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# An Intersectional Analysis of Young People's Cultural Participation in the Context of the European Capital of Culture: The Case of Oulu2026

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## Abstract

The European Capital of Culture (ECoC) highlights the importance of promoting social inclusion and equal participation opportunities for a wide range of citizens, with special attention paid to young people, as well as marginalised and disadvantaged groups. In light of the looming risk of global youth disillusionment, such goals appear increasingly important. Enhancing participation and a sense of belonging among young people is a centrally important goal for the ECoC project of the city of Oulu and its wider region (Oulu2026), which aims to tackle existing issues related to, for example, youth unemployment, mental health issues, and negative net migration among young adults.

This mixed methods study adopts an intersectional lens to examine young adults' cultural participation and experiences of disillusionment in the Oulu2026 region, as well as related strategies presented in the bid book of Oulu2026. Special attention is paid to questions of marginalisation and disadvantage. The research data consists of a survey among young adults in the region, document analysis of the bid book, and review of the ECoC criteria and guidelines. Supported by existing research and academic discussion on cultural participation, cultural citizenship, and intersectionality, the paper concludes that the bidding phase strategies of Oulu2026 fail to recognise the diverse participatory needs of those young adults who experience marginalisation and/or disadvantage, especially when such experience is based on multiple categories of difference.

Based on the findings, I suggest that cultivating a profound understanding of the issues limiting full cultural citizenship among young adults in the region and adopting an intersectionally aware approach would help Oulu2026 to better respond to the participatory needs of young people from diverse groups and backgrounds. Moreover, I propose that the official ECoC guidelines and criteria, as well as contemporary cultural citizenship debates would benefit from the integration of an intersectional dimension.

## Keywords

European Capital of Culture, Oulu2026, youth disillusionment, cultural citizenship, cultural participation, intersectionality, young people

## Introduction

The principles and objectives of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) action highlight the need to promote social inclusion, cultural diversity, widened accessibility to culture, and equal participation opportunities for a wide range of citizens (European Commission 2017; The European Parliament and The Council of the European Union 2014). Since 2020, the official ECoC action has emphasised the need to pay special attention to young people, as

well as marginalised and disadvantaged communities (The European Parliament and The Council of the European Union 2014). The new emphasis seems increasingly necessary in light of the Global Risks Report 2021, which mentions youth disillusionment as a major neglected global risk (World Economic Forum 2021). The report notes that societal transformations and crises, such as the financial crisis, Covid-19, and the climate crisis have challenged young people's economic prospects, mental health, and future opportunities, which has resulted in experiences of disappointment and lack of faith in the future among young people worldwide (World Economic Forum 2021).

Enhancing young people's participation, inclusion, and sense of belonging are essentially important yet challenging goals for Oulu2026—the ECoC project of the city of Oulu and its surrounding region in northern Finland—, as the region struggles with a high percentage of youth unemployment, increasing mental health issues, and negative net migration among young adults (Oulu2026 2021).

In this article, I will adopt an intersectional lens to examine young adults' cultural participation and experiences of disillusionment in the Oulu2026 region, as well as the ADEI (accessibility, diversity, equality, inclusion) measures of the bidding phase of the Oulu2026 project. I will specifically analyse how the strategies presented in the bid book<sup>1</sup> respond to issues related to marginalisation, disadvantage, and disillusionment among young adults.<sup>2</sup> My research questions are: 1) How do the participatory measures in the bidding phase of Oulu2026 respond to the youth disillusionment and cultural participation related needs and challenges among young adults in the region, especially among those experiencing marginalisation or disadvantage? and 2) How do the ECoC criteria and guidelines guide bidding cities in ensuring the widest possible participation and equal inclusion of marginalised and disadvantaged communities?

I will start with a presentation of the issue of youth disillusionment, followed by a description of the Oulu2026 project and its bidding process. I will then discuss relevant parts of the ECoC guidelines and criteria before moving on to describe the data and methodology and to provide an overview of relevant concepts and theoretical discussions. Finally, I will present and analyse the findings and discuss their implications for Oulu2026 and the ECoC action, as well as for contemporary cultural citizenship debates in academia and policy.

## Overview of Youth Disillusionment and Notions from the Finnish Context

The Global Risks Report 2021 (World Economic Forum 2021) names youth disillusionment as a major neglected risk globally that will become a critical threat within the near future. As a consequence of the financial crisis of 2008–2009, the Covid-19 pandemic, and

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1. Bidding ECoC cities submit a bid book which outlines the planned programme and strategies for the ECoC year and their connection with the ECoC objectives. The designation of a city as ECoC, as well as later monitoring and evaluation, is based on the bid book.
  2. It must be noted that terms such as “minority”, “minoritised”, “underrepresented”, “marginalised”, and “disadvantaged”, which I use in this paper, are not neutral nor unproblematic (see e.g., American Psychological Association 2021; OHSU Center for Diversity and Inclusion 2021). Such words may, for example, reinforce whiteness, heterosexuality, or able-bodiedness as norms and conceal the fact that different minoritised communities have different kinds of experiences. In this article, acknowledging the problematic nature of such terms, I use them with the aim of understanding young adults' experiences of belonging to one or several marginalised/disadvantaged or minority/underrepresented communities. The aim is not to discuss the experiences of a specific minoritised/marginalised group but rather to examine wider questions of cultural citizenship, participation, and disillusionment through an intersectional lens.

issues like the climate crisis and environmental deterioration, rising inequality and violence, and the social disruption caused by the technology-driven industrial transformation, young people globally are facing weakened educational, economic, and job prospects, as well as increasing mental health issues. While young people have become more active and outspoken, they also increasingly experience disappointment, pessimism, anger, and betrayal (World Economic Forum 2021: 44).

In a recent survey conducted by UNICEF, one in three Finnish youths responded that it was not easy to dream of a good future (Finnish Committee for UNICEF 2021). Younger generations in Finland have been among the most affected by Covid-19, as related restrictions have endangered their rights to education, social and health services, social security, and participation in hobbies and free time activities (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2020). In the youth barometer 2020, the overall quality of life estimations of young people in Finland were lower than ever before in the history of the barometer (Berg & Myllyniemi 2020). Unemployed young people were found by another study to be especially stressed, worried about their income, and pessimistic about their future (State Youth Council 2020), which is a relevant concern for the Oulu2026 region, where youth unemployment is high.

Youth disillusionment is also linked to mental health issues which are a known challenge among young people in Finland. For example, mental health based sickness absences (related to, e.g., depression and anxiety) have clearly grown among younger age groups since 2005, especially among young women (Blomgren & Perhoniemi 2022). Similarly, the latest School Health Promotion study shows that experiences of anxiety and depression have increased among young people, especially among girls—both in the Oulu region and nationwide (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic appears to have aggravated young people's anxiety and other mental health issues (Hakulinen et al. 2020; Kestilä et al. 2020; Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2020).

Recent studies show that young people from gender and sexual minorities, of foreign backgrounds, and with disabilities are more likely than other young people in Finland to be discontent with their lives; feel lonely, unsafe and exhausted; have negative estimations of their health; have symptoms of mental health issues; experience discrimination, harassment, violence and bullying; and lack necessary support and help services (Jokela et al. 2020; Kivelä et al. 2019; Eid & Castaneda 2023).<sup>3</sup> This may suggest a greater risk of youth disillusionment among young people who belong to minoritised or marginalised groups.

