

Challenging competition brought fresh ideas for developing the Helsinki region

The jury for the Greater Helsinki Vision 2050 ideas contest felt that the competition assignment proved challenging for the participants, and that the best entries brought innovative and fresh ideas for developing the Helsinki region. The goal was to find new and open-minded residential, land use, and transport solutions for developing the region.

The population of the Helsinki region will grow from 1,3 million to 2 million within the next 50 years. The amount of required new building is so great that it enables developing the region's overall structure in a way which strengthens the region's position and competitiveness as one of the Baltic Sea region's leading cultural and technological centers and an appealing residential and business location.

The competition was organized by 14 towns and municipalities of the Helsinki region: Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, Kauniainen, Kerava, Tuusula, Järvenpää, Nurmijärvi, Mäntsälä, Pornainen, Hyvinkää, Kirkkonummi, Vihti and Sipoo, together with the Ministry of the Environment.

The competition was an open, international planning competition. Even by international standards, it was exceptionally sizeable in terms of set goals, the size of the planning area, and the prize money. The first prize is 160,000 euros and altogether a sum of 500,000 euros is awarded in prizes. There were 86 accepted entries.

The jury's chair was Mayor for City Planning and Real Estate Pekka Korpinen. Professional judges named by the Finnish Association of Architects SAFA were professor Helka-Liisa Hentilä and professor Trevor Harris. Professor Peter Arche functioned as the jury's foreign member.

Climate change and ageing as megatrends

In the entries, the central megatrends that planning for the metropolitan area must take into account were seen to be climate change, ageing population, the rise of environmental and health awareness, ethical consumership, the diversification and individualization of lifestyles, change in the nature of paid labor, and the increase in work-based mobility.

The global role proposed for the metropolitan region (Greater Helsinki Region) was most often that of a hub for flights to and from Asia. The rise of St. Petersburg and the whole of Russia was also seen as a possibility. The metropolitan area was even positioned in some cases as an idyllic, safe and clean living environment of the St. Petersburg commuter area. In most cases, however, the role was seen to be that of a self-sustained city region belonging to the group of Global Top 50 Cities, with its basis in ICT, advanced logistics, and travel, and with nature as its main pull factor.

The basis for planning of the metropolitan area was mainly either the emphasizing of the identity and character of different parts of the area, thus striving for a regional whole, or a given fully encompassing theme of urban planning applied throughout the region. The most common model for regional structure was the so-called finger model complementing the current structure. Particularly interesting were entries, which aimed at adapting the current finger-like structure into a grid with new transverse area reservations, development corridors, or transport networks.

A wide variety of solutions were offered as the recipe for a sustainable city: organically growing village-like communities, garden city-type self-sufficient communities relying on rail transport, modernist, nature area-based tower block cities, suburb-type field-like areas enabling continued

growth, as well as modifications of traditional city centers alive with 24-hour urbanism. The most interesting entries did more than simply applied ready-made urban planning ideals to Helsinki; they were able to produce original solutions committed to the local landscape, climate, and lifestyles.

The most insightful entries to the competition were those which gave thought to complementing the communal structure and presented strategies and tools for complementing suburbs, route-side areas, and intersectional areas.

Transport on rails, living near water

In the region's transport solutions the emphasis was on rail transport. With regard to private car transport, the propositions focused mostly on converting the cars' power source or fuel type to a more environmentally viable one. The introduction of road tolls and car share policies was also proposed.

In some entries, the assumption was that in the future, environmental awareness will make living even more local, reducing mobility. One way of encouraging residents toward more environmentally conscious means of transportation could be a "climate bonus card", where a consistent preference for mass transit would bring various benefits such as free fares. A contrary perspective could be found in entries where the growth of air travel and especially air traffic to and from Asia was seen to be the foundation of all prospective regional growth.

The message relayed in nearly all propositions, however, was that the increase in the amount of traffic and subsequent problems can only become manageable through extensive investment in a rail transport-based transport network and restricting the growth of private car transport.

Some entries featured ideas on local food and biomass production, as well as on the reservation of land for urban agriculture and the prospective raising of edible marine life. Service innovations were few in number but rich in ideas: one example was the proposition for a mobile shop ('shop-on-tracks'), to be mobilized along with rail transport.

The most daring vision for the entire region's commercial life was found in a proposition for the region's future role as a Social Silicon Valley. This was to be accomplished through various social innovations created by extensive participation and the commercial, organizational, and business life rising thereof.

A qualitative factor for residential and living environments was in many entries seen to be contact with nature or water. The entries featured various modifications of waterfront living from landfill islands, off-shore living, and floating housing to waterfront areas filled with tower blocks and terrace houses. An increased diversity of living environment was emphasized and considered essential for attracting residents in the future.

On the basis of the competition results, a strong message was the need for new initiatives in the metropolitan area in terms of organizing and providing practical tools for regional governance and planning of land use. It was considered beneficial for the region's future that municipal borders are either completely removed or that inter-municipal cooperation is strengthened, especially regarding the planning of land use. The increasing of citizen participation was believed to increase the region's appeal, ensure sustainable development, and strengthen residential rooting.

'Emerald' wins *Greater Helsinki Vision* ideas competition

The competition received 86 accepted entries. The jury was unanimous in all cases. The entries raised to the prize category are of two kinds: those, which succeed in comprehensively answering all of the goals laid out in the competition assignment, and those which find an exceptionally commendable solution to a given part of the whole. The standout entries offer clear visions for the development of the region and complement each other. They offer a diverse platform for future visionary and strategic work.

