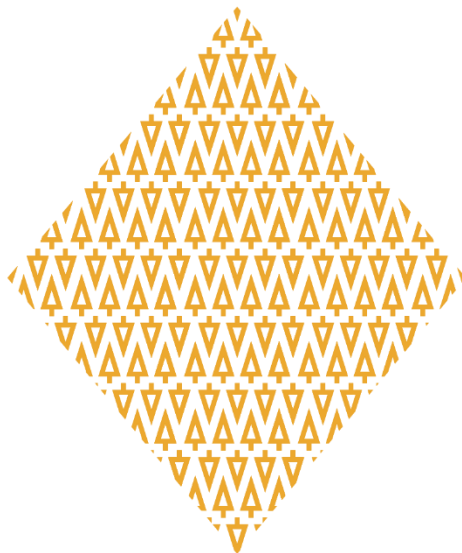


Culture from the Wide Open

South Ostrobothnia Cultural Strategy for years 2026–2035



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Foreword

In South Ostrobothnia, culture belongs to everyone. It means that everyone has the right to experience and create art, stories and connections. Culture is present in everyday life and celebrations, in cities and villages, in individuals and communities. It brings people together and gives space to different voices, experiences and perspectives.

Culture from the Wide Open – the South Ostrobothnia Cultural Strategy for years 2026–2035 is built on three overarching ideas, themes. Firstly, culture is everyone's right, not a privilege for a few. Secondly, culture grows together, in interaction, cooperation and respectful encounters. And thirdly, culture calls upon nature, both human character and courage, and responsibility for nature and the future.

We live in a time that needs the power of culture: its ability to shake up, renew and unite. This strategy gives direction, but also a promise. The promise that culture carries when we carry culture together.

Culture from the Wide Open is also a call to action. The strategy identifies a set of goals that need to be implemented. Hopefully, everyone will find the goals they want to pursue. Each of us can be involved in building a stronger, more inclusive and sustainable culture in our own way. Together, we will make this strategy a reality.

Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia

Janne Sankelo

Chair of the Regional Board

Heli Seppelvirta

Regional Mayor

Hanna Hangasluoma

Cultural Manager

Cultural promise

There is room for culture in South Ostrobothnia. Here it can live as unique, deep-rooted, vibrant, diverse and boldly reaching out into the future. Culture grows sustainably and belongs to everyone. We have *Culture from the Wide Open*.

Values

The three values guiding the implementation of the South Ostrobothnia Cultural Strategy have emerged from strategy workshops. The values of South Ostrobothnia culture are reflected in our principles: culture is done with courage and joy, and we treat each other with respect. However, the effects of the values are felt more broadly, wider than the plain.

- **Courage**
- **Joy**
- **Respect**

Dimensions of sustainable development

We want to create and serve culture in South Ostrobothnia sustainably. This means that we consider the four dimensions of sustainable development in our operations, which also overlap closely with each other.

- **Economic sustainability**

Culture is produced, consumed and grown in a balanced way, without going into debt and while conserving natural resources.

- **Social sustainability**

Culture can be used to ensure people's equal opportunities for well-being, happiness and participation.

- **Ecological sustainability**

Culture respects the intrinsic value of nature and adapts activities to the renewal and sustainability of nature and the environment.

- **Cultural sustainability**

Culture is the process of developing and preserving traditions and customs from generation to generation, respecting others and accepting diversity.

Cultural profile of South Ostrobothnia

Cultural activities in municipalities in South Ostrobothnia

- 18 municipalities
- 189,937 inhabitants (31st December 2024)
- The net operating costs of municipal cultural activities per inhabitant in South Ostrobothnia in 2024 were €150.27/inhabitant, compared to a national average of €174.00/inhabitant. (source: Statistics Finland's local government finances / Taidejakulttuuri.fi)
- Municipal cultural activity grants per inhabitant in South Ostrobothnia in 2024 were €21.64/inhabitant, compared to a national average of €26.27/inhabitant. (source: Statistics Finland's local government finances / Taidejakulttuuri.fi)
- Cultural education plans made in 13/18 municipalities
- Network of cultural managers of the municipalities in the region, compiled by the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia

Library services

- 18 main libraries
- 14 local libraries
- 9 mobile libraries
- 41 library service points in total
- Seinäjoki City Library has a national development responsibility (ERTE) for library services that promote reading among children and young people
- Vaasa City Library has a regional development responsibility (AKE), covering the municipalities of Ostrobothnia, South Ostrobothnia and Central Ostrobothnia
- Eepos libraries: a library consortium formed by the municipalities of South Ostrobothnia and the libraries of Kaskinen, Perho, Veteli and Laihia

Museum services

- 13 professional museums
 - Kauhava Knife and Textile Museum, Kauhava
 - Lapua City Museums (vos = receiving state subsidies): Lapua Cartridge Factory Museum, The Lapua Movement Museum, Pyhälahti Photo Studio Museum and Lapua Art Museum
 - Nelimarkka Museum (vos) and Villa Väinölä, Alajärvi
 - Seinäjoki Museums (vos): South Ostrobothnia Museum, Hospital Museum, Civil Guard and Lotta Svärd Museum and Drying Barn Museum
 - Seinäjoki Art Hall, Seinäjoki
 - The Jaeger Museum of Finland, Kauhava
- 63 local museums
- 76 museums in total
- Nelimarkka Museum (Alajärvi) has a regional art museum responsibility
- Seinäjoki Museums (Seinäjoki) has a regional museum promotion responsibility and a cultural environment responsibility

Music services

- Seinäjoki City Orchestra (vos)
- Rhythm Institute, Seinäjoki: one of Finland's national music institutes, its mission is to promote popular music nationally (government transfer)
- South Ostrobothnia Folk Music Festival Spelit (government transfer)
- Ilmajoki Opera Music Festival (government transfer)
- South Ostrobothnia is known for its several large music events with over 10,000 visitors, such as Provinssi, Tango Festival, Nummirock and Vauhtiajot. In addition, South Ostrobothnia hosts numerous smaller festivals, music events and concert series.

Theatre services

- 3 professional theatres
 - Seinäjoki City Theatre (vos)
 - Theatre Hysteria and Improvisation group Improaalto
 - Törnävä Summer Theatre (Seinäjoki City Theatre)
- 39 amateur and summer theatres
- 42 theatres in total

Cinema services

- a total of 13 cinemas in South Ostrobothnia: Alajärvi, Alavus, Kauhajoki, Kauhava (2 venues), Kurikka (2 venues), Lapua, Seinäjoki (2 venues), Teuva, Vimpeli, Ähtäri (source: Finnish Film Foundation / Taidejakulttuuri.fi)

Visual arts services

- 11 year-round visual arts and gallery venues
 - Art House Jurva, Kurikka
 - Gallery Kaari, Kauhava
 - Hella Gallery, Kauhajoki
 - Lapua Art Museum, Lapua (vos)
 - Nelimarkka Museum, Alajärvi (vos)
 - Patruuna Gallery, Lapua
 - Pirkanpohja Art Center, Ähtäri
 - Seinäjoki Art Hall, Seinäjoki
 - Art Center Harri, Alavus
 - Varikkogallery, Seinäjoki
 - Villa Väinölä, Alajärvi
- 25 other art galleries and exhibition spaces
- 4 artist residencies

- Architecture and Space Residency, Alajärvi
- Nelimarkka Museum Artist Residency, Alajärvi
- Artist Residency Peripeteia, Seinäjoki
- Vanha Paukku Artist Residency, Lapua
- 40 visual arts venues in total
- South Ostrobothnia Visual Arts and Gallery Network

Regional actors

- Louhimo Children's Cultural Centre (Seinäjoki, Ilmajoki and Kurikka)
- Taito South Ostrobothnia (Seinäjoki, Isokyrö, Kauhajoki, Alavus): tasked with promoting South Ostrobothnia's craft culture and skills as well as the craft industry
- Botnia Film Centre, Vaasa (area of operation: Ostrobothnia, South Ostrobothnia and Central Ostrobothnia)
- Ostrobothnia Dance Regional Centre, Vaasa (area of operation: Ostrobothnia, South Ostrobothnia and Central Ostrobothnia)

Cultural wellbeing

- Cultural wellbeing has been included in wellbeing account and plan in the Wellbeing Services County of South Ostrobothnia
- 8 municipalities (Alajärvi, Evijärvi, Isokyrö, Kauhava, Lappajärvi, Lapua, Seinäjoki, Vimpeli) and the Wellbeing Services County of South Ostrobothnia participate in the Kaikukortti service
- Western Finland Taikusydän Regional Network (South Ostrobothnia, Central Ostrobothnia, Ostrobothnia)

Cultural education

- Seinäjoki unit of Uniarts Helsinki: Bachelor's degree in cultural music studies, in addition to open university courses in various art fields and work-oriented education
- Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences SEAMK: Bachelor of Culture and Arts, Cultural Management

- The University Consortium of Seinäjoki
- 16 educational institutions offering basic arts education: 8 community colleges, 6 music colleges and 2 other educational institutions (source: Statistics Finland's register of educational institutions / Taidejakulttuuri.fi, 2nd February 2024)
- 6 art forms where basic arts education is available in South Ostrobothnia: music, visual arts, crafts, dance, theatre arts and circus arts
- 9 community colleges
- 7 music colleges and 2 additional music colleges providing education for the region
- South Ostrobothnia Folk High School
- South Ostrobothnia Summer University

Cultural enterprises

- a total of 513 enterprises whose business activity is arts, entertainment and recreation (The Standard Industrial Classification TOL 2008) and whose registered office is in South Ostrobothnia (source: Statistics Finland's regional business statistics, 19th December 2024)

Cultural associations

- a total of 777 cultural associations with their registered office in South Ostrobothnia (source: Finnish Patent and Registration Office, number of associations by purpose category [main category] in different regions, 9th January 2026)

Highlights from South Ostrobothnia's cultural environments

- 58 built cultural heritage sites of national significance (RKY sites)
- 25 nationally significant archaeological sites (VARK sites)
- 9 nationally valuable landscape areas (VAMA areas)
- The regional inventory of the built cultural environment of South Ostrobothnia included in the South Ostrobothnia Regional Plan 2050
- Traditional Ostrobothnian houses (two-storey houses)
- Aalto centers in Alajärvi and Seinäjoki (architect, designer Alvar Aalto was born in Kuortane in 1898)
- South Ostrobothnia's cultural environment and cultural heritage working groups

Cultural strategy goals, actions and indicators

The South Ostrobothnia Cultural Strategy expresses the region's will: we promise that we will have *Culture from the Wide Open*. A common direction has been sought in workshops, where goals, measures and indicators describing their implementation have been planned. The goal can also be achieved using other methods. The Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia carries out cultural situational assessment work, monitors indicators and provides information to the region.

The cultural strategy is built around three themes:

- I In South Ostrobothnia, culture is everyone's right
- II In South Ostrobothnia, culture grows together
- III In South Ostrobothnia, culture asks nature

I In South Ostrobothnia, culture is everyone's right

Participation in and creation of culture are fundamental rights that have been considered in the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the Constitution of Finland. Culture belongs to everyone, regardless of background, language, location, age or financial resources. A flourishing culture needs not only users and experiencers, but also creators and supporters. Each of us can promote the availability and accessibility of culture in South Ostrobothnia.

a) Goals

- Culture is offered evenly and equally.
- Diverse culture accommodates different voices and respects diversity.
- Culture is available and accessible local service.
- Cultural education supports the adoption of art and culture as part of everyday life.
- There is space here for creators and supporters of art and culture, as well as users and experiencers.

b) Actions

- The status and availability of cultural education will be secured throughout the region.
 - We will ensure that all municipalities in South Ostrobothnia have a cultural education plan by the end of 2035.
 - Municipalities will reserve resources for the implementation of the content of cultural education plans.
- Accessibility, diversity and equality will be considered in the planning, implementation and communication of cultural services.
 - Services will be produced with an understanding of the needs of different customer groups (e.g. age, language).
 - Accessibility and availability will be promoted, also in digital services.
 - Mobile cultural services will be developed and piloted.
- Opportunities for those in a less economically disadvantaged position to participate in cultural life and engage in artistic activities will be strengthened.
 - Efforts will be made to expand the use of the Kaikukortti card to the whole of South Ostrobothnia.
- The stability of institutions receiving state subsidies for art and culture (vos institutions) in the region will be supported.
- Ensure the regional availability and accessibility of liberal arts and basic arts education.
- Support regional arts and culture professionals.
 - Order services from regional arts and culture professionals.
 - Utilize the Culture Bank to find South Ostrobothnia's cultural and art creators and the services they can order.
 - Ensure sufficient workspaces for cultural and art creators.
- Lower the threshold for cultural participation and engage new customers by offering culture in various, even surprising, contexts.

