

## FINLAND: ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY IN NATIONAL LANGUAGES

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*In this blog, first published as the **ESEH Notepad** in **Environment and History** 26.2 (May 2020) Timo Myllyntaus surveys environmental history writing in the national languages of Finland.*

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For decades, it has been reiterated that ‘Finnish environmental history has not yet been written’.<sup>[1]</sup> This slogan is just as correct or incorrect as the mantra of the half-filled glass of water: whether it is half-empty or half-full. It points to the fact that no comprehensive volume has yet been written on the environmental history of Finland, whereas several other countries have had such books for many years. The lack of such an overview does not mean that Finnish nature is modest and lifeless, or that its history is so short that there is not much to describe and analyse historically. Everything on the surface of Finland is younger than 10,000 years because, before that, glaciers devastated the upper layers of the earth. Yet below this soil, there are very old layers of nature.

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Depussi, 2019. By Timo Myllyntaus

By territory, Finland is the sixth largest country in the EU and the eighth largest in Europe. A thousand kilometres long, with 180,000 lakes and even greater numbers of islands, it consists of several different habitats. As a result, there are many topics for environmental historians to study. Indeed, the available literature on Finnish environmental history is abundant and has

long traditions. One might claim that, consequently, the discipline can be divided into so many detailed subareas that nobody has yet dared to work out a national synthesis.

The following survey covers publications published in national languages of Finland between 2013 and early 2020. Finnish environmental historians tend to publish most of their scientific articles and books in English or other major languages. Nevertheless, publications of the last seven or so years in national languages form an exciting niche in Finnish environmental history.

In Finland, there are two official languages, Finnish and Swedish. There are also four Sami languages, which are indigenous languages even if they lack the status of official languages. In the past, a considerable portion of trail-blazing work in environmental history about the eighteenth to late twentieth centuries was published in Swedish, written by such path-breakers as Johan A. Gadd, Pehr Kalm, Adolf E. Nordenskiöld, Ernst G. Palmén, Ilmari Hustich and Sven-Erik Åström.<sup>[2]</sup> Only a part of these publications has been translated into Finnish. In scientific publications, the Finnish language gained a foothold only from the mid-nineteenth century, becoming dominant only by the interwar period. Since the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, when the concepts *miljöhistoria* in Swedish and *ympäristöhistoria* in Finnish (environmental history) were launched, Finnish undoubtedly gained the upper hand in writings depicting nature as a deteriorating condition. Thus, the transition from the Swedish language to the Finnish language took place just as there was a push for nature conservation and environmental history. This kind of linguistic transition in publications in Finland took place later in environmental history than in other disciplines on average. Very little has been published about the sciences in the Sami languages, or even popular scholarly literature on environmental history. Dissertations and other scientific books on the history of Finnish Lapland are mostly published in Finnish. Key issues in researching the environmental history of the regions inhabited by the Sami focus on land ownership and rights to utiliseland. A case in point on this dispute is a recent Ph.D. thesis by Tarja Nahkiaisojja *Conversion of Sami Lands and Waters to New Crown Farms: Habitation and Land use in Inari and Utsjoki, 1747–1925*.<sup>[3]</sup>

Finnish environmental history has traditionally focused on such central themes as forests, water, climate and weather, animals, conflicts of interests and the conservation of nature. The popularity of these themes has varied over the decades, and environmental history has developed in waves of about 25 years when one or two of these themes are the centre of attention. Many other themes, such as landscape history, urban environmental history or long-term pollution, have not been studied with such intensity as the major subjects.

