

VAASA (FI)

FIELD OF CONNECTIONS

The bundle of roads connecting the city of Vaasa and the island offers an opportunity to develop a project at the territorial scale which focuses on the road as the catalyst for urban development.

In a general view, the area is made up of an irregular layout of unconnected paths, whose general interest lies in the great existing vegetation, typical of Vaasa. We find herb-rich forest, herb-rich heath forest, mesic heath forest and xeric forest.

The proposal tries to preserve this natural wealth through the reuse of the maximum number of existing roads and the minimum occupation of the building surface.

Instead of a masterplan, our proposal aims to transform what is already there through minimum, punctual and affordable molecular interventions, implemented in phases and capable of redefining this latent urban condition by introducing collective facilities, encouraging densification and curating the void space.

The residential building is articulated around a central empty space —a wood / edible garden— framed by a 4 floors housing building, relocating the camping site to the north of the island.

In a first stage, the aim is the repaving of the existing roads with continuous and modular pavements, which allow water to pass through them, infiltrate through the ground or to be captured and retained in subsurface layers for its subsequent reuse or evacuation. The new connections between roads and the arrivals to the coast have the same treatment, giving unity to the whole area.

The proposal promotes this route through the forest with the implementation of a series of pavilions and small infrastructures for public use. Bus stops, huts, saunas, bicycle shelters... Public interiors that facilitate, and in some cases enable, walking or cycling in the intervened area.

For the AK-2 area, our living proposal requires a rethinking of the forest as a sequence of ever-changing gardens. The proposal is intended to cause the least possible impact on the forest, but in addition to re-naturalizing degraded areas and diversifying flora and fauna by including new plant species, edible in some cases. The strategy proposes a gradient with edible gardens linked to housing, followed by an area of weeds and spontaneous growth of plant species, ending in the existing forest.

To achieve this, we need to leave the site as free and open as possible by pushing the new housing development to the edges. For the proposed area of 55.000 sqm for 800 inhabitants, we achieve 27.200 sqm of free area, almost 50% of the total area. This allows us to have 16.200 sqm of dwellings, 11.000 sqm of meeting points, storage and bike parking.

In typological terms, our housing model proposes a simple interior organization made of a 4x4 meters square for main rooms and 2x4 meters for services rooms. Instead of thinking about a wet area that serves only the houses, a perimeter of wet elements (kitchens and bathrooms) can serve the houses and the edible gardens. Then, we have an external ring of 4x4 rooms without use, an internal ring of wet elements, and an interior ring of open communal spaces and edible gardens at the ground floor.

This strip of vegetable gardens nearest the housing, with relatively dense planting, creates a first level of privacy for the great public interior. Further in, the land is with dense existing trees. The sense of commonality engendered by the large communal garden counteracts the proprietary logic of the surrounding suburban landscape.

Fields are also meant to accommodate large recreational and sport facilities that cannot fit in between the gardens. While fields and gardens represent the fixed structure, buildings are flexible, generic and even rough. The buildings are not developed as distinct entities, but are arranged as part of a continuous pattern.

Evoking the theme of the garden does not mean going back in time but on the contrary, going forward beyond the idea of the park as a space for passive contemplation of nature, encouraging its consideration as a space of diversity, sharing and solidarity among the inhabitants of the city. The park thus becomes an analogical device in which the different landscapes are evoked, not only as images but above all through their use by inhabitants. The sequence of public interiors leaves their functions vague while defining precise spatial areas, ever-changing situations such as areas exposed to the sun and others that are cooler, spaces where the intensity of use can vary during the day or over the seasons.

As a result, the proposal is made up of different minimum programmatic elements in its extension on the surface, like the Elia and Zoe Zenghelis "confetti" concept. The residential building, the edible gardens, the public interiors, and the paths are placed strategically, with a common language, achieving the maximum impact with the minimum consumption of forest and earth movement.