FROM LOCAL TO TRANSLOCAL EXPERIENCE
The Nationwide Culture of Letters to the Press in Mid-1800s Finland

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The phenomenon of letters to newspapers developed into a nationwide and pervasive culture of local letters in the mid-1800s Finnish-language press. A characteristic feature of this culture was that the readers’ letters published in the press were written in the names of local communities. Thus, the writer of the letter claimed to represent the entire local community. This interaction between different locations via the press transformed local into societal and societal into local. The culture of local letters had decisive influence on the development of Finnish society, nationalism and civic society in the nineteenth century.

KEYWORDS Civic/civil society; nationalism; Finland; newspapers; translocal; letters to the press

Introduction

Constant interaction via internet and social media is an essential feature of the current digital age. The development of information technology has enabled novel societal and even global forums of discussion, which create new kinds of communities that are no longer tied to the locality of the participants. Similarly, a special kind of public discussion forum that went beyond local face-to-face communication emerged with the rise of the first mass media in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The letters to the press offered the first interface for this kind of interaction.

Recent research has indicated that in generally the letters to the press are twofold as a historical source. On the one hand, as text written by ordinary people, they could be an important source for the vernacular History of Experiences. For the historian of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, for example, they contain material that is often difficult to find. On the other hand, as the letters to the press developed into the specific genre of journalism, the letters sent by contributors were often crafted and curated by editorial processes. Thus, the letters as historical sources could neither to be seen straightforwardly as a representation of public opinion nor journalistic agendas. Furthermore, the letters and the identities of the writers could have been fabricated to serve different purposes. The problematic nature of the letters to the press as a historical source leads inevitably to the conclusion that each individual historical case needs to be considered separately.
In general, the letters to the press have not been seen as a significant factor for the development of the societies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, there are cases, in which the letters to the press had a crucial social impact on the local community. For example, in late eighteenth-century Philadelphia the debate in the press turned out to be a crucial source of information necessary for survival when the yellow fever epidemic raged through the city. With their letters, people from various strata of society formed the community that passed along experiences that helped to pull through the epidemic. However, because the early press was in general local or regional, these kinds of phenomena of letters to the press did not spread nationwide to the societal stage. Comparative historical studies have shown that in Europe generally readers had a minor role in contributing their views to the public debate via letters published in the press in the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The role of the press was to provide information and materials for informed debate, but the discussion took place in other urban forums of civil society, such as coffee houses, associations and clubs.

Nevertheless, apparently in countries where the freedom of speech was at some point relatively high developed different kinds of cultures of letters to newspapers. In both Britain and America, where the press was remarkably free, there emerged from the eighteenth century onwards a culture of usually anonymously written readers’ letters, where even people from the lower ranks of society could attack the higher-level figures and institutions of society. However, in most cases, newspapers became forums for a societal debate only during revolutionary disturbances, because the press was usually strictly controlled by the authorities. Typically, readers’ letters were few and those that were actually published were usually from prominent influential figures in society. For example, in the Netherlands a culture of political readers’ letters by Spectator-figure commentators emerged in the turbulent times at the end of the eighteenth century, when censorship was not so tight.

However, in the grand duchy of Finland a nationwide and pervasive culture of letters to newspapers developed without revolutionary disturbances and in spite of the tightened censorship of the press in the mid-1800s Russian Empire. A characteristic feature of this culture was that the readers’ letters published in the press were written in the names of local communities. Thus, the writer of the letter spoke for the entire local community even though usually he or she had not been assigned such a role. This emphasis of spatial collectiveness was usually highlighted by the passive voice of the narrator. The Finnish word ‘täällä’, which means ‘here’, was frequently used in the letters to refer to the location that the writer claimed to represent. This is why they are called local letters. Another typical feature of the culture was the option to remain anonymous. It was unusual for a writer to sign a local letter with his or her full name. This enabled the writers to cross the social barriers of the society (Figure 1).

