

TRANSURBANISM: TOWARDS A NEW TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACH IN URBAN PLANNING

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The on-going financial crisis is having a negative impact on post-communist European countries of the Baltic Sea Region. In Estonia, for instance, recent data ¹ related to annual population growth reveal a loss of 0.2% while at the same time Tallinn, the capital city, has gained 0.6%. Thus a double layer dynamic affects the country whereby Estonia loses population to wealthier European states and other countries, while Tallinn drains the remaining population from the countryside.

Similar dynamics affect other post-communist Baltic States (the once labelled 'Baltic Tigers') so much so that while 30% of Estonian residents live in Tallinn, 32% of Latvian residents live in Riga, and 26% of Lithuanian residents live in Vilnius. Comparing this data with the northern sector of the Baltic Region (Finland and Sweden) we find that 11% of residents in Finland live in Helsinki and 9% of residents in Sweden live in Stockholm.

However, in this paper we argue that while the urban population imbalances (i.e. urban primacy versus shrinking countryside) of shrinking Baltic states (i.e. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) put pressures on the land uses and social milieus of their capitals (e.g. Tallinn in Estonia) the same is true for Scandinavian capitals whereby rising international migration is putting pressure on their welfare states (see the case of Helsinki in Haila 2005: 20).

Maimone (2004: 6) explains that while for cultural reasons the Russian-speaking minority in Estonia has been generally urbanised, Estonians, on the other hand, disperse in the countryside. The recent urban migration in Tallinn has thus increased the chances for social conflict between Estonians, independent from USSR since 1991, and their rivals Russians. The latter are perceived as intruders and never fully integrated in post-communist Estonia (Maimone 2004: 4). In 2007 a conflict between these two groups revolved over the issue of the relocation of a soviet memorial (the so called 'Bronze Soldier') from the city centre to the periphery of Tallinn. For weeks, tensions at the political and social level (Estonia vs. Russia and Estonians vs. Estonians of Russian origin) resulted in urban riots and demonstrations.

Finland does not share a similar past with Estonia, having been an independent and liberal country since 1917; however, recent immigration inflows from European, African and Asian countries have put some strains in its social tissue - particularly in Helsinki where the share of foreigners in 2011 was above 10% (with Estonians being the largest minority) while in the rest of

1 Source citypopulation.de, 2010-2012.

the country this share was little above 2% ². The dynamic contexts above and their social, cultural and economic developments cannot but affect urban development as well.

In this paper we analyse two projects and we present our approach in planning and research practice that we have called TransUrbanism, a term previously used by Arjen Mulder (2002) to describe the contemporary state of urbanisation in which continuous transformations produce a ‘multiplication of information’. In section two we further explain our theoretical and methodological baselines while in sections three and four we present, in a chronological order, two projects we were involved in Tallinn and Helsinki. These were to various degrees collaborative projects carried out by the authors together with professionals, activists, and agencies ³. We have documented and reported on the projects elsewhere; however, by collecting here these experiences and practices our aim is to exemplify TransUrbanism. In the conclusions we summarise the results of the two projects, their significance for contemporary urbanism, and suggest paths for future applications and research inquiries.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

In recent years the financial crisis and rising xenophobia in Greece have caused an increase of protests by autochthonous residents against refugee centres in their neighbourhoods. Once again foreigners become the Other who contaminate national space and devalue local real estate. Sandercock (2003: 112) writes about the sense of loss and even fear we experience when ‘others’ seem to invade and appropriate ‘our’ space. Urban change is often feared when the familiar is threatened to turn into something else, something that we don’t know and that is causing us uncertainty and anxiety. How many instances haven’t been documented of changes authorities impose without involving us (and those with less power) who will be affected? How many times don’t people protest about changes that are planned for their neighbourhoods? Current socio-economic and political negotiations take place within a framework of diversity and global movements that are important factors for challenging social, political and cultural norms. Changes in our living environments while fear inducing are often necessary, therefore, we propose that, when possible, we better test (simulate) changes through the medium of Urban Art Interventions, before such changes become irreversible.

Planning for a diversity of people – autochthonous and not – requires that in order to deal with our fear of socio-spatial change we need to systematically practice pro-activeness and intentionality, as well as open-endedness. In this framework research into urban phenomena and certain foreseeable changes is recommendable when and where it is possible. Concerted research efforts could develop into open source knowledge that would contribute to the betterment of life for all. The fact that individual actors, grass roots and NGOs develop initiatives and interventions to claim urban space makes it a pressing need to study such phenomena and analyse their potentials for community engagement and sustainable development. The various formal and informal appropriations of public spaces taking place around the world are telling.

