Abstract: Nature in urban planning is a constantly fluctuating concept, which is manifested in attempts by designers to define a good living environment and its green spaces. The transition from the Finnish forest town to the compact city between the 1950s and 1970s represents a paradigm shift which epitomizes a change in the notion of nature. Although the concept of both the forest town and compact city pursued wellbeing and quality, the ideas about appropriate methods for urban planning varied substantially. The forest town of the 1950s fostered the idea of preserving the landscape in its natural state, and landscape design introduced the aesthetic and social values of nature to urban structures. In the compact city phase in the late 1960s, the constructed urban green and networks of social contacts in efficient grid plans replaced the natural environment. The site-sensitive approach of the forest town was replaced by quantitative instructions on green spaces and requirements for playgrounds.

In Finland, post-war residential planning has been mainly studied from the perspective of urban planning and architecture. However, less attention has been paid to how forest towns and compact cities relate to nature and landscape design, or to the contributions of the landscape architects who worked alongside the architects. Nevertheless, nature and green spaces are an integral part of these urban ideals. Our article explores landscapes in forest towns and compact cities, and examines meanings and their societal contexts assigned to nature by urban planners and landscape architects. How was the welfare state and its urban planning ideals conceptualized and materialized in landscape design? Using two case studies in Helsinki – Keski-Vuosaari forest town and Itä-Pasila compact city – we examine these two urban ideals that appear contradictory in numerous ways. We aim to diversify the understanding of these concepts and elucidate the interpretations, in both eras, of nature as a source of wellbeing. We demonstrate that the representations of nature in sparse and dense cities are not contradictory and mutually exclusive, but complementary. We also discuss how the transition from forest town to compact city is reflected in today’s urban planning discourse and in the current struggle between sparsely and densely built urban structures.
Post-war construction in Finland was characterised by a strong social conscience and a national aspiration for common good, which was encapsulated in residential suburbs. In Finland, Tapiola in Espoo was considered a renowned model community of the 1950s, built in accordance with the garden city ideology. Its landscape and green spaces, along with the architecture, were intrinsic to the cityscape and the objectives of the welfare state. Whilst Tapiola garden city focused on designed landscapes, its successor, the forest town, fostered the idea of preserving the landscape in its natural state. After the 1960s, industrialisation, rationalisation and new ideals of urban planning led to strong criticism of sparsely built forest and garden cities and the emergence of densely built compact cities. In the efficient grid plans, the immediacy of nature was replaced by built urban greenery and the network of social contacts. Both the forest and compact city concepts served the construction of the welfare state, but their means and their relationship with nature differed to a significant degree.

In Finland, post-war residential planning has been mainly studied from the perspective of urban planning and architecture. However, less attention has been paid to the forest and compact cities’ relationship with nature and their landscape design or to the contributions of the landscape architects who worked alongside the architects. Nevertheless, nature and green spaces pertain to building healthy and functional communities. Our article explores landscapes in forest and compact cities and examines the meanings and their societal contexts assigned to nature by urban planners and landscape architects. How was the welfare state conceptualized and materialized in landscape design? The question is linked to the topical and, particularly in the Nordic countries, growing interest in the landscapes and natural environments of the post-war welfare state.

Our article falls within the context of research on Finnish urban planning and especially into residential areas. This research tradition presents a creditable analysis of the ideologies behind the construction projects and their ethical and social objectives. Our research builds on several earlier studies on urban planning and adds a new perspective on landscape and urban green. An important inspiration for our study has been geographer Virpi Hirvensalo’s doctoral thesis, which analyses the nature relationship of modern urban planning. Riitta Hurme discusses in her doctoral thesis the development of Finnish suburbs from Tapiola’s garden city to Pihlajamäki’s forest town. Johanna Hankonen, in turn, explores the implementation of efficiency in suburban construction. Kirsi Saarikangas has widely examined the development of the Finnish way of life from housing design to residential district planning. Moreover, the book Unelma paremmasta maailmasta (A Dream of a Better World), published in 2016, examines, for the first time, more extensively the landscape design of modern residential areas.

