Nordisk tidskrift för socioonomastik / Nordic Journal of Socio-Onomastics (13–44)

Geographical imagination and urban–rural binary in online discourses related to the capital region of Finland: A corpus onomastic study of Helsinki, Vantaa and Espoo

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Abstract: The article focuses on digital discourses related to Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa, the three biggest municipalities in Finland's capital region. The data consist of texts from the discussion forum of Suomi24 that was analysed to find out how forum users produce socio-spatial distinctions by categorizing some groups as 'others' thus differentiating in-groups and out-groups. The analysis used methods of comprised corpus assisted discourse studies (CADS), including collocation analysis. The results show that discourses related both to native and non-native Helsinkians and to those living in the capital region in contrast to those living elsewhere in Finland are common and the juxtapositions between various groups are repeatedly constructed.

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NoSo 2023 | https://doi.org/10.59589/noso.32023.14401

This points to the distinctive role of the capital region and its inhabitants in people's geographical imagination. The qualitative analysis reveals the contexts in which different groups of people are discussed. The findings shed light on some of the discursive practices through which the special role of Helsinki and the capital region in Finland are negotiated and perpetuated.

Keywords: corpus onomastics, digital discourse, capital region, spatial category, corpus linguistics, keyword, collocation, geographical imagination

1. Introduction

Intersubjective understandings of space and place are important to the construction of a shared social reality and coordinated action in the world. In research, this idea has been captured through the concept of 'geographical imagination', which refers to people's perceptions of space and their ways of acting in the world based on their spatial knowledge. Since the publication of Edward Said's (1979) seminal book *Orientalism*, many researchers have studied the ways in which geographical imaginations are produced through discourse on several interrelated sites, including news media, popular culture, online media, and political discussions (Eriksson 2010; Jansson 2003; Johnson & Coleman 2012). These studies show that emerging understandings of space frequently draw on conceptualizations of 'us' and 'them', and other related dualisms, reproducing 'moral geographies' where the virtues and vices of a community are assigned to specific places and regions (Johnson & Coleman 2012).

In this paper, we focus on one of the most dominant and persistent binaries associated with geographical imagination, namely that of the 'city' (urban) versus 'countryside' (rural) (cf. Eriksson 2010; Short 2005). Our interest in this topic stems from data-driven research on digital discourses surrounding the three biggest municipalities in Finland's capital region: Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa. When studying how these cities have been discussed on Finland's biggest discussion forum Suomi24, we found that the urban–rural binary is prevalent in discussions related to all three cities – especially discussions related

to the capital city Helsinki. This confirms earlier findings about the special role of the capital city (and capital city region) in the spatial order of Finland (Jokela & Linkola 2013). At the same time, it also calls for closer investigation of the discursive practices through which ideas of the city and the countryside are negotiated in the context of the recent growth and restructuring of the capital region, which has unfolded as part of a wider transformation of state space in Finland (Ahlqvist & Moisio 2014).

Recently, the populations of many small towns and rural municipalities in Finland have been aging and shrinking. While migration from small Finnish towns and rural areas to major cities has slowed down, many political actors view urbanization as unavoidable and even necessary, associating it with modernization, positive development, and competitiveness in contrast with more negative views of sparsely populated rural areas (Soininvaara 2022). In this context, Finland's capital region has gained renewed political and economic importance as a unit of competition of international investments and talent (Ahlqvist & Moisio 2014) and gone through major changes in terms of housing production, population size, and expanding infrastructure (City of Helsinki 2021). These processes are part of wider trends in Europe, which include the increase in regional inequalities, as well as the growing importance of suburban areas as concentrations of population, innovation, and economic activities (Keil 2017; Moore-Cherry & Tomaney 2019).

With this context in mind, we ask: How is the urban–rural divide negotiated and spatialized in a time when urbanization is viewed as a 'megatrend', leading to the intensification and expansion of urban infrastructure and movement of people to city regions that allegedly offer more opportunities than rural areas (see Rodríquez-Pose 2017; Soininvaara 2022)? What new knowledge can we obtain about the ideas of the 'city' and the 'countryside', if we direct our attention beyond the city centre (Helsinki) to more suburban areas (Espoo and Vantaa)?

As Barbara Johnstone's (2010) study on the discursive production of imagined dialects in the UK shows, new discursive practices and

understandings of locality arise in the wake of social mobility and spatial changes. We follow this idea to study how the recent process of urbanization is reflected in digital discourses, where the relationship between Finland's capital region and more rural areas, as well as imagined boundaries between the city and the countryside are being (re)defined. Our data come from the Suomi24 corpus, which is a comprehensive collection of texts from threads on the Suomi24 discussion forum. Our four-billion-word corpus includes discussions from 2001–2017. We analyse this data to find out how the users of Suomi24 produce socio-spatial distinctions by using categories associated with the urban–rural division, and how these categories draw on and contribute to a particular geographical imagination. In doing so, we shed light on relationships and roles of the three cities in negotiations, through which people make sense of and gain ownership of the recent developments.

Theoretically and methodologically, we bring together socio-onomastics, human geography, corpus linguistics and discourse analysis. We adopt quantitative methods of corpus linguistics and combine them with qualitative methods of discourse analysis. This combination of methods leads to methodological synergy which is known as corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS, see e.g. Partington et al. 2013). Statistical collocation analysis is the exact corpus methodological tool used in this article (cf. Chapter 3.2). Together, the quantitative collocation analysis and qualitative close reading analyses reveal which groups of people are discussed and in which contexts. This approach directs our attention to what Määttä et al. (2021:774) refer to as the 'micro-level linguistic workings of everyday discourse'. In other words, we view discourse as a site through which the boundaries and content of socio-spatial categories, such as the cities of the capital region or the capital region and countryside, are constantly produced and redefined. In doing so, we acknowledge that discourses are embedded in and constitutive of power relations and social identities. They may naturalize some ideas of space and social groups and create divisions between 'us' and 'them'. In the era of rapid urbanization, such knowledge is important, because it enables understanding

 NoSo 2023 | https://doi.org/10.59589/noso.32023.14401

the spatial dynamics of meaning-making in cities, as well as the ways in which urban discourses are entangled with the social processes that are transforming cities. Spatial categories also play an important role in constructing people's identities and life stories.

