

New Scenes Ahead: A Case Study on how the '90s Pori Alternative Music Scene Emerged

28.2.2023

Music Scene, Alternative, Locality, Pori, Finland, '80s, '90s, Symbolic Knowledge Base, Related Diversification, Unrelated Diversification, Epistemic Communities, Accessibility

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In this article I concentrate on the emergence of the alternative music scene in Pori, in the '90s, its relations to the Pori scene of the '80s, and the world wide, popular music trends of the '90s. The key concepts applied in the article are locality; symbolic knowledge base; related and unrelated diversification; epistemic communities; and accessibility. The research material consists of interviews with members of the Pori music scene in the '90s and documents from the Youth, Sports and Leisure, and Culture boards of the city of Pori. The objective of the article is to examine the key factors that made it possible for an alternative music scene to emerge in Pori. My wider scope is to map how paradigm changes occur, creating new music scenes. I also participate in the discussion on how the concept of scene can be used to understand cultural and social activities in society.

Historical background

In the beginning of the '90s the world of Western popular music was in a state of change. In the early '90s, new emerging sub-genres such as trip hop, shoegaze and Britpop and scenes such as the Seattle grunge, began to take over from the acts of the '80s, especially in the media.

Correspondingly, in the small Finnish coastal town of Pori, a musical breakthrough was taking place: the super popular Pori-pop-rock acts of the '80s were losing their place in the sun and new

bands were emerging from the underground. This article examines the alternative music scene of Pori, Finland in the time period from early to mid '90s. Pori, with its roughly 80, 000 inhabitants, may sound like a small town, but by Finnish standards, it is in fact a mid-sized town and sometimes even considered as a city. Due to drastic changes in Finnish society during the '90s but mainly because of what could be described as local peculiarities and lucky coincidences, what would be known as the Pori alternative scene produced highly revered bands. Circle, Deep Turtle and Magyar Posse, in particular, were noted, for example, by [John Peel](#), [Iggy Pop](#), [Mike Patton](#), [Pina Bausch](#) and [Wim Wenders](#) [1].

Finland, a social democratic Nordic country, was on the verge of an economic depression in the early '90s. As a city with a high reliance on an industrial economy, Pori suffered from this depression more than most similarly sized cities in Finland (Toivonen et al. 2008, 22, 35, 41). Just as Finland in general, Pori was not ready for upcoming challenges of the new post-industrial era and the loss of a lot of its industry and jobs. This, in turn, led to a high supply of vacant industrial and other buildings and spaces. Many of which were left in the hands of the city of Pori, which turned out to be happy to allow townspeople to use them for cultural activities. This sudden supply of available space added to the already existing musical infrastructure—such as recording studios, rehearsal rooms and performance venues; the changing cultural and social policy of the city and the state; access to new music through new channels; and a new generation taking the stage—created the foundation for an alternative scene to be born and to flourish in Pori.

Before moving on to the actual case at hand, it is important to give the reader a brief overview of the *nationally* successful Pori music scene which preceded the internationally successful alternative music scene which is the focus of this article. In the '80s, Pori was the home of the biggest bands in the country. Groups, such as *Dingo*, *Mamba* and *Yö*, with their glam rock and mainstream-inspired image, were formed in the early '80s and enjoyed exceptional national success during the decade, earning multiple gold and platinum records. They are still on constant rotation in Finnish radio, now classified as classic Finnish rock. They remain, in the Finnish public's eye, the key reference point for the "Pori sound".

Here is a key starting point of this article. The '80s Pori bands are practically a reverse image of what was to come in the '90s. If one compares the 1984 Dingo hit single, [*Sinä ja minä*](#), to a Circle song [*Kyberia*](#) released a decade later, the differences are as immense as they are immediate, from the image to the music. Dingo's wistful lyrics and melodic pop-rock approach contrast strongly, for

example, with the raw, monotonic and fast one riff experimental rock of Circle. The music videos could not be further away from each other either: in the Dingo video the focus is on the band members and their neo-romantic looks, while in the Circle video, the focus is on machines, factories and a young ballerina dancing as though under hypnosis, in what seems like an old factory hall. Times were not so much “a-changin’”, as they were consciously being changed by new bands. This, of course, was in line with international trends; glam and “hair metal” would be made obsolete by grunge rock, led by e.g. Nirvana, during the same period. In Pori the alternative scene, that was not genre-based, developed its sound further from grunge—and other early ’90s “global sounds” like trip-hop—adopting influences and sounds, for example, from krautrock, post-rock, progressive rock and symphonic film music. There seems to have been an underlying tendency to stay in the fields of experimental music and marginal sounds in the Pori alternative scene. Even though this is not heavily emphasized in the interviews used for this article, it can be heard in the music itself. It was never typical radio-play-pop or rock of the times.

It should be noted that other cultural endeavours and actors, besides musical and musicians, were linked to the alternative scene of Pori. However, these land beyond of the focus of this article. For context, it can be mentioned that many of these scene members were women, and many of them went on to forge successful careers in journalism, fashion, arts and design and photography. A group of these women also organized alternative music clubs/art exhibitions called “Diamond” in Pori in the early ’00s. Because the focus of this article is in the early to mid ’90s, these club events—as well as other activities linked to the scene—will be discussed in the coming research.

Theoretical framework

Throughout the history of Finnish rock, international success stories in popular music have commonly emerged in major cities, which have plenty of local talent but also draw young people from across the country to study or otherwise to just meet as many talented people of same age as possible. For this reason, my research questions are: How did the aforementioned happen in a much smaller city that had no significant opportunities for higher art education, or any higher education for that matter, except in engineering and health care, fields not typically associated with rock culture? And indeed, what is required for a *scene* to emerge in the first place?

