HEVINNOVATIONS RESULTS & IMPACT REPORT 2026

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HEVinnovations - Helsinki metropolitan ecosystems

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HEVinnovations programme monitoring data (Innovation Ecosystem Agreement for the Helsinki Metropolitan Area)

Data sources:

EURA2021 indicator data for 2023–2025;
programme coordination's own monitoring data for 2021–2026

This publication is a condensed English version of the original, more comprehensive monitoring report published in Finnish. The full report is available in the resource library at hevinnovations.fi: https://hevinnovations.fi/tietoa-hevi-ohjelmasta-raportti-koottu-tuloksista-10-2026/

Learn more about the programme: https://hevinnovations.fi/en/

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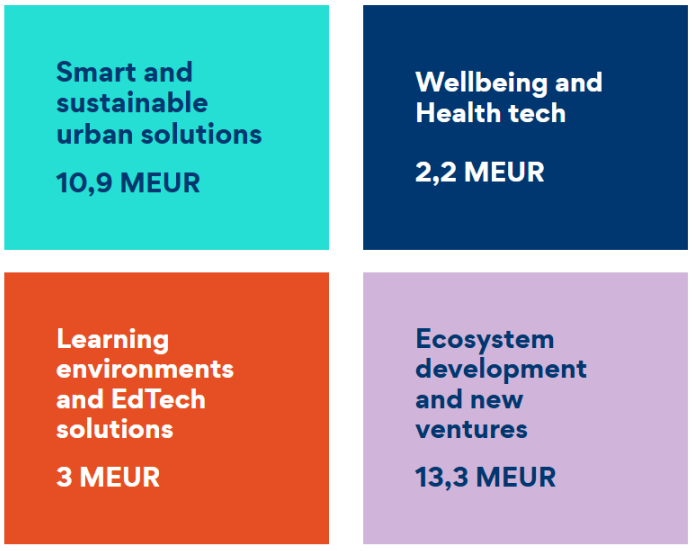
Introduction

What do the cities of Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa with the Finnish Government aim to achieve through the Innovation Ecosystem Agreement?

The Innovation Ecosystem Agreement for the Helsinki Metropolitan Area for the 2021–2027 EU programming period sets out the following objectives:

1. **Innovative, pioneering cities accelerate the renewal of the business sector and the transition towards a sustainable future.** Companies and RDI actors work together to harness new opportunities and avenues for growth created by digitalisation, emerging technologies and carbon neutrality. These activities strengthen the development of attractive competence clusters and innovation environments and connect actors to international RDI networks and value chains.
2. **In line with the objectives of sustainable urban development, innovation ecosystems are developed, key areas of expertise are strengthened, and the impact of research, development and innovation activities is increased.** These measures create new local development dynamics, aim to generate new internationally significant growth opportunities, and leverage synergies across the capital region area.
3. **HEVi strengthens cooperation across the Helsinki metropolitan area in areas of strategic importance to the cities, in new initiatives, and in the cross-cutting development of innovation ecosystems.** A portfolio of development projects designed to address current needs creates favourable conditions for the emergence of new innovation-driven companies and the development of existing businesses. Successful companies create new jobs. The growing metropolitan area serves as an engine of growth for Finland and as an internationally competitive innovation hub where solutions are developed to global urban challenges.

The project portfolio is built upon four key themes as planned in the agreement:



The programme has succeeded in building a broad and concrete portfolio of projects.

Since 2021, HEVi has funded 28 projects, demonstrating the programme's ability to translate business and RDI strategies into practical action. From a broader European perspective, HEVi's funding is relatively modest compared with the level of ambition and the wide range of tasks and objectives set for both the programme and the individual projects.

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The programme has translated regional strategic objectives into a broad portfolio of concrete development activities. Projects have established experimentation and development environments, strengthened RDI clusters, and developed business incubators and other business services. These activities have created new opportunities for companies, cities, higher education institutions and research organisations to develop, test and evaluate solutions together.

A significant share of the funded projects focuses on experimentation environments where companies collaborate with other actors to develop products and services. The programme also provides a wide range of new direct business services, some addressing entirely new opportunities and others supporting ecosystem development across different thematic areas.

Summary of monitoring, results and key changes achieved

The monitoring of the HEVinnovations programme draws on two data sources:

1. **Monitoring data collected in the EURA 2021 system**
   Project results data is based on ex-post verified monitoring reports required under the ERDF programme and reviewed and approved by the funding authority. The publication of monitoring data is subject to delays due to reporting practices and challenges related to the EURA system.
2. **Monitoring data collected by the programme**
   The HEVi coordination team compiles up-to-date information on both project funding and programme-level activities. Information compiled and published by the funded projects has also been used in this report.

