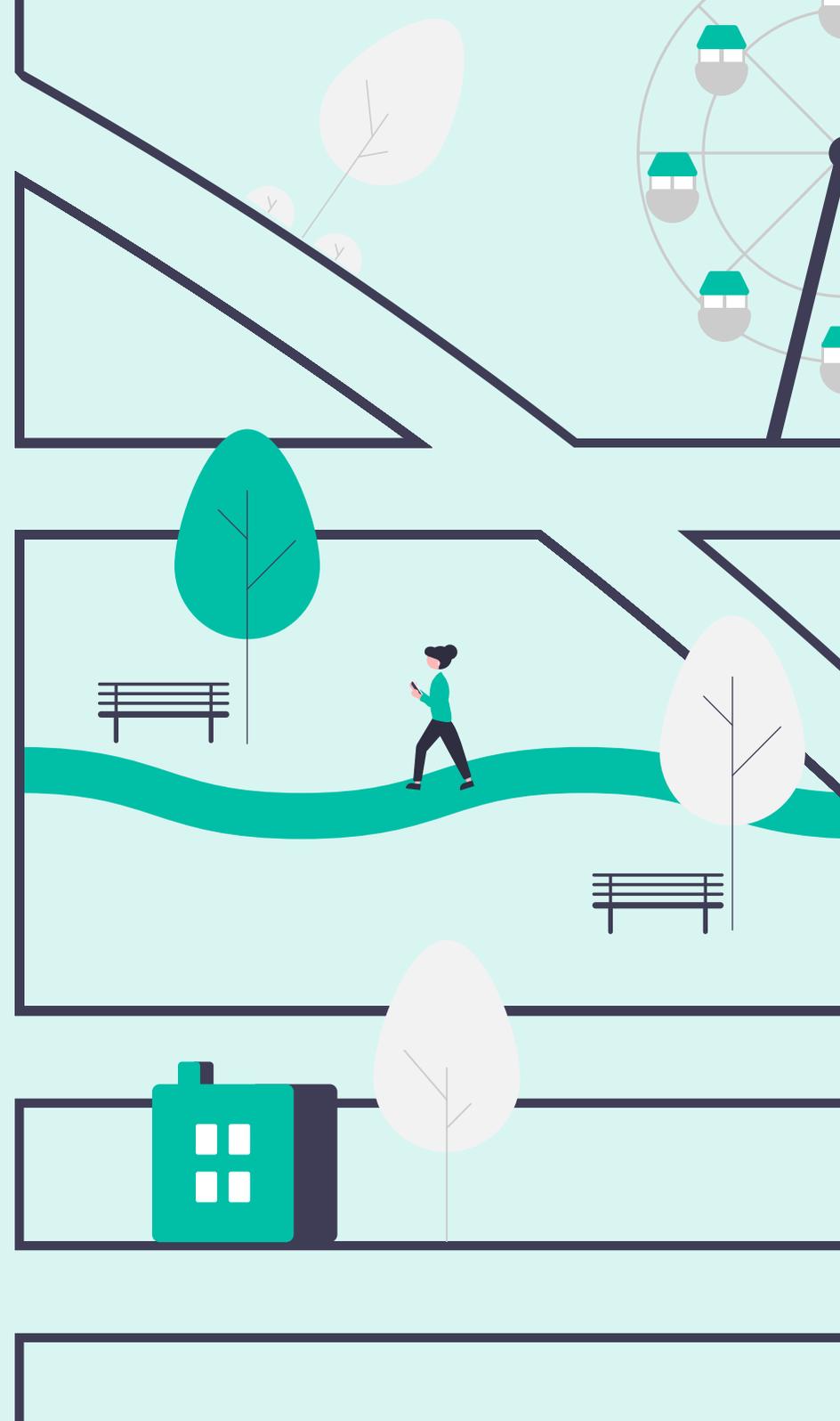


URBAANIA  
KASVUA  
VANTAA



# CONTINUOUS LEARNING IN SMES REQUIRES PROACTIVE REGIONAL COOPERATION

Action proposals of the  
Urban Growth Vantaa project

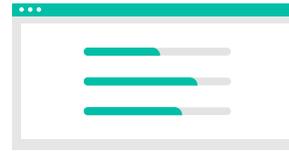


# TOWARDS SEAMLESS COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

The project's action proposals reflect a strong need for closer cooperation between companies, cities and educational institutions, because the competence development of companies requires the development of shared operational processes. The project's tests showed that cooperation allows the education and training services to be customised to the companies' needs. The same services can also help companies to commit to competence development by making its benefits apparent.