In this article, I will provide answers to these questions. I will begin by introducing how the concept of scene has been used and defined. Next, I will define more precisely how I see the concept of

scene in the context of this article, before moving on to the particular characteristics of the Pori scene. My main objectives are to discuss and further define scene as an applicable concept, using the historically specific case of Pori. In other words, my aim is to provide knowledge of the nationally and internationally notable Pori scene and to participate in discussions on how the concept of scene can be used to understand cultural and social activities in a society.

When scenes are discussed, they tend to be seen as something almost tangible and the only logical development in a given place and time. However, for the sake of historical and intellectual honesty, this is never a completely justifiable view, no matter how many indicators one can find in hindsight. The Pori scene is no exception. In essence, a scene is a platform to perform in (Rautiainen-Keskustalo 2013, 324–325.), as the origins of the word reveal, but we seem to have loaded the term with meanings that stray rather far from its origins. As if a scene is something of a distinct entity, which produces and introduces new music, high art, computer programs, theatre, films or even identities; in a sense, commodities, whether commercial or not. Seeing identity as a commodity is not a far-fetched notion, considering such scenes as UK punk of the '70s or the grunge scene, which spread far beyond of the Seattle area (Bell 1998, 35–47; Moore 2005, 229–252; Savage 2010, 6, 152, 167, 174; Saglam 2014, 554–570; see also Perry 2019, 561–579). Even in academic discussions scenes are often interpreted, above all, as places of value production or as assets, which have the capability to boost local and/or national economy (Lange & Bürkner 2013, 149–169; Seman 2015, 33–49; Watson 2020, 1574–1584).

The researchers have hitherto interpreted what scenes are (Straw 2015, 476–485; Kruse 2003) and how they influence their surroundings and vice versa (Bennett et al. 2020; Bottà 2009, 349–365; 2020; Thompson 2020, 389–400); how individuals perform and interact in them — including politics, identity and aesthetics (Griffin 2012, 62–81; Jian 2018, 224–240; Pedrini et al. 2021; Rodger 2020, 159–177); how scenes interact (Makkonen 2015, 334–340) and how they break through into mainstream culture (Stapleton 1998, 219–234; Pruett 2010); and, finally, how scenes decline (Anderson 2009, 307–336). My task, in turn, is to attempt to understand the material, societal and cultural conditions, which enable a scene to emerge. I am not so much interested in what the scene was like—this issue I will be discussed in further articles—as than in what made it happen.

In my task at hand, I attach myself to the continuum of researchers such as Simon Frith, who describes himself as an empiricist interested in material conditions of music production and

musicians as economic actors (Frith 2019, 85–112). I too rely on empiric research materials and try to find the key reasons for emergence from, what could be described as, materialistic and tangible basis. This has some resemblance with Will Straw’s idea of emergence of scenes, which goes as follows: “Scenes emerge from the excesses of sociability that surround the pursuit of interests, or which fuel ongoing innovation and experimentation within the cultural life of cities.” Straw also suggests, that Canadian public policies had a huge effect on, for example, emergence of the disco scene in Montreal. (Straw 2004.) As we will later see, this bears similarities to how local and national policies on schools, grants and spaces affected the Pori alternative scene. Still, first and foremost, Straw’s idea of a city does not scale to a place the size of Pori. In fact, Pori could be seen as a village in a global scale. Secondly, Pori might have had some home-grown excesses of sociability, but the scene in Pori was very homogenic—as was the city itself—when comes to its members: almost everyone was an ethnic Finn from Pori or from the close by municipalities. Nor did Pori have the buzzing universities or similar institutions, that Straw seems to find pivotal for the emergence of a scene (Straw 2004).

Following Andy Bennett’s work on scenes, I recognize some global elements in the emergence of the Pori alternative scene; for example, the influences of heavy metal, grunge, and Music Television. From the early ’90s onwards the scene also had connections to other bands and cities throughout Finland. For instance, the *Bad Vugum* record label from Oulu, for example, released the first albums of Deep Turtle and Circle. Thus, one could claim that the scene had a *global and translocal* (see Bennett et al. 2004, 7–9; 2019, 15; Cohen 1999, 239–250) undercurrent to it. However, I emphasize the local elements over the global and translocal. In so doing, I rely much less on the global effervescence, music genres and trends as the building blocks of a scene, than the local—and partly national—socio-cultural and economic factors, which I claim had more to do with the emergence of the scene than the aforementioned factors.

I see a *scene* as an *epistemic community* in the same way as introduced in the article “Epistemic Communities, Localization and the Dynamics of Knowledge Creation” by Patrick Cohendet et al. In the article, epistemic communities are defined as, “groups of knowledge-driven agents linked together by a common goal, a common cognitive framework and a shared understanding of their work” (Cohendet et al. 2014, 929–954). This does not differ much from the *symbolic knowledge base* as defined by Benjamine Klement and Simone Strambach (2019a; 2019b), but as I will later

highlight below, they are not interchangeable. In fact, I argue that, one is dependent upon the other.

In their two articles concerning innovation in creative industries (Klement and Strambach 2019a, 385–417) and the emergence of music genres (Klement and Strambach 2019b, 1447–1458), Benjamin Klement and Simone Strambach created a model that presents how new genres and innovations are more likely to emerge in places that already have symbolic knowledge bases beforehand. For Klement and Strambach, “symbolic knowledge refers to knowledge required to create and interpret socially constructed symbols, ideas, habits and norms” (Klement and Strambach 2019b, 1448). Related and unrelated diversification refer to the sources of knowledge which, if the circumstances are right, can combine to form new knowledge bases (Klement and Strambach 2019b, 1447–1458). Simply put, new music tends to come about in places that already have lively music scenes and structures for playing and producing music, but they usually also need extra-local influences.

