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Published in:
Built Environment and Architecture as a Resource

Published: 01/07/2020

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please cite the original version:
Hautamäki, R., & Donner, J. (2020). Park in flux: Change and continuity in the planning discourse of Kaisaniemi Park. In M. Chudoba, A. Hynynen, M. Rönn, & A. E. Tóft (Eds.), *Built Environment and Architecture as a Resource* (1 ed., Vol. 2020, pp. 153-180). (The NAAR Proceedings Series; Vol. 2020, No. 1). Nordic Academic Press of Architectural Research. <http://arkitekturforskning.net/files/journals/1/issues/117/117-27-PB.pdf>

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PARK IN FLUX: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN THE PLANNING DISCOURSE OF KAISANIEMI PARK

Ranja Hautamäki and Julia Donner

ABSTRACT

The dynamic between change and continuity represents the fundamental tension within the urban planning of historically valuable, protected environments. This study examines a less well-known area of cultural heritage: a historical urban park and the problematics of preservation and renewal. The case study of this research analyses the planning discourse of Kaisaniemi Park, one of the oldest city parks in Finland, situated in the centre of Helsinki.

Divergent planning and renewal projects have been an almost constant part of Kaisaniemi Park's nearly 200 years of history. This article focuses on the three central planning phases of the park: the renewal discourse of the 1910s; the design competition of 2000; and the master plan of 2007, connected to the local detailed plan. Opposing ideals and styles collided in the park renewal process of the 1910s. The architectural competition in 2000 aimed at redefining the identity of the park and replacing the historical structure with new meanings and contents. The master plan of 2007 sought a new balance between continuity and transition.

With the case study of Kaisaniemi, we explore how the renewal and preservation intentions appear in the planning discourse. What were the arguments and who were the actors behind this discourse? We link our case study to a wider framework of the preservation of urban parks and examine how continuity materializes in this context. We also consider how to preserve cultural heritage, its essential dimension being change, and the contradictory interpretations of different eras.

KEYWORDS

Historical urban park, Kaisaniemi Park, planning discourse, preservation

PRESERVATION OF HISTORICAL URBAN PARKS: THE DYNAMIC BETWEEN CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Introduction

In honour of the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage, it is appropriate to explore urban cultural heritage and its preservation. Our article addresses historical urban parks, a phenomenon at the margin of cultural heritage. The preservation and recognition of urban parks has remained underdeveloped compared to architectural heritage.¹ Urban parks have often been regarded as land use reserves or frameworks for a variety of changing needs or events. Many parks have encountered changes which have weakened their historical characteristics, composition, vegetation, or use.² Furthermore, the ideologies that determined the initial park design or original use have remained undiscovered or underrated. Renewal has been a self-evident part of urban parks, even when their historical values would have vindicated their preservation. Preservation of urban parks substantially differs from conservation of architectural heritage. Parks are shaped by natural processes, and vegetation, an essential part of them, is transient. Change is inbuilt in the evolution of urban parks, and the dynamics between transition and continuity establishes the fundamental tension for park renovation.³

The article discusses the depicted uneasy relationship between continuity and change with the case study of Kaisaniemi Park, one of the oldest city parks in Finland, situated in the centre of Helsinki. Divergent planning and renewal projects have been an almost constant part of Kaisaniemi Park's nearly 200 years of history. The case of Kaisaniemi Park demonstrates that the development of urban parks, as with other urban structures, is not linear. Instead, the plans and solutions concerning them are under continuous re-evaluation. In the case of Kaisaniemi Park, diverse modernization intentions have eventually led to indecision and stagnation. Although the park is currently formally protected, the status has not resulted in any obligatory practical measures. Instead, the park has been left to deteriorate. Our observations of the problematics concerning the preservation and renewal of Kaisaniemi Park and the low status of urban parks' cultural heritage in general provided the initial incentive for this article.

The research contribution of the article is twofold. With the case study of Kaisaniemi, we explore how continuity and change are manifested in the planning discourse of the historical Kaisaniemi urban park. How have the renewal measures been justified and what kinds of objectives and actors

underpinned them? Which attributes emerged as the park's values and features worth preserving? We contextualize our case study in a wider discussion framework on the preservation of urban parks and consider how to preserve green heritage, its essential dimension being change, and the contradictory interpretations of different periods.

Our article is divided into four parts, including this introduction. In the second part, we examine historical urban parks as a research topic and the discourse on their preservation. At the end of part two, we position Kaisaniemi Park within the context of Helsinki's historical parks. The third part analyses the planning history of Kaisaniemi Park with regard to its most significant reform phases, which elucidate the renewal and preservation process of historical urban parks and the conflicts and discussions connected to that. In the fourth and final part, we contextualize the case study's observations in the wider context of park preservation.



Figure 1. The Historical Kaisaniemi Park is located in the centre of Helsinki. 1. Kaisaniemi Park, 2. Kaisaniemi Botanical Garden, 3. Central Railway Station, 4. The Senate Square, 5. Kaisaniemenlahti Bay. City of Helsinki, City Survey Services, 2017.

URBAN PARKS AS A RESEARCH TOPIC AND THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Urban Park Research

Urban green spaces and parks have stirred growing interest, particularly due to the ecosystem services they offer and from the perspective of their ecological and recreational values.⁴ Urban green infrastructure also contributes to climate change adaptation owing to its role in stormwater management and the alleviation of the urban heat island phenomenon. As new nature-based solutions are being developed to support sustainable cities, the old parks and their historical values are overshadowed. Urban parks gained momentary attention in history research a few decades ago,⁵ but after that, research outputs have decreased. It is also noteworthy that historical research on urban parks has not taken a clear stance on park preservation. Although urban parks are recognized as an essential feature of urban environments, their status as cultural heritage remains weak.

