

# Places of power: Naming of affective places

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**Abstract:** By analysing Finnish data drawn from 106 written responses to a questionnaire, we have studied the ways people name their places of power and the ways affective meanings are present in their descriptions. Places of power renew, calm, invigorate and help in distress. They allow the respondents to be alone and listen to their own thoughts, or they make them feel at one with nature. Four main strategies are used to identify these places of power: official place names, relational place descriptions, unofficial place names and classifying expressions. In the process of placemaking, three kinds of agency stand out: the agency of the materiality of the place, that of emotions and affective practices, and that of the person experiencing the place. Identifying the place by naming it is part of this process.

**Keywords:** space, place, affect, emotion, place naming, placemaking, place reference

## 1. Introduction

As we write this article in the spring of 2020, we are living in a world that is coping with the coronavirus crisis. The situation has given rise to various kinds of restrictions in our everyday lives: our social circles have shrunk and our movements have been limited. In Finland, these restrictions have meant that people have found new and more active ways to relate to their immediate environment. Taking walks in nature or surrounding neighbourhoods has become an important leisure activity and means of taking care of oneself. Via social media and news coverage, it has become very clear that people have been empowered by different kinds of places. This has highlighted a phenomenon that has been analysed in many studies: places are infused with different atmospheres that can cause different emotions and feelings to arise in people as they experience their environment (see for example Edensor 2017; Manzo 2003).

Even before the arrival of coronavirus, we had discussed in a small group of urban researchers the ways places affect us. During the conversation, one of us said that he had drawn analogies between power songs – ‘a song that makes you feel powerful and ready to whop some serious ass’<sup>1</sup> – and power places. He wondered what kind of power places there might be for people, because there was definitely such a place for him. This conversation led to an experimental research project in which we specifically asked people about their ‘power places’. Asking about the different meanings people attach to places has been done before in the Finnish context. For example, the City Museum of Helsinki asked residents of the city to name their favourite places in 2015 in preparation for a new exhibition. For this project, the museum received over 1,000 responses. Other questionnaires dealing with relationships to places have also been popular among researchers of urban dwellers (e.g. Åström 2016; SKS 2004–2005). The popularity of these enquiries and questionnaires may reasonably be assumed to demonstrate the many meanings places have for people. However, a

<sup>1</sup> Urban dictionary (‘powersong’): <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=powersong> (accessed 6 May 2020).

specific focus on the ways places empower people was something we had not previously encountered.

This study focuses on *places*, as distinct from *spaces*. In this understanding, *spaces* refers to physical environments in general and *places*, in contrast, to more specific, socioculturally meaningful entities. Thus, following the definitions of Tim Cresswell (2015:15), we are interested in the ways in which spaces can be turned into places, a process of placemaking in which names and naming are of key significance. Besides proper names, however, languages provide many additional resources for formulating places out of physical space (see also Schegloff 1972; Williams 2017).

Our aim in this article is twofold. Firstly, we study the ways in which ‘power places’ are identified, i.e. whether the places in question are identified using proper names or other linguistic resources. Secondly, we explore how people describe these empowering places, in particular in the context of emotions and affective practices. We do not answer our two research questions separately, but rather wish to be able to combine them and look for the connections between place naming<sup>2</sup> and affect. Our theoretical and methodological background derives from socio-onomastics and ethnology; we aim to bring new insights to research on place naming and placemaking.

In our analyses, we use affective reading (see for example Rinne & Olsson 2020). We therefore focus on how affect can be read both in the ways people have named places that are important to them and in the ways they give reasons for this naming. In our analysis of the emotion and affect present in the descriptions given, we refer to Margaret Wetherell et al. (2015) and their understanding of the relationship between these two concepts. They challenge the separation of emotion and affect both theoretically and methodologically. For them, it is impossible to separate the bodily and non-representational from the discursive and culturally bound (Wetherell et al. 2015:57). For Wetherell, affect is ‘sense as well as sensibility’. Affective patterns

<sup>2</sup> By ‘place naming’ we mean all the possible ways to identify a place (see e.g. Schegloff 1972). Likewise, in the following the general term ‘names’ is most often used to include all the place references in the data.

are based on distinct kinds of histories, narratives and discourses and on body patterning with feelings and thoughts. Wetherell also considers the surrounding materiality to be an active agent in people's lives (Wetherell 2012:13–14, 88; Rinne & Olsson 2020:337). She uses the term 'affective practice' to refer to a psycho-discursive 'figuration where body possibilities and routines become recruited or entangled together with other social and material figurations' (Wetherell 2012:19; Wetherell et al. 2020:15).

The idea of the material surroundings having an agency is an important starting point for us, as in our questionnaire the hypothesis was that places have empowering effects on people. This being the case, the emotions and affective practices present in the respondents' descriptions are mostly positive. This emphasis on the positive affect of place has been criticized, as it can ignore the negative affect and lead to simplified readings (Manzo 2003). That criticism is also important to bear in mind: we are not arguing for specific places to be places of power as such. Instead, it is important to understand the mechanisms through which some places become chargers for people in different life situations. For Sara Ahmed, emotions 'are what move us', but they are also about 'attachments, about what connects us to this or that' (Ahmed 2004:27). Following this, we understand that not only material surroundings have agency; so too do the emotions and affective practices arising in specific places. It is this interaction between the different agencies – the materiality of a place, the emotions and affective practices, and the person experiencing the place – that is the focus of our analysis.

