

Co-operation between local and national municipalities in education and culture based on the example of Oulu, Finland

Mika Penttilä, director

A high-angle, wide shot of a large indoor concert venue. The stage is circular and illuminated with red and blue lights. A large crowd of people is gathered around the stage, filling the floor. A large curved screen above the stage displays a close-up of a performer. The overall atmosphere is vibrant and energetic.

THE LARGEST URBAN CENTRE IN
NORTHERN SCANDINAVIA WITH
250,000 people

A city for people and business
since 1605



Capital of Northern Scandinavia

Centre of **education
and culture**

Centre of **trade and
economy**

Logistics centre

Experience centre



Oulu is a
**City of two
universities**



Oulu is **one of the youngest cities in Europe**

An atmosphere that encourages innovation

High education level – every third person in Oulu has a university degree.

**University of Oulu and University of Applied Sciences:
about 25,000 students**



**A great foundation
for building the future!**

LINNANMAA

Largest under-one-roof
campus in Europe

UNIC

European Network University



FLAGSHIP

**UNIVERSITY
OF OULU**



What specific tasks does Oulu perform in the field of education and culture cooperating with other municipalities?

National level:

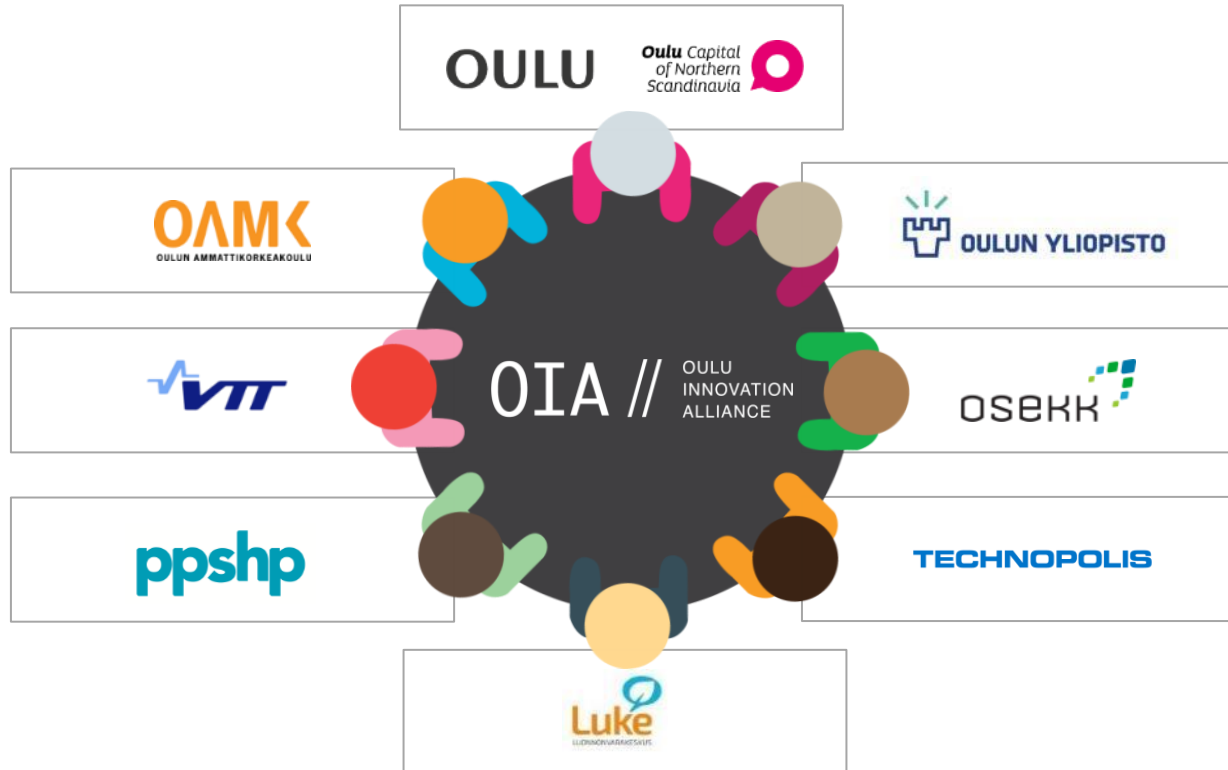
- legislation
- development of fields of operation
- development of digital platforms
- development of competence of the staff
- collaboration with the larger cities on different themes

