

ERL - 8

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

Mr. Tapiola

Helsinki, Finland
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Mr. R.H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 10017, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nolte,

The bus ride from downtown Helsinki, Finland, to Tapiola Garden City takes about 15 minutes. It was still early in the morning when I arrived, so I strolled leisurely along the footpaths, headed nowhere in particular. Eventually, I returned to the information center to negotiate the purchase of a map. Finnish is, by any rational standard, easily the most difficult language in the world; every transaction, no matter how small, has the quality of either a negotiation or an auction, in which you bid coins until you have hit the right sum. Suddenly, from another direction there came a thundering herd of that most dangerous of all species known to Europe - professional American tourists. In this case they happened to be city planners.

Having determined that their interest in Tapiola coincided with mine, that they were probably getting a special tour of some sort, and their number was sufficiently great so one more wouldn't be noticed - I attached myself to the swarm and followed along. They had finished their walking tour and were off to the administrative offices nearby for some background talks and the inevitable promotional film.

Worming my way among them, I made a rough calculation. They were walking in three clusters; two had as nuclei, statuesque blonde hostesses in fetching pale green uniforms with shoulder badges saying Tapiola Garden City (in English.) The third group surrounded a slender man of medium height with greying hair and the tan fitness of indistinguishable middle age. He had a face-filling smile and spoke softly, in a deep voice. I poked a random camera bag in the third group and whispered "Is that Mr. von Hertzen?" The answer came from an unenlightened spouse, not a planner. "Dunno,... he's the director of this place, though."

For the next hour I watched Heikki von Hertzen, President and Planning Director of the Finnish Housing Foundation in one of his favorite combination roles; host, guide and proud parent of Tapiola. From the terrace at the top of the administration building he guided camera bugs to especially fine views. He gave a little commentary about certain features. "The building next to the pool?

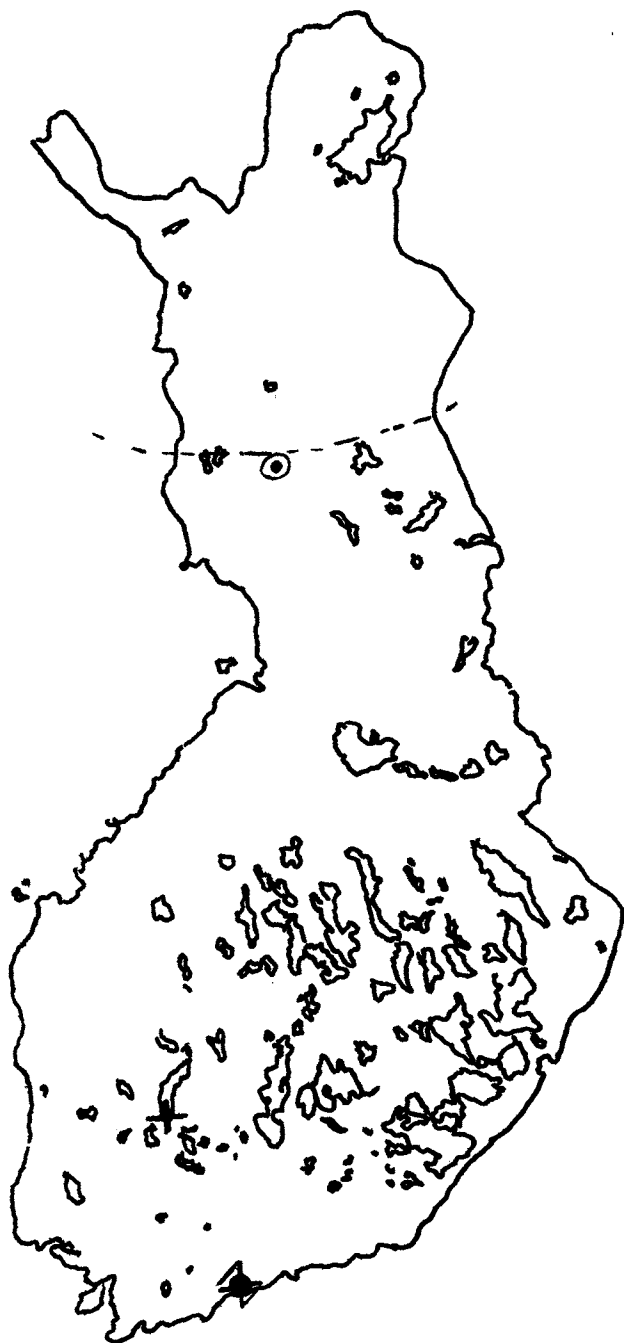
That is the indoor swimming pool. Of course you are wondering why we built the large ornamental pool in Finland, a country with 70,000 lakes and with the bay just over there." He waits a split second for everyone to wonder. "The explanation is very simple. There was a crummy looking gravel pit and Aarne Ervi, our architect, decided this was the best way to get rid of it." He fielded comments on the weather (it was beginning to drizzle), the decor of the cafe behind the terrace, and the Helsinki skyline in the distance. "What does Tapiola mean? We had a competition for a name, we believe in competitions and we have many of them. In this case there were ten thousand suggestions and four thousand of them were different. 'Tapio', in our folklore is the king of the wood, and, in Finnish, we add '-la' to make place names. So, Tapiola means 'the kingdom of the king of the wood.'" He beamed quietly as the usually cynical American planners gushed praise for everything in sight. Then, without losing a beat, he re-organized the tour. Two groups were formed "one for the film, one to see the models, only eight to an elevator, please." He gave instructions to the guides, and then led one group down two flights of stairs to his office, on the 11th floor, where large scale models of the town center were displayed.