In the following, we will first examine the way our data was produced and how this may affect the ways places of power are interpreted, and then go on to analyse the ways these places are named and described. After categorizing the descriptions by the way the places have been named, we engage in a close reading of the words and impressions that reflect the emotion and affect in them.

## 2. Research data

Our data consists of 106 responses involving references to and descriptions of empowering places. The places were documented using a questionnaire survey conducted by the Finnish Society for Urban Studies (the authors are members of the Society and were responsible for the survey) over two months from the beginning of December 2019 to the end of January 2020. The questionnaire was designed for Internet users and was circulated via social media.<sup>3</sup> Its design was simple, with only five questions. The first four concerned the gender of the respondent, year of birth, current place of residence, and identification of a place of power. The fifth part of the questionnaire was an open-ended request for a description of the respondent's place of power. Respondents were encouraged to write freely in their own style. The descriptions received varied from a couple of sentences to half a page of typewritten text. The shortest version of a response was one with a place name repeated three times: as the respondent's current place of residence, as his/her place of power and as the description of that place of power (#34F).<sup>4</sup> In a sense, this could be interpreted as referring to a place of power that is self-explanatory.

The questionnaire was circulated in three languages: Finnish (101 responses), Swedish (1 response) and English (4 responses). In it, we did not direct respondents to choose a certain kind of place, such as an urban place. However, the fact that the questionnaire was circulated by the Finnish Society for Urban Studies understandably guided respondents' thinking towards urban places. However, this was not always the case: the respondents described the actual places that they found empowering, regardless of the location.

Even so, most of the places described were situated in the Helsinki capital region (92 responses in all). One surprising fact was that one specific place, Helsinki-Malmi Airport, was described in a total of

<sup>3</sup> We also arranged a world café-type discussion event in January 2020, but this data is not included here and will be analysed in another context.

<sup>4</sup> The reference is the incoming number of the response plus the language it is written in (F = Finnish, S = Swedish and E = English).

41 responses. This shows once again that questionnaires designed for research operate not only on a neutral level, but also on a political and social level (Olsson 2016:164–169; in the context of oral history, see Portelli 1997:9). These responses also highlight the political nature of people’s place attachment (Creswell 1996; see also Manzo 2003). In this case, the future of the airport in question, which also has cultural and heritage value, has been much debated and respondents apparently viewed the questionnaire as a way of participating in this discussion and safeguarding memories of a place that is now being repurposed.

**Table 1. Distribution of participants.**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Birth decade</b>		<b>Place of residence</b>		
female	65	1930s	4	Helsinki	64
male	38	1940s	12	Espoo	10
N/A	3	1950s	17	Vantaa	1
Total	106	1960s	39	Other Greater Helsinki <sup>5</sup>	8
		1970s	17	Other Finnish cities, towns and municipalities <sup>6</sup>	21
		1980s	10	Cities in Sweden	2
		1990s	7	Total	106
		Total	106		

Source: Data available by request from the Finnish Literature Society.

The distribution of respondents by gender, age group and place of residence is presented in Table 1. As can be seen, most of the respondents were women born in the 1960s. Nevertheless, the age distribution was quite broad, with the oldest respondents in their eighties and the youngest in their twenties. Furthermore, many respondents live in or near Helsinki. It is not surprising, therefore, that most of the power

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater\\_Helsinki](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_Helsinki) (accessed 20 July 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Heinävesi, Hollola, Joensuu, Jyväskylä (2); Kemi, Lahti (3); Mikkeli, Nokia, Pello, Pori, Raisio (2); Tampere, Turku (4), Varkaus.

places identified are situated in the Helsinki region. Besides Helsinki dwellers, there are respondents from both cities elsewhere in southern Finland (Tampere, Turku, Lahti) and cities and towns in other parts of the country (Jyväskylä, Joensuu, Mikkeli, Kemi). A few reside in smaller municipalities (e.g. Hollola, Heinävesi) and two respondents live in Sweden. It is worth mentioning that in our analysis of the data we do not take these variables (gender, age, place of residence) into account, owing to the nature and the number of responses. The individual groups in our source material are too small to make exact comparisons and the descriptions are so compact that it would be impossible to distinguish among the groups. However, on a general level, we find it interesting and significant to note that the question of power places was important for so many different age groups and for people in different locations.

### **3. Many ways to identify a place: naming categories**

In responding to the question about a place of power, respondents simultaneously identified the place in some way. It is worth noting that we did not explicitly ask them to give a proper name, but simply to identify the place of power. This approach gave us an opportunity to study the various ways people identified their specific places (see for example Schegloff 1972; Ainiala 2014), an essential starting point in socio-onomastics, which acknowledges and explores the social and situational variation in the use of names and other identifying resources (see for example Ainiala & Östman 2017). Further, as will be seen, not all our respondents even wrote an identifying expression, giving a classifying expression instead.

The responses varied from a single name to expressions of many words. However, most of the answers consisted of a single name or a name with a specifying element. The responses given can be divided into four main categories according to their status as a place reference: official place names, relational descriptions, unofficial place names and classifying expressions (see Table 2). The categorization

is not entirely clearly defined and there is some overlap. These cases will be explained in the analyses.

