

Excursion

Helsinki

2014



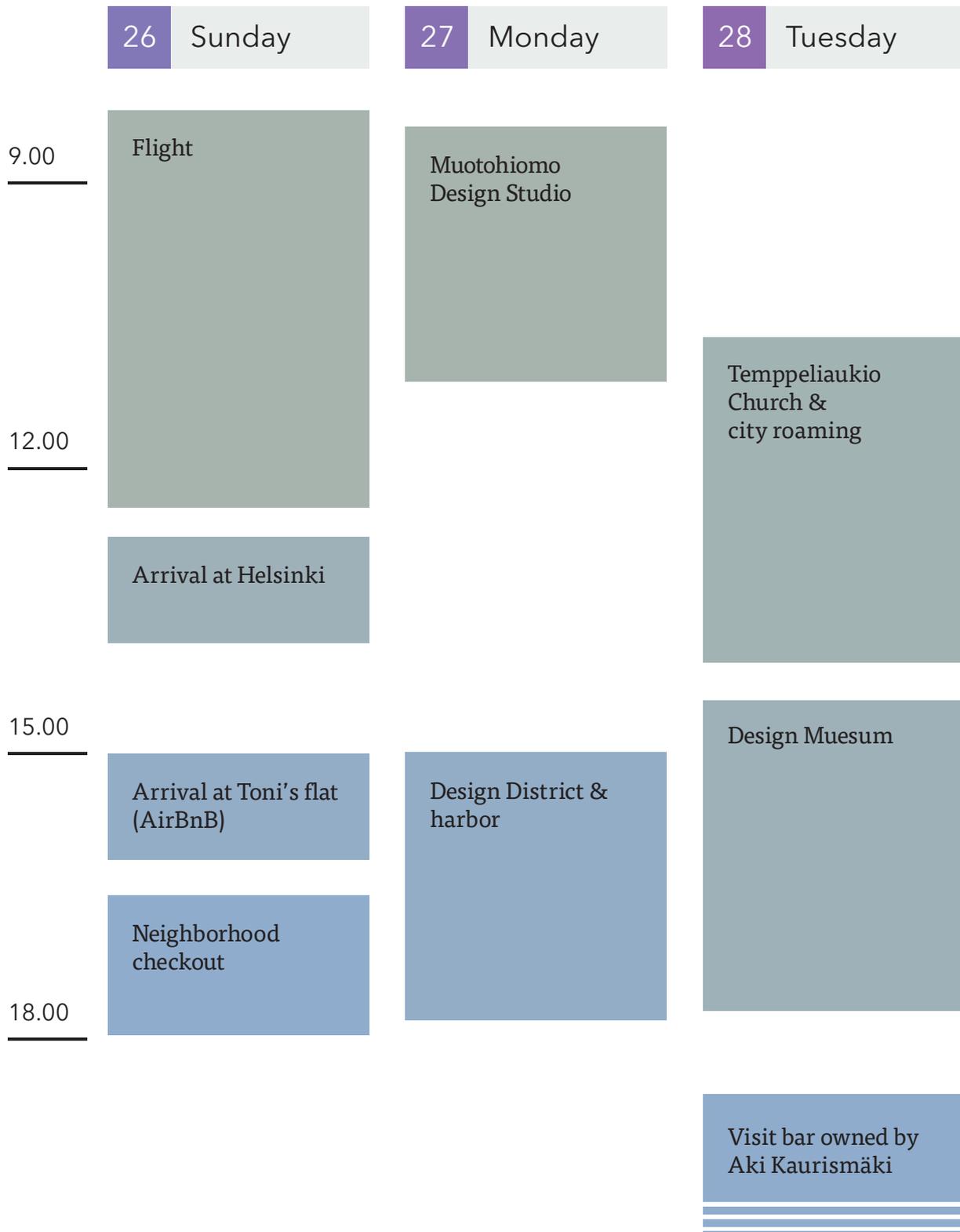
Introduction

From the first moment we heard about the possibility to do an exchange course we were excited and we tried to find a relevant city known for its design culture in Europe we could easily travel to. After some research we discovered that Helsinki has been the World Design City 2012, which was one of the reasons we decided to travel there. But not only this led us there, also the newly founded Aalto University, which is a partner school of the Zurich University of Arts (ZHdK) and the Finnish design scene in general, were points of interest.

