



# Design Education Advances Sustainable Development

Helsinki applies design thinking in education and promotes the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



**HELSINKI**  
CITY OF DESIGN

Designated  
UNESCO Creative City  
in 2014

# Design helps to build sustainable society

Helsinki relies on design in urban transformation and in moving towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Design education in Helsinki provides young learners with skills and capabilities to pursue the goals.

Helsinki's vision is to be the world's most functional city. The Helsinki City Strategy lists elements of functional Helsinki that create the best conditions possible for urban life. Coupled with its strategic vision, Helsinki pursues ambitious climate action to render the city carbon neutral by 2035.

To implement the City Strategy, Helsinki relies on design thinking. Helsinki embraces design thinking as a strategic strength and utilizes the methods of design in management processes and in co-creation of services. To date, the City has applied design thinking in more than 200 projects.

Design thinking is also a method for educating children in Helsinki. The City of Helsinki Education Division seeks to incorporate design education into the school curriculum, emphasizing that design thinking increases students' problem solving abilities and develops creativity. Design thinking helps schools to provide students with the skills that they will need in the future's workplace and society.

Helsinki wants to be a forerunner in local implementation of global responsibility. It is the first city in Europe to submit a voluntary local review of its progress on the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to the United Nations, following New York City in doing so. Helsinki's voluntary local review 2019 highlights connections between the Helsinki City Strategy and the SDGs.

Design education is in an important role in enabling Helsinki to reach its strategic and climate goals and thereby to achieve sustainable development according to the SDGs.

Finland and Helsinki are internationally recognized as global leaders in education. By integrating design education with schoolwork, Helsinki sets a global example and so helps to make design thinking part of school education and sustainable development worldwide.





Photos: Marja Väänänen (cover), Susa Junnola

## Helsinki educates problem solvers of the future to achieve sustainable development.

“Design education is essentially about learning and practicing problem solving skills. Therefore design education should play a key role when we tackle the challenges of sustainable development and pursue the Sustainable Development Goals. Our challenges are so big that it’s vital to educate children as problem solvers from early on,” says **Leenu Juurola**, a design-education project planner for the City of Helsinki Education Division.

Juurola coordinates a project to create maker-spaces – collaborative workspaces – with participatory design at six Helsinki comprehensive schools: as users of the spaces, learners have been keenly involved, co-creating makerspaces based on their dreams.

The project, entitled *Tinkering to take on the world – joy and innovation in learning*, is one of the latest Helsinki design education initiatives.

New learning methods applied in Helsinki schools rely strongly on design thinking and its inherent problem solving process. For example, design thinking is a tool in phenomenon-based

learning, in which learners explore a theme in groups in a holistic manner. Digitalization of learning is coupled with concepts that are supported by design processes, such as the expansion of the learning environment from the classroom to the surrounding society.

The Arabianranta Comprehensive School of Helsinki specializes in learning by design thinking. The school’s design-based approach crosses the boundaries of subject studies, focusing on thinking skills and creative problem solving. The school is a partner school of Finland’s Design Museum.

Helsinki educates children in design through several other partnerships. The Education Division and Finnish design organizations have produced *Helsinki Design Path for Schools*, a hands-on guide for applying the methods of design in schools. Helsinki Design Week has taken designers to schools. Helsinki and the city of Kobe, Japan, collaborate to “create more creative and sustainable cities by nurturing and utilizing the design mindset of children”.

# Helsinki milestones in design education and sustainability

- 1993** **Arkki** School of Architecture for Children and Youth opens. Arkki is a pioneering design education institution in Finland and globally.
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- 2012** **World Design Capital Helsinki 2012.** The project strengthens the emphasis of design in education. In one initiative, preschoolers are taught design thinking with *Designer's Treasure Chest*.
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- 2013–** **Design Driven City 2013–2015** followed by ongoing operation of **Helsinki Lab**. The projects introduce and strengthen design thinking in city processes and service development.
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- 2014–** Design education initiatives advanced by
- **City of Helsinki Education Division**
  - **Annantalo Arts Centre**
  - **Arkki**
  - **Design Museum**
  - **Ornamo Art and Design Finland**
  - **Helsinki Design Week**
  - **Museum of Finnish Architecture**
  - **SuoMu** – The Finnish Association of Design Learning
- 2014** Helsinki joins the **UNESCO Creative Cities Network** as a City of Design. Helsinki's contributions to the network include international cooperation in design education.
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- 2015–2018** *Design stories from Helsinki: an online publication on the power of design thinking to create better cities.*
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- 2016** Helsinki is the first European city to appoint a Chief Design Officer. *Helsinki Design Path for Schools* is published.
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- 2017** Helsinki announces the City Strategy to become the most functional city in the world. Helsinki announces the climate goal to become carbon neutral by 2035.
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- 2018** Helsinki commits to voluntary local review of the City's implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.
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- 2019** **Helsinki Central Library Oodi** opens. The library is a hallmark of participatory design and a place of learning with makerspaces.