REFURBISHMENT PROJECT OF THE SUOMI-TALO IN BUENOS AIRES

Laura C. Zubillaga

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School of Arts, Design and Architecture
Aalto University
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ABSTRACT

This thesis work includes the description and analysis of the design process that took place while doing the refurbishment project proposal of the building which used to serve as the Finnish Seamen’s Church and the Finnish house (Suomi-talo) in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The proposal focuses on the refurbishment of the building in order to serve as a start-up hub for Finnish companies, willing to begin a new business in Argentina; and a meeting point of the Finnish community in Argentina, which has formerly used the premises as a church and gathering place. The building will bring together two communities with different characteristics and needs. My hypothesis of work is that both communities can clearly strengthen and benefit from each other.

The thesis’ main research question addresses how to refurbish a building so that it hosts both communities. At the same time how to achieve Finnish atmosphere in a building located in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The thesis consists of five sections. The initial section includes the assessment in person of the building in Buenos Aires along with a historical review of the area and the house. The second section consists in understanding the future users by conducting questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. A Human-centred design approach was chosen to develop the design process. The third section of the thesis includes the analysis of functions and current usage of three premises of the Finnish Seamen’s Mission, the association which established the Finnish Seamen’s Church in Buenos Aires. Through the analysis of three Finnish Pavilions at the World Fair Expos, the fourth section introduces research on how Finland has portrayed itself abroad. The fifth phase presents the development of the design and the description of the proposal based on insights gathered and analysed during the previous phases.

Keywords: refurbishment, Suomi-talo, Finnish atmosphere, human-centred design, start-up, Buenos Aires, collaborative space
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This thesis includes the description and analysis of the design process that took place while conducting the refurbishment project of the building which used to serve as the Finnish Seamen’s Church and the Finnish house (Suomi-talo) in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The project was born as part of a commission by the Finnish company Tango Alliance Ltd, aiming to create in the premises a co-working space for Finnish start-up companies.

The building is nowadays owned by the Ibero-American Finnish Foundation and it has been uninhabited since 2008.

I was acquainted with the building in February 2016, when I was asked by Pekka Heikkinen, a board member at Ibero-American Finnish Foundation, to make a photography building survey of the house during my trip to Argentina, my home country.

One year later, the Ibero-American Finnish Foundation started conversations with Tango Alliance Ltd., a development company working on start-ups and ecosystems up growth. On that occasion, I was asked to develop a proposal for an adaptive reuse of the building in order to evaluate the feasibility of setting up a start-up hub.

Starting a venture abroad implies a connection between its local and foreign culture. I also considered it essential and beneficial to foster a connection between brand-new companies and the Finnish community in Buenos Aires in the development of spaces to enhance this collaboration. This house could be a key space in this collaboration. To establish a dynamic place where the needs and yearnings of newcomers and old-comers catalyse was a premise.

I was challenged by the commission. Nevertheless, my four years living in Finland and the understanding of its culture from an Argentinean perspective steered and eased the design process.

1 “A start-up ecosystem is formed by people, start-ups in their various stages and various types of organisations in a location (physical and or virtual), interacting as a system to create new start-up companies.” (Startup commons, 2018)
CASE DESCRIPTION
The property to be refurbished is located in Av. San Juan 234, within San Telmo, one of the oldest neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires. As other neighbourhoods in the city, San Telmo was shaping its character as from the settlement of collectivises, churches, the establishment of sport and cultural centres, the construction of hospitals, along with the development of commerce [Sanguinetti,1939]. Its name comes from San Pedro Gonzáles Telmo, patron saint of Santo Domingo convent established in 1600. In its origins, the neighbourhood was populated by dock labourers and seafarers working in the nearby commercial harbour. During the “English Invasions”, in 1806, the neighbourhood was occupied by the invaders which established two blood hospitals. By the second decade of 1800, when Argentina became independent from Spain, the area had already turned into a commercial area holding the biggest market of the city. San Temo Market was officially established in 1822 in Defensa street and remains in use until now. [Sanguinetti,1939]. The traditional patrician families of Buenos Aires built their mansions and established them in the flourishing neighbourhood. Nevertheless, in 1871 due to a yellow fever epidemic, those families abandoned the area and moved to the north of the city. Their mansions were rented mainly to European immigrants, who arrived during one of the most important migratory flows of the country. Entire families settled precariously in these old colonial houses converted into the so-called “conventillos”. They lived crammed in their rooms, sharing the restroom. In the meantime, wealthy families were enriched with rents and continued building their new mansions in the north of Buenos Aires. (“Historia de San Telmo”, 2018)

In around 1880 a period of decline initiated. The commercial area had also been moved to the north of the city and the building environment in San Telmo stayed neglected, without any maintenance. The decadence was such, that in 1950, the Municipality of Buenos Aires considered the possibility of a mass demolition of the area in order to transform it into an immense neighbourhood in a modern style, with residential blocks and large open spaces. The project did not prosper, and the neighbourhood continued its stagnation. (“Barrio San Telmo”, 2018)

San Telmo underwent a drastic alteration in 1955 when the urban plan of widening the old avenues was activated. Thus, Independencia, San Juan and Garay avenues were enlarged. The facades on both sides of the streets were demolished and pushed five metres back. (“Barrio San Telmo”, 2018)

In 1970, as Modern architecture began to spread in Argentina, demolitions and modifications of numerous constructions began, losing part of their important architectural heritage, at that time not yet valued. The Historical Museum of the City created then, an antique fair in the central square of San Telmo, “Plaza Dorrego”, aiming to create awareness of the historical heritage. (“Barrio San Telmo”, 2018)

The construction of the motorway in 1979, again changed the street grid. The neighbourhood was divided symbolically into two halves, north and south. Since the 90’s, the northern area of San Telmo has been the redoubt for the bohemian. Artists and artisans live in the old colonial houses. Antiques, workshops of craftsmen and “tanguerias” – places to dance or listen to tango- were spread in the neighbourhood. That was the seed of the current character of San Telmo.

In 2012, the southern area of San Telmo was included in a project created by the city of Buenos Aires called “District of the Arts”. The project promoted the development of an artistic ecosystem where the visual, scenic, literary and musical arts coexist. Likewise, aimed to stimulate the social, cultural and economic development of an area for years neglected. Old warehouses and power plants of the area were transformed into cultural centres. (“Distrito de las Artes”, 2018)

During the last decade, due to an increasing amount of tourism in Argentina, and particularly in San Telmo, the area has changed in appearance. Stores of the most well-known designers were opened; museums and artistic exhibitions were established and gastronomic premises mostly grew in the northern side of San Telmo. (“San Telmo, 2018) The Museum of Contemporary Art of Buenos Aires and the Museum of Modern Art of Buenos Aires are located 200 metres away from Suomi-talo, on the same road. The traditional Dorrego square is located 400 metres from the house. The area is crowded with people at weekends.
San Telmo, 1940
- The street grid follows the orthogonality set by the first urbanization plan.
- San Juan avenue and Paseo Colón were two of the main urban collectors of the neighbourhood.

San Telmo, 1978
- San Juan avenue was widened in 1955.
- The front facade of Suomi-talo had to be pushed 5 metres back.

San Telmo, 2004
- The highway AU1 was built in 1995.
- The back lots of Suomi-talo became a public square.
According with the Urban Planing Code of Buenos Aires City, the building in Av.San Juan 234 is located within the Historical Protection Area (APH1) and Side of Highway area (RUA). Additionally, its demolition is ban since the property was build before 1945.

- **Building restriction APH1:**
  Any structural modification requires previous authorization by the office of Historical Heritage.

- **Building restriction RUA:**
  Any intervention of the facade facing the highway requires a previous approval by the office of Urban Interpretation.

(Source: [http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/planificacion/registros-interpretacion-y-catastro/informacion-para-tu-proyecto/area-de-proteccion-histórica])

1. Defensa street market
2. San Telmo market
3. Dorrego square
4. Museum of Modern Art of Buenos Aires
5. Museum of Contemporary Art of Buenos Aires
6. Ministry of Culture of Buenos Aires
7. Suomi-talo
8. Museum of Craft
9. Puerto Madero commercial area
1. Defensa street market. 250m from the Suomi-talo.