In a casual, seemingly random way, he talked his audience around the models. In fact, he moved smoothly from the function of one building to another, leading directly to the answer to all remaining questions, the piece de resistance, the new, as yet unbuilt all in one, town center, shopping center. He took apart the model of the complex building and happily put it back together, explaining the while how this town center would live by day and night. "As you can see we have put the discotheque here, underground. Such a place does not need daylight, and this way we can soundproof it completely so the noise will not disturb anyone." "Usually, in big shopping centers there are three or four food stores, and they each carry the same things at the same prices and they are each missing the same things. So we won't do that. We'll just have one and try to remember everything it should have." Every so often he would forget a word in English, like "balcony," or "escalator," and the group standing around him, by now behaving like the children of Hamelin, would chorus it out, eager to please the Pied Piper. Then, quite suddenly, my group found itself in the elevators on the way to the sixth floor movie. Returning later to the 12th floor where it seemed the group was going to have lunch in the first class restaurant which also has panoramic views of Tapiola, I saw Mr. von Hertzen. This time he was showing the ladies where to take their coats. I explained that I had intended to request an interview by letter and phone. Next thing I knew, I was being led back to the office on the 11th floor where an appointment was made for the following day "if it is convenient for you to come."

Heikki von Hertzen is an adamant humanist, not a professional town planner or architect, although he is given, and accepts, prime credit for both the creation and construction of Tapiola. Thinking back to his childhood in a small town, he remembers spending hours staring at construction sites and imagining other places. He studied law because he had no clear idea of what he wanted to do, but thought legal training was bound to be useful. As he was finishing law school he was casually offered a job as manager of a bank branch in the north of Finland. A young man was sought because the branch was failing, and no one else would take the job. Von Hertzen accepted the challenge, and, within two years, he was running a successful small branch and a larger office in Tampere, Finland's second largest, and prime industrial city, as well. It was as a banker that von Hertzen became actively interested in social welfare. He also acquired the administrative and financial skills and acumen that have been so useful in recent years. In 1943, he was offered the managing directorship of the Finnish Family Welfare League. He took it.

In classical revolutionary fashion, von Hertzen's first direct involvement in town planning took the form of pamphleteering. In 1946 he wrote a short book called "Homes or Barracks For Our Children?" He showed me the book, which has never been translated into English, for one reason. The front cover illustration shows the ugly, cement block type of apartment housing that was, and, unfortunately, still is, the easiest and most typical urban housing pattern. The back cover shows radiant children gazing out at an idealized Garden City; a complex green belt of trees and grass separating a mixture of high and low housing. The illustration, von Hertzen says, was the theory of Tapiola. It was clear in his mind by 1946; after that it was just a matter of time.

