Graduation Thesis

From Place to Practice: Exploring the Role of Place in Helsinki Design

Vilma Katariina Havo

701269

Supervisor: Professor Gregory Richards

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Abstract

This study examines the role of place attachment in shaping the creative output of a place, studied with a focus on Helsinki and its design professionals. The research adopts a qualitative, mixed-method approach combining semi-structured interviews and visual analysis of Instagram content produced by Helsinki's design practitioners. Four in-depth interviews were conducted with experts from different positions in Helsinki's design ecosystem, including an interior architecture, graphic design, space design and the city's design brand management. In parallel, five publicly available Instagram accounts were analyzed with a multi-modal approach to visual analysis. The data coding was done using inductive thematic analysis approach, supported by the Place Attachment Frame work (Person-Place-Process, PPP) by Scannell and Grifford (2009).

This study aims to explore how designers notice and utilize place or relationship with it, and how these expressions have an impact on understanding the broader scale in creative cities and cultural ecosystems. The results provide a multi-layered perspective on the interaction between place, identity, and creative production. There is a main research question formed as follows, what is the role of place in shaping the design output of Helsinki, and a sub question of, in what ways is place attachment reflected in the work of design professionals of Helsinki?

The study found out that place attachment manifests in both subtle and strategic ways, in the work of Helsinki- based design professionals. Through a combined analysis of visual social media content and expert interviews, the research reveals how emotional connection to Helsinki's material environment, its values, and the institutional ecosystem shapes creative output. Design professionals navigate between personal place-bound identities, and global creative networks and influences. Helsinki was seen functioning as both lived environment and a symbolic brand. The findings further suggest that place in not just a passive entity, but an active element in creative processes of the design industry. By applying the place attachment framework by Scannell & Gifford, the research contributes to understanding how local context matters in the production and representation of design work.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The problem statement for this thesis stems from the academic knowledge gap that exists between the creative industry and place. An urban place is defined as a geographically located city with a distinct aesthetic, nature, climate, emotion, and atmosphere (Evans, 2009). I want to study the effect of Helsinki as a place on its creative industry in the field of Finnish Design. The paper 'This Place Gives Me Space' by Drake, proposes that the links between place and creativity can be important and influential in the creative process and that current theory of the role of place in art making, should be expanded to account for individual creativity and how the characteristics of localities can be used as a catalyst for individual creativity (Drake, 2003, p. 511). The aim of this study is not to measure the impact of place in the creative process but design industry workers recognize place as a factor in their work or as another influence to their work. The study used a mixed-method approach by incorporating expert interviews with visual analysis data. Design industry professionals were interviewed to establish the most important aspects of place attachment in the design field in Helsinki.

The study was executed with a mixed method approach. Semi structured interviews and a visual content analysis were used to gather the research data. Because of the subjective nature of the creative design process, this research adopted a qualitative approach based on the interviews and the multi-modal visual analysis approach. Design industry professionals were interviewed to establish the most important aspects of place attachment in the design field in Helsinki. The analysis uses mixed-methods in order to establish the most coherent overview of the effects of place to the Helsinki Design industry output. Moreover, the study analyses which aspects of place attachment are deemed important and how much workers in the creative (design) industries are influenced by the characteristics of the area where their business is situated. Finnish Design is distinguishable from its minimalism, affected by the weather and Nordic Traditions, emphasizing simple functionality (Aav & Stritzler-Levine, 1998). So, if Finnish Design is known for its references to nature, the welfare state, and other unique cultural cluster characteristics, this study aims find out whether these characteristics

have an impact on the creative industry output.

The research question of this master thesis is, what is the role of place in shaping the design output of Helsinki? Meaning, how is place reflected in the work of designers from Helsinki, to audiences? The relevant theoretical concepts are place attachment, creative ecosystem, cultural place, and creative impact of place. There is a sub question that is formatted as follows: In what ways is place attachment reflected in the work of design professionals of Helsinki?

The main assumption for these research questions is that place attachment has serious impact on the creative industry. Creativity is a subjective topic, but the author is confident that a location has some characteristics that influence the art-making in a place, even if their meanings differ from person to person.

The authors motivation for writing this thesis has been developed during a long period of time. The author has been interested in design and themes such as creativity, space and atmosphere in aesthetics for years, but only now has the skills and academic confidence to produce her own research about the topic. The author wants to narrow down the research to Helsinki, because the unique feeling of Nordic, and especially Finnish design that is professionally the most concentrated in its capital. Additionally, the interviews were held in Finnish to ensure continuity of the cultural nuance. They are more accurately described in one's first language or at least it takes a lot of perfecting to be able to express oneself in a second language. So, the author wants to execute the thesis interviews in Finnish and to translate the language's unique tone to English. In the visual analysis, the multi-modal approach was chosen to capture the Designer's unique tones and narratives.

The idea of this thesis is rooted in being an expat and the different approaches to experiencing place. The core of choosing design as the creative industry of choice for this thesis is personal. The author is deeply interested in the duality of design being a part of the creative industry, yet, simultaneously acting as an operator for function, and its output as an economic force. I want to explore a creative city, Helsinki, from a new angle. This angle is built by using design professionals' interviews and their visual output on Instagram. The scope was widened to professionals in the design industry, because the creatives have a sensitive ability to experience nuances of place, or at least they know how to interpret those feelings better than someone with less artistic skill. An institutional or managerial approach was included in the analysis to get a coherent overview of the Helsinki Design industry. The thesis highlights that making art in a geographical place is also a reflection of place, culturally and concretely.

The cultural and creative industries (CCI), reflects current world events, and that is why the notion of place is addressed via the place attachment framework (PPP) by Scannell and Gifford (2009). The framework divides place attachment into three parts including place, person, and process. They were discussed further in the theory chapter.

The author wanted to dive into the unique creative atmosphere of her home city, Helsinki, and highlight the one-of-a-kind feeling that Finnish design has as a part of the Nordic Design scene. The intention was to reflect on the Finnish design innovation and entrepreneurship, and the inspiration to creativity that comes from place. A Finnish writer Jaana Venkula, characterizes the process of studying art, as using scientific tools to approach the part of art which can be described scientifically (Venkula, 2011). Furthermore, she discusses that the scientifically produced study is only a fraction of the multi-modality of art. Yet, it plays an important role in understanding art, especially for those for whom art does not open experientially (Venkula, 2011). And for this same reason I want to explore the Finnish environment for art, to open it for those who might not experience it as strongly. Additionally, I wish to bring some of the underlying possibilities of creative place to the fore, so the appreciation of creativity could be enhanced.

This thesis topic is relevant today, because of its academic importance and the presented academic gap in the effects of place and art, but also because of its urgency in the political field. In this current political (far) right governments rising around the world, the importance of preserving cultural industries such as design is crucial. The current Finnish government has indicated that they will be making significant budget cuts to the creative industries. Jakonen et al. discuss this very issue in their recent work concerning the populist parties of Finland and Sweden, and their effect on the cultural policy changes in these two countries (2024). They state that according to the FP (Finnish Populist Party) program declarations, the state should prioritize supporting cultural activities for 'ordinary individuals.' As the party's ideological stance on the right wing of the Finnish political spectrum would imply, governmental support is fused with market demand: according to the FP, art forms that do not have 'real market demand' (from the 'people') should not be sponsored by the state (2024). As this party is now a big and powerful part of the government, I think it is crucial to academically discuss how creatives in Finland work and how the place reflects their art. Additionally, this underlines that Finnish design is not necessarily only tied to Finnish heritage, but all the diverse ways and paths that people take to understand their surroundings in the small but beautiful country.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the theoretical foundation for understanding how place attachment shapes creative practices within Helsinki's design field. In order to explore how designers relate to their urban environment both emotionally and professionally, this study makes use of interdisciplinary literature from urban studies, environmental psychology, and design theory. The discussion is based on the PPP framework by Scannell and Grifford, which provides a structured overview of what to focus on when analyzing a multilayered phenomenon such as how place attachment is reflected in the design industry of a place (2009). The Person-Place-Process framework gives insight on how to analyze the relationship between individuals, their environment, and the creative processes they engage in. Additionally, literature about creative ecosystems, institutional support, and the symbolic role of cities in design practice offers important insights into the structural and cultural dimensions of place-based creativity. The literature has been integrated to provide conceptual clarity, and analytical tools to interpret the visual- and interview data gathered in the study.

2.1 The Creative Industries

The terms used to describe economic activities, such as "industry," "sector," and "cluster," often serve dual purposes, reflecting both geographic and economic dimensions (Malmberg & Power, 2006). In practice, these terms frequently emphasize the physical proximity or co-location of businesses rather than sustainable economic groupings. They are commonly used in policy discussions and initiatives to describe various networks (Evans, 2009, p. 1026). According to (Stevenson & Magee, 2017) cultural value of a city as traditionally as been seen as important not just to a city's overall reputation, but also to its long-term economic growth and success. So, the concepts around place, policy and economic value of art making as a reputational aspect for a city are explained.

Hesmondhalgh's (2018) "The Cultural Industries" defines cultural and creative in-

dustries (CCI), emphasizing their economic and social roles. The influence of creative institutions on the CCI is, for him, directly tied to the production of the social meaning that they have. He emphasizes their influence on general knowledge, understanding, and experience through products that they make and then circulate to the public. Therefore, the social role of the creative industry seen by Hesmondhalgh is their effects on social- and cultural change, products or knowledge, but also as whole systems of knowledge and creativity. The economic value of the cultural industry on the other hand is growing in importance. While growth brings significance to creative industries by generating revenue and -jobs, it does take away from the cultural value of the industry by diminishing the perceived value of the industry as a whole. The role of creative products is also emphasized not being solely for entertainment but also influencing understanding of the world, on issues and occasionally in an educational way. In Hesmondhalgh's book, the present contemporary capitalist societies benefit from CCI in organizing and circulating creativity and therefore reflecting present inequalities of the system (Hesmondhalgh, 2018, p. 10). While he does not think design is a 'core creative industry' to the society nor the CCI, it is evident that all creative workers add to the industry as a whole. Hesmondhalgh observes that, from an economic standpoint, the growth of the phrase 'creative industries' has been related to a 'creative economy' in which economic activity is founded on a new centrality for creativity and invention (2018). Policymakers have frequently used this to justify their concerns on a national scale, relating arts and cultural output to economic development, job creation, tourism marketing, and urban renewal. Some definitions of creative industries, such as Howkins, broadly embrace those involved in intellectual property, including medicines, electronics, and engineering, assuming that the modern economy is moving to one based on creativity (2013). However, Hesmondhalgh criticizes such problematically broad definitions. Cultural policy should not reduce the CCI to just economic and social benefits, while this may have effects on the whole industry. Do, for example, designers feel appreciated beyond the economic function of their work?

