

# Cultural Climate Change



OULU  
2026



YOU ARE  
PART OF  
— the —  
**Cultur  
alClim  
ateCh  
ange**

Bid Book | Oulu2026 ECoC Candidate City

**Take another look!**

Download the Oulu2026 application on your phone or tablet, point it at the cover of this book and see how the book comes to life! When you see this AR-icon in the bid book you can then use your device to discover the augmented reality features.





# Contents

Introduction and Long-Term Strategy 4

16 Cultural and Artistic Content

European Dimension 67

74 Outreach

80 Management

Capacity to Deliver 97

## Imprint

**BID BOOK TEAM** Piia Rantala-Korhonen, Director / Samu Forsblom, Programme Director

Vilma Alamaula / Erika Benke / Anna-Riikka Hirvonen / Arja Huotari / Annu Höttönen / Jennika Karppinen /  
Santeri Koppelo / Heli Metsäpelto / Mari Paavola / Tuukka Pynnönen / Leena Pälli / Olli Rantala / Erika Rieki / Soile Salo /  
Kaisa Silvo / Tarja Sirniö / Priyanka Sood / Mirja Syrjäjä / Katri Tenetz / Henri Turunen / Mika Vierimaa

**SPECIAL THANKS** to all the individuals and institutions who co-created the concept with proposals, production plans and impulses / to the members of the working groups / to the Oulu2026 Delegation / to the Creative Advisors / to the Artistic Experts / to operators helping with the finalisation of the bid book / to the municipalities of Haapajärvi, Haapavesi, Hailuoto, Ii, Kajaani, Kalajoki, Kemi, Kempele, Kuhmo, Kuusamo, Kärsämäki, Liminka, Lumijoki, Muhos, Nivala, Oulainen, Paltamo, Pielavesi, Pudasjärvi, Pyhäntä, Raahe, Sievi, Siikajoki, Siikalatva, Sotkamo, Suomussalmi, Taivalkoski, Tornio, Tyrnävä, Utajärvi, Vaala and Ylivieska / to all persons and decision makers supporting our journey towards the European Capital of Culture 2026

**BOOK DESIGN, PHOTOGRAPHY AND ILLUSTRATIONS** Harri Tarvainen

**PRINTED BY** PunaMusta Oy, Tampere 2021



# 1 INTRODUCTION AND LONG-TERM STRATEGY

## Q1 Concept of the Programme

*Cultural Climate Change* is about reconnecting with the world around us and creating a new sense of togetherness. This remains our concept as it was at pre-selection. And yet our concept has changed, because the world has changed.

Cultural Climate Change is now, in April 2021, even more relevant than in April 2020 when we were finalising our

pre-selection bid. Why? Because now, Cultural Climate Change (CCC) has become a fundamental European and global issue. After the pandemic, simply returning to our 'old normal' is no longer an option. While we may still long for the intimacy of silence and darkness descending on a tightly packed auditorium, we must prevent ourselves from easily slipping back into our old cultural comfort zones.



## Full of Soul.

For us, Plans A and B have come and gone. We are now faced with implementing Plan C. Covid-19. Culture. Children. Climate. Each relating to Oulu's original challenges: The hard tech-city, the unbalanced community and the peripheral region, but pursued with increased focus and urgency given that we are still fighting, literally, for our lives and livelihoods.

The Covid-19 pandemic looks like it will be with us for quite some time, so we need to find ways to deal with it. Oulu2026 wants to be a European laboratory, to find solutions to the changing cultural climate in which we find ourselves, finding the right balance between fear and freedom. Coming back to that key topic from our first Bid Book – reconnection, now massively important and very Oulu, given how much our City is associated with Nokia and its 1990s slogan *“Connecting People”*.

We argued last year that technology had separated us and disconnected people.

Since then, the pandemic has shown us what separation really means. Of course, technology has enabled us to stay connected and to continue to function. Yet we all know that functioning is not the same as really living and that the imbalance in our communities between those who are connected by technology and those who aren't has become even more obvious. This is what we were trying to get across with Cultural Climate Change. The need to shift Oulu's emphasis from being a hard-tech, functional city to one which is full. Full of soul. Full of possibilities. Full of Culture.

The Culture industry has come under increasing pressure with cultural institutions and operators having to prove that they are 'relevant to the system', independent artists and producers out of work and municipalities facing financial pressure to make cuts.





## Full of possibilities.

Yet out of crisis, new opportunities can arise. We know that CCC is about a major change in the way that Oulu operates as a European cultural city, the largest in the Arctic region. More than ever, that means delivering the City Strategy and the Cultural Strategy! And since the main cultural institutions account for 80% of what we spend on culture, then we won't achieve CCC without bringing them along too.

Culture is our builder. We can rebuild and reshape our cultural system which everywhere is facing the same existential threat. Making our museums as bold and adventurous as our own vision. Repairing the damage to our independent sector as well as through projects like **Untamed Office**, offering exciting new pathways into culture and jobs for young people.

The goals and values described in our City Strategy and Cultural Strategy are still valid – more so than ever. We see more clearly now how achieving those goals will make us stronger and better as a city and as a region. We describe in Q2 how our City administration has taken a huge leap forward in making these goals a reality.

ECoC Oulu2026 is the action plan to accompany, activate and accelerate CCC. We know that ECOC is not a lever we can simply pull and BAM! – hard tech city becomes the warm creative village where literally everyone feels wild, cool and brave. But we know too that Oulu2026 can be the perfect tool to balance the fusion of the macro-level visions and strategies with the micro-level delivery of real social and cultural change.

Children and youth are at the heart of CCC. We want to raise bold, creative and responsible citizens of the future. Yet lockdowns and school closures have disproportionately affected our young people. We need to redress the balance, so we are excited about including a number of innovative projects which we genuinely believe will reset models for cultural education and creative employment for many years to come. Many of our ideas are built on the value-base

originally defined by children and young people in our 2017 Outreach consultation. They include a children's cultural centre and bringing art to early childhood education. Whilst young adults have their own programme line, Urban Boost, focusing on training and employment opportunities in the field of culture throughout the Oulu2026 region.

Finally, actual Climate Change impacts us more visibly here than almost anywhere else in Europe with biodiversity already significantly diminished. The global response to climate change has so far been too timid. We explore this topic in our theme Brave Hinterland. We take climate change seriously and adjust our actions accordingly. The work already done by our partner, European Green Capital Lahti 2021, supports us in developing criteria for carbon-neutral cultural activities. The goal is to create tools enabling us to move to a carbon-neutral lifestyle in the Oulu2026 region and eventually deploy these solutions throughout Europe.

Cultural Climate Change and actual climate change have a lot in common. Climate change means that we need to reshape the way we interact with the planet. Cultural Climate Change means that we must reshape how we interact with each other – on the social, cultural, artistic, political, spatial and virtual levels. Both reshaping processes transcend the local and make European cooperation more necessary than ever.

Sparsely populated areas like ours have the potential to develop new creative economy models, offering affordable spaces and inspiring environments. The last year has shown us that living in remote areas does not have to mean isolation or exclusion. We must seize this chance to spread creative and cultural opportunity beyond their current southern Finnish heartlands.

## Full of Culture.

## Q2 Cultural Strategy

Oulu's Cultural Strategy was unanimously adopted by the City Council in January 2020 and will run to 2030. The key goals of the strategy were formed in response to many of the issues raised in the very collaborative process of preparing the Oulu2026 bid.

The cultural strategy is based on Oulu's City Strategy *'The Light of the North'* which outlined Oulu's vision of becoming a more vibrant, attractive city, built around the values of courage, fairness and responsibility. The goals of the cultural strategy remain the same, using culture to build:

**Place and identity** Culture creates new meanings in spaces, it is strongly linked to urban environment planning.

**Sense of community and wellbeing** Oulu strengthens every citizen's opportunity to participate in making and experiencing culture. Culture has confirmed its significance in everyday life.

**Creativity** Cultural and creative professionals are key to Cultural Climate Change implementation.

As with the Cultural Climate Change concept however, a combination of learning from the pre-selection process and our experience of the impact of the pandemic have enabled us to amend and sharpen our priorities. This is best explained in The Cultural Climate Change Machine on the following page.

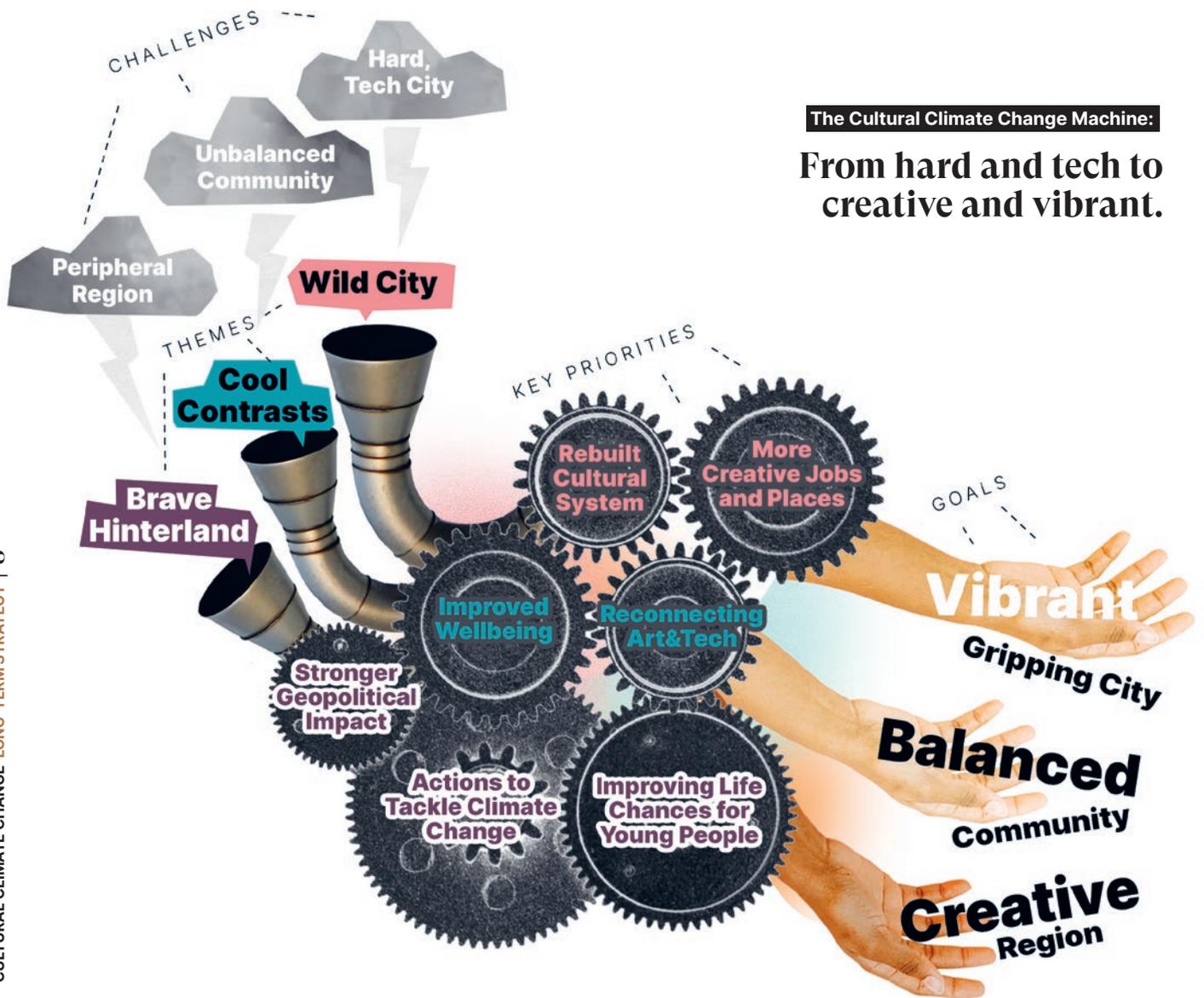
The process of developing the cultural strategy and ECoC projects in tandem has accelerated over the last year. During the long ECoC process the city administration as a whole has successfully internalised in its decision-making processes the potential of culture and creativity to provide the tools to help us to create a better future.

Culture and technology are helping us to rebuild after the pandemic. Like cities all over Europe, we took a big digital leap forward enabling continued access to culture during lockdown. The exciting implications of this for the future will be explored through the cultural programme. The **TechArt** project, implemented in 2021–2022, will create new bridges between art and technology, together with a new cooperation-based ecosystem. The **DigiCult** project in 2021-2022 creates a digital platform for cultural and nature spots, available for everyone, everywhere.

The special mix of programming and creative placemaking are seen in the way Wild City has started to take shape as a series of **Creative Villages**. Spreading throughout the city, running wild into places perhaps once thought beyond the reach of traditional cultural institutions. Culture will be encouraged to flourish in city-owned spaces turning traditional facilities into dual-use venues, improving accessibility.

For example, following pre-selection, plans to develop both the **Pikisaari Creative Village** and the old barracks area in Hiukkavaara into thriving creative economy hubs have already been put into action. Planning for the Oulu Children's Cultural Centre has also begun, with local children and their ideas at the heart of the design process. And the world's smartest hospital area is also under construction during the period 2015-2027 in Oulu. Culture is integrated into the care work, forming an important element of our 2026 programme and the legacy of Oulu2026.

A key part of the City of Oulu's business strategy is the DesignOulu programme which runs until 2026. Its goal is to significantly increase the capacity of the region's companies to use design methods. The AV industry has quickly become a major employer in our region. To ensure positive development, emphasis has been placed on the criteria for available



**The Cultural Climate Change Machine:**

**From hard and tech to creative and vibrant.**

funding which will trigger a significant increase in support received for the development of manuscripts in the region. At the same time, a regional film and media incentive policy is being prepared to support the production of films and TV series at a rate of 10% of the costs incurred in the region.

To address some of the contrasts which we highlighted during pre-selection, Oulu is developing a cultural wellbeing plan. This aims to provide transformational opportunities for people in more hard-to-reach communities to participate in the making and enjoyment of culture. Working with Oulu's social and health services staff, we know that we can reach more of those people who have not traditionally seen

culture as being 'on their radar'. Helping people to live more active and engaged lives is a fundamental part of creating a more balanced city.

Finally, as the major city of the North, Oulu is ready to step up and to think and act in a more strategic and geopolitical way.

In short, our strategy and goals remain the same. Our priorities and the focus of delivery have however grown stronger and become much more sharply focused. The combination of ECoC 2026 and growing recognition of culture as the builder of a stronger and more creative post-Covid-19 city and region gives us the confidence that we can change our cultural climate for the better.

## Q3 Long-Term Impacts of Oulu2026

Our vision in terms of the long-term impacts of Oulu2026 is to rebalance the city and reconnect people in a sustainable way. Cultural Climate Change transforms both City and Region. The shared challenges will connect us with our European partners, helping us to build new capacity for the future.

The graphic below shows the CCC model in action, illustrating how the new components of our city, region and European partners will come together to create something which is greater than the sum of its parts. By 2027, Oulu Region will look very different.

The model is both complemented by and given impetus through the Oulu2026 Cultural Programme.



## Q4 Monitoring and Evaluation

Oulu2026's plans encompass a variety of research activities and collaborations which will form a comprehensive research programme. This programme will consist of:

- a) monitoring and evaluation using the guidelines established by the European Commission (Decision No 445/2014/EU).
- b) research on the Oulu2026 project's effects on the economy and wellbeing conducted by the University of Oulu and Oulu Business School.
- c) Incorporating various theses and dissertations addressing the Oulu2026 project conducted through various degree programmes across Finland.

### Who Will Carry Out the Evaluation?

Monitoring and evaluation will be conducted by the *Centre for Cultural Policy Research, Cupore*. The centre was selected as our partner in 2018 through a competitive tendering process.

Cupore is an independent foundation and a cultural policy expert organisation producing, processing and transmitting high-quality research information. It collaborates with a broad network of research centres, universities and scientific and professional organisations, both in Finland and internationally.

Cupore's strengths include a strong understanding and knowledge of cultural policy governance structures and sectors as well as a strong research profile on culture's role in city development and arts and culture events and festivals. Monitoring and evaluation work for Oulu2026 will be carried out by a multidisciplinary team with strong and diverse experience in different areas of cultural policy and evaluation.

### Methodology and Framework

We aim to measure the success of Oulu2026 in reaching its long-term goals in creating:

1. Vibrant, Gripping City
2. Balanced Community
3. Creative Region

Success in meeting these goals will show whether we have actually achieved the Cultural Climate Change to which our project aspires. To enable us to measure this objectively we have established a series of SMART indicators: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely. These will be measured using both quantitative and qualitative data. Together with Cupore, we have already laid the groundwork for monitoring and evaluation.

Since 2018, background information provided by Cupore has supported the planning of Oulu2026. This has included compiling and analysing a comprehensive set of already available quantitative and qualitative information as well as gathering new data. For example, in 2019 Cupore conducted two surveys, one for residents (N=2,838) and the other for arts and cultural actors (N=74). These studies assisted us both in setting the Oulu2026 project goals and in devising the indicators to measure whether we have succeeded.

Our monitoring and evaluation framework also draws on recent research on culture-led development in cities and regions in the evaluation literature. Recent evaluations conducted for previous ECoC cities and assessment guidelines are also used.

The impacts of the current pandemic on the cultural field are also recognised in our monitoring and evaluation work. This includes current research conducted by Cupore on the impact of Covid-19 in Finland which will allow us to access updated data on the pandemic's effects on the cultural and creative sectors and apply it to our own plans to link the Oulu2026 project to our post-Covid-19 recovery plans.

## Timing and Milestones

Between 2022–2027, monitoring and evaluation activity will track the Oulu2026 project. Specifically, this will be arranged in three milestone periods:

**Period 1** covers the build-up to 2026 and takes place before the ECoC year. The formation of baseline data on the chosen indicators in 2022 will be the first key milestone.

**Period 2** will be the ECoC year itself, 2026. Here, comprehensive information on the outputs, outcomes and impacts is collected.

**Period 3** in 2027, will involve an analysis of the results and their publication. The final report will be published by the end of 2027.

## Definition of Success

Oulu2026 will measure its progress in attaining the 3 main goals. These goals are in line with the general objectives (GO) and specific objectives (SO) of the ECoC action. Each main goal is further sub-divided into outputs, outcomes and impacts of the Oulu2026 activities. Attainment of the main goals defines the success of the Oulu2026 which will be evaluated at the end of the project.

The connection to the ECoC action objectives and examples of how to define success are described below:

### Main goal: Vibrant, Gripping City

ECoC action objectives:

*Strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector and its links with other sectors (SO3). Raise the international profile of cities through culture (SO4)*

Examples to define success:

- *Oulu's reputation as a city of culture strengthens in Finland by 25% and Oulu's international visibility grows by 25% by 2027*
- *50% of the events of the cultural programme's projects take place outside of established cultural facilities*
- *Net migration is positive among young adults (25-34 years) in 2027*





### Main goal: Balanced Community

ECoC action objectives:

*Safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe, highlight the common features they share, increase residents' sense of belonging to a common cultural space (GO1)*  
*Widen access to and participation in culture (SO2)*

Examples to define success:

- 40% of Oulu2026 projects are implemented outside of Oulu city centre
- 10% of residents participate as volunteers and 80% as an audience in Oulu2026 activities in the project area
- 80% of Oulu's residents feel that, by 2026, it is good for everyone to be in Oulu

### Main goal: Creative Region

ECoC action objectives:

*Foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities (GO2)*  
*Enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offering in cities, including through transnational cooperation (SO1)*

Examples to define success:

- 80% of Oulu2026 projects are implemented via international cooperation
- 70% of Oulu2026 projects combine art and technology
- The creative economy in the Oulu region has grown by 20% and the number of jobs in the creative sector has grown by 30% by 2027

The table on pages 14 and 15 provides a full illustration of Oulu2026's main goals, outputs, outcomes and impacts that will be monitored according to a set of indicators used to detect changes and trends in the objective areas of Cultural Climate Change. Data will be collected from multiple sources, also shown in the table. Cupore will use existing statistical and other data sources in addition to gathering new information.

The main existing sources for the statistical data include local, regional, national and European level data providers. The datasets will include statistics from the City of Oulu and

other municipalities as well as from the national statistical agency's database (Statistics Finland). The monitoring and evaluation programme will work closely with the City of Oulu in their data collection activities.

The new data sources include:

- Oulu2026: statistics, surveys, interviews, self-evaluation
- Cultural programme actors: surveys, self-evaluation
- Residents' surveys
- Cultural and creative actors in Oulu and Oulu Region: surveys, interviews
- Entrepreneurs' surveys
- Oulu2026 attendees' surveys
- Media analysis

## Dissemination

Oulu is keen to be part of the ECoC learning community, where knowledge is shared, accumulated and made available to all. As such, we will make visible our entire journey to change the cultural climate.

Information about the activities and results of the Oulu2026 project will be communicated at regular intervals via the project's own website and in both Finnish and European channels. We will also host seminars, media updates and other forums, including the City of Oulu's national and international partnership networks. The results of our research will also be reported in scientific forums, including academic publications.

Finally, the results of the evaluation will be communicated through a final report and conference to be held by the end of 2027. This will be an international seminar inviting representatives of past, present and future European Capitals of Culture. We want to share both with our own people – and with Europe more generally – how Oulu's cultural climate is warming and at the same time helping the ECoC and other cultural networks to play a major role in reducing global warming, something which hits us particularly hard here in the North.



Snowboarder Roope Tonteri



Main goals	Expected outputs, outcomes and impacts	Set of indicative indicators	Data sources
Vibrant, Gripping City	<b>The facilities</b> for cultural activities will be <b>renovated</b> and many more people will use them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reform of key cultural institutions (number, profile)</li> <li>• Wider use of cultural facilities (new users and ways of use)</li> </ul>	Oulu2026, Cultural programme actors, Culture and creative actors in Oulu and Oulu Region
	<b>New spaces</b> are being created and opened <b>for culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of the creative island of Pikisaari (profile)</li> <li>• Creation of innovative and flexible cultural centres (number, profile)</li> <li>• Incorporating culture into Oulu's Smart Hospital</li> <li>• New facilities for culture</li> <li>• New use of unused spaces for culture</li> </ul>	Oulu2026, Cultural programme actors, Cultural and creative actors in Oulu and Oulu Region
	Oulu's <b>reputation</b> as a city of culture improves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The reputation of Oulu as a city of culture (assessment)</li> <li>• Geographical coverage and reception of media visibility of the Oulu2026 actions</li> </ul>	Residents, Cultural and creative actors in Oulu and Oulu Region, Media analysis
	Oulu is an <b>attractive city</b> in which to live, work, study and visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of travellers and overnight stays in Oulu / region</li> <li>• Number of restaurant customers</li> <li>• Number of students</li> <li>• Population, population structure</li> <li>• Net migration of Oulu and Northern Ostrobothnia</li> </ul>	Statistics Finland, City of Oulu (BusinessOulu)
Balanced Community	Oulu2026 involves many active <b>volunteers and participants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projects with the possibility of volunteering (number, profile)</li> <li>• Number of volunteers, age group, region</li> <li>• Volume of work done by volunteers</li> </ul>	Oulu2026, Cultural programme actors
	Active public debate and interest in Oulu2026 grows <b>civic pride and togetherness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respondents to surveys, social media followers</li> <li>• Number of interested participants and producers</li> </ul>	Residents, Media analysis
	Implementation of Oulu2026 creates <b>job opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of employees and hours worked by them</li> <li>• Employed labour force by target group</li> <li>• Youth unemployment</li> </ul>	Oulu2026, Cultural programme actors, Statistics Finland, Statistical of Oulu
	The <b>regional cultural offer</b> and its accessibility improve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Venues of Oulu2026 cultural programme (number, profile)</li> <li>• Participatory actions in different districts (number, profile)</li> <li>• Facilities for cultural activities in different districts (number, location and profile)</li> <li>• Number of events in different districts (number, location, profile)</li> </ul>	Oulu2026, Cultural programme actors
	The <b>diversity of participants</b> is promoted through projects in the Cultural Programme and new operative models and guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The diversity of participants as producers and experiencers of cultural programme (number, profile)</li> <li>• Measures and events aimed at increasing participation opportunities for different population groups (number, profile)</li> <li>• Citizens' experience of barriers to participation</li> <li>• New guidelines and operating models are co-created with diverse representants of citizens (number, profile)</li> </ul>	Oulu2026, Cultural programme actors, residents

Main goals	Expected outputs, outcomes and impacts	Set of indicative indicators	Data sources
	Most Oulu residents feel that it is <b>good</b> for everyone <b>to be in Oulu</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizens' experience of team spirit in Oulu</li> <li>• Citizens' experience that it is good for everyone to be in Oulu</li> <li>• Citizens' experience of Oulu's openness</li> </ul>	Residents
	A growing proportion of citizens <b>feel European</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizens' experience of Europeanness and other identities (locality, regionalism, nationality, internationality)</li> </ul>	Residents
Creative Region	The <b>operating conditions</b> and <b>earning models</b> of culture professionals improve significantly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The experience of cultural actors regarding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the cultural climate of Oulu</li> <li>• the benefits and diversity of public support</li> <li>• the opportunity to participate in cultural decision-making in Oulu2026 municipalities</li> <li>• support for know-how and capabilities and its benefits in Oulu region</li> </ul> </li> <li>• New operating models for competence and capacity development (number, profile)</li> <li>• New earning models (number, profile)</li> <li>• Companies and jobs in the cultural / creative sectors (number, €),</li> <li>• The percentage of the creative economy in the Oulu economy</li> </ul>	Culture actors in Oulu and Oulu Region, City of Oulu (BusinessOulu)
	The amount of <b>public funding</b> for culture grows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocations for culture in cities / region (€, % of budget)</li> <li>• Culture grants for cities / region (€)</li> </ul>	City of Oulu and municipalities in the region, Statistics Finland, Arts Promotion Centre, Cupore
	The programme for Oulu2026 is <b>artistically diverse</b> and of a <b>high standard</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oulu2026 programme project implementers' assessment of the artistic content of the Oulu2026 project</li> <li>• Participants' / visitors' assessment of artistic content</li> </ul>	Oulu2026, Cultural programme actors
	<b>Cooperation</b> across the cultural system and <b>with other fields</b> increases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation and development of new collaborative models (number, profile) within cities (culture and other fields)</li> <li>• Assessment of culture actors on the realisation of cooperation</li> <li>• New models of cooperation (number, profile) between actors and cities and municipalities</li> </ul>	Oulu2026, Cultural programme actors, City of Oulu, Culture actors in Oulu and Oulu Region, 32 partner municipalities in the region
	The combination of <b>art and technology</b> increases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Art and technology cooperation projects in Oulu2026 programme (number, profile)</li> <li>• Number of participants in art and technology cooperation projects</li> <li>• Projects implemented in whole or in part on virtual platforms (number)</li> </ul>	Oulu2026, Cultural programme actors
	<b>Cultural actors collaborate</b> more at regional, national, European and international levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation between cultural actors at local, regional, national, European and wider international level (number, profile)</li> <li>• Number of artists and other actors involved in collaborative projects</li> <li>• Cooperation with other third sector actors and companies (number, profile)</li> </ul>	Oulu2026, Cultural programme actors, Culture actors in Oulu and Oulu Region

# 2. CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC CONTENT

## Q5 Artistic Vision and Strategy

*Inspiring. Sustainable. European.* That is our vision for the Oulu 2026 cultural programme.

