

**Teuvo Peltoniemi**  
*teuvo.peltoniemi@a-klinikka.fi*

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## FINNISH UTOPIAN SETTLEMENTS IN NORTH AMERICA

*"On the other side of a vast ocean somewhere there is the land, where the wave dashes on the beach of happiness,  
 where the flowers most beautiful always stay at blossom,  
 there one can forget the sorrows of tomorrow.  
 Oh, if I once could fare to the dream land,  
 Then I would never leave it as the birds do.  
 But wingless, I cannot fly, I am a prisoner of the earth,  
 only by dreams, which reach so far, I can travel there."*

The Finnish tango "Dream land" by Unto Mononen is a typical example of utopian thinking, a concept that is dear for all human beings.

The word utopia derives from Thomas More's book "De optimo statu rei publicae deque nova insula Utopia" that was published in 1516. The Greek word utopia thus refers to a (non-)location. In everyday usage the meaning of the word is broader. Webster's dictionary (Allee 1979) explains the word as "any ideal state, constitution, system, or way of life; ideally perfect but impracticable, visionary". The Finnish equivalent Nykysuomen sanakirja (1966) also lists synonyms referring to dreams and fantasies.

The tradition of utopian literature goes far back to the Hellenic Greece. Plato deals with the topic in his "Republic" and the "Laws" and Aristotle in the "Politics". Plato's utopia of order has been an ideal to many totalitarian states.

The influence of More's Utopia has been remarkable. Kautsky thought it predicted a Socialist state. The Catholic Church sees in the Utopia the Medieval monk ideal and More was canonized in 1935.

In the 17th century a vast utopian literature developed. It was represented by names like Rousseau, Tommaso Campanella and Denis Vairasse. The utopian communities described by the latter two authors can be classified as socialist utopias. Simultaneously also bourgeois utopias were published, among which especially Francis Bacon's "Nova Atlantis" become famous. It has been suggested that the Suomenlinna fortress off Helsinki has been designed on the basis of Bacon's ideas.

The utopian socialism was given birth by the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century. Its principal representatives are Claude Saint-Simon, Francois Fourier and Robert Owen. Their solution to the

problems of industrialism was harmonious socialism that is based on the cooperation of people and on class harmony. Utopian socialists believed that a "New Man" with higher moral standards should be raised.

The ideas of utopian socialism were shadowed by the socialism of Marx and Engels (Kateb & Skinner 1968). This was reflected also in the Finnish utopian settlement Sointula (Harmony) where the founder Matti Kurikka was a "Dream Socialist" and his partner A.B. Mäkelä a Marxian.

It is quite easy to trace utopian elements in the main ideologies of our time, Christian faith, socialism and capitalism. All promise a future society where development has reached its culmination. Socialism promises a communist society, Christianity heaven. There is the utopian element also in capitalism, even if more hidden than in the two others. As what else is the belief in continuous growth of standard of living than a utopia a kind.

#### Finnish emigration and utopias

The Finns are realistic in their utopias. At the turn of the century they did not establish their attempts in Tahiti or Shangry La but in the back yards of North and South America. Only the goals were set high.

There has been a dozen Finnish utopian settlements in all continents. About the turn of the century Matti Kurikka founded three of them; El Dorado in Queensland, Australia (Koivukangas 1972), as well as Sointula and Sammon Takojat in British Columbia, Canada. A few years later in the USA two cooperative farms started; the Finnish Colony in Redwood Valley, Cal. and the Finnish cooperative farm in McKinnon, Ga. All five were mainly socialist oriented settlements. Also the emigration to Soviet Karelia from North America is related to the same tradition (Kero 1983).

Nationalist oriented attempts at the turn of the century build up the next group. This consists of Colonia Finlandesa in Argentina (Peltoniemi 1981) and Ponnistus in Cuba (Jarva 1971).

On the background of the third group were religious sects, vegetarianism and thrive for sun, the Tropic Fever. (Lähteenmäki 1981). These settlements were established in the 1920's and 30's in Dominican Republic (Viljavakka), Brazil (Penedo) and Paraguay (Colonia Villa Alborado).

Only one present settlement continues with utopian ideas. That is Jad Hashmona, the Finnish kibbutz in Israel. In addition some communities of green's movement in Finland can ideologically be added to the list.