**Table 2. Naming categories.**

<b>Naming category</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Official place names	69	<i>Tampere</i> (city), <i>Haltiala</i> (outdoor recreation area), <i>Uunisaari</i> (island)
Relational descriptions	25	<i>Helsingin rannat</i> (Helsinki + shores), <i>Silta Kulosaaren ja Herttoniemen välissä</i> (a bridge between Kulosaari (neighbourhood) and Herttoniemi (neighbourhood))
Unofficial place names	3	<i>Kaivarin ranta</i> (shore), <i>Sörkän silta</i> (bridge)
Classifying expressions	9	<i>Kirjastot</i> ('libraries'), <i>Metsä</i> ('a forest')
Total	106	

In the following sections, we will present and analyse the respondents' places of power according to these categories. We will also analyse the affective expressions under each category. This is not to argue that the way people identify and name a place directly correlates with the affect they express about the place. However, we find it interesting to look at the possible connections between naming strategies and ways of describing places.

When giving examples and quotations from the data, we present the names and the descriptions exactly as our respondents did. Besides original responses in Finnish or Swedish, we include an English translation.

### 3.1 Official place names

The largest group includes official place names, which we define as names that have been planned for a specific area. Official names are typically those referring to neighbourhoods or districts, streets and parks. Additionally, official names of cities and municipalities, as well



as official company names, names of institutions and other public names (e.g. names of public swimming pools) used as place names belong to this group (Ainiala et al. 2012:99–105).

In the group of official place names, the responses referring to Helsinki-Malmi Airport make up the majority (41 answers in all). In addition, there are 28 responses referring to other geographical locations. In this latter group, one place is mentioned in two responses (the city of Tampere), but all the other responses refer to different places.

Names in this category are most often names of neighbourhoods, districts and parks (14). Additionally, cities, municipalities (2 referents, of which Tampere is mentioned twice) and bridges (2) are mentioned. There is only one representative of each of the following groups: airport (i.e. Helsinki-Malmi Airport, with 41 responses), indoor market, shopping mall, art museum, university, statue, cemetery, church, café and swimming pool. Obviously, these places primarily represent urban and built environments. It is noteworthy that not a single street or road is mentioned, even though they are central not only to urban but also to rural settings. The places mentioned mostly seem to be for spending time in an extremely specific atmosphere; they are places in which to stop and enjoy the surroundings for an extended period. This may also explain the absence of streets and roads, as they can mostly be regarded as places to move and pass through.

Some of the responses in this category also contain a specifying element that clarifies the country, city or neighbourhood where the place is located: e.g. *Tampere, Finland*; *Helsingin Lapinlahti* (Helsinki + GEN + Lapinlahti); *Hauhonpuisto, Vallila* ('a certain park in a neighbourhood in Helsinki'). By using these specifying elements, the respondents probably wanted to ensure that the places were correctly situated geographically, even if the researchers did not necessarily know them themselves. This suggests that respondents were directing their answers to a wider audience, and this may also have influenced the ways in which the places were identified in other respects.

In this category, the affective practices associated with the places are not interwoven into the place names. Rather, naming with official names is very neutral. The affective practices become explicit in

the section where respondents describe their place of power. Many of these descriptions reveal that the respondents have a long history with the place and that important phases in life and experiences may have taken place there (e.g. #1E; #10F; #17F). This highlights the idea of a space transforming into a place through a growing knowledge and understanding of its nature (Tuan 1979). The place may have empowered the respondent in a very concrete way, as for example with a university, where the person could ‘freely interact with diverse opinions’ or where their thinking was widened. It may have been a place that had given an opportunity to visit different countries: ‘It therefore was my stepping-stone to the world. It will forever be dear to my heart for I see the universe through its lenses’ (#3E). Here, the place has had a lifelong effect on the narrator’s life and the social factors associated with it are primary.

The relationship of a place to resolving important questions in life is also mentioned in other responses, as in the one referring to a public swimming pool where the respondent had solved many problems and felt herself renewed (#21F; also #40F). In another response, a church and cemetery were reported to have helped the person to concentrate and get in touch with themselves, hear their own inner voice (#52F). Respondents sometimes used a simple appellative (e.g. *kirkko* ‘the church’) to describe the place, instead of an official name, and this may actually be a common, everyday practice for identifying and referring to a place (see also Schegloff 1972:97; Ainiala 2016:377; Williams 2017). In these responses, it is not so much the social as the material environment that empowers people: it is the calming atmosphere that allows the respondent to be alone and to feel and hear their inner self.

The places of power in this category vary, as mentioned, including cities, institutions and smaller attractions within a city such as statues. The specific attractions can be described as places or locations that form a routine when a person visits a certain destination. For example, when visiting Helsinki one of the respondents ‘always’ visits two specific statues in the city. The affect she expresses for these attractions is described in a very concrete way: ‘When visiting Hel-

sinki, I always try to take a photo or selfie with them or even touch the pedestal of Paraske's sculpture'. It seems that it is important to document each visit and that it is not enough to see the place: it also has to be physically felt by touching it, and recorded by taking a photograph. The respondent refers to it being of 'special personal importance' for her emotions, but does not further explain these reasons (#4E).

While in the case just mentioned visiting the place of power is a special occasion, for others the importance of the place arises from their everyday lives, as for example with the outdoor area in Viikki, a forested neighbourhood on the outskirts of Helsinki. For one of the respondents, this place is part of everyday life throughout the year, where '[seeing] the cows is a summer bonus!' (#2F). For another respondent, the everyday source of power is a park with roses beside a busy road:

Puisto on minun arkipäivieni kauneuden lähde, rauhoitun puistossa kun pysähdyn katsomaan ja haistelemaan.

