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Cultural Changes and the Finnish Architectural Review 1967-76

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Finland underwent extensive economic and cultural change as it became urbanised and industrialised from early 1960s on. Shopping centres and motorways became part of the landscape. Lifestyles changed, with increased wealth, more private cars, television, mildly alcoholic drinks in grocery stores, and the Pill. From the mid-1960s on, the Social Democratic Party was in power and social reforms were undertaken. The effects of the reforms, such as social security, a renewed education system, and the 5-day working week, were visible in many areas of life, even in extensive town planning. The baby-boom generation of the 1940s was growing up; housing, schools, universities, and civic offices were built. Cultural life became radical, at first with liberal and social tendencies and new global perspectives, and, from the early 1970s, with pronouncedly left-wing political views. During the spring of 1968 the academic and cultural revolution reached Finland from the western world. It merged with the generation gap, leading the post-war baby-boomers to a rebellion against the older generation, with their patriotic and conservative values. The effects of the social reforms were also visible in the Finnish Architectural Review, "Arkkitehti" as represented by extensive town planning as well as universities, civic offices and schools. Increased leisure time and a newly gained wealth were reflected in buildings connected to tourism and in summer cottagesas well as in an interest in Lapland and the archipelago.

From 1957 to 1978 a record-breaking over one million new dwelling units were built. The building companies

1. *Dipoli student house in Otaniemi by Reima and Raili Pietilä, 1961-66*

2. *Dipoli student house in Otaniemi by Reima and Raili Pietilä, 1961-66*

designed and built complete population centres. A high-class example of the dense "compact towns", which had become the ideal, was the Turku Student Village. However, most housing areas were constructed entirely under the conditions of prefabricated building production. The architects were organised into large design teams, who offered their work to decision-makers and building companies. Many architects became civil servants. Even though the "assembly line" reinforced concrete-built blocks of flats were an ideal of modernism, many architects felt helpless when confronted with the prefabricated element technology.[1]

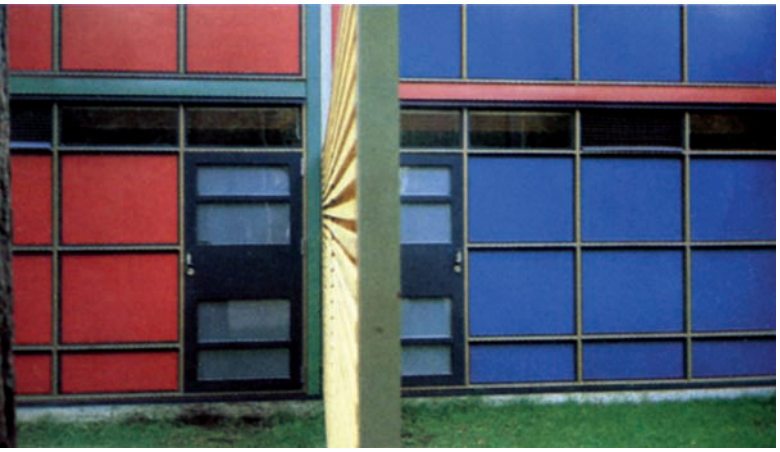
A loose group of architects, often in cooperation with like-minded artists and designers, called themselves constructivists and started their careers in the mid-1960s. Models for the constructivists' architecture came from diverse sources. Their much-admired teacher, Professor Aulis Blomstedt (1906-1979) taught his students aesthetic minimalism and a proportional system he had developed in the spirit of Le Corbusier. He admired the architecture of Mies van der Rohe and traditional Japanese architecture and gave his students an interest in rationalist building systems.[2] The studio of Aarno Ruusuvuori (1925-1992) provided further education for many young architects. Ruusuvuori was also influenced by the work of Le Corbusier, especially in his use of rough-cast concrete. Furthermore, the new architecture from the United States gave models ranging from Mies van der Rohe to West Coast case study houses, especially the Eames house with its ready-made components. Constructivists strived for an architecture that was anonymous, aesthetically controlled, logical-mathematical and "user-centred" Japanism and asceticism, combined with minimal articulation and colorfulness, seemed to be important aesthetic ideals. At the end of the 1960s the constructivists started to undertake research into prefabricated element systems, an important model for them being Mies van der Rohe. Their work, emphasising structurality, succeeded best in industrial buildings, such as the diaries for the Valio company and the factories for the Marimekko company as well as in single-family housing. The best known architect members of the group were Kirmo Mikkola, Juhani Pallasmaa, Kristian Gullichsen, Erkki Kairamo and Ola Laiho.[3]