Hou (2010: 2) explains that while the idea of public space in western societies evokes the practice of ‘democracy, openness, and publicity of debate’, today’s European public space, is mostly the result of the efforts of pre-democratic states to display their military power and to control social life. Recently, particularly after 9/11, over-control and display of power once again

2 Source: City of Helsinki, Helsinki Urban fact.

3 For more information about our collaborations see Cityleft Network at www.cityleft.blogspot.com

suppress the rights to demonstrate and of freedom of speech. Against this trend, inspired by the seemingly un-organised and informal use of public space typical of Asia and Latin America (e.g. informal markets, favelas, etc.), non-governmental urban activists around the world have sought to peacefully re-contest public space through their presence, uses, and practices such as urban art interventions. From Rebar's Park(ing) intervention in San Francisco (see Merker 2010: 45) – planting parking lots with trees and grass – to Guerrilla Benching – installing benches in empty public space – or Circle Lane Party – in London's underground - of Space Hijackers (the first staged in 1999), to the Stalker group/OsservatorioNomade's TV(2005) interventions in the periphery of Rome, artists, urban activists, and architecture practitioners have joined their forces to re-discuss, engage, and re-imagine city's public space.

In a recent conference at Bauhaus-University Weimar, Alain Bourdin (2012) has highlighted the tensions between the fields of 'Urban Studies' and 'Planning', the latter being a procedural line of inquiry while the former being a substantial one. While planning, says Bourdin, '... has not found its ways to innovate itself...', urban studies, on the other hand, have not been engaged '...in finding solid concepts for the notions deriving from action'. While planners usually answer to questions and urban researchers pose questions, local actors, say Bourdin, also formulate questions - thus urban researchers should additionally be more involved in creating tools to solve urban problems, rather than to merely contest injustice (perpetually opposing but rarely constructively proposing).

In the 'Empire of Meaning. The humanization of the social Sciences' Francois Dosse (1999) advocates for a reconciliation of the relations between exact sciences, social sciences, and philosophy based on a new transdisciplinary paradigm. Dosse notes that the social sciences are witnessing '... a genuine transformation: the terms structure, reproduction, static, combinatory, invariant, universal, and binary logic are being effaced, in favour of the notions of organizing chaos, fractal, event, process, meaning, complexity, self-organization, construction, strategy, convention, autonomy, enaction' (Ibid. 1999). Thus for Dosse the task of the new, transdisciplinary-scholar is to conduct a more modest 'clarification' rather than an artificial separation between 'judgements of fact' and 'judgments of value'. In this way he continues a '... a third way between the prevalence of pure lived experience and the priority of conceptualization...' can be sought.

Inspired by these ideas, we call Transdisciplinary Urbanism (or TransUrbanism) a new, emerging field of study/intervention in which social and action researchers, artists, animators, performers, and activists come together to contest space and to openly re-negotiate power structures in urban space. The social aspects of urbanism connect different practices, ideological frameworks and disciplines in order to address issues of everyday life. Disciplinary crossovers are central in researching and planning urban space and potentially facilitate city inhabitants and professionals to even temporarily leave their comfort zones, co-design their interactions and communication and work together in non-predetermined ways. Within TransUrbanism we advocate to industriously work with uncertainty, chance and open-endedness. TransUrbanism with its participatory and transdisciplinary approach may help us to re-think polarized European cities, such as Tallinn for its strong urban primacy in a shrinking Estonian economy and Helsinki for its increasing diversity undermining its long-established welfare state, towards a more just urbanism.

For us TransUrbanism concerns socio-spatial issues of multi-layered urban phenomena. Independently, sociology and spatial design merely provide the theoretical context of what our objective is with TransUrbanism, namely the proactive (but not pre-determined) investigation of the implications of change in urban space. TransUrbanism is our approach regarding research

into socio-spatial change in urban space. We endorse the idea of researchers/activists who conduct what Hoggart et al. (2002: 292) describe as action research: 'Action Research is associated with learning about society through efforts to change it.' With TransUrbanism thus we recognize that urban research does not need to be only and always reflective; researchers may also aspire to bring social change.