Another study examined sexual and/or gender minorities' experiences of multiple discrimination (i.e., discrimination based on multiple grounds) based on 27 interviews with people who also belonged to an ethnic and/or religious minority and/or had a disability. According to the report, multiple discrimination multiplies incidences of discrimination, unequal treatment, and exclusion, which makes a person's experience of discrimination more frequent, probable, and pervasive. Belonging to multiple minority groups appears to be especially challenging when a person belongs to two minority groups with rejecting or adverse attitudes towards each other (e.g., a specific ethnic or religious community and sexual or gender minority). People facing multiple discrimination often struggle to find the support that they need, as support services tend to be specialised for the specific needs of a single group. (Lepola 2018).

3. The data of the studies is based on material collected for School Health Promotion Studies and Birth Cohort Studies. According to the reports, 1.3% of 14–29-year-old Finns have physical disabilities; 11% of the Finnish population aged 12–29 are of foreign backgrounds (78% of them born abroad and 22% born in Finland); and 3% of the respondents to the School Health Promotion Study 2019 belonged to gender minorities and 9% to sexual minorities. (Jokela et al. 2020; Kivelä et al. 2019; Eid & Castaneda 2023)

## Oulu2026: Background and Bidding Process

The Oulu2026 region is located about 600 km north of Helsinki with the area stretching from the west coast all the way to the eastern border with Russia. The region is home to approximately 528,000 people, while the city of Oulu, Finland's fifth biggest city, has a population of almost 212,000. The average age of Ouluanians is 39.4, which is slightly lower than the national average of 43.6 (City of Oulu 2022; Statistics Finland 2021a). The share of residents with foreign backgrounds in Oulu was 5.4% at the end of 2021, while that of the foreign-language speaking population was 4.8% (Statistics Finland 2021b).<sup>4</sup> That is less than the national average: 8.5% of the Finnish population were of a foreign background and 8.3% were foreign-language speakers (Statistics Finland 2021b).

The Oulu2026 region struggles with several social and societal challenges. The population—although currently consisting of a relatively large number of young adults—is aging fast. Youth unemployment is high and many young adults leave after graduation for better opportunities in southern Finland or abroad (Rantala-Korhonen et al. 2020). According to a research by the University of Turku, Oulu has more disadvantaged neighbourhoods than any other of the six biggest cities in Finland (Erola et al. 2017). In addition, 8% of the population of Oulu use 80% of the social and health funds; problems of mental health and loneliness are increasing; and political contrasts are stronger than in southern parts of the country (Rantala-Korhonen et al. 2020; Oulu2026 2021). The contrasts refer to, for example, smaller municipalities losing their working age population to bigger cities; social and cultural differences between the different municipalities in the region; and a strong presence of religious communities who may, for instance, have stricter boundaries regarding cultural participation (Pekkarinen 2021; Rantala-Korhonen et al. 2020). Contrasts have also appeared on the political decision-making level; according to the national broadcasting company Yle, the climate in the city council of Oulu was exceptionally bad in 2020, and councillors reported cases of swearing, offending and provocation, and an atmosphere of fear and insecurity (Sipola 2020). By 2022, city councillors felt that the atmosphere had improved significantly, but a survey conducted by Yle showed that around a half of them still felt that there was room for improvement in the atmosphere and communication (Sipola 2022).

Rather than a cultural city, Oulu is best known as a technology hub. In the 1990s, led by the Nokia Corporation, an information and communication technology cluster was built in Oulu, which led to significant economic growth in the region (Simonen et al. 2020). The reputation still lives on, as Oulu continues to be seen as a tech hub and student city, and rarely associated with culture (Cupore 2019; Rantala-Korhonen et al. 2020). Oulu does, however, have several established arts institutions, such as the City Theatre and City Library, Oulu Art Museum, and the Madetoja Music Centre, all of which were built in the 70s and 80s and still stand today (Rantala-Korhonen et al. 2020). Nowadays, cultural institutions account for 80% of Oulu's expenditure on culture (Oulu2026 2021). In addition to being home to many libraries, cinemas, museums, and theatres, the Oulu2026 region hosts plenty of events and festivals, such as the Qstock music festival, OuDance festival, Comics

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4. According to Statistics Finland (n.d.): "Persons whose both parents or the only known parent have been born abroad are considered to be persons with foreign background. Persons who have been born abroad and whose parents' data are not included in the Population Information System are also considered to be persons with foreign background. Persons born in Finland before 1970, whose native language is a foreign language have been considered to be persons with foreign background, as have persons born in Finland in 1970 or after this, whose parents' data are not included in the Population Information System. Persons, whose mother tongue is not Finnish, Swedish or Sami are regarded as foreign-language speakers."

festival, Music video festival, and the Air Guitar World Championships in Oulu; Bättre Folk new music and literature festival on the Hailuoto island; Art Ii Biennial in the municipality of Ii; and the Full Moon Dance Festival in Pyhäjärvi. However, in terms of cultural activities, services, and opportunities, the different municipalities in the region vary greatly from one another. While Oulu and some smaller municipalities like Hailuoto and Ii have a rich cultural life and attract professional artists and cultural workers to settle in the area, there are other municipalities—often places with a very religious profile—with significantly less cultural offering and opportunities available (Pekkarinen 2021). What Oulu2026 aims to do, is to shift the emphasis and reputation of Oulu from a functional tech city to a soulful cultural city, where everyone can feel included in the region's cultural life and where young, creative people can find attractive opportunities (Oulu2026 2021; Pekkarinen 2021).

The bidding phase of Oulu's ECoC project started in 2017. The guiding principle was that the cultural programme should be built *with* the people, not *for* them. The aim was to enable different ways and levels of participation at different stages, from very low threshold opportunities to more active co-creation or volunteering. The role of children and young people was seen as central: in the early stages of the bidding process in 2017, a series of facilitated workshops and hearings were held with elementary school children to learn about their hopes and dreams for future Oulu. The outcomes—a total of 1,358 dreams—informed the value base creation for the whole project and led to a shared vision of a communal, humane, and fun Oulu. The project team also organised visits to everyday places like shopping centres and schools to discuss with different kinds of people in their daily environments, as well as meetings with municipality representatives, third sector actors, and different communities and groups of people. Public discussion sessions were also held to discuss diverse matters ranging from the role of culture in religious circles to ecological issues. Special meetings were held with representatives of the older population, people with disabilities, and minority communities, and a series of equality workshops were organised with different communities, including ethnic minorities, LGTBQIA+ people, and people with disabilities. (Rantala-Korhonen et al. 2020; Oulu2026 2021).

To gain a better understanding of people's perceptions of Oulu and the Oulu2026 project and of locals' cultural participation habits and barriers, Oulu2026 commissioned a survey from the Cultural Policy Research Centre Cupore (2019). A comparison between age groups shows that the cultural activities and services offered by the city were least relevant for 18–24-year-olds and best suited for over 65-year-olds. Among young adults aged 18–24, lack of money, time, and information, having no friends to go with, long or difficult distances, and wrong kind of selection of cultural activities and services stood out as the main aspects preventing cultural participation. Respondents under 24 years old were less familiar with the Oulu2026 project than other age groups. Moreover, while 66% of the 18–24-year-old respondents reported a high sense of belonging to Oulu, young people were less certain than other age groups that they would be living in Oulu five years on from the time of the survey (Cupore 2019).

