

Breaking from and building on the past: Helsinki and Dublin after independence

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ABSTRACT. *Capital cities play a significant role in interpreting a country's past and charting its future. In the aftermath of the First World War nine new European states, Finland and Ireland among them, were confronted with the question of how to create a capital city befitting their new status and national identity. Instead of designing and constructing an entirely new capital city which would have marked a clean break from the past, all these states chose an existing city as the capital. This article will examine processes through which two capitals, Helsinki and Dublin, were renewed physically and symbolically to make the political change 'real' to people, but also to reinterpret the past and create a 'teleology for the present'. The aim is to discuss the ways in which the changes, planned and implemented, both reflected and reinforced new interpretations of the history of the city and the nation, and the continuities and discontinuities the changes created between the past and the present. Some elements and versions of the past were chosen over others, preserved and reinvented in the cityscape, while others were ignored, hidden or denied.*

Capital cities are among the most important arenas for proclaiming national identity. Through these cities, nations articulate their ideas of what holds them together, but also the nature of their relationships to other nations.¹ Giving a concrete form to these abstract ideas and inscribing them into a cityscape is a complicated process in any society but especially so in societies undergoing major political transitions. What makes the process challenging is the uneven pace of different transformations: compared to political arrangements and social relations, which can change very rapidly, the physical and spatial forms of cities are relatively stable and resistant to radical change. Even in periods when a society undergoes fundamental transformations and when national identity is profoundly renegotiated, the pace of

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¹ Andreas W. Daum, 'Capitals in modern history: inventing urban spaces for the nation' in Andreas W. Daum and Christof Mauch (eds), *Berlin – Washington, 1800–2000: capital cities, cultural representation and national identities* (Cambridge, 2011), pp 3–30; Lawrence J. Vale, *Architecture, power, and national identity* (2nd ed., Abingdon, 2008), pp 14–17; Göran Therborn, 'Monumental Europe: the national years: on the iconography of European capital cities' in *Housing, Theory and Society*, xix (2002), pp 26–47.

physical change in the capital city may be very slow.² Newly-independent nations constitute a prime example of the tensions these differently-paced developments may cause. National independence always carries with it a promise of a fresh start, but fulfilling the promise in the relatively fixed built environment of the capital city is usually difficult.³ Frequently, the journey as an independent nation begins in an urban landscape where the past under foreign rule is manifest throughout the city: monuments and buildings, streets and squares.

In Europe between the two world wars, many countries faced the question of how to create a capital city befitting their new status and national identity. As a result of the collapse of the Ottoman, Austro–Hungarian and Russian Empires and the incipient disintegration of the British Empire, nine new states had emerged in northern and central-eastern Europe.⁴ Instead of adopting an entirely new capital, which would have marked a clean break from the past, all these states chose an existing city as the capital and renewed it physically and symbolically to meet the needs and demands of the new independent era.⁵ Renewing a city with centuries of eventful history inevitably involved the challenge of confronting the past. Obliterating the past was not possible, but it could be reinterpreted to allow the new state and its policies to appear the natural result of sustained trends. In this process, only certain elements and versions of the past were brought into the ‘present’.⁶

This article will focus on two capital cities, Helsinki and Dublin, and on the material and symbolic changes planned and implemented in their respective cityscapes after independence. In particular, the aim is to discuss the ways in which these changes both reflected and reinforced new interpretations of the history of the city and the nation in the early years of independence. With this aim, the article will discuss the various continuities and discontinuities these transformations served to create between the past and the present. What elements and versions of the past were chosen, preserved and reinvented in the cityscape and what others were ignored, hidden or denied?

Many historians and cultural geographers have examined how the cityscapes of Helsinki and Dublin changed in the decades before and

² Robert A. Beauregard and Anne Haila, ‘The unavoidable continuities of the city’ in Peter Marcuse and Ronald van Kempen (eds), *Globalizing cities: a new spatial order?* (Oxford, 2000), pp 22–36.

³ See, for example, Joseph Brady, *Dublin 1930–1950: the emergence of the modern city* (Dublin, 2014), p. 13.

⁴ Finland in 1917, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland (reconstituted), Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia (the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes) in 1918, and Ireland in 1922.

⁵ A new capital city was designed and built, for example, in Australia (Canberra).

⁶ For discussion on capital cities and the reinterpretation of the past in newly-independent states, see, for example, Roy Jones and Brian J. Shaw, ‘Palimpsest for progress: erasing the past and rewriting the future in developing societies – case studies of Singapore and Jakarta’ in *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, xii (2006), pp 122–38; Robert Powell, ‘Erasing memory, inventing tradition, rewriting history: planning as a tool of ideology’ in Brian J. Shaw and Roy Jones (eds), *Contested urban heritage: voices from the periphery* (Aldershot, 1997), pp 85–100. For more general discussion, see Erika Hanna, *Modern Dublin: urban change and the Irish past, 1957–1973* (Oxford, 2013); Jennifer A. Jordan, *Structures of memory: understanding urban change in Berlin and beyond* (Stanford, 2006).

after independence. In her book, *Reinventing modern Dublin*, Yvonne Whelan has analysed the cultural landscape of early twentieth-century Dublin as a means of cultivating imperial and national identities, but also as a site of resistance and opposition. In particular, she has looked at four specific landscape elements: public statuary, street names, architecture and urban planning initiatives.⁷ Anja Kervanto Nevanlinna has examined the historical centre of Helsinki and the changes in the cultural meanings attributed to it at different times.⁸ Furthermore, researchers who have examined Finnish and Irish cultural nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century, and especially the search for national architectural styles, have made an important contribution to the discussion concerning the presence of the past in urban landscapes. For example, they have explored the ways in which architects and their designs influenced, and were influenced by, the desire to construct a distant ‘national’ past – Gaelic Irish and prehistoric or medieval Finnish – to support the aims of nationalist movements.⁹ Most of these studies tend to focus on the national and local levels, making little attempt to integrate national and local strands into transnational developments. Yet reinterpretation of the past did not occur in a vacuum, within a single city or country, but through the interplay of different – domestic and transnational – discourses and practices. The comparative international approach chosen in this article enables greater emphasis to be placed on an analysis of transnational influences and dependencies that had a lasting impact on the development of both Helsinki and Dublin. Despite many differences between these cities, they went through some very similar processes and were both subject to similar transnational influences when reinterpreting their history and renewing their cityscapes.¹⁰

⁷ Yvonne Whelan, *Reinventing modern Dublin: streetscape, iconography and the politics of identity* (Dublin, 2003); eadem, ‘The construction and deconstruction of a colonial landscape: monuments to British monarchs in Dublin before and after independence’ in *Journal of Historical Geography*, xxvii (2002), pp 508–33. See also David Dickson, *Dublin: the making of a capital city* (London, 2014) and Andrew Kincaid, *Post-colonial Dublin: imperial legacies and the built environment* (Minneapolis, 2006).