In this article, I analyse this phenomenon of readers’ letters which emerged in the Finnish-language press in the middle of the nineteenth century. I begin my analysis by describing the characteristics of the Finnish-language press in comparison to development in Western world. I then analyse the emergence and expansion of the culture of local letters in Finland before moving on to study the content, authors and the readership of the local letters. I argue that because of the mid-1800s national and transnational circumstances, the Finnish culture of readers’ letters to the press was characteristically...
national and societal. Readers’ letters created a forum for discussion that had significant consequences for the development of the Finnish nation, society and civic society.

My research material is based on the Translocalis Database. This is a digital database compiled by the Finnish Academy Centre of Excellence in the History of Experiences (HEX). The Translocalis Database contains all readers’ letters written in the name of local communities and published in the Finnish-language press during the period 1850–1875, gathered from the fully digitalized newspaper collection of the National Library of Finland.7 The database includes some 27,000 letters.8 The article is based on the quantitative analysis of the database and qualitative analyses of the local letters.

The Finnish phenomenon of the letters to the newspaper has been recognized in the research by the Finnish pioneer in historical newspaper research Päiviö Tommila, already in the 1970s and 1980s, but it has not been analysed in detail at that time.9 Because of this, it has not been taken into the account in the studies that have outlined the development of the Finnish public sphere and civic society.10 Indeed, the extent of the phenomenon and its societal significance has been revealed to the research not until the digitalization of the newspaper sources in the twenty-first century.11

The Characteristics of the Early Finnish-Language Press

In the mid-1800s, Finland was a sparse-populated small agrarian country. Over 90% of its population of 1.6 million lived in the countryside. Finland was a grand duchy of the Russian empire and the Czar constituted the supreme authority in mid-1800s Finland. The grand duchy was led from top down as the legislative assembly, the Diet of Finland, was

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FIGURE 1
A short local letter written from Mikkeli by the peasant’s son Antti Manninen published in a publication called Suometar. Suometar 12 September 1856.
not convened in the period 1809–1863. This led to the accumulation of power to the Swedish-speaking government employees. Overall, the administrative structure carried the legacy of the earlier Swedish reign that ended in 1809. The entire central administration functioned in Swedish although 85% of the population were Finnish-speaking and only 14% Swedish-speaking. Due to this Swedish that is linguistically unrelated to Finnish, was the language of the educated people. Briefly, Finnish was the language of the common people, who lived their self-sufficient lives in the numerous local rural communities. There were no state schools for Finnish-speaking people and the Finnish-language literary culture was thin still in its infancy. The early press in Finland mainly used Swedish as its language from the end of the eighteenth century onwards. After a few early, short-lived attempts in 1775–1776 and 1820–1841, only from 1844 onwards has there been an active Finnish-language press.

Shortly after the beginning of the Russian reign, the nationalistic movement that emphasized the significance of the Finnish language and Finnish folk poetry was born. This was not seen as a problem with the Russian authorities, because it drove a wedge between the Swedish-speaking elite of Finland and Sweden that lost the area of Finland in the 1809. The first representatives of the Finnish nationalistic movement were a small fraction of the Swedish-speaking cultural elite that created an Enlightenment-aspired programme. Their objective was to promote the development of the Finnish language and educate the Finnish-speaking people. This could be seen as one of the key reasons why the members of the nationalistic cultural elite began to establish newspapers and use them as a vehicle for promoting their cultural-political programme. At first, the known figures like the philosopher Johan Vilhelm Snellman published mainly in Swedish, but in the course of the nineteenth century, the language of the nationalistic cultural elite changed to the Finnish.

Because of this historical development, in the middle of the nineteenth century the Finnish-language press was printed and edited in the towns, but mainly read in the sparsely populated countryside where most of the Finnish-speaking people lived. The vast majority of the newspaper issues were delivered to the rural areas by the mail service. For example, the two largest Finnish-language newspapers of the late 1850s, Suometar and Suomen Julkisia Sanomia were printed in Helsinki, but only 5–6% of their subscribers lived in this capital city. Indeed, because of these circumstances the Finnish-language press became instantly nationwide during its first rise in the middle of the nineteenth century.