Drawing from fields and literature of evolutionary economics geography (EEG) and differentiated knowledge bases (DKB) Klement and Strambach have analyzed quantitative user-based data gathered from the social media platform [last.fm](https://www.last.fm/). The data relies on European and North American music genres that emerged in certain areas and cities—such as Atlanta, Berlin, and Seattle—and employs user tags to showcase the relatedness of these genres to latter genres that emerged in the same areas/cities. They also account for extra-local genres that have contributed to the birth of new genres, thus introducing an unrelated diversification element to the theory of how new genres emerge.

By showing how related and unrelated knowledge created in symbolic knowledge bases and then adapted by others can give rise to of a new genre, Klement and Strambach take the first steps to explain how something new can emerge if the conditions are right. Both related and unrelated diversification is present in the case of Pori and was needed for the alternative scene of the '90s to emerge. However, the thought process still falls short, as Klement and Strambach admit, “...the findings of this study research should be complemented by a more qualitative analysis of processes, institutions and actors that promote the anchoring of symbolic knowledge” (Klement & Strambach 2019b, 1455). In the case of Pori, following the method and data base used by Klement and Strambach, one would conclude that the music made in Pori in the '80s is not at all related to the music made there in the '90s and '00s, as the only common tag on last.fm that is shared by the

bands from these different eras, is *Finnish*. This is not the case at all, as we will later see. As Klement and Strambach rely on the tags used by the users of last.fm to prove the relatedness of different genres, the data used cannot go into the depths required to reveal the true nature of relatedness. This requires qualitative data, as I will demonstrate below as well.

As outlined above, I see scenes as *epistemic communities*, but to understand how they form, I will first shed a light on the correlation between epistemic communities and *symbolic knowledge bases*. My argument here is that symbolic knowledge bases serve as the roots for new epistemic communities, but the relations between them are not simply causal. *Symbolic knowledge* and knowledge bases can emerge without them ever leading to the emergence of an epistemic community – a scene. Still, it is the epistemic communities in the first place, that create the symbolic knowledge and knowledge bases. Of course, it is possible that the knowledge bases they have created are not observed by anyone after the creation of the community, and thus they can not serve as roots for new epistemic communities.

The '80s classic Pori rock could have been the “epitome” of homegrown music in Pori and all the symbolic knowledge created and taken up inside the musical scenes of the city. After all, it was, and is still is, the most well-known “sound of Pori”, at least amongst Finns. On the other hand, it could have just as well been forgotten and lost in time. In this case, it did not go to “waste,” as it was adopted, along with other influences, by members of the upcoming alternative scene, as well as the City of Pori and other actors in the field of music and culture. They began to create an *infrastructure* that, more or less, was based on noticing that Pori stood to offer something special to popular music. I will come back to the infrastructure, but first I will unpack the concept of epistemic community more.

Cohendet et al. (2014, 935) suggest that the first task of an epistemic community is to develop a “manifesto” in some form: a guideline for breaking the prevailing conventions and paradigms. The next step, after the manifesto, is to create “codebook”, “...which will precise the associated codes, norms and practices (grammar of usage) that the members of the community will respect” (Cohendet, Patrick et al. 2014, 935–936). Only after this is it possible for new ideas to truly flourish and spread outside the original circles. Developing the manifesto is in fact a dialectical process of first absorbing, then tearing apart, combining and rearranging past symbolic knowledge in order to pave the way for new knowledge to emerge. Or indeed, a process of the epistemic community to become *das Ding an sich*. Creating a codebook means creating a new symbolic knowledge base.

This is also the point at which the *infrastructure* (e.g. rehearsal spaces, performance venues, bars) becomes necessary for the epistemic community to display its existence. Cohendet et al. continue by describing, what could be seen as necessary conditions for the creation of the codebook:

Once the manifesto has been expressed, the building of the codebook will mostly require a rich heterogeneous environment out of which the members of the epistemic community can find new sources of inspiration, make new combinations, build new partnerships, generate new forms of expertise and start new (and often unexpected) ventures. (Cohendet, Patrick et al., 2014.)

Lastly, in my task to explain the emergence of a scene, I apply *Jochen Eisenraut's theory on the accessibility* of music. Eisenraut categorizes engagement to music on to three accessibility levels: physical access (being able to find, afford and hear music), personal reception (being able to tolerate, understand, interpret and enjoy music) and participation (being able to participate, create, perform and learn how to make music) (Eisenraut 2013, 85–112). It is crucial to highlight that the usage of the concept of *accessibility* in the context of this article is tied to a certain historical, societal and local moment. It is used to describe the possibilities that opened at that specific moment, and is not to be confused to with the idea of accessibility in general. I argue that the lure and success of Pori alternative scene amongst the youth can partly be explained by using aforementioned categorizations. Accessibility, in the sense that it is applied in this article, allows us to understand how a scene is “put into practice” in a certain historical, societal and local framework. It provides a peek into participants’ mindset and reveals their point of view to the scene in action. A view, on how all the forces surrounding, effecting and molding the scene finally come together, in many cases in a very tangible way, in the practices of participating individuals.

It has not yet been explicitly explained how scenes emerge. In order to provide my contribution to this ongoing discussion, I apply three different theories presented in the research of Benjamin Klement and Simone Strambach (2019), Patrick Cohendet et al. (2014) and Jochen Eisenraut (2013). In the following sections I will go through them one by one and at the end of each chapter I contextualize and showcase their relevance to the case at hand. By applying these theories to my empirical research data, I will form a synthesis of them and further build a theory on how, where and why scenes emerge.