After our unanimous decision we started to plan our trip to Helsinki. We rented a flat and found a relatively cheap flight quite easily. We sent several emails to different design studios in Helsinki asking for a meeting. Some of them replied while many didn't, so we made a week plan to organize the short time we spend in Helsinki. Additionally we wrote a short briefing document about Helsinki in which we pointed out our interests and placed some information about Helsinki.

When we arrived in Helsinki the first thing we experienced was the heartfelt and welcoming Finnish culture. In many ways we felt the Finnish people seem quite similar to the Swiss. With their humble, honest way – at times also very quiet and introverted – it often feels very much like back in Switzerland, but once a conversation is sparked and you start talking and having a good time over good food and a beer an amazing transformation seems to occur. A liveliness takes hold, always coupled with a great deal of hospitality and friendliness. During all our trip we have never been treated badly or perceived any sort of impoliteness. It was quite remarkable.

Timeline



29 Wednesday

30 Thursday

31 Friday

Studio of Alvar Aalto

Alvar Aalto University (Arabia, Design Department)

Studio of Mari Isopahkala

9.00

Kamppi chapel

Fish market

12.00

Alvar Aalto University (main campus) & Design Factory

Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma

Flight to Switzerland

15.00

Bookshop

Fennia Prize 14

18.00

Muotohiomo

The first design studio to respond to our inquiries was the **Design Studio Muotohiomo** which is located in Helsinki itself.

Muotohiomo design office founded in 1992. We apply and develop participatory design processes and skills in our projects as much as possible. Co-creating and brainstorming with people involved in projects, whether professional planners or end users, is rewarding and useful. We believe that combining different aspects and points of view from different people creates the best result.

We are about playfulness. Without humor and courage no new ideas get rooted. We are eleven creative individuals that play together and share the common ambition to make new things happen. We are devoted to create solutions that last and enrich our environment.

As we arrived at the small, white two-story house built in the typical nordic classicism style, we were heartily welcomed and taken inside by the lovely Riitta Palomäki. With a comforting smile she offered us a warm tea, which we all gladly accepted. We had been out in the streets for almost half an hour trying to make sense out of the hastily written notes on how to find the office. **The cold in Helsinki can be relentless.** Unless you wear an

arctic tent as a coat, it will strip you of all your warmth and energy. This is one of the reasons we refrained from going out unplanned to explore the city. When you have experienced the unforgiving cold, it is all about making plans to avoid it as much as possible.

The cold in Helsinki can be relentless.

We were still warming ourselves with the lovely tea, when **Pekka Toivanen** made his appearance. He is a slender man with fair hair, who has an air of determination about him. He is a fascinating person; he makes jokes but doesn't smile; he always seems very serious, but relaxed at the same time. We got together and Pekka gave us a lengthy introduction into what Muotohiomo does and how they understand and interpret design responsibilities. Pekka himself studied Industrial Design, though today he does not work often as an actual Industrial Designer, he told us. Muotohiomo labels their work often as Service



Design but this is not a definition. Clients come with problems and Muotohiomo does solve them, yet the final solution can **involve many fields** such as Interior Design, Graphic Design, Industrial Design, Engineering, Architecture or any other complementary skillset. Service Design is often seen as a package. It helps clients realize what their problems are.

“You can’t do it alone!”

Pekka laid heavy focus on the phrase “You can’t do it alone!” As an example he named the **Kamppi Chapel**, a Lutheran chapel in Kamppi, Helsinki, located on the Narinkka Square. It is also known as the “Chapel of Silence”. The Chapel is a breathtaking piece of architecture, built in 2012 as a part of the World Design Capital program. While it has a clear vision the architect fell into isolated thinking, he did not consider the people who actually have to work there. The infrastructure cannot fulfill the given requirements. The planning stage in the design process could have been improved through better communication and a dialog between the team and the target users.

In it’s own projects Muotohiomo tries to involve the people that will be affected by their decisions from the start. The studio tries to actively engage the concerned people as early as the planning stage. This allows them to satisfy many needs that arise during the process which the client might not have even thought about. Pekka sees a good design solution as something that involves much more than what is classically considered to be design. Service Design is a new trend and demand is rising.

