

DESIGNSTORIESFROMHELSINKI.FI

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**Stories and information about  
developing cities through design.  
This is a short summary for  
readers with very little time.**



## PART 1:

# Background and concepts of design thinking

### The design shift: From functional objects to better solutions

Design has for a long time addressed objects and buildings. Now its methods are harnessed for the sake of better cities. Society no longer has the resources to keep up the current forms of public services, and at the same time services supplied by the private sector have raised the bar higher in terms of customer expectations. Design can be used to create entirely new, better solutions to meet the needs of society. Design know-how is especially useful in foreshadowing and anticipating shifts in a society where there is less time for slow-paced research work. Cities need quick experiments and a bold touch to try out what could work, instead of preparing endlessly before taking action. Designers must, however, understand and consider the particularities of the public sector and take the time to explain the benefits of design in a new context.

#### INTERVIEWS WITH:

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**Marco Steinberg**  
Strategic designer



**Tiina-Kaisa Laakso-Liukkonen**  
Secretary General at International Design Foundation

### Design thinking in Helsinki

The City of Helsinki is known around the world for a well-designed curiosity: design thinking is embraced and put to practice on all employee levels, including management. Staff is trained to put design practices into use, yet there is still a need for more know-how. Professional training de-mystifies the design process. This way, public officers can better understand the hands-on benefits of design thinking. Current hot topics in Helsinki include integrating design methods into administration, and considering design education in the primary school curriculum. One-off initiatives are not enough to find a proper foothold for design. Instead, design methods should be a firm part of service structures. Only then can design stick to the inside layers of urban development.

#### INTERVIEW WITH:

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**Jorma Lehtonen**  
Design Agent,  
Design Foundation  
Finland

### Smart-city thinking

The smart city has public services that are easy and fun to use. Smart-city thinking means to enhance city infrastructure through technology. Gathering and evaluating information about the city and its citizens can be used to analyse the city's functions, and to make well-informed decisions. We can, for example, gather large amounts of traffic data which can then be used for planning public transportation and non-motorised traffic, such as bike lanes. Citizens can also freely use open data and build their own applications, to develop the shared cityscape and even make a business out of it.

#### INTERVIEWS WITH:

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**Jaakko Salavuo**  
Director of Information  
Technology and  
Communications,  
City of Helsinki



**Santtu Von Bruun**  
Head of the  
Competitiveness and  
International Relations  
Unit, City of Helsinki

## User-driven design

User-driven design refers to products and services that have been produced in constant interaction with the future users, right from the initiation of the project. This is the way to shape services that correspond to an actual need. There are many methods to use, such as asking the user directly what is needed and wanted. When services match needs, it is possible to save costs by replacing outdated and under-used services with ones that fit current needs better. Public offices can take the first steps in user-driven design by listening to their own employees. They know their customers well and can give the first good insight. The next step is to listen directly to the customers. Employees involved in development work should be granted the most honest and up-to-date information: they must be informed on what is the question at hand, what is the time frame, are customer experiences injected directly into the development work, or are they only a baseline for further development efforts.

### INTERVIEWS WITH:



**Turikka Keinonen**  
Professor of Design,  
Aalto University



**Päivi Sutinen**  
Director for Services  
Development,  
City of Espoo

## Participatory design

The idea behind participatory design is that the users should also be involved in the design process. The user is seen as an individual who tries to actively express his or her needs on what the solutions could entail. There is a belief that hierarchical specialist knowledge or bureaucratic decision-making are not the only ways to develop a city. The current discussion addresses participatory planning more and more, and the process involves end users as well as other groups. Participatory design should be of interest to public officers as it not only strengthens democracy, but also has potential to cut costs. As an example, participatory city planning has led to less complaints from citizens. If participatory design methods are not yet familiar to a city office, it is possible to seek guidance from the outside.

### INTERVIEWS WITH:



**Tuula Jäppinen**  
Innovation Adviser,  
Association of Finnish  
Local and Regional  
Authorities



**Tuuli Mattelmäki**  
Professor of Design,  
Aalto University

## How to speak about design?

**Clear vocabulary.** Let the audience know what you mean with 'design' and related terms. Design refers to both thinking and doing. Service design and city design imply developing services and cities.

**Don't be afraid of the word 'design'.** A new term and concept becomes familiar only through using it.

**Release early and often.** Stay in constant dialogue with people and listen to users.

**Speak in simple terms.** Avoid specialist jargon and complicated concepts. Use examples to illustrate your story.

**Design is more than icing on the cake.** For design to reach its full potential, it is essential to work beyond the surface level.

**Gather and follow facts.** Proper statistics make it easier to justify the benefits of design methods.

**More is more in communications.** Design is an everyman's right, and not just for designers. Everybody dealing with city development should learn about design! Designers should be able to explain their work in simple terms, and to justify the value added for city development.

