Not all the activists go on the streets with flags

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Not all the activists go on the streets with flags

Case of a documentary about citizens movements in Helsinki

Master Thesis of Arts
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This Thesis would have not been possible without...

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Abstract

There has been growing interest towards the urban culture in Helsinki during the last decade, and, only recently, urban civic activism has been recognized as a potential resource for the development of the city. Nevertheless, there are discordant opinions if the urban movements in Helsinki lay down the foundations for a new form of civic life, or limit to a fashioned lifestyle. Furthermore, most of the attentions of the researchers have been focused on the implications of civic activism for cities, whereas little is known about the impact of the urban activists on the everyday life of the residents. These uncertainties suggest looking at urban civic activism in Helsinki as a fragmented phenomenon, holding the potential to lead to a better sustainable society, but lacking at the moment clear measures to support it.

This thesis seeks to contribute to better understand the role of the urban activists in the city. The research focuses on one particular form of urban activism, local movements, and takes two districts in the greater metropolitan region as an example where three groups of citizens are actively contributing to developing the community. By observing the dynamics between the activists and other residents in the areas, the research questions how designers can explore the implications of active citizens on the development of the neighborhood and the consequences on the everyday life of their residents.

The research employs first methods from user-centered design, such as interviews and field observations, to better understand the activists’ practices. I compiled the interviews and observations in the format of a Documentary film to highlight the impact of the activists renegotiating the role and responsibilities of the residents to use the public space and defining a new process of local participation. By doing so, the documentary helped me to frame the research material into a coherent narrative and identify two possible implications of the activists on the everyday life in the neighborhood. In addition, the documentary plays a provocative role, inviting the viewers to accept, question and reflect the role of the activists and the nature of the phenomenon of urban civic activism. In this way, documentary films become highly inspiring and provocative tools for designers to engage with local communities and question the impact of new social behaviors like in the case of urban civic activism.

Keywords: urban civic activism, local movements, user-centered design, documentaries
Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured in five sections, including introduction, background, research methods and approach, findings, reflections, and conclusions.

Chapter 1 introduces the topic, its relevance and the existing controversy that the thesis takes as starting point. It also describes the research focus and research question. It closes with the overall goal and personal motivations for the study, as well as a visual summary of the research phases.

Chapter 2 seeks to answer what is Civic Urban Activism, focusing mainly on the definition of the term and laying down the background for the study; the first part explores briefly the literature about social movements in the urban context, reviewing some of the main characteristics of current activism in western countries; the second part of the chapter is instead dedicated to describing the urban scene in Helsinki, introducing the definition of urban civic activism and reflecting on some of the main arguments that have been written about this phenomenon.

Chapter 3 addresses the methodology followed for the study. It introduces the approach and the methods chosen for gathering data and analyze it. It explores the literature about documentaries techniques for designers and the use of video in HCI studies.

Chapter 4 argues the findings gathered during the research phase and describes how the documentary has been constructed out of the observations gathered on the field. It offers an overview of the hypothesis, the process of analysis and the final findings. It closes with the description of the documentary, its parts, and final title.

Chapter 5 reports the reflections after the study and conclusions. It answers how designers can explore the implications of urban activists in local communities and use documentaries as a technique to study their interactions with the residents. The chapter finally gives suggestions for further development of the documentary and further studies related to the topic.

The link to the documentary can be found in the appendix.
1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the topic

During the past decade Helsinki has seen a blooming urban culture and an increased participation of citizens in matters of public concerns, such as urban planning, food consumption, recycling, refugees hospitality (Hernberg, 2012, Mäenpää & Faehlne, 2017); a series of cases, such as the well-known Restaurant Day or Kallio Block Party*, signal the increased confidence of people to participate and use the public space in a different way; whereas, often citizen initiatives take the form of cooperatives, not-for-profit organisations, volunteer initiatives or commercial and mission-driven activities, this phenomenon has led recently researchers to note that, citizens are embracing new roles and challenging the ways cities function; indeed, they do not simply consume what is offered, but they become co-producers of the services and spaces they need directly by themselves (Mäenpää & Faehlne, 2017). This brings a series of implications, that question the relationship between citizens and administration, as well as the division of roles, duties and responsibilities among them (ibid, 2017); This phenomenon has been described, not only from the perspective of Urban Studies and Design, but also in Marketing, Innovation studies and other similar fields; in fact, digital technologies have provided the infrastructure that has transformed the relations of consumers to markets and of citizens among themselves (Meroni, 2011); in particular the rise of social media has had an important role, fostering the new culture of participation, challenging the previously established cultures of passive consumption (Saad-Solonen, 2014). In the context of urban culture, in Helsinki, citizens have shown a growing interest to participate to improve the city, whereas a series of bottom-up initiatives (street festivals, block parties, neighbourhood movements), have been commonly referred as a form of urban activism (…) This suggests a shift, particularly, in the meaning of term activism, now seen not only as a form of political protest but as a proactive and collaborative resource for the development of the city. Traditionally, activism has been used to denote reactive social movements and political interventions finalised to influence public opinion or decision making (Jacobsson, 2015). Now, in view of the recent development of new approaches to activism, everywhere the term seems to have included also more collaborative and less politicised practices (e.g YesInMyBackYard - YIMBY*). As a result, this has led the researchers to notice a positive impact of activist practices on socio and economic assets of the cities, calling for a potential synergy between active citizens and cities.

In Helsinki, the city seems to have become a more inclusive and collaborative entity (see Mustonen, 2014), with a growing interest to involve citizens in the development of areas and services, as well as, to encourage local participation and citizen engagement. A recent example is the map-based citizen survey related to the vision and drafting for Helsinki’s new City Plan, attracting 4,700 respondents to the online survey (source Quarterly, 2014); also other major projects, such as the development of the new central library (to be opened in 2018) and the renovation of the City Museum (2016), have involved the

*See for example restuarantday.org and kallioblockparty.org
*See yimbycon.com
residents during the planning phase (source Quarterly, 2014). On the other hand, City of Helsinki is spending efforts to support citizen's own initiatives; during 2013, a survey carried out by the City of Helsinki Culture Office revealed a growing interests of the citizens in organising collective events, and during the same year the city allowed grants for 152 events (source Quarterly, 2014). In November 2013, the mayor was recorded in a interview acknowledging that there are "too many forms to fill, if a citizens want to organise an event" and that City of Helsinki is trying to make easier for citizens to engage with the city (Pulkkinen, 2014). Furthermore, following the efforts to open the City to its citizens, the City Planning Department has opened an exhibition centre and meeting place, Laituri, and launched its own Facebook page and Twitter account called "Helsinki Suunnittelee" “Helsinki plans” (Saad-Sulonen, 2014, p. 21).

All in all, there is a clear sign that the city administration wants to harness the know-how of local residents to help develop the city and solve shared socio-environmental problems (Berglund, 2017, p.568). Indeed, the motivations behind the initiatives promoted by the citizens often implies sustainability values, in line with the city strategic goals (Mäenpää & Faehnle, 2017, p70). As a consequence, the public administration is advised to work closely to support citizens activities to impact on the wider community (ibid, p.76.)

Nevertheless there are some grey areas behind the phenomenon of urban civic activism; the urban activists seem spread across the region, particularly at the “fringes of the inner city” (Mustonen, 2014, p.35), but some examples start springing also in the suburbs. Furthermore, this form of social movement doesn’t reach the level of politicisation likewise in other countries in Europe; in fact, the movements in the city often involves people who are not the most vulnerable or marginalized, but rather the middle class, “green” and conformed to the “creative class” (Berglund, 2017, p.567). As some researchers have argued, the activist scene in Helsinki could resembles, more than a form of resistance, a "life-style" (Berglund, 2017, p.568) or simply a way to spend leisure time and have fun (Mäenpää & Faehnle, 2017, p.76). As a consequence, looking at this phenomenon as “social movements” may not be the most appropriate: in fact, it could be argued that, the same initiatives represent forms of "active citizenship" or even be called "grassroots innovation" (Seyfang and Smith, 2007), inviting to look, for example, in studies about diffusion of innovations. The phenomenon appears fragmented and not yet univocally defined. For this reasons, the thesis takes a critical approach, employing the use of a documentary film to explore the role of the urban activists in the city. By observing two communities of urban activists, the interviews material is turned in a documentary, presenting the activists’s view point on the development of their neighbourhoods;

The groups of activists involved comes from two different part of the city, the central district of Pasila, in downtown Helsinki, and Myyrmäki, suburban area in the greater region of Helsinki, under the municipality of Vantaa; these districts have seen an growing presence of citizens-driven initiatives during the last years, around themes such as street art, urban gardening, block parties and other street festivals. The research comprises of qualitative data gathered during a series of field trips during January 2017 and May 2017, when I interviewed some of the members of these movements and participated to some of their events. Most of the interviews and observations have been video recorded. As a result, the findings gathered during the research have been used to produce a short documentary [see appendix 2], employing the video material gathered previously, and opens up some of the implications that the activists have on the development of the neighbourhood.

Finally, the thesis argues the provocative role of Ethnographic material in Design, borrowing methods from similar fields such as filmmaking and visual anthropology, pushing the tradition of user centred methods in Design into a more critical direction. In fact, here design is intended as open-ended instrument for describing behaviours, beliefs and theories than a resolution of a particular issue (Halse & Boffi, 2016, p.91); the outcome therefore seek
1.3 Process of research

My process of research can be divided into three phases. The first phase started in December 2016 and concluded around March 2017 and served to explore the theme of Urban Civic Activism and frame the research question. During this exploratory phase, I started by interviewing a group of active citizens to better understand their motivations and everyday routines. I identified a group of people who saw themselves as activists or whose work was related to encouraging civic participation [see appendix 1]*. I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with each one of them, to explore their backgrounds, needs, desires and gain an insider view on the phenomenon of urban activism. Since I didn’t consider myself an activist particularly, neither I had an extensive first-hand experience of their initiatives, this first round of interviews helped me to empathize with the activists and explore possible areas for a design intervention. At the same time, I started researching on the literature about civic urban activism and mapping the existing communities of urban activists in Helsinki. I realize that the phenomenon was more complex and fragmented than what I was expecting;

Figure 1, residents in Pasila meet to discuss about their neighborhood (picture taken by the author, 2017)

*Jalmari is a resident of Pasila. He is also my friend. In December 2016 he was doing his civilian service at the planning department in City of Helsinki. I met him because I wanted to hear about his experience at the work, particularly about the participatory web tool kerrokantasi.hel.fi (which I knew he used it), created by the department to gather feedback from citizens about city districts and related development plans of Helsinki. During the meeting, unexpectedly, he informed me about the idea of starting a bottom up movement in Pasila to gather enthusiasts about urban planning and create a sense of community among the residents living in the area. Three months later he invited me to their first meetup. I join the meeting. That was the first day of Pasila liike, one of the local movement I followed for the study of this thesis.
Urban activism is seen as a potential resource for the development of a sustainable society, but its nature still uncertain; how and where urban activism originates in cities? What are the conditions that encourage citizens to be active? How could be nurtured? What kind of implications does it bring to other citizens and society at large? Moreover, in the case of Helsinki, there are discordant opinions if the urban activists hold the premises for the rise of a new conscious and self - responsible class or it is simply a bubble, fashion or temporary trend good for promoting the city.

The approach became rather exploratory, embracing the more radical directions than the instrumental and solution-oriented tradition in Participatory Design, towards a more discursive and provocative one. What are the implications of this phenomenon, not only for cities but for the other citizens and stakeholders in the city? What does it mean civic urban activism for society and how should we look at this phenomenon?

The objective of the research is therefore not to develop products or services for the activists, but rather to raise awareness about the implications of this phenomenon and inform a critical perspective to look at it. In this way, I embraced the agonistic approach discussed in the beginning of this chapter and set to explore how designers could explore the implications of new social phenomena such as urban activism. What questions can I provoke? How could I form a debate about Civic Urban Activism? What opinions can be encouraged and how publics can be informed?

My research question became:

**What are the implications of the urban activists on the everyday life of the citizens in the neighborhood and how designers can explore them?**

The field research started in March 2017 until May 2017, when I immersed myself in two communities of urban activists for 6 months, took part in their events, observed their interactions with the other residents and interviewed some of their members. I used a video camera as the main form of documentation and recorded my visits to their neighborhood. I then reviewed and reflected on the interviews and observations by editing the video material in a form of a short documentary.

