

Assessment of the City of Helsinki's participation work in the strategy period of 2017–2021



Helsinki

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Summary of the results

The main principles of participation work in Helsinki are the utilisation of the knowledge and expertise of individuals and communities, facilitating independent activities and creating equal participation opportunities.

The City-level participation and interaction model describes the structures, objectives and key areas of participation work. The participation and interaction model emphasises connecting participation to all of the City's operations. Previously, residents were able to influence the City in a variety of matters, but participation has been sparse. As a result of the participation and interaction model, the City's participation work has become clearer, more systematic and more managed. The divisions' participation plans compile the goals and procedures for strengthening residents' participation in developing services.

Helsinki has developed a variety of participation methods, which are being used extensively in service development and decision-making preparations alike. The service development work has been carried out as broader wholes from perspectives such as that of regionality, providing residents with new kinds of opportunities for participating in and influencing the development of their residential area.

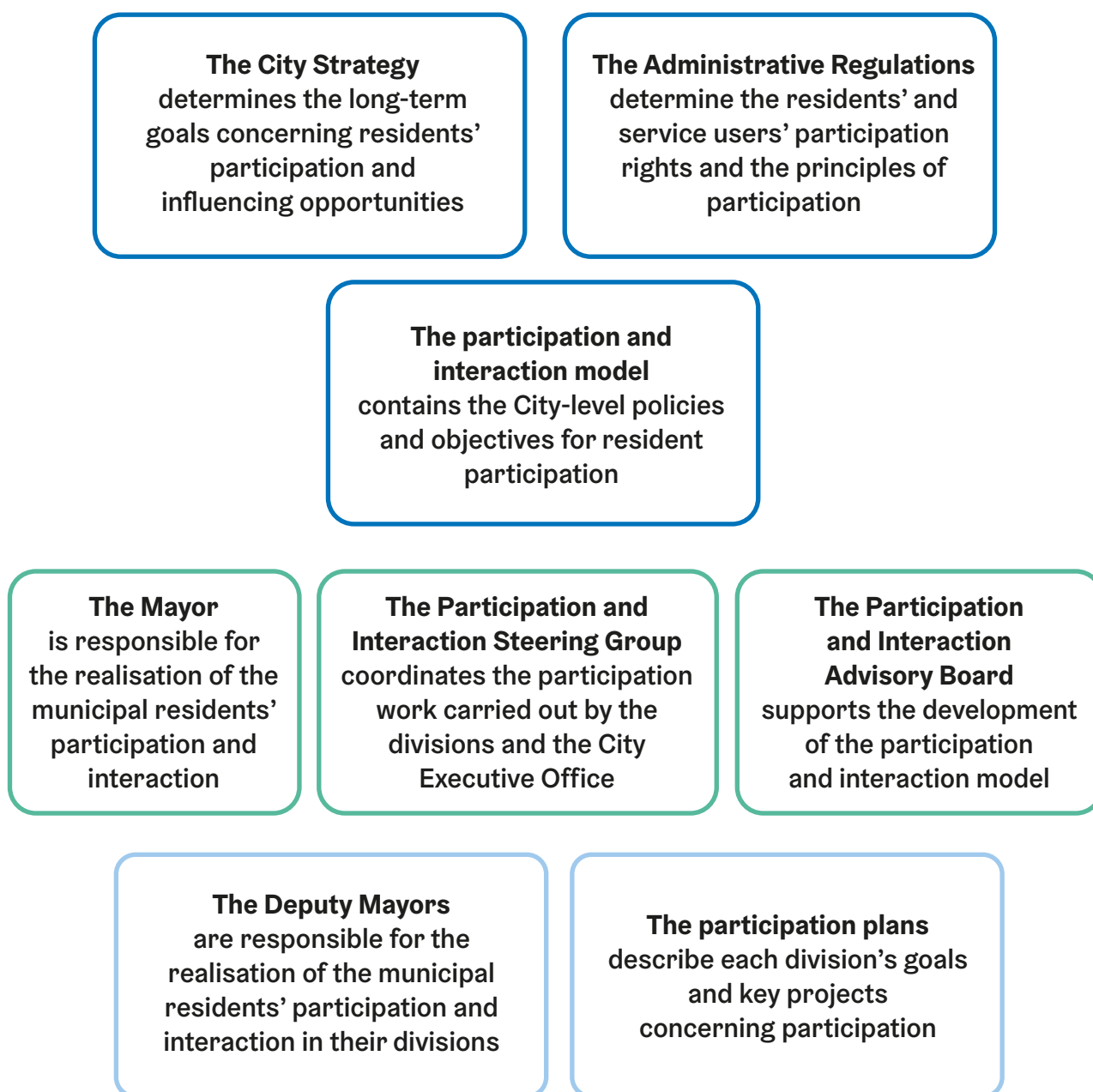
With the participation and influencing model introduced, Helsinki launched a City-level participatory budgeting model called OmaStadi, as well as borough and business liaison operations, as new forms of participation work. The City's residents, experts

and stakeholders have expressed their pleasure with both forms of liaison operations. Participatory budgeting has proven to be a form of participation that reaches and activates residents well, but is also challenging in some areas. In the first implementation round, the voting percentage in participatory budgeting rose to an internationally high level. Furthermore, Helsinki has received international recognition in particular for developing digital participation.

The significance of participation in all of the City's operations must be increased further by promoting an open operating culture and interactive operating methods, as well as utilising feedback from residents. Increasing interactivity in the City's operations and management would improve development of the City and strengthen the experience of participation and commitment to shared goals among staff and residents.

From a resident perspective, the greatest participation-related challenge for a participatory City has to do with clarifying its communications concerning participation opportunities. Helsinki's growth into an increasingly multicultural city is challenging the City to develop its participation and influencing opportunities to make them increasingly multilingual and diverse. Opening the City's facilities for resident use plays a key role in facilitating independent activities for residents, and the development of related practices has had a slow but positive start.

Implementation of the participation and interaction model and distribution of work within the City organisation



The participation and interaction model strengthened the diversity of the City of Helsinki's participation work

The participation and interaction model was introduced in Helsinki in connection with an overhaul of the City's management system in 2017. The objective of the model is to improve customer orientation, create equal participation opportunities and make the City organisation's operating culture more open and participatory.

Initially, an extensive group of representatives of different departments participated in preparing the participation and interaction model, while experts from all upcoming divisions took part in the second phase. A wide variety of co-creation methods were used together with residents when preparing the model, and several information events were held in different phases of the preparation process. It was decided that the participation and interaction model would be built on principles of participation that aim at increasing openness in decision-making and strengthening customer and user orientation perspectives in the development of services. The utilisation of the knowledge and expertise of individuals and communities, facilitating independent activities and creating equal participation opportunities were listed as participation principles in the Administrative Regulations. Concurrently, the management of participation was determined to be the responsibility of the mayor and the deputy mayors. A two-level management structure was created for the management of participation: in addition to the mayor and deputy mayor, the City's external experts are represented in the Mayor's Participation and Interaction Advisory Board, while the City's divisions and the City Executive Office are represented in the Participation and Interaction Steering Group.