The project School Dinners Rocks carried out by Muotohiomo is such a example of Service Design. Free school meals are **a traditional source of Finnish pride**, though



the reputation of school meals amongst students is rather poor. Nowadays food is discussed more often and dining is seen as more than just ‘refuelling’ – so why isn’t this the case in schools, too?

The design project developed school dining and the entire environment around it: menus, interior design, communication and processes. The aim was to increase appreciation for the food and make school meals more appetising, as well as to reduce the amount of biowaste created. Solutions were developed through student, staff and vparent **participation**, and dining will also be linked to teaching. The Martinlaakso school in Vantaa acts as a pilot for the project.

The designers organised a design week at the Martinlaakso school, during which time school dining developed together with staff and pupils through drawing, modelling, comics and role-playing games.

Problems that were identified included a missing communication, inefficient or missing organisation of queues, inadequate equipment and infrastructure – for tables that are too high for the children to reach. As Pekka told us, they would rather speak to a **few people intensively** than having 500 poll papers that don’t really communicate the problems.

All in all Pekka helped us lot getting an insight into the finnish culture. We instantly **felt at home**. It was a pleasure to follow all the tips and advice we were given. We agreed to check back on Pekka soon. It would be a pleasure to have him come to Zurich one day or visit Muotohiomo and see Helsinki in the summer.

Muotohiomo

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Pekka Toivanen,
Managing Director

***“God created
paper for the
purpose of draw-
ing architecture
on it.***

***Everything else is,
at least for me, an
abuse of paper.”***

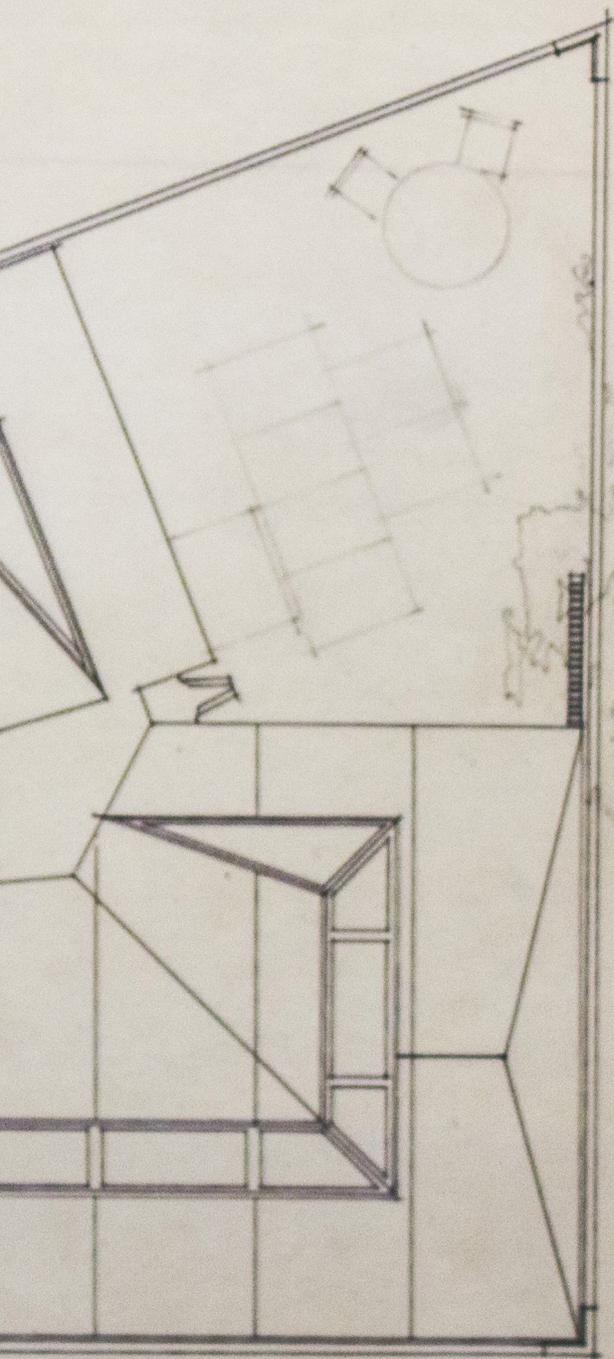


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Design Scene Helsinki

An exact definition of the design scene in Helsinki is quite difficult but we try to gather some points we got to know about it during our stay in Finland.