This study is positioned within the theoretical framework of historical urban park research. The history of urban parks gained international attention in the 1980s and 1990s as part of the growing interest in socio-historical urban research. American researcher Galen Cranz's *The Politics of Park Design* (1982) discusses the typologies of park design and the intentions behind them.⁶ Her classification describes the successive park design stages of the pleasure ground emphasizing aesthetic ideals; the reform park following social reform; the recreation facility; and the open-space system. Hazel Conway's research examines the planning practices and design elements of parks in Britain from a sociohistorical perspective.⁷ In the 1990s, Maunu Häyrynen's doctoral thesis 'Maisemapuistosta reformipuistoon' (1994) shed light on the history of Helsinki's urban parks. Häyrynen investigates the change that took place in the design of urban parks from the 1880s to the 1930s and the transition from the emphasis of aesthetic ideals to reformist functional content. From the perspective of our article, Häyrynen's thesis is important, because Kaisaniemi Park is a core example of the transitional phase in park planning. After Häyrynen's work, Catharina Nolin completed her doctoral thesis 'Till stadsbornas nytta och förlustande' on Sweden's urban parks.⁸ These studies demonstrate the evolution of the urban park institution and the social objectives which have steered their development. However, preservation has received less attention. Preservation is discussed in various inventory and action reports, but they do not generate actual academic discussion—critical questioning and reflection.

Preservation Framework for Historical Urban Parks

Negotiations between continuity and change, preservation and renewal are deeply embedded in the planning discourse of historical urban parks. Whereas renewal depends on continuous growth and urban development and the often momentary needs of vitality, preservation is based on continuity and the idea of fostering cultural heritage for future generations. Although institutional preservation already has an established place in urban planning, the values of green heritage and particularly urban parks are still poorly recognized. The inadequate status of parks is also evident in the fact that the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) only produced a policy document⁹ for the protection of historical urban parks in 2017. As a comparison, it is noteworthy to point out that the equivalent document for architectural heritage, the Venice Charter, was prepared already in 1964.¹⁰ The legislative position of landscape and garden heritage is sandwiched between architectural heritage and nature conservation. According to Häyrynen, ‘it could be generalised that parks and garden art have been left between two categories highly prestigious in our culture, architecture and nature. Parks are not “genuine” nature nor are they “real” art; their designers have not enjoyed the widespread national and international prestige felt for architects, so their representatives, styles and typologies have remained unidentified.’¹¹

Despite their inadequate institutional status, historical urban parks constitute an integral part of urban cultural heritage. They can be considered historical gardens whose preservation leans on the Florence Charter of 1981. The Florence Charter is an addendum to the principles of the Venice Charter (1964), and gardens are juxtaposed with historical monuments in it.¹² Fundamental to the identity of historic urban parks is their composition and dependency on such elements as vegetation, spatial configuration, topography, and vistas. According to the Document on Historic Urban Public Parks, parks often accrue a range of values, including aesthetic values for their design or character, horticultural and ecological values, and social and intangible values to local or wider communities.¹³ Parks have meaning to urban residents as places of recreation, gathering, celebration, and protests. Due to these versatile values, historical urban parks must be protected and their stewardship based on careful historical research, inventories, and evaluation.¹⁴

Thus, the protection of historical parks can be perceived as the union of social and material, whereby endorsing experienced values and social meanings is

as important as preserving authentic materials, structures, composition, and vegetation.¹⁵ Experienced values are also associated with the interpretation of how earlier generations have experienced a place and what kinds of symbolic meanings have been attached to it.¹⁶ A significant part of experiencing a park is the time dimension: the changing seasons and the dynamics of the vegetation—growth, ageing, and renewal. Because of the time dimension, fostering the authenticity of parks differs from preserving the original building material of architectural heritage. Vegetative environments are shaped by natural processes and their key material, vegetation, must be renewed from time to time. With regard to vegetation, the original form also changes, and each natural growth stage of vegetation is equally authentic.¹⁷

Although traditionally authenticity has referred to the original state and characteristics of a site, the concept can be understood in a wider context. According to this interpretation, authenticity includes also layering and the changes that have taken place at the site, which have engendered positive characteristics worth preserving.¹⁸ The layered nature of urban parks is characteristic to them, because they often embody many construction phases which have utilized the structures and vegetation of the previous phases.¹⁹ Consequently, urban parks are by nature cultural heritage which incorporates the dimension of change. The distinctive characteristic of their preservation is the interpretation of the transition phases and steering future changes.

Understanding the park as an evolving process has a clear parallel with the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) recommendation,²⁰ adopted by UNESCO in 2011. The emergence of HUL reflected a paradigm shift in conservation as the approach understood the city not merely as a series of buildings but as a living entity and interaction between culture and nature. Therefore, HUL emphasized the management of change, recognizing urban heritage as a vital resource in enhancing liveability.²¹ Accepting change as part of cultural heritage was adopted largely also in Finnish strategies. For example, the cultural environment strategy in 2014 stated that ‘cultural environment can be renewed and adapted to the changes brought by time while preserving its central features of different ages.’²²

Although change is part of cultural heritage, it is vital to consider what kind of change is acceptable and where to draw the line after which the landscape will be destroyed or exploited.²³ The ICOMOS document voices a severe concern that the cultural heritage embedded in urban parks is under threat.