The City Board approved the introduction and

resourcing of the participation and interaction model on 13 November 2017 (item 1047). Based on the decision, Helsinki launched its borough and business liaison operations as entirely new operating models. Three other positions were also established for implementing City-level participation work and participatory budgeting. The annual budget for the staff resources, consisting of a total of thirteen City Executive Office employees and supervisors, is approximately €767,000.

Resident feedback regarding the preparation work for the participation and interaction model highlighted residents' problems with the size of the organisation and finding the right expert party. The City hired seven borough liaisons in response to the residents' wish for easier co-operation between the City and residents. The participation and interaction model also involved identifying the important role of businesses in developing areas and the entire city, and three business liaisons were hired to carry out this interaction. Another novelty was the City's decision in principle regarding the launch of City-level participatory budgeting. On 13 June 2018 (item 176), the City Council established a participation fund, the €40 million capital of which was used for starting the first round of participatory budgeting in 2018.

As the participation and interaction model was approved, it was also decided that each division would develop an individual participation plan that describes how the participation principles listed in the Administrative Regulations are to be implemented in the division's work. The participation plans play an important role in changing the City's operating culture, as the plans describe how participation work is to be deployed at all service levels

of the division. The City Board also required that the divisions report how their participation work progresses to the division committees on a regular basis.

Participation has a prominent presence in the current City Strategy. According to the Strategy, Helsinki will strengthen its position as a pioneer in participation and openness. The 'realisation of resident engagement in the divisions' strategy gauge provides a quantitative tool for monitoring the extent of the

use of participation methods in different services. The strategy gauge does not, however, facilitate qualitative monitoring. The City-level strategy gauges also include the voting percentage in participatory budgeting, which rose to an internationally high level (8.6%) in the first implementation round.

Resident and user satisfaction is among the City's key effectiveness gauges, and the divisions monitor resident and user satisfaction extensively as part of development of services.

The ten areas of the participation and interaction model



Borough liaisons
(regional participation)



**Opening the use of
the City's facilities**



Business liaisons
(regional participation)



Open data



Participatory budgeting



Initiatives and feedback



The divisions' participation work



Influencer bodies



Volunteer activities



Digital participation

Assessment of the areas of the participation and interaction model

In the decision to establish the participation and interaction model made by the City Board in 2017, the City's participation work was described through ten key areas of participation. The areas are regional participation (borough and business liaison operations), initiatives and feedback, open data, digital participation, opening the use of the City's facilities, participatory budgeting, the divisions' participation work, volunteer activities and influencer bodies.

The assessment describes how the implementation of these areas has progressed in 2017–2021. Observations on the progress of operations, key successes and development areas were compiled for the assessment from approximately ten surveys and reports on the City's participation work and its areas. Furthermore, the evaluation utilised the assessment reports of the divisions' participation plans and academic studies concerning the

management system overhaul. The assessment was carried out in interaction with the Participation and Interaction Advisory Board, the Participation and Interaction Steering Group, a participatory budgeting project group and the City's participation experts. The Participation and Citizen Information Unit of the Communications Department of the City Executive Office was responsible for carrying out the assessment. The divisions are responsible for assessments of their own participation plans and will carry out a final assessment of their plans in the spring of 2021.

An interim assessment of the participation and interaction model carried out in the spring of 2019 also involved Helsinki residents, who participated in open resident events. Participatory budgeting has been assessed systematically during its implementation in co-operation with residents and users of the OmaStadi.hel.fi online service.

Initiatives and feedback



Initiatives from members of the municipality and service users, as well as initiatives from young people, are communicated to the City Council twice a year. In 2020,

the City received 15 initiatives from municipal residents, which is around one third of the 42 initiatives received in 2019. The City receives initiatives via the Kuntalaisaloite.fi online service maintained by the Ministry of Justice and as direct submissions to the City of Helsinki Registrar's Office. In total, 40 initiatives from young people were received in 2020 (67 initiatives were submitted in 2019 and 25 in 2018).

In the autumn of 2020, the City's Audit Department conducted a survey among Youth Council representatives on topics such as the processing of young people's initiatives. Almost half (46%) of the young people who responded to the survey feel that initiatives can genuinely influence the City's operations. Of the respondents, 70% share the notion that young people outside the Youth Council are not familiar with their opportunities to submit initiatives.

In its statement given on 14 September 2020, the Youth Council drew attention to the fact that the number of initiatives submitted by young people has decreased by more than half when compared to the first half of 2019. The Youth Council's assessment is that this may be because even viable initiatives do not necessarily lead to concrete procedures and initiatives are not responded to quickly enough. The Youth Council's view is that in order to support diverse participation among young Helsinki residents, it is important that young people who are not in the Council also put the initiative system to use to promote matters that they find important.

In its decision given on 5 October 2020 (item 625), the City Board required the young people's initiative system to be developed so that the

guidance and support provided to young people regarding submitting initiatives is increased at schools and in youth work. The goal is for the initiative system to be genuinely available to all young people. Furthermore, efforts will be made to shorten the response times. Development work on the initiative system was started with a service design project that involved young people in 2020.

In 2018 and 2019, efforts were made to improve the processing of initiatives, by means such as piloting the AloiteAsema event concept, the purpose of which is to bring the young people who have created initiatives, other young people interested in the matters mentioned in the initiatives and the City's experts together to give thought to how each initiative could or should be taken forward.

The City receives an annual total of approximately 70,000 feedback submissions and contacts from municipal residents via the current feedback system, and the number has increased every year. Feedback data text analytics trials were carried out in 2017–2018, yielding positive experiences. The objective has been to publish feedback submissions both via the Open311 interface and on the City's website. However, the number of published feedback submissions has been small; in 2019, only 8% of all processed feedback submissions were published. The City's service promise states that feedback is replied to within five weekdays (seven days). In 2020, the City's average processing time was 5.5 days (6.8 days in 2019).

The preparation and procurement process for a new feedback and contact system began in the spring of 2019, and the plan is to introduce the new system, after a tendering process, in 2022. The goal is to make giving and processing feedback more fluent, increase transparency regarding the effectiveness of feedback and increase the utilisation of feedback data in services.

The City of Helsinki receives an annual total of
approximately 70,000 feedback submissions
from municipal residents.

Regional participation



The seven major district specific borough liaisons started their work in the spring of 2018. The borough liaisons' work has emphasised developing participatory budgeting and implementing it in co-operation with residents and the City's divisions. The borough liaisons have organised and facilitated numerous events that support participation in different districts, provided information about current participation opportunities in different areas and provided advice on matters related to the City's services and influencing opportunities. The communication, guidance and advice work has been carried out via multiple channels at events, on social media channels and by e-mail and telephone. The borough liaisons have identified regional co-operation and communication structures and participated in regional networks. The aforementioned procedures cover the basic duties determined for the borough liaisons. The borough liaison operations were awarded the Ministry of Finance's democracy recognition in 2019. The grounds for awarding the democracy recognition state that the borough liaisons' operations have, among other things, increased participation among population groups who may be difficult to reach by other means.