In the Western world, the press generally developed as an urban and regional phenomenon. In many countries, the press emerged and became institutionalized during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries before the advent of steam power and advanced printing technology. Newspapers in those times were commercial enterprises, which could be made to show a profit with a small amount of capital and a circulation of a few hundred copies. This tied the early newspapers efficiently to their local and usually urban environment, which had the easily accessible market for printing products. This meant that the early newspapers did not usually develop into a broad-based and integrated national or societal forum of discussion. Instead, the early press generally developed as an extension of the urban oral cultures.
The Finnish-language press, which main readership was in the rural areas, is an exception in this development. This is due to the late emergence of the Finnish-language press. As it initially arose in the 1850s, it could benefit from the contemporary technological progress in printing and transportation. Due to the societal circumstances and rapid advances in printing technology, telecommunications links and transportation connections, the Finnish-language press did not build upon the tradition of the early European press, which arose as an extension of urban face-to-face oral cultures. This opened the way for a nationwide culture of local letters.

The Beginning of the Culture

Letters to newspapers were a characteristic feature of the early Finnish-language press right from the beginning. The editors often urged their readers to send the contributions that they could publish in their newspapers. This was because newspaper publishing was not a lucrative business. The editors were usually volunteers or worked only part-time. Thus, they were usually happy to accept letters from their readers that could fill the columns of their newspaper.19

Furthermore, the writing of the letters in the name of local communities became a practice of the Finnish-language press from the beginning. The reason for this was probably the non-local character of Finnish-language press. It could be assumed that because the readers of the press were all around the country, titling the letters in the name of communities was a practical way to structure the correspondence. It is possible that at first this was done via editors, but it soon became as a convention that the writers of the letters absorbed.

The number of readers' letters began to increase at the beginning of the 1850s at the same time with the first rise of the Finnish-language press. This change was connected to the revolutions of 1848. After the European upheavals, the administration of the Russian empire began to tighten the censorship of the Finnish-language press. The restrictions were aimed especially at the newspaper Suometar, which was edited by the leading members of the young university-educated nationalistic elite. In 1849, the authorities forbade Suometar to publish any international news. Next year the authorities issued a decree permitting only such writings to be published in Finnish, which aimed to advance the common economic development or Christian devoutness.20 Because of the strict censorship regulations, Suometar had to go out of business for half year in the middle of 1850. In 1851, when the editors of Suometar began to publish their newspaper after the break, they adopted a new publishing strategy that concentrated on the local domestic news. As the local news could usually be interpreted as material conducive to economic development, they did not suffer so much from censorship. The editors of Suometar began to send requests to well-known figures around the country to write something about current events and issues in their local communities. These individuals were usually members of clergy, teachers or civil servants who supported the development of the Finnish language. Suometar succeeded in enlisting them as the correspondents and thus began to publish an increasing number of local news reports from all around the country.21 Therefore, even though this censorship has generally been seen a
setback to the development of the Finnish language and culture, indirectly it opened the
door to the nationwide phenomenon of readers’ letters.

The activity of Suometar in soliciting letters from correspondents accelerated in
1853, when the newspaper started to be published in a wider format. This meant that a
greater number of readers’ letters now could be fitted into the columns of Suometar.22
In the same year, the editors of Suometar published an article requesting their readers
to send them all kinds of contributions. They especially requested articles about local inci-
dents, accounts about attempts to found schools and libraries and reports about the local
church’s meetings. In addition, Suometar wanted information about the literacy and the
industrial plants around the country. The editors wanted to know how these things had
influenced local life. Suometar promised a modest payment for longer contributions.23

The consequence was that Suometar began to receive more and more readers’
letters from people all around Finland (see Table 1). Both the number of local letters pub-
lished and the number of places from which they came increased about threefold between
the years 1851 and 1855. The importance of local letters as newspaper material also grew.
In 1851 there were on average two local letters per issue of Suometar. In 1855, the same
number was already six.24 What is significant is that at the same time the circulation of Suo-
metar increased exponentially. From 1851 to 1856, it grew 48-fold.25 This indicates that the
local letters were something that people wanted to read. The popularity of the press rose
also because of the Crimean War 1853–1856, which reached Finland when the British and
French navies engaged in operations on the Baltic Sea. The nearby warfare fuelled the
hunger for news in Finland.26 Indeed, the events of the Crimean War and local efforts in
Finland were reported in the local letters.27

