Spatial aspects of de-radicalisation processes in Helsinki : D9.1 City Report

Kuokkanen, Kanerva; Hernández Gomes, Eurídice; Sarla, Jalmari Julius; Palonen, Emilia

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DeRadicalisation
in Europe and Beyond: Detect, Resolve, Reintegrate

Spatial aspects of de-radicalisation processes in Helsinki

D9.1 City Report

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Kanerva Kuokkanen, Eurídice Hernández,
Jalmari Sarla & Emilia Palonen

UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at: emilia.palonen@helsinki.fi

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Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

CSO	civil society organisation
D.Rad	DeRadicalisation in Europe and Beyond: Detect, Resolve, Reintegrate Horizon 2020 project
EU	European Union
I-GAP spectrum	injustice-grievance-alienation-polarisation spectrum

About the Project

D.Rad is a comparative study of radicalisation and polarisation in Europe and beyond. It aims at identifying the actors, networks, and wider social contexts that drive radicalisation, particularly among young people in urban and peri-urban areas. D.Rad conceptualises this through the I-GAP spectrum (injustice-grievance-alienation-polarisation), with the goal of moving towards the measurable evaluation of de-radicalisation programmes. Our intention is to identify the building blocks of radicalisation, which include the person's sense of being victimised, of being thwarted or lacking agency in established legal and political structures, and of coming under the influence of 'us vs them' identity formulations.

D.Rad benefits from an exceptional breadth of backgrounds. The project spans national contexts including the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Finland, Slovenia, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Israel, Turkey, Georgia, Austria, and several minority nationalisms. It bridges academic disciplines ranging from political science and cultural studies to social psychology and artificial intelligence. Dissemination methods include D.Rad LABs, D.Rad hubs, policy papers, academic workshops, visual outputs, and digital galleries. As such, D.Rad establishes a rigorous foundation in order to test practical interventions geared towards prevention, inclusion, and de-radicalisation.

With the possibility of capturing the trajectories of 17 nations and several minority nations, the project provides unique evidence base for the comparative analysis of law and policy as nation states adapt to new security challenges. The process of mapping these varieties and their link to national contexts is crucial in uncovering the strengths and weaknesses of existing interventions. Furthermore, D.Rad accounts for the problem that processes of radicalisation often occur in circumstances that escape the control and scrutiny of traditional national frameworks of justice.

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Executive Summary/Abstract

For this report, we studied the Finnish capital Helsinki from the perspective of inclusion and social cohesion. Our empirical data consists of expert interviews and two workshops held in the multi-purpose Maunula House in North Helsinki with city employees, resident activists and young adults.

In Helsinki, the Nordic welfare state tradition is reflected in the broad provision of municipal services and a structured form of urban planning. During recent decades, Helsinki has become more diverse and socio-economic differences between neighbourhoods have increased, but residential segregation is not as pronounced as in some other European cities. Helsinki is a relatively green city, but the weather conditions also necessitate indoor public spaces. The city is also relatively safe, although gang-related youth violence has arisen lately. Best practice areas named by the expert interviewees consisted of open and accessible public spaces, while “contested” areas were perceived as unsafe, involved planning conflicts (e.g., affecting green areas), or acted as sites of political protest. The participants in the Maunula House workshops saw that the house had brought together different groups, partly because it combined several municipal services and a shopping mall, and they appreciated the do-it-yourself spirit of the house.

Our policy recommendations highlight accessible public spaces in the city centre and in the suburbs, combining several services if possible. The involvement of residents in the planning of these spaces and their use is crucial but requires flexibility from public authorities. Informal and uncontrolled places to hang out necessitate trust for the users, but public authorities need to intervene in case problems. In addition to local public spaces, the planning, social, education, youth and other policies of the city and the role of civil society organisations and residents also contribute to social cohesion.

1. Introduction

This report is a study of the Finnish capital Helsinki from the perspective of inclusion and social cohesion broadly understood, including the social and political background of the phenomena. As the other reports produced in the context of the DeRadicalisation in Europe and Beyond: Detect, Resolve, Reintegrate (D.Rad) project have covered various aspects of (de)radicalisation, the perspective of this report is at the local level and on the role of public space in creating social cohesion and inclusion and preventing exclusion. In the deradicalisation literature, this can be defined as a form of primary prevention, concerning the population as a whole, instead of secondary and tertiary prevention targeting more specific groups (Haugstvedt and Bjørgo 2020). The focus here is on local encounters and processes of inclusion and the tensions related to them, rather than radicalisation as such.

Helsinki provides an interesting case for studying social cohesion and inclusion for several reasons. Helsinki is Finland's capital and its largest and most significant city. It had 664,028 inhabitants in 2022, representing 12 percent of the country's population of 5.6 million, while the Greater Helsinki region has a population of over 1,600,000 inhabitants or 29 percent of the population (Statistics Finland n.d.).

The city, as Finland in general, is characterised by the Nordic welfare state model. This refers to extensive publicly funded social services based on national-level legislation and implemented by the municipalities (or, in the case of municipalities other than Helsinki, by recently established wellbeing services counties). Urban planning is highly regulated, following a structural, multi-layered model.

In terms of languages and nationalities the city has diversified rapidly during the last few decades. According to a recent survey (Helsingin kaupunki, kaupunginkanslia, osallisuus ja neuvonta 2021), Helsinki residents appreciate the diversity of the city’s population, but equality, non-discrimination and accessibility need to be strengthened in the services provided by the city. Although the issue of segregation cannot be compared to many other European cities, socio-economic differentiation between neighbourhoods has become greater during the 2000s and it particularly affects areas in the eastern and north-eastern parts of the city (Kortteinen and Vaattovaara 2015). Helsinki has adopted a policy of social mixing as a part of its housing and zoning policies (City of Helsinki, n.d. a). The offer of cultural facilities, libraries, and youth centres reach the whole territory, which combined with efficient public transportation, contributes to tackling segregation.

The relatively green city’s use of outdoor public spaces is affected by the Nordic weather. This puts pressure on establishing accessible indoor public spaces such as libraries and youth centres. This is also impacted our case selection. In the recent years violent youth gangs and youth violence have drawn attention in Helsinki which is otherwise considered to be a relatively safe city.