The business liaison operations began in September 2018. The three business liaisons have their own content-related points of focus, and they all have the entire city as their area of operation. The business

liaisons focus on overall matters covered by the Urban Environment Division, businesses' workforce and know-how needs, and developing co-operation between businesses, entrepreneur communities and the City. The business liaisons' goal is to contribute to making Helsinki the most business-positive city in Finland in accordance with the City Strategy. The business liaisons do grassroots work with businesses, provide entrepreneurs with extensive guidance towards the City's services regardless of division, and promote regional vitality by developing co-operation between entrepreneurs in accordance with the City's participation and interaction model.

During the coronavirus pandemic that started in the spring of 2020, the business liaisons assisted businesses and the City organisation alike through means such as taking part in realising the Senate Square terrace. The service was targeted particularly at businesses that are essential to Helsinki's vitality, such as restaurants and other service businesses, which are major employers among groups such as young people and immigrants. The business liaisons also played an important role in processing solo entrepreneurs' support applications.

The business liaison operations have generated highly positive feedback from co-operation partners. Based on a feedback survey conducted regarding the business liaison operations, conducting business with the business liaisons was found to work smoothly and be useful.

During the coronavirus pandemic that started in the spring of 2020, the business liaisons assisted businesses and the City organisation alike through means such as taking part in realising the Senate Square terrace.

Open data



Open data refers to data such as public information accumulated by public administrations that has been opened in a structured form to be utilised freely and free of charge by parties outside the organisation as well. By opening data, the City provides universities, developer communities, businesses and the media with an opportunity to utilise city information for purposes such as developing services and communications. Since 2011, the City of Helsinki has been opening its data in the Helsinki Region Infoshare (HRI.fi) online service shared by all Cities in the metropolitan area. Helsinki is an international pioneer in opening data. The operations of HRI have been established as part of the distribution of open data and promoting open administration. Events and network co-operation strengthen residents' participation opportunities.

Feedback received from events and a user survey conducted in 2020 has been positive.

In 2020, the HRI.fi online service was visited by more than 76,000 people. The number had increased from the previous year. The service features a total of approximately 660 data items, of which the City of Helsinki has opened 396. The service takes user orientation into account by opening increasingly more extensive unified data sets via interfaces.

The City publishes information such as feedback published in the Open311 interface and directed to the feedback system, after a review and without the submitter's information, as open data. In addition to this, anyone can download the results of all surveys in table format from the KerroKantasi online service.

Since 2019, the opening of interfaces has been monitored with an open interface number strategy gauge. 26 external interfaces were opened in 2020.

**The HRI.fi online service features
a total of approximately**

396

**items of data opened
by the City of Helsinki.**



Digital participation



Digital participation services are being built and developed as part of the 'resident services' section of the City's digitalisation programme. The Participation and Citizen Information Unit of the Communications Department of

the City Executive Office serves as the product owner for several participation platforms that are provided for the use of the entire City organisation.

Currently, the most significant digital participation platform is Decidim, which the City is developing as part of an international developer community. Decidim is an open source platform, the development of which is being managed by the City of Barcelona. Helsinki has been a highly active developer in the Decidim community, and many components implemented by the City have been put to use extensively. The implementation of Helsinki's online participatory budgeting service OmaStadi has sparked international interest (several municipalities and the Coldigit project in Sweden, Trondheim in Norway and Lausanne in Switzerland). Decidim has also been utilised in other participation and ideation processes since 2019. Such processes include the Mayor's idea contest MaaIlmantoimivinkaupunkki.fi, the staff's internal idea channel Ideapaahimo, young people's budgeting model RuutiBudjetti and, as the latest addition, the Experimentation Accelerator of the City Executive Office's Strategies Division. In 2020, the OmaStadi online service carried out user-friendly backend functions, making the work of both the borough liaisons and the divisions easier when assessing participatory budgeting proposals and plans.

The City's KerroKantasi online service has been put to active use. Between its opening in December 2014 and the end of 2020, 180 hearings for municipal residents have been published in the service. The hearings have enabled residents to give their opinions on various topical matters to be prepared or already being prepared. The number of people visiting the service has increased every year (37,000 visits in 2017, 71,500 visits in 2019), and users have submitted a total of approximately 35,000 comments and opinions. The Urban Environment Division has opened the greatest number of hearings. KerroKantasi is an open source service of the City, and the source code is currently being utilised by the City of Turku as well.

In late 2019, the City acquired the Harava survey tool to complement its digital participation toolbox by providing the divisions with a platform for map-based surveys for municipal residents. The City's own KerroKartalla online service was decommissioned in 2018 due to its outdated technical implementation.

Helsinki's participation work has generated national and international interest, and information about the City's participation work is provided through several forums. Efforts will be made to provide information about concrete implementation of the participation work more extensively on the Osallistu.helsinki website published in January 2021. The website provides residents with information about current topics related to participation. The website features a collection of information about active participation processes (such as KerroKantasi hearings) and participation events beyond the Linked Events interface. The website also features a method library with an extensive collection of information about different types of participation platforms, as well as facilitation and ideation methods. The goal is to provide tools for those who want to deepen their own know-how and try different types of participation platforms and methods in their work. The English-language content of the website is provided so that it serves both international users seeking participation information and English-speaking residents of Helsinki.

An increasingly large portion of participation processes are implemented partially or fully online. Facilitating equal participation requires citizens to have access to sufficient support for using digital services. The Participation and Citizen Information Unit of the Communications Department of the City Executive Office coordinates City-level digital support. In the spring of 2020, almost all digital support locations (libraries, assisted living facilities, etc.) were closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, leading to the launch of remote digital support as an entirely new function. Through digital support, residents can contact City employees and volunteers working in the remote digital support network by telephone for help with problem situations. Helsinki's digital support service has its own website, Digi-tuki.hel.fi.

A total of approximately 35,000 comments and opinions have been submitted in the KerroKantasi online service.

