



HEISE Challenge-based learning case

CHALLENGE-BASED CULTURAL PLANNING IN THE CULTURAL DISTRICT OF TÖÖLÖ BAY IN HELSINKI

Sibelius Academy at Uniarts Helsinki, Arts Management Master's Degree Students

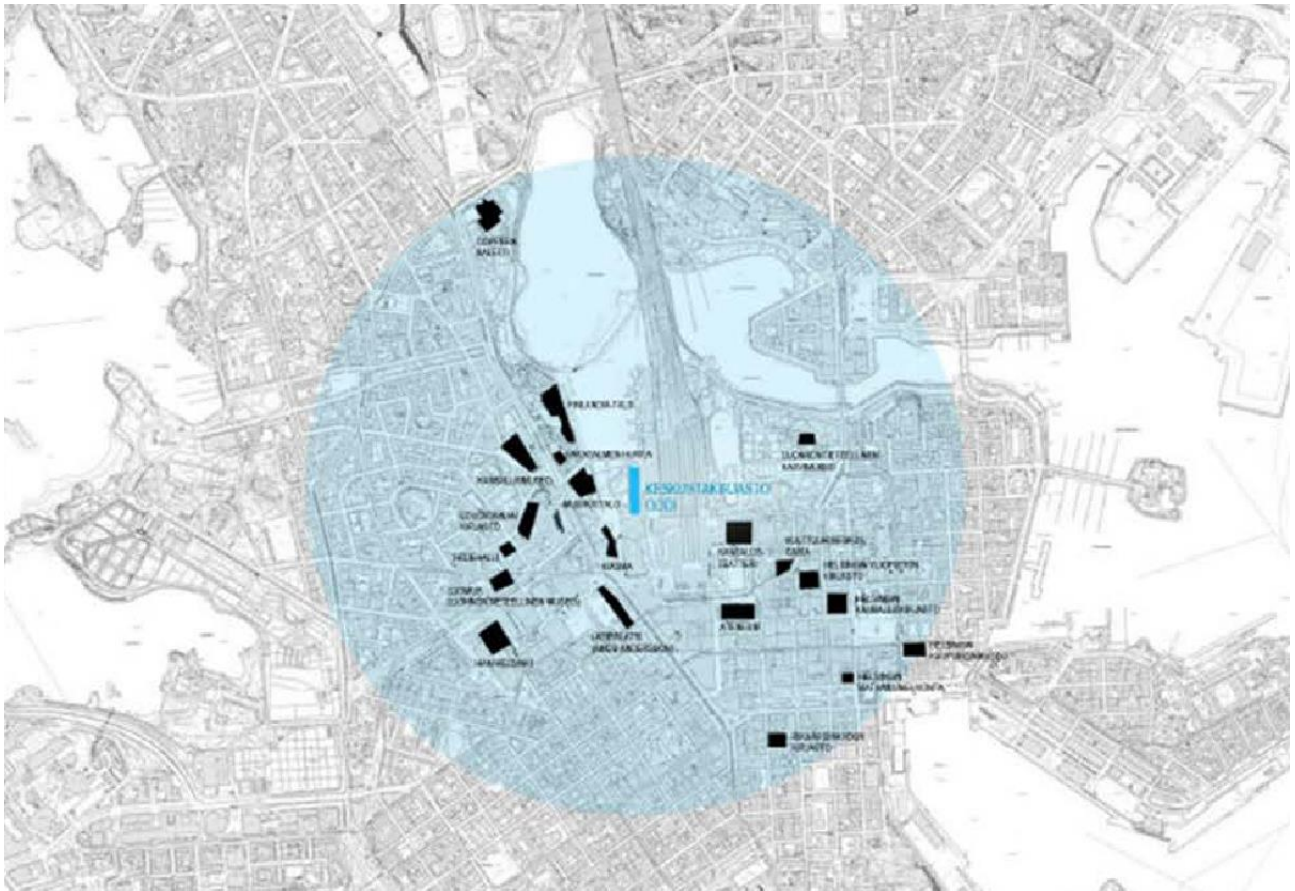
Description of the Context

The challenge-based learning case involved arts management master's degree students of the Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki in Finland. The arts management program includes various courses related to cultural policy, cultural planning and cultural economics, as well as management courses dealing with issues connected to strategic management, marketing, fundraising and leadership in the field of arts and culture. Courses are normally taught in small groups of 15 to 22 students, with the teaching staff comprising both academics and professionals working in the field.