⁸ Anja Kervanto Nevanlinna, *Kadonneen kaupungin jäljillä: Teollisuusyhteiskunnan muutoksia Helsingin historiallisessa ytimessä* (Helsinki, 2002).

⁹ See, for example, Ritva Wäre, *Rakennettu suomalaisuus: Nationalismi viime vuosisadan vaihteen arkkitehtuurissa ja sitä koskevissa kirjoituksissa* (Helsinki, 1991); Charlotte Ashby, ‘The Pohjola building: reconciling contradictions in Finnish architecture’ in Raymond Quek and Darren Deane (eds), *Nationalism and architecture* (Farnham, 2012), pp 135–46; Marjaana Niemi, ‘Kansallinen ja kansainvälinen Eliel Saarinen – kaupunkisuunnittelija tieteen, taiteen ja politiikan risteyksissä’ in Irma Sulkunen, Marjaana Niemi ja Sari Katajala-Peltomaa (eds), *Usko, tiede ja histori-an kirjoitus – suomalaisia maailmankuvia keskiajalta 1900-luvulle* (Helsinki, 2016), pp 237–66; Murray Fraser, *John Bull’s other homes: state housing and British policy in Ireland, 1883–1922* (Liverpool, 1996), pp 7–15.

¹⁰ By combining comparative and transnational approach, and by analysing differences, similarities and entanglements, it is possible to reveal dependencies that transcend territorial and political borders. For discussion, see Deborah Cohen and Maura O’Connor, ‘Introduction: comparative history, cross-national history, transnational history – definitions’ in Deborah Cohen and Maura O’Connor (eds), *Comparison and history: Europe in cross-national perspective* (New York, 2004), pp 9–24; Paul Caffrey, ‘Nationality and representation: the Coinage Design Committee (1926–1928) and the formation of a design identity in the Irish Free State’ in Linda King and Elaine Sisson (eds), *Ireland, design and visual culture: negotiating modernity, 1922–1992* (Cork, 2011), pp 75–8; Sebastian

What follows is divided into three parts. The first part will give a short overview of the histories of Helsinki and Dublin before independence. The second part will look at the transformations planned in Helsinki and Dublin immediately after independence. The main aim is to analyse the ways in which these plans contributed to the reconstruction of the nation's past. The third part will concentrate on the 1920s, and examine some transformations that were implemented in Helsinki and Dublin, and the role of the changing cultural landscape in the imaginative construction of the nation's past and its contemporary place in the wider world. The comparison between Helsinki and Dublin reveals important differences, but it also uncovers a similar past which national grand narratives might ignore.

I

The area now known as Finland was at the point where east met west for centuries, absorbing influences from both directions. The Finnish peninsula was an integral part of Sweden from the twelfth century to the early nineteenth century, and the long association left a lasting mark on Finland in terms of economy, political system, language and religion. In 1809, Russia took possession of Finland from Sweden. Finland was annexed to the Russian Empire as an autonomous grand duchy with a separate Finnish central administration, which meant that a capital city had to be chosen to house government officials and civil servants. Tsar Alexander I chose Helsinki, a merchant town with a few thousand inhabitants. Turning Helsinki from a tiny wooden town into a capital city with a monumental neoclassical centre was a lengthy process carried out under the architectural leadership of Berlin-born Carl Ludvig Engel. The monumental centre influenced by the empire style of St Petersburg and Prussian architecture was completed by the mid-nineteenth century.¹¹

As a grand duchy, Finland enjoyed relatively extensive autonomy and – especially from the mid-nineteenth century – was able to develop its own political, economic and cultural life without too much interference from St Petersburg. Under these favourable conditions, Finland experienced an economic and cultural upsurge, the effects of which were clearly seen in the capital. The expansion of the commercial centre, the proliferation of cultural institutions and the development of new residential areas gave Helsinki the appearance of a modern European city. The emergent cultural nationalism also found expression in the cityscape, especially in the statues of national heroes erected in parks and squares.¹² In the late-nineteenth century, however, the era of liberal reforms came to an end. The Russian government, which was eager to consolidate the empire, began to curtail Finland's autonomy.

Conrad, 'Entangled memories: versions of the past in Germany and Japan, 1945–2001' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, xxxviii, no. 1 (Jan. 2003), p. 86.

¹¹ Matti Klinge, *Pääkaupunki: Helsinki ja Suomen valtio 1808–1863* (Helsinki, 2012); Marjatta Hietala and Martti Helminen, 'Helsinki since 1550' in Marjatta Hietala, Martti Helminen and Merja Lahtinen (eds), *Helsinki: historic town atlas* (Helsinki, 2009), pp 9–30; Thomas Hall, *Planning Europe's capital cities: aspects of nineteenth century urban development* (London, 1997), pp 93–6.

¹² Harry Schulman, 'Settlement growth, structure and land use' in Hietala, Helminen & Lahtinen (eds), *Helsinki*, pp 53–60; Liisa Lindgren, *Monumentum: Muistomerkkien aatteita ja aikaa* (Helsinki, 2000).

The most intense Russification periods were 1899 to 1905, and 1907 to 1917. The tightening grip of the Russians also manifested itself in the cultural landscape of Helsinki, for example in the monuments such as the Peace Chapel and commemorative festivities celebrating the Russian conquest of Finland. The policy of forced integration, which the Finns saw as an encroachment on what they perceived as their constitutional rights, further fuelled Finnish political and cultural nationalism.¹³ Among the high points of this cultural creativity were national romantic style buildings designed by architects such as Eliel Saarinen and Lars Sonck. These buildings were looked upon as modern, international designs and at the same time as ‘authentically’ Finnish buildings with deep roots in nature and ‘Finnish’ ancient or medieval history.¹⁴

Helsinki was a contested space in the early-twentieth century. In addition to the widening rift between the Finns and the Russians, social class and language were key dividers. In 1900, about half of the population spoke Finnish, and the proportion was growing. Swedish, the traditional language of the elite, was spoken by 43 per cent of the population and Russian by 5 per cent.¹⁵ The Russians and the Finns, as well as different social classes and language groups, maintained their own interpretations of the nation’s past. The dramatic winter of 1917–18 challenged all these interpretations. Finland declared independence in December 1917, taking advantage of the power vacuum emerging after the Russian revolutions, and just over a month later civil war broke out between the forces of the non-socialist government (the Whites) and those of the socialist movement (the Reds). The war lasted less than four months, ending in victory for the Whites in May 1918, but left thousands of people dead on both sides and created a deep political divide.¹⁶ These events provided an entirely new lens through which to contemplate and interpret the past of the city and the nation.