Only in the late 1960s did young constructivists undertake research into prefabricated element systems, for example Erkki Kairamo (1936-94) and Kristian Gullichsen (1932), with Juhani Pallasmaa (1936). In their architecture the construction was openly shown and transparency was created by large glazed window areas. Strong colour schemes for the exteriors were created in collaboration with artists. The artist Jorma Hautala collaborated with Erkki Kairamo in the colour scheme for a three-house group of terraced buildings at Honkatie 3 in Espoo (1971). The main façades onto the street are refined and neutrally coloured; there is a Japanese spirit in the rhythms of wooden shutters and windows. The private courtyard side had been sketched intially in two different ways. The first sketch was based on a white, gray and black scale that differentiates the construction frame, surfaces, and window and door frames. The second sketch was initiated by the mutual friend, Kirmo Mikkola and was much bolder. The courtyard side became a colour play: red, blue and green fields exchange places as do the colours of the frame. The panels were made of baked sheet metal, evoking the industrial design ideal that was a vital part of the Constructivists' ideology. In the interiors, with a double-height living room á la Corbusier, sliding doors in primary colours cite the Schröder house.[4]

For the so-called wooden module constructivism an important model was the Japanese wooden building tradition; the other were the houses in Finnish neoclassical wooden towns. Kristian Gullichsen worked together with Juhani Pallasmaa on the pre-fabrication system called Module, which was designed as a hybridid between Lego (based on blocks) and Meccano (based on structure). The Module was based on the idea of constructive and perspective flexibility, clients being able to choose the design and compose the parts of

1. Niskanen, Aino: A time of experimentation. The use of concrete in architecture of the 1940s and 1950s. *Concrete in Finnish Architecure*. Helsinki: The Finnish Museum of Architecture and association of the Concrete Industry in Finland. 1990, pp. 28-47.
2. Mikkola, Kirmo: *Architecture in Finland in the 20th century*. Huhmari 1981.
3. Niskanen, Aino: From Utopia to Reality, 1967…1976. *Arkkitehti 2/2003*, pp. 80-87.
4. Interview of Hautala by Niskanen 2005; *Arkkitehti 8/1976*, p. 3.

3. *Terraced houses, Westend Helsinki by Erkki Kairamo – Aulikki Jylhä, 1971*



4. *Terraced houses, Westend Helsinki by Erkki Kairamo – Aulikki Jylhä, 1971*

the house a kind of do-it-yourself housing.[5] The first Module house was produced in 1973. The project was initially applied just to holiday homes. Some 60 houses were manufactured. The production programme was dropped fairly soon, it was not a commercial success.

A sauna near the water, designed by Aarno Ruusuvuori, was another example of strict modularity. The sauna building was developed from an experimental house for the Marimekko company. It had a tripartite arrangement consisting of an outdoor space, a washing room, and the sauna itself, all three parts separated by glass walls. The outdoor space could be transferred into an indoor one by means of canvas walls – Marimekko textile, of course. The photograph by Simo Rista of the sauna near the water is one of the iconic images of Finnish architecture, with its unreachable fairy-tale island in the middle of the image field. The framed view towards a lake is somehow Japanese in its spirit but also contains the essence of Finnish sauna rituals with a view of a virginal landscape.[6]