Firstly one has to say that the design scene nowadays still is remarkably influenced by the omnipresent **Alvar Aalto**. You come across his name everywhere; his furniture-design is displayed in the design museum and you meet his architecture on postcards at the kiosks. You find plenty of books about him, his life, his work or about his wives, the biggest school in Helsinki is named after him and when Finnish people tell you where to go and what to visit in Helsinki – especially if its design-related – they will probably name him in their first sentence.

A good impression of the design scene in Helsinki we probably got at the “**Fennia Prize 14**”, an annual design award, where we had the chance to visit the event with all the designers present. There we also met again Pekka Toivanen, the managing director of the Muoto-

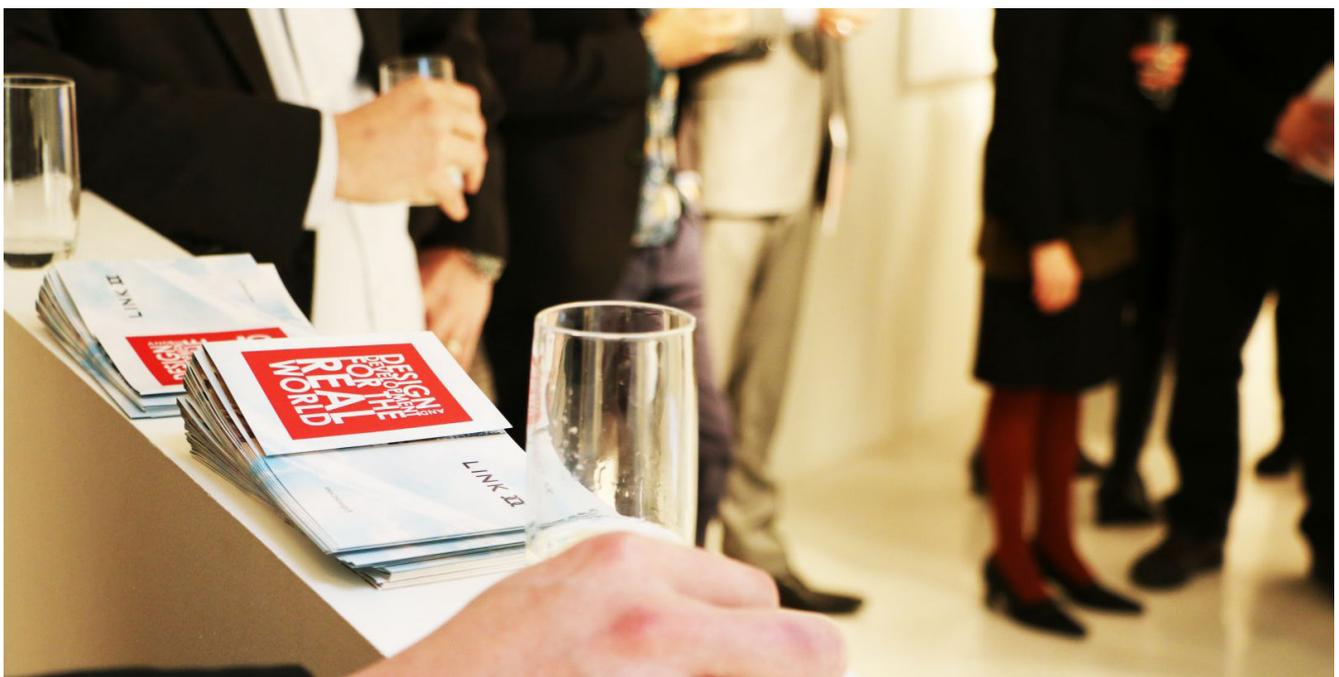
hiomo Design Studio, and an academic of the design school. We had insight into about 25 design products which competed for the award, which was organised by the Design Forum Finland. (www.designforum.fi)

Good design grows global

We were told that a lot of the most known designers of Finland were present that evening and it was interesting so see them (inter-)act.

Another influence in the design scene is probably the long history in the art of glass blowing. We cannot say how much it actually influences the designers, but compared to Zurich it's influence is definitely greater.

