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<p>This thesis studies the negative labeling of a neighborhood or <i>territorial stigmatization</i> in a residential suburb of Helsinki called Mellunmäki. The purpose of this thesis is to find out whether a territorial stigma features in local residents accounts of the area. The theoretical framework for this thesis is drawn from Loic Wacquant's idea of a territorial stigma. Wacquant proposes that a negative label or a stigma easily becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, when the residents of stigmatized areas begin to look for ways of distancing from their neighbors and begin to blame neighbors for the area's alleged hardships. Another theoretical tool to better study the topic in the Finnish context is drawn from previous research on media depictions of Finnish residential suburbs or lähiös through recent decades.</p> <p>The data has been collected by semi-structured interviews. The residents of Mellunmäki have been interviewed in depth about their experiences and opinions on Mellunmäki. Only by understanding the experiences on an individual level can we say something concrete about the wider phenomenon of territorial stigma. By comparing the collected data, themes have been constructed of the phenomenon. The analysis of these themes provide findings as follows.</p> <p>A stigmatizing discourse is found in Mellunmäki through a distinction between Old and New Mellunmäki. New Mellunmäki is used in local discourse to denote areas of social housing within Mellunmäki. These areas are looked down upon by homeowners in Old Mellunmäki and seen as concentrations of unemployed and immigrants. The lived social realities between new and old areas are marked by a symbolic distancing from neighbors.</p> <p>Mellunmäki was also reported to suffer from a wider stigma of East Helsinki. The bad reputation of East Helsinki was seen as easily affiliated to a rather unknown neighborhood of Mellunmäki. Amongst others, a strong need arises from this thesis for further research on the effects of territorial stigma on neighbor relations.</p>			
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<p>Tutkielmassa perehdytään Mellunmäen lähiön mahdolliseen alueelliseen stigmaan. Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää, onko asuinalueen sisällä havaittavissa mielikuvien tasolla käytävää, asukkaiden välistä symbolista erottautumista, joka kertoo alueen leimaantumisesta. Toiseksi, tutkielma selvittää asukkaiden ajatuksia Mellunmäkeen liitetystä mielikuvista. Tutkimuskysymyksenä esitetään, löytyykö paikallisten keskusteluista syitä olettaa että alue on leimaantunut.</p> <p>Tutkielman teoria johdetaan kahtaalta. Teorian vahvasti rakenteellisena kehikkona toimii ranskalaisen sosiologi Loic Wacquantin esittämä ajatus alueellisesta leimasta. Wacquant esittää, että negatiivisesta leimasta eli stigmasta syntyy helposti itseään toteuttava ennuste, kun huonomaineiseksi mielletyn asuinalueen asukkaat etsivät niin symbolisia erottautumiskeinoja toisistaan kuin syitä alueen huonoon maineeseen naapureistaan. Tämä luo toimivan teorian aihealueen tarkasteluun myös Suomessa. Toinen, lähinnä teoreettisena työkaluna toimiva konsepti on johdettu Irene Roivaisen tutkielmasta. Roivainen löysi, että 1960-luvulta lähtien lähiöt on nähty ongelmina. Kirjoittelussa korostuvat lähiöt sosiaalisina, fyysisinä ja toiminnallisina ongelmina. Tutkielma selvittää, toistuvatko ongelmakategoriat vielä tänä päivänä mellunmäkeläisten kertomuksissa asuinalueestaan.</p> <p>Tutkielman aineisto on kerätty puolistrukturoiduilla haastatteluilla. Haastatteluiden vahvuudeksi koetaan niiden syväluotaavaa informaatiota tuottava tyyli. Mellunmäkeläisille on annettu vapaus kertoa omista kokemuksistaan ja näkemyksistään. Vain yksilötason kokemusmaailmaa tutkailemalla on kyetty tuottamaan laajemmin alueellisesta leimasta kertovaa materiaalia. Toisaalta haastatteluissa on haluttu säilyttää tietty rakenne, jotta aineisto on helpommin vertailtavissa. Vertailemalla haastatteluaineistoa, kyetään erottamaan selkeitä ja johdonmukaisia teemoja. Näiden teemojen analyysistä syntyvät seuraavat tutkimustulokset.</p> <p>Asuinalueen sisällä on havaittavissa leimaava vastakkainasettelu. Niin kutsutut ”Vanha Mellunmäki” ja ”Uusi Mellunmäki” jäsentävät ihmisten mielikuvia ja kokemusmaailmaa asuinalueestaan. Vanhassa Mellunmäessä on mielikuvissa omistusasuntovaltaista, luonnonläheistä ja rauhallista. Asukkaita kuvaillaan ”alkuperäisinä” mellunmäkeläisinä, aktiivisina ja vastuullisina. Uusi Mellunmäki koostuu mielikuvissa rumista taloista, kaupungin vuokra-asunnoista, maahanmuuttajista ja köyhistä lapsiperheistä. Uuden Mellunmäen asukkaat mielletään vastuuttomiksi ja epäaktiivisiksi. Eletty sosiaalinen todellisuus pyritään selittämään alueittaisella nimeämisellä, joka toimii symbolisena erottautumiskeinona yhden lähiön sisällä.</p> <p>Mellunmäki kärsii laajemmasta Itä-Helsinkiin kohdistuvasta stigmasta. Itä-Helsingin huonon maineen nähtiin virheellisesti muokkaavaan ulkopuolisten mielikuvia Mellunmäestä. Lehdistöä ja mediaa syytettiin mielikuvien levittämisestä ja vahvistamisesta. Myös lähiöihin yleisesti liitettyjen ongelmakategorioiden todetaan esiintyvän mellunmäkeläisten mielikuvissa. Lähiön fyysiset, sosiaaliset ja toiminnalliset ongelmat korostuvat ja leimaavat Mellunmäkeä. Alueellisen leiman vaikutuksia naapurusten välisiin suhteisiin tulisi kartoittaa jatkotutkimuksilla.</p>			
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# Resident Accounts of Mellunmäki

Territorial Stigma Explored in a Helsinki Lähiö

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## 1. Introduction

This thesis studies the negative labeling of a neighborhood or *territorial stigmatization* in a residential suburb of Helsinki called Mellunmäki. The purpose of this thesis is to find out whether a territorial stigma features in local residents accounts of the area. Previous research on related topics in Helsinki has concentrated on large geographic areas (Alamiekkaoja, 2005) or wider phenomena such as the stigma of residential suburbs (Roivainen, 1999). This thesis will take the reader to a specific locale to look at whether a territorial stigma is to be found in a single neighborhood and in the discourses of its residents.

Territorial stigmatization is the negative labeling of an area. This labeling is the outcome of a collectively shared perception or belief that manifold social and economic weaknesses are endemic to a given territory. When these weaknesses become publicly acknowledged as to be expected of that territory, a discourse of criticism and blaming will ensue from below in interactions of everyday life and from above in fields of journalism, politics and science (Wacquant, 2008).

Mellunmäki is a residential suburb in the eastern district of Helsinki. Like many other neighborhoods of Helsinki, Mellunmäki is a residential area, constructed essentially as the outcome of a municipal politics practiced from the 1960's and changes in land ownership. Due to large structural shifts in the economy and socio-political developments, construction became a highly profit oriented venture. The particularities of the urban structure of Helsinki are explained below, but for its residents, Mellunmäki is home, neighborhood and the stage of their everyday lives. How they view Mellunmäki is ultimately the topic of this thesis.

During the summer of 2012 as part of a group of urban activists, I had the privilege to work on a shared project with the local residents' association of Mellunmäki. The group's work in Mellunmäki is fairly irrelevant to this thesis, but in short the group organized events with locals to think of ways to have residents' opinions heard on an alleged lack of local services. Relevant to this thesis are my encounters with residents

during our work. These encounters formed the very premise of my research. I would venture out to Mellunmäki multiple times and spend a considerable amount of time with local residents. During my time in Mellunmäki I began to hear a distinction between “The Old Mellunmäki” and “The New Mellunmäki” in residents’ discussions. Listening to these discussions a question began to formulate. I wanted to know, whether this dichotomous categorization between the old and new could be traced to some areas or territories being perceived differently within a single neighborhood. The seed for research was planted then and I began to see the task of my thesis.

The theoretical framework for this thesis is derived from Loic Wacquant’s (2008) comparative work on marginalized areas of Chicago and Paris. The theory states that, firstly, a territorial stigma on its own is enough to spark harmful social processes, despite the actual social reality “on ground”. Secondly, a territorial stigma drives people to look for ways of symbolic distancing from their neighbors and hence erodes social relations within a neighborhood. This thesis is interested in the workings of a territorial stigma on ground level. Territorial stigmas are however found to be enforced in public discussion and the media and then to seep into the neighborhood level as self-fulfilling prophecies. For theoretical robustness, previous scholarly work on the way residential neighborhoods in general have been portrayed in the Finnish media in the past decades is integrated into the theory on stigma. In short, residential suburbs have been portrayed in the media as a problem from the 1960’s and this thesis investigates whether such problem categories are to be found in resident accounts.

For the purposes of this thesis local residents of Mellunmäki have been interviewed and their opinions, experiences and images of their own neighborhood studied under the light of my theory. The primary research question for this thesis is as follows. “Do residents’ accounts depict a territorial stigma for Mellunmäki?” To answer this, the following secondary research questions have been formulated.

1. What are the reasons for the distinction between Old and New Mellunmäki?
2. How do Mellunmäki residents talk about their neighborhood?
3. Does Mellunmäki feature as a problem in resident accounts?
4. How do residents of Mellunmäki think their neighborhood is viewed by outsiders?

In order to answer these questions, this thesis proceeds as follows. I begin by setting the historical context. In chapter two I discuss the historical trajectory of urban development in Helsinki beginning from early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Among other developments, I discuss the formation of working class neighborhoods on the north side of The Long Bridge as so eloquently studied by Waris (1973). Next, moving on to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I present the particularities behind the construction of Helsinki's residential suburbia or so-called *lähiös*. Here, I will introduce the particularities of the construction of *lähiös* away from the city's urban center and ensuing fragmentation of Helsinki's urban fabric. I will discuss how this was ultimately due to a shift towards profit-oriented construction. In this part of the chapter I also justify my use of the Finnish word *lähiö* throughout the thesis. Then, an all too brief overview is provided of today's urban research and *lähiö*'s place in it. In the final part of the chapter, I introduce the case of this thesis, the *lähiö* of Mellunmäki.

The third chapter provides an in depth consideration of the theoretical framework of this thesis. I begin by introducing the concept of *territorial stigmatization* as put forth by Wacquant (2008). I will discuss the specificities of territorial stigma, which to speak far too bluntly, denotes the negative labeling of an area due to one or more perceived inefficiencies or social ills. This stigma has the tendency to work in a cyclical manner, in local parlance and public discussions, enforcing not only itself, but the weaknesses it is only supposed to record. After discussing the concept in more detail, I then argue for the theory's suitability in the context of Helsinki.

Territorial stigma is said to hinder the relations between residents of a neighborhood as they come to build coping mechanisms to escape the stigma. These mechanisms are ways of symbolic and material distancing from neighbors, whom the stigma has labeled as the reason for the territory's professed plight. Here, in the second part of the third chapter, it is important I present, amongst others, the idea of *social bonds* by Blokland (2003). Although not an integral part of the theory here, as I do not study the effects of stigma but its mere existence in Mellunmäki, the topics of stigma and neighbor relations are nonetheless so intertwined, that the latter must also be regarded.

If the second chapter introduces *lähiös*' "material" construction and its specificities, the third chapter discusses their "social" construction. Roivainen (1999) has studied the way *lähiö* has been depicted in a major Finnish newspaper from the 1950's to the early

1990's. As it stands, lähiös have been written about as different “problems” and instead of understanding the socio-economic shifts that led to the lähiös' particularities, lähiö-residents and their neighborhoods have been negatively labeled. A theoretical tool is constructed of the lähiö-as-a-problem and this is further discussed in chapter three. In the final part of the theoretical chapter I voice a request for scientists to acknowledge their responsibility in taking care not to be parts of the process which enforces territorial stigma. If the previous part of the chapter discusses the media's responsibility, I finally lean towards the academics and call for conducting critical research.

The fourth chapter I devote to a deliberation on the used research method and collected data. In this chapter I justify my use of *semi-structured interviews* as my research method. Furthermore, I discuss the data and method of analysis. My data is collected via fourteen semi-structured interviews with Mellunmäki residents. These interviews have been transcribed and translated into English for the purposes of this thesis. Finally I consider any research ethical conundrums I have faced.

In the fifth chapter I move on to discuss in detail the analysis of my data. The analysis is based on, first, reorganizing the data according to common features in interviewee accounts. These commonalities are then synthesized to form themes. Second, the analysis is based on discussing these themes parallel to those thematic concepts of *territorial stigma* and *lähiö-as-a-problem*. The constructed themes are the building blocks of territorial stigma in the views, opinions, imaginations and experiences of Mellunmäki residents interviewed for this thesis.

I dedicate the sixth chapter on providing a summary of findings and a discussion on ensuing conclusions from the analysis chapter. Furthermore, I answer my research questions on the basis of my findings. I use this opportunity to discuss any possible shortcomings of this thesis, but also any and all trailblazing discoveries that warrant further research. Finally I make suggestions as to how contemporary research might, in some small ways, be improved by understanding and considering *territorial stigma*.



## **2. A brief history of urban development in Helsinki**

In this chapter I provide a brief overview of the urban development of Helsinki. This is done bearing in mind that my interest ultimately rests in the residential neighborhoods or so-called lähiös around Helsinki's central, urban core. Hence, in this chapter I mostly concentrate on those structural factors, planning ideologies and social trajectories which lead to the particularities of the lähiö. Although this can in no way be a comprehensive account, this chapter will both set the historical context for the thesis at hand and show some of the intricacies of the development of lähiös. Furthermore, this chapter also aims to justify my use of the Finnish term lähiö throughout the thesis to denote residential suburbs of Helsinki as their specificities are so best described. Finally, in this chapter I introduce the case of Mellunmäki and the way Mellunmäki is situated in the context of Helsinki's urban planning. But before looking at the particularities of lähiö construction, let us go back to Helsinki in the early 19th Century.

### **2.1 A growing population, a city spreading**

Contrary to many of its European counterparts, Helsinki's very early urban development was not driven by industrialization. Helsinki gained its urban form through a different path. In 1812 Helsinki became the capital of the Grand Duchy of Finland under the Russian Empire. As capital, Helsinki was formed as a center of governance, administration and education – not a hub of grand industry. For instance, the largest factory in Helsinki in 1810 was Sederholm hemp-fabric factory which had 12 men working in it. Neither was Helsinki a large city population-wise. In the same year, 1810 Helsinki was home to barely over 4000 people. Quite soon however the new departments of administration and the reconstruction works began to bring in more people to the city, which had just survived the war and suffered severe damages in the great fire of 1808. (Waris, 1973: 13-17.)

Helsinki's population grew throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only slowing down in 1840's and 50's to pick up again in the 1860's. Simultaneously, the small former city of

merchants and craftsmen had begun to turn into a center of industry. By the year 1875 industry had established a foothold in Helsinki which was now home to 89 factories, one of them having as many as 700 men working under the same roof. Industry's expansion became apparent in the fact, that over 4000 people were now engaged in industrial work. The formation of Helsinki's industrial working classes had begun. (Ibid., p. 17-18.) The urban core of the city developed primarily on the Helsinki peninsula through vast reconstruction efforts. The war and fire had taken their toll on the city, leaving much of it destroyed. Between the years 1812-1825 the city's appearance went through drastic renewals. A new plan was extended well beyond the old city borders and Helsinki's urban center started to take shape. Despite the wider spreading out of the city, impoverished folk settled on the rocky shores and hills called "Punavuori" south of the city. Here, one could build outside the official city plan. Fishermen and others with meager means built their cabins and shacks and the areas became known as quarters of the deprived. Common to these areas on the outskirts of the city were poverty and vice. These were the traits the territories became notorious for. They became labeled as territories of the poor way before Helsinki established itself as a city of industry. (Ibid., p. 19-24.)

These southern areas were included in the official city plan in 1875. Now, tighter regulation on construction became enforced. However, these territories remained residential areas of the poor. They offered the most affordable lodgings and life-chances for the people moving in from the countryside in search of work and livelihood. At the same time Helsinki had started to spread north, where constructors could rent land for cheap and build as they wished – there was no need to buy expensive city land. Here, north of the Long Bridge, was where factory workers and immigrants moving in from the countryside would settle towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (Ibid., p. 24-26.) And this is where Helsinki's first working class area formed, its particular socio-economic realities famously studied by Waris in his pioneering work on Finnish urban sociology, *Työläisyhteiskunnan syntyminen Helsingin Pitkänsillan pohjoispuolelle* (1973).

Elsewhere, the fact that Helsinki could no longer expand within its boundaries had led to its spreading out towards Töölö already in the 1860's and -70's. Later this prompted one Eliel Saarinen to begin an urban planning process of a scale yet unseen in Finland.

In 1915 Saarinen drew up an intricate plan for Munkkiniemi-Haaga. In 1918, right after Finland having gained its independence and amidst a harsh civil war, Saarinen and his collaborators published a general plan for all of Helsinki. This was in fact a vision for a future Greater Helsinki Metropolitan area, in which a number of independent but ultimately linked suburbs are constructed on the peripheral areas. Representative of the British architect Ebenezer Howard's garden city ideals, these suburbs would be surrounded by green belts, giving residents access to nature. Saarinen's master plan was however never realized, as the land on those peripheral areas was not for sale and hence the city of Helsinki could not extend any planned development. Also only parts of the Munkkiniemi-Haaga plan ever saw daylight. Despite this, it has been argued that Saarinen went far in introducing Howard's garden city to the Finnish context and established an example for the planners of 1920s. (Sundman, 1991: 76-78.)

I have now, with the help of Waris (1973), introduced the story of urban development of Helsinki through the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In essence it is the story of Helsinki turning into first a city of administration and later one of industry. It is also the story of intense population growth and placement of different social strata in different parts of the city, due to structural factors such as land ownership. Planning-wise it is the story of a city spreading out. The turn of the Century saw the arrival of architectural and planning ideologies as noted above. The 20<sup>th</sup> century then sees the advent of the lähiö. So, in the next part of the chapter I look at how the above trajectories and further developments lead to the particularities of the lähiö. Below, I will also justify my use of the word lähiö throughout the thesis.

## **2.2 House the masses and make a profit - The advent of lähiö**

The above-mentioned Eliel Saarinen's assistant from 1914 to 1915 was Otto-Iivari Meurman. Later a professor of town planning at the Institute himself, Meurman had an unrivaled influence on city planning in Helsinki (Herranen, 1997). Meurman among others was responsible for "the ultimate synthesis of 1920's environmental impulses", the garden city of Käpylä (Sundman, 1991: 83). Käpylä was the planners' and architects' answer to the demand for healthy working class suburbia. Where it diverged from Howard's vision was that Käpylä offered no workplaces and as a community was

too minor to be able to carry its own services. (Ibid., p. 83.) In 1931 a new Detailed Planning Law was drawn up, triggered by unrestrained developments around Helsinki and a number of other Finnish cities. This meant that from 1931, cities had the freedom to plan not only land they owned, but also privately owned land. The whole ideology of regulation here was broadened; from hence forth entire cities could be included in planning, not just the properties owned by the city (Häussermann & Haila 2005: 56).

The single most tremendous internal migration of people during Finland's independence took place throughout the tumultuous decade of 1960's and lasted into the 1970's. Agriculture began to diminish and Finland's rapid industrialization process began. Thousands upon thousands gradually left from north, east and central Finland to the growing metropolises of the south. Here a developing service industry and prospects for occupational employment drew people in. The Great Migration (Suuri Muutto) of 1960's and 70's and the relocation of the migrants posed a challenge for the country's capital – where would they all live? (Kortteinen, 1982.)