All the above-mentioned characteristics affect inclusion and social cohesion as well as policies targeted to address them. The aim of this report is to shed more light on the case of Helsinki as a whole and provide an in-depth analysis of a case study, the multi-function municipal building Maunula House in North Helsinki. The structure of the report is the following: First, we present the methods and data used in the study. Second, we describe the spatial characteristics and the socio-political context of the city, including three best practice areas and three kinds of contested areas, identified in the expert interviews conducted as a part of

this study. We follow by the analysis of the Maunula House case study. We then present our analysis and policy recommendations, before going to the conclusions of the study.

2. Description of methods

The research is a qualitative investigation that combines desk research, semi-structured expert interviews and two participatory workshops. First, the desk research was based on a selection of relevant studies, reports, statistics and media data concerning Helsinki. Second, we conducted seven expert interviews with eight experts (one of the interviews was with two people) between December 2022 and June 2023 to gather background information on public space and social cohesion in Helsinki and to identify best practice areas and contested spaces (see Appendix 1). The aim with the interviews was to take a holistic perspective on public space and the spatial aspects of inclusion and exclusion in the city. They were recorded with the interviewees' consent, transcribed and analysed with qualitative content analysis, except two of them, which were based on notes taken by the researcher that the participants read and completed afterwards (EI_Helsinki_7, EI_Helsinki_8 in Appendix 1).

We also conducted two participatory workshops (D.Rad LABs I and II) at Maunula House, in North Helsinki, in 2023. The decision to choose this space was based on previous participatory action research conducted by one of the researchers in the area and on the perspectives acquired during the expert interviews. The first workshop was held on 16 January 2023, with eight participants who were divided into two groups. The participants represented people working at Maunula House and resident activists belonging to the board of the house or having had a significant role in the planning process of the building. (One person working in the house who could not participate in the workshop was interviewed personally; see EI_Helsinki_5 in Appendix 1) The second workshop, targeting local young adults between the ages of 18 and 26, was conducted on 19 June 2023. The recruitment of participants for this workshop proved more difficult than for the first one, but three young people had a lively discussion on Maunula and Maunula House.

Both workshops were organised using a deck of cards produced by the D.Rad WP9 team which included questions to stimulate the discussion and was later uploaded to the D.Rad repository. The themes addressed in the deck of cards of D.Rad LAB I concerned the role of the Maunula House as a space of encounter in the Maunula neighbourhood and the central actors and processes in this space and in the area surrounding it. In addition to these two themes, the D.Rad LAB II with the local youth also had a third thematic card deck on inclusion and exclusion. The card decks also included open cards that could be suggested by any of the participants and separate cards for challenges and solutions to be pointed out by the participants. We took notes in D.Rad LAB I and II, and LAB II was also recorded and transcribed. The results of the workshop were analysed with qualitative content analysis in which we identified the most central themes present in the workshop discussions.

3. Description of spatial characteristics and city context

In this section, we present first a general overview of Helsinki. After that, we give examples of three best practice areas and contested areas, based on the expert interviews conducted as a part of this study.

3.1. General overview of the city

Helsinki and the Greater Helsinki region are growing, mainly because of immigration from the rest of Finland and from abroad (Mäki and Saikko 2022, 7). However, the COVID-19 pandemic slowed down growth in Helsinki, and during the most recent years, population in the neighbouring municipalities has grown faster than in Helsinki (ibid., 15).

Helsinki, as Finland in general, is characterised by the Nordic welfare state model, referring to extensive publicly funded social services based on national-level legislation and implemented by the municipalities or the recently established wellbeing services counties. Although the rest of Finland has a three-tier model in the production of social and health services, Helsinki has no regional administration above it. Helsinki nevertheless collaborates with the neighbouring municipalities, particularly Espoo, Vantaa and Kauniainen (officially forming the Helsinki metropolitan area with Helsinki), but also with municipalities in the broader Helsinki urban region.

The administration of the City of Helsinki was reformed towards a mayor-led and more streamlined model in 2017. The previously more dispersed administrative structure of the City of Helsinki now consists of four divisions and the central administration. All the divisions play a central role regarding social cohesion and public space. The of Division of Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services and the Division of Education are responsible for providing central social, health and security and educational services. The Division of Urban Environment is responsible for planning, constructing and maintaining Helsinki's urban environment, building control and environmental services (City of Helsinki, n.d. c). Cultural and youth policies, libraries and sports facilities fall under the Culture and Leisure division. Finally, the City Executive Office situated under the central administration is responsible for several planning and executing tasks including strategic and administrative work, economic development, human relations, information and resident participation (City of Helsinki, n.d. b).

The municipal council is directly elected, and the mayor comes from the party that receives the most votes in the municipal elections. The five biggest political parties in Helsinki are the National Conservative Party, the Green Alliance, the Social Democratic Party, the Left Alliance and the Finns Party, but nine parties are represented in municipal council. The administrative reform of 2017 introduced a new model for resident participation based on participatory budgeting, online tools for resident feedback, institutionalised councils for youth and elderly and disabled people, specific participation plans for each of the divisions, and local participation coordinators, among others. Helsinki has active district associations and other CSOs as well as looser forms of resident activism based on informal networks and social media groups (Mäenpää and Faehnle 2021). As a capital city, Helsinki is also a central place for demonstrations and other protests. Although the subculture scene is minor in international comparison, a small-scale squatter movement exists (EI_Helsinki_3).

The Finnish planning system can be described as regulated and multi-layered. The Land Use and Building Act provides the legal framework for land use and planning. The national government sets general guidelines, and several planning instruments, such as the regional plan, are decided upon at the regional level (Ministry of the Environment, n.d. a). Municipalities produce both local master plans and local detailed plans, but also influence land use through their social, housing, and industrial policies (ibid.). According to Joutsiniemi et al. (2021), although a reform of the Land Use and Building Act in 2000 aimed to increase the participatory character of planning, Finnish planning legislation has strengthened established institutional

stakeholders. A recent reform attempt of the law during the Marin government (2019–2023) proved conflictual and was only partly completed. During recent years, Helsinki has undertaken several building projects. These include new neighbourhoods in former harbour areas and infill construction in older neighbourhoods, and ambitious public transport projects.