SAMPLE BASED ON PROJECT MONITORING REPORTS	REAL-TIME PROGRAMME-LEVEL MONITORING
Result and output indicators for funded projects, verified through approved monitoring reports (mainly during 2023–2025). **New jobs (RCR03): 297** *246 were created in international startups that entered the region with the support of startup soft-landing services.* **New enterprises (RCO05): 86**, of which 29 were founded by women. *67 are international startups that entered the region with the support of startup soft-landing services.* **Enterprises starting new business activities (NR03): 90** **Enterprises supported in incubator services (RCO15): 117** **Business development support, such as de minimis aid: 236** **SMEs introducing product or process innovations (RCR03): 211** **Innovations, products and services developed by networks and innovation ecosystems (NR01): 179** **Enterprises making use of RDI infrastructure (NR02): 5** **Enterprises participating in projects led by research and development organisations (RCO10 + NO05): 342** **Enterprises participating in co-creation (NO03): 530** **Platforms and networks supporting co-creation (NO02): 124** **A total of 929 unique enterprises have participated in the programme's projects, of which 122 have either participated in activities in more than one project or used several different services.** • *57% micro-enterprises, 20% small enterprises* • *62% involved in co-development, 21% in direct business development, and 15% participated in testing, piloting or demonstration activities*	*Monitoring carried out by the HEVi coordination team, 2021–2026.* **Funding of the HEVi portfolio: EUR 30 million** *Total funding for ERDF and AKKE projects, including the project implementers' own co-financing* 15 organisations 29 projects, 87 sub-projects **National Innocities funding for the capital region: EUR 300,000+** **Communications by the HEVi coordination team:** HEVinnovations.fi website: 2,000+ visits during active months 21 consortia and 59 sub-projects presented 277 articles published 129 events published HEVi LinkedIn: 1,500+ followers **Events organised by the HEVi coordination team:** 100 events 2,500 participant attendances NPS 63 **Qualitative analyses:** • InnoVisions • The shift in the innovation paradigm

The programme's EUR 30 million project portfolio covers multiple thematic priorities, broad objectives and development activities addressing different stages of the innovation and growth pathway. It is therefore appropriate to analyse the results through categories that capture the programme's objectives and activities across several dimensions: direct results for businesses, innovation- and solution-oriented RDI activities, and ecosystem development that supports and strengthens innovation activities across the capital region.

The HEVi monitoring report is structured around the following three categories:

1. Business and growth: What has the programme achieved for businesses and the economy?

2. Innovations, experimentation and new solutions: How does the programme promote innovation, market development and sustainable solutions for urban development?

3. Ecosystems, capabilities and operating culture: How does the programme change ways of working, ecosystem dynamics and the conditions for future development?

By the end of 2026, the HEVinnovations programme has strengthened the capital region's capacity to support the creation and growth of innovative companies, developed new solutions together with businesses, and promoted innovation across the region as a whole. A key qualitative outcome of the programme is the shift from individual projects and organisation-specific services towards shared service pathways, multidisciplinary project portfolios and more long-term ecosystem development.

Key changes

1. **Companies now have access to a broader and more regionally integrated pathways to innovation services.** Companies can be supported across city, organisational and project boundaries to RDI collaboration, experimentation environments, expert networks, and growth and internationalisation services.
2. **Urban challenges and business solutions are being brought together more systematically than before.** Urban environments have been opened up for the development, testing and co-development of products, services and operating models in areas such as sustainability, mobility, energy, learning and well-being.
3. **Cooperation among RDI actors in the capital region has intensified.** Cities, companies, higher education institutions and research organisations have found new opportunities for collaboration, and co-development has become a key approach for bringing together the needs, expertise and resources of actors.
4. **The focus has shifted from individual projects towards a shared development portfolio.** Projects are increasingly prepared and targeted as part of regional objectives and broader innovation pathways. At the same time, collaboration, cross-fertilisation and shared learning between projects have increased.
5. **The capital region has developed a shared approach to managing innovation activities and making them more visible.** Shared operating models, evaluation, communications and integrated service offerings have made previously fragmented innovation activities more accessible and strategically managed.

1. Business and growth

New jobs (RCR03): 297

New enterprises (RCO05): 86, of which 29 were founded by women.

Enterprises starting new business activities (NR03): 90

Enterprises supported in incubator services (RCO15): 117

Business development support, such as de minimis aid: 236

The programme has expanded and strengthened services for growth-oriented and innovative companies. At the same time, the way companies are directed to relevant services, networks and markets has been developed to operate more effectively across the capital region. The shared service offering has attracted international startup entrepreneurs, contributing to the creation of new companies, jobs, partnerships and opportunities for future growth.

Key changes

1. **Growth-oriented and innovative companies now have access to a broader and more diverse range of services.** Companies have gained access to incubation, coaching, internationalisation, experimentation and co-development services, as well as support for developing new products, services and business models.
2. **Supporting the establishment and growth of international startups is now a joint effort across the capital region.** Cooperation between the cities, Business Finland and other key actors provides companies with a more integrated pathway to establish themselves in the region, build networks and start growing their business.
3. **Companies have gained closer access to the RDI activities of cities, higher education institutions and research organisations.** New opportunities have been created for companies to make use of experimentation environments, participate in co-development and research collaboration, and develop their solutions together with other actors in the region.
4. **Business service guidance has become more integrated across the capital region.** Based on their needs, companies can be directed across project, organisational and city boundaries to relevant services, networks, experts and markets.

According to data from the EURA system, **929 companies have participated** in HEVi project activities. Although direct project funding is allocated to public-sector organisations, the number of companies and company representatives participating in RDI collaboration within the projects is several times higher than the number of participants from other sectors.

