

# Flex Your Ed

## Espoo is championing a new 'School as a Service' concept

*The City of Espoo is convinced that a school is no longer about walls and blackboards – or even teaching, for that matter. More and more, the focus turns to learning itself.*

Conventional school space does not support today's school kids – these digital natives – in the best possible way. With this in mind, the City is launching a concept by the name of School as a Service, which revolves around shared resources. For example: not every school has to have a gym or a soccer field, as long as there is convenient access to them when needed.

One of the original developers of the concept is Aalto University Professor Jarmo Suominen, who started to consider, if it was

possible to bring improved flexibility into the way schools use real estate and other assets. The idea was well received by the City and developed further on.

### Fix it!

Suominen says that School as a Service (SaaS) concept can be viewed as a service innovation – in contrast to the traditional school-building process which focuses on product innovation.



Photo: Jina Pennetta

“Right now, we see that school as a ‘product’ is kind of broken down, and the solutions that are produced are inflexible as circumstances are rapidly deteriorating.”

All that is needed now is a pilot to test the waters. In fall semester 2016, the concept will be tried out in earnest at Aalto University as the 350 students of Haukilahti high school take to the grounds. The idea is to fully utilise the flexible learning spaces located at the Otaniemi Campus. As the facilities are adaptable and allow users to



Photo: Sankari-Melander



Photo: Andreas Michaele

**Centralized  
School as a Product**



design and customise them according to their needs, the students are able to develop user-oriented learning environments.

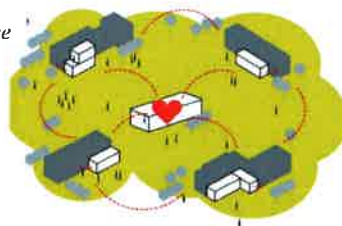
**Fauna, Flora, Phenomena**

The modern Puu2 building will be used as the "home base" for the new school, but students are likely to roam around the campus as need arises.

"For instance, Start Up Sauna and Design Factory – both located on campus – are available for the students," says Suominen, adding that concept is very much rooted on "phenomenon-based learning" which takes place in appropriate communities.

Kristiina Erkkilä, Director of Development in Education and Cultural Services, says that the high school students will benefit from the academic environment that Otaniemi campus can provide:

**Distributed  
School as a Service**



"There is multipurpose space available that will challenge, support and inspire in the development of new kind of education," she says.

**Welcome to the Future**

Jarmo Suominen points out that the perspective of "social learning" is key here: the school of the future is integrated into various learning communities and educational value is created together with others.

"The SaaS concept creates the circumstances where the participants feel they are a part of a learning community: they create joint histories of development as well as common meanings and practices," he envisions.

Suominen and Erkkilä explain that the concept is "anchored down" by three themes: Flexibility, Ownership and Accessibility. Put these three things successfully

together, and the new concept has a chance to go far.

"Take ownership, for instance. When you have a chance to shape your learning environment, your sense of ownership of your own learning strengthens," Erkkilä says.

**Going Global?**

Kristiina Erkkilä reports that the concept – while still in its formative stages – has already peaked some international interest: for example, Unesco's Learning Cities and Eurocities are keen to learn more about the Espoo innovation.

The City is eager to push the concept, too, says Erkkilä. "We are committed to School as a Service, starting from the students and teachers and the officials responsible for the premises, and reaching all the way to the City's top leadership."

Thanks to Espoo's considerable education volume, scalability can be achieved very easily, if the results from the pilot are positive.

"The Otaniemi pilot is planned to run for two years and we will develop the concept further based on the feedback from the project," Erkkilä says. 🌟