A vision which meets our goal of Cultural Climate Change. Creating a movement. Supporting artists, creative producers and citizens to work together to build a new Oulu. Fit for the future. Building on our past. Connecting our Arctic Hinterland to Europe's heartland.

First and foremost, our vision is built on creating new connections. Creativity, curiosity and ingenuity are the result when different ideas and people meet. Our movement will encourage Cultural Climate Change to radiate out from Oulu. Right across Europe. Promoting things that thrill, challenge and change. Joyous things that help us all to reconnect. We deliver our vision with the passion that has grown throughout Oulu Region since we started building our application in 2017.

We learned much in the pre-selection process. We also reviewed our artistic vision to include what has changed during the pandemic. We originally talked about reconnection. But we realise that simply reconnecting is not enough. We want to build a cultural vision fit for the 2020s. Maximising the quantum leap that digital expression had made possible while, at the same time, celebrating the value of live culture now so much more appreciated after the experience of being forced to stay apart. Oulu2026 wants to create a future lab for culture. Wild, experimental, and innovative.

There are three cornerstones to our artistic vision. First is our absolute commitment – as we set out above – to building an inspiring programme and to do it sustainably. We live in a region where the effects of climate change are visible every day. Secondly, we need to bring culture to new arenas, opening it up to new audiences through different experiences in incredible places. Thirdly, we need to revamp the way our cultural system works. To de-institutionalise and to de-centralise. Not least through involving children and encouraging young people to become major co-creators, letting them run wild in a city whose future belongs to them.

Our vision challenges and encourages northern cultural and creative people to transform the way they work. Taking advantage of digital and hybrid productions. Sharing our passionate belief in the power of co-creation. Together we can put professionals and people together to create something new, exciting and lasting.

### A Strategy for Sustainability

Social, cultural, economic and ecological sustainability is emphasised throughout our Cultural Programme. In August 2019, we launched **The Most Sustainable European Capital of Culture** project. This will support event organisers right through our build up process. Helping our partners and producers to reduce the environmental impact of all Oulu2026 productions.

A key early-win will be the production – in 2022 – of a guide to sustainable event production. A key strand of our plans for long-term capacity building, it will include guidelines for reducing emissions and a sustainability checklist for event organisers. The City of Lahti, *the European Green Capital 2021*, is our partner on the way towards carbon neutral cultural productions.

We are also cooperating internationally in this field with *Innofest* from the Netherlands and the England-based international organisation, *A Greener Festival (AGF)* which awards certificates for successful environmental work.

## **Q6 Cultural and Artistic Programme**

The structure of the cultural programme divides the story of Cultural Climate Change into three chapters or themes. Each chapter includes a group of exciting projects which bring our story to life. Together they combine to produce a compelling glimpse of what the future could hold.

The Wild City chapter tells how, out of a harsh, unforgiving Northern wilderness, grows a city with a unique wildness of creative spirit, focused on encouraging and supporting the dreams of young people. Cool Contrasts celebrates, challenges and connects the contrasts that are such a strong feature of Northern life. The differences and divisions – both here and in Europe - between the connected and the disconnected, between light and darkness and between technology and art. Finally, there are tales of the Brave Hinterland, telling stories of life at the edge and on the edge, of climate change and of an area yet to be fully discovered by Europe.

Three major international flagship projects kick off the chapters while a fourth new reconnecting flagship provides a dynamic and fitting prologue to our Cultural Climate Change story.

Each of the three theme chapters is divided into programme lines which enable us to group connected projects together to maximise synergy and impact.

Through the AGF, we are part of an exciting network of festivals, promoters and musicians enabling the exchange of information and good practice for greater sustainability.

Sustainability is also deeply embedded in our plans to develop the quality and connections of Oulu's cultural players. A key feature of our programme is the process of learning from top European artists and ambitious cities, including former ECoCs. They will form part of our European laboratory. Resetting Oulu's, and Europe's Cultural Climate. There can be no turning back.

The anticipated impact is shown clearly as each programme line has its own CCC Factor. The CCC factor describes how each line delivers specific elements of the CCC story, and also identifies some of the key capacity building activities which are inherent in delivering Cultural Climate Change.

We have encouraged the many creators of the cultural programme to find new and surprising partners both locally and from across Europe, building our capacity and connectedness. We set out our structure in the diagram on the following page. This is followed by the projects themselves. They form the core of a programme which will start and end in the cold and dark, but with lots of light moments in between as well as huge amounts of genuine warmth. Indoors and out.

With each programme line we indicate an overall budget and for each project we indicate how much of the overall programme line budget goes to this specific project by showing either

€ (0-100 000 €)

€€ (100 001 – 500 000 €) or

€€€ (above 500 000 €).

Estimates relate to Oulu2026's share of the project, the actual budgets as a whole may be higher.

# Cultural Climate Change

Peace Machine  
Reconnecting Flagship

**Brave Hinterland**

Theme

**Climate Clock**  
Flagship

**Cool Contrasts**

Theme

**Underground Clash**  
Flagship

**Wild City**

Theme

OPERA GOES WILD  
**The Rise of the Tar Kingdom**  
Flagship

Programme Line

**Art <3 Tech**

**ArTech City**  
**Oulu Dance Hack**  
**Tomorrow's Wardrobe**  
**Beyond the Sky**  
**Earth, Time and Adaptation**

Programme Line

**Art Takeover!**

**Delta Life**  
**Exploring ART!**  
**The Art of Work**  
**Hybridise your Festival**  
**Bang Bang Riviera**

Programme Line

**Creative Villages**

**Pikisaari Creative Island**  
**Hiukkavaara**  
**- Creative Boot Camp**  
**SmART Hospital**  
**Rethinking Libraries**  
**Creative Campus**  
**#CultureMonopoly**  
**AALTOSILLO**  
**The Nook**

Programme Line

**Northern Vibes**

Let It Snow!  
Arctic Food Lab  
Aurora Revelare  
Hope in the Hinterland  
In Europe's Spotlight

Programme Line

**Between East & West**

Tar Wharf to the Seven Seas  
2nd Generation  
Cultural Embassy  
E75 Highway  
Looking East  
Village Anthems

Programme Line

**Naturally Art**

Natural Stages  
Art and Nature Trails  
Borderless  
Sámi Culture  
Climate Arena

Programme Line

**Dark Matters**

Light Matters  
Voice the Taboo!  
Mindblown –  
Borderlines of the Mind  
Parts of a City

Programme Line

**Oulu Calling!**

Faravid's Land  
The Snowflake  
Stone Age  
Survival Strategies  
From Here to Art  
- Travel Agency

Programme Line

**STREAM to the Future**

Go with the STREAM  
Art Seeds  
Children's Biennale  
Frozen Nights

Programme Line

**Urban Boost**

Untamed Office  
Agent 026  
MC Oulu  
Generation Xulu

# Reconnecting Flagship

---

## Peace Machine

---

Changing the cultural climate in Europe will change the way we communicate and how we promote peace. Not just peace as the absence of conflict, but peace as a trustful, sharing and caring cultural climate.

The European Union was founded as a peace project after the ruins of war. Within an increasingly polarised Europe the potential for violence and conflict is rising – hate speech has historically been the match which lit the tinderbox of war. The Peace Machine concept searches for new ways to resolve conflicts and promote dialogue, improving Europe's cultural climate and redefining common interests and common humanity. In order to avoid repeating history, we must be able to recognise the seeds of conflict in hate speech, discrimination and 'othering'.

The Peace Machine programme is rooted in the life work of the Finnish scientist **Timo Honkela**, an artificial intelligence researcher who studied at the University of Oulu. Honkela died all too young, in May 2020, but his life work lives on. Honkela's dream was to create a machine using artificial intelligence to facilitate conflict resolution and promote world peace.

### **Immersive Peace Machine – Combining Art and Tech**

The Peace Machine combines art and technology which can be experienced as an immersive aesthetic experience. The Finnish *Ekho Collective* will lead the design consisting of the overall artistic concept and principles of interaction and facilitation enabled by artificial intelligence, machine learning and machine vision. Thus, the Machine will learn from interaction with users, who then become co-producers of the Peace Machine.

The Peace Machine is based on modular architecture and is usable simultaneously and virtually in different places. In 2026, the work will be on display in Oulu as well as in the winning Slovak ECoC city. In 2027, the Peace Machine's journey will continue to the winning ECoC cities from Portugal and Latvia. With an open international programme call we invite artists to build their own Peace Machines, to address issues of war, peace and conflict, building common comprehension through different forms of art.

### **Peace Machine Kids – Let's Explore Peace!**

The future belongs to the children! In 2021-2025, we invite kids in schools and kindergartens to build prototypes of the Peace Machine. Prototyping is fun, at the same time it is a part of the STEAM philosophy, where children and young people themselves can explore the nature of conflicts and learn to resolve them through science, art and technology.

Peace School is a method of peace promotion and global education based on drama and participatory methods, created by the Peace Union. Peace School challenges students to think about global development issues, peace and non-violence in their own lives while reflecting on conflict at a global level.

The working methods are participatory drama, role play, process drama and other participatory methods. Each student is empowered to engage in their own critical thinking and to increase their empathy and dialogue skills as well as their respect for diversity. Through the ECoCs across Europe and our twin cities we will invite European peers and children to join in during the Oulu2026 programme.



## Hot Sauna Debates!

These debates are going to be heated by default. The traditional Pehkola sauna will host a series of sauna discussions with locals and European guests to discuss current conflicts and seek solutions to them – our ECoC-competitors from Savonlinna and Tampere are invited to join us in heated and naked debate! Pehkola's sauna benches have witnessed

discussions among its famous guests including scientists, artists and politicians for more than 40 years. Now the hot topics will be related to Cultural Climate Change and European challenges. The discussions will be streamed live and later subtitled for European distribution.

## Everyman's Right to Conflict Resolution Skills!

Timeout is a dialogue and conflict resolution method for people from different backgrounds, developed by the future-oriented *Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra*. Utilising the Timeout Dialogue (*Erätauko*) we learn to understand each other better. The model will be deployed across various events including the Pehkola Sauna Debates.

## Shadows of War – the History Around Us

For the Oulu Housing Fair 2025, a new residential area will be built on the site where, in the Vaakunakylä garrison area during the period 1941-44, up to 4 000 German soldiers were billeted. There will be a Pavilion for events and exhibitions, reconnecting the history and the future using augmented reality to display the history of this place.

Additionally, a local production company *NTRZ Media Ltd* has produced a documentary film series, '*Untold Arctic Stories*' which will be presented in the Pavilion. Young researchers, **Emil Kastehelmi** and **Aleksi Rikkonen**, who were involved in the production of the series, will tour schools and teach kids to recognise the traces of history in everyday environments.

The Peace Machine project also includes a series of international meetings where experts in various fields discuss war and conflict prevention. We will also collaborate with several European events, such as the Conversation Festival LAMPA.

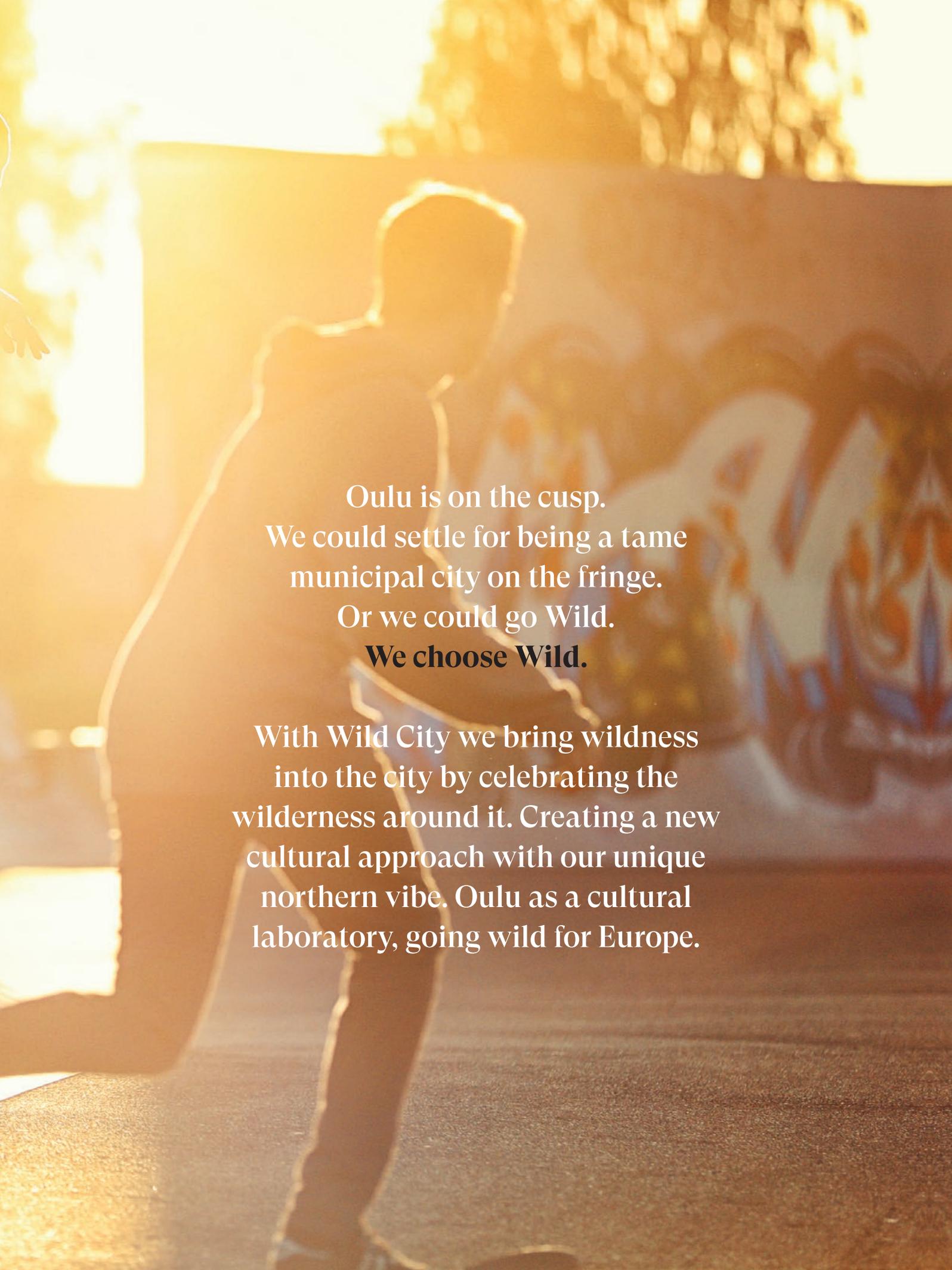
**Producers:** Oulu2026, Ekho Collective (FI)

**Partners:** Peace Machine Association (FI), Oulu University Association (FI), University of Oulu (FI), University of Helsinki (FI), Peace Union of Finland (FI), Aveiro2027 (PT), Conversation Festival LAMPA (LV), Mother and Child Home and Shelter of Oulu (FI), Timeout Dialogue Foundation (FI), Forgotten Fronts (FI), NTRNZ Media Ltd (FI), Liepaja2027 (LV)

**Budget:** €€€



Theme  
**Wild  
City**



Oulu is on the cusp.  
We could settle for being a tame  
municipal city on the fringe.  
Or we could go Wild.  
**We choose Wild.**

With Wild City we bring wildness  
into the city by celebrating the  
wilderness around it. Creating a new  
cultural approach with our unique  
northern vibe. Oulu as a cultural  
laboratory, going wild for Europe.

## OPERA GOES WILD

---

# The Rise of the Tar Kingdom

---

Oulu2026 wants to shake up opera. We want to reach non-opera audiences and show the unfettered wild side of this unique art form.

We will commission a new opera under the artistic direction of **Phelim McDermott** (UK) – one of the world's top opera directors. Since the founding of his London-based theatre company, Improbable, he has proved his ability to think 'outside the box'. Improbable has a rich history of reinventing theatre forms and synthesising diverse practices to create unforgettable shows. For Oulu2026, McDermott brings Oulu's *Screaming Men's Choir* (*Mieskuoro Huutajat*) into the performance space with world-renowned counter tenor, **Antony Roth Costanzo** (US).

For McDermott the creative journey will be shaped by Open Space Technology – engagement and consultation with the local community. Embedding the piece in the community and building its audience whilst at the same time creating a stunning, site-specific opera that invades the wild, shaping and reimagining an industrial depot as a cultural centre and creating an astonishing environment for this visceral musical experience.

The Rise of the Tar Kingdom will be a ritual opera telling a mythical new story about the city of Oulu through large scale puppetry (**Scott Wright**, AU), choreography (**Rosemary Lee**, UK), orchestra (*the Oulu Symphony Orchestra*) - and shouting! The set will be designed by **Kati Lukka** (FI) with the libretto written by author **Riikka Pulkkinen** (FI) in a departure from the traditional librettist.

McDermott's collaborative working methods enable the narrative to emerge from text and design, reinventing how an opera is made but also creating an event which takes this orchestral-scale work into exciting, accessible new territory through a parallel design, devising and composing process. The composer will be approached later in this democratic creative process, again in a departure from usual operatic creative practice.

Capacity building sits at the heart of the project, with younger Finnish creatives shadowing and assisting the highly experienced core creative team. We hope to leave our imprint on a new way of working, embedded in the professional practice of the next generation of opera makers, creating a transformative professional experience.

*"I want to take audiences on a dream-like journey. My non-linear approach will resonate with younger people used to gaming and intense short visual experiences. At the end, the public will emerge wondering how they went on this operatic journey. Transformed in how they see their city, as well as how they see the art form itself."* -McDermott

Only the total experience of opera can take our audience on the transformative, ritualistic journey which will be at the heart of the 2026 Capital of Culture experience. A surprising, promenade ritual opera for a new cultural era.

**Budget:** €€€

## Programme Line: **ART TAKEOVER!**

Meet the buzz. Dancers, circus, poetry and artwork taking over the city. Art might surprise you as a spectacular event or when you walk into a grocery store. It tunes you into creativity at your workplace, makes you smile on a busy day.

**CCC factor:** vibrant city, creative working life, digital outreach

**Overall Budget:** 1 950 000 €

### **Delta Life**

The Oulu riverfront will provide the backdrop to a series of immersive performances; drones dancing over the water, a mesmerising take on the Åland War with peaceful air guitar forces, or a dancer's interpretation of log driving. Expect unexpected pop-up-performances, workshops and community gatherings. You can follow our journey through the waterways across multiple media channels.

Rivers connect people and transport stories from across the seven seas. Their ever-evolving deltas are places where these interactions pile up, showing us the way to the future. The Delta Life project invites an international group of artists to explore time, place and stories with locals along the shores and tributaries of the rivers of the Oulu region. The findings of the artist expeditions during the preparatory years will wash up into the Oulu River delta in a grand spectacle that invites everyone to celebrate the wild summer in August 2026.

**Producer:** Oulu August Festival (FI)

**Partners:** Walk the Plank (UK), Arctic Drone Labs (FI), Metsähallitus (FI), National Parks Finland, Ostrobothnia and Kainuu (FI), Association for Rural Culture and Education (FI)

**Budget** €€€

**Where:** Hupisaaret Islands, river delta area, river shores throughout the region



## Programme Line: ART TAKEOVER!

### Exploring ART

Fifty works of art placed in the environment will transform seven residential areas into a unique art path. Exploring ART brings art to neighbourhoods for anyone to discover in places where it's not expected to be. A significant part of these installations will remain in their urban environments, permanently.

Exploring ART culminates in the International Festival of Visual Arts. This major festival extends traditional forms of visual art exhibitions, museum performance conventions and audience interfaces beyond established visual arts venues into the urban space. The festival provides an engaging cross-section of a wide range of contemporary art. A highly inclusive programme connects the local and the global by combining local participation with wider European artistic currents.

The artists will be selected internationally through open call by a team of curators formed around the project.

**Producers:** Oulu Artists' Association (FI), The Union of Finnish Art Associations (FI)

**Partners:** Sculpture Network, The International Association of Art (IAA), ADKV – Die Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutscher Kunstvereine (DE), bbk Berlin - Berufsverband bildender Künstler\*innen Berlin (DE), Sammenslutningen af Danske Kunstforeninger (DK), Norske Kunstforeninger (NO), Sveriges Konstföreningars Riksförbund (SE), Swedish artist society / Konstnärsalliansen Sweden (SE), Oulu Museum of Art (FI)

**Budget:** €€€

**Where:** Oulu River (7 districts): City centre, Pikisaari, Hietasaari, Toppilansaari, Toppilansalmi, Meri-Toppila and Tuira

### The Art of Work

Thinking like an artist can impact the way organisations deal with uncertainty. How? By using the artist's mindset to create new strategies, managerial solutions, business models, or communication tools that appear, initially, to be improbable. According to futurologists, machines will soon be doing all automatable work, but that also means that we have an unprecedented opportunity to reshape society and working life. Creativity thus becomes our most important skill.

In collaboration with the Jean-Baptiste Say Institute for Entrepreneurship, Art of Work invites organisations in Oulu and across Europe to develop their art thinking skills through international workshops, pilots and congresses. In

2026, organisations in Oulu will become wild laboratories of creativity.

**Producers:** Blueberryland Productions (FI), Oulu2026

**Partners:** Jean-Baptiste Say Institute for Entrepreneurship (FR), Art Thinking Collective, Ecole Pro Centre Pompidou (FR), City of Oulu (FI)

**Budget:** €€

### Hybridise Your Festival

Covid-19 has crushed the events industry. Under this existential pressure, imaginative event producers have however shown their ingenuity and resilience. Livestreams have filled our living rooms. It's clear that we can't digitally replace the live atmosphere with its genuine flavours and scents. But that's not the point. It is not either-or rather, it is both-and. The hybrid.

The Hybridise Your Festival project brings together an international network of event organisers and professionals in the gaming and the audio-visual sectors to share the prodigious variety of Oulu Region festivals direct to your smart device via digital channels. VR. AR. Whatever the letter combination is, digital technologies can provide a different live experience. Add something to it. Allow a new kind of accessibility. Interaction with the on-site audience. More audiences.

**We need new kinds of skills to allow our events to be experienced smoothly across different channels. We will gain the flexibility to face the viruses and scourges of the future.**

To be more confident that our cultural programme will be transmitted to Europe, rain or shine. There's an entirely new frontier to explore in consuming culture using new technologies, be an early adopter and get ready to turn on, tune in and ... we'll even try to make sure you don't drop out!

**Producer:** Oulu2026

**Partners:** North Finland Film Commission (FI), The European Festivals Association (EFA), LiveFin (FI), Nitra2026 (SK), local festivals

**Budget:** €€



Dancer **Milla Virtanen** & Media artist **Leevi Lehtinen**  
Mural by **Andrew Bird & Baidak Iliya** Produced by Culture Association **Kulttuuribingo**

## **Bang Bang Riviera**

Grab your dancing shoes! This event will take you on an unforgettable trip along the river in and around Oulu, steering you through a mix of genres, styles, art forms and invigorating Finnish traditions. The greenery of nature, the wildness of street artists, the gentle arrogance of dance artists and the nuances of Central European clubs. All locations can be reached by your choice of environmentally friendly transportation; skateboarding, bicycling, running or rollerblading and some locations even by Nordic pole walking.

The intimately small expedition locations include sneaking inside a speakeasy, a throwback to the summer of 1967, 'the summer of love' by a dance duet and enjoying a grand choir in the wilderness. You will also get to leave your mark by planting a tree. The happening ends in an open-air party with social dancing, a DJ spinning nostalgic old-school dance music and with food prepared on a campfire.

**Producers:** Milla Virtanen & Leevi Lehtinen (FI)

**Partners:** Independent artists from Belgium, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland

**Budget:** €€

## Programme Line: CREATIVE VILLAGES

The Creative Villages programme line reshapes the city and its cultural climate by adding places for creativity in the urban space.

**CCC factor:** cultural living rooms, rethinking spaces, city for youth

**Overall Budget:** 850 000€

### Pikisaari Creative Island

Pikisaari has a special significance in Oulu's history. Once home to a pitch tar distillery, Pikisaari now houses arts and craft studios in the heart of Oulu. Sadly, not many doors are open to visitors in this creative island. But not for much longer!

**Our plan is that, in future, Pikisaari will become a really unique cultural island where art, nature and creativity coexist, just a few hundred metres from the city centre.**

Working with the active creative community on the island, 2026 will see Pikisaari turned into a vibrant urban village, a cultural hub for Oulu's inhabitants, artists and tourists alike.

Oulu2026 will focus support on the development of Pikisaari's Old Wool Factory. It functions as a common cultural hub for the island's cultural actors. The area includes artists and designers, artisans, music professionals and experience-service providers, as well as creative companies and associations. An important addition to the Wool Factory site is the provision of year-round open spaces for the public, restaurants, a black box-style cultural space, galleries and other shared spaces. The attractiveness of the area is increased by communal events organised by tenants and other actors in the city.

**Producers:** City of Oulu (FI), Oulu2026

**Partners:** P60 Podium Amstelveen (NL), Oulu Urban Culture (FI), Culture Collider Association (FI), Culture Association Kulttuuribingo (FI), Galleria Harmaja (FI), PROTO ry (FI)

**Budget:** €€

### Hiukkavaara - Creative Boot Camp

The military moved out of the Hiukkavaara barracks more than 20 years ago. The buildings were left empty, but over the years, artists 'occupied' the place. Today, the area is home to 250 bands, 50 visual artists and numerous sports and craft actors. Hiukkavaara will be opened up to the wider public. The development of festivals, events and restaurants in this suburban area of Oulu will be a priority in the coming years.

We will invite creative producers from other European creative hubs to our producer residence programme to collaborate. Together we'll develop models for renovating the old infrastructure for cultural use and public accessibility in a sustainable way.

**Producers:** Koy Hiukan Piha (FI), Kokardiklubi ry (FI), Kulttuurikasarmi ry (FI)

**Partners:** City of Oulu (FI), Trans Europe Halles

**Budget:** €€

### SmART Hospital

What would happen to Oulu if the 8% of people who need 80% of the city's social and welfare budget became more resilient, stronger, happier and healthier? SmART Hospital provides one way to make this happen. Art, in sickness and in health, is the motto of this creative health care approach.

SmART Hospital is a groundbreaking collaboration between Oulu2026 and the northernmost university hospital in the European Union, Oulu University Hospital, currently undergoing a major renewal programme. SmART Hospital wants to combine methods of cultural wellbeing and high quality medical care because health does not only mean the absence of illness.

SmART Hospital operates across three levels:

First, a Cultural Wellbeing Network brings university hospitals together to help promote local and international cultural wellbeing. The main purpose of the network is to share the newest research and test the best methods in this field. An international conference will also be organised in 2026.

