

Shores in the city: opportunities, threats and challenges — viewpoints of citizens in Helsinki

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The attitudes of citizens in Helsinki towards sea shores were investigated by means of three different surveys in the late summer of 2002. Survey data showed clear evidence that the shores are important to the citizens of Helsinki. People visited the shores often and participated in many different activities including general recreation, sunbathing, nature observation, swimming and physical exercise. Problems mentioned in the surveys were related on the other hand to the purity and tidiness of the water and the shores and on the other hand to the development plans of the growing city. Most people want to keep the shores in natural condition, but at the same time they also ask for services like litter bins, benches and toilets. People using boats would appreciate better garbage management, fire places and landing stages. There was some variation among different age groups and areas, but generally the citizens of Helsinki are quite unanimous in their opinions concerning the importance of shores and archipelago for physical and mental welfare.

Introduction

Helsinki is a city with approximately 500 000 inhabitants situated by the Gulf of Finland. It has approximately 200 km of sea shores and 300 islands in the sea area. The islands are mostly small, but there are approximately 50 with a size exceeding three hectares. Management of island and shore recreational areas covers a spectrum from pristine environment to intensively managed environment (Jubenville *et al.* 1987). In urban areas most of the areas are intensively managed but the recreational shores in Helsinki are to a great extent in nearly natural condition. In addition most of the shores and the bigger islands are free for public access. This is partly based on the right of public access adopted in Nordic countries, partly on specific land use

plans in the City of Helsinki. Thus the citizens have a unique opportunity to reach the shores for recreational and other purposes and they also use this opportunity frequently. For instance, more than 600 000 people visited the islands of Suomenlinna in 2003. The recreational value of the shores is generally known, but only a few studies concerning the attitudes and activities of people using the shores were carried out.

Outdoor recreation can be divided into two overlapping categories. Passive recreation is spending leisure time in a pleasant environment, e.g. sunbathing. Active recreation includes physical exercise like jogging or swimming. In addition, many people have special hobbies like birdwatching, sailing or fishing. In Finland participation in outdoor recreation is very high. During the course of one year 97% of Finns

participate in outdoor activities and visit nature. All age groups, genders and social groups are equally active and participation is highest during the summer months (Sievänen 1993, 2001). The most popular activities include walking, swimming, spending time at summer cottages, picking berries and mushrooms, cycling and boating. Fishing and hunting are male-dominated, while women are more interested in walking and picking berries and mushrooms. In summertime the frequency of participation in outdoor recreation is higher than during the rest of the year.

Many studies on the use of recreation areas were carried out, but generally little attention was paid to the sea or lake shores. Forests and waterways are most important for Finns when considering areas ideal for recreation. These elements were mentioned by 56% and 54% of the respondents in a survey, respectively (Eskelinen 1979). Consequently shores often include the most attractive elements of recreation. In a study in northeastern Helsinki (Tyrväinen *et al.* 2003) 41% of the respondents mentioned places near sea shores when asked about their most favoured recreational sites outside the study area.

The purpose of this study was to get answers to the following questions: (1) What are the recreational activities of the citizens of Helsinki? (2) How do they use the shores? (3) What are the problems and concerns regarding use and planning of shores?

Table 1. Distribution of groups (sex, age, area/school) in valid responses to the questionnaires for shore users (A), boat users (B) and school children (D).

	A	B		D
<i>N</i>	742	212		365
Sex (%)				
Females	68	24		48
Males	32	76		52
Age (%)				
5–19 years	10	4		100
20–34 years	32	18		–
35–49 years	30	41		–
50–64 years	21	32		–
> 65 years	7	5		–
Area (%)				
Western	14	18	School 1	22
Middle	26	46	School 2	7
Eastern	56	36	School 3	43
Islands	4	–	School 4	29

Material and methods

The survey included questionnaires distributed in late summer 2002 to three groups of people within the city of Helsinki:

- A people using the shores (742 completed surveys were accepted)
- B boaters (212 accepted surveys)
- D school children (365 accepted surveys).