Whether looking through literature, media and the press, conducting discussions and interviews, or setting up urban artistic interventions such as in Tallinn in Helsinki, our aim has been to find arguments that support our advocacy for change regarding the ways we deal with socio-spatiality. Research without such a quest for change is valuable albeit not necessarily impartial or socially relevant. In *New Strategies for Social Research*, Layder (1996: 45) talks about the kind of research that generates 'theory that fits the data,' rather than 'data to fit the theory'. This is called the grounded theory approach, and offers another perspective on the issue of the relationship between the researcher and the field of research. According to TransUrbanism fieldwork guides researchers to theories that assist critical understanding of the field and its actors as well as the theories themselves. It is not necessarily the aim of urban research to develop a grounded theory; however, it is part of our contribution to knowledge to make certain links between theorised practise and theory in practice, which may shed more light on socio-spatial phenomena.

In what follows we briefly present and analyse two cases that have helped us form our understanding of TransUrbanism as a practice. It is important to clarify that our attempt to formulate TransUrbanism came after these examples, and our formulation is not finite but a work in progress.

PROJECT I: ARCHIPELAGO-TALLINN

As part of an international group of young urban researchers based at the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation, in 2008 we were asked to explore the complex dynamics of trans-national urbanism in the Baltic Sea Region (Rizzo, 2009a). Our research tested the notion of an integrated regional identity formation as desired by region makers to determine whether this model or alternate emergent forms better describe the situation of the Helsinki-Tallinn-Region. Dialogue with local stakeholders and region makers as well as local inhabitants provided both a top down and bottom up view on the development of both cities and the interconnections -and imbalances- that existed between them. When considering the distribution of services, jobs and business activities our group recognized a complex area of overlapping networks without clear borders, mainly based on informal and flexible relations rather than politically governed ones.

Observing that most of the implications of this relationship appeared manifest in the urban form of Tallinn led the group to further research here. This process of rapid urbanization and modernization has had both positive and negative impact on the city and its people. Estonian Independence, declared in 1991, and the subsequent interest and influence from Finland and Sweden gave rise to a process of modernization of the region through economic growth, better living conditions, increase in wages and global connections.

The results of this rapid development have affected the demographics of Tallinn, leaving different sections of the population outside this framework. Estonians with lower income or education, or with limited Estonian language skills (such as Tallinn's sizable Russian speaking population) had more difficulty adapting to the sudden shift of internal market and governance rules. This economic disparity in the social structure plays out in the urban form of Tallinn, creating spatial segregation in certain parts of the city. Kopli, Mustamäe and Lasnamäe are