At the end of 2021, 68,033 foreign citizens (10.3% of the population) lived in Helsinki, and the largest groups consisted of Estonian (10,790 people), Russian (5,929 people), Iraqi (4,005 people), Chinese (3,050 people) and Somalian (3,032 people) citizens (Mäki and Saikko 2022, 25). Of the people living in Helsinki, 114,117 (17.3% of the population) had a mother tongue other than Finnish, Swedish or Sámi (ibid., 7). The largest groups spoke Russian (19,443 people), Somali (12,601 people) and Estonian (10,156 people) as their mother tongues; approximately 140 languages were registered as a mother tongue in Helsinki (ibid., 20). By 2035, the number of residents with a foreign mother tongue is expected to be 196,000 people (26% of the population) (Helsingin kaupunki, kaupunginkanslia, kaupunkitieto, n.d.). Compared to the rest of the population, people with an immigrant background more often live in rental housing and have a lower level of employment, but they form a heterogenic group in many respects (Saukkonen 2021).

In a survey conducted at the end of 2020 (Helsingin kaupunki, kaupunginkanslia, osallisuus ja neuvonta 2021), almost nine out of ten of the respondents appreciated the diversity of Helsinki's population. However, only slightly over half of the respondents perceived Helsinki as safe for people belonging to minority groups, and under half of them saw that all residents, despite their background, had the opportunity to influence the city's policies and that equality, non-discrimination and accessibility were realised in the services of the city. Only one fifth of the respondents saw that the city had succeeded in preventing digital exclusion and that the COVID-19 pandemic had not affected equality and non-discrimination in the city's services (ibid.). The uneven effects of the pandemic regarding both neighbourhoods and resident groups in Helsinki are also confirmed in later studies (Mäenpää et al. 2023).

The social-economic spatial distribution in Helsinki reveals a discernible division, which has been growing throughout the 2000s, although it is not as pronounced as in some other European cities (Helsingin kaupunginkanslia 2019). Upon analysing data on income, education, unemployment, and rental housing, indicators often associated with social vulnerability, it is possible to identify a certain concentration of areas with a combination of lower income and education levels and higher levels of unemployment and rental housing in the eastern and north-eastern parts of the city (Figure 1; see also Kortteinen and Vaattovaara 2015). The proportion of residents with a foreign mother tongue is also significantly higher in these areas than the city average (Mäki and Saikko 2022, 23). The difference between neighbourhoods is particularly pronounced when comparing the proportion of children having a mother tongue other than Finnish, Swedish or Sámi (Helsingin kaupunginkanslia 2019). The image of certain neighbourhoods also impacts the reputation of some schools, which might affect school choices, even in the case of schools with high institutional quality and performance (Bernelius et al. 2021). However, people living in suburbs with a problematic reputation emphasise the sense of community in their neighbourhoods (Junnilainen 2019).

Helsinki tackles the threat of segregation by maintaining a policy of social mixing as a part of its housing and zoning policies as well as through its social, education, cultural and leisure policies (City of Helsinki, n.d. a). Specific measures are targeted by the city to the neighbourhoods of Malminkartano-Kannelmäki in north-western Helsinki, Malmi in north-eastern Helsinki and Mellunkylä and Vuosaari in eastern Helsinki and allocates additional

resources to services and investments in areas identified as having a greater need (ibid.; EI_Helsinki_7). In addition to the institutionalised policies of the city, public authorities and civil society organisations (CSOs) also implement fixed-term projects in the field of social cohesion (EI_Helsinki_7, EI_Helsinki_8). Both the EU and the Ministry of the Environment have funded suburban projects (EI_Helsinki_1, Ministry of the Environment (n.d. b).

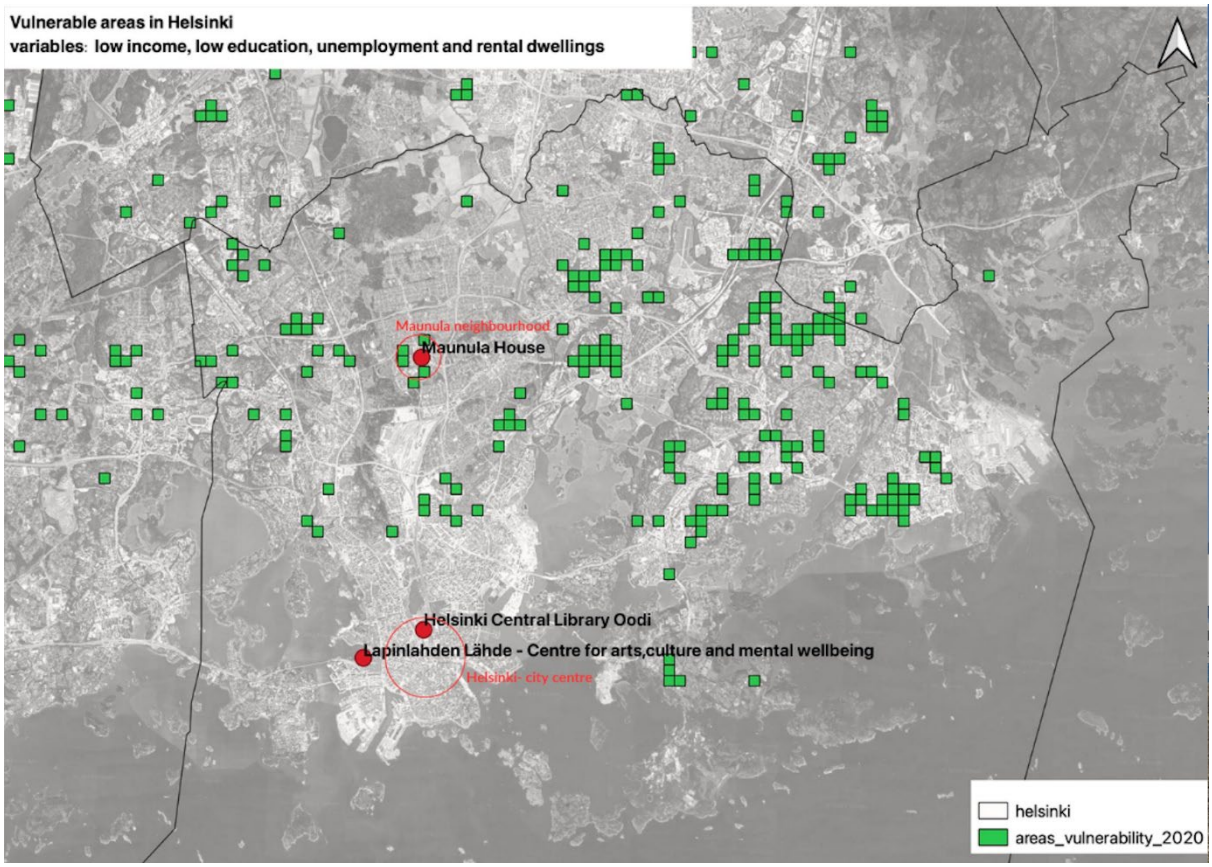

Figure 1: Vulnerable areas in Helsinki; source: authors with data from the City of Helsinki and Statistics Finland's Grid Database 2020