2. San Telmo market. 600m from Suomi-talo.

3. Defensa square. 350m from Suomi-talo.


5. Museum of Contemporary Art of Buenos Aires. 150m from Suomi-talo.

9. Puero Madero commercial area. 400m from Suomi-talo.
Visual identity of the neighbourhood

The San Telmo neighbourhood has a strong visual identity. Most of its building facades have murals or are painted in different colours. This characteristic has its roots in the early days of the 20th century when “fileteado art” was born. (“Buenos Aires”, 2018)

“Fileteado” is a colourful painted ornamentation which was inspired by the art nouveau designs that were in vogue in the cosmopolitan area. Using leftovers from the colourful paint used in the ships, Italian artists settled in the former harbour, started decorating the boats and the sides of the horse-drawn charts emulating art nouveau motifs. (Genovese, 2010)

In the 40’s the “fileteado” eventually spread onto the city’s buses, transport lorries, building façades and daily life objects. What started as just the painting of boats and carriages, became a more complex popular art form.

Nowadays San Telmo’s facades are not painted only with “fileteado” motifs but the buildings in the neighbourhood keep the tradition of having murals in their front. As shown in image 18, if a mural disappears from a façade, there might be reactions from neighbours asking for a new one. The red writing says: “And the mural?” [“¿Y el mural?”]. And the light dark writing says: “Give back the mural” [“Devolvé el mural”]
In 1936 Lieutenant Commander Konkola visited Buenos Aires in command of a ship called Suomen Joutsen, a steel-hulled full rigged ship which served as a school for the Finnish Navy. The ship also has diplomatic functions, “a sailing Embassy”. The Capitan had the mission to establish business contacts, meet Finnish immigrants and promote Finland. It hosted an exhibition of Finnish good arranged by the “Finnish Export Association”. Lieutenant Commander Konkola considered during that voyage that it was time to establish the Finnish Seamen’s Church. (Meronen, 2018)

The building was located on what had been San Juan 234, since the middle of the 19th century, a British work centre and once in a while some work force for a couple of days. The temporary reading room was ready at the end of March, 1952. Rantanen made tables and benches; a shelf for newspapers and for a hand-to-hand library. All in all, the inception of the Seamen’s Church in Buenos Aires was modest, but at least there was a place to invite seafarers to spend their evenings at. (Pohjanpirkka, 1983)

In April of 1952, the Finnish sailors from the ship M/S Helios were the first to use the reading room. The sailors accepted it as their place from day one. During cold periods of time, the fireplace in the corner produced more smoke than heat, but the atmosphere was homelike. If there were several Finnish boats in the harbour, there might have been 30–70 sailors in the reading room every day. (Pohjanpirkka, 1983)

Pohjanpirkka proceeded with the second stage of the renovation work at the end of 1952. Together with Jukka Rantanen and Pekka Putkuri, a Finnish immigrant from Kílee, he worked in the replacement of the metal plates of the roof. A wall with a vault shaped opening was built to divide the reading room from the chapel and the wooden ceiling. An entry hall, a kitchen, toilets, storage spaces and a vicarage in the spaces adjacent to the reading room. The third stage, including tearing down the old facade and making a new one, five metres behind it, were left to the following station managers. (Pohjanpirkka, 1983)

In February 1952 the first stage of the renovation work started. Jukka Rantanen, a Finnish immigrant agreed to help Olva Pohjanpirkka with the project. The Finnish ships donated some tools, paints, nails, hardboards, some money and once in a while some work force for a couple of days. The temporary reading room was ready at the end of March, 1952. Rantanen made tables and benches; a shelf for newspapers and for a hand-to-hand library. All in all, the inception of the Seamen’s Church in Buenos Aires was modest, but at least there was a place to invite seafarers to spend their evenings at. (Pohjanpirkka, 1983)

In 1950 the British offered this building to the Finns for a reasonable price. The Finnish Seamen’s Mission (Suomen Merimieskirkko in Finnish), the Finnish South American Lines, Wihuri Foundation, the paper Industry and private citizens of Finland raised money. Eventually, David Orädd, secretary of foreign activities of the Finnish Seamanship travelled to Buenos Aires to examine the building and negotiate with the British the purchase of the house (Leskinen, 2018). Once the building was bought, Olva Pohjanpirkka, first priest of the Mission in Buenos Aires, was in charge of the renovation work of the premises. He made a three-part plan. His idea was to first renovate the British chapel into a reading room, in order to get activities started. Stage two included dividing the reading room into a church and a reading room, and building an office, an entry hall,
pulpit was completed. (Pohjanpirkka, 1983)

Rantanen continued his work building the sauna from used bricks and wooden planking from the old floor planking. The sauna was used in May 1953 for the first time. (Pohjanpirkka, 1983)

Together with Väinö Jaakkola, a trained carpenter, Putkuri started making the ceiling of the big hall. Four big chandeliers were built of black steel for the ceiling. Walls were plastered and painted, bookshelves were made. Arabia Company donated the tableware and Fiplasto donated hardboards. (Pohjanpirkka, 1983)

At the beginning of 1954, a Sunday school for children and a Sewing Club were started in the reading hall. By the end of the year, the second stage of the renovation work was completed. (Pohjanpirkka, 1983)

The third renovation stage started at the end of 1956. It included electricity and gas works. By then, the widening of the street San Juan was ready and for several months the street side facade wall was just a low brick wall, until the street side part of the building was completely renewed. The ground level housed the caretaker’s apartment, the sauna and the shower room, a spacious dressing room, a boiler room, a small workshop, and a garage underneath these rooms. (Pohjanpirkka, 1983)

Because of political issues in Argentina at that time, the architect in charge had received an instruction that the building should not look like a church from the outside. So, any symbol of the Christian Church was placed onto the facade. At the end of 1957, Pohjanpirkka applied for final approval of the renovation work. Meanwhile, in 1959 a strong storm damaged the walls of the reading room. After some months, when the walls had dried enough, Pohjanpirkka decided to cover them with wooden planking of Parana pine.

“The reading room is the most essential part of the work of the Seamen’s Church. The sailors had to have a nice evening there in order to want to come back, too. The reading room was a cozy place, where all the sailors are welcome. There they can look for advice in their mother tongue, take care of their mail, phone or other errands, read magazines and books, play games, listen to music from their home country, go for sauna, drink coffee that has been percolated in the Finnish way, write letters or simply just tell or share stories in their own language. And after having spent an evening there, the sailor did not have to pay for anything, but he was thanked for his visit and told that he was welcome to come back again.” (Pohjanpirkka, 1983)

The final approval papers from the City of Buenos Aires arrived in January of 1962. Renovating the ruined building and getting the final approval had taken a little more than a decade. According to the record of visitors, during the year 1964 the house had 3,770 visitors. (Meronen, 2018)

Suomi-talo was actively in use for the following five decades. It was the meeting point for both, Finnish seafarers and the Finnish community in Buenos Aires. The activities ranged from Sunday school, christenings, confirmations, weddings, monthly meetings, nights of sauna and Finnish lessons. Furthermore, the library was an attraction for families. Every so often, benefit dinners for 120 people were organized in the mail hall and the raised funds were used for the maintenance of the house. The Christmas bazaar was arranged every December. The community used to sell the carpets and other handcrafts made during the year, along with Finnish preserves and sweets. (Heinonen, 2018)

In 1987, due to the stop of the regular maritime trade between Finland and Argentina, the Finnish Seamen’s Mission decided to stop its work in Buenos Aires and donated the property to the Ministry of Education of Finland. The last priest of the Mission went back to Finland in 1989 (Laasio, 2018). After that, because of a lack of funds, it was difficult to continue with activities and maintain the house. Nevertheless, the Finnish community continued to occasionally gather in the house and arrange activities and Finnish lessons. (Heinonen, 2018)

The Finnish government donated the house to the Ibero-American Finnish Foundation in 2006. Due to the need of fixing the leaking roof and its poor condition in general the house was closed. A renovation project was proposed in 2010 but only the same repairs were made, such as the insulation of the terrace floor and the removal of the wooden cladding from the main hall walls. Between 2015 and 2017 building improvements in the main hall and the electric system were made. During those years some events were held in the main hall, such as exhibitions, reading meetings and the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Finland. Nowadays, Suomi-talo remains closed for public activities due to its poor condition. (Korpi-Tommola, 2018)
Fifth voyage of Suomen Joutsen, training ship of the Finnish navy.

