# Roadmap to a smart Oulu

The city of Oulu, Finland, is developing and testing new practices for the built-up environment as an innovation platform to boost businesses and research

Each year, cities invest billions of euro in the built-up environment. For example, from 2013-2017 investments in properties owned by the city of Oulu in northern Finland alone, with its some 200,000 inhabitants, total nearly €700m. As a consequence, development of the built-up environment offers an excellent starting point not only for the city, but also for research institutions and businesses to study, develop and test new products and services in a genuine environment alongside local residents.

## Description of the project

In January 2015 Oulu launched a development project entitled 'Roadmap to a Smart Arctic Specialisation'. Within the project, new operational concepts and interactive practices for urban development are created and tested to enable research institutes and businesses to make more efficient use of the built-up environment as an innovation platform, as the city constructs new or renovates existing infrastructure.

The aim is such that, with the aid of the roadmap work and novel interactive practices developed within the project, needs-based R&D projects as well as external funding will be secured for the city's future investments more successfully than at present. The expected outcome is that, in the future, collaboration involving a multi-actor network of developers will result in more attractive residential and business areas for local residents and the business sector. At its best, a city that is part of an ecosystem that works well will speed up research in the region and promote market entry for new products and service solutions developed by local businesses, minimise investor risk, and provide references for companies as they seek entry into international markets.

At the beginning of the project, the task was to identify and select the city's actual future regional development and investment sites that attract businesses and research institutes to collaborate with the city, for example, because of their location or intended future use. The identification and selection was performed by the city's internal actors at workshops arranged for officials working in various positions. At the very onset of the workshop process it was decided that the built-up environment as a whole could act as an 'urban lab' for urban development. This means that the regional roadmap development sites may be located in areas involving new construction as well as renovation or complementary construction. The decision was made to ensure better possibilities for the development of property owned by the city in cases where changes in use are being planned over the coming few years, based on population projections, for example. The workshops were arranged during spring and autumn 2015.

## Joint practices

Smart joint practices are at the core of a smart city. Since one of the aims of the project is to link collaboration partners' development projects and external funding that makes development work possible for the city's investments to make them more efficient than at present, information about existing practices within the city organisation that may be used to promote joint development was also gathered at the abovementioned workshops.

One practical example of joint development is innovative site allocation. It has been tested during the project at two roadmap sites selected for complementary construction in the open site allocation (i.e. developer) competition arranged by the city, where the city has looked for a collaboration partner for the development of the selected sites with some new criteria that differ from normal competition specifications. The following was recorded in the instructions for application for the site allocation competition: 'The main applicant must name as partners a minimum of 3-5 businesses and/or research organisations focused on development of housing, services or construction that will use the site in a variety of ways as a product and/or service development platform.'

Both site allocation competitions have aroused national interest, and the model has been copied elsewhere in Finland. Compared to the first competition, an increase in the standard of the competition entries was already seen after the second competition. The city has also developed its own site allocation competition process based on the experiences gained during the first competition. Evaluation of the applications received in the second competition is currently underway. In the evaluation process, the ability of application groups to collaborate is assessed as a new element. This is natural in view of the fact that there are years of collaboration ahead, with the competition winner and its partners investing tens, if not hundreds of millions of euro in the project.

Smart joint practices are at the core of the development of a smart built-up city. In this project, the aim has therefore been to look for new ways to involve decision makers, local residents and other stakeholders in urban planning, in addition to the city organisation, businesses and research institutions. A solution to help bring about new kinds of participation and interaction was found at the end of last year, when a decision was taken to develop the new 'Mapgets portal' by FCG City Portal Oy (https://www.fcg.fi) intended for publication and distribution of Finnish city data as a platform in Oulu. Mapgets utilises

technology for modelling virtual reality. It is aimed at developers of city data-related applications, providers of city data and other services as well as professionals who make use of city data in selling and marketing their products.

So, during the last three months, the Mapgets portal has been tailored for the use of the city of Oulu. Information about the regional development sites included in the roadmap project has been compiled in the platform. At the same time, a system allowing local residents and others to provide feedback has also been developed for the platform. The SmartOulu application is now ready to be launched and introduced to the general public. This will take place in April when representatives of businesses and research institutes, city officials, local residents and political decision makers will be invited to get acquainted with the new development and innovation platform aimed to gather and disseminate data describing built-up environments. This means that in the very near future, work within the roadmap project will proceed based on an extensive network of collaborative partners.

The roadmap project will close at the end of August 2016. Half of the funding for the project, with total costs amounting to €315,500, has been awarded by TEKES (Finnish Funding Agency for Innovation). The remainder of the funding comes from the city of Oulu. Even though the project is not large in scope it must be pointed out that without funding from the TEKES Innovative Cities programme it is very likely that the project would not have been implemented.

## Benefits of the project

The effectiveness of the urban development resources used and investments made by different actors will improve as new projects, identified at a sufficiently early stage and based on real need, are launched at the right time and in the right place. This also means an improved opportunity to make use of external funding. In the future the lifespan of individual investments by the city may thus involve a number of R&D projects, with collaboration groups consisting of regional, national or international actors. As a result, the spectrum of funding will also be wide and varied.

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