

**FOSTERING CULTURAL PARTICIPATION TO ADDRESS  
YOUTH DISILLUSIONMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE  
EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE**

**The Case of Oulu2026**

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## ABSTRACT

Thesis

<p><b>Title</b></p> <p>Fostering Cultural Participation to Address Youth Disillusionment in the Context of the European Capital of Culture. The Case of Oulu2026.</p>	<p><b>Number of pages</b></p> <p>108 + references and appendices</p>
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<p><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>In June 2021, the city of Oulu was selected to host the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2026. For the old technology city located in the remote, Northern corner of Europe, the designation offers a great opportunity to develop what Oulu2026 calls Cultural Climate Change. However, besides opportunities, the ECoC is also faced with new challenges brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic and the looming risk of youth disillusionment.</p> <p>This qualitatively driven mixed case study research focuses on the challenges and opportunities related to young adults' cultural participation in Oulu2026. The aim of the study is to explore and understand if and how Oulu can address the risk of youth disillusionment by fostering cultural participation in the context of the ECoC project. The research pays special attention to questions of marginalisation and disadvantage, the importance of which is also highlighted by the ECoC initiative.</p> <p>The study adopts an interdisciplinary approach and operates mainly in the fields of cultural planning, cultural policy, and arts management. The primary data consists of a survey among young adults in the Oulu2026 region, three semi-structured interviews with representatives of Oulu2026 and the city of Oulu, and document analysis focusing on the Oulu2026 bid book.</p> <p>The findings suggest that youth disillusionment is a real issue in the Oulu2026 region and that a link between cultural participation and youth disillusionment exists. Oulu2026 was found to address and respond to many real and existing cultural participation challenges among young adults in the region. However, an awareness of the diverse diversity of young adults still appeared to be lacking. The study suggests enhancing a cultural citizenship approach to participation and embracing a pluralist and intersectionally aware approach at all stages of cultural planning processes.</p>	
<p><b>Keywords</b></p> <p>Cultural planning, cultural participation, European Capital of Culture, Covid-19, youth disillusionment</p>	
<p><b>Additional information</b></p>	

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the Study

In June 2021, the city of Oulu was selected to host the next Finnish European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2026. For the remotely located technology city, the designation provides a great opportunity for culture-led urban regeneration in the region. Besides opportunities, however, there are also new challenges brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic and youth disillusionment, which is warned to be one of the major ignored risks in the near future (McLennan & Group, 2021).

Young people have been among the most affected groups by Covid-19 (e.g. Konle-Seidl & Picarella, 2021; Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2020), and the consequences of the pandemic are feared to further aggravate the risk of youth disillusionment (McLennan & Group, 2021).

The long-term impacts of Covid-19 and related restrictions remain largely unknown, but many areas of the ECoC initiative were affected during the pandemic. Cultural participation appears to have been the most negatively affected area of activities (Bomash et al., 2021).

With these contemporary challenges in mind, this research will study the risk of youth disillusionment in Oulu and the surrounding region and explore possible ways in which the risk can be addressed by fostering cultural participation in the context of the ECoC project of Oulu (Oulu2026).

The ECoC initiative emphasises the role of young people in the cultural programme of the capitals of culture. One of the main objectives is to widen access to and participation in culture, with special attention given to young people. ECoC cities are expected to promote social inclusion and equal opportunities and to ensure the broadest possible involvement of the civil society in the preparation and implementation of the cultural programme. (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2014)

Besides young people, the ECoC highlights the need to pay special attention to marginalised and disadvantaged groups (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2014). Indeed, addressing young Oululians as one group would be inadequate and untruthful. It is

fundamental to recognise the plurality of citizens and identities. Moreover, it is necessary to recognise the diverse and intersectional ways in which different kinds of crises and challenges affect different groups of people, especially the marginalised and disadvantaged. This is of central importance in the context of the pandemic, which has most severely affected those who were already in a vulnerable or disadvantaged position (e.g. Finnish Government, 2020).

This research was started when Oulu2026 was still in the bidding stage, before the Finnish ECoC for 2026 was selected. Some of the data was collected before the designation and some after it. The findings of the study would have been relevant even if Oulu had not won the title, as the results and implications are not exclusively related to the official ECoC project. However, the designation of Oulu as the next Finnish ECoC enhanced the significance and relevance of the research.

Besides being relevant and current, the topic of this study is also of great personal interest to me. During my MA studies, I found myself to be highly intrigued by the field of cultural planning, and the master's thesis was a great opportunity to dive deeper into the topic. As the biggest and perhaps most impactful culture-led urban regeneration project in Europe, the ECoC is a fascinating event to study and highly relevant right now in the Finnish context. Being born and raised in Oulu – even though I have lived elsewhere since 2009 –, I have a close personal connection to the city. Therefore, the ECoC project of Oulu2026 also interests me on a personal level. Finally, I find the youth disillusionment crisis and the impact of the pandemic to be issues that require urgent attention from many different sectors and disciplines. This research is my attempt to address them from the point of view of cultural planning and participation.

## **1.2 Problem Formulation**

Young people worldwide struggle with distress and disappointment. *The Global Risks Report 2021* by the World Economic Forum notes that youth disillusionment is a critical threat to the world in the short term and one largely neglected by the global community. The report points out that young adults worldwide – already living through the consequences of the financial and environmental crises and rising inequality – are having their education,

economic opportunities and mental health severely challenged by the pandemic. (McLennan & Group, 2021)

The pandemic has significantly challenged young people's livelihood, cultural rights, participation opportunities, and wellbeing. Indeed, young people are believed to be among the most affected mentally and emotionally, as their rights to education, sufficient social and health services, social security, equality as well as leisure and recreational activities have been restricted. Feelings of insecurity, uncertainty, anxiety and loneliness have increased, and the pandemic and related restrictions are expected to have the most devastating effects on those who are already at the weakest position. (European Youth Forum, 2020; Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2020, pp. 10–11)

Challenges related to the wellbeing, opportunities, and rights of the youth are also a reality in Oulu. Unemployment and mental health issues are common among young Ouluians (Oulu, n.d.; Sutela et al., 2016), and young people in the region tend to be less interested in the cultural activities and services offered by the city than other age groups (Cupore, 2019). Oulu, on the other hand, struggles to engage young people, and educated young adults tend to leave the region after graduating (Cupore, 2019; Rantala-Korhonen et al., 2020).

### **1.3 Aim of the Study**

The aim of this study is to generate new insights and understanding about young adults' cultural participation and youth disillusionment in the context of the ECoC and the Covid-19 pandemic. More specifically, my aim is to explore and analyse if and how Oulu2026 can address youth disillusionment by fostering cultural participation among young adults in the context of the ECoC. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic will be studied in relation to young adults' cultural participation and experience of disillusionment.

Cultural participation is understood broadly to encompass not just attendance and participation in the arts or the so-called high culture, but also questions of cultural democracy, cultural citizenship, and cultural rights. These concepts will be explored with more depth in chapter four.

The research focuses on young adults aged 18–24 in the Oulu2026 region. Disillusionment

and participation challenges as well as their possible solutions will be explored from the perspectives of young adults, Oulu2026, and the city of Oulu.

Special attention is paid to marginalised and disadvantaged groups, as recommended by the ECoC initiative (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2014). One of the central topics of analysis is whether and what kinds of relationships can be identified between marginalisation or disadvantage, cultural participation, and disillusionment. Questions related to, for example, inclusion and exclusion, cultural rights, identity, and intersectionality, are essential considerations for the purpose of this study.

This study is a case study research focusing on the Oulu2026 ECoC project. The data collection and analysis, therefore, focus on young adults in the Oulu2026 region. The aim is not to produce generalisable findings or conclusions but rather to generate new understanding about the research topic specifically in the context of Oulu and the wider Oulu2026 region. That said, it must be noted that the risk of youth disillusionment is a broader one and questions of cultural participation and citizenship relevant for all ECoCs. Therefore, the outcomes may bring some relevant insights for other contexts, too. The applicability of the results in a broader context will be discussed in the final chapter of this paper.

With the presented aims in mind, I introduce the following main research question:

- In what ways can Oulu2026 foster cultural participation to address youth disillusionment in the context of the ECoC?

The following sub-questions are used to support the main question:

- What is the current state of cultural participation among young adults in the Oulu2026 region and how has Covid-19 affected participation?
- How does disillusionment manifest among young adults in the Oulu2026 region?
- Can any links be identified between young adults' cultural participation, marginalisation and disadvantage, and experiences of disillusionment?
- How well do the plans and strategies of Oulu2026 respond to the identified needs and challenges?



## 1.4 Relevance of the Study

I have chosen this topic for its relevance, topicality, and personal interest. The topicality can be justified from at least three points of view. First, youth disillusionment is seen as a worldwide risk, and now the Covid-19 crisis is causing further challenges for young people's livelihoods, participation, rights, future expectations, and wellbeing. Exploring responses to such challenges in the contexts of cultural planning and policy is current and necessary. Moreover, as Finland will host a European Capital of Culture in the post-pandemic period in 2026, addressing contemporary challenges and identifying solutions in the context of Oulu2026 is highly relevant.

Second, the ways of planning and organising the ECoC, fulfilling the official goals and objectives, and building on the legacy plans have been severely challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic. The long-term impacts of the pandemic on the ECoC and regional cultural planning remain unknown. This study will address the question of cultural participation – the perhaps most affected area of the ECoC – and explore participation related needs, aspirations, and expectations as experienced by young adults during the pandemic.

Third, in the context of fundamental global crises, rising inequality, increasing polarisation, and deepening wellbeing challenges, questions of cultural citizenship and cultural democracy have gained new relevance and importance.

This study aims to contribute to existing research in the fields of cultural planning and policy, as well as arts management by bringing a new, unexplored perspective and approach to the cultural participation debate, especially in the contexts of the ECoC and the post-pandemic period. The new dimensions that my thesis aspires to bring to the discussion include: 1) exploring the connection between cultural participation and youth disillusionment and its implications in the contexts of Oulu and the ECoC; 2) the impact of Covid-19 on young adults' cultural participation habits, needs, aspirations, and expectations; and 3) a combination of theories of cultural participation, cultural citizenship, and intersectionality applied to a specific context with a special focus on marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

## 1.5 Research Approach

This research is a qualitatively driven mixed case study research. After a careful consideration and acknowledging the pros and cons of the approach, case study research was chosen as a suitable approach considering the research question and aim of this thesis. A case study explores a particular case from multiple perspectives in a real-life context (Simons, 2009, p. 21). This thesis analyses how Oulu2026 can foster cultural participation among young adults to address the challenge of youth disillusionment. The case, or the unit of analysis, is the Oulu2026 project, and the issue to be studied in the context of the chosen case is how cultural participation can be fostered to address youth disillusionment in the Oulu2026 region.

As a problem-centred approach involving both qualitative and quantitative methods, a mixed methods research approach is considered to be most suitable for studying and gaining a comprehensive understanding of complex issues, and for describing, explaining, or evaluating issues (Leavy, 2017, p. 164). Given the multi-layered nature of the chosen research question and the aim to produce new understanding of a complex issue, a mixed methods approach was chosen for this case study. The chosen methods included a survey containing both quantitative and qualitative questions, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and critical discourse analysis. Moreover, an adaption of a multi-level intersectional analysis was employed to study different levels of intersectional categories and exclusion. Essentially, this study is a qualitatively driven mixed methods research. A qualitative approach is given privilege, while the quantitative approach and method takes on a secondary role in the research design (Brannen & O'Connell, 2015).

Lähdesmäki (2014) points out that the interdisciplinary nature of the ECoC demands openness for different disciplines and approaches. This study, too, adopts an interdisciplinary approach. Combining different theories and perspectives to study a specific case helps to gain an in-depth understanding of the case and phenomenon in question. Interdisciplinarity is also a very natural approach for arts management and cultural planning related research, given that both fields are inter- and cross-disciplinary in their very essence.

As is typical for qualitative – or qualitatively driven – research, the research is conducted

within a chosen theoretical framework. I will approach the research question and critically analyse the findings from the points of view cultural planning, cultural policy, and arts management. The central concepts of culture, cultural planning, cultural participation, cultural democracy, cultural citizenship, identity, and intersectionality will be discussed in chapter four.

## **1.6 Limitations**

There are certain limitations to this study that are important to recognise. First, the study focuses on the Oulu2026 region, which consists of the city of Oulu and 32 other municipalities. These 33 municipalities do not form an official region together. The official Oulu region includes the city of Oulu and seven other municipalities: Hailuoto, Ii, Kempele, Liminka, Lumijoki, Muhos, and Tyrnävä, whereas the county of North Ostrobothnia consists of 30 municipalities and cities, including the whole Oulu region. The Oulu2026 region, on the other hand, includes all the municipalities of the Oulu region but only 25 of the wider North Ostrobothnia. In addition, eight other municipalities and cities from three other counties are involved in the Oulu2026 region.

Consequently, given the composition of the Oulu2026 region, there are no statistics nor data about the area as a whole. Therefore, I will have to refer to data that concerns only part of the whole area. To be clear about these differences, I will talk about Oulu, when talking about the city of Oulu, and Oulu2026 or Oulu2026 region when referring to the 33 municipalities involved in the ECoC project of Oulu.

The uncertainty about the long-term impact of the Covid-19 crisis can be considered a limitation. Part of the findings and conclusions are thus based on a limited understanding of the situation and its consequences. However, studies related to the impact of Covid-19 conducted during the pandemic are of vital importance. Therefore, I find the choice of topic justified and relevant but want to remind the reader that comments related to the long-term impact are mere assumptions. Throughout this paper, I aim to be as clear as possible when referring to my own assumptions instead of known facts.

## 1.7 Ethical Considerations

I believe it is important for myself as well as for the reader to acknowledge that the underlying assumption behind the phrasing of the research questions is that cultural participation and cultural citizenship are desirable things and matters that I believe should be addressed on the ECoC and policy levels. Moreover, as the research question may reveal, my own hypothesis is that enhancing cultural participation and cultural citizenship among young adults might be an impactful way to mitigate youth disillusionment. Aware of my personal beliefs and values and their influence on my thinking and reasoning, I will do my best to stay true to the principle of critical, “anti-bullshit” research ethos promoted and reinforced by Eleonora Belfiore (2009) by maintaining a reflective, conscious, and mindful concern for the truth and facts throughout the research process.

Questions of power are important ethical considerations in this research. As O’Leary (2004) rightly points out, all researchers need to recognise the political nature of research; manage the position of power a researcher has; recognise the impact power can have on the research process; and be aware of the responsibility that comes with power. Everyone is affected by their own contexts, histories, backgrounds, and experiences, and therefore purely objective research is impossible. O’Leary (2004) highlights the importance of “recognition of the self”, referring to attributes of the researcher – some of which are associated with power and privilege and others not – that affect how others see the researcher and how the researcher sees the world. In a study such as this one, where matters such as marginalisation and disadvantage, intersectional inequality, identity, diversity, and cultural rights are discussed, these considerations are essential. In the research process, I must recognise my own position. As a white person with a university level education, residing in a country whose official language is my first language, and belonging to no disadvantaged or marginalised minorities, my attributes are associated with privilege and power, which I must be aware of and open about.

It is important to point out that I do not think that a position of privilege and power should prevent a researcher from addressing questions of exclusion and inequality – quite the contrary. Addressing such topics is an important responsibility of the society as a whole, and I think it would be morally dubious and unjust to leave the job of critically examining such

issues for the less privileged alone. That said, it is vital to highlight that addressing questions of inequality, marginalisation, and disadvantage from a position of privilege and power should be done with a modest and critical approach and with awareness and openness of one's own position.

In addition, it is important to understand that the terms 'minority', 'marginalised' and 'disadvantaged' are not neutral terms. Instead, they may reinforce the sense of 'otherness' and marginality. The terms are discussed to understand marginalisation, minority status, and positions of disadvantage as experienced by young adults in the region. It is not my purpose to define who are marginalised or which attributes cause disadvantage. Instead, the focus is on the respondents' experiences of marginalisation or disadvantage and their causes.

In more practical terms, the ethical guidelines and principles of research with human participants by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK (see Kohonen et al., 2019) were followed and used as a guiding framework to ensure that the research was conducted in an ethical manner. The research was conducted in collaboration with the Oulu2026 project team and the city of Oulu. A contract and confidentiality agreement were signed by both parties and strictly followed at all stages. An unbiased approach free from political or other influence was maintained throughout the process.

## **1.8 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of eight main chapters and several relevant sub-chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to the study by exploring the background and context, formulation of the research problem, aim of the study, personal interest, as well as considerations of limitations and research ethics.

Chapters two and three will introduce the context of the study in more detail and discuss current issues related to the topic of the study. In chapter two, the ECoC initiative and related guidelines and criteria will be presented, while the third chapter discusses the issues of youth disillusionment and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The fourth chapter will present the theoretical framework of the study by presenting key concepts, theoretical approaches, and previous research related to the topic of this study. The

central theories and concepts include cultural planning, cultural participation, cultural citizenship, cultural democracy, cultural rights, identity, and intersectionality.

Chapter five will present the methodology of this study. The chapter includes a discussion of the methodological approaches and research paradigms, as well as a justification for the choices made. The chosen methods of data collection and analysis, as well as the reasons behind the choices made will also be presented. Finally, the methodology chapter includes critical reflections on the research process.

In chapter six, the selected case, Oulu2026, will be presented. This chapter presents the context and background of the project and explores areas of the project that are relevant from the point of view of this study.

The seventh chapter will present the findings and analysis of the data. This chapter includes a description of the outcomes and analytical reflections in relation to the research questions.

Chapter eight is dedicated to a wider discussion and conclusions of the findings. The outcomes of the research will be discussed in a broader context and with references to the theoretical framework. The main findings will be concluded, and implications and suggestions for Oulu2026 will be presented and discussed. Successes and limitations will be addressed and suggestions for further research will be presented.

## **2 EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE**

### **2.1 An Introduction to the ECoC Initiative**

The European Capital of Culture, nowadays one of the longest-running EU initiatives, was first proposed in 1983 by the Greek Minister of Culture Melina Mercouri with the aim to promote cohesion among European citizens. The first ECoC was held in Athens in 1985. Besides the aim of bringing European citizens closer together, the initiative aspired to highlight the role of cities in the cultural life of Europe and to improve quality of life and sense of community through arts and culture. These ideas and motivations are still valid to date. (European Commission, n.d., 2015; Rinne-Kanto, 2013)

Since 1985, the ECoC initiative has grown and gone through many changes and developments. So far, over 60 cities in Europe have held the title of European Capital of Culture – or European City of Culture until 2001 –, each in their own unique way. The processes of reviewing applications, designating cities, monitoring of performance and evaluation of legacy plans have been evolved throughout the years, and the official ECoC priorities and criteria have changed significantly. The application and preparation periods have become longer, more support and funding have become available for participant cities, and from 2021 onward, the ECoC title will be available also for cities from European Union candidate countries and the European Free Trade Association every three years. (European Commission, 2015; European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2014; The European Parliament and The Council of the European Union, 2017)

The long and varied history of the ECoC has widened the understanding of its aims and potentials, which has been reflected in the changes of the ECoC criteria since the early 90s. Celebrating the cultural richness of Europe has been one of the purposes of the event since the beginning, but rather than just a celebration, the ECoC is increasingly seen more broadly as an opportunity for wider and long-term urban change and development. Enhancing a sense of belonging to a common cultural area and strengthening European collaboration and cohesion remain as central goals of the initiative but many additional aims have been recognised. Although primarily a cultural event, the ECoC is nowadays seen to have

potential for the social, educational, urban planning and economic development of cities and regions. Indeed, cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary collaboration now has a central role in the ECoC programmes and objectives. Over the years, more and more emphasis has been placed on the overall sustainability of ECoC projects and on engaging diverse audiences and reaching out to the non-customary participants of cultural events. (European Commission, 2015)

Furthermore, nowadays not only the designation but also the bidding process itself has become a visible and important event with potential to develop the cultural field, urban planning, and international profile of candidate cities. Candidate cities are encouraged to consider from early on how to build on the candidacy even if they do not get the designation. The official criteria is presented as a toolkit for all candidates to build on their cultural strategy and legacy, whether they win the title or not. (European Commission, 2014, 2015)

Some of the legacies of the ECoC reported by previous holders of the title include its potential to act as a catalyst for significant changes in the development of the city or region in question; increased self-esteem and local pride of citizens; enhanced local cultural engagement; development of new cultural services, skills, and opportunities; new European and international connections in the field of arts and culture; and an enhanced European and international profile and reputation, often reflected in growth in the tourism sector (European Commission, 2014, p. 4).

Now, the Covid-19 crisis has forced the ECoC to face new and unprecedented challenges. The pandemic is likely to have some long-term implications, and it might make it necessary to once again review the official ECoC criteria, objectives, and processes. While many consequences and impacts still remain unknown, the pandemic has already affected cities that are currently at different stages of their ECoC processes in many ways (Bomash et al., 2021).

## **2.2 ECoC Guidelines, Criteria, and Objectives**

The general objectives and criteria of the ECoC action provide a central framework for analysing the plans, goals, and strategies of Oulu2026. The action has two general objectives and four specific objectives. The first general objective is to safeguard and promote the



cultural diversity of Europe, to highlight the common and shared features of different cultures, and to increase citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural area. The second general objective is to promote the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities. The specific objectives include enhancing the scope, diversity, European dimension, and transnational cooperation in cities' cultural offering; widening access and participation in culture; enhancing the capacity of the cultural sector and its cross-sectoral links; and harnessing culture to raise the international profile of cities. (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2014)

The criteria of the ECoC action are divided in six different categories: contribution to the long-term strategy, European dimension, cultural and artistic content, outreach, capacity to deliver, and management (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2014, pp. 5–6). This research will focus on the categories of outreach and cultural and artistic content. The other categories will be referred to and discussed insofar as they are relevant considering the scope and purpose of this study. Below, I will present the categories of outreach and cultural and artistic content.

The category of outreach refers to the need to involve the local population in different phases of the ECoC project. This category is divided into three main points. First, ECoC cities must involve the local population and civil society in the preparation of the application and in the implementation of the plans. Second, cities should create new and sustainable attendance and participation opportunities for a wide range of citizens, with particular attention paid on young people, volunteers, and the marginalised and disadvantaged. The criteria also call for recognition of minorities and specific social groups, especially people with disabilities and the elderly. Third, an overall audience development strategy must be in place, including a link with the education system and participation of schools. In terms of outreach, it is important to note that citizen participation, including a wide range of citizens, should start early in the preparation phase. The ECoC criteria also emphasize the importance of active rather than passive participation. The importance of a strong volunteer programme is highlighted, as such programmes can have a significant impact on citizen engagement with the ECoC and its legacy. (European Commission, 2014, pp. 18–19; European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2014)

The cultural and artistic content category pays attention to four main areas. Firstly, ECoC

cities should have a clear and coherent artistic vision and strategy for their cultural programme. Second, they should involve local artists and cultural organisations in the concept building and implementation of their cultural programme. Third, the range, diversity and artistic quality of the programme will be evaluated. And fourth, cities should show ability to combine local cultural heritage and traditional forms of art with new, innovative, and experimental expressions. This category highlights that the ECoC is first and foremost a cultural project that should show open-mindedness in its thinking about the future. The programme should be a combination of high-end, popular and grassroots cultural activities, and a mixture of ticketed and free events. (European Commission, 2014, pp. 14–16; European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2014)

Both presented categories have been impacted by the pandemic. In terms of outreach, participatory activities and involving the local population, especially the marginalised and disadvantaged, have been severely challenged. In terms of artistic and cultural content, the pandemic has had devastating impacts on many arts and cultural field professionals and organisations, especially in the independent cultural sector. Planning the long-term strategy is a challenging task, as the long-term consequences of the pandemic remain unknown.

### 3 CURRENT ISSUES: COVID-19 AND YOUTH DISILLUSIONMENT

This chapter will discuss two current issues underpinning the choice of the research topic: youth disillusionment and Covid-19. I will first explore the global issue of youth disillusionment and briefly discuss it in the Finnish context. I will then discuss the impact of Covid-19 on young adults in the contexts of Finland and Oulu.

#### 3.1 Youth disillusionment

*Young people are demanding more egalitarian, equitable and sustainable societies, yet they continue to face unnecessary barriers and blocked pathways.*  
(McLennan & Group, 2021, p. 46)

*The Global Risks Report 2021* by the World Economic Forum sees youth disillusionment as a major neglected risk that will turn into a critical threat to the world within the next two years. As the report points out, the Covid-19 crisis is already the second major global crisis in a decade for young people aged 15–24: first, the financial crisis in 2008–2009, and now, the global Covid-19 pandemic. As a result of these crises, young people are having their education, economic and job opportunities and mental health challenged. (McLennan & Group, 2021)

Furthermore, young people's visions about the future have been affected by the climate crisis and environmental deterioration, rising inequality, violence, and social disruption caused by the technology-driven industrial transformation. While young people have become more active and outspoken in the past decade, they have also expressed feelings of disappointment, pessimism, anger, and betrayal. (McLennan & Group, 2021)

Another important challenge, closely related to youth disillusionment, is the growing of mental health problems. *The Global Risks Report* depicts mental health deterioration as one of the top neglected risks globally. Youth mental health problems, including loneliness and anxiety, were already a serious issue before the pandemic, but since the beginning of the

Covid-19 crisis, the mental health of children and young people has deteriorated by 80%. (McLennan & Group, 2021, pp. 23, 45)

It is important to note that the problem of youth disillusionment is very different in different parts of the world. Prosperity has been unequally distributed and regional inequalities endure. In some parts of the world, young people struggle with lack of access to education, health services, social security and protection from violence and conflicts. The challenges that young people are facing in Northern Finland are very different. However, there are also globally shared concerns, such as failing climate action, social disruption, rising inequality, societal frictions, domestic violence, youth unemployment and a precarious job situation. (McLennan & Group, 2021)

Young people facing the consequences of the pandemic are feared to become a “double lost generation” of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, for whom the lack of opportunities for economic, societal and political participation could have long-lasting consequences globally (McLennan & Group, 2021, p. 44). To this list, I would add the lack of cultural rights and opportunities for cultural participation as an important concern.

A related risk identified by the report is that of digital inequality, seen as a critical threat and as a likely long-term risk. The Fourth Industrial Revolution – which refers to the global phenomenon of the convergence of the physical, the digital, and the biological – has the potential to bring about many benefits for societies around the world and new opportunities for the civil society. However, the speeding shift is also challenging the employment opportunities of young adults and is feared to deepen inequalities and create new gaps between regions and social groups. Although members of the Generation Z are generally speaking digital natives, the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the rising inequalities it may cause will inevitably also affect them, and the Covid-19 crisis is expected to accelerate the shift. (McLennan & Group, 2021)

According to the *Youth and Satisfaction with Democracy* report by the Centre for the Future of Democracy (2020) younger generations around the globe have become more dissatisfied with democracy. However, regional differences were found, and a similar trend was not detected in Northern Europe: on the contrary, young people in northern Europe were found to be more satisfied with democracy than their elders. The report suggests that the decline in

satisfaction with democracy among younger generations in developed democracies is caused by growing intergenerational divide in life opportunities and difficulties in finding secure employment, starting a family, and getting ahead in life. Furthermore, in some parts of the world, populist movements have gained popularity and even suggested a renewed interest in democracy. The report suggests that instead of treating populism as a threat, democracies should focus more on the core of democracy, representing the citizens' concerns and delivering policy solutions to them. (Foa et al., 2020)

A recent survey by Unicef suggested that there are clear signs of youth disillusionment in Finland, too: it was found that one in three youngsters feels that it is not easy to dream of a good future (Finnish Committee for UNICEF, 2021).

### **3.2 Impact of Covid-19 on Young People in Finland and in Oulu**

In the context of Finland and Oulu, there are clear signs that younger generations are indeed among the most affected by the pandemic and related restrictions.

A report by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health explains that even though the coronavirus is not dangerous for most children and young people, the crisis has had severe impacts on their wellbeing and rights. The pandemic-related restrictions have endangered the rights of children and young people to, for example, education, social and health services, social security, and participation in hobbies. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2020)

The Covid-19 pandemic and related restrictions seem to have caused further equality and equity challenges, as the pandemic has hit the hardest those already in a vulnerable position. Furthermore, the corona crisis is seen to threaten the intergenerational justice, as younger generations are the most affected by the social and economic impacts of the pandemic. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2020)

Mental health issues were an existing problem already before the pandemic, but during the pandemic, anxiety and other mental health problems among young people seem to have increased and aggravated significantly, while queues to get help have been long (Hakulinen et al., 2020; Kestilä et al., 2020; Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2020).

Stress was also common among young people during the pandemic. Especially unemployed

young people were clearly more stressed than others, were worried about the income of their household and had more pessimistic views about the future. (State Youth Council, 2020)

The wellbeing of unemployed youth is a central concern in Oulu, where youth unemployment is one of the major structural challenges (Oulu, n.d.). The rate of youth unemployment in the city was 27,9 % in 2020, which is 7,8 percentage points higher than a year earlier (Forsman, 2020). The youth barometer 2020 also showed that young people in Lapland and Oulu had the weakest estimations of the competitiveness of their hometowns than the rest of Finland (Berg & Myllyniemi, 2020).

Moreover, the pandemic time has impacted young peoples' wellbeing at work and in their free time. The pandemic had most negatively impacted the wellbeing at work of young adults, whose burnout symptoms and boredom at work had increased, while a positive "pull" and working ability had decreased (Kaltainen & Hakanen, 2021). A survey by the Finnish Youth Research Society shows that young people were also less happy with their free time during the pandemic than before it, which was at least partly caused by the suspension of hobbies (Salasuo & Lahtinen, 2021).

In the context of the ECoC, cultural participation appears to have been one of the most affected areas by the pandemic. Especially participatory programme and projects aimed at involving the most marginalised and socially excluded groups have been severely challenged (Bomash et al., 2021)

Overall, according to the youth barometer 2020, the quality of life estimations of young people were lower than ever before in the history of the barometer (Berg & Myllyniemi, 2020).

## 4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I will present the concepts, debates, and theories relevant for this study. I will explore and present existing research and theories about the interrelated topics of cultural planning, cultural participation, cultural democracy, cultural citizenship, identity, and intersectionality, and justify their relevance for this study. My point of departure is in the fields of cultural policy, cultural planning, and arts management, but given the interdisciplinary nature of the research topic, references to other fields are also included.

### 4.1 Definition of Culture

In this study, respecting the tradition of cultural planning, culture is understood in a broad and anthropological sense, as a way of life rather than explicitly the arts and the so-called high culture.

According to Colin Mercer (2003), culture, in the context of cultural planning, must be understood as what is conceived as culture by its participants. Mercer further notes that talking about cultural resources instead of culture as art is intrinsically more democratic, more respectful of cultural diversity and intangible heritage, and more conscious of the notion of difference. (Mercer, 2003)

Bianchini (2005) also defines culture in the broad sense in the context of cultural planning. However, he highlights the importance of clarifying the elements that are included in the definition of culture in order to avoid vagueness and obscurity, which could make the implementation of cultural planning impossible. Bianchini and Ghilardi (2007) suggest a cultural mapping approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods as a tool for identifying and describing local cultural resources. With the cultural mapping method, the local cultural sector can be studied through an exploration of the following resources: arts and media activities and institutions; the cultures of youth, minorities and other communities; sports and recreation; tangible and intangible heritage, places for sociability; the natural and built environment; intellectual and scientific environment and institutions; creativity expressed in local crafts, manufacturing and services activities; and the local image

bank. (Bianchini, 2005; Bianchini & Ghilardi, 2007)

Landry (2008) also recognises the importance of identifying local cultural resources in cultural planning and states that cultural planning is a process of using cultural resources to identify projects, preparing plans, and managing strategies to implement the resources.

This study therefore assumes a broad understanding of culture with an aim to understand what counts as culture for young adults in the Oulu2026 region, and what cultural resources are accessible for and valued by them.

## **4.2 Cultural Planning**

Cultural planning, or culture-led urban regeneration, is a central concept in this study, given that the ECoC is fundamentally a project embracing culture for urban regeneration. In this study, I aim to identify what kinds of culture-led urban regeneration plans and strategies Oulu2026 has for young adults and how well they match the needs and aspirations of the youth.

Cultural planning is a term that might be mistakenly understood as the planning of culture or cultural activities. However, as Bianchini (2013) emphasises, the intention of cultural planning is not the planning of culture but a culturally sensitive approach to urban planning and policy. Indeed, Bianchini (2013) points out that the planning of culture would be an impossible, undesirable, and even dangerous undertaking.

Mercer (2002a) explains that cultural planning refers to implementing a cultural approach at all stages and processes of planning and development. Similarly, Brecknock (as cited in Simjanovska, 2011, p. 18–19), talks about “planning culturally”, and states that culture should be at the centre of all urban development processes, focusing not only on social and civic, but also on environmental, infrastructural, and economic matters.

It is important to point out, as some authors have noted (e.g. Bianchini, 2005; Mercer, 2006) that cultural planning should be an integral part of each step of the planning process rather than just a cosmetic fix or decoration. Mercer (2006) maintains that cultural planning refers to the “strategic and integral planning and use of cultural resources in urban and community development”. Strategic because, as Mercer argues, cultural planning must be a part of a



larger strategy for urban and community development, making inter-disciplinary connections with all stakeholders and aiming for long-term goals; and integral, because cultural planning must be present in the planning process from the beginning and at all stages of the process. With a different approach, Mercer warns that things could go wrong:

*Cultural Planning at its worst can produce the best so-called cultural centre in the world surrounded by decaying neighbourhoods, deserted streets, minimal public transport, homeless families and bankrupt businesses. This is not cultural planning. (Mercer, 2006, p. 6)*

Bianchini (2005) also maintains that cultural policy should be integrated to urban policy as an organic part of other policy areas, as a part of a larger strategy. He explains that cultural planning relates cultural resources to other policy areas through a two-way dialogue between equals.

### **4.3 Cultural Participation**

*What matters so much about participation in the arts is not just that it gives people the personal and practical skills to help themselves and become involved in society – though it does – but that it opens routes into the wider democratic process and encourages people to want to take part. (Matarasso, 1997, p. 77)*

Cultural participation is a key concept in this study. The concept, however, is not an unambiguous one. Therefore, further exploration and definition are needed to understand what exactly is meant by cultural participation in this specific study.

Bonet and Négrier (2018) point out that there is a participative turn in cultural policy, brought about by technological, societal and political trends. They explain that, in interaction with society, culture is shifting from a focused and hierarchical model to a diffused and shared one. Consequently, they explain, citizen participation has recently gained renewed relevance.

Bonet and Négrier (2018) explain that different overlapping paradigms related to cultural participation coexist in contemporary cultural policies: cultural excellence, cultural democratisation, cultural democracy, and cultural economy. The paradigm of cultural excellence, which emerged in the post-World War II context, highlights the importance of

artistic excellence; autonomy of art; and support for non-commercial artistic expressions. Artistic quality is prioritised over audience. Cultural democratisation, on the other hand, has aimed at facilitating access to high-quality culture to a broad number of people since the 60s. The emphasis of cultural democratisation is on passive participation and consumption. The paradigm of cultural democracy emerged in the 70s emphasising the right and possibility of each social group to obtain recognition of and support for their own cultural practices. Under the paradigm of cultural democracy, all cultural expressions are seen as equally valid and important. Participation is understood as active participation and co-creation. Finally, the cultural and creative economy paradigm has gained visibility and presence in cultural policy agendas since 1980s. Participation is seen as consumption, and the focus is on both passive consumers and active so-called prosumers. (Bonet & Négrier, 2018)

A glance at the Cultural Policy Strategy 2025 and Guidelines for Arts and Artist Policy by the Ministry of Education and Culture reveals that all four paradigms are present in the Finnish cultural policy goals (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017, 2018). The coexistence of different paradigms does not need to be contradictory, but can, at best, be complementary. As Matarasso (1997) points out, “it is perfectly possible to combine high aesthetic standards with lasting social value”. Matarasso argues that art is valuable and worthwhile as art, but that the aesthetic or cultural value is not undermined by thinking about the social impacts.

A study by the Center for Cultural Policy Research Cupore from 2015 provides an overview of cultural participation related research, policies, and practices in Finland. The study points out that an increased interest towards cultural participation is related to a wider question of citizen participation in society. Since the 70s, active cultural participation has been on the policy agenda in Finland. Equal opportunities to cultural services despite social, economic and regional differences has for long been seen as one of the central goals of Finnish cultural policy. (Virolainen, 2015)

Indeed, the current cultural strategy of Finland also mentions increasing inclusion in culture and cultural participation among different demographic groups as one of the three main goals (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017).

The study by Cupore recognises three central concepts related to cultural participation:

participation (osallistuminen), inclusion (osallisuus), and non-participation. The study points out that all three are ambiguous concepts that have been defined in a variety of ways in different contexts. Cultural participation is often discussed in terms of active participation and passive audiences, but other concepts have risen alongside them, including customer, consumer, and citizen. Inclusion, on the other hand, refers to social inclusion and engagement. It refers to a sense of community and belonging and societal participation. Inclusion can be seen to contain two dimensions: political and social. Finally, non-participation has been studied in cultural participation related research. Who do not participate and why, and what counts as cultural participation or non-participation are relevant questions from the point of view of cultural non-participation. (Virolainen, 2015)

Janovich and Stevenson (2020) criticise the prevailing cultural policy discourse regarding cultural participation for its underlying assumption that it is the participants and their skills and participation patterns that need to be changed – not the cultural offer, decision-making processes, nor definitions of culture – in order to enhance opportunities for cultural participation. Janovich and Stevenson suggest that new logics are needed that begin with equity instead of the arts. Such logics, they suggest, would “offer support for people to participate in decisions that affect their lives, ensuring resourcing for what they already choose to participate in” (p. 180). Janovich and Stevenson maintain that the first step towards an equity-based approach would be to abandon the discourse of the non-participant, which is a form of micro power suppressing many voices in in the field of cultural policy. “Until this happens”, they claim, “cultural policy will continue to favour how cultural professionals define what cultural participation should be” (p.180).

In a report exploring the social impact of participation in the arts, Matarasso (1997) claims that their collected evidence suggests that participation in the arts has the capacity to address social problems and disempowerment. Despite the economic or social situation, people always develop their own creative resources. However, Matarasso argues that everyone’s opportunities to access and participate into wider cultural activities should be supported – not because everyone must participate but because everyone should have the possibility to do so. The paper suggests that participation in the arts encourages people to want to participate more, not just in culture but also in wider societal and democratic processes:

*Again and again, it is the opportunity to get involved in – indeed to define – what*

*matters that motivates people, transforming them from passive consumers of culture and social policy into engaged participants in arts projects and, by extension, in local democratic processes. (Matarasso, 1997, p. 79)*

The positive outcomes of cultural participation are, of course, not self-evident and do not always take place in the planned way. Emphasising the positive outcomes of cultural participation without reflexivity and clarity about definitions, strategies, and goals; openness about the evaluation of successful methods; and critical examination of outcomes, it is easy to fall into the trap of mindless “bullshit” lacking an interest to how things really are, which Belfiore (2009) warns us about.

In a study conducted in 2020, Husu and Kumpulainen found evidence to the positive impact of cultural participation, but they also identified some critical shortages in the perceived positive impact. Husu and Kumpulainen explored how workers and volunteers in the non-profit sector perceive the benefits of young people’s cultural participation in Central Finland. The results suggest that participation does generate positive outcomes in cultural, social, economic, and political dimensions. Identified positive outcomes included, for example, improved quality of life and sense of belonging; new networks; increased self-esteem and self-awareness; improved emotional and social skills; and new skills and experience. However, an examination of the findings through the Bourdieusian concept of capital revealed that the benefits were understood in individualistic terms by the respondents but expressions of wider benefits at the societal level were lacking. The authors point out that there was no evidence of social improvement or upward mobilisation of marginalised young people. They argue that when participatory projects focus too much on the individual level – as, they argue, is typical of the participatory paradigm – the structural limitations and disadvantaged positions of participants are ignored. (Husu & Kumpulainen, 2021)

A recent report by the ArtsEqual project demonstrated that participation in arts and culture is not equal in Finland. The report claims that in Finland, those with the best chances to be successful in the art world, the gifted, and the most active ones are the ones who participate in the arts, and also the ones who art education is mostly targeted at. In addition, the report argues that the current funding system causes inequality. The internal mechanisms causing inequality in the art field were found to be distancing (elitism, targeting services at the gifted and privileged), exclusion (fear of difference, ableism, discrimination), and hierarchies (top-

down approach). External inequality causing mechanisms, on the other hand, were evaluating and justifying arts based on profits and benefits, and shortages in the realisation of cultural rights among different demographic groups. Because of these mechanisms, the report claims, access to arts is easier for some than for others. As solutions for these issues, the report suggests lowering barriers to participation; inviting citizens to take part in decision-making; collaboration and a sense of togetherness between operators in the field; and active reaching out to wider target groups. (Ilmola-Sheppard et al., 2021)

In the context of the ECoC, Matera 2019 embraced cultural participation and cultural citizenship as central themes. However, a case study by Demartini et al. (2020) suggests that even though citizen participation was active in the early stages and an essential factor in legitimising Matera's ECoC project, participation declined after the initial phase and decision-making became more centralised. Such results suggest a clear need for ECoCs to integrate cultural participation as a central theme in the long-term strategies in a reflective and informed manner for a bottom-up participatory approach to carry until the ECoC year and beyond.

Cultural participation can be studied and discussed on the levels of the individual, community, and society. This study focuses on the individual and societal levels. From the point of view of the individual, the interest is on what the individual gets from participating in culture, how cultural participation affects them, and what are their motivations to participate or reasons not to participate. From the society perspective, the focus is on active citizenship and cultural contents from a societal point of view. (Virolainen, 2015)

In this study, my aim is to let the young adults in the Oulu2026 region define what culture is and what cultural participation means for them. My starting point, as suggested by Janovich and Stevenson (2020), is equity, not the arts. In other words, my aim is not to explore participation from the point of view of traditional art forms or art institutions, but rather from the perspective of young adults with a bottom-up approach.

#### **4.4 Cultural Democracy**

Cultural democracy has been a widely discussed topic in the field of cultural policy since the 1970s, and later also in the field of arts management. Cultural democracy emerged as a

response to and criticism against the perceived hierarchy and elitism of cultural democratisation, which was seen as a top-down attempt at “civilising” and “educating” people through a distribution of elitist cultural values (Matarasso & Landry, 1999). As opposed to that, cultural democracy aimed at promoting active cultural participation; self-expression of subcultures, communities, and minorities; a pluralistic concept of culture; equal opportunity and equality of all forms of culture; and recognising the everyday expressions of people as culture (e.g. Bonet & Négrier, 2018; Matarasso & Landry, 1999; Simjanovska, 2011).

