Greening Turku
A Vision for a Greener and Sustainable Historic Town 2019
Ana Maria Jones and Markku Wilenius
The Green-in TURKU project, originally titled as Towards a Greener Urban Future, has been an investigation towards innovative solutions to increase liveability in the inner city of Turku. The project idea stemmed from Turku Vision for the City Centre 2050, a project chaired by Prof. Markku Wilenius in the years 2016-2017. The Vision was well received by the public and political decision-makers alike. As a result, developing a more detailed plan on key priority areas was thought to be useful to push the progress of the city centre design to the forefront. A central theme, that came already well forward during the vision work, was the current state of green areas. That meant not only parks and gardens but actually the reinvigoration of the city core to meet the needs of a new urban generation, appreciative of social and ecological environments over cars, concrete-dominated landscapes and opportunistic economic reasoning. Together with the city authorities, a more qualitative research and urban analysis of Turku's urban structure was conducted by the Germany-based resource efficiency planner Ana Jones. The purpose of the project was to investigate innovative strategies, identify challenges and formulate new pathways for how to scale-up usability and access to green areas in the city centre of Turku.
The Green-In Turku project is structured in two phases:

**Phase I:** Understanding the role of green areas and public spaces in the city centre

The phase I of the project covers a comprehensive urban analysis of green and public spaces in the core districts of the city centre. Our analysis was based on urban trends and case studies from cities with a high greening profile in Europe and abroad. Following this analysis, an urban evaluation was conducted giving consideration to the Turku context and to the following trends and measures: 1. The growing need for adequate access to green space for human health in highly urbanised areas; 2. The growing need for adequate distribution and quality of green areas per inhabitant. The project has produced two key reports in the areas of urban futures research and urban green: *A Green Urban Future: Scaled-Up Perspectives in Urban Green for Human-Centred and Liveable Urban Cores, and Access to Green: Enhancing Urban Attractiveness in Urban Centres-The Case of Turku.*
Phase II: Developing a plan for greening the core of the city centre

Phase II concludes with a plan to reactivate the network of green areas including some of the most important parks and public squares in Finland, the historic and commercial town of Turku. The plan consist of a total reconfiguration of this historical town and its parks to tackle critical challenges concerning fragmentation and spatial inefficiencies. The plan creates space for a new visitor centre and learning hub at the heart of the Suurtori and Cathedral Squares. With the cooperation of stakeholders and the local community, phase II has produced a revitalisation plan for the historic town and cultural landscape of Turku building on the appreciation and preservation of Turku’s past as foundation for an economically and culturally dynamic future. The plan calls for a new green network structure and goes as far as to suggest new multifunctional approaches and new uses for historical parks and pockets currently underutilised by the city and its citizens.
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A Vision for a Greener and Sustainable Historic Town 2019

Aerial view of Suurtori and Cathedral Square today
01 Introduction
Founded in 1229, Turku is the oldest city in Finland. The city centre is characterised by a cluster of districts: The Old Town, the central business district (CBD), the university town, and the riverbank district that together give Turku its identity. Yet, from a broad perspective, these core areas appear to be fractured. The contributing factors to this negative development are continuous urban sprawl, new development going outside the city core, and the ubiquitous presence of shopping malls that causes growing challenges to businesses in the area. All of this resulting in a poor connectivity and mobility flow deficiencies between districts. Turku’s historic town has lost its role as being the heart of city life. The remaining of what in the past was a town for commerce and main urban squares is today a series of green areas fragmented by a main transportation artery that cuts through the system of parks. The disintegration of these important green and public spaces represent a major challenge for building land use efficiency and enhance well-being and liveability at the heart of the city.
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<tr>
<th><strong>Turku Facts and Figures</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Population in 2017</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Area</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Mean annual temperature</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Industries</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Sustainability profile</strong></td>
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*Source: City of Turku; Turku Business Region*
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<tr>
<th><strong>Population</strong></th>
<th>ca 56,000</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total area</strong></td>
<td>ca 121 km²</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of buildings</strong></td>
<td>3,388</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>City centre core districts</strong></td>
<td>Yliopisto I, Vartiovuori II, Samppalinna III and Urheilupuisto III, Tuurepori VI, Kauppatori VI, Rauhankatu VII, Ursininkatu pohj., Kristiinankatu et., Kristiinankatu pohj., Puolalanmäki VII</td>
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<td><strong>City centre districts with the highest % of green area (52% - 31%) in 2017</strong></td>
<td>Samppalinna III, Mäntymäki, Kupittaa, and Urheilupuisto III</td>
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<td><strong>City centre districts with 0% of green areas (2017)</strong></td>
<td>Ursininkatu pohj., Kristiinankatu pohj., Kurjenmäki länt., Rahtisatama</td>
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City Centre Core Identities
Historic Town Evolution