Opening the use of the City's facilities



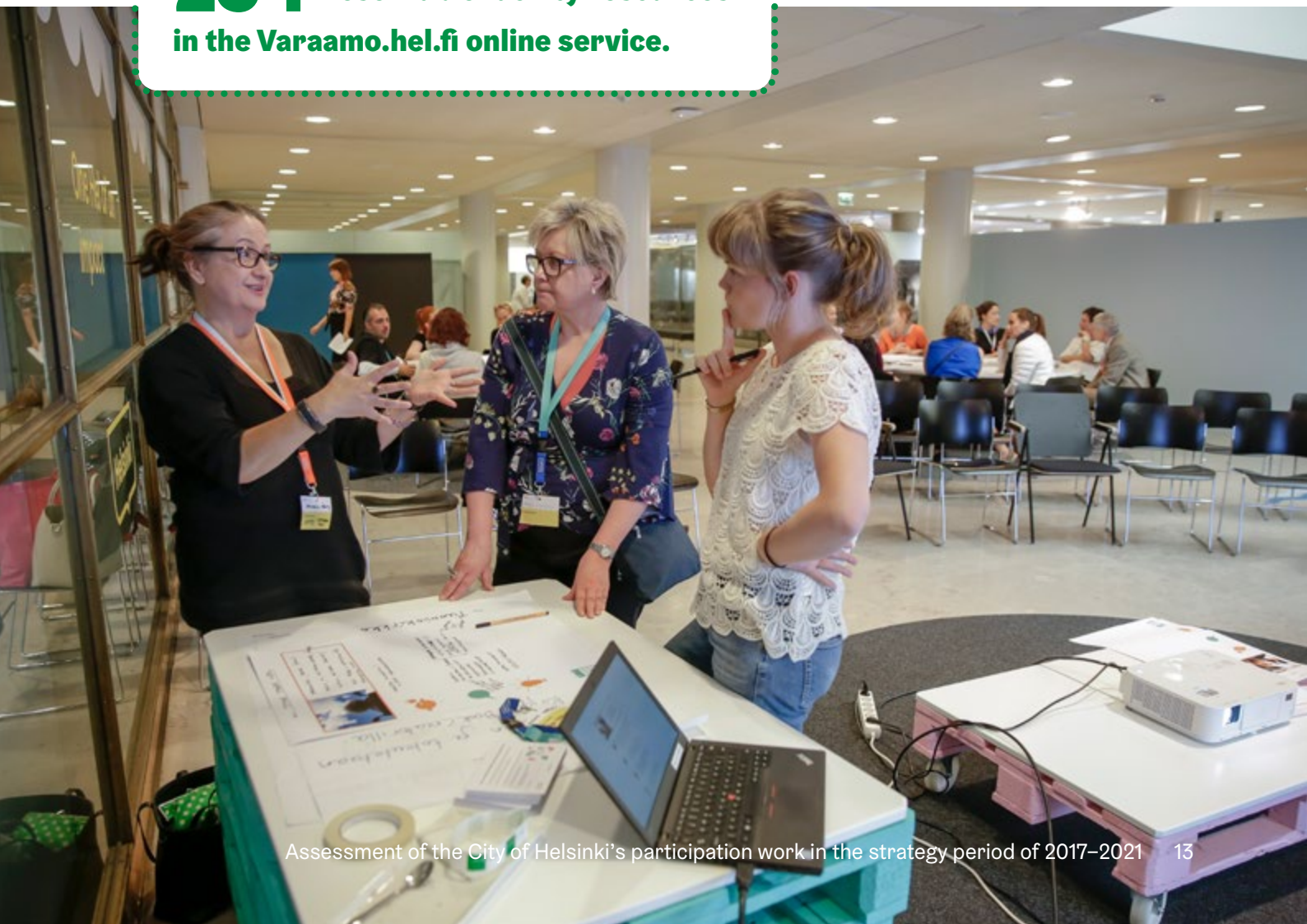
The City Board gave its decision on the principles of resident use of the City's facilities on 20 August 2018 (item 505). The principles of resident use make it easier to use the City's facilities for cultural and civic activities. The main rule of the principles is that the facilities are available to civic society and third-sector operators outside the primary operating hours. Facilitating the resident use of facilities is also taken into account in the City's real estate programme (City Board 24 June 2019, item 485). One project included in the City's digitalisation programme for 2019–2021 is that the City will overhaul its digital services related to reserving and relinquishing the City's facilities.

In 2020, work was started to develop the management model for the facility reservation system, including creating a proposal regarding the management structure and ownership of the facility

reservation system. Furthermore, City-wide development work was started on a digital system that facilitates a good customer experience. The development work will be carried out for several years, and the objective is to develop the next version of the electronic facility reservation service Varaamo to make it possible to reserve all of the City's facilities via one service. The development work was started in 2020 by extensively hearing residents and stakeholders and holding numerous co-creation workshops.

In 2019, customers reserved facilities via the City's facility reservation service Varaamo for a total of 240,000 hours. The reservation rate was double that of 2018 (120,000 hours). The amount of facility resources available for reservation has also increased, and there were 254 reservable resources in 2020 (229 in 2019 and 122 in 2018).

254 reservable facility resources
in the **Varaamo.hel.fi** online service.



Participatory budgeting



The City allocated €4.4 million for realising residents' ideas in the first round of participatory budgeting in 2018–2019. The allocation was divided among the major districts based on their number of residents and for implementing proposals concerning the entire city. In the first round, residents submitted almost 1,300 proposals in the OmaStadi online service, nearly 300 of which were developed into plans to be voted on. The participatory budgeting voting was carried out in October 2019. The voting was the largest electronic voting programme organised by the public sector in the history of Finland. In accordance with the rules of participatory budgeting, all Helsinki residents turning 12 or older that year were eligible to vote. The voting percentage in the first round rose to almost 9%, which can be considered high even on an international scale. 44 plans were voted to be implemented. 29 of the plans are

assigned to the Urban Environment Division, 10 to the Culture and Leisure Division and 5 to the Education Division. The divisions began implementing the plans in early 2020. More than one tenth of the projects were completed by the end of 2020, and the rest will be completed in 2021.

On 4 May 2020 (item 279), the City Board gave its decision on overhauled implementation principles for the second implementation round of participatory budgeting. The implementation principles were prepared based on experiences and feedback from the first round. The most significant reforms in the implementation principles are related to combining overlapping proposals, the voting practice, the annual cycle of implementing participatory budgeting and the allocated funds. The implementation cycle became biennial, and the allocation for the round was increased to €8.8 million. The second round was started with an ideation phase in October 2020.

44

**participatory
budgeting
plans were
selected to be
implemented in
2019.**

**Voting percentage in
participatory budgeting in 2019 8.6%**



The divisions' participation work



The divisions are responsible for realising participation in the development and implementation of their services. The divisions have created their own participation plans, which were approved by the division committees in November and December 2018. The divisions also report on implementing their participation plans to the division committees on a regular basis. The divisions' participation plans describe goals and procedures through which residents can take part in developing services. In particular, the participation plans highlight developing the customer experience by utilising feedback information, strengthening equality through multilingualism and communications, supporting the operations of regional networks by means such as providing them with facilities, improving residents' participation skills and knowledge and utilising digital services more extensively.

In the **Education Division**, education, teaching and learning are based on learners' participation and being heard. Children, pupils and students are involved in planning, developing and assessing activities and learning, and they gain experiences with democratic operations. The division's competence development plan emphasises customer orientation and participation, as well as communications and interaction. In order to monitor the development of information-based management and the customer experience, service entities and the administration conducted customer experience surveys featuring four themes: participation, the service experience, accessibility and realisation of the service in relation to meeting expectations. Based on the results, the division's strengths include everyday encounters, an approach that values people when producing services, co-operation between home and staff, a sense of security, and the staff's genuine desire to serve customers well, which is conveyed to the customers. Interacting with young people in a more personal manner and taking their needs into consideration, low-threshold communication and access to information and customers' influencing opportu-

nities were highlighted as areas for development. Participation was highlighted as a shared area for development. Each service entity and administration has determined a participation-related development procedure for 2021. Regional influencing has been developed with a facility network review with the Urban Environment Division and municipal residents. In order to strengthen regional participation, the use of a pedagogic plan to take users' views and needs into consideration has been piloted in the planning of new buildings and renovations.

The **Urban Environment Division** has begun to organise Helsinki New Horizons events in each major district. The events bring together different services' plans and projects, enabling residents to conveniently get a comprehensive picture of the development of the area. Since the coronavirus pandemic started, these events have been held online. More than 200 residents have attended each event, and their feedback has been positive. The division also actively uses online surveys: for example, more than 30 KerroKantasi surveys were conducted in 2020. A co-operation network of organisations has been assembled to support participation among immigrants. The network is utilised in communications and developing participation. The communications emphasise clear language and visualisation of participation opportunities. Staff are provided with training regarding clear language, public speaking and interaction methods. 29 of the 44 proposals that proceeded to the implementation phase of the first round of participatory budgeting were assigned entirely or partially for the division to realise. Participation is yet to be established as part of all processes that affect residents' services and living environment. Areas in need of development include the management of participation, measurements, equality, supporting residents' independent activities and utilising feedback. The effectiveness of participation and communication regarding it must also be developed. The division monitors residents' experience of participation and its effectiveness with an annual communication survey and utilises the results in planning operations.

The divisions' participation plans describe goals and procedures through which residents can take part in developing services.

The **Culture and Leisure Division's** objective was to connect participation to the implementation and development of all the operations and services of the division in a permeating manner. Equality has been promoted by developing equality-conscious communications and the accessibility of digital services. However, equality work in developing services is quite fragmentary and requires improvements, such as strengthening know-how for designing facilities that are safe and accessible to all and staff training in the future. Users' participation in planning services has been promoted systematically. User-oriented planning and service design know-how have developed. The practices for hearing people in a vulnerable position require further development of know-how and resources.

Residents' and communities' knowledge and know-how are being utilised more extensively in development work. Assessing the representativeness of the expert parties involved and hearing new expert communities must be developed further. Independent activities are supported with grants, facilities, borrowable equipment and materials, and open information sharing. Meetings with new applicants and grant information events have been increased and new forms of grants have been introduced. The functionality of the Varaamo service has been developed and new facilities have been added to the service. The support models for independent activities have progressed well, but there is room for further development, particularly in the opening of facilities. Equal customer service has been supported with service design tools, training courses and new customer information measurement methods. The City must be able to increase resources and know-how for utilising customer information in practice. Planning processes have been

opened to make them more participatory. Members of the Youth Council take part in committee work, and young people's initiative operations have been developed. Residents' participation in decision-making must be developed in a more systematic direction.

In the Social Services and Health Care Division, participation is realised in customers' services and service development. The division has utilised customer panels, experience experts, online panellists and customer councils, as well as individual customers and families, in a variety of ways. Experience experts' reception operations have been established in substance abuse services, and in child welfare, the structures of experience expert operations have been clarified and established. The customer experience is being measured in all services with a wide variety of methods. The customer experience is being measured at approximately 300 locations. In order to strengthen regional participation, the views and needs of local residents are taken into account in developing services.

In addition to utilising various digital means of interaction, the division has involved residents by holding resident evenings, resident walks and workshops. Interaction plans have been implemented at Myllypuro Health and Well-being Centre, in health stations' service procurements, in the naming of the oral and dental centre and in the needs description of the health and well-being centre and family centre to be built in Haaga, among others. In 2020, the coronavirus situation posed challenges for interaction with municipal residents, and group functions and meetings have been cancelled. Over the course of the year, the division found new digital ways to interact with municipal residents and collect their views.



Volunteer activities



In May 2018, the coordination of volunteer activities was centralised to the Culture and Leisure Division. During the autumn of 2018 and the spring of 2019, shared practices regarding volunteer activities were strengthened by holding several co-creation workshops and conducting surveys with persons responsible for the volunteer activities of the City's different divisions. Centralising the operations has strengthened shared practices and tightened City-wide development work.

One important development area has been the diversification of external and internal communications and strengthening instruction skills in volunteer activities. In the autumn of 2020, the City launched the volunteer activity website [Vapaaehtoistoiminta.hel.fi](https://vapaaehtoistoiminta.hel.fi), which compiles the volunteer activities of all divisions in one place for easy access. The website lowers the threshold to take part in volunteer activities. Further development of the website in 2021 will result in digital features to be used to support the creation of high-quality and safe volunteer activity paths in Helsinki.

In a survey conducted with volunteer activity participants at the turn of 2019 and 2020, more than 90% of the respondents found the volunteer tasks meaningful. More than 60% would recommend taking part in Helsinki's volunteer activities. The volunteers' responses highlight added content and value being brought to their own lives. Volunteers are satisfied with the volunteer tasks and find the activities very important. Volunteers would like to have more extensive information about the different volunteer activity opportunities, and they find the quality of

the instruction work of the City's volunteer activities important as well.

Together with the parishes of Helsinki, the City launched the Helsinki Helpline service due to the coronavirus pandemic. The service was intended to ensure that Helsinki residents over the age of 70 could receive practical help and conversational support during the pandemic. The Helsinki Helpline service was active in March–August 2020, with organisations and volunteers taking part in implementing it.

The City supports various organisations and communities by awarding an annual total of approximately €80 million in grants. The customer orientation and understanding of the grant process has been developed and its practices have been unified during the strategy period. The grant system is being assessed and developed together with grant applicants. The grants are awarded to support the civic society of Helsinki extensively, and the support is gratuitous. Carrying out the operations in accordance with the principles of good governance is being ensured by means such as random inspections. The significance of ethical principles has been strengthened as part of the grant awarding process, and instructions have been issued for grant awardees to ensure the ethicality of their operations. Several significant new grant forms were introduced in the strategy period. These included but were not limited to the Culture and Leisure Division's special grant for recovering from operational crises caused by the coronavirus pandemic and the Culture and Leisure Division and the Social Services and Health Care Division's shared grant for cultural activities for elderly people funded with state inheritance funds.

**More than
60%
of volunteers
would
recommend
taking part
in Helsinki's
volunteer
activities.**

Influencer bodies



The following statutory influencer bodies operate in Helsinki: the Council of the Elderly, the Council on Disability and the Youth Council. The duties of presenter and secretary of the Council of the Elderly and the Council on Disability were transferred from the Social Services and Health Care Division to central administration in connection with the management system reform in the summer of 2017, which has promoted connecting the councils' operations to the City's participation work. The number of statements and opinions given by the Council of the Elderly increased in 2020, partially due to the Council's own activity. During the year, the Council of the Elderly gave 14 opinions and statements (8 in 2019), while the Council on Disability gave 10 opinions and statements (6 in 2019). The visibility of the influencer bodies has been increased through communications, e.g. by launching the Human Rights in Helsinki website.

In January 2019, the Youth Council's initiative led to the launch of a trial in which Youth Council representatives were granted the right to speak and be present at the division committees' meetings. As a result of the trial, the Youth Council representatives were granted a permanent right to speak and be present at the division committees' meetings in the autumn of 2019. Additionally, an investigation was started in the autumn of 2020 to serve as the basis for creating a proposition regarding granting the Youth Council representatives the right to take part in City Council meetings.