The leading figure of the architectural profession in Finland, Alvar Aalto, was accused of exclusiveness and individualism by the constructivists. Also the architecture of Reima Pietilä was much too individual for them. The debate in the Finnish Architectural Review following the publication in 1967 of Reima Pietilä's Dipoli Student Union in Otaniemi, Espoo building, became a classic. International critics, Norwegian Christian Norberg-Schulz, German Udo Kütermann and Polish Oscar Hansen praised Dipoli. Juhani Pallasmaa criticised the form of the building for being an end in itself. However, Pietilä justified the form as a means for architecture to answer the needs of society: Dipoli tested how architecture could "be aesthetically classless" and "blur the boundaries".[7] Though Pietilä failed to receive any commissions in Finland for many years, he continued a discussion through exhibitions and articles in which language and pictures were combined.

During the editorship of the the Finnish Architectural Review by Kirmo Mikkola, 1967-68, Finnish cultural life generally became more radicalised. To start with, the journal edited by Mikkola was coloured by cheery anarchy and utopias. Buckminster Fuller's geodesic domes and the works by Archigram created interest. Work by young architects, and even students, was presented. Many of these were "non-buildings", such as an ambulatory clinic and a transportable reindeer slaughter house, not to mention transportable churches, of which three were actually built. The plan for the centre of Tapiola suburb was one of the first examples of Finnish structuralism, a flexible and continuous

5. *Arkkitehti 371969; Finnish architecture 1975. Exhibition of Finnish architecture.* Torino 1975, p. 34, Brandolini, Sebastiano: Kristian Gullichsen, Erkki Kairamo & Timo Vormala: architecture 1969-2000. Milano 2000, pp. 74-79.
6. *Arkkitehti 1/2003*, p. 29.
7. *Arkkitehti 5/1967* and *Arkkitehti 9/1967*; *Pietilä intermediate zones in modern architecture*. Edited by Noprri et al. Helsinki 1985, pp. 54-55.

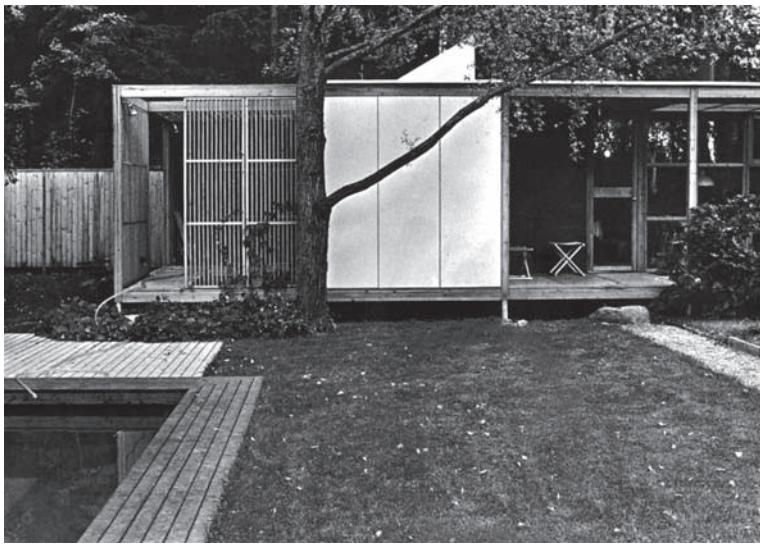
5. *Marimekko sauna by Ruusuvuori, photo Simo Rista*