Year 1853 was a turning point in the phenomenon of local letters. Besides the
increase in the locations from which letters were sent (Table 1), Figure 2 shows how the
number of signed letters increased rapidly at the same time in the columns of Suometar.
While in 1852 only 18% of local letters were signed, the following year the figure was 49%.
The rapid growth continued: in 1854 as many as 87% of the local letters published in Suo-
metar were signed with the writer’s name, initials, or a pseudonym. In addition, the
number of individual signatures that appeared in the annual volume of the newspaper
only once grew fast. In 1852 only 10% of the letters published in Suometar were signed
with the individual name or pseudonym. In 1853, the figure was 25% and in 1856 it was

| Year | Local letters | Places of origin | Circulation |
|------|---------------|-----------------|-------------|
| 1850 | 28            | 18              | 410         |
| 1851 | 111           | 48              | 95          |
| 1852 | 109           | 45              | 249         |
| 1853 | 167           | 72              | 630         |
| 1854 | 316           | 114             | 1372        |
| 1855 | 319           | 137             | 3863        |
| 1856 | 252           | 120             | 4600        |

*Source: Circulation: Tommila, “Suomen lehdistön levikki ennen vuotta 1860,” 330–34;
other: Translocalis Database.
This indicates that more and more individual writers wrote these readers’ letters. Furthermore, the signatures were needed, because instead of one there emerged multiple writers from the same locality.

The practice of signing the letters written in the name of local communities served to establish the format for local letters for decades to come. The growing number of letters from various writers around Finland would suggest that these letters were written not only by specifically recruited correspondents but also by volunteers from all around the country. The organized top-down activity turned into civic activity from below.

Altogether, this marked the starting point for the culture of local letters in the Finnish-language press. Paradoxically, this first civic nationwide activity of the Finnish-speaking majority of population began as censorship pushed the editors of Suometar to concentrate on domestic news. The nationalistic editors of Suometar, who in 1853 requested local letters from across the country could barely imagine how popular the letter writing and letter reading could become.

Expansion of the Culture

After the success of Suometar, all the other Finnish-language newspapers followed suit. Newspapers published in the major cities in Finland—Turku, Oulu and Kuopio—began to print more local letters. At the same time, the circulation of the entire Finnish-language press increased from about 1,000–8,000 in the period 1851–1856.

The growth of the Finnish-language press and its culture of local letters attracted the attention of the authorities of imperial Russia. Instead of censorship, the officials perceived the advantages of the developing press and increasing participation around the country. In 1857, the authorities launched the official newspaper, Suomen Julkisia Sanomia, which
achieved immediate popularity. It began to publish local letters and the authorities even encouraged people to send their contributions by exempting them from postage fees. This move by authorities institutionalized the culture of local letters.

The culture of local letters grew markedly during the 1850s and 1860s. Figure 3 presents the local letters published in Finnish-language newspapers between 1850 and 1870. In 1860 over 1,000 local letters were published in the Finnish-language press. This was more than 22 times the number in 1850. In 1870 about 500 more letters were published than in 1860.

![Figure 3: Local letters in the Finnish-language press.](image)

![Figure 4: Local letter writing activity, percentage of all localities 1850–1870.](image)
The years 1853 and 1854 mark the turning point for the spatial representativeness of local letters. Figure 4 presents how for the first time in 1858 local letters were received from over half of all towns and parishes in Finland. In 1866, this number was over two-thirds of the towns and parishes. The graph shows how most of the local letters were sent from the rural areas because most of the Finnish-speaking subscribers of the press lived in agrarian surroundings.

The culture of local letters also spread across the sparsely populated country. Figure 5 is a map of Finland, which presents the total geographical distribution of the local letters published in the Finnish-language press in the period 1850–1870.

