

# EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE YEAR 1975 – REFLECTIONS IN FINLAND

M. Ehrström, P. Kärki, M. Mattinen & R. Salastie

**ABSTRACT** This paper discusses the political situation in Finland in the 1970s – especially the relationship to the Soviet Union – which prevented Finland from being partner of the Council of Europe and joining the *European Architectural Heritage Year* (EAHY 1975). The paper describes how the leading forum for the preservation debate came to be the *Finnish Architectural Review* (ARK), where a reference to EAHY 1975 can be found in the special issue for preservation (7/1974). The period was marked by focus shifting from the protection of monuments to the preservation of wider entities and milieus. The paper discusses how one important link to the European debate was through direct contacts with other Nordic countries, both by experts as well as through training programmes in restoration. This is exemplified by the *Nordic Wooden Town Project*. Although Finland did not take part in the EAHY 1975, the general debate and ideas that were closely linked to it arrived through different channels to Finland. Heritage issues were raised relatively early in the focus of the architectural debate, practically simultaneously with, or even before the EAHY 1975. Changes in the conservation discourse took place and led to the adoption of gentler restoration, renovation and conservation methods in the years to come.

## 1. THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN FINLAND AND THE EAHY 1975

The state of conservation and restoration in the 1960s and 1970s in Finland reflected the general political situation in relation to the country's domestic and foreign affairs. This was a time period, when the influences of the Second World War were still strongly felt and the relationship between Finland and the Soviet Union influenced Finland's participation in international organizations such as UNESCO or the European Council. Finland had joined UNESCO in 1956, but the relationship with the European Council was difficult. Finland did not join the *Council of Cultural Cooperation* that was established in 1961. In 1987 Finland joined the European Council as its 23<sup>rd</sup> country.

Instead, Finland had strong ties with other Scandinavian countries, politically especially through the *Nordic Council*, which was established in 1952 and which Finland joined in 1955. On the basis of the Nordic democracy that all Nordic countries shared together, they hold very much identical attitudes to architectural heritage and to the conservation of it. This can be seen, for instance, in the legislation. The common features of the built and architectural heritage have also helped to build up close cooperation and joint projects between Nordic preservation specialists and other actors. ICOMOS Finland was established in 1967, two years after the establishment of the organization. Through ICOMOS Finland got up to date information on conservation matters from the international field. In the beginning of the 1970s the focus in Finland was very much on the *European Safety and Cooperation Pact*. Outside the official policies, the conservation specialists observed and were aware of the international conservation debate through writings and also, through direct personal contacts. This was also the situation with the EAHY 1975, which was unofficially monitored by Finnish conservation architects and experts.

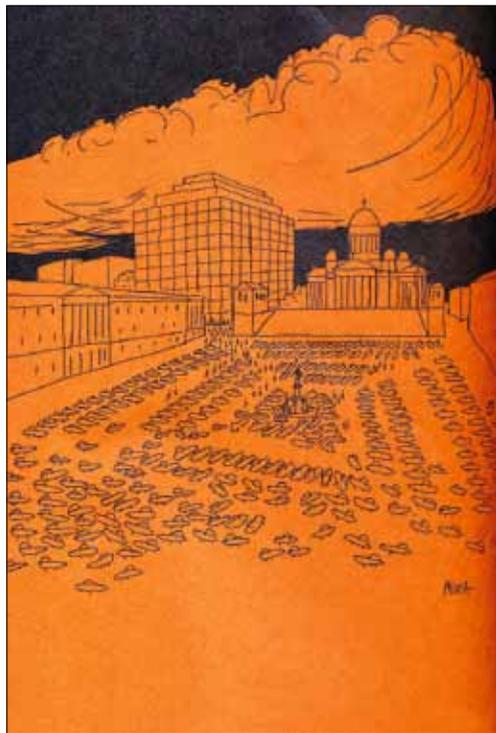
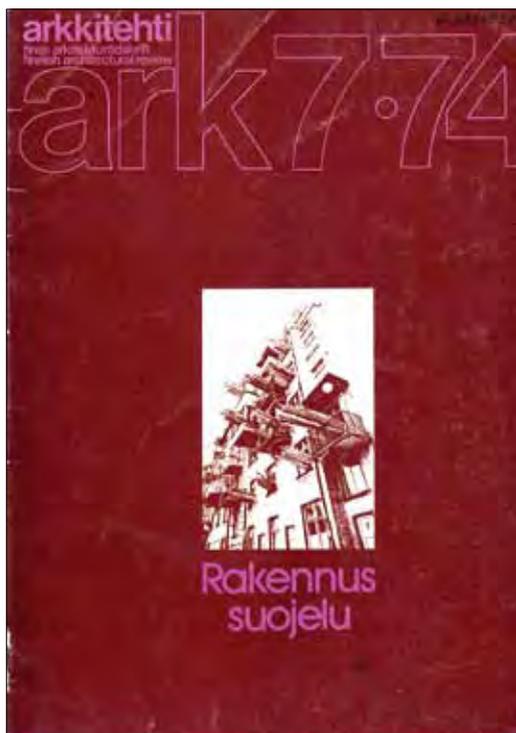
Finland's first *Protection of Buildings Act* was passed as late as 1964, considerably later than in other Nordic and European countries. The legislation, however, proved ineffective and only a few buildings