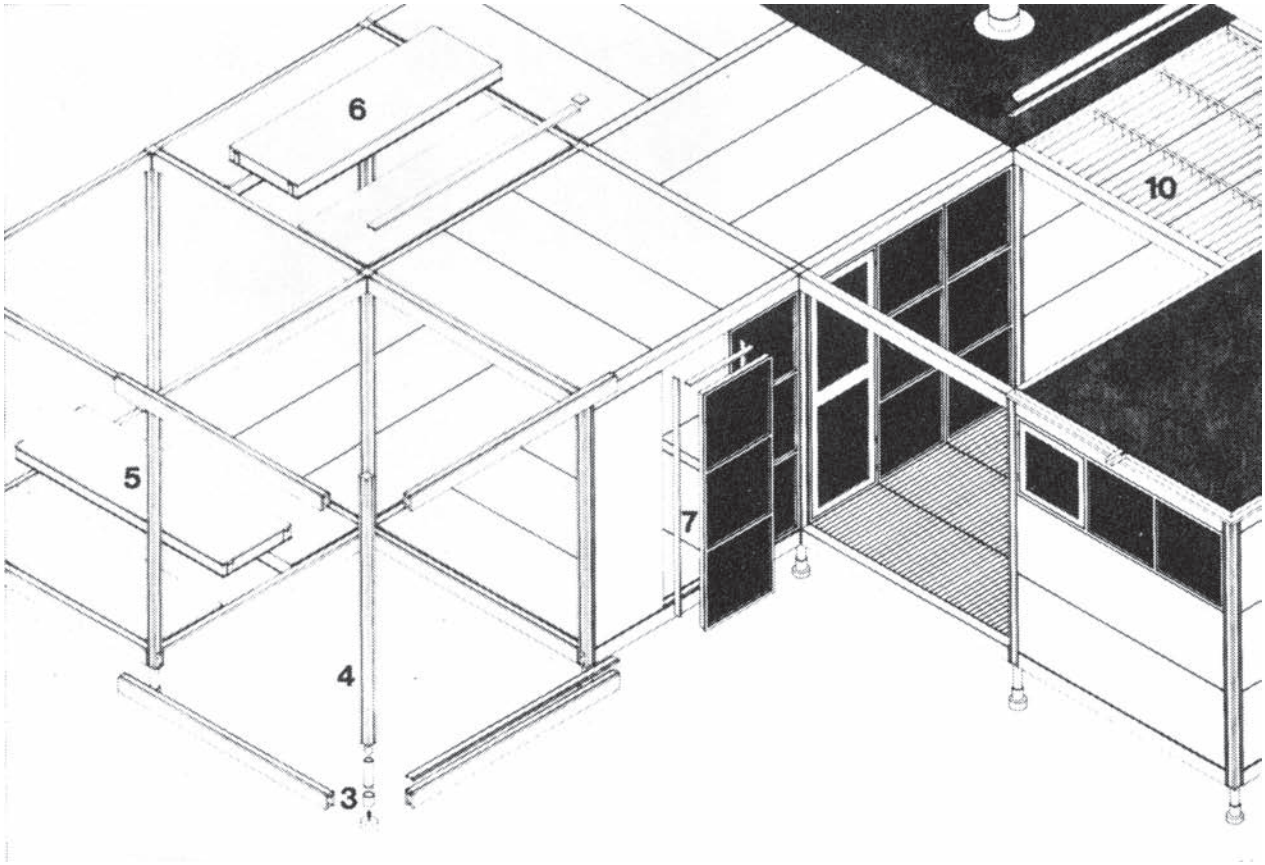
system of covered central spaces.[8] The generation gap culminated in the issue of the journal published in the mad spring of 1968, a time when there was unrest throughout the western world. The Vietnam war, famine in developing countries, the pollution of the environment, the Paris student demonstrations and even the conquering of space appeared on the pages of the journal. The issue dealing with education edited by students contained the words "globalism, equality, democracy, indoctrination, commercialism, bourgeoisie, workgroup, and hit squad".[9] It was no wonder that older colleagues were upset and the number of subscribers to the journal dropped.

