

Effectiveness of design activities at the City of Helsinki

A joint project between the Department of Design of Aalto University's School of Art, Design and Architecture and City of Helsinki
Report of the analysis phase 30.9.2019

Public summary for distribution

Helsinki

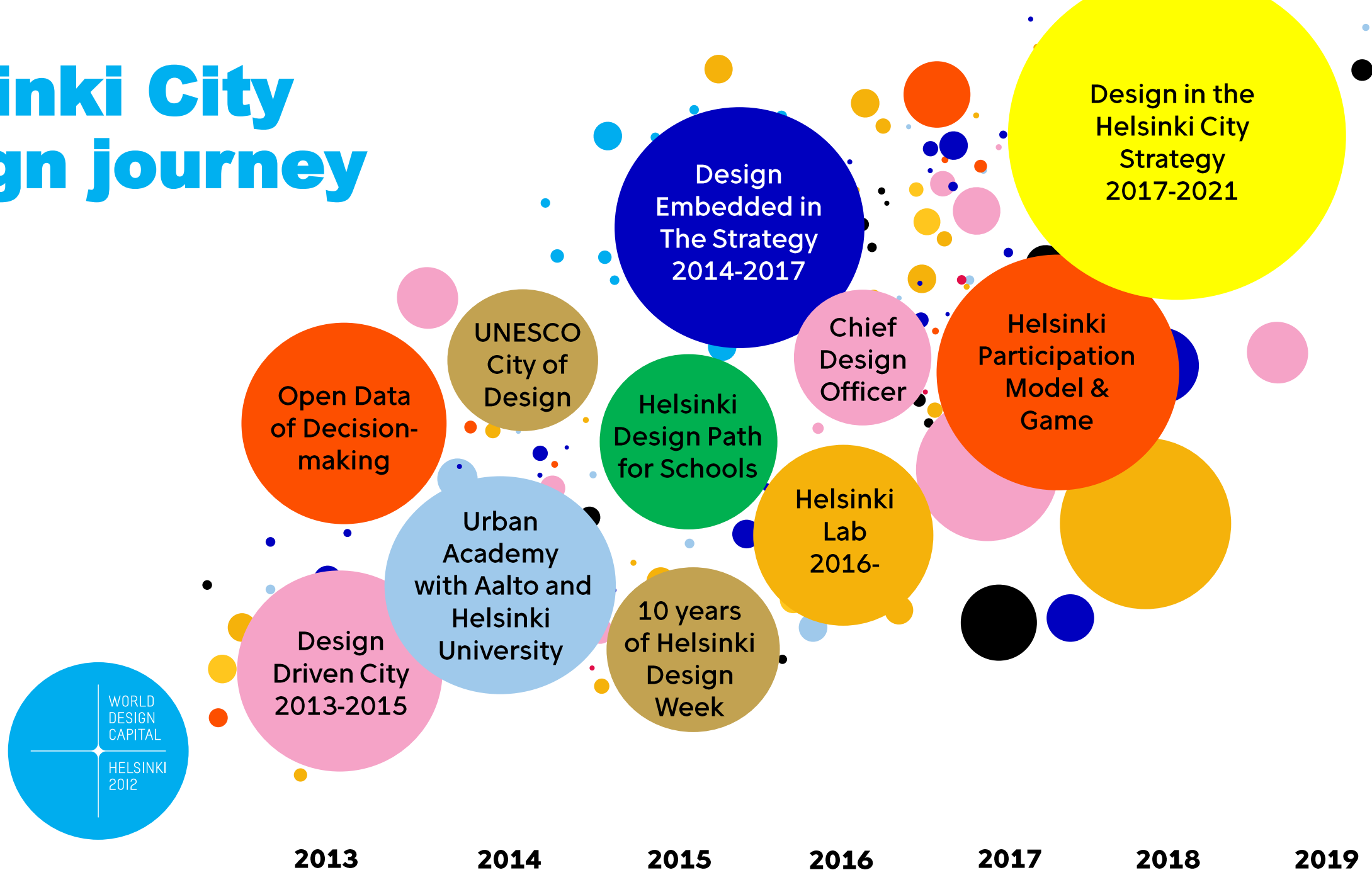
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1. Background

- The objective of this exploratory project was to map the City of Helsinki's design activities and structure them in recognizable categories (typology).
- For close to ten years the City of Helsinki has used design at various levels of the organization, in different types of projects and implemented by varied actors.
- Nevertheless, there is limited knowledge of design's dimensions, contents impact and effectiveness, and this knowledge is dispersed among different actors.
- For the exploratory project, 13 representatives of the city organization were interviewed, also various materials and research information were utilized. The typology was developed jointly by Aalto University experts and key City personnel.
- The working group at Aalto University was composed of Tuuli Mattelmäki, Sampsa Hyysalo, Kaisa Savolainen, Antti Pirinen and Andrea Botero (starting August 2019).
- The working group at the City of Helsinki was composed of Päivi Hietanen, Meri Virta, Elise Rehula and Anni Leppänen (starting August 2019).

