

# TOWARDS OULU2026 – EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

Baseline for the evaluation in 2022

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# TO THE READER

Since 1985, the title of ‘European Capital of Culture’ has been awarded annually to one or more European cities or regions that showcase their culture through a yearlong cultural programme. European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) is one of the most well-known initiatives of the European Union (EU) in the cultural sphere. Each year, two to three capitals of culture are chosen from different parts of Europe.

Oulu decided to apply the title of ECoC in 2017 and in early June 2021, Oulu, along with its partner municipalities, was officially designated as the European Capital of Culture for the year 2026. Oulu is Finland’s third ECOC, after Helsinki (2000) and Turku (2011). Sharing this title with Oulu in 2026 is Trenčín in Slovakia.

ECOC activities are guided by the following goals of the EU: highlighting the common features of European cultures, promoting intercultural dialogue, implementing a cultural programme with a European dimension and promoting long-term urban development through culture.

According to the decision of the *European Parliament and the Council establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture* (No 445/2014/EU), the designated cultural capitals must develop plans for monitoring and evaluating the impact of ECOC activities. In line with the requirement, Oulu has been collaborating with the Center for Cultural Policy Research Cupore since 2018 to monitor and evaluate ECOC activities.

Cupore has provided data to support Oulu’s application for the ECOC since 2018, and since selection, has also been analysing ECOC implementation activities. By the end of 2027, Cupore will provide information on the impact and effectiveness of Oulu2026. In addition, it will present an evaluation report of the outcomes of Oulu2026, as required by the EU.

As described in the Oulu2026 bid book, Oulu2026 activities will be monitored and evaluated in three phases from 2022 to 2027:

**Phase 1** covers the lead-up to 2026 (i.e. before the ECOC year). A key milestone in this phase is the defining the baseline situation using data from 2022 on the indicators relevant to the monitoring and impact of ECOC activities.

**Phase 2** will be the ECOC year – 2026. Here, comprehensive information on the outputs, outcomes and impacts will be collected.

**Phase 3** in 2027 will involve an analysis of the collected data and their publication. The final report will be published by the end of 2027.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Bid Book, 2021, p. 11.

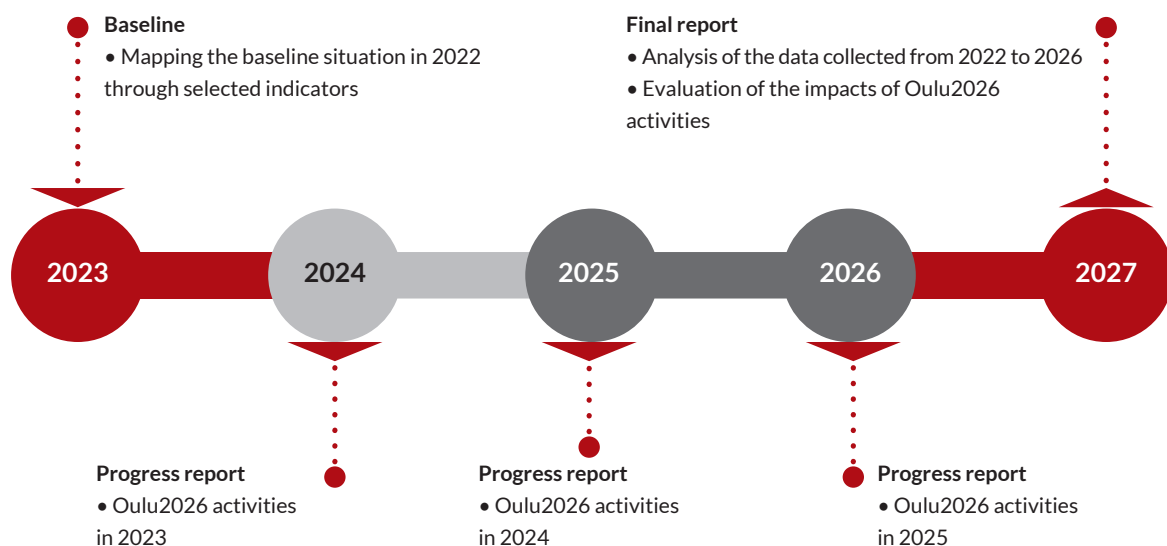


This report is part of Cupore’s series of reports on monitoring ECOC activities, to be released annually until 2026. Figure 1 shows the publishing timeline for all the reports. After the ECOC year in 2026, an evaluation will be conducted in 2027 to compare results against the objectives defined for Oulu2026 activities. All the reports will be publicly available via Cupore’s publication channels.

As a starting point for monitoring and evaluating the impact of ECOC in the Oulu2026 region, this report maps the baseline situation in the year 2022 based on the specific indicators that can be mapped to ECOC’s objectives. These indicators have been defined in collaboration with the organisation responsible for the implementation of Oulu2026 (hereinafter referred to as the Oulu Culture Foundation) and are based on EU guidelines. The indicators and their selection are described more thoroughly in the following chapter.

In the baseline year, Oulu2026 activities had not yet been widely implemented. Therefore, the reporting of the baseline situation mainly relies on the bid book<sup>2</sup> prepared by the city of Oulu, based on which Oulu2026 was selected as the European Capital of Culture. *The bid book* defines the key objectives of Oulu2026 activities, which also form the basis for the selection of indicators.

**FIGURE 1.** Publishing timeline of the reports.



<sup>2</sup> In this report, the bid book is referred to as *Hakukirja, 2021* (from the Finnish version) or *Bid Book, 2021* (from the English version).

# 1 OULU2026 AS A DRIVER OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Oulu2026 – European Capital of Culture is a yearlong schedule of events that focuses on art and culture and requires several years to organise. ECOC serves as an umbrella under which the programme and other activities are held. In a way, cultural capital activities are comparable to, for example, national jubilee celebrations. Interestingly, the Oulu City Council decided to apply for the ECOC title precisely during the celebrations for Finland's 100th year of independence.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the limited duration of the ECOC year, Oulu2026 activities are expected to have visibly positive and long-lasting effects in the region. Thus, Oulu2026 is a tool for regional development, with art and culture at its core. The linkage of cultural capital activities to long-term local and regional development reflects a broader phenomenon that has strengthened since the 1990s, linking culture to regional development. Culture is seen as a medium to introduce changes in the regional economy, tourism, participation and well-being.<sup>4</sup>

## Oulu2026 – Roots

The significance of culture to Oulu's long-term development is well known. The *Urban Culture Action Programme* [*Kaupunkikulttuurin toimenpideohjelma*]<sup>5</sup> implemented in 2014 initiated the long-term development of an urban culture in the city. In 2017, *Center Vision* [*Keskustavisio*] was developed to further promote urban culture and related events.<sup>6</sup> In the same year, cultural capital was named as one of the key focus areas of Oulu's city strategy.<sup>7</sup>

On 27 February 2017, the Oulu City Council announced its decision to apply for the title of European Capital of Culture as a part of Finland 100 jubilee celebrations.<sup>8</sup> In the City Council minutes, the decision was justified as follows:

*Everywhere in the world, cities seeking growth and favourable development consider the quality of life and the well-being of residents as the most important factors in urban development. The decision to apply for the title of European Capital of Culture for the city of Oulu in the year 2026, to mark the 100-year celebrations of Finland, broadly promotes the city's goals and creates new opportunities in a centre like Oulu, which is associated with high education and expertise levels.*

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3 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 4; see also Ruokolainen et al., 2020, s. 83.

4 See, for example, Alexander et al., 2017; Ilmonen, 2009; Lindeborg & Lindkvist, 2013; Lindqvist & Lorentzen, 2015.

5 Approved by the City Board on 8 December, 2014. See section 6.4.

6 Approved by the City Council on 3 April 2017.

7 See also Hakukirja, 2021, p. 4.

8 OUKA/1499/12.00.02/2016

Candidate cities applying for the title are required to have, among other things, a valid cultural strategy, plans to strengthen the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors, and a vision for the long-term social, cultural and economic impacts resulting from the European Capital of Culture activities in the region.<sup>9</sup> In 2020, the City Council unanimously approved *Oulu's Cultural Strategy 2030*, which communicated Oulu's aspiration to become the European Capital of Culture for the year 2026. The goal of the cultural strategy was to elevate the significance of art and culture in Oulu's urban development and leverage the existing 'cultural capital: artists, cultural heritage, unique northern creativity, and the potential for combining art, science, and technology'.<sup>10</sup>

The European Capital of Culture event is a strategic focus area for the city of Oulu. According to the city's cultural strategy, Oulu2026 operations can enhance the city's attractiveness and vitality. Further, the city's strategic objectives are linked to the thematic long-term goals of the ECOC initiative, which include realising 1) a vibrant, gripping city, 2) a balanced community and 3) a creative region. Another strategic goal of the city is to promote economic growth through tourism and enhance the city's appeal by creating a pleasant, functional, healthy and safe urban environment.<sup>11</sup>

The Oulu Cultural Foundation, appointed by the Oulu City Board on 4 October 2021, is responsible for Oulu2026 activities.<sup>12</sup> The foundation's mission is to develop Oulu into a cultural and event city, promote the operating conditions of artists and the cultural sector and participate in cultural development activities nationally and internationally.<sup>13</sup>

A geographically extensive implementation area covering four counties, which is unlike other central European cities, is a distinctive feature of Oulu2026.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the event's regional perspective aligns with the objectives of the EU's ECOC initiative, which emphasises the significance of local and regional development. The broad geographical scope of Oulu2026 necessitates regional cooperation. In fact, in many sections of the bid book, the aim of Oulu2026 activities is defined as building a stronger northern Finland.

At the time of application, ECOC activities were planned to be held in Oulu and its 32 partner municipalities.<sup>15</sup> However, since the selection, the implementation area has expanded considerably. As of November 2023, the Oulu2026 region consists of Oulu and 39 municipalities, each of which had made a decision on the municipality's participation in Oulu2026. For mapping the baseline situation at the

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9 No 445/2014/EU, article 5.

10 Oulun kaupunki, 2020, p. 5.

11 Oulun kaupunki, 2020.

12 OUKA/1518/00.02.01/2020.

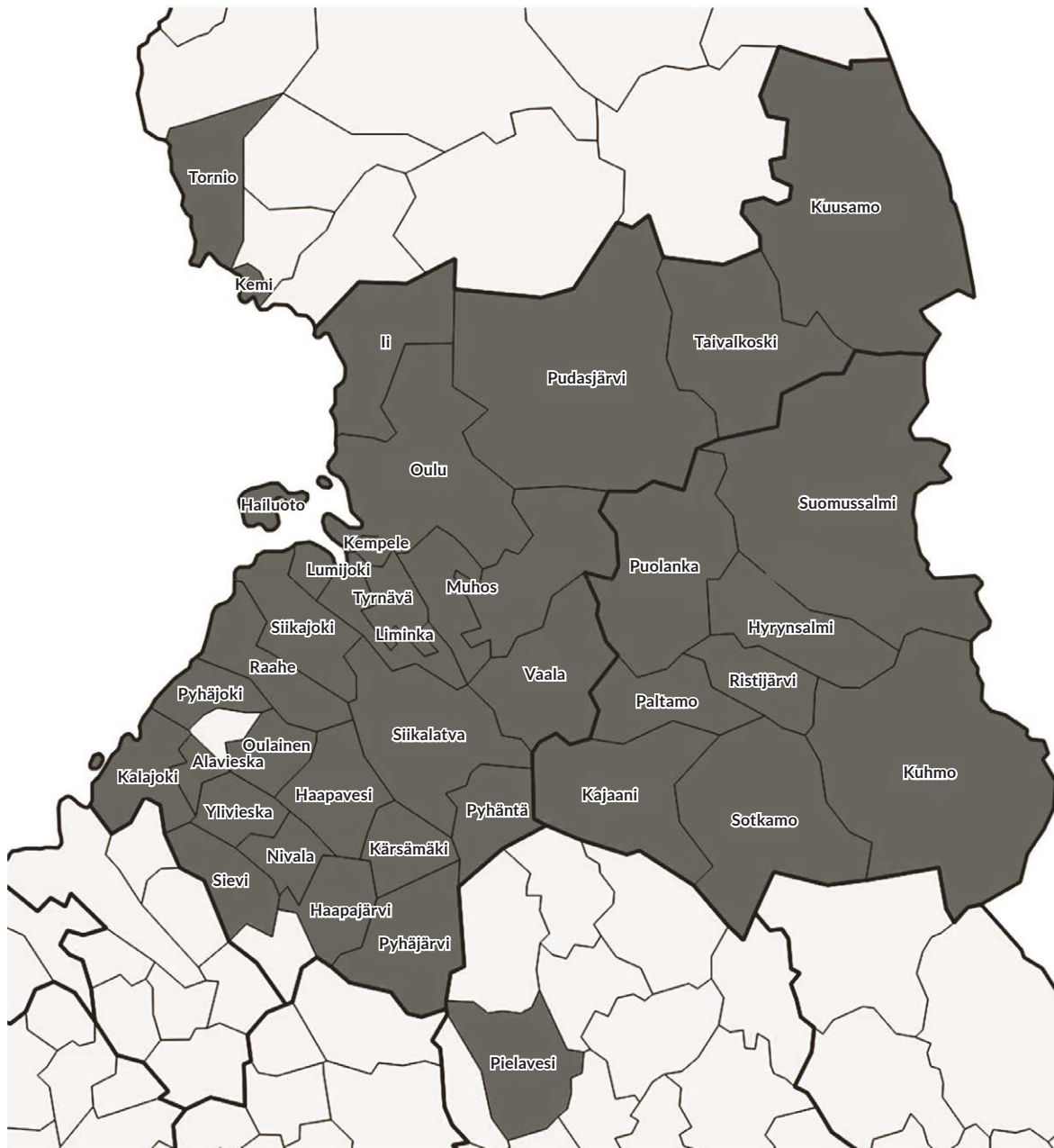
13 Oulun kulttuurisäätiö, 2023a.

14 The Oulu2026 area is spread over 40,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, for example, the area of Slovakia is 49,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Trenčín, another European Capital of Culture for 2026, is located in Slovakia.

15 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 6, see also p. 70.



**FIGURE 2.** Oulu2026 municipalities (as of 31.12.2022).



end of 2022, this report considers the Oulu2026 area to include a total of 39 municipalities from four different counties: Lapland, Northern Ostrobothnia, Kainuu and Northern Savonia<sup>16</sup> (see Figure 2).

<sup>16</sup> The Oulu2026 region has further expanded during the year 2023. Ranua joined the Oulu2026 area in the spring of 2023.

## Oulu2026 – Objectives, monitoring and evaluation

### Aiming for Cultural Climate Change

The main goal of Oulu2026 is *Cultural Climate Change (CCC)*: a concept introduced in the *Oulu Cultural Strategy 2030* to link the region's cultural strategy with the Oulu2026 project.<sup>17</sup> Conceptually broad, Cultural Climate Change was further refined during the application phase.<sup>18</sup>

As per the cultural strategy, Cultural Climate Change envisions culture as a key resource for the city's future development.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, it seeks to connect the social, economic and ecological dimensions of Oulu in order to facilitate the development of the city's identity, revitalisation of the city centre, promotion of increased employment in creative industries, and the ability to sustainably adapt to societal structural changes.<sup>20</sup>

In the Oulu City Strategy that is related to overall development of the city, Cultural Climate Change is described as a new sense of togetherness, a local attitude and a way of operating. Its goal is to ensure 'more city, improvement of cultural infrastructure, cultural events, as well as national and international visitors and collaboration opportunities'.<sup>21</sup> Thus, it is strongly linked to strengthening the operating conditions for arts and cultural actors.

In the Oulu2026 bid book, Cultural Climate Change is described as a sense of togetherness and a new way for people to interact with one another.<sup>22</sup> Its goal is regional: the objectives of the cultural programme are to increase the vitality of the Oulu2026 region by integrating culture and creativity broadly into societal activities and by combining culture with expertise from different fields in new and inspiring ways. The cultural programme is described as highly communal, with Cultural Climate Change seeking solutions to 'how, through culture and art, we can genuinely bring people together, create engagement, establish new connections, improve cooperation, and combine technology, art, and nature in unprecedented ways'.<sup>23</sup>

The definition of Cultural Climate Change has evolved through strategy processes and with progress in Oulu2026 activities. The latest definition dates to the baseline year of 2022, when the Oulu Cultural Foundation defined cultural climate as follows:

*Cultural climate change combines culture, art and technology in surprising ways, creates engagement, and fosters interaction. Oulu is the stage for European culture in 2026, and it is time to elevate*

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17 Oulun kaupunki, 2021a, p. 8.

18 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 7.

19 Oulun kaupunki, 2021a, p. 5, 8.

20 Oulun kaupunki, 2020.

21 Oulun kaupunkistrategia 2030, City Council 31.1.2022 § 3.

22 Bid Book, 2021, p. 7, 8.

23 Oulu2026, Mistä kulttuuripääkaupungissa on kyse. <https://oulu2026.eu/mista-on-kyse-oulu2026-kokonaisuudessa/>

*culture, cultural creators, and artists to their rightful position and recognise the significance of culture for the vitality of regions. (Oulu2026, Mistä on kyse.)<sup>24</sup>*

## **Intended impacts and effectiveness**

Cultural Climate Change is the overarching goal of Oulu2026: a vision that is articulated through specific objectives outlined in the bid book. In addition to Oulu2026's long-term impacts of realising a vibrant, gripping city, a balanced community and a creative region, there are several specific objectives named in the bid book.

The objectives of Oulu2026 (and other cultural capitals) complement those set by the EU for the European Capital of Culture initiative, and the implemented cultural capital activities are in line with this framework.

The EU divides the objectives of the cultural capital initiative into *general objectives (GO)*, *specific objectives (SO)* and *operational objectives* (see Figure 3). Essentially, general objectives are further specified through specific and operational objectives, and the operational objectives describe how the objectives will be realised by the cultural capitals.<sup>25</sup>

In the bid book, the three main long-term impacts of Oulu2026 are linked to the objectives of the EU cultural capital initiative. The goal of a vibrant, gripping city relates to the EU's general and specific objectives of strengthening the capacity of the cultural sector and its links with other sectors as well as raising the international profile of the cities through culture. The objective of a balanced community is linked to the EU objective of widening access to and participation in culture, safeguarding and promoting the diversity of cultures in Europe, highlighting the common features they share, and increasing citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural space. Finally, the objective of a creative region is linked to promoting the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities and municipalities as well as enhancing the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offerings in the cities, including through transnational cooperation.<sup>26</sup> The bid book also mentions a wide range of specific objectives, such as increased cultural participation and improved infrastructure.<sup>27</sup>

Through its objectives, Oulu2026 aims to create visible impacts that will last beyond 2026. When the impacts generated by the activities correspond to the intended objectives, the activities are considered effective. Thus, the effectiveness of Oulu2026 activities refers to the desired and targeted changes as outlined, for example, in the Oulu City Strategy and the Oulu Cultural Strategy which are included in the Oulu2026 bid book.

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24 Translated from Finnish by the authors.

25 European Commission, 2018, p. 7.

26 Hakukirja, 2021, pp. 13, 15–16.

27 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 13.



**FIGURE 3.** Hierarchy of ECOC objectives.  
Source: European Commission, 2018, p. 7.

General Objectives (GO)				
Safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe, highlight the common features they share, increase citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural space (GO1) and foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities (GO2)				
Specific Objectives (SO)				
SO1: Enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offerings in cities, including through transnational cooperation	SO2: Widen the access to and participation in culture	SO3: Strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector and its links with other sectors	SO4: Raise the international profile of cities through culture	
Operational Objectives				
Design extensive cultural programmes of high artistic quality	Ensure cultural programmes feature a strong European dimension and transnational cooperation	Involve a wide range of citizens and stakeholders in organising and implementing the cultural programme	Create new opportunities for a wide range of citizens to attend or participate in the cultural events	
Improve cultural infrastructure	Develop the skills, capacity and governance of the cultural sector	Stimulate partnership and cooperation with other sectors	Promote the city and its cultural programme	Improve the international outlook of residents

In monitoring and evaluating the impacts and effectiveness of Oulu2026, we examine how the various forms and contents of the Oulu2026 action contribute to the defined objectives for the year and their effects. The examination is based on the monitoring and evaluation guidelines defined by the EU, which are applied within the framework of Oulu2026 activities. In practice, evaluating effectiveness calls for a broad perspective as objectives can be achieved through different routes. In general, it is possible that all the objectives may not be met, that only some objectives may be achieved, and that some may lead to unanticipated results.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> cf. Mintzberg et al., 1998, pp. 11–12.

