 1926 Limited Liability Housing Companies Act.

Since the Finnish arrangement involves a legally recognised joint-stock company responsible for all the functions described above, the history of mass housing in Finland differs from the rest of Europe. The housing company is based on private homes being built on lease- or landownerships comparable to other forms of real estate ownership. The sale and purchase of homes is similar to any other stock and does not, for example, require transaction notaries and separate land registries for individual owners. It means that jointly shared real estate properties are built, owned, traded and administered as a joint-stock housing *company*.<sup>11</sup> The Finnish model was based on self-organisation and more autonomous than other models at the time. Since the developers differed for each apartment house, the houses differed architecturally based on the agency of the housing company boards. Thus, they were unrelated to centrally organised public or other private housing production. The founders of the companies varied greatly from both politically and economically, ranging from cab drivers to civil servants and others. In all cases, the City of Helsinki provided the master plan and sold or rented the parcels of land. Instead of institutional estates and other forms of mass housing, the individual housing companies and their founders, as owner-occupiers, had agency of their own in determining the overall architectural style of the building, as decided by the board and at shareholders' meetings.

The primary source material consists of four major architectural journals, *Arkitehti/Arkitekten*, *Rakennustaito*, *Rakentaja*, *Byggaren* and *Teknikern*, and the relevant debates in each of them about architectural styles. Aside from the 15 volumes of *Helsingin kaupungin historia* (The History of the City of Helsinki) and Riita Nikula's seminal doctoral thesis on Etu-Töölö's and Vallila's urban design history and housing companies,<sup>12</sup> little other relevant research exists on housing production in Helsinki during the 1920s. The general research literature on housing companies in Finland includes a general study of the technical development of housing companies by Petri Neuvonen, Erkki Mäkiö and Maarit Malinen and a general history of the Finnish Limited Liability Housing Company as the 'people's stock' by Esko Nurmi, Laura Puro and Martti Lujanen. As for the architecture of the interwar period and later decades, Elina Standerskjöld's study of Finnish architecture from the 1930s to the 1950s is a relevant general source.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Later, *housing company*, a term favoured by Statistic Finland.

<sup>12</sup> Riita Nikula, *Yhtenäinen kaupunkikuva 1900–1930. Suomalaisen kaupunkirakentamisen ihan-teista ja päämääristä, esimerkkeinä Helsingin Etu-Töölö ja uusi Vallila* (Uniform Cityscape 1900–1930: Of Finnish Urban Design's Ideals and Aims, Helsinki's Etu-Töölö and New Vallila as an Example). Societas scientiarum Fennica, 1981.

<sup>13</sup> Petri Neuvonen, Erkki Mäkiö, and Maarit Malinen, *Kerrostalot 1880–1940*. Rakennustietosäätiö Oy, 2002; Esko Nurmi, Laura Puro, and Martti Lujanen, *Kansanosake - Suomalaisen asunto-osakeyhtiön vaiheet*. Suomen Kiinteistöliitto Ry, 2017; Elina Standerskjöld, *Arkkitehtuurimme vuosikymmenet 1930–1950*. Suomen rakennustaiteen museo, Rakennustietosäätiö RTS, and Rakennustieto Oy, 2008.

### The evolution from National Romanticism, *Art Nouveau*, or *Jugend*, to Nordic Classicism

The brief period of Art Nouveau, or *Jugend*, architecture was an international response to the pomposity of the Beaux Arts. However, the new turn-of-the-century style championed in Belgium and France quickly faded before the First World War. In Germany, during the first decade of the 20th century some architects began objecting to *Art Nouveau*'s elegant forms and rich ornamentation. They wanted to return to more factual architecture, and they saw role models in the neo-classical buildings. This new wave of classicism was pared down with more austere and geometric shapes. Especially in the Nordic countries, for a brief period in the 1920s, architects designed a type of building style that is now called Nordic Classicism, or 1920s Classicism, an in part wholly new interpretation of classical architecture. Grand Tours to Italy, made by the leading architects of the time, were an essential factor in this process. Famous products of those excursions were Gunnar Asplund's (1885 – 1940) Stockholm Public Library (1928), Hack Kampmann's (1856–1920) Copenhagen Police Headquarters (1924) and Kay Fisker's (1893–1965) Hornbækhus (1923).<sup>14</sup>

German architects, especially Heinrich Tessenow (1876–1950), were influential in housing design at the time and became significant in spreading neoclassicism to the Nordic countries. In Denmark, architects created many public buildings and new residential courtyard blocks. In Sweden, Gunnar Asplund became an important figure at the forefront of the latest style, as did Sigurd Lewerentz, Ivar Tengbom, Cyrillus Johansson, Carl Bergsten, Georg Arn, Björn Hedvall, Gunnar Morssing, Gunnar Leche and Erik Lallerstedt. The particular 'brokenness' of classical decorations bore a resemblance to the later post-modern architecture, which played with classical themes and details.<sup>15</sup>

In Finland, the dominant architectural style and thinking changed swiftly from Nordic Classicism to functionalism at the end of the 1920s and early 1930s. It has been quite generally thought that most of the influence for Nordic Classicism and the later functionalist architecture resulted from the close collaboration among Nordic architects, such as Finnish architects Alvar Aalto (1898–1976), Erik Bryggman

<sup>14</sup> There are several publications in English about Nordic Classicism. For example, from the newest to the oldest: Harry Charrington, "Nordic Visions of a Classical World". *The Routledge Handbook on the Reception of Classical Architecture* (1st ed.). Edited by N. Temple, A. Piotrowski, and J.M. Heredia. Routledge, London and New York 2019; John Stewart, *Nordic Classicism. Scandinavian Architecture 1910-1930*. Bloomsbury Academic, New York 2018; Simo Paavilainen, *Nordisk classicism – Nordic classicism: 1910–1930*. Finlands arkitekturmuseum, Helsingfors 1982; Simo Paavilainen, "Classicism of the 1920's and the classical tradition in Finland". *ABACUS 1: Vuosikirja 1979 – Yearbook*. Suomen rakennustaiteen museo, Helsinki 1980.

