

Expectations for the Oulu2026 ECOC year

Preliminary findings

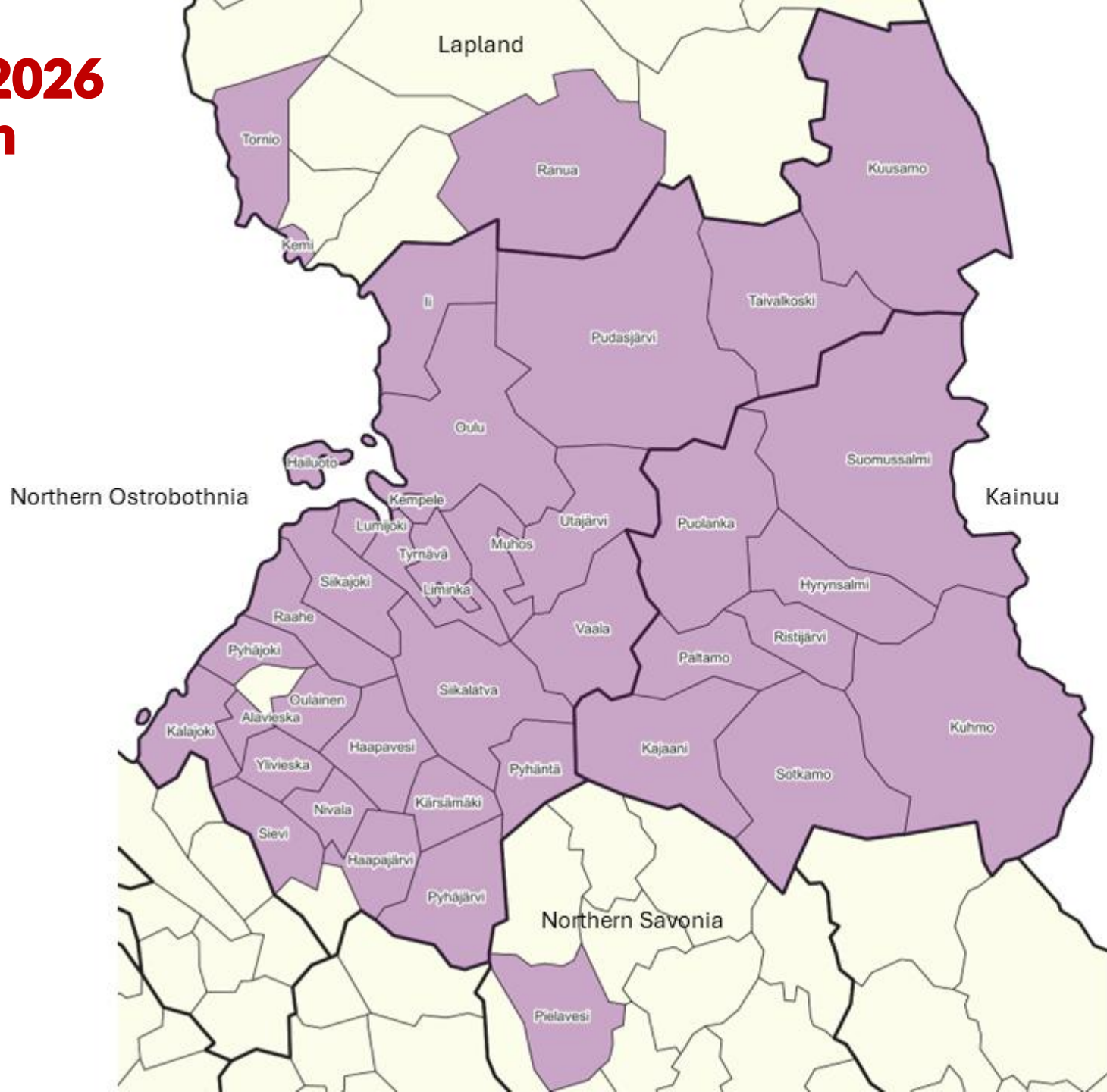
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Monitoring and evaluating Oulu2026 at Cupore

- Cupore is an independent research center
 - Producing research-based knowledge and committed to good scientific practice
 - Multi-disciplinary approach
- Long-standing collaboration with Oulu2026
 - Supporting the bidding process since 2018
 - Developing and applying a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework in close collaboration with Oulu2026 since 2021