In an international comparison, Helsinki is a relatively green city, with parks, urban forests, the seaside, islands open to the public and colony gardens (EI_Helsinki_2, EI_Helsinki_4). The green areas were particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, and many of the city's building projects affecting these areas have been met with opposition (EI_Helsinki_2). The use of outdoor public spaces in Helsinki is affected by the Nordic weather, which puts pressure on creating indoor public spaces such as libraries and youth centres, which exist throughout the city (EI_Helsinki_4). Young people also hang around in shopping malls, many of which also include some public services such as libraries, blurring the distinction between commercial and public spaces (EI_Helsinki_1, EI_Helsinki_4). The number of non-accessible spaces such as gated communities is small. However, the city has more "invisible boundaries": for instance, people living in more vulnerable suburbs do not necessarily come to the city centre (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017).

Although Helsinki is a relatively safe city, youth violence, including violent youth gangs, has increased during the last few years (EI_Helsinki_1, EI_Helsinki_4, EI_Helsinki_7, EI_Helsinki_8). The gangs are often connected to specific neighbourhoods, and many of them attract young people with an immigrant background (Kantola 2023, EI_Helsinki_4) or more

generally, young people who feel excluded, expressed as one of the expert interviewees as following:

> *I feel irritated that today some people are still of the opinion that we don't have gangs -- wake up, for God's sake; now quite quickly we should undertake some correcting measures in the case of youth remaining outside society, who feel this sense of exclusion. Those who then search for acceptance and their own role and place from somewhere else. It's like a real bomb which is in our hands.* (EI_Helsinki_1)

The expert interviewees were relatively positive on the increased use of camera surveillance (EI_Helsinki_1, EI_Helsinki_4) or did not express a clear stance on it (EI_Helsinki_3, EI_Helsinki_6), but some questioned how necessary it was outside the city centre (EI_Helsinki_2). The interviewees mentioned that security companies could also be perceived as threatening (EI_Helsinki_2, EI_Helsinki_3), particularly among the youth, and this could partly depend on their prominent role in the earlier policies of zero tolerance (particularly towards graffiti) conducted at the turn of the millennium (EI_Helsinki_3). On the other hand, one interviewed expert lauded the local police force, illustrated by the quote below:

> *The way the police in Helsinki thinks about social cohesion, preventing violence, preventing radicalism, I think is of a global level. They're more comprehensive, more holistic in their approach than, I think, most police forces.* (EI_Helsinki_4)

In policies concerning security and the prevention of radicalisation, the city collaborates with international, EU-level, Nordic, and national actors (EI_Helsinki_7). Inside the city, the work is conducted in several divisions, particularly in the central administration and in the field of education, and it is a combination of fixed-term projects and long-term work (EI_Helsinki_7, EI_Helsinki_8).

3.2. Description of three best practice areas

The expert interviewees were also asked to name what they perceived as "best practice" spaces or areas from Helsinki. One of such spaces, mentioned by several interviewees, is Oodi, the city's central library inaugurated at the end of 2018 after a broad consultative planning process, known as Helsinki residents' "living room" (EI_Helsinki_1, EI_Helsinki_2, EI_Helsinki_3, EI_Helsinki_4; see Figure 1 above and Picture 1 in Appendix 2). The library is a three-floor multifunctional building close to the railway station and the bus terminal, allowing easy access to residents. Since its opening, the place has been used by various groups such as youth, families with small children and immigrant groups (including the Eastern European Roma). The library's policy is to be a free-of-charge indoor space for all residents irrespective of their age or background. Various activities are conducted in Oodi, and users can reserve its band studios, sewing machines and 3D printers. Organisations and residents can also book spaces for their own events. However, as one interviewee put it, *"the whole Oodi is so overbooked, and it tells us something about the tremendous need for spaces like this, so there could be five Oodis, or two or three Oodis"* (EI_Helsinki_2).

Another space perceived as a best practice was Lapinlahti, a former mental hospital relatively near the city centre (EI_Helsinki_2; see Figure 1 above and Picture 2 in Appendix 2). This place has been the subject of heated debate for decades, first when the city closed the hospital and then, regarding its further use. The space, nowadays called Lapinlahden Lähde, is currently run by mental health and arts organisations (see Lapinlahden Lähde, n.d.). Various

cultural and mental health activities, both free of charge and based on the work of volunteers, as well as small-scale commercial services, are situated in the building. The space is open to the public, with mental health patients and artists as users, among others. The organisation running the space has also conducted projects to increase the inclusion of unemployed people and other vulnerable groups.

A third best practice space mentioned by the interviewees is Maunula House as a whole and the programme organised during the summer in its outside yard (EI_Helsinki_4, EI_Helsinki_5; see Figure 1 above and Picture 3 in Appendix 2), treated more in detail below.

The list above is by no means comprehensive, and the interviewees mentioned various types of best practice areas in addition to the ones above. At a more micro level, these included public swimming pools that had tried to take into consideration the diversity of their users, and adult education centres and community centres (run by the city or by CSOs), which organised courses and events for a broad audience, including people with an immigrant background (EI_Helsinki_2, EI_Helsinki_3). Examples at a more macro level included neighbourhoods with successful regeneration projects, green areas and/or distinct identities, and the political mobilisation of an East Helsinki suburb have a representative on the city council (EI_Helsinki_4). The interviewees also highlighted a general principle of good communication and listening to residents when deciding over the use of a specific space (EI_Helsinki_2). Although shopping malls are not public spaces, the interviewees named dialogue that some of these companies had had with young people spending time in them as well as the collaboration between shopping malls and public services when they were located in the same building (EI_Helsinki_1, EI_Helsinki_5). Other spaces mentioned were colony gardens and garden lots (usually rented or owned, and often run by specific associations; EI_Helsinki_2).