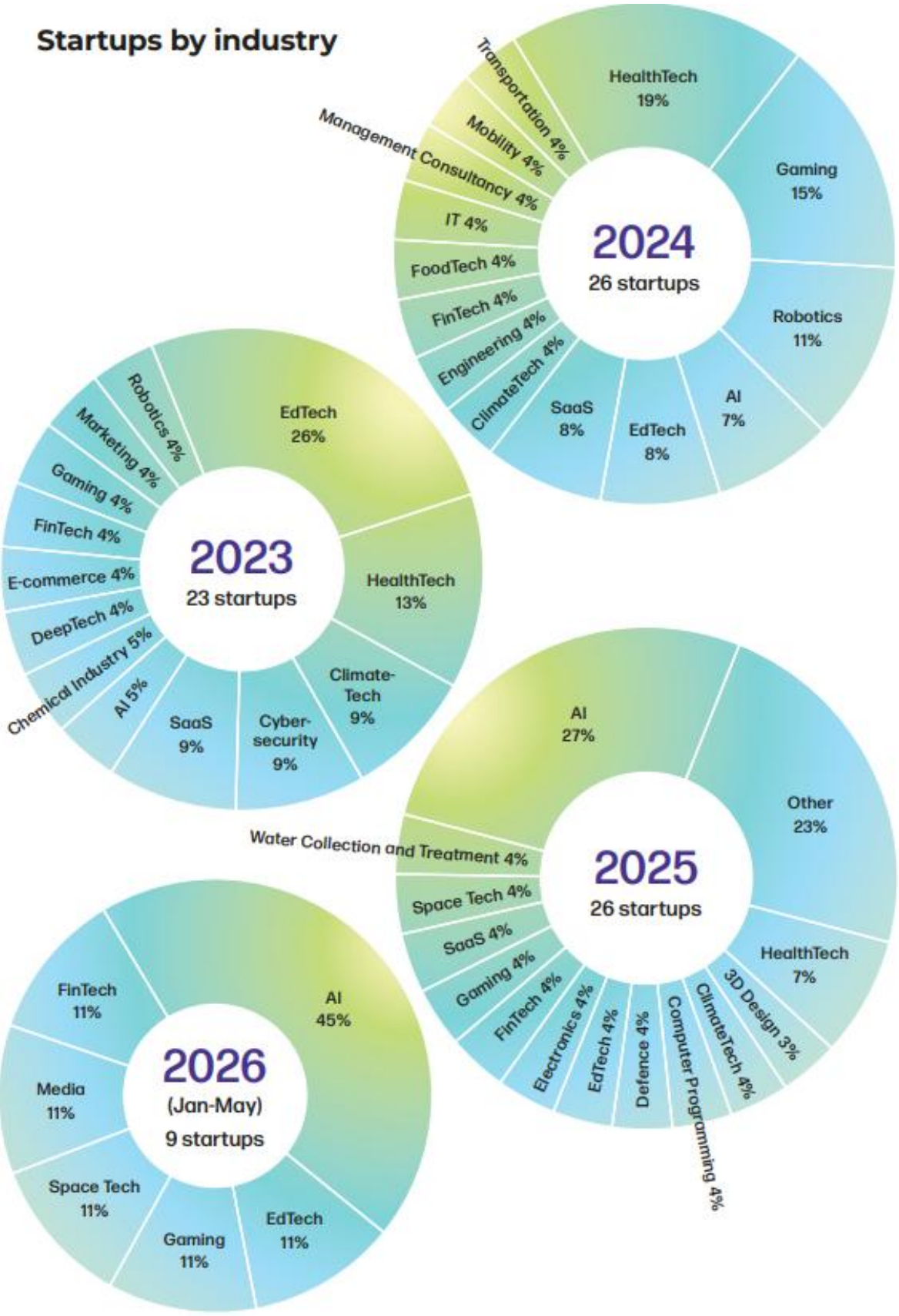
The majority of the jobs created are associated with companies that have relocated to Finland from abroad. The result therefore primarily reflects the capital region's ability to attract businesses and jobs. The high figure does not, in itself, demonstrate the employment impact generated by RDI and innovation activities originating in the region.

More broadly, the HEVi portfolio creates favorable conditions for the emergence of new innovation-driven companies. The majority of funded projects focus on earlier stages of the pathway towards building innovative growth companies, with results expected to materialize as new companies established after the projects have ended. **Successful companies create new jobs for residents and generate tax revenue for cities, helping to support well-being and sustainability.** Innovative growth companies also attract other growth-oriented businesses and contribute to the development of thriving innovation and growth clusters.

The results particularly highlight the new companies and jobs generated through startup soft-landing services, as well as the successful development of the capital region's joint service offering in close cooperation with Business Finland and other actors. The overview below shows the sectors in which new companies and jobs have been created.

A further area for development is the more systematic identification of business needs and ensuring that participation delivers clear and tangible business benefits for companies. These perspectives have guided the direction of the project portfolio towards the latter part of the programme period, 2026–2029, and some of the newer projects continue the development work in areas where earlier projects have already achieved significant results. Monitoring data is not yet available for the most recent projects.

> The programme evaluation has highlighted the need to strengthen business engagement as an area for further development. The aim should be to develop operating models that provide stronger incentives for private-sector participation and respond more directly to the identified needs of businesses. Both in the planning and implementation phases, it is essential to ensure that companies can derive, and perceive themselves as deriving, direct business benefits from the collaboration.
>
> **European Urban Initiative, Peer Review 2026**



Source: Building Sisu Factory Soft-landing services for Finland capital region report

2. Innovations, experimentation and new solutions

SMEs introducing product or process innovations (RCR03): 211

Innovations, products and services developed by networks and innovation ecosystems (NR01): 179

