

"The bicycle question will not be treated here any further, as bicycle traffic is transforming into car, motorcycle, and moped traffic. In the USA bicycles are only children's toys and do not constitute any kind of traffic question. If separate bicycle paths are to be built in our country, they can only be constructed alongside main roads. In residential areas traffic is low and in the city streets bicycles are not a suitable vehicle."<sup>1</sup>

OLAVI LAISAARI,  
CITY PLANNING ARCHITECT  
IN TURKU 1948-1960





Olavi Laisaari's comment from the early 1960s is a typical example of the attitude modernist traffic planners had towards cycling.



Cycling was supposed to disappear, and it was not perceived as a proper mode of traffic, the way motorized traffic was.



It did not need to be taken into consideration in traffic planning.<sup>2</sup>



The USA was seen as the ideal country in traffic planning. There large-scale motorization had taken place a lot earlier than in Europe.



City centers had been renewed drastically to make space for massive urban highways.



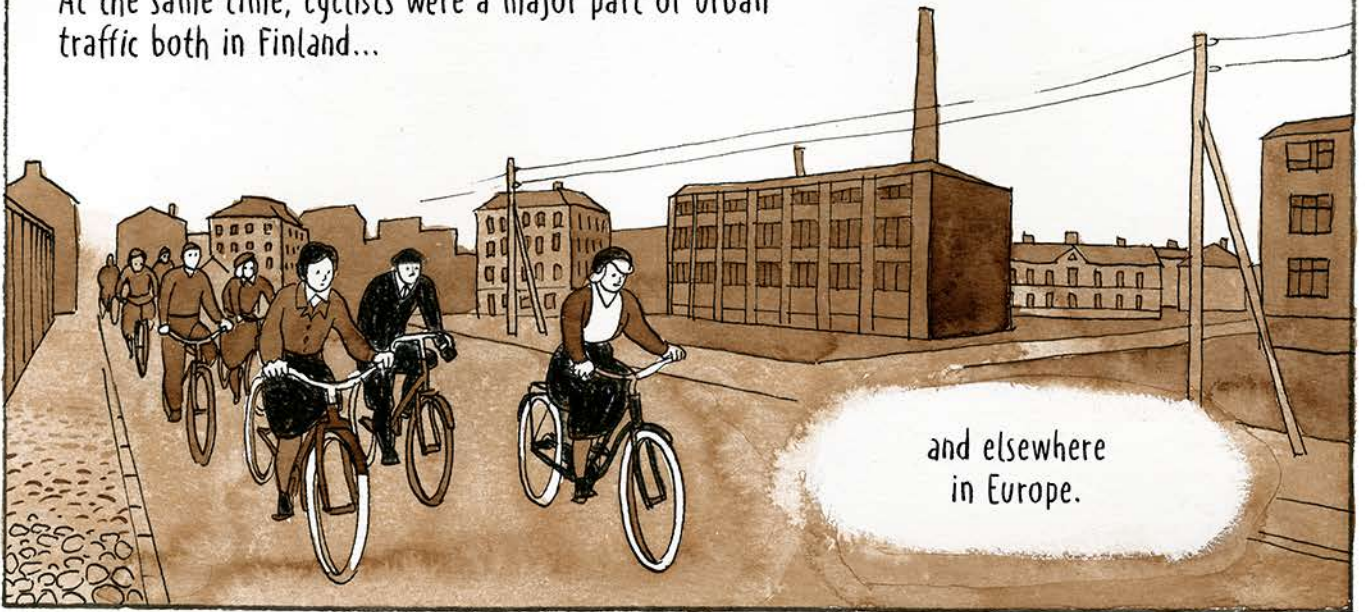
Cycling as a traffic mode had practically disappeared in the USA already during the early decades of the 20th century.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>2</sup> EMANUEL, 331-337; FLÄSCHNER 2000, 4-22; OLDENZIEL & HÅRD 2013, 152-161; KALLIIONEN 2002, 64-70.  
<sup>3</sup> NORTON 2008; HERLIHY 2004, 322-328.



