

# **Where east met west: Helsinki and the staging of the 1975 Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe**

TIMO VILÉN\*

School of Social Sciences and Humanities FIN -33014 University of Tampere, Finland

ABSTRACT: The final phase of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) in 1975 is widely regarded as the high point of détente. This article discusses the staging and legacy of the CSCE from the perspective of its host city, Helsinki. The article examines how the Finnish initiative to host the conference became enmeshed with Helsinki's municipal politics and how the CSCE's and Finland's neutrality were used by the Helsinki authorities to project an attractive image of their city. The article further highlights the Helsinki Summit as a public spectacle with which a large number of local residents engaged.

<\abstract>

## **Introduction**

In late July 1975, the heads of 35 countries – the USA, Canada, the Soviet Union and all the European countries with the exception of Albania and Andorra – convened at the white marble Finlandia Hall of Helsinki to participate in what was arguably the most significant conference in the history of Europe since the Congress of Vienna: the final stage of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). The Helsinki Summit marked the high point of détente and the culmination of a lengthy process whose legacy remains a subject of intense debate in Cold War historiography. Although widely condemned by the Americans and much acclaimed by the Soviets who had repeatedly pressed for the conference since the mid-1950s, the CSCE set in motion a complex set of developments, which facilitated the peaceful transition in eastern Europe and eventually also contributed to the demise of communism. Most importantly, the Helsinki Final Act encouraged the establishment of

various dissident and human rights groups (the so-called Helsinki groups) in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, while at the same time providing the west with a normative framework through which the criticism of the communist rule could be channelled.<sup>1</sup>

The starting point of this article is constituted by the said conference, and, more specifically, its final stage, the Helsinki Summit. Unlike most other accounts of the topic, this article will not primarily be concerned with the diplomatic aspects of the CSCE or its significance for the transformation of Europe. Rather, the focus will be on the staging and legacy of the CSCE from the point of view of the host city. What is important for my purposes is, first, that the CSCE's final stage took place in Helsinki, and, second, that its realization was greatly facilitated by the agency of the city of Helsinki. The aim of this article is twofold. In particular, I will explore how the proposal of the Finnish government to act as a host for a European security conference became enmeshed with Helsinki's municipal politics and how Helsinki city authorities attempted, quite deliberately, to use the CSCE and Finland's self-assumed role as a bridge-builder between east and west to project a positive image of Helsinki. At another level, my purpose is to examine how the CSCE was constructed and shaped as a public spectacle and how it was experienced and consumed by the local residents.

In order to understand the specific urban dynamics of the CSCE, I have chosen to treat the Helsinki Summit (loosely) as an exemplar of what Roche calls a mega-event.<sup>2</sup> Even if the CSCE might not be construed as a typical example of a mega-event, it did, as we shall see, display most or all of the characteristics usually associated with mega-events. It was a major international event and one of the most important urban happenings staged in Helsinki since the 1952 Olympics; a number of actors were involved in its organization and hundreds of thousands of people experienced it as delegates, media personnel and spectators. Moreover, in addition to its obvious political and diplomatic dimensions, the CSCE also had – or was expected to have – important economic repercussions and provided Helsinki with a rare opportunity to promote itself in front of a large global audience, not only as a city where east and west met but also as a modern European metropolis.

Much of my analysis will revolve around the Finlandia Hall, which served as the focal point of this spectacle and provides a lens through which the urban aspects of the CSCE can be considered. I will, however, start by briefly outlining some of the dominant features in Finnish post-war political culture. Such an outline is, of course, bound to be highly selective,

but the intention is mainly to help the reader place the CSCE and the Helsinki Summit into an adequate political and cultural framework.

### **Friendship and neutrality in an urban context**

Whatever approach one takes to Cold War Helsinki – and the history of Finland during the Cold War – it is hard not to make at least a brief reference to the large and pompous Soviet embassy at Tehtaankatu (Factory Street) and to Tamminiemi, the official residence of Finland's long-time (1956–81) President Urho Kekkonen. Whereas Tehtaankatu epitomized Soviet power in the Finnish capital, Tamminiemi also became shorthand for Kekkonen's controversial figure which dominated Finnish history during the Cold War.<sup>3</sup>

The policy line that bore the name of Kekkonen and his predecessor, the 'Paasikivi–Kekkonen line', grew out of the post-war realization that the survival of Finland as an independent nation depended on maintaining friendly relations with its powerful neighbour and, in particular, the acknowledgment of Soviet security interests. In 1948, Finland and the Soviet Union signed an agreement known as the treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance (the FCMA treaty). The treaty acknowledged 'Finland's desire to remain outside the conflicting interests of the Great Powers' – that is, in principle, Finnish neutrality – but bound it to defend itself against an attack on Finland or on the Soviet Union via Finland by 'Germany or its allies', which could be done with the assistance of, or jointly with, the Soviet Union. However, until the removal of Soviet forces in 1956 from the Porkkala naval base, leased to the Soviet Union by virtue of the peace treaty, all talk of Finland's neutrality lacked credibility. The Soviet Union never fully acknowledged it in bilateral contexts, and, after the Prague crisis in 1968, no longer referred to 'Finland's neutrality', but only spoke of the country's 'aspirations to neutrality'. The west, likewise, viewed Finnish neutrality with suspicion, but readily recognized it believing that in doing so they would stop Finland from falling into the Soviet sphere of influence.<sup>4</sup>

Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, maintaining friendly relations with the Soviet Union was a matter of the highest priority to the Finnish political leadership, so much so that, as David Kirby notes, the Paasikivi–Kekkonen foreign policy doctrine tended to be 'elevated to the status of official liturgy'.<sup>5</sup> Since the mid-1960s, there was mounting pressure for all major political parties to demonstrate their loyalty to Finnish foreign policy by lining up

behind Kekkonen's presidency, while the self-censorship exercised by Finnish politicians and mainstream media effectively prevented the publication of material deemed to be hostile to the Soviet Union. The political culture that emerged from all this reached its culmination during *détente* and has largely become synonymous with what Finnish commentators now refer to as 'Finlandization'. Underneath the surface of Finlandization there remained, however, a deeply rooted mistrust of Soviet intentions, and the repeated assurances of friendship were not enough to wipe away the bitter memories of the Soviet invasion of Finland in 1939. Nevertheless, in spite of the recurring Soviet intrusions into Finnish internal affairs and the huge sums spent on military and civil defence, the official Finnish foreign policy discourse of the era remained very much that of friendship and peaceful co-existence.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, maintaining friendly relations with the Soviet Union was not just an important dimension of Finland's official foreign policy; it permeated all levels of civil society, as shown, for instance, by the active involvement of tens of thousands of Finnish people in the Finnish-Soviet Friendship Society, established in 1944.<sup>7</sup> Finnish-Soviet friendship furthermore manifested itself in town twinning between Finnish and Soviet cities (between Helsinki and Moscow, for example), an activity that was closely intertwined with Finland's official foreign policy.<sup>8</sup> Within a broader context, the domestic aspects of the Cold War also had an impact on urban politics. Following the legalization of the Finnish Communist Party after the end of the so-called Continuation War in 1944, the country's radical left-wing parties succeeded in making inroads into city administration, although the authority in Helsinki and other major Finnish cities remained in the hands of the non-socialist majority throughout the Cold War. As the case of the CSCE demonstrates, some of the issues faced by city authorities during the Cold War even had a direct linkage to international politics. This was especially the case in Helsinki, which, due to its position as the capital, occupied a prominent role in the pursuit of Finland's official foreign policy.<sup>9</sup>

While Kekkonen's long presidency and Finlandization have been at the centre of most accounts of Finland's history during the Cold War, they do not, however, constitute the only possible narrative frame through which to interpret the history of post-war Finland. To a considerable extent, the history of Finland during the Cold War was also a story of the nascent Nordic welfare state and the country's gradual integration into western economic communities. As pointed out by Mikko Majander, during the Cold War central or western Europe were not Finlandized, but Finland was thoroughly westernized or even

Americanized.<sup>10</sup> Closely related to this is another narrative which both intersects and contrasts with the aforementioned perspectives, namely that of Finland as a neutral and non-aligned country and the bridge builder between east and west. At the heart of this narrative lie Finland's diplomatic initiatives – including the Nordic nuclear-free zone proposal, SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) and the European Security Conference – and its active role within the international community from the late 1960s onwards.<sup>11</sup>

When considered in an urban context, the history of active Finnish neutrality was – and still is – to a large extent associated with one of Helsinki's key landmarks, the Finlandia Hall (Figure 1).<Fig. 1 near here> Designed by the celebrated Finnish architect Alvar Aalto, the Finlandia Hall, with its asymmetric, fan-shaped form and light and lofty interior, was one of the two buildings that were built from Aalto's grand plan for Helsinki city centre, which proposed several monumental buildings along Töölönlahti Bay. While the notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk* – 'a total work of arts' – has often been used with reference to Aalto's works, only a few of them express this idea as convincingly as the white marble Finlandia Hall: everything from the landscape down to the smallest detail in furnishing was specifically designed by Aalto and his bureau. It was intended as a new symbol of an independent Finland and served as Helsinki's main concert venue from its inauguration in 1972 until the completion of the New Helsinki Music Centre in 2011. After the completion of the main hall, a separate conference wing also designed by Aalto was linked to the south end of the main building. The conference wing was completed in May 1975 and faced its acid test with the final stage of the CSCE.<sup>12</sup>

Despite Finlandia Hall's close association with Cold War diplomacy and politics, the idea of a concert hall to cater for the musical needs of the Finnish capital was first raised during the early 1900s. After World War II, the plans for a concert hall also came to include hosting conferences, which were seen as a way to attract wealthy tourists and to raise Helsinki's international profile.<sup>13</sup> The debate concerning the concert hall was organized along ideological lines and sheds interesting light on the Cold War battle for hearts and minds in Helsinki's local policy: whereas most parties to the right of centre favoured the construction of a purpose-built concert hall, the communists in general resisted it as extravagant and elitist, albeit less so if the hall was also to be put to use as a conference venue. Instead, the communists tried to persuade the city council to build a new theatre, a branch of culture enjoying special patronage and protection among the left.<sup>14</sup> The issue also came to be linked

to the Helsinki Hall of Culture (1958), likewise designed by Alvar Aalto and commissioned (as well as built, quite literally) by the left-wing Finnish People's Democratic Union (SKDL). The Hall's acoustics were praised as being among the best in Helsinki, but in the conception of the right and the majority of social democrats – the so called 'brothers in arms axis' – its association with communist activities rendered it unsuitable as a national symbol, and merely underlined the urgency to set about a new concert hall as a counterweight to left-wing culture.<sup>15</sup>

An attempt to bring about a compromise solution was made in 1956, when the city appointed a committee to investigate the possibility of constructing a multipurpose building to provide facilities for concerts, conferences and theatre. The idea was rejected as impractical,<sup>16</sup> but in 1962 Helsinki city council unanimously voted for the construction of a concert and conference hall to mark the 150th anniversary of the naming of Helsinki as the new capital of Finland. The final design of the building was approved in 1965, and at about the same time the city authorities started the construction of a new city theatre which was intended as a successor to the city's old people's and workers' theatre with roots dating back to the early 1900s.<sup>17</sup>

### **<A-head>A temple of détente**

The construction of the Finlandia Hall coincided with a period of rapid growth in Helsinki: from being a medium-sized city with roughly 250,000 residents at the end of the war, Helsinki had mushroomed into a sprawling metropolis of over half a million people.<sup>18</sup> When viewed against this background, the Hall can be seen as representing a corollary of Helsinki's aspirations to position itself in a context of inter-urban competition.<sup>19</sup> These aspirations were expressed by the mayor of Helsinki (1968–79), Teuvo Aura, in a speech delivered at the laying of the Hall's foundation stone in May 1969:

I see it [the Concert Hall] first and foremost as necessary equipment for Helsinki as a city of services, a city of tourism, a basic prerequisite for Helsinki's cultural and congress tourism. Without this prerequisite being satisfied, Helsinki would lack the opportunity to compete with other European centres for one of the intellectually and materially significant elements of travel and international exchange.<sup>20</sup>

As Laura Kolbe has pointed out, the period overlapping the construction of the Hall was also characterized by a rapprochement between President Urho Kekkonen and Mayor Aura. The friendship between Kekkonen and Aura dated back to the 1940s, and, although their relationship cooled somewhat over the years, Kekkonen appointed Aura as a minister in two caretaker non-party-political governments during the 1970s.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, during the 1960s Kekkonen, who had maintained a certain distance to Helsinki, assumed a more active role in the city's official life, engaging, for instance, in the twin city exchanges between Helsinki and Moscow. At the same time, the promotion of Helsinki's own foreign relations became increasingly intertwined with Finland's official foreign policy. This was reflected by the fact that before every important foreign visit, Aura would turn to the Foreign Ministry and request a memorandum briefing him on issues vital to Finland's foreign policy. These included, among other things, the so-called German question and a number of other tricky issues that might have come up in discussions with foreign dignitaries.<sup>22</sup>

In many respects, Aura's aspirations to promote Helsinki's global image and Kekkonen's efforts to advance the doctrine of active neutrality intersected in Finland's initiative to host the CSCE (Figure 2).<Fig. 2 near here> The idea of a pan-European security conference was first put forward by the Soviet Union and its allies in 1954, and repeated later on several occasions. The proposal, however, elicited a lukewarm response in the west; first, because it was seen as an attempt to legitimize the Soviet Union's hegemony over eastern Europe (and this indeed it was), and, secondly, because it did not include the United States, whose influence in Europe Moscow sought to restrict. In May 1969, two months after the so-called Budapest Declaration issued by the Warsaw Pact countries, the Finnish government presented its own proposal for the European security conference. The Finnish proposal differed from the Soviet proposals in that the invitation to participate was also extended to the North American members of NATO. The Finns offered to host the conference, and also expressed their willingness to take on the conducting of inter-governmental consultations over the preparations.

The timing of the proposal turned out to be perfect; European détente was flourishing and the fact that the initiative came from neutral Finland helped make the originally Soviet idea acceptable to the west, although it was widely suspected that Finland was merely acting as a messenger for the Kremlin. The Soviet Union had, indeed, repeatedly urged Finland to initiate such a conference, but with its initiative Finland was first and foremost advancing its

own foreign policy goals: a strengthening of the security of Europe was bound to reduce its commitment to the FCMA treaty, while the conference itself created a forum in which Finland could promote its status as an active 'western neutral'.<sup>23</sup>

Even though it was far from clear whether the conference would materialize, the event was immediately linked to the Finlandia Hall.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, in addition to 'Finnish culture', 'world-class architecture' and 'Sibelius', the notions of détente and the Paasikivi–Kekkonen line now came to be applied to the Hall. That Helsinki was exceptionally well suited for hosting conferences designed to resolve international conflicts because of its geopolitical location seems to have been axiomatic in public opinion. This image emerged gradually during the late 1960s and early 1970s and was greatly reinforced by the first round of the SALT negotiations that began in Helsinki in November 1969.<sup>25</sup> The talks became a major media event and served as an early demonstration of how Helsinki could capitalize on the publicity that Finland's diplomatic initiatives generated. As a survey conducted by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1970 indicated, during the preceding year over 900 articles with a special focus on Finland and Helsinki had been published in the United States alone. Much of this was attributed to the SALT talks, and the CSCE obviously held the promise of creating even more publicity for Helsinki as a serious conference venue and a European metropolis.<sup>26</sup>

From the early 1970s onwards, the unity constituted by the Finlandia Hall and the CSCE became increasingly synonymous with Helsinki's internationalization.<sup>27</sup> As one of the newspaper reports from the early 1970s argued, the Finlandia Hall and the new hotels built in its immediate vicinity would

utterly transform the Helsinki cityscape – making it more international. Because of SALT, the eyes of the world have recently been focused on Helsinki. But due to the lack of sufficiently large and high-class hotel facilities, and due to the fact that no global conference facilities are available in Helsinki, many international conferences and consultations have eluded us.<sup>28</sup>

The organ of the conservative National Coalition Party, *Uusi Suomi* (the New Finland), adopted a similar tone in an editorial published in May 1970. The editors of the paper noted with satisfaction that with SALT, Helsinki had taken its place among international conference cities. Providing the necessary technical facilities, however, was not enough to make Helsinki



a first-class meeting place: 'The city must also be a lively centre of culture and in this sense it must project an attractive image of itself'.<sup>29</sup>

These concerns were shared by the Helsinki authorities, which were quick to embark on their new international role as facilitators of détente. This was reflected in a speech delivered by Helsinki's deputy mayor, A.K. Loimaranta, at the opening of the Finlandia Hall in December 1971. While stressing the importance of Finlandia Hall for Helsinki's musical life, Loimaranta also painted a vivid picture of the Hall as a meeting place between east and west.<sup>30</sup> This idyllic image was perfectly in line with the active bridge-building policy which characterized Finland's foreign policy in the 1960s and 1970s. It can also be viewed in the context of city branding, as an attempt to exploit the rare opportunity that Finland's presence on the international stage seemed to offer to promote a distinctive image of Helsinki to a global audience.

