



Prototyping Innovation Policies with(in) cities

Innovation Area:

Cross-innovation with(in) Performing Arts

Tampere, Finland



How does “prototyping...” work?

This City Case Description is the outcome of a policy prototyping exercise within a city ecosystem. Once the ekip research team has explored a policy area and its connection to cultural and creative industries (CCIs) and innovation, we ask: what would this mean in a local city context?

Together with local stakeholders, we test how a draft policy recommendation might stimulate innovation. Using Portfolio Sensemaking, stakeholders simulate an innovation portfolio, analyse the strengths and gaps of the local support system, and identify what resources are needed to realise the portfolio.

Tampere Context & Area of Focus

Tampere is located in south-west Finland, roughly 160 kilometres north of Helsinki. It is the country's third largest city with ca. 263 000 inhabitants. Tampere is a popular urban, economic, and cultural centre. The city has a vibrant cultural and creative sector. In 2026, the European Commission named Tampere the European Capital of Smart Tourism, recognising the city for its digital services, sustainable tourism initiatives, and rich intangible cultural heritage.



PERFORMING ARTS IN TAMPERE

Tampere holds an established status as a strong city of performing arts with a broad and diverse ecosystem and a notable concentration of education, up to doctoral level, in performing arts with degrees in theatre, music, film and television, and cultural production. Tampere Theatre Festival (*Tampereen teatterikesä*) is the largest theatre festival in the Nordic countries gathering tens of thousands of visitors.

The key challenge for the city is that innovation policies and support structures are first only emerging in the cultural sectors while in the region's technology-driven fields those are more developed.

PERFORMING ARTS AND INNOVATION

Developing meaningful intersections between the performing arts and other sectors to drive innovation leads to the development of cross-sectorial networks, the exchange of knowledge, skills and perspectives. It can bring, for example:

- Critical reflection on the impact of practices;
- Experiential citizen science through practices and knowledge;
- Improved product or service development;
- Inclusive innovation in scientific development; innovative business ideas and sustainable organisations.



Portfolio sensemaking

PERFORMING ARTS AND INNOVATION FOR STRONGER COMMUNITY

After analysing Tampere context of performing arts, participants worked in four teams that each discussed the innovation portfolio concept and outlined their version of how it could be applied in Tampere's performing arts ecosystem.

The drafts for innovation portfolios created during the workshop illustrate the many possibilities to develop and work with the portfolio approach. While there surely can be found some overlap that might allow for merging the drafts into a one, wider portfolio for the ecosystem, we here present the four innovation portfolio drafts as separate.

• “
• *Let's make Tampere*
• *the Finnish capital of hope!*”
•



The **four** portfolios

Portfolio 1

PERFORMING ARTS & SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Scope

Performing arts offer many ways to interaction and meeting with people and methods for narrativization, simulation, and drama pedagogy. Through drama-based methods it is also possible to concretely play out different future scenarios, including both utopias and dystopias. The overall goal of this portfolio is to increase social well-being in Tampere, especially among the young people.

Subareas

- Recognition of arts' impact on sense of community, interaction, and resilience.
- Investments in arts as investments in social well-being.
- Regenerating and re-imagining future scenarios.

Stakeholders

- City public authorities (City of Tampere); wellbeing services county (Pirha).
- Cultural organisations (public, third sector, private) and independent artists and experts in performing arts; event and festival industry.
- State (ministries); EU.

Vision

The case aims to a longitudinal co-operation between performing arts professionals and public actors such as city social and cultural sectors. This would yield new cross-sectoral work groups that make use of performing arts-based methods and knowledge.

The vision is a long-term shift of paradigm to strengthen social sustainability in Tampere. Instead of short, four-year or only one-year budget cycles that keep breaking momentum again and again, portfolio approach allows sustainability. For example, in a twenty years' time, children born today would grow up in a Tampere where financial growth would no longer be the main goal for the cultural field, but to prioritize social growth and well-being instead.



Portfolio 2

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

Scope

The focus is on the more socially aware application of technological solutions in ways that enhance vibrant, accessible, and sustainable performing arts – specifically theatre – with the aim of engaging new audiences such as the young, people with impairments, and linguistically and culturally diverse groups.

The case brings together technology development, business innovation, theatres' audience engagement work, and awareness about diversity in performing art services. The group explored not only technological but also other innovative ways to get more people to go to the theatre, and conversely, to make theatres more accessible and interesting for a more diverse range of people. A particular focus was put on young people and people with other than Finnish lingual and cultural background.



Vision

The vision of group 2 is to enhance the socially and culturally sustainable application of technological solutions and especially theatre technology. According to the vision, socially and culturally aware and ethical application of technology can promote and increase cultural participation and audience engagement in performing arts. This would bring diverse and new audiences, but also new approaches to audience work methods.



For example, the use of VR goggles would add extra layers of information or material onto a theatre experience. This could mean digital characters integrated into the performance, or subtitles and real-time translations delivered through the technology so that language would no longer be a barrier: you could speak Finnish and your audience would hear it in English, seamlessly.