were preserved as a result of it. Private ownership interests were deeply rooted in the minds of people and many opposed conservation objectives. The public in general was for new constructions, while only small groups of experts were in favor of preservation. The government was unwilling to pay compensation for conservation, neither did it allocate any funds for the restoration of listed buildings. In many cases, money or the lack thereof put a stop to conservation projects.

Consequently a *Building Protection Committee* was set up, aiming to propose changes in the legislation, which had proved to be ineffective. The report was published in 1974, just one year before the EAHY 1975 was launched. The proposals made in the report largely reiterated issues and recommendations that had been raised in the previous years. The report was published as a book with a wealth of beautiful illustrations, and it served as an important reference for many conservation planners for decades to come. Eventually, the principles and proposals presented in the report came to be enacted, one by one, both in legislation and in practice in the years to come.

## 2. EAHY 1975 AND THE FINNISH PRESERVATION DEBATE

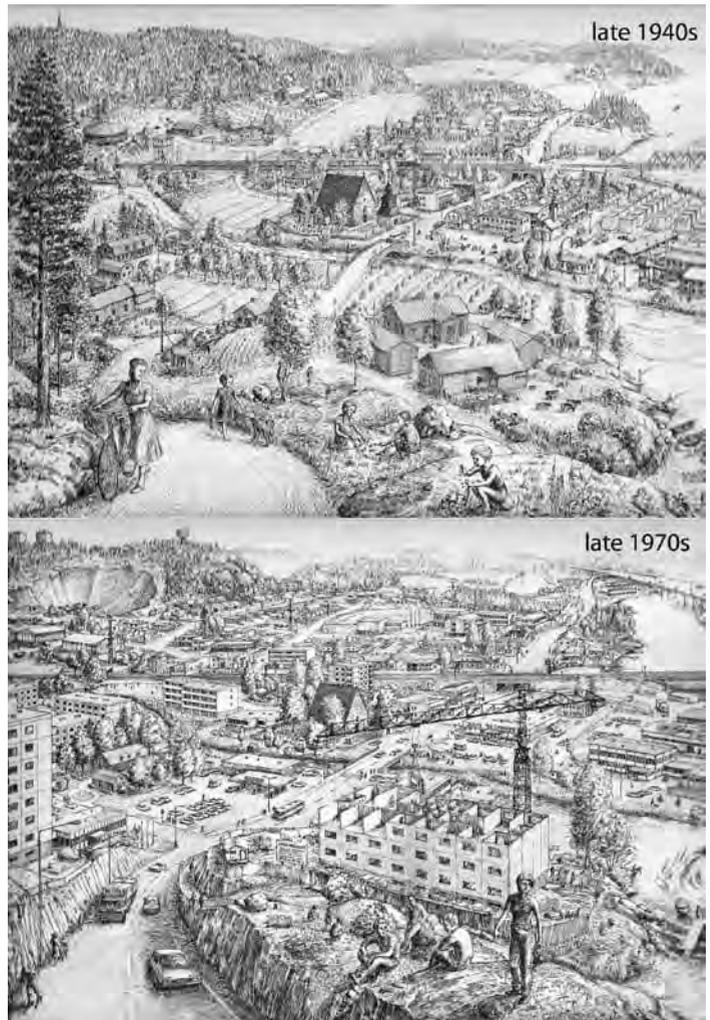
As mentioned above, the international contacts were very much based upon the personal and professional interest of individuals. One of the canals for the preservation debate in Finland was the *Finnish Architectural Review* (ARK). In this context it is noteworthy that the last issue of the year 1974 was specially dedicated to the heritage preservation theme. In this issue the editor-in-chief, architect Jussi Vepsäläinen, quotes in his introduction, “Rakennussuojelu kannattaa” – “Preservation Makes Sense” (Vepsäläinen 1974, 21), also directly the EAHY 1975 (Figs. 1a, b).