The winner of the international *Greater Helsinki Vision 2050* ideas competition is an entry entitled Emerald. Its author is planning agency WSP Finland, whose competition team was led by architect Juha Eskolin. The jury characterizes Emerald as a visionary and versatile entry, which genuinely reaches into the future. The winner is awarded a prize of 160,000 euros.

The jury placed three entries on the shared second place. Each is awarded a prize of 80,000 euros. An additional five entries were purchased, each being awarded 20,000 euros. The following presents summarized bases for the choices.

Emerald is an innovative entry where building is directed both to supplementing existing community structure and to some completely new areas in the urban core and border municipalities of the metropolitan area. The consequent community structure for the whole region is balanced. The choice of focal points for growth is determined by rail transport connections. Residents are encouraged to choose more ecologically viable lifestyles through various active inducements. The service structure is considered from new, innovative, and ecological bases. The service innovations include the idea of a mobile shop that comes to the client. Public transport is proposed to introduce a "climate bonus card" which benefits the user through e.g. free fares for favoring public transport. The entry thoroughly considers the quality of life from the perspectives of residents of different kinds and ages.

The following three entries received the shared second prize

Boundary Strips is an exciting and innovative entry whose basic premise is to guide supplementary building to the seams of existing community structure and green spaces. This attempts to avert the dispersal of the community structure. The author is German architect Frank Görge.

Towards City 2.0 is an interesting and in a positive sense idealistic entry whose goal is to activate residents to create information, innovations, services, and entrepreneurship on their own initiative. Social innovations are presented to be the area's central developmental force ("Social Silicon Valley"). The members of the entry's creative team were architect Tuomas Toivonen, Hans Park and researchers Roope Mokka ja Aleksi Neuvonen, Finland.

Holistic Uniqueness is an entry whose strongest offering is its analytical part, convincingly outlining the status of Finland and the capital region on the European and global scale. The goal of regional development is set to be the sharpening and balanced development of its profile. This is sought through distinguishing the different parts of the region and strengthening their identities. The authors are German architects Oliver Seidel and Verena Brehm, Cityförster - Network for Architecture.

These five entries were purchased

Metroscape Helsinki is a logically realized entry based on four clearly presented growth strategies: balanced, green, diverse, and flexible growth. The natural environment is developed in the vicinity of population concentrations to enable active recreational use. The insight is simple but commendable: if we live more densely in the future, there is an increased demand and use for quality park and green environments. The authors are a group of architects, landscape architects and engineers from the HafenCity University in Hamburg.

Orlando is a professional entry whose basic land use solutions are commendably linked to the development of both existing areas and public transport. The region's community structure remains dense in the entry, reducing the need for mobility. The author is Italian TSPOON architecture studio.

(R)evolver includes an interesting analysis of planning tactics applicable in different situations, including the increasing of attainability and togetherness, combining of functions, and articulating of edge areas. These are illustrated with detail studies and related inspiring scenic visuals. The Finnish authors of the entry are landscape architect Samuli Alppi, architect Anssi Joutsiniemi and professor Staffan Lodenius from the Tampere University of Technology together with architects Antti Moisala and Kimmo Ylä-Anttila, Arkkitehtistudio M&Y.

Line TM is an exciting entry emphasizing a cross-border perspective. Its premise is a linear development corridor based on a super-high velocity international train connection. The creative team, project leader Isabella Pasqualini, professor Dieter Dietz and architect Daniel Pokora is from the Polytechnic School of Lausanne, Switzerland.

Thirdlife is an entry researched from many perspectives, where the metropolitan area's most important pull factors are defined to be the seaside and the sea. The center of growth is in the east, resulting in an anchor-like areal structure heavily dependent on coastal building. The authors are architect Marja Straver-Nevalainen and landscape architect Hans Dekkert from DN Urbland, the Netherlands.

Recommendation for further action

The jury recommends that the region's municipalities begin a common vision and strategy process emphasizing land use in the metropolitan area, utilizing the awarded entries and calling for cooperation with their authors. The planning of complementary building in different areas within the region, as well as other planning, should include cooperation with the authors of the awarded entries when possible.

Competition entries open for public

An exhibition of the winning entries of the Greater Helsinki Vision 2050 ideas competition is opened in conjunction with the award ceremony on December 14th 2007 in the lobby of the Helsinki City Hall, Pohjoisesplanadi 11-13. The exhibition is open until 14th January 2008, Monday - Friday 8.15-16.00. Extended hours until 17.30 on Mon 17th December, Mon 7th January, Tue 8th January, and Mon 14th January.

Non-winning entries are also open for public at Aleksanterinkatu 26 (2nd floor) 14.-21.12.2007, Monday - Friday 12.00-16.00, and on Saturday 22nd December, 12.00-17.30. The final hour is reserved for retrieval of the entries.

In addition, two public occasions giving an account of the competition outcome (in Finnish) are arranged, on Monday 7th January and Tuesday 8th January between 15.00-17.00 in the City Hall auditorium (entrance to the courtyard through Katariinankatu). In the former occasion, the competition's outcome will be presented by professor Helka-Liisa Hentilä, and in the latter by professor Trevor Harris.

Additional information

Paula Huotelin, Competition Secretary, architect SAFA, paula.huotelin@safa.fi, 09 5844 4224
Tanja Sippola-Alho, Deputy Town Clerk, Helsinki, tanja.sippola-alho@hel.fi, 09 3103 6024

All materials related to the competition can be found online at:
<http://www.greaterhelsinkivision.fi>