## Monitoring and evaluation of Oulu2026 activities

According to the EU, the capitals of culture are responsible for evaluating the results of their year as an ECOC. To ensure a consistent approach to evaluation, the European Commission has established guidelines and indicative indicators for cities, which are based on the objectives outlined in Figure 3 (Article 2) and the criteria (Article 4) of the European Capital of Culture action.<sup>29</sup>

In this report, an indicator generally refers to a key data measure that tracks change and helps monitor and understand the examined phenomenon. Indicators depict the state, change or direction of performance. The goal of using indicators is to condense a large amount of information into manageable and understandable components.<sup>30</sup>

The EU guidelines for the cities' own evaluations of the results of their ECOC list a set of indicative indicators which are related to the general and specific objectives of the ECOC action as well as to the application of these objectives at the local level (see Figure 3 above). The guidelines state that the indicators may need to be further refined and supplemented to suit the diverse contexts of the ECOCs.

In this report, indicators refer to quantitative data. The quantitative indicators defined in the evaluation framework meet the stated general requirements: they capture the essence of the analysed phenomenon, measure the intended subject matter and are based on reliably collected and analysed data. Additionally, monitoring these indicators is practical and cost-effective with the help of comprehensively collected data by various stakeholders.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to quantitative indicators, in-depth qualitative analyses have been conducted to delve deeper into various themes, by focusing on aspects that cannot be captured by quantitative indicators alone. These qualitative analyses complement the indicators and broaden understanding of the impacts of Oulu2026 activities as well as other factors influencing community and regional development.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, the monitoring and evaluation of Oulu2026 activities is based on an evaluation framework that consists of quantitative indicators and in-depth qualitative analyses. Cupore has developed this framework in close collaboration with the Oulu Cultural Foundation by building on the set of indicative indicators described in the bid book.<sup>33</sup> This framework aligns with the key objectives outlined in the Oulu2026 bid book, which reflect the general, specific and operational objectives set by the EU for ECOC activities as well as the strategic objectives of the city of Oulu.

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29 45/2014/EU, Article 16.

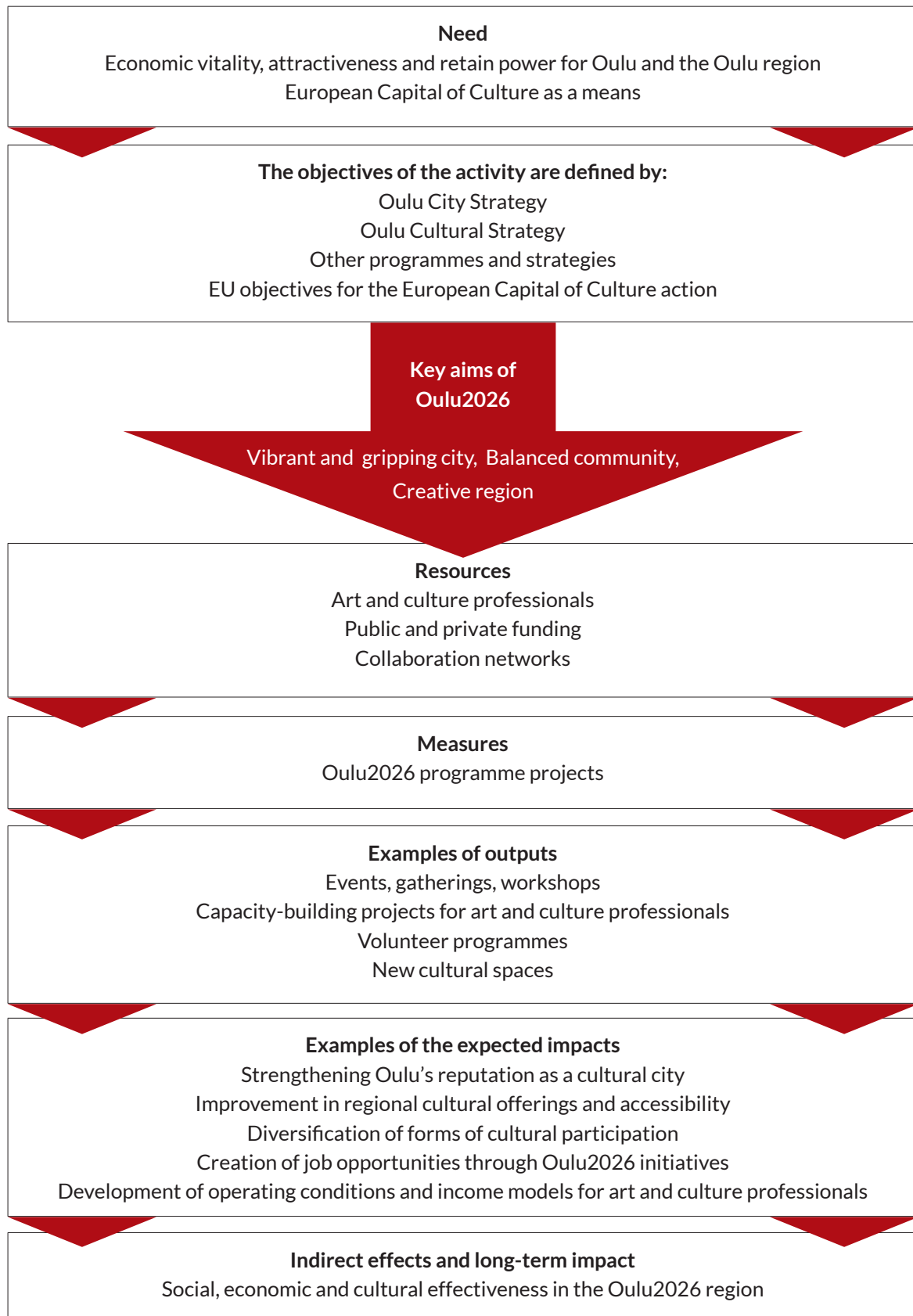
30 See, for example, OPM, 2009.

31 OPM, 2009.

32 European Commission, 2018, p. 7; see also Lemola et al., 2008; Opetusministeriö, 2009.

33 Hakukirja, 2021, pp. 18–19.

**FIGURE 4.** Starting point for monitoring the impacts of Oulu2026 activities.





The quantitative indicators in the evaluation framework satisfy the so-called SMART criteria required by the EU: they are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. The in-depth qualitative analyses also adhere to the SMART criteria in all aspects except quantitative measurability. Both the quantitative indicators for monitoring and evaluation and the in-depth qualitative analyses are listed in Appendix 1.

To structure the broad and multi-level objectives, the monitoring and evaluation framework of Oulu2026 activities is divided into seven themes: content and offerings, operating conditions in the arts and culture domain, spaces, participation and inclusion, community and well-being, reputation and image, and the development of Cultural Climate Change (see Figure 5).<sup>34</sup> Additionally, Cupore monitors indicators that broadly reflect the economic, social and cultural development of the Oulu2026 region.<sup>35</sup>

**FIGURE 5.** Themes in the monitoring and evaluation framework of Oulu2026.



34 In defining the themes, the framework has utilised the structure developed by Aarhus University for monitoring of ECOG activities in Aarhus in 2017 (see <https://projects.au.dk/aarhus2017>).

35 No. 445/2014/EU, Article 5.

## Data and methods

In this report, we describe the baseline situation as analysed in 2022. Since the activities of Oulu2026, the selection of programme projects and the production of the cultural programme as well as their monitoring were still in various stages of development, data on all the indicators were not available at that stage of monitoring. In future, as the activities progress and the production process advances, the monitoring and evaluation work will also proceed forward (see Figure 1, p. 8).

Monitoring and evaluation research extensively utilises quantitative and qualitative data collected from various sources (see Table 1). The primary data consist of information collected for the research, and these include surveys and research interviews targeting a wide range of participants, statistics collected from various existing data sources and information collected from Oulu2026 programme projects. Additionally, previous research on the topic and existing literature are utilised as data sources (including strategic texts and decision documents from Oulu2026 municipalities and media data).

Understanding the ECOC phenomenon that is being monitored and evaluated is also supplemented by observing the activities of other current ECOC cities and their ongoing research and evaluation projects.

**TABLE 1.** Data.

<b>Data source</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Collection frequency</b>
Citizens	Nationwide survey	2022, 2025, 2027
Arts and cultural actors	Survey in the Oulu2026 area and in-depth interviews	-
Public officials (culture department or equivalent)	Survey in the Oulu2026 area and in-depth interviews	-
Council members	Survey in the Oulu2026 area	-
Key stakeholders	Survey and in-depth interviews	2025 and 2027
Visitors	Survey for Oulu2026 visitors	2026
Programme projects / Oulu Cultural Foundation	Information from the grant system Information from the production management system Information from the event calendar Quantitative data on the foundation's activities (volunteers, staff, economy) Self-assessment data from the Oulu Cultural Foundation	Annually
Statistics	Statistics collected by various entities (including Statistics Finland)	Annually
Previous research	Previous research on the topic, ongoing research and results of evaluation projects in other ECOCs	Continuous
Businesses	Survey of businesses in the area	2025 and 2027
Media monitoring	Media monitoring data commissioned by Oulu2026	Annually
Written material	Document material from the Oulu2026 region (municipalities, region) and EU-level material	Continuous
Observation material	Notes, photographs and other observation material	Continuous







## 2 OVERVIEW OF THE OULU2026 REGION IN 2022

According to the European Commission's vision, being designated as a European Capital of Culture should create sustainable economic, cultural and social impact on the city.<sup>36</sup> Economic, cultural and social impact are broad concepts that relate to broader societal changes and may not always be directly linked to ECOC activities themselves. It is difficult, or even impossible, to separate the effects of ECOC activities from other societal developments within these broad dimensions.

Further, the European Commission's decision does not specify how the effects on these three dimensions should be monitored. In this work, we examine the overall development of the Oulu2026 region by examining key data that highlight the social, cultural and economic impacts, as emphasised in the Oulu2026 bid book. Here, we describe these indicators and their connection to the objectives outlined in the bid book. This is an overview of the baseline situation in 2022.

The overview data for the Oulu2026 region have been primarily collected at the municipal level from all Oulu2026 municipalities. By the end of 2022, Oulu2026 activities covered 39 municipalities. In this section, the tables summarise the situation at the municipal level in Oulu, urban municipalities<sup>37</sup>, semi-urban municipalities and rural municipalities. The grouping of municipalities is defined by Statistics Finland.<sup>38</sup> Regional information is considered in cases where local data were not available.

### **Social development: Baseline**

The Oulu2026 bid book highlights several aims related to social development, which is a focus area for the cultural capital activities. The goals relate to youth employment, regional attractiveness, residents' satisfaction and the inclusion and participation of different population groups.

The aim in relation to young adults (aged 25–34 years) is a positive net migration rate in 2027 and improvements in youth employment in the region. A long-term vision of Oulu2026 is an 'attractive region for artists and young people to move to and live in'. Specifically, attractiveness and residents' satisfaction are emphasised in the goal: by 2027, 80% of Oulu's residents should feel that it is good for everyone to be in Oulu.<sup>39</sup> With regard to different population groups and inclusion,

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36 Article 16.

37 Cities of Kajaani, Kemi, Kempele, Raahe and Tornio.

38 [https://www.stat.fi/meta/kas/til\\_kuntaryhmit.html](https://www.stat.fi/meta/kas/til_kuntaryhmit.html) (accessed 1 December 2023).

39 Bid book, 2021, pp. 10, 11–12.



the bid book highlights the importance of realising Oulu2026 together with the citizens. Additionally, Oulu2026 has formulated an Equality and Diversity Strategy to ensure the participation of different population groups.<sup>40</sup>

Given these priorities, the following key pointers of social development have been considered: changes in the residents' age structure and student numbers; unemployment rates; population changes; the proportions of different language groups and people with foreign backgrounds in the population; and the perception of well-being. Data have been obtained from a citizen survey conducted by Cupore as well as from other data sources. Population data are based on Statistics Finland's population structure statistics. Student population is estimated from Statistics Finland's employment statistics, which capture the population's occupational details. Youth unemployment and unemployment rates in the workforce are monitored through THL's Sotkanet statistical service. Data on residents' satisfaction with being in Oulu in Oulu are collected through periodic citizen surveys: 2022, 2025 and 2027.

The Oulu2026 municipalities vary greatly in terms of population size and structure. At the end of 2022, the Oulu2026 region had a total population of 528,227, of which 40% lived in Oulu, 23% in other urban municipalities in the area, 20% in semi-urban municipalities and 17% in rural municipalities. At the end of 2022, the proportion of individuals under the age of 15 was the highest in semi-urban municipalities and the lowest in rural municipalities (See Appendix 2). The proportion of the working-age population (15–64 years old) was the highest in Oulu, and the proportion of people over 64 years was the highest in rural municipalities (Table 2).

The majority of the population in the Oulu2026 area municipalities were Finnish speakers. Swedish speakers accounted for 0.1% of the rural municipality population and 0.2% of the population in other areas. The highest proportion of foreign language speakers were in Oulu and other urban municipalities (Table 2). Sami speakers in the region, especially in Oulu, accounted for a very small proportion of the population.<sup>41</sup>

In most municipalities in the area, the population was declining. Between 2021 and 2022, only four municipalities witnessed an increase in population: Oulu (1.1%), Hailuoto (1.1%), Kempele (1.0%) and Liminka (0.4%). In other four municipalities, the population remained almost unchanged (change between -0.2% and 0.2%), and in 25 municipalities, the population had decreased by 0.3% to 3.0%.

At the baseline stage, just under half (48%) of the respondents of the citizen survey, conducted by Cupore, felt that it is good for everyone to be in Oulu.

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40 Bid book, 2021, pp. 74–75.

41 At the end of 2022, there were 193 reported Sami speakers residing in the municipalities of the Oulu2026 region, with 143 of them living in Oulu.

**TABLE 2.** Social development: Baseline situation in the Oulu2026 region in 2022.

<b>Social development in the Oulu2026 region</b>	<b>Oulu</b>	<b>Other urban municipalities (5)</b>	<b>Semi-urban municipalities (10)</b>	<b>Rural municipalities (23)</b>	<b>Oulu2026 region (39) *</b>
Population as of 31.12.2022	211,848	120,396	103,653	92,330	528,227
- Proportion of population under 15 years (%)	16,6	17,1	19,2	15,8	16,8
- Proportion of population aged 15–64 years (%)	66,3	58,0	55,8	52,2	54,2
- Proportion of population over 64 years (%)	17,1	24,9	25,0	32,0	28,9
Proportion of students and schoolchildren in the population (%)	11	7	7	5	6
Net migration of young adults (25–34 years)	-617	-107	206	-15	-533
Unemployment rate (%)	11,4	9,8	8,2	9,1	9,1
Unemployment rate (%) among the youth (18–24 years)	15,6	14,3**	11,1**	10,7**	11,4**
Population change from the previous year (%)	1,1	-0,6	-0,6	-1,6	-1,2
Percentage of Finnish speakers (%)	94,5	96,1	98,0	97,7	97,5
Percentage of Swedish speakers (%)	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,1	0,1
Percentage of foreign language speakers (%)	5,2	3,6	1,9	2,2	2,4
Percentage of people with foreign backgrounds (%)	5,3	3,9	1,9	2,3	2,6
Perception of that it is good for everyone to be in Oulu (%)***	48% experienced that it is good for everyone to be in Oulu	-	-	-	-

\*Ranua joined the Oulu2026 area in 2023. It has not been considered in the baseline data included in the table. For municipalities other than Oulu, the variable value is presented as a total (and in proportions, % is the average).

\*\*Regarding youth unemployment data, a threshold value of 5 was applied by the Sotkanet service maintained by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL). Observations falling below this threshold are not available. For this reason, data for Hailuoto, Pyhäntä and Ristijärvi are missing from the averages.

\*\*\*Question posed only to the respondents living in Oulu (n = 1,317).

## Economic development: Baseline

The Oulu2026 bid book emphasises economic development goals, with a particular focus on creative industries. For example, it anticipates that by 2027, the creative economy of the Oulu region will have grown by 20%, and the number of jobs in the creative sector by 30%. Economic development goals include promoting tourism and urban planning as well as increasing cultural tourism in the region through sustainable and innovative means.<sup>42</sup>

Information about businesses and jobs in the creative industries and generally in the Oulu2026 region has been obtained from Statistics Finland's establishment register. It is important to mention that the definition of culture and creative industries is not straightforward. Cultural statistics from Statistics Finland include companies working in cultural domains and mass communication, which in turn covers a wide range of activities, including production and support as well as design, publishing and art trade. The statistics also provide information on tourist numbers and overnight stays in Oulu.<sup>43</sup>

In 2022, the number of establishments associated with culture and mass communication in the Oulu2026 region was approximately 2,000, of which about half were located in Oulu. Around 358,000 tourists arrived at accommodation establishments in Oulu, with approximately 560,000 overnight stays. Nationwide, the number of tourists in 2022 was approximately 11.5 million, with about 22 million overnight stays.

Establishments in the domain of culture and mass communication in the Oulu2026 region accounted for 4.1% of all establishments in the area. Their presence varied between Oulu and other Oulu2026 municipalities as well as within the different municipalities, ranging from 2% to just under 7%. The share of personnel-years in culture and mass communication establishments of all establishments in the region was 0.8%, with a clear difference between Oulu and other municipalities. The share of turnover in these establishments, as against total turnover across establishments in the area, was 0.4%, with Oulu clearly accounting for more than the other municipalities.

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42 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 16, 80.

43 Statistics Finland's Municipal Establishment Statistics have been used for data on businesses, which are relevant to the economic development of the region. The information is based on Statistics Finland's Business Register, and data from the previous year are compiled towards the end of the current year. At the municipal level, the data become available in the early part of the following year. Tourism-related data are based on information from the Rudolf Statistical Service on tourists arriving at accommodation establishments and for overnight stays in these establishments. Tourism data are presented only for Oulu and the entire country due to data-collection requirements in the tourism statistics (sufficient number of tourism establishments in the municipality).

**TABLE 3.** Economic development: Baseline situation in the Oulu2026 region in 2022.

<b>Economic development in the Oulu2026 region</b>	<b>Oulu</b>	<b>Other urban municipalities (5)</b>	<b>Semi-urban municipalities (10)</b>	<b>Rural municipalities (23)</b>	<b>Oulu2026 region (39)*</b>
Number of establishments in the culture and mass communication domain	1,122	384	349	245	2,100
Personnel in the culture and mass communication establishments (personnel years)*	915	79	56	8	1,058
Percentage of culture and mass communication establishments (of all establishments)*	6,6	4,0	2,9	2,0	4,1
Percentage of personnel in culture and mass communication establishments (of total personnel of all establishments)	1,6	0,2	0,2	0,0	0,8
Revenue of culture and mass communication establishments (in thousand euros)*	167,012	9,108	7,038	2,135	185,293
Percentage of revenue of culture and mass communication establishments (of revenue of all establishments)*	1,0	0,1	0,1	0,0	0,4
Number of tourists staying at accommodation establishments	358,039	-	-	-	-
Number of overnight stays	560,014	-	-	-	-
Number of accommodation establishments*	78	65	140	119	402
Number of food and beverage service establishments*	485	238	225	163	1,111

\*An average of percentages is presented for urban, semi-urban and rural municipalities, while for Oulu and the entire region, the percentages are based on absolute numbers. Statistics Finland's establishment data for 2022 are based on new data sources vis-à-vis the previous years, allowing for more location-specific information. Hence, the number of establishments has increased in several municipalities compared to 2021. This change particularly affects industries with many small operators (Personal communication, January 16, 2024). For data protection reasons, there is a significant amount of missing data, especially in personnel-years and revenue. This is particularly true in scenarios with fewer than three establishments in a municipality, and the data provided in this regard are indicative.

