

**Collaboration is key:
the City and
the University
of Helsinki build
success together**

Helsinki



UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI



When the expansion of the University of Helsinki's Viikki Campus began in the 1980s, the City of Helsinki and the university had disputes over the use of land in the Viikki area. Decades have passed, and during that time there's been a quantum leap in attitudes and mindsets.

Today, the city and the university are intertwined and interconnected on so many levels that it is difficult to imagine one without the other. The city needs data and research for decision-making. At the same time, ideas need the right growth environment to transform into a business, and society needs skilled people to cater to its ever-changing needs.

The rise of urban research collaboration

The disputes over land use in Viikki set the tone for formal collaboration, and in the late 1980s the city and the university decided to set up a Collaboration Advisory Board (HYNK) to help the parties find and maintain common ground. The first area the parties decided to jointly invest in was urban studies. Between 1998 and 2010, the city, the university and other partners provided financing for six professorships in urban studies at the University of Helsinki. The objective, which had been to establish urban studies as an academic discipline supporting metropolitan development, was met, and collaboration in this area has produced the desired results.

Urban studies were later expanded to promote a wider understanding of metropolitan research. The professorships were followed by a collaboration programme in urban studies and metropolitan policy (KatuMetro 2010-2018). For the first time, this programme brought together cities in the metropolitan area and higher education institutions to pursue their shared interest: urban studies. Once the partners had found a common ground, they were quick to identify new ways to collaborate.

Urban researchers from the University of Helsinki and Aalto University offered an inspiration to broaden the horizons further. They were convinced that in an increasingly complex world, it was necessary to bring together the expertise of urban studies specialists from Aalto University and the University of Helsinki. This insight led to the establishment of the Urban Academy (2016-), which was tasked with identifying current urban issues in need of attention, and communicating the related research needs to academia. Urbaria, Helsinki Institute of Urban and Regional Studies, set up in conjunction with the Academy, brings together a multidisciplinary network of more than 150 researchers to find answers to these questions. Launched in 2018, a new post-doctoral collaboration between internationally recruited post-doc researchers and cities further underlines the need for urban research.

Urbaria, Helsinki Institute of Urban and Regional Studies, brings together a multidisciplinary network of more than 150 researchers.