Part of the answer came from afore-mentioned Meurman and his follower Olli Kivinen. These ideological descendants of Saarinen and Howard placed emphasis of town planning on a so-called lähiö-theory and the multi-central construction of urban environment became the principal idea of town planning. Partly due to this, new residential areas were no longer constructed affixed to the existing urban structure as had been done during the pre-war period with areas such as Töölö and Vallila. Now, green belts were left between the urban core of the city and new residential areas, which were built on those peripheral lands that the city now had planning rights over. By building lähiös into forests surrounding the city it was argued that people had better opportunities to enjoy the natural environment and would not have to suffer the intolerable urban conditions of congestion and crowdedness. (Herranen, 1997.) The first larger expanses of residential suburbia in Helsinki which could be called “asumalähiö” were Pohjois-Haaga, Maunula and Herttoniemi. These suburbs provided residents with many amenities not available in previous housing forms. The policies behind construction had however changed from the humane ideals of previous years to hard, rational reasoning for the housing of those brought in by the Great Migration. Standardized construction from prefabricated materials took foothold. Vast numbers of

apartments were needed and lähiö construction was now a materialization of increasing ideology of efficiency. (Hankonen, 1994.)

Despite the ideological drivers behind planning and architecture, the main reason for the placement of lähiös outside the city center was the fact that lähiös were the outcome of what are known as *development contracts* (aluerakennussopimus). Development contracts are the consequence of a move towards speculative construction or construction which aims at maximizing profits. Here, the constructor is not the forthcoming resident or an organization representative of the resident, but an outside private constructor who is interested in making a profit out of the land. Land is a means of production as any other, except that as such, it is everlasting. (Bengs et.al., 1989.) So, development contracts were made between municipalities and construction companies. The municipalities did not have the resources to plan and construct housing fast enough for the growing population. Hence, construction companies acquired the land, took care of planning, construction and finally the marketing of apartments (Hankonen, 1994: 19). Helsinki now had to grow and spread out on private land, owned by the construction companies as majority of the development contracts signed by Helsinki were so called transfer contracts (luovutusopimus). Here, the municipality as the original landowner “transferred” territories to the constructor to take care of construction work.

Now, comprehensive urban planning and development came to depend on the private land owner, whose property the particular administrative territory happened to be on. As raw land close to the urban core of the city was most expensive, the construction companies acquired land further away and clearly separate from the urban fabric. Here, *development areas* denoted the never before seen construction of whole neighborhoods at once. Construction companies were keen on efficiency and inexpensive construction. So, large suburban neighborhoods or lähiös constructed of pre-cast concrete materials began to arise away from the urban core. Ultimately, the construction of lähiös outside the urban center was more about deep-seated structural factors than any individual architects or planners. Lähiö-construction was the outcome of private land ownership and municipal politics. To put it bluntly, a move towards free market economy resulted in construction which enforced the fragmentation of the urban structure of Helsinki. (Bengs et.al., 1989.)

As commonly understood, lähiö is a residential area adjacent to or a short distance from the urban center of the city. The word lähiö is rather particular to the Finnish language. It derives from “asumalähiö” which loosely translates to residential area. Meurman drew the plan for the very first Finnish asumalähiö called Tapiola in the city of Espoo. Asumalähiö denoted a residential unit within the town-planning system. Eventually the word “asuma” (residential) has been dropped off and lähiö (which does not easily translate to English) gained widespread usage to signify a neighborhood built outside the more fixed urban fabric of a city. Lähiö is a derivative of the word “lähellä” (Finnish for *close*) which goes some way in explaining its character as a residential area often found outside the city center, but *close* enough to be accounted as part of the city, which it of course is.

Pihlajamäki in East Helsinki has been seen as first development area. In construction technologies developments had led to the discarding of bricks as the raw material and the use of concrete instead began to popularize. Precast concrete materials were now used and this had a large impact on the way lähiös were designed and built. Pihlajamäki still adhered to the architectural aesthetic preferences of the time, but as the sixties rolled along the influence of architects diminished and decisions moved to constructors and politicians who preferred cost-effective construction. Precast concrete buildings provided the favorable option. (Herranen, 1997: 140-142.) The word lähiö is used widely in both everyday language and academic considerations. In her work *Lähiöt ja tehokkuuden yhteiskunta*, Hankonen (1994) describes lähiös as residential areas comprising largely of apartment blocks which have been planned, constructed and marketed as different applications of the lähiö-idea.

As Kortteinen has it, if the working class areas of North of the Long Bridge were constructed on Social Darwinist principles by anyone who could and Tapiola on a philanthropic ideology of the good life, then lähiös are built on purely economic basis and are the outcome of development contracts (Kortteinen, 1982: 33). It is these historical and structural particularities of the Finnish lähiö which I find to justify my use of the term throughout the thesis. In the next part of the chapter I briefly discuss lähiös today, as a topic of research and as the stage of everyday life for their residents.

### 2.3 Deciphering the futures - Lähiö as a topic of research

Today lähiös are the stage of everyday life and its interactions for a large, heterogeneous part of the population. Lähiös are not all the same and hence speaking of them as one and under the same rubric is problematic. There have, however, surfaced worries of social and territorial differentiation of Helsinki which often coincide with fears of a large scale process of urban *segregation* of Helsinki, wherein lähiös would be headed towards a future of social disarray. In short, segregation here means the territorial division between the population and concentration of specific social and economic classes in distinct territories. Segregation may denote both the process which leads to such division or the outcome itself. Whichever, segregation may roughly be determined as beginning from a situation in which the territorial placement of households is decided by house prices. Here, income differences would then lead to segregation. (Lankinen, 1994.)

Fears of segregation in Helsinki have been sparked by a number of things. For one, the serious recession of the early 1990's which changed the social landscape of the country was seen to materialize partly in the concentration of unemployment and poverty in lähiös, where affordable and social housing had provided homes for the working classes. The recession had long lasting ramifications for the country. Many were left to battle with long term unemployment, others completely dropped out of the labor force. Furthermore, the geographical placement of jobs has also seen a restructuring and this has been argued to also have affected the placement of social strata. (Lankinen, 2001.)

Furthermore, international examples from as close as other Nordic countries and the social development in neighborhoods comparable to Finnish lähiös have been the source of such worries. There is strong proof of negative processes of accelerating unemployment, increasing out migration, growth of immigrant populations and rising rents which have caused social deterioration of the territories (Lankinen, 1994). Also there are worrying examples from residential neighborhoods on the outskirts of European metropolises, such as Paris (which shall be regarded in more detail in the theory chapter), where social life has clearly segregated from the mainstream society. According to Lankinen the most horrendous examples are from the US where the

extreme social deficiency and physical deprivation of neighborhoods has led to the demolition of whole neighborhoods. (Ibid., p. 9.)

These international examples and the historical, social and economic developments in Helsinki have then sparked a whole field of research on possible segregation, social and spatial differentiation and the urban development of Helsinki. They have been studied from the viewpoints of urban geography, utilizing Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Vaattovaara (1998). Segregation has been studied by conducting statistical comparisons of demographic variables (Lankinen, 2001). And social life of lähiös has been studied by sociologists (Kortteinen, 1982). But despite the growing need of scientists to understand the structural processes which have led to discrepancies and differentiation of the urban fabric and understand the future amongst fears of segregation, in public discourse it is the lähiö and its residents that have come to carry the antipathy and are seen as the reason and culprits for their plight. I will discuss some possible reasons for this in the next chapter on the theoretical considerations. But before that, in the following final part of this chapter, let me I introduce the case of this thesis, the East Helsinki lähiö of Mellunmäki.

## **2.4 Mellunmäki**

Mellunmäki was only home to a small number of people until the 1930's. At the beginning of the century villas were constructed to accompany a number of large farms residing on the eastern edge of the area. The area is still known for its existing historic villas and nature walks in the woods. Townhouses were constructed in the low-lying areas of Mellunmäki already in the 1940s and smaller, three story apartment buildings in the 1950's. (Lampi, 2013.) But as a lähiö, the construction began in 1968. As explained above, development areas denoted the construction of whole neighborhoods and boroughs at once. The city of Helsinki signed development contracts with the construction companies. The majority of Helsinki's development contracts were signed in the 1970's. But in fact, Mellunmäki is the only development area where a contract was signed already in the 1960's. (Bengs, 1989.) The building rights went to two companies, Palkki Oy and Rakennus Oy. The construction plan, drawn in 1967, included high rise buildings of up to seven stories. In 1975 Mellunmäki was already home to 5500 residents. Further supplementary construction and the extending of the



metro line to Mellunmäki brought in further population and today Mellunmäki is home to some 8500 residents. (Lampi, 2013.)

Mellunmäki is located in the Eastern district (itäinen suurpiiri) of Helsinki and resides at the eastern end of the public transportation Metro line. It belongs to Mellunkylä basic district (peruspiiri) along with the neighborhoods of Kontula, Vesala, Kivikko and Kurkimäki. Mellunkylä is bordered by Vuosaari to the east, Länsimäki (which belongs to the city of Vantaa) to the north, Itäkeskus to the south and Malmi to the west. Especially the neighborhoods of Vesala and Länsimäki are so close to Mellunmäki, that when walking around the area it is hard to distinguish one neighborhood from the other. The borders reside between apartment blocks which are very similar in appearance. In some areas of Mellunmäki new construction work was reportedly going on.

A division is made in resident discussions of the whole lähiö, based on the notions of a New Mellunmäki and Old Mellunmäki. New Mellunmäki denotes Fallpakka which is on the south-east side of Itäväylä, a major highway running east from Helsinki, and the area around the Metro station. Old Mellunmäki denotes largely owner occupied smaller apartment buildings constructed in the fifties and early sixties. In general, housing is made up of mixed tenures and is in close proximity to natural surroundings which are much valued by residents. The territories closer to the metro station, which border the neighborhoods of Vesala and Länsimäki were reported to have more social housing in high-rise apartment buildings. It is this unofficial division in residents' discourse on their neighborhood which sparked my interest in the area.

I have now discussed the historical and structural development of lähiös. I presented the economic reasons for their placement away from the urban core. I also briefly introduced above the growing field of research around social and spatial differentiation and segregation in Helsinki, which have been argued to materialize in the uneven placement of lower social strata in Helsinki's lähiös. In the next chapter I will introduce the theoretical field under which this thesis falls. I suggest that despite the structural reasons for possible differentiation, in public rhetoric, journalism and even in scientific discourse, it is the lähiö and its residents which have been labeled as the reason for the hardships they carry. Lähiös, in their structural and socioeconomic variance and their heterogeneous populations have become the keyword to explain social "weaknesses". The concept of territorial stigma has been the subject of too little research in the Finnish

context and this thesis attempts to partly add to the existing body of knowledge on the topic.

### 3. Theoretical considerations

I have now discussed the historical trajectory of urban development in Helsinki and those structural, planning and ideological factors which played their part in the birth of lähiös and the intricacies of why they came to be. Furthermore I have introduced above the specific lähiö studied in this thesis, Mellunmäki. Let me now move on to provide an account of the theoretical framework for the thesis. In the first part of this chapter I discuss the concept of territorial stigmatization as put forth by Loic Wacquant (2008). In short, territorial stigmatization is the negative labeling of a certain area in an attempt to describe its perceived social reality. Territorial stigmas become easily enforced in daily lives and everyday discussions and from above in the media and even scientific publications. As will be discussed, territorial stigmas may aggravate the reality they attempt to describe.

Partly this aggravation happens through the deterioration of relations between residents. When residents find inferiorities in their territory to be emphasized, say, by public discussion, they find ways of coping in blaming others in the locale. It is beyond the means of this thesis to study the actual effect of stigma on neighbor relations in Mellunmäki. I am merely investigating whether territorial stigma has taken hold in local residents' imaginations. However, due to the interlinked nature of the topics (stigma and social cohesion), it is useful here to introduce Blokland's (2003) idea of social bonds and Forrest and Kearns' (2001) studies on the role of neighborhoods for social cohesion. This is done in the second part of the chapter.

In the third part of this theoretical chapter I introduce Irene Roivainen's work (1999) *Sokeripala metsän keskellä* or *Sugarcubes in the forest* (my translation). According to Roivainen a major Finnish newspaper, Helsingin Sanomat, has written about lähiös throughout the decades as a problem. Hence, it has been instrumental in creating a certain image for lähiös. Drawing from the writing Roivainen constructs a threefold "lähiö-as-a-problem" categorization. The categories are presented in finer detail below when I also argue for their usefulness for this thesis.

Roivainen discusses media's role and responsibility in not enforcing territorial stigmas. In the fourth and final part of this chapter I make a note of scientists' responsibility.

Social scientists are often the ones creating categories and sparking certain discourses. I heed here the call of Hastings (2001) and Wacquant (2008) in taking care not to in fact only impose territorial stigmas when we are supposed to shed light on their construction and hence also get closer to their dismantling. But now, let me introduce the concept of territorial stigma.

### 3.1 Territorial Stigmatization

The theoretical framework for this thesis is built on the concept of *territorial stigmatization*, put forth by Loic Wacquant in his *Urban Outcasts* (2008), a comparative work of Chicago's ghetto and French working-class banlieue. Due to the structural processes of post-Fordist reorganization of the economy and the post-Keynesian reconstruction of the welfare state, parts of the population on both continents have been sentenced to redundancy. These populations are increasingly marginalized and consigned to so-called neighborhoods of exile. These are confined and separated areas which are reviled from above in public discussion and from below by local residents and outsiders. They are negatively labeled areas, stigmatized territories. (Wacquant, 2008.)

The above-mentioned sociopolitical and economic changes which work reciprocally to enforce one-another, have been toughest on the dispossessed in contemporary Metropolises. For one, these changes have ensued in the polarization of the class structure. Together with ethno-racial segregation and the drawing back of the welfare state this polarization has produced a dualization of the social and physical structure of the metropolis, moving large sections of the unskilled labor force to economic redundancy and rendering them socially marginal. (Ibid., p. 24.) This "violence from above", has three main elements. First, mass-unemployment leading to deproletarianization. Second, relegation of the deproletarianized population to decaying neighborhoods where social fall of working class households and settling in of immigrant populations intensify. And third, an increasing *stigmatization* not only according to class and ethnic origin but also place of residence or *territory*. (Ibid., p. 25.) It is this final element and its peculiarities which this thesis is concerned with.

But before I go further into the intricacies of *territorial stigma*, it is justified to ask, what is *stigma*? Erving Goffman's *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity* (1963) is the seminal sociological work on stigma. For Goffman stigma is a discrediting attribute, a debilitating label imposed on an individual due to one or a number of different negatively perceived qualities. Goffman mentions three different types of stigma. First are 'abominations of the body' such as physical abnormalities. Second, follows a long list of personal 'blemishes of individual character' including traits such as weak will and treacherousness. Lastly, there are so called 'tribal stigma', based on nationality, ethnic background or religion. (Ibid., p. 4.) Now, it is to this list that Wacquant has found an important addition, a fourth stigmatizing element namely place of residence or territory. Wacquant finds territorial and tribal stigmas similar in that they can for instance be passed on within a family and come to contaminate all of its members. But he sets territorial stigma off from the rest as it can be rather simply shed off through "geographic mobility" - given of course that changing location is an option for the individual. (Wacquant, 2007: 67.)

As this thesis is concerned with the workings of a possible territorial stigmatization in the Helsinki lähiö of Mellunmäki, I will of course discuss the concepts relevance in Finland. But before moving too hastily into the discussion on the theory's suitability in a Helsinki lähiö, let me provide a brief overview of the workings of territorial stigma in French banlieue and Chicago's ghetto as studied by Loic Wacquant (2008).

In 1950's France, construction of public housing projects was a celebrated and admired development. French high-rise projects of the 1950's were welcomed with enthusiasm and seen to provide middle class families with the avails of modernity. But already a decade later these estates saw the moving out of middle classes, rising unemployment and a quick turn into quarters the dispossessed. A continuous material and demographic decline from the 1960's and a steady flow of people of immigrant background beginning in the 1970's has left the French banlieues with negative public images associated with scarcity, immigration and insecurity. Now, both the media and residents refer to the territories as, for example, "trash-cans" or "reservations". To live in a French banlieue is to reside in branded territory. By the end of the 1990's a ghetto-discourse had entered to enforce the stigma. French urban space became strongly "ethnicized" due to misrepresentation of pockets of Arab poverty in the banlieues. (Wacquant, 2008: 170-171.) Interestingly, for their residents these French estates are not

monolithic entities. Instead, residents distinguish sub-units and micro-locales which center on buildings and even different stairwells inside a single building and are used to organize daily lives. For instance, in a certain estate the residents of northern part of the estate regarded those from the southern part as hoodlums and wanted nothing to do with them. (Ibid., p. 172.)

The story of ghettoization in America is the story of racial segregation. The ghetto is “[...] not simply a topographic entity or an aggregation of poor families and individuals but an *institutional form*, that is, a distinctive, spatially based, concatenation of mechanisms of *ethnoracial closure and control*” (ibid., p. 49). Wacquant provides the most sobering historical and structural account of the formation of the American ghetto. The communal ghetto of 1960’s, which was strictly bounded, had a social division of labor and agencies of representation, where black classes were bound together by a collective consciousness, has turned into the hyperghetto. The hyperghetto is decentered and split between a deteriorating and spreading subproletarian core and outpost working class neighborhoods. The separation of blacks has moved beyond housing to again include schooling, employment and public services. (Ibid., p. 43-56.)

Despite the above-mentioned ethnicization of the French banlieue in public discourse, one of the main differences in the stigma between the banlieue and its American counterpart is that for the former it is a residential stigma, whereas for the latter, the ghetto is “inseparably spatial-cum-racial” (ibid., p. 180-181). Not only does living in Chicago’s ghetto render a resident “socially unworthy and morally inferior”, this is not merely a territorial stigma. The residents of French banlieue are, for example, capable of temporary impression management by going to spend time in more upmarket or fashionable areas. They have the capability of traversing symbolic spaces and live out fantasies of social inclusion. The inhabitants of the American ghetto do not have the ability to change context and live such fantasies. The ghetto is a specifically racial formation – in America, unless successfully displaying middle-class white symbols and cultural preferences, blacks are by definition seen as residents of the ghetto and of lower class status. The idea of the American ghetto as a racial construct has so permeated the social fabric and the black-white dichotomy is so inherent in the social and economic systems and characteristic of the urban and mental landscape of the country, that the racial segmentation of the US urban arena is self-evident for all parties. (Ibid., p. 182.)

Now, territorial stigma is one of the key factors in the way residents experience life in those areas. Furthermore, it is stigma which most lucidly explains the mechanisms of coping and escape which people develop in these instances to live with those experiences. (Ibid., p. 169.) Despite the above charted differences in the roots and nature of stigma, the main effect of territorial stigma is parallel in both instances. “[...] it is to stimulate practices of internal social differentiation and distancing that work to decrease interpersonal trust and undercut local solidarity” (ibid., p. 183). People living in stigmatized territories of France and Chicago experienced shame and guilt, which had adverse effects on their social contacts. Residents of a housing project on the periphery of Paris would hide their addresses and steer clear of having friends and family visit them at home. In Chicago, residents would go to great lengths to distance themselves from and deny belonging to the local micro-society and population. (Ibid., p. 184.)

Often the only way to assuage the sense of indignity created by life in a stigmatized neighborhood is to blame the demonized other, an impersonal yet familiar scapegoat such as “a young drug abusing criminal” or “a lazy person abusing welfare benefits” or “immigrants abusing our society”. One begins to see other residents, their neighbors, who most likely endure similar challenges and impoverishment as the reason for the areas plight – in effect furthering the stigma. Wacquant calls this “lateral denigration and mutual distancing”. (Wacquant, 2007: 68-69.)

According to Wacquant marginality and dispossession do not spread evenly through working-class areas, but concentrate in “[...] leprous badlands at the heart of the post-industrial Metropolis where only the refuse of society would accept to dwell” (ibid., p. 67). As these “leprous badlands” become commonly known and fixed as worse-off, they also become discussed as such – they are reviled ‘from below’ in common parlance and everyday speech as well as ‘from above’ in journalism, politics and in fields of science. Now, not only are the residents of these areas labeled by poverty and possibly ethnic origin, a stain of place is also laid over them. This stigma becomes strengthened in those places, which are unfortunate enough to gain a national reputation for their misery. According to Wacquant these places are found in all First World Metropolises and not even Scandinavian countries which have stood firmly against the rise of marginality have been saved from the phenomenon of territorial stigmatization. (Ibid., p. 67-68.) But is the theory of territorial stigmatization suitable in studying the case of a Helsinki lähiö?

