

PLACE BRAND. A CULTURAL APPROACH THROUGH PUBLIC SPACE

European cities are changing rapidly in partial response to the processes of economic globalization, mobility and European integration. The existence of transient people in cities has resulted in an intense flow of people and cultures leading to 'social and cultural diversity to most cities', challenging people's sense of identity and social relationships (Philips, 2007). These changes entail a respective transformation of public space where public life of both local population and visitors unfolds.

Public spaces in cities play an important role in urban experience, being the meeting spaces of cultures, politics, collective and individual trajectories. It is suggested to be an important and necessary platform for people's socialization through social and economic 'exchanges', building of group identity (Castells, 1996) and negotiations of relations among visitors themselves and the host society. This proposal aims at addressing the role public spaces are expected to play in the continuous and fast transformation of cities, as well as the impact of these transformations on the nature of public space as a shared cultural resource.

In such a context, where the movement of people, capital and ideas is more fluid than ever, we propose the strengthening of the "sense of place". On one hand, a strong "sense of place" - place brand - can facilitate competitiveness in the global marketplace and strengthening of the tourist industry; on the other hand, it can facilitate the local community to distill, articulate and strengthen its unique characteristics and unique culture.

Thus we explore alternative ways in which financial investment could support public life and development of the local culture through an understanding of "sense of place" as a dynamic process. As Massey argues, the notion of place is a process redefined in terms of social interactions which are dynamic processes.

Since places do not have boundaries in the sense of divisions that frame enclosures, they do not have unique identities and are instead a mixture of wider and local social relations, making them progressive and outward looking instead of self-enclosing (Massey, 1994).

Culture is understood as a notion, which, among others, includes the idea of something being constructed. Thus our proposal evolves around the concept of what can be referred as local products; ranging from traditional food and craftsmanship to their construction processes and techniques. As such, culture is proposed to be explored in three ways; the visual impact of the object, the participation in its production and in its experience through its use.

As a strategy small building units (both permanent and temporary) are proposed to be placed in the city's public spaces which will address the dynamic aspect of "place" and will host activities and uses related to Finnish culture and local everyday practices (traditional ice cream, Finnish beer, local food, environmental concerns, wood, sauna). The units are seen as innovative "start-ups" where traditional "ingredients" will be proposed in new, alternative ways; thus creating employment opportunities for people among various disciplines (crafters for workshops, entrepreneurs etc) and transforming rather than importing the local culture. They will be part of a production network - crafts, where locals and foreigners are able to participate either through the production process – organized workshops - or through the final product. As such providing the opportunity of interaction and exchange among people from different cultures. The units will be supported by the already existing network of businesses, ranging among transportation services, suppliers etc. For example one unit that is associated with construction of furniture, made up with the use of local timber can be supplied by existing factories and transportation arrangements; thus supporting the local economy. In this way an exchange is promoted between big companies and the new start-ups, ensuring though at the same time the independency of the latter.

The structure of the units will be made from local materials, timber, promoting in this manner an architecture with a relation to its place of construction and the elevations will be made out of glass movable panels in order for each unit to construct its own identity through the processes and tools that will be taking place in the interior. Each unit will be self-sustainable, incorporating bioclimatic systems such as rainwater storage tanks etc.

In addition they will be placed at strategic locations throughout the city in the street level in order to attract the passengers during their trajectories. Urban space will be studied and analyzed in an attempt to identify potential locations for both the permanent and mobile units. The placement of the structures will form a wider network, which will relate to existing city networks and layers (transport networks, public open spaces, public attractions, public services). This network will intersect at selected strategic points with important nodes of other layers (transportation hubs) in order to be supported by the already existing conditions. Sites such as the waterfront could be configured as an open public space, which could be designed in order to accommodate permanent or mobile units. Furthermore, possible sites could be neighborhoods where the use of the units will adapt to local characteristics and needs.

While the permanent units will accommodate uses that are active on a daily basis and they are in need of a permanent infrastructure (such as kitchens, tools), the mobile units will focus on activities that can be part of temporary activities of the city or as selling points of products deriving from the permanent units. For that reason a specific network of locations will be created incorporating certain architectural elements, which will signify their possible presence (floor materials or colors).