The principal way of getting people involved in the programme planning were open calls, through which everyone could participate with their own programme ideas and suggestions. The first open call was opened in spring 2019, resulting in 450 programme proposals (Rantala-Korhonen et al. 2020). Through the open calls, the project aimed to create equal opportunities for all to participate and apply for funding for their own projects. People's own activity was seen as key: the most active ones would benefit the most from the opportunities offered by the ECoC year (Pekkarinen 2021).

Another participation opportunity in the bidding phase was a communications-based Cultural Ambassadors programme. The programme was open for everyone, and the idea

was that cultural ambassadors would get information about the project, be invited to trainings, events, and activities, and work as messengers of Oulu2026 in their own communities. The bidding phase did not include any other volunteering opportunities nor democratic decision-making processes for young people to take part in (Pekkarinen 2021; Rantala-Korhonen et al. 2020).

The final stages of Oulu's bidding process were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. During the most part of 2020–2021, live encounters were inhibited, limited, or moved to online channels. One of the cancelled activities was a board game tour, which was meant to take a participatory Oulu2026 board game to different everyday places where people could share their hopes for the ECoC year while playing. Overall, across ECoC cities at different stages, participatory activities have been among the most affected areas by the pandemic (Bianchini & Simjanovska 2022).

## **ECoC Guidelines and Criteria**

The formal and legal basis of the ECoC action is the Decision, the newest version of which for 2020–2033 was agreed by the European Parliament and all EU Member States in 2014 and amended in 2017 (The European Parliament and The Council of the European Union 2014, 2017). The Decision contains information of the background of the programme and outlines its objectives, application processes, selection process and criteria, monitoring, and evaluation.

The Decision gives cultural diversity a central role. The document refers to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and the Creative Europe Programme, both of which have in their aims to safeguard and promote cultural and linguistic diversity and intercultural dialogue (UNESCO 2005; The European Parliament and The Council of the European Union 2013)—objectives to which the ECoC action is committed to. The official objectives mention highlighting the richness and diversity of European cultures—the original objective of the ECoC—and enhancing the diversity of the cultural offering in cities.

In terms of other ADEI goals of the ECoC, the Decision highlights social inclusion, equal opportunities, and widening access to and participation in culture. The target groups of this research are specifically mentioned in one sentence in the basic principles:

(9) It is also important for cities holding the title to seek to promote social inclusion and equal opportunities and to do their utmost to ensure the broadest possible involvement of all the components of civil society in the preparation and implementation of the cultural programme, with special attention being paid to young people and marginalised and disadvantaged groups (The European Parliament and The Council of the European Union 2014: 2).

And in the outreach-related criteria for the assessment of applications:

[...]the creation of new and sustainable opportunities for a wide range of citizens to attend or participate in cultural activities, in particular young people, volunteers and the marginalised and disadvantaged, including minorities, with special attention being given to persons with disabilities and the elderly as regards the accessibility of those activities (European Commission 2017: 6).

Besides the Decision, which bidding cities are expected to familiarise themselves with, the ECoC Guide for cities preparing to bid (European Commission 2017) is an essential guiding document for the programme planning of ECoC applicants. The Guide specifies the

bidding phase process and presents the six categories of criteria outlined in the Decision: contribution to the long-term cultural strategy, cultural and artistic content, European dimension, outreach, management, and capacity to deliver. The Guide mentions the target groups of this study (only) in the section presenting the outreach criteria, which, in line with the Decision, mentions the requirement to create participation opportunities for young people, marginalised and disadvantaged communities, and minority groups. The same section names the “involvement of the local population and civil society in the preparation of the application and the implementation of the action” as a selection criteria and notes that cities are expected to involve schools and have a link to education (European Commission 2017).

## Source Data and Methodology

The data of this mixed-methods study consists of an online survey with young adults aged 18–24 in the Oulu2026 region and document review of the bid book of Oulu2026.<sup>5</sup> A review of the ECoC guidelines and criteria was used to support the analysis.

The survey was built on SurveyPal in Finnish and English. It was open from May 4th until June 4th 2021. It consisted of a demographic section with questions of the respondents’ background and an information section with specific questions related to the research topic, supported by the theoretical framework and reports related to the issue of youth disillusionment. It included checklists, multiple choice questions, rating scales, Likert scales, and open-ended questions. As incentives to answer the survey, a 50-euro gift card to the ticket sales company Tiketti and Oulu2026 products were raffled among participants. The sampling method was volunteer sampling, and respondents were reached out to by contacting high schools, vocational schools, universities, art schools, municipal services related to culture, cultural wellbeing, youth, and immigration, as well as different organisations and associations working with matters related to mental health issues, disability, immigration, accessibility, and social inclusion across the Oulu2026 region.

The survey gathered 193 responses from 24 municipalities<sup>6</sup>. One of the responses appeared unreliable and was thus deleted, leaving 192 responses to analyse, 97 % of which were in Finnish<sup>7</sup>. Most responses were received before the designation date (June 2nd 2021) of Oulu as ECoC 2026. However, as the initial deadline was extended from May 31st until June 4th, some of the responses were collected just after the designation. Out of all respondents, 77% identified as female, 19% as male, and 4% as non-binary. The number of male respondents was remarkably low, as was the case in the 2019 Cupore survey, too. This may suggest a lower level of motivation to participate among young men, but qualitative research is required to understand the underlying reasons behind the gender divide.

The analysis consisted of a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. I analysed the quantitative data by means of cross-tabulation with the aim of identifying differences between three groups: 1) all young adults, 2) those young adults who experienced marginalisation or disadvantage, and 3) those young adults who experienced marginalisa-

5. The data was collected for my master’s thesis research (Pekkarinen 2021). The survey consisted of 30 questions and related sub questions. Only part of the data is used for this article.

6. At the time of the survey, the Oulu2026 region consisted of 33 cities and municipalities (including Oulu). Six more municipalities have joined the project since then by March 2023.

7. The quoted open-ended survey responses are the author’s translations from Finnish to English when the respondent’s answer was in Finnish.



tion or disadvantage based on two or more intersecting categories of difference<sup>8</sup>. I conducted statistical tests (one-way ANOVA or G-test, depending on the type of data) to determine the associations between variables<sup>9</sup>. On one-way ANOVA results, I also performed the post-hoc Tukey-Kramer test to indicate the statistical significance of difference between groups.

Open-ended survey answers were analysed using the content analysis method with an inductive approach, letting categories derive from the data and then combining them with central themes from the theoretical framework. I also used the content analysis method to analyse the bid book. My approach was partly deductive, drawing on predefined categories and themes based on the research questions and theoretical framework. Based on the survey findings, the themes and categories were further modified and clarified. The survey findings thus informed the more in-depth analysis of the bid book.

It is noteworthy that the analysis deals with the bidding phase activities and the official bid book of Oulu2026. The plans and strategies that have been developed and defined since then have not been considered in this paper.

## Central Concepts and Theoretical Discussion

The article contributes to contemporary discussions on cultural participation and cultural citizenship through an intersectional lens. I have adopted a bottom-up approach in my understanding of *culture* and *participation*. The starting point, therefore, is to understand how culture is conceived by those who take part in it (see e.g., Mercer 2003). Rather than referring to culture as the arts, I have approached culture in terms of cultural resources (see e.g., Bianchini 2005; Bianchini and Ghilardi 2007) and asked young people in the Oulu2026 region what cultural resources they appreciate in the region and how they participate in culture.

