

Kirsi Mäkinen, University of Helsinki, Department of Forest Ecology

'Forestry serving urban societies in the North Atlantic Region'

Conference in Reykjavik, Sept 2009

Experiencing and designing time-spaces in urban forests



Walking interview material from the urban woods in Helsinki

Objectives:

- To reveal place encounters and time-space aspects within an housing area, Haaga, Helsinki, Finland.
- Grasp the sense of place of the forests on-site.
- Promote hidden/ undervalued routes and footholds .
- * To reintroduce embodied forest experiences to UFOR planning from lived perspective

Walking interview method*

enables and limits:

- It opens relations and networks in and between green spaces rather than gives all-inclusive information of a certain woodland. Provides some detailed information for design and planning.
- **Exploratory research design*

The walking interview material
opens the landscapes and
environments from embodied
perspectives and from the route
perspective.

Embodied: *Body* (age, gender, culture, sensuous e.g. capacities), *Being-In-The World*, *Temporality*, *Situationality*, *Cultural and social context* (norms, ways of knowing/doing)

Time-Space is about temporal aspects of Places, Dwelling, Movement and Practices.

- History of the suburb
- Dwelling in suburb through decades/years
- Time-space routines ... Changes in routines
- Time for reach forests and duration of visits
- Spatio-temporal knowledge



A visit to the woods is always a way to the woods and back *in your body*.

Time-space and sensuous experiences during a walk

- **Walking rhythm and mode** (march, stroll, flânerie, hang out, etc.)
- **Distance & time** (how much still to go? How long way we've walked)
- **Our strengths and capacities** (being tired, energetic; balance issues (winter), health, strengths, feeling cold, etc.)
- **Proximity and remoteness** (close to the "centre", far away from the "centre").
- **Soundscape, smellscape, microclimate**
- **Terrain texture** (asphalt, gravel, snow, forest floor, rock)
- **Public space, private space** (negotiations/contests of space: especially the shortcuts in the neighbourhood)

Traversed route aspects in focus

- **Two types** of routes examined based on the walking (movement<observation) interview (talk<listening/coding) material:

The scale of examination is housing district level:

- > Major outdoor recreation trails (large recreational forests)
- > Inofficial forest footpaths (neighbourhood forest patches and large recreational woods)

Some examples of paths and trails:



Yellow: Popular recreational Trails

Green: Footpaths and shortcuts In proximity

Blue: Remote foot-paths

Time-space aspects and woodland experiences in the major recreational trails

- The recreational sealed routes afford less haptic and kinaesthetic variation. Less integrated to the landscape. On-looker –effect. Walking mode is often exercise and traffic mode.
- The interview themes dealt the whole study area, history/present, the use of the area, etc.
- Often few remarks of the landscape, hardly any remarks of details of the landscape.
- The area is valued for as public space, recreational area, nature area.



Sealed recreational network has a dominant role in outdoor recreation discourses, mapping and managing practices.



Marching, strolling in regard to the others.

Examples of talk along the route

- *"Of course that noise is something different than in normal forest... but I would say that there is also real forest."*

(Man in 50s)

- *"From here, when you start to go... to the forest direction, you'll reach to Lassila, etc. (neighbouring districts)"*

(Man in 50s)

- *"There goes a route that you can run, and I used to run a lot before."*

(man in 60s)

Time-space aspects and woodland experiences in the unofficial footpaths



Forest footpaths are not usually discussed as a management or design perspective, but from erosion and trampling perspectives.



- The soft terrained footpaths are an exploration mode to which remarks are very 'of the time and now'. Details

contact and as we walk in these areas "far away from the city".

- Kinaesthetics and walking choreography is variable on every step.
- Forest near houses: intimate places near home (at-homeness, at-easiness (Seamon, 1979), joy,

Strolling, wandering, climbing, crouching..