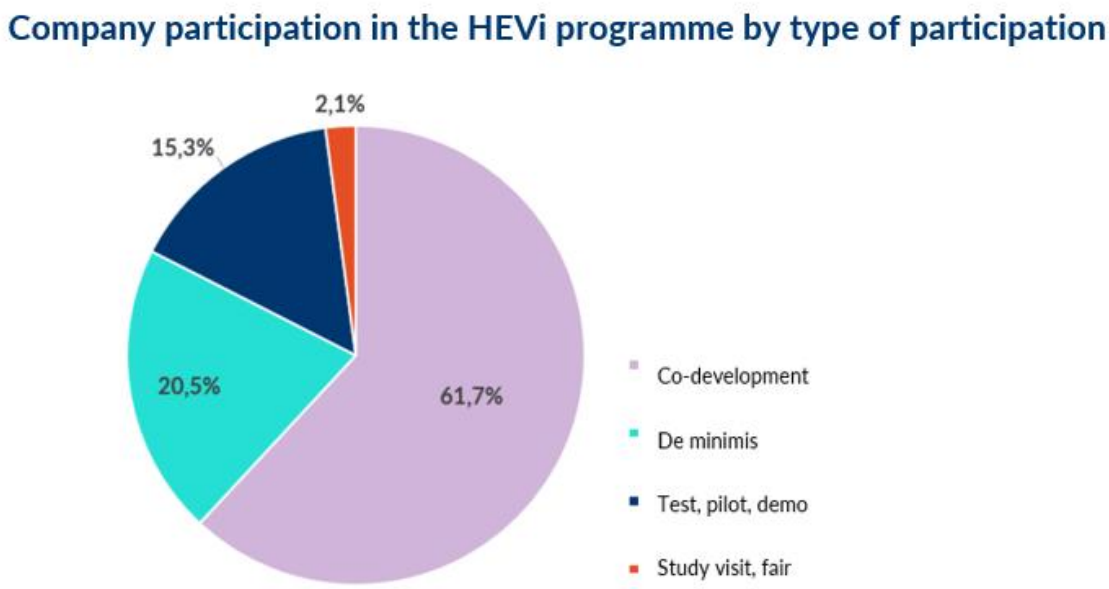
Enterprises making use of RDI infrastructure (NR02): 5

Development activities have covered a wide range of sectors. Collaboration with SMEs has been particularly active in learning environments and in experiments applying digital creative sector solutions across different fields. Looking ahead, multidisciplinary innovation activities offer significant new potential, supported by the new initiatives, capabilities and connections created during the programme.

Key changes

1. **Urban sustainability challenges have become more closely linked to business innovation activities.** Companies and other RDI actors have gained concrete opportunities for development in areas such as the circular economy, energy, mobility, food systems, learning environments and well-being technologies.
2. **Urban environments across the capital region have been opened up as development and experimentation environments for companies.** Companies have been able to test and develop their products, services and operating models in real-life or simulated user environments before commercialisation and wider deployment.
3. **Co-development has become a key form of collaboration across all programme priorities, but more active efforts are still needed to enable SMEs to make use of the RDI infrastructure of higher education institutions and research organisations.** The different needs, expertise and resources of companies, cities, higher education institutions and research organisations are brought together in shared development processes. This strengthens the practical applicability of solutions and their connection to the real needs of both users and cities. Access to RDI infrastructure remains a challenge for companies.
4. **Solutions and operating models developed through experimentation have been connected to broader ecosystems.** This enables the results of individual projects to benefit not only their participants but also other companies, cities and development organisations, while laying the groundwork for new collaboration.
5. **The threshold for companies to participate in solution development has been lowered, but the pathway from experimentation to wider adoption still needs to be strengthened.** Co-development in particular provides a flexible way for companies to participate. The next key step is to ensure that promising solutions progress from experimentation to procurement, commercialisation, continuous service delivery and wider adoption.

The opening up of the capital region cities as development and experimentation environments has gained momentum through the HEVi programme. In each funding round, projects have been launched to provide companies and other RDI actors with opportunities for co-development and experimentation. **Activities at this early stage of innovative entrepreneurship are a natural area for public-sector involvement, while collaboration also enables cities to strengthen their own capabilities and expertise in solutions for future urban development.**



Monitoring data shows that the majority of company participation takes the form of co-development. Co-development allows a larger number of companies to participate at the same time, which partly explains the high indicator figures for this type of activity. Co-development is a relatively light-touch way for both companies and projects to organise participation and collaboration. This contrasts with, for example, piloting programmes and de minimis services, which require considerably more preparation and administration from both the project and the participating company.

Project services classified as de minimis aid are tailored to individual companies and provided free of charge. They enable public-sector actors to support business development and growth, making them particularly important in the context of the Innovation Ecosystem Agreement. However, their practical implementation has involved some uncertainty, as the guidelines have changed during the projects and the administrative workload for projects has been greater than anticipated.

3. Ecosystems, capabilities and operating culture

Enterprises participating in projects led by research and development organisations (RCO10 + NO05): 342

Enterprises participating in co-creation (NO03): 530

Platforms and networks supporting co-creation (NO02): 124

RDI collaboration across the capital region has natural synergies, as municipal boundaries are not relevant to business growth or successful innovation activities, and a region-wide network provides significantly more support for development than individual service offerings. A large number of potential partners are within easy reach, and the multidisciplinary programme can connect both people and RDI platforms across sectors with those who need them for development activities.