Instead of conventional mass production (Fordism), today's economic development is driven by high-tech industries, Neo-artisanal manufacturing, business services, financial services, and cultural-product industries, such as media and design (Scott, 2006). Scott calls this the "new economy" and describes these industries, by fueling innovation and economic growth (2006). "The notion of creative autonomy is absolutely crucial for an understanding of the cultural industries" (Negus, 1992, p. 46). "It shows that the metaphor of the traditional factory production line — often used in critiques of industrial cultural production — entirely misses the point", says (Hesmondhalgh, 2018, p. 96). Unlike standard industrial manufacturing, cultural industry creators have considerable control over the initial creative process. Even in tightly controlled environments such as Hollywood studios, screenwriters and directors enjoyed creative

license under certain constraints.

Hesmondhalgh (2018), like many others, approaches job viability in the CCI with the lens of accessibility to resources such as jobs, housing, studio space and financial aid. If this access is managed improperly, can lead to gentrification within a creative area of a city. The impact of gentrification on the creative sector is reflected in terms of Helsinki Design District by who can afford to live and create there.

The reproduction stage of cultural production has historically relied on complex, industrialized processes (e.g., printing, film mastering, broadcasting, illustration). However, digitalization is changing circulation within cultural fields in various ways, such as digital divides, the attention control of platforms, commercialization of digital networks and the intensified role of advertisements, as well as data protection difficulties with big data of IT -giants (Hesmondhalgh, 2018, p. 263). While the changes have been fast, they are still inclining and making creative workers compete with professional marketing machinery of platforms. Individual artists have to brand, market and manage their digital social presence in order to stay relevant to audiences and the industry.

In contrast to the extrinsic measurement of economic and societal 'effect', 'intrinsic' value has been linked to 'art for art's sake'. Pratt & Hutton appear to reverse the typical polarity of this discussion. Cultural infrastructure projects and initiatives attempt to attract tourists, talent, and investment while also representing the state's authority and legitimacy. An industrial economic program prioritizes the sector's underlying interests and demands (Pratt & Hutton, 2012). To recognize that the creative industries (CCI) is not parasitic to the consumption of the financial effects, but does generate wealth and employment of its own, is essential to fostering creativity in a city. In the next chapter the author will further examine the concept of urban creativity and how it has developed until today.

2.2   Urban Creativity

Until the late 1990s, the European academic concept of the 'creative city' focused on leveraging cultural activities and creative interventions for urban regeneration, aiming for economic benefits. However, post-1998, the term 'creative' gained broader popularity, emphasizing cultural production, creative industries, and the role of skilled labor in the emerging knowledge economy (Comunian, 2011). This shift was influenced by the UK's Department for Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) introduction of the term 'creative industries' in 1998 and Richard Florida's 'creative class' theory (Florida, 2002). The DCMS's definition highlighted the importance of producing cultural and creative products, the workforce behind them, and the supporting infrastructure. Consequently, the 'creative city' began to be seen as a hub for concentrated and supported

creative industries, with cultural consumption becoming secondary to cultural production(Comunian, 2011). According to her critique, the new developments have a one size fits all approach and top-down policy basis, yet also encourages placing the agents to the center of action, by having interaction based approaches to cultural policy and research (Comunian, 2011).

Margaret Mead described the creativity in a city as vital because "the city as a center where, any day in any year, there may be a fresh encounter with a new talent, a keen mind or a gifted specialist – this is essential to the life of a country" (Mead, 1987, p. 189). To play the role in our lives "a city must have a soul – a university, a great art or music school, a cathedral or a great mosque or temple, a great laboratory or scientific center, as well as the libraries and museums and galleries that bring past and present together" (Mead, 1987, p. 189).

O'Connor & Shaw (2014) explore the potential and limitations of the creative (or cultural) economy as the cornerstone of the creative city. They discuss the five dominant accounts of the creative city by Pratt & Hutton 2012, starting with how creative sectors often rely on advanced production services such as media, new media, design, and advertising. Additionally, they may be linked to cultural consumption facilities and creative service providers. The high-culture, or traditional cultural policy stems from the Italian quattrocetto and is considered the start of historic cities becoming the staple of cultural tourism in cities (Pratt & Hutton, 2012). The prestige cultural institutions becoming more powerful financially and therefore attracting foreign direct investment. Additionally, an interesting angle Pratt and Hutton (2012) have on ordinary culture as a balancing force to the above-mentioned high culture is social regeneration. Sports and other cultural objectives that are easier to approach and obtain by the public are considered to make people participate in cultural activities. Urban culture is not seen as an end by itself, but as a means of making a better city. Treating the creative sector can not be only based on an argument on economic value, but the sector has to be recognized in its intrinsic worth in order to urban creativity to be further developed. Recent arguments on the role of culture in public policy have been divided into 'intrinsic' and 'instrumental' values, meaning that for Pratt and Hutton, the creative economy benefits the city by directly contributing to its productivity 2012.

The importance of social networks for economic growth has been examined in analyses of regional innovation, learning, and growth (Florida, 2002; Hesmondhalgh, 2018; Gertler et al., 2000). Daniela Jelinčić argues that creativity is linked to uniqueness and innovation on an individual basis, but collectively, it presents as an entrepreneurial endeavor in the creative sectors (2025). Jelinčić contends that in an effort to increase their creative industries and tourism appeal, local communities and nations frequently use generic global branding patterns (2025). However, because it emphasizes globally known, commercially viable components more than genuine regional customs, practices,

and creative expressions, this strategy may result in the loss of cultural distinctiveness. She raises the concern of top-down cultural branding strategies being too focused on commercial viability rather than the organic, grassroots creativity of a community. So, instead of fostering original creative ecosystems, these strategies can produce an artificial cultural design that serves the economic values rather than the creative community (Jelinčić, 2025). She criticizes smaller cultural centers' propensity to adopt successful creative city models—like those found in large cultural capitals—without customizing them to fit their unique artistic, social, and historical settings (2025). As a result, cultural identity becomes homogenized, making various locations less unique as they begin to feel and look alike. In order to avoid the placelessness in art, place needs to be positioned as an asset in creativity.

Creative businesses have established themselves in areas where social networks and urban aesthetics are important, resulting in close spatial grouping. (Clare, 2012, p. 52). Urban creativity is therefore reliant on social connections and the atmosphere of the city they exist in. A popular phrase in marketing, business, and design, co-creation, refers to new ways for individuals to interact with one another in order to unlock the creative potential of different groups (Rill & Hämäläinen, 2018). So, co-creation for creatives in an urban environment is a way to access further potential and therefore build sustainable businesses. This so-called creative output is examined more in the following chapter.

2.3   Creative Output

What is creativity and how does it affect the creative output? According to Garcês et al., creativity is a natural resource for humans, not exclusive to only some individuals, nor is it only a cognitive process. A person's interactions with school, family, and society have been associated with promoting creativity. So, an environment positive for creativity development will have a connotation for future creative processes (2016). Visible creative output of a city can then be a catalyst for promoting creative thinking for new generations.

Mel Rhodes is among the first to propose that creativity is a combination of four elements is the 4 P's categorization: (a) the creative individual; (b) the creative process; (c) the creative output; and (d) the press (1961). According to Rhodes, creativity is the process by which a person creates new things using implicit cognitive thinking in the presence of an environment that enhances that creation (1961).

So, the individual's surroundings have an effect on their creativity, if the environment they're in, enhances that creation. This would further indicate that place has effects on the creative work that is made there. Scannell & Gifford give explanation and reflect on the Creative City approach by Comunian, via critiquing the creative city being too

place-neutral. Therefore, we need to look closer to the role of place in creativity (2009).

2.4   Place in Creativity

First, how can we distinguish the role of place in creativity? Place meaning is knowledge and beliefs about a location that are scientific, traditional, or local, as well as a symbolic connection between a person or group and a place (Williams et al., 2012). Meaning that the overall cultural knowledge about a place gives it meaning. Secondly, the notion of place in art and culture extends beyond its conventional position as a background or setting. Instead, place changes and interacts with identity, culture, and perception, becoming an active participant in the creative process (Yates, 1995; Potts et al., 2008). Space, as well as place, is frequently used by modern artists to investigate and question standard understandings of reality (Gieryn, 2000).

A place is described as "not only materially carved out" of space, as it is "interpreted, narrated, understood, and imagined ... the meaning or value of the same place is labile— flexible in the hands of different people or cultures, malleable over time, and inevitably contested" (Gieryn, 2000, p. 465). The ever changing nature of place is given different meaning, or value, by generations of people. Artists create compact representations of those meanings in their work, and viewing the creative history of a place one can see how others have seen it before them.

Graham Drake explains the scope of place in creativity, by suggesting that in the context of creative industries, an additional place-based prompt and even stimuli, might be available as a resource for the economic advantage of artists and designers (Drake, 2003, p. 513). Additionally, he explains that for an individual creative worker, their subjective, personal, or emotional response to a place would affect how they see a place and how they use its attributes for aesthetic inspiration (2003). This then would affect their creative response that is molded by their individual beliefs, perceptions, and identities (Drake, 2003). The personalized views of locality were identified at data collection of the study and discussed in the analysis.

The above-mentioned writers have pioneered the creative industry concept, but a lot of changes have happened in society since they were writing them. The author anticipates that their work will still apply, but the perceptions of the specific place in this study, Helsinki, might differ. Partly because of the niche localization to one city in this study, but also because they have not been studied enough in the digital-, or the global era. Despite increased globalization, place remains a crucial factor for economic activity. Creative industries benefit from the inspiration and stimuli provided by a location, in addition to traditional economic factors like low costs, infrastructure, market size, and expertise (Drake, 2003, p. 513). In other words, certain places can attract creative professionals not just because of practical business advantages but

also because they offer cultural, aesthetic, or social influences that fuel creativity and can be monetized (Florida, 2019). The interaction between place and the creative community is especially visible in the complexity of social networks of a place. These social networks predominantly determine value and act as building blocks for these "social network markets" (Potts et al., 2008, p. 182).

Drake also has a specific perspective on how researchers see people's attitudes toward a place. He says that when studying how people use and respond to locations, it's crucial to consider that they might be subjective, imagined, and emotional, as well as unbiased and actual (2003). Individual identities, perceptions, and ideas shape a creative worker's attitude to a location, influencing their usage of its aesthetics for inspiration (2003). Each person interprets a location differently, resulting in unique cues and aesthetics. Artists and designers can use place- or locality-inspired aspects in their aesthetic or emotive designs. Drake additionally argues that when products are created in a certain location, it can influence how others see that location, regardless of whether they are consumed locally or globally (Drake, 2003, p. 514). Economically speaking, places are then indirectly being branded by the design made in them. This is important to highlight because the value of the creative goods and the valuation of their makers is deteriorating in the eyes of political bodies across the world and in the Nordics as well.