With a broad understanding of culture comes a broad understanding of cultural participation. It has been my aim to not pre-determine what cultural resources are or what cultural participation means but to let young adults define what it means for them. I have considered aspects of “passive” participation (i.e., attendance), different forms of “active” participation (e.g., co-creation or volunteering), inclusion, and influencing (see e.g., Virolainen 2015, 2016; Bonet and Négrier 2018). In addition to the mentioned approaches, participation is often discussed in terms of *non-participation*, i.e., who do not participate and why (see e.g., Heikkilä 2021). This article, however, steers away from the discourse on non-participation to avoid a pre-determination of what cultural participation is or should be. Janovich and Stevenson (2020), for example, argue that the continuous existence of non-participation discourse suppresses many voices and maintains existing power relations in cultural policy. Therefore, they argue, discourse of the non-participant should be abandoned. They suggest that participation discourse in cultural policy should not begin with the arts as defined from a top-down perspective, but with equity, ensuring opportunities for people to participate in decision-making that affects their lives and support for what people already participate in on their own terms (Janovich and Stevenson 2020).

8. Note: Group2 includes all respondents who responded that they belonged to a marginalised or disadvantage group, whether they belonged to one or several groups. It thus also includes the respondents of Group 3. This approach was chosen to identify if looking at the group of young adults experiencing intersectional marginalisation/disadvantage reveals different kinds of insights than looking at the total group of young adults experiencing marginalisation or disadvantage. Group 2 would have also been too small (n=13) if only those who experienced marginalisation based on one factor were included.

9. I used a significance level (alpha) of .05 for all statistical tests, except for the multiple response question presented in Figure 2, where alpha level .017 was determined after applying the Bonferroni correction.

The concept of *cultural citizenship* is essential in my approach to participation. Different authors from the fields of sociology and cultural anthropology have contributed to my understanding of the concept, which essentially claims that full citizenship has an inherent and inseparable cultural dimension. Cultural citizenship has been defined as the right to be “different” and to belong in a participatory, democratic sense (Rosaldo 1994: 402); as a question of full inclusion into the social community (Pakulski 1997); as a matter of cultural rights, responsibilities, identities, and dismantling exclusive assumptions and representations (Stevenson 2003); and as a question of societal inclusion and belonging (Pakulski 1997; Stevenson 2001; Beaman 2016). Importantly, the notion of cultural citizenship goes beyond the formal and legal citizenship status and focuses on how citizenship is socially and culturally constructed. Beaman (2016: 852) argues that “full citizenship as a process and social status is inherently cultural”, as cultural assumptions create ideas of citizenry that make some citizens more or less accepted than others. Analysing how citizenship works for marginalised groups, Beaman notes that the cultural normative dimension (referring to the norms, values, practices, and behaviours that are seen as normative) needs to be re-examined in discussions of citizenship to acknowledge that legal citizenship status is not sufficient to guarantee societal inclusion and belonging.

Cultural citizenship is often discussed in terms of cultural rights, which are considered essential alongside the civil, political, and social rights (see Pakulski 1997; Bloomfield and Bianchini 2001; Stevenson 2001). The UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity describes cultural rights as an integral part of human rights and declares that all people have the right to express themselves and to create and disseminate their work in the language of their choice; that all people are entitled to quality education and training that fully respect their cultural identity; and that all persons have the right to participate in the cultural life of their choice and conduct their own cultural practices (UNESCO 2001). In cultural citizenship literature, cultural rights have been discussed, for example, as the right to representation, recognition, acceptance, and integration (Pakulski 1997); in terms of equal access to cultural literacy, critical competences and public cultural goods which enable equal opportunity to participate in cultural, economic, and political life (Bloomfield and Bianchini 2001); and as the right to propagate a cultural identity or lifestyle (Stevenson 2001). Beaman (2016) highlights that neither legal status nor specific rights are sufficient to guarantee full citizenship, as such approaches ignore the ways and extent to which individuals understand their relationship to being part of a citizenry. Besides cultural rights, cultural citizenship thus brings to the fore matters of full societal belonging, inclusion, equality, and difference. Stevenson (2003) also points out that cultural citizenship demands questioning and reformulating notions of the “ordinary”, as well as recognising and dismantling exclusive and marginalising structures, assumptions, and representations. While the need to promote and protect the cultural rights of minority and marginalised communities is at the core of cultural rights discussions, Bloomfield and Bianchini (2001) emphasise that minority cultures must not be treated as exclusive, pure, or unchanging, as such treatment would reaffirm their position of marginality in society. The authors note that (cultural) citizenship should be detached from the idea of exclusive cultural belonging (Bloomfield and Bianchini 2001).

To summarise, I understand cultural citizenship as a notion of citizenship that considers citizenship to be not just a legal status or a question of formal rights but a social and cultural construct that is influenced by cultural norms, assumptions, normalised representations, ideas of accepted or desired citizens, and exclusive and marginalising structures. While I do think equal cultural rights and participation opportunities are at the core of the concept, my focus is not on legal and formal matters but rather on inequal-

ity creating structures and systems, questions of representation, inclusion and belonging, and people's own experiences of their citizenry. Cultural citizenship requires an inclusive society respectful of pluralism and difference where the needs and aspirations of marginalised groups are placed at the core.

To address matters of cultural citizenship and equal cultural participation among young adults in the Oulu2026 region, I have adopted an intersectional lens to generate understanding of the experiences of marginalisation, disadvantage, exclusion, and disillusionment among the target group. The term intersectionality—originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in a paper for the University of Chicago Legal Forum in 1989—has questions of sameness and difference and their relation to power at its core (see Crenshaw 1989; Cho et al. 2013). Analysing the exclusion of black women from both antiracist and feminist policies and laws, Crenshaw (1989) notes that the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism—and therefore neither framework alone is enough to describe the experience of black women. This is the so-called sameness and difference paradox often mentioned in intersectional literature: while black women were too similar to both white women and black men to form a separate group, they were also too different to represent either group (Crenshaw 1989; Carbado 2013; Cho et al. 2013). As Patricia Hill Collins (2019: 26) explains, Crenshaw used intersectionality to name “the structural convergence among intersecting systems of power that created blind spots in antiracist and feminist activism”. Essentially, intersectionality maintains that the simultaneous experience of different forms of discrimination (related to e.g., ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, body, nationality, social status) is more than the sum of its parts, and thus the struggles of different marginalised groups and activists are often intertwined (see e.g., Crenshaw 1991; Collins 2019).

Since Crenshaw's 1989 analysis, intersectionality has been discussed in many different contexts in academia and beyond. Cho et al. (2013) suggest that researchers in different fields should integrate intersectionality in their own tools to generate understanding of the intersecting axes of power and inequality in different areas of society. With this paper, I participate in this discussion in the context of the ECoC. This article takes as its starting point Collin's (2019) notion that intersectionality can work as a tool for social change. After all, social change for more participatory, inclusive societies is one of the goals of the ECoC action.

