

Re-use of an old garrison area with cultural-historical value

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Summary

A sniper battalion was established in Oulu, the capital of Northern Finland, in the early 1880's, and barracks were built to accommodate the troops. The wooden garrison buildings, which represent architectural classicism, are of nationally significant cultural-historical value. The area, which is located in the city centre, was vacated when the garrison was re-located in 1999. The old garrison barracks are protected, and a new layout plan, which also allows some new construction, was outlined with respect for the valuable old milieu. In Finland, the building stock is young compared to other European countries. There is little left of the built heritage established before the 20th century. Wood has dominated the Finnish way of building for centuries. Wooden garrison areas have been historically the most unique sites of Finnish urban culture. The sniper battalion in Oulu is a good example of this.

Finland's Fourth Sniper Battalion in Oulu

As a consequence of the war between Sweden and Russia, Finland, which had previously been part of Sweden, was annexed by Russia as an autonomous grand duchy in 1809. In the summer of 1878, a law on compulsory military service came into force in Finland, and a Finnish army was subsequently established. At the same time, all conscripted troops were abolished. Eight sniper battalions were established and stationed in the provincial capitals.

August Boman, senior architect of the Board of Public Buildings, was authorised to design the new garrisons. He produced complete sets of drawings for layout, buildings, yards and parks. The garrisons were constructed in accordance with the drawings, with only minor local modifications. The layout plans were slightly different, due to the variable local conditions. Boman designed the residential buildings, military quarters and service units as separate entities. The buildings were functional and the park-like surroundings gave the garrisons a manor-like quality.

The garrison and training grounds of Finland's Fourth Sniper Battalion in Oulu were placed in the immediate vicinity of the city centre. The battalion consisted of 400 servicemen and a staff of 100. In agreement with the Russian practice, married non-commissioned officers were paid a residential allowance to rent a dwelling close to the garrison.

The basic layout plan in Oulu was similar to those applied in the other towns. The buildings were placed in

a rectangle surrounding a central park. The battalion commander's and his assistant's quarters (A10) were placed west of the park. They were symmetrically flanked by the company commanders' residential quarters (A9, A11), both of which consisted of two apartments. At the extreme ends of the line were the quarters for married and single officers (A8).

Immediately next to the officers' quarters on both sides of the park were the main guard (H3), the offices, and officers' clubs (H2). Four garrison barracks in pairs were placed on both sides of the park (K1, K2, K3, K4). Only one company (100 men) was housed in each barracks. In accordance with the regulations, the barracks were built with corridors along one side rather than interconnecting rooms. Each garrison barrack had eight dorms, each for 13 men, and a family residence for the company's sergeant major.

On the eastern side of the park, opposite the commander's quarters, was the Artteli hall (H14), where each company had a kitchen and storeroom, and shared a dining-hall for 200 people. In addition to this, there was a small military club room. On both sides of this building, there were service buildings such as a workshop, horse stables, wood sheds and storerooms.

The hospital was situated some distance away from the barracks. The hospital buildings also included a kitchen unit, an ice shed, a mortuary and a wood shed. A separate unit consisted of a repair shop, a forge, a sauna, a vehicle shed and a wood shed. Cellars and lavatories were placed in different parts of the garrison area (ROUDASMAA, 1981).

Construction of the Oulu garrison

The city set aside 11.38 hectares of land as the site of the garrison in May 1880, and the construction of single-storey log buildings was begun immediately. The law on compulsory military service came into force at the beginning of 1881, and the first conscripts were called up for service in November 1881. When the conscripts arrived, the garrison buildings were more or less ready.

The garrison area was a harmonious whole consisting of the garrison buildings and the park-like surroundings. The log buildings were boarded and painted. Tin roofing was placed on all buildings. The doors and windows were of wood. The window frames were painted brown on the outside and the steps were tarred. In this way, the whole garrison area had a consistent