We begin by introducing our theoretical background before presenting the data and methodology used in the article. We then present and discuss the results of both the quantitative and qualitative analysis, and finally, we present the conclusions.

2. Theoretical background

The fascination of language is based on its ability to create order in a world that is inherently messy and complex. Language enables people to think in terms of categories and binary oppositions, to organize their impressions into coherent systems of knowledge, and to orient themselves in their daily lives. In social settings, language is organized into discourses, which are shared and historically contingent ways of making sense of the world. As the work of Michel Foucault (1980) shows, discourses are imbued with power, because they create taken-for-granted assumptions and position certain knowledge as being more relevant than other. Thus, not only do discourses reflect people's understanding of the world, but they also have ramifications for how the world is perceived and organized.

Discourses are integral to the emergence of geographical imaginations – that is, shared ways of thinking of the world as socially and spatially distinctive entities, which exist in people's mental maps and affect the way they act in the world (Said 1979). These conceptualizations have tangible consequences for how different geographical areas and groups of people are viewed and treated in practice.

The idea of geographical imagination has been applied to other contexts, including discursive processes and spatial differentiation within countries and across regions (e.g. Eriksson 2010; Jansson 2003; Johnson & Coleman 2012). Regardless of the scale of observation, geographical imagination often draws on and contributes to cultural dualities, which are mapped onto space in and through pop-

ular representations. These representations are entangled in complex ways and connected to similar representations from other geographical contexts (Eriksson 2010). One of the dualisms that manifests itself in different geographical contexts is that of city versus countryside, which is the focus of this paper. As Madeleine Eriksson (2010) shows in her study of Sweden, this distinction is often associated with other attributes (such as feminine/masculine or modern/traditional) and spatialized in different ways depending on the scale of observation. Such essentialized notions of the city and the countryside are not innocent, as they may conceal structural reasons for uneven development and justify policies that aim to move people to urban areas with more opportunities (see Eriksson 2010:101; Rodríguez-Pose 2017).

The distinction between the urban and rural has also been integral to geographical representations and discourses of Finland. Historically, the south-western part of Finland has been represented and conceptualized as the urbanized 'core' of Finland as opposed to the more rural and peripheral areas (Jokela & Linkola 2013). These representations and discourses have been primarily produced and controlled by influential individuals and networks organized around the national elite residing in the capital city. Because of this, Helsinki has come to symbolize a 'superior' place as opposed to the 'other' that has been associated with the provinces.

These kinds of distinctions often become intertwined with the emergence of spatially embedded social identities. For instance, people who live in the capital region may view themselves and their place in the world differently from those who live in the provinces, and geographical categories like the 'city' and the 'countryside' may come to play important roles in people's life stories (Debarbieux & Petite 2014). Furthermore, there are often experienced distinctions even within a city, and non-native people may be characterized as 'peasants' instead of 'authentic' and native city dwellers (e.g. Ainiala & Lappalainen 2017).

Books and newspapers have traditionally been important to the construction of socio-spatial identities, not least because they have enabled the emergence of what Benedict Anderson (1991) terms

'imagined communities'. These are communities of people, who may not know each other personally but who still share a feeling of togetherness. More recently, the role of online discussions and social media in the creation of socio-spatial identities has increased (Kavoura 2014). There has been many discussions on the formation of new social 'bubbles' through algorithms used by social media platforms, but online discussions also shed light on how traditional socio-spatial categories are conceptualized, challenged and (re)produced in everyday discourses. Furthermore, due to the abundance of entries around different topics, online discussions offer rich data for a fine-grained analysis of the spatialization of difference at various geographical scales.

In this article, we take the city names as our starting point. Generally, place names can have a central role in the construction of socio-spatial identities. For example, the recurrence of specific names in media and everyday representations reinforces the idea of the existence of these places and regions and consequently, their roles as part of a larger spatial order. Often, maps or pictures are attached to these names, linking them to a certain socio-spatial reality. Since place names are capable of indexing locality, names often shape people's senses of place and the social identities associated with place (see e.g. Ainiala 2020; Johnstone 2010).

In onomastics, our study is closely connected both to socio-onomastics and to corpus onomastics. In the field of socio-onomastics, questions related to names' roles in the construction of social identities as well as stances and attitudes towards certain names and their referents (see e.g. Ainiala & Östman 2017) are relevant to us. Self-evidently, we take the cultural and social context into account in our close analysis of names and their use. Corpus onomastics, in turn, is a relatively new approach in onomastics. It can be defined as a field in onomastic research, where electronic databases, i.e. corpora, are utilized as data, where analysis is based on corpus research methods (such as wordlist analysis, concordance and collocation analysis) and where the subject of the research is the prevalence of names, their usage in textual contexts (e.g. in collocations and other phraseological

relations, and genres), as well as regional and local variation (Jantunen et al. 2022).

In sum, this multidisciplinary approach in our onomastic study will shed light on the meanings attached to the toponyms and their referents. As our special focus lies on the ways in which different groups in the capital region are viewed, compared, and discussed with each other and in relation to the rest of the country, various layers of identities and group-makings will be examined.