Like the Swedish presence in Finland, English involvement in Ireland began in the twelfth century, and by the seventeenth century, Ireland was increasingly and more decidedly under the control of English and, latterly, British government structures. Dublin experienced periods of decline but also periods of remarkable growth under British rule. In the late-eighteenth century, when Helsinki was still slumbering in almost rural peace, Dublin had a population of well over 150,000 and was adorned with boulevards, squares and neoclassical public buildings such as the Custom House and the Four Courts. The increasing economic prosperity was accompanied by growing political influence, as the Irish legislature was nominally independent from 1782 to 1801.¹⁷

¹³ Henrik Meinander, *A history of Finland* (London, 2011), pp 97–123; Riitta Pakarinen, ‘“Tervaskojournalismia”: Rauhan kappelin kohtalo’ in *Narinkka 1996: Helsinki City Museum Yearbook* (Helsinki, 1996), pp 130–9.

¹⁴ Wäre, *Rakennettu suomalaisuus*; Niemi, ‘Kansallinen ja kansainvälinen Eliel Saarinen’, pp 242–6.

¹⁵ Sven-Erik Åström, ‘Kaupunkiyhteiskunta murrosvaiheessa’ in *Helsingin kaupungin historia* (5 vols, Helsinki, 1950–65) iv, part 2, p. 31.

¹⁶ Meinander, *A history of Finland*, pp 128–31.

¹⁷ Mary E. Daly, *Dublin: the deposed capital* (Cork, 1984), pp 2–3; Edel Sheridan, ‘Designing the capital city: Dublin, c.1660–1810’ in Joseph Brady and Anngret Simms (eds), *Dublin through space and time* (Dublin, 2001), pp 66–135. Kincaid, *Postcolonial Dublin*, p. 4.

In the nineteenth century, the development of Dublin was in many ways contradictory. Dublin was still an important administrative centre, a thriving commercial hub and, as an early twentieth century author argued, ‘a bright, cheerful city, with plenty going on’.¹⁸ With the abolition of parliament, however, Dublin lost significant prestige. Many of the wealthy citizens moved to Britain or to the suburbs, and their elegant Georgian townhouses were converted into multi-family tenements.¹⁹ The Industrial Revolution did nothing to reverse these fortunes: it breathed new life into Belfast but Dublin struggled through a difficult transition from an urban economy based on workshop manufacturing and processing, to one based on a great diversity of service industries, where a large proportion of unskilled and semi-skilled workers were left chronically under-employed. If language was a key divider in Helsinki, Dublin was divided by religion. Professional and mercantile life was led by Protestants, many of whom lived in suburbs outside the city, although they exerted considerable influence on the cultural and commercial life of the city. Municipal politics was dominated by Catholics who, in the early twentieth century, accounted for over 80 per cent of the population. The overwhelming majority of Catholics were nationalists of some description, and sought an Ireland which would, at the very least, enjoy a greater level of autonomy from British governance.²⁰ The strengthening position of the nationalists in the Dublin Corporation had a direct impact on the cultural landscape of the city – not so much on architecture but on the decorative use of Celtic symbols and on the commemoration of national heroes.²¹

In the tense atmosphere prevailing in the city, town planning was seen as one way to mediate conflicts between the British and Irish nationalists, but also those between different social classes. British imperial officials encouraged British planners, such as Patrick Geddes, to work on Dublin. Geddes was invited to Dublin in 1911 by the viceroy and his wife, Lord and Lady Aberdeen, and for the following three years he devoted much effort to searching for solutions, for example, to the city’s housing crisis.²² Whilst attracting interest from different quarters, town planning was often sidelined by more important issues, such as the issue of home rule, and progress was modest. The zeal to implement far-reaching urban reforms was further dampened by political upheavals between 1916 and 1923.²³ In Dublin, as in Helsinki, the process of gaining independence provided an

¹⁸ Joseph Brady, ‘Dublin at the turn of the century’, p. 221.

¹⁹ Mark Crinson, ‘Georgianism and the tenements, Dublin, 1908–1926’ in *Art History*, xxxix, no. 4 (Sept. 2006), p. 630.

²⁰ Daly, *Deposed capital*, pp 1–19, 117–51; Jonathan Bardon and Dermot Keogh, ‘Introduction: Ireland, 1921–84’ in J. R. Hill (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, vii: Ireland, 1921–84* (Oxford, 2003), p. lvii.

²¹ Whelan, *Reinventing modern Dublin*, p. 136; Fraser, *John Bull’s other homes*, pp 10–11. The Dublin Corporation would, in the 1920s, become a stronghold for anti-Treaty politicians and was suppressed by the Free State government. As a result, it could not exert any real influence on urban planning in the early years of the new state.

²² Dickson, *Dublin: the making of a capital city*, pp 423–4, 476–7.

²³ Fraser, *John Bull’s other homes*, pp 132–47; Kincaid, *Postcolonial Dublin*, pp 5–6, 11–18, 32–4; Ruth McManus, *Dublin, 1910–1940: shaping the city and suburbs* (Dublin, 2002), pp 49–68.

entirely new framework through which to interpret the past and foresee the future of both the city and the nation.

II

Once independence was achieved it was important to make the political and cultural change visible and tangible in the capital city. As Lefebvre has pointed out, ‘any “social existence” aspiring or claiming to be “real”, but failing to produce its own space, would ... sooner or later disappear altogether, thereby immediately losing its identity, its denomination and its feeble degree of reality’.²⁴ The need for change was obvious to many contemporaries. For example, the *Freeman’s Journal* argued in December 1922 that: ‘We are now entering upon a new era and it is the national duty to ensure that the national capital shall naturally reflect the spirit of a free Ireland.’²⁵ Making the change visible in Helsinki and Dublin was also important because both countries were deeply divided in complex ways. In such circumstances, the capital city is usually expected to act ‘as the mediator among a collection of peoples who, one way or another, have come to be recognised as a single sovereign state’.²⁶ The strategies and measures the Finnish and Irish authorities planned and implemented to shape the cityscapes of their respective capital cities are interesting in their own right, but they also offer an invaluable lens through which to examine the efforts of each to create a new common past for the nation, that would legitimate the new state and its policies.

In both Helsinki and Dublin, one of the first impulses, after independence was achieved, was to start afresh and build an entirely new city centre. When envisioning a new centre worthy of their country’s enhanced status, planners and policy-makers interested in planning questions rarely looked to ancient ‘national’ pasts for ideas. Instead, they drew their inspiration from world-renowned nineteenth-century city planning schemes, and they were not alone. As Peter Hall has pointed out, the modernisation of Paris by Baron Haussmann and the American City Beautiful movement, which both emphasised ‘timeless’ classicism and uniformity, provided ‘the model for urban regeneration in any self-respecting city’ until the 1920s.²⁷ By looking to Paris and American cities for models on the basis of which to redesign their capital cities, planners in both Helsinki and Dublin interwove their country’s past with that of the western ‘civilised nations’. Furthermore, the planners legitimated their plans by reference to new scientific knowledge and expertise. An integral part of redesigning Helsinki and Dublin in the early twentieth century was a civic survey – a systematic study of the respective cities and their surroundings. In these studies the planners not only interpreted the past but also highlighted impending challenges and suggested strategies for dealing with them. By sheltering behind the authority of ‘value-free’ scientific knowledge – behind systematic investigations, impersonal statistics and bare facts – planners were

²⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The production of space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, 1991), p. 53.

