

Participating in Oulu

The City of Oulu Participation and Interaction Plan
2023–2030



Foreword

Participating in Oulu

In the spring, I participated in a seminar organized by Sitra, which discussed the impact of loneliness on people's well-being. We heard startling examples from post-Covid Finland, where loneliness is growing into a true national epidemic. I especially remember one student girl's description of her everyday life at her new place of study. She described her loneliness the following way: "I am so unnoticeable that I am always stunned when the storefront doors open automatically for me."

Being seen is one of the most important basic human needs. Belonging to something and being involved are the cornerstones of a person's sense of self-worth. Good self-confidence and a sense of belonging decisively determine a person's well-being and their relationship with life crises.

It is the municipality's job to build safe spaces and opportunities for participating and interacting. In Oulu, interaction is equal dialogue based on respectful encounters.

This plan is the result of extensive participation and interaction work. The working group has listened to the needs of the different city divisions, organizations, businesses and individual residents. New forms of participation and a will to learn to do things together have emerged.

The unstable situation in world politics and the resulting concern have increased people's sense of uncertainty. Also, in the light of the megatrends published by Sitra this year, the future looks considerably more threatening than before. Challenges to mental well-being are on the rise, nature's carrying capacity is crumbling and even the foundations of the economy are creaking.

In this situation, we need a cultural climate change for caring. In the future, Oulu aspires to be a city where crisis awareness is accompanied by a new kind of trust to the society and each other. We aspire to be a city where no one in distress gets left behind.

In Oulu 17 August 2023

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1 Introduction

The aim of the City of Oulu's participation and interaction plan for the years 2023–2030 is to promote interaction between the city and the residents, as well as between the city and stakeholders. The plan is based on the city strategy 2030 and on the city's values of courage, fairness and responsibility. The aim of the participation work is for the residents of Oulu to have the opportunity to feel heard and understood, and for the residents and communities to have opportunities to act, participate and influence in their neighborhoods and throughout the city.

Participation is based on personal experience and the starting point is participation in one's own life. Participation in communities means the opportunity to feel being part of a community that is important to oneself and to receive support for influencing and experience sense of community. Participation in common good and joint activities also produces well-being for oneself and others. For example, organizational activities and volunteer activities offer a good opportunity for joint activities and communality in Oulu.

The central basis of legislation for the plan can be found in the Constitution, the Administrative Procedure Act and the Local Government Act. The plan is linked to the open government plan, the wellbeing plan,

the non-discrimination and equality plan and to the child-friendly municipality model and the principles and objectives mentioned in them.

The participation and interaction plan guides participation and influencing in Oulu. The plan presents the city's opportunities for participation and influencing, as well as goals and measures to develop participation and interaction. The practical implementation of the objectives and measures is presented in a separate annex.

The preparation work for the plan has been diverse and participation has been taken into account when drawing up the plan.

Principles for good public interaction

There are seven principles for good public interaction, which aim to help make better decisions and address any concerns of those involved. The principles are based on the ethical principles of the International Association of Public Participation, which consists of professionals in the field.



Public interaction:

1. Derives from the principle that everyone affected by a decision has the right to participate in the decision-making process.
2. Includes a promise that the parties' views will be taken into account in decision-making. It should be noted here that it does not mean that the parties will necessarily decide on the matter, but that their views are taken into account.
3. Supports sustainable decision-making by taking into account and communicating the needs and interests of all parties involved, including decision-makers. Sometimes decision-makers worry about whether their power will be taken away by the participation of residents. No, it will not be, because a good process also takes into account their needs and, ultimately, they make the decisions, unless it is separately decided that the power is delegated to the involved parties.
4. Supports the participation of those who the decision-making affects or of those who are interested.
5. Is properly executed when the participants are asked about their wishes on how to participate. Different people have very different ways of participation: children, youth, immigrants, senior citizens or disabled people need non-discriminatory and equal ways to participate.
6. Provides participants with the information they need in an understandable and easily accessible form. A scientific study or a hundred-page report is not necessarily in an understandable form for everyone. Plain language, visuality, explanatory videos, images and figures and summaries make information easier to perceive.
7. Includes a promise that those involved will be informed about how their views have been taken into account in the decision. "We told our opinions and never heard back what happened next." Therefore, good interaction also involves committing to reporting back to participants and explaining how and why their opinions were or were not taken into account.

2 Democracy, Participation and Interaction as National and Local Objectives, Phenomena and Definitions

2.1 The National Democracy Programme 2025

The National Democracy Programme 2025 outlines the objectives of Finnish democracy policy in the 2020s. Finland has a strong tradition of democracy, but in an unstable global situation it increasingly important to defend a functioning democratic system at national and international level. Finland ranks among the top countries in the world in studies measuring and comparing democracy and its functioning. The Finnish people's trust in each other and in different operators in society is at a high level also in international examination. Although the state of democracy in Finland is good by international standards, many challenges have also been identified in the functioning of Finnish democracy.

The following trends have been raised as particular challenges in Finnish democracy:

- decaying participation and developing inequality
- declining voter turnout
- increasing political polarization
- differences in the trust experienced by different population groups

Arising challenges also include:

- polarization of conversational culture
- cyber threats, disinformation and information influencing on officials, decision-makers, journalists, researchers and, for example, the systematic harassment, meaning targeting, of different operators of the civil society
- uncertainty of the civil society's economic scope of action

According to the 2021 evaluation by OECD, Finland remains still a high-trust society.

However, citizens' trust in different institutions varies. 66 per cent of citizens trust central government, 61 per cent the government, 53 per cent the parliament and 52 per cent the municipal administration. There were significant regional differences and difference between population groups in trust. According to the study, trust is high among population groups with a high level of education, good health, optimistic prospects and who have active participation in, for example, civic activities and live in cities.

The OECD has recommended the dialogues between the administration and the citizens were established in Finland in order to strengthen people's trust, increase the transparency of administration and decision-making, develop processes for participation and influencing, and involve citizens in the preparation of political options. The social exclusion and the discrimination of different population groups should be prevented by strengthening opportunities for participation and by ensuring that nobody is left behind in society. The OECD recommends a broader implementation of new approaches, such as deliberative or conversational operation models.