Case studies are used quite regularly in the classroom, providing a certain level of engagement with the professional field of arts management. However, this engagement with the industry does not often concern real cases offering prolonged engagement with professionals or the opportunity to help solve their actual operational issues. This time, a wonderful opportunity emerged to get involved with a highly interesting cooperation between several arts and sports institutions located in close proximity of the Töölö Bay area in central Helsinki, the capital of Finland.

The park around Töölö Bay begins in the heart of Helsinki and there is a popular walking and cycling path circling the bay. The Winter Garden, which boasts hundreds of plants, is located at the north end of the bay. Wooden villas recall Helsinki's history and there are good opportunities for bird watchers ([www. myhelsinki.fi](http://www.myhelsinki.fi)). There are nearly 30 different cultural and sports organizations in the vicinity of Töölö Bay, including the Finnish National Opera, Helsinki Central Library Oodi, Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, the Finnish National Gallery, Finland Hall, the Olympic Stadium and many more. These operators in the Töölö Bay area have created a network to plan the future of this vibrant cultural district. The

aim is for the Töölö Bay area to become the venue for regular urban events and experiences in the heart of Helsinki (www.toolonlahtihelsinki.fi/en). The map below shows the area around Töölö Bay and some of the important cultural institutions operating in the district.



Different attempts to develop the Töölö Bay area have occurred over the years, the most recent undertaken in August 2017 when the Dean of the Sibelius Academy invited all the representatives of cultural and sports/leisure organizations around Töölö Bay to discuss how to cooperate and create joint activities for citizens and visitors alike. The representatives were highly interested in developing these projects, but to get a clearer picture of the aims, wishes and concerns of each organization in the area, the city of Helsinki initiated a small study among them. This was the moment when arts management students of the Sibelius Academy first got involved in the process.

Description of the Challenge

The participants in the first meeting of Töölö Bay operators identified a need for cooperation in projects such as creating a shared profile and image of the area, deepening specific forms of cooperation, sharing some marketing and communication efforts, and finding new ways

to increase public participation. In order to obtain a more extensive overview of these wishes, the participants in the meeting agreed to conduct a study and interview representatives of stakeholders in the Töölönlahti area about their ideas for development and cooperation. This overview was planned to act as the foundation for future development of services and cooperation in this area.

The Department of Arts Management proposed that their students carry out the study. The research embraced 27 cultural, sports and leisure organizations operating in the Töölö Bay area, with the aim of capturing the overall expectations, thoughts and wishes for the further development of the Töölö Bay project. The research was based on 27 semi-structured interviews with managers and experts working for arts, culture, sports and leisure organizations in the area. These interviews were carried out in October and November 2017.

The challenge-based learning case was integrated into a course on cultural planning, as the case represented an interesting aspect of cultural planning at the municipal level. The overall learning objectives of the course were that the students would learn to identify local, national and European-level cultural planning and recognize the role of arts managers in these processes. In addition, the student would be able to:

- recognize the connections between the different local and national authorities, policy-making structures, structures of resource allocation and funding bodies in the arts
- identify the role of the EU, UNESCO and other international stakeholder organizations in cultural planning practices
- distinguish the indicators and impacts of cultural planning

Description of the Learning Process

Preparation

The Töölö Bay challenge-based learning case involved the responsible teacher of the cultural planning course, 15 arts management students, and another teacher in co-writing the final report on the study. The students were responsible for conducting the semi-structured interviews based on an interview guide supplied by the city administrators. The city administrators also provided the list of interviewees, but the arts management students conducted the interviews independently in pairs or individually.

