

# *Co-Constructed Narratives of the Grassroots in the City*

## Narrating Hiedanranta

Dalia Milián Bernal, Elina Alatalo, Jeremy Allan Hawkins and Panu Lehtovuori

With contributions by Sila Kartal, Mattias Malk, Mathilde Merolli, Hanna Musiol, Matej Nikšič, Dorina Pllumbi, and Elena Sitrakova in collaboration with different members of the grassroots of Hiedanranta: Henna Matanuska, Juha Sepponen, Matti Lankinen, Niko Lehtola, Taina Laaksonen and Ville Natunen

### Introduction

In his seminal book *The City and the Grassroots*, sociologist Manuel Castells argues that ‘major innovations in the city’s role, meaning, and structure tend to be the outcome of grassroots mobilizations and demands’.<sup>1</sup> Like Castells, for years critical urban theorists have called for attention to the desires, stories, practices and spaces of the grassroots in the city, the ways they are shaping the territory, the material substrate of the city, and the meaning of the built environment, and how they are introducing ‘into the city new identities and practices which disturb established histories’.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless,

these calls have received scant attention from mainstream urban planning and architectural research, education and discourse. In the words of Christian Schmid, ‘their histories are yet to be written’.<sup>3</sup> In our view, as long as these stories remain invisible, not only is a theory of the city incomplete, but paths to alternative, diverse, possibly more democratic, just and sustainable urban futures are more difficult to imagine.<sup>4</sup> It is within this context that two initial questions emerge: How are the grassroots shaping the material and immaterial dimensions of urban places? And, how, in turn, are these spaces shaping the practices and identities of the grassroots in the city?

However, in order to be able to ask these questions, we are also faced with an epistemo-methodological conundrum. In the same way that Brazilian scholar Marcelo López de Souza asserts that ‘insurgent spatial practices cannot be exerted exactly in the same spatial environment created by old, status quo-confirming spatial practices’, neither can grassroots spatial practices, narratives and stories be queried from the same status quo-confirming epistemological positions (like those linked to a positivist paradigm and objectivist epistemologies) or by employing the same status quo-confirming methodological repertoires (like those that aim for great generalizations, homogenizations and abstractions, such as the products of surveys or statistical analysis).<sup>5</sup> As Huq argues, these (insurgent, grassroots) practices ‘shift the ground of knowledge from that of professional analysis to that of first-hand collective knowledge of social groups living under oppressive conditions’.<sup>6</sup> Here, two additional questions surface: How, then, can we unearth and understand the narratives of the grassroots? And how can their narratives be transcribed, translated and retold without being co-opted and instrumentalized?

To engage with these two sets of questions, we organized an intensive three-day workshop in the city of Tampere, Finland, held within the framework of the COST Action ‘Writing Urban Places’. Titled ‘Narrating Hiedanranta: Stories of Objects and Subjects of Urban Places’ (hereafter referred to

as 'Narrating Hiedanranta'), the workshop brought together an international and interdisciplinary group of participants, most of them researchers, in a former industrial area called Hiedanranta. Situated on the shores of lake Näsijärvi, Hiedanranta has been the site of vivid grassroots, which have been shaping the area for several years but whose future there is uncertain, as a large urban development project is underway. This project has already dramatically changed the material substrate of the area as well as the internal social dynamics of the site, as some cultural groups have been permanently displaced. Against this backdrop, the two objectives of the workshop were to, on the one hand, learn about and interact with the grassroots of Hiedanranta in a situated way and, on the other, explore *in-situ* different approaches to unearth, make sense of, visualize and retell the narratives of the grassroots of Hiedanranta, while these groups and individuals are still active and accessible.

The aim of this chapter is to present the three different methodological approaches introduced during the workshop, illustrate how these were woven together to produce co-constructed narratives of the grassroots in Hiedanranta, and discuss the usefulness of these approaches not only as a means to generate situated and subjective knowledge about the grassroots in the city and the value of their practices, but also as a method of representation that is difficult to codify and, thus, hard to instrumentalize.

This chapter will present six co-constructed narratives that build on the work produced during the workshop. For the purposes of this book, we asked different contributors to develop their initial narratives and arrange them to each fit in a two-page spread. Their contributions had to clearly link all methodological approaches to create a co-constructed visual narrative. Each contribution is accompanied by a short text that introduces the person they engaged with in Hiedanranta and explains the methods employed to represent their narratives.