Argentinean newspaper announcing the arrival of Soumen Joutsen ship. March 1936

Exhibition onboard of Suomen Juotsen, 1936
Cadastral plan, 1960

Water system plan, (n.d.)
CURRENT STATE OF SUOMI-TALO

Site plan 1:1500

Av. San Juan 234

Av. San Juan 234
Inventory plans - Current state of the building

Ground floor - 19.8 sqm
1. Garage
First floor - 138 sqm

1. Mezanine
2. Entrance
3. Living room
4. Sauna
5. Machine room
6. Apartment
7. Stairs case
Photographic survey - Current state of the building

Entrance

First floor

Hall second floor
Terrace

Terrace

Back facade
DESIGN BRIEF

The refurbishment project of the building will gather the yearning of the investors and the Finnish community in Buenos Aires. The main objective of the client is to develop an entrepreneurial ecosystem of Finnish start-up companies in Argentina. It aims to create an ecosystem to boost innovation, sustainable growth, employment, and international collaboration between countries. Similarly the Finnish community already settle in the city will strength the collaboration among them an ease the networking and understanding between the locals and the newcomers.

The refurbishments program includes:

- Co-working spaces for 25 people
- Meeting rooms
- Private offices
- Lecture room
- Exhibition space
- Presentation space for 100 people
- Finnish sauna
- Open-air terrace
RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

- How to refurbish a building so that it hosts co-working spaces for start-up companies and a space for encounter of the Finnish community in Buenos Aires?

- How to achieve a Finnish atmosphere in a building located in Buenos Aires, Argentina?

- To identify the challenges in the process of developing an adaptive reuse of a building responding to the needs of the different users.

- To understand which are the essential features that represent Finland abroad.
This thesis consists of five sections: 1) the case description, 2) the understanding of the future users, 3) the analyses of three premises of the Finnish Seamen’s Mission, 4) the analysis of three Finnish Pavilions abroad and, 5) the development of the design proposal.

Different research approaches were chosen in this thesis. An historical review of Suomi-talo was implemented and explained in section 1. A description of the human centered design approach, in order gain insights of the future users, was adopted in Section 2. Finally, a functional and aesthetical review of the case studies was conducted and described in section 3 and 4.

The initial section includes the assessment of the building to be refurbished, the description of the area where it is located and the history of the building. The assessment was realized in person, I visited the premises in three opportunities to accomplish a photographic documentation and a general survey of the building measurements. Furthermore, I also realized a photographic documentation of the surroundings. The Department of Urban development of the City of Buenos Aires provided me information on the development of the area. Finally, the history of the house was reconstructed consulting a variety of sources. I gathered information conducting informal interviews of members of the Ibero-American Finnish Foundation, of staff members of the Finnish Embassy in Buenos Aires, of former priests of the Seamen’s Church in Buenos Aires and the curator at the Forum Marinum in Turku. Moreover, I interviewed and conducted a questionnaire of Finnish people living in Buenos Aires which have formerly used the house. A bibliography on the voyages of Finnish Seamen’s to Buenos Aires were also a source of data.

The second section consists of the understanding of the future users of the house. The main stakeholders will be the newcomers of Finnish start-up companies, willing to begin or expand a business in Argentina; and the Finnish community settled in Buenos Aires, which have formerly used the premises as a church and meeting point. I conducted questionnaires of the Finnish community in Buenos Aires and semi-structured interviews of start-up members in Helsinki in order to gather their insights. A human-centred design was the selected approach to develop the design process. As described by IDEO (2015), a human-centred design is a creative approach of problem solving. It involves developing an understanding of users and takes a holistic view of all stakeholders who benefit from the product or service that is created. It involves building empathy with people’s need, behaviours and collaborating with stakeholders during various stages of the design process.

As illustrated in the following image by GreaterGoods Studio (2018), the human-centred design process can be described in five phases. During my thesis work I developed from phase one to four. I framed the questions to be answered, researched about the needs of stakeholders, found areas to be developed and created proposals. I recommend to realize in the future the last phase of the process in order to gather feedback from the users, identify weaknesses of the proposal, refine it and evolve the project.

I found suitable qualitative research as a method of observation to gather the insights. Qualitative methods are best for researching many of the “why” and “how” questions of human experience (Babbie, 2014). The data collection was accomplished by conducting semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to the futures users of the premises. In order to seek meaning to the insights I sorted, categorize and analyse the gathered data.

The third section of my thesis includes the analysis of functions and current uses of three premises of the Finnish Seamen’s Mission, the association which established the Finnish Seamen’s Church in Buenos Aires. The premises chosen are located in Rotterdam, The Netherlands; Hamburg, Germany and Vuosaari, Finland. The material was gathered by interviewing the Director of the Work of the association and research into the graphic files of their archives.

The fourth section introduced a research on how Finland has portrayed itself abroad. Through the analysis of three Finnish Pavilions at the World Fair Expos, essential features, spatial experience and physical character of the building were brought into focus.

Finally, the fifth phase presented the development of the design and the description of the proposal based on insights gathered and analysed during the previous phases. The section includes sketches, drawings and visualizations of the project.
UNDERSTANDING THE FUTURE COMMUNITY
UNDERSTANDING THE FUTURE COMMUNITY

The aim of this section is to understand the needs and behaviours of the future users of the building. The approach selected to develop the design process was Human-Centred Design. According to phases described in the methodology section, I researched on the needs of the stakeholders, found areas to be developed in the project and created proposals. Gathering feedback from users in order to identify a weakness of the project and refining it to be better developed.

This section describes the insights I gathered from each community. This data helped me to lay a platform for the development of the design process.

The main actors in Suomi-talo community will be newcomer members of Finnish start-up companies, willing to begin a new business in Argentina; and the Finnish community settled in Buenos Aires, which has formerly been used as a church and meeting point. The building will bring together two communities with different characteristics and needs. My hypothesis of work is that both communities can clearly strengthen and benefit from each other.

First of all, the start-up community will generate an active atmosphere, where interaction, openness and creativity will be encouraged. The start-up place needs to be a spot of collaboration and connections. On the other hand, Finns established in Buenos Aires might facilitate the interaction between newcomers and locals. Knowing the customs of the local culture is a key issue, especially in Argentina where a trustworthy network is strongly built on references and recommendations of known people. This trustworthy network is crucial to find the right companies to partner with, suitable places to establish business or outsourcing vendors of any kind. Finally, both actors have their roots in Finland. To share the culture, generate a strong bond between people, particularly when being abroad.
I conducted informal interviews of start-up members in Helsinki considering them as a reference of possible start-up members that might work at the Suomi-talo premises in Buenos Aires. Start-up Sauna and Maria 01 were chosen as a case study. The aim of the interview was to understand their way of working, preferences and needs. The following questions regarding the space, the facilities and the networking guided the interview:

1. Which kind of working space do you value/use the most? In which occasion? (open office, study booth, work lounge, etc)

2. What do you value the most about the facilities and support spaces? (coffee place, kitchen, game room, tidiness)

3. What do you value the most about networking? Do you think the space enhances interactions? With whom do you interact with?