At the same time, cyclists were a major part of urban traffic both in Finland...



and elsewhere in Europe.

The 1948 traffic count in Turku was carried out in one spot for Olavi Laisaari's city plan.



Statistical models were important in social planning that had a central societal role in post-war Europe.<sup>4</sup>



Traffic planning became a planning field of its own, giving traffic planners and their guidelines the power to transform whole cities.<sup>5</sup>

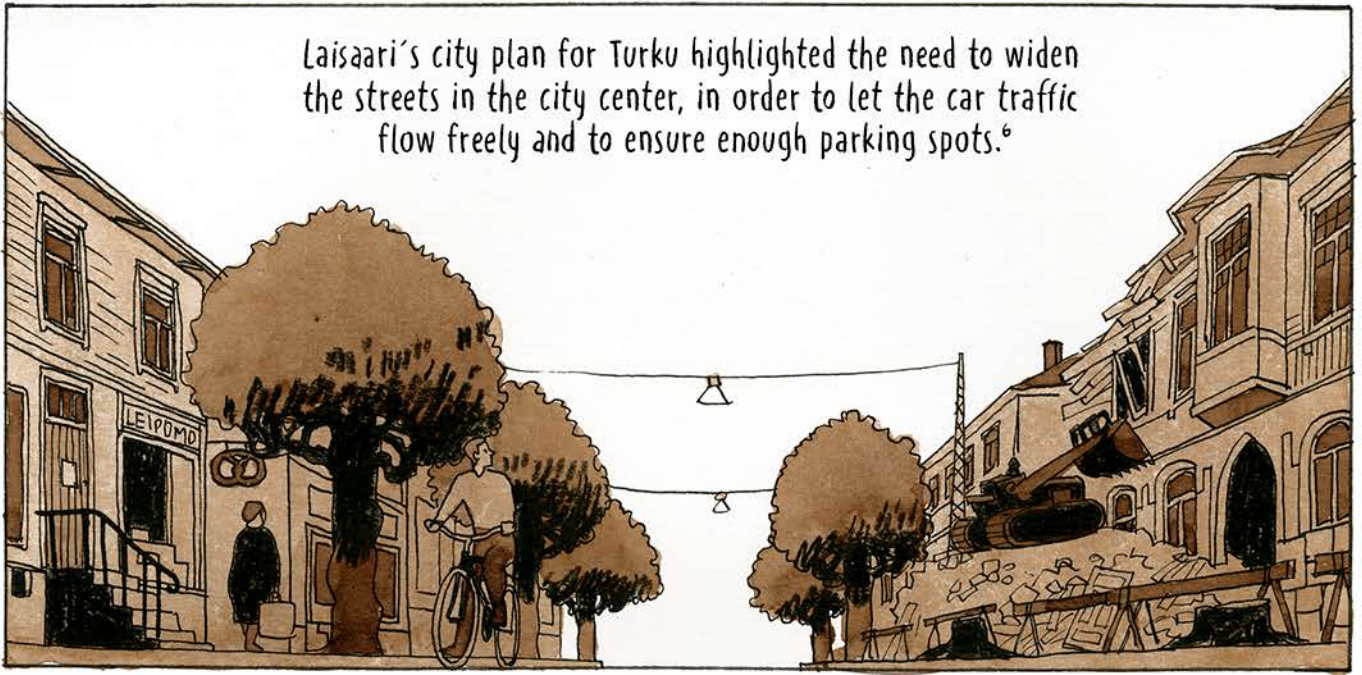


Olavi Laisaari's 1952 city plan and development programme for Turku were based on projections of ever increasing car traffic.