Round one million Finns have emigrated abroad, about 420 000 of them to North America (Siirtolaisuusinstituutti 1984). The continent's Finnish utopian settlements count, however, less than a thousand people altogether. The role of utopian emigration seemingly does not lay on its quantitative aspects.

The same holds truth when the Finnish utopian settlements are compared with the utopian

emigration to North America as a whole. In fact, the continent has most probably received the bulk of all utopias in history. Famous ones are the Oneida Perfectionists, Amana, Brook Farm, North American Phalanx, Cabot farm, and the New Harmony, to mention a few. And of course, many religious communities like Mennonites and Quakers belong to the same tradition (Kateb & Skinner 1968).

### **Matti Kurikka**

The Finnish utopian emigration to North America is closely associated with the life history of Matti Kurikka. He was born in Ingria in 1863 and died in Penkese, Conn. in 1915. He was a charismatic journalist and author and at certain times one of the leading figures in the Finnish worker's movement. In Kurikka's biography, Kalevi Kalemaa (1978) summarizes his life: "The uniqueness of Kurikka was the fact that only a few people have been able to attract as much of enormous expectations and still fewer betrayed miserably all hopes thus directed."

Another scholar Donald Wilson (1981) emphasizes Kurikka as one of the fascinating type of "intellectual that no longer exists, one who struggled to bring his ideas into being, not just to talk about them".

Kurikka's ideological thinking was derived mainly from three traditions: socialism, theosophy and writings of Tolstoy. In addition he was very nationalistic and highly appreciated Kalevala. But greatest of all for Kurikka was Jesus Nazareth and his Sermon on the Mount.

### **Sointula**

The attempt of Kurikka to establish a utopian settlement in Australia had failed (Koivukangas 1972). Despite of the news, the Finns in British Columbia were eager to start their own settlement. They send money for the fare and Kurikka arrived in Nanaimo, B.C. in August 1900 (Halminen 1936).

Kurikka found a site for the settlement in Malcolm Island, about 300 kilometers from Vancouver. The island was renamed to Malkosaari and the settlement got the name Sointula. An advance troop of five men sailed to Malcolm Island on December 15, 1901.

The Finns founded Kalevan Kansa Colonization Company. Shares were issued at \$ 200 each, but many penniless emigrants paid the share by work instead of money.

In the beginning the host country was very supportive for Sointula. The Minister of Natural Resources giped at Sointula's members that Kalevan Kansa's rules more resembled a constitution than rules of a commercial organization. Sointula was given an exempt of taxes, duties to clear land and an English school.

To assist Kurikka his friend and colleague A.B. Mäkelä was hired directly from Finland. Already before to the settling of Malkosaari Kalevan Kansa had started a journal which advertized for

Sointula: "The sceneries in Malcolm Island misleadingly resemble Finnish archipelago. Only the snow-peaked mountains in the background give the scenery a festive magnificence."

The Kalevan Kansa members were mainly North American Finns even though a few immigrated directly from Finland. Among the newcomers there were loggers and miners but also many taylor and shoemakers, young idealists and adventurers. According to the annual report of 1902 Sointula had 127 inhabitants.

Sointula got wide publicity and Kurikka traveled round the continent to recruit new members. Many were great believers in Sointula idea. On the other side there were the church-minded Finns of America who were struck by the anti-clerical character of Sointula.

It was soon discovered that Malcolm Island was situated unfortunately far from populated areas. To sell timber and fish was costly even if both were well available in Sointula. Kalevan Kansa was soon heavily in debts and later a great part of Kurikka's time went with financial arrangements.

A borderline in Sointula's fate was January 29, 1903. In the middle of a general assembly a fire began. It resulted in the death of 11 persons. After the fire accusations were laid from different sides. The relations between Kurikka and Mäkelä quickly deteriorated. But Sointula still attracted new members so that in the end of 1903 the count resulted in 238 people.

In 1904 Kalevan Kansa made an agreement with the government of British Columbia to build bridges. The contract was a fiasco. That understandably added the disagreements.

There was disharmony also on more ideological issues. In Kurikka's view marriage was a capitalist vice. Some of the members of the community supported free love. Outside Sointula the settlements was put a mark as a base for sexual promiscuity (Kolehmainen 1941).