A survey conducted with the Council on Disability, the Council of the Elderly and the Youth Council in November 2020 was responded to by 22 council members. More than half of the members and

trustees of the Council of the Elderly and the Council on Disability responded to the survey, while the Youth Council had fewer respondents in comparison. Approximately 54% of the respondents feel that the City has provided very good or somewhat good opportunities for the respondent's council to influence the City's operations and services. The majority of the respondents are of the opinion that the councils have had major (36%) or moderate (60%) influence over the City's services. Only one respondent's assessment was that no influencing has taken place, while no respondents were of the opinion that the influencing has only been slight. With regard to influencing decision-making, the results were not as good. The level of influencing was assessed to be high in 10% of the responses and moderate in 67%. Nine out of ten respondents' assessment was that influencing opportunities have improved since 2017. Meetings with the City's staff members and trustees, as well as giving statements, were seen as the most important influencing methods. An information event and a KerroKantasi survey regarding the development of co-operation will be carried out for organisations and associations for the elderly and the disabled in February 2021.

Youth Council representatives who responded to a survey conducted by the City's Audit Department in the autumn of 2020 gave the Youth Council's participation in elections and its operations a positive assessment. 11 out of 13 respondents (85%) were of the opinion that being a member of the Youth Council has enabled them to influence the City's operations. Half of the respondent fully agreed with the statement "I have been able to influence the Youth Council's speeches in committees".

Statutory influencer bodies operating in Helsinki: the Council of the Elderly, the Council on Disability and the Youth Council

opinions and statements

	2020	2019
- Council of the Elderly	14	8
- Council on Disability	10	6
- Youth Council	approx. 10	9



Academic research materials and other key research pertaining to the participation and interaction model

Several academic studies and consultant reports have been ordered for assessing the management system overhaul. The assessments have not included a resident perspective, as interviews and other research methods have focused on the City's supervisors and trustees. Some of the assessments also examined the participation and interaction model and how participation has progressed. Furthermore, the City Executive Office has co-operated with the University of Helsinki in assessing participatory budgeting. Student theses have also been written on participatory budgeting. Below are key highlights from the studies from the perspective of participation.





More than 70% of the City's supervisors were of the opinion that participation and hearing trials for residents, communities and businesses were being implemented in the respondent's division.

Consulting firm KPMG's assessment research

In the previous management system assessment rounds carried out by consulting firm KPMG (spring of 2018 and 2019), one of the three key positive achievements identified was the fact that the management overhaul has created a good basis for making the City's operations more resident-oriented and involving residents in developing services.

Based on supervisor interviews conducted in the autumn of 2020 and survey results in particular, participation and resident orientation have improved in daily operations as facilitated by the division model. Examples of resident orientation mentioned include participatory budgeting, the divisions' participation plans, liaison operations and the Urban Environment Division's regional forums. An indicator of positive development is the observed change in thinking, according to which employees are there for the residents, not the City.

Resident orientation and participation are considered important and even a strategic spearhead. It is also acknowledged that there is a lot to do in customer-oriented service development. Even though customer orientation is spoken of frequently, many supervisors find that it has not yet been adequately implemented in practice. Resident orientation was strongly evident particularly in the early stages of the management system overhaul, in connection with the division model change. At the time, the message

emphasised was that the City is there for its residents and businesses, and this message is considered to have been effective.

On the other hand, the most positive aspects highlighted among all the effects pertaining to the management overhaul in the responses to the management overhaul survey were participation and resident orientation. An increasing number of supervisors were of the opinion that the customer experience and feedback are being utilised more systematically in developing services, the needs of residents and service users are emphasised more in the management of the division's services, and residents' participation and interaction opportunities in developing the division's operations have improved from the results of spring 2018 when compared to the results of autumn 2020. In the autumn of 2020, more than 70% of respondents were of the opinion that participation and hearing trials for residents, communities and businesses were being implemented in the respondent's division.

Due in part to the current situation, interviews with supervisors indicated mixed opinions on the development of more customer-oriented operations and resident participation in service development. A few of the supervisors interviewed no longer saw the previously observed positive development or found it difficult to give an opinion on the matter on behalf of residents.

Tampere University's assessment research

The key conclusion of the assessment study (2020) carried out by Tampere University based on the results of surveys conducted with persons such as the City's office holders, trustees and staff members is that residents' participation opportunities have been increased, but promoting participation is not connected to the City's management and the staff's basic work. The assessment states that one objective of the overhaul was to improve democratic decision-making, but this has not been realised extensively. Criticism focuses mostly on the fact the Council's role as a collective has not been strengthened, not on the citizen participation that the participation and interaction model aims at.

Citizen participation is considered strategically important in the City organisation, but it clashes with other values that are considered the most important, being overshadowed by aspects such

as professions, expertise, cost efficiency and other areas of the organisational reform. Another obstacle is the scarcity of resources allocated to promoting participation, as the resource intensity of work to support participation has not been taken into account sufficiently. Not enough work has been carried out to create value for participation together, due to which it does not yet steer the organisation's operations and service development extensively. The new meaning of citizen participation has not been understood on a large scale and across the organisation. Improving the effectiveness of participation would require more interactive management and critical examination of the participation channels and processes from the perspective of their accessibility, effectiveness, utilisation of resident information and use of the organisation's resources.

The University of Helsinki's BIBU survey on participatory budgeting

Researchers of the BIBU (Tackling Biases and Bubble in Participation) research project funded by the Strategic Research Council of the Academy of Finland have served as the City's research-based assessment partners regarding participatory budgeting. Helsinki has served as a partner in a partial study to support the development of participatory budgeting in Finland by developing and testing an evaluation model suitable for assessing municipalities' participation activities. Helsinki has tested a participation evaluation model called the Co-Creation Radar and used it as a central framework in developing and assessing participatory budgeting. According to an interim assessment published by the BIBU project, the early stages of Helsinki's participatory budgeting project (2018–2019) were successful in their implementation. The interim report urged the City to pay attention to the following implementation areas in the future: sufficient implementation transparency and dialogicality, increased participation among marginalised groups, streamlining of the process, smooth flowing of communications and clarity of the rules regarding residents' proposals.

The final assessment was published in December 2020. According to the report, the general assessment of the implementation is cautiously positive. The model is a significant democratic innovation in developing the City, emphasising direct participation, online democracy and deliberative democracy. Participatory budgeting is seen as a welcome new opportunity to participate and make a difference. It can be used to develop democracy in such a way that provides city residents with more say over decision-making. Recommendations for further development were related to aspects such as promoting equality, expanding co-creation and connecting it more strongly to be part of grassroots democracy, increasing active discussion regarding the contents of proposals, clarifying the objectives of participatory budgeting, and integrating research and assessment as part of the process. Many of the recommendations given in the report have already been taken into consideration in the principles for implementing the second round of participatory budgeting.

