

SPEECH BY MR JUSSI PAJUNEN, MAYOR OF HELSINKI
WORLD DESIGN CITIES SUMMIT SEOUL, FEBRUARY 23, 2010.
OPEN HELSINKI – EMBEDDING DESIGN IN LIFE

Honourable Mayor of Seoul,
Distinguished Colleagues,
Esteemed Delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to participate in this forum. We are all united by the ambition to make the cities that we represent better places to live by the means of design.

I find Mayor Oh's wording regarding the aims of the summit extremely well formulated:

“With the global change from a knowledge-based society to a creativity-based society, design now stands at the center of such world-wide transition. Urban design offers a solution for the current urban shift toward a more decent and comfortable living place, while industrial design acts as a key driving force behind the growth of future creativity-driven industries in the 21st century.”

Those words show how high expectations are currently being placed on design. The trend is further accentuated by the fact that the global economy is just recovering from one of its most serious crisis. In spite of the somewhat diminished influence of traditional nation states, the competition to attract jobs and investments is probably harder than ever. The world is indeed in great turmoil and innovative ideas are desperately needed to solve acute problems. Design appears to be part of the answer for many of these open questions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Just about exactly three months ago, in November last year, I experienced some of the most memorable moments of my career as Mayor of Helsinki. After a tremendously exciting bidding process, Helsinki with its partner cities was nominated as the World Design Capital of 2012 during the World Design Congress of the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design – or just Icsid - in Singapore.

The designation opens up remarkable opportunities for our city and we feel deeply honoured to join the distinguished group of World Design Capitals. There is a saying about being in the right

place at the right time. I believe this was the case of my city concerning the World Design Capital bid. The jury understood our momentum. From numerous points of view this is the perfect point in time for Helsinki to carry the title.

First of all, as a foundation for everything, we have a strong design tradition, which is very much based on the fundamental values of the Nordic welfare society. Without exaggerating, I can say that design is a part of our national heritage and identity. Virtually everyone has a piece of Finnish design at home, because it is integrated in everyday life.

Secondly, at present time the whole metropolitan area is at a turning point – a sort of critical juncture, about to undergo a radical transformation both regarding its urban structure and as well as its core business: the provision of public services.

And last but certainly not least: we have a unanimously formulated vision to be a globally notable design-led metropolis. The importance of design has been recorded in the strategy programme of Helsinki, adopted by our City Council last spring. Furthermore, all the municipalities of the Greater Metropolitan Area have in their common strategy named it as a crucial driver of competitiveness and well-being.

We have also a strong commitment from our business life and a functioning partnership with the national government. All these ingredients together form an unequalled design ecosystem of public and private actors. Design plays a central role in our local economy as well as the entire Finnish national economy and is regarded as a key driver of cultural, social, economic and sustainable development. According to the definition of Richard Florida, 45 percent of industries in Helsinki belong to the so called super-creative core which employs creative experts.

It is of interest to take closer look at how the perception of design has developed over the decades. In the mid 20th century it was mainly seen as a tool for product aesthetics. During the period of urbanization Finland was building a new national identity, trade and industry were restructured, and the climate of international politics changed.

Designers responded to the challenge of the spirit of that time and began to form a new-styled everyday life and an international image of a modern nation. The story of a small, northern country's struggle against the forces of nature and the pressures of history provided a basis for branding Finland with even mythical elements. From this point onwards, the conception of

design has gradually been widened. It has become a part of the industrial product development and corporate strategic processes; and most recently a driver of innovation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe that we are all in agreement of the broad definition of design and its usefulness as a tool to shape the surrounding society. The World Design Capital title is basically about how local authorities can improve their services and the living environment through innovative applications of design. It is also an obligation to do so.

The Finnish municipalities are responsible for virtually all welfare services; sectors like education, health care, social services, basic infrastructure, economic development, cultural affairs, city planning, public transport, quality of the environment, day care and so on. This is where design steps into the picture. Especially in Europe, we have to make difficult choices as a consequence of an aging population structure and the subsequent increasing demand for public services. Inevitable cutbacks in public expenditure lie in front of us. To tackle these challenges, we should use design to make public services more user-oriented and effective.

In Helsinki, service design has been used in the development of sector crossing processes, which are often difficult to implement in a public organization, where boundaries between units are high. We have successfully built service strings that cover the responsibilities of several city departments and even outside authorities.