The community arts movement had a significant role in the emergence of the cultural democracy debate in the 70s and 80s (Jeffers, 2017; Kelly, 2016). Owen Kelly (2016), one of the early proponents of cultural democracy, demonstrates how the early motivations of the community arts movement were based on cultural activism. He explains that the aim of the originators of the community arts movement was to enable working people to “be creative in ways that would make their creativity socially effective” (p. 41), because they thought that that creativity would heighten their morale and lead them to empower themselves in other areas of life, and because they believed that it was everyone’s right to participate in shaping the world in which they lived. They wanted to empower people to a “liberating self-determination” (p. 54) and thus enable people to gain control over some areas of their lives. In addition, their objectives and activities were founded on the idea that artistic practice itself could be a form of cultural activism.

Hadley and Belfiore (Hadley & Belfiore, 2018) note that, from the point of view of cultural policy, the community arts movement also had an anti-institutional and political agenda: they aimed at a wider change in the nature of democracy not only in terms of culture, but also in areas of political, economic and institutional life. Kelly (2016), for example, described the demand of the community arts movement for cultural democracy as follows:

*The demand for cultural democracy around which these networks should unite is a revolutionary demand. To decentralise the means of cultural production it will be necessary to overthrow the dominant structures; the determining agencies whose effect is to bewilder and fragment for the sake of increased production. They cannot be reformed because they are systemically oppressive, and they cannot be controlled or tamed because their inherent oppressiveness*

*would continue no matter who their nominal masters were. They must be demolished.* (Kelly, 2016, p. 199)

Since the 70s, questions of cultural democracy have been explored from many different points of view, including community arts (Jeffers & Moriarty, 2017; Kelly, 2016), participatory policies (e.g. Bonet & Négrier, 2018; Juncker & Balling, 2016), diversity (Bonet & Négrier, 2018; Gross & Wilson, 2020), cultural rights (e.g. Baltà Portolés & Dragičević Šešić, 2017; Pakulski, 1997), cultural citizenship (e.g. Bloomfield & Bianchini, 2001; Mercer, 2002a; Pakulski, 1997; Stevenson, 2001, 2003), high and popular culture (e.g. Braden, 1978, as cited in Gross & Wilson, 2020), elitism and populism (e.g. Mulcahy, 2006), cultural capability (e.g. Gross, 2021; Gross & Wilson, 2020), and cultural opportunity (Gross & Wilson, 2020). In addition, the impact of technology and digitalisation have become an important topic in the discussion around participation and other dimensions of cultural democracy (e.g. Juncker & Balling, 2016). Cultural democracy has also been criticised for cultural relativism, neglecting artistic and aesthetic values and criteria, and lack of support for professional artists (Bonet & Négrier, 2018; Simjanovska, 2011).

These and many other publications show that despite the complex history (Hadley & Belfiore, 2018) of the cultural democracy discourse, the relevance of the topic has not disappeared. As Kelly (2016) notes in the digital re-edition of his 1984 book, arguments about cultural democracy still resonate. Similarly, Hadley and Belfiore (2018) note that there are significant macro-level shifts in economic, technological and social fields, which make it necessary to re-evaluate earlier arguments for and against cultural democracy. They call for a “historically informed yet present- and future-oriented” (p. 221) theoretical development of a renewed, contemporary concept of cultural democracy that would recognise and address both the historical articulations, debates, and practices, as well as the changes and shifts that have taken place since the 70s.

I agree with the continued and growing relevance of the cultural democracy debate and research in cultural planning and policy. However, contemporary discussion must be accompanied by an acknowledgement that the context for discussing cultural democracy is very different today than it was during the early formulations of the concept. Even though the British context and cultural policy model, which Hadley and Belfiore (2018) discuss, differ from the Finnish context in many ways, I believe that the discussion about the

necessity of re-evaluating and reformulating the concept of cultural democracy in the present and future contexts is as relevant for Finland as it is for the UK. Moreover, I argue that the topic of cultural democracy should be addressed and reassessed also in the context of the European Capital of Culture – not only because of the technological, political, societal, economic, cultural, and ecological changes, but also because the ongoing Covid-19 crisis and the issue of youth disillusionment have made questions of cultural democracy ever more pressing.

#### **4.5 Cultural Citizenship and Cultural Rights**

*Cultural citizenship aims to promote conversation where previously there was silence, suspicion, fragmentation or the voices of the powerful...This requires not only that we empower 'minorities', but that we also seek to understand the social processes that have historically promoted some views over others. The recovery of the 'other' and wider questions of justice remain essential to inclusive forms of citizenship. The key word here is respect, not tolerance. (Stevenson, 2003, p. 153)*

In my understanding of cultural participation in the context of this study, cultural citizenship is a central concept. Cultural citizenship has been discussed in the fields of sociology and anthropology, and later in the fields of cultural policy and planning and arts management.

Cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo has defined cultural citizenship as “the right to be different” and to belong in a participatory democratic sense. With belonging, Rosaldo refers to a full membership in a group with influence and voice in decision-making. Cultural citizenship, according to Rosaldo, presumes social justice and equity among citizens. (Rosaldo, 1994, p. 402)

For the sociologist Jan Pakulski (1997), cultural citizenship is about new citizenship claims that involve the right to unhindered and dignified representation and the maintenance and propagation of diverse identities, cultures and lifestyles. Pakulski notes that cultural citizenship is primarily not a legal, political, or socioeconomic matter, but rather a question of cultural rights, symbolic representation, and cultural recognition.

*Cultural citizenship involves the right to be 'different', to re-value stigmatised*



*identities, to embrace openly and legitimately hitherto marginalised lifestyles and to propagate them without hindrance...Full citizenship involves a right to full cultural participation and undistorted representation. (Pakulski, 1997, p. 83)*

As Nick Stevenson (2003) points out, the concepts of culture and citizenship have not traditionally been seen to have a lot in common, since culture is often associated with cultural institutions and the production of meaning and aesthetics, while citizenship is associated with membership, belonging, rights and responsibilities, and inclusion and exclusion in legal terms. Stevenson, however, argues that considerations of culture are central to questions of citizenship, inclusion, dialogue, and rights and responsibilities. (Stevenson, 2003)

Mercer maintains that culture is closely connected to citizenship, identity, democracy, ways of life and values, and affects how we communicate, work, and understand differences. Indeed, Mercer argues that citizenship is what cultural policy is fundamentally about, as it deals with the resources of identity, the most essential of human capacities. For Mercer, cultural citizenship is about making connections between citizenship, identity, social and cultural capital, and democracy. (Mercer, 2002a)

Violeta Simjanovska stresses the importance of equal opportunity. She argues that cultural citizenship requires that all citizens have opportunities to participate in the cultural life of their communities and the freedom to express their cultural identity (Simjanovska, 2011, p. 11).

Stevenson (2003) argues that in contemporary societies, the power to construct meaning; name and categorise things; and exercise power over information flows is a central cause of structural divisions. In other words, besides the material dimension, power is also exercised on the symbolic level. Citizenship, therefore, cannot be discussed without considerations of culture. Stevenson argues that cultural citizenship aims at questioning and reshaping constructions of the “ordinary”, as well as exclusive and marginalising images, assumptions, and representations. Essentially, cultural citizenship aims at building a more inclusive society. (Stevenson, 2003)

What Stevenson (2003) calls for, are preconditions for “cosmopolitan imagination”, or cosmopolitanism, a global sense of citizenship. For Stevenson, cosmopolitanism is a worldview free from “national exclusivity, dichotomous forms of gendered and racial

thinking and rigid separations between culture and nature” (2003, p. 5). Such a worldview, Stevenson argues, would be more open to and appreciative of cultural pluralism and intercultural ways of life.

Communication and dialogue based on the recognition of difference and universal principles are at the core of Stevenson’s (2003) understanding of cultural citizenship. He argues that instead of a consensus about interpretations and meaning, we need “space for plurality and difference at the beginning and the end of democratic forms of communication” (Stevenson, 2003, p. 25). Moreover, Stevenson argues that cultural citizenship can only promote dialogue when the cultural complexity of different viewpoints and positions is understood. A communicative civil society, according to Stevenson, would produce the kind of cultural citizenship where citizens can learn from each others’ points of view. (Stevenson, 2003)

Sociologist Jean Beaman (2016) emphasises that citizenship is not just about legal status and rights or about formal membership within a nation-state. Legal citizenship, according to her, is not enough to guarantee inclusion and belonging. Instead, in her understanding of cultural citizenship she focuses on questions of inclusion, belonging, and difference. Beaman highlights that understanding the cultural nature of citizenship is central for the actualisation of full citizenship. (Beaman, 2016)

Beaman’s (2016) framework emphasises that citizenship can operate as a marker of difference in society: it can differentiate among citizens, create different classes of citizens, allow for different degrees of inclusion in society, and cause marginalisation (2016, p. 850). In the context of cultural citizenship, Beaman understands culture as cultural difference, and as the norms, values, practices, and behaviours that are seen as normative. She points out that coherence with the traditional concept of common culture makes some citizens more accepted than others. Citizenship thus creates full and second-class citizens. Marginalised people, Beaman explains, are not fully included in the citizenry despite having the formal and legal status as citizens. Indeed, Beaman highlights the importance of addressing how citizenship operates for people in the margins of society. Her framework helps to understand how marginalised people make sense of their multiple identities and social positions.

*By only focusing on citizenship as a legal status or in terms of specific rights, we miss the full extent of how individuals actually understand their relationship to being part*

*of a citizenry.* (Beaman, 2016, p. 855).

Bloomfield and Bianchini (2001) maintain that in a democratic state that takes the existence of multiple cultures seriously, citizenship must be detached from exclusive cultural belonging. They point out that treating cultural minorities as exclusive and pure reaffirms their position of marginality in the society. Cultural minorities and the discrimination they face must be recognised, their rights guaranteed, and cultural diversity respected, but cultural recognition must not lead to a further marginalisation of minority cultures. According to Bloomfield and Bianchini, cultural recognition should offer opportunities for interacting with, influencing and being influenced by other cultures; it needs to offer opportunities for preservation and renewal alike (Bloomfield & Bianchini, 2001).

Bloomfield and Bianchini (2001) further note that the only way for cultural policies to revitalise citizenship is to open up the local media and city planning to popular participation. Such approach would aim to “reconnect the social innovativeness and critical energy of young people and social movements to the local political sphere” (p. 261–262). Bloomfield and Bianchini advocate an open-ended system which would be built by self-organised autonomous actors in civil society. The city could support the actors by offering training and by actively soliciting initiatives in different areas of urban policy. (Bloomfield & Bianchini, 2001)

Bianchini, Albano and Bollo (2013) have studied the regenerative impacts of the ECoC on symbolic, physical, economic, and social dimensions. They found that one of the most significant impacts of the ECoC was encouraging citizens from different neighbourhoods and backgrounds to participate in conversation about their city and its future (Bianchini et al., 2013). This is an important notion from the point of view of cultural citizenship. A study conducted in 2017 at the University of Turku found that Oulu has more disadvantaged neighbourhoods than other Finnish cities (Vauhkonen et al., as cited in Haapsaari, 2018; Hinkula, 2018). The potential of enhancing cultural citizenship in the context of the ECoC might therefore be significant for Oulu.

Cultural rights are essentially linked to cultural citizenship and an integral part of human rights, as the following quote describes:

*Cultural rights are an integral part of human rights, which are universal, indivisible*

*and interdependent. The flourishing of creative diversity requires the full implementation of cultural rights...All persons have therefore the right to express themselves and to create and disseminate their work in the language of their choice...all persons are entitled to quality education and training that fully respect their cultural identity; and all persons have the right to participate in the cultural life of their choice and conduct their own cultural practices... (UNESCO, 2001, p. 13)*

However, there are severe deficiencies in the fulfilment of cultural rights of different groups and minorities. As Portolés and Šešić (2017) point out, cultural rights have often been seen as secondary to other human rights, and their integration in cultural policies and sustainable development strategies has often been inhibited by a limited understanding of cultural rights and the vagueness of their policy implications.

In 1997, Pakulski argued that new social movements – or “socio-cultural movements for citizenship” (p. 82) – had generated the need to extend citizenship rights to the domain of cultural rights from the more traditional civil, political, and social dimensions. According to Pakulski, the new set of citizenship claims included the idea of rights to representation, cultural identities, and lifestyles. These rights, according to Pakulski, can be into three different sections: the right to symbolic presence and visibility; the right to dignifying representation, and the right to the propagation and maintenance of identity and lifestyles. For Pakulski, cultural rights represent a counterforce to marginalisation, stigmatisation, assimilation, and ‘normalising’ distortion. Therefore, as Pakulski notes, the cultural rights related claims inherent in cultural citizenship promote an extended cultural democracy. Furthermore, according to Pakulski, cultural rights extend citizenship rights to, for example, the realm of multiculturalism, indigenous peoples’ rights, and rights of minorities. (Pakulski, 1997)

Bloomfield and Bianchini (2001) see cultural rights as extended social rights. For them, cultural rights include “equal access to the cultural literacy, critical competences and public cultural goods which would enable equal opportunity to participate in cultural – as well as economic and political – life” (p. 220). They maintain that cultural rights should ensure equal opportunity to participate in the society and to engage with and transform the public culture, and that no particular culture should be privileged over others (Bloomfield & Bianchini,

2001).

*A civic identity, which does not privilege any particular culture, but rather the city as a meeting place of cultures, of exchange, is a prerequisite for cultural pluralism in the public sphere, not on the basis of corporate representation of fixed ethnic collectivities but on the basis of universal rights and republican citizenship.*  
(Bloomfield & Bianchini, 2001, p. 225)

It is important to note that despite many similar ideas, there are some central differences in the approaches of cultural citizenship theorists. Authors, such as Stevenson (2001, 2003), Bloomfield and Bianchini (2001), Beaman (2016), and Simjanovska (2011) promote a bottom-up approach to cultural citizenship. They highlight that a formal, legal, and institutional understanding of citizenship is not enough for the realisation of full citizenship. Mercer, on the other hand, sees the domain of governance as a determining factor in cultural planning and policy, an approach which seems to highlight the legal and institutional aspects of citizenship (see for example Mercer, 2002b).

In this study, my approach is a bottom-up one, less interested in legal status and focusing more on the preconditions of equality and equity, inclusion, belonging, and pluralism. Cultural citizenship is examined in the context of the ECoC and in close connection with theories and ideas related to cultural participation, identity, and intersectionality.

#### **4.6 The Plural Nature of Human Identity**

The concept of identity is closely related to questions of belonging and cultural citizenship. Amartya Sen (2007) argues that identities can be a source of warmth as well as of violence; generators of solidarity on the one hand, but motivations for exclusion on the other. Sen explains that identities, of course, are not the cause of such problems. Rather, it is the lack of understanding of competing identities inherent in each group and individual what causes violence, hostility, and exclusion (Sen, 2007).

Sen argues that a singular understanding of identity is reductionist, simplifying and harmful. Each of us has a variety of affiliations and belongings to different groups and communities. The particular identity of a person is not made of a single membership but of multiple

simultaneously existing dimensions. In other words, human identity is plural, and no singular affiliation can be taken as the one decisive identity of a person. Sen argues that the lack of understanding of the plural nature of identity causes conflicts, stereotypes, and discrimination. (Sen, 2007)

As Sen points out, instead of just being different from one another, we are “diversely different”. The relative importance given to the different affiliations is a question of choice and often depends on the context. We usually understand the plural nature of our own identities and multiple belongings, but often fail to see the plural identities simultaneously held by others. Instead, we tend to categorise people based on factors such as religion, nationality, culture, appearance, class or social status, or occupation. Even when done in good faith, simplifying categorisation is reductionist and harmful. (Sen, 2007)

In her dissertation, Tuuli Lähdesmäki (2014) studies identity politics in the ECoC initiative. The interdisciplinary research focuses on local, regional, national, and European cultural identities. Lähdesmäki explains that the concept of cultural identity emphasises the role of distinctions in the construction of identities. Cultural identity, she explains, is constructed in “constant dialogue, negotiations, and contest of similarity and difference, sameness and distinction” (p. 33). In her research, Lähdesmäki understands the four levels of identity (local, regional, national, European) as discursive cultural identities, represented and manifested in various cultural phenomena. (Lähdesmäki, 2014)

In terms of identity creation in the context of the ECoC, she notes:

*Cultural phenomena, such as the ECoC events, can be understood as representations of cultural identities and as spaces of negotiations and contests where the contents and meanings of identities are formed. (Lähdesmäki, 2014, p. 33)*

In this study, a plural understanding of human identity is of central importance. The promotion of cultural participation and cultural citizenship can only be truly inclusive when the essentially plural nature of group and individual identities is recognised and respected.

#### **4.7 Intersectionality**

Another central concept related to identity, participation, and citizenship is that of

intersectionality. In this study, intersectionality is adopted as an analysis of power used to explore political and structural inequalities. Intersectionality examines how different combined ways of inequality operate and the different simultaneous ways in which groups and individuals may experience discrimination and exclusion. An important notion of intersectionality is that the simultaneous experience of various forms of discrimination related to, for example, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, or the body, is more than the sum of its parts. (see for example Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Hill Collins, 2019; Winker & Degele, 2011)

The term intersectionality – although initially used just as a metaphor (Hill Collins, 2019) – was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 in a paper for the University of Chicago Legal Forum in 1989. The paper addresses the exclusion of black women from both feminist and antiracist policies and demonstrates that the intersectional experience of black women is greater than the sum of racism and sexism. Therefore, Crenshaw argues that an intersectional analysis is needed to address the particular ways in which black women are oppressed. (Crenshaw, 1989)

The paper, stemmed from critical race theory and circulated within critical legal studies, addressed the failure of legal, institutional, and political contexts to address the particular situation and challenges of black women in the United States. With examples of several legal cases, Crenshaw demonstrated that black women could experience discrimination in ways both similar to and different from the experiences of white women and black men. Crenshaw pointed to the failure of judges and the antidiscrimination law to address the sameness and difference paradox: black women were simultaneously too similar to black men and white women to represent themselves as a separate group and too different to represent either black people or women as a whole. Indeed, questions of sameness and difference are at the core of intersectionality. (Cho et al., 2013, pp. 790–791; Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149)

Crenshaw (1991) points out that although the process of categorisation on the basis of sameness and difference is a form of exercising power, the existence of different categories, related to, for example, race, gender or class, is not the most pressing problem in revealing processes of oppression and privileging. Rather, the problem lies in the particular values that are attached to such categories and the way those values create and uphold social hierarchies. According to Crenshaw (1991), political power is exercised through categories, which are

based on narratives that privilege some while excluding others:

*...the narratives of gender are based on the experience of white, middle-class women, and the narratives of race are based on the experience of Black men*  
(Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1298)

As Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall. (2013, p. 791) note, the terrain of intersectional exclusion and marginalisation go beyond feminism and antiracism. Indeed, since the late 80s, intersectionality has been discussed and analysed in many different contexts related to the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, disability, and other categories.

Cho et al. (2013) promote an approach to intersectionality that emphasises what intersectionality does rather than what it is. They describe intersectionality as an analytic sensibility:

*...what makes an analysis intersectional — whatever terms it deploys, whatever its iteration, whatever its field or discipline—is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power.* (Cho et al., 2013, p. 795)

Cho et al. (2013) suggest that scholars from different fields should embrace the tools of their own disciplines to reveal how the intersecting axes of power and inequality cause collective and individual disadvantage. Furthermore, they argue that scholars should be aware and aim to expose the ways in which the used tools, or ways of knowing, might themselves be objects of intersectional critique as creators of inequality generating structures. (Cho et al., 2013.)

In this study, I attempt to follow this recommendation by incorporating an intersectional approach in the theory and in the methodology. I believe that an intersectional approach as an analysis of power and inequality can be a valuable tool in a variety of contexts and disciplines. When it comes to cultural participation and cultural citizenship, I believe that the intersectional approach can bring about fundamentally important insights that would otherwise be missed. In this study, my aim is to explore if an intersectional approach can help explain and bring new insights and solutions to questions of cultural participation, cultural citizenship, and youth disillusionment in the context of Oulu2026.



## **4.8 Summary of the Literature Review**

The theoretical framework of this study consists of the interrelated concepts and theories of cultural planning, cultural participation, cultural democracy, and cultural citizenship. Within that framework, questions of cultural rights, identity, and intersectionality are of central importance. In addition, the ECoC provides a clear context and framework for the research.

In this chapter, I have presented the central theories and concepts, as well as some relevant findings from previous research. Culture, in this study, is understood in a broad way, as a way of life rather than just the arts, and cultural participation is studied with a bottom-up approach.

Emphasis is placed on active participation in culture, based on young adults' understanding of culture and their needs and aspirations related to cultural participation. Understanding the plural nature of identity, intersectional categories of difference, and the importance of cultural rights as universal human rights are of fundamental importance in this study.

Identity and intersectionality are studied in relation to young adults' cultural participation. Different levels of local, regional, national, European, or international cultural identities are not addressed, unless the respondents of the survey (see chapters 5 and 7) themselves mention such area-based identities. Young adults' experiences and feelings related to European identity are, of course, of central importance in the context of the ECoC, but because of the scope of this study, such considerations have been left as a topic for future research.

The main authors and key concepts of the literature review are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1***Summary of the Theoretical Framework: Central Authors and Concepts*

<b>Framework</b>	<b>Central Authors</b>	<b>Central Concepts and Key Words</b>
Culture	Franco Bianchini Lia Ghilardi Charles Landry Colin Mercer	Broad understanding of culture Cultural mapping Cultural resources
Cultural Planning	Franco Bianchini Colin Mercer	Culturally sensitive approach Culture-led urban regeneration
Cultural Participation	Lluis Bonet Paola Demartini et al. Hanna-Mari Husu Leena Ilmola-Sheppard et al. (ArtsEqual) Leila Janovich Kaisu Kumpulainen François Matarasso Emmanuel Négrier David Stevenson Jutta Virolainen (Cupore)	Bottom-up vs. top-down Cultural participation paradigms Equal opportunity Inclusion Long-term citizen participation Non-participation Participation Participative turn
Cultural Democracy	Eleonora Belfiore Lluis Bonet Owen Kelly Steven Hadley Charles Landry Francois Matarasso Emmanuel Négrier Violeta Simjanovska	Active cultural participation Bottom-up approach Community arts movement Cultural activism Pluralistic concept of culture Self-expression
Cultural Citizenship and Cultural Rights	Jean Beaman Franco Bianchini Jude Bloomfield Colin Mercer Jan Pakulski Jordi Baltà Portolés Renato Rosaldo Milena Dragicevic Sesic Violeta Simjanovska Nick Stevenson	Cosmopolitanism Cultural pluralism Cultural recognition Diversity and difference Equal opportunity Extended cultural democracy Full citizenship Human rights Identity Inclusion Right to be different
Identity	Amartya Sen Tuuli Lähdesmäki	Belonging(s) Cultural identity Categorisation Diverse diversity Identity construction Plurality Stereotypes
Intersectionality	Sumi Cho Kimberlé Crenshaw Patricia Hill Collins Leslie McCall	Categories of difference Discrimination Inequality Intersecting categories Power Sameness and difference paradox

*Note.* Authors and concepts are organised from A–Z (authors based on last name).

## 5 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I aim to shed light on the methodological ground of this research and to justify the choices and decisions made. First, I will present the research approach and philosophical viewpoints and choices underpinning this study. I will then move on to present the case study research design and case selection, and to describe and justify the chosen methods of data collection and analysis. Finally, I will critically reflect and analyse different aspects of the research process.

### 5.1 Methodological Approach of the Study

This research is a qualitatively driven mixed case study research that adopts a combination of interpretive, critical, and intersectional paradigms. In the following pages, I will describe the research design and approach in more detail and aim to explain and justify why the methodological choices made are appropriate for this specific study.

#### 5.1.1 *Qualitatively Driven Mixed (Methods) Research Approach*

This research adopts a multi- and mixed methods research design. A multimethod approach refers to a research design that uses two or more methods within one research tradition, i.e., either within the quantitative or the qualitative tradition. A mixed method approach, on the other hand, involves methods from both traditions. (e.g. Anderson, 2016; S. Hesse-Biber, 2015; Kuada, 2012; Leavy, 2017)

As Stake (2010) points out, using mixed and multiple methods means more than just employing different methods somewhere in one study; mixed methods means using multiple methods interactively and together in a conscious manner to study a single thing in order to improve the quality of the evidence. My aim in this research is to combine the multiple and mixed methods in interaction with each other and to bring the different perspectives and outcomes together to generate more thorough understanding and knowledge about the research topic.

The approach of this study is qualitatively driven. In other words, the core method is

qualitative, while the quantitative approach and method are given a secondary or auxiliary role. (Brannen & O’Connel, 2015)

Besides mixed methods, the model of research adopted in this study could be referred to as mixed research (Pearce, 2015), because the research is also mixed on the paradigm level. Mixed research is a holistic perspective on research, encouraging a dialogue between a diversity of approaches to advance science (Pearce, 2015, p. 43). The mixed research approach is also reflected in the interdisciplinary perspective of the study. The ECoC initiative is related to and can be approached from many different perspectives and disciplines. As Lähdesmäki (2014, p. 21) notes, the inter- and cross-disciplinary nature of the initiative requires openness for different perspectives in order to understand its points of departure. The interdisciplinary essence is present both in the theoretical framework and the methodology of this research.

### ***5.1.2 Combining Paradigms: Interpretivism, Critical Theory and Intersectionality***

In this research, the interpretive, critical, and intersectional approaches coexist. In this sub-chapter, I will first discuss the more traditional paradigms of interpretivism and critical theory, and then briefly explore intersectionality as a research approach.

The ontological underpinning of this study is in line with interpretivism and critical theory. Both paradigms – in contrast to positivism –reject the notion of a single, verifiable reality, and believe instead in socially constructed multiple realities and subjective knowledge (Brodsky et al., 2016; S. Hesse-Biber et al., 2015; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

In terms of epistemology – or assumptions about knowledge and knowing (e.g. Brodsky et al., 2016, p. 14; Kuada, 2012, p. 59) – my beliefs are also in line with both interpretivism and critical theory. Interpretivism is subjective and claims that reality cannot be known because it is always affected by our senses, worldviews, backgrounds, and other factors – therefore, interpretivists aim at understanding social phenomena in their unique contexts (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Similarly, critical theorists claims that subjectivity is an essential part of knowledge production and that it is impossible to research an object without it being affected by the researcher (S. Hesse-Biber et al., 2015; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

When it comes to axiology – beliefs about the role of values and ethics in the research

process (Brodsky et al., 2016, p. 14) –, both interpretivism and critical theory differ significantly from positivism, which calls for an objective, value-free approach (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). However, it is in terms of axiology that interpretivism and critical theory most differ from each other. Both paradigms consider values and ethical reflections to be an inevitable part of the research process, but their role is seen differently. Interpretivism aims at a balanced axiology. In other words, a researcher must recognise that their values will be reflected in the research outcome; aim to present a balanced report of the findings; and make the underlying values explicit (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Critical theory, on the other hand, maintains that values are not only an inevitable but also a desirable part of the research process, given that the aim of critical research is to shed light on social injustice and oppression, and to ultimately change things and bring about more social justice and equity (Cram & Mertens, 2015). Here, my approach is closer to critical theory.

Besides interpretive and critical, the research approach is also essentially intersectional. Intersectionality has become a widely used theoretical approach in many fields, but as a methodological approach it is still relatively new, underdeveloped and lacking a unified set of assumptions (Hillsburg, 2013). Therefore, although intersectionality has already been discussed as a theory in chapter 4, I find it important to briefly discuss it as a methodology.

Hill Collins (2019) points out that even though intersectionality has not yet realised its potential as a research paradigm, it is on its way to becoming a relevant critical social theory that can address contemporary social problems and the social changes needed to solve them. Whereas traditional paradigms have approached different forms or categories of inequality as separate and disconnected phenomena, intersectionality emphasises how intersecting power systems and structures shape social phenomena and create intersecting social inequalities. In that sense, intersectionality is not just an adjustment to existing paradigms but contributes to a fundamental paradigm shift. (Hill Collins, 2019)

The core constructs and guiding premises outlined by Hill Collins (see 2019, pp. 44–49) have guided and informed the paradigmatic thinking and critical inquiry in this research. In more practical terms, the multi-level intersectional analysis presented by Winker and Degele (2011) was adapted as a method of analysis, as will be explained in chapter 5.3.1.

### ***5.1.3 Case Study Research Design and Defining the Case***

The case study research approach is useful for generating in-depth understanding of a particular case in a specific real-life context (Yin, 2014). Stake (1995, as cited in Simons, 2009, p. 19), for example, defines case study research as “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances”. Yin (2014) explains that case study research is a suitable approach when the main research questions are “how” or “why” questions about a contemporary phenomenon or set of events over which a researcher has little or no control.

In this research, I have chosen the case study research approach for three principal reasons. First, my research question is a “how” question. Second, the research problem requires a thorough exploration and analysis of a phenomenon within important circumstances. And third, I am studying a particular project and phenomenon in a specific, real-world context, with the aim to generate new knowledge and understanding of a specific case.

Triangulation – the use of multiple sources of evidence in order to improve the quality and reliability of a research (Yin, 2014) – is essentially linked to mixed research and case study research (e.g. S. Hesse-Biber et al., 2015; Yin, 2015). Yin (2014, p. 335), for example, argues that without the use of a variety of data collection techniques and multiple sources of evidence, the “invaluable advantage” of case study research is lost. In this study, I employed theoretical, methodological, and data triangulation to gain a deeper understanding of the topic and to increase the validity of the study. Such a triangulation strategy could be described as multiple triangulation (Kuada, 2012).

One of the most critical determinations a researcher must do when conducting case study research, is selecting and defining the “case” – or unit of analysis – to be studied. Defining the case in a focused manner requires setting some limits or bounds to the case, and ensuring that there is a sufficient amount of relevant data available for the case study. (O’Leary, 2004; Yin, 2014)

According to Simons (2009), the case can be defined based on the research problem or the researcher’s intrinsic interest. In this research, the case definition started with intrinsic interest and definition of the research problem. The boundaries were set by elaborating the research questions, defining the context of the study, and determining the theoretical

framework.

The design of this research is a single-case study, meaning that the focus is on one, single case. When starting the thesis process, I considered the option of conducting a multiple-case analysis involving all three Finnish ECoC 2026 candidate cities: Oulu, Tampere, and Savonlinna. Of course, there was also the option of involving ECoC cities or candidates from other countries. However, within the frames of a master's theses, I concluded that a single-case design would allow me to conduct a more thorough and focused study.

## **5.2 Data Collection**

The mixed and multiple methods of data collection included a survey with young adults in the region, three semi-structured interviews with representatives of Oulu2026 and the city of Oulu, and document analysis of the bid book of Oulu2026. In this chapter, I will briefly introduce each method.

### ***5.2.1 Survey With Young Adults in the Oulu2026 Region***

A survey (Appendix C) was conducted to gather answers from a larger number of young adults than could have been achieved through, for example, interviews or focus groups. A survey is considered to be a powerful and economic method, allowing the researcher to collect a lot of information from a large number of people in a relatively short time (Messenger Davies & Mosdell, 2006).

The questionnaire was built on SurveyPal and it was open from 4 May until 4 June. Most responses to the questionnaire were collected before the designation of Oulu as the ECoC 2026. The final deadline – originally planned to be 31 May – was extended until 4 June. Oulu was selected as the ECoC on 2 June, so some responses were received when the selection was already known.

Before distributing the survey among the target group, the questionnaire was piloted with four test respondents. The survey was available both in Finnish and in English to enable answering also for non-Finnish speakers. As incentives, a 50-euro gift card to the ticket sales company Tiketti and a total of six Oulu2026 products were raffled among participants.

Incentives might have both desirable and undesirable effects. On the one hand, they may motivate people to answer, leading to a bigger sample and potentially more generalisable findings. On the other, incentives may motivate dishonest answers, if respondents answer the survey only for the chance of winning the prize but without paying attention to the actual questions. However, for this study, the benefits were considered to be greater than the risks.

The sampling frame – referring to the individuals who can potentially be selected as subjects for the study (Cassell et al., 2018) – consisted of all 18–24-year-olds living in the Oulu2026 region. The type of sampling used was volunteer sampling, which refers to a process of selecting a sample by asking for volunteers (O’Leary, 2004). Respondents were reached out to by contacting high schools, universities, municipal cultural and youth services, art schools, and other institutes in the 33 municipalities of the Oulu2026 region. Many of them shared the survey on their digital platforms, social media channels or mailing lists. The challenge with volunteer sampling is that it might not result in representative data, because the characteristics of those who volunteer are likely to be different from those who don’t (O’Leary, 2004). In the case of this study, it was likely that those familiar with interested in the Oulu2026 project or cultural participation were the most likely to answer the survey. Acknowledging these potential limitations, volunteer sampling was still chosen as the most suitable sampling method for this research, as the contact details of the whole population were impossible to have access to. Moreover, the described targeted distribution of the survey was aimed at addressing the known limitations.

As is usual for questionnaires, the one built for this research also consisted of two main sections: a demographic section consisting of questions related to the respondents’ demographics and background; and an information or attitude section consisting of questions of specific relevance for the research questions (Messenger Davies & Mosdell, 2006). The questionnaire contained checklists, multiple choice questions, rating scales, Likert scales, and open-ended questions. The combination of closed and open-ended questions was considered beneficial. Whereas closed-ended questions enable an easier analysis and statistical handling of data, open-ended questions allow respondents to answer in their own way, with more details and their own personal perspective (Messenger Davies & Mosdell, 2006). One of the limitations of open-ended questions is that they are more time consuming to analyse. However, in a qualitatively driven study with a pluralist and intersectional



perspective, open-ended questions were vitally important. Instead of letting my own assumptions limit the respondents' replies, I wanted to make sure that there is enough space for the respondents to describe their own feelings and lived experience.

### **5.2.2 *Semi-structured interviews***

The interview is one of the most important and commonly used sources of case study research evidence because of its ability to offer insights and information about human affairs or actions (Yin, 2014). In this research, three semi-structured interviews were conducted. I interviewed the project director Piia Rantala-Korhonen and the programme director Samu Forsblom from the Oulu2026 organisation with the aim to gain an understanding of the cultural participation related goals and strategies involving young adults. From the city of Oulu, I interviewed Jaana Potkonen, the executive producer of art and wellbeing, to gain an insight to the current state of cultural participation and wellbeing of young adults from the city point of view. Samu Forsblom, as the cultural director of the city of Oulu, represented both the city and the ECoC project. All interviews were conducted after the selection of Oulu as the ECoC 2026.

The interviews were held online over Zoom or Teams, as meeting in person would have been complicated because of the geographical distance between Helsinki and Oulu and because of the prevailing Covid-19 situation. All interviews were recorded with the interviewees' permission and later transcribed. Recording may de-naturalise the situation and strain the interviewee (Messenger Davies & Mosdell, 2006), and the online interview format might have the same effect. In this research, however, that was not considered to be a major concern, given that all interviewees were professionals in the topic of the interview, and – as a consequence of the pandemic reality – very much used to Zoom and Teams conferences. The concern would have been far greater had the topic of the interview been of a sensitive or personal nature or the interviewees of a young age.

Case study interview questions are usually fluid rather than rigid (Yin, 2014). The fluidity and less structured interview format allow a researcher to ask additional questions and get more detailed and in-depth answers from the interviewee, which was a great advantage in this research. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher has a predetermined list of questions to cover, but unplanned talk and questions are allowed (Peer et al., 2012). The set

of research questions (Appendix D) was sent to the interviewees in advance with a notion that the final list may slightly change and additional questions may be asked. Given that the interviewees had different roles in the ECoC project and in the city, the questions asked were not identical. The interviews were held in Finnish, and all quotes in this paper are translations made by the researcher.

The possibility of interviewing young adults for the purpose of this study was also considered. Respondents of the survey were given the opportunity to leave their contact details for a possible interview, and some young adults did volunteer for an interview. In-depth interviews could certainly have generated more insights and understanding about the research topic. However, eventually no interviews were held with young adults for two main reasons. First of all, given the scope of the master's thesis, only a very small number of interviews could have been conducted in addition to the other methods of data collection. The sample would therefore not have been enough to be representative of the views and experiences of young adults in the wide Oulu2026 region. Second, since the contact details were collected in a way that guaranteed the respondents' anonymity, it was not possible to select interviewees based on, for example, their experience of marginalisation or disadvantage. A small number of interviews with a random selection of interviewees was thus not considered to be a suitable or sufficient additional data collection method.

### **5.2.3 Document Analysis**

Document analysis refers to the collection, review, interrogation, and analysis of different forms of text and primary source of data collection. Unlike other sources of data, such as interviews and surveys, which are generated by the researcher, the documents that are analysed are existing, previously produced texts generated by someone else. Because of that, the process of data collection differs from the other methods. The main steps of document analysis include planning the different parts of the process; gathering the documents; reviewing the authenticity and credibility of the documents and exploring their possible agenda or biases; interrogating the content and context and exploring what the documents aim to convey and what else they convey; and reflecting and refining the process, as the document analysis is an iterative and continuous process. (O'Leary, 2004)

The document analysis in this research focused on the bid book of Oulu2026. I chose to

study only the parts of the bid book that I found to be most relevant for the aim of this research: the outreach strategy, parts of the communications strategy, relevant programme lines, and specific projects presented. The analysis consisted of content analysis and critical discourse analysis, as will be explained in chapter 5.3.3.

### **5.3 Data Analysis: From Data to Understanding**

Mixed and multiple methods were also employed to analyse the collected data. Data analysis includes examining, categorising, tabulating, testing, or otherwise combining and connecting the collected evidence in order to produce empirically based findings (Yin, 2014). It requires keeping sense of the overall project in a critical, reflexive and iterative manner, cycling between the data and the theoretical and methodological frameworks (O’Leary, 2004). The analysis process was not straightforward but included cycling between the original data, findings from the separately made data analyses, and the overall analysis. At all stages of the analysis, I kept the research question and theoretical framework in mind to keep focused on relevant parts of the data collected. In the following sub-chapters, I will describe in more detail the different stages and methods of the analysis process.

#### ***5.3.1 Survey Analysis: Connecting Numeric and Verbal Data***

In this essentially qualitatively driven research, the aim of the survey was not to generalise from the quantitative findings, but rather to support the qualitative analysis and to generate insights about the selected case. Minimal statistical analysis was found to be sufficient for the purpose. As O’Leary (2004) explains, minimal statistical analysis is justifiable when the goal is to do just basic statistical analysis or to support qualitative data analysis.

Yin (2014) suggests starting the analysis by “playing” with the data in search of patterns, insights, or concepts with the aim to define one’s priorities in terms of what to analyse and why. I followed Yin’s advice and started by playing with the data to get an overall image of the responses before moving on to analysing it in more structured and informed ways.

As O’Leary (2004) explains, both describing the data and inferring meaning from it requires understanding and distinguishing the variables – in other words, identifying what depends on what. It was important to identify and be conscious of the dependent and independent

variables throughout the analysis. In the descriptive stage, as suggested by O’Leary (2004), I aimed to summarise the basic features of the collected data and to present the descriptions in a manageable and comprehensible form. For this stage of data analysis, Microsoft Excel, and the analytic tools of SurveyPAL were used.

Only basic inferential statistical analysis was conducted. Inferential statistics refers to drawing conclusions that go beyond descriptions by, for example, estimating generalisability of the data, testing hypotheses and the validity of the findings, and – essentially – analysing and explaining the statistical significance of the findings (O’Leary, 2004). In more advanced inferential analysis, SPSS or other such tools would be needed, but they were not considered necessary for the scope, nature, and purpose of this study.

The open fields of the survey were analysed using the inductive content analysis method. Content analysis involves coding, categorising, and tabulating textual data, and it is suitable for exploring what is said in a text, how it is said, and how often (Rugg & Petre, 2007). Coding and categorising were done in an inductive way, referring to an approach to analysis in which categories are derived from the data (e.g. O’Leary, 2004; Rugg & Petre, 2007; Yin, 2014). Later, however, the categories were matched with themes rising from the theoretical framework, and the parts that were irrelevant from the point of view of the research question were not considered in the analysis. The coding and categorisation were done manually since the amount of data was manageable without any specific software. Content analysis also allows a quantitative analysis, as categories can be quantified and compared (Peer et al., 2012). Where it was considered relevant and valuable – for example, in the case of open-ended answers in multiple choice questions – the categorised data was presented quantitatively in a table format to support further analyses.

### **5.3.2 *A Multi-level Intersectional Analysis***

After employing the content analysis method, an intersectional multi-level analysis was conducted to explore, understand, and bring to light categories of inequality and power differences from the point of view of young adults in the Oulu2026 region. A multi-level intersectional analysis presented by Winker and Degele (2011) was adapted to fit the purpose of this study. They suggest that the multi-level approach allows the researched to analyse interactions of different categories on the levels of identity constructions, symbolic

representations, and social structures. They present eight steps to facilitate the multi-level analysis:

1. Describing identity constructions to identify categories of differentiation.
2. Identifying symbolic representations to bring to light the norms, values and ideologies that are referred to.
3. Finding references to social structures to find out if and how the respondents' narratives of their social practices relate to structural power relations.
4. Identifying interrelations of central categories on the three levels of identity constructs, symbolic representation, and social structures.
5. Comparing and clustering subject constructions by inductively identifying dimensions of comparison.
6. Supplementing structural data and analysing power relations to gain further understanding of the structural level.
7. Deepening the analysis of denominated representations with additional data sources, such as media, advertising, and written documents.
8. Elaborating interrelations in the overall demonstration with the aim to generalise beyond the single case and type.

Their framework was used and adapted to the extent that it was suitable for the purpose of this study. Steps 1–3 were followed as advised by Winker and Degele, and step 4 was followed to the extent that it was possible with the survey material. The final steps could not have been reliably addressed in this study.

### ***5.3.3 Interview and Document Analysis: Making Sense of Speech and Text***

Content analysis of interview data was done in a very similar way as with the qualitative survey material. I began by coding the data and then dividing it into categories. However, the approach was more deductive than it was with the survey data. I had a predefined idea of categories and themes guided and informed by the research question and theoretical framework. However, I did not let the predetermined categories and themes restrict the analysis too much. The categories were modified based on the findings, while still ensuring that they were in line with the research question. In other words, my way of analysing the data was not purely inductive nor deductive, but rather a combination of the two approaches.

The interview data was coded first on an Excel sheet, and then reorganised and categorised utilising a mind mapping tool. When categories were defined, quotes from the interviews were organised in their respective categories.

Content analysis on the bid book was conducted by first highlighting relevant parts and making notes, and then coding and categorising the data on Excel. The categorisation was done in a deductive way, using the categories formed in the interview analysis phase.