Key changes

1. **Previously fragmented innovation activities across the capital region have been brought together into a more coherent whole.** A shared long-term model for collaboration connects the activities of cities, higher education institutions, research organisations, companies and other development actors.
2. **The cities' collective capacity to steer and enable innovation activities has strengthened.** Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa define shared objectives, bring actors together and steer the project portfolio based on regional needs. At the same time, the cities act as enablers of collaboration between companies, higher education institutions, research organisations and other development actors.
3. **Collaboration and mutual understanding among RDI actors in the capital region have strengthened.** Joint preparation, project clinics, networks and stakeholder events have lowered the threshold for initiating collaboration. At the same time, cross-fertilisation between projects has increased across organisational, thematic and project boundaries.
4. **New shared capabilities for planning and managing innovation activities have been developed.** Support for project preparation, portfolio thinking and developmental evaluation help connect individual projects to regional needs, broader ecosystems and shared strategic objectives. At the ecosystem level, the key unresolved challenge is how to ensure that results become embedded in permanent structures and that development can be sustained over the long term.
5. **Joint communications have made innovation activities across the capital region more visible and accessible.** Projects, events, funding opportunities and experimentation environments are presented on a shared platform as part of a broader whole. A key challenge going forward is to ensure permanent ownership of the most effective operating models, tools and collaboration structures once project funding ends.

The programme has established a considerable number of new co-development networks and platforms. These naturally vary widely in terms of their themes, continuity, number of participants, and the organisations represented, and not all of them necessarily involve companies. The 124 platforms and networks can contribute to regional collaboration and enable co-development to continue beyond individual projects. The indicator primarily reflects structures that enable collaboration, and the number of such structures alone does not indicate how active or sustainable the platforms are or what impacts they have generated for companies.

342 companies have participated in collaboration with research organisations. This figure provides a concrete indication of how companies are being integrated into RDI activities and how the expertise of research organisations is being utilised in business-driven development. **However, the use of actual RDI infrastructure, such as laboratories, has so far remained very limited among companies.** The programme is actively building bridges between research organisations and companies, but there is a need to develop the opportunity to access and use infrastructure.

The innovation paradigm shift is underway

A broader shift is taking place in the way public innovation activities are understood and implemented. As highlighted in the original operating environment analysis (by Demos Helsinki, 2022) prepared for the programme, the role of the public sector in innovation policy has evolved significantly over the past decade. Whereas public authorities were previously seen mainly as providers of favorable operating conditions and correctors of market failures, there is now growing recognition of the need for a more active, strategic, and mission-oriented public sector.

The 2022 analysis examined this transformation broadly. This report focuses on HEVinnovations and, based on the programme coordination team's assessment, how it has advanced the transition to the new innovation paradigm. However, progress has varied across different areas.

The cities of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area have strengthened their capabilities as intermediaries alongside their traditional enabling role. This intermediary role has also reinforced their capacity to act as strategic visionaries. Innovation actors in cities increasingly require a strong vision to connect stakeholders, thematic areas, and services into coherent innovation ecosystems.

The old paradigm focused on individual projects and services.

The new paradigm focuses on the long-term vitality and functionality of innovation ecosystems.

1. From Traditional Business Services to Societal Innovation Policy and Wider Economic Vitality

The old paradigm relied heavily on traditional business advisory services and support mechanisms. Although the City of Helsinki and other metropolitan cities had already developed a diverse service portfolio before the HEVinnovations programme, the programme has enabled stronger regional development, the expansion and complementing of existing services, and deeper cooperation across the metropolitan area.

The programme has provided an opportunity to launch funding calls in areas where cities themselves have identified development needs, ensuring that resources are directed effectively towards metropolitan development priorities.

This programme period has also placed greater emphasis on multidisciplinary collaboration and substantive content development. However, such work requires long-term and sustained investment if it is to become the new normal and provide stronger responses to systemic societal challenges.

Although sustainable development has been embedded throughout the programme, its primary focus remains on supporting business growth and competitiveness, which is appropriate given the programme's objectives. At the same time, through new initiatives and ecosystem development activities, the programme has enabled broader regional renewal and contributed to long-term economic vitality.

2. Who Innovates?

There has been relatively little change regarding who is recognised as an innovator, as the programme's primary objective remains the promotion of business growth and competitiveness. Consequently, residents and civil society play a relatively limited role within innovation activities.

Within a programme of this nature, their role will continue to be primarily that of customers, target groups, and, in some cases, co-creators. Nevertheless, by openly sharing urban challenges and development needs, cities can facilitate the emergence of new innovations and create opportunities for a broader range of actors to participate.

3. The Role of the Public Sector

The programme is primarily perceived as a funding mechanism and an enabler, and this is indeed a significant part of its role. However, much more takes place behind the scenes. Capital region cities jointly determine the priorities for funding allocation and influence how resources are utilised, including the programme's requirements regarding collaborative projects.

The programme also actively seeks to strengthen connections between actors: within projects, across projects, and between the cities of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. A shared agenda is developed through annual network events, open stakeholder dialogue, and by identifying common strategic priorities among the participating cities.

In practical terms, strengthening innovation ecosystems also means enhancing the strategic capabilities of city experts. The programme has supported this particularly through project meetings, networking events, and training activities. Shared forums allow experts to view their own work as part of a larger ecosystem rather than as isolated project tasks.

These interactions generate new insights that influence day-to-day project work and ultimately contribute to greater impact.

4. The Nature of Innovation

New products and services developed by companies remain at the heart of the programme. At the same time, resources have been allocated to developing and scaling new operating models and practices throughout the metropolitan area.

Unlike many other external funding sources, the regional focus of HEVinnovations has made it possible to develop shared metropolitan practices during project implementation. For target groups, this translates into more comprehensive and locally relevant services.