## Results and Analysis

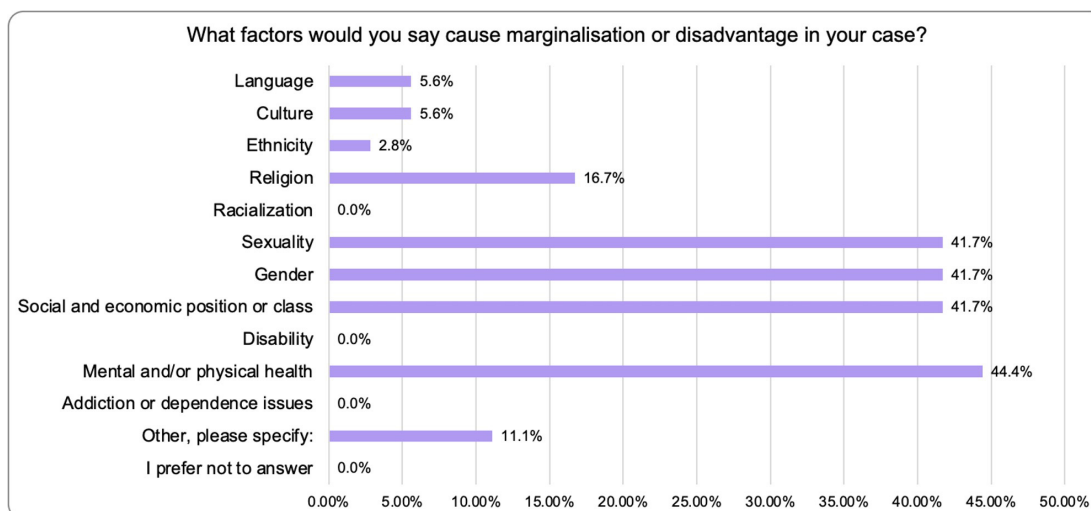
### Marginalisation and Disadvantage

The survey asked whether respondents belonged to marginalised or disadvantaged groups. Respecting a plural understanding of human identity (see Sen 2007), instead of simply offering “Yes” and “No” answer options, the respondents could also choose that they “Partly” belonged to such groups. Options “I don't know” and “I prefer not to answer” were also included. About 19% (n=36) of all respondents belonged or partly belonged to a marginalised/disadvantaged group, while 13% (n=25) did not know whether they belonged to such groups or not. About 64% (n=23) of those who answered “Yes” or “Partly” listed two or more factors that caused marginalisation or disadvantage for them.

Presenting the results, I will refer to the three groups as group 1=those young adults who did not belong to a marginalised or disadvantaged group; group 2=those young adults who belonged to a marginalised or disadvantaged group or groups; and group 3=those young adults who belonged to two or more marginalised or disadvantaged groups. The division of

respondents in the groups is done solely based on the respondents' answers and experience regarding their belonging to a marginalised/disadvantaged group or groups, not on the author's assessment. It is also noteworthy that belonging to a minority or specific social group did not in all cases lead to an experience of marginalisation or disadvantage; about 29 % (n=37) of those who responded that they did not belong to any marginalised/disadvantaged groups answered that they belonged to a minority or specific social group (e.g., LGT-BQIA+ or religious).

As Figure 1 shows, mental and/or physical health was the most common cause of marginalisation or disadvantage, followed by sexuality, gender, and social or economic position or class. The results do not illuminate what kinds of mental and/or physical health issues are in question. However, as young people's mental health issues are a known challenge in Finland and in Oulu—even more so after Covid-19—and mental health issues were also found to be a central factor causing disillusionment among marginalised/disadvantaged respondents (see Figure 7), it is likely that mental health issues form a significant part of this number. The categories causing marginalisation/disadvantage and their intersections among the respondents in groups 2 and 3 are presented in Table 1.



**FIGURE 1** Marginalisation and/or Disadvantage Causing Factors

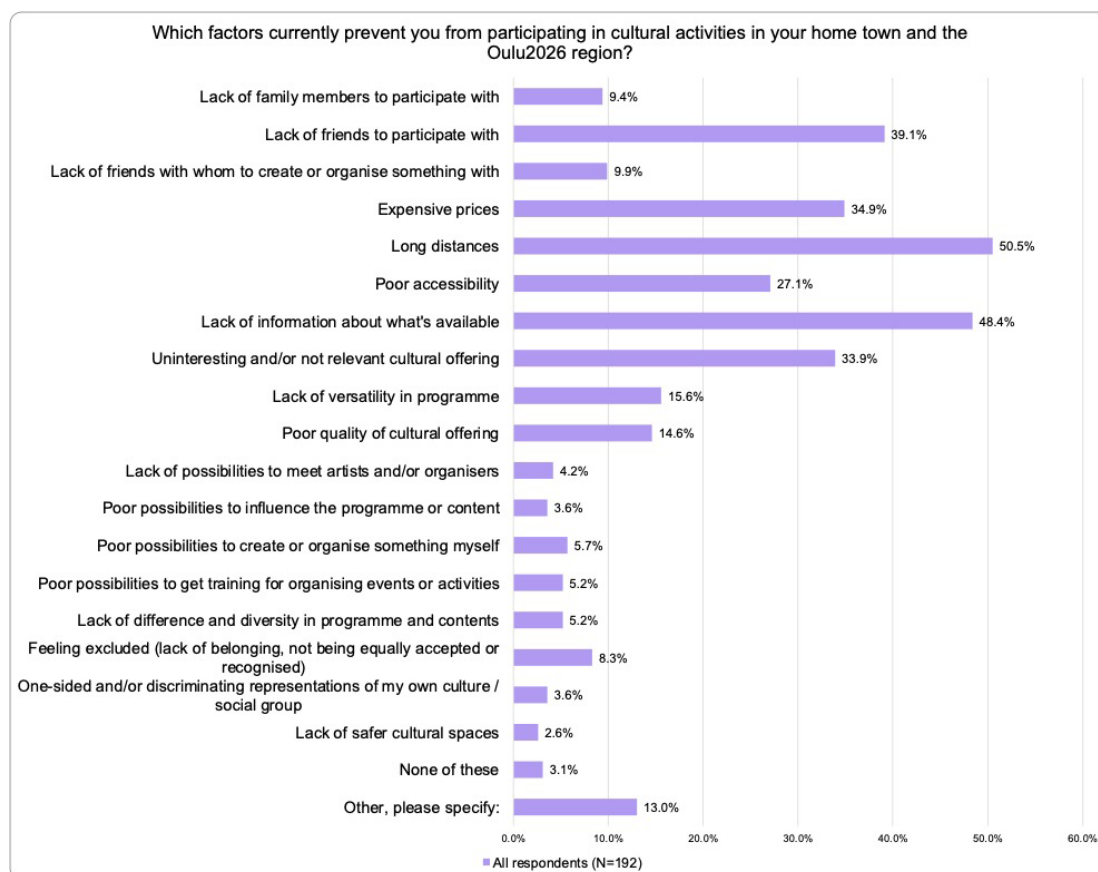
Note: N=36. The "Other" answers included insufficient income, poverty, non-Christianity, and obesity.