<sup>15</sup> Kristina Knauff, "Perspektiv på tjugotalet". *Konsthistorisk tidskrift*, Vol. 86, No. 2, 2017, 116–133.



(1891–1955) and Hilding Ekelund (1893–1984), who collaborated with their Swedish counterparts Sven Markelius (1889–1972) and Gunnar Asplund. The ties were indeed close, mainly because of the common language they all used – Swedish. During this period, several classicising housing companies were built in the classical style in Finland. The Aaltos designed the Agricultural Cooperative Building and Erik Bryggman the Hospits Betel and As. Oy<sup>16</sup> Atrium in Turku, along with several other classicising housing companies in the classical style. None of the three architects designed a single housing company in Helsinki before the mid-1930s, but their work gives a general architectural context for this article. Ekelund designed the Töölö Church, which had strong connections to his Grand Tour and was the first to introduce the later quite common rowhouse type of architecture based on the atrium found in a typical Roman domus (Fig. 2).

One of the main stages for Nordic Classicism was the 1923 Gothenburg Exhibition, where all the permanent and temporary exhibition buildings were designed in a classical style. Ekelund wrote a review of the exhibition in *Arkkitehti*, where he criticised the exhibition for being too bombastic in a German style.<sup>17</sup> However, eight years later he described the new and even more bombastic Finnish House of Parliament, built in a similar classical style by J. S. Sirén (1889–1951), as, in the words of Horace (*Carmina* III:XXX:1), a ‘*monumentum rere perennius*’, or a monument more lasting than bronze, using highly complementary and patriotic rhetoric.<sup>18</sup> In a later perspective, the Gothenburg Exhibition was also credited with first introducing the architectural style characteristic of the new Swedish *Folkhem* (people’s home). Many of the state’s public buildings, from libraries to hospitals, would be designed along similar Nordic Classicism lines, including thousands of new housing co-operatives for the working class.

How much of the influence was ultimately Greek or Roman is impossible to determine. As for the architects of the time, they would probably suggest that everything was inspired by the Greco-Roman style. Alvar Aalto designed a building for his brother Villa Väänölä (1926), which was supposed to be a hybrid of a Roman domus, with an atrium, and the Erechtheion in Athens (5<sup>th</sup> century BCE). The atrium was left out of the final version, however, and now the entire villa more closely resembles the Erechtheion due to its asymmetry. Overall, the Erechtheion did play a role in influencing Nordic Classicism, with its asymmetrical positioning of gables and porticos, even though many of the Nordic architects had not even visited Athens, like Aalto, who only first visited the city in 1933. Manuals like Paul Marie Letarouilly’s (1795–1855) *Les édifices de Rome moderne* were widely read and owned, in addition to the published work of architects like Claude-Nicolas Ledoux (1736–1806), whose

<sup>16</sup> As. Oy = Limited Liability Housing Company, or just housing company, referring to a single building/apartment building (*Asunto-osakeyhtiö* [Fin], *Bostadsaktiebolaget* [Swe]).

<sup>17</sup> *Arkkitehti* 1.1.1923, 104–106.

<sup>18</sup> *Arkkitehti* 1.5.1930, 65–66.

Paris tollbooths were copied early on in Finland, for instance the church bell tower in Tammisaari (Carlo Bassi, 1842).

Nordic Classicism in Finland is not easy to define. The National Romantic, or *Jugend*, phase ended somewhat before the 1910s, and all the examples of it in Helsinki discussed in this article are from the 1920s. The period in between has often been called *Late Jugend*, a highly problematic and misleading term. Riitta Nikula divides Nordic Classicism in Finland into three phases, 1910–1919, 1920–1926 and 1927–1932, which works much better. The phases include several developments, such as the German and Austrian *Secession* and its influence on Finnish architecture,<sup>19</sup> as well as the American influence, such as Pauli E. Blomstedt's (1900–1935) Union Bank (1929), which is traditionally labelled an example of Nordic Classicism but is in reality much more in the tradition of American commercial architecture.<sup>20</sup>

### The Framework: Nordic Classicism in post-civil war Helsinki

In Finland, the National Romantic style achieved its most prominent features partly in response to the oppressive Russification efforts by Tsar Nicholas II and his regime in 1899–1905 and 1908–1917, when Finland was an autonomous grand duchy within the Russian Empire. Still, the style was quickly criticised in Helsinki, especially by younger architects like Sigurd Frosterus (1876–1956) and Gustav Strengell (1878–1937), who favoured more rationalist approaches without national romantic decorations, which might range from squirrels and bears to pines and cones, according to Strengell's criticism of an early version of Helsinki's central railway station and the nearby Pohjola Insurance Company building.