**Participatory budgeting
is seen as a welcome new
opportunity to participate and
make a difference.**

Voices of Helsinki residents in participatory budgeting

The Urban Research and Statistics Unit of the City Executive Office's Strategies Division has researched residents' voting behaviour in participatory budgeting. The unit's 2020 research review, entitled *Kaupunkilaisten äänet osallistuvassa budjetoinnissa*, Helsingin kaupungin osallistuvan budjetoinnin äänestys 2019 (Residents' Voices in Participatory Budgeting, the City of Helsinki's Participatory Budgeting Voting 2019) examined the results of the participatory budget voting held in 2019 and the voting activity of Helsinki residents. By international standards, Helsinki residents voted actively in par-

ticipatory budgeting. The voting percentage across the entire city was 8.6%. In some areas, voting activity was clearly even higher. Comprehensive school pupils proved to be particularly active voters, voting as part of their school day and education. Conversely, the voting activity of elderly residents was lower. When planning the next implementation rounds, thought should be given to how different population groups' voices could be heard more equally in the different phases of participatory budgeting in the future.

Theses

Many students writing their master's theses have been interested in participatory budgeting. **Pia Laulainen** (2019) wrote a thesis for Aalto University entitled *From OmaStadi towards MeidänStadi – research about the first year of the participatory budgeting model of the city of Helsinki and suggestions for the development*. The theoretical framework of Laulainen's work has played an important role in efforts to improve the equality of participatory budgeting.

Johanna Sinkkonen's (2018) study for the University of Tampere entitled *Osallistuva budjetointi demokratiainnovaationa: tapaustutkimus kolmen kunnan osallistuvan budjetoinnin kokeilusta* (Participatory Budgeting as a Democratic Innovation: a case study on three municipalities' participatory budgeting trial) found that if participatory budgeting is wanted to be a part of municipal administration that expands residents' participation and democracy, sufficient funds must be allocated to it and an implementation model that facilitates resident participation must be in place.

Andreas Sode's (2020) thesis for Aalto University entitled *OmaStadi Budgeting Game – an evaluation framework for working towards more inclusive participation through design games* researched the benefits of gamification in participatory budgeting. According to the thesis, the game increased the inclusivity, equality and creativity of the process and improved the quality of the plans submitted. However, the game was not assessed as improving the deliberative quality of discussions, as the most enthusiastic players were mostly focused on promoting their own ideas, ignoring others.

Pauli Saloranta's (2020) study for the University of Helsinki entitled *Helsingin osallistuvan budjetoinnin mallit ja muodot kansainvälisessä kontekstissa* (Helsinki's Participatory Budgeting Models and Forms

in an International Context) examined the method's global background and development, as well as Helsinki's solution. According to the study, special characteristics of Helsinki's participatory budgeting include equal individual participation and related planning participation. In addition to decision-making power, the solution emphasises co-creation, to which plenty of time is devoted by proposal makers and the City's experts alike. It opens the City's planning machinery to individual residents without excluding community participation. This makes residents temporarily part of the administration. The solution does not form new representational elements, unlike the internationally renowned model of Porto Alegre and the closest comparison point, Helsinki's young people's budgeting model RuutiBudjetti. All in all, participatory budgeting combines the functions of the right of initiative, co-creation and municipal referendums, which are well-established in Finland, in a new way.

Belinda Barbato and Antti Sarpo's (2020) thesis for Humak University of Applied Sciences entitled *Participation at its best? Reinforcing the sense of involvement through participatory budgeting events of the City of Helsinki* examined whether participatory budgeting events strengthened the experience of participation and what kind of factors affected the strengthening of the experience of participation. According to the thesis, participatory budgeting events and deliberative discussions therein play a major role in residents' experience of participation. Based on interviews and surveys, event participants expressed particular appreciation for the knowledgeability and solution orientation of the City's experts involved, a pleasant conversation atmosphere and goal-oriented work on matters important to residents and the City's experts. The thesis contains recommendations and a checklist for participatory budgeting co-creation events for ensuring deliberative discussions and strengthening the experience of participation.

Participation survey for Russian-speaking Helsinki residents

The participation survey for Russian-speaking residents was conducted as part of the City of Helsinki democracy trial, which is part of Sitra's national Demokratiakokeilut 2020 democracy trials project. The objective of Helsinki's democracy trial is to strengthen Russian-speaking residents' knowledge of the City's participation and influencing opportunities and to try different methods to increase participation. The trial was carried out by the City Executive Office's Participation and Citizen Information Unit and the Urban Environment Division. The Cultura Foundation served as the City's co-operation partner in the project. The survey was open in the summer of 2020. 623 responses were collected for analysis.

The respondents were asked about their knowledge of the different participation and influencing methods in Helsinki and any experiences with them. Overall, the majority of respondents were not aware of the participation and influencing methods in Helsinki presented in the survey.

71% had not heard of participatory budgeting or OmaStadi, but 49% were interested to find out more. With regard to the Urban Environment

Division's plans, the results were similar: the majority of respondents

(53%) were interested in the plans, but they were not aware of opportunities to follow them. 60% of the respondents had not heard of the borough liaisons, either, but were interested to find out more.

The people's initiative appeared to be known better than other participation and influencing channels among the respondents. On the other hand, when the respondents were asked about voting in the municipal election, it turned out that it was unclear to some respondents whom they could vote for in the election.

The respondents were asked about themes that would inspire them to take part in the City's operations. The most popular themes brought up were leisure time, environmental subjects and themes related to children and families. The most popular concrete ways to take part in themes important to the respondents were taking surveys and following the processing of an interesting subject on the City's social media channels.

Feedback survey regarding borough liaison operations

An online survey regarding borough liaison operations was conducted in the autumn of 2020. The respondents were also asked about general experiences with participation and influencing in Helsinki, regional communications and co-operation networks. 333 responses were collected. Based on the responses to the feedback survey, it can be concluded that there continues to be a clear need to make the borough liaisons' work more visible and better known. The borough liaisons have provided residents with advice regarding influencing opportunities, addressing feedback to the right party in the City organisation and participatory budgeting. Residents expressed a wish to be provided with advice regarding the aforementioned matters in the future as well. Using the borough liaisons' services was found to be useful and to flow well for the most part.

The most frequently selected answers to the question "What is your preferred way to participate in and influence the development of your living

environment or the City?" were voting in the municipal election, giving feedback, taking online surveys and participatory budgeting. The people's initiative and fourth sector operations (such as pop-up stores) were found to be the least preferable influencing methods.

The majority of respondents (60%) found finding the right influencing channel of the City to be difficult or somewhat difficult. Additionally, when asked about their general experience regarding ease of participation, the majority of respondents found it somewhat difficult or difficult. For finding information about participation opportunities, electronic channels and particularly area-specific Facebook groups were found to be the best resources. With regard to regional discussions and forums that facilitate interaction, the City was expected to take an active role as an information provider, event organiser and general facilitator.

The borough liaisons have provided residents with advice regarding influencing opportunities, addressing feedback to the right party in the City organisation and participatory budgeting.



Final results

The Local Government Act (Section 22) states that the Council must ensure that municipal residents and service users have an opportunity to participate in and influence the municipality's operations. Participation and influencing can be promoted by holding discussion and hearing events and resident panels, surveying residents' opinions before making decisions, appointing service user representatives to the municipality's influencer bodies, organising opportunities to take part in planning the municipality's economy, designing and developing services together with service users and supporting residents', organisations' and other communities' independent planning and preparatory work. Realisation of the aforementioned has improved due to the implementation of the participation and interaction model and the development of the divisions' participation work.

