

The Flow of Urban Life – a podcast by KONE – Transcript  
Inclusive Cities

**[00:00:00] Sam Hughes:** The next time you leave your house, head to the office, drop your kids off at school or go to the supermarket, ask yourself, do your surroundings help or hinder your day? Everything in our cities has been designed by someone for someone. The question is, has it been designed for you?

Welcome to The Flow of Urban Life, a podcast by KONE that explores how urbanization and digitalization are transforming the way we live, work and commute in cities. I'm your host, Sam Hughes, and in this episode we look at the subconscious bias in our city surroundings and explore how we can step beyond them to create more sustainable and inclusive spaces.

Architect, Le Corbusier believed that a uniform standard for the height of human beings would improve the appearance and function of architecture. But when all humans are not the exact same shape and size, whose scale should we be working to? In the best-selling book, invisible women, Caroline Criado-Perez says most of the data we use to design solutions today is based on the male as the human default.

Caroline tells us how cities have been designed around the idea that work takes place in factories or offices and home as a place for rest and recreation. But this doesn't reflect the way of life for many women. According to Caroline, because women are much more likely to be engaged in unpaid care work, they have different travel patterns. Yet, when city planners create new transport routes they often prioritize suburb to city travel over suburb to suburb travel, which women are more likely to do when going to their kid's school, for example. By failing to distinguish things like gender in the data we collect, we risk excluding others.

But this bias isn't intentional. It happens when we don't question the data used in the design process. Research has also uncovered racial and gender bias in the AI services developed by some of the biggest tech companies in the world. This is down to the lack of diverse data, used to train machine algorithms. I spoke to Hannah Harris, who believes there's a clear need for people today to be involved in the development of their cities and to understand their design process. Her job as chief design officer for the city of Helsinki is to help the city identify how design and architecture can bring added value.

**[00:02:25] Sam Hughes:** Hi Hanna! So you have a pretty unique job title. Why does the city of Helsinki have a chief design officer?

**[00:02:32] Hanna Harris:** If you think about Helsinki as a city, or obviously also Finland as a country, there's obviously a strong legacy in all things design and architecture – and that remains one of the big draws as well for people to visit. But – actually 10 years ago, so in 2012, Helsinki really kick-started a process where the city, as a city organization decided that, okay, we're going to take design seriously and think about what might that mean in terms of helping us develop this into an even better city. So in 2012, Helsinki was nominated as the world design capital. That's a kind of touring, global initiative that every second year a city that uses design in various strategic ways gets given this title. In 2012, there was a sort of massive investment all year. There were hundreds of partners and projects all year and very visible things for the public as well that happened that year. But what really was the legacy that took on from there, was that we kind of understood that, okay, there's something in design thinking itself – how design functions and how that helps make stuff better, makes processes better. And importantly, kind of turn the lens on to the users. So the people. And of course, in something like a city organization, it's very important that, okay, the services we deliver, the reason why we exist – how do we do that even better? With the people of, in this case, Helsinki. And, yeah, today in 2022, that marks 10 years on that journey that Helsinki has seriously taken design. And in that 10 years, that has shown in lots of different ways. Obviously that path has grown – how design thinking is used across different sectors. Literally, the latest figures are something like nine times more projects than even five years ago we work. We've got in-house designers, the team, and an amount of that kind of thinking is growing across all the different divisions. We work closely with some of the best design agencies in Helsinki who are our close partners to work on delivering a better city, basically. And obviously with lots of partners, like universities, other cities elsewhere around the world, and so forth. So, my role came along as well. The first edition of the chief design officer was in 2016 to 2018 – a kind of pilot edition. Then the learnings from that we'll take on board. And I came in

as the second one in 2020, literally the same time as the pandemic hit. Perfect timing! So, my role is kind of a bit of a special role in the city. It's a city-wide role – I work with with central administration, the mayor's office, and with all the different sectors across the city, but then I have one foot sort of tighter in the urban environment division.

So we're working on lots of new initiatives as well that have more to do with connecting design thinking and kind of architectural work as well with urban environment matters. So I'm really like a connector – bringing ideas and people together and finding places and ways where we should work even better with design or with architecture, connecting them inside the city, partners outside, and very much to conversations elsewhere in the world.

**[00:06:08] Sam Hughes:** Yeah, nice. Now in the design thinking and throughout all these phases. So we're talking about bias, and the design phase can lead to non-inclusive products, services, and even cities. How could unintended bias affect something like urban planning?