The biggest political parties on the Helsinki City Council were the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the liberal Swedish People's Party (SFP). Helsinki was majority Swedish-speaking during the 1906 parliamentary reform, when the modern political parties came into existence. The current long-time ruling Conservative party (KOK) won the 1906 elections. During the 1920s, the SFP was by far the biggest party, and the party favoured market-based solutions instead of social housing. The far-right Patriotic People's Movement (IKL) had only two representatives on the city council during the interwar period, which differed significantly from most of the rest of the country, where the movement enjoyed great popularity. In short, Helsinki was leaning left, and the SFP was a far more moderate party than the later conservatives. The architects were mainly apolitical in public. However, some assumptions can be drawn based on their socioeconomic backgrounds, which are briefly dealt with in this article.

<sup>19</sup> Nikula 1981, 42–87.

<sup>20</sup> Juhana Heikonen, *P. E. Blomstedtin Liittopankki: Aleksanterinkatu 17, Helsinki. Rakennushistoriaselvitys*. Supra Arcadiam Aurora, Helsinki 2024.



Fig. 4. Clockwise from the upper left corner: House of Parliament, by J. S. Sirén. Picture: Aarne Pietinen Oy, 1934. HKM; Kunsthalle, by Hilding Ekelund. Picture: Kuvakeskus, 1929. HKM; Union Bank, by P. E. Blomstedt. Picture: Pietinen, 1942. HKM; Workers' Institute, by Gunnar Taucher and P. E. Blomstedt. Picture: Foto Roos, 1927. HKM.

Many of the essential works of Nordic Classicism were built outside of Helsinki, including the most important housing companies built by Bryggman and the Aaltos. However, many important public buildings (Fig. 4) were also built in Helsinki, such as the House of Parliament (J. S. Sirén, 1931), Kunsthalle (H. Ekelund, 1928), the Union Bank (P. E. Blomstedt, 1929) and the Workers' Institute (G. Taucher and P. E. Blomstedt, 1927). Gunnar Taucher also designed the City of Helsinki's employees' housing complex (Mäkeläncatu 37–43, 1926, Fig. 5),<sup>21</sup> which is now considered a



Fig. 5. Tenant apartment blocks for Helsinki's workers, by Gunnar Taucher. Picture: Atelier Apollo, 1928. HKM.

<sup>21</sup> HEL RAVA (City of Helsinki, Building Permission Department Archives) 74/028011 and 74/028006.



Fig. 6. *Puu-Käpylä social housing, by Martti Välikangas. Picture: unknown, 1920s. HKM.*

prime example of a housing style characteristic of Nordic Classicism, but it is not discussed in this article since its history is less the story of individual architects and more institutional in nature, much like Puu-Käpylä, where the primary agents were the City of Helsinki and nonprofit organisations (Fig. 6).

Architectural journals during the period rarely used words like ‘classical’

to describe contemporary architecture. The term ‘Nordic Classicism’ was only applied later. When journalists used the word classical, they were mainly referring to the earlier neoclassical architecture of the Prussian architect Carl Ludwig Engel (1778–1840), who was responsible for Helsinki’s rebuilding after the Russian annexation of Finland in 1809. His most famous work was Helsinki’s Senate Square together with the surrounding cathedral, main university building and the Senate House. Contemporaries viewed the neoclassical architecture as ‘national’ instead of international in style. Engel had studied with Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781–1841) at the Berliner Bauakademie, and their architectural styles are quite similar. Engel’s style also shares similarities with the architecture found in St. Petersburg. Nonetheless, criticisms that architecture was too ‘national’ in the press can be found already in 1884, when the Russian real estate speculator Jakov Logginovitš Tschernischeff (1826–1906) decided to rebuild an earlier important city palace, an example of stoic neoclassicism, and give it a more flamboyant Russian neo-baroque look, with the building repurposed as rental apartments, which very quickly became one of the most infamous tenant slums in the city, along the same lines as another Russian speculator, Mikael Antipoff’s (1830– ?) rental units, which eventually had to be torn down. The leading Swedish-speaking newspaper, *Hufvudstadsbladet*, launched an attack, calling the plans tasteless.<sup>22</sup> The case also gave rise to one of Helsinki’s earliest public building preservation fights, eventually lost by a senate decision. In 1924, Professor Carolus Lindberg celebrated in *Arkkitehti* the repurposing of the palace as the new Swedish embassy by Torben Grut (1871–1945), who remade the façade according to Swedish baroque classicism style and completely eliminated any traces of ‘that

<sup>22</sup> *Hufvudstadsbladet* 19.8.1885, 1.

Russian moneybag'.<sup>23</sup> Nordic Classicism freed itself of all national features because of the reference to a universal sense of antiquity, unlike with previous examples of National Romanticism, as Kirmo Mikkola argued.<sup>24</sup>

However, it would seem, architects at the time perceived neoclassicism as standing in opposition to the previous neo-baroque and neo-byzantine Russification projects. Subsequently, nearly all other eclectic neo-baroque buildings in Helsinki were built by Russians for Russians, such as the Russian Alexander High School (Lev Šiško, 1913). Neo-baroque and neo-byzantine styles were the favoured styles of the Russian Empire, as was the neo-baroque *Wilhelmine* style in Tsar Nicholas II's third cousin, Wilhelm II's, neighbouring German Empire. In the interwar years, the latter style would continue even after the Bauhaus movement, found in the classicising National Socialist styles of Albert Speer and his peers. The neo-baroque style continued after a brief interlude of Russian constructivism, later termed Stalinist or Socialist Realism architecture, which also included the Russian Embassy in Helsinki (Anatoli Striževski, 1952).

