

MEANINGS AND REFLECTIONS OF MULTICULTURALISM IN PLANNING AND DESIGN

Katja Maununaho

MSc (Arch), researcher, postgraduate student, TUT School of Architecture, katja@maununaho.fi



Multiculturalism is a word that is used in many ways in contemporary discourses in media, politics, social work, education, business; today the issue is present also in discussions about planning and housing design in residential areas. But the word is awkward, ambiguous and many times misunderstood. My intention in this paper is to look into the different meanings of multiculturalism and evaluate what kind of reflections it can have in our built environment. Can we speak about multicultural design issues? Or what would be the useful terminology for design in an increasingly multicultural society? How does multiculturalism reflect on social and spatial issues in urban housing environments?

Introduction

Multicultural, Finnish translation *monikulttuurinen*, is a descriptive word that refers to a society consisting of multiple different cultures. The Finnish noun *monikulttuurisuus* is usually understood as descriptive and neutral derivative of the adjective *monikulttuurinen*, as a concept concerning something that is multicultural such as a society which is composed of groups with different cultural backgrounds and practices. English equivalent multiculturalism has also this same descriptive meaning, but with the suffix *-ism* it carries a stronger normative meaning, referring to certain ideals of how a variety of cultures are supposed to go together in a society, and also to certain policy that is aiming to these ideals. Direct translation of this meaning in Finnish would be *monikulturalismi*, but this term is rarely used, mostly when someone is disagreeing with the ideals.

The slightly different emphasis in the terminology in English and Finnish language may origin in the different national histories; in Finland cultural diversity as a subject of political debates has only a short history beginning with the increasing immigration in early 1990's. Finland is not officially a multicultural nation such as Canada, Australia or the UK, and multiculturalism is not mentioned in Finnish Constitution or Equity Act. But it has been said that Finland is a nation with multicultural susceptibilities. Finnish policy aims to promote work-related immigration, to support the development of good relations between the different population groups, and to promote the inclusion of immigrants and to support opportunities to maintain their own culture within the framework of the law.¹

Despite the ambivalence of the terminology, different municipal policy papers concerning immigration and multiculturalism² offer a rather strict definition of the concept.

Monikulttuurisuus: Eri kulttuurisia ja kielellisiä taustoja edustavien ryhmien tasa-arvoinen rinnakkaiselo.

Multiculturalism: Equal co-existence of groups that represent different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

This definition is normative in its aims of equality, but it doesn't explain how, why or by whom this ideal is set. Instead it is presenting the ideal in a form of a real life fact. Another problem lies in the reference to cultural backgrounds or origins: it gives a somewhat static impression of culture, as something that people are given and that they are representing (as samples). Also the reference to different backgrounds can easily be read as if multiculturalism concerns only people that come from somewhere else-that is:

¹ Hallituksen maahanmuuttopoliittinen ohjelma 2006 (Government Migration Policy Programme 2006)

² Vantaa on muuttajien kaupunki (2008), Hämeenlinnan monikulttuurisuusohjelma vuosille 2012-2015, Espoon kaupungin monikulttuurisuusohjelma 2009-2012

immigrants. This way multiculturalism is seen as a character of others, not us, which is by many critical writers considered to be the underlying problem of the whole multiculturalism discourse.³ This 'otherness' in multiculturalism forms already a contradiction to the ideals of equity, giving one group the advantage of determining others. When cultural diversity is limited to the origins of ethnicity, religion or language, the rest of the population is easily seen as monocultural and 'normal' in comparison, and the fact that Finland was actually a multicultural country before the recent increase in immigration is forgotten. From the hegemonic position of 'us', people in minority groups seem as captivated in their positions, their identities shaped by their cultural group identities, and their individual choices limited by traditions. Group identities are seen as solid and based on tradition, not as something that can be formed and moulded by time, by the people in the group and also by influences coming from outside the group in interaction with the surrounding society. This societal setting of multiculturalism seems to highlight cultural differences more than common features or potentials of cross-cultural communication.

This limited and problematic notion of multiculturalism has been criticized in many ways in academic papers in recent decades. But the link between multiculturalism and immigrant minorities is strong in public discourses, making multiculturalism a subject of immigration policy, and locking the public debates and media presentations to opposing corners of for or against multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is seen either as problems and challenges to be solved in housing areas, workplaces or schools, or as potentials for economic growth in business, culture and urban environment.

As an architectural researcher my intention here is not to give a comprehensive picture of multiculturalism as a social issue, nor to make any policy recommendation on it. But if we accept multiculturalism as a state of our society, as an architect I am tempted to ask what kind of spatial issues it brings to our built urban environments, particularly in residential areas? But before I can make that question I feel I need to look at this setting of social and spatial issues from the other way around: I need to form an image about the ideas of cultural diversity in society that could be taken as a context for spatial and structural questions in design.