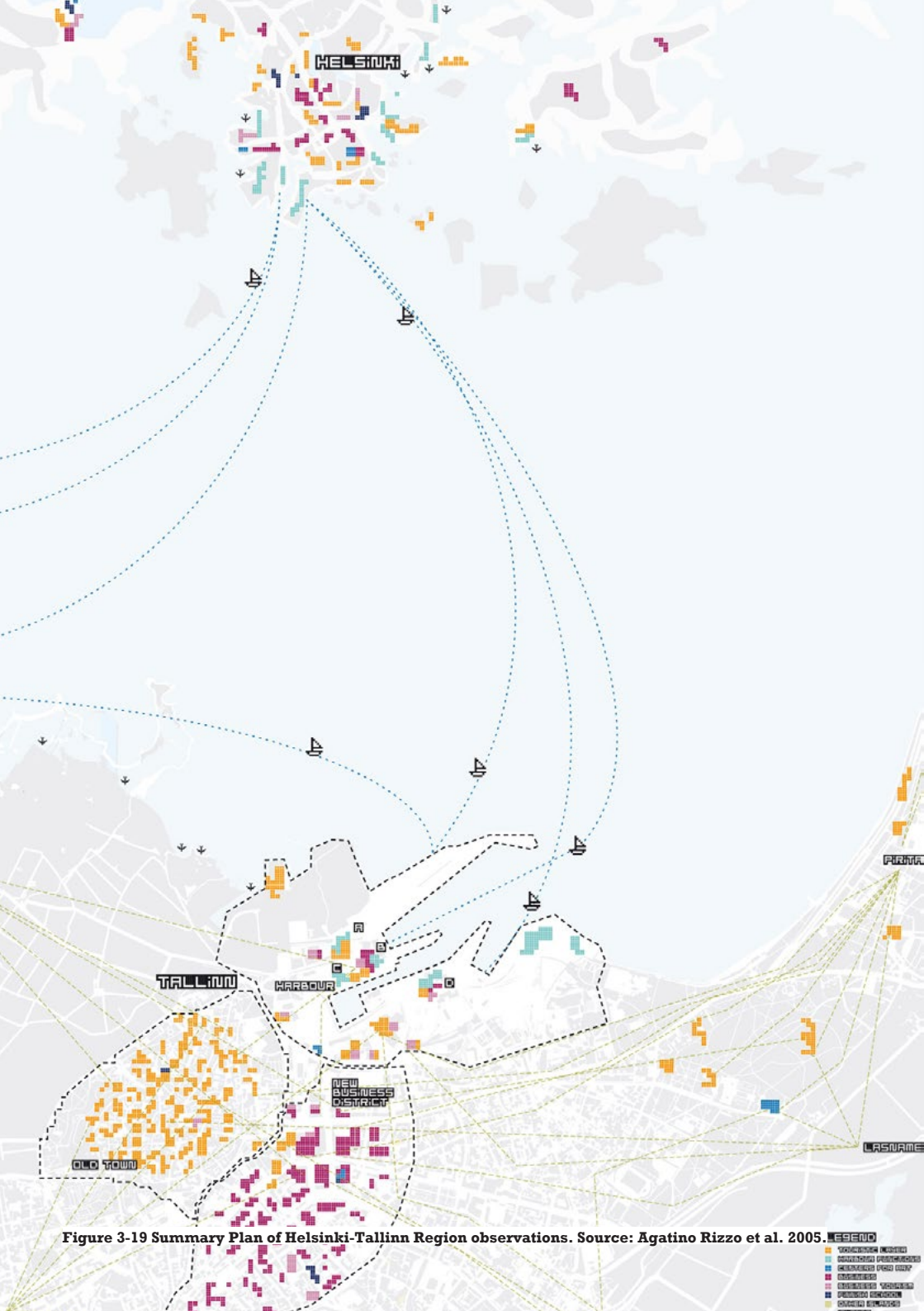


Figure 3-19 Summary Plan of Helsinki-Tallinn Region observations. Source: Agatino Rizzo et al. 2005.

examples; despite their proximity to developed or developing areas, they remain disconnected from the overall development surge of the city.

The cross border effects as well as historical pre-conditions manifest in the urban fabric of Tallinn appeared to the group as an 'Archipelago of Islands' (see Figure 3 19- Rizzo 2009b), each with different economic, social, and cultural milieus: the unfinished harbour dotted of commercial malls catering for Scandinavian visitors; the old, medieval city centre crowded with hotels, restaurants and clubs for wealthy locals and European tourists; the socialist residential peripheries populated by the Russian speaking minority; and so forth. The model of the archipelago also drawn the group's attention on the in-between space made of semi-abandoned spaces, parking lots, roads, and other infrastructures.

After carrying out a SWOT analysis for the city of Tallinn the group discussed and generated qualitative scenarios, trying to sketch the urban future of Tallinn - within the Helsinki-Tallinn Region - against the most uncertain and important driving forces (e.g. technological, social, environmental, economic, political, etc.). The scenarios pointed to two main hypotheses (Rizzo et al. 2008): the need to deal with material and immaterial borders defining the Archipelago as a way to denounce social segregation and urban fragmentation and the opportunity given by the in-between space to negotiate diversity in the city. These latter hypotheses were tested in Tallinn through a series of urban art interventions in May 2008, concluding with a discussion between city planners, architects, art critics and general public. Tallinn urban art interventions were highly interactive and intuitive, suggesting and collecting social-local feedbacks.

'Porta de Viru' at Tammsaare Park (Figure 3 20) was a performance aimed to explore the spatial concept 'Archipelago' by visualizing the borders of Tallinn 'urban islands' with stripes, banners, and gates. All material was acquired in the second hand market in Tallinn and deployed with the help of local NGO 'UusMaailm'. The setting was a busy area in the centre of the city (Tammsaare Park), between the old fortifications and the socialist business district. 'Tallinn Retold' at the harbour aimed instead at building a more intimate relation between the research group and the inhabitants. Discussions with tourists and locals took place about the potential of the spatial structure of Tallinn; people were encouraged to visit different parts of the city and exchange stories about meaningful places. Another public performance ('Wind-up') helped to explore in-between space potentials. Many areas at the harbour are waiting for transformation but seem abandoned at the moment. Through temporary structures installed in the space the group wanted to show that a different use of urban space is possible. Related projects used these spaces for breakfast and dinner gatherings as well as an area next to Linnahall for a temporary beach.

