

Promoting Participation in the City of Helsinki 2026–2029

Levels of Citizens Participation and Influence

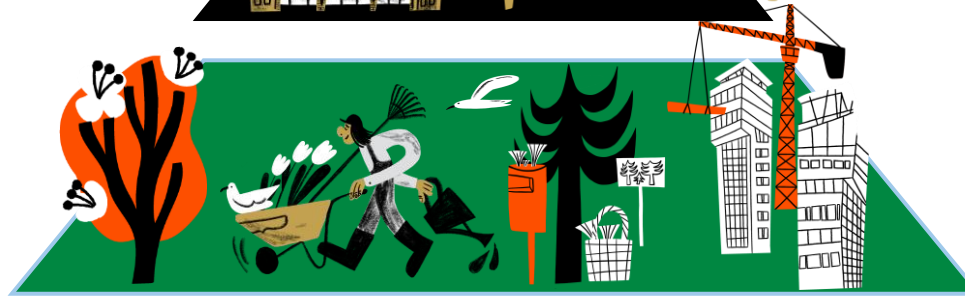
Participation is the experience of belonging and having opportunities to influence matters that are meaningful to you.



I can influence and participate in society



I can influence and participate in the city



I can influence and participate in the local area



I can influence and participate in my everyday life



I am seen, heard, and acknowledged every day

Principles of participation in City of Helsinki

**Utilizing the
knowledge and
expertise of
individuals and
communities**

**Enabling independent
activities**

**Creating equal
opportunities for
participation**

A Helsinki we can be proud of

Key Participation and Inclusion Priorities in the City Strategy 2025–2029

Pleasant neighbourhoods with a strong sense of community

- The districts and neighbourhoods of the city are distinctive local communities that play an important role. We support local organisations and associations and include their voice in the development of their area. Helsinki is shaped by its residents.
- We make a variety of methods available for people to share their experiences, wishes and opinions with us.
- We strive to develop these means of participation so we can reach Helsinki residents of all ages and backgrounds.
- Together with local associations, we plan concrete ways to enhance people's sense of agency, their willingness to forge connections and their desire to do something for their local community.
- Our activities promote the connection diverse communities and people from different backgrounds feel with Helsinki, as well as their identity as a Helsinki resident.

Widespread wellbeing

- In Helsinki, everyone – regardless of their background or starting point – should be able to live a good life and pursue their dreams. All of Helsinki's residents should feel like they belong. We are resolutely working to ensure that every resident of Helsinki can live a good life in our city.
- The city is committed to combating regional segregation and inequality between residents. We devote special attention to keeping differentiations between the realities of children and young people to a minimum. We are resolutely working to improve wellbeing in every neighbourhood of the city and support every resident on their journey through life.

A smooth everyday life and functional services

- The good life of Helsinki residents is founded on a smooth everyday existence and functional services.
- People's situations in life vary. The significance of different services and phenomena changes at different stages of our lives. Each of the city's divisions has an important role to play in ensuring that Helsinki runs smoothly and provides residents with the conditions for a good life.

How we work

- We exist for the people of Helsinki. We care about the wellbeing of the city and its residents. Our work is open and straightforward.
- We are utilising multilingual services and communications to reach out to and include different residents of the city
- We work in cooperation with the third sector, businesses and residents of the city. We have an open mind and positive attitude when it comes to new ideas.

Implementation of the Participation Plan during the Strategy Period

- The city's divisions prepare division-specific participation plans as part of the City's Participation and Interaction Model.
- The plan brings together the objectives and measures for strengthening the participation of residents and various stakeholders during each strategy period.
- The plan includes participation priorities that have been defined for the entire strategy period 2026–2029:
 - The priorities are based on the City Strategy and the participation principles set out in the Administrative Rules.
 - The priorities are common to all city divisions.
 - The content has been developed using a broad evidence base, including research, surveys, and workshops
- At the beginning of the strategy period, measures to implement the priorities have been defined for the entire strategy period as part of the preparation of the plan.
 - The measures related to the priorities may be updated when necessary as part of the annual operational and financial planning of each division.
 - The participation plan and a final report will be submitted to the relevant committee at the end of the strategy period. In addition, an interim review may also be submitted for consideration



The Plan Has Been Co-created and Informed by Evidence

The content of the participation plan was developed through dialogue and collaboration with residents, businesses, organizations, advisory bodies, and councils.