I decided to take a particular typology of urban civic activism as an example: following the classification proposed by Mäenpää and Faehnle [see table 4, p.31] I decided to focus on “local movements” as a common form of citizens’ organization at grassroots level aiming at improving the quality of a specific area or district in the city. Helsinki offered many examples of “local movements” as several districts of the city witness the presence of at least one active group of citizens. I could identify two areas with presence of urban activists, whose activity fit the description of local movement as used by Mäenpää and Faehnle:

Myymälä, a suburb area part of the city of Vantaa, in the greater capital region, and Pasila, a central area of downtown Helsinki. Both areas are currently in subjected to great transformations: in 2015, a new ring rail line was opened, offering better connections to Myymälä with Helsinki downtown, the airport and other towns in the region; in Pasila, a major construction project started to renew the east part of the district and the railway station located in between, expecting to turn the neighborhood in a central hub for commercial activities and new apartments by 2019.
In both areas there are groups of active citizens, who have recently started to promote various initiatives to encourage sense of community and improve the atmosphere in the neighborhoods. The first one is Myyrmäki liike, a group of resident from Myyrmäki that has been beyond a successful street art movement, attracting a lot of attentions from media and local authorities. In Pasila, I met Pasila liike, small group of residents that is also promoting local initiatives to improve particularly the western side of the neighborhood. In addition, I interviewed also a street art organization, Helsinki Urban Art, helping street artists and other activists to promote street art in the Helsinki region. One of the founders has been an active member of the urban scene in Helsinki and promoted many bottom-up cultural events around the city. At the time I contacted them, they were already working with Pasila-liike to organize street paintings in the district.

Table 1. Map of greater Helsinki region

*Helsinki region is compiled of three municipalities. Pasila is part of City of Helsinki. Myyrmäki is part of City of Vantaa. Both, together with City of Espoo, form the greater capital region.
2. LIST OF ACTORS

<table>
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<th>Organizations</th>
<th>Actors</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pasila Liike</td>
<td>Jalmari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I knew Jalmari from my network of friends. He lives in Pasila and is currently doing his civilian service at the city planning department of City of Helsinki. His background is in Industrial Design but holds an interest in urban culture and grassroots movements. During winter 2016 he contacted me saying that he was about to start a movement of active citizens in Pasila, after being inspired by other similar initiatives in Helsinki. He created a Facebook page to gather other enthusiastic residents and share ideas how to improve the district. In addition, he will start to study a new degree program in Urban Studies at Aalto University during fall 2017, to continue his passion and interest in urban planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myyrmäki liike</td>
<td>Jenni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>She is one of the producers in Myyrmäki Liike. She is originally from Martinlaakso, a neighboring district to Myyrmäki. She joined Myyrmäki Liike in 2013 after a friend invited her to take part in a mural painting in Myyrmäki. Her background is in Civic Activities and Youth Work, and today she helps young street artists to find permits, grants, and spaces for street art and mural painting in the region of Vantaa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helsinki Urban Art</td>
<td>Jaakko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He is one of the most well-known characters in the activist scene in Helsinki. He used to work at the Culture House in Helsinki when he started organizing pop-up activities with other urban culture enthusiasts. He is one of the organizers behind well-known local events, such as Cleaning Day, Sauna Day, DinnerUnderTheSky. Since 2012 the group has founded a non-profit organization called Yhteismaa, to promote bottom-up culture in Helsinki and in 2016 he was awarded the title Citizen of the Year. In 2017, he decided to focus on Street Art as a form of community engagement, and he founded Helsinki Urban Art. Some of their first projects were targeted to Pasila, and by the time I met Jaakko, he was already in contact with Jalmari to organize street art interventions in the neighborhood.</td>
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I decided to focus on these three particular communities for various reasons; first of all, I had already established a connection with some of the members of these organisations during the first exploratory round of interviews; I came to know about Pasila liike from a friend who is living in Pasila and informed me about the intention of a group of residents in founding the group; in the case of Myyrmäki liike, I came in contact with organisers through snowball sampling, after interviewing other activists I could recruit from my network. When I approached the research it was, therefore, easier to start from these two local movements instead of benchmark new ones.

The second reason is that all the groups are tied to a particular territory, sharing the same interests to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood where they are based. At the time I approached them, they were all working around the theme of street art or using art to engage with the public space, sharing therefore similar approaches. Indeed Myyrmäki presents an extensive amount of murals today, and street art has become a successful point of agreement between the organization and city of Vantaa to improve the safety and general atmosphere in the neighborhood. Pasila liike has been planning to organize street art interventions in the neighborhood too; besides painting murals, the group has been planning to paint way finding signals and paths to guide visitors to explore the “hidden gems” in the district. Both groups then showed similar approaches around art and urban space.

Nevertheless, the groups showed also differences: indeed Myyrmäki liike has been running since 2012, while Pasila liike formed during winter 2016, at the time when I approached them. As a consequence Myyrmäki was counting on a wider base of volunteers, paid producers, board of members and a long history of activities in the neighborhood; in the case of Pasila liike the group counted up to 10 people, where two were the founders; whereas Myyrmäki liike was more involved in the execution of their initiatives, most of the time spent with the volunteers in Pasila liike was on planning and discussing the agenda.
Figure 2, Jenni and Klaus (Kerttula, 2017)
Figure 3, Jalmari (Kerttula, 2017)
Figure 4, Jaakko (Kerttula, 2017)
Figure 5, Myyrmäki (Kerttula, 2017)
Figure 6, Pasila (picture taken by the author, 2017)
3. SUMMARY OF THE PHASES

2016 ............................................... 2017

December ........................................ January ........................................ February ........................................ March .................. April .................. May .................. June .................. July .................. August

1. Exploratory phase

Literature review
Conversations with activists

2. Field research

Interviews with activists from Pasila Liike and Myyrmäki Liike
Observations during the activities promoted by Pasila Liike and Myyrmäki Liike

3. Analysis

Editing video material
Production of the documentary

Documentation

Writing and reflections
Finally, I reflected on the interview material and video recordings through editing a short documentary film describing the communities I visited. The act of framing the reality observed in a coherent narrative helped me to reflect on the implications of the activists on the everyday life of the residents in the neighborhood. I used the act of framing the documentary as a form of analytical tool to gain insights from the interviews and observation and present them in a visual format. Indeed, the documentary represents both the tool through which I analyze the data and the outcome of my research: it offers the opportunity to confront the audience with the practice of the activists and provoke them to reflect on their role as residents in their neighborhood.

What is Civic Urban Activism? What does it mean for our society? How could it be encouraged? Even though the Thesis addresses these questions, it leaves them open, offering the documentary as a discursive medium through which reflect upon them.

The motivation for this work started from a series of questions I pose to myself during the past three years. Why citizens in Helsinki are taking part to improve the urban culture of the City? Could it happen somewhere else? Why is it considered particularly a form of activism? Shouldn't be considered normal if a citizen want to grow vegetables in a parking lot, commission a mural in front of his or her house, or sell second-hand clothes in the park? What else could citizens do by themselves and what they can not?

When I moved to Helsinki in the late summer 2014, I became impressed by the urban culture of the city and the way people contributed to it. I recognised that if citizens are allowed to take part to improve the city, such us cleaning the streets, finding a purpose for an empty lot, organising a block party, or even facilitating integration of immigrants in a local community (like one of the examples in Helsinki), the society would benefit out of it. As a designer with interests in design for social impact, I recognised in Civic Urban Activism an opportunity for facilitating the transition towards a more sustainable society. I set therefore to study this phenomenon and find ways to support it.

From this regard, I approached this topic independently, out of pure personal interest, acting as an independent designer willing to contribute to the discussion around Urban Civic Activism, bringing in an external and international view on this topic. With this premise, I wanted to experiment how design methods can foster social and political impact.

Finally, why particularly Helsinki? Helsinki has been the city where I lived for the last three years, when I moved in to start my Master’s studies at Aalto University. This city has an incredible potential: awarded capital of Culture in 2010, Design Capital in 2012 and ranked as most liveable city, Helsinki is undergoing profound changes at a fast pace (see Berglund and Kohtala, 2015); from 2008 a series of extensive urban developments have been transforming the city plan since then; Design has been taken at the core of the city administration, whereas in 2016 the City has nominated a Design Chief Officer, first in the world; today the city is considered a trailblazer in urban culture (see Mustonen, 2014) and its citizens are often placed at the very centre of the development of the municipality.

Studying citizen participation in Helsinki means to observe the dawn of this phenomenon in a perfect environment where city strategy and people’s visions meet in a promising synergy. Will people really take care of their own neighbourhood? Will citizens co-operation facilitate the transition to a more sustainable lifestyle? What kind of future lies in these movements? What kind of lessons can be shared with other cities?
2. Background

This chapter introduces the background of the research. As the rise of participatory culture in Helsinki has been commonly referred as a form of urban activism, this section explores briefly the literature about social movements in the urban context, reviewing some of the main characteristics of current activism in western countries; follows, in the second part of the chapter, a review of the current urban scene in Helsinki, introducing the term urban civic activism as it has been recently used in the context of Helsinki activism, and reflect on some of the main arguments written about this phenomenon. By doing so, the chapter aims to better understand the interpretation of Helsinki urban movements as a form of activism and lay down space for a design intervention.

2.1 How Activism looks today?

Today mobilizations look very different from earlier protests in the 1960’s. Many scholars have noted that today social movements form around new kind of struggles, different from the workers organized protests and other political confrontations (Finquelievich, 1981, Jacobsson, 2014). Being commonly argued as the consequence of advanced capitalism (Finquelievich 1981) or post-industrial neoliberalism (Mayer, 2013, Jacobsson, 2014), today we are living, undoubtedly, a sort of urban crises (Finquelievich, 1981): an increasing number of residents are demanding renewed urban policies, safer neighborhoods, protection of green areas and protests against commodification of public space (Jacobsson, 2014).

Therefore, whereas social movements usually formed around social causes such as poverty, fight against social exclusion, homelessness, protection of human rights, animal rights and the environment, now new groups arise also around urban problems such as degradation of urban areas and poor living conditions in the cities (Finquelievich, 1981). In Europe and North America urban movements, today range from anti-austerity and alter-globalization protests to include mobilizations around issues of everyday life and urban movements (Jacobsson, 2014 p.14-15); The result is a heterogeneous landscape of activist groups.

There are many examples in Europe (see figures 7-14), where residents have actively protested to protect the urban space or advance ecological concerns for the environment, becoming at times, a powerful pressure force against the administrative authority. Most of the conflicts happen in cities (Jacobsson, 2014); some citizens mobilizations are spontaneous while others are better organized; some are reactive while others proactive, progressive or conservative, as well as disruptive or moderate in their claims (Jacobsson, 2014, p.4). Nevertheless, researchers overall agree that today we are witnessing a growing level of citizen participation in matters of urban governance, alongside to new forms of civic life.

Moreover, unlike the politicised oppositional movements of the 1960s - 1970s, these movements offer a progressive vision about the urban space and an alternative to the eroded welfare institutions. In most of the cases, these groups of citizens organize actions that aim at challenging dominant values
*Kotti & Co is a Berlin based tenant initiative in the area of Kreuzberg (kottbusser tor), who is struggling with the rising rent in social housing. In May 2012 the group squatted a spot at kottbusser tor and build a protest-house. Since then, the group has organized also other activities such as concerts, reading sessions, discussion rounds, parties at the protest area. "We are Kreuzberg!" is a slogan designed by the communication agency, Image Shift, for Kotti & Co, as well as most of the communication and media of the group. As the agency is located in Kreuzberg itself, some of the partners are also activists in Kotti & Co. [source image-shift.net]
Figure 10. A masked protester wearing Santa Claus in holding a 'Free Hugs' placard., (Pezzali, 2016)

Figure 11. Several supporters argued they should be free to pass on public roads after police imposed restrictions on the march, including a three-hour protest limit (Petrazhitski, n.d.)

*In 2016, thousands of people took part to “Million Mask March” in central London wearing Guy Fawkes masks in reference to the cult pro-revolution film V for Vendetta. On the event’s Facebook page, nearly 20,000 people had indicated they would have attended. Most of the protesters were supporters of anti-globalization and anti-capitalist movements such as Anonymous and the Occupy [source theguardian.com].
Figure 12, Trädgård på Spåret (n.d, 2015)
Figure 13, Urban Beekeeping classes at Trädgård på Spåret (n.d, 2015)
Figure 14 panorama de Ceuvel, (Martijn van Wijk, 2014)

*Trädgård på Spåret is an urban garden situated on discontinued train tracks in the heart of Eriksdal, Stockholm. The organization started in 2012, with the aim to find a temporary use for the old rail and support the food-growing trends in Stockholm. It was inspired by similar urban gardens such as Prinzessinnengärten in Berlin and the High Line in New York [source www.blogs.sweden.se].

*Since 2000, the city of Amsterdam has administered a robust set of policies aimed at supporting artist studio spaces and creative incubators. A municipal government agency known as the Bureau Broedplaatsen helps groups of artists transform abandoned or underutilized spaces into places for creative work. The agency provides subsidies, credit guarantees, project management expertise, and legal assistance to get the incubators off the ground, and then the spaces are run as independent organizations. [source www.john-adams.nl]
of consumer society, sharing interests and solidarity with the authorities in charge of governing (Jacobsson 2015). Indeed, since intensifying fiscal constraints and an increased social expenditures brought within neoliberalism, local governments, hit by austerity politics, have become interested in the ways some of the movement organizations have addresses problems of youth unemployment, housing decay, and other social and neighborhood problems (Mayer, 2013). This suggests a new relationship between social movements and the public authorities; as Mayer describes it, "what used to be a rather antagonistic relationship transformed into a more cooperative one", resulting in the shift for the movements “from protest to program” (ibid, 2013, p.7). This meant for the urban movements to become less radical, focused on promote self-responsibilization rather than political empowerment (Mayer, 2013).