3.3. Description of three contested areas

The expert interviewees did not name three specific contested areas, but rather, different types of contested areas. They are classified according to their characteristics, with examples of such areas or spaces inside all the categories.

One group of contested areas has a visible use of drugs or alcohol, which is often perceived as unsafe (EI_Helsinki_1, EI_Helsinki_3, EI_Helsinki_4, EI_Helsinki_5). Such spaces include several squares and parks both in central Helsinki and in the suburbs, and although the interviewees did not name the same areas, all the areas shared the same characteristics. Common to these spaces is their central and easily accessible but often slightly "hidden" location near the city centre or in a specific neighbourhood. One of the interviewees mentioned the central railway station and the adjacent subway station, which can be described as central transit hubs, and a similar place was in the eastern Itäkeskus suburb outside the metro station and partly inside the shopping mall next to it (EI_Helsinki_4). A specific difficulty with the latter places was that the security measures of the adjacent places were often handled by different authorities or service providers. The city has had initiatives to address spaces perceived as unpleasant or unsafe, not only by security measures but also by renovating the area to make it more welcoming. One the expert interviewees taking up this theme also pondered which groups' substance use in public space was more accepted than others', as particularly upper socio-economic classes' *"picnic sipping"* (EI_Helsinki_1) is better tolerated by the authorities than the substance use of other groups.

Other interviewees highlighted disputes in urban planning when defining contested areas (EI_Helsinki_2, EI_Helsinki_3, EI_Helsinki_4, EI_Helsinki_6). Such disputes often included the diminishing of the city's green areas due to construction projects, and here, too, although the interviewees did not mention the same places, they all could be seen as an example of this. One of the interviewees also mentioned the government-owned railway company's storehouse buildings (VR:n Makasiinit), spaces that had low threshold citizen activities that were partly demolished (and the remaining building was burnt down) in the early 2000s, and the place currently hosts Helsinki's most prestigious buildings (EI_Helsinki_3). The former Lapinlahti hospital, mentioned above as a best practice space, was also seen as a contested space, as there is a pressure to open it to "big money" (EI_Helsinki_2), which would transform its current small-scale mental health and cultural activities. The interviewees also mentioned shopping malls, which in principle are privately owned commercial spaces but function as spaces of encounter in the neighbourhoods (EI_Helsinki_3). In particular, two shopping malls in East Helsinki with immigrants' shops and restaurants were perceived as potentially contested spaces. The small scale of the commerce was seen as preventing further investments in these relatively run-down malls, but at the same time, future renovations could threaten the current businesses that were locally important (EI_Helsinki_2, EI_Helsinki_4).

One group of contested spaces had a clearly political function. Here, one of the interviewees mentioned the demonstrations temporarily occurring in several places in Helsinki (EI_Helsinki_3). A central site for demonstrations was the Parliament House, and Elokapina (Extinction Rebellion Finland) had organised street blockades in Mannerheimintie, among others. The Töölö Square had symbolic importance as a space for far-right demonstrations and left-wing counterdemonstrations on Finnish Independence Day. The interviewee also mentioned squats run by left-wing and anarchist groups that in some cases had managed to negotiate a permanent position with the city but had faced arsons and other attacks from the extreme right.

One of the expert interviewees also saw that the spaces that the youth was allowed to spend their time were often contested, as young people were often perceived as noisy, disturbing, or even frightening if they spent time in a bigger group (EI_Helsinki_6). Another one brought up the spaces allowed for the Eastern European Roma in the city (EI_Helsinki_3). A long-standing tension concerned the spaces allocated for cars, pedestrians, and cyclists (ibid.). More specific groups involved in a certain hobby (*e.g.*, rock climbing) could be involved in local tensions regarding the use of a specific space or place (EI_Helsinki_3, EI_Helsinki_6).

4. In-depth analysis of the case study

Maunula House, the site of the two workshops conducted as a part of this study (D.Rad LAB I and II), is a multifunctional building which combines a library, a youth centre, an adult education centre, cultural events and café in the Maunula suburb in North Helsinki. Maunula is a socio-economically mixed area with a population of 9,030 and a 58–42 ratio of rental and owned housing at the end of the year 2018 (Helsingin kaupunki, kaupunginkanslia, kaupunkitutkimus ja tilastot 2020, 107–109). The neighbourhood can be described as a relatively typical Helsinki suburb. The average age of the population, the unemployment rate and the proportion of rental dwellings are slightly above the city's average while the population density, mean size of the dwellings, average household income and the amount of people with a tertiary degree are slightly below it (ibid.). At the end of the year 2018, 82.7 percent of the

residents had Finnish as their mother tongue, 4.2 percent belonged to Finland's Swedish-speaking minority and 13.1 had another mother tongue, the biggest groups consisting of Somali, Russian and Estonian speakers (ibid.).

The neighbourhood relies on a long tradition of active locals, who successfully lobbied for a local youth house at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s and had been demanding a local cultural centre since the mid-1980s (Staffans 2004). Maunula House, opened to the public in 2016, can be seen as a result of the earlier demand for a cultural centre, which became intertwined with the development of the Maunula centre and its shopping mall (Kuokkanen and Palonen 2018). The planning process of the building was further coupled with "democracy pilots" (local fixed-term projects aimed to develop new forms of local democracy and participation) funded by the City of Helsinki in 2013. One of these pilot schemes was the Maunula Democracy Project, which enabled residents to participate in the planning of the facility alongside municipal officials and the architect (ibid.). More than 70 residents actively engaged in this planning process, which resulted in a multifunctional building encompassing a library, a youth centre, an adult education unit (*Suomenkielinen työväenopisto*), and cultural events.

The establishment of Maunula House was the outcome of collaboration between various municipal units, residents, and the architect. Even though the ethos of resident participation has undergone transformation, it remains an integral part of the governance of the house. The advisory board of the building includes representatives of the residents, and the users are consulted when planning the building's activities. The residents and associations can also organise own events in the premises.