A few statements which he continually repeats summarize von Hertzen's philosophy of planning, and clearly illustrate the roots of his thought and experiences in both welfare organizations and the business world. "Man and always man and his family." - "There is no family welfare without good housing, but there can be no good housing without good town planning, no good town planning without regional planning, and no good regional planning without some kind of national planning." - "Environment and services are as important as the dwellings themselves." - "Inside four walls only 25% of the problems of human beings can be solved." - "We must stop thinking that housing and town planning shall be a business. It is the most important part of all human activity, of society." - "Man is both the subject and the object of all human activity, and man must run industry. We must never let industry and technology run man. We must never plan for the convenience of the machines."



FINLAND

Helsinki ♦ -.-.-.-. Arctic Circle
 Tampere +
 Rovaniemi ○

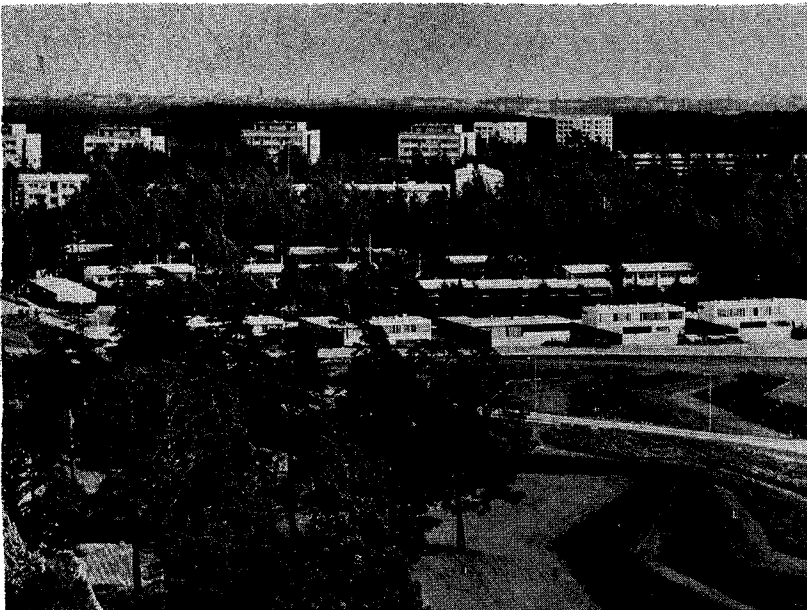
The Finnish Family Welfare League and other believers, in other groups wrote endlessly in the post war years, criticizing housing trends in Finland, and promoting alternatives, mostly theoretical, which drew heavily on English ideas of town planning and proper environment. They were ignored, scorned, or rebuked for pure, and therefore, foolish, utopianism.

Six miles from Helsinki, on a graceful bay, was a tract of 660 acres of deeply wooded land: a perfect site for building an experimental new town to show what the pamphlets insisted could happen through good planning. Von Hertzen knew about the site, knew also that in 1951 a number of contractors were bidding for bits and pieces of the land, and, if it were sold piecemeal, it would effectively be lost. In a flurry of activity he organized, and installed himself as President of, the Finnish Housing Foundation - the Asuntosäätiö. The constituent members of the Foundation are six organizations, the most important being the Family Welfare League, the Child Welfare League and the Confederation of Finnish Trade Unions. The charter empowered the Asuntosäätiö to ease the housing shortage by purchasing land and developing new housing according to complete plans, on a non-profit basis. No bank in Finland would lend money for such nonsense. To buy the land a large sum was needed, and quickly. Finally, a private source agreed to lend \$600,000 for two months at 7½% interest, and von Hertzen promptly bought the whole tract he wanted and began assembling the team that built Tapiola.

With an expansive gesture toward the window views, von Hertzen said, "Every town, every new city, is the child of the period in which it was conceived. Tapiola may represent the best of the 1950's and 1960's, but no more. When the period of the automobile is ended town planning will be entirely changed, but we couldn't wait. We plan now as best we can. This kind of layout, this kind of Garden City will always appeal to some people, but others will always want to live in crowds and near pavement."

