



Final report on participation in the Culture and Leisure Division for the 2021–2025 strategy period

Helsinki

Culture and Leisure Division

The Culture and Leisure Division maintains and improves the opportunities for Helsinki residents of all ages to foster their mental and physical wellbeing, learning and active citizenship, while also supporting Helsinki's vitality.

The Division is responsible for library materials, museum and art museum collections and maintaining cultural heritage.

The Division takes care of regulatory duties related to fostering the cultural environment. The Culture and Leisure Division operates under the Culture and Leisure Committee.



Culture and Leisure Division's Participation Plan for the 2021–2025 strategy period

On 31 January 2023, the Culture and Leisure Committee approved the Culture and Leisure Division's Participation Plan for the current strategy period.

In accordance with the plan, the Division and its departments have updated and reported on their participation measures annually as part of the annual planning process.

In accordance with the decision on the implementation of Helsinki's participation and interaction model, the City's divisions regularly report to the committees on the realisation of participation in their respective areas.



Summary of participation work objectives in the Culture and Leisure Division for the 2021–2025 strategy period

1.

The development of the customer experience in the Division

2.

Consultation with target groups and impact assessment by target group in the Division's decision-making

3.

The key annual participation goals of the departments, updated as part of annual planning



Implementation of the five approaches to participation in the Culture and Leisure Division 2021–2025



Promoting participation through local development and regional activity



Site-based development and co-creation, and support for active locals through cooperation, facilities and grants.

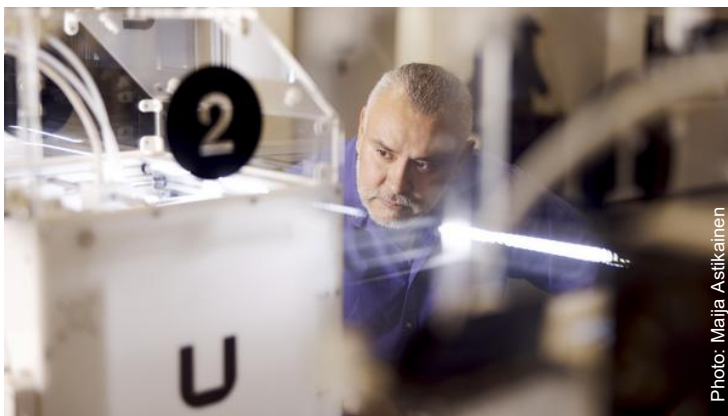
Successes

In addition to core service operations, regional development and local participation made visible and impactful progress in the Culture and Leisure Division through activities such as network efforts, voluntary work, the model for inclusive and participatory regional cultural work, work on the suburban regeneration areas, Varaamo, vision work at cultural centres, the implementation of a participatory model for facility projects and OmaStadi.

Room for improvement

There is a recognised need for improvement in City- and Division-wide coordination, in particular. It is challenging to get a clear picture of the full range of services and opportunities available in the regions, which makes it difficult to guide residents towards the right channels, opportunities and services. There is also room for improvement in communication and interaction with city residents and partners.

Promoting participation through activism and support for independent activities



The City as a place for community building, effective actions and encounters, and as an enabler of independent activities through facilities, grants and cooperation.

Successes

Varaamo underwent significant renewal and expansion during the strategy period. The new booking system, the transfer of the use of the Education Division's facilities by residents to the Culture and Leisure Division and the development of keyless access will make facilities and equipment more efficiently available to city residents. Under the Helsinki Model, city residents were able to collaborate directly with artists to co-create works of art. The City overhauled the initiative system for young people, and youth work developed guidelines for supporting young people's activism.

Room for improvement

Residents continued to provide feedback that the City does not sufficiently value or support the activities, venues and communities that arise from residents' own initiatives. There is still a need to develop dialogue and new forms of cooperation with partners – including fourth sector operators.

Promoting participation by utilising the knowledge of city residents and the participation of users



Photo: Sakari Røyskö

We draw on the experiences, knowledge and expertise of city residents and partners in the development of the City's operations and services, as well as in the preparation of decision-making.

