

Experiment on customer insight and profiling of public space users in Malmi area

**GreenIN
Cities**

KYMP

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Foreword

This report presents a project carried out in the spring of 2025, commissioned by the City of Helsinki's Urban Environment Division (KYMP) and Forum Virium, as part of the **Green In Cities** initiative. The project was implemented by the design agency **Kuudes**.

The project experimented with and developed various **user-centered urban planning methods** and produced insights related to the **development and maintenance of public areas in Malmi, Helsinki**.

The objectives of the project were to:

Identify residents' **needs related to the development of public areas in Malmi**

Utilize existing research and expert knowledge as effectively as possible and build upon it

Explore ways to **profile users of public spaces** in a manner that could later be applied in other parts of the city

Examine the **specific needs of hard-to-reach and vulnerable residents** in terms of urban development and participation

In total, **nearly 250 residents** and **over 10 experts** (including representatives of organizations and experts from the City of Helsinki) took part in different phases of the project

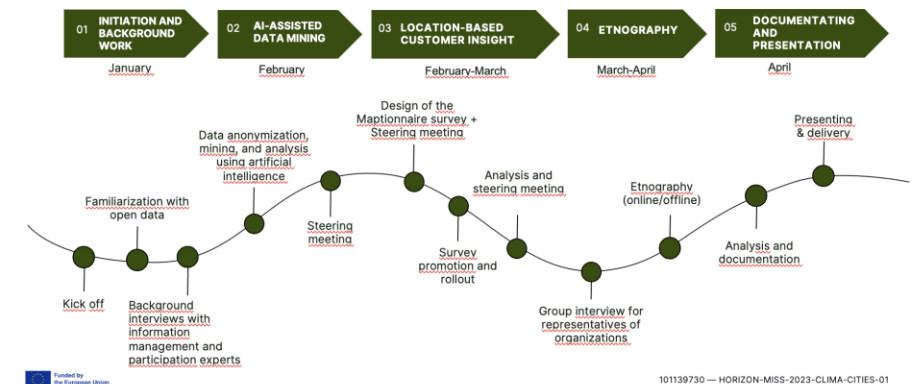
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Client: Anu Kiiskinen and Kaisa Koskinen, (KYMP, City of Helsinki,)

Time: January to April 2025.

Process and a timetable



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About the execution of the project

The project comprises three pilot entities that provide insights both on the phenomenon level within the Malmi area and on how the perspectives of different residents can be incorporated into urban development.

1. AI-assisted data mining for building baseline understanding

We will map existing documents and their key findings to serve as background material for the study.
We will define what new data should be collected in the next phases of the project.

Outcomes:

A **baseline understanding** of Malmi's public areas, their strengths, and development needs
An understanding of **hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups**, as well as **best practices** for identifying their needs
Insights and best practices for utilizing AI in data analysis
Guidelines for applying AI and prompts in similar research projects

Phase implementation: Interviews with experts from the City of Helsinki and AI-assisted data analysis.

2. Location-based resident insights and distinct profiles to illustrate expectations for the development of public areas

A **Maptionnaire survey** through which we will collect *Malmi-specific, phenomenon-level data* based on geolocation.
An **analysis of differing motivations and priorities** related to the development of public areas.
We will **experiment with developing a profiling model** that could be more widely applied in other areas as well.

Outcomes:

A **summary of the strengths and key development needs** of Malmi's public areas
Approximately **5–7 user profiles** of public space users, illustrating the needs and expectations of different residents toward urban development
A **replicable model** for creating such profiles in future research projects

Phase implementation: Maptionnaire survey.

3. Engaging vulnerable groups through ethnography and interviews

Qualitative interviews with NGO experts to identify target groups and understand their needs.
Ethnographic fieldwork and contextual interviews with vulnerable residents.
Experimentation and development of a methodological framework that combines the perspectives of experts and residents.

