

The citizens in Turku (Åbo) want rapid change in the city centre's traffic arrangements

As part of the preparation of the new general plan, the city of Turku studied the opinions of city dwellers on traffic in the city centre.

- We actively develop and use tools that increase citizens' opportunities to participate in the development of the city and influence decision-making. How to organize the traffic in the city centre is a topic that many citizens find very important. The decisions concerning guidelines for the traffic in the city centre will be made as part of the on-going work on the new general plan, says the mayor of Turku Minna Arve.

Professor Kimmo Grönlund from Åbo Akademi University states that the preliminary results of the research project send a clear signal:

- The inhabitants of Turku want to see fewer private cars in the city centre. They also want less traffic passing through the centre. There are no differences in opinions between men and women concerning these views.

Almost two thirds of the respondents wish for more pedestrian-only streets. Especially women are more in favour of pedestrian streets. A clear majority of the city dwellers are, however, not in favour of building a tramline.

The study was conducted through a survey sent to 12 000 randomly selected, 15–79-year-old residents in Turku at the end of March 2020. Altogether 2463 people answered the survey. In addition to the survey, the respondents were given a chance to participate in a deliberative mini-public named *Turku keskustelee* (Turku deliberates), in which the participants learned about scenarios and background information regarding the traffic in the city centre.

- Altogether 172 Turku residents participated in this deliberative mini-public organized completely online. They received background information and discussed via webcams in small groups between 7th and 14th of May. In some of the groups there were also local politicians participating in the discussions, explains Professor Kaisa Herne from the Tampere University.

After the small-group discussions, each participant chose one of the three scenarios and filled in again a survey on traffic arrangements.

- The participants' opinions on light traffic became more positive, but the support for a tram did not increase as a result of the information or deliberations. Of the three alternative scenarios that concerned the traffic in the centre, the "rapid change scenario" received the most support. More than half of the participants supported that scenario, concludes Professor Grönlund.

The "major change scenario", with 30 % support, was the second most popular scenario. The scenario with little change was considered the least interesting by the mini-public. It was supported by 10% of the participants.

Postdoctoral researcher Maija Jäske from Åbo Akademi University explains that the participation in the mini-public was a positive experience for the Turku citizens who were chosen to the mini-public.

- Over 90% of the panellists would participate again in a similar process, and think that deliberative mini-publics could be used in future decision-making of the city.

The mini-public also seems to have succeeded in its goal: creating constructive dialogue and enlightened opinions amongst the participants. Over 75 % of the participants felt that they had learned enough to make an informed choice between the scenarios. In addition, 90 % felt that they learned to understand opinions different from their own.

Researchers from Åbo Akademi University and Tampere University were responsible for the project. The project was funded by the Turku Urban Research Programme, the Åbo Akademi University Foundation and the Academy of Finland. The preliminary results from the research project were presented in an open webinar on the 28.5. A full research report will be published in autumn 2020.

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