

Helsinki

Helsinki News

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Helsinki Central Library Oodi:
Temple of literacy, house of democracy

Amos Rex: More than an art museum

Helsinki approaches diversity
by inclusion, empowers youth



Library Oodi's top floor opens views to the surroundings and faces the Parliament House as an equal in space.

Helsinki Central Library Oodi nears completion

The library will be a house of democracy designed together with citizens

Helsinki's downtown cityscape is about to be crowned with a new landmark building in the heart of the city-centre cultural district: the Helsinki Central Library Oodi will open doors in early December 2018, as the culmination of the centenary celebrations of Finnish independence.

The library name Oodi – the Finnish for Ode – symbolises the role of this public library in Helsinki and for all of Finland. “We will be a temple of liter-

acy and a place of learning,” says Oodi Director **Anna-Maria Soininvaara**.

Library Oodi will be the flagship of the Helsinki City Library function, which includes 36 local public libraries. Oodi will both serve as a traditional library and foster digital culture. Many services will rely on robotics and artificial intelligence. For example, a traditional living library dog, which children can read to, is replaced by a

responsive virtual animal that recognises speech.

“Our mission is to support and to improve literacy by all means, as well as to narrow the digital divide,” Soininvaara emphasises. “We will provide new channels to information.”

She points out that the building faces the Parliament House directly across an open space, and the library’s top floor is at the same level. This makes the two buildings equals in space. “The physical connection is an ideal context for interaction between citizens and the State. It opens a new avenue to promote freedom of speech and democracy.”

Library Oodi is a showcase of modern-day design from architecture to services.

The library building is a powerful and iconic contemporary design by ALA Architects of Helsinki. The building makes extensive use of wood and natural light. It completes the city space of the Töölönlahti area, where it is flanked by many other architectural landmarks.

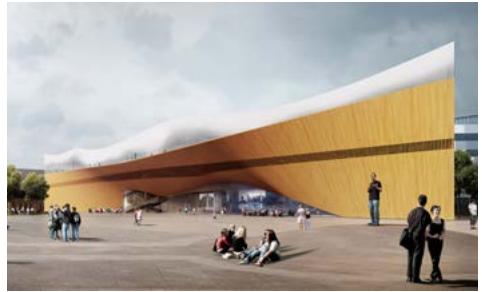
The library functions and services are outcomes of a long design process, which has incorporated design thinking and service design. “We’ve been designing the library for over 10 years,” Soininvaara comments.

Helsinki City Library invited citizens to share their wishes for library services, for example, by posting them on a Tree of Dreams. Representatives of a broad range of communities from education to digitalisation as well as opinion leaders gathered together in workshops to brainstorm for library contents. The feedback and ideas were analysed and utilised to draw up the library project plan.

To finalise the library concept, service design professionals have produced spatial solutions and plans to bundle services.

The three floors of the library building each accommodate different functions.

The ground floor forms an extension to a public



Helsinki Central Library Oodi

10,000 daily visitors

2.5 million visitors annually

Up to **100,000** books

Opens to the public
3 December 2018

Hours: **8–22** on weekdays
and **10–20** on weekends

Open international design
competition: **544** proposals

Winning design:
ALA Architects

lic plaza in front of the building. This floor has a multipurpose hall for the services of partners, which range from exhibitions to information counters. There are cafés, a restaurant and a cinema.

The top floor is dedicated to traditional library functions. This is an unbroken and adaptable space in which functions blend into each other. Only the children’s section is distinct from the rest. The floor and its wide balcony offer unobstructed views to the surrounding cityscape.

The middle floor is dedicated to urban workshops that offer opportunities for learning by doing. There are studios for multimedia productions optimised for the latest digital tools.



The Lasipalatsi Square of Amos Rex

Amos Rex: Art goes underground

Amos Anderson Art Museum reaches out to new audiences

The Amos Anderson Art Museum of Helsinki will reopen on 30 August 2018, reformed and in a new museum building, with an exhibition built with more than 100 laser projectors. The Tokyo-based art collective teamLab will immerse the exhibition space of the Amos Rex museum in digital installations that draw the viewers into a reconfigured reality.

