

# SUVELA CHAPEL

**location** Espoo, Finland

**client** Parish of Espoo

**commission tender**

**year** 2010 - 2016

**size** 2.150 brm<sup>2</sup>

**architect in charge** Anssi Lassila

**project architect (construction phase)** Iida Hedberg

**team** Juha Pakkala, Teemu Hirvilammi, Jussi-Pekka Vesala, Hanna-Kaarina Heikkilä, Anis Souissi, Miguel Silva

The Suvela chapel was commissioned by the Espoo Parish Union and it will be used jointly by the Espoo Parish Union, the Swedish Parish of Espoo and the City of Espoo to serve the entire community of Suvela. It is a multifunctional building that offers a space for the people of the community to use together for their many different needs regardless of their religious affiliation.

OOPEAA embarked on the design and planning for the Suvela Chapel and the nearby community park in 2012. The goal was to create a building that has a strong identity of its own while also entering in dialogue with the multicultural context of its suburban neighborhood.

With roughly one third of the inhabitants being of foreign descent, Suvela is one of the most multicultural districts in the Helsinki metropolitan region. Cultural diversity is both a rich potential and a challenge to the community. In the design for the Suvela Chapel and the adjacent community park, the goal was to create a building that offers opportunities for a rich variety of activities and provides a framework for the residents to come together in a flexibly adaptable and functional space. Due to the relatively long, dark, and cold winters, communal indoor spaces play an important role as places for people to gather in Finland. Public buildings, such as schools and libraries, as well as churches and chapels offer spaces that are open to all. Providing schools, libraries and churches as places where people can come together on the common ground of a shared space has deep roots in the cultural tradition of Finland. These buildings serve as platforms for a variety of activities initiated by the citizens, thereby facilitating the exchange of ideas through collaboration and working and enjoying life together. They are designed to include communal spaces that offer places where local communities may hold meetings and events and where they can come together around various activities, both in the everyday as well as for special occasions. The Suvela Chapel is part of this tradition in which the architecture of church buildings and chapels offers a framework for a multiplicity of functions and a place for people of the community to come together.

The chapel offers an approachable and welcoming space with a human scale and an inviting atmosphere. The building serves many functions providing a home base for many different kinds of organizations and forming as a dynamic place of activity. It is first and foremost a meeting place that serves members of the parish and other groups of people in the community alike. The local community park with its services is one of the three principal users of the building offering the children and their parents an opportunity to use the space in various ways. There is afternoon care for children after school as well as day care services for younger children. There are spaces for the youth as well as spaces for the various local community clubs to use for their activities. The building offers office space for the employees of the parish as well as for social workers and family services provided for helping people in their various needs in their lives. A soup kitchen providing food for a very low cost is operating in the premises as well. The chapel naturally also serves as a place for mass, concerts, weddings, funerals, and baptizings.

The location of the various functions in the different parts of the building is identifiable from the outside. While the height of the building varies greatly with the chapel hall as the tallest part, all functions are placed on just one level, and the building wraps into a single U-shaped entity forming an intimate interior courtyard in the middle. The belfry is embedded in the main building volume providing further closure to the yard.



The different functions in the building orient themselves around the inner courtyard. The main entrance is placed in a corner where the U-shaped building opens to the courtyard. The main chapel hall with its auxiliary spaces is located in the north-east part of the building. Offices and work spaces of the parish staff as well as additional meeting and group work spaces are located in the middle part of the U-shaped volume. Spaces for children and the youth as well as spaces that are rented out to the city to serve the community park are located in the west part of the building. While the majority of the interior spaces face the yard, the spaces occupied by the community park face outward to the park.

The building is a hybrid structure with wooden as well as concrete and steel elements. A tactile sense of material has a deliberately strong presence both in the interiors as well in the exterior of the building. The exterior shell is entirely clad in copper to emphasize the unity of the varied volume of the building. Copper was an ecological choice of material for the exterior. It is both durable and recyclable and therefore sustainable. It also ages well and acquires a beautiful patina over time. Local spruce is the material used in the interiors. In the spaces for the children's activities, wood is present also in the outdoor canopies that provide shelter from rain giving the children an opportunity to play outside even in rainy weather. The presence of wood is most prominent in the tall chapel hall where the walls are covered with wooden scantlings.

The Suvela Chapel is one of the four finalist candidates nominated for the Finlandia Prize in Architecture in 2016. It has also been awarded bronze in the American Architecture Prize 2016.