Two very different areas, Rotterman district and BaltiJaam Market, were chosen for integrative projects (Figure 3 21); while Rotterman is a well designed new urban site with expensive high brands but few social interaction, BaltiJaam Market is a very cheap informal area that is very important for economically less fortunate locals. The group's project consisted of building up small market stands where participants distributed goods from the contrasting area in exchange for people's desires. The intent was to get local opinion about what has value in the further development of the city. In a subsequent project in the evening, a projection regarding real estate speculation in UusMaailm community started a discussion about the topic of future city development and whose city it is to develop.

The results of the group's interventions were not definitive but they helped to build platforms to discuss regional and local challenges with local stakeholders of both sides of the Gulf of Finland. Despite the small budget made available by the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation, the urban art



Figure 3-20 PlayTallinn, Urban Art Intervention Week: 'Porta de Viru'. Source: Agatino Rizzo et al. 2008.



Figure 3-21 PlayTallinn, Urban Art Intervention Week: ‘Wind Up’. Source: Agatino Rizzo et al. 2008.

interventions helped strengthening links between the group and local stakeholders beyond the duration of the research project: a member of the group seasonally works with students of a local university on issues about landscape and identity; others have taken part in workshops and other interventions this time organized by local NGOs in Estonia.

PROJECT II: MEIDÄN-OURCITY - HELSINKI

Under the auspices of the foundation of the World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 (<http://wdchelsinki2012.fi/en>), a group of architects, designers, and community workers, including Galanakis, planned and realized a multifaceted project titled Ourcity (<https://meidankaupunki.wordpress.com/>). The members of Ourcity strived to bring forward the richness of diversity by promoting cultures present in Helsinki and by creating opportunities for intercultural dialogue to occur. Design, architecture and urban design were the main tools, while a transdisciplinary approach guided Ourcity group to focus geographically and enter into negotiations with local communities. The aim was to reach out to the people who had the least access to the design processes shaping what was their city too. The strategy was to mobilize the existing human resources in the focus neighbourhood of Meri-Rastila in the suburb of Vuosaari, in the more multicultural East part of Helsinki.

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The neighbourhood of Meri-Rastila, was selected as the focus area of Ourcity project because:

- 1 In Helsinki, MeriRastila has one of the highest concentrations of people of ethnocultural background since immigrants tend to gravitate towards Meri-Rastila (Vilkama 2011). In 2010 in Meri-Rastila area lived 5,224 inhabitants of which 3,539 were Finnish speakers, 175 were Swedish speakers and 1,446 spoke other languages (Helsinki City Urban Facts 2011)



Figure 3-22 Ourcity presented the alternative master plan to the people of Meri-Rastila. Here at the annual Rastori event in the main square of Meri-Rastila. Source: MichailGalanakis 2012.

- 2 The City of Helsinki has plans to build private housing for 2500 new inhabitants in the area by appropriating part of forest land in Meri-Rastila. A group of active residents lobby against this plan.

By focusing on Meri-Rastila and the design challenges posed by the decision of the City of Helsinki, Ourcity group materialized what originally was the theoretical aim of the whole project; namely, to democratize design by facilitating people who are not involved in such processes to articulate their voices and concerns in ways that the authorities would find difficult to ignore. Design was the main medium with which Ourcity worked because this was a requirement from the World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 in order to secure funding that allowed the project proposal to be realised. Community engagement was a component of Ourcity project that soon became crucial in order to fulfil the promises of the project, however, it also turned out to be more challenging than anticipated.

Community engagement was challenging because Meri-Rastila has attracted a lot of stigma in Finnish media and the public opinion is rather negative or indifferent at best (Galanakis 2008). Therefore there was justifiable resistance from local ethnocultural groups to liaise with Ourcity group, an outsider. However, the group of active citizens who had a pressing need and concern quickly took advantage of the opportunity Ourcity represented. The pro-Meri-Rastila group of residents, asked Ourcity group to help them to constructively challenge the decision of the City of Helsinki to build in the forest that they considered being an invaluable asset of their area. Ourcity group members decided to offer expertise and networks to pro-Meri-Rastila people. Together with six students of architecture and planning geography a work team was formed that drafted an alternative master plan for Meri-Rastila providing housing for approximately 2,500 new inhabitants while leaving intact the forest (Ourcity 2012).