Outcomes:

A deeper understanding of how the needs of disadvantaged groups are manifested and addressed in Malmi.
Action models and lessons on how to ensure that their voices are heard.

Phase implementation: Fieldwork in Malmi, observation, and interviews with representatives of organizations.

In total, we engaged 248 residents and 10 experts through various methods

A total of 138 respondents completed the Maptionnaire survey.

In addition to those who completed the entire survey, 87 participants responded partially.

Through fieldwork, 23 residents were reached.

In addition, experts from the City of Helsinki and representatives of various organizations were interviewed.

Altogether, 9 experts were reached within the scope of the project.

Key themes emerging from the project regarding the needs for public spaces in Malmi:

Safety

Appreciation of nature and closeness to green areas

Improving accessibility

Sense of community

Increasing recreational opportunities



The experience of safety emerged as a central need

The most important theme in Malmi is the experience of safety, which repeatedly emerges, especially in the Malmi center and station area.

Areas perceived as unsafe:

- Malmi railway station and its surroundings
- Ala-Malmi and Ylä-Malmi squares
- Pekanraitti, pedestrian route

Reasons for perceived insecurity:

- Substance use and youth gangs
- Poor lighting and maintenance
- Littering and an unclean environment
- Weak visible supervision and lack of accessibility

Residents' development wishes:

- Increased security presence and visible surveillance
- Better lighting in shadowed areas
- Spaces where natural social oversight by others is possible

Green and natural areas are highly valued

Nature and outdoor opportunities are by far the most important factors contributing to Malmi's attractiveness.

Most valued green areas:

- Malmi airfield area (for outdoor recreation and nature)
- Longinoja stream and related stream routes
- Fallkulla and the banks of the Vantaa River

Challenges:

- The green areas in Malmi's center are perceived as unpleasant (especially Ala-Malmi Park)
- Disturbing behavior reduces the sense of comfort and safety

Residents' development wishes:

- More plantings, benches, and picnic tables
- Improved cleanliness and reduction of disruptive behavior
- Protection and highlighting of nature





In Malmi, there is a strong emphasis on improving mobility and accessibility

Accessibility and barrier-free mobility

are repeatedly highlighted as key areas for improvement.

Areas perceived as problematic:

- Station area (poor elevators, escalators, and slippery routes)
- Connection between Ala-Malmi and Ylä-Malmi (difficult to cross the railway)
- Cycling and walking routes in the center are narrow and unclear

Residents' development wishes:

- Accessible and smooth routes to the station and market squares
- Better cycling lanes and safe pedestrian paths
- Improved parking opportunities for local errands

Places that support a sense of community are viewed more positively.

Community spirit is seen as a strength in Malmi, but it needs more spaces and opportunities to grow.

Main places perceived as fostering community:

- Former Malmi Airport (aviation community, jogging, events)
- Malmitalo (culture and low-threshold encounters)
- Swimming hall and outdoor sports facilities
- Ala- and Ylä-Malmi squares
- Playgrounds and daycare yards for families with children

Residents' development wishes:

- More meeting places (cafés, parks, events)
- Spaces also for youth and seniors
- Multi-purpose public spaces that bring together different population groups



Residents wish for more hobby and leisure activities in Malmi

There is a broadly shared need among different resident groups in Malmi to increase recreational opportunities.

The majority of survey respondents expressed a wish for more hobby and leisure options, and other research conducted during the project supported this finding.

Identified benefits of hobbies and leisure activities:

- Developing opportunities for leisure activities demonstrates appreciation and creates a caring atmosphere. It can also strengthen the sense of inclusion — something that has been perceived as limited in the Malmi area.
- A way to increase local community spirit, which in turn affects both safety and comfort.
- An opportunity to profile the area and improve its reputation through positive experiences.