**[00:06:25] Hanna Harris:** I suppose that that's one of the key questions that has driven lots of the design work that the city of Helsinki has done. If there's any given issue, and I'll kind of start from elsewhere than urban design as well. But any given issue, let's say how to deliver housing services for disabled people, for instance, that: are we doing it in the right way? Are we even looking at who we are working with or who the service is delivered for. And how do we kind of turn the lens to make really sure that we've taken all the different voices and all the different needs into consideration and in something like a city, that's obviously a difficult task.

Often people ask: Oh, how would you make the voice of the citizens heard? Obviously there are lots of different voices and they can be contradictory as well. So, that's kind of one thing. But making sure that you really grasp what you are dealing with and are ready to challenge also your own kind of assumptions about that is crucial there. When it comes to Urban design, one of the difficult issues of course, is that these are long, slow processes. You're working towards something that happens somewhere, several years down the line. And at the same time, obviously, people who are going about their everyday life, they experience things here and now as well.

So, there's that kind of managing expectations of different people sort of now and what might happen in their lives or their children's lives or also somewhere down the line. Also, if you kind of look at, in any given city, I suppose there's certain groups of people that might be more keen to sort of take part in stuff and be active about what's happening in their city and some others less so. And, one important thing there is as well is how to, for instance – we've been working quite a lot with schools in terms of the kind of architecture and design education that do you have a sort of basic understanding of your immediate environment? You know, the school building, the park around it, your neighborhood. Appreciating those places and spaces. And then through that kind of appreciation, also being empowered to have certain tools to think that, okay, I actually have a say as well in how my city might be in the future or might want to do something about it somewhere later down the line. So we've had really fantastic projects where kids have been doing stuff in schools about their immediate environments as well. And I very much believe that design and architecture touch upon each and every one of us, and there's a connection to our everyday lives.

**[00:09:22] Sam Hughes:** The data and processes We use to design things, can reinforce stereotypes about what people do and how they behave. But when we question what we're creating, or rather Who we're creating for They can also help us step beyond stereotypes and build more sustainable long lasting solutions. I spoke to Juha Matti Kuhanen about how KONE uses data to program the algorithms for KONE's elevators and got his thoughts on how we could eliminate bias.

**[00:09:51] Sam Hughes:** Hey Juha, for the benefit of our listeners, could you just tell us what your role is at KONE?

**[00:09:56] Juha-Matti Kuusinen:** Well, at KONE I'm the head of flow intelligence. In practice, I lead a product development organization. Or a tribe as, as we call this unit at KONE, and the products that we develop change, or they will change the way, ah, smart cities and buildings are designed, used operated and renovated.

**[00:10:18] Sam Hughes:** Unintended bias can get embedded in things that we design. When it comes to elevators, I can imagine their role is to get people where they want to go in the fastest way possible,

right? To minimize wait times, elevators might prioritize floors that are furthest away, such as the upper and lower floors. People on the middle floors may see the elevator, pass them by more often.

**[00:10:40] Juha-Matti Kuusinen:** This is a very interesting and intelligent topic. Um, and maybe, just start with, we can properly agree that, let's say the target to minimize waiting times is kind of acceptable. Right. But we don't like waiting in general, yeah.

**[00:10:54] Sam Hughes:** And if the elevator is full, it probably won't stop. In this very simplified scenario. This type of programming could lead to socioeconomic bias. Penthouses, luxury restaurants, or executive level offices are often on the upper floors. So people that hold a higher social standing could be prioritized. What do you think about that? And could we optimize elevators for a more inclusive people flow experience?

**[00:11:18] Hanna Harris:** in Finland, in general and, and cities in Finland, we take these things about accessibility or equality in space quite seriously. We just this year did quite a lot of work around that as well, in terms of urban planning and trying to offer tools for our planners and designers, to be aware of the choices and issues that what you do somewhere, how that might affect something else and how you might try and take into consideration those different issues that are translated into physical space itself or how socially or culturally different groups and issues can be part of making a city.

**[00:12:00] Juha-Matti Kuusinen:** Yeah. But that's, then That comes into this topic of social status and so on, If we understand that there is this unintended bias and sometimes we kind of just avoid bypassing and so on. So we would need to take into account better this, this bias. I guess that would mean that we would need to understand, let's say people's intentions and the context better. And we do have already, the technology exists already, to some extent. We have smart sensors and edge analytics to detect the personal characteristics like mood and movement and posture. And that could be maybe applied, in addition to artificial intelligence of course.