Indeed, the interest in the urban space characterized by the movements provides an easy access also for ordinary people to step into activism and grassroots initiatives, often with a playful and do-it-yourself attitude (Jacobsson, 2014). All in all, today activism results in a very heterogeneous landscape, made up of combinations of different social groups: anarchists, leftist organisations, students, artists and other member of the creative class, immigrants and other minorities, and finally representatives from the middle-class interested in local urban matters and environmental issues (Mayer, 2013).

Furthermore, Mayer observes, western cities have released concessions particularly to those movements that have a positive impact on city image and marketing (ibid, 2013). Indeed according to Mayer, deregulation, and flexibilization of labor markets have brought to increasing unemployment, poverty, housing needs, new riots and squatting movements, and left cities to compete in a global market to attract investors, workforce, and tourists (ibid, 2013). In this context, municipalities have discovered cultural revitalization and creativity-led urban development as a useful strategy to enhance their brand and improve their global image (ibid, 2013, p.11). Through what is known as "creative city politics", cities have promoted the idea of an urban space changed through festivals and mega-events to attract consumers, tourists and creative industries in a sort of “work-play” environment (ibid, 2013, p.9); continuing, “the cities of the North, become the playground for the upper classes and offer opportunities for alternative milieus and cultural activities to flourish, niches for artists and alternative activist to play crucial roles in marketing suburban areas and turning them into vibrant city district.” (Ibid, 2013); as she put it, even "radical squats and self-managed social centers have taken on an ambiguous role as they mark urban space as attractive" (ibid, 2013, p.11).

*The BMW Guggenheim Lab was a mobile laboratory about urban life that began as a co-initiative of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and the BMW Group. From 2011 to 2014, the Lab traveled to New York, Berlin, and Mumbai. Part urban think tank, part community center and public gathering space, the Lab’s goal were the explorations of new ideas, experimentation, and ultimately the creation of forward-thinking visions and projects for city life. The project concluded with an exhibition presented at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (October 11, 2013–January 5, 2014). Titled Participatory City: 100 Urban Trends from the BMW Guggenheim Lab, the exhibition (October 11, 2013–January 5, 2014) spotlighted major themes and ideas that emerged from the Lab in each of its three locations. Among the examples listed in the exhibition can be found social movements such as Occupy, The 99 Percent, and ParksForPeople. [source www.bmwguggenheimlab.org] According to Mayer, BMW Guggenheim Lab is one of the initiatives in the West that shows the unusual relationships between social movements and the elite.
“Urban commons* have radical potential – it’s not just about community gardens [...] Public services are at the mercy of austerity policies, public housing is being sold off and public space is increasingly no such thing. In a relentlessly neoliberal climate, the commons seems to offer an alternative to the battle between public and private. The idea of land or services that are commonly owned and managed speaks to a 21st-century sensibility of, to use some jargon, participative citizenship and peer-to-peer production. (Justin McGuirk, 2015)

*Designing Urban Commons was an exhibition held at LSC in London on June 15 – July 11, 2015. The exhibition seeks to reimagine the existing architecture and infrastructures in neighborhoods across London as common spaces. After the exhibition, the Journalist Justin McGuirk was noticing “It has become fashionable to talk about the “urban commons”; in a article on the Guardian, he advances the critic that often the notion of urban commons limits to refer to small interventions, like in the example of a community garden, loosing the opportunity to reimagine the all city as commons; instead of tackling questions of housing, energy use, food distribution and clean air, commoning fall in the realm of tiny acts of autarchy and resistance. The article concludes therefore that Urban Common holds today the potential to reshape our understanding of citizenship and sustainability – but the conversation needs to move beyond gardening [source: theguardian].
To conclude, today urban movements in western cities range across various forms and types: whereas mobilizations form usually in response to globalisation and austerity programs, channeling the protests of individuals at risks of unemployment, homelessness and other consequences brought within the crisis, increasingly social movements are involving also regular citizens interested to protect, so called, urban commons. As citizens become interested to promote the urban space, improve the neighborhoods, safeguard green areas, these phenomenon calls for a self-responsibilization of civil society, rather than a political mobilization, promoting the idea of a collective management of the urban space.

The result is of a growing interest by the authorities to leverage on the citizens’ know-how to improve the city. As often these movements employ collectives of artists and other creative professions, these movements impact on the marketing of city districts*, revitalizing suburban areas and retargeting industrials abandoned ones. As cities continue to invest in “creative city politics”, releasing concessions to those movements who impact on city marketing, they are also encouraging movements that are less radical and politicised. Moreover, where citizens initiatives often challenge values dominant in the consumer society, they also contribute to the city’s efforts to market itself as an attractive location for business and investors. This controversy lay down the background for most of the activists’ practices in western society today.

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Figure 16, The High Line (n.d. 2016)

“The High Line in New York City is one of the most remarkable examples of how spontaneous civic actions can scale up and impact on city development and re-market unvalued urban districts. The High Line was opened in 1934 and served as a railroad to transport goods through Manhattan industrial districts until 1980. In order to avoid demolition, in 1999, a group of residents and rail-road enthusiasts founded "Friends of the High Line" to advocate for the High Line’s preservation and reuse as public open space. Today, it is a public park elevated above the streets on Manhattan’s West Side. Friends of the High Line has helped the City of New York to conduct the process to select a design team, and today its volunteers maintain the areas as well as coordinate various activities promoted by the residents; free events for adults and families, gardening workshops, street food, live gigs, performances.... [source: www.thehighline.org]

Whereas The High Line is seen as an excellent example of community building, sustainable practices, stewardship and innovative programming, the high-line is also impacting dramatically on the development of the area; the project promoted by the activist has influenced the level of rents, attracted investors and caused real estate speculations. The documentary work by Marc Levin, “Class Divide”, published in 2016, address the rapid gentrification of the neighborhood of Chelsie, taking the High Line into account as one of the causing factors: “The High Line, a once-abandoned elevated railroad track, was reborn and turned into a wildly popular public park in 2009. Attracting five million people a year, The High Line has transformed a once-gritty area into the hottest neighborhood in NYC’s high-end real-estate market.” He concludes, referring to Joe Restuccia, Community Board Committee co-chair: “Every building is trying to outdo each other.” [source: hbo.com/documentaries/class-divide]
I moved to Helsinki in early August 2014. The city is generally known for having a vibrant summer, full of events and happenings where both tourists and residents find themselves enjoying the outdoor, finally relieved by the dark winter. During August, the traditional block party of Kallio, ex-working-class district, nowadays consider bohemian hip neighbourhood, takes place and thousands of people gather in the streets, listen to live music gigs, arrange pop up restaurants and sell second-hand clothes in small flea markets in the park; the festival is organised by the local citizens organisation in the neighbourhood, Kallio like (“Kallio movement”), and with only a few years, it has attracted a lot of participants, media coverage, turning the block party in one of the main events during the summer in Helsinki. Here the atmosphere is usually joyful and people participate with a positive attitude, meanwhile the city allows them to use temporarily the public space. Not too far from Kallio, in the industrial area of Suvilahti, at the border of a large construction area, a group of ‘activists” is running a small pop up sauna, alongside couples of coffee shops hosted in empty containers next to the sea shore. When I arrived in Helsinki for the first time, I had the opportunity to visit both Kallio Block Party and Sompasauna (the hippy pop up sauna in Suvilahti) and discover the urban culture of the city.

The vitalization of the city has been a clear goal of the city administration during the last decade (Mustonen, 2014). Within the struggles to compete in the global market with other cities in Europe, such as Berlin and Stockholm, Helsinki put in place a series of strategies to target itself as an interesting and vibrant metropolis for new comers (ibid, 2014). It became European Capital of Culture in 2010; Monocle ranked it “the world’s most liveable city” in 2011 and by 2012 Helsinki was awarded “Design Capital”; alongside with the nominees, the grassroots culture of the city has exploded and there has been a lot of attention around the urban scene of the city.

“Who would have thought. Twenty years ago only few were able to imagine the Helsinki in which we live today. A city where anybody is allowed to sell food on the street or grow zucchinis by an old rail yard. Perhaps in Berlin or Stockholm, but hardly in Helsinki...” (Katja Lindroos, 2015)

One of the first to write about the new grassroots movements in Helsinki is Hella Hernberg, Helsinki based architect, who reported: “There is a new generation flourishing in Helsinki, willing to take action when they want to tackle a problem or when they want to simply have fun” (2012, p.17). Indeed, during the past decade, different small urban collectives have formed and started promoting a series of initiatives that have brought the grassroots culture in the city to bloom (ibid, 2012). In a publication launched in 2012, named “Helsinki Beyond Dreams”, Hella Hernberg presented several examples of citizen-led grassroots actions happened in Helsinki between 2008 - 2012, such as examples of urban farming, street food movements, block parties and other similar initiatives that engaged people in the public space; these activities advanced for the first time the idea of a city co-created by their citizens; as a form of “positive civil disobedience”, the grassroots initiatives suggested the potential for a civil society based on active citizenship and common good (Hernberg, 2012).

Since then, the grassroots movements in Helsinki have gained a lot of hype and the city has started leveraging on some of the activities organised by the citizens to promote itself; Helsinki has become a city that promotes participation and urban culture have become one of the drivers of its strategy; whereas continues efforts are spent to encourage citizens to become active.
The local magazine “Helsinki This Week”, was reporting in occasion of the annual Kallio Block Party: “Stop the traffic, dance on the tram tracks, rock to the music and party, party, party. Sturenkatu”. Run entirely by volunteers, Kallio Block Party is an annual, non-commercial community event. Kallio Block Party is organized by Kallio Liike (translated Kallio Initiative), a politically non-aligned community of people living, working and hanging out in and around the district of Kallio, Helsinki. The Initiative endeavors to influence the city’s decision-making and policy-building, and to organize block parties. On the Facebook page of the event, the associations published: “How would you like to enjoy one of the busiest streets in Helsinki without all the traffic? Kallio Block Party invites you to do exactly that on Saturday, August the 5th! Run entirely by volunteers, the seventh annual block party turns the Sturenkatu area into a huge urban festival.” [source Facebook]

Restaurant Day is a worldwide food carnival and a movement that allows anyone to set up a restaurant, café or a bar. It started in Helsinki, Finland, in 2011 in response to the strict food policies against street vendors and restaurants owners. On the official website, it is possible to read a quote from Paavo Arhinmäki, Minister of Education and Culture, affirming: “Restaurant Day has probably affected Finnish restaurant culture more than anything else since the new alcohol legislation of 1969 when beer was allowed to be sold in supermarkets”. Today the Restaurant Day is advertised on visitfinland.com, official travel guide of Finland, and visithelsinki.fi, tourist info page for the City of Helsinki. [source restaurantday.org]

Katja Lindroos, is a producer and writer, founder of MOMOLIVING, a project devoted to suburbs and 50s, 60s and 70s housing. In 2014, a column on Helsinki Design Week blog, entitled “Suburban = Unurban?”, she was questioning why isn’t there urban culture in the suburbs. As she was pointing out, a new generation of urban activism has transformed the image of Helsinki from “the cold and resolute Nordic capital into almost its polar opposite”. Nevertheless, the idea of urban culture has often been associated with central urban areas. With images of streets and block parties attended by huge crowds, picnics in crowded city parks, the writer noted, the rise of participatory culture has struggled to develop in the suburbs [source helsinkidesignweek.com].
Today the urban movements in Helsinki range across various formats, such as street art collectives, food circles, recycling groups, including even one asylum seekers support network. New groups are constantly forming and other have stopped existing. As a result, the urban scene of Helsinki is very active and diverse. Researchers Pasi Mäenpää and Maija Faehnle have recently proposed a first classification [see table 4]. According to Mäenpää & Faehnle, these grassroots activities represent a form of civic activism that differ from the traditional form of political influencing in many ways: they are usually proactive and constructive; they are directed primarily at action rather than a political expression, relies on do-it-yourself attitude and p2p networks; finally they utilise the internet and social media as form of organisation (2017, p.70).

According to the authors, we are witnessing a fundamental shift in the civil society today, whereas a more informal and self-organized sector is emerging.

“A person in a public office can become an activists by volunteering to take on tasks within their own work that benefit the community more than what would be required by their position.” (Mäenpää & Faehnle, 2017, p.80)

Other authors have also described the innovative approach of many of these groups: according to Pulkinen, during the last decade, the urban activists in Helsinki have shown a pioneering approach to urban culture; they have been implementing, what she calls, the “change they wanted to see”, driven by the mantra “let’s just do it” (Pulkinen, 2014). Moreover, the urban movements in Helsinki have often organized events as the main form of action (Pulkinen, 2014); this is seen as one of the key elements behind their success - a tactical approach to gather public support and negotiate with the authorities.