### Housing companies for those on the political right

Ole Gripenberg (1892–1979) graduated in 1915 from the University of Technology. He received his doctorate in 1939 for research on the building frame-shape-related production cost causality in housing. In 1916–1917, Gripenberg worked in southern Russia, in the Donetsk region, designing workers' residential houses for the new industrial city of Jusovka. After the Russian Revolution, he returned to Finland and worked as a draftsman in the architectural office of Sigurd Frosterus. Gripenberg and Frosterus jointly shared the Architect's Office from 1918 to 1936. In 1935, Gripenberg founded his own office, Arkitehtitoimisto Gripenberg & Co, which he managed until 1957. Gripenberg was responsible for several public buildings, with the classicising Nordic Union Bank (Aleksanterinkatu 30–34, 1936) being the most important.<sup>25</sup> In the 1920s, Gripenberg designed 13 apartment buildings in Helsinki, including one complete block of ten houses along Mannerheimintie.<sup>26</sup> The houses represented the stylistically simplified classicism of the 1920s and mainly contained larger apartments for the middle class. Gripenberg belonged to a large aristocratic family

<sup>23</sup> *Arkkitehti* 1.5.1924, No. 5, 57–58.

<sup>24</sup> Kirmo Mikkola, "The transition from classical to functionalism in Scandinavia". *Classical Tradition and the Modern Movement – Den Klassiska Traditionen Och Modernismen*. SAFA, Helsinki 1985, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Juhana Heikonen, *Pankkikiinteistö kolmella vuosisadalla: Aleksanterinkatu 30–34, Helsinki. Rakennushistoriaselvitys*. Supra Arcadiam Aurora, Helsinki 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Of the ten quite similar façades found on the same block, a good example could be HEL RAVA 76/020330 or 76/020271.



with a long military and civil service tradition. His father and other relatives were exiled during the Russification period for their advocating Finnish independence. Gripenberg wrote actively for the *Finnish Architectural Review*, but many of his publications were about Swedish military and civil service uniforms and swords. Gripenberg, for instance, had a collection consisting of more than 900 self-painted tin soldiers.<sup>27</sup>

The housing company at Merikatu 5 (Ole Gripenberg, 1925), in southern Helsinki by the sea, was built for the White Guards mainly for residential use. However, it also included other functions typically needed by the White Guards, such as armouries and other paramilitary spaces. Gripenberg designed the building to be divided between military ranks, with one stairway for the higher officers and the other for the lower ranking officers. Even though the building had elevators, the help was expected to use separate kitchen stairs, which had become rare after the civil war. The façade of the housing company is far stricter in form than that of the other classicising housing companies of the same period, mainly the main entrance contained thick variations of the more militant Doric order. All the classicising decorations are of a military kind. The otherwise sober classical creation had a tall medieval fake tower atop the cornice.

Compared to Gripenberg's other developments, in which he operated as architect, investor, developer and speculator, the housing company has a very heavy appearance as a representative work of classicism. Even though the White Guards were a paramilitary organisation, their PR image was far more militant than that of the official army. The two institutions had an uneasy relationship until the White Guards were placed under army command and later dismantled as a result of the 1944 Moscow Armistice. In this sense, Merikatu 5 offers an excellent point of comparison with As. Oy Sotilaskoti (*Soldiers' House*, 1928), which was founded and built by the army officers for themselves (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Left: Merikatu 5, by Ole Gripenberg. Picture: Hannes Mustakallio, 1930s. HKM; Right: As. Oy Sotilaskoti façade, by Kalle Lehtovuori. HEL RAVA 5583-169-12.

<sup>27</sup> *Helsingin Sanomat* 17.9.2017.

Kalle U. Lehtovuori (1889–1956) graduated from Helsinki's Industrial School and Technikum Streliz, after which he completed further studies at the University of Technology in 1924. After graduating, he worked for the rest of his life in the army designing military buildings, the most famous being the modernist army barracks in Niinisalo (1935).<sup>28</sup> Lehtovuori designed the façade of As. Oy Sotilastalo, but the original plans were created by Jalo O. A. Viljanen (1880–1944).<sup>29</sup> This curious mismatch was due to disagreements between the officers' union, the developer and the army's general staff, which did not approve of the façade designs for some reason. This was possible because the army rented the land to the officers, and the state backed the construction loans. Unfortunately, the competing façade designs have not been preserved.<sup>30</sup> The exterior is an example of redbrick classicism, with towers at the ends of the exceptionally lengthy façade. The whole building visually commands the entire seafront. Otherwise, the housing company is quite similar to many other redbrick classical housing companies, except for the military-fashioned detailing: heavy Tuscan orders are used inside, with several army and state insignia, the most recognisable being several swastikas, which had been the symbol of the Finnish Army since 1918.

The military had its own architectural office. In the 1930s, the military began to prefer modernism as an architectural style, like in the case of the Niinisalo barracks. The barracks are characterised by white-plaster buildings, offices and military hospitals, all of which seemingly had no connection to classicism.<sup>31</sup>

The oldest military-related architect was Georg Thure Nummelin (1873–1935), a Finnish major and an architect. Nummelin attended Hamina Cadet School and then served in the Finnish and Russian armies. Nummelin was promoted to lieutenant in 1899, but after Finnish conscription was abolished during the Russification period, he studied to become an architect and graduated from the Polytechnic Institute in 1903. Nummelin worked in Russia until independence, during which time he also organised and led the establishment of a new industrial community in Yusovka, Ukraine. The factory in Jusovka manufactured locomotives and railcars, and apartments were built for 7,000 employees. Nummelin recruited architects from Finland for the project, and between 1914 and 1917 Jusovka's design work also included the architects Ole Gripenberg and Martti Välikangas. The Russian Revolution interrupted work on the project, and so the architects returned to Finland. Nummelin returned to Finland in 1918, joined the Ministry of War and became a Finnish army major. In 1921, Nummelin resigned from the army and returned to Soviet Russia, organising Finnish

<sup>28</sup> *Arkkitehti* 1.3.1939, Numbers 3, 9.

