

THINKING IT THROUGH *Demos*

Think-tank Demos maintains a significant stake in its home turf of Helsinki, despite nationwide success. Curating the programme for the World Design Capital pavilion, the approach is social and collaborative, with workshops set up for visitors to share skills from gardening to taxes. Demos is pushing a trend in the city that's making the capital more neighbourly.

It is all about how individuals fit into communities – and Demos's approach to rethinking demographics (by interest, not age group or economics) has fans that range from the Finnish government to design company Marimekko.



Urbanism Future City



COMMUNITY SPIRIT *Mass movements*

After less than a year, Restaurant Day has reached almost mythic status in Helsinki (see page 118). Now that Finns are comfortable with strangers at their dinner table, the trend is heading curb-side. On the agenda is another populist public project, Spring Cleaning – a loosely organised mass garage sale in the works for mid-May.



BEHIND THE SCENES

City planning department

For a municipal government that owns 70 per cent of the city's land, Helsinki is secure in its power to tackle large-scale projects. So you might expect a rather large planning department – and Helsinki's certainly tips the scale with 200 architects, traffic planners, engineers and landscape architects. Focused on detail and consensus, the department's work helped put Helsinki at the top of MONOCLE's 2011 Quality of Life survey. But, with such a large workforce, individual roles are limited so it is more difficult to innovate, and experimentation is sacrificed for the sake of consistency. There is hope, though: "The younger generation are more connected. They realise that Helsinki needs to compete internationally," says Bryan Boyer of Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund.

JOINING FORCES

Even greater Helsinki

Plans are afoot to merge the municipalities of the greater Helsinki region, namely Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, Kauniainen and Sipoo. In an attempt to streamline municipal services, the proposal would take effect in 2015 and is supported by the mayor of Helsinki, Jussi Pajunen.

In the other corner are leaders of the smaller municipalities and, it seems, the residents of the region. A recent TNS Gallup poll, commissioned by *Helsingin Sanomat*, showed that in Helsinki only a third of the city's residents want a merger. Risto Rautava, chairman of the Helsinki City Board, calls it a "communications challenge".