Altogether, statistical analyses of the Translocalis Database show that in the period 1850–1870 the culture of local letters to newspapers emerged from the experiment of one individual newspaper’s editors and developed into truly nationwide civic activity. This indicates that there was a call for both the content of these contributions and the interactivity the local letters created between the different localities.
Content of the Local Letters 1850–1870

Recent international analyses of digitalized newspaper material have shown that the news stories of the early press were often transnational and travelled around the world.35 Seen in this light, the local letters of 1850–1870 were quite authentic material; only about 10% of the published letters were acknowledged to have been borrowed from other newspapers by the editors or the press.36

The authenticity is connected with the content of local letters. Typically, the focus in the local letters was on everyday matters. In the 1850s the writers usually commented on weather conditions, crop yields, health issues and peculiar incidents of their local communities. A more general topic was farming methods. This was connected to the transition from traditional slash-and-burn to field cultivation, which was still an ongoing process in eastern Finland. Lutheran Christianity was also a pervasive topic, forming a background discourse of the local letters in the entire period 1850–1870.37

The 1860s witnessed a diversification in the topics of the local letters. This is connected to the large-scale social reforms implemented in the 1860s in Finland. In 1863, the Finnish Diet convened after a recess of over 50 years. The municipal reform (1865) and the new Church Law (1869) curtailed the power of the Lutheran Church in local government and gave more power to the local landowners. At the same time, economic reforms liberated trade and enterprise in the rural areas. The industrialization of Finland advanced and it became possible to establish small shops in rural settlements. As the market prices of forest and agricultural products started to rise, the Finnish countryside became connected to the global market of capitalism. In short, modernization began to infiltrate the everyday lives of agrarian people. This caused a transformation in the topics of the local letters. Now there was more and more discussion about the changing times and how the social and economic reforms should be conducted in different localities.38

Altogether, the local letters serve as a chronicle of everyday life in different locations and at different times. Press censorship was intended to protect Christianity, the Czar, the government, the constitution and law and order in the Russian empire. The censorship protected the upper level or the hierarchy, which was thought to have been ordained by God. In practice the policies of individual censors varied widely.39 However, the range of issues that could be debated in the local letters still ranged widely. Public discussion about the execution of the orders of the authorities by local communities was generally allowed. Indeed, at least implicitly, it was even expected because the social reforms of the 1860s were implemented at the local level.

The anonymity of the local letters promoted freedom of speech on topics that did not challenge the imperial regime. The degree of anonymity varied. The use of initials meant that the writer could usually be identified in his or her local community although the identity of the author was not apparent outside this location. However, the use of pseudonyms offered total anonymity although the editors required that the real name of the writer should be in the letters sent to the editorial offices. Anonymity enabled new kinds of power struggles in the society of four estates, representing the nobility, the clergy, burghers and the landed peasantry.40
from the lower ranks of society could challenge those at the higher levels. Anonymity also made it possible to play with identities and use power in that way, as the culture of local letters enabled the use of various pseudonyms. All this was a completely new feature in the culture of Finnish-speaking people in Finland, where local agrarian life had been largely the same for centuries.

The societal significance of culture of local letters increased further in 1866–1868, when Finland suffered the nationwide famine known as ‘the great hunger years’. During this disaster, about 10% of the entire population of Finland died. Along with the subsequent Swedish famine of 1867–1869, it was the last major naturally caused famine in Europe. The disaster touched almost everyone in Finland. Even though not all localities suffered hunger, contagious diseases spread because of the crowds of beggars moving across the country. In addition, the disaster evoked a broad discussion in the press, which had just expanded into a forum, which could reach most of the population. I argue that because of the arising public sphere and its pervasive culture of local letters, the famine became the first common societal experience in Finland.

Participation in Culture

The Finnish-language press had the potential to become a significant societal phenomenon, because almost nine out of ten of the country’s population spoke Finnish. As Lutheranism was a state religion in Finland, every individual was required to go through confirmation classes at the age of about 15 and prove that they could read. In practice, the proper ability of reading was not so common because reading in the confirmation classes focused solely on Lutheran doctrine. Furthermore, there was not so much use for this skill in the traditional Finnish-speaking agrarian culture. Nevertheless, the reading taught in the confirmation classes prepared people for the rise of the press as a primary media.