Our aim is to examine the forest town and
compact city from the perspective of landscape design and the nature relationship of these urban planning ideals. The notion of nature is highly elusive, referring at the same time to a place and its natural elements, and more conceptually to “the other” of human society. We use both dimensions of the notion, examining how nature is conceptually interpreted and materially constructed in design. The phenomena of forest town and compact city are complex and encompass a wide range of different urban planning ideals. We focus on the nature relationship of these urban planning ideals, and acknowledge that several other aspects, characteristics of these concepts are not addressed in this framing. With the forest town we specifically refer to the sparse and nature-rich residential areas, inspired by garden city ideals and functionalism from the 1950s. The compact city, also called the structural city, represents a paradigm shift in the late 1960s, emphasizing high-density urban areas with grid plan and man-made urban green. Furthermore, we concentrate on the high-rise and do not address dense and low housing areas, characteristic of this era as well.

The two urban ideals seem to be opposite— not only in density, but also in relation to nature and its two dimensions: the untouched and man-made nature. Nature was regarded as an integral part of the planning of the forest town, but was largely ignored in the compact city discourse. Furthermore, the later evaluation of forest and compact cities reveals interesting differences. Forest towns were praised for their natural setting but criticized for their ineffective land use. Compact cities, for their part, were valued for their density but simultaneously were denounced as monotonous concrete-built environments. In this article, we aim to diversify the understanding of the two urban planning ideals and elucidate both eras’ landscape qualities and interpretations of nature as a source of wellbeing. We demonstrate that the nature representations of sparse and dense cities are not opposites and exclusive of one another but complementary.

We also discuss how the notions of forest and compact cities are reflected in today’s urban planning discourse and in the current wrestle between sparsely and densely built urban structures. The aspiration towards sustainability has led to the renaissance of the compact city ideal and simultaneously, the low-density suburbs have been presented as undesirable. The interpretations of forest town and compact city have changed but as in the 1950-70s, the tension between the dense and the sparse remains the prevailing narrative. This narrative also reshapes the representation of nature and defines what kind of nature is acceptable and desirable in the ideal city.

Even though the context of this study is Finland, the phenomena of garden and forest towns and compact cities have several parallels in the international movements of urban planning. The Nordic countries offer the closest references. In Sweden, the combination of functionalism and social democratic idea of the people’s home resulted in the construction of suburbs in the 1930-1950s, characterized at its best by careful planning of parks and green areas. Similarly in Norway, the modernist planning absorbed the aspects of garden city into new town ideas. Like in Finland, the compact city led to both mass production and the revival of the urbanity. For example in Sweden, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed the implementation of the Million Homes Programme and the rationalization and industrialization of the housing sector. Good intentions of neighbourhood planning were not fully achieved and the results came to be known as concrete suburbs or sleeping towns. The environmental debate attacked the monotonous suburbs and the explosion of the city, with Jan Gehl’s Livet mellem husene (1970) as one of the debate’s powerful statements. Even if the mass housing areas have received a lot of criticism, the recent research has called for a re-evaluation of this legacy and its qualities that have mainly been bypassed. The need for a more multidimensional review is an important starting point also for us, looking closer at the landscape of the Finnish forest and compact cities.
Keski-Vuosaari and Itä-Pasila as case studies

We have chosen to examine two residential districts in Helsinki which embody the change in the design paradigm: Vuosaari, now known as Keski-Vuosaari, and Itä-Pasila. Vuosaari in eastern Helsinki, built in the 1960s, has been regarded as a representative of the forest town concept in Finland, and it gained a special status in the Helsinki 2002 master plan as a significant cultural environment and built heritage. Despite the historical significance of the district, it still lacks thorough research and only a few inventories have been conducted on it. Compact Itä-Pasila, built as an extension to the inner-city in the 1970s, symbolises the quintessential and highly criticised aspirations of the age of efficiency. The area has been widely discussed by architects and urban planners, in addition to the press and the general public that criticised the area already in its construction phase. The discourse has, however, by-passed the district’s urban greenery. We evaluate the aspirations assigned to landscapes and nature within the chosen areas and the role landscape design played in their implementation. How were the social objectives of the welfare state justified and embedded in landscape design?