Residents:

- Voxit participation discussion
- Discussion events with local networks in urban renewal areas
- Targeted engagement events for specific groups, such as young people and residents with foreign language backgrounds

Businesses and Civil society organization:

- Surveys

Staff:

- Voxit participation discussion
- Participation Network survey
- Thematic workshops

Advisory Bodies and Councils:

- Workshop with the Youth Council
- Workshop with Council for the Elderly, the Council for the Disabled, the Advisory Board for Equality and Non-Discrimination, Youth the Advisory Board for Organizations and the National Languages Board.

In addition, the plan has been informed by research, reports, and studies from Helsinki, Finland, and international contexts.

Helsinki

2128
survey
respondents

301
workshop
participants

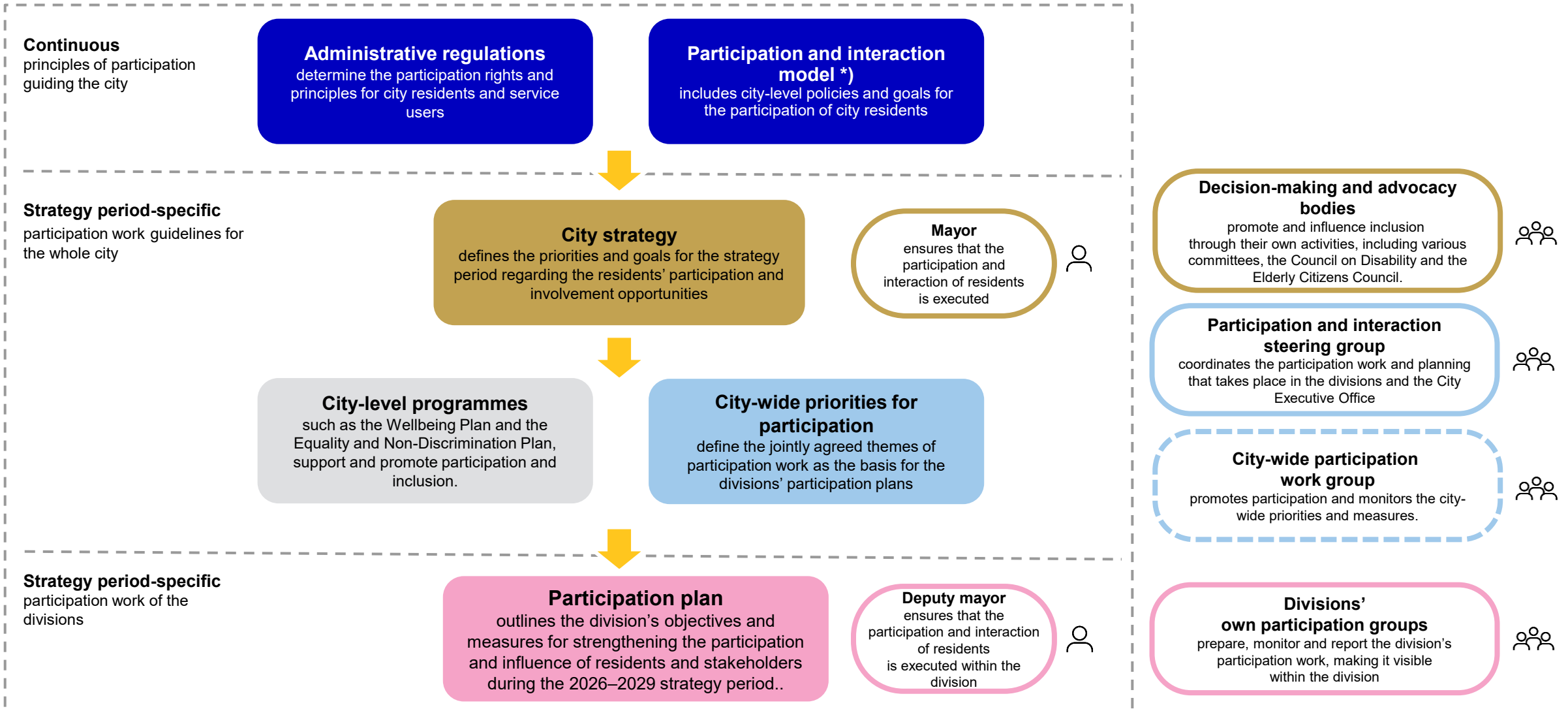
11
workshops

27.8.2026

Links Between the Participation Plan and Other City Plans

- In preparing and drafting the Participation Plan, consideration has been given, according to their stage of development, to the City's plans and programmes that are connected to participation and civic influence.
- These include:
 - ✓ The City of Helsinki Wellbeing Plan 2026–2029, including work on preventing domestic violence and the Child-Friendly Municipality initiative
 - ✓ The Equality and Non-Discrimination Plan for City Services 2026–2029
 - ✓ The Development Programme for Immigration and Integration 2026–2029
 - ✓ Suburban regeneration
 - ✓ Objectives for Preventing Segregation

Implementation of participation plans and division of tasks



Participation priorities and goals for 2026–2029

Participation Priorities 2026–2029



**Promoting Equality
and Diversity Through
Participation**



**Strengthening Local
Influence and
Community
Participation**



**Functional Services
and a Positive
Customer Experience
Through Participation**

City-wide Actions for the Strategy Period

Priority	City-wide Actions for the Strategy Period
Promoting Equality and Diversity Through Participation	PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES AND INTERACTION: 1. We develop, embed and pilot diverse methods for participation and engagement. 2. We invest in timely and effective communication throughout the different stages of participation processes, taking into account the needs of different population groups. 3. We strengthen opportunities for children and young people to have their voices heard across the city and pilot new ways of engaging with children and young people in vulnerable situations.
	WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP: 4. We develop and strengthen new forms of partnership with residents and a wide range of stakeholders. 5. We design participation measures and promote participation together with representatives of target groups, civil society organizations, businesses, and other partners.