Maunula House was chosen for the study because of its role as an important suburban public space combining several units and services of the city and relying on resident involvement both in its planning phase and in the current running of the house. Moreover, both the socio-economically mixed character and the tradition of resident activism of the Maunula neighbourhood makes it a good case for studying inclusion, exclusion and social cohesion in the city. As a part of the D.Rad project, we organised and conducted two participatory workshops in the area. D.Rad LAB I, held on 16 January 2023, had eight participants who either worked in Maunula House or, in the case of the resident activists, belonged to the Maunula House board or had had a significant role in its planning. Moreover, one person belonging to the staff was later personally interviewed (see Appendix 1). The recruitment of local young adults (aged between 18 and 26) to D.Rad LAB II, conducted on 19 June 2023, was more challenging. In the end, three young people participated in the workshop, which was very successful in terms of content.

4.1. Summary of D.Rad LAB I

The D.Rad LAB I participants considered that the combination of a library, youth centre, adult education centre, remote workspaces, cultural activities and café in the same building contributed to encounters between people from diverse backgrounds and of different ages. They stressed that the supermarket in the same building as Maunula House and events organised in the yard in summertime broadened the range of visitors (also mentioned in the expert interviews, EI_Helsinki_5). The participants perceived Maunula House as easily accessible and well located, although slightly hidden from the main street.

The participants appreciated the proactive role of the city in involving residents in the planning process and running of the house, although one resident activist would have wanted resident involvement in an earlier planning phase. The participants praised the governance model of Maunula House, based on collaboration between several units of the city and resident representation in the advisory board. However, they mentioned that the board did not currently have a representative of the Somali residents but saw that such person would be elected if he or she became a candidate.

Not all the ambitious ideas present in the planning process of Maunula House, such as round-the-clock open spaces and completely resident-led events and communication, had been realised due to practical issues. However, residents can currently contact the staff and suggest activities or organise some events themselves. The participants stressed the receptive atmosphere and *"let's get over it spirit*" (Participant, D.Rad LAB I), referring to a proactive and pragmatic do-it-yourself attitude in how problems were solved, as well as the non-commercial character of the events, also mentioned in the expert interviews (EI_Helsinki_6). The popularity of Maunula House was not completely acknowledged during the planning phase, which sometimes causes difficulties in booking spaces. The participants perceived that the users mainly acted in a respectful manner despite a low level of supervision. The COVID-19 pandemic had temporarily restricted the use of the spaces. According to the participants, 10–13-year-olds hung out in the building after school, but older teenagers were elsewhere. The participants suggested that that collaboration with the local school could be deepened. They wanted more intergenerational events and better dissemination of information in various languages, if possible, in collaboration with organisations representing people from minority language groups. They also pondered whether social or tax services could be located in the same premises to attract a more diverse group of visitors.

The participants perceived Maunula as a compact neighbourhood with good traffic connections, green areas, an idyllic atmosphere, old architecture, and a feeling of community. They saw that the two centres of the neighbourhood, one around Maunula House and the other one near the community centre Saunabaari ("Sauna Bar"), made it easy to meet people. However, some were afraid of services concentrating near Maunula House and the "Old Maunula" around Saunabaari quietening down. The participants appreciated the heterogeneity and diversity of Maunula in comparison with the neighbouring districts, mentioning both the relatively equal ratio of rental and owned housing and the residents with a Finnish Romani, Russian, Somalian or Asian background. The participants saw that the neighbourhood had become younger during the recent years, but it was poorer, in poorer health and had a lower level of social cohesion than the neighbouring districts. One participant highlighted the internal division of the neighbourhood, where one's social class and could be seen from his or her address and "cultural capital" (such as associations) was concentrated in certain areas.

Central meeting points besides Maunula House named by the participants included the Saunabaari community centre, the playground, school and kindergartens, the Central Park city forest, the outdoor sport facilities and, temporarily, common neighbourhood events. The participants emphasised the extensive need for public space in the area and saw that Maunula House did not compete with the other spaces. The participants named sports clubs, the resident association, Lions club, scouts, the Martha association, the people involved in the activities of Maunula House, the local Evangelic-Lutheran church and active elderly people as central actors in the area. However, only a small proportion of the residents could be labelled

as resident activists, and the local newspaper did not reach all residents. The participants considered that people with an immigrant background seldom participated in the leisure activities, partly due to language barriers, but some events and activities had been organised by or targeted at them in Maunula House and in Saunabaari.

The participants discussed the rough reputation of the neighbourhood in the earlier decades. The park situated on the site where Maunula House was later erected had been perceived as unsafe because of substance abuse. The participants saw that the construction of Maunula House had improved social inclusion, augmented the feeling of security, and transformed the neighbourhood into a cultural hub. Currently, they perceived few places as unsafe, but mentioned bicycle thefts, substance abuse and litter. In a conflict between young people and a group of older people drinking alcohol, the youth and social services had intervened effectively. Some participants also mentioned a tension between immigrants and those with anti-immigration views. They underlined that although low-threshold meeting points in principle reduced confrontation, racist incidents such as grown-up men yelling at young people of colour required other types of measures.

In the future, the participants wanted to augment the dissemination of information both to residents speaking various languages and between the local actors, to gather the tacit knowledge of the local municipal employees, and to have events joining the local civil society actors. They also suggested that the low-threshold events organised in Maunula could be used as a model for other districts.

4.2. Summary of D.Rad LAB II

Maunula House was perceived by the participants in D.Rad LAB II as a positive place that caters to a diverse range of individuals, from children to the elderly. The participants expressed concerns about alcohol consumption outside Maunula House but considered the basketball court to be a positive example of activities in urban space. Additionally, they expressed a desire for more public art within the building itself. One of the issues identified by the participants was the lack of a suitable area for casual socialising. The youth centre primarily targets underage individuals and is predominantly occupied by a tightly knit group, making it difficult for newcomers to feel comfortable frequenting the space. Conversely, amenities such as band practice rooms are often occupied. The library and the main entrance hall are not particularly welcoming to young people either. Participants suggested that the interiors should be designed with a softer, café-like ambiance, featuring chairs, sofas, secluded seating areas, and plants. Although the participants recognised the value of Maunula House, they tend to spend most of their leisure time in parks, school yards, common areas of apartment buildings, and in private homes. The participants described the dynamics surrounding local parks in terms of ownership and occupancy: when a specific group, such as another group of youths or local individuals known for alcohol consumption, occupies a park, it becomes challenging for others to share the space.