3. Data and methodology

3.1 Data: Suomi24 Corpus

Our data come from the 4-billion-word Suomi24 Corpus (City Digital Group 2021), which consists of posts published on the Suomi24 ('Finland24') discussion forum. The discussion forum is part of the social media website Suomi24, which comprises services such as chat rooms, blogs and dating service. Suomi24 is the most visited Finnish discussion forum with more than 3 million monthly users (in 2021), and it is one of the most visited Finnish social networking services (Kohvakka & Saarenmaa 2021). The discussion forum is divided into several sub-forums, such as health, hobbies, traffic, travelling and relationships. While the Suomi24 includes material from a vast number of users and is an all-round forum, we must bear in mind that the corpus data is not wholly representative of Finland's population in general. According to Ruckenstein (2017), for example, two-thirds of forum users are men and there is a possible over-representation of certain demographics. The Suomi24 corpus is available to researchers through The Language Bank of Finland. Our research corpus dates from the period 2001–2017. It consists of a total of approximately 10 million words divided into three sub-corpora as follows: 5.1 million words for the Helsinki corpus, 2.8 million words for the Vantaa corpus and 1.9 million words for the Espoo corpus. For the keyword analysis, the reference corpus was compiled using systematic sampling in which postings in the discussion forum were extracted at one minute

past each hour around the clock. This method enabled us to avoid thematic and temporal bias in the reference data.

In this article, the aim and research questions have been formulated so that no personal information of the Suomi24 users is needed to conduct the analysis. On the Suomi24 discussion forum, writers use pseudonyms instead of personal information, such as real names. Thus, it is practically impossible to determine which user has produced a certain comment, although with some effort it is technically possible to find individual comments using search engines. In this article, the forum extracts are provided without the pseudonyms of the writers. On the user guide page for Suomi24, users are informed that their posts may be used for research purposes. However, it may of course be the case that users do not always understand that the posts may be used as research data. Thus, researchers must remember to respect the individual poster's culture and rights when analysing such data (Lagus et al. 2016).

3.2 Methods: Keywords and corpus-assisted discourse study

The data were analysed using a corpus-assisted discourse study (CADS), which combines qualitative discourse analysis with quantitative methods from corpus linguistics (cf. Partington et al. 2013:10–14). In the first phase, the data were analysed using a statistical keyword analysis. Keywords are words that are statistically more frequent in the research data in comparison with the reference data (Scott & Tribble 2006:58–59). For the calculation of keywords in Jantunen et al. (2022), we used the Keyword List program in the AntConc corpus toolkit (Anthony 2017), the Log-Likelihood test as the statistical measure (Rayson & Garside 2000) and a threshold 50 for occurrences to eliminate noise which may result from the repetition of identical postings. After this, the data were explored using qualitative close reading (cf. Mautner 2009); the results of this phase were reported in Jantunen et al. (2022). In their study, the 300 most significant keywords were grouped into discourse prosodies, i.e. associations of 'word, phrase or lemma and a set of related words that suggest a discourse' (Baker

2006:87). The discourse prosodies help us to shed light on the prevalent discourses that surround each city in the discussion. 'People' was one of the discourse prosody classes in Jantunen et al. (2022), and for the purpose of the present study, the keywords belonging to this discourse prosody were analysed more thoroughly and divided into sub-categories according to the co-textual meaning. The following analysis will concentrate on one of these sub-categories, namely demonyms, i.e. words that identify groups of people (natives, inhabitants) related to a particular place (cf. Roberts 2017).

Although the demonym keywords are clearly associated with Helsinki data (Jantunen et al. 2022), this does not mean that they do not exist in the contexts of Espoo and Vantaa. To the present study, four demonyms were taken into account. A statistical collocation analysis was carried out to find what discursive patterns the demonyms are related to. In this phase, collocations for each demonym were counted using the AntConc Collocate program. For the collocation analysis, a span of 4 words left and right and MI-test (with a cut-off point of 1.58) as a statistical measure were chosen. The MI-test was chosen since it does not correlate with collocation frequencies and thus also emphasises collocates that are not frequent in general but may reveal relevant information on discourses. See Appendix 1 for the frequencies and MI-scores of the collocates. In the final phase of this analysis, the collocates were grouped together in order to reveal the most common ways of discussion related to the demonyms.

The demonyms under study are words *stadilainen* [Stadi dweller], *hesalainen* [Hesa dweller], *maalainen* [peasant] and *juntti* [bumpkin]. The choice for these particular words arises both from their extensive occurrence in the data and their representative characteristics. Previous studies (e.g. Ainiala & Lappalainen 2017; Paunonen 2006) have revealed the meanings and functions of these words in the construction of in and out-groups and in negotiating urban–rural division. The words *stadilainen* and *hesalainen* are of special interest in our study, even for the reason they both include a common slang name for Helsinki, i.e. *Stadi* and *Hesa*. Usually, *Hesa* is known as a variant used by non-native Helsinkians and *Stadi*, in turn, as a variant

used by native Helsinkians (Ainiala & Lappalainen 2017). The slang names *Stadi* and *Hesa* have their origin in Helsinki slang, which was a unique variety, a kind of pidgin language in Finland. Helsinki slang developed at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century among the working class with both Finnish and Swedish language backgrounds in the densely populated areas of Helsinki. Consequently, these words can create discrepancies between the imagined and experienced urban and rural within the capital city Helsinki.