\*\*At the time of reporting, an error was noted in the establishment statistics for Pudasjärvi for the year 2022. Therefore, the municipality has not been included in the table. This information will be added to future reports of the research project.

## Cultural development: Baseline

Cultural development lies at the heart of Oulu2026, as the European Capital of Culture initiative is targeted at using culture as a tool for local and regional development. The bid book highlights the goals of expanding and opening up established activities ('renewal of the cultural system') as well as broadening participation and inclusivity in the region's culture. The application notes that according to Eurobarometer data, cultural offerings, especially in rural areas, are perceived as narrow and of poor quality. One of the desired long-term effects of Oulu2026 is improved cultural resources.<sup>44</sup> The strong connection between culture and urban planning is also emphasised in the bid book.<sup>45</sup>

Information about cultural development in the Oulu2026 region has been obtained from the available data on established cultural policy structures and funding (e.g. cultural statistics from Statistics Finland; information on cultural buildings from the building stock and construction database; and data produced by the Ministry of Education and Culture Finland, the Arts Promotion Centre Finland, and Cultural TEAvisari by THL<sup>46</sup>). The TerveSuomi survey provides information about the use of cultural services and residents' perceptions of the adequacy of cultural offerings relative to their needs.

In Finland, municipalities are legally obligated to organise cultural activities, taking into account local conditions, resources and the needs of different population groups. At the same time, they have the autonomy to define the content and form of these cultural activities.

The state-supported system of art and cultural institutions is a key feature of the cultural policy in Finland. In the municipalities of the Oulu2026 region, there were a total of 12 state-subsidised institutions in 2022. Of these, six were museums, four were theatres and two were orchestras. The activities of art and cultural institutions are concentrated in Oulu and other urban municipalities of the Oulu2026 region,<sup>47</sup> which is similar to the nationwide trend of art and cultural institutions being concentrated in larger cities. State subsidies for art and cultural institutions in the Oulu2026 region amounted to 9.7 million euros in 2022, with over half (52%) being allocated to theatres, 29% to museums and 19% to orchestras. The institutions located in Oulu received 61% of the state subsidies allocated to arts and cultural institutions in the Oulu2026 region.

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44 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 5, 13, 20, 77.

45 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 11.

46 The TEAvisari, which monitors municipalities' health promotion activities, is not updated annually. Therefore, unlike other datasets, the baseline situation refers to information for the year 2023.

47 State-subsidised museums in the Oulu2026 region include Aine Art Museum and Museum of Torne Valley in Tornio, Oulu Museum and Science Centre Luuppi in Oulu, Kemi Art Museum in Kemi, and Kainuu Museum and Kajaani Art Museum in Kajaani. In the data, Oulu Museum and Science Centre Luuppi are considered as a single art and cultural institution, whereas in Kajaani, the Kainuu Museum and Kajaani Art Museum are considered separate units. The state-subsidised theatres are Kajaani City Theatre, Kemi City Theatre, Oulu Theatre and JoJo – Oulu Dance Centre. The state-subsidised orchestras are Kemi City Orchestra and Oulu Symphony Orchestra.



TEAvisari provides information on the opportunities for cultural participation offered by the municipalities. In most of the Oulu2026 municipalities (26 municipalities), there was a permanent system in place allowing children and young people to receive basic arts education free of charge and/or to fee-related concessions based on their financial situations.

Twenty-nine municipalities had a permanent system in place for engaging children and the youth in cultural activities (e.g. discounted tickets, hobby passes, and cultural cards for middle school students).

Public art is made accessible, and operating conditions are created for artists and other professionals through the percent for art principle. According to TEAvisari data, decisions regarding the implementation of the percentage principle for construction-related art had been made and/or applied in 13 municipalities in the Oulu2026 region.

**TABLE 4.** Cultural development: Baseline situation in the Oulu2026 region in 2022 at a local level.

<b>Cultural development in the Oulu2026 region</b>	<b>Oulu</b>	<b>Other urban municipalities (5)</b>	<b>Semi-urban municipalities (10)</b>	<b>Rural municipalities (23)</b>	<b>Oulu2026 region (39) *</b>
State-subsidised arts and cultural institutions (number): Museums	1	5	-	-	6
State-subsidised arts and cultural institutions (number): Theatres	2	2	-	-	4
State-subsidised arts and cultural institutions (number): Orchestras	1	1	-	-	2
State subsidies for museums, €	1,506,891	1,304,336	-	-	2,811,227
State subsidies for theatres, €	2,834,735	2,217,798	-	-	5,052,533
State subsidies for orchestras, €	1,567,704	233,581	-	-	1,801,285
Average net operating cost of cultural activities per resident (€ per capita)	169,4	168,7	130,9	115,8	127,8
- Museum activities	29,0	30,2	4,8	6,9	11,7
- Theatre, dance and circus activities	27,3	80,4	2,8	2,2	28,2
- Visual arts activities	1,8	-	12,8	0,1	6,7
- General cultural activities	21,5	16,5	25,4	20,1	21,1
- Library activities	51,8	52,7	66,5	85,6	75,6
- Basic arts education	14,4	44,3	32,3	7,8	20,7
Percentage of municipalities with permanent systems for children and the youth to receive basic art education free of charge and/or fee-related concessions based on their financial situations	Yes	Yes 4/5	10/10	11/21	26/37
Percentage of municipalities with permanent systems for engaging children and the youth in cultural activities (e.g., discounted tickets, hobby passes and cultural cards for middle school students.)	Yes	Yes 5/5	9/10	14/10	29/37
Percentage of municipalities that have formulated/executed decisions regarding the percentage principle for construction-related art	Yes	Yes 2/5	4/10	6/21	13/37
Cultural buildings (number)	35	36	62	59	192

\*TEAvisari lacks information on Siikalatva and Vaala municipalities from the Oulu2026 region, thus accounting for 21 out of the 37 municipalities that responded to the survey from Oulu2026 region.

Some of the key figures describing cultural development are only available at the regional level. Here, we have examined all four regions whose municipalities are included in the Oulu2026 region (see Figure 2). Regional-level data are available on the allocation of state funding by the Arts Promotion Centre Finland (Taike). TerveSuomi survey responses also present residents' experiences of the availability and use of cultural services at the regional level.

In 2022, Taike granted a total of 6.1 million euros in grants and subsidies to the counties [Finnish: maakunta] that are a part of Oulu2026. According to Taike's statistics, about 4% of all funding distributed by Taike in 2022 was allocated to the Northern Ostrobothnia region. The percentage was similar for Lapland but lower for the other regions of the Oulu2026 area. The four counties included in the Oulu2026 region accounted for 9.5% of all applications received by Taike for grants or subsidies and 11.1% of all the recipients of those grants or subsidies. The total share of grants and subsidies awarded to the region constituted 12.6% of all grants and subsidies awarded nationwide.

According to the TerveSuomi survey, approximately a quarter (25.5%) of the residents had used some cultural service (including library services) in Northern Ostrobothnia in 2022. The percentage was slightly lower in Kainuu but slightly higher in Lapland and Northern Savonia. In all four regions, cultural services were used primarily by those with higher education. However, the proportion of those with higher education using a monthly cultural service was lower in Northern Ostrobothnia, (31.6%) compared to other regions included in the Oulu2026 region.

Of those in Northern Ostrobothnia who needed cultural services, 26.2% felt that the cultural services were not adequately available. This percentage was significantly higher in Lapland (40.7%) compared to the other Oulu2026 regions. Interestingly, although individuals with higher education were the highest users of cultural services, the lack of such services was more often felt by those with lower education.

**TABLE 5.** Cultural development: Baseline situation in the Oulu2026 area in 2022 (by region).

<b>Cultural development in the Oulu2026 region</b>	<b>Northern Ostrobothnia</b>	<b>Lapland</b>	<b>Kainuu</b>	<b>Northern Savonia</b>	<b>All Oulu2026 regions</b>
Share of applications for Taike grants and subsidies (% of all Taike grant applicants)	3,8	2,7	0,7	2,2	9,5
Share of recipients of Taike grants and subsidies (% of all Taike grant recipients)	3,9	3,3	1,1	2,7	11,1
Share of Taike grant and subsidy sum (% of total grant sum)	3,8	4,0	2,1	2,6	12,6
Taike grant and subsidy sum, €	1,862,090	1,965,190	1,038,620	1,282,800	6,148,700
Percentage of population using some cultural services monthly (incl. library services)*	25,5	27,6	24,3	28,3	26,4
- Ages 20–64	26,1	31,8	22,6	29,5	27,5
- Aged 65 and above	23,9	19,9	27,2	25,8	24,2
- Aged 75 and above	21,1	18,6	18,6	23,4	20,4
- Low education	19,9	20,1	17,5	21,1	19,7
- Medium education	28,6	29,3	25,0	31,8	28,7
- High education	31,6	40,8	43,3	37,8	38,4
Percentage of service users finding the availability of cultural services (excl. library services) inadequate (%)*	26,2	40,7	22,8	25,4	28,8
- Ages 20–64	25,4	43,1	20,9	24,8	28,6
- Aged 65 and above	28,8	34,9	26,8	27,0	29,4
- Aged 75 and above	32,0	39,4	27,9	31,2	32,6
- Low education	29,4	46,1	25,1	31,8	33,1
- Medium education	26,6	32,2	19,7	19,0	24,4
- High education	21,1	42,2	21,3	21,6	26,6

\* The last column indicates the average percentage in the four regions (original data not available).

## 3 CONTENT AND OFFERINGS

### Why did we measure

Content and offerings are the first theme of the Oulu2026 monitoring and evaluation framework. This theme is vital because cultural offerings and the use of culture in local and regional development are at the heart of the ECOC action. One of the specific objectives of the ECOC initiative is enhancing the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offerings in cities, including through transnational cooperation. It is important to highlight that the focus is on the offerings during the ECOC year. The guide for applying to the ECOC title clarifies that a city is awarded the title not based on its current vibrant cultural offerings but for its future programme in the ECOC year as set out in its bid book.<sup>48</sup>

The European Capitals of Culture is an example of a multidisciplinary and site-specific platform of events that enable year-round production of cultural programmes and participation in cultural activities.<sup>49</sup> Cultural capitals often outline the year's offerings as programme agendas that include substantial flagship projects and various programme lines under which individual programmes are grouped. This is also the case with Oulu2026. The vision for Oulu2026's cultural programme is driven by the words inspiring, sustainable and European.<sup>50</sup> According to the bid book, the artistic vision underlying Oulu2026's programme rests on three pillars: 1) to implement an inspiring programme sustainably, 2) to bring culture to new arenas and audiences and 3) to revamp the way that the cultural system works by de-institutionalising and de-centralising cultural activities.<sup>51</sup>

The Oulu2026 programme has been a collaborative effort from the start. According to the bid book, cultural co-development has been the guiding principle for programme choices since the very beginning of the bidding process. Co-development refers to expanding and deepening the framework of the cultural programme presented in the bid book together with residents, artists and partners after the selection.<sup>52</sup>

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48 European Commission, 2019, p. 11.

49 Kajdanek, 2022; van der Steen & Richards, 2021.

50 'Inspiring. Sustainable. European. That is our vision for the Oulu 2026 cultural programme.' (Bid Book, 2021, p. 16)

51 Bid book, 2021, p. 16.

52 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 5, 72.



## How did we measure and what did we find

While the indicators for content and offerings have been tailored to the Oulu2026 cultural programme, their broader impacts on cultural offerings locally and regionally have been generally identified.

Surveys conducted by Cupore at the baseline stage highlighted the desired long-term effects of Oulu2026 on the local cultural offerings. In surveys directed at public officials and municipal council members in the Oulu2026 region, the diversification of art and cultural offerings at the local level was the third most common desired impact of the ECOC action. It was favoured by 76% of the public officials and 53% of the municipal council members surveyed. The most desired impact among the surveyed citizens was also related to cultural offerings. Approximately 75% of the citizen respondents completely or somewhat agreed with the statement that Oulu2026 strengthens the cultural life of the region.

At the baseline stage, most of the cultural programmes outlined in the bid book had not yet been realised. Therefore, they could only be described in terms of plans and expectations, with the help of some of the indicators. In this report, information on the programme projects at the baseline stage is mainly based on the bid book. Additionally, data have been obtained from the Oulu Cultural Foundation and the results of a survey involving arts and cultural actors. It should be noted that the programme described in the bid book is merely a framework to be expanded and deepened together with residents, artists and partners after the selection decision.<sup>53</sup>

Quantitative data on the indicators relevant to content and offerings are to be obtained from 2023 onwards via the Oulu Cultural Foundation's grant and production management systems and later from the information available in the event calendar. Additionally, future citizen and stakeholder surveys will assess the cultural programme's contents.

### Content and offerings: Baseline situation in the light of indicators

The content and offerings of Oulu2026 is described with the help of eight quantitative indicators. Baseline-level information was available for four of these (See Table 6).

The bid book lists 51 Oulu2026 programme projects, which are described in more detail below. A success factor listed for Oulu2026 activities is that 70% of the Oulu2026 projects should combine art and technology. Within the programme projects in the bid book, 10% belong to the Art <3 Tech programme line.

According to the survey responses of the arts and cultural actors (n = 115), the assessment of artistic quality at the baseline stage was mainly based on perceptions as the cultural programme was not fully developed. The majority of the survey respondents somewhat or fully agreed that the cultural

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<sup>53</sup> Hakukirja, 2021, p. 5.

programme seemed interesting (60% of respondents) and diverse (54% of respondents).

The total budget for the cultural programme mentioned in the bid book is €31 million. The programme outlined in the bid book accounts for approximately 60% of the total budget.<sup>54</sup> Information on the total funding released to the Oulu2026 programme projects is expected to be available at the end of the ECOC year. The cultural programme budget also includes funding channelled from the Oulu Cultural Foundation to selected cultural programme projects and community activities (Our Oulu) through application procedures. At the baseline stage, the total realised cost of the programme was approximately €860,000.

**TABLE 6.** Quantitative indicators: Content and offerings.

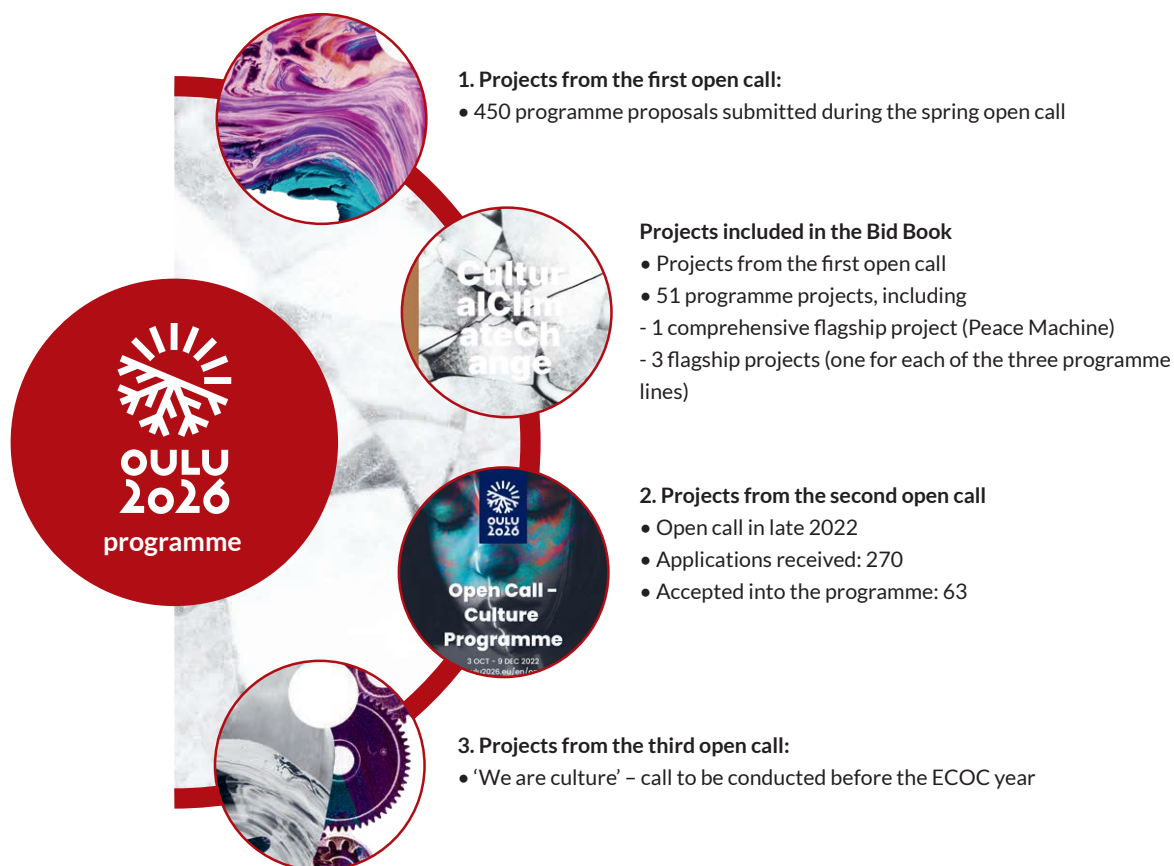
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Year 2022</b>	<b>Source</b>
Number of projects in the Oulu2026 programme	51	Baseline: bid book For realised programme: grant and production management systems
Share of art and technology projects in the Oulu2026 programme	10% of projects are part of the Art <3 Tech programme line in the bid book	"
Assessment of the artistic quality of the Oulu2026 programme's contents	3.71 on a scale of 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree)	Arts and cultural actors' survey (n = 112)
Citizens' assessment of the Oulu2026 programme content	To be updated based on realised programme	Citizen survey (years 2025, 2027)
Professionals' assessment of the Oulu2026 programme content	"	Arts and cultural actors' survey (years 2025, 2027)
Share of Oulu2026 projects implemented outside the Oulu city centre	"	Grant and production management systems
Number of events in the Oulu2026 programme	"	Event calendar
Total budget of Oulu2026 projects	859,684 €	Baseline: Oulu Cultural Foundation For realised programme: grant and production management systems as well as information from Oulu2026 municipalities

<sup>54</sup> Hakukirja, 2021, p. 72.

## Overview of the Oulu2026 programme

The entire Oulu2026 cultural programme was developed through various stages and in close collaboration with arts and cultural actors. The Oulu2026 organisation conducted two open programme calls: one during the bidding stage and the other in late 2022. In the baseline year, the programme as a whole was still being formulated. It is expected to be supported closer to the ECOC year with an open call titled 'We Are Culture', aimed at the actors at the grassroots level. The call is set to open in the autumn of 2024 (see Figure 6).

**FIGURE 6.** The formation of Oulu2026 programme.



The first open call for programme projects was held spring 2019, resulting in 450 proposals. In the bid book, all the projects not produced by the Oulu Cultural Foundation can be attributed to this initial call.<sup>55</sup>

Per the bid book, the Oulu2026 cultural programme consists of 51 programme projects. These projects are categorised under different programme lines. The main theme of the programme is Cultural Climate Change, which includes the Peace Machine as a reconnecting flagship. Three themes stemming from the main theme are the Wild City, Cool Contrasts and Brave Hinterland. Each theme involves a large-scale international flagship production. Additionally, it includes a set of interconnected programme projects.<sup>56</sup>

**TABLE 7.** Programme schedule in the Oulu2026 bid book.

Main theme	Flagship		
Cultural Climate Change	Peace Machine		
Theme	Flagship	Programme line	Number of projects
Wild City	The Rise of the Tar Kingdom	Art Takeover!	5
		Creative Villages	8
		STREAM to the Future	3
		Urban Boost	4
Cool Contrasts	Underground Clash	Art <3 Tech	5
		Dark Matters	4
		Oulu Calling!	4
Brave Hinterland	Climate Clock	Between East & West	5
		Naturally Art	4
		Northern Vibes	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>47</b>

For each programme line, the bid book defines a Cultural Climate Change factor (CCC factor), which describes how the programme line addresses the theme and defines its key implementation capabilities (see Table 8).<sup>57</sup> The set of CCC factors illustrates the multidimensionality of the concept (see Chapter 1).

55 Written Communication, Samu Forsblom, 23 November 2023.

56 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 21.

57 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 21.