Within its self imposed limits Tapiola is probably the best example of Garden City planning in the world. It is precisely those limits which put Tapiola in a class by itself and make it a laboratory size jewel, largely irrelevant to most of what is happening in town planning elsewhere. The most important self limitation is size. The first decision made about the new town was to drastically limit population density. The actual figure is 26 people per acre, very low. The total population of Tapiola will be 17,000, a drop in the proverbial bucket. With that population Tapiola was designed as a suburb, a marvelous suburb for modern man and his family. But a suburb isn't and never can be an urb. Some specialized job opportunities in addition to service occupations have developed; even so, Tapiola was not intended to be a self sufficient economic community. In order to plan freely, the Asuntos~~Asuntos~~ found a site in a rural commune. Part of the price of such freedom was the full cost of development, including roads, sewers, heat and power. But it was not done for profit, only to prove it could be done economically.

The aesthetic addage "less is more" has very specific meanings in Tapiola. Less people meant more space. Less houses meant even more space. Contrary to all building myths about separating housing styles, in Tapiola apartment buildings, terraced and single family houses are clustered together in small groups. The eye is not offended because the clusters are deeply buffered by woods and parks. Also, as a general rule, in order to give everybody the best possible views and maximum privacy, tall buildings are on top of gentle slopes, terraced housing below, and single family houses nestle among the trees.



This publicity photo is a catalogue of Tapiola's virtues. In the distance Helsinki. In the mid-ground - the range of housing styles: high, low, terraced and single family. The special delights: space, trees and parks.

Less visual confusion means more harmony. Almost all the buildings, whatever their function and size, are white. In terms of utilities, again, less is more. One specially built plant services all units with heat, hot water and electricity, thus enabling all units to be fitted to the same high standard of efficiency and convenience. Throughout Tapiola, construction has been to maximum standards. In the early years an unfortunate law rigidly restricted the size of subsidized dwellings. While the law has since been repealed, the first houses built between 1953 and 1958, are distinctly smaller than those built recently. The overall design competition for Tapiola was won by Aarne Ervi, who is now the municipal architect of Helsinki. He also designed many of the individual projects, though a total of 20 architectural firms are represented.

The plan of Tapiola really is for man and his family, for pedestrians and consumers. No home is more than 250 yards from a small neighborhood shopping center. There are three kinds of roadways - one for cars, one for pedestrians and one for bicycles. Of the three, the pedestrian moves most slowly and has the most time and freedom to observe and enjoy the environment. Not only are there parks, woods and lawn, but the subtle design changes and visual surprises have been especially arranged to catch the pedestrians eye. The sense of space, privacy and quiet harmony with nature is Tapiola's greatest achievement.

Initially the Asuntosäätiö advertised Tapiola in the Helsinki papers. Applications for houses and apartments flooded in and backlogged almost immediately. Reflecting a firm belief in owner occupancy, 90% of the residents own their homes or apartments. The latter arrangement is close to, but not exactly the same as what we call condominiums. Most of the units were built with some degree of government subsidy which primarily affects re-sale procedures. Predictably, very few people leave Tapiola. The usual reason is increase in family size and the unavailability of larger units.

During my last year in college my next door neighbors were a young Finnish couple studying on a Fulbright. We had vaguely stayed in touch. Though letters came back and forth I had never gotten their full address straight, and didn't realize they were living in Tapiola. I suspect they were even more amused than flattered by my interest in Tapiola. They led me on a proud residents' tour that substantiated everything I had seen and read.

Both of my friends are busy professional people, even though they now have two very small children. They bought their large apartment site and sight unseen, before it was built, as they were leaving for the States four years ago. They freely explained that they spent more than they could sensibly afford and would be paying off painful bank loans for years to come. The bank payments mean that they cannot afford a car, which they want. They both commute to Helsinki. by bus, which is easy and convenient.

They gleefully told me their section of Tapiola, consisting of a half dozen graceful, low apartment buildings, in which most of the units are smaller than theirs, is locally called "the slum." Some slum! It is generally true throughout Scandinavia that because of the climate no one can afford to build badly. Building well, however, is not the same as building thoughtfully.