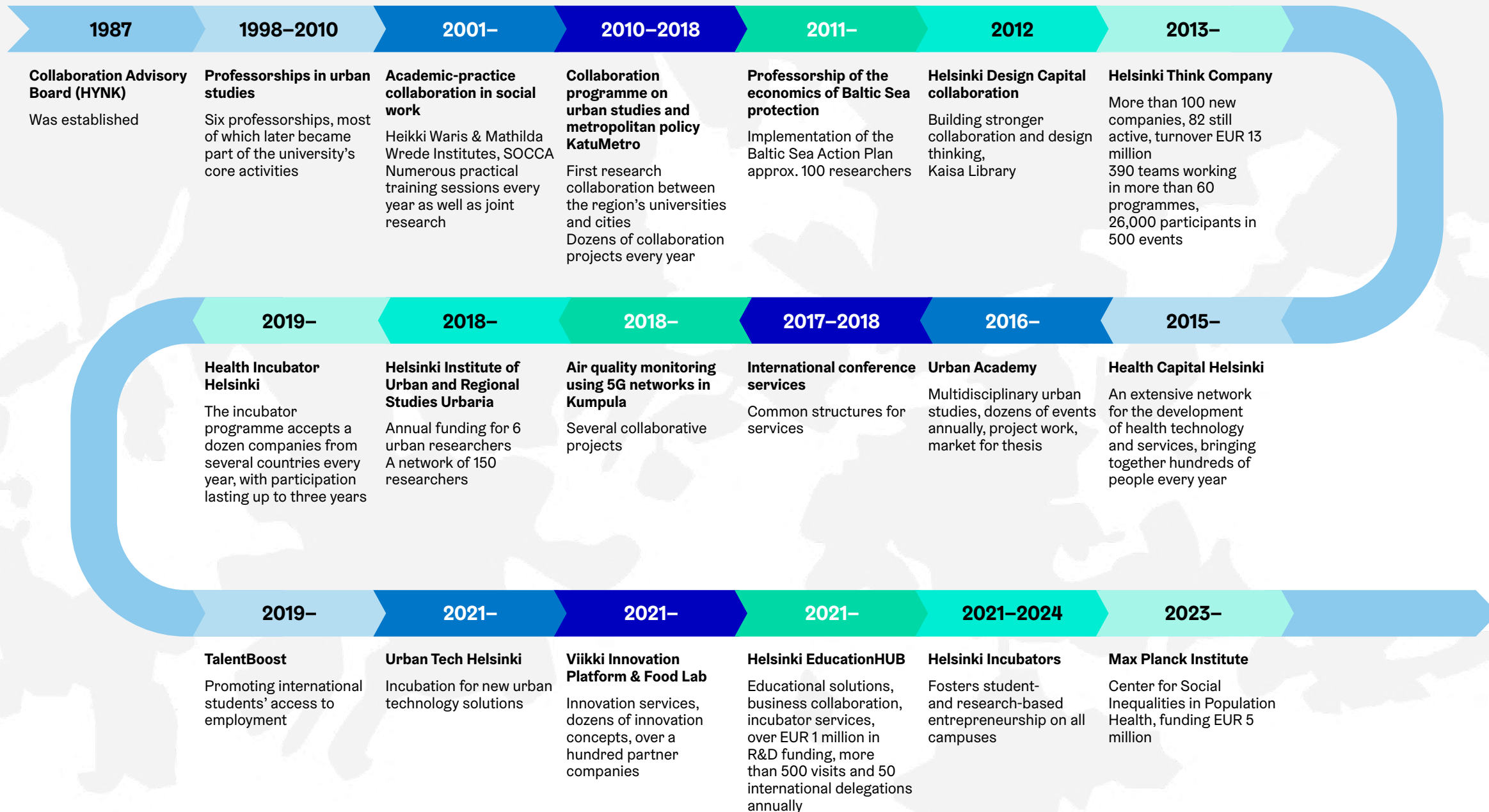
The most recent step in this research collaboration was taken with the establishment of a new centre of excellence in demography. Opened in 2022, the Max Planck – University of Helsinki Center for Social Inequalities in

Population Health, is a joint project between the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Germany and the University of Helsinki. The cities in the Helsinki metropolitan area are jointly co-financing the project. The University of Helsinki is the first Finnish university, and among a selected few in the Nordic countries, to have the honour of hosting an internationally renowned Max Planck Institute.

The cities in the Helsinki metropolitan area have invested a total of EUR 2.72 million in post-doctoral research collaboration in 2018–2025. The collaboration between the University of Helsinki and Aalto University includes research carried out by six post-doctoral researchers annually. Their research covers areas such as:

- Urban Inequality
- Towards a Carbon Neutral City
- Digitalisation & Urban Life
- Urban Population Dynamics
- Urban Geography

Collaboration throughout the years



A new dawn for entrepreneurship

While it was a well-known fact that businesses are a cornerstone of a functioning society and a vibrant city, there was little sign of that at the university campus before the collaboration between the City of Helsinki and the University of Helsinki. In fact, talking about entrepreneurship was discouraged and even frowned upon in some faculties. But the city was keen to foster strong growth in innovation and entrepreneurship in Helsinki, and the mayor was able to get the university's management on board. As a result of the city-university collaboration, a novel meeting place for students and researchers interested in entrepreneurship was created in 2013, bearing the name Helsinki Think Company.

Helsinki Think Company's first coworking space at the city centre campus of the University of Helsinki opened in spring 2013. The queue outside on the opening day proved that there was a need for this type of space. Once the wheels were set in motion, innovations and new businesses started flowing

When Helsinki Think Company's first coworking space for aspiring entrepreneurs opened in 2013, there was a queue of students and researchers waiting to get in.

in. Over the years, Helsinki Think Company has inspired entrepreneurial thinking in hundreds of students. Almost 400 teams have participated in Helsinki Think Company's more than 60 accelerator programmes. Around 500 events have been organised, with more than 26 000 participants.