**TABLE 8.** CCC factors for the Oulu2026 programme lines listed in the bid book.

<b>Programme line</b>	<b>CCC factors</b>
Art Takeover!	Vibrant city, creative working life, digital outreach
Creative Villages	Cultural living rooms, rethinking spaces, city for the youth
STREAM to the Future	Learning through culture, fostering creativity, European children's culture
Urban Boost	Tackling youth unemployment, inspirational future, local to global
Art <3 Tech	Sustainable and accessible culture, humanising digital culture, future art platforms
Dark Matters	Balanced community, cultural well-being, the voice of the margins
Oulu Calling!	Local identity, finding roots and myths, diverse region
Between East & West	Cultural influences, renewing European connections, celebrating the edges of Europe
Naturally Art	Reconnecting art and nature, climate change, indigenous Sámi culture
Northern Vibes	Promoting northern culture in Europe, pride and joy linked to snow and ice, gastronomy

Apart from the actual cultural programme, the bid book mentions a number of other projects related to the development of operating conditions in the area and to supporting the ECOC action. These will be addressed in the section on 'Operating conditions in the arts and culture domain'.

In the citizen survey conducted at the baseline stage, 21% of the respondents claimed to know Oulu2026 activities well or very well. The most well-known project was the Arctic Food Lab under the Northern Vibes programme line focusing on northern food culture, which had 22% of the respondents stating that they knew it well or very well. In contrast, the flagship production Peace Machine, addressing cultural climate change, was relatively less known, with only 10% of the respondents claiming to know it well or very well. In the arts and cultural actors' survey, the respondents were asked to evaluate how various adjectives described their perceptions of the Oulu2026 cultural programme. The three most common adjectives were interesting (60% somewhat or completely agreed), diverse (54%) and high artistic quality (49%).

The second open programme call was conducted in late 2022, targeting professionals. A total of 270 applications<sup>58</sup> were received, of which 70% were organisations (n = 189). Workgroups ac-

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58 Additionally, there were 3 projects in the bid book that applied and 1 applicant who withdrew their application shortly after the open call ended. These have not been included in the total number of applications.

counted for less than one-fifth (17%, 45) of the applications, and individual applicants comprised about one-tenth (13%, 36).

Nearly all the applicants (89%) were from Finland. Individual applications were received from the following countries: the Netherlands, Argentina, Armenia, Belgium, Brazil, Spain, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Norway, France, Sweden, Germany, Slovenia, Denmark, Hungary, the United Kingdom and the United States. Of the total applications, 41% (111) were from Oulu. Applications were also received from 22 other Oulu2026 municipalities, including Kajaani (7); Hailuoto and Liminka (5 each); Ii, Kempele and Kuusamo (3 each); and Kalajokki, Kemi, Muhos, Nivala and Sotkamo (2 each).

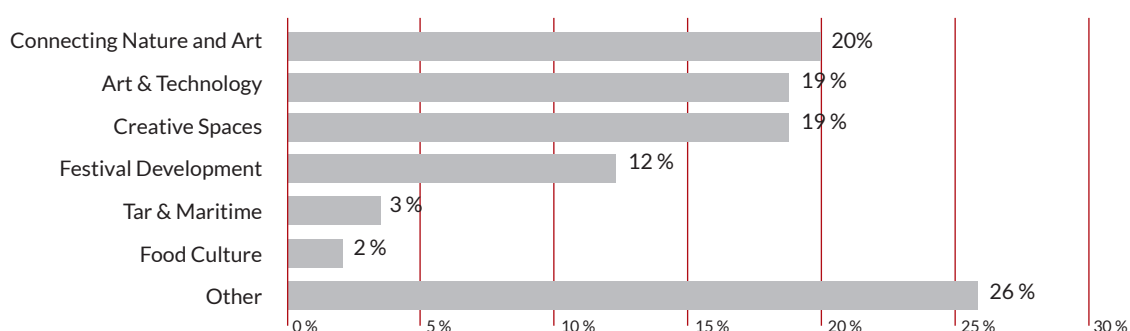
The application form included a question of asked about specific focus areas that the project develops. The options included in the application form were Art & Technology, Connecting Nature and Art, Tar & Maritime, Food Culture, Festival Development and Creative Spaces. However, it was not mandatory for the projects to target these areas specifically. For focus areas other than these, respondents were asked to select the ‘Other’ option, and this was chosen by 26% of the respondents.<sup>59</sup> Among the given focus areas, Connecting Nature and Art was most frequently selected (20%), followed by Art & Technology (19%) and Creative Spaces (19%). Food Culture (2%) and Tar & Maritime (3%) were the least frequently chosen options. Festival Development was chosen by 12% of the applicants (see Figure 7).

From the applications for the second programme call, 63 projects were selected to be included in the Oulu2026 programme in spring 2023. Detailed monitoring of these selected projects will begin in the Oulu2026 monitoring and evaluation report for year 2023.

**FIGURE 7.** Focus areas of project proposals from the second programme call.

Source: Application data and the Oulu Cultural Foundation's grant system.

**Proposals submitted via an open call: activity**



<sup>59</sup> The selections for the 2022 programme call were announced on 31 May 2023. The selected programme content will be included in the evaluation and monitoring report for the year 2023.



## 4 OPERATING CONDITIONS IN THE ARTS AND CULTURE DOMAIN

### Why did we measure

Operating conditions in the arts and culture domain constitute the second theme of the Oulu2026 monitoring and evaluation framework. Operating conditions refer to a broad spectrum of factors. The work and livelihood of individual artists and other professionals in the domain require diverse sources of income and funding, education and expertise, work and performance spaces, as well as audience bases, among other factors. Arts and cultural actors are part of a larger system that involves various interacting entities and networks.<sup>60</sup> The vitality of this system affects the operating conditions of individual actors, and it is fostered by elements such as a diverse network of actors, collaboration, and knowledge sharing.

One of the specific objectives of the European Capitals of Culture action is to strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector and its links with other sectors. This capacity is related to the operating conditions for arts and culture actors and collaboration opportunities, which create long-term connections between different sectors.<sup>61</sup> Previous studies have shown that the ECOC initiative has positively influenced the emergence of new methods and ideas, collaboration and networking opportunities, and professionalisation among arts and cultural actors.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, maintaining or preserving these strengthened operating conditions after the ECOC year is challenging and requires a clear strategy and measures.<sup>63</sup>

The development of operating conditions for the cultural domain as well as collaboration opportunities is also emphasised in the objectives of the city of Oulu. Oulu's cultural strategy calls for increasing the number of grants to support professionals' work and the internationalisation of the cultural sector. The goals also include promoting the work of art and culture professionals and expanding connections within the sector. Collaboration between the cultural sector, businesses and science is specifically emphasised.<sup>64</sup>

The goal of Oulu2026 is a long-term change in the cultural climate by strengthening the readiness of the cultural sector and its connections with other sectors.<sup>65</sup> The bid book emphasises, for example, the significance of arts and cultural institutions in implementing cultural climate chan-

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60 See, for example, Holden, 2015.

61 European Commission, 2019, p. 14.

62 Bergsgard & Vassenden, 2011; Quinn, 2010.

63 Quinn, 2010.

64 Quinn, 2010., p. 16, 17.

65 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 15.

ge.<sup>66</sup> In particular, it highlights the connections between art and technology. Developing the readiness and operating conditions of the arts and culture domain in the Oulu2026 region can deliver the long-term effects of the ECOC activities and contribute to the goals of the city and its cultural strategies.

## How did we measure and what did we find

The monitoring of the operating conditions in the arts and culture domain is guided by the Oulu2026 activities. Indicators have been used to examine arts and cultural actors' experiences of their operating conditions in the Oulu2026 region. The indicators also address the extent of collaboration and the decision-makers' attitudes as well as the role of Oulu2026 activities in channelling funding and promoting expertise within the arts and culture domain.

Additionally, in-depth qualitative analyses are targeted at the financial resources attracted by the programme projects, the expertise of the cultural actors, the capacity-building projects aimed at developing operational and revenue models, and the forms of collaboration at various levels and sectors.

Cupore conducted a survey at the baseline stage to shed light on how the arts and cultural actors expected Oulu2026 to influence their operating conditions and, more broadly, the vitality of the domain in the region. At the time of the survey, in autumn 2022, the actors perceived their operating conditions to be weak in many respects. Particularly weakly assessed were the financial aspects/income (40% rated as fairly or very poor), availability of spaces (34%) and the appreciation for the work (23%). Self-expertise was the most highly rated operating condition (84% rated as fairly or very good). Oulu2026 was expected to positively contribute to the operating conditions in many ways. Mainly, the respondents hoped that Oulu2026 would expand the demand and audience base (91% rated as fairly or very important), increase appreciation (87%), improve collaboration and networking opportunities (86%) and enhance the visibility and recognition of the actors in the Oulu2026 region (86%).

### Operating conditions in the arts and culture domain: Baseline situation in the light of indicators

The operating conditions in the arts and culture domain have been mapped using eight quantitative indicators (Table 9). At the baseline stage, the information was based on survey responses collected from arts and cultural actors, survey responses from municipal council members and the bid book. In future, information about programme projects will be updated once data are available from the Oulu Cultural Foundation's grant and production management systems.

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<sup>66</sup> 'And since the main cultural institutions account for 80% of what we spend on culture, we won't achieve CCC without bringing them along' (p. 8.)

**TABLE 9.** Quantitative indicators: Operating conditions in the arts and culture domain.

Indicator	Year 2022	Source
Art and cultural actors' experience of the municipality's support*	2.6 on a scale of 1 (very poor) – 5 (very good)	Art and cultural actors' survey (n = 110)
Art and cultural actors' experience of the ability to participate in cultural decision-making in Oulu2026 municipalities (average)	2.4 on a scale of 1 (very poor) – 5 (very good)	Art and cultural actors' survey (n = 115)
Art and cultural actors' cooperation within the Oulu2026 region**	2.8 on a scale of 1 (not at all) – 5 (a lot)	Art and cultural actors' survey (n = 114)
Art and cultural actors' cooperation elsewhere in Finland**	2.2 on a scale of 1 (not at all) – 5 (a lot)	Art and cultural actors' survey (n = 114)
Art and cultural actors' cooperation elsewhere in Europe**	1.7 on a scale of 1 (not at all) – 5 (a lot)	Art and cultural actors' survey (n = 113)
Share of arts and culture projects facilitating international collaboration in the Oulu2026 programme	82% of cultural programme projects in the bid book include plans for international collaboration.	Baseline: bid book For realised programme: grant and production management systems
Decision-makers' assessment of Oulu2026 within their respective municipality***	4.1 on a scale of 1 (completely disagree) – 5 (completely agree)	Municipal council members' survey (n = 168)
Decision-makers' attitude towards culture within their respective municipality****	4.0 on a scale of 1 (completely disagree) – 5 (completely agree)	Municipal council members' survey (n = 171)

\*Statements: My municipality supports project activities of art and culture actors. My municipality provides financial support for professional art. My municipality supports communication and information for art and culture actors. My municipality helps arts and cultural actors find funding. My municipality helps nurture contacts and collaboration opportunities between different sectors. My municipality provides financial support for international activities, My municipality promotes professional employment opportunities within the art and culture sector.

\*\*Collaboration with individual artists or other actors in the arts and cultural sector, companies, public sector actors or third-sector actors.

\*\*\*Statements: Oulu2026 is a good thing for cultural actors in our municipality, Oulu2026 is a good thing for the residents of our municipality, Oulu2026 is a good thing for businesses in our municipality.

\*\*\*\*Statements: Organising cultural activities is a central task of municipalities. It is important that artists live and work in our municipality. Art and culture provide solutions to future challenges in our municipality. Our residents have good opportunities to use cultural services or engage in cultural activities.

In 2022, the arts and cultural actors surveyed by Cupore gave a moderate ratings for support received from their municipalities (2.6) and participation opportunities (2.4) on a scale ranging from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good). The indicator for municipal support is based on a set of related statements.

The actors were asked about their collaborations with other actors (individual artists or other actors in the arts and cultural sector, companies, public sector actors or third-sector actors), and in 2022, collaboration was relatively limited, especially at an international level. On a scale from 1 (no collaboration at all) to 5 (a lot of collaboration), the average rating for collaboration was 2.8 within the Oulu2026 region, 2.2 elsewhere in Finland and 1.7 elsewhere in Europe.

Implementing 80% of the Oulu2026 projects via international collaboration is a success factor listed in the bid book. At the baseline stage, 82% of the cultural programme projects in the bid book include plans for international collaboration, with producers, partners or both coming from outside Finland.

At the baseline stage, the decision-makers in the municipalities showed positive attitudes towards Oulu2026 and cultural engagement in general. The average ratings towards Oulu2026 and cultural engagement were 4.1 and 4.0, respectively, on a scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Both indicators were based a set of related statements.

## **Financial resources channelled by Oulu2026 projects within the region**

Events like the European Capitals of Culture generate direct, indirect and multiplier effects on the local and regional economy. The regional economic impacts are generated within the networks formed by Oulu2026 actors and local businesses. The impacts can include local financial flows generated by event production, spending by event attendees, consumption by those directly or indirectly engaged in Oulu2026 activities, and the local tax revenue effects generated by these employments and productions.<sup>67</sup>

The financial resources channelled by Oulu2026 projects towards the region will be further examined through an in-depth qualitative analysis. Data will be collected from programme implementers, using a percentage-based estimation, before the ECOC year through Oulu Cultural Foundation's programme work systems. The data will be supported by a survey conducted after the Oulu2026 title year.

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67 See also Herrero et al., 2006; Kainulainen, 2005; Luonila et al., 2022; Tohmo, 2005.

## **New operational and income models for competence and capacity development of cultural actors in the Oulu2026 programme**

In addition to the cultural programme, Oulu2026 activities encompass a wide range of projects aimed at strengthening the operating conditions of cultural and creative actors in the region. The bid book lists many projects focused on developing actors' competence and capacity, which build on a strategy established by the city of Oulu in 2019 for improving its capabilities as an applicant for international funding.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to the projects listed in the bid book, new projects aimed at developing the operating conditions have been initiated since the application phase, which are mentioned on the Oulu Cultural Foundation's website. For example, the Cultural Sustainability School aims to increase the knowledge and skills of cultural and, particularly, event industry actors in relation to responsible and sustainable event production.<sup>69</sup>

Table 10 lists the projects that focused on cultural actors' competence and capacity development within Oulu2026 activities in 2022. These data have been obtained from the bid book, the Oulu Cultural Foundation's website and the city of Oulu's project database<sup>70</sup>. The list demonstrates the breadth of the projects and the significance of developing operating conditions as part of the Oulu2026 activities.

It should be noted that competence and capacity development are also addressed in many projects within the cultural programme. Additionally, the Oulu Cultural Foundation is building the Oulu2026 Academy for project implementers in order to support the operating conditions of regional actors in various ways. The foundation also disseminates information and develops skills through funding information sessions and other events. The Oulu Cultural Foundation is a partner, for example, in the new incentive policy for the regional film and media industry, by which film and TV series productions are supported with 10% of the locally incurred costs.

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68 Hakukirja, 2021, pp. 95–96.

69 <https://futurevents oulu.com/> (accessed 1.12.2023).

70 Development Projects and Initiatives of the City of Oulu.

<https://www.ouka.fi/kehittamishankkeet-ja-projektit?accordion=accordion-15094>

**TABLE 10.** Projects focused on skills development in Oulu2026 activities: Status in 2022.

<b>Project</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Status in 2022</b>
Arctic Pulse	Strengthening Sámi cultural production: The project took northern Finnish artists to perform in Sweden and Norway and brought performers from neighbouring countries to northern Finland.	Completed (2019–21)
Black Hole Network	Creation of a network involving authors residing in Northern Ostrobothnia and other professionals in the publishing industry – graphic designers, illustrators and publishing editors – to promote employment and livelihood.	Completed (2021–22)
Culture United	Skills development under the STREAM to the Future programme line: promoting learning in primary schools.	Completed (2019–22)
DigiCult	Development of a digital platform to familiarise residents and visitors to the municipality with cultural experiences and natural sites.	Completed (2021–22)
EU Expertise Boost	Enhancing EU funding application capabilities: Intensifying collaboration in Oulu and in the region to increase the amount and proportion of international funding in different organisations.	Completed (2019–22)
International Residency Innovation Network in Northern Ostrobothnia (KRIPA)	Developing interdisciplinary collaboration in artist residencies: Identifying strategic collaboration opportunities and partnerships for residency activities and piloting business in residency mediation.	Completed (2020–22)
Reading Joys and Book Frenzy	Establishing a permanent model resulting in early childhood educators and teachers from Oulu being identified as literary arts educators and reading enthusiasts.	Completed (2020–22)
Creativity +	Advancement of the Urban Boost programme line: Promoting employment opportunities in the creative industries for 17–29-year-olds, encouraging new professionals to enter the field and providing opportunities to demonstrate self-acquired skills in creative professional networks.	Completed (2019–22)



<b>Project</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Status in 2022</b>
OSAaValo	Development of skills for the Dark Matters programme line: The project developed and piloted lighting design training in Finland and develop light-based city and business models.	Completed (2019–22)
Sustainability in culture	Skills development for carbon neutrality in events and development of international networks.	Completed (2021–22)
TRACES - Transformative tourism across European Capitals of Culture	Developing unique, transformative experiences for Oulu's tourism offerings.	Completed (2020–21)
Urban Boost	Advancement of the Urban Boost programme line: Promoting employment opportunities and participation among young adults and enhancing the possibilities for urban culture production in the Oulu region.	Completed (2019–21)
Free Space	Advancement of the Urban Boost programme line: Promoting the employment of young people and others with a weak labour market status.	Completed (2020–22)
Warjakka stories – Augmented reality experience and gallery	Promoting the culture programme line of Art<3Tech. Development of new technologies for showcasing cultural heritage. The project also created a new resource from the region's cultural heritage, thus supporting the development of regional tourism.	Completed (2019–20)
Artistivarikko	The project improves the relevance of and accessibility to music industry education via a training module. Workplace-oriented training is aimed at artists and bands at various stages of their careers, aiming to improve their business skills and employment prospects.	Ongoing (2021–23)
ARTS up	Development of new models supporting the independent activities and self-employment of young creators, enabling innovations.	Ongoing (2022–23)
The Most Sustainable European Capital of Culture	Models for sustainable development of events: The project promotes a low-carbon and sustainable economy through collaboration between events and innovation organisations.	Ongoing (2019–23)
Cultural experience guides	Employment in the cultural sector, cultural tourism, culture in care facilities: The project aims to create a cultural tourism model and a network of actors in Northern Ostrobothnia who help tourists discover new experiences in the region.	Ongoing (2021–23)
Light Art in Public Spaces (LAIPS)	Development of expertise in light art: The project promotes the status of light art and strengthens exchange of experiences and development of digital tools in the field.	Ongoing (2020–23)

<b>Project</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Status in 2022</b>
Making City	Strengthening competence in sustainable development: Planning, implementing and testing an innovative energy-based pilot project called PED (Positive Energy District) in Kaukovainio, Oulu.	Ongoing (2019–23)
MaKuRu	Developing North Ostrobothnia’s food culture and tourism as part of the European Capital of Culture preparation. The project aims to activate stakeholders, increase cross-sectoral cooperation, and elevate food culture, under the Arctic Food Lab programme line.	Ongoing (2022–23)
More Than Planet	A project of the Creative Europe programme that serves as an introduction to Oulu’s European Capital of Culture year 2026.	Ongoing (2022–25)
Oulu Housing Fair 2025 Art Programme	The project aims to create an art programme coordinated by a professional artist for Hartaanselänranta in Oulu, in accordance with the percent for art scheme.	Ongoing (2022–23)
Northern Cultural Flow	Building capacities for Delta Life and Hybridise Your Festival projects: Enhancing awareness and visibility of cultural events and strengthening collaboration with cultural content and tourism services.	Ongoing (2021–23)
TechArt	Increasing capacity for the TechArt ecosystem and the Art <3 Tech programme line in the cultural programme.	Ongoing (2021–22)
Ulysses A European Odyssey (UEO)	A project within the Oulu2026 Light Matters initiative. The project aims to produce an artwork for the Lumo Light Festival in 2023 and strengthen European cooperation networks.	Ongoing (2019–24)

## **Cooperation between arts and cultural actors across different levels and sectors**

Collaboration can be examined from various perspectives, including sectors and levels. Societal activities are traditionally divided into private, public and third sectors. The private sector carries out market-driven activities while the third sector covers civil society’s activities. Collaboration between different sectors can thus be understood as, for example, one between the public and third sectors. From a regional perspective, collaboration can also be observed at different levels (local, regional, national, international).