It is difficult to frame the notion of place for artists based in a certain area (Drake, 2003). This is why the paper aims to investigate whether creative workers see their location as a source of inspiration, so interviewees are free to choose their definition of "place", whether it refers to their part of their town, the street their studio is located or to the whole region in question. Furthermore, in the visual analysis, the more objective approach enabled the research to look at the same phenomenon from two different directions. While this study examines Finnish designers' public Instagram accounts, it is critical to first contextualize the findings by investigating the historical and cultural evolution of Finnish design.

2.5   Finnish Design Journey

This chapter will introduce how Finnish Design has started to emerge, why it happened and what the term represents today. While, the characteristics of Nordic Design can be seen to emerge in Finnish Design, this does not imply that Finnish design lack intrinsic value, nor independent merit.

2.5.1   Roots of Finnish Design

During the 50's to 70's, the term Scandinavian Design was evolved as a marketing concept. This branding tool promoted high-end, craft-based products of Denmark, Sweden, and Finland (Skjerven, 2001). The label had an inclusive nature, so Finland was seen as a part of it, even more than Norway due to their modest production. This allowed the design identity to emerge in unity, supporting competitiveness between participating nations. The products exported under its banner were often tied to broader social democratic ideals and to the model of the Scandinavian welfare state, meaning that they were not only stylistic, but ideological. However, Finland's inclusion in Scandinavian design was not without tension as geographically, and linguistically, Finland is distinct from the Scandinavian Peninsula. The need for inclusion stemmed from the Finns seeking an anchor to the Western Bloc during the cold war, downplaying their 'Finnishness' to fit into a broader Scandinavian identity (Kalha, 1998).

As stated in Kolmas Aalto -report by Kaila et al. (2013), Finnish Design started to move away from national romanticism when the angle of design was set to prioritize the everyday, serving people not with mere symbolism, but with practicality and consciously constructed and sustainable solutions 2013. According to Kaila et al., the merging of function, form, and aesthetics is what has made, and continues to make Finnish design unique today. This triadic work is still celebrated for it's clarity, craftsmanship, and human-centered approach (2013). And this cultural positioning had significant political significance. Unlike Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania -the Baltic states in a similar situation, Finland was able to better resist the Soviet pressure and maintain it's gained position in alignment with Western markets and values.

Terms like 'Scandinavian-', and 'Nordic Design', are still widely associated with Finland, but as the political tension has loosened, the need to identify with Scandinavia has diminished and now mostly the word Nordic is used to categorize Finns and their design.

2.5.2   History of Finnish Design

In 1951 Milan Triennale and the 'Design in Scandinavia' exhibition tour (1954–1957) positioned Finland as a distinct member of the Scandinavian design cluster with Denmark and Sweden (Discovering Finland, n.d.). Finland's contribution—through figures like Tapio Wirkkala, Kaj Franck, and Alvar and Aino Aalto—cemented a shared Nordic design language, reinforcing the association between democratic values and domestic aesthetics (Discovering Finland, n.d.).

Finnish Design has strong roots as it has been used as a tool in pursuit of national identity, international recognition, and innovation-led policy-making (Discovering Finland, n.d.). These still are important catalysators of appreciation for Finnish design

within it's own boarders, and internationally (Venkula, 2011). The impact of Russia and Sweden in constructing the Finnish- style were visible for a long time, but after the 1917 independence declaration, design became a cultural tool for expressing national distinctiveness, shaped by natural landscapes and aesthetic values based in simplicity and functionality (Discovering Finland, n.d.). Early design movements, particularly in architecture and applied arts, reflected both the influences of former rulers and a growing interest in forging a unique, nature-oriented style.

With the growth of industrial manufacturing and the founding of groups like Design Forum Finland (1987), Finnish design became more institutionalized by the 1970's and 1980's (Discovering Finland, n.d.). Advancements like these established design as a strategic element in cultural and economic advancement. A significant change in policy was brought about by the economic crisis of the 1990's, when the state aggressively included design into its larger innovation agenda. SITRA-backed Design 2005!, a national design program, marked a shift to a knowledge-based economy by highlighting design as a tool for sustainable development and competitiveness (Discovering Finland, n.d.).

2.5.3   Finnish Design Today

In the 21st century, institutions like Aalto University, Designium, Helsinki Design Week and others are sustaining the legacy and built knowledge around Finnish design (Discovering Finland, n.d.). As a relatively young country and market, the Finnish Design industry illustrates well the power of cultural production in building place-identity, and therefore place attachment for its residents.

Jokela and Coutts establish the influences of northern design by highlighting the weather specific components such as climate, environments, the culture, and community frameworks in political-, social-, and, economic decision making (2018). In Charland et al.'s concept in today's design elements must entail a larger advancement; the perspective of design cannot be limited to material, but should also encompass problem solving, style, aesthetics and even higher levels such as values and social-responsibility (as cited in (Jokela et al., 2018). These grand societal issues sound rather big for one industry to handle, but it is true that the environment of today's cities makes the everyday lived experience reliant on human design. Therefore, most of today's problems are also design problems (Jokela et al., 2018, p. 16).

Finnish design has always been defined by ideals and utility, human-centeredness, and strong connection to nature. These ideals are expressed not just in practical products, but also in Finnish designers' professional identities and narratives informing their work. However to transcend beyond stylistic or national interpretations of designs, this study uses the place attachment framework by Scannell & Gifford as its analytical

framework. It allows for more in-depth analysis of the emotional, geographical, and procedural levels of place attachment, making it a suitable tool to researching how designers interact and express their connection to Helsinki as a creative setting.

2.6 Place Attachment

For the theoretical relevancy of this study, the author will introduce the place attachment framework on which the empirical data collection was based.

Thompson and Prokopy say that place attachment means "the emotional bond established between individuals or groups and a place and further developed through the interaction with the place" (Thompson & Prokopy, 2016, p. 3). Place attachment has been established as a strong predictor of an individual's decision to behave in a physical setting (Thompson & Prokopy, 2016). Therefore, in this study the framework is used to distinguish themes and patterns between design professionals, and their place attachment, to examine the role of place in this creative field.

PPP framework is a multidimensional and comprehensive framework. The author has situated the topic-specific definitions of place attachment within the tradition of place attachment research. Each of the three dimensions were used to establish a new aspect of place attachment. Was place attachment formed individually, or collectively, as well as, is it felt in a affective-, cognitive, or behavioral way? A relevant question in this study is the role of place, so establishing the place components is important.

For this qualitative study, the framework was used to develop semi-structured interviews, in which question categories are based on each of the framework's three dimensions. Additionally, the framework was used as a theoretical basis of visual analysis coding.
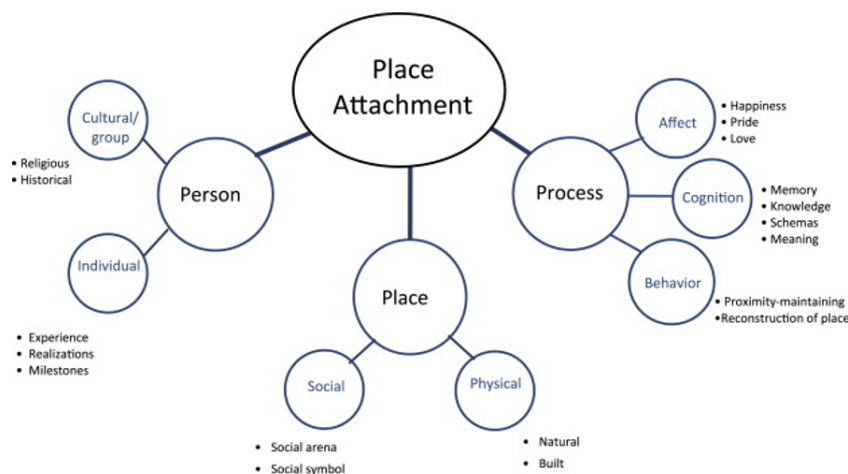

Figure 2.1: The Place Attachment framework, based on Scannell & Gifford (2009)

2.6.1 Person, Process, and Place

According to Purwanto & Harani, place attachment involves three key dimensions (2020). First, the person—who experiences the attachment? Connections to place can be personal or collective, shaped by individual experiences or shared cultural meanings (2020). Second, the place itself influences attachment through both physical and social aspects. The built environment, natural surroundings, and social interactions all contribute to how people relate to a location. The concept of genius loci captures a place's distinct identity, shaped by its enduring features and unique character (2020). Finally, the process of attachment involves emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses. People form bonds with places through memories, routines, and everyday interactions. Mental mapping, as explored by scholars like David Stea and Roger Down, helps individuals organize and recall spatial information, shaping their perception of urban environments (2020). They further describe place attachment as an emotional bond affected by personal experience and resulting from pleasant interactions with a location (Purwanto & Harani, 2020).

Together the literature on place attachment, urban creativity, Finnish Design provides a conceptual foundation to research how Helsinki-based designers engage with their surroundings and how that affects their work. The Place-Person-Process (PPP) model by Scannell & Gifford, serves as the central analytical framework throughout the study (2009). Therefore, personal, spatial, and procedural aspects of creative and design work can be interpreted. Alongside with institutional perspectives on cultural ecosystems and design governance allow this study to consider not only the variable dimensions of place, but the structural conditions that enable or constrain design expression. The above mentioned theoretical approaches inform collectively the research design, the making of the interview guide, and the coding strategy applied to both interview- and visual data. The following chapter outlines the methodology the study used, and informs the reader of sample and coding specifications used.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This section outlines the research design, including data collection methods, participant recruitment and the analytical approach. It further addresses the coding, ethical considerations and the theoretical positioning of the study.

My main research question covers the overall topic that I want to research. The research question of this master thesis is, what is the role of place in shaping the design output of Helsinki. And, the sub question is, in what ways is place attachment reflected in the work of design professionals of Helsinki?

The principal study methods this thesis applies are a mixed-method qualitative approach combining expert interviews and visual analysis. The qualitative, exploratory approach is reached by combining semi-structured expert interviews and visual analysis. This research aims to explore how place attachment manifests in the creative outputs of Helsinki-based design professionals without imposing any predefined categories. Recurring patterns and emotional textures emerging from the collected data are analyzed, rather than testing predefined hypotheses. Therefore, the analytical orientation is inductive and thematic, stemming from the Place Attachment Theory (PPP) model by Scannell and Gifford (2009), which informs both the interview guide and the visual coding structure.

Qualitative content analysis, which according to Braun & Clarke, can give rich and complicated insights into participants' attitudes, experiences, and behaviors (2013). Given the exploratory character of the research questions and the complexity of the phenomena under investigation, qualitative interviews provide a flexible and in-depth method to data collection, allowing for a thorough analysis of the research topic (Denzin, 2018). Interviews are a versatile yet commonly used approach for assessing and methodically detecting, classifying, and interpreting patterns and themes in data (Denzin, 2018). The data will be interpreted using the conventional qualitative content analysis approach.