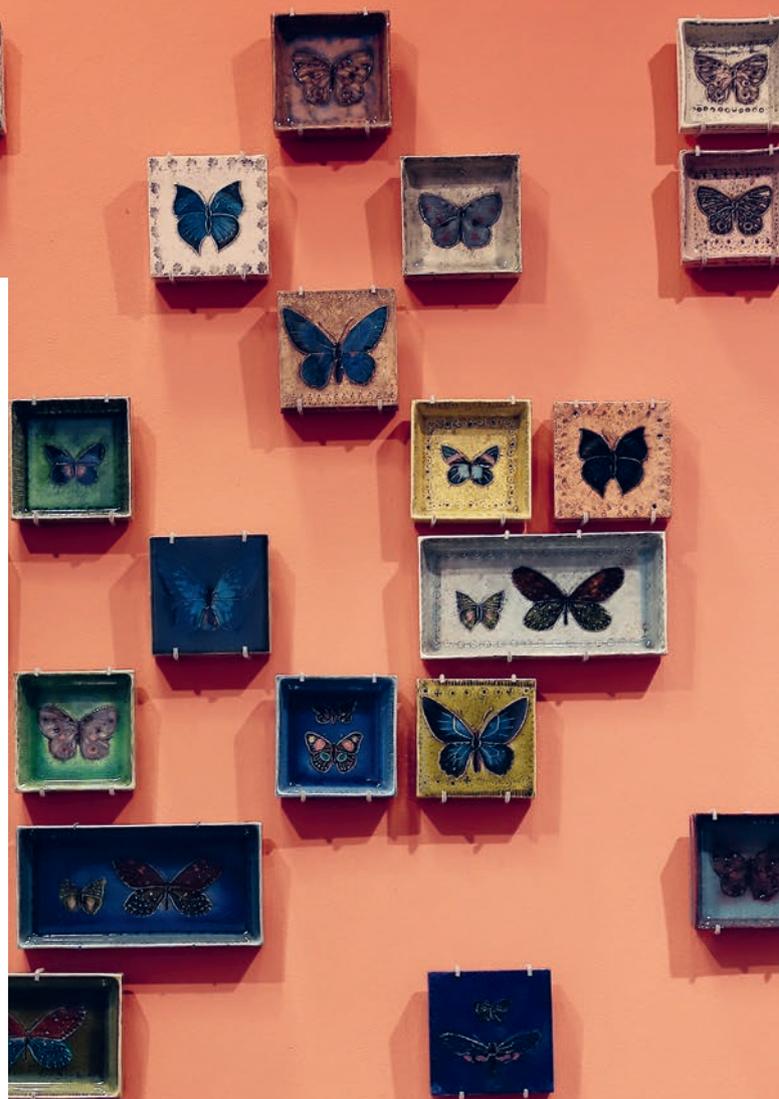
**Secondly, artists and medical staff, including their students, will develop cultural and artistic ways to help people recover and stay healthy through the Creative Care Method.**

Thirdly, a series of art experiences such as exhibitions and performances will be presented at the hospital to support the recovery of the patients as well as the staff's wellbeing at work.

**Producers:** Oulu University Hospital (FI), Oulu2026

**Partners:** Arts Ability programme, Wexford (IE), Alder Hey Children's Hospital and Royal Salford Hospital (UK), ECoCs from Tartu (EE), Bad Ischl (AT), Bodo (NO), Turku (FI) and Kaunas (LT), KulttuuriKauppila Art Centre (FI), OLKA® (FI), Museum and Science Centre Luuppi (FI), Cultural Centre Valve (FI), Oulun Tähtisirkus (FI), Council of Oulu Region (FI), PROTO ry (FI), The Finnish Hospital Clowns Association – Sairaalaklovnit ry (FI), Vapari ry (FI)

**Budget:** €€





### Rethinking Libraries

With Oulu's renovated Central Library reopening in 2026 we are gaining a new space where our Cultural Climate Change comes alive and is palpably present. **The Library is a beacon of sustainable development and responsibility. It is the ecological opposite of the shopping mall.**

A place where you cannot buy anything but you can still have fun and spend time with friends, be creative and get free access to the latest technology.

Of all the city's cultural institutions libraries have the greatest recognition among citizens and are considered low-threshold places for culture, information and democracy. It is an open, safe and accessible space for meaningful and exhilarating encounters. The Central Library acts as a co-creative incubator, as well as an incubator for STEAM thinking, such as potential innovations of the future and for the creativity displayed at their source.

The future of libraries starts here. Read all about it!

**Producer:** Oulu City Library (FI)

**Partners:** Deichman Bibliotek – Oslo Public Library (NO), Stormen bibliotek – Bodø (NO), Schools of Oulu (FI), Cultural Centre Valve (FI), Museum and Science Centre Luuppi (FI), Oulu Comics Centre (FI), Oulu Writers Association (FI), Oulu Theatre (FI), Oulu Symphony Orchestra (FI)

**Budget:** €

### Creative Campus

In 2026, Oulu will finally begin to feel like a real student city, introducing a new, youthful burst of cultural climate-infused life to residents and visitors alike. Although Oulu has one of the largest university campuses in Europe, it often feels physically and mentally detached from the rest of the city. Creative Campus aims to build a creative bridge between the city and the university, to bring science and student culture into the heart of the city and deliver arts and events to the campus.

Restaurants, clubs, events and cultural centres in the city centre will be transformed into open arenas for science events for everyone. The University Business Forum, Scientists' Night and Festival of Cultures are events where science comes close to all of us. The opening event of the student year, Avanto, will make student culture a visible part of Oulu.

The university campuses' own facilities will be opened for art and cultural events. The University's CampusStage and the Science Garden events meet in the Oulu2026 Cultural programme. We will bring art and culture directly to the heart of the scientific community inviting students from European partner universities to join the party!

**Producers:** University of Oulu (FI), Student Union of the University of Oulu (FI)

**Partners:** Oulu University of Applied Sciences (FI), City of Oulu (FI), University of Deusto (ES), Ruhr University Bochum (DE), University College Cork (IE), Koç University (TR), University of Liège (BE), Erasmus University Rotterdam (NL), University of Zagreb (HR)

**Budget:** €€

**Where:** Linnanmaa, Kontinkangas, City centre

### #Culture Monopoly

The #Culture Monopoly model gamifies the use of vacant spaces and engages 'players' from various fields. Cultural actors, property owners and the public administration. The city centre area is transformed into a vibrant and lively cultural jamboree. Shop windows showcase art works with the whole city offering a new kind of platform for artistic co-creation. There are more and more empty shops in the centre of Oulu and the aftermath of the pandemic might add a few more as shop closures have accelerated the shift to online shopping. But city centres need not be just about shops. They can be different, playful and more attractive than ever.

Culture Monopoly fills places and spaces with pop-up exhibitions, small-scale theatre and dance performances, circus acts - anything that brings life and colour to the city centre.

When a suitable tenant for the empty store is found, **our wild performances will simply take over the next available empty space.**

The model is scalable in nature and can be used to change the cultural climate beyond Oulu city centre into our neighbourhood and region.

**Producers:** Oulu2026, Oulu Writers Association (FI)

**Partners:** Nitra2026 (SK), Oneday Regeneration (UK), Flow Productions (FI), JoJo Oulu Dance Centre (FI), Oulu Artists Association (FI), Northern Photographic Centre (FI), PROTO ry (FI), Soiva Siili ay (FI), The Irish Festival of Oulu ry (FI), Puppet Theatre Akseli Klouk (FI), Oulu Comics Centre (FI)

**Budget:** €€

## The Nook

As in many European cities, Oulu's public spaces rarely foster open access, equity and interaction, the key basis for creativity. The Nook is an urban project that will focus on transforming drab public spaces into meaningful places where residents can either 'hang out' alone or spend time and socialise with others. The nooks are always free and open to everyone. Just relax.

Imagine cosy and playful urban pockets stuffed with cultural experiences, jaw-dropping architectural interventions and parks that invite you to read or play board games. Wandering through the different nooks and crannies of Oulu will inspire you to look at your everyday surroundings in a new way.

The climate-friendly places glow with artistic content, offering elements that promote community and spontaneous encounters. The Nooks and their treasures will be designed by an international team and will evolve gradually and in a participatory way to be fully experienced in 2026.

The concept of the Nook will be piloted in 2021-2022 during a suburban regeneration project.

**Producer:** Oulu Urban Culture (FI)

**Partners:** Trenchin2026 (SK), The Living Room Project, Boden (SE), MateraHub (IT), San Sebastian (ES), Placemaking Europe, Jeesjeesgood Collective (FI), City of Oulu (FI)

**Budget:** €€

## AALTOSIILLO

Do you know where the iconic Finnish architect **Alvar Aalto** meets 3D technology and cultural heritage? Well, of course in the AALTOSIILLO. The aim is to restore the industrial building into a world-class research and visitor centre – where culture and science meet. Aalto's innovative cathedral-like concrete structure – the Toppila Pulp Mill's wood chip silo – will become a multi-purpose exhibition and performance space for the public. This building is located in the heart of a culturally deprived area in Oulu.

An adjoining structure will explore new forms of these historic industrial materials currently being developed for sustainable construction, such as 'eco-concrete' and laminated 'celluwood'. The centre will develop 3D and other digital recording capabilities, training and skill-sharing to demonstrate the ways in which technology can help us to see the world afresh. Recording will focus on preserving both the local cultures and natural environments of the far north Nordic region – by bringing together local and international universities, foundations and artists. The AALTOSIILLO will work to highlight the importance of the industrial architecture of the north and the impact that industry has had on the environment.

**Producers:** Factum Foundation (ES), Skene Catling de la Peña (UK/ES)

**Partners:** University of Oulu (FI), Oulu University of Applied Sciences (FI), Aalto Foundation (FI)

**Budget:** €€

## Programme Line: **STREAM TO THE FUTURE**

True and sustainable cultural climate change begins with children and young people. Our schools and cultural services will collaborate to seek solutions to future challenges at the crossroads of art, science and technology.

**CCC factor:** learning through culture, fostering creativity, European children's culture

**Overall Budget:** 690 000€





## Go with the STREAM

Oulu's exciting new children's cultural centre, opening in 2026 will be called STREAM, with the R of Reading being added to the STEAM programme which aims to deliver better learning in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths. This exciting physical and virtual space will offer a unique cultural centre supporting a freer approach to thinking and creativity, combining art, science and technology.

This unique centre and approach will underpin Oulu's aim to become a leading city in implementing STEAM for children and young people. A study path from early childhood to high school will also be developed to enable schools and the arts and creative sectors to work more closely together.

Oulu will set up an international network with cities interested in, or already implementing, the STEAM philosophy.

**Producers:** Oulu City Library (FI), Cultural Centre Valve (FI)

**Partners:** Local cultural scene and professional artists, writers and literary educators, Hands on! International Association of Children in Museums, Association of Finnish Children's Cultural Centres (FI), Aveiro2027 (PT), Liepaja2027 (LV)

**Budget:** €€

## Art Seeds Children's Biennale

Art seeds are planted in early childhood as Oulu2026 transforms day care facilities into an art-friendly, aesthetic environment. The project encourages early childhood educators to adopt art and culture-based methods. Together with our European partners a quality certificate for early childhood art education will be piloted and put into action.

Starting in 2024, with the second edition in spring 2026, the project culminates in the Children's Biennale, with a major programme of events and exhibitions showcasing art created by children. As a framework programme for the Biennale a whole month will be dedicated to a display of children's culture phenomena.

**Producers:** City of Oulu (FI), Oulu2026

**Partners:** Museum and Science Centre Luuppi (FI), Cultural Centre Valve (FI), The Association of Cultural Heritage Education in Finland (FI), Association of Finnish Children's Cultural Centres (FI), Aveiro2027 (PT), eTwinning, Big Bang – Adventurous music festival for a young audience (BE), Nitra2026 (SK)

**Budget:** €€

## Frozen Nights

How do you make a movie-making career in the far north? Here's how you do what you love from right where you are! When the days are dark and nature is cloaked in frost and ice, we launch a new international film event and competition, Frozen Nights.

The event involves young people aged 13–22 from different countries, cultures and backgrounds, whose passion for making films brings them to Oulu. Young filmmakers are accompanied by film education experts and professionals. The programme includes movie screenings, meeting professionals, master classes and a final gala showcasing the contestant's movie pieces.

Frozen Nights connects the international movie scene to the artistic visions of local and international youth.

## Oulu will be the acclaimed film education capital of Finland.

**Producers:** Oulu Cultural Centre for Children and Youth (FI), Valve Film School for Children (FI)

**Partners:** Oulu International Children and Youth Film Festival (FI), Educational Consortium OSAO (FI), Olympia International Children and Youth Film Festival (EL), Nordic Youth Film Festival NUFF (NO), Schlingel – International Film Festival for Children and Young Audience (DE)

**Budget:** €€





## Programme Line: URBAN BOOST

The Urban Boost programme line gives young people the opportunity to build the future on their own terms and to challenge out-dated practices.

**CCC factor:** tackling youth unemployment, inspirational future, local to global

**Overall Budget:** 1 430 000€

### Untamed Office

Many youngsters say they find Oulu quite dull. Where are all the wild events and the European city hustle? Untamed Office is set to change all that. A youthful production office for young and ambitious creators will introduce sprawling block parties, community-oriented urban culture, public art interventions, spectacular clubs and intimate boutique festivals, such as the Frozen Man festival which blasts electronic music across the frozen sea.

The office's workshops offer young unemployed people the opportunity to develop their skills in the culture industry, through music and art coaching programmes. We are also introducing new employment opportunities through a young people's expert bank and by starting up an innovative Art Up process.

The Untamed Office is also a gateway for sending and inviting young professionals between Oulu and the rest of the continent through the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+ programmes.

We want to send a strong common European message to our young people. You can act and make an impact from wherever you are!

**Producer:** Oulu Urban Culture (FI)

**Partners:** P60 podium (NL), Radi Vidi Pats (LV), Pikisaari Creative Island (FI), City of Oulu, Cultural Services (FI), Culture Association Kulttuuribingo (FI), Rotos ry (FI)

**Where:** Pikisaari, Oulu

**Budget:** €€€

### Agent 026

Could a car mechanic act as a spokesperson for our cool upcoming local music festivals while repairing their customer's exhaust pipe? Could a nurse recite poetry to the elderly during their rounds, or an electrician apply inspiration from light art into their installations? We will make sure they can!

During 2022-2026, the Agent 026 project will empower 500 new graduates from OSAO's various vocational school branches as cultural agents with skill sets that enable them to sow the seeds of culture into their future jobs in the companies and organisations in our area. The cultural agents will perform 2,026 cultural interventions and the colourful results will be presented to a wider audience in 2026.

Annual events involve students and staff bringing out culture as part of the institution's teaching. Different school units can employ joint teaching and implementation methods during the project. International student and teacher exchanges, as well as international camps and on-the-job training periods with partners, will also be used.

**Producer:** Educational Consortium OSAO (FI)

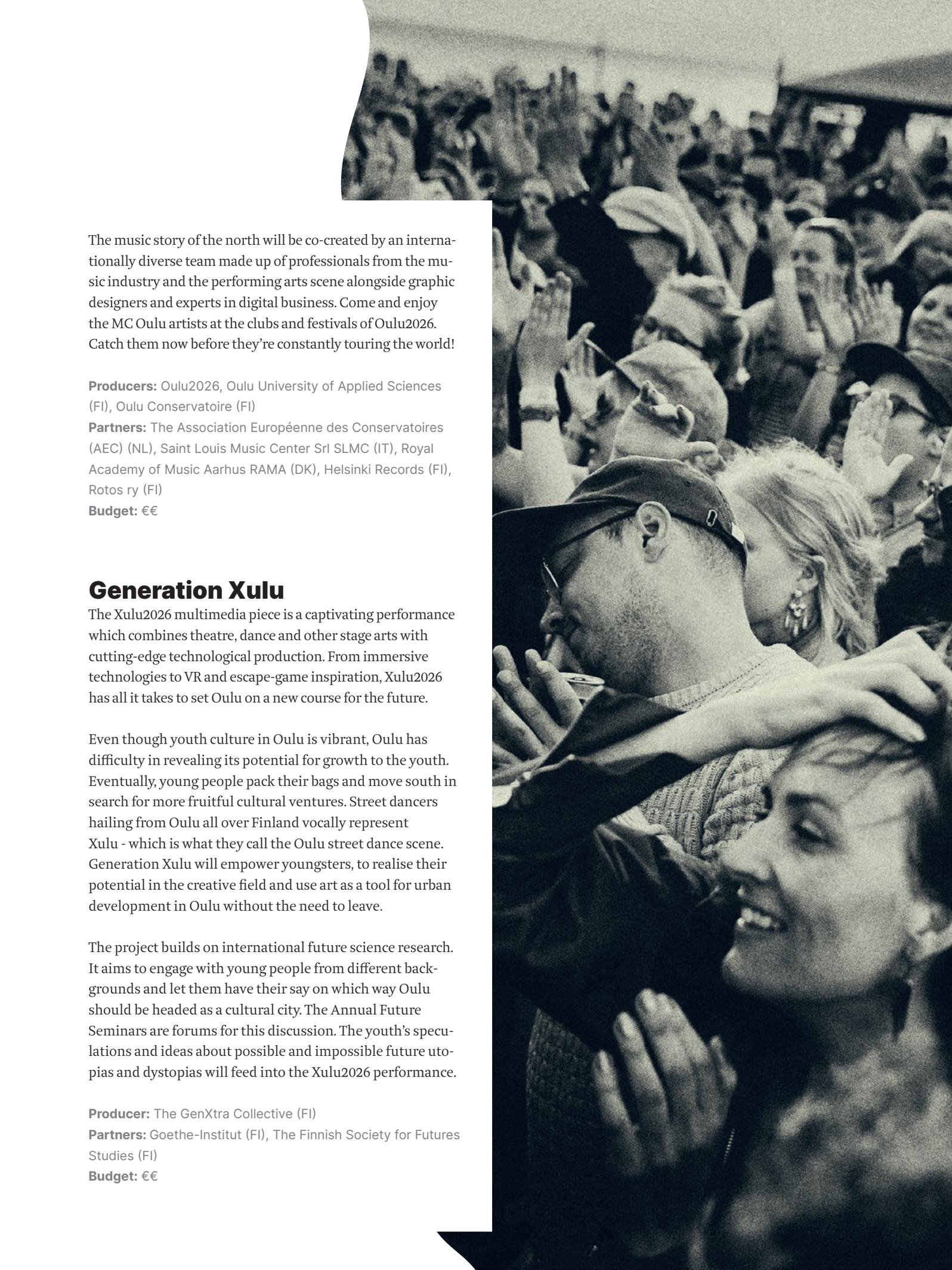
**Partners:** Second Chance Gifts and Recycling (UK), Tartu Kutsehariduskeskus (EE), Ayuntamiento de Alcoy (ES), Gewerbliche Schule im Hoppenlau (DE), Landstede Groep (NL), Handwerkskammer Flensburg (DE), Prometna Šola Maribor, Srednja Prometna Šola (SI)

**Budget:** €€

### MC Oulu

What is the sound of Oulu? Music marinated in the harsh conditions of the North is unique. We want to bring it to the rest of the world.

MC Oulu is a top of the range mentoring programme for young musicians and professionals in the music industry. The goal is to help artists in the north to promote and market themselves towards international stardom, following the footsteps of **Sentenced** (heavy metal), **Terveet Kädet** (hardcore punk), **Blind Channel** (violent pop), **Jori Hulkkonen** (electronic) and others. The recipe for exciting new music can be found in the crossover between the underground and the mainstream.



The music story of the north will be co-created by an internationally diverse team made up of professionals from the music industry and the performing arts scene alongside graphic designers and experts in digital business. Come and enjoy the MC Oulu artists at the clubs and festivals of Oulu2026. Catch them now before they're constantly touring the world!

**Producers:** Oulu2026, Oulu University of Applied Sciences (FI), Oulu Conservatoire (FI)

**Partners:** The Association Européenne des Conservatoires (AEC) (NL), Saint Louis Music Center Srl SLMC (IT), Royal Academy of Music Aarhus RAMA (DK), Helsinki Records (FI), Rotos ry (FI)

**Budget:** €€

## Generation Xulu

The Xulu2026 multimedia piece is a captivating performance which combines theatre, dance and other stage arts with cutting-edge technological production. From immersive technologies to VR and escape-game inspiration, Xulu2026 has all it takes to set Oulu on a new course for the future.

Even though youth culture in Oulu is vibrant, Oulu has difficulty in revealing its potential for growth to the youth. Eventually, young people pack their bags and move south in search for more fruitful cultural ventures. Street dancers hailing from Oulu all over Finland vocally represent Xulu - which is what they call the Oulu street dance scene. Generation Xulu will empower youngsters, to realise their potential in the creative field and use art as a tool for urban development in Oulu without the need to leave.

The project builds on international future science research. It aims to engage with young people from different backgrounds and let them have their say on which way Oulu should be headed as a cultural city. The Annual Future Seminars are forums for this discussion. The youth's speculations and ideas about possible and impossible future utopias and dystopias will feed into the Xulu2026 performance.

**Producer:** The GenXtra Collective (FI)

**Partners:** Goethe-Institut (FI), The Finnish Society for Futures Studies (FI)

**Budget:** €€

Theme

# Cool Contrasts

Oulu is the kingdom of great contrasts  
– positive, but also challenging.  
Contrasts such as the nightless nights  
of the midnight sun and sunless  
days in the heart of winter.  
Contrasts have the power  
both to connect and  
disconnect, but also to create  
something new.



Mayor of Hailuoto Aki Heiskanen

# Underground Clash

---

The world is changing at an unprecedented pace, often without consensus on how best to navigate our future through this metamorphosis. This shift affects every aspect of our cultural, political, environmental and technological landscape.

In 2026 we propose to cooperate with artists who work within a similarly shifting paradigm, where technological innovation and traditional art practices meet. This year-long exhibition will tackle issues around climate change and humanity's relationship with the environment, with artists who will be engaging locally to shape the content and activities of the exhibition.

Superblue, a social change initiative and ground-breaking new enterprise created by Pace Gallery and The Emerson Collective, is our curator and partner. It is dedicated to presenting large-scale, immersive, experiential art which is as meaningful as it is spectacular, encompassing the belief that art has the potential to change the way we see the world around us.

The heart of The Underground Clash is a specially commissioned piece from Danish artist, **Jakob Kudsk Steensen**. A 'digital gardener', Jakob brings together physical, virtual, real and imagined landscapes in mixed reality, interactive installations, focusing on how humans, technology and natural environments connect. His physical commission will be accompanied by online platforms, allowing the project to be experienced remotely.

The commission will include a residency during which Steensen will explore regional and northern European climate issues, meeting with technologists and researchers, academics and citizens, gamers and artists.

We will also feature the existing work of three extraordinary artists, modified for this site-specific presentation, who will continue the narrative and encourage us to think about the concept of long-term thinking and our individual impact on our environmentally-challenged planet.

**Katie Paterson** (UK) collaborates with scientists and researchers on projects that consider geological time and change. Her two works *The Sound of* (a live phone line, linked to an underwater microphone allowing the listener to hear a glacier melting) and *Vatnajökull, Snæfellsjökull, Solheimajökull* (sound recordings from three Icelandic glaciers, pressed, cast and frozen into three records which are played until they melt) will be adapted to a local context - powerful reminders of the fragility of our planet and of our impact on it.

Studio Swine is Japanese architect **Azusa Murakami** and British artist **Alexander Groves**. Their installation, *New Spring Forest* offers a multi-sensory interactive experience - an artwork evoking the fragility of nature and the ephemerality of the seasons, whilst capturing the hope associated with the first signs of spring. Bubble-like magical blossoms burst or are salvaged in interaction with the visitor's touch, reminding us of our ability to both destroy and save the natural environment. *New Spring*, like a public park, is also a gathering space for the local community - a place for talks, meditation and performance.

**Carsten Nicolai** is a German artist who creates all-encompassing sensory audio-visual environments. His work *Unicolour* examines the psychology of colour perception - a physical experience reminding us of our individual solitary position in an infinitely intertwined universe. Nicolai is also a composer and producer of electronic music - AKA *Alva Noto* - and has worked with Oulu-based musician **Vladislav Delay** - a collaboration which could be further explored in 2026.

All of these works together tell a stunning story of innovation, time, climate and the power of individuals in both local and global communities. As a collective, the artworks will inspire audiences to contemplate our current world through a different lens - one of empathy, potential and hope.

**Budget: €€€**



## Programme Line: ART<3TECH

Every day, nearly three billion people use mobile technology developed in Oulu. The city has long been a pioneer in technology research, product development and start-ups – and now it wants to take over Art&Tech. The models used to produce the culture of the future will increasingly utilise a hybrid strategy, a combination of virtual and physical experiences.

**CCC Factor:** sustainable and accessible culture, humanising digital culture, future art platforms

**Overall Budget:** 2 150 000€

### ArTech City

What does a city connecting technology and science with art and creativity look like? What will the cultural field be like post-pandemic? Turning Oulu into an ArTech City requires a rethink. We also recognise - and will build into STREAM to the Future - this connection between arts, science and technology. ArTech City brings together European cities who share an interest in developing interaction between art and technology through the following events and processes:

#### European ArTech Network

A European-wide network will be launched where cities and regions, together with technology companies, RDI organisations, creative as well as the cultural industries and art professionals will be able to meet, learn and share their experiences, knowledge and good practices. How can cities best develop a platform that will boost collaboration between technology and culture is the central question facing this ecosystem. The European ArTech Network will explore this question through matchmaking events, webinars, seminars, expert visits and residencies. Through the network, we will be able to better recognise our role within the international field of art and technology, discover our unique strengths and build up our position in these areas.

#### ArTech Festival

The international ArTech Festival will showcase new innovations and pilots combining media art and art and technology, sourced via open international calls. Held in conjunction with the Lumo Light Festival, it will host an extensive networking event for European cities as well as a matchmaking event for artists, technology innovators and entrepreneurs.

### ArTech Pilots

In the search for future solutions, rapid experimentation and piloting with companies and artists are the methods adopted to design innovative and interactive technology-based cultural products and services. One of the main focus areas here is streaming, highly popular in current cultural productions, where elements of interaction still require strengthening. Here, we are collaborating with European festivals through the ambitious Hybridise Your Festival project.

### ArTech Spaces

To match the high-quality level of ArTech productions, great spaces for their delivery and consumption are needed. A new immersive art and technology space will be built for the Museum and Science Centre Luuppi. **Deep Space allows for a completely unique experience** that will be utilised in, for example, cultural heritage demonstrations, gigs, events, expert visits, works of art and games. Further, Oulu University of Applied Sciences is preparing funding to develop a digital production space suitable for teaching, RDI and professional productions. Oulu2026 is negotiating partnership options that would ensure access to the space for both public and private sector users.

**Producer:** Oulu2026

**Partners:** Linz Ars Electronica (AT), Oulu University of Applied Sciences (FI), University of Oulu (FI), Lumo Light Festival (FI), Museum and Science Centre Luuppi (FI), A network of European cities: Cities of Aveiro (PT), Ghent (BE), Tallinn (EE), Coventry (UK), Edinburgh (UK), Eindhoven (NL)

**Budget:** €€€

## Oulu Dance Hack

A celebration of the spirit of Oulu, despite being located on the margins of Europe, pushing the boundaries of technology and art to raise the profile of Oulu as a world-class dance and technology hub.

Oulu Dance Hack incorporates local artists selected through an open call on a variety of levels, including students from the local universities. During the festival in early 2026, a large-scale projection will be displayed on the festival site, looping a film featuring 1000 local dancers. It will be mapped onto the building so that the dance emerges from the features of the façade. Additionally, the producer, Taika-Box, will bring three specially commissioned international performances to Oulu where the **artists will also work as mentors for a special edition of Oulu Dance Hack for young people** and local professional artists to provide them with professional development opportunities.