Start-up Sauna

“The Start-up Sauna co-working space is a focal meeting point in Northern Europe for entrepreneurs and investors alike. It’s a 1,500 square metre industry hall open for everyone – no membership or previous ties to Start-up Sauna are required.” (Start-up Sauna, 2018)

The Start-up space accommodates desks for about 80 people, two large meeting rooms for 10-15 people, three small meeting rooms for 4-6 people and 4 phone booths. Besides having, a kitchen area and two stages. A sauna, which gives the name to the hub, can be used as a meeting room. (Nilini, 2018)

Maria 01

“Maria 01 is a community for the start-up ecosystem. A league of tech entrepreneurs and investors building the future. We provide the home base and the network to get better and to compete. The hospital acts as the top meeting spot for hundreds of tech meetups and entrepreneurial get-togethers.” (Maria 01, 2018)

Maria 01 members occupy 10,000m2 of space in the former Maria hospital. It offers flex spaces, fixed workstations and private offices. For the common use, it has meeting rooms, a music room, a gym, event spaces and a member lounge. (Kangas, 2018)
Learnings from interviews

Regarding question 1, (which kind of working space do you value/use the most? In which occasion?) the interviewers referred mainly to three types of working scenes: individual work, team work and events or presentations, each one of these scenarios requires a different space quality.

When thinking about individual and concentrated work some interviewed asserted that, occasionally, when they need to focus on something without any disturbance, they go to the small meeting room. As an example, Kangaspeska (2018) described: “We also work in the “koppero”, a small room about 4x4 mts. Once a week one team member does their work in there… if they have a lot on their hands and really have to concentrate extra hard on something. The desks are placed next to each other but people understand that when somebody goes to the “koppero” they don’t want to be disturbed”. Silence and sound proofing were also valued in these kinds of spaces.

The open space was considered the core area by many of the start-up members. Keeping in mind that it might be a less effective area to work but increases networking. As Perttinen (2018) explained: “The common area is a bit restless, but I like that it is lively. It is nice to see all the time what’s happening and where, and it is nice to meet new people every day.” Moreover, the zoning inside the common area was also pointed out as a positive trait. “With the team of eight we like the most to sit in one group of sofas in the corner of the common area. Anyone can come and chat with us whenever they need to, but we still have our own space” (Tavela, 2018) Meeting rooms are also spaces suitable for team work. Different sizes of meeting rooms in order to optimise the use of space were appreciated.

“Stage-audience type of spaces” (Mikkola, 2018) were mentioned as a flexible space. “We organize events in this area so it is important that the furniture is movable, and that we also have a storage area here” (Puranen, 2018).

Question 2 was focused on support spaces. These types of spaces ease and make more efficient daily work. As stated by Rotstein (2018), “Being able to make your own shakes and drinks adds to the comfort and makes one fewer thing to worry about”. A nice and fully equipped kitchen was considered by many start-up members a plus of the hub.

In the case of Maria 01 Start-up centre, the reception and info desk were highly valued. Many companies settled in the hub receive their clients or investors and find it important to offer them an engaging welcoming experience.

The openness of the spaces was appreciated, in addition to the tidiness and quietness. Supporting spaces as storage places and printing points were valued although “printed material is becoming less and less common in our daily work” (Rahiala, 2018).

Concerning question 3 about networking, most of the start-up members recognized it crucial for the development of their business. It might “bring relevant connections for future working life and even the possibility of starting new ventures” (Oguilve 2018).

They find open and informal spaces the most suitable to enhance networking. Interviewers mentioned that they interact among their own team but also collaborate with other teams. “Usually we organize meetings, but sometimes just quickly chat in the common areas”, said Tavela (2018).

Events and presentations are especially important occasions to boost networking. Entrepreneurs interact with different stakeholders of the start-up ecosystem, such as, “funding organizations, angel investors, venture capital companies, universities or other entrepreneurial minded people” (Oguilve, 2018) These kinds of events usually require an auditorium-like setting and a big space where start-ups can showcase their business in a fair-like arrangement.

Finnish community in Buenos Aires

In order to know the opinion of the Finnish community in Buenos Aires a questionnaire was made. The questionnaire was uploaded on the Facebook group webpage of Finns living in Buenos Aires and the Facebook group webpage of the Argentinians living in Finland.

The aim of the questionnaire was to understand the previous use of Suomi-talo and to know the user’s experiences of the building. But mostly, to be aware of their preferences regarding future activities. A personal perception of the architectural Finnish identity was also asked.

The questions were:

1. Have you been in Suomi-talo?
2. How many times have you been in the building?
3. Have you ever been involved in some activity at Suomi-talo? Which one? When? List the three most meaningful ones.
4. Which space of the building do you value the most?
5. What activities do you imagine in the future at “Suomi-talo”?
6. What architectural features do you consider representative of the Finnish identity?

The questionnaire was answered by 10 members of the Finnish community in Buenos Aires. Four of them were involved in Suomi-talo since its inception, in 1952. They participated actively both in the activities held in the building and in the building of the house. Three of the surveyed members had been connected to the house between 1990 - 2010. They were especially involved in the Finnish school (a club in which the kids of the community get together to sing, read and play) and the maintenance of the library. The final three participants of the questionnaire became acquainted with the house between 2014 - 2017. During those years, mostly cultural activities were organized in the main hall.

Considering that I am not an active member of the community, their immediate reply to my request let me think that Finns in Buenos Aires care about the house. It’s
Important to note that many warm memories and dreams will be seen if they are able to use it more in the future. Many referred to the house as a place where one can “have a sense of community”. A place where kids can be identified with Finland (Heinonen, 2018). The Finnish School and the library where activities are most yearned for. “The library on the second floor was a treasure. A moist treasure, but a treasure in the end. I imagine a bright room where everyone can borrow books” (Eeronen, 2018).

The main hall, where Christmas Markets, dinners and gatherings were held, was considered the most valuable space of the house. Although, as expressed by some member of the community, the spatial quality of the space was not positively assessed since “it was a dark space with dark wooden panels on the walls and torn billiard tables” (Eeronen, 2018). The chapel and the terrace are also places valued by the community.

When asking about possible future activities in the house, most of the answers were related to cultural activities such as exhibitions, concerts, screenings, lectures, reading meetings and also a coffee place or a pop-up restaurant. To see again the Finnish school was a willing of the community.

Most of the members of the community did not find characteristic features of Finnish architecture in Suomi-talo, besides the use of wood in some spaces. Concerning what they considered representative of Finnish identity, Leskinen (2018) mentioned it was the opposite in Buenos Aires, where there is a high density of inhabitants, in Finland spaces are broader, more austere and less decorated. Light and brightness are highly valued. Niemela (2018) considered the open space, simplicity, brightness and at the same time warmness, as distinctive features of Finland.

The following images represent the answers and the prominent opinion of the surveyed members:

### Former activities in Suomi-talo:
- reading meeting
- Finnish literary discussion
- benefit dinner
- sauna
- library
- Christmas bazaar
- mass
- Finnish school
- sewing club
- wedding
- women’s monthly meeting
- right of sauna

### Possible future activities in Suomi-talo:
- exhibitions
- concerts
- sauna
- Finnish school
- cultural center
- library
- lectures
- screening
- meeting point
- yoga
- discussions
- referent of Finland

### Finnish architectural features:
- pragmatism
- freshness
- simplicity
- wood
- open space
- light colors
- warmth
- brightness
- harmony
- austerity
THE FINNISH
SEAMEN´S MISSION
The aim of this section is to analyse and understand the use of space and the activities held on the premises of the Finnish Seamen’s Mission. “The Finnish Seamen’s Mission is a neutral non-profit association; whose mission is to be the church and meeting place for moving people.” (Merimieskirkko, 2018). The Finnish Seamen’s church and Suomi-talo in Buenos Aires were established in 1952 by this Mission and owned by them until 1992, when their services stopped and the building was donated to the Ministry of Education of Finland.

Similarly, to the use that the Seamen’s church had in Buenos Aires, their premises abroad functioned both as a church and as a meeting point for Finnish residents. Furthermore, during the last years the variety of activities has increased and the spaces are used flexibly. They can change their function after needs or be divided by movable elements according to the activity to be held in them. Furthermore, the premises are open for the general public and in some cases, meetings or accommodations are offered for rent.

The material contained in this section was gathered by interviewing the Director of the Work of the Finnish Seamen’s Mission, Jaako Laasio and researching into the graphic files of their archives.