The participants also engaged in discussions regarding Maunula as a neighbourhood. Despite a slight stigma attached to being from Maunula, as perceived through the reactions of non-local individuals, the neighbourhood was viewed as a welcoming and relaxed place where one can be accepted for who they are, fostering diverse identities and lifestyles away from the bustling city centre. Although they primarily associated Maunula with families and the elderly rather than young adults, they acknowledged the neighbourhood's residents' diverse socio-

economic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. According to them, Maunula House plays a crucial role in ensuring that the neighbourhood remains a vibrant mix of residents, rather than being predominantly occupied by elderly individuals. The participants experienced a sense of belonging in Maunula, derived from their familiarity with the neighbourhood's paths and routes that only locals would know, such as shortcuts through residential yards. Furthermore, they appreciated Maunula's abundant urban nature and the sparse urban fabric, considering them as assets of the neighbourhood. They also saw that the forthcoming light rail connection crossing Maunula was good from a climate perspective and that it would increase the accessibility and urban character of the district.

While the participants had friends from various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, they interestingly saw that local Swedish speakers largely remained distinct, and although the Finnish- and Swedish-language schools were situated in the same building, there was little collaboration between them. The participants also highlighted a certain division in the neighbourhood between the owned and the rental housing regarding the places in which young people spent their time and how they used public space, illustrated in the following quotation:

> *"It occurred to me that since I have lived in these rental barracks of the city almost all my life, the yard was very nominal. If there was a yard then there might have been a bit of a suspicious neighbour, you couldn't really spend time in that yard. -- And no one was ever invited to the Heka [municipal rental houses] yard because there was [somebody] with a syringe or a can of beer. We were then in the playground, or we were at the school yard at the time. The need for public space was emphasised."* (Participant, D.Rad LAB II)

Central Maunula has undergone significant changes in recent years. The former outdoor shopping mall has been replaced by a complex that now houses both business functions and public amenities, including Maunula House and a public library. The participants agreed that while the previous mall hosted more interesting local entrepreneurs, the current state can be considered to be an improvement. Firstly, services that were previously scattered are now more easily accessible. Interestingly, the participants argued that if the new mall only featured non-local businesses like the Subway fast food chain, it would not have been embraced by Maunula residents to the same extent it has now. Consequently, despite initial local scepticism about its construction, Maunula House has assumed a vital role in the local community.

4.3. Synthesis of the case study

The two workshops held in Maunula House depicted a rather similar picture of the multi-purpose building and the neighbourhood in which it is situated despite their different participant groups (people working in the building and key resident activists in LAB I and young adults in LAB II). Both groups saw that Maunula House was a local space of encounter for a range of groups, and they perceived that the combination of several municipal services (library, youth house, adult education centre, cultural events) in the same building was an important factor in this. They also considered that the existence of the supermarket in the same building augmented the number of users in the municipal services of the building. Both groups also appreciated a flexibility and do-it-yourself attitude, and particularly the youth would have wanted more of this. Moreover, they highlighted similar problems such as the high demand for certain of the spaces (e.g., band rehearsal rooms) inside the building. They were also

concerned that people with an immigrant background did not use Maunula House more. In the case of LAB I, one solution proposed was to provide more information in various languages and to involve immigrant associations in planning the activities.

The perception of the Maunula neighbourhood, the groups present in it, the central social divides, the public spaces deemed to be important, and the places that felt uncomfortable was similar in both groups. Both groups appreciated the local green spaces and sports facilities. They named similar groups such as the elderly people, the youth, the local Finnish Romani community, groups with an immigrant background, and the more specific groups such as the group of local alcohol drinkers. Both groups also named the divide based on the address at which people lived (in LAB I) or between owned and rental housing (in LAB II), which overlapped to a large extent. The interviewees saw that Maunula House had positively contributed to the development of the neighbourhood. However, Maunula has also undergone a more general process of change independently of Maunula House.

Differences also existed between the groups in the two labs. Maunula House is not as clearly a place for young adults as it is for older people. Although there is a youth centre in the building, its users are usually younger teenagers, not older teenagers or young adults. The participants in LAB II also pointed out that the people spending time at the youth house could feel like a tight-knit group for newcomers. The café at the entrance of the building is not frequented by the youth as much as by older residents, although the café staff consists of young people. While both groups saw that Maunula House should be more inviting for people with an immigrant background, the young participants emphasised more the white, middle-class and middle-aged or pensioner background of many Maunula House users.

Moreover, the young adults did not see their opportunities to influence things at Maunula House as positively as older resident activists and saw its functioning as more bureaucratic compared to LAB I. Unlike the participants in LAB I, they also wanted the space to be cosier, with sofas to hang out. There was also a more methodological difference between the two labs, as it was more difficult to recruit young people compared to the employees of Maunula House and older resident activists, which can also be perceived as a separate research result. Reaching residents with an immigrant or other ethnic or linguistic minority background (e.g., Finnish Romani, Swedish-speakers, or migrant-background groups) proved difficult in both cases, which may also reflect more broadly the most active users of the house.

5. Analysis and policy recommendations

The expert interviews conducted as a part of this study and the two labs held at Maunula House had several overlapping themes, such as the central role of meeting places, the role of public authorities, other actors (such as CSOs) and residents in producing social cohesion and public space, and the characteristics of best practice and contested areas (in the case of the Labs, mostly in Maunula). The central findings of the study can be summarised in the form of the following policy recommendations:

1. Enough resources must be targeted for easily accessible public spaces, not only in the city centre, but also in the suburbs. If these spaces can combine various public services (e.g., library, youth services, courses and events for various user groups), it is more likely that people from diverse backgrounds and of different ages will meet in them. Although commercial spaces such as shopping malls in some cases can be problematic in terms of inclusion and

exclusion, the location of public and commercial services (such as a library and a supermarket) next to each other, possibly even in the same building, can attract a more varied range of users than public services alone. In addition to indoor public spaces such as libraries, youth and cultural centres and the like, outdoor green spaces are also of importance.