Strengthening Local Influence and Community Participation	USING KNOWLEDGE AND DATA: 6. We make better use of existing knowledge and data in local participation work and in service development.
Functional Services and a Positive Customer Experience Through Participation	PARTICIPATION COMPETENCE OF STAFF: 7. We further strengthen staff competence in participation and engagement through a range of capacity-building and professional development measures.

Culture and Leisure Division's Participation Plan for 2026–2029

Helsinki



Participation is a cross-cutting principle in the Culture and Leisure Division

Participation is a cross-cutting principle in the Culture and Leisure Division's services, underpinning all service provision and development. The aim of the promotion of participation in culture and leisure services is to:

- develop services with a resident-oriented approach
- strengthen Helsinki residents' experiences of inclusion
- support the independent activities of individuals and communities and work together as partners
- provide democracy education and promote good relations between different population groups
- give special consideration to those in a vulnerable position
- provide public services in an equal and responsible manner.



The Municipalities Act governs participation in common matters

A municipality's residents and service users have the right to participate in and influence the activities of the municipality. Participation and exerting influence can be furthered especially by:

- arranging opportunities for discussion and for views to be presented, and setting up municipal resident panels
- finding out the opinions of residents and service users who are legal or long-term residents of the municipality before making decisions
- electing representatives of service users to municipal decision-making bodies
- arranging opportunities to participate in the planning of the municipality's finances
- planning and developing services together with service users
- supporting independent planning and preparation of matters by residents, organisations and other corporate entities.

Municipalities Act, section 22 ([8 February 2019/175](#)) Opportunities to participate and exert influence

The provision of culture and leisure services and participation are also governed by the following:

- Constitution of Finland
- Non-Discrimination Act and Act on Equality between Women and Men
- Act on Public Libraries
- Youth Act
- Act on Cultural Activities in Local Government
- Act on the Promotion of Sports and Physical Activity

City-level development responsibilities linked to participation

The Culture and Leisure Division is responsible for the City-level development of three themes that promote the participation of residents:

1. participation and influencing by children and young people, in collaboration with the Education Division
2. grants awarded by the Culture and Leisure Division and the development and implementation of the City's facility reservation system and the Varaamo service
3. City-wide development of volunteer work.