As the quantitative indicators showed, the arts and cultural actors that responded to the survey engaged in relatively little international collaboration in the baseline year. Collaboration was more common at the national and, especially, at the local level. Almost all (90%) of the respondents had engaged in at least some form of cooperation with individual artists or other arts and cultural actors in the Oulu2026 region in 2022. Nearly half (45%) of the respondents had engaged in a considerable or fairly substantial amount of collaboration.

Over three-quarters of the respondents had collaborated with third-sector organisations (78%) and public-sector actors (77%) in the Oulu2026 region. For a third of the respondents, collaboration with these actors had been at least fairly substantial. A clear majority (60%) had collaborated with local businesses; for just over a tenth (14%), collaboration with businesses had been substantial.

Significant collaborations among arts and cultural actors also occurred at the national level. Three-quarters (75%) of the survey respondents had collaborated with individual artists or other arts and cultural sector actors in Finland in 2022. A total of 56% of the respondents had collaborated with third-sector organisations, 49% with the public sector, and 38% with businesses operating elsewhere in Finland.

Nearly half (47%) of the respondents of the arts and cultural actors' survey had collaborated with individual artists or other arts and cultural actors elsewhere in Europe in the baseline year. Collaborations with European third-sector organisations had been undertaken by 36% of the respondents, with the public sector by 32%, and with businesses by a fifth (20%) of the respondents.

A quarter (26%) of the respondents felt that Oulu2026 had strengthened their collaboration within the Oulu2026 area to some extent, while 16% reported that Oulu2026 had already strengthened collaboration with actors located elsewhere in Finland.

The perspective of the municipalities on collaboration was obtained from a survey of public officials responsible for culture in Oulu2026 municipalities. In the baseline year, 33 municipalities were covered in the survey. According to the survey responses, the cultural services branch in most municipalities had engaged in at least fairly substantial collaborations with other municipal branches, including the education branch (or equivalent) (30 municipalities), the technical branch (or equivalent) (22), the business development branch (or equivalent) (14), the administration branch (or equivalent) (17), and the social and health branch (or equivalent) (13). A little over a third of the surveyed public officials (13) felt that Oulu2026 activities had already somewhat strengthened collaboration with other branches in the municipality.

Around 40% of the municipalities (14) had engaged in at least fairly substantial collaboration with other municipalities in the Oulu2026 region in 2022. However, only two municipalities had engaged in substantial collaborations with municipalities located elsewhere in Finland. The majority of responding municipalities (70%, 23 municipalities) at the baseline stage felt that Oulu2026 activities had strengthened collaboration among municipalities in the Oulu2026 region to some extent. Five municipalities felt that the activities had strengthened collaboration with municipalities located elsewhere in Finland.

In nearly all the Oulu2026 municipalities (30 municipalities), there was at least fairly substantial collaboration with associations and other civil society actors in 2022. One-third of the municipalities (11) felt that Oulu2026 activities had strengthened this collaboration to some extent. A similar proportion of municipalities (36%, 12 municipalities) had collaborated with businesses in

2022. Nine felt that Oulu2026 activities had somewhat strengthened their collaborations with businesses. The majority of the municipalities (70%, 23 municipalities) had collaborated with artists in 2022. Fourteen felt that Oulu2026 activities had strengthened this collaboration to some extent.

International collaboration was still relatively limited among municipalities in the baseline year. Six had engaged in international collaboration within Europe in 2022, and five felt that Oulu2026 activities had strengthened this collaboration to some extent.

## 5 SPACES

### Why did we measure

Spaces are the third theme of the Oulu2026 monitoring and evaluation framework. Location and physical environment and their development are key factors that determine the emergence of creative hubs, cultural sector businesses, and novel products and job opportunities in the region.<sup>71</sup> Cultural activities and spaces have for long played a role in urban regeneration.<sup>72</sup> Constructing new cultural spaces, renovating old buildings and incorporating art and culture into public spaces are examples of efforts that facilitate participation and experience of art and culture. The aims of developing spaces include promoting inclusivity, community cohesion and the conditions conducive to creative industries.<sup>73</sup> In turn, striking and architecturally appealing flagship projects have sought, for instance, to attract visitors and enhance the urban landscape.<sup>74</sup>

Projects focusing on the development of places, spaces and infrastructure have been central to many European Capitals of Culture in the past as well.<sup>75</sup> Often, the application for and acquisition of the ECOC title reflect a positive environment for public investments, laying the groundwork for building and renovating cultural spaces. New and renovated spaces are one way to increase the event's visibility and attract audience and the media.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, data show that renovated cultural spaces during the ECOC year have a short-term positive impact on property prices in nearby areas.<sup>77</sup>

For many European Capitals of Culture, spaces form a legacy that remains visible and relevant even after the ECOC year. However, construction and renovation projects have also been criticised for diverting resources and focus away from actual needs.<sup>78</sup> Large-scale construction projects have led to maintenance and utilisation challenges after the ECOC year.<sup>79</sup> Ideally, spaces enable and support activities by providing the appropriate facilities. It is important to strike the right balance between investing in infrastructure and allocating resources to activities or developing other capabilities of cultural actors.<sup>80</sup>

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71 Markusen & Gadwa, 2010.

72 Anders, 2011, p. 795; Gunay, 2010.

73 Grodach, 2010; Anders, 2011.

74 See, for example, Sternberg 2002; Frey 1998.

75 See, for example, Anders, 2011; Nemeth, 2010; Balsas, 2004; Gunay, 2010.

76 Nemeth, 2010; Balsas, 2004.

77 Dzapka & Gróf, 2020.

78 Balsas, 2004.

79 Nemeth, 2010; García, 2005.

80 García, 2005.

In the Oulu2026 bid book, culture and urban planning are acknowledged as being closely linked, with spaces and their innovative use playing a central role. The bid book lists several expected outcomes and impacts related to spaces and their utilisation. The goal is to create both entirely new spaces for arts and culture and to expand the use of the existing cultural spaces. The aim of Cultural Climate Change is to increase the presence of culture in public spaces and promote a broader and more open use of public and cultural spaces. Such efforts increase encounters and connections between various actors both within and outside the cultural domain.<sup>81</sup>

By extending culture beyond the traditional arts and cultural institutions, Oulu2026 aims to improve cultural offerings and accessibility in the region. In addition to physical spaces, efforts are being made to provide various opportunities for digital participation. An important objective is also to enhance the working conditions of cultural professionals through developing such spaces.

## How did we measure and what did we find

We monitored the spaces used and developed in line with the framework of Oulu2026 activities.

Data on spaces and investments have been obtained from various sources, including the bid book, city of Oulu's financial statements, budgets and action plans, and other documents related to construction, renovation and investments. Survey responses related to spaces collected from public officials, municipal council members, arts and cultural actors, and citizens in autumn 2022 have also been analysed.

Relevant data from 2022 are not available for all the indicators related to spaces. The indicators will be updated once data on the programme venues become available through the grant and production management systems. The baseline data given below are based on the bid book and the survey responses of arts and cultural actors.

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81 Bid Book, 2021, p. 7, 77.



## Spaces: Baseline situation in the light of indicators

Spaces are assessed based on seven quantitative indicators, of which baseline data are available for four (Table 11).

**TABLE 11.** Quantitative indicators: Spaces.

Indicator	Year 2022	Source
Number of Oulu2026 programme venues	To be updated based on realised programme	Grant and production management systems
Share of Oulu2026 programme events that take place outside of established cultural facilities	80% of projects in the bid book take place outside of established cultural facilities either fully or partially	Baseline: bid book Realised programme: grant and production management systems
Share of Oulu2026 hybrid projects	Examined for realised programme	Grant and production management systems
Cultural actors' perception of their operating conditions related to spaces	3.2 on a scale of 1 (very poor) – 5 (very good)	Arts and cultural actors' survey (n = 116)
Cultural actors' perception of how well the municipality provides spaces for cultural activities*	2.9 on a scale of 1 (very poor) – 5 (very good)	"
Share of implemented infrastructure projects included in Oulu2026 activities	20% of the infrastructure projects mentioned in the bid book have been fully implemented	Bid book and document data
Number of new cultural venues opened as part of Oulu2026 within the region	Examined for realised programme	Grant and production management systems

\*Statements: My municipality offers working spaces for arts and cultural actors. My municipality offers other facilities for arts and culture (e.g. performance and exhibition spaces)

The success factors for this theme stated in the bid book are as follows: 50% of the events of the cultural programme projects will take place outside of the established cultural facilities, and 40% of the Oulu2026 projects are to be outside of Oulu city centre. According to the analysis of the bid book, 80% of the planned projects are expected to be conducted outside of established cultural facilities either fully or partially. The achievement of these objectives will be further be assessed through the grant and production management systems.

The bid book notes that at least 70% of the cultural programme will be based on hybrid content;

that is, it can be experienced fully or partially on virtual platforms from anywhere in the world.<sup>82</sup> Performance in relation to this indicator will be reported when implementation data about the actual programme become available. At the baseline stage, 20% of the infrastructure projects listed in the bid book had been fully realised. Progress will be monitored primarily through document data in the future.

The development of spaces is closely linked to the strengthening of the operating conditions for arts and cultural actors (see Chapter 4). However, our baseline assessment clearly revealed room for improvement in these conditions. Cultural actors rated their operating conditions regarding spaces at 3.2 and the provision of spaces for cultural activities by the municipalities at 2.9 on a scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good).

For 71% of the respondents in the arts and cultural actors' survey, better access to spaces was an important focus area for the ECOC year. At the same time, discussions with cultural actors in Oulu highlighted concerns about the lack of spaces during the ECOC year to support the existing basic operations.

## **Description of construction projects included in Oulu2026 activities**

The Oulu2026 programme does not rely on large-scale investments in new facilities. Instead, it aims to upgrade the city's infrastructure by renovating cultural institutions and repurposing other municipal spaces for cultural use.<sup>83</sup> The bid book lists a total of 20 infrastructure projects that support the implementation of Oulu2026 programme.<sup>84</sup> Table 12 presents the status of those projects at the end of 2022.<sup>85</sup> Of the 20, four had been fully realised, 10 were in progress or partially realised, and six had not yet begun.

The majority of the infrastructure projects listed in the bid book are located in Oulu's city centre (11 projects) or in nearby areas (5 projects). Planned investments away from the city centre include the Hiukkavaara cultural barracks and the renovation of Ylikiminki library, which is located in the formerly merged municipal area. Investments related to the bicycle network, light art and urban lighting are spread across several different neighbourhoods, although the majority were located in and around the city centre in 2022.

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82 Bid book, 2021, p. 64.

83 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 72.

84 Bid book, 2021, p. 98.

85 Data sources for the analysis include the activity reports and financial statements of the city of Oulu for the years 2021 and 2022; the budget for 2023; and the plan for 2024–2025 as well as the renovation programme of the Oulu Property Management Centre.

The investments aim to update the technical and functional aspects of the existing spaces, thereby improving their usability especially as venues for Oulu2026 events and generally for cultural and other activities. They also contribute to enhancing the accessibility of culture, improving the operating conditions for cultural actors and enabling the exhibition and experience of culture in new ways and in new places.

In addition to the infrastructure projects listed in the table, the bid book mentions other projects and initiatives related to spaces and construction. One such project is the Aalto Silo, which aims to convert the former wood chip silo designed by Alvar Aalto into a multi-purpose space for culture and research. Located in an area with limited cultural offerings, the silo building was auctioned off in 2020 by the city of Oulu, and it is currently co-owned by the English architect Charlotte Skene Catling and Factum Foundation, a Spanish organisation specialising in the digital preservation of cultural heritage.

The city of Oulu has followed the percent for art principle since 1964. The Hartaanselänranta Art Programme, linked to Oulu2026, was the first art programme to be implemented in Oulu for regional development project.<sup>86</sup> The Oulu Housing Fair 2025 is also linked to Oulu2026 via the renovation of the Oulu City Depot. An event pavilion showcasing the area's history has also been planned in the housing fair area.<sup>87</sup> The Hartaanselänranta Art Programme aims to produce a new artwork in the area during the ECOC year.<sup>88</sup> The construction project for the new Oulu University Hospital, initiated by the North Ostrobothnia well-being services county, also follows the percent for art principle.<sup>89</sup> The joint SmART Hospital project aims to integrate cultural well-being methods into healthcare.<sup>90</sup>

The bid book also mentions the construction of the Hailuoto Bridge as a state project. The construction of the bridge is likely to significantly improve the accessibility to Oulu2026 events held on the Hailuoto Island. While the construction of the bridge has been principally agreed on, the permit and appeal process is still underway.<sup>91</sup>

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86 Oulun kaupunki, 2023, p. 7.

87 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 25.

88 Oulun kaupunki, 2023, p. 26.

89 See, for example, <https://www.julkinentaide.fi/oulun-uudessa-sairaalassa-nykytaidetta-leikkaussaleissakin>

90 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 32.

91 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 96.

**TABLE 12.** Infrastructure projects supporting the implementation of Oulu2026 programme as listed in the bid book.

<b>Project</b>	<b>Nature of the project</b>	<b>Connection to Oulu2026 Cultural Programme</b>	<b>Status in 2022</b>	<b>Sub-area in Oulu</b>
Pohjankartano – Music School and Adult Education College	Extensive renovation	Art Seeds Children’s Biennale, cultural use of school buildings	Completed	Höyhtyä
Oulu’s Bicycle Network	New bicycle routes	Bang Bang Riviera, Let It Snow!	Partially complete	Several
Indoor Market Hall	Extensive renovation	Arctic Food Lab	Completed	Centre
Oulu Hall – Sports and Events Venue	Expansion and renovation	Opening Ceremony	Completed	Centre
Oulu City Theatre	Renovation: Audience stand and HVAC	Oulu Dance Hack	Completed	Centre
Outdoor Market Place	Infrastructural improvements	Arctic Food Lab, The Nook	Partially complete	Centre
Oulu Lyceum	Extensive renovation	Art Seeds Children’s Biennale, Go with the STREAM	Ongoing	Centre
Ranta-Toppila’s New Marina	Dredging and other included works	Tar Wharf to the Seven Seas, AALTOSILO	Ongoing	Tuira
Museum and Science Center Luuppi	Extensive renovation	ArTech City, Tomorrow’s Wardrobe, Mind Blown – Borderlines of the Mind, Tar Wharf to the Seven Seas, Aurora Revelare	Ongoing	Centre
Central Library	Extensive renovation	Rethinking Libraries, Go with the STREAM	Ongoing	Centre
Oulu City Hall	Renovation	ArTech City, Peace Machine	Ongoing	Centre
Ylikiiminki Library	Renovation	Rethinking Libraries	Not started	Ylikiiminki
Permanent Lighting Art and the Development of Urban Lighting	Development of lighting	Light Matters	Partially complete	Several
Oulu Energy Arena – Ice Hockey and Event Venue	Extensive renovation, part 3	Let It Snow!	Ongoing	Centre

Project	Nature of the project	Connection to Oulu2026 Cultural Programme	Status in 2022	Sub-area in Oulu
Oulu Music Centre	Extensive renovation	MC Oulu, Beyond the Sky	Not started	Höyhtyä
Sahasaari – Space for Cultural Activities	Extensive renovation	Exploring ART	Not started	Centre
Housing Fair Culture Depot	Extensive renovation	Opera Goes Wild, Land of Faravid’s Land	Not started	Tuira
Cultural Centre Valve	Extensive renovation	Art Seeds Children’s Biennale, Frozen Nights, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Generation Cultural Embassy	Not started	Centre
Pikisaari – Creative Island	Extensive renovation	Pikisaari Creative Island, Untamed Office	Ongoing*	Pikisaari
Hiukkavaara – Culture Barracks	Renovations	Hiukkavaara – Creative Boot Camp	Not started	Hiukkavaara

\*Instead of extensive renovations, repair and modification work will be undertaken. The area is being developed by Potential Toimitilat Oy, owned by the city of Oulu, in collaboration with the city, cultural actors and entrepreneurs in Pikisaari.<sup>92</sup>

## Reformation and wider use of key cultural institutions in Oulu

This in-depth analysis on the theme of spaces focuses on reforming and widening the use of key arts and cultural institutions as part of Oulu2026 activities. This goal, as highlighted in the bid book, is not solely related to physical spaces but also extends to the renewal of activities and structures. The emphasis here is on revamping the spaces.

The bid book envisions the renewal and renovation of all major arts and cultural institutions in Oulu, including the Museum and Science Center Luuppi (comprising the Northern Ostrobothnia Museum, Oulu Art Museum and Science Center Tietomaa, Kierikki Centre, Turkansaari Open Air Museum, Sailor’s Home Museum, and Pateniemi Sawmill Museum), Oulu City Theatre, Oulu Music Centre, Cultural Centre Valve and the city’s libraries.

While some projects focus on renovating and refurbishing old spaces, others target a renewed or innovative use of the premises. The Oulu Central Library is being refurbished, and plans are in place to renovate the Ylikiiminki Library. Extensive renovation of the Museum and Science Center Luuppi is scheduled to be completed by 2026. The bid book also includes plans for the renovation of Oulu City Theatre and extensive refurbishment of Cultural Centre Valve and the Oulu Music Centre (main concert venue for the Oulu Symphony Orchestra).

<sup>92</sup> <https://potential.fi/oulun-pikisaaren-miljoota-kehitetaan-yhteistyossa/> (accessed 8 December 2023).

Of these projects, the renovation of Oulu City Theatre was complete in 2022. However, plans for renovating Cultural Centre Valve and the Oulu Music Centre seem to have been postponed to until after the ECOC year.

As part of the renovation of the Museum and Science Center Luuppi, a new immersive art and technology space called 'Deep Space' is expected to be built. It will provide opportunities for experiencing art and culture in new ways, equipped with space and technology for various performances by cultural actors across the city.<sup>93</sup> Additionally, operations at Oulu Central Library will witness a change after the renovation. The goal for the library is to create a low-barrier participation space and a co-development hub based on the STEAM philosophy, which will inspire and enable future innovations. As part of the renovation, a new children's cultural centre called STREAM will also be launched within the space.<sup>94</sup>

Oulu2026 aims for the wider use of key arts and cultural institutions. This can refer to broader usage of institutional spaces, such as growth and diversification of audiences and users, or new ways and spaces to experience art and culture either within the institutions' premises or outside. Of the 51 projects listed in the bid book, nearly one-third (19 projects, 37%) name a key arts and cultural institution either as a producer or a project partner. Alongside the main Oulu2026 cultural programme, the existing programme produced by arts and cultural institutions is part of the city's rich cultural offerings. Participation in the Oulu2026 programme projects provides opportunities for established arts and cultural institutions to develop their activities and reach new and broader audiences. Some of these projects will be implemented within the institutions' premises, but many of those listed in the bid book seem to focus on activities outside of the established cultural institutions and on moving cultural activities out of institutional premises.

## **Profiles of new cultural venues opened as part of Oulu2026 within the region**

An in-depth qualitative analysis will study the new cultural venues opened as part of Oulu2026 within the region. The analysis will rely primarily on written data.

A survey conducted at the baseline stage on spaces and venues within the municipalities in the Oulu2026 region revealed that just over a third (36%) of the 33 municipalities had planned space-related projects and/or investments for the ECOC year. About half of the municipalities (52%) did not have specific plans regarding spaces in autumn 2022, and just over a tenth (12%) could not provide input on the matter. The respondents of this survey were municipal officials responsible for culture.

Some of the municipalities had planned renovating or refurbishing old cultural spaces (5 municipalities), repurposing non-cultural spaces for cultural use (3 municipalities) and constructing new

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93 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 44; Oulun kaupunki, 2021, p. 34.