The primary sources for our research include the landscape design documents for Vuosaari and Itä-Pasila, drafted by two established Finnish landscape architects: Katri Luostarinen and Leena Iisakkila. Katri Luostarinen’s (1915–1991) collection of drawings includes around 20 drafts for Keski-Vuosaari, drawn in 1964–1969. The area has previously been examined in two thorough inventory reports. Landscape architect Leena Lisakkila (1927–) drafted an extensive amount of landscape designs for Itä-Pasila. An inventory has never been carried out in Itä-Pasila, and the source literature on the area concerns its construction phase, bypassing its
green structure. Luostarinen and Iisakkila have also written landscape design books, which illuminate their thoughts and the ideals of the era and are used here to support the planning material. Katri Luostarinen discusses landscape design from large sites to small garden details in her books, *Puutarha ja maisema* (Garden and Landscape, 1951) and *Viihtyisä piha* (Cosy Garden, 1966). Leena Iisakkila published garden design examples in her report *Piha vihreäksi – neljä suunnitteluesimerkkiä* (Green courtyard – four examples, 1985) and collected her design projects into the book *Maisema-arkkitehti ajan virrassa* (Landscape Architect in the flow of the time, 2000).

**Nature relationship of urban planning**

Nature and the city constitute a core conceptual alliance and tension in the construction of modern residential areas. The academic discussion has accentuated the mutual dependency and intertwined relationship of the society and nature. The production of modern cities has historically been infused by visions and ideologies about the conceptualisation of nature in the city. Despite the intense study of the nature/city relationship in academic literature, a systematic analysis of the spatial implications has remained understudied.

Nature in urban planning is a constantly fluctuating concept, which is manifested in designers’ attempts to define a good living environment and the ultimate green spaces for it. Nature appears simultaneously as the vision behind the design and as the object of design, construction or maintenance. Nature has been associated with strong aesthetic but also moral, hygienic and social objectives, which have gained their form in the plans for residential areas, the network of green spaces and the design
of individual parks and gardens. The attitudes towards nature have changed with urbanisation, industrialisation and social circumstances as well as scientific evolution.

The dichotomy between city and nature has been representative of modernism. The nature/society dualism has been produced not only on a theoretical and conceptual level but also translated into spatial practices in urban planning. Nature in a city has been considered as non-nature and nature found outside the city as genuine nature. Valsson (1999) has separated different periods in the tense relationship between nature and the city. The evolution has not been linear; it has fluctuated between reactions and responses. The changing ideals of land use efficiency and the geometrical or organic forms of architecture have determined the trajectories. According to Valsson, modern urban planning can be divided roughly into three ages: the age of integration, the age of alienation and the age of reconnecting. Finland’s forest town from the 1950s represents the first era, which rested on the balance between city and nature, and the construction was carefully integrated into the landscape sparing the topography, vegetation and natural elements. The compact city phase, which started in the late 1960s, implies to Valsson’s idea of the age of alienation which cut the link with nature, replaced it with constructed greenery and isolated genuine nature outside the city. The third phase from the 1980s, the era of reconnecting, stems from ecological awareness and the search for a new equilibrium with nature and the city. Despite the roughness of Valsson’s categorization, it captures an underlying narrative in the evolution of the nature relationship of urban planning.

A town in a forest – nature as the source of wellbeing

In the post-war era, urban planning became a public sector undertaking and a core part of implementing the welfare state. The vigorous reconstruction and new residential areas, public buildings and roads pertained to the national project during which agricultural Finland transformed into a more modern, industrialised nation. Urban areas grew and changed significantly. The urban development was inspired by suburban construction based on late-functionalism, which became the dominant design paradigm in Finland for decades.

The 1950s’ forest town ideal is regarded as a somewhat Finnish phenomenon, even if it originated in the synthesis of a number of international influences. Its most significant inspirations were the garden city ideology and the examples of Ebenezer Howard’s garden cities, New Towns in England and the Siedlung residential districts in Germany. Clarence Perry’s theory on suburbs, Le Corbusier’s futuristic urban visions and Lewis Mumford’s ideological criticism of metropolises also influenced Finnish thinking. The post-World War II suburban theory based on concentrated decentralisation with Finland’s first professor of urban planning, Otto-Iivari Meurman as its most significant advocate. According to Meurman’s Asemakaavaoppi (Urban Planning Handbook), published in 1947, housing was to be organised in separate communities surrounded by green zones, with the communities then divided into neighbourhood units and further into smaller residential units. The aim of suburbs was to combine what was optimal in cities and the country, following the earlier garden city ideal.

