

# Helsinki's Terrain Vague: Alternative Public Space and *Expectant Design*

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## Abstract

Between deharborization and build-out, Helsinki's Kalasatama has existed as a *terrain vague*. Its unfinished and transitional nature has inspired city residents to take ephemeral authorship in the area. Fruits of this are seen in temporary interventions and urban actions in the export, which range from graffiti to urban gardening. Kalasatama's transitional period has offered the city center a vacant, unoccupied and unfinished space: an urban rarity that, as noted by Ignasi de Solà-Morales implies a condition where exists also freedom, availability, and opportunity. In the cultural epoch of controlled and technocratically constructed shopping malls, Kalasatama's public space offers a more democratic, open alternative.

In open "platform" space users can, through intervention, engage in discussion and community membership. Such places are both instigators and stages for a truly public realm. The degree to which residents have capitalized on Kalasatama's potential speaks of the need for inclusion of platform public space in otherwise closed and finished urban fabric. Despite this, the vague space of Kalasatama will be fully redeveloped into residential and commercial uses, and an urban dream of public space will come to a close.

Or will it? A design/research thesis in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology presents an alternative for flexible public spaces in the context of Kalasatama's redevelopment.

**KEYWORDS:** public space, urban design, terrain vague, open city, *Expectant Design*

## Introduction

Open space in cities is indisputably valuable. Parks and squares provide relief from dense urban form and thus allow city inhabitants to find moments of pause, let them be mere block-long walks in sunlight or day-long picnics. Parks and squares are, however, planned and composed. Through their constructed nature, such spaces are finite and occupied, and offer a limited palette of interpretations and uses. Furthermore, as parks and squares are official parts and property of the city, they are not only informally but also formally regulated. Through these characteristics of defined program and form, usership, regulation and ownership, the use of typical public spaces is limited.

Unfinished urban space is categorically different, and as this paper aims to argue, potentially more valuable than the familiar urban public spaces discussed above. Vagueness of space and openness of cities are broad subjects, and it is not within the scope of this study to examine the topics in full. The intent of this paper is to examine the relationship between the themes, through the lens of Ignasi de Solà-Morales Rubió's *terrain vague* (1995).

Empty lots, space left over by infrastructure, deindustrialized areas, places damaged or neglected by circumstances: these spaces delineate what de Solà-Morales describes as the *terrain vague* (Ibid.). Because of their absence of a strictly designated use or order, such spaces hold spatial and programmatic potential for realization of what is thus far unseen or unimagined, both in the eyes of cities' economic and developmental forces, as well as in those of its users. Similarly, the implied lack of regulation and proprietorship that both causes and results from the *terrain vague*'s exclusion from composed urban fabric, connotes freedom and opportunity for engagement on the part of the user. This freedom is part of what makes genuinely *public* space, and an *open* city.

With the deharboring of Helsinki's Kalasatama, an industrial area that was previously occupied and closed off by harbor activities opened to the city. Between its time as a harbor and its future as a residential and commercial area, Kalasatama has existed as a *terrain vague*, and a platform for public action. Hosting activities such as urban gardening, graffiti mural-making, and a temporary café, the area served as an open, flexible space for users to not just take a moment in but to take up full engagement with. Because of its temporary unproductivity and transitional nature, Kalasatama's regulatory environment was more relaxed than the traditional open public spaces, and although actions were facilitated by the Helsinki-based practice Part, users were largely given freedom to intervene. Through the undefined quality of its space, Kalasatama offered itself as a catalyst for the imagination of new ways of occupation and engagement. Its many temporary uses and interventions by city residents attest to the need for such places of potential and freedom to exist in the city in a more permanent form. With redevelopment, standardization and build-out, the *terrain vague*

of Kalasatama and its linked potential for participation in public space is lost, through its assimilation into the regular and closed urban fabric. The realization of an urban dream of authentically public space comes to a close.

It is through this potential closure that the author asks: **In the context of urban redevelopment, how can the qualities of the terrain vague be preserved?** Terrain vague serves not only as a place of potential but also a platform for informal public dialog on topics such as city development, cultural and political values, and environmental issues. As the case of Kalasatama shows, vague space is of great cultural value to city residents, but is often assigned another use in favor of economic development. Despite its economic unproductivity and unregulated character, the terrain vague should be allowed to perpetuate after redevelopment. Could aspects of design enable the continuation of vague space's role as a catalyst for user engagement, after areas such as Kalasatama undergo conversion?

This aspect of inquiry guided the author's post-professional design and research thesis in architecture and urbanism, completed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, *Adaptation and Adaptability: Expectant Design for Resilience in Coastal Urbanity* (Delaney Ruskeepää, 2011). The project strove to negotiate issues of environmental change in the Kalasatama coastal redevelopment, but also to investigate the maintenance of terrain vague characteristics past the area's finalization and build-out. The primary design and research goal in *Adaptation and Adaptability* was to provide a climate change adaptation strategy for Kalasatama that would act in addition to its current development plan. As will be discussed and described in this paper, the project also aimed to create a network of open and participatory spaces that would bring city residents into active discussion and engagement, particularly on environmental issues connected to climate change in the water-proximate site. This network was proposed using public space as a medium and proximity to water and civic areas in Kalasatama as a site.

The project research was supported by analysis of flexible design precedents (Team 10, N.J. Habraken, Yona Friedman, Cedric Price, parametric design, et al.), as well as natural hazards research (Gilbert F. White, climate change adaptation strategies, Dutch water cities, etc.). The thesis's climate change adaptation strategy served as a site for the design of a flexible public space scheme that was in light of Kalasatama's recent history; design of the project's public spaces strove to create permanent places for user engagement as was seen in Kalasatama's temporary uses. This paper returns to the author's completed thesis work to place an angle of inquiry on the project, from the specific viewpoint of de Solà-Morales's discussion of the *terrain vague*, in order to further the author's concept of *Expectant Design* (Ibid.).



**Figures 1,2,3. Kalasatama's terrain vague, in years 2010 and 2011. Note: all images included in this study are by the author unless otherwise indicated.**

## Part I: Background

### Terrain Vague and the Open City

*Terrain vague* was coined as an expression in de Solà-Morales's 1995 essay of the same name (published in *Anyplace*) to describe urban space that is both "empty, unoccupied" yet also "free, available, unengaged". Here, "[t]he relationship between the absence of use, of activity, and the sense of freedom, of expectancy, is fundamental to understanding the evocative potential" of the terrain vague's unfinished and open nature (Ibid.). The words "freedom", "expectancy" and "potential" in de Solà-Morales's writing are key in describing the link between *vague* space and alternative *open* public space.

In the terrain vague, it is the "absence, yet also promise, the space of the possible, of expectation" (Ibid.) that provides opportunity and motivation on the part of an active user. Through this freedom of imagination, engagement, and intervention the user is welcomed to enter into a dialog with the space of the city. Vagueness of areas such as empty lots, deindustrialized areas, and residual places between infrastructures connotes unengagement, non-proprietorship, and lessened regulation. When space is not clearly planned, regulated, owned and maintained, it offers itself to the creative and interested passer-by as a place of potential intervention.

Through intervention the user is able to mark and thus gain partial proprietorship on the land, not in the sense of direct ownership legally or economically, but in the way that he/she forms a particular personal and intimate bond with the place through personalization. Vague space's physical sense of expectancy provides the experiential openness that provokes action. This incitement to bonding through physical intervention is largely what sets terrain vague public space apart from typical public space.