In addition to the content analysis method, critical discourse analysis was employed to analyse the bid book discourse. Critical discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary approach to analysis (Amoussou & Allagbé, 2018), which can be used to investigate social problems in different fields (Bloor & Bloor, 2007, as cited in Amoussou & Allagbé, 2018). It examines questions of power and resistance, and the capacity of discourse to privilege or reaffirm certain realities over others (Cassell et al., 2018). The aim of critical discourse analysis is to critically investigate social inequality as it is manifested, signalled, constituted, and legitimised by language and discourse (Wodak, 2001). Fairclough and Wodak (1997, as cited in Amoussou & Allagbé, 2018) outline eight basic principles of critical discourse analysis: (a) it addresses social problems; (b) power relations are discursive; (c) discourse constitutes society and culture; (d) discourse does ideological work; (e) discourse is historical; (f) the link between text and society is mediated; (g) discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory; and (h) discourse is a form of social action. Guided by several questions outlined in separate publications by Fairclough and Huckin (as cited in Dolón et al., 2006), I chose to approach the critical discourse analysis through an exploration of vocabulary, transitivity, mood and modality, topicality, and presuppositions.

#### ***5.3.4 Combining Findings and Analyses***

Having analysed the data from the different sources separately, I brought the findings together for a comprehensive analysis. As O’Leary (2004) reminds us, the overall aim of data analysis is to move from raw data to meaningful understanding. The final stage of analysis thus involved making comparisons, finding connections and contradictions, identifying patterns and paradoxes, exploring the data and findings from different theoretical perspectives, and developing the findings into meaningful insights. This stage of the analysis included making notes, creating tables, mind maps, and comparative figures, and cycling

between the different sources of evidence.

I found the different sources of evidence and different methods employed to complement each other in an insightful way. A comparative and critical analysis revealed contradictions and similarities in the data and brought to light relevant issues and questions that would have been missed without the mixed and multiple methods.

#### **5.4 Critical Reflections on the Research Process**

The findings and conclusions of this research are a result of a careful familiarisation with the case and the theoretical framework, data collection, and analysis. They are, however, also a result of several choices, prioritisations, and interpretations made in the research process. My values and worldviews as a researcher have inevitably affected the research process and outcomes. Therefore, to enable a critical and informed reading and to increase the validity and reliability of this study, I have aimed to be open and reflective of my own standpoint within and influence on the research and its outcomes. I have aspired to maintain an unbiased, critical, and reflective approach throughout the research to address possible bias in different stages of the process.

The choice of mixed research method and case study research design requires a critical word of reflection, too. The mixed research method was time consuming and challenging, and the case study approach turned out to be more complex than I had initially realised or expected. For a novice researcher, there were several lessons to be learned on the way. However, even though there are some shortcomings in the data, I argue that the chosen approach was a suitable and useful one for this study. A purely qualitative study could have resulted in more in-depth insights and understanding but, as a starting point, I think a study with an overview of the situation, with different perspectives and methods, was useful to begin to understand a phenomenon that has not previously been studied. The findings can be treated as preliminary and incomplete, but they provide important insights and good ground for future research, as will be discussed in chapter eight.

To ensure the quality of the research, questions of construct validity (the researcher's ability to address shortcomings in the research and the researcher's own preconceptions in a way that they will not bias the study), internal validity (the ability of the research design to

measure what it aims to measure), and external validity (evaluation of the generalisability of research findings) have been considered (Yin, 2014). I have addressed construct validity by using multiple sources of evidence, maintaining a chain of evidence, and having the citations and direct quotes validated by the interviewees. The internal validity was evaluated by exploring possible rival explanations and with a critical examination of causal links. In terms of external validity, it has been openly discussed that the results do not allow for far reaching generalisations but, rather, provide some interesting insight and new understanding about the topic of the study.



## 6 INTRODUCING THE CASE: OULU2026

In this chapter, I will briefly present the city of Oulu and the wider region and describe the parts of the bid book that were considered relevant for this study. Analysis of the content of the bid book in relation to the research findings, theoretical framework, and wider context will be presented and discussed in chapters seven and eight.

Oulu, located in the county of North Ostrobothnia in Northern Finland, is the biggest city of Northern Scandinavia and the fifth biggest city of Finland with a population of over 207 000 (City of Oulu, 2020). Although easily accessible by train, bus, car or airplane, Oulu is remotely located from other bigger cities in Finland – not to mention Europe.

Oulu was applying for the ECoC title with 32 other cities and municipalities from three different counties. The area stretches from the west coast all the way to the eastern border with Russia. The wider Oulu2026 region is home to about 500 000 inhabitants. (Oulu2026, 2021)

Oulu is generally associated with technology rather than culture. Home for one of the biggest universities in Finland and two universities of applied sciences, Oulu is also known as a student city. A survey conducted by the Center for Cultural Policy Research shows that these associations still hold true in the minds of Ouluians as well as people living in other parts of Finland (Cupore, 2019).

A relatively big part of the city's population consists of young adults but while Oulu is still growing, the population is now aging fast. Oulu is struggling with a similar challenge as many other cities in Europe: the number of babies born is decreasing while the number of old people is rapidly increasing. Furthermore, social contrasts are big, and 8% of the city's population use 80% of the social and health services' resources. (Rantala-Korhonen et al., 2020)

Oulu is struggling to engage its young professionals, as many young adults leave for the South of Finland after graduating (Rantala-Korhonen et al., 2020). At the same time, while the high youth unemployment rates of 2020 have come down to 13,4% in September 2021 (City of Oulu, 2021), youth unemployment continues to be an issue.

In terms of Oulu2026, the mentioned Cupore survey also shows that the project was the least well-known among the under-24-year-olds. The survey shows that the main things preventing young people aged 18–24 from participating in cultural activities and services are lack of money (58%), lack of time (46%), lack of information (46%), having no friends to go with (43%), too long or difficult distance to travel (30%), wrong kind of selection (28%), lack of interest (23%), and life situation (23%). It is also interesting to note that the selection of cultural activities and services seems to be most suitable for people over 65 years old. The long or difficult distance to travel challenge was clearly highlighted in the merger areas. The survey results suggest that 66% of people aged 18–24 have a high sense of belonging to Oulu. Younger people were less certain than other age groups that they would be living in Oulu five years from the time of the survey. (Cupore, 2019)

## **6.1 Cultural Climate Change and the Role of Young Adults**

The overarching concept of Oulu2026 is Cultural Climate Change. According to the bid book, Cultural Climate Change is about reconnecting with the world and creating a new sense of togetherness, and about turning Oulu from a hard tech city into a creative and vibrant city with soul, potential, and culture. (Oulu2026, 2021)

The reconnecting flagship of the overall project is called Peace Machine. The Peace Machine combines art and technology to create an immersive aesthetic experience. Its aim is to look for new ways of conflict resolution; promotion of dialogue; improving the cultural climate in Europe; finding common interests; and enhancing a sense of shared humanity. The project addresses issues such as polarisation, hate speech, discrimination, and othering. (Oulu2026, 2021)

Although not targeted specifically at young adults, the Peace Machine flagship is highly relevant from the point of view of this study, especially in terms of cultural citizenship.

Oulu2026 has three main objectives, all linked to ECoC action and all with some level of relevance for the purpose of this study: first, Vibrant, gripping city; Balanced community; and Creative Region. Improved cultural participation is mentioned as one of the key components in reaching the objectives. (Oulu2026, 2021)

The Vibrant, gripping city objective is linked to the ECoC objectives of strengthening the capacity of the cultural sector and its links with other sectors and using culture to raise the international profile of cities through culture. The aims include strengthening the reputation of Oulu and turning net migration positive among young adults in 2027. (Oulu2026, 2021)

Balanced community, the most relevant objective from the point of view of this study, responds to the ECoC objectives of safeguarding and promoting the diversity of cultures in Europe and highlighting the common features shared by them; increasing residents' sense of belonging to a common cultural space; and widening access to and participation in culture. The aim is to create a balanced community by enhancing participation, addressing barriers and respecting diversity, and to enhance a sense of belonging and togetherness on local, regional, and European levels. (Oulu2026, 2021)

Finally, the third main objective, Creative region is related to the ECoC objectives of fostering the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities, and enhancing the range, diversity, and European dimension of the cultural offering in cities. The expected outcomes are strongly related to cultural and creative economy, including things such as improving operating conditions and earning models; growing the amount of public funding for culture; creating and artistically diverse, high quality cultural programme; interdisciplinary collaboration; increasingly combining art and technology; and increasing cultural collaboration on regional, national, European, and international levels. (Oulu2026, 2021)

The three central themes around which the artistic and cultural programme is built are Wild City, Cool Contrasts, and Brave Hinterland. Wild City focuses on creative placemaking; Cool Contrasts is about understanding and respecting differences, connecting with another, and building a sense of togetherness; and Brave Hinterland is about living, collaborating, and connecting with one another and the nature in the periphery of Europe. (Oulu2026, 2021)

## **6.2 Presentation of Relevant Programme Lines**

### ***6.2.1 Urban Boost: New Opportunities for Young Adults***

The programme line Urban Boost is specifically targeted at young adults. It aims to give

young people “the opportunity to build the future on their own terms and to challenge outdated practices”. The programme line consists of three projects: Untamed Office, Agent 026, MC Oulu, and Generation Xulu. (Oulu2026, 2021)

The Untamed Office project will set up a youthful production office and offer young unemployed people workshops and coaching through which they get to develop skills for working in the culture industry. Collaboration will be done with European partners to offer international opportunities and encounters for young people. (Oulu2026, 2021)

The Agent 026 project, on the other hand, is specifically targeted at students in the vocational school. The aim is to enable young people to incorporate culture into their future jobs. Young participants will work as cultural agents who will perform 2,026 interventions in the organisations and companies in the area. In addition, arts and culture will be brought to the life of the vocational school through teaching and events. (Oulu2026, 2021)

The MC Oulu project offers young musicians the opportunity to be mentored by professionals in the music industry. A music story of the North will be created in international and interdisciplinary collaboration. (Oulu2026, 2021)

Finally, Generation Xulu is a multimedia performance which aims to empower young people to realise their potential in the creative field, and to make Oulu look attractive and vibrant in the eyes of the youth. In the project, young people will get to express their utopias, dystopias, and ideas about the future of Oulu. (Oulu2026, 2021)

### ***6.2.2 Creative Villages: Vibrance Through Creative Placemaking***

The Creative Villages programme line is all about creative placemaking. It aims to “reshape the city and its cultural climate by adding places for creativity in the urban space.” Three projects within this programme line are of special interest: Pikisaari Creative Island, Hiukkavaara – Creative Boot Camp, and Creative Campus. Pikisaari is an old tar distillery, and today a home for arts and crafts studios in central Oulu. Nowadays, most doors are not open to visitors, but Oulu2026 aims to change that by turning Pikisaari into a common cultural hub and vibrant urban village for artists and cultural professionals, Oulu’s inhabitants, and tourists. Attractiveness will be increased by year-round open spaces, restaurants, and communal events. (Oulu2026, 2021)

Hiukkavaara, on the other hand, is an old military area, whose barracks have been taken over by about 250 bands, 50 visual artists and many sports and crafts actors. Oulu2026 will open Hiukkavaara to the wider public, supporting restaurants, festivals, and events in the area in collaboration with European partners. Public accessibility and sustainability are mentioned as goals. (Oulu2026, 2021)

The Creative Campus project wants to connect the university campus with the city by bringing science and student culture into the city and arts and events to the university campus. Spaces and places in the city centre will serve as open arenas for science events, and special events will bring science closer to everyone. In addition, the university campus facilities will host arts and cultural events. (Oulu2026, 2021)

### ***6.2.3 Relevant Projects from Other Programme Lines***

Besides the two programme lines described above, Oulu2026 has three other projects from different programme lines that are relevant for this study. First, a project called Voice the Taboo! addresses mental health issues and is relevant especially from the point of view of youth disillusionment. The project will be produced by the local mental health association together with an international team of artists. The aim to change attitudes related to mental health and to address prejudice and stereotypes together with people who suffer from or have a history of mental health issues. (Oulu2026, 2021)

Second, the From Here to Art Travel Agency project will create trips to the region with people from Oulu as travel guides who will use art to show their unique perspectives on the city. The guides will come from diverse backgrounds and the trips can vary according to the guide's vision. The project is essentially a community art project which aims to engage with the local community and to lower the threshold for participation. "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", the bid book declares. (Oulu2026, 2021)

Finally, Frozen Nights is an international film event and competition that brings to Oulu young people aged 13–22 from different countries and backgrounds. Young people are offered both capacity development and networking opportunities, as they get to work with film education professionals and to meet peers from near and far. (Oulu2026, 2021)

### 6.3 Outreach Strategy

The bid book of Oulu2026 describes how cultural co-creation and involving the local population are at the heart of the project and have guided the project and programme selection. The whole process was started by hearing children and young people. (Oulu2026, 2021)

“Equal opportunities are not enough. Barriers to participation will be removed consciously and systematically”, the bid book states (p. 74). The bid book describes that through meetings with diverse groups and representatives, it has been ensured that the views of minorities and different groups have been reflected in the bid. (Oulu2026, 2021)

Moreover, Oulu2026 has held workshops with a range of communities, including ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+, and disabled people who have worked as a consultation forum in the process. Collaboration with the forum is planned to continue. The forum has designed an Equality and Diversity Strategy for Oulu2026 (Table 2). The principles of courage, diversity, safety, and enabling are said guide all ECoC year activities. In addition, accessibility guidelines will be created for all Oulu2026 producers to follow. (Oulu2026, 2021)

In Oulu, 8% of the population consume 80% of the social and welfare budget (Oulu2026, 2021). In addition, according to a 2018 study by the University of Turku, Oulu has more disadvantaged suburbs than any other large city in the country (e.g. Haapsaari, 2018; Hinkula, 2018).

The bid book points out that during the pandemic, the most disadvantaged communities have suffered most in economic and social terms. To respond to these challenges, Oulu2026 wants to improve and find preventative models related to community wellbeing and health. The Art and wellbeing plan of the city of Oulu is noted be included in the process, with the aim to provide more opportunities to participate in and enjoying culture. (Oulu2026, 2021)

As specific groups of attention, the Sámi people, elderly people, youth, and children are mentioned. Young people are described as the strength and future potential of the region. “We will also encourage young adults in our area to remain here after their studies. There will be no shortage of things to do”, the bid book declares. (Oulu2026, 2021, p. 76)

In terms of expanding the audience base, the bid book emphasises as a central action to take

culture into spaces and places where people spend their time. At least half of the cultural programme will take place outside of traditional cultural institutions. In addition, about 40% of the programme will happen outside central Oulu. Furthermore, a big part of the programme and activities will be free of charge, further lowering the threshold to participate. (Oulu2026, 2021)

As part of the outreach plan, the bid book describes the volunteer programme. The aim is to have volunteers from all over Oulu and from different social groups. Collaboration with the fourth sector is mentioned as an important part of the volunteer programme. When the final bid book was written, Oulu2026 already had about 250 Cultural Ambassadors registered. Eventually, the aim is to involve about 20,000 people as volunteers or ambassadors. (Oulu2026, 2021)

**Table 2**

*Oulu2026 Equality and Diversity Strategy*

<b>Principles</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Actions</b>
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>

*Note.* Table copied from the Bid Book of Oulu2026 by Rantala-Korhonen et al., 2021, p. 75.

## **6.4 Marketing and Communications Strategy**

Marketing and communication are an essential part of outreach activities. Oulu2026 is the first ECoC to have its own communications strategy for children and young people. The aim of the strategy is to make the voices of young people heard. There will be a children and youth advisory group for communications, and children and young people will get to communicate with their own voice and to decide on the content and channels to use. (Oulu2026, 2021)

Other relevant marketing strategies from the point of view of this study include creating the means for peer-to-peer sharing and human communication; engaging with hybrid communication channels to increase accessibility and reach diverse groups of people; and addressing the digital divide. (Oulu2026, 2021)



## 7 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I will present the findings and analysis of the data collected. The chapter is divided thematically into relevant sub-chapters. In the presentation of findings and analysis, I will discuss the results of different data collection and analysis methods together in a comparative and reflective manner. The survey findings are presented in form of figures and tables in Appendices A and B. When referring to a certain figure or table, I will mention the number of the figure or table preceded by the letter A when referring to figures, and B when referring to tables (e.g. Figure A1, Table B1).

A total number of 193 responses to the survey were received from 24 municipalities. One of the responses seemed to contain unreliable data and was therefore deleted, leaving the total size of the population to be analysed to 192. Because of the limited number of responses from and the relatively small size of the municipalities, I will not discuss findings per municipality in order to protect the privacy and anonymity of respondents. I will discuss some findings specifically in the context of the city of Oulu and make comparisons with the rest of the Oulu2026 region. In some questions, I will show answers separately from Oulu, Kajaani and Kalajoki – the three municipalities from which the biggest number of responses was received – and present the rest of the municipalities in one group “others”. In the case of Oulu, Kajaani and Kalajoki, I feel confident that I can show numeric answers without compromising the anonymity of respondents. When directly quoting answers, I will not connect them to detailed demographic data in order to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents.

It is important to point out that a large majority, almost 77%, of respondents identified as female, while only about 19% as male, and 4% as non-binary (Figure A2). The gender divide was similar in the 2019 survey conducted by Cupore (2019). The difficulty of engaging young male respondents could suggest that disillusionment, lack of motivation, or a lack of a sense of belonging are bigger problems among young men than young women. However, this is just an assumption, and more research is needed to understand the underlying reasons.

In the document analysis, I have only focused on the parts of the bid book that are most relevant from the perspective of this study. My analysis of the content and discourse are

therefore focused on the outreach strategy, parts of the communications strategy, relevant programme lines, and specific projects presented in the bid book. Similarly, the analysis of the interview data focuses only on the parts that are relevant for the specific purpose of this study.

## **7.1 Cultural Participation: Emerging Issues and Responses**

### ***7.1.1 Cultural Offering: Interest, Availability, and Accessibility***

The interviews and bid book clearly demonstrated that Oulu2026 has adopted a bottom-up cultural planning approach in their understanding of culture. Culture is understood in the broad sense as a way of life and as what counts as culture to its participants, as recommended by Mercer (e.g. 2006, p. 8), rather than just the arts.

Indeed, in the context of cultural planning and for a bottom-up approach to cultural participation, it is essential to get an understanding of what counts as culture for those who take part in it. Therefore, to understand what young adults in the Oulu2026 region consider to be culture and what forms of culture they value, respondents were asked what cultural resources are important for them and what important cultural resources are available for them in their hometowns. Moreover, the questionnaire aimed to find out how young adults evaluate the cultural services and activities in their hometowns and in the Oulu2026 region in relation to their needs and aspirations.

Performing arts (41%); Cafes, bars, pubs, and nightclubs (83%), film and video (35%); libraries, literature, and reading (33%); and green spaces (32%) stood out as the top five most important cultural resources among the respondents. The list of most important cultural looks slightly different when looking at the cultural resources available in the respondents' hometowns, with libraries (70%); open spaces (63%); cafes, bars, pubs, and nightclubs (54%); youth centres and houses (53%); and green spaces (52%) as the most popular five resources. (Figures A12 and A13)

The responses suggest that there is room for improvement in the cultural activities and services to better match the needs and aspirations of young adults, especially in the other municipalities outside of Oulu (Figure A15). Respondents from Oulu had the most positive

estimations: about 66% of them felt that Oulu's cultural services and activities match their needs and aspirations either pretty well or very well. Respondents from other municipalities (other than Oulu, Kajaani, or Kalajoki), on the other hand, had the most negative estimations, with 45% thinking that their hometown's cultural activities and services match their needs and aspirations either pretty well or very well.

The respondents living outside of Oulu gave more positive estimations to the cultural offering of the Oulu2026 region than that of their hometowns, whereas Ouluians gave more positive estimations to their hometown than the region (Table B7). This suggests that respondents both from Oulu and from the other municipalities consider the cultural offering of Oulu to be better than the offering of their hometowns. The findings also suggest that young Ouluians do not consider the cultural offering in other municipalities to bring new opportunities for them.

Jaana Potkonen (personal communication, 29 June 2021), the executive producer of art and wellbeing at the city of Oulu, pointed out that those who plan the public services tend to be middle-aged people, who are quite far from the lives and realities of young adults. Potkonen highlighted that in designing cultural services, young people should be listened to more, and young people's voices should be heard better than they now are.

Indeed, from the point of view of active cultural participation and cultural citizenship, involving young adults in the design and decision-making of cultural services is of fundamental importance.

28% of respondents felt that some cultural resources, services, or activities were missing or undervalued in their hometown (Figure A14, Tables A5 and A6). The percentage of "I don't know" answers was high, almost 52%, which could suggest that the question was not completely understood, and a clarification could have been useful. Respondents hoped for more cultural and outdoor spaces; more diversity of artistic and cultural contents; more opportunities and offering; different types of museums; free activities; sports and exercise facilities and opportunities; LGTBQIA+ spaces and activities; more activities and opportunities related to gaming; and more activities related to minority, alternative and subcultures. English speaking offering was also hoped for.

In terms of missing cultural resources, a respondent from Kajaani noted: "There aren't really

any activities or resources suitable for over 18-year-olds, besides bars and cafes. There's a lack of events and free activities for our age group." Another respondent from the same city was on similar lines: "Recreational activities are limited to a small number of choices. There are very few options and even the library is small." A respondent from Oulu hoped for "a common cultural space where one could go without belonging to an association, a place to go play instruments etc., a place targeted to young adults and older." Some respondents pointed to LGBTQIA+ spaces and activities, as well as different minority, alternative and subcultures as both missing and undervalued cultural resources. One respondent from a small municipality, for example, noted that minority cultural activities are both missing and undervalued in their hometown: "Things related to minority cultures: in a small town there aren't many different or out of the 'ordinary' hobbies or ways to express oneself."

As a challenge related to interesting cultural offering for young adults, Forsblom (personal communication, July 5, 2021) pointed out that arts and culture have diverged in the past 10 years. He noted that it is difficult to get young people involved in traditional arts, or the so-called high culture, which tend to be directed from top-down. He pointed out that while Oulu continues to target most resources at traditional arts institutions, the city has fallen behind other bigger cities in terms of urban cultural activities, spaces for cultural and creative activity, and hybrid productions. "The way I see it, is that where Oulu is lagging behind is understanding that for young people culture is more and more about spaces, places and hybrid productions", he explained. The need for spaces and new, different kinds of cultural contents was also highlighted in the survey responses.

Forsblom pointed out that instead of seeing the cultural centres as a separate thing from other daily things, the ECoC project should aim to find ways of making culture a part of everyday life, enhancing creativity and inspiration. This is what the Creative Campus project, for example, aims to do.

Interestingly, the reachability of cultural services and activities (Figures A17 and A18, Table B8) seemed to be a bigger issue than the offering itself. Respondents from Oulu and Kajaani estimated their ability to reach interesting cultural services and activities in their hometowns better than respondents from other municipalities did. Especially Kalajokki stood out in terms of negative estimations of reachability of cultural offering: 44% of respondents felt that interesting cultural offering was either quite difficult or very difficult for them to reach in

their hometown.

The problem of long distances and difficulty to reach cultural activities and events was recognised by Oulu2026. According to Rantala-Korhonen, difficulty to physically access cultural services, activities, and events is a real challenge in many parts of the region because of the long distances and lack of public transportation. Indeed, the need to develop public transportation had stood out in the Oulu2026 participatory process in 2017.

Interestingly, though, young adults from outside of Oulu estimated the reachability of interesting cultural activities and services to be clearly better in the Oulu2026 region than in their own hometowns, whereas Ouluians estimated the reachability of services in the region to be the same as the reachability in their hometown. Again, this suggests, that while Oulu is seen to bring more opportunities for young adults from the smaller municipalities – despite the distances and lack of public transportation –, Ouluians do not consider the region to bring new opportunities for them.

Rantala-Korhonen noted that young people mostly organise cultural activities for and by themselves. As an example of such self-organised activity of the youth, Rantala-Korhonen mentioned the barracks in the old military area in Hiukkavaara, which are now used for training by local bands. She pointed out that the city had nothing to do with organising such opportunities. Because of the importance of self-created activities and opportunities and different forms of youth culture, Rantala-Korhonen believed that the cultural youthwork of the city – targeted mainly at those young adults who need socio-cultural support – has a rather marginal significance in the lives of young people at large.

### ***7.1.2 Cultural Participation: Habits, Opportunities, Barriers and Motivations***

The most popular monthly cultural activities to attend or participate in among the respondents were cafes, bars, pubs, and nightclubs (44%); libraries, literature and reading (44%); and sports and recreation (38%). As an annual – but more rare than monthly – cultural activities, going to the cinema (59%) and festivals and events (45%) were the most popular (Figures A18 and A19). While these results partly show what is popular among young adults, they also show what is and what is not easily accessible for them. As we have seen in the previous section about cultural resources, there is room for improvement in the accessibility

and reachability of cultural activities and services in all municipalities, especially the smaller ones outside of Oulu.

In an open-ended question, the respondents had the opportunity to tell in their own words what kinds of cultural activities they would like to participate in more often (Table B9). Most answers were related to artistic and cultural content and programme (42 answers). Other answers included mentions of events and festivals (17 answers); activities and events related to sports and exercise (10 answers); and peer group activities (8 answers). In addition to specific types of activities, a few interesting themes and issues emerged from the open answers. First of all, the importance of accessibility and low threshold activities was present in several answers. Second, some respondents felt that there should be more opportunities to participate in different ways, while some just needed more information about different kinds of participation opportunities. Fourth, the importance of inclusion and feeling included came up in a few answers. Finally, as an overarching finding, there seems to be a clear need for addressing different types of barriers to participation with awareness of the plurality and diversity of the group of young adults.

Since cultural participation can be understood in many different ways, I wanted to find out not just *what* cultural activities young people participate in but also *how* they participate. More specifically, I aimed to find out what ways and in which roles young adults participate and want to participate in culture. As Figure A21 shows, the most popular way to participate in cultural activities was clearly as an audience member, visitor, or customer, while the second most popular way of participation was as an active participant. Participating as a cultural activist, or as a journalist or blogger were the least popular answers. These could mean that participation as passive audiences or, perhaps, as ‘prosumers’ is the preferred way of participating among young adults. However, this should be examined critically. As answers to other questions in the survey suggest, there is a lot of room for improvement in terms of cultural participation opportunities and accessibility. It may, therefore, also be that young adults do not have enough opportunities or information about them for more active or different types of participation.

Indeed, as Figure A22 demonstrates, there is great potential to enhance more diverse ways of cultural participation, as young people seem to be willing to participate more often and in more diverse roles. It is especially noteworthy that besides audience members, visitors or

customers, a large number of young adults seem to be interested in participating more often as active participants and volunteers. There is also significant interest in participating as artists or creators or as organisers or managers of events and activities. These findings suggest great opportunities for Oulu2026 to enhance participation in the context of the ECoC and in the long-term.

Overall, the respondents gave negative estimations to their participation opportunities in their hometowns: the average grade on a scale from 0–10 was 4,75. Opportunities in the Oulu2026 region were estimated to be better, with an average grade of 6,12. Again, Oulu makes an exception: Ouluians estimated their participation opportunities to be better in Oulu than in the wider region.

The survey results (Figures A22 and A23) provide interesting insights into factors that support and prevent cultural participation among young adults. The most important factor helping and motivating cultural participation was having friends to go with (76%). Affordable prices (44%) and interesting and/or relevant offering (31%) were the second and third most important factors. The three most important factors preventing participation, on the other hand, were long distances (51%); lack of information about what is available (48%); and lack of friends to participate with (39%). In the open-ended answers – unsurprisingly – the Covid-19 pandemic was mentioned as a preventing factor in 18 different answers. Besides the pandemic, the identified barriers to participation also came up in the survey conducted by Cupore two years earlier (2019). The challenges of long distances, communication gaps, and the impact of Covid-19 were issues that Oulu2026 was aware of and had addressed in the bid book. The bid book also addresses the need to have low threshold and free-of-charge cultural activities, which seems to be in line with young adults' needs.

Comparing the barriers to participation in Oulu with those of other municipalities (Figure B24), some interesting insights emerge: Ouluians did not consider long distances to be a major barrier, whereas distances were clearly the biggest barrier for young adults from elsewhere in the region. Ouluians, on the other hand, considered expensive prices to be one of the main barriers, alongside lack of information and lack of friends to participate with. These responses demonstrate the difference in the nature of challenges that different municipalities in the region face. The results confirm the finding made by Cupore (2019)

that the challenges of long or difficult distances are highlighted in the merger areas.

Rantala-Korhonen explained that there are many young people in the region who are not familiar with different forms of cultural participation and opportunities, and who feel that culture is not for them. This, she explained, is one of the issues Oulu2026 aims to address. She pointed out that through Oulu2026, more and increasingly diverse groups of people could find their way to culture and notice that it indeed is for them too. She also pointed out that many young people in the Oulu2026 region come from religious families and have stricter boundaries in terms of cultural participation.

Potkonen explained that creating opportunities for participation and more accessible services is one of the central goals in the recent Art and wellbeing plan of Oulu. One concrete course of action, Potkonen explained, is developing and enhancing the use of Kaikukortti, which aims at enabling participation in cultural events and institutions for people in weaker economic situations (for more information about Kaikukortti, visit [www.kaikukortti.fi](http://www.kaikukortti.fi)).

### ***7.1.3 Impact of Covid-19 on Cultural Participation***

During the Covid-19 pandemic, over 40% of the respondents had not participated in any cultural activities or events (Figure A30). Over half of the respondents replied that their participation in cultural activities had decreased significantly (Figure A31). The pandemic had some impacts on the respondents' level of motivation to participate in cultural activities. Over 40% of all respondents felt that their motivation to participate had decreased at least a little bit (Figure A32). In terms of virtual and digital cultural activities, 38% felt that their motivation to participate had decreased (Figure A33). This might suggest a general tiredness, lack of motivation, or digital fatigue among young adults caused by the pandemic.

The open answers (Table B10) confirmed these findings and brought some additional information. One respondent noted that digital cultural content had been poorly organised, and several respondents explained that digital or virtual contents have not been able to replace live participation. One respondent described the situation as follows: "Remote studying consumes energy, so when one is already tired of staring at the screen, there's no energy left to take part in remote events".

As emerging issues, the findings suggest that while the digital and/or virtual participation



opportunities have suited some, they have not been available or appealing to others. The findings also confirm that participation has decreased, and young adults seem to miss live events and gatherings. Moreover, remote working, studying, and participation might indeed consume more energy than live gatherings, and that raises the question of whether the revitalising potential of culture is partly lost in virtual and digital alternatives. The risk of digital fatigue caused by the pandemic is an important issue for Oulu2026 to address in the post-pandemic period. The findings also confirm that there is a more general lack of relevant participation opportunities not related to Covid-19.

#### ***7.1.4 Minority, Alternative and Subcultures***

Rantala-Korhonen hoped that Oulu2026 could support all kinds of youth subcultures, thus strengthening young people's sense that what they do is important and meaningful. She also hoped that Oulu2026 could be a wide manifestation of fourth sector activity, where people would work together for a common project and goal.

The importance of minority, alternative, and/or subcultures was asked from the survey respondents in an open-ended question (Table B4). This was done to avoid predefining the meaning of minority, alternative and subcultures and to hear how young people understand and define them. However, it could have been useful to offer some kind of a definition for the terms minority, alternative, and subcultures, as they were not clear for all. One respondent, for example, answered "I am not sure what is meant by this", and another noted in the free field at the very end of the survey, that "Some concepts were a bit unclear, for example, I had to google what a subculture means". This is an important point to consider in future research: how to be clear and explain all concepts well enough without defining things and concepts on behalf of the respondents.

However, many insightful answers were received through the open-ended question. Several answers emphasised the importance of a diversity of sub-, alternative and minority cultures, and a couple of respondents found it important to have subcultural expressions in artistic and cultural contents. As specific minority, alternative and subcultures that were considered important, the following were mentioned: LGTBQIA+; the Sámi culture; E-sports, gaming, and digital culture; and underground and urban culture.

### ***7.1.5 Belonging, Inclusion, and Representation***

The respondents' evaluations of their sense of belonging, inclusion, and representation in their hometowns and in the Oulu2026 region were far from excellent (Figure A26). Knowing that the Oulu2026 region is a wide region with a lot of internal differences, I found it interesting to explore the responses with a comparative view of different municipalities.

As Rantala-Korhonen pointed out, the municipalities are very different from one another. She explained that there are small municipalities, such as Ii and Hailuoto with rich cultural life and professional artists who have settled in because of the open and motivating atmosphere. On the other hand, there are small municipalities – often small places with a very religious profile – with significantly less cultural activities, services, or opportunities available. Because of these internal differences, the cultural participation challenges faced by different municipalities also vary. Rantala-Korhonen noted that creating a sense of togetherness and feeling of belonging to a common Oulu2026 region is a challenging task requiring a lot of communication efforts. She believed that technology could prove to be helpful in creating networks and a sense of community, especially among young people. So far, however, there were no concrete plans or projects aimed at bringing young people from different parts of the region together.

On average, respondents estimated their sense of belonging to their hometowns at 5,04 on a scale from 0–10. Sense of belonging to the Oulu2026 region was even lower; 4,98. Respondents from all other municipalities felt a stronger sense of belonging to their hometowns than to the Oulu2026 region, except for Kajaani where the respondents had a stronger sense of belonging to the region (grade 5,39) than to their hometown (grade 4,40).

Lack of a sense of belonging is a known challenge in Oulu. One specific challenge raised by Forsblom was that even though Oulu attracts students, the critical group of people aged 29–35 tend to move out, especially creative professionals who move to southern Finland for better employment opportunities. Rantala-Korhonen recognised the same issue of young adults moving out of Oulu, especially young women, which leads to a gender imbalance in many municipalities. Forsblom noted that more spaces, opportunities for networking, more funding, and renewed funding models would be needed to attract young creative professionals to stay in the area. More specifically, Forsblom mentioned cultural and creative

spaces to enable encounters between young people and creative professionals; more working spaces with accessible rents; more funding for makers and creators of culture; training in how to apply for funding; and new ways to support entrepreneurs, sole traders, and not-for-profit entrepreneurship in the cultural field as possible ways to make Oulu a more attractive city for young adults.

It is mentioned as one of the key aims of Oulu2026 to create opportunities and a more open cultural climate to enhance the sense of belonging among young people and young creative professionals and to make young adults want to stay in the region after graduating.

In terms of feeling included in and represented by the cultural life of their hometowns and the region, evaluations were equally low: on average 5,06 in the respondents' hometowns and 5,41 in the region. Interestingly, respondents from all municipalities, Oulu included, felt more included in and represented by the cultural life of the Oulu2026 region than by that of their hometowns. Despite these differences, all estimations regarding belonging, inclusion, and representation were still remarkably weak and require attention from Oulu2026.

One of the strategies of Oulu2026 to address issues related to inclusion and sense of belonging, is hiring an audience engagement manager and a community work manager. Forsblom explained that the person responsible for community work will work specifically with matters related to communality, inclusion, and participation.

#### ***7.1.6 Equality and Diversity of Expressions***

Rantala-Korhonen highlighted that equality has been an important consideration in the Oulu2026 project and that involving people from diverse backgrounds is at the core of the project:

*I personally find involving and mixing people from different backgrounds in all our events very important, and I think that is a core matter in what we are doing here...this [participation in the Oulu2026 project] does not require any cultural competence so that only certain kinds of people could participate. Instead, we need to modify our operations so that this is suitable for everyone. (Rantala-Korhonen, personal communication, June 28, 2021)*

She explained that Oulu2026 aims to make visible diverse cultural phenomena and

expressions, especially those that are often ignored when talking about culture. The aim is to recognise what people consider as culture and as something significant and important in their lives.

*This is not just arts in the traditional sense. We haven't built the programme around traditional art genres but have aimed at involving different kinds of phenomena. Our bidding team was also very heterogeneous; we didn't have just 'culture aunts and uncles' but people from different educational backgrounds. For example, we had many cultural anthropologists involved, so I believe that has kept us aware and conscious about building a programme that is not just for white, well-educated, middle-class people. (Rantala-Korhonen, personal communication, June 28, 2021)*

Rantala-Korhonen hoped that Oulu2026 could provoke discussion about the importance of culture and education for all. “In a complex democratic society, one cannot fully actualise their citizenship rights and potential without a certain level of knowledge base”, she noted.

As a current challenge related to diversity and cultural participation, Potkonen mentioned language as a major barrier for people from immigrant backgrounds.

*All materials should be available at least in English, and preferably in all the languages of the biggest language groups of each city...Having services in different languages is the basic starting point. There's room for improvement there, and also in increasing awareness at all levels. (Potkonen, personal communication, June 29, 2021)*

Both Forsblom and Rantala-Korhonen explained that Oulu2026 does not intend to make specific programme for special groups. Instead, the project aims to get people from different groups to participate in the planned programme and to suggest and create their own contents through the open calls. Forsblom emphasised that young people should be seen as active participants and makers of culture.

However, Forsblom noted that they have several productions in which different groups have been taken into account, for example, projects related to cultural wellbeing, mental health, and collaborations with the Sámi and people from immigrant backgrounds. “The biggest mistake we could have done with the Sámi and different special groups is developing a

programme idea and only asking them afterwards”, Forsblom explained.

### ***7.1.7 Minorities, Social Groups and Experiences of Marginalisation and Disadvantage***

Survey respondents were asked if they belong to any minorities or specific social groups. Because identity is understood to be plural, instead of offering only “Yes” and “No” answer options, the respondents also had a chance to answer that they partly belong to a certain minority or social group. Options “I don’t know” and “I prefer not to answer” were also included. If the respondent answered “Yes” or “Partly”, they were directed to further questions about the kinds of groups they belong to or identify with.

The number of “I don’t know” answers in the question about belonging to a minority or specific social group was remarkably high (44,3%). This could be because the term “specific social group” can feel somewhat vague. However, I did not want the term minority to limit the answers too much, especially because besides minority groups, people might have other group belongings that are meaningful for them. In addition, I wanted to avoid defining any groups as minorities and leave the power of definition for the respondents themselves. Therefore, even if the risk of vagueness was, to some extent, expected, “specific social groups” felt like a correct term to be used. However, more explanation of what was meant with the question would have been useful.

The pre-determined answer options – although they made the question more deductive in nature – were considered as necessary to make the question clearer and to allow an analysis of a large number of responses. Respondents were allowed to choose several options, add their own options, and clarify their answers in their own words, which, on the other hand, made the approach more inductive.

41,2% of all respondents either belonged or partly belonged to one or more specific social groups and/or minorities (Figure A7). The largest group was the LGBTQIA+ (57%), followed by religious (29,1%) and lifestyle (19%) groups (Figure A8).

9,9% of respondents had some kind of a physical, mental, cognitive, sensory, and/or other kind of disability that they felt affect their participation opportunities (Figure A9). The respondents had a chance to specify what kind of disability they have but answering was optional. The open answers included mentions of functional, mental, behavioural, metabolic,

neurological, neurodevelopmental, pediatric, physical, physiological, and sensory disorders. Disability was not considered as a factor causing marginalisation and/or disadvantage by the respondents.

For the purpose of this study, it was highly relevant to find out about the respondents' experiences of marginalisation and disadvantage (Figure A10). 18,7% of respondents felt that they belong to a marginalised or disadvantaged group, while 13% did not know whether they belonged to such group or not.

The most common causes of marginalisation and/or disadvantage were mental and/or physical health (44,4%), sexuality (41,7%), gender (41,7%), and social and economic position or class (41,7%) (Figure A11). Intersections of categories of difference and factors causing disadvantage and/or marginalisation were also identified (Table B3). They will be discussed later in the context of the intersectional analysis.

Rantala-Korhonen and Potkonen pointed to challenges in the education system that may cause marginalisation and inequality. Rantala-Korhonen pointed out that the way the Finnish education system divides young people into two groups after comprehensive school is an inequality creating challenge in the whole country:

*Part of the young people go to general upper secondary school, and they are taken good care of, ensuring that they get a good general education and learn to be culturally active citizens. And then the other part goes to vocational school, and especially after the vocational education renewal in 2018, it has been highlighted that for the people in vocational education it is enough to just learn to do the work they are trained for, and nothing else really matters...If I'm worried about something, I'm worried about how we are building an unequal society through our education system. It can already be seen in voting behaviour, for example, and I find that really worrying. (Rantala-Korhonen, personal communication, June 28, 2021)*

Potkonen also noted that after the compulsory education ends at the age of 18, connection may be lost with those young adults who do not continue to further studies, making it harder to enhance their involvement and participation in different services and activities.

When it comes to gender and sexual minorities, Potkonen explained that the conversation in

Oulu is still at the level of the “toilet discussion”, referring to the discussion about increasing the number of unisex toilets in schools and public spaces. Potkonen noted that gender matters have been discussed in the city, but that gender and sexual diversity are still new things for many.

Potkonen noted that the most marginalised and disadvantaged young people are often left unheard. She explained that even though there are events where citizens are invited and heard, those who participate usually represent a small number of young people who are already active, conscious, and motivated to influence things. Partly, Potkonen believed that reaching young people from various backgrounds is a question of insufficient resources. She pointed out that associations in social, health and wellbeing fields are an underused resource, even though collaboration with such flexible and professional organisations could prove to be highly fruitful.

The Diversity and Equality Strategy of Oulu2026 addresses issues of marginalisation and disadvantage. It includes measures such as positive discrimination, diversity and anti-racist training, developing ‘safe space’ principles, service design, and adopting a diversity perspective to cultural projects and programmes. The strategy responds to many of the identified challenges and provides a great starting point to building a diverse and equal ECoC project. However, the bid book seems to lack awareness of the multiple and intersectional causes of marginalisation and disadvantage, as will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.

#### ***7.1.8 An Intersectional Analysis***

The multi-level intersectional analysis adapted from the framework suggested by Winker and Degele (2011) generated some significant insights regarding reciprocities of categories of difference on the levels of identity constructions, symbolic representations, and social structures.

On the level of identity constructions, as Winker and Degele (2011) explain, identifying categories of differentiation which people use to position themselves is an essential part of an intersectional analysis. In this study, my aim was to find out what kinds of minority or group belongings the respondents have, what causes marginalisation and disadvantage

among them, and what intersectional categories of disadvantage of marginalisation can be identified. These issues were explored in relation to the research questions.

On the level of symbolic representations, the analysis aims at making explicit the norms, values, hegemonic representations, and ideologies the persons refer to. The aim is to identify naturalised symbolic representations which support structural power relations. (Winker & Degele, 2011)

At the structural level, Winker and Degele (2011) point out that social practices and identity constructions (i.e. the micro level) are affected by social structures and institutions (i.e. the macro and meso levels). The analysis of social structures, therefore, aims to discover references to social practices, structures and institutions in the categories of class; gender and sexuality; race (i.e. classifications based on nationality, ethnicity, religion, worldview etc.), and body (related to e.g. age, appearance, disability) to find out how people relate to the power structures in their everyday social practices. (Winker & Degele, 2011)

Whereas quantitative data is not suitable nor sufficient for a reliable analysis at the symbolic or structural levels, the open-ended survey responses provide some useful material for analysing symbolic representations as they manifest in the responses. It must be noted that the number of open-ended answers was relatively low, and thus many voices are not represented in the analysis and findings cannot be generalised. The aim of the analysis on both symbolic and structural levels attempts to generate some new understanding and to provide insights for further research, not to make far-reaching conclusions. As follows, I will present some intersectional insights from the findings, combining findings at the levels of identity constructions, symbolic representations, and social structures.