A one-week dance and technology festival, Oulu Dance Hack, brings dance, media and other artists from around the world to Oulu to explore new technology in a performance context through a programme of workshops, talks and seminars. Oulu Dance Hack also invites local technology businesses to provide their products offering unique opportunities to artists to collaborate in the creation of short performances, installations and dance films while also providing businesses with the opportunity to showcase their innovations to the public. The festival will end with performances of the pieces created during the week.

**Producer:** TaikaBox (FI)

**Partners:** eTOPIA Centre for Art and Technology – Zaragoza (ES); CINETic International Centre for Research and Education in Innovative and Creative Technologies in association

with the National University of Theatre and Film – Bucharest (RO); Central Europe Dance Theatre in association with Pro Progressione (Cultural Organisation) – Budapest (HU); Dansinitiativet – Production House/ Venue – Luleå (SE), Oulu University of Applied Sciences (FI), City Dance (FI), Oulu Museum of Art (FI), Probot Oy (FI), BusinessOulu (FI), Studio Siilo at Culture Power Station ry (FI)

**Budget:** €€

## Beyond the Sky

Open your eyes to the universe where artistic space images meet music and transport you to new galaxies. Experience the sky in all its glory and witness the birth and death of the stars while enjoying the sound of a symphony orchestra combined with soloists and live electronics in Oulu's pedestrian Rotuaari Promenade. Beyond the Sky is a unique project where art meets science to make 'the stars' accessible to everyone.

With the help of technology, space images are projected onto fog clouds along Rotuaari Promenade. Returning some of the unique photos taken and projecting them back onto the sky has been a long-term desire of the artist behind the installation, the self-proclaimed astroanarchist, **Jukka-Pekka Metsävainio**, whose previous works include a 3D book on cosmic clouds together with the Queen guitarist and astrophysicist **Brian May** and writer **David J. Eicher**. To further enliven the visual elements, a soundscape will be composed by a Finnish composer and musician **Lauri Porra**.

**Producers:** Jukka-Pekka Metsävainio (FI), Oulu2026, Oulu Symphony Orchestra (FI), Lumo Light Festival (FI)

**Budget:** €€



## Earth, Time and Adaptation

Time is not on our side. Earth, Time and Adaptation focuses on major global changes and their local impact by seeking future solutions through a dialogue between art and science, while looking with a critical eye at emerging technologies in climate and space research, satellite observation, biotech and artificial intelligence. **The project will explore possible futures – in the midst of climate, environmental, technological and cultural changes** – and will be presented to the general public and to decision-makers through different activities such as art and science exhibitions, laboratories, artistic practices and research collaborations.

Extending across the Northern wilderness areas in Finland, the project will provide residencies to artists to research, develop and produce new artworks. Activities based on the outcomes of the project will be exhibited at the Museum and Science Centre Luuppi together with six to eight new works by local and international artists, during 2026. Additionally, a new immersive work connecting local human and natural knowledge to global satellite and research data will be produced by **Antti Tenetz** at the same museum.

**Producer:** Antti Tenetz, Albedo Laboratory (FI)

**Partners:** ESA, ESRIN (IT) International Lunar Exploration Working Group (NL), Waag Society, PlanetB (NL), Culture Association Lumi, Rome (IT), Bioartsociety (FI), Museum and Science Centre Luuppi (FI), Calliolab, Pyhäjärvi Mine (FI), Sodankylä Geophysical Observatory, Oulu University (FI), Subzero Collective (FI), Oulanka Research Station, Oulu University (FI)

**Where:** Oulu (FI), Oulanka Research Station (Kuusamo) (FI), Sodankylä (FI), Kilpisjärvi (FI), Kevo (FI), Pyhäsalmi (FI), Amsterdam (NL), Frescati (IT)

**Budget:** €€

## Tomorrow's Wardrobe

What does cultural climate change look like inside your wardrobe? What can we achieve when we combine high fashion, ecology and technology? Tomorrow's Wardrobe presents a wide range of future materials in clothing and textile design as well as costume design in the performing arts in the form of two exhibitions, an international conference and research in the field. The project's perspective is artistic and exploratory, visual and practical.

The project's content focuses on 3D-printed clothing, research on and innovation with future fabric materials and smart clothing as well as intangible and biomaterial suits. The main exhibition will take place at the Oulu Museum of Art showcasing materials and clothes made by international designers, including 3D printed items by the current international *Haute Couture* fashion designer **Iris Van Herpen**, whose clientele includes **Lady Gaga**, **Björk** and **Beyoncé**. The second investigative exhibition, created in collaboration with the Department of Design at Aalto University, addresses the global issue of sustainability and the ecology of materials. Showing how current technology, new material innovations and product development, can generate solutions here will be the subject of an exhibition at the Science Centre Tietomaa.

**Producers:** Museum and Science Centre Luuppi (FI), curator and costume designer Pasi Rähinä (FI)

**Partners:** Iris Van Herpen (NL), Textilmuseet (Textile Fashion Centre), Borås (SE), Trencin2026 (SK), Aalto University (FI)

**Budget:** €€

# What does Cultural Climate Change look like inside a wardrobe?



Pasi Răbină Costume Designer, Oulu Theatre

Clay and wood sculptures by Inka Nieminen in the Sea-changes exhibition at the Oulu Museum of Art

## Programme Line: **DARK MATTERS**

Acknowledging the dark and harvesting the light for health and wellbeing.

**CCC factor:** balanced community, cultural wellbeing, the voice of the margins

**Overall Budget:** 1 035 000 €



See Valoukot in action!

## Light Matters

No one has such an intimate relationship with light as us northerners. When is light cold or warm? What does darkness actually mean? How does light connect to our wellbeing? Light Matters focuses on the elements of light and darkness in our surroundings in all seasons. The project explores the meanings and dimensions of light not only for human beings but also for nature as a whole.

Light Matters will extend the annual Lumo Light Festival through 2025 into 2026, including it as part of the ECoC opening and closing ceremonies. The festival will host an impressive array of international light artists and promote co-productions with local and international artists to strengthen networks and exchange. Light Matters brings together an international group of light artists to implement a light installation that circulates at partner European festivals.

**Producer:** Lumo Light Festival (FI)

**Partners:** Light Art Collection (NL), Tartu Valgus Festival (EE), Lovely Experience multimedia festival (SK), Prisma – Art Light Tech (PT)

**Budget:** €€€

## Voice the Taboo!

Guerrilla art takes over the city! The local mental health association, Cheerful House will team up with a diverse team of open call-selected international and local artists to change attitudes and tackle cultural climate issues head-on. People who suffer from, or have a history of, mental health issues or disorders will create art, both together with the artists and as equals, to reveal the prejudices and stereotypes we often feel too awkward to talk about. A series of debates, street performances, flash mobs and YouTube videos will be used as platforms for people's untold experiences.

Let's talk about death, let's talk about mental health, let's talk about what's still considered taboo! And hey, let's listen...

**Producer:** Cheerful House Association (FI)

**Partners:** Trencin2026 (SK), Cie A Tam Tam/Melanie Gourdon (FR), Museum and Science Centre Luuppi (FI), The Finnish Association for Mental Health (FI), Oulu Urban Culture (FI), The Irish Festival of Oulu (FI), Film School of Cultural Centre Valve (FI), Oulu Comics Center (FI), Jojo Dance Centre (FI), Culture Power Station (FI), Oulu University of Applied Sciences (FI), POPkulta network (FI), Future Hospital OYS 2030 (FI), Tyly Terapia Band (FI)

**Budget:** €

## Mind Blown - Borderlines of the Mind

*"Cuckoos, nuts or mad geniuses?"* It is often said that there is a thin line between genius and madness. Get ready to burst the bubbles around mental health issues! The 'Mind Blown - Borderlines of the Mind' exhibition will explore the realm between sanity and insanity using gripping multisensory spaces and history-related installations. This open-minded exhibition is created by the Museum and Science Centre Luuppi and a multi-professional team.

The exhibition is an immersive journey into the wonders of the mind – with an emphatic and sensitive view. The exhibition also extends beyond its walls: enjoy music therapy or even live streams from mental health lectures.

Don't plan on experiencing the exhibition all in one go, because it will be periodically renewed to include new ways of exploring the mind, constantly reinventing how it tackles prejudiced attitudes to mental health around Finland and Europe.

**Producer:** Museum and Science Centre Luuppi (FI)

**Partners:** Bethlem Museum of the Mind (UK), European museums like City Museum of Halle (DE), MIELI Mental Health Finland (FI), The Finnish Association for Mental Health (FI), Oulu University (FI), Oulu University Hospital's Unit of Psychiatry (FI), Lumo Light Festival (FI), Cheerful House Association (FI)

**Budget:** €€

## Parts of a City

What does 'reality' mean to different people? The city can be a calming experience, but it can also appear as restless or even schizophrenic. An environment can be associated with deep depression for one person, but to another the same *milieu* can evoke euphoric experiences.

A city's mindset will be mapped in a photography exhibition and ultimately disseminated through digital channels to create a dialogue with European citizens. The Parts of a City project pushes you to consider the impacts of urban environments on our mental wellbeing and the role of people's experiences in urban planning. Images created with the double exposure photographic technique reveal the inner landscape of the denizens of Oulu. **Jan Gehl** and other international cities-for-people experts will join in, all other city buffs should too.

Parts of a City will be opened up as a concept to artists and creators in other cities, as artists across Europe are invited to make their own versions and interpretations of the concept.

**Producers:** Janne-Pekka Manninen (FI), Sampo Marjomaa (FI)

**Partners:** Jan Gehl (DK), Helena Águeda Marujo (PT), Jens Friis (DK), Flow Productions (FI), Juha Penttinen (FI)

**Budget:** €



**Play,  
imagine,  
hide and  
interact.**

Photo: Janne-Pekka Manninen



## Programme Line: OULU CALLING!

Celebrating the city's resilience and power of reinvention as an inspiration for the future. We want to explore our local identities through outsiders' eyes, and be surprised by what we discover about ourselves.

**CCC factor:** local identity, finding roots and myths, diverse region

**Overall Budget:** 700 000 €

### Faravid's Land

Enjoy an interpretation of Oulu's mythical past starring the ancient king Faravid. Artistic Director of the Oulu Theatre **Alma Lehmuskallio** and choreographer, artist **Pirjo Yli-Maunula** will direct an immersive, multi-sensory piece combining contemporary dance and circus, theatre, music and visual elements in unexpected ways. History, stories, roots and identity will form a mythical world in cooperation with a number of international and Finnish professionals from the operating cultures of the theatre world and the freelancer scene.

Faravid's Land will take place in an empty factory building. You will step right into this immersive creation and experience a profound urban adventure: You can choose your own path through this world and play, imagine, hide and even interact with the artists. Co-creating the dramaturgy through one's own actions makes the experience both intimate and unique.

Audience accessibility will be expanded through digital methods, so that parts of the work can also be experienced remotely, from anywhere in the world.

**Producers:** Flow Productions (FI), Oulu Theatre (FI)

**Partners:** Rapid Eye (DK), Marta & Kim (NO/NL), Oslo Nycirkus & Acting for Climate (NO), Oulu August Festival (FI)

**Budget:** €€

### The Snowflake

How does the Oulu2026 region appear through the eyes of six European artists? Do we share many similarities with other European peripheries? What kinds of visual images of Cultural Climate Change will the city and the countryside of Oulu2026 inspire them to create?

The snowflake has six 'arms' and a centre representing the perfect geographical map of this project which reaches out from the centre of Oulu into the city's surrounding areas. Six European lens-based artists (drawn from photography, light, video, performance and game arts) will be selected by four European curators through an international call. The artists will work both in the city centre and in the countryside areas, studying communities there to familiarise themselves with their identity, lifestyle and values. The process, including a month's residential period, will lead to a series of site-specific and virtual exhibitions with the main Snowflake exhibition presenting all the results together.

The project strengthens the identities of the Oulu area, highlighting its special features and uniqueness while also exploring the wide range of challenges and opportunities facing Europe's rural peripheries. Interest in the regions as residential areas and workplaces is growing with the snowflake concept supporting this identity reclaiming process.

**Producer:** Northern Photographic Centre (FI)

**Partners:** Centre Rouen Normandie Photographic Centre (FR), Association Diaphane (FR), Street Level Photography (UK), Centrum för fotografi (SE), Förbundet frie fotografer (NO), Nordnorsk kunstnersenter (NO), Galleria Image (DK), Fotografisk Center (DK), FÌSL The Icelandic Contemporary Photography Association (IS), Kaunas Photography Gallery (LT), Municipalities of Muhos and Tyrnävä (FI), KulttuuriKaupila Art Centre (FI), Kattilakoski Culture Cooperative (FI), the residency network Northern AiR (FI)

**Budget:** €€



## From Here to Art – Travel Agency

The 'From Here to Art – Travel Agency' project offers experience trips from one cultural climate to another.

The pandemic has made us rethink leisure travel, shifting our gaze instead to our own, more immediate, surroundings. This may not be a bad thing, as the most important trip can often simply be to our neighbour's home.

The trip itineraries are created together with communities and professional artists from different fields. The travel guides are people from Oulu who use art to provide their personal perspectives on the city. The guide can be, for example, a nature activist, a homeless person, a religious activist, a visually impaired person, a child or an elderly person. Trips are on offer from small-scale visits to another person's home to multi-day carnival neighbourhood walks taking in the phenomena that occur along the way from a chosen perspective. The Travel Agency also organises climate-friendly art trips for special groups from Europe to Oulu and from Oulu to Europe. The Travel Agency is specifically conceived to reflect one of the main goals of Oulu2026 – the need to move to climate friendly travel and to embrace sustainable tourism.

By 2026, the Travel Agency will have opened both in Oulu city centre and online, where you can register for a trip or to be a guide. Participation is made possible on an equal footing, for instance, for those living in care facilities or on the margins of society. Everyone's needs can be addressed. This community art concept provides visitors to the city with a new and intimate way to experience Oulu.

**Producer:** Cultural Cooperative ILME (FI)

**Partners:** Entelechy Arts (UK), Proqvi (SE), ANTI Festival (FI), Reality Research Centre (FI), Vuolle Settlementti (FI), Nuorten Ystävät ry (FI), Mother and Child Home and Shelter of Oulu (FI), Oulu City Hospital (FI), Mental Health Services of Oulu (FI), Veeran Verstas (FI), Oulu Urban Culture (FI), Multicultural Centre Villa Victor (FI), Cultural Centre Valve (FI), VisitOulu (FI)

**Budget:** €€

## Stone Age Survival Strategies

The impact of the current pandemic reminds us that crises are likely to become increasingly endemic. The pandemic has shown us the hard facts of life and brought us closer to nature. Indeed, age-old survival routines have re-emerged as the new 'must have' skills at the dawn of this new era, emphasising the intimate connection between people and nature. This project brings humans and nature closer together by training survival skills in Neolithic surroundings. The project also seeks to question the current culture of consumption; it aims to stir visitors' thoughts on climate change and our connection to nature thus contributing to the overall theme of Cultural Climate Change.

Historical and nature-based attractions often face preservation challenges from growing visitor numbers. The Kierikki Stone Age Centre is no different from other such European attractions in this regard.

Situated in a unique location close to Oulu, the Centre aims to develop experimental archaeology and sustainable, eco-friendly tourism, sharing past stories of this fragile area in sustainable ways, including through digitalisation and open data usage.

**Producer:** Kierikki Stone Age Centre (FI)

**Partners:** EXARC, AÖZA (DE), Fotevikens museum (SE), Vimnaciun (RS), Grampus Heritage (UK), Lynx Vilden, Mesolithic Resource Group (UK), University of Exeter (UK), Anja Mansrud & Mårten Kuchera (NO), Alta Museum (NO), Raisio Regional Education and Training Consortium (FI), University of Helsinki (FI), University of Oulu (FI), Kierikki ry (FI), Kierikki networks (FI), Miika Vanhapiha (FI), Museum and Science Centre Luuppi (FI), VisitOulu (FI), Luovi Vocational College (FI), Oulu University of Applied Sciences (FI), Educational Consortium OSAO (FI)

**Budget:** €€

## Experimental Archaeology and Sustainable Tourism



Stone Age comes to life in the Kierikki Stone Age Centre

Theme

# Brave Hinterland

You need to be brave to live here.

Brave too to pack up and leave, starting a new life elsewhere. But even braver to stay and try to change things. Far away from everything, on the periphery of Europe. We live facing an uncompromising nature, extreme climate (change), enormous distances and wild vastness, excessive light and excessive darkness. Only a few in Europe are willing to live with extreme hardship and extreme beauty. Yet Europe is much more than just its geographical core. We want Europe to get excited by its edges in 2026.



---

## Climate Clock

---

The clock is ticking, the snow is melting. Time is limited if we want to keep our planet from overheating. In 2026 we want to highlight these issues in a public art commission embracing local environmental concerns within a European context.

Climate Clock will explore how climate change is affecting Sub-Arctic life; its effects on the weather, nature and culture. The project will create six permanent artworks across the region and the city of Oulu, forming a new cultural heritage route for Oulu.

Climate Clock is curated by **Alice Sharp**, Invisible Dust (UK). Alice has worked with artists and scientists since 2009 and is an international advisor and presenter on arts and climate change, including talks at Davos 2020 and the UN Development Programme 2019.

Alice Sharp and Oulu2026 have already had conversations with a wide range of technologists, scientists, communities, artists and stakeholders to identify the key local and Europe-wide environmental issues. These included meetings with the *University of Oulu BioCentre*, the *National Finnish Meteorological Society*, the *Oulanka Research Station*, local artists, *Museum and Science Centre Luuppi* and *the Oulu Environmental Coordination Group*.

Over the coming years the international artists commissioned for Climate Clock will work with scientists to explore local stories. For example, the effects on daily life and people's wellbeing during the shorter snow season. Less snow reduces ambient winter light as the snow acts as a reflector under the trees. People love the snow and the frozen sea. A reduction in the amount of seasonal snow and ice is seen as a cultural loss.

Like most Finns, people in the Oulu region are very connected to nature. In the context of the project, artists will

look at the effect on local plant and animal life, including microbiology, using sensors and scientific research methods. The future of energy and waste are also key to this story. Technology is interwoven throughout, as is Oulu's history, each informing the artists on their creative journey.

The final line-up of artists has yet to be confirmed, but through the involvement of several European artists a Europe-wide climate change perspective will be ensured. At this early stage we can already confirm the involvement of **Mariele Nuedecker** (Germany), **Sirious Namazi** (Iran), **Rana Begum** (India) and **Tea Mäkipää** (Finland).

Community involvement is at the heart of the project and Climate Clock includes a community-based umbrella project taking place in the years leading up to 2026, led by **Tellervo Kalleinen** and **Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen** (Finland) and culminating in the first community-created artwork across the region.

Climate Clock will also enable high level art/science collaboration and professional development through a capacity building project. Artists new to this cross-sectoral field will have an opportunity to learn and engage in professional development through online workshops with leading international practitioners in the field of art and science, culminating in an exhibition. This is a project which seeks to enrich and broaden artistic professional practice in the region. The project will be managed locally and will include a young curator in a further layer of capacity building.

Climate Clock's artists will seek to be optimistic and potentially also humorous, engaging in and building on inspiring local and European stories of adaptation and resilience - creating artworks to embody the Oulu region's growing climate awareness and action.

**Budget: €€€**



## Programme Line: BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

Oulu exploring its roots and the routes linking it to Europe. These routes shaped the identity, cultural and societal development of the city and deserve exploring.

**CCC factor:** cultural influences, renewing European connections, celebrating the edges of Europe

**Overall Budget:** 1 650 000 €

## Tar Wharf to the Seven Seas

What caused Oulu's Cultural Climate Change in the late 19th century? The black gold of the North. Oulu had its feet deep in wood tar in the late 19th century which made it one of the world's leading export harbours for shipping tar around Europe. Some even claim wood tar from Oulu was the secret ingredient that powered Britain's Royal Navy to sail the seven seas. But the historical memory of the place and impact of wood tar on our region and beyond has dimmed over the years.

Tar Wharf to the Seven Seas will be a European journey which tells an exciting story of the wood tar trade and how it shaped who we are even today. Following the historic tar transport route from Kainuu region to Oulu, the project will enrich the region with stories, sights and prehistoric remains of the route through digital content and augmented reality.

Historical research will be combined with tar-related artistic events and exhibitions, reconnecting Oulu to cities, such as Stockholm, Copenhagen, Hull, Liverpool, Marseille, London and Cadiz, all of which were once linked to Oulu through the export of the black gold of the North. In addition to a number of tar-related events in the municipalities along the historical wood tar transport route, the Northern Ostrobothnia Museum will create an exhibition taking the visitor on a journey with the tar. It will highlight both the local historical impact of the trade and its importance to the world economy and the shipbuilding sector in Europe's golden era of sail.

**Producers:** Museum and Science Centre Luuppi (FI), Oulu2026

**Partners:** Musei Civici di Modena (IT), Finnish Youth Council Allianssi (FI), Humanpolis Oy (FI), Metsähallitus (FI), The Danish National Museum (DK), European Cities and their museums along the Tar Route, Municipalities of Muhos, Utajärvi, Vaala, Kajaani, Paltamo, Sotkamo, Kuhmo and Suomussalmi (FI)

**Where:** Municipalities along the Tar Route

**Budget:** €€€

### 2nd Generation Cultural Embassy

Have you ever thought about how big an impact immigration has had on the history and formation of cultural industries in Europe? In fact, the familial roots of many Europeans lie somewhere other than the country they grew up in. 2ndG Cultural Embassy introduces the true masterminds behind local art scenes: overrepresented but undetected, second generational nationals. The project will reconnect them with their roots while creating new opportunities for them in the form of residencies and work opportunities in Oulu.

This work has already been kick-started by the Sweden-Finnish Cultural Embassy providing Swedish artists of Finnish heritage with the chance to reconnect with their roots through residencies in Oulu. These monthly residencies for artists will have been expanded to include second generation nationals from across Europe by 2026.

**The project will culminate in ‘Oulu2026 2ndG’ which is an intimate boutique festival where the Gothenburg Book Fair, the Midnight Sun Film Festival and the unique spirit of local cultural festivals meet.**

**Producer:** Sweden-Finnish Cultural Embassy (FI)

**Partners:** Finnish Institute in Stockholm (SE), Sveriges Radio Finska (former Sisuradio) (SE), City of Gothenburg (SE), extensive list of Sweden-Finnish parties, Halti Kven Culture Centre IKS (NO), London Irish Writers (UK), Liverpool Irish Cultural Centre (UK), Embassy of Ireland (IE), Res Artis (FI), Cultural Centre Valve (FI), Pohjola-Norden (FI), Svenska privatskolan i Uleåborg (FI), University of Oulu (FI), the residency network Northern AiR (FI), Oulu Writers Association (FI), Hanaholmen Cultural Centre for Sweden and Finland (FI), Embassy of Sweden (FI)

**Budget:** €€

### E75 Highway

Road-trip! Jump aboard the Artists’ Association MUU’s art bus and take a journey along the E75 that connects Oulu to Vardø, Norway, in the north and Sitia, Greece, in the south. The art adventure includes dozens of exciting pit-stops, visiting art events and site-specific artworks co-created by over a hundred international bus travellers along the way. The project highlights the cultural significance and the history of roads. The future of mobility in a sustainable way is also one of the key issues to be explored.

Artists and art lovers will get to meet their peers and in E75-connected towns, including ECoC cities Helsinki, Budapest, Novi Sad, Thessaloniki and Athens. It will also be possible to join an ongoing dialogue on the meaning and history of roads in the bus or through a live online vlog. The road also passes through our 2026 Slovak sister city. For example, Zilina, together with its Polish border neighbour Bielsko-Biala is already planning their own project that will connect with our road-trip.

The project will culminate in a contemporary art festival in Oulu, bringing artists from along the route together once again to celebrate the role of roads as the foundation of civilisation. E-roads are Europe’s vascular system, allowing free movement within the EU for both people and services. What would our European community be without the infrastructure connecting the Member States?

**Producers:** Artists’ Association MUU (FI), The Cultural Magazine Kaltio (FI), Oulu2026

**Partners:** Zilina2026 (SK), Stanica Žilina-Záriečie (SK), Malý Berlin (SK), Nadácia Cvernovka (SK), Centre for Contemporary Art Laznia, Gdansk (PL), Trencin2026 (SK), Nitra2026 (SK)

**Budget:** €€

## Looking East

We are between East and West. Looking East increases the number of opportunities gained by cultural professionals to create international networks and gain employment in the creative industries as well as gaining support for the development of new ideas. In particular, it creates cultural bridges between Oulu and Russia.

For example, if you are lucky, your next train ride between Helsinki and St. Petersburg can take you to unexpected worlds: you might find your carriage decorated with mind-boggling media art pieces by emerging young artists from each side of the border. Such innovative ideas are born at Cultural Climate Change Pitching, an annual event that challenges its participants to share how they would foster Cultural Climate Change. Further, to continue collaborating with the Karelian College of Culture and Arts, creative projects such as the Youth Art Festival of the Arctic Territories in the City of Kostomuksha and Dance Laboratory consisting of training, masterclasses and cross-border performances will be implemented in partnership.

Oulu University of Applied Sciences will continue strengthening its cross-border partnerships in Russia and elsewhere in Europe through its Centre for New Media Arts and Performance. The centre will take advantage of its position as an internationally recognised regional hub in the field of art and technology, especially for music, dance and media, to create new ways of experiencing culture at the edges.

**Producers:** Oulu2026, Oulu University of Applied Sciences (FI), Karelia College of Culture and Arts (RU)

**Partners:** Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Karelia (RU), CULTA Project (RU), State University of Petrozavodsk (RU), Arctic State Institute of Culture and Art (RU), St. Petersburg State University of Film and Television (RU), Karelian Research Center (RU), National Museum of the Republic of Karelia (RU), UiT – The Arctic University of Norway (NO), Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim (NO), Luleå University of Technology (SE), Saxion, Enschede (NL), Letterkenny Institute of Technology (IE), Duale Hoch-

schule Baden-Württemberg, Stuttgart (DE), Birmingham City University (UK), Hanze University of Applied Sciences (DE), Hochschule der Medien, Stuttgart (DE) Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim (NO)

**Where:** Oulu and the Republic of Karelia

**Budget:** €€

## Village Anthems

Oulu2026 – soon coming to a village near you! And in a way that you are bound to remember. It might be the crash course in Finnish folk dancing you took at your local village fiesta that stuck in your mind. Or, more likely, it's because the Oulu-based folk music group *Rällä*, with local musicians, **composed a unique anthem for your village that proudly gets played at every suitable opportunity.**

The Village Anthems project will send Rällä to 5 villages around the Oulu2026 project area and another 5 out into the far hinterlands of Europe, each seeking to get their own Cultural Climate Change underway. Each village will get their own communal celebration and anthem, based on studies of local stories, history and future visions. Don't worry if your village didn't make the cut: you're welcome to join the Village Anthems finale, a merry folk music and folk-dance festival in Oulu's Turkansaari.