The model community for the forest town was the garden city plan for Tapiola produced by Meurman in 1945. The aerial view demonstrates how Tapiola combined two of the key principles of garden cities: the open block structure of modernism and the close proximity to nature. It offered a spacious alternative for the narrow and gloomy stone blocks in the city centre and the monotonous districts of detached houses. Well-designed green spaces, designed by landscape and garden architects, contributed significantly to the identity of Tapiola.

Although the forest town grew from the garden city movement and implemented many of its ideals, its relationship to nature was different. Compared to Tapiola, which used landscape planning to create a designed park-like landscape, the emphasis for forest cities was to pre-
sent nature in its natural state. The proximity to nature and particularly to forests possessed significant symbolic value when the urbanisation started in earnest in Finland, and the population was moving at increasing rates from the country to cities. In forest towns, nature was reclaimed as a factor that supports wellbeing and moral values, as well as, as aesthetic ideals. In addition to the moral function of the forest town, it also reflected the aesthetic visions of architecture. The landscape, topographical features, vegetation and cardinal directions were carefully considered in the configuration of buildings.

**Vuosaari – the modern forest town**

The zoning of Vuosaari in eastern Helsinki was launched in the 1950s by the area’s largest landowner, Saseka Oy, a brick and building element factory. Earlier, the area had been a land reserve for Helsinki’s industry and harbour operations, but due to the growing housing shortage and the lack of cheap undeveloped land, the area

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**Figure 3. Tapiola garden city in the 1960s with its designed garden-like milieus and forest areas. Photo: Teuvo Kanerva, Espoo City Museum.**
was reserved for housing. In the late 1950s, Olof Stenius, Helsinki City’s town planning architect, prepared a local detailed plan for the area with approximately 20,000 homes. The local detailed plan was finally approved in 1965, and Vuosaari became part of Helsinki in the annexation of 1966.33

The local detailed plan for Vuosaari followed the principles presented by Meurman.34 The town plan was sparse, and the built housing square metres matched the square metres of green space. The aerial photograph of the unbuilt area illustrates how the arrangement of residential buildings were to observe the topography of the area, and the buildings were to be assembled around a central park with public buildings adjacent to it. An external feeder road system was to ensure safe walking routes using the pedestrian walkways through the park areas.35

The largest developer in the area was the non-profit-making organisation Asuntosäästätät ry, which aimed to provide social housing. Some of the construction was carried out collectively by local residents. The community spirit also extended to finalising the outdoor areas.36 The residents formed an attachment to their new surroundings by planting trees and shrubs together. In 1965, the housing companies established the Vuosaari Foundation, which was responsible for the development and maintenance of the public areas and organised services for the local inhabitants.37 Thus, the scope of the building project was extensive and reflected many of the objectives associated with the construction of the welfare state.

Special attention was also given to Vuosaari’s landscape design. Asuntosäästätät ry employed landscape architect Katri Luostarinen, known as a wide-ranging professional specialising in residential areas and later as the first professor of landscape planning.38 The aim of the local detailed plan in Vuosaari was to preserve and emphasise the area’s existing nature, its rocks, forests and old agricultural land and take them as the premise for the planning. The highest rocky hills were left undisturbed and the low-lying terrain was preserved as park land. Blocks of flats were built on hillsides and terraced houses by open fields. The only designed parks were the narrow strips on both sides of the main streets.39

Luostarinen valued Finnish landscapes and nature as a starting point for planning.40 According to her, it was even more important to provide accessible nature to residents in urban areas than in the countryside. The prerequisite for wellbeing was to promote people’s attachment to their neighbourhood through the surrounding nature and local green spaces with the possibilities for outdoor recreation, playing and exercise close to home. In Vuosaari’s marketing, the surrounding natural environment was pivotal to the area’s identity. According to developer’s magazine, “Vuosaari is rich in untouched for-
Figure 5. Above: Existing vegetation and preserved pine trees between the long residential blocks of Kivisaarentie 12, Vuosaari. Photo: Éeva Rista. Helsinki City Museum.