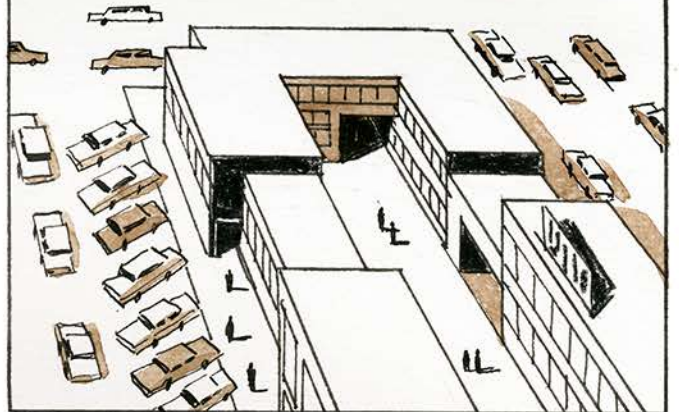
Laisaari's city plan for Turku highlighted the need to widen the streets in the city center, in order to let the car traffic flow freely and to ensure enough parking spots.<sup>6</sup>



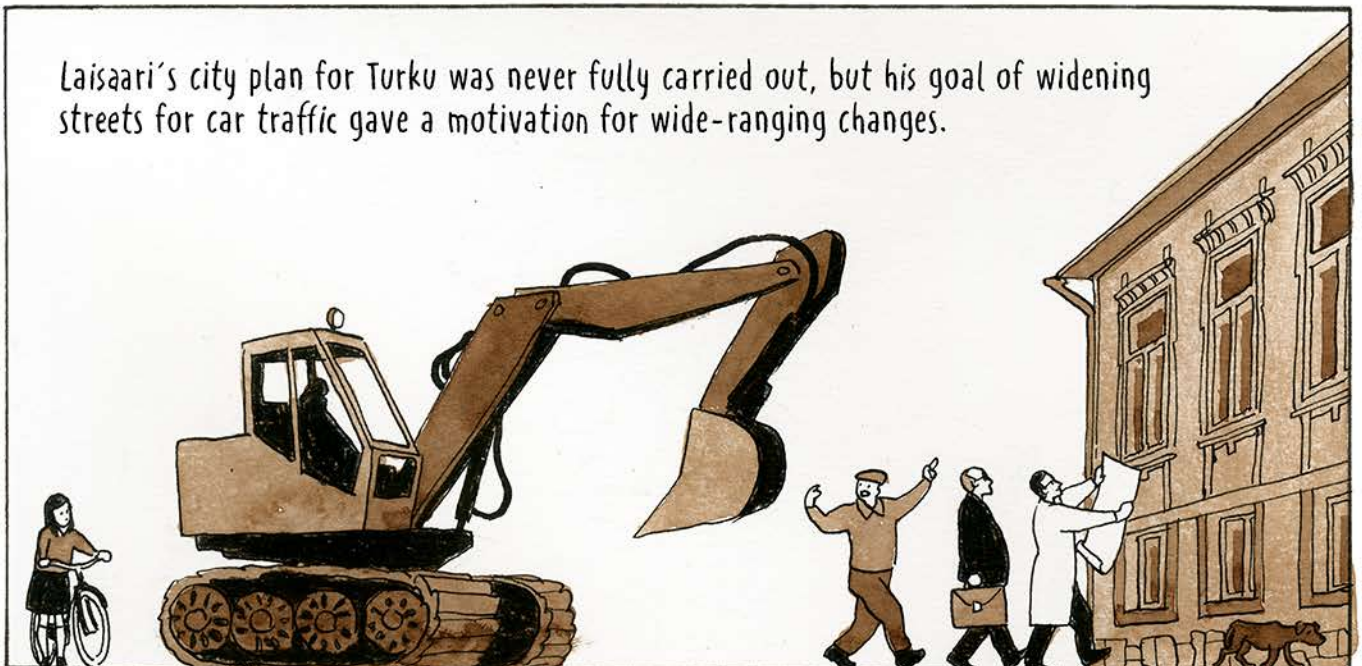
Even though the city had less than 4000 registered cars in the beginning of the 1950s.<sup>7</sup>



Laisaari was a modernist traffic planner who wanted to design functionalist decentralized cities that prioritized car traffic.<sup>8</sup>

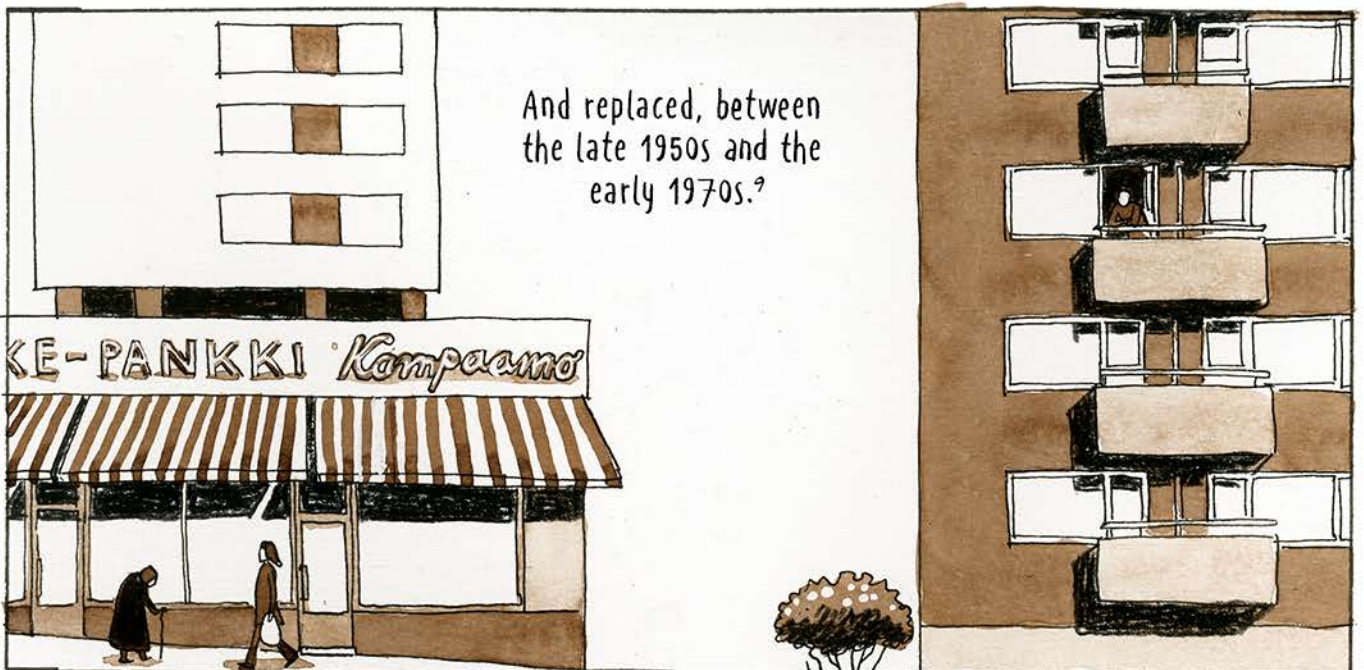
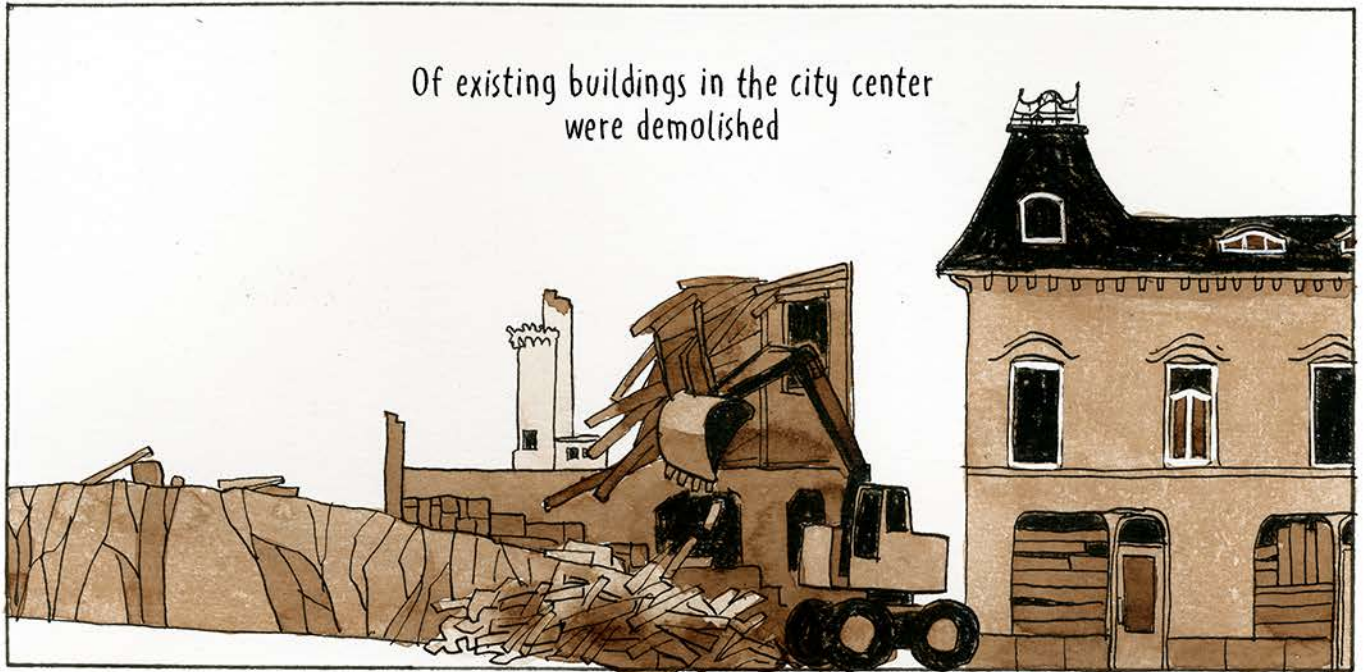
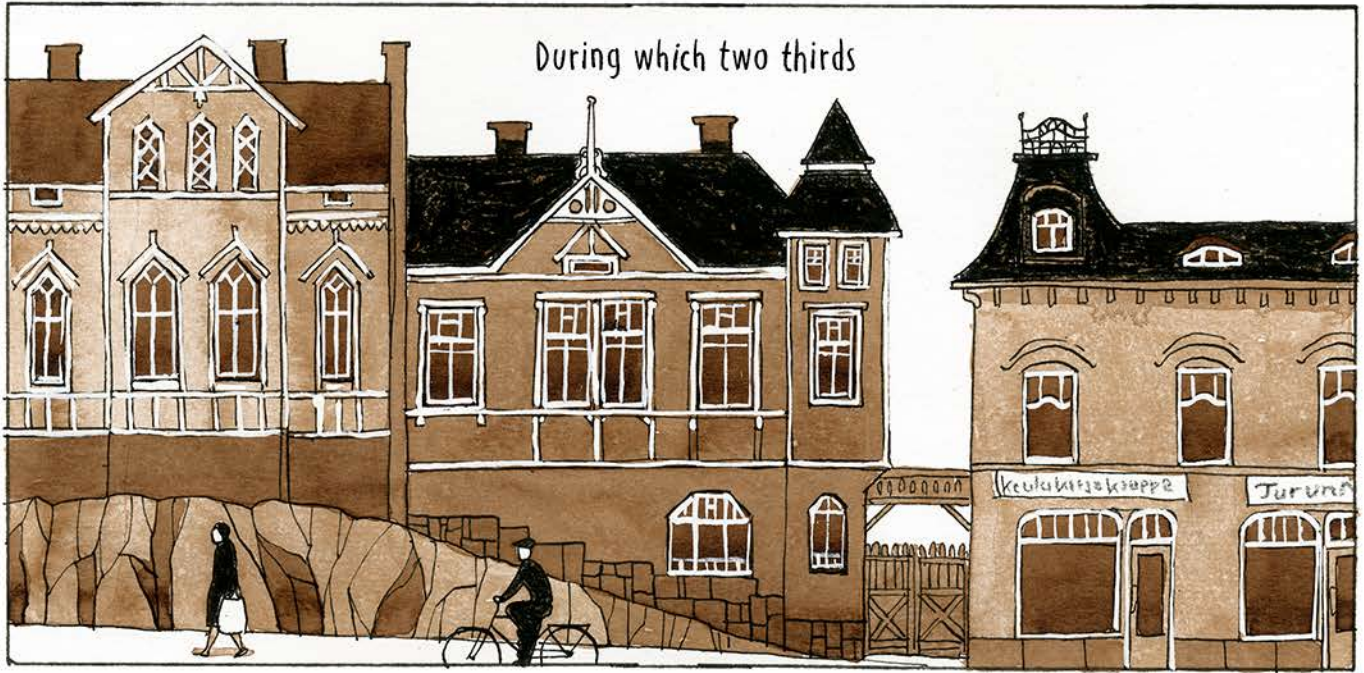


