From a history of war into a multicultural urban environment:

A cultural impact assessment of the conservation of the Swedish-Russian Fortress of Lappeenranta, Finland

SUVI NIINISALO*

Abstract: *Finland, under Swedish rule at the time, started constructing the Lappeenranta Fortress in the 1720s for defence against an eastern threat. A small town had been founded on the site as early as 1649. In 1741, the Russians invaded the fortress in a fierce battle. Russians, led by Aleksandr Suvorov, started to improve the fortress in the late 18th century. The oldest buildings in the fortress date back to this time. When Finland was annexed into the Russian Empire as an autonomous grand duchy, the fortress was employed as a correctional facility for prisoners. After the Second World War, the fortress was left to deteriorate, but in the 1970s a 30-year conservation project was launched. This article explores the effects of this conservation work on the city of Lappeenranta as well as on its inhabitants.*

Keywords: Fortress, conservation, impact study, cultural impacts.

The Fortress of Lappeenranta has been under conservation work since 1976 by the Finnish National Board of Antiquities, and by the city of Lappeenranta. At the beginning, it was believed that the project would take a few years at most. Little by little, both parties began to fully realize the possibilities that the Fortress presented, and the conservation work has continued ever since. Before the conservation, the fortress peninsula was the “backyard” of the city – a deteriorated, grubby and neglected place. Now, nearly 30 years later, the site has changed. It is a culturally rich area that serves simultaneously as a major historical monu-

ment, a tourist attraction, a work place for artisans, a residential area and, above all, a centre for cultural services and events.

Over the course of centuries, the Fortress of Lappeenranta was built by Finns, Swedes and Russians on its current hillside location by the lake. Most of the constructions, walls and buildings were built under Russian rule between 1741 and 1917. The fortifications were officially renounced in 1835. In 1819, a women’s prison was founded in the Fortress, and in 1881 it was turned into a male prison. The Fortress has also held prisoners during the Civil War (1918), and many of them were killed or executed at the

Fortress of Lappeenranta, summer 2005, Raimo Suomela, City of Lappeenranta, Technical Services, Department of Surveying and Real Estate.

site. It also served as a prison during the Second World War. The reputation of the Fortress was therefore harsh and grim in the eyes of the Lappeenranta citizens, which drove the Fortress into a state of decay in the mid 1950s and 1960s.

In 1976, systematic restoration, conservation and renovation of the Fortress were started. The aim was to preserve the former military fortifications intact and as a monument of the Swedish-Russian military architecture for posterity. At the same time, the aim was to turn it into a lively and pleasant area for the citizens and tourists to enjoy. According to the

plan, old buildings were converted into housing, artisan shops and different kinds of art schools for children and youth. As a result of this renovation effort the Fortress has changed considerably over the past 30 years.

HOW TO ASSESS THE IMPACTS OF CONSERVATION?

A year ago, in the spring of 2004, I was given the assignment in the South Karelian Institute to assess the impacts of the conservation of the Lappeenranta Fortress. In the same year, the institute published a report on this research

76 called *Takapihasta kaupungin helmeksi, Lappeenrannan Linnoituksen restaurointityön vaikutustutkimus* (From a Backyard to the Jewel of the City; the Cultural Impact Assessment of the Conservation of Lappeenranta Fortress). This is the first assessment of cultural impacts of conservation work that the National Board of Antiquities has commissioned on a site it has restored.

The time frame for the research was four months. Since this is the first impact assessment that the Board of Antiquities has commissioned on a site it has restored, the board could not define in detail the objectives of the study. For instance, an assessment of the financial impacts of the conservation would have produced clear figures on how the city of Lappeenranta had benefited from it. This, however, would have required time and a detailed analysis of material including the financial investments in the conservation of the Fortress. Specific figures on the money spent in the area could not be provided by the city, according to the head architect of city of Lappeenranta, Seppo Aho.

The actual conservation project was initiated in the 1970s to provide work for the unemployed for the winter. Employment was thus the primary goal of the project until the 1990s when it received EU funding. The conservation and restoration of the area was not therefore systematic but was instigated as a bonus. With the EU funding, the project could be realized more flexibly and the special requirements of the Fortress could be taken into consideration. Because the conservation work has continued for 30 years, the motives for utilizing the area have changed along the way. Initially in the 1970s, the area was designed for the use of small enterprises and industries. In the 1980s, the focus was on the public use of

the area including museums, archives and the local office of the Finnish National Broadcasting Company *Yleisradio*. Only during the 1990s did the emphasis of the area turn to tourism, and – consequently – more systematically planned cultural services. Currently, all of these aspects can, in a way, be seen in the Fortress.

In Finland, cultural impact assessments commissioned by a state authority (e.g. the National Board of Antiquities) are still a new phenomenon. There has been little public discourse and research on the matter, and many concepts have yet to be defined. Cupore (the Foundation for Cultural Policy Research) has recently become actively involved in cultural impact assessments. The foundation has published two studies on the subject, one of which was used as material for this research.