Research material and methods

The primary source material of the article consists of data I gathered between the years 2020 and 2022. During 2020 and 2021 I interviewed members of the Pori alternative scene from musicians to producers, from venue owners to audience participants. The interview material was produced by using semi-structured theme interview method and they were filmed and recorded. All the interviews were conducted in Finnish, in Pori. I have translated them into standard English, instead of using a “suitable” English equivalent to Pori dialect. I have also removed expletives from the translation in all the cases where they do not have an obvious relevance to the context.

I started gathering the material by contacting the members of the bands and other individuals linked to the scene and with a snowball method I expanded the circle of interviewees to whomever the interviewed scene members suggested. At the time of publication, I have gathered 43 (N=43) interviews and the process is still ongoing. I have conducted personally 35 of the interviews, while eight of them were conducted by students participating in the course “Ethnography and Research Ethics”, organized in the University of Turku in the spring of 2021. I selected the interviewees for the students and provided instructions on how to conduct the interviews in order to collect the information I needed for this research. So far only five of the interviews conducted for the research are interviews of women, two of them conducted by me and three by the students. The reason for the lack of women’s perspective at this point is partly due to Covid-19 pandemic and resulting restrictions that were in place in 2020 and 2021. As I have decided to conduct all of the interviews face-to-face, I had to be very cautious of different restrictions and safety protocols while conducting the interviews during the pandemic years. Nowadays, most of the women linked to the scene live outside of Pori, often because Pori in the ’90s did not offer possibilities for higher education or employment opportunities in the fields of their interest. As mentioned above, at this point it is already clear that women did not participate so much in the making of music in the scene as much as they were linked to other cultural activities such as photography, high arts and journalism. Women started to play a more significant role in the music-making of the scene in the late ’90s and early ’00s.

I have also gathered material from the archives of the City of Pori, going through the minutes and annual reports of the culture-, youth- as well as sports and leisure boards of the city from 1989 to 2010. From this material, I assembled information about band practice spaces, annual grants for

bands, concerts and festivals organized or supported by the city as well as other relevant information on how the city of Pori created the infrastructure and opportunities for the bands, musicians and other scene members to practice their arts.

Symbolic knowledge base, related and unrelated diversification

Despite obvious differences in style and ethos, it seems clear that there could not have been a Pori alternative scene without Pori mega bands of the '80s. Here I rely on the research by Klement and Strambach to argue that the symbolic knowledge produced in the '80s Pori scene was crucial for the '90s alternative scene. Their relatedness is supported by the interviewees' comments. Former Circle member *Petri Hagner*, for example, suggests that without the '80s Pori rock scene there would not have been any interest on the part of the city to support bands with rehearsal spaces and other activities.

When you play rock and make noise, you need room to do that. [...] One has to give credit for the city of Pori for organizing places to rehearse. And why did the city do it? It was most likely because of the musical phenomenon that bands like *Dingo* and *Yö* created." (Petri Hagner, 20.10.2020.)

During their heyday, the '80s bands left an everlasting mark on many of the members of the upcoming alternative scene. Even though the alternative scene would go on to create a different kind of rock music, they were immensely impressed and influenced by the 1980s bands hailing from Pori:

For me, *Dingo* was the first band that blew me away. *Nimeni on Dingo* was the first album that I was really a fan of. (Harri Vilkuna, 13.08.2020.)

I remember hearing *Likaiset legendat* by *Yö* on the radio and afterwards the host said that this was a band from Pori. I went like, "Wow! Something like this comes from Pori?!" (Mikko Elo, 12.10.2020.)

Another former Circle member, Teemu Elo, suggests that the link between the '80s Pori rock scene and the '90s alternative scene can be traced to the Pori punk scene, which had already started in the late '70s and still exists today. Both of the scenes adopted some of punk rock's DIY and laissez-faire attitude. For the alternative scene, the classic '80s Pori rock was also something to rebel against—a generational opposition. I interpret this distance-taking as related diversification in a way, that the symbolic knowledge created in the '80s was adopted and used by '90s scene members and later abandoned in order to create something new. Metaphorically speaking, it was a process metamorphosing into something new without abandoning essence of the phenomenon, especially regarding locality.

Pori has had a strong punk underground culture for years and I would say that the '80s and '90s scenes both sprout from that. [...] On the other hand, I was really against the '80s classic rock. I thought it was awful shit and that this (alternative scene) was almost like a movement targeted against it. Of course, I'm not that hardcore anymore, but I remember being very hard in my opinions about it back then. (Teemu Elo, 04.12.2020.)



Figure 1. Punk gig at Annis in the '80s. Photographer unknown. Source: Archives of Annankatu 6.

Another interviewee suggests that in the '80s the bands were, right from the start, “unfit”, as it were, for Pori’s rough, working-class environment and were “bravely” on a path of their own in order to break free from the cultural standards imposed upon them. In the context of symbolic knowledge, later the members of the '90s alternative scene seem to have been doing the same:

“When you think of the habitus of these guys (the members of the '80s scene) and then picture in your head the Pori of the '80s... These guys were very marginal, brave and really did their own thing. [...] So, in that way there is a continuum: they (the members of the '90s scene) were probably not thinking much of what others thought of them.” (Jari Laasanen, 22.10.2020.)

The comments above are also enhanced by the fact that the City of Pori had noticed the thriving band culture at least by the end of the '90s. In 1997, the city had started to support bands with grants specifically aimed at them, though the grants were introduced more as a social program, than an official grant given for purely artistic reasons. This came quite late as bands like Deep Turtle had already done their [John Peel Session](#) in 1994 and Pori bands had been on rotation on [Music Television](#) as early as 1994. Nevertheless, in 1998 the city culture board states the following in their third meeting of the year, held on 28.04.1998.

