

## **HAMINA AREA AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE POSSIBILITIES OF RESTORATIVE RENOVATION**

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**Abstract** The Hamina area in Ii is a market place that sprang up in the 1500s; the oldest existing buildings are from the 1800s. Energy-economic renovations were done in the 1970s under the supervision of government-approved specialists, but the renovations ignored the viewpoint of building conservation. Individual buildings lost their architectural historical value and their authenticity. Still, the buildings together with their outbuildings and courtyards form a relatively whole, intimate entity.

A new wave of renovation is beginning in the area. At the same time it is possible to restore the original outward appearance of individual buildings. Thus, for many of the buildings the renovation will mean dismantling the drastic modifications of the 1970s and re-renovating them, while respecting the original architectural features of each building.

### **1. History of Ii's Hamina area**

#### **1.1 BIRTH OF A MARKET PLACE**

Historical sources mention Ii, Finland, the first time in 1374. Ii's harbor was probably already then a market place. Ii's most important exports at the time were fish, above all salmon, and furs, which were traded for goods shipped from Stockholm: wheat, rye and legumes from southern Sweden, furniture and decorations from Germany, cloth from England and Flanders, salt and wines from Spain and Portugal. Salmon, tar and furs from Ii and elsewhere in northern Ostrobothnia were in demand in Sweden's towns. (Elo et al. 1998, 16, 34)

Trade through Ii's Hamina was for the most part Karelian trade. King Gustav Vasa had granted Karelian and Russian merchants

trading rights for which they paid a duty. These Karelian merchants arrived in Hamina primarily from Russia, for example Russian Kemi, by the boatload. Along with them were merchants from Ladogan Karelia, also. The Karelian merchants had their own shorefront storehouses in Hamina. These Karelian peddlers were especially interested in buying and selling furs. In the late 1500s these peaceful trading expeditions turned into military and plundering expeditions. Thus, in 1581 the Karelians invaded Hamina and burned the king's storehouse, the parsonage and the parish clerk's and rural police chief's houses, and the following year the church. Nevertheless, conditions gradually calmed down. (Elo et al. 1998, 17-19)

The earliest map of Hamina is from 1648. Based on the map it can be concluded that there was no permanent habitation in the area yet, only trading storehouses, which at times were also used as residences. The church is in the same place on the map as it is today. (<http://www.iiseutu.fi/Ii-kunta/SEURA/srkuu.htm>)

## 1.2 THE FIRST PERMANENT HABITATIONS

Finland suffered from years of crop failure in the early 1700s. In 1723 there were already 41 storehouse plots in Hamina, but in addition, at the beginning of the 1800s simple habitations were also built in the area. Trading became more diversified; additional flavor was brought by timber product trading, which spawned small sawmills at the mouth of the river and boosted permanent habitation. (Nissilä 1990, 5) Distinct permanent habitations were built along Hamina's lanes during the first decades of the 1800s. An independent village community was born and developed freely without any regulations, plot divisions or construction guidelines. Cabins were built on common village land without separate permits, each builder building according to his own wishes and resources. The houses were grouped in a ladder formation along two meandering streets: the one closest to the river is Alakatu or Etukatu and the higher one is Yläkatu or Takakatu. The streets were connected at their east end. Construction began to be supervised as a result of a decision made in 1850, after which new houses could not be built without a permit. (Nissilä 1990, 37)

People skilled in many fields worked in Hamina: craftsmen, boat builders and merchants. Shoemakers, tailors, smiths and carpenters, in particular, settled in Hamina. A steam-powered sawmill also operated near the harbor, further increasing the area's attractiveness. Several salmon cellars were founded in Hamina after 1874. Trade flourished and Hamina's market attracted people from a wide area. (Rytkönen 1978, 375-377)



*Figure 1.* Hamina's markets were arranged annually until the 1930s, and they were known throughout Finland. (<http://www.iinhamina.fi/sivu/fi/>)

## 1.2 ESTABLISHMENT OF A PERMANENT SETTLEMENT

Nearly 500 people lived in Hamina in 1875, and by the turn of the century there were 600. The area remained peaceful, as moving there required permission after 1865. (Rytkönen 1978, 41) In 1902 Hamina became a so-called densely populated community, a separate administrative unit with its own building code and disciplinary regulations. (Tolonen 1995, 292). Much small industry and many shops sprang up in Hamina and organizational activity was very brisk. The building code strictly regulated construction, such as the location of outhouses and refuse heaps.