³ Löytty (2010) Monikulttuurisuuden käsitteen mieli. In Heikkinen, Mynttinen (ed) Kollaasikaupunki



From multiculturalism to post-multiculturalism and interculturalism.

In academic literature the terminology on the subject of cultural differences in a society has alternated and evolved in recent decades from multiculturalism to post-multiculturalism and interculturalism with differing opinions on the subject.

Iverson (2010)⁴ in his review on the subject of multiculturalism as public ideal, attaches multiculturalism to non-dominant ethnocultural groups that may be immigrant minorities or 'historically settled' minorities. He further separates three different logics of multiculturalism as public ideal: *protective* (or communitarian), *liberal* and *imperial* multiculturalism. In *protective* logic different cultural groups need to be recognized and their cultural integrity needs to be protected as something that is authentic. Traditional cultural practices are seen as essential to one's cultural identity and the protection of these original identities as a civic right. The right to make judgments about cultural practices is seen as a matter for the group to decide. The tension between group rights and individual rights in this thinking is highlighted. For example in the case of cultural traditions like circumcision that can be seen as offensive to individual rights the legitimacy of group rights is highly questionable. On another case it can be argued that preservation of small traditional cultural groups, which used to live relatively isolated but are now threatened to die out by more powerful global influences, can be valued important as such. And in such cases the members of the cultural group seem like the best authority to define what is essential to be preserved. In *liberal* logic on the other hand multiculturalism is seen as something that "promotes liberal values such as equality, autonomy, toleration or equal respect" (Iverson 2010). The right to preserve cultural habits is seen as secondary, instrumental to

⁴ Iverson (2010) Introduction: Multiculturalism as a Public Ideal. In Iverson (ed.) The Ashgate Research Companion to Multiculturalism.

promote liberal ends. If *protective* multiculturalism relies on tradition as something to be preserved, "*liberal* multiculturalism aims explicitly at *transforming* current social and political arrangements, and especially the cultural dimensions of these arrangements". Ivison positions liberal logic to be the most influential in recent political theory. "It seeks to transform the identities and practices of both minority and majority groups in line with liberal-democratic norms of anti-discrimination, equality and basic human rights" (ibid). An important question to this logics is does living together with diversity actually increase tolerance, or can it be a source of hostility. Third logic of multiculturalism, what Ivison calls as *imperial* multiculturalism "provides a critical lens through which the various relations of power that operate via forms of liberal government can be analysed". Here the multicultural 'otherness' is made questionable "...it raises questions about the way in which 'minorities' and 'majorities' are defined and produced in the first place. Who are the 'we' that tolerates 'them' and what are the underlying assumptions about who can be accommodated and why?" (ibid)

In Ivison's definitions the issues of multiculturalism still basically remain within minority ethnic groups and white majority. As an extended interpretation to this bipolar approach, in a study concentrated on people's attitudes and prejudices to differences of each other's in urban environments Valentine (2008)⁵ brings a more varied range of minorities to the discussion, including disabled people, lesbians and gay men, transsexual people, gypsy and travellers, women, children and young people, asylum-seekers, minority ethnic and faith-based communities. This kind of range gives a more open and nuanced perspectives on differences than the usual setting of ethnic minorities against the rest of the society. The list could be continued also to sections that are usually considered as parts of majority: married with children, singles, hippies, yuppies, ice-hockey players... There is an enormous variety of sub-cultures that are part of people's identity, that structure our everyday practices, interpretations and meanings. This kind of listing shows that people are not defined by strictly defined cultural groups, but that identities are rather overlapping, hybrid and changing.

Uitermark et al (2005)⁶ raise a context of post-multiculturalism as an approach that reflects the critique on traditional multiculturalism. This approach "seeks to recognize ethnic diversity but at the same time tries to move beyond traditional multiculturalism by emphasizing the multifaceted and dynamic nature of cultural identification." They argue for more attention to individuals within ethnic groups, and more support to local projects than to organizations in order to prevent reifying predefined ethnic division, although

⁵ Valentine (2008) Living with difference: Reflections on geographies of encounter. In Progress in Human Geography 32(3).

⁶ Uitermark, Rossi, van Houtum (2005) Reinventing Multiculturalism: Urban Citizenship and the Negotiation of Ethnic Diversity in Amsterdam. In International Journal Of Urban and Regional Research Volume 29.3

inequalities between ethnic groups as an issue should not be forgotten. They set Amsterdam as an example of moving towards post-multicultural governance of diversity, encouraging inter-ethnic dialogue and debunking ethnic stereotypes. They point out that the new approaches in Amsterdam are yet established as durable structures in administration, but ask if actually the abstract nature of discourse and lack of rigid institutions are “characteristics of newly emerging ways to accommodate ethnic diversity” (ibid). The local project level here seems like a natural basis for concerning cultural differences in design, but on the other hand stressing individual preferences instead of community benefits may be problematic. This problem comes up in many participatory projects: if there is a wide range of individual preferences they may prove to be incompatible, but the more common problem is that there usually is just a few people that speak out and their preferences may get disproportionate attention.