The circulation of the Finnish-language press increased rapidly along with the culture of local letters. In 1860 about 1% of Finnish-speaking people over the age of 15 subscribed to newspapers. This figure was ten times higher than ten years earlier. The readership was of course a wider phenomenon: There were multiple readers and listeners for each newspaper subscription. It is commonly estimated in the history of the press that each newspaper issue was read by approximately ten people. This means that in 1860 the Finnish-language press reached about 10% of the Finnish-speaking population over 15 years old. This figure does not include the listeners; it was usual to read the newspaper aloud and of course, there were a lot of people who heard of the information published in the press at second hand. The wide geographical distribution of the newspapers increased the circulation of the information published in them in the sparsely populated country.

The ability to write was rare in Finland in the mid-1800s. The first official statistics (1880) show that under 13% of the whole population over ten years old could write. Full literacy was much more common within the Swedish-speaking minority, who accounted for 14% section of the total population. This means that in the middle of the nineteenth century only a few per cent of the Finnish-speaking adult population
could write. As education was not available to native speakers of Finnish, the Finnish-speaking writers were a special group of people. Significantly, quite many of them also wrote the local letters.

The writers of the local letters came from a wide spectrum of society. Suometar, for example, reported that by the end of 1855 they had published a total of 386 local letters written by 205 gentlemen and 181 peasants. In 1862, the editor of Sanomia Turusta wrote that his paper should be called ‘the newspaper of the people’, because among the local letters only few were written by gentlemen. In the historical context, gentlemen usually referred to all educated people while peasants referred to all uneducated people. Indeed, the writing of the local letters was not only an activity of people from the higher echelons of society. Päiviö Tommila suggests that in the period 1847–65 the writers of these letters numbered at least 2500 individuals. He estimates that in the 1850s 40% of the writers identified were either peasants or from the lower social ranks. In reality, the number of ‘from below’ writers is likely higher, because their pseudonyms are more difficult to recognize than those of the higher social ranks. In the Translocalis Database, hundreds of letter writers explicitly identify themselves as crofters, farmhands, workers or servants.

Previous research has established that the newspaper writers of the era were predominantly men. In the Translocalis Database 1850–1875 there are about 27,000 letters and about 180 of them are signed with a name or pseudonym suggesting a female writer. The small share of female writers reflects the gender system of agrarian Finland. Learning to write and getting the text published was more difficult for women in the social circumstances of the country.

In addition to the writers of the letters, the editors of newspapers played a role in the culture of local letters. In the period 1850–1870, there was typically only one editor per newspaper. The main task of the editors was to proofread submissions sent by uneducated writers. In the 1850s newspapers sought to publish all readers’ letters sent to the editorial offices. In the 1860s the editors assumed more of a gatekeeper function vis-à-vis the public because the number of readers’ letters grew so large that they could reject some submissions. An exception was Wolmar Schildt whose newspaper Kansan Lehti’s content was composed of readers’ letters that were not edited almost not at all. Although the local letters usually went through an editorial process, there is no reason to believe that the editors fabricated the local letters to any great extent. Because the letters were public, the other local contributors controlled each other. The hundreds of writers and thousands of readers across the country cautiously controlled what the other authors wrote. The debates and comments on the other authors’ letters were a characteristic feature of this culture of letters to the press. As the debates were public and nationwide, the control by the peer group was societal by its character. To write a local letter demanded a lot of local knowledge and the lack of it could have exposed the imposter.

Altogether, the wide participation in the culture indicates that the local letters are a fruitful source for the research of the ‘history-from-below’. Indeed, the local letters are the first larger historical source material of this kind in the Finnish-speaking culture.
From Face-to-Face Local to Translocal and Societal

While elsewhere in Europe the early press was usually a medium that provided information for the face-to-face debates of civil society, the early Finnish-language press developed into a forum of societal interaction that went beyond face-to-face communication. While elsewhere in the Western world the early press had a tendency to regionalize around urban centres, the early Finnish-language press immediately became nationwide, connecting the different localities to each other. This was due to the historical and societal circumstances of the Grand Duchy of Finland. The late modernization and the peculiar language situation of Finland opened the way for the interactive culture of local letters in the Finnish-language press. The spark for this development was given by the cultural elite who published and edited the press. They began to favour letters sent from the local communities because of the censorship of foreign news after the revolutions of 1848. In few years, the organized correspondent activity developed rapidly into the civil activity.