To further describe terrain vague, it can be contrasted with the typical public space of parks and squares. Traditionally constructed public spaces in contemporary cities are of a defined, and closed nature. Using a public space familiar to residents of Helsinki as an example, the Kamppi metro station and center may be utilized to illustrate this point. The example is used not for its specific design, but for its spatial and programmatic typology. Opened in 2005, the urban project contains both interior and exterior public space. Its built public space consists of a transportation and shopping center, which joins on its ground and first floor with the center's exterior squares. From the standpoint of architecture and urban design the center is successful, particularly considering the center's being built in a single phase and the challenges of navigating the urban scale in the context of the Nordic climate.

Kamppi center and station's interior type of public space, well-defined architecture aside,



is moderated by the economics of such a large scale project. Although it accommodates travellers' movement well, it is dominated by shopping. This is unfortunately the fate of most large-scale interior "public" spaces built today, due in part to their mechanisms of finance. Not only are such spaces of consumption highly regulated in their form, content, and function (opening hours, who is admitted and allowed to roam, activities the users are allowed to perform, etc.), but they are also entirely closed to user engagement. Beyond consumption, that is.

The Kamppi metro station and center is bordered on two sides by squares that comprise the project's exterior public space. From a design standpoint the spaces handle scale well, provide seating, and angle sectional changes so as provide good perches for people-watching. Although these squares have the liberation of the open air, they too are regulated in their defined forms, uses, proprietorship, allowed occupancy, and materials. This is all within the language of the traditional square or park, and the example spaces are taken as such merely because of their likely familiarity to the reader, both in context and construction. Through the finite, regulated and closed nature of the function, materials and proprietorship of typical public space design the user as an agent of action, intervention, and personalization is excluded.

This exclusion happens precisely through the closure of possibility for alternative uses, occupancies, interpretations, and forms of proprietorship. In public spaces such as Helsinki's Kamppi the acceptable functions and modes of interaction on the part of the user is clear and commonplace; there is no room for engagement, action, or new dialog. The space does not expect to be interacted with in ways beyond what is defined by its offerings of set program, finished surfaces and clearly defined space.

For a space to be genuinely public, it must be open, democratic and engageable. Consumption alone is not engagement; the mere possibility to move about a space does not make it fully public. In the contemporary public sphere the user typically does not have broad freedom beyond locomotion and purchase. He or she cannot assemble or campaign without a permit, cannot personalize or otherwise mark the surfaces of the space, and most of all cannot build in nor apply an alternative function to the space. Such limitation of the user in space is executed by the explicitly defined and regulated character of public parks and squares.

Users of public spaces should instead be given the opportunity to activate themselves as agents of change in the city fabric. Possibilities to alter function, materials or configuration of urban public space, the opportunity to imagine and enact an alternative usership, and the potential to temporarily feel a sense of proprietorship in the public realm: these are all examples of user engagement in the public space. For such engagement to occur, the built



**Figure 4. Kamppi's exterior public space.**

environment needs to accept change. The user must be encouraged to become active and engaged through the openness and *expectancy* of an environment to his/her influence and presence.

Public space that is designed to be anticipatory encourages engagement. Spaces' receptivity to dialog and personalization on the part of the user render them animate and flexible systems. Similarly, and as this paper argues, openness and potential for engagement through expectancy of a place is part of what makes space truly public. In the terrain vague receptivity towards the user can be found in its qualities of non-definition, non-finiteness, absence of formal regulation and resulting openness and promise. Thus, the value of open, undeveloped, or otherwise unclaimed space in cities cannot be overstated in terms of the prospects it offers to residents. Flexible urban areas that are yet to have their full spatial potential exploited in the form of full development or build-out are few remaining places of responsiveness to the city resident as a non-commercial actor, and are last bastions of personalizable public space.

## Terrain Vague in Helsinki

Spaces that are "indeterminate, imprecise, blurred, uncertain" as de Solà-Morales argues, connote an "absence of limit" that "precisely contains the expectations of mobility, vagrant roving, free time, liberty" (Ibid.). As has been the case in Helsinki's Kalasatama, the area's lack of definition during its transitional time from harbor to developed neighborhood granted the margin for imagination as to what could be there. The area's deregulation conceded public action. Local groups were inspired to and allowed to temporarily inhabit the space through several improvised programs. Kalasatama's open, unfinished, and flexible space invited residents to imagine and realize alternative uses, and its deregulation made the coming and going of people and projects more possible than elsewhere in the city center.

Vague spaces of Kalasatama's scale are rarely seen as active areas in an urban core. Kalasatama's deharborization and following openness to the public provoked and helped its transformation into an open and alternative public space. City officials and planners were not incognizant of the space's potential, and perhaps allowed it to be engaged with ("squatted") because it was recognized that the transformation of the industrial space into a kind of public initiative festival area would encourage interest on the part of future buyers, and would raise the property value of the area. In Kalasatama's case it may be too early for citable articles that give evidence of the effect of public activities on property values and perceptions of redeveloped space, but it certainly is a topic for further study.

The public interventions were not entirely unassisted, and the work of Helsinki practice Part does not go unnoted: the firm's role in facilitating user action can serve as an example



to urban design practices globally. Even without this professional facilitation and recognition on the part the city, Kalasatama's activities still exemplify the possible output of an urban space that opens itself towards user action and personalization, and the spatial realization of a democratic alternative to ordinary urban citizenship.

## Spaces of Potential: Valuable but Diminishing

A common loss of urban living is the ability to alter and engage with outdoor space, with exceptions made in the case that one breaks social and legal conventions through unofficial interventions such as graffiti. Alterable open space that serves the preferences of several users through temporary use, alterability, and multiple meaning has a public and collective agenda. It gives urban communities the opportunity to sense (albeit fleeting) proprietorship of city space outside of the home or office. Discussion of "creative spaces" (Lehtovuori & Havik, 2009) describes this desire of city dwellers, and the possibility for this to be a collective and productive act. Similarly, Michel Foucault's *Heterotopia* speaks to the mysteriousness of spaces that are "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites" (Foucault, 1967). Through latent and hidden characteristics, the heterotopia is *not clearly defined*, and is thus open towards multiple realities. Paul Barker, et al. (1969, 1999) discuss possibility



**Figure 5. Preparing food in Kalasatama's container square. Image: Katharina Moebus.**



**Figures 6, 7, 8. Kalasatama's temporary cafe, "Ihana Kahvila". Images: flickr user Ihanakahvila.**



Figures 9, 10, 11. Temporary use in Kalasatama as inspiration for *Expectant Design*: Helsinki NGO Dodo's container gardening, and the Kalasatama graffiti wall.

and engagement in spatial realms that are without finite and complete plans. Such ideas are a sampling of broad thought on vague space, and both foreshadow and harken back to de Solà-Morales's terrain vague.

In established, concentrated, and built-out cities vague places of significant scale such as was seen in Kalasatama are few and far between. As populations globally concentrate in urban areas, real estate economics shift to make redevelopment of unoccupied spaces feasible (and even popular). Redevelopment and densification can help a city to widen its tax base, accommodate more residents, develop its services and infrastructure, and potentially lower its environmental impact, but is often at the cost of urban flexibility and openness. As cities reach further towards the exhaustion of spatial potential, they lose some of the sense of promise and possibility that can inspire residents towards intervention and personalization.

Through the development of empty lots, deindustrialization, and renewal of economically underproductive vague spaces, the city form moves further towards the finished and finite, maximized and static condition of build-out. Alterable and adaptable space is needed in the city, and especially in response to redevelopment. It is the place where community discussion and awareness can be brought up, and engagement of the environment on the part of user can take place. The valuable freedom that vague spaces offer to the city resident and user should, despite development, be preserved. The author's thesis (*Adaptation and Adaptability: Expectant Design for Resilience in Coastal Cities*) explores design's ability to preserve and promote the flexibility of space in Kalasatama.