The questionnaires for these groups were similar, but not identical, containing questions about activities, problems and expectations related to the shores. The questionnaires have been published in whole in Finnish (Lodenius and Lepänen 2003).

Questionnaire A was distributed in ten public places around Helsinki. The locations were chosen in order to reach as many citizens from different parts of Helsinki as possible. These locations included city libraries, cafés and two public happenings. Questionnaire B was distributed in six boating clubs along the shores of Helsinki. Questionnaires A and B were open for all interested who returned their questionnaires into boxes at the same place where they received them. Questionnaire D was distributed to pupils from 5th and 6th grade classes (normally aged 11–12 years) in four primary schools (Munkkiniemi, Tahvonlahti, Laajasalo and Meri-Rastila). The answers from that questionnaire were collected by the teachers.

The number of accepted questionnaires was 1319; those were divided into five age groups and four areas (Table 1). The most common reason for rejecting a questionnaire was that the response was incomplete. Although the answers to the questionnaires do not form a representative sample of Helsinki citizens, the number of respondents poses a good base for evaluation.

Results

The results are shown as relative occurrence for different categories. Sums may exceed 100, as in several cases respondents could choose more than one alternative.

Questionnaire A (shore users)

The most important forms of recreation were: general outdoor life (being outdoors, picnics, sunbathing, partying, camping), sports (walking, cycling, jogging, skiing, swimming, skating), hobbies (walking dogs, birdwatching, photography, fishing, botany, washing rugs, flying kites) and boating (boating, canoeing) (Table 2). Walking was mentioned by 81% of the respondents and was more popular among elder people (90% in age groups 50 years and older as compared with 57% in age group 5–19 years). Bathing was a little more popular among women (63%) than men (56%), and it was mentioned less frequently by respondents in the central parts of Helsinki (39%). Also sunbathing was more popular among women (42%) than men (32%), and its popularity decreased from 52% in age group 5–19 years to 22% in age group > 65 years. Men more than women were interested in boating (25% and 8% respectively) and fishing (21% and 5.5%, respectively). Fishing was more popular in the eastern parts (13%) than in other parts of the town (2%–6%).

Forty percent of the respondents used the shore a couple of times a week and 27% used it daily. There was a strong trend among people to use the shore daily for recreation with older people using it more often than younger (Table 3). A majority (52%) of the respondents used the shore for some years and 38% for decades or the whole life. In the last mentioned group the proportion of men was higher (49%) than that of women (33%). Almost all the respondents (95%) considered shores important for their mental health. Seventy-three percent also wanted to keep the shores natural. Furthermore a great majority (85%) considered it relatively easy to reach the shores in Helsinki.

The most important problems people encountered on shores were related to public nuisance

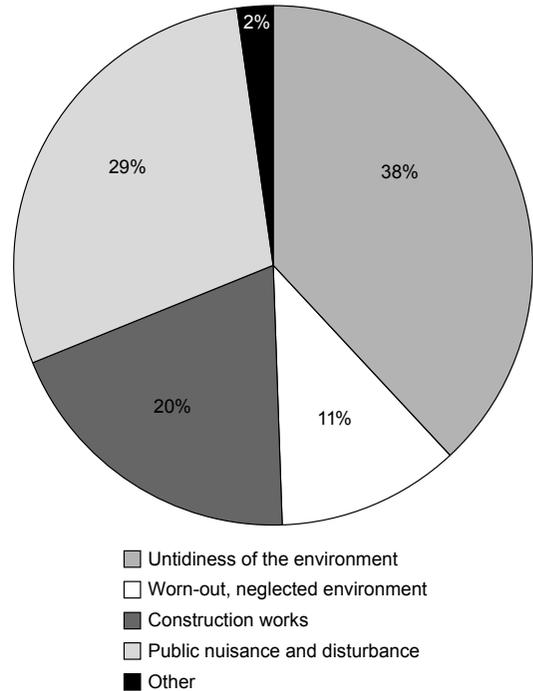


Fig. 1. Questionnaire A for shore users: Causes of concern related to the shores.