1827
The Old Town was known as the administrative and commercial centre of Turku

1897
After the Great Fire of Turku, the dense Old Town core structure was arranged around a series of parks

2050
Potential for strengthening the Turku's urban core as a vibrant historic town and European city

From Past to Future
Historic Town Evolution
Urban Life in Historic Turku

Source: Lahtinen, 2009; Lahtinen et al., 2016.
Green Network and Urban Connecting Tissue

Moving from a linear arrangement of parks to a circular network of green spaces
A Concept for Future Green Mobility

Towards a human-centred mobility infrastructure prioritising pedestrian, bicycle and public transport
Cultural Urban Nodes

Capitalising on the cultural assets concentrated in the Old Town and surrounding areas
02 The Old Town
Potential and Challenges
Green and Public Spaces
The current situation
Green and Public Spaces

Challenges
- Uneven distribution of green areas across districts
- Inadequate design of access points to green areas
- Lack of functionality and quality of public space for public enjoyment
- Fragmentation of green and public spaces due to traffic in Uudenmaankatu that divides the Old Town and parks

Potential
- Preservation and cultural heritage of Turku's most important historic parks and public spaces
- Proximity to the Aura River and urban green network
Historic Buildings and Urban Spaces

The current situation
Historic Buildings and Urban Spaces

Potential
+ Historical layers
+ Old Town scale and atmosphere

Challenges
- Large and undefined spaces
- Dominant traffic and parking in the area
The Blue Spine

The current situation
The Blue Spine

Potential

+ Strengthening linkages between the eastern and western sides of the city

Challenges

- Poor quality criteria for enjoyment of green and public spaces around the riverbanks
- Not sufficient human-nature connection and interplay with the water element
Emerging Functions

Knowledge Creation
University, business, city

Social
Parks, sports, nature

Creative
Culture, art, design
03 A New Historic Town Vision
The Vision is the revitalisation of the Old Town and consolidation of Turku’s most important sites and parks, the Old Market Square, Turku Cathedral Square and adjacent parks. The idea is to create a dynamic and integrated space with potential to generate the highest positive impact on city and community.
Vision
Appreciation for Turku's past as foundation for an economically and culturally dynamic future
The New Historic Town

Masterplan
04 Planning Approach
Scale-up the access to green areas in the heart of the city

Employ human-centred design as guiding principle for new public spaces

Focus on complexity management of urban nodes, networks and functions

Use a systemic approach to urban planning instead of parochial, project-based development

Planning Approach
Scale-Up Green and Public Spaces
Measure of Accessibility to Green Areas

1. Proximity to green spaces (Linear distance of 300m or 15 min. walking distance)

2. Access to green areas for public use

3. Access points to green areas (Pathways, stairs, ramps)
+ Enhancing liveability in the city centre by working with the access and connectivity of green areas and pockets, elevating biodiversity and ensuring well-being

+ Improving the urban experience by increasing the availability of and proximity to multifunctional green areas

+ Prioritising walking and cycling, and their relationship with the urban landscape and extended network of green areas

Scale-Up Green and Public Spaces
Revitalising Historic Buildings and Urban Spaces
+ Introducing mixed-use schemes on existing building infrastructure, highlighting the historic layer and scale of the historic town and a new urban and architectural dialog

+ Transforming the urban experience revitalising pockets and spaces between buildings