<sup>29</sup> HEL RAVA 5583-169-12.

<sup>30</sup> Ruth Rosenlöf, *Sotilastalosta Kiholinnaksi. Kerrostalon 75 Vuotta*. As. Oy Kiholinna, Helsinki 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Anne Mäkinen, *Suomen valkoinen sotilasarkkitehtuuri 1926-1939*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, Helsinki 2000.

state-owned properties in St. Petersburg. In 1924, he returned to Finland and worked as a private architect, designing several housing companies in Helsinki. Later in life, he suffered economic hardship and died poor. Members of the highest general staff and Marshal Carl Gustav Mannerheim (later President of Finland) attended his funeral, which was peculiar considering Nummelin's mid-rank in the army.<sup>32</sup>

Housing companies designed by Nummelin also have the heaviest of appearances for works in the style of classicism, and most of them were designed for investors or owner-occupier investors. Gripenberg, Nummelin and their colleagues later switched to functionalism. However, there were some exceptions, like Vietti Nykänen (1884–1951), who was probably more active in far right-wing politics than in architectural circles. He was also active in several far-right political organisations, including the Finnish National Socialist Party. His more direct activities included a planned military coup to overthrow the left-centre government in 1938. This could also explain his highly negative view of modernist architecture in general.<sup>33</sup>

### Housing companies for those on the political left

Marti Välikangas (1893–1973) is best known for his social housing project in the Puu-Käpylä neighbourhood of Helsinki. The wooden house area was the result of negotiations between the City of Helsinki and several non-profit organisations in the 1920s. The moderate, mainly two- or three-room and kitchen apartments were built as two-story classicising units spread over a vast area, inspired by the Garden City ideology, traditional Finnish vernacular buildings and classical architecture. Finnish architects found similar aesthetics in other classicism-inspired buildings, the Italian *architettura minore* style and the LeCorbusierian Platonic solids of classical antiquity during this period. This well-researched estate was not the work of an individual housing company.<sup>34</sup> Still, it offers an excellent point of comparison with Välikangas's other designs. A comparable site in Helsinki is Torkkelinmäki, which consists of free-standing, smaller-scale apartment blocks in a hilly terrain.

Välikangas graduated as an architect in 1917 from the University of Technology. Immediately after graduating, he worked for six months at the Parviainen factories in Jusovka with Nummelin. From 1918 to 1920, he worked in the offices of Sigurd Frosterus and Ole Gripenberg. The housing projects As. Oy Sture and As. Oy Hauho are both representative of Nordic Classicism. Their appearance subtly alludes to classical design and includes carefully designed floor plans for a number

<sup>32</sup> *Hufvudstadsbladet* 8.12.1935, No. 331, 15.

<sup>33</sup> *Rakennustaito* 1.1.1928, No. 1, 6–8.

<sup>34</sup> Simo Paavilainen, Pekka Heikkinen, and Aino Niskanen, "Wooden Käpylä – the birth of a garden city. The architecture of Martti Välikangas and construction of the district". *Planning Perspectives*, 2024, 1–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2024.2396607>.

of small apartments for the working population, anticipating the efficiency and *Existenzminimum* of functionalism. In the 1930s, Välikangas was one of the pioneers of functionalism in Finland (he designed the Olympiakylä [Olympic Village] 1939–1941, together with Hilding Ekelund). Not only did he promote the breakthrough of functionalism as an architectural style, but he was also editor-in-chief of *Arkkitehti* magazine (1928–1930). Välikangas has said that his most significant influences came from Italy, especially from the everyday buildings of *architettura minore*.<sup>35</sup> He even arranged an exhibition of his travel sketches with other colleagues in Helsinki.<sup>36</sup>

Of the many housing projects for workers in the 1920s, As. Oy Sture is an example where the owner-occupiers had a say in the final design, despite it being financially backed by the city and the state (Fig. 8). The final design of 155 apartments sold out quickly before construction had even been completed. According to the first shareholders list, the future owner-occupiers were working class, and the housing company's bylaws included many measures to prevent speculation.<sup>37</sup> The construction took nine months, and the first people moved into the apartments in December 1926. The construction costs (including all the commercial and utility spaces) without the

