Open Knowledge Finland / Daniel Schildt

Open data heightens transparency

The world's first open data festival was held in Helsinki in September 2012.

Pioneering applications in open data in Helsinki put the City at the forefront in public-sector transparency, a deep-rooted tradition in the City administration.

The City of Helsinki launched a Web service titled *Open Ahjo* in March 2013. The new service gives an opportunity for the citizens of the Finnish capital to go online to find out the agendas and decisions of Helsinki City leaders and elected officials.

Open Ahjo gives access to City records and makes them available to the general public as open data through an open user interface. Open Ahjo represents the latest stage of the City of Helsinki electronic decision-making system Ahjo used by the Helsinki City Council, City Board and other decision-making bodies. Open Ahjo lists about 25,000 City decisions in a year.

Helsinki Mayor **Jussi Pajunen** envisioned at an early stage of the development: "This is likely to be the biggest single factor affecting our democratic process throughout the City's modern history… Our democracy will be stronger than ever."

Mayor Pajunen pointed out, "Openness has been our guiding principle even earlier. Secrecy is an exception. But reviewing City

" *Open Ahjo represents a revolution in transparency.*

documents has been a laborious task. Everything has been there, but behind many doors."

All municipal records in Finland have been public long since with the exception of a few that are classified by the power of law. In the Internet age, the agendas and protocols of the City decision-making bodies have been published on the Web. Public records can be freely reviewed by anyone.

However, Open Ahjo now makes the City electronic archives available on an unprecedented scale and facilitates the review process. Records are automatically copied into Open Ahjo, where they and their attachments are available in a machine-readable format for anyone in an unrestricted manner and free of charge.

The usability of Open Ahjo is being enhanced through application development encouraged and supported by Helsinki Region Infoshare, a project initiated by the City of Helsinki to publish open data from public-sector sources for the creation of new apps, digital services and business activity.

The Finnish word ahjo means the blacksmith's forge. The association with the Helsinki City decision-making process is one of forging, or processing, an issue.

Open Ahjo moves forward with a user-friendly service

The Open Ahjo interface is mainly intended for developers. Open Ahjo is ideal for developers and provides vast opportunities where only programming skills and the imagination set limits.

Average citizens, however, may need to wait a while longer for apps that help them to peruse City records with ease. With this in mind, the City of Helsinki is about to launch a user-friendly service for Open Ahjo. The app organises the Open Ahjo content, and it allows users easily to browse all issues, pinpoint them on a map and check who is responsible for each decision.

Some of the key users of Open Ahjo are journalists. **Esa Mäkinen**, the producer of data journalism at the main Finnish daily paper Helsingin Sanomat, sees great potential in Open Ahjo.

"Open Ahjo makes it easier to follow the City decision making and access the related processes," Mäkinen says. Previously journalists went through a laborious task of digging up information in reporting on current City affairs.

Helsinki challenges developers

A developer portal named *Helsinki Loves Developers* largely focuses on Open Ahjo, providing application programming interfaces (APIs) for developers. The Helsinki Loves Developers project participates in app challenges such as *Open Helsinki Hack-at-Home*, which seeks out good ideas for Open Ahjo and helps the ideas' creators to build apps that advance transparency in the City decision making and facilitate citizen feedback to the City. More at dev.hel.fi.

Helsinki is the pioneer of open data in Finland

The City of Helsinki adopted an open data policy in May 2010. Helsinki Region Infoshare (HRI) was established later in the year to publish open data from public-sector sources through the project's online service at www.hri.fi, and the project was joined by the Helsinki Metropolitan Area cities of Espoo, Vantaa and Kauniainen. HRI works in co-operation with Forum Virium Helsinki, a non-profit company that develops digital services for citizens with public-sector organisations and private-sector companies.

Today www.hri.fi gives access to more than 1,000 datasets from the Helsinki Metropolitan Area cities and other public-sector sources for unrestricted use by anybody free of charge. The milestone 1,000th dataset opened consisted of aerial photos of Helsinki from 1943 onwards, which have since been used by app developers to produce visualisations of the city's evolution over the decades.

Open Ahjo is one of the most important additions to HRI.

In June 2013 the European Commission awarded HRI with the European Prize for Innovation in Public Administration for achievements in promoting transparency through open data.