I find the following statement Wacquant makes is particularly well-suited and applicable in researching the residents' perceptions of a Helsinki lähiö, in this instance Mellunmäki: "[...] whether or not these areas are in fact dilapidated and dangerous, and their population composed essentially of poor people, minorities and foreigners, matters little in the end: the prejudicial belief that they are suffices to set off socially noxious consequences" (ibid., p. 68). The strong belief in the inferiority and evils of a territory render the lived reality secondary. Truthful depictions of daily life and social reality are soon veiled by the stigma which works its way in cyclical motions from, say, public discussions to local understandings. Ultimately this means that territorial stigma has the tendency to turn into a so-called self-fulfilling prophecy. When a territory becomes known for some perceived social evil, its residents will develop coping mechanisms. They will find symbolic and material ways to distance themselves from their neighbors who are viewed as the causes of those very evils. Social atomism, disorganization of the community and cultural anomie then ensue from that public taint or stigma which was supposed to only record them. (Wacquant, 2008: 169-184.)

Although Wacquant's comparative research deals with the specific cases of French banlieue and Chicago's ghetto, his question on territorial stigma may just as well be posed in the context of the Helsinki lähiö of Mellunmäki. The caution that lived, social realities become secondary when an area is viewed as bad and criticized accordingly calls for studying the heterogeneous population and diverse economic and social circumstances of lähiös in the light of territorial stigma. A question highly interwoven to the topic of stigma is that of social relations between neighbors, a topic which I will discuss next.

### **3.2 On neighborhoods and social relations**

If territorial stigma materializes as anomie and disorganization of the community, i.e. the deterioration between neighbor relations and social bonds, I must next discuss the premise of these concepts and their place in this thesis. As noted earlier, it is beyond the means of this thesis to study stigma's effect on social relations in Mellunmäki. However, these topics are so interlinked in academic discourse, that to provide any



sober account of the phenomenon of territorial stigmatization, social bonds and cohesion need to be addressed. Now, social bonds and moral cohesion between urban dwellers have always been a theme of much interest. What happens to relations between people in the urban realm? Tönnies (2002) for one voiced his concerns about the loss of *Gemeinschaft*; long term, steady communal bonds of the more rural lifestyles.

Urbanization in his vision leads to individualistic *Gesellschaft*, or more passing and short term relations, bonds and indeed solidarity where associations are based around an instrumental value. Durkheim (1984) of course also identified social cohesion as either mechanical or organic solidarity. Shared values and morality result in mechanic solidarity, which is inscribed in and furthered by institutions that steer people's actions. Organic solidarity is about functional interdependencies; even though separated by labor differentiation people are mutually dependent. (Durkheim, 1984.)

Talja Blokland's (2003) influential work *Urban Bonds* questions the taken-for-granted association between neighborhood and community. Based on empirical research in a disadvantaged neighborhood of Rotterdam, the essential query of her work is what the role of neighborhood is for community in large urban settings. Firstly, Blokland argues that communities have become increasingly private affairs based on attachments that function outside the public and institutional spaces (such as neighborhoods). In the Durkheimian view, outside society is structured by purely functional interdependencies. However, bonds which instigate feelings of belonging and attachments which make us have a sense of community have become more person-oriented actions. Blokland then found residents to hold four patterns of interpretation for 'neighborhood' – "people who associated no particular significance with location; people who used the neighborhood for practical purposes; people who focused on symbolic neighborhood use and people who associated living in the neighborhood with a specific lifestyle" (ibid., p. 157). But these interpretations do not denote a link between neighborhood and community. The neighborhood can be used as a platform to form a number of communities which function within, but according to Blokland, "[...] the neighborhood is not, never was and can never be a community. Instead it serves a practical and symbolic purpose as a means to form and perpetuate many different communities." (Ibid., p. 207.)

Just as society at large, neighborhoods are made up of different communities. Both of them may or may not be socially cohesive. A common belief according to Forrest and Kearns (2001) is that, in the British context, social cohesion has decreased from some often unspecified golden era. This is felt to be the case especially for areas that are impoverished; dislocated from mainstream society, their lack of those features that create and maintain social cohesion is even greater. For some, the crisis of social cohesion is furthered by individualism, the information age and virtual social contacts – spatial proximity and kinship become less meaningful. Unemployment, rising divorce rates, social fragmentation and organized crime are seen as signs of a stressed and disorganized social order. National identities and nation states' legitimacy are eroding. Multiculturalism and a strange heterogeneous society leave people with nothing to hold onto. Religion, nationality and patriarchalism are no longer viable markers of common identity. Rather than a growing and socially cohesive middle class we have the growth of polarized opposites with regards to income, assets and lifestyles. Following, it would make sense that the socially cohesive characteristics of neighborhoods were also eroding. (Ibid., p. 2127-2128.)

One should however remain cautious and not too hastily draw conclusions about neighbor relations in disarray based on resident accounts. Van Eijk (2012) calls on researchers to be vigilant in not inferring practices of distancing from narratives of dissociation. I cannot stress Van Eijks lucid plea enough here. To base analysis of neighbor relations on narratives runs a high risk of painting dystopian images over already stigmatized areas. Firstly, residents' narratives about conflicting relations do not always mean that practices of neighboring are disturbed. When residents of a neighborhood describe, say, the inactivity of their neighbors, they may in fact only be describing very "normal" neighbor relations built around privacy. Secondly, geographically spread-out, extra-neighborhood associations, social networks and leisure activities have been understood to mark life in contemporary Western cities. However, this understanding has not been extended to studying "deprived" neighborhoods. In essence a double standard has been used. When explaining life in affluent neighborhoods, extra-neighborhood activities are evoked; when explaining life in poor neighborhoods, we tend to look at what people do inside the neighborhood. This double standard does not only further stigmatize the territories and problematize lives of

residents; it also makes it that much harder for local residents to reach some feeling of “normality”. (Ibid., p. 3009-3011.)

Forrest and Kearns (2001) point out, and here I strongly agree, that neighborhood still remains an important source of social identity and cohesion but does this parallel to those extra-neighborhood associations. But when researching this, one must remain aware not to exercise a double-standard on different neighborhoods. The fact that the role of neighborhood, among other aspects of peoples’ lives, is changing does not mean that it is disappearing. “It is these residentially based networks which perform an important function in the routines of everyday life and these routines are arguably the basic building blocks of social cohesion – through them we learn tolerance, co-operation and acquire a sense of social order and belonging” (ibid., p. 2130). I would hold this to be true and for neighborhood to matter, even when neighbor relations are based on a mutual understanding of privacy and distance.

Furthermore, I suggest that social cohesion tackles the poisonous formation of a “need” for to build instruments of symbolic distancing from their neighbors. This symbolic distancing is a different scenario than a “normal” neighbor relation based on distance and privacy. Territorial stigmatization enforces residents to stress their moral worth as individuals in order to regain a measure of dignity and reaffirm the legitimacy of their own status in the eyes of society (Wacquant, 2008: 183). The Catch-22 situation here is brought on by the cyclical mechanism of territorial stigma. Both residents of banlieue and the ghetto, as Wacquant has it, “[...] form an *impossible community*, perpetually divided against themselves, whose members cannot but refuse to acknowledge the collective nature of their predicament. They are therefore inclined to develop strategies of material and symbolic distancing – culminating in out-migration – that tend to distend and unravel social ties and thereby validate negative outside perceptions of the neighborhood.” (Ibid., p. 184.) Here, material and symbolic distancing ensue from a need to “shed off” the stigma.

One should bear in mind that a territorial stigma does not function only inside the territory and in the daily interactions of local residents. A territorial stigma is upheld by public discussion and rhetoric from above. In the next part of the chapter I present and discuss how media depictions have rendered the Finnish lähiö a “problem”.

### 3.3 Lähiö as a social construct

In this part of the chapter I provide a recapitulation of Irene Roivainen's work *Sokeripala metsän keskellä* (1999). The title hints at the rhetoric used in public discussions to portray lähiös; residential areas of Finnish cities, made up of white and grey apartment blocks constructed amidst the woods surrounding urban centers. When studying territorial stigma in the case of a Finnish lähiö, in addition to understanding the historical path of physical lähiö construction as explained in chapter two, it is essential to understand the socially constructed images which have taken shape in the same historical context but follow their own logic. Roivainen studies how lähiö has been portrayed and constructed in a major Finnish newspaper called *Helsingin Sanomat*, beginning from the era when lähiö-building started up to the early 1990's. Introducing this in some detail enables the study of the topic in the Finnish context with a profound understanding of some of the public discussion on lähiös.

Roivainen (1999) conducts an analysis of newspaper articles published first in a period between 1955-1967 and a second period between the years 1968-1993 and sets out to problematize the taken-for-granted concept of lähiö, showing how it has been socially constructed (ibid., p. 12). The central research material is material archived by *Helsingin Sanomat* itself under the name "lähiö-writing during the years 1968-93". Roivainen does not carry out an extensive analysis of the quantitative and qualitative development of lähiö-writing during the given time period, but concentrates on an intense analysis of the writing itself. (Ibid., p. 31.)

Roivainen begins with an argument she formulates in her work after some ten years of researching the Finnish lähiö; lähiö-residents speak about lähiö in more positive rhetoric than is done in public discussion. Ultimately this seems to denote that there is no objective definition of lähiö; instead, it is a multidimensional social construct. (Ibid., p. 9.) The material world of existence where people and things reside is not the same as the world of symbolic processes and concepts, through which representation and meaning and language are formed. In the social constructionist fashion, Roivainen reminds us that things do not mean anything: we construct the meaning. We, the social actors utilizing conceptual systems, are the ones who construct meaning. Roivainen applies the concept of categorization to denote the forming of a conceptual construct of

lähiö. She is interested in how lähiö is being categorized in newspaper writing and through the further analysis she wants to reach an explanation of how this happens in different temporal contexts. (Ibid., p. 21-23.)

### 3.3.1 Lähiö as harbinger of modernity

In the first period (years 1955-67) of newspaper writing, *asumalähiö* or as it could loosely be translated *residential suburb*, featured frequently as a category. These new residential areas and their environments were categorized as healthy, beautiful and spacious. The old wooden city center was categorized as opposed to the above *asumalähiö*; unhealthy, ugly and constricted. (Roivainen, 1999: 41.) The residential areas built around and relatively close to the city center were described in positive categorical characteristics. Areas such as Herttoniemi, Maunula and Pohjois-Haaga were described in newspapers as built in good locations and close to nature. *Asumalähiö* was the redeemer of modern urbanity and urban culture. (Ibid., p. 50-51.) During the fifties Helsingin Sanomat reported about these residential areas in a positive light. Lähiö was a manifestation of modernity, innovative and fresh in every way. The old and aged cultural landscape of yesteryear was giving way to the modern city. During the fifties and early sixties the newspaper writing told the narrative of famous architects, rise of the middle class and lähiö as a harbinger of modernity and well-being. (Ibid, p. 51.)

Then in the mid-sixties an “everydayness” began to characterize the writing. In place of big promises and a discourse of hope and inevitable progress, writing concentrated on the mundane. Instead of glamour and the highlighting of famous architects, the discussion centered on the large scale, development area projects now taking place. What led to this was a paradigm-shift in the premise of *asumalähiö* construction and the way it came to be carried out. (Ibid., p. 51-52.) As described in chapter two development areas now aimed at compact housing for the masses with Pihlajamäki the first such development area. At the same time it was one of the final areas constructed which came to be reported about in Helsingin Sanomat by utilizing categorizations of modernity and improvement. But with Pihlajamäki, the discussion centered on the innovation of architecture and supremacy of pre-cast materials. Inexpensive industrial materials and large scale, development areas lead to lähiö no longer being the work of

art it used to be. In place of big name, super-star architects there were now construction companies. According to Roivainen, the newspaper discussion however at this time remained rather descriptive and “neutral” in the sense that it concentrated on the physical changes taking place instead of describing any social and economic realities (Ibid., p. 52-53.)

### 3.3.2 Lähiö as so many problems

During the years 1968-93, a dramatic change takes place in Helsingin Sanomat lähiö-writing (Roivainen, 1999). Problem-centric categorizations enter the discourse and overwhelmingly begin take over the discussion. From the late sixties to early nineties the weight of lähiö-writing has rested heavily on describing the problems of residential suburbia. Helsingin Sanomat has categorized lähiö as a problem in different dimensions. On the basis of her data, Roivainen construes three thematic entities: lähiö as a physical, social and functional category. Each of these is then granted sub-divisions under which she studies lähiö as categorized. (Ibid., p. 56.) I make use of this three-fold categorization of lähiö-as-a-problem as a conceptual tool for this thesis. The use of this tool is described in more detail in the next chapter, but in short I study the material from interviews with Mellunmäki residents to see whether these problem categories are found in locals depictions of their home lähiö. Hence, it is important that I describe next the categories.

As a physical category, lähiö is portrayed as a problem throughout the years of archived articles in Helsingin Sanomat. Roivainen specifies three sub-themes from the category; *the unnatural lähiö*, *the incomplete lähiö* and *lähiö as a risk society*. (Ibid., p. 57.) Under *unnatural lähiö* are placed writings which regard lähiö as an abnormal and anomic living environment. Rhetoric describing lähiö as an unnatural physical environment implicitly contains its counterpart – the “natural” physical environs of city and countryside. Lähiö is described as sterile and empty of stimulus and change, an unnatural, artificially produced object. Words such as the “human-silo”, “warehouse” and “child reservoir” are used as metaphors for lähiö in describing its anomic characteristics. (Ibid., p. 60-61.) Under *incomplete lähiö* are writings which categorize lähiö as somehow inadequately planned or executed. Here problems of an incomplete

lähiö become accentuated when compared to another; the *celebrated lähiö*. The impression of inadequacy of one lähiö is exaggerated through a contrast structure, wherein two residential areas are named and compared as epitomes of good and bad areas. The third way to define lähiö under the physical category is to define it as a *risk community*. Lähiö as a physical and social entity is risk-laden and here the discussion turns to improvements made in order to reduce those risks. Now suddenly instead of being inherently poor and unnatural, lähiö becomes perfectible. Again, the rhetoric of risk is not utilized per-se but instead created as the inherent counterpart of the improvement discussion. When writing about improvement and renovation and the amelioration that they will bring socially and physically one is in fact writing about the current impoverished state of things. (Ibid., p. 65.)

The functional problems of lähiö are largely determined in Helsingin Sanomat lähiö-writing as problems in services or the lack of them. Also the critique towards a non-existent lähiö culture deals heavily with the “problem of services”. This critique was almost without exception produced from above, by journalists and professionals. Although a citizen point of view was invoked, it was largely reconstructed from the statements of city planners and officials. The writing construes lack of services as a universal problem of lähiö as a functional category. With regards to functional problems, lähiös also categorize as “sleeping-suburbia”, places with a singular purpose of residentiality. Missing services and lack of self-sufficiency in the occupational structure which features in some specific lähiös becomes reconstructed as the problem of all lähiös. (Ibid., p. 74-80.)

### **3.4 Lähiö as slum**

Although the research material extends to the year 1993, a note is made of later lähiö discourse in Helsingin Sanomat as well. A major theme that guides the discussion during later nineties is the discourse on lähiö as slum (Roivainen, 1999: 104). The slum discourse of the mid-nineties was a case where newspapers took research findings and combined them with adopted postulates from international discussions and then used an ill-fitting rhetoric to describe the processes taking place in Finland. Firstly, a study by geographers at University of Oulu, where the map of Finland is divided into squares and

the unemployed placed on it according to their place of residence, showed that for example in a number of cities over half of the working-age population were unemployed. The article tried to support the geographers' findings with social researchers' findings that second generation unemployment could be found in Finnish *lähiös*. This prompted Helsingin Sanomat to write that (my translations) "Unemployment is inherited from father to son in the *lähiös* of large Finnish cities" and "European style urban slums are taking shape in Finland, fear researchers." (Ibid., p. 104.)

According to Roivainen, the category of "urban slum" gave a way to label the victims of poverty. The slum discourse was a prime example of newspaper writing which takes research findings (findings which undisputedly point to a distressing socio-economic reality) and exaggerates the findings with rhetoric of blame and labeling. With titles like "Unemployment spawns from urban *lähiö*", this style of writing creates an idea of *lähiö* as a spatial generator of unemployment on the one hand. On the other, it suggests a culture of poverty; poverty as socially inherited. What this type of discourse does is place the blame for mass unemployment on families and *lähiös*. Roivainen aptly notes that here, a structural problem constructed by researchers turns into a behavioral one (Ibid., p. 105.) I might add that attempts to find such geographical explanations for social problems in public discourse may only aggravate territorial stigmatization.

How do these problem-categories and changes in *lähiö*-discourse affect today's public discussion? Creating different phases for the writing on *lähiös* is in a way misleading. This is because past discourses are to be understood as the rhetorical sediments and resources of the writing and ensuing discussion of today. These can be and often are mobilized from beneath contemporary rhetoric. (Ibid., p. 111.) If not as intensely as in many other places, *lähiö* – as if some spatial totality or universal territorial unit – has in Finland formed into a place of otherness and distinction, where, spatial keywords have been used as social codes. According to Roivainen, a symbolic politics of drawing borders between say the employed and unemployed becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy materialized when an area stigmatized as lower class sees an exodus of the able-bodied (ibid., p. 124). I would like to take this idea further and propose more along the lines of Wacquant (2008), that a stigma fulfills its own prophecy at the un-assignable moment when we begin to treat our neighbors as the core problem of the perceived or



experienced social hardships plaguing our place of residence and home. This does not require the able bodied to flee the territory. It requires the process of stigmatization to have influenced our thinking to the degree that we begin to symbolically distance ourselves from our neighbors. When border-drawing and Othering are the tools we have for approaching our neighbors to assuage a sense of dis-empowerment, the cycle of stigmatization has begun.

For us, out of Roivainen's findings, the following is most crucial; during the past thirty years, lähiö has been categorized as problem oriented. This takes place through the conscious or unconscious construction of categories which always and inherently come to contain their opposites. Lähiö is explained through some view of its opposite – be it opposite the serenity of country life or the more sophisticated and civilized urban life of inner city. Lähiö has for the past decades been portrayed as a problem via explaining the supposedly unproblematic existence in other residential forms. But it was not so from the start. As was noted in the previous chapter on the historical trajectory of lähiö-construction, lähiös were first built as the harbingers of modernity and unparalleled improvement to everyday life and as such they were also written and portrayed in public discussions. To end this chapter on theoretical considerations in the following final part I voice a concern for two things. Firstly, stigmatization needs to be studied more. And secondly, it needs to be studied with critical eyes considering it as manifold phenomenon.

### **3.5 A call for critical research**

With this thesis I hope to add to the body of knowledge on territorial stigma so far. Hastings (2004) argues that too little research has been conducted on territorial stigmatization and its causes and writes “[...] what is lacking [...] is a substantial body of research and analysis capable of fully investigating the causes of stigma. Clearly, without in-depth research, evidence on the causes of stigma will be slight, even impressionistic and, crucially, will be insufficient to support effective policy and practice.” (Hastings, 2004: 234.) Hastings then provides a lucid account of some of the few works regarding stigmatization in urban studies and regeneration literature and comes to the conclusion that explanations are often too pathological. This becomes

evident in two ways. Firstly, peoples' 'common sense' demonization of residents of stigmatized places by other inhabitants (blaming the neighbors), is often presented in an uncontested fashion in academic works. Even if a scholar does not hold the opinion of the residents, their views are presented without sufficient criticism. Secondly, stigma is too readily explained as a social phenomenon arising from inadequate internal social control in the territory. (Ibid., p. 238-239.) One can read in Hastings' work a subtle call for scientists' responsibility in taking care of not in fact being part of the force that comes to enforce the stigma. The residents' views are of utmost importance and study participants' opinions of great value. But clearly, as Hastings continues "[...] accounts of stigma which focus exclusively on the explanatory potential of the characteristics and behaviors of the residents of problem estates fail to recognize how a variety of actors can be complicit in building problem images" (ibid., p. 253).

Wacquant (2007) states that scholars are not without their fault in having been the cause of stigma and reminds us that "[s]ocial scientists have added significantly to the burden of urban infamy by concocting pseudo-scholarly notions that dress up ordinary class and racial prejudices in an analytic-sounding language" (Wacquant, 2007: 74).

