

## CREATIVE CITY PLANNING: INTEGRATION OF CULTURAL ASSETS IN PLANNING THE VIBRANT CITY

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**Abstract:** Cultural-planning has been a popular topic among urban planners as a strategy to regenerate city centres. Helsinki started adapting the concept of *creative-city*, a prodigy of *cultural-planning*, after being named the *European Capital of Culture* in 2000. This annual crowning is parallel to the embracement of the *creative-city* paradigm in North America, where the societies are diverse and polarised. The complexity of social value in the North American city may have found refuge in this concept to unite its urban landscape. More homogeneous Helsinki is readopting its industrial core for creative industries thus initialising city's intention to exploit this impulsive regeneration to embrace its cultural diversification. Our research focused on Arabiaranta, a regenerated urban district where the School of Arts and Design forms the nucleus of a new urban living. City authorities took progressive steps, removing constraints to implement *cultural-planning*, by reforming land-use planning, zoning, and organizational structures to create socio-culturally diverse urban spaces. The place-specific strategy improved the liveability of Arabiaranta without compromising its morphology. Our study, based on qualitative research, documents a case of adopting the concept *creative-city* to instigate regeneration within a city-wide master plan.

**Keywords:** Creative-city, Cultural-planning, Urban-regeneration

### 1. Introduction

“Cultural resources are the new materials of the city and its value base: its assets replacing coal, steel or gold. Creativity is the method of exploring these resources and helping them grow” (Landry, 2005)

Cultural resources are no longer considered as mere symbolic goods, and as such not a burden to the city. They are now promoted as city's potential economic resources. It is a fact that each city needs to plan their nurturing so that these resources would spring the benefits. However, cities have found it difficult to integrate planning for culture with urban planning policy and practice. Many North American cities have very strong culture departments that seek to develop projects that not only attract tourists but also utilize cultural resources and amenities to attract educated-knowledge workers. Helsinki persuaded this educated-knowledge segment of the society as potential users of their rejuvenated urban areas. In this pursuit, the city planners placed their hopes in the cultural strategy that would allow the city to reap benefits from leveraging unique aspects of heritage and culture, and more importantly the re-invented *spirit of place* in the post-industrialist era.

The city of Helsinki was crowned the Cultural City of Europe in the year 2000. Being one of the youngest capitals in Europe, this was encouraging to the city authorities to revamp their city planning strategies. This was parallel to the unprecedented urbanization resulted by the

post-recession economic growth inspired by the information technology in early 1990s. The city had to build new housing to accommodate the new comers, and at the same time plan for those massive buildings that were vacated by obsolete industries and services. The concept of *creative-city* was in the horizon, and the city that was opening to outsiders decided to test the concept in order to facilitate Helsinki's new image as a socio-culturally diverse urban space. The understanding that art and design are cherished in the Nordic society was a reason for the city authorities to bank on this idea. George Dolivo, the Director of Helsinki European Capital of Culture 200 later pointed out "... we saw significant changes in citizen attitude and involvement. People suddenly realised the importance of culture, and they became active audiences as well as participants and creative partners" (European Capital of Culture, 2009). The practice of this strategy paid dividends in 2015 when Helsinki was named the Global Design Capital. Our paper, emphasizing Helsinki's shift from *creative-city* to the city of creative citizens, studies one particular urban district, where these cultural strategies played a vital role in urban planning.

The creative-city discourse was introduced by Charles Landry in 1990. There were many other contributors like Bianchi (1991), and Grogen and Mercer (1995). However, Richard Florida (2002 and 2005) can be noted as the author who popularized this idea. These authors collectively contribute to our understanding of the shift of the post-industrial economy from manufacturing to knowledge-based approach. Landry (2005) particularly emphasizes that dealing with these changes requires a re-assessment of the way cities operate in response to the emergence of neoliberalism and governments' downsizing arts funding. Evans (2001) notes that the arts communities in the US, UK and Australia began to justify their economic worth by claiming that the arts provided economic and lifestyle benefits that improved the vitality of cities in 1980s. Based on this research, Evans (2001) further argues that a unified urban agenda that incorporated cultural planning would achieve a range of social, economic and urban goals. Having tested various ways and means to revitalize post-

industrial city centres, UK developed cultural strategies as a way of economic regeneration that began pave the way to broaden the links between culture and urban regeneration. It is a fact that culture gives the urban space its essence thus making it liveable. Therefore, without protecting the cultural values attached to those places by the society, these urban spaces will fail to continue as urban containers.