Additionally, the planning of participation takes into account the fact that, from 1 January 2027 onwards, the Culture and Leisure Division will take over the responsibility for the community houses and the Stadin safka food aid network from the City Executive Office, and the Culture and Leisure Division's Welfare Promotion Services and Youth Services will form a new service area.

Helsinki



Welcome Day, Stoa, 2025

Helsinki residents' thoughts about participation

Highlights from a Voxit survey of Helsinki residents, which drew responses from 1,623 residents.

80%

think that the way in which people are treated is particularly important.

88%

are of the opinion that there should be more dialogue in Helsinki between residents, experts and decision-makers.

18%

feel that it is easy to do things on your own or by working together with others on a voluntary basis in Helsinki.

79%

think that residents' knowledge and skills are not utilised sufficiently in the city's development.

69%

are of the opinion that the City should provide more support for residents' independent activities and activism.

Helsinki

“People are lonely, but the barrier to joining is high unless someone asks you to join.”

What aspects of participation do the division's employees want to develop?

Thematic division of responses collected from around 200 Culture and Leisure Division employees through workshops and surveys.

1.

Interaction skills and attitudes

The standard of interaction skills in services is perceived as being uneven. There is room for improvement in interactions with people from different backgrounds and in how they are served. There is a need for practical, hands-on training and equality skills.

2.

People in a vulnerable position

The reach is patchy. There is a need for more outreach work and tools to help overcome language and cultural barriers (e.g. interpretation services). If special groups only participate in their own separate services, it will increase the risk of segregation.

4.

Resources and division of responsibilities

Participation work often has to be done on top of other work. Outreach work and consultations take time, which we do not have. We feel that centralised structures do not provide sufficient support for the work. We want to involve people, but the structures do not support this. The management of participation is unclear.

3.

Methods and processes

There is a need for a participation checklist or process. Methods that involve participation in ways other than online and through dialogue and co-creation. We need ways to reach non-users.

5.

Communication about participation

Helsinki residents are not sufficiently aware of the opportunities they have to make a difference. Participants are not always told what happens to their feedback or ideas. Communication does not reach all target groups.

Helsinki

“Services and engagement are reaching those who are already active, rather than those who would benefit the most.”

Culture and Leisure Division's objectives and measures related to participation for 2026–2029

Culture and Leisure Division's objectives and measures related to participation for 2026–2029



1. We will strengthen the inclusion of vulnerable people, listen to them more and take into account those who do not yet use our services.

- ☐ We will make sure that the voices of children and young people are heard in all our services.
- ☐ We will test new ways of listening to and involving residents who are in a vulnerable position.
- ☐ We will test and adopt a wide range of methods for participation and making a difference.



2. We will support independent activities and explore new types of partnerships. We will strengthen opportunities for local participation.

- ☐ We will support residents' independent activities, agency and communities in local areas.
- ☐ We will facilitate and support interaction and dialogue between residents of different ages and backgrounds.
- ☐ We will strengthen and test new low-threshold ways for people to get involved and have a say in their area.



3. We will involve service users in the development of services and improve the way we interact with customers in our services.

- ☐ We will involve residents in the development and evaluation of our services.
- ☐ In key facility projects, we will set aside work time for resident participation.
- ☐ We will tell the participants how their participation has made a difference.
- ☐ We will improve our interaction skills through staff training and we will highlight successes.



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City Strategy 2026–2029

- In Helsinki, everyone – regardless of their background or starting point – should be able to live a good life and pursue their dreams. All Helsinki residents should feel like they belong. We are determined to make sure that everyone in Helsinki can live a good life in their home city.
- The City is committed to preventing regional segregation and inequality. We pay special attention to the widening gap in realities among children and young people. We are determined to carry out measures that both enhance the attractiveness of every area of the city and support the life path of every Helsinki resident.
- We are developing participation with the aim of reaching residents of different ages and backgrounds. We are utilising multilingual services and communications to reach out to and include different residents of the city.