The association has churches abroad in Athens, Brussels, Hamburg, Rotterdam and London. Just as the location of Buenos Aires’s seamen church, those venues are located near the former harbour of the cities, usually a reinvigorated area holding cultural and gastronomic investments. In the Finnish shores the Seamen’s Mission has established venues in Kemi, Tornio, Oulu, Rauma, Hamina, Kotka, Turku and Helsinki, Vuosaari. (Laasio, 2018)

The Seamen Mission’s premises are a meeting place for Finnish residents abroad, seafarers and local people. Events related to Finnish culture, such as, national celebration, bazaars, art exhibitions and concerts are arranged at the building. The community can read Finnish newspapers and books and buy Finnish foodstuffs and other articles, as well as, go for a sauna. Some of the venues offers accommodation for visitors. (Merimieskirkko, 2018)

Moreover, weddings, christenings, baptisms, Sunday school and religious services are held at the churches. At present, about 10% of the services provided by the Seamen’s Mission is related to seafarers, while a wide range of activities are offered to the Finnish community living abroad and to the locals. (Laasio, 2018) “The Seamen’s Mission is a piece of Finland overseas, a cosy place of rest during your journey or amid the bustle, a home away from home. Essential to our activities is getting people together”. (Merimieskirkko, 2018)
Finse Huis - Rotterdam

Location: Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Studio: Gremmen Architectuur
Year: 1926 - Renovation year: 2012
Client: Finnish Seamen’s Mission

The building belongs to the Finnish Seamen’s Mission since 1926. It was renovated in 1942 and later in 2012. It serves as a meeting space for Finnish residents settling in Rotterdam.

Nowadays the church services for seafarers are mainly held on board. The Finnish community gathers in the premises for social meetings, national celebrations or the traditional Christmas bazaar, where food and design products from Finland are sold. Moreover, a Finnish school, a music group for children and a chorus have monthly meetings in the house. The library is widely used by families, especially by young couples with kids.

The church hall functions as a multipurpose space and can be divided according to its needs. Not only the Finnish community uses the space but also the locals. The coffee place is open to the public and the church hall is occasionally rented out to other religious groups. The meeting room can also be rented out for locals. Accommodation for the staff and volunteers is located on the 3rd floor.
Finnische Seemennskirche - Hamburg

Location: Hamburg, Germany
Studio: Arkkitehtiryhmä Pitkäranta Oy
Year: 1996
Client: Finnish Seamen’s Mission

The building was designed by Finnish architect Pentti Ahola in 1965 and renovated in 1996. As well as other seamen’s churches the premises nowadays functions as a gathering space.

Religious services such as weddings, christenings, baptisms, and Sunday school are held at the church. Activities such as reading meetings, labour workshops and dinners are organized by Finnish residents in Hamburg, which can also use the sauna located in the basement.

The coffee place is the welcoming space of the building. The house has a flexible use, the multipurpose space can be divided into meeting rooms or recreational spaces according to the activities organized by the community. Moreover, the church hall can also be divided according to the amount of people attending the event.

The premises has a 5-floor housing building used by the staff of the house. Since 2012 the office of the Finnish Embassy is located on the ground floor of those living units. Some rooms located on the 2nd floor and in the basement of the main building are rented out as a hostel room during peak season periods.
Helsinki Seafarer’s Centre

Location: Vuosaari, Helsinki
Studio: ARK-house arkkitehdit Oy
Year: 2006 - 2009
Status: Completed
Project area: 800 m²
Client: Merimieskeskus, Helsingin Satama

The Seaferer’s Centre is located in Vuosaari harbour, Helsinki. Its soft organic language informed by the traditional wooden ship’s aesthetics and functionality contrasts with the artificial landscape of tarmac fields and containers. The small volume of the Centre has been carefully juxtaposed with the large steel warehouses (Tiainen, Mayow, Roth & Vadejel, 2011).

The building consecrated as a church serves as a place of relief and as multipurpose space for the seamen who arrive at the harbour from distant places. It aims to create positive welcoming memories to travellers (Tiainen, et al, 2011).

The Centre offers to seafarers and truck drivers in the port a coffee place, a reading area, a laundry, computers and also the possibility of take a sauna. Events such as church evenings, concerts and language and hobby courses are organized by the Finnish Seamen’s Mission at the premises (Laasio, 2018).
IMAGE OF FINLAND ABROAD
Finnish architecture and design have been historical landmarks of Finnish culture and the image of Finland abroad. Finnish pavilions at the world exhibitions and their internal displays have been fundamental components in the shaping of that image. (MacKeith, Smeds 1992). This is why in this thesis I review them in order to get inspiring elements for the Suomi Talo in Buenos Aires. Through the analysis of three Finnish pavilions, the aim of this chapter is to understand which essential elements of Finland were portrayed abroad, along with the spatial experience and physical character of the buildings.


The question of which characteristic features represent Finland has been addressed by many authors. The designer and urbanist Hill states that “the essence of Finnishness sometimes appears to be an essence in itself, to be about essential”. (2014) He remarks the severity of the natural Finnish environment and finds its implication in the purist form of objects and architecture and in a design oriented around authenticity and the qualities of natural material. In the same direction, Plumer asserts the bond between the use of bare materials, direct techniques and the absence of inessential gestures with hard conditions. (2012)

Every Finnish pavilion and its exhibition had sought to portray the distinctive features of the national culture. (MacKeith, Smeds 1992)
“Hell’s Gorge”, Seville World Expo 1992

Location: Seville, Spain
Studio, Monark Group
Year: 1991
Status: Completed 1992
Project area: 1425 m²

The architects clearly showed their idea in the conceptual model: “pairing a long, tall, narrow steel bar with a shorter, curving, ship-like wooden form. A narrow gap between the forms provided illumination and entry, and the material qualities of the design were directly stated” (MacKeith, Smeds 1993, p.164).

The dual character of the two-blocks building and their exhibition spaces was revealed through the contrast between light and shade, movement and quietude, and nature and technology. As Rispa states, the wooden volume, known as Keel, evoked wooden ship hulls. The entire building was handcrafted following traditional boat-building technique. The load-bearing wooden skeleton of laminated rib-bent was covered by pine boards to create the volume. On the other hand, the rectangular building known as Machine, was built on steel. Its modular structure and sheathing were completely prefabricated and assembled on site. (1992)

Another essential trait of the pavilion was, the space between them. The narrow shaft lead to the exhibition spaces and created a passage where visitors experienced the intense interplay of the two sculptural volumes. “The sensation of ascension through compressed space and shifting light created a heightened awareness of this place between a dramatic sense of anticipation” (MacKeith, Smeds 1993, p.165).

Any literal manifestation of Finnish signifiers was expressed in the pavilion. Visitors may develop an intuitive image of Finland guided by the austerity and determination of the pavilion. “Simplicity is one of the best traditions in Finnish environmental culture” (MacKeith, Smeds 1993, p.170).
The Finnish Pavilion at the Hannover World Expo 2000 was the result of an architectural competition won by SARC architects. The core of the pavilion was a birch grove created by more than 100 trees brought from Finland especially for the Expo. The copse symbolizes the significant role that the forest plays in Finnish society (Flamme-Jasper, 2000, p.126).

As explained by the authors, trees were surrounded by two four-storey building wings. The inner facades of those monolithic 16-metre-high volumes were partly silk-screened glass walls, which allowed a constant view of the grove during the entire tour in the pavilion. Contrarily, the outside walls were completely lined in dark brown heat-treated wood (Sarc, 2018).

Regarding its program, the first and second floors host the exhibition spaces and a restaurant. Offices, a sauna and the utility service rooms are located on the third and fourth floor (Sarc, 2018). As part of the design concept, visitors move from one building to another by walking on wooden bridges over the birch copse. It was meant to create a calm and relaxing space (Flamme-Jasper, 2000).
“Kirnu”, Shanghai World Expo 2010

Location: Shanghai, China
Studio: JKMM
Year: 2008
Status: Completed 2010
Project area: 3200 m²
Client: Finpro

The Finnish pavilion at the Shanghai World Expo, design by JKMM was called “Kirnu” (“Giant kettle”). “The aim of the pavilion was to portray Finland in a microcosm, presenting both Finland and its society to the world” (JKMM, 2018). The heart of the pavilion was a forum where you can meet and mix.