In the following sections, we will first situate Hiedanranta within its context and provide an overview of the different grassroots groups active in the area. Then we will briefly describe the workshop and introduce the three different methodological approaches that were explored, which are visual methods, poetic practices and narrative (situated) interviewing. Subsequently, we will briefly describe the six co-constructed visual narratives, each presented in one spread, with some linked to video recordings. To conclude, we will discuss how these methods helped to engage with both sets of questions and argue for the potential of weaving these approaches together to produce creative and potentially subversive forms of scholarly communication as well as to generate co-constructed future narratives.

### **Hiedanranta as a Place to Invite the Grassroots**

Tampere is the third largest city in Finland with a population of about 240,000 inhabitants.<sup>7</sup> Due to its long history of textile and pulp industry, the city was nicknamed the Manchester of Finland. As the city underwent major and rapid growth, many of its historical industrial buildings were transformed by or became replaced with new urban development projects. This is now also taking place in Hiedanranta, where a project is being developed to house around 25,000 inhabitants.<sup>8</sup>

When the Hiedanranta area was bought by the city of Tampere in 2014, it had been gated and some of its buildings had been unused for decades. The start was challenging, as the forgotten site is also somewhat far from the city centre and there was a limited budget. City officials responsible for the area took a leap of faith: instead of business as usual, they decided to rent out the premises cheaply to the kind of actors that would do something that could attract people to Hiedanranta. The area was given an experimental status to appeal to alternative cultures and start-up entrepreneurs. Hiedanranta is not the most typical former industrial site: in addition to the various factory buildings, there is also a manor with a garden towards the lake, and two wooden villas. This spatial and material diversity has attracted

a variety of users and experiments, including social enterprises collaborating with a vocational school, big event spaces hosting alternative scenes, biochar production, circus performers, skateboarders, urban gardeners, artists and artisans. Many of the experiments have focused on new models of collaboration, trust and freedom. Without this, it would have proved extremely difficult to bring life to the area.

Bringing vacant spaces back into use has been a challenging learning process for all participants, with success stories as well as mistakes and unfortunate surprises. Many of the actors started as temporary users, without a certain future, yet some have settled at Hiedanranta and become more organized, following the pace of the place itself as it became more formal.<sup>9</sup> The experimental status created a window of opportunity for growth. For many, this has been a life-changing experience, as there has been room to test novel practices in a permissive setting.

Hiedanranta has become an excellent setting to explore grassroots' socio-spatial practices for several reasons. There is currently a vivid grassroots culture, in which local researchers are also participants. Regardless of certain losses, such as some of the active pioneering groups not finding a new space when the building they used was demolished, the attitude of the city has been mostly about supporting a variety of initiatives without prejudice.<sup>10</sup> Long-lasting relationships have built mutual trust. Over seven years, local people, researchers and city officials, supported by visiting groups, have built a community sauna together, avoided some unnecessary building repairs, designed a solar summer kitchen and a makerspace, created two new study programmes and developed a future space-sharing model, to name but a few.<sup>11</sup> For every successful project, there are at least three that were not realized. All of these shared adventures have made it possible to have local pioneers participate in an intensive workshop, offering direct and even intimate encounters for the guests from abroad, similar to the ones between the people of Hiedanranta itself. As such, the

guests of the workshop had the opportunity to jump into the Hiedanranta bubble, feeling safe and welcome, prompted to try out something that might be outside their usual comfort zone.

### **Narrating Hiedanranta: The Workshop**

Taking place from 8 to 10 June 2022, the 'Narrating Hiedanranta' workshop attempted to give participants the opportunity to engage directly with the question of how to work with grassroots narratives. Open to members of the COST Action 'Writing Urban Places', but also to local actors, the workshop assembled diverse backgrounds of research and practice. This created a need for shared spaces, including the physical spaces of the buildings and the landscape of Hiedanranta, as well as shared theoretical spaces, developed through lectures and activities relating to the workshop's theme. A particular focus on methods aimed to offer participants a non-exhaustive but substantial array of strategies for fieldwork sessions. These methodological approaches examined how visual methods for social research, poetic practices in spatial knowledge production and longform narrative interviewing can be used to engage with the grassroots.

