

Mapping the historical sense of Finland

JOUNI HÄKLI

Häkli, Jouni (2002). Mapping the historical sense of Finland. *Fennia* 180: 1–2, pp. 75–81. Helsinki. ISSN 0015-0010.



The article looks at the development of cartographic representations of Finland from a social constructionist perspective. The image of Finland, as portrayed on maps, has contributed significantly to the Finnish nation-building process. As a medium for the dissemination of information, maps have enabled the broad popularisation of the idea of Finland as a unified territory and nation. Maps have also helped to build the sense of Finnishness by representing the country in exclusively Finnish terms, e.g., with Finnish place names. Finally, maps build the sense of a continuous national history by situating political and cultural events and portraying these in a timeless manner. In all, maps are powerful representations that should be assessed as agents of change rather than passive objects.

Keywords: cartography, history, national identity, Finland

Jouni Häkli, Department of Regional Studies and Environmental Policy, FIN-33014 University of Tampere, Finland. E-mail: jouni.hakli@uta.fi

Maps as story-tellers

Maps that describe the European North have portrayed the area long before the Finnish territory was established culturally and politically. The best-known examples of these early cartographic images include such masterpieces as Jacob Ziegler's (published in 1532), Olaus Magnus' (1539), and Gerardus Mercator's maps (1595), as well as the one published by Andreas Bureus in 1626. These maps portray Finland as a separate peninsula, but inaccurately in today's standards (Fig. 1). Accuracy in depicting the coastline, the surface area, and the spatial dimensions of the Finnish peninsula only reached the modern level by the end of the eighteenth century, with the advancement of cartographic methodology.

Progress in cartographic accuracy is an important, but certainly not the only interesting facet in the history of Finland on the map. Maps have always portrayed the physical world, but, moreover, communicated about cultural realms and political events. Maps of kingdoms and states tell stories about history seen in a particular light, one that often considers the national community as the unquestioned starting point (Häkli 2001). Maps of nation-states, therefore, tend to insert a nationalist tone in the interpretation of history. The

history of Finland makes no exception in this respect. The image of Finland as portrayed on maps has functioned as a symbol that has united the national community and told particular stories about the Finns as one people.

The rhetorical power of maps originates both in cultural and political imagery. The Finnish identity derives from certain lands and landscapes and their cultural representations. In territorial terms maps are significant not only in that they portray a land that the ordinary people can identify with, but also in the sense that they help in disseminating the idea of Finland as a unified country and nation. This has been vital to the Finnish nation-building process that took place in newspapers, books, and school education, as well as through various social practices that ranged from voluntary associations to military training (Alapuro 1988; Paasi 1996).

Maps have also been instrumental to the way in which ideas and their discourses have been linked with particular locations. The concept of *discursive landscape* captures well this interlinkage. The concept points at the symbolic fabric that links the self-understanding of a people with a particular territory, concrete places, everyday practices, and imagination (Häkli 1999: 124). The Finnish place names, for example, are one con-



Fig. 1. Olaus Magnus: *Carta Marina et Descriptio Septentrionalium Terrarum*. Venice 1539. The map is unusually detailed and it has influenced the conceptions and images of the European North significantly. (Reproduced from Fredrikson 1993: 24–25, with permission)

create historical testimony to the cultural presence of the Finns on the Finnish peninsula. Written on maps these names take on a particular aura of fixity, an almost self-proclaimed physical presence that does not require further proof or justification. As hybrids of textual and pictorial representation maps help in fortifying the idea of a territorially definable 'Finnish' culture.

In addition to their role as cultural signifiers, maps are concrete and visible traces of power politics (Häkli 1998b: 134). Cartographic representations created in different times illustrate well the history of an emerging state system and changing political power relations in the European North. Also the developments that led to Finland's independence have been stored in the form of a series of maps telling the story of the nation as a part of Sweden (13th century–1809), then of Russia (1809–1917), and, later, as an independent state (since 1917).

The shaping of Finland on the map

Finland took shape on the map first as a geographical region and only after that as a political-cul-

tural entity. The mapping of the Finnish lands increased significantly during the seventeenth century when the Swedish State began to centralise and consolidate its government and the land survey was institutionalised. In the Kingdom of Sweden, which consisted of centrally governed provinces, the Finns represented a linguistic and culturally distinctive people (Fig. 2).