According to previous studies (e.g. Paunonen 2006), the words meaning 'peasant', both *maalainen*, also used in standard Finnish, and *juntti*, used especially in Helsinki slang and in colloquial Finnish are common in contexts where Helsinkians, particularly native Helsinkians are discussed in opposition to other Finns or non-native Helsinkians. Words meaning 'peasant' or 'country people' are extremely common in Helsinki slang and the concept of 'a peasant' belongs to the centres of semantic attraction in Helsinki slang. There are more than 150 words in Helsinki slang for 'peasants' (Paunonen 2006:353). The number of words given to 'a peasant' illustrates the significance of dividing the experienced rural and urban in the everyday speech among Finnish people, and likewise the words *hesalainen* and *stadilainen* the words *maalainen* and *juntti* are used also in discussions making contrasts between people living in Helsinki.

The collocation analysis was followed by a qualitative analysis interpreting the cultural meanings associated with the selected demonyms *maalainen* [peasant], *juntti* [bumpkin], *hesalainen* [Hesa dweller], and *stadilainen* [Stadi dweller]. We looked at the context of these words to analyse the mechanisms through which they were connected to wider cultural understandings of the socio-spatial order of the Finnish capital region, as well as its role in Finland. In doing so, we used the 'saturation principle' (Jokela & Raento 2012), which meant that we went through discussion entries entailing the selected words until new entries did not significantly add new insights into the contexts in which these words were used. In this phase, we also used our own cultural knowledge as Finns to interpret the nuances of the discussion entries, acknowledging that our social position inevitably

affects our ways of making meaning out of the social phenomena we observe (Evans 1988).

4. Results

4.1 Discourses related to Hesa and Hesa dwellers vs. Stadi and Stadi dwellers

Hesa is a common slang name for Helsinki, and very often it is labelled as a variant used by non-native Helsinkians, in contrast to other well-known slang name for Helsinki, namely *Stadi* (Ainiala & Lappalainen 2017; see also Section 3.2). Followingly, *hesalainen* [Hesa dweller, Helsinkian] is frequently used to refer to someone who lives in 'Hesa'. The slang demonym *stadilainen* [Stadi dweller] also refers to the people living in Helsinki, but as well as *Stadi* is used by native Helsinkians, *stadilainen* also underlines that those people are born and raised in Helsinki, not those who have moved there. Table 1 lists the most statistically significant collocates of these keywords.

Genuineness and nativity versus non-nativeness are often discussed by Suomi24 users, as seen in Table 1. The table interestingly shows that this theme is represented using different collocations: collocates such as *aito* [genuine], *syntyperäinen* [native] and *paljasjalkainen* [born and bred] are common and statistically significant collocates of both Hesa and Stadi dwellers, as well as are *polvi* [generation] and *alkuperäinen* [original]. The words denoting nativity are noticeably associated with Helsinki, which tend to indicate that native Helsinkiness and social norms governing who can be counted as Helsinkian or especially as Stadi dweller are repeatedly negotiated. Extract 1 clearly points out that a first-generation resident of Helsinki has not lived there long enough to be considered *stadilainen* – the correct demonym would be *hesalainen*, according to the writer.

1) jos olet vain yhdenpolven helsinkiläisiä, olet hesalainen [if you are just a first-generation Helsinkian, you are a Hesa dweller].

 NoSo 2023 | https://doi.org/10.59589/noso.32023.14401

Table 1. Statistical collocates of *hesalainen* [Hesa dweller] and *stadilainen* [Stadi dweller] in data from Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa.

	hesalainen	stadilainen
Native vs. non-native Helsinkians	Helsinki: *paljasjalkainen* [born and bred], *alkuperäinen* [original], *syntyperäinen* [native], *aito* [genuine], *polvi* [generation] Espoo: *aito* [genuine]	Helsinki: *paljasjalkainen* [born and bred], *alkuperäinen* [original], *syntyperäinen* [native], *aito* [genuine], *polvi* [generation] *wannabe* [wannabe], *sukupolvi* [generation] Espoo: *paljasjalkainen* [born and bred], *syntyperäinen* [native], *syntyä* [to be born] Vantaa: *paljasjalkainen* [born and bred], *oikea* [real], *syntyä* [to be born]
Capital area vs. countryside	Helsinki: *maalainen* [peasant], *savolainen* [Savonian], *hesalainen* [Hesa dweller], *stadilainen* [Stadi dweller], *turkulainen* [Turku dweller], *sakki* [gang; people living in Helsinki]; *pönde* [countryside], *Hesa* Espoo: *hesalainen* [Hesa dweller], *stadilainen* [Stadi dweller] Vantaa: *kaupunki* [town; city], *Vantaa*, *Helsinki*	Helsinki: *stadilainen* [Stadi dweller], *hesalainen* [Hesa dweller], *lande* [countryside], *landelainen* [lande dweller], *juntti* [bumpkin], *heinähattu* [bumpkin]; Espoo: *hesalainen* [Hesa dweller], *Stadi*, *lande* [countryside] Vantaa: *Stadi*, *Espoo*, *Helsinki*, *Vantaa*

There is a lively debate about who is eligible to use the demonym *stadilainen* and what kind of group of people it can or should refer to on the discussion forum. Extract 2, in which *stadilainen* occurs alongside with *paljasjalkainen*, illustrates that the discussion is also often affective. This extract also mentions *ylpeä*, which is one of the statistically significant collocates of *stadilainen* (cf. Appendix 1), and which signifies that people born in Helsinki are proud of their roots (cf. Ainiala & Lappalainen 2017).

2) paljasjalkainen stadilainen, varsinkaan ylpeä stadilainen ei ikinä käyttäisi itsestään nimitystä “hesalainen”!! EI IKINÄ! NEVER! Bonjaatsä? Se olisi majesteettirikos! [a Stadi dweller born and bred, especially a proud Stadi dweller would never call themself a ‘Hesa dweller’!! NEVER! NEVER! Do you get it? That would be a crime against humanity!]

