

Toppilansaari Park in Oulu

Tangentially staggered paths accompany the rainwater in swales on its way out to sea.

Connection plazas have clear wall elements which give the 'flowing park' an anchor and space for relaxation and play.

The park 'flows' over the street crossings and thus has priority.



Few, apart from the Finnish, know where Oulu is. A town tucked away at the furthest reaches of the Baltic Sea, just 160 kilometres south of the polar circle, it is not the sleepy stop-over one might expect. World leaders in mobile telecommunications and advanced medical and electronic technology have chosen to base their businesses in Oulu. It is the city with the highest rate of economic growth in Finland and, consequently, there is high demand for attractive, affordable housing.

Toppilansaari, a half island between the canalised Oulu harbour entrance and the open sea, is the site of the Finnish Housing Expo 2005. The unique ecology and distinctive flora of the saline wetland on the sea side is made even more interesting through the proximity and contrast of the urban and industrial maritime canal.

The housing is laid out as a sustainable pilot project. A green park forms a central core for the relatively spread-out housing elements. The park provides convenient and informal recreation and activity areas which help reduce recreational impact on the sensitive wetland habitat. It is also a stormwater system, where rainwater and spring snowmelt are collected, cleaned and slowly released to the wetland via swales whose soft topography mirrors the flow of water. The proximity of the sea is further evoked by waved steel planting edges which are a repeated design element throughout the park.

'Toppilansaari' means 'Park of the Young Sailor' in Finnish. This name defined the programme of two land art installations which close the southern and northern ends of the park. In the southern garden, a conceptual, sunken boat is a memorial to all the young sailors who never returned to land. Masts are strung like an instrument, low tones are heard from the benches integrated into the

Concrete stepping stones also function to hold back rain and melt water for detention.

Openings at street crossing convey the rain and melt water to the next park swale.



Run-off from adjacent roads and plazas is cleaned and brought to the 'flowing park'.