c) Indicators

- Net operating costs of cultural activities in municipalities
- Monitoring of regional accessibility indicators for cultural services
- Number of cultural education plans in South Ostrobothnia
- Number of children and young people participating in content according to cultural education plans
- Cultural services as part of municipal integration programs
- Regional coverage of liberal arts work
- Number of educational institutions offering basic art education
- Number of students participating in basic art education
- Number of Kaikukortti distributed and Kaikukortti visits
- Number of creators living in South Ostrobothnia registered in the Culture Bank

II In South Ostrobothnia, culture grows together

The strength of South Ostrobothnia lies in its diverse communities and spirit of togetherness. Voluntary community work ("kökkätyö" in Finnish) is our resource, the living cultural heritage of the plains, which must be cherished. Culture enables us to encounter both ourselves and each other. Culture has a unifying power, but to grow, it needs cross-border cooperation and the same direction.

a) Goals

- Shared experiences unite, build community and strengthen inclusion.
- Culture is a well-being and health service that secures the resilience of individuals and communities.
- Collaboration and new partnerships are actively sought, also across industry boundaries.
- Internationalization diversifies and strengthens the cultural sector.

b) Actions

- Strengthening inclusion authentically and utilizing various methods.
 - Methods such as customer and resident surveys, citizen panels, partnership tables, participatory budgeting, co-development and service design together with service users.
 - Supporting the operating conditions of the third sector and volunteer work.
 - The South Ostrobothnia Regional Council supports the networking of cultural actors in the region.
- Raising project expertise to a new level in South Ostrobothnia.
 - Improving expertise in applying for and managing projects.
 - Organizing financial advice for different target groups.
 - Reserving the self-financing portion of projects in budgets.
 - Piloting the model of a regional funding table for regular meetings and information exchange between different funding bodies in the cultural sector under the leadership of the South Ostrobothnia Regional Council.
 - Increasing the number of high-quality applications prepared in the region.
- Actively seek new funding models and partners to implement ideas, also from outside the cultural field.
- Cooperate between municipalities to secure local cultural services and at the same time implement cultural social responsibility.
 - Pilot the regional producer model in South Ostrobothnia, which connects municipalities and the free field of art and culture.
- Boldly seize opportunities for internationalization.
 - Boldly seek international partners and funding.
- Promote cultural well-being as part of the activities of municipalities and the wellbeing services county and cooperation between them.
- Increase understanding of the fundamental importance of culture as part of mental crisis resilience.

c) Indicators

- Municipal grants for cultural activities
- Joint meeting of cultural operators and the municipality and expert body of cultural operators
- Ways for municipalities to increase participation
- Visits to art and cultural institutions (museums, theatres, cinemas, libraries and orchestra listeners)
- Number of participatory budgeting experiments and amounts allocated to experiments
- Number and amounts of cultural projects financed from European Regional and Structural Policy funds in South Ostrobothnia
- Number and amounts of discretionary state grants granted to South Ostrobothnia by the Ministry of Education and Culture, Business Finland, the Finnish Arts and Culture Agency and the Finnish Heritage Agency
- Participation in international networks and South Ostrobothnia partnerships in international projects
- Number of cultural coordinators appointed to service units in the Wellbeing Services County of South Ostrobothnia

III In South Ostrobothnia, culture asks nature

The people of South Ostrobothnia are known as a unique tribe. We boldly embrace who we are, who else could we be? We have enough creative ideas, entrepreneurship and courage to realize even the wildest visions, and if something is decided, it is also done. Culture also asks for nature, it requires both character and responsibility to act in a comprehensively sustainable manner.

a) Goals

- There is room and will for creativity here, also as a means of livelihood.
- The experience economy grows from feelings and stories but also requires investments.
- Culture is created in a bold and original way that is recognisable as South Ostrobothnia.
- Cultural heritage is a resource and element for new combinations.
- Culture is a bold force for change that breaks boundaries and creates new things.