The task was therefore difficult: how to assess the impacts of restoration that has continued for close to thirty years? It was clear from the start that the conservation work cannot be studied as a separate issue; it is an intricate part of the Fortress as an entity, which in turn has developed over time into what it is today. The conservation work is thus only one phase in the history of the Fortress, which dates back centuries. This means that the conservation mostly affects the Fortress area itself – its appearance and image as well as the attitudes, values and beliefs of those who work and live in the area, as well as those who are visitors. A wider framework for these effects is provided by the *changes* in the attitudes, values and beliefs of the inhabitants and authorities of Lappeenranta.

My study was focused on cultural impacts, i.e. possible changes in people's attitudes, values and beliefs. The effects on attitudes, values and beliefs are always cultural and culture-

specific. Possible changes in these attitudes, values and beliefs were indicators in this study and they were charted with a survey. To what, then, can the results of the study be compared? No such survey had been conducted before the conservation began. Therefore, historical documentation plays an important role. In fact, in the first part of the study I present the historical phases of the conservation of the Fortress. The source material includes a rather extensive collection of newspaper articles and official documents which display the views of authorities and citizens in detail.

As stated above, the first part of the study is on the history of the conservation work. The most central phases of the conservation and related decision-making are introduced. In the past thirty years, the Fortress has become the most important tourist attraction in Lappeenranta, so I have also discussed the impact of the conservation on local tourism. The second part of the study consists of the survey results. Four different groups were surveyed: people who live or work in the Fortress, inhabitants of Lappeenranta and visitors to Lappeenranta. The purpose of these surveys was to ascertain the opinions, attitudes, values and beliefs concerning the Fortress and how they may have changed during the conservation process. Over two hundred people were surveyed, so those who were most involved in the conservation play an important role in the study.

FROM BACKYARD TO JEWEL

First and foremost, when discussing the fortress conservation work we need to keep in mind that it actually took place. People's memories are relatively short, and without documentation (photographs etc.) it is often diffi-

cult to recollect the former appearance of an area. Furthermore, memories are gilded by the passage of time – nostalgia usually makes people look at matters from a favourable point of view. Conservation has had a great impact on the appearance of the Fortress. Today, it is a welcoming area which is well taken care of. The restored berms indicate to the viewer that the site is a historical monument. What in the early 1970s was a deteriorating relic is now a unique, well-preserved site. This, in turn, demonstrates that people want to remember their past – even its less pleasant sides – and honour it.

During the conservation work, the area was excavated. This has considerably increased knowledge about the history of Lappeenranta and the Fortress. The excavations revealed a great deal about past methods of constructing berms, roads and buildings. All this information tells the citizens of Lappeenranta tales about their past. This historical information may be considered as the very foundation of the identity of the inhabitants of Lappeenranta. The history of the city is important; recognizing the uniqueness of one's home town can lead to making use of its advantages in, for instance, building the city's image or making the city more attractive to inhabitants and tourists. In my opinion, Janne Vilkkuna, Professor of Museology at the University of Jyväskylä, put it well when he said that museums are a system of coordinates that helps people locate themselves in the instantaneous point of convergence of past and future; when we understand where we come from and where we are, we may also be able to plan which route we take in the future. I believe the same can be said about other aspects of our cultural heritage, as well.

The inhabitants of the Fortress and of Lap-

78 peenranta in general consider the Fortress as an integral part of the city and its mentality. It is where the construction of the city began and the part that was not demolished during the 1950s and 1960s when efficiency was emphasized. During that period, old wooden houses were torn down and replaced by more efficient urban construction. Older buildings were considered to occupy too much space, to be inappropriate in a modern urban environment and to be out-dated and to show poor taste. Consequently, the Fortress is an important mental landscape that the inhabitants of Lappeenranta wish to preserve in its current state.

According to the survey, the Fortress is highly valued by its inhabitants, who feel it plays a significant symbolic role in their identity. They are proud to live in an area of historic importance and feel that the conservation has made the neighbourhood more pleasant. Thanks to the conservation efforts, the inhabitants have become more interested in their neighbourhood and more willing to take care of it.

The inhabitants and visitors in Lappeenranta consider the conservation a success. They view the Fortress as an important and valuable piece of local history, and the restored appearance emphasizes its uniqueness. The Fortress is regarded as a vital part of Lappeenranta and its future maintenance a very important issue. According to those surveyed, the conservation has made the area and even the entire city more attractive. Also outsiders appreciate the city more. This indicates how much attitudes can change with time. The Fortress used to be the “backyard” of the city because of its history as a prison, but now it is found intriguing despite – or perhaps due to – this history. In a way, the conservation work

may have given the Fortress a clean slate and even its darker sides can now be discussed without prejudice.