The lack of preservation status for parks has led to numerous alterations either through gradual deterioration or precipitous renewals, which have impaired their historical value. Urban parks have been regarded as reserve grounds, spaces corresponding to the demands of divergent eras and actors.²⁴ Parks have been confronted with the ill-considered establishment of new functions and structures, such as sports and playground facilities, transport routes, parking areas, substations and other technical equipment, without the backing of a comprehensive plan. Parks have been the object of unfounded revamps and 'facelifts' based on the shifting fashions and predilections.²⁵

Eeva Ruoff, who has studied urban parks' threat factors, has indicated that the reduction in maintenance costs and the requirements of efficient upkeep are the key problems.²⁶ These have resulted, among other things, in the removal of high-maintenance structures and simplifying carpet beddings, tarmacing of gravel paths, and widening paths for maintenance equipment. Due to technical requirements, distinguishing furnishings, such as lighting and benches, have been renewed and standardized. The distinctive features of historical urban parks have been replaced by contemporary norms and standard solutions for park construction.²⁷ In addition to impoverishing park landscapes, the increasing consumption is also a threat to historical urban parks. Growing use and public events have damaged plants and structures and weakened parks' aesthetic and social value. The ICOMOS Document highlights especially the need to restrict or monitor park use and the necessity to create enough new parks to provide sufficient recreational facilities for the growing population.

Helsinki's Historical Urban Parks

Following international example, Finland awakened to the preservation of its historical parks in the 1990s. Helsinki's historical parks were highlighted in the green space programme,²⁸ and simultaneously, the first extensive urban park restorations were initiated in Esplanadi and Kaivopuisto parks. The preservation methods were developed and, for example, the city prepared a sectional target and implementation programme for Kaivopuisto, which was based on the careful analysis of the park's historical phases.²⁹ The preservation methods in local detailed planning were also advanced in the late 1990s. Preservation of parks through urban planning was almost non-existent prior to that. For instance, in 1972, the local detailed plan for Tähtitorninvuori only incorporated a definition that it was a 'historical park' without explicating the obligations of the stipulation. The pioneering 1998 Kaivopuisto urban plan,

however, introduced an elaborate stipulation: the park is historically, culturally, and park-architecturally a prestigious part of the cityscape, and its trees, shrubs, and other plantings must not be destroyed nor its protected structures changed, dismantled, or destroyed. The stipulation also encompassed an amendment detailing that the building permits or action permits in the area must include a statement from the museum authorities and the Public Works Department. In addition to the local detailed plans, the city master plan of 1992 highlighted historically significant urban green spaces and cultural landscapes as an integral component of cultural heritage. The city master plan of 2002 further expanded the notion and introduced the concept of landscape culture referring to the distinctive green environments of the city. The status offered by master plans has steered land use planning and established the preconditions for composing local detailed plans for preservation.³⁰

The City of Helsinki has carried out pioneering work to protect and renovate historical urban parks. The significant historical parks in the city centre, including Kaivopuisto, Esplanadi, Sinebrychoff, and Tähtitorninvuori have been restored and their importance recognized. Many smaller and more recent parks have also been restored. From this perspective, it is interesting to debate why Kaisaniemi Park, as Helsinki's oldest urban park, is not among them and why its local detailed plan for preservation was only initiated in 2007. In addition to the problematic characteristics of the site itself, one influencing factor is the value discussion embedded in the decision-making of different eras. Characteristic to the 1990s and 2000s was the emphasis of cultural heritage values, but in the 2010s, attitudes have changed. The strategic comprehensive plan of 2016 implies the paradigm shift in preservation and the discourse emphasizing the city's growth and efficiency.³¹

KAISANIEMI: HELSINKI'S OLDEST URBAN PARK IN A STATE OF FLUX

A Park amidst a City: Historical, Layered, Fragmented Kaisaniemi

The approximately seventeen-hectare Kaisaniemi Park in Helsinki city centre is the city's oldest urban park originally established for public use. It borders in the south on the Kluuvi blocks, in the west on the main railway station yard, in the north on Kaisaniemenlahti Bay and University of Helsinki Botanical Garden and in the east on Unioninkatu and Kaisaniemenkatu streets. When the park was originally planned in the early nineteenth century, it was a significant part of the city's new empire-style centre and fitted with the archi-



Figure 2. Aerial photo of Kaisaniemi Park and its central features: 1. Central birch alley, 2. Botanical garden, 3. Water basin, 4. Sports field, 5. Gate to the park, 6. Tennis fields, 7. Temporary kindergarten. City of Helsinki, City Survey Services, 2017.



Figure 3. The central birch alley of the park. Photo: Sarianne Silfverberg.



Figure 4. The water basin in front of the national theatre. Photo: Sarianne Silfverberg.



Figure 5. The enclosed botanical garden next to the park. Photo: Ranja Hautamäki.