This study follows a conventional qualitative content analysis approach, and is therefore suitable for contexts where the goal is to explore complex social phenomena. Where, theoretical categories are emergent rather than predefined (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The phenomenon under study is the influence of place attachment on creative production. Since the topic has been underexplored in the context of Finnish Design, like many others, inductive analysis is particularly appropriate. The benefit of this method of analysis is that the information obtained from the data is rich and unaffected by previously established categories or theoretical perspectives (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Visual data was analyzed using a multi- modal and semiotic reading, paying attention to composition, materiality and atmosphere, and implicit narratives of place. Essentially, the term "multi-modality" refers to a phenomena rather than a theory, and it describes the use of communicative resources including language, images, sound, and music in multi-modal texts and events of communication (Mannay & Pauwels, 2019). Additionally, the verbal conveys a certain narrator perspective and a representation of various forms(Mannay & Pauwels, 2019, p. 7).

The visual data was collected primarily from Instagram posts. The platform was chosen, because according to Celik, it has emerged as a critical branding tool for designers in the recent years by precisely meeting the industry demands in being visual-centric, allowing direct contact with customers, and increasing brand awareness by community participation (2017). Instagram additionally has a range of other tools to communicate than the visuals, as the platform also lets the accounts signal their messages in hashtags, location tags and most importantly, captions. In a caption text the designer or a studio can communicate their intentions, mention collaborations, share thoughts and generally enrich the pictures. Compared to Twitter and Flickr, Instagram has lesser reciprocity and stronger clustering, indicating unique social network features and interactions (Manikonda et al., 2014).

Composing insightful coding categories is known to be challenging for pictures as they can contain even richer features than text (Hu et al., 2014). Therefore the visual analysis also takes into consideration the date, caption, hashtag, and location tags of the pictures. In (2015), Smith & Sanderson found out that on Instagram, it is usually that the text and other means accompany the visuals. Therefore, rather than isolating visual features the study interprets images rationally. this is done by considering how people interact with places, atmospheres, and materials, and how emotional tones affect the expressions of place attachment to Helsinki as a city, and as a big part of the Finnish Design environment. Via these methods the research deepened the understanding of design professionals' place attachment and analyses how it is translated to their audiences.

This mixed method design allows for triangulation between spoken reflection via

interviews and visual self-representation through visual and text posts on Instagram. This provides a richer multi-layered understanding of role of place attachment in shaping creative outputs.

3.2   Data collection

The research interviews were held online via Microsoft Teams. The collected data was recorded and transcribed into text, and then a best-suited tool, Atlas.ti, was used for coding to sort out interview data into codes. The visual analysis was made from public Instagram accounts of Helsinki based designers or design agencies.

Initially both research samples were selected using a non-probability sampling approach known as self-selection. The method of self-selection samples was used to identify key characters in the Helsinki Design scene. In addition to lowering interviewee reluctance, the self-selection method guarantees the voluntariness of interviewees and therefore the ethics of visual analysis. Participants gave explicit consent to be named in this thesis, due to the professional and public nature of their insights about the Helsinki Design ecosystem. The interview participants were also given the opportunity to speak Finnish in their interviews, because if participants feel more at ease in answering, there is less hesitation, which elevates the conversation. In this way the author wanted to encourage participants to use descriptive language by speaking in their first language. The author chose people for the research among product and interior design professionals in Helsinki. Using the method of snowball sampling to reach participants of these identified sample, the author was able to reach a satisfactory number of participants for expert interviews. The self-selection sample technique was additionally used to enhance the needed sample size and data characteristics in both data collection methods. The interviews were scheduled, and conducted using Microsoft Teams platform and it's video call technology, to acquire the needed data.

3.2.1   Sample

The author has chosen the following data sample for this research: adult, design industry professional product design or interior design worker, based in Helsinki.

The interviewees were contacted via e-mail, LinkedIn, or Instagram, depending on where it was seen most appropriate and suitable per interviewee. A total of four female design industry professionals were interviewed. One of the four replied to the questions via email, since her schedule did not fit an extra interview.

For the visual analysis sample, the official Instagram pages of five Helsinki based designers or design agencies were selected for visual analysis. Joanna Laajisto @joannalaajisto personal and designer page, Harri Koskinen's design studio page @friend-

sofidustryltd, Linda Bergroth @lindabergroth personal designer page, Elina- and Klaus
Aalto @aaltoxaalto designer agency page, and Studio Rouhunkoski Mikkonen Interior-
, Furniture-, and Commercial Architecture-, and Product Design studio page @stu-
diorouhunkoskimikkonen. All the accounts selected had a dual purpose of commercial
branding for work projects and personal branding. Instagram as a platform was used
because of its nature for portfolio building for professional use was taken into consid-
eration.

The thematic importance of place-based references in the accounts' visual narratives
was evaluated. in addition to their professional output. Joanna Laajisto, for instance,
often draws attention to Finnish and Helsinki interior design, whereas Linda Bergroth
takes a more global and philosophical stance.

Table 3.1: Overview of Instagram Accounts Used in Visual Analysis

Designer/ Studio Name	Instagram Handle	Followers	Scope	Work Type	Activity-level	Place-Focus
Studio Rouhunkoski Mikkonen	@studiorouhun-koskimikkonen	2.4k	National	Interior, Object	Med	High
Joanna Laajisto	@joannalaajisto	19k	Internat.	Interior, Spatial	High	High
Linda Bergroth	@lindabergroth	7.1k	Internat.	Spatial, Installation, Product	Med	Med
Aalto+Aalto	@aaltoxaalto	2.3k	National	Product, Furniture	Med	Med
Friends of Industry Ltd	@friendsof-industryltd	1k	Internat.	Conceptual Product	Low	Med

The sample for the interviews consists of important outliers in the design environ-
ment of Helsinki. Institutions such as the biggest, and most highly considered Univer-
sity with arts and design (Aalto University), the most known enterprise for creating a
design milieu in terms of professional coherence, and distinguishability to the public
(Helsinki Design Week), and Helsinki City representative from media and press for
Design are included. Additionally, two designers with a private business were included
in the interview sample for a coherent overlook of the city's Design Scene. One of the
businesses has international recognition and the other one is a part of a local collective
making smaller scale partnerships.

3.3   Data and Coding

In the following chapter, the author provides a more detailed introduction to the coding and data processing procedures used in this study. By going over the acquired material of the interviews and visual analysis, the author was able to detect the basic codes. The initial coding categories were therefore created based on the first emerging themes of the data. While the coding took place, the themes emerged into their final forms only after all interviews were done and all data was carefully investigated.

3.3.1   Visual Data Collection

The visual data was gathered between 22nd and 24th of April 2025. The accounts were selected using self-selection, based on known big names in the Finnish Design scene. By being able to browse who the most renewed designers follow, the author was able to choose five relevant accounts of design professionals in Helsinki Design. As can be seen from the above Table 4.1 all the studios and designers selected had high or medium place focus, meaning that they reflected to their surroundings and included content from their work, and occasionally personal life. Accounts with solely curated professional content were not selected.

The analysis was conducted at the same time, by analyzing 30 Instagram posts totaling of 92 pictures. As the analysis is based on publicly available Instagram content created for professional branding purposes, no anonymization was applied.

The coding of the visual analysis texts was done between 28.-30. of May. The preliminary code groups were named by the Place Attachment (PPP) framework, so Person, Place, and Process. Additionally one more code group was added, named Meaning. The distinction was made to enhance the emotional side of the visual analysis, but in theory the fourth code group is a part of the Process group. The four groups were then used, along with the data, to identify the codes within groups.

Overall 25 codes were identified and applied to the data a total of 731 times. The multi-modal approach enabled a richer visual analysis to emerge, and the captions of every post were also analyzed.

The most prominent thematic patterns identified from the coded visual analysis are: the feelings of intimacy to communicate the Finnish designer's work (Meaning), Cultural or seasonal reflection (Person), Identity Expression (Person), Architectural References (Place), Finnish Nature (Place), Design as a part of everyday life (Process), Design / Styling Curation (Process), Material Focus (Process).

3.3.2 Interview Data Collection

The interviews for this study were conducted between April 2. and May 2, 2025. A total of four expert interviews were held with professionals working in diverse roles within the Helsinki design ecosystem and its institutions. Participants included a Programme Director at Luovi Productions, a designer and entrepreneur at Minestrone Workshop Helsinki, a Senior Manager of PR and Communications (Travel & Culture) at Helsinki Partners, and an interior architect. Additionally, a creative director and lecturer affiliated with Aalto Arts and the Finnish Book Art Committee was interviewed. All other participants have given consent to be identified by name.

The coding was done in Finnish to guarantee clarity and consistency, the suitable translations were provided in the results, and analysis to meet the thesis language requirements. Several culturally or contextually meaningful terms were kept in their original Finnish form alongside their translation. Translations used in the Results and Discussion chapters were made by the author with care to preserve the authentic meaning and tone. This method enables both language precision and cultural purity in understanding participants' reflections. For academic transparency, a 200-word summary of each transcript is included into the appendices. Participants were recruited by direct outreach and snowball sampling, reflecting the interconnected nature of the Helsinki design industry.

Chapter 4

Empirical Results

This chapter presents the empirical findings of this study, which, examines how place attachment is reflected in the work of Helsinki-based design professionals. The results are gathered from two distinct but complimentary data sources, a visual analysis of selected Instagram account and the expert interviews with designers and institutional actors. The findings are organized into two sub chapters, beginning with the visual analysis data. The visual representation of place in social media content that was analyzed and coded, will be presented, followed by thematic insights from the interview material. While the two data sources are presented separately for clarity, discussion chapter after the results explains their interconnectedness. The structure of this chapter follows the Place-Person-Process (PPP) framework, allowing for an analysis of emotional, spatial, and creative dimensions across both data sets.

4.1 Visual Data Results

The visual data was gathered between 22nd and 24th of April 2025. The analysis was conducted at the same time, by analyzing 30 Instagram posts totaling of 92 pictures. As the analysis is based on publicly available Instagram content created for professional branding purposes, no anonymization was applied. All visual material was from sources that are publicly accessible Instagram accounts used for professional or personal branding purposes. Any references to personal preferences are included only when they were deliberately made public by the account holders and do not constitute a violation of personal privacy.

The coding of the visual analysis texts was done between 28.-30. of May. The preliminary code groups were named by the Place Attachment (PPP) framework, so Person, Place, and Process. Additionally one more code group was added, named Meaning. The distinction was made to enhance the emotional side of the visual analysis, but in theory the fourth code group is a part of the Process group. The four groups were then used, along with the data to identify the codes within groups.

Overall 25 codes were identified and applied to the data a total of 731 times. The multi-modal approach enabled a richer visual analysis to emerge, and the captions of every post were also analyzed.

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4.1.1   Person

Referring to the framework for themes such as, religious, and historical cultural group affiliations, or individual experiences, realizations, and milestones. Being "a northerner".