During the next editorship, 1969-71, the need for scientific research was emphasised. There was a lot of text and few pictures in the journal. Even mathematical analyses were applied to architectural critique and aesthetical values. Norms, design methodology, and futurology were written about. The role of the architect was discussed: "The ... design architect will disappear... also in the future be needed as one expert among others."[10] The high points of works published in the journal in the early 1970s were Kouvola Town Hall, the Suvikumpu residential area in Tapiola, the

8. *Arkkitehti 7/ 1968*.
9. *Arkkitehti 6/1968*.
10. *Arkkitehti 7/1968*, interview by Matti K.Mäkinen .

6. *Modular system, Gullichsen-Pallasmaa 1968-73*



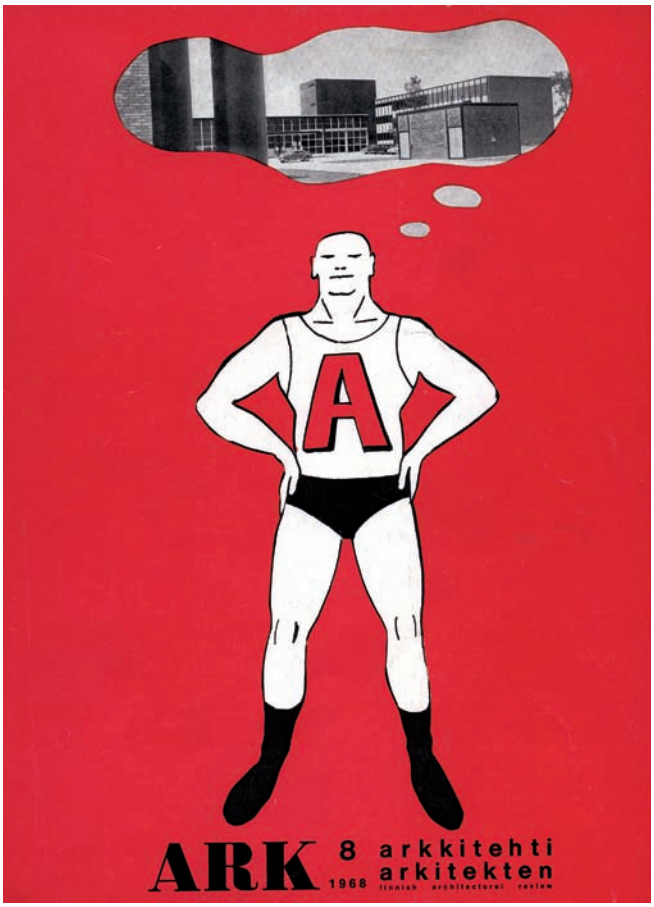


7. *Modular system, Gullichsen-Pallasmaa 1968-73.*

Temppeliaukio Church in Helsinki, and the Hyrylä garrison heating plant. The global angle and a growing environmental consciousness were evident in the 1970s in articles about communes, children's environment and work in developing countries. Topical publications about social issues were discussed. The debate about the residential environment began with a critique of the prefabricated concrete suburbs. Building restoration became topical in architectural education and public consciousness generally, and became an official part of architectural design. City centres, however changed dramatically when the old fabric was demolished to make way for new office buildings. The structure of the old wooden towns was destroyed. Public transport was argued for, Helsinki received a metro and pedestrian streets were experimented with in the Helsinki city centre.

The 10-year period from 1967 to 1976 was design-wise rather straight forward, and curves and diagonals had not yet arrived. The presentation of Robert Venturi's Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture in 1968 led, with a delay, to postmodernism in the early 1980s, and the presentation of Norberg-Schulz's publications in the early 1970s were the first symptoms of the phenomenon of the 1980s. The most positive sides of the period were collective responsibility and care of the everyday life of common man. In the discussions within the profession itself there were also active differences of opinion which later diluted into consensus.

Optimism in the growth of the economy and technology prevailed until 1973, after which followed energy crisis, economic recession and a halt in building production.



8. *Arkkitehti journal edited by the students, cover 8/1968 by Mikko Heikkinen*