The government's decision-in-principle outlines the objectives of Finnish democracy policy in the 2020s. In an unstable global situation, it is increasingly important to defend a functioning democratic system. The government's central objective is that Finland continues to be among the most democratic countries in the world. The main outlines of the decision in principle:

1. The electoral system is functional, safe and reliable. Everyone has equal opportunities and sufficient capacity to exercise their right to vote.
2. Finland has a wide range of opportunities for participation, and an increasing amount of people are exercising their right to participate. The administration is transparent

and interactional, which strengthens trust. Decision-making is data-based.

3. Education on democracy, human rights and media, and continuous learning, support the fulfillment of rights to participate.
4. The media environment is multivoiced and diverse, the society's conversational culture enables everyone's participation.
5. An active and vital civil society is a central part of a functioning democracy.
6. Finland actively participates in the EU's democracy work and supports international development of democracy.

2.2 Sitra's Megatrends 2030

Sitra published its megatrends for 2030 in early 2023. The megatrends are development trends consisting of several phenomena and they describe the broad development curve. They often take place at a global level and the trend is often expected to continue in the same direction. Megatrends reflect phenomena that are currently highlighted around us. Especially the megatrends regarding democracy, influencing opportunities and technology are important to notice in the development work of participation and interaction.

Democracy continues to weaken. The global weakening of democracy continues and authoritarianism increases. 70 per cent of the world's population already lives in non-democratic states. At the same time, the need to actively defend democracy has been recognized. The development of democracy requires determined action both to strengthen participation and to reform decision-making methods and structures.

Fast and direct civic participation becomes increasingly common. Commitment to operations by civic organizations continues to decline and a decreasing amount of people wish to participate in society through traditional parties. People, especially young people, are looking for fast and direct ways to participate. Digitalization and platforms and networks enabling it have revolutionized the methods of information production, transmission and utilization. Micro activism becomes increasingly common and an increasing amount of people participate



in societal influencing through social media. New initiatives are established and they spread fast.

Technology creates inequality. The rapid development of technology creates separate technological realities. Different age and population groups use technology in different ways. As the society's services and functions are transferred online, there is a risk that people's social agency is differentiated. Utilizing technology requires new skills and equipment that not everyone can afford. In the development of services, special attention must be paid to accessibility and to ensuring that development happens on the terms of people, not technology.

2.3 Defining Participation

The experience of participation increases well-being, security and faith in the future and on one's own potential. The aim is to reduce inequality, poverty, solitariness and discrimination. THL's project to coordinate the promotion of social inclusion divides participation and various measures promoting participation and inclusion into three areas:

1. [Participation in one's own life \(in Finnish\)](#)
Opportunity to live life suitable to one's personal preferences;
Opportunity to define what activities or services one participates in.
2. [Participation in communities and influencing processes \(in Finnish\)](#)
Opportunity to belong to groups and communities important to oneself and to influence matters important to oneself; opportunity to gain support in influencing
3. [Participation in joint good \(in Finnish\)](#)
Opportunity to do and work together; opportunity to get to enjoy joint good and to participate in producing joint good and sharing it. Joint good is activities and values that result in appreciation, thanks and connections to and by other people.

The North Ostrobothnia Participation Network has developed a definition for participation from a resident's perspective, in cooperation with various operators, following THL's definition of participation:

I am heard, I can participate in activities voluntarily and my individual needs are taken into consideration. (Participation in one's own life).

I can influence my own life and the developing of matters and services concerning myself. (Participation in communities and the opportunity to influence).

If I wish, I can do things that promote joint good and I can also get to enjoy them myself. (Participation in joint good)

When we want to promote everyone's participation, you should follow these **principles for promoting participation**:

- A person can participate in activities or services voluntarily.
- Individual solutions are sought together with the participant.
- Participant is encountered respectfully and without categorizing them.
- Lonely and solitary individuals are found and involved in the activities.
- Activities and services are developed together.
- Activities strengthen the participant's opportunities to influence also outside the activities.
- A person becomes part of a community that is important to them.
- A person is able to enjoy joint good and can participate in producing and sharing the good equally with others.
- A person receives appreciation, thanks and connections to and by other people. Different social groups encounter.
- Methods promoting participation become a solid part of activities.

The society should promote such conditions and functions where people outside working life can influence their own life and living environment and where they could make their competence visible, thus gaining recognition from other people as well. Experiencing participation directs a person's agency: people in positive mood see more opportunities, become motivated and are encouraged to seize opportunities.

2.4 Oulu-based Participation and Interaction

The City of Oulu's participation and interaction plan for 2023–2030 has taken into account opportunities for participation already in the planning phase. Interaction strengthens the participation of residents and stakeholders and opportunities for influencing. The development of interaction and participation in Oulu is based on the City Strategy 2030 and on the development of human-centered services. Effective means of participation are important for strengthening sense of community and communal activities. In today's time, it is essential to pay particular attention to promoting equal participation.

The European Capital of Culture activities offer Oulu-based residents and communities many opportunities to participate in the joint implementation of Oulu2026. Open calls for programme support the implementation of voluntary cultural projects and the hundreds of projects in the cultural programme include numerous opportunities for participation and influence.

In addition, it is possible to participate as a volunteer in the European Capital of Culture activities or, for example, school classes and hobby groups can provide opportunities for participation. Oulu2026 strengthens residents' equal opportunities to participate in culture as its producers and experiencers. In 2026, Oulu will have unique experiences every day, and the effects of the cultural climate change will remain visible long after 2026.

Many different definitions have been presented for interaction and participation. In Oulu, **interaction is equal dialogue based on respectful encounter**. Good interaction between different operators requires wide-range commitment and responsible activities. In Oulu, officials, elected officials and city personnel all possess the will to engage in fair interaction and to create a sense of community together with the residents. Not everything has to be agreed upon, but different perspectives are taken into account and openly reasoned.