During the Swedish rule the concept of 'Finland' was generally associated with the south-western corner of contemporary Finland, that is, the region of Varsinais-Suomi ('Finland Proper'), or sometimes with the entire collection of Sweden's 'Eastern provinces'. The ambiguous use of the concept shows well that Finland did not yet form a political-administrative unity, but rather served as a geographical designation of the eastern parts of the Swedish Kingdom. Interpretations that seek to portray Finland as a nation and a state before the nineteenth century modernise history by viewing the past through later events.

The situation changed in 1809 when Finland became the autonomous Grand Duchy of Russia. Disconnection from the association with, and dependence of, Sweden allowed the formation of separate governmental structures, as well as the

Fig. 2. Johann Baptist Homann: *Regni Sueciae in omnes suas Subjacentes Provincias accurate divisi Tabula Generalis*. Nürnberg 1737. The map from the period of Sweden as a Great Power portrays the kingdom as composed of provinces. Finland figures on the map in a form that could today be interpreted as a political-administrative unity. Recent historical research does not lend support to such an interpretation, however. (Reproduced from Fredrikson 1993: 72, with permission)



territorial shaping of Finland as a political-administrative whole for the first time. Seen from the outside, however, the association of Finland with Russia signified the relaxation of the Scandinavian connection. This was quickly recognised in some maps showing the North of Europe (Fig. 3).

Finnish nationalism and the strive for an independent state expanded gradually during the nineteenth century. At this juncture the image of the territory of autonomous Finland became a national symbol with a politics of its own.

The politics of cartography

The map is graphic and effective as a narrator of political history. This has made maps subject to various political uses, from a tool in territorial demarcation to downright vehicles of propaganda. The maps' enduring status as highly objective representations of space increases their political significance (Häkli 1998). It has become abundantly clear, however, that cartographic representation of reality always occurs in a specific societal context and that this affects the selection and interpretation of whatever is mapped (Wood

1992; Edney 1997). Hence, for example, a map that portrays some aspects of the physical environment in a seemingly neutral way may in fact be very politically laden if these aspects are interpreted as belonging to a particular state territory or national landscape (Harley 1988, 1989).

A major increase in the political significance of maps occurred when national self-determination was adopted as the ruling principle in international justice in early twentieth-century Europe. The ideal of "one nation, one state" was both promoted and realised with the aid of maps (Herb 1997: 17). From the perspective of congruence between national groups and territorial homelands, however, the ethnic patterns of Europe turned out to be tragically confused and mixed.

Finland is among the countries that were dramatically affected by the geopolitical turmoil of World War I. Political history research has identified Finland as one of the smaller European polities with a history of economic and political dependency on metropolitan centres. Finland also belongs to a group of countries called *successor states* (e.g., Hroch 1985; Smith 1991). The term was widely used between the World Wars to denote those polities, with similar state structures