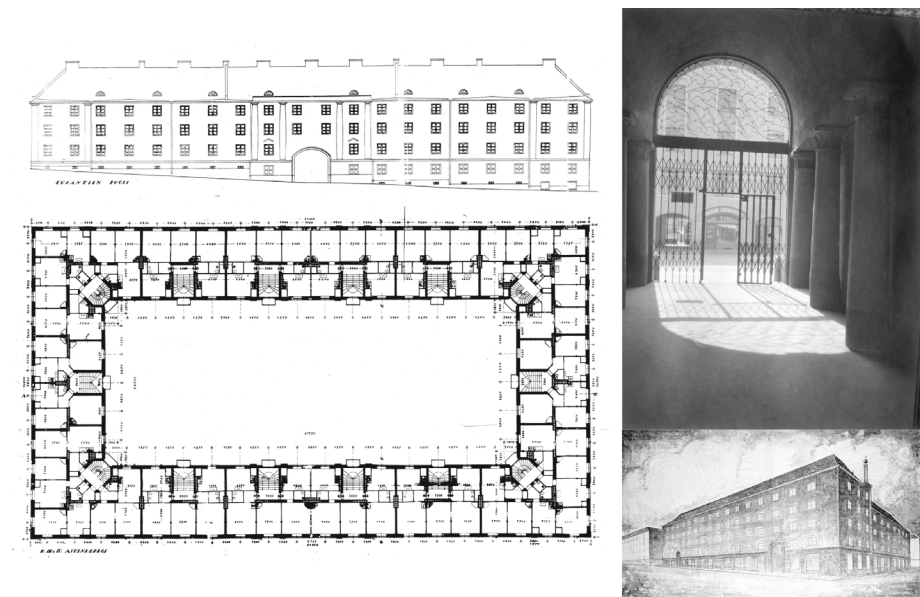


Fig. 8. Clockwise from top: As. Oy Sture, by Martti Välikangas. Façade and plan: HEL RAVA 74/031029 and 74/031025; Main gate with columns. Picture: Sakari Pälä, ca. 1930. HKM; Perspective drawing, by Martti Välikangas, 1924. MFA.

<sup>35</sup> Timo Keinänen, Kristiina Paatero, and Arkkitehtuurimuseo, *Martti Välikangas 1893–1973 Arkkitehti*. Arkkitehtuurimuseo, 1993.

<sup>36</sup> *Arkkitehti* 1.1.1922, No. 8, 119.

<sup>37</sup> As. Oy Sture, original 5 000 Finnish Mark share that includes the bylaws of the housing company.

parcel were 630 euros per square metre in 2024 prices. The cost was cheap and remained so even when construction costs rose quickly at the end of the 1920s. These costs are approximately a tenth of contemporary housing prices in the same area. The housing company owned a large share of the commercial spaces for rental income to help offset the costs of utilities, interests and mortgage amortisation. The commercial spaces included a market hall, co-op shops, a bathhouse with saunas and a branch of the city library.<sup>38</sup> The original design included a row of columns in the façade, but they were later left out.<sup>39</sup> The massive composite columns in the gateways remained, though. All in all, the general appearance was very classicising.<sup>40</sup>

Väinö Niilo Vähäkallio (1886–1959) graduated as an architect from the Technical University in 1909. Vähäkallio's father was the foreman of the Hietalahti carpentry factory. Vähäkallio was born in Helsinki's first housing company for workers, and his childhood friend was the future Social Democratic Party prime minister Väinö Tanner, who also hired Vähäkallio for several co-op building projects during the 1920s and 1930s. He worked in his own architectural office from 1911 to 1941. He served as the principal architect for the Central Union of Consumer Cooperatives from 1928 to 1934 and as the first director-general of the construction board from 1936 to 1943. Vähäkallio was a state construction administration committee member between 1926 and 1928. He designed classical interior designs for the stores, residential buildings and factory buildings of the Elanto consumer co-operative. Vähäkallio also designed Helsinki's Elanto quarter in 1917. Elanto's head office, built in 1928, represented classicism in the Stockholm City Hall style. In the 1920s, many other public buildings were built in Helsinki using Vähäkallio's plans, such as the Yrjönkatu swimming pool (1928). The later state alcohol monopoly Alko's functionalist production plant in Helsinki is also one of Vähäkallio's major works.<sup>41</sup>

Vähäkallio designed several housing companies, many organised under the Elanto co-op umbrella. Most of them were built north of the city, in the Vallila and Kallio neighbourhoods. Housing companies designed and built for the middle class and for investment purposes were located in the southern part of the city. Eventually, Vähäkallio became Finland's wealthiest architect. Examples of workers' housing include two companies that stand opposite each other on Mäkelänkatu, close to Välikankangas's As. Oy Sture design and Taucher's Mäkelänkatu 37-43 project.

<sup>38</sup> Anne Sjöholm, *Asunto Oy Sture: Kahdeksan Vuosikymmentä 1926-2006*. Asunto Oy Sture, Helsinki 2006.

<sup>39</sup> HEL RAVA 74/.

<sup>40</sup> HEL RAVA 74/031029 and 74/031025.

<sup>41</sup> Aino Niskanen, *Väinö Vähäkallio Ja Hänen Toimistonsa: Arkkitehdin Elämäntyö Ja Verkostot*. Helsinki University of Technology 2005.





Fig. 9. Left: *As. Oy Säästö*, by Väinö Vähäkallio. Picture: unknown, 1927. HKM; Right: *As. Oy Mäkelänkatu 28*, by Väinö Vähäkallio. Picture: Simo Rista, 1978. HKM.

The housing projects *Oy Mäkelänkatu 28* and *As. Oy Säästö* (Eng. *Savings*) were built according to the earlier classicising master plan at a junction where the southwest end contained an exedra (Fig. 9). The simple façades with minimum decoration and sloping roofs are typical of mid-1920s Nordic Classicism. It would seem that the workers' housing companies especially preferred the more vernacular sloping roofs instead of the Italianate low-angled roofs hidden behind large cornices.

### Housing companies for the middle classes

One of Nummelin's most significant works is the *As. Oy Hietala* housing project (Hietalahdenranta 11, 1927, Fig. 10). The militant-looking façade was done in classical style, with natural stone for the two first floors and light plaster for the rest, ending with a substantial cornice. Just as Asplund's Stockholm Public Library owes much to Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, so too did this housing company look to him for inspiration. The corners contain two-story *aedicules* with boxed columns. The press described the project as



Fig. 10. *As. Oy Hietala Bostads Ab*, by Georg Nummelin. HEL RAVA 74/026806.

