Plain Sailing

A century ago, the islands of eastern Helsinki used to be in active recreational use by the city's inhabitants. Since then, the city has expanded towards the east and densely populated areas have grown along the shoreline. While the population in surrounding areas has increased, public accessibility to the islands has declined. The mental distance between the city and the islands is far longer than the physical distance: the boat trip is like a capsule between the nine to five everyday life and the serenity of the archipelago. The city-owned islands, with their unique nature and historical villa milieus, have become a secret accessible only to very few.

This project set out to find a way to re-introduce the islands to the inhabitants of the surrounding areas without endangering the archipelagic nature. The mechanisms of urban development that have driven the growth of the city do not fit the small-scale archipelago, its fragile ecosystem and its unique historical layers. More sensitive and local planning tactics are required to reconnect the city with the archipelago in a way that does not damage the environmental and cultural values of the islands.

The Eastern Helsinki archipelago offers an ideal laboratory for slow urban development that takes the existing elements of the area as the starting point of the design process. Instead of re-inventing the sites, the plan is to identify the potential of what there already is and develop solutions that support it. This means carefully analyzing the natural as well as the cultural and societal values of the sites and the surrounding archipelago, proposing changes only where they are necessary.

This project draws out a strategy of re-introducing the islands to the inhabitants little by little through a set of measures ranging from the conceptual and areal scale to the architectural level. The area of natural areas will be maximized and additions made in places where they cause the least possible harm to the environment. The proposed measures together with a modular architectural concept form a toolkit, to be implemented one step at a time, responsive to the effects and even surprising developments that may arise.

URBAN A new public water bus route from Reposalmi to Aurinkolahti forms the spine of the project on the urban scale. It connects the islands with the public transport network, offering inhabitants of Eastern Helsinki easy access to the archipelago. With the completion of the Kruunusillat light rail, Reposalmi will become an important connection point between the city centre and the eastern archipelago. The water bus route also functions as a way to structure the process of introducing the islands to the public. By managing the route and its timetables, different islands can be added to the route once they have the necessary infrastructure to support recreational use.

COMMUNITY Bringing people together and developing new functions based on the current users on the sites, including non-human users.

HERITAGE Launching a maintenance program in order to restore the valuable villa milieus. The program will be organized in collaboration with educational institutions including third sector actors such as the Adult Education Centre and it will offer courses and workshops on gardening and traditional construction techniques for local inhabitants, as well as working holidays attractive to international visitors. The historically valuable Sunnanvik manor area will be developed as a test site for community maintenance. After the Sunnanvik area, the concept can be applied to the restoration of other sites, such as the garden in Kotiluoto and Villa Stigen in Villinki.

VIRTUAL Providing comprehensive information of the landing sites along with accommodation and equipment rental services online. Instead of creating new platforms, this information should be integrated into the existing Helsinki city online platforms such as Varaamo.

EVENT A floating sauna built with modular elements will be used to introduce new landing sites to the public. On the completion of a new landing site, the sauna can be attached to the dock, providing visibility both as a landmark for maritime travelers and virtually in social media, drawing more visitors to the site.

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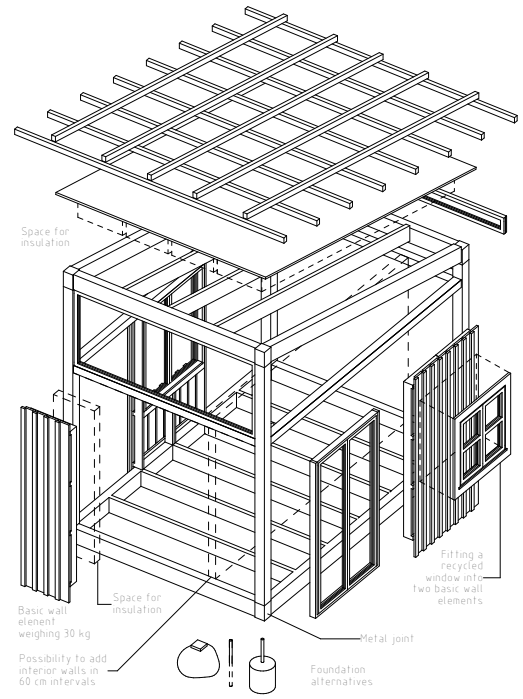
ARRCHITECTURAL CONCEPT AND VISUAL IDENTITY