## PART 2:

# Examples of good city design

1



### **Many actors, one customer: Stoa and the new era of cultural centres**

The cultural centre Stoa in eastern Helsinki was assigned a top-notch design team in spring 2015 for a development project running two months. During this experiment, the city offices housed at Stoa tested out different forms of collaboration together with experts from three design agencies. The aim was to build a unit that could offer the best possible services to the shared customer. The most important lesson learned was to recognise the true needs of the customers and pinpoint the collaborative bottlenecks that tend to slow down the process of meeting these. The experiences were shaped into a model that also other cultural centres in Helsinki could use. The Stoa house now has better signs, an empty space was repurposed as a study lounge, and a chess tournament was organised after a wish from the young community. The experiments were executed quickly and the project was considered very successful.

2



### **Information belongs to everyone: Helsinki Region Infoshare**

The cities of Helsinki, Vantaa, Espoo and Kauniainen have gathered city-related data and shared it openly since 2011. Anyone can access the data through the HRI website and use it for one's own purposes. The idea is that open data can motivate the development of new applications and services. Open data is the benefit of everyone. The HRI database already has over 1200 open statistics and other portrayals of data. More is added constantly as cities gather and produce data. Open data has also brought transparency to decision-making, leading to enhanced democracy. The City of Helsinki has estimated that just the act of opening up the data has cut costs by 1–2 percent, as public procurement is now done more consciously.

3



### **Espoo's public services gather under one roof: The Iso Omena Citizen Service Centre**

The shopping centre Iso Omena ('Big Apple') in Espoo's Matinkylä will host a new citizen service centre. The joint space places a large variety of public services together. The upcoming citizen service centre will include library, child health, mental health and substance abuse, health clinic, laboratory and medical imaging, social insurance, and youth services, as well as a City Service Unit. Citizens can, for example, renew their passport and visit the child health clinic in a single trip. Customer interviews proved that the clientele of the citizen service centre is very diverse and the need for guidance varies. The service designers of the project focused on making sure that the different viewpoints of customers are taken into account. It was important that representatives from different city offices collaborate and share information.

4



### **On-demand public transport is a hit: The smart-bus Kutsuplus**

Citizens expect public transport that is easy, well functioning, reliable and comfortable. The Kutsuplus smart-bus operated by Helsinki's Regional Transport Authority is exactly this. The service design process of Kutsuplus has been based around the user experience from the very beginning. Kutsuplus matches different public transport functions; vehicles and their routes, passenger data and communications. The smart-bus runs on-demand in real time and the innovation has proved a huge hit – and a noteworthy challenger for private cars. The service paves the way for a new style of user-driven public transport.

5



### **A museum renewed through design: Helsinki Art Museum HAM**

Located in Helsinki's Tennis Palace building, the Helsinki Art Museum went through a rigorous renewal process. The surface area of the museum doubled, and units that were spread out came together under one roof. The refashioning included everything from the museum shop to the storage lockers. The final touch was a new name: HAM, Helsinki Art Museum. The refreshed art museum pinpointed three motivation-based user groups: art lovers, pulse feelers, and communality seekers. The new museum and its functions have been planned around the needs of these groups. The execution is comprised of hundreds of details ranging from sign posts to the museum shop. The design team included city designers, museum staff and a brand group made up of top marketing experts.

6



### **For us by us: Helsinki's new central library is a collective dream**

Set to overlook the Töölönlahti bay in 2017, Helsinki's new central library will be an open, public space that invites everyone to enjoy activities, education and culture. The new central library will house a cinema, music studio, restaurant, an open co-working space, a "Citizens' Balcony", and many more features – not forgetting a traditional library space, of course. Citizens were invited to share ideas on the roles and services of the new library well before the construction work was started. The Central Library Friends network was set up to weave a web of dreams, bringing participatory planning to the core of the project. These co-creation experiences are now being spread inside the library network as a best practice.

7



### **Tackling youth homelessness through experimentation: A Home That Fits**

Youth homelessness is a structural problem troubling many countries. Helsinki decided to solve this with the help of designers and quick prototyping. Run by the City's Youth Department and guided by a City Designer, the initiative A Home That Fits repurposes unexpected spaces and buildings into living quarters. The city is full of unused spaces fit for living. For instance, a sea container can be turned into a temporary home for a young person for a few months, and retirement homes can find a new form as cross-generational communal housing. The designer's task is to transform new locations into functioning communities. At its best, many problems can be solved at the same time: a young person finds a home, unused spaces discover a purpose, and many young people get to participate in developing housing and communal living.

8



### **Good design hides or highlights: Stara and Helen**

Helsinki's in-house construction and maintenance provider Stara and energy generator and distributor Helen have learned through design that responsibility is the key to winning hearts. Sometimes it means being visible, sometimes staying out of sight. Both companies have a great impact on their surroundings. As its name suggests, Stara's Tidy Construction Site project tidies up construction sites. This is done by communicating clearly to residents and passersby about the site at hand. Helen uses design know-how by staying in the shadows: minimising interferences to city life caused by energy production. Introducing user-driven thinking into a producer-driven organisation calls for a shift in culture, which is a long-term task.