The project proposes that the recognition of different cooperative networks and supporting closer cooperation in them should be one of the focus points in Finnish competence development. Continuing to move closer to competence development in a continuous learning ecosystem is in everyone's best interest.

We propose that policymakers on the national level should investigate suitable funding models to enable test programmes. Finland must also actively promote the competence development of companies on the EU level and be active in other international cooperation, such as through the OECD.



## **ACTION PROPOSAL 1:**

Working adults need accessible education and training services based on their needs.

## **ACTION PROPOSAL 2:**

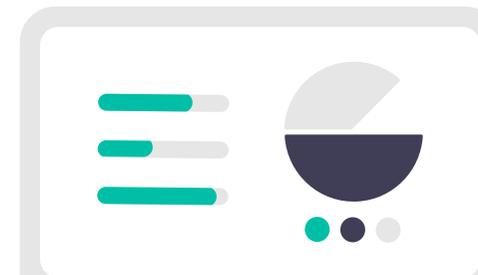
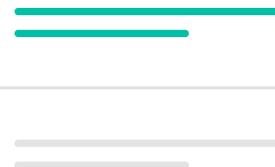
Cities should actively contact SMEs and chart their needs.

## **ACTION PROPOSAL 3:**

SMEs need support to develop a culture of learning at the workplace.

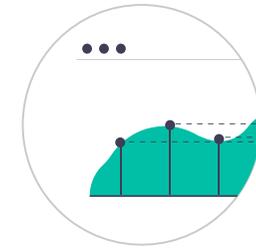
## **ACTION PROPOSAL 4:**

The technological development of SMEs should be supported.



## ACTION PROPOSAL 1

# WORKING ADULTS NEED ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION AND TRAINING SERVICES BASED ON THEIR NEEDS



### Current state

In Finland, the possibilities to complete a degree in professional or higher education are excellent. On the other hand, especially education for maintaining professional competence is fragmented in Finland. It is difficult for an individual to find education that suits their needs, because there is a large variety of options and seeking information requires an understanding of the titles and structures of degree programmes.

Degree-based education at higher education institutions is often fairly generic, and studies must be completed in a predetermined order. However, a working learner does not always need a full degree. According to the project findings, individuals can feel that education is useless, and that completing a new degree may even slow down their professional development if it is not possible to tailor the education to their own needs.

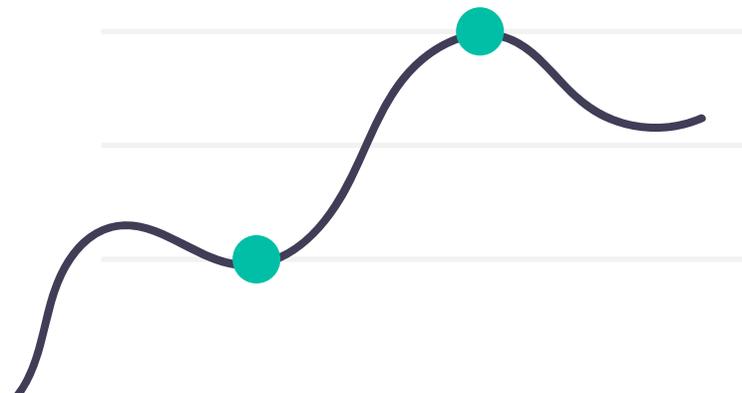
### How the project created change

The project supported the competence development of SMEs through individual guidance by education and training specialists, which facilitated the start of professional degrees and apprenticeship training.

Additionally, we surveyed working adults for their views on learning. Based on the results, continuous learning requires the working community to provide support in finding learning paths, explicating the benefits of learning and developing a sense of self-efficacy.

### FURTHER STEPS

1. Degrees must be flexible. Education and training should also be offered in smaller modules to match the needs of working adults.
2. Education should be tailored to the company's needs in order for it to solve the competence needs of companies and provide lifelong continuous learning.
3. National funding should be allocated to developing methods to support learning at companies, such as the operational methods of educational institutions and immediate supervisors.
4. The visibility of education and training options must also be improved by utilising digital tools and algorithms on platforms such as TE-palvelut.fi.