[The park is the source for my everyday beauty; I calm myself in the park when I stop to observe and smell [the flowers]]. (#13F)

Here, moreover, the importance of the place is described in a very physical and sensory way. It is noteworthy that the respondent does not once use the official name she gave to identify her place of power (*Hauhonpuisto*: Hauho, a former municipality in Finland), but constantly talks simply about *puisto* ('the park'). This reflects a widely used way of talking about places in everyday contexts (see also the example of *kirkko* 'the church' in this section). Furthermore, the respondent uses *ruusupuisto* ('the rose park') as a characterizing expression, but it might also be used as an unofficial name. From previous research we know that these kinds of unofficial descriptive names are common everyday names (e.g. Ainiala et al. 2012:108–109). The name *Ruusupuisto* would also describe the concrete feelings and emotions attached to the place more vividly than the official name. This might also make it easier for an outsider to understand the different affective practices the place can give rise to.

Sometimes the places are described as ‘emotionally significant’ (#1E) or places that can calm (#4F; #6F; #8F) or invigorate (#6F) a person. The elements of nature in the city make a person forget they are in the largest city in Finland (#6F). In the descriptions, it is not only the place as such but also the landscape it is immersed in that matters (regarding landscape, see for example Stewart & Strathern 2003). It may be enough just to stop and admire the view (#22F) and the surrounding beauty is soothing when one feels distressed (#24F). Nature also offers an empowering ‘lap’ or ‘embrace’ (#28F; also #36F). Looking forward to and awaiting the flowers in bloom is something the respondents mention in their descriptions, which were written in the darkest time of the year (#33F). Nature in all its forms, whether in the middle of the city or out at sea, plays an active part in empowering the respondents, thereby demonstrating the agency of their material surroundings (see also Rinne & Olsson 2020):

Tässä paikassa tunnen aina, että jokin henki on kanssani ja tunnen oloni turvalliseksi – ajatuksiani kuullaan ja saan siitä voimaa sekä uskoa tulevaan.  
[In this place I always feel there is some spirit with me and I feel safe; I feel confident in my thoughts and get/receive power and trust in the future.]  
(#42F)

However, places of power are not always places for solitude or retreat. In one of the responses, it is the possibility of manifesting one’s opinion that is considered the empowering element of the place, in this case an art museum (#2E). Another place is a combination of nature and historical buildings, namely the grounds of a former mental hospital (*Lapinlahti*) close to Helsinki city centre. Here the respondent highlights the specific nature of the place: it is considered an open space for ideas and for diverse groups of city dwellers to be and act in:

Rahaton, työtön saa ilmaiseksi oleilla kauniissa ja elvyttävässä paikassa...  
[The moneyless, unemployed may spend their time in a beautiful and regenerative place...] (#46F)

Helsinki-Malmi Airport was mentioned as a place of power a total of 43 times<sup>7</sup> (#54F–#86F; #88F; #90F–#98F; #100F–#101F). The place itself was referred to in numerous ways, though all the expressions are regarded here as official names. All the answers contained both a neighbourhood name *Malmi* in the genitive and a Finnish word for airfield (*lentokenttä*) or airport (*lentoasema*) as a generic element. In the official name the word *lentokenttä* is used, but since *lentoasema* is also commonly used in standard Finnish, we have included them both in this group, as well as a shorter form *kenttä* ('field') which was used once. Moreover, it is convenient to analyse all the names referring to the airport under the same category. Some of the responses contained a specifying element (*Helsinki*) stating the home city of the airfield, a practice already seen in some other responses in this category.

Of special interest are the two responses (#72F, #90F) that also included supplementary information (e.g. 'and its surrounding nature/forest'); thus, they also referred to the natural features adjacent to the airport. In these place formulations, the respondents probably wanted to point out that the place was not just an airport, but a broad area with trees and shrubs and other natural elements. The descriptions people gave reinforce this interpretation. The place was related to layers of both personal and national history, with comings and goings, an optimistic future and a sense of timelessness. The fact that the airport is going to be closed and repurposed for housing has aroused strong emotions in some of the people who responded: anxiety, anger and sorrow (e.g. #64F; see also #69F). One of the respondents wrote that the prospect 'Brings a tear to the eye' (*tippa tulee öögaan*) (#97F).

In this category, both in the case of Malmi Airport and also in descriptions of the Munkkivuori shopping centre in Helsinki, the affective practice can be read not only from the way the change in the environment is described, but also from the way different histor-

<sup>7</sup> In addition to 41 answers counted as explicit Malmi Airport responses, the airport was mentioned as an additional place of power in two responses. In general, only one place was specified per response, but a couple of answers mention two or even three places, usually geographically close together. In our categorization, we have only taken the first place mentioned into account.

ical and social layers are present simultaneously in a certain place (see #37F; #43F). The narrative may otherwise even be quite neutral (e.g. #1S), but certain expressions and comparisons reveal the emotions associated with change. In the *Munkkivuori* (or *Munkshöjden* in Swedish, as in this response) shopping centre, the removal of park benches had given rise to a ‘Benchgate’ (*Penkki-gate*, as in Watergate), and a comparison is made with a large new shopping mall – the Mall of Tripla – opened in the neighbouring area the same year as the old shopping centre with its cultural heritage value celebrated its 60th birthday: ‘It remains to be seen if Tripla will still be there in 60 years’ time’ [*Det återstår att se om även Tripla får stå kvar i 60 år*]. Future change is expected to be even quicker than hitherto, or perhaps the architecture is seen as more disposable than that of the present centre, which seems so powerful to this respondent.