On a more cautionary note, the group reflected on what happens if nothing is done. If theatres and the performing arts field are not actively developed, culture risks becoming more global in a flattening sense. Young people who are not going to physical theatres most likely continue to consume and participate in performing arts and culture, but at home and through global platforms – leaving city theatre buildings empty. The challenge, then, is finding ways to spark young people's interest in attending physical events. The vision for a positive future includes greater diversity and variation in the kinds of theatre on offer, more theatre makers, and more diverse audiences. And underpinning it all: the belief that participation in culture builds resilient communities.

Subareas

- Technology development; especially theatre technology development.
- Business innovation
- Theatre audience engagement / audience work
- Diversity expertise

Stakeholders

- Tech start-ups in Tampere / Startup.Tampere
- European tech-companies
- Multidisciplinary think tanks



Portfolio 3

DRAMA PEDAGOGY FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY TURN



Vision

The vision builds on embodied practices. Performing arts are corporal, embodied arts – and as such, they offer a way of countering disembodiment that both society as a whole and individuals are increasingly experiencing. Part of this involves confronting our current, often troubled relationship with technology.

How do we reorient ourselves, and our communities, within the technological frames we inhabit – the various media, devices, and gadgets that consume so much of our time and draw us away from engaging with social issues and from participating in shared, embodied activities? places like Nekalab, Tullikamari, and the city's major theatres, each with their own distinct scope and focus. Tampere University was identified as a potential key player and partner in this work.

The ambitious vision sees enhancing sense of belonging, meaningful coexistence and the quality of performing arts innovation raised to a new level and hope become possible. Tampere could become a city where performing arts professionals actively cooperate across the field – and ultimately, the Finnish capital of hope.

Scope

The case links together developing citizen participation and pedagogical approach on sustainability issues. This includes seeing participation as a mode of social action that has to be (re)learned – and that performing arts would be the voice through which that learning happens.

The case also endorses intersectional innovation in performing arts – meaning inclusion, accessibility, diversity, and related values – and that those are not add-ons but the core to the whole approach.

The position of Tampere as the capital of theatre would profit from the active co-operation among the field's actors so that Tampere's reputation as a performing arts city would grow also internationally.

Subareas

A network of venues functioning as pedagogical hubs – spaces where people can rehearse dialogue, social empathy, paradigm building, transition, and eco-social justice. Several existing and emerging venues in Tampere were mentioned in this context: the future cultural centre at Hiedanranta, as well as places like Nekalab, Tullikamari, and the city's major theatres, each with their own distinct scope and focus.

Stakeholders

The group envisioned a steering committee bringing together all the relevant actors identified earlier in the workshop. There was broad agreement that the practices and realities are already present in the field – what is needed is to systematise them, organise them coherently, and identify what is still missing.



Portfolio 4

SUPER-PORTFOLIO FOR TAMPERE & REGION PERFORMING ARTS ECOSYSTEM

Scope

The scope of this case is to create a larger portfolio for all of the performing arts in Tampere and more broadly across the Pirkanmaa region.

Rather than fishing for funds – like pulling water out of a pool bucket by bucket – the goal should be to surf on the wave of funding. Performing arts actors across the sector would be surfers riding that wave together. The point of the portfolio approach is precisely this: that more ideas, projects, and initiatives find their way under one umbrella, with greater cohesion and a shared strategic direction.

Vision

To manage a large portfolio requires a continuous networking system, run by a dedicated party, that brings people together regularly to discuss topics, identify shared interests, and form groupings that could then develop funding applications or projects together.

Such a networking system ought to be built on some form of structure that represents voices of the ecosystem democratically and that sustains dialogue continuously – not a one-off gathering, but an ongoing conversation that the broader community can trust.

This activity needs funding: seed money for experiments, resources for facilitating innovation platforms and spaces and continuity (to funding) to secure the instilling of the new mode(s) of action.



There's also the need to visualise the ecosystem in ways that help different actors understand the value of ecosystem thinking.

Additionally, information and data about the ecosystem would be needed. This requires planning what data and information would be important to have, and how and by whom would it be collected and handled. This involves follow-up ideas regarding monitoring, spreading and instilling best practices and scalability thinking.



Who was there?

A BROAD MIX OF STAKEHOLDERS FROM THE DIVERSE FIELD OF PERFORMING ARTS

PERFORMING ARTS

theatre

Tampere Theatre, Täsmäteatteri,
Teatteri Siperia, Art Collective Iva,

Mansedrag

dance

Dance Theatre MD,
Pirkanmaa Dance Centre

circus

Sorin Sirkus



PERFORMING ARTS

BUSINESSES

Lidia Oy, Disakamula Oy,
Digital Audiences Oy, Cultural
cooperative TICAS

NGOS

Yhteisöarkkitehtuuri ry,
freelancers



PUBLICLY FUNDED PROJECTS

Pirkanmaa Creative Industries Innovation
Portfolio (Pirkanmaa Regional Council)

Culture District - Western City Centre of
Tampere (City of Tampere)

Welcoming City programme (City of Tampere)



ACADEMIA

Tampere University: NÄTY
(Theatre Arts degree
education and research),
TAMK (Tampere UAS),
HUMAK UAS / Tampere
campus



POLICY MAKERS & AUTHORITIES

Vice Mayor,
City of Tampere



Analysis



THE LOCAL INNOVATION SUPPORT SYSTEM

Tampere has a performing arts ecosystem that is rich in potential but structurally unprepared for cross-innovation.