## ACTION PROPOSAL 2

# CITIES SHOULD BE IN ACTIVE CONTACT WITH SMES TO CHART THEIR NEEDS

### Current state

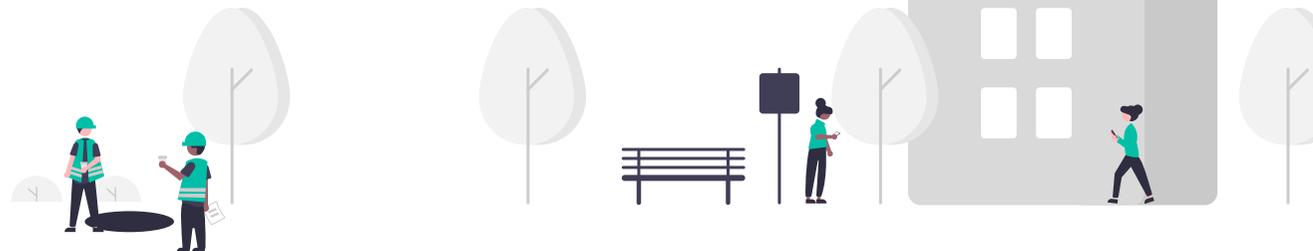
The Vantaa growth services do not have a systematic mechanism for staying in contact with local companies. As such, the city does not always have up-to-date information on companies' situations and needs, so it cannot optimally support companies and offer them targeted services. It is solely up to the companies to identify their development needs and seek out suitable services and partners. The services are often available, but companies don't always find information on them.

### How the project created change

The project's experts maintained regular contact with companies, charted the competence development needs of the companies and personnel, and offered them the services created in the project. A company-specific contact person was designated for participating companies. The companies found it positive that the city showed an interest in promoting the competitiveness and growth of companies, which improved the profile of Vantaa from the perspective of local companies.

## FURTHER STEPS

- 1. The city should have a team focusing on business cooperation that maintains active contact with companies.**
  - The team's purpose would be to chart companies' needs in regard to competence, workforce and development, so that the company could be referred to suitable services.
  - The team should also have experts in business cooperation with resources for the development of business cooperation.
- 2. A local education ecosystem can answer competence development challenges, especially for SMEs.**
  - The development and coordination of continuous learning services requires closer cooperation between cities, educational institutions and companies.
  - This improves educational institutions' capacity to predict companies' needs, and companies can utilise education and training services more effectively.
  - To function properly, a network requires an active coordinator.
  - The implementation still requires further research.



## ACTION PROPOSAL 3

# SMES NEED SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF LEARNING AT THE WORKPLACE



### Current state

Many companies focus on securing their short-term operations and sales. The competence development of personnel is considered important, but competence development is not linked to the company's strategy. As such, competence development is seen as an expense, and time is not allocated for it. Additionally, competence development is often thought of as disparate training sessions, and not as a continuous learning process in conjunction with work. These companies often lack HRD operations and any strong expertise in competence development, and the learning potential of personnel is not seen as an opportunity.

SMEs need assistance in order to build a culture of learning at the workplace. Cooperative networks, education ecosystems and project cooperation help companies, but services are often fragmented, disparate and hard to find.

### How the project created change

The project developed coaching services that matched the competence needs of companies and motivated employees to learn new skills. The effective contents were tailored to the needs of the company and personnel. Company-specific coaching was an effective implementation method, especially when the benefits of coaching were explicated to the company management. By including the employees, the coaching was integrated as part of the entire community's development work.

Initiating the change was found to be easier and more effective when it was facilitated by an external and neutral operator. A business coach made sure that the team stopped to discuss their shared issues and sparked change.

### FURTHER STEPS

- 1. Communication with companies regarding different education and training options should be clear and targeted.**
  - The information should be easy for companies to find.
  - The active and targeted offering of education to companies should be developed.
- 2. Companies need support and guidance from the organiser of education or training for creating a workplace culture that supports competence development.**
  - Support and guidance should especially be offered to companies with limited HRD resources and low levels of education among their personnel.
  - Effective methods include supervisor training, the development of peer networks, and offering outside facilitator support.



## ACTION PROPOSAL 4

# THE TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SMES SHOULD BE SUPPORTED

### Current state

SMEs must keep up with technological development to maintain their competitiveness. However, the digitalisation of work requires an understanding of what solutions would be the most effective for a company. Most SMEs are able to identify their technological development needs, but they don't have the competence or resources for the necessary measures.

Companies' competence needs and initial situations are very different from each other, and the reaction to technological transformation needs often comes at the last minute. Additionally, the expectations for technological development leaps may be too high. In reality, the best way to maintain competitiveness is to make small, steady digital development steps to continuously develop operations.