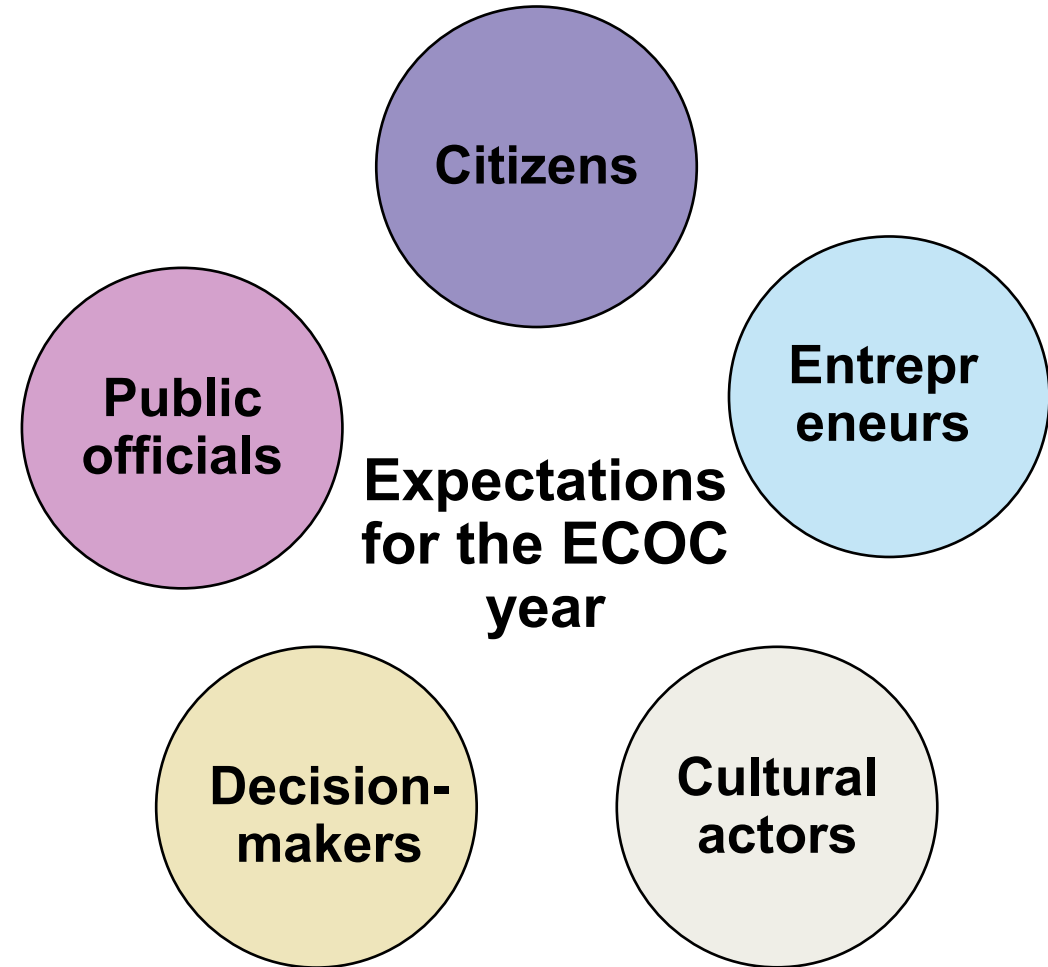
Oulu2026 region



- 39 Oulu2026 municipalities
- Region over 57.000 km²
- Aiming for Cultural Climate Change *that “... creates connections and softens up the cultural climate in the region”* (Oulu2026 Bid Book)

Key question and perspectives

How the Oulu2026 as a ECoC initiative addresses the needs of various regional and local stakeholders in Northern Finland?



Data

- The preliminary analysis draws on both qualitative and quantitative data from surveys, interviews and documents.
- Citizens: surveys (2022, N= 1327)
- Decision-makers: surveys (2022, N= 171)
- Public officials: surveys (2022, N= 33)
- Cultural actors: surveys (2022, N= 118)
- Entrepreneurs: survey (2025, N=31), interviews (N=5)

Expectations – decision-makers and public officials

- Public officials and council members see the initiative as a tool the long-term development
- A clear gap between Oulu and the smaller municipalities: Oulu expects enhance of collaboration, whereas it is not central goal for the other municipalities.
- Smaller municipalities do not see the leverage impact of the initiative for local development

Expectations – cultural actors

- Cultural actors expect Oulu2026 to enhance their operational capacity by increasing demand: Oulu2026 broadens the demand and audience base for cultural activities.
- Increase in the sense of appreciation for cultural actors and their work is expected.
- Enhanced regional collaboration in cultural activities is also expected.

Expectations - entrepreneurs

- No direct impact on company turnover is expected from the ECoC year.
- Expectations regarding improved company visibility: most of respondents expect the Oulu2026 activities to enhance visibility at the regional and national levels, and over half expect increased visibility at the European level.
- Cooperation with Oulu2026 is not expected to lead to company growth; instead, the focus is on networking opportunities and building a positive regional image.

Expectations - citizens

- The **expectations of Oulu residents are strongest** regarding the strengthening of cultural life, tourism, and the city's image.
- The development of community spirit, European identity, and the mental atmosphere do not evoke strong expectations among residents.
- In the **recently merged municipal areas of Oulu**, people are more skeptical about the potential impacts of the ECOC year: effects related to community spirit, cultural life, the economy, and the mental atmosphere are perceived as weaker.

Concluding remarks: Multiplicity of expectations on various levels

- Expectations differ significantly at the municipality level: core and peripheral views on regional development
- The focus of the cultural actors' expectations is on operational capacity: collaboration and stronger audience base
- The expectations of the local businesses are relatively modest: no direct expectations for the development of own businesses
- The expectations of Oulu residents are strongest regarding concrete and comprehensible impacts: the strengthening of cultural life, tourism, and city's image.

Thank you!

Read more: <https://www.cupore.fi/en/research/oulu2026-evaluation-research/>

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