The responses showed that respondents belonged to many different groups based on gender, sexuality, language, lifestyle, culture or subculture, minority status, religion, immigrant background, political views, or worldview. Approximately 9% of all respondents belonged to two or more minorities or special social groups.

The open-ended answers, in which respondents could specify their answers, provided mainly specifications to the kinds of minorities the respondents belonged to, but they also gave more understanding about intersections categories of difference. For example, some respondents clarified that they belonged to a sexual or gender minority and to a Finnish national minority



(such as the Roma people, the Sámi, or the Karelians), or to a sexual and lifestyle minority.

The open-ended answers also proved their value in that they provided insights about group belongings beyond the predetermined answer options, such as group belongings based on political views or health conditions. They also revealed some subcultures that had not been previously considered, such as the furry fandom and weeb culture. Many respondents identified with a lifestyle or subcultural group based on belonging to groups such as skaters, students, athletes, IT people, or vegetarians. In terms of religion, Laestadianism was mentioned in many answers, which came as no surprise, as the revival movement has a strong presence in the region.

It was found that 31% of those who felt that they belong to one or more specific social groups or minorities either belonged or partly belonged to disadvantaged or marginalised groups. There were notable differences among different types of social groups and minorities and their relationship to an experience of marginalisation or disadvantage. For example, belonging to a social group based on sports or athleticism did (expectedly) not have a connection with feeling disadvantaged or marginalised.

Experiences of marginalisation and/or disadvantage were most common among the LGBTQIA+ group, 44,4% of whom felt marginalised or disadvantaged at least partly. Marginalisation and/or disadvantage was second most common among language groups or minorities (40%) and third most common among Finnish national minorities (33,3%), but because of the small number of respondents in these two groups, these numbers should be read critically.

As mentioned, the most common factor causing disadvantage or marginalisation among young adults appears to be mental and/or physical health, followed by sexuality, gender, and social and economic position or class (Figure A11).

The open-ended answers did not provide much further information about mental and/or physical health. The big impact of health issues as a marginalisation or disadvantage causing factor might well be connected to the issue of mental health problems, which is known to be an issue among young adults in Oulu. It might also be that Covid-19 has made such issues even worse. The significance given to mental and/or physical health as causes of marginalisation and disadvantage could be connected to prejudice towards mental health

issues at the symbolic level and to a difficulty to get help or treatment at the structural level. However, these are just assumptions and there is no evidence to support either claim at the symbolic and structural levels.

Gender and sexuality were also common causes of marginalisation and disadvantage. It is notable that five out of seven respondents who identified as non-binary answered felt that they belonged either fully or partly to a marginalised or disadvantaged group, while the remaining two answered “I don’t know”. 19% of female respondents felt that they belonged to a marginalised or disadvantaged group, while the corresponding percentage among male respondents was 6,2. More specifically, 6,8% of those who identified as female experienced disadvantage or marginalisation specifically based on gender, whereas the percentage among those who identified as male was zero. Out of the non-binary respondents, a remarkable 71% experienced marginalisation or disadvantage based on gender.

Some open-ended answers revealed experiences of not feeling recognised or represented and a lack of a sense of belonging. One non-binary respondent, for example, explained their situation as follows:

*My gender identity as non-binary is not officially accepted or recognised in Finland, which is why I need to hide it in fear of maltreatment, and that complicates my life.*

This response reveals important insights both at the symbolic and at the structural levels: symbolic because of norms and a lack of recognition; structural because of a lack of official acceptance. In another open-ended question, the respondent explained that the “lousy” trans law of Finland and discrimination cause disillusionment for them. This, too, reveals an experience of exclusion at both symbolic and structural levels.

A respondent from one of the smaller municipalities described their situation as follows: “Living in a rural area partly makes my position unequal, especially since I also belong to a sexual minority”. This response reveals two layers of inequality: on the one hand, living in a rural area may cause inequality because of lack of opportunities or difficulty to reach services and activities, and on the other hand, the response suggests that the local environment may not be accepting or respectful of sexual minorities. Another respondent belonging to the LGTBQIA+ group from one of the smaller municipalities felt disillusioned

because of the public discrimination that sexual and ethnic minorities face. “You hear hate speech almost daily”, she explained. Yet another respondent mentioned that they belong to a sexual minority, but few people know about it, which might suggest a fear of discrimination or lack of acceptance.

In terms of class or social or economic position, one respondent, who felt partly disadvantaged or marginalised specified his answer as follows: “[I am] part-time employed, raised by a single mother”. Another respondent answered that they feel marginalised or disadvantaged because of a low level of income.

Moreover, several responses mentioned either religion, language, ethnicity, or immigration background as a factor causing disadvantage or marginalisation. One respondent described a feeling of having fallen in the margins after resigning from a religious minority. Another respondent answered that they felt marginalised or disadvantaged based on ethnicity. They felt that the atmosphere in Oulu is conservative with many social and economic problems, and that there is a lack of opportunities for cultural participation in the region.

A response from a second-generation immigrant revealed a feeling of disappointment and disadvantage, hinting perhaps to a lack of representation and opportunities:

*Socially and culturally speaking, the Oulu region is around 30 years behind cities in southern Finland (and 50 years behind international cities such as Berlin). As a result, anyone with an independent mindset will find themselves at a disadvantage. The basic problem is that Oulu has a conservative population that [lacks] the will to be honest with itself.*

One respondent from Oulu felt that there is a lack of religious freedom in Oulu and described the situation as follows:

*The dominance of Christian congregations in our society causes distress for the non-religious and followers of other religions in terms of, for example, burial services, equality in schools, and freedom of speech.*

Some responses referred to discrimination and prejudice region. A comment from a respondent from Oulu, for example, revealed a double discrimination: “Prejudice of a foreign last name. I am often thought to be from the Roma community.” This answer reveals

both a prejudice of foreign names and a deeply rooted discrimination of the Roma people. An exploration of the intersections of different factors causing marginalisation or disadvantage among young adults reveals that a total of 23 respondents belonged to a marginalised or disadvantaged group based on two or more factors (Table B3). The different intersections suggest that there are diverse intersecting factors causing marginalisation and/or disadvantage among young adults in the Oulu2026 region.

The most common intersectional causes of marginalisation or disadvantage were gender and sexuality (connected in 11 responses) and social and economic position or class and mental and/or physical health (connected in 8 responses). Other common marginalising intersections included sexuality and mental and/or physical health; sexuality and social and economic position or class; and gender and mental and/or physical health (each pair connected in 5 responses). More research with a qualitative approach is needed to better understand these intersections and their implications.

An interesting finding was that those who experienced disadvantage or marginalisation based on two or more intersecting categories were the most likely to feel disillusioned. This will be further discussed in chapter 7.4.

Direct and indirect references to all categories of class, gender and sexuality, and race were found, and there were some mentions of the influence of the structural level on the respondents' everyday lives. The norms, ideologies, and values, as well as structural discrimination directly or indirectly referred to in the survey answers are of central relevance for an understanding of exclusion, disadvantage, and intersectional discrimination. The right to be different and recognised, full cultural rights are essential aspects of cultural citizenship, and a lack of them might cause severe barriers to cultural participation.

However, to enable a better, more thorough, and more reliable intersectional analysis, an in-depth qualitative study is needed. Here, the lack of more qualitative material prevents an in-depth intersectional analysis, but I hope that these findings can act as a starting point for considering matters of intersectional exclusion and categorisation in the context of Oulu2026 and in further research related to cultural participation.

Moreover, it is important to note that this analysis has not aimed at nor been able to build an in-depth analysis of intersecting categories of difference and their presence on the levels of

identity constructions, symbolic representations, and social structures. Consequently, this research cannot analytically compare or discuss different kinds of categories of difference or their impact on youth disillusionment. What this analysis does enable and provide are first, a starting point to understanding intersecting factors related to marginalisation and disadvantage among young adults in the Oulu2026 region, and second, an exploration of possible links between intersectional exclusion or discrimination, cultural participation, and youth disillusionment.

## **7.2 Oulu2026 Project: Current Views, Familiarity, and Will to Participate**

The findings (Figure A27) suggest that there is a lot to be improved in terms of communication about the Oulu2026 project, especially in the wider region. Up to 64% of the respondents were not familiar with Oulu2026 and an equally large number had not received information about the project. Moreover, 78% had not received information about their participation opportunities in the project. Consequently, many respondents (38%) did not feel included in or represented by the project or programme, and most (62%) did not know if the programme matched their needs or aspirations.

It is interesting – although not surprising – that the responses look different if we compare Oulu with the other municipalities in the region. In Oulu, most (61%) respondents had received at least information about the Oulu2026 project. The number of respondents who had not received information about their participation opportunities was high (58,5%) in Oulu too, but clearly lower than in the rest of the region. The percentage of respondents who felt that they were not at all familiar with the project shows a clear difference: 34% in Oulu and 64% in the rest of the region.

Moreover, compared to other municipalities, young adults in Oulu felt slightly more included in and represented by the programme and felt that the programme matched their aspirations and needs a little bit better, but the amount of “I don’t know” answers in these questions was high in all municipalities, which is natural given the lack of information about the project. Only three respondents had been involved in the Oulu2026 application and planning process, two of them from Oulu and one from Paltamo.

These findings show that there is a clear need to improve communication, marketing, and

other outreach activities. The challenge appears to be acknowledged by the Oulu2026 organisation. Rantala-Korhonen, for example, noted that creating a feeling of belonging to a common Oulu2026 region is a challenging task requiring communication efforts.

In terms of the perceived importance of the ECoC title, the respondents on average considered the title to be more important for the region than for their hometown or themselves (Figure A28). This was the case among respondents from Oulu as well as those from the other municipalities, although the differences were smaller among Ouluians. It is notable that respondent from Oulu evaluated the ECoC project to be clearly more important from all three perspectives (for their hometown, for the region, and for themselves) than the respondents from the other municipalities on average did. This shows a clear imbalance with the perceived importance of the ECoC between Oulu and the rest of the region.

On a more positive note, most young adults were interested in participating in the ECoC activities in one way or another if Oulu was to win the title (Figure A29). Most were interested in participating as audience members, visitors or customers, but many were also interested in active participation and in taking part as volunteers or as artists or creators.

Six respondents answered that they would not like to participate at all. Reasons included lack of time, lack of money, and a feeling that the project “does not concern me”. One respondent who did not want to participate because of lack of interest explained: “I’m not against participation in general. I’m merely a person with little to no interest in Finnish/European cultural activities.” It is important for the Oulu2026 organisation to try to understand what aspects in “Finnish” or “European” cultural activities are not interesting for some. Do activities with such a label feel exclusive, one-sided, and lacking pluralism? This would require further research. An equally important and related consideration is why some people feel that the project does not concern them.

The results also suggest that the ECoC has the potential to increase cultural participation and encounters among young adults between municipalities. If Oulu was to win the title, over one fourth of all respondents were intending to attend and/or participate in cultural activities in some other cities of municipalities in the region besides their own hometown, while 64% were maybe intending to do so. This suggests an opportunity for the region to enhance regional travelling, mutual understanding, and encounters between artists, organisers,

volunteers, and audiences from different parts of the region.

### **7.3 Oulu2026 Project: Participation Opportunities**

Both the bid book and the interviewees highlighted that Oulu2026 wants to create the ECoC programme *with* the people, not just *for* them. Forsblom and Rantala-Korhonen, in line with the bid book, explained that the Oulu2026 project started in 2017 with a series of workshops and hearings in which children and young people had the chance to express their hopes and dreams for future Oulu. This process created the value base and building blocks for the whole project. The outcome was a vision of a communal, humane, and fun Oulu. Other important hopes for the future were related to exercise and technology.

According to Forsblom, although young people may have their prejudice about city-led projects, everyone who was invited was excited to take part in the Oulu2026 project planning. Forsblom highlighted the importance of a truly participatory approach and recognising new and different forms of culture.

*Usually, when the city is about to organise something, the typical mental image and expectation is that it is going to be a top-down process instead of a participatory one, which indeed it often has been... I don't think it [involving young people] is a problem when young people are given an opportunity in a way that things are not too far planned beforehand, but ideas are genuinely developed together. (Forsblom, personal communication, July 5, 2021)*

In addition, Forsblom and Rantala-Korhonen explained that the bidding process involved a number of discussions with various stakeholders, visits to everyday places like shopping malls, and meetings with municipal representatives, third sector operators, and different communities. In 2020, a population survey was conducted to find out about the use and awareness of cultural services. It was found that Oulu needs to improve their approach to communicating about culture.

Special meetings were held during the bidding phase with representatives of elderly people, people with disabilities and minorities. Oulu2026 also organised a series of equality workshops with different communities, including ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+, and people

with disabilities. These workshops formed a consultation forum, which will continue to be included in the Oulu2026 process. The bid book states that the forum has made Oulu2026 rethink their approach to cultural equity and audience development. (Oulu2026, 2021)

Forsblom highlighted that inclusion and co-creation are of central importance when finding solutions for future challenges. He noted that about 80% of the Oulu2026 programme includes a communal element. In the process, he saw it as essential to see young people as doers and creators, and not just as audiences or experiencers. To truly involve local people in the process, Forsblom highlighted that they have followed design thinking principles.

Forsblom emphasised that the aim is to make different ways of participation possible, including easy to access, very low threshold opportunities so that everyone can feel included in one way or another.

Oulu2026 had not planned any democratic decision-making processes that young people could take part in, but Rantala-Korhonen noted that having such processes would not necessarily be a bad idea. She pondered that a voting or consultation process could take place.

The co-creation principle of Oulu2026 is strongly based on open calls, which, according to the bid book ensures openness, transparency, and quality in the programme construction. In addition to curated and themed open calls guided by professional artistic criteria, a grassroots-based open call called We Are the Culture will open in 2024 with the aim of reaching out to the whole community and lowering the threshold to participate. “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 bid book states (Oulu2026, 2021, p. 64).

Forsblom explained that Oulu2026 hopes to reach young people and people from different social groups to motivate them to participate with their own ideas and suggestions through the open calls. He believed that open calls form a basis for a good participatory format that creates an equal opportunity for all to apply for funding for their own projects. He noted that communication and finding key people who work with the youth are essential in reaching young people and different groups in the region.

Forsblom also emphasised that the ECoC should be seen as a laboratory of future culture



and ECoC cities should show the direction by working in future-oriented ways. In that, he sees an important role for young people. In the case of Oulu, Forsblom believed that the ECoC could give the old tech city the opportunity to take a leading role in cultural productions and activities combining arts and technology. The young, digital native generations could have a central role in that.

Rantala-Korhonen emphasised that Oulu2026 is not a production agency that would produce content and offering for the people. Rather, she explained, Oulu2026 is an enabler and a platform, offering opportunities for people who want to create or organise something. Rantala-Korhonen pointed out that people's own activity is key: the most active ones will benefit the most, as they can use the ECoC as a platform for their own creativity.

In addition, people will have the opportunity to participate as volunteers. Rantala-Korhonen noted that Oulu2026 has an ambitious plan to involve 10% of Ouluanians – a total of 20,000 people – in the volunteer programme. She explained that collaboration will most probably be done with different sports clubs, associations and other organisations with people who are already active, to plan together different forms and ways of volunteering.

*Citizen activity cannot really be done as a paid job; it cannot be outsourced to any authorities or public officers. When we are building a better society, I think we need everyone to be involved. (Rantala-Korhonen, personal communication, June 28, 2021)*

During the bidding phase, Oulu2026 did not have a volunteer programme for production or planning tasks, but they did, and still do, have a communications-based Cultural Ambassadors' programme. Anyone could register as a cultural ambassador, get information about the project, and be invited to training, events, and activities. The ambassadors could then work as messengers about the Oulu2026 project in their own communities.

The ambassador idea will continue in the Agent 026 project, which has been described in chapter 6. The aim of the project is to encourage vocational school students to act as spokespersons for Oulu2026. The aim is to find new ways and develop new skills that will support them to encompass culture into their future professions.

Rantala-Korhonen explained that most of the budget goes directly into the cultural project and will thus directly support professionals in the fields of arts and culture. In addition, she

noted that the Oulu2026 organisation itself offers internship opportunities for young people, which she believed is a significant opportunity for young cultural field professionals. Forsblom also highlighted the need to support young cultural field professionals. As tools to create new opportunities, he mentioned creating more spaces and places for encounters, networking and creative work; renewing the funding system; and recognising and supporting new forms of cultural entrepreneurship.

In the future, Forsblom believes that Oulu can offer more opportunities for young professionals to stay, work and be successful in the city and region. Both in terms of new opportunities and improved reputation as a city of culture, Forsblom believes that Oulu can become an attractive and interesting city for creative and cultural professionals, and for anyone interested in a vibrant, creative lifestyle. Besides engaging young cultural professionals locally, Forsblom noted that Oulu can become an interesting city to work for creative field professionals from the Helsinki region and other parts of Southern Finland, where competition is tougher.

Overall, participation opportunities within the Oulu2026 project are plenty: one can participate as an audience member; operate as an ambassador alongside one's job; apply for an internship; volunteer; suggest own projects through the open calls; or participate in one of the official Oulu2026 projects. The open call format also provides good opportunities for a diversity of cultural expressions and self-organised activity among young adults.

What might be problematic from the cultural participation point of view, is the structure that rewards those who are already active. The marginalised, disadvantaged, and others with a lack of personal resources may be at risk of being excluded from the project – at least from the more active ways of participation – unless Oulu2026 finds ways to support the participation of the most excluded and disadvantaged groups.

#### **7.4 Experiences of Youth Disillusionment**

One of the central aims of this study was to find out if the global risk of youth disillusionment is also an issue in the Oulu2026 region, and if yes, what are the main causes to it. The findings show that youth disillusionment indeed is a risk for Oulu2026; 75% of the respondents confirmed that they feel disillusioned at least sometimes. Over 27% felt

disillusioned quite often or all the time, while only 18% felt disillusioned only rarely and 4% not at all. A relatively small number, a total of seven respondents, answered “I don’t know”, which suggests that the question was generally well understood.

The results suggest that young adults in the Oulu2026 region experience more disillusionment based on factors on the general level than in their personal lives, although there were significant causes of disillusionment found on the personal level too (Figures A38 and A39). The three factors causing most disillusionment on the general level were inequality in society; discrimination of different demographic or social groups; and the impacts of Covid-19. The three most common factors causing disillusionment on a personal level were the impacts of Covid-19 on the personal lives of the respondents; financial challenges or worries; and lack of faith in their possibilities of changing things.

A comparative exploration of the results shows that partly different factors cause youth disillusionment in the different parts of the Oulu2026 region (Figures A40–A45). Young adults in Oulu felt that the factors causing most disillusionment were the impacts of Covid-19; lack of employment and/or career opportunities; and, in a shared third place, discrimination of different demographic or social groups; and youth unemployment. In Kajaani, the top three youth disillusionment causing factors were lack of employment and career opportunities; lack of meaningful hobbies and participation opportunities; and a general pessimism about the future among young people. In Kalajoki, the most common factors were the impacts of Covid-19; lack of meaningful hobbies and participation opportunities; and lack of employment and career opportunities. In the other municipalities, the most common causes of disillusionment were lack of employment and/or career opportunities; the impacts of Covid-19; and lack of meaningful hobbies and participation opportunities. These findings suggest that opportunities for meaningful hobbies and participation have a connection to youth disillusionment, which is a significant finding for this study.

Youth unemployment is a known issue in the Oulu region, and its presence in the disillusionment causing factors came as no surprise. As has been discussed, Oulu2026 is attempting to address the issue in several ways, including concrete projects such as the Untamed office and by creating new employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in the cultural field in terms of spaces, networking opportunities, and renewed funding models.

The Global risks report warned that Covid-19 might deepen the issue of youth disillusionment. The findings from the survey confirm the risk. The impact of the pandemic on young adults were also acknowledged by the city of Oulu and Oulu2026. Rantala-Korhonen connected the Covid-19 situation with the 90s recession. It was found back then that the recession hit the hardest those young people who were already in the weakest positions, as has been the case with the Covid-19 pandemic too, she explained.

The interviewees recognised the issue of youth disillusionment on a more general level, too, not just related to the pandemic. As possible causes, they mentioned matters of climate crisis, Covid-19, mental health, and availability of support networks. Potkonen and Rantala-Korhonen pointed out that also drug problems have increased and gotten more severe as a consequence of the pandemic.

Especially the issue of mental health problems among young adults was emphasised by both Rantala-Korhonen and Potkonen. Rantala-Korhonen pointed out that mental health issues were already a recognised problem before, but the situation may have gotten worse as a consequence of the pandemic.

*I have no statistical data available but there are signs coming from the mental health services that anxiety disorders among young people have increased. It might be principally related to the pandemic, but it might also be related to the other looming, big threats, such as climate change. (Rantala-Korhonen, personal communication, June 28, 2021)*

Rantala-Korhonen pointed out that young people are a very heterogeneous group of people. While most of them are doing well, have clear plans for the future and parents who support them, others are in a more difficult situation.

*But then there's the 10–20% of young people – as has been for a long time – who don't have a support network at home or in their close circles, and perhaps it is that group who gets hit the hardest by crises and critical periods, such as this pandemic. (Rantala-Korhonen, personal communication, June 28, 2021)*

Insightful findings were identified from the survey responses in terms of a link between marginalisation and/or disadvantage and experiences of disillusionment. It is noteworthy that while feelings of disillusionment were common among all respondents, they were clearly

more common among those respondents who felt marginalised or disadvantaged (Figure A39). Out of respondents who belonged to marginalised and/or disadvantaged groups a staggering 94% felt disillusioned at least sometimes, 39% of them quite often or all the time. The findings thus suggest a clear link between youth disillusionment and marginalisation or disadvantage.

The situation is even worse when we look at responses from those who belonged to two or more marginalised and/or disadvantaged groups: all of them felt disillusioned at least sometimes, and 48% quite often or all the time. These findings – although the results need to be treated with critical caution because of the relatively low number of responses – suggest that young adults in the intersections of two or more marginalisation or disadvantage causing factors are significantly more likely to experience disillusionment than those who do not belong to marginalised or disadvantaged groups.

There were also some slight differences in terms of causes of disillusionment among those who felt marginalised or disadvantaged and those who did not (Figures A38 and A 39). Feelings of disillusionment both on a general level and on a personal level were higher among the disadvantaged and/or marginalised groups than other respondents. It is therefore important to emphasize that the fact some factors were not considered significant causes of disillusionment in average does not mean that they could be underrated or ignored. What should be paid special attention to, is how different groups, especially marginalised and disadvantaged groups, experience disillusionment and its causes.

I also wanted to find out if any links can be identified between participation in cultural activities and feelings of disillusionment. It was found that those who participated in some cultural activities monthly or more often were less likely to feel disillusioned: 6% did not feel disillusioned at all, and 21% felt disillusioned only rarely. Moreover, 3% of those who participated in cultural activities at least monthly felt disillusioned all the time, whereas the average of all responses was over 9%. However, although those who actively participated in culture were less likely to feel disillusioned all the time or often, active cultural participation did not totally prevent disillusionment: most (56%) of the respondents who participated actively also felt disillusioned sometimes. The situation was similar among respondents who felt that the cultural participation opportunities in their hometown matched their needs and aspirations. 7% did not feel disillusioned at all, while 21% felt disillusioned only rarely. The

number of respondents who felt disillusioned all the time or quite often was lower than the overall average, but still half of the respondents with good cultural participation opportunities sometimes felt disillusioned.

Interestingly, respondents with a strong sense of belonging to their hometown felt clearly less disillusioned than the average respondent. Almost 10% did not feel disillusioned at all, and 24% only felt so rarely. Slightly over 2% felt disillusioned all the time and under 10% quite often. Again, however, 55% of respondents with a strong sense of belonging sometimes felt disillusioned.

These findings do not take a stand on possible causal links. It is not possible to conclude whether people who participate less are more likely to experience disillusionment or whether those who feel disillusioned are less likely to participate in cultural participation. What these findings do suggest is that there is a link between participation in cultural activities and youth disillusionment – especially since, as explained earlier, many young adults estimated the lack of hobbies and participation opportunities to be one of the main causes to their feelings of disillusionment. Surely, further research with a more in-depth and qualitative approach is needed in order to find out more and to make further conclusions about the matter.

Answers in the open-ended questions (Table B11) gave more depth into the findings and brought to light some other factors that had not been considered in the pre-determined options. Deficiencies in the education system and students' situation, for example, emerged as a new factor. One respondent noted:

*Employment opportunities for students are poor, and abuse happens through practical internships that are part of my studies. With this, I mean that I think the workforce of students should not be abused by accepting them to an internship but without any compensation for the work. Student support is being cut anyway and working for free or with just a food compensation doesn't financially help at all.*

Another respondent answered that the level of education; the state's and municipalities' financial investment into university studies; and the unequal quality of university studies in different cities cause disillusionment.

Yet another new emerging, disillusionment causing factor was feeling inadequate, which was

mentioned in a couple of responses. Also, discrimination, bullying, and power structures came up in several responses. One respondent, for example, explained:

*As a non-binary person, I don't even exist for the Finnish state as myself, so that causes a lot of disillusionment. The lousy trans law of Finland and the grown hatred towards sexual and gender minorities in the world also cause pain.*

One respondent noted that one hears hate speech almost daily and that the public discrimination of sexual minorities and people from different ethnic background causes disillusionment. Yet another explained that they had been bullied by their peers in the past, were being bullied right now, and were expecting to be bullied in the future, too.

In terms of lack of help and support available, one respondent explained the cause to their disillusionment as follows:

*The fact that my own resources are just not enough. When finally, as a person with an achiever mindset, you admit that to yourself and try to get help, having crossed the big threshold feels hugely disappointing, because the resources are not sufficient and there is no help available. The limited support and lack of safety network feel scary.*

What Potkonen thought should be improved is hearing young people. She pointed out that the value system of young people differs significantly from the traditional value system and societal norms:

*For example, it's no longer a self-evident achievement or a goal to have a permanent full-time job, but rather it's desirable to feel good in one's own life and to be able to realise the things and values that are important for oneself, without taking external norms as a given. So, somehow, I see a big contradiction there. Maybe it has something to do with the disillusionment that the consciousness that young people live in and the value systems that they hold are no longer the values of the old society. And that causes a collision, as the society and structures are still in the old value system. And we don't know how to communicate. (Potkonen, personal communication, June 29, 2021)*

Potkonen continued by noting that city organisations tend to be quite conservative, which

adds on the challenge. According to her, more openness is needed to understand the needs of different kinds of people and to identify barriers to participation and use of cultural services.

The findings related to youth disillusionment are of high relevance from the point of view of this study and for the Oulu2026 project. They confirm that youth disillusionment is a real risk and already existing issue in Oulu, especially when it comes to marginalised and disadvantaged groups. As a future-oriented project that aims to create a balanced community, improved life chances for young people, and improved wellbeing (Oulu2026, 2021), Oulu2026 should take this issue seriously. Clearly, from a cultural citizenship perspective, more open dialogue, mutual understanding, respect for difference, and addressing issues of (intersectional) discrimination and disadvantage are needed.

## **7.5 A Critical Examination of the Bid Book Discourse**

A critical discourse analysis on the bid book of Oulu2026 produced some relevant findings. Here, I will briefly introduce the main findings and their relevance.

First, it is important to recognise that the bid book was written for a very specific purpose: convincing. Its aim was to present the plans, programme, and strategies in a way that will first, convince the local policymakers about the importance of supporting the project and second, to convince the ECoC selection panel that Oulu2026 is the best candidate for ECoC 2026. Eventually, of course, anyone would have access to the bid book online so it was also for the general public. For the discourse analysis, understanding the context was of fundamental importance, as it inevitably affects the vocabulary, emphases, and tone of the text. Moreover, in terms of context, the ECoC framework must be understood. The ECoC rhetoric and ideology is reflected in the choice of vocabulary, values, and topics.

Young people have a strong presence in the discourse. “The bottom line is that children and young people taking over the city”, the bid book declares (Oulu2026, 2021, p. 79). Young adults are specifically mentioned three times in the book in relation to the programme line Urban Boost, which is specifically targeted at young adults, and to the goal to turn net migration positive among young adults (Oulu2026, 2021, pp. 6, 11, 76).



It was noted that young people were often talked about together with children. There were in total 16 mentions of “children and young people”. This was the case especially in the parts discussing outreach and communications. The situation was different in the parts discussing the artistic and cultural content: in relation to different programme lines, especially Urban Boost and Creative Villages, young people and young adults were also addressed as a separate group. It is not defined who are included in the group of “young people”, so it remains unclear whether it includes young adults, too. It is important to recognise young adults as a separate group from children in the context of outreach, communications, and cultural programme, as the needs and interests of the two age groups are likely to differ significantly from each other.

Looking at the discourse through the lens of cultural policy paradigms related to cultural participation, the four paradigms of cultural excellence, cultural democratisation, cultural democracy, and creative economy seem to coexist – just as they do in Finnish cultural policy and in the ECoC guidelines. The strategies and goals related to young adults are mostly discussed in relation to cultural/creative economy and cultural democracy. In outreach activities, cultural democracy and active participation are highlighted. In the programme, young adults are seen to have versatile roles as co-creators, active participants, prosumers, and as audiences.

The notions of participation and inclusion coexist and partly overlap in the participation discourse. Indeed, although in the Finnish context participation (*osallistuminen*) and inclusion (*osallisuus*) are often talked of separately, the English term participation tends to embrace both concepts (Virolainen, 2015). The discourse reflects the ECoC objectives and ideologies related to both participation and inclusion.

There were notable differences in terms of vocabulary and tone between the programme and outreach sections. The tone and mood were much more celebratory, positive, and energising when discussing the programme and more serious when discussing outreach.

The vocabulary alone, however, does not take us far. An exploration of who were and who were not included in the plans of Oulu was also needed. There were some projects targeted specifically at certain groups, including unemployed youth; people with mental health issues; the Sámi community; and vocational school students. These groups were specifically

mentioned in the Oulu2026 programme plans. Other groups, such as the LGBTQIA+ community, ethnic or religious groups, and the Roma community are not mentioned in the programme. Some groups are addressed with one or two words in the outreach plan but not in the cultural programme. Moreover, the presence of artists and cultural professionals from different minorities, or marginalised and disadvantaged groups as creators of contents of “strong artistic criteria” has not been addressed at all. These points raise some questions.

First, could it be that the specific groups mentioned in the programme (unemployed youth, people with mental health issues, the Sámi community, and vocational school students) are politically non-controversial groups and therefore programme plans related to them are easier to get support for on the political and societal levels? And on the other hand, are issues related to the LGBTQIA+, ethnic, religious, and cultural minorities and groups more controversial topics that Oulu2026 has not wanted to touch upon?

Different local and regional challenges also seem to be dealt with a certain level of carefulness and diplomacy. The bid book addresses many challenges in the region, some in very concrete terms. There are, for example, mentions of youth unemployment, disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and mental health issues – all inarguably important matters from the point of view of cultural participation and youth disillusionment. However, as with the addressed groups, the topics are not especially controversial. The mentioned challenges seem to be issues that are easy for policymakers from different parties to agree on in the relatively conservative and polarised political and societal climate of Oulu. Topics such as the position of different religious minorities, racism, and discrimination of the LGBTQIA+ community, which are not discussed at all, would probably have been more controversial in the context of Oulu, thus possibly causing more local opposition towards the ECoC project.

Second, are the groups that are mentioned only in the outreach activities seen more as targets of outreach and support activities but less as creators or organisers of cultural programme? The bid book lacks a description of how people who experience marginalisation or find themselves at a disadvantaged position will be supported to participate in diverse and active ways. The outreach plan describes hearing different groups; improving accessibility and sustainability; enhancing diversity and cultural equity; and removing barriers to participation, but not how different groups will be supported to take part in creating high quality artistic and cultural content and programme. The participation of minorities and

marginalised and disadvantaged groups is not just about inclusion and social work but about equal opportunities, cultural rights, and full citizenship. Quality artistic content and outreach are, of course, different matters, but marginalised and disadvantaged groups have a role in both areas, not just the other.

On a more positive note, the bid book describes that the programme has been developed through over 200 meetings with local communities, third sector operators, as well as municipal and societal representatives. Moreover, a consultation forum consisting of workshops with a range of communities, including minorities and specific social groups. The forum is said to continue as an ongoing feature of Oulu2026. This is a welcome initiative and a potential response to the identified challenges.

Straightforward conclusions obviously cannot be made from this analysis, especially knowing that the bid book does not cover the full plans and strategies of Oulu2026. However, addressing possible underlying assumptions, worries, imbalances, as well as their possible implications should be addressed and discussed openly and with a diverse group of stakeholders to address the plurality of needs and aspirations of diverse groups. Addressing such issues openly and with respect for diverse and plural values and identities in the midst of conflicting interests would be a manifestation of the kind of bold, brave, and connecting activity that Oulu2026 promotes. It could be a starting point for building Peace Machine - like communication (Oulu2026, 2021, p. 20) and cosmopolitan dialogue (Stevenson, 2003).

## **8 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

Having presented and analysed the research outcomes on a more general level, this chapter will take a more focused approach by embracing the ECoC and the discussed theories as a guiding framework for a more in-depth discussion and concluding remarks. In this chapter, my focus will be on the main findings, which will be studied in relation to the research questions, theoretical framework, and wider context.

### **8.1 The Risk of Youth Disillusionment is Real**

Youth disillusionment is a risk and an already existing problem in the Oulu2026 region. This was very clear in the responses of young adults, most of whom felt disillusioned at least sometimes. Inequality, discrimination, and Covid-19 emerged as the main causes on the general level, and Covid-19, financial challenges, and lack of faith in one's own possibilities to influence things on the personal level. Mental health issues were a significant cause of disillusionment among young adults who felt marginalised or disadvantaged.

The findings are in line with the Global Risks Report (McLennan & Group, 2021), which warned that Covid-19 and mental health issues may aggravate the risk of youth disillusionment. Political polarisation and growing support for populism were seen as significant causes of disillusionment among marginalised and disadvantaged groups, but that did not seem to affect their trust in democracy. Polarisation and populism were not considered as significant causes of disillusionment by those who did not experience marginalisation or disadvantage. These findings are in line with earlier studies that suggest that crisis of democracy is not an urgent risk among young people in the Nordic countries (Foa et al., 2020).

The bid book of Oulu2026 does not directly mention the issue of youth disillusionment, but some related issues, such as mental health and youth unemployment, are addressed. The interviewees had considered some aspects of the issue. The Oulu2026 organisation, as well as the bid book, emphasised mental health issues and youth unemployment as the principal challenges faced by young adults. Potkonen also pointed out that young people might feel

like they are not being heard and that their worldview might be in contrast with the surrounding society. All interviewees believed that the pandemic has had a remarkable impact on young people. It was also noted by the interviewees that the pandemic is likely to have the most severe impact on those who were already at a vulnerable position before.

Although youth disillusionment was recognised and indirectly addressed by both the interviewees and the bid book, the approach to the issue was quite narrow. While projects addressing mental health problems and youth unemployment deal with real and severe challenges in the Oulu2026 region, they are only part of the whole picture. It seems that the diverse and sometimes intersecting factors causing disillusionment were not recognised, nor was the fact that different factors impact different groups of young people in different ways. This will be discussed in more detail in the next sub-chapter.

The findings suggest a link between cultural participation, sense of belonging, and youth disillusionment. However, the findings do not comment on whether a lack of cultural participation and belonging may cause youth disillusionment or vice versa. This research alone does not provide sufficient information about the link, but previous research supports the idea that cultural participation has a positive impact on young people. The findings of the study by Husu and Kumpulainen (2021), for example, showed positive outcomes of participation on social, economic, and political levels which manifested in, for example, enhanced self-esteem, improved sense of belonging and quality of life; as well as new skills. Even though Husu and Kumpulainen do not directly discuss youth disillusionment, they address similar topics, and their findings can be seen to support the findings of this study. However, as the authors (Husu & Kumpulainen, 2021) point out, more information is needed in terms of long-term and wider impacts of participation on the different dimensions.

It is important to note that there were a lot of differences in the levels and causes of disillusionment between different groups of young adults. Differences can be identified, for example, between young people from different municipalities and between those young adults who experience marginalisation or disadvantage and those who do not. Indeed, this research demonstrated the risk of only looking at average numbers in quantitative studies. Focusing only on averages or medians may conceal the position of the most disadvantaged, thus just increasing the risk of exclusion. Two central points need to be made: first, when looking at quantitative data when groups of people are studied, it is important to examine

different sub-groups separately to get an idea of the real issues. Marginalised and disadvantaged groups, and intersectional difference and discrimination need to be paid special attention to. Second, quantitative data is not suitable nor sufficient to make conclusions about reasons behind the studied issues. Therefore, in this study, the causes of disillusionment need to be read with caution. Qualitative research is needed to study and explain causes, reasons, and experiences of youth disillusionment.

Within the ECoC framework, the issue of youth disillusionment should be addressed at different levels and in relation to the different objectives. The outreach category is perhaps the most obvious dimension, especially since the ECoC calls for special attention to the marginalised and disadvantaged – an issue closely connected to youth disillusionment, as the results of this study have shown. However, youth disillusionment affects other areas too. As a global issue, it is also a shared European challenge that could – and perhaps should – be addressed in the context of the ECoC and as part of the European dimension. In terms of long-term sustainability, addressing youth disillusionment and related risks appears to be an urgent matter. In artistic and cultural content, the issue of youth disillusionment could be discussed and studied by means of art.

The cultural democracy framework provides an insightful lens through which youth disillusionment and possible solutions can be addressed. The insights from *The Global Risks Report* related to young people's demands for more egalitarian, equitable and sustainable societies and the need to hear them better (McLennan & Group, 2021) specifically bring to mind the early cultural democracy debates, strongly based on cultural activism, social effectiveness, and liberating self-determination (Kelly, 2016) – albeit that my approach here is clearly less revolutionary than Kelly's. These main ideas of the movement, as well as the aim to enable and empower people to gain control of some areas of their lives and seeing artistic practice as a form of cultural activism (Kelly, 2016) resonate in the context of youth disillusionment.

As *The Global Risks Report* suggests, young people have become increasingly vocal in the past decade (McLennan & Group, 2021, p. 45). The increasing activism and proactivity can also be seen in Finland. The Extinction Rebellion Finland movement is perhaps the most visible example of climate activism led and powered largely by young people. To support young adults to get their voices heard and be more vocal about their concerns, Oulu2026

could find ways to support and enhance youth activism, thus strengthening the cultural democracy and citizenship dimensions in their programme. The activism should be self-organised and led by the youth, but Oulu2026 could work as a supporter and as a remover of barriers. Such an approach would enable young people to get their voice heard around Europe and to connect with other European youth activists with similar concerns. Whether such activism would take the form of artistic practice, cultural expressions, or anything else, is up to the participants themselves to determine. Perhaps this could be a form of “historically informed yet present- and future-oriented” approach to cultural democracy, which Hadley and Belfiore (2018, p. 221) call for.

Another related theory and idea as a response to youth disillusionment, is that of “cosmopolitan imagination”, a global sense of citizenship (Stevenson, 2003). Youth disillusionment is a global issue, affecting young adults around the world. The shared concerns could work as a starting point for cosmopolitan dialogue and a global sense of togetherness among the youth. As a European and international initiative, the ECoC could take a leading role in promoting cosmopolitanism.

## **8.2 Marginalisation, Discrimination, and the Need for Intersectional Awareness**

The findings related to marginalisation, discrimination and intersectionality can be concluded to three main points. First, a clear link can be identified between marginalisation/disadvantage and youth disillusionment – and even more so when marginalisation or disadvantage was based on two or more intersecting categories of difference. While young people who experienced marginalisation or disadvantage were clearly more likely to experience disillusionment than those who did not, those young adults who experienced disadvantage or marginalisation based on two or more intersecting categories were clearly the most likely to feel disillusioned.

According to the survey responses, mental and/or physical health was the most common cause of marginalisation or disadvantage. The results do not give further information about the kind of health issues, but in the light of the deepening mental health crisis in Oulu and Finland, it is likely that mental health issues form a large part of that percentage. Further

studies are needed to know more details.

Second, Oulu2026 addresses most of the main challenges related to marginalisation, disadvantage, and disillusionment when looking at the overall group of young adults. However, some of the main challenges are not addressed at all, and an in-depth understanding of the plural and often intersecting factors behind exclusion, discrimination, and disillusionment seems to be lacking. It can be concluded that Oulu2026 is well aware of the main overall cause of marginalisation or disadvantage (in terms of mental health), and the issue has been addressed in the ECoC programme. Also challenges related to social and economic position or class – which emerged as the third most common cause of marginalisation/disadvantage – have been clearly noted by the Oulu2026 organisation. For example, youth unemployment was a widely discussed theme both in the interviews and in the bid book, as was the challenge of young adults moving to the South in search for better employment and career opportunities. Indeed, Oulu seems to have captured two major and well-known challenges in the region and to have succeeded well in addressing them in the Oulu2026 plans and strategies. However, other issues, especially related to gender and sexuality, ethnicity, or religion, as well as intersecting factors related to marginalisation and disadvantage appear to be largely ignored.

Third, a contradiction and equity challenge were identified between the aim to provide equal opportunities for all and the principle that the most active ones will benefit the most. On the one hand, Oulu aims to ensure equal participation opportunities for all, with a special focus on marginalised and disadvantaged groups. On the other hand, it was emphasised in the interviews that the most active ones will benefit the most from the ECoC year. A contradiction emerges. The most active ones tend to be the ones with good personal resources and sufficient support networks, while the least active ones are likely to be people in more vulnerable, excluded, or disadvantaged positions. Supporting the most active ones instead of the least active ones might therefore lead to further inequality. Of course, Oulu2026 aims to support the less active ones – hopefully also in terms of active participation, co-creation, self-expression, and with possibilities to take part in decision-making processes. However, a situation in which the least active ones would benefit the most would be more desirable from the points of view of equity, diversity, and equal opportunity. Favouring the least active ones seems like a justifiable approach also in light of the recent



ArtsEqual (Ilmola-Sheppard et al., 2021) report, which found that participation in arts and culture in Finland is unequal. The report suggests that those who participate in the arts are the most active and gifted ones, and those who have the best immediate chances to be successful in the art world. Others are faced with distancing, exclusion, and a top-down approach. Paying less attention to the less active ones could just deepen the divide between the active and privileged and the disadvantaged and less active.