'monumental'. Nummelin's other design, the As. Oy Helsingin Sibeliuksenkatu 11 housing project, more strongly resembles the Italian *quattrocento* palazzo. The *opus quadratum* of the first floor, with arched windows, is followed by four lightly plastered floors and an *attica* with a heavy cornice. What makes this housing company unique is its opposition to the rest of the city's master plan: the entire parcel length was left unbuilt, leaving space for a small side garden, to give the impression, at least from one direction, of a free-standing object based on Renaissance ideals. The motifs of the classical medallion decorations of fishing and hunting included on the façade relate to the German chairman of the board's profession of selling fishing and hunting equipment.

Civil servants were among the many professional groups to found their own housing companies. Välikangas designed the impressive As. Oy Töölönkatu 14 housing project (1923) for civil servants (Fig. 11). Compared to the As. Oy Sture housing project, built two years later, the influences of classical antiquity are far more apparent at Töölönkatu 14. The façade comprises a ground floor with arched windows, with four plastered walls above it and an *attica* floor. The façade is dominated by a massive order of seven pilasters that end with a heavy cornice before the *attica*. However, the most exceptional feature is the seven amphorae, close to two metres tall, on top of the massive order. The *amphorae* were not unique for the period but, in this case, became dominant in the façade without the usual balustrade.<sup>42</sup>

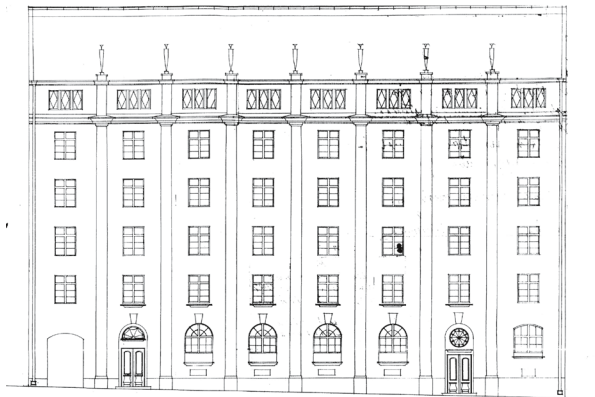


Fig. 11. As. Oy Töölönkatu 14, by Martti Välikangas. HEL RAVA 76/006948.

Vähäkallio's unrealised project for the well-off Kaivopuisto neighbourhood (Itäinen Puistotie 3, 1930, Fig. 12) fell somewhere in between classicism and functionalism. Two solid blocks of apartments, designed with deep angles, formed an honorary court like Michelangelo's Campidoglio in Rome and were connected by an arched portico, opening onto Kaivopuisto Park. All the period's architects were interested in this kind of Italianate hilly terrain and free-standing architectural objects. Vähäkallio's investment project and his own housing company (Annankatu

<sup>42</sup> HEL RAVA 76/006949 and 76/006948.

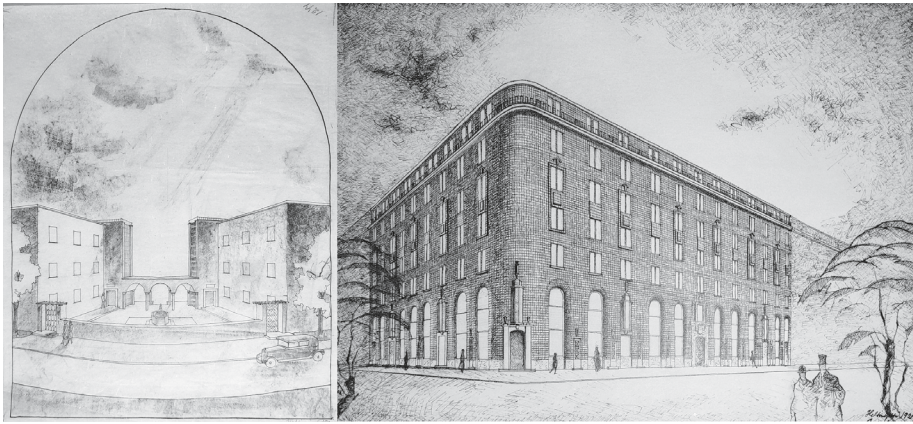


Fig. 12. Left: design proposal for Itäinen Puistotie 3, by Väinö Vähäkallio. MFA; Right: perspective of Väinö Vähäkallio's own housing company, home, and office, Annankatu 23. MFA.

23, 1924) give something of an impression regarding what he preferred at the time: redbrick-arched classicism style without heavy cornices, sloping roofs or antique façade detailing (Fig. 12). The nearby, built-for-profit As. Oy Simonlinna housing project (Simonkatu 12, 1925), with a dominating corner tower, is typical of the housing companies from that period.

At the end of the 1930s, Gripenberg also participated in solving the housing problem. The Social Democratic Party was the main driver of the nonprofit developer HAKA, which was later responsible for building thousands of apartments. On the political right, Gripenberg was the CEO of a similar organisation (SATO) and designed housing companies for another similar organisation (Asuntoemissio) in Helsinki. The developments for the middle class, by Asuntoemissio, were still, in some cases, very classicising in style, like the As. Oy Lauttasaarentie 34 and 36 housing projects (Olavi Sohlberg, 1938).