Helsinki City design journey



Helsinki City Design Ladder

1

Design of
the built
environment

2

Design
as a
development
method

3

Design as
a holistic,
structural
approach

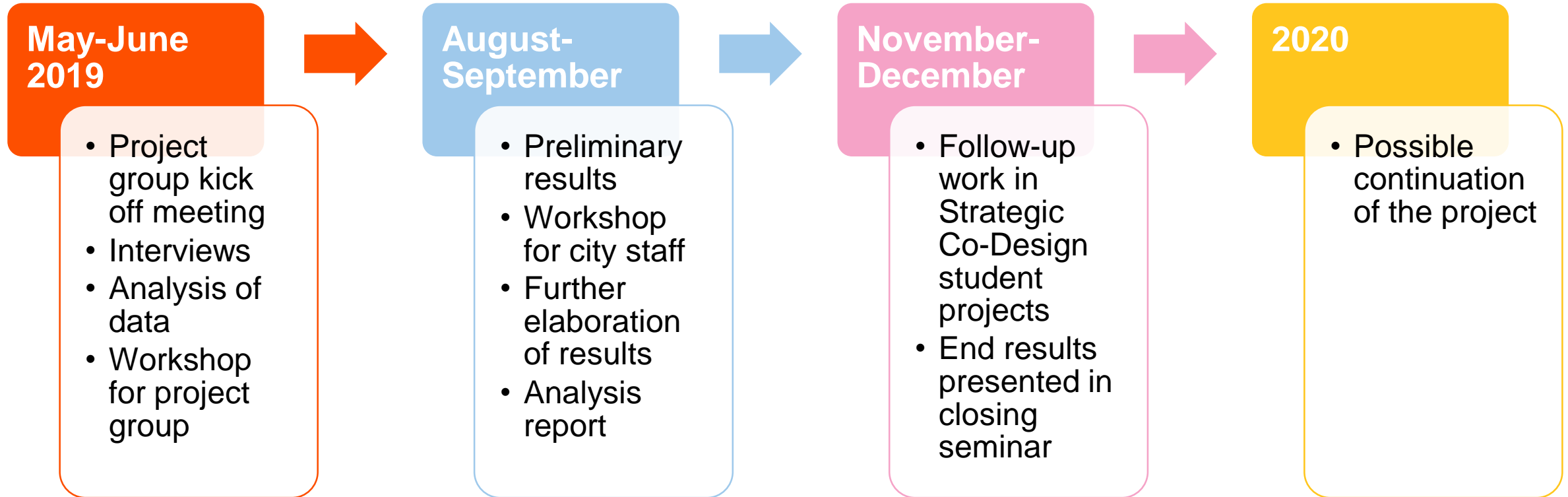
4

Design thinking
as a strategic tool
for creating
shared visions
and alternative
solutions

Helsinki

Based on Danish Design Ladder model

2. Phases of joint development project



3. Features of the design activities at the City of Helsinki

3.1 Features of City's design activities

These include activities known as design thinking, service design, human-centered design, participatory design, city design*. Relevant features include:

- 1) **User-centered approach**, empathy, customer experience and employee experience
- 2) **Improvement orientation** – emphasis on operational processes and their structuring; joint collaborative production that crosses roles, fields, or organizational boundaries
- 3) **"Design doing"** – testing and doing together by means of rapid prototyping, iterating, structuring, learning, ideating, concretizing and synthesizing together, among others
- 4) **Plurality of voices** – participation in both design processes and results

*term city design was used when the City organization was the facilitator in the design project.