The opening exhibition shows what Amos Rex can do: the installations are one of the most technically complex exhibitions ever realised in the Nordic countries.

Amos Rex represents a vast stride for the 50-year-old private art museum, which found its conventional galleries in downtown Helsinki insufficient to meet the museum's ambitions. Amos Rex is a new type of museum, which lends itself to different kinds of exhibitions, ranging from contemporary art to 20th century modernism to ancient cultures.

Amos Rex is more than a museum; it's a place for social encounters. The museum particularly reaches out to young people.

The museum's new home is in the modernist 1936 Lasipalatsi building and underneath the Lasipalatsi Square. "Art usually needs no natural light, so it was a logical decision to go underground," says Amos Rex spokesman **Timo Riitamaa**. JKMM Architects of Helsinki designed the complex, which also includes the square and the Amos Rex movie theatre in the original Lasipalatsi building.

The underground museum space is built with structural dome ceilings. The domes shape the square above, and skylights provide a connection between the exhibition hall and the square. The overall feel of the underground space is simple and calm. "The philosophy of the design is that the museum shouldn't be an artwork in itself but serve art flexibly," Riitamaa explains.

Keys to rewarding life

Culture and leisure play vital roles in making Helsinki the world's most functional city

It's one thing to build lamps, another thing to light them. I like to use this metaphor to describe what culture and leisure mean for a city.

Helsinki seeks to become the most functional city in the world.

The whole Helsinki City organisation works on every front to move closer to the goal day by day – to ensure that all neighbourhoods are good and safe, all schools educate children well, and public transport runs smoothly.

As the Helsinki City staff responsible for cultural, youth and sports services, our role in the Culture and Leisure division in building a functional city is to brighten that city. We are convinced that our efforts are vital to making Helsinki a better city, as we can make people happy.

People are happy when they are active with their bodies and in their minds. Helsinki offers its people splendid opportunities for both – with extensive sports and outdoor activities, and with a broad cultural offering. Together they make for rewarding experiences that enrich people's lives.

Truly rewarding experiences in Helsinki are made possible by the city's special features. One of them is Helsinki's many islands open to the public. Another one is the dynamic downtown cultural district, which is about to strengthen further, first with the Amos Rex art museum, and later in 2018 with the Helsinki Central Library Oodi.

Library Oodi exemplifies Helsinki's cultural strengths at their best: that culture belongs to everybody. An oasis of learning, Oodi will also be a stronghold of democracy that offers equal opportunities for all to participate in cultural activities.

We want to take cultural participation further, to all parts of Helsinki and more and more to embrace Helsinki's expanding diversity. As well as creating happiness, cultural activities can play key roles in creating encounters that strengthen our society and Helsinki as a city.

Nasima Razmyar

Helsinki Deputy Mayor for Culture and Leisure



Pertti Nisonen / City of Helsinki



The City of Helsinki makes diversity visible, for example, by joining the annual Helsinki Pride LGBT culture and human rights festival.

Helsinki embraces diversity through positive encounters

The City relies on design thinking in integrating minorities by inclusion

Young immigrants often struggle to find a place in Finnish society. Elderly people living alone struggle to cope and suffer from loneliness. The Helsinki youth services and We Foundation put the two groups together, employing foreign-born young people to assist and keep company to World War II veterans at their homes. Both met as equals, and both were winners.

“The encounters built positive interaction between elderly native Finns and foreign-born young people,” says **Tommi Laitio**, Executive Director of the City of Helsinki Culture and Leisure division.

“We can actively build such encounters,” Laitio continues. He cites the Godchildren programme of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, which brings children and families across the board of Helsinki’s cultural diversity together with the mainstream society. Children see themselves as members of the community and parents feel empowered.

“As Helsinki embraces increasing diversity, the City integrates minorities – immigrants, sexual minorities, disabled people and other – by inclusion. We develop our universal services so that everyone is able to join and feels welcome in this society. We do our best to highlight diversity in our interactions and communication,” Laitio says.

