

Designing with Children

Hernesaari Masterplan

Hernesaari is a 32-hectar area situated in the south of Helsinki. The shipyards have controlled the peninsula for many decades, however it was decided that between the years 2010 and 2012 the shipyard would close and all of its buildings would be removed as part of a new residential agreement to accommodate around 4,000 people. In this context, and alongside the three architect consultants who were selected to work on the design project, the Helsinki City Planning Department asked two lay groups to submit their own proposals or, 'competition entries', for the developing peninsula: these were locals in the surrounding areas and a group of children and young people from Arkki, the School of Architecture for Children and Youth.

This project therefore represents the application of a novel participative urban design model in which the residents of the neighbouring areas, professional architects and the Arkki School of Architecture were asked to analyse and develop the Hernesaari Local Master Plan. The aims for the new residential area were to achieve a high quality and pleasant maritime environment, with its own distinct identity and original design. Following the consultation process, which lasted from 2006 until May 2007, the construction was set to begin in 2012.

Motivation

That children and young people were invited to offer their input in local planning was novel for any city planning office in Finland. In light of achieving an authentic participation experience for the children and young people involved, it was acknowledged that accommodating children's inputs in the planning process alongside the professional knowledge of expert architects is a challenging endeavour. It was a key concern for the planners and facilitators involved to avoid placation and remain open to the young participants' own suggestions. In this light, Arkki students offered their views about the area development as expert consultants together with the designers and other lay participants.

What

Activities for the development of the Hernesaari peninsula: public exhibitions, website, children's masterplan, maps and models

Where

Helsinki, Finland

Age

3-18

Group Size

Approximately 100

Project Stage

Brief

Children's Roles

Creative Inspirers

Timescale

2006 - May 2007

Partners

Anttila & Rusanen, Helin & Co. and Brunow & Manula (Architects)

Helsinki City Planning Department (Initiator)

Niina Hummelin, Sini Meskanen and Pihla

Meskanen (Arkki Director)) (Arkki co-ordinators)

Children and young people from Arkki (Participants)

Children's involvement

The children's participation process lasted 6 months and consisted of 500 working hours. The first phase of the project was the planning process and it lasted six months. An excursion was planned for the children to familiarise themselves with the area and enable them to experience the environment through sensory exploration. The children created a variety of maps: a map of smells, sounds, textures, structures, vegetation, forms, materials; a map from the viewpoint of a frog and a bird; a map from the viewpoint of a detective and so on, to support the creative and imaginative capture of as many opinions as possible. The children developed their proposals in aged-based sub-groups. The youngest children (3-6 year olds) worked in child-parent groups and focused on exploring the qualities of spaces and buildings through story-telling, drawings, models using symbolic colours and imaginary tales about the area and its residents. The children aged 10-13 developed a diverse range of plans for the area, while the 15-18 year-olds pulled the whole project together, taking an overview of the ideas from all the young participants, analysing these and representing the key emerging themes through one joint design plan and a model of the area. Other engagement activities used through this process included: discussions, a visit to the City planning office, theatre workshops, group planning and finally the presentation of children's own ideas in public discussions and more traditional planning contexts.

The official planning process that followed lasted three years. From that point onwards, children were updated by the planners and architects on how the process was continuing. In November 2012 the Hernesaari area plan was finished, and Arkki children who participated in the project were given a presentation of the final plan at the Helsinki City Planning Office.

Outputs and outcomes

The initial proposals were completed in May 2007, and all the entries from Architects, local people and the children were publicly presented. Two public exhibitions and public discussion events took place in Helsinki to generate discussion among citizens. Children also explained their ideas through several other presentations in different contexts. A website was set up for anyone interested to send their comments about the area development to the city planning department. The different solutions offered and the public discussion comprised the starting point for the Helsinki City Planning Office to carry out the master plan of the area. More specifically, the children's plan for the area involved the following:

- canals through the peninsula with houses alongside the canals;
- the area to be divided into smaller islands, as it used to be;
- green areas around the housing and on all coasts, with 'floating' housing areas;
- small-scale housing that resembles a medieval village;
- public and housing areas with a distinct character; and
- a yacht marina shaped like a half moon.

Stella Kaminen (5 years old) describes her own vision for the area: *'My Hernesaari island is full of birds. Some houses are tall, so people can look out to the ocean. There is a cafe and*

a park, where children can play with other children and animals. On the beach people can swim and in the winter they can skate on ice. The atmosphere is calm and refreshing because of the grass hills and trees. Behind every hill there is a surprise. My Hernesaari is for all people, children, young people and outdoor people. [...] The spirit of the island comes from many small things, that's why people feel so happy there!

The children's planning project was reported to be a great success in capturing young people's viewpoints. Children and young people exhibited interest in city planning, discussed the priorities for the new developing area and evaluated the different proposals made. Overall, the project helped to strengthen relations between local people and the city council and marked the beginnings of a new model for public participation in local planning.

'New winds are blowing. Previously the City Planning Department had put forward its own plans to the public. Now we are doing the reverse. We are listening to visions and dreams of the people [...] Hopefully [children and young people] will sense that it is possible to have an influence on the environment' (Tuomas Tajajärvi, City Planning Department).

Resources

Kids propose floating neighbourhoods and residential islands for area vacated by shipyard. Online. Available:

<http://www.hs.fi/english/article/Kids+propose+floating+neighbourhoods+and+residential+islands+for+area> (accessed 8 April 2013).

Hernesaari Master Plan in Helsinki http://www.arkitekt.se/s33022/f5239/arkki_text.pdf (accessed 8 April 2013).

Meskanen, P. (2008) *Architecture Education in Finland – A glimpse to the everyday in 2008* Available in: http://www.mimarlarodasi.org.tr/UIKDocs/SAFA_Meskanen.pdf (accessed 8 April 2013).

Meskanen, P. (2012) 'Architecture Education – Initiating a Change!, SchulRaumKultur Symposium 2012' Online. Available: <http://www.schulraumkultur.at/assets/papers/meskanen-architecture-education-initiating-change.pdf> (accessed 8 April 2013).

Meskanen, P. (2012) 'Encouraging Children and Youth to Participation, Get Involved, International Symposium, Architectural and Built Environment Education for young people. International Architecture Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia' Online. Available <http://www.baukulturvermittlung.at/wp/wp-content/plugins/download-monitor/download.php?id=132> (accessed 8 April 2013).





Courtesy: Pihla Meskanen (photographer Arkki)

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Courtesy: Pihla Meskanen (photographer Sini Koivisto)



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