Residents' development wishes:

- Outdoor gym / fitness stairs
- Artificial turf field / football
- Nature trail / outdoor recreation / urban gardening
- Guided exercise / park workouts
- Culture / events
- Climbing
- Petanque



Specific and concrete development wishes for public spaces

SAFETY

Security presence and police visibility

More security guards, community police officers, and visible surveillance — especially around Malmi Station and the shopping center.

Spaces and activities for young people

A youth café, youth facilities, and low-threshold meeting places to prevent young people from drifting into gangs or spending time in areas perceived as problematic.

Addressing substance use

A need to intervene in the public use of intoxicants, ensure access to treatment, and remove disruptive behavior from the station and market square areas.

Lighting and cleanliness

Better lighting, regular litter collection, prompt repair of vandalism, and a more pleasant environment.

Improving the cityscape and reputation

A need to enhance Malmi's image, renovate buildings, and promote more positive communication about the area — both outwardly and to local youth themselves.

GREEN- AND RECREATIONAL AREAS

More benches and rest areas

Especially along the Longinoja stream, in Ala-Malmi Park, and by the Vantaa River. Sun loungers and picnic table groups were also suggested along outdoor routes and walking paths.

Cleanliness and peacefulness

A cleaner environment and intervention in disruptive behavior (such as substance use, littering, and public drinking) were requested especially for Ala- and Ylä-Malmi squares and the parks near Malmitalo.

Vegetation and pleasantness

More lush plantings, meadow parks, and preservation of old trees — particularly in Malmi center, behind the library, and in the areas of the former airfield and Kotinummenpuisto. Adding information boards to nature sites was also suggested.

Preservation of Malmi airfield as a recreation area

Keeping the airfield as a green and outdoor recreation area was seen as important — it serves as a valuable place for nature, exercise, and encounters. Losing it would also mean losing outdoor routes and the area's sense of tranquility.

More diverse activities

Residents hoped for an area similar to Töölönrinta, with playgrounds, game areas, events, barbecue spots, animals (e.g., sheep), and café activities. Ala-Malmi Park was mentioned as a key development site that could be made more inviting and safer through improved design.

ACCESSIBILITY

Comfort of the station and shopping center area

The station area is perceived as dirty, noisy, and unsafe. Residents hope for improvements in cleanliness and overall clarity of the environment.

Connections between Ala-Malmi and Ylä-Malmi

Crossing the railway is considered difficult, especially for people with strollers, wheelchairs, or bicycles. The stairs next to the Noli building are currently out of use.

Accessible and safe station

Elevators and escalators are often out of order, and the overpass tunnel is slippery. The station's accessibility and maintenance require improvement.

Improving cycling and pedestrian routes

The routes are narrow and congested, especially around the shopping center. Poor visibility and vehicle traffic increase the risk of accidents.

Public transport and parking for errands

The transfer between Sepänmäki and Tapanila is slow. The city center lacks short-term parking spaces for everyday errands.

COMMUNITY

The former airfield as a unifying element

Many respondents suggested restoring the former airfield for aviation and recreational use. The area was seen as fostering community spirit, offering space for events, encounters, and a shared local identity.

Low-threshold encounters

Residents wished for small-scale events, summer concerts, game nights, and workshops — as well as free recreational activities and clubs for families, young people, and seniors.

Spaces and places for togetherness

There is a need for cafés, community houses, playgrounds, and seating areas. The squares and parks were hoped to become pleasant, welcoming meeting places open to everyone.

Cleanliness and safety

Addressing public substance use and disturbances was considered important. A pleasant, clean, and safe environment was seen as a prerequisite for a strong sense of community.

Local identity and participation as strengths

Residents emphasized the importance of being heard and involved in the area's development. Malmi was hoped to develop into a distinctive, village-like district where residents can take pride in their neighborhood.

Residents' diverse and shared needs for developing Malmi's public areas

User profiles of public space users and the needs of vulnerable groups

User profiles of public spaces

At the start of the project, we had two main hypotheses regarding the possible bases for profiling — that is, what unites and differentiates residents in their expectations for the development of public areas.