**Producer:** Rällä (FI)

**Partners:** Jurmala2027 (LV), Open call for partnering villages in Europe, Oulu University of Applied Sciences, Media and Performing Arts (FI)

**Where:** Around Europe

**Budget:** €€

Solstice Festival in  
Ruka, Kuusamo



## Programme Line: NATURALLY ART

Pulsing forces of the North – Nature and Art. With the growing focus on climate change, we cannot ignore or deny nature's forces – whether you live in Oulu region or on the southern-most shores of Europe. We wish to showcase our region's traditional engagement with nature reminding us how it enriches our lives, sharing its vibrant inspiration with a broader Europe.

**CCC factor:** Reconnecting art and nature, climate change, indigenous Sámi culture

**Overall Budget:** 1 400 000€

## Natural Stages

Experience world-class performers in a breathtaking wilderness! The project highlights how well nature and art work in symbiosis, reminding us of the importance of nature and sustainability.

Natural Stages events in 2026 include **Tero Saarinen Company's** dance work in Hailuoto Island. Circus artist and choreographer, **Ilona Jäntti** is doing her 'thing' based on air acrobatics in Oulu ... but, out at sea! **Tony Kakko**, lead singer of the famous metal band **Sonata Arctica** from Kemi, will perform an Arctic concert in their hometown at the world's largest snow castle. The accompanying orchestra utilises instruments made of ice. Natural Stages turns scenic northern nature into Oulu2026 concert halls and stages.

**Producer:** Oulu2026

**Partners:** Jurmala2027 (LV), Metsähallitus (FI), Visit Kemi (FI), Liepaja2027 (LV)

**Where:** Across the Oulu2026 area

**Budget:** €€

## Art and Nature Trails

There are a multitude of Art and Nature Trails in the Oulu2026 area for visitors to slowly wander, discovering along the way glorious nature sites, cultural and historical locations and areas and original events. Northern Finland invites locals and other Europeans from near and far to experience, for example, our unique archipelago life, church routes, stories relating to our city's history - between east and west - the UNESCO Global Geopark and many, many more surprises, all combining art and nature. Some of them being enhanced as we move towards 2026. The map on the page 63 illustrates all the wonderful Art and Nature Trails you will find in the Oulu2026 area.

These trails remind us that the Oulu2026 area is a fusion of European cultures, where culture is a diverse mixture of different eras, conquerors and people. Northern Finland can sweep you – and the whole of Europe! - off your feet, if you look closely enough and have an open mind. Which path would you like to take a closer look at first?

**Producers:** Municipalities in Oulu2026 region

**Partners:** Local organisations

**Budget:** €€

## Borderless Sámi Culture

Would you like to know more about the history and living culture of the only indigenous people in the EU, the Sámi people? Oulu is the place to connect with the Sámi people as it hosts the largest Sámi community in Finland. Indeed, the name Oulu comes from the Sámi language meaning melted snow or floodwater. The University of Oulu is the only university in Finland teaching Sámi language and culture as major subjects.

For the Sámi people, borders are fluid. The Sámi were divided in an artificial way when the modern national states of Fenno-Scandia were created. Our project, Borderless Sámi Culture also knows no borders. The Arctic Festival in Bodø and Oulu brings together Sámi artists and cultural figures from Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia.

## Arctic Festival

The Arctic Sámi festival will be organised in ECoC history's two most northern cities, in Bodø2024 and then again in Oulu2026, to celebrate this arctic friendship accompanied by music, memories and tales of other landscapes, places and myths relating to arctic Europe. Producing festivals across borders will unite the people in Sápmi (the Sámi word for their homeland) and the arctic region. The festival programme will be inspired by Sámi traditional and contemporary cultural and artistic expression and influences from many cultures and people in Europe.

## Programme Line: NATURALLY ART

The week-long festival will include traditional Sámi handicrafts and new Sámi design, Sámi movies showcased at local cinema and an exhibition of three Nordic Sámi Artists as well as lectures on Sámi art by the Giellagas Institute of the University of Oulu, at the Oulu Museum of Art. Let's also not forget music, poetry, theatre and gastronomic experiences!

### We also want to grow the visibility and awareness of Sámi Culture.

Several projects between the Arctic Festivals wander into and out of Oulu and around the arctic region. In Oulu, children and young people will participate in a series of Sámi culture workshops in schools together with the Youth Academy and the Youth Council of the Sámi Parliament. School teachers will also be provided with up-to-date methods to support the teaching of Sámi culture. The aim is for schools to be able to include topics related to Sámi culture in their teaching, especially during the Sámi National Day (6 February). Educational institution Oulu-opisto will organise Sámi handicraft courses and handicraft workshops. At the Oulu-opisto, Oulu2026 will also add a drama course based on Sámi literature. The theme culminates in the 2026 *Studia Generalia* series, in which different local and minority cultures in the Oulu region engage in dialogue with their fellow Oulu residents.

**Producer:** Oulu2026

**Partners:** Bodo2024 (NO), Norrbottensmusiken (SE), Kultur i Troms (NO), Ubmejen Biejvieh, The Sámi Week, Umeå (SE), Giellagas Institute, University of Oulu (FI), Sámi Duodji ry (FI); Cinema Star (FI), International Sámi Film Institute (FI), Skábmagovat Film Festival (FI)

**Budget** €€€

## Climate Arena

The small municipality of Ii thrives on serving as a central arena for the climate change debate! Come to Ii and participate in Europe's coolest debate. Join Climate Arena 2026!

Climate change belongs to everyone. Climate Arena researches and distributes solutions in relation to climate change touching all aspects of life, ensuring that the journey towards a carbon-neutral society is also made in a socially sustainable way. The Arena deals with climate change in a multidisciplinary manner: climate change can be seen, heard,

tasted and smelled. In the arena, science meets the arts, entertainment culture and citizen decision-makers. In particular, Climate Arena brings together Europe's rural and peripheral regions to discuss mutual problems and possible solutions.

Ii's Micropolis has already received numerous international awards for its climate work, most recently, it won Best European Climate Policy at the Innovation in Politics Awards. The Annual Climate Arena will gradually grow from a local and national event to an international one-week event by 2026, positioning itself at the centre of the European climate debate.

**Producer:** Ii Micropolis Ltd. (FI)

**Partners:** Greenpeace (FI), Ministry of the Environment (FI), Finnish Environmental Institute (SYKE) (FI), The Agenda 2030 Youth Group (FI), Invisible Dust (UK), Green Scotland, Perth Scotland (UK)

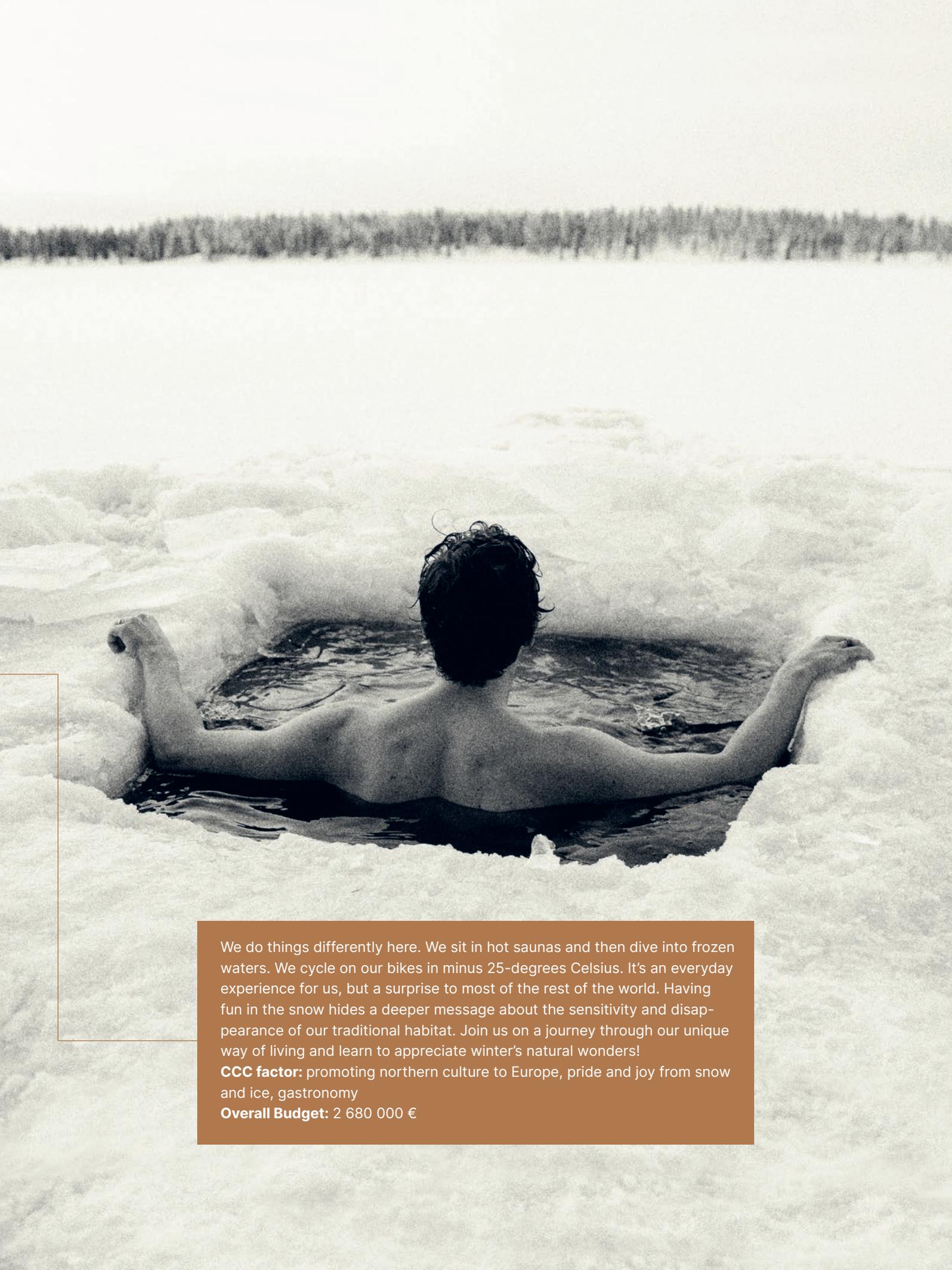
**Budget:** €€

## Programme Line: NORTHERN VIBES

### Let It Snow!

Oulu2026 will be a celebration of snow, ice and the arctic lifestyle. We'll build a winter village of snow and ice in the city. An arena for events with ice-art, ice-sports, ice-swimming, snow-filled games – with saunas, hot tubs and warm drinks also in the mix.

The Let it Snow! project brings together several winter events. Oulu Snow Fest is an international snow sculpture event that will grow by 2026 as we invite snow sculptors from past and future European Capitals of Culture to Oulu. How about ice art installations, Arctic fashion, electronic music and performance art on top of the frozen Sea, in sub-zero temperatures of minus 20 degrees Celsius? All of this is included in the Frozen Man Festival. This brutal winter event is inspired by the legendary Burning Man Festival. The Let It Snow! project creates hope for the future. European climate innovations will be pitched from an ice hole during a Polar Bear Pitching event and we will invite Europe to join the party: ice-sculptors, ice hockey players – all those who love life with an arctic twist! The arena will open at the beginning of 2026 as one of the locations for the Opening of our cultural year.



We do things differently here. We sit in hot saunas and then dive into frozen waters. We cycle on our bikes in minus 25-degrees Celsius. It's an everyday experience for us, but a surprise to most of the rest of the world. Having fun in the snow hides a deeper message about the sensitivity and disappearance of our traditional habitat. Join us on a journey through our unique way of living and learn to appreciate winter's natural wonders!

**CCC factor:** promoting northern culture to Europe, pride and joy from snow and ice, gastronomy

**Overall Budget:** 2 680 000 €

## Programme Line: NORTHERN VIBES

Ice hockey is the most popular sport in Finland and Oulu is one of the most significant ice hockey cities. Our ice hockey team Oulun Kärpät will be 80 years old in 2026. The year culminates in a winter classic, an outdoor league match on ice, where they face their traditional opponent HIFK from Helsinki.

Please, let it snow!

**Producers:** Oulu Safaris (FI), Oulun Kärpät (FI), Urban Boost (FI), Oulu2026

**Partners:** Jurmala2027 (LV), Bodø2024 (NO), International Snow Sculptors, International Electronic Music Artists, Lumo Light Festival (FI)

**Where:** Nallikari Winter Village, Raksila Sports Centre

**Budget:** €€€

### Arctic Food Lab

The ingredients ripened in Northern Finland's short but intense summer provide the basis for our arctic cuisine. Have you ever eaten berries and mushrooms which you have just freshly picked from the forest? Or caught fish from the clean river or lake waters? These activities were a crucial part of our ancestor's way of life – now they are a culinary luxury for visitors and a manifestation of 'the good life' for the locals. The Oulu2026 region is home to the world's cleanest and most ecologically produced wild food.

The unique flavours of the region come from Finland's special northern climate and the extreme shift between light and dark producing unique arctic flavours in wild berries and honey. The Arctic Food Lab brings together Oulu Region's gastronomy and food culture operators, celebrating northern food and gastronomy through food-related events, such as PotatoGallery 2026, a project that combines environmental and community art, science and gastronomy to agriculture in extraordinary ways. The concept is created by the village of Tyrnävä and its partners who already have quite a reputation for growing prime potatoes; the events and especially an innovation called air-potatoes are their main draws here. The project creates a Bridge to the Turku2011 Virgin Potatoes Festival and Leeuwarden's and Valletta's Potatoes Go Wild project. Northern culinary art for European visitors in 2026 and beyond.

**Producer:** Oulu2026

**Partners:** Municipality of Tyrnävä (FI), Leeuwarden (NL), Valletta (MT), Nitra2026 (SK), FinPom (FI), Kantaperuna HZPC (FI), Siemenperunakeskus (FI), professor Jari Valkonen, University of Helsinki, department of Agricultural Sciences (FI), curator Pirkko Siitari (FI)

**Budget:** €€€

### Aurora Revelare

How are the northern lights formed? Where do they get their colour brilliance from? What different beliefs are associated with the northern lights? Seeing the Northern Lights is an amazing experience. They have always fascinated people and been an inspiration for stories, myths and art. The Aurora Revelare exhibition reveals the secrets and extraordinary nature of the northern lights through an interactive and multifaceted exhibition in the Science Centre Tietomaa during 2026. In the new Deep Space, the visitor will dive into the world of the northern lights with the latest presentation technology.

### Visitors will be able to learn about this amazing natural light show and hopefully experience it first-hand

– a particularly active period for the northern lights is forecast for the years 2025–2027 in the Oulu region! Aurora Revelare's northern lights expeditions to nature sites allow you to see and record these fires of heaven in both videos and photos. Dress up warm. Sit back, relax and enjoy one of nature's most wondrous 'performances'!

**Producers:** Science Centre Tietomaa (FI), Salamapaja (FI)

**Partners:** Explogy (NO), Experium (NO), Science Centres from Nordic countries and/or North America, Observatories from different countries with ties to aurora studies, University of Oulu/Sodankylä Geophysical Observatory (FI), Kierikki Stone Age Centre (FI), Go Arctic (FI)

**Budget:** €€

## Hope in the Hinterland

As the old saying goes, “*Sometimes you have to travel a long way to find what is near*”. We want to bring the influences of South by Southwest, the legendary festival in Austin Texas, to the north and to develop our city into a cradle of new kinds of conferences. Music clubs are transformed into seminar halls while small cafés become venues for world-class professional debates.

Hope in the Hinterland consists of four conference weeks. We are known for our odd events here that have attracted international audiences. These events will form natural milestones in the cycle of the year. We'll create a smooth service path for international networks to organise their own seminars in our city. Streamlined collaboration with local restaurants and hotels will also create new opportunities for artists.

In the spring-winter the networks of creative industries and new innovation are active during the Polar Bear Pitching event. Design thinking is emphasised by DesignOulu events. Experience the different aspects of northern life, Sámi and arctic indigenous peoples in connection with the new Arctic Festival.

The Air Guitar World Championships in late summer have been declaring world peace and respect for the environment for decades. We will dedicate the summer week to a discussion on climate change and sustainable development. During the Lumo Light Festival in the darkness of November, we will invite all Art & Tech networks to Oulu.

Creating a thoughtful mix of serious conversations and wild weirdness. **The entire city acts as a laboratory for Cultural Climate Change with Hope in the Hinterland joyously expressed.**

**Producers:** Oulu2026, Oulu Convention Bureau (FI)

**Partners:** Oulun liikekeskus (FI), International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), BusinessOulu (FI)

**Budget:** €

## In Europe's Spotlight

In Europe's Spotlight offers Europeans unrivalled coverage of our northern festivals from light-based events to musical experiences, poetry weeks to UFO festivals ... Yes, you got that right, really talking about UFOs! Projects depict Cultural Climate Change throughout the Oulu2026 area. The whole of Europe will be able to enjoy the most distinctive festivals, event locations and atmospheres of northern Finland. Think about this: In Oulu, you step on a bus that takes you to the middle of the wild northern periphery, pulsating throughout your visit as a cheerful and vibrant art village full of laughter, wine, unspoiled nature, good conversations and new friends. You don't want to miss this!

The International Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival presents classics, rarities and new compositions in the field of chamber music, the Haapavesi Folk Music Festival dances a nightless night away to the beat of folk music. Raahe Jazz on the Beach Festival gathers people together by the sea and lets the jazz music flow. In Kuusamo you can enjoy the magnificent Polar Night Light Festival, poems are recited in Kajaani, environmental art can be experienced in Ii, air guitars are shredded in the centre of Oulu, a children's literature festival bringing together an international field is held in Liminka, while various old cars, tractors and mopeds are introduced in Oulainen. But back to those UFOs ... In Syöte village, part of Pudasjärvi, an inclusive event entity is growing around the strange light phenomena and other observations experienced over the decades by the locals. Another must see!

**Producers:** Kuhmo & Kuhmon Musiikkiyhdistys ry (FI); Haapavesi & Haapavesi Folk ry (FI); Ii & Kulttuurikauppila Art Centre (FI); Raahe & Rajatsi ry (FI); Kuusamo & Rukakeskus Oy (FI), Sun Effects (FI), Ruka-Kuusamo Tourist Association (FI); Kajaani & Kajaanin Runoviikko (FI); Liminka (FI); Oulu & Airnest Productions Oy (FI); Oulainen & Weteraanimoottori-kerho Wanha Voima ry (FI); Pudasjärvi & Syötteen Kulttuuriyhdistys ry (FI)

**Partners:** Partners of municipalities and producers

**Budget:** €€€

**Where:** Kuusamo, Kuhmo, Haapavesi, Ii, Raahe, Kajaani, Liminka, Oulu, Oulainen, Pudasjärvi

**1. Kalajoki**

From Church to Church – Church Routes in Northern Ostrobothnia ANT  
Kallankari Islands ANT  
Charcoal Grilled River Lampreys AFL

**2. Raahe**

Old Town Raahe ANT  
The Old Raahe Teachers' Seminary Area's Culture Center ANT  
Raahe Jazz on the Beach ES  
Kripu (not a donut although looks like it!) / Aunt Hanna's Cookies AFL

**3. Hailuoto**

Rapinoja Museum and Relating Nature Trails ANT  
Operating Lighthouse ANT  
Overall Unique Archipelago Environment ANT  
Salted Fish AFL

**4. Tornio**

Borderless Twin City TornioHaparanda (FIN-SWE) with world's only cross-border museum ANT  
Bothnian Bay National Park ANT  
The Struve Geodetic Arc Station Point ANT  
Whitefish Skewers AFL

**5. Ylivieska**

Art Spindles and Trekking Trails ANT  
Rieska (bread) and Red Whey AFL

**6. Siikajoki**

Industrial History starting from 17th century ANT

**7. Sievi**

Mutti Fair (Mutti is made from barley) AFL

**8. Oulainen**

National Veteran Machine Days ES  
Midsummer Cheese AFL

**9. Kemi**

Northern Contrasts ANT  
Kemi Snow Castle, significant snow and ice construction ANT  
Ice Breaker Sampo ANT

**10. Lumijoki**

Winter/Ice Fishing ANT/AFL

**11. Nivala**

Presidents' Path together with Haapajärvi and Pielavesi ANT

**12. Liminka**

Path of Giants ANT  
LIMMI – European Children's Literature Symposium ES  
Limppi Soup AFL

**13. Oulu**

Air Guitar World Championships ES

**14. Haapavesi**

Haapavesi Folk Music Festival ES

**15. Kempele**

Art Linnakallio 2026 Symposium ANT  
Zeniitti Event Hub ANT

**16. Tyrnävä**

PotatoGallery 2026 AFL

**17. Ii**

Environmental Art Park ANT  
Art Ii Biennial 2026 – wellbeing through art and environment in the north ES includes local food AFL

**18. Haapajärvi**

Presidents' Path together with Nivala and Pielavesi ANT  
Haapajärvi is Finland's Tea-town AFL

**19. Kärsämäki**

Kärsämäki Shingle Church ANT  
Traditional Storytelling on Nature Trails ANT  
Elsuupa Soup AFL

**20. Muhos**

Expedition to Art – project together with Rokua Unesco Global Geopark, Utajärvi and Vaala ANT

**21. Siikalatva**

The Village of Piippola ANT  
Spinach and Sausage Soup AFL

**22. Pyhäntä**

Perttuli's Days Event ANT

**23. Utajärvi**

Expedition to Art – project together with Rokua Unesco Global Geopark, Muhos and Vaala ANT  
Culture Stadium ANT

**24. Vaala**

Expedition to Art – project together with Rokua Unesco Global Geopark, Muhos and Utajärvi ANT  
Enchanted Frost Adventure Park ANT

**25. Pielavesi**

Presidents' Path together with Nivala and Haapajärvi ANT

**26. Pudasjärvi**

Significant Log Building ANT  
Syöte National Park ANT  
From Russian Border to Swedish Border Ski Tour ANT  
UFOs ES

**27. Kajaani**

Kajaani Castle Ruins ANT  
Words and Music in Kajaani – Kajaani Poetry Week ES

**28. Paltamo**

Cultural Heritage, Village Parties and Art Experiences at Lake Oulujärvi ANT

**29. Taivalkoski**

Trolley Rally/Trench Railway ANT  
Mashed potatoes with blueberry soup / Dried fish skin with coffee AFL

**30. Sotkamo**

Vuokatti – Significant Centre for Sport Culture (also coaching and academic research) ANT  
Wild Berries AFL

**31. Kuusamo**

Karhunkierros Trail in Oulanka National Park with Wild festival ANT  
Polar Night Light Festival ES  
Vendace with potatoes AFL

**32. Suomussalmi**

Hossa National Park ANT  
Raate Road ANT  
The Silent People ANT  
The Musical Forest ANT

**33. Kuhmo**

Winter War Museum ANT  
The Information Center for the Kalevala and Carelian Culture – World's largest Kalevala collection ANT  
Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival ES  
Rönttönen (pie: rye dough, mashed potatoes, lingonberry) AFL



## Q7 Process for Choosing Events

Cultural co-creation has been our guiding principle for programme selection from the very outset of our application.

We have established a 'curated' series of open calls themed and guided by strong artistic criteria to build the programme we have just described. This has ensured openness and transparency in the construction of the programme, as well as quality.

Programme proposals received through the open call process have been complemented by a number of commissioned works which also contain strong elements of community action and children's co-creation.

The framework for the selection phase of the cultural programme was put in place in the spring of 2019 based on the 450 programme proposals received through the open call process. We also selected international artistic experts to ensure the quality of the programme proposals, its European dimension and to draw up a plan for flagship productions in the first phase.

The cultural programme set out in this final Application represents around 60 per cent of what we anticipate our 2026 programme will finally look like. It has included projects which we believe, provide a clear illustration of our

passion for Cultural Climate Change and which also display a broad European dimension.

Building on the process which has served us well to date, if we are designated as ECoC we will start to complement the cultural programme by identifying gaps and deepening existing programme lines. The Programme Director of the Oulu2026 Foundation, together with the programme coordinators, will launch a very focussed set of themed international open calls for further programme proposals as well as specific artistic commissions.

In 2024, a further grassroots-based open call, **We Are the Culture** will open. We want to reach out to our entire community: workplace coffee room gangs, neighbourhood activists, hunting clubs, snowshoers and horn bands. Small or large ideas are equally valid, this search seeks to tap into the joy of life in Oulu Region and the growing sense of participation and possibility characterising our communities.

The timetable is as follows:

- 2021-2023 Negotiations with international productions
- 2022-2023 Thematic international Open Calls
- 2024-2025 We Are the Culture Open Calls
- 2025-2026 Implementation

## Q8 Combining Cultural Heritage and Traditional Art Forms with New Expressions

Oulu2026 aims to showcase a creative laboratory for Europe. Innovation has been a key requirement for just about every entry in the cultural programme. We prioritised new forms of collaboration and perspectives beyond the ordinary in our search. The cultural programme also includes several cross-cutting perspectives supporting the emergence of innovative, experimental cultural expressions, including their application to traditional art forms and cultural heritage projects.

We believe that by inspiring our project producers to consider sustainable solutions, we will also bring about a

new kind of approach to developing cultural content. The sudden need brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic to transfer cultural content to virtual platforms has seen us make a quantum leap in developing new kinds of cultural expression. Oulu wants to become one of Europe's leading cities developing art and technology cooperation. Incorporating technology into the cultural agenda strongly guides new types of innovation in cultural heritage in addition to making traditional art forms more exciting and accessible. At least 70% of the cultural programme will be hybrid content-based, fully or partially experiential on virtual platforms around the world.

Examples of how we mix and merge new forms of expression with cultural heritage and/or traditional art forms are illustrated in the following table.

<b>Project</b>	<b>Innovation</b>
Tar Wharf to the Seven Seas	From the tar-related cultural heritage of our region, a virtual data bank will be created
Underground Clash	New ways of connecting humans, technology and natural environments
Hybridise your Festival	Redefining streaming and deepening festivals' digital expression
Creative Villages	Traditional forms of art will be relocated in new ways to the hospital, the university, shop spaces...
Oulu Dance Hack	Combining dance and technology in an innovative way in street-space
Tomorrow's Wardrobe	New ways to digitalise fashion design
Beyond the Sky	Art gallery in the sky based on the works of astrographer Jukka-Pekka Metsävainio
Borderless Sámi Culture	Giving the stage to the only indigenous people in Europe, the Sámi people, to tell us not only about their histories but also to present their current art and design
Faravid's Land	Combining different forms of art to produce a truly immersive experience, where the audience also plays an important role

## **Q9 Involvement of Local Artists and Organisations**

From the beginning, starting in 2017, it was clear that we needed to ensure that local artists and cultural organisations were at the very heart of our project. Our bottom-up cultural programme building began with a survey of children and young people and 200 meetings with local artists and cultural communities. The value-base emerging from these pre-surveys was developed by a team of 20 creative advisors, assembled on the basis of 200 proposals from Oulu's communities. Through an in-depth series of workshops, our creative advisors then created the themes which have driven our programme from the start. We firmly believe in them.

Our cultural programme then moved forward, in the spring of 2019, through an open programme call as described in Q7. Local artists and cultural organisations were major contributors to this process. Many participated in joint Event Clinic sessions prior to the pre-selection application. We continued meeting with the artists and organisations who submitted notable proposals and developed the programme together with them.