Pori has a long tradition in band culture and it has given rise to such groups as Dingo, Mamba and Yö. It has been a tradition in Pori that bands are being supported as part of the city’s culture and arts activities. (Pori Culture Board proceeding, 28.04.1998)

Strangely the culture board does not mention that Pori has since 1966 been home to one of the biggest annual jazz festivals in Europe, [Pori Jazz](#). World stars, old-time jazz musicians, experimental electronic and free jazz artists have passed through its line of performers and the people of Pori have had the privilege to hear all of them all in their backyard. The grants provided by the City of Pori, as will be seen later, mainly meant possibilities to perform in concerts organized by the city, easy access to rehearsal spaces and occasional funding from the city. The last, though, was

very rare until the end of the '90s, and, in terms of money, was rather minor in comparison to other arts and cultural activities supported by the city.

The unrelated diversification elements of the '90s scene come from various sources and not all of them are strictly music-related. The people associated with the '80s rock scene in Pori had mostly been born at the end of the '50s or early '60s, while the members of the alternative scene were born in the early to late '70s, representing the heart of Generation X. During the years 1972–1977, the Finnish education system was built on a completely new basis, when the elementary school system was established (see Kettunen & Simola (eds.) 2012). The elementary school arrived in Pori in 1974, which meant that all the children born in 1967 and later went through the same basic education until the ninth grade. It also meant that all these children started to learn two languages in elementary school, one of them being Swedish and the other one usually English (Taavitsainen & Pahta 2003, 3–15). By the end of the '80s the general education level of Finns had risen dramatically and half of the young adults had a degree beyond elementary school: a decade before the number had been just 1/3 (Ahonen 2012, 157). It could be said that the members of the '90s scene were born at the “right time” when it comes to education, as they would benefit from the newly built elementary school system, but did not have to go through its birthing pains. They were significantly more educated than their preceding generation and had tools, like the English language, with which they could navigate in the society that was rapidly becoming more international in the '80s.

At the turn of the decade ('80s and '90s) we made several trips to London with a group of friends. The main attractions for us, were of course, record shops and gigs.
(Mikko Elo, 12.10.2020.)

“There was some kind of a new urban like sense of community between them (the alternative scene). It was not all about music, not at all.” (Aki Peltonen, 20.07.2020.)

These statements highlight a key argument of this article, which is how music and larger cultural and social matters intertwine in the emergence of a scene. It appears, as in the quote from Peltonen, that music was so ever-present that it could be argued that it had no role at all. MTV

was launched in Finland in 1987 with the rest of Western Europe (see Wieten, Murdock & Dahlgren (eds.) 2000). MTV gets mentioned surprisingly seldom in the interviews, but with all of its special programs like “120 Minutes”, “Alternative Nation” and “Headbanger’s Ball”, it still must have had at least some effect in Pori as it did in the rest of Finland (Karjalainen 2020, 49). Still, beyond MTV, two influential international trends landed in Finland in the ’80s, which had an effect: Finnish commercial radio and heavy metal as a genre—the latter being, and remaining, exceptionally popular in Finland. Commercial radio broadcastings began in Finland as late as 1985. (Kemppainen 2015.) Before their launch, copying and trading cassettes with friends was a path to new music for the majority of the youth. Radio did not change this, but it offered a variation of special programs that would widen the spectrum of music that was available in Pori.

I used to listen to blues a lot and that is the beginning of it all for me. But then, of course, I used to trade cassettes with my friend, heavy bands like *Iron Maiden*, *Scorpions* and *DIO*. All the bands that everyone else was listening to as well. (Mika Rättö, 05.11.2020.)

I have a heavy metal background. Yep, one could say that. I have never listened to classical music and never really wanted to, even though I understand the point and beauty behind it. Still, it’s just not my thing (Veli Nuorsaari, 13.10.2020.)

Radio Pori, which was launched 01.12.1985, would have a significant effect on the upcoming alternative musicians in all of Pori area. Radio host *Mauri Päivistö*, with his programs *Happy Radio* and *Neonrokoko*, seems to have been in the centre when it comes to the “new medium” spreading the gospel of music amongst to the youth of Pori. His resemblance with the late Manchester-based record label owner, journalist, and impresario *Tony Wilson* (Brown et al. 2020, 437–451; Chittenden 2007, 14.), seems almost too obvious. Päivistö, who later on joined Circle as a bassist, was a known character in Pori and his name comes up in almost all of the interviews conducted for this study. Here are a few examples of his influence.

“He is a man to whom I am eternally indebted with when it comes to music, because through him I heard dub music for the first time. [...] The minute you thought you knew something about music, there would be someone like Pentti Dassum or Mauri Päivistö to show you something completely new.” (Kai Johansson, 24.08.2020.)

My big brother was organizing one of the first rave happenings in Pori – it was probably 1989 or something – and that was because of Mauri Päivistö. He [Päivistö] had two radio shows and he might play something like Joy Division on them in the middle of the day. He just played whatever he wanted. The music in the mid ’80s was quite different on the radio in Pori, which seem funny in these conservative times [refers to playlist radios] [...] He also ran the Skatrek rehearsal complex, where, for example, Circle and Deed Turtle rehearsed. (Pasi Salmi, 21.07.2020.)

Mauri Päivistö was an idol to the three of us (Circle members in the early ’90s). He was about ten years older than us and represented the older generation of Pori rock. [...] I would say that the music Päivistö played on his radio program had a huge effect on us and it opened us new paths to music for us. It might have also updated our taste a little bit towards contemporary music. [...] I think he introduced us to bands like Nirvana, Loop, The Telescopes. Bands that Circle were sort of imitating. (Petri Hagner, 20.10.2020.)