Amin (2002)⁷ emphasises cross-cultural communication instead of cultural differences with the term interculturalism. This perspective highlights negotiation of differences in everyday interaction. In his writing this negotiation is evaluated as one way out of the situation of 2001 ethnic riots in North England, which was one significant point of crises for multicultural thinking. Amin uses term interculturalism “to stress cultural dialogue, to contrast with versions of multiculturalism that either stress cultural dialogue without resolving the problem of communication between cultures, or versions of cosmopolitanism that speculate on the gradual erosion of cultural difference through interethnic mixture and hybridisation” (ibid). Amin highlights residential environments of everyday lived experiences as sites of intercultural communication and negotiation over usually underlined urban public spaces, which to him are just spaces of transit or territorialised by some groups in a way that makes intercultural communication impossible. His “focus on the microcultures of place is not meant to privilege bottom-up or local influences over top-down or general influences, because both sets make up the grain of place”(ibid). This dual emphasis on influences and the attention on residential environments make Amin’s ideas of interculturalism seem like an interesting basis for design. Professional knowledge on design and design processes potentials to make ideas about not yet existing future situations are essential in finding ‘third’ choices that could combine conflicting preferences in present situations.

Notions and logics of cultural diversity and design

Since the emergence of the discourses of multiculturalism in urban social policy the subject has also been concerned in urban design. Architecture, city structures and our living environments are cultural products, they reflect different cultural meanings and values, and they form a framework for our everyday cultural practices. So it seems that cultural differences that have been increasing in our societies are something that

⁷ Amin (2002) Ethnicity and the multicultural city: living with diversity. In Environment and Planning A volume 34

deserves to be considered in planning and design. Planning being a disciplinary in close connection to urban studies and having an essential role as a part of public policy has followed these discourses more closely than design with its more private role in a society. After the divided city structure of modernism planning has come to a phase where it can be said that “diversity represents the new guiding principle for city planners” (Fainstein 2011⁸). The questions of why and how diversity can be considered have been discussed from many angles. Fainstein (ibid) lists arguments for and against privileging diversity in planning which are related to political theory of multiculturalism. The more special question in planning theory remains can diversity be planned? Does physical or functional diversity match to the social and cultural diversity? Here social diversity and functional, formal and spatial diversity in built environment are easily mixed in to a strange synthesis precisely when it would actually be important to make a distinction between them. Creating diversity in built environment doesn’t need to be justified or excused by its potentials in creating social diversity. Rather it can be utilized as a tool for recognizing cultural differences, aiding different needs and making the city structure in itself more tolerant to different lifestyles, practices and interpretations. Yet because architecture is something that affects strongly to our daily lives, though having also logics of its own, architectural design shouldn’t be separated from the values of the society. Therefore it is important to consider how the different notions and logics of cultural diversity would reflect in design practices and in built environment.

It is quite possible to transport the logics of *protective* multiculturalism in some parts to architecture. Traditional architecture is usually seen as strongly rooted in traditional local cultures, and local architectural traditions with their traditional building techniques can be valued as such. But the connection of architectural solution and local site in question is essential in this line of thought, and transporting traditional solutions to different locations is mostly considered questionable. There are contemporary examples of imported building forms from other locations, such as Le Medi Housing Estate in Rotterdam, a residential city block where Moroccan building culture is interpreted and located in Dutch urban structure. The block has been evaluated as successful mostly because it doesn’t follow the Mediterranean style to the end but manages to make a version of it that meets the capabilities of Dutch building industry and appeals strongly to a large and diverse group of house buyers in the Netherlands.⁹ But this doesn’t really follow the *protective* logic, even if it in parts may offer a Moroccan type of built environment for the Moroccans to live. It could be seen to resonate more strongly to the *liberal* logic, giving the environment something that may help in promotion of mutual understanding and equity between the different groups, and also making a contribution to local architectural practices.

