Headline: Helsinki is returning to the era of smaller squares

Subhead: Critics say that the Finnish construction companies are building unpractically tiny apartments, but modern homes are not exceptionally small.

(250 words)

In Finland, apartment construction has waned dramatically since 2022 due to the rising interest rates and consumers’ economic insecurity. It can be hard to recall, that just few years ago, especially in Helsinki metropolitan area, new homes were built in haste. Investor market was booming, and new residents were floating in the cities until the COVID-19.

As new high-rises were emerging, size of brand-new apartments provoked discussion. For example, a Finnish property developer and manager Joo Group is renting out three-room apartments size of less than 40 square meters (430 ft²).

Critics claim that people do not want smaller apartments – they want small housing expenses. As cost of construction increases, residents living in big cities are forced to choose smaller apartments to curb their expenses. It has been argued also that constructors are thinking mainly investors’, not the inhabitants’ interests when architecting the apartments.

But are homes constructed since the 2010s really tinier compared to apartments built back in the “good old days”? Digging of home sales data reveals that there can be found one period during which flats were made in Helsinki even smaller than today.

To compare apartment sizes from different decades, I investigated database maintained by The Ministry of the Environment. <https://asuntojen.hintatiedot.fi/haku/> The data does not show median size of all apartments existing in Helsinki, but it contains details of good 1,712 studios, two-rooms and three-rooms sold during last 12 months.

Kuva, joka sisältää kohteen teksti, kuvakaappaus, Fontti, numero

Kuvaus luotu automaattisesti

Every second household in Helsinki is a single-family household, which is why studio construction has been booming. Nevertheless, during last 12 months, five big real estate brokers have reported less than 400 sold studios in Helsinki. The humble count reflects current absence of investors.

When looking at the size of the sold studios, modern studios are on average bigger than the ones built between 1930s and 1940s and same size as the ones built after the World War II.

Of course, the home sales data can be somewhat misleading. It is possible that there are dozens of unsold teeny new studios waiting to be purchased: 31 square meters is just the median of *sold ones*. The home sales data does not tell only, what kind of apartments there are in Helsinki, but also what people have been willing to buy.

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But the 1930s and 1940s stands out too when comparing sizes of two-room and three-room apartments. It really looks like, that compared to modern apartment construction, the period straight before and after the WWII was an era of even tinier apartments.

So, are we just imagining that the apartments are getting smaller? According to the home sales data, no, because there can be seen descending trend from last decades. In studios and three-rooms the maximum size peak was reached in the 1990s and 2000s, in two-rooms little earlier.

It is important to note that this analysis would be worth of repeating with a bigger data set. In my data there were couple groups in which the amount of data points was smaller than 50 flats.

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Kuvaus luotu automaattisesti

Even though new apartments are not exceptionally tiny, it seems they are clearly tinier compared to apartments built just 20 years ago. When it comes to the apartment sizes, Helsinki is returning to the 1930s and 1940s.

[TAULUKKO DATAN KOOSTA]

FACT BOX

Data source: Apartment price information webpage <https://asuntojen.hintatiedot.fi/haku/> maintained by The Ministry of the Environment.

Data origin: Home sales are reported by five big real estate realtors.

Data size: 374 studios, 755 two-room and 583 three-room apartments. These three are the most sold apartment types in Helsinki, so no bigger apartments were considered in this analysis.

Limitations: Dataset does not encompass all sold apartments, but it offers a comprehensive snapshot of apartments built on different decades. The material shows home sales from 12 previous months, but exact house address or sale date is not reported.