Figure 6. Below: Courtyard plan for Säästökeula, Säästömasto and Säästöpoiju in Vuosaari by Katri Luostarinen. The residential blocks follow the topography and the contours of the rocky hill. Finnish Museum of Architecture.
ests, lush seaside and idyllic woodland ponds. Its local detailed plan aims to retain, where possible, the area’s harmony with nature. Architecture accentuated the topography and inherent characteristics of the area: the long low-rise buildings did not rise above the treeline and the high-rise blocks of flats aimed to emphasise the high places. An illustrative example of the importance of the topography is Luostarinen’s plan (figure 6) for residential blocks “Säästökeula”, “Säästömasto” and “Säästöpoiju” where the courtyard has been adjusted to a rocky hill.

Nature in Vuosaari forest town was organised in aesthetic and functional typologies which ranged from wilderness to maintained nature and garden-like milieus. The idea behind the careful design of the courtyard functions was to preserve the unbuilt, natural environment surrounding the buildings as the example of Kivisaarentie 12 shows (figure 5). The courtyard design highlighted the aims to apply elements of natural landscape into the courtyard. As an example, in block 64, designed by Katri Luostarinen, the central area of the courtyard featured a “meadow” and the surrounding “forest-like wilderness” continued as a maintained park strip through the middle of the plot. The heath plants and other wild flowers were moved from the forest, sown from seed or bought as forest seedlings. Traditional decorative garden verdure was planted only in the immediate vicinity of the buildings.

Katri Luostarinen had a pragmatic way of communicating the notion of wellbeing and Finns’ special relationship with nature for which others - architects and writers - were also looking for a suitable, modern expression. The proximity to nature was believed to promote social wellbeing. For the new city dwellers, a home surrounded by greenery provided a link to the traditional lifestyle in the countryside. The vernacular values were translated to correspond with the modern way of living. The forest town also presented an opportunity of a better standard of living for the working-classes residing in cramped and inadequate conditions in the centre of the city. The courtyard setting with its plants was an extension to the home and its importance for the wellbeing and comfort of the inhabitants was regarded as significant. The courtyard rooted people to their home and neighbourhood.

**Rational nature in the compact city**

The design paradigm and the ideals of urban planning reversed in the late 1960s. Industrialisation and the demands for the rationalisation of construction led to new building techniques and more efficient production. The industrial building production provided an answer to the growing housing shortages due to the structural societal changes and rural flight. Finland was becoming urbanised at an increasingly fast rate.

The sparsely built forest town was replaced by an urban and dense grid plan, which offered a solution for the efficiency requirements. Structuralism was the new guideline for architecture. The modular grid concept served precast concrete element construction and serial production. The element technology increased building efficiency and the height of buildings and changed the features of architecture. Structural thinking also led to the construction of larger unified areas.

The density of the compact city also strove for a new style of urban culture and effective services for which the forest town was not seen to cater. The motto “the compact city is a contact city” embodied the objectives of urban planning to create communities and venues for human encounters. The contact city concept also impacted the ideals for nature and green spaces within residential areas. The green spaces in the forest towns were considered by critics to enforce individualism and weaken social interaction. The compact city ideal’s notion of nature was in many ways the opposite of the forest town. Whilst the forest town fitted into the landscape and its topography, the module grid of the compact city did not interact with the natural elements of the site. The existing landscape and nature were replaced by planned and planted urban greenery. Instead of aesthetic features, the compact city focused on functions
of nature, and particularly the operation of pedestrian and cycle routes and the sufficiency of sports and playground facilities. The belief in standards and comprehensive planning surpassed earlier design aims, which took into consideration the site and landscape. Nature was considered an element that did not belong to a compact city and it became invisible in the planning rhetorics.

Whilst the forest town criticism concentrated on the sparse and fragmented urban plans and poor transport solutions, the realised compact cities were chiefly condemned for their large-scale industrial construction and assembly-line-style of production. Rationalism was on many sites harnessed to serve the speed of construction, but instead of creating efficiency and simplified structures, it resulted in bleakness. Despite the problems associated with compact cities, structuralism provided a basis for environmental design and the environmental movement of the 1970s. The ecological environment criticism in Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* and Ian
McHarg’s seminal *Design with Nature* offered guidelines for ecological urban design, which recognised the interaction between the city and nature and their connection to environmental problems.98

**Urban centre expands**
- **Itä-Pasila’s compact city district**

The Pasila area, north of the city centre and adjacent to the main railway line, was connected already in the early 20th century to the expansion plans of the City of Helsinki. However, the area’s zoning was not initiated until the early 1970s with the completion of the master plan for Pasila in 1971.59 In the plan, the area was divided into two parts: eastern Itä-Pasila and western Länsi-Pasila.