⁸ Fainstein (2011) Cities and Diversity. Should we want it? Can we plan for it? In Fainstein, Campbell (ed) Readings in Urban Theory

⁹ <http://www.afritecture.org/architecture/le-medi>

There are some issues in contemporary cities where *protective* logics on multiculturalism in architecture could be argued. In single family houses on privately owned sites the legitimacy of municipal and state authorities to set conditions that limit architectural forms to the ones that originate from western modernism and in this way prevent other cultural influences, can be challenged. Shouldn't people have the right to define their own living environments that they build with their private money to their private sites? Usually there are two sorts of reasons for setting restrictions to this freedom. First one has to do with the idea that buildings are intended to last longer than individual human life expectancy, that they form a large part national assets, and therefore need to be regulated to serve more universal needs. (Here universal refers mostly to western.) Second there is a distinction made between the outer appearance of a building and the internal spatial configuration, outer appearances requiring more regulations being a part of city scape that is seen as a property of the city. Universal ideals of *design for all* and *image of the city* are set before the rights of group or individual identities, but who defines what is universal and how can anything be for all?

In architectural design diversity is usually seen as a response to the critiques of modernisms universal ideals. But modernism has still left a deep impact in architecture and its ideals of common good are holding tight, despite the decades of post-modern critique. In the ideals of modernism humans were considered basically similar, and only physiological differences were acknowledged; in extreme cases design guidelines still present children as shorter people that need a place to play, and elderly as people with disabilities in moving. But gradually the critique of modernism accompanied with changing circumstances in society and increasing debates on multiculturalism have resulted in a growing awareness of the importance of recognizing cultural differences in design and a growing need for cultural knowledge to proceed in it.

The needs concerning housing that differ from the modern universal needs have been studied in some parts. As an early example, Penoyre and Prasad (1993) wrote a guide on design of housing for minority ethnic, religious and cultural groups¹⁰. The guide highlights that the needs of ethnic groups have not been taken into account previously, and sets examples on the layout of buildings, aesthetics and appearances, the effect of family structures and religious practices to apartment layouts, and then in a very detailed manner on things like kitchen cabinets. The manual doesn't take a stand on multiculturalism, but the perspective is quite well aligned with the traditional *protective* multiculturalism in the attempt to recognize and enable different traditional practices.

¹⁰ Penoyre, Prasad (et al) (1993) Accommodating diversity. The design of housing for minority ethnic, religious and cultural groups

In Finland there are few similar efforts to recognize different cultural needs in housing. Geographer Hanna Dhalmann's (2009)¹¹ research on how cultures should be taken into notice in housing design is one starting point, including a recent "built environment idea card" (RT-ideakortti) on immigrant housing needs (Dhalmann et al 2010¹²). Design issues have also been studied in dissertation works from the perspectives of identity and integration (Maununaho 2006¹³, Virkkala 2010¹⁴) or religion (Hewidy 2010¹⁵). Finnish perspectives have usually highlighted that many different needs can be met by building flexible and adaptable apartments. Also the needs of immigrants in built environment are seen in large parts match the needs of original population, and differences are mostly found in issues that could best be met by proper guidance-such as in household skills or understanding different building management company rules. In this perspective the *protective* logics of multiculturalism doesn't seem like the most valuable line of thinking. The combination of *liberal* logics of multiculturalism and architectural design, even though still less discussed than the protective cultural needs perspective in design literature, would seem actually a more natural couple. Ideals of diversity as something that assists liberal values of equality, tolerance and welfare live already strongly in post-modern design thinking. Further more diverse urban environments with rich architectural expressions are seen as a source of innovation and economic vitality. These connections have been highlighted in liberal thinking, and also in the literature concerning interculturalism¹⁶.

Concentration on cultural needs or preferences in housing should be considered only as a first step in a process of incorporating multiculturalism or interculturalism to design. Fincher and Ivison (2011)¹⁷ identify two lines of recognition in planning, *affirmative* recognition that concentrates on groups and their shared preferences, and *relational* recognition that looks into dynamic processes of identity groups that emerge and mobilize around current political subjects. They point out that *affirmative* mode can easily be proven

¹¹ Dhalmann (2009) Kaksi olohuonetta ja tilaa riisisäkille? – Maahanmuuttajat ja asumisen suunnittelu Esitelmä Rakennustiedon Rakennusfoorumissa 1.12.2009 Maahanmuuttajat ja rakennettu ympäristö. Miksi vanhat mallit eivät kelpaa? Mitä tulisi tehdä toisin? Miten?

¹² Dhalmann, Ilmonen, Mälkki, Norvasuo (2010) RT-ideakortti 2010: Lisääntyvä maahanmuutto ja asumisen suunnittelu. Rakennustieto Oy.

¹³ Maununaho (2006) Monikulttuurinen asuinalue Hagalundiin. Master's Thesis, Tampere University of Technology, Department of Architecture.

¹⁴ Virkkala (2010) Asuntosuunnittelun merkitys maahanmuuttajan kotoutumisessa. Bachelor's Thesis, Aalto University.