²⁵ *Freeman’s Journal*, 12 Dec. 1922.

²⁶ Vale, *Architecture*, p. 17.

²⁷ Peter Hall, *Cities in civilization: culture, technology, and urban order* (London, 1998), p. 937.

able to identify problems and offer solutions to them in ways which appeared apolitical, even though they, too, had their own political agendas.²⁸

In Finland, the two architects who made the most important contribution to the planning of Helsinki immediately before and after independence were Eliel Saarinen and Bertel Jung.²⁹ In their proposal for a new master plan for Helsinki, which was published under the title *Pro-Helsingfors* in 1918, Saarinen and Jung suggested that an entirely new city centre be created for Helsinki north-west of the old empire-style centre. Their planning project had started before independence, but it took on a new urgency in December 1917, when Helsinki transformed, as Jung described it, from ‘a residence of Russian provincial satraps’ to the capital of an independent Finland.³⁰

In designing the new centre, Saarinen and Jung made use of the axial organisation favoured by Haussmann in Paris, drawing long straight streets lined with uniform facades that seemed to stretch to infinity. The focus of the new centre was to be King’s Avenue, a three-kilometre-long boulevard dissecting the new centre from south to north. The intersection of the south–north axis and the east–west axis was reserved for public buildings, but otherwise the avenue was to be lined with modern commercial and office blocks. The streets running parallel to the avenue were to be residential streets with dignified apartment buildings and with easy access to parks surrounding the centre. Building a monumental centre was not possible without a thriving economic base. Taking heed of economic realities, Saarinen and Jung devoted much time and thought to ensuring favourable conditions for trade, shipping and industry. They also sought to increase traffic flow in the city. In addition to offering an abundance of light and air, the broad thoroughfares they planned were designed to facilitate the economically essential movement of goods and people.³¹ The population of Helsinki was increasing at a rapid pace at the time, exceeding 160,000 around the time independence was gained, and

²⁸ *The Dublin civic survey: report prepared by Horace T. O’Rourke & the Public Civic Survey Committee* (Dublin, 1925); Eliel Saarinen, *Munkkiniemi-Haaga ja Suur-Helsinki: Tutkimuksia ja ehdotuksia kaupunkijärjestelyn alalta* (Helsinki, 1915). For discussion, see also Michiel Dehaene, ‘Survey and the assimilation of a modernist narrative in urbanism’ in *Journal of Architecture*, vii (2002), pp 33–55; Michael Hebbert and Wolfgang Sonne, ‘History builds the town: on the uses of history in twentieth-century city planning’ in Javier Monclús and Manuel Guàrdia (eds), *Culture, urbanism and planning* (Aldershot, 2006), pp 3–20; Marjaana Niemi, *Public health and municipal policy making: Britain and Sweden, 1900–1940* (Aldershot, 2007), pp 2–3.

²⁹ Jung had worked as the first town-planning architect for the city of Helsinki from 1908 to 1916, and was therefore well acquainted with municipal policymaking and planning. Saarinen had won his spurs as an architect but also as a planner in international projects. He participated in the planning processes of Budapest and Tallinn in the years 1911–13, and won second prize in the 1912 international competition for the design of Canberra.

³⁰ *Pro-Helsingfors: ‘Suur-Helsingin’ asemakaavan ehdotus, laatineet Eliel Saarinen y.m.* (Helsinki, 1918); Egidius Ginström, *Julius Tallberg och hans verk* (Helsingfors, 1930), pp 102–7. The plan was based on Munkkiniemi-Haaga plan which Eliel Saarinen had published in 1915. The earlier plan focused on two suburbs outside the boundaries of Helsinki but also offered general suggestions for the expansion of the city. Saarinen, *Munkkiniemi-Haaga*.

³¹ *Pro-Helsingfors*.

outside the municipal boundaries new ‘wild’ working-class suburbs were growing fast.³²

The new centre, which was to be built on virgin soil, would mark a clean break from the past under Russian and Swedish rule, and celebrate the beginning of the new era.³³ The new core of the city was to be so monumental in order to eclipse the old Russian-era centre and turn it into an historical, central business district. The past under foreign domination was not, however, the only past from which the planners were keen to distance themselves. Gone also were references to ancient or medieval ‘Finland’ which abounded in the national romantic style buildings designed by Eliel Saarinen and his colleagues in the early years of the twentieth century.³⁴ The planners wanted to convey a message of Finland, past, present and future, as a part of the western world. Commentators in newspapers and journals were profoundly impressed with the *Pro-Helsingfors* plan, which sought to create something enticingly new but which at the same time was comfortingly familiar, since it was well-grounded in the European tradition of classicism. Some voices of caution and criticism were also raised, mainly along the lines that the plan was far too ambitious for a country as poor in capital as Finland.³⁵ The central government for its part demonstrated interest in the plan and set up a committee to examine whether it could be realised.³⁶

In Dublin, significant and major public buildings in the city centre, including the Four Courts, the Custom House and General Post Office (G.P.O.) were severely damaged and in need of serious repair at the time of independence. This afforded an opportunity to rebuild significant parts of the city centre to meet the demands of the new era and to create something that would reflect ‘the spirit of a free Ireland’. This, however, was no small order. For example, Darrell Figgis, a writer and political activist, argued that colonialism had blocked the ‘natural’ development of Irish culture and therefore Ireland had been left ‘without a distinctive architecture’.³⁷ The discussion about redesigning Dublin revolved around two plans. The first scheme, *Dublin of the future*, was published by the Civics Institute in 1922 and originally prepared by Patrick Abercrombie for the Dublin Town Planning Competition in 1914. When published, the plan was already somewhat out of date due to the destruction the city had suffered. Abercrombie acknowledged the problem but stressed that his

³² Åström, ‘Kaupunkiyhteiskunta’, p. 11; Brunila, ‘Asemakaava ja rakennustaide’ in *Helsingin kaupungin historia*, iv, part 1, pp 35–49.

³³ *Pro-Helsingfors*; Riitta Nikula, *Focus on Finnish 20th century architecture* (Helsinki, 2006), pp 177–8.

³⁴ Saarinen and his colleagues had planned the Finnish Pavilion at the Paris Exposition in 1900 and the National Museum in 1902 – both works of art which ‘left a lasting imprint on the soul of the nation’ – and therefore they, and especially Saarinen, were among the figureheads of the Finnish nationalist movement (Marika Hausen, ‘Saarinen in Finland’ in Marika Hausen, Kirmo Mikkola, Anna-Lisa Amberg and Tytti Valto, *Eliel Saarinen: projects 1896–1923* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), pp 8–9).

³⁵ See for example, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 22 Oct. 1918; Berndt Aminoff, ‘Helsingin kaupungin asemakaavakysymyksiä 1915–1931’ in *Helsingin kaupungin keskiosien yleisasemakaavaehdotus* (Helsinki, 1932), p. 9; Ginström, *Tallberg*, p. 106.