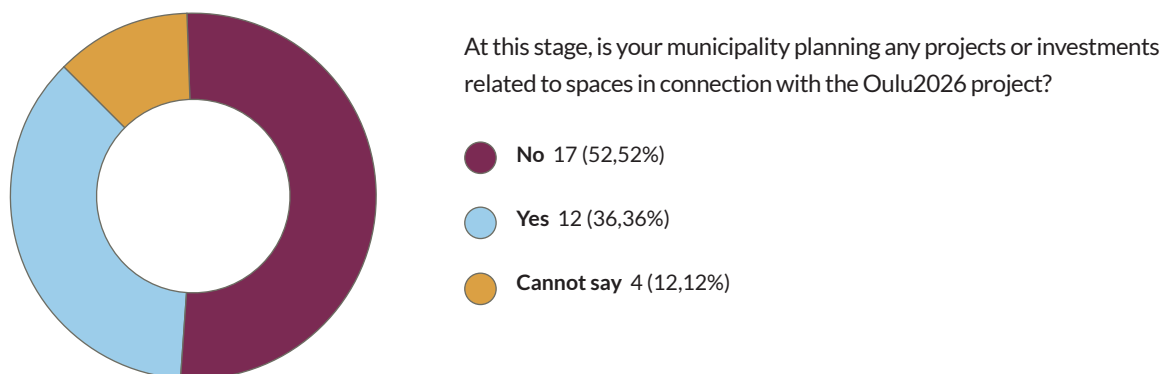
94 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 34, 37.



spaces for cultural activities (2 municipalities). The plans also mentioned developing a designated cultural area and renovating a culturally and historically significant building. In many municipalities, matters related to spaces were still at a nascent stage, and no final decisions had been made regarding infrastructure investments.

**FIGURE 8** Assessment of plans regarding spaces and infrastructure in Oulu2026 municipalities.

Source: Local public official survey, n = 33.



## Location of the Oulu2026 programme venues

Once the Oulu2026 programme is finalised, an in-depth qualitative analysis will be conducted to determine the distribution of programme venues in Oulu as well as in other municipalities within the region. Additionally, it will examine how the Oulu2026 programme facilitates the presentation and experience of culture in new locations, such as public and outdoor spaces, hospitals, daycare centres, schools, educational institutions or retail spaces. This in-depth analysis is strongly linked to the ECOC goal of promoting the accessibility and availability of culture. Bringing cultural activities closer to the residents and within the reach of their everyday activities can act as a pull factor for cultural participation.<sup>95</sup>

The need for cultural offerings and spaces for experiencing and engaging with culture is pronounced, especially among those living further away from the Oulu city centre or in other Oulu2026 municipalities. According to a citizen survey conducted in the autumn of 2022, nearly one-fifth (18%) of the respondents in Oulu and over half (54%) of those living in other Oulu2026 municipalities indicated that distance or the difficulty in travelling prevented them from using or engaging in cultural services or activities to some or great extent. Among the residents of Oulu's from the formerly merged municipal areas (Ylikiminki, Haukipudas, Kello, Kiiminki, Jääli, Oulunsalo, Yli-Ii), 40% felt that distance or travelling difficulties hindered their use or engagement with cultural services or activities. In other areas of the city, this proportion ranged from 7% to 19%.

<sup>95</sup> Cultural participation is often examined from the perspective of push factors (such as social class, education, economic situation and family background). See, for example, Delrieu & Gibson, 2017.







## 6 PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION

### Why did we measure

Participation and inclusion are the fourth theme of the Oulu2026 evaluation and monitoring framework. The two concepts are closely intertwined. Participation refers to general citizen involvement in cultural activities, including the use of cultural services. While individual actions form the basis of participation, societal mechanisms also play a key role in enabling it. Participation is a pathway to inclusion. While participation describes activity, inclusion relates to experiencing significance as a member of a community and a sense of belonging to a group or crowd. Participation does not directly lead to inclusion, but inclusion requires opportunities to participate in activities that are important and meaningful to oneself.<sup>96</sup>

Increasing participation and inclusion in cultural activities are key objectives of the ECOC action, and their importance has been steadily growing. Participation has been strongly emphasised in the selection criteria for ECOCs since 2005, which in turn has led to a greater focus on participation-related actions in programme evaluation. In the evaluation guidelines provided by the European Commission, widening access to and participation in culture are one of the four specific objectives.

In Oulu, inclusion and participation in culture are linked to the city's strategic development. In Chapter 5 of the city's strategy document (Oulu 2030), increasing inclusion is highlighted as part of building a healthy and prosperous life. Facilitating human interactions, community activities and a safe living environment constitute a strategic goal, with promoting local culture being one of the measures to advance this goal.

Similarly, Oulu's cultural strategy emphasises addressing the needs of different population groups and aims to develop cooperation to reach new audiences. Improving inclusion is sought through cultural services targeted at the elderly and special groups. Producing events in different neighbourhoods is seen as one of the measures to advance these goals. Overall, measures to promote inclusion and participation in the cultural strategy are also linked to community development, which is included in the indicators presented in the following section.

Participation presents a key starting point for the entire Oulu2026 event. The cultural programme has been developed through open programme calls (see Chapter 3), and the core idea behind Cultural Climate Change, the themes and programme lines is citizen participation, which has been ensured, for example, through workshops, public discussions and meetings.<sup>97</sup>

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96 See Kangas et al., 2014; Karttunen et al., 2020; Kiilakoski et al., 2012.

97 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 85.

In the Oulu2026 bid book, inclusion is linked to the main goal of achieving a balanced community. The book highlights certain population groups whose participation and inclusion are particularly vital, and they are, mainly, children and the youth.<sup>98</sup> Among the specific strategies and programmes developed to promote participation and inclusion is the *Oulu2026 Equality and Diversity Strategy*. It has been developed together with various citizen groups, and a model has been developed in collaboration with Oulu Art School for consulting children aged three and upwards.<sup>99</sup>

## How did we measure and what did we find

Indicators for participation and inclusion assess opportunities for and the realisation of participation. Some indicators also directly measure the achievement of goals related to the theme in the bid book. The bid book targets the participation of 10% of the residents as volunteers and 80% as audience in Oulu2026 activities within the project area.

Data on all indicators were not available for the baseline year of 2022, and they will be reported when the programme has been extensively implemented. The baseline data given below are based on the bid book, citizen survey responses, and the information obtained from Oulu Cultural Foundation. Since the realisation of participation cannot be comprehensively monitored before the ECOC year, this baseline report focuses on indicators demonstrating opportunities for participation and in the in-depth analyses on projects emphasising participation and its barriers. Once the programme is implemented, audience numbers will be reported with the help of data on programme projects. Information on projects emphasising participation and inclusion will also be obtained in the future.

The experience of inclusion has not been evaluated with a separate quantitative indicator. Instead, indicators have been used to monitor the perceived sense of community and well-being in the Oulu2026 region, and they are described in the following chapter titled Community and well-being (see Chapter 7).

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98 'Children and youth are at the heart of CCC. We want to raise bold, creative and responsible citizens of the future.' (Bid book, 2021, p. 8.)

99 Bid book, 2021, pp. 75–76.

## Participation and inclusion in Oulu2026 activities: Baseline situation in the light of indicators

Participation and inclusion are examined through nine quantitative indicators, seven of which provide information about the baseline situation in 2022 (see Table 13). Data from 2022 are not available for all the indicators, and they will be reported when the programme has been extensively implemented. The presented baseline data are based on the bid book, citizen survey responses, and information obtained from the Oulu Cultural Foundation.

**TABLE 13.** Quantitative indicators: Participation and inclusion.

Indicator	Year 2022	Source
Visitors to the Oulu2026 programme	To be updated based on realised programme	Grant and production management systems
Share of citizens outside the Oulu2026 region interested in participating in the Oulu2026 programme as audience	27% of citizens residing outside the Oulu2026 region are interested in participating in the Oulu2026 programme as audience	Citizen survey (n=1,089)
Number of actors involved in Oulu2026 projects	326 producers/partners are listed in the bid book	Baseline: bid book For realised programme: grant and production management systems
Number of employees for Oulu2026	13 employees	Oulu Cultural Foundation
Number of projects focused on participation in different areas	To be updated based on realised programme	Grant and production management systems
Residents' experience of barriers to cultural participation	2.45 on a scale of 1 (no barriers at all) – 5 (a lot of barriers)	Citizen survey (n=1,330)
Share of residents interested in participating/or have participated in Oulu2026 activities*	67% of residents in the region were interested in participating in Oulu2026 activities	" (n=1,655)
Share of residents who consider themselves part of a minority that are interested in participating/ or have participated in Oulu2026 activities	72% of residents who consider themselves part of a minority in the region were interested in participating in Oulu2026 activities	" (n=256)
Volunteers participating in the Oulu2026 programme	0 %	Oulu Cultural Foundation

\* What things in particular prevent you from participating in cultural activities and services (e.g. attending events and personal hobbies)? Lack of time, Lack of money, Lack of interest, Lack of information, Too long and/or difficult distance to travel, No friend to go with, Life situation, I have not attended before, The selection is of wrong kind, The selection is of wrong time



In 2022, residents living in the Oulu2026 region were more interested in participating in Oulu2026 activities than those living elsewhere in Finland. As shown in Table 13, 67% of the citizen survey respondents in the region expressed interest in participating as audience members or as organising team members. Among those identifying themselves as minorities, the proportion of interested individuals was even higher (72%). Among citizens living elsewhere in Finland, only 27% were interested in participating as audience members in Oulu2026 activities. Respondents in the Oulu2026 region experienced a moderate level of barriers to cultural participation. The average score for perceived barriers was 2.45 on a scale from 1 (no barriers at all) to 5 (a lot of barriers).

The bid book names 326 producers/partners for the cultural programme, which can be considered for baseline purposes. This includes all the actors named in the bid book's programme, except the Oulu2026 organisation itself.<sup>100</sup> A total of 65 have been named as producers and 277 as partners. Some actors are both producers and partners but on different programme projects.

In 2022, according to the information obtained from the Oulu Cultural Foundation, 13 employees were working at the foundation, of whom 11 were full-time and 2 were part-time employees. According to the personnel plan for Oulu2026, which covers the years 2022–2027, the total number of foundation staff planned for 2022 was 15 (10 full-time, 2 part-time, 2 trainees and 1 in non-military service). The planned staff number is the highest in 2026, when 56 people are expected to work at the foundation.<sup>101</sup> Volunteering for Oulu2026 activities and the Oulu Cultural Foundation's volunteer programme will start only in 2024. For this reason, there were no volunteers at the end of 2022. Volunteer data are reported as a percentage of the residents of the Oulu2026 region because the bid book aims that least 10% of the residents will participate as volunteers in Oulu2026 activities in the project area.

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100 The number does not include, in particular, unnamed groups of actors, such as schools in Oulu, observatories from different countries pursuing aurora studies, or similar.

101 Bid book, 2021, p. 88.

## Oulu2026 projects focused on participation and measures for increasing participation opportunities among different population groups

The in-depth analysis focuses on the programme projects targeted at ensuring the participation of various population groups and of people from different areas in the Oulu2026 region. In the future, the analysis will be enriched with data obtained from the implemented programme. Reports from the programme projects will include, among other things, the organisers' assessment of how participation and inclusion have been realised.

For the baseline stage, we referred to the population groups and programme projects that emphasise participation in the bid book. Children and youth are emphasised in the bid book and in many programme projects. Oulu2026 aims to be the best ever European Capital of Culture for children and young people. In fact, the Oulu2026 bid book is fundamentally inspired by workshops held for children in Oulu in 2017 asking them to share their dreams for Oulu. Other resident groups mentioned in the bid book include elderly people, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ groups, ethnic minorities and the Sámi community (See Table 14).<sup>102</sup>

The bid book emphasises equal opportunities to participate in cultural activities for residents living in different areas. It is noted that Oulu has significant regional disparities, for example, in the use of social and health services and in well-being. Given this situation, Oulu2026 aims to promote active cultural participation as part of proactive well-being activities.<sup>103</sup>

**TABLE 14.** Programme projects with focus on participation of different population groups in the Oulu2026 bid book.

Source: Hakukirja, 2021, p. 85–91.

Population Group	Programme Projects
Children	STREAM to the Future, Children's Art Biennial 2026
Youth	Urban Boost, Untamed Office, Creative Campus, Agent 026, Generation Xulu, Frozen Nights
Disadvantaged communities in different residential areas of Oulu	SmART Hospital, Creative Villages, Voice the Taboo!, Here to Art - Travel Agency, What Do You Want to See on Stage?
Elderly People	Senior concerts of the Hybridise Your Festival programme, Art Takeover!
The Sámi People	Boundless Sámi Culture

102 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 85, 87, 90.

103 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 86.

## Forms of and barriers to participation in the Oulu2026 programme

After the baseline stage, participation in Oulu2026 activities will be analysed using the forms of participation identified in previous research. Understanding the various forms of participation can support the development of initiatives that residents would both wish for and be able to participate in.<sup>104</sup>

In previous studies on participation, reference is often made to Sherry Arnstein's (1969) 'ladder of citizen participation' model in which the bottom rungs represent superficial participation, whereas at the top, citizens have complete control. Another common approach to conceptualising participation is the wheel of participation,<sup>105</sup> which depicts various dimensions of participation: information, consultation, participation in decision-making and empowerment. Each dimension encompasses various possible methods and choices and influences other dimensions. The wheel of participation has been used, for example, to examine the actions of WHO's Healthy Cities programme in different cities.<sup>106</sup>

In 2011, when Turku was designated the European Capital of Culture, it was observed that individuals, families, workplaces, associations, schools, daycares and other institutions participated extensively in the ECOC activities.<sup>107</sup> Similar observations have been made regarding Finland's centenary celebrations in 2017.<sup>108</sup> Research on Turku's ECOC year revealed the presence of four key roles in participation: the audience, participant, collaborator and volunteer.<sup>109</sup>

At the baseline stage, information on barriers to participation in the Oulu2026 region was obtained from a citizen survey. Among respondents from Oulu, the two most prominent barriers to using cultural services or engaging in cultural activities were lack of money (18% perceived it as a significant barrier) and lack of time (13%). The next most significant barriers were life situation (8%), wrong kind of selection (8%) and offerings being at the wrong time (7%). Content and timing of offerings, in particular, are aspects that can be addressed in the planning and implementation of the Oulu2026 cultural programme. The inhibiting effect of lack of money can be mitigated by holding free-of-charge programmes or issuing free tickets as needed.

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104 cf. Dodge et al., 2012; Ruokolainen et al., 2019, p. 34.

105 See Davidson, 1998.

106 Dooris & Heritage, 2011.

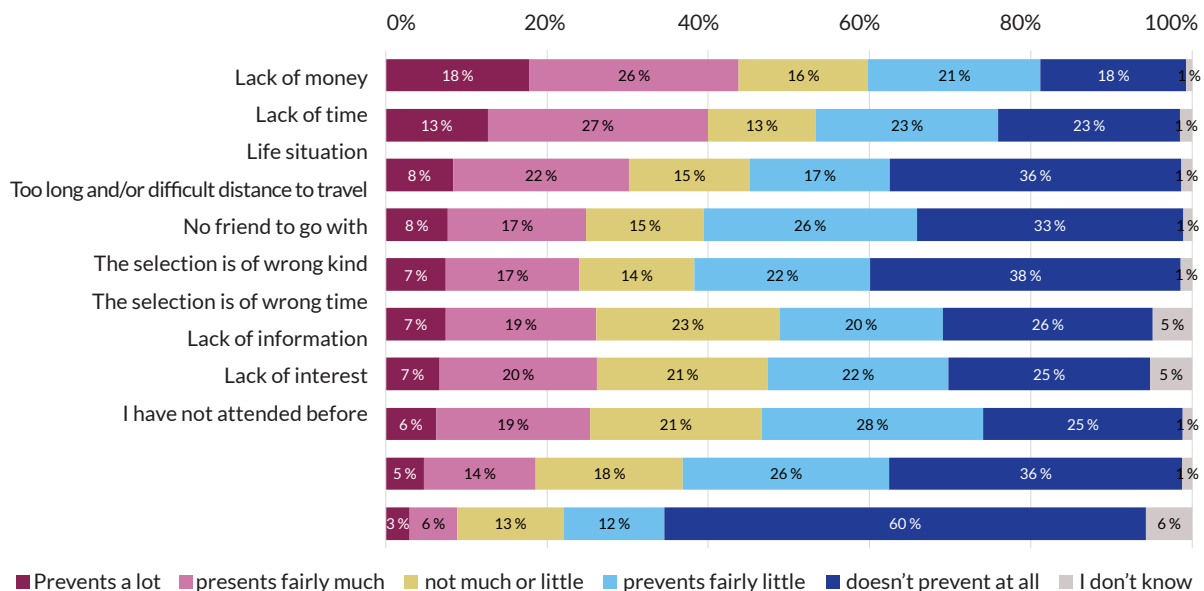
107 Ertiö, 2013, p. 1.

108 Luonila et al., 2020.

109 Ertiö, 2013, p. 1.

**FIGURE 9** Barriers to participating in cultural activities and services in the Oulu2026 region.  
Source: Citizen survey 2022.

Do the following factors prevent you from using cultural services or engaging in cultural activities?  
Oulu2026 region



## Volunteering for the Oulu2026 programme

Through an in-depth analysis, the significance of volunteering to implementing the ECOC activities will be evaluated. The evaluation is based on information collected by the Oulu Cultural Foundation. As stated above, volunteering for Oulu2026 activities and in accordance with the Oulu Cultural Foundation’s volunteer programme will only commence in 2024. According to the bid book, volunteers are instrumental to promoting Cultural Climate Change and the primary resources for implementing the cultural programme.<sup>110</sup> The aim is to involve people from different backgrounds, including those who have not engaged or been interested in the established cultural offerings. The goal is to recruit 20,000 volunteers.<sup>111</sup>

During the bidding phase and the initial stages of the Oulu Cultural Foundation’s activities, individuals could participate in Oulu2026 activities as cultural ambassadors. During the bidding phase, around 250 people had registered as cultural ambassadors.<sup>112</sup> By the fall of 2022, this number was 400. The tasks of the ambassadors were mainly communication and disseminating information.

110 Oulu2026 volunteering programme (draft 16.2.2023).

111 European Commission, Oulu – First monitoring report, p. 6.

112 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 88.

# 7 COMMUNITY AND WELL-BEING

## Why did we measure

Community and well-being are the fifth theme of the Oulu2026 monitoring and evaluation framework. The role of culture in shaping well-being has been widely acknowledged. In addition to creating economic prosperity, culture has been found to enhance citizens' quality of life by providing opportunities for meaningful, self-development.<sup>113</sup> An activating force for citizens, culture can strengthen social relationships as well as reinforce regional identity, community spirit, sense of belonging and local pride.<sup>114</sup> These dimensions are also central to monitoring and evaluating the ECOC action.<sup>115</sup>

In the context of ECOC action, community and well-being are approached from two perspectives: from the standpoint of a common European cultural area and more specifically from the perspective of the host city itself. The goals of Oulu2026 include increasing the citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural area as well as widening access to and participation in culture.<sup>116</sup>

The Oulu city strategy aims to enhance residents' satisfaction with and commitment towards their living, working and recreational environment. Accordingly, one of the focus areas is ensuring that everyone in Oulu has the opportunity to live a healthy and safe life. The stated strategic objective was that after 2023, when the city's well-being mission changed with the responsibility of social and welfare services being transferred to the new well-being services counties, the well-being of Oulu residents would further increase when people and things meet.<sup>117</sup> The goal of the Oulu cultural strategy is linked to the objectives and measures of Cultural Climate Change, and one of its focus areas is strengthening the community spirit. The cultural strategy views arts and culture as capable of bridging the gaps between conflicting elements in Oulu.<sup>118</sup>

In the Oulu2026 bid book, a balanced community is listed as one of the three focus areas of the ECOC activity.<sup>119</sup> The goal of the cultural programme is to promote well-being. It aims to strengthen the opportunity for all residents of Oulu to participate in cultural activities and experiences in order to reinforce the significance of culture in everyday life. Additionally, augmenting the sense of community as well as residents' ties to their neighbourhood and municipalities is also a cherished goal.<sup>120</sup> Thus, community and well-being are closely related to cultural participation, and its indicators partly overlap with those for evaluating participation and inclusion (see previous Chapter 6).

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113 Honkasalo & Laukkanen, 2015; Virolainen, 2015.