Two interrelated deficits stand out:

- 1) the lack of intermediary capacity — people and organisations capable of bridging the cultures of arts and innovation — and
- 2) a fragmented field where actors rarely find each other or build on each other's work.

The absence of any existing institution willing or able to take a systemic, field-wide coordinating role is not merely a gap to be filled;

it is itself a diagnostic finding about the current state of the ecosystem.

At the same time, the group identified performing arts as a platform with genuine transformative potential — particularly in relation to pedagogical paradigm shifts, citizen participation, and community-building goals already embedded in Tampere's city strategy.

The challenge therefore is not about vision but infrastructure. Creating soft structures, sustained funding mechanisms, and democratic networking culture that would allow the potential to be realised over time.

Conclusions

& RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Create a dedicated intermediary role

Invest in developing "synopsis" agents — individuals or organisations fluent in both arts and innovation cultures — possibly by supporting hybrid professional profiles combining cultural production, community pedagogy, and cross-sectoral brokerage.

2. Establish a coordinating body for the performing arts field

The absence of any institution capable of speaking for the theatre and performing arts field as a whole is a critical gap. A new or designated body should take on this systemic coordination role.

3. Anchor cross-innovation in Tampere's city strategy

Performing arts and CCI innovation should be explicitly named in city-level strategic documents, building on the existing commitments to enhance sense of community and participation.



4. Build a continuous networking system

Replace one-off gatherings with a sustained, facilitated networking structure that regularly brings field actors together, supports the identification of shared interests, and enables collaborative funding applications and project development.

5. Secure dedicated funding streams

Seed funding for experiments, resources for innovation platform facilitation, and continuity funding to embed new modes of working are all prerequisites — not optional extras.

6. Map and visualise the ecosystem

Develop tools and processes for making the performing arts innovation ecosystem visible to its own actors, including agreed frameworks for data collection, monitoring, and the sharing of best practices.

7. Use performing arts as a driver of pedagogical renewal

Policy should recognise and support the role of performing arts in rethinking how knowledge is transmitted and acquired — positioning the field as a key resource for broader societal transitions.

8. Foster open, democratic dialogue structures

Rather than centralised decision-making, open innovation policy should support multiple, open channels of dialogue across the field — prioritising flow, inclusion, and shared goal-articulation over governance by a privileged few.

What next?



We noted that in the creative fields cultural policy is well familiar but innovation policy less so. We also lack clear support structures, research labs, incubators, or start-ups in the same ways as the technology sectors have them. Cross-sectoral and open innovation can enable building bridges between the creative industries and other sectors, and brings the sector's potential more visibly into use. The workshop sparked lively and in-depth discussion and generated concrete openings. I am certain that, for example, in building the city's strategically important goals – such as sense of community, inclusion, and sustainable living – there is a real place for the expertise of performing arts professionals. This is a great foundation to build on!

*Anna Vesén, Project manager and Hiedanranta cultural spaces developer,
City of Tampere*





Our methods

THE INNOVATION PORTFOLIO POLICY CANVAS

The Prototyping Workshop Methodology and the Innovation Portfolio Policy Canvas guide local stakeholders to analyse their local ecosystem, make an inventory of actors and resources, identify and create a potential innovation portfolio and analyse their local innovation support system.

THE OPSI MODEL

The OPSI-model (Open Public Sector Innovation OECD) is adapted to analyze the innovation character of the policy area. Participants explore whether the policy involves new legislative measures or is more exploratory in nature, allowing for a deeper understanding of how the policy might influence the local ecosystem

THE LIEPT MODEL

The Lund Innovation Ecosystem Portfolio Tracking (LIEPT) model is a tool that provides a framework for tracking changes in innovation portfolios in ecosystems where impact and growth happen not in one organisation but in many. This relies on collaborative efforts by many stakeholders.

What is ekip?

The ekip partnership funded by the European Commission consists of 5 universities, 4 consultancies, 4 creative and cultural organisations and 4 cities. Together we develop innovation policies for the cultural and creative industries in Europe. We do that in various ways: through research, consultations and interaction with people in the sector at policy labs and focus groups and assessments in city ecosystems.

Want to know more? Want to do it in your city?

Would you like to explore the topic further? You can even host your own session in your city! It's an empowering and insightful way to bring together local stakeholders across sectors and disciplines for a focused discussion on a topic of shared importance. The ekip method and approach are open for anyone to use including a Facilitator's Guide and templates available in the ekip Knowledge Bank under [Tools and Methods](#).

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Disclaimer:
Each City Case Description reflects the views of workshop participants. It is a perspective from one city context, intended to inspire and ignite action



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