The glass blow lectures at the design school speak for themselves and **Mari Isopahkla**, the designer we met on





The project "Scorpion" that won the Grand-Prix price at the Fennia Prize 14 – A innovative tree harvesting machine by Ponsse Oyj.

Friday, also told us that she once has had classes in glass blowing. Though she did not have such a strong intention to end up in glass blowing, she said that these classes may influence her work nowadays.

The Design District Helsinki, where one would expect the center of the design scene, was difficult to grasp. One has to admit that we did not meet a lot of designers there and therefore can not say much about it, but our impression we received made us think that only a small part of the different design fields were significantly represented in this district.



We think that small ateliers and mostly designers of jewelry or decoration articles and fashion designers have their offices and stores in the design district. It is therefore hardly representative for the actual design scene.

Whenever we asked designer to tell us something about the design scene in Helsinki, they also dropped a few words about the difficulty to sustain one's position as a designer. They don't contend that you have the hardest time to find jobs as a designer in Helsinki, but they rather stated that nowadays it's hard to find jobs in these fields everywhere in the world.

Difficulties to sustain one's position as a designer

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However we were told that lots of people either change their field of work or go abroad after the design school, because Helsinki itself probably does not provide enough job opportunities. Maybe we encountered the statement "**Good design grows global**" as the slogan of Fenniaprize14 because of this frequent exchange with the whole world.

Design Helsinki

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Design District

www.designdistrict.fi/news

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Fennia Prize 14

www.designforum.fi/prizes/fenniaprize/2014_en

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en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fennia_Prize

Interview with Mari Isopahkla

The visit at the little one-man studio of Mari Isopahkla (www.mariisopahkala.com) showed us an absolutely different way of working in comparison with the visit at Muotohiomo. Mari works alone in a **small office behind a big display window** in the Design District of Helsinki and is mainly working in the fields product, furniture, jewelry and spatial design.

Although she also admits that working as a self-employed person can be quite challenging and struggling for survival is probable, she dared to make the step into self-employment immediately after graduating from design-school. Winning a **several design prizes** and **working hard** helped her strengthen her name as a designer.

In her daily work collaborations with bigger players from the industry are evidential. Aside from these larger jobs, Mari also puts energy into making unique design objects like **her adjustable lamp** (KURKI - mobile led light),

which employs a fascinating concept to light itself. The lamp has not yet been accepted into production.

Winning several design prizes and working hard helped her strengthen her name as a designer

Travelling belongs to her daily business. An example: Mari planned to attend a design fair in Stockholm one week after our visit and she's not the only one going abroad. From what we understood a lot of people in the design community are **going abroad permanently**





because of the lack of job opportunities. She says that many graduates also fall back to doing internships because of the same reason.

The question whether the title 'Design Capital 2012', which Helsinki was awarded, helped her or the whole design business was answered negatively. She stated that the interest was raised for this time period and that there

was a lot going on in the streets with little exhibitions and workshops, but the ones that did make profit from this, were probably only the supermarkets, who sold goods to everybody.

During our interview with her, she also wanted to know what we are studying in Zurich and when it came to the subject of Interaction Design and the connection with IT, she said that she had no clue of the 'coding stuff' but thinks that the perspectives in this field are quite promising, because practically everyone, included her have a need for such services.

'I will taste this this very day' was her statement, when we presented her our souvenir – a can of **'Appenzeller Quöllfrisch'** – a well brewed beer from Switzerland.

Mari Isopahkla

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Aalto University

One of our reasons for visiting Finland's capital city was, that the University of Zurich has a exchange twinning with the Aalto University. During the time in Helsinki, we spent two days visiting two of the three campuses. The Aalto is a merger of three schools with three different backgrounds and histories: the Helsinki University of Technology, the Helsinki School of Economics and the University of Art and Design Helsinki.



Aalto University

The Aalto University was established on 1st January 2010, so it's pretty young and the students and staff is still adapting to the new situation. The Aalto University aims to create a new science and arts community by bringing together several existing universities of technology, economics and art. The university is organized into six schools with their respective deans and administrative structures.

The **Aalto Arts** is one of the three parts of Aalto University and contains Arts, Design and Architecture. It has been a leader in art and design education in Finland for over 138 years. Students over 50 countries are doing their doctorate, master and bachelor degrees in a wide range of disciplines - fine art, design, new media, art education, visual culture, motion picture and production design.

