

FINNISH CABLE FACTORY

Finland's premiere cable business was established in 1912. Prior to that all telegraph, electricity, and telephone lines were manufactured of imported materials. Suomen Kaapelitehdas Oy, (Finnish Cable Factory) expanded their operations rapidly and underwater telephone cables enabled the company to enter international markets. Suomen Kaapelitehdas Oy was founded by Arvid Wikström, a 26-year-old engineer, who had gained work experience in the UK and Germany and had graduated from the Helsinki School of Polytechnics. The vast development of electricity, telephone, and telegraph lines inspired the young engineer to set up the first production facility in the country. Although Wikström passed away at the early age of 51, he saw his company survive many hardships over the first decades its existence.

The construction of the new Cable Factory was initiated by the next General Manager, Verner Weckman. Mr Weckman was known as a very colorful person who had graduated from the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology and worked as a head of a mining company in Ural. He returned to Finland once the country had gained independence in 1917. Following the Second World War, Weckstöm took part in the negotiations for war reparations between Finland and The Soviet Union. His participation was vital, as he spoke fluent Russian and he was a leader who was extremely familiar with the cultures of both countries. In addition, he had won Olympic gold medals for Russia in wrestling, both in Athens in 1906 and in London in 1908 – Finland was then a part of the Russian empire. Mr. Weckman always inspired his workers to take part in sports; he had a wrestling training facility built on the roof of the factory.

THE HISTORY OF THE BUILDING

The Cable Factory doubled their production facilities by building a new factory, which was built in three stages during the years of 1939-1954 according to a uniform plan. The new Cable Factory, which was the largest building in the country at the time it was completed, was built far from the main city of Helsinki, on the seashore. Just like many of its contemporaries, the Cable Factory was built of light-colored limestone bricks. Its appearance also communicated of the company's value and financially sound situation.

The end of the building which connected the five-stories tall wings of the U-shaped construction, was built seven-stories tall. In the south-wing, the fanciest industrial facility in Helsinki, three-stories tall Merikaapelihalli, was built. The Second World War slowed down the construction process and cable manufacturing was started in 1943. When completed, the building featured 262 000 cubic meters and surface area of 55 800m².

At the end of the 19th century, foreign designers were still very much responsible for designing all industrial facilities in Finland. The architect department of The Helsinki School of Polytechnics started producing architects in the early 20th century. One of the graduates was Wäinö Gustaf Palmqvist (1882-1964). He was given the task of designing the Cable Factory.

W. G. Palmqvist was familiar with the requirements of the building as he had designed the Cable Factory's first large industrial facility in Helsinki.

Palmqvist's long career and extensive production is very versatile. He's known as the designer of clear entities. He researched technical solutions with extreme care and finalised his work down to the last detail. He appreciated classical influences through out his career, regardless of the changing styles in architecture.

W. G. Palmqvist has designed many of the public buildings in Helsinki. He was trusted by many of Finland's industrial leaders and he designed entire industrial communities all around the country, starting from town plans to production facilities to schools and hospitals.

FIRST STEPS IN ELECTRONICS

Circa 1960 the Cable Factory emphasised in new lines of business: condensers, aluminium profiles and electronics. Cooperation between the Cable Factory, the University of Helsinki and the School of Technology created the foundation for the development of Finnish electronics and computer industry.

In 1967 the Cable Factory merged with Nokia Oy, which operated in the forest industry. Cable Factory, later Nokia Kaapeli, was an independent industrial group of Oy Nokia Ab, which was born in the aforementioned merger. When the company celebrated its 75th birthday in 1987, Nokia Kaapeli proved to be one fifth of the Nokia Corporation, measured both in invoicing and number of personnel. Another independent industrial group separated from the Cable Factory was Nokia Electronics. When Nokia Electronics was divided into three subgroups in 1986, information systems, communications and Nokia-Mobira, the turnover of the electronics industry was threefold compared to that of the cable industry.

THE CHANGING ENVIRONMENT OF THE CABLE FACTORY

Salmisaari, the location of the Cable Factory on the west side of Helsinki, was nothing but a rocky island in the beginning of the 20th century. The city of Helsinki did not reach that far yet and shores of the islands were dominated by their very few inhabitants. The only link to those days remains in the names of streets and places. The rocky islands have been aligned and connected to the mainland and occupied by industrial and storage buildings.