What exactly was the image that the city authorities were wishing to project? It was, as we have seen, that of a city of high culture, a city of world class modern architecture and a city pervaded by western values. The challenge, of course, was that such notions were not always easily consonant with Finlandization and the country's somewhat off-balance neutrality.<sup>31</sup> This was implied in an article published in *Time Magazine* in the aftermath of the Finnish proposal. After an overview of the immediate background for Finland's initiative and the main features of the Paasikivi–Kekkonen line, the author goes on to give a brief description of Finnish society and institutions (based supposedly on the promotional materials by the Finnish Foreign Ministry): 'Most Finns have accepted the need for neutrality, but internally they have built a society that is thoroughly Western in look as well as outlook. Its architecture is trim and modern, and so are its leggy, miniskirted blondes.'<sup>32</sup>

That said, it should be stressed that the talk of the Finlandia Hall as some sort of a temple of détente may also have stemmed from the needs of the city authorities to justify a project that had been criticized heavily by the local press.<sup>33</sup> As already noted, the pressure to subscribe to Kekkonen's foreign policy line had increased markedly since the mid-1960s, and, as the Finlandia Hall became associated with that policy, open criticism of the Hall could be taken to be directed against the official foreign policy and, ultimately, against Kekkonen. This is not to say that the press in Helsinki refrained from criticizing the city authorities with regard to the Finlandia Hall. The organ of the Swedish People's Party of Finland, *Hufvudstadsbladet*, for instance, continued its attacks against the city leadership for extravagant spending of

taxpayer money on a project that had proved much more expensive than initially anticipated. At the same time, however, the communist *Kansan Uutiset* (The People's News) remarkably toned down its earlier criticism of the Hall.<sup>34</sup> As the majority of the party readily endorsed the Soviet idea of a European security conference, it is hard not to think that this sudden change of heart with regard to the Finlandia Hall was not related to its association with the CSCE.

The CSCE and Finland's foreign policy also figured prominently in the debate concerning the extension of the Finlandia Hall. By the time of the Hall's official opening, the city authorities had already realized that the capacity of the building was not enough to accommodate an event as big as the CSCE.<sup>35</sup> The staging of concerts and conferences in the same venue already had proved to be problematic and there was a growing dissatisfaction among Helsinki's musical elite with the disruptions that had been caused by conferences to the capital's musical life.<sup>36</sup> As a remedy, the city authorities proposed constructing a separate conference wing linked to the south end of the main building. Funds for the extension to the house were already allocated in the 1971 city budget, and in May 1972, two months before the launching of the first phase of the CSCE in Espoo, a few miles from Helsinki, a motion on the alteration of the city plan to enable the extension was brought before Helsinki city council. The motion prompted an intense debate as to whether Helsinki could afford yet another extravagant building and whether it was for the city of Helsinki to bear the costs incurred by Finland's diplomatic initiatives.<sup>37</sup> The latter question came to be raised several times during the subsequent debate, for instance, with reference to the conference's traffic arrangements, and illustrates the at times strained relationship between the official Finland and its capital.<sup>38</sup>

Mayor Aura nevertheless defended the motion by maintaining the necessity to extend the existing facilities in view of the impending CSCE, not to mention the wealthy tourists who would flock to Helsinki as soon as the extension was completed. Aura's sense of urgency was further fuelled by the pressure that was brought to bear on the Helsinki city authorities by Finland's political leadership. The new Social Democratic foreign minister, Kalevi Sorsa, was mentioned as having pressed the matter, but it is likely that Kekkonen, too, had intervened behind the scenes. Here it must be pointed out that at this point the staging of the conference in Helsinki had already become a matter of highest priority for Finland's political leadership. Although there appears to have been a gentleman's agreement to the effect that, in addition to multilateral preparatory talks, the final stage of the conference would also be held in Helsinki, other cities such as Geneva were, at times, suggested by leading European politicians

and high CSCE officials as more fitting sites for the Summit.<sup>39</sup> Such suggestions were, of course, part and parcel of the normal diplomatic game, but for the Finnish government and the Helsinki authorities their message was clear: the fate of CSCE in Helsinki seemed to depend on the preparedness of the city administration to improve Helsinki's conference facilities.

Whether it was more because of concerns for Finland's foreign policy or the city's international image and tourism remains an open question, but in the final vote a clear majority of the council favoured the alteration to the city plan, thereby enabling the extension of the Finlandia Hall. Opposing the resolution were only five delegates of the Swedish People's Party, while the left unanimously accepted the motion in spite of the doubts voiced in *Kansan Uutiset* during the course of the Hall's construction.

In commenting on the decision, Georg C. Ehrnrooth, one of the most vocal critics of the motion, acidly remarked that it must have been 'the first time when the city council of Helsinki based its resolution on foreign policy'.<sup>40</sup> Apart from his long service in the Helsinki city council, Ehrnrooth, like many of his fellow councillors, had an impressive career as a member of parliament. He was, moreover, an ardent critic of communism and one of the very few people openly opposing Kekkonen and his policy during the Cold War. As can be seen from his remark, for Ehrnrooth the debate surrounding the extension of the Finlandia Hall served as yet another demonstration of the kowtowing of Finnish politicians to Kekkonen.<sup>41</sup> Yet Ehrnrooth's statement that this had been the first time when a decision made by the city council of Helsinki would have been motivated by foreign policy considerations involved a certain amount of exaggeration. There had been other occasions, for example, in 1968, when Helsinki approved of the erection of a statue celebrating the 20th anniversary of the FCMA treaty in Helsinki's South Harbour (Eteläsatama). The erection of the statue had been initiated by the communist-led Finnish Peace Committee, but the project was later taken over by the Finnish government, which at the time was coming under increased pressure from Moscow. A national funding campaign was raised, while the city of Helsinki contributed by providing a worthy site and a plinth for the statue.<sup>42</sup>

### **The CSCE as a spectacle**

At about the same time as the city authorities proceeded with the construction of the new conference wing, the multilateral preparatory talks of the CSCE commenced in the town of Espoo, a few miles away from Helsinki.<sup>43</sup> Yet the question of the venue for the final stage of the CSCE remained unsettled until May 1975, when, after years of bargaining and negotiation, it was finally announced that the signing of the Final Accords, which had been negotiated in Geneva since mid-July 1973, would take place at the end of July at the newly completed Finlandia Hall (Figure 3).<sup>44</sup><Fig. 3 near here> In addition to Finland's political leadership, this was a great relief for the authorities of Helsinki, not only because of the huge international exposure which the conference promised, but also because the much debated conference wing had to a large extent been justified by the CSCE.