Ourcity group members pull together their knowledge and skills in order to open up the discussion regarding the area of Meri-Rastila in general, and in order to engage the local residents in planning their living environment in participatory ways. Expertise on interaction design (Figure 3-22) as well as community engagement allied design to produce a dynamic conversation and ultimately a plan that adhered to the requirements that the City of Helsinki planning office had set. A dynamic conversation spread into virtual forums on the Internet and members of the green party embraced the alternative master plan for Meri-Rastila as more environmentally friendly and socially sustainable. The alternative master plan was presented at the same time as the plan by the city's planning office in spring 2012 and was considered by the City Council, which eventually voted in favour of the official plan but only with one vote difference.

One of the strengths of Ourcity's alternative master plan was that it was built upon the results of two university courses (OURcourse) held in autumn 2011 in which students from disciplines, such as business management and geography, conducted fieldwork in the area of Meri-Rastila and came up with scenarios for new services and socio-spatial strategies based on direct observations and interviews of local residents. The results of these two courses were publicly presented in Meri-Rastila. After the courses had concluded, Ourcity group organised workshops to bring together all those working on the alternative master plan and pro Meri-Rastila people as well as other local residents.

The alternative master plan (Figure 3-23) in its entirety demonstrates that although design is an important component of urban development and planning, it needs to be effectively linked with local communities in order to represent their needs and aspirations. Ourcity also demonstrates that for an effort like the drafting of the alternative master plan to be an effective challenger of



SUUNNITELMA 1:2000

SUUNNITTELUPERIAATTEET

YHDISTÄÄ JA
INTEGROIDA ALUEEN
KAUPUNKIMAISET
SEKÄ HARVAANASUTUT
OSAT, JA VÄHENTÄÄ
SOSIAALISEN
ERITYMISEN RISKIÄ

KASVATTA A ALUEEN
ASUUNTOKANTAA JA
PARAN TAA ALUEEN
MAINETTA

SÄILYTTÄÄ JA
HYÖDYNTÄÄ ALUEEN
LUONNONYMPÄRISTÖÄ
JA LUODA AIDOSTI
KESTÄVÄ LAHTOKOHTA
SEN KÄYTTÖLLE

ELVYTTÄÄ JA
HYÖDYNTÄÄ OLEMASSA
OLEVA ASUINALUE SEKÄ
VAHVISTA SEN
ERITYISLUONNETTA

HYÖDYNTÄÄ
PAIKALLISTEN
ASUKKAIDEN TIETÄMYS
ASUINALUEESTAAN
OTTAMALLA HEIDÄT
MUKAAN SUUNNITTELU-
PROSESSIIN

TÄYDENNYSRAKENTAMISEN ALUEET



TOIMINNOT



OMISTUSMUODOT



VAIHTOEHTOINEN ASEMAKAAVA MERI-RASTILAAN 2012

EIN ALTERNATIVER MASTERPLAN FÜR MERI-RASTILA, HELSINKI

Tristen Hughes, Marcelo Diaz Gutiérrez, Martina Jerina, Petteri Kosonen, Eini Lehto, Maja Paavainen, Heini-Ermi Sääri, Conja Sahlinen



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Figure 3-23 Ourcity master plan for MeriRastila.

Source: <http://meidankaupunki.wordpress.com/alternative-master-plan/>

top-down decision-making then concerted community engagement is necessary. Intercultural competence is a key in building bridges of communication in-between cultures unaware of the common grounds they may be sharing and of the improvement they may bring to their lives if they were to negotiate and act together (See Sandercock and Attili 2009).

The outreach that Ourcity group members conducted before and while working on the alternative master plan reaffirmed to all stake holders including the architecture and planning geography students, that planning the urban development of an area cannot ignore the people in that area. On the contrary any sustainable process must in its very early stages engage as many diverse people and groups as possible. Experts thus become facilitators. As Netami Stuart (2011), a young park planner in Toronto who believed in planning for diversity put it:

‘the best way to do it is to have planning done by a diversity of people. So to be as consultative as possible... I think it’s really about dedicating enough resources to identifying voices and listening to them, and spending the time to understand how you should communicate with people who have different needs than you.’