These responses emphasise not only the historical layers of a city, but also the everyday meanings and practices that have been formed for some people using and living in these places. The sorrow felt as the places change can partly be interpreted as nostalgia for a lost place. According to Korhonen, moreover, it is often the threat of future change that arouses nostalgia (2006:27; see also Rinne & Olsson 2020:318–323). Sorrow, a basic element of nostalgia, is also visible in these responses, where the emphasis seems to be more on arguing that the places are being changed for the worse and expressing the perceived injustice of the decisions made about their future. Problems will arise when the people who make decisions about a place do not understand the meaning it has for its users.

The respondents do not usually explain or justify the names themselves when giving their descriptions of places. Thus, there is no metalinguistic commentary on names or name elements in the data, as there often is in onomastic interviews or surveys (see for example Ainiala & Halonen 2017:20–223; Ainiala 2014:38–42). However, there was one exception. In the example below, the name itself is given as a reason for the respondent’s attachment to the place and can be regarded as evidence of toponymic attachment (see also Kostanski

2016). The name is *Haltiala*, referring to an outdoor recreation area in Helsinki:

Haltialan kohdalla myös kaunis nimi on varmastikin vaikuttanut positiiivisiin mielikuviin ja läheisen suhteen muodostumiseen.

[In the case of Haltiala, it must have been the beautiful name that has affected the positive images and the forming of a close relationship.] (#6F)

The name includes the word *haltia* ('elf, fairy') and the word and its semantics are probably appealing to the respondent. Possibly the phonology of the name is also regarded as pleasing.

Referring to one's place of power by its official name constituted the largest naming category in the data. This is partly explained by the many responses regarding Malmi Airport. However, use of the official name might also show that it was important for these respondents to clearly identify the specific place of importance for the benefit of those later reading the responses. In the descriptions, the ways of identifying these places vary more. Numerous affective practices are connected to the respondents' places of power.

Most of the descriptions are concisely written. Some characteristics from social media were adopted, which can make the descriptions even more specific. In one of the most straightforward responses, the affect was expressed by a heart emoji at the end of a short sentence (#2E; also #59F; #86F). On the one hand, using the emoji indicates the difficulty the respondent had in putting their affect into words, but it also provides an easy way of expressing emotions in a culturally defined way (see for example Bai et al. 2019:4–5). A review of the responses using official place names indicates that there are a variety of places that can empower people, ranging from a specific park or statue to an entire city. Furthermore, the places may be visited every day or on special occasions to be documented. What is common to these places is that they have had an extraordinarily strong effect on people's lives, as places where they either grew up or learnt something profoundly life-changing. At the same time, the affective practices described are mostly sensory and bodily experiences; respondents have freely described their emotional bonds with certain places.

Overall, these respondents easily and naturally put their relationship with a specific place into words.

### 3.2 Relational descriptions

The second largest group consists of relational descriptions. In this group, the place reference is formulated using some other place as a point of reference (Schegloff 1972:100–101), and the place formulations include a place name or occasionally two, a classifying appellative and occasionally an adposition. These formulations may be used because the place does not have an official name or the respondent does not know it. Even if it does have an official name familiar to the respondent, he/she may want to use a relational formulation instead if it is regarded as more precise than the official name. The use of an extra specifying name element together with an official name (as presented in the previous section) may have served the same aim of presenting the location of the place as precisely as possible.

Most often, the place formulations in this category follow the pattern PLACE NAME + APPELLATIVE, e.g. *Helsingin rannat* (#9F; Helsinki + GEN + *ranta* ‘shore’ PL), *Päijänteiden saaristo* (#5F; *Päijänne* + GEN + *saaristo* ‘islands’). Usually, there is no official name for these places. Moreover, the formulations in question are also used in standard language in the media.

Some of the place formulations in this group state that the place is located between two other places (e.g. *Silta Kulosaaren ja Herttoniemen välissä* ‘A bridge between Kulosaari (neighbourhood) and Herttoniemi (neighbourhood)’ (#35F). Here, an official name does exist (*Naurissaarensilta*; *Naurissaari* (name of an island) + *silta* ‘bridge’), but the respondent may not know it or she may have regarded the longer description as more characteristic. In the description she writes that from the bridge one has a view of the bay in front of *Vanhakaupunki* (a neighbourhood) in all seasons. A special view is also mentioned in other responses; in one, in fact, the place of power was particularly specified as a view behind *Mattolaituri* on a hill (#38F). Here, the name *Mattolaituri* refers to a terrace restaurant named after



a jetty for outdoor carpet-cleaning, a practice characteristic of and commonly known in Helsinki.