Their apartment is spacious, airy, well designed, includes large closets, a balcony where the baby likes dozing in the soft sunlight, and an efficient kitchen. The basement of the building is a treasure trove of ingenuity. There is, of course, a sauna for the residents. Also a cold room with lockers for storing food supplies. The dry storage room, with wood and chicken wire lockers, can double as an air raid shelter since it has running water, air vents, and a special tunnel hatch that emerges far away from the building. And, there is a bicycle - baby carriage room. The bikes are hung on racks, sleds are stacked, and carriages line the large dry room. The inside door is next to the elevator. The outside door opens onto a stair-ramp connected to the foot path.

My friends used to live in another suburb of Helsinki. They volunteered the differences they appreciate most, the differences that keep Tapiola from being simply a beautiful dormitory. They do food shopping practically at their doorstep. The bank and other shops are just a few minutes away in the Town Center. They play tennis regularly and also use the swimming pool. They often go out for dinner and then to a movie without going back downtown. They picnic in the woods and have the children back home again before they have time to grow tired and cranky. The playground for very small children is right next to the house, but there is space and imaginative equipment nearby for the older children. They said they know and greet most of their neighbors by sight as the parents of this or that child. Only when I asked did they stop and realize that most of their close friends also live in Tapiola, not in other areas.

Much has been made of the fact that Tapiola is an economically integrated community in which approximately 55% of the population is white collar or professional, and 45% skilled and unskilled workers. It is not accidental but the deliberate result of a special board, representing various interest groups including several of the constituent members of the Asuntosuunnitelma sifting carefully through the applications to achieve the right social and age mix. The facts should be viewed critically before leaping to any conclusions. In Tapiola it does work. An economically heterogeneous population thrives happily in a beautiful setting. Doctors' children play with plumbers' children. Carpenters' wives and bankers' wives chat comfortably as they supervise their broods on the playing fields. High standards of public amenities have been set and are maintained. The parks and lawns are immaculately manicured. The flowerbeds are untrampled. There is no visible vandalism. The owner-shareholders in the companies that administer the utility company and the maintenance of the apartment buildings operate smoothly.

However, Finland is a country with a very high standard of living, nearly universal literacy, and, moreover, a relatively homogeneous population. The class distinctions of British speech patterns, for example, as well as the racial, ethnic and educational social distinctions of the United States simply do not exist. The fact of the successful social mixture at Tapiola is not to be admired less because it was more easily achieved. The difficulty lies in returning home and touting that success as a relevant norm. It has been done. Certainly the carefully planned environment helped the situation develop so smoothly, but it is irresponsible to suggest that the result was automatic. Tapiola cannot be copied, but already it has heavily influenced the planning and design of numerous new town projects all over the world. Similarly thoughtful physical conditions will be achieved elsewhere. Creating and sustaining social and economic mixtures comparable to Tapiolas will be much more difficult.

As early as 1956 it was clear that Tapiola was going to be a brilliant success. Von Hertzen, who also edits two Finnish planning journals, was appointed to the National Planning Board. He is still a member. With chilling graciousness he says the Planning Board is "very theoretical, it does much research, pursues many ideas." But it is not dynamic or in the habit of implementing decisions. "So" he says, "I have had to go my own way."

Heikki von Hertzen goes a long way, constantly. By his own count he has been abroad 87 times, and, as this newsletter appears he will be in the United States again. He is a member of a number of distinguished international committees, and, as Mr. Tapiola, is a popular and engaging lecturer as well as a busy consultant. The international reputation keeps him busy at home, too. A large percentage of his time when he is in Tapiola, and especially during the summer, is spent greeting and guiding visitors and dignitaries through the Garden City. He explains thoughtfully, "I've visited so many places; all the Scandinavian towns, the English towns, all the new American projects, Brazilia and so on. I've met the key people, the planners, the architects, and even more importantly, to my mind, the administrators of these projects. I know them. I've been in their homes, I've toured their projects. It gives me great pleasure to welcome people when they come here, to see Tapiola."