Successes

The Culture and Leisure Division accumulated and utilised a wealth of information on city residents through channels such as feedback, facility projects, service design projects, user surveys, panels, networks and questionnaires – such as the extensive Youth Budget data collection, in which over 10,000 young people participated each year in 2021–2025. The City puts the skills of its residents to good use in a variety of ways through voluntary work.

Room for improvement

There is room for improvement in the use of data in the development, assessment and decision-making relating to services. Grants, Varaamo, voluntary work and sponsor activities enable people to engage in activities independently and make use of their skills, but there is still a need for new forms of activities and new roles for city residents within culture and leisure services, particularly for those in vulnerable positions.

Promoting inclusion through the development of the customer experience



Services are designed with the user in mind and based on customer data, so that the service meets both the customer's needs and the service provider's objectives.

Successes

During the period, the Division invested in service design. The Division planned new services and facilities, as well as the renewal of existing ones, in even closer collaboration with city residents and partners. In line with the participation and service design model for facility projects, stakeholders were extensively involved right from the needs assessment phase onwards (e.g. Yrjönkatu Swimming Hall, Stoa, Malminkartano Library, Itäkeskus Swimming Hall). The cultural centres' vision work, in particular, focused on the participation of city residents and the customer experience.

Room for improvement

A great deal of data is being generated, but there is room for improvement in the common models for processing it, utilising it, measuring its impact and communicating it back to city residents. The experience metrics currently in use are either rather limited (Net Promoter Score, NPS) or difficult to apply to service development (Experiences of Social Inclusion Scale, ESIS).

Participation aims at equality



Participation supports equality and takes into account the target groups for services, particularly those who are in a socially disadvantaged position.

Successes

The Integration Promotion Programme, the Helsinki Model and the programme for the suburban regeneration areas gave rise to and strengthened several participatory activities, such as Welcome Day events, the library's Democracy Cafe and celebrations of different cultures. The Division took several steps to address girls' experiences of lower levels of inclusion and to improve recreational opportunities for girls who have immigrated to the country. The Division improved the inclusion of older adults by focusing on accessibility and establishing the Older People's Exercise Council, among other measures.

Room for improvement

There is a constant need for more multilingual communication and marketing that resonates with city residents – but communication cannot make up for a lack of resources in service provision. Efforts must focus on improving inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility in structures and service provision.

Key successes in participation in the Culture and Leisure Division in 2021–2025



Strengthening the participation of children and young people

The City overhauled the children and young people's influence system in 2022 and, at the same time, established a City-level steering group for children and young people's participation. Two objectives were set for the strategy period:

1. **Every child and young person feels included and believes that they have opportunities to make a difference.**
2. **The voice of children and young people is heard in a variety of ways in the city.**

A new initiative were the events entitled 'The Voice of Children and Young People Is Heard!', at which the divisions' leaders have been meeting with children and young people twice a year to listen to their views on current issues that are important to them.

Youth work developed an approach that promotes participation. The City revised the Youth Budget in collaboration with young people. In 2025, elections for the Youth Council were held, with a voter turnout of 44.8%, which was higher than in previous elections.

UNICEF Finland awarded Helsinki the Child Friendly City designation in October 2024, and the second term will run from 2025 to 2028.

Helsinki



Participation of older people

Older residents of Helsinki played a key role in the development of services, such as in the vision work of cultural centres, the Older People's Exercise Council, established in 2024, and the Palvelutori service events for older people, likewise launched in 2024.

In 2025, **the City allocated two million euros of state inheritance funds to activities for older people**. The funding was used to promote physical activity, cultural participation, functional capacity and independent activity. The allocation will continue in 2026.

Cultural and library services focused on communal and accessible activities. Memory cafes, community singing sessions, customer panels and wide-ranging collaboration with organisations. Services were brought to people's homes in the Helsinki City Museum's Suitcases of Memories and by streaming events, for example.

Of the approximately 5,400 volunteers involved in voluntary work, around 50% are of retirement age. Examples of activities include library walks, language cafes, homework help for children and support for service homes, as well as the Helsinki City Museum's Kuvaussakki photography group and museum grandmas and grandpas.