Animal history achieved the steepest upsurge in the past decade, while new ways of thinking about food production and concern about both domesticated and wild animals have turned attention to animal history. Moreover, the heated discussion about big predators has attracted much more interest among historians. Most attention has been directed to wolves, although they have not killed any person over the past 120 years. Nevertheless, the image of wolves is more threatening than that of bears, which have slain people even in the past decade. Bears are regarded as less aggressive and malicious than wolves. Bears are respected and even beloved, whereas wolves have been met with spite and hatred. The last few years have seen several Ph.D. theses focused on the history of wolves.<sup>[4]</sup> The most recent is the dissertation, *Wolves' Places. The Human-wolf Relationship in Twentieth Century Finland*, by Heta Lähdesmäki.<sup>[5]</sup>



Forest studies have been versatile in Finland, and some of them can be regarded as environmental history. Many of these forest-related articles are written in English and published in foreign journals. Nevertheless, political debates and polemics about forest policy are often published in Finnish. The most common themes here centre on appropriate methods of cutting trees in forests; specifically, clear-cut logging, small spot logging or selective logging. These issues have also been examined from a historical viewpoint. For example, some years ago, emeritus professor of forestry, Erkki Lähde, published the pamphlet (in Finnish): *Finnish Forest War: How Continuous Growing Won Over Clearcutting*.<sup>[6]</sup> Various kinds of popular books on forest history are also published in Finnish. For instance, it is now popular to emphasise the recreational impact of forests, such as the volume *Forest Heals!* edited by Leena Paaskoski et al. and published by the Lusto Forest Museum.<sup>[7]</sup>

Landscape history is a rising trend, studying landscapes from various perspectives and focusing especially on the interaction of humans and the environment. For instance, Päivi Maaranen examined changes of landscapes in southern Finland from the Stone Age to the

present. Her Ph.D. thesis belongs to the sphere of interpretative archaeology, where she applies methods of archaeology and geography with historical sources.[8] Her research area and approach resemble the dissertation by Niklas Huldén, *Coastal Dwellers and Material Inheritance*. Huldén aims to find out how coastal dwellers in southwestern Finland adapted to their living environment. This ethnographic study is primarily based on historical sources, mainly probate inventories, and applies Julian Stewart's methods of cultural ecology.[9] Although this Ph.D. dissertation in Swedish can be considered environmental history, no Ph.D. thesis in Swedish about environmental history has been produced by any Finnish history department during the period 2013–2019. Swedish-speaking authors did produce dissertations and other publications on environmental history, but these appeared in English. An example is a dissertation by Stefan Norrgård on the climate in West Africa in the late eighteenth century.[10]