For example, the most emblematic and successful initiative goes beyond the name “Restaurant Day”, an event where everyone can set up a restaurant by the street for a day. Born for the first time in May 2011, when a group of friends decided to set up a pop up kiosks inside their homes, marking them on Google map and spreading the voice through Facebook; soon 40 new restaurants were opened at the same time, at the street corners and in various parks in the city. The event attracted a lot of interests, both from people who attended the event and the main Finnish media broadcasters that covered it in the national news. The first two events went unsupervised by the police, while after the third, the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health started being alerted and the Restaurant Day established the official association. The idea that channelled the critics against Finland’s bureaucratic food control and restaurant licensing, turned a form of civil disobedience into a joyful Carnival. After the first edition, 200 restaurants were opened in August 2011 and 300 in November the same year. By February 2012, the event became international and spread to South Korea, Thailand, Japan, and Nicaragua. In December 2011, the Minister for Culture awarded the Restaurant Day with the Finland prize.

Other citizen-led initiatives have shown a similar pattern; the pro-immigration and refugees integration network called “Refugees Hospitality Club” and the recycling/flea market festival “Siivouspäivä” (“Cleaning Day”) are two remarkable examples; as one of the activists, Pauliina Seppälä, wrote in an article published in 2012, both projects were born first out of “random ideas” posted on social media and later evolved as form of “experiments.”
4. TOWARD A TYPOLOGY OF URBAN CIVIC ACTIVISM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tipology</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharing/platform/peer-to-peer/citizen economy services</td>
<td>peer-to-peer trade, food distribution (online flea markets, food groups and co-cops, REKO groups, Kallion safkat kiertoon groups,...) peer-to-peer rental, other peer-to-peer services and exchange of services (kuinoma, time banks, PiggyBaggy, carsharing services, Nappi Naapuri...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community activism, or activism that emphasises community, mutual help, or the environment</td>
<td>city events (Restuarant Day, Cleaning Day, Dinner Under the Stars, Sauna Day, Block Parties...) local movements (Kallio, Kannelmaki, Myyrmäki or Jatkasaari movement, ARTOVA, Hertikan pumpuu, Saaremme...) social peer support (Refugee Hospitality Club, support group for asylum-seeking minors in Espoo, emergency coffee, emergency beer...) improvement of social services (&quot;environment grandma and grandpa&quot; activities, libraries opened by individuals, kaupunkifillarit.fi bycicle service, Vaista viharatikka journey planner...) environmental movements (don't put frozen goods in a plastic bag, The better clothing recycling service...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space-related activism, or modifying spaces for short-term or long-term use, directly or through planning</td>
<td>urba planning groups (&quot;towards a more urban Helsinki&quot; + Espoo + Tampere, Selkaranka, Urban Helsinki, Urbaani Tampere ry, Herttonien ja Roihupellon vaihtoehtoinen tulevaisuusvisio (&quot;alternartive vision for the future of Herttoniemi and Roihupelo&quot;)...) House or space squatters, openers and modifiers (Suvilahti, Herttoniemi, Lauttasari, Lapinlahi, Vartiosaari, group builders, urban farming incl. Guerilla Gardens Helsinki, ice castels, Hoffice, Olohuonenayttely (&quot;living room exhibition&quot;), Korttelipihat takaisin (&quot;bring back block yards&quot;), Taukotilapiet... artivism or art activism (murals, graffiti, street drawing, flash mobs...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital activism or activism that develops the use of information technology</td>
<td>Hacktivism or activism requiring special information technology expertise (&quot;developing, incl. open data hackathons, improvement of data systems and data... Development of digital society (development of openness, encrypted currency activism, fibre-optic, co-operatives, digiapuri.com service...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activism support, or activism that supports other forms of activism</td>
<td>Innovation and transmission communities (&quot;Yhteismaa ry, Hukkatila ry, Dodo ry, Oranssi ry, ARTOVA ry...) Development of tools for activism (development of activism guides, operating models, crowdfunding and other platforms, voluntary research and investigative work to help activism...) Activating communications (Kapitaali.com, cultural disruption, counteradvertisements...)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Towards a typology of Urban Civic Activism. (Mäenpää & Faehnle, 2017, p.79)
“I was imagining football games among asylum seekers and residents, networking that might help the seekers find their way in the Finnish society a little bit easier.” (Seppälä, 2012, p.63)

In both cases, Facebook has helped the activists to gather support and offered other citizens to participate, give comments, share ideas or take part to group actions (Seppälä, 2012, p. 63). The Refugees Hospitality Club (RHC) was founded in 2009 after a new reception center opened in the central neighborhood of Punavuori; since then it has been a reference point to organize support activities for asylum seekers, share information about refugees and most importantly channel the support against the rise of anti-immigrations groups in Finland. In case of Siivouspäivä, the flea market festival was inspired by the examples in many cities abroad, where it is allowed for people to leave furniture on the streets and wait for passengers to pick it up or been collected by the garbage trucks. Again, like in the case of the Restaurant Day, making it a special day, a [flea market] carnival, made it easier for the Finnish authorities to tolerate.

Figure 19, Siivouspäivä 24.5.2014 (Helenius, 2014)

“Cleaning Day is a day of celebration for friends of flea markets and recycling”, says the official page of the event. The celebration turns city districts into huge flea markets and marketplaces, inviting citizens to make recycling easy and create a responsible urban culture. (source siivouspaiva.com)
As these initiatives take often inspiration from similar examples abroad, also the green movement has its local pioneers here in Helsinki; Dodo is a non-profit organisation who has been running several urban farms and tried to promote the idea of a sustainable life-style and local production. The first “farm” was opened without any kind of authorisation in the unused railyard of Pasila Station.

“We scraped together old wooden pallets under snow and built our first grow bins. Our theme for the year 2009 was food and we wanted to demonstrate how to grow clean and local vegetables in an urban environment. Almost all of us were unexperienced in farming - our point was to show that it’s not rocket science.” Päivi Raivio (in Hernberg, 2012, p.98)

After 2009, Dodo has opened several urban gardens in different areas in Helsinki, testing several different solutions for growing vegetables, such as using wooden pallets, plastic bags, car tires and shopping trolleys; they have released a guide for urban gardening developed together with City of Helsinki. Today the old urban farm in Pasila has evolved to a test laboratory for urban agriculture and a semi-temporary pavilion, known as “Turntable”, serve as meeting point for other urban farming enthusiasts. On the other hand Dodo is not the only actor in favour of a more sustainable society, in Herttoniemi, east Helsinki, other food activists have experimented Community Supported Agriculture since 2011; a small cooperative of 115 members rented for the first time 1.3 hectares of field, in the suburb of Vantaa, outsourced to a “personal farmer” and then each member pays a fixed fee per season to collect their equal share from one of the members’ garage.

Dodo is a Finnish environmental organization founded in 1995. The group addresses various environmental issues, helping to spread information, discussions, and projects to support environmental causes. A statement on their web page sums up the spirit of the group: “From a dining table, a metro tunnel or an adventure holiday, there is a short way to global environmental issues”. Although Dodo promotes various activities, it has gained particular fame for installing several urban gardens in various districts in Helsinki. (source dodo.org)
Figure 22, Kääntöpöytä (n.d, 2014)

Kääntöpöytä, in English Turntable, is the urban farming test lab, opened in 2012, by Dodo. It is located in Pasila railway yard, in the middle of Helsinki, and today it represents a key spot for all urban farming enthusiasts. The project was initially part of World Design Capital 2012, and since then, Turntable keeps offering workshops, gatherings, organic brunches and other activities related to urban farming throughout the year. (source: Facebook/ Kääntöpöytä)
Even if, in most of the cases, the starting point of the urban activists is to answer to existing conflicts, such as lack of flexible food policies, promoting a more sustainable lifestyle, or helping immigrants to integrate in the Finnish society, the urban activists in Helsinki also adopt a collaborative attitude towards the city authority. Indeed, the city is eager to try to involve the city activists and take advantage of their know-how. In 2009 the “Kalasatama Temporary” project seek to promote temporary uses of public space during the constructions of the new apartment blocks as part of the large scale residential development in the area; indeed, Kalasatama used to host the cargo port, but after the decision in 2008 to relocate it in the suburban area of Vuosaari, a vast area of 173 hectares was appointed for one of the Europe’s largest construction sites. In order to promote the area and attract people to visit it, City of Helsinki appointed Johanna Hyrkäs, architect and visual artist, to coordinate temporary uses and cultural activities in the empty harbour, under the name of "Kalasatama temporary". As Hella Hernberg writes, "Kalasatama temporary was based on a hunch that there were active people in Helsinki who would organise inspiring things, - if they are given a little push to do so", after a "open brunch in exchange of ideas" (ibid, 2017, p.90), the city provided permissions, containers and water supply to those who were interested: the result was a series of grassroots initiatives such as live music gigs, punk concerts, theatre shows, poetry evenings, art exhibitions, food events, a bike repairing workshops, turning an empty and inhospitable construction site in a unique and inspiring urban gem;

From these perspective, the urban civic activist become a resource for urban development (see Mäenpää and Faehnle, 2017). The urban civic activists tend to take, in fact, tasks typically expected by the municipality (ibid, 2017); the Facebook support group pro Asylium Seekers is an emblematic example of it; indeed, the group help to organise clothing donations and other activities for refugees families, and in this way "the city administration's tasks of receiving asylum seekers was handled better and faster than could have been done by the authorities alone" (2017). As the researchers continue, "the container pilots in the Kalasatama district, for instance, have demonstrated ways to fill gaps in public services when services have been cut, or when they do not yet exist" (ibid, 2017).

As many have argued, there is a spirit of collaboration between active citizens and city authorities, and the city seems to have become a more inclusive and collaborative entity.

“What was considered originally as a rule-breaking behaviour of the citizens, has now been adopted and even promoted by the city” (Pulkkinen, 2014, p.75)

In fact, the values promoted by the activist, such as environment, collaboration, fairness and efficiency, seems to be often in line with the city strategic goals (Mäenpää and Faehnle, 2017, p70); in other words, there is a clear sign that the city administration wants to harness the know-how of local residents to help solve shared socio-environmental problems, co-creating areas and services together with the residents (Mäenpää & Faehnle, 2017, Berglund, 2017, p.568).

Even though the phenomenon of urban activism show that today people consider normal to co-create cultural activities instead of just passively accept what is offered mainstream, not everyone seems to participate in the same way.

Many attempts have been spent to open up urban planning to the citizen as a way to implement representational democracy at the municipal level (Saad-Sulonen, 2014). Nevertheless, in most of the cases, the proposals don’t go beyond the consultation model, whereas citizens are offered the opportunity to comment and vote a set of given solutions. As Saad-Sulonen (2014, p18) writes,
only the most active, those who passionately devote their time to following the planning processes, are likely to sustain an involvement with such possibilities for participation. As a result, the average citizens, busy with their work, family, and social life, will only bother with the motions of formal participation when planning and implementation threaten their own comfort, their own everyday life. Otherwise, they will only catch themselves drawing from time to time: I wish there were a cycling route along the seashore...What if this plot of land next to the supermarket was a community park? A pedestrian street would work well here, with a lot of nice cafes?"

Who really are the urban activists of Helsinki is not very clear - since no demographic studies* have been carried about these social movements, making the distinction between a mass phenomenon, subculture or niche is very hard. The anthropologist Eeva Berglund has shared some critical viewpoints about the urban scene in Helsinki. As she writes, the social movements in the city often involves people who are not the most vulnerable or marginalized, but rather the middle class, "green" and conformed to the "creative class" (Berglund, 2017, p.567); most of the Helsinki's activists live in the greater Helsinki area, speak Finnish, often have design and architectural background.

Already in 2009, an article on Helsingin Sanomat described the activists involved in the environmental organisation "Dodo" as "young, cool, fashionable, urban, and inspired by global trends around food and social media"; The article noted also as often the background of the participants comes from architecture, design, tech, and art; in conclusion, the author made clear as "today, [these movements are] a fashion popularised by activists, the day after tomorrow, everyday life among the masses". (Berglund quoting Mutta Tuli Kaupunkiin 2012, p.203) - truly is that without going far from being a "popular fashion", the Helsinki middle-class activism resembles, more than a form of resistance, a "lifestyle" experimenting with the aim to "simply live better" (Berglund, 2017, p.568).

According to Berglund, the Helsinki Design World Capital year in 2012, has given the impression of a diffused and vibrant "urban-vibe" in the city, attracting 300 founded proposals and numerous DIY events that injected new life to the Helsinki streetscape (Berglund, 2013, p.200-201) Nevertheless, the creative community in Helsinki has been one of the drivers in presenting these alternatives, sometimes in forms of street parties or environmental art (2013, 2015).