Unfortunately such rhetoric is also found in some early Finnish scholarly work on lähiös. "Lähiö", a seminal work on the topic by Matti Kortteinen (1982) despite its successes portrays lähiös in some rather stigmatizing words. For example, he quotes an interviewed disgruntled carpenter who says that (my translation from the Finnish) "[w]hat else is this but a worker reservoir?" Kortteinen then goes on; "[t]he concept of worker reservoir aptly brings together [...] the area's distant location, the population structure and the everyday-life labeled by inequality. The area is a worker reservoir, it has been designed as such and as such it will also function." (Ibid., p. 56.) Such rhetoric has its ruinous reverberations in everyday language. However, using "worker reservoir" to denote a working class neighborhood and home, put forth in an academic context could have monumental and long term effects in creating stigmas for all areas named lähiö. Especially in a text called "Lähiö" which is key reading at undergraduate level urban sociology at Helsinki University.

Following Hastings' (2004) and Wacquant's (2007) advice, this thesis does not present the interviewees answers as if in vacuum or somehow taken for granted. Instead, both the historical trajectory of and reasons behind lähiö construction and a historical

background of lähiö-discussion in Finland are provided. This will help remain aware of the context in which the opinions arise and what kind of past rhetoric has been instrumental in formulating today's discussion. Interviewee accounts, for instance, are honest depictions of people's life and daily experiences. Here, they hopefully will tell us whether Mellunmäki residents have experienced their neighborhood as stigmatized or not. But as social scientists our job is also to be able to unpack those depictions (whatever our scientific disposition), understand their contextual framework and historical background and make conclusions based on analysis

I want to find out whether an internal mechanism of territorial stigmatization has worked its way into the local, neighborhood level of Mellunmäki. I want to find out whether there exists a nuanced and strongly internal labeling system between old and new Mellunmäki as explained in the introduction. As Wacquant has it, territorial stigma is not evenly spread out in old working class neighborhoods and writes instead “[...] advanced marginality tends to concentrate in isolated and bounded territories increasingly perceived by both outsiders and insiders as social purgatories, leprous badlands at the heart of the postindustrial metropolis where only the refuse of society would accept to dwell” (Wacquant, 2007: 67). Are there negatively stigmatized, “social purgatories” within Mellunmäki which divide the residents somehow or immobilize them? Does a Finnish lähiö, far from the harsh realities of Parisian banlieue or black ghetto of Chicago nevertheless suffer from the cyclical motion and self-fulfilling prophecy of territorial stigmatization?

A territorial stigma is born out of hearsay, lived reality, understanding and misunderstanding context, historical and cultural projections, other stigma (religious, ethnic, class-based). A stigma might be sparked by a research finding, a scholarly article or journalistic piece. Or a real-life event. Or the lingering and prolonged process of “Othering” between, say, social strata. The exact moment of conception of a territorial stigma is hard to pinpoint. But one can attempt to unravel its social constructedness and roots in the large scale structural economic and socio-political developments of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century which have rendered our urban fabric so fragmented. To do this one must carefully study public discourse, media, science and the accounts of local residents. I have now set the historical and structural contexts and the theoretical framework for this thesis. I have explained the particularities of the lähiö and concept of territorial stigmatization. In the following chapter I move on to discuss how the research for this

thesis has been conducted. I discuss research methods, data and analysis. Furthermore, I consider the ethical implications of studying territorial stigma on ground level.

#### **4. Method, data and ethics**

I will now discuss the used research method and collected data. Not only is this a discussion on the used research method for gathering the data. Instead this chapter will explain why certain types of material are seen as paramount for developing our understanding of the studied phenomena, namely territorial stigma. Distinct types of social phenomena require distinct types of data to be deciphered for us to make any further conclusions. Hence the researcher must understand and be able to prove why they wish to gather the chosen type of material.

Some topics of social research call for quantifiable and numeric data and ensuing methods of analysis. These are topics which are understood best by logic of deduction. Here, questions are formulated first by the researcher and utilized to gather answers. The skills of a scientist working with quantitative data are measured first by how successfully questions are formulated to reach the wanted outcome and later in analyzing the data (Grönfors, 1982). Other topics require a more in depth understanding of the phenomena at hand. Here the work of a researcher is built upon the logic of induction. The researcher may venture out to the field to first find answers and only build the formal hypothesis afterwards. When the research is qualitative in nature, the researcher him- or herself functions as the primary research instrument. What this means is the researcher's skills are measured at the very moment she or he is in contact with the research participants or people being studied. (Ibid., p. 13.)

As Eskola (2007) has it, the strict division of research into qualitative and quantitative forms is not epistemologically constructive. This is because whatever the form of research in this sense, conducting research still deals with the same matters – theory, collecting data, analysis, interpretation and writing (ibid., p. 32-33). Moreover, it is not as if one somehow produced a better “truth” than another. Instead when evaluating methods we should pay attention to the particular method's strengths and weaknesses in producing social knowledge (May, 2001: 121). Hence it is important for the researcher to be able to show why one type of data is more telling of the particular phenomena under scrutiny than another. In this way the distinction between methods might also prove useful.

#### 4.1 Interviews and entry to the field

The topic of my research does not deal with an easily quantifiable phenomenon, but instead one where I am interested in people's perceptions, experiences and opinions which hopefully take us closer to understanding the said phenomenon. Hence I use semi-structured interviews as my research method. Semi-structured interviews allow for discussion and dialogue and a degree of freedom with each individual interviewee. Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to maintain a degree of control over the course and direction of the discussion while providing interviewees the freedom to talk about the phenomenon in their own terms and from the vantage point of their personal experiences (May, 2001). Instead of adhering to a strict survey or questionnaire form, I wish to let the interviewees talk freely. As interviewer my task is then to make sure those thematic areas interesting to me are covered during the interview (Grönfors, 1982). All in all fourteen people were interviewed for the thesis. Although a rather small number of interviewees, I was able draw clear enough thematic similarities from the material that conclusions and generalizations can be and are made. The interview questions are provided in Annex 1.

The use of interviews in social research is a contested topic. Its robustness as a method of data collection is often critiqued. Those at the more positivistic end of the spectrum uphold that interviews should aim to create a "mirror reflection" of the phenomenon being measured in the social world. Here a "pure" interview should be created in a sterilized context (Miller & Glassner, 1997). At the other end social constructionists would propose that interviews cannot produce any knowledge about a reality outside of us, as "[...] the interview is obviously and exclusively an interaction between the interviewer and interview subject in which both participants create and construct narrative versions of the social world" (ibid., p. 99).

It is the very "nature" if you will, of social sciences to be in a continuous state of self-definition and reflection. It is not a simple task to attempt an answer to how do we withdraw scientifically significant information about the social reality that we are inevitably and indubitably parts of? Of course, much scholarly work has been devoted to this and it is not the main point of the thesis at hand to contribute largely to this existential discussion. Diving deep into the discussion about positivist and social

constructionist views on validity of interview data and its usefulness is a task for another time. However, I assert that interviews can be and often are used successfully as a primary research method in social sciences. Interviews can provide diverse insights into people's biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings. As social scientists our duty then is to have a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of interviewing as a process and recognize the different methods of conducting interviews and data analysis and their usefulness in specific studies. (May, 2001: 121.)

This thesis studies residents' opinions about the area and investigates how residents view their neighbors and other residents of Mellunmäki. With the use of semi-structured interviewing I was able to specify certain questions and yet elaborate and clarify with further questions on the spot. By not adhering to a strict set of questions I gave more room for the interviewees to convey their own narrative. Furthermore I gave myself the option to ask so-called "probing questions" when interesting insights and opinions surfaced. Probing is about encouraging and motivating the interviewee to elaborate on a given topic. Also, a question worded in one way might yield a lengthy answer from one interviewee and a simple yes or no answer from another. The strength of semi-structured interviewing is in the leeway to re-word or probe on the spot. Probing is not about steering the conversation or manipulating the discussion one way or another, but being able to give subtle cues as to when you would hope for the interviewee to go further into a topic in their answer (May, 2001).

Interviewees often think about their own position to the research and researcher and whether or not they have enough knowledge on the topic to "give good answers". For instance, I met with an interviewee who had confirmed the time and place of the interview the previous week. As I arrived at the local residents' association clubhouse, called "Mellari" on time she was already sitting on the bench waiting and told me she had been thinking about the interview for the past couple of days and was worried whether she would be able to answer my questions in any way. Although I had provided an introductory text to my research and its purpose via e-mail (see Annex 2), it was only after sitting down with her and explaining these again that she felt comfortable enough to go on. After reassuring that no expertise on or previous engagement with the topic

was needed and that I was solely interested in people's personal views on the topic her doubts faded.

I found it useful to distinguish a number of people who might as well be called "introductory", to gain access to the field. This is because I wanted to interview people from different areas of Mellunmäki and to have at least some demographic variance between the interviewees. The introductions are as follows.

*The Chairperson of Mellunmäki Residents' Association*

This first "introductory" person was an earlier acquaintance from my work with the association. As the research question began to clarify I realized that this would be my first point of contact to the field. The chairperson was not interviewed but instead she introduced me to residents who frequent the clubhouse Mellari and were willing to take part in interviews. Four residents were interviewed and three of them lived in owner occupied apartments in what they called Old Mellunmäki. I also interviewed an employee at the clubhouse and a woman who runs her own café adjacent to the clubhouse.

*An ex-colleague*

The second "introductory" was an ex-colleague of mine whom I had not met in years but ran into on one of my excursions to Mellunmäki. After catching up it came out that she rented an apartment in what she later called New Mellunmäki and was an active in her housing committee. Her social scene was mostly made up of neighbors and friends in that area and I spent a day meeting her friends and conducting interviews, mostly in small groups in two local pubs. All in all five people were interviewed here.

*The Chairperson, Parent's Association of Mellunmäki Elementary School*

Finally, I wished to interview working age people with families and decided to contact the PA of the local elementary school. Unfortunately only three people from the association were interested in participating. However, the material from these interviews is immensely fruitful and gives insight to the multiplicity of residents' views of their own neighborhood, hence rendering thematic comparisons all the more relevant.

## **4.2 Data and analysis**

Like interviews, data analysis is a conscious act on behalf of the researcher where things do not just happen and materialize, but where the researcher has influence on and responsibility over the whole process. The researcher here carries the responsibility to make decisions and carefully study the data with the best suited methods. Bearing this



in mind, I recorded and transcribed all fourteen interviews. The interviews were conducted in Finnish and later translated into English. I took care in translating the interviews word to word so as not to lose anything in translation. However, some slang words, for instance, obviously lose some of their weight and nuances when translated, but I attempted to find correct equivalents in English. Ultimately my data then consists of fourteen interviews with residents of Mellunmäki, transcribed and translated into English. So, what did I do with this data?

My method of analysis is “thematizing” or theme-building. Theme-building is about taking the data apart and reorganizing it according to certain thematic entities. In essence it is a way of simplifying the data by cutting and pasting. I built the themes from common features in recorded interviews that provide insight into the studied topic of territorial stigma. Not only do themes help us in seeing the commonalities in, for example, interviewees’ views of and opinions on Mellunmäki, but they make it possible for us to say something relevant about peoples’ experience of a possible territorial stigma. I only use features in accounts that could be drawn from the material on so many instances that I began to see a commonality in how a topic is discussed. Once common topics were drawn from the data they were then constructed into themes. As with any material gathered by interviews, many other interesting and important issues feature in the data. But a rigorous theme-building requires a critical eye from the researcher, who must ask of the data; is this issue relevant to my research question? (Eskola, 2007.) Incorporated into the analysis is the three-fold “lähiö-as-a-problem” category, introduced in the previous chapter. This is done to enable a more robust analysis where bottom-up themes drawn from interviewee accounts and particular to this study, run analogous to those problem categories which depict a more top-down conception of lähiö. With this combination I have an analytical tool which helps in further abstracting the data.

### **4.3 Ethical Considerations**

When researching the social world and its phenomena, one will in many instances be looking at the private lives, sensitive experiences and marginalized groups of individuals. Here, a researcher cannot pay enough attention to research ethics. Instead, they are to be kept in mind throughout the entire research process. Beginning with the very ontological and epistemological questions of how we understand the social reality under scrutiny and how we argue to gather scientifically valid knowledge about it, to

almost every practicality of the research process we should remain aware and in a reflective position to ethics (Viinamäki & Saari, 2007).

Defining the viewpoint of one's research is one of the most crucial, preliminary ethical considerations. Here, what I'd like to call "naming and framing", should be paid attention to in order to avoid unintentionally affecting or guiding the research and its outcomes from the very start. As Pohjola (2007) has it, simply naming your research one way or another may have ramifications as to how the research, its purpose and understanding of the studied phenomena are read and perceived. Pohjola provides the following lucid example. When researching youths and their relation to education, there is great difference between naming your study "Young school-dropout" and "Young person's relationship to school and education". The first one instantly *names* the topic of research as problem-oriented and *frames* the subjects of study as the one's bearing the problems. The second one leaves the situation open at title level and does not *name* the phenomenon with problem-rhetoric. It also avoids *framing* the subjects of study at the outset and hence leaves room to make conclusions after providing solid research findings. Here we see how "naming and framing" are integral in avoiding instances of, as Pohjola has it (my translation), "[...] automatic self-fulfilling premises or prophecies in research" (ibid., p. 18-19).

Now, for research participants the researcher's field of study might be strange (not everyone knows what, say, sociology or anthropology is) and even the term "researcher" might pose resistance or create strange dichotomies. Also, what the researcher must bear in mind is how far into people's private lives is he or she allowed to probe. Even if the participants do not restrict or forbid the researcher's attempts to observe or participate, it does not mean that it would be ethically sound. Grönfors (1982: 198-199) asks aptly, "[d]oes a line of privacy exist which is not to be crossed even if invited?" How to inform participants or interviewees about one's study and research questions without unintentionally affecting the outcome of interviews? One is likely to find differing opinions as to how this should be done. According to Grönfors (1982) it is best to establish a relation based on trust with everyone involved from the very beginning. This involves being very honest about one's intentions and interests.

The very topic of this thesis renders it challenging but not impossible to follow Grönfors' guideline. Territorial stigma is largely a social and semantic construct which becomes reproduced through stereotyping and categorizing discussion. Here, discussing with the interviewees, if not about stigma directly but even matters dealing with it, I as a researcher and interviewer run the risk of denoting and enforcing the existence of such stigma. Then again, hiding my interest in people's perception and understanding of territorial labeling yet attempting to gather information about it poses another risk. My interviewees are not naive or blind. Were they to sense a hidden agenda, they would most likely feel betrayed and cheated by my on-goings.

So frankly the dilemma I faced here was whether to be honest about my interest and tell it like it is, or try to talk my way around it. In many ways, conducting social research by utilizing interview methods is not unlike any other situation of social interaction where viewpoints and information are exchanged. Following May (2001) according to what might be called the deontological ethical code, no matter what the place or situation, a researcher should adhere to universal research ethics. One of the major elements of this is informed consent. Participants of a study should be provided with sufficient information about the topic of research for them to be able to make an informed decision of their participation. Hence I made it as clear as possible to my interviewees that I was would be asking them about their perceptions and experiences of Mellunmäki. I provided interviewees with an information sheet (see Annex 2) which stated their right to anonymity, voluntary participation and right to withdraw given information. I wanted to be sure that enough information was given despite the delicate nature of the topic.

I also made it clear that interviews were part of an MA thesis, not a part of a professional census or wider research project. When it comes to this thesis, I would argue there is nothing questionable in "downplaying" my role as researcher by being honest with the participants and telling them that what I am working on is an MA thesis and a part of my studies. By no means does this remove or lessen my responsibilities as researcher or scientist. Instead, the risk of possible confusion of researcher as an authority is decreased or removed. Even if the distinction is irrelevant to the academic audience, it could be instrumental when gaining access to the field. A student researcher

is likely a far more comfortable discussion partner to a person unfamiliar with the topic than a professional one. Instead it might in fact provide the interviewee with a sense of ownership and expertise over the matter. Albeit a plea to my student status is not a durable way to gain entry to the field, I do not see it as ethically questionable or unsound. The topics of social research are usually social phenomena and the goal to develop a more profound understanding about said phenomena. Individual people are not the core interest and such is ultimately the case for the thesis at hand. But to be able to say something relevant about the phenomena we must begin by understanding the experiences of individuals. Through interviews I have been able to gather data which is telling of those experiences. Let us now move to the analysis of said data.

## 5. The Analysis

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the data analysis is conducted by constructing themes from my data. Here, themes are those elements which can be generalized from interviewee accounts as the building blocks of a possible territorial stigma. The biggest challenge in creating these themes is in their overlapping form. Everything is linked and when interviewees are given freedom to talk on an issue without a strict structure, featured topics become all the more scrambled. Hence, it is impossible to regard one thematic entity totally in separation from the others. Instead the analysis proceeds, theme by theme meanwhile building a synthesis and looking at how these themes interact.

### Internal stigma

- The sins of tenancy
- Resident activity
- Immigrants and “othering”

### External stigma

- “The East”
- Mellunmäki in the media

The first three themes deal with the construct of an internal labeling system for the neighborhood. In short, they are the contents of a localized and specific territorial stigma at work in the imaginations and lived out in daily realities and routines of Mellunmäki residents. The first one deals with a dichotomy of homeowners and tenants which was used to categorize people and characterize the different areas of Mellunmäki. The second theme deals resident activity. Pre-constructed questions were used to investigate interviewees’ accounts of resident activity and neighbor-relations as this is paramount in opening up the possible workings of a territorial stigma. Here, the topic of social relations and cohesion and the effects of a possible territorial stigma on

neighborhood relations are regarded in more detail. “Immigration” was used similarly to the idea of “tenancy” to distinguish us from them and the repeated rhetoric of “othering” warrants its own third theme. Both tenancy and immigration deal heavily with resident activity and so a synthesis is built between these thematic entities.

The fourth and fifth themes deal with how the residents feel Mellunmäki to be viewed from the outside. As will be discussed, the established stigma of “The East” weighs heavy on the shoulders of residents of Mellunmäki and warrants its own thematic consideration. Distorted media portrayals of Mellunmäki are seen to effect outside opinions and also create much of the discrepancy in resident and outside images of the area. All of the above themes are ordered and presented here with titles to create conceptual parts which we can bring together and make conclusions. As noted above, an analysis which would present these themes wholly separately is impossible and given the interlinked nature of topics a ludicrous venture. Hence, when regarding next the theme of tenancy, for example, which featured in many interviewee accounts, also resident activity will be talked about. It is not possible or in any way desirable to totally separate the themes. What is called the analysis of qualitative data always also denotes the synthesis of data. What I do is break down the collected material via analytical processes into conceptual parts (here themes) and then with the use of synthesis bring these parts together to form scientific conclusions (Grönfors, 1982: 145).

So let me begin with discussing the first of those themes which deal with interviewee accounts of how residents themselves depict Mellunmäki and describe their neighborhood and lähiö. By an analysis of the theme of tenancy I am able to decipher part of the answer to the secondary research questions.

## 5.1 The sins of tenancy

*“When people say they do not want social housing in their neighbourhood, they mean that they do not want its tenants.” (DeDecker, 2004: 308.)*

When working in Mellunmäki in the summer of 2012 our point of contact was the residents’ association clubhouse called Mellari. Mellari is located below ground, in the downstairs of an old mall. Mellari is situated closer to the area where housing was reported to mostly consist of owner occupied apartments. It is here I first began to hear a type of territory talk where “old” and “new” Mellunmäki were contrasted. It seemed that this division was not only based on the time of construction of the areas, or the fact that Old Mellunmäki is seen as the home of elderly people whereas New Mellunmäki houses young families. Instead, it appeared the division was used to describe a perceived social reality and to label locations accordingly. This then turned into part of the research question for the thesis at hand. What are the reasons for the distinction between Old and New Mellunmäki?

### 5.1.1 These irresponsible people

To inquire the opinions and experiences behind the old-new division, I did not ask interviewees about Old and New Mellunmäki as such. Instead, I was interested in finding out whether these categories would appear in resident accounts on their own. Although I had heard people using these names to clearly demarcate areas of Mellunmäki, I was also interested in how widespread their usage is in common parlance in the area. So to gain an understanding of this I would instead ask things like “is Mellunmäki very similar throughout?” Or “are there different kinds of neighborhoods in Mellunmäki?” From the answers to these kinds of questions and the discussions that were developed through probing the first theme began to formulate.

