Strategic revitalization of polluted bay area into new citizens park

2015

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The project transforms Töölönlaiti, a polluted bay area currently dividing Helsinki’s centre in two, into an attractive green heart that unifies the city- a new citizen’s park for all of Helsinki. The project proposes new pedestrian and bicycle routes that will reconnect the surrounding neighborhoods with the bay area and provide an eventful promenade along the newly cleaned water. Like the purification of Copenhagen’s central harbour at the end of the nineties, water purification will be the catalyst for revitalizing Helsinki. The revitalized Töölönlaiti will become the central urban space in Helsinki.

Location: Helsinki, Finland  
Program: Transformation of bay area into a citizen’s park  
Size: 40 000 m²  
Status: Commission 2015, on-going  
Client: N2  
Collaborators: COBE, Ramboll Finland Oy, Terramare Boskalis  
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Existing Situation

For the past century, the future of Töölönlaiti (Töölö Bay) has been debated and discussed, leaving the potential of the area unfulfilled. Instead of suggesting a total redesign of the popular park, the aim of this project is to use a set of specific urban, architectural and environmental strategies to transform the park into a new social, recreational and cultural heart of the Finnish capital.
The Green Spine

Töölölähti is part of a green spine that spans from the north of Finland to the heart of the capital. The bay is a forgotten pearl in the heart of Helsinki. However, given its location, it has the potential to unify the city.

The bay area is surrounded by an unparalleled series of cultural icons. Finlandia Hall, the National Opera House, the Linnunlaulu villas and the recently built Helsinki Music Centre, among others create a completely unique urban setting in Finland. The lush, green parks and the surrounding nature form a rare, green heart in the centre of Helsinki.

The areas surrounding the bay have their own specific identity and contribute to the understanding of Töölölähti. These identities are carefully considered when envisioning the areas’ future. Through detailed analysis of the specific bay areas, the proposal seeks to identify the main challenges and potentials of Töölölähti. The analysis establishes a foundation for transforming and revitalizing Töölölähti into an active and vibrant part of Helsinki.
Urban Acupuncture

We adopt an urban acupuncture approach, where we pinpoint the main challenges and potentials of each specific site and propose a set of actions that would contribute towards making each area better for its users. The method offers five strategies for revitalizing Töölönlahti.

**Strategy 1:** Back to the water!
The first strategy involves cleaning the bay’s contaminated water, activating the neglected 2km long shoreline and reestablishing its connection with the water. The south and southeast edge of the bay will provide more urban and public functions. The shores of Linnunlaulu will be connected to the south and the north by a simple wooden boardwalk by the water allowing visitors to enjoy the beauty of the Linnunlaulu villas. The north end of the bay will be connected to the water with a natural beach. Along the eastern shores of the bay by Hesperia Park, small and precise water connections create new public spaces.

**Strategy 2:** The Social heart of Helsinki!
Not only can Töölönlahti physically connect divide districts, it can also be a social patchwork that stitches the city together from within. Today, many of the functions around the bay are characterised as high culture, thus creating a mono-functional atmosphere, lacking life throughout the day. By introducing diverse activities around the bay, the area can
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transform into the social heart of Helsinki. A continuous waterfront route features numerous public activities, such as restaurants, cafes, swimming areas, beaches and natural attractions.

Five Strategies

**Strategy 3: From backside to frontside!**
Many of the existing buildings in the area have their backsides facing the bay. The third strategy proposes opening up and making the ground floors of the Opera and Finlandia Hall accessible to the public. The large parking areas located on the bay side will be replaced with outdoor public areas. In the future, both old and new buildings by the bay will have their frontsides facing the bay. A diverse path running around the bay will connect a series of high quality urban spaces.

**Strategy 4: Connecting the city!**
Instead of dividing, Töölönlahti will unify the city. Excellent pedestrian and bicycle paths will reconnect Töölö in the west with Kallio in the east, and the Olympic Park in the north with the city centre in the south. The bike route, “Baana” will be extended to the shores of the bay and onwards under the railway to Kallio and Siltasaari. The two districts will once again be relinked after being separated by the railway for almost a hundred years. Two new landscape bridges provide smooth and accessible connections across the busy Helsinginkatu, reconnecting the bay area with the northern forests.

**Strategy 5: Restoring the green spine!**
Töölönlahhti is positioned at the end of a green spine, the Helsinki Central Park. It is an entirely unique feature for the capital city that should be preserved and strengthened. At the moment, large infrastructural barriers sever the bay from this spine. The northern landscape bridges create contact points with the Central park while also connecting Töölönlahhti with the Olympic Park and Linnanmäki amusement park. The lush park landscape continues south through Töölönlahhti Park, forming an unbroken green spine that reaches the heart of the capital.
Proposed Situation

The strategies combined create a revitalized and united Töölönlahit. In the future, Töölönlahit will be an area where the water is present and in immediate contact with the people. It will be a collection of different identities unified by a path that lets citizens and visitors experience the water in multiple ways. The introduction of diverse attractions will ensure that Töölönlahit will truly be an outdoor living room for Helsinki residents all year round.

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South Boardwalk
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A new urban waterfront
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Views toward south