

Naming Metro Stations in Helsinki and Espoo, Finland

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Abstract

The first metro line in Helsinki was opened in 1982. Today the metro has 17 stations, and the metro system is being expanded to the west in the city of Espoo with eight new stations that will open in 2016.

The metro stations are traditionally named after surrounding districts or neighbourhoods or other well-known toponyms. The name planners have considered this type of station names to be informative, neutral and well-fitting in the environment. The stations are named in the official languages, Finnish and Swedish.

The established principles of giving names to metro stations have lately been challenged by other kinds of naming motivations. In Espoo, the future metro station in the district of *Otaniemi* been renamed trilingually *Aalto-yliopisto – Aalto-universitetet – Aalto University* in 2013 after the university that has its main campus in Otaniemi. Similarly, University of Helsinki wants to change the traditional name of *Kaisaniemi* metro station into *Helsingin yliopisto*. In addition, a private corporation has made a proposal to name the nearby metro station after the company name.

As in all name planning, the two viewpoints of guiding and branding are to be considered. The decision-makers choose which one they want to emphasize.

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Naming Metro Stations in Helsinki and Espoo, Finland

Helsinki and Espoo are the two largest cities in Finland. Both municipalities have two official languages – Finnish and Swedish. In the whole metropolitan area there are 1.2 million residents and 660,000 jobs. Each year approximately 350 million trips are made on the region's public transport network. Public transport is provided by buses, trams, underground metro and trains. Last year there were 62 million trips made on the metro line.

The first metro line in Helsinki was opened in 1982. Today the metro line has 17 stations in the City of Helsinki, and the network is being expanded westwards into the City of Espoo with eight new stations (two in Helsinki, six in Espoo) that will open in 2016. The stations are named in Finnish and Swedish (in this paper, the Finnish-language names are used).

An important aim of naming places is to separate places from each other and to help people identify where they are. Consequently naming places that will have many users and that are located in central areas should be done with particular care. Metro stations are a perfect example of such places as they serve daily a large amount of people from a broad area.

The best station names are given after traditional, well-established and well-known area names. In Helsinki and Espoo, stations are quite spaced out so area names are usually

appropriate. Therefore, metro stations are traditionally named after district names or other well-known toponyms. The place name administrators consider these type of station names to be informative, neutral and well-fitting within the environment.

However, construction companies and other businesses consider the task of place naming in a different way: the name should be more about selling a product than locating a place. Developers often try to influence names at the early stages of the planning process so that they could better sell and brand an area.

In the naming of metro stations, however, new factors have become apparent – from surprising sources. Two universities have wanted to have their names used as a metro station name, at the expense of two well established area names of which one has been used as a metro station name for decades. Education establishments have, in the same way as commercial enterprises, wanted to achieve visibility and promote their activities, and the city governing bodies have wanted to promote the university town image. Most of all, metro users expect that official names help them find their destination as easily as possible. That is the primary task of a name.

Metro Stations in Helsinki

The metro stations in Helsinki are typically tightly bonded with the district centre, and in most cases, the station has been named after the area (e.g. district *name Herttoniemi* > metro station name *Herttoniemi*). These names support each other. Well-known macrotoponyms make orientation easier for both city dwellers and occasional visitors.



Fig. 1. Metro stations in Helsinki

Kaisaniemi or Helsingin yliopisto Station

A much discussed name change has recently occurred in Helsinki. This happened when the metro station of Kaisaniemi was renamed to *Helsingin yliopisto* ('University of Helsinki'). The initiative to change the name had originally come from the vice-chancellor's office of the University of Helsinki in March 2012. The City Name Committee objected to this proposal, and so did the joint-stock property company who administers the property (Kiinteistö Oy Kaisaniemen Metrohalli):

Changing the name of the metro station cannot bring any benefits. On the contrary; changing the name of the station will mean a long-term learning process and can cause many kinds of cost effects on the area; especially on the companies and enterprises in Kaisaniemi, as well as on potential customers and passengers. (Helsingin kaupunginhallitus 2014)

The name change was suddenly on the agenda of the Helsinki City Board in April 2014 and a unanimous decision was made. The public's opinions diverged dramatically when the name change was made official.

The newly opened main library of the university is located in Kaisa-talo building alongside the former Kaisaniemi metro station. The name of the Kaisaniemi metro station came from the neighbourhood name *Kaisaniemi*, which originally was a name of a public park (Helsingin kadunnimet 1992: 105). The park was named after a well-known restaurant keeper Catharina (Kajsa) Wahllund (1771-1843) in the 1830s (Haggrén 2007). She was very popular with the students of University of Helsinki and is part of university history.