A critical examination of the bid book discourse raised two principal questions. The first question is related to the role of minorities, as well as marginalised or disadvantaged groups in the programme. The analysis raised a question of whether marginalised and disadvantaged groups are seen more as targets of outreach activities and less as creators or organisers of artistic programme of high quality. For example, the presence of diverse minorities and marginalised/disadvantaged groups as creative or cultural professionals has not been addressed. Three exceptions must be noted: the unemployed youth, people with mental health issues and the Sámi community have a strong presence in the cultural programme. The second emerging question was related to a possible avoidance of controversial issues: have issues that could have been opposed (by policymakers and parts of the public) in the conservative and polarised climate of the Northern region been avoided?

The bid book does not mention measures to remove barriers affecting artists and cultural professionals from minority backgrounds. Addressing such barriers is highly necessary in the cultural field, as the recent *Art, Culture and Diverse Finland* report by the Ministry of Education and Culture has demonstrated (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021).

The ECoC criteria highlights the importance of recognising the marginalised and disadvantaged groups. Oulu2026 has recognised the requirement in their plans and strategies, and they address many relevant matters. However, the approach of Oulu2026 to questions of marginalisation and disadvantage seems to be partly narrow and lacking pluralist and intersectional understanding. The current understanding seems to be based on non-controversial issues and data based on averages that lack awareness of the “diverse diversity” (Sen, 2006) of young adults, identities, and the plural and intersecting factors causing marginalisation, disadvantage, and disillusionment.

The framework of cultural citizenship provides a specifically useful approach to these

questions. As Beaman argues, guaranteeing inclusion and belonging in plural societies, and understanding of how people make sense of their multiple identities and social positions are vital considerations from the point of view of cultural citizenship. (Beaman, 2016)

Moreover, as Stevenson (2003) explains, the power to construct meaning, to name and categorise, and to control information flows is a central cause of structural divisions. Oulu2026 has the power to describe the challenges in their area, to name and categorise different groups, and to reshape constructions of the ordinary. Their definitions and categorisations can contribute to the way things are understood, discussed, and addressed. Their discourse can maintain and justify existing structures, mechanisms, representations, and norms – or challenge them. I suggest that Oulu2026 should strive to challenge them within the ECoC context, which could lead to European-wide debate and action.

Bloomfield and Bianchini's (2001) idea of an open-ended system consisting of self-organised autonomous actors in civil society can be seen reflected in Oulu's bid. They offer training and actively solicit initiatives from citizens, as recommended by Bloomfield and Bianchini (2001). However, I argue that more attention needs to be paid to the multiple and intersectional ways of marginalisation and disadvantage for such a system to become a reality.

The findings also suggest a need to enhance the presence of young adults, especially from marginalised and disadvantaged groups in decision-making processes. As Janovich and Stevenson (2020) argue, equity-based participatory strategies should support people to participate in decision-making to ensure that resources are directed to their favoured forms of cultural participation. Chances to participate in decision-making is very relevant from the point of view of cultural citizenship and also a course of action recommended by the recent Arts Equal report (Ilmola-Sheppard et al., 2021).

Another emerged issue was the lack of offering in different languages. As an international project, the ECoC framework provides a great opportunity to begin to develop more opportunities for multilingual cultural participation. A pluralist and intersectional approach will help with addressing this issue, too.

The Equality and Diversity Strategy of Oulu2026 demonstrates a will to address plural questions of discrimination and exclusion. The strategy is a good starting point to begin

responding to the identified issues. The notion by Potkonen that third sector associations in the social and health sector are an underused and undervalued resource is an important notion here. Collaborations with associations were not discussed in detail in the bid book nor the interviews, but such cooperations could bring expertise to the identified challenges and understanding about potential tools to solve them.

### **8.3 Regional Imbalance and the Diversity of Needs**

Regional imbalance and the internal differences in the Oulu2026 region were issues that Oulu2026 was well aware of. However, I find it important to highlight certain areas to which the findings of this study can bring more understanding.

First of all, the cultural participation challenges are very different in different parts of the region. Common challenges were lack of information and lack of friends to participate with. The biggest obvious difference was that whereas the greatest barrier for young adults from other municipalities were long distances, Ouluians did not struggle with distances but called instead for lower prices. The aspiration to participate as a co-creator, artist or performer, or organiser of events was emphasised in the open-ended answers from Oulu, whereas respondents from other municipalities hoped for cultural activities and events with a lower threshold to participate.

In terms of cultural offering, opportunities, and inclusion, young people from other municipalities felt that the Oulu2026 region responded to their aspirations and needs better than their hometowns. This suggests the centrality of Oulu as a cultural hub in the region. On the other hand, Ouluians did not seem to consider the other municipalities in the region to bring additional value for them in terms of cultural participation. In addition, young adults from other parts of the region had heard significantly less about the Oulu2026 project and their participation opportunities than young adults from Oulu.

These findings suggest a need for Oulu to increase the regional sense of community and togetherness, as well as collaboration and encounters between cultural operators and young adults from the different municipalities. There are, of course, local challenges to be addressed in terms of cultural participation in all of the municipalities, but there are also regional matters that need collaborative efforts. Collaborative cultural projects with young

adults from different parts of the region could work as a starting point, enhancing both local and regional sense of belonging, agency, and cultural citizenship. Another possible solution could be a forum or steering group consisting of young adults from different parts of the region that would participate in planning, decision-making, and evaluation in the ECoC project. Such a steering group should represent the diversity and plurality of young adults in the region, not just in terms of municipality of residence but in respect to the overall diverse diversity that represents the region.

Encouraging a form of cosmopolitan communication (Stevenson, 2003) and dialogue among young adults from the region could enhance a mutual understanding of the plural and competing identities (Sen, 2006) and strengthen a sense of belonging to a common region.

#### **8.4 Cultural Citizenship as A Response to Youth Disillusionment**

In the first chapter of this paper, I presented my main research question: how can Oulu2026 foster cultural participation to address youth disillusionment in the context of the ECoC? The findings and their examination through the theoretical and ECoC frameworks suggest a clear link between cultural participation – understood in a broad sense – and youth disillusionment. The identified challenges and possible solutions suggest that the area that needs most strengthening in the programme and strategies of Oulu2026 is a cultural citizenship approach.

As a concluding response to my main research question, I argue that Oulu2026 can foster cultural participation to address youth disillusionment by adopting a cultural citizenship approach to cultural participation and planning, and by integrating a pluralist understanding and intersectionally aware approach to all stages and levels of cultural planning processes, including decision-making and evaluation.

Similar to the cultural planning theorists, who have argued that culture should be an integral part of urban planning processes, I argue that a pluralist and intersectionally aware approach should be integrated at all levels of cultural planning processes. I believe that questions of intersectionality should be central matters in the contemporary cultural citizenship debate.

I have suggested that Oulu2026 could address youth disillusionment by better addressing the

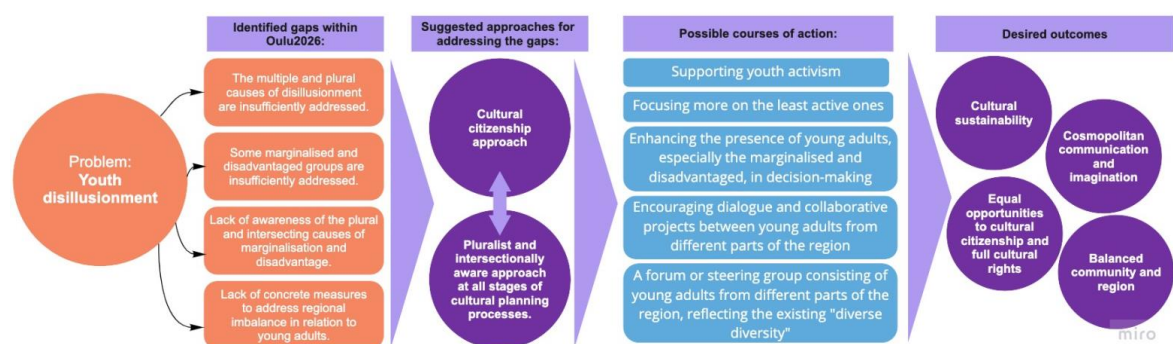
plural and intersectional causes, and by supporting cultural activism. I have argued that Oulu2026 should develop a plural and intersectional understanding and approach to questions of marginalisation and disadvantage; pay more focus on the least active ones rather than the most active ones; and involve young people from diverse backgrounds in decision-making processes. Moreover, I have suggested establishing forum or steering group consisting of young adults from the different municipalities and from diverse backgrounds representing the real “diverse diversity” in the region. The issues, suggested solutions, and expected benefits are summarised in Figure 1.

These suggestions for action presented here are, of course, not the only possible or recommendable actions. The main aim of this study has been to identify challenges in cultural participation that may have a connection to youth disillusionment, and to explore potential ways that the identified issues could be addressed. The presented suggestions are just some examples and ideas to respond to the identified challenges

The Equality and Diversity Strategy of Oulu is a great starting point towards more understanding of questions of diversity, plurality, and intersectionality. As the bid book states, the strategy is still a work in progress and its development will continue. “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”, the bid book notes (Oulu2026, 2021, p. 74). This research hopes to contribute to that important work.

**Figure 1**

*Fostering Cultural Participation to Address Youth Disillusionment within Oulu2026*



*Note.* A bigger size version of Figure 1 is presented in Appendix E.

## 8.5 Final Conclusions

This mixed methods case study has focused on the Oulu2026 ECoC project and attempted to find out how Oulu can address cultural participation to address youth disillusionment in the context of the ECoC.

It has been my aim to generate new understanding and knowledge about fostering young adults' cultural participation in the context of the ECoC. Moreover, I have attempted to study how cultivating cultural participation within the ECoC framework can help to address the risk of youth disillusionment. On another, more concrete level, I have aspired to produce relevant findings and knowledge for the Oulu2026 project with the aim to support them in generating strategies and ways of working that are more aware, respectful, and appreciative of the diverse group of young adults and their needs, challenges and aspirations related to cultural participation and, especially, cultural citizenship.

The Oulu2026 project was found to include many approaches to cultural citizenship and youth disillusionment that responded to actual, existing challenges, especially youth unemployment, mental health issues, and regional imbalance. Moreover, Oulu had started to build a Diversity and Equality Strategy together with a forum consisting of diverse stakeholders, which I considered to be a very welcome initiative and a great start to the important work. However, some gaps were identified, especially related to equity, marginalization, disadvantage, and intersectionality. What seemed to be lacking, was an awareness of the “diverse diversity” (Sen, 2007) of young adults.

In view of the findings, supported by the theoretical and ECoC frameworks, I have argued that youth disillusionment can be addressed by fostering cultural participation, more specifically, by emphasising and enhancing a cultural citizenship approach to participation. I have claimed that the main issues that Oulu2026 should address are the multiple, plural, and intersectional causes of marginalisation, disadvantage, and disillusionment, as well as regional imbalance. As an overarching solution, I have suggested integrating a pluralist and intersectionally aware approach to all stages of planning, decision-making, and evaluation.

Overall, I believe I have succeeded in answering the research question and in providing some implications and suggestions. However, it must be acknowledged that more research with a

qualitative approach is needed, as will be discussed in the following sub-chapter.

The research process has been a complex but highly rewarding journey. It has included moments of uncertainty and self-doubt but also – and fortunately more often – others of deep motivation and realisation. The process gave me countless new insights and an opportunity to develop my thinking and understanding in the field of this study. Besides the personal gains, I first and foremost hope that the findings and conclusions of this study will help Oulu2026 to build an even more inclusive programme and strategy, aware and respectful of the diverse diversity of its (cultural) citizens.

## **8.6 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research**

Throughout the paper, I have aimed to be open about the limitations of this study to allow a critical reading. The most central limitations will be discussed and summarised in this chapter. In addition, suggestions for future research will be presented.

First of all, the number of survey responses was relatively low considering the size of the overall population of young adults aged 18–24 in the region. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalised to the whole population, and it is likely that the voices of the most marginalised have not been heard. Moreover, the volunteer sampling method, as discussed, may lead to a situation where the ones who are interested and motivated about the topic of the survey are the ones most likely to answer, while many other voices are left unheard. There were big differences in the response numbers from the different municipalities, which places further barriers to generalising any findings to the whole region. However, the survey responses show that many people who were unaware of the Oulu2026 project did answer and there was some diversity in the backgrounds of the respondents.

Another limitation, which has been addressed in this paper, is a lack of qualitative data from the point of view of young adults. This was a conscious choice, as has been explained, but one that significantly limited the ability to make analyses and conclusions about reasons behind certain phenomena, causal relationships, and the deeper impact of the studied issues on young people's lives. For example, more qualitative data would have been required for a thorough intersectional analysis.

After a critical reflection of the research process and findings, and with the described limitations in mind, I consider the findings of this study to be relevant and important. The research has provided a general idea of the topic of the study, increased understanding of the existing challenges, and suggested possible solutions. Moreover, I believe that this study has provided a good starting point for further research.

During the research, many suggestions for further research emerged. I made it a habit to keep an updated document of emerging ideas throughout the process. First of all, as discussed above, more qualitative research from the point of view of young adults is needed to better understand the causes of marginalisation, disadvantage, and disillusionment – including a proper intersectional analysis – and their impact on young people’s cultural participation. Examining the links between cultural participation, cultural citizenship, and youth disillusionment also requires a more qualitative, in-depth focus.

As we are moving towards the post-pandemic period, more detailed research about the impact of Covid-19 on young people’s cultural participation within the Oulu2026 project and beyond is needed. Research is also needed about the impact of speeding digitalisation on cultural participation in the context of the ECoC.

I would also suggest a thorough cultural mapping exercise among young adults in the different municipalities, areas, and suburbs of the region to get a wider understanding about what counts as culture and cultural participation for the diverse group of young adults, and how, perhaps, the pandemic may influence cultural participation habits and needs.

Multiple case-studies could also provide interesting insights. For example, a case study comparing the Equality and Diversity Strategies in different ECoC cities and their links to cultural citizenship and youth disillusionment could provide relevant understanding about the impact of such strategies on different levels.

Finally, in the context of the ECoC it would be interesting to address the topic of this study on a European level.



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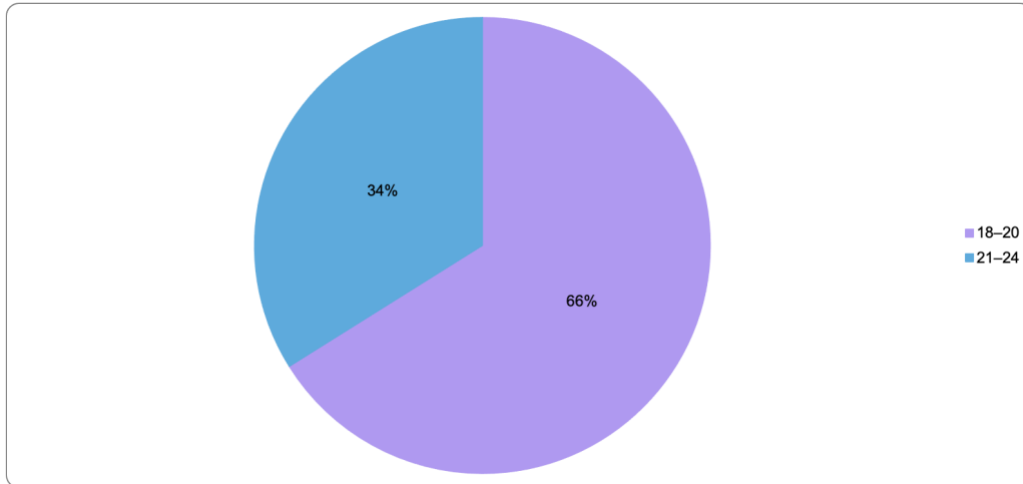
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## APPENDIX A. FIGURES (SURVEY RESPONSES)

**Figure A1**

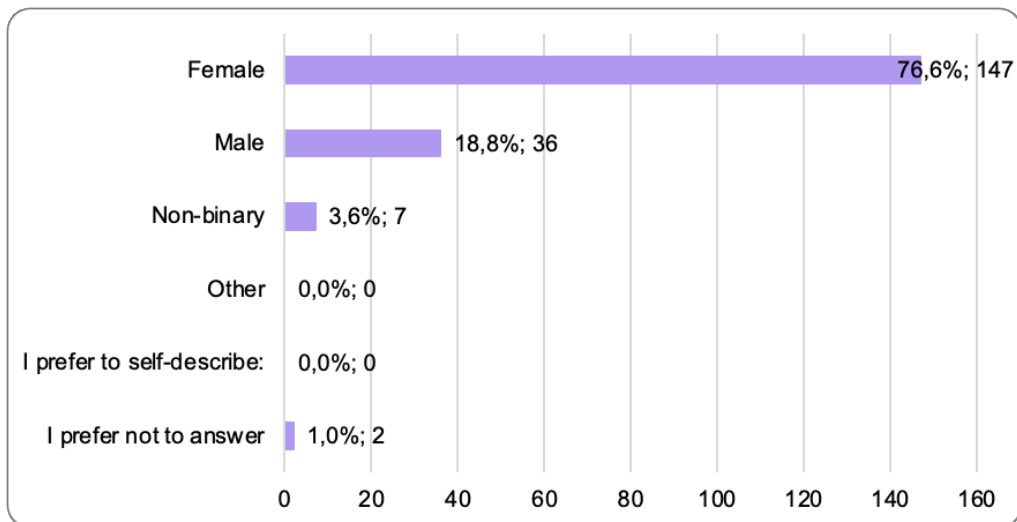
*Survey Respondents by Age*



Note. Total N=192.

**Figure A2**

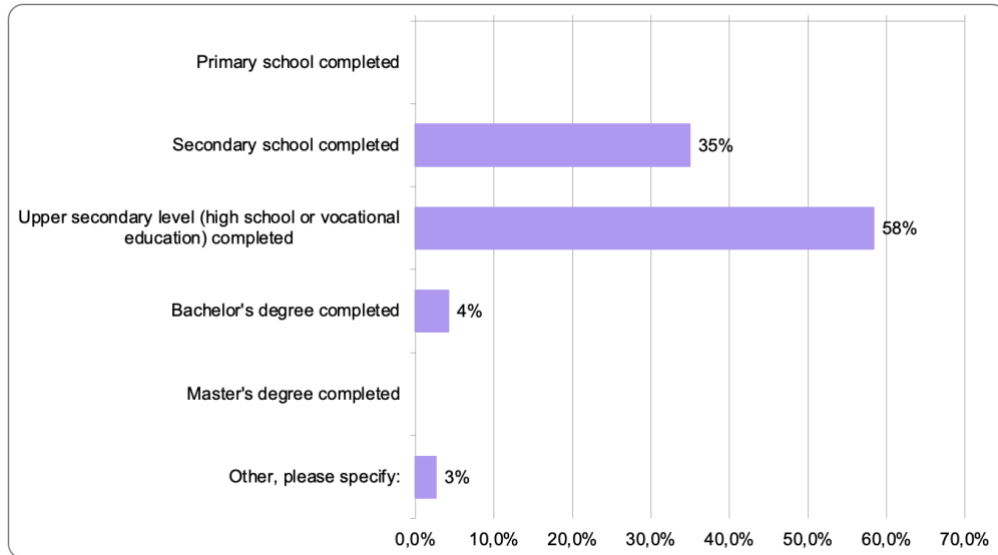
*Survey Respondents by Gender*



Note. Total N=192.

**Figure A3**

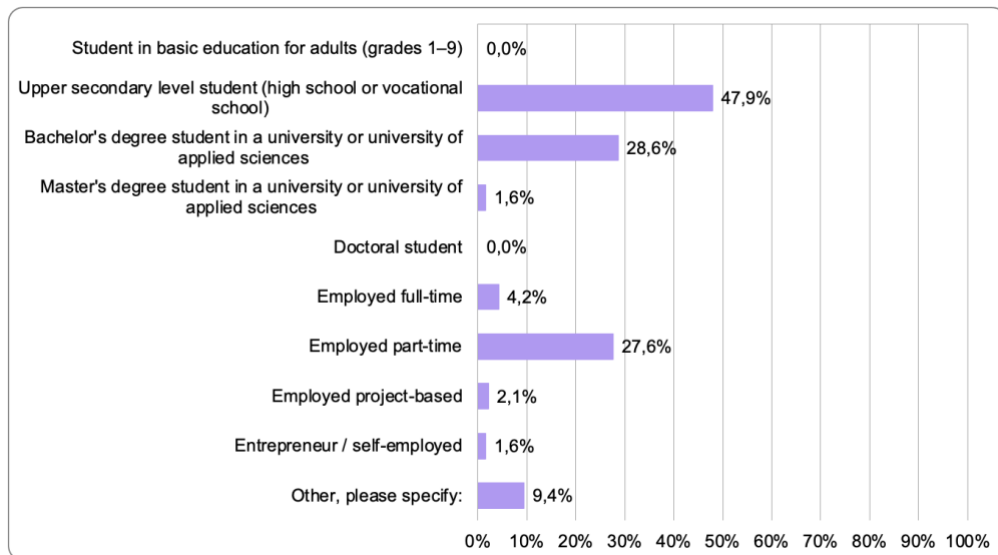
*Education Level of Respondents*



*Note.* Total  $N=192$ . The “other” answers included three mentions of a Christian institute and two mentions of a current student status at a university of applied sciences.

**Figure A4**

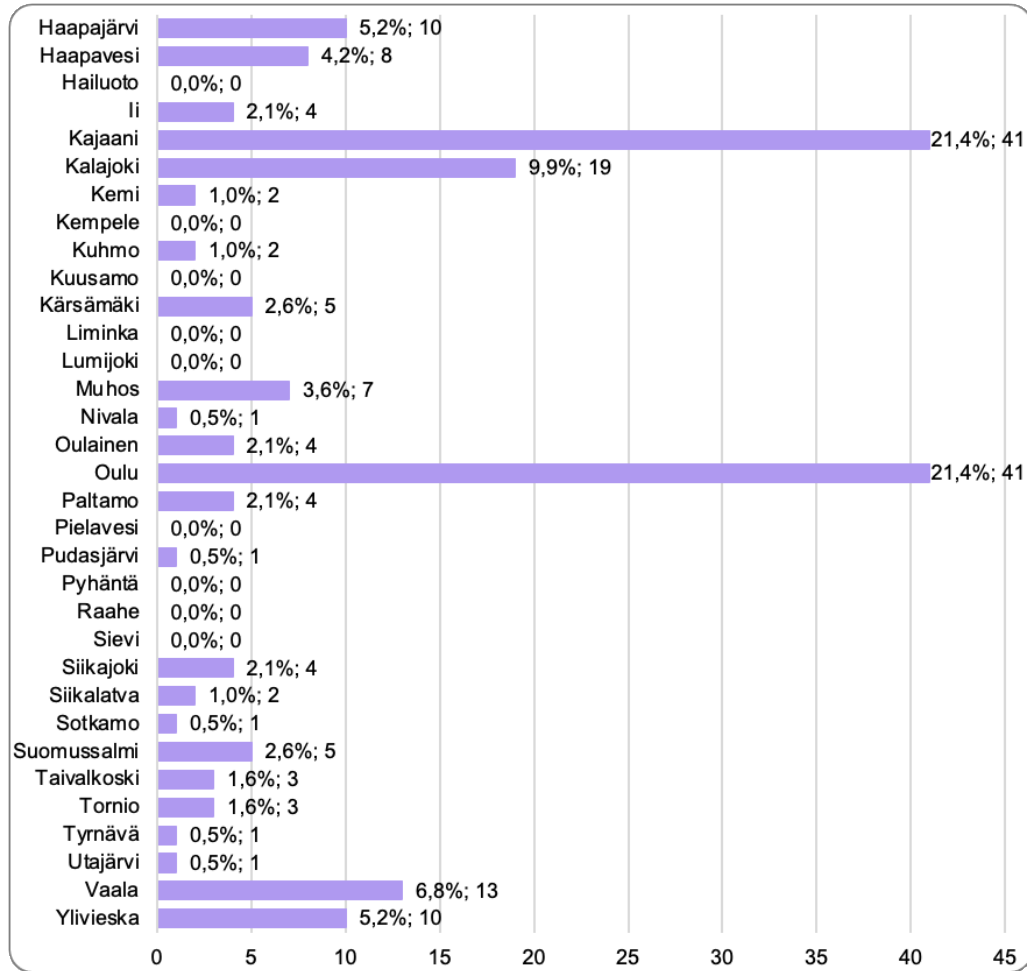
*Current Employment and/or Student Status of Respondents*



*Note.* Total  $N=192$ . The “other” answers included the the unemployed, the recently graduated, and those in maternity leave, military service, working with grants, or doing work try-outs.

**Figure A5**

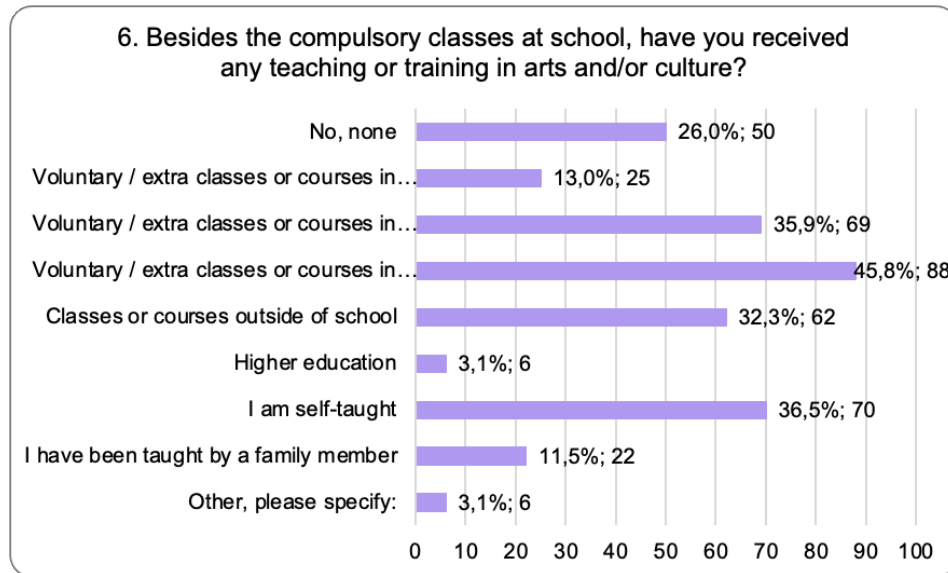
Survey responses from the different municipalities in the Oulu2026 Region



Note. Total N=192.

**Figure A6**

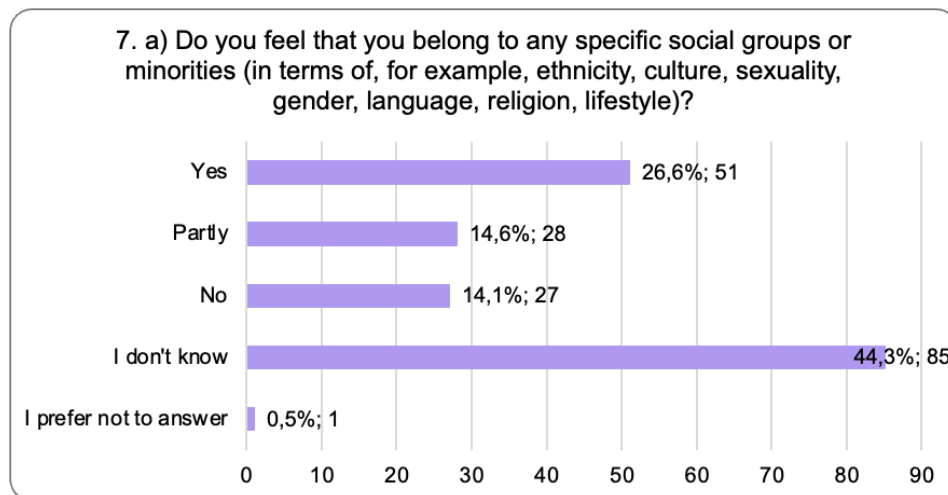
*Teaching and Training Received in Arts and/or Culture*



*Note.* Total  $N=192$ . The “Other” responses included folk high school studies, courses, work try-outs in the cultural field, and open university studies.

**Figure A7**

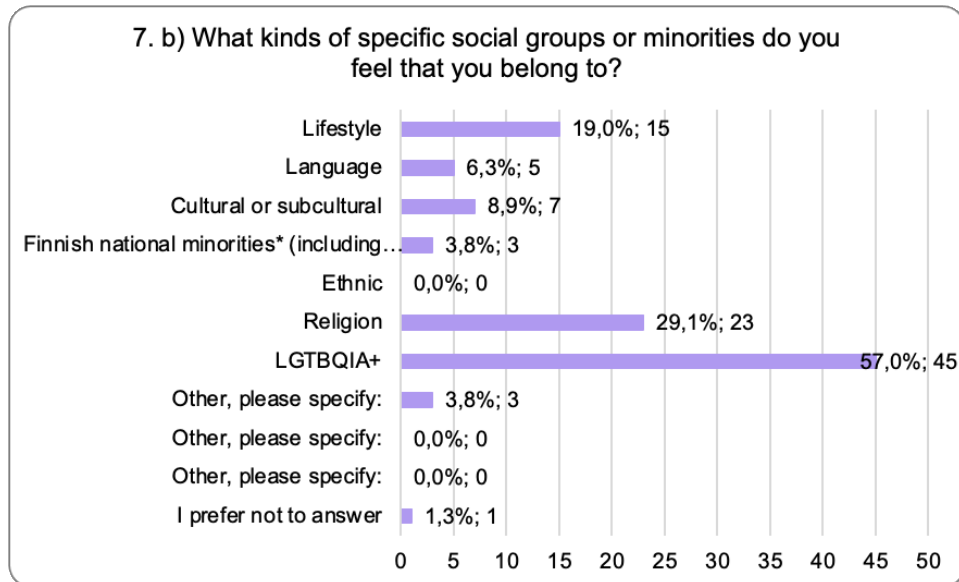
*Belonging to Specific Social Groups or Minorities*



*Note.* Total  $N=192$ .

**Figure A8**

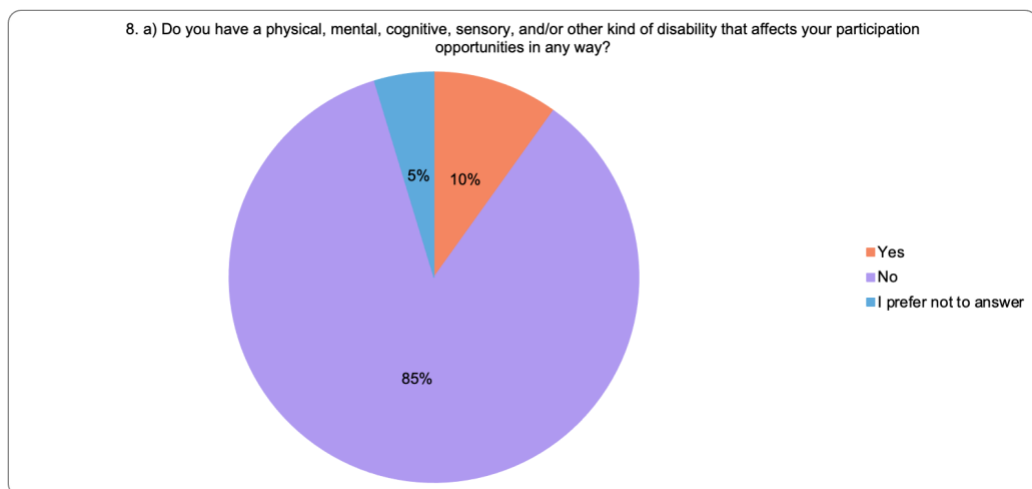
Types of Minorities or Social Groups the Respondents Belong to



Note. Total  $N=79$ . The respondents were allowed to choose one option or several, and/or add their own options. In parenthesis after “Finnish national minorities” it said “including Swedish-speaking Finns, the Sámi, the Roma, the Jews, the Tatars, the Karelians and the Russian-speaking minority”

**Figure A9**

Disabilities that Affect Participation Opportunities Among Respondents

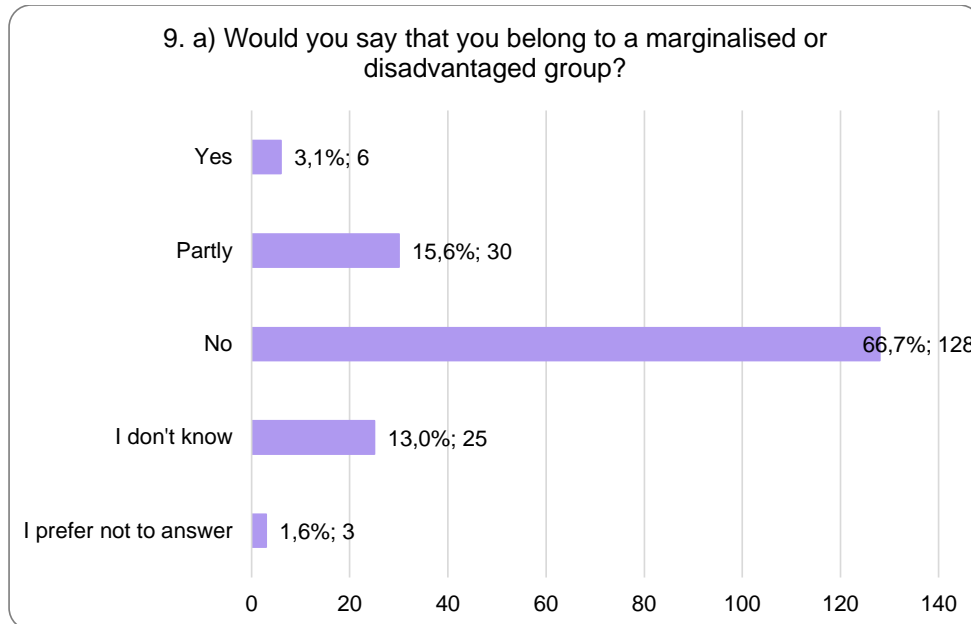


Note. Total  $N=192$ .



**Figure A10**

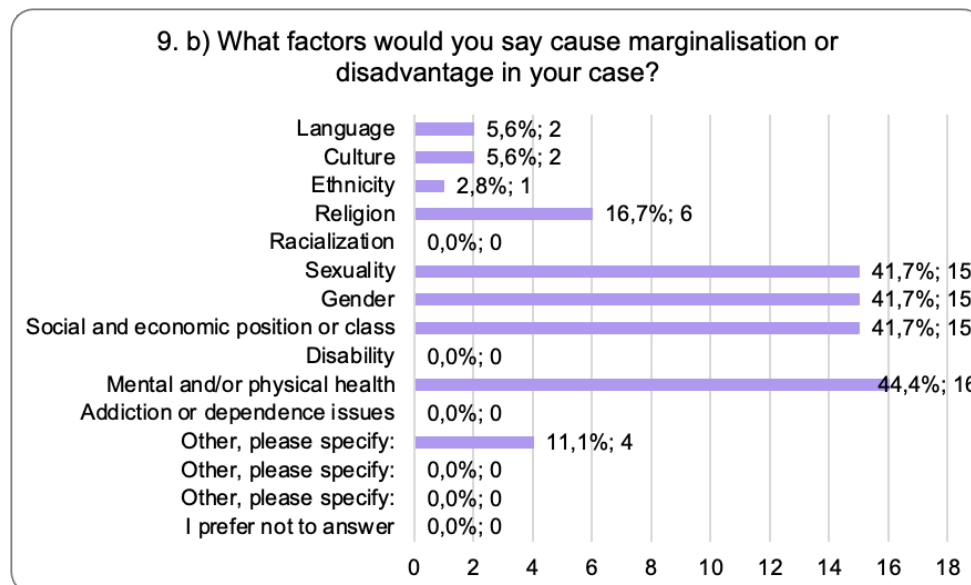
*Belonging to a Marginalised or Disadvantaged Group*



Note. Total N=192.

**Figure A11**

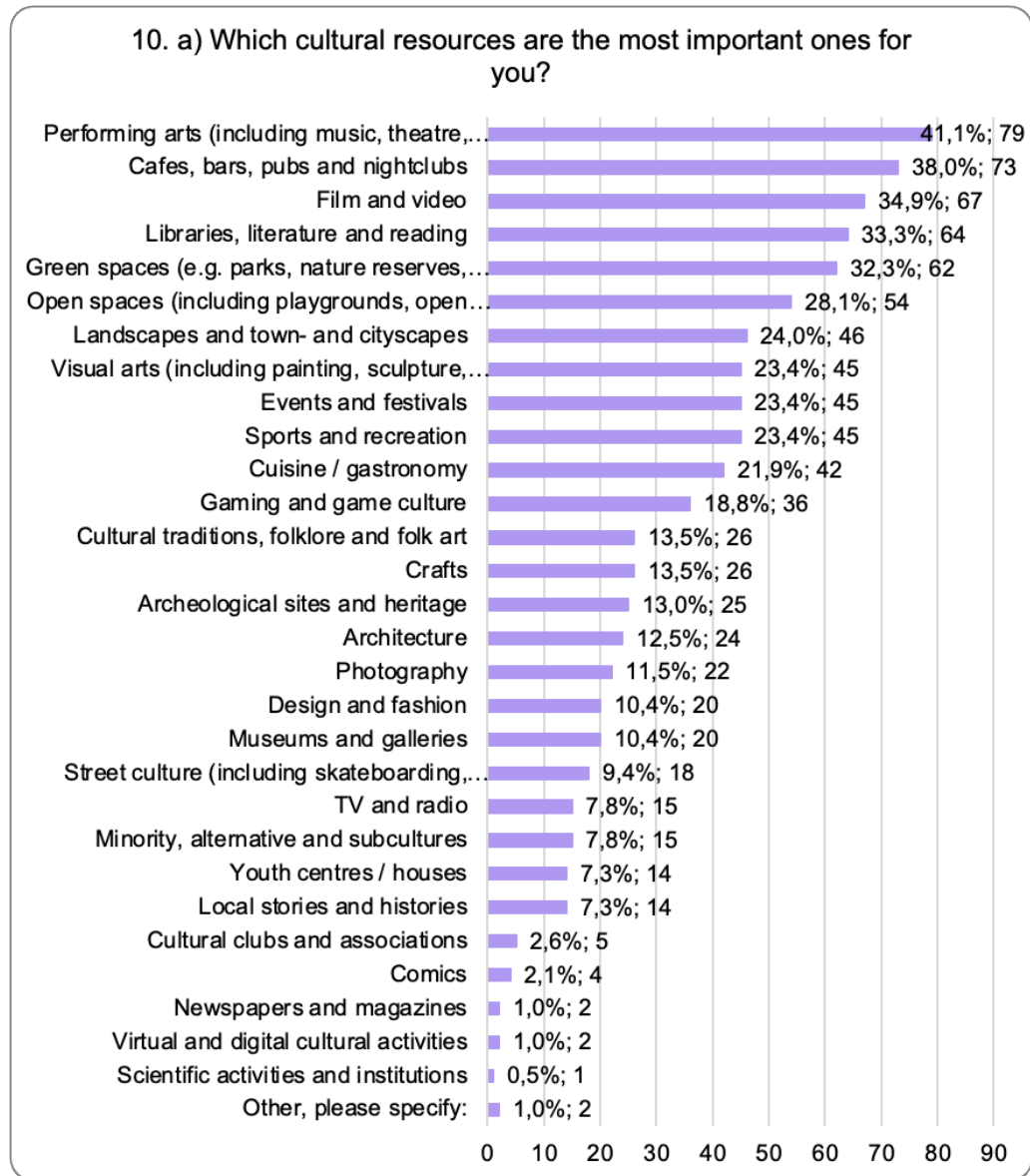
*Factors Causing Marginalisation or Disadvantage*



Note. Total N=36. The “Other” answers included the following four answers: money (insufficient income as a student), poverty, not being Christian, and obesity.

**Figure A12**

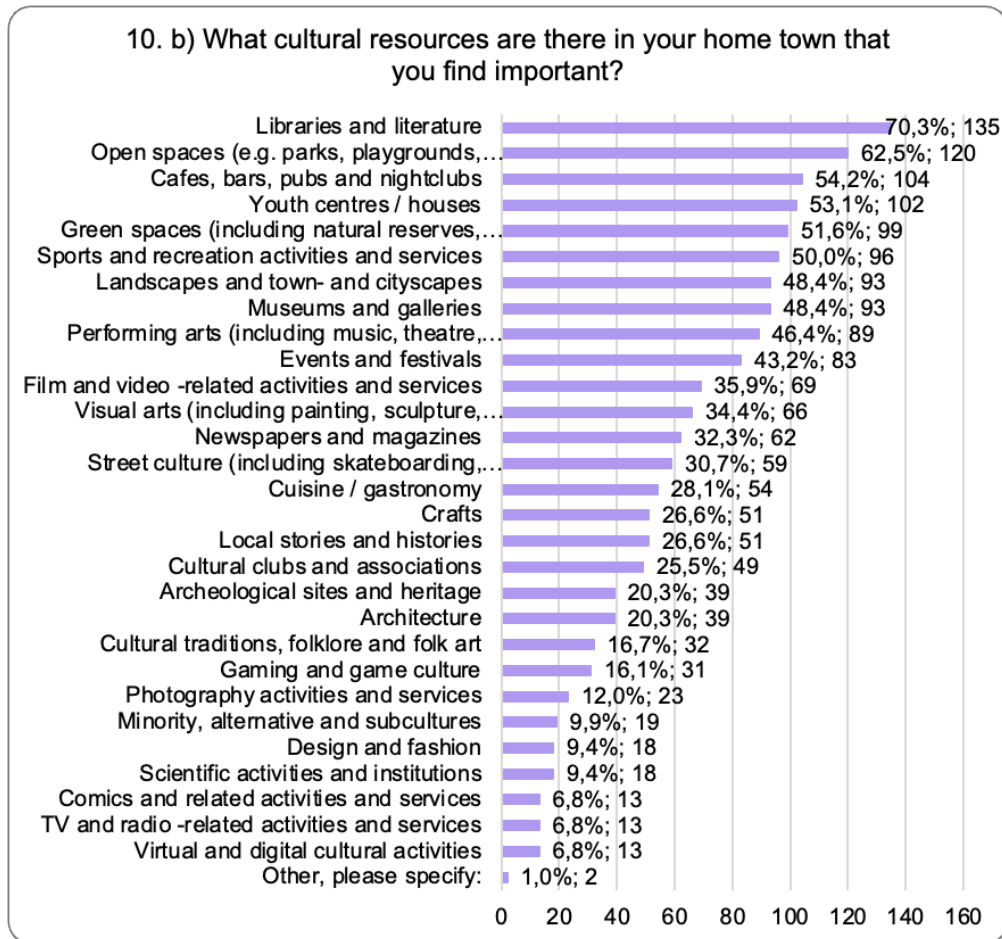
*Cultural Resources Valued by Young Adults in the Oulu2026 Region*



*Note.* Total N=192. Respondents were allowed to choose a maximum of five options. The two “other” answers included “I love everything above, especially artistic part, it is very sad there’s no any classes for English speaking available in Oulu :(” and “the park”.