¹⁵ Hewidy (2010) The Big Issue. The Religious Dimensions in Muslims' Housing Within the Helsinki Metropolitan Area: Challenges and Opportunities. Master's Thesis, Aalto University.

¹⁶ Wood, Landry (2008) The Intercultural City. Planning for Diversity Advantage.

¹⁷ Fincher, Iveson (2011) Conceptualizing Recognition in Planning. In Fainstain, Campbell (ed) Readings in Urban Theory

wrong: ethnic groups are not internally coherent, people may feel attachment to many different groups, and the meanings of group membership to an individual vary. But to move towards planning and design that would be aligned with the *relational* mode of recognition is not a thing that can be easily written into design guidelines and practices. Fincer and Ivison (ibid) point out that ethnic or other cultural identities cannot be clearly outlined, they are not fixed, but dynamic and overlapping, and so design solutions that only enable predefined practices are not the answer. Identities are not just expressed, but also revised. Needs and preferences should be evaluated in public debate. Attention in design should at least partially turn from making spaces for a multiple cultures to making spaces for intercultural communication. But how can this very challenging attempt be reached with the current politically stigmatized understanding of multiculturalism as questions to be resolved? Can multiculturalism play other roles than that of an image problem in urban housing areas that are struggling with many other problems as well as very limited financial resources? I will next take a look at the present situation in Finnish suburban residential areas in order to evaluate how multiculturalism is seen from the perspectives of concrete redevelopment project.



The concrete nature of design issues in Finnish multicultural neighbourhoods

The rise in immigration in Finland started in the beginning of 1990's when the disintegration of the Soviet Russian and Finland's accession to the EU affected Finnish immigration policies. Since then the number of immigrants in Finland has multiplied. Most of the immigrants have settled in the Helsinki metropolitan area. In the beginning of 2011 10 % of the population in the metropolitan area had an immigrant background (Vilkama

2011)¹⁸. This is still relatively low compared to internationally levels, but what is significant is that immigrant population seems to be centralizing on certain housing areas. In Vilkkama's research (2011) several areas of concentration were found. Areal segregation has been increasing after year 2000 due to selective migration of both original and immigrant population. Segregation of single ethnicities was not found in the study; instead the more segregated areas were ethnically and culturally mixed. In Helsinki the immigrant population is concentrating quite evenly to eastern areas, the city of Vantaa has a few residential areas that are located by the train lines with higher immigrant population concentrations, and in the city of Espoo there is one clear area of concentration, Suvela.

What is common to most of these areas is that they are suburban housing areas with clear concentration of municipal public housing units. Many of these areas are built in 60's and 70's in a period of rapid urbanization. About 35 % of Finnish residential buildings are built in this era. It was also an era of speedy development of construction industry, building element technology, standardization and large developer lead regional building projects. Now the majority of this building stock is getting to the age when it needs major repairs and general renovations. In these areas many quite urgent and concrete problems are combined. Structurally the element blocks are challenging for renovation; they were built fast and cheap with new and untested technology. Also the suburban areas are criticized of their monotonous appearances, and their lack of public or commercial services. The long distances to city centres and poor public connections have made the areas quite isolated. This is the general structural and infrastructural part of their image; the other part consists of the social life on the areas, or the reputation of it. After the high decades of urbanization Finnish population has been gathering wealth and bit by bit the ones that can afford it have been moving either back to city centres or to single-family-house areas that have been growing on the city edges. The recession in early 1990's happened at the same time as the increase in immigration, and after this era parts of the suburban areas have been suffering of social-economic deprivation. The recent reputation of "immigrant suburbs" (*maahanmuuttajalähiö*) is a naming that adds yet another layer to the suburban image.

Suvela in Espoo is one clear example of this accumulation of problems. Or more precisely a part of Suvela is: there is a considerably large concentration of public housing in central area in Suvela, and that part seems to affect also the image of the whole area. The houses are mainly built in 1970's, and there is a need for major renovations, today among others also in energy efficiency. The visual image of these blocks is dominated with large car parking areas with clear marks of vandalism and environmental negligence. The amount of residents that speaks something else than Finnish as their first language in the public housing

¹⁸ Vilkkama (2011) Yhteinen kaupunki eriytyvät kaupunginosat. Kantaväestön ja maahanmuuttajataustaisten asukkaiden alueellinen eriytyminen ja muuttoliike pääkaupunkiseudulla.

apartments varies from 37 to 60 %.¹⁹ The blocks are known of alleged social problems among the residents. Additional to all the other problems, or due to them, the property values in Suvela are low compared to other areas nearby. The prices of sold apartments near the public housing blocks in 2009- 2010 started from 1600 €/m² and ended approximately in 2000 €/m² with two exceptions under 2500 €/m², while in other areas prices started from 2300 €/m².²⁰ Low prices might be considered a good thing to low income home buyers, but it becomes a problem when people want to relocate themselves away from the area, and also when the buildings need to be renovated. The mathematical renovation debts may be higher than the actual property value.