3.2 The big picture of design activities

Strenghts

- ✓ City of Helsinki is a global pioneer in the utilization of design in the public sector
- ✓ Design utilized broadly and for many different objectives
- ✓ Design, participation and citizen-oriented approach as parts of the City strategy
- ✓ Significant successes also in large-scale projects
- ✓ Significant opportunities in improving customer understanding, developing internal work practices, experimentation, increasing of plurality of voices and in city branding

Challenges

- Strongly variable degree of design maturity at different levels (project, personal and organizational)
- Wide range of challenges; biggest issue relates to the splintering of design actions and 'adding' or 'appending' design to projects
- Better targeting and systematic and long-term planning are central for the future design activities

**There is a need to clarify
what design is for the City
of Helsinki and how
projects of different types
can be assessed and
developed**

4. Map of design activities

4. Design activity map



The map illustrates the **different types of design activities in the City**, which support design thinking and the cultural change of the organization into a human-centered one.

A single project can contain elements from different types of design activities.

4.1 Design of services

- Improving or redesigning existing services: digital and physical services and physical environments
 - ✓ Most important category with majority of projects
- Design of new services
- Design as part of larger construction and spatial projects, aiming often at new operational concept and cultural change
- Development of internal services
- **Case example: booking service Varaamo**



4.1 Design of services: key considerations regarding effectiveness and assessment

- Solutions are end results that have external or internal users: customer value, customer satisfaction, and price and quality of service are key to effectiveness
- Customer perspective and participation are design's leading core values
- Solutions also create brand value and processes have an impact on design competencies
- Central to success is how precisely the design has been identified in the procurement and tendering processes
- Project scope and amount of design work significantly impact the magnitude of the challenge
- Control of the design project over its results: the whole project or just part of a bigger project?
- Novelty of the services designed is a significant variable
- Ownership and sufficient internal resources are critical - the development and implementation of a service design solution cannot be outsourced

4.2 Design in the organization's development

- Updating and streamlining the City's development processes
- Increasing customer insight and user understanding for future projects
- Creating design tools for the City, like user profiles and participation games
- Co-operation and project planning beyond individual service developers; development of operations within and between City Divisions
- Leadership in change and managing change
- **Case example: Service design for internal development discussions**



4.2 Design in the organization's development: key considerations regarding effectiveness and assessment

- Development of design skills through the development of design tools and processes
- Developing staff skills can play a key role in solving the project's aims
- In this case, services' results and impact criteria are not the same
- Number of staff involved and the understanding, insight and know-how generated by involvement are crucial
- Increasing management and middle management know-how is a challenge
- Impact may manifest in the new operating models and in the smooth implementation of subsequent projects

4.3 Design in strategy and branding

- Future foresight work
- Strategic scenario work
 - ✓ participatory models
 - ✓ clarification of the visions of the different Divisions
- Visibility of design and its use in branding
- **Case example: Scenario work in the preparation of the City Strategy**

The Most Functional City in the World

Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021



4.3 Design in strategy and branding: key considerations regarding effectiveness and assessment

- Design is used to generate more interactive strategy work, to concretize the future opportunities and clarify messages in communication
- Design is a newcomer among more traditional strategy tools and processes
- It is in the nature of strategy work to seek new perspectives and new tools

4.4. Design in participation and collaborative work

- Designing for citizen engagement and participation
- Designing idea competitions and sparring of solutions
- Citizen and customer communities
- Legally binded participation and consultation
 - defined by law as obligatory
- Design as part of Living Lab activities
- **Case example: Participatory budgeting**



4.4 Design in participation and collaborative work: key considerations regarding effectiveness and assessment

- There is a significant amount of co-design between citizens and different stakeholders: this requires practical arrangements and tools, development of which can be, in whole or in part, service design*
- Co-design often requires from the City organization the sparring of results and further refinement into proper service concepts
- The direct participation of citizens and stakeholders in the development and implementation of services can be called 'profound' participation
- The City also has a lot of statutory participation; involvement of residents defined in the law as obligatory

**Note: co-design for example in citizen- and customer communities or in living labs is not necessarily design as such*

4.5 Design in the built environment

- City design concepts and exceptional design initiatives
- Service design for spatial planning: comprehensive transformations of service environments
- Workplace development projects
- Design manuals for designing the physical environment
- **Case example: Oodi Central Library**



4.5 Design in the built environment: key considerations regarding effectiveness and assessment

- Seeing all design of physical structures as city design or service design makes no sense
- Design concepts differ from traditional expert-driven urban, landscape, architectural, spatial, and construction design
 - ✓ user-driven, often interactive projects
 - ✓ integrated design of both the new service concept and the new space
 - ✓ emphasis on the functionality and visual quality of the end result
- Design in the built environment category emphasizes projects in which the main solution is physical