Florida (2002) goes one step further by emphasizing the rise of the creative class in the city and by identifying a different relationship between creativity and class that includes educated workers of various fields. He argues that this broadening of the creative class enhances the competitiveness in the revitalized city districts, and therefore the economic success of the present-day city depends largely on the proportion of these knowledge-based professionals living there. In Helsinki, it was highlighted that the members of this creative class demands not only living spaces but also entertainment spaces, cultural activities and happening, and such institutions. It must be noted that aiming at one particular class may backfire thus creating post-modern utopias if the economic strength of the citizens is not identified. Jenkins (2005) agrees that attempts to utilize cultural institutions as an economic development strategy have been highly contentious and have had mixed results.

At the same time, Landry's (2005) idea of cultural planning has gained resonance as he proposed the cities to challenge their existing organizational structures and traditional ways of doing things by implementing greater flexibility of governance. Landry (2005) notes how conditions needed to be created around which people could think, plan and act with creativity and imagination to address urban problems. For him, creativity entails thinking more holistically about city making and creating new organizational structures to make this happen. Landry (2005: 13) notes, "A pro-condition for good city-making, the creativity of the creative city is about lateral and horizontal thinking, the capacity to see parts and whole simultaneously as well as the woods and the trees at once".

The policy makers in Helsinki seem to have followed Richard Florida to a considerable extent, as they paid more attention in attracting creative industries and knowledge workers. Their idea was to exploit the new residents' appreciation of cultural institutions and activities and the particular genius-loci of the place that has evolved with the well-reputed design ceramic-ware factory and the School of Arts and Design. They also seem to have adopted Charles Landry's vision of restructured city governance and decision making. Even the program director, Dolivo finds the lack of such structures as the biggest challenge he and his team had to overcome (European Capital of Culture, 2009). Our interest is to find how far this cultural strategy and the focus on the knowledge-based social class have been successful in Arabiaranta.

### 1.1 Cultural Planning and the City

Mercer (1991) and Evans (2001) have recorded that North American, European and Australian cities embraced cultural planning as a process that involves leveraging cultural assets to support city revitalization. They, having defined cultural planning as the strategic use of cultural resources in urban and community development, find how these cities had the common goal of integrating culture sector across all aspects of municipal planning. Just like any other municipality, culture and arts policies were dispersed across various departments in Helsinki. This also made it difficult to categorize the cultural resources, their values and how they can be integrated in urban planning to get the maximum benefit. Therefore, the most initial step was to unite them in one department and then develop an assessment pattern. The city authorities were well aware of the elusive nature of the concept and mixed results received in North America and Europe. They were also aware of the fact that their city was smaller, less diversified but the proportion of the creative class was much higher than their counterparts. The case in which the museums and art galleries replaced the abandoned structures but became too expensive for the locals alarmed the city authorities though the buying power of their citizens were much

higher. It was then all important to understand those resources: for example this youngest capital had less historic built fabric.

The location of culture and cultural products within a municipal structure often reveals city's strategic objectives. A survey conducted by Grodach and Loukaitou-Siders (2007: 356) finds that cities have subsumed cultural planning under economic development functions. This move is a clear signal that cultural planning, the culture in general, is viewed as a tool to enhance and improve communities and cities by creating economic returns. One of the most important issues they discovered was that most cities do not have an overarching body to implement cultural strategy. This was the case of Helsinki too. However, the city created a new agency to plan the culture city initiative thus bringing most of its relevant departments under one umbrella and intensified public and professional consultation in late 1990s. The creation of various projects, including the Modern Arts Museum and the revitalization of two most prominent urban buildings from city's Olympic past, fittingly reflect on Helsinki's initiation of the cultural strategy.

Markusen (2006), Markusen and Gadwa (2010) have given many detailed organizational studies of how cultural plans are actually implemented in order to illuminate not only the opportunities but also the limitations of implementing cultural planning for urban revitalization of urban districts. Municipal administrative structures can work to either hinder or improve cultural planning goals. According Markusen (2006:15), "... major challenge at the local level is the fragmentation of responsibilities for cultural and arts policy and planning across three distinct agencies". The regulatory tools that enable or hinder artistic space are located within planning departments and run by people with city planning degrees, who may or may not have expertise or experience in urban design or cultural policy. Markusen and Gadwa (2010: 384) note that the control of the creation and management of cultural space is housed in economic development departments, and the policy required to sustain these is housed in culture departments, which have little interaction with either of the other two.

The archaic notion that cultural products would only be valued by the rich and the elite as well as the consumerism that attaches a price tag for each product seem to have hindered the potentials of cultural strategy in many cities. The lack of communication across departments contributes most to a rather compromised implementation of cultural planning. Each agency of department operates under a specific mandate, using unique tools and operating with a limited scope. The fragmentation of cultural and arts policy across distinct agencies or departments is problematic for a unified vision of cultural planning. It is difficult to integrate the *creative city* idea and policies into the existing planning framework in such a framework. Therefore, establishing a new agency and transferring all relevant departments to that agency was a positive start for Helsinki's initiative.