What does this objective stem from?

- **Ensuring equality in municipal services** enhances people's experiences of inclusion and fairness. In culture and leisure services, it is justified to focus on those who have the least experiences of inclusion.
- **Young people's experiences of inclusion** have declined in recent years, particularly among girls, young people belonging to sexual and gender minorities, young people from low-income families, and young people who perceive their own health to be poor.
- When promoting participation, we must take into account not only people of different ages and backgrounds and speakers of different languages, but also **other vulnerable groups**, such as people with disabilities, people with a long-term illness, the lonely, the unemployed and those with a low level of education. When developing services and participation, we will also always keep Swedish-speaking people in mind.
- **Equal participation can be promoted** by means such as removing barriers to participation, communicating more effectively, bringing different population groups together, focusing on those in a vulnerable position, increasing the number of meeting places, and involving residents in important matters that affect their lives and day-to-day routines.



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- ☐ We will strengthen and test new low-threshold ways for people to get involved and have a say in their area.

City Strategy 2026–2029

- The districts and neighbourhoods of Helsinki are important local communities with a distinctive character. We support local communities and ensure that the voice of the local community is heard in the development of their area. Helsinki is shaped by its residents.
- Together with local communities, we plan concrete ways in which communities can strengthen people's agency, as well as their willingness to build reciprocal connections and act for the benefit of their own local community.
- Our work promotes the attachment of different communities with different backgrounds to Helsinki and people's identity as Helsinki residents.

What does this objective stem from?

- Helsinki is an increasingly diverse city, but opportunities to participate, make a difference, engage with others and build ties with communities are not always distributed evenly. Local culture and leisure services play **a significant role in strengthening inclusion and local communities and in engaging with residents as part of everyone's everyday life.**
- Local communities, independent activities and networks are key building blocks of wellbeing. **Culture and leisure services often serve as facilitators and coordinators in local areas.** They also support residents' independent activities and opportunities for local participation by providing grants and facilities for residents' independent activities.
- The diversity of the city highlights the importance of interactions, dialogue and shared spaces. Studies show that residents want to participate online, but at the same time, polarisation and loneliness have increased. **In local areas, culture and leisure services create opportunities for different population groups to interact and engage in dialogue.**



3. We will involve service users in the development of services and improve the way we interact with customers in our services.

- ☐ We will involve residents in the development and evaluation of our services.
- ☐ In key facility projects, we will set aside work time for resident participation.
- ☐ We will tell the participants how their participation has made a difference.
- ☐ We will improve our interaction skills through staff training and we will highlight successes.

City Strategy 2026–2029

- Good urban life is based on a smooth everyday life and functional services. Different things and services are more important at different stages of life. Each of the City divisions has an important role to play in ensuring that everyday life in Helsinki runs smoothly and residents can enjoy a good quality of life.
- We use a variety of means to listen to the experiences, wishes and perspectives of Helsinki residents. We approach new ideas with a positive and open mind.
- We exist for the people of Helsinki. We care about the wellbeing of the city and its residents. Our work is open and straightforward. We work in cooperation with the third sector, businesses and residents.

What does this objective stem from?

- It is still often the case that the knowledge and experience of Helsinki residents do not receive enough attention. **Timely engagement and clear feedback on the impact of participation strengthen experiences of inclusion and the motivation to participate.** In contrast, a lack of transparency, interaction and trust undermines inclusion.
- Communities and inclusion arise from and thrive on interactions, but they also often require physical spaces. In the Culture and Leisure Division's service development projects, including key facilities projects, **the work time set aside for resident participation allows local needs to be heard and sustainable solutions to be developed.**
- In the day-to-day work of culture and leisure services, calmness, listening and being present help strengthen resident participation and community spirit. **Communication, being present and face-to-face interaction strengthen a sense of community** in a situation where segregation, barriers and digitalisation have weakened social interaction between people.

Further information

Culture and leisure services:

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

The Culture and Leisure Division's Participation Plan for 2026–2029 in the Decisions service (in Finnish only):

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

Helsinki





Kontula Cultural Mall, OmaStadi project 2025–2026