***Leader in Art and Design
Education in Finland for
over 138 years***

The **main university campus** is located in Otaniemi, Espoo. It's reachable from Helsinki's city centre by bus in 15 minutes. The four Schools of Science and Technology are based in this campus designed by Alvar Aalto. Otaniemi has the highest concentration of high technology in the Nordic countries. Headquarters of several notable Finnish companies, such as Nokia and

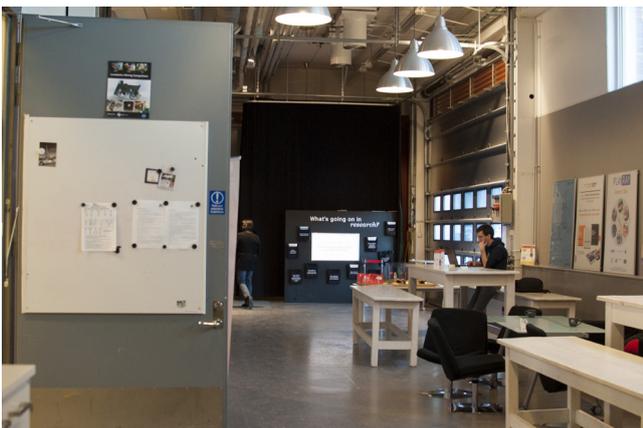


Fortum are located nearby. The campus in Otaniemi is really quite, open and close to nature, although there are these huge buildings of the leading nordic companies. We planned to visit in Otaniemi the - for our fields of study - most interesting campus part: the **Design Factory**.



Simply put Aalto Design Factory (ADF) is just one building made out of red bricks located in the campus of Aalto University in Espoo. However there is much more to it. ADF opened in October 2008, is one of the projects of Aalto University. Design Factory is the symbiosis of the state-of-the-art conceptual thinking and cross-disciplinary hands-on doing. To see the ADF with its rooms, halls, labs and workshops was highly inspiring. Students from different continents and cultural backgrounds, with knowledge from other fields of study are working together on creative solutions for several questions. The ADF philosophy contains low bureaucracy, low hierarchy, interaction, development methods and workshops that support co-creation and planned coincidences.

Although we tried several times, we didn't get any appointment at the Design Factory. But as we arrived there, it was really easy to find someone who was able to take us around and show us the facility. We randomly approached someone in the corridor. It turned out that he was an engineer working at the Aalto, most of the



time at the Design Factory. He spontaneously agreed to show us around and was talking with us for more than an hour. The kind engineer made mention - among other things - of the low-hierarchy-thinking and their area of meeting. It looked like a normal cafeteria, but included some uncommon details.

"Hug me!"

For example there was a colored circle on the floor, with the inscription: "Hug me!". What meant, that every time, you see someone standing in this circle, you have to embrace him. Besides, the engineer told us, that Finland's population has the worldwide highest coffee



consumption. Nevertheless, or precisely because of that, you only can find one big coffee machine in the middle of the red brick building's center: in the cafeteria. They even have written rules, that forces the coming, talking and working together. Everybody who works in the ADF, has to talk to a stranger and ask the person what she or he is doing. With tactics like these, the concept of the ADF tries to bring the students together and let them have a casual meeting in this building. At best they will get to know each other and maybe realize a collective, interdisciplinary project.

A great example for the interdisciplinarity at the Aalto are the **Product Development Projects (PdP)**. Each of them is realised during one year by a team consisting of students of different disciplines. Engineering, industrial design and business students are working hand in hand with a company on a real-life problem and developing a product respectively a consumer good. Most of the problems are given and sponsored by manufacturing companies, who are searching for innovative cooperation with the next generation of product developers. These