Before the interviews took place, the teacher coordinated with the city administration and asked the cultural director of the city to meet the students and explain the context and aim of the learning case. This was crucial in terms of the preparation of the process because this allowed the students to get a broader view of the aims and objectives, and also to ask any questions they had prior to the interviews.

Actions

The interviewees were distributed between the students based on their interests. After the distribution, the students started to schedule the 30-minute semi-structured interviews. Each pair of students had two interviews to conduct during a two-month time period. Some of the interviews were conducted in English and others in Finnish. After the interviews, the students recorded the main aspects of the interviews in an Excel sheet that was then sent to the responsible teacher of the course.

Before the interviews began, the responsible teacher described some basic elements of research interviews, as the students had not yet started their research methodology courses. Later on, when the students started the research methodology course and research interviews were discussed and practiced, it was very beneficial to reflect on these practical experiences of interviewing experts: how to start the interview, how to create trust, how to ask non-leading questions and how to end an interview. In this way, the Töölö Bay learning case provided learning opportunities beyond the case itself.

Evaluation and Results

This challenge-based learning case, which involved a city administration and almost 30 different operators in the cultural, sports and leisure field, was mainly about doing a study that helped the operators to get an overview of the situation and to make decisions regarding how to continue the development of the network. Hence, different types of research project can also act as valuable learning experiences when conducted in collaboration with several professionally relevant actors. This type of challenge-based learning case provided the students with the opportunity to meet potential employers and to learn about their work.

When the students had conducted the interviews, the teachers organized an evaluation

session in which the students were able to reflect on the different situations they had faced with the interviewees. In general, the students were excited about the opportunity to meet the top managers of the organizations. One disadvantage for the research was the limited information available regarding the initial idea for the Töölö Bay area. On a more negative note, some of the interviewees treated the interviewers as students, whereas others treated them as arts management professionals. However, some of the students felt that the interviewees seemed very relaxed while talking to students and that this might have been different if talking to city administrators. The students thus had an advantage as interviewers because they were seen as outsiders in the project, and therefore as neutral participants. It seemed that this learning experience was a win-win situation for both students and the city administration.

The interviews were initially analyzed by the students themselves as they filled out their reports on the interviews. After that, the two teachers wrote the final report based on the interviews. The results of this research provide an overview of the landscape of the Töölö Bay project, contributing to a greater understanding of the potentiality and challenges that this project may face. The report provides informative insights into emerging needs of the actors in the area and identifies some risks and challenges as well potential opportunities that should be taken into consideration in the further development of the project. At the end, the report provided a conclusion and recommendations for development of the project.

The overall timetable of the challenge-based learning experience was from August to January, in other words six months. This period included the very first discussions about the collaboration and the final presentation of the written report. The most active work period for the students lasted about four months, including two months for the interviews. Two months may seem a long time to dedicate to the interviews, but it was necessary because scheduling an interview, even a short one, in the busy schedules of top managers required time.

One of the most critical parts of this learning process was the way teachers and city administrators negotiated the goals. Fortunately, the goals were very clear from the beginning and everybody knew their responsibilities and what was expected from each of them. This type of learning process did not require any specific financial resources over and above the time dedicated by the teachers.

Reference for quotation

Ateca-Amestoy, V.; Äyväri, A.; Eskelinen, A.; Johansson, T.; Jyrämä, A.; Kanervo, R.; Kein, A.; Kiitsak-Prikk, K.; Plaza, B.; Pusa, T.; Ranczakowska, A.; Sarlio-Siintola, S.; Sassi, M.; Simjanovska, V.; Tasser, C. (2019). Roadmap for Societal Engagement for Higher Education Institutions. *Higher Education Institution for Societal Engagement*. HEISE Project, Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership.