



President's Message

Multi-disciplinary Collaboration: Insights and Reflections

Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to be back in Helsinki and spend time again on the Aalto University campus visiting in person with our Secretary-General Eija Salmi on my way to our Cumulus Board meeting in Barcelona. After two long years of the pandemic, I was grateful for this long-postponed face time with our Secretariat.

It came with the gift of receiving my long-awaited copy of the Aalto 2021 publication *Pro Arte Utili: Multi-disciplinary Collaboration, the Key to Success*, edited by Helena Hyvönen, Pekka Korvenmaa, Ossi Naukkarinen, Martti Raevaara, Pekka Saarela, Anna Valtonen, and Aalto University Emeritus Professor and Cumulus Emeritus President Yrjö Sotamaa. This stunning hard-copy volume is a collection of first-person essays, testimonials, and archival documents that bring together the perspectives of key individuals who contributed to forming the vision of Aalto University. A critical focus is on the shaping and evolution of one of its six colleges, the School of Arts, Design, and Architecture, and its consequential impact on the formation of Aalto. Yrjö Sotamaa's chapters provide crucial historical context to understand the evolution of design education and research in Finland in the past fifty years and speak to some of the drivers behind the founding of Cumulus. Our association's original connection to our ongoing host institution, Aalto Arts, and the invigorating internationalization agenda the concept of Cumulus has nourished over time is inspiring to read.

Furthermore, for those among us who study how innovation in higher education and public sector organizations happens and what role creativity coupled with a global and social impact outlook brings to this endeavor—this book is a treasure trove of insights and inspiration. It presents with modesty and honesty many of the questions and challenges this community of art and design educators and researchers had to wrestle with on this 30-year journey of transformation and multi-disciplinary collaboration. It is a journey that would ultimately give birth to Aalto University in 2010 and contribute to further sedimenting the global standing and excellence of Aalto ARTS today (read more on that history [here](#)), but it is also a journey that as the editors state, may be useful to many of our members who are managing processes of success and change.

The end chapters by Anna Valtonen, a founding member of the Aalto University Board, and former Dean of the School of Art, Design, and Architecture (2014-2019), bring us back to more recent times. The reader can trace a clear lineage in the story of a bold future-oriented agenda of change set by Yrjö Sotamaa and his colleagues to the current *“radical creativity”* cross-cutting pillar that the university espouses today.

“While it may be difficult to foresee the outcome of change, the journey to it is always fascinating and worth embarking upon.” This summoning by Yrjö Sotama is one of many kernels of wisdom and courage one finds in this book. His words echo that of John Dewey. In his celebrated Democracy and Education text of 1916, the philosopher provides counsel that seems more urgent than ever in these fraught times: “We live not in a finished and settled world, but in one which is going on and where our main task is prospective.”

Peace,

Mariana

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