4.6. Design know-how and training

- Design coaching and training
 - ✓ Design training projects
 - ✓ Design projects in which staff training is the main objective
- Implementation of service design know-how and lessons learnt
- Design as a learning tool (design education)
- **Case example: Helsinki Lab activities**



4.6 Design know-how and training: key considerations regarding effectiveness and assessment

- Service design training has led to new and more agile development culture in the Organization
- Many ideas and concepts that have been produced in training and implementation tools, have been put into practice; their number, quality and implementation is an additional evaluation criteria
- Number of staff involved in training and the understanding, insight and know-how generated by the involvement are crucial

5. Opportunities and challenges of using design

5.1 Design opportunities: summary

- 1) Increasing customer insight and empathy
- 2) Development of operating models
- 3) Experimentation
- 4) Plurality of voices
- 5) Support for city brand and communication

5.2 Design challenges: summary

- 1) Challenges of the City as an organization
- 2) Challenges related to the design field
- 3) Design leadership and organization in the City
- 4) Challenges of the Divisions, variable level of design maturity
- 5) Procurement and allocation of design services
- 6) Implementation of design results and managing change
- 7) Measuring the impact of design

6. The next phase: development of indicators for design activities

6.1 Challenges in measuring the impact of design

- When projects have no measurable objectives, those cannot be measured.
- The assessment of impact requires a benchmark, with available data.
- It is difficult to separate the service design components for measurement.
- What to measure: the effectiveness of the design project or the effectiveness of the service?
- What to measure: the assumed impact of a service concept or the impact of a real service?
- How to measure change in operations, user-inspiration and customer experience?
- Effectiveness not only on users but also on the achievement of the City's strategic goals?
- How to develop, for different types of projects, an adequate combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators?
- How to integrate design metrics to the metrics specific of the divisions?
- How to finetune metrics for project use and activity management?
- Measuring effectiveness as a living medium for learning, planning and self-guidance?
- Linking metrics to leadership and orientation of development investments?
- Linking metrics to planning and political decision-making?

6.2 Factors influencing design projects

Factors influencing a design project may include, for instance

- Framing of the design brief – openness, conception of time, focus on solution
- Scope of design – e.g. from customer experiences (customer level) to organizational practices and culture (organizational level) to an entire service system and a collaboration network (cross-organizational level)
- Framing of the results and deliverables of design – should it produce ideas about concrete changes and their visualizations (e.g., improvement ideas, touch points, customer journey maps); or service concepts (often presented as scenarios, videos, service blueprints and process models); or better future strategies (e.g., a set of experience goals and future road-maps)
- Scope for diversity – e.g different competencies, stakeholders network, different actors' distribution of responsibilities
- Framing of collaborative activities – is it about articulating experiences and building mutual understanding or rather about generating future ideas together
- Decision power possibilities – manager or customer, expert-driven or democratic
- Outcome expectations: can it include new mind-sets, processes and culture, future project ideas or other changes gained in the participants?

(See: Lee et al. 2018. Design Choices Framework for Co-creation Projects. International Journal of Design; for longer treatment of these issues)

6.3 How to assess the impact of design?

- Limited, cohesive set of features to evaluate so that, internally and externally, in all projects it is known what and how to evaluate: careful consideration given in advance, not post-hoc
- Suggested evaluation framework: 7-10 evaluation criteria, which are clear and easy to keep in mind
- Each project type has its own profile, which is always specified for each project
- Take into consideration that the city design changes and expands over time and that project profiles will require updates every two to three years

6.4 Preliminary criteria as starting points 1/2

1. Desirability of a solution by the clients/customers (external or internal)

- Increase in customer numbers (or decline if the goal is to reduce the load on a service)
- Increase in customer satisfaction
 - Quality of customer feedback
 - Recommender score

2. Improvement of process quality

- The total cost of producing the service OR the unit cost of the service produced
- Enhancement of internal operations: working time per service unit / improvement in the interaction between units
- Improvement of process quality: number of errors, number of exceptions

3. Transformation of operating culture

- Management's understanding of design: how widely management knows of and speaks about design, and leads it
- Staff competence: How many staff members have taken part in, and generated, know-how
- Experienced and objective participation of citizens and stakeholders

6.4 Preliminary criteria as starting points 2/2

4. Employee experience

- Increased satisfaction and commitment to Helsinki
- Increase in new skills and understanding