Laisaari's city plan for Turku was never fully carried out, but his goal of widening streets for car traffic gave a motivation for wide-ranging changes.



6 LAISAARI 1952, 66-68.  
7 LAAKSO 1984, 276.  
8 NISKANEN 2010, 30-43.



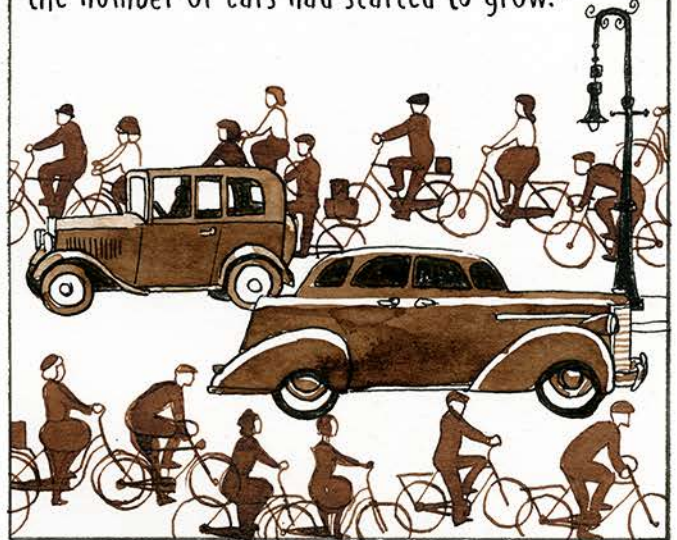




Traffic in the Finnish cities went through a dramatic change due to a quick motorization, but not without the purposeful contribution of the traffic planning.



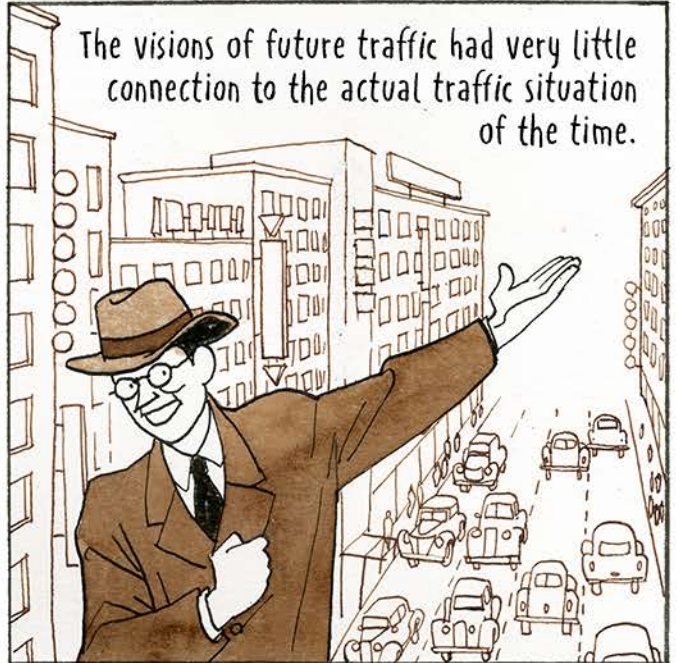
Following international trends, traffic planning had started to focus on car traffic even before the number of cars had started to grow.<sup>10</sup>