This is an image of an immigrant suburb that is many times attached also to other neighbourhoods in Finnish suburbs, and this is also the image that comes up in public discussions concerning multiculturalism and housing areas. In this setting the issues of *protective* or *liberal* multiculturalism are not concerned, and interculturalism might come up only in discussing different cultural misunderstanding, for example in common laundry rooms and saunas. Multiculturalism is not seen as something to be preserved or as something valuable, but it is mostly seen as an ingredient in a complicated web of structural, social and economic problems, and mainly as an image problem.

Of course the people living in Suvela don't seem to fully recognize the problematized image of the area. In a survey done in the area three out of four respondents were more or less contented with the area.²¹ They value the transportation services, public library and grocery store services. The green nature of the area with its parks, recreation and play areas are appreciated. Least contented people were with the tidiness, beauty and security issues of the area. But the worst images about the area seem to come from people outside the area.

In Suvela Espoo city as an owner of the rental apartments on the area has come to a conclusion that quite drastic means of regeneration will be needed to deal with these problems. A large part of the building stock is in such a condition that renovation is financially out of the question, but they need to be demolished. This intention is also affected by the views that the concentration of public housing is too large, and that building apartments with diverse forms of ownership would help on the socio-economic and cultural segregation. This makes multiculturalism a social issue on the project. But the concrete economic and structural problems in the same areas with the ethnic segregation influence strongly the concrete design work at hands. Resources are very limited, and the focus needs to be put to finding actually feasible

¹⁹ Väestö kielen mukaan (Population by language) 2008, Espoon kaupungin kehittämis- ja tutkimusryhmän verkkotilastopalvelun tilastotietokanta

²⁰ Myydyt kerrostaloasunnot/postinumeroalue 02760 Espoo (2010) Ympäristöministeriö: www.asuntojenhintatiedot.fi

²¹ Hirvonen (2011) Suvela tilastoissa ja asukkaiden kokemana. (Suvela in statistics and experienced by the inhabitants)

solutions, so in reality only a little effort can be put to spatial questions of accommodating a multicultural society by any logics or ideals. Also the gap between the abstract critical perspectives and the concrete physical problems seems quite unbridgeable. On the other hand it needs to be remembered that this reality is the very same where the actual multicultural society with its cultural diversities lives, so the question of how the notions of multiculturalism meet and fit to the world of design and construction are valid.



Urban design in a (post-) multicultural society

I have been observing the planning and design process in Suvela since November 2011. The observation has been conducted in forms of attending to the meetings of the designers and the control board, by interviewing the parties (planners, designers, the municipal public housing company administration) and reading the starting materials, the strategic plan and the new design proposals. The project has evolved from land use sketches to town planning, and both the redevelopment project and my research on it are still continuing. I will now shortly evaluate some notions on the issues of multicultural society that have come up in the ongoing process.

Multiculturalism is a term that has been used in the project in a variety of contexts. In discussion it has been identified as a source of image problems (“images don’t come out of nothing, there are actual problems behind them”), as one reason for the low property values, and as something that “needs to be dealt with”. In these discussions multiculturalism refers to the immigrant population, but not necessarily to their actual cultural differences but more to “general handicaps in everyday skills” that are seen as a source

of disturbance, uncleanliness and neglect in the environment. In this sense also the underprivileged Finnish population is a part of the 'multicultural problem'.

These handicaps in everyday skills have already been handled quite successfully in the area with local projects. A research and development project of Espoo Community Organisations (*Espoon Järjestöjen Yhteisö*) with the aim of helping families with problems concerning housing, especially in payment of rent, has had an office in the area where resident's advisory personnel with ethnic connections has been working for two years. With their bottom up consultation (for instance housing counselling for immigrants) they have managed to prevent evictions and homelessness in Espoo. Municipal housing company Espoonkruunu has also allocated one apartment in Suvela housing blocks for counselling purposes, and a garage space for leisure activities such as crafts that have proven to be important for some immigrant groups. Small scale up scaling projects in the blocks, such as staircase painting with the residents' chosen colours has been noted to increase the level of environmental concerns. In the light of these projects it seems that the problems of multiculturalism as handicaps in everyday skills are not a matter of regeneration but rather similar grassroots neighbourhood projects.