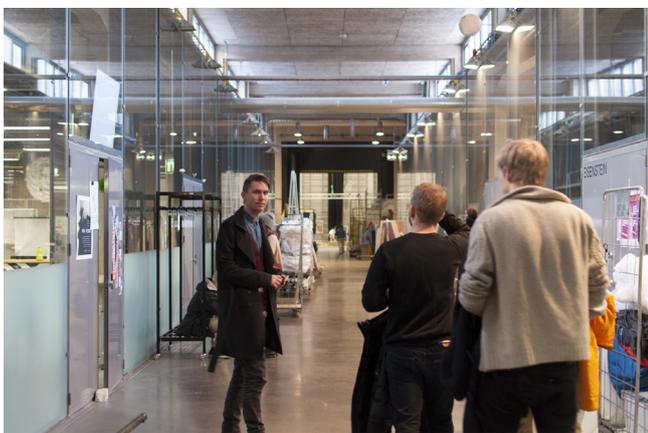
companies includes some of the companies around the Otaniemi campus. At start, much attention is directed to the forming of highly motivated interdisciplinary teams. A project typically includes phases of planning, searching for information, creation of concepts, decision making and detailed computer aided development. The project phases of manufacture, assembly, and testing are strongly related to the most valuable learning experiences.

The kind engineer proudly showed us some posters hanging in the entrance area. Each shows a product of the PdP. One that stuck to our memory, was the Deer Project. A group of students of the three fields of study developed an application for the smartphone, that warns a hunter, if he targets with his gun at another hunter. This project was initiated by a Finnish gun factory, motivated by the number of hunting accidents in the foregoing year in Italy.

Another Campus called **Arabia** is located in the northeast of Helsinki. It contains the School of Arts, Design and Architecture. Although we couldn't find anyone during the preparation time who could show us around, it wasn't a big deal to find someone helpful at the campus.

School of Arts, Design and Architecture

We were led from the receptionist, to the director of the Industrial and Product Design at the Aalto University, to a students' association and finally to a MA student who had time to show us around. Kasper Mäki-Reinikka was already studying 7 years at the Aalto. Because of that,



he knew the Arabia campus really well. The buildings are huge. Kasper showed us the media lab, design lab

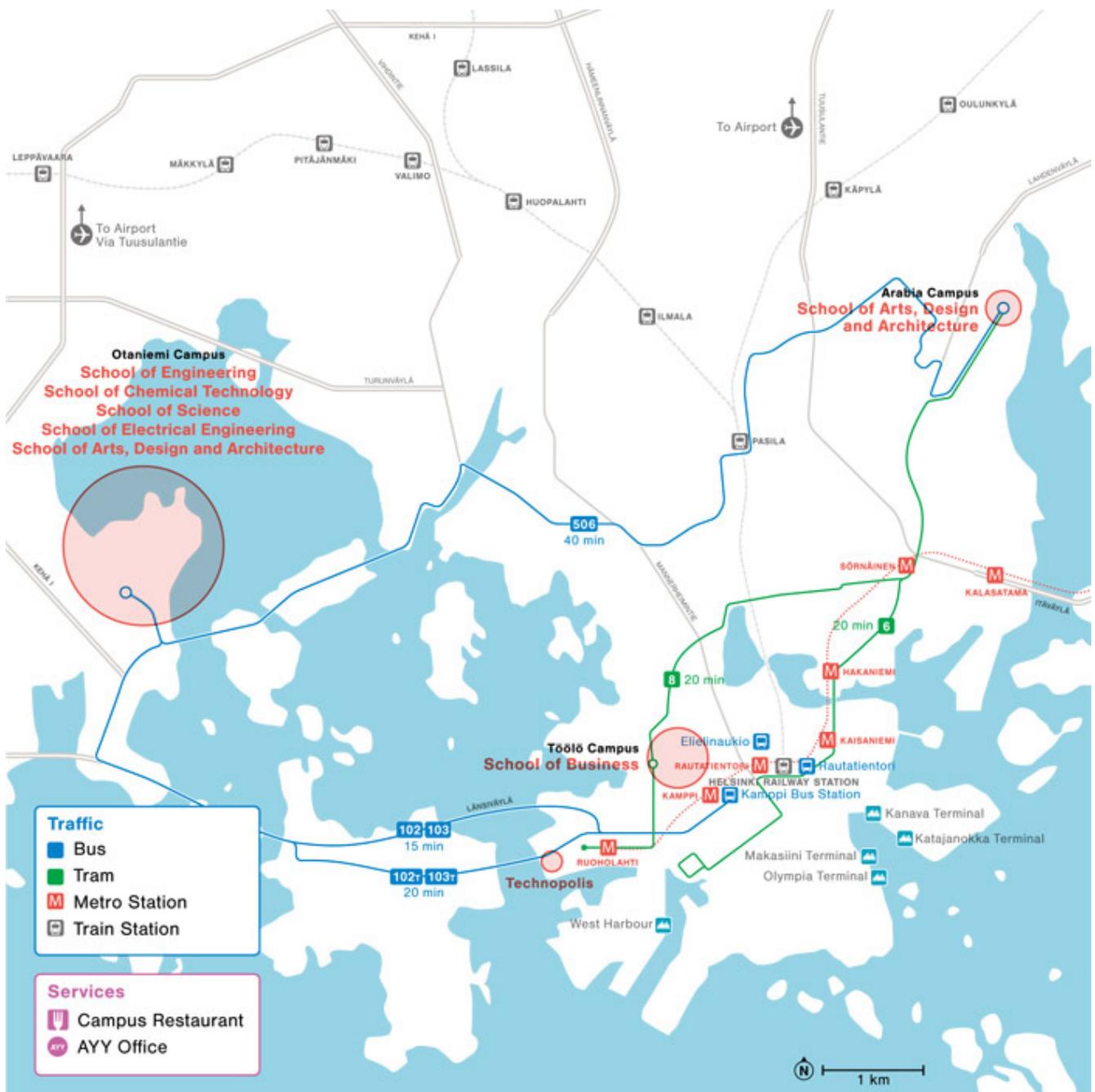
and the studios and class rooms of the Graphic Design students. There were enormous spaces for the students from the Scenography section, where they build their stage settings and costumes. They have even got a glassblowing workshop.