Examples of talk along the route

- *I always walk on these higher footholds. You save incredibly much energy, rather than going always down to the bottom and then rise up again,..”*

(woman in 60s)

- *”I like that the forest starts immediately (from doorstep).. This paths also,.. It carries a lots of memory.. It is very soothing...”*

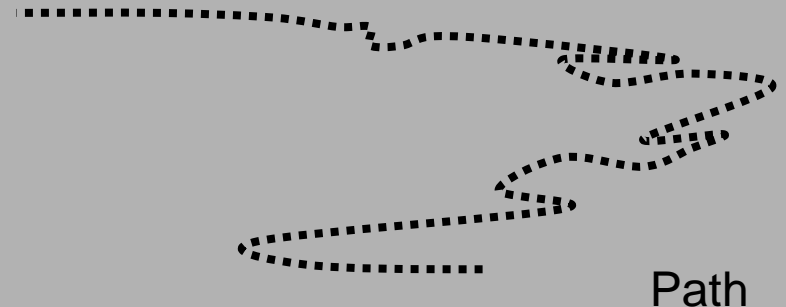
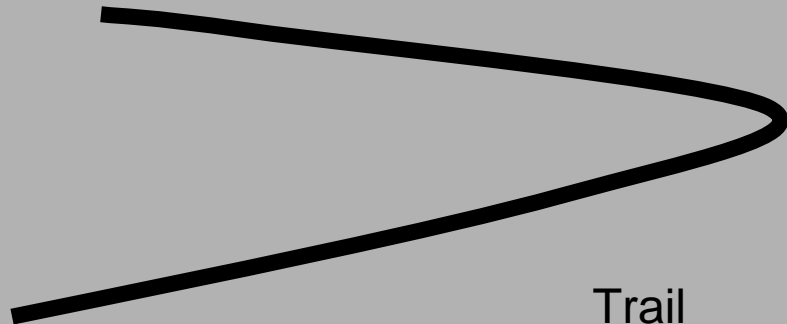
(Woman in 50s)

- *”From here, look, this is very, very..tiny track. Can you walk here? - If I was asked, that hill top is the most attractive place in here. Then this (track) descends and continues as Ida Aalberg’s park”.*

(man in 70s)

Sensescapes of the recreational trails and footpa

- A perception of an open space – a feeling of relaxation, freedom to traverse, social/cultural codes in recreational space.
- Soundscape and smellscape partly shared in trails and footpaths
- Visual perception is influenced by the walking rhythm and orientation.
- Haptic encounter is varying: sealed vs. forest floor (bedrocks, peatlands, etc.)
- Kinaesthetic sense and walking choreography is varying.
- Encounter and integration to the woods?
 - Oblivion – Attention – heightened contact > (Seamon, 1979)
- Time-space is different (speed, rhythm, distance)
- Use and appropriation (situational/temporal purposes for both route types)