Revitalising Historic Buildings and Urban Spaces
Activating the Blue Spine
+ Strengthening the connection between the central business district (CBD), university area, the commercial layer of Old Town with the River Aura

+ Creating linkages between the east and the west side of the historic town to enhance access, pedestrian and bicycle flows

+ Enhancing the quality of green areas and public spaces to improve the urban experience along the Aura River and further into surrounding inner city districts

Activating the Blue Spine
1. Scale Up Green Areas and Public Spaces
2. Revitalising Historic Buildings and Spaces Between Buildings
3. Activating the Blue Spine

= The key elements of the new historic town strategy
The New Historic Town

A sustainable historic town at Finland’s most significant cultural centre with appreciation for Turku’s past as foundation for an economically and culturally dynamic future
05 The Plan
New Green Areas Masterplan
Suurtori Gardens
Historical plots before the Great Fire 1827

Reintroduced as new gardens

Suurtori Gardens Concept
2. Revitalising Historic Buildings and Spaces Between Buildings

3. Activating the Blue Spine

Suurtori Gardens
Runeberg Biodiversity Park
1. Scale-Up Green and Public Spaces

2. Revitalising Historic Buildings and Spaces Between Buildings

3. Activating the Blue Spine

Runeberg Biodiversity Park
Green Connection to Tuomaanpuisto
1. Scale-Up Green and Public Spaces

2. Revitalising Historic Buildings and Spaces Between Buildings

3. Activating the Blue Spine

Green Connection to Tuomaanpuisto
06 New Learning Hub and Citizens Park
New Learning Hub and Citizens Park

A view overlooking Aninkaistenkatu
Sustainability Concept

The learning hub will not only serve as a magnet for the New Historic Town, but an exemplar of sustainable design. The building will work in harmony with its natural surroundings: using resources efficiently, and utilising solar energy and rainwater. Constructed from structural wood and glass, the naturally lit and ventilated interior will provide ideal conditions for people and plants.

New Learning Hub and Citizens Park
New Learning Hub and Citizens Park
New Learning Hub and Citizens Park
Closing Remarks

The Green-in TURKU project lays the foundation for the further development and planning of green areas in Turku in support of the city centre strategy for liveability and vibrancy. Our research draws from a comprehensive analysis and city-level initiatives implemented in Europe and abroad aimed to scale-up the value of green areas in mixed-use dense urban centres. Our investigation also draws from a series of meetings with corresponding city officials, urban planners, architects and researchers involved in greening development plans in cities and communities. The project builds on a series of workshops organised under the BASTU-platform. BASTU is a network of active citizens of Turku, coordinated by Finland Futures Research Centre, working for more sustainable and dynamic business environment for the region.

Our investigation has led us to the conclusion that creating an attractive urban environment is today - more than ever - a highly complex task. The new demands for space utilisation coupled with urban pressures on equal distribution, access, and quality of the green areas is a hard equation in itself. Yet it is obvious that progress towards more and better access to green space is of paramount importance for ensuring liveability. Congested and grey environments are no one’s benefit.

In our view, the capital investments made towards this urban revitalisation and greening plan will pay back in the years and decades to come. Improvements on urban green infrastructure will mean more people, residents and tourist flows, and it will also mean more capital and business exchange as more services will be needed to support the economic vibrancy and trade of the new historic town.

This project is a contribution towards holistic planning and integration of green areas in Turku and its historic town. The project addresses challenges hindering development and puts forward a plan for resource utilisation of green areas to improve vibrancy and liability at Turku’s most representative commercial and historic centre. The proposed plan formulates a new pathway and calls for the need for a more circular approach to greening the city core and its most representative districts and historic parks. In our view, a vision for a greener and sustainable historic town for Turku entails the transformation of its core to that of a town that is above all human-centred, accessible and with adequate presence of nature. So, what this all means is more biodiversity in the city, and better integration of nature and public space with a full consideration for all groups of society. It means calling visitors and residents to the experience of an urban life that is of strong human quality. Simply put, more life at the heart of the city.