

## World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 in 5 Cities

### Helsinki - Pins and treasure chests

**City of Helsinki's WDC contact person Henri Kähkönen wrote down his thoughts on the design year on October 24th 2012. Henri is working as a Business Development Advisor at the City of Helsinki's Office of Economic Development.**

Now down to its final stretch, the World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 year has offered plenty of experiences also for me.

Portuguese collectors, for example, have asked for WDC Helsinki 2012 pins and Turkish design students for internships. A Polish textile start up approached me with a request for finance. I have hosted Chinese design delegations, written articles, held presentations and planned some concrete projects.

I have been no stranger to criticism, either. After one particular presentation on the design year, there was an advice from the audience to try out a real job. And then there was this journalist who demanded, after examining some financial figures of the year, whether there is a good amount of design-themed cocktail parties throughout the year.

The effects of the World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 year are visible on at least three levels: in design-driven projects, in events spicing up the city's everyday, and in international media visibility for Helsinki.

In my opinion, one of the most significant projects in the World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 programme has been the Designer's Treasure Chest. In it, every preschooler in the metropolitan area and in Lahti gets to participate in 10 hours of play and games with a design perspective.

Instead of carving a stool or blowing a glass vase, the children might think about, for example, the life cycle of a shoe produced in the Far East. They giggle when told that someone has even put time and effort into planning how a toilet works.

According to parents and teachers, the kids have enjoyed. Perhaps some of them will be inspired in the future to design Finnish tractors or wellbeing services.

The costs of the design education scheme for a total of 11 000 kids come down to approximately six Euros per preschooler. For day care centres the programme is free of charge. The best part is that one Treasure Chest can be opened more than 1 000 times, meaning that

future generations get to enjoy the toolbox for the same price.

World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 has hosted on average four events per day, a total of 1 400. Of these, 90 percent have been open for all and 80 percent are free of charge. The Pavilion, a temporary event and meeting space that remained open from 12 May to 16 September, welcomed some 80 000 visitors – despite of the chilly summer. The Cable Factory's HI Design showcase of achievements in Finnish industrial design attracted over 20 000 visitors. The Everyday Discoveries exhibition at Suvilahti was visited in a short time by 15 000 citizens from families of small children to seniors.

The visibility for World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 has been huge all over the world. All in all the value of more than 6 000 international media articles has been – like the credit card company would put it – priceless.

During the year, Helsinki has been written up by top international magazines and newspapers such as The New York Times (USA), El País (Spain), Die Zeit (Germany), Daily Telegraph (UK), La Repubblica (Italy), Svenska Dagbladet (Sweden) and Wallpaper\* (UK). Ming Pao Weekly (Hong Kong) covered Helsinki in 32 pages. The distinguished Japanese architectural review a+u dedicated 72 pages to the WDC Helsinki 2012.

The articles are all about Helsinki and its citizens; local products, restaurants, sights, culture, buildings – not just World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 projects. The publicity brought on by the WDC Helsinki 2012 has by far been the biggest thing in city marketing for Helsinki in the 21st century.

Still, the design year 2012 has not been just accomplishments and success stories. The challenge and multi-dimensionality of the project were well foreseen already in the beginning of the year. There were amazing events that were left with a small audience. Several good projects never made it to realisation. In hindsight, many things should have been made differently.

The World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 legacy will be made in the coming years. Many projects will live on. City departments have learned more on user-driven planning. The experiences from this year will make it easier for everyone to use design methods in the future.

All in all, World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 has created expectations that will have to be met by the city of Helsinki, together with its partners. Fewer pins and more treasure chests. That is what is needed to remain a Design Capital forever.



Photo: Mikko Uro / City Planning Department

### Espoo - Visions and miracles of growth

**Helsinki-based designer and city garden carpenter Niko Riepponen summed up the City of Espoo's design capital year as follows. Niko's column was published 31st of October 2012.**

The World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 year has been marked by projects touching all Espoo-dwellers in one way or another

Variety has been plentiful. The city has been designed into a new place both through the local spirit of doing things together, as well as through the giant T3 project that is reshaping the whole Espoo skyline. It is depicting that even the Mayor of Espoo has turned to preschoolers for advice in governance. All projects big and small have held on to the same ideal: of creating better understanding of citizen needs, and of creating an even better Espoo to live in.