**Figs. 1a, b:** The Finnish *Architectural Review* 7/1974: cover and a magazine clipping where the EAHY 1975 was for the first time officially quoted. This issue itself was one of the water sheds in the Finnish preservation debate for the coming years.

The issue contains a long article directly related to the European debate by architect Mikko Mansikka, then and later employed by the Ministry of Environment. The title of Mansikka's article is tellingly "Rakennusten suojelusta ympäristön kehittämiseen" – "From Protecting Individual Buildings to the Revival of Built Heritage" (Mansikka 1974, 22–25). Also Pekka Kärki calls in his own article for a broader approach in preservation (Kärki 1974, 26–28). This discussion was crucial for the modern Finnish preservation debate and meant a kind of turning point towards a broader concept of preservation. Three years later, Professor Vilhelm Helander, one of the forerunners in preservation and conservation in Finland, stated in 1977: "The need to use and develop existing building stock is widely acknowledged. And yet, the preconditions for building protection have not improved to any significant degree [...] The protection of built areas of high cultural historical value offered by legislation is all but non-existent. Changes in legislation never went further than the paper they were written on, while at the same time the escalation of conservation disputes shows how ineffective the current legislation is" (Helander 1977, 28).

A major obstacle to successful conservation was the building code, which was the act to steer and regulate new constructions. In 1976, however, a major improvement was achieved in the building regulations, allowing the code to be more reasonably applied in the renovation of old buildings. The interpretation of the code was, however, the responsibility of local building control authorities. The Ministry of the



**Fig. 2:** The *Finnish Association of Architects* and a number of other co-operation partners published an educational package aimed at schoolteachers on the history and preservation of the cultural landscape, and a project based on the material was carried out in schools during 1979–1980. The textbook material was complemented by a poster series illustrating changes in the Finnish rural environment since the Second World War (Harö et al. 1980)

Interior Affairs published a series of guidelines and memoranda to steer the practice towards more non-intrusive renovation methods, but usually an uncreative and mechanical interpretation of the regulations and the use of new construction methods took priority. Ten years after the EAHY 1975 theme year – in July 1985, the new *Protection of Built Heritage Act* was approved by the government. In conjunction with the new act, the planning and building legislation was improved with regard to the regulation of conservation and demolition. Despite a weak national legislation concerning conservation and restoration, the 1970s proved to be an active decade in public debate on the safeguarding of the architectural heritage. Very much was due to the activities of individuals and experts working for government and local authorities who debated the issues in public, organized seminars, films and exhibitions. In the 70s the *National Board of Antiquities* was also allocated more resources. Regional museums were able to improve their resources and hire archeologists and other building conservation researchers. In addition, many NGOs dedicated to preserving the built heritage were established throughout the country. At schools, the year 1979–1980 was a theme year dedicated to the built environment following a joint initiative by different ministries, the *National Board of Antiquities*, NGOs and the *Finnish Association of Architects* (SAFA). Teachers were provided with an extensive package of educational material on heritage (Fig. 2).