Finally the disagreements led to the point where Kurikka left the leadership. In the final meeting in October of 1904 the atmosphere was strained. About half of the members joined Kurikka when he left the island (Wilson 1981). Next year the remaining 66 members disbanded the company and land was divided between the shareholders.

Nowadays there are about 750 inhabitants in Sointula. The cooperative store and the library are still run mainly by the descendants of the Finnish pioneers. Most important, the name Sointula has remained as the official name and post address of the community.

Utopian ideas have remained in Malcolm Island in the way that in the 1960's a group of American hippies moved there. They live a simple life trying to get along without new technology. Their ideology is, however, rather back to nature than the socialist ideas represented by Kalevan Kansa.

### **Sammon Takojat**

At Sointula harbor when Mäkelä saw Kurikka supporters off to Vancouver he told Kurikka: "I

intend to dedicate the rest of my life to make you harmless to the mankind." And Kurikka replied: "You condemn me now. But some day I will find a real Harmony."

A part of the members who left simultaneously with Kurikka were disillusioned. But there were many who thought the the idea was betrayed by Mäkelä.

In November 1904 Kurikka chose a group of 24 bachelors to establish a new settlement "Sammon Takojat". This time no women were allowed as it was considered that women were a distracting element. The new site was in Webster's Corner at Frazer river, about 30 miles from Vancouver. A timber contract was done. January 1, 1905 the group departed for the new utopia.

The life in Sammon Takojat was based totally on collective ideas. The work was equally shared and all lived in a dormitory hall. The ideological emphasis was apparent in the seal of the settlement which bore theosophic symbols.

The community life turned out to be hard. The contract was not profitable and the winter was exceptionally cold and snowy. Kurikka's enthusiasms had faded. A small group of men did not really correspond to the magnitude of Sointula. In the spring he left for a lecturing tour and did not return any more.

Kurikka still planned new utopian communities. After the male Sammon Takojat he even laid plans for a women's settlement. But Kurikka's time was over and nothing came out of that nor of his other plans for Canadian or Finnish utopian ventures.

In Sammon Takojat disagreements developed. In 1909 Sammon Takojat become a cooperative, and in 1912 the disagreement had reached the point where it was decided to disband the company. Land was shared and Webster's Corner continued as an ordinary Finntown. Now renamed to Maple Ridge the village still has some inhabitants of Finnish origin (Katainen 1971).

### **The Finnish Colony Inc.**

The Finnish Colony in California was founded by Finnish miners from Butte, Montana in 1912. The idea came up in a meeting of the Lodge of the Knights of Kaleva. After a orientation visit it was decided to buy a farm in Redwood Valley near Ukiah, Cal. The farm had 1453 acres land and some cattle. The price was 56 250 dollars. When the farm started about 500 people lived in Redwood Valley. There was already another settlement in the valley founded by Scottish emigrants (Peltoniemi 1981b).

In the beginning seven families moved from Butte and later people came also from Nevada and Oregon. During the existence of the cooperative farm there lived 33 families altogether. The number of families did not, however, exceed 20 families at a time.

The Finnish Colony Inc. was founded in October 1913. The capital was \$ 12 000 divided into shares of \$ 10. Five leaders, who succeeded each other, were elected to the company. Alex

Kauhanen headed the farm most of the time.

First all the members lived in a same building which also had a community kitchen. The building burned down two years later and families lost all their property. A new building, a sauna and some family houses were built instead.

Redwood Valley was an attempt of the labor movement. Specially in the beginning it was spoken on socialism a lot. Everyone got same pay, a dollar a day. Later that caused quarrels. The Finns did not go to the church in the valley. The school was English but otherwise only Finnish was spoken in the farm.

Farming suffered from the fact that the soil was less fertile and from the lack of water. The fields were cleared in forests like at home in Finland. First it was tried to raise hops but after the price fall this had to be given up. Pear trees suffered from diseases. Alfa-alfa and corn were then tried with little results.

Wine production which needs great care ended because of the water problems and finally because of the Prohibition. Chicken, dairy and beef cattle was hold in the farm. Raising horses was given up when the automobile became more common.

Railroad shingles were brought to San Francisco by horse because roads were bad. The threshing machine of the farm was also available for the neighboring farmers to rent.