Hypothesis 1: *Users of public spaces differ from one another based on age, life stage, or other demographic factors*

Hypothesis 2: *Users of public spaces differ from one another on the level of values, attitudes, and motivations*

In the Maptionnaire survey, we examined both factors to identify the most distinct differentiating and unifying elements. The goal was to recognize sufficiently strong connections so that the profiling could be used as an interpretive framework in other city districts in the future

Demographic variables:

- Respondent's age
- Respondent's study, employment, or other status
- Respondent's life situation, assessed for example through the use of services targeted at families

Value-, attitude-, and motivation-based variables:

- Which goals the respondent prioritizes in urban development
- What kind of city would be the best place to live for the respondent personally
- Statements related to urban development that the respondent was asked to evaluate or take a stance on

Based on previous research, we examined the use of the following value-, attitude-, and motivation-based emphases in profiling



Summary:

The ability of demographic variables to unite or differentiate respondents is weak.

Demographic factors as weak explanatory variables

Demographic factors, such as age, proved to be weak in explaining residents' specific behaviors and needs. Either no clear differences were found, or the needs were not unique to a particular demographic group.

It therefore does not appear that certain priorities or goals automatically follow from residents' demographic characteristics. For example, **the appreciation and preservation of natural areas**, as well as **the desire to make Malmi's city center safer**, were shared by residents with very different backgrounds.

Thus, **demographic factors poorly explain residents' wishes for the development of public areas**, and on their own, they are not a sufficient basis for profiling in contexts where the goal is to understand, explain, or anticipate residents' needs.

However, **demographic aspects and life situations** can influence *which public spaces are used and how*. For instance, **families with children** may have more experience with playgrounds. Therefore, it is important to reach people of different backgrounds and life stages to ensure that the emerging understanding of valued and improvable places is **balanced in relation to the actual use of public areas**.

It is also worth noting that **the most important priorities are shared among all residents**.

Differences between the value-, attitude-, and motivation-based groups were observed, but they were not very significant.

The analysis of the Maptionnaire survey revealed that certain values were **universally important** to respondents. In other words, rather than dividing respondents into distinct "camps" based on their values and motivations, these appeared to align within a fairly **similar hierarchy**.

Nature-related values, safety, as well as smooth and accessible transportation were identified as the most important values for all respondents.

Meanwhile, **economic vitality, community, and support for urban culture** occupied the next level in this hierarchy.

When examining **map markings**, it was observed that areas marked as **inaccessible or unsafe** were located close to each other regardless of the respondent group. Similarly, there was little variation in the places identified as **community-oriented**.

However, **favorite places** showed more variation between groups — though some locations were shared across all, such as **the airport** and the **dense service areas in the city center**.

For **nature-oriented respondents**, green areas were emphasized more broadly; for those focused on **traffic and mobility**, the airport was a highlighted location.

Respondents emphasizing **economic vitality** often mentioned **Tapanila** among their favorite places, while **cultural-oriented** respondents referred to **Fallkulla** and **Ala-Malmi**. For those emphasizing **community**, several places within **Ala-Malmi** stood out. Recommendations for the **further development of value-, attitude-, and motivation-based profiling** can be found at the end of this report.

Summary of public spaces user profiling

Key findings from public space user profiling

Our main finding from the public space user profiling was that residents and their aspirations are **not significantly differentiated** by

a) **motivation- and value-based factors**, or

b) **differences related to life stage or situation**.

Based on this, our conclusion is that it is **more fruitful to focus on identifying the themes and issues that engage and concern local residents**, rather than on defining what kinds of people live in a given area.

When it comes to these themes, residents' perspectives appear to be **largely aligned**.