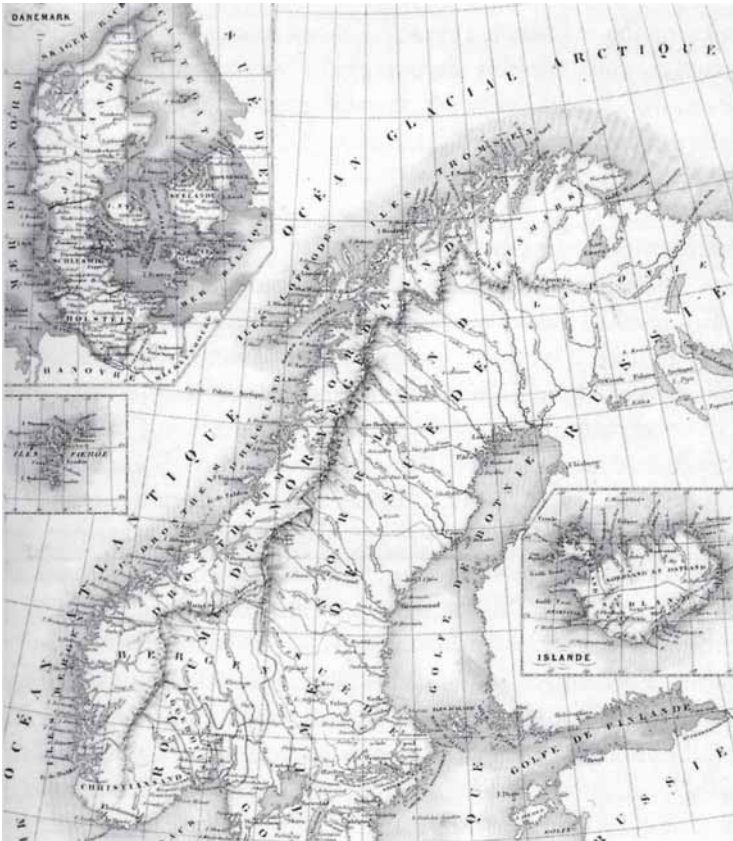


Fig. 3. Alexandre Delamarche: *Atlas Delamarche, Géographie Moderne, Suède, Norvège, Danemark*. Paris 1851. The Grand Duchy of Finland was portrayed as a lost territory that did not merit detailed description. (Reproduced from Fredrikson 1993: 106, with permission)

and internal conflicts, that formed a geographically contiguous area between Russia and the other major European powers (Alapuro 1988: 2–3).

Born out of the aftermath of World War I, the successor states became the axiomatic test ground for the principle of national self-determination. The task of recreating the political map of Europe was carried out largely according to Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points Address, which stressed in several occasions that self-determination was a solution to the problems of war-ridden Europe. It soon became clear for those who were in charge of defining new national territories that maps on 'peoples', 'nationalities', 'languages', or 'races' were absolutely necessary for the task. In the situation where the number of nationalities far exceeded that of existing state territories, maps soon became tools of persuasion and propaganda (Herb 1997: 33).

All successor states were more or less created by the then-existing ones, but Finland is an ex-

ceptional case because it gained its independence on a territory that had already been established in the imperial period (Engman 1989: 108). When Finland became the autonomous Grand Duchy of Russia in 1809 and the province of Vyborg was attached to its territory three years later, the Finnish nation-building assumed a territorial framework that would remain virtually intact until 1940. Therefore, maps did not play a great role in the establishment of the sovereign state of Finland, but were of much importance in the process that rooted the sense of Finnishness in the population.

Awareness of Finland and Finnishness can hardly be imagined without reference to the territorially defined Finnish space. Hence, as Finland had already assumed its territorial shape during the metropolitan rule, nation-building in Finland took place as a process of national and territorial unification. The national elite faced the task of producing 'Finland' as a symbolic landscape in the

popular realm in order to foster the self-understanding of a coherent ethnic nation. Maps were instrumental in this task.

Maps became the privileged images of the Finnish national territory through a process that had two aspects, which only can be distinguished analytically. On one hand, representations of the Finnish lands made the Finnish territory visible in a popularly appealing manner. For example, the cartographic image of the Finnish territory portrays the contours of the 'Maiden of Finland', which personified and embodied the idea of a unified nation and the belonging of the Finns to the Finnish lands. The rhetorical power of anthropomorphic images is well known (Olwig 1987).

On the other hand, to point at a more concrete aspect of cartographic communication, maps were increasingly available to the masses. Various atlases became common items both in home and at school by the early twentieth century. Cartographic images, produced mostly by the educated elite for governmental, academic, and educational purposes, were disseminated over the Finnish territory via books, newspapers, education, and such institutions as museums and public offices. In consequence, the sense of Finnishness as rooted in a particular soil gradually emerged as an image of the Finnish territory and cultural sphere (Paasi 1992: 94).

Finland had become well captured on maps by the end of the inter-war period. They were available practically everywhere. This contributed significantly to the establishment of national identity among the Finnish people. Yet, it cannot be assumed that the Finnish identity had somehow reached its final form at that time. Quite the contrary, a continuous search for national identity has been characteristic to Finland throughout its independence (e.g., Räsänen 1989).

For instance, the traumatic experience of World War II and its aftermath affected both the Finnish territory and the self-image of the Finns. The mythic lands of Karelia, which had figured strongly in the Finnish nation-building as the source of the original Finnish vernacular culture, had to be ceded to the Soviet Union (Kärkkäinen 1987). The fact that Karelia region had been the centre of aspirations toward "Greater Finland" before and during World War II further strengthened the feeling of loss (Paasi 1990).