Although preparations for the Helsinki Summit had been underway for several years, the tight schedule of the event put considerable pressure on the officials of the Foreign Ministry and the city of Helsinki.<sup>45</sup> As many as 3,500 people were involved in the arrangements of the meeting, making every effort to ensure that the Summit would be remembered as a resounding success. Special attention was paid to traffic arrangements, and the security measures were on a scale hitherto unknown in Finland and exceptional even by international standards, as suggested by the many commentaries in the world's media.<sup>46</sup> Anxious about its image, the city also ordered an operation to clear the neighbouring parks of drunkards and 'anti-social' elements.<sup>47</sup> Helsinki was the city where east and west would meet, but great care was taken to ensure that the international press and the delegates themselves were not to be faced with the harsh reality of the people who risked tarnishing the image that Helsinki was keen to project.

The Helsinki Summit also had a marked effect on the lives of the local residents during the few sweltering days of late July and early August. Some followed the advice of the police not to come to the central Helsinki to avoid traffic jams, but thousands of people made their way to the centre to get a glimpse of some of the CSCE's famous attendees and to participate in the peculiar ritual that was taking place at the Finlandia Hall. Gerald Ford and Leonid Brezhnev, of course, commanded most attention,<sup>48</sup> and Brezhnev's arrival in Helsinki railway station by his 16-carriage special train attracted great numbers of curious spectators.<sup>49</sup> It is also interesting to note that, although all local papers devoted the majority of their space to minute descriptions of all official events and speeches, the Finnish tabloid *Ilta-Sanomat* and, to a lesser degree, other papers bestowed a great deal of attention on the wives of some of

the principal participants and, in particular, their visits to some of Helsinki's most famous attractions. The papers' coverage of celebrities such as Mrs Betty Ford, a former photographer's model, and Henry Kissinger's young wife, Nancy, provided a human interest angle for the public to relate to, while at the same time creating a link between the CSCE and Helsinki's tourism industry.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, if one ignores the direct political and military context of the event – and if one adds to the picture nearly 2,000 journalists, a massive cocktail party for 1,500 people at Kalastajatorppa restaurant and the t-shirts with the emblem of the CSCE that Stockmann's department store was selling during the event – the picture that emerges is that of a major urban festival.<sup>51</sup>

All this invites attention to the point raised at the beginning of this article, namely that, from the perspective of Helsinki and that of its citizens, the CSCE was also – and for some people, primarily – a mega-event, a prominent public spectacle crafted for both active and passive consumption. This is also the context in which the comments sent in to *Ilta-Sanomat's* hotline in the aftermath of the conference should be seen. When asked to share their views about the Summit, many brought up the possible positive and negative implications of the CSCE for the international situation. A few complained about the disruption caused to their businesses by the conference, whereas others were annoyed by how much the event, what one commentator ironically referred to as 'the world's biggest theatre on the world's smallest stage', would cost the taxpayers.<sup>52</sup> Equally many, however, had appreciated the opportunity to spot world class celebrities such as Gerald Ford and Helmut Schmidt, the chancellor of West Germany, who appear to have left a lasting impact on some of the female spectators: a woman in her thirties, for instance, wrote that she had found the former 'an astonishingly likeable person', while Schmidt was described by another woman as having 'a charming, cheerful and relaxed' personality (Figure 4). The stringent security measures – which themselves were an inseparable part of the spectacle – were also a subject of complaints, not only because they had intruded into the lives of local residents but also because they were thought to have severely obstructed the public from engaging in celebrity spotting.<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusions

An article published in *Time Magazine* captured the CSCE's spectacular aspects, while at the same time offering an opportune summary of the different perceptions of the Helsinki Accords:

It was show time in Helsinki. This week's Summit spectacular might be titled *Goodbye to World War II*. Others thought of it as *Dreams of Détente*. Still others would prefer to call it *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Grand Illusion* or perhaps even *The Decline of the West*. A few days before the show opened, the conference received some bad news from critics who labelled it *The Betrayal of Eastern Europe*. But fortunately they will not be present at the première to put a damper on the show...In any case, the cast being assembled at Helsinki is indisputably topnotch. The star was unquestionably that durable ex-heavy Leonid Brezhnev. Co-starring in a role that his fans are a little uneasy about is Gerald Ford, who is coming up fast as a jovial but strong character actor...In all, leaders or representatives of 35 states will gather at Helsinki, including spokesmen for the Vatican and every European country except myopic, Maoist Albania. Everyone seemed to be groping for a phrase that would sum up the spectacle. Departing slightly from theatrical images, a European delegate murmured: 'Helsinki will be a living Madame Tussaud's, the greatest show of living waxworks on earth'.<sup>54</sup>

Although opinions were divided on what had been achieved in Helsinki, from a Finnish point of view the CSCE was welcomed as a huge victory. The recognition of the territorial and political status quo in Europe was assumed to reduce Finland's commitment to the FCMA treaty, and the staging of the conference had also drawn attention to the country's neutrality, although not always quite as the Finnish political leadership had hoped.<sup>55</sup>

As might be expected, the Helsinki Summit also was estimated to have been a major success for the host city. The conference was seen as a substantial boost for Helsinki's image as a world class conference venue and many, including the head of the Helsinki tourist authority, believed that the event was likely to have a long-term positive impact on Helsinki's tourism industry. While the long-term economic and social benefits of the CSCE for Helsinki are difficult to assess, it is certainly not exaggerated to claim that the Helsinki Summits served to showcase the city, its institutions and culture on the international stage, although, perhaps, not as powerfully as the Helsinki Olympics had been able to do some 20 years earlier.<sup>56</sup> All this seemed to justify the belief of the Helsinki city authorities that a combination of world

class architecture, high culture, Finnish organization and détente would provide a powerful instrument for promoting the city – and maybe even for manipulating some of the negative connotations attached to it because of Finlandization and Helsinki's difficult geographical position between the two competing blocs.