In support of their projects, project owners have also drawn up extensive production plans, on the basis of which it has

been possible to assess the viability of the projects from many different perspectives. Our cultural programme involves all of the city's cultural institutions as well as a large number of independent associations and companies.

Before the pandemic, we maintained this community spirit by organising joint Christmas parties and have tried to maintain an open and approachable philosophy during this second phase. We think it has secured real, long-term, 'buy-in'. After the pandemic forced us to connect remotely, it was still quite easy to communicate since we had already met the majority of actors face-to-face.

Following the pre-selection decision, feedback on the pre-selection report has been reviewed with all those selected for the programme. Production budgets and financing plans have been negotiated and reviewed in detail, while their resilience in the event of sudden changes as well as their European dimension has been ensured. We have also been able to support the building and networking of European connections in respect of cultural actors with our two mobility projects.

# Q10 Examples of Planned Cooperation with Local Artists and Organisations

Given the process described above, the many artists and cultural groups right across Oulu region are deeply committed to taking Oulu2026 forward. Creating new connections between local and international artists and audiences old and new. Here are some examples.

Project	Artist
Delta Life	Writer-musician <b>Jukka Takalo</b> devised the creative concept of the project.
Bang Bang Riviera	Dancer <b>Milla Virtanen</b> and media artist <b>Leevi Lehtinen</b> are producing a summer spectacle that features multiple art forms and takes participants across Oulu.
Generation Xulu	This multimedia performance, combining traditional art forms with modern techniques, is produced by creatives at GenXtra Collective ( <b>Julian Owusu, Marja Isotalo, Kalle Jurvelin, Antti Kyllönen</b> and <b>Antti Uimonen</b> ).
Light Matters	Advice on the production will be provided by the industry experts such as researcher <b>Henrika Pihlajaniemi</b> (University of Oulu, Oulu School of Architecture), landscape architect <b>Veera Sanaksenaho</b> (City of Oulu, Urban and Environmental Services), specialist <b>Salla Hirvonen</b> (OuluHealth), executive director <b>Pia Alatorvinen</b> (Oulu Culture Events Association), specialist <b>Mia Kemppaala</b> (Polar Bear Pitching Festival), managing director <b>Helena Lindqvist</b> (Jojo Oulu Dance Centre, OuDance Festival) and curator <b>Jonna Mölläri</b> (Museum and Science Centre Luuppi).
MC Oulu	Jazz musician, <b>Heikki Ruokangas</b> , will assist in creating connections to music industry experts in Europe.
Tomorrow's Wardrobe	The main exhibition is curated by costume designer <b>Pasi Räbinä</b> .
Beyond the Sky	Space images captured by astrophotographer <b>Jukka-Pekka Metsävainio</b> will be displayed across the sky.
Parts of a City	A photography exhibition mapping the mindset of the city is produced by photographer <b>JP Manninen</b> and scriptwriter <b>Sampo Marjamaa</b> .
Faravid's Land	This semi-fictional, immersive and multisensory performance is directed by dancer/choreographer <b>Pirjo Yli-Maunula</b> , and artistic director of Oulu Theatre <b>Alma Lehmuskallio</b> .
Village Anthems	Anthems for each village are composed by <b>Rällä</b> , a folk music group based in Oulu.
Natural Stages	Contemporary circus artist, <b>Ilona Jäntti</b> , will create an air acrobatics performance out at sea.

# 3 EUROPEAN DIMENSION

## **Q11**<sub>a/b</sub> **Promoting Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue. Highlighting Shared Heritage and European Themes.**

In our pre-selection application, we spoke of the last decade being the “decade of disconnection” and of the need to reconnect.

At the moment one theme unifies us across Europe and across the world. The need to defeat our common enemy, the Covid-19 pandemic. And when we do so, other common European challenges are waiting. In order to face up to these challenges all across Europe, we need a stronger and more cohesive Europe to help us build the future our children deserve. We believe that we need to change the cultural climate in our own cities and across Europe too. Cultural Climate Change can be a Europe-wide laboratory for positive, sustainable change. We want our fellow Europeans to join us in finding the key to a positive future. Many are already on board as we describe below (Q11c). We hope many more will join us because, as we enter this critical decade, we believe that the themes we identified in curating our Cultural Programme encompass fundamental Europe-wide challenges.

Wild City is, at heart, about creative placemaking. Resetting our towns and cities. Rebooting and recovering the European cultural and creative scene which was so hard hit by the pandemic’s cultural lockdown. For example, reports from NEMO, the European Museums Network, talked of museums right across Europe losing up to 75% of their income during periods of closure with 25% of museums losing even more. Even during periods of opening, up to 90% of visitors have been lost. Theatres have perhaps fared even worse while independent creatives, with no regular salary, have probably fared worst of all. Europe needs a recovery programme for culture and Oulu is ready to actively take a leading role.

Yet culture is also a key element in reconnecting us. The latest study from the Cultural Relations Platform shows that the areas most impacted are international relations and audience outreach. We should work together at the European level both to recapture our audiences while encouraging wider participation particularly from the young.

Oulu’s model of Creative Villages uses culture to reconfigure the city as a more welcoming and innovative place. Strengthening its sense of reflecting community life and embracing the threat to city centres from internet shopping. Promoting more opportunities for us all to engage in creative work, putting people at the heart of our cities. Making our cities wild and fluid. We already have many European partners who want to explore new ways to make wild, exciting cities like we do.

We wish to give to our children and young people a bright future. Across Europe, the economic impact of the pandemic has disproportionately hit the jobs, education and travel prospects of young people while the impact of school closures on learning and social skills remains a big worry. That’s why we are putting so much emphasis on the young, on creative jobs and on cultural education in our programme lines STREAM to the Future and Urban Boost. We are proud of our new Children’s Cultural Centre which will enable children’s active participation and work as a platform for European co-creation while the Children’s Biennale will be a shared opportunity for children across Europe to create together. We have even created an ECoC board game which has been a big hit both here in Oulu and with some of our ECoC friends who want to develop it further with us.

Cool Contrasts is about rebalancing our communities. There is already a recognised European need to use culture as a means to help reduce health inequalities. Oulu2026 will work with our citizens and with European partners to develop cultural practices that promote positive engagement to rebalance these inequalities. People are literally dying of loneliness in parts of Europe, both in big cities and in struggling rural hinterlands. Oulu2026 wants to help Europe to reconnect with itself, promoting community life and face-to-face connection and exploring mental wellbeing through sensitive and thoughtful projects like those in our Dark Matters programme line.



## From Hard Tech to Humanised Tech

Whilst we worried during pre-selection about the trend towards excessive reliance on technological interaction rather than human contact, we recognise that technology has been a lifeline for families and for businesses. Given our previous leadership in smartphone culture creation, we feel that it is our responsibility to become a European leader in humanising technology to reconnect people. Enabling better communal experiences, a sense of belonging and improved dialogue. The Art <3 Tech projects play an important role which we are keen to develop along with our close European collaborators.

### Europe's Hinter- or Europe's Heartland?

Culture should be valued more in Europe's hinterlands. Eurobarometer 399 reports that residents in these areas complain about the 'limited choice or poor quality of the cultural offer' (17% in rural areas compared to 5% in large towns and 12%, on average across the EU). In many parts of Europe, but particularly in remote locations, our communal spaces are also under threat. Rural libraries are closing. Internet shopping and car-friendly shopping malls are decimating our traditional high streets. Our nature is retreating as climate change intensifies. We want to change this prevailing climate of disconnection.

We will kickstart a process that addresses this climate of dis- possession and fear of change in Europe's hinterlands. Rebuild- ing our cultural identities and regaining civic pride. Creating cultural heartlands in the hinterland to encourage people to come and discourage people from leaving. Not gloomy and forgotten but underexplored and full of hidden meaning.

### Climate Change

Despite our current struggles coping with Covid-19, the climate change issue has not gone away. It remains a, if not *the critical threat*, not just to Europe but to the planet as a whole. Sustainable cultural tourism is one way to reduce the climate burden while simultaneously creating new ways to promote deep intercultural interaction and learning, where sustainability, creativity and culture are placed centre-stage.

Together with European Green Capital Lahti and our local initiatives, we are creating a scalable model for a car- bon-neutral cultural event to be rolled out across Europe.

We live in an area where the effects of climate change increase our sense of urgency to act decisively. We want to link into the new initiatives the EU has just launched around the European Green Deal, specifically the New Eu- ropean Bauhaus, which – like our Cultural Climate Change notion – emphasises the connection between culture and sustainable development. Oulu wants to become a partner of the New European Bauhaus initiative. We will organise European events where the conversations will shape our tomorrow using CCC-tools.

### Peaceful Dialogue

Today's uncertain global political situation is increasingly calling into question our ability to resolve conflicts and face future challenges together. New citizen-skills promoting dialogue and conflict resolution are needed to combat this. Our reconnecting flagship project **Peace Machine** creates new models of dialogue in cooperation with our European partners. Realising that despite contrasts in our back- grounds, cultures, ages and opinions we mostly laugh at the same things and most often, at ourselves.

We believe that it is not overly ambitious for a European Capital of Culture to want to contribute to this change in Europe's cultural climate. The future of Europe can only be built through collaboration! Particularly if all our capitals work together. Especially in a sauna. That's the naked truth...

## Q11c European Artists, Operators and Cities

The following table illustrates a number of our most sig- nificant international partners, many more are included in the project descriptions in Q6. In addition to our pro- gramme-specific partnerships, Europe and Europeanness have become part of our discussions across Oulu region in a completely new way. We have also gained a lot of new Euro- pean partners for activities outside of the bidding process.

Project	Cultural Connections and Types of Exchange
2nd Generation Cultural Embassy	Finnish Institute in Stockholm (SE) and Sveriges Radio Finska (SE) will raise awareness of the programme in their communities in the native language of second generational nationals while London Irish Writers (UK) and Liverpool Irish Cultural Centre (UK) will provide their best practices on cultural exchange.
Agent 026	Cultural Ambassador training received by exchange students and teachers in Oulu will initially be introduced to their institutions by them after which it will be enacted in the following partner educational institutions Second Chance Gifts and Recycling (UK), Tartu Kutsehariduskeskus (EE), Ayuntamiento de Alcoy (ES), Gewerbliche Schule im Hoppenlau (DE), Landstede Groep (NL), Handwerkskammer Flensburg (DE) and Prometna Šola Maribor, Srednja Prometna Šola (SI).
ArTech City	Linz Ars Electronica (AT), a leading art and technology centre, will be part of the ArTech network as an advisory partner.
Climate Clock	Working together with an international artistic team and local communities, <b>Alice Sharp</b> from Invisible Dust (UK) will curate the project while <b>Mariele Nuedecker</b> (DE) is involved as one of the artists.
Earth, Time and Adaptation	As leading science organisations in their industries, ESRIN, ESA (IT), International Lunar Exploration Working Group (NL), Waag Society, Planet B (NL), and Culture Association Lumi (IT) will make their expertise and data available for artists to utilise in their work.
Faravid's Land	Rapid Eye (DK), Marta & Kim (NL/NO) and Oslo Nycirkus & Acting for Climate (NO) are performing artists who will implement the project together with the local directors.
Frozen Nights	We will collaborate on the programming with Olympia International Children and Youth Film Festival (EL), Nordic Youth Film Festival NUFF (NO) and Schlingel – International Film Festival for Children and Young Audience (DE).
Hybridise Your Festival	The European Festivals Association (EFA) will assist in forming new partnerships with festivals across Europe and provide best practices for local festival organisers.
Light Matters	Part of the programme will be created collaboratively, including commissioning artwork together with Light Art Collection (NL), Tartu Valgus Festival (EE), Lovely Experience Multimedia Festival (SK) and Prisma – Art Light Tech (PT).
Oulu Dance Hack	Long-term partnerships have been formed with eTOPIA Centre for Art and Technology – Zaragoza (ES), CINETic International Centre for Research and Education in Innovative and Creative Technologies in association with the National University of Theatre and Film – Bucharest (RO), Dansinitiativet - Luleå (SE) and Central Europe Dance Theatre in association with Pro Progressione (Cultural organisation) - Budapest (HU) to advance connections between technology, dance and media arts.
Peace Machine	We will take our Sauna Debate concept to Conversation Festival LAMPA (LV) in the upcoming years.
Parts of a City	Professor and architect <b>Jan Gehl</b> (DK), assistant professor in psychology <b>Helena Águeda Marujo</b> (PT) and editor-in-chief of Katalog <b>Jens Friis</b> (DK) will be the main advisors as well as the patrons for the project.
The Snowflake	Centre Rouen Normandie Photographic Centre (FR), Association Diaphane (FR), Street Level Photography (UK), Centrum för fotografi (SE), Förbundet frie fotografer (NO), Nordnorsk kunstnersenter (NO), Galleria Image (DK), Fotografisk Center (DK), FİSL The Icelandic Contemporary Photography Association (IS) and Kaunas Photography Gallery (LT) are the advisory organisations who will assist in raising awareness of the project, including the lens-based artists open calls.
Untamed Office	P60 Podium (NL) and Radi Vidi Pats (LV) are venues that will provide the youth from Untamed Office with internships and other work opportunities.

## Q12 Strategy to Attract the European and International Public

Our strategy to attract visitors from Europe and even further afield is based around three features.

1. Our northern location, pure nature and four seasons which offer a unique platform for cultural experiences.
2. A shared and sustainable visitor strategy.
3. An opportunity to join us remotely if you can't get here in person.

Programme First. Oulu2026 has at its heart a highly original cultural programme which focuses on unique places and seasonal variations that cannot be experienced elsewhere in Europe. Oulu will be the place where culture runs wild for all those who are culturally curious.

The cultural programme includes a great variety of cutting-edge events and flagships. Wherever you travel in Oulu2026 you will find an enticing cultural route to follow as part of the **Art & Nature Trails** project. Six magnificent, bold and assertive works of environmental art produced for the **Climate Clock** project stand along these new cultural heritage routes. **In Europe's Spotlight** offers Europeans unique coverage of our northern festivals from light events and musical experiences to poetry weeks and UFO festivals! There is also the opportunity to get acquainted with Sámi contemporary art. **The Borderless Sámi Culture** project highlights the culture of Europe's only indigenous people, both in Oulu and across the entire Arctic region. Our flagship **Peace Machine** approaches Europe's crucial questions through immersive, innovative artwork and participative dialogue. Good reasons to travel to Oulu are not in short supply.

Our visitor strategy connects our appealing programme, our unique destination, our special mix of culture and nature and our strong collaboration with our tourism partners at both regional and national levels.

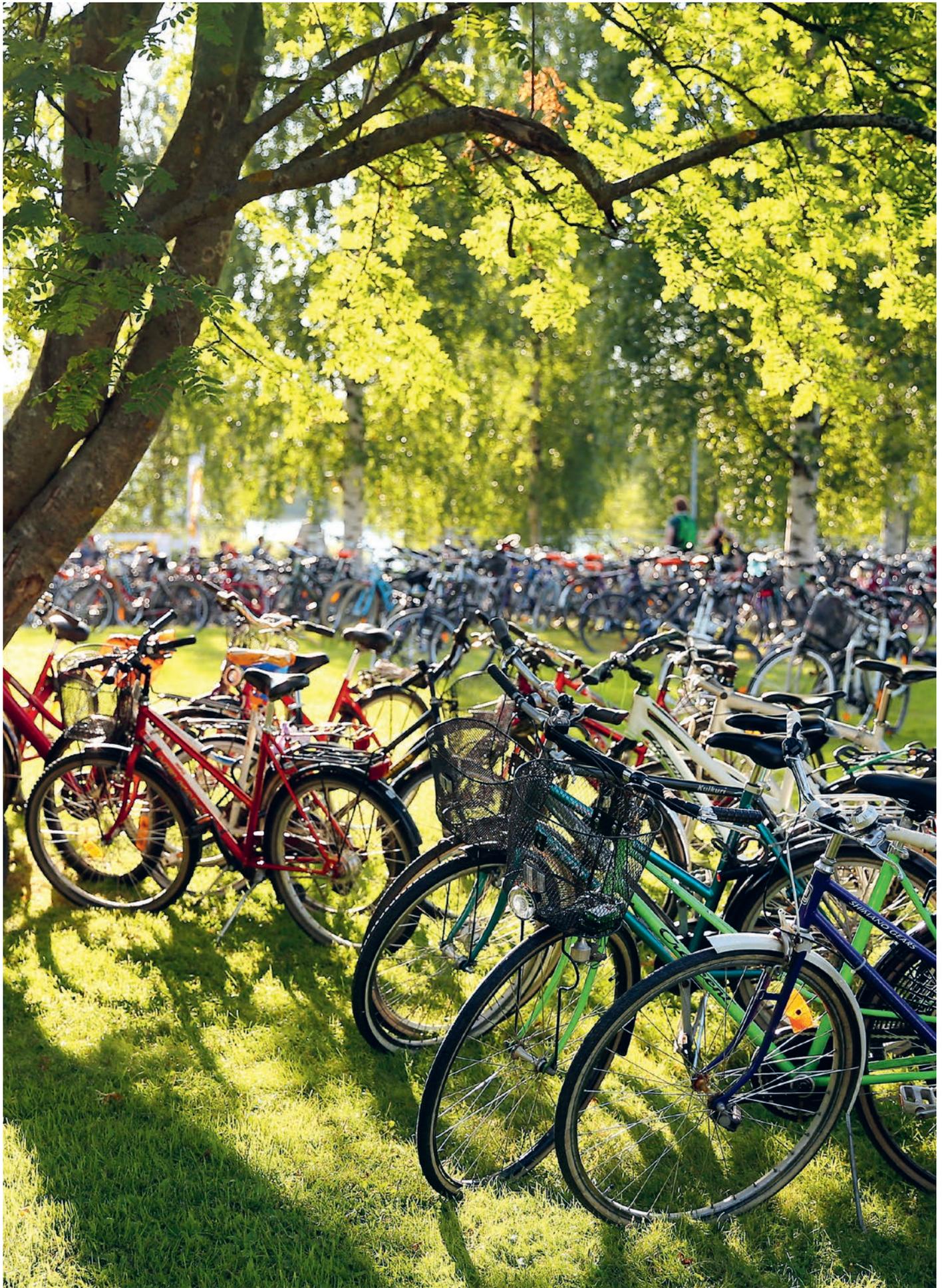
Currently we are not the first port of call on Europe's cultural tourism scene. This is something that we will change in partnership with VisitOulu, VisitFinland and other travel

organisations in Oulu region. We plan to change the climate of cultural tourism across Oulu region by developing a sustainable and transformative tourism model which we believe will be needed post-pandemic. This includes learning from our participation in MateraHub's Transformative Tourism Culture project. This has created a sustainable model for ECoC urban tourism with the creative industries.

We have a lot going for us. Oulu region is a safe and clean travel destination. We may be on the edge of Europe, but it is easy to travel here by plane, train, coach or even by bike. Oulu is home to Finland's second busiest airport which acts as a hub for those traveling to northern Finland. Yet Oulu is not, currently, a destination of choice for culture. This is what we want to change. Joining forces both to strengthen the visibility of the North and to promote the hidden quality of Finland as a cultural tourism destination.

The Oulu2026 region is like Finland in miniature with all its delicacies. Pudasjärvi and Kuusamo can offer a genuine Lapland atmosphere. We have lakes and a unique archipelago as well as the fascinating frozen sea in winter. Combine this with our excellent transport connections and suddenly a trip to Europe's hinterland is not so far away after all. The Northern Vibes programme line highlights our versatility; we tell here of our surrounding waters, of nature, an urban city, fishing on the ice, diving under the ice, the frozen sea, photographing the northern lights, the northern atmosphere by the fells and those warm, nightless summer nights.

If you can't make it here, we will create multi-channel and interactive digital services to experience Oulu2026 from wherever you are. Our digital services will be easy to use and will enable you to find all the information you need in one place. Programme and travel information as well as links to booking accommodation, food and dining, local excursions, tickets and lots of other exciting encounters and experiences can all be sourced from a single service point. Everything points North for 2026.





### Our European City Partners in Cultural Climate Change

- ECoC Cities and ECoC Candidate Cities
- Other City Partners



# Q13 Links with Other ECoCs and Candidate Cities

Despite our inability to physically meet up with our fellow ECoCs since the pre-selection period, we have remained connected. Teaming-up regularly to develop ideas, partnerships and to identify ways to build our knowledge and capacity. Not just for the Oulu2026 team, but also for our cultural institutions and creative professionals to implement the long-term changes we require.

## 2026 Partners

We are sure that both Finnish and Slovak ECoCs for 2026 will benefit from close collaboration. We have already explored connections with Trencin, Nitra and Zilina, identifying common themes and projects in our programmes. The **E75 Highway** is a natural collaborative project, as the highway crosses or goes very near all 3 candidate cities. Our art bus will also visit the chosen ECoC town. In addition, we can join forces to share online our most memorable ECoC 2026 events during the inaugural weeks. This would bring additional media visibility to ECoC events as well as strengthening the relationship between the cities and their citizens – especially through inter-school connections. Finns and Slovaks both love ice-hockey!

## Cooperation with Other European Capitals of Culture

Throughout our application process, we have maintained good connections with many European Capitals of Culture. Pre-pandemic we visited Leeuwarden, Plovdiv, Matera, Rijeka, Galway, Elefsina, Kaunas, Chemnitz and Tartu as part of the 'getting to know you' process. We want to use the experiences of other cities and share our 'good practice' with others. We will play a full part in the mutual ECoC capacity building initiative.

As a northern – indeed Arctic - city, we have a strong relationship with Bodø. **The Borderless Sámi Culture** project crystallises this collaboration, as the project will first be presented in Norway in 2024 and subsequently at Oulu2026. With Northern Swedish ECoC 2014 city Umeå we also share this Sámi culture-related common theme. Oulu2026 invites both cities to be partners in the Arctic Festival.

We already work together with Matera on the TRACES project to build transformative travel experiences. We have invited Matera to join the ArTech City network, where former ECoCs Tallinn and Linz are also participating.

The **E75 Highway** also connects us with several former ECoC cities. The route starting from the Arctic Ocean passes through Helsinki, Novi Sad and Eleusis among others. The **Peace Machine** will be circulating in future ECoC cities. Latvian Cesis and Portuguese Aveiro have already expressed an interest in the project. Our Lumo Light Festival is planning a collaboration in **Light Matters** with Aveiro as well as with the Tartu Light Festival. The idea is to continue the light art theme, discussions will also take place with Chemnitz and Nova Gorica 2025. And, along with many other ECoCs and candidates, we joined Faro in their Europe at Home art project in 2020.

Other specific connections include the link with Nova Gorica's Cultural Improvement District with Oulu's Creative Villages Programme line. And with all three 2024 ECoCs and with our friends from Turku (ECoC 2011) we want to explore rebalancing communities, especially culture and health links. With Aveiro in Portugal and Liepaja, one of the Latvian 2027 candidates we will connect on STEAM education.

This is just a summary of our main connections. Circulating artistic content will continue to illuminate the open sharing of tacit knowledge between ECoC cities and will help to promote the good that can come when culturally ambitious cities work together.

## Play Together, Learn Together

Perhaps our most exciting ECoC collaboration opportunity comes through the game we have developed. The Oulu2026 team has created an ECoC Board Game for schools where, as they play, children and young people learn new things from the data cards about previous European Capitals of Culture. At the end of the game, its players can submit their own programme ideas for a cultural programme. Oulu2026 has also played games with people in our city libraries. The game will be used in schools and other community places for years to come. We are also developing a digital version which can be more easily adapted for ECoCs in other European countries.

# 4. OUTREACH

## Q14&15

### **Involvement of the Local Population and Civil Society. Reaching and Engaging Disadvantaged and Marginalised Groups in Oulu.**

As we described in Q7 and Q9, much of the thinking behind Cultural Climate Change and the focus of our themes and programme lines came from the heart of Oulu's community. Starting in 2017, we held a series of workshops where we asked the children of Oulu what their dream Oulu looked like. The results formed the value base for our bid.

We have organised public discussions, visits to local shopping centres and travelled across the region to meet municipal representatives and third sector operators. We have also met with around 200 communities located all across the region to discuss the challenges facing our region as well as residents' hopes for the future. Societal representatives, including those from social clubs, political agents and residential associations were also involved in this process.

People told us with great passion that the programme should be built around and reflect the things that are important to them and help us make Oulu the place they want it to be. That has driven us to create our programme *with* people and not just for them. We may be on the very edge of Europe, but our heart and soul has gone into this bid to be its cultural capital.

Building on the Outreach activities we described previously, in March 2020 we organised the first open Cultural Climate Change Pitching event. The winning pitch was included in the Cultural Programme as part of the **Looking East** project. Immediately afterwards, all our public consultations moved online. For example, in summer 2020, we carried out a big population survey on the use and awareness of cultural

services. The results showed that we need to improve our approach to communicating about culture. We also organised meetings in Oulu region with our 32 partner municipalities, and in different residential areas around Oulu. Specific meetings were held to ensure that the views of elderly people, people with disabilities and minorities were reflected in our bid.

Perhaps our most important consultation forum was a series of equality workshops which we held with a wide range of communities including ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ and disabled people. This forum is going to be an ongoing feature of the Oulu2026 build-up. Complementing the sustainability support for event organisers we described in Q5, we will create accessibility guidelines to be practiced by all Oulu2026 producers.

The forum has already challenged us to rethink our approach to cultural equity which also informs our audience development (see Q16). Equal opportunities are not enough. Barriers to participation will be removed consciously and systematically. To kick-start this process the forum has designed the Oulu2026 Equality and Diversity Strategy. It is built on the principles of courage, diversity, security and enabling which will guide all Oulu2026 activities. The strategy is outlined in the table below. It remains a work in progress, but we are proud to be inspired by the openness and constructive way that our 2026 Equality Forum has sought to change Oulu's diversity climate.

Principles	Objectives	Actions
Courage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be bold in advocating for diversity</li> <li>• Increase skills to promote equality in art and cultural institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blogs, posts and videos</li> <li>• Diversity and anti-racist training for different actors</li> </ul>
Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow the contents of art and culture to represent a number of voices and values.</li> <li>• Use versatile communications channels and communicate in different languages</li> <li>• Individuals from various backgrounds are represented in communications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop cultural projects and programmes from a diversity perspective</li> <li>• Translation and interpretation costs are included in production and communication budgets</li> <li>• Service design will improve accessibility of cultural events</li> <li>• Include diversity of representation in communications strategy</li> <li>• We comply with the EU's Digital Services Accessibility Directive</li> </ul>
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Events are safe for everyone</li> <li>• Ensuring access (e.g., for the partially-abled) and general accessibility for all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish clear procedures for dealing with discrimination and harassment</li> <li>• Develop the principles of 'safe space' in Oulu2026</li> <li>• Develop access and accessibility practices for events and communications</li> </ul>
Enabling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating clear channels to enable inclusion and influence for artists and experiencers</li> <li>• Create channels to support minority arts</li> <li>• Lowering the threshold for participation through positive discrimination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organise regional resident evenings and equality workshops</li> <li>• Include support for minority arts in the funding criteria</li> <li>• Support the participation of minority groups in the pricing of events</li> <li>• Representatives of the City committees of elderly people, young people, disabled people and immigrants are on the Oulu2026 advisory board</li> </ul>

## Tackling Oulu's Own Hinterland

In our first Bid Book we described the big challenge we face in our own city, where 8% of our most disadvantaged residents consume 80% of the social and welfare budget. In fact, a recent study by the University of Turku showed that Oulu has more disadvantaged suburbs than any other large city in Finland. We went to those suburbs and talked with local residents about their dreams for the Cultural Programme. The most disadvantaged communities have suffered most, economically and socially, during the pandemic. In response, it is vital that we work together, creatively, to make a difference. If we can reach even part of this 8% group, we can make a huge contribution to community wellbeing.