My interviews suggest that a strong hierarchy between homeowners and tenants is a large part of this division and the way residents experience and explain their neighborhood. For instance, for many, homeownership featured as a motor of resident activity and tenancy was a marker of irresponsibility. “Conventional wisdom” holds that homeowners are more active in taking care of their neighborhoods than tenants. In economic terms this is explained as the “quality” of the neighborhood affects the value of their homes. A correlation has also been found between homeownership and variables which try to measure good citizenship such as organization membership and local political involvement (DiPasquale & Glaeser, 1998).

However, the worrying trend that I found in my interviews, was a very set-in-stone perception that the people living in certain areas – namely areas of social housing – are the reason for that areas plight. Tenure is heavily linked to a territorial categorization of the active, original Old Mellunmäki of homeowners and the inactive, problem ridden New Mellunmäki of social housing. This is despite the fact that most people living in social housing in New Mellunmäki reported to be active residents and to socialize with neighbors in one way or another. In total eleven out of fourteen interviewees made a clear distinction between areas of social housing and areas of owner occupied apartments. The following statement is by a young woman, who lives with her family in a social housing in, as she put it, New Mellunmäki, when inquired about the similarities of areas in Mellunmäki.

*The areas are very clearly different. There's Old Mellunmäki and then there's this new one. They are distinguished by money. And you can at least make assumptions about people coming out of the Metro on which side they live. And the old side has noticeably more elderly people. So that's the biggest thing, you have those buildings constructed in the late -50's and it's people who moved in at that time. And these ones are built -89 so there you have it. The ones built in the -50's are better than these prefabricated houses which they built for us in a terrible hurry. And now they're constantly fixing these up.*

-Young, New Mellunmäki woman



What is not straight forwardly said, but inherently implied by this woman's statement, is that old and new are used as indicators of areas of owner occupied and social housing or as she expressed it, areas “distinguished by money”. Homeownership and tenancy are seen as indicators of difference between areas. Here, New Mellunmäki also features as a physical problem. Using Roivainen’s (1999) “lähiö-as-physical-problem” subcategories, it is an incomplete lähiö, constructed hurriedly and under constant renovation. Old Mellunmäki on the other hand is viewed as physically successful. For many interviewees, Old Mellunmäki is the celebrated lähiö. Old and New are employed as a contrast structure, in order to categorize two residential areas within the same territory.

Wassenberg (2005) writes that naming territories is done by parties external to the area. Naming gives one an image of the area without having any prior knowledge of it (Wassenberg, 2005: 274). Here, however, we find that naming areas within Mellunmäki is an internal process to distinguish parts of the same neighborhood – and the people who live there. Territorial naming can be a degree of symbolic distancing which then personifies in residents of the same neighborhood when one attempts to place them on the map according to their appearances. This recalls Wacquant’s (2008) banlieue, where residents would go to great lengths to distance themselves from neighbors on the north and south sides of the same neighborhood and even in adjacent stairwells. This distanciation is suggested to be a way to cope with the weight of negative affiliations with the territory at large.

I also discussed residents’ activity and how well they knew their neighbors with the young woman quoted above and her friend, both living in rental apartments in New Mellunmäki. Interestingly, they held different views on whether New and Old Mellunmäki differed. Whereas the first was convinced they were very different, the second felt that Mellunmäki does not have internally differing areas and that it is rather homogeneous throughout. I interviewed the first lady on her own at a pub we met in and she discussed her role in the housing committee and how people in her neighborhood participate. Even though she felt the participant numbers were rather low and always the same people taking part in the committee work, she gave an account which depicts residents as sociable and sharing in things like yard work and taking care of the kids.

*Yes, it's [resident activity] visible. And we have a few of those owner occupied houses in between. I think they tried from the beginning to build so that it's like rental house, owner, rental, owner... just because of that. So you see it. And there's things like a bee [a collective voluntary event eg. spring clean-up] on one side of the street and they might yell across the street for people to come and give a hand. And then the next week it's the other way around. So there's that kind of common thing. And the kids participate really well always. They are easy to motivate with soda or whatever. They take part even if it's not their own yard! And I've said to my kid, this is a small village. Whatever you do, sneak a cigarette behind the corner and someone sees, I will hear about it! It's no use hiding things, everybody knows. At least on this side of Mellunmäki. We will snitch, because we want to know what the kids are up to."*

-Young, New Mellunmäki woman

Despite both a tenant and an active resident herself, she seems to hold a view that neighborhood activity exists because of mixed housing and having homeowners in the neighborhood. It appears that also some of the residents of New Mellunmäki have an inherent idea of homeowners as bringing in more active neighbors. This idea is in contrast to their accounts of participation. According to the woman above for example, people know each other, know each other's kids and make efforts to report rule breaking to their parents. Describing Mellunmäki as a small village says much about the social cohesion of the area. Her account describes a neighborhood where residents look after the common good, help each other out and look after the neighbor's kids as well as their own. We met with the young woman's friend and the discussion changed somewhat. The friend was pessimistic about the prospects of increasing residents' participation. As often happens in joint interviews individual opinions soon become shared views on a topic and interviewees come to common conclusions even if they previously held a different view.

*Friend: I believe that if for example we had a work space where you could, say, do carpentry like a lot of men like to do or fix furniture or a loom for the women and all that. I think they still wouldn't go!*

Young, New Mellunmäki woman: *Yeah or then someone would just break the places and everything would go wrong. It's like this trait in people today, that if something's not yours you don't have to care for it.*

Friend: *It's this sense of responsibility missing from these people which I don't understand.*

What we are faced with here is an inconsistency between reported levels of resident activity and reported images about inactive neighbors. My interviews depict strong social cohesion in Mellunmäki and yet a rhetoric drawn from established stigmatizing discourse and territory talk which work to break internal community and exclude people. I then asked whether they had examples of what had happened and the above ladies explained how the committee had purchased snow shovels, placed them in a shed behind a locked door and within in a week they had been stolen. In similar vein, shared washing equipment was being stolen from the laundry rooms. The women explained these as instances of irresponsibility and a general trait in tenants. People who do not own property and material are viewed by these active tenants as neglectful. Here, we are reminded of Wacquant (2008) who found residents of deprived neighborhoods to use distancing and blaming as coping mechanisms to survive the stigma enforced inferiority of their neighborhood. How far have gone the stigmas of social housing and New Mellunmäki, when people living in rental apartments, who are active in their neighborhood, know their neighbors, take part in resident committees and still see tenancy and not owning apartments and maintenance materials as a diminishing factor here?

It is safe to say that the misconduct and stealing of common property is likely to be done by a very small number of neighbors. Yet, it becomes seen as the general attribute of irresponsibility of "these people". Hence, when inquired about the prospects of a clubhouse in the area the views are very negative and make broad assumptions about other residents' irresponsibility and inactivity. Tenants themselves use a labeling and distancing rhetoric of other tenants. As was suggested in chapter three on theoretical considerations, perhaps what people actually do in the neighborhood and how they

describe activities and other residents do not always match. Van Eijk (2012) calls for making a distinction between “narratives” and “practices” in analyzing social processes of neighbor relations. Van Eijk found his interviewees to portray similar discrepancies when describing “others” and broad problems in the neighborhood on one hand and good personal neighbor relations on the other (ibid., p. 3013). Although my data only consists of “narratives”, there are clear discrepancies in collective accounts of resident activity and the perceived inactivity of neighbors. Then again, tenants of social housing blaming each other do point towards Wacquant’s (2008) findings of stigma’s cyclical functioning, ensuing in reciprocal distancing between neighbors. I shall return to discuss this in the concluding remarks.

### **5.1.2 The freaks won’t climb to the hilltop!**

If social tenants blamed each other for negligence and saw their neighborhood plagued by other’s irresponsibility, more elaborate was the distancing rhetoric used to distinguish from tenants and their territories when talking to homeowners. A young homeowner and career-woman from New Mellunmäki discussed her neighborhood of Fallpakka. She talked about the peace and quiet of her neighborhood and elaborated that people in the neighborhood lived mostly in owner occupied housing. (Note, that Fallpakka is that area which is a more recent addition to Mellunmäki and resides to the southeast across Itäväylä, a major highway. Fallpakka was reported by some Old Mellunmäki residents as “unknown territory” and “ugly social housing in New Mellunmäki” by others. Those who lived there, however, reported it as lovely place to live and a much preferred location. I will discuss these discrepancies later on.) This interviewed homeowner felt that things were more restless around the metro station. She talked of being afraid of having her kids walk from the metro station home. When inquired about her use of public transport she however replied to mostly using her car and very seldom going to the metro herself. But the few times she had, she would run into some “weird characters”.

*Well. I want to say no, but the truth is that, well, rental housing is inhabited by people who deviate from others. So I have had to sort out things like with the kids, there's one person especially who torments the kids.*

- New Mellunmäki female homeowner

For her, tenants are people who deviate from “ordinary” homeowners. The deviant behavior of an individual who is known to be living in social housing becomes a trait endemic of all tenants. It is by no means my intention to belittle the negative experiences of above cited interviewees. Any harassing behavior towards ones children or the infuriating events of common property being stolen are serious incidents. If such incidents are repeated offenses, they will work far in eroding a sense of camaraderie between neighbors. But I do believe that there is more at work here. My interviews suggest, that Roivainen’s “lähiö-as-a-social-problem” resonates here, with the added stereotype of “urban slum” rhetoric gaining foothold in the 1990’s. This is accentuated in the following. I talked about his perceptions of Mellunmäki and whether he felt the area was similar throughout with a young male homeowner in Old Mellunmäki. He lives with his family in what he calls the hilltop, denoting the very same area some would talk of as Old Mellunmäki. He used to live in social housing in another lähiö and talked very openly about growing tired of it. He chose to move to Mellunmäki for the peace and quiet and natural surroundings and the lack of social housing close to where he now lives. For him, the Mellunmäki he lives in, is its “own little world”. But, like most interviewees, he makes a clear distinction and describes how Mellunmäki is not the same throughout.

*The closer you go to the metro station, there you have municipal apartments, then there's Falpakka which is new. You have the owner occupied housing on top of the hill here and then there's the town-house area. The metro station is just one of those, that some DDR-planner might be envious of it. I mean it's just, for goodness sake... You might have that in America, 'cause they don't have eye for architecture, not one bit! Even the town-houses there are appalling! So there that might be fucking art. Then in the summer time you have noisy people, but they don't really bother. Areas around*

*stations always gather this and there's a couple of boozers. But it's small for that kind of concentration of city apartments; I know junkies and drunks so that kind of lager-lout-gang doesn't bother me. They have always been in the city. But the freaks won't climb to the hilltop, hahaha!*

– A male Old Mellunmäki homeowner

According to this homeowner the “area around the metro station” appears to suffer from all those physical, functional and social problems which Roivainen (1999) charted. This is also how many others saw that particular area. Interviewees reported being scared of the metro station because suspicious characters frequent the area and because drunks and drug users usually spend time there making noise and disturbing passers-by. Right next to the metro station are situated much the social housing of New Mellunmäki. To get to Old Mellunmäki one needs to walk along further north-east of the station, or “climb the hill”. For the man quoted above, “for a concentration of social housing” the vicinity of the metro station is however socially not so bad. His experiences of social housing have left him with a strong categorization of municipal apartments and the people dwelling in them as questionable and by definition worse than homeowners and their areas. Mellunmäki is here imagined through dichotomies of old/new, tenant/homeowner, active/passive. These binary opposites are taken for granted as the given “order of things.” Another young family man who lives in a rental apartment next to the metro station had a different opinion however and voiced against such categorizations. Originally from the Middle East this man had first-hand experience of the results of segregation and horrors of the conflict of his homeland. This echoed in his discussion as he called on media to hold back exaggerations of poverty and spoke against designating people to distinct areas.

*The newspaper had a few opinions, that Mellunmäki is not a good place to live. That it's a poor place. But this situation they have depicted, you find it anywhere. People just trying to make it from day to day, you have them everywhere. If we took all the people who aren't so lucky and put them on one side and the rest on the other, that would be*

*apartheid! Then we could shape it even more – different colors separately, religions separately, countries separately! Life is beautiful because we are different!*

-A New Mellunmäki family-man

DeDecker and Pannecoucke (2004) have studied the formation of an image of the “incapable tenant” in the context of Flanders, Belgium. The authors draw their material from a plethora of sources such as policy documents, reports, news articles and other media and discuss how the public definition of the “incapable tenant” has been created very much apart from what residents themselves might have to say. It is needless to go into the particularities of the process of how this stigma was created and is being enforced to this day in the public discourse in the case of Flanders. Let it suffice to note, that the authors conclude the following; “[a]ll in all, the discourse evolved from a local and dispersed theme to a broad consensus on problem tenants, problem estates and the mechanism causing the problems. In all this, the press has served as a megaphone, publishing sensational headlines, front-page scandals and cliché photos.” (Ibid., p. 305.) The authors chart the formation of this label using as their backdrop a study which shows that residential satisfaction among social tenants is relatively high; residents feel positive about their neighborhood and have no intention of moving out in the near future. Despite the results of such studies, which according to the authors most importantly prove that there is no liveability problem in social rental sector, social tenants are nevertheless labeled as “[...] deviant, noisy, dirty, dependent, ungrateful and above all, incapable of living together with other people” (ibid., p. 294).

Interviews for this thesis suggest a very similar phenomenon. Not a single one of my interviewees reported having intentions of moving out or being displeased with where they live as such – neither tenants nor homeowners. All reported being satisfied with where they live and when interviewees spoke of negative experiences, they were likely to make corrective remarks on how pleased they were with *their* place of residence. Tenants in general however, were described as irresponsible and incapable by other tenants and as “weirdos” and “freaks” by some homeowners. Territories of social housing were stigmatized accordingly as “strange”. New Mellunmäki is used as a denominator for areas of social housing which deviate from the normality of homeowner life. But their images of where these deviant territories and accordingly

stigmatized tenants reside were not unanimous. Interestingly as we will learn from the next part of the chapter, in places of mixed housing, territorial stigma would echo in the minds of homeowners and their reactions to neighbor tenants. Having already touched on the topic of resident activity and neighbor relations, it can now be explored as a separate theme. It will further elucidate the discussion on tenancy and also work as a bridge to the third theme on internal stigmatization and its intricacies in Mellunmäki, “immigration”.

## 5.2 Resident Activity

Based on the answers to questions such as whether people know their neighbors, spend time with them, take part in voluntary resident activities and to what degree they see Mellunmäki residents in general taking part in resident activities, a discussion can be reconstructed on neighborhood activity. Now, of course the questions themselves render this theme in essence pre-constructed. Unlike for the themes of “tenancy” and “immigration” it was a deliberate decision to steer the discussion so that perceptions on resident activity could be gathered. How one views their neighbors is so intrinsically linked to the topic that it was to be investigated. What came as a surprise however was how strongly resident activity was linked to territory talk, differences in areas of Helsinki and within the interviewees’ own neighborhood of Mellunmäki in particular. The partly pre-conceived nature of this theme by no means renders it less significant. Instead, it can provide us with information about the effect of territorial stigma on neighbor relations. Importantly it becomes apparent, that what some people *do* in the neighborhood but even more so what other people are *perceived not to do*, are linked to how one describes the social realities of their neighborhood.

### 5.2.1 The Salad Days

All interviewees reported to know at least some of their neighbors. However, how well a neighbor is known varies from a person who is greeted when met to a close friend who one spends time with and helps out at a time of need. For some interviewees a



“normal” relationship with their neighbor meant that they said hello when they met in the yard or the stairwell. For others, common activities were more important for relations with neighbors. The self-claimed residents of Old Mellunmäki all talked of how there used to be much more activity amongst neighbors. These interviewees spoke about still knowing some of their neighbors, but mostly those who had lived in the same house for longer. They all shared a view that residents of the previous generation took part in resident activity a lot more. Some talked of having “a generally positive attitude” towards or a “normal relationship” with their neighbors. They took part in resident activities at Mellari and highly valued the clubhouse and the provided activities. Although they found it hard to speculate on how others in Mellunmäki lived or regarded their neighbors, these interviewees felt that older residents participate more and reasoned that younger residents have jobs and kids to look after and perhaps do not have the time and interest to participate.

A clear difference is found in the accounts on resident activity by people of different age. Firstly, contrary to the views of the elderly interviewed at Mellari, most of the younger interviewees also spoke of being active residents. Second, people of different ages participate in different activities and in different places. For example, the younger participants who were contacted through local elementary school’s parents’ association talked about their activity as mostly organizing things for the children, whereas the elderly spoke of taking part in organized events at Mellari. There is nothing alarming about this, it is quite common for people of distinct age groups to stick together and participate in shared activities. Hence, the fact that one would only see their respective age group participate would also explain their depiction of who participates accordingly.

What could be a cause of alarm in my findings, however, is the perception of some Mellunmäki residents that inactivity is endemic to a certain territory. This perception takes shape in the blaming of neighbors of different ethnic, socio-economic or age backgrounds. Two of the retired interviewees, who own their apartments and state they live in Old Mellunmäki, spoke directly about the disappearance of resident activity and what could be called the social cohesion of their neighborhood. What was striking in the discussions was the similar way in which both participants talked about the inactivity of

new tenants. People living in rental apartments were seen as inactive and not taking care of common property. Old Mellunmäki was seen as suffering from a growing occupation by “the Other”, meaning tenants. It was clear to these interviewees that things were and had always been worse off in New Mellunmäki and that there people did not participate as much. Now this inactive element was also moving into their neighborhood. Here's how an elderly Old Mellunmäki homeowner replied when I asked how well she knows her neighbors.

*Now that we have these Estonians and alike and they lead a different kind of life, I've noticed now that we have these sheds for the garbage containers and also the rainwater pipe, you should call the janitor about those things. Even he said that I'm the only one from our staircase who ever calls. I said this apartment is such a big investment I want that people take care, not that the pipe is all over the yard and water spilling along the walls. Now the neighbors can count on me calling. We used to have such a tight knit group when there were just six families living in the house!*

-A disgruntled elderly Old Mellunmäki homeowner

This lady went on to explain how she had been helping out a particular neighbor who has issues with mobility and hence faces trouble in getting her daily errands done. The lady had been bringing food to this elderly neighbor, gone to use the ATM on her behalf and delivered and even opened her mail. She said she has the neighbor's full trust and that the neighbor is very “clear minded”, meaning that she would most likely suspect and be able to spot any foul play on her part. But mobility, even going to the toilet, was troublesome for her and neighborly assistance came as a blessing. Here, the interviewed elderly homeowner – herself retired and of respectable age – talks fondly of yesteryear when neighbors knew each other well and took part in taking care of the yard. For her people's activity in the neighborhood seem to denote community and solidarity. She harkens back to a time of perceived stronger social cohesion, when neighbors lived similar lifestyles and shared common values. As Forrest and Kearns have it, social scientists themselves make “[...] occasional predictions of cohesion in crisis, [which] typically rest on assumptions that the social cement of a previous era is crumbling and

that we are being collectively cast adrift in a world in which the previous rules of social interaction and social integration no longer apply. -- Information technology, a new virtuality in social networks and a greater fluidity and superficiality in social contact are further eroding the residual bonds of spatial proximity and kinship.” (Forrest and Kearns, 2001: 2126.)

But the issue here is not so much about new sources of a sense of community and belonging or even the disappearance of previous sources and the ambivalence of contemporary ones found somewhere in the ether, left unspecified. The issue here is that this elderly homeowner places blame for a misplaced rainwater pipe on the Estonian neighbors, who do not take initiative to call the janitor. Wacquant writes that “[t]he acute sense of social indignity that enshrouds neighborhoods of relegation can be attenuated only by thrusting the stigma onto a faceless, demonized other – the downstairs neighbors, the immigrant family dwelling in an adjacent building, the youths from across the street who ‘do drugs’ or are engaged in street ‘hustling’, or the residents over on the next block whom one suspects of illegally drawing unemployment or welfare support” (Wacquant, 2007: 68).