**[00:12:43] Sam Hughes:** Yeah, definitely. a lot of these voices can be a bit contradictory and you're trying to kind of sift through. How do you isolate the, the kind of, important voices that haven't been heard before, but should be heard now?

**[00:12:57] Hanna Harris:** One thing I think that's kind of crucial when you look at participation issues in, let's say, planning questions also, is that you can't end up in an end result – well, maybe sometimes you can, but there will often be a situation that not every opinion or every voice can be part of the initial or they might be something different to what, you know, you wrote down in, in some way, the crucial bit is that people have an experience that what they have expressed has been part of the end solution and that they have an understanding of why a given solution came out of some process. What was there at stake and, and this is where it's often difficult that, um, it gets kinda muffled for people. That short-term and long-term, they might be, you know, taking part in a questionnaire about some change in let's say a building project coming somewhere nearby, and then the actual end result happens so much later down the line that they've kind of in the interim sort of forgotten or don't understand what was it that I took part in in the first place? And there's something that we are setting up at the moment that's tackling this kind of a contradiction of the different timelines. So it's not a new method as such but cities haven't been working with it so much. It's called Placemaking, which takes into consideration that you'll take a place – typically it will be a central public space, let's say that in a neighborhood of Helsinki or central square for instance, would be a good example. And as the starting point, you take really the strengths of that place before you change something, you look okay, what's here already, What's the narrative and story of this place? Who exactly are the residents, the businesses that are around them? Whatever it is in that particular neighborhood, that's important and you bring them along early on before anything happens and importantly as well, what, sometimes it's difficult for organizations like cities that you, you have to be able to experiment and do quicker stuff as well. Quick and dirty stuff and easy and light stuff where you might experiment that, ok, we know that in this square, there will be a bigger, let's say infrastructural change in three years time also. Now in the interim, we'll try stuff out. And we make sure that those things that we experiment and do together with the people produce data that is taken back to the designer's table for those sorts of long-term changes.

And so we are currently now setting up these kinds of things starting this summer, actually across Helsinki, where we identify spots like that, where there's lots of change that's happening and where it

would be very important to work more closely with different communities and businesses residents. So all of those areas to, um, see what we can do. And, and also as a city, be more ready to experiment.

**[00:16:11] Sam Hughes:** And in general, do you think we should design people flow experiences for the majority or the minority? It's a tricky one.

**[00:16:18] Juha-Matti Kuusinen:** It's a tricky one. Yeah. And I guess we shouldn't plan either for the minority or the majority, because both are important groups, but it's true that in many cases it's likely that the minority for example, suffers from the design decisions more. And if you for example consider a shopping mall, where you typically move around, taking the escalators, right? Because escalators are typically visible, they're easy to find. And so on. Then if you need to use the elevator for some reason, it might take some effort to find the elevator in the first place. And an elevator that would take you to the right destination, for right. Yeah, because from the waiting time point of view, it's kind of optimal in many cases. But, uh, especially when there's a lot of traffic and there's a lot of traffic demand especially from the bottom and the top floors, then it might happen that because elevators tend to become full at the top or bottom first, then elevators need to bypass the middle floors. And that kind of results in bad service, in some cases, especially with simple control algorithms that are not capable of, let's say, estimating the passenger traffic demand, for example – the number of passengers behind the calls.

**[00:17:36] Sam Hughes:** Yeah. Nice. But what are some of the other biggest challenges to inclusive placemaking when it comes to the city's short-term and long-term development projects?

**[00:17:44] Hanna Harris:** Well, perhaps exactly that. I think one thing of course is that now for instance, when we're in the process of trying to set this kind of activity up in Helsinki, that you, first of all, try and identify spots where it really makes a difference that you are identifying things where there's change happening and you can time something experimental in a nice way there so that it doesn't end up being – Okay, this nice thing was done but let's get back to business as usual, but it's actually something that contributes to a longer sort of trajectory of that place. In Helsinki, for instance, we have three dedicated areas that are called these urban renewal areas, which have been selected as that. There's, let's say, big rail investments coming in, building social and demographic factors and lots of different factors that have contributed to that. Okay, these areas will be under, under kind of there's lots going on. So these would typically be places where it's very important to have stuff going on early on with the people. So for instance, this coming summer, we're going to be doing some experiments in a neighborhood in north Helsinki, where there are some really interesting public squares that have quite a lot of potential actually, and sort of active groups that want to get involved in trying stuff out there. But likewise similar things, of course, in places like city centers that all across the world are under a lot of battering, not just because of the pandemic, but of course everything: change of retail, how people work and so forth. And Helsinki has now in the past two summers done quite nice experiments around bringing businesses, restaurants together in slightly different ways using public squares for rediscovering the city center and kind of giving the people giving people, at the same time safe, but really sort of nice way to enjoy, um, city spaces. So bigger outdoor terraces that have been done in Senate square and Kasarmintori square. And we're looking at how to kind of develop these kinds of activities and also certain kind of summer street trials in the city center that then contribute to vibrant urban life, but in a, in a way that gives something special, something that has a flavor of Helsinki.