The design year in Espoo was kicked off with excitement to share. There was a clear idea that through the World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 projects the city would be handed over to the citizens. To those who wish to participate, and to those that already call Espoo home.

One thing that design year activists have in common is a vision of something better. A shared and clear understanding that the World

Design Capital Helsinki 2012 year allows a new type of thinking. There have also been challenges. I remember clearly how the first visions of design left us all in question marks. Without the education to match, with very few tools and with next to no resources we decided to go forward, towards a better Espoo, towards a better future. It has been thrilling to follow this build-up of excitement.

One of the year's brightest diamonds has been the Gardens for All project, whose energetic and positive visionary Saana Karlsson I have had the pleasure of getting to know during the past year. Saana is one of the people who are building a better Espoo with small-scale yet impressive strokes. Gardens for All has a literal aim to boost citizen wellbeing through urban gardening. Gardening crates were erected in the Jousenkaari neighbourhood in the spring-time, giving a chance to pursue a refreshing and ecological hobby. Feedback from citizens speaks of communality and wellbeing. The former thicket has now been transformed into a beautiful and enjoyable place. This is exactly how living environments should be shaped.

My own Shape your World project has also addressed the aims of a better Espoo for us all. Users – kids of all age groups – have been eager to play their part in making schoolyards

and kindergarten play areas better. Especially the children, and their desire to actively impact their surroundings, have been in a league of their own. Frankly, a more motivated and motivating design team is hard to even come by. Not even to mention the energy, attitude and joy of life that really go into working in the yard.

Behind a successful project there is always a large group of people. Colleagues who do not have the words “none of my business” in their vocabulary. I am still astonished by the open-mindedness shown for the project by Espoo Public Works. Thanks to these bold individuals, the Shape your World and Gardens for All projects will continue next year in new locations.

The grassroots action done together with the citizens is truly something to be proud of. When you can read the feedback directly off of citizen faces, it is easy to rest assured of the positive impact. And that is why I can safely say: Thank you to the World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 year in Espoo for even more smiling faces and happier people. Maybe the memory of a ripe summer tomato or fixing the schoolyard is still on their minds.

## **Vantaa - Everyday design, urban planning and design windows**

### **City of Vantaa's Project Manager for WDC Lea Rahkola-Kauranen shared her thoughts on the city's design year on 6 November 2012. Lea works for the City of Vantaa as a Cultural Manager.**

I literally jumped on a moving train when I was appointed the Vantaa project manager for World Design Capital Helsinki 2012, alongside my other duties.

The application process for the design year title was already well on its way and I must admit that the first months in the position seemed somewhat chaotic. I kept wondering how perceptions of design could vary so much from one individual to the next. I remember how, in several meetings, I asked around for a sound explanation of ‘design’, even nearing a point of exhaustion. I admit to filing design under industrial practices. That did not fit the concept of “Kunst (an sich)”, not even to mention the design of services.

When the themes of World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 began to crystallise, my own excitement started to grow with some personal revelations. I came to understand that design processes could be applied to much more than just objects and appliances. It was a splendid thought to place the focus on good everyday living and service design. These themes

seemed a good fit to the mindscape of Vantaa-dwellers.

We rented a space in Tikkurila right in the middle of a construction site. Over the course of the year, that space has been home to the City of Vantaa's own design year projects through exhibitions and workshops. We have also lent the space to the neighbouring Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, which has come up with several exciting and innovative design year projects.

World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 projects by the City of Vantaa have largely been long-term initiatives tackling regional issues, urban planning and everyday living, often through perspectives that not all residents have yet learned to link with design. For exactly this reason, we wanted to set up a concrete space where residents of Vantaa are welcome to come and discover the design year projects of their own hometown.