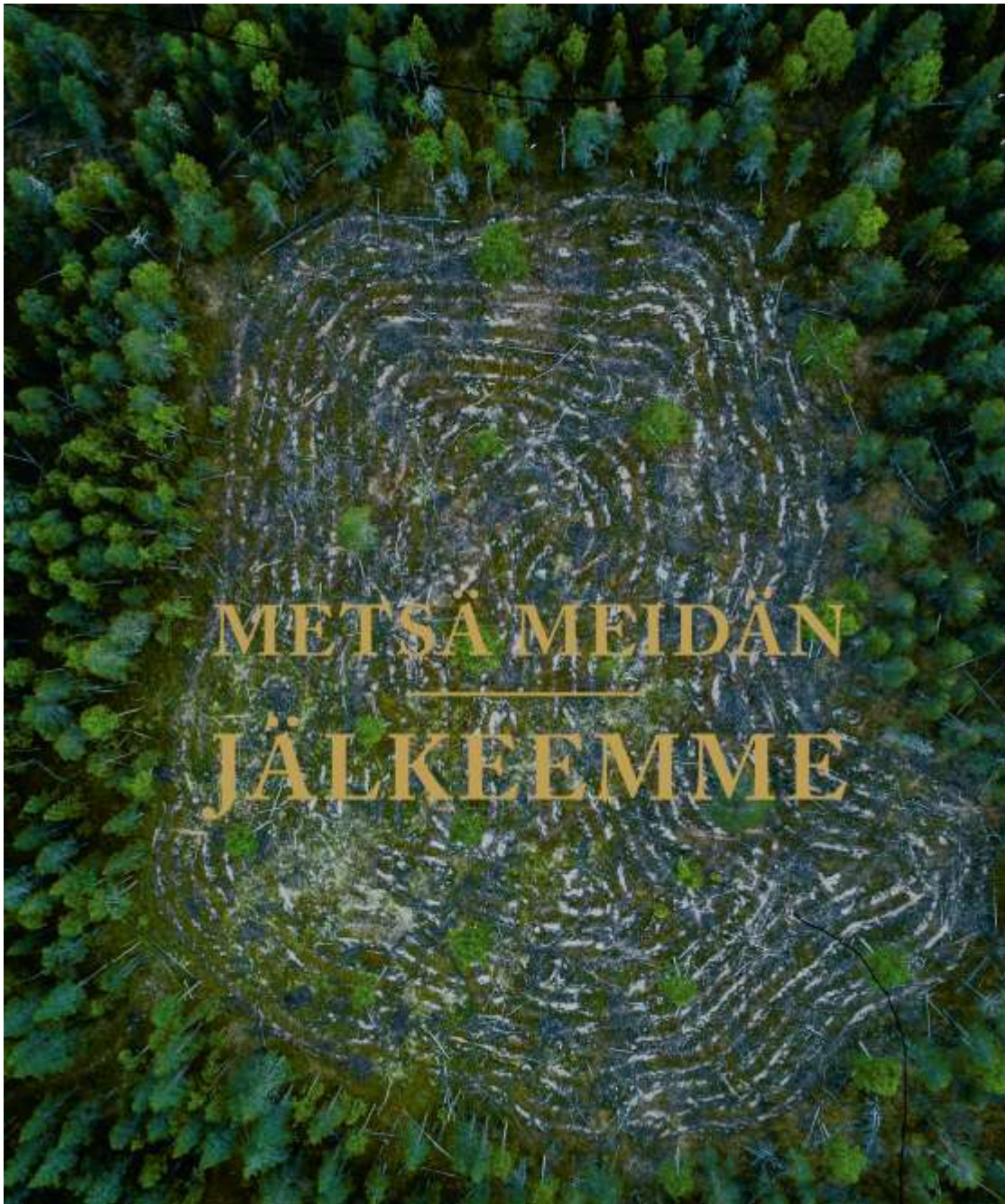
Research on water history has continued over the last decade. Themes of water historians have centred on water uses, its quality and conflicts of interests related to water resources and the history of watercourses. Sami Louekari prepared his Ph.D. thesis on how locals have tried to benefit from one of Finland's most significant rivers, the Kokemäenjoki River. He, like Tarja Nahkiaissoja, focused on the late agrarian period of Finnish history, from the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries.[11] In a series put out by the Prime Minister's Office for the hundredth anniversary of Finnish independence, Petri Juuti, Tapio Katko and Riikka Rajala published a book examining the development of regional and municipal water supplies and sewage treatment.[12]

Like water supply utilities and sewage systems, city planning and conservation of old buildings and prestigious neighborhoods are related to environmental history. In her Ph.D. dissertation, Maria Lähteenmäki analysed the debate on what to do with derelict premises of the large cotton mill of Finlayson and the engineering works of Tampella in the city of Tampere.[13] She studied the quarters around the famous Tammerkoski rapids as a national landscape and defended her thesis in the public debate at the department of art history at Helsinki University.

An exciting feature of the 2010s was that scholars of different disciplines started to insert environmental history viewpoints into the broad research approaches of their own fields. A case in point is the book on landscape paintings from several countries across different centuries by the well-known TV meteorologist Seija Paasonen.[14] In her monograph, she focuses on skies and clouds in these old paintings.



Her approach resembles that which Henry Makowski and Bernhard Buderath applied in their joint work.<sup>[15]</sup> She even presents forecasts of what kind of weather followed after the moment at which the work was painted. Environmental history aspects are also included in pamphlets on current ecological problems such as natural resources,<sup>[16]</sup> climate change<sup>[17]</sup> and forests.<sup>[18]</sup> Of these examples, two books, by Hanna Nikkanen et al. and Anssi Jokiranta et al., have been nominees for the prestigious annual Finlandia nonfiction book prize.