To begin, sociologist Luc Pauwels presented a series of visual approaches to social research ranging from researcher-produced imagery, respondent-generated image production (RGIP), and 'visually expressive forms of scholarly communication'.<sup>12</sup> Whether looking at photographic methods such as Repeat Photography or visual elicitation techniques to generate respondent information, these methods were offered to workshop participants as means to query how the visual field can be drawn upon to develop new understandings of grassroots spatial practices. As a complement, poet and researcher Jeremy Allan Hawkins gave an introduction to poetic practices in spatial knowledge production, drawing on theories of poetic language and its relation to understanding, while also proposing strategies for *in-situ* writing that included the use of constraint, accident, play and collaboration.<sup>13</sup> These strategies were paired with practical experiments, including

a prompt-driven site poem written during the lecture and a deambulating collective poetry reading as a site exploration. The presentations on visual methods and poetic practices worked together to question how text and image could be used creatively to produce data-rich and complex accounts of a site like Hiedanranta and the people currently shaping its character as space and place.

Finally, Elina Alatalo and Dalia Milián Bernal introduced narrative interviewing, a mode of interview through which longform recountings are produced.<sup>14</sup> Not fully structured and usually started by means of open-ended questions, this type of interview allows conversations to unfold in directions that are meaningful to the interviewee, often leading to unexpected anecdotes and stories. During the 'Narrating Hiedanranta' workshop, researchers in teams of two were each able to interview one individual part of the Hiedanranta grassroots. The interviews took place on the same sites where the grassroots work, have appropriated and transformed, and/or move within and around, thus adding a degree of situatedness to the process. The narrative and situated interviews had a duration of approximately two hours and were recorded. Before the interviews, interviewees were invited to bring visual material to the interview and both interviewee and interviewer were encouraged to produce visual material during the interviewing process. This led to multiform and varied results from the interviews conducted, which will become evident below.

Across the three methodological approaches – visual, poetic and narrative interviewing – the workshop organizers attempted to provide participants with tools for meaningful encounters and collaboration with Hiedanranta and its grassroots. On the one hand, this could mean soliciting narratives from the recent past or tracing extant marks of the activities that have shaped the site, but on the other it also implied a creative interaction with the people and the place, opening opportunities for the problematics of co-construction. It is a question of how, with these methodological tools,

incoming researchers could participate in re-telling the stories of the grassroots in Hiedanranta, whose voices would be preserved, what knowledge would emerge, and to what ends.

### **Six Co-constructed Narratives**

The following six co-constructed stories, each presented on a spread, build on all these activities and weave together the three methodological approaches. The local people participating in these stories all have long-standing relationships with Hiedanranta. They have been among the first to arrive and have been central in materially and culturally making Hiedanranta what it is today. The first project, titled 'Quoetry: Hands, Words, Worlds', is the work of Mathilde Merolli and Dorina Pllumbi, who interviewed Ville Natunen, a skateboarder and professional skatepark builder, and member of Kaarikoirat association. During the workshop, Merolli and Pllumbi developed a method according to which they handpicked quotes from the interview and arranged them into a text with poetic qualities. This method, which they called 'quoetry', has been further adopted and adapted by other contributors to this chapter and is visible in subsequent stories. In addition, Merolli and Pllumbi made video recordings and took clips from the video to construct their project.<sup>15</sup>

The second project, 'Contouring with Universumi', is by Mattias Malk, who interviewed Niko Lehtola, a graffiti and urban artist and one of the founding members of SprayCanKontrol, a group mobilizing in Hiedanranta, that has been responsible for the organization of several international graffiti and urban art events in the area. Malk's work fuses his conversation with Niko during and after the interview with his own experience of the spaces of Hiedanranta, which he explored employing a method called 'bordering'.<sup>16</sup> It is through a form of bordering that, in turn, Malk presents the words of Niko from their conversation about 'what it means to live a good life and to be happy' as their co-constructed project.



This story is followed by 'Memory Strips', by Sila Kartal who interviewed Henna Matanuska, a circus artist and member of Sirkus Faktori. The group was active in Hiedanranta until they needed to move to make way for a new tramline. Inspired by Henna's work, which involves, above all, movements of the body, Sila uses a video of one of Henna's early performances and created image strips employing a method called 'slit scanning' to 'present varying layers of time' and movement as well as certain qualities of the space, though these remain abstract. The image strips are accompanied by powerful, short lines of poetry, which clearly depict the way in which the places of Hiedanranta have inspired Henna's work.