114 See, for example, Grossi et al., 2011; Liu, 2014.

115 Žilič Fišer & Kožuh, 2019; van der Steen & Richards, 2021.

116 No 445/2014/EU, Article 2. See Figure 3, p. 14.

117 Oulun kaupunkistrategia, 2021.

118 Oulun kulttuuristrategia, 2021.

119 Hakukirja, 2021.

120 Oulun kulttuuristrategia, 2021; see also Lewica, 2005.



## How did we measure and what did we find

Indicators for community and well-being were developed in accordance with the goals of monitoring the community spirit and belonging. Questionnaires on local pride and attachment to the place were distributed among citizens to track the changes in the Oulu2026 region and compare them with national trends.

All data for the quantitative indicators have been sourced from citizen surveys. This approach allows the indicators to directly reflect individuals' experiences of the development of community spirit and well-being in the Oulu2026 region. In the survey, residents of the Oulu2026 region were asked about their feelings of pride towards their home municipality or region, their sense of being European and their assessments of the impact of Oulu2026 activities on the general mood in the region. The indicators are reported as percentages of responses from all respondents.

The in-depth qualitative analyses broadly examined how participation in Oulu2026 activities affects the sense of community and well-being as well as the European dimension.

### Community and well-being: Baseline situation in the light of indicators

Community spirit and well-being are addressed by six quantitative indicators (Table 15). Data on all of the indicators have been sourced from citizen surveys. This approach allows the indicators to directly reflect individuals' own experiences of the development of sense of community and well-being in the Oulu2026 region.

**TABLE 15.** Quantitative indicators: Community and well-being.

Indicator	Year 2022	Source
Share of the residents in Oulu experiencing a strong sense of community	33% somewhat or completely agree	Citizen survey (n=1,318)
Share of residents in the Oulu2026 region who are proud of their home municipality	68% somewhat or completely agree	" (n=1,659)
Share of residents in the Oulu2026 region who are proud of their home province	69% somewhat or completely agree	" (n=1,615)
Share of residents in the Oulu2026 region expecting to be living in their home municipality five years from now	70% somewhat or completely agree	" (n=1,625)
Share of residents in the Oulu2026 region who consider themselves at least somewhat European	89% somewhat or very much	" (n=1,594)
Share of residents in the Oulu2026 region who experience that Oulu2026 improves general mood in the region	51% somewhat or completely agree	" (n=1,626)

At the baseline stage, one-third (33%) of respondents from Oulu somewhat or completely agreed that there was a strong sense of community in Oulu. The experience of strong community spirit was more pronounced among younger Oulu residents under the age of 25 (45% of respondents). In older age groups, the propor-

tions of those who felt this way was smaller. The average response rating for the statement ‘Oulu has a strong sense of community’ was 2.9 on a scale of 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree).

Among the surveyed citizens in the Oulu2026 region, 68% expressed pride in their home municipality. In Oulu, 65% of the respondents were proud of their home municipality, while the average in other Oulu2026 municipalities was 75%. Among respondents living elsewhere in Finland, 67% were proud of their home municipality, and 69% of the respondents in the Oulu2026 area were proud of their home region. The majority (89%) of the residents in the Oulu2026 region considered themselves to be at least somewhat European.

The majority (70%) of the Oulu2026 region respondents believed that they would still be living in their home municipality in five years. The percentage was similar in Oulu and higher than the national average (64%). Most Oulu residents over the age of 65 (77%) completely or somewhat agreed that they would be living in their home municipalities in five years. However, significantly fewer respondents under the age of 25 (43%) believed in Oulu’s future attractiveness.

## **Sense of community and well-being from participating in Oulu2026 activities**

The in-depth qualitative analysis focuses on the significance of the Oulu2026 activity in strengthening the community spirit and well-being in the region. Moving forward, this analysis will mainly be conducted through survey data. For the baseline, data were obtained from surveys conducted in the autumn of 2022 (see Table 1).

In the Oulu2026 bid book, the main objective of the initiative, Cultural Climate Change, is fostering a new sense of togetherness. The initiative is linked to cultural co-creation and aims to improve well-being and promote collaboration. Similar objectives have been highlighted in the cultural programme presented in the bid book, with community spirit forming the core of two flagship productions. The production titled Climate Clock includes the creation of a community art piece that will commence in 2025 and culminate during the ECOC year itself. The other flagship production, The Rise of Tar Kingdom, utilises an Open Space method, suitable for collaborative production, to engage the local community in a creative process and thus promotes a sense of community.<sup>121</sup>

At the baseline stage, respondents in the citizen survey were asked to evaluate what experiencing and engaging in culture means to them. The majority of respondents in Oulu and the Oulu2026 region somewhat or completely agreed that culture made them happy (88% of respondents) and enhanced well-being (83%). However, the sense of community was not as favourably evaluated: 55% of residents in Oulu and the Oulu2026 region somewhat or completely agreed that experiencing and engaging in culture makes them feel that they belong.

Surveys directed at public officials and council members in the Oulu2026 municipalities revealed that public officials and decision-makers often justify the importance of cultural activities by tying them to community spirit and well-being. All public officials (n = 33) unanimously agreed that cultural activities were

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121 Hakukirja, 2021, p. 8, 20, 28, 106.

important or very important to promoting well-being and community spirit among the local residents. Responses from the decision-makers in the Oulu2026 region were similarly aligned: 94% linked the importance of culture specifically to promoting the well-being and community spirit of residents.

The survey responses highlighted the expected effects of Oulu2026 activities on community spirit and well-being. Of the citizen survey respondents living in Oulu and the Oulu2026 region, 57% somewhat or completely agreed that the Oulu2026 programme and activities strengthen the sense of community in the region, while 51% agreed that Oulu2026 improves the general mood in the region. The public official survey responses confirm the expectations related to promoting well-being and community spirit through Oulu2026 activities. The majority (73%, 24 respondents) of the public officials expected that Oulu2026 activities would strengthen residents' sense of community. In the municipal council members' survey, half of the respondents identified residents' sense of community as one of the five key expected impacts of the ECOC activity.

## European dimension

An in-depth qualitative analysis examined the significance of the European dimension as part of the Oulu2026 programme and activities. The European dimension is among the key objectives of ECOC action at the EU level. Moving forward, the focus of the qualitative analysis will be on monitoring European cooperation in the cultural programme projects and the achievement of goals from a European perspective.

At the baseline stage, the vision of the Oulu2026 cultural programme was based on three concepts: inspiring, sustainable and European. These are linked to the ECOC objective of increasing citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural area through a cultural programme.<sup>122</sup> Previous research indicates that the ECOC initiative is a tool focused on arts and culture through which the EU promotes European identity and supports regional development strategies.<sup>123</sup> The ECOC action has been found to consciously and unconsciously produce and promote 'Europeanness' and European identities alongside local and regional identities.<sup>124</sup>

In the citizen survey, respondents were asked to assess the statement 'The Oulu2026 programme and activities strengthen the region's connection to the rest of Europe'. Among respondents from Oulu and the Oulu2026 region, only 54% felt that the ECOC initiative strengthened the region's connection to the rest of Europe.

Similarly, public officials and decision-makers did not strongly resonate with idea that Oulu2026 activities promote the European dimension of the region. According to their survey responses, the region's sense of belonging to the European community was weak. When the public officials were asked to select the five most desired impacts of Oulu2026 activities in their respective municipality, only four respondents (12%, n = 33) chose the strengthening of residents' sense of belonging to a European community. Among the decision-makers, 14 respondents (8%, n = 170) chose it as one of the five most important impacts.

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122 No 445/2014/EU, Article 7.

123 Sassatelli, 2008.

124 Lähdesmäki, 2008.

## 8 REPUTATION AND IMAGE

### Why did we measure

Reputation and image are the sixth theme of the Oulu2026 monitoring and evaluation framework. A region or city's positive image is one of the key resources for regional development,<sup>125</sup> for it increases the attractiveness of the region. Regions that recognise the importance of image, reputation and identity as well as how to manage them in the context of urban development succeed in regional competition.<sup>126</sup> A good reputation also has a positive impact on the regional economy. A reputable area is perceived as reliable, competitive, attractive and the first choice for stakeholders in decision-making situations. An unclear or weak image does not generate interest and, at worst, can prove to be problematic for the region.<sup>127</sup> Creating a positive perception and image of a region through its strengths and history are concrete ways to build the regional brand and enhance the region's attractiveness while distinguishing it from others.<sup>128</sup>

Reputation is related to perceptions that are formed broadly based on various intangible factors.<sup>129</sup> These include, for example, local and regional politics, economy and culture. A good reputation attracts investments, tourists and workforce, whereas a weak reputation is detrimental to the region's prospects.<sup>130</sup> A weak regional identity reduces the interests of the regional stakeholders and the residents in regional development and decision-making. It is also difficult to build a regional image for places that are not identifiable or known.<sup>131</sup> Long-term action, clear profiling and determined efforts for building the region's brand and image ultimately contribute to the formation of a positive reputation.<sup>132</sup> Events such as the ECOC action are a means to influence the formation of positive images and reputations of cities and regions.<sup>133</sup> ECOC activities that take place within communities and networks and their publicity tend to boost the positive perceptions of the host cities and other stakeholders, resulting in the title of ECOC significantly supporting regional development and strengthening the region's brand.<sup>134</sup>

The specific objectives of the ECOC action include the goal of enhancing the international profile of cities through culture. According to the operational objectives, the ECOC and its cultural programme should be promoted and should improve the international outlook of the residents.<sup>135</sup> Further, the Oulu city strategy

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125 See, for example, Ruokolainen, 2017.

126 Zimmerbauer, 2008; Halonen, 2016.

127 Halonen, 2016.

128 Halonen, 2016

129 Halonen, 2016, p. 99.

130 Anholt, 2009; Halonen, 2016.

131 Zimmerbauer, 2008, p. 69.

132 Halonen, 2016.

133 García, 2017; Heikkinen, 2000; Liu, 2015.

134 Hakala & Lemmetyinen, 2013.

135 No 445/2014/EU, Article 2. See Figure 3, p. 14.

specifies that Cultural Climate Change is intended at, among other things, strengthening Oulu's attractiveness and appeal.<sup>136</sup> Similarly, an objective of Oulu's cultural strategy is to elevate the city into a significant cultural tourism destination.

In the Oulu2026 bid book, strategic objectives are linked to reputation and image factors. The aim of the initiative is to promote the vision of a lively and captivating city so that people across Europe recognise Oulu and understand what it is capable of. Additionally, the goal is to enhance the region's image by promoting high-quality events along with the city's distinctive culture and soft values, all of which contribute to advancing Cultural Climate Change.<sup>137</sup> Thus, the ECOC activity is a strategic measure aimed at developing the reputation and image of Oulu city and the region. Its objectives support the overall image-building efforts of the city and the formation of positive perceptions, thus increasing the region's attractiveness.

## How did we measure and what did we find

In the bid book, Oulu2026 is positioned as a unique opportunity to boost the image of both the city of Oulu and the adjoining region through high-quality events, unique cultural aspects and soft values, which contribute to Cultural Climate Change.<sup>138</sup> Oulu2026 activities are strongly linked to the city's rebranding efforts, and it is described that the city will renew its brand to align with the Oulu2026 narrative. Because the goals are closely tied to Oulu city specifically, the indicators tracking changes in reputation and image mainly focus on themes related to Oulu. Additionally, in-depth qualitative analyses are conducted to identify related factors.

Some quantitative success factors outlined in the bid book include strengthening Oulu's reputation as a city of culture in Finland by 25%, which will be monitored via a quantitative indicator, and a 25% increase in Oulu's international visibility by 2027, which will be tracked using both quantitative indicators and in-depth qualitative analysis.<sup>139</sup>

All indicators listed below are sourced from a citizen survey, which sought information on citizens' perception of Oulu as a European and a cultural city. The survey covered both residents of Oulu and citizens in general. The research design provided an opportunity to assess and compare the views of different residents – from Oulu, from other Oulu2026 municipalities and from elsewhere in Finland – on Oulu's image and reputation, which is the focus of an in-depth qualitative analysis.

The in-depth qualitative analyses also expand the examination of Oulu2026's media visibility and the development of the city's reputation as a result of Oulu2026 activities.

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136 Oulun kaupunkistrategia, 2020.

137 Hakukirja, 2021.

138 Hakukirja, 2021, s. 106.

139 Bid book, 2021, p. 11.

## Reputation and image: Baseline situation in the light of indicators

Four quantitative indicators are used to summarise the evaluation of reputation and image (Table 16).

**TABLE 16.** Quantitative indicators: Reputation and image.

Indicator	Year 2022	Source
Citizens' experience of Oulu as a European city	3.5 on a scale of 1 (completely disagree) – 5 (completely agree)	Citizen survey (n = 2,742)
Citizens' experience of Oulu as a cultural city	3.5 on a scale of 1 (completely disagree) – 5 (completely agree)	" (n=2,726)
Residents' perception (average) of Oulu's image and reputation	3.3 (Oulu has a good reputation) on a scale of 1 (completely disagree) – 5 (completely agree)	" (n=1,317)
Other citizens' perception (average) of Oulu's image and reputation	3.8 (Oulu has a good reputation) on a scale of 1 (completely disagree) – 5 (completely agree)	" (n=1,415)

At the baseline stage, citizens' perceptions of Oulu as a European and a cultural city varied somewhat by region. Most of the respondents expressed moderate opinions about Oulu being a European city (average rating of 3.5) and a cultural city (average rating of 3.5) (on a scale from 1 = completely disagree to 5 = completely agree).

Oulu residents viewed Oulu as a European city less often than the other respondents. 53% of Oulu residents<sup>140</sup>, 63% of respondents living elsewhere in the Oulu2026 region<sup>141</sup> and 66% of respondents living elsewhere in Finland<sup>142</sup> somewhat or completely agreed that Oulu is a European city.

Perceptions of Oulu as a cultural city varied more by region. A total of 52% of Oulu residents, 67% of respondents living elsewhere in the Oulu2026 region<sup>143</sup> and 64% of respondents living elsewhere in Finland<sup>144</sup> somewhat or completely agreed that Oulu was a cultural city. Among Oulu residents, the share of somewhat or completely disagreeing with the idea that Oulu was a cultural city was significantly higher than in other respondent groups (34%).

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140 n=1,323

141 n=334

142 n=1,085

143 n = 333

144 n = 1,081



## Coverage and tone of media visibility for Oulu2026 action

The bid book describes the implementation of communication and marketing activities for Oulu2026 in three phases. The first phase, from 2022 to 2024, is an attraction phase. Key objectives of this phase include triggering active participation, stimulating interest and increasing collaboration. The main themes of Oulu2026 are to be promoted through active marketing and campaigns implemented in the region and across all digital channels. The other two phases are reconnection (2024–26) and rooting (from 2027).<sup>145</sup>

The in-depth analysis describes the coverage and tone of media visibility for the different phases of the Oulu2026 activity. Going forward, data will be obtained from Oulu Cultural Foundation's partner, Meltwater. Media monitoring will yield information about mentions and tone as defined by Meltwater.<sup>146</sup> For mapping the baseline, information about Oulu and Oulu2026 activity has been gathered from mentions in domestic and international media. Additionally, information is obtained from Oulu2026's social media channels, which in 2022 included Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Information from Twitter (currently X) is not available for baseline assessment.

In 2022, national media coverage of Oulu2026 activity was heavily focused on Oulu and its surrounding area. Visibility in the domestic press was evenly distributed throughout the year. A news feature on Oulu City Council's decision to avoid fireworks for New Year celebrations highlighted Oulu2026's goal of carbon-neutral event production and the aim of making Oulu the most sustainable European Capital of Culture. The news was published in several regional newspapers in Savo, Kymenlaakso, southern Finland and Uusimaa. The tone of the coverage was neutral.

International media coverage of Oulu2026 in 2022 mainly revolved around the announcement of the cultural programme call: out of 95 international mentions, 77 appeared around the beginning of October 2022, when the open call for the cultural programme was announced (see Oulu Cultural Foundation, 2022). The press release gained visibility in Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Spain, France and the UK as well as outside Europe in countries such as the USA, Mexico, India and Chile.

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145 Bid book, 2021, p. 93.

146 Meltwater's natural language processing algorithm classifies media hits into positive, negative, neutral and unclassified categories. The language model also accounts for factors such as emojis.

**TABLE 17.** Oulu2026 media coverage in 2022.

<b>Monitoring target</b>	<b>Count in 2022</b>
Mentions of Oulu by domestic media	23,988
Mentions of Oulu by international media	17,061
Mentions of Oulu2026 by domestic media	444
Mentions of Oulu2026 by international media	99
Facebook page visits	27,289
Oulu2026 Facebook account followers	1,024
Instagram profile visits	11,508
Oulu2026 Youtube channel subscribers	79
Oulu2026 Youtube channel video views	9,013

## Developing the reputation of the city of Oulu

An in-depth qualitative analysis examines the development of Oulu city’s reputation over the course of the implementation of Oulu2026 activities. The starting point for this analysis is the perceptions associated with the city of Oulu and the changes related to Oulu2026 activities. The analysed data included information gathered from citizen surveys. The monitoring will be developed in collaboration with the Oulu Business School at the University of Oulu.

In the citizen survey conducted for baseline assessment, all the respondents were asked to describe Oulu in a single word. A total of 2,331 classifiable adjectives and nouns were collected and categorised by the researchers into positive, negative and neutral adjectives as well as general nouns. The categorisation revealed that the overall perception of Oulu was quite positive. Specifically, a little more than half the adjectives were positive, while negative adjectives accounted for just over a third, and neutral adjectives for about 10% of the words. Ambiguous adjectives accounted for just under 10% of the descriptors.

In positive terms, Oulu was described as a diverse, beautiful, pleasant and an emerging city. Negative descriptions included windy, cold, remote and a dull city. Neutral adjectives emphasised the northern location and maritime nature of the city. The sea featured prominently in both adjectives and nouns, along with the concept of home. Other frequently mentioned words included technology, Kärpät (a local hockey team) and the university. Culture was rarely mentioned although some iconic cultural references unique to Oulu, such as Toripolliisi (the Market Square Policeman’s statue) or ‘paska kaupunki’ (a colloquial expression meaning ‘a crappy city’) were brought up.

Additionally, respondents were asked to evaluate Oulu as a tourist destination and as a residential city. Over 62% of respondents living outside Oulu somewhat or completely agreed that Oulu was an appealing tourist destination, while only 34% of respondents from Oulu shared the same sentiment. A majority of the respondents living in the Oulu2026 region (outside Oulu) (67%) perceived Oulu as a lively city, and 62%

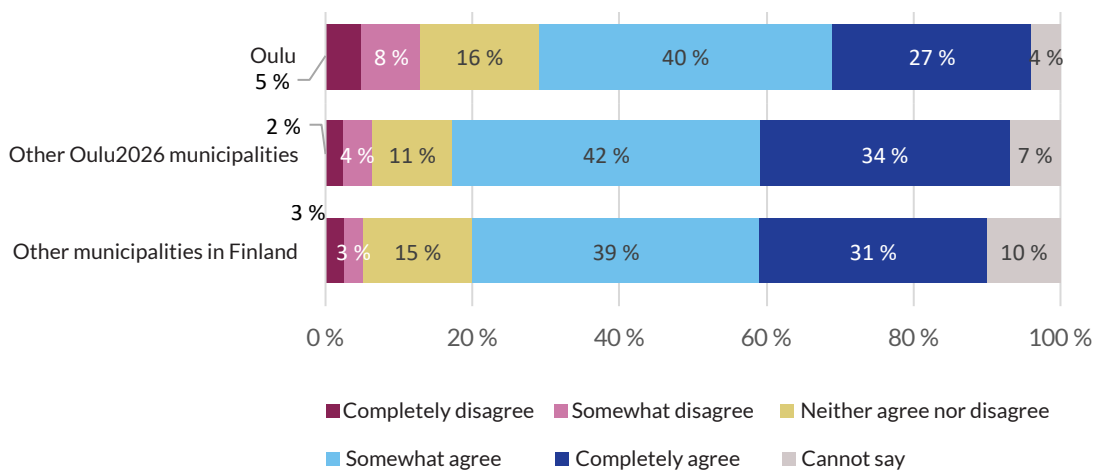
of the respondents from elsewhere in Finland and 53% of the respondents from Oulu held the same view.