In conclusion, I would like to put forward the following observations:

Firstly, Finnish environmental history moved during this survey period from macroenvironmental history towards microenvironmental history, at least by its approaches to research themes, as well as from the national scope to regional and local levels.

Secondly, a new trend is to publish popular nonfiction books on the environment and integrate environmental history in studies on present situations and forecasts of the future. As a result, specialists from various other fields have started to study and write about environmental history. This has meant the democratisation of research in this field and the emergence of new ideas and approaches.

Thirdly, in Finland the years 2013–2019 witnessed a break in the long tradition of publishing prominent books of environmental history in Swedish. Fortunately, a similar ebb tide did not happen in publishing environmental history in Finnish. This trend indicates that there are still some niches where researchers and amateur historians prefer to publish in Finnish – not in the *lingua franca* of the time, English.



Late apple harvest, 2019, by Timo Myllyntaus

*Timo Myllyntaus*  
*University of Turku*

[1]Kaarina Järventausta, Suomen ympäristöhistoria on vielä kirjoittamatta, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 2 June 2001, <https://www.hs.fi/tiede/art-2000003973267.html>

[2]More on the earlier historiography of Finnish environmental history in Timo Myllyntaus. 'Writing about the Past with Green Ink: The Emergence of Finnish Environmental History', *H-Net Humanities Online, Historiography Series in Global Environmental History* at: [https://www.academia.edu/984893/Writing\\_about\\_the\\_Past\\_with\\_Green\\_Ink\\_The\\_Emergence\\_of\\_Finnish\\_Environmental\\_History](https://www.academia.edu/984893/Writing_about_the_Past_with_Green_Ink_The_Emergence_of_Finnish_Environmental_History); Timo Myllyntaus, 'Old Wine in New Bottles? Traditions of Finnish Environmental History' *Värna, vårda, värdera, Miljöhistoriska aspekter på miljöhistoria*, Redigerad av Erland Mårald & Christer Nordlund, Skrifter från forskningsprogrammet 'Landskaper som arena' nr 5, (Umeå: Nyheternas Tryckeri 2003), pp. 177–200; Per Eliasson, Poul Holm and Timo Myllyntaus, 'Finland, Sweden, Denmark' (pp. 508–510) in the article by Verena Winiwarter et. al., 'Environmental History in Europe from 1994 to 2004: Enthusiasm and Consolidation', *Environment and History*, 10th Anniversary Issue, **10**(4) 501–530.

[3]Tarja Nahkiaisoja, *Saamelaisten maat ja vedet kruunun uudistiloiksi: asutus ja maankäyttö Inarissa ja Utsjoella vuosina 1749–1925*, Diss. (Oulu: University of Oulu, 2016). Online: <http://jultika.oulu.fi/Record/isbn978-952-62-1050-6>

[4]Jukka Bisi, *Suomalaisen susikonfliktin anatomia* [Anatomy of the Finnish conflict with wolves], Ph.D. thesis, 2010; Eeva Jansson, *Past and Present Genetic Diversity and Structure of the Finnish Wolf Population*. Acta Universitatis Ouluensis. Series A, Scientiae rerum naturalium 608, Ph.D. diss., University of Oulu, 2013; Mari Pohja-Mykrä, *Vahinkoeläinsodasta psykologiseen omistajuuteen: petokonfliktien historiallinen tausta ja nykypäivän hallinta* [From War on Vermin to Psychological Ownership: Sustainable Management of Predators in Past and Present, A Legitimacy Conflict in the Field of Large Carnivore Management], Diss. (Seinäjäki & Mikkeli: University of Helsinki, Ruralia Institute, 2014).