Both the programme coordination team and individual projects have invested not only in direct business services but also in improving the functioning of the wider innovation system. The objective has been to make the regional innovation ecosystem more efficient, higher in quality, and more accessible.

Service pathways have been refined across project boundaries, and companies' journeys through the innovation ecosystem have become a central topic in the developmental evaluation discussions conducted with all portfolio projects.

The programme period has also enabled stronger investments in multidisciplinary collaboration and cross-project cooperation, although there remains considerable potential for further development in the coming years.

5. Governance and Leadership

Before this programme, cities in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area lacked a dedicated funding instrument through which larger strategic project portfolios could be developed. Instead of supporting only isolated initiatives, the programme has enabled cities to design funding calls that address their own development needs and to do so together with regional research, development, and innovation stakeholders.

The programme has also provided projects with opportunities for both formal and informal collaboration, helping to strengthen synergies and networks between different initiatives.

The long programme period has allowed lessons learned from earlier projects to be transferred into later projects and into programme-level development efforts. As a result, programme content and implementation have improved year by year.

Furthermore, the programme has become an important tool for implementing city strategies due to the degree of strategic steering it allows, something that many other external funding sources

do not provide. Sparring and support resources offered through the programme have also added value by helping projects become more coherent and higher in quality.

Towards the Next Stage of the Paradigm Shift

Overall, the programme has moved project activities towards the new innovation paradigm. However, a complete transition has neither occurred nor necessarily been desirable, given the objectives of the programme and the constraints of the funding instrument.

The most significant drivers of change have been the cities' partial ownership of programme content and an operational culture that emphasizes collaboration.

From the perspective of the innovation paradigm shift, **the most important remaining challenge is institutional transformation**:

- How can project-level coordination evolve into continuous ecosystem portfolio management?
- How can city departments become genuine innovators and drivers of innovation alongside companies and economic development actors?
- How can residents and civil society become active participants in research, development, and innovation cooperation alongside businesses and higher education institutions?
- How can a shared innovation agenda steer broader investments and support systematic regional development that transcends organisational and sectoral silos?

A single ERDF-funded innovation programme cannot solve all these challenges. However, the lessons learned from HEVinnovations can be applied much more broadly in public-sector innovation policy and ecosystem development.

The paradigm shift in public-sector innovation is already underway.

Strengthening RDI collaboration in the Capital Region

At the programme level, HEVi coordination promotes and maintains regional dialogue on the current state and future of innovation ecosystems. The coordination team contributes to sharing an up-to-date overview with stakeholders, while also strengthening innovation capabilities through joint events, communications and training.

The portfolio also includes several projects that support the vitality of RDI clusters and ecosystems in the Capital Region. These projects connect RDI actors across the region and build networks that support their shared objectives.

The scale of innovation activities in the Capital Region makes it possible to identify the key activities within different thematic areas. There are only a few dozen organisations that play a key role in urban development, meaning that, at the organisational level, they can all be reached and invited to participate. However, the innovation landscape is evolving and people move

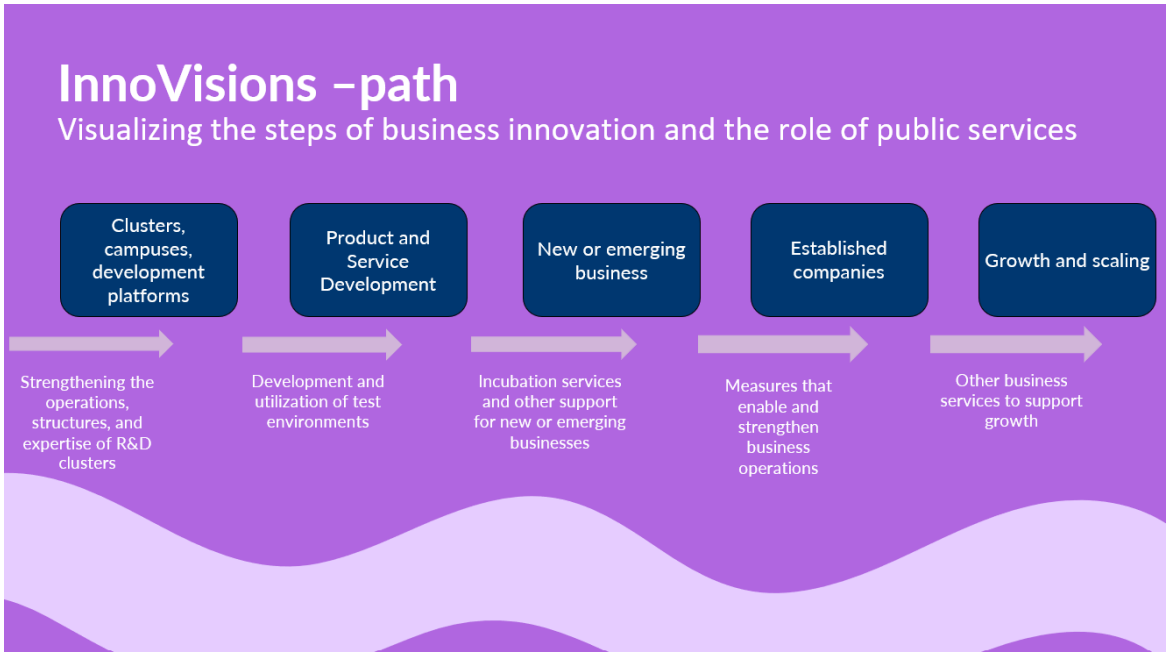
between roles at such a pace that knowledge of available growth and innovation services quickly becomes outdated. **Particular attention must therefore be paid to multidisciplinary innovation activities, as there are still very few networks, funding instruments and mechanisms that support them.**

The metropolitan area of Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa is, by Finnish standards, a large, dynamic, vibrant and international hub where collaboration cannot be built on the assumption that everyone knows each other personally or that ecosystem activities are driven by an established network. Compared with internationally significant metropolitan areas, however, the region is relatively compact, accessible and offers an innovation ecosystem that is open to collaboration, also for newcomers. This is a genuine strength and competitive advantage.