Oulu2026 wants to be part of a process that sees a shift to more preventative models of community health. Active cultural engagement is part of the answer. We are working closely with the City of Oulu on its Cultural Welfare Plan. Its goal –

like ours - is to provide more opportunities to participate in making and enjoying culture. This connects with our **SmART Hospital** project and we see excellent opportunities to work with social and health services staff to help and include more people from our most disadvantaged communities.

The Creative Villages concept can also be brought to our more vulnerable neighbourhoods. Things are already starting to happen. For example, cooperation with local grocery co-ops will in future open up local marketplaces in these areas as potential venues for culture – even on a shopping trip. More neighbourhood events, including guerrilla and community art can change the community cultural climate. Our *Kaiku*-card provides free access to culture for the most vulnerable people and Oulu City Library provides free season tickets for certain cultural events.

Personal experience is also highly valuable in encouraging others. Even the most vulnerable groups can share their experiences in **Voice the Taboo!** At the **From Here to Art Travel Agency**, people from Oulu present the city from their own perspective. Would you like to get to know Oulu with a homeless person, a member of a religious organisation or a visually impaired person? Here it is possible. In the series **What do you want to see on stage?** Oulu Theatre presents stage works, whose starting point is to ask marginalised groups about the things they would like to see in the theatre.

## The Sámi People

Oulu is an important area for Sámi culture and this is fully reflected in Oulu2026. Sámi culture is, currently, not sufficiently visible in Oulu and we want to change this. Sámi people have been actively involved in the design of our themes, particularly in the conception of those parts of the programme dealing with their own culture. One of our main creative advisors belongs to the Sámi community and the Sámi-focused, Giellagas Institute (part of the University of Oulu) has collaborated in programme design from the outset. The Institute conceptualised the **Borderless Sámi Culture** project and will be involved in its implementation. Sámi languages are used in communication and marketing, where appropriate.

## Elderly People

Oulu is a rapidly greying city, the number of people 75 years old or more will double by 2035. Some of these people need specialised care, but most remain active members of society and heavy users of cultural services. Our cultural programme is however built around a versatile offer as elderly people are a heterogeneous group with many interests. In care homes, we plan to develop cultural activities together with the residents, bringing both live and virtual culture into their homes.

As a key part of **Hybridise Your Festival**, together with the Oulu Music Festival, we are organising a senior concert for every Oulu nursing home and for those in our European twin cities as a streamed connection from the Madetoja Concert Hall. Art also comes into seniors' own homes and their shopping trips in the Art Takeover! programme line. Spreading cultural projects into residential areas helps involve residents, making it easier for older people to participate without long journeys.

## Youth

Oulu is a city for old and young people alike. Young people are our strength, representing our potential for the future. Since the pre-selection period we have increased the number of youth projects in the cultural programme. We are also increasing the capacity of young people through the Urban Boost programme line. In the **Untamed Office**, unemployed young people are building a platform for wild cultural experiments in Oulu and finding new paths to employment in creative fields. Through the **Creative Campus** and **Agent 026** projects, we will increase the level of interaction between students, citizens, college campuses, vocational schools and companies. We will also encourage young adults in our area to remain here after their studies. There will be no shortage of things to do.

What about young people's dreams and prospects? **Generation Xulu** is inspired by the utopias and dystopias of young people. We let young people's own videos and stories speak for themselves when **Frozen Nights** invites young filmmakers from across Europe to Oulu. Young people produce views of their home region and communicate them in a multimedia way to other Europeans. Their own production office shows the whole of Europe how Oulu comes to life with young people. Block parties, art projects, spectacle-like clubs and intimate boutique festivals. Young people make a wild city!

## Children

In Finland, we are already quite good at consulting people, but we often overlook the need to actually ask children and enable them to voice their own opinions. In collaboration with Oulu Art School, Oulu2026 created a model for consulting children from the age of three upwards. The plan is to roll out the model into kindergartens and schools. After the pandemic we will continue to advance participatory cultural projects together with children. We will have a group of children and young people leading the implementation of their own communication plans as a key part of the Oulu2026 Marketing and Communication plan (see Q38). More detail on our plans for children and schools can be found in Q16.

## Volunteers

We want our Volunteers to come from all over Oulu and are keen to recruit from the groups we described above. Oulu2026 volunteers will be key facilitators of Cultural Climate Change, even (perhaps especially) those who have not consumed or are attracted by the traditional cultural offer.

In addition to the 3rd sector, we are actively cooperating with the 4th sector - those groups working together to advance one of the goals and ideas they have about making Oulu a better place. About 250 local residents have already registered as Oulu2026 Cultural Ambassadors. Our ultimate goal is that 20,000 people participate as volunteers or ambassadors for

Oulu2026. This can be as part of their own work: bus and taxi drivers become cultural guides; restaurant staff promote local food culture; teachers become European cultural heritage ambassadors. Cultural Godparents can assist disabled and lonely people to participate in cultural events. We encourage people to set up carpools in our sparsely populated region to help people without cars to reach cultural venues.

Our guiding principle is that volunteers and ambassadors experience joy in their work and want to take part in changing the cultural climate.

## Q16 City's Strategy for Expanding the Audience Base, Including Links to Education and School Participation

Culture loves an audience, but currently not everyone loves culture. Or knows much about it. Cultural Climate Change is about offering everyone a chance to participate and experience.

As our answers to Q14 and 15 have already indicated, we have already done a lot of work on seeking out the opinions of people who are not represented in traditional cultural audiences. Our Equality and Diversity Strategy will address issues relating to the various barriers excluding some groups or communities. We also showed how, especially in our more deprived areas, we plan to take culture into the spaces and places where people spend their time rather than simply expecting people to troop, obediently, to traditional city centre cultural venues which have not appealed to them in the past. Our vision is that local people become co-developers, no longer just a passive audience. Though for some, actually even that would represent a good start.

The philosophy of Cultural Climate Change is, in part, about increasing the cultural use of public space, cultural institutions and facilities, schools, parks and outdoor areas but also about sharing those spaces between culture-based and other civic activities. Our own project office is located in a city council One-Stop-Service Point. This helped us to stay grounded and kept us connected to the things that matter in the day to day lives of the people of our city. The Oulu2026 Cultural Programme champions the increased and imagina-

tive use of public spaces, for example in **Rethinking Libraries**, **Go with the STREAM** and **The Nook** projects.

A concrete challenge here is to ensure that audience development does not stay in an 'ECoC bubble' and that cultural operators and venue owners share our vision in order to embrace new audiences. We are pleased that the City of Oulu's Cultural Services group is developing a new model for audience outreach, where they will cooperate with other cities in Finland and take account of good practice across Europe. The model will combine further analysis of Oulu's audiences, building on the baseline data collected for this bid, together with the embedding of new ideas and good practice guides.

At least half of our programme will take place outside traditional cultural institutions. For example, a street gallery will be opened throughout Oulu and well-known treasures from The Finnish National Gallery's collection will be projected on the walls of suburban apartment buildings. Culture will be part of everyday life in Art Takeover!.

We have learned much from others, such as, for instance, the ways in which audiences were grown by Liverpool and Lyon. At the European level, we want to share experiences, good practices and carry out experiments in such networks as Eurocities and Culture Next. During 2021-2025 we will work with like-minded ECoCs and other cities to pilot new and experimental approaches and projects.

## Schools and Children

As we indicated in the Cultural Programme and, indeed in our Oulu city goals, we are keen to transform the way Oulu develops as a place where young people can grow, thrive and forge for themselves a strong, creative future.

We have already made a start on developing what we believe to be the best ever ECoC for children and young people. Oulu is the capital of children's culture in Finland, Finland's Capital of Children's Music in 2021 and for the second time, a UNICEF Child-Friendly Municipality.

Oulu has made a promise to families that high-quality children's culture is available every weekend. We also have a cultural education path in our schools which gives us a

great framework for delivering the schools' elements of the Oulu2026 cultural programme in an equal way across our entire school community, using already existing structures for cultural participation to plan and implement the 2026 children's cultural programme.

We will also update our ECoC Board Game (see Q13), creating a digital version so that children around Europe can learn from previous and upcoming ECoCs. Playing the game with children across Europe – from Slovakia, from other ECoCs and from our twin cities, for example.



In 2026, each school-age child in the region will participate in at least one Capital of Culture event. The STREAM to the Future programme line provides space for bold and creative content produced by children and young people themselves. It also offers new tools for educators - from early childhood to high school. The STREAM Cultural Centre will become an exciting new laboratory for children's culture, where new phenomena relating to children's culture are co-created with our children. Oulu has also decided to carry out a child impact assessment for the project. Achieving Cultural Climate Change in Oulu's early childhood educa-

tion is a common goal. Additionally, the Children's Art Biennale 2026 will showcase how childhood educators adopt art and culture-based methods.

The bottom line is that children and young people are taking over the city! They will design and make art for the streets, underpasses, walls, windows, screens - just about anywhere. We will share their work for the world to admire. Finally, Oulu2026 has already declared itself to be the first ECoC with its own communications strategy for children and young people, enabling them to make their voices heard. Communication for children and young people is most effective when they are able to communicate directly to and among themselves. That's the plan in Oulu.



# 5 MANAGEMENT

## a. Finance

### Q17 Total Operating Budget

Total income to cover operating expenditure (in €)	From the public sector (in €)	From the public sector (in %)	From the private sector (in €)	From the private sector (in %)
50,000,000	44,000,000	88	6,000,000	12

### Q18 Income From the Public Sector

Income from the public sector to cover operating expenditure	In €	In %
State	20,000,000	45.5
City	20,000,000	45.5
Region	2,150,000	4.8
EU (with exception of the Melina Mercuri Prize)	1,850,000	4.2
Total	44,000,000	100

### Q19 Financial Commitments for Operating Expenditure

In December 2019, the Oulu City Council decided that, if Oulu is selected, EUR 20M will be spent on ECoC2026 activities covering the period 2021–2027.

The councils of the 32 municipalities in the Oulu region have officially decided to participate in the Oulu2026 bid. They are committed to the implementation of the cultural programme in their area and have announced investments to support the implementation of the programme. Municipal funding from across the region has been totalled and

expressed here as regional funding. The municipalities have been represented in the Oulu2026 Delegation since spring 2018 and have nominated their representatives to the cultural programme preparation working groups.

The Finnish state has made a decision, in principle, in the current government programme that the state will contribute to the financing of the ECoC year. We expect that the financing decision will follow the same principle as in the Helsinki2000 and Turku2011 projects, in which the state matched the city's contribution.

## Q20 EU Support for Operating Expenditure

The City of Oulu prepared a strategy for EU and international funding (incl. Nordic, national and regional funding) in 2019. Its purpose was to strengthen Oulu's ability to utilise development projects during the application process and after possible selection.

The strategy brings together different sources of funding, describes the purpose for which they are suitable and prioritises the funding applications upon which the Oulu ECoC project will focus. Cultural and creative actors were directly informed of the funding sources, their criteria and application deadlines.

As a result, it became clear that Oulu's capacity to apply for direct EU funding, especially for the cultural sector, needed to be strengthened. Oulu subsequently began to implement the Competence in Bidding for EU Competi-

tive Programmes project (2019-2022) together with Oulu University of Applied Sciences, University of Oulu, Centria University of Applied Sciences and BusinessOulu. The aim of the project is to increase our knowledge of EU financial instruments and our ability to apply for direct EU funding.

The City of Oulu has strong expertise in running a project portfolio. In 2019, the overall project volume was 13.1 million euros, of which EU funding accounted for about 2 million euros. Urban culture projects receive annually around 285,000 euros from the EU. We intend to significantly increase the amount of EU support for culture by 2026.

National preparations for the EU regional and structural policy programming period 2021-2027 are underway. In the table below we list the Oulu2026-related projects for which we have, or will apply, for EU-funding:

Funding source	Project name	Relation to Oulu2026	Status
Creative Europe	Light Art in Public Spaces (LAIPS)	Capacity building for light art and Light Matters in Cultural Programme (CP)	Ongoing 2021–2023
	Oulu Dance Hack	Dance Hack in CP	Planned for funding 2023–2026
Horizon 2020	Making City	Capacity building for sustainability	Ongoing 2019–2024
ERDF	The Most Sustainable European Capital of Culture	Event field capacity building in sustainability	Ongoing 2019–2022
	TechArt	Capacity building for TechArt ecosystem and Art<3Tech in CP	Ongoing 2021-2022



Funding source	Project name	Relation to Oulu2026	Status
	Competence in Bidding for EU Competitive Programmes	Capacity building to apply for direct EU funds	Ongoing 2019–2022
	Art & Nature Trails	Art & Nature Trails in CP	Planned for funding 2022–2026
	In Europe's Spotlight	In Europe's Spotlight in CP	Planned for funding 2022–2026
	Hybridise Your Festival	Hybridise Your Festival in CP	Planned for funding 2023–2026
ESF	Creativity + Urban Boost	Urban Boost programme line, focusing on youth unemployment	Ongoing 2019–2021
	Free Space	Urban Boost programme line, focusing on youth unemployment	Ongoing 2020–2022
	Northern Attraction from Lighting Know-How	Capacity building for Dark Matter programme line	Ongoing 2019–2022
	Cultural experience guides	Focusing on employment in creative sector, transformative tourism	In the application phase
	Game Mode for Youth Work	Capacity building for post-pandemic recovery	Ongoing 2021–2023
Erasmus +	Culture United	Capacity building for STREAM to the Future programme line	Ongoing 2019–2022
Interreg Nord	Arctic Pulse	Supporting the Cultural programme, Borderless Sámi Culture	Ongoing 2019–2021
Interreg Aurora	Borderless Sámi Culture	Borderless Sámi Culture	Planned for funding 2022–2026
European Solidarity Corps	Untamed Office Peace Machine	Untamed Office Peace Machine flagship	Planned for funding 2022–2026
European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)	International innovation network of artist residencies (KRIPA)	Focusing on artistic residencies, capacity building for multisectoral cooperation	Ongoing 2020–2022
	Delta Life	Delta Life in CP	Planned for funding 2022–2026
COSME	TRACES - Transformative tourism across European Capitals of Culture	Capacity building for transformative tourism, Oulu is supporter and contributor	Ongoing 2020–2021
	Arctic Food Lab	Arctic Food Lab in CP	Planned for funding 2022–2026
LEADER programme	Warjakka stories - augmented reality experience and gallery	Art<3Tech in CP and capacity building for cultural heritage in new expressions	Ongoing 2019–2021
	Northern Cultural Flow	Capacity building for Delta Life and Hybridise Your Festival	Ongoing 2021–2022
	Tar Wharf to the Seven Seas	Tar Wharf to the Seven Seas in CP	Planned for funding 2023–2026
Europe for Citizens	Peace Machine	Reconnecting Flagship project	Planned for funding 2022–2026

## Q21 Timetable for Income to Cover Operating Expenditure

Sources of income for operating expenditure	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	ECoC Year 2026	2027
EU	0	100,000	100,000	350,000	500,000	600,000	200,000
State	0	0	1,400,000	2,600,000	6,000,000	10,000,000	0
City	1,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000	3,000,000	4,000,000	7,000,000	1,000,000
Region	0	0	200,000	300,000	400,000	1,150,000	100,000
Sponsors	0	0	200,000	300,000	500,000	5,000,000	0
Total	1,000,000	2,100,000	3,900,000	6,550,000	11,400,000	23,750,000	1,300,000

## Q22 Strategy to Seek Support from Private Sponsors

We want to bring Cultural Climate Change into business cooperation and fundraising. While there clearly remains a role for traditional brand partnership-based cooperation, alongside this, we strongly support the pursuit of social responsibility and change. We combine traditional business partnerships with a genuine opportunity to be involved in Cultural Climate Change.

Oulu2026 CCC Partnership is a form of business cooperation in which we seek partnerships to solve key future challenges. Our business cooperation model offers companies the opportunity to be involved in promoting the goals of Cultural Climate Change. A company can choose to finance e.g., preventing climate change, increasing cultural attractiveness, or cultural wellbeing. Funding will be channelled into themes, programmes and projects that support these issues with the impacts studied as part of the monitoring and evaluation work.

Business cooperation operates on four levels:

### 1. Official Main Partners - target amount EUR 1.8M

Five national or locally significant companies are sought as our main partners with values and goals closely aligned with those of Oulu2026. The cooperation projects are long in duration and include several measures and larger entities.

### 2. Co-creation Partners - target amount EUR 1.7M

These companies are invited to join the Oulu2026 co-development laboratory. Companies have the opportunity to set up their own ECoC project and develop the project exclusively for the needs of their own customers and employees. Cooperation includes individual measures and events planned with companies. The companies benefit from the Oulu2026 communication and marketing channels.

### 3. Product and brand cooperation Partners - target amount EUR 1.5M

Companies have the opportunity to produce and sell products and services incorporating the Oulu2026 brand. Attention is paid to the quality and content of products/ services in terms of their suitability. These products and services will be for sale throughout the Oulu2026 operating area and available via various channels.

### 4. Logo Partners – target amount EUR 1M

Companies have the opportunity to choose different kinds of marketing and communications packages to increase their visibility e.g., to use the Oulu2026 logo, to be visible in Oulu2026 communication and marketing channels, or to be involved directly in the events.

## Q23 Breakdown of Operating Expenditure

Programme expenditure (€)	31,000,000	Wages, overheads and administration (€)	8,620,000
Programme expenditure (%)	62	Wages, overheads and administration (%)	17,2
Promoting and marketing (€)	7,000,000	*Other costs (€)	3,380,000
Promoting and marketing (%)	14	*Other costs (%)	6.8
		Total of the operating expenditure	50,000,000

\* Other costs include monitoring, evaluation and research work, external service procurement, possible construction of competence capacity specifically for Oulu2026 needs and travel expenses etc.

## Q24 Timetable for Operating Expenditure

Time-table for spending	Programme expenditure (€)	Programme expenditure (%)	Promotion and marketing (€)	Promotion and marketing (%)	Wages, overheads and administration (€)	Wages, overheads and administration (%)	Other costs (€)	Other costs (%)
2021	255,000	0.8	115,000	1.6	530,000	6.1	100,000	3.0
2022	600,000	2.0	500,000	7.1	800,000	9.3	200,000	6.0
2023	1,985,000	6.4	555,000	7.9	960,000	11.1	400,000	11.8
2024	4,260,000	13.7	680,000	9.7	1,160,000	13.5	450,000	13.3
2025	6,800,000	22.0	2,000,000	28.6	1,980,000	23.0	620,000	18.3
2026	17,000,000	54.8	3,000,000	42.8	2,560,000	29.7	1,190,000	35.2
2027	100,000	0.3	150,000	2.3	630,000	7.3	420,000	12.4
Total	31,000,000	100	7,000,000	100	8,620,000	100	3,380,000	100

## Q25 Income from the Public Sector for Capital Expenditure

Income from the public sector to cover capital expenditure	In €	In %
City	166,120,000	100

The total amount of capital expenditure has risen from the pre-selection phase, as more renovations, repurposing, upgrades and infrastructure projects supporting the Cultural Programme have been planned. These projects will be presented in Q43.

## Q26&29 Financial Commitments for Capital Expenditure and New Cultural Infrastructure

As stated in the cultural strategy, the most important cultural institutions owned by the City of Oulu will receive funding for major renovations by 2026. In connection with the 2021 budget, Oulu City Council has decided on the investment programme for the coming years, though it should be noted that the programme is supplemented annually. The programme includes investments in the cultural institutions and other cultural programme implementation locations mentioned in our bid.

Cultural Climate Change demands a sustainable and agile programme in relation to venues and available spaces. The city will renovate key cultural facilities, existing buildings will be converted and at least partially repurposed for cultural use. New investments will be made only to the extent that repairs to existing facilities cannot guarantee the location of the cultural programme. Therefore, we have not attached a table specifying new cultural infrastructure. The table in Q43 provides a more detailed summary of planned renovation and infrastructure projects. The financial figures are in euros and are largely based on current estimates.

## Q27 EU Support for Capital Expenditure

In Finland it is not possible to cover infrastructure investments with Union funding. Thus, infrastructure investments are not included in the measures financed by the EU Structural Funds here. The decision is based on EU regulations on cohesion policy.

## Q28 Timetable for Income to Cover Capital Expenditure

Sources of income for capital expenditure	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
City	72,615,000	27,355,000	20,150,000	24,250,000	21,750,000	

Several large renovation projects in Oulu related to the implementation of the cultural programme had already started prior to 2021 but remain ongoing (see Q43). The costs of these renovation projects realised before 2021 are 'bundled' into 2021 and thus the figure for 2021 is proportionately higher.

### b. Organisational Structure

## Q30 Governance and Delivery Structure

A cross-sectoral working group explored different options for a good governance model implementing Oulu2026. The solution and the proposal for the Oulu City Board was to establish a new foundation. If the Oulu ECoC bid is successful, the Oulu Cultural Foundation will start operating at the beginning of 2022.

The City Board appoints 12 members of the Cultural Foundation's Board. All members are required to have excellent expertise in the cultural and creative fields and experience in European cooperation.

Membership is selected to be gender balanced with a minimum of 40% of both genders. The Oulu Cultural Foundation makes decisions independently but is still part of the Oulu

City Group. Its management regularly consults with the officials responsible for the city's ownership guidelines.

The Oulu2026 Delegation has been active since spring 2018 representing 32 participating municipalities and the key stakeholders of the area. Candidates for the Oulu Cultural Foundation Board will also be invited from the delegation. The delegation will continue to act as an Advisory Board to the Cultural Foundation Board. Committees of elderly people, young people, disabled people and migrant communities will have their representatives in the Advisory Board of the Foundation.

All our partner municipalities are collaborating in regional working groups on the regional culture programme as well as on communication and marketing.

## Q31&34 Management, CEO and Programme Director

The Oulu Cultural Foundation is responsible for all Oulu2026 activities. The Cultural Foundation's Board is its highest decision-making body, but operational decisions are made by the CEO, the Programme Director and the heads of the units. The Board will select the CEO and the Programme Director based on an open international call as their first task.

The CEO and the Programme Director must have the capacity to deliver the cultural programme, excellent communicative skills and broad European networks. Oulu2026 needs the best directors available, with experience and passion to achieve our main goal, Cultural Climate Change, together with our local, regional and European partners.

Creativity and working experience in cultural institutions is a requirement for both positions. The CEO must have proven, excellent skills in management and leadership. In addition to a strong artistic vision, the Programme Director also needs to display the ability to lead and coordinate the cultural programme process produced by large networks of actors working on cultural productions.

The CEO of the Foundation nominates the heads of unit. The Programme Director selects the staff for programme production. The heads of unit select their own staff. For the management of a large-scale and long-term project it is important that the heads of unit are recruited immediately after the foundation is established.

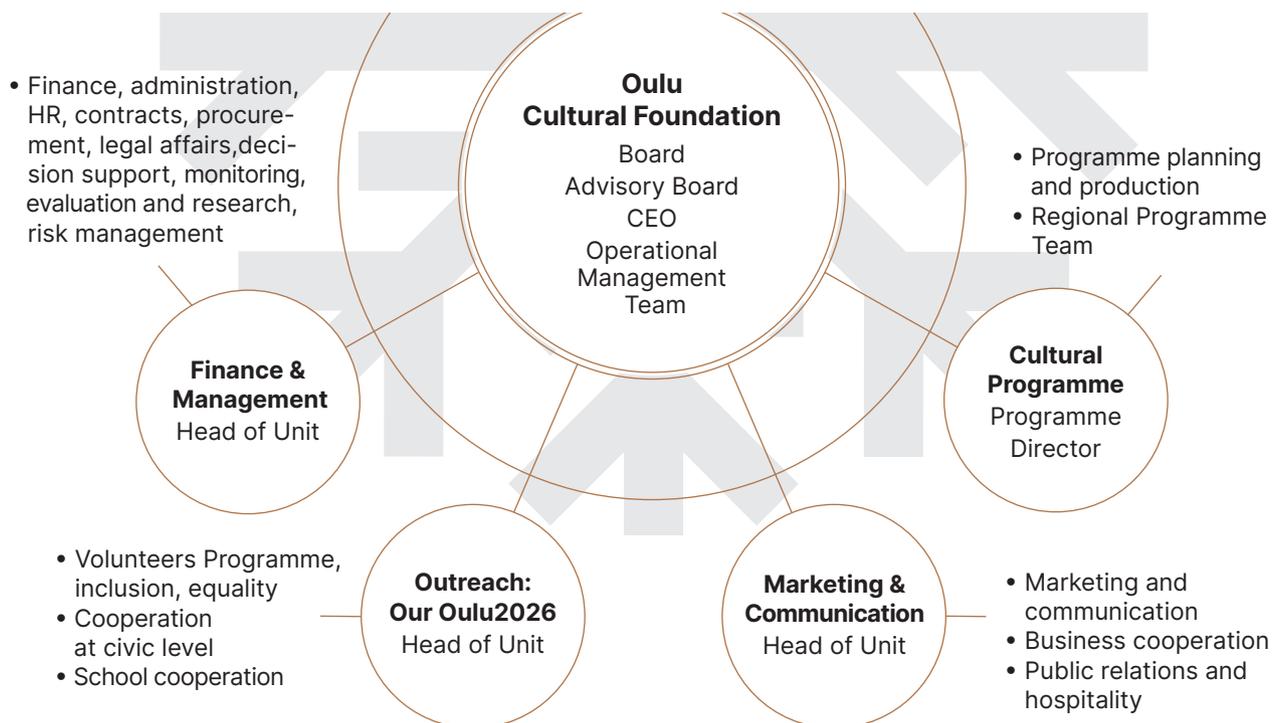
According to the organisation chart, Foundation activity is divided into four units, each with its own responsible unit head. The CEO will be the director of the entire organisation, responsible for finance, administration, involvement and volunteering, human resources and communications and marketing. The CEO will also supervise the Programme Director and the cultural programme which is realised through an artistic vision and implemented within the given financial framework, but with sufficient autonomy.

In practice, the Programme Director decides on the productions to be selected for the cultural programme.

The Programme Director is responsible for the implementation of the artistic vision through the cultural programme. Our entire process has followed the bottom-up principle from the beginning which is why we consciously chose not to use the title Artistic Director substituting instead Programme Director which we think connotes more openness and diversity. Most of the programme is however implemented by our partners with their own people in charge of artistic design.

The programme lines have their own production managers who work in collaboration with the production implementers selected for the programme.

The CEO, the Programme Director and unit heads form the Operational Management Team. This team is jointly responsible for the implementation of operations and for the preparation of decision matters which must be decided by the Foundation's Board. The Foundation's Board will base its decisions on the reports from the Operational Management Team and on consultations with the Advisory Board.