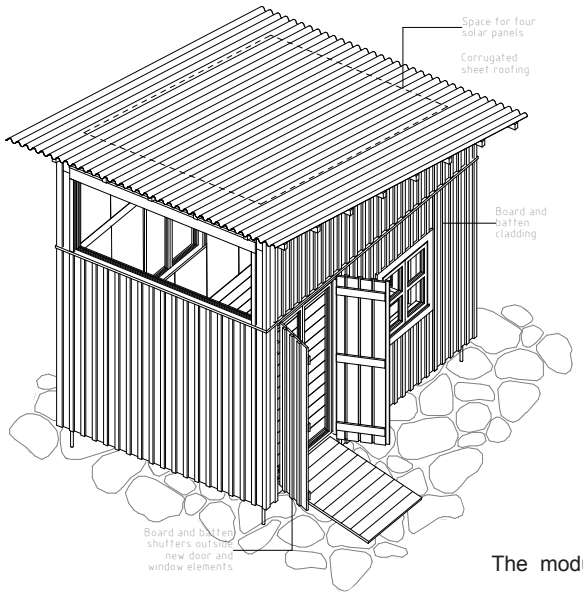
To implement the new structures necessary for improving the recreational capacity of the islands the proposal includes a modular architectural system that can be adapted to a variety of different building types and uses. Instead of prominence, the architecture embodies the supportive role of the new elements of construction, blending into the existing natural and cultural environment defined by historical villas and archipelagic nature. The aim is to create a harmonious environment where all historical layers are cherished.

The architectural concept is based on a module of 2,4 x 3,6 m that can be used alone or combined to create larger buildings. Structures can range from clad terraces and cooking shelters to cabins, saunas, and service buildings that can be heated and insulated by separate insulation elements. The buildings have several alternative foundations and can be founded on different terrains without damaging the ground. They can even be founded on pontoons, and function as waiting rooms for the ferry and floating saunas. The modular structure is compatible with the system of docks, jetties and pontoons applied on the landing sites as well as the signs and furnishings used in Helsinki city recreational areas.

The architectural system combines traditional construction materials and standard structures with the ideas of modular construction and open building. The design of the structural and supportive elements of the building is based on considering the degree of permanence of each element and allowing further alterations. Modularity and standardization have meant preferring simple geometry and choosing joints where one part can be disconnected without dismantling the entire structure. In practice, this means using modern metal plate joints instead of traditional wooden joints. Logistics of the archipelago have also been an important starting point for design. All construction elements are small enough to be shipped to the islands by boats, carried to the sites and put together by two people.

Appreciating what there already is, is a key element of the project. This is also a top priority in circular construction, where the primary goal is maintaining existing buildings in their current use. Re-use through renovation and modification and even the re-use of dismantled building parts preserves the value of existing materials to a higher degree than recycling building materials.