> Peer reviewers recommend further strengthening synergies between the cities and leveraging the profile of the metropolitan area as a whole. The cooperation and governance model should include structures and practices that ensure continuity beyond individual projects and programme periods.
>
> **European Urban Initiative, Peer Review 2026**

InnoVisions: a tool for developmental evaluation

InnoVisions serves as a tool for the developmental evaluation and portfolio management of the HEVi portfolio. It provides an evolving overview of project activities, visualizes where projects are positioned along the innovation pathway (see below), identifies connections and synergies between ecosystems, and assesses company contributions and the conditions for impact.



InnoVisions is not merely a reporting tool, but an operating model that supports dialogue, learning and the strategic direction of the portfolio.

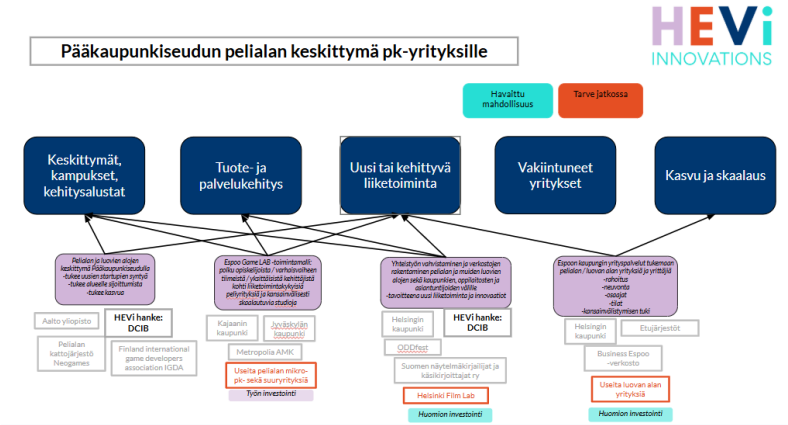
How is InnoVisions used in practice?

InnoVisions is used as a shared working and discussion tool.

- To understand how projects are positioned within the portfolio and ecosystems.
- To identify overlaps, gaps and opportunities for collaboration.
- To support decision-making when selecting, steering or complementing projects.
- To help project actors see their role in the bigger ecosystem context.

The tool is used to support concrete discussions and decision-making: for example, when identifying what kind of new projects are needed, how to complement an existing portfolio, or how to strengthen cooperation across ecosystem boundaries.

InnoVisions also helps project actors understand their role within the bigger picture and avoid fragmented or overlapping activities. See below an example of one project overview (in Finnish).



What does InnoVisions make visible?

The tool visualises development from multiple perspectives:

- The overall project portfolio and its focus areas.
- Individual ecosystems and their key actors and activities.
- Connections and synergies between ecosystems.
- The role of companies and how engagement evolves along the innovation path.

InnoVisions supports impact-oriented management by making ecosystem development visible and comparable. It enables cities and programme coordination to follow how ecosystems evolve, how company engagement changes along the innovation path, and how achieved results can be used as a basis for long-term, strategic development.

Showcasing the Capital Region's innovation ecosystem and the benefits of programme-level communications

For the first time, a single website brings together the innovation activities of the Capital Region cities on this scale. Communicating about such a diverse innovation portfolio has demonstrated the value of collaboration in several ways.

1. Centralised communications strengthen the visibility and impact of the Capital Region's multidisciplinary, multi-actor innovation ecosystem

The website provides an organisation-neutral platform for regional innovation activities. Shared communications present individual projects, events and experiments as part of a broader whole and can help guide target audiences from one service or opportunity to another.

The visibility generated by one project can also benefit other projects when communications are centralised on a shared platform. User journeys show that interest in a particular event or theme can encourage visitors to explore other projects, funding opportunities and networks as well.

2. The website serves as a window into the Capital Region's innovation activities for international audiences

Shared communications make local innovation activities accessible to international audiences. Interest in the website's English-language content demonstrates that projects and networks in the Capital Region are reaching international communities.

In addition, the relatively limited amount of English-language content produced within ERDF-funded projects supports the case for bringing such content together on a shared website.

3. Effective and engaging communications encourage action

Effective communications not only raise awareness but also encourage audiences to participate. The content that has attracted the most interest offers users concrete opportunities to take part in events, network with others, apply for funding, explore experiments or otherwise become involved in activities.

Returning website traffic and the steady flow of visitors to project, event and funding-related content indicate that the website has become a natural source of information and participation opportunities for the network.

4. The partner network also serves as a communications network

The ecosystem network also functions as a distribution network for communications. Partners bring their own diverse audiences to shared communications, extending the reach of content beyond the organisations' own channels.