In the project called 'Public Art in a Tight Spot', Hanna Musiol and Panu Lehtovuori reflect on their eye-opening conversations while touring around Hiedanranta with Matti Lankinen, another key artist of SprayCanKontrol, responsible for the impressive murals in the area. They bring forth a pair of features, a kind of tension between monumentality and fragility that exists simultaneously in a place. For example, murals are materially monumental and intended to bring art to everyday environments for anyone to enjoy. Yet, they are also very fragile, since the buildings can be torn down, the paintings can be painted over, or the people advocating for them may turn their interests elsewhere. Hanna and Panu invite us to think about this tension in a small, even claustrophobic, closet space.

Next, is the project titled 'Brooch' by Elena Sitrakova, who interviewed Taina Laaksonen, one of the key individuals behind the project for an edible garden that has been built by the community of Hiedanranta in collaboration with refugees from various countries. Here Sitrakova presents close-range images of the greenhouses accompanied by double-layered poetry. The close-range images depict different abstract plants inspired by the flora in the homelands of the refugees, engraved in the glass of the greenhouses. Sitrakova's poetry differs from the other uses of poetry in that she high-

lights in bold certain lines that can be read as a poem on its own, hence, the name 'double-layered poetry'.

The final project, titled 'Made of real...and not of some composites', is by Matej Nikšič, who invites us to see the importance of small entrepreneurs, such as artisans, in bringing life to areas like Hiedanranta. Our focus is often on the most visible and loud actors, who organize big events or deal with public space. Nevertheless, transformations also happen on more hidden and personal levels. People make use of cheap places as their work space, such as Juha Sepponen, to develop a more meaningful and sustainable livelihood. The photographs shot by Matej deliver us the sensory experience of Juha's new everyday life: the smell of wood, the sawdust, the hand-felt texture of wood. The story is not only about Juha, but also about how Matej was transformed himself. The discoveries he made in Hiedanranta now made him see similar places in his home country literally through a new lens.

# Quoetry: Hands, Words, Worlds

Dorina Pllumbi, Mathilde Merolli, and Ville Natunen

Our encounter with Ville Natunen was one of the richest exploratory moments we had in Hiedanranta.

Ville has been part of the Tampere skateboarding scene all his life, both as a professional skateboarder and skatepark builder. He is an activist on different levels. Ville advocates and claims skating space in the city, but is also actively changing the skating culture from within by challenging and subverting existing problematic narratives through his designing and building of more inclusive slopes.

We arrived without predefined ideas about and methods for how to capture and represent the agency of his character. We followed Ville's lead while he guided us through buildings and skateparks, pausing at places that were meaningful to him to share his experiences with us.

Choosing video over audio recording was sparked by the desire to include a spatial dimension in the interview. We realized the potential of video recording as a less reductionist medium that would do more justice to not only the incredible spatial configurations we were

emerging into but also to the conversation flow. Ville's confidence, openness and storytelling skills stimulated the dialogue between the interview questions, adding our own personal reactions and reflections to the recording.

Although time was limited to process the three-hour-long interview, we experimented with turning this encounter into a short documentary of selected pieces of the most meaningful moments, along with the QUOETRY compilation consisting of 110 quotes handpicked from the interview.

Ville's ability to narrate inspired the choice to pull quotes from the interview. By replaying the recording, we handpicked the quotes – focusing on message, keywords and humour. We used a text shuffler tool to randomize the order of the quotes. A handful of quotes were then repositioned to accentuate the poetic quality of the collected quotes. We named the poem 'Quoetry', a portmanteau of 'Quote' and 'Poetry'.

Interview: Ville's Story by Mathilde Merolli & Dorina Pllumbi [www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDyh\\_b4553l](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDyh_b4553l)