The sculptural asymmetrical building intended to communicate visions of freedom, creativity given by technology in construction and innovation represented in technical details (Palsila, Nummela-Knox, Nummi, Nurmela-Knox, & Kujala, 2013).

“Elements of nature were reinterpreted in the pavilion, like the shape of small rocks found on coastal islands, the surface of a fish, reflections on the water, a framed view of the sky and the smell of tar on wood” (Area, 2018).

The pavilion was built in such a way that could be disassembled and reassembled. The vertical load-bearing structure built on site was made of steel. While the horizontal structure was made of wood. The walls around the atrium are made of fabric and the outer facade covered in paper/plastic composite shingles (Palsila, et al., 2013).
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Birch grove: Represents the importance of forest in Finnish culture

Literal use of birch trees brought form Finland to the inner yard of the pavilion.

Freedom and creativity in construction enable by technology

Natural elements:
- costal rocks
- surface of fish
- water
- sky
- wood
The design was developed based on insights gathered during the research phase. Aspects related to the history of the house, the needs and aims of the users and Finnish identity were taken into consideration to define the concept and guidelines of the design.

Graphical elements of nautical charts were reinterpreted in the graphics applied in the design so to evoke the origins of the house as a Seamen’s church. The historical value given to the house by the Finnish community in Buenos Aires was also a guideline.

Regarding the needs of the entrepreneurs described in section II, I considered it to include in the design program collective working spaces, rooms for silent work, networking areas and presentation spaces. Besides, supporting facilities such as a reception, relaxing area, storage places, printing points and writing boards were also considered.

In order to give a response to the yearnings expressed by the Finnish community in Buenos Aires, I considered to provide open spaces for gatherings, set a Christmas market or eventual exhibitions, screenings and lectures. Furthermore, I bore in mind a sauna and a space to hold a traditional Finnish school. According to the community, the Finnish school needs a flexible lecture type of space.

As described in section III, the use of a space for the Finnish Seamen’s buildings, used nowadays mainly by the Finnish community abroad and locals, sat a reference on how the spaces can be used flexibly by different stakeholders. I considered it worthwhile to incorporate those types of spaces when thinking about a building that will host Finnish start-up companies and the Finnish community in Buenos Aires.

Both the analyses of the Finnish pavilions at the World Expo Fairs and the feedback of the Finnish community in Buenos Aires, gave me insights on how Finland has been presented abroad and its distinctive architectural features.

From the previously presented analysis and the questionnaire’s results I considered the following aspects the most representative and meaningful to be included in the design concept:

- “The essence of ‘Finnishness’ sometimes appears to be an essence in itself.” (Hill, 2014, p. 36)
- “Bare materials and direct techniques, enhanced by the stripping away of inessential gestures and decoration.” (Plummer, 2012, p. 174)
- “Simplicity is one of the best traditions in the Finnish environmental culture” (MacKeith, Smeds, 1993, p. 167).
- “Open space, brightness and wood.” (Eeronen, 2018)
USE OF SPACE

In order to enlarge the sauna and add a shower room I decided to demolish the wall of the former heating room and close the straight connection of this space with the vestibule.

Instead of using the space as a working area I decided to assign it to a library space. I considered it beneficial to have the library at street level and have a visual communication with the outside.

For big events or presentation both the chapel and the private terrace can be used as a presentation stages of 100 and 30 people respectively. The main hall can be set as a exhibition and lounge area.

The main hall can also be used as a working area. As mentioned by entrepreneurs, it could be use by the start-up teams when the “team building” events are held and a large space is needed to gather all teams.

The proposal of placing the apartment on the first floor and modify the location of the main entrance was dismissed because it implies a major change to the facade an ineffective use of the space.

In order to visually connect the spaces adjacent to the entrance hall, I propose to replace the corridor walls by glass walls.

MATERIALS AND FURNITURE

For the internal and external appearance of the building it is necessary to use high-quality materials and furniture to ensure durability and aesthetic value.

Various materials and furniture options have been explored to provide a variety of choices for the clients to select from. The selected materials should be easy to maintain and resistant to wear and tear.

The furniture selection should consider the design, comfort, and functionality. The chosen furniture should complement the overall design and add value to the interior and exterior appearance of the building.
The refurbishment project focused on the reuse of the 710 sqm building in order to serve as a start-up hub for Finnish companies and a gathering space for the Finnish community living in Buenos Aires.

The proposal comprises minor alterations of the structure of the building.

The 40 sqm ground floor and mezzanine consists of an apartment for newcomer start-up members.

The 120 sqm first floor includes a reception area, a library, a meeting room and a sauna. The spaces interact visually with one another and with the street. The whole floor is meant to be used by both the Start-up community and Finns in Buenos Aires.

Two multipurpose halls and working areas are located in the 550 sqm second floor. The working space includes a collaborative working area, an individual work office, a kitchen and a lounge.
0. Facade.
I considered the façade at street level as a transition area between Buenos Aires, specifically San Telmo and Finland. It is a plain one which, on one hand, is related to the visual aesthetics of the neighbourhood and, at the same time, its big openings display Finland openly, as a trait of transparency. The big openings establish a visual relationship between the interior and the exterior of the building. The surface of the façade is considered as a canvas where murals can be painted periodically with different themes and merged with the strong changing atmosphere of San Telmo’s facades. For this instance, I proposed to use graphical elements of nautical charts to evoke the origins of the house a Seamen’s church.

The main entrance divides the façade of the building into two halves. The big windows, as well as to establish a visual relationship between the interior and the exterior, showcases Finland. On the left hand side, a meeting room with a sauna-like atmosphere which is, indeed, the vestibule of the sauna. And on the right-hand side, a library with reading areas and space to work.

1. Apartment.
The former garage and mezzanine were transformed into an apartment with entrance from the street level. The 38 sqm two-storey apartment is meant to be used by any recently arrived entrepreneur. It gives the possibility of a maximum one week stay for those that has not arranged accommodation before arriving in Buenos Aires. The internal connection of the space with the current meeting room of the sauna was kept.

2. Entrance
The entrance door leads straight to a corridor preceding the staircase. On each side of the corridor there is an entrance door to adjacent rooms. I proposed to replace the corridor walls with glass walls in order to visually connect both spaces.

3. Sauna meeting room.
The space is a meeting room for 10 -14 persons. It is suitable for scheduled meetings with team members, clients or partners. It is the vestibule of the sauna. It can be used as a lounge area after taking a sauna, a traditional way of networking for Finns.

The spatial qualities refer to a sauna-like atmosphere. The wooden furniture and cladding afford the space warmth and cosiness.

4. Sauna.
The original sauna was extended as well as the shower room. A changing room was added to the layout to provide a comfortable sauna experience.

5. Reception.
As mentioned by the entrepreneurs, many companies receive clients, visitors or partners at the premises and they consider it important to have a person welcoming them. Besides, events gather people that is not acquainted with the building and need guidance or information.

Visitors arriving at the building can step directly into a reception area. It is an open space with soft seating and a reception desk to create an engaging reception situation and to make people feel welcome.

6. Library
The library is open to street level. It contains bibliography, newspapers and digital material in Finnish. It is open to the public.

The space offers reading spaces, tables to work and a
7. Staircase
It is a transitional space of narrow proportions. The wooden steps and walls are completely white and are lit through the glass roof.

From the entrance space, the stair leads to the entrance hall of the second floor.

SECOND FLOOR

8. Entrance hall
The hall is equipped with lockers to keep personal belongings. As a distribution space, the hall leads to the main hall, the public terrace and a working area.

9. Main hall
The large hall is where major gatherings take place. It is a flexible coming-together space for the communities where exhibitions, presentations, lectures, screening or parties can be held. It is also a space where the traditional Finnish Christmas market can be arranged as well as a fair-like presentation for start-up companies.