The Finnish Colony was a vacation and week-end picnic spot for the Bay area Finns. The distance to Redwood Valley took about four hours. Summer and weekend guests were given good care because they brought in money to the farm. Time was spent in good company and home wine was freely available (Peltoniemi 1980a). Little plays were performed on the yard of Lind house or in the school building (Carlson 1964).

After ten years the farming was still unprofitable. In 1922 with a majority of two-thirds it was decided to divide the company into separate farms.

Seven families, however, wanted to continue with the cooperative farm and took loans for it. Ten years later also this attempt fall down. The Great Depression had started and there was not enough money to pay the loans. United California Bank took over the farm.

There would have been a more fertile valley available for the Finns in the vicinity. But seemingly miners were not very well acquainted to evaluate farming land nor later to run the farm. But the immediate reason for failure was the Great Depression.

The Finnish heritage of Redwood valley is not specially apparent anymore. Only a couple of people of Finnish origin live in the area. Total population of the valley has increased to nearly 4 000. By irrigation farming has finally become profitable.

## **McKinnon cooperative farm**

In accordance with the Finnish tradition, the establishment of the Finnish cooperative farm in Georgia was determined in a sauna. The founders were Finnish emigrants in Brooklyn, N.Y. Other members were acquired by advertisements in Finnish American newspapers.

Georgia cooperative farm was founded in McKinnon, close by Jessup, Ga. On the farm some German emigrants had earlier unsuccessfully tried to breed cattle. The committee of the Finnish venture, however, informed that the farm was perfect, "like a Western prairie, flat and bare of trees". 1500 hectares were bought in overprice and Fairfield Co-operative Association was formed. 100 shares valued \$ 550 each. In 1923 the farm was renamed to Wayne Produce Association in accordance with the the county where it was situated. (Suomalainen ... 1922).

30-40 families joined the farm. Different kinds of farming was tried. Results from tobacco, potatoes, sugar, sweet potato, cabbage and corn were all rather discouraging. Cattle was raised and chicken production at times was the specialty of the farm. Members also did logging as a part time work. The best results were achieved in 1929.

During the Great Depression economic difficulties were met. Both husbands and wives had to look for jobs elsewhere, even in New York area. In this way it was possible to gain some money for the farm.

The farm had a community kitchen and a boarding house. The Germans had built a church in the area but the Finns demonstrated their feelings towards the clergy by turning the church into a mule stable.

A special feature of the Finnish cooperative farm was the emigration to Soviet Karelia in 1920's and 30's. Many members thought that the real utopia was to be find in Soviet Union (Kero 1983). A part returned later to North America but only one came back to McKinnon.

The cooperative went on and the population decreased on the 1940's and 50's when children went to schools further-away and took jobs elsewhere. In 1966 a paper company bought the farm which once again had ample forests. By that time some 20 families still resided in the farm. All were given a lot. The school and the hall remained in common possession.

## **Discussion**

**Kurikka.** Even though both Kurikka's attempts and the cooperative farms have all been discussed here, one has to remember that they do not have a direct connection. Kurikka's name was known to the inhabitants in Redwood Valley but obviously his ideas did not have much influence for inception of the California cooperative farm. Kurikka's name did not come up in McKinnon which was founded a decade later. The cooperative farms also got members in areas from where moving to Sointula had been insignificant: Montana, Nevada and New York.

**Socialism.** All the four attempts started with symbols of the worker's movement. The movers were socialists although they represented different groupings.

In all of the four attempts inner ideological disagreements arose although there is no reason for exaggeration. The disagreements were most often about management and economy. The emigration to Soviet Karelia shows the strength of the labor movement in McKinnon. But this emphasis weakened quickly also in cooperative farms which had goals like equal pay rotation of jobs and shared decision making at start.

**Country life.** It seems that a common feature of the attempts was the desire into the country. The background of the members was industrial even if many of them originally came from rural areas in Finland. The environment was, however, quite different from Finland and the members did not have much experience in farming.

The choice of the sites for settlements shows the quite stubborn desire to the country in any price whatsoever: Redwood Valley was founded in an area where also a green neighboring valley was on sale, McKinnon in an overpriced spot which German emigrants just had forsaken.

Moving out into the country obviously meant for the Finns searching for security, escape from the hazards of the industrial world. Working in forests, mines and metal factories was heavy and insecure. The economic circumstances pushed the movers to leave.

