

## pasila quarter in helsinki

### Cino Zucchi Architetti with One Works, Buro Happold London

**Work**  
Central Pasila Tower area detailed plan

**Date**  
2009

**Location**  
Helsinki, Finland

**Project Architect**  
Cino Zucchi

**Client**  
City of Helsinki – City planning department

**Project Team**  
CZA:  
Paolo Moretto, Luca Torri, Valentina Zononi, Sarah Zezza, with Enrica Mannelli, Roberta Ticcozzelli, Lorenza Odorizzi, Diego Martinelli, Minko Lin, Filippo Facchinetto and Davide Aprea (render)

**One Works:**  
Leonardo Cavalli, Claudia Battistella and Norma Stivaletta

**Buro Happold London**  
Wolf Mangelsdorf, Giammichele Melis, Neil Francis, Angelo Fasano, Paul Trews, Cristina Kuo Lin, Bernardo Vazquez and Ben Smallwood

**Size and total area**  
Area: 36.620 m<sup>2</sup>  
Gross floor area: 158.800 m<sup>2</sup>

**Stores**  
From 19 to 38

**Image credits**  
Courtesy of Cino Zucchi Architetti

Just like architecture, urbanity evolves through unpredictable steps that are the result of a process of adaptation to the multiple conflicting forces involved in its creation: a singular set of circumstances that resist generalizations of sort. In the last two decade it has become clear how architects have stopped imagining new ways in which a city should be constructed, and, in turn, have taken comfort in filling the intellectual void in which globalization incessantly reproduces itself by gathering knowledge on how cities actually are developed in circumstances in which solid eats void at a dizzying pace. The way urbanity grows has become a reflection of the more general attitude characterizing the Age of globalisation which is based on rackets that are said to be “too big to fail”. Similarly, urbanity now appears to be seen as an issue “too big to be tackled”. Perhaps, the way urbanity should evolve in the XXI century – at a time when it finds itself in a condition of theoretical and practical confusion – is arguably better indicated by concrete examples than by general statements. Indeed, the general master and detailed plan for the Pasila Quarter in Helsinki designed by Cino Zucchi, One Works and Buro Happold appears to have such a role since it produces a case that finds its toolbox in its elements rather than in little convincing “reflections” of the cultural trajectory. Produced as an alternative to the current (and reckless) urban growth model, the urban proposal for Pasila simultaneously questions and acknowledges the long durée of certain distant facts of the city of Helsinki by interpreting them in a contemporary fashion. It is a plan based upon an integrated analysis of the specificity of the site in relation

to the city of Helsinki. By making the most of its existing condition, its topography and its transportation system in order, it aims to propose a new, varied urban landscape “through a continuous sequence of open (concave) spaces of different qualities” interspersed with a number of mixed used, high-rise towers ranging from 88 to 170 m. These towers feature a pitched single-eave roof line that, while producing a storing energy performance, have the added advantage and making the towers appear as “grafted” on the site: “geological objects with a crystal like envelope”. The declared goal of the authors is to “achieve continuity and harmony between the buildings and the existing conditions”, since they too also believe in what Bruno Taut believed, namely, that (*Die Stadtkrone*, 1919) the natural and the built environment should “blend in”. When architects talk about their buildings, they often produce theoretical statements that are at odds with the artistic statements made by the works themselves. Yet, for once, with the Pasila Plan, the designer’s statements are one with the hypothesis put forward by the actual work. Taken together – the statement and the work – they suggest that architects should have more confidence in the basic things architecture and urbanity are made from: structure, material, construction, earth, sky, sun, trees, all of which can be made to work together in establishing a convincing cluster of livable urbanity made of objects and landscape that provide citizens with a new urban catalyst that has the potential of becoming a destination and a reference for the larger metropolitan area. Such goal is reached thanks to its

skyline, its sequence of meaningful public spaces that integrate the existing railway station into the urban fabric and thanks to a number of “development rules”. A number of architectural guidelines are in fact set for the development of the area with the aim of giving a familiar feeling of space to its dwellers. They concern the materiality, the textures, the color palette of the building envelopes, a few strategies for the lighting design and the design of the public areas in order to achieve one goal: to merge the building with the existing topography by “creating a number of interlocking spaces which hold together the different buildings”. Thanks to its silhouette, the project for the Pasila Quarter provides the city with a new “orientation point” by demonstrating how “designed density” placed at critical infrastructural nodes may be the main single factor helping human settlements to save precious natural resources integrating social aspects, energy consumption, land use issues and material durability. It also demonstrates how a number of varying parameters like solid versus void, horizontal versus vertical, rough versus smooth, or regular versus random of a given palette of colors, material and textures, besides being a personal poetics, can become a convincing impersonal way of showing how architects can still design contemporary urban parts of great richness, variety and cultural significance which, on the one hand, abolish the supposed dependency on the center, and, on the other, they encourage diversity, creating a positive competitions between the various towns and a general social cohesion. All of the above, at this juncture, may be said to be an achievement of the first order.

Conrad-Bercah