The culture of local letters emerged while the Finnish nationalism began to extend to the phenomenon that began to reach the lower layers of the society. This indeed seems to support Benedict Anderson’s famous and at the same time controversial theory of the emergence of nationalism. According to Anderson, especially the newspaper as a medium created imagined community and experience of ‘meanwhileness’ that went beyond the face-to-face communication. Because of the wide extent and the geographical distribution, the culture of the culture of local letters had a vital role in this construction of Finnish nationalism. In a sense, the culture of local letters concretizes the theory of Anderson by giving an empirical example for the construction of imagined community.

Significantly, the culture of local letters created something more than the imagined community of nationalism. It took part in the constructing of the political public sphere in a sense described by Jürgen Habermas. The anonymity of the letters in particular promoted critical reasoning that was not based on the writers’ social status in their communities. This could be seen as a key dimension in the development of the political public sphere as a counterbalance to the hierarchical distinctions in the society of estates and its traditional institutions. Although Habermas’ overall theory of the public sphere is widely criticized, his remarks on the formulation of the literal public sphere as the precondition for the political public sphere apply well to the culture of local letters.

However, the subject area of the local letters in the 1850s and 1860s was societal rather than political. The letters address common matters, but rarely challenged the authorities. The meaning of this societal activity changed over time depending on what was important in the everyday lives of the local communities. In the local letters, various local experiences in the sparsely populated country could be shared in the public sphere for the first time. Conversely, the public sphere reached the local level via the local letters, which were an essential part of the content of the newspapers. Indeed, the major significance of the culture of local letters was in the interplay between the local and societal. The phenomenon rendered the local societal and societal local. By this way, the culture of local letters was also involved in the formulation of the modern institutions of society, which formed the Finland of the 1860s. Via this interactive public sphere, it became possible to negotiate the implementation of large-scale social reforms. This
became especially vital after the famine of 1866–1868, which was the first truly societally and nationally shared experience in Finland.

Furthermore, the interaction of the new literate public sphere created a fertile ground for the growth of the associations and mass movements of civil society that emerged in Finland in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The breakthrough of mass organization occurred in Finland in the 1870s, when the Finnish nationalistic cultural elite organized as the Finnish party and began to introduce the means of modern politics. The Finnish party started to organize new associations and public meetings to the countryside and claimed to represent the ‘will of the people’. By this way, the Finnish nationalistic elite began to utilize the public sphere which combined the local and national level. The structure of this public sphere was constructed by the participants of the culture of local letters over a decade earlier.

In a wider sense, the culture of local letters in Finland opens a ‘from below’ perspective on how the local, national, societal and political intertwined in the construction of the modern state and its civic society. At the core of it was a new kind of social interactivity that went beyond face-to-face communication. This transformed the notion of local to something that could be seen as ‘translocal’, which included the new idea of national. Indeed, the ‘translocal’ is the conception of local that is familiar to us today. It is the ‘pre-modern non-translocal local’ based solely on face-to-face interaction which is difficult for us to access. In Finland, the local letters were the first societal interface that extended the idea of local in this way.