Participating in international co-operation, particularly within the frameworks of ICOMOS and ICCROM, was crucial. On the government and local authority levels, conservation gained a more established position. On the whole, the built heritage was better appreciated. The training of architects, construction engineers, researchers and artisans was developed from the 1970s onwards to provide deeper knowledge about conservation, which in turn secured better quality conservation work. The building protection campaigns of that time were parts of a progressive housing policy movement, highlighting the social problems that the demolition of old buildings and the modern mass-housing developments brought in their wake. With a number of renovation and modernization projects that improved the quality of old housing units, the owners of old houses began to show interest in their own living environments.

### 3. FRAGILE FINNISH ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

Compared with other European countries, Finland's building stock is relatively young. At the time of the EAHY 1975, more than half of the buildings in Finland had been built after the Second World War. There were relatively few protected buildings or environments. The removal of building stock was double that in Western European countries. Land use planning and housing policy in post-war Finland were based on the belief that demolishing the old building stock and a total reconstruction of the urban structure was inevitable. City plans were oversized in proportion to need. Extensive building rights were an incentive to demolish old, usually timber-structure small buildings and to replace them with much larger new buildings. Many 19<sup>th</sup> century wooden blocks of flats had to give way to more efficient housing in city centres. The belief was that since the old buildings would eventually all be demolished, there was no need to make new buildings to conform to the existing surroundings. Buildings were demolished at random. The harmonious historical townscapes became fractured. The maintenance of old buildings was often neglected. They were deemed outdated and lacking in comfort. In many cities, the old buildings were increasingly inhabited by lower-income groups. Old buildings in bad repair were eventually considered beyond repair and ready for demolition only because they were more than 50 years old and they lacked modern amenities or their appearance was seemingly dilapidated. New pre-fab housing was regarded as offering a superior living standard and dwelling environment. Historical buildings held no value in contemporary opinion. Protection was seen as an impediment to progress.

Dramatic changes in the economic structure, the rural exodus and rapid post-war urbanization led to the depopulation of the countryside. The exquisite wooden farmhouses based on a long legacy of vernacu-

lar architecture were allowed to decay. Rural villages saw the emergence of modern houses, and clumsy extensions were added to the old buildings. The housing shortage was acute in the cities. Streets were widened and old buildings lining the streets were demolished. The new motorways cleaving through the rural areas were built with no regard to the old settlements, villages and cultivated landscapes. Massive traffic bypass arrangements, even close to shorelines and over water, were being planned. Fortunately, because of lack of money, such plans were usually not realized: Building protection was highly selective in the 1970s. Only the oldest historical monuments, such as manor houses and the medieval stone churches or a few mediaeval city blocks, were considered worthy of preservation. It was thought simply impossible to protect the wider cultural landscape or urban entities. There were no feasible examples of how to restore old building stock or how to modernize and upgrade old apartments, or of how an old building, once renovated, made for much more comfortable housing than a new concrete block. However, there was a budding appreciation of Finland's industrial history, and for example, old ironworks and their milieus were documented. In 1975, a fierce campaign got under way to preserve the most significant centre of Finland's traditional textile industry, the milieu around Tammerkoski and, in particular, the Tampere Verkatehdas broadcloth mill. *The Finnish Architectural Review* (ARK 7/1975) published articles in favour of preserving the mill. Sadly, the mill was torn down a few years later, but it became a symbol for the preservation of Finland's redbrick industrial heritage.

#### 4. WHOSE HELSINKI IS IT – PRESERVATION IN FINLAND BEFORE AND AFTER THE EAHY 1975

The 1960s demolition boom aroused a major backlash in society. Architects and conservation professionals pointed out that the appreciation of the traditional building stock cannot be based on art historical factors alone. Strongly worded pamphlets were published and numerous seminars held throughout the 1970s. Some of the most influential ones were published already before the EAHY 1975. The publication *Kenen Helsinki* [Whose Helsinki is it?] (Helander 1970) and the *National Board of Housing* study *Renovation in Finnish Towns* 1972 opened the eyes of both the public and decision makers to the fact that the indiscriminate demolition spree was not only destroying urban heritage but was detrimental to the quality of the living environment (Fig. 3). Publications and public debate also highlighted the enormous economic losses that the demolition of old buildings was causing. It slowly dawned on everyone that preserving historical urban entities was in everyone's interest. Developers and builders, however, opposed conservation efforts in the interest of their own financial gain.