Although residents of Oulu did not perceive their home city to be a tourist destination, unlike those living elsewhere, they did find it a pleasant place to live in. A majority (73%) of Oulu residents agreed that Oulu was a pleasant place to live, and the descriptions of Oulu residents were more positive than those of other the groups, with 61% respondents from municipalities within the Oulu2026 region and 54% of respondents from elsewhere in Finland agreeing with the sentiment.

In addition to general perceptions and attitudes, citizens were asked to assess the impact of Oulu2026 activities on perceptions of the Oulu2026 area. The statement ‘Oulu2026 programme and activities have a positive effect on perceptions of the region’ is relevant to not only residential attachment to the place but also external attractive factors. At the baseline stage, the most positive expectations about the impact of Oulu2026 activities were expressed by residents of the Oulu2026 region, with 76% somewhat or completely agreeing that Oulu2026 activities can have a positive impact on the perceptions of the region. Among respondents from other parts of Finland, 70% shared the same view. However, residents of Oulu city (67%) did not have as positive view of the impact of Oulu2026 activities. In fact, 13% respondents from Oulu somewhat or completely disagreed that Oulu2026 activities would have a positive impact on the region’s perceptions.

**FIGURE 10.** Opinions about the impact of Oulu2026 activities on the region’s perception.

Oulu2026 programme and activities have a positive effect on perceptions of the region









## 9 TOWARDS CULTURAL CLIMATE CHANGE

The Oulu2026 – European Capital of Culture initiative is a regional development project targeting the city of Oulu and, more broadly, northern Finland, that aims to implement *Cultural Climate Change (CCC)*. The idea and the goal of Cultural Climate Change encompass multiple concepts and perspectives. According to the Oulu2026 bid book, Cultural Climate Change involves collaboration and a sense of togetherness as well as changes in the ways people interact with each other.<sup>147</sup> The goal of CCC is concretised in the bid book through three main objectives: to develop a vibrant and gripping city, a balanced community and a creative region by bringing people together through the cultural programme; to create encounters and new connections; and to improve cooperation and combine technology, art and nature in unprecedented ways.

The development of Cultural Climate Change is the seventh and overarching theme of the Oulu2026 monitoring and evaluation framework (see Chapter 1). It is monitored on two levels: through quantitative indicators tracked via a grade monitoring system and through in-depth qualitative analyses. The in-depth analyses are structured along the three main objectives of the Oulu2026 bid book related to place, community and creativity. They reflect the economic, cultural and social development impacts, which are emphasised by the EU's decision establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture (see Chapter 2). The in-depth analysis of Cultural Climate Change is based on the themes of the Oulu2026 evaluation framework discussed above, and it brings together the key findings related to these themes.

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147 Bid Book, 2021, p. 7, 8.

## Grades for the cultural climate

Quantitative assessment of the development of Cultural Climate Change is based on survey data gathered from a wide range of respondents from different population groups. Surveys are scheduled to be conducted three times: twice before the ECOC year (in 2022 and 2025) and once after the ECOC year (in 2027) (see Table 1).

For the baseline survey in 2022, respondent groups consisted of citizens, arts and cultural actors, municipal council members and public cultural officials in Oulu and elsewhere in the Oulu2026 region. In the future, target and stakeholder groups will be expanded to include local actors involved in Oulu2026 programme projects, volunteers working with the Oulu2026 cultural programme and businesses operating in the region.

The survey seeks answers to the following questions: ‘How would you rate Oulu’s cultural climate as it is today?’ (citizens) and ‘How would you rate the cultural climate as it is today in your municipality?’ (arts and cultural actors, public officials and municipal council members). The indicators are structured around these two questions, measuring citizens’ assessments of the cultural climate of Oulu and other groups’ assessments of the cultural climate of their respective municipality. The evaluation scale is from 0 (very bad) to 10 (very good).<sup>148</sup> The information presented below is the average of responses obtained for the baseline survey in 2022 (see Table 18).

**TABLE 18.** Quantitative indicators: Cultural climate change.

Indicator	Average (on a scale of 0–10)	Source
<b>Citizens’ rating of Oulu’s cultural climate</b>		
All respondents	6.0	Citizen survey (n = 2,734)
Respondents from Oulu	5.6	“(n=1,318)
Respondents from other Oulu2026 municipalities	6.3	“(n=332)
Respondents from outside the Oulu2026 municipalities	6.3	“(n=1,084)
<b>Assessments of the cultural climate of the respondent’s respective municipality</b>		
Arts and cultural actors in Oulu2026 municipalities	5.0	Arts and cultural actors’ survey (n = 116)
Arts and cultural actors in Oulu	4.7	“(n=64)
Arts and cultural actors in other Oulu2026 municipalities	5.5	“(n=42)
Public officials in Oulu2026 municipalities	6.6	Public officials’ survey (n = 33)
Municipal council members in Oulu2026 municipalities	6.6	Municipal council members’ survey (n = 170)

148 Cultural Climate Change was described in the questions as follows: Oulu2026 seeks to create cultural climate change. The aim is to combine ideas in surprising ways, promote encounters and promote interactions between people by means of culture and art.



In the baseline year, the experience of the cultural climate in Oulu was the most highly rated by respondents who were not from Oulu. Their average rating was 6.3, whereas among residents of Oulu, the average rating was 5.6. Young people under 25 years who lived in Oulu perceived Oulu's cultural climate to be better than average (6.4), while those over 25 in Oulu rated it the lowest (5.4). The cultural climate was rated the weakest in the former municipal merger areas<sup>149</sup> (5.1). It was significantly better in the areas around the centre (5.6–5.8).

Arts and cultural actors in the Oulu2026 region were asked to assess the cultural climate of their respective municipality. The average rating of their assessments was 5.0. Those in Oulu rated the cultural climate of their municipality (average 4.7) lower than those in other Oulu2026 municipalities (average 5.5). Public officials and municipal council members (average 6.6) gave the highest ratings to the cultural climates of their respective municipalities.

## Summary and conclusions: The status of Cultural Climate in 2022

This chapter presents the key conclusions regarding the baseline stage of the Oulu2026 activity in 2022. We summarise the main findings under the three main objectives of the ECOC action of Oulu2026.

The observations also reflect the potential risks, outlined in the bid book, to the successful implementation of Oulu2026.<sup>150</sup> Some risks are related to the general operating environment while others concern the execution of the ECOC activity. Unforeseen events and sudden changes in the operating environment include the altered geopolitical situation, which has affected the planned cooperation with Russian partners. A significant risk associated with the implementation of the ECOC year is insufficient budget or economic crises during 2022 to 2027. Given the current state of weak public finances, obtaining corporate partnerships is crucial to mitigating economic risks.

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149 Ylikiiminki, Haukipudas, Kello, Kiiminki, Jääli, Oulunsalo, Yli-I

150 Bid book, 2021, pp. 89–90.

## Vibrant, gripping city

- **Citizens' perceptions of Oulu were generally positive.** At the baseline level, citizens' views of Oulu as a European city and a cultural city were quite positive. Residents of Oulu were less likely to consider Oulu as a cultural city than citizens living elsewhere. Oulu residents mostly perceived Oulu as a pleasant city to live in; however, the perceptions tended to be more negative in other municipalities of the Oulu2026 region and, especially, elsewhere in Finland.

- **Communication should reach audiences beyond the Oulu2026 region in the future.** The visibility of the Oulu2026 activities in the media was relatively modest at the baseline stage and primarily associated with programme-related communications. Initially, interest in participating in the ECOC activities within the Oulu2026 region was quite high, but weaker outside the region. Among the risks identified in the bid book are weak engagement by key stakeholder groups and audiences as well as failure of Oulu2026 to address and engage local, national, European and international audiences and partners.

- **Most of the proposed programme included in the bid book is being implemented outside the established cultural institutions; however, the established structures must also be considered to ensure long-term impact.** Issues related to spaces are crucial to the implementation of the ECOC year, its success and its lasting legacy. Regarding new cultural programme venues, a clear strategy for the future use is essential – it is important to determine which spaces will be permanent and which ones will be temporary and operational only for the ECOC year. Similar decisions should be made about spaces for cultural activities established beyond the Oulu city centre and in other Oulu2026 municipalities.

- **At the baseline stage, arts and cultural actors perceived the availability of spaces as inadequate, and the ECOC year is expected to improve the situation.** Availability of spaces should be ensured well in advance for both the activities of the ECOC programme and the basic operations of cultural actors that will continue beyond 2026. In fact, the ECOC year may provide opportunities to actors for developing and promoting their own activities. At the baseline stage, the projects related to spaces in the Oulu2026 municipalities were largely in their early stages or at the planning level. A related risk identified in the bid book is the inability to complete the renovations of cultural programme venues before 2026. This risk is likely to be partly realised, but timely measures can be taken to prevent it.

## Balanced community

- **The sense of community in Oulu was not perceived as very strong.** Young people perceived a stronger sense of community in Oulu than the older respondents. Half the respondents did not expect Oulu2026 activities to improve the overall mood in the region. Further, less than half (48%) the respondents of the citizen survey felt that it is good for everyone to be in Oulu. However, there was considerable pride in one's own municipality and region. While the majority of the respondents expected to live in their municipality for the next five years, young respondents under 25 did not express this opinion as strongly as the older respondent groups. The baseline situation showed that the central goal of Cultural Climate Change – strengthening community and cohesion – is essential and relevant to the region.

- **The majority of respondents in the Oulu2026 region were interested in participating (or had already participated) in Oulu2026 activities.** Participation and inclusion are central to the Oulu2026 activity, and efforts are being made to develop new ways of participation. However, in the baseline year, information on participation and involvement, such as event attendance numbers, was obviously not available. In the future, it is important to monitor how the audience responds to different forms of participation, including hybrid ways of participating and experiencing art and culture online. The theme of community and well-being is closely linked to issues of participation and inclusion.

- **The ECOC activities can offer many opportunities to promote cooperation in the region.** At the local level, the cultural actors were collaborating extensively, but little cooperation was seen at other levels (especially international). In 2022, Oulu2026 activities were already seen to have promoted cooperation. In the bid book, the risks identified in relation to cooperation include a confrontation between the city of Oulu and other municipalities in the region and that the region does not share ownership of the project. In other Oulu2026 municipalities, there was a sense of partial exclusion from the activities, and the Oulu2026 activities were not as visible in the municipalities beyond Oulu. The resources and starting points for municipalities to participate in the ECOC activities varied greatly. In some municipalities, a single person was the only link between the Oulu Cultural Foundation and the municipality, which weakens the sustainability of the operations and networks.

- **Citizens and decision-makers had different expectations regarding the effects of the ECOC activities on the community.** Citizens did not see the connection between Oulu2026 activities and strengthening of the community as broadly as the public officials and decision-makers.

## Creative region

- **Expectations from the cultural programme were high.** Decision-makers' attitudes towards culture and Oulu2026 activities were quite positive. At the baseline stage, the arts and cultural actors demonstrated a very positive perception of the artistic quality of the programme.
- **Many cultural programme projects were already underway, and more will be selected through the open call – the cultural programme is to adapt and evolve.** Audience-engaging co-production methods and extensive collaborations were emphasised in all flagship productions, in line with the goals set for Oulu2026 activities. The total budget in the bid book is largely allocated to the programme content.
- **Most of the projects presented in the bid book are planned to be carried out in collaboration with international partners.** Listed as partners in the bid book are past and future European Capitals of Culture, international networks in the arts and cultural domain, arts institutions, festivals, educational institutions, artists and artist groups. Accordingly, in the baseline year, many international collaboration projects were planned and included in the bid book (with a target of at least 80%). The expectation is that collaboration would further develop.
- **Cultural actors' experience of municipal support and opportunities to participate in cultural decision-making was relatively poor at the baseline stage.** The experiences of actors and the views of decision-makers were often contradictory. Sustainable urban and regional development that is based on culture requires strengthening of the operating conditions for arts and cultural actors, also as part of the ECOC activities.
- **Art and cultural institutions remain key cultural actors in the city and region even after the ECOC year.** It is important that they are able to leverage the opportunities of the ECOC year and that through the cultural capital year, new audiences and users are attracted to their spaces and the programmes they offer.







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# APPENDICES

**Appendix 1.** Quantitative indicators and in-depth qualitative analyses developed for evaluating and monitoring Oulu2026.

## **CONTENT AND OFFERINGS**

### **Quantitative indicators**

Number of projects in the Oulu2026 programme

Share of art and technology projects in the Oulu2026 programme

Assessment of the artistic quality of the Oulu2026 programme's contents

Citizens' assessment of the Oulu2026 programme content

Professionals' assessment of the Oulu2026 programme content

Share of Oulu2026 projects implemented outside the Oulu city centre

Number of events in the Oulu2026 programme

Total budget of Oulu2026 projects

### ***In-depth qualitative analysis***

*Overview of the Oulu2026 programme*

## **OPERATING CONDITIONS IN THE ARTS AND CULTURE DOMAIN**

### **Quantitative indicators**

Art and cultural actors' experience of the municipality's support

Art and cultural actors' experience of the ability to participate in cultural decision-making in Oulu2026 municipalities (average)

Art and cultural actors' cooperation within the Oulu2026 region

Art and cultural actors' cooperation elsewhere in Finland

Art and cultural actors' cooperation elsewhere in Europe

Share of arts and culture projects facilitating international collaboration in the Oulu2026 programme

Decision-makers' assessment of Oulu2026 within their respective municipality

Decision-makers' attitude towards culture within their respective municipality

### ***In-depth qualitative analysis***

*Financial resources channelled by Oulu2026 projects within the region*

*New operational and income models for competence and capacity development of cultural actors in the Oulu2026 programme*

*Cooperation between arts and cultural actors across different levels and sectors*

## **SPACES**

### **Quantitative indicators**

Number of Oulu2026 programme venues

Share of Oulu2026 programme events that take place outside of established cultural facilities

Share of Oulu2026 hybrid projects

Cultural actors' perception of their operating conditions related to spaces

Cultural actors' perception of how well the municipality provides spaces for cultural activities

Share of implemented infrastructure projects included in Oulu2026 activities

Number of new cultural venues opened as part of Oulu2026 within the region

### ***In-depth qualitative analysis***

*Description of construction projects included in Oulu2026 activities*

*Reformation and wider use of key cultural institutions in Oulu*

*Profiles of new cultural venues opened as part of Oulu2026 within the region*

*Location of the Oulu2026 programme venues*

## **PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION**

### **Quantitative indicators**

Visitors to the Oulu2026 programme

Share of citizens outside the Oulu2026 region interested in participating in the Oulu2026 programme as audience

Number of actors involved in Oulu2026 projects

Number of employees for Oulu2026

Number of projects focused on participation in different areas

Residents' experience of barriers to cultural participation

Share of residents interested in participating/or have participated in Oulu2026 activities

Share of residents who consider themselves part of a minority that are interested in participating/or have participated in Oulu2026 activities

Volunteers participating in the Oulu2026 programme

### ***In-depth qualitative analysis***

*Oulu2026 projects focused on participation and measures for increasing participation opportunities among different population groups*

*Forms of and barriers to participation in the Oulu2026 programme*

*Volunteering for the Oulu2026 programme*



## **COMMUNITY AND WELL-BEING**

### **Quantitative indicators**

Share of the residents in Oulu experiencing a strong sense of community

Share of residents in the Oulu2026 region who are proud of their home municipality

Share of residents in the Oulu2026 region who are proud of their home province

Share of residents in the Oulu2026 region expecting to be living in their home municipality five years from now

Share of residents in the Oulu2026 region who consider themselves at least somewhat European

Share of residents in the Oulu2026 region who experience that Oulu2026 improves general mood in the region

### ***In-depth qualitative analysis***

*Sense of community and well-being from participating in Oulu2026 activities*

*European dimension*

## **REPUTATION AND IMAGE**

### **Quantitative indicators**

Citizens' experience of Oulu as a European city

Citizens' experience of Oulu as a cultural city

Residents' perception (average) of Oulu's image and reputation

Other citizens' perception (average) of Oulu's image and reputation

### ***In-depth qualitative analysis***

*Coverage (number of mentions) and tone of media visibility for Oulu2026 action*

*Developing the reputation of the city of Oulu*

## **CULTURAL CLIMATE CHANGE**

### **Quantitative indicators**

Citizens' rating of Oulu's cultural climate

Arts and cultural actors', public officials and municipal council members rating of their respective municipality's cultural climate in Oulu2026 region

## **REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **Social development**

Population as of 31.12.2022

Proportion of population under 15 years (%)

Proportion of population aged 15–64 years (%)

Proportion of population over 64 years (%)

Proportion of students and schoolchildren in the population (%)

Net migration of young adults (25–34 years)

Unemployment rate (%)

Unemployment rate (%) among the youth (18–24 years)

Population change from the previous year (%)

Percentage of Finnish speakers (%)

Percentage of Swedish speakers (%)

Percentage of foreign language speakers (%)

Percentage of people with foreign backgrounds (%)

Perception of that it is good for everyone to be in Oulu (%)

### **Economic development**

Number of establishments in the culture and mass communication domain

Personnel in the culture and mass communication establishments (personnel years)

Percentage of culture and mass communication establishments (of all establishments)

Percentage of personnel in culture and mass communication establishments (of total personnel of all establishments)

Revenue of culture and mass communication establishments (in thousand euros)

Percentage of revenue of culture and mass communication establishments (of revenue of all establishments)

Number of tourists staying at accommodation establishments

Number of overnight stays

Number of accommodation establishments

Number of food and beverage service establishments

### **Cultural development at a local level**

State-subsidised arts and cultural institutions (number): Museums

State-subsidised arts and cultural institutions (number): Theatres

State-subsidised arts and cultural institutions (number): Orchestras

State subsidies for museums, €

State subsidies for theatres, €

State subsidies for orchestras, €

Average net operating cost of cultural activities per resident (€ per capita)

Museum activities

Theatre, dance and circus activities

Visual arts activities

General cultural activities

Library activities

Basic arts education

Percentage of municipalities with permanent systems for children and the youth to receive basic art education free of charge and/or fee-related concessions based on their financial situations

Percentage of municipalities with permanent systems for engaging children and the youth in cultural activities (e.g., discounted tickets, hobby passes and cultural cards for middle school students.)

Percentage of municipalities that have formulated/executed decisions regarding the percentage principle for construction-related art

Cultural buildings (number)

### **Cultural development by region**

Share of applications for Taike grants and subsidies (% of all Taike grant applicants)

Share of recipients of Taike grants and subsidies (% of all Taike grant recipients)

Share of Taike grant and subsidy sum (% of total grant sum)

Taike grant and subsidy sum, €

“Percentage of population using some cultural services monthly (incl. library services)”

Ages 20–64

Aged 65 and above

Aged 75 and above

Low education

Medium education

High education

“Percentage of service users finding the availability of cultural services (excl. library services) inadequate (%)”

Ages 20–64

Aged 65 and above

Aged 75 and above

Low education

Medium education

High education

## **Appendix 2.** Statistical grouping of municipalities in the Oulu2026 region.

The statistical grouping of municipalities is a classification developed by Statistics Finland for describing the degree of urbanisation. It divides municipalities by the proportion of the population living in urban settlements and by the population of the largest urban settlement into urban, semi-urban and rural municipalities. It is used both as the regional division of statistics compilation and in chargeable special surveys.

### **Urban municipalities**

Kajaani, Kemi, Kempele, Oulu, Raahe, Tornio

### **Semi-urban municipalities**

Haapajärvi, Ii, Kalajoki, Kuhmo, Kuusamo, Liminka, Muhos, Nivala, Oulainen, Ylivieska

### **Rural municipalities**

Alavieska, Haapavesi, Hailuoto, Hyrynsalmi, Kärsämäki, Lumijoki, Paltamo, Pielavesi, Pudasjärvi, Puolanka, Pyhäjoki, Pyhäjärvi, Pyhäntä, Ristijärvi, Sievi, Siikajoki, Siikalatva, Sotkamo, Suomussalmi, Taivalkoski, Tyrnävä, Utajärvi, Vaala



[oulu2026.eu](http://oulu2026.eu)

[cupore.fi](http://cupore.fi)