## Part II: Design

### Designing a permanent space for engagement

After forming the project's theoretical basis, the thesis examined Kalasatama's environmental and social challenges in a systemic manner. Although the research and design work strove to primarily address issues of a changing natural environment in the site, it also aimed to devise public space strategies that were in considerations of the area's recent history. Kalasatama's status as a terrain vague and the resulting public action influenced the thesis design approach; the project was to propose not only a space that would adapt to environmental influence and change but to social change and activity as well. Design strove to strategize and implement infrastructure for climate change adaptation, but simultaneously to provide the spatial framework for the area's future public space adaptability.

### *Expectant Design*

The project's design mechanism for supporting adaptation and adaptability, and as discussed in this paper, is that of *Expectant Design* (Delaney Ruskeepää, 2011). This termed, coined for the purpose of the author's research, takes inspiration from de Solà-Morales's use of "expectant" in his description of the terrain vague, mentioned above. Research also references the expectancy and anticipatory design of flood infrastructure, as well as the flexibility and multiplicity of temporary use.

Expectant design awaits influence and change in its site and from its inhabitant, and is thus open and partial. It anticipates influence from its environment and occupancy by its user. The concept drives design that is developed and implemented towards being adaptable to changes in environmental context, as well as changes in user needs and desires. Through openness to and engagement with context and user, expectant design aims to respond to fluctuations in contextual forces. Expectant design inquiry is made through the examination of user and site experience and expectation, and thus it presents the user and site with latent or suspended characteristics and possibilities.

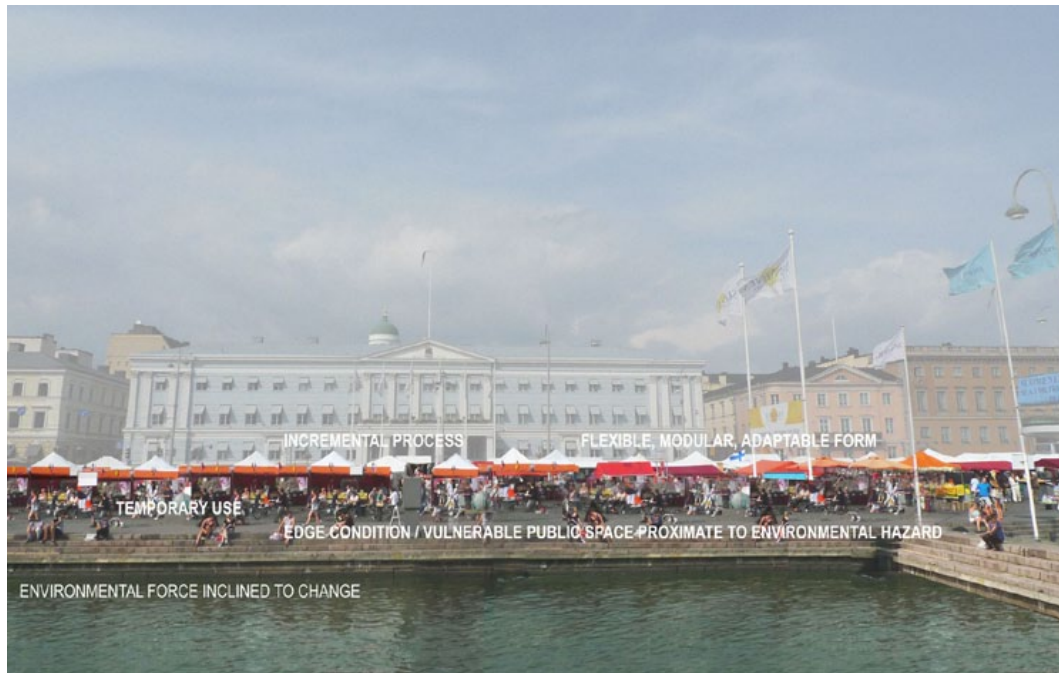
Expectant design was the conceptual driver for the development of the project's site strategy. This involved phasing and incrementality of design implementation, which allows time and space for the user and environment to imprint themselves onto the design. The unfinished quality of built space that occurs in a phasing process invites user personalization. Through anticipation of the forces (environmental and dynamic) in the site, as well as the expectations and propensities of the user (individual, group, and city), design initiated a dialog of change. Expectant design is engaging, flexible, time-sensitive, and incremental. The project design used this as a generating principle towards an adaptation of the site that is, through time



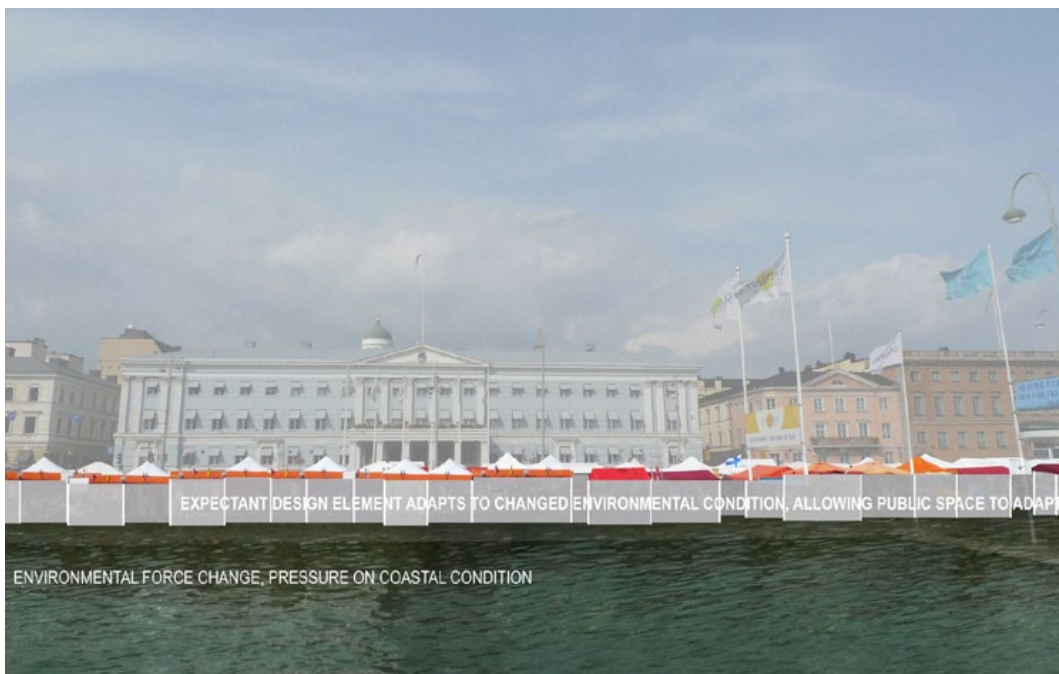


**Figure 12.** *Expectant Design* was the project's conceptual driver. Here, a diagram shows the concept in a coastal context. Adaptive infrastructure and adaptable space inspired the concept through *expectancy*: having the ability to react to fluctuation of contextual forces, and as well possessing latent or suspended characteristics and possibilities.





**Figure 13. Conceptual image of expectant design in coastal public space context, part one. Expectant design is incremental, flexible, modular, public and participatory.**



**Figure 14. Conceptual image of expectant design in coastal public space context, part two. Expectant design is a time sensitive intersection of flexible, open and alterable public space, and the terrain vague of temporary use and infrastructure.**

and circumstance, and by different users, was made adaptable. Through the layering of use, potential and meaning the project design in Kalasatama aimed to make the sense of expectancy spatial, programmatic, participatory, and public.