Even though unarguably these interventions have been opposed to the mainstream ideas of top down urban development, what happened was, more than a Civic Renaissance, a series of "legal variants of Design Activism" or "artivism" that helped people to engaged with urban matters as participants or "participant-spectators" (ibid, 2013, p.201).

Although the border between design infused activism and activist design is very vague, similar remarks have been shared also by other authors. Pauliina Seppälä calls their activities more as "tiny social movements": since they pick up spontaneously on social media, they offer a "medium" for people to promote social and cultural change as counter movement to existing issues; on the other hand the urban movements of Helsinki don't reach the level of politicization of other anti-austerity or alter-globalisation likewise in other countries. The Refugees Hospitality Club and Cleaning Day, for example, attracted a great number of artists, art teachers, event producers and other professionals whose interests is close to cultural and social work. Finally, without diminishing the social goal of most of the urban initiatives promoted by the activists, activism in Helsinki may become simply a way to spend leisure time and have fun (Mäenpää and Faehnle, 2017, p.76). Furthermore, the synergies between city and active citizens could be explained as merely a potential commercial assets for the city; the heritage of the urban movements may seem in this case a form of "culture
An article, published on Helsinki Sanomat in August 2017, was reporting “Helsinki is much cooler than Stockholm”, introducing the experience of visiting Sompasauna, at the outskirts of Kalasatama district construction site. It is probably the best examples of how bottom-up activist initiatives have been branded to promote Helsinki city image. Indeed the article highlights how the tiny self-managed sauna, opened illegally in 2011 by a group of “activists”, as an act of squatting the area of Kalasatama, today has been covered by the Guardian, Nordic Business Insider, and Finnair’s Blue Wings magazines to promote Helsinki as a vibrant metropolis and touristic destination. The city of Helsinki awarded Sompasauna with the Helsinki Culture Award in 2015 and it is used by the Marketing department in various advertisements on the streets and at the airport with hashtag #MyHelsinki (source: Sanomat).
[turned] into a branded sales item, used to target Helsinki as creative city and attract tourists and businesses (Berglund, 2013, p.197-199).

To conclude, the urban scene in Helsinki consists of a growing presence of citizens participated activities; whereas these projects take various forms, they all use social networks as the main form of organization, as well as, develop through tactical interventions often in forms of events. These factors have brought the urban movements in Helsinki to gain a lot of attention and attract numerous people. As a result, civic urban activism has been recognized as a potential resource for the development of Helsinki, as often the activists are promoting values of sustainability, inclusion, and efficiency, close to the city strategic goals. As a consequence, the city administration is advised to work closely with their citizens and encourage new forms of participation. On the other hand, very little is know about the urban activist themselves, as some authors have expressed the impressions that often these movements don't grow beyond the creative and environmentally conscious bubble. Furthermore, as the city target itself around the urban activist milieu, the impact of the urban movements suddenly becomes unclear (Berglund, 2016). What is the impact of the urban activists in Helsinki? What are the implications, other than for the administration, also on the citizens, businesses and other relevant stakeholders in the city? What can we learn from observing the rise of this participatory culture among people?
3. Methodology

This chapter addresses the methodology followed for the study. It first argues the rise of more critical and socially engaged practices in user centered design and introduces the usage of video as the method chosen for gathering data and analyze it; the chapter reflects on the existing literature about video and documentaries techniques for designers and lay down the positioning of the thesis.

3.1 How designers can approach social studies?

Before starting the research, one of the first questions I pose to myself was if studying the implications of civic activism would have been a legitimate question for a designer. I started by looking at ways designers have addressed similar questions, and I looked into the recent developments in design research. Indeed new approaches have emerged and today many researchers are trying to map the landscape of design methods in, what has been described as, both “exciting” and “confusing” time (Sanders, 2006, p.1)*; Today the landscape of design methods can be divided in design-led or research-led, while the designer becomes, at times, the expert of the process or invite the users and other stakeholders as co-creators of future solutions (ibid, 2006, p.5).

In the expert mode, the designer/researcher looks at the people they research about / design for as subjects, or informers or users, asking questions providing stimuli and/or observing/probing a response. In this scenario, the people are often referred as the audience of the design act and the designers might also create things to provoke and/or communicate with other expert designers (ibid, 2006 p.5). On the other hand, with the participatory mindset, the researchers or designers invite the people who will benefit from design into the process as partners (ibid,2006. p.5); the participatory mindset builds on shared trust among the participants. Furthermore, the participatory approach is considered one of the major shifts in design, moving from a user centered design, where the trained researchers/designers observe and/or interview passive users, to co-designing with the users directly (Sanders & Stappers, 2006, p.5). Although historically, user centered design approaches have been US-driven, while participatory design (PD) originated in Scandinavia in the 1970s, today both approaches coexist and influence one another (ibid, 2006,.p5)

PD tradition builds on the notion that designers try to minimize the distance between contexts of use and design, creating familiarity and empathy with the users. Indeed, one of its core principles is Empathy, or the idea that “the more designers can live and experience the users’ emotions, the better they can transform the ideas and constraints into appealing and pleasing design solutions” (Mattelmäki et al, 2013, p.70). For this reasons, often participatory designers start with immersion in real-life situations to gain insight into experiences and meanings that form the basis for reflection, imagination, and design. As PD borrows methods from other disciplines, such as ethnography, for example, some of the methodologies at the use of participatory designers include user interviews, field observations, and other ethnographic techniques. The mindset and the practice of participatory design research were created in product design and design for emotions, started with the need to have a stronger connection with the users through contextual and experience-driven user studies; now design research has expanded to include more collaborative approaches and, as some researchers have argued, "radical twists". (Mattelmaki et al., 2013, p.70).
According to Sanders (2006), today design practitioners are witnessing a massive change in society, impacting on design practice as well: first of all, “people who are not educated in design are designing; the line between product and service is not longer clear; the boundaries between the design disciplines are blurring; the action now is in the fuzzy front end of the design development process with a focus on experiential rather than physical or material concerns;” (ibid, 2016, p.1). The result is in the rising interest of the business community in the value of design research and design thinking, as well as a series of buzzwords “being thrown around [that] today include co-creation, innovation, Web 2.0, empathic thinking, human-centered, people-centered, user-generated and so on.” (ibid, 2006, p.1). Nevertheless, in Europe design research community has been particularly focusing on participatory approaches to design, making PD a wide umbrella term that includes many different techniques and approaches.
Indeed, the objective of participatory design has recently expanded to address wider social processes and innovation, (see Mattelmaki al), becoming increasingly engaged in public spheres (Björgvinson et al., 2010). The notion of “Things”, introduced recently in the academic circles, suggests going beyond thinking in terms of products towards a view of Design that embraces working relations and “engagement with milieus where user driven design and innovation can take place”. (Ibid, p. 42). This shift from products and services to innovation brings enormous implications on Design practice: design is seen as an ongoing process, where co-creation and integration is continuously happening, and should not be seen only as being delimited to one single design project (Ibid, p. 43); rather than designing products and pleasurable experiences, the role of the designer is to work in communities and facilitate the construction of spaces where people can confront ideas and participate to create their own products and services.

The result is a constellation of approaches and methods to design for innovation and co-creation*. Koskinen has recently noticed that most of the recent developments in Design represent a form of New Social Design, starting from the considerations that Design is becoming increasingly immaterial and focus on social forces (Koskinen, 2016, p.18).

Designers are pushing the world of physical objects to the background and instead use social forces and processes as its material" (Koskinen, 2016, p.18).

Indeed, he describes three approaches to design social forms: he calls them “agonistic”, “convivial” or “conceptual”; the agonistic approach results generally in provocative designs that intend to provoke questions, lead to debate and enable to form opinions among the public; Here designers seek to create a rich discourse and offer the possibility for better collective decisions. When the aim is convivial, the aim is to form new community interactions that empower people to cope with everyday challenges; with clear references to the work of Desis Network in Milan, designers focus on social communities and become co-

*There are several strategies that researchers have discuss when it comes for designers to facilitate processes of change and innovation. To mention few of them: Björgvinson et al., (2012), proposes first to democratise innovation, suggesting the role for designers to infrastructure agnostic public spaces, or arenas made of heterogeneous participants in dispute among each other, and where dilemmas and controversies can emerge; this conflictual process is seen as a key factor to allow innovation to happen, through a kind of “agonism”. Similar critical approaches have been explored by other researchers in Participatory Design; for example, an important field of discussion is about the impact of design to construct publics, here seen as entities formed around matters of concerns (see Dantec & DiSalvo, 2013, DiSalvo, 2009). Building on the notion of publics brought by John Dewey at the beginning of the XX century, DiSalvo proposes to see matters of concern as subjective experiences of perceived situations and their consequences (Carl DiSalvo, 2014). By making the conditions and consequences of an issue apparent and known, designers can identify and articulate issues and ultimately facilitate publics to form. In this way DiSalvo brings into focus the capability of Design to increasing societal awareness, and enabling change, particularly at the political level, opening up more dialogical scenarios for Design [see design for debate]. This implies a particular agonistic, or adversarial, attitude to design. Finally I could not mention the work of Manzini, one of the pioneering researchers, together with Anna Meroni from DESIS Network, who brought participatory design to address themes of diffusion of social innovation: seen as creative solutions able to impact on social goals and create discontinuities with mainstream ways of doing and thinking, design for social innovation is “everything that expert design can do to activate, sustain, and orient processes of social change toward sustainability” (Mazini, 2015, p.62). Indeed, design happens thinking and acting by projects, through networks and coalitions of social actors in shared agreement (Ibid, 2015, p68-69). Designers become social actors themselves in a society in which, as Manzini points out, “everybody designs”. Whereas all of these approaches may seem different at a first analysis, they all fall in the categories presented by Koskinen (2016), being a form of Social Design.
designer of their own social goods. As a result, the design is often meant to live beyond the single projects. Finally, the conceptual approach aims at creating small interventions within existing communities intended to produce social good, usually borrowing methods from emphatic design and ethnography. The work is often the result of facilitation and co-creation processes with people and design becomes a form of exploration and expression for local communities. Interestingly, Koskinen proposes to look at New Social Design in the perspective of the earlier social movements in the 70s, such as Papanek’s Design for the Real World or Branzi’s Radical Design movement in Italy. As Koskinen writes, both Design practices take social causes as motivation for their work, with the only difference, quoting Branzi, that the “new generation of designers is happy changing the world in a molecular fashion without the utopic causes that animated the earlier generation” (Koskinen, 2016, p.18). I found this quote particularly interesting when looking at most of the recent development in design too.

To conclude, Design has evolved dramatically during the past 15 years, towards more immaterial objectives, including more radical approaches, rather focused on creating milieus of innovations than products that are useful and provide pleasurable experiences. My Thesis is positioned in this landscape of emerging socially engaged design practices, whereas urban activism becomes a legitimate subject to design for.

The methods I chose comes from user centered design primarily. Most of the data have been collected through in-depth interviews with the members of these organizations, observations during events and other informal conversations with some of their participants. Most of the interviews have been video recorded, as well some of the events I attended with the activists. I then used the video material to reflect on the insights gathered during the interviews and present them in form of documentary movie about the communities of activists observed.

The choice of using video as part of my methodology is linked to various reasons and personal interests. First of all, it is not the first time that designers have used video as material during their work. There is an extensive body of literature in participatory design, about the use of video in user studies as a source of documentation and, most importantly, an inspiration for the design of future objects or services (Buur, & Binder, & Brandt, 2000). Indeed, traditionally video has often been used to provide accountability for results, like in usability engineering or in ethnography field work; this has implied that the recordings

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*Table 6. Design seen as New Social Design (based on Koskinen, 2016)
themselves should not have affected the event being recorded, treating videography mostly as pure “hard data” (Buur et al, 2000). Nevertheless, working with recordings and editing of video materials has brought researchers to notice an ambiguity and open-endedness of interpretation, making videos dependent on who is observed, recording, editing and watching (Buur et al, 2000). As a result, video has gained a prominence in design research, advancing the idea that designers can work their way into a design problem by recording, editing and viewing video materials; recordings from contextual inquiry are no longer hard data, but the first attempt to create stories that frame the design problem and impose order on the complexity of everyday life (Buur et al, 2000, p.21).

Secondly, continuing the efforts of other researchers in HCI to explore the use of video in Design, a group of researchers from Royal College of Arts has started using the term Design Documentaries, to investigate the relationship between Filmmaking and Design. According to tho Raijmakers et al, (2006), “designers can benefit from films’ capabilities to preserve ambiguities and paradoxes instead of resolving them into univocal conclusions”, therefore exploring the elusive aspects of everyday life and understand it omits own terms (p. 229).

“Design documentaries serve as a source of both information and inspiration. They inspire through the direct connection with the rich fabric of the everyday; they inform through the vast amounts of high level and detailed information that film can bring across” (Raijmakers et all., 2006, p.237).