In 1967, architect Reijo Jallinoja, an influential advocate for compact cities, outlined in his master’s thesis a theoretical model of a centre system and the impacts of industrialisation and mass production on urban planning and architecture.60 Pasila’s eastern compact city district designed for 6,400 inhabitants became the site for the practical application of Jallinoja’s model. The local detailed plan for Itä-Pasila was a uniform grid plan covering almost the entire area. The dense grid enabled mass production, offered flexibility for changing the use of plots and allowed for building the area in stages.61

The new social and rational objectives of urban planning were reflected in Itä-Pasila’s planning. The aim was to establish an urban lifestyle by combining residential and office buildings. The desired inhabitants would regard services and an active urban lifestyle as the most im-

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**Figure 8. Social structures such as playgrounds were an important feature of the compact city ideology. Photo: Harri Ahola. Helsinki City Museum.**
important value for their home. Itä-Pasila’s grid plan and dense block structure was believed to generate socially active urban environments that enforce encounters and interaction, “positive conflicts”, between people. Social spaces created the urban identity of the area. Itä-Pasila’s block structure and traffic solutions with the pedestrian decks were envisioned as “a protected and safe haven featuring pedestrian networks, vegetation and shops”. Thus, the objectives of building a welfare state were reflected in particular in the reformation of the social dimension of urban structures.

The construction of Itä-Pasila was started from scratch. The grid structure, inspired by the compact city ideal, did not take the existing terrain into account. Due to the steep topography, the original rock face was only preserved at the edges of the area and as small hillocks in the courtyards. The area’s urban greenery had to be built anew. The plan proposed fewer green spaces than was customary for residential districts. However, landscape design was applied to create a pleasant setting for social interaction and encounters between people. The design was assigned by the City of Helsinki Public Works Department, and the work was carried out by landscape architect Leena Iisakkila. Iisakkila had an extensive experience of designing residential areas in the Greater Helsinki Region, and in the 1970s she worked as the acting assistant professor of landscape planning in the Helsinki University of Technology.

The planning relied on the hierarchical typology of recreational areas for different functions. Iisakkila proposed a compact green structure framework for the area: the yards, neighbourhood parks, the green pedestrian paths, neighbourhood playgrounds and parks, as demonstrated in the figure 9. The green structure plan also propounded connections to the regional green structure networks. The hierarchy pertained to the design of courtyards as well and was manifest in spaces for the activities of people of different ages.

The landscape design was governed by the standards assuring the quality of the area. Particular attention was given to the quantitative space requirements for outdoor recreational areas and playgrounds, in addition to the amount of play equipment, as the photograph of a playground in Itä-Pasila illustrates (figure 8). The requirement for machine maintenance also affected the design. The plant selection available for the designers became limited with the official guidelines produced by the Board of Agriculture in 1966. The unified range of woody plants cultivated in nurseries were to be economical, hardy and low-maintenance.

The local detailed plan regulations defined a
rough framework for the landscape design and urged for a “sufficient number of large trees” to be planted. “Efficient green masses” were to compensate for the limited scale and quantity of the green areas. The aim was to establish lush, carefully designed spaces to contrast with the vast concrete structures. Fast-growing species were favoured and the greenery was accomplished by planting large trees and thick shrubs in the pedestrian areas and in parks to provide shelter from wind.73 Particular attention had to be given to the vegetation in playgrounds and neighbourhood parks to achieve pleasant spaces.74 The detailed planting schemes and alternative types for courtyards were to frame different social interactions (figure 10). The use of vegetation reflected the design ideals of the period: vegetation separated different functions and prevented disturbances. The intention was also to achieve ease of maintenance and durability.75

The origins of Itä-Pasila stemmed from the desire for renewal and the criticism the new generation of architects directed at the wide and sparse forest towns. The objective was to achieve a walkable city; however, the result was a stripped-down version of the plan, without the conveyor belts, heated pavements and many of the spaces intended for social encounters. In the discussions on Itä-Pasila, two interpretations emerged: the unreserved idealisation or complete dismissal of the area. It was either praised as a bold display of the power of urban development or regarded as bleak, empty and grim with its wide gulfs of streets.76 The area’s planner Reijo Jallinoja noted already in 1974 that the implementation did not meet the original architectural objectives. One of the leading proponents for structural planning, Kirmo Mikkola called the area a “milieu catastrophe” in his criticism of the early 1970s urban planning.77 However, it is an interesting fact that the residents experience the area as pleasant.78 As time has passed, urban greenery has formed a contrast to the built environment; although in landscape architect Lisakkila’s opinion, the vegetation has over the decades grown “even too lush”.79