## Quoetry

Something like ocean and jungle  
It is big money / it is big stuff  
Where they take the dogs from the street  
There was no design for this  
He will not understand them, he will not support them, he will not be, or maybe he will  
It is just easier for him to say, yeah sure, instead of creating a conflict  
This will be, like, our space  
I go to my Instagram  
But I think it is part of life  
I am in a place of certain power  
Three weeks, away three weeks back  
This is tiny  
Now I had to cut them out  
Just two weeks ago  
People do not want to have it  
Their fathers never said any good thing to them  
They are massive / they are beautiful  
Nobody skates this ramp / there is no ramp to skate  
I drew it on a piece of plywood  
Probably he believes something / that all we do good  
Whatever we do, you cannot drill anything through the floor  
I want to drink whatever I want  
Not on the sides meant for girls and kids  
It would be, like, I do not know, fun for the kids to get to build ramps  
Yeah, I do not know what is the truth  
He said, everyone is happy  
So, I have been thinking about her  
I kind of started learning about feminism through her  
Change is the only constant  
Everything was big, and tall, and she is a small girl  
We open the doors, we sell the tickets, we run the place  
Kind of like, a private section of the city  
My dad was a sailor  
The name in Finnish, Muovitehdas  
In the buildings  
He would be, like, you are crazy  
How long are you going to be in Tampere  
We will make all this great for you  
I know how it feels to skate there  
It was nice to, nice that it was you, who came  
Really young girls coming to talk to you  
They were like, yeah, let us put you guys in that building  
You are twenty years old  
That is Temu, that is me  
What is it?  
It is right there, it is, I don't know  
Against the concrete  
If you have power, you do not want to argue with people that are not on your level  
He manages big thing / we are little things  
He is called Matti / he is my friend  
What do you call that?

What the fuck are you talking about  
It will get better  
Now a friend  
I want to eat to eat whatever I want  
I hope my son will speak like you  
She used to have short, blue hair  
Or something  
It looks good / it is not good  
It seems like I have a lot of muscles  
That is how he works  
They will be skating in the Olympics, like, in the United States, like  
One morning, everything was gone  
It is kind of like a youth house in the end  
What people speak  
It has, like, a rough sound  
White walls will create a lot of light in here  
People working in swimming halls should pay rent  
The Ukrainian situation had already started  
Fit in this space  
For a long time, it was in my taste, more beautiful  
I have a plan  
I am known  
Somewhere  
Maybe in ten years or stuff  
Urban culture, rap culture  
He was interviewing me in here  
I would like to write stories  
Yeah, it is good enough, it is good enough  
This will be torn down, we will go somewhere else  
This is not boring  
Kids, and girls, and whoever skate  
Different sound, different, maybe concrete  
But it is also nice, we have, like, actual toilets  
To actually have a space to go to work to  
The buildings  
When those kids, in ten years, they been skating this ten years  
I do that all the time, I do that all the time  
He teaches them  
Then they leave, and you pick the next one  
Some day, we all die  
Why would you waste space inside for this  
We are under them always  
I do not care  
How to skate this  
This cannot be the space where we start, like, running this kind of thing  
We do not know what is down there  
You understood a lot  
I wanted to, now, when I had the power  
The roof is leaking  
Please help us  
It is already in the signs, in google maps  
A glass ball spinning on it  
I was expecting it to be boring people  
You are now you  
I have all the keys  
Whatever we want, like, it is kind of good  
Oh, okay  
Let us put those kids in a chemical factory  
I make changes and piss the architect off  
Ville Natunen

Follow the heart, not the profit.  
and agendas

It's not about not making profit. It's about making things for the right reasons.

Scale the

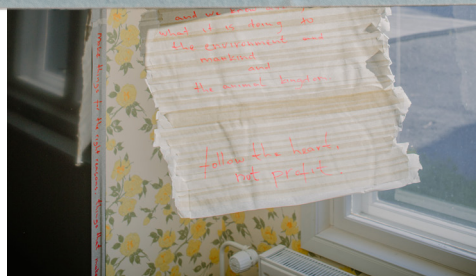
## Contouring with...

by Mattias Malk and Niko Lehtola

It is not easy to get to know a place only in a matter of days. The task becomes even more complicated if you are expected to relate this experience to others, to say something new or from a different perspective. In Hiedanranta we received many valuable insights from our hosts, but most importantly we were given the chance to speak to different local actors on our own terms. If there can be a story of a place, it is not a singular narrative. It is written and told in parallel by many.

This short project fuses my own walk on the periphery of Hiedanranta – my initial attempt to define the place by tracing its border – with insights from an interview with Niko Lehtola. Niko is also known by his street artist name Uni or Uni-versumi and has been active in the heart of Hiedanranta for years. Our conversation illuminated some of

the changes taking place in the area and some of the anxieties that exist regarding its future. Still, we spent most of our breath beyond Hiedanranta, treading more universal topics of what it means to live a good life and to be happy. This continued long after the dictaphone was shut off, and in the steam of the evening sauna. These reflections fuse with the introspective documentation of the walk to create a portrait of Hiedanranta at a particular time and in a specific context. More of an ambience than a narrative, really.