Perhaps to use Wacquant’s quote is exaggerating the case here. It may be too much to say that such would be the case for elderly Old Mellunmäki residents, who in fact reported to love and cherish their neighborhood. The above-quoted lady for instance builds a compost during the summer for collective use and takes long walks in the natural surroundings of Mellunmäki. I would be risking an over-analysis of the matter to say that frowning upon the neighbor’s inactivity and blaming them could be taken as a case of this woman *attenuating her sense of social indignity*. But her account does portray a degree of resentment of inactive neighbors based on territorial antagonism. The following extracts from her interview can further elucidate this. We talked about her view of people’s general levels of participation in resident activities in Mellunmäki, whether she saw areas inside Mellunmäki as somehow different and if she had ever felt afraid in Mellunmäki.

*They are such that they don't participate in anything. I don't think this could be enhanced anyhow. Some people like to grab a rake and comb the yard. In the past there was also a lot more to do for the youngsters, now there is nothing to do for them. -- I don't think so. But things change at the other end of the metro station, because as you go along Naulakalliontie, you can't reach Itäväylä anymore. And there you have these city apartments. They look bad.*

-A disgruntled elderly Old Mellunmäki homeowner

Interestingly, she finds a common fault in the area in that it does not offer enough things to do for young people. Here, lähiö features as social and functional problem in the imagination of an elderly interviewee. On the other hand, a young homeowner living in Old Mellunmäki reported not to really spend time with her neighbors as they were mostly old people. Her activities revolved around the school's parent's association and children's hobbies. Age difference is one of the primary factors here when it comes to spending time with the neighbors. But how residents explain this is often via other means. For instance, we find in the above account a distaste of the bad looking city apartments. The interviewee is projecting the territorial stigma of Mellunmäki "at the other end of the metro station" on to residents of rental apartments and Estonians, whom are now even invading her own neighborhood, living different kinds of lives and leaving the rainwater pipes unreported. People living in social housing and rental apartments were seen and portrayed by these participants as inactive, burdened by "their own issues" or suffering from a lack of energy to take part in shared activities. This was the way those who lived on rent, both close neighbors and those living in other parts of Mellunmäki were perceived.

### **5.2.2 People with issues**

According to Kearns and Parkinson, "[i]t is when a neighborhood is perceived to be a place where one can become 'trapped' either in a bureaucratic or market allocation system, that long-term reputational problems arise" (Kearns and Parkinson, 2001: 2105). This is how New Mellunmäki was perceived by those interviewees living on the old side – people trapped in public housing. This idea of "entrapment" is however not

discussed by participants as a systemic problem arising from dysfunctional bureaucracy or market allocation, but as both a cause and effect of peoples' lack of energy. People are seen to have their "own issues" and time constraints which in effect render them inactive in the neighborhood. The above-quoted interviewee explains how the neighborhood does not offer anything for the young people to do anymore. Then again, people are the way they are and "do not participate in anything" anyway and a cyclical motion of social and functional problems of the lähiö make it seem as if there was nothing to improve the situation. A similar rhetoric is found in another elderly Old Mellunmäki active resident's account. She runs a seniors' ICT-class at Mellari and found that a degree of inactivity and loss of energy was not specific to Mellunmäki but plagued most of East Helsinki. She spoke about the low turn-out in elections in East Helsinki and that she felt people there at large were negligent and only did what they wanted to. When I asked why she thought that was, she replied the following:

*I think we have so many problems of our own. People have their jobs. Well statistically we have a lot of unemployed. Lots of immigrants and poor people. Just like other this type of lähiös, the level of income here is low. People don't bother because they have their own issues. I don't bother either! I have a full job keeping myself together and taking care of this work. I don't bother to demonstrate.*

When I then inquired further and asked whether she did not think organizing a course at the clubhouse Mellari was taking part in resident activity, she went on:

*It is! And I've noticed a lot of people on the course are from nearby because it's easy for them to come here. It's wrong of the city to try and demolish this [Mellari]. People in the east are like this, incapable. And even this lähiö now has plenty of these municipal apartment buildings. I don't know how many, but probably so that there are now less owner occupied apartments. So when you go to Fallpakka, it's all social housing. People there are even less, or they are not active about their own neighborhood. Because they have their own problems. Fallpakka has all sorts of people living there. Starting from alcoholics to regular families with children who can't afford*

*to live any other way. But they don't bother anything, it's one of the difficulties of an eastern lähiö. Our people don't have the energy to fight for their neighborhood.*

–Old Mellunmäki active and homeowner

She continues the rhetoric of “people with issues” but starts on a more positive note in saying that people do not actively participate because of their jobs and how “we” have personal problems. At first preventative issues are a common trait and she noted not always bothering herself. She quickly however finds her argument in unemployment, people of immigrant background and a specific part of Mellunmäki which she sees as housing a dubious assortment of social matter. Once again the homeowner vs. tenant rhetoric is repeated and a strong dichotomy created. When I asked her whether she knew the different areas of Mellunmäki well, she said she did not venture out much to Fallpakka. Her opinions on New Mellunmäki are based solely on an imagined state of matters. It would appear that a level of territorial stigmatization steers her opinion. The earlier views of a young homeowner in Fallpakka depict a very different kind of reality. She did not talk about alcoholics or destitution. Instead, she spoke of appreciating the natural surroundings and the peacefulness of her neighborhood. For her part, the young Fallpakka woman was afraid of the metro station and its weird characters, but also reported not to use the metro much as she usually drives to work.

The accounts of people living in New Mellunmäki in both social housing and owner occupied apartments paint a somewhat different picture about resident activity when compared to those of the participants discussed above, although also these discussions differ from one another. I interviewed another young mother and homeowner in Fallpakka. She also talked about the peace and quiet of her neighborhood and how before living there she used to pass by on the bus and dream of living in Fallpakka, the area described above as possibly dangerous, bad looking and inhabited by people with many problems and issues. The following extract will shed light on her view residents' activities in Fallpakka.

*We're out in the yard doing this and that, and we have quite a few bees and just last Saturday we were painting together. We do quite a bit of stuff through voluntary work. That's where you see a lot of neighbors, in the spring and fall. And now we've been*

*renovating our clubhouse during the past four Saturdays and painting and fixing it. It's a pity that it's usually the same neighbors and small core-group that join in.*

Contrary to the views expressed above, this woman gives an account of some rather active Falpakka residents. She owns her apartment in Falpakka, where forms of tenure are more mixed. She also gives an account of the neighboring building where people mostly rent their apartments.

*There's a municipal building right next to us and quite often the police pay them a visit so surely that brings such [...] In a way maybe, I'm not saying it's the only reason, but you notice that the neighbor's house is visited a bit more often than ours.*

–Young female New Mellunmäki homeowner

A little later this woman spoke about how she found it was nevertheless a good thing that people of different social and ethnic backgrounds lived in the same area and felt this was a positive thing. Nonetheless, she is clearly making a distinction between those who own their apartments and people living in social housing. However, this is talked about in structural terms. The homeowner in New Mellunmäki sees the problems brought on by municipal housing which “brings such” problems. For the residents of Old Mellunmäki this feature is more about the laziness or incapability of New Mellunmäki residents. The former falls under lähiö as functional problem – social housing inherently brings in problems. The latter explains New Mellunmäki as a social issue – people living in social housing bring problems. Here the accounts of residents of Old Mellunmäki do not hold true on this New Mellunmäki resident's part. Her “own issues” in no way thwart her capabilities in taking part in resident activities, as was perceived by the above resident of Old Mellunmäki. This young woman is a single mother of five children and works a full time job and still actively participates in her neighborhood.

If tenants are seen as the hopeless, problem-laden group of inactive residents on social welfare, then “immigrants” are the strangest of “others” not taking part in neighborhood activities as much as natives, but also as a self-evident reason for why distinct areas differ from one another. The mere existence of “immigrants” renders an area as obviously and definitely different. But other issues with regards to “ethnic minorities”

were also raised and reported to the extent that a theme is constructed on immigration. I shall discuss this theme next.

### 5.3 The Immigrant Dump

Not a single question was formulated in advance which would have regarded the “issue of immigration” or, say, opinions about people of immigrant background inhabiting lähiös. Still, ten out of fourteen participants raised the topic of immigration during the discussion. Of these ten, five talked about immigration and immigrants as either generally viewed as problematic or held a critical view of immigration or people of immigrant background. The remaining five talked about immigration in positive terms or rather, via a negation of what they saw as a generally perceived problem.

All interviewees from Old Mellunmäki talked about immigration through a rhetoric of giving up or not having any influence over the matter and hence – even if reluctantly – “accepting” of it. A degree of what could be seen as ignorance of neighbors’ cultural or religious practices steered their discussion and interviewees would say things such as *I don’t bother about them as long as they don’t do this or that* or *fine by me if nothing is broken*. The attitude is reserved and in no ways inclusive. A clear language of “Othering” was used where those of local population belonging to ethnic minorities or being of immigrant background are not perceived as part of “us”. I draw from a couple of interviews below to exemplify and elaborate the types of discussions I held with these elderly Mellunmäki residents.

I interviewed an elderly Mellari active. I also met her on a couple of further occasions when interviewing other participants and she always asked how my research was going. She came to our discussion very enthusiastically and was very opinionated about her neighborhood, city planning and zoning and the politics of these matters. She even brought with her a file of newspaper articles she had collected about Mellunmäki over the years and a document she had received on a recent plan made over the construction



of a new library building. She criticized current talk of revitalizing lähiös and attempts to create social well-being through physical improvements. She laughed out loud a program she had heard of which plans to “enliven” lähiös and criticized attempts at top-down revitalization. She took a strong stand in favor of neighborhood activity and social interaction. It seemed that a socially cohesive neighborhood was something she held in high regard and essential for the well-being of residents. Yet, amidst a lengthy discussion on neighborhood activity and the importance of good neighbor relations, I asked how well she knew her own neighbors and surprisingly she replied:

*So these people I don't know and have no social interaction with. We [our building] now have the first immigrants, a family from Bangladesh.-- I mean I think positively of immigration. That's because they're here now and we can't get them out whatever we do, so why not react positively? Why waste energy? In principle I'd like to get to know them, but I don't bother to go ring their doorbell and ask if they want to come and see Mellari. We haven't had these colored people before. They sure don't take part in anything!*

– Old Mellunmäki Mellari active and homeowner

She was frustrated with her incapability of having say in the matter of immigration and reluctantly accepted the “reality” for what it was. She then talked of how she would like to get to know her neighbors but for some reason cannot get herself to do it. She spoke back and forth about her own insecurities, about not knowing if her neighbors would understand her and not bothering to try, to then venting out her frustration by saying that her neighbors from Bangladesh do not take part in anything. There is an apparent paradox here where the interviewee is aware of her own insecurities as her personal reason for not being sociable towards her neighbors from Bangladesh, but then resorting to blaming the neighbors for not taking part. She is negotiating her own role as a “welcoming host” and is frustrated by her own incapability to successfully socialize with her neighbors. Yet, she turns to blame the neighbors for not being active participants and questions whether they would understand her. However, it is only after her next remark that one can see where her views are born out of. What she said next

came without a prompting question, but was a continuation of her own reflection on the issue.

*What I am really upset about in society is that we put so many of these [people of immigrant background] in one place. I follow these discussions in the media. Every time they say we should not be building ghettos, meaning that we concentrate a certain group of people in one area. But this is not true, they do it all the time. The city does.*

– Old Mellunmäki Mellari active and homeowner

Here, “ghetto”, drawn from the American discussions features in the imagination and discussion of a lähiö-resident who is upset about the residential areas of Helsinki now being the home of people of immigrant background. This recalls Roivainen (1999) who writes about the formation of the slum-discourse in Helsingin Sanomat during the 1990’s. The newspaper twisted the words of scholars working on unemployment at the time in order to come up with flashy titles like (my translation) “*Researchers fear the birth of European urban slums in Finland*” (ibid., p. 104). The slum-discourse of the mid 90’s was a case of public debate adopting the notion of underclass from European discussions via researchers. This opposed the view generated by administrative research which showed that no such trajectories were taking shape in lähiös, although the proportion of unemployed was increasing. Instead of attempting to solve the problems of people facing unemployment or poverty, what the urban slum-discourse did was create a tool to label the victims of poverty. (Ibid., p. 105.)

Arguably what slum-discourse did for the poor and unemployed yesterday, different forms of ghetto-discourse do for “minorities” today. Here we find an ill-founded territory talk which in no way tackles possible social issues but instead only stigmatizes an area and labels its residents. Today, immigration plays a major part of this territory talk. Concentration of ethnic minorities and people of immigrant background is a recurring feature in media discussion and undoubtedly draws from academic discourses on polarization and the “uneven placement” of different ethnic groups. A female tenant living in social housing in New Mellunmäki was also critical of concentrating people

into specific areas. We talked about her living preferences and when she mentioned Vuosaari as her least preferred place of residence, I asked why.

*There're too few of those people from Helsinki, or like Finns. I mean that there are way too many foreigners dumped into the same area. Then there's, just like here you get problems and then people just think about what might be the cause of those problems. So for example our kid goes to a school where 52 percent of students are foreigners. I think that's strange when we're in Finland. Why are so called native Finns the minority? Because also in Helsinki there are schools where there are no foreigners, so why have they dumped all those families in the same places? Then all their kids go to the same school. They could have placed those people more evenly.*

-Young New Mellunmäki woman in social housing

This account reflects the level of contemporary discussion on immigration and concentration of immigrants. Immigration is used as a keyword to alleviate a multitude of social ills. I will discuss this further in the concluding chapter, but there is some evidence to suggest that social scientists are not totally without fault in having portrayed immigrant concentrations in distinct areas of Helsinki without sufficient explanation as to why this might matter. When such findings become depicted in the media they easily turn to use exaggerating rhetoric such immigrant-dump. These then circulate in local parlance and become fixtures in residents' understandings of lähiös, in this instance that of Vuosaari. Has the "worker reservoir" of Kortteinen's (1982) *Lähiö* turned into the "immigrant dumping-ground" of today's lähiös? For the above woman, the absence of native population renders Vuosaari an uninviting place. The fact that her child now goes to a school with an allegedly large student population of immigrant background further distresses her. She does not specify why this is a bad thing, but the mere idea of "too many foreigners" is disturbing.

The effects of territorially stigmatizing discourse, which attempt to decipher social phenomena with territorial means, can be seen on many levels in interviewees'

discussion. When it comes to the issue of immigration and the perceived problems of concentrations of people of immigrant background it is clear that people interviewed here have little personal experience of such problems and are aware of this. However interviewees fall back on imagery, concepts and labeling put forward by media, stigmatizing talk and use statistics to explain the reality of living in a multiethnic society. Another elderly Mellunmäki original who had lived in the lähiö since the late sixties, talked at length about how she takes care of her neighborhood and helps her neighbors, how Mellunmäki is peaceful and how she appreciates the friendly people and natural surroundings. She did however have her reservations about “people who live differently” and about an area where a mosque had been constructed.

*The original residents I know very well and I have nothing bad to say about them! It's only now that people have begun to lease their apartments that we are getting these Estonians and others and they lead a different kind of life! -- Well there's now that place where those men go to stick out their behinds. What the heck is that place? You know those men wearing dresses? There used to be a grocery store there. Muslims! They now have that house [mosque]. But I don't think they're of any bother if they just go in there to stick out their butts, they probably won't begin to rage about. Then when you cross over to Länsimäki you begin to get more of these immigrants and all that. And they have infiltrated us as well! And they can't even sort out their rubbish, they just throw in everything and mix up the bins.*

– A disgruntled elderly Old Mellunmäki homeowner

Ignorance of her neighbors' cultural and religious practices leaves her wondering how the Other has infiltrated her territory. Whereas Old Mellunmäki and its original residents are held in high regard, a dubious assortment of people who cannot sort their rubbish is now infiltrating her home. Other interviewees talked about not really knowing their neighborhood that well outside of the Old Mellunmäki. They talked about how outside of Old Mellunmäki there are more social housing, larger high rise buildings and more people of immigrant background but made it clear that although these were commonly regarded as problems, they did not have sufficient knowledge to make any

assumptions. The earlier described territorial dichotomy between old and new is clear here and when it comes to the issue of immigration, ignorance appears to breed and strengthen the stigma. One interviewee wondered whether it would be good for people to have their own “designated areas” in the city and made comparisons to Chinatown in New York.

Not all commentary on the issue from my interviewees was totally negative. Some negotiated with the perceived positive aspects of a more “multicultural” Helsinki and voiced their considerations. Two middle aged men living in social housing in New Mellunmäki debated the issue of immigration. When I asked if there were changes they would like to see in Mellunmäki in the future:

*Man 1: Well, if there aren't too many of those refugees, hehe!*

*Man 2: Well hey, the way I see it is like some smart politician said, a multinational Finland. And so it should be. I have nothing against them in principle. It's not a problem here. But you take the metro to Kamppi, there you have it!*

*Man 1: Yeah, there're no problems yet. But the young ones might have them still!*

The discussions around immigration and people of different ethnicities living together often revolve around the pros and cons. An “us vs. them” scenario is constructed, where people weigh the positives and negatives of distinct groups of people who are seen as different. As a topic this would warrant its own study and theoretical considerations, but this type of categorization of people, even if negotiating the “positive aspects of immigration” might only add to the toolkit of symbolic distancing from peers. A male homeowner from Old Mellunmäki talked about the vicinity of religious buildings and how the presence of religious groups had driven out an unwanted element – the alcoholics at the local boozier.

*We have a conglomeration of religious buildings. The Iranians have their place and then the Russian Orthodox have theirs. A work mate of mine lives right next to the Shia*

*place, it's really laid back. There's no fuss about it, at first they parked their cars a little wrong. There used to be a pub there but it ran out of business. The Mueslis don't mess around with booze, hahah!*

–Old Mellunmäki male homeowner

This interviewee is negotiating a harmonious group of religious church- and mosque-goers who at first parked their cars wrong. The religious group is ultimately seen as a better option to having a pub and its drunks in the neighborhood. Even when people of immigrant background, or say of different faiths, are spoken of favorably, they are spoken of as the Other. Has public discussion been so adamant in creating the “immigrant problem” that neighbors can now only be spoken of in categorical terms; as of an instrumental value whether they are good for the neighborhood or not?

Following Wacquant who describes the differences in territorial stigma in Chicago and Paris, what is particular to the territorial stigma carried by Chicago's “Black Belt” is that it is “spatial-cum-racial”. In the banlieue of Paris residential stigma is not directly linked to an ethnic or cultural marker that would immediately place a person as from the banlieue. The banlieue is inhabited by a multitude of ethnicities and, other middle class identity markers aside, people can manage their impression simply through territorial mobility. In Chicago on the other hand this type of moving from one category of the population to another is beyond the reach of the ghetto resident. There, “race” or “blackness” is the very basis of social division drawn from the “historic disgrace of slavery” and for instance, black youths cannot simply stroll over to a white neighborhood in order to shed the weight of territorial stigmatization. (Wacquant, 2008: 181-182.)

As it is in the banlieue, it is impossible to state that a person lives in a lähiö by their “ethnicity”. Certainly there are variances on an individual level to how residents approach this topic. Personal accounts are just that. But I find there is evidence to suggest that, individual experiences and accounts aside, a structural mechanism of tying an ethnic element to lähiö discussion has enforced the way people view residential territories and lähiös. I propose that a malfunctioning and misleading rhetoric in academic and public discussion and the heavy tying of ethnicity to spatial

differentiation of the urban realm of Helsinki could run the serious risk of only further labeling lähiö-residents of Helsinki, the lähiös and people of immigrant background. My interviews suggest that those Mellunmäki residents who do not have regular contact with neighbors of immigrant background are also bound to utilize “immigration” as a reason for perceived or experienced territorial plight. Immigration and immigrants have entered public discussion and local understandings as keywords which explain experienced and imagined hardships and needs. Like social housing and its tenants, immigration or immigrants become constructs of territorial stigma laid over certain lähiös. If tenants and immigrants and other freaks and weirdos are the Other in Helsinki, then East Helsinki, to use Said’s (1991) lexicon, is the Orient.

