



Helsinki: An Overview

Helsinki, the largest city in Finland, is the nation's capital and its administrative, economic, scientific and cultural center. The metropolitan area covers 0.2 percent of Finland's land area, yet 19 percent of the country's population lives there, generating 30 percent of the nation's total output.

Demographics

Helsinki is growing more international at a fast pace. Today 10 percent of Helsinki residents are foreign-born, and the frequency is higher among younger age groups. The proportion of foreign-born residents is expected to rise to 20-25 percent by 2025.

Economy

Finland's economy is among the most competitive in the world, according to the World Economic Forum.

Helsinki is the engine of Finland's growth and is the country's main economic and logistical center. Its industrial structure is diversified, but services and high-tech industries account for a large proportion of output.

As the economic weight of Northern Europe shifts eastward, Helsinki is emerging as a regional hub of business and commerce. Located at the heart of the fast-growing Baltic Sea region, 315 miles due east of Stockholm, Helsinki serves as a gateway between East and West. Several daily flights and new high-speed trains link Helsinki to St. Petersburg, and extensive intercontinental flight connections make Helsinki a major hub for the megacities of East Asia, serving 13 million travelers in 2010. Annually, some 9 million ferry passengers travel through the port of Helsinki.

Quality of Life

Helsinki ranks second among European cities in The Economist Intelligence Unit's Global Liveability Report (2010). According to Mercer Human Resources Consulting, Helsinki tops Europe in health and sanitation (2007). Unicef places Finland among the four best nations in child well-being (2007).

Transparency International, an independent watchdog organization that fights corruption in the public sector around the world, has consistently placed Finland at the top or close to the top of the most uncorrupt nations in the world.

Helsinki enjoys the highest resident-approval rating among European cities in cultural services and public transportation. Helsinki's approval rating is the second highest in Europe in education and safety.

Environment

The central parts of Helsinki are located on a peninsula, and the city has a strong maritime flavor. Whole suburbs are located on islands, and the coastal areas of Helsinki are enriched by an archipelago of 300 islands. Helsinki is also a green city, with one-third of the land area preserved for parks and other green areas. The World Economic Forum places Finland fourth in the world in environmental performance (2008).

Helsinki pays special attention to water. The city, together with Turku, is spearheading a campaign to save the Baltic Sea, which is burdened by human activity beyond its capacity to cope. With their "Baltic

Sea Challenge,” the cities set an example by their own actions to improve the state of the sea and challenge others to act.

The Helsinki water treatment facilities set world standards. Wastewater treatment is some of the most efficient in the world and takes place in underground halls extending over 15 hectares in the Helsinki bedrock, sealed from the surrounding urban environment. Helsinki emits far less nitrogen than a natural river flowing through the city into the sea.

Basic Education

Since 2000, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) has consistently ranked Finland's 15-year-olds best or close to best in reading, mathematics and science.

Helsinki's education specialists cite many reasons for the achievement. Not least of them are culture and tradition – policies and practices in education reflecting basic values of Finnish society.

Higher Education and Culture

Helsinki is home to Finland's two largest universities, the University of Helsinki (35,000 students) and Aalto University (20,000 students). The city is also home to the nation's art universities, from classical music to design to theatre. Sibelius Academy, Finland's only music university, has produced an outstanding number of conductors, composers and musicians for the international classical music scene.

The Helsinki metropolitan area has approximately 70 art galleries and a strong group of museums, which include the Helsinki Art Museum; the institutions of the Finnish National Gallery (including the Ateneum Art Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma and the Sinebrychoff Art Museum); and the Espoo Museum of Modern Art.

Finnish society is built by design: the country has been shaped by its architecture, and the innovative processes inherent in design continue to be embedded in its society. The distinctive identity of Finland first came to prominence on the international scene through the presentation of Eliel Saarinen's epoch-making Finnish Pavilion at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1900. Well before then, however, Helsinki had begun to have its own architectural profile, thanks to the neoclassical city plan and major buildings designed for it by Carl Ludvig Engel (1778-1840).

Helsinki today has rich architectural layers, from this neoclassical architecture (dating from Finland's Russian era) to Art Nouveau, modernism and a current flourishing of contemporary architecture.

Summing up its philosophy with the theme “Embedding Design in Life,” Helsinki won the international title World Design Capital for 2012.

Urban development

After the completion of a new cargo harbor in 2008, vast waterfront areas in downtown Helsinki have been freed for redevelopment, further enhancing Helsinki's strong maritime character and making the urban structure more sustainable. As a result, the city faces the biggest development boom in its history. In response, Helsinki is defining its future through urban design. New districts accommodating housing, services and jobs will have individual profiles ranging from commercial and urban to residential, marked by human scale and closeness to nature.

Social and environmental sustainability is an overarching goal in the planning and construction of the new areas. The goal is sought by mixed use (placing housing and jobs side by side to reduce the need for commuting), by mixing various types of housing to avoid segregation along income lines, and by a heavy emphasis on public transportation.

Helsinki is also growing rapidly under the surface, and is the first city in the world to draft an underground city plan. The city's bedrock already hosts more than 400 underground facilities, which even include

sports halls. There are 200 km (125 miles) of drivable maintenance tunnels, which accommodate water mains, sewage pipes, district heat and cooling pipes, and electrical cables.

Helsinki residents rely on public transportation. Seventy-one percent of all commuting to the city center during the morning peak hours is by the metro, trams (streetcars), commuter trains and buses. There is a heavy emphasis on rail in Helsinki's development plans. Trams are an integral part of Helsinki's new central districts, and the metro system is being expanded.

Innovative energy solutions

Helsinki's sustainability goals culminate in energy-smart solutions that lower overall energy use and emissions, aiming at a carbon neutral future by 2050.

A cave underneath the Uspenski Cathedral in downtown Helsinki houses the world's most eco-efficient data center. The servers are cooled by district cooling produced by Helsinki's own energy company Helsingin Energia, and the heat produced by the servers is retrieved and conducted into the Helsinki district heating network to heat housing and domestic water.

Helsinki is a world-leader in district heating and cooling, based on co-generation of electricity, district heat and cooling in the same process. The result is extremely high energy efficiency.

Today 93 percent of the buildings in Helsinki are heated by district heating. The city's district cooling network is now the third largest and the fastest growing system in Europe.

Helsinki today has rich architectural layers, from this neoclassical architecture (dating from Finland's Russian era) to Art Nouveau, modernism and a current flourishing of contemporary architecture.