**Figure A13**

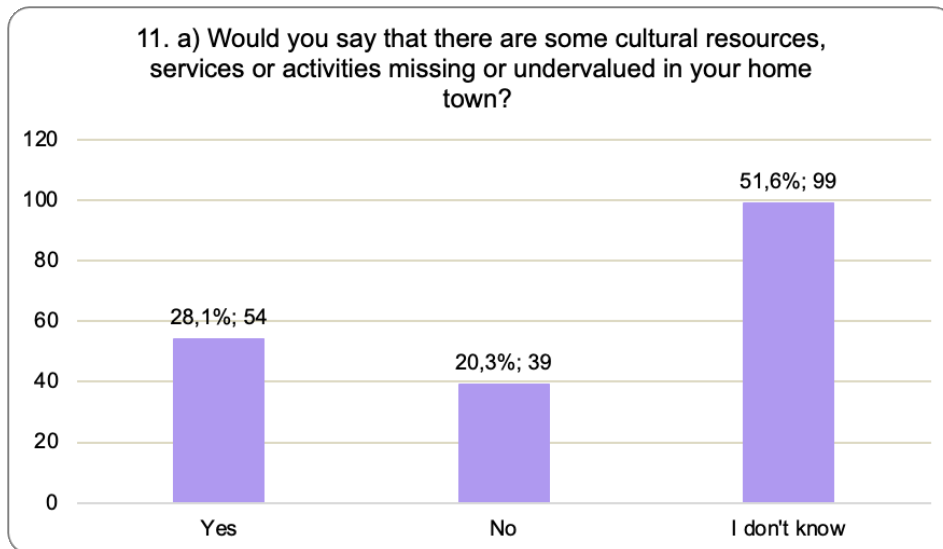
Important Cultural resources in the Respondents' Hometowns



*Note.* Total N=192. Respondents were allowed to choose as many options as they wanted to, which explains the difference in the number of answers between 10 a and b. The two “other” responses included “Nothing, I think” and “Nothing really that I find important”.

**Figure A14**

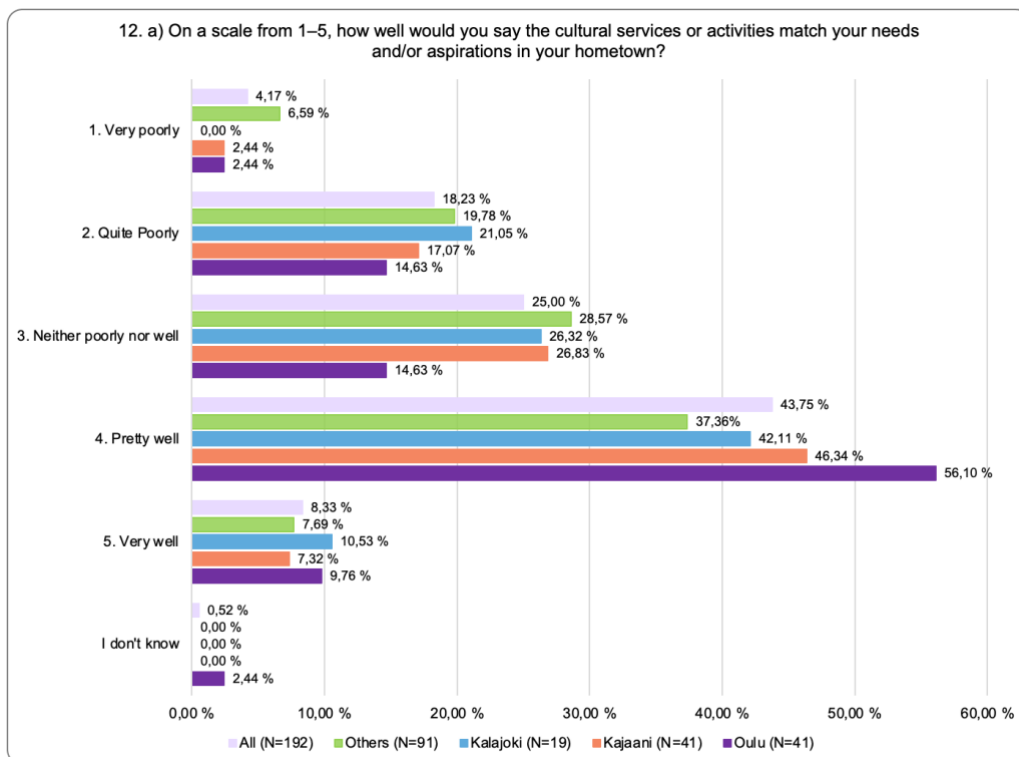
*Undervalued or Missing Cultural Resources, Services or Activities*



Note. Total N=192.

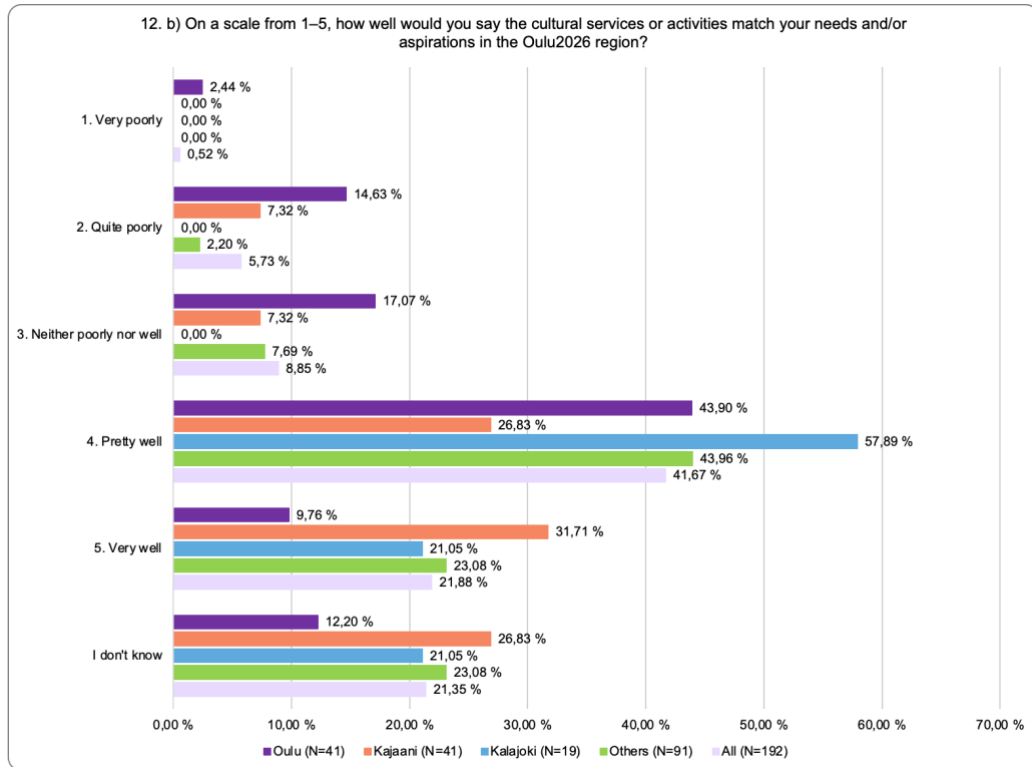
**Figure A15**

*Compatibility of Cultural Services and Activities in Different Municipalities with the Needs and Aspirations of Young Adults*



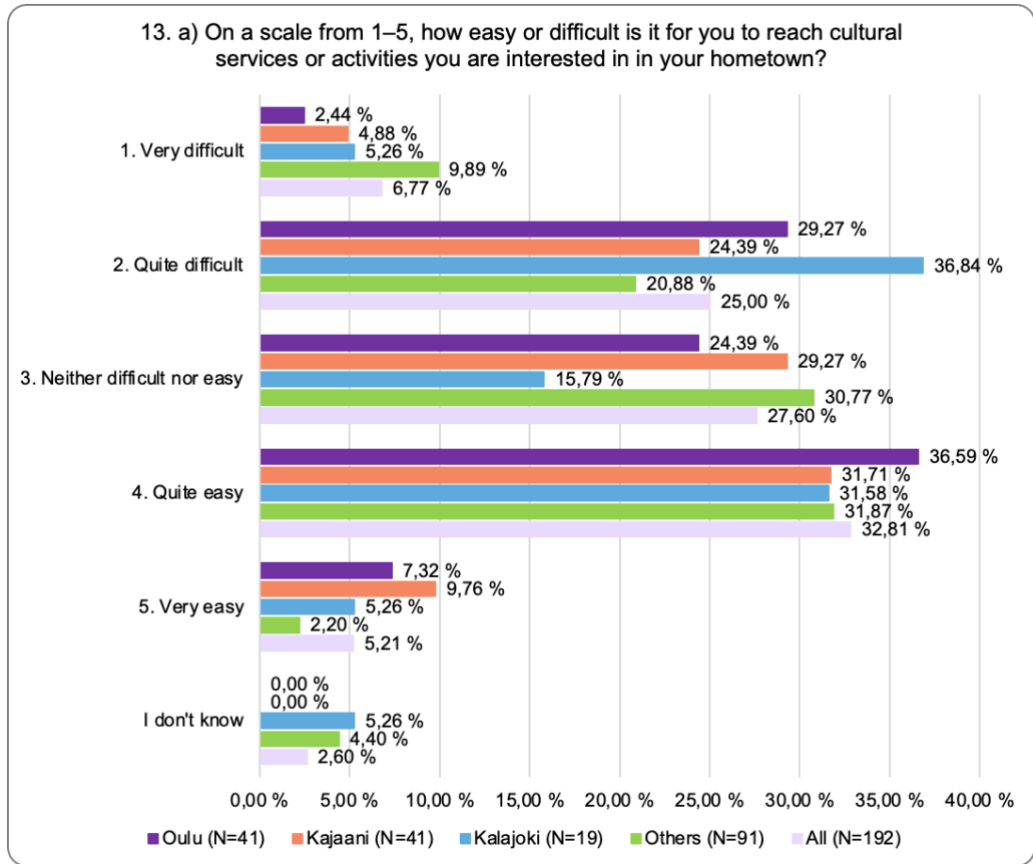
**Figure A16**

*Compatibility of Cultural Services and Activities in the Oulu2026 region with the Needs and Aspirations of Young Adults*



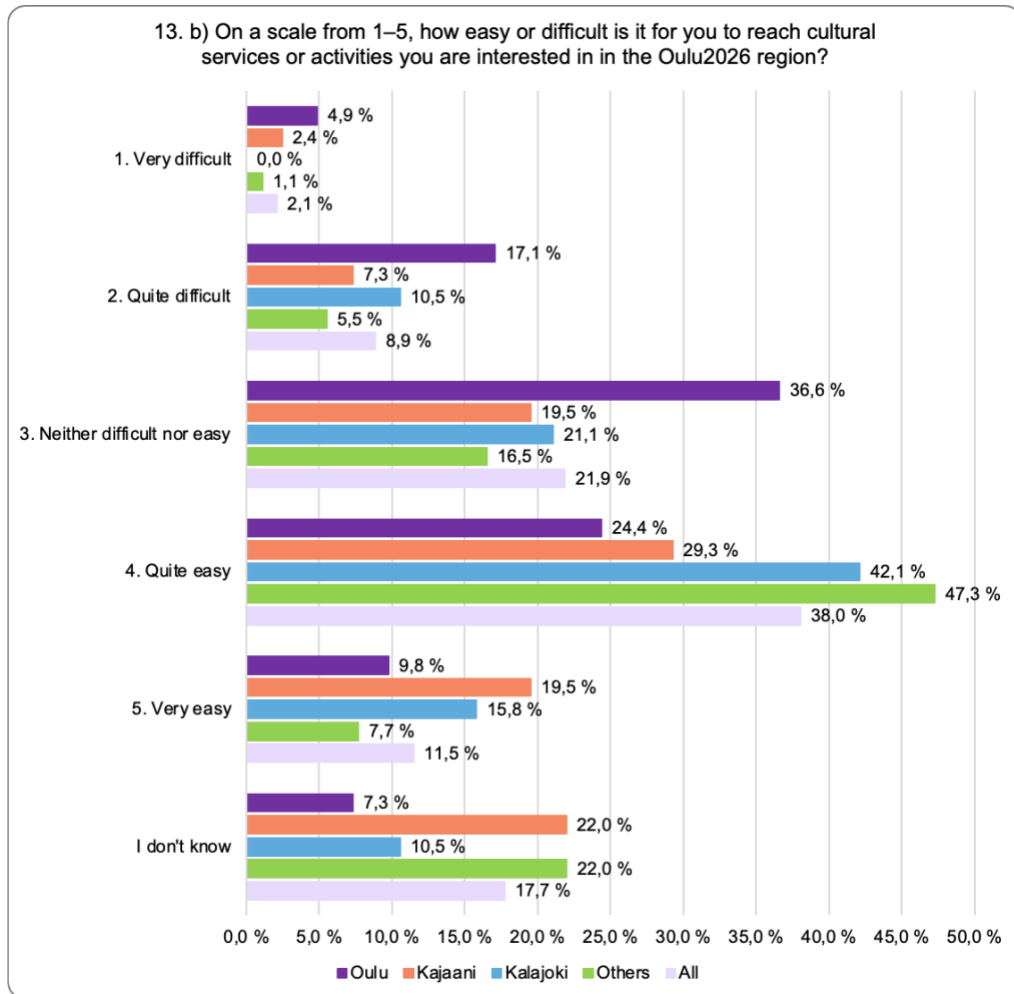
**Figure A17**

*Accessibility of Cultural Services and Activities in the Respondents' Hometowns*



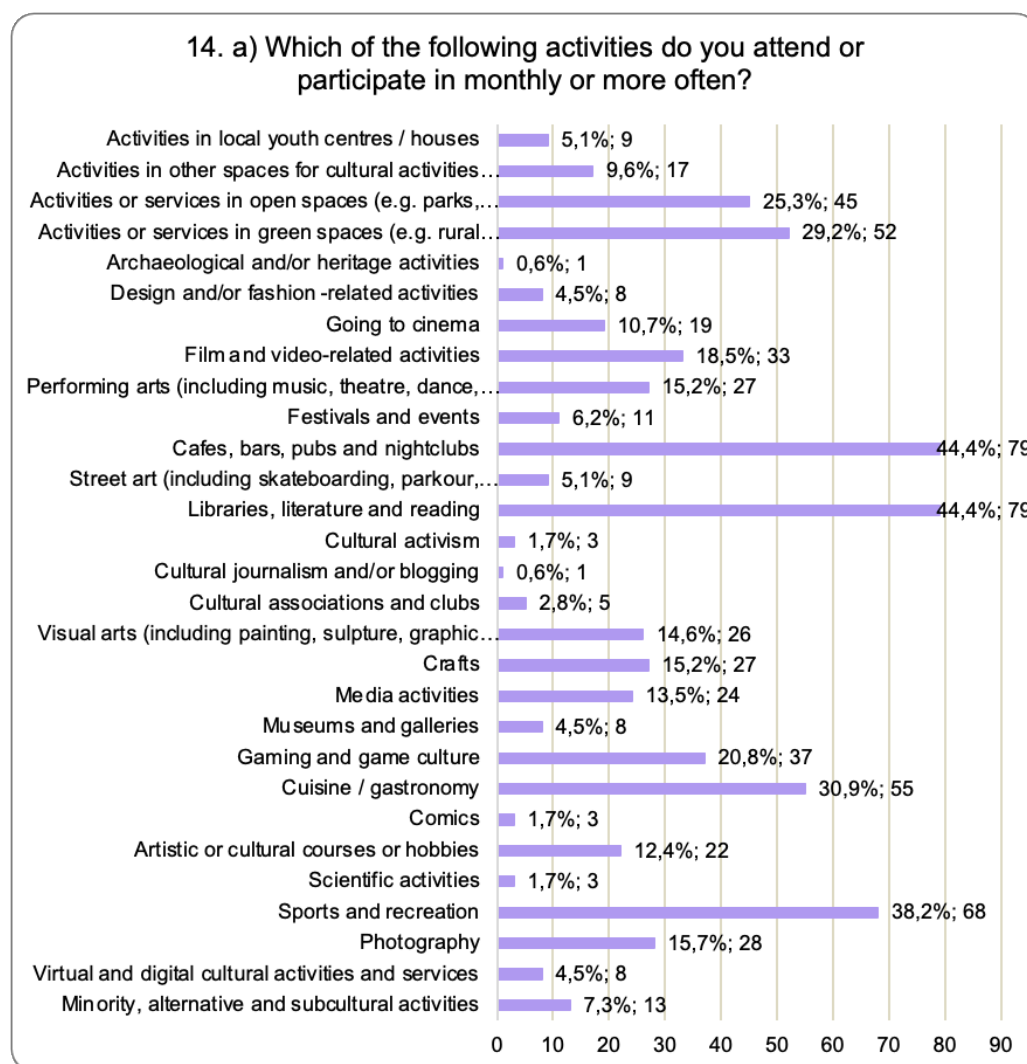
**Figure A18**

*Accessibility of Cultural Services and Activities in the Oulu2026 Region*



**Figure A19**

*Monthly Participation and Attendance in Cultural Activities*

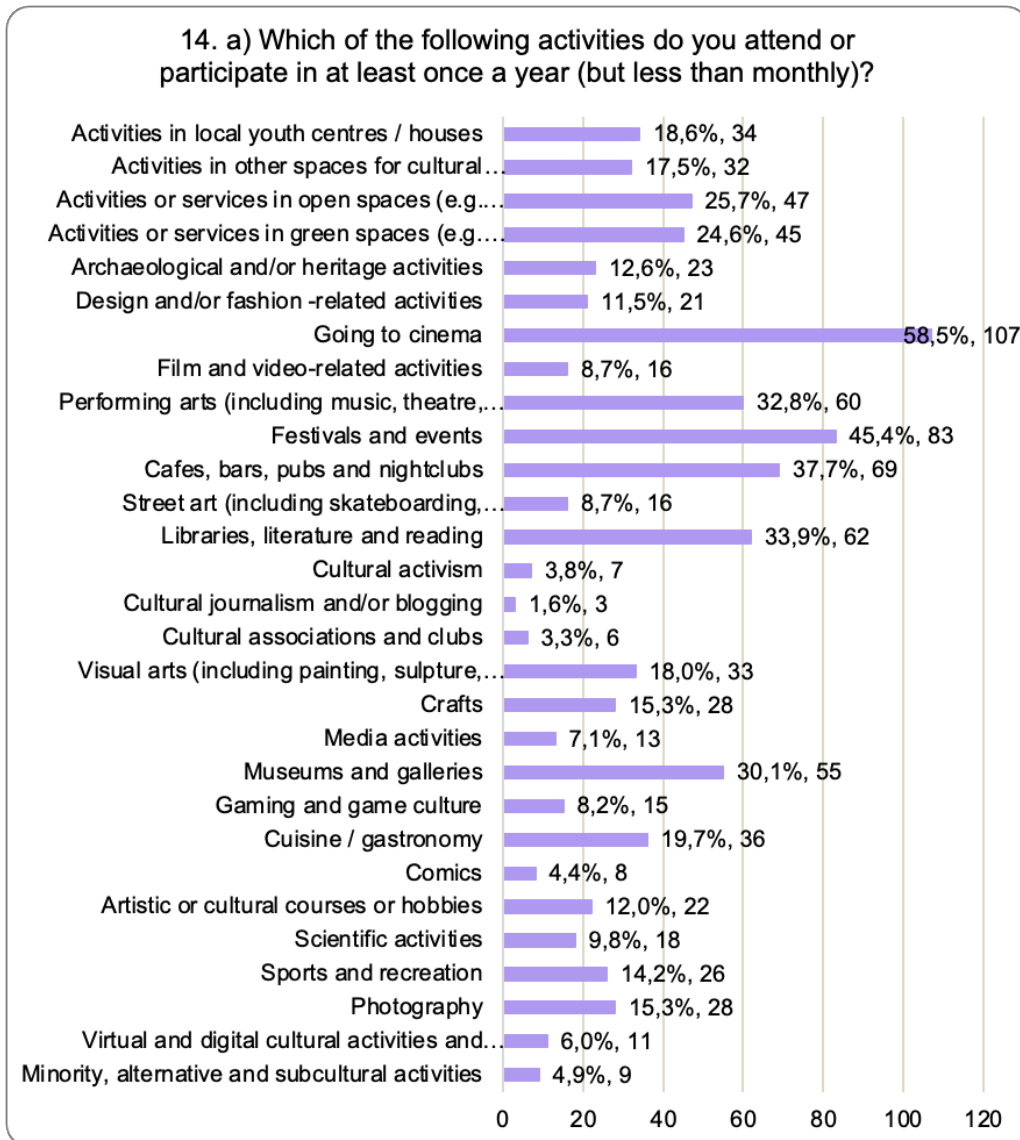


*Note.* Total N=192. Participants were allowed to choose as many options as they wanted.



**Figure A20**

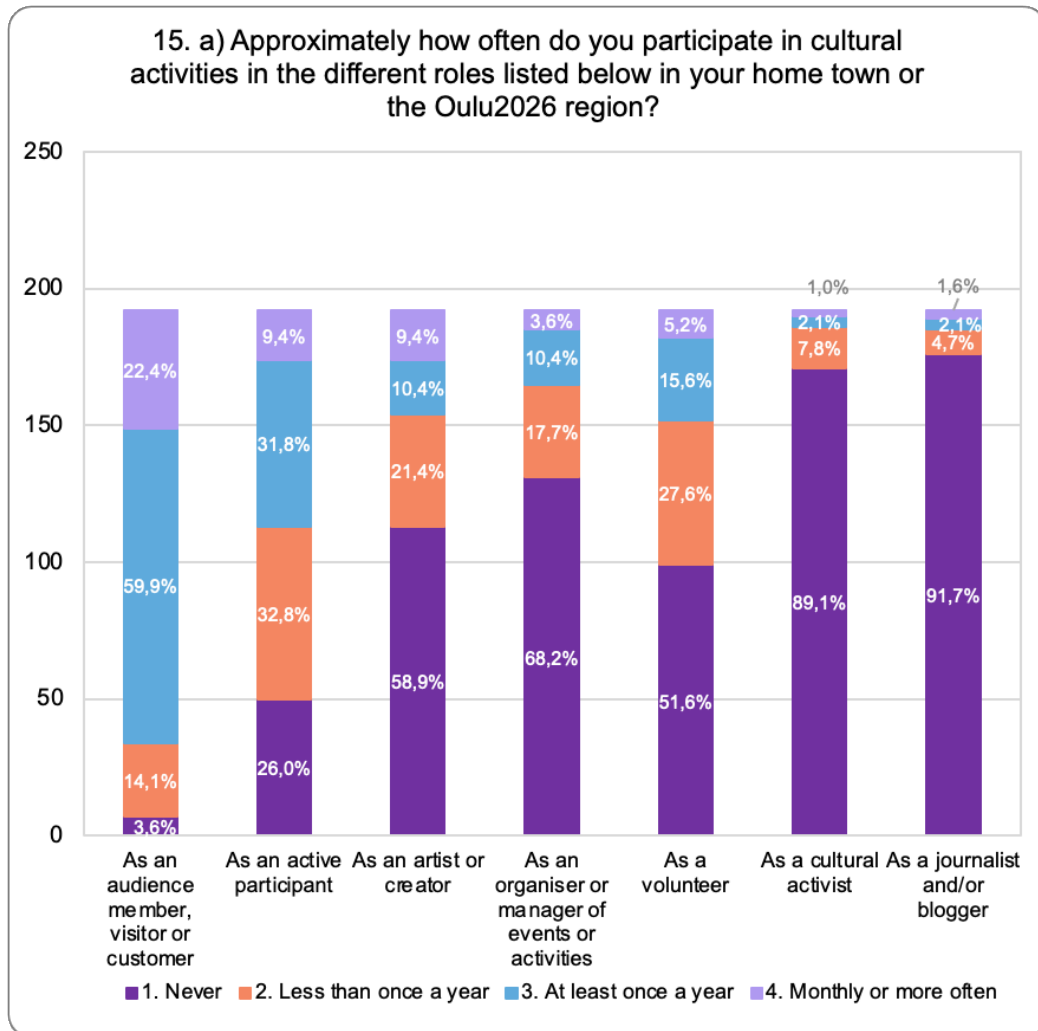
*Annual Participation and Attendance in Cultural Activities*



Note. Total N=192. Participants were allowed to choose as many options as they wanted.

**Figure A21**

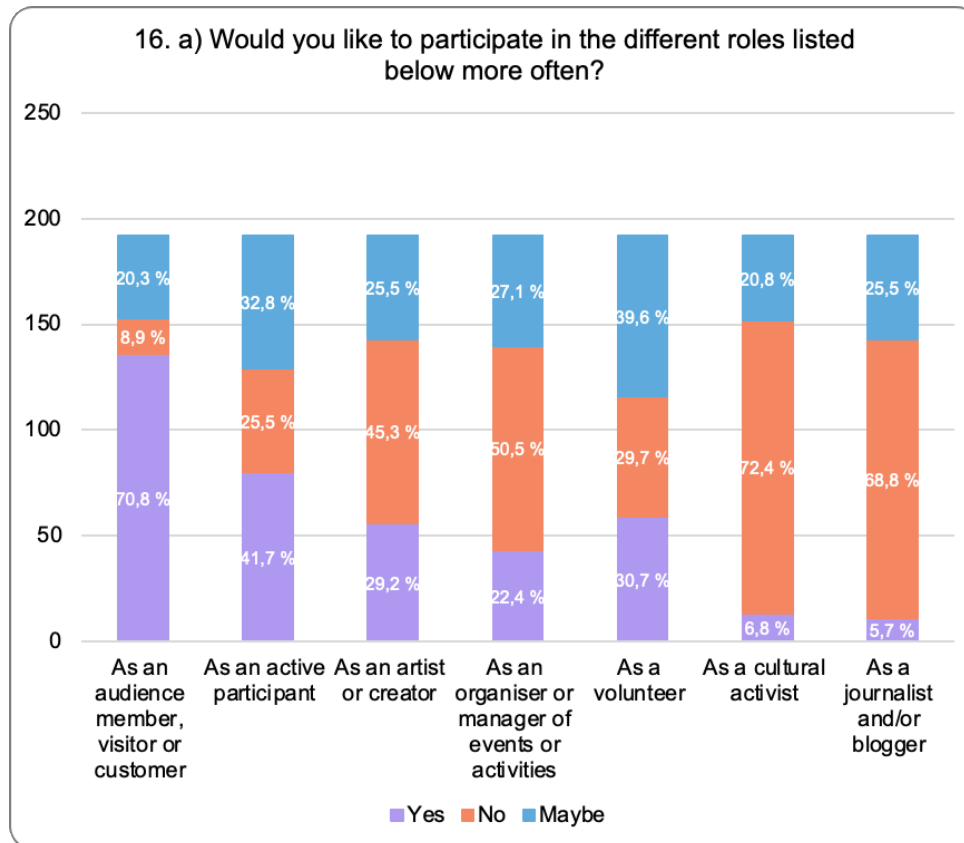
*Different Ways of Cultural Participation Among Young Adults in the Region*



*Note.* Total  $N=192$ . The respondents had a chance to list other roles in which they participate. The following answers came up: business partner, funder and exporter; photographer; social media content creator; and an assistant in organising events.

**Figure A22**

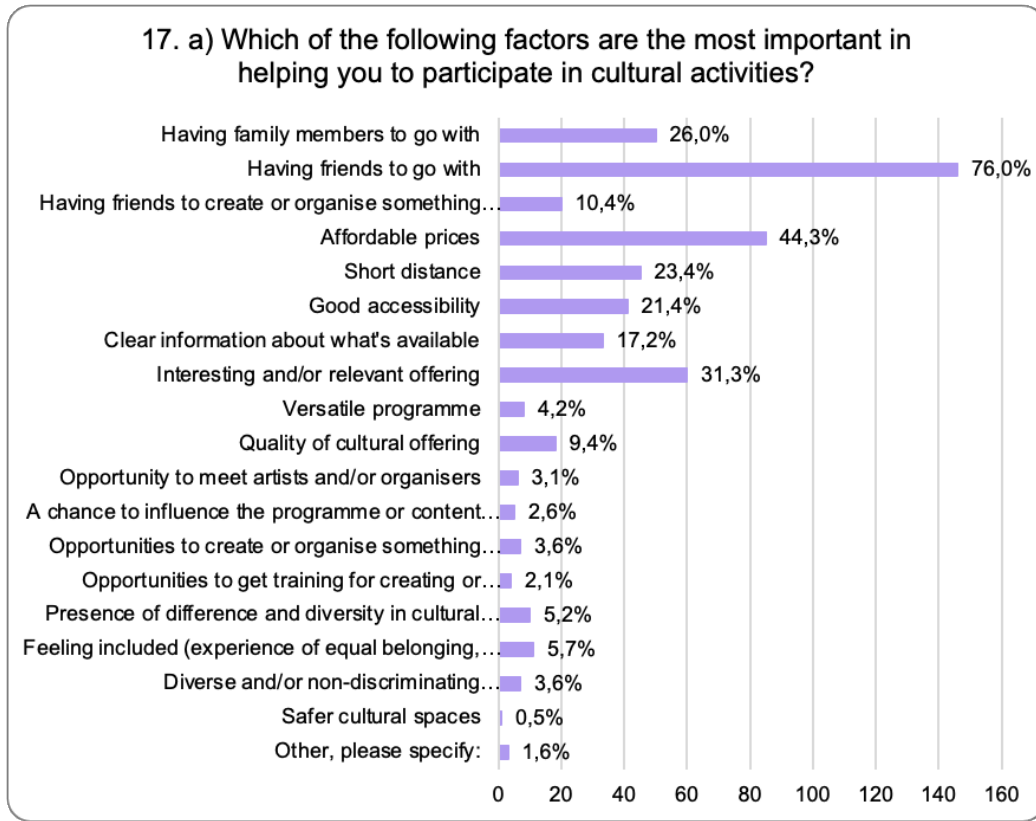
*Young Adults' Aspirations Regarding Roles of Participation*



*Note.* Total  $N=192$ . Y axis represents the number of answers. The open-ended answers included roles such as business partner or funder, and Arcade player. One respondent also noted that they would like to participate more often but did not know in what kind of role.

**Figure A23**

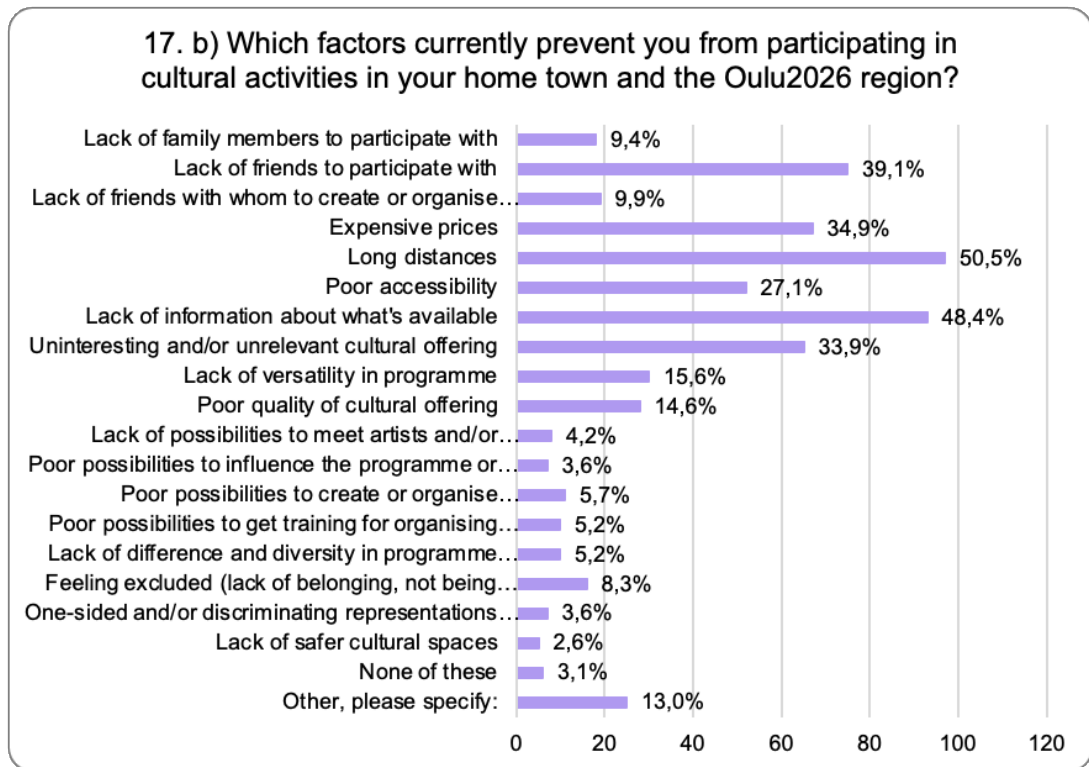
*Factors Enhancing Cultural Participation Among Young Adults*



*Note.* Total  $N=192$ . Three people answered “Other”. The open-ended answers included the possibility for self-development and learning; boredom; and school.

**Figure A24**

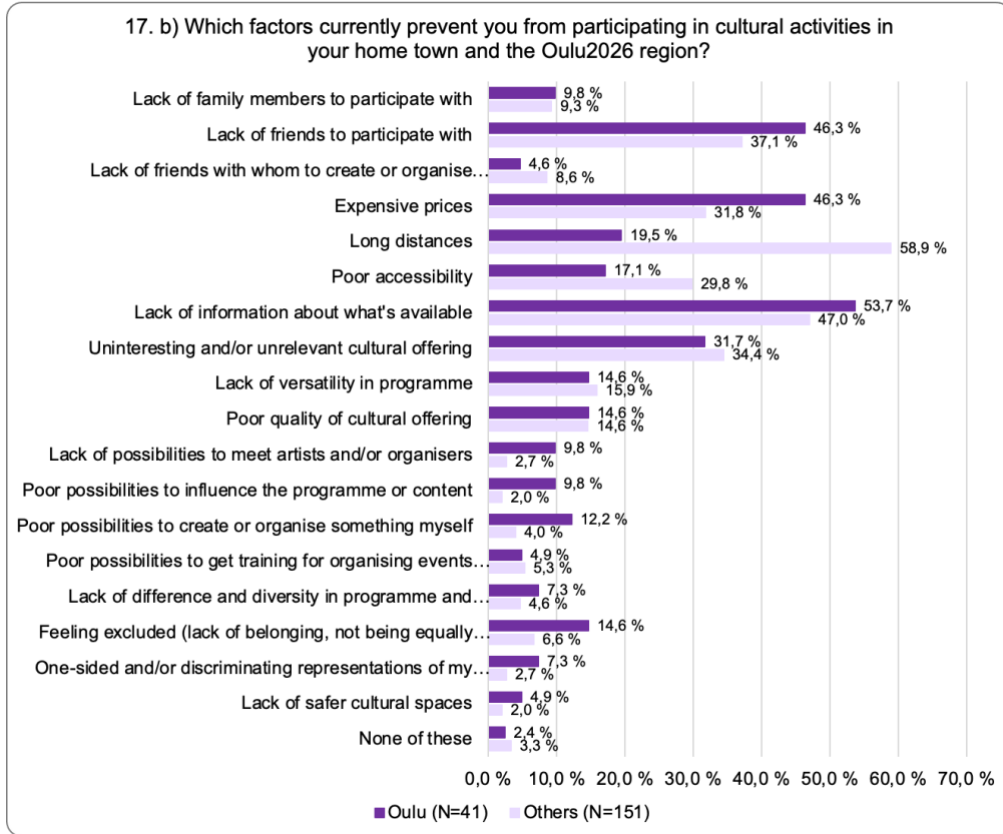
*Factors Preventing Cultural Participation Among Young Adults*



*Note.* Total  $N=192$ . The other answers ( $N=25$ ) included several mentions of Covid-19; unsuitable offering in folk high schools; lack of time; school; and laziness.

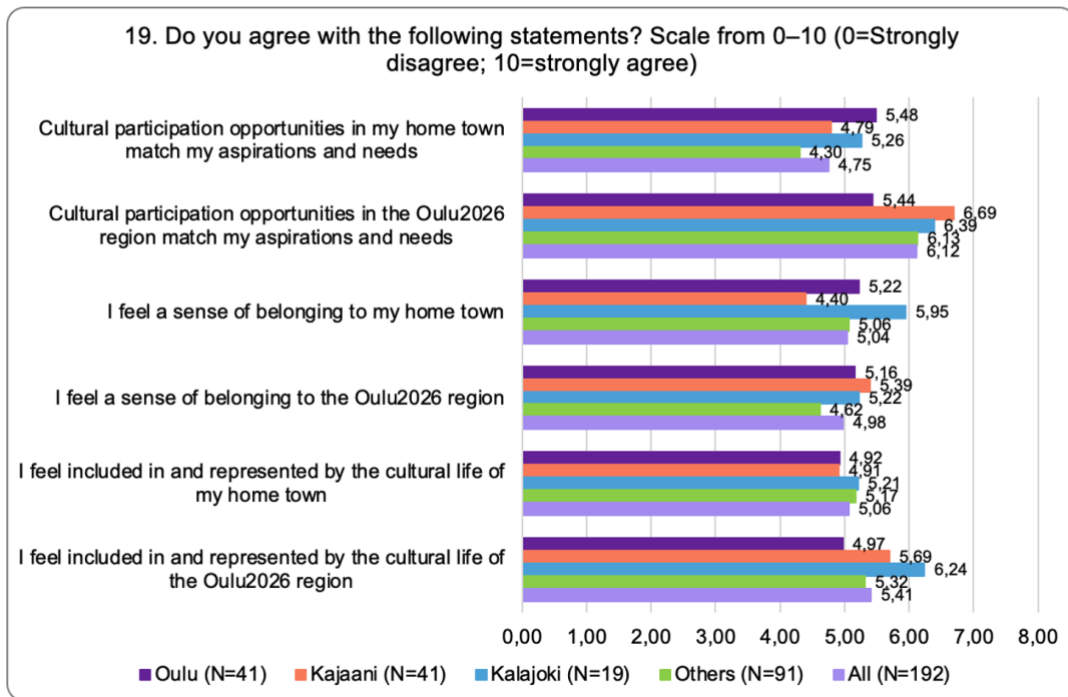
**Figure A25**

*Factors Preventing Cultural Participation Among Young Adults: A Comparison Between Oulu and Other Municipalities*



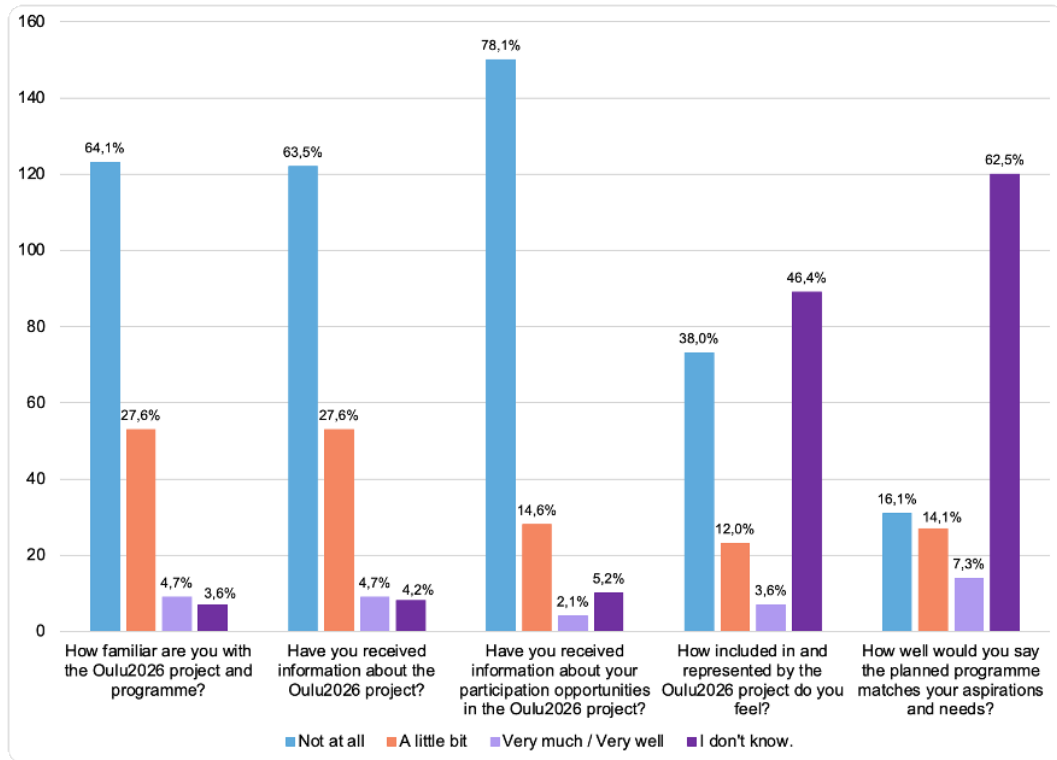
**Figure A26**

*Average Values of Young Adults' Views on Cultural Participation Opportunities, Sense of Belonging, Inclusion and Representation.*



**Figure A27**

*Familiarity With and Views About the Oulu2026 Project and Programme.*

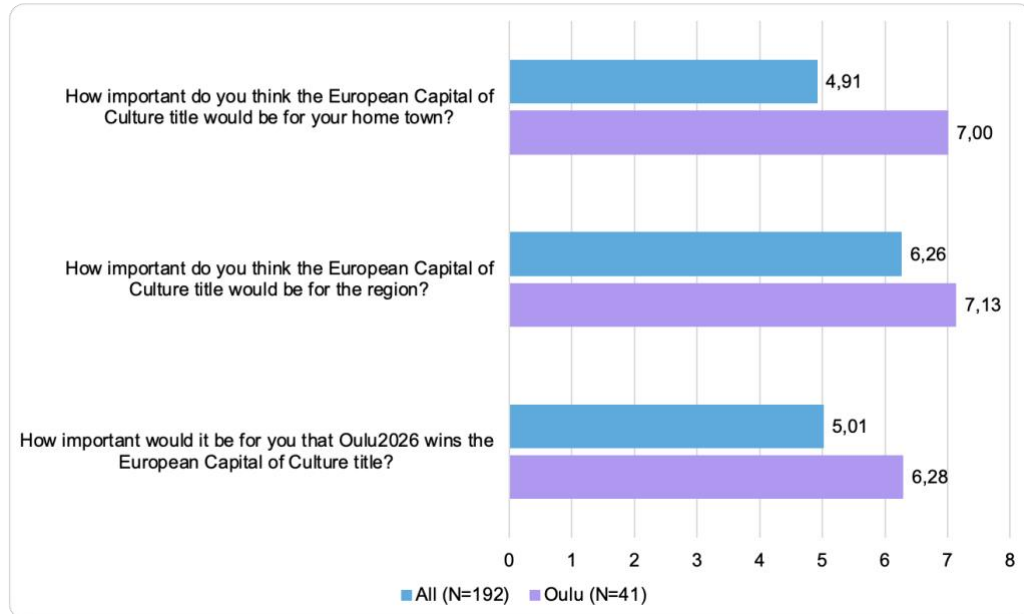


*Note.* Total N=192. The Y axis represents the number of answers.