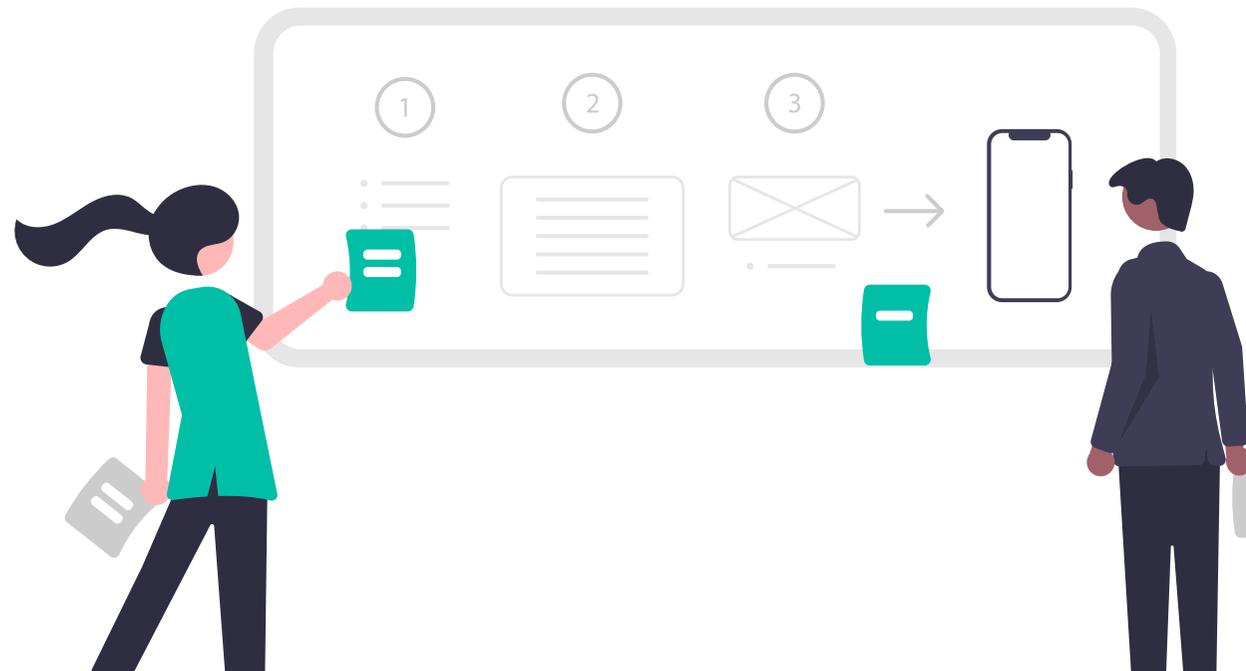
### How the project created change

Companies were offered tailored support and sparring for identifying digital development needs and planning technological solutions. Discussions with external specialists provided support for technological investments. Under the specialist's guidance, the companies created development plans and proposals for further action.

In addition to a technological solution, the company's basic processes and business models were reviewed and, if necessary, redefined. By ensuring the groundwork and preparations for the technological investment were thorough, the companies were able to create competitive advantages through wise automatization of processes, among others. The changes were successful when the personnel were committed to competence development.

### FURTHER STEPS

- Cities must chart the industries and companies with the most significant difficulties in digitalisation.**
  - Cities must offer support for these companies' development based on the companies' needs, and the support must be integrated as part of their business operations from the planning phase onwards.
- National funding should be allocated more towards the development of companies' operational capacity for digitalisation, instead of separate digital projects.**



# THE URBAN GROWTH VANTAA PROJECT

The Urban Growth Vantaa project is co-creating and testing new innovative solutions as well as developing a local jobs and skills ecosystem with the aim of supporting both local SMEs and their employees in employment, upskilling and digitalization.

The challenges of the low level of competence of the Vantaa workforce are part of a complex problem for which there are no easy solutions. As such, intersectional cooperation and systemic solutions are required.

Three service packages, or Growth Deals, were co-created during the project:

- Growth Deal 1 offered companies services supporting recruitment, as well as training and coaching services supporting growth.
- Growth Deal 2 supported companies in competence development.
- Growth Deal 3's services supported companies in promoting technological change projects and the development of competence management methods.

Timeframe: 1/2019 – 7/2022.

Funded by Urban Innovative Actions (UIA). UIA is an Initiative of the European Union promoting pilot projects in the field of sustainable urban development.

## Project partners



## Partner companies