[5]Heta Lähdesmäki, *Susien paikat. Ihminen ja susi 1900-luvun Suomessa*, Jyväskylä 2020. Before her dissertation, an edited volume *Suden kanssa* [With Wolf], ed. by Juha Hiedanpää and Outi Ratamäki was published by Lapland University Press, (Vantaa, 2015) and a popular book on wolves was also published by Erkki Pulliainen and Lassi Rautiainen: *Suomalainen susi* [Finnish wolf] (Helsinki: Minerva, 2019).

[6]Erkki Lähde, *Suomalainen metsäsota: miten jatkuva kasvatusta voitti avohakkuun* (Helsinki 2015).

[7]Leena Paaskoski et al. (eds), *Metsä tekee hyvää!* (Lusto and Tampere: Forest Museum of Finland, 2016).

[8]Päivi Maaranen, *Neljä näkökulmaa maisemaan: havaintoja menneisyyden ihmisen ja ympäristön välisestä vuorovaikutuksesta eteläisimmän Suomen alueella* [Four Outlooks on Landscape. Observations of Interaction Between Humans and the Environment in Southern Finland] (Helsinki, 2017).

[9]Niklas Huldén, *Kustbor och det materiella arvet: upptecknad egendom som indikator för kulturell anpassning i sydvästra Finlands skärgård 1700–1900* [Coastal Dwellers and



Material Inheritance. Estate Inventories as Indicators of Cultural Adaptation in the Archipelago of Southwestern Finland, 1700–1900], Diss. (Turku: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2018). English summary online: [hulden\\_niklas.pdf](#)

[10] Stefan Norrgård, *A New Climatic Periodisation of the Gold and Guinea Coasts in West Africa, 1750–1798: A Reconstruction of the Climate During the Slave Trade Era, Including an Analysis of the Climatically Facilitated trans-Atlantic Slave Trade*, Diss. (Turku: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2013).

[11] Sami Louekari, *Hyödyn politiikka: Kokemäenjokilaakson ympäristöhistoriaa 1720–1850* [Politics of utility: Environmental history of the valley of the river Kokemäenjoki], Diss., Annales C365, Turku: University of Turku 2013, Online: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-29-5472-8>.

[12] Petri Juuti, Tapio Katko and Riikka P. Rajala, *Sata vuotta vesihuoltoa Suomessa 1917–2017* [A Century of Water Supply in Finland, 1917–2017] (Tampere University Press & OAPEN, 2017).

[13] Marja Lähteenmäki, *Tammerkosken kansallismaisema teollisuusperintönä: verkatehtaasta Finlaysoniin 1965–2005* [National Landscape of Tammerkoski as an Industrial Heritage: From a Cloth Factory to Finlayson, 1965–2005], Diss., University of Helsinki 2017. Online: <https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/172821>

[14] Seija Paasonen, *Taiteilijoiden taivaat meteorologin silmin* [Skies of Landscape Painters Through the Eyes of a Meteorologist] (Helsinki: Maahenki, 2018).

[15] Henri Makowski and Bernhard Buderath, *Die Natur dem Menschen untertan. Ökologie im Spiegel der Landschaftsmalerei*. (München, 1983).

[16] Mikael Hildén, Eeva-Liisa Hallanaro, Leena Karjalainen and Marja Järvelä, *Uusi luonnonvaratalous: Onko biomassa avain kestävään kasvuun?* [New Economy of Natural Resources: Is Biomass the Key to Sustainable Growth?] (Helsinki, 2013).

[17] Hanna Nikkanen et al., *Hyvän sään aikana. Mitä Suomi tekee, kun ilmasto muuttaa kaiken* [During the Good Weather: How Will Finland React When the Climate Changes Everything] (Helsinki, 2018).

[18] Anssi Jokiranta, Pekka Juntti, Anna Ruohonen and Jenni Räinen, *Metsä meidän jälkeemme* [Forest After Us] (Helsinki, 2019).