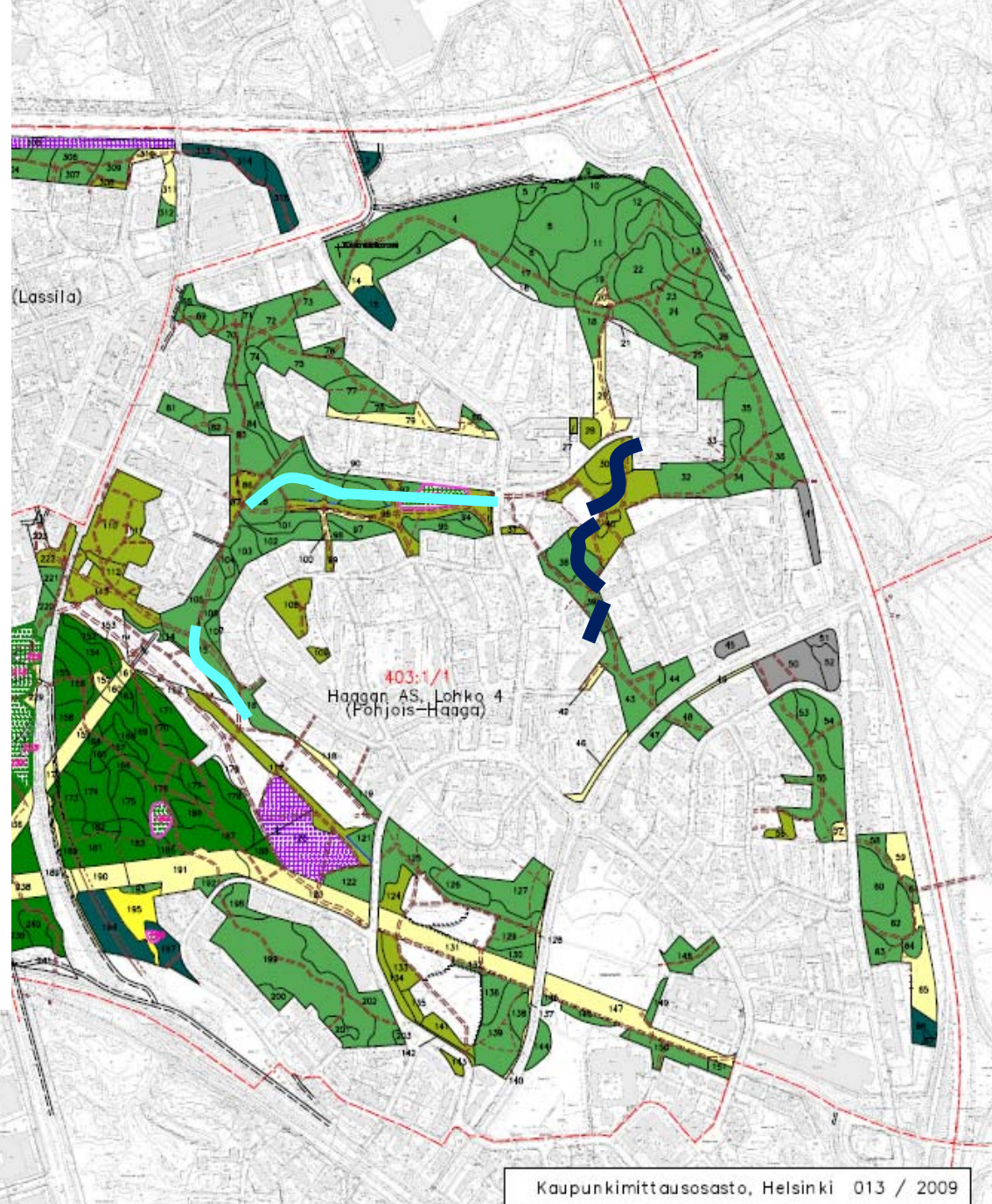
Nature management plan Of Northern Haaga 2008-2017

Two kinds of sense of
place in footpaths:

Forest footpaths in heart of
Haaga: soft terrain, hideaway trail,
smell of forest relaxation, comfort,
intimacy, peacefulness

-Scary and dense in
late hours

Forest shortcuts in Ida Aalberg's
park: comfort, joy, relaxation,
coziness, favorite
place, appropriation, at-homeness,
at-easiness



Do the small paths capture attention/heightened contact better?

- Haptic and kinaesthetic variation/attention
 - Place-attachment, intimacy, joy, relaxation, nature contact & enjoyment
 - Attentive restoration theory (Kaplan et al.) ?
- > Some people avoid footpaths:
preferences, physical limits, fear, social reasons, culture of walking on paths?

Promoting footpaths and soft terrained paths: *"here and now" places*

1. Identify the attractive and promising paths. Use the local people.
2. Learn about the attractivity and sense of place of these woodlands.
3. Make a visionary plan over ten year cycle: 20-30 years. Make a time-adjusted detail plan, how to manage the path environment.
4. Longer paths as alternative routes to sealed trails?

Why?

- To preserve the attractive qualities and intimacy of places, to identify promising places (non-places, "killed places", *waiting-to-be found*-places)
- To allure new people to the woods.
- To surprise people/users? *Designer-on-the-loose* – To promote professional creativity and practical skills of designing woods.
- To break the model of standard forest planning time-scale in



...A right to soft terrains (right to trample the woods)

- Forest footpaths should also be taken care for the people who want to walk on them:
- Short and fragmented to longer paths?
- Eroded , trampled
- Nettles and other weed
- Forestry machines ruin paths.
- Save the spontaneity

Thank you