The related and unrelated diversification elements, that paved the way for the Pori alternative scene, seem to be more complex and nuanced than can be shown just by studying influential music styles and genres. It is impossible to explore all the potential musical paths and influences here, and they would be hard to measure in terms of the dichotomy of related and unrelated diversification. Would a homegrown jazz festival, like Pori Jazz, with its international artists, be something that creates related symbolic knowledge or should it be seen as symbolic knowledge coming from outside? There is fluidity in these categorizations, which I claim, can be explained by looking at the infrastructure surrounding the emerging scenes.

Local infrastructure

In this chapter, I apply the ideas of Patric Cohendet et al. about the relations of an *epistemic community* (scene) and local infrastructure. The basic idea is, that for an epistemic community to emerge and flourish, it needs a certain environment (symbolic knowledge) and substantial local infrastructure around it. (Patric Cohendet et al. 2014.) In Pori, this environment and infrastructure were provided by multiple different actors, one of them being the City of Pori. The city supported bands/artists and organizations operating in the field of popular music with grants, though they were significantly smaller than grants for classical, choir and brass musicians/bands/organizations, political and youth organizations, or sports. For example, by looking at the grants allowed by the Culture Board and Sports and Leisure Board in 1996, one can get a good picture of how undervalued, when it comes to money, popular music was amongst these institutions. In that year the Culture Board granted 249,000 Finnish marks (60,426 EUR) to organizations in the field of music of which only 10,000 FIM (2,427 EUR) went to popular music organizations (Culture Board proceedings, 25.04.1996). The Sports and Leisure Board allowed in total 2,38,7095 FIM (579,285EUR) in grants, and none of it went to the field of popular music. (Sports and Leisure Board annual report 1996.) This does not tell the whole story though, as the city controlled two major venues that provided rehearsal space and possibilities for performances for bands: the Youth Center (*Nuokkari*) and Culture House Annankatu 6 (*Annis*). They were both located right in the center of the city, approximately 300 meters from the main market square.

In 1994, there were 9 concerts with 21 local bands in Nuokkari and a total of 26 disco evenings on Fridays and Saturdays. In 1996 the numbers were 10 (the number of bands is not mentioned) and 26, plus unspecified music evenings that took place 8 times. (Sports and Leisure Board annual report 1994; Sports and Leisure Board annual report 1996) This might not seem like much, but one must understand, that as a youth center, Nuokkari had multiple other functions besides being a music venue. Almost all of the interviewees bring up Nuokkari, and especially the concerts and people who they had met there seem to be on the foreground in the memories attached to it. Former Magyar Posse guitarist Harri Sippola remembers Nuokkari fondly in his interview.

There used to be these band events in Nuokkari back in the days. We played in them, but I can't remember how many times. Probably two or three. [...] Nuokkari was an

important place because my own bands rehearsed in there and it was also the place where I attended one of my first Circle gigs. (Harri Sippola 23.07.2020.)

Nuokkari also hosted Aki Peltonen's *Musiikkihuone* from 1997 to 2008, being one of the prominent studios in the Pori alternative scene (Sports and Leisure Board proceedings, 14.12.1999; 18.06.2008). The studio was founded in 1992, and had operated in various other places before Nuokkari. By the time it moved there it had already earned its reputation as the "go to" studio for the scene. Bands like Circle, Deep Turtle, Groovector, Kuusumun Profeetta, Magyar Posse and Pharaoh Overlord all used the services of Peltonen and *Musiikkihuone*, most of them during the time the studio was located at Nuokkari.



Figure 2. Circle in the Musiikkihuone studio in Nuokkari. The picture was taken on 20.01.1997 during the recording sessions of the album Fraten. On the guitar Teemu Elo, Janne Peltomäki on the drums and Pentti Dassum looking in to the bass drum. Photographer unknow. Source: Personal album of Janne Peltomäki.

If Nuokkari comes up in most of the interviews, Annis comes up in all of them. Annis, an old industrial property in the centre of Pori, was altered for cultural use in the early '80s. It is still

somewhat under dispute whether the place was originally squatted, or the youth were handed the keys under the watchful eyes of the city officials, or just what actually happened. The stories are abundant and I have not yet found a sufficiently reliable source to confirm any of them. What is known, though, is that it had been under the control of the Culture Board from 1983 onwards and was rented by various culture organizations (Culture Board proceeding, 01.06.1989). In the proceeding referred to above it is mentioned that Annis is a prime example of the youth's autonomous activities in the field of culture. Sometimes the happenings got a little bit wild, but on the whole, Annis seemed to be a rather comfortable arena for the youth to try their hand at producing events, going to concerts, rehearsing, or just hanging around. This notion is supported by the stories of the interviewees as well:

We used to organize these club events and festivals at Annis. I was hanging out there a lot. We also did all sorts of art exhibitions and stuff like that. [...] There used to be a lot of gigs, raves and other stuff related to music in there. (Lauri Levola, 20.10.2021)

At some point we noticed that the doors there were open day and night. It was a good place to enjoy some alcoholic beverages when the weather was bad. We sat there on one table and the original punks at another one. [...] During the first gig I saw there, I was brave enough to stay there for about half an hour to see *Maho Neitsyt* and then I had to leave. But it sparked something in me. Next time, I stayed for the whole gig, and after that I basically went to every gig that was organized there. (Antti Lehtiniemi, 19.10.2021.)



Figure 3. Entrance to Annis at the end of the '80s. Photographer unknown. Source: Archives of Annankatu 6.

Besides Annis and Nuokkari the city offered rehearsal space for bands at an old radio station located about six kilometers from the city centre. Rehearsal space offered by the private sector was located, for example, at the old cotton factory close to the centre and at a couple of old wooden houses right in the city centre. A little bit further from the centre, there were spaces at a couple of old schools and community halls. It is more than likely—though no specific records seem to exist—that the rents of these spaces were partially subsidized by the city, either with grants for the bands or through grants for the organizations controlling these spaces. (See the annual reports of the Sports and Leisure Board, 1993 to 1999.)