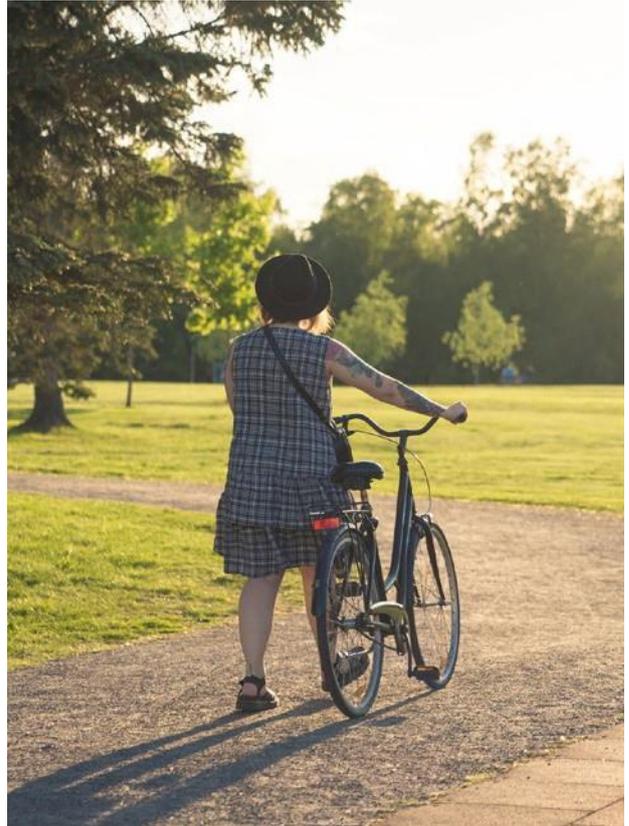
Participation can be structured by dividing it into **information, planning, decision-making and activity participation**. This plan has utilized this division. The structuring method is a useful tool when assessing the opportunities of residents and stakeholders to influence the activities of the municipal organization and the municipal community. The different forms of participation complement each other and are diverse. The information block below provides a closer look at the contents of the different forms of participation.

Sub-areas of participation:

- **Participation in information** refers to the municipal residents' right to receive and produce information about the municipality. Forms of participation include easy-to-implement forms such as informing, listening to residents and service commitments.
- **Participation in planning** is deeper interaction between the municipality and its residents related to preparation. Residents participate, for example, in the planning of activities, services or infrastructure concerning them by providing their ideas and opinions and by working on them together with the municipality.
- **Participation in decision** is direct participation in decision-making regarding producing services or certain residential areas.
- **Participation in activities** means the residents' opportunity to act in their own living environment. Participation in activities includes, for example, voluntary work, organizing events or maintenance of residential area.

Interaction and residents' opportunities to participate and influence are tightly intertwined. By developing interaction we can improve residents' participation in decision-making and other influencing opportunities. The emphasis of interaction and influencing in municipal work reflects a broader change in society.

The concept of democracy has expanded to cover both the democracy related to representativeness and voting and also other forms of participation, like different ways of everyday participation and deliberative, meaning conversational, democracy. Representative democracy is no longer alone in charge of meeting the citizens' participation and influencing needs, even though municipal decision-making continues to take place through it. Citizens influence not only by voting and through political parties and associations, but through new channels as well. For example, unofficially organized civic activities and activism in different forms have grown in popularity. The everyday experiential knowledge of previously under-represented population groups is valued increasingly in addition to research information and official information.



Central concepts

Participation Participation refers to the personal feeling that arises from experiences related to opportunities to influence. Participation is belonging, unity, compatibility and inclusion. Participation is influencing one's own life and its opportunities, development of services and joint good.

Participating The concept of participating is widely used in discussion related to citizens' democratic role. Three dimensions are connected to it:

- Social dimension: participating is only possible when other people are involved.
- Functionality: participating is, principally, active functioning.
- Civic participating: the opportunity to handle joint affairs by participating.

Participating is more concretely linked to citizens' rights and responsibilities in decision-making concerning themselves and those close to them. Participation and participating are firmly intertwined. The feeling of belonging creates the foundation for participating.

Influencing means actively acting and positioning oneself over personal, common and public matters. Influencing is also using personal or communal power in such way that one can promote a matter important to oneself or the community. In Finland, the citizens' opportunities to influence have been recorded in the constitution. Other legislation supports the citizens' opportunities to influence as well. For example, it is clearly stated in The Local Government Act that it is the municipalities' obligation to provide residents with opportunities to influence municipal decision-making.

Interaction is reciprocal communication between two or more people. In interaction, both parties take initiative, react to each other's messages and feel connected to each other.

Dialogue is a constructive and equal way to discuss. Dialogue aims at a better understanding of a topic, other people or oneself, but not at a consensus or quick solutions. At best, dialogue creates unexpected insights and new thinking. A popular discussion method is, for example, the Timeout method, which allows constructive discussion.

Human-centeredness means that people's views and experiences guide activities and development. When designing, people's abilities and requirements are put at the centre instead of developing products, services or software with technology or price first in mind.

Phenomenon-centered analysis observes entities – phenomena – instead of individual problems or needs, which provides an opportunity to find new operation models. The more multidimensional the phenomenon, the more information, understanding of information and discussion between different operators are needed.

Vitality. A municipality is vital when it is able to provide its residents with the services they need to live there. This means that vitality is a conceptual goal, a state that a municipality can strive for by investing in a variety of matters, such as the economy, business life, education, healthcare or recreational opportunities.

2.5 Opportunities for Participation and Influencing are Guaranteed in Legislation

The Constitution, the Administrative Procedure Act and the Local Government Act define the foundation for participation, influence and interaction in a municipality. Thus, they also guide the activities of the City of Oulu centrally.

The Constitution regulates general the electoral and participatory rights (14 §). The task of public authority is to promote the individual's opportunities to participate in the society's activities and their influence on decision-making that affects them. Public authority must also strive to ensure everyone's opportunity to influence decision-making concerning their living environment (20 §).

The Administrative Procedure Act defines good principles for governance and obliges public administration to take into account the principles of good governance in all of its activities (6 §). These legal principles of administration guide the authorities' decision-making consideration and the handling of matters.

The Local Government Act regulates residents' opportunities for participation and influence. The municipal strategy must take into account opportunities for participation and influence (37 §). The municipality's residents and service users have the right to participate in and influence the municipality's activities (22 §). The council must ensure diverse and effective opportunities for participation.

The Local Government Act also regulates the municipal residents' right of initiative (23 §). Residents of the municipality as well as associations and foundations operating in the municipality have the right to submit initiatives in matters concerning the municipality's activities. The initiator must also be informed about the measures taken in response to the initiative.

According to the Local Government Act, the municipality must also have a youth council (26 §) a council for the elderly (27 §) and a council for the disabled (28 §).

Residents, service users, organizations and other communities must be informed about municipal activities (29 §). In addition, the municipality must provide sufficient information about the services organized by the municipality, its economy, municipal matters under preparation and plans concerning them, processing of matters, decisions made and the effects of these decisions. The municipality must also provide information on how to participate in and influence the preparation of decisions. The municipality must use clear and understandable language in its communications and take the needs of different population groups into consideration.

Child's rights A child's right to participate in all matters concerning them is very strongly protected by legislation. The basis for national legislation is Article 12 of the international UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, according to which participation is one of the fundamental rights permeating all official activities. The convention states that a child must have the right to express their views on matters concerning them, and their opinion must be taken into account according to their age and level of development (Article 12). In addition, the best interest of the child must be a primary consideration in decisions concerning the child, which includes taking into account their views and opinions (Article 3).

In Oulu, themes related to participation and influencing are also discussed in several city documents, to whose principles and objectives this participation and interaction plan is linked.

Other laws guiding participation and influence include:

Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, Act on Supporting the Functional Capacity of the Older Population and on Social and Health Services for Older Persons, Youth Act, Act on Disability Services, Equality Act, Non-Discrimination Act, Library Act, Act on Cultural Activities in Local Government, Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, Land Use and Building Act, Act on the Wellbeing Services Counties, Child Welfare Act

Oulu City Strategy 2030



<https://www.ouka.fi/en/strategy>

One of the focus areas of the City Strategy is for everyone in Oulu to have the opportunity to live a healthy and safe life. In 2023, the city's well-being task will change. In Oulu, well-being increases when people and matters meet.

Strategic objective: We enable people encountering and communal activities, as well as a safe living environment.

Measure: We strengthen participation models in Oulu.

Meter: We develop new means of participation together with the municipality's residents and test them in different operating environments (yes/no). The measures are described.

Open Government Action Plan 2021–2023

Availability and accessibility of services as well as expertise by experience as sub-areas of the plan and goals based on them are measured every two years. The interaction plan measures

the implementation of participation and interaction and has been recorded in the objectives of the open government's action plan. The plan is updated in autumn 2023.

Welfare Plan 2023–2025

The focus areas of promoting well-being are based on the well-being phenomena emerged in the City of Oulu's City Strategy 2030 and the proposed measures. The goal for 2025 is a communal and safe living environment regarding Oulu residents of all ages. The measure for the objective aiming for relationships with other people and the opportunity to participate and influence is the implementation of the measures of the interaction plan.

Broad Welfare Report (2022)

During the council term 2017–2021, well-being promotion work was executed in accordance to the focus areas approved by the City Strategy and the City Board. The third focus area is influencing the development of inequality

between regions and different population groups. Common well-being information, setting goals and measures promote the well-being and participation of residents and customers at everyday level. The interaction plan has, as one of the guiding documents for the promotion of well-being, functioned in the evaluation of the implementation of participation and interaction in 2019–21.

Child-friendly City

Is based on the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child and is build on four general principles:

1. Non-discrimination and equality
2. The benefit of the child as a priority
3. The right to life and development and
4. Respecting the child's views.

In practice, this means that the development, planning and decision-making of municipal activities or any other activities regarding children are examined in light of these general principles. Promoting participation for children of all ages, especially for those in vulnerable situation, should be the guiding principle.

Ikävoimainen Oulu – The City of Oulu Ageing Policy Programme 2021–2030

One theme in the programme is the following: we care about the elderly and include them to participate. Measures include, for example 1) We will develop low threshold activities and meeting spaces around the city in collaboration with other operators.

2. We participate in the elderly week and care day in Oulu. 3. We develop volunteer work for the support of the elderly and provide opportunities for volunteering in collaboration with other operators.

Functional Equality and Equality Plan Concerning the City of Oulu Services 2022–26

The objectives of the plan state that promotion of equality, non-discrimination and inclusion will be taken into account in the city's programme and planning work and in the development of services in sectors. A measure in this objective is to set concrete goals in the city's programmes and plans to promote equality and non-discrimination in services and to utilize experiential well-being data and research data. Participation will be taken into account in the preparation phase. Among sectors, for example, the objectives of the Education and Culture Services also highlight promoting equal participation, for example, by means of promoting accessibility of services and drawing up principles for safer spaces.

Yhdessä kotoutuva Oulu – Integration Programme 2022–2025

The City of Oulu's integration programme, Yhdessä kotoutuva Oulu, aims to integrate immigrants to active citizens on all society sectors. Interaction between population groups, influencing and participation are themes where communication between people is in the core. Lack of communication results in differentiation, misconceptions and decreased opportunities to influence. Good communication creates more connections, mutual understanding and a sense of meaning for things and other people. The integration programme highlights how important it is to speak, hear and, above else, listen. Development of good population relations and participation is monitored in Finland with indicators developed for the purpose. The indicators and meters in question focus especially on mapping good relations on a local level and the development of relations between different groups. The aim is for the indicators and meters to cover all, both positive and negative, factors related to relations between groups.

Oulu oivaltaa – Educational and Cultural Plan 2023-2026

The Educational and Cultural Plan guides the Education and Culture Services' activities. One of its strategic focus areas is well-being and participation: we grow, educate and encounter together. This means, for example, that Oulu is a place where people care and work together and that we strengthen our residents' opportunities to participate and influence.

Digitaalinen Oulu – Programme (2019-2023)

Digitaalinen Oulu programme compiles city-level objectives, measures and meters under two focus areas. The other focus area is influence by utilizing digitalization and data. The focus area's other objective is the following: we include residents' to participate in developing digital services in order to ensure customer oriented actions and usability.

The handbook of communications, the City of Oulu brand and instructions for social media

The handbook of communications compiles the central instruction and principles that are followed in the City of Oulu's communications. The city's communication is open, proactive and interactive. Through dialogue we strive to create new together with the Oulu residents.