In many places, building for the growth of car traffic started already in the 1930s, when cycling was at its height.



The visions of future traffic had very little connection to the actual traffic situation of the time.



Cyclists were perceived as a hinder for car traffic, but as there were so many of them, separate bicycle paths were seen as a possible solution.<sup>11</sup>



For example, in Helsinki the first bicycle path network was planned during this period, in 1939.<sup>12</sup>



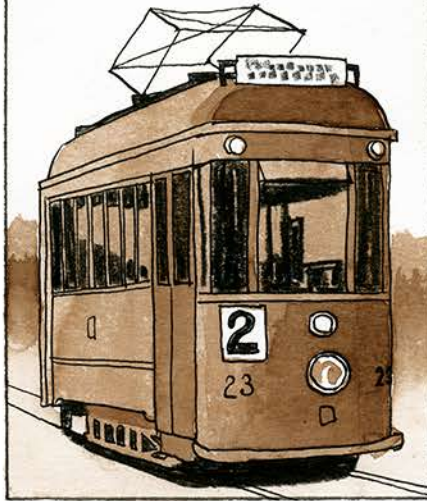
<sup>10</sup> MCSHANE 1995; KALLIOINEN 2002.  
<sup>11</sup> OLDENZIEL & HÄRD 2013, 152-154.  
<sup>12</sup> KALLIOINEN 2002, 54-55.



In the 1950s, the focus on car traffic further increased in European traffic planning.



Whereas the planning in earlier decades had also considered public transportation...



and non-motorized modes, now the planning ideal was a car city of high efficiency. The most important goal was to let the maximum amount of car traffic flow through the urban centers.<sup>13</sup>



Motorization was treated as a force of nature, the development of which societies had to accommodate and advance.<sup>14</sup>



<sup>13</sup> SCHMUCKI 2001, LUNDIN 2008.  
<sup>14</sup> LUNDIN 2008, 271-275.



Also Laisaari's attitude changed during the years. Although his 1952 city plan for Turku clearly focused on car traffic



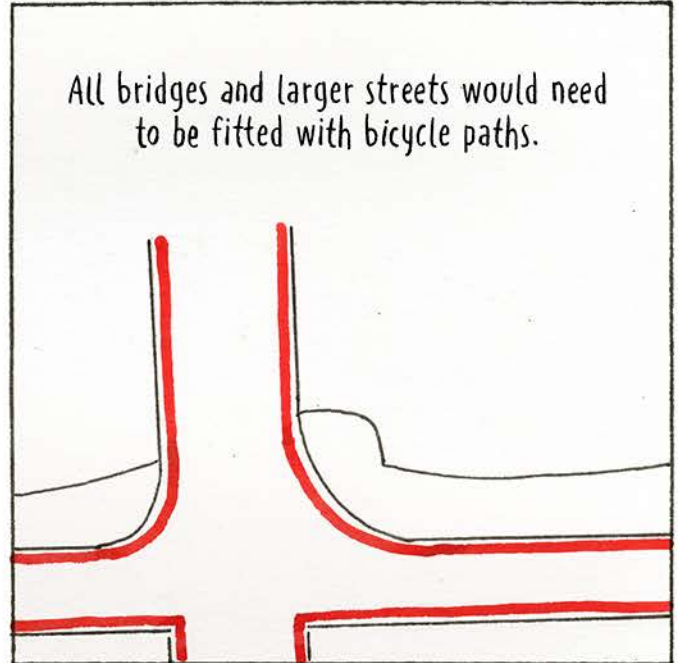
It still also considered the bicycle as a traffic mode and referred to Danish bicycle planning.