## A Short Note on Research Processes

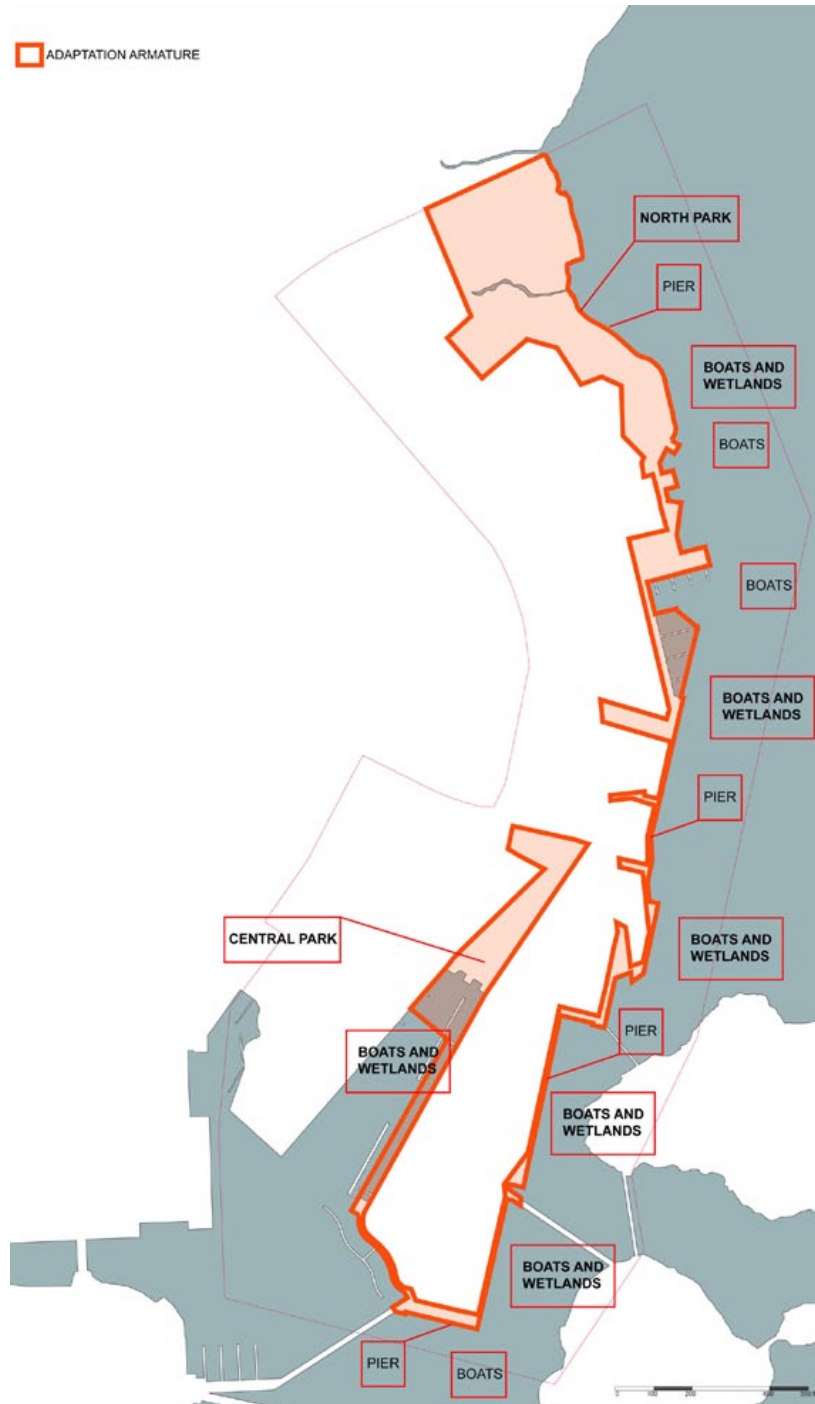
Initial project research involved an investigation of environmental and urban planning issues in Helsinki, and development of loose collaborations with local actors. Literature, project and policy review, and many interviews with experts and stakeholders informed the study and design. On-site research, assisted by the generous support the Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE) and the Schlossman Travel Grant, allowed for a view into the current conditions, policies, and stakeholders in Kalasatama's development.

The site's development, zoning, proximity to water, and future urban design were analyzed in consideration of the thesis's proposal to develop alternative public space. Rather than alter the existing development plan, the project's design was to act in concurrence with existing plans for Kalasatama. This was firstly in consideration of the plans' approval and likely future implementation, but also because the project strove to provide solutions for sites in addition to Kalasatama. As many places in Helsinki and cities globally are experiencing build-out, other contexts exist where such a scheme could be suitable.

In examination of the Kalasatama zoning plan, the project proposed a zoning analysis of spaces that should be designed so as to accommodate public space and to facilitate user intervention. These considerations, when combined with the urban design in existence at the time of the study, produced the coastal and public space zone for design implementation.

This coastal zone was the site for the design of several public space elements. The elements themselves were to stand alone or act in concert with other elements, and could be singular or multiple. Elements consisted of piers, vegetation rafts or "islands/wetlands", floating public space or "boats", a park landscape scheme, and "field houses" or interior modular public spaces. Each element illustrated a new design recommendation that the project produced. Recommendations were to react to environmental conditions on site, but also to the need for flexible public space. The overall design was to be implemented in a phased and incremental manner.





**Figure 16. Design armature and elements in the site. The armature described a zone of water proximity and public space, which acted as the site of the new terrain vague.**



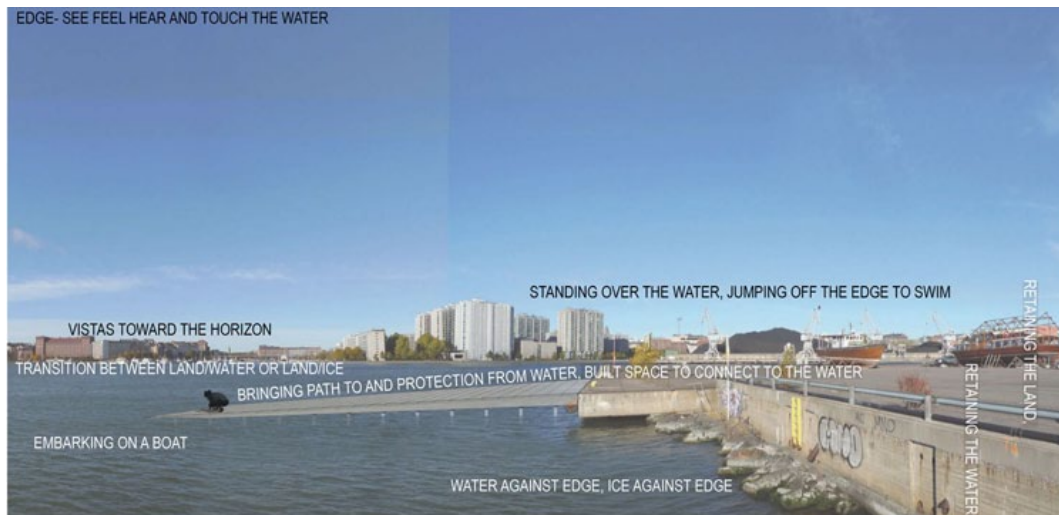
## Design Inquiry: Expectations and Experience

Design inquiry investigated the site under the assertion that user experience and expectations of the space should be engaged with in the design phase, and that design should indeed activate the area's inhabitants to engage and alter the design. Thus the observations and propensities one might have in experiencing the site's qualities were key to developing the design. The expectant design strategy considered the site as a set of experiences, potential questions, inclinations, and needs of the user. Examination of the site and potential expectations and experiences of the user created both an openness and specificity to the nature of participation, and aided in forming the design's invitation to the user to continue the area's process of intervention and change. This, along with the nature of change in the site environment due to its contextual cityscape (of post industry, water), was the design's assurance of literal and conceptual continuation. The engagement of expectation, experience, and environmental force served as the design's manual for perpetuation by the user after it was put in place. Through the expectant design strategy, the project strove not to be an end in itself but to serve as a platform in the city for the founding of a permanent terrain vague.