Unfortunately, there is no space in this article to discuss the record shops and other places where physical recordings could be found and listened to, such as the public library, as central to the emergence of the Pori alternative music scene—even most of the smaller towns at the time had both. However, for context, it can be said that Pori had a couple record stores that served as suppliers of alternative music and sold records of local bands. The city library was also a significant place to find new music and it comes up frequently in the interviews. When it comes to bars, cafeterias and clubs, Pori could not match bigger cities, but there were enough from which to choose. To single out a few that frequently get mentioned in the interviews, there

were, *Cats*, *Jungle Jane/Club Moo* and *One for the Road*. *Cats* was the place to be in the early '90s and the others followed from mid-decade onwards. The only place still surviving today is *One for the Road*. Here, I will only cover *Cats* and *Jungle Jane/Club Moo*, as *One for the Road* and its micro scene would almost certainly require an article of its own.

Cats served not only as a meeting place for the alternative scene, but also as a place to play one's music of choice. It had a system in which, anyone could volunteer as a DJ by writing their name on a list. The bar would even pay in beer for the gigs.

The whole system, that you could just go there and play your own records all night and get drunk for free while doing it... I think it really helped people to find new bands and new friends. [...] It wasn't too often that mainstream music got played in there. (Henrik Wetterstrand, 03.09.2020.)

Jungle Jane, which later changed its name to *Club Moo*, was the number one club in the '90s to go see bands, both local and from elsewhere. Harri Vilkuna, who owned the club from 1997 to 2000, wanted the place to serve all kinds of audiences, from alternatives to mainstream club-goers, and the concept apparently worked well.

We found a strange balance for the club. It was a place for the alternative people as well as mainstream folks. On Fridays we had bands and on Saturdays it was a normal disco, but downstairs the music was always alternative or underground. (Harri Vilkuna, 13.08.2020)

At three in the morning, you could hear Teemu Elo playing Neu!'s *Hallogallo* in there! It feels strange now. Which club would do that now days? Think of going to a Heidi's Bier Bar [a chain of bars/nightclubs targeted at mainstream young adults] today with *Hallogallo* playing! No way! And it was like that every night! I'm happy that it was, because it was a real culture shower for us all. (Harri Sippola, 23.07.2020)

One place rises above the others when it comes to rehearsal spaces and venues: *Skatrek*. Besides being the rehearsal room to, for example, Circle, it also served as a speakeasy and a music venue. Among the interviewees it is surrounded by an aura of mystery and almost mythical fame. Located about one kilometer from the city centre, Skatrek was run by the previously mentioned Mauri Päivistö. It hosted parties and concerts for the local bands and also for bands coming from other parts of Finland. The place was open when the members felt like it, but especially when all the bars in the centre were closed. It seems that at Skatrek the alternative and underground potential of Pori was truly put into action. Event producer Vesa Salmi sums up the atmosphere of Skatrek:

Skatrek was a place that usually opened when all the bars closed. [...] There were bands like *Larry and the Lefthanded*, *Rinneradio*, *The Cybermen* and even *CMX* playing there. They were alternative bands of that time which would play there. Sometimes the parties were just improvised and spontaneous, but there were also organized events. There were reggae, ska and techno parties. Everything you could think of. I can remember that every time we went there it was dark and when we came out the sun was shining. (Vesa Salmi, 25.08.2020)

Pori had an infrastructure consisting of rehearsal places, venues and bars, all of which supported the passing on of symbolic knowledge inside the scene. All combined, the circumstances for the potential emergence of an epistemic community—a scene—were present. With the infrastructure and knowledge, the scene was able to grow, experiment and build its own manifestos and codes. The city of Pori was a major player within this network of venues and rehearsal places. By granting subsidies to musicians, whether relatively small or not, the city obviously gave a concession of sorts to the actors in the field of popular music in Pori. However, there is still one piece missing from the puzzle of the emergence of Pori's alternative scene; that piece is accessibility.

The accessible alternative scene

As mentioned in the chapter considering the theoretical framework of the study, Jochen Eisentraut categorizes the accessibility of music to three levels: physical access, personal reception and participation (Eisentraut 2013, 85-112). In the case of Pori, the physical access to music was

obvious, as the infrastructure allowed the bands to perform and spread their music. Concerts were taking place where the youth spent their time, and recordings by local bands were readily available. As the bands in Pori followed their time, their sound and expression were somewhat familiar to the audience. Grunge sound and aesthetics can be found on Circle's first recordings, and Deep Turtle's abrupt approach to music was not totally unheard of in the sound of bands like *Faith No More*, *Mr. Bungle*, *Melvins* or *Cardiacs*. Magyar Posse's post-rock draws from the likes of *God Speed You Black Emperor* or *Sigur Rós*, as well as from the music of *Ennio Morricone* and *John Barry*. Still, they were something completely new in Pori and a disconnection from the '80s classical Pori rock. Backing up Teemu Elo's earlier comment, Harri Sippola sums up the thoughts and feelings of the early '90s:

I can't remember if I read this or if someone told me this quotation from Pentti Dassum. He said that they [the bands of alternative scene] wanted to be anything else than what the '80s classical Pori rock was. The further ahead the better. When you hear something like that, it is in fact quite logical that you end up completely different. Being from Pori was an awful burden in the beginning, that's how I've understood it. It had to be redefined. (Harri Sippola, 23.07.2020)

It could be said that the classical '80s Pori rock had come to its end in terms of locality. It had lost its moment as genuine representatives of the now-changing cultural climate of Pori. Even if the key bands of that era would go on to produce occasional major hits and remaining, on and off, *nationally* very successful concert attractions, things were bound to change one way or another. The resemblance with prog-rock's shift to punk rock, or in hair metal's to grunge, is evident. (see Eisentraut 2013; Clover 2009.) Finnish society, as mentioned above, faced a deep economic recession in the early '90s, while at the same time musical tsunamis, like grunge, landed in Finland. The members of the alternative scene were there at the "right time", and they were coming up as the new thing in town. They had the knowledge, and the facilities, they got the public backing for their endeavors, and the Zeitgeist was on their side. Mika Rättö describes the feeling in the scene as being very eclectic, experimental, intense and easy to access.

