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*Source: Oulu2026,
photograph: Sanna Kroo*

Oulu: European Capital of Culture 2026

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Oulu's 4-year bid process for the title of European Capital of Culture was completed in June, and Oulu was selected from Finland to host the title in 2026. The title of European Capital of Culture will bring significant media visibility to Northern Finland as a whole, increase funding for culture and help profile the area as a major producer of cultural content on a European scale.

Oulu bid for the title together with 32 municipalities in the surrounding region. The programme area is extensive and shares some 300 km of border with Russia. We asked Piia Rantala-Korhonen, Director of the Oulu2026 project, some questions regarding the Finnish-Russian cooperation:

1. How did cooperation with Russia manifest in Oulu's bid for European Capital of Culture?

Oulu's bid-book presents a package entitled Looking East, which describes plans for future cooperation with Russia. All in all, a wide range of opportunities will be created for cross-border cooperation between our countries, both among students and professionals. The cooperation will involve the School of Culture of the Oulu University of Applied Sciences, which will strengthen cross-border cooperation with both Russia and European countries. The study programme will use its position as an internationally renowned regional centre of art and technology, which specialises especially in music, dance and media art in seeking new ways to experience culture in peripheral areas.

The Cultural Climate Change Pitching launched in the bidding phase has produced great pilot blanks for the future. Students from Oulu and Russia developed the idea of bringing media art to trains crossing the Finnish-Russian border. This is a concrete proposal for 2026.



Oulu2026 project director Piia Rantala-Korhonen

*Source: Oulu2026,
photograph: Harri Tarvainen*

In the Borderless Sami Culture project, the Sami people of Russia will also be able to produce an Arctic festival with us.

2. What kind of cooperation would you like Oulu to have with Russian cultural actors?

Cooperation can take place at many levels. We can create networks where professionals and students work together to find solutions to the challenges facing Europe's peripheral regions. Cooperation between artists and residency exchanges can quickly become concrete, so this type of cooperation is important. Since the Oulu2026 implementation area includes border counties, such as Kuusamo and Kuhmo, cross-border cooperation is quite natural and we as Oulu residents can also learn from this.

3. What opportunities do you see in cooperation between Finnish and Russian cultural actors?

Oulu2026 could build a dialogue with Europeans and Russians, the range of topics is inspiring. Art can well be used to highlight sore points, which are not otherwise discussed in the media and in the political arena. It is also possible to create a new kind of cultural tourism in the area by building content where nature and art meet.

Oulu was selected to host the European Capital of Culture in 2026. A city in Slovakia will also hold the title of European Capital of Culture in the same year.

The European Capital of Culture event highlights the importance of cities as centres of cultural life. The city that is awarded the title gets the opportunity to develop culturally, socially and financially.

The European Capitals of Culture highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures and the common cultural characteristics of Europeans. The event strengthens the feeling that we belong to a common cultural area. In addition, the event promotes the impact of culture on urban development.

(Source of the info box: <https://minedu.fi/kulttuuripaakaupunki2026>)