#### **5.4 East Helsinki as the Orient**

*For me, this is where Helsinki ends. For all I care, they can hand over everything from here eastwards to Russia.*

-A young man on the Metro in Kalasatama, 2013

To speak of East Helsinki in Said’s (1991) lexicon is to heed Wacquant’s (1997) call for sociology’s task and steer clear of being the force that drives othering and symbolic distancing. Wacquant writes, that “The task of sociology must be to uncover the *immanent social necessity* that governs the practices and life forms of ghetto residents, not to participate in the fabrication of a new ‘urban Orientalism’ — in Edward Said’s sense of the term — of which the ‘underclass’ would be the loathsome figurehead” (Wacquant, 1997: 349). Wacquant of course writes in the context of the ghetto. But it is no exaggeration to require social scientist working in the context of the Finnish lähiö to similarly avoid being part of that process which creates the urban Orientalism.

If urban sociology in Helsinki began with research into the working class area north of the Long Bridge and its dichotomous relationship with south of the bridge (Waris, 1973), today’s research deals with a different set of binary opposites. East and West, or better yet, East and the Rest have come to signify the inherent otherness of working class areas and lähiös of eastern Helsinki when compared to life in the city center and

perceivably better-off areas of western Helsinki and lähiös of the north. But Waris had the benefit of being able to study a strictly demarcated geographical, social and economic landscape. He was there to paint a picture of the very conception of Helsinki's working class neighborhood and its relation to the bourgeoisie areas of South Helsinki. East Helsinki is in no way such a specific landscape. Nor is it only working class. In fact, to speak of East Helsinki is to speak of a plethora of social and economic realities. It is administratively and geographically a vast area comprising of no single social class or lifestyle. It is, to a great extent, a mere social construction.

For a good while now East Helsinki has epitomized the dark and miserable side of urban life in the Finnish capital. In the popular imagery and collective imagination "The East" means concrete blocks and excluded immigrants, unemployment and alcoholics, teenage mothers and juvenile delinquents. The strikingly durable list of exaggerations and top down stigma goes on. The stigma of the East seems also to weigh heavy on the shoulders of residents of Mellunmäki. For most interviewees Mellunmäki is a much favored and appreciated place of residence. All interviewees reported to favor East Helsinki for the peace, quiet and especially the natural surroundings. Being able to walk out to the woods from the apartment building doorstep was reported to be one of the greatest perks of living in the East. Least favorable residential areas were seen as those closer to the city center. Crowdedness and lack of privacy were seen as off-putting factors of city life. One man noted that he decided to buy an apartment in Mellunmäki because, as he put it, "there is no place in Helsinki where a working class man can live so close to the ocean!"

However, interviewees felt that in popular imagery, public discussion and common knowledge East Helsinki has been labeled as worse off from the outside and reported this to have a negative influence on the common conception of Mellunmäki as well. In her thesis *Mielikuvien Itä-Helsinki* (2005), Riitta Alamiykkaoja has studied the imagined East Helsinki. Alamiykkaoja finds her theoretical tools in Rob Shields' "place myths" (1991) and Edward Soja's concept of third space (1996). Alamiykkaoja's hypothesis, which she successfully proves correct, is that East Helsinki is not just a geographical area, but an example of a Sojan third space, a crossroads between real (first space) and imagined (second space). East Helsinki functions very much as a



combination of the “real” material world and its interpretations through “imagined” representations of spatiality (Soja, 1996: 5). For Alamiykkaoja, East Helsinki is an imaginary place reaching beyond its borders at will; East is used to describe and explain social realities and problems even beyond the borders of geographical East Helsinki. Furthermore, following Shields’ lexicon it is a mythical place determined by those exaggerated stereotypes recycled in the popular imagery above (Alamiykkaoja, 2005).

Alamiykkaoja found different groups of notions and images of East which she constructed into themes such as drug abuse, crime, ethnic diversity, segregation and polarization. These themes are what make up the imagined East Helsinki. She then ties all these up into a larger thematic construct of the “Wild East”. East Helsinki in the collective imagination is something beyond mere categories of “problem lähiö”. The Wild East is imagined and reproduced in popular culture, recently in movies and rap-music. Alamiykkaoja found in her material The Wild East to be about the reproduction of a certain type of aesthetics of “roughness”. The aesthetics of The Wild East are dreamed up by storytellers and become “social realities” in public imaginations, supported by stereotyping media reports. (Ibid.)

The East featured strongly in my interviewee accounts. Some interviewees themselves saw particular social issues or lähiö-problems arising from the fact that Mellunmäki resides in the East. For them East had become a marker of otherness and inferiority and was used to describe their perceived problems. An elderly Old Mellunmäki resident complained how people are inactive and do not take a stand for their neighborhood. She talked about the lack of services which renders the area functionally poor. Her discussion was loaded with lähiö-as-problem rhetoric and she would fall back on this to depict Mellunmäki. Lastly, however, she turns to use the stigma of the East as an argument.

*The eastern lähiös have the worst turn out. And it’s probably the same that all the people here are pretty negligent, whatever is done over here. They don’t stand up to the barricades like people do in Rastila who have the pro-Rastila movement which tries to stop new construction on top of the woods. There has never been a pro-movement here.*

*I moved here in the 70's when they started building this lähiö and the services we were promised never materialized. This has been the easternmost lähiö for a long time.*

-Old Mellunmäki homeowner and active

Mellunmäki features above as an incomplete lähiö and is compared to other, “celebrated lähiös”. The lähiö is portrayed as a functional and a social problem. Finally, it is “the easternmost lähiö” which works as the final, rhetorical nail to seal the casket. For this interviewee, lähiö-problems and inactivity have existed since the dawn of time in Mellunmäki. She voices her frustration with the lack of services and unfulfilled promises. Finally though, it is the East which explains it all. Other interviewees felt that outside perceptions of the area were constructed based on a combined ignorance of Mellunmäki and the stigma of the East. Many talked amusedly about the illogical fear their friends or family from elsewhere often experienced about East, which then resonated when they visited Mellunmäki. For instance, a New Mellunmäki resident I interviewed in a pub by the Metro station talked about outsiders’ irrational fear of Mellunmäki based on their notion of East Helsinki.

*I don't know. Or well yeah, but it's more about East Helsinki than Mellunmäki. People immediately feel like East Helsinki sucks and it's dangerous. But it's not about Mellunmäki it's just East Helsinki. I feel like these images of East Helsinki were born already when they began building these [lähiös]. A lot of people moved in from the countryside. Of course the kids grew up in awful gangs. So it's from the beginning of time, because I don't think anything so special has happened here in the recent years which would warrant fear or...But my sister's husband is from Kirkkonummi and he is in panic about having to come here. We came in here for a beer to wait for the Metro and he just stood outside smoking and refused to come in. He couldn't explain why, he was just scared. It's just where you grow up.*

-New Mellunmäki woman

This interviewee holds that certain images have existed for East Helsinki lähiös from the day they were built; as if the images had been woven into the fabric of the concept of “East”. For her, the main issue is about the images of East Helsinki having been created in the very social premises of lähiö construction and the way everyday life turned out for the children of lähiö. For her negative images have existed for the eastern

lähiös “from the beginning of time” and even though nothing really maintains the negative images, they still resonate strongly in outsiders imaginations. One is reminded of Roivainen (1999) and the way Helsingin Sanomat discussed lähiös throughout the decades as so many problems and not as the realities, homes and stages of everyday life for the working classes in neighborhoods which have been detached from the urban fabric due to profit oriented construction. To recall Wacquant (2008) the marginalization of part of the population to distinct and separate spheres of the city is part of the structural violence unleashed by the sociopolitical and economic restructuring of society. Even though the populations of Helsinki’s lähiös are heterogeneous and largely do not suffer the hardships of residents of French banlieue or American ghetto, the stigma of the East which now reflects negatively on Mellunmäki and its residents appears to have been created through the unwarranted blaming and labeling of lähiös and their residents instead of understanding the very similar structural shifts that Wacquant speaks of, which render urban life in Helsinki so fragmented.

A territorial stigma of “The Wild East” is laid on neighborhoods like Mellunmäki from the outside. In their forest-settings and populations made largely of young families and retired folk most lähiös are light-years from the “realities” portrayed in pop-culture depictions. In my interviews, The Wild East rhetoric does not appear in local residents’ accounts. Instead, many residents depict and highlight the normality and peacefulness of life as they did for Alamiykkaoja (2005). One of my interviewees, a young homeowner from New Mellunmäki, talked about how her living preferences resided in East Helsinki. For her, the area means peace and nature and very intriguingly, “concrete lähiö” is a different reality altogether.

*It would be here in the east. Because I like to have the peace and the nature. I wouldn’t want to be in the center or so. It’s just somehow... well it has it’s perks because everything is so close by. But then I like to have the nature and it’s not all concrete lähiö around you, such as Merihaka and Itä-Pasila.*

– A young career woman from New Mellunmäki

Many interviewees were aware of the negative label of the East and voiced their disagreement with. Instead, East Helsinki was reported to be a much favored and loved

place and those negative affiliations to be wildly misjudged. If Alamiykkaoja was able to abstract the specific themes that make up “East Helsinki” in the collective conscious, it is East Helsinki which works as a part of the makeup of Mellunmäki imagined. For the residents of Mellunmäki interviewed here, East is one of the features that makes up general conceptions of Mellunmäki for both outsiders and to themselves. To recall Wacquant (2008), territorial stigmas become self-fulfilling prophecies, they function in cyclical ways and create and aggravate that which they were supposed to only depict. We find that localized, context specific social issues such as drug use are the building blocks of the broad stigma of East (Alamiykkaoja, 2005). On the other hand, the East for my interviewees here is one of the integral parts of how experiences, imaginations and views of the lähiö of Mellunmäki are discussed. Most interviewees talked about how this labeling was done from the outside and felt that Mellunmäki residents do not agree with this. For the residents “East Helsinki” is the stage of their everyday lives, home and much preferred locale to live in. Another elderly homeowner put it in the following words.

*The eastern lähiös are specifically talked about as one lump and still they are pretty different, most likely. And then from these some theme always bounces up. I think people have a little negative view of Mellunmäki when you compare to those who live here. At least I think what their thoughts are when the news is what it is. We would move out if it was miserable here.*

–Elderly homeowner, Old Mellunmäki

### **5.5 Anonymity and misleading media depictions**

One of the secondary research questions which I pose to get a deeper understanding of the workings of a possible territorial stigma in Mellunmäki was, “how do residents of Mellunmäki think their neighborhood is viewed by outsiders?” Accordingly, part of my interview questions dealt with this topic. I enquired this by asking how participants found Mellunmäki depicted in the media, what kind of

reporting there had been on Mellunmäki, whether they thought residents and outsiders of Mellunmäki had general conceptions of the area and what these were. Answers and discussions were very parallel and portrayed shared opinions and views. A general consensus among the interviewees from Old Mellunmäki however was that Mellunmäki is talked about negatively in the news. They felt that the area was not depicted truthfully and that media gives misinterpretations of the area which distorts outside opinions.

Interviewees from New Mellunmäki on the other hand felt that the area is not really reported about and most could not recall an article on Mellunmäki from the past year. Those who did remember articles in the newspapers reported them to deal with accidents and crimes and individual instances of “newsworthy” events such as apartment fires. Interestingly despite the fact that many found media to have had a large role in creating a bad reputation for Mellunmäki, most felt that Mellunmäki was not really paid any attention to in the media nor could most remember specific instances of negative reporting on the area. Some even felt this anonymity to be the source of negative outside perceptions of Mellunmäki as ignorance would breed misrepresentation. Finally, Mellunmäki was described strongly in relation to other lähiös or areas of Helsinki. Some interviewees recalled comparative articles on East Helsinki neighborhoods; others voiced their own opinions on such comparisons.

An elderly homeowner talked about her understanding of outsiders’ views on Mellunmäki. She had an intriguing account of a number of residents coming together in their disagreement about a newspaper article that had depicted Mellunmäki in unfavorable terms. Like most interviewees, she first states that media representations of Mellunmäki are exaggeratedly negative.

*Well at least according to the press. Pretty negative. I mean unbelievably negative. We Mellunmäki people don't understand this at all. One day a few of us sat on the bus and we had read something in Helsingin Sanomat, and everyone said that no way is that written by a person from Mellunmäki. And it was great because I was just chatting to my friend and people joined in on the conversation from the next seats and said “how dare they as we like it so much here”. How can they talk like this? Somehow they gave a picture that this is like segregated, maybe somehow slummified. Very strange!*

-Old Mellunmäki homeowner

As a comparative analysis between contemporary lähiö writing and the writing studied by Roivainen (1999) is beyond this thesis, no robust conclusions can be made about the temporal continuity of media enforced stigma. But the above quote from an elderly Mellunmäki resident recalls the slum-discourse of the 1990's. Also the fact that especially the elderly felt media to have a great role in furthering negative depictions might suggest that a change has taken place in the style of the writing. When I discussed media depictions further with the above interviewee and asked if she kept an active eye on the news on Mellunmäki and wondered whether there had been much of such negative writing recently, she answered the following.

*Yeah. What there is. But there's not much of it, we're a little off the map in that sense, but I don't know if that's really a bad thing. We are nationally a very insignificant place!*

-Old Mellunmäki homeowner

The above interviewee talks about media generally painting a negative picture of Mellunmäki. However, she notes that there is not that much reporting and wonders whether no news is in fact good news. Similar discussion came up with other interviewees as well. Anonymity was seen as a good thing and one interviewee mentioned how she does not care about outside perceptions and that they have no significance for her. For a male homeowner too much publicity and outside coverage was a threat. He was happy with Mellunmäki and talked about his distaste for Espoo, a city west of Helsinki. He had strong categorizations of residents of Espoo as wealthier and was cautious of Mellunmäki housing costs going up in case the metro line was extended.

*We have been thinking that if the metro goes all the way to Espoo, then the people from Espoo will find their way here. And they'll bring their Audis and all that. For real, it's only a good thing, keeps the housing costs low and anyway it's really nice to be here.*

-Old Mellunmäki male homeowner

Others found their neighborhood to particularly suffer from anonymity in the public eye. A woman from Old Mellunmäki was unhappy with residents' level of activity in

the neighborhood. She first compared Mellunmäki to another East Helsinki lähiö which for her was, to recall Roivainen (1999), the “celebrated lähiö”, or as the interviewee had it “a pet in media’s eyes”. There residents had organized events and invited media to increase positive image for their lähiö. This interviewee at first finds blame in the impotent residents of Mellunmäki for rendering the place a “sleeping lähiö” (nukkumalähiö).

*The interaction is born when people of the lähiö let the media know what our outstanding features are and what we’ve done. And so that lähiö is brought into a positive cycle in the eyes of the media. And that possibly feeds itself. Because you have to maintain the reputation. So it’s just that what we’re missing and what many lähiös are missing and are real sleeping lähiös. This Mellunmäki is also so unknown, no outsider probably has any image but they just think east is east.*

-Old Mellunmäki homeowner and Mellari active

Missing resident activity and citizen participation are for this interviewee the primary reasons for anonymity of Mellunmäki. She finds that people should be more active in upholding a positive image of their neighborhood. One recalls here the plea for caution in concluding dissociation from narratives of “poor” neighbor relations, as for one this can place strenuous expectations on a neighborhood and its residents to achieve a level of “normality” (Van Eijk, 2012). In similar vein, I suggest that celebrating the resident activity of one lähiö and portraying it as “the way things should be” could run the risk of further fragmentation of lähiös where people live totally harmonious lives based on privacy and distance. This could lead to instances where a lähiö and its residents are only stigmatized further as inactive for not upholding the image. It is a strange reality where one is made to feel that as a resident they were responsible for upholding an image, as if a neighborhood was to be branded like a product and the inhabitants responsible for its marketing!

The above interviewee’s final remark makes it clear for us, why some residents might partly feel, that anonymity in the public eye is impairing for the lähiö. One of the ways this anonymity is exacerbated is through the vast generalization that is “East Helsinki”. It would appear that because the stigma of the East, discussed in the previous part of the chapter, is so effectively laid from above that it enshrouds single lähiös and their

residents. As it stands, interviewees felt that media discussion on the area itself was minimal and that Mellunmäki disappeared among other lähiös that make up East Helsinki. These findings support and are analogous to Alamiikkaoja's (2005) assertion that outside perceptions of East Helsinki are characterized by anonymity. East Helsinki here is a highly categorizing concept. It builds hierarchy between specific areas elsewhere in Helsinki and those residing in the East. South, West or North Helsinki are not spoken of as such, but areas within these administrative districts are called by their name. A stereotype is created of the residents of East Helsinki, bundled up under the same category and held as deviants from the "normal order of things". The risk here is that these top-down perceptions are then, as Wacquant would have it, absorbed to the local residents' imaginations and the self-fulfilling prophecy and cyclical motion of territorial stigma has begun (Wacquant, 2008).

If outside conceptions were reported to be based on anonymity, comparisons with celebrated lähiös or negative affiliations with the East, some interviewees made a different kind of comparison. A male tenant from New Mellunmäki compared Mellunmäki to that working class area studied by Waris (1973), Sörnäinen. The old working class area of Helsinki has drawn in a more middle class crowd of young entrepreneurs and students in recent years. This man found Mellunmäki more to his liking.

*How should I say it. Humble. More so than if you go to for example Sörnäinen. This is a nice area and people know it but no-one walks around arrogantly. Although they have talked about this a little nastily. Friendly folk. This metro gang is little different than the bus gang. I don't know why.*

–New Mellunmäki family man

For this interviewee, Sörnäinen epitomizes the arrogant city folk, whereas in Mellunmäki people are friendlier and humble despite their being aware of how good their area is. This New Mellunmäki tenant also distinguishes and draws from the internal differences of Mellunmäki. Metro gang are quite likely those residents of New Mellunmäki and closer to the metro station, whereas the bus gang live on the old side,



or towards Fallpakka and closer to bus routes, but he does not go into the intricacies of why and when I asked how he found them to be different, he could not explain it.

Other interviewees felt that if people know of Mellunmäki they usually regard it as at least a bit better than other lähiös. In a number of interviews, Mellunmäki reclaims the position of the celebrated lähiö. Most interviewees brought up the adjacent lähiö of Kontula as a comparison at some point. Some held it as a bad area themselves and talked about not really enjoying having to go there for services not available in Mellunmäki. Others talked about Kontula as generally regarded as a worse-off area, but noted that they knew better and would make corrective remarks such as “Kontula is not as bad as it’s made out to be”.

A number of interviewees reported how Mellunmäki used to be seen as a generally better off area than adjacent lähiös of Länsimäki and Vesala. It was well-known among interviewees that apartments located in these lähiös had been sold and rented out in the past as residing in Mellunmäki because of its better reputation. A woman living in social housing in Vesala explained how this was brought on by an article in *Helsingin Sanomat* in the mid 1990’s. The article had talked about Vesala’s large immigrant population as a social problem plaguing the area. Due to negative reporting apartments in the area were marketed as residing in Mellunmäki. The newspaper article, which the woman remembered well, had influenced her moving decision to Mellunmäki when it stated the Mellunmäki had older buildings and mostly Finnish people living in them. As it turned out, she had however really rented an apartment in Vesala, thinking it was Mellunmäki. As noted in chapter two, the borders between Mellunmäki and its adjacent lähiös are not that clear. The fact that Vesala is viewed as worse than Mellunmäki, yet one may rent an apartment in Vesala thinking it is Mellunmäki is the most lucid example of territorial stigma and its loose connection to any lived reality in the context of a Helsinki lähiö!

So, in this final part of the chapter on analysis, I have discussed mainly the question of how residents of Mellunmäki find their neighborhood to be viewed by outsiders. Here, interviews suggest that residents think of their lähiö as either rather anonymous in the public eye or they think of the media to portray Mellunmäki negatively. Anonymity is found as either a good thing, to keep out unwanted elements, or to be a reason for the wider negative labeling of East Helsinki to affect Mellunmäki in harmful ways. Also

those who thought of Mellunmäki to be portrayed negatively saw it as having taken place from the time the lähiö was constructed and for this labeling to carry on today, or again for the stigma of the East to penetrate Mellunmäki via the media. Let me now turn to a meditative chapter on the findings the above analysis has provided. In the next chapter I bring together the analysis, answer the research questions via my findings and based on them make any further suggestions.

## 6. A meditation on findings

*"All ghettos do have a stigma, but not all stigmatized areas are ghettos"*

(Wassenberg, 2004: 228).

The question this thesis set out to answer is "Do residents' accounts depict a territorial stigma for Mellunmäki?" The observant reader might have already come to some conclusions as to whether the answer is ay or nay. But let me nevertheless bring together the main findings in this meditative chapter before answering. I will go forth here by way of answering those secondary research questions I posed in the introductory chapter. Again, the topics are heavily interrelated and a synthesis of findings drawn from the analysis of data is bound to be the way these answers materialize.