They describes a series of approaches to documentary filmmaking that are relevant for designers: best known documentary technique is often called “Fly-on-the-wall” or unmediated films where the filmmakers limit to observe without intervention, interviews, reenactment, or narration in the editing; the objective of such representations is to present reality as objective as possible, leaving the viewer the role of interpreter. Other approaches involve role-playing or re-enactment to allow filmmakers, instead, to shoot everyday situation several times, from different angles, and reconstruct these through editing as a compelling story; these techniques, seen also as “intervention” or “reconstruction”, have similarities with other techniques in Design, such as artefact walkthrough or video scenarios. Finally, filmmakers can revisit existing footage to construct, what is known as, compilation films, or record themselves as protagonists, being the performer and the director at the same time, forcing even more the filmmaker’s own interpretation to emerge; both techniques, in these cases, reference activities such as collages or video-diaries or video-letters more common in Design. Nevertheless, as Raijmakers et al, argue, Fly-on-the wall techniques could be the least useful for designers when looking for inspirations and opportunities to emerge. Indeed, quoting Bruzzi, what makes documentaries interesting is the dialectic that originates between the researcher/filmmaker and the rich reality that is filmed (Raijmakers et al., 2006, p230). The dialectic originates in the process of researching, collecting, and editing the film, by problematizing the relationship between the perspective of the filmmaker and the realities being filmed. In order to do this, Raijmakers et al. suggest to explore the opposites paradoxes and ambiguities that are part of the everyday life, rather than resolve them. Furthermore, according to Raijmakers et al., the difference from traditional documentaries lies in Design Documentaries being meant primarily to inspire design teams. By doing so, documentary approaches embrace the dialectic rather than opposing it, and Design Documentaries invite designers viewing them to accept, deny, questions, or offer perspective explicitly on offer.
7. FILMMAKING TECHNIQUES FOR DESIGNERS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Techniques</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fly-on-the-wall</td>
<td>The filmmakers limit to observe without intervention, interviews, reenactment, or narration in the editing; the objective of such representations is to present reality as objective as possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role-playing or re-enactment</td>
<td>It allow filmmakers to shoot everyday situation several times, from different angles, and reconstruct these through editing as a compelling story;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compilation films</td>
<td>Filmmakers can revisit existing footage to construct or record themselves as protagonists, being the performer and the director at the same time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 7. Filmmaking techniques for designers (based on Raijmakers et al., 2006)

Figure 24, Sony Nex-FS700E (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Nevertheless, the difference between Design Documentaries and traditional documentaries remains vague and even Raijmakers et al. conclude that further studies are required to investigate this aspect. Since the Thesis doesn’t seek to inspire any design team, or it is not its ultimate aim, like in the case of Raijmakers et al, I will limit to use the term "documentaries", referring to the opportunities for designers to take inspirations from documentaries films discussed earlier.

Indeed, particularly the notion of Documentaries brought by Raijmakers et al. is extremely interesting as it addresses the relationship between Design and Filmmaking, leveraging on the critical dimension of ethnographic material. The dialectic between reality filmed and the choices of the filmmaker, made in the phase of shooting and editing the video material, makes documentaries an highly inspiring and informative medium. By doing so, documentaries also hold a provocative aspect, as they invite the viewers to accept, question or deny the perspective narrated.

By the time I approached the communities of activists in Myyrmäki and Pasila, and I started filming their activities, I also developed a sub research question to frame the scope of my research:

**How documentaries can be used to explore the implications of urban activists in local communities?**

Since the literature about the relationship between filmmaking and design is limited*, I decided to involve a professional filmmaker in to the design process, and assure the most out of using documentaries. I recognized that my design competences were not enough to execute my research. I invited a Finnish photographer, whose work has been already focusing on social and political issues in society. I contacted him through my personal network and I presented to him my research plan. His name is Mikko Kerttula, he has been producing independent documentary projects and works as freelancer since 2008; holds a photography degree at the Lahti Institute Of Design and Fine Arts and in 2016, received his M.A in Photojournalism from the international programme of Mid Sweden University. We started filming the documentary in April 2017 and ended in June 2017. Since we did not have any budget reserved for the project, I counted on the resources available for the students at Aalto University Studios. For this reasons the involvement of Mikko has been limited to assist myself as camera man during the shootings and interviews, as well as coaching and commenting during the editing and production phase. In the future we hope to collaborate more together and receive fundings to invest in the project. Having said this, the documentary is done by me and Mikko in collaboration.

**Role and responsibilities between the designer and the filmmaker**

**Designer (Me)**

Director, interviewer, second camera man, video editing

**Filmmaker (Mikko)**

Camera man, lights, audio and support during the editing

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*See for example stbyblogs.eu/designdocumentaries/

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Figure 25, Mikko (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Figure 26, aereo shot with Canon Mark II (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Figure 27, Panorama in Myyrmaki (picture taken by the author, 2017)
8. USING DOCUMENTARIES AS APPROACH TO DESIGN

Table 8. Using documentaries as approach to design (modified by the author based on Sandersa & Stappers, 2006)
3.3 Conclusions

Finally, the thesis takes a critical approach rather than participatory; it takes the expert mindset as the starting point and it employs video as the material of design. The users are seen rather as informants than partners; moreover, as the thesis takes inspiration from documentaries, it explores the provocative role of ethnographic material, to reflect on the interview data and probe new questions about the subject observed.

Furthermore, I involved a professional filmmaker during the process to assure high-quality filming and benefit from specific expertise around film production and filmmaking.

To conclude, even though, the approach in the thesis can not be argued as participatory design, it shares the same social concern with PDers, as it aims not at contributing to design new products or services. Nevertheless, the boundaries of where and how documentaries are positioned as a design tool are open, since it has not been largely addressed in the design research literature.

For this reason, I will further analyze this particular choice in the final chapter, reflections, and attach my considerations for further studies.
This chapter introduces the findings from the research.

The observations have been gathered during March 2017 and May 2017 when I followed two communities of urban activists in Helsinki and interviewed some of their most active members. I used the production of a short documentary reporting the “life in the field” as a technique to reflect on the interviews material and field notes; the operation of framing the most important scenes and building the narrative for the documentary, helped me to make sense out of the research material and identify a set of implications of the urban activists on the everyday life of the residents in the neighbourhood.

4. Research findings

To begin with, it is important to introduce the hypothesis from which I started my research. During the background studies, I developed a series of hypotheses that guided me to form my research questions and frame the focus for the interviews. As a consequence, when I approached the urban activists for the first time, I seek to argue the hypothesis through in-depth interviews and observations. The discussion that followed gave me insights on if and how the hypotheses were validated or not.

4.1 Hypothesis

One of the motivation of the urban activists is to have fun - urban activism is a leisure activity.

Urban activism channels people dissatisfaction about how the city is developed by the authorities.

Urban activism impact primarily on city marketing and culture revitalisation of suburbs.

Only creative people are involved or those with prior activist experience.

Urban activism attracts primarily citizens from the middle class, averagely young and familiar with digital technologies.

Residents who are not active on social media are left out and don’t participate to improve the neighbourhood together with the urban activists.

Urban activism is generally welcomed and accepted by the residents.

All of these hypotheses were formed starting from the background material I explored during the first phase of the project. As the focus of the research is to reflect on the implications of Urban Civic Activism on the everyday life of the residents in the neighborhood, I framed each of these hypotheses from the point of view of what urban civic activism means for citizens and what implications have in their life.

I structured a series of questions to conduct semi-structured interviews with the activists. The interviews followed the logic of ethnographic in-depth interviews, including only open questions, encouraging the interviewee to talk as much as possible leaving the interviewer the role of listener.

Together with the interviews, I also participated in a series of events organized by the activists and observed their interactions with the other residents and stakeholders in the neighborhood. Overall I took part in 6 different events.
### 9. INTERVIEWS QUESTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How the activists see themselves and their activity in the neighbourhood.</td>
<td>What is your role in the organisation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is the aim of your organisation?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What is the best word to describe your work?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When did you realise you were an urban activist?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What role do you see your organisation to play now and in the future?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the challenges for your organisation today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the activists interact with the residents and other stakeholders in the neighbourhood</td>
<td>How do you encourage other residents to take part to your initiatives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How is the relationship with public authorities and other stakeholders in the neighbourhood?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How active are residents in the neighbourhood?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How other people sees your organisation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What kind of feedback do you receive?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the opinions and beliefs of the urban activists and what urban civic activism means for them.</td>
<td>What do you think about the current phenomenon of urban activism in Helsinki?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What would you suggest to other people who would like to be more active in their neighbourhood?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 10. FIELD OBSERVATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who</th>
<th>What</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Myyrmäki</td>
<td>One planning meeting organised to discuss the arrangement of the annual event called “night of the arts”, taking place regularly every August in Myyrmäki and attracting many visitors from the region. The event involved a group of activists from Myyrmäki liike, representatives of local youth organisations, the local art museum and a group of street artists. The event took place in the local co-working space run by the activists themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasila Liike</td>
<td>Two planning meeting organised to brainstorm ideas about what activities to promote, areas to improve and other practicalities related to their organisation. Both events saw a group of 7 - 12 residents involved and they took place in the communal spaces located in both of the two main organisers’s apartment buildings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One placemaking intervention event where the activists turned two empty squares in the neighborhood in one pop-up cafeteria and one pop-up restaurant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One guerilla gardening intervention to turned a wasted green area in a urban garden for the residents .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helsinki Urban Art</td>
<td>One mural painting workshop organised by the activists of Helsinki Urban Art at Pasila Railway Station.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. TIMELINE

Planning

I met Mikko, I formulated the hypothesis and we started planning the interviews and shootings together.

Filming

We started by attending the planning meeting organized by Pasila Liike and Myyrmäki liike.

We interviewed Jeeni, Klaus, and Jaakko.

Meanwhile, I attended the restaurant day in Helsinki and the same day I visited the pop-up cafes organized by Jalmari and Paulina from Pasila liike.

I visited back Pasila to film the gardening event organized by Jalmari when I had the opportunity to interview him afterward.

Finally, I attended the painting event organized by Helsinki Urban Art to paint the Railway station in Pasila.

Analysis & editing

The analysis is explained in details at p.63

Figure 28, Mikko filming the big murales “this is it” in Myyrmaki (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Figure 29. Jalmari is interviewed (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Figure 30. Pasila-liike logo designed by Jalmari (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Figure 31, Pasila liike first meeting (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Figure 32, Pasila liike gardening intervention (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Figure 33, One of the activists from Pasila liike is taking care of the urban garden (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Figure 34, Pasila liike pop up cafe (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Figure 35, Aerial view of Pasila Liike Pop Up Cafe (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Figure 36, Jalmari and two other members of Pasila liike explores the neighborhood, looking for potential areas of intervention (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Figure 37, Planning meeting organised by Myyrmäki Liike (Kerttula, 2017)
Figure 38, Mikko is setting up the microphones for the interviewees (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Figure 39, Interview with Jenni and Klaus from Myyrmäki Liike (Kerttula, 2017)
Figure 40. Mikko is filming one of the murales painted by the activists in Myyrmäki (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Figure 41, Setting up the interview with Jaakko (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Figure 42, Me interviewing Jaakko Bloberg from Helsinki Urban Art (Kerttula, 2017)
Figure 43, Two participants take a selfie at the painting event organised by Helsinki Urban Art in the Pasila Station (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Figure 44, Short video posted on Facebook about Pasila painting event organised by Helsinki Urban Art (screen captured by the author, 2017)
Figure 45. Me and Mikko reviewing the video material (Kukkonen, 2017)
4.3 Analysis

The data was gathered in the format of video recordings, and I used to edit it in form of short documentaries as a way to analyze it. The following paragraph will explain in more details the process.

First of all, I approached the analysis in two phases:
At the beginning, I analyzed the data by clustering the observation and notes from the interviews in 5 major themes; the themes were identified by grouping together extracts from the video interviews and shootings from the field that expressed similar view points or subjects, identifying, therefore, a series of repeating patterns. I created 5 short documentaries that focused on each of the identified themes and helped to visualize the first set of findings from the interviews.

Themes

- the process of participation promoted by the activists
- the visions of the activists about the development of their neighbourhood
- the relationship between the activists and the City authorities and other public organisations
- the motivations and reasons for the activists to be active
- the skills and know how of the activists

In the first phase, I focused on reporting what I saw on the field and what I heard from the interviewees, limiting mainly to the activists’ point of view. My role became the one of an observer that carefully try to catch the important aspects of the subject and communicate them in a clear format; indeed the 5 short documentaries I created at this stage, out of the first collection of videos, were mainly informative, focused primarily on what important aspects the activists presented to me.