Nature in cities yesterday and today

Discussions about nature and the contradictory notions of it are manifested in the paradigm shift of Finnish urban planning and the transition from the forest town to the compact city between the 1950s and 1970s. Although both the forest and compact city concepts pursued wellbeing and quality, the ideas about the appropriate methods for urban planning varied substantially. So far, research on the involvement

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**Figure 10.** Compact green in the dense Itä-Pasila: type plan 1 for courtyards by Leena Lisakkila. The detailed planting was designed to frame the social functions. Finnish Museum of Architecture.
and significance of landscape design has been limited, but our research alone would indicate that the understanding of the two urban ideals is more multi-dimensional than the urban planning discourse would imply.

The forest town movement, reflecting Nordic welfare ideas, put the wellbeing of people and particularly families with children to the forefront. Housing in sparsely populated areas surrounded by untouched nature provided a means to bring about wellbeing. In the 1950s, the design of new residential areas and courtyards sought to achieve outdoor lifestyles common in rural communities. Nature was regarded as an integral part of cities, and through landscape design, the aesthetic and social values of nature were introduced to urban structure. Despite the apparent qualities of the forest town, the era must also be critically scrutinised. In Keski-Vuosaari landscape architecture contributed to the planning of the area, but landscape design was not part of all forest towns. Furthermore, even if landscape designs were drawn, they were often not fully implemented, or the green spaces were not properly maintained. Due to the partial implementation and poor maintenance, the surrounding nature did not endure the intense use, which resulted in the bleakness of the environment. However, the later criticism of forest towns also requires re-evaluation. The lack of social interaction was largely criticised, even though the landscape design of many forest towns, such as Keski-Vuosaari, did pay attention to the outdoor areas’ social dimensions.

In the compact city phase from the late 1960s, the representation of nature reversed. The objective for urban planning was now social and spatial density in which residents’ wellbeing was constructed by human encounters. Designed and built urban greenery formed a backdrop for social life in compact cities. In the 1960s, architects shifted their focus to industrial production and standardisation. As housing construction turned into mass production, the idea of nature vanished from urban planning discourse. The site-sensitive approach of the forest town was replaced by quantitative instructions on green spaces, requirements for playgrounds and standards for parking.

The landscape of compact cities has in general been presented in a negative light. The discourse has focused on the adverse effects of rationalising construction, the deterioration of environmental diversity and the unfinished character of the environment. Structural planning did not automatically make residential areas urban and lively or communal. The quality of the surrounding environment was also criticised. Although prefabricated element construction focused on quantitative results, there were also positive aspects to compact cities’ approach on urban greenery. As Itä-Pasila demonstrates, landscapes were dealt with versatility and designed with care by landscape architects.

The compact city movement had multi-dimensional implications to landscape design. The analytical approach and the recognition of environmental problems established the foundation for ecological design. New instructions and standards for residential environments and courtyard design laid the groundwork for landscape design to become an established part of urban planning. The role of landscape architects gained new emphasis in the design of dense and urban residential areas, where the design premise and growing conditions for vegetation were more demanding: the urban greenery had to be established anew with a rational and sustainable approach.

**Forest city and compact city today**
Sparse and dense cities have once again become a focal point within urban planning discourse. The project for the densification of the urban structure, which started in the early 2000s in Finland and in particular in Helsinki, has adopted the objectives of the compact city. The prevailing urban narrative has turned against urban sprawl, and suburbs are now seen in negative light. The low population density of forest towns and their inefficient land use have become the object of re-evaluation. The idealisation of dense, urban cities and the significant densification of the urban structures are reminiscent of the paradigm shift that took place in the 1960s. Although the
priorities are largely the same, the arguments for denser cities have changed. In addition to economic efficiency, the densification argument is strongly supported by the goals of sustainability, global urban development, climate change and low-carbon development. The social arguments have many common traits, although the interpretations differ; whilst the 1960s rhetoric relied on the contact city concept, the urban planning narrative of the 2010s has centred around urbanism. Both eras share their firm belief in the advantages of dense cities. It is presented as a cure-all for a variety of environmental and social ills: climate change, traffic congestion and pollution, in addition to social segregation.