Oulu's new brand relies on three key concepts: Northern, humane and smart.

Oulu residents have participated in building the new brand. Each act, idea, response, comment and feedback has led the brand to reflect Oulu to a higher grade.

The City of Oulu has renewed its instruction for social media for the personnel in 2023. The document is now called **Oulun kaupungin sosiaalisen median linjaukset ("The City of Oulu Social Media Guidelines")**.

The City of Oulu uses social media as a support for official communications in order for the City of Oulu's communications about residents' services to reach the residents as well as possible. In social media, we also wish to strengthen Oulu's attraction and ability to retain residents, to promote a positive employer image and to attract students to Oulu.

The City of Oulu actively engages in interaction with Oulu residents on social media. We target the posts made in the City of Oulu's social media to the people who use the assigned channel. We follow the discussion taking place in our social media channels and respond to questions as quickly as possible. Our tone of voice on social media is proper and clear and, when in appropriate situation, more relaxed.

Environmental Plan 2026

Focus area 4 states: we promote environmental responsibility. The target group is environmentally responsible Oulu residents. The aim is for Oulu-based residents, companies and communities to know and understand the effects of their own actions in order to achieve the city's environmental goals. The city encourages and guides its people and enables sustainable living on all divisions within its sphere of influence. The measures include, for example, the following: Oulu-based flow of study of sustainable future guides Oulu-based children and youth and those operating with them to a sustainable lifestyle.

Yrittämyönteinen Oulu – Industrial Policy Development Programme 2022-27

The strategic point is the development of cooperation networks and business ecosystems. Under this strategic point, the focus areas include seamless cooperation and interaction between the city's operators and the business field.



2.6 Different Opportunities for Participation and Influence in Oulu

The city's role as an active communicator enables, through the means of different feedback services, resident evenings, newsletters, surveys and joint planning, the promotion of both the residents' and the stakeholders' opportunities for participation and influence in Oulu. Municipal residents and stakeholders in Oulu already possess many opportunities to participate in and influence the city's activities. The development of communications technology and establishing new platforms have offered new ways to participate and influence in Oulu, for example through participatory budgeting. The city engages in participation and influence work through several channels, both digitally and through traditional methods. When promoting equal digital interaction in development of services, the Web Accessibility Directive and the possibility for digital support must be taken into consideration.

Residents' participation is about participation rights and opportunities to participate and influence. In all this, it is essential that residents have information on how and why to participate in the city's activities. In order to achieve this, residents should also have information on what is expected of them and what their expertise, experiences and opinions are used for. From the point of view of preventing mistrust and strengthening willingness to participate, it is essential to communicate according to the open government principles about how the information has been taken into consideration and what the information gathering has led to.

Inequality in terms of residents' opportunities to participate and influence stems from socio-economic and regional differences. Educational level, language and cultural background in addition to gender have a central role in these differences. In this respect, several organizations and communities have had a central impact on creating equality and non-discrimination for members of groups with special challenges in participating and influencing.

So-called urban activism has led to new actors being formed in society that actively challenge the interaction between residents and the city. It is also essential for the city to enable the so-called fourth sector's activities, meaning also assisting non-organized communities in their active activities and events. From the city's perspective,

regional differences and differences between neighborhoods can be equalized through the means of positive special treatment. By utilizing a map depicting disadvantage and vulnerability, regional differences can be identified and support can be targeted on a specific area through the means of positive special treatment.

These third and fourth sector operators usually reach the different vulnerable residents more effectively (more successfully/better) in their activities than the city's general services do. By participating in volunteer activities, residents and stakeholders can influence the development of opportunities for participation and influence through their own initiative.

As stated above, the City of Oulu's activities from the perspective of participation and influence are regulated by several statutes containing dozens of provisions on various forms of participation and influencing opportunities. In addition to regulations, there are various non-established and informal ways to participate and influence, so presenting an exhaustive list of different opportunities for participation and influence would be an almost impossible task. It is possible, however, to present an exemplary list of different means and methods of promoting participation and influencing in Oulu instead. Participation projects and various experiments enable and expand the methods of participation. Sharing good practices and operating in networks is also essential in increasing the means of participation and interaction.



Participation and influence can be especially promoted by:

1. Organizing discussion and hearing sessions and municipal councils
2. Hearing out residents' opinions before decision-making
3. Selecting representatives of service users to municipal bodies
4. Organizing opportunities to participate in planning the municipality's finances
5. Planning and developing services together with service users
6. Supporting residents', organizations' and other communities' self-motivated planning and preparing of matters

Municipal decision-making can be influenced **by voting in municipal elections or by standing as a candidate**. The municipal and city councils elected in municipal elections decide on the municipality's activities and finances and on the organizing of the municipal services. The council is the highest decision-making body in the municipality. A resident can express their views to the city councillor by, for example, calling them or sending a message via social media. A municipal resident can also submit **a municipal initiative** regarding matters related to the municipality's activities or give **feedback** on it.