Collage was used to generate associations of potential user experience and expectations in visiting the site. As the project focused not only on adaptable space for users, but also adaptation to climate change, issues of water hazard were critical in determining the design zone, or area of influence. This zone was identified both by areas of hazard (flooding) and planned or likely public spaces (Kalasatama central park, site edge). In this coastal and public area, design strategies worked according to existing conditions and propensities of visitors to those areas. Conditions in Kalasatama that were investigated were as follows: land edge, water, parks and floodplain. The resulting collages informed the generation of design components that correlated to different site conditions and potential user expectations.

The following images are excerpts from the thesis site investigation and design inquiry. Collages describe the project's expectant design inquiry into site conditions and expectation/experience.





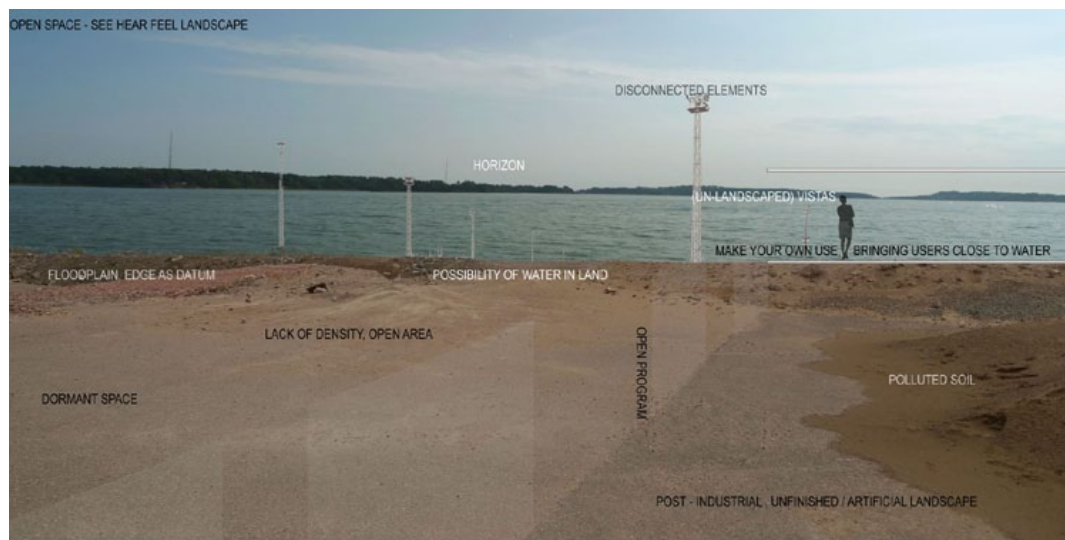
**Figure 17. Experiential Expectations of Coastal Areas and Public Space: Edge.**



**Figure 18. Experiential Expectations of Coastal Areas and Public Space: Water.**



**Figure 19. Experiential Expectations of Coastal Areas and Public Space: Park.**



**Figure 20. Experiential Expectations of Coastal Areas and Public Space: Open / Unused Space in Floodplain.**

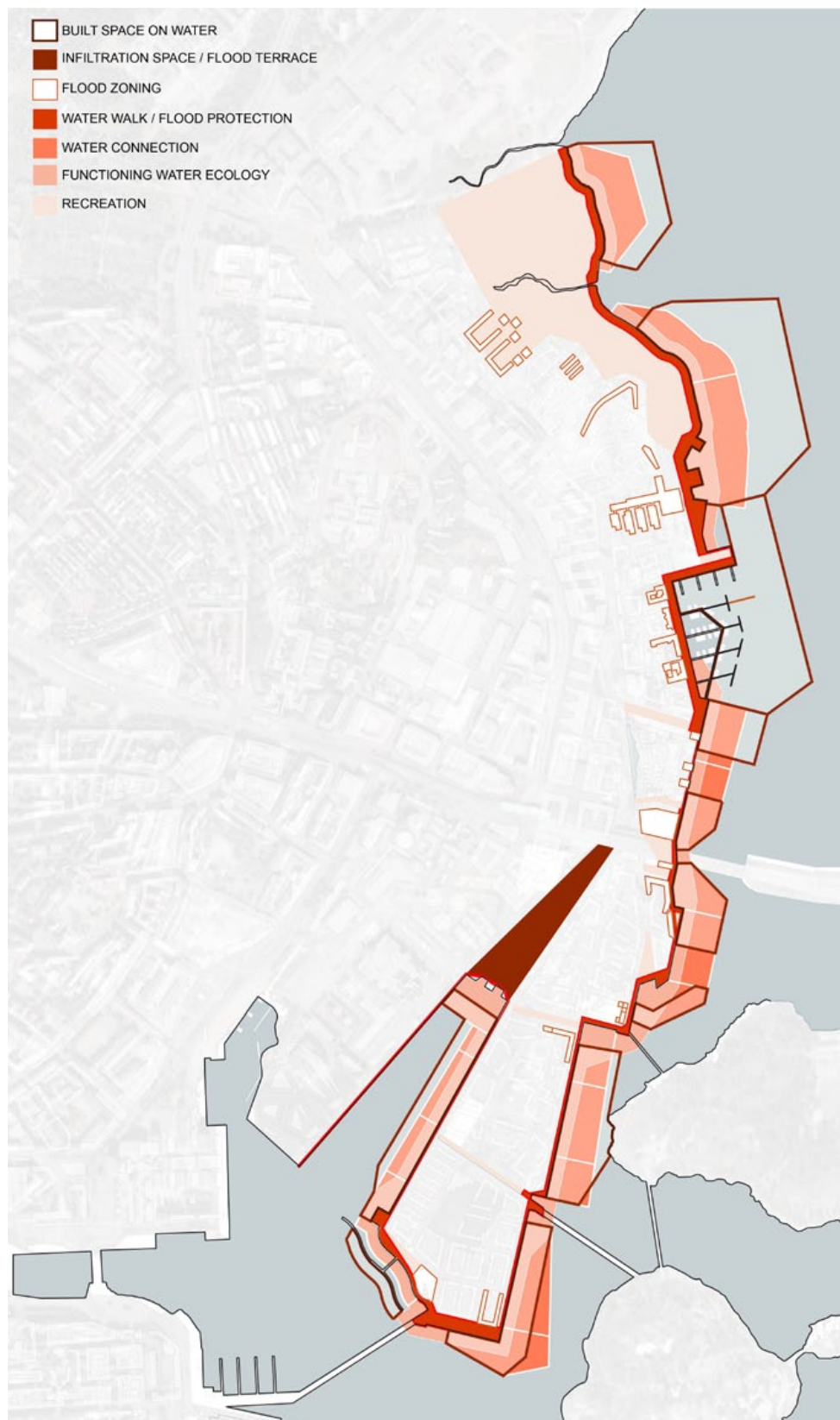
## Design

Design was made to be partial and potentially fragmentary, with the intent of provoking awareness, participation, and intervention on the part of the city and public. Design was in the coastal zone and consisted of a series of new and flexible spaces, on land and water. This flexible spatial zone aimed to create an accessible and permanent *terrain vague* that would act within the context of the area's redevelopment. Through its public program and formal openness, design strove to invite public participation as a means of shaping the coastal and water zone's character.

