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A PORTRAIT OF THE HELSINKI REGION IN TERMS OF FOUR MAIN CHARACTERISTICS: POPULATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES, ECONOMY, SOCIAL WELFARE AND ENVIRONMENT. AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

The data we refer to, particularly the international comparative data, are taken from the publication
HELSINKI STATS - A Statistical View of the Capital Region

Some facts about Helsinki

Helsinki proper has half a million habitants and the Helsinki Region has just over a million. The region's economy consists mostly of service and trade, with just over ten per cent manufacturing. Over half of Helsinki's labour force are women, and two-thirds of women go to work. A fifth of adults in Helsinki have an academic degree.

In a European perspective, Helsinki is relatively young (450 years), and people in Helsinki like to call their city the Daughter of the Baltic. Helsinki is also frequently called a place where West meets East. The city has been shaped as a result of its Swedish roots and its Imperial Russian influence. Helsinki's centre is architecturally something of a miniature of St Petersburg. (The latter is, of course, much bigger, with as many inhabitants as the whole of Finland.)

In terms of amplitude of the informational infrastructure, Helsinki and its region are unique in Finland - although Finland has other strong centres of knowledge, as well. The Helsinki Region has five scientific and four artificistic schools at university level, plus dozens of research centres and scientific libraries.

Helsinki City Information Management Centre - urban statistics and data bases, applied urban research

The City of Helsinki both produces and consumes urban background data. The Helsinki City Information Management Centre has about 70 employees, about half of which work with statistics or research. Our centre issues about 50 publications a year. We also annually attend to around 4000 information requests, more and more international ones, and give around 400 lectures to external clients. We are aware that our business is rapidly changing, and therefore we have 3 or 4 larger development projects under way every year.
The City of Helsinki's services are carried out by a total of 35,000 employees. Almost 60 per cent of them work in health care or social welfare. 20 per cent work in the technology sector (the port, the energy supply, transport, construction, water provision). The planning and real estate authority employs 3 per cent of the city's employees, and the educational and cultural sector 17%.

Helsinki in a European comparison

A small international metropolis

By Finnish standards, Helsinki is a densely inhabited major city region. Helsinki's population density is 2,850 people per square kilometre. The most sparsely inhabited parishes of the region are twice as densely populated as Finland as a whole.

Compared with European capitals Helsinki is a small and relatively sparsely inhabited metropolis. In terms of population density, Helsinki most of all resembles the other Scandinavian capitals. Among Central European city regions, Greater Amsterdam has a similar population density, just slightly more crowded.

Nature and environment

Wherever you move in Helsinki, you are close to nature; the forests, parks and waterfront, the islands and rocks are never far away. In Helsinki, you can walk in forests and parks, pick berries or mushrooms and sail, swim or fish in the heart of the city.

But the state of the environment is a thing that people in Helsinki feel more and more concerned about. Air pollution is a problem, and so is, in particular, the eutrofication of the Baltic Sea. Although water quality near the shores of Helsinki has improved over the last decades thanks to efficient waste water purification, the bays are still more overfed than the outer sea areas.

A growing major city area

The population of both Helsinki and its region have turned into new growth in recent years. According to UN statistics, the region is the European Union's fastest growing metropolis, after Lisbon.

The population of Finland is also expected to grow in the next few decades. The growth is third highest in Europe after Ireland and Sweden. In Helsinki, the population figure will probably rise faster than in other parts of the country. Urbanisation is today, once more, an ongoing trend.

The growth of Helsinki's population is due to natural reasons: there are more babies born than people dying. It is also due to immigration from other parts of Finland and from abroad. Nativity is today, clearly
higher in Helsinki than in the big cities of Central and southern Europe. Nativity is expected to remain fairly high in Finland for a few years, and migration is also expected to be brisk in the near future.

The working aged are getting older

Compared with the other Scandinavian capitals and with many other European major cities, Helsinki has a relatively young population, dominated by people in their working age. Only 10 per cent of the region’s population are old age pensioners. The proportion is 15% in the conurbations of Stockholm, Copenhagen and Oslo, almost 20% in Vienna and Greater London, over 20% in Hamburg and St Petersburg.

In the Helsinki Region, both men and women live quite long, as in western European cities in general these days. Men’s life expectancy is 72 years and women’s 79 years. These figures are of the same order as in Brussels or Vienna. Life expectancies are higher than Helsinki’s in Stockholm, Oslo, Paris, Rome and Madrid, and somewhat lower in Lisbon and Hamburg. Our neighbours on the eastern Baltic rim have clearly harsher living conditions, which can be seen in significantly lower life expectancies.

The rising life expectancy is due to a significant decrease in mortality over the last few decades. Increasing longevity and the great proportion of working-aged people will imply rapid aging of the population in years to come. The elderly will increase faster than other age groups. A greater proportion of the elderly than today will be women, because the difference in mortality between men and women have not changed much over the years. European women live, on average, seven years longer than European men.

Recession is over but unemployment has stayed

In the early 1990s, Finland and Helsinki were deep down in economic recession. Now the recession is over, but its consequences are still felt badly.

Unemployment is very high in Helsinki today. Statistics from 1995 show that we had 112 000 unemployed in the city, which makes 17 per cent of the labour force. This kind of unemployment is something we have never experienced before. No other Scandinavian capital has this high figures.