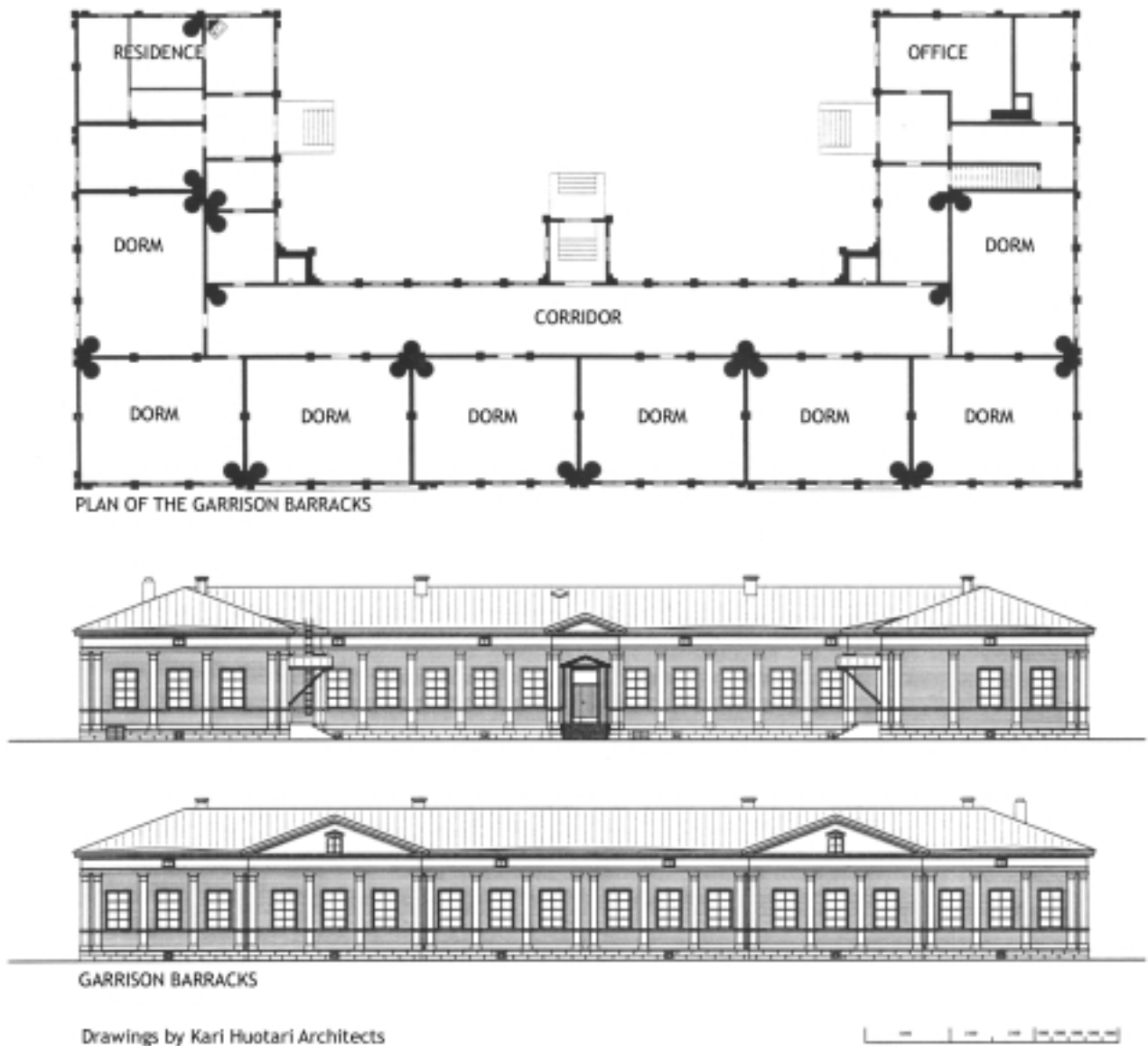


Figure 1. Garrison barracks designed by August Boman.

classical appearance. Boman also paid attention to the spaciousness of the quarters, ventilation and heating.

The garrison area was provided with water pipes and sewerage in the late 1880's. The hydrant available to the local inhabitants for their household needs was placed in front of Artteli. Electric lighting was also provided as soon as the first electric company was established in the city in 1889.

The garrison area was enlarged in 1899, and a couple of years later a two-storey residential building was constructed for non-commissioned officers. The first storey was made of brick and the second of wood. A building for the training task force (H1) and some outbuildings were also constructed. A stone bakery (H15) was completed in 1900. The new stone buildings were different from the classical style of the original garrison area (ROUDASMAA, 1981).