The pop up space entitled Vantaa Design Window has served its purpose well. There have been many visitors, even taking into account the location in the middle of a construction site. The very idea is to be “in the middle of change”! In a few years the current building hosting the Window will most likely not be there anymore, and the whole Tikkurila area will look very different – like a real city centre!

Visitors have been very interested in our exhibitions. One in particular must be mentioned, the ‘Central, Residential and Workplace Environments Exhibition’ carried out in four parts. It portrayed city planning in Vantaa with its extensive viewpoint of better living environments for residents, taking into account aesthetics, functionality and sustainable development. A thematic highpoint of the exhibition series was the international seminar on Suburban Design. In addition to presentations and Power Points, attendants got to discover the surroundings by foot to learn about the urban planning solutions with the guidance of architects.

The year's projects have all created something new and durable. Not always tangible and directly visible, but an eye-opener to discover the world around us through a scope of design. The Designer's Treasure Chest for pre-schoolers, led by the City of Vantaa, has been received very well. A continuation is in the planning, so that new pre-schoolers in Vantaa and elsewhere in Finland could share the educational joys of the Treasure Chest.

Vantaa is currently developing several new residential areas. For example, in Leinelä the first bits of the area's art concept are under way, and the concept will develop while the new residential buildings are being completed. On

the other hand, it is also clear that old centres must also be renewed to better face the needs of modern society. These projects will go on for a long time to come.

The passing year has taught that design is certainly more than just objects. A memorable experience was our visit to the Karlsruhe Fair in Germany a year ago. We were showcasing Vantaa as a part of World Design Capital Helsinki 2012. Many people had not yet even heard about the said title, but when we told them that we wish to broaden the definition of design to encompass services, it was a revelation for many. The Finnish take on design sparked up many interesting conversations. Even though the trade show days were long and tiring, it was quite a boost of energy to be a part of redefining design.

The design year can evoke emotions also on a smaller level. I was on call at the Design Window one Saturday in August. I could see a man walking his bicycle back and forth outside the spacious windows. He was clearly hesitant to enter. Finally he found the courage to step in. At the time, we were exhibiting reformed city centres. The man carefully read all the exhibition material and when he was leaving, he coyly muttered something about being a part of the theme year and the Reformed Centres project. When I inquired more, he told me that he had been renovating the Vantaa City Hall by laying out some of the groundwork in the courtyard. He was truly proud of being part of a World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 project. I was left with a smile on my face. Here in Vantaa, many have been touched by the design year, also regular city-dwellers. Which is great.

## **Kauniainen - The world in a little village**

### **Martina Harms-Aalto, the head of WDC team in the City of Kauniainen, wrote a column on her design year experiences on 16th November 2012. During 2012 she was also the Vice Chair of the Kauniainen City Board.**

One might hastily claim that Kauniainen – a small garden city with under 9 000 residents – has little to do with the World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 project. On the contrary. In our perspective Kauniainen has celebrated the design year consistently. Naturally taking into consideration its size. To us the year has been about ideals and a sense of enjoyment, as opposed to how things look – more about the citizens and their challenges, and less about memorials and one-off events.

In addition to participating in several projects shared between the World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 cities, Kauniainen decided from

early on to seek those aspects that seemed important and worth striving for. In these times of redrawn municipal lines and renewals that to us come across as irrelevant, it felt important to examine the first steps of our city and think about what initially led to the shaping of what is now Kauniainen. At the same time we wanted to look forward and ask: what sort of a city do we have in our hands in ten years' time? We summoned together a group of experts to review these questions with respect to a garden city's history of ideologies, urban geography, the past and the present day. In dialogue with citizens, we discussed topics of connections, cohesion, independence and language. Did our conversation touch upon the subject of design, even in the broader sense of the word? While this was left unclear to some, the dialogue was – and remains to be – indispensable.