After the interesting tour with our guide, he showed us the canteen where we had lunch and a beer (although he had to give a class for kids afterwards). A bunch of dedicated students run this place, where they have really delicious, solely vegan food and a cozy atmosphere. Kasper recommended us a comic book store across the street. With a few unconventional comic books in our bags and many valuable memories and impressions in our heads, we made for home.



Visiting the two campuses of the Aalto University was an important part of our journey. It showed us another way how a University of the Arts can look like, beside the ZHdK. The students at the Aalto have an unbelievably diversified equipment located in beautiful campuses. They can use new big workshops, rooms, offices, labs, brainstorming lounges for transdisciplinary projects. The level of how they understand and practice transdisciplinarity across their respective fields is impressive. We hope that with the move to the new Toni Areal in Zurich West in 2014 we make a step into a similar direction.



A map of Helsinki and Espoo with the campuses of the Aalto University (www.aalto.fi)

Aalto University

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FI-00076 AALTO

Visiting address

Lämpömiehenkuja 2
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Official Website

www.aalto.fi/en/

Campus Information

www.aalto.fi/en/about/campuses/

Contact Archive

<http://people.aalto.fi/>

Aalto Design Factory

www.aaltdesignfactory.fi/about

PDP

www.pdp.fi/course-overview/what-is-pdp

Final words

For us the whole trip to Helsinki was a success. We met a lot of nice and interesting people and learned more about the Finnish design scene. Additionally we had the chance to visit different locations and institutions of the Alvar Aalto University. Due to long city walks by day and night we got a feeling of the capital city of Finland even though it was frickin' cold outside!

Many thanks!

It is important to say that a lot of people contributed to this success. And this is the moment, where we want to thank all these people.

Many thanks to the whole team of **Muotohiomo**, and especially to **Pekka**, who welcomed us very warmly.

The same is true for **Mari**, who also took time to tell us something about Helsinki and its design scene, in spite of a very tight schedule.

As well we want to thank **Kasper** for taking two hours of his time to show us around at the design department of the Aalto University.

Our thanks go as well to all the other **students** and **people at the university** and **the design factory** who showed us around or helped us finding our way.

Furthermore we want to thank **Michele** for her presence in Helsinki. We hope all the best for her future.

Of course we would also like to thank **Christoph Allenspach** for his continuing, helping guidance during the preparation phase.

And last but not least we definitely want to thank **Solja Kalha** and **Otto Mäkkelä** for showing us around at night, giving us hints what we should visit and introducing us to a lot of things aside from design in Helsinki! Was fun!

David Simon

Martin Dusek

Sebastian Bayer

Jonas Scheiwiller