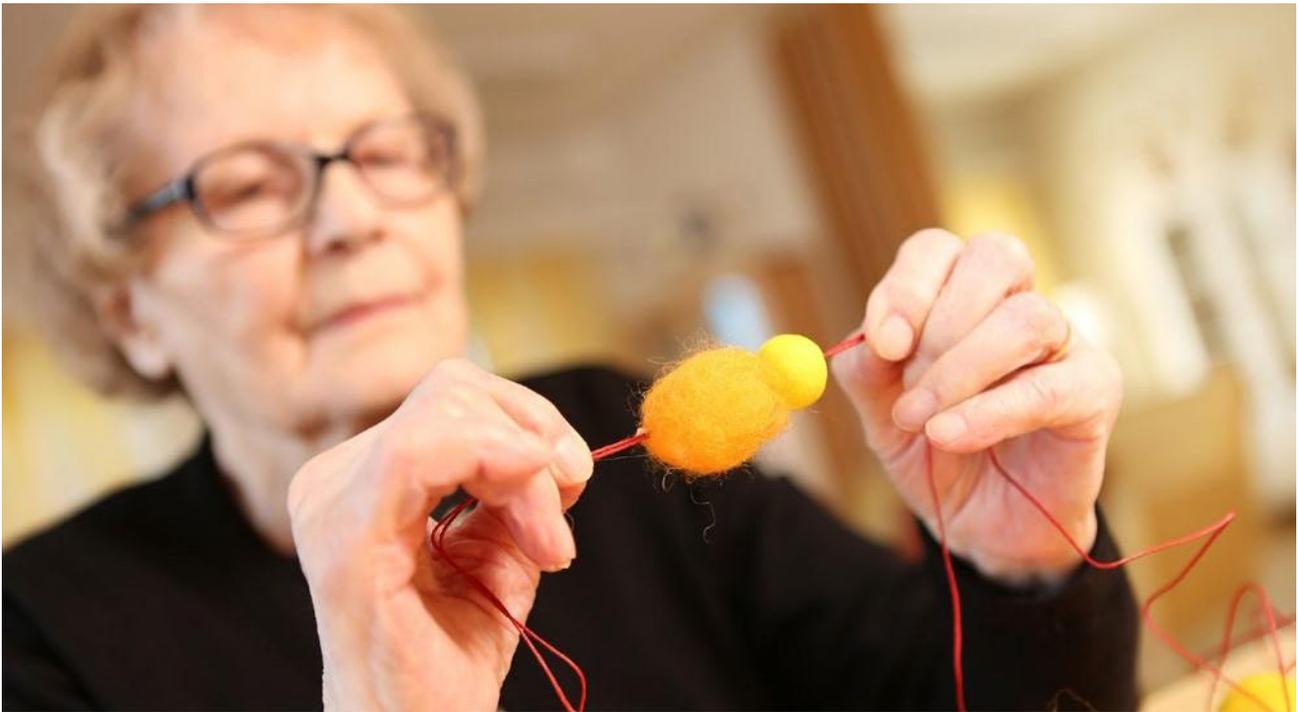
Voluntary activities mean participating in and influencing the well-being of oneself and of others around. Voluntary activities can be executed by anyone according to their abilities, schedule and resources, either in organizations or independently. Voluntary activities include, for example, organizing or participating in events including sports and physical activity as a support for a person in a weaker life situation.

Residents can also engage in independent **urban activism**, for example by organizing pop-up events. Urban activism means **independent joint activities organized by citizens themselves**, which usually take place outside organizational activities.

Participatory budgeting is used in Oulu. Participatory budgeting means combining economy and democracy. In participatory budgeting, residents are involved in innovating and deciding what financial resources are used for.

Regional participation is important in geographically broad Oulu. Municipal residents can influence joint matters of their individual neighborhood and the entire city at regional **residents' evenings**. Residents' evenings discuss current topics, give and make statements and organize information and statement sessions. The city supports residents' regional participation and activities with regional operating funds and by providing spaces on different areas in Oulu. Regional events also include meetings between the mayor and the senior elected officials, which are organized by touring different city areas.

Municipal services, such as daycare centres, schools and libraries, and the interaction and participation related to them are central in the everyday life of residents. Operation models and methods that promote interaction and participation utilized in the city include, for example, **service design, experiential activities and developer customers**. The city also aims to support flexible service using, participation and interaction through **digitalization of services**. The number of easy-to-use self-service, independent and home services will increase along with the utilization of data produced by municipal residents in services. It is also essential to organize digital support in connection with the digitalization of services. Both internal and external digital support networks are built in Oulu during 2023.



Equal participation of their own groups is promoted by the different **influencing bodies**. The statutory councils in Oulu are the Youth Council, the Council for the Disabled and the Council for the Elderly. Oulu also has an Immigrant Council and a network for mental health and substance abuse organizations. The city also has Local Democracy Committee and Committee for Equality and Non-Discrimination.

Representative participation of children and the youth is enforced in addition to the Youth Council in student union activities and regional youth participation groups. The Oulu Youth Council has the right to attend and speak in boards. At the city meetings for children and young people, children and the youth decide on joint matters concerning them. The Child-Friendly Municipality operation model by UNICEF is also enforced in Oulu. A child-friendly municipality allows children to plan, evaluate and develop services together with adults. In accordance with the operation model, objectives and measures which are regularly evaluated and monitored have been set in Oulu.

Oulu has **digitalized democracy services** and the development of digitalization continues. Different tools for digital participation are tested and evaluated constantly. The city supports the residents' digital

participation by, for example, organizing **remote and hybrid events and workshops**. Residents have had the opportunity to participate electronically in city surveys and receive information on current matters related to the city through a mobile application.

Residents and staff are also **informed** about current city matters, such as different national or Oulu-related **surveys**. The starting point for communication is the residents' opportunity to participate and to receive correct, reliable and up-to-date information on the city's activities, plans and services and the opportunity to influence them. Accessibility and diverse communication channels, as well as the needs of special groups, are taken into account in communications. New ways of operating are also needed, with the help of which information and experience obtained from the residents can be documented for developmental use.

Personnel and elected officials are **trained** in planning participation and influence and in utilizing the methods. Training is also provided in relation to the themes of open governance and equality. Residents and stakeholders actively participate in **city planning and developing** in Oulu.

3 Participation and Interaction in Oulu at the Target Level

The goal in Oulu is for everyone to feel heard and understood and for everyone to have the same opportunities to act, participate and influence in their neighborhood and throughout the whole city. Interaction based on mutual respect promotes well-being and increases vitality. A sense of community emerges from fair attitude and search for solutions together with different operators. Courage to responsibly try new means of participation is one opportunity to increase the residents' experiences of participation and sense of belonging.

The city's ambition is to be an operator for its residents and stakeholders that is easy to cooperate with. Effective interaction within the city and cross-sectoral collaboration support good customer experience for residents and stakeholders. The city invests in the quality of service experiences. Good interaction is supported by a smooth flow of information and clear communication through several channels. The city actively utilizes social media and digital means of communication. Communication takes into account different resident groups and the communication methods and channels suitable for them.

This chapter presents the objectives and measures that develop interaction between the city and the residents, as well as between the city and the stakeholders. A central matter is the interactional relationship between the city and the residents. In relation to stakeholders, the main focus is on non-profit organizations and companies.