During the course of the year, Kauniainen has tackled many relevant and also concrete questions surrounding service design. A good example is that of Wellbeing360, a development project which invited students, architects and community planners to consider the challenges inevitably brought on by the aging of the population. The starting point has been that, for example, senior services offered by municipalities should be designed from the full perspective, and not through individual solutions in accessibility and conversion of housing. Community planning should therefore take into account the needs of the aging citizens broadly. While spaces and activities would be planned comprehensively (meaning, in a better way), there would be more contact points between age groups. As is often called for in speeches.

Kauniainen Music Festival is one of the ambitious projects that did not receive official World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 status, even though the application and justifications were sound in our opinion. This was a decision we had to accept yet it did not stop us from bringing out the event as one of the highlights of the design year, a meeting point for world-class performances, music and thoughts. The collaboration of creatives and artists gently led by professor Seppo Kimanen even evolved into a string of concerts organised in the studio of Yrjö Kukkapuro. Such interesting encounters!

Time flies. The holiday season is almost here. What remains of the design year? At least on my own behalf, a greater understanding of the importance of building our surroundings on a sustainable base. And an even greater understanding of the Finnish relationship with the surrounding nature, a luxury in many Central Europeans' eyes. This close-knit relationship with nature is also visible in one way or another.

er in what Finns call good design. This line of thought is part of our national romanticism and something that every Finn – and why not also a foreigner – can appreciate and absorb.

So what about Kauniainen? What legacy will the design year leave for us, a garden city of less than 9 000 residents? This is a question that the residents must answer by themselves. Time will tell.

## **Lahti - Makers of the design capital**

**Heini Moisio, City of Lahti's Project Manager for WDC, reviewed the city's design year in column that was published 21 November 2012. Heini is working as the Head of Communications at the City of Lahti.**

The first World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 idea day was held simultaneously in all five cities three years ago.

On a sunny day in Lahti over 400 ideas on a functional design capital were collected. At the top of list was an idea of public tap water stations. As the best groundwater in the country is filtered through the Salpausselkä ridges, well-designed water stations could be scattered around the city for passers-by to fill their water bottles or to have a sip of refreshing water. In autumn 2010 a group of industrial design students from Lahti University of Applied Sciences, Institute of Design were asked to design a public water tap.

In February 2011 five plans for water station were presented to citizens in the form of the first exhibition hosted by the Muotohuoltamo Centre. Three designs were then chosen based on feedback from exhibition visitors. The three prototypes were tested out in authentic urban environments: in the harbour, on the market square and in a park for families. The water stations have received plenty of positive feedback from city-dwellers. The coming winter will show which model will best sustain heavy use and the changing seasons.

The public water stations are a prime example of design capital activities in Lahti. The

Radanvarsi ideas competition is in progress for the development of the area along the railway tracks in the centre of Lahti. The Radanvarsi call for ideas is one of the biggest architectural competitions of World Design Capital Helsinki 2012. All entries along with images and descriptions can be found on the website [www.radanvarsi.fi](http://www.radanvarsi.fi). Evaluations are openly exhibited online to continue the active discussion on the future of the area. Citizens have the opportunity to partake in choosing the winner and thus have an influence on the urban landscape to come.

The participation of Lahti residents in the Radanvarsi ideas competition is a pilot run as a part of the design year programme. Together with Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra, it aims at testing out interactive ways to activate citizens in planning their living environments. Citizen views and ideas were charted out in the Lahen D panel as well as several workshops held in, for example, day care centres, schools and nursing homes. Lahen D is a product development panel first started in August 2011. It comprises citizens of Lahti and has an aim to map out the user experiences and viewpoints needed to develop different product, service or, for instance, urban planning initiatives.

The City of Lahti has already picked design as a strategic future component several years before the joint design capital initiative. Utilizing design methods has gained results with companies in the Lahti region. Now during the event year, local industrial design and designers have been even more visible. World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 programming in Lahti includes design education and industrial design projects, as well as initiatives to develop the city centre. A common denominator has been the active participation of Lahti residents. A thirsty young biker en route from the Renkomäki district to Lahti Harbour came up with the idea for water stations and has since seen his idea come to life. Stacks of equally good ideas now lie on the tables of designers to shape the future of Lahti.