Apps developed from Helsinki Region Infoshare open data

Helsinki car owners no longer need to remember where they parked their cars or run out to put more money into parking meters. All that is handled by an app named **Parkman**, developed with the help of open data. Parkman reminds car owners of the location of their cars, tells them the parking charge and allows them to pay the charge on their mobile phones. The app utilises the Helsinki metropolitan parking map's data on parking rate zones and the GPS location information system. More at www.parkmanworld.com.

BlindSquare helps the blind and visually impaired to navigate through the city by literally telling them where to go. The app determines the user's location and looks up information about the surroundings from OpenStreetMap, Foursquare and local open public data. It speaks out the information in a synthetic voice on the mobile phone. More at blindsquare.com.

What is open data?

Open data refers to such raw data produced or gathered by the public administration, businesses, other organisations and citizens that has been made easy to use by anyone freely and free of charge.

Open data helps to generate new business and create new services by allowing developers to use the data as the building blocks of innovations. Open data brings many benefits to education and research. The average citizen benefits from open data through new services that ease the everyday life.

Open data can increase public awareness and understanding of developments in their neighbourhoods through apps based, for example, on decision-making records and location information.
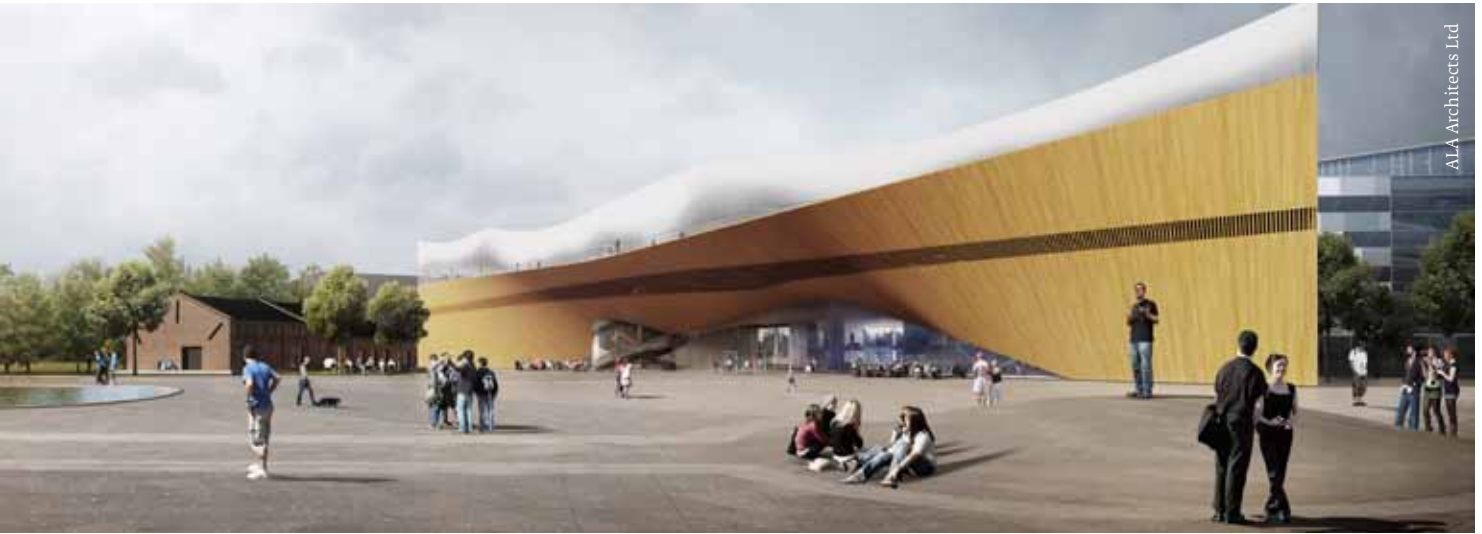
eServices boost efficiency

Before Helsinki residents may decide to contest a parking ticket online, they can review the basis of the fine from an online photo of the wrongly parked car posted by the parking enforcement officer. The parking fine service is one of the City's eServices for citizens.

Some of the most popular City eServices relate to public child-clinic and child-care services, largely used from 10–11 p.m. when the busy parents of young children finally have a moment to spare. Before the eService was available, the parents were forced to squeeze these affairs into their hectic office-hour schedules.