³⁶ The Committee delivered its report on the issue in 1922. *Komiteanmietintö 1922/ N:o 11: Helsingin – Fredriksbergin rautatieasemain kehittämiskomitealta* (Helsinki, 1922).

³⁷ Darrell Figgis, *Planning for the future* (Dublin, 1922). For discussion, see Kincaid, *Postcolonial Dublin*, pp 72–3; Whelan, *Reinventing modern Dublin*, pp 129–30.

plan was only a basis on which the final scheme would be built.³⁸ The second proposal, the *Greater Dublin reconstruction scheme*, was published in 1922 by the Greater Dublin Reconstruction Movement (G.D.R.M.), a voluntary group of businessmen, architects and politicians. The G.D.R.M. claimed that Abercrombie's plan was obsolete and that a new scheme was needed, since the problem 'has become new in many of its important details'.³⁹ The driving force behind the G.D.R.M. was E. A. Aston, already a noted planning enthusiast before independence.⁴⁰

Abercrombie's plan built on the work done by the Wide Street Commission in Dublin in the second half of the eighteenth century and drew further inspiration from the modernisation of Paris that Haussmann had carried out in the nineteenth century. Abercrombie planned to 'Haussmannise' Dublin – to demolish the derelict areas and rebuild them with more architectural grandeur and convenient traffic networks. This was by no means a new approach and had been mooted since the nineteenth century. In this, he also had the initial support of the city's (often Protestant) champions of urban planning (although, post-independence many in the Protestant business elite objected to any large-scale government spending on public projects). Ultimately, the focus of the city was to be shifted from O'Connell Street westwards towards the Four Courts, where Abercrombie wanted to create a traffic hub similar to the Place de la Concorde in Paris. O'Connell Street would form part of a monumental boulevard, like the Avenue de l'Opéra. Paris was seen as emblematic of modernity, and Dublin was to be like Paris, only better.⁴¹

Abercrombie promoted 'universal' planning principles, and his position – as a British planner designing the capital of Ireland – caused him to emphasise the 'non-political' nature of planning, yet he was also mindful of nationalist expectations. In discussing the placement of public buildings, he made an effort to show that he was politically aware of, and sensitive to, national and local concerns. Instead of following the example of Vienna and some 'New World' cities, where new civic centres had been built to house government departments and cultural institutions, Abercrombie respected some vestiges of Dublin and placed the most important institutions in old 'sacred spots' in the otherwise 'Haussmannised' city. The Irish parliament, for instance, was to be housed in the old eighteenth-century parliament buildings, even though they were 'most awkwardly situated as regards architectural purism'.⁴²

The *Greater Dublin reconstruction scheme* suggested a less thorough reworking of the city. The backbone of the scheme was the 'national highway' that would traverse the city from the commercial centre in the north-east corner to the new capital complex in the south-west. Many buildings, including the G.P.O. and the Custom House, were to be reconstructed.

³⁸ Patrick Abercrombie, Sydney A. Kelly and Arthur J. Kelly, *Dublin of the future* (Dublin, 1922), pp ix–xi; Whelan, *Reinventing modern Dublin*, pp 131–9; McManus, *Dublin*, pp 55–68. In 1916, Abercrombie was awarded the prize for the Dublin Town Planning Competition of 1914 and the plan was finally published in 1922.

³⁹ *Irish Times*, 16 Sept. 1922; *Greater Dublin: reconstruction scheme described and illustrated* (Dublin, 1922); Whelan, *Reinventing modern Dublin*, pp 120–30.

⁴⁰ McManus, *Dublin*, pp 23–4, 76.

⁴¹ Abercrombie, *Dublin of the future*, pp 3–4, 9, 15, 36–8, map 2 and plate xvii.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp 37–9, map 5 and plate xxxiii.

The G.D.R.M. scheme differed from that of Abercrombie in creating a continuity between the ‘pre-colonial past’ and the newly-independent Ireland. The G.D.R.M. suggested that instead of using the old eighteenth-century parliament house, a new capital complex be created in the suburb of Kilmainham, on the site of a Celtic village ‘from which the Irish Metropolis began its growth more than a thousand years ago’.⁴³

The initial reaction to both Dublin plans was mainly positive, and both Abercrombie and the G.D.R.M. were praised for creating bold visions that made it possible to address the problems as a whole, and not in fragments.⁴⁴ In reality, however, fundamental changes in the urban fabric and landscape were difficult to achieve. In both Finland and Ireland, the first years of independence were characterised by economic austerity.⁴⁵ On the eve of the First World War, in 1913, Finland and Ireland had already made an initial breakthrough into modern economic growth and were by no means among the poorest European countries, but they were far behind Britain.⁴⁶ Furthermore, it was not only a question of how far the financial resources would stretch, but also a question of dividing them so that most people would feel they had received a fair share. Both Finland and Ireland were still predominantly agrarian countries, and justifying large investments to build ‘palaces’ in the capital city would have been difficult. The shadows of bitterness caused by the civil wars only made things even worse.

Since major changes were either out of the question or would take a long time to construct, some small but effective measures were taken in both cities immediately after independence to obliterate some of the visual evidence of foreign rule from the cityscape. In Helsinki, Russian street signs were removed as soon as the thunder of the battles of the Civil War had abated in the city.⁴⁷ The languages of the street signs had been one of the many means of articulating power relations in Finnish cities, and at the same time they had been a means by which power relations had been contested. In 1903, Tsar Nicholas II had decreed that the Russian name should always appear first, but the order had been difficult to enforce, even in the capital city Helsinki. With independence, the Russian signs were removed, and the street names appeared in Finnish and Swedish, in that order.⁴⁸ In Ireland, there were long-established campaigns by the Gaelic League and others to have street signs in Irish and this reached a high point during the War of Independence and in its aftermath. Another symbolically important but relatively inexpensive effort to inscribe national identity in the cityscape of post-independence Dublin was to paint green the originally red Victorian and Edwardian post-boxes with the letters V. R. (Victoria Regina) or E. R. (Edwardus Rex). The painting of the post-boxes was among the first commissions of the Irish Free State.⁴⁹

⁴³ *Greater Dublin*, pp 7–8.

⁴⁴ *Irish Times*, 16 Sept., 14 Dec. 1922; *Freeman’s Journal*, 12 Dec. 1922; 24 May 1923.

⁴⁵ Dickson, *Dublin: the making of a capital city*, p. 471.

⁴⁶ Tom Garvin, *1922: the birth of Irish democracy* (Dublin, 2005), pp 214–15.

⁴⁷ *Helsingin Sanomat*, 17, 22 Apr. 1918.

⁴⁸ Berndt Aminoff and Leo A. Pesonen, ‘Helsingin kadunnimistöön synty ja kehitys vuoteen 1946 mennessä’ in *Helsingin kadunnimet* (Helsinki, 1981), pp 46–50.