and disturbance (34%), to the untidiness of the environment (30%) and to construction works (Fig. 1). Water quality was a matter of concern, especially among young people (Fig. 2) and was mentioned more frequently in western and central Helsinki (37% and 39% respectively) than in eastern Helsinki (29%) and the islands (32%). This concern obviously reflects the actual water quality in these areas. The youngest age group (5–19 years) saw construction activities as a problem less frequently (13%) than the other age groups (29%–37%). Public nuisance was disturbing more the older citizens (from 19% in age group 1 to 33% in age group 5). When asked

Table 2. Questionnaire A for shore users: What are you usually doing on the shore?

Outdoor living	32.6%
Exercise	49.6%
Hobbies	10.5%
Boating	3.7%
Other	3.6%

Table 3. Questionnaire A for shore users: How often do you use the shore for recreation? Percentage of people responding "daily" in different age groups.

5–19 years	14.7
20–34 years	17.9
35–49 years	26.7
50–64 years	37.0
> 65 years	55.1

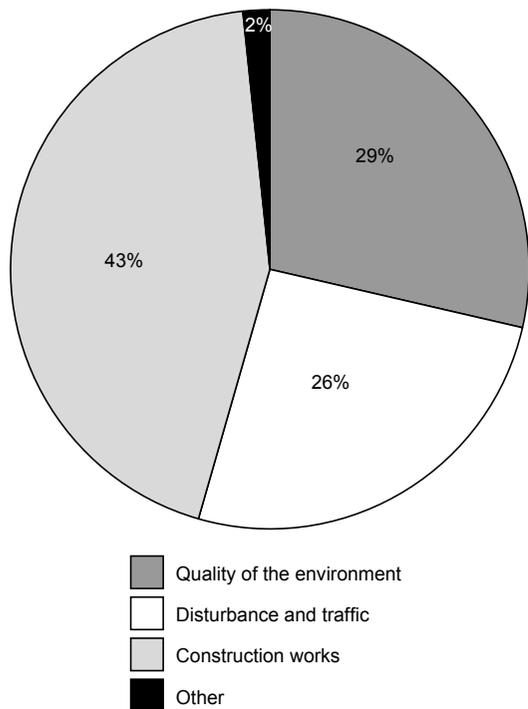


Fig. 2. Questionnaire A for shore users: What kind of future threats are related to the shores?

about the most important future threats, more people (43%) were concerned about construction plans than about quality of the biological environment (29%) or nuisance and traffic (26%; Fig. 3).

More than half of the respondents were opposed to more recreational infrastructure or services on the shores. The youngest age group (5–19 years) was more interested (69%) in getting new recreational constructions or services than the older age groups (35%–47%). The expectations of the respondents can be grouped into: general (waste management, benches, kiosks/cafés etc.; 41%), related to swimming (27%), related to exercise (15%), related to boat-

Table 4. Questionnaire B for boat users: What kind of a boat do you use?

Motor boat (> 10 hp)	51.4%
Motor boat (< 10 hp)	3.3%
Rowing boat	4.2%
Canoe	20.3%
Sailing boat	32.1%
Other	3.3%

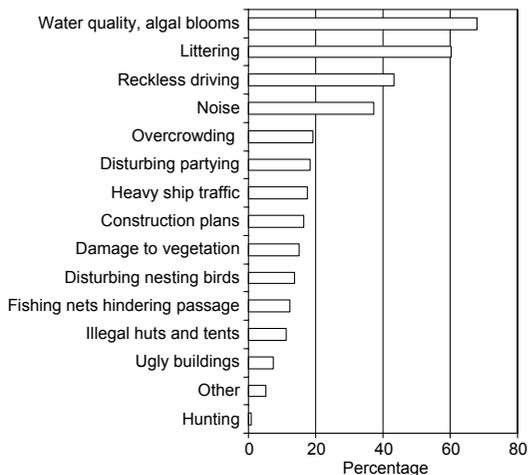


Fig. 3. Questionnaire B for boat users: What are the main problems related to the archipelago and sea areas?

ing (7%) or related to hobbies (7%). When asked about unwanted constructions at the shores, many people mentioned ugly buildings and facilities, cars and car parks.