After all this talk about city promotion, public spectacles, celebrities and tourism, one must ask: to what extent exactly has this been a Cold War story? Where is the conflict? Where is the US–Soviet battle for 'the soul of mankind'?<sup>57</sup> As we have seen, the Cold War in its local manifestations was, of course, reflected in the process leading up to the construction of the Finlandia Hall, although it should be clear that the Cold War is only one of the many contexts in which the history of the Hall can be studied. Similarly, there can be no doubt that the majority of Helsinki city authorities subscribed to Kekkonen's foreign policy line and, in particular, to the view that the CSCE and its hosting were vital to Finland's national interests. That said, for the city authorities the CSCE meant, primarily although not exclusively, an opportunity to market their city to the world. At the same time, the CSCE also became a vehicle for changing the city, as illustrated by the case of the Finlandia Hall's conference wing. While there is much to suggest that the city authorities would have been forced to tackle the vexatious issue of the Hall's extension sooner or later, the CSCE provided a convincing pretext for speeding up the process. Pressure from the Finnish political leadership also played a role, but it should be evident that the CSCE represented an undertaking in which both parties had a strong vested interest.

Just as the CSCE helped place Helsinki on the world map, so too did it initiate a process through which Helsinki was assigned a prominent position in Cold War historiography. Indeed, whereas Berlin came to embody the Cold War division of Europe – and many other European cities likewise came to be associated with specific Cold War events – Helsinki became the city of détente, a city where east and west met.<sup>58</sup> This, if anything, remains the CSCE's – and the Cold War's – most enduring legacy for Helsinki.

To judge by the title of this special issue, it seems to me that the historical study of cities during the Cold War has entered – or is about to enter – into the distinguished company of other disciplines of history in which the term 'Cold War' has already undergone a metamorphosis from a noun into an adjective (such as Cold War science and Cold War social science).<sup>59</sup> While I am somewhat sceptical about the prospects of making far-reaching generalizations based on the notion of 'Cold War cities' – and while I am aware of the risks

associated with the use of such concepts – I do welcome it as a potentially fruitful tool for studying how the Cold War shaped (and did not shape) developments in a given urban context. Not because of its analytical clarity, which to a considerable degree seems to be lacking, but because of its very ambiguity, the term provokes us to problematize the relationship between cities (whatever is meant by them) and the Cold War (which itself is a highly problematic term).<sup>60</sup>

When considering the fruitfulness of the notion of ‘Cold War cities’ for the purposes of historical analysis, one is also led to wonder whether there also existed such a thing as ‘an anti-Cold War city’.<sup>61</sup> And even if not, whether we should consider introducing the notion of ‘anti-Cold War cities’ as a means of identifying and examining how cities themselves challenged and transcended Cold War dichotomies, whether it was for political, economic or cultural reasons. Whatever the potential of such a term might be, it can be argued that at least the case of Helsinki and the CSCE could be equally well or perhaps even more appropriately presented under such a heading.

**Figure 1:** The Finlandia Hall, Helsinki, Finland

*Source:* the Photo by Daderot is licensed under the Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication.

**Figure 2:** US president Gerald Ford addressing the 1975 CSCE Summit in Helsinki, Finland

*Source:* photo by Tapio Korpisaari, Helsinki City Museum’s Picture Archive.

**Figure 3:** Cars of the delegates of the 1975 Helsinki Summit waiting outside the Finlandia Hall

*Source:* photo by Tapio Korpisaari, Helsinki City Museum’s Picture Archive.

**Figure 4:** Curious citizens watching the motorcades of the delegates of the 1975 CSCE Summit on their way to the Presidential Palace, Helsinki, Finland

*Source:* photo by Erkki Salmela, Helsinki City Museum’s Picture Archive.



---

\* I would like to thank Matthew Farish, David Monteyne, Tanja Vahtikari and Marjaana Niemi for their comments on earlier drafts of this article. I am also indebted to Shane Ewen for helpful criticism, as well as the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions. Research for this article was supported by the Academy of Finland through the project (SA 132337) 'Cities and Transnational Interaction. The Cultural Contacts between West and East European Urban Centres during and beyond the Cold War'.

<sup>1</sup> The recent literature on the CSCE is vast. For a sample, see S.B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge, 2011); A. Wenger, V. Mastny and C. Nuenlist (eds.), *Origins of the European Security System: The Helsinki Process Revisited, 1965–75* (London, 2008); P. Villaume and O. A. Westad (eds.), *Perforating the Iron Curtain: European Détente, Transatlantic Relations, and the Cold War, 1965–1985* (Copenhagen, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> M. Roche, *Mega-events and Modernity: Olympics and Expos in the Growth of Global Culture* (London, 2000). On the impact of mega-events on cities, see e.g. H.H. Hiller, 'Post-event outcomes and the post-modern turn: the Olympics and urban transformations', *European Sports Management Quarterly*, 6 (2006), 317–32.

<sup>3</sup> For general accounts of the history of Finland during the Cold War in English, see H. Meinander, *History of Finland* (New York, 2013); D. Kirby, *A Concise History of Finland* (Cambridge, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Kirby, *A Concise History of Finland*, 238–40; Jussila, Hentilä and Nevakivi, *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State* (London, 1999), 312–13; J. Tarkka, *Uhan alta Unioniin: asennemurros ja sen unilukkari EVA* (Helsinki, 2002), 212–13.

<sup>5</sup> Kirby, *A Concise History of Finland*, 246.

<sup>6</sup> On Finlandization, see e.g. Kirby, *A Concise History of Finland*, 245–6, 272–5; T. Vihavainen, *Kansakunta rähmällään: suomettumisen lyhyt historia* (Helsinki, 1991); J. Tarkka, *Karhun kainalossa. Suomen kylmä sota 1947–1990* (Helsinki, 2012). On Finnish military defence, see e.g. M. Jakobson, *Finland in the New Europe* (Westport, 1998), 88–90.