However, despite how clearly defined the use of *hesalainen* and *stadilainen* seems to be in some postings, the difference in the denotations is not at all clear (see also Ainiala & Lappalainen 2017). An interesting example of this is Extract 3, in which the poster refers to himself as Hesa dweller, even though he was born in Helsinki and has family roots there.

3) Vaikka olen syntyperäinen toisen polven Hesalainen en ollut käynyt Myyrmannissa joten en tunnistanut ko. paikkaa. [Although I am a native, second generation Hesa dweller I had not been to Myyrmanni so I’m unfamiliar with the place.]

Moreover, the non-nativeness of Hesa dwellers is often discussed in connection to collocates of ‘countryside’ and thus, the juxtaposition between rural Finland and the capital region is explicit. In Extract 4, people moving from the countryside (collocate *lande*: a slang word for ‘countryside’; see also Table 2) are considered as people who instantly regard themselves as Hesa dwellers when they have managed to rent a flat in the outskirts of Helsinki, in a neighbourhood of Vuosaari (cf. Jantunen et al. 2022:31–32). The writer expresses a somewhat condescending view towards these kinds of people through the lexical choices made (e.g. *lande*, *ängetä* [force one’s way]) (see also Ainiala & Lappalainen 2017:137–141).

4) Landelta änkee väkeä Hesaan ja rupeaa pitämään itseään hesalaisina, kun ovat saaneet vuokrakämpän Vuosaaresta. [People from the countryside force their way into Hesa

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> and regard themselves as Hesa dwellers as soon as they have managed to sign a contract for a flat in Vuosaari].

Likewise, in Extract 5 the writer makes a confrontation between Hesa dwellers and the people from the countryside. The writer somewhat ironically, and using a laughing smiley in his comment, regards himself as *maalaisjuntti* ([country bumpkin], cf. Section 4.2) and even explicitly mentions he is from Tornio, a city in Northern Finland, Lapland.

> 5) Aattelin että te hesalaiset tiiätte paljon paremmin ku tällanen maalaisjuntti Torniosta :D [I thought you Hesa dwellers know much better than this kind of country bumpkin from Tornio :D]

Otherwise, as Extract 5 above shows, the demonym *hesalainen* may refer to Helsinkians only or all the people in the capital area. Often, it remains unclear which ones are included as *hesalainen*. As a common idea, other Finns may categorize all the people in the capital region as Hesa dwellers. This becomes apparent in Extract 11 (see Section 4.2), where the writer expresses how Hesa dwellers is a category which sometimes may even include people living in Espoo, however, this is a conception possible only for peasants. Simultaneously, the writer makes a strong categorization between Stadi dwellers and Hesa dwellers.

Thus, as the previous extracts illustrate, *hesalainen* is sometimes a categorization given to those who have moved to the capital region, not simply to the city of Helsinki. In Extract 6 below, the writer expresses how people who have moved to Espoo deliberately label themselves as 'genuine Hesa dwellers' (*muuttaa* [to move] is also among the significant collocates, cf. Appendix 1). Thus, even here, the collocate *aito* [genuine] is represented (see Table 1). Otherwise, the approach is very similar as in Extract 4, the capital region and the rest of Finland are confronted. It is noteworthy that the city mentioned here is Oulu, a city situated in North Ostrobothnia and presumably regarded

by many living in southern Finland as a very northern part of Finland (see Pietilä et al. 2019).

6) Se on ihka aito hesalainen eli oulusta espooseen muuttanut uuskaupunkilainen. [He is absolutely a genuine Hesa dweller, that is, a new city dweller who moved from Oulu to Espoo.]

As the previous examples have shown, Hesa dwellers, the non-native Helsinkians and people who have moved to the capital region, are regarded as an out-group, as 'country people', and very often are the subject of pejorative comments. This can be seen also in Table 1, which lists several disparaging labels for non-Helsinkians and areas outside Helsinki (e.g. *landelainen, heinähattu, pönde*). Additionally, in comparison to Stadi dwellers, Hesa dwellers are the more underestimated group (cf. Extract 7).

7) ne pahimmat suunsoitajat ovatkin niitä hesalaisia ei stadilaisia. [Anyway, the worst boasters are Hesa dwellers not Stadi dwellers.]

Occasionally, Hesa dwellers are framed explicitly as people who live in Helsinki and thus differ from people living in the neighbouring cities of Espoo and Vantaa. In these discussions, *hesalainen* is usually a categorization used by a non-native Helsinkian. Excerpt 8 also shows another theme closely related to the nativeness, that is, moving to Helsinki or to the capital area (collocates *muuttaa* [to move], *asua* [to live]; cf. Appendix 1)

8) Muutettiin vantaalle reilu kuukausi sitten, Onko näin että hesalaiset on yhtä tyhmii ku vantaalaiset? [We moved to Vantaa more than a month ago. Are Hesa dwellers as stupid as Vantaa dwellers?]

Even though the collocations in every sub-corpora, Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa, are in many respects similar, there are some differences.

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In discussions involving Helsinki, the content words for country people are much more common than in Espoo and Vantaa. Additionally, demonyms referring to people in some other parts of the country (*savolainen*, *turkulainen*) appear only in discussions related to Helsinki. In general, the variety of different content words is remarkably bigger in the Helsinki material. Common to all sub-corpora is, nevertheless, the striking confrontation between urban (native and 'real' Helsinkians or all the people living in the capital area) and rural areas (non-native and 'unreal' Helsinkians or all the people living outside the capital area).