**TABLE 1** Intersections of Factors Causing Marginalisation and/or Disadvantage

	<b>Factors causing marginalisation/disadvantage and their intersections</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
1 factor causing marginalisation or disadvantage ( <i>n</i> =13)	Religion	2
	Sexuality	1
	Gender	2
	Social and economic position or class	5
	Mental and/or physical health	3
Intersections of 2 factors causing marginalisation or disadvantage ( <i>n</i> =13)	Gender & mental and/or physical health	1
	Language & culture	1
	Mental and/or physical health & obesity	1
	Religion & sexuality	1
	Sexuality & mental and/or physical health	1
	Sexuality & gender	5
	Sexuality & social and economic position or class	1
	Social and economic position or class & mental and/or physical health	2
Intersections of 3 factors causing marginalisation or disadvantage ( <i>n</i> =6)	Religion, social and economic position or class & mental and/or physical health	1
	Gender, social and economic position or class & mental and/or physical health	2
	Sexuality, gender & social and economic position or class	1
	Sexuality, gender & mental and/or physical health	2
Intersections of 4 factors causing marginalisation or disadvantage ( <i>n</i> =3)	Religion, sexuality, social and economic position or class, mental and/or physical health	1
	Sexuality, gender, social and economic position or class, mental and/or physical health	2
Intersections of 5 factors causing marginalisation or disadvantage ( <i>n</i> =1)	Language, culture, ethnicity, religion & social and economic position or class	1

### Barriers to Participation

The multiple response question on barriers to participation (Figure 2) revealed that long distances and lack of information of what is available were the main barriers among all respondents. While the two major barriers were the same in all three groups, there were still significant differences between them (Figure 3). Expensive prices and lack of friends to participate with were common barriers among groups 2 and 3. Respondents in groups 2 and 3 also named feeling excluded and lack of difference and diversity in programming as a barrier significantly more often than group 1. Respondents who belonged to marginalised or disadvantaged groups also faced overall more barriers to participation than other respondents. The difference was even greater when the respondent's marginalisation/disadvantage was based on two or more categories of difference.



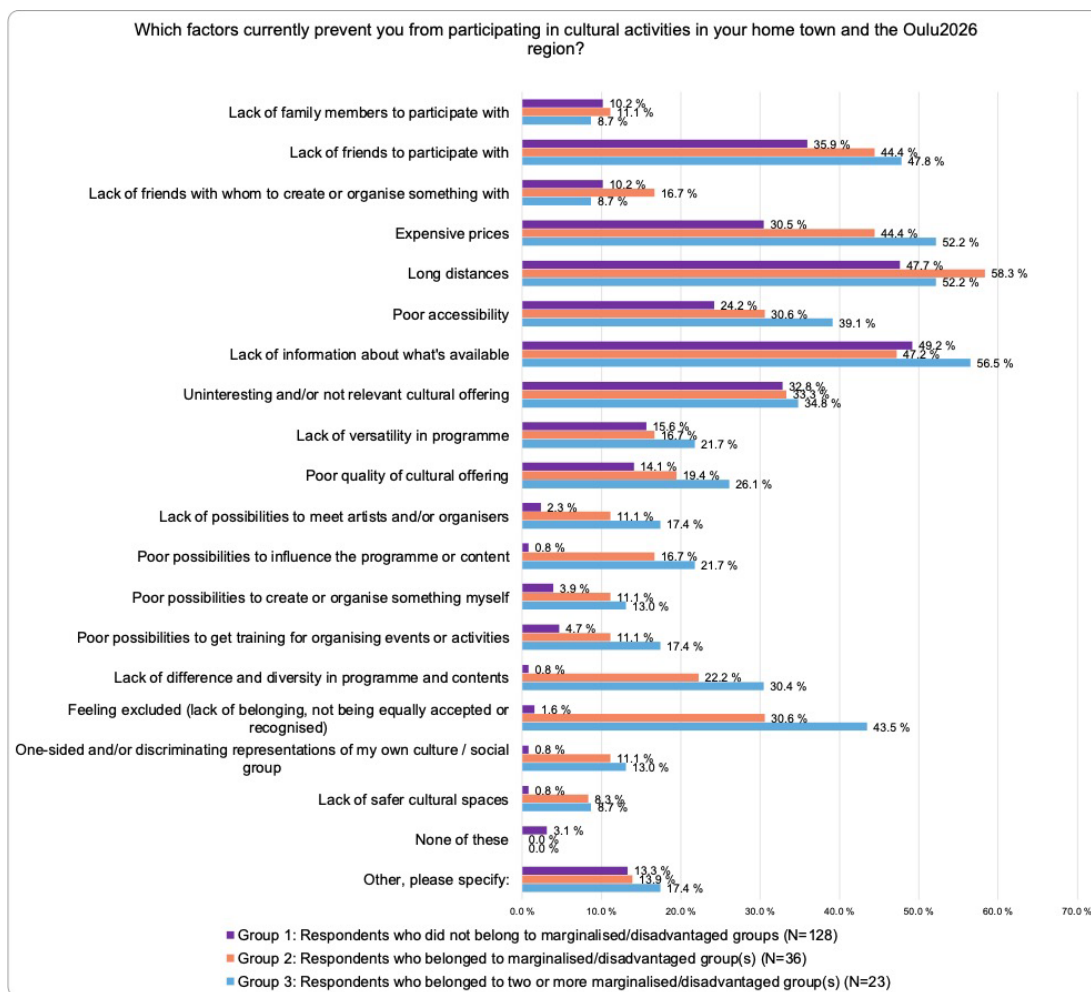
**FIGURE 2** Barriers to Participation

Note: The “Other” answers (N=25) contained 17 mentions of Covid-19, and individual mentions of unsuitable offering in folk high schools, lack of cultural offering in general, lack of time, school, and laziness.

A G test (or a likelihood ratio test) was conducted to evaluate the impact of the respondent’s experience of (intersectional) marginalisation or disadvantage on barriers to participation<sup>10</sup>. A statistically significant difference was identified comparing all three groups ( $G=1345.4$ ,  $df=36$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and between the tested pairs (groups 1 & 2  $G=834.1$ ,  $df=18$ ,  $p<0.001$ ; and groups 1 & 3,  $G=801.1$ ,  $df=18$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

In the open-ended answers, some respondents hoped for more accessible, inclusive, and low threshold activities. Some respondents felt that their hometowns did not have cultural offering representing minority cultures. One respondent hoped for more “things related to minority cultures” and noted that “in a small town there are not many different or out of the ‘ordinary’ hobbies or ways to express oneself”. Several respondents also hoped for more opportunities for and representations of the LGTBQIA+ community. One respondent, for example, noted that “there is nothing specifically for the LGTBQIA+ youth” and another one pointed out that “there are no LGTBQI+ spaces”. Yet another respondent felt that there were no cultural activities related to minority, alternative or subcultures in their hometown and noted that “for example, a Pride flag would be nice to have”. Some respondents also felt that different cultural or ethnic minorities were undervalued, and several responses pointed to racism and discrimination. One respondent felt that there was “insane racism towards, for example, the Roma people and people with brown skin” in their hometown.

10. A G-test was chosen instead of the chi-square test because many of the expected frequencies were under 5 and some even under 1. The “None of these” answers were left out of the G-test as none of the respondents from groups 2 and 3 had selected that option.