The historical background of individuals practicing design in contemporary Helsinki appears significant, less in a general biographical sense, and more in relation to the city's architectural and design heritage. A lot of references to the "golden age of Finnish design" designers, such as Alvar- and Aino Aalto, Tapio Wirkkala and Kaj Franck were seen throughout the visual analysis. Additionally, the old buildings of Helsinki were seen as a valuable add to leisure time posts of Helsinki designers. While all the mentioned historical details, were detected, the most culturally significant references were directed traditions, color palettes and aesthetics. As for the individual experience, of the place attachment theory, the visual analysis gathered that identity expression was the most used tool to express the heritage and personal/ national style. As design styles are also affiliated with specific countries or cities, many generally known Finnish Design elements were distinguished in the designers' Instagram posts.

4.1.2   Place

Referring to the framework themes on the design professionals' social arena and their symbols, or physical, natural or built environment.

As can be expected, Finnish nature was found to be one of the most distinct characteristics of place attachment for the studied designers. With extreme cold and lighting shifts, the weather is not just seen as an inspiration but as a condition to respect and live by. The architectural references were highly visible in the visual analysis. This can also be detected in the interior-, product-, or other design choices made by the studied designers, in the choice of materials that they have made.

The social side of a designer's job, especially in a small market, is to collaborate. There were distinctive expressions of symbolical Finnish-ness (Cultural identity, identity expression and personal rituals and habits in the data.

4.1.3 Process

This section refers to the framework's themes like, effect of happiness, pride, love. Additionally, cognition, memory, knowledge, schema, meanings, behaviors, proximity-maintaining, and reconstruction of a place were included.

Design as a part of everyday life was identified as one of the most dominant themes of this visual analysis. The chosen designer pages on Instagram showed a variety of different levels in the personality of the account and it's content. While not all designers were exactly keen on sharing their quiet afternoon moments with their work audience, the new generation space designers took the opportunity to showcase the atmospheric and interior design skills by reflecting their aesthetic personal life to their audiences. These accounts also had a major following compared to other accounts.

Design as a part of everyday life was shown to reflect intentionally, or unintentionally of the designer's work. Some accounts had their most personal pictures shared as portraits of them within a workspace. Finnish Design was seen in the details, materials, places, and references from historical objects to the most wanted design items in the Nordic Design scene. In subtle ways, place attachment was extremely present in the personal section. Glimpses of Finnish- and Nordic design aesthetics in a current, or historical setting were included in all 25 pictures coded into the theme. The @aaltoxaalto account wrote a caption "Making of new Luoto candleholders. Stones foraged from around Finland (and one from Ireland) this summer", and via subtle hints the average Finn would determine the stones are from Finland and get the atmospheric Finnish view with a muted earthy color palette, rocky woods and a clear view.

One kind of continuation of design in everyday life is intentional living. It gathered a total of 19 quotes of coding, and @joannalaajisto depicts it well. Her picture of "the holiday apartment of the designer. A wooden table with designer chairs, a glass wall facing the Finnish forest/ lake view. A big light hoovering over the table is not on but a small candle below it, is", and her caption is "Easy like". While the picture is quiet, laid back, dimly light and overall presented with a muted color and material palette. The intentional Finnish design nuances and details can be very easily detected. Nordic Modernism, many wood and glass elements, big windows to bring the outside in with its snowy curves. Intentionality is seen as a big enforcement of Finnish cottage tradition 'Mökki', meaning that the restorative force of nature is always present, and the connection between architecture, design, and nature is grounding to the visitors. Therefore, it is not uncommon for a lot of Finnish Design aesthetic to come from these views of serenity and natural recharging.

Design and styling curation was the biggest coding group of the sample. A total of 27 quotes mentioned the theme, suggesting that the subtle touch of the place references in Finnish Design professionals' work are based in design of a space, an object, a

place and a mood. A great example can be found in the 15th picture analyzed. It describes how "a carefully curated Marimekko photo shoot that is a masterclass in design storytelling through atmosphere in textiles and textures. The location has been picked to complement the products with the curved leather sofa, the textured plaster walls positioned in a small corner or a lodge. Soft, embedded materials meet rough plater walls, shiny ceramic products meet the matte, deep colored curves of the couch."

Interactions with space or object, and artistic labor, were detected as less influential but mainly because they were incorporated in the design functions showcased in the analyzed pictures, rather than a detached reflection of the attribute of *Process* in place attachment.

The seasonal influence of work was highly detectable in the Instagram posts. The topic will be more broadly discussed within the scope of the interview analysis, yet the impact of the seasons was highly visible in at the visual analysis as well. The rite of changing the office for midsummer, or the long nights of late August, or the lack of design campaigns throughout winter because of the difference in natural light (the time of daylight is very short, and the available light is blue and overall shaded differently than i.e. summer light).

Creative workspace on display (or the lack of it), showcased in the visual analysis that while the designers were happy to share their work, the unfinished or maybe less curated spaces did not manage to get into the pictures. The professionalism, and design/ curation, and generational differences in social media usage in the work of designers were clear between the selected accounts.

4.1.4   Meaning

The last visual results subsection refers to themes such as, calmness/ stillness, grounded/ recharging, intimacy, nostalgia, and playful/warmth. Although the original PPP framework situates "meaning" within the "process" dimension, this study presents it separately due to prominence of emotional and symbolic themes in visual data. This is done because the combination of multi-modal visual analysis, and the variety of contextual elements in an Instagram post create a lot of information. So, by constructing the solely feeling based category, the author was able to look at the most evident feeling emerging from the analyzed pictures and texts.

The biggest three feelings communicated through the images were calmness/ stillness, groundedness/ recharging, and intimacy. The latter was more evident than the rest and it emerged 17 times during the coding. For example, a renowned designer had had an informal meeting with a renowned architect. The photo gives off an informal and intimate feeling, yet the caption leaves the viewer to wonder if they did actually know each other after all. The picture is overall very informal but the most known

passage of taking visitors to a Finnish home is present, making coffee. The setup of the table is filled with usable, everyday design items from Finland. This is only worth noting, because almost every single home in Finland would provide us with a similar setup, no matter what economical class, age or even location in Finland. The place of the picture is reflected as a place of cultural production and invention of sort, yet the atmosphere is very distinguishable for many Finns. These insights will be further discussed in the analysis and discussion of the interview data. The feelings of intimacy and still life have more insights to reveal in terms of democratic design as a key element in Finnish Design. Therefore, the in the next chapter the interview data results will be discussed.

4.2 Interview Data Results

This chapter will explain the process of data results and its limited interpretation before the discussion. All interviews were conducted in Finnish. The author transcribed each transcript for analysis and writing purposes with Turboscribe transcription tool and Atlas.ai platform was used to code the transcribed interviews. All interviews consented to include mentioned names of industry workers or businesses.

4.2.1 Institutional

The 'Means to build a Design ecosystem' is the first code examined, and the interviews overall reveal a closeup look to the design ecosystem built in Helsinki. The most used code for institutions revealed to be the actions of actively building an ecosystem and maintaining it with further collaborations and other actions. The term design ecosystem was said to constitute the following entities, city residents, city organizations, schools and universities, cultural institutes, museums, event management institutes, creative design actors, organizations related to design internationalization (embassies, trade representatives, representatives of industry and ministries). The Helsinki Design Week respondent summarized well the many functions of the professional design entities by saying, "we do not operate only with an event unit, but we also talk to the urban environment department, the economic development department, and the culture and leisure department". These multidisciplinary tracks enable them to be a tool for the city in many different ways. As the other interviews reflect a similar stance from other crucial entities in the city, Helsinki, a place starts to form as crucial for its Design- industry in many aspects. The openness of processes is seen as a big advantage for the industry in Helsinki. Many respondents felt that compared to other industries in the city, design is based on collaborations and helping others. Yet, the professionals felt that these collaborations do not form without personal connections

within the field. The relative small scale of the city was also said to limit the working possibilities and therefore create unwanted competitive setting, possibly leading to less innovative production. The design professionals listed many of their own ways to prevent this from happening, from sharing opportunities, communicating well with the city municipality level, encouraging students and emerging designers. Additionally, working with like-minded people was seen as an advantage in a tight financial period, because collaborations were seen as a source of learning new skills and discovering new possibilities for their career.

A big part of an ecosystem is the city and its actions. The city of Helsinki is fighting gentrification by enabling students, the elderly, and even the wealthy to live among each other on many areas, for example in the form of city rental apartments. Of course, there are also a lot of luxury apartments in these said the areas, but the children all go to the same schools.

Networks and collaborations code had many forms, yet they all had similarities. Uplifting other skilled professionals in any stages of their career was seen as a advantage. "In our exhibitions, in our communications, in all event content, we highlight designers and their work. We do a lot of communications and marketing communications work all year round." - Helsinki Design Week (HDW). Many design professionals also stated that they have specifically chosen to stay in Helsinki/ or came back to Helsinki after working or studying abroad, because of their intrinsic motivation to help build the design scene in their hometown. Aalto University professor and designer summed up her approach as trying to share information, ask questions, and open processes mentoring younger designers and students. The reason behind this was stated as, "In Finnish culture, there is a very strong perception that someone else's success is beyond your control. I try to break this perception through openness and sharing towards a world where by supporting others and rejoicing in or sharing someone else's success, the whole scene is strengthened and the atmosphere becomes more supportive of creativity". About Helsinki, it was said that one will encounter same people many times in their career in different positions, meaning that you cannot pick and choose who you work with, but rather have to be able to work with a diverse range of colleagues/ clients.

The code about 'collaborations with institutions/ city based entity' was seen as significant, because it gives creditability and opens up more possibilities in the industry. Most respondents felt that a win for Finnish Design in a form of a good and visible campaign is a win for all entities in it. "We think a lot about what the next 20 years will be like and what all has been done here and where we are going. Design has changed a lot in the past 20 years and will certainly change a lot in the coming years. One of our behind-the-scenes activities, is that we have started to develop cultural placemaking methodologies, where we use various tools to define a cultural place", HDW established about their strategy. Historically Helsinki and Finland have not had a long time to

develop their own design language, in which the design storytelling about the culture has been seen as a significant tool for it. Institutions in the city also recognize this and wish to participate in it.

The following code results will be examined next. 'Inclusion and accessibility', 'design education and literacy', and 'funding and resources'. There is a duality in the description of Finnish Design, it is said to be, fair/ real, and also democratic. Design is being described as democratic, and its inclusion of non- design professionals or amateurs is being highlighted in the interviews. But, there is a not-so-special feature of design companies being sold, and, or, their production being transferred to lower wage countries. Although, it is not known if the lack of consensus in production truly is significant, or perhaps the definitions of phrases such as 'democratic nature of design' has different characteristics in its meaning. These meanings can differ between design professionals depending on their professional role, generational approach to consuming, or personal opinions. Yet, the study aim is not to determine the exact characteristics of Finnish design, but their perceived forms and how the professionals reflect them in their work. The Helsinki Partners representative shared their insight as, "international journalists often ask how Finnish design differs from Scandinavian design. It is not as expensive and exclusive, which in many countries is more easily perceived as what design is. That it is somehow upper-class. In Finland, it is basically made for everyone".