The first industrial buildings in the area were those of the Cable Factory and Oy Alkoholiliike Ab, side by side on the western shore of the area. The area between these massive and bulky facilities was soon filled with other industrial and storage buildings.

In the 1950's, industries kept growing in Helsinki. In the 1960's, however, there was a change in the general town plan. The main idea being that all industrial buildings were to be moved farther from the main city. This also

affected Cable Factory's decision to relocate. There were also plans to build residence buildings in Ruoholahti, the area in the immediate vicinity of the Cable Factory. 12 hectares of the sea was filled in order to have more building space and construction work for the metro was started. In 1992 the first inhabitants moved to Ruoholahti, which was designed to provide residences for 9000 people. Ruoholahti also provides office and business buildings for 5000 people.

Today the Cable Factory is a valuable oldtimer among the modern residence buildings. There are still marks in the building left by the years of industrial use, to remind people today of all the hard work of yesteryears. Besides the industrial dimension, the Cable Factory offers the people of Ruoholahti varied and fresh cultural aspects. The Cable Factory also feels right at home among the modern glass buildings, boasting the high-tech image. Within the confines of the Cable Factory's traditional brick walls, a dynamic electronics department started its operations some forty years ago. Today, their achievements are better known under the brand of Nokia. Their accomplishments have played a major part in paving the way for their modern neighbours and the contemporary high tech-identity of Ruoholahti.

PRO KAAPELI

As Nokia Kaapeli was about to move out of the building, the city of Helsinki realised that they are about to gain ownership of a very unique building and space as well as a problem. What to do with a factory with the capacity of ten apartment houses? During the last few years of their ownership, Nokia Kaapeli hardly invested in the maintenance of the building. As the industry was moving out, Nokia Kaapeli started renting the premises at very affordable rates.

Plenty of artists and businesses moved in to the Cable Factory, as they were able to secure peaceful working spaces. There were also spaces suitable for performances and exhibitions. The potential of the factory and its ideological-philosophical starting point was proven effective in practice before any official decisions were made. The administrative decision making took its time – four years to be exact.

In 1987 the city of Helsinki and Nokia agreed on the procedures for the transitional period and formed a delegation to plan the future use of the factory in the ownership of the city. According to the delegation, the entire factory wasn't worth saving. It was decided to split it into three separate units. Plans were made to build schools, hotels, museums and even a carpark to the former factory. The renovation costs were estimated to be 350-500 million Finnish Marks.

The concerned tenants of the Cable Factory founded an association, Pro Kaapeli. Architects who had worked at the Factory, created a parallel plan to save the building and the activities that were prevalent at the post-industrial Cable Factory. Pro Kaapeli also pointed out deficiencies in the planning of the area and even got the media involved. Pro Kaapeli was featured in the

leading national newspapers and national TV and managed to dissolve deeply rooted prejudices against house squatters and artists who were often considered as shady.

Along the same lines with Pro Kaapeli were the committee formed to create guidelines for cultural activities in Helsinki. They felt that the building and its newly found artistic community were unique and too valuable to be wiped away. The Cable Factory was to remain in its original form.

This was groundbreaking. A new agreement was made with Nokia, the city counsel decided to protect the Cable Factory and its milieu and an estate company was founded. Almost all tenants were allowed to stay. The estate company, Kiinteistö Oy Kaapelitalo was founded in the fall of 1991.

With this final solution established, one could say the new Cable Factory was primarily born by coincidence and later because of the tenants' activity. Many public servants, committees and political decision makers along with Nokia are to be thanked for this, but most of all, the new Cable Factory exists because of Pro Kaapeli.

The Cable Factory had great examples and forerunners in other European industrial buildings. The Cable Factory was recognised as a new, independent, European art center when it was accepted as a member of TransEuropeHalles.

In fifteen years, the Cable Factory's operations have been established. Besides the artists and businesses, even museums and a dance center among many other tenants have found a home in the old factory. The usable surface area including all stories and basement is 53 348 square meters, of which 40 000 have been rented. 99% of the work spaces are in use. More than 200 000 people per year attend the events taking place in the halls, museums and dance theaters. The Cable Factory finances its own operations, in 2005 the turnover surpassed 3,5 million Euros.

© Hillka Högström, translated by Niklas Nuppola