"You are from some group in New York, am I correct?" he begins. "Do you realize that in your country more than 70% of the people are crowded onto 1% of the land? I'm no enemy of big cities. I even like New York. It has a certain charm; hard to define, but it's there. But New York and Los Angeles are un-necessary. This kind of centralization is not needed, and it isn't an example for the rest of the world to follow. I know that such cities are too big already and the difficulties will become higher (sic) year after year. I know that such places are not good for the big majority of people to live in, and, very soon 97% of the human race will live in cities. In order to survive, biologically, as a race, we must not let cities grow this way. The air is bad and it gets worse,

the water is polluted. There is too much noise and too much traffic. It is madness." He has left his chair and is pacing the conference room, hands thrust in pockets, a look of anger and dismay on his face. Suddenly he sits down again and grins. "You are a New Yorker, yes? Am I too hard? Do I say too much?"

He continues "Every city must, as I have always said, be planned for man and his family. Every city. My main philosophy is more than planning for man and not machines, for consumers not producers. My main philosophy is also that every town and city should have individual characteristics and a personality of its own, not just a different name. The biggest danger in modern town planning is monotony. Repetition and dullness. You have seen this in your country, in England, in Scandinavia, you know I'm saying the truth. They look the same. I say there should be three dozen acceptable urban patterns. Three hundred even better. What will not be acceptable in any new city is not to solve the problems of air and water pollution. The garden city, such as Tapiola, is just one urban pattern. I never said it was the only one, and I am well aware it is a very small example. We built Tapiola to prove that man could live in a certain kind of beautiful urban environment. It is easy to build beautiful settings for the rich, but we built Tapiola for ordinary men. I said when we started that our main purpose was to force others in Finland to follow us, to see and then accept new ways of thinking about what can be, and what must be done. Such experiments will always lead the way."

"By the way, did you hear my private advice to the American planners who were here yesterday? I say it now to all my American friends because you are finally facing your urban problems. What you need are good examples of what can be done, and you need them fast. People, regular people cannot discuss these things in theory. They must see the differences to want them, to understand them. I'm afraid by giving some little money to several hundred cities you won't solve your problems. Please, don't discuss any more. You have been doing that, at least some of you have, for twenty years. Tell me, why can't you say to your conservatives - take 95% of the money and use it in the old ways, and give us the other 5% of whatever you are going to spend. In ten years we will show you what can be done." He punctuates the seriousness of his suggestion by grinning again, this time like a riverboat gambler. "You know what I think? I think your conservatives are so afraid they won't do it."

Von Hertzen is ambitious and impatient. So long as his international reputation rests on Tapiola it is firm but limited. He said it himself: "My American colleagues have told me if we could make something on a larger scale, say of 100,000, then we could set an urban pattern that could be followed." What he wants to do is effectively re-shape Finland. It won't be easy, but neither will it be impossible.

While they are hardly microscopic, the numbers used in calculating Finland's population growth for the next few decades are small enough so the mind and eye don't completely bog down in zeros. Finland is the 5th largest country in Europe, lavishly endowed with the green gold of trees and the recreational silver of those 70,000 lakes, but sparsely populated. The 1960 figure was 4,446,000. The national Statistical Office projects a population touching the 5,000,000 mark around 1980, with an increase of 250,000 in the following decade.

Albeit considerably later than other European countries, Finland is now urbanizing rapidly, and rushing toward automation as well. From 1960 to 1990, the same thirty year time span in which the population will grow by 804,000, a slightly larger number, around 845,000 people will leave the countryside. Three quarters of the growth and shift will be felt in the southern province, around the capital city of Helsinki, called Uusimaa. In 1960, 56% of the Finnish population lived in settlements with 200 or more inhabitants. By the year 2010 the figure will be 90%. Uusimaa should reach the 90% level by 1990. As early as 1980 there will have to be homes, jobs, services and facilities for a new urban population of 900,000 people.