The EAHY 1975 and the debate that was going on in other parts of Europe, also saw positive development take place in Finland. In the EAHY 1975, the *Finnish Architectural Review* (ARK 2/1975, 32–43) published the redevelopment plan for Katajanokka area, a prime example of Helsinki *Jugendstil* architecture. Through the project Katajanokka's old residential area became an important object for conservation and also for a redevelopment plan. The plan was highly successful in reconciling the



Fig. 3: The cover page for the book *Kenen Helsinki – Whose Helsinki it is?* (Helander 1970)

new plan with the existing historical building stock. In the same issue there was also an in-depth report on the new utilization plan for Suomenlinna fortress, which had been aptly completed in 1975, the EAHY 1975.

Since 1970s preservation and building protection was seen as an integral part of Finnish housing policy. State subsidy allocated towards renovation proved an effective way to promote conservation in the late 1970s. The *National Board of Housing* launched a nationwide housing modernization scheme in 1979, which was participated in by most of Finland's cities with notable old wood-built districts. Now that the renovation work was being supported by the government, the old population structure could be retained. The dwellings were renovated and upgraded with modern kitchens and bathrooms and an essentially better housing comfort was achieved. Later, in the 1980s, new forms of subsidies were introduced, including renovation support for the elderly, which was granted based on social grounds. In the rural areas, preserving and improving the rural built heritage received support, although the radical changes in agricultural production and livelihoods caused changes in the life of traditional rural communities. The Finnish government has consequently been reluctant to allocate direct financial support to the protection and restoration of the built heritage. Therefore, the conservation has remained mainly the responsibility of property owners. Despite the availability of renovation grants, such as those awarded by the *National Board of Antiquities*, they are desperately insufficient in comparison with the demand. The Finnish tax regulations are not supportive of the preservation or renovation of old buildings, unlike in many other European countries.

Today, we have a new *Act on the Protection of the Built Heritage* as well as an *Amended Land Use and Building Act*, both enacted in the 2000s. The point of departure in both laws is sustainable development, and the aspects of building protection have been well covered by the new legislation. For the past twenty years, the focus of urban conservation has moved more and more to the preservation of our modern heritage, which in Finland forms the large majority of the entire built heritage.

## 5. THE NORDIC WOODEN TOWN PROJECT 1968–1972

As already stated above, a majority of influences came to Finland through direct Nordic contacts in late 1960s. Between 1968 and 1972, Finland participated actively in the *Nordic Wooden Town* project (Fig. 4). The aim of this project was to raise awareness of the shared urban heritage in Nordic wooden towns and to



Fig. 4: In 1970s the European debate was assimilated in Finland much through Nordic contacts. One outcome of the Nordic cooperation was the *Nordic Wooden Town Project* (El Harouny 1995)

develop methodology to preserve them. Twenty-five Finnish towns participated in the project, which approached the issue from a variety of angles. Seminars were held throughout the Nordic countries and an extensive series of reports, including inventories, studies and surveys as well as development plans, were devised as diploma work at universities. There were documentary films and exhibitions on wooden towns. In fact, the publications formed a noted body of work and an important part of architectural literature of that time period. The project involved a wide range of experts, such as architects, planners, researchers, decision makers and journalists, and its outcomes reached the general public quite effectively. The main achievement of the

project was to improve the image and reputation of old wooden towns, and it was widely understood how endangered this urban heritage was, while the alternative town plans were a way of developing the methodology for conservation planning.