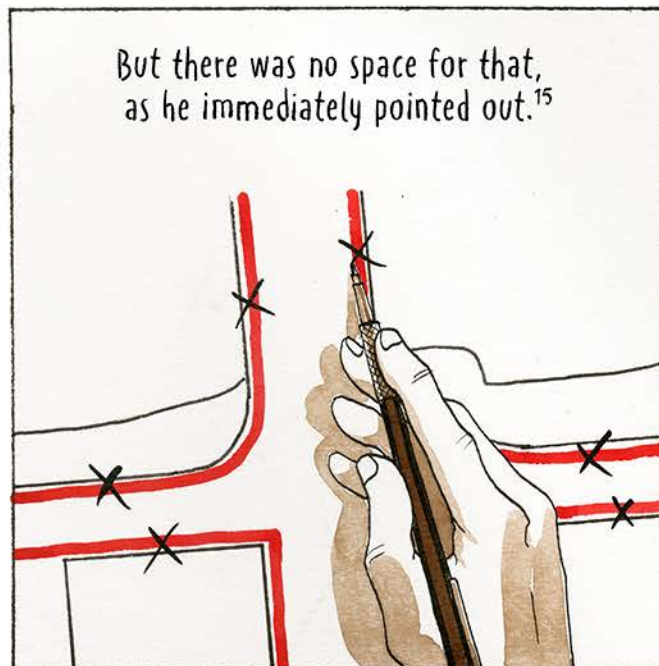
According to Laisaari's prognosis, car traffic would grow manifold in the coming years, but also bicycle traffic would likely double in numbers.



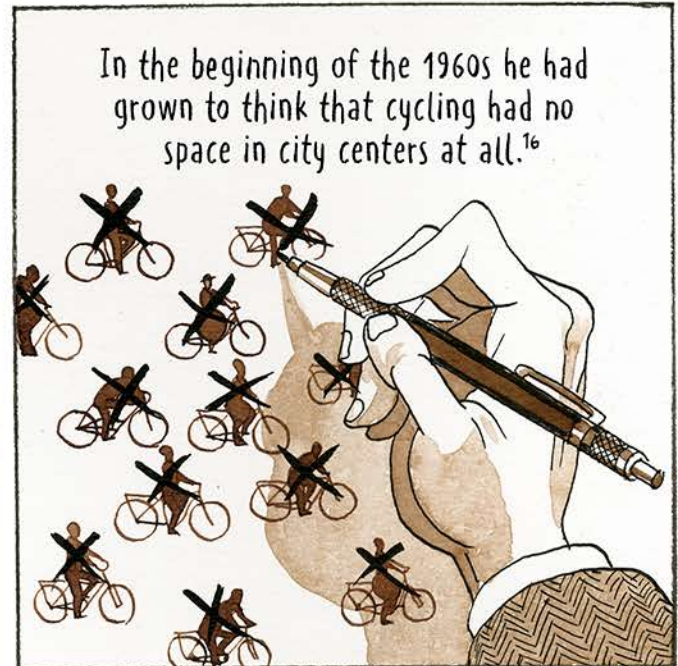
All bridges and larger streets would need to be fitted with bicycle paths.



But there was no space for that, as he immediately pointed out.<sup>15</sup>



In the beginning of the 1960s he had grown to think that cycling had no space in city centers at all.<sup>16</sup>



<sup>15</sup> LAISAARI 1952, 64.  
<sup>16</sup> LAISAARI 1962, 54.



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