By its nature and location, Helsinki is a small capital city. Although she bills herself for the tourist trade as the "Daughter of the Baltic" the city is wedged on a narrow peninsula with a harbor that is not particularly good. The traffic system works like a vise. Work has begun on a subway system, more because subway systems are fashionable than because Helsinki can support it. A future population of one and half million will drastically alter her charm. Von Hertzen thinks letting Helsinki grow like an amoeba, filling and back spilling into every scrap of space is absurd. "Helsinki is our capital", he says. "It is the center of our cultural lives, our government and our offices. Why should it be more? Why should it be miserably crowded, get traffic jams, bad air, bad tempers and other such problems? Why should it try to be like New York? Every ship unloads its goods onto trucks that must rumble through the very center of the city to reach the country, first noisily passing the windows of the palace of the President of the Republic."

Von Hertzen, like Ford, has a better idea. As with Tapiola the ideas began to take shape in his mind before any possibilities existed. The national objective is to de-centralize Finland's growth. He wants to prevent Helsinki from succumbing to giantism with all its concomitant ills. And, of course, he wants to build new towns, on new scales to prove it can be done.

In 1959, when construction of Tapiola was well underway, Asuntosäätiö began buying new properties in Uusimaa Province. Professor Alvar Aalto, the great Finnish architect who designed, among other things, the remarkable main building of the Technical University at Otaneimi, a worthwhile ten minute walk from Tapiola, was persuaded to plan one of the new areas, Stensvik, in Espoo.

The Seven Towns plan, von Hertzen's private opinion of what should be done, was announced in 1962. Despite, or rather because of the success of Tapiola, the first public reaction to the new scheme was not very favorable. Led by ever-skeptical bureaucrats and the press, Finnish public opinion took nervous refuge in a simple minded equation, roughly: "Asuntosäätiö equals Tapiola, equals more beautiful dormitory towns." Undaunted by the reaction, but also unaided, Asuntosäätiö, which definitely does equal von Hertzen, commissioned through its own resources and by contracting additional professional staff, a defense in the form of a regional plan for Uusimaa. Since the beautifully bound document called Uusimaa 2010, with caption translations in German and English, was issued last year, the opposition has been fragmented. Uusimaa 2010 bears more than a technical, structural resemblance to the Plan for Washington D.C. in the Year 2000, largely because von Hertzen's personal ties to planners in the Washington area are especially strong.

There are two pre-conditions, one national and one capital, to the Seven Towns plan. To ease the population flow south it calls for national planning of three new towns - one in the north, one in Ostrobothnia and one in the east. As for Helsinki, a ceiling for growth would be set at 630,000. This could be done by limiting construction and building permits. Then, seven towns will simultaneously be developed in Uusimaa, some in virgin land, some around existing, smaller communities. The new towns will be economically self contained, and will include service and cultural facilities. They will be separated by green belts. In fact, if the plan is followed, 90% of the total area will be kept in agricultural, forest or recreational use.

Porkkala, Porvoo and Riihimäki - Hyvinkää would be developed past the 100,000 mark (attention, world!) and become regional centers. Espoo Bay will have twin towns - a Finnish Budapest. There is no intention to undercut Helsinki as the national administrative and cultural center. However, Porkkala has a better natural harbor. Porkkala Seaside Town, as it is referred to in plans, has a quaint, almost resort ring. The town being planned will offer 85 - 90% employment. Besides, by moving the major shipping port away from Helsinki perhaps the President of the Republic will get some more sleep. Only a partial jest, for urbanization is having a marked effect on Finnish politics. The old coalitions are shifting ground. Image, image on the wall ... the Agrarian Party recently changed its name to the Middle Party. There is no special Lex Uusimaa yet. Planning progresses quietly. There are national elections next year, and, as von Hertzen keeps telling the bureaucrats, Finns are quick to recognize good ideas.

Before we began to talk, von Hertzen had wheeled into the room an enormous painting, the size of a big blackboard. It was a bird's eye rendering of Uusimaa Province with the Seven Towns. "I must talk with many people who cannot visualize the charts, who don't like to read maps. So, I had this unartistic painting made to show them how it will be." He picked up a pointer, and, in a casual, seemingly random way, started to explain the details.

Sincerely,

Eden Koskipson

Received in New York September 19, 1967.

This map does not do Uusimaa Province justice in any way. There are, of course, many other small and medium size towns in the province. This shows only the location for the Seven Towns of von Hertzen's plan, plus Helsinki and Tapiola.

UUSIMAA