Questionnaire B (boat users)

As expected, a great majority (76%) of the respondents to the boating questionnaire were men. Most people used motor boats equipped with engines over 10 hp or sailing boats (Table 4). The popularity of sailing increased with age (Table 5). Boat users have usually been engaged in the hobby for a long time: no less than 67% responded that they have been boating for decades or the whole life. The respondents are also very active boat users: 71% were at sea at least a couple of times per week. Almost all (99%) saw the sea as an important place to calm down and find peace of mind.

Table 5. Questionnaire B for boat users: Distribution of sailors in different age groups

5–19 years	25%
20–34 years	25%
35–49 years	28%
50–64 years	40%
> 65 years	50%

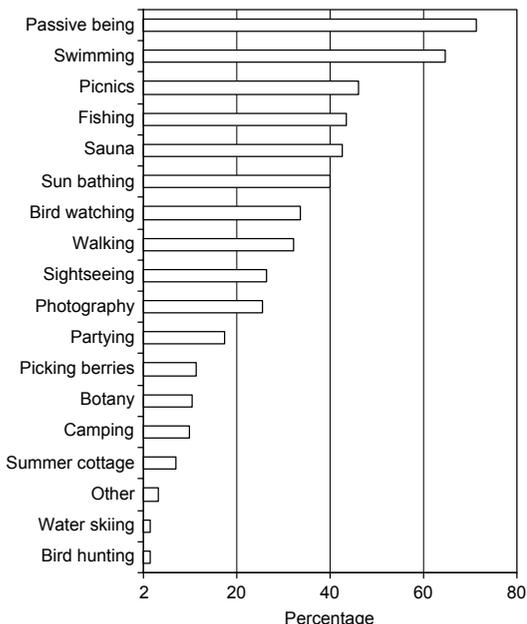


Fig. 4. Questionnaire B for boat users: What kind of activities are you involved in when boating?

The most important destinations for boaters were the islands of Pihlajasaaret, Kaunissaari and Suomenlinna. These are all rather large islands with public transport and services. A large number of other, smaller islands were also mentioned.

The boaters listed a wide range of recreational activities (Fig. 4). Passive staying and relaxing was more frequently (78%) mentioned by women than men (69%). The same was true for sunbathing (55% and 35%, respectively), walking (49% and 27% respectively) and bird watching (49% and 29%, respectively). Men were clearly more interested (49%) in fishing than women (26%). The popularity of the sauna increases with age (from 30% in age group 1 to 60% in age group 5). In case of photography there seemed to be geographical differences that are difficult to explain: western Helsinki 43%, central Helsinki 17% and eastern Helsinki 27%.

Problems associated with boating included issues related to the quality of the environment and to the behaviour of other people (Fig. 5). Women were more concerned about disturbing nesting birds than men (28% and 9%, respectively), while men were more concerned about

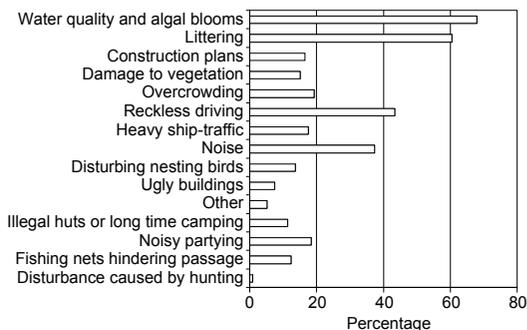


Fig. 5. Questionnaire B for boat users: What kind of problems are related to the shores and to the archipelago?