The conservation scheme has had a clear impact on tourism in the Fortress. It is difficult to measure exactly how much the conservation effort has increased tourism in the city of Lappeenranta because many different factors contribute to tourism and the period we studied was quite long. However, due to the conservation work the Fortress has become the most important tourist attraction in the city. It has also been presented as a regional attraction in several brochures and communications. A general change in attitude was necessary for the Fortress to become the tourist attraction it is now.

Due to the restoration, the Fortress is a clear entity of its own, and as such it is easier to market. The restoration of the Fortress also triggered the restoration of the surrounding areas: beautiful residential areas are being built in Rapasaari and Pikisaari, and the former industrial harbour is currently used for leisure and tourism. In 2003 the harbour was chosen as guest marina of the year. The Fortress is an ideal tourist attraction because it is located near the city centre and offers a great deal to see, from a nature trail to artisans’ shops. Tourists bring money to the city and the Fortress. The ones who profit most from the tourism are locals who produce cultural products in the region. Most of those active in the area are cultural professionals, such as artisans and artists.

The state has funded the conservation of the Fortress with employment funds. Substantial funds have also been granted by the EU, especially at the turn of the millennium. When the conservation work was started, the National Board of Antiquities required a plan

A picture of the Fortress of Lappeenranta in the so-called Mordinov Atlas from the year 1780. Regional Museum of South Karelia.

for how the Fortress area would be used so that funds could be applied for as easily as possible. In 1978, the Fortress planning and conservation committee proposed that the area be used mainly for cultural, administrative and residential purposes as well as small-scale industry. This was the policy applied for quite a long time, but recently culture and ser-

vices have been emphasized. This plan on the use of the area would hardly have been made at the time if not for the conservation work.

The emphasis on culture is considered a part of the current image of the Fortress. The area is seen as a cultural heritage site, and therefore it is only natural that the Fortress harbours cultural services. These services, such as

80 artist studios, art schools, artisan shops, museums and city archives, create synergy in the area. In addition, the cultural emphasis contributes to the image of the Fortress as the city's cultural centre, which also supports the marketing of the area.

During the course of the conservation work, approximately ten people have been employed using state employment funds. However, the impact of the conservation on employment is for the most part indirect – for instance on tourism and related industries. In addition, it is difficult to determine whether the conservation affected the value of real estate since all of the buildings (except the Orthodox Church and rectory) are owned by the city and a special rent policy is applied to them.

CONCLUSIONS

This study on the impact of conservation is the first one the Board of Antiquities has commissioned on a site it has restored. This may be due to the fact that conservation can be considered a value in itself. The Board of Antiquities is accountable for its actions and must present facts and figures to demonstrate the profit and additional value derived from e.g. conservation projects. These kinds of studies are still a new phenomenon in cultural fields of activity. Nevertheless, they can help people understand and appreciate the fact that time and money are invested in cultural sites. They can also develop the entire cultural heritage sector.

At present, many factors in addition to the conservation contribute to the value of the Fortress. For the people of Lappeenranta, the Fortress is also an important part of their identity. Currently, people are able to face the

darker sides of the history of the Fortress, such as the prison camp during the Civil War in 1918, as part of the site's attraction. The Fortress is important to the inhabitants of Lappeenranta also because the local office of Finland's National Broadcasting Company (*Yleisradio*) and the city's most important museums are located there. The Regional Museum of South Karelia has been situated in the Fortress since the 1950s and *Yleisradio* since the 1970s, and they have contributed to the strong status and value of the Fortress. Nevertheless, their role in the actual conservation project of the Fortress was minor. The restoration work was carried out by the city of Lappeenranta (consulting the museum on occasions) and the berms were restored by the Board of Antiquities.

The Fortress is currently one of the most highly valued areas in Lappeenranta where the citizens often spend their free time. The persistent conservation work is finally showing concrete results. Nevertheless, there are still some issues that need to be considered. For example, should the city of Lappeenranta build new buildings in the area in order to make it livelier? How should the Fortress be supported in the cold and dark wintertime? And most importantly, now that the restoration project is coming to an end, what kind of development is good and sustainable for the Fortress itself and for the whole community in the future?

*Further information on the Fortress of Lappeenranta, the museums in South Karelia and the city of Lappeenranta is available on the Internet: <http://www3.lappeenranta.fi/linnoitus/english/index.html>
<http://www.lappeenranta.fi/?deptid=10973&languageid=4>*

<http://www.ekarjala.fi/museot/engl/index.html>

This article is based on the following report published by the South Karelian Institute:

Niinisalo, Suvi, 2004. *Takapihasta kaupungin helmeksi. Lappeenrannan Linnoituksen restaurointityön vaikutustutkimus*. ISBN 951-764-973-8. Lappeenranta University of Technology.

**Suvi Niinisalo, MA Suvi Niinisalo, Researcher,
South Karelian Institute,
Lappeenranta University of Technology*

*Address: PL 20 , 53851 Lappeenranta
Puh. 05 621 7006, 050 3812 744
www.lut.fi/eki. E-mail: suvi.niinisalo@lut.fi*