

Heili Sepp
Viru County Court

The Broken Axis of Juhkental: A Different Kind of Heart

Juhkental, Joachimstal, Joaorg – the historical district located to the south of Narva Old Town and Hermann Castle is rarely remembered when discussing Narva these days. That might be somewhat justified considering the suburb was officially united with the city only in 1917. Nevertheless, the oldest settlements of the area are located at Joaorg and there is something else at its heart that one might consider a painfully exact symbol of Narva. The whole layout of the suburb that burst into its true existence in the end of the 19th century (and was a home for ca 7000 people in the beginning of the 20th century - most of them workers at Kreenholm) had a majestic axis uniting two polarities at its core. The suburb burnt down twice (in April of 1919 and during WWII) but the axis remained, albeit today we experience it as something broken. The two places of worship – Alexander’s Cathedral (Lutheran) and The Resurrection of Christ Cathedral (Orthodox) – were designed to dominate this part of the city and to face each other in direct confrontation or dialogue. Originally everyone passing Juhkental could be overwhelmed by the experience of standing between two towering cathedrals – each one at its own end of the Church street. This historical view belongs to the past due to the architectural changes creating a strict “stonewall” to split the district apart: a kind of internal border. That is not the only way how Juhkental appears to be a place of boundaries. Having been destroyed twice and struggled twice to “resurrect” it has always been in something akin to a limbo between existence and non-existence. The memories of the “*schlagbaum*” and “dirt dyke” that used to separate the provinces of Estonia and Petersburg illuminate its liminal nature. Today there is almost nothing (except one house at Raudsilla street) to aid one to recognize the bustling streets lined with wooden buildings that Vilde’s Ann (“Iron Hans”) or Oskar Luts passed during their imaginary or actual days in Joaorg. I trace their steps every day because I work in Juhkental. My intervention aims at reviving this place as it was once intended – as a whole – and as it appears in literary texts, even if only for ten minutes. I also want to provoke the listeners to think about the grand yet sadly broken axis at the heart of Juhkental.