Figure 6. An open-air concert in Kaisaniemi Park. Photo: Ranja Hautamäki.

tectural and garden design ideals of the time. In architect Carl Ludwig Engel's plan of 1827, Kaisaniemi was designed as a formal axial composition, but a large part of the area was left in its natural state and treated as a landscape

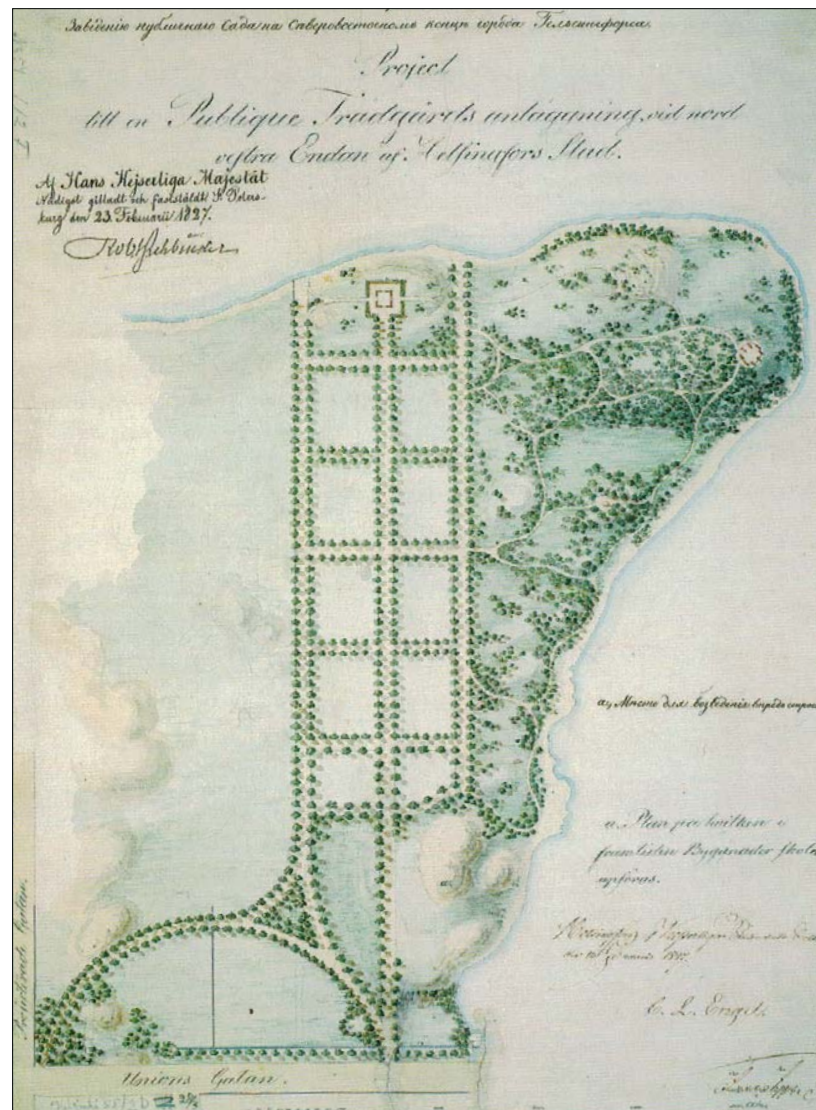


Figure 7. Carl Ludwig Engel's plan of 1827. Kaisaniemi Park included a formal garden and a landscape park next to the shoreline. National Archives of Finland.

park. The hilly terrain and Kaisaniemi bay shoreline offered beautiful park views, whereas the axial grid structure connected the park towards the new town centre and its main street, Unioninkatu.³²

After Engel made his plan, a new urgent need emerged and changed the implementation of the plan.³³ The University Botanical Garden was decided to be moved to Kaisaniemi after the great fire in Turku. It replaced most of the formal garden by Engel, and Kaisaniemi Park was built as a landscape park next to the botanical garden.³⁴ Over the course of the nineteenth century, Kaisaniemi Park established itself as a popular destination for strolls, and its ponds, streams, and leafy trees were imprinted in the memories of the city's residents. Helsinki's first sports field opened in the park in 1884, reflecting the social reform ideals of the day. It remained the only sports field in the city until Eläintarha sports field was founded in 1910.³⁵

Kaisaniemi Park established its position as an important public park with aesthetic and functional dimensions early. However, in the twentieth century there have been many attempts to renew the park and expose it to numerous different interpretations. The park's first renewal phase took place approximately a hundred years later, when the park had fallen into a state of disrepair and it no longer met the requirements of the day. In the 1910s, the future direction for the park turned into a planning dispute with conflicting stylistic, professional, and political visions for the park. As a result of the conflict, a decision was made in the late 1920s to take measures to renew the park. The work was, however, not completed.³⁶ Approximately seventy years later, in the early 2000s, the park's renewal debate resurfaced. This time, the objective was to find new ideas and development directions through an international landscape architecture competition which aimed to find 'a high-quality, creative solution for a new master plan which respects the park's historic value.' However, the winning entry was not implemented.³⁷ Seven years later, the park's planning was initiated again as part of a local detailed planning process aiming to preserve the park. The restoration in accordance with the plan has not yet been carried out.³⁸

The tension between renewing and preserving has emerged as one of the main themes of the park. It has encountered divergent expectations, urban development plans, initiatives of private actors, and different interpretations of its nature. The diverse interpretations have also affected the park's identity. Instead of possessing a distinct identity based, for example, on the park's early

phases, Kaisaniemi's character is ambiguous, and the successive renovation plans have become a distinctive feature of the park. Kaisaniemi Park's changing identities and the conflicting aims for it have also had an impact on the park's preservation discourse and on how its cultural heritage is understood. As Helsinki's oldest urban park, the area is unquestionably part of the city's historically significant cultural heritage, but the park's preservation has not become a self-evident part of its design.