**FIGURE 3** Barriers to Participation: Comparison Between Three Groups

### Experiences of Disillusionment

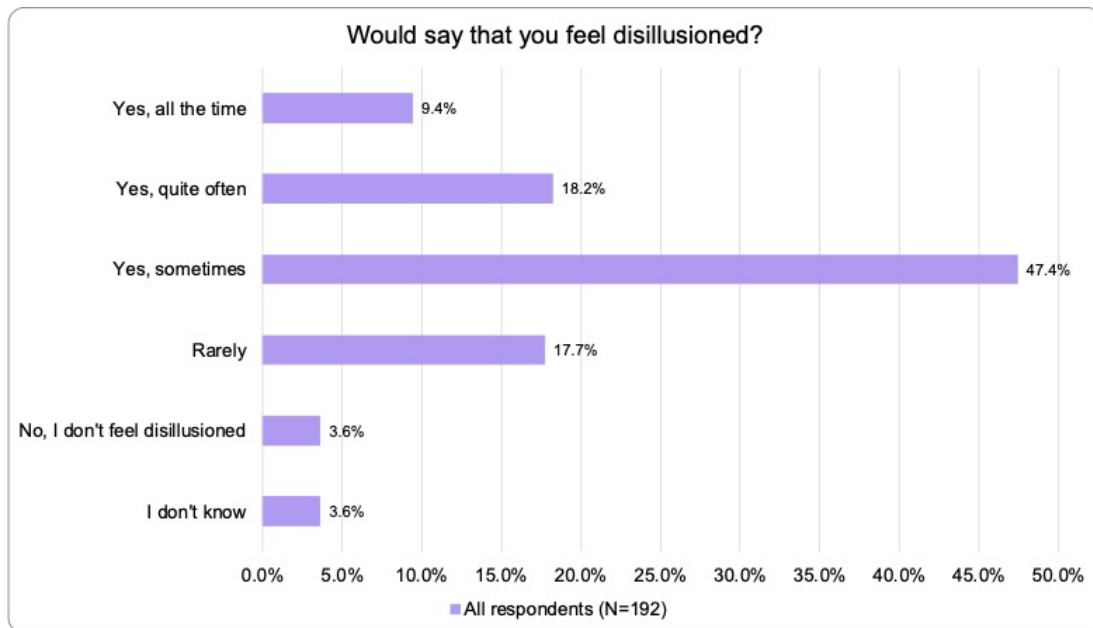
Given that “youth disillusionment” is not a well-known term and lacks an established Finnish translation, the meaning of the term was explained in the survey form. Despite the risk that the term could have been understood differently by different respondents, the answers appear coherent. The low percentage (3.6) of “I don’t know” answers to the question of whether the respondent felt disillusioned also suggests that the term had been generally well understood.

The survey responses suggest that youth disillusionment is a risk and an already existing issue in the Oulu2026 region. Most (75%) survey respondents felt disillusioned at least sometimes (Figure 4), but the respondents who identified themselves as belonging to marginalised or disadvantaged groups were more likely to experience disillusionment more often (Figure 5). The link between marginalisation/disadvantage and youth disillusionment was even more clear when the respondent’s experience was based on two or more intersecting factors; in group 3, 100% of respondents experienced disillusionment at least sometimes and almost half of them quite often or all the time.

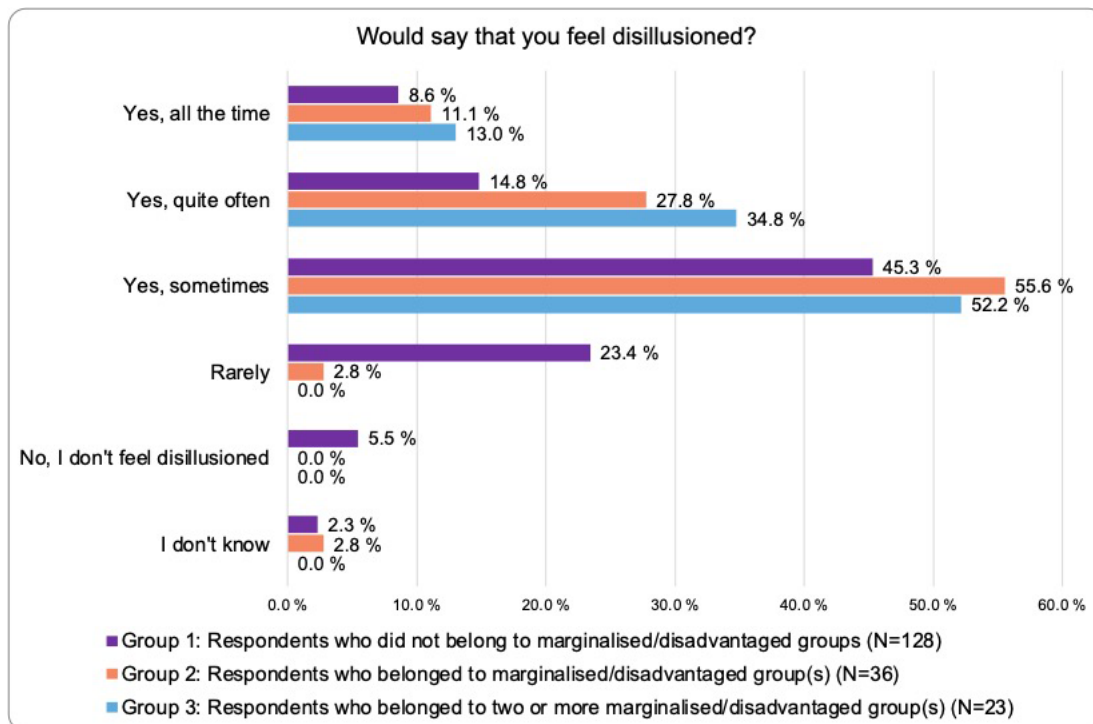
A one-way ANOVA test confirmed the effect of the respondent’s experience of marginalisation/disadvantage on their experience of disillusionment ( $F(2, 180)=7.48, p<0.001$ )<sup>11</sup>.

11. For the one-way ANOVA, responses were changed to a numeric format: 1=No, I don’t feel disillusioned; 2=Rarely; 3=Yes, sometimes; 4=Yes, quite often; and 5=Yes, all the time. The “I don’t know” answers were left out of the test.

A post hoc Tukey-Kramer test showed a statistically significant difference between groups 1 and 2 and 1 and 3.



**FIGURE 4** Experiences of Disillusionment



**FIGURE 5** Experiences of Disillusionment: Comparison Between Three Groups

The survey distinguished between general (regarding the wider societal level) and personal (regarding matters directly related to oneself) levels of disillusionment. Among all respondents, the most common causes of disillusionment on the general level were inequality in society, discrimination of different demographic or social groups, and the impacts of Covid-19 (averages on a scale from 1–10: 7.20; 7.14; 7.06). On the personal level, the most