In Suvela projects strategy papers²² multiculturalism is seen mostly as a social potential: multiculturalism and internationalism are something that must be developed. According to the strategy, keywords in the development will be multiculturalism, diversity and tolerance. The positive value of multiculturalism is connected to its educational potentials. For example pupils in a multicultural school will learn open-minded internationality that is needed for success in global markets. This seems to correspond to *liberal* logics of multiculturalism in Ivison's (2010) description. On the other hand, when social challenges are recognized, the writing doesn't target them to multiculturalism or cultural differences, but to immigrants: there are challenges about too many immigrant children in one school, special challenges in educating immigrant children, immigrants need social counselling, and immigrant girls need special attention. So a simplified notion in the strategy would be: multiculturalism is a social potential, but immigrants bring also social challenges.

Interestingly when the strategy comes to suggested spatial solutions, there are no mentions about multiculturalism, only an emphasis on *cultural* spaces. What these spaces would be is left unanswered. This feels like a good solution here, not underlining the differences or the political debate on immigration issues like the term multicultural tends to do, instead it seems to give a less contested less politically loaded contents to further design. Different cultural spaces in housing areas are important also in Amin's (2002) perspectives on everyday lived experiences and local negotiation of difference. Leaving the actual contents

²² Suvela-visio 2035. Kehittämisen tahtoa ja toimia! (Suvela vision 2035. Will of development and action!)

of the cultural spaces in the strategy open for the diversity of people in the area to decide could be seen as gesture towards this kind of thinking.

The planning and design practices described in the strategy seem quite promising from the point of dynamic local processes:

“A socially sustainable infill building is carried out

- in cooperation with the residents; active use and development of influence and participation opportunities*
- paying special attention to the needs of both Finns and the residents coming from many countries; focus resources in understanding and development of multicultural living environment*
- an economically sustainable way - infill development aimed at interests of existing residents, property owners and business.”*

These intentions might lead a way towards post-multicultural or intercultural perspectives in design practices. The important question is how these intentions can be carried through in the operational environment that struggles with the very concrete physical and economic difficulties in the area. Resources may have to be focused on solving the equation of mixing low income rental apartments, middle class owner occupied apartments and expensive underground car parking together. Trying to improve the image of an area with “too many immigrants” or “too many similar social housing units”, leads easily to displacement of the “too many” population.

Suburban redevelopment is something that is slowly on its way to Finland, and in Suvela project the intention is to make a good reference to many other forthcoming projects in the future. In this perspective yet another addition to the projects strategic aims could be a connection between ecologic and social sustainability. In Finland urbanization is still an ongoing process, and the urgency for more dense urban structure adds pressure for developing an urban culture of tolerating difference and living close to each other. When designing dense urban environments it is important to realize the lack of such urban culture and also the challenges of developing one. Recognizing the differences in cultural practices, or in housing cultures is one starting point, further negotiating these differences in design could take a long step towards a local urban culture.

Internationally regeneration of low income neighborhoods has been a contemporary phenomenon for years, and important lessons should be learned from the international examples. Even in the egalitarian city of Amsterdam Uitermark (2011) reports that “the focus of policies has shifted from empowering communities to promoting gentrification and displacement.”²³ Even though the image problems of the area

²³ Uitermark (2011) An actually existing just city? The fight for the right to the city in Amsterdam. In Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer (eds) Cities for People, Not for Profit: Theory/Practice. Oxford: Blackwell

could be connected either to multiculturalism or more generally to social disadvantages of different population groups, the answer should not be sought in relocating these groups to other areas. Instead creating new images should be done in cooperation with local residents. In Suvela the project promises new images and new identities to the area, but in design practices, where professionals of images deal with these questions, the images easily turn out to be top-down images. Already in Suvela strategy papers, despite the other dynamic ideas, identity is seen as a local *shared* thing, which is connected both to image and to community. Emphasizing the *shared* identity, leaving both personal and cultural identities out, connects the thinking again back to the modernistic ideals of shared values, which seem a bit contradictory in an area with 77 different languages. Here something like Amin's²⁴ ideas about combining local bottom-up and professional top-down influences in the grain of place could sound like a more feasible perspective.

Conclusions

Different ideals and logics of multiculturalism have long been an issue in urban social policy. Diversity is seen as a new paradigm in planning, but can social diversity actually be planned remains an open question. On the other hand diversity as a spatial question in urban living environments is quite another thing. Design practices need to be developed in order to be able to recognize cultural differences in everyday practices. And for these purposes it is important to evaluate what kinds of ideals of multicultural society are taken as a context. Traditional *protective* logics of multiculturalism offer a starting point in recognizing the differences, but design needs to go further, to put more weight on the *liberal* logics of multiculturalism, and still further, to develop dynamic practices for designing spaces for intercultural negotiations in a post-multicultural society. This is a challenging aim, and when it is reflected on the reality in housing areas with very real and acute social, structural and economic troubles, the more theoretical issues of multiculturalism are easily put aside. To make the issues seem less impossible, partly because of the highly contested and politically stigmatized nature of the term multiculturalism, in design it might in the end be more useful to leave the whole terminology aside when discussing spatial questions. Instead the emphasis could be on the need for different cultural spaces, the importance of the many different cultures of everyday life and especially in a country yet urbanizing, the relevance of the multiplicity of urban cultures.