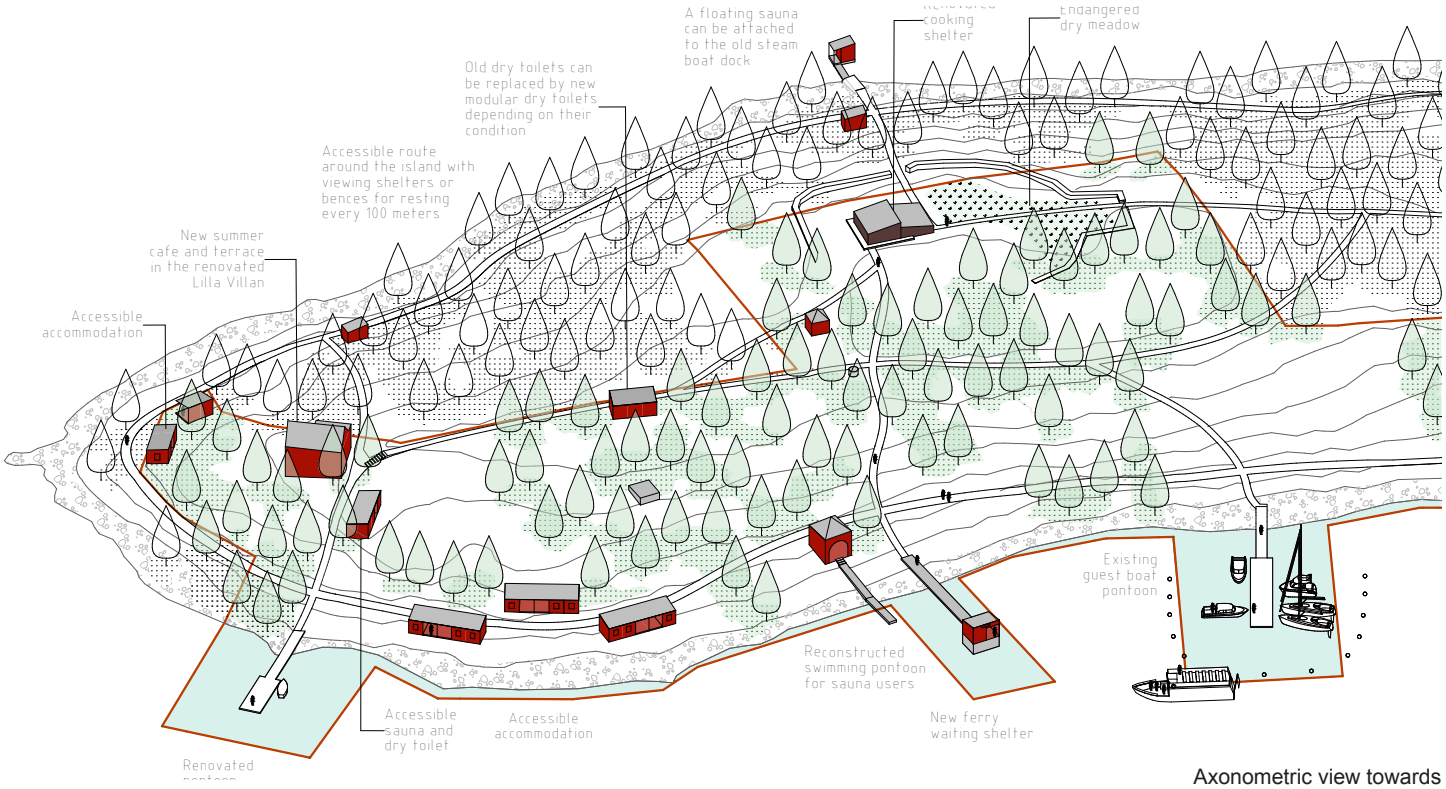


The modular unit.

Circular practices are common in Finnish everyday construction and are present also on the site for instance in Malkasaari, where the fire shelter is built on the foundation of the old national romantic villa. Such circular construction practices tend to evade modularity and standardization, since the existing is always unique. This is why the project also contains an element of creativity and craftsmanship. The minimalist architectural expression of the modular elements can be enriched by adding elements such as windows and doors from buildings demolished from the area.

As a result, the architecture explores the tension between the standard and the unique both in structural and aesthetic terms. The basic architectural system is enriched by the old construction elements and simultaneously linked to the history of the sites. In addition, the appearance of the new buildings can be varied by finishes that are chosen to fit the colour palette in each site.