4.2 Discourses related to peasants and bumpkins

We examined discussions which involved the keywords *maalainen* [peasant] and *juntti* [bumpkin]. Table 2 illustrates statistically significant collocates that denote either people living in the countryside (e.g. *landepaukku*, *savolainen*) or in city (e.g. *stadilainen*, *kaupunkilainen*), and collocates referring to urban (*Stadi*, *Espoo*) and rural (*lande*) area. In Finland, *maalainen* refers to a person living in the countryside, but also more generally to a stereotypical idea of an unsophisticated country person. *Juntti* is more explicitly a derogatory term for a simple-minded, awkward, uneducated, and often bad-mannered person (Ahjopalo 2015). English equivalents of *juntti* would be *yokel* and *bumpkin*. *Maalainen* and *juntti* are often used interchangeably, which is evident also in our data.

Table 2. Statistical collocates of *juntti* [bumpkin] and *maalainen* [peasant] in the Helsinki, Espoo, and Vantaa data.

	juntti	maalainen
Capital area vs. countryside	Helsinki: *landepaukku* [bumpkin], *maalainen* 'peasant], *juntti* [bumpkin], *savolainen* [Savonian], *stadilainen* [Stadi dweller]; *lande* [countryside] Espoo: *Stadi, Helsinki, Espoo* Vantaa: *Helsinki*	Helsinki: *maalainen* [peasant], *kaupunkilainen* [city dweller], *juntti* [bumpkin], *stadilainen* [Stadi dweller], *hesalainen* [Hesa dweller], *helsinkiläinen* [Helsinki dweller]; StadiEspoo: *Helsinki* Vantaa: *kaupunki* [town; city]

The keywords *maalainen* and *juntti* are regularly mentioned in discussions concerning differences and similarities between the municipalities of the capital region on the one hand, and between the capital region and the rest of Finland on the other hand. This is a way of negotiating boundaries between urban sophistication and small-town backwardness, as well as constructing and reworking a multi-layered socio-spatial order associated with these categories.

In this spatial order, Helsinki clearly appears superior to the rest of Finland. This superiority is constructed and justified by statements, which combine ideas of the city and countryside with common binary oppositions, such as large–small, and good–bad. For example, the geographical features of Helsinki are contrasted with those of the provinces, as evidenced by an entry where a discussant refers to Finland's biggest lake, Saimaa, as 'savolaisten junttien meri' [the sea of the Savo bumpkins] as opposed to the 'real' sea by Helsinki. Similarly, discussions on people's behaviour in traffic demonstrate the alleged superiority of the Helsinki people over those from the countryside (Extracts 9 and 10) (cf. also Appendix 1 for collocates denoting traffic).

9) Helsingissä osataan ajaa, eikä autoa vie kun kuski! [In Helsinki people know how to drive, and nobody except the driver steers the car!]

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10) Maalaiset tukkivat liikenteen, koska he pitävät liian pitkiä turvavälejä. [Country people cause traffic jams, because their distance between cars is too long.]

While Helsinki is clearly portrayed as the core of urban sophistication, the boundary between what counts as Helsinki or 'urban' on the one hand and *juntti* or *maalainen* on the other hand is not clear-cut. Rather, it is continuously remade and context dependent. Many discussions hint that the degree of backwardness increases as a function of distance from Helsinki. From the perspective of the provinces, the residents of Espoo and Vantaa may appear as 'Helsinki people' (cf. Extract 6), but when the geographical scale of observation changes, differences between these municipalities become more evident (Extract 11).

11) Maalaisille espoolaiset ovat hesalaisia mutta stadilaisten kanssa niillä ei ole mitään tekemistä! [For country people, the residents of Espoo are Hesa people, but they have nothing to do with residents of Stadi.]

When observed in more detail, Espoo and Vantaa varyingly appear as part of a transitional zone between the capital city and countryside or as intimately connected Helsinki. This is evident, when the content of *maalainen* or *juntti* are negotiated in relation to the physical characteristics, urban structure, and mentality of Espoo and Vantaa (Extract 12) or their surrounding municipalities, such as Tuusula (Extract 13).

12) Espoo on maalaisille, jotka haluavat asua Helsingissä. Ei yhtäkään kunnon keskustaa, pelkkiä autoteitä ja omakotitaloja. [Espoo is for country people, who want to live in Helsinki. No real centre, only roads and detached houses.]

13) Tuusulassa olis halvempaa, mutta on vähän liian maalaistyylinen ja kaukana. Haluttaisiin olla espoolaisia, vantaalaisia tai hesalaisia. [It would be cheaper in Tuusula, but that's a little too country-like and far away. We'd like to be residents of Espoo, Vantaa or Hesa].

As the former discussion entry shows, Espoo and Vantaa are often deemed suitable for country people who want to enjoy the pros of city life. In contrast, the people of Helsinki are more often portrayed as self-important people who look down on country people, pretending to be more urban than they are. These discussions emphasize how Helsinki is not as urban as it appears to be, because 'along with migration waves, Helsinki has become a city dominated by country people' and 'there is no other place in Finland that has so many country people in a small area as Helsinki.'

These discussions also show that it is easy to become classified as a *maalainen* or *juntti* and, because of this, several discussants claim that people make a conscious effort to speak in the 'Helsinki way'. For instance, calling Helsinki *Hesa* instead of *Stadi* or simply *Helsinki* is a clear giveaway that the speaker is from the countryside (cf. Ainiala & Lappalainen 2017). It is also claimed by one discussant that people living in Helsinki try to hide their dialects to avoid being classified as country people.

In short, it is evident from our data that living in Helsinki does not automatically make one a 'real' Helsinki resident. This also enables debates about who is to blame for the perceived ills of Helsinki, such as self-importance or arrogance (Extracts 14 and 15).

14) Kyllä junttikin voi asua stadissa, mutta ei se siitä stadilaista tee. [A juntti can live in Stadi, but that doesn't make them a 'Stadi'.]