b) Actions

- Increase awareness of the importance of culture and the creative industries as a means of livelihood.
- Utilize the leverage effects of the creative industries, i.e. the opportunities for creative expertise to create intangible value in other sectors, without prejudice.
- Strengthen creative entrepreneurship and the industry's ecosystems in South Ostrobothnia.
 - Provide information on financing opportunities for companies in the cultural and creative industries.
 - Promote the implementation of fair earnings models in the cultural sector in the region.
 - Utilize the opportunities brought by new technology in the growth and development of the creative sector.
 - Establish a regional expert network for the experience economy under the leadership of the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia to create a situational picture and deepen dialogue in the sector.
- Maintain the current cultural education in South Ostrobothnia and create the conditions for strengthening education in the future.
- Promote the integration of public art into everyday life in South Ostrobothnia.
 - Share information about good practices, such as the percentage principle and the KEM art fee model.
- Cherish the cultural heritage of South Ostrobothnia as our own and common and encourage the creation of new innovations that build on our heritage.
- Develop cultural tourism content and create appealing service offerings.
 - Boldly highlight, for example, Alvar Aalto's architecture and geoparks in tourism marketing.
- Lead the development of cultural sectors with information.
 - The Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia is involved in harmonizing the principles of statistics describing the number of employees and companies in the cultural and creative sectors between different regions.

c) Indicators

- Locations of cultural companies and employed workforce in cultural sectors
- Educational offerings and educational path opportunities in the cultural sector
- Projects and procurements promoting public art and the implementation of the percentage principle in the region on a municipality- and construction project-specific basis
- Grants granted by the Finnish Heritage Agency for cultural heritage-related activities
- Product and company cards registered on Visit Finland's DataHub platform that are related to South Ostrobothnia culture
- South Ostrobothnia tourist survey

Description of strategy process and concluding words

The South Ostrobothnia Cultural Strategy has been created as a result of participatory and interactive work. The preparation coordinated by the South Ostrobothnia Regional Council has brought together many different actors: municipal employees and elected officials, art and cultural institutions, associations, education providers, financiers and many others. Everyone has brought their own views and experiences, and a common picture has been built from these valuable ideas.

Preparations have been made in three open cultural cafés, where the current state of culture in the region has been explored in depth, a vision for the future has been created and concrete measures have been planned to achieve the goals. The result is a strategy that includes the insights of more than two hundred participants who took part in the workshops. Working versions of the strategy have also been presented to key stakeholders during the process: the regional board, the network of municipal cultural officers, the network of basic arts education, the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, the Leader groups, the Arts Promotion Centre, Into Seinäjoki, the Finnish Cultural Foundation's South Ostrobothnia Regional Fund, Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, Seinäjoki unit of Uniarts Helsinki and the regional cooperation group. The feedback and comments received from these parties have helped to take the right direction.

We thank the regional development consultancy MDI for facilitating the workshops and challenging our thinking. We also warmly thank everyone who has given their time to the preparation. Thanks to you, culture in South Ostrobothnia has an unyielding foundation from which we can push forward into the future. We believe that we have also grown into an even stronger team, ready for teamwork to achieve a common goal. So: let's carry South Ostrobothnia's culture with courage, respect and joy and let it carry us. Let's cherish traditions but also make room for new culture.

Finally, we would like to say that the cultural strategy is much more than a document. It is the result of a process during which we have been able to encounter and strengthen the common South Ostrobothnian spirit of doing things. Now it is time to start the actual work, roll up our sleeves, choose measures and redeem the cultural promise made together.

Reading material to support the cultural strategy

- Summary of the Regional Strategy [\[link\]](#)
- The Cultural Policy Report [\[link\]](#)
- Growth Strategy for the Creative Economy 2025–2030, description sheet in English [\[link\]](#)
- *Art, Culture and Diverse Finland* – Final Report of the Working Group for Cultural Policy, Immigrants and Promotion of Cultural Diversity [\[link\]](#)
- Government Resolution for the Cultural Heritage Strategy 2023–2030 [\[link\]](#)
- *Towards Sustainable Architecture*. Finland's national architectural policy programme 2022–2035 [\[link\]](#)
- Roadmap for the National Development of Cultural Tourism, description sheet in English [\[link\]](#)