Design brought users closer to and in contact with water, gradually introducing it as an element in daily life. This was present in the design's use of water as space able to be built on and experienced, and an element expected in the city fabric. Water permeated and was permeated by the design's space. Floating public spaces were buoyed by the sea, waterside promenades allowed and confronted fluctuations in sea level, and floodable parks invited water in as a spatial element. Water and flexible public space were key themes in the design, and the relationship between the two was used to highlight the project's emphasis on flexible design and vague space. Through the user engagement with open public space that was in contact with water, he or she would also engage the fluctuating and vague environment of water.

Waterspace provided a platform for much of the project's flexible public space. It is itself a flexible realm changing with the subtle Baltic tides, times of day, weather, seasons, and climate. Waterspace also functions as an *other* space in the sense of Foucault's Heterotopias. It represents part of nature's unknown, right in the city center. Water is itself a *vague* space, and when it enters city fabric, creates vagueness of space. It is one of the last frontiers on urban development (The City of Helsinki City Planning Department, 2011), and yet at the same time belongs to everyone (The Finnish Ministry of the Environment, 2007). The project accessed water's ability to create malleable, oscillating and dynamic space through the use of it both as a site (in design's floating public spaces, ecosystem islands, piers) and as a spatial ingredient (public walkway, field houses, floodable park). Through the use of water as a site and element of design the project moved closer to the creation of a permanent *terrain vague*.

The following images describe excerpts of the design components, beginning in Kalasatama's northern floodplain zone (Hermannin) and southern unbuilt section of Arabianranta) through to its southern central park, with water and coastal areas in between. Design elements are to be seen as typologies for the area's conditions, and are to be implemented robustly so as to invite user intervention and personalization, while monitoring and adapting to the site's changes. All images are by the author.



**Figure 21. Design recommended a new “flexible zone” of terrain vague for coastal public space, to be constructed along side Kalasatama’s redevelopment.**





**Figure 22. Initial state of project phasing. Intervention occurs in the coastal zone of Kalasatama's redevelopment, creating new ground for flexible spaces.**

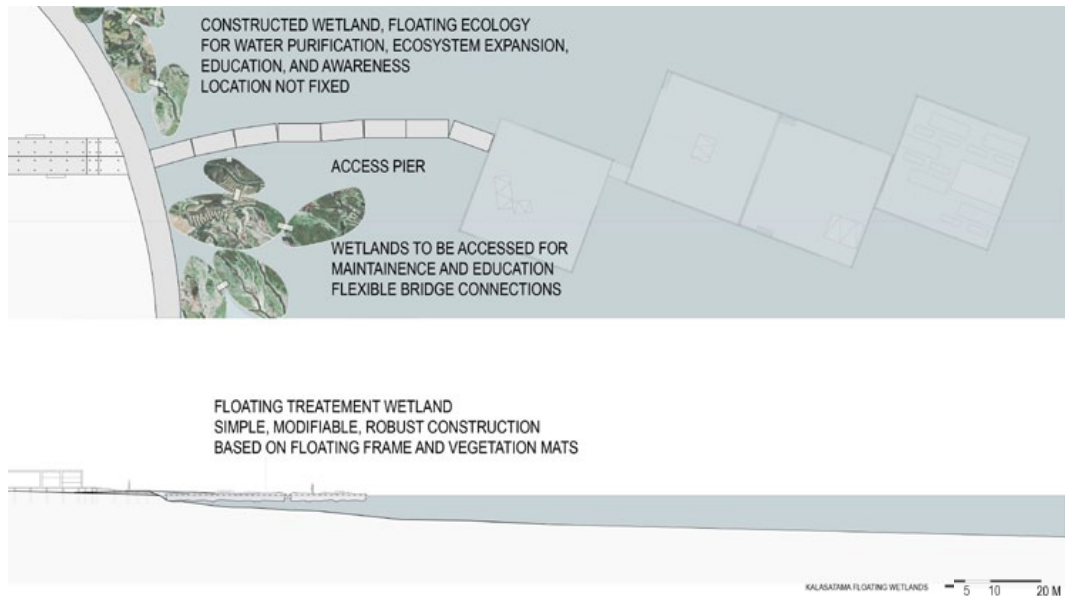




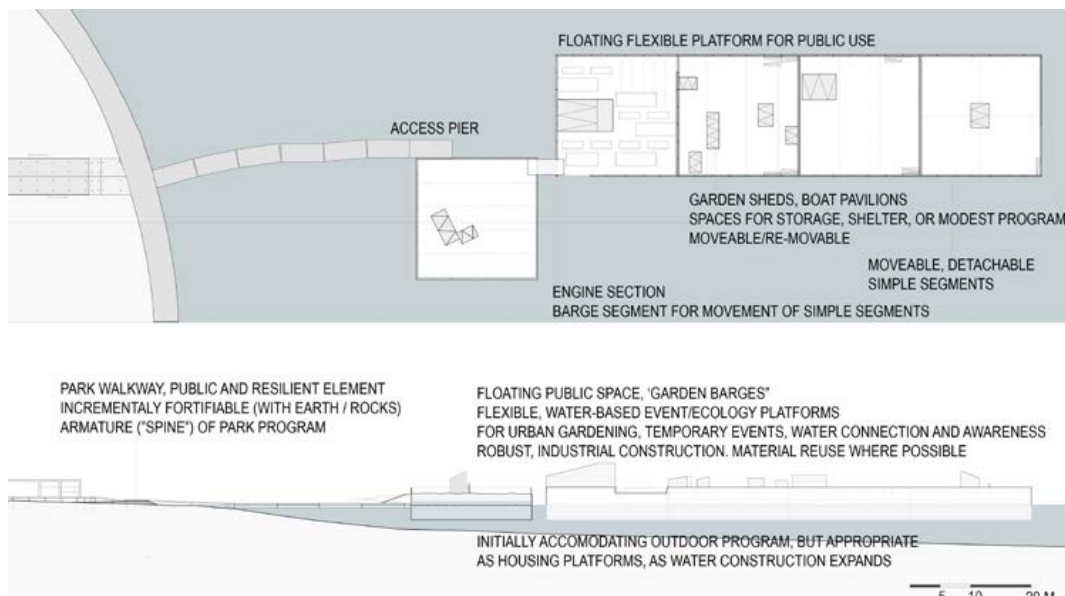
**Figure 23. Advanced state of the project's phased implementation. Kalasatama's new terrain vague and alternative public space is established along the redeveloped site's edge.**



**Figure 24. View of design in the northern flood plain. A flexible and expectant adaptation strategy is made through the incremental components of fortifiable path, flexible piers, water-based public space, and functioning public ecologies.**