This article examines three different planning phases of Kaisaniemi Park's complex past with the corresponding plans. Of the 1910s' planning phase, we will explore two differing visions for the future of the park. The first one is the city head gardener Svante Olsson's 1911 plan (*Förslag till reglering av Kajsaniemi park*) to renew the park. His proposal highlighting traditional landscaping styles is compared with Bertel Jung's reformist plan (*Projekt till omreglering af Kajsaniemi park*) of the same year.³⁹ Of the entries to the landscape architecture competition in 2000, we examine two different proposals which illustrate vividly the conflict between change and preservation: '131517' by Stefan Tischer, Susanne Burger and Francesca Venier from Germany pursuing renewal and 'Helmi' by Ria Ruokonen and Eeva Byman from Finland advocating restoration.⁴⁰ Finally, we look at the master plan by Gretel Hemgård produced in 2007, which is the basis for the local detailed plan for preservation.⁴¹ The plan sought a new balance between continuity and transition, reconciling the contradictory objectives of divergent interests—sports facilities, bicycle routes, events, and finally preservation. Thus, this article's Kaisaniemi narrative is based on the plans for the park, the grounds for the plans, and the discussions on them. The empirically collected and defined, context-bound data play a central role. Our case study on Kaisaniemi Park is based on the close reading of the selected plans, which, in this context, refers to the interpretation of the meanings and their detailed analysis in light of our research questions. With this narrative analysis, we look for the key themes and main points, the repetition of information, distinctions, and contrasts. These analytical tools are used to categorize the empirical material and discover the frame-shaping elements of Kaisaniemi Park's planning and preservation discourse.⁴²

From a Classical Urban Park Ideal to a Modern City Centre Park: Discourse on the Future of Kaisaniemi in the 1910s

Kaisaniemi Park's planning phase in the 1910s was central to Helsinki's park policy and highlighted the collision of traditional and reformist renewal ideas

and the division between the professions endorsing them. Maunu Häyrynen has examined the development of Helsinki's park policy and illuminated Kaisaniemi Park's planning discourse in the 1910s and 1920s. The two opposing parties of the debate, the 'Kaisaniemi quarrel', were Helsinki the city head gardener Svante Olsson and the Helsinki city town planning architect Bertel



Figure 8. City head gardener Svante Olsson's plan of 1911, illustrating a traditional pastoral scene in a continental landscape style. Helsinki City Archives.

Jung with their respective supporters. The debate was initiated by Olsson who was part of the old school and who, as the city gardener, was in charge of park planning under the city's Gardens Committee. Jung, on the other hand, represented the new era's ways of thinking and, according to his vision, parks should be linked more widely to local detailed plans and urban planning. Kaisaniemi, as Helsinki's oldest park, was a natural arena for this debate. The discussion on the boundaries between the professions also highlighted the values guiding the plans and the requirements the plans should respond to. The renewal plans for the park stemmed, above all, from the need to find solutions to topical problems, the core ones being the thoroughfare through the park and improving play and sports facilities.⁴³

Olsson's Plan of 1911

When the discussions on Kaisaniemi planning started in earnest in 1911, the public works board ordered plans from the city head gardener Svante Olsson and the town planning architect Bertel Jung. Olsson's aim was to create a pastoral pedestrian park in a continental landscape style with interesting park vistas, meandering paths, and beautiful free-form planting. Compared to the existing situation, the new plan included a children's play area and a series of smaller open spaces.⁴⁴ In the discussions for the future of Kaisaniemi Park, Olsson and his supporters' aims were to preserve the traditional landscape garden as the basis of the design. This continental style was defended in the council debates on the park's history, Finnish landscape and the nature of the nation, as well as its low implementation cost. The city head gardener bypassed the park's present functional requirements and even denied them in his statements. According to Olsson, ball games were in no way suitable for an elegant city centre park.⁴⁵

Olsson's vision for urban parks' stylistic appearance and content was tied with tradition in two ways. On the one hand, his plan was conceptually connected to the history of the park. Just as C. L. Engel's 1827 plan for the park, Olsson's plan was based on the idea of nature as a haven in the midst of the city. However, the city head gardener did not return to C. L. Engel's formal plan. Instead, he updated the pastoral scene by referring to the tradition of park design and the German models of landscape gardens.⁴⁶

Jung's Plan of 1911

Bertel Jung's proposal (1911) was simpler than Olsson's plan and reflected the reform park ideas with sports and play facilities located along

the two main axes. Compared to Olsson's pastoral landscape style, Jung's park represented a formal and axial composition. The natural swan pond, characteristic of the pastoral park, was replaced with new rectangular water features. The bigger pond, with its plantings, was located in front of the National Theatre, built in 1902.⁴⁷

The reform park was presented as an up-to-date solution suitable for modern lifestyle and the park's style and content. The renovation was expected to be