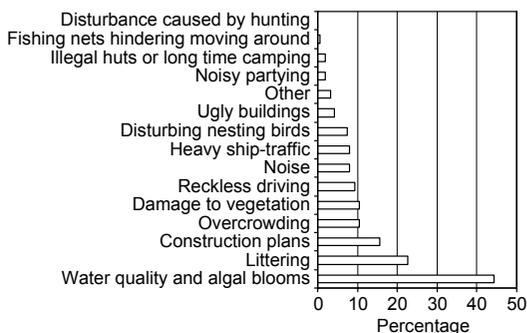


Fig. 6. Questionnaire B for boat users: What kind of future threats are related to the shores or to the archipelago?

fishing nets which hinder boating (14% and 6%, respectively). Young people more often than older ones mentioned the problem of ugly buildings spoiling the landscape (from 13% in age group 1 to 0% in age group 5).

When asked about future problems, the answers were similar to those concerning the current problems (Fig. 6). Older people were more concerned than younger people about water quality and algal blooms (from 13% in age group 5–19 years to 50% in age group > 65 years). The same was true for littering (from 0% in age group 5–19 years to 40% in age group > 65 years). Among boat users women were more eager than men to preserve the shores and the archipelago untouched (86% and 68%, respectively).

Although most boaters wanted to save the archipelago untouched, many wished to have more services on the islands: better waste management, landing places, fireplaces and toilets

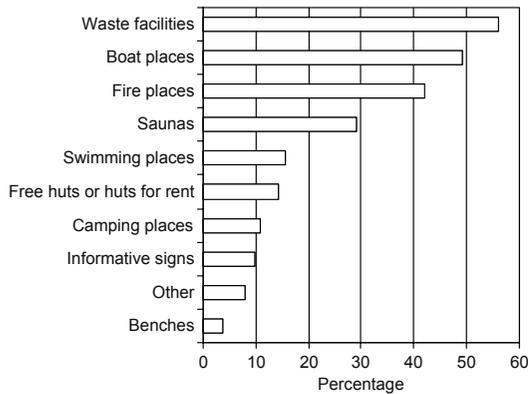


Fig. 7. Questionnaire B for boat users: What kind of services do you want for the islands?

(Fig. 7). Young people were interested in swimming facilities and camping. Women were a little more interested in fireplaces than men (49% and 40% respectively), while men more often wanted to have better landing places (52% and 41% respectively). When asked about infrastructure or facilities not suited for the archipelago, most respondents (87%) answered that they do not exist, while some others mentioned uncontrolled camping, huts and the presence of the army. Most respondents wanted to open the military areas on the islands for public recreation (men 72%, women 53%).

Questionnaire D (school children)

Three of the four schools where the school children questionnaire was distributed were situated in eastern Helsinki. All of them are situated quite near the sea shore. The percentage of boys was approximately equal to that of girls (Table 1).

Most pupils (72%) responded that the school sometimes arranges trips to the shore. In one school 40% answered that the school arranges such trips often. Swimming and sunbathing are the most popular ways of spending time on the shores (Fig. 8). Girls were more interested than boys in sunbathing (64% and 38%, respectively) and, like male adults, boys were more interested in fishing (38% and 10%, respectively). Girls were more often interested in enjoyment of nature (24% and 14%, respectively). They were also more interested than the boys in picnics

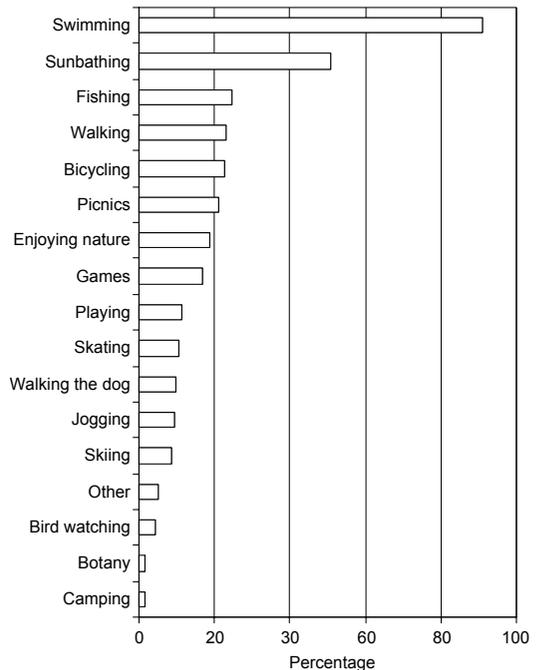


Fig. 8. Questionnaire D for school children: What are you doing on the shore?