## Conclusion

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1939, the Italian architect and editor-in-chief of the magazine *Casabella*, Giuseppe Pagano (1896–1945), gave a lecture in Helsinki on contemporary Italian architecture. Pagano discussed the common notion that fascist Italy was simultaneously maintaining an interest in classicising and modern architecture. The idea was understandable since Italy was the birthplace of contemporary architecture's predecessors, ranging from classical antiquity to the Baroque period. In his telling, all else that had pre-dated the fascist regime would be musty and stale. The post-WWI

architecture had produced a 'false renaissance'.<sup>43</sup> Except for the House of Parliament, no great works of classicism had been designed in Helsinki for a decade. Helsinki's housing production had immediately shifted to functionalism after the Wall Street Crash. Another link had been broken, too: unlike previously claimed, functionalism in housing design did not arrive through the Nordic countries but from Germany and other relevant countries through travelling architects.<sup>44</sup> However, the Grand Tour still played its part, as it did in Bryggman's, Ekelund's, and Aalto's later work.

Helsinki's individual housing companies in the 1920s are all more or less classical in design. Their differences are often marginal, except for the size of the apartments and the cost of their decorations. However, since the difference in cost was marginal, the choice could also be seen as intentional on behalf of the client and architect. At the same time, the European autocratic regimes adopted classical styles, and the International Style, contra Stalinism, would mark the later Cold War period. However, in Finland the mutual use of classicism by those from both the political left and right was comparable to the situation more than a hundred years prior. The new American Republic and the imperial powers of Europe used the same architecture, intentionally imitating Rome. The difference was that US architects associated their designs with the Roman Republic when building the Capitol and the Tripoli Monument (Giovanni C. Micali, 1808), where the US victory over Barbary Coast pirates is linked to the Roman Republic's victory over Carthage by the columned monument's *rostrae*. The European emperors, for their part, associated designs with the Roman Empire. The architecture was about the same. The post-WWII Western revival of classicism had a more humorous intent, though, disregarding the previous classical utopias, much to the disappointment of the architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri, even though his friend Aldo Rossi considered the classical period potential inspiration for the inter-period style before proper Marxist architecture could gain prominence.

Even though it is difficult to make generalisations based on just a couple dozen housing companies in Helsinki from a period when hundreds of buildings were being designed by more than a hundred architects, some conclusions can be drawn within the broader context presented here. The early social housing projects in Helsinki and the individual housing companies followed the same, more austere style of architecture as did their Swedish co-op counterparts. The winning side in the Finnish civil war (the conservative Whites) demonstrated their architectural sentiments, if not always overtly promoting them as part of the city's development, in examples such as the As. Oy Sotilaskoti housing project. The less political middle class desired more the subtler aspects of classical antiquity brought back by the architects from their Grand Tour. Whether it took the form of *architettura minore* or classical ruins,

<sup>43</sup> *Arkkitehti* 1.1.1939, 2–3.

<sup>44</sup> Juhana Heikonen, "The Influence of German Siedlungen and Bauhaus on Helsinki's Prewar Housing Companies". *Tahiti*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2021, 40.

most clients preferred a certain amount of asymmetry in the massing or on the façade of buildings.

Why did the working-class housing company boards jump onto the classical bandwagon, so to speak? The new constructivist architecture of Soviet Russia was well known at the time, and half of the architects discussed in this article had worked in Ukraine. Architects on both the political left and right aspired to the same types of design in many cases. In Välikangas's housing companies, for example, priority was given to functional plans and low building costs. Appearance was probably secondary, and the mainly social democratic clients were perhaps more conservative than communists. In contrast, many of the right's solutions still retain features of the *Belle Époque: enfilades*, including separate stairs for the servants and reception halls. Even though rising inflation after WWI destroyed hindered many middle-class families, the floor plans retained elements of a better-off past. The architectural jump to functionalism was thus more straightforward for the working-class housing companies in terms of flattening the roof angles and stripping down the remaining decorations.

### Abstract

The brief period of *Art Nouveau*, or *Jugend*, architecture was an international response to the pomposity of the Beaux Arts. Like other styles, it quickly faded before WWI, followed by many styles before functionalism. Especially in the Nordic countries, a brief period in the 1920s produced a type of architecture that is now known as Nordic Classicism, in part a wholly new interpretation of the classical architecture found in Italy. A new generation of Nordic architects on the Grand Tour, such as Gunnar Asplund, Hack Kampmann and Aino and Alvar Aalto, saw Italy with new eyes.

In Helsinki, despite a rather hectic period of housing construction in the 1920s, almost no public housing was built. Various private joint building ventures were the principal developers of the city. The few public housing projects at the time were mainly designed by Gunnar Taucher and Martti Välikangas. Based on their architectural Grand Tours to Rome and Pompei, they connected the low-budget public projects to the more affluent classical private housing companies. The state's civil service built the classical housing companies, while the army's officers built their own. The working class had their own interpretations of the same theme. What architectural differences are evident due to the clients' varying political backgrounds?

On the one hand, Nordic Classicism in Helsinki was an aspect of close-knit Nordic cooperation between different architects, which was connected to the architects' Grand Tours to Italy. Many Italian *architettura minore* influences found in their travel sketches materialised in the newly built environment. What is interesting is that the priority given to the new simplified version of classical architecture occurred in parallel with the early state-building process in the Nordic countries. At the same time, the clients, whether public or private, favoured classical architecture, ranging from workers' joint building ventures to the more affluent and luxurious housing companies. Do specific political motives underlie this style, helping connect the newly independent state of Finland to the West? How did the Grand Tour affect architectural styles?



This article focuses on Helsinki's select apartment houses, or *housing companies*, discussing in particular their founders and the different architectural agencies involved. For the architects, the influential Grand Tour was the main driver of architectural style. According to archive and press material, Nordic Classicism and the interwar political situation after the 1918 civil war significantly influenced housing development in Helsinki.