**Independence.** The utopian settlements in North America offered the Finnish emigrants a community where one could escape as well home country's as the new country's authorities.

The members had left behind the Finnish red tape and the strict informal control of the small villages. They had also forsaken the illiberal guardianship of the church to which they were tired. They did not let any priest in Sointula, the church in McKinnon was changed to a mule stable and the Finns simply did not go to the church in Redwood Valley.

All settlements had strong economical ties, debts and trade with the world around them. This hastened the assimilation with the outside world. On the other hand assimilation was detained because of the dominant position of the Finnish language and the fact that the settlements were to quite an extent self-supporting units: they offered food, residence, entertainment and education.

The Finnish utopian settlements turned into idyllic extended families in which both work, joy and sorrows were divided democratically. Settlements were like the best sides of the old country in miniature: there were enough people so that they did not had often to appeal to outsiders for aid.

The surrounding society's opinions seem often be characterized by admiration for the diligence of the Finnish people. The Finns followed the heritage of their Protestant work ethics. Assimilation did not start until people were compelled to search for jobs and schools elsewhere.

**Dependence.** The Finnish utopias did not last long. Kalevan Kansa member Matti Halminen

writes in his book (1936) on Sointula how much he had hoped that "we should already at start have had as much common sense and economic expertise as we had unconsidered sacrifice and enthusiasm".

But although in all settlements disagreements arose it would be unjust to interpret the failing of the settlements only due to the special nature of the human being.

The obvious reason was that the settlements were founded on wrong sites: there was too much work and too little results. They could not cope with the economic system of the surrounding world. In the March of Kalevan Kansa it was proudly song:

"Forward Kaleva's folk,  
off from the wage slaves,  
our way leads into the freedom.  
Slavery does not  
produce happiness."

But how much ever was tried, the slave band with the surrounding society could not be severed. When practical troubles were many did not even the spirit last. High ideals had to be given away.

This hastened the emerging of both ideological and personal conflicts in Sointula and Sammon Takojat. In the case of Redwood Valley it is easy to associate the end with the Great Depression which the cooperative heavily in debt could not stand. On the other hand, the McKinnon farm did not end for reasons of economy but rather because of urbanization. The old people got tired and the young people left to search for a better future elsewhere.

### **New utopias**

Palmgren (1963) named his study on utopian literature "Utopias of Hope and Fear". By the title he refers to the fact that the utopian literature of our century has rather been pessimistic prospects of totalitarian states than expectations of a dream land. Especially since 1930's negative utopias like Huxley's "Brave New World" and Orwell's "In 1984" have been predominant.

Thoughts of fear, and especially fear of nuclear war have spread widely during the last few decades. For the first time in the history it is really possible to destroy all the mankind at one time. Still more distinctly only two ways seem to exist for the mankind: heaven or hell, the two utopian extremes.

This dualism connects the older utopian settlements to the newcomers of Sointula; the group of hippies: a strive towards a society where the harmony exists not only within human beings but as well between the mankind and the nature.

A few decades ago a slogan claimed that ideologies had died. One could interpret that also referring to utopias. But utopias don't die. It has instead begun a new era of utopias. What makes

the difference to the previous ones is that even if the new utopias project pessimistic predictions they also emphasize the possibilities of human beings to reverse the unfavorable development.

The message of new utopias is not to get everyone to live primitively on the countryside. In women's weeklies there are sarcastic examples of romantic returns to the nature, unsuccessful attempts of personal utopias.

But environmental movement fulfill the traditional role of utopian societies. They help us see what is important and how we can strive for it.

Philosopher George Kateb (1968) writes that utopian communities act "as the conscience of all societies". The utopian settlements widen the thinking and understanding of human being. They point out many issues which we now consider as natural and universal but which really can be changed. This was finely understood by J.K. Kari, the translator of Bellamy's "In 2000" who in 1902 in the preface of the Finnish edition writes: "The book in a way opens the eyes of the reader to see in another light many circumstances of today which now are pretended to be natural and rightful."

The Finnish utopian settlements have turned out to be failures but that is not very important. It belongs to the concept of utopia that it really can never be achieved. What really is important is the strive towards a utopia. And that is what we all share.

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