Luovi Productions discussed in their interview about the need for design literacy for city dwellers, and its importance to the whole industry. Developing design in a city stems from people being able to notice that everything around them is designed by a person and therefore solutions that do not work in their best capabilities, can be changed if change is being demanded. In order for people in a city to recognize and critically approach design solutions, it takes continuous work from institutions to build attention to them.

Funding and resources are also discussed and the perceived role of them is clear to respondents. The role of funding institutions is big in Finland. Because design is a creative field that does not solely depend on public funding, it does not mean that its existence is guaranteed without it. No interviewees specifically mentioned pay or taxes as a barrier to work as a design professional, but rather that there is not always enough work for creatives in a small environment. This can also be a reason for professionals wanting to be more proactive in building the Helsinki design ecosystem.

4.2.2   Person

This subsection will got through the findings on, 'Person' dimension in the interview code book. First, the relationship to Helsinki, or locational relationship. Different interviewees discussed their relationship to Helsinki in various ways, but the city's in-

stitutional approach to enabling design awards, naming a City Head of Design, and including design and its relevant themes to the official City Agenda were deemed an important strategy. Additionally, the local design professionals expressed fondness of the city by studying or working abroad, yet still coming back to Helsinki. The creatives approach the economy in the city as relatively small and job opportunities being limited. Regardless of the lack of opportunities, they have made continuous decisions to return to Helsinki and building the design economy bit-by-bit. The decisions made by them reflect the strong place attachment that locals have for the city and its intimate feeling and communities.

The next item in the code book is 'Professional identity'. The professional identity of Helsinki Design professionals was tied around the developing design scene that is highlight the past, but by also taking sizable steps forward in developing innovation and creative freedom.

The Finnish societal work life balance was praised in the interviews. The common beliefs about overworking are largely negative. The concept of overworking was said to be an individual choice and for creatives especially, there is a fine line between what constitutes working and where leisure time starts. Also, the work is described as value based, meaning that it is a valid excuse not to engage in a project if it goes against one's values.

It was also mentioned several times that to reflect the city feeling of having nature and the ocean nearby at all times, one has to feel good in the environment they create in. Intimate and regenerative design is developed in the atmospheric archipelago of Helsinki.

The professional identity of Helsinki designers is also tied to the connections and the opportunities built upon them. New collectives are emerging, enabling less established designers to try out new things and get involved in projects outside of their usual scope. This phenomenon was said to help designers to stabilize their income and learn new skills from others. A Minestrone Workshop designer described her experiences, "of course, this is such a luxurious situation in the sense that there are people around who are incredibly good at making, working, handling wood and everything else. Then there is space or inspiration in general, what to use". Common workshops, brainstorming, helping with deadlines has been a big help. Also, the workshops have been established between friend groups that are also colleagues, so the spaces are used for working, as well as socializing. The central location of workshops helps to make efficient use of them.

Inspiration was said to be drawn from many places by the professionals but the most common answers was the Finnish seasonal changes and weather altogether, and the collaborations around design work. Especially exhibition work was said to be engaging many people and therefore a chance to learn.

Further more, the following codes are labelled 'Local Pride' and 'Personal memories/experiences'. The tie between local pride and professional identity has a lot to do with work-life values. A designer said in the interview that, " I appreciate that in Finland, designers can work based on values – it's okay to express your opinion and not do things that you don't feel are right for you. Even if it means refusing to do a project related to the meat industry if you're vegan".

The Nordic design tradition was a dividing force among the respondents. Design professionals feel that they do not want to elongate the past 'golden age of design' in Finland during the 60's, but to shape the industry to their own with respect to the old. The respondents felt that the impact of nature, especially in experiencing the participation of nature as part of the design process. Minimalism and functionality were also seen as driving forces of the old tradition, but not as the most modern version of Finnish-ness in design.

Nature's effect on life was also thought through colors and the color spectrum of the seasons. Some designer's own vision would be to lean more heavily on colors, but Finns prefer something more safe in order for the colors to look good all year. Having cold and dark winters do not allow a similar lighting and interpretation of colors even indoors, which seems to have a big effect on the tradition of using colors in Helsinki and Finland overall. The most uninspiring time of the year is said to be winter, when there is 1 or 2 hours of light. The blue, cold shades of natural light for several months in a row create a space of stillness in the industry. The same phenomenon of stillness is seen on the warmest months of the year, during July and August, people flee the cities to enjoy solitude or time with loved ones, as especially the simple grounded life of summer cottages around the country.

A common issue with not-so-renowned-yet-artists and designers in a small economy like Helsinki, is that they cannot choose their work in the way a bigger studio can. There are a lot of artistic compromises to be made because the market and demand for services is so small. Designers make things fast, in a budget- friendly way, with more easily available materials. Internationally this is not a unique problem but a common one. And even though the problem is based on demand and supply, it does limit the creative energy of the city by blocking designers from advancing into bolder directions. In product-and, interior design the client is always in a central position in the creation process and that is a big reason why design is valued, made, and appreciated in a place. But regardless of the most common signs of trust are there or not, younger artists do deserve appreciation for good work. A respondent stated that good teams, work partners, or cases are not appreciated enough, even if they are significant or internationally known.

4.2.3 Place

The next dimension is called Place, refers to the 'Local context aa inspiration' code.
Reconstruction of Finland happened after WW2, when the Finnish identity was more
of a mental status than a visual one. Design was one of the most visible ways of re-
building the nation and as the capital, Helsinki had a big part in that. The interviewees
all recognize the effect of the Finnish Design story in their work, and how design
and resource-wise, streamlined planning also became a way to strengthen and unify
Finland. The local context is also a feeling/ an atmosphere that the designers interpret
in different ways. Respondent number 2. explains her inspiration for a local context
as such, "the silence and tranquility of Finland also influences the design language –
there is often something quiet or peaceful about it. On the other hand, Finland allows
you to be strange, in a different way than in Denmark or Sweden, for example. The
appreciation of strangeness and uniqueness has created such design stories as those of
Eero Aarnio, Oiva Toikka or Yrjö Kukkapuro – it would be difficult to imagine their
imprint in other Nordic countries". The example designers are true pioneers in their
fields and certainly have had a big impact on the Finnish Design industry.

As mentioned before, the relation to nature has always been a big part of the
Finnish Design tradition as it still is to this day. The codes of 'Nature and seasons',
'visibility and communication', and 'strategies and branding' are the next in the results.
The approach is slowly shifting from utilizing nature, back to more conscious and
collaborative approach. The designers felt that fortunately there have been made
significant progress in defining Finnishness in a space overall. Wanting to create a
truly authentic Finnish environment, is not essentially about including the birch forest
aesthetic, or other rather classical elements anymore, but about being open about how
you do it. That involves employing real materials rather than trickery. And what truly
distinguishes extremely successful offices is that, even when there is little money to
spend, they never use deception. Things are done under those conditions, as long as it
is true and correct. Modesty has always been seen as a quite Finnish value, and while
it is still seen today, the respondents said that more brave execution of projects can
help to whole industry.

What in Helsinki perhaps also affects design in general according to the interviews,
is the wider physical environment, which is related to having the sea and islands close
at all times, which affects the relationship with nature more broadly. The whole climate
affects what we design, why we design, what our needs are for design. There is no need
for heated sidewalks in some warmer country or other service design-type projects. The
closeness of nature for the Nordics is conceptually rich, yet it demands more careful
thought and overall urban design. It is not to say that warmer climates would not
have an increasing need for climate balancing design for their inhabitants. They do,

but many places in the world are only recently started having recurring weather that can be lethal to humans if not considered with architecture, planning, and other large scale innovation.

Helsinki's nature is also a big hook on tourism communications for design and cultural visitors. The city's 327 islands and the 131 km of coastline surround the city and one cannot go further than 10 km from the ocean anywhere in the city. So, even though forest is the most known Nordic nature element in Design, Helsinki does base a lot of it's nature inspiration for the ocean and it's small islands.

Following the nature theme, the next codes are to do with the intentional strategy of Helsinki, its city feeling and aesthetic. The codes are called, 'Physical facilities and infrastructure', and 'Cityscape and aesthetics'. According to the interviews, to many young Designers, Helsinki is a sort of a safe heaven because they know the city, are acquainted with a lot of like-minded people and speak the language. Close to Helsinki, in Espoo, is the biggest design school near the capital, and many starting designers feel that their strongest work related networks are there. The earlier mentioned studios and workshops can emerge from many designers being in similar situation with their colleagues.

4.2.4 Process

The last dimension is called process, because it entails the creative process and the influence of place. The influence of place on the creative process is a multifaceted phenomenon and the author is not trying to explain it in its whole complexity, but rather touch upon the factors of place that the interviewees saw as important to their creative processes. The first one is that in a small country, you can't take risks either, everyone knows everyone. You always have to deal with difficult customers and situations. You can't choose your frame of reference or subculture if you work in any commercial way - the same people come up many times during your career, often in different roles. "I feel that the profession here is much more human work than, for example, in Germany, where there are significantly more people" - interviewee 3.

All interviewed design professionals have their roots in Finland, in Helsinki or relatively close to it. When asked if they intentionally reflect a place in their design, it was clear that this not their intention. Which is a significant reflection of the role of place in creativity. Place was not intended to be reflected, but by natural work flow, it was. Rather they felt that growing up in a specific place and culture alters your visual preferences and eventually forms your unique taste. The needs and preferences of a place of design then can be determined from it's peoples cultural fabric. Additionally, they mentioned that a small market with limited opportunities and having a declining financial situation in the world, makes creatives even more resourceful in finding work.

This resilience was seen to be more manageable with good connections in the field.

The process of creativity is heavily affected by the materials used by designers. They will be introduced next with codes 'Material choices and aesthetics' and 'Use of space in working'. Materials such as oak-, birch-, and pine wood were mentioned as one of the most distinguished Finnish Design staples. Additionally, historically glass and ceramics were important but fewer new designers decide to work with them. Furniture-, space, and interior design projects were the main work of the interviewees, so their work is based on mixing and utilizing materials in their work to create specific atmospheres.

Usage of materials in the work of these design professionals, as well as usage of pace in their work is well summed up here by the respondent 3."There is also room for individualism at the moment, because all kinds of collectible design and the interfaces between design and art are trendy. We do not strive for mass production, it is considered old-fashioned thinking. We strive for craftsmanship and artistry, imperfection and surprise. This is where Finns are strong, because the idea of strangeness and imperfection has always been part of Finnish design".