*Figure 2.* Old map of Hamina, 1901. The houses were grouped in a ladder formation along two meandering streets. (Kononow 1901)

The town plan of 1912 required a large number of old buildings to be moved away and streets to be widened. The goal of the town plan was to widen closely spaced areas that were a fire hazard. With the

construction of the railroad, the focal point of the region's inhabitation was shifting away from Hamina, but there were still about 850 people in Hamina in the 1920s. Hamina's administrative independence was revoked just before the second world war in 1938; at the time Hamina looked like a level sea of cabins characterized by untidiness and a lack of sewer lines. (Rytkönen 1989, 189; Nissilä 1990, 8)

Renewal of Ii's town plan was started in 1936 by encouraging residents to purchase their leased plots. Due to the war, the planning work lasted ten years. The town plan took into consideration the traditional right to access the shore along paths between the houses. Today's buildings in Hamina are still located on plots laid out at that time. (Siivola 2000, 8-10)



*Figure 3.* Crossing of the streets Takakatu and Etukatu, 1931. On the background a coffee house. The street is very dense. (Kalle Backman's private archive)

## **2. Awakening of building conservation**

The idea of creating a museum village out of Hamina's most valuable buildings was brought up in the Ministry of the Interior already in the 1950s. The value of the area was recognized and acknowledged widely in Finland. The plan awakened contradictory feelings, as it was considered to be managed too much from Helsinki. (Siivola 2000) The museum village was to be built on common land, and its implementation would have destroyed most of Hamina's milieu: it was threatened by dismantling and relocation. A few new buildings were constructed in the area in the 1960s, and numerous empty

outbuildings were torn down, which widened the area's living space. (Siivola 2000, 14)

In 1969 Finland's National Board of Antiquities supported Hamina's village community financially and provided guidelines for proper renovation of the valuable buildings. The reason mentioned was the culturally and historically valuable milieu: *"The twin street system with its irregular blocks and plots, which has been created independently and over time, and the buildings along the streets and surrounding the courtyards, have formed a uniformly scaled village in which details are of secondary importance from the standpoint of the entity"* (Statement by the National Board of Antiquities, 1969). A new building plan with the goal of stopping the decimation threatening Hamina's buildings was ratified in 1973. The plan was renewed in 1987.



*Figure 4. Ii Hamina today.*

(<http://www.kotu.oulu.fi/maaponteva/koulutus/tyopaja/hamina/index.htm>)

### **3. Effects of destructive experimental renovation**

As a result of the worldwide oil crisis in the 1970s, Finns awoke to improve the thermal insulation of buildings with the goal of decreasing their energy consumption. New building codes required new buildings to have good thermal insulation, but at the same time Finns widely began repairing old buildings. The repairs were expressly focused on improving the thermal insulation of buildings.

A renovation experiment was started in Hamina in 1979 with the support of the National Board of Antiquities and government funding. Renovation guidelines were compiled for the area, which are visible today in the buildings' oversized exterior thermal insulation thickness, paneling architecture foreign to the original area and modifications of window details and generally simpler details. The repairs focused on energy economy rather than original material, structure and appearance.

### 3.1 REFLECTIONS OF 1970S REPAIRS TODAY

Awareness of the errors made in carrying out the repairs of the 1970s is gradually emerging. Nearly everything old was removed from the buildings; the walls were stripped to the bare log surface and the historical layering was destroyed. The appearance of the buildings has changed and the content of the statement by the National Board of Antiquities (1969) has been concretized in a sad way: the loss of details has also weakened the value of the area entity. Nevertheless, the fact that the new structures have caused extensive damage that threatens the existence of the buildings is problematic.



*Figure 5 and 6.* Typical buildings after alterations: windows have been enlarged, a thick layer of insulation has been added outside the building and the original, simple type of boarding has been changed. (Photos A. Soikkeli)

Typically, a thick layer of additional exterior insulation has been added to the buildings. As a result the eaves are narrower, the windows and foundation are left deep in the facade and the building

has a bloated appearance. The windows and doors have been replaced with modern ones. The old thick, wide facing boards have been replaced with thin, narrow, commercially produced paneling with poor long-term durability. Traditional paints have made way for commercially produced plastic paints. The buildings have lost their original proportions and their original layout of openings, and they have become clumsy caricatures of their appearance at the time when they were built. Unused outbuildings have either been destroyed or left to decay.