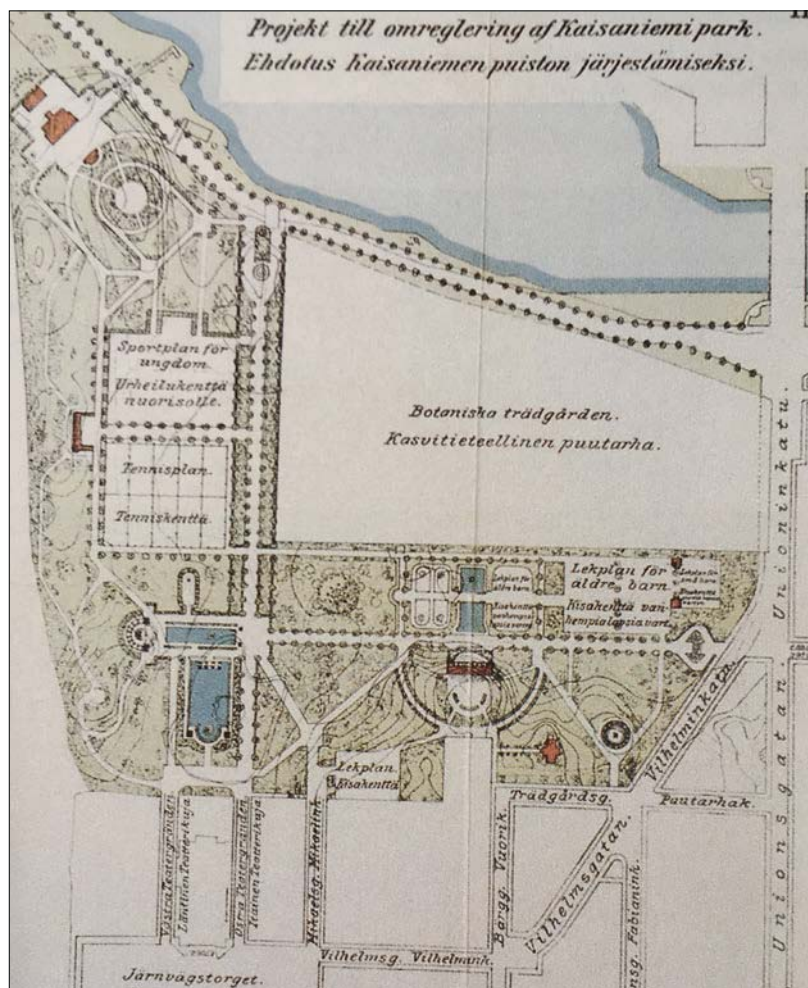


Figure 9. Town planning architect Bertel Jung's plan of 1911. Jung proposed an axial composition with functions corresponding to modern needs of city dwellers. Helsinki City Archives.

noticeable; the park was, after all, the most central and prestigious urban park in the city. Urban parks' acreage had to be efficiently used, and parks were there to serve the residents of a growing city. Whilst the formal style of design was presented as 'honest', understanding it required knowledge of architecture, urban planning, and aesthetics. Sports, playing, and games were significant in the agenda set out for the park. Unlike before, nature in the city was not perceived as a value in itself. It was more important to offer urban residents sports and exercise facilities and space for events in the city centre. All in all, the reform park, according to its defenders, most of whom represented architects, was to be more democratic than its predecessor.⁴⁸

Different Interpretations of Renewal

Both Olsson's and Jung's plans aimed to achieve a functional, impressive, and modern urban park, but the ways of implementing the required renewal significantly differed from one another. What was conceived as modern in the last decade of the nineteenth century no longer was so in the early twentieth century. The city head gardener Olsson wanted to show at the start of the new century that he mastered the garden art tradition in an urban park context and wished to create a continental appearance for Helsinki's most important park. However, renewal based on the garden art tradition was regarded as old-fashioned.⁴⁹ Bertel Jung's design was closer to the fresh ideas and notions on the function of urban parks prevailing in urban planning. The park corresponded both functionally and aesthetically with the contemporary aspirations of rationality.⁵⁰

The plans were also evaluated on the basis of how the old park's features and elements were preserved in the proposed revamp. Jung's plan took into consideration the area's natural features and preserved, despite the suggested alterations, the park's original character better than Olsson's proposal. In 1912, Jung produced a map to support the reform park solution, presenting Kaisaniemi Park's existing pathways along with the new paths in Olsson's plans. Jung wanted to prove that the curvy paths in Olsson's plan would change the old park as much, if not more, than Jung's own proposal based on a rectangular network of paths.⁵¹

The city council adopted Bertel Jung's proposal in 1912. The renewal work in accordance with Jung's plan was interrupted by the First World War and the period of instability following it.⁵² After the war, in the early 1920s, the discussion on the park's fate was initiated again. The City Treasury asked the

following town planning architect Birger Brunila to prepare a proposal based on Bertel Jung's plan. However, this renovation was also postponed to the end of the decade.⁵³

Landscape Architecture Competition of 2000: Renewing or Preserving?

The discussion of Kaisaniemi Park started again in the late 1990s. The forgotten park epitomized the idea of the 'geography of fear'. As a blind spot in the city centre, it was often described in surveys as its scariest place, and walking through the park alone, particularly in the dark, was not recommended. Kaisaniemi Park was part of the city centre plan to review the future of Töölönlahti Bay, traffic solutions for the centre, and the requirements for sports and exercise facilities.⁵⁴ In 1999, the Helsingin Sanomat Centennial Foundation donated one million Finnish marks to the City of Helsinki towards a Kaisaniemi planning competition. Six design groups were invited to the competition: Jeppe Aagaard Andersen (Denmark), Susanne Burger and Stefan Tischer (Germany), Eeva Byman and Ria Ruokonen (Finland), Michael R. van Gessel (Holland), Gretel Hemgård (Finland), and Jyrki Sinkkilä (Finland).⁵⁵

The aim of the competition was to find a 'high-quality, creative solution for a new master plan which respects the park's historic value' forming the basis for the local detailed plan and the implementation plan for the park renovation.⁵⁶ The competition programme emphasized the park's design and stressed that preserving the park or place as such was not recommended. The programme also noted that one style feature should not upstage another nor one historical phase be taken as a target for the design. However, the park's phases had to be taken into account in the plan, but the solution should not be a collection of historical fragments.⁵⁷ Therefore, the competition programme created per se a tension between the renewal and preservation of the park.

Discreet Historical Charm or Contemporary Perspectives?