## 1.2 Creative-city Initiative in Helsinki

Finland has been quite a social homogeneity for a long time. The National Statistics show how the Finnish cities got socially and culturally diversified recently (2014 Statistical Yearbook of Helsinki). The location in the far North and the unfriendly weather would have discouraged cultural invasions in Finland. However, this situation started to change in early 1990s as the global political issues and the diversifying Finnish economy made the country more attractive to foreigners. At the same time, Helsinki started to attract more Finns from other parts of the country too. It was clear that most of these new comers represented the knowledge-based social groups. The city understood the needs for opening up new residential districts and employment areas with distinctive characters to cater to these new social assemblies. The reputation of the architects and planners was dependable in trying out new strategies to make these distinctive urban districts. Going along with the global trends, these modern classists responded to the city's call for building a city for the creative class. Most interestingly, these planners made a point to bring art, culture and design to the core of all these new habitats.

Having become a shop-window for the Soviet Union, the country had no economic hardships until early 1990s. The Finnish economy took a very hard blow as the global economic downturn was coupled with the dissolution of the former USSR in 1991. The closure and downsizing of many factories, as they were no longer globally competitive made Finns looking for new avenues for economic recovery and found the most dependable refuge in communication and software industries. The city authorities were looking at ways and means of regenerating those extensive built spaces abandoned by the factories and urban districts around them productively since then. The crowning of the city as the Cultural Capital of Europe encouraged them to think of a brand-new strategy- cultural strategy for urban planning. On the other hand, the appreciation of arts and design has been a key feature of the Finnish society.

The Finnish Society of Crafts and Design initiated in 1875 shows that the Finns have a history of arts and design. Later this society adopted the name Design Forum and established as the prime organization in arts and design. The emergence of several design products such as fabric, glassware, ceramic ware, etc. and internationally-known artists and designers such as Jean Sibelius and Alvar Aalto also testify to this appreciation of arts and design. It is possible to see how far their works are included in presenting the city. Helsinki University of Industrial Arts at Arabiaranta was started in this background. It has been a known fact that the artists and craftsman were putting their stamp on their products and customers looking for those stamps before purchase. Our interviews find that possessing and exhibiting Aalto vase, a glass flower vase designed by the celebrated architect Alvar Aalto, has become a way of showing off one's belonging to an intellectual minority: an *elite class* that understood the value of design.

The idea of testing the concept of cultural planning as a strategy to revive the urban space and the economy was mostly based on this appreciation of arts and design, and as such the belief that there would be a demand for high-

quality design. As a whole, the city made an important case build upon the particular genius loci of each district, and made attempts to frame their new revived identities using the cultural images of those places. Naturally, with its orientation to arts and design, our case Arabiaranta was to be built as the arts and design district.

## 2. The case of Arabiarnata

Arabiaranta or the coast or the shoreline of Arabia bay got a special recognition with the establishment of Arabia ceramics and glassware factory in 1871. There had been a lengthy discussion whether the factory was named after the bay or the bay was named after the factory, thus showing the significance of the factory. The factory grew and later became the biggest ceramics factory of Europe, but more importantly won a reputation for the production of high quality design products. Later, the listed buildings of the factory was repurposed to accommodate the Helsinki University of Arts and Design and the Helsinki Design Museum. By the time the idea of building the arts and design district in Arabiaranta was mooted in late 1990s, it was already known to be an area of a creative class. In addition to those involved with the university and the museum, there were some who frequented the area for its modest art-based industries.

Among the most striking policies, the requirement of investing 2% of the cost of all modern buildings on principle of art and art related industries is noteworthy. In the Arabia region, the works of art reflect the history, nature and the unique tradition of Finnish design. The Art and Design City Helsinki Ltd (ADC Oy) was founded to manage the project, and its developing the information network structure and Helsinki Virtual Village services, also the basis for this particular site. The mid-rise low-density urban district is filled with modest buildings that are partially devoted to art and design. The built environment, in buildings, public yards and premises, the consideration given to arts and culture are actively exhibited. In addition, the strength of arts and designed is introduced to the residents and visitors through

educational institutes such as the performance art of Metropolia, Helsinki Pop & Jazz Conservatory, and the university. The educational institutes offer *The Masters of Arts Festival*, a major event along with the Artists Nights has become the biggest single event in the area. Advanced and modern projects and experiments in apartment building design and business operations are typical for the Arabia district. The price of properties in this district of Helsinki is higher than the average in Helsinki due to its proximity to nature and modern infrastructure. Those who moved to the district enjoy free internet (10Mbit/s) due to the district's comprehensive fiber optic network dedicated to the residential building in this area.