5. Effective communications also require consistent, long-term communication

Consistent project communications complement campaign-based visibility and support long-term discoverability. The website is maintained beyond the programme period, allowing its benefits to accumulate over time.

Unlike the websites of individual projects, the programme website has time to become widely recognised and adopted by different innovation actors. This visibility and discoverability also benefit projects launched at a later stage. Search engines recognise the website as a key source of information on regional innovation activities.

HEVi's role as a connector and ecosystem enabler is already a significant achievement. The programme brings together cities, higher education institutions, research organisations and companies around joint development.

European Urban Initiative, Peer Review 2026

Conclusions and outlook

Success factors in ecosystem projects

At the programme level, recurring observations have emerged about the types of innovation ecosystem projects that deliver results effectively and the factors that may slow down or hinder the achievement of results. Peer support between projects, the sharing of best practices and providing guidance to projects from the preparation phase onwards are effective ways to share knowledge and build broader capabilities.

Success in ecosystem projects requires much more than basic project management skills. **Collaboration with partners and aligning project activities with the broader ecosystem are key cornerstones of successful ecosystem work.**

What are the key characteristics of transformative, systemic projects that deliver significant economic development outcomes?	*What characterizes less impactful project work driven by short-term, siloed optimisation?*
• The project seeks to achieve **strategic change** and greater benefits than could be achieved by acting alone. • A clear interface with business services helps ensure that meaningful results are achieved already during the project. • Teamwork within the consortium is part of everyday work, with **shared goals guiding the activities**. • The project connects with the broader network of actors in its field, rather than limiting collaboration to the consortium. • **Multiplying outcomes: the impact of the project's results expands through networks, generating further outcomes and creating a sustained cycle of growth.**	• The consortium's sub-projects operate in isolation, with activities planned within organisational silos. • Project funding is primarily seen as a way to cover part of the costs, making it difficult to distinguish project activities from the organisation's core activities. • The project is seen as a source of temporary resources rather than as a strategic tool for ecosystem development and an enabler of broader objectives. • Project-based work is not recognised as a key tool for organisational development. Ecosystem-level results are expected, but the ways of working and logic of collaboration required to achieve them are not supported in day-to-day operations. • Development remains confined to the project.

Measuring ecosystem work and identifying its impact

Where does each euro invested through the ecosystem agreement generate the greatest impact, and how should this impact be measured? So far, there are no consistent and comparable tools for doing so. What matters is achieving results that are significant at least at the local level and that have a leverage effect on the vitality of the region.

When it comes to development funding, there must also be room for failure. Otherwise, the level of ambition risks remaining unnecessarily low. Funding models should be genuinely ambitious, allow for an appropriate level of risk-taking, encourage experimentation with new approaches, and be based on open, evidence-informed decision-making.

> There is no perfect measurement system, and the resources devoted to evaluation should be proportionate to both the scale of the activities and the benefits being pursued. Multiple complementary approaches are needed, with communications and evaluation reinforcing each other.
>
> Impact assessment could move beyond an approach based solely on technical indicators towards a model that combines strategic storytelling, a small number of clear key indicators and tangible real-world examples.
>
> **European Urban Initiative, Peer Review 2026**

Several factors linked to the impact of project-based work have been identified within the HEVi programme**. It is essential that we work according to the logic of ecosystem development and continuously strengthen the synergies within collaborative networks.** A relatively small project portfolio in relation to the size of the region can have a significant impact when efforts are focused on the right priorities and developed together with partners that are essential to achieving the objectives.

Long-term outcomes and multiplier effects

Do the programme's outputs and immediate outcomes translate into sustainable urban development, profitable business, tax revenues for cities, success factors for innovation and growth hubs, vitality across the region, and well-being for residents?

Funding for sustainable urban development enables activities that would otherwise be implemented on a much smaller scale due to limited resources, or would not take place at all. Potentially, the greatest impact of the HEVi portfolio lies in what it can leverage for the region over time, with many of the benefits only becoming visible in the future.

For example, international startup entrepreneurs who have moved to the region may generate multiplier effects that bring further international networks, capital and activity to the region.

New initiatives open doors to further opportunities that cannot yet be anticipated and that would not have been possible without these projects. Another significant benefit is the expertise and capabilities that cities build through development projects.

Five insights on impactful ecosystem work

1. Impact is created through collaboration, not by individual projects.
At their best, projects become part of a broader ecosystem, strengthen collaboration between actors, and generate outcomes that continue beyond the lifetime of an individual project.

2. The best results are achieved when a project is seen as a shared and strategic tool for renewal.
The most impactful projects do not simply fund activities within individual organisations. Instead, they address shared challenges, experiment with new ways of working, and build new capabilities.

3. Even limited funding can generate significant leverage.
What matters is not only the size of the project portfolio, but whether efforts are focused on the right priorities and whether the partners essential to achieving the objectives are involved. The multiplication of outcomes through networks can be a significant part of the programme's overall impact.

4. Impact cannot be captured through project indicators alone.
Quantitative indicators need to be complemented by qualitative assessment, practical examples and strategic storytelling in order to capture the significance of innovations, changes in ways of working, and the strengthening of ecosystems.

5. The greatest impacts may only become visible after the projects have ended.
Long-term impact is created through what the project results generate over time: new companies and business activity, networks, investments, capabilities, operating models and further steps in development. Therefore, not all impacts of ecosystem work can be observed during the project implementation period.

Data sources used in this summary: the EURA 2021 database and compiled datasets, Innokaupungit.fi, and HEVi's own monitoring data.

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