One of the places in this category is a summer cabin situated in the central part of Helsinki. The name the respondent has given is *Kesämaja Lauttasaaren Länsiulapanniemellä* ('summer cabin located on a cape called *Länsiulapanniemi* in the neighbourhood of Lauttasaari island'). In the description, the respondent has even characterized the place as *Pikku Kesäparatiisi* ('Little Summer Paradise'). The use of initial capital letters emphasizes the importance of the place to the writer. This kind of epithet could also be used as an identifying place name (see also Ainiala et al. 2012:115). In addition, the respondent uses the appellative *mökki* ('the cottage') and a more colloquial form *möksä* to refer to the place, and they could actually be the most common ways for her to talk about it, similar to 'home', 'the office' (see also Schegloff 1972:97; cf. 'the church', 'the park' mentioned in the previous category). When describing the place in more detail, she explains how the walk there from home takes only 20 minutes, during which she turns into another person as she listens to the birds singing (#3F). This is one of the few responses in which the soundscape is explicitly mentioned, although that does not mean that the importance of sounds was not recognized in other responses. This can be inferred from descriptions in which the calming nature of the environment is emphasized, which would indicate silence or muted sounds. Pitsrick and Isnart have analysed sounds as an important part of placemaking mobilizing feelings of both belonging and nostalgia (2013:506).

As in other categories, nature and especially the sea and the seashore are experienced as key places of power and freedom that support one (#5F; #9F; #19F; #87F). However, in this category it does not have to be a specific place that empowers, but a combination of certain characteristics of nature. The seashore opens up views for those living in the city and the time spent there is described as a time of luxury, in the sense of something precious rather than expensive (#16F). For some, it is nature in the Finnish archipelago in general and a summer cottage there in particular that bring strength and peacefulness:

Suomen saaristo on niin kaunista, ainutlaatuista, villiä ja karua. Mökillä luonnon keskellä, meren ympäröimänä koen olevani osa luontoa, olen vahva. [The Finnish archipelago is beautiful, unique, wild and bare. In the cottage surrounded by nature, I feel as if I am a part of nature; I am strong.] (#11F)

In this example, the respondent becomes one with the environment, which again emphasizes their bodily experience. In another response, the Pori bridge is described as a special place where one can see ‘the power of nature in stormy weather, the sunrise in the morning and the sunset in the evening when leaving work, and all those many jack-daws and rooks that spend their time in the structures of the bridge’ (#25F). A bridge offers an unobstructed view, sometimes coloured by the city lights, sometimes by the sun. It is a place where the rest of the world disappears (#35F; also #41F). These nature descriptions are very sensory, as in the official name category, and the agency of the material environment is clear. In these responses, the agency of light is given prominence (see Bille & Sørensen 2007). The banks of a river are also described as a lifeline where something is always happening. The flowing water in the river is a symbol of continuity that gives a sense of calm (#32F). The inner-city sea view is described as ‘hypnotic, sentimental and empowering’ (#38F) and the relationship with the sea as interactive, as if the sea has the role of someone receiving both the happy and the sad emotions of the respondent (#39F). A respondent who in particular named the seashore in Helsinki as her place of power writes that there are many places in Helsinki that ‘thrill’ her (#9F), i.e. cause a bodily, affective reaction.

The way nature is present in the descriptions is not surprising (see for example Vannini & Vannini 2020). In this category, a specific wish is expressed to retain the natural places that are deemed important (#89F). However, there are also descriptions in which the respondents highlight the overall urban atmosphere of the city. The inner city can be a ‘home’ that is full of new activities and people unknown to the respondent. The mixture of familiarity and the potential for small adventures makes the place special. At the same time, urban life is based on the historical layers between the past and the present (#12F; see also #30F). These features are also apparent in another response,

where the person's childhood environment is pictured as a place of almost unlimited possibilities. In childhood memories, the opportunity for adventures is emphasized (#14F; #15F):

Se oli paikka, josta kadut veivät melkein minne vain.

[It was a place where the streets led to almost anywhere.] (#14F)

Yleensä kesän helteisin päivä, ruohikko on palanut ja ilmassa makea elokuun tuoksu. ... Päivän päätteeksi vilkuttaa Viking Linen palaavalle laivalle, ja raukeana & vähän auringossa kärehtäneenä talsii hitaasti takaisin lauttarantaan, kaupunkiin.

[Usually the hottest day in the summer, the grass is burned and the sweet smell of August is in the air.... It is wonderful to wave at the end of the day to the Viking Line ship coming home, and walk back to the ferry dock, to the city relaxed and slightly burned by the sun.] (#18F)

Sensory feelings are also expressed here, as they were in other responses. It is important to be able to hear, feel and smell one's surroundings (#26F). In the empowering forest, the specific parts have been given names:

pupun koti, kellokäpä, satumetsä ja käärmeen kolo

[home of the bunny, forest creatures, enchanted forest and snake's hole]

(#50F)

The respondent describes how she often visits this forest together with her family, sometimes just to walk, sometimes to pick berries and mushrooms, and how these specific parts 'must always be checked'. The semantics of their names gives the impression that they have been given together with or by a child (see also Ainiala et al. 2012:114–115); thus, they are probably part of the creation of a 'forest wonderland'. The names are written in lower case and two of them are presented as phrases rather than compound names. The respondent may thus be emphasizing their status as unofficial names.

In this category, relational expressions are most probably used as place references for the same reason as official names in the previous category: the respondent wants the specific place to be identified as precisely as possible. With regard to their affective character, the descriptions provided for this group are quite similar, as expected,

to those given for places identified only by an official place name: the bodily and sensory elements are highlighted and the senses can be seen as agents in placemaking (see for example Pistrick & Isnart 2013). However, in this category, it is not always a specific place that empowers, but rather the characteristics of certain kinds of places and landscapes make them empowering. The impulses the environment gives are described as important in creating a certain mindscape.