As in the age of modernism, nature and urban greenery are currently also associated with contradictory objectives. Green areas and their multiple values are widely recognised, but they are simultaneously contested and redefined to adapt to the reigning urban vision and its political aims. The multidimensional urban nature is reduced to qualities that correspond to the regime defining what kind of nature is acceptable in the city. Small, intensively maintained pocket parks and urban plazas depict the dense urban city whereas nature-rich residential areas and forests within the city are not part of the approved narrative. The network of green zones in their natural state in suburbs has been interpreted as redundant and inadequately utilised, unmaintained thickets, which should be developed through infill construction.

The ecological arguments that endorse the densification of cities are often contradictory to the values local residents attach to nature. The efforts to densify urban structures and avert urban sprawl support the preservation of peri-urban landscapes outside the city, but simultaneously, the urban green inside the city is under threat. The densification hits hardest forest towns’ nature-rich and low-density residential areas, whose characteristic qualities will disappear if their sparse urban structure is lost. The landscape in compact cities demands attention, as well. Although the structural grid plan makes it easier to continue the grid with infill development, the construction may compromise the green zones surrounding the compact city and the small-scale urban greenery. Therefore, both forest and compact cities and their green areas embody cultural values that require recognition.

The perception of ideal nature has changed and will continuously modulate along the urban planning ideas. The different interpretations of nature materialize in landscape architecture. The landscape of forest towns and compact cities encapsulates the paradigm shift in the change of the notion of nature. Both notions – the preserved natural environment and the constructed urban green - in addition to their myriad combinations, belong to the city. Urban green is not about one idea of nature but about diversity that fundamentally contributes to the understanding of the relationship between nature and culture.

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Notes
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8 Andersson 2000, pp. 61–75; Björk 2016.
9 Brown & Luccarelli 2012, p. 112.
13 Helsingin yleiskaava 2002, p. 166; Salastie, Värijola-Gal-
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26 Meurman 1947, pp. 78–79.
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28 von Herzen 1945.
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69. Rosengren 1997, p. 156.
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Maisema- ja kaupunkikuvallinen selvitys.
Representations of Nature  
- the Shift from Forest Town to Compact City in Finland

by Ranja Hautamäki & Julia Donner

Summary
Nature in urban planning is a constantly fluctuating concept, which is manifested in attempts by designers to define a good living environment and its green spaces. The transition from the Finnish forest town to the compact city between the 1950s and 1970s represents a paradigm shift which epitomizes a change in the notion of nature. Although the concept of both the forest town and compact city pursued wellbeing and quality, the ideas about appropriate methods for urban planning varied substantially. The forest town of the 1950s fostered the idea of preserving the landscape in its natural state, and landscape design introduced the aesthetic and social values of nature to urban structures. In the compact city phase in the late 1960s, the constructed urban green and networks of social contacts in efficient grid plans replaced the natural environment. The site-sensitive approach of the forest town was replaced by quantitative instructions on green spaces and requirements for playgrounds.

In Finland, post-war residential planning has been mainly studied from the perspective of urban planning and architecture. However, less attention has been paid to how forest towns and compact cities relate to nature and landscape design, or to the contributions of the landscape architects who worked alongside the architects. Nevertheless, nature and green spaces are an integral part of these urban ideals. Our article explores landscapes in forest towns and compact cities, and examines meanings and their societal contexts assigned to nature by urban planners and landscape architects. How was the welfare state and its urban planning ideals conceptualized and materialized in landscape design? Using two case studies in Helsinki - Keski-Vuosaari forest town and Itä-Pasila compact city - we examine these two urban ideals that appear contradictory in numerous ways. We aim to diversify the understanding of these concepts and elucidate the interpretations, in both eras, of nature as a source of wellbeing. We demonstrate that the representations of nature in sparse and dense cities are not contradictory and mutually exclusive, but complementary. We also discuss how the transition from forest town to compact city is reflected in today’s urban planning discourse and in the current struggle between sparsely and densely built urban structures.

Keywords: Forest town, compact city, nature, Finnish urban planning, landscape design, Helsinki