More than 90 percent of all applications for City-provided social housing are today made electronically.

City eService users' transactions are all stored in their personal folders. Use of the services requires electronic identification to log in. The eServices are provided in Finnish, Swedish and English 24/7. More at asiointi.hel.fi.

Helsinki Central Library design selected

The winning design of the Helsinki Central Library competition

The winner of the open international architectural competition for the Helsinki Central Library is ALA Architects of Helsinki.

The Helsinki Central Library will be a next-generation library and a landmark building in the cultural heart of Helsinki in the Töölö Bay area, standing adjacent to other major public buildings. The library is expected to receive 5,000 visitors per day – 1.5 million annually.

The competition was held in two stages. The first, open stage attracted 544 proposals from around the world. Six designs were selected for the second stage. The winner was announced in June 2013.

According to plan, the library will be completed in 2017 to celebrate the centennial of Finnish Independence. The library is the Finnish Government's official centennial project.

Crown Bridges ideas competition completed

The winner of an international bridge design competition for *Kruunusillat – Crown Bridges* – is a cable-stayed bridge designed by a Finnish-British team co-ordinated by WSP Finland.

Crown Bridges are a proposed landmark bridge connection between the new housing area of Kruunuvuorenranta under development in eastern Helsinki and the inner city over a central Helsinki bay. The connection would include Finland's longest bridge spanning 1.2km. The bridges are intended for public transport serving trams, cyclists and pedestrians.

No decision on bridge implementation has yet been made.

Crown Bridges would be highly visible in Helsinki and stand as a new architectural icon in the city.

Helsinki 8th most liveable, Finland 3rd most competitive

The Economist Intelligence Unit places Helsinki in 8th place in its new liveability index that compares living conditions in 140 cities worldwide. According to the index, the world's most liveable city is Melbourne. Vienna is in 2nd and Vancouver in 3rd place. Notably, Vienna and Helsinki are the only European cities on the Top Ten list, which also includes Toronto and Calgary.

The index ranks cities in categories that assess political stability, health care, cultural offerings, education and infrastructure.

The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2013-2014 ranks the Finnish economy the 3rd most competitive among 148 nations, behind Switzerland and Singapore and ahead of Germany and the USA. The Forum defines competitiveness as the set of institutions, policies and factors that determine the level of productivity of a country.

Haltia takes visitors to Finnish wilderness

Mika Huisman

Haltia overlooks the Nuuksio National Park.

The Finnish Nature Centre Haltia is a new gateway to Finnish wilderness located in the Nuuksio National Park just 30km from the Helsinki city centre. Haltia brings the most treasured Finnish nature to the doorsteps of the Finnish capital through exhibits ranging from southern Finland's archipelago to the fell tops of Lapland in the far north. The permanent exhibits present all 37 national parks of Finland.

The green building makes maximum use of wood in the exterior, interior and structural elements. It utilises solar and geothermal energy for heating and cooling, achieving 75-percent self-sufficiency in heating energy and 100-percent self-sufficiency in cooling energy.

The architecture by **Rainer Mahlamäki** of Lahdelma Mahlamäki Architects was inspired by the Finnish national epic Kalevala. Haltia is owned and operated by Metsähallitus, a Finnish State institution that administers the Finnish State-owned land and water including all national parks.

Civic participation reinforced through 10 democracy pilot projects

Residents of the Malminkartano suburb of Helsinki were urged to submit ideas through the first half of 2013 to strengthen a clean and safe local environment. They were able to post their proposals on a digital map with an app titled "Tell it to us on a map". The citizen feedback was passed on to the appropriate Helsinki City officers.

The project, *Magnificent Malminkartano*, was one of 10 democracy pilot projects to promote local civic participation during 2013, most of them citizen-initiated and citizen-driven.

The 10 projects were selected for merits in building new models for resident participation. Some projects focused on a particular district and others were city-wide focusing on a theme.

The thematic project *Helsinki's cycling districts* sought to promote cycling and associated city planning through citizen feedback, training sessions, inspiring special events and information campaigns.

The democracy pilot projects are used to develop new means of participation and interaction. Helsinki strongly emphasises local democracy and civic participation in the City strategy.