

Best Citizen Engagement



Think Sustainably

City of Helsinki / Helsinki Marketing

With political and scientific conversations around climate change dominating the global news, Helsinki wanted to demonstrate how to craft a culture of sustainability that guided residents, visitors and business owners – giving everyone the chance to be part of a wave of change and to care for the environment in smart, effective ways.

Helsinki is home to Flow Festival, one of the world's leading carbon neutral music festivals; the Nordic region's first zero waste restaurant Nolla, and non-profit foundation Compensate which was established to fight climate change by using compensation payments to donate towards international carbon sink projects. Sustainability is deeply ingrained in their approach. To showcase this, Helsinki has recently launched Think Sustainably, the world's first online service that enables making sustainable choices as easy as using an app. The service empowers residents and visitors to make informed daily choices, rating the Finnish capital's restaurants, attractions, shops and accommodation against bespoke sustainability criteria. It also gives users concrete tools to radically rethink their lifestyles toward sustainable practices, an approach that they hope could provide a digitally-based sustainability blueprint for the rest of the world. With climate change an acknowledged global issue, Helsinki is committed to promoting a more sustainable lifestyle – for everyone.

Helsinki has become a testbed for solutions that can later be scaled-up for the world's megacities. In June 2019, Helsinki was crowned as the most innovative region in the EU by the European Commission and is a European Capital of Smart Tourism 2019. It's also the first European city and the second globally (after New York) to report voluntarily to the UN on its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and leads the way in experimenting with sustainable policies and initiatives. Helsinki has set an aim to reduce emissions by 60 percent by the year 2030 and to be carbon neutral by 2035. Two thirds of Helsinki residents identified the climate crisis as their major concern when thinking about the future. Many feel frustrated that there's nothing they can do to stop it and there was a great demand for that frustration to be channeled into something productive

Services filtered through the online programme include restaurants, shops, events, experiences and accommodation, each benchmarked against tailor-made criteria. The service also includes a route planner feature that enables choosing emission-free transportation options to the wide variety of experiences on offer in the city. The process of developing the Think Sustainably service included researching the most significant factors of ecological sustainability related to different service categories and has already resulted in several service providers making changes such as switching energy and heating contracts to more environmentally friendly options.

The process of developing the Think Sustainably service included researching the most significant factors of ecological sustainability related to different service categories. These dealt mostly with greenhouse emissions caused by energy production, the impacts of mobility and food, waste management, factors related to circular economy, protecting biodiversity, accessibility, but also employment and preventing discrimination. A major part of the CO2 emissions in Helsinki comes from heating and electricity consumption (73%), so energy production was a top priority when developing the criteria.

Businesses have welcomed the service and the criteria warmly as it provides concrete tools to facilitate thinking around sustainability. Many have already switched energy and heating contracts to more environmentally friendly options. The Think Sustainably service is publicly available with plans to roll the programme out further and review its impact in 2020. The long-term vision is that all the companies and service providers on the team's database will adopt at least part of the service and meet at least the minimum criteria.

During the first month after the launch, Think Sustainably service catapulted MyHelsinki.fi to almost 380 K monthly visitors, an all-time record and a range of global media were interested in the topic with The Independent, Fast Company, The Guardian, La Repubblica and Helsingin Sanomat writing articles about the service among others. ●