



Transformation of Meri-Toppila Industrial Area in Oulu Finland

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This article deals with the transformation and identity of Meri-Toppila suburban area in Oulu, Finland. The area is formal industrial area, among with silo building designed by Alvar Aalto. Some of the old industrial heritage buildings are preserved and re-used. New residential buildings are built in the area since 1980s. Despite of well kept and designed new buildings, waterfronts and preserved old cultural heritage, the area has a great deal of social problems. This area has become the most multicultural neighborhood in Oulu.

The article points out some of the difficulties which stem out both from intensive urban planning and architectural solutions.

Research project MERA/KOLA is concerned about Meri-Toppila area. Urban designers and planners in the University of Oulu and City of Oulu have started new empowerment thinking in the area which includes its inhabitants. The inhabitants of the area and close-range neighborhood employers are working together in order to get a better life. Making use of inhabitants' experiences can give valuable information for urban planners. Culture Power Plant association has planned to renovate Alvar Aalto's Silo building for use of social art and resident activities. Silo building is one of the case studies.

The research aims to find usable methods to reinforce the local identity of the area through participation and empowerment of its inhabitants. As a result may emerge new social activities, improvements of public spaces and green interventions.

Despite of high quality architecture and industrial heritage, identity of Meri-Toppila is not very strong. New empowerment thinking and social art process might develop new identity of the area and increase local commitment of the inhabitants.

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