²⁴ Amin (2002) Ethnicity and the multicultural city: living with diversity. In Environment and Planning A volume 34

References

- Amin (2002) *Ethnicity and the multicultural city: living with diversity*. In *Environment and Planning A* volume 34, pp. 959-980
- Dhalmann (2009) *Kaksi olohuonetta ja tilaa riisisäkille? – Maahanmuuttajat ja asumisen suunnittelu*
Esitelmä Rakennustiedon Rakennusfoorumissa 1.12.2009 Maahanmuuttajat ja rakennettu ympäristö. Miksi vanhat mallit eivät kelpaa? Mitä tulisi tehdä toisin? Miten?
- Dhalmann, Ilmonen, Mälkki, Norvasuo (2010) *RT-ideakortti 2010: Lisääntyvä maahanmuutto ja asumisen suunnittelu*. Rakennustieto Oy.
- Espoon kaupungin monikulttuurisuusohjelma 2009-2012, Espoo
- Fainstein (2011) *Cities and Diversity. Should we want it? Can we plan for it?* In Fainstein, Campbell (ed) *Readings in Urban Theory, third edition*. pp. 115-128
- Fincher, Iveson (2011) *Conceptualizing Recognition in Planning*. In Fainstein, Campbell (ed) *Readings in Urban Theory, third edition*, pp. 129-146
- Hallituksen maahanmuuttopoliittinen ohjelma 2006 (Government Migration Policy Programme)
- Hewidy (2010) *The Big Issue. The Religious Dimensions in Muslims' Housing within the Helsinki Metropolitan Area: Challenges and Opportunities*. Master's Thesis, Aalto University.
- Hirvonen (2011) *Suvela tilastoissa ja asukkaiden kokemana*. *Tiede + teknologia* 17/2011. Aalto University.
- Hämeenlinnan monikulttuurisuusohjelma vuosille 2012-2015, Hämeenlinna
- Iverson (2010) *Introduction: Multiculturalism as a Public Ideal*. In Iverson (ed.) *The Ashgate Research Companion to Multiculturalism* pp. 1-18
- Löytty (2010) *Monikulttuurisuuden käsitteen mieli*. In Heikkinen, Mynttinen (ed) *Kollaasikaupunki*, pp. 43-53
- Maununaho (2006) *Monikulttuurinen asuinalue Hagalundiin*. Master's Thesis, Tampere University of Technology, Department of Architecture.
- Myydyt kerrostaloasunnot (Sold apartments)/postinumeroalue 02760 Espoo (2010) *Ympäristöministeriö: www.asuntojenhintatiedot.fi*
- Penoyre, Prasad (et al) (1993) *Accommodating diversity. The design of housing for minority ethnic, religious and cultural groups*. London: National Federation of Housing Association.
- Suvela-visio 2035. *Kehittämisen tahtoa ja toimia!* Espoo City Planning
- Uitermark, Rossi, van Houtum (2005) *Reinventing Multiculturalism: Urban Citizenship and the Negotiation of Ethnic Diversity in Amsterdam*. In *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* Volume 29.3 pp. 622-640
- Uitermark (2011) *An actually existing just city? The fight for the right to the city in Amsterdam*. In Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer (eds) *Cities for People, Not for Profit: Theory/Practice*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Valentine (2008) *Living with difference: reflections on geographies of encounter*. In *Progress in Human Geography* 32(3) pp. 323-337
- Vantaa on muuttajien kaupunki (Vantaa city of immigrants)(2008), Vantaa
- Vilkama (2011) *Yhteinen kaupunki eriytyvät kaupunginosat. Kantaväestön ja maahanmuuttajataustaisten asukkaiden alueellinen eriytyminen ja muuttoliike pääkaupunkiseudulla*.
- Virkkala (2010) *Asuntosuunnittelun merkitys maahanmuuttajan kotoutumisessa*. Bachelor's Thesis, Aalto University.

Väestö kielen mukaan (Population by language) 2008, Espoon kaupungin kehittämis- ja tutkimusryhmän verkkotilastopalvelun tilastotietokanta

Wood, Landry (2008) The intercultural city: planning for diversity advantage. London: Earthscan.

Photographs by Katja Maununaho:

1, 4: Suvela katutaiteilee! Suvela school street art project opening in 1.6.2011

2, 3: Suvela public housing block in April 2012