With the implementation of the participation and interaction model, City-level participation work is more systematic and promoting residents' participation opportunities is included in the City's service operations more extensively than before. Improved resident and user orientation has reformed the City's service operations and their planning. Participatory budgeting is the first direct method of influencing the City's service planning and ideation, or even starting entirely new operations, that is open to all residents. Helsinki has developed a variety of participation methods, which are being used extensively in the development of the customer experience of the City's services and decision-making preparations alike. The service development work has been carried out as broader wholes from perspectives such as that of regionality, providing residents with new kinds of opportunities for influencing the service operations of their residential area.

The academic studies of the overall assessment of the management system strongly indicated that participation is yet to fully permeate the management and operating culture. Promoting participation is still not connected to the City's management and the staff's basic work. Increasing interactivity in the City's operations and management would improve development of the City and strengthen the experience of participation and commitment to shared goals among staff and residents.

From a resident perspective, the greatest participation-related challenge for a participatory City has to do with clarifying its communications concerning participation opportunities. The assessment identifies a need to further develop communications regarding regional participation opportunities, as well as ways to improve the findability and usability of different participation and influencing channels. Particular attention should be paid to communications regarding timely influencing opportunities. Furthermore, the City should communicate more transparently how residents' opinions have influenced its decision-making and service development. Communicating about overall participation work to residents

From a resident perspective, the greatest participation-related challenge for a participatory City has to do with clarifying its communications concerning participation opportunities.

and other stakeholders will be easier with the new [Osallistu.helsinki](https://osallistu.helsinki.fi) website. The borough and business liaisons have made regional information flow and co-operation between the City and residents easier regardless of the large areas of the major districts.

A need to link businesses more strongly to the process was identified based on the first round of participatory budgeting. Increasing businesses' involvement in devel-

oping the City's services through participatory budgeting also will enable the City to take the business sector's needs into account as well in the future. The resource intensity of participatory budgeting has required the City Executive Office and all divisions to make greater efforts than was anticipated in the planning phase. Even though participatory budgeting is one of the most important forms of regional participation, it has also taken up more of the borough liaisons' working time than was anticipated. Based on the divisions' feedback on the first round, the City's internal work distribution process regarding participatory budgeting was simplified, and the City Executive Office assumed a larger role in the preparatory work than before.

Participatory budgeting has also been the target of plenty of expectations, especially from the perspective of realising equality. Having been observed in other democratic activities, an uneven distribution of participation activity among population groups can be identified in participatory budgeting as well. Participatory budgeting cannot be used to solve all obstacles to participation faced by different population groups. However, solutions for lowering the threshold for participation and providing more tailored support have been actively sought in the implementation of participatory budgeting. Important parts of supporting equality have included aspects such as drawing attention to the user orientation and accessibility of the [OmaStadi.hel.fi](https://oma.stadi.hel.fi) online service, communication about activities in seven different languages and providing individual participation support in the different phases of the process, as well as co-operation with organisations and the

City's services to reach and involve different population groups.

A multi-channel approach is key in developing participation. Municipal residents are using more and more digital means of participation that are independent of time and place, but they also appreciate face-to-face meetings and events such as participatory budgeting

ideation workshops, OmaStadi Raksa events and regional resident evenings. The assessment also highlights a need for the City's presence on various digital discussion channels. However, participation in the planning of the City's services and decision-making cannot be imagined in the present time without the digital dimension. It is therefore important to acknowledge that participation on digital platforms requires sufficient skills and suitable devices, to which not all residents have access. The City's digital support services at designated locations and in the form of remote digital support make it possible to lower the threshold of participation.

Helsinki has actively developed its portfolio of digital participation tools by developing it itself (Kerro-Kantasi online service, feedback system), utilising ready-made products (Harava) and joining an international software development team (Decidim) alike. Not all products available on the market or intended for shared use in public administration are suitable for the use of the City of Helsinki as they are, which has required the City to invest in its own expert work and tenders over the years.

The participation gauge used in the last strategy period – the amount of resident participation methods in the divisions – does not form a qualitative picture of the City's participation work. As such, it is recommended for the next strategy period that the City create a more extensive participation gauge together with the divisions. The City's strategy gauges have also featured the voting percentage in participatory budgeting, which could be narrowed down to age groups, such as residents aged 12–18, for closer monitoring, making it possible to examine region and school specific differences.

Increasing equal participation opportunities is key in developing participation work further. Helsinki's growth into an increasingly multicultural city is challenging the City to develop its participation and influencing opportunities to make them increasingly multilingual and diverse. Equal

participation opportunities can be improved especially by strengthening co-operation with organisations. Volunteer activities could also be used to support non-Finnish-speaking residents' participation opportunities more effectively and promote integration into society.

The City's allocated grants and opening of facilities are key in facilitating residents' independent activities. The City's grant operations emphasise supporting free, ethical activities. The grant operations can also complement the City's services, as is the case with the grants awarded by the Social and Health Committee, for example. There are a few trials running in Finland regarding different hybrid funding models for resident and community oriented projects. Trying these hybrid projects, in which residents acquire some of their funding themselves and the City only supports a limited portion, in Helsinki could provide civic society with new opportunities to participate in developing the city.

The coronavirus pandemic has had an impact on the City's participation work as well. A wide variety of digital methods have been created for interaction with residents, and hybrid events have been held in accordance with relevant restrictions. The Mayor's resident evening event was held for the first time in a hybrid format in Kannelmäki in November 2020. The coronavirus pandemic has served as a reminder that a good City requires co-operation, of which the Helsinki Helpline is a good example. The Helsinki Helpline service was implemented in collaboration by the City, parishes, volunteers, organisations and businesses.

The strategy period of 2017–2021 saw a successful launch of the participation functions that were described in the resourcing decision for the participation and interaction model.

A wide variety of digital methods have been created for interaction with residents, and hybrid events have been held in accordance with relevant restrictions.

Successes and challenges in the City of Helsinki's participation work in 2017–2021

Where did we succeed?	What were the challenges?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying participation as a strategically important area • the management structure of the participation work • different methods of resident participation used extensively • the divisions' participation plans • children's and young people's participation • active participation in participatory budgeting and its high voting percentage • borough liaison operations (Democratic Recognition 2019) • promotion of digital participation • resourcing of businesses' participation opportunities (business liaisons) • broader volunteer activity opportunities than before • several different methods and projects launched to promote equality • supporting independent activities with various grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interactivity of management and utilisation of resident information in management • scarcity of resources allocated to promoting participation in the divisions • the limited nature of opening the City's facilities for resident use • influencer bodies' genuine influencing opportunities • increasing the visibility of the divisions' participation work and resident assessments • all population groups' participation in developing the city • communications about timely influencing opportunities • transparency of operating processes • resource intensity of participatory budgeting • increasing the significance of participation in all of the City's operations • general awareness of participation and influencing opportunities • unclear aspects in the application process for and processing of grants awarded by the City • utilisation and usability regional information

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