As I wanted to investigate the implications of their actions on the everyday life of the residents, I engaged again with the video material from the field, this time trying to develop a personal interpretation of what I observed. I used the short documentaries as a source of reflection, and this time I played the role of a spectator who critically observes the subject represented and questions its implications and meanings:

Reflections

- What does it mean to be an urban activists?
- What are the rights of the residents in regard to the public space in the neighbourhood?
- What is the role of social media in the neighbourhood?
- What are the roles of public authorities?
- Are there any conflicts that the activists create?
I reframed the short documentaries in one single narrative that highlights the impact of the activists on the everyday life of the residents according to the interpretation I developed observing and editing the video material. These represent also the two final findings of my research. Here follow the findings, accompanied with real quotes from the interviewed to better explain the context and reasons why they matter.

1. Urban Civic Activists are renegotiating the rights and responsibilities of citizens to use the public space, challenging the divisions of roles and duties between residents and public authorities

Urban activism offers an innovative way to look at the public space, inviting the residents to take ownership of it and use it as they wish; indeed, the urban activists themselves often are brought together by a strong vision how they would like the public space to be, which they try to achieve through direct interventions in the urban space. To be more precise, the urban activists I interviewed shared all the same personal interest to "make their home their own" and take ownership of the public spaces in the neighborhood. As these movements represent, first of all, groups of "like-minded people", most of their members share the same vision to improve their neighborhood as home: the key goals of the movements are often to build a sense of community, improve the green areas and other urban spaces, promote cultural activities or, simply, improve the atmosphere of the neighborhood.

“One of my dreams is to make Pasila a place that is unique or that people would come from abroad to see it.”

Jaakko

“I want to see Pasila as a place for grassroots initiatives and not only for shopping malls and other economic alternatives.”

Jalmari

I identified two major topics that represent implications on the everyday life of the residents in the neighborhood:

**Implications**

1. **First of all, the urban activist are renegotiating the rights and responsibilities of citizens to use the public space**

2. **Second, the interventions of the activists is challenging the formal process of participation.**

Findings

4.4

Through this second reflection, I identified two major topics that represent implications on the everyday life of the residents in the neighborhood:
Figure 46, Construction of new apartments and shopping mall in Pasila (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Figure 47, Walk in the neighborhood with the activists of Pasila Liike (Kerttula, 2017)
Figure 48, Passenger in Myyrmäki (Kerttula, 2017)
Figure 49, This Is It - Murales painted by Myyrmäki liike at the local Art Museum in Myyrmäki (Kerttula, 2017)
Figure 50, A passenger is commenting on the idea of Jalmari to turn the empty lot in a urban garden in Pasila (picture taken by the author, 2017)
As the activists take ownership of the public space, by organizing a mural painting, building an urban garden, or opening an outdoor café on the street, a series of questions arise: is the public space, still public? whose right is to choose what is the theme for the mural? whose responsibility is to cultivate and maintain an empty green lot? Furthermore, what else can people do in the public space? what are citizens allowed to do and not to do when using the public space?

“During our urban garden intervention, a passersby came to ask if we had any permission to do it...we told him not, we are just a group of citizens trying to make the area nicer”

Jalmari

“We are making our home our own,... we have a lot of underpasses here, what else can we do with them, rather than paint a nice piece of art?”

Klaus

Furthermore, these questions have deep consequences also on the power structures of the neighborhood, since they modify the traditional relationship between residents and public authorities in charge of planning. If citizens become co-creators of the public space, what roles is the municipality playing? Furthermore, when citizens organize themselves collectively, what roles have other public organizations such as neighborhood associations and other non-profit organization working for the territory? These questions will remain unanswered as the roles and responsibilities of the residents is not redefined first.
2. Urban Civic Activists are challenging the formal process of participation.

The groups of urban activists operate often independently, organizing primarily their action on social media platforms; their planning meetings, public hearings or voting sessions are always informally organized and advertised primarily through social media. Indeed, it is often that the groups come up first with ideas, post it on social media, organize a meeting to discuss it further and try to act with semi-temporary interventions. This way of acting, challenge the formal channels of participation, such as public hearings or voting sessions, like those organized by the official neighborhood association or city local councils

“when you join our Facebook group, you don’t have to pay any membership fee, wait for meetings to present your ideas,.... if I want to turn the lot in front of my apartment building in a café or urban garden, I would just rather do it than ask for another organisation approval”

Jalmari
Some of the groups are not very organized, don’t have boards of members, regular elections, offices and all the communications may happen informally through various social networks. On the other hand, it is important to underline that these groups are not exclusive but always promote collaboration and all the decisions are openly documented and shared over the social media; nevertheless, even the activists themselves* recognise that those who are not familiar with these tools, or are not aware, are at risk to be excluded.

“social media makes it so easy and quick to participate, on the other hand you have this hearings organised from the city where only elderly people attend”

Jaakko

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Figure 52. Video shared on Facebook by Helsinki Urban Art after painting a square (screen captured by the author, 2017)
Figure 53. One activist from Pasila Liike shows some ideas to another member of the group (Kerttula, 2017)
Nevertheless, depending on the interactions on social media, also the physical interventions promoted by the activists have an impact on the level of community engagement: all the activists I interviewed recognised that their interventions work as platform of participation for the other residents: Myymäki liike, for example, tends to organise workshops alongside when painting the murals, where residents and passengers can take part and participate to paint together; by doing so, people meet the street artists, discuss with the organisers and have the opportunity to take part in their initiatives.

“When we do street art we usually organise a workshop to invite people to brainstorm, vote proposals, participate painting - it is a way for people to take part”

Jenni
When the activists in Pasila-liike started planning the guerrilla gardening action to intervene in an abandoned lot in the neighborhood, they also organized a pop-up restaurant to promote the ideas and discuss with the residents how to improve the neighborhood.

"we decided to start from community gardening, because is very visible, practical"

Jalmari

"I organised a pop up restaurant to discuss with other people how we could improve the public spaces in the neighbourhood"

Jalmari

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Figure 54, One passerby take part to the painting of Pasila Station organised by Helsinki Urban Art (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Figure 55, Screenshot from the video posted on Facebook by Helsinki Urban Art about the painting of Pasila Railway Station (screen captured by the author, 2017)
Figure 56, One passenger writes "Pasila Liike" on the ground while waiting to be served at the pop up cafe organised by Jalmari in Pasila (picture taken by the author, 2017)
Figure 57, Screenshots from the online article published on Vantaan Sanomat about the impact of the street art movement promoted by Myymäki Liike on the public opinion (screen captured by the author, 2017)
These forms of offline and tactical participation accompany the one happening on the social media, working as an additional antenna for the activists to reach to the community.

Nevertheless, it is not yet clear how dissensus, for example, is expressed through this channels. When I interviewed the activists of Myyrmäki-liike, they reported that they have never submitted any official survey to the residents in the area to collect feedback about their initiatives. The local newspaper, instead, submitted a survey to their readers, in 2016, asking ”Does Myyrmäki have to many graffiti?” - the answers were for more than 90% ”no”. Nevertheless, the survey covered 752 responses, leaving opened the question if and how other residents are enabled to advance other views than the ones promoted by the activists.

4.5
Summary of the research

The results show that Urban activism, when takes the form of local movements, starts often from the individual vision of a group of residents interested to improve the neighborhood. In this way, it represents an act of power that disrupts the structure of the local community, by empowering groups of residents to take ownership of the public space and transform it according to their own vision. By doing so, the meaning of public space is challenged, the rights of the citizens to use the public space and who has the responsibilities to developed it.

Furthermore the process of participation is challenged, as the activists often operate spontaneously, proactively, and through tactical interventions, using social media as main form of communication: therefore a series of questions emerge that suggest further research how participation is facilitated with the new offline-online model, how consensus is built and how dissensus is expressed.

To conclude, as the urban activists intervene on the public space and interact on social media, they are renegotiating the rights and responsibilities of citizens to use the public space as well as the process to participate and collectively develop the neighborhood according to a common vision, co-created and crowdsourced. These findings add shades to the more generalist scenario of a civic renaissance, often associated with the urban activists in Helsinki, as well as enriches the more simplistic idea of the urban activist just as citizens having fun together.

Finally, the same notion of urban activism becomes controversial when thinking of a possible adoption as a mainstream practice. The role of the urban activists that I described resulted being firstly a group of like-minded people, driven by strong individual visions and personal commitment to improving the neighborhood. As they produce, undoubtedly, a counter-effect on the community, by bringing the change they want to see, this practice represents a form of activism. Nevertheless the notion of activism suggests the need to remain a minority in order to be seen as counter movement to the mainstream views of development and participation in the city; it becomes evident to reframe this phenomenon differently if we want to encourage the adoption of its practices by a larger group of people; moreover, as the process of renegotiation continue and the practices of the activists will be recognised as normal and part of the everyday life of every resident, it will not be a form of activism anymore.
This research presents two implications of urban civic activism for the residents in two neighborhoods in the Helsinki region. The results have been identified through editing the video materials collected during the research phase. In order to analyze the data, I produced up to 5 short documentaries which I used as a mean to cluster the information, identify patterns and reflect upon their implications. The result is one documentary that presents, in a unified narrative, a collection of the most important scenes. Although constructing the documentary has served as form of reflection and analysis of the data collected during the research, it also represents its main outcome, presenting the final findings; The documentary, therefore, invites the audience to reflect if and how civic urban activism is renegotiating the roles and responsibilities of citizens to use the public space and take part to improve the urban areas in their neighbourhoods. The total length of the documentary is 23 mins and the main language is English.

“*The title is inspired by a quote of Pedro Aibeo, architect and activist I interviewed during the early exploratory phase when I was mapping the context of urban civic activism in Helsinki and framing the research question. I contacted Pedro through my thesis advisor Wu Yiyings contacts. She appointed me to him after he gained popularity for opposing the construction project of the new Guggenheim museum in Helsinki. I decided to interview him, to better understand his motivation, how he approached the ‘No-Guggenheim’ protest and how he gathered support; while he was trying to explain me his strategy, he used the expression “not all the activists go on the streets with flags”, referring to the stereotype of the political activism of the 60s, and 70s. The conversation with Pedro opened my eyes to the world of activism and the role of active citizens in our society. I decided to title the documentary with the same expression, trying to question if the active citizens I interviewed would be considered activists in the first place. Few weeks after I met Pedro, he joined the left party and run the municipality elections in Helsinki. Today he is still active on the public scene, while he is employed as a researcher at Aalto University.*"
The title* of the documentary is:

“not all the activists go on the street with flags”

The title refers to the common opinion that activism refers to political demonstrations and protesting against authorities. In this way the title works as a provocation, introducing to the controversy if urban civic activism could be considered a form of activism in the first place. The documentary aims at confronting the audience with the implications raised in this research and develop an opinion about the phenomenon of Civic Urban Activism; What is it? What does it mean for our society? What can citizens do or not in the city?

### 12. THE STRUCTURE OF THE DOCUMENTARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part 1</td>
<td>Introduction to the activists and the neighbourhoods: Here the activists introduce their background and the moment the became interested to urban activism; they also describes their attachment to neighbourhoods where they lived and what are their opinions about them. The voice of the activists overlay long shots taken of the neighbourhoods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2</td>
<td>Description of the activities: the activists explain the initiatives they promote, the reasons behind and the interactions they have with the other residents. The scenes from the interviews are alternated with shootings taken during the events that I attended, showing the context and background of the statements of the interviewees. The activists also address the role that social media plays in their organisation, and how it affects the process of participation in the neighbourhood and the new opportunities it brings to the residents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 3</td>
<td>Dreams for the neighbourhoods and the mindset of the activists: the final chapter closes with the dreams and hopes of the activists for their neighbourhoods, revealing a similarity of interests and mindset towards what kind of future they see.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 59. Meeting in Pasila - min. 19.40 (screen captured by the author, 2017)
Figure 60. Klaus explains the geography of Vantaa - min. 2.25 (screen captured by the author, 2017)
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Figure 62, Restaurant day in Helsinki - min. 21.34 (screen captured by the author, 2017)
Figure 63, Restaurant day in Helsinki - min. 1.38 (screen captured by the author, 2017)
5. Reflections

5.1 How designers can explore the implications of active citizens on the everyday life of the residents in the neighbourhood?

During my research, I combined ethnographic methods to documentaries techniques to engage with two groups of urban activists and study their role in the neighborhoods. My process of analysis revealed that documentaries can help designers to make sense out of qualitative data, and reflect on the insights through the act of framing them in a coherent and unique narrative.

By first clustering the video material in themes and reviewing them separately, I identified two major implications that the activists bring to the everyday life of two communities in the region of Helsinki. Indeed, while constructing the documentary, I first immersed myself in the reality filmed, identifying the repetitive patterns brought within the interviews and observations, playing, what I called, the role of an observer. I then developed a critical perspective towards the material filmed, by reviewing the videos by themes, and playing, this time, the role of a spectator, that questions the reality presented.

Furthermore, during and after the research, the ethnographic material can be explored and used as a source of inspiration if video recorded; in particular, the format of documentary allows designers to develop a dialectic, as Raijmakers defined it, between the reality filmed and their own perspective. The tensions that are created makes documentary films highly inspiring and provocative as they invite the viewers to accept, questions or deny the perspective on offer.