The findings presented in this chapter reveal how both the visual and the interview data reflect the complex role of place attachment in shaping the design industry practices and output of Helsinki. Through patterns that emerge from visual aesthetics, material choices, and spatial narratives, as well as expert reflections on institutional networks and creative routines, a multifaceted overview of Helsinki as a design environment takes shape. These results highlight the recurring themes across personal, spatial, and systemic levels. By that they provide a basis for further studies. In the following chapter, these insights are contextualized within broader theoretical perspectives, with particular attention to the Place-Person-Process (PPP) framework and the implications of the institutional structures on creative production.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of the paper. The analysis combined expert interviews with visual data from Instagram to examine how Helsinki based design professionals express and navigate place attachment in their work. They are reflected through the lens of the Place-Person-Process (PPP) framework by Scannell & Gifford (2009), while considering the institutional context in which Helsinki's design professionals operate in. The analysis is based on both the public visual material and private expert interviews. The discussion reveals how place attachment interacts with the working identity, and professional practice within a city-specific creative environment. The chapter explores the multi-layered ways that Helsinki functions in its creative context.

There were many overlapping themes in both data collection methods used in this study, but a prevalent theme of how Finnish design heritage was positioned by design professionals differed. First, almost all captions related to the visual analysis pictures on Instagram were written in English. This is worth noting because the use of Finnish Design items and architectural references from the 1950's to 1970's is still relatively new for international audiences. This means that the content on the selected pages was also directed to the global audience. Finns have long loved the local brands of Arabia, Iittala, Aalto, and others, yet they are new to most international consumers. This implies that what Finns, especially Design professionals can regard a classic to be already somewhat worn out. There has heavy-, yet successful re-branding of the said staple pieces of Finnish Design, but their reputation is rather familiar to most Finns. In this discussion the relationship to place of design workers is being examined through the lens of the empirical data gathered in this study.

5.1 Self-representation and Identity

This section of the analysis looks into how Helsinki's design professionals express their personal attachment to place, and through their identity to express self-representation. Both the interviews and the acquired visual materials showed, how designers frame

themselves within the context of Helsinki design. Themes such as local pride, emotional familiarity, and the sense of shared design ethos emerged as key indicators in this dimension of place attachment. These narratives are often linked to cultural values of lived experience. Also, the role of design in constructing a sense of self within the city was discussed.

Helsinki designers highlighted the feeling of nature even in the city. A relatively quiet region with not specifically densely populated areas create the atmosphere. Work-life balance was described as a plus in Finland compared to other countries that some respondents had worked in, such as the UK and Germany. The close proximity of Helsinki with the ocean, the forests, and the archipelago combined with the welfare state benefits were established as the most important factors to boost living conditions, alonside having a close community.

Urban creativity is reliant on social connections, the atmosphere, and designers work. According to Rill, this leads to co-creation, in which interacting with others is done to unlock the group's creative potential (Rill & Hämäläinen, 2018). Low hierarchy at work is a recurring theme throughout both data sources. On the negative side, it can be difficult to separate one's own opinions from those of experts is low hierarchy environments, especially in brand design. This can further create friction and confusion in processes, and can lead to flatness and mediocrity if project priorities are thrown off balance.

Financial and career risks are high, because the economy is small and volatile. The profession of a design professional overall is more human work than "in bigger markets". This is because navigating human relations has a bigger effect in an environment where those connections are important to commercial viability. Consequently, the effect of value-based work is appreciated in the field, which means that designers do not feel they have to deviate from their values in order to succeed. Notably, these effects were more visible when professionals have other, bigger European markets to compare to. Cuts to grant-making organizations like ArcInfo, Ornamo, Finnish Design Info, and FOFI have had a direct influence on the profession. These organizations play an important role in conveying the significance of design and fostering creative activity. Without them, not only is the exposure of local design jeopardized, but also the viability of certain types of work. As one respondent pointed out, if there is no one to tell the story of design in Finland, the consequence is more than just symbolic, it materially limits the types of creative outputs that are feasible to makers in the CCI.

While there are regional variations and micro-level occurrences in Finland, Finnish design is not isolated from global trends. Economic uncertainty, geopolitical volatility, and, perhaps most profoundly, climate anxiety faced by younger generations are all increasingly mirrored in designers' creative expression and working techniques. These global problems influence both the aesthetic and functional aspects of design in Helsinki

and elsewhere.

5.2   Designing In and Through Place

This dimension analyzes how place is embedded in the day-to-day process of Helsinki's design professionals. They for example described how working in specific spaces, such as studios or shared workshops, shapes their working rhythms and routines. Or how specific public places inspire them to use specific materials. This section explores the iteration between place and creative labor. The analysis is focused on decisions around collaboration, and public presentation. Place based design is presented as intuitive and relational, often shaped by spatial constraints and seasonal conditions. Additionally, the overall emotional atmosphere described by the interviewees, and visual data, will be discussed.

As discussed in the theory, terms such as 'industry', 'cluster', and 'sector' include an ongoing duality of meaning, by being referred as geographical-, as well as economic terms (Malmberg & Power, 2006). This reflects the creative businesses established in places where, social networks, and urban aesthetics are both important. In the Helsinki design scene community is important as a source of information and peer support. According to Potts et al.(2008), the industry phenomenon is predominantly coordinated by value that is built upon social networks supporting both demand and supply, called social network markets. Therefore, this results in close spatial grouping of the industry in a place(Clare, 2012). The Helsinki design practice is based specifically on collaborations, whether the creator is already successful in their career or just starting out. This leads the author to wonder if urbanization can also be connected to the globalization of creative work and for example the possibility to study abroad? Studying design abroad can result in international relationships among future collages and therefore widen the networks outside the usual surroundings. This creates possibilities to co-creation connections to other places.

Intentional, or intentional usage of design as a part of built aesthetics, was seen as a factor in reflecting place in the work of Helsinki designers. There was a difference in social media where these aesthetics can be shared more casually, more in a private way. A respondent described designing the Nordic lifestyle, by that it rests on contrasts and the possibility that "you can go first on the same day, touring the archipelago, go to Pihlaajasaari for a day of swimming, and then eat at a restaurant and then go to a club in the evening. So they all fit into that Helsinki experience".

The influence of the seasons on design work is big in Helsinki, such as seasonal rites like midsummer, and Christmas and their collective meaning to work. The streets of cities empty at these times of a year and while everyone is out of office for two weeks in a row, there are effects on creative work. Many feel that these collective, seasonal

breaks are what fuels them to create through the long winter months. The promise of a never ending summer night with nature in bloom will encourage the creators of Helsinki, and all Finland to endure the cold and darkness. The phenomenon of light differences during winter, especially with the constant blue shade of winter light, and the excessive shortness of daylight during winter, shapes the perception of what can be designed in Finland all year round. The entire climate affects what we design, why we design, and what we need design for.

Despite its youth, Finnish design tradition has acquired significant cultural weight. This historical base provides designers with a firm platform from which to innovate while also contributing to the country's international image, particularly in tourism and national branding. However, within this expanding ecosystem, many practitioners in applied arts or design have entrepreneurial aspirations and frequently navigate an uncertain funding circumstances.

5.3   Material and Symbolic Values

In this dimension of the discussion we analyze how Helsinki's physical, atmospheric, and symbolic characteristics inform the design practices of local creatives. The city is frequently referenced as a source of inspiration, and identity for the creative workers analyzed. All studied data reflected the themes and highlighted elements such as seasonality, light, domesticity, and architectural texture as contributing to their creative processes in Helsinki. The city emerges not only as a site of production, but as an active influence in the design logic and spatial narratives of its practitioners.

The Finnish forest and nature aesthetic is a strong spatial narrative of Helsinki even through it is the capital of Finland, as well as the biggest city in the country. Therefore, Finnishness is seen to be experienced as a value and not just as aesthetics. The atmospheric nature of the colors was identified as a signature theme for the interviewees. Additionally, ceramics, the color palette with muted tones, wood such as birch and pine, granite, glass, nature brought into the space narrated the Finnish design atmosphere. Feelings that are most commonly communicated, reflect calm and symbolic themes, grounded atmospheres, yet also unexpected features are appreciated.

Genuinely green production is not adequately supported according to the industry professionals. Arguably because of the democratic nature of the local industry, people are unwilling to pay enough extra for higher production quality, which the designers would like to work with.

Curation of designing spaces in a place. There is importance of trendiness in the digital age in order to stay 'up to date'. Therefore, one cannot completely avoid trends in commercial work, however, the Finnish design tradition includes 'independent self-direction', where according to a respondent, "one's own imprint and perseverance are

part of the work". The above is said to be the difference between Finnish- and Danish design. Therefore, in Finland, to be trendy at the right moment is not seen as important as in Denmark.

The different approaches to the Finnish design look are the new digital storytelling of lifestyle and aesthetic. The more global branding angle is aimed to reach new consumers and audiences by highlighting staple pieces that are already too familiar to the Finns. This is a more traditional take on the Finnish design and its historic merits in design, glass, fabric, and architecture. Current trends of Finnish design are said to be more based on individual takes on design trends within a frame of communicating with traditional materials, colors and mental landscapes. I believe Finnish designers may work from their own starting points while sifting and recognizing worldwide trends and currents. It's important to stay informed about what's going on in the world, but you can also be proud of your work. Individualism is also on the rise, thanks to the popularity of collectible design and the intersection of design and art. Mass production is not the goal, but rather considered as outdated thinking. The designers are said to strive for craftsmanship and artistry, imperfection and surprise. This is where Finns are strong, because the idea of strangeness and imperfection has always been a part of Finnish design.

5.4   Strategy and Cultural Brand

In addition to the spatial and personal dynamics mentioned above, interview participants reflected on how Helsinki's design identity is being supported and shaped by its institutional actors. This section considers how Helsinki's most influential design organizations such as the city of Helsinki, Helsinki Parters, Luovi Productions, and Aalto University contribute to strategic place-making, and the branding of Helsinki. Through storytelling, ecosystem building and design advocacy, these institutions help frame Helsinki. These experiences are designed for both locals and internationals. The discussion also highlights tensions between bottom-up creativity and top-down representation in how the city is constructed as a cultural brand.

As identified before in theorethical framework, CCI is not parasitic on financial effects, but does generate wealth, employment, and innovation by itself (Pratt & Hutton, 2012). This approach then creates advanced production services in a city such as Helsinki. The notion of place, in art and culture, extends beyond being in the background to an active participant in creative production (Pratt & Hutton, 2012). That is why Helsinki city has identified design as one of its attraction factors in the city agenda for the last four years. According to Florida, places attract creatives with creative communities, yet financial fuel for their career is evidently seen as an attractive trait of the location. (2019). The current study suggests that the creative agents, design pro-

fessionals, should be further centered in creative policy with a bottom-up approach, to bring gain to the industry and further vicarious benefits to the surrounding areas.