The central identified successes and areas for development in regarding participation and interaction are presented below through participation mappings and the Audit Committee evaluation report. These have served as background material for the renewed interaction plan when updating the plan. Simultaneously, they structure the relationships between the objectives and measures for the interaction plan for 2023–2030.



3.1 Residents' Experiences of Opportunities to Influence in Oulu

The 2022 survey on city and municipal services (FCG Oy) asked: How well have the residents' opportunities for influencing been managed in the municipality? Opportunities were considered well-managed by 20% of respondents in Oulu and poorly managed by 33%. The share of respondents who felt that the influencing opportunities were managed well had decreased by six percent from 2020 and the share was lower than the average in comparison municipalities (27%). The share of respondents who felt the opportunities poorly managed was the same as the average in the comparison municipalities. The highest "well-managed" experience percentage was 36% in Helsinki (2020 result) and 32% in Espoo (2021).

According to the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities' survey (2020), 15

% of residents in Oulu somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement "The municipality listens to the residents' opinions". The corresponding value for all study municipalities was 19%. The statement "There is sufficient information about the decisions of my municipality" was somewhat or strongly agreed with by 29% of Oulu residents. The combined percentage of all study municipalities was 32%.

3.2 The Audit Board's Evaluation Report on the Opportunities for Participation and Influence under the Local Government Act

The Audit Board evaluates how the opportunities for participation and influence under the Local Government Act have developed in Oulu in 2018–2022. The 2022 evaluation report by the Audit Board has been approved by the City Council in spring 2023. According to the Local Government Act, the City Council is in charge of ensuring that city residents have access to diverse and influential opportunities and methods for participation and influencing also between elections. Such opportunities include, for example, municipal juries, participatory budgeting and joint planning of services.

In Oulu, the opportunities for participation and influence have been developed with an interaction plan approved by the City Board. Through the plan, the council can be ensured that its statutory responsibility is fulfilled.

The Audit Board last evaluated the opportunities for participation and influence in 2017 and now stated that its development proposals at the time have proceeded well. The development proposals concerned, for example, the fact that opportunities for participation should be included in the city Strategy and that their development should be goal-oriented. The Audit Board also pointed out that different means of participation should be compiled in one place on [the city's website](#). Both proposals have been implemented.

Oulu has implemented so-called [participatory budgeting](#) since 2018. In 2021 and 2022, a total of 50,000 and 70,000 euros were reserved for this purpose in the city budget. However, the Audit Board noted in its evaluation that the participation of Oulu residents in brainstorming the use of the sum has remained small compared to other large cities. The Audit Board stated in its proposal that the operating model should be developed and communications increased. By asking for the citizens' views, information about the right direction of development can be obtained.

According to the Local Government Act, city residents and service users can submit initiatives to the city ([initiative instructions in Finnish](#)). However, relatively few initiatives are submitted, for example in 2022, 44 initiatives were made. The Audit Board noted that all replies to initiatives must be submitted within three months or the initiator must be informed of delay. At the moment, this was not entirely done. Initiatives are reported to the City Council twice a year.

The city's interaction plan that develops its opportunities for participation and influence should remain in force without interruption. The monitoring reporting of the plan should be simplified so that it can be utilized in management. Digital opportunities for participation have developed and lowered the threshold for participation, but it is important to acknowledge that encountering people improves the interaction experience. Residents who have participated and used the opportunity to influence must be informed about how their matter was decided on and what it resulted in. It is good for the city and the wellbeing services counties to find common ways to implement the right to participate and influence, because the rights to participate are similar in legislation. In participatory budgeting, the brainstorming phase

attendance has been small compared to other big cities, which indicates that the operation model must be developed and communications amplified. The municipal survey provides an opportunity to obtain information on the right direction of development. Initiatives under the Local Government Act are one means of participation with many opportunities to develop the city's activities. Making initiatives should be encouraged in the same way as other means of participation and influence. Responses to initiatives must clearly state whether the initiative is supported and what proceeding actions will take place.

3.3 Participation in Planning

In planning work, it is important to take into account different groups' participation. Representatives of several different parties have participated in the work of the working group preparing the interaction plan: the City of Oulu personnel, organizations, the Local Democracy Committee and Oulu Youth Council (ONE), as well as representatives of entrepreneurs. In addition, in connection with the preparation of the plan, surveyed experiences of and opinions on participation and interaction have been and will be organized utilizing different methods of participation, either as part of events or through surveys.

3.3.1 Survey in Nuorten foorumi

An event focusing on influencing and targeted for young people, Nuorten foorumi, is organized every autumn on week 42. The target group for the event is lower secondary school pupils and also older students. At Nuorten foorumi, various organizations, associations, different city operators and political parties meet, network and exchange ideas with young people. Summaries of the surveys of Nuorten foorumi autumn 2022 event can also be found on the Nuorten Oulu website.

Nuorten foorumi conducted a visitor survey on young people's opportunities for participation. Majority of the respondents felt that young people have enough opportunities to influence in Oulu. There was a total of 149 respondents.

Below is a word cloud of open question responses.



In what kind of matters would you like to influence the city of Oulu? The young people referred most to the opportunities of influencing hobbies, followed by the city's pleasant environment and urban planning, and almost equally to matters related to school/education.

3.3.2 Robot Phone Call Results

On week 6, the City of Oulu asked opinions on the city's opportunities for participation and influencing and their development needs. Through robot phone calls. The questions were asked in the voice of the City of Oulu's new mayor, Seppo Määttä. Hearing the residents' voice and opinions is important when developing participation and interaction. The aim of the phone calls was to also try a new method of involving residents in participation. Plenty of responses were gained through the robot phone calls.

The robot called 2000 numbers in one day. The call reached 1176 people, meaning 59 per cent of the sample corresponding to the target groups.

The first question 'Do you feel like you can participate and influence the planning of services and activities of the City of Oulu?' received a total of 782 responses.

- 5,2 % strongly agreed
- 21,1% somewhat agreed
- 32,2 % did not know
- 26,9 % somewhat disagreed
- 14,6 % strongly disagreed

The second question on whether there is sufficient dialogue between the decision-makers and residents in Oulu received a total of 684 responses.

- 4,2 % strongly agreed
- 24,3 % somewhat agreed
- 35,1 % did not know
- 24 % somewhat disagreed
- 12,4 % strongly disagreed

The third question on whether the residents' voluntary activities are supported sufficiently in Oulu received a total of 634 responses.