**[00:20:09] Sam Hughes:** Yeah. And Have you found with these experiments that it's actually raising awareness and you're seeing more proaction from people in society?

**[00:20:17] Hanna Harris:** I think so. I mean, often it's about that, you know, as a city also often our job is to provide a certain platform or framework for stuff to happen and how people can get involved easily. So, for instance, following these kinds of things that were done really kind of pandemic first, that there was a desperate need to help businesses, desperate need to make sure that people are safe, but that they can still be some form of, you know, enjoyment of urban life. And there's some form of you know – you can go and eat somewhere and sit outside and fall in love with a certain square and Helsinki again. But out of those trials, importantly, something like a city organization learns as well. So you start looking more deeply, okay: Licensing department, business department events, sector. How do these work together and how do we, for instance, make sure that there's a smooth process in the future, for instance, about how outdoor terraces is work? And so just recently we have

published an update to how outdoor terraces work sort of guide and streamlined stuff so that it's it's, hopefully it works, works better for businesses as well. And obviously then the the people of Helsinki, visitors and residents alike will be the benefactors of that.

**[00:21:42] Sam Hughes:** Excellent. And I'm really curious as well, you do these short-term and long-term experiments. How do you ensure, I mean, as we've seen over the last couple of years, anything can happen and the world can change very fast. So with the longterm projects, how do you ensure that, you know, it's still up to date when it's finished?

**[00:22:00] Hanna Harris:** Well, one thing that's coming out for instance, we've just done a big feedback round of the stuff I mentioned in the beginning of that - How we work with designers and design teams, design agencies at the moment. And obviously that kind of strong service design mentality is becoming more, that it's taken for granted.

And it's sort of swam into the city machinery better, which is great. But the thing I think that's important for the future, then that still needs strengthening is more, for costing and on future design. And this has come out very strongly in conversations we've been having across different sectors at the moment that that kind of thinking and tools, and also obviously that connects to data as well, that how do we use data in somewhere like a city, that how can that help us in even better decision-making? Obviously, um, something like, you know, rail investments. These are kind of brick and mortar things that you can't change so quickly either. But I think it's also important to sort of, Helsinki has very long-term, ambitious climate aims, for instance. And part of that has been also, how do we support public transport? What kind of rail networks are we putting in place in the city? And very importantly, we've continued on that path, you know, there's different kinds of people, obviously last year and the year before there's been sort of at how much are people moving around, what are they doing? So, yeah. And then obviously things like, architecture, buildings play a big role in there as well.

**[00:23:45] Juha-Matti Kuusinen:** And one thing we need to take into consideration is that when we designed the buildings, we may make these design decisions, like putting the luxury hotels or restaurants and penthouses on the top floors. But why would we why would we do that when we can put restaurants on the middle floors? It happens that often it's optimal, from the waiting time perspective to dispatch the elevators, to serve, for example, the furthest away, cause first.

**[00:24:17] Sam Hughes:** Okay, and in your opinion, how could we eliminate bias in these algorithms? Because obviously the, the computer or the algorithm itself is just going: "better wait times." That's all it cares about most of the time now, but how would we eliminate any sort of bias?

**[00:24:33] Juha-Matti Kuusinen:** Well, I guess that one thing is that we can, of course, improve the algorithms to maybe optimize the perceived experience better and the related metrics there. And for example, many times your rating experience depends on the context and situation many times. So when you're, for example, waiting for the elevator with a colleague and you're having a nice discussion, you don't mind waiting a bit longer, right? Instead, or compared to the situation where you are alone late for the meeting. And then you're kind of, you know...

