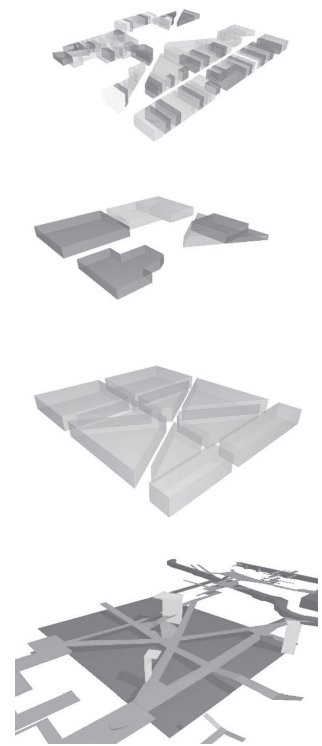


No Slush

By Tommi Mäkynen During the past decade Helsinki Metropolitan Area (HMA) has been the second fastest growing urban area in Europe. In a time when the city center is turning in to a museum, out of town shopping centers - only accessible by private car - have become destinations for family weekend cruises, and the Zone III ring road has become the busiest shopping street of the HMA, the project focuses on neglected developments and missed potentials in the center of Helsinki.

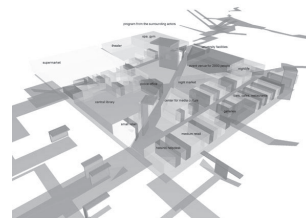
In the center of Helsinki the so called 'modernization project' - replacing old buildings with new ones - carried out in the fifties and sixties came to a halt when the political climate changed in the early seventies in favor of building preservation. The situation in the center was "frozen" with planning instruments, resulting in a status that effectively limits modern programs. Today, in order to preserve the life of the center, unprejudiced solutions are needed to allow its growth. For it is getting cramped in the center. The current building envelopes are being used to their full potential. Wanting to preserve the low skyline of the center, Helsinki has chosen not to build upwards. Instead, there is an inverted development that has gone behind and below the surface of the city, and created an archipelago of hollowed out, excavated fragments - traffic infrastructure and private real estate developments - forming a interior world of covered passages, shopping centers, metro stations, underground walk-through developments, department stores, sub-terrain car parks etc. Not only is this urban jungle the true wild west of real estate business in Helsinki, but also the everyday environment of tens of thousands of people daily!

The project explores this unmapped 'invisible city' in a city, and thus offers an x-ray view to the incredible tangle of these new collective spaces and routes inside the city blocks and under the streets. This indoor world was never planned to become the network that it eventually has become. It has developed piece by piece and therefore its full potentials have never really been studied. This valuable existing infrastructure, as its starting point the project studies these missed potentials and new concepts for densifying and enhancing the



center of the city. The proposed scheme, called 'Takku' (Finnish for tangle) focuses on one of the key-places of the city-structure - the Rautatietori-square.

Although one of the most central and accessible locations thinkable in the center of Helsinki, the huge square is an inactive urban space, separating entire parts of the center. By introducing new connections and program below the square the scheme not only aims in activating the square itself, but also in amalgamating the whole center and balancing its development. 'Takku' - the proposed plug-in piece below Rautatietori - not only connects the existing underground networks, and them to the city center above, but links the existing transportation networks with planned future infrastructures. 'Takku' not only becomes an important patch in the urban fabric, but more importantly 'Takku' enables new program in the center which otherwise couldn't be accommodated for reasons of scale or style. 'Takku' enriches the urban life of the center with a 24/7 all-mixed-in-together-program - a city in a nutshell. Meant as a scheme rather than a design, it could provide new urban space, new streets, new blocks - around an oversized staircase connecting the different levels of the city. The circulation route is kept on one level and bent down towards the central crossing giving more vertical space and better orientation. The circulation works a part of the bigger system or as a closed circulation when the other parts of the network are closed. 'Takku' not only becomes the focal point of the underground Helsinki, but it becomes essential in forming the identity of the whole. By not recognizing this existing network, and developing it as such, the city of Helsinki is missing a unique opportunity to add a new layer to the image of the whole city.



When the visions of the urban planning authorities don't meet with the visions of other stakeholders the result is a profound qualitative gap in the chain of the production of built environment. As the idealistic planning system concentrates its efforts elsewhere and fails to accept the importance of projects such as hypermarkets and other commercial developments as the everyday environment of citizens, the planning apparatus, which might otherwise be a proactive player, becomes reactive and misses the potentials of the initiatives coming from the private sector. As the built environment consists of projects it also depends on successful co-operation among the stakeholders. Bridging the gaps calls for identification of self-interest and positioning them in the project and in relation to other stakeholders. The self-interest, which is dependent of the success of the project, is a basis for a voluntary activity. The current way of producing built environment, as illustrated by the present situation, results if not in failures in implementation, at least in the loss of potential.