- 3,8 % strongly agreed
- 29,7 % somewhat agreed
- 42,7 % did not know
- 15,9 % somewhat disagreed
- 7,9 % strongly disagreed

The fourth, open-ended question asking 'If you were in my role as the city mayor, what matter would you work for?' received a total of 315 responses. The themes listed below emerged in the open responses.

Theme 1: Investing in the services and well being of families with children

Theme 2: Investing in senior citizens

Theme 3: Investing in sports and exercise and sport facilities

Theme 4: Improving the functionality of the city centre of Oulu

3.3.3 Results of Personnel Participation Survey

During the spring, a participation survey in Akkuna was executed for the personnel, inquiring about the implementation of participation and influence concerning residents and city stakeholders, i.e. organizations and companies, in services. A total of 318 people responded to the survey.

Residents' participation and interaction

The residents can participate and influence in the planning of the City of Oulu's services and activities statement received over 60 per cent of responses thinking that there is still a need for development in implementing participation and influence. Participation was experienced to be executed using different methods, such as in various events, through surveys and by other methods, but communication about the results and effectiveness was perceived to perhaps remain low or not conveyed to a resident.

Open-ended responses suggested, for example, that planning teams (for spaces, green spaces, buildings) included more voluntary representatives of residents and/or space users or people who would be using the spaces for work in the future.

One development suggestion that arose was also a clear website where finding pending city plans and changes to them as well as instructions and a link on how to influence in sufficient time and at the right phase would be easy.

There is enough dialogue between the personnel, the elected officials and the residents in Oulu section highlighted clear developmental needs. More than 70% of the respondents felt that there was still room for development in joint dialogue.

The responses highlighted, for example, the fact that the personnel have not met the elected officials through any means. The so-called members of one's own board were not known either.

The respondents felt that events held by the city mayor, for example resident evenings and events with coffee serving, were good. The impact of Covid on events was acknowledged in the responses too.

In Oulu, residents' voluntary activities are sufficiently supported (e.g. events, use of facilities, community activities). Over a half of the respondents felt the support was inadequate or were not aware of how resident activities are supported in the present. This point was raised in multiple open-ended responses. Respondents felt that there are available spaces for residents, but that the spaces' using possibilities should be communicated about more. Regional differences in availability of spaces was also experienced.

The reservation service Varaamo used by the library was suggested to be expanded to ease the use of facilities. In order to ease the use of community centres' facilities, it was proposed that the websites of the centres could clearly state which facilities can be booked free of charge, who can book them and where. The digital workshop in Jääli was stated to be a good initiator for the versatile use of facilities and equipment. The need for meeting places was experienced as significant for developing a sense of community and activity after the pandemic.

How I would increase residents' participation in the city's services, planning and decision-making and how I would develop interaction regarding residents, the open-ended responses raised, for example, the following suggestions:

- More surveys, also more physical presence in, for example, family events.
- More discussion: councils, regional planning groups, discussion events.
- More communications, information about influencing channels and opportunities.
- Clear, repeatable feedback channels.

Participation and interaction of stakeholders

The stakeholders of the City of Oulu (organizations, associations and businesses) can participate in and influence the planning of the city's services and activities section's personnel responses highlighted uncertainty of the stakeholders' opportunities for participation and influencing. Over half of the respondents would develop the stakeholders' opportunities for participation. It was also felt that the stakeholders' opportunities for participation may vary by sector or that not all stakeholders' opportunities are on the same level.

The responses highlighted, for example, how small entrepreneurs or organizations could make their voices heard.

Joint forums in which stakeholders could participate were also proposed. Developing organizational collaboration also emerged in the responses.

There is enough dialogue between the personnel, the elected officials and the stakeholder (organization and companies) in Oulu statement's responses emerged a clear developmental need. Over 70 % of respondents felt the need to increase joint dialogue. It was felt especially necessary for elected officials to be involved in everyday services. A need for targeted participation was especially felt needed when things are changed or something new is done.

The stakeholders' (organizations and companies) voluntary activities are sufficiently supported (for example, events, use of facilities and spaces, communal activities) section's responses noted that more information was needed to support the activities of stakeholders. More than half of the respondents felt that there was insufficient support for activities.

An easy-to-use calendar was proposed for the stakeholders' use of the city's facilities and, for example, for making bookings. Awareness between different sectors should be increased, for example, regarding booking event and meeting spaces. It was felt that thorough evaluation of the entirety of organizational assistance was needed. Drawing up principles for a safer space as a city level document was seen necessary.

How I would increase stakeholder participation in the city's services, planning and decision-making, and develop interaction regarding stakeholders section's open-ended responses raised the following developmental matters:

- By increasing opportunities to influence and bringing out new ideas.
- Compiling information to one easily accessible place, open communications and marketing about events and the utilization possibilities of spaces.
- Discussions and events.
- Association coordinators and human resources for stakeholder collaboration and networking.
- Better feedback channels, proper processing of the feedbacks and questions submitted through the channels and taking following measures.

3.4 Monitoring and Evaluation of the Fulfilment of the Objectives and Measures Presented in the Plan

The fulfilment of the objectives and measures of the participation and interaction plan will be evaluated in 2024, 2027 and 2030. Objectives and measures can be updated as a part of the evaluation on different years.

Regular participation surveys for residents and stakeholders are part of monitoring participation.

The functionality of participation and interaction is measured between the city and the residents, as well as between the city and the stakeholders in everyday encounters, networks, planning and preparation of services and participation in decision-making.

The city actively interacts with its residents and stakeholders and takes different views and feedbacks into account as a part of decision-making.

The members of the interaction plan working group are responsible for preparing the evaluation and the monitoring. They evaluate the fulfilment of the plan's objectives and measures in their division and carry forward the monitoring to management groups and boards.

The city's joint evaluation report will be compiled and summarized for the City Board to approve.

House Rules 1: Participation in Oulu



House Rules 2: Interaction in Oulu



► www.ouka.fi/osallistu (in Finnish)

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Participating in Oulu

**The City of Oulu Participation and
Interaction Plan 2023–2030**