According to Mitchell, "The forms that cities take, the ways they function, and the mixes and distributions of activities within them have always been influenced very strongly by the capabilities of their underlying network infrastructures. (...)

Today, a new type of network infrastructure-high speed digital telecommunications — is being overlaid on cities everywhere (Mitchell, 2010).”

As the Internet and the use of online application have penetrated our everyday routines, we propose a set of online tools such as mobile applications and websites to support the proposing physical infrastructure of Helsinki. The units' positions will be recorded on digital applications (Apps). An additional digital network will essentially provide information on the location of each mobile and permanent unit, on products that will be promoted, on possible events etc.

We are thus proposing three overlapping networks – the permanent network consisting of the permanent units which is incorporated in strategic locations of the urban fabric with the aim of mutating the culture through participating processes (workshops, public meetings, seminars); the temporary network consisting of the temporary units which has the ability to host multiple events, thus adapt into changing social-programmatic conditions; and the digital network which aims at coping up with the fast pace of the everyday, achieving as such an immediate –real-time relationships between the units function and the people - locals and tourists. These networks correspond to three different times of the city, while working together in an attempt, to join augmented cultural manifestations.

The notion of augmentation is not only understood purely as a result of the different timings of everyday process but also as a cultural condition; the condition of what might C.Cavafy¹ calls in his poem as destination- end product. The persistence of the proposal on revealing and promoting people's participation in the processes of construction, techniques and reason behind the object creates an awareness that surpasses the object itself; as it connects the

¹ . Cavafis in his poem Ithaca, explains the importance of the journey over the arrival at a destination. Destination appears as something important to have, but for him the journey is the one that it's going to cultivate your spirit and make you wiser.

augmented understanding of the object with its reason. As such locals and tourists experience the culture of the place in multiple levels of meaning - Heidegger concept of multiplicity – rather than only the image of the thing – a condition which is widely spread due to the development of the social networks and the channeling of millions of pictures. Through this alternative experience locals and tourists are reintroduced to a deeper understanding of the culture of Helsinki, becoming part of the “place”. In the same manner which does not exclude the traditional form of art; usually related on the observation of a certain exhibit which its origins and reason might not be accessible, a new type of art understanding is proposed that it is directly related to the everyday life. This new understanding and gathering of multiple levels of meaning, allows and stresses the importance of the ταξίδι taksidi / journey ; an appreciation of the everyday which becomes accessible due to its unfolding in the public domain (units in the city).

De Certeau's (1984) distinction between strategies and tactics may help in understanding the proposal better. According to De Certeau, bodies of authority and power can use 'strategies' to create space while individuals use tactics in order to use such spaces so as to create their own private and usually short-lived utopias.

“tactics do not obey the law of the place, for they are not any more localizable than the technocratic strategies that seek to create places in conformity with abstract models. But what distinguishes them at the same time concerns the types of operations and the role of spaces: strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces, when those operations take place, whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces (Certeau, 1984)”.

Strategies are here seen as controlling or producing space while tactics are seen as using the dimension of time. Strategies define a proper space and can thus be located above it. In our proposal the permanent network act as the main strategic

move, which could be reinforced by the government in the form of financial investment boosting the start-ups for a sufficient amount of time.

On the other hand tactics (temporary and digital network) operate immersed in such a space without gaining the right or ability to have a panoramic and thus controlling relative position to it. It is tactics that visitors and locals may use in the already existing space in order to 'make do'. Opportunities for participation in production processes or for socializing through events and activities may appear in space but are actually offered through time since they may not be offered constantly.

The combination of both these strategies and tactics lead to a hybrid situation where a variety of actors, formal and informal - professionals and ordinary people – locals and tourists become part of promoting the culture and economic development of Helsinki through a process of unfolding and penetrating in the cultural production. Tourists are not only seen as temporary users which will just improve the economy of Helsinki, rather as active members that through the use of public space will get the chance to participate and transform the cultural production. At the same time this new approach to culture and public space aims to elevate the city into the global competitive market by strengthening its own character. The function of the three proposed networks alters the experience, understanding and use of public space placing it in the center of cultural production by elaborating on place brand.

“This, in the end, is what a city is: a complex of things and activities connected over space and time, form and managed by many different actors (Tonkiss, 2013)”.

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