The attempt to justify the annexation of Eastern Karelian areas to the territory of Finland represents perhaps the most explicit case of the use of maps

for propaganda in Finland (Kosonen 2000). In 1941, a special issue of the geographical journal *Terra* was dedicated to the mapping of "future Finland." Such features as the rock bed, forests, agriculture, and industries were shown on maps portraying areas that extended east from the Finnish-Russian state border (e.g., Eskola 1941; Auer 1941). Other features, such as the flora and the fauna, language groups, and cultural characteristics, were described textually and photographically (e.g., Linkola 1941).

Conclusion: Finland re-joins the Nordic countries and Europe

During the Cold War era that followed World War II, Finland was imagined as part of the Scandinavian family of nations, largely for the official neutrality policy reasons. More recently the Baltic Sea region and the European Union have again become the foci of identity-building on a wider scale. While the concomitant urbanisation, cultural changes, and increasing globalisation of the post-war era have changed the expressions of Finnish identity, the map image of Finland continues to convey and inform the national sense of history of the Finns.

Changes in the image of Finland communicate historical events: times of war and peace, the drawing of boundaries, and the shifting cultural influences caused by territorial changes. The Finns who went to school in the early twentieth century were familiarised with a map that included the Petsamo and Karelia regions in the northeast and east. The generations born after World War II have come to know Finland in its current shape.

Hence, throughout the history of Finland the country's cartographic image has reflected not only domestic events, but also Finland's international relations. The separation of Finland from Russia was internationally recognised by portraying the country among its Nordic neighbours on the Scandinavian map (Fig. 4). The straddle between East and West after World War II is a Finnish episode in the Cold War history. And, of course, a more recent event of importance is the joining of Finland in the European Union (1995), which has set Finland firmly on the political map of Europe.

More than ever before, maps are a natural part of our everyday visual environments through the media, books, advertisement, and the Internet.

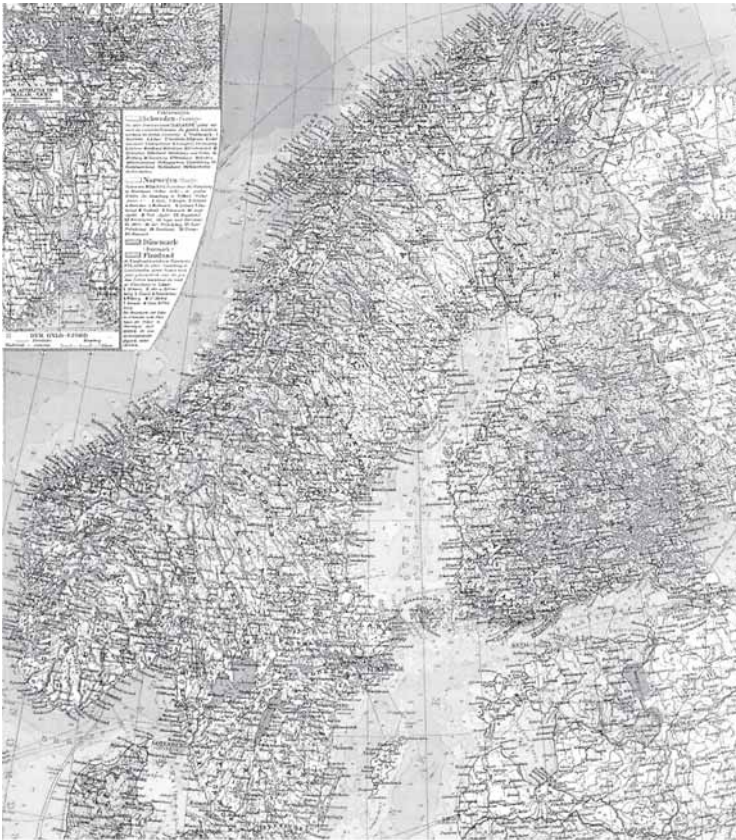


Fig. 4. Ernst Ambrosius: *Velhagen & Klasings Kleiner Handatlas, Skandinavien und Finnland, Übersicht*. Bielefeld & Leipzig 1930. The territory of Finland was the most extensive between the World Wars when the Petsamo area had been annexed by Finland in the peace treaty of Tartu in 1920. Finland returned to the family of Nordic countries in European atlases gradually during this period. (Reproduced from Fredrikson 1993: 114, with permission)