## Q32 Staff with Appropriate Skills and Experience

We have the chance to really change the climate in our city with a great team that will be able to do what they love right from where they are. Since spring 2018, the Oulu2026 bidding team has grown from 2 workers to 14 members in spring 2021. In all recruitment processes there have been many excellent applicants for the available vacancies. ECoC project-related jobs are seen as desirable.

The foundation will start operating in early 2022. The Foundation's staff will gradually increase according to the chart below. Foundation staff will be selected through public calls. We will pay special attention to ensure diversity and complementary skillsets to build a strong team. Some tasks

will be part-time so, for example, staff in the implementation area municipalities can apply for work in addition to their regular positions. This will ensure that the legacy of the project is instilled throughout the region. The workforce employed by the Foundation over the period 2021–2027 will total 150 person-years. Oulu2026 will, in itself, become an opportunity for young professionals to find an interesting job without having to leave Oulu for the south - or to come home from elsewhere. It is also an opportunity to connect with projects like **Untamed Office** to provide job placements and capacity building. The foundation offers internships for students in various fields and service positions for non-military service. Internships last 4-6 months.

Number of employees per year	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
Full-time	10	12	15	29	36	6
Part-time	2	2	2	2	6	0
Trainees	2	2	4	4	12	0
Non-military service	1	1	1	1	2	0
In total	15	17	22	36	56	6



## Q33 Cooperation Between the Local Authorities and the Oulu2026 Team

Since 2018, the Oulu2026 bidding team's Project Director and Programme Director have met regularly with the City executive team, the executive teams of the units responsible for services and key political decision-makers: the city council, city board, boards and advisory boards. We have arranged workshops to help them to develop the best conditions under which to implement our Cultural Programme, to make CCC possible.

It is clear to city-level policy makers that the content of an artistic programme is not a matter for political decision. The role of political decision-making in the activities of the

ECoC2026 bid has been to approve Oulu's cultural strategy and to make decisions on key investments supporting operations.

Local authorities have been informed of the progress of the project through their own newsletter which will continue to be produced on a monthly basis. The MunOulu city media platform of the City of Oulu has communicated openly about the preparation of the project and the open events and workshops organised by Oulu2026 to the authorities as well as to residents and stakeholders.

## c. Contingency Planning

# Q35&36 Risk Assessment and Mitigation Measures

Risks	Solutions to avoid risks
<b>PARTICIPATION AND ACCESSIBILITY</b>	
<p>Weak engagement by key stakeholder groups and audiences; Oulu2026 does not reach its targeted audiences</p> <p><b>Probability:</b> Medium <b>Level of effect:</b> High</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oulu Cultural Foundation has a department Our Oulu2026 for volunteering, equality and other inclusion issues</li> <li>• Oulu2026 is committed to the idea that inclusion increases participation and engagement</li> <li>• Audience development and participatory process design for all productions</li> <li>• Equality and Diversity Strategy set out the cornerstones for participation.</li> <li>• Communication and marketing are carried out in different languages, channels, taking into account accessibility e.g., children's and young people's own communication plan</li> <li>• Encouraging self-organised activity of young people</li> <li>• <b>We Are The Culture</b> open call, enables participation with a low threshold</li> </ul>
<p>Poor accessibility to cultural events</p> <p><b>Probability:</b> Low <b>Level of effect:</b> Medium</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projects take into account accessibility. Accessibility directives in both physical premises and online material (as discussed in Q15 Equality and Diversity Strategy)</li> <li>• Free access to some events</li> <li>• Event producers can consult accessibility experts</li> <li>• The majority of the events are produced using a hybrid model, allowing participation via several channels</li> </ul>
<b>EUROPEAN DIMENSION</b>	
<p>International collaborations not delivered as planned.</p> <p><b>Probability:</b> Low <b>Level of effect:</b> Medium</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong, continuous cooperation and communication with international partners.</li> <li>• Possible problem situations are addressed as early as possible.</li> <li>• International cooperation planned so that implementation can still take place even under pressure of 'exceptional circumstances'</li> <li>• Create a management structure to prepare for growing European interest after selection</li> </ul>
<b>MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION</b>	
<p>Communication does not address or reach local, national, European and international audiences and partners.</p> <p><b>Probability:</b> Medium <b>Level of effect:</b> High</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare a good communications and marketing plan that also takes into account strong international visibility</li> <li>• Hire professionals in the field and increase international communication and marketing skills</li> <li>• We have a strong visual look for print materials, street photography, communications and marketing in general</li> <li>• Target making Oulu2026 operations a recognisable brand</li> </ul>
<p>Oulu2026's reputation is impaired with project activities attracting negative comment</p> <p><b>Probability:</b> Low <b>Level of effect:</b> Low</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuous open communication and interaction across all channels concerning project events, activities and impacts</li> <li>• Engage relevant target groups</li> <li>• Produce crisis communication plan</li> </ul>
<b>GOVERNANCE, FUNDING AND CAPACITY TO DELIVER</b>	
<p>Insufficient political and administrative support (Municipal elections in 2021 and 2025)</p> <p><b>Probability:</b> Low <b>Level of effect:</b> Medium</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuous interaction and dialogue between Oulu2026 and leading civil servants and policy makers</li> </ul>



Risks	Solutions to avoid risks
<p>Insufficient budget secured or economic crisis during 2022-2027</p> <p><b>Probability:</b> Medium <b>Level of effect:</b> High</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constantly provide information on the financial impact of the ECoC to city decision-makers so that financial support remains strong throughout the ECoC process</li> <li>• Agile ways to gain new resources and partnerships</li> <li>• Support and provide information to project implementers from different funding sources, help to apply for self-financing contributions from different sources</li> <li>• Separate programme for sponsorship and business cooperation</li> </ul>
<p>Renovation of the cultural programme venues will not be completed before 2026 (The large-scale projects are just about to start)</p> <p><b>Probability:</b> High <b>Level of effect:</b> Low</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With a vigilant steering structure in respect of the renovations, we will ensure that the items in the investment programme are completed on time</li> <li>• Alternative locations are also being identified for key events.</li> </ul>
<p>The staff of the Foundation lack sufficient capacity to carry out the heavy ECoC production tasks</p> <p><b>Probability:</b> Low <b>Level of effect:</b> High</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management is selected through an open international call, with high qualitative criteria</li> <li>• Lessons learned from other ECoCs</li> <li>• Quality HR management</li> <li>• Resource planning</li> <li>• Tactical recruitment</li> </ul>
<b>REGIONAL ISSUES</b>	
<p>Confrontation between the city of Oulu and the regional municipalities. The region does not share ownership of the project.</p> <p><b>Probability:</b> Low <b>Level of effect:</b> Medium</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuous dialogue with the municipalities in the area.</li> <li>• The cultural programme is implemented throughout the implementation area.</li> <li>• Designated staff specifically address issues relating to the balance between city and region.</li> <li>• Communication and marketing ensure that the whole area is covered.</li> <li>• Emphasising the common goal and doing things together.</li> </ul>
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY</b>	
<p>The principles of sustainable development are not sufficiently taken into account.</p> <p><b>Probability:</b> Medium <b>Level of effect:</b> Medium</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental responsibility set as a key indicator in the work of the Oulu2026 Foundation.</li> <li>• Information and training on sustainability for all staff and volunteers</li> <li>• Attain relevant environmental certificates</li> <li>• The Most Sustainable European Capital of Culture project guide is taken as a binding document.</li> <li>• All operations based on sustainable choices: Sustainable travel modes; materials; applying principles of circular economy; CO2 compensation programme in use; digital working methods when relevant</li> </ul>
<b>SUDDEN CHANGES</b>	
<p>Unforeseen events and sudden changes during implementation (like Covid-19)</p> <p><b>Probability:</b> High <b>Level of effect:</b> Medium</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All projects in the cultural programme also have a designated 'plan B'.</li> <li>• Scalability, scaling to different locations, timings or audiences</li> <li>• Digitalisation and virtual presentations: 70% of cultural projects are implemented via a hybrid model</li> <li>• Indoor/Outdoor events interchangeable</li> </ul>
<p>Extreme weather conditions</p> <p><b>Probability:</b> Medium <b>Level of effect:</b> Low</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scalability, scaling to different locations, timings or audiences</li> <li>• Digitalisation and virtual presentations: 70% of cultural projects are implemented via a hybrid model</li> </ul>

**d. Marketing and Communication**

**Q37** Slogan

**Cultural Climate  
Change is about  
reconnecting!**



**Reconnecting People  
Reconnecting Nature  
Reconnecting Culture  
Reconnecting Art & Technology  
Reconnecting the City  
Reconnecting the Region**

# Q38 Communication and Marketing Strategy

Our communication approach to Cultural Climate Change is to tell Europe the story of our struggle to change the cultural climate of a hard, tech-based, functional city to one which is full. Full of soul. Full of possibility. Full of Culture.

The change in the cultural climate of our city, our region and far beyond enables us to reconnect through culture, bring people together and elevate the process of European reconnection and dialogue. We invite everyone to participate in this, improving our opportunities for cultural co-creation in our new creative villages and districts, improving our health and mental atmosphere and the prospects for cooperation. We will create a movement that encourages Cultural Climate Change to radiate out from Oulu, across Europe, showcasing the North as a wild, cool and brave part of our shared cultural space.

## Strategic Approach

Reconnecting is already a communication task and to live up to it we have been preparing Oulu2026's marketing and communications strategy since 2018 with wild joy. We feel that we have compelling stories to share about a change in the cultural climate of our city, of Europe and of our approach to actual climate change. We aim to spread our message to locals, other Finns and to the whole of Europe! We will tell other Europeans about the city of the north which sits boldly on the wild edge of Europe and how we make great, world-class art. We will show that Oulu is an attractive European city for residents, companies and visitors. We also invite everyone to participate in dialogue -to exchange ideas and to learn together. We will stop hiding our special wild-side and instead celebrate it!

Through various means and across numerous channels we are targeting - and reconnecting - everyone, not just those who are already consumers of the city's current cultural offer. Supplementing our traditional approach to communication was clearly necessary given the pandemic. In response we adopted new digital strategies which will be used to reach people in interactive ways. Marketing is already the message: we promote reconnecting using the media of art and tech to initiate dialogue.

We take a four-fold strategic approach to the sharing of these stories:

### 1) Human-to-Human Communication

In 2026 Cultural Climate Change is discussed across a multitude of channels by diverse groups of people. We want our message to be shared, to travel from human to human, using familiar channels and the personal touch. We will create the means for young people to talk to young people, mostly digitally; seniors to be reached by radio, busy parents to pick up information from kindergarten bulletin boards or via podcasts while out jogging. We will turn wellness centres, restaurants, libraries and parish facilities into places where the person-to-person communication of Oulu2026 events takes place.

The target groups of our communications and marketing are divided into international, national, Oulu2026 and Oulu regions. These are the main target groups under which more precise targeting can be made according to time and need.

### 2) Driven by Children

Oulu2026 is determined to be the first ECoC with its own communications strategy for children and young people. Not only will we have a children and youth advisory group for our communication but our communication strategy, driven by children, means that children and young people will communicate with their own voice, will have the power to decide on content and channels and those who would, traditionally, have been at risk of being left out are assisted in getting involved. The key to the communication strategy is that children take over and teach us what they want to tell the world about their city and what is happening. Together with the new STREAM Children's Cultural Centre it will be our task to find the ways and means to provide a safe and joyful way to have children connect to their peers (from) all over Europe and to invite them and their families to come to Oulu or connect online.

### 3) Hybrid Communication Channels

Hybrid participation is the new norm and we are currently developing a number of smart solutions to facilitate the production of hybrid events. We will make at least 70% of Oulu2026's content available on digital channels, easily accessible to all Europeans. The Oulu2026 media family will become the most important channel for both the area's residents and visitors to Oulu; it will contain all the information you need about what is happening in the city and in the Oulu2026 area, how to get to the events, where to stay and dine and through it you can even book an authentic

local experience and buy event tickets. We will work hard to overcome the digital divide. Moreover, we will continue to use face-to-face communication and traditional media to reach people who prefer those methods.

#### 4) Strong Northern Region

In the North, there are extremely cool contrasts between breath-taking nature and jaw-dropping art & tech. This is something only we can share. Between operas going wild and **Climate Clocks** ticking. Oulu2026 is a unique opportunity to elevate the brand image of not only the City of Oulu but the entire region and to highlight the high-quality events, distinctive culture and softer values which propel Cultural Climate Change forward. The City of Oulu is already renewing its brand to ensure that it is aligned with our Oulu2026 story. The brand will be revealed after the European Capital of Culture for Finland has been selected.

Collaboration in communication, is already a special strength of the Oulu region. All of the region's and city's marketing and communication outlets will relay this unified Oulu2026 message. If Oulu is selected, we will also invite other key players and the main communications professionals of major cities, destination management organisations, the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Education and Culture to work together for Oulu2026.

The City of Oulu has intensified its international communications and established a separate group to coordinate the international communication and marketing package. VisitOulu and BusinessOulu are also involved – and of course Oulu2026 is closely involved in the design and content process.

#### Three Phases to Communicate Oulu2026 to the World:

Each phase comes with its own detailed plans for communication and marketing activities. The plan is constantly updated and maintained and serves as a tool for ex-post evaluation.

Phase	Key goals	Key activities
Attraction Phase 2022-2024	Trigger active participation.	Introducing the main themes in active marketing. Campaigns in the region and across all digital channels.
Reconnection Phase 2024-26	The golden age of anticipation and enthusiasm. Active event marketing and redeeming the promises of Cultural Climate Change using a wide variety of channels to reach all targeted audiences locally, nationally and internationally.	Big bang on marketing and communications campaigns, using a wide variety of channels to attract audiences to participate and to tell Oulu2026 stories. This is the phase when we fire up our international communication campaigns to let our Finnish, European and international audiences know what is going on in terms of the programme and events. All digital, physical, broadcasting and interactive means in use. Our media is online to conquer people's hearts wherever they are.
Rooting Phase 2027 (post Oulu2026)	Rooting Cultural Climate Change; consolidating cultural changes in the collective consciousness of the city's residents and across wider European audiences.	Synthesising the Oulu2026 story and making it readily available in interesting media formats. Oulu2026 documents available digitally. Communicating the learnings and impacts. The story continues...

## Q39 Meeting the Media

Our media strategy is based on a strong partnership with Finnish and international media, in-house production of compelling content and the utilisation of digital media. Local and national media are our most important partners in reaching the Finnish market. To reach European audiences we will work with international media and invite them to our virtual media meetings. The international media is already interested in stories of us 'odd' northern people. For example, a winter cycling video about Oulu posted at the end of January 2021 had been viewed 350,000 times across Europe by February, spawning several international media articles and visits to Oulu. We will continue with this authentic storytelling approach.

We cooperate with and meet media representatives regularly. The media in Northern Finland have already reported on our ECoC journey; for example, the local newspaper *Kaleva* which reaches almost 450,000 readers, is already engaged in scripting Oulu2026 stories. We will also cooperate with the local editors of *YLE*, the public national media broadcaster. The City of Oulu's new international communication and marketing group will also coordinate international media visits. We will invite international media to Oulu before 2026 and invite visitors again to the opening and closing ceremonies during the anniversary year. Travel operators as well as many of our region's cultural actors already have extensive networks with international media, something which we will leverage for Oulu2026.

In addition to media partnerships, communications partnerships with various media agencies, freelancers and other actors will also be of crucial importance. Through our extensive cultural programme, hundreds of communications and marketing partnerships are being created. We will support the partner network with our common Oulu2026 communication guidelines.

### Being Media Ourselves - Let the # and @ Spread

People increasingly seek information from diverse sources, often bypassing traditional media outlets. The City of Oulu has already shown how an organisation can itself be a media player, producing interesting content. We will build the Oulu2026 media family which will become an important

channel for the area's residents and for visitors to Oulu. We will use the latest communication and marketing technology.

The media family includes the Oulu2026 magazine, a podcast series, videos, streams, image galleries, social media channels with their content, websites and calendars and an all-inclusive mobile application. Interaction plays an important role in content terms. The mobile app provides hints for event visits in close proximity to the app-user, attracting people to explore cultural sites across northern Finland. Our goal is that through the app you could also plan and book experiences and tours.

The media family compiles current news and events using the flow of social media, telling users about northern Finland's way of life, its food culture, wellbeing and activities. Our channels show social media influencers visiting our events and youth groups building a wild city. We already produce engaging content. Social media channels are tactically applied to reach special interest groups and people of all ages. We are smart with our digital marketing. People are invited to use hashtags and easy-to-share media content to take Cultural Climate Change forward. We want to get people to share our content on their own channels. Let the stories go viral!

The City of Oulu is already pioneering this, opening its own *Mun Oulu* city media in 2020 and an event calendar in 2021. The print and online media communication channel publishes cultural stories almost daily and has already incorporated Cultural Climate Change messages into its content. The journey towards Oulu2026 has been reported on several times in both the *Mun Oulu* online-media and the magazine which is distributed to every household in Oulu.

### Live Like an Oulu Resident and Tell It to the World!

Social media influencers often reach large audiences. Influencer marketing is characterised by storytelling and individuality - that's exactly what we want! We will invest in genuine cooperation with Finnish and international influencers: we will invite several influencers to live in Oulu, to get acquainted with everyday and cultural life here, to work in creative residences and to share their stories with the world.

## **Q40** Let the People Tell It to the World

We believe in the power of doing things together, *with* people, not just for people! Most of our programme is participatory, so we believe that when you participate and enjoy what you are doing, you will tell others about it – either face to face or through social media.

### **365 Stories and Cultural Ambassadors**

We believe that genuine stories have power. To deepen our love for and pride in the North through stories, we let local people tell them themselves. With the help of various campaigns and influencers, we are looking for Oulu residents and northern Finns to tell about our wild city, cool contrasts and brave hinterland in their own way. We believe that authenticity is of great interest in an otherwise filtered and surface-polished world. In 2026, we will give Oulu and Oulu2026 residents 365 days - one story for each day - which will be published on our channels to share with the rest of the world! The stories of our local storytellers will, we hope, charm the international audience!

The Oulu2026 project has already recruited several hundred Cultural Ambassadors. Cultural Ambassadors act as ECoC project communicators with their own communities and networks - they are really important partners for us! We are also looking for cultural ambassadors from around the world. They can, for example, be people who have moved from northern Finland and now live anywhere in the world but want to promote our northern culture.

### **Authentic Oulu Experiences!**

A tourist coming to Oulu can book authentic experiences with locals online. For example: a mushroom or berry picking trip, meeting a local Oulu family, a sauna session in a real wooden sauna by the river, a cycling trip with a young person, a shopping day or even a discussion about Oulu's stories. By inviting people to experience new situations with locals, we also expand the concept of culture.

### **Everyone Is a Communicator – Together We Are More**

We aim to harness skilled service professionals as our ambassadors. These key players include cultural operators, hotel and restaurant workers, taxi and bus drivers, tourist guides and shop staff. They will be given material and information to use so that they can tell our story to visitors.

# Q41 **Highlighting the European Capital of Culture as an Action of the European Union**

The visibility of the European Union and the ECoC brand is very important in all our communication and marketing materials. We already promote the ECoC brand and cities through our channels. We have presented “Facts about the ECoC”, introduced the previous ECoC cities and keep sharing their stories. Citizens can follow the other ECoC cities’ social media channels from the Oulu2026 website.

The European Capital of Culture will be visible everywhere emblazoned with our visual identity: on construction site walls, in shop and restaurant windows, on screens, bus stops and murals. Visibility will also be guaranteed by including the European Union logo in all Oulu2026 marketing materials, on the website, social media and in our graphic material. Guidance on the correct use of the logo and the flag will also be issued in all the brand packs and guidelines. We will make sure that our ECoC flags are fluttering in the streets of Oulu, all the way from the airport and railway station to the heart of the city.

We work closely with the two local Europe Direct Information Points (EDIC) in the Oulu2026 region. We organise joint EU-themed public events, debates and seminars. Together we visit schools and other events to talk about the activities of the European Union and the European Capital of Culture. We will jointly produce a communication materials package for schools.

To celebrate the European Union and the Melina Mercouri Prize, all the essential members of the European Commission, especially from the DG for Culture and the President, in addition to former, current and future ECoC cities will be invited to take part in Oulu’s opening and closing ceremonies as well as in the key events throughout the year. These events will also be linked to every town and municipality in the region, for example, via live social media broadcasts.

Above all, our cultural programming advances Europe’s rich cultural and linguistic diversity as well as peace and wellbeing which are among the main goals of the European Union.



# 6. CAPACITY TO DELIVER

## **Q42** Political Support and Commitment

On 27 February 2017, Oulu City Council decided to apply for the European Capital of Culture 2026 with a celebratory decision made in honour of Finland's 100th anniversary of independence. Moreover, the City council also nominated Oulu2026 to be a strategic flagship project.

The City steering group, led by the mayor, has acted as the lead group for project preparation. Oulu2026 has received appropriate resources from the beginning, a total of approximately EUR 1.2M has been spent on preparation during the period 2017–2020.

In December 2019, the city council decided on the level of the city's contribution to the project, amounting to EUR 20M for the period 2021–2027, should Oulu be designated.

Municipal finances in Finland are currently quite stretched, due to ongoing changes in the age structure and the impact of the pandemic. However, the decision-makers of the City of Oulu see the European Capital of Culture as strengthening the region's vitality and attraction, creating the founda-

tion for a better future. The city's operating expenditure for 2021 totals around EUR 1.4 billion of which savings of EUR 50 million have been sought, though appropriations for the ECoC or from the city's own cultural activities were not cut.

All 32 municipalities that have decided to participate in Oulu2026 have appointed a member and deputy member to the Oulu2026 Delegation as well as a contact-person for practical and communication cooperation. Most recently, during the autumn of 2020, representatives of all 32 municipalities were met at municipality-specific meetings with the ECoC viewed as positive across the region, e.g., as an initiator of the municipalities' own development projects and as a booster to inter-municipal cooperation.

The Council of Oulu Region has given its support to the Oulu2026 application and has also financially supported the creative internationalisation development projects related to the application during 2018–2020.



# Q43 Infrastructure Projects

As stated in the pre-selection phase, implementation of the Oulu2026 bid does not rely on large scale new facility investments but rather on upgrading the city’s infrastructure by renovating cultural institutions and repurposing existing premises for cultural use. This approach is firmly based on the city’s cultural strategy.

Oulu’s Central Vision 2040, the Architectural Policy Programme and the Oulu Cultural Environment Programme contribute to the implementation of the Cultural Climate Change concept, building an experiential city with even more space for art and culture.

The change in the cultural climate in the city can be felt and seen in 2026 on a walk through the city of Oulu. After renovation of the City Hall, its premises will be used for art and culture more than ever before. The City Hall, the Valve Cultural Centre, the Market Square, the Oulu Theatre and the Central Library which is currently renewing its operating concept in a major renovation, form a densification

of cultural facilities, which expands to the Raatti Stadium, Pikisaari (one of our Creative Villages) and the newly built event park in Kuusisaari. From the market square walk along the estuary shoreline and you will end up in Hupisaari City Park, passing Sahasaari, the new Outdoor Theatre, the Museum of Northern Ostrobothnia, the Oulu Museum of Art and the Science Centre Tietomaa. In the dark season, public light art unites these areas into an interesting ensemble. There are more permanent works of light art in the city centre every year, as well as bicycle paths along which Oulu residents peddle briskly all year round.

Hailuoto is an island off Oulu where the state is building a bridge connecting the mainland to the island. The decision is significant in terms of improving accessibility. Several cultural programme projects are being implemented in the Hailuoto area. A decision, in principle, on construction has been made, but the permitting process is still ongoing. The costs of the Hailuoto bridge project have not been included in Tables relating to Q25, Q28 and Q43.

Project	Description	Est. costs	Est. timetable	Connection to Oulu2026 programme
Pohjankartano - Music School and Adult Education College	Major overhaul	14,200,000	2016–2022	Art Seeds Children’s Biennale. See also Outreach for plans to use school buildings.
Oulu’s Bicycle Network	New bicycle routes	24,000,000	2018-2025	Bang Bang Riviera. Let It Snow.
Indoor Market Hall	Renovation	5,250,000	2019–2020	Arctic Food Lab.
Oulu Hall - Sport and Events Venue	Expansion and renovation	21,418,000	2019–2021	Opening Ceremony.
Oulu City Theatre	Renovation: audience stand & HVAC	600,000	2021-2022	Oulu Dance Hack.
Outdoor Market Place	Infrastructure improvements	500,000	2021-2022	Arctic Food Lab. The Nook.
Oulu Lyceum	Major overhaul	15,252,000	2021-2022	Art Seeds Children’s Biennale. Go with the STREAM.

Project	Description	Est. costs	Est. timetable	Connection to Oulu2026 programme
Ranta-Toppila's new Marina	Dredging and other included works	5,000,000	2021-2023	Tar Wharf to the Seven Seas. AALTOSILO.
Museum and Science Centre Luuppi: Oulu Museum of Art, Northern Ostrobothnia Museum, Science Centre Tietomaa	Major overhaul	37,500,000	2021-2025	ArTech City. Tomorrow's Wardrobe. Mind Blown – Borderlines of the Mind. Tar Wharf to the Seven Seas. Aurora Revelare.
Central Library	Major overhaul	Budget included in Luuppi's costs	2021-2025	Rethinking Libraries. Go with the STREAM.
Oulu City Hall - also Event Venue use	Renovation	20,000,000	2021-2025	ArTech City. Peace Machine.
Ylikiminki Library	Renovation	2,000,000	2021-2025	Rethinking Libraries.
Permanent Lighting Art and the Development of Urban Lighting	Development of lightning	2,500,000	2021-2025	Light Matters.
Oulu Energy Arena - Ice Hockey and Event Venue	Major overhaul, part 3	900,000	2022-2023	Let it Snow.
Oulu Music Centre	Major overhaul	10,000,000	2023-2025	MC Oulu. Beyond the Sky.
Sahasaari - Space for Culture Activities	Major overhaul	1,500,000	by 2026	Exploring ART.
Housing Fair Culture Depot	Major overhaul	5,500,000	by 2025	Opera Goes Wild. Faravid's Land.
Cultural Centre Valve	Major overhaul	will be specified	2022-2025	Art Seeds Children's Biennale. Frozen Nights. 2nd Generation Cultural Embassy.
Pikisaari - Creative Island	Major overhaul	will be specified	by 2026	Pikisaari Creative Island. Untamed Office.
Hiukkavaara - Culture Barracks	Renovation	will be specified	by 2026	Hiukkavaara - Creative Boot Camp.

## Q44 Final Words

What started in 2017 as an application has now given us a future. Oulu is irreversibly on the path to changing its cultural climate. We owe it to the people who have been hit hardest by the pandemic to build a fairer, kinder society. That's where culture and creativity can be our rebuilders. Oulu2026 could have an European impact!

Our cultural programme has been created with a northern passion that doesn't always shout out loudly. Yet we have numerous expressions for important things - the Sámi languages have hundreds of expressions for snow, dozens in Finnish. Unexpected experiences can arise in harsh conditions, by reconnecting cool contrasts in a brave hinterland. We invite all Europeans to join the CCC-movement.



# Share The Cultural Climate Change!



**#CulturalClimateChange**

**Take a photo with the Snowflake!**

Scan the page with Oulu2026 application, take a photo with the Snowflake and share it on Social Media with #culturalclimatechange. Find us on Instagram @oulu2026official