⁴⁹ Brian P. Kennedy, ‘The Irish Free State 1922–49: a visual perspective’ in Raymond Gillespie and Brian P. Kennedy (eds), *Ireland: art into history* (Dublin, 1994), p. 134.

III

As making a fresh start was not an option, a concerted effort was made both in Helsinki and Dublin to renew the city to meet the needs and demands of the new era. The state and municipal authorities as well as private sector and civil society actors participated in making the political change ‘real’ in the cityscape and underlining the new status of their capital city. In so doing they not only constructed the future and but also re-interpreted the past of their city and nation. In both Dublin and Helsinki, many changes and transformations implemented in the cityscape in the course of the 1920s served to create continuities between the eighteenth century and modern times, and at the same time many elements of the recent ‘colonial’ past were hidden or denied.

When Finland gained independence in 1917, the capital city of Helsinki was very much a creation of the Russian era. Virtually the entire city had been built or rebuilt during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Finland had been part of the Russian Empire.⁵⁰ The real challenge facing the policy-makers was to make the political change apparent in the core of Helsinki, which had originally expressed the ambition and power of Tsar Alexander I. The fact that most of the public buildings in the city centre had been used by the Finnish central administration, the university and the Lutheran church simplified the task.⁵¹ The buildings that had been used by Russian officials – for instance the palace of the governor general⁵² – was simply cleaned and refurbished. It was emphasised that the governor general’s palace, ‘like other works by the architect Engel, is pure in its modesty’.⁵³ The neoclassical empire-style buildings were considered to be so ‘noble’ and ‘timeless’ that even the Russian oppressors had not been able to desecrate them.

Some buildings and monuments erected by the Russians during the period of Russification were demolished, a prime example being the Chapel of Peace. The chapel had been erected in 1913 to commemorate the Russian conquest of Finland and had immediately become a symbol of Russian oppression. After independence was achieved, it was pulled down, even though a few cultural dignitaries – including the composer Jean Sibelius and the artist Magnus Enckell – argued for the preservation of the monument. In their opinion, Finland, as a civilised nation, had no reason to be ashamed of its past.⁵⁴ A few other buildings were converted for other uses and the most obvious symbols of Russian power were removed from public places.⁵⁵ These changes were visible to everyone but did not drastically change the cityscape. Some Russian-style buildings and monuments, such as Uspenski Cathedral,

⁵⁰ Mikael Sundman, *Stages in the growth of a town: a study of the development of the urban and population structure of Helsinki* (Helsinki, 1982).

⁵¹ Klinge, *Pääkaupunki*, pp 102–31, 148–53.

⁵² The governor general was the highest representative of the Russian tsar in Finland.

⁵³ *Suomen Kuvalehti*, 19 July 1919.

⁵⁴ *Helsingin Sanomat*, 11 Nov. 1913; 5 May 1918; 13 Oct., 10 Dec 1919; Pakarinen, “‘Tervasankonationalismia’”, pp 130–9.

⁵⁵ Marjaana Niemi, ‘1917: En reseguide till ett sargat men okuvat Finland’ in Nils Erik Villstrand and Petri Karonen (eds), *Öppet fall: Finlands historia som möjligheter och alternativ, 1417–2017* (Helsinki, 2017); Ove Enqvist and Mikko Härö, *Varuskunnasta maailmanperinnöksi: Suomenlinnan itsenäisyysajan vaiheet* (Helsinki, 1998), pp 139–45.

remained part of the physical and cultural landscape of Helsinki. After the collapse of the Russian Empire, these remaining monuments, so it was argued, had lost most of their ‘power’ and therefore had a new meaning. As the writer Ture Jansson commented: ‘The Uspenski Cathedral still stands defiantly on the hill of Katajanokka. The glimmer of its oriental onion domes has faded.’⁵⁶

At the same time as Russian cultural elements were removed or lost their significance in the cityscape of Helsinki, Swedish or Scandinavian elements were highlighted. From the Swedish era, Helsinki had inherited very few buildings of any significance. The areas that had not been destroyed by the fire of 1808 had been demolished to make way for the construction of the new neoclassical city centre in the early-nineteenth century. Almost the only exception was the fortress Suomenlinna ‘the Gibraltar of the north’, which had been built as a maritime fortress on an island off the city coastline in the second half of the eighteenth century.⁵⁷ Although the bustling heyday of Suomenlinna drew to a close with the end of Swedish rule, the fortress remained an important garrison throughout the nineteenth century, mainly because the Russian army considered it important to maintain a military presence near the centre of Helsinki. In peacetime its barracks accommodated 4,000–5,000 soldiers and sailors from different parts of the Russian Empire, and in wartime the number of men could rise to 13,000.⁵⁸

Suomenlinna is a prime example of the way in which Helsinki and Finland emphasised their affiliation with the Nordic countries. When Finland became independent in 1917, the Finnish Defence Forces took over the fortress, but the fortress islands were also recognised and developed as an historic site and a tourist attraction. From the 1920s to the 1970s, the buildings and structures built during the Swedish era were considered to be ‘authentic’ and worth preserving, while the Russian era structures were often seen as ‘unauthentic’. Many of the Russian era buildings were demolished, converted for other uses (the Russian military church was converted into a Lutheran church) or re-painted with straw-coloured paint to cover the ‘barbaric Russian colours’. Straw-coloured paint referred to the Gustavian period in the late-eighteenth century, when Finland was still part of the kingdom of Sweden.⁵⁹ This policy was in line with the general trend of developing Helsinki in the 1920s. Architectural expression was dominated by Nordic classicism that was rooted not only in neoclassicism and early stirrings of modernism, but also in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Nordic vernacular architecture.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ture Jansson and Erkki Kivijärvi, *Hyyä Helsinkimme* (Helsinki, 1929), pp 27–8.

⁵⁷ The original name of the fortress was Sveaborg (Swedish castle), but the Finnish-speaking Finns called it Viapori. In 1918, the fortress was renamed Suomenlinna (Castle of Finland).

⁵⁸ Liisa Eerikäinen, ‘Suomenlinna puolustuksen ja linnoitusteorioiden näkökulmasta’ in Liisa Eerikäinen (ed.), *Viaporista Suomenlinnaan* (Helsinki, 2006), pp 9–32; Gisela M. Tjapugin, ‘Viaporin asukkaat venäläisellä kaudella 1808–1918’ in *ibid.*, p. 135.

⁵⁹ Heikki Tandefelt, ‘Ehrensvärd-Seuran toiminta 1921–1928’ in *Piirteitä Suomenlinnan historiasta* (Helsinki, 1929), pp 177–89; Mikko Härö, ‘Suomenlinna historiallisena muistomerkkinä: Tavoitteita, suunnitelmia ja niiden toteutuksia’ in Eerikäinen (ed.), *Viaporista Suomenlinnaksi*, pp 146–58.