The competition jury noted in its evaluation that all six competition entries were highly measured and carefully researched park plans. The collection of entries contained proposals aiming to renew the park as well as ones emphasizing the park's historical characteristics. The international competitors had a more relaxed attitude to preservation whilst the Finnish participants focused on the park's historical design phases in their plans. According to the committee, the Finnish competitors Eeva Byman and Ria Ruokonen's 'Helmi' had the strongest link to the park's earlier phases. The German competitors Stefan Tischer, Susanne Burger and Francesca Venier's proposal '131517', on

the other hand, represented the most modernizing outlook and was chosen as the winner of the competition.⁵⁸

In their 'Helmi' proposal, Eeva Byman and Ria Ruokonen took into consideration the park's historical phases with particular care, and the plan was built on the characteristics shaped over the course of the twentieth century. Their aim was to create a park landscape based on the existing features, but one which would be more general and simpler, establishing a contrast to the detailed and diverse milieu of the adjacent University of Helsinki Botanical Garden. The plan can be viewed as a modern interpretation of the late nineteenth century landscape architecture ideals. However, the proposal was considered to be too cautious. According to the committee, it was lacking 'compelling charm' which as a wording reveals the preconceptions for and intentions of the competition.⁵⁹ The historical characteristics had to be considered but emphasizing them was too much.

The competition winners Stefan Tischer, Susanne Burger, and Francesca Venier's proposal, '131517', aimed to reinterpret the historical park. With regard to this proposal, the committee noted that it introduced the present



Figures 10a and 10b. Two entries for the Landscape Architecture Competition for Kaisaniemi Park in 2000. On the left the winning entry '131517' by Stefan Tischer, Susanne Burger, and Francesca Venier and on the right 'Helmi' by Eeva Byman and Ria Ruokonen. The two plans represent opposite approaches: bold renewal and careful renovation. Source: *Kaisaniemen puiston maisema-arkkitehtuurikilpailu* (2001).

day with natural ease into the park. The aim was to inject a breath of fresh air to Kaisaniemi Park, instead of a discreet solution referring to the park's history. The proposal featured a wide, arresting red lane across the park as a unifying feature; the idea was also to create new connections within the urban structure. The new lane replaced the park's original north-south and east-west axes and would, if implemented, have meant the removal of not only the water feature but possibly also the park's most recognizable element, the birch avenue. In the winning proposal, as was the case with the previous one, the gravel sports pitch was replaced by a large landscape space, the 'Great Lawn' and 'Vappu Lawn'.⁶⁰ Replacing the park's distinctive sports field with a lawn can be viewed as an aim to strengthen the park-like nature of the place and to fade its functional content, characteristic of its history.

Although the competition was a big investment bringing a lot of publicity, the winning proposal was never implemented. After the competition, the city organized many discussion forums on the competition outcome and the park's further planning.⁶¹ The city district's sports actors, among others, voiced their concern regarding the direction the park's sports opportunities were taking. The winning entry was lacking a general sports field of similar size to the existing one. Experts in the field—landscape architects and historians—also noted the fact that the proposal overlooked the park's original structure and criticized the plan's interference with the park's characteristic axes composition.⁶² Despite all the criticism, the competition was a discussion opener and helped define the direction the park's development should take.

The Park Plan of 2007 and the Local Detailed Plan for Preservation-Stagnation and New Value Discussion

The wishes placed on the landscape architecture competition for the restoration of the park were not fulfilled due to conflicting visions. The indecisions led to stagnation and the deterioration of the park. The worn structures, aging vegetation, and the general dilapidated appearance weakened the identity of the protected urban park as a prestigious cultural heritage site and was likely to increase the feeling of insecurity people experienced in the park.⁶³ The park was also facing increasing pressure as a venue for sports functions and ever-expanding park events. Of the different sports disciplines, Finnish baseball and football had had a growing presence in the park since the previous century. Concerts and events were also part of Kaisaniemi's history, but the scale of the events required new arrangements that took the park to the edge of its endurance.⁶⁴

As the park was left to wait for future decisions, a new opportunity for a value discussion presented itself. In 2006, the city produced new guidelines for Kaisaniemi's planning based on the criticism of the landscape architecture competition. The new guidelines emphasized the importance of the park's historical features and aimed to ensure that Kaisaniemi was, above all, 'an attractive urban park in the city centre, a pedestrian park, leisure park and a local sports park—an everyday park for the residents'.⁶⁵ The new vision clearly looked for a balance between renewal and preservation and Maisemasuunnittelu Hemgård Landscape Design, which had participated in the competition, was chosen to implement the vision.⁶⁶



Figure 11. The park plan Kaisaniemi of 2007 by Gretel Hemgård. The plan seeks a balance between preservation and renewal. Helsinki City Planning Department.

Kaisaniemi Park's Master Plan of 2007

The core thinking behind the 2007 master plan project was to emphasize the park's historical characteristics but also to offer a new interpretation of its history. The plan by landscape architect Gretel Hemgård and architects Kari Järvinen and Merja Nieminen aimed to preserve the park, but it also accepted the park's evolution and place within the developing city. They proposed new elements for the park, examined options for the new form of the water feature outside of the National Theatre, and for the location of a new café building. The plan's central content also included a thoroughfare through the park and opening a new entrance to the University of Helsinki Botanical Garden from the park. The plan did not suggest major changes for sports, but the facilities were more centralized within the park. The sports fields on the western side of the park remained and the smaller field in the east was replaced by a high-quality play area. The solution was likely to have been influenced, on the one hand, by the status of sports in Kaisaniemi's history and, on the other, by today's requirements.⁶⁷

An important aim was to provide a basis for the local detailed plan whose objective, laid down in 2008, was to preserve and restore the park in a way that would fit its status as an esteemed urban park. The plan emphasized the preservation of the park's characteristic axes. Although the plan aimed, above all, for the preservation of the park, it also contained solutions which conflicted with the park's existing historical elements. For example, the route choice for the extension of the major cycling route, Baana, across the north of the park, would infringe on the park's atmosphere and weaken the values preserved in the area. Furthermore, the sound barrier by the railway tracks would conceal the view from the park to the west.⁶⁸ The examples show that it is difficult to reconcile conflicting aims, and even if preservation and restoration are primary goals, compromises are inevitable.

