

Turku

# Vicus Selvaticus

**Luonnon  
läheinen  
kylä**

**A village  
connected  
to Nature**

## ***A future rooted in nature and community***

Vicus Selvaticus is not simply a new neighbourhood to be built: it is a profound and radical vision of how to inhabit, think and feel the city of Turku in a different, integrated and sustainable way. It is the promise that nature and human life are no longer considered separate or conflicting entities, but that they intertwine and mutually support each other within one large, living, complex ecosystem, capable of regenerating, evolving and adapting together over time. This project is the spokesman of an ancient culture, strongly rooted in Finnish territory, and at the same time innovative: that of *luonto*, the profound bond with nature, respect for water, forests and watercourses, and the collective awareness of the responsibility to take care of what is common heritage. Vicus Selvaticus was born from attentive listening to these cultural and environmental roots, translating them into an urban design that regenerates the fractures caused by past urbanisation, enhances local economies and creates public spaces that are alive, welcoming and capable of generating well-being. At the centre of this transformation is not only human well-being, but a paradigm of interspecies coexistence, where animals, insects, plants and microorganisms are recognised as an active and irreplaceable part of the urban community. The project is inspired by the principles of

regenerative design, which aims not only to reduce environmental impacts, but to actively regenerate natural systems, creating habitats, ecological corridors and green networks that support local biodiversity and foster climate resilience. Like a small Aurajoki, the river that flows calmly and steadily through Turku, Vicus Selvaticus flows into the urban fabric, bringing with it the promise of a neighbourhood that knows how to regenerate, accommodate and transform itself over time, respecting the city's most authentic values: living nature, collective memory and the shared care of a space open to all forms of life. This village connected to Nature is therefore a living, unfolding story, an interweaving of past and future, nature and culture, community and landscape. Every step on the ground, every encounter in its green spaces, tells a story of bonding, care and regeneration that Turku can live and tell every day as a virtuous example of harmonious coexistence between man, nature and all the species that make this place unique, resilient and fertile for the future.

## ***Natural roots, urban fractures: a new green heart for Vähäheikkilä***

The project stems from the desire to reknit the broken threads of an area marked by post-World War II urbanisation, which fragmented the natural and social landscape of

Vähäheikkilä. Like a contemporary eco-village, Vicus Selvaticus wants to recover this lost continuity, creating an ecological corridor that crosses the area from east to west, along the natural path of the water, and from north to south, along the daily routes of those who live, work and move about the neighbourhood.

This new green centrality is in direct dialogue with the Pihlajaniemi masterplan (signed by Jan Gehl Architects and others), contributing to the construction of a wider and shared green network, which recalls the traditional Finnish idea of the 'luonto': nature experienced not as a closed reserve but as an open space, accessible to all, that favours social cohesion and collective identity.

The installation of the new pedestrian alley near the Braheskolan school is not only a safety measure, but an invitation for the new generations to rediscover a safe and daily connection with the territory, walking, meeting, exploring. The area is thus transformed into a place of attraction that enhances Turku's gifts: flowing water, lush greenery, landforms and open spaces that tell a life story that is both natural and urban.

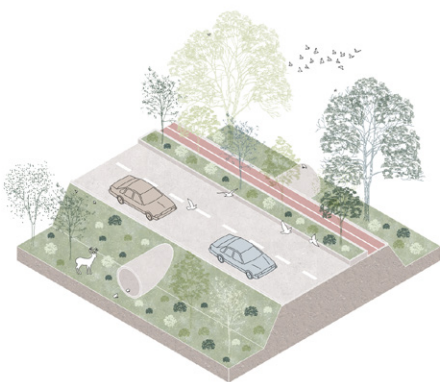
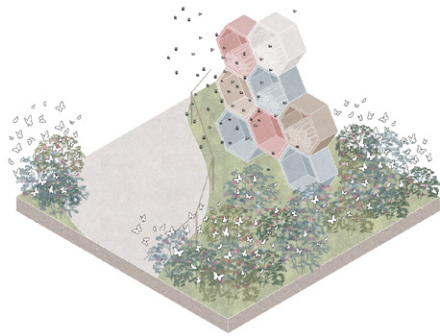
***Corridor of water, network of life: the Aura River in miniature***

At the heart of the project is an integrated and multifunctional water-nature system, inspired by the historical and cultural presence of the Aurajoki River, which has always

shaped the identity of Turku. This blue-green system, the ecological and symbolic heart of Vicus Selvaticus, ideally takes up the role of the main river, transforming itself into a fluvial microcosm that crosses the area longitudinally, conveys and filters rainwater in a natural way, accumulates snow in the winter months and expands during floods, generating dynamic landscapes that change over time. Far from conventional technical solutions, the project adopts a nature-based solutions approach, in line with the objectives of the Nature Restoration Law. The project contributes to these objectives through concrete actions of renaturation, adaptive water management and habitat reconstruction for biodiversity. The natural morphology of the site is exploited for the creation of small ecological reservoirs and dams. These life ponds not only manage water runoff in a widespread and resilient manner, but also restore balance to local ecosystems. Excess water is retained and slowly released, helping to mitigate the effects of climate change and securing resources during periods of drought or frost. The ecological corridor not only has an environmental function, but acts as a relational and symbolic infrastructure: it connects urban fragments and open spaces in a fluid green-blue embrace, evoking the Aurajoki connection between city, sea and nature. It is home to native plant species such as birch and pine,