*Figure 7 and 8.* As an result of exterior insulation the eaves are narrower and the windows are left deep in the façade. The building has a bloated appearance. (Photos A. Soikkeli)

Regardless of all the modifications, the area's cultural and historical value is still significant. The traditional connections to the shore along the neighbor's fence still function in principle, although as the residents change, walking through the yard does not happen as flexibly as it used to. Some residents have extended their plot to the shore, even though the shore is traditionally meant to be commonly used. The elevation of some of the streets is too high with respect to the floors of the buildings. Rainwater is able to enter the cellars and lower structures of the buildings, thereby causing damage. In practice, the problem can be eliminated only by lowering the surface of the street.

#### **4. Restoring the wholeness of the area using restorative renovation methods**

From the standpoint of Hamina's future, preserving the milieu and supporting the area's identity have become increasingly important in recent years. What methods can be used to steer self-guided renovation in the area and guide independent builders facing problems caused by erroneous repairs and modifications?



*Figure 9 and 10.* Regardless of all the modifications of buildings, the area's cultural and historical value is still significant and the milieu is unique.  
(Photos A. Soikkeli)

Construction know-how and a break in building tradition place challenges before independent builders who often lack their father's knowledge of maintaining a house. Every building in Hamina is an individual requiring individual guidance and planning when carrying out renovations and modifications. The Hamina area has been documented during the past century with photographs, for example, but the area still lacks up-to-date inventory material comprised of building condition surveys and assessments of the degree of preservation. Today the area has an active residents' association that is striving to preserve the area as a living community. However, the residents' conceptions and views of the future of their home area are contradictory. Many want more space, which in practice means outbuildings should be demolished. The problem is that there is interest in renovating the old only if more permitted building volume is granted for new construction.

Today the Hamina area contains 51 residential buildings located along Etukatu and Takakatu. There are 10 unbuilt plots or plots with non-residential use. Most of the area's buildings are inhabited all year round, three are used in summer and one is completely empty. As a result of the 1970s renovation program, most of the buildings have lost their historical layering. The renovations have been so drastic that no authenticity can be found in the buildings any more. Nevertheless, Hamina's courtyards form a relatively whole, intimate entity.

It is possible to further condense the structure of Hamina to make it resemble what it used to be with carefully planned new construction or by transferring old traditional outbuildings into the area. However, this requires further revision of the existing town plan and a mutual will to hold on to objectives. To prevent surface water from damaging the buildings, the surface of the streets must be lowered in conjunction with street repairs due within a few years.

It is important from the standpoint of the building to assess the degree of preservation and the value of earlier layers. Hamina still has dilapidated empty buildings and outbuildings with historical values already lost elsewhere. They contain original building components and structures: windows, doors, wall facings, roofs. We need to be careful not to lose or replace a repairable building component simply because it looks worn, deteriorated and grey. Age is no reason to replace an old building component with a new one.

The most challenging part of restoring the area is repairing the buildings, which is linked to eliminating structural problem factors. For example, in conjunction with the unavoidable renewal of the deteriorated facade facing, made of poor-quality, thin boards, and the unfit windows of the 1970s, it is possible to restore the original window openings and modify the facade moldings and boarding to resemble their original appearance. At the same time the correct technical functioning of the wall structure can be ensured.



*Figure 11.* One of the last original buildings in Hamina area. (Photo A. Soikkeli)

There is abundant photographic material of the Hamina area beginning from the early 1900s, i.e. the period before the renovations of the 1970s and 1980s. A model for restorative renovation can also be taken from residential buildings preserved in the surroundings of

Hamina and the few unrenovated residential buildings and outbuildings in Hamina. These existing documents reliably point the way for future renovations. Restorative renovation that is more extensive than just individual buildings has not been implemented in Finland, and architects customarily have not grabbed the possibilities and challenges offered by restorative renovation. It would be possible to start a national pilot project in Hamina, since in any case the area's buildings will require extensive renovation in the near future because of their structural problems. It would be desirable to have the government support, as it did in the 1970s, the measures needed in Hamina, which would raise the value and living comfort of the area and ensure that the buildings continue to be preserved.

Right now, most important in the Hamina area is to visualize the overall objective of preserving this miniature urban milieu, and individual renovations in the area should aim for that objective. Such a valuable area should be preserved and developed as an entity – together with the residents.

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