Local level:

- Oulu's role as the central city of the region
- promotion of welfare
- collaboration with health and social services

Significant collaboration with the University of Oulu

COOPERATION ACROSS ORGANISATIONAL BOUNDARIES

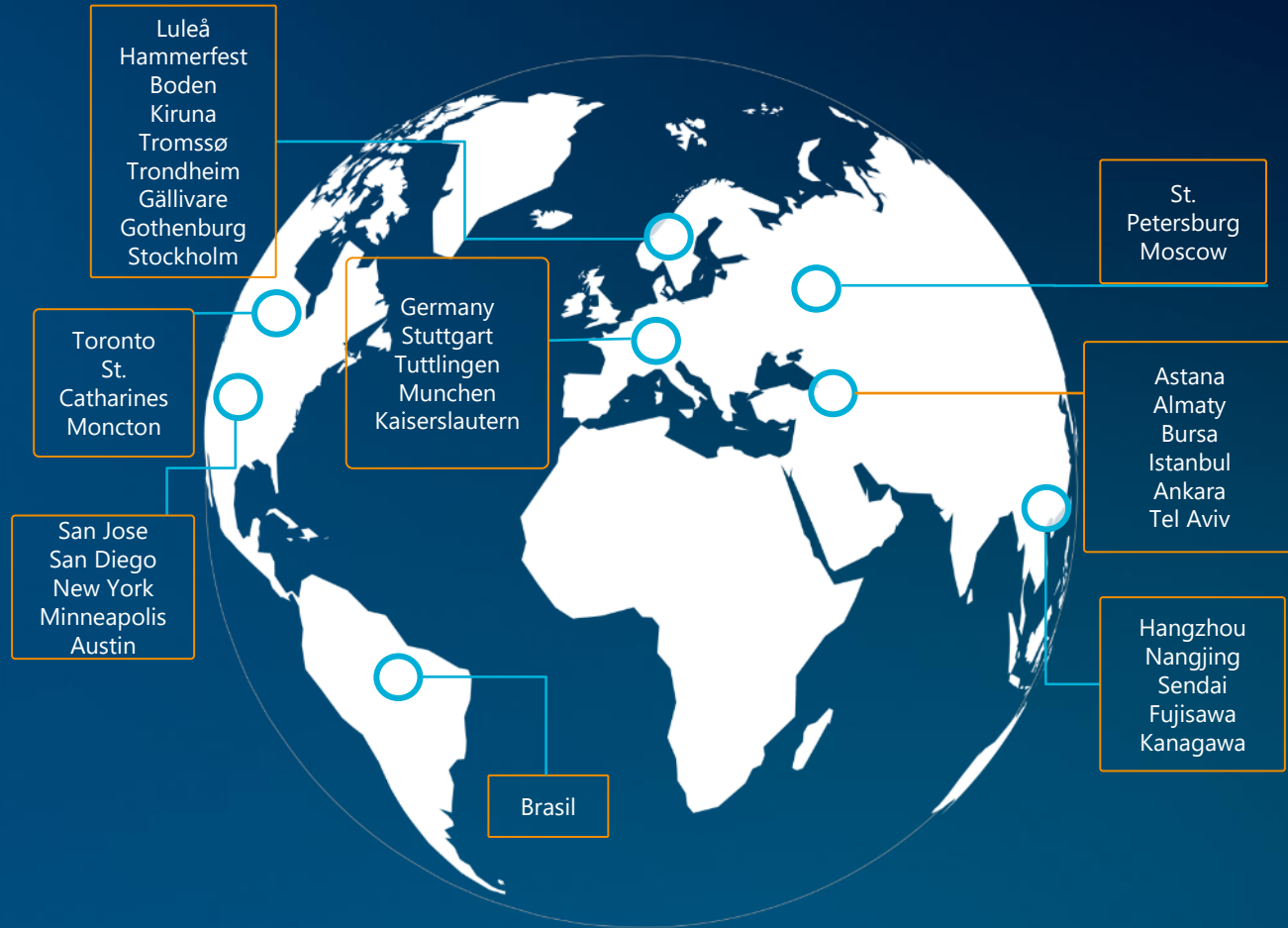


International Networks



OULU HAS NETWORKED GLOBALLY

- ▶ We participate in export promotion trips, meet with potential associates and funders, as well as assist in organising sales negotiations.
- ▶ Additionally, we strive for increasing awareness of our City's reputation as the globally appealing place it has become for businesses, investors, travellers, event organisers, and experts from various fields.



What is the legal form of cooperation?

Basis for collaboration varies and is context-specific

Examples of forms of collaboration:

- Association of Finnish Municipalities -> membership
- Digione -> contract
- groups to be gathered around different themes
 - development initiatives
 - projects

How have local governments delegated decision-making power?

Decision-making in different cooperation contracts

1. The city council or the municipal council makes the decision
2. Board makes the decision
3. The office-holder makes the decision based on delegated powers

The decision-making sequence depends on

- a. scale and effectiveness of the contract
- b. length of the contract
- c. parties to the contract

Decision Making

Finnish municipalities have self-government powers. According to the law, municipalities must provide certain basic services for their residents.

The most important basic services include social and healthcare services, education, and environmental and technical infrastructure. Through the basic services, municipalities provide residents the prerequisites for good living, wellbeing and basic safety.

City of Oulu administration

The highest decision-making body is [the city council](#), which is elected every four years in local elections. The current council has 67 councillors.

[The city board](#) is responsible for city administration and finances. It also prepares matters for the decision-making process, ensures that council decisions are in accordance with the law and enforces the decisions.

Committees and boards are institutions consisting of trusted persons under which the actual City of Oulu services operate.