Today, students and researchers interested in entrepreneurship and early-stage entrepreneurs have access to facilities, coaching, workshops, and idea accelerators on all University of Helsinki campuses. Various forms of business-focused collaboration are being explored. The most recent joint project to support entrepreneurship is the Campus Incubators Programme, involving an investment of EUR 2.3 million from the city and the university during 2021–2024. The programme has generated the so-called Helsinki Incubators, which provide support to researchers, students and alumni aspiring to turn their ideas into commercial business activities, and also strengthen cooperation with other incubator programmes in the metropolitan area.

Health, food and new innovations

The University of Helsinki's Meilahti campus is home to one of the largest university hospitals in Europe and to cutting-edge medical research and facilities. Aalto University also boasts state-of-the-art health technology expertise. Together, they represent a significant pool of expertise that both the City of Helsinki and the University of Helsinki wanted to push forward and make more impactful. Similarly, they felt it was important to gain international recognition for this expertise.

In 2015, to turn ideas into action, the University of Helsinki, Aalto University, the Helsinki and Uusimaa Hospital District HUS and the City of Helsinki created Health Capital Helsinki. HCH aims to improve collaboration between the life science and health technology sectors and to promote the development and internationalisation of companies in the sector. In 2019, other cities and higher education institutes joined HCH.

This collaboration has brought together players from different fields to set common goals and create new services, such as the Terkko Health Hub and the Health Incubator Helsinki. Health Capital Helsinki was able to change the research community's attitudes towards business cooperation and entrepreneurship to a more positive direction. In addition, it has contributed a constant stream of new innovations that promote health and wellbeing.

The University of Helsinki's other campuses are equally dedicated to promoting innovation. In Viikki, the city and the university are co-financing innovations in biosciences and sustainability sciences, such as sustainable food production. Since 2020, Viikki Innovation Platform

& Food Design Factory has been striving to increase science-driven innovation by bringing together students, researchers, start-ups and established players. Multinational companies have also expressed an interest in new sustainable solutions in the food chain.

New sustainable innovations for the food chain developed in the Viikki campus attract international interest

Major challenges require collaboration

Against the backdrop of long and extensive co-operation, past achievements and future endeavours gain more significance. In fact, they have proven themselves necessary. Changes in the world around us highlight the need and demand for information and effectiveness. This change also affects and transforms the hopes and needs of citizens.

Interdisciplinary urban research has been, and continues to be, instrumental in addressing and finding solutions to complex challenges such as segregation or climate change. In the university setting, climate sustainability can be approached from both a theoretical and a practical angle. The Kumpula campus, for example, boasts world-class expertise in air quality monitoring and in developing novel sensor technologies. The campus works with the City of Helsinki to continuously collect measurement data.

A fundamental change in attitudes towards entrepreneurship has been instrumental in creating success for Helsinki and for Finland. The current climate allows students and researchers from various disciplines to put their heads

together to develop entirely new solutions that will ultimately benefit all of us, even on a global scale. Different meeting places and incubators play a vital role by providing a nurturing environment for ideas to flourish. It takes a multitude of ideas and plenty of hard work to produce a single bright diamond.

**The university and city work
together to solve sustainability
challenges**

Artificial intelligence is another area where there is strong city-university collaboration. A case in point is the recent Finnish AI Region FAIR project, which aims to make companies better equipped to use artificial intelligence in their operations.

An ageing population, digital transformation, and the dramatic changes in the world of work make the supply of labour one of the most burning issues in society today, and tomorrow. The City of Helsinki is one of Finland's largest employers, while the University of Helsinki is one of the largest educational institutions contributing towards the skilled workforce. The social and health sectors are struggling to attract skilled employees, and the same holds true for service and technology industries. To build a better future, we need both a domestic and an international workforce. An attractive and functional city and an inspiring and innovative university can contribute to resolving both these needs.

The City of Helsinki and the University of Helsinki have proven that one plus one is greater than two, and that collaboration is the key to success.

**A positive attitude towards
entrepreneurship in academia
is a major success factor for
Helsinki and Finland**

More information about the collaboration
between the City of Helsinki and
the University of Helsinki

University of Helsinki

Director of Communications

Taina Kyllönen

taina.kyllonen@helsinki.fi

City of Helsinki

Director of Economic Development

Marja-Leena Rinkineva

marja-leena.rinkineva@hel.fi

Photographer Jussi Hellsten / Helsinki Partners