15) Jos helsingissä joku on tyly tai muuten juntti, niin hän on jostain muualta. [If someone in Helsinki is arrogant or otherwise juntti, they come from somewhere else.]

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In these discussions, the relationship between Helsinki and the countryside resembles that of an adult and a child, who is trying to fit in with a group of adults but still lacks some of the knowledge, manners or autonomy that are attained with age. This contrast echoes a geographical imagination embedded in popular visual representations of the spatial order of Finnish nation-state (Jokela & Linkola 2013). It is also evident in discussions about the economic relationship between the capital region and rural Finland. For example, several discussants claim that 'country people' earn money as income transfers from the growing municipalities in the capital region (Extract 16). On the other hand, this view is also challenged by some, who point to the dependency of the urban areas on the countryside, which appears as a sphere of people who are not alienated from nature or physical work (Extract 17).

16) maalaisille kärrätään rahaa kärry tolkulla kasvukuntien kirstusta [piles of money are being carted to the country people from the coffers of the growing municipalities]

17) Ettei vaan olis niinpäin, että ahkerat maalaiset elättää stadin muovikassi-miehet [Isn't it rather so that the hard-working country people support the plastic bag men ('drunkards') of stadi]

These divergent interpretations echo wider political sentiments that emphasize the value of urban areas as engines of national economies and portray rural centres in the context of crisis-speech related to problems of declining regions (Soininvaara 2022:12–43). As Eriksson (2010:101) points out, representations of peripheral areas as 'weak' and subordinate to the urban areas are inherently political, not least because they help to justify regional policies that favour urban areas by highlighting their capacity to provide economic growth for the entire nation. Eriksson (2010) examines the situation in Sweden, but similar developments are evident in Finland, where the idea of investing uniformly throughout the country has been largely replaced by political viewpoints that emphasize the development of Helsinki into

an attractive and innovative 'world city' that connects Finland into global economic flows (Ahlqvist & Moisio 2014). In this context, the efforts of some Suomi24 discussants to show the economic value and authenticity of the countryside (Extract 17) can be interpreted as acts of self-empowerment and ways of justifying living in areas associated with the prevailing crisis-speech.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In this article, we have discussed digital discourses of geographical imagination produced in the discussions related to Helsinki, Espoo, and Vantaa, the three biggest municipalities in Finland's capital region. Using texts from the Suomi24 discussion forums as our data, we analysed the ways in which the users produce socio-spatial distinctions by categorizing some groups as 'others' and thus differentiating in-groups and out-groups. In the analysis, we started with statistical collocation analysis which was complemented with close reading and an interpretation of the cultural meanings of the utterances extracted from the data. Our aim has been to combine methods in a manner that pays attention to the strengths and limitations of them. While the analysis of a large body of corpus data may lose detailed information, qualitative analysis without statistical information may strengthen the role of researcher's intuition. By using mixed method approaches, such as keyword and collocation analyses and close-reading in the present study, the methodologies can reinforce each other (cf. Baker 2006:15–16) and produce perhaps more accurate information of the phenomenon under study.

The results show that discourses related both to native and non-native Helsinkians and to those living in the capital region in contrast to those living elsewhere in Finland recur, and the juxtapositions between the experienced 'urban' and 'rural' are repeatedly constructed. This points to the distinctive role of the capital city and its inhabitants in people's geographical imagination (Eriksson 2010; Jokela & Linkola 2013). The qualitative analysis reveals the contexts in which the division between the urban and rural are discussed.

All the four keywords analysed qualitatively in our article, namely *hesalainen* [Hesa dweller], *stadilainen* [Stadi dweller], *maalainen* [peasant] and *juntti* [bumpkin], are used in making comparisons between people living in Helsinki or in the capital region and people living outside Helsinki region. Whereas Stadi dwellers are categorized as native Helsinkians and often presented as 'genuine' Helsinkians, Hesa dwellers are framed as non-natives and simultaneously often as country people or at least equal to them in comparisons between different Helsinkians (cf. Ainiala & Lappalainen 2017). Respectively, in discussions between the capital region and the rest of the county, Hesa and Stadi dwellers are confronted with all the other Finns, who, in turn, are often presented as country people.

Our analysis supports earlier studies that have shown the importance of binary oppositions in meaning-making and discourses, which work towards particular geographical imaginations (Eriksson 2010; Said 1979; Silva 2017). The attributes associated with people living in and outside of Helsinki confirm the special role of the capital city in the spatial order of the Finnish nation-state and contrast it with the 'rest of Finland' (Jokela & Linkola 2013). What is new in our study is that by comparing discourses associated with Helsinki, Espoo, and Vantaa, we have demonstrated the important role of suburban areas around the capital city in the negotiation of what counts as 'urban' as opposed to 'countryside' or sophisticated as opposed to 'juntti'. This points toward the need for new research that focuses on the special urban citizenship and forms that are emerging in these areas that have less clearly defined and stable positions in the geographical imagination of Finnish people (cf. Keil 2017).

Usually, the ones who label people in Helsinki (region) as Hesa dwellers are from outside of the capital region, and thus Helsinki and people living there are observed from outside. This shows that, as a capital city, Helsinki is a special geographical entity impregnated with symbolic power and charged with meaning. It is within mundane discourses, like the ones apparent on the Suomi24 discussion forum, that this meaning is mobilized for the construction of spatially embedded social identities (cf. Määttä et al. 2021). Comments about

Helsinki and Hesa dwellers serve to distinguish 'us' (people living outside of the capital region) from 'them' (people living in Helsinki) and, simultaneously, to gain ownership of some of the meanings associated with the capital city.