5.2 What are the benefit of using documentaries as a technique when studying local communities?

From the experience of this study, documentaries can be of great help for designers when exploring the implications of social practices such as urban activism. The documentary helps the researcher to question the reality observed, search the hidden tensions and bring possible controversies to emerge. The production of a short-documentary played a central part in the thesis; The documentary worked as an initiator for the research, mean through which develop knowledge about the activists and, of course, the final outcome of the research.

To start with, the purpose of producing a short documentary gave me a concrete motive to enter the communities and observed their activity; as a design researcher studying local communities, it is possible that the members of the groups would question, mistrust or simply don’t understand my role and relationship. Likely approaching the activists with the purpose to film their activities in a documentary film, made me being recognized as the filmmaker from the very beginning; this profile resulted being a relative familiar role for these groups, as they are used to receive a lot of attention from media reporters and various journalists.

The documentary helped me to obtain a clear role in the communities and became a purpose for collaboration; indeed, during the research the activists started inviting me to specific events they considered relevant for the documentary and therefore contribute to it; in fact, the production of the documentary represented in this context a shared goal, since the movements would benefit from it also as source for publicity. After all, it is arguable that, in the context of urban activist movements, the documentary resulted in a
A successful strategy to approach and study the communities. The act of filming the documentary had also important implications for my own process of research, as I already discussed in the analysis: indeed, the use of a video camera, helped me to develop a critical distance from the subject I was observing and reflect on the implications of my observations; some of the findings were developed while shooting on the field, and, more importantly, during the editing of the material in post-production. Finally, the documentary represents also the final outcome of my research, contributing to spread information about urban civic activism with a wider public. The narrative presents the activists’ activity in the neighborhood and highlights their impact on the every day of the residents. The final version of the documentary reflects also my own interpretation about the implications of urban civic activism, allowing the viewer to confront to it and form an opinion. By accepting, denying, or offering an alternative interpretation, the documentary contributes to the discussion about Urban Civic Activism in Helsinki.

Figure 64, Facebook post by Pauliina after the gardening session in Pasila (screen captured by the author, 2017)
What other themes can be explore through documentaries?

In the context of urban civic activism, the same approach could be applied to other forms of citizens driven initiatives. According to the categorization proposed by Mäenpää and Faehnle (2017), urban civic activism takes various forms. As this documentary focus only on local movements, it should rather be seen part of a series of chapters about citizens movements in the city: for example, what are the implications of online p2p networks on the development of more sustainable life styles? How Hacktivism and other civic hackathons are mobilizing civil society? What are the implications of time banks and other citizens created encrypted currencies?

What other approaches can be followed?

First of all, it was my intention to involve a professional filmmaker to better benefit from applying documentary techniques during the process. Unfortunately, I have to admit that the lack of resources and budget limited Mikko’s role to be marginal during the research. Since he did not always have time to join during the production, I ended up holding a major role and responsibility in making the decisions during the scripting and editing phase. This has probably led the production of the documentary to be rather amatorial than professional.

For this reason, using documentaries as design tool require further attention and research. One aspect that comes up during the research, which I did not explore, is the use of participatory documentaries. With participatory documentaries, I refer to an experimental approach to filmmaking which builds upon user generated contents (see Green et al. 2015, Aston, & Gaudenzi, 2012). Participatory documentaries are particularly fashioned thanks to the spread of digital technologies and sharing platforms such as YouTube and...

### 13. NEXT DOCUMENTARIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of activism</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other local movements</td>
<td>Kallio liike, Kannelmaki liike, Jatkasaari movement, ARTOVA, Hertikan pumppu, Saaremme...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-to-peer groups</td>
<td>online Flea Markets, REKO Groups and community supported agriculture, Refugees Hospitality Club and other support groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City events</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban Planning</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Alternative economy</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student activism</td>
<td>Student groups, Aalto Entrepreneurship Society, Slush...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How to take into considerations issues of gender equality and social inclusion?

After reviewing the video material I noticed that I favored largely the presence of male actors over female characters. As a consequence the documentary could give the wrong impression that the activists’ movements in Helsinki are male-driven or lack the presence of women; none of this is true, or at least I don’t have any evidence to argue it. On the contrary, I met many women in the groups I described, for example Paulina, who founded Pasila liike together with Jalmari, but she does not appear talking in the documentary. The reasons for the presence of more male interviewees than female ones is purely accidental. When I approached the groups I let them choose who would have been interviewed, except for Jalmari, who was my friend and, therefore, it was easier and faster for me to approach.

Nevertheless, it is not an excuse, as gender equality requires extreme attention and the documentary could lead to the wrong assumption. Therefore, for further iterations, the designer/filmmaker should consider more carefully whose voices are expressed in the documentary and allow an equal presence of opinions.

Vimeo. A famous example is, undoubtedly, Life in a Day*, directed by Kevin Macdonald and produced by Ridley Scott in 2010. 80,000 contributors uploaded their clips to YouTube, and let the team of editors turn their footage into a movie that captured a day of human experience in the world. In 2013 a similar experiment was conducted in Italy when Gabriele Salvatores directed Italy in a Day*; 44,000 videos were uploaded on the official website in less than three weeks and resulted in 1h15min long documentary about the country.

Participatory documentaries could bring even more opportunities for designers has they would move closer to participatory design tradition; users would become design partner and co-creators of the narrative in the documentary and opens up more collaborative scenarios.

Here follows a series of questions I pose to myself during the final stage of my research, but which have remained unanswered as they require further studies and investigations among the literature.

1. How documentaries can be used as a form of design intervention?

The first suggestion is to research if and how the use of documentaries could be considered a form of design intervention, as very little literature has been produced in this regard. According to Buur and Rajmakers, video and design documentaries have the impact to inspire and spark discussion, particularly among designers in the early phase of research or to engineering teams when presenting user requirements. Nevertheless, both researchers haven't addressed the role of video documentaries in wider social contexts, such as local communities for example: how documentaries can be used as an intervention to design for local communities? How can films be used not only by designers but by citizens, public authorities, local businesses, NGOs in the context of Urban Civic Activism?

With Design intervention, I refer to a specific method of research where the design act is to intervene materially in people’s everyday experiences and study problematics not yet emerged (see Halse & Boffi, 2016). For this reason,

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*See youtube.com/user/lifeinaday
*See italyinaday.rai.it
the aim of a design intervention is to generate an event that describes future matters of concern, and in this way is future oriented (Halse, p.147). The term “interventions” has become particularly prominent within Design Anthropology (see DiSalvo, 2016), and researchers within this field are arguing that design interventions are particularly suitable to study phenomena that are incoherent, unsettled or “in process of being conceptually and physically articulated” (Halse & Boffi, 2016, p.89). This makes Design Intervention an interesting approach to study the implications of Civic Urban Activism as the intention is particularly to emerge issues and conflicts not yet apparent. Therefore, what kind of interventions could be designed to study the implications of urban civic activism, and most importantly, how documentaries can be used to facilitate these problematics to emerge? In other terms, what happened after a design documentary is presented?

As my research doesn’t include the observations after the documentary, I can not argue these questions. Nevertheless, from the literature on documentaries studies and Filmmaking some leads can be found; documentaries have always been recognise having a political impact, vehicles for social change. Whiteman has recently argued that, the traditional “distribution model”, focused primarily on the effects a documentary may have on individuals reached through mainstream channels, leaves little space to assess the impact of documentaries (2007, p.62). He instead proposes to look at documentary filmmakers as “being immersed in a larger policy process”, whereas the documentary becomes an “intervention” into a complex and on-going network of activists and policy makers concerned about the issue raised in the documentary (ibid, 2007, p.63). Indeed, “producers and activists trying to maximise, political impact, scholars seeking to understand political impact, benefit from conceptualising the production and distribution of a social-issue documentary as an intervention into a policy process” (Whiteman, 2007, p.63)

According to Whiteman, activists and policy makers becomes of more interest than individual citizens, as, most likely, the documentary could be used by either one of them to approach elites, mobilise other groups and change public policies. Finally, from design point of view, if documentaries become a form of intervention, what designers can observe from the distribution of such documentaries into complex social networks. Furthermore, since the political aspects of design documentaries haven’t yet been explored and, in general, how designers could use documentaries techniques to address processes of social change, a second question emerge.

2. what are the impacts of documentaries to bring change?
This question builds on a similar intuition that documentaries may work as a form of intervention in local communities but brings a new set of academic implications.

If documentaries hold the opportunity to facilitate social change and impact on society, how design documentaries can be used as a form of Design Activism? Design activism is an approach recently emerged and not yet widely explored. Indeed, during the past 50 years, Design has often fallen into commercial logics, focusing primarily on consumeristic purposes. The questions if and what design can do to promote a better society were mostly left behind. In the recent years, design activism has gained interest both by researchers and practitioners in design. The term has been since then explored and argued by different authors (Thorpe 2008, Fuad-Luke 2009, Julier 2013, Markkussen 2013). Today, within the emergency brought by the global crises, there is a growing interest in design’s ability to contribute to social impact; Indeed, according to various authors, designers have always tried to address social causes of various nature, starting from the suffragette movement to AdBusters, (Thorpe 2008, Fuad-Luke 2009); but, the rise of geopolitical, economic and environmental concerns is seen particularly as one cause for the emergence of Design Activism as approach (Julier, 2013, p.226). Design activism is not the work of writing manifestos or designing political posters (Julier, 2013, p.219); neither deals with boycotts,
In conclusion, documentaries help the researcher to question the reality observed, search the hidden tensions and bring possible controversies to emerge. In the case of urban activism, when takes the form of local movements, I was able to identify two implications urban civic activist bring to the everyday life of the citizens: it represents an act of power that disrupts the structure of the local community, by empowering groups of residents to take ownership of the public space and transform it according to their own vision. By doing so, the meaning of public space is challenged, the rights of the citizens to use the public space and who has the responsibilities to developed it is also questioned. Furthermore, the process of participation is challenged, as the activists often operate spontaneously, using social media; indeed, from my study, a series of questions emerge that suggest researching how participation is facilitated when using offline-online models and how dissensus can be expressed.

From the experience of this study, documentaries can be of great help for designers when exploring the implications of social practices, such as urban activism. The documentary worked as an initiator for the research, mean through which develop knowledge about the activists and, of course, the final outcome of the research. Documentaries can be used within an expert mindset, where the expertise of the designer/filmmaker is used to frame the information provided by the users/informants; by doing so, the video format of the documentary allows also to provoke and reflect on the subject observed and probe new question in the mind of its audience.

On the other hand, new approaches, such as participatory documentaries, suggest also to explore a different role for the users, not only as informant/audience but co-creators and partners. As a consequence, a series of questions are left for further studies: How documentaries can be used as design intervention? And, how could they bring social and political impact?
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Figure 53, One activist from Pasila Liike shows some ideas to another member of the group. Photo taken by Kerttula. Rights reserved by the author

All the other photos are taken by the author
Appendix

Appendix 1 - list of people interviewed during the exploratory phase

Anna Hurmeranta - Youth Council
Jalmari Sarla - Civil servant at the Planning department of City of Helsinki and activist in Pasila liike
Cindy Kohtala - Researcher, activist in O2 Global Network
John W. Fail - Artist, founder at Temporary
Pedro Aibeo - Active citizen, candidate to municipal elections, architect and researcher
Jaakko Blomberg - Activist, part of non profit organization Yhteisma
Petteri Niskanen - Resident in Myyrmäki, activist in Myyrmäki liike
Maria Nordlund - Student from the department of Architecture at Aalto University. Activist in Dodo

Appendix 2 - link to the documentary [YouTube]

https://youtu.be/UF501Q08dXI

Appendix 3 - interview script for the activists in Myyrmäki liike/ Pasila liike/ Helsinki Urban art

What is your name? What is your role in your organization?
How could you describe your organization?
What is your organization trying to achieve?
When did you start? How many people are part of the team? What projects are you promoting at the moment?
Could you describe your typical day?
What is the best word to describe your work?
How did you become an activist? and Why?
When did you realise you were an urban activist?
Many people describe your initiatives as a form of “participatory urban culture” - what is it? what do you think about it?
Why the focus on street art?
Do you see a role of art in place-making today?
Do you think your organization is setting an example for promoting street art and co-create urban culture in the cities?
What are the challenges for your organization today?
What role do you see your organization to play in the future?
If you would chose one thing, what would you like to see changed in the future?
What is your opinion on the current phenomenon of urban activism?
You are considered one of the pioneer, how does it sound to you?
Why do you think Helsinki has seen an explosion of grassroots movements and activist initiatives during the past years? What make this city particularly active? What prevent this phenomenon to scale to other cities in Finland?
What do you think prevent other people to start doing this kind of activism?
What would you suggest to those who are trying to be more active, organising events or forming neighborhood groups? How could they learn?

All the information contained in this work have been shared under an agreement with the people involved during the study.