The proposed measures of the local detailed plan and park plan were never implemented. The park's one-off substantial restoration was not financially feasible, and it was decided to restore the park in stages one area at a time. In 2016, the City of Helsinki commissioned an environmental history study and development principles as a basis for the park's restoration measures. Thus, the discussion on the balancing act between Kaisaniemi Park's renewal and preservation is still ongoing.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, the park has been left to deteriorate and exposed to temporary uses and vandalism.

MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF URBAN PARK PRESERVATION

In this article, we have examined Kaisaniemi Park as an example of the struggle between renewal and preservation. Urban parks, such as Kaisaniemi, convey the idea of something new and modern which manifests itself in the desire to renew them. Kaisaniemi reflects in an interesting way how change has been a motivation in different eras' planning and urban development. The renewal objectives of Kaisaniemi Park's first phase in the 1910s demonstrates Helsinki's journey into a modern metropolis. Kaisaniemi's designers, the city head gardener Svante Olsson, and the town planning architect Bertel Jung all shared an understanding of Kaisaniemi's position, but their interpretations of what kind of park would be suitable and best serve urban residents differed. Olsson advocated scenic landscape style while Jung supported more modern and function-oriented expression. However, the proposals were united in their belief that Kaisaniemi was a resource for the growing city.

The renovation plans in the 2000s clearly took a stance on history and the modern requirements of an urban park. The landscape architecture competition's winning entry aimed for renewal and did not view history as an unquestionable driving force behind a viable urban park. The competition programme, which steered the designs, also conveyed a similar message: the competitors were warned not to take one historical phase or stylistic appearance as the guiding light for their design, and simultaneously, the park's many layers were perceived as problematic and fragmented. In the 2007 park plan and the local detailed plan to follow it, the park's preservation was in the focus and the aim was to bring together the park's new needs and its historical values. The historical survey, commissioned by the authorities, supported this understanding.

What would be the next step for Kaisaniemi Park? Today, the park brings up a strong contradiction between its formal preservation status and current state. Helsinki's oldest urban park has an unusually strong preservation status for a park. In addition to its preservation through the local detailed plan, Kaisaniemi Park has also been classified as a significant national cultural environment and has been placed in the highest class in the City of Helsinki's prestigious cultural environment classification system.⁷⁰ The joint aim of these measures is to recognize the park's value as a historical park with an ambition to preserve its historical and landscape features. However, despite the park's status, the area has been left to deteriorate and it has become a

hollow space, a non-park.⁷¹ Even if the city seems to support preservation, the renovation has been postponed several years. Different interests and the uncertainty of the right direction for its development have resulted in a state of stagnation for the park's planning. The stagnation together with temporary uses, the decay, and vandalism reveal the tangible conflict between the preservation statements and the park's present state.

The Kaisaniemi Park emphasizes historical layers as a key feature for historical urban parks. It also shows that the historical layeredness is a value that can be appreciated only through understanding the history of the park. Without this knowledge, the park may appear as a fragmented collection of elements in need for cohesion and renewal. Therefore, the historic layers and their embedded meanings form the starting point of restoration where the primary goal is to safeguard historical features. Other interests, functional needs, economic interests, or artistic intentions are subordinate to this. International comparisons for Kaisaniemi Park could include the first European publicly funded urban park, Birkenhead Park, in Manchester, Central Park in New York, or Vasaparken in Stockholm, all of which were restored based on an appreciation of the parks' historical identity and careful plans to adopt the required functional changes.⁷²

Our research shows how difficult it is to restore a historical urban park with conflicting interests. Historical park worth preservation or a flexible urban space to be renewed for contemporary needs? Historical parks correspond to multiple needs in the city. As the oldest public park of the city, Kaisaniemi Park should be self-evidently regarded as significant cultural heritage to be preserved and not as a place in need for a facelift or divergent short-sighted functions. However, even if safeguarding historic significance is the most important aim, preservation does not imply freezing the park in the past. Change is an inherent part of the park but this does not mean changes which endanger the park's historic values. Therefore, preservation includes managing change in a sustainable way without compromising the integrity and authenticity of the place. Reconciling change is normally easiest when the historical phases or past functions and new requirements correspond with one another. The question of what kind of change is acceptable does not have an unambiguous answer. Above all, attention must be directed at the reasons behind the change or renewal, the values steering it, and the prospects for cultural heritage to embrace change and still preserve its characteristics. Old, traditional urban parks do not require new clothes or ideologies, but

careful revival, improvement, and repair of their old attire. History connected to urban parks must be understood as an asset and a cultural resource in a changing and growing city.

Post Scriptum. In March 2019, new guidelines for the renovation of Kaisaniemi Park were outlined and the implementation of the project was approved. Hopefully, this will lead to the renovation of the park—finally.

NOTES

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