Subsequent development of the garrison area

The last conscripts of the sniper battalion were called up on 1 November, 1900. The Russian Tsar had issued a new law on compulsory military service, which caused the Finnish army to be abolished and the garrison area to be handed over to Russian troops. During the period 1902–1914, however, the Russian troops only arranged peacetime training in the garrison. The Oulu garrison area was not crucially altered during the Russian period of 1902–1918. The residential building for married officers burnt down in 1916, and two new buildings were erected: a grocery store and a storeroom for sacks.

When Finland gained independence, the garrison area was returned to the Finnish troops in 1918. During the Russian period, the garrison buildings had fallen into disrepair, and repairs were begun immediately in the

spring (HAUTALA, 1982). The garrison remained nearly unchanged throughout the 1920's and 1930's.

During the Second World War, the Oulu garrison was in active use. Despite the occasional shortage of space, hardly any changes were made, and only a new garage and three small dorm barracks were built. During the war the wooden garrison area grew, and new stone barracks, a canteen and club facility, service buildings, gun halls and staff residential buildings were erected.

The Artteli canteen was supplemented by new stone kitchen facilities, a storeroom and a dining-hall in 1952–1955. The old Artteli dining-hall was converted into a food storage area. Later on, the hall was converted into a staff dining-hall (HUOTARI, 2000).

Although some original service buildings and barracks that were in poor condition were demolished in the 1950's, a decision was made to preserve the harmonious whole of the garrison buildings and the park (SUUNNITTELUKOLMIO Ltd, 2000). It was also pointed out then that the old wooden buildings were in urgent need of repair. Basic repairs were done in the years 1958–1959, when central heating was installed in the buildings and the water pipes, sewers and electric wiring were replaced. Some changes and repairs were made as late as the turn of the 1970's and 1980's.

New use of the garrison area

Military training in Oulu was discontinued in 1999, when the garrison was closed down and the troops were re-stationed out of town. The 35.6-hectare garrison area in the vicinity of the city centre was vacated by the Defence Forces.

The National Board of Antiquities has issued a protection order concerning the wooden barracks and the park-like milieu designed by August Boman (HUOTARI, 2000). The buildings and the park represent the classical style, which is characterised by symmetry and simple, monumental facades. The architectural quality of the buildings is clear and generous, which makes them suited to both military and educational use.

The military buildings were advertised for sale. The stone barracks constructed in the 1950's were purchased by private companies and the wooden barracks by the Merikoski Vocational Training Centre in 1998. The wooden barracks area is 6.79 hectares in size, and there are 14 buildings with a total gross floor area of 12,709 square metres (HUOTARI, 2000).

The Merikoski Vocational Training Centre is a national institution owned by the Pulmonary Association Heli. The centre provides instruction in special vocational training and serves as an expert and developer in the field. Over 100 training professionals will work in the area, training approximately 500 students.

The City of Oulu has produced a layout plan for the whole area. New residential buildings are planned to be located both in the garrison area and by the river. There will be 1,600 inhabitants, 1,000 working places and 600 students (CITY OF OULU, 2002).

The first new educational facilities in the old garrison area were adopted into use in the early part of 2000. They included Artteli (H14), a media house (K4) and instruction facilities for wood technology (H15). The conversion of the garrison barrack (K4) was accomplished in such a way that it can be used as an example for the technical and architectural repairs of the other buildings. The newly renovated facility now houses the audio, light and video editing studios of the communications line (MERIKOSKI VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE, 2000).

The battalion commander's quarters (A10) will be converted into an administrative building, the main guard (H3) into a library, the company commanders' quarters (A11) into accommodation and project work units (A9). The office and club building (H2) will be used for receptions and seminars. The Artteli hall (H14) will be converted into an assembly hall.