**Figure 25. Plan and section of the flexible path and island spaces.**

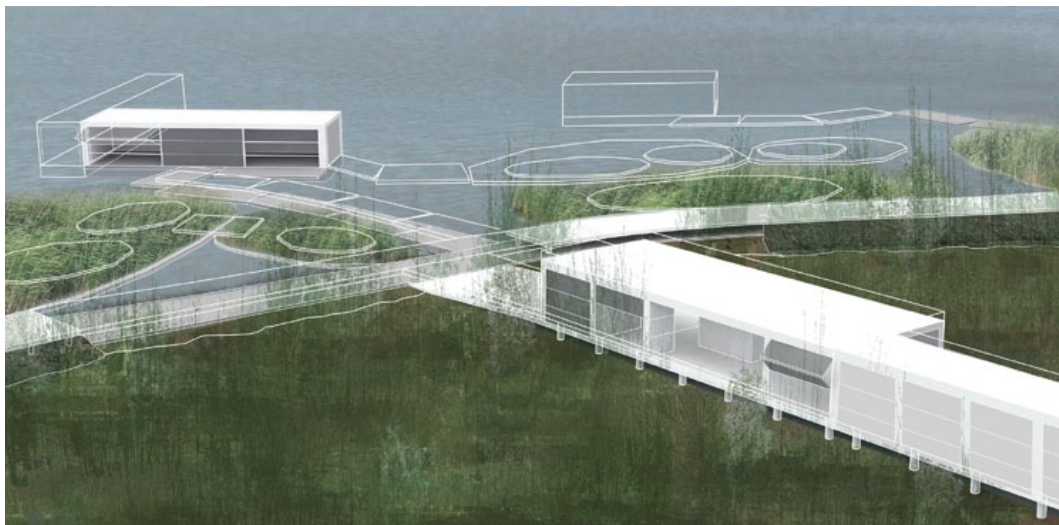
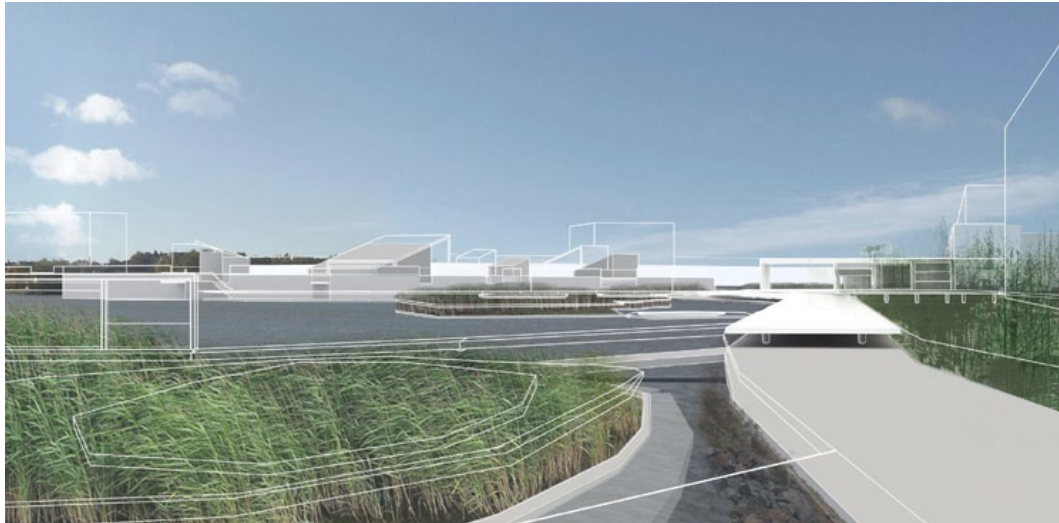


**Figure 26. Plan and section of the floating public spaces for temporary and flexible use, or "boats".**



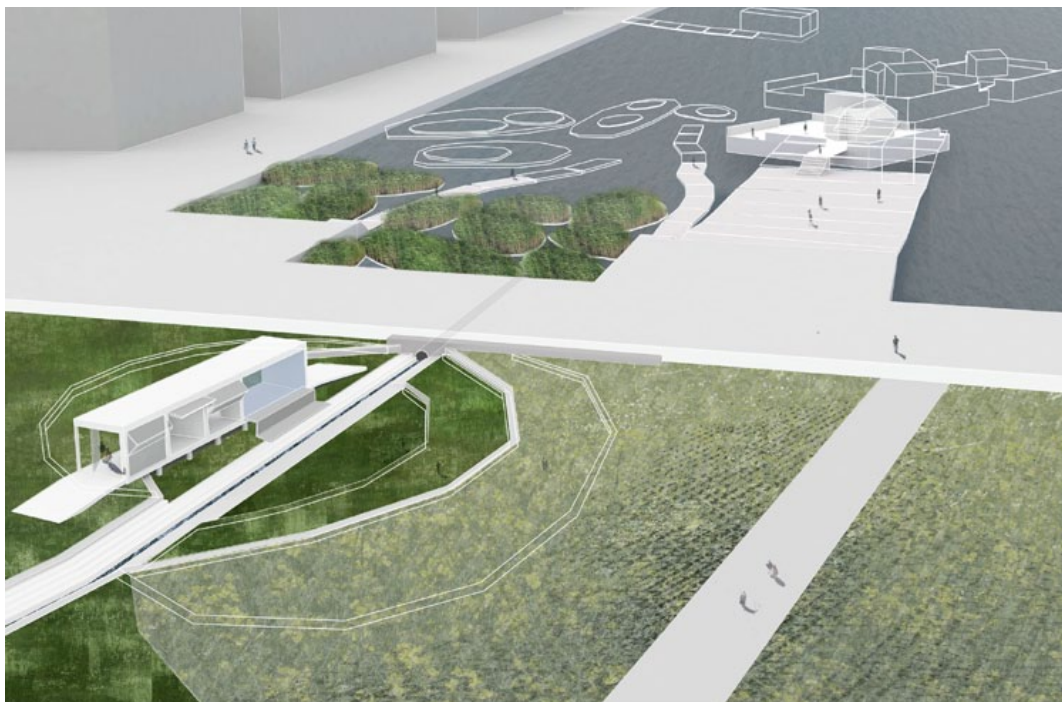
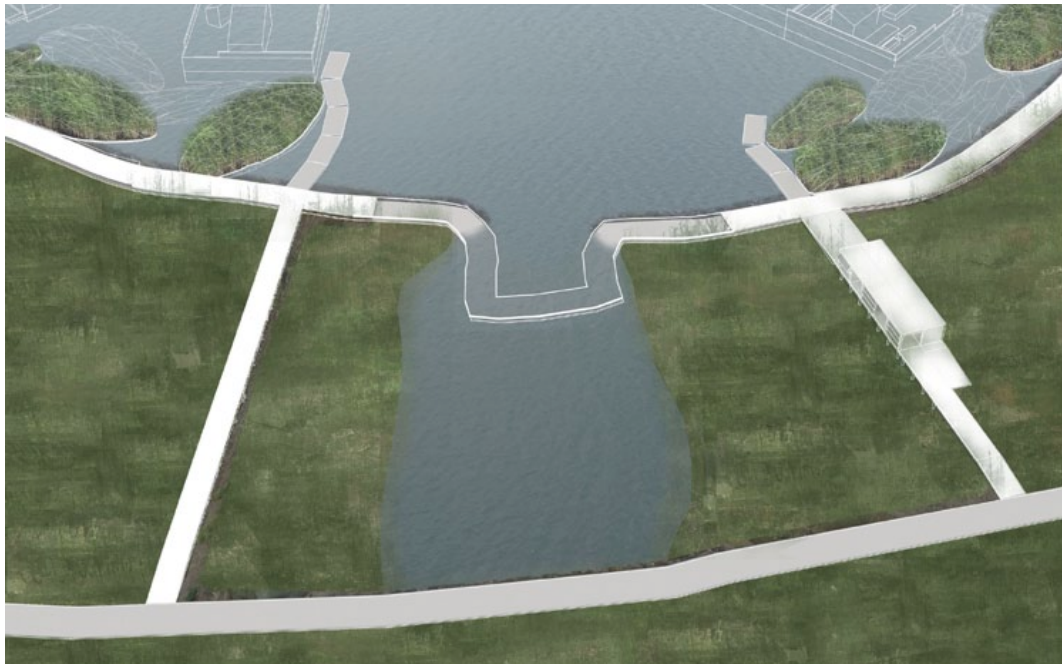
**Figure 27. Terrain vague's expansion to the water. Public piers allow engagement with and access to the water, bringing new flexible space to residents, along with ideas of water quality and use of the water as buildable / recreation space.**