(27% and 15%, respectively). School children did not in general (71%) consider the shores as especially important places for relaxation. Sixty-six percent of the pupils thought the shores should be kept untouched.

The main problems mentioned by the pupils were related to littering, overcrowding and water pollution (Fig. 9). Most respondents (75%) thought that there have been no significant changes related to the shores they use. Boys were more often than girls of the opinion that development of the shores is negative (13% and 7%, respectively). When asked about the most popular activities on the shores swimming got the largest amount of the answers (261) while sunbathing was second (71). Other answers were resting/passive being (27), relaxing/reading (19), fishing (14) and watching nature/landscapes/picnic (14). More than half of the respondents (53%) have been boating in the archipelago and appreciating fresh air (21), landscapes (20), waves (19), speed (12), fishing (10), nature (8), swimming (8) and boating (7). When asked about the best experiences at the shores or in the archipelago, the answers were usually related to

picnics (27%), nature (16%), swimming (14%) and passive being (13%). Also more than half of the pupils (58%) move around on the ice in winter mostly skating and skiing.

Discussion and conclusions

In most industrialized countries the economic welfare, reduced age of retirement, longer life expectancy, and the amount of free time have been significant in the past 150 years. At the same time urbanization has in many areas been rapid. This has often resulted in changed attitudes towards the physical environment and an increased participation in outdoor recreation (Glyptis 1993, Sievänen 2001, Cordell *et al.* 2002). In Britain participation rates have increased in virtually every outdoor activity including angling, field sports, boating, hiking, walking (Cherry 1993).

The answers to the questionnaires gave clear evidence that the shores were very important to the citizens of Helsinki. People visited the shores very often and participated in many different activities including general recreation, sunbathing, nature observation, swimming and physical exercise. The activities were similar to those reported for the Finnish population in general (Sievänen 2001). They were also similar to the shore-based activities at Loch Lomond reported by Dickinson (2000) although physical exercise seems to have higher priority in Finland than in Scotland. In this survey the importance of special hobbies or activities was not pronounced although Cordell *et al.* (2002) found a very significant increase in activities like birdwatching, hiking and backpacking during 1983–2001. Many people emphasize the importance of nature experiences and quietness which improve mental welfare. The problems mentioned were related on the other hand to the purity and tidiness of the physical environment (water and shores) and on the other hand to building plans. Most people wanted to keep the shores in natural condition but at the same time they also asked for services like litter bins, benches and toilets. People using boats wanted better garbage management, fireplaces and landing stages.

Jaatinen (1973) studied the recreational use of the Central Park in Helsinki and a recreation

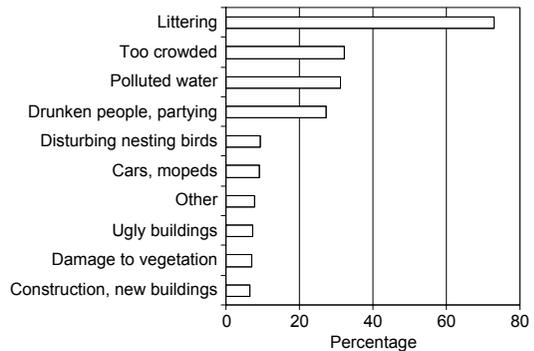


Fig. 9. Questionnaire D for school children: What problems are related to your favourite shore?

area outside the town. He found that the majority of the users in these areas (64% and 58%, respectively) were men although the share of males in the total population was only 44% at that time. In that survey there were no significant differences between the sexes in overall participation in outdoor recreation, which indicates a change during this period. The most important activities in summer mentioned by Jaatinen (walking, running, cycling and swimming) were the same as in this survey. There was some variation between different age groups and areas, but generally the respondents to this survey seemed to be quite unanimous in their opinions concerning the importance of shores and archipelago for physical and mental welfare.

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