

Urban Planning Studio

Urban Landscape

Aim and scope

This report outlines the features of the urban landscape of Lahti-Nastola growth axis. The focus is on four centers of Nastola (part of Lahti, starting from the beginning of this year) that are situated along the railway line from Lahti to St. Petersburg. Two of them, Uusikylä in the east and Villähde in the west are mainly residential areas, with a train stop. Nastola's commercial center Rakokivi and the administrative center with the church share a train stop.

The aim of this report is to describe and map the perceived urban landscape in these four centers. The urban landscape consists of land-uses, densities, landmarks, boundaries, important nodes and points of interest. Finally the aim is to characterize different zones according to their urban morphologies.

Data collection

We made an on-site survey in Nastola on 29 September during daytime. We moved around with a car and made several stops around the focus areas. We observed the landscape, took photographs and conducted 5 interviews (two in Uusikylä, two in Nastola commercial center and one in Nastola administrative center). The interviews were used to probe some interesting points that we observed during the stops, they were not used as a main collection method.

We also used Corine data to see the land-uses, and base-map and Google maps.

Findings

Uusikylä

General character of Uusikylä is that of a rural village scattered around two sides of the rail. The south-side especially is very rural, and agriculture is present in the south-east. The roads are partially dirt roads and there are no hierarchies. The rail acts as a border between the two sides and there is only one point in Uusikylä (in the west) where the rail can be crossed through a tunnel.

Uusikylä consists mostly of residential area with one bar, a school and some industrial buildings. The residential area in the south is mainly detached houses without a clear structure with one row-house area and three multi-storey buildings. In the north, there is one cohesive detached housing area. The area has clearly "seen its better days" with obsolete commercial estates in the southern side and stated difficulty of selling empty houses in the north (per interview). Per interview, Uusikylä used to be the most populous area in Nastola before the 1970s, from which time there remains an obsolete health-care center in the middle of the residential area in the north.

The area is enveloped by roads. In the south there is the highway number 12 from Lahti to Kouvola. In the north, there is a smaller road. In the southern side, you can hear the noise of the highway.

The area is served by a train stop, when you arrive from north, you have to cross a road and coming from the south, the station is quite far in the west. The area provides an access point to the highway number 12.

There are some interesting points in Uusikylä, the health-care center in the north (although, it is not open for visits), a memorial to commemorate the German soldiers who died in the civil war of Finland. The citizen journalist Pasi Viheraho also lives in one of the former commercial estates in the south-side of the rail and the “brand” of his media is visible there.

Nastola commercial center, Rakokivi

Presently, the most populous area is Rakokivi that hosts a commercial center surrounded by several residential neighborhoods. The area is located in the northern side of the railway station Nastola and a belt of industrial buildings. There are several shops, bars and other services in the center. The center is dominated by cars and parkinglots but also one section of the central square is used as a market place. Saturday is the actual market day (per interview) but there were two kiosks on the visiting day.

In the middle of the day (time of our visit), there are many people conducting their business in the center.

Rakokivi is relatively dense and urban, compared to the other parts of Nastola and relatively new (built mainly in 1980s) and well maintained (the main square is paved with cobblestone and there are flowers). One interviewee characterized the area as “declining”. As evidence, it was pointed out that some services were being shut down in the center.

There are several residential areas around the commercial center. There is even one multi-storey housing area in the west that is fairly well connected to the center. There is also a combined upper secondary and professional school in the west corner of the center, an elementary school in the north and somewhat as part of the center still, a sports field.

The industrial area in the south acts as a border between the center and the railway stop. Hence the railway stop is not very well connected to the center. The housing areas and the commercial center are located on top of the Salpausselkä ridge, whereas the industrial area is located on lowland, which also provides a clear separation between the two. Near the center there are also topographical holes near the center, which function as borders.

Nastola administrative center (“kirkonkylä”)

Nastola administrative center is built around the church that is built in 1804. The city hall of Nastola is also located here. The church dominates the area that otherwise is just a cell of space in the middle of the forest. The buildings frame a space that is supposed to be a civic square. The area is empty of people compared to the commercial center. The feeling is that of being surrounded by forest and fields, the area is not very urban. There are a few residential houses and apartments. The center is located on the Salpausselkä ridge.

There are few high apartment buildings, scattered, and some wooden houses. There is the old city hall that still houses some services, some restaurants and a grocery store. A health-care center is somewhat near the center. There is also a graveyard.

There is a north-south road leading to the train stop but the center is not very close to the stop.

Villähde

Closest to previous border with Lahti, in the west, there is the Villähde residential area. The area is a collection of neighborhoods and a loose cluster of few services next to roads leading to Lahti. The area doesn't form very cohesive whole. The housing areas in the middle of the forest in the north are connected to a well-maintained park and there is a public but somewhat hidden waterfront with a small boat dock that you can also access from this area.

The detached housing area in the north is relatively new. That area also has an access to a park. The waterfront is not well publicized but it can also be accessed from this residential area. The view is beautiful, so there is potential for recreation.

The north and south are divided by the highway 12. The train station is not very well connected to the urban area but somewhat better reachable from the respective area than the Nastola stop. As interesting sights, there is an old grain warehouse, "makasiini", that functions as a museum.

Conclusions

The three train stops serve four distinct areas that all have their special character. Villähde is closest to Lahti and has some chance of developing while improving the connectivity from the train stop. The strength of Villähde is the waterfront of the beautiful Kymijärvi. Rakokivi commercial center is fairly strong in services and serves adjacent neighborhoods probably well. Rakokivi's challenges are retaining the existing services, the connection to the rail stop and perhaps the dominance of cars. Uusikylä is fairly rural and doesn't seem to have so much potential for development, as the area is enveloped by roads and doesn't currently support many services. Perhaps the potential there lies maintaining the rural, village like dwelling for those who value that.

Sources

Corine Land Cover data

Google Maps

Field visit to Lahti on 29.10.2016