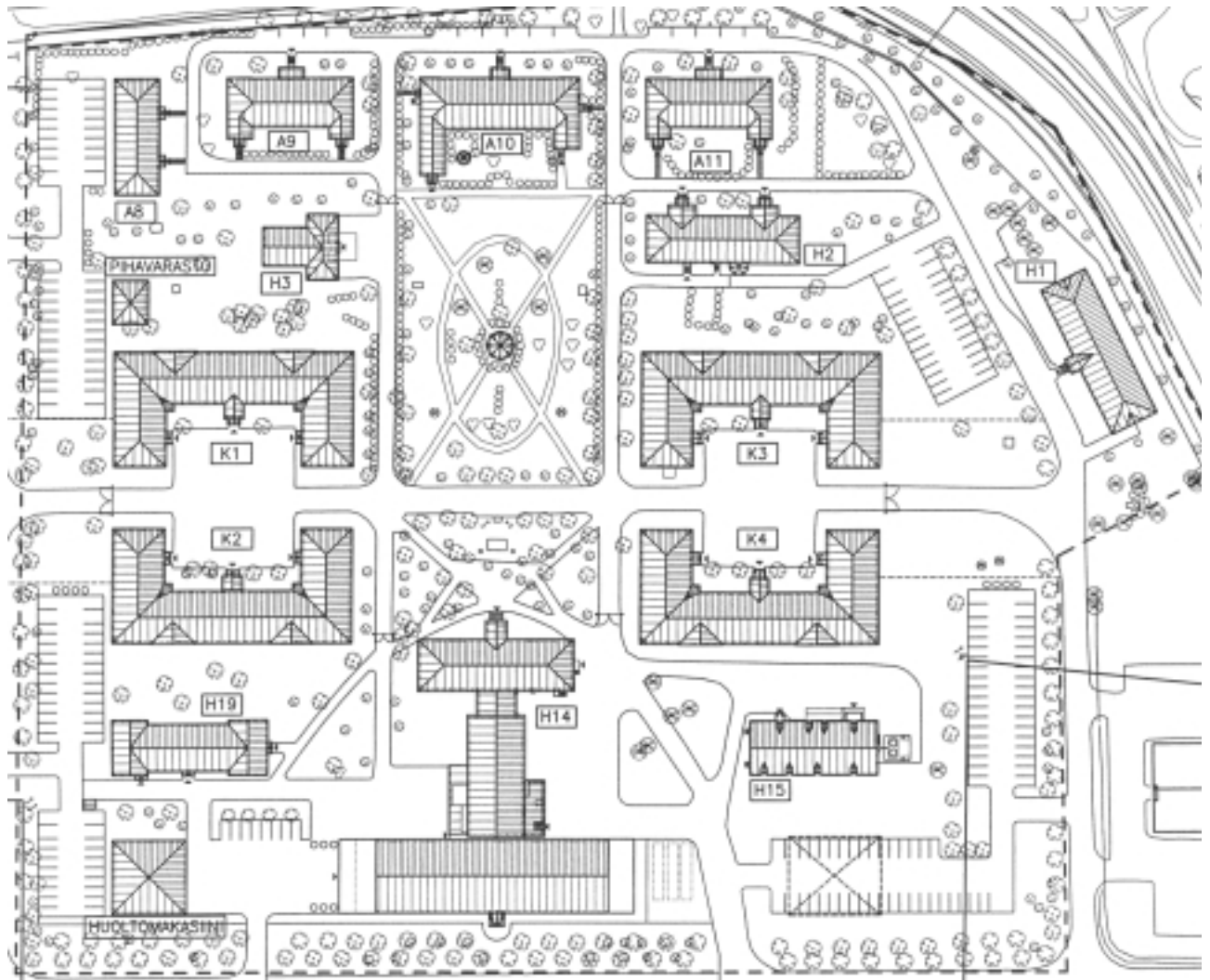
The design for facilities includes some new buildings. The new buildings will be erected in place of the old demolished ones, which will improve the classical symmetry of the old garrison area. The buildings will be modern, but compatible with their old counterparts as far as dimensioning and mass allocation are concerned (HUOTARI, 2000).

The National Board of Antiquities was consulted throughout the entire selling, planning and design process. The co-operation between the board, the City of Oulu and Heli functioned well, without any major conflicts.

Conclusions

The wooden garrison area in Oulu has retained its original appearance, and it has been classified as a nationally significant milieu of notable cultural-historical value. The wooden garrison in Oulu is the only area with sniper battalion barracks in Finland that has been preserved in its original form.

A successful example of controlled conversion is the sniper battalion's wooden barracks area in Oulu. The National Board of Antiquities has approved a project plan for new utilisation of the area, according to which the new operations will be organised to suit the original spatial arrangements; both the facades of the buildings and the interiors will be renovated with respect to the original structures. As far as the park is concerned, the National Board of Antiquities has approved a landscaping plan according to which the park area will also be renovated to retain its original appearance.



Drawing by Kari Huotari Architects

Figure 2. Old wooden garrison area in Oulu.

The area is a pilot project for new utilisation. No similar park-like wooden garrison areas built for a sniper battalion have been renovated anywhere else for civilian training purposes.

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