and animals typical of the Finnish landscape, such as the flying squirrel, a discreet but emblematic presence of local biodiversity. Alongside the canal, the project envisages the restoration of wooded areas and pioneer vegetation - such as clearings, ruderals and wastelands - that strengthen the urban ecosystem's ability to retain water, absorb heat, filter air and host spontaneous life forms. Instead of being residual, these landscapes become a resource and a place for ecological experimentation, integrating themselves into the everyday life of the inhabitants. The design approach aligns with the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), 13 (Combating Climate Change), 14 (Life Under Water) and 15 (Life on Earth). Furthermore, it responds to more advanced European strategies such as the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and the Finnish Sustainable Development Frameworks, which promote urban resilience, ecological transition and the integration of green infrastructure and human well-being. The landscape, thus conceived, becomes pedagogy and an immersive experience: it invites you to pick blueberries along the paths, feel the breath of the forest, observe the snow slowly melting in the canals, and rediscover a deep contact with the rhythm of the seasons. The Finnish principle of "jokamiehenoikeus" - the





universal right of access to nature - is translated here into a city that does not isolate, but welcomes. A city that evolves together with its environment, finding in nature a silent and powerful companion of urban living.

***Productive ecologies and evolutionary urban mix: roots in the past, looking to the future***

The project proposes a vision of a living, porous and adaptive neighbourhood, in which the coexistence of different functions is based on an open, flexible and regenerative conception of space, an alternative to rigid zoning. At the heart of this transformation is the progressive reconversion of the current industrial area, today only partially active, into a mixed urban ecosystem, capable of accommodating new local economies, light production, technological start-ups and facilities for the neighbourhood. Turku's industrial history of handicrafts and light manufacturing lives in this transformation not as nostalgia, but as an engine for a new season based on regenerative and circular principles. Ex-industrial warehouses are no longer static containers, but habitats for new creative and local based economies that mix together work, culture and everyday life in a dynamic and resilient way. The strategy enhances the existing building heritage through the selective recovery of warehouses and the insertion of new hybrid architectures, capable of combining historical memory and sustainable innovation. Where complete reuse is not possible, materials are reused in buildings with a low environmental impact, according to the logic of circular economy and ecological coherence. During the transition phase, temporary uses are activated that facilitate the evolution of the site: selective demolition with material recovery, adaptive reuse, performance improvement of building envelopes and gradual re-naturalisation of the soil through bioremediation

practices. These temporary spaces, marked by the natural rhythms of the seasons, reflect a long and profound time, just like that which governs life in Finland. A symbolic and strategic element of the project is the re-functionalisation of the former underwear factory, testimony to an often overlooked industrial past. This building becomes the beating heart of the district: an open hub for coworking, catering and handicrafts, recalling the atmosphere of Finnish villages, where sharing, self-sufficiency and a sense of community are deeply rooted values, more relevant today than ever before. A network of flexible spaces dedicated to light manufacturing, design and small local productions (food, breweries, innovative materials) is developed around this core, with the aim of generating employment and activating short and resilient supply chains. The new central square, conceived as a hybrid of market, civic space and leisure area, becomes the hub of daily life and a meeting point between local economy and urban nature. Here, the principle of "jokamiehenoikeus" - the right of every person to have access to nature - is translated into an open and inclusive space, into a city that evolves together with its inhabitants and the landscape that surrounds it. The spaces and architecture are designed to be modular, composable and easily disassembled, according to the principles of design for disassembly, reducing time, costs and environmental impact. This approach allows construction in phases and the ability to adapt to future functions, guaranteeing flexibility, sustainability and continuity over time.

***Strolling: soft and active mobility, a new step towards the healthy city***

Vicus Selvaticus promotes mobility that puts people and nature at the centre, redesigning spaces to free the land from the car footprint and return it to urban and green life. The old petrol station makes way for a multi-storey car park integrated in the green, with a playground

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designed for children and families, and functions as an intermodal node, uniting bus, bicycle and shared mobility. The widespread presence of bicycle racks and racks with frame locks, both inside and near the residences, facilitates the daily use of active means, in perfect harmony with the Finnish culture of cycling and walking as part of daily activity routine. The networks of walking and cycling routes are not rigid infrastructures, but are modelled on the natural trajectories of inhabitants and animals, becoming spaces for meeting and relating. This approach, which resonates with the Finnish tradition of slow and ritual walks in the forest, restores a human and sustainable breath to the city.

### ***Inhabited nature: architecture in symbiosis with the Finnish forest***

The urban design is inspired by the image of the traditional Finnish village close to the forest, a place where each inhabitant lives with nature and respects its rhythms. The planned urban villages are immersed in lush greenery, with trees exceeding ten metres in height and vegetal canopies acting as bridges for the fauna, in particular for the flying squirrel, a symbol of natural continuity. The buildings, made with techniques and materials that recall Turku's tradition of wooden houses, are integrated into this landscape as living elements, hosting urban greenhouses, collective spaces and green roofs, encouraging urban and

community farming practices. In this context, the human dimension merges with the interspecies dimension: insects, birds, mammals and microorganisms participate together in the construction of a regenerative place, capable of evolving without losing the profound sense of belonging and continuity with the Finnish culture and landscape.