<sup>7</sup> K. Kinnunen, *Suomi-Neuvostoliitto-seuran historia 1944–1974* (Helsinki, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> L. Kolbe, 'Helsinki kasvaa suurkaupungiksi', in L. Kolbe and H. Helin, *Helsingin historia vuodesta 1945, III: Kunnallishallinto ja -politiikka, kunnallistalous* (Helsinki, 2002), 144–9, 370–5.

<sup>9</sup> Kolbe, 'Helsinki kasvaa suurkaupungiksi', 159–93, 264–73, 318–29, 374–5; T. Aura, *Sovitellen. Muistiin merkinnyt Pertti Mustonen* (Espoo, 1982), 327.

<sup>10</sup> M. Majander, 'Post-Cold War historiography in Finland', in T.B. Olesen (ed.) *The Cold War – and the Nordic Countries: Historiography at a Crossroads* (Odense, 2004). 63.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. Tarkka, *Karhun kainalossa*.

<sup>12</sup> <http://file.alvaraalto.fi/search.php?id=048> accessed 22 Jan. 2014;

[www.finlandiatalo.fi/en/architecture/alvar-aalto/finlandia-hall-spaces-and-interior](http://www.finlandiatalo.fi/en/architecture/alvar-aalto/finlandia-hall-spaces-and-interior) accessed 22 Jan. 2014.

- 
- <sup>13</sup> P. Mustonen, 'Finlandia-talon kolme vuosikymmentä', in E.-K. Holopainen, P. Mustonen and P. Suhonen (eds). *Finlandia-talo, tapahtumia, ihmisiä, musiikkia* (Helsinki, 2001), 13–18, 27. *Hufvudstadsbladet (Hbl)*, 24 Apr. 1970; *Uusi Suomi* (hereafter *US*), 14 Mar. 1971.
- <sup>14</sup> Kolbe, 'Helsinki kasvaa suurkaupungiksi', 172–7.
- <sup>15</sup> A. Kostander, 'Koko kansan koti vai kommunistien pesäke? Helsingin Kulttuuritalon rakentaminen ja paikan henki 1955–1959', University of Helsinki Master's thesis, 2011, 59–67.
- <sup>16</sup> Kolbe, 'Helsinki kasvaa suurkaupungiksi', 172–7; *US*, 10 Oct. 1963.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*; Mustonen, 'Finlandia-talon kolme vuosikymmentä', 17–18.
- <sup>18</sup> M. Bell and M. Hietala, *Helsinki. The Innovative City: Historical Perspectives* (Helsinki, 2002), 266.
- <sup>19</sup> *Helsingin Osuuskauppa* (hereafter *HOK*), 1 (1970); *Hbl*, 24 Apr. 1970.
- <sup>20</sup> T. Aura, cited in Kolbe, 'Helsinki kasvaa suurkaupungiksi', 362.
- <sup>21</sup> Kolbe, 'Helsinki kasvaa suurkaupungiksi', 351, 352; Aura, *Sovitellen*, 152–3, 171–2.
- <sup>22</sup> Aura, *Sovitellen*, 271–2. For a fine account of Finnish–German relations during the Cold War, see S. Hentilä, *Neutral zwischen den beiden deutschen Staaten: Finnland und Deutschland im Kalten Krieg* (Berlin, 2006).
- <sup>23</sup> Jussila, Hentilä and Nevakivi, *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State*, 312–13. A detailed account of Finland's involvement in the CSCE is M. Reimaa, *Helsinki Catch: European Security Accords 1975* (Helsinki, 2008). See also Jakobson, *Finland in the New Europe*, 80–3.
- <sup>24</sup> *Hbl*, 24. Apr. 1970; *Helsingin Sanomat (HS)*, 31 May 1972; *HS*, 1 Jun. 1972.
- <sup>25</sup> *Hbl*, 17 Jan. 1970; *Hbl*, 24 Apr. 1970.
- <sup>26</sup> *US*, 23 Dec. 1969; *HS*, 15 Jan. 1970; *Hbl*, 17 Jan. 1970; *US*, 16 Jan. 1970.
- <sup>27</sup> For comparative purposes, see Iris Schröder's discussion on the UNESCO headquarters in Paris: I. Schröder, 'Der Beton, die Stadt, die Kunst und die Welt: Der Streit um die Pariser UNESCO-Gebäude', *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, 7 (2010), 7–29.
- <sup>28</sup> *HOK*, 1 (1970). See also *US*, 31 May 1970
- <sup>29</sup> *US*, 31 May 1970. On conference tourism to Helsinki, also see *US*, 15 Sep. 1970; *Suomen Sosiaalidemokraatti (SS)*, 27 Mar. 1971; *HS*, 28 May 1975.
- <sup>30</sup> Mustonen, 'Finlandia-talon kolme vuosikymmentä', 12. See also *Kansan Uutiset* (hereafter *KU*), 3 Dec. 1971.
- <sup>31</sup> The question of Finland's international image was, of course, closely linked to the Finlandization debate. See Tarkka, *Uhan alta Unioniin*, 176–85.
- <sup>32</sup> *Time*, 27 Jul. 1970, vol. 96, issue 4, 1, 21.
- <sup>33</sup> *SS*, 15 May 1970; *Hbl*, 27 May 197; *KU*, 11 Aug. 1970; *HS*, 20 Dec. 1970; *KU*, 16 Oct. 1971; *SS*, 16 Oct. 1971; *SS*, 11 Nov. 1971; *KU*, 12 Dec. 1971.
- <sup>34</sup> This observation is based on my perusal of the comprehensive newspaper clipping collection at the Helsinki City Archives. On *Hufvudstadsbladet*, see e.g. *Hbl*, 13 Dec. 1972; *Hbl*, 16 Dec. 1972; *Hbl*, 7 Jun. 1973; *Hbl*, 21 Nov. 1973; *Hbl*, 31 Mar. 1974.
- <sup>35</sup> *SS*, 4 Apr. 1970; *US*, 26 Jun. 1970; *US*, 2 Jul. 1970; *Aamulehti*, 22 Sep. 1970; *HS*, 14 Oct. 1970; *US*, 13 Oct. 1970.