Today, Arabianranta is a home for 10,000 people, a workplace for 5,000 and a campus for 6,000 students and professionals. As a residential district, Arabianranta is heterogenic, with different types of housing: modern loft buildings, city villas, and the Plus Koti (Plus Home) concept and homes for groups with special needs such as Loppukiri (community housing for active elderly people), Käpytikka (residence for mentally disabled juvenile) and MS-Talo (House for people with Multiple Sclerosis). The Arabianranta district has formed a "laboratory" for housing and since 2007 there has been testing for services and products called *Helsinki Living Lab* together with the residents.

The 300+ enterprises and 4,000 employees in the field of creative industries and enterprises that are mingled with the residences and educational spaces is a stimulating urban landscape. After the educational institutes, the biggest private sector employers are the Iittala Group and Digia Oyj. The unified campus area of Arabianranta consists of 6 educational institutes. The universities are the Aalto University's School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Arcada University of Applied Sciences and Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. The upper secondary vocational institution: Swedish Prakticum and Finnish Heltech, and the Helsinki Pop & Jazz Conservatory where about 1,000 students study rhythm music are the other such institutions. Educational institutions and students can use

and benefit from this platform in their own research projects, one example of this is Helsinki Living Lab project sponsored by TEKES. This continuous experiment involving the dwellers and inhabitants has fine-tuned city's way of dealing with the housing issue.

Arabiaranta is also a good example of the place of contraries and unusual combinations: *old and new, nature and urban city, industry and residence, studying and peace, art and technology* are a few to mention. The true nature of art that is represented by the Chinese Yin-Yang seems to have come alive in this urban residential district, due to the successful cultural planning. Arabiaranta informs how the Helsinki's vision for cultural strategy necessarily found balance between living and working. One of the residents who moved into the housing district with his young family compared the entire residential district to a large live-work unit. He notes, "... we certainly live here, raising our children and working but also enjoying the best of Finnish arts and design products". The residents seem to enjoy the heterogeneity of the society made of students, professors, artists, designers, technologists, etc. though some residents are not happy with the idea of becoming an elitist social niche.

However, the story of Arabiaranta will have a new chapter as the Aalto University plans to move its School of Design to Otaniemi, where the main campus is. This will certainly create a huge vacuum in the urban landscape, leaving the large factory spaces empty. More significantly, this move means the loss of the student population. The residents consider having those students, who occupy the public space throughout the year, as an asset in terms of making the urban district a living place.

### 3. Concluding remarks

Arabiaranta, a kilometre long redevelopment area along the shore line, is a vital part of the industrial re-development on the eastern waterfront of Helsinki. The project included a housing area and many new work places in design industries. The urban district became known to the public by its massive Arabia

factory complex, which today houses the School of Arts and Design and the Helsinki Design Museum. As such, the urban district had the best opportunity to be redeveloped along the *creative-city* idea. The addition of new multimedia industries combining voice, text, image and data started establishing Arabiaranta as a vibrant living space in Helsinki by combining new businesses, services, and shopping with an established knowledge-based society. The experiment of mixing design, technology and management as well as research and innovation is the core reason to attract and sustain the knowledge-workers to its housing. Living in Arabiaranta seems to be replacing the possessing and exhibiting well-known design product. Many residents feel that they live with arts and design. Identifying the emergence of this creative class and responding to their desired place of living in an urban district that already possessed the spirit of creativity is the first step towards the success of this district. The next important step was formulating a framework and institutional structure to implement the idea of *creative city*.

Creativity and innovation are the historical lifeblood of any living city. Today they increasingly come out of the synergy between cultural and technological innovation. As such, understanding the strength of cultural strategy in urban revitalization is becoming more important. Our interest was to understand how Arabiaranta focused on its particular synergy and interpreting it within the socio-cultural context that has always looked for innovations. As a new housing area, it sought to establish a link between information technology, cultural production, design and urban creativity through innovation. The use of public spaces to give special attention as a possible interface that fosters the necessary synergy between these elements, and social innovation in relation to the new information and communication structures and the creation of new working places, especially those live-work units, found the supportive urban milieu and urban context. It was expected to create a new quality of public space by bringing together diverse elements of technology, arts and design and to facilitate for the new knowledge-based society. The city's aim of experimenting to use Arabiaranta a pilot

project for a new urban milieu of the emerging creative urban society, one can say, has been

achieved.

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