This is interesting in the context of the recent processes of urbanization and related political discussions, where shrinking and aging towns and rural municipalities are frequently framed as problem areas (Soininvaara 2022). The 'othering' of Helsinki is a discursive strategy that enables people living in small towns and rural areas to gain agency by challenging some of the prevailing ideas of the alleged virtues of the capital region. In other words, the formation of social identities around an adversarial relationship between Helsinki and the rest of Finland may serve to foster or return the self-regard of people who do not identify themselves with the values and meanings associated with the urbanized 'core' of Finland.

With this in mind, we suggest that studying digital discourses may help researchers and urban professionals become more aware of discourses through which people's geographical imagination is continuously remade as a response to various ideas that underlie urban policies and regional development agendas. Identifying possible tensions and anticipating conflicts enables these professionals to direct their actions in a socially sustainable way, ensuring that no one is left behind.

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Appendix 1. The most significant content word collocates (denoting to authenticity, opposition between Helsinki and countryside, characteristics, traffic and moving and living) of the four studied node words in three data. The frequencies and statistical MI-values are presented in those data categories in which the collocates exist.

Semantic group	Node word	Collocates with frequencies and MI-values in three data		
genuine Stadi dweller	*hesalainen*	Helsinki-data	f	MI
		paljasjalkainen [born and bred]	14	7.91
		syntyperäinen [native]	8	7.55
		alkuperäinen [original]	12	6.89
		aito [original]	14	6.44
		polvi [generation]	8	6.61
		Espoo-data	f	MI
		aito [original]	3	8.91
	stadilainen	Helsinki-data	f	MI
		paljasjalkainen [born and bred]	66	9.75
		syntyperäinen [native]	42	9.55
		wannabe [wannabe]	8	8.88
		aito [original]	91	8.55
		polvi [generation]	33	8.26
		alkuperäinen [original]	37	8.13
		sukupolvi [generation]	7	6.71
		Espoo-data	f	MI
		paljasjalkainen [born and bred]	6	12.35
		syntyperäinen [native]	4	11.05
		syntyä [to be born]	4	6.46
		Vantaa-data	f	MI
		paljasjalkainen [born and bred]	9	9.94
		syntyä [to be born]	6	4.28
		oikea [real]	6	3.81

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Helsinki vs countryside	*hesalainen*	Helsinki-data	f	MI
		pönde [countryside]	5	9.36
		turkulainen [Turku dweller]	11	7.36
		hesalainen [Hesa dweller]	42	6.92
		stadilainen [Stadi dweller]	41	6.49
		savolainen [Savonian]	9	6.24
		maalainen [peasant]	16	6.18
		sakki [gang]	5	6.12
		Hesa	221	4.04
		Espoo-data	f	MI
		hesalainen [Hesa dweller]	4	9.92
		stadilainen [Stadi dweller]	3	9.19
		Vantaa-data	f	MI
		kaupunki [town; city]	5	5.07
		Vantaa	8	4.03
		Helsinki	7	3.71
	stadilainen	Helsinki-data	f	MI
		heinähattu [bumpkin]	6	7.87
		landelainen [land dweller]	9	7.46
		lande [countryside]	51	6.69
		stadilainen [Stadi dweller]	60	6.65
		hesalainen [Hesa dweller]	41	6.49
		juntti [bumpkin]	35	6.44
		Espoo-data	f	MI
		hesalainen [Hesa dweller]	3	9.19
		lande [countryside]	11	8.70
		Stadi	3	7.77
		Vantaa-data	f	MI
		Stadi	10	7.41
		Espoo	14	4.62
		Helsinki	10	3.56
		Vantaa	6	2.95

	maalainen	Helsinki-data	f	MI
		maalainen [peasant]	18	5.00
		kaupunkilainen [city dweller]	9	5.57
		juntti [bumpkin]	10	3.68
		stadilainen [Stadi dweller]	13	3.18
		hesalainen [Hesa dweller]	7	3.17
		helsinkiläinen [Helsinki dweller]	8	2.82
		Stadi	92	1.68
		Espoo-data	f	MI
		Helsinki	13	12.22
		Vantaa-data	f	MI
		kaupunki [town; city]	17	2.80
	juntti	Helsinki-data	f	MI
		juntti [bumpkin]	66	7.93
		landepaukku [bumpkin]	6	7.11
		maalainen [peasant]	20	6.68
		stadilainen [Stadi dweller]	35	6.44
		lande [countryside]	26	6.29
		savolainen [Savonian]	7	6.06
		Espoo-data	f	MI
		Stadi	9	7.65
		Espoo	53	3.84
		Helsinki	9	3.78
		Vantaa-data	f	MI
		Helsinki	7	9.87
characteristic	*hesalainen*	Helsinki-data	f	MI
		leuhka [boastful]	5	9.21
		ylimielinen [arrogant]	9	7.86
		kusi [piss]	6	6.72
	stadilainen	Helsinki-data	f	MI
		dille [stupid]	5	9.92
		ylpeä [proud]	15	7.52
	maalainen	Helsinki-data	f	MI
		typerä [fool]	21	19.80

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	juntti	Helsinki-data	f	MI
		idiootti [idiot]	5	5.81
traffic	*hesalainen*	Helsinki-data	f	MI
		kolaroida [to collide]	5	8.33
		Espoo-data	f	MI
		metro [underground; metro]	4	6.34
		ajaa [to drive]	4	5.15
moving and living	*hesalainen*	Helsinki-data	f	MI
		muuttaa [to move]	41	4.60
		muualta [from elsewhere]	13	4.39
	stadilainen	Espoo-data	f	MI
		muuttaa [to move]	6	5.60
		asua [to live]	16	5.19
		Vantaa-data	f	MI
		asua [to live]	10	12.68
	juntti	Helsinki-data	f	MI
		muuttaa [to move]	52	5.13
		asua [to live]	60	4.20