5. Co-development and implementation

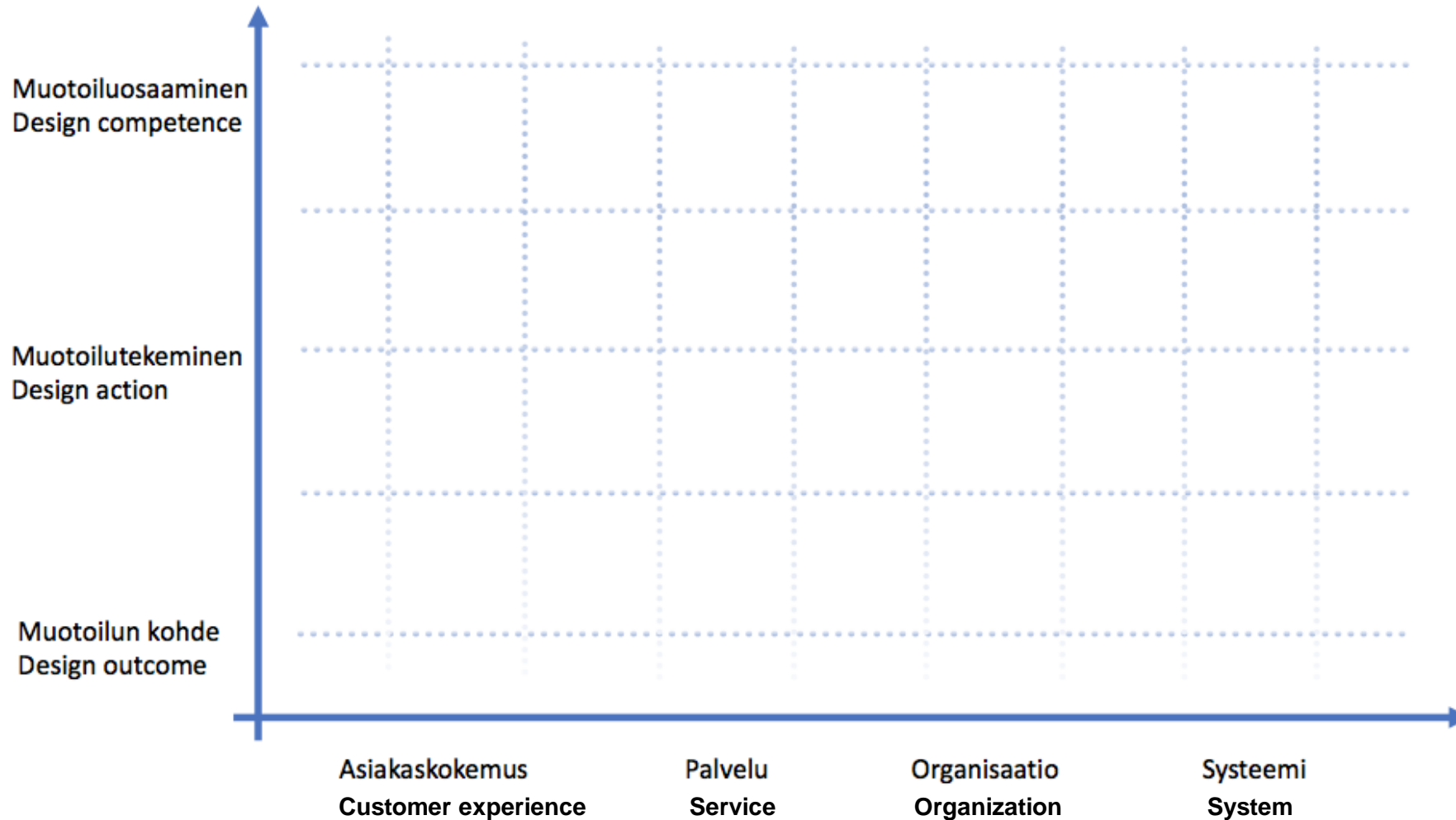
- The degree of collaboration between different bodies and divisions in developing a service
- The amount of co-operation between different bodies and divisions in the production itself of the service

6. Perceived involvement of citizens and stakeholders

7. Brand and communication value

- Creation of a positive brand image; its reach, aptness and attractiveness to the target audiences

6.5 Focal points



Evaluating effectiveness is eased by outlining and defining the starting points as well as focuses and emphases of design activities.

Main aims, targets and complexity can vary significantly also by project size.

More information

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