The exchange of knowledge and experiences between experts from the different Nordic countries gave Finnish experts the necessary competence to draw up appropriate conservation plans. The cities of Rauma and Porvoo were the first pioneering projects. The focus shifted from preserving street-side buildings and townscapes to the conservation of entire urban areas and their building stock. Wooden towns served as model projects in urban conservation. By the late 1980s, the worst of the demolition frenzy had calmed down and professional interest refocused on the repair of the remaining building stock and the challenges that its maintenance presented. A comprehensive follow-up study of wooden towns in Finland was carried out by the *National Board of Antiquities* and the Ministry of the Environment in 1994–1995. In the study, the quality of preservation and the restoration work carried out was evaluated as well as the relationship between the historical townscape and infill construction. The findings of the study showed that the *Nordic Wooden Town Project* had reversed the negative developments in wooden towns in favour of the historical architecture and urban heritage.

## 6. CHANGES IN THE CONSERVATION DISCOURSE LEAD TO GENTLER RESTORATION AND RENOVATION METHODS

The renovation of state-owned heritage buildings has often served as a model for renovation of privately owned properties. In the 1960s and 1970s, the renovation followed the principles of modern architecture and new materials and building parts (aluminum wooden window frames had still not been invented!) were favored in the renovation work. This usually meant that old interiors were completely rebuilt. The *Venice Charter* of 1964 was interpreted to prescribe that new buildings should clearly stand out from the old building stock. The restoration projects of that time are often referred to as 'heroic restoration.' Some historical milieus were lost, but in some successful cases these were replaced with sophisticated, minimalistic modern architecture. In a number of historical sites, such as castles and museums, the aim was to restore the building to its original appearance and the later historical layers were removed without hesitation. This aroused vocal opposition. As soon as Finland had joined ICCROM in the early 1980s, it hosted large international seminars. It was felt that it was the duty of the government to restore state-owned properties as showcases of good restoration practice.

Conservation methods developed and local conservation societies were established, while advisory centres were set up to provide conservation advice and conservation guidelines were published. Recycling centres were established to allow builders reclaim old building parts and materials, e.g. old doors, windows, fittings and other parts. Also traditional paints, vintage wallpapers etc. became available. Less invasive restoration methods, respecting the authenticity of original structures and building materials, were slowly adopted. These were developed at the *National Board of Antiquities* by the initiative of and under the leadership of architect Panu Kaila. These thesis and restoration principles were also spread internationally through conservation courses held by Kaila at ICCROM. Collaboration between the National Board of Antiquities and the *National Board of Public Building* grew closer in the 1980s and 1990s. By that time, the practice had become to base all building restoration on historical studies and surveys, and the two bodies joined forces to find non-invasive solutions to meet current fire safety and ventilation regulations. Some of the most successful restoration projects were the renovation of the Government Palace, the restoration of the House of the Estates and many of the restoration projects of the University of Helsinki properties, such as the National Library and the Observatory building.

The debate on restoration principles in Finland has mainly been limited to the professionals and the main instigators of these discussions have been the *National Board of Antiquities*, architectural faculty, ICOMOS, TICCIH and recently also DOCOMOMO Finland (Fig. 5).



**Fig. 5:** Preservation in Finland forty years after the EAHY. Modern architecture has risen in the focus of preservation. *The Repair Guidelines for the Helsinki Olympic Village.* (Helsinki City Planning Department 2014)

reconstructive methods, redirecting the restoration practice towards cherishing authenticity. Suomenlinna was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1991. Suomenlinna is Finland's most successful restoration achievement. The work was carried out carefully, retaining the different layers of history, of which a prime example is the east wing of the Crownwork Ehrensivär.

## CONCLUSION

Finland did not officially take part of in the EAHY 1975, but general debate and ideas that were closely linked to it, arrived through different channels to Finland and heritage issues raised in the focus of the architectural debate relatively early, practically simultaneously. The leading forum for the preservation debate in Finland was the *Finnish Architectural Review* (ARK). One important link to the European debate was through direct contacts with other Nordic countries both by experts and authorities as well as training in restoration. The former can be exemplified by the *Nordic Wooden Town Project*, the latter by the influence of Professor Ove Hidemark's philosophy in conservation and restoration.

Only on a few occasions have the media taken any noticeable interest in public restoration principles. An exception in this was the demolition of the historically significant Kämp Hotel and the subsequent reconstruction of its façade, which were met with strong resistance and negative publicity in the 1960s. This was one of the first times that facadism aroused strong and widespread criticism, and demands were made for the preservation of the entire building. The most heated arguments of summer of 1975 – at the EAHY 1975 – concerned Helsinki's townscape and preserving its low-rise silhouette. Finland's leading architects formed a united front, opposing plans to build the Helsinki Tower that would have exceeded 100 metres in height. The plans were eventually set aside.

