

Urban climate change adaptation in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area

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The four cities of the Helsinki Metropolitan area and the Helsinki Region Environmental Services Authority (HSY) are preparing a joint adaptation strategy to prepare for the consequences of climate change. The preparation work is coordinated by HSY and supported by two projects: Julia 2030 (www.julia2030.fi) and BaltCICA (www.baltcica.org).

The aim of the strategy is to assess the impacts of climate change in the area and to prepare for them and the extreme weather events in order to safeguard the welfare of the citizens and the functioning of the cities also in changing climate conditions. The focus of the strategy is on urban and built environment and on those impacts and measures that require cooperation between different sectors and/or cities, or cross sectoral, administrative or geographical borders.

The strategy work started in 2009 with the preparation of climate scenarios for the area and compilation of a background report. Experts and planners from the cities have taken active part in the preparation process in workshops and interviews. The strategy's steering group that consists of representatives of different sectors and cities of the area, and the local decision makers play an important role in mainstreaming the strategy into the city organisations' everyday work.

The draft strategy was completed in the end of 2010. In the draft strategy, measures and policies are presented for the following sectors: General and cross sectoral measures; Land use; Transport and networks; Building; Water and waste management; Energy management; Rescue services and safety; and Social and health services. The draft strategy was sent for comments to the cities and stakeholders in February - May 2011. The citizens were also invited to give their comments through the Internet. The Helsinki Metropolitan Area adaptation strategy will be ready at the end of 2011 and will go to the approval process in the HSY and the cities. The cities will then prepare their own more detailed adaptation action plans.

The key question of the strategy is how to transfer the policies into action and get them implemented. An essential requirement is that the strategy is useful and relevant to the cities and deals with concrete impacts and risks of climate change in the area. It is therefore important to involve the city planners and experts in the planning process from the start. It is also important to deal with actual and relevant problems related with both current climate variability and expected future changes. To ensure mainstreaming of the strategy to the cities' policies and actions, it is vital that the decision makers approve and support the strategy and its implementation.