

BIG DATA AND SMART & SUSTAINABLE CITIES CONFERENCE 5.9.2017
Opening Speech by Mayor Jan Vapaavuori

Esteemed Minister,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Cities are the new nation states. Cities are highly independent actors, and are becoming more and more remarkable in size. Helsinki has reaped many of the benefits of urbanization but has also identified many of the challenges. Helsinki is therefore also committed to finding solutions to the challenges that urbanization and continuous growth bring to us and to all cities globally. This isn't a trend that will reverse. Half of humanity currently lives in cities. By 2030 we will be at 60 percent of the world's population.

The role of cities globally is significant in reaching for instance the objectives of the Paris climate agreement. Cities and municipalities have great autonomy and therefore also great responsibility to act as forerunners. Cities are the places where we will solve, or not solve, the most central challenges of sustainability.

In order to solve complex challenges, like climate change, we need political will and decisions, but we also need innovation. With challenges of this magnitude, we need all players: cities, citizens, companies and universities, to work together. We need to engage a wide range of actors in a participatory, decentralized and open approach to innovation.

In Helsinki, one of the key drivers for innovation is open data. We started systematically opening all the basic data sets and masses of operational data in 2011. These include data on city land use and all of city spending, along with 600 other data sets systematically organized and enabled for anyone to use freely.

Open data is an integral part of open governance and transparent society. Helsinki believes strongly in community and co-creation, and open data is definitely one of the key enablers. Citizens can access city decision-making in real time and, thus, transparency has risen to a new level.

In the field of mobility, open data has enabled the creation of a smart mobility ecosystem and the concept of Mobility as a Service or MaaS. Big data is essential to understanding how

people in cities move, how energy is used, how various aspects of infrastructure interact, and much more. From a more strategic perspective, we expect the turnover from smart city investments to lead to the creation of the most advanced everyday life in the world.

Open cities are also smart cities. It means that we are able to make more efficient use of our resources. Our citizen's and companies best initiatives – making energy cleaner, making mobility innovations smarter, creating new urban culture – all make Helsinki not just sustainable, but also a fun and interesting place to live.

In Helsinki, we want to be a role-model: an open city that works together with metropolitan, national and global partners. Helsinki is not just a place for visiting, but a place where innovative, forward looking companies and individuals can take advantage of our innovation ecosystem. We offer the city, its infrastructure and services, as a testbed for new ideas. Our city is big enough to create systemic changes with a real impact, but small enough to actually get things done and actually succeed.

Helsinki has been nominated as one of the finalists for European Capital of Innovation. In our application we have identified The Helsinki DNA. It is based on the four cornerstones of our society: equality, world-class education, ICT maker culture and our “One Hel of an impact” attitude, which challenges us to take impactful, brave and visionary actions for a better world.

I wish you a most successful and productive conference here at City Hall.