What I think was special in Pori, and probably in the whole country, was that everyone was playing together all the time. There was no jealousy, genre limits or gangs inside the scene. This resulted in a practice where almost everyone who played music in Pori played together at some point. It also created an atmosphere where experimentation, breaking the limits, and just doing without thinking too much, was encouraged. [...] Every time we sat at a bar there were discussions about music and every time someone was forming a new band. I had a friend, who was not a musician, and he was quite fed up with all this. When these discussions started, he always used to say, 'Oh... Bands again...' [...] Our mentality was very lowkey. We didn't dream of gold records or things like that. We didn't need great musicians from other cities, because the fellow in the next table would do just as well. The people who had other kinds of goals simply left Pori for bigger cities and started to build their careers in them. (Mika Rättö, 05.11.2020)

In the '90s, Pori was a town in which agency at three levels of musical accessibility (physical, personal and participation) was possible. This led to a situation where participation in making music of your own was easy and even encouraged. The pressure of "making it" was non-existent, and free experimentation was the way forward. To sum it up, the Pori alternative scene was accessible.

Conclusions

In this article I have tried to draw a road map for how scenes emerge and I hope this study serves as a guideline for further research on the subject, as it is evident that further research on the subject is needed. By creating a synthesis of three theoretical models and applying it to the case of the Pori alternative scene, I have shown how this emergence happened in '90s Finland. However, I suggest that it also could have happened in another Nordic country or elsewhere on the western hemisphere under fairly similar circumstances; maybe even in other parts of the world. My research highlights that the emergence of a scene is deeply rooted in the material, societal and cultural realities of the time and place where the emergence happens. I also claim, that locality plays a far more important role in the emergence, that is often realized or admitted. This is especially the case when scenes emerge outside of major cities or areas, where global

effervescence is not ever-present, possibilities for higher education do not support cultural endeavours and the flow of people and ideas is not a constant factor; in places that might be seen as straight-out periphery, or at least being outside of the hotspots of where scene emergences and musical innovations are expected to happen. These findings are somewhat in contradiction with what Andy Bennett, Richard Peterson and Will Straw suggest in their work on scenes (see Bennett and Peterson 2004; 2019; Straw 2004). I suggest that the emergence of a scene is foremost dependent on locality in all its forms, whereas Bennett, Peterson and Straw see global—and national—phenomena as the key causations of the scene emergence. According to my findings, the keys to the emergence of a scene are existing symbolic knowledge and related- and unrelated diversification, supportive local infrastructure, that allows an epistemic community to flourish, and accessibility. This categorization could also be seen as a dissection—or a laboratory test—made with a scene. This dissection, or test, allows the cultural, societal and material factors behind the scene to be traced and seen.

Pori had the existing symbolic knowledge that could be used, and abandoned, for the sake of creating something new. The circumstances were right for the accumulation of unrelated symbolic knowledge, which played its part in breaking out of the old practices and models. With these, it was possible for a new epistemic community to emerge, and the '80s could change into '90s, so to speak. The local infrastructure supported passing on of the symbolic knowledge inside the scene. Rehearsal spaces and venues to perform and hear music were available. And lastly, it was possible, and easy within the historical, societal and local context, to have access to the scene's music and to participate in its creation. The scene was happening there and then, people were present and there was no pressure to succeed or to "make it". It was more about experimentation and sharing a common journey. It is evident, that further research on other cities and areas is still needed, as the roles, weight scales and specific causations of the key elements vary according to where the emergence occurs.

There are open questions that could not be answered in this study, but which I will later tackle in my upcoming articles. One of the big ones is, that what was the role of women in the scene? It needs to be said, that most of the members of the scene were men, especially the ones playing in the bands. However, this does not mean that women did not have roles in the scene, or furthermore, that they did not choose their roles in the scene. Even though my research focuses on the music and music-making, one could easily take a broader research perspective to the Pori

alternative scene. Photography, high arts, film, theatre and other forms of culture were produced and consumed in and around it. These also happen to be the forms of culture where women were more present than in music. And the forms of culture, where higher education and work opportunities were not present in Pori, and thus, to pursue a career in these, one had to move to another location. Researching these would need an article of its own, but for now, I simply have to leave them aside.

Acknowledgements

This research was funded by the Finnish Cultural Foundation's Satakunta Regional Fund. I would also like to thank the Satakunta Museum for their support for my research. Finally, I would like to thank the reviewers for their excellent feedback and colleagues who commented on my manuscript.

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All links verified 02.02.2023

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Notes

[1] John Peel had Deep Turtle and Circle on his program in 09.10.1994 and 09.06.2002. Iggy Pop praised Circle in his BBC program *Iggy Confidential* in 01.05.2022. Mike Patton has signed Circle

founder Jussi Lehtisalo's and Aaron Turner's band Split Cranium on his label *Ipecac Recordings*. Pina Bausch has used Magyar Posse music in her piece *Vollmond*, and later on Wenders included a brief clip of the music in his 2011 film *Pina*.