### 3.3 Unofficial place names

Unofficial place names are names (most often urban) that have not been officially adopted (Ainiala et al. 2012:105–109). Only three names are regarded as unofficial in our categorization: *Sörkän silta* (*Sörkkä* + GEN + *silta* ‘bridge’), *Kaivarin ranta* (*Kaivari* + GEN + *ranta* ‘shore’) and *Pikku-Vesku* (*pikku* ‘little’ + *Vesku*). The first two are like the previous group in their formation, namely relational descriptions, and they could also be categorized as such. However, since they include a slang name, *Sörkkä* or *Kaivari*, they are analysed here instead. Additionally, we wish to emphasize that all the names in this category include slang names, which make up a subgroup of unofficial names (Ainiala et al. 2012:105).

*Sörkkä* is a slang name for the neighbourhood of *Sörnäinen* in Helsinki (Ainiala 2014) and *Kaivari* a slang name for Kaivopuisto park in the same city (Paunonen & Paunonen 2000). They are both very widely used slang names in Helsinki and are recognizable even outside the Helsinki region. In both cases, the respondents begin their descriptions by saying that these are familiar places from their childhood:

Hämeentie 37 on lapsuuden kotini. Sörkän (olen aina sanonut Sörkän en Sörkan) Tuolla sillalla hypättiin narua, siitä näin ratapitskulle, Pääskylänrinteen puistoon, Kurvin kulmaan, melkein kaikkialle, missä lapsena leikittiin ja braijattiin ja alkavassa nuoruudessa vain ‘notkuttiin’ friidut ja kundit kimpassa. Se oli paikka, josta kadut veivät melkein minne vain.

[Hämeentie 37 is my childhood home. At the bridge in Sörkkä (I have always said Sörkkä not Sörkka), we skipped and from there I could see the railway yard, the park of Pääskylänrinne, the corner of Kurvi, almost everywhere

we used to play as children and in our early youth when we hung around with lasses and lads together. It was a place where streets led to almost anywhere.] (#14F)

At the beginning of the description the respondent gives the street address (see also Schegloff 1972:97) of her childhood home. Nevertheless, she did not choose to write it as her place of power in the questionnaire, but as mentioned gave a slang name instead. It is noteworthy that the respondent also uses other slang words in her response: *ratapitsku*, *braijattiin*, *friidut* and *kundit* (concerning slang, see Ainala & Lappalainen 2017:132; Paunonen 1994:237–238). The choice of slang words and names instead of standard Finnish variants is probably an indication of a close, even intimate relationship to the place and displays a strong attachment to it. Slang would undoubtedly have been the language the respondent used as a child and in her youth. Generally, slang is often seen as a language belonging to a special age group, in particular youth (Chambers 2009:170–181). (Regarding the use of slang as an emotional language, see also #97F in the Malmi Airport group.)

The metalinguistic comment the respondent offers concerning the name is also of interest. She states, in parentheses, that she has always used the name variant *Sörkkä* instead of *Sörkka*. She thus makes it evident that she is well aware that there are two variants of the name and that the choice between them is often disputed (Paunonen & Paunonen 2000). Metalinguistic comments of this kind are exceedingly rare in the data (however, see #6F in the official names group).

Both these responses, *Sörkkä* and *Kaivari*, may be seen as echoing some nostalgia for memories of childhood and youth, times in the past but not necessarily present or at least meaningful any more. However, *Kaivari* is explained to be the respondent's own territory and as such still carries a specific familiarity (#27F; cf. the responses about Malmi Airport).

Unlike *Sörkkä* and *Kaivari*, the name *Pikku-Vesku* (or *Vesku*) is not linked to the respondent's childhood or youth. In this case, the respondent just says that the place is a magnificent natural area in the middle of the city: 'Water, greenness, beauty' (#23F). The unofficial

name refers to a park and lake area in the city of Lahti in southern Finland, officially known as *Pikku Vesijärvi*. The name *Vesku* is commonly known and even sometimes used in the local media. This unofficial name could thus be regarded almost as a ‘semi-official’ name and it demonstrates the wide continuum unofficial names cover, from widely known names to rarely used microtoponyms (Ainiala 2014; Ainiala et al. 2012:116–117). Similarly, the two other unofficial names, *Sörkkä* and *Kaivari*, are widely known and, as such, safe enough to be used in a public survey.

In addition, a parallel unofficial name is once mentioned in a respondent’s description of their place of power: *Munkshöjdens köpcentrum eller* [or] ‘*Ostaren*’ (#S1). The name is written in quotation marks to indicate its status as an unofficial name. The respondent does not express any personal relationship to this place; rather, the use of the unofficial name is connected to everyday meanings and practices of the place.

Unlike the previous categories, this one displays an ambiguous (even an emotional) way of naming places of power. By using unofficial place names, the respondents have wanted to emphasize either the special role of the place as part of their childhood memories, or its everydayness. In these cases, reading the particular kind of affect from the responses requires a historical understanding of the use of unofficial names and slang. In a way, the affect is performed in the use of language itself. The slang used can occasionally make the descriptions themselves sound harsh and even unemotional, if the reasons for using it as a symbol of belonging and personal history are not understood. For those using slang in their responses, these emotional meanings are self-evident, and in that sense the responses concerned can be seen as directed at a like-minded audience.