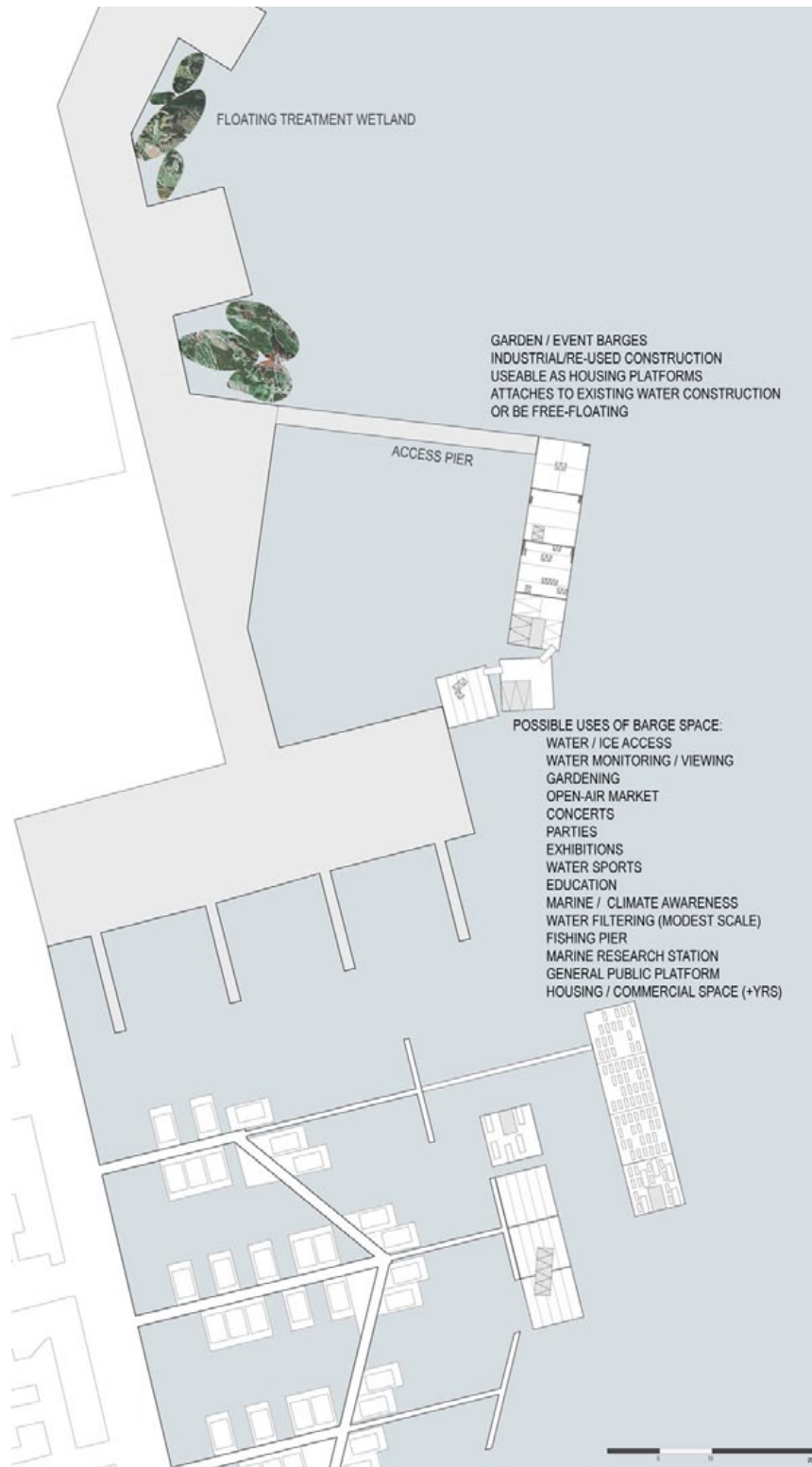


**Figures 28, 29. Above, a view of the flexible public path and islands along the site edge, with profiles of floating public spaces in the background. Below, a view of the site edge design, with a public pavilion for temporary use in the foreground. White lines indicate further phasing of the design.**





**Figures 30, 31. Above, the design strategy welcomed influence from the user as well as from the site, for example allowing flood water to enter the design area. Below, the southern park strategy allows public space to expand out onto the water.**



**Figure 32. Mid-site strategy, showing floating houses, as planned by the city. Design added floating public spaces, with vague program designation so as to encourage residents to appropriate them for their own uses.**

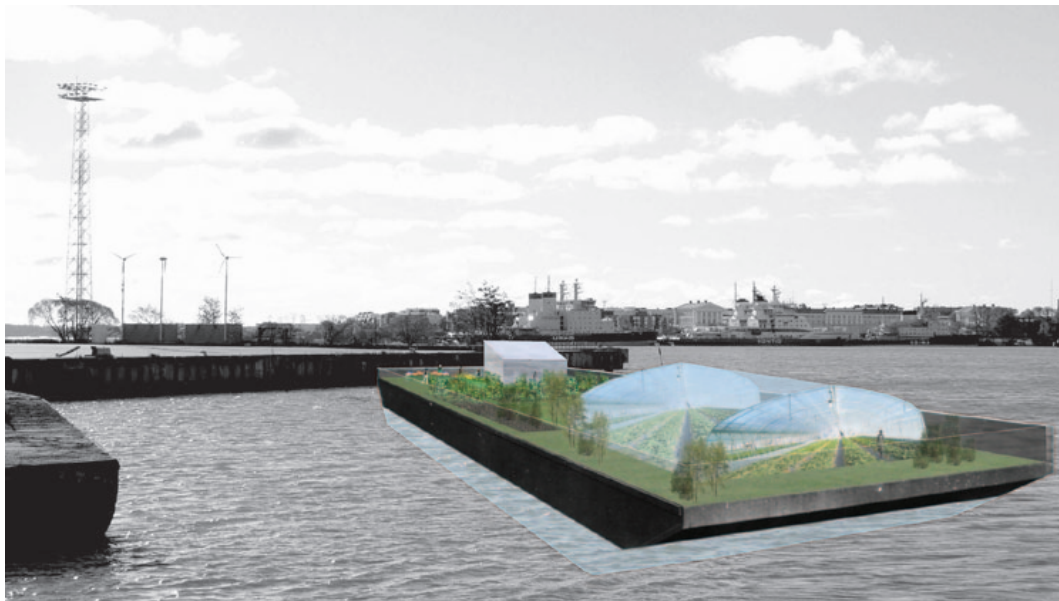


**Figure 33. View of the floating public spaces, located mid-site. The multifunctional spaces are accessed by piers and served as floating terrain vague, housing temporary programs such as urban agriculture.**



**Figure 34.** The design scheme extended to the southern park, modifying the city's plan at the time to accommodate more diverse activities and ecologies.





**Figure 35. Throughout the design strategy, open “platform” space, such as the boats (shown here) acted as new terrain vague. These spaces, which were placed in addition to the site’s redevelopment plan, were to serve as permanent places for public action and engagement.**

## In Conclusion: directions for further research

The author's review of the thesis project research and design draws the conclusion that design itself should be an open and flexible process. When spatial planning aims to create active and engageable urban spaces, what's placed in site must be, instead of a finished scheme, an invitation to residents for design continuation. Implementation should be viewed as a first step rather than the last. In reflection of this, design's qualities must be open and fluctuating, with enough vagueness in spatial definition, regulation and program to leave freedom of the imagination, presence, and authorship of the user. This would essentially remove some of the authority of the designer as author, the city as owner, and the city's spatial planner as decision maker. Such design would represent a departure from established practices. This would indeed challenge current structures in the design and planning professions, and would thus warrant more in-depth investigation than what is provided for in this study. The author's revisitation of the thesis project leaves direction and spirit for further exploration and development of alternative futures in the design of urban public space; for the promise of the terrain vague is worth pursuit.

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