It is a poor comfort for us that unemployment is an all-European problem today: among the cities we compared with only Oslo, Vienna and Hamburg had less than 10% unemployed. There was worse unemployment than Helsinki’s only in Madrid.
A strong economy improves quality of life

Despite unemployment, the Helsinki Region’s economic level is higher than Finland’s average, and it is 26% higher than the average for the EU. But Helsinki’s GNP per capita is lower than, for example, Paris’, where the entire “agglomeration’s” economic activities are very much centred in Paris proper. Helsinki’s GNP per capita is also lower than Hamburg’s, Brussel’s, Stockholm’s and Copenhagen’s.

The Helsinki Region produces almost a third of Finlands total GNP, although it has only a fifth of the country’s population. The population is highly educated and relatively young, which implies a higher standard of living than in the country as a whole. The region has about half of the country’s research and development, and the most important decisions of business and administrations are made in the region. Helsinki’s strong industries are wholesale trade, financing and insurance, and knowledge-intensive company services.

Large cities live from services

Over 80 per cent of Helsinki citizens make their living in the service industries. This is about the same percentage as in the regions of Stockholm and Copenhagen, and for example Amsterdam and Vienna. Manufacturing is stronger than Helsinki’s in Vienna, Madrid and Hamburg.

Over 40 per cent of Helsinki citizens belong to the employed labour force. Mostly due to the high unemployment rate, this proportion is today smaller than in metropolises of northern and central Europe such as Copenhagen, Hamburg, Amsterdam, London or Vienna. But going to work is still more common in Helsinki than in southern cities like Madrid and Rome, or even Brussels.

Women commonly go to work full-time

In Helsinki, the economic activity rate is higher among women than among men. Among other European capitals, only Stockholm has this kind of situation. Although the trend in southern Europe has for quite a long time been towards higher female participation in working life, particularly among young women, it is still something of a rule that the further south in Europe we go, the lower the female economic activity rate becomes.

Another typical feature of female employment in Helsinki and Stockholm is that women work full-time. In Helsinki, 93 per cent of employed women work full-time, and in Stockholm 96% do. Madrid has an even higher percentage, 97%, but then again, Madrid has a relatively low economic activity rate among women.
Helsinki - near and far

In Helsinki, there are around 300 cars on each 1 000 inhabitants. The car-owning rate is of the same order as in Stockholm, but half of the rate in Rome. In the Helsinki Region, public transport grants easy and relatively cheap travel for all.

Helsinki is linked to the rest of Europe by frequent flights, plus boat and train departures. Helsinki-Vantaa airport lies only 25 minutes by bus from Helsinki’s city centre. The flight from Helsinki to such European metropolises as Paris, Milan, Vienna or Brussels takes less than three hours.

In recent years, passenger volumes at Helsinki-Vantaa have grown strongly not least due to transit flights. The straightest way from Central Europe to Japan and China is over Finland.

The fluent international contacts are backed up by Finland’s modern telecom infrastructure. Prices in telecom are low thanks to almost free competition in the field since the 1980s and thanks to skilled expertise and great investments in the infrastructure. In recent years, the rate of PC purchase in Finland has been very high. Today, the rate of Internet users per 1 000 inhabitants is highest in the world in Finland. Finland is also a leading manufacturer and consumer of mobile phones.

Experiences of the need for developing the urban statistics

Quite often, administrative delimitations do not correspond to urban functional regions or economic regions. International comparative data are best available at NUTS2 level. But the NUTS are different by size in different countries, and do not lend themselves easily to a comparative analysis of the properties of urban regions. In the future, GIS systems will make this thing easier.

In Finland urban regions can be formed, because the smallest units of the administrative district division function as the basic units when aggregating and delimiting the functional urban region.

Data

There are data available on the areas’ economic strength, industrial activity, employment and unemployment. Many parameters of business activity cannot, or can only occasionally, be obtained from major cities.

There are also basic data on population by age and about population changes. But there are very little data by gender available.

Databases give only some answers to questions regarding the population’s living conditions and welfare. For example, it is not possible to analyse such phenomena as subjective well-being or deprivation in terms of international databases. These require data collecting
and unification of comparability and concepts.

As an example of a functional major city database, we want to present NORDSTAT, the database for the largest city regions in Scandinavia. We established NORDSTAT in 1992. The job was not that difficult mainly for the reason that we had long traditions of statistical cooperation with the other Scandinavian countries. Thanks to this cooperation, where we know each other personally, we have been able to maintain and develop the database successfully.

The comparability of concepts

Various statistical concepts are not yet compatible, although there has been work going on for a long time to harmonise them. Comparisons can be made only at rather rough level, and they yield relatively little material for analytic studies of cities.

Conclusions

It has been an interesting task to collect data and edit HELSINKI STATS - a Statistical View of the Capital Region. We have met many joys and sorrows, and we feel that we have made an important first step. We have made a contribution to the provision of international comparative statistics, which have, we are glad to say, improved clearly in recent years. This is not to say that there wouldn’t be a lot of work and challenges ahead. We hope that our work and the experiences we share will be of use for the compilation of similar statistics elsewhere.