## Universumi

Follow the heart, not the profit.

It's not about not making profit, it's about making things for the right reasons.

Scale the reasons.

Make things for the right reasons.

Things that make a positive change.

This becomes difficult when there are businesses that need to make a profit, not really for the right reasons, but they still need to make a profit.

It is a difficult dynamic when there are corporations and agendas.

Each man or woman makes his or hers decisions or what they are willing to do.

If you follow what your heart wants to do, it's probably for the right reasons and it can bring you profit, also.

Because we see it happening a lot around that people and corporations are following the profit and we know already what it is doing to the environment and mankind and the animal kingdom.

Follow the heart, not the profit.

Niko Lehtola

Project: Hiedanranta ambient by Mattias Malk  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPsbM0ARzDE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPsbM0ARzDE)

It's a difficult dynamic when there are corporations and agendas.

Scale the

Scale the reasons. Make things for the right reasons. Things that make a positive change.

this becomes difficult when there are businesses that need to make a profit, not really for the right reasons, but they still



# Memory Strips

by Sila Kartal and Henna Matanuska

Inspiring to be here, everything was very open



There were lots of 'freedom' and 'opportunities'



I worked with what I found.

Henna Matanuska, a circus artist, discovered the idle spaces of Hiedanranta with her body and her art. Her tools were whatever she found in Hiedanranta with a scrap of her soul. She gets inspired by Hiedanranta. Henna feeds her creativity in this place while she is defining its spirit. The visuals were produced by slit scanning Henna's performance called 'Hiedanranta' as film strips. Film strips express the interaction between time, body and space. They present varying layers of time; past, present during the past, traces of now and they evolve into a memory. The strips are narrating inertia,

precession and creation of Henna in Hiedanranta. One can observe the inertia of abandoned industry buildings, and alleys from consistent pinkish and greenish backgrounds. One can follow Henna's precession by looking at her black traces in the film strips. The hoop with fire was what she used to ensure her corporeal interaction with the space. She created that tool from what she found in Hiedanranta. What she told and shared during our narrative interview was clearly observed in her performance's strips. Her poetic expressions that attached to the strips elucidate the time-body-space interaction. Her movements were shaped by the space itself. She created many stories and narrated them with her art in Hiedanranta's abandoned places.

The area behind the factories was inspiring



red bricks, alley, texture



Inspiring for creating the movement



You can go anywhere in abandoned factories...  
...and create a story in your head.

*Henna Matanuska*

# Public Art in a Tight Spot

by Hanna Musiol and Panu Lehtovuori, guided by Matti Lankinen

## The Site Breathes, We Listen

Panu and I hail from architecture and literature, and work with different disciplinary fixations on words, histories, surfaces, scales, atmospheres. We bring, in other words, different ways of *disciplinary listening*. In Hiedanranta, we met Matti Lankinen, a visual urban artist and a member of SprayCanKontrol, one of the artists who had imagined Hiedanranta, as a public art space, into existence.

Lankinen became our interlocutor and guide to this post-industrial neighbourhood of Tampere. We walked with him and listened. Touching concrete and brick surfaces. Recording sounds and images. Sneaking into vast industrial buildings, small crevices and indoor skating parks. Lankinen's guidance on our walk changed the cadence of our listening. Hiedanranta was alive and had much to say, we realized in the summer, and with his help we could hear some of its stories.

## Monumentality and Fragility

Initially, we were just bewitched by the exuberance and magnitude of Hiedanranta's public art work. Yet, hours of walking, listening, and recording, however, made us also sense the site's

paradox: its simultaneous monumentality, and its endangerment, fragility. Could we meet the storytelling need of this hurting space, which was literally being disassembled by bulldozers while we worked on our interview and recording?

Deeply moved by the dogged persistence of Lankinen and others to change, clandestinely, the public character of urban art for years, we also understood, felt, the physical and emotional heft of such monumental but ephemeral urban-scale visual work. Angered by the devaluing of grassroots public art in our socioeconomic profit system, we wanted to do justice to the expansive, tender, larger-than-life story of young graffiti artists who defied the odds and pried a public art space from a city that saw no need for it.