The nature of maps as representations therefore tends to go unnoticed, while the messages they help to mediate are everywhere. Still, maps are much more than mere pictures of the world. They are what Latour (1986: 7–11) calls “immutable mobiles,” that is, standardised representations of territory that are movable across distance. The fact that maps are fixed and conventional images that are easily transportable makes them useful for the dissemination of information and ideas. Moreover, maps are important constituents of people’s sense of national history, as the case of Finland well illustrates. While the stories that maps tell are interesting, they should be listened with due caution.

REFERENCES

- Alapuro R (1988). *State and revolution in Finland*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Auer V (1941). Tuleva Suomi talousmaantieteellisenä kokonaisuutena. *Terra* 53, 206–215.
- Edney M (1997). *Mapping an empire: the geographical construction of British India, 1765–1843*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Engman M (1989). Finland as a successor-state. In Engman M & D Kirby (eds). *Finland: people, nation, state*, 102–127. Hurst & Co, London.
- Eskola P (1941). Itä-Karjalan kallioperästä. *Terra* 53, 171–189.
- Fredrikson E (1993). *Finland defined. A nation takes place on the map*. Gummerus, Jyväskylä.
- Häkli J (1998a). Discourse in the production of political space: decolonizing the symbolism of provinces in Finland. *Political Geography* 17, 331–363.
- Häkli J (1998b). Manufacturing provinces: theorizing the encounters between governmental and popular geographers in Finland. In Dalby S & G Ó Tuathail (eds). *Rethinking geopolitics*, 131–151. Routledge, London.
- Häkli J (1999). Cultures of demarcation: territory and national identity in Finland. In Herb, GH & D Kaplan (eds). *Nested identities: identity, territory, and scale*, 123–149. Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham.

- Häkli J (2001). In the territory of knowledge: state-centered discourses and the construction of society. *Progress in Human Geography* 25, 403–422.
- Harley B (1988). Maps, knowledge, and power. In Cosgrove D & S Daniels (eds). *The iconography of landscape: essays on the symbolic representation, design and use of past environments*, 277–312. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Harley B (1989). Deconstructing the map. *Cartographica* 26, 1–20.
- Herb G (1997). *Under the map of Germany: nationalism and propaganda 1918–1945*. Routledge, London.
- Hroch M (1985). *Social preconditions of national revival in Europe*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Kärkkäinen L (1987). Suomen valtakunnan vanhat rajat ja itärajan käynti 1934. *Maanmittaushallituksen julkaisu* 59. Helsinki.
- Kosonen K (2000). *Kartta ja kansakunta. Suomalainen lehdistökartografia sortovuosien protesteista Suur-Suomen kuviin 1899–1942*. SKS, Helsinki.
- Latour B (1986). Visualization and cognition: thinking with eyes and hands. *Knowledge and Society* 6, 1–40.
- Linkola K (1941). Suomalainen kasvimaailma jatkuu kauas itään. *Terra* 53, 194–203.
- Olwig KR (1987). Den forsvundne region. *Kulturgeografiske haeft* 35, 17–24.
- Paasi A (1990). The rise and fall of Finnish geopolitics. *Political Geography Quarterly* 9, 53–65.
- Paasi A (1992). The construction of socio-spatial consciousness. Geographical perspectives on the history and contexts of Finnish nationalism. *Nordisk Samhällsgeografisk Tidskrift* 15, 79–100.
- Paasi A (1996). *Territories, boundaries and consciousness*. John Wiley, Chichester.
- Räsänen M (1989). Kansankulttuuri kansakunnan identiteetin rakennuspuuna. In Korhonen T & M Räsänen (eds). *Kansa kuvastimessa: etnisyyks ja identiteetti*, 10–28. SKS, Helsinki.
- Smith AD (1991). *National identity*. University of Nevada Press, Reno.
- Wood D (1992). *The power of maps*. Guilford, New York.