

The City of Helsinki – an important player in urban research

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New Research Programme

The City of Helsinki's Research Programme is drawn up every three years to activate and co-ordinate research on Helsinki and the entire Helsinki Metropolitan Area. The programme seeks to increase the knowledge of living conditions and welfare of Helsinki citizens and to strengthen the competitiveness of the business community in compliance with the principles of sustainable development and good administration. It also supports the City of Helsinki's strategic work and information needs relating to common strategies. The programme covers research projects that are of major interest to various partners and conducted or co-ordinated by Helsinki City Urban Facts. This programme excludes research independently commissioned or carried out by the city's other offices and departments, although such research, too, includes data from Helsinki City Urban Facts' Research Register.

The research programme has been drawn up under the direction of a steering group for research co-operation led by Deputy Mayor Ilkka-Christian Björklund. The steering group comprised representatives of several of the City of Helsinki's offices and departments as well as co-operation partners from the University of Helsinki, Helsinki School of Economics,

Helsinki University of Technology, and Statistics Finland. The steering group provided the outlines for the work and Helsinki City Urban Facts researchers did the preparation work. Dozens of meetings with hundreds of co-operation partners were held. Urban Facts has a staff of 15 researchers.

The programme includes 93 research ideas or projects grouped into seven themes: (1) Regional, urban and municipal economy, (2) Population, housing, (3) Living conditions, safety and urban culture, (4) Education and labour market, (5) City governance and participation, (6) Urban structure and environment, (7) Urban history.

Besides the thematic division, the programme was also prepared to take into account current challenges and information needs in Helsinki's urban policy. Six themes emerged:

- 1 Helsinki's metropolitan region as an innovative environment and system,
- 2 The income basis of the city economy,
- 3 Social coherence (inclusion / exclusion),
- 4 The effects of EU enlargement,
- 5 Co-operation in the management and development of the urban region,
- 6 Sustainable development in Helsinki's planning and participation system.



Deputy Mayor Ilkka-Christian Björklund has just handed over the Helsinki City Research Scholarship diplomas of 2004.

Photo: Vesa Keskinen.

The idea is to use these themes to support the common strategies of the City of Helsinki. The theme Helsinki's metropolitan region as an innovative environment and system combines research projects that analyse measures of importance to Helsinki's competitiveness as well as the potential of the metropolitan region to be successful in international economic development. Analyses of the income basis of the city economy focus on both Helsinki's own municipal economy and the economic operational environment of the City of Helsinki and the entire urban region.

For many years, Helsinki City Urban Facts has studied social differentiation in Helsinki and the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. There have been fears of increasing social differentiation between neighbourhoods and of the phenomena such differentiation may cause in a big city. Furthermore, knowledge of the population's living conditions and welfare relates to themes that affect Helsinki and safety in the city. Therefore, social coherence has been highlighted in the programme.

The enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and, above all, the entry of the Baltic States implied a

new kind of situation for Finland and the Helsinki Region. Hence the reason to highlight the effects of EU enlargement in the research programme. Due to current regionalisation, new solutions are needed in the production of administration and services of both the City of Helsinki and its entire urban region and in their contentual development. An urban region appears differently to inhabitants than it does to administration. Taking these different views into account is one of the key issues when discussing co-operation in the management and development of the urban region. Co-operation is topical also when discussing sustainable development in Helsinki's planning and participation system, and therefore special attention is paid to balanced growth in the region's population and jobs as well as to social structure, traffic and environmental diversity.

Research projects within the various themes have been divided into two categories, i.e. projects to be carried out and research ideas. Projects to be carried out have advanced to the point where research material, researchers and finance have mostly been found, so it is likely the projects will go ahead. It is less certain whether research ideas will be implemented in the form suggested. In addition to the research ideas and projects included in the programme, the website of Helsinki City Urban Facts will be supplemented by a section primarily serving people working on their theses.

The research projects noted in the present programme do not represent all the research conducted by the City of Helsinki or about the economic region of Helsinki. Some of the remaining research is responsive to current needs, while other is regular follow-up. The latter includes regular statistical surveys and their analytical sections, which are produced by Helsinki City Urban Facts' Unit for Statistics. In addition, the city's other offices and departments continuously make surveys in their own fields.

Cooperation with universities, research scholarships and awards

A chapter of its own is the research conducted at universities, polytechnics and other research establishments and which in many ways concerns the activities taking place in Helsinki and the whole metropolitan region. An important opening are the professors of urban research, who significantly supplement and steer the field of urban research. When the programme was started, there were six professorships, but their number will rise to nine. At the same time, the number of sponsors increases with the cities of Espoo, Vantaa and Lahti joining in. In future, there will be research professors at the Helsinki University of Technology as well as at the University of Helsinki. The network of nine urban research professors will produce a separate research programme that will supplement the co-ordination of urban research in Helsinki's metropolitan region.

There are also other possibilities to support urban research in Helsinki. Urban Facts prepares the decisions for granting Helsinki City research scholarships, the Helsinki City Scientific Award and awards for academic theses.

The City of Helsinki annually grants research scholarships for studies on a Helsinki topic. This is a way of stimulating and promoting the kind of research that the City considers important. These scholarships are intended for post-graduate researchers, including doctoral theses, licentiate theses and even master's theses.



Professor Jaakko Frösén, winner of the Helsinki City Scientific Award in 2004, receiving congratulations. Photo: Vesa Keskinen.

Studies on the conditions of the city's finances and the local business sector, on public services produced or commissioned by the City, and on the environment and everyday life of Helsinki citizens are given priority in granting the research scholarships.

Since its introduction in 1996, the aim of the Helsinki City Scientific Award has been to consolidate and promote Helsinki as a City of Science. The award is granted in recognition of a significant scientific work done by a Helsinki citizen or in Helsinki.

One further form of co-operation with local universities is the Award for Meritorious Master's Theses, which has been granted to master's theses and similar theses since 1992. No restrictions as to the scientific discipline exist. The awards are granted to 4-6 people annually.