ISLAND PROFILES

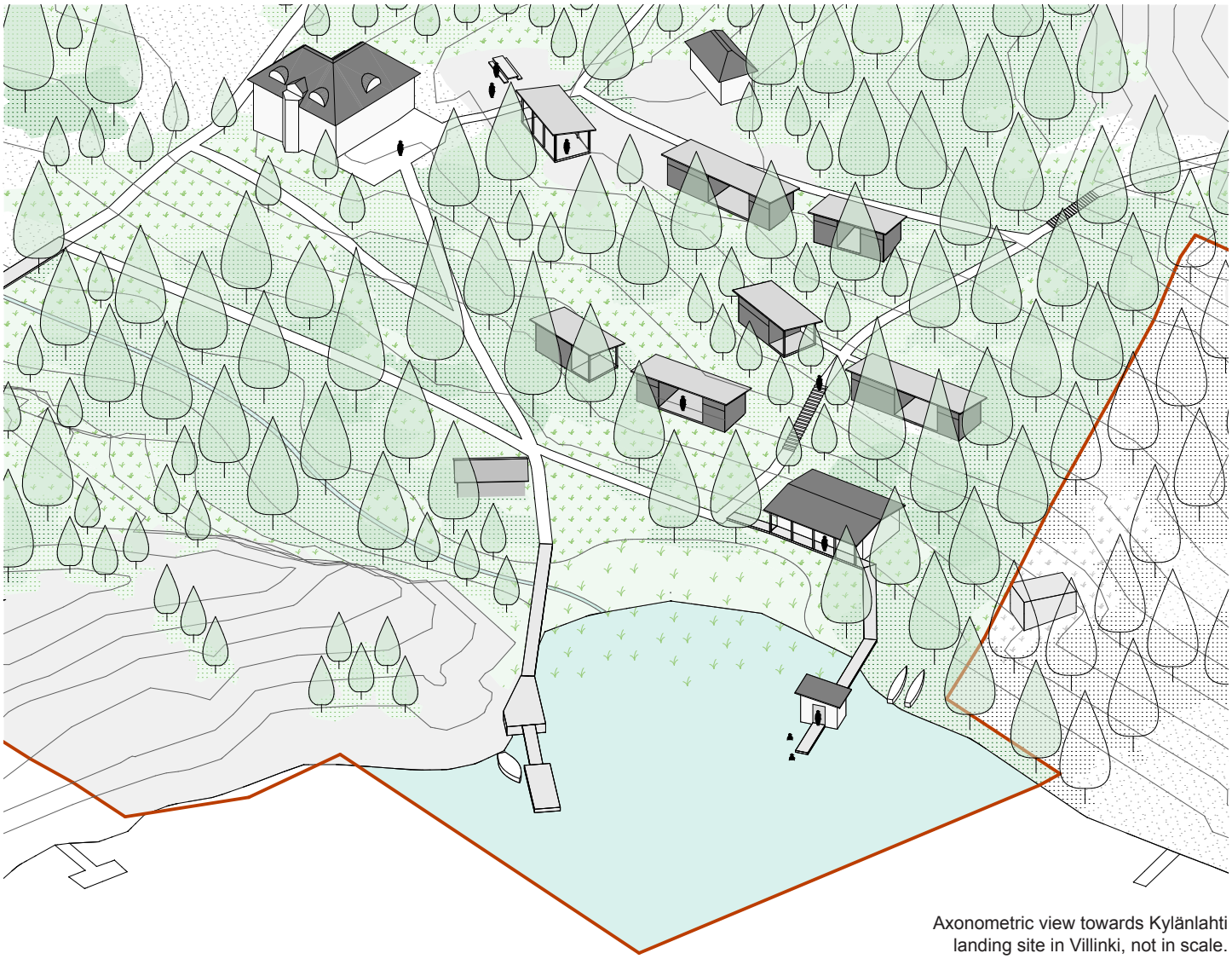


Axonometric view towards Malkasaari, not in scale.

VARTIOSAARI The recreational capacity of Vartiosaari will be improved by developing landing sites and opening the old villas for new uses. A new guest harbour will be founded in Pässinlahti bay. The ”Iso-Hovi” as the main building, the harbour makes use of the existing buildings and infrastructure of the bay area to provide services as well as accommodation to people arriving with smaller boats. Additional buildings are constructed out of the modular units.

The historically valuable Sunnanvik manor area will be developed as a test site for communal restoration and gardening. Organized in collaboration with third-sector actors such as the Adult Education Centre, the site offers courses on gardening and traditional construction techniques for local inhabitants and working holidays attractive to international visitors as well. The buildings on the site will be restored one by one, using the new modular units as supportive structures for accommodation and other services while the old buildings are under maintenance. After the Sunnanvik area, the same concept can be applied to the restoration of other sites, such as the garden in Kattnoto and Villa Stigen in Villinki.

MALKASAARI Malkasaari will be developed into an accessible recreational island for the residents of the surrounding areas. Accessibility, here, is understood in a broad sense, ranging from mobility to financial accessibility. The transport connection to the island will be significantly improved by the new public ferry connection, where Malkasaari will be the first stop from the Aurinkolahti direction. The island can also be accessed by private or rented boats. Rowboats and canoes can already be rented from Kallahti bay. Activities on the island include camping, grilling and sauna. A café can be opened to the red villa. In the vicinity of the villa, there are small accommodation cabins to provide an alternative for camping. The routes and structures on the island will be designed accessible for people with decreased mobility. During winter the structures on the island can be used by visitors arriving to the area by skiing or ice skating.



Axonometric view towards Kylänlahti landing site in Villinki, not in scale.

KOTILUOTO Kotiluoto will be developed as a boating island, where the existing landing site will be improved in collaboration with the sailing club currently renting the villa. Maritime activities will be made accessible for visitors taking the ferry, by providing row boats, canoes and sup boards for rent through the Helsinki city online platform Varaamo. The surrounding Villaluoto island group is an ideal destination for shorter trips or even camping. The historical garden and old routes will be partially restored. A climbing route will be cleared and marked on one side of the large boulder.

PIKKU-NIINISAARI Detached from the ferry route, Pikku-Niinisaari is a destination designated for independent hikers arriving with small boats and canoes in the summer and in the winter by skiing, ice skating or walking. Very few additions will be made on the island with significant nature values. The most important addition is the nature route exploring the island's different nature types, simultaneously providing routes between different parts of the island. The old cabin in the proximity of the project site will be transformed into a wilderness hut for daytime visits and an overnight shelter for emergencies.

VILLINKI Villinki has the potential to become a unique destination attractive to local as well as international visitors. By improving transport connections and providing the necessary services, more people can experience the island's unique nature and historic villa milieu. Private boats land at the Villinginlahti landing site, which offers basic services for visitors. The public ferry will stop at the old main dock in Kylänlahti bay. The project site around Villa Stigen will be developed into a villa settlement, where local and international tourists can have a taste of island life with traditional summertime activities.

The route network between the city-owned areas and the Myrskykalliot rock formation in the east will be marked and necessary services provided within reach of the most important transport nodes. The reference sites on the northern shore will be developed as canoe rental stations and camping sites.