- 
- <sup>36</sup> For example, *Ilta-Sanomat (IS)*, 5 Jun. 1970; *Hbl*, 7 Jun. 1970; *HS*, 7 Aug. 1970; *US*, 22 Sep. 1970; *HS*, 23 Sep. 1970; *SS*, 17 Nov. 1970; *SS*, 22 Dec. 1970; Mustonen, 'Finlandia-talon kolme vuosikymmentä', 12–13.
- <sup>37</sup> *KU*, 22 Dec. 1970; *US*, 22 Dec. 1970; *Hbl*, 8 Jun. 1971; *Hbl*, 4 Feb. 1972; *US*, 18 Feb. 1972; *Hbl*, 18 Feb. 1972; *KU*, 4 May 1972; *Hbl*, 5 May 1972; *HS*, 8 May 1972; *HS*, 9 May 1972; *HS*, 1 Jun. 1972; *SS*, 1 Jun. 1972.
- <sup>38</sup> *KU*, 12 Dec. 1971; *KU*, 15.5.73; *HS*, 15 May 1973; *HS*, 22 May 1973.
- <sup>39</sup> See *HS*, 4 Jun. 1973; *HS*, 18 Oct. 1973; *HS*, 18 Mar. 1975; *HS*, 22 Mar. 1975.
- <sup>40</sup> *US*, 4 May 1972; Mustonen, 'Finlandia-talon kolme vuosikymmentä', 30. The final decision was taken in late May 1972. *HS*, 1 Jun. 1972; *IS*, 1 Jun. 1972.
- <sup>41</sup> J.F. Cooper, *On the Finland Watch. An American Diplomat in Finland during the Cold War* (Claremont, 2000), 314–15; G.C. Ehrnrooth, *Krokotiilien keskellä. Muistelmia kylmän sodan vuosikymmeniltä* (Espoo, 1999).
- <sup>42</sup> *Hbl*, 23 Dec. 1965; *Hbl*, 7 Apr. 1968; *SS*, 12 Apr. 1967.
- <sup>43</sup> See e.g. *Hbl*, 13 Dec. 1972; *Hbl*, 25 Apr. 1973; *US*, 16 Jan. 1973; *International New York Times (INYT)*, 8 Jul. 1973. See also E.-K. Holopainen, 'Kongressitalo', in Holopainen, Mustonen and Suhonen (eds.). *Finlandia-talo, tapahtumia, ihmisiä, musiikkia*, 99–101.
- <sup>44</sup> Holopainen, 'Kongressitalo', 99.
- <sup>45</sup> For example, *Hbl*, 22 Jul. 1975; *SS*, 26 Jul. 1975; *KU*, 26 Jul. 1975.
- <sup>46</sup> The total number of police and armed forces involved was estimated at 3,000–5,000. For example, *HS*, 22 Jul. 1975; *HS*, 23 Jul. 1975; *IS*, 23 Jul. 1975; *HS*, 26 Jul. 1975; *HS*, 28 Jul. 1975; *Time*, 4 Aug. 1975, 5, 20, 22.
- <sup>47</sup> *Hbl*, 23 Jul. 1975; *IS*, 24 Jul. 1975. A similar operation had been carried out in 1973 in association with the CSCE's first phase. See *HS*, 3 Jul. 1973.
- <sup>48</sup> See e.g. *HS*, 31 Jul. 1975; *HS*, 1 Aug. 1975; *IS*, 29 Jul. 1975; *Hbl*, 1 Aug. 1975.
- <sup>49</sup> See e.g. *IS*, 29 Jul. 1975.
- <sup>50</sup> See e.g. *HS*, 22 Jul. 1975; *IS*, 23 Jul. 1975; *IS*, 31 Jul. 1975.
- <sup>51</sup> See e.g. *Time*, 4 Aug. 1975, 5, 20, 22; *INYT*, 1 Aug. 1975; *IS*, 29 Jul. 1975; *HS*, 31 Jul. 1975; *Hbl*, 1 Aug. 1975.
- <sup>52</sup> *IS*, 8 Aug. 1975. On the relationship between mega-events and security, see P. Boyle and K.D. Haggerty, 'Spectacular security: mega-events and the security complex', *International Political Sociology*, 3 (2009), 257–74.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>54</sup> *Time*, 4 Aug. 1975, vol. 106, issue 5.
- <sup>55</sup> Tarkka, *Uhan alta Unioniin*, 212–16; J. Suomi, *Umpeutuva latu: Urho Kekkonen 1976–1981* (Helsinki, 2000), 283–4, 368, 388–90, 398.
- <sup>56</sup> *Hbl*, 1 Aug. 1975. See also *IS*, 2 Aug. 1975. On the construction of Finland's image during the 1952 Olympics and the reception of the Games, see M. Urponen, *Yli kaikkien rajojen?: Helsingin olympialaiset ja Armi Kuusela kansainvälisyyden kynnyksellä* (Helsinki, 2010).
- <sup>57</sup> M. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York, 2007).
- <sup>58</sup> For example, *INYT*, 2 Aug. 1975, 8.
- <sup>59</sup> J. Isaac and D. Bell, 'Introduction', in J. Isaac and D. Bell (eds.), *Uncertain Empire: American History and the Idea of the Cold War* (Oxford, 2012), 3–4.

---

<sup>60</sup> An impressive recent attempt to make sense of the idea of the Cold War is provided by Isaac and Bell (eds.), *Uncertain Empire*.

<sup>61</sup> My suggestion is inspired by the notion of 'anti-Cold War social science' which Mark Solovey has put forward in a different context. M. Solovey, 'Cold War social science: spectre, reality, or useful concept?', in M. Solovey and H. Cravens (eds.), *Cold War Social Science: Knowledge Production, Liberal Democracy, and Human Nature* (New York, 2012), 18.