In this analysis, the key is to identify, for example, the following:

Places of ecological or natural value that residents consider worth “protecting”

Important outdoor and recreational areas

Places perceived as unsafe or dangerous that residents wish to see improved

Locations considered challenging in terms of accessibility

Places that support community spirit and local culture

Places and actions that enhance aesthetic values and strengthen local identity

Particularly, **map-based location tasks**, when enriched with **open-ended survey responses**, **qualitative interviews**, and **ethnographic observations**, provide **clear directions and deeper understanding** to inform the development of public areas.

Needs of hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups

Inclusion of hard-to-reach and disadvantaged groups

Engaging hard-to-reach and disadvantaged groups was an important part of the project.

One of the project's objectives was to explore how the opportunities of people in weaker social positions to influence the development of their immediate surroundings and public spaces could be increased.

We identified the following groups as those who have been difficult to reach through survey methods and who potentially do not have their voices heard in the context of urban development:

- People struggling with substance abuse and possibly without permanent housing
- Residents with immigrant backgrounds
- Young city residents

Key needs are largely shared:

The needs of these resident groups for public spaces are largely similar — comfort, places for gathering, and social oversight are considered important.

Differences arise in the experience of safety: people struggling with substance abuse are perceived as a threat particularly from the perspective of other disadvantaged groups, while young people associate insecurity with the presence of youth gangs.

Across all groups, there is a common desire for well-maintained, inviting spaces that encourage spending time, offering opportunities both for visibility and retreat.

Versatile use, aesthetics, and maintenance of public spaces can help prevent social problems and strengthen a sense of community.

People feel they have little opportunity to influence decisions

- 74% of respondents to the survey conducted during the project felt that they cannot influence the development of the area.
- Official communication does not reach all resident groups — particularly those with immigrant backgrounds.
- There is a need for genuine and impactful participation.
- Fieldwork and expert discussions produced similar insights: while participatory planning is being implemented, residents do not see or experience its concrete effects. As a result, fatigue and frustration related to participation have started to increase.

Summary and Recommendations:

Strengths and development areas of Malmi

Lessons learned from methodological
experiments

Insights from the pilot project

Summary of Malmi's core strengths and development priorities

Malmi's strengths lie in its sense of community and nature – these are worth strengthening

The surroundings of the former airfield, Longinoja stream, and shared events give Malmi its distinctive identity.

Closeness to nature and community-oriented meeting places — such as Malmitalo and the swimming hall — are strengths that residents wish to preserve.

Community spirit is a strength in Malmi, but it needs more spaces and opportunities to grow.

Malmi is seen as having the potential of a small city

Although Malmi is in many ways seen as an area in need of development, many respondents view it with affection.

Malmi appears as a small city within the city — a place with the potential for a way of life that combines everyday convenience, safety, greenery, and an active sense of community.

Malmi is in need of a more attractive, tidy, and safe city center

Respondents wish for a clearer and cleaner city center as well as an accessible station area. The market squares and the surroundings of the station are perceived as noisy, colorless, littered, and unsafe. Disruptive behavior limits the use of these spaces.

Green areas are hoped to be further developed and safeguarded from new construction

The green areas in Malmi's center are perceived as uninviting. Residents wish for more benches, plantings, and clearer spatial designs — especially in Ala-Malmi Park, behind the library, and around the former airfield.

Social cohesion needs to be strengthened and given space to grow.

The responses reflected a perception that certain groups are taking up space from others. At the same time, these mentioned groups (such as young people and minorities) may themselves feel disconnected or unwelcome, which can manifest as visible restlessness.

Summary of the methodological pilots and recommendations for next steps.