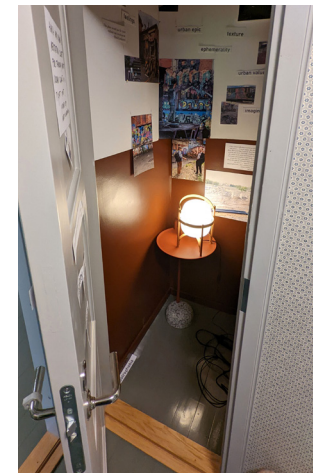
## Experiencing Urban Scale in a Tight Spot

We wondered for a while how to best express the conflict over the right to public art and space, the ongoing demolition efforts, and to celebrate the aliveness of the site in an art exhibit. Ultimately, we decided to reverse-play with scale, in- and outside surfaces, media, and the atmospheres of



>> I have been collecting trash from the streams and rivers... I mean nature has always been there [but now] that I actively don't do [graffiti] anymore, I feel like working good for the nature feels more meaningful. It does not feel more meaningful if I just make a painting in my free time somewhere... I was talking about this with my [friends] what we would ask for more? ... "natural activism" feels meaningful now... hey... picking trash from the nature's feeling meaningful. <<  
Matti Lankinen

Hiedanranta. To this end, we designed a makeshift "Meditation Closet." This tiny, immersive, multimedia installation cabinet was created as a claustrophobic space in which to ponder the scales of public visual art and to feel the tenderness of and the threat to the site. Our inward gesture also mirrored the generosity of Lankinen, who guided us into his world, speaking intimately about his work, about Hiedanranta, and about its grassroots history. Our micro-cabinet of curiosities was ultimately an invitation to sense the different urban scales, their magnitudes and constrictions, dreams and disappointments, with our ears and eyes, on the skin, and in the body.



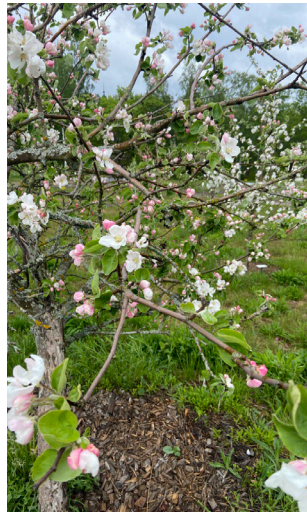


# Brooch

by Elena Sitrakova and  
Taina Laaksonen

The photo narrative story of the greenhouses was inspired by an interview with one of the coordinators of the floating garden and the Hiedanranta greenhouses. The idea for greenhouses originated from the organizer's grandmother's brooch, and it served as inspiration to create a square-like area where people could gather and feel a sense of community while farming. Designers worked in cooperation with immigrants to design greenhouses. They designed patterns using as an inspiration plants from different places so people can feel more at home.

Those images show how powerful collaboration and social interaction can be, and they tremendously motivated me. The way those greenhouses were built and the number of people who collaborated to make them a reality demonstrate their significance and success of that social project.



## Double-layered quometry

<< It was my grandmother's brooch. I really liked the idea of a community around the greenhouses. So I thought that those greenhouses could be like jewels here in this region and that they could somehow **sparkle and glow**. So that was the first idea.>>

<< I wanted to keep it as a **non-formal activity**, like the refugees designed it by themselves and created it by themselves. just like with the floating garden. >>

<< We had that refugee crisis. I was working with other charity social projects and I thought that this would be a good opportunity to bring some kind of **healing aspect** to the refugees. >>

<< It was a design project, but it was also a social one. There were greenhouses here from the 30s, so we wanted to revive them too. We had a graphic designer who created that pattern, and we had a person who designed the light. All the time when we were designing those patterns, there were the refugees that were studying the Finnish language at the education centre. **They were like a peer group that evaluated the project.**>>

<< There are Nordic trees around, and in the greenhouse there are some **tropical trees in the form of a pattern**. Now I know how to combine design so it has more impact. >>

<< In some other places, it would be harder to persuade. I also like the aesthetics here; **everything is not finished or polished.** >>

<< **People come here and they leave their marks here, and I think I did it too.** >>

<< It was nice here because it was so **informal and quite creative. You can see the impact.** >>

Taina Laaksonen

# Made of Real . . . and Not

by Matej Nikšič and Juha Sepponen



This is the story of Juha, a wooden-glasses maker from Hiedanranta. He did not enjoy his previous, eight-hour computer shift job and looked for a place where he could start his own production – he found it in Hiedanranta.