We think that one of the most substantial contributions of the alternative master plan was that it created a platform for discussion amongst the residents of Meri-Rastila. Not all local residents shared the conviction of the pro Meri-Rastila group regarding the untouchability of the forest; however, through the workshops and discussions organized by Ourcity more residents had the opportunity to engage in the debate. Even if this debate was at times mainly driven by the agenda of the pro Meri-Rastila group, more stakeholders had the opportunity to realise for themselves the different perspectives, interests and some of the arguments for and against building in the forest. This was the case not only for the active residents who participated in the process of drafting the alternative master plan but also the members of the planning team as well as all the members of Ourcity.

Ourcity did not manage to carry out the community engagement it initially aspired to. The fixed time of the project (one year), its voluntary and multifaceted nature and open-endedness made many stakeholders in Meri-Rastila to be reserved. This unfortunately was the case regarding some of the crucial social service providers in the area whom the instigators of Ourcity didn’t have the foresight to involve when planning the project. These stakeholders at times acted as gatekeepers of Meri-Rastila and resisted facilitating Ourcity’s community outreach fearing that the project interfered too much with their work. A weakness of Ourcity was that the community outreach wasn’t extensive enough to make the alternative master plan representative of most of the local residents. It did however expand the discussion of the planning agenda to more residents and managed to engage a few at least of the residents with ethnocultural background.

All these and more realizations wouldn’t have been reached had not Ourcity created opportunities for multifaceted interaction with the various stakeholders in Meri-Rastila, from fliers inviting for residents’ opinions about their area, to participatory design workshops, exhibitions and physical and virtual discussion forums. While the alternative master plan started as an experiment with unforeseeable results but serious investment in time, energy and resources, it progressed into a real life planning process that generated substantial media and public interest. Ourcity and the planning team that worked on the alternative master plan offered the results of their labour to the public domain and the active pro Meri-Rastila people. The alternative master plan, at the time of writing, has entered a new phase where an independent body of experts assesses

the environmental impact of both the city's official plan and the alternative master plan for Meri-Rastila. There are still hopes that the City of Helsinki might reconsider their plan. The alternative master plan equipped the active pro Meri-Rastila people with confidence and a conviction that their cause is not lost and the forest of Meri-Rastila shouldn't be reduced either. Ourcity project aligns to principles of TransUrbanism by providing a testing ground for socio-spatial change, and by transforming the process of planning into a platform for community engagement and community building. As such processes are open-ended mistakes are unavoidable but even they are beneficial as part of shared knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS

The recent geo-economic crises have affected immigration flows in such a way that in post-communist countries of the Baltic Sea Region such as Estonia, capital cities have drained inhabitants from shrinking country-towns while in traditional liberal countries such as Finland, capital cities have attracted transnational workers often from the former countries (Estonians are the largest minority in Finland).

As results of these dynamics, social conflicts have been rising in both Tallinn and Helsinki. While the socio-economic-political context of these two cities are different, on the other hand, their symptoms are similar: in Tallinn as in Helsinki minorities challenge regions makers for what Lefebvre (1968) has called the 'right to the city', a right that in the interpretation of Harvey (2008: 23), is:

'... far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights'

Inspired by recent studies in the fields of multiculturalism, urban activism, and action research we propose 'TransUrbanism' as a practice with methodological implications in the field of Urban Studies and Planning. TransUrbanism is an emerging field of study/intervention in which social and action researchers, artistic performers, activists, architects and planners come together to contest space and to openly re-negotiate power structures in public space.

156 Within this framework, we briefly reviewed two research projects in Tallinn and in Helsinki. Ourcity as well as Tallinn's interventions were Urban Artistic Interventions open for public use and abuse. Both practices constituted a soft urban design approach that paid off. The empirical data retrieved during Ourcity as well as Tallinn's interventions was the biggest return, along with the trust that both authors gained regarding the unknown public. Ourcity and the alternative master plan for Meri-Rastila in East Helsinki provided a testing ground for socio-spatial development by opening up the planning debate to more local people.

As Europe is in a phase of de-growth and decline, Trans-Urbanism could help us conduct research while livening up our cities on limited resources. Trans-Urbanism also may represent an excellent framework for urban planning to regenerate itself, shifting from its procedural/technocratic origins (Bourdin, 2012) to capitalise on emergent urban activism (i.e. DIY urbanism, public space activism) that often better advocate public interests.

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