**Figure A28**

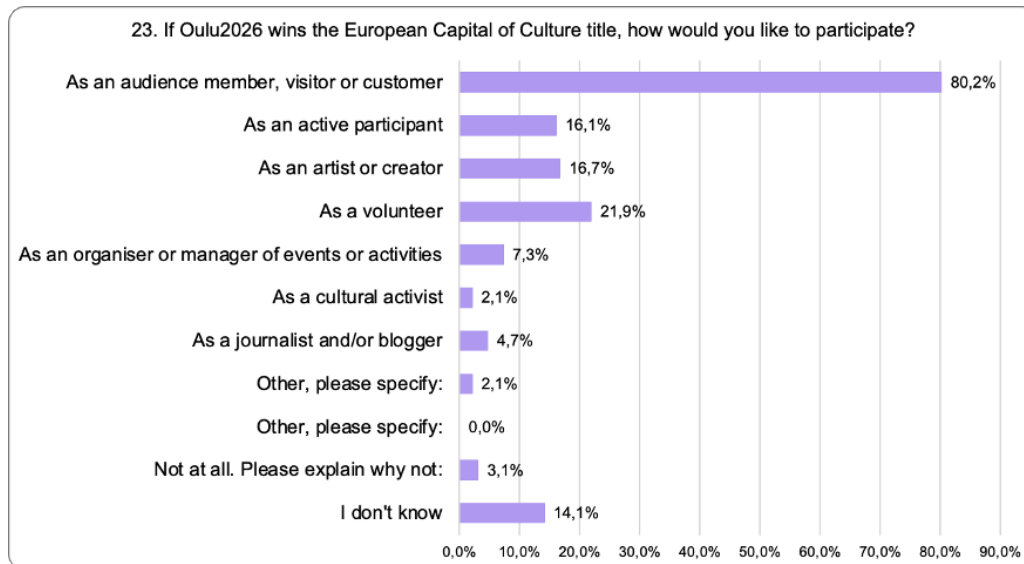
Perceived Importance of the ECoC 2026 Title. Average Values on a Scale from 1–10.



Note. The figure shows the averages of the responses on a scale from 0–10 (0 = Not important at all, 10 = Very important).

**Figure A29**

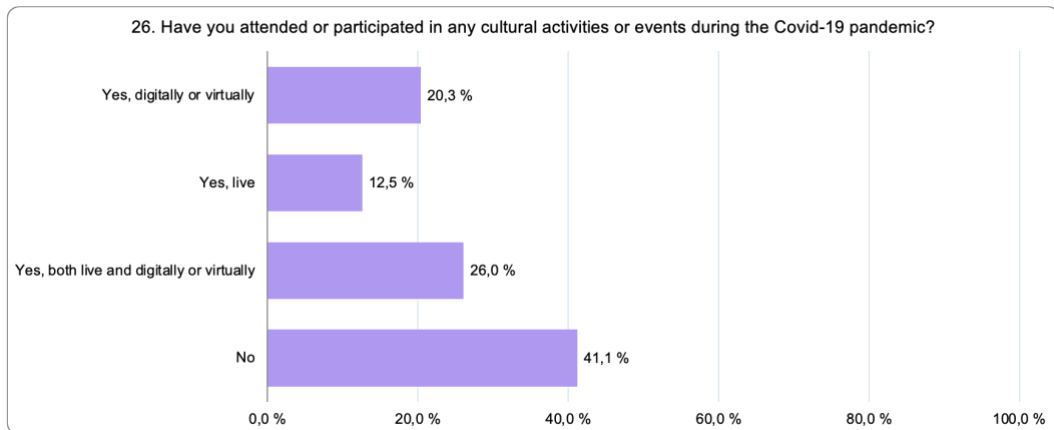
Participation Aspirations if Oulu Wins the ECoC Title



Note. Total N=192. There were a total of four “Other” answers, including “anything”, “Social media content creator”, “Arcade player” and “Not at all”. Reasons to not want to participate at all included lack of time, lack of money, and a feeling that the project “does not concern me”.

**Figure A30**

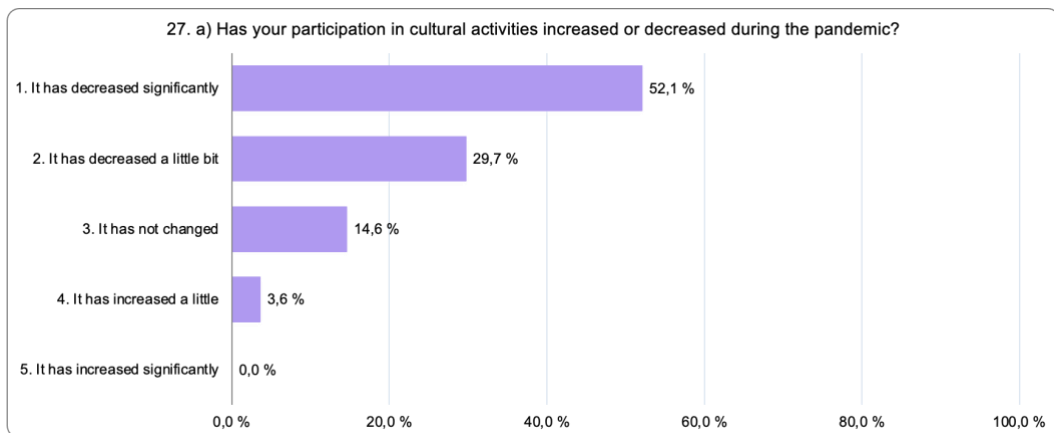
*Participation in Cultural Activities or Events During the Covid-19 Pandemic*



Note. Total N=192.

**Figure A31**

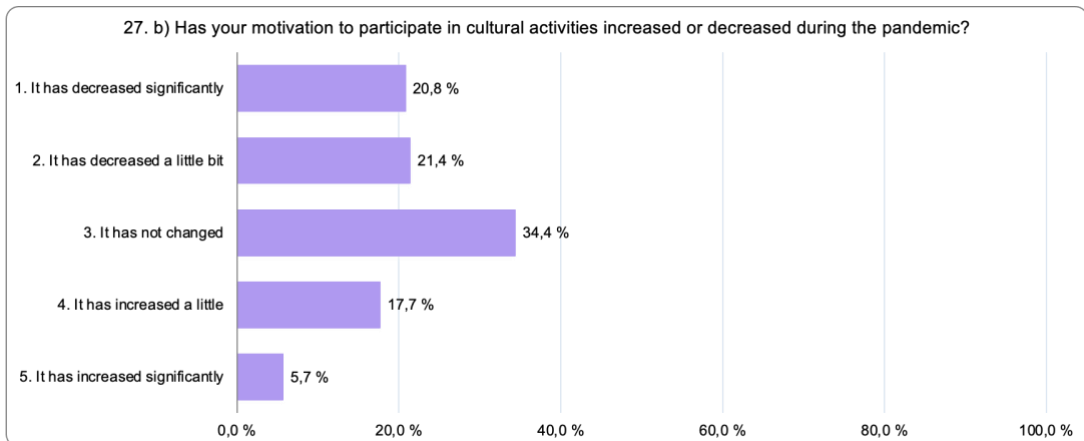
*Changes in Cultural Participation During the Pandemic*



Note. Total N=192.

**Figure A32**

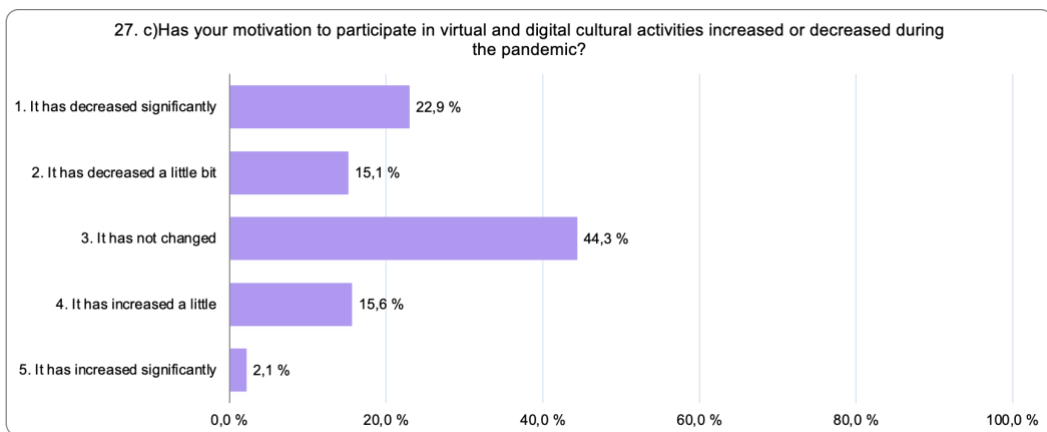
*Changes in Motivation to Participate in Cultural Activities During the Pandemic*



Note. Total N=192.

**Figure A33**

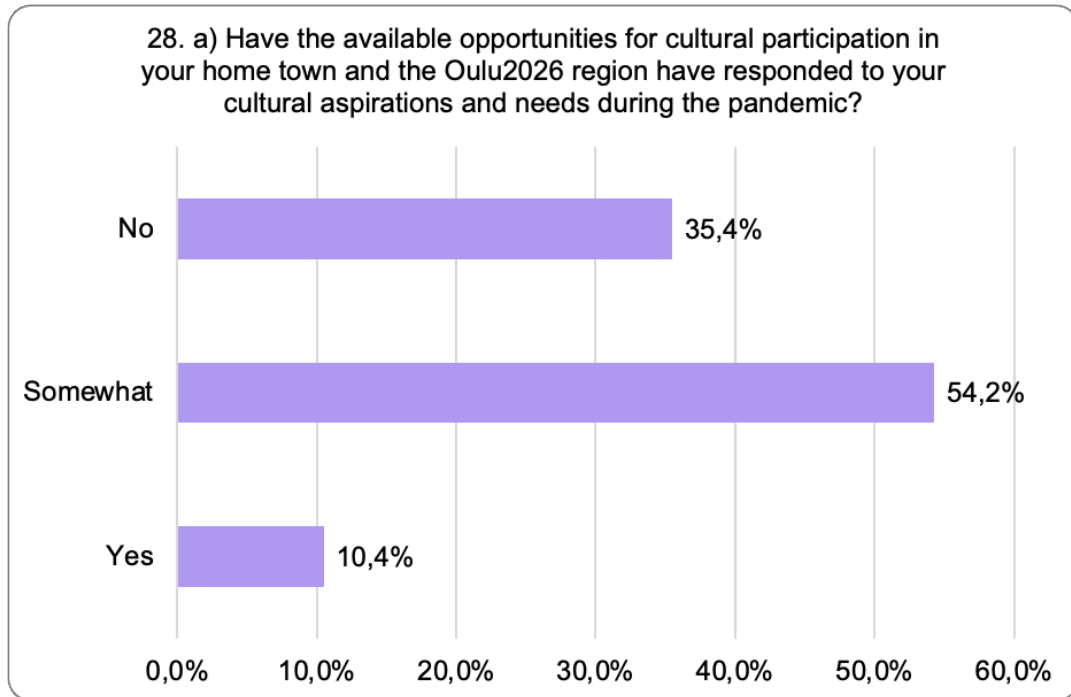
*Changes in Motivation to Participate in Virtual and Digital Cultural Activities During the Pandemic*



Note. Total N=192.

**Figure A34**

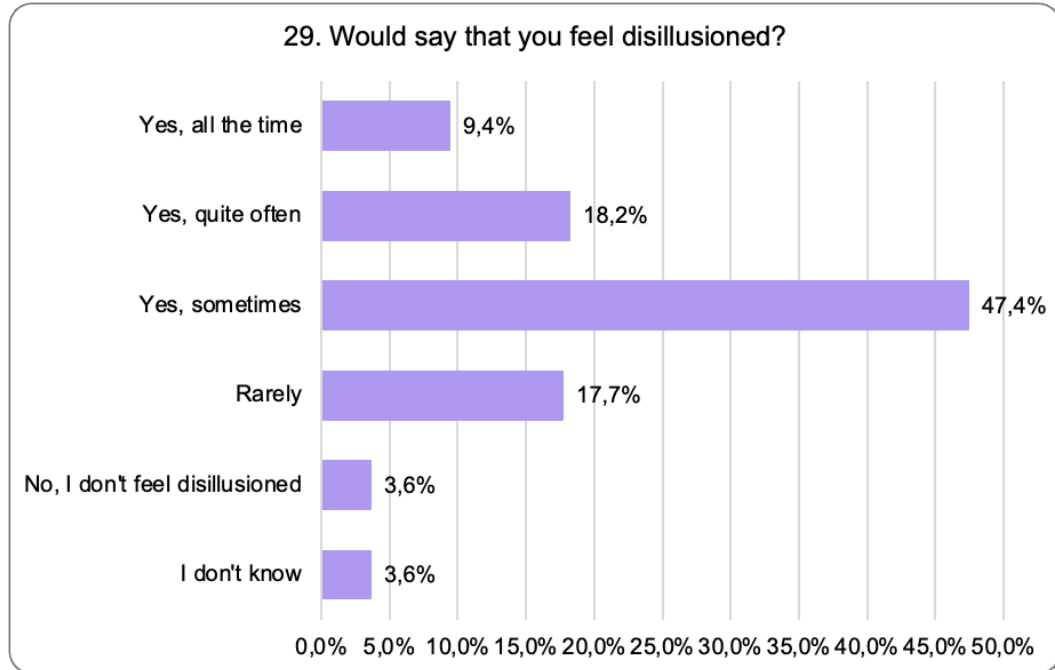
*Cultural Participation and Opportunities During the Pandemic.*



*Note.* Total N=192.

**Figure A35**

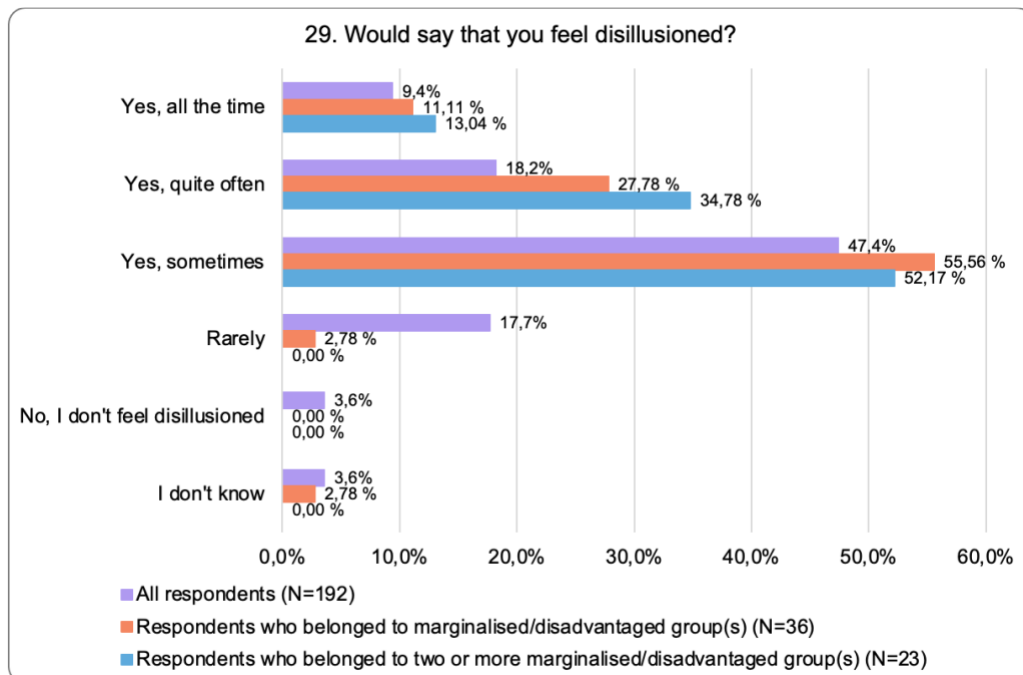
*Feelings of Disillusionment Among Young Adults in the Oulu2026 Region. All Respondents.*



Note. Total N=192.

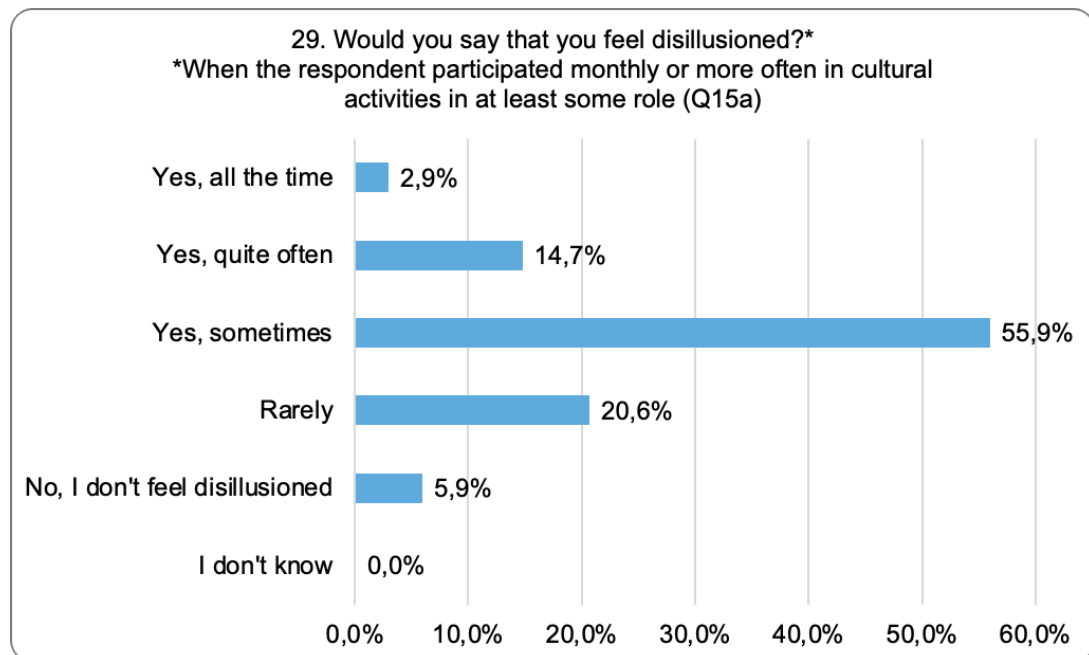
**Figure A36**

*Feelings of Disillusionment Among Young Adults Who Belong to Marginalised and/or Disadvantaged Groups*



**Figure A37**

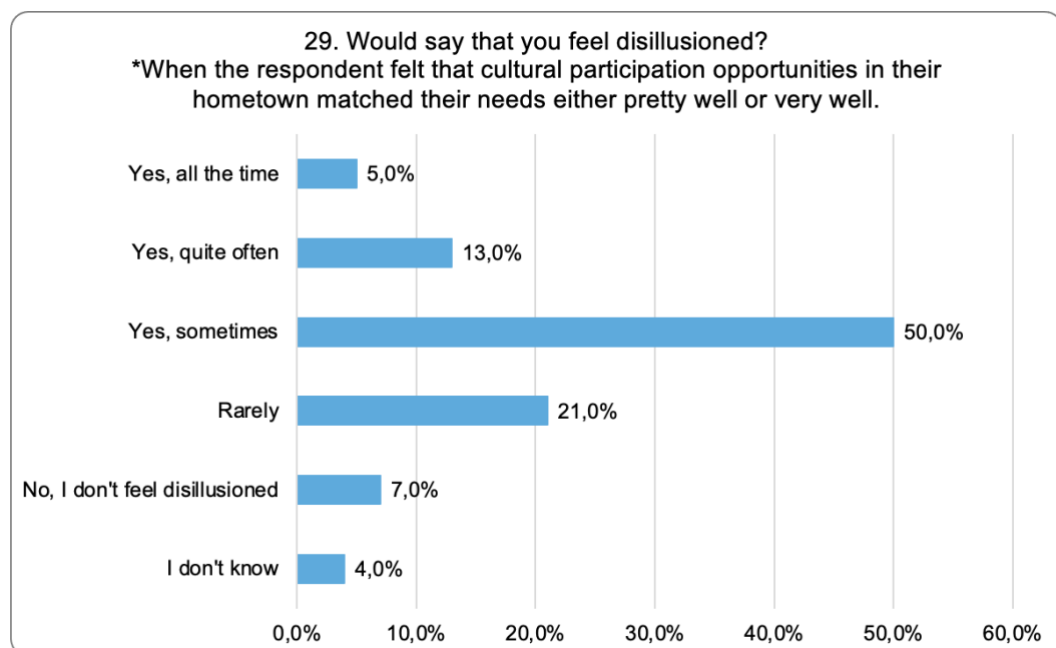
*Youth Disillusionment Among Respondents Who Actively Participate in Cultural Activities*



Note. N=34.

**Figure A38**

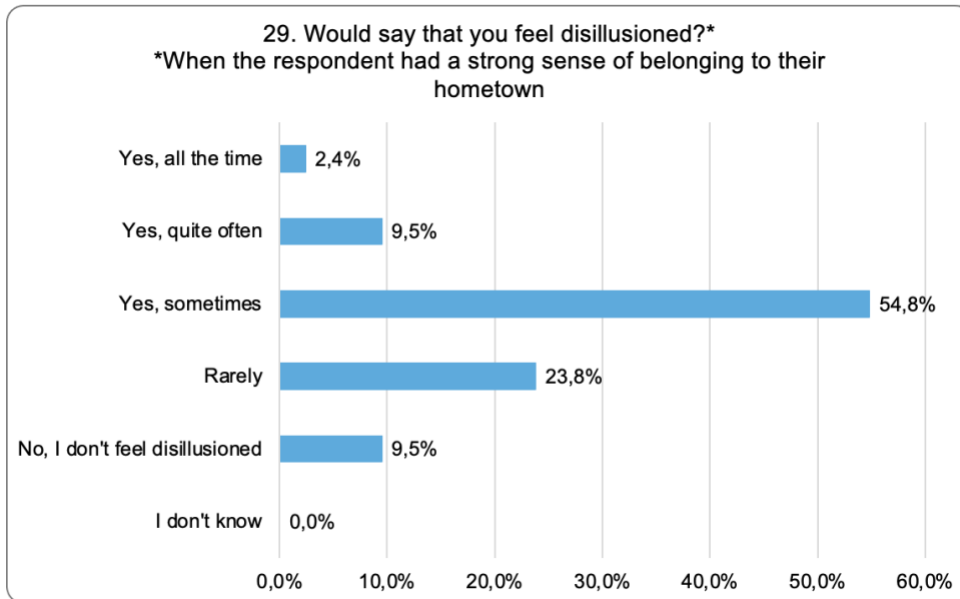
*Youth Disillusionment Among Respondents with Good Opportunities for Cultural Participation*



Note. N=100.

**Figure A39**

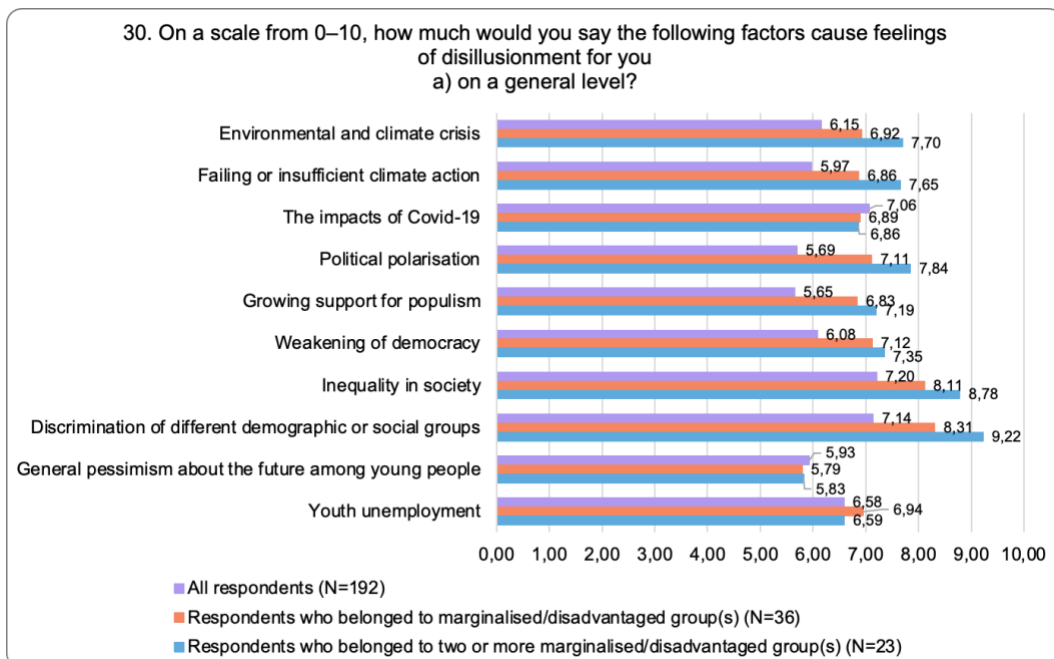
*Youth Disillusionment Among Respondents with a Strong Sense of Belonging to Their Hometown*



Note. N=42. Included are respondents who evaluated their sense of belonging between 8 and 10 on a scale from 0–10.

**Figure A40**

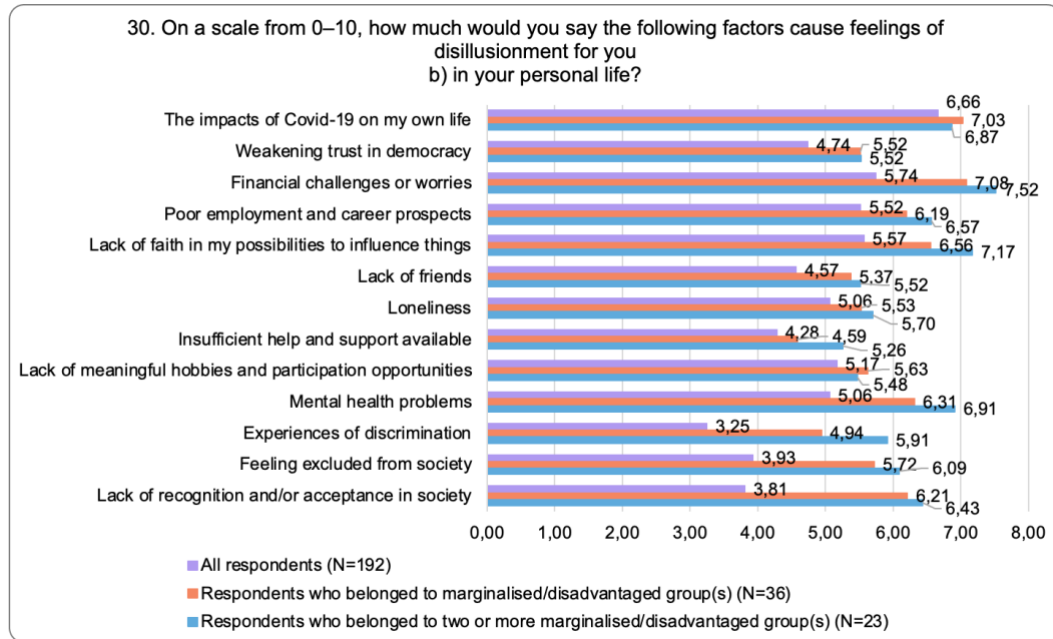
*Factors Causing Disillusionment Among Young Adults on a General Level*



Note. The values represent average values on a scale from 0–10.

**Figure A41**

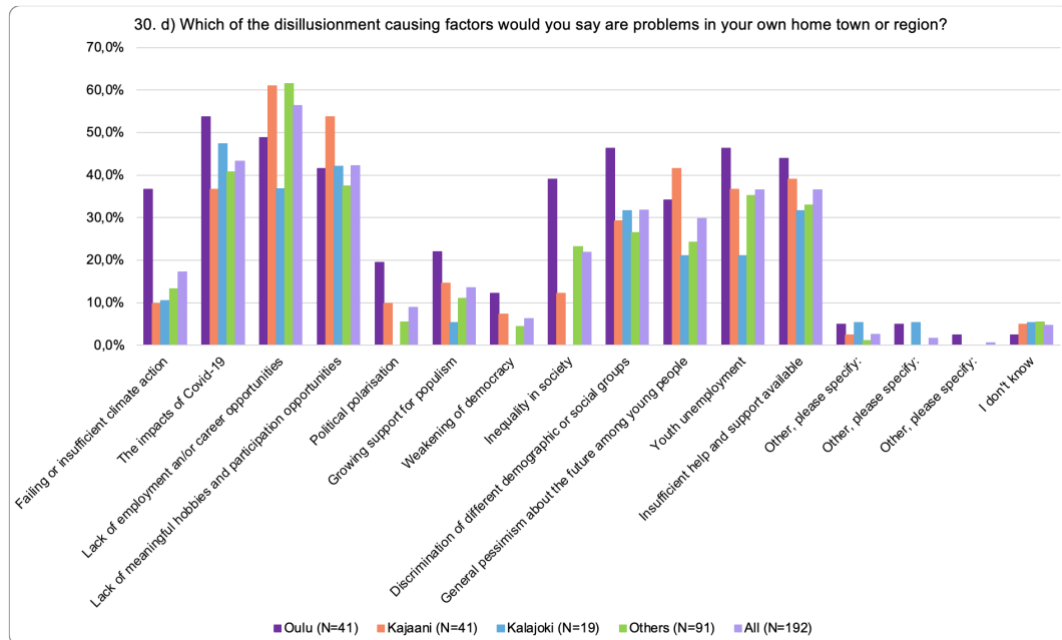
*Factors Causing Disillusionment Among Young Adults in Their Personal Lives*



*Note.* The values represent average values on a scale from 0–10.

**Figure A42**

*Factors Causing Disillusionment in the Respondents' Hometowns. A Comparison.*



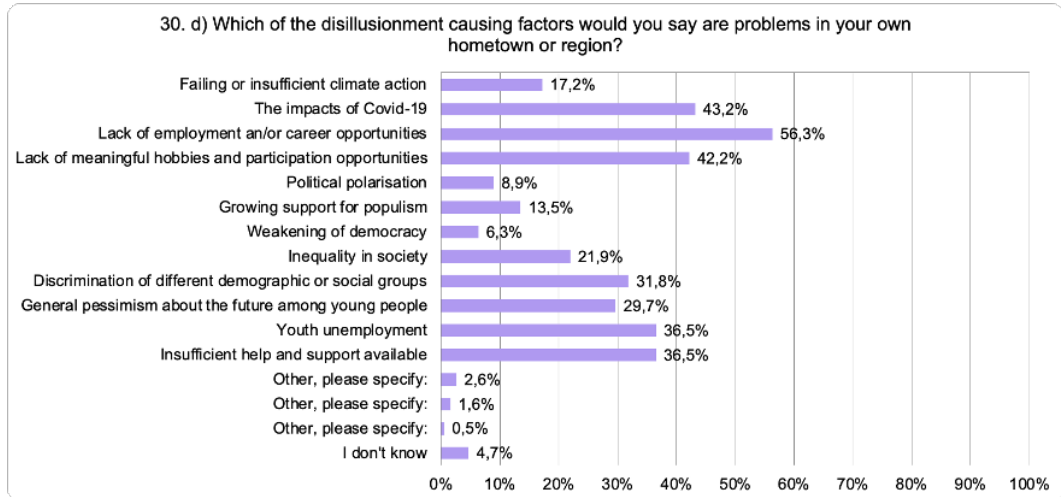
*Note.* The “Other” answers included mentions of narcotics and intoxicants; high price of gasoline; racism; lack of honesty about social problems; lack of organised sports and other



activities for the youth; and problems of religious freedom, but these were all individual answers.

**Figure A43**

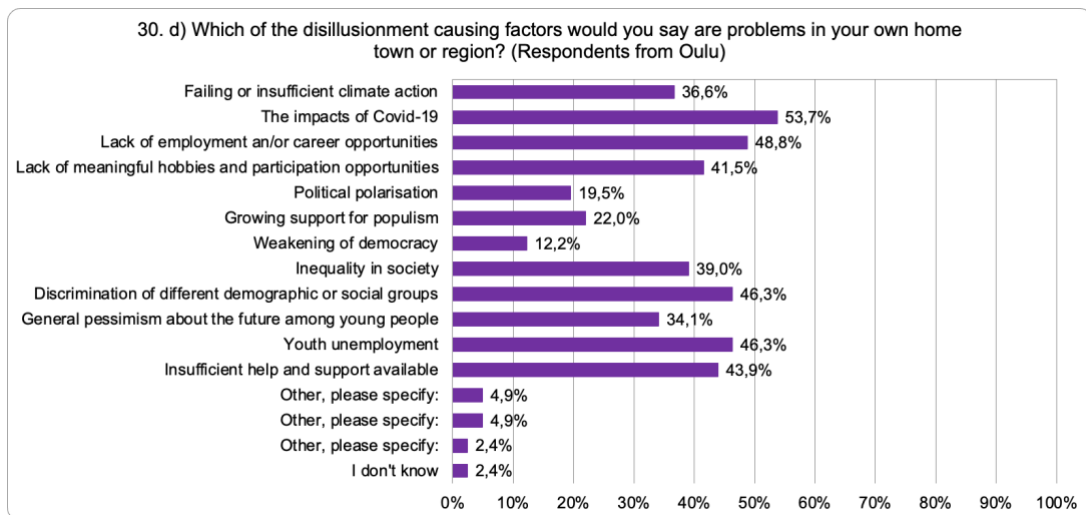
*Factors Causing Youth Disillusionment in the Oulu2029 Region. All Municipalities.*



Note. Total N=192.

**Figure A44**

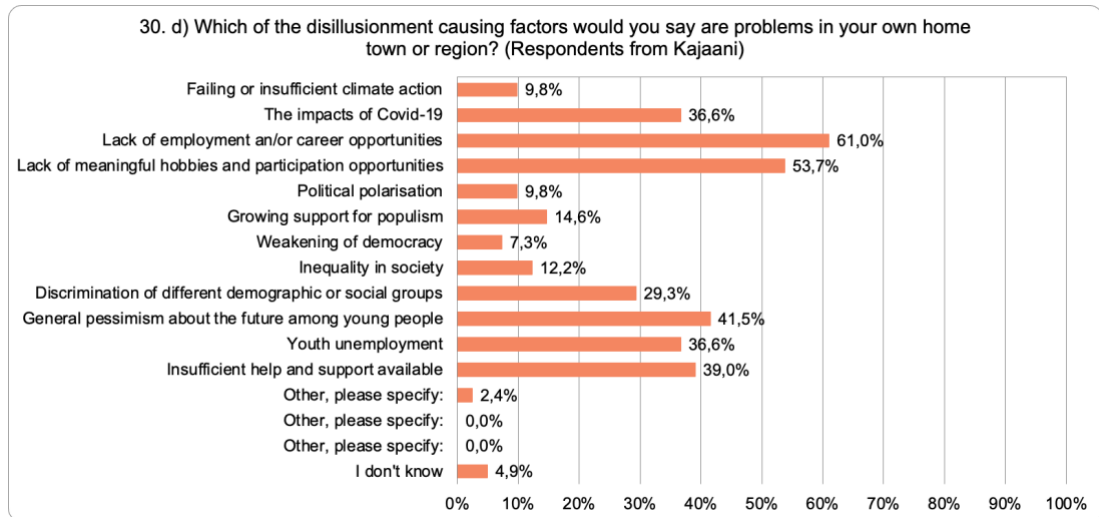
*Factors Causing Youth Disillusionment in Oulu.*



Note. Total N=41.

**Figure A45**

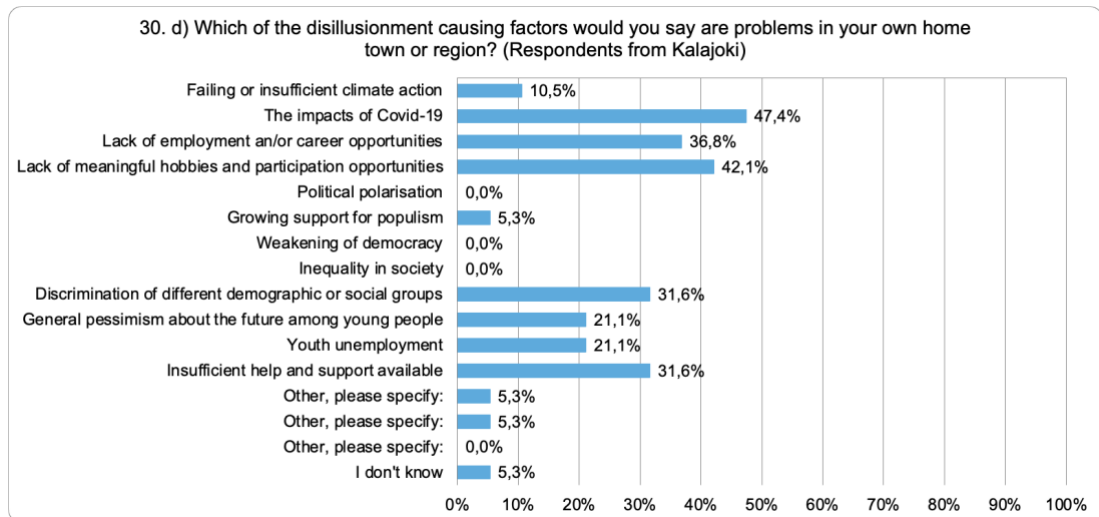
*Factors Causing Youth Disillusionment in Kajaani.*



Note. Total N=41.

**Figure A46**

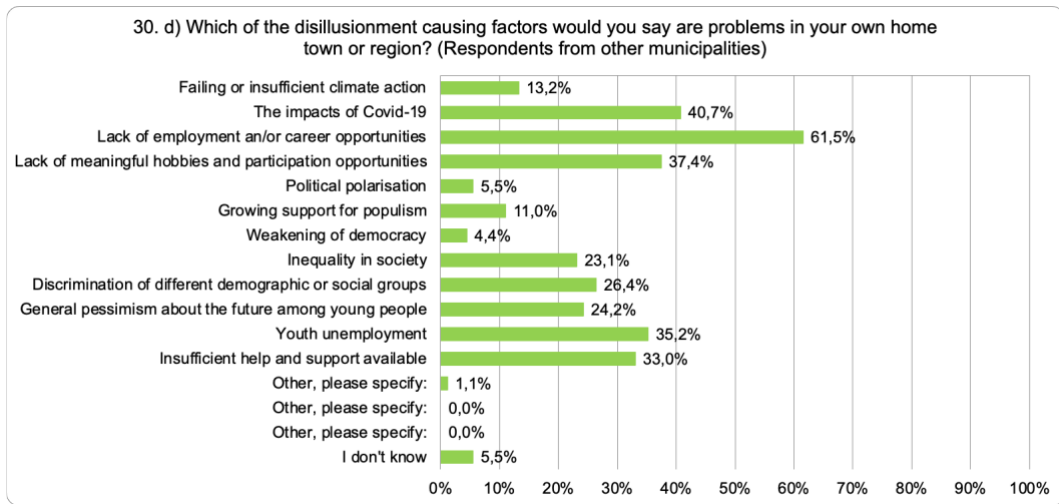
*Factors Causing Youth Disillusionment in Kalajoki.*



Note. Total N=19.

**Figure A47**

*Factors Causing Youth Disillusionment in Other Municipalities.*



Note. Total N=91.

## APPENDIX B. TABLES (SURVEY RESPONSES)

**Table B1**

*Belongings to and Intersections of Different Social Groups and Minorities*

Intersections of minority and group belongings		
	Lifestyle	7
	Language	1
	Cultural/subcultural	1
<u>Belonging to 1 social group or minority (N=61)</u>	Finnish national minority	1
	Ethnic	0
	Religion	15
	LGTBQIA+	36
	Other	0
<u>Belonging to 2 different social groups or minorities (N=12)</u>	Lifestyle & cultural/subcultural	2
	Lifestyle & religion	1
	Lifestyle & LGTBQIA+	2
	Lifestyle & other	1
	Language & other	1
	Cultural/subcultural & LGTBQIA+	1
	Finnish national minority & LGTBQIA+	2
	Religion & LGTBQIA+	2
<u>Belonging to 3 different social groups or minorities (N=4)</u>	Lifestyle, religion & LGTBQIA+	1
	Language, cultural/subcultural & religion	2
	Religion, LGTBQIA+ & other	1
<u>Belonging to 4 different social groups or minorities (N=1)</u>	Lifestyle, language, cultural/subcultural & religion	1

*Note.* Total N=78. There were three “Other” responses: political, worldview, and immigrant. Given that they were all individual answers, no new categories were created, and they figure in the table as “other”.