The plurality of participation

The Culture and Leisure Division used the Koto programme to try out new approaches **focused on improving the participation and opportunities for influence of immigrants and foreign-language speakers**. The Koto project made it possible to invest in measures such as communication in Somali and Arabic and trials of new communication approaches.

The aim of the Koto programme's youth work activities has been **to establish youth work that promotes integration on a permanent basis**. 'The Voice of Young People Is Heard!' events focused on themes such as improving recreational opportunities for girls who have immigrated to the country.

Welcome Days have welcomed new residents to Helsinki. The Democracy Cafe project at Itäkeskus Library was aimed at Helsinki residents who had recently moved to the city and were not yet familiar with the ways of influencing society or the channels for social debate.

Large-scale facility and service development projects (such as Stoa, Itäkeskus Swimming Hall and Malminkartano Library) made efforts to facilitate **participation in several languages and cooperated with partner organisations**.



Developing the Culture and Leisure Division's facilities in collaboration with city residents

The Culture and Leisure Division introduced a process model for participation and service design in facility projects in 2023. The aim of the model is **to strengthen cooperation between owners, make annual planning more predictable, enhance the impact of residents' participation** and better integrate facility renewals into the development of the customer experience and service environments.

The Division utilised this model during the period in projects such as

- the renovation of **Yrjönkatu Swimming Hall**,
- the renovation and extension of **Stoa**,
- the renovation of **Itäkeskus Swimming Hall**,
- the renovation of **Töölö Sports Hall**,
- the preparation for the renovation of **Annantalo**,
- the needs assessment for **Lauttasaari Multi-purpose Building**,
- the renovation of **Rikhardinkatu Library** and
- the design of the spatial and service concept for the new building of **Malminkartano Library**.



Helsinki residents themselves as culture and leisure organisers and volunteers

The development of Varaamo during the 2021–2025 period increased **opportunities for city residents to come together, pursue their interests and organise activities themselves**. In 2025, 74,000 different people used Varaamo, 43% of whom were new to the service. The number of bookings for facilities and equipment is on the rise. Keyless access and the transfer of the use of the Education Division's facilities by residents to the Culture and Leisure Division will make the use of these facilities by residents more efficient.

Harnessing the skills and enthusiasm of city residents through voluntary work. At libraries, volunteers run language cafes, book clubs and various other clubs, among other activities. Liikuntaluotsi volunteers, on the other hand, are peer instructors who help people get active.

A wide range of grants support residents' participation and independent activities. For example, the Helsinki Model has helped develop an approach in which **residents themselves can act as creators and curators of art and work together to develop their neighbourhoods**. The Sponssi project grant for youth groups, in turn, **enables young people to organise activities independently**.



New physical activity, cultural and youth services from OmaStadi

During the four rounds of OmaStadi in 2020–2025, city residents submitted approximately 1,700 proposals regarding services provided by the Culture and Leisure Division. The most popular themes were **exercise and outdoor activities, facilities and services for children and young people and, to a growing extent, culture, communality and wellbeing.**

To date, city residents have voted to implement **67 proposals related to services provided by the Division, with a total cost of approximately EUR 14 million.**

During the 2021–2025 period, the Culture and Leisure Division used the OmaStadi budget to implement projects such as 19 new permanent sports facilities, a number of outdoor gyms, sauna and winter swimming facilities, events and temporary services and pilot projects.

The implementation of the OmaStadi projects highlights the need for communication and interaction. As the City carries out these projects on the initiative of city residents, their progress is closely monitored.

1,700

project ideas from
city residents
relating to culture
and leisure services

19

new
permanent
sports
facilities

67

projects
implemented by
the Culture and
Leisure Division

approx. EUR

14

million
spent on services
provided by the
Culture and
Leisure Division

More information

Culture and leisure services:

[Culture and Leisure | City of Helsinki](#)

**Final report on the Culture and Leisure
Division's 2021–2025 Participation Plan in the
Decisions service (in Finnish):**

[Osallisuussuunnitelma 2026–2029,
osallisuussuunnitelman 2021–2025 loppuraportti,
kulttuurin ja vapaa-ajan toimiala | Decisions | City
of Helsinki](#)

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