The City Board consists of [13 members](#) elected by the City Council for a four-year term. The Chairman of the Board is **Mrs. Mirja Vehkaperä** (Centre Party).

The City Board is responsible for municipal administration and economy, preparation of the matters to be decided by the City Council and making sure that the decisions made by the council are implemented and in accordance with the law.

The City Board represents the municipality: it uses its right to speak and performs various judicial actions on its behalf. The tasks of the City Board are defined in the by-laws. The Mayor and directors prepare and present the matters to be decided by the City Board. The City Board's 13 members all have a personal deputy. The mayors of the City Council can attend and address the meetings.

The agendas of the meetings and the minutes of the decisions of the City Board are displayed in all [libraries](#) and on [the Internet](#) (in Finnish).

The public cannot attend these meetings, but the decisions of the board are in the public domain.

How is the management and financing of the cooperation organized?

Administration and financing of cooperation is based on the form of cooperation

For example:

- A membership fee is payable to the Association of Finnish Municipalities
 - government, industry-specific groups, theme groups
- Digione-> membership fee
 - owned by municipalities, the steering group decides, different subgroups
- unofficial -> meetings
 - e.g. invitations are made to groups of ministries, the convenor administers

What has improved since the collaboration?

- Finland's public sector and its successes would not be possible without cooperation.
- Cooperation and networking are strategic choices.
- As for Oulu, we have profited e.g. from
 - influencing legislation
 - sharing best practices
 - the benefits from development projects





What are the challenges in local government cooperation?

- Finding time for collaboration
- Finding suitable partners
- The surrounding municipalities are so small that in many cases there is cooperation with other larger cities



What are your recommendations for Estonia?

- 1+1 equals more than 2
- If one is prepared to commit oneself to cooperation, one will also receive the rewards
- Of course, defining the limits of cooperation is important, because every day cannot consist of cooperation only.



OULU
2026



European Capital of Culture 2026





Thank you!