⁶⁰ Malcolm Quantrill, *Finnish architecture and the modernist tradition* (London, 1995); pp 29–56; Riitta Nikula, *Yhtenäinen kaupunkikuva 1900–1930: Suomalaisen*

The most important project to enhance the status of Helsinki was the new parliament building: a stone castle exemplifying Nordic classicism designed by the architect J. S. Sirén and built north-west of the city centre in the late 1920s. Designing the parliament building was a challenging task, given the high and often contradictory expectations. The building was to convey, both domestically and internationally, that Finland was a modern western democracy on the road to prosperity.⁶¹ The speaker of the parliament, Väinö Hakkila, and the architect, Sirén, emphasised in the late 1930s that this aim had been achieved: the fact that Finland had the newest and most modern parliament building in the world had not gone unnoticed. Furthermore, the modern technology in the building was a particular source of pride: an electric voting machine, American ‘acousti-celotex’ and good telephone connections.⁶² The emphasis on modernity was, however, paradoxical. In the late 1920s, functionalism was already embraced by many architects, and in the 1930s it became the dominant trend in Finnish architecture.⁶³ In this new atmosphere, the parliament building, which drew inspiration from buildings such as Schinkel’s Altes Museum in Berlin, appeared traditional rather than modern.

The new parliament was also expected to impart a sense of unique national identity. The building process was often represented, by both the state authorities and the media, as a collective national effort which galvanised the strengths and capabilities not only of Finnish architects and artists, but also of cabinet-makers, construction workers and quarrymen. They all left their mark on the monument.⁶⁴ The calming classical appearance, and elevated and isolated location of the parliament building, created an image of enduring and legitimate state power. In order to imbue this image with true substance, the building also needed to contribute to the process of unifying the divided nation – and to some extent it did. The parliament building was a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total work of art, meaning that nothing old was used to build or decorate it. In the brand-new building the nation was to make a fresh start, leaving foreign rule and civil war behind, and grasping the opportunities offered by independence and stability. Many aspects of the visual programme, however, revealed underlying tensions. The artists designing the interior of the building thought it safer to concentrate on the agrarian past rather than the imminent industrial future.⁶⁵ Furthermore, some critics pointed out that something more

kaupunkirakentamisen ihanteista ja päämääristä, esimerkkeinä Helsingin Etu-Töölö ja uusi Vallila (Helsinki 1981), pp 52–86.

⁶¹ K. Kallio, ‘Itsenäisyytemme muistomerkki’ in V. Hakkila, J. S. Sirén and H. J. Viherjuuri (eds), *Suomen eduskuntatalo* (Helsinki, 1938), pp 7–8; *Suomen Kuvalehti*, 7 Feb. 1931; Liisa-Maija Hakala-Zilliacus, *Suomen eduskuntatalo: Kokonaistaideteos, itsenäisyysmonumentti ja kansallisen sovinnon representaatio* (Helsinki, 2002), pp 85–133.

⁶² V. Hakkila, ‘Suomen uusi eduskuntatalo’ in Hakkila, Sirén & Viherjuuri (eds), *Suomen eduskuntatalo*, pp 10–13; J. S. Sirén, ‘Arkkitehtoninen selostus’ in *ibid.*, pp 95–6.

⁶³ Nikula, *Yhtenäinen kaupunkikuva*, 73.

⁶⁴ Sirén, ‘Arkkitehtoninen selostus’ pp 95–6; *Suomen Kuvalehti*, 7 Mar. 1931; Hakala-Zilliacus, *Suomen eduskuntatalo*, pp 114–18.

⁶⁵ Hakala-Zilliacus, *Suomen eduskuntatalo*, pp 186–9, 321–3, 482–91.

modest and less expensive would have reflected their national identity more accurately.⁶⁶

In Dublin, as in Helsinki, the plans were thoroughly discussed in the early years of independence, and Abercrombie's *Dublin of the future*, in particular, did set the tone for future discussions, but had little immediate impact on the reconstruction of the heart of the city.⁶⁷ The Parisian boulevards designed by Abercrombie and the 'national highway' envisioned by the G.D.R.M. were not realised. As in Helsinki, the Irish state and municipal authorities focused on smaller scale and more specific projects, the most important of which was the rebuilding of three neoclassical landmarks – the Four Courts, the Custom House and the G.P.O. – in their original Georgian splendour. These three buildings had been important focal points of the British imperial administration in Ireland: the Four Courts had been the site of 'British justice', the G.P.O. had linked Ireland to the trade and communication networks of the British Empire and the Custom House symbolised the growth of the state itself with links to local government and the operation of the poor law. But the symbolic meaning of these buildings changed radically during the struggle for independence; they transformed from symbols of British colonial power to important national monuments. This was particularly true of the G.P.O., the seat of the Easter Rising in 1916. The events in and around the G.P.O., though they failed in their immediate purpose and were interpreted differently by the winners and losers of the Civil War, soon acquired the status of the founding act of the nation.⁶⁸ The new symbolic meaning of the G.P.O., the Four Courts and the Custom House played a crucial role in the decision to reconstruct the buildings. But there were, of course, also other factors involved, not least the practical importance of a functioning postal service, the necessity of a venue for the higher courts and the need for a centre for the supervision of local government. These buildings also provided a sense of continuity and stability, both qualities which were highly prized by the pro-Treaty government.⁶⁹

The rebuilding of the three landmarks was initially surrounded by controversy. According to the *Irish Builder and Engineer*, a rumour circulated in 1920 that 'it was the intention of the Government to destroy the beautiful façade [of the G.P.O.] and to erect a red brick monstrosity'.⁷⁰ In the Irish Free State there were influential individuals and groups in favour of an extensive de-Anglicisation of Ireland, while others emphasised the importance of historical layers and a crucial link between the present and the brief period of 'legislative independence' in the late-eighteenth century.⁷¹ For example, Darrell Figgis stated that, 'During the few years of legislative independence at the close of the eighteenth century a host of buildings sprang into existence. Public works were busy. It was as though a great restrictive pressure had been removed and the fruits of that liberation are almost an incredible achievement for the brief

⁶⁶ *Suomen Kuvalehti*, 17 Jan. 1931.

⁶⁷ Abercrombie continued to exert an influence until the 1940s. See Dickson, *Dublin: the making of a capital city*, p. 479.

⁶⁸ Clair Wills, *Dublin 1916: the siege of the GPO* (London, 2009), pp 1–21, 133–71; Kincaid, *Postcolonial Dublin*, pp 1–3; Kennedy, 'The Irish Free State', p. 133.

⁶⁹ See also Whelan, *Reinventing modern Dublin*, pp 139–42.

⁷⁰ *Irish Builder and Engineer*, 11 Feb. 1922; 21 Oct. 1922.