Social affairs and health care take up more than half on the city budget and personnel. Chains of care are today an important counterbalance to the ever-increasing fragmentation of services. By optimizing the service string it should be possible to make the process more smooth and effective –regarding both costs and impacts. It is also a way to make sure that the patient or customer is not lost while crossing from one unit to the next.

Everything we do as cities is sponsored by the taxpayers. For that reason we always have a duty to consider what is in the interest of our citizens. This is also the case of the design year. We need to bear in mind the three letter abbreviation R – O – I: Return On Investment. Many of us are familiar with the formula to evaluate the efficiency of an investment or to compare different investments with each other. I would like to introduce a new performance indicator for the World Design Capitalship: R – O – D: Return On Design. If we do not carefully consider this aspect, design will continue to be viewed with some level of scepticism.

Esteemed Summit Delegates,

Another way may be to look how we do in the historical wave of construction that will sweep over the city as we launch the regeneration of former cargo harbour areas in downtown Helsinki. Ambitious development projects will improve the texture of the city over the next decades. These large-scale projects will give the city a whole new face and fortify its distinct maritime profile, providing nearly endless work for designers shaping the future of the city.

Our prime goal is to safeguard a harmonious urban structure. The planning principles include a heavy emphasis on public transport and mixed use - integrating housing with commerce and services, as well as combining various types of housing in the same neighbourhood. The districts must be grouped together properly and the transportation scheme must serve the entire entity, linking together existing areas with the new quarters in an energy-efficient and sustainable way.

This brings me to perhaps to one of the greatest challenges to mankind right now. The fight against the global warming is going to modify numerous established ways of operating. Local authorities have an obligation to take this into consideration as the principal providers of welfare services and designers of the societal structure. In other words, the climate change aspect has to be integrated to our current welfare service model. We have to redesign it. More and more questions that local authorities seek to answer have a dimension which stretches beyond national borders. In short: we need local actions to solve global problems.

The nomination of one particular city to carry the title of World Design Capital does by no means limit the project to the confines of one metropolitan area. This global city summit serves as an excellent demonstration of this fact.

Neither is the nomination about one specific year. It is about a long-term dedication to finding solutions for all the local communities in the world, seeking a better everyday life for their residents. To achieve this ambitious goal, we should find a way to build a grid that unites like-minded cities and creates resonance of the efforts to embed design in everyday life. The fact that we are here today is an important demonstration of our joint passion to foster a family of design-led cities in the world in close co-operation with Icsid.

I sense a wind rising. Someone might consider taking shelter. That is not our way to react. We must build a sail and take full advantage of the thrust forward and exploit our position as global role models. Design can make a difference – because its solutions are not fundamentally

dependent on materials, techniques, disciplines or ideologies. It merely wants to find the best solution.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Finally, I would like to return to Singapore for a few moments. Among the first questions that I was asked by the press was what projects and monuments Helsinki is going to carry out following the nomination as World Design Capital. My answer was that instead of something physical we are going to construct an intellectual tribute to design through the creation of brand new university concept by combining art, design, economics and technology under the same umbrella, which resembles partly our World Design Capital concept. Windows to the future are traditionally perceived as something concrete in glass and frames. However, in today's world, they are increasingly immaterial and closely connected to creativity and knowledge.

The new university is called Aalto after the Finnish architect Alvar Aalto. The name symbolizes the values of modernism; firm faith in the future and the power that comes from the creation of new ideas. It means an open-minded approach to everything we do; to avoid settling for the ordinary and to find solutions by doing things differently, just like a World Design Capital is supposed to act as far as I am concerned.

I am proud to say that the Aalto University was officially launched on January 1. The opening marks a fresh chance for Finland and for the Helsinki region. I strongly feel that the new university will form a part of the innermost core of the World Design Capital project and I also believe that in the centre of the success story of Aalto University will be the World Design Capitalship.

Dear friends,

Taking all this in consideration I know the World Design Capital will be a major driving force and a turning point in the story of Helsinki. I also firmly believe that we can contribute to making the World Design Capital nomination ever more desired and sought-after.

I invite you to find out for yourselves and hope to see you in 2012 in Helsinki. Thank you for your attention!