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Notes

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10. Alapuro and Stenius, “Kansanliikkeet loivat kansakunnan. Niimenen,” 20–39; “Kansa seisoi liittymään,” 101, 107–9, 124–5, 196–200.
11. Stark, “The Limits of Patriarchy”, 48–77; Kokko, “Suomenkielisen lehdistön paikalliskirjekulttuuria tallentava digitaalinen Translocalis-tietokanta”; Kokko, “Suomenkielisen julkisuuden nousu 1850-luvulla ja sen yhteiskunnallinen merkitys,” 12–21; Kokko, “Kuviteltu minuus.”
12. SVT VI:1.
13. Tommila, “Suomen sanomalehdistön alkuvaheitt,” 54–8; Tommila, “Yhdestä lehdestä sanomalehdistöksi 1809–1859,” 87–91, 143.
14. See for example Klinge et al., Helsingin yliopisto 1640–1990 II, 109–11.
15. Kokko, “Suomenkielisen julkisuuden nousu 1850-luvulla ja sen yhteiskunnallinen merkitys,” 16–19.
16. Tommila, “Yhdestä lehdestä sanomalehdistöksi 1809–1859,” 236–8.
17. Kokko, “Suomenkielisen julkisuuden nousu 1850-luvulla ja sen yhteiskunnallinen merkitys,” 11–12.
18. See Barker and Burrows, “Introduction,” 5–6; Barker, “England 1760–1815,” 104–5; Copeland, “America 1750–1820,” 142–3.
19. Kokko, “Suomenkielisen lehdistön paikalliskirjekulttuuria tallentava digitaalinen Translocalis-tietokanta”; Tommila, “Yhdestä lehdestä sanomalehdistöksi 1809–1859,” 196–7.
20. Louhivuori, “Suometar,” 255–70, 343–60.
21. Ibid., 427–9; Kokko, “Suomenkielisen julkisuuden nousu 1850-luvulla ja sen yhteiskunnallinen merkitys,” 13.
22. Tommila, “Yhdestä lehdestä sanomalehdistöksi 1809–1859,” 201.
23. Europaeus, D.E.D. “Kehoitus maamiehille lähettämään kirjoituksia maamme sanomalehtiin” Suometar 14 January 1853.
24. Translocalis Database.
25. Tommila, “Suomen lehdistön levikki ennen vuotta 1860,” 332–5.
26. Tommila, “Yhdestä lehdestä sanomalehdistöksi 1809–1859,” 175–8.
27. See for example “Pieksämäeltä” Suometar 7 April 1854; “Tuuloksesta” Suometar 28 April 1854.
28. Translocalis Database.
29. Tommila, “Suomen lehdistön levikki ennen vuotta 1860,” 332–5.
30. Tommila, “Yhdestä lehdestä sanomalehdistöksi 1809–1859,” 179–81.
31. Kokko, “Suomenkielisen lehdistön paikalliskirjekulttuuria tallentava digitaalinen Translocalis-tietokanta.”
32. Translocalis Database.
33. Translocalis Database.
34. Translocalis Database. The boundary lines on the map mark the borders of the Finnish parishes in 1860. The black points on the map are towns. The letters sent from towns are added to the numbers sent from the parish in which the town is located.
35. See for example Oiva et al., “Spreading News in 1904,” 4–14.

36. Translocalis Database.

37. Kokko, “Suomenkielisen lehdistön paikalliskirjekulttuuria tallentava digitaalinen Translocalis-tietokanta.”

38. Ibid.; See Stark, “The Limits of Patriarchy,” 40–1.

39. Tommila, Suomen lehdistön levikki ennen vuotta 1860, 95–101.

40. Stark, “The Limits of Patriarchy,” 55–9.

41. Voutilainen, “Poverty, Inequality and the Finnish 1860s Famine,” 15–18.

42. See Kaukiainen-Leino, “Suomalaisten kirjalliset tiedot autonomian kaudella,” 422–4.

43. See Kokko, “Suomenkielisen julkisuuden nousu 1850-luvulla ja sen yhteiskunnallinen merkitys,” 7–9.

44. SVT VI:11; SVT VI:1.

45. Polén, “Suomettaren lukioille” Suometar, 28 December 1855.

46. A. Liljefors, “Näiden sanomain lukioille!” Sanomia Turusta, 24 December 1862.

47. Tommila, “Yhdestä lehdestä sanomalehdistöksi 1809–1859,” 201–2.

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51. Stark, “The Limits of Patriarchy,” 49–55, 178.

52. Kokko, “Suomenkielisen lehdistön paikalliskirjekulttuuria tallentava digitaalinen Translocalis-tietokanta.”

53. See for example Kokko, “Temporalization of Experiencing.”

54. Anderson, “Imagined Communities,” 6, 22–5, 35. For further discussion, see Breuilly, “Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities.”

55. See for example Kokko, “Temporalization of Experiencing.”

56. Habermas, “The Structural Transformation,” 87.

57. See for example Brooke, “Reason and Passion in the Public Sphere,” 54.

58. The culture of the local letters itself continued in the Finnish-language press until the first decades of the twentieth century.

59. Liikanen, Fennomania ja kansa, 177–86, 271–9.

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