AI-ASSISTED DATA MINING

Strengths of the method:

- Efficiently processing and summarizing large volumes of data in a resource-effective way
- Continuity and transfer of insights between different projects and studies
- Possibility to combine various data sources and materials from different organizations

Weaknesses:

- Without reviewing the source materials, it can be difficult to assess the content quality of the AI-generated summaries

Recommendations for further development and use:

- Define clear research questions: what is the project aiming for, and what answers are you seeking
- Invest in identifying relevant data sources together with experts
- Pre-process the material: gain a high-level understanding of the content, categorize and prioritize it
- Mine data both piece by piece and comprehensively across the entire dataset
- Experiment with different prompts and evaluate which are most useful for your purpose
- Carefully review the texts produced by AI and verify the final content yourself

LOCATION-BASED MAP SURVEYS

Strengths of the method:

- Online surveys enable very broad participation, independent of time and place
- Cost-effective in terms of individual participants
- Possibility to combine different types of questions (qualitative, quantitative, and location-based)
- Results are immediately available in a digital and easily processable format

Weaknesses:

- Surveys tend to reach those participants who are already active and engaged
- Ensuring accessibility of the survey requires significant time and attention to detail
- Some respondents leave the survey unfinished — attention should be paid to keeping the form concise

Recommendations for further development and use:

- Keep the survey short and focused only on essential topics
- Choose question types carefully: mandatory and open-ended questions are the most demanding
- Allocate enough time to learn how to use the survey tool
- Make deliberate decisions regarding language versions and reserve sufficient time for translations
- Consider which channels best reach your target groups; collaborate with partner organizations to distribute the survey
- Test before launch:** send the survey to team members for testing

ETHNOGRAPHY AND INTERVIEWS

Strengths of the method:

- Enables a highly targeted and flexible approach to reach groups that cannot be engaged through other means
- Easily collects rich data that includes not only participants' responses but also your own observations about the environment and themes that may be difficult to express verbally
- Deepens understanding and helps explain phenomena, potentially revealing their concrete causes and effects

Weaknesses:

- Highly resource-intensive — requires sufficient working time to reach target groups and gather responses
- Requires good interviewing skills and prior experience

Recommendations for further development and use:

- Use these methods selectively, especially when reaching groups that require special attention
- Conduct fieldwork together with an organization or professional who can help reach target group representatives, act as an “interpreter,” and provide contextual understanding for the responses
- Aim to listen to participants openly and on their own terms
- Plan the ethnographic framework and documentation method in advance to save time during the documentation phase

What can other regions learn from the Malmi pilot project?



- There is no shortage of data: **information exists in abundance** — finding and utilizing it is both a challenge and an opportunity.
As a result of this project, new knowledge was generated that validated, explained, and refined existing data. New insights were gained both regarding areas for development and residents' experiences of Malmi's public spaces.
- **Collaboration is key to data sharing and achieving results:** the project identified a need to improve network cooperation, as coordination between actors was found to be insufficient.
- **Superficial participation undermines genuine inclusion:** it is essential to communicate openly how the gathered information will be used and what participants can actually influence.
- Surveys serve as a useful participation and data collection tool for certain residents, but reaching all groups requires **additional methods**.
- Including vulnerable groups requires the **support of experts who understand these communities** — but also direct contact with their representatives to gain a realistic understanding of their everyday circumstances.
- In developing public spaces, the most fruitful approach is to focus resident **insights on phenomena- and location-specific information**.
- Value-, attitude-, and motivation-based profiles could be re-clustered around **the three most distinctive dimensions** (as shown on the right) to explore whether differences emerge in responses among the people within these groups.
- **Continuity and comparability are needed.** The pilot survey can be repeated in other areas in the future.
- Using similar questions enables monitoring development over time and comparing areas within the city.
- The project results can benefit KYMP's experts, professionals working in urban development areas, other cities involved in the Green in Cities project, as well as those interested in applying service design methods.

From individual profiles to clusters

- Those who **emphasize economic vitality and smooth traffic flow** could potentially form one distinct group. The responses in this group reflected slightly more conservative values than those of others.
- Another possible cluster could consist of **supporters of community and vibrant urban culture**. Their responses highlighted the importance of functional services, social encounters, and the richness of diversity in the city.
- A third distinct cluster comprises the **nature-oriented**. However, this group should be better understood, as it represents a very large segment.

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