University of Helsinki has had an impact on street naming before. One of the oldest official street names in Helsinki, *Hallituskatu*, was partly changed in 1995 to *Yliopistonkatu* (University Street) (Helsingin kadunnimet 3 1999: 174). There was already a street name referring to the university before, *Aleksanterinkatu*, which was named after the former name of the University of Helsinki (Imperial Alexander University) in 1833 (Helsingin kadunnimet 1992: 90). Some of the reasons why naming a metro station had become a fairly topical issue must have been the need to make the most of the university brand, the coverage in the cityscape and rivalry with Aalto University, who had made its metro station public a little earlier.

University of Helsinki has four campuses. The metro station in question does not only serve the university and its staff, students and visitors. It is located in a central and busy part of the business centre. The new name signs will be on display in January 2015. It is interesting to see the development in the future. How long will it take for the new station name to become firmly established? How long will it take to forget the old name? Or will the name of Kaisaniemi metro station survive after all?

Metro Stations in Espoo

In Espoo, there were six metro stations under construction in 2014. In this phase, the end station of the metro line in Espoo will be Matinkylä, but in the future, the line will continue to Kivenlahti in South West Espoo with five more stations.

The final resolution of the locations of the stations was made in 2008. Between 2005 and 2008, the name planners in Espoo town planning department made a name plan for the 11 projected metro stations. These names were brought into use in communication by the city of Espoo and the metro constructing company owned by the cities of Espoo and Helsinki.

As most stations will be located right under the centre of an area, they were easy to name after the area. This applies to the stations in *Matinkylä*, *Niittykumpu*, *Tapiola*, *Otaniemi* and *Keilaniemi*, and to the five stations to be constructed west of Matinkylä as well.



Fig. 2. Metro stations in Espoo

Jousenpuisto or Urheilupuisto Station

One station will be located almost on the boundary of Niittykumpu and Tapiola districts. It proved to be a more challenging case to name. The names of the surrounding residential areas, such as *Tontunmäki*, would have given a wrong idea of the location, and the name of the adjacent sports park, *Tapiolan urheilupuisto*, was unsuitable for station as it is rather long and would cause confusion with the station name *Tapiola*. The unofficial elliptic name *Urheilupuisto* was considered unsuitable as a station name by the name planners because it

consists of simply the generic *urheilupuisto* meaning ‘sports park’. A station name should refer to one specific place in Espoo and the whole Helsinki region, but there are many other sports parks in Espoo only.

The name planners proposed the name *Jousenpuisto* to the metro station, after a park and a residential block next to the station entrance. Previously, the name was not known widely, but the name planners supposed that as a station name, it would soon become well-known anyway.

However, in 2010, the board of the metro construction company dealt with the name *Jousenpuisto* and made a decision that it would be changed to *Urheilupuisto*. According to the company board, ‘the name describes the services of the area’ (Länsimetro 2010). That is perfectly correct. However, the company did not consider as a disadvantage that the same name is used to refer to other places in Espoo (e.g. the sports park in Leppävaara, Espoo). In late 2010, Espoo city planning board decided as well that the station name shall be *Urheilupuisto*.

Otaniemi or Aalto-yliopisto Station

A large part of the district of Otaniemi is a campus area. The university that operates there is called *Aalto university*, in Finnish *Aalto-yliopisto*. In 2013, the university made a proposition that the *Otaniemi* metro station should be named after the university, and the Espoo City Board decided to name the station *Aalto-yliopisto*. The reasoning was that this station name would ‘support the importance of the main campus of Aalto university’ and ‘the development of the university town image of Espoo’ (Espoon kaupunginhallitus 2013). Nothing was said about how this station name would serve the passengers in their daily movement.

It can be assumed that in any case, many people will spontaneously call the station *Otaniemi*. Such a situation where the official name and the popular name are not compatible makes the government more distant from the residents.

Root Names in Other Metro Systems

The station names in the metro systems of Stockholm, Paris and Glasgow were studied. The root names of the station names in these cities are often area names (e.g. *Hillhead*, Glasgow) and, especially in central areas where the distance between stations is relatively short, other names, often names of squares (*Odenplan*, Stockholm) and streets. In Paris, many station names are elliptic (street name *avenue George-V* > station name *George V*). The metro station names in all these cities are also rather stable: it seems that they have been changed only for informative reasons, e.g. when the original root name has been changed.

Two metro station names in Stockholm have root names referring to universities (university name *Stockholms universitet* ~ *Universitetet* > station name *Universitetet*, university name *Kungliga Tekniska högskolan* ~ *Tekniska högskolan* > station name *Tekniska högskolan*). The station name *Tekniska högskolan* was presented as the reason of the name *Aalto-yliopisto* in Espoo (Espoon kaupunginhallitus 2013). However, in these two cases in Stockholm, there were no area names available that would have been exactly suitable for the metro stations.

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