⁷¹ See, for example, *Irish Builder and Engineer*, 21 Oct. 1922; *Dáil Éireann deb.*, ii, 31, (7 Dec. 1922).

period within which it lasted.⁷² Those in favour of rebuilding the G.P.O., the Four Courts and the Custom House stressed that each of these three buildings was a fine specimen of classicism, a style that was ‘timeless’ and not ‘owned’ by anyone, but by everyone. The neoclassical landmarks had been built to symbolise the British Empire but, in the new circumstances, it was possible for them to symbolise Irishness.⁷³

Discussions concerning the rebuilding of the G.P.O. started in earnest in 1922, and two years later the Free State government unveiled more detailed plans. The building, which for years had stood as an empty shell in the centre of the city, was to be refurbished and restored not only to its former glory, but also to its original function as the headquarters of the postal services.⁷⁴ In 1925, the rebuilding of the G.P.O. and also the Four Courts and the Custom House were underway. Like the new parliament house in Helsinki, the Dublin landmarks were to signify the respect accorded to great architectural traditions, but also the progress and modernity of the new era and the new state. When the G.P.O. was formally opened in 1929, the grand neoclassical facade of the building masked a modern post office and a savings bank, as well as radio studios with state-of-the-art microphones and soundproofing. Other technological devices, such as electric lights and lifts, electrically controlled ventilation and synchronised clocks, and hot-water heating, made the G.P.O. ‘a new, well-lighted and convenient modern building’.⁷⁵ Furthermore, an ‘essence of Irishness’ was instilled into Dublin landmarks in very concrete ways. The buildings were to exemplify the skill of Irish workmanship and the unique use of Irish building materials. A rumour in 1927 had it that Swedish granite had been used in the re-construction of the G.P.O. A representative of the contractor denied the rumour immediately, assuring the public ‘that every piece of granite being used in the re-construction work’ was from Ireland.⁷⁶

Instead of building a new parliament house, as was done in Finland and Northern Ireland, the Irish Free State chose, again, an eighteenth-century building. The most popular option for a permanent residence was the old parliament buildings on College Green, where the Irish parliament had convened before the Act of Union abolished the institution in 1801. This option, however, was gradually put aside. The buildings were owned by the Bank of Ireland, and turning them back into a parliament house would have been a long and expensive process.⁷⁷ The G.D.R.M. had suggested that the Royal Hospital of Kilmainham, a monumental military hospital, could be converted and extended into a parliament house and government buildings, but the suggestion failed to win sufficient backing from members of parliament, the public and media.⁷⁸

⁷² Figgis, *Planning for the future*, p. 23.

⁷³ This argument was rejected by some parliamentarians from provincial Ireland and cultural revivalists who were anti-urban and anti-Dublin in outlook (Dickson, *Dublin: the making of a capital city*, p. 479).

⁷⁴ *Irish Builder and Engineer*, 11 Jul 1925; *Irish Independent*, 8 Mar. 1922, 1 Feb. 1923, 27 Jun. 1924.

⁷⁵ *Irish Builder and Engineer*, 20 July 1929; Willis, *Dublin 1916*, pp 139–42.

⁷⁶ *Irish Independent*, 6 Sept. 1926, 27 Aug. 1927.

⁷⁷ *Freeman's Journal*, 13. July 1923; Edward McParland, ‘Building the parliament house in Dublin’ in *Parliamentary History*, xxi (2002), pp 131–40.

⁷⁸ *Greater Dublin*, pp 7–8; *Ninety-second annual report of the Commissioners of Public Works* (Dublin, 1924), 4; *Irish Times*, 2 Feb. 1924.

For example, Senator W. B. Yeats felt it was ‘undesirable that Kilmainham should be the permanent site of an Irish Parliament. People coming up from the country ... will want to find themselves nearer the Parliament than they would be if you put it out into a remote suburb.’⁷⁹ The parliament of the Irish Free State settled in a majestic eighteenth-century city centre mansion, Leinster House, built by the earl of Kildare in the 1740s and owned by the Royal Dublin Society (R.D.S.) since 1815.⁸⁰ While Finland built a monumental stone castle on the outskirts of the city centre, Ireland located its parliament in a public space where people’s paths crossed.

IV

Capital cities have played a crucial role in legitimising new states emerging from domination by an external power. Policy-makers and planners have redesigned capitals to make the political change ‘real’ to people but also to reinterpret the past and to create a ‘teleology for the present’. When Finland and Ireland achieved independence in 1917 and 1922 respectively, one of the strongest impulses in both capital cities was to start afresh. The planners in both Helsinki and Dublin looked to modern Paris for inspiration and were eager to interpret their respective countries’ histories within a wider western European framework. The architects Eliel Saarinen and Bertel Jung designed an entirely new monumental centre for Helsinki, relinquishing the past under foreign rule but also the ancient ‘national’ past so cherished by the Finnish national movement at the turn of the twentieth century. Patrick Abercrombie designed a new Dublin, leaving only a few vestiges of the old city.

It was often a long process for newly independent countries to become recognised as full members of the international community. Finland and Ireland looked hesitantly – and often in vain – to the international community for approval. Having a monumental and modern capital city, or even an ambitious plan to build one, was seen as a way of gaining credibility in the international arena. Eventually, almost every element of the ambitious plans had to be abandoned due to the financial and political realities facing Finland and Ireland in the early 1920s and, in particular, political opposition to schemes which involved large spending on urban projects. The cultural landscapes of Helsinki and Dublin were dramatically altered, however, in many ways in the course of the 1920s to enhance the new status of both countries. In Helsinki, some elements from the recent Russian past were removed from the cityscape, and at the same time continuities were built between the present and the eighteenth century: the period during which Finland was still part of Sweden. In Dublin, continuities were likewise created between early twentieth-century Ireland and the era of ‘legislative independence’ in the late-eighteenth century.

The newly-independent European states in the 1920s – including Finland and Ireland – have often been portrayed as inward-looking countries suspicious of the outside world. The ways in which these countries renewed

⁷⁹ *Seanad Éireann deb.*, i, 1390 (11 July 1923). See also, *Irish Builder* 21 Oct. 1922.

⁸⁰ Terence Brown, Arthur Gibney and Michael O’Doherty, *Building for government: the architecture of state buildings; OPW: Ireland, 1900–2000* (Dublin, 1999), p. 42; *Dáil Éireann deb.*, viii, 914–35 (10 July 1924); *Irish Times*, 11 July 1924; Whelan, *Reinventing modern Dublin*, p. 130.

their capital cities to meet the demands of the new area opens, however, a different perspective on the matter. The changes planned and implemented in Helsinki and Dublin were to signify independence from foreign rule, but at the same time they proclaimed allegiance to a European cultural and economic model. Both Finnish and Irish national identity was often expressed by using the architectural lingua franca, classicism, or by utilising the latest technology and thereby connecting with European industrialisation and modernisation. What was Finnish or Irish and what was more broadly European were inseparably blended. Furthermore, the comparison of Helsinki and Dublin shows how planners and policy-makers on different peripheries of Europe faced very similar challenges and met them in surprisingly similar ways. These cities, which had very little direct contact with each other, shared many of the same pressures and expectations.