

**John LeBaron's report on Fulbright SSP assignment to the University of Helsinki,  
May-June, 2006, Award 2077**



**University of Helsinki  
Faculty of Behavioural Science**



**Tuula Laurila, John LeBaron and  
Terhi Topi at Fulbright Center, Helsinki**



**Project host Heikki Kynäslähti and John LeBaron  
at Porkkala Peninsula cook-out**



**Medieval church at Porvoo**

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I knew enough about Finland to relish the prospects for my Senior Specialist assignment at the University of Helsinki in May and June, 2006. My first visit to Helsinki had been in 1967 at the end of a two-month railway journey that began in Hong Kong. But that's another story. More recently my wife and I spent a year-long Fulbright appointment at Finland's University of Oulu.

I was asked to conduct a project assessment related to a Finland Ministry of Education-funded teacher education program whose external support was about to terminate. The program research director, Heikki Kynäslähti, was facing the prospect of integrating this five-year pilot project into the core programmatic course line-up provided by his Department, while at the same time securing forward funding to launch fresh initiatives related to the funded pilot. My primary challenge was to examine data sources relevant to project aims, to explore ideas for a new project focus and to produce a mission-related document based on this research.

I arrived in Helsinki on a very chilly mid-May afternoon. Throughout my stay I was treated with utmost courtesy and friendship. Heikki met me at the airport, drove me to my comfortable University apartment, a ten-minute walk from my office. During the next couple of days, he took me on a personal walking tour of the City, and included me in University meetings related to my task. On the final, sunny day of my posting, Heikki and two of his Department colleagues took me for a cook-out to Porkkala, a peninsula jutting into the Gulf of Finland Archipelago, 30 minutes west of Helsinki, occupied by the former Soviet Union between 1944 and 1956. It was a touching "good bye" for a stay far too short.

Helsinki is a superb city; clean, modern and accessible yet with a historically rich inner core. Cultural opportunity abounds. Opera, symphony, theatre, lectures and museums offer too many opportunities to cover in a four-week span. The tenor of the city is manifested through its eclectic architecture, with stunning examples ranging from neo-classical through jugend to national romantic to art-deco to thoroughly modern. The three most famous churches are the majestic Lutheran Cathedral on Senate Square in the city centre, the more ornate Russian Orthodox cathedral a stone's throw away, and the modern "Dome of the Rock" cathedral a short distance from the City Centre.

Several Finnish friends generously took me to other area attractions. East of Helsinki, the medieval village of Porvoo features many well-preserved wooden buildings of the 15<sup>th</sup> through 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Closer to town is Seurasaari, an outdoor museum representing primitive construction from various Finnish regions and epochs. Close to the city centre is the controversial Sibelius monument, an enormous aluminized structure of stylized organ pipes, with a smallish, scowling sculpture of the great composer himself appearing nearby almost as an afterthought.

As significant as I found my professional encounter, equally important were the renewal of old friendships and the formation of new ones. I am lucky to have had the chance to return to Finland for a second Fulbright. I intend to come back.

June 9, 2006