The restoration of the Island Fortress of Suomenlinna became a leading exemplary project for many years, after it was demilitarised in 1973 and a decision was made to preserve it as a living city district and tourist attraction. The extensive fortress site is fully state owned and therefore all efforts were made to carry out the conservation and restoration according to best possible practices. The first *International Restoration Conference* was held in Suomenlinna in 1974, hosted by ICOMOS Finland, and, ever since then, regular discussions and seminars have been held on the theory and principles of the restoration. The 1985 ICOMOS and ICCROM conference held at Suomenlinna became the turning point in Finland's restoration theory. The conference unanimously denounced

## REFERENCES

- Asuntojen ja asuinrakennusten perusparantaminen* [Housing modernisation]. 1977. Helsinki: Committee Report.
- Building Protection Committee report*. 1974. Helsinki.
- El Harouny, E., O-P. Riipinen, K. Santaholma, and T. Tuomi. 1995. *Suomalaisia puukaupunkeja. Hoito, kaavoitus ja suojelu* [Finnish Wooden Towns. Maintenance, planning and conservation]. Helsinki: Ministry of the Environment 5/1995.
- Helander, V., and M. Sundman. 1970. *Kenen Helsinki* [Whose Helsinki is it?]. Porvoo: WSOY.
- Helander V., and M. Sundman. 1972. *Saneeraus suomalaisessa kaupungissa* [Renovation in Finnish Cities]. Helsinki: National Board of Housing, Research and Planning Office.
- Helander, Vilhelm. 1977. "Suunnittelun ehdot [Framework for planning]." *The Finnish Architectural Review* 1: 28.
- Härö, M., L. Piironen, M. Vesikansa, and S. Vesikansa. 1980. *Viihtyisä ympäristö*. Ympäristökasvatuksen virikekirja, julkaisu 1 [Pleasant Living Environment. Textbook in Environmental Education, vol. 1]. Vantaa: Finnish Association of Architects (SAFA) publications.
- Kärki, Pekka. 1978. "Monumenteista miljöösuojaan. Rakennusmuistomerkkien suojelun kehityspiirteitä 150 vuoden aikana [From Monuments to Milieu Conservation. 150 Years of Development Trends of Built Heritage Conservation]." *Taidehistoriallisia tutkimuksia [Art Historical Studies]*: 89–96.
- Linnasalo, M. 1980. *Viihtyisä ympäristö*. Suomalaisen kirkonkylän kehitysvaiheet. Ympäristövuoden julistesarja selostuksineen. [Pleasant Living Environment. The Development of the Finnish Village. The Year of the Environment Poster Series and Explanations]. Vantaa.
- Mansikka, Mikko. 1974. "Rakennusten suojelusta ympäristön kehittämiseen [From Building Protection to Environmental Development]." *The Finnish Architectural Review* 7.
- Mattinen, M., M. Häyrynen, M. Kairamo, and T. Tuomi, ed. 1999. *Monuments and Sites, Finland*. Helsinki: ICOMOS Finland.
- Rakennusten säilyttäminen kaavoituksessa ja rakentamisessa* [Conservation of Buildings in Planning and Construction]. 1977. Helsinki: Ministry of the Interior Affairs, Planning and Building Department.
- Seminar on 20th century Heritage*. 1995. Helsinki: ICOMOS Finland.
- The Finnish Architectural Review*, issues: 2/1975, 3/1975, 5-6/1975, 7/1975, 8/1975, 1/1977.
- Tuominen, L. 1992. *1900-luvun rakennusperintö. Luettelointi- ja suojelukysymyksiä* [20<sup>th</sup> Century Built Heritage. Questions of Cataloguing and Conservation]. Helsinki: Ministry of the Environment.
- Vanha Rauma – Old Rauma*. 1992. Rauma: The Museum of Rauma.