Admitting that Helsinki is still a young city in diversity, Laitio is trustful that Helsinki is on the right track: “Helsinki approaches integration with design thinking, that is, by putting the user – in this case members of minorities – in the centre of development. User-centred design stems from the needs and desires of the targets of design processes to ensure the best possible outcomes. Helsinki is way ahead of other cities in this respect.

“The fundamental values of Finnish society give us a good foundation to proceed on: high levels of trust, low corruption, strong egalitarian values especially among the younger generations, and an overall benevolence of the society.”

Youth empowered

Helsinki strives to enable all young people to have their voices heard

Helsinki youth work made history in April 2018 in advancing the public participation of young people: the Helsinki Youth Council took the floor in a Helsinki City Council meeting for the first time ever, when the meeting agenda reached initiatives made by young people. City councillors stepped aside to allow youth councillors to speak. The speakers proposed that youth work should be integrated into the operations of the Helsinki Central Library Oodi, among other opportunities for youth participation.

“This was a tremendous occasion for the Helsinki youth,” says **Katri Kairimo**, the programme leader of Ruuti (“igniting force”), which is the Helsinki youth public participation system. “It underscored our mission with Ruuti to make young people active doers, not targets of action.”

“Ruuti empowers young people and makes their voices heard through several channels,” Kairimo explains. “First, Ruuti supports youth events and young people’s self-initiated action. Second, the system seeks to make young people active members of the democratic decision-making process.” Every 13–17 year old can vote in the annual Ruuti elections to elect the members of the Youth Council. The Youth Council represents young people and advances their initiatives with Helsinki decision-makers and leaders.

“The key Ruuti channel for youth empowerment is participatory budgeting,” Kairimo emphasises. This is a system in which every young person in Helsinki can propose how some of the City youth budget should be used.

The Ruuti principles come together in the Youth Eco-Café: the initiative for this pop-up café



The Ruuti Youth Council holding an open meeting during a Ruuti event at the Helsinki City Hall. The event comprised happenings in which young people met with opinion leaders and politicians.

promoting sustainable values emerged through the Ruuti initiatives system, the funding came through Ruuti participatory budgeting, the staff includes young people hired by the City as summer workers, and the café tours youth venues and summer youth events.



Helsinki tourism shows robust growth

Overnight stays in Helsinki broke the record in 2017, exceeding 4 million and showing a 13% growth over 2016. Overnight stays by foreign visitors grew by 15% while those by domestic visitors grew by 10%. The Helsinki region recorded 5.3 million overnights.

Helsinki is the engine of tourism for the whole country, manifest especially in the numbers of international visitors. The highest numbers of visitors to Helsinki in 2017 came from Russia, Germany, the UK, the USA, Sweden and Japan. The number of Chinese visitors grew by 31%.

Helsinki is also the most popular congress city in the Nordic region, and its passenger port is the busiest in Europe.

Travel and tourism have developed markedly better in the Finnish capital than in the capitals of Finland's neighbouring countries. Overnight stays grew by 2% in Copenhagen, 3% in Oslo, 3% in Tal-

linn and an estimated 3% in Stockholm from 2016 to 2017.

"Helsinki's main attractions as a tourist destination are the city's proximity to nature, an intriguing urban culture and a rich event offering. Tourists today are increasingly interested in truly experiencing the destination. As the most popular city destinations in Europe suffer from excessive tourism, smaller cities like Helsinki are well positioned to respond to the growing demand for experiential tourism," says **Laura Aalto**, CEO of Helsinki Marketing.

What to see and do in Helsinki as well as visitor information can be found at MyHelsinki.fi.

Equality for young immigrants

Migrant Youth Helsinki is a project by the City of Helsinki and We Foundation to improve the equality of foreign-born youth in the workplace, education and social environment. Project components include *Buddyschool*, in which older students teach younger ones on the communal peer learning principle, and the *Job'd* model, which provides young people with first jobs and creates new jobs.

Migrant Youth Helsinki was selected to compete in the finals of the international Engaged Cities competition, which highlighted cities that have developed creative solutions to their problems together with their citizens. Engaged Cities was organized by the Cities of Service network of more than 200 U.S. mayors.

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