### 3.4 Classifying expressions

In nine responses, classifying appellative expressions are used to refer to places of power. These expressions cannot be interpreted as proper names and they do not, as such, denote a single entity. The responses

mention forests, seashores and libraries as meaningful places. Additionally, one answer mentions ‘an aesthetic city’ and another ‘a city café’. In the latter, a specific establishment is mentioned in parentheses, as an example of a nice café. Sometimes specific places are mentioned in the place descriptions.

In these places, it is often the atmosphere that is described as empowering. Just to go to any library ‘calms’ and ‘refreshes’ you, and an unspoken connection between the people within the same place is created (#1F). It is the combination of ‘impressive collections, spaces and personnel’ that empowers (#53F). Cafés, on the other hand, create a more lively ‘non-space between the public and private’:

Kahvilan tuoksut ja äänet, arjen luksuksen mielikuvat ja vapaa-ajan assosiaatiot tekevät kahvilassa olemisesta ilahduttavaa, lataavaa ja rauhoittavaa vaikka tekisin töitä.

[The smells and voices, the images of everyday indulgence and associations with free time make being in cafés joyful and both energizing and calming even when you are working.] (#45F)

This is also the case with more specific cafés: ‘The café is a place where time stops’ (#51F).

In this category, nature is also emphasized: ‘City dwellers also need experiences of nature’ (#20F; see also #99F). For another respondent, the seashore offers the best of the city: there, you do not need to talk, but on the other hand it also offers a place for joyful sociality (#7F). The forest is a place where it is ‘good to breathe and be’ (#29F), where you experience peace and a good feeling (#48F). One respondent even refers to a specific tree in her local park which she can rarely pass by without taking a closer look at it (#49F).

In addition, the aesthetic city is described through attributes that describe an urban atmosphere: cafés, culture and other opportunities to pursue hobbies and exercise (#31F). For one respondent, open space makes her feel better: ‘[I like] the feeling of space around me and the wind on my face’ (#44F).

The group of responses using classifying expressions is substantially different from the other categories. Here, no individual places are mentioned as places of power, but rather several types of places

are described. In a strict sense, these are not ‘places’, since they cannot be understood as entities (cf. Cresswell 2015). The respondents have not wanted to state a precise place and have interpreted the whole question of a power place partly differently from what we as questionnaire designers had in mind. Nevertheless, these answers have helped us to understand the wide spectrum people may have regarding meaningful places. In addition, here too individual places were mentioned, though only in the descriptions. The affective practices present in these descriptions confirm the factors that are also visible in the previous categories: what gives a place its empowering nature is a certain kind of atmosphere, which can vary from busy urban street life to the soothing effect of nature. However, in these descriptions what is represented is more an image of a place of power than a concrete manifestation of it; respondents reported on a *kind of place* that empowers.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Places of power renew, calm, invigorate and help in distress. They allow the respondents to be alone and listen to their own thoughts, or make them feel at one with nature. They may have been a ‘stepping-stone’ to the world or an ‘empowering lap’ in a time of need. In these places people sense, touch, hear, smell and observe their surroundings (see Olsson, Rinne & Suopajarvi 2021; Pistrick & Isnart 2013). They interact both bodily and socially with their environment, often consciously aiming to meet their needs (see Manzo 2003). The material surroundings of a power place can vary in size and nature, from an extremely specific geographical spot like a statue to a large and sometimes socially more structured entity like a city or a university. The place may be one linked to everyday life or one for special occasions, and it may carry personal, cultural or national meanings with long and life-changing histories. Sometimes the place of power is more of a landscape or an atmosphere than a geographically defined place.



Despite the variety of power places, there are also many similarities when we compare the mechanisms of the agencies in which we were interested: the agency of the materiality of the place, the agency of emotion and affect, and the agency of the person experiencing the place. It is the specific material particularities that arouse feelings of empowerment. These particularities are important because of the cultural and historical meanings people attach to them (Wetherell 2012). Emotions and affective practices, which are also culturally constructed, guide people physically or mentally to these specific places to empower them, and literally change the way people feel about themselves (see Rinne & Olsson 2020:334–339). When a place makes a person feel safe, as one of our respondents wrote, there is a harmony among these three agencies.

The way places of power are identified and named is another layer of placemaking (see Creswell 2015). We found four main ways of identifying a place in the data: official place names, relational place descriptions, unofficial place names and classifying expressions (cf. Schegloff 1972). The process of naming in the context of a questionnaire has influenced the data collected. Since we did not include a map, and did not ask the respondents to give a precise location or name of the place, we gained more varied and even open-ended responses. For example, ‘forests’ or ‘libraries’ as places of power would not have been elicited by a more rigid questionnaire.

Official place names and relational place descriptions were the typical ways of referring to one’s power place. These ways emphasize the need to specify the place as accurately as possible. However, in these categories too, it is not only the place as such that is important, but sometimes a certain atmosphere that can also be associated with other places. The most visible way of expressing emotions and affective practices in naming is to use unofficial place names; in this case, our respondents did so using slang. Classifying expressions in themselves carried an understanding of the nature of the place; the idea was a shared understanding of what an aesthetic city, café, sea or forest could mean to a person. The many ways of naming places of

power show both the variety of the places and the diverse ways places become empowering.

To give a place a name is a sign of its importance. Names as such do not necessarily always reveal what kinds of meanings, emotions and affective practices are attached to a place. They can be one way of expressing one's feelings towards a place, though, whether it be the 'rose park', the name of the neighbourhood in which you were born and raised, the calming landscape, or the city with its urban buzz. Identifying places of power lends visibility to the power of places and their agency in people's lives.

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