**Table B2**

*Specific Social Groups and Minorities Respondents Belong to*

Category	Codes	Quotes
<b>LGTBQIA+</b>	LGTBQIA+ Sexuality Gender  Bisexuality Hiding, secrecy Transgender Non-binary Pansexuality Lesbian Homosexual	Pansexuality I belong to both gender and sexual minorities Lesbian I am bisexual but few people know about it, and as I also date a person who represents the opposite sex, it hardly shows in my life. LGBTQ+, both gender and sexual minorities. Bi LGBTQ+ Furry fandom. LGBTQ+ (Non-binary, transgender and asexual) Asexual LGBTQ+ I belong to a sexual minority I am satanist, bisexual and communist Asexual Karelians, sexual and gender minorities LGBTQ+ LGBT and the roma people gender and sexual minorities gender and sexual minorities LGBTQ+ Sexual minority Sexual orientation Atheism, sexual minority Homosexuals Gender minority Sexual minority (bi) and non-monogamous (open relationship) Asexual spectrum
<b>Language</b>	Bilinguality Language Russian speaking minority	Bilinguality and nationality between Finland and USA, conservative laestadian Russian speaking minority Russian speaking minority, big group of IT guys
<b>Nationality</b>	Nationality Immigration Second-generation immigrant	Bilinguality and nationality between Finland and USA, conservative laestadian (This my second attempt at completing your form - the one one crashed.) Basically, I am a second generation immigrant. Immigrant
<b>Finnish national minority</b>	Russian speaking Karelians, Finnish minority national Roma people	Russian speaking minority Russian speaking minority, big group of IT guys Karelians, sexual and gender minorities
<b>Religion</b>	Religion  Laestadianism Resigning from a religious minority, Revivalist movement Satanism Christianity Congregation volunteers Evangelic lutheran Religious community  Conservative laestadianism Atheism	I have resigned from a religious minority, I feel like I have fallen in between things. Bilinguality and nationality between Finland and USA, conservative laestadian Conservative laestadian Revivalist movement I am satanist, bisexual and communist Conservative laestadian Laestadianism Christianism Religious community Higschool students, congregation volunteer, Finnish people, Evangelic Lutheran church Conservative laestadian Conservative laestadian Conservative laestadian Atheism, sexual minority
<b>Culture/subculture</b>	Subculture  Student culture IT subculture Skaters  Higschool student culture Congregation volunteer group Furry fandom Weebs	Furry fandom. LGBTQ+ (Non-binary, transgender and asexual) based on the activities I take part in - football, volleyball, student lifestyle - living with other nationalities together Russian speaking minority, big group of IT guys Skaters Higschool students, congregation volunteer, Finnish people, Evangelic Lutheran church Rural youth, summer athlete, IBD youth "weebs"
<b>Lifestyle</b>	Sports Active lifestyle Student lifestyle  international lifestyle  IT Skating Vegetarianism, diet Higschool studens Athletic lifestyle Rural youth Congregation volunteers IBD, health issues	based on the activities I take part in - football, volleyball, student lifestyle - living with other nationalities together Russian speaking minority, big group of IT guys Skaters Vegetarians Higschool students, congregation volunteer, Finnish people, Evangelic Lutheran church athletes Rural youth, summer athlete, IBD youth Sexual minority (bi) and non-monogamous (open relationship)
<b>Politics</b>	Communism	I am satanist, bisexual and communist
<b>Health</b>	IBD, health issues	Rural youth, summer athlete, IBD youth

Note. Total N=51.

**Table B3**

*Intersections of factors causing marginalisation and/or disadvantage*

Intersections of factors causing marginalisation and/or disadvantage		
<u>1 factor causing marginalisation or disadvantage (N=13)</u>	Religion	2
	Sexuality	1
	Gender	2
	Social and economic position or class	5
	Mental and/or physical health	3
<u>Intersections of 2 factors causing marginalisation or disadvantage (N=12)</u>	Gender & mental and/or physical health	1
	Language & culture	1
	Mental and/or physical health & obesity	1
	Religion & sexuality	1
	Sexuality & mental and/or physical health	1
	Sexuality & gender	5
	Sexuality & social and economic position or class	1
	Social and economic position or class & mental and/or physical health	2
<u>Intersections of 3 factors causing marginalisation or disadvantage (N=5)</u>	Religion, social and economic position or class & mental and/or physical health	1
	Gender, social and economic position or class & mental and/or physical health	2
	Sexuality, gender & social and economic position or class	1
	Sexuality, gender & mental and/or physical health	2
<u>Intersections of 4 factors causing marginalisation or disadvantage (N=4)</u>	Religion, sexuality, social and economic position or class, mental and/or physical health	1
	Sexuality, gender, social and economic position or class, mental and/or physical health	2
<u>Intersections of 5 factors causing marginalisation or disadvantage (N=1)</u>	Language, culture, ethnicity, religion & social and economic position or class	1

*Note.* Total N=36. Two “other” answers regarding lack of money and poverty were combined with the answer option “social and economic position or class”, and one “other” answer regarding not being Christian was combined with the answer option “Religion”. That left only one “other” option, obesity, which was handled as an independent answer.

**Table B4**

*Minority, Alternative, and Subcultures Important for Young Adults in the Region*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of responses related to this category</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Selected quotes</b>
<b>Diversity</b>	8	All As many as possible Difference Different cultures Equality and respect Lack of options Minority cultures Minority representations	"All subcultures :)" "As many as possible - this is critical for especially realistic discussions about climate change solutions." "All. The more difference, the better." "Generally speaking, I think that different culture and important and it is good that there are many of them in my city. It would be quite boring to not see different kinds of people around." "The cultures that are distorted and discriminated by the society are important because we are all equal, human beings. Everyone has their own things and directions and those should be respected." "Half of the above mentioned options are missing." (referring to the list of cultural resources in the previous question) "In cities and bigger centres it is important to give space and support for minority cultures." "Minority representations in the media should be improved."
<b>Subcultural expressions and representations in arts, music and culture</b>	3	Artistic subcultural representations Arts and music subcultures	"Literature, movies/series and paintings related to subcultures" "Subcultures related to arts and music"
<b>LGBTQIA+</b>	8	Bars, cafes, spaces Pride Rainbow youth culture LGBTQIA+ culture and people	"Gay bars" "LGBTIQ+ cafes and spaces" "Pride events" "Such cultural activities are not available in my hometown, but, for example, Pride flag would be nice to have." "Things targeted to Rainbow youth" "LGBTQ+ culture and people are close to me." "Eurovisions, drag"
<b>Underground, alternative, and urban culture and arts</b>	5	Underground events Alternative music and arts Urban arts Sadomasochism Nerd culture	"...underground events, alternative gigs, urban art etc." "At least some styles, such as punk and gothic" "...I also like 'a bit' more special music (Asian metal, pop and alternative rock)" "punk" "The local BDSM association" "Subcultures representing atheist, satanic imagery, related to, for example, metal music (not black metal), are important to me, but I'm not saying it suits everyone. There could still be some in my hometown, because no there is none, unlike in the capital city." "Nerds"
<b>Gaming, E-sports, Virtual/digital culture</b>	2	Gaming culture E-sports Virtual reality	"Because of my education and future work, gaming, e-sports and all cultures related to virtual reality" "Finnish E-sports"
<b>Religion(s)</b>	3	Laestadianism Religion(s)	"Religion" "Religions" "Conservative laestadianism"
<b>Sámi culture</b>	2	Sámi Lapland	"Cherishing the Sámi culture" "For me personally, the Lappish and Sámi culture"

*Note.* Total N=31. Two responses ("I don't know" and "Nothing, really") are not included in any of the categories.

**Table B5**

*Cultural Resources, Services and Activities Missing from Respondents' Hometowns*

Categories	Number of answers connected to the category	Subcategories	Selected quotes
Accessibility	4	Opening hours Language barriers	"Activities and services should be open longer. There's no time to use them, because one is always either at school or at work during the opening hours."  "Theatre plays in English. Even in bigger cities like Oulu."
Activities, services and resources	10	Youth activities LGBTQIA+ Activities for children and families Lack of choices	"Interesting group activities for the youth"  "There's nothing specifically for the LGBTQIA+ youth."  "I think Oulu should have more activities for children, young people and families."  "Resources for music and crafts"  "There aren't really any activities or resources suitable for over 18-year-olds, besides bars and cafes. There's a lack of events and free activities for our age group."
Architecture	2		"Beautiful architecture"  "There are no architectonically fine destinations"
Artistic and cultural contents and museums	12	Museums Artistic contents Cultural contents Cultural institutions Cultural history	"Art museums and exhibitions"  "As far as I know, my hometown doesn't have any activities or information related to folk traditions."  "For example jazz and poetry clubs"  "Year-round working theaters, museums and other culturally significant places."  "Events, arts and films"  "There could be more museums of different kinds"
Cuisine, gastronomy and restaurant culture	5	Cafes Restaurants Food culture	"Cafes and restaurant services"  "Different restaurants with for example vegan options"
Events and festivals	9		"There could be more winter festivals!"  "More free events accessible for everyone"  "There are hardly any events"
Minority cultures	3		"Things related to minority cultures: in a small town there aren't many different or out of the "ordinary" hobbies or ways to express oneself"
Opportunities	8	Education Classes and courses Hobby opportunities	"Young people's opportunities to get cultural field education"  "Low threshold courses in different things"  "A lot of services and opportunities are missing. There aren't many hobby opportunities, spaces to hang out in, film or video hobbies or even clothing stores."  "Local courses, drama classes etc."
Spaces and places	9	Open spaces Common cultural spaces LGBTQIA+ spaces Youth spaces Parks	"There are no open spaces to spend time in except for the youth house"  "Having a common cultural space where one could go without belonging to an association. A place to go play instruments etc., a place targeted to young adults and older."  "There are no LGBTQIA+ spaces"  "There isn't really anything for the young people except for one youth space and open air spaces."  "The network of jogging and skiing tracks is crappy. Connecting tracks and better guide signs would be needed."  "There could be more sporting opportunities. For example, a turf for football"
Sports and outdoor facilities and opportunities	4		"Street art" "Street culture"
Urban arts and culture	2		"Arts and culture in general are undervalued, technology is appreciated more. This can be seen, for example, in the university development"  "Sights"  "Design"  "Science"  "Institutions"
Other	7	Art vs. tech Design Sights Science and institutions	

Note. Total N=75.



**Table B6**

*Cultural Resources, Services and Activities Undervalued Respondents' Hometowns*

<u>Categories</u>	<u>connected to the category</u>	<u>Selected quotes</u>
Activities and services for different age groups	3	"Activities for the middle-aged and older" "Youth recreation, for example"
Architecture	1	
Artistic and cultural contents and opportunities	10	"Art (in all its forms)" "Live arts" "In Oulu, the opportunities to network with other people interested in culture are quite poor. Also, performing arts, visual arts, performance or dance are generally speaking rather little appreciated"
Crafts	2	"Crafts, visual art, live music aren't really visible in the city centre"
Design and fashion	2	"Design and fashion"
Different cultural groups	2	"Insane racism towards, for example, the Roma people and people with brown skin" "Different nationalities, ethnicity etc."
Events and festivals	3	"Public events" "Different kinds of events, such as concerts"
Gaming	1	"The importance of games in young people's lives. Games help the youth to have a better life and happiness, if, for example, their family life of school is going badly, they at least have one way to relax and have fun."
Minority, alternative, and subcultures	2	"Minority, alternative and subcultures. I think there are also no cultural clubs." "Music, culture, art"
Museums	3	"Museums, theatre, music events"
Outdoor spaces and green spaces	5	"Parks, open spaces" "Parks and green urban spaces" "Nature, landscapes, outdoor recreation opportunities"
Public cultural services	3	"In my own circles (everyone is closely connected to cultural life" appreciation for culture is big, but I think public cultural services get too much negative feedback" "The city theatre is undervalued. Young people are not interested"
Spaces and places	2	"Open spaces" "LGBTQIA+ spaces"
Sports and exercise facilities, services, and opportunities	5	"Free outdoor exercise spaces" "Exercise services" "Sports clubs"
Urban culture	1	"All things related to arts, also for example more could be invested into skateboarding"
Other	8	"A bit of everything" "Modern, contemporary things" "Maybe not undervalued but missing" "The local population has been severely undervalued. This is because of structural problems, e.g. reliance on experts, a myopic focus on technology (including when 'culture' is being discussed), and weak stakeholder engagement."

Note. Total N=53.

**Table B7**

*Average Values of Compatibility of Cultural Activities and Services with the Needs and Aspirations of Young Adults in the Region*

<b>On a scale from 1–5, how well would you say the cultural services or activities match your needs and/or aspirations...</b>					
	<u>Oulu</u>	<u>Kajaani</u>	<u>Kalajoki</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>All</u>
...in your hometown	3,58	3,39	3,42	3,20	3,34
...in the Oulu2026 region	3,50	4,13	4,27	4,14	4,00

Note. Total N=192.

**Table B8**

*Average Values of the Accessibility/Reachability of Cultural Activities as Evaluated by Young Adults in the Region*

<b>On a scale from 1–5, how easy or difficult is it for you to reach cultural services or activities you are interested in in your hometown?</b>					
	<u>Oulu</u>	<u>Kajaani</u>	<u>Kalajoki</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>All</u>
...in your hometown	3,17	3,17	2,94	2,95	3,05
...in the Oulu2026 region	3,18	3,72	3,71	3,70	3,58

Note. Total N=192.

**Table B9**

*Cultural Activities Young Adults Would Like to Participate in More Often*

Categories	Number of related answers	Sub-categories	Selected Quotes	Emerging themes and issues
Activities and events related to sports and exercise	10	Sports events Sporting activities Low threshold sports activities	"Low threshold sports events, such as yoga in a park" "Sporting events where one doesn't compete as a professional. Low threshold events such as swamp football."	Low threshold Importance of peer group activities (activities for peer groups and activities organised by peer groups)
Artistic and cultural content and programme	42	Music and performing arts Visual arts Ginema	"Different exhibitions, visual arts, sculpture, design, photography etc." "Music-related, relaxed activities that are easy to come to" "Concerts and gigs, the National Ballet" "Go to movies and theatres" "Dance performances"	Inclusivity Accessibility Identifying barriers to participation
Co-creation, production, programming and artistic work	6	Participating as organiser Participating as an artist or creator Participating as activist	"As a performer I would like to participate in different kinds of music events a lot more." "Maybe something literature-related, or an arts events, in which one could also participate in making art." "Concerts or, for example, dance performances, either as audience or as a performer" "It would be great to get to create own content for different events as a young artist." "I would love to be an activist for organising international events in Oulu" "I would just like to know how and who to get in touch with to get to participate and possibly to organise events"	Opportunities and information about them
Crafts	1		"Activities related to arts and crafts".	
Cultural traditions	2	Traditions Folk culture	"Folk traditions, especially folk dance" "I would like to participate in activities such as courses, especially a national costume course."	
Events and festivals	17	Mass events and festivals Concerts and gigs Outdoor events Other events	"I would like to go to festivals and other gigs because I have never had a chance to do so, for many reasons." "Bigger events that could be related to music and sports" "Different kinds of outdoor events" "All kinds of events"	
Gaming	5		"Gaming events" "Arcade playing, for example"	
Hobbies and recreational activities	6	Courses and classes Hobbies Other recreational activities	"I would like to take part in art courses" "Recreational activities" "Work shops" "Hobbies"	
Institutions	5	Museums	"Museum visits"	
Alternative and subcultures	0		"Underground events"	
Nature related activities	1		"Nature-related activities"	
Other	3		"Cultural activities that inform us of the cultures outside the one we live in. Preferably giving us the chance to choose which cultures specifically we'd like to learn more about. Yes, it's important to indulge people in the culture they're surrounded in, but I personally think efficient cultural activities are inclusive to all. The point is: Include everyone. Even those that aren't into it like myself." "General communication about international ideas (Oulu is very inward looking)."	
Peer group activities	8	Conventions Youth and student events and activities Other peer events	"Conventions" "Events where you get to do things with friends or to meet new friends" "Activities like my own hobby, where one could meet other hobbyists" "Activities together with different peer groups, like picnics" "Student parties" "It would be nice to see events organised by young people not related to alcohol"	
Restaurant culture	2		"Events related to food" "Going to cafes or restaurants with friends or family"	
Science	1		"Scientific things"	
Travelling and tourism	1		"I would like to do more regional travelling"	
Urban culture	1		"Activities related to skater culture interest me more than a lot"	

Note. Total N=73.

**Table B10**

*Cultural Participation and Opportunities During the Pandemic. Open field.*

Themes	# of answers related to the category	Quotes	Emerging issues
Barriers to and lack of participation	2	<p>"As far as I can tell, very few towns or cities are concerned about opportunities for cultural participation. This is mainly because there is a lack of honesty about what the population really needs. There is also a failure to build communication channels to establish trust."</p> <p>"I don't think there's much to tell. I hadn't participated in cultural activities before covid and I haven't during it. This has mostly been my own choice (Although the covid restrictions have most likely made the slightest plans of doing something disappear)."</p>	<p>Lack of participation opportunities Feeling ignored Lack of interest</p>
Cultural offering and participation opportunities during Covid-19	3	<p>"There is quite a lot of offering even though the corona situation has been bad. I have missed live events a lot though but I understand that they cannot be organised in corona times."</p> <p>"In Haapajärvi for example music events have been organised live also."</p> <p>"I like to familiarise myself with history and that doesn't require seeing other people. I like to visit historical sites on, for example, Raattentie and Salpalinja."</p>	<p>There have been opportunities that have suited some</p>
Decreased participation (because of Covid-19)	4	<p>"There hasn't been much cultural participation, or if yes, I haven't been aware. Doing things that I used to do, like going to student parties and bars/cafes has decreased, or actually halted completely."</p> <p>"Kajak Games has organised a few game jams that I have taken part in but that's about it."</p> <p>"Webinars don't interest me, but I'm happy that other people have been able to learn new things. Answers to my hopes to other people but not for myself."</p> <p>"Digital cultural content is poorly organised."</p>	<p>Participation has decreased Opportunities suit some but not all Digital cultural content does not totally respond to the needs and aspirations of young audiences However, there is interest towards digital cultural contents</p>
Factors enhancing participation	3	<p>"In Kajaani, you get to go to museums for free and students have a student price to swimming pools, and I also prefer to use outdoor gyms now rather than normal gyms."</p>	<p>Accessibility helps Outdoor and other safe opportunities have potential to enhance participation</p>
Live vs. digital/virtual	5	<p>"There have been some live gigs but most of the cancelled gigs/events do not offer a virtual participation opportunity."</p> <p>"I would hope to be able to participate in events live"</p> <p>"Remote organised music events and other things are quite plain and don't really excite me."</p> <p>"Remote studying consumes energy, so when one is already tired of staring at the screen, there's no energy left to take part in remote events."</p>	<p>All event organisers do not yet have the needed skills and/or resources to organise (good) digital/virtual participation opportunities. Remote everything consumes energy -&gt; what happens to the revitalising and refreshing potential of culture and arts? For some, the corona-safe opportunities are fine, but many respondents miss live events.</p>

*Note. N=15.*

**Table B11**

*Other Factors Causing Disillusionment Among Young Adults*

Category	# of answers related to this category	Subcategories	Quotes
Climate change	2	Inability to affect things Underestimation	"Climate change, which my opinion cannot affect" "Underestimation of climate change in Haapajärvi"
Discrimination, bullying and power structures	6	Supremacy of institutions Feeling ignored Legal inequality Discrimination Hate speech Bullying Prejudice	"As a non-binary person I don't even exist for the Finnish state as myself, so that causes a lot of disillusionment. The crappy trans law of Finland and the grown hatred towards sexual and gender minorities in the world also cause pain." "The supremacy of certain societal structures and institutions that I oppose." "People with higher education treating others as 'lower' people" "The public discrimination of sexual minorities and people from different ethnic backgrounds, you hear hate speech almost daily." "Peers. In the past, right now and most likely in the future. In the past, they brought my self-worth/energy levels/aspirations way down, basically causing at the very least mild disillusionment through various ways. These ways include bullying for whatever reason they found fit and generally being obnoxious to the point where it could barely be tolerated. This was not the case all the time, but it happened enough to have a noticeable effect. My peers right now aren't as bad. In fact, I rarely notice it anymore. It still does happen though and I'm willing to bet that the past predicts the future as usual." "Discrimination, mean people, bullying, prejudice (not just towards groups of people but also towards individual, ordinary people)"
Education system and students' situation	3	Level of education Inequality between cities Inadequate funding Students' employment opportunities Students' economic situation	"Level of education; the financial investment of the municipality and the state into university studies; unequal quality of university studies in different cities" "Employment opportunities for students are poor, and abuse happens through practical internships that are part of my studies. With this, I mean that I think the workforce of students should not be abused so that they are accepted to an internship but are not paid any compensation for the work. Student support is being cut anyway and working for free or with food compensation does not help at all financially." "The deficiency of the Finnish university system and the decreasing investment from the state"
Feelings of inadequacy	2		"Feeling of inadequacy. Globalisation and capitalism have created circumstances of continuous competition which force people to extremities, and when they are not enough anymore, external factors are blamed, which leads to blaming innocent people, such as minorities." "My own inadequacy"
Lack of events, activities and hobbies	2	Sports hobbies Cultural events	"It is difficult to find sports hobbies that I'm interested in nearby, especially in a competition- and goal-oriented manner." "Lack of cultural events in my hometown"
Mental and/or physical health	2		"Health problems" "Mental health problems"
Personal resources and available help and support	2	Lack of friends Lack of personal resources Insufficient help and support available	"I have many 'friends' but only one of them seems to care about me" "The fact that my own resources are just not enough. When finally, as an achiever person, you admit that to yourself and try to get help, having crossed the big threshold feels hugely disappointing, because the resources are not sufficient and there is no help available. The limited support and lack of safety network feel scary."
Other	2		"The rising price of gasoline, hostility towards cars of the national government" "Local officials refusing to reply to communications - this highlights a democratic deficit in Oulu. Local nurses admitting that they do not follow basic ethical standards - this highlights how individual power is used in Oulu."

*Note.* Total N=21.

## APPENDIX C. QUESTIONNAIRE



### Young adults' cultural participation in the Oulu2026 region

Thank you all for your answers! The survey is now closed. The prizes have been raffled and winners have been notified personally.

This survey is part of Jenni Pekkarinen's master's thesis at the University of the Arts Helsinki's Arts Management department. The research is conducted in collaboration with the Oulu2026 project and the city of Oulu. The master's thesis is about the cultural participation of 18–24-year-old young adults in the [Oulu2026 European Capital of Culture](#) region.

**You can answer this survey if you are 18–24 years old and live in the Oulu2026 region\***

**\*The Oulu2026 region** consists of 33 cities and municipalities:

Oulu, Haapajärvi, Haapavesi, Hailuoto, Ii, Kajaani, Kalajoki, Kemi, Kempele, Kuhmo, Kuusamo, Kärsämäki, Liminka, Lumijoki, Muhos, Nivala, Oulainen, Paltamo, Pielavesi, Pudasjärvi, Pyhäntä, Raahen, Sievi, Siikajoki, Siikalatva, Sotkamo, Suomussalmi, Taivalkoski, Tornio, Tyrnävä, Utajärvi, Vaala and Ylivieska.

**Aim of the survey:**

The aim of this survey is to get an understanding of the cultural needs and

interview is completely voluntary. If you agree to an interview, you have the right to withdraw your consent at any moment. Interview data will be handled anonymously and confidentially.

**Use of collected information and anonymousness of answers:**

The collected information will be used only for the purpose of the mentioned master's thesis. The information will be used and analysed with care in order to ensure that identifying individual answerers will not be possible. All answers will be collected and analysed anonymously.

If you give your contact details for the purpose of the raffle or an interview, they cannot be connected to your answers in any way. Collected contact details will not be used for any other purpose besides the raffle and/or interview, they will not be given to third parties, and they will only be accessed by the author of this survey, Jenni Pekkarinen. Collected contact information will be deleted from the system by the end of September 2021.

**Answerer's rights:**

Answering this survey, as well as giving your contact details for the purpose of the raffle or interview is completely voluntary. You have the right to discontinue answering at any moment. If you agree to an interview, you have the right to withdraw your consent at any moment. You also have the right to receive information about the content and implementation of the research, handling of information, participating in the survey and/or interview and about storing information. The contact information is provided below.

Any questions or comments regarding the survey or research, please do not hesitate to be in touch.

**Contact information:**

Jenni Pekkarinen  
jenni.pekkarinen@uniarts.fi

aspirations, participation habits, and experiences of inclusion, marginalisation and disillusionment among young adults aged 18–24 in the Oulu2026 region. The information gathered will be used to analyse how well the the Oulu2026 European Capital of Culture project matches the cultural needs and aspirations of young adults in the region. Please answer as truthfully as you can.

**Structure of the survey:**

The survey consists of six sections and a total of 30 questions (some of which have parts a, b, c and d).

**How long does it take to answer?**

Answering will take about 15–20 minutes of your time. If you want to, you can also complete the survey in parts by saving your partial answers and completing them later.

**A 50€ gift card to Tiketti and Oulu2026 prizes will be raffled among respondents:**

The following prizes will be raffled among participants:

One gift card worth 50€ to [Tiketti](#)

Two Oulu2026 sweaters

Two Oulu2026 t-shirts

Two Oulu2026 tote bags

Each respondent can win a maximum of one prize. The raffle will be conducted in June 2021, and winners will be contacted personally via email. Participating in the raffle is voluntary.

**The survey will be open until the end of May:**

The survey will be open from 4 May until 4 June 2021.

**Possible interview:**

At the end of the survey, you will be asked if you are available for a more in-depth interview about young adults' cultural participation. If yes, you will be asked to give your email address or phone number, but your contact details will not and cannot be connected to your answers in any way. Participating in the



Section 1/6

## Background information

### 1. Please select your age group \*

Please note that the survey is aimed at people aged 18–24

18–20

21–24

### 2. Gender\*

Female

Male

Non-binary

Other

I prefer to self-describe:

I prefer not to answer

### 3. Municipality of residence\*

Please note that survey is aimed at people who live in one of the 33 municipalities in the Oulu2026 region.

Haapajärvi

Haapavesi

Hailuoto

Ii

Kajaani

- Kalajoki
- Kemi
- Kempele
- Kuhmo
- Kuusamo
- Kärsämäki
- Liminka
- Lumijoki
- Muhos
- Nivala
- Oulainen
- Oulu
- Paltamo
- Pielavesi
- Pudasjärvi
- Pyhäntä
- Raabe
- Sievi
- Siikajoki
- Siikalatva
- Sotkamo
- Suomussalmi
- Taivalkoski
- Tornio
- Tyrnävä
- Utajärvi

Vaala

Ylivieska

#### 4. Education\*

Choose your current highest level of education.

Primary school completed

Secondary school completed

Upper secondary level (high school or vocational education) completed

Bachelor's degree completed

Master's degree completed

Other, please specify:

#### 5. Current employment or student status:\*

Student in basic education for adults (grades 1–9)

Upper secondary level student (high school or vocational school)

Bachelor's degree student in a university or university of applied sciences

Master's degree student in a university or university of applied sciences

Doctoral student

Employed full-time

Employed part-time

Employed project-based

Entrepreneur / self-employed

Other, please specify:

6. Besides the compulsory classes at school, have you received any teaching or training in arts and/or culture?\*

- No, none
- Voluntary / extra classes or courses in primary school
- Voluntary / extra classes or courses in secondary school
- Voluntary / extra classes or courses in upper secondary education
- Classes or courses outside of school
- Higher education
- I am self-taught
- I have been taught by a family member
- Other, please specify:

7. a) Do you feel that you belong to any specific social groups or minorities (in terms of, for example, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, gender, language, religion, lifestyle)?\*

If yes or partly, more options will open.

- Yes
- Partly
- No
- I don't know
- I prefer not to answer

7. b) What kinds of specific social groups or minorities do you feel that you belong to?\*

- Lifestyle
- Language
- Cultural or subcultural
- Finnish national minorities\* (including Swedish-speaking Finns, the Sámi, the Roma, the Jews, the Tatars, the Karelians and the Russian-speaking minority)
- Ethnic
- Religion
- LGBTQIA+
- Other, please specify:
- Other, please specify:
- Other, please specify:
- I prefer not to answer

\*See for example this [guide to national minorities in Finland](#) from the website of the Finnish Peace Committee.

7. c) Can you name the specific social groups or minorities you belong to?

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8. a) Do you have a physical, mental, cognitive, sensory, and/or other kind of disability that affects your participation opportunities in any way?\*

- Yes
- No
- I prefer not to answer

8. b) Specify if you want to:

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9. a) Would you say that you belong to a marginalised or disadvantaged group?\*

If yes or partly, more options will open.

- Yes
- Partly
- No
- I don't know
- I prefer not to answer

9. b) What factors would you say cause marginalisation or disadvantage in your case?\*

- Language
- Culture
- Ethnicity
- Religion
- Racialization
- Sexuality
- Gender
- Social and economic position or class
- Disability
- Mental and/or physical health
- Addiction or dependence issues
- Other, please specify:
- Other, please specify:
- Other, please specify:
- I prefer not to answer

9. c) Specify if you want to:

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## Cultural resources

In this section, you will be asked about cultural resources and services that are important for you – generally and in your own hometown. Cultural resources refer to, for example, arts and media activities and institutions; sports and recreation; heritage; places for sociability; intellectual and scientific environment and institutions; creativity expressed in local crafts, manufacturing and services activities; representations of a town in media, arts and culture; local jokes and conventional wisdom etc.

You can rely on your own understanding of what counts as culture. What is important here, is what culture means for you.

10. a) Which cultural resources are the most important ones for you?\*

- Archeological sites and heritage
- Architecture
- Open spaces (including playgrounds, open outdoor exercise spaces, public seating areas, boulevards, squares)
- Design and fashion
- Film and video
- Performing arts (including music, theatre, dance, circus)
- Cafes, bars, pubs and nightclubs
- Street culture (including skateboarding, street art, street dance, graffiti, parkour)
- Libraries, literature and reading
- Cultural traditions, folklore and folk art
- Cultural clubs and associations

- Visual arts (including painting, sculpture, graphic art, printmaking)
- Crafts
- Landscapes and town- and cityscapes
- Museums and galleries
- Youth centres / houses
- Local stories and histories
- Gaming and game culture
- Cuisine / gastronomy
- Newspapers and magazines
- Comics
- Events and festivals
- Scientific activities and institutions
- TV and radio
- Sports and recreation
- Photography
- Green spaces (e.g. parks, nature reserves, national parks, gardens, rural areas)
- Virtual and digital cultural activities
- Minority, alternative and subcultures
- Other, please specify:
- Other, please specify:
- Other, please specify:

10. b) What cultural resources are there in your home town that you find important?\*

- Archeological sites and heritage

- Architecture
- Cafes, bars, pubs and nightclubs
- Open spaces (e.g. parks, playgrounds, public seating areas, squares)
- Design and fashion
- Film and video -related activities and services
- Performing arts (including music, theatre, dance, circus)
- Street culture (including skateboarding, street art, street dance, graffiti, parkour)
- Libraries and literature
- Cultural clubs and associations
- Cultural traditions, folklore and folk art
- Visual arts (including painting, sculpture, graphic art, printmaking)
- Crafts
- Landscapes and town- and cityscapes
- Museums and galleries
- Youth centres / houses
- Local stories and histories
- Gaming and game culture
- Cuisine / gastronomy
- Newspapers and magazines
- Comics and related activities and services
- Events and festivals
- TV and radio -related activities and services
- Scientific activities and institutions
- Sports and recreation activities and services
- Photography activities and services

- Green spaces (including natural reserves, national parks, gardens, parks, rural areas)
- Virtual and digital cultural activities
- Minority, alternative and subcultures
- Other, please specify:
- Other, please specify:
- Other, please specify:

10. c) What kinds of minority, alternative and/or subcultures are important for you?

If nothing comes to mind, leave empty.

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11. a) Would you say that there are some cultural resources, services or activities missing or undervalued in your home town? \*

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

11. b) Can you specify which cultural resources, services or activities you think are missing from your home town? \*

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11. c) Can you specify which cultural resources, services or activities you think are undervalued in your home town? \*

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12. On a scale from 1–5, how well would you say the cultural services or activities match your needs and/or aspirations

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.  
Very poorl y Quite poorl y Neither Pretty well Very well I don't know

a) in your home town? \*

b) in the Oulu2026\* region? \*

## Cultural participation

In this section, you will be asked questions about your participation in culture.

When answering the questions, you can rely your own understanding of culture.

What is important here, is what culture means for you.

14. a) Which of the following activities do you attend or participate in monthly or more often?

- Activities in local youth centres / houses
- Activities in other spaces for cultural activities and/or sociability
- Activities or services in open spaces (e.g. parks, playgrounds, public seating areas, squares)
- Activities or services in green spaces (e.g. rural areas, natural reserves, national parks, gardens)
- Archaeological and/or heritage activities
- Design and/or fashion -related activities
- Going to cinema
- Film and video-related activities
- Performing arts (including music, theatre, dance, circus) activities and services
- Festivals and events
- Cafes, bars, pubs and nightclubs
- Street art (including skateboarding, parkour, street art, graffiti, street dance)
- Libraries, literature and reading
- Cultural activism
- Cultural journalism and/or blogging

13. On a scale from 1–5, how easy or difficult is it for you to reach cultural services or activities you are interested in

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
	Very difficult	Quite difficult	Neither	Quite easy	Very easy
	It is difficult	It is difficult	It is neither easy nor difficult	It is quite easy	It is very easy
a) in your home town? *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b) in the Oulu2026* region? *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\*Oulu2026 region consists of 33 cities and municipalities:

Oulu, Haapajärvi, Haapavesi, Hailuoto, Ii, Kajaani, Kalajoki, Kemi,

Kempele, Kuhmo, Kuusamo, Kärsämäki, Liminka, Lumijoki, Muhos, Nivala, Oulainen,

Paltamo, Pielavesi, Pudasjärvi, Pyhäntä, Raahen, Sievi, Siikajoki, Siikalatva, Sotkamo, Suomussalmi, Taivalkoski, Tornio, Tyrnävä, Utajärvi, Vaala and Ylivieska.

- Cultural associations and clubs
- Visual arts (including painting, sculpture, graphic art, printmaking, drawing) activities and services
- Crafts
- Media activities
- Museums and galleries
- Gaming and game culture
- Cuisine / gastronomy
- Comics
- Artistic or cultural courses or hobbies
- Scientific activities
- Sports and recreation
- Photography
- Virtual and digital cultural activities and services
- Minority, alternative and subcultural activities
- Other, please specify:
- Other, please specify:
- Other, please specify:

14. a) Which of the following activities do you attend or participate in at least once a year (but less than monthly)?

- Activities in local youth centres / houses
- Activities in other spaces for cultural activities and/or sociability
- Activities or services in open spaces (e.g. parks, playgrounds, public seating areas, squares)
- Activities or services in green spaces (e.g. rural areas, natural reserves, national parks, gardens)



- Archaeological and/or heritage activities
- Design and/or fashion -related activities
- Going to cinema
- Film and video-related activities
- Performing arts (including music, theatre, dance, circus) activities and services
- Festivals and events
- Cafes, bars, pubs and nightclubs
- Street art (including skateboarding, parkour, street art, graffiti, street dance)
- Libraries, literature and reading
- Cultural activism
- Cultural journalism and/or blogging
- Cultural associations and clubs
- Visual arts (including painting, sculpture, graphic art, printmaking, drawing) activities and services
- Crafts
- Media activities
- Museums and galleries
- Gaming and game culture
- Cuisine / gastronomy
- Comics
- Artistic or cultural courses or hobbies
- Scientific activities
- Sports and recreation
- Photography
- Virtual and digital cultural activities and services

Minority, alternative and subcultural activities

Other, please specify:

Other, please specify:

Other, please specify:

15. a) Approximately how often do you participate in cultural activities in the different roles listed below in your home town or the Oulu2026 region?

	1. Never	2. Less than once a year	3. At least once a year	4. Monthly or more often
As an audience member, visitor or customer *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As an active participant *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As an artist or creator *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As an organiser or manager of events or activities *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As a volunteer *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As a cultural activist *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As a journalist and/or blogger *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. b) Do you participate in cultural activities in another role?  
If yes, please specify which role(s) and how often.

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16. a) Would you like to participate in the different roles listed below more often?

	Yes	No	Maybe
As an audience member, visitor or customer *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As an active participant *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As an artist or creator *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As an organiser or manager of events or activities *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As a volunteer *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As a cultural activist *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As a journalist and/or blogger *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. b) Would you like participate in cultural activities in another role more often? If yes, please specify.

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17. b) Which factors currently prevent you from participating in cultural activities in your home town and the Oulu2026 region?\*

- Lack of family members to participate with
- Lack of friends to participate with
- Lack of friends with whom to create or organise something with
- Expensive prices
- Long distances
- Poor accessibility
- Lack of information about what's available
- Uninteresting and/or irrelevant cultural offering
- Lack of versatility in programme
- Poor quality of cultural offering
- Lack of possibilities to meet artists and/or organisers
- Poor possibilities to influence the programme or content
- Poor possibilities to create or organise something myself
- Poor possibilities to get training for organising events or activities
- Lack of difference and diversity in programme and contents
- Feeling excluded (lack of belonging, not being equally accepted or recognised)
- One-sided and/or discriminating representations of my own culture / social group
- Lack of safer cultural spaces
- None of these
- Other, please specify:

Other, please specify:

Other, please specify:

18. What kinds of cultural activities would you like to participate in more often?

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## APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Note. The interviews were held in Finnish. The questions were translated in English for the purpose of the appendix. The list of questions was tentative, and all questions were not discussed.

### Interview questions for Piia Rantala-Korhonen (28.6.2021)

Current state and bidding phase:

- How would you describe the current state of young adults' cultural participation in the Oulu2026 region?
- In what ways were young adults involved in the Oulu2026 bidding phase and what kinds of participation related challenges were identified?
- What would you say are the biggest barriers to young adults' cultural participation in the Oulu2026 region?

Young adults' cultural participation from now on:

- What kinds of participation opportunities will there be for young adults in the coming years and during the ECoC year?
- How have you reached out to young adults and found out about their participation aspirations in the ECoC?
- What kinds of goals do you have for young people's participation in the ECoC and in the long term?

Active participation, cultural rights, and diversity:

- How does Oulu2026 aim to strengthen active participation and a sense of belonging?
- How does Oulu2026 appreciate, recognise and enable diversity and different kinds of cultural expressions?
- What kinds of opportunities are there for young adults in the region to participate in decision-making processes related to the ECoC project?
- How does the Oulu2026 project aim to foster cultural participation among different demographic groups? Have for example marginalised and disadvantaged groups been specifically considered?
- In what ways does Oulu2026 aim to strengthen a sense of community among people from different backgrounds?

Volunteer programme:

- What kinds of volunteering opportunities are there for young adults and how does the volunteer programme aim to strengthen cultural participation in the long term?

Capabilities and networks:

- What kinds of learning and development opportunities does Oulu2026 offer for young adults?
- What kinds of opportunities for networking and relationship building does the ECoC project provide for young adults?

Participation in the region:

- Have any differences been perceived between the different municipalities in the region in terms of cultural participation?
- What kinds of challenges and opportunities does the wide region bring in terms of young adults' cultural participation?
- Have there been attempts or plans to enhance and strengthen collaboration between young adults from different parts of the region?

Young artists and cultural professionals:

- How are young artists and cultural field professionals supported in Oulu2026?

The impact of Covid-19:

- How has Covid-19 affected and how does it still affect young adults' cultural participation?

Youth disillusionment:

- According to the Global Risks Report by the World Economic Forum, youth disillusionment is one of the major ignored risks in the near future. Has the risk been considered or signs of it perceived in the Oulu2026 project?
- How do you think the ECoC project can address the challenge of youth disillusionment?

The European dimension:

- What do you think is the role of European collaboration in strengthening young adults' cultural participation?

## **Interview questions for Jaana Potkonen (29.6.2021)**

Current state:

- How would you describe the current state of young adults' cultural participation in the Oulu2026 region?
- How would you describe the current state of young adults' cultural wellbeing in the Oulu2026 region?
- What do you think are the biggest cultural wellbeing challenges among young adults in Oulu and the Oulu2026 region?
- What do you think are the biggest barriers to young adults' cultural participation in Oulu and the Oulu2026 region?

Young adults' cultural participation and cultural wellbeing in Oulu and Oulu2026:

- What kinds of cultural wellbeing and cultural participation goals does the city of Oulu have related to young adults?
- In what ways does the new cultural wellbeing plan of Oulu address the cultural participation opportunities of young adults?
- How have different demographic groups and minorities been considered?
- Do other municipalities in the Oulu2026 have a similar cultural wellbeing plan?
- How has the cultural wellbeing plan been integrated in the ECoC programme?
- How do you think the Oulu2026 project can enhance cultural wellbeing and participation among young adults?



Active participation, accessibility and diversity:

- What is the role of active participation in the cultural wellbeing plan?
- How does Oulu aim to appreciate, recognise and enable diversity and different kinds of cultural expressions? How do these things manifest in the cultural wellbeing plan?
- How does Oulu aim to enhance cultural participation among different demographic groups? Have for example marginalised and disadvantaged groups been specifically considered?
- How have matters of cultural accessibility been considered in Oulu and in the cultural wellbeing plan?

Impact of Covid-19:

- How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected and how does it still affect young adults' cultural participation and cultural wellbeing in Oulu?

Youth disillusionment:

- According to the Global Risks Report by the World Economic Forum, youth disillusionment is one of the major ignored risks in the near future. Has the issue been perceived or considered in Oulu?
- How do you think the ECoC project can address the challenge of youth disillusionment?

Finally:

- Which cultural wellbeing issues related to young adults do you think require the most attention and development in Oulu and in the Oulu2026 region?

## **Interview questions for Samu Forsblom (5.7.2021)**

Current state and bidding phase:

- How would you describe the current state of young adults' cultural participation in the Oulu2026 region?
- In what ways were young adults involved in the Oulu2026 bidding phase and what kinds of participation related challenges were identified?
- What would you say are the biggest barriers to young adults' cultural participation in the Oulu2026 region?

Young adults' cultural participation from now on:

- How have you reached out to young adults and found out about their participation aspirations in the ECoC?
- What kinds of participation opportunities will there be for young adults in the coming years and during the ECoC year?
- What kinds of goals do you have for young adults' participation in the ECoC and in the long term?
- What kinds of opportunities are there for young adults in the region to participate in decision-making processes related to the ECoC project?
- What is the role of active participation in the ECoC project?

- A lot of young adults are moving away from Oulu. How do you think this challenge can be addressed by the Oulu2026 project?

#### Diversity and community:

- How does Oulu2026 appreciate, recognise and enable diversity and different kinds of cultural expressions?
- How does the Oulu2026 project aim to foster cultural participation among different demographic groups? Have for example marginalised and disadvantaged groups been specifically considered?
- In what ways does Oulu2026 aim to strengthen a sense of community among people from different backgrounds?

#### Volunteer programme:

- What kinds of volunteering opportunities are there for young adults and how does the volunteer programme aim to strengthen cultural participation in the long term?

#### Participation in the region:

- Have any differences been perceived between the different municipalities in the region in terms of cultural participation?
- What kinds of challenges and opportunities does the wide region bring in terms of young adults' cultural participation?
- Have there been attempts or plans to enhance and strengthen collaboration between people from different parts of the region?

#### Capabilities and networks:

- What kinds of learning and development opportunities does Oulu2026 offer for young adults?
- What kinds of opportunities for networking and relationship building does the ECoC project provide for young adults?

#### Young artists and cultural professionals:

- How are young artists and cultural field professionals supported in Oulu2026?

#### The impact of Covid-19:

- How has Covid-19 affected and how does it still affect young adults' cultural participation?
- How are you preparing for the consequences of the pandemic from now on until the ECoC year?

#### Youth disillusionment:

- According to the Global Risks Report by the World Economic Forum, youth disillusionment is one of the major ignored risks in the near future. Has the risk been considered or signs of it perceived in the Oulu2026 project?
- How do you think the ECoC project can address the challenge of youth disillusionment?

#### The European dimension:

- What do you think is the role of European collaboration in strengthening young adults' cultural participation?

# APPENDIX E. ADDRESSING YOUTH DISILLUSIONMENT WITHIN OULU2026