The first of the secondary research questions asks: *what are the reasons for the distinction between Old and New Mellunmäki?*

This was the distinction some residents made when I worked in Mellunmäki in the summer of 2012 and what drove me to study the topic of territorial stigma in that particular lähiö. First of all, my interviews confirm that indeed such a territorial division between new and old *is* made by residents and it was not just the imaginings of a young and enthusiastic student of all things urban. Four interviewees used the exact terms Old Mellunmäki and New Mellunmäki to describe internal divisions of the area. Two interviewees talked about the "old side" of Mellunmäki or the area around "the old mall", where clubhouse Mellari resides, but did not use the exact terms old or new

Mellunmäki. Other ways to denote these different areas were to talk of “the hilltop” (Old Mellunmäki) and “the area around the Metro station” (New Mellunmäki).

First and foremost this distinction between new and old is made to denote a hierarchy between territories of social housing and areas of owner occupied housing. New Mellunmäki is seen, especially by the homeowners who reported to live on the old side, as those more recently constructed areas of Mellunmäki close to the metro station, adjacent to lähiös of Vesala and Länsimäki. Furthermore, New Mellunmäki also denotes the area of Fallpakka which almost exists as its own neighborhood on the other side of a major highway. The division between new and old works as a way of symbolic distancing from residents of the very same neighborhood. For the residents of Old Mellunmäki, New Mellunmäki is an unknown territory. This is exemplified by one interviewee’s depiction of Fallpakka as the home of alcoholics and troubled folk even though she had not really been there. Strikingly, a Fallpakka homeowner described the vicinity of the metro station as often populated by weirdos, although she did not use the metro much but drove to work instead. Here, territorial stigma proved to work in cyclical motions and resonate throughout the neighborhood, the strength of resonance depending on where one is placed on the hierarchy of territories. This territorial stigma laid upon areas of social housing then reflects on tenants who were reported to deviate from the ordinary homeowners.

Tenants of social housing are seen as inactive and burdened by their own problems. Symbolic distancing from neighbors is taking place on ground within a single neighborhood. Othering and distancing have worked their way to the individual, resident level and the social “problems” of tenancy, which are explained partly by territorial labeling in resident accounts, are seen to be concentrating in New Mellunmäki. Furthermore, tenants in Old Mellunmäki were seen as infiltrators and to bring in the unwanted element to the neighborhood. It could be suggested, that tenants carry with them the territorial stigma of New Mellunmäki.

A categorical term to explain the differences in territories of Mellunmäki across the board was that of immigrants. Areas of New Mellunmäki were described as home to immigrants and hence as inherently different. When immigrants were neighbors in Old Mellunmäki, interviewees would debate the pros and cons of the group and their own

position to the neighbor of immigrant background. I feel there is evidence here to suggest, that the weight residents place on the question of immigrants and immigration in their accounts of Mellunmäki is one of the main findings of this thesis. It points towards the ethnicization of territory talk in the context of a Helsinki lähiö. I discuss this a little further in a separate chapter as I feel the gravity of the topic warrants a closer look.

The second of my secondary research questions asks: *how do Mellunmäki residents talk about their neighborhood?*

All residents reported to enjoy living in Mellunmäki. Most important factors in resident satisfaction were environment and nature, good connections and transportation possibilities, peace and quiet and finally the people and neighbors in Mellunmäki. Interviewees held a common view of a generally inactive resident base which was a part of the way they described Mellunmäki. People saw themselves as active residents; yet spoke of others and the area at large as inactive. Furthermore, the discussion had a common paradoxical feature where most talked about how participation and neighborhood activity was visible, but saw that many neighbors are lazy and inactive. This was especially so for the homeowners in Old Mellunmäki who saw the tenants in New Mellunmäki and in their own buildings as inefficient and lazy.

Furthermore Mellunmäki was described through comparisons with other areas and neighborhoods of Helsinki. Common comparisons were made with other lähiös and in these instances Mellunmäki claimed the position of the celebrated lähiö. Also, more central locations of Helsinki were viewed in unfavorable terms as too crowded and not providing the peace and privacy that was available in Mellunmäki.

Now, the fact that interviewees spoke of other residents in the area as inactive or lazy, and yet reported both the visibility of resident activity in the area and to personally enjoy the peace and privacy of the neighborhood, can be read as further supporting the claim that one is not to infer dissociation and poor neighbor relations from resident narratives on a territory (Van Eijk, 2012). Despite the fact that resident activity, or rather resident inactivity, is one of the constructs of territorial stigmatization in Mellunmäki (i.e. “New Mellunmäki residents are inactive”), there is not enough proof

here that *this* would be the cause of disruptions in any neighbor relations. Also in hindsight I would say that the degree of pre-constructedness of the theme of resident activity could have been left out and only to build it afterwards, if it turned out important. Further research is clearly needed on ground level to study the effects of territorial stigma on neighbor relations, social cohesion and resident activity.

The third secondary research question regards the very problem categories extended to lähiö descriptions. I wanted to know: *does Mellunmäki feature as a problem in resident accounts?* This is how lähiös in general have been portrayed in a major newspaper and media depictions are held to be one of the key purveyors of territorial stigma.

In light of my interviews it would seem that residents of Mellunmäki view certain areas of the lähiö as social and physical problems. Internal territorial stigmatization of areas of Mellunmäki, namely those areas some would call New Mellunmäki, is a construct of perceived differences in the physical and aesthetic appearance of the areas, in the imagined and experienced differences in social and economic realities of homeowners and social tenants. Lack of services was reported by a majority of interviewees as a functional problem per se and something they would like to see change in Mellunmäki. Most however did not see this as a fault of the lähiö, but blamed failed politicians and municipal politics. Furthermore, Mellunmäki as a whole was not seen as a social or physical problem either, only distinct areas and territories within it. There could be evidence here that those problem categories of lähiö induced by Helsingin Sanomat as studied by Roivainen (1999) and furthered in public discussions, have seeped to the neighborhood level and are used inside the lähiö of Mellunmäki to draw boundaries and make distinctions. But here, further research is warranted and robust comparisons of contemporary and past media depictions of lähiös should be compiled.

The fourth and final of my secondary research questions ponders: *how do residents of Mellunmäki think their neighborhood is viewed by outsiders?*

Media depictions of Mellunmäki were seen by some as exaggerated and negative and not portraying the realities of life in Mellunmäki. Most however discussed how Mellunmäki does not much feature in the news and that there really is nothing to report about it except for individual instances of accidents or crime. Serious crime such as assaults and murders was reported by only one interviewee to be characteristic of the

social housing areas of New Mellunmäki. Others thought that nothing out of the ordinary really happens around the lähiö. Outsiders were thought to not really know about Mellunmäki and many speculated on the anonymity of the lähiö.

Both the negative images and anonymity were linked to a wider territorial stigma of the East. The bad reputation of East Helsinki was held to negatively affect Mellunmäki, as outsiders views were thought to be the result of stereotyping discourse on East Helsinki. Also the anonymity was seen as a hindering factor by some, as this would only lead to associations with the wider stigma of the East. Some interviewees also used the East to explain perceived social and economic defects of the area. The same interviewees might speak of their love of East Helsinki in one sentence and nonchalantly state East to be the reason for social plight in the next.

Now, after all the areas around the proverbial bush have hopefully been beaten, *do residents' accounts depict a territorial stigma for Mellunmäki?*

According to my interviews and their careful analysis and the findings discussed above, residents' accounts depict a very strong, *internal territorial stigmatization* of what is known in local parlance as New Mellunmäki. New Mellunmäki is used to denote areas of social housing and the weight of territorial stigma is carried by unspecified tenants and clearly specified immigrants. The internal territorial stigma of New Mellunmäki is a construct of frowned upon social tenants, inactive residents and immigrants. It is used as a basis for symbolic distancing between neighbors. Other residents in Mellunmäki are viewed as just that, the Other as opposed to us. Socially constructed hierarchies such as homeowner vs. tenant and native vs. immigrant materialize through a territorial stigma. When stigmatized populations cross over from New to Old Mellunmäki, such as moving into a municipal rental apartment in the same building, homeowners debate the tenants' activities and criticize them according to the preconceived notion that the tenant should live in New Mellunmäki.

However, Mellunmäki does not appear to have a stigma that would specifically set it apart from other Helsinki lähiös. Instead, Mellunmäki carries on the legacy of labeling induced, for example, by newspaper writing from the mid 1960's onwards which has affected both common conceptions of all of eastern Helsinki and the wider lähiö-discussion. Interviews revealed that Mellunmäki residents feel that there are ill-founded

views of Mellunmäki that circulate in public discussion. Resident accounts depict an overarching territorial stigma of “East Helsinki” which bears down on the interviewed residents of Mellunmäki but is also used by some as a keyword to explain perceived and experienced local shortcomings. Here, East also becomes part of the construct of the territorial stigma over Mellunmäki. All those specific and detailed social issues which are often “explained away” in public discussion with what I call territory talk - drug abuse, alcoholism, unemployment, social exclusion and a whole conglomeration of ills and evils, as somehow the normal order of things in certain areas - come to also be associated with Mellunmäki. Wacquant recalls fittingly back to Wittgenstein, who reminds us to “beware of the power that language has to make everything look the same” (Wacquant, 2008: 162). He finds the quote especially applicable to the word ghetto which has worked far in making many working class territories into symbolic ghettos, obscuring the process of their decomposition and reinforcing their spiral of stigmatization. (Ibid., p. 162.) When it comes to Mellunmäki, it is East Helsinki that bears the ill reputation which in everyday rhetoric labels and stigmatizes numerous Helsinki lähiös (whether they reside geographically in the east or not) as urban purgatories.

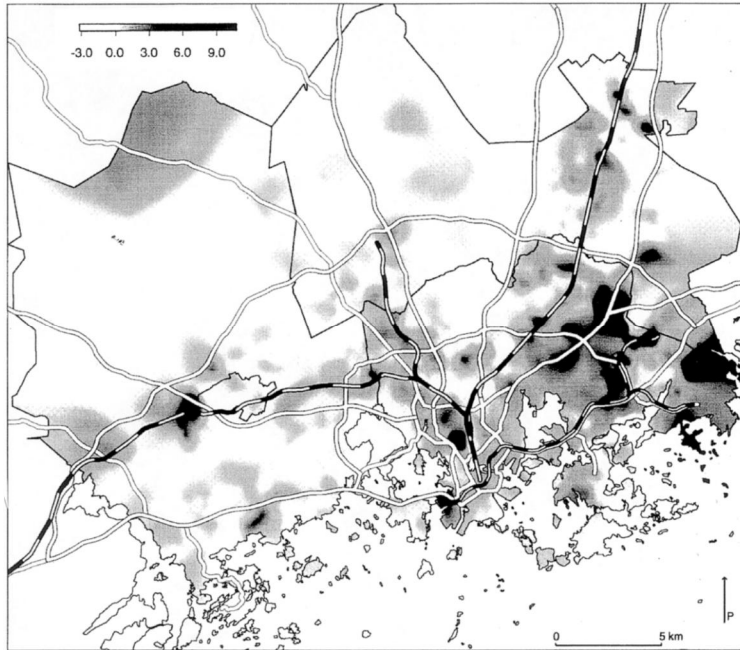
Now, a major topic of discussion, which I only mentioned briefly in this meditation on findings but which is paramount I consider is that of “immigration”. This topic featured in all interviewee discussions. The profundity with which this topic was tied to territory talk in resident accounts was bewildering to say the least. Immigration and immigrants were raised as a topic on almost all areas of discussion, yet I had not a single structured question on the matter. Hence, I devote some of my final pages here to the topic of immigration as I feel it deserves a closer look. Based on the interviews and their careful analysis it could be suggested that immigrants and immigration have entered the territory talk on lähiös to an extent, that they could be included as constructs of the categories of “lähiö-as-a-problem”. I suggest that the reasons for this are complicated and scientific publications not totally without blame and in essence the following is my attempt to decipher at least part of the reason the topic is so “popular”.

## 6.1 On “immigration”

The topic of possible concentrations of people of immigrant background into ethnic enclaves has been linked in recent years in Finnish discussions to general debates on economic polarization, professionalization and urban segregation in the academic context (eg. Lankinen, 2001, Vaattovaara & Kortteinen, 2003). The growing population of people of immigrant background is seen as a threat for some and as a hope for others in, say, alleviating future shortages of manpower (Lankinen, 2001: 9). When scientific publications show the growth patterns of immigrant populations and their placement on the map, it is surprising how these tend to often be done as carrying some inherent message. I merely use the following as an example, and with the utmost respect towards the researchers who have provided us with a body of knowledge on urban development and its intricacies in Helsinki throughout a number of decades.

Vaattovaara and Kortteinen (2003), for example, write lucidly about the particularities of spatial divisions of a high skill, high demand population and a low skill, low demand population and assert that eastern areas of Helsinki are lagging behind in economic development and that a surplus population has begun to form in pockets of poverty all over the city. Not going into the intricacies of their analysis, they also state the following; “[a]dditionally, it seems that the ethnic minorities - quite insignificant by number before the 1990s and with no spatial concentrations - have clearly begun to concentrate in roughly the same eastern areas that are lagging behind in economic development and socioeconomic structures” (ibid., p. 2137-2138). Accompanying this quote the following map is provided:





**Figure 1.** “Change in the percentage of foreign population (born outside the EU) in the Helsinki Metropolitan Region, 1987–97. *Data source:* Statistics Finland.” (Vaattovaara & Kortteinen, 2003: 2138.)

Now, in the above quoted the authors state that “the ethnic minorities” have begun to concentrate in East Helsinki. The map however is supposed to be illustrative of the change in percentage of people born outside the EU. But in this it fails miserably. Areas marked black are illustrative of everything between three to ten percent of the population. Firstly, this map does not provide any solid information. All it does is show East Helsinki painted black. Secondly, the strangely unexplained rhetoric used by the authors leaves one wanting. The authors speak of “the ethnic minorities” and “foreigners born outside the EU” as one and the same thing. Also, no explanation is given to why this “concentration” might matter. The problem with this type of data and its haphazard analysis in the long run is that they tend to move into media and public discussions which deal with lähiös, unemployment and immigration on more general levels. If implications of, say, concentration of people of immigrant background are left unspoken, the media and public will be left to make their own analysis.

Lankinen has measured the spatial placement of immigrants with the concept of non-native language speaking population as it also includes those who have gained Finnish nationality (Lankinen, 2001:47). Lankinen shows via a statistical analysis how the growth of non-native speaker populations in East Helsinki was greatest in the years

1994-96. In 1997-99 it was slightly greater when compared to West Helsinki and in the year 2000 the share of non-native speakers grew faster in the West. Also the size of immigrant population in absolute terms was greater in the West in that year. He also asserts that the placement of populations of immigrant background in Helsinki is even and has added to segregation minutely and that its effect is decreasing. (Ibid., p. 48-51.)

If the perceived concentration of immigrants and its implications are left unexplained, yet spoken and written about as a significant factor in the urban development of a city, what happens? What could happen is for us to follow a wider European trend of “Americanization” of poverty, as Wacquant (2008) has it. Due to a particular historical trajectory of slavery and the construction of racial segregation as a guiding principle of the American social order, the American ghetto is a spatial manifestation of systemic disenfranchisement of the black population. Poverty in the ghetto is intrinsically linked to “blackness” and hence the territorial stigma carried by areas of relegation also has the built-in notion of “the black ghetto”. (Ibid., p. 163-165.)

This is not the case in the working class districts of European cities or in the economically and socially heterogeneous lähiös of Helsinki for that matter. Instead, these are multiethnic territories, where the burden of stigma does not weight as heavily on the residents’ shoulders – or at least it does so in a different way to the “black ghetto”. Yes, the populations of working class areas in European cities are increasingly made up of people of different ethnicities, “minorities” or phenotypically marked populations. (Ibid., p. 168.) Colonialist histories, globalization and mobilization of migrant workforces – the reasons for peoples’ movements are many and intertwined. But the working class territories of European cities are not “racial” constructs. Nevertheless, the American rhetoric has been utilized to construct analytical tools by many European academics and commentators when attempting to unravel the intricacies of urban poverty on this side of the Atlantic. An “intellectual importation” as Wacquant calls it has brought the “transatlantic diffusion of concepts, models and sometimes ready-made theories from [...] American social sciences” (ibid., p. 164). Somehow an ethnicization of territory talk had taken hold of residents’ accounts on Mellunmäki. The opinions of local residents do not appear out of thin air. “The Finnish lähiö” if such an utter generalization is allowed here is not a racial or “ethnic” construct. Let us not attempt to make it into one for this will only add to undermine the social relations of neighbors living in one lähiö, whatever their background. I wish to leave the reader with

this above attempt at understanding part of the reason behind the public rhetoric and debate and with this following quote from an interviewee from New Mellunmäki, when I enquired what kind of people in her opinion live in Mellunmäki:

*All kinds of people. There's no one, specific type of person. And I think it's lovely that we have such a variety of people; old, young, foreigners and natives.*

– A female New Mellunmäki homeowner

## 6.2 Summary

This thesis set out to study the possible workings of territorial stigmatization in the lähiö of Mellunmäki. Beginning with a discussion on the urban development of Helsinki it was noted how from a very early stage a city rapidly growing in population and spreading geographically outwards gained its form largely due to land ownership and construction regulations. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century structural changes in Finland, mainly a shift towards free market economy, led to profit oriented construction of whole neighborhoods at once as *development areas*. These lähiös, as they are called, constructed out of precast materials on private land outside of Helsinki's urban core are the manifestation of efficiency and speculative construction. They are the outcome of development contracts which transferred municipal land to private constructors, for whom the main interest in the land is to maximize profits.

A body of research in Finnish social sciences has come to concentrate on the fears over social and spatial segregation which could lead to the exclusion of lähiös, which due to the historic-structural developments are already spatially distinct from the urban core of the Helsinki. There are signs of unemployment and ensuing social ills to have gathered in lähiös and there are well founded reasons to study the possible futures of and structural reasons for lähiös to thwart the possibilities of their downward spiral. But more than this is needed.

Lähiös are many and diverse and speaking of them as one and the same is very problematic. However, there is evidence to suggest that in Helsinki lähiös and their residents have in fact come to carry the blame for any perceived and existing plight they might suffer from. This thesis studied territorial stigma, which denotes exactly this; the blaming and labeling of an area and ultimately its residents for social ill.

Territorial stigma was introduced as the theoretical framework for the thesis. Territorial stigma means the collective shared belief that social and economic weakness are endemic to a territory which then becomes reviled from below and from above. Stigma may take on properties of a self-fulfilling prophecy where it only enforces those weaknesses it was supposed to record. Furthermore the idea of lähiö as a social construct and its depiction in the media were discussed as integral parts of the theory here.

This thesis asked whether residents' accounts of Mellunmäki depict a territorial stigma for Mellunmäki. The claim that on-ground reality of a territory matters little, when a strong enough stigma has been attached, proved a well-suited theoretical frame for the research here. The answer to the main research question is two-fold. Firstly, a strong internal territorial stigma was found in the division of the neighborhood to so-called Old and New Mellunmäki in common parlance. New Mellunmäki was found to denote areas of social housing where the unemployed, alcoholics, freaks and immigrants would be found. Old Mellunmäki on the other hand denoted areas of owner occupied housing. The stigma of New Mellunmäki was found to be malleable and in a state of flux, and its influence over territories would change depending on who one is speaking with. Second, a territorial stigma to set Mellunmäki somehow apart was not found. Instead, there is evidence that stigmas induced from above, for instance the stigma of the "Wild East" are an existing and widely used social construct to explain social realities through territory talk.

This thesis has added to the existing body of knowledge on territorial stigma in Helsinki. But more research is needed. This thesis presented the structural factors that lead to the construction of lähiös. But it also looked at the social construction of lähiös and the image and enforced stigma created for lähiös in public discourse, media and science. Now, more research is called for to study the particularities of the stigma on ground level, in the daily interactions of everyday life. By doing so we may just decipher the multitude of factors that drive forward the cyclical and self-fulfilling prophecy that is territorial stigma and also think of ways to unravel it.

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