2. The involvement of residents in the planning of the activities of these spaces and, in the best case, of the space itself, is important. Residents from diverse backgrounds and of different ages need to be reached and their interests must be considered, as the same space can be inclusionary for one group but exclusionary for another. Enough information about the spaces, the services and activities present in them and the opportunities to influence them must be provided in several languages and through various channels. Public authorities working in these spaces must leave room for the initiatives and agency of the citizens even if these seem to be messy or difficult to control from their perspective. If the space combines public services from different institutional backgrounds or public and commercial actors, collaboration between all the actors involved is crucial.

3. In addition to more controlled public spaces dedicated to a certain function (e.g., libraries), more relaxed places to hang out are important, particularly for the youths. These two aims can also partly be combined when planning the spaces. Spaces with a low level of social control require a certain level of trust for the users and tolerance for their activities.

4. Although spaces in which people from different background can meet are important for social cohesion, their mere existence is not enough in polarised conflicts. Public authorities need to intervene in cases of social unrest, disturbances and violence or the threat of it. Although safety and security measures are important, many issues can be solved by social or youth workers or CSOs working in these fields, if possible, in dialogue with the involved actors. In some cases, augmenting the cosiness and attractiveness of a certain space might also augment the feeling of safety related to it.

5. Local public spaces are important in strengthening social cohesion, but the broader policy context around social cohesion and public space is also central. Urban planning that provides enough public spaces of different kinds throughout the city, planning and housing policies preventing segregation, adequate social, education, culture, integration and youth policies at both national and local levels, and local democracy and the opportunities for participation for various groups are all important in this context. In addition to public authorities, CSOs also play a central role in carrying out these policies. It is important to address the right level of political action (e.g., at national, municipal and neighbourhood levels) for the measures to be effective, and fixed-term projects need to be integrated with longer-term measures to achieve continuity.

6. Finally, it is important to keep in mind that public space is not only about public authorities or actors closely related to them and policies conducted by them. Residents and users of public spaces contribute to social cohesion and to the safety and attractiveness of the public spaces.

6. Conclusion

As noted above, Helsinki is characterised by the Nordic welfare state tradition, reflected in the broad provision of municipal services, and a structured form of urban planning. During recent

decades, Helsinki has become more diverse. The socio-economic differences between the various neighbourhoods have also become more pronounced, although the city does not have the same level of segregation as some of its European counterparts. The city is a relatively green one, although the Nordic weather also requires the existence of indoor public spaces. The city is also relatively safe, although youth violence and violent gangs have arisen during the most recent years.

Best practice areas named by the expert interviewees in this study consisted of open and accessible public spaces – a library in the city centre, a former mental health hospital run by mental health and arts associations slightly outside the centre, and the multi-purpose Maunula House in a North Helsinki neighbourhood – but also whole neighbourhoods, inclusive practices in public spaces such as swimming pools, and dialogue with users and public services in cases of commercial spaces such as shopping malls. Contested areas included spaces perceived as unsafe, often with substance abuse, but also areas with planning conflicts affecting green areas or current activities, and politically loaded spaces used in demonstrations and protests.

The general characteristics of the city were also reflected in the analysis of our in-depth case study. The two workshops (D.Rad LAB I and II) held at Maunula House depicted a relatively similar picture of the building and the Maunula neighbourhood. The participants perceived Maunula House as a local space of encounter for a wide range of groups and saw that the combination of several municipal services and a shopping mall in the same building contributed positively to this. They appreciated the participatory and do-it-yourself attitude of Maunula House, although the young participants perceived their own influencing opportunities as less good than the older resident activists.

Our policy recommendations highlight the importance of accessible public spaces both in the city centre and in the suburbs, combining several kinds of services, if possible. The involvement of residents in the planning of the activities of these spaces and, preferably, of the space itself, is central, which requires flexibility from the public authorities involved. Informal and uncontrolled places to hang out require that public authorities trust the users; at the same time, public authorities need to intervene in cases of polarised conflicts, social unrest, disturbances, or violence. Planning policies allocating public spaces throughout the city, zoning and housing policies preventing segregation, adequate social, education, culture, integration and youth policies, and local democracy and participation opportunities are also important. In addition to public authorities, the CSOs and citizen groups also play a central role in carrying out many of these policies, and residents and users of public spaces contribute for their part to social cohesion, safety, and attractiveness of the public spaces.

The topic of (de-)radicalisation has been not at the centre of this study, which has primarily concentrated on social cohesion and inclusion, but the two phenomena are related. The role of the local environment has been acknowledged in earlier studies on radicalisation and extremism (Rottweiler et al. 2022). While our study on Helsinki did not reveal clear processes of (de-)radicalisation, it nevertheless showed local-level tensions and exclusion mechanisms. Moreover, the increasing youth violence, including the rise of youth gangs, was noted in several expert interviews. To prevent exclusion, the sense of belonging to a local community by all resident groups can be fostered through the existence of public spaces in which various resident groups can meet, functioning local services and the opportunity for the residents to impact local issues are crucial. This contributes to preventing pronounced social divides, polarisation and radicalisation inside or between neighbourhoods.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Expert interviewees

No.	Area of expertise	Area of employment	Interview conducted
EI_Helsinki_1	Participation, inclusion	Municipality	20/12/2022
EI_Helsinki_2	Resident activism, urban planning	CSO	21/12/2022
EI_Helsinki_3	Youth, participation	University	24/01/2023
EI_Helsinki_4	Public space, municipal administration	University	01/02/2023
EI_Helsinki_5	Maunula House	Municipality	08/02/2023
EI_Helsinki_6	Youth, participation	Municipality	16/02/2023
EI_Helsinki_7	Safety, prevention of radicalisation	Municipality	28/6/2023
EI_Helsinki_8	Prevention of radicalisation	Municipality	28/6/2023

Appendix 2: Pictures

Picture 1: The Oodi library in central Helsinki (Photo: Joonas Hassinen)

Picture 2: Lapinlahden Lähde, a place combining mental health and cultural facilities (Photo: Joonas Hassinen)

Picture 3: Maunula House, a multi-functional building combining a library, a youth house, an adult education centre and cultural facilities and the site of the D.Rad LABs (Photo: Emilia Palonen)