**[00:25:06] Sam Hughes:** Of course. Um, and do you think it will go far enough one day where it will already know or estimate which floor you're probably going to go to next and therefore do another algorithm that will be like: "okay, they're going here, they're probably going there, so let's do it this way."

**[00:25:21] Juha-Matti Kuusinen:** And they are, discussing that that person is alone? Hopefully, or I don't know what kind of biases that might, uh, result in. But anyway, I guess that being able to understand what the context is, what is actually happening at the given time on different floors,

**[00:25:40] Sam Hughes:** I suppose, in terms of bias, it's almost impossible to remove it completely, right? There's always going to be something. If you're weighing up certain amounts of factors, there's always going to be a bias towards a certain element, right?

**[00:25:51] Sam Hughes:** Yeah, for sure. And going back to inclusivity that we were speaking about earlier, how effective are things like policies in making our cities more inclusive?

**[00:26.00] Hanna Harris:** I think in Helsinki and Finland in general, there's several things going on there that contribute to that. Obviously something like Helsinki has had a pretty successful housing policy, which has been a mixed housing policy for years. If you look at some other cities we've been pretty successful that the city has sort of developed in relatively equal manners across the board. However, of course, we are also aware that there might, you know, that we have to pay attention to certain segregation processes and keep an eye on that. But sort of mixed housing policies have been very good. So that sort of policy level has been very good, coupled obviously with that all across Finland, but Helsinki's been very adamant to stick to that is of course education that how do we provide good education for every kid in this city, independent of their background, where they live and so forth. And that sort of goes, of course, with how the schools and the school system works, but then very importantly as well that what are those schools like? So for instance, I mean the school design in Helsinki has been a sort of big thing that we want to keep doing school, school environments that are relevant and we can have the best possible place to learn in a way. And then that also of course, translates to do kids have possibilities, to every kid independent of their background to take part in hobbies and so forth, things like that. But then, in terms of kind of architecture and planning, more specifically, we are currently working on a new architecture program for Helsinki, which is more like a policy program that sort of brings together different stuff that's done around architecture across the city. So that should be ready later this year. And that obviously looks at different things from the sort of building that goes on the city's own public buildings. And of course the city's own housing, but then also, things like public spaces, access to greenery: Very important across, across the city in, in matters of inclusiveness as well. And importantly how all of this contributes to climate targets as well. So, yeah. And then in something like policy work like that, of course it brings you back to, okay: How do you do participation work for instance, or are we able to set things up such as place-making projects that really work with the people of Helsinki and different important public spots.

**[00:28.45] Sam Hughes:** So, is this something where policies are updating constantly or is it quite a long process to update policies?

**[00:28.51] Hanna Harris:** Such policies I believe, need to be relevant for sort of X amount of years. However, of course, in a way, for instance, in this case, this is a policy which also is in conversation with national policies.

There has been a national architecture policy that came out in January. I was involved in my previous job on work, working on that as well, setting that up with different ministries, but it's, that as well as something that, had been sort of, there had been demand for it for quite a while in Finland. But do you have to keep in mind that you set targets so that they can work for several years, but they are in line with other targets that are happening in other policies in some way, like a city. So that's really important. So you don't sort of produce something where the left hand is doing something and the right hand is doing something else and they don't meet anywhere. So that's kind of one of my jobs is to try and make sure that what comes out and from an architectural angle or lens that actually connects and is in conversation with other aims that have been set in the city sort of elsewhere in different different areas somewhere, for instance, like the climate targets. And then of course, in a way, yes, you can update, or you can review, let's say annually or biannually or whatever path you choose. But the process itself of bringing such policies together is kind of an important part of the work I feel. So that is in a way a tool to bring different people around the table in this case to talk about architecture and see why it might be important. And then that, of course, tech continues after the policy is ready.

**[00:30:36] Sam Hughes:** One size doesn't fit all. When we rely on so-called standards, universals, and norms to define the typical user, we end up excluding people and the things we create don't live up to expectations. Bias is often unintentional. That's why we must put in the work to question what we're designing and who [00:37:00] we're designing it for. policies and processes can help us catch subconscious biases before they're built into new solutions. But we also need to include a diverse range of people during the design process, both in the data sets we use and at the decision-making level. Hey everyone. This is Sam. Thanks for listening to the flow of urban life. A podcast produced by. I hope you enjoyed this episode. Be the first to listen to the next episode in this series and subscribe to the flow of urban life Wherever you listen to your podcasts.