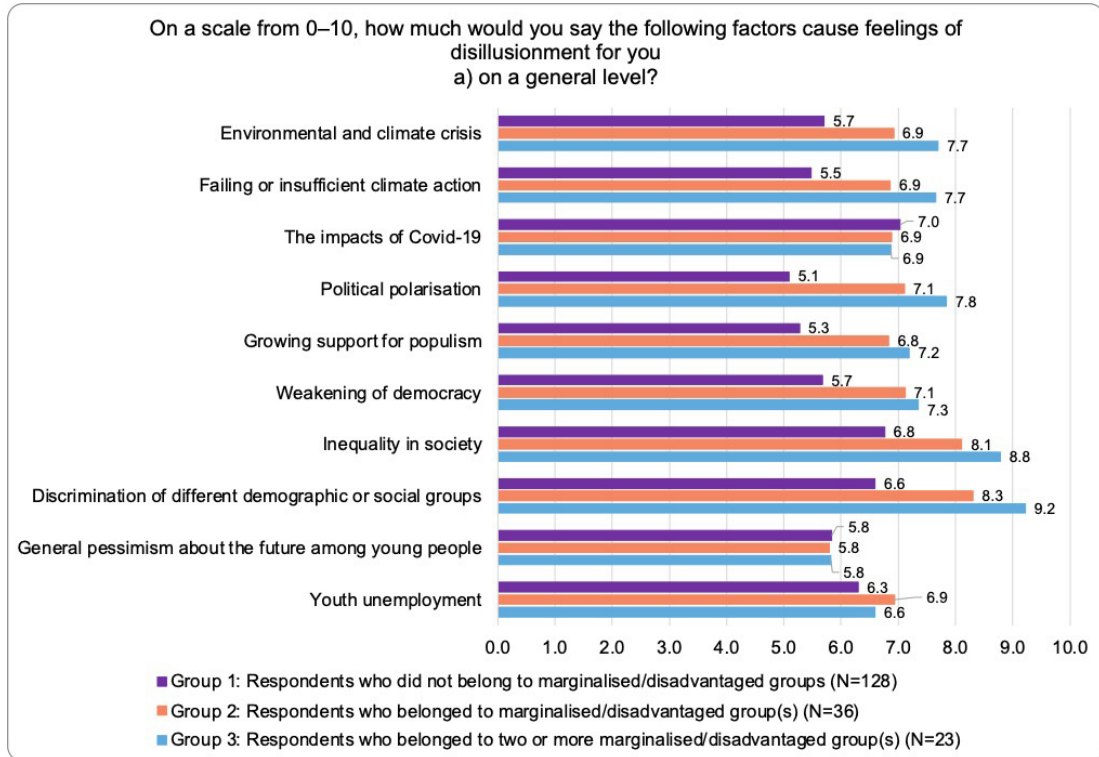


common causes were Covid-19, financial challenges, and lack of faith in one's own possibilities to influence things (averages: 6.66; 5.74; 5.57). The survey was conducted when the pandemic was still affecting people's lives in many ways, which explains the predominance of Covid-19 in the responses. Overall, young people experienced more disillusionment based on factors on the general level than related to their personal lives.

Differences in the disillusionment causing factors were identified between the three groups (Figures 6 and 7). Those belonging to multiple marginalised/disadvantaged groups were the most likely to experience disillusionment on both personal and general levels. A statistically significant difference was identified between groups 1 and 2 and 1 and 3 in all disillusionment causing factors on the general level except for the impact of Covid-19, general pessimism about the future among young people, and youth unemployment (see Table 2 in Appendix 1 for one-way ANOVA and Tukey-Kramer results). In other words, all other factors caused significantly more disillusionment for those who experienced marginalisation or disadvantage than for other respondents. Regarding disillusionment causing factors on the personal level, the results were similar although statistically significant for only 7 out of 13 questions (see Table 3 in Appendix 1). Financial challenges or worries, lack of faith in one's possibilities to influence things, mental health problems, experiences of discrimination, feeling excluded from society, and lack of recognition or acceptance in society caused significantly more disillusionment on the personal level for groups 2 and 3 than for group 1. In addition, poor employment and career prospects were rated significantly higher by group 3 than group 1.

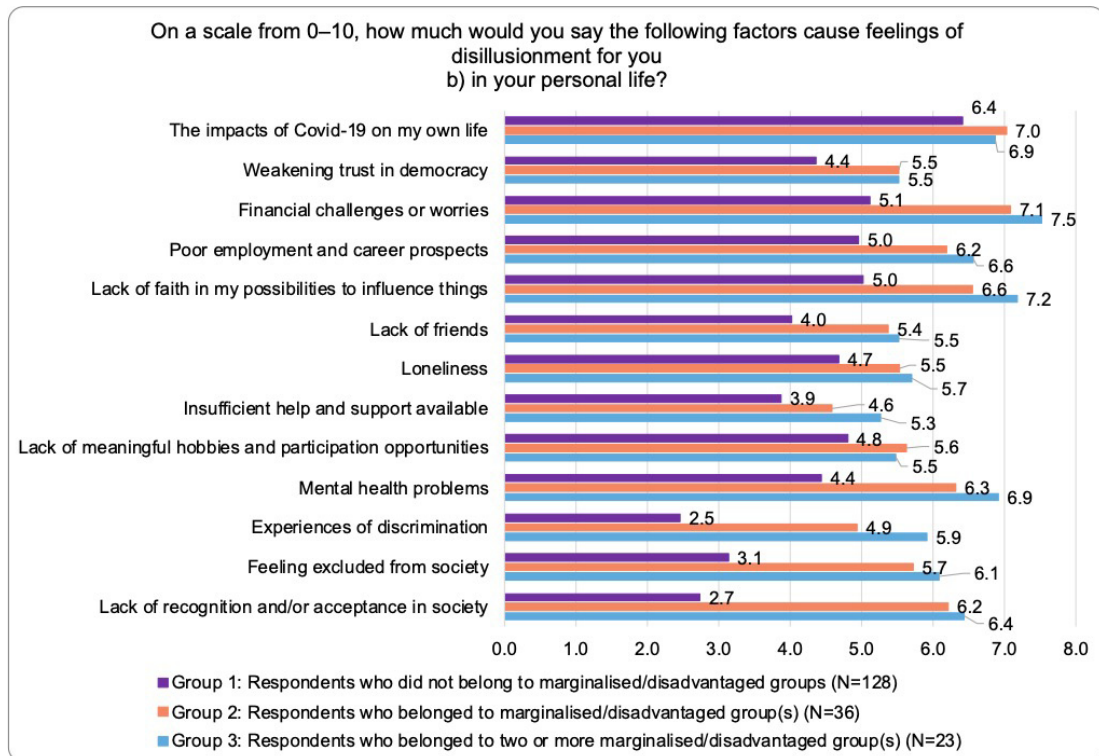
The open-ended answers included mentions of a lack of recognition, exclusion, and discrimination. One respondent wrote that "the public discrimination of sexual minorities and people from different ethnic backgrounds" caused disillusionment for them and added that "you hear hate speech almost daily". Another respondent answered:

As a non-binary person, I don't even exist for the Finnish state as myself, so that causes a lot of disillusionment. The crappy trans law of Finland and the grown hatred towards sexual and gender minorities in the world also cause pain.



**FIGURE 6** Factors Causing Disillusionment on a General Level: Comparison Between Three Groups

Note: The values represent average values on a scale from 0–10.



**FIGURE 7** Factors Causing Disillusionment on a Personal Level: Comparison Between Three Groups

Note: The values represent average values on a scale from 0–10.

## Participatory Measures in the Bid Book

The bid book of Oulu2026 (2021) demonstrates a bottom-up participatory approach. Culture is understood broadly, not just as the arts, to encourage participation and a sense of belonging among a wide range of citizens. Measures include bringing culture to everyday surroundings and inviting different kinds of people to participate in different roles in the official programme and to suggest their own ideas through open calls. The aim is to “de-institutionalise and de-centralise” (Oulu2026 2021: 16). Children and young people are said to be one of the main target groups and the starting point for a “cultural climate change”, the main theme of the project. The value base of the project was formed during the bidding process based on the hopes and dreams of children and young people.

Enhancing young people’s participation, sense of belonging, and future opportunities is important for Oulu2026 because, as the bid book notes, the region is struggling to engage their young, educated people who tend to move to the South for better opportunities and a more open atmosphere. The official programme presented in the bid book includes several goals and projects targeting the youth as audiences, artists, programmers, producers, co-creators, and volunteers. The programme