He has learnt how to produce glasses along the way. He mainly produces them for clients he knows. His glasses are made of real wood and not of composites. He likes to keep focused on the selected range of items and will keep producing glasses.

Juha occasionally joins the events organized in Hiedanranta and takes part in other activities in the area. After our interview he was going to heat up the sauna to be used in the evening.

# of Some Composites



'THE FUTURE

IS NOT OURS TO SEE,' Juha says.

He has some concerns about what will happen to Hiedanranta when the new development will be in full swing, but he is optimistic.

*Juha Sepponen*



### Concluding Remarks

Since one of the principal characteristics of the grassroots in the city includes escaping and exceeding traditional measures, the knowledge production around their popular, spontaneous, emergent and often subversive spatial practices presents methodological challenges and requires engagement with epistemologies that take situated and subjective knowledge seriously. To inquire into these practices, status quo-confirming epistemological perspectives and methodological approaches would do nothing to account for the social value produced by, for example, a self-organizing urban gardening community or a self-built skateboarding park.

The co-constructed narratives presented here immediately offer an interesting 'visually expressive form of scholarly communication' worth exploring.<sup>17</sup> By weaving the different methods, the participants' situatedness and experience of place, and the stories of the grassroots of Hiedanranta all together, the different co-constructed stories introduce an interesting approach to tightly synthesizing knowledge. These methods of synthesis can be useful to represent interview material and stories of personal experience with spatial practices as well as the materiality of the built environment. Moreover, this approach to scholarly communication responds well to increasing calls for more creative, playful, and even 'rebellious' forms of representing research findings.<sup>18</sup> And while we are aware that these forms of representation might not be well suited for mainstream academic forums, they certainly have the potential to be powerful tools for academic communities willing to enact 'epistemic disobedience', seeking to decolonize research practices, engage with diverse audiences and/or emancipate the imagination.<sup>19</sup>

By following the visual, poetic and interviewing approaches introduced during the workshop, the participants were able to pursue and produce different types of material, discursive and relational knowledge. On one hand, this was about producing new and qualitative empirical documents about

the present sociospatial context and relationships as well as the immediate history of the different actors living and working *in-situ*, available for further interpretation at later stages, including images, interview texts and recordings. On the other hand, the methods employed were also a means of breaking the boundaries of participation that might otherwise exclude outsider researchers from certain types of knowledge about a site.

To that end, whether in the photographing of an urban gardening project or the highlighting of quotes from an extended interview, the researchers were actively involved in the production of situated knowledge – engaged, embodied, entangled. As represented in the immediate outcomes of the workshop, which took the form of an impromptu exhibition, and in the continued developments partially represented in this chapter, the voices and perspectives of both insider grassroots actors were and are combined with those of outsider researchers in singular forms. In this way, we can see how the co-construction of narratives during the workshop, while mindful of the recent past, also created new stories from the collaborative encounters between researchers and local actors. This co-construction also ensures that distortive co-options of grassroots' narratives cannot happen so easily, even by researchers like us.

These strands of knowledge offer new accounts of the value and meaning of a site like Hiedanranta and the spatial practices that were able to flourish there. In practice, this ranged from the highlighting of an important feminist commitment in the local skateboarding association, materialized in the design itself of the on-site skate park. It also revealed the fragility of seemingly monumental works of art produced by the locally situated but globally recognized group of graffiti artists, suggesting a certain fragility of the site that is currently under pressure because of urban development. Or again, the poetic but tenuous occupation of space that can be seen in the ongoing history of a now-displaced circus association.



If these narratives bring forward knowledge of the Hiedanranta grassroots that was previously hidden or understated, they remain situated in the present tense of the site and its community, in part due to their co-constructed nature. Rather than performing purely archival work, the 'Narrating Hiedanranta' workshop participants engaged with the site and its actors using methodological approaches that called on forms of agency and creativity that, by design, entangle them in the now to produce situated knowledge in tune with the power relations at work.<sup>20</sup> In this way, we believe the workshop, while attempting to do justice to the recent past of grassroots activity in Hiedanranta, drew on the dynamics of co-construction to build new, future-oriented narratives of the site and its actors as they are in the present.

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The co-constructed narratives which appear in this chapter were adapted from their original forms in order to fit the format of the *Writingplace journal*.

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