The hall can be used as an alternative workspace, it can be booked occasionally for “team building” activities for start-up companies coming from Finland and requires a large space to interact with local entities or other teams. Furnishings can be used as configuring elements of the space.

The large open space with a 7mt tall ceiling produces a strong change of scale for people coming from the narrow staircase and the 3 mt high entrance hall. In addition, the distance from the street makes the hall a silent space contrasting with the bustling San Juan avenue.

The original ceiling clad in wooden bars was preserved. In order to bring a brightness to the hall the entire walls were painted white and the former floor covered with white industrial concrete. The wooden sliding door of the arcade was also kept in its original form.

The large hall is where major gatherings take place. It is a flexible coming-together space for the communities where exhibitions, presentations, lectures, screening or parties can be held. It is also a space where the traditional Finnish Christmas market can be arranged as well as a fair-like presentation for start-up members.

12. Small meeting room
It is an intimate meeting room for 6 people it is suitable for small meetings or confidential discussions. It is for short term use. The space is equipped for virtual meetings.

14. Lounge-Kitchen
The former kitchen located in the back of the space was moved to the from in order to get natural light and create a space for encounters. The lounge – kitchen area is openly connected with a common working area. The place is meant to encourage discussions and interactions among start-up members.

15. Working space
The work space is to be used by the start-up community. It is a collaborative working space with an office-like character. The open plan facilitates interaction among start-up members.

The intermediate arcades of the space were demolished in order to unify the area. The long and narrow space was furnished creating different working scenarios according to the needs. Low sofas and movable tables near the window to the terrace for individual or pair work, a long table for team work in the middle and a high table for small team work at the back.

The space is equipped with a printing point and wall boards to support collaborative work.

16. Individual work office
The space used to be the former open patio of the house. During a roof renovation in 2015 the patio was covered by a metal corrugated sheet. I propose to reopen the roof and cover it in a translucent material in order to get natural light in the space and also cast light in the adjacent working area.

The space is meant to be an office for concentrated and uninterrupted work. As suggested by entrepreneurs, a place to retreat when extra concentration and individual work is needed. The individual desks are divided by acoustic panels. The acoustic comfort of the room is improved by sound-absorbing materials in the surfaces.

The public terrace can be used by visitors as a place to have a coffee or a drink after enjoying an event in the main hall. It also offers a space for traditional Argentinian barbeques which are very important when creating a sense of community. It is not only the act of eating but the preparation of the fire, the cooking, the eating and the later dessert and coffee can be compared with the ritual of sauna for Finns.

The private terrace can be used by entrepreneurs as a resting and relaxation area. It also boosts networking among teams. Informal presentations can be held on the stage.
Visualization of the sauna meeting room - first floor
Visualization of the sauna meeting room - first floor
Visualization of the main hall - second floor
Visualization of the working area - second floor
Visualization of the terrace - second floor
CONCLUSION

As was mentioned in section 1, the development of this thesis was guided by two research questions. The first question regarding the functionality was how to refurbish a building so that it hosts working spaces for start-up Finnish companies, while at the same time functioning as a meeting place for the Finnish community living in Buenos Aires. The second question was how to achieve a Finnish atmosphere through interior design for a building located in Buenos Aires.

My first approach to the research was through the history of the place. My research began with my personal assessment of the house and the surrounding area, which brought me insights regarding the premises and its relation with the area. Walking the bustling San Juan Avenue and coming into the narrow and dark staircase, which led into an unexpected 7 metres-high and silent space was an interesting spatial experience of the building and its relation with the location. The peculiar interaction between different scales and atmospheres, as well as between exterior and interior spaces, was my first impression of the building.

Besides visiting the building, I studied the urban development of the area and the future plans. Suomi-talo is located in the historical centre of Buenos Aires within the San Telmo neighbourhood. The area has experienced a strong urbanistic and cultural development during the last decade. According to the urban plans of the City of Buenos Aires, investments are to be made in the following years to continue the revitalization of the area.

My research into the history of the place revealed a strong bond between the building and Finland going all the way back to 1936. Suomi-talo has been both a home away from home for Finnish sailors and a gathering space for Finnish immigrants in Buenos Aires. The Finnish community made great efforts to recondition the building during the 1940’s, which can be seen in the collaborative imprint of house. In the same way that sailors were warmly welcomed to the house and interacted with other Finns settled in Buenos Aires, coming to the present time, start-up members from Finland can interact and network in the premises with old comers.

To sum up, from my first approaches there were two initial characteristics I wanted to have transmitted through my design. First, I wanted to keep -and probably enhance- the impact of the interior/exterior transition that I first experienced when entering the building. Second, I considered important that the building will continue to be a gathering place for the Finnish community living in Buenos Aires. Not only as recognition for their efforts, but also as a premise to reinforce the engagement of the community into maintaining a meeting place.

My second perspective on the research was understanding the possible future users through a human-centred design approach. As a starting point to boost community engagement in section 2 of this thesis, I share the needs and expectations of possible future users that I collected through interviews of Finnish start-up members in Helsinki. According to the feedback, an open and collaborative working space seems to be the core area of a start-up hub. It is the space where informal interaction with team members and other entrepreneurs occurs. Besides, entrepreneurs also mentioned the need for an area for periodical individual and concentrated work. Suggestions were made for different sizes of meeting spaces in order to accommodate large teams, with clients or investors. As an essential feature of the start-up way of working, a presentation space was very valuable as a place to enhance networking. It is on the stage where connections, and even the possibility of starting new ventures, take place.

My second approach to possible users of the space was through a questionnaire handed out to the Finnish people living in Buenos Aires. The results of this questionnaire showed that the Finns who have used the premises considered the main hall, the terrace, the chapel and the former library as the most valuable spaces in the building. When asking about possible future activities in the house, most of the answers were related to cultural activities such as exhibitions, concerts, screenings, lectures and reading meetings. Re-establishing the Finnish school and having a
characteristics to my own design; partially answering my second research question on how to create a Finnish atmosphere.

Regarding the methodologies used during this thesis, I learnt a great deal from applying a mix of research approaches. I consider that simultaneously applying a historical review and a human-centred design approach was extremely enriching and beneficial to getting a holistic understanding of the project and laying a steady platform for my design decisions. I was able to interweave data gathered from different sources and perspectives. For me this was the first time I applied a human-centred design approach in an interior architecture project. I consider it was a very valuable experience, which helped me to truly understand the needs and expectations of possible future users of the space before creating a solution to serve them. It was a very challenging experience to interpret the information collected into design solutions. During this research I also realized the importance of high quality personal documentation in order to be able to analyse it later and gain insights.

To sum up, my project consisted of first framing the questions to be answered, secondly collecting the needs of multiple stakeholders, thirdly identifying strategic development areas in the building, and finally designing a proposal. In order to succeed with the human-centred approach, I strongly recommend gathering feedback from the users in the future, as a way of identifying the weaknesses of the proposal and developing the project.

During my design process I found it challenging to express Finnish identity in an existing building located in Buenos Aires, as it has almost the opposite spatial characteristic to the Finnish architectural features mentioned previously. The building has many cramped spaces, it lacks natural light and some rooms are decorated with dark-colours. Therefore, the overall design strategy was to generate larger spaces within the factory in order to connect the interior spaces visually with the exterior at street level, and to enlarge windows in open skylights so as to bring brightness through natural light - when possible - or with the use of light colours in surfaces and furniture. These design decisions also answer the need expressed by the possible future users, who required open spaces in order to enhance interaction and collaboration.

Finally, the proposal has considered the uplift of the historical and social value of the building as a gathering place for the Finnish community, both for the settlers in Buenos Aires and for those staying in the city for a shorter period of time. I proposed a dynamic space to foster connections and collaborations.
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APPENDIX

Questionnaire answered by members of the Finnish community in Buenos Aires:

1. ¿Conoces el edificio? / Do you know the building?
2. ¿Cuántas veces ha estado? / How many times have you been in there?
3. ¿Ha participado de alguna actividad en “Suomi-talo”? / ¿Cuál? ¿Cuando? / Have you attended to any activity in “Suomi-talo”? / Which? When?
4. ¿Qué espacio del edificio valoras más? / Which space of the building do you value most?
5. ¿Qué actividades se imagina en un futuro en “Suomi-talo”? / What activities do you imagine in the future in “Suomi-talo”?
6. ¿Qué aspectos arquitectónicos considera representativos de la identidad finlandesa? (Ej: atmósfera, proporciones del espacio, iluminación, materiales, etc) / What architectural aspects do you consider representative of the Finnish identity? (Ex: atmosphere, proportions of space, lighting, materials, etc.)

List of answers:

Paivi Niemela, 10.7.2018
1. Conozco el edificio desde que nací, lo vi construirse paso por paso.
2. Desde 1952 en casi todas las festividades celebradas.
3. He tomado mi primera comunión en el templo.
4. La capilla tiene un valor especial y único, no solo emocionalmente, si no por su diseño como se lo construyó manualmente pieza por pieza.
5. La capilla tiene un valor especial y único, no solo emocionalmente, si no por su diseño como se lo construyó manualmente pieza por pieza.
6. En cuanto la arquitectura, la verdad, es un poco descontada. La verdad, sería un crimen que se demoliera ante un nuevo edificio.

Mikael Leskinen, 11.7.2018
1. Sí, desde que Jali Wahisten se vuelve administrador en 2015
2. Muchas veces, por lo menos una vez por mes desde 2015
3. Participé en la mayoría de las actividades organizadas por Jali durante el tiempo que él estaba a cargo. Las más significativas serían la fiesta de independencia de Suomi-100 y la visita de un par de artistas que ahora ya no me acuerdo. Para mí las más significativas fueron los rodajes de mis tres cortometrajes, en noviembre del 2015, octubre del 2016 y octubre del 2017.
5. Todo tipo de actividad cultural: seminarios, charlas, lecturas de poesía, teatro, proyecciones de cine, exposiciones... lo que sean! Es un espacio muy versátil y aprovechable. La verdad, sería un crimen que se demoliera ante un nuevo edificio.
6. En cuanto la arquitectura finlandesa lo principal me parece el espacio. A lo contrario de Buenos Aires donde hay mucha densidad de habitantes, en Finlandia los espacios son más amplios, más austeros, con menos decoración. Se valora mucho la luz y los colores pálidos, la claridad.

Rosalia Pankiv, 10.7.2018
1. Conozco el edificio desde 1957.
2. Desde entonces cuando yo tenía 4 años, habitualmente ibamos con mis padres y hermana.
4. El gran salón y la capilla.
5. Muestras de arte, cine debate, fiestas de la colectividad.
6. Atmósfera, iluminación, acústica, materiales, estética armoniosa

Hann Popponen, 15.7.2018
1. Sí
2. Creo que 5
3. La inauguración de una exposición y la fiesta no oficial de san juan y Ilallinen taivaan al evento.
4. La sala con techo alto.
5. Conciertos, exposiciones, noches con dj, pop up restaurante.
6. En merimieskirkko quizás solo uso de madera en la sala.

Pulmu Heinonen
1. Sí
2. Muchas veces desde su apertura.
3. Participé en casi todos los eventos desde que se abrió la casa. Fui bautizada en la capilla. Fui parte del grupo de mujeres que comenzaron las reuniones mensuales para realizar manualidades finlandesas. Ayudé a armar la biblioteca.
4. El gran salón donde reíbamos los bailes de navidad y las cenas.
6. La madera clara, espacios amplios.

Lumi Eeronen, 12.7.2018
1. Conozco el edificio. Creo que estuve ahí por primera vez en un “café de las señoras” que se organizaba creo que los jueves, o jueves por medio, en 1999. Estaba estudiando en Fio UBA y no tuve mucho interés en acercarme a la comunidad finlandesa, la verdad, pero recuerdo una enorme sensación de nostalgia en esa reunión. Algunas señoras eran realmente viejitas, suecoparlantes, imagino que de los primeros en llegar a este país durante la colonia finlandesa en Misiones, que al principio eran suecoparlantes en su gran mayoría. (Este puede ser producto de mi imaginación, nunca les pregunté cuándo habían llegado.) Fue la única vez que entré en la Suomi-talo en esa ocasión.
2 and 3. He estado varias veces, y acá ya te contesto la tercera pregunta también. Cuando mis dos hijos eran chiquitos, año 2004, estuvimos en una feria y misa navideña, con la visita de papá noel y todo. Todavía tuve una sensación de colectividad, de que la casa era de todos nosotros. Luego, en 2008, cuando volví a Buenos Aires con mis hijos, tomé la posta de profesora de la escuela finlandesa. Riina, la antigua profesora se volvió a Finlandia. Sé que en los años anteriores funcionó la escuela finlandesa en la Suomi-talo, y los padres remodelaron con mucho amor y a pulmón uno de los "departamentos", la
de la izquierda cuando subís la escalera, para que sea un espacio confortable para los chicos, con libros a su alcance, música, mesa para dibujar, etc. Seguimos con las clases en ese hermoso espacio, con los recreos y momentos de juegos en la terraza, hasta que nos echaron por la clausura de la Casa que se ponía en obra. Esto fue en mayo del 2008. Esperamos varios años poder volver a poner los libros en una biblioteca y tener un lugar que sea nuestro, para que los chicos lo identifiquen como un lugar donde se habla y se escucha finés. Como sabés, nunca pudimos volver. Ya no soy profesora de la escuelita hace mucho, mis hijos ya tienen 18 y 15, pero me sigue dando mucha pena que no haya un mínimo lugar de identificación para nosotros. Ni hablar uno con tantísima historia y tantas historias! La escuelita funciona aún, con cada vez menos interés de parte de los padres, y en mi opinión la única razón es que no hay un lugar fijo. Los chicos se encuentran en casa de alguno o en un lugar exterior y no llegan a entrar en “modo finés”. Siguen jugando en castellano como lo hacen todos los días. Perdón el sermón, pero me entristece terriblemente.

Lo veo muy claro en mi hijo menor que tenía 4 cuando lo conozco muy bien. Apenas lo vi, me enamoré del lugar identificatorio para mantener y seguir aprendiendo más. Se fue disolviendo el lugar fijo y se en ambientes cambiantes se hacía cada vez más difícil que los chicos entre en el mundo finlandés por dos horas cada dos semanas. La cocina claramente es importante pero ya que yo conocí la casa, la cocina y los baños estaban en un estado que no daba ganas de quedarse mucho.

5. Imagino muchísimas actividades culturales. 6. Los aspectos que se deberían valorar son la madera, ya que es el elemento fundamental, en trabajos con curvatura estilo Alvar Aalto. Vidrio, y luminosidad en la sala como en la capilla (esta no tiene nada). Mantener el trabajo con venecitas realizado por el pastor que estuvo en la Iglesia viviendo. Todo los aspectos arquitectónicos Nórdico que existía lo sacaron, como la decoración de la madera de las paredes y el techo. Hoy es un simple gárgola de cemento. Manejar colores neutros y sobrios típicos de la arq. finlandesa.

Ana Vogel, 26.7.2018
1. Sí, lo conozco muy bien. Apenas lo vi, me enamoré del edificio.
2. Muchas, durante julio 2016 y marzo 2017 iba por lo menos dos o tres veces por semana.
5. Imagino muchas actividades culturales.
6. La Materialidad, la madera y la forma de trabajarla, Los materiales que existía lo sacaron, como la decoración de la arq. finlandesa. Bautismos de mis hijos

Miguel Pappaiani, 24.7.2018
1. Sí.
4. Todo en general. La aula de Suomi koulu ya que nosotros la reparamos, pintamos y arreglamos. La sala grande de recepciones y principalmente la Capilla.
5. No muchas, quizás algún encuentro musical, furtivo, under y o hippie. Sin mucha relevancia, especialmente para la colectividad, espero equivocarme.