For a city to increase their brand value or tourism, they often use generic global branding models (Jelinčić, 2025). The effectiveness of the efforts to increase the tourism appeal and creative industries in a city, depends on the actual effects on local communities. Therefore, emphasizing globally known and commercially viable components more than genuine regional customs, practices, and creative expressions, the strategy may result in the loss of cultural distinctiveness (Jelinčić, 2025). So, the nurture linked to a place for a commercial gain, has to stem from organic grassroots creativity of a community. So, instead of fostering original creative ecosystems, globalized strategies can produce a artificial cultural design, which serves economic values rather than the creative community. A smaller cultural center, such as Helsinki, should not adopt successful creative city models made for large cultural capitals, without first fitting their unique artistic, social and historical setting to them. Without this kind of customization, diverse cultural identities can become homogenized, making locations less unique as their feel and look start to unify. To avoid placelessness in design, place needs to be positioned not just as an asset but as a prerequisite in creativity. Finland's big brands, which can occasionally be worn out locally, are new to the world and therefore still interesting. What is obvious in Finland is still new elsewhere, and the branding of the city often relies on that. Although, it is a fine line whether the creativity of a place is reflected authentically, or if commercial value is being highlighted instead.

City connectedness of place gives a reflection of place in form of everyday actions. For example, Helsinki Design Awards, Helsinki city design director (supposedly first in the world), design as a part of the city mission, being a member of the UNESCO Design City Network, World Design City 2012, are all enhancing cultural policy tools to signal the design values of Helsinki. Characteristics of Helsinki, such as short distances and a certain low hierarchy are themes that these tools are based on. Inclusion and accessibility to design also play a role in Helsinki's feeling and image of being a design city. Among many others, the Arabia school enhances city design by teaching design ethos as a school subject.

Another social role of the CCI is their effect on social- and cultural change, and the way a city has to support this (Hesmondhalgh, 2018). Institutional attitude the city to design, is what conditions and structures support the well-being of communities, and what design and architecture do about it. They should allow individual organizations to share the message of design with the audiences and enabling education within the framework of the CCI. Design and architecture stay in the news and in people's minds when these kind of policies are reinforced, such as in Helsinki". They want to offer design professionals and buyers of various services opportunities to develop connections with the city.

Design can be used as a tool to strengtening the cultural image of the city, showcasing makers and the cultural design product industry as a part of the "new economy" by (Scott, 2006), and therefore fueling innovation and economic growth. Helsinki as the capital has a role in representing the country's creative industry globally, provide job opportunities, support tourism, and strengthen the urban culture in its many forms.

The role of the city and its institutions in building a design ecosystem is obviously big, and the design professionals interviewed recognize that. By highlighting local designers in global branding strategies, essential design networks can be built. A a concrete action from the city to align with this strategy would be for example enabling creatives to work in workshops, foster interdisciplinary collaborations, creating opportunities, and long term plans and goals with the city agenda.

Another globally interesting branding point made about Finland and Helsinki, is the sauna. The Helsinki Partners representative discussed in an interview, what an interesting topic it is at the moment for wellness and community building purposes, but also for of course the traditional culture reasons. What may come up is that, in relation to climate, the cold season is now appearing to be a globally intriguing aspect of Finland. Due to climate change, it is no longer necessary to be warm and sunny, but Northern countries are exotic because they have remained cold. While the climate is not cold enough globally due to many strains on it, northerners can feel lucky about the Nordic coldness. It is not seen as mere weather condition, but a lifestyle.

5.5 Limitations of the research

The limitations of this graduation thesis are listed below. The usually occurring limitations, including resource limitations are added.

The small scale of the study is an obvious limitation with this study. As the time reserved for the master thesis is relatively small, only four interviews and 30 Instagram posts including 90 pictures and captions were analyzed. Regarding the sample size, the normal guidelines concerning a master graduation thesis were applied.

Another limitation of this study is the fact that the current political climate needs further academical evidence from the connectiveness of place and the CCI urgently. While this is not a direct limitation for this research, it is a condition to which I would urge Finnish researchers to react in their own capacity. The urgency for this study is further elaborated in the declining state of funding for cultural and creative research in universities of many European countries.

The distant location of Finland to bigger markets, shapes the study subject to more limited audience, yet the surrounding Nordic countries could be used to do a similar, comparative study. The limited number of studies of the Nordic creative field also poses further limitations.

Furthermore, one entity group, consumers, is not included in this study at all. This narrows the impact of the study and could suggest that further research is needed in the field.

This study used mixed methods that allowed a wider range of insights, yet limited the emphasis on a specific data collection method. The interviews could have been incorporated on a larger scale to gain even deeper insights.

Lastly, this study navigated the place attachment of design professionals in including the more soft, atmospheric and creative aspects of place, with the more hard aspects of place, such as economic or cultural branding. While this approach was intended, the final results of the study could have been emphasized from this division in the discussion. The generally used division was not incorporated as much as it could have been to gain a clearer picture of the researched phenomenon.

5.6   Suggestions for future research

In this section the author will introduce suggestions for future research. Longer term studies could be incorporated in the future studies of effects of place to design. Alternatively, to further examine the effects of the findings in this study, a comparative study of Finland's other cities could help to improve the effects of place on a narrower scope. While this study reveals characteristics of Helsinki's design trade professionals who also relate to Finnish nature and atmosphere, other cities would most likely differ in their unique ways. Although, the effects of nature to all Finns is relatively significant, even if you've grown up in the city, because of summer cottage culture and the presence of nature in cities. Additionally, the distinction of the role of space in creativity in a place could be examined by this comparative method between cities. Similar studies from different fields in the CCI could be done to discover patterns and aid the economic resilience of the design industry. Also a more mature economy in term of cultural fields, such as Italy, could be compared to Finland to see which aspects of place attachment matter in different cultural environments.

Involving non-professionals with creative professionals in the design field could be studied to discover differences and similarities between the data sets. Interviews could be used via mixed methods with survey data in order to grasp how does place reflect in the consuming of local design, for example.

Overall larger studies of creative field professionals in larger areas, such as the Norcis, Baltics or Scandinavia, would be advised to do. Correlation of happiness and creativity in a place could then be compared to the interview data to see if design has a place in making a nation happier.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This study has identified a number of place attachment themes and dimensions in order to explore the role of place attachment in shaping the creative output of Helsinki's design professionals. By combining two different data collection methods, the study was able to reveal how the emotional, spatial, and institutional dimensions of the PPP framework are embedded in the professional practice of the research subjects. The results demonstrate that place attachment is not only a personal or even aesthetic concern for creatives in a city, but also a structural ecosystem that is influenced by international positioning, lived experiences, and many other factors. Helsinki's role as a place in its design industry was bigger than thought, as it was positioned as an important setting for creative identity and the intended symbolic meaning of the design work made there.

Place attachment informs the design output of Helsinki-based design professionals, and the ways those attachments are reflected in their creative work and outputs. Anchored in the place attachment framework of Scannell & Gifford, the findings confirm that Helsinki is not only a backdrop for design, but a central actor in shaping design identity, intention, and communication.

Through the data and discussion, it became clear that Helsinki design can never be a separate part of the Finnish design heritage, but one embodiment of it's many forms.

The two research questions of the study are, *what is the role of place in shaping the design output of Helsinki*, and *in what ways is place attachment reflected in the work of design professionals of Helsinki*?

The combined insights from the interviews and the visual analysis of Instagram content demonstrated that designers in Helsinki relate to the city through multiple layers of meaning that overlap each other. These include the material and symbolic aesthetics of the city, for example the muted color palettes, the natural textures and the seasonal light. Additionally, the emotional and personal dimensions of being rooted in a community that values democratic design, sustainability, and human centered living, are essential parts of those layers.

There is a double role of place in shaping the design output. The institutional, economic and reputational aspects of place give frames to place in which the creative activity is done. The CCI is a market and the values within a work culture also have a serious affect on the creative output. Additionally, enabling and highlighting the intangible part of creative practices can then create multitudinous value to a place and grow within it. The impact of identifying to a place gives the creative tone to design made by people from a specific place at it is shown to be mostly unconscious. External factors of place such as built environment, nature, and seasons effect the creative environment and therefore the design. Cultural values are built upon historical aspects of place and the mentioned external factors, and they have a role in shaping the design output of a place. The global look on design output of a place can differ from the local views, because a small market can saturate output before it is known by international audience. This occurs especially if trends are not being as actively responded to by local designers than they are by designers from other similar markets.

Place attachment is reflected in design professionals' values, decision making, creative output, and career building. Designers articulated a sense of belonging and identity formation through their spatial and cultural surroundings. While their public-facing content often reflects a global aesthetic language, their creative logic is profoundly shaped by Helsinki's physical, emotional, and social environment. The effects of natural elements, and the lived, Finnish cultural atmosphere were shown to shape not only design outputs, but designer's self- understanding and professional values.

An equally important role for the design industry output was identified in the city's role of institutions. Organizations such as Helsinki Partners, Luovi Productions, and Aalto University were shown to influence how design is being practiced and supported, and how these actions are then communicated externally. These institutions play a significant role in fostering the ecosystem that enables the Helsinki design industry to exist. However, tensions emerged between the grassroots creativity and top-down strategies, emphasizing the need for even more bottom-up engagement in cultural policy.

The research process was overall successful. The mixed method approach was formed because the original plan to only interview creatives proved to be too challenging within he given thesis time frame and limited possibilities to be in Helsinki for the interviews. Furthermore, the visual analysis approach gave a lot of insight that could have not been reached through the expert interviews and vice versa. The place attachment framework gave a lot of tangible points of reflection throughout the making of the theoretical framework, interview guide, both data codebooks, and analysis. The multi-faceted phenomenon studied was not the most simple to construct into a graduation thesis within the given guidelines and available resources. Yet, I feel that this study managed to capture interesting insights about the role of place in shaping the creative,

design output. The visual analysis revealed the social media presence of designers and amplified the differences of local and global looks on Finnish design. The interview gave more in depth insights on institutional aspects of place, but also specified personal values and feelings of designers. In total the mixed method approach gave this study more cohesive insights on the effects of place to its design output.

Ultimately, this research demonstrates that place attachment is both emotional and structural. It is lived and narrated, while being strategized at the same time. The attachment to place becomes a design tool, a source of legitimacy, and a frame for aesthetic- and professional decision- making. While global influences are undeniably present in Finnish design today, this study shows that the role of place in design is not diminished but rather reconfigured in contemporary Helsinki.

In conclusion, place attachment in Helsinki is not only a personal sentiment of its creatives, but it is a professional and institutional force that shapes how, and why design is produced, shared, and valued as it is.

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Appendix A

Visual Analysis

Click here to view: visual analysis sample (PDF)
   Click here to view: visual analysis (PDF)

Appendix B

Code book

Click here to view: interview analysis codes
Click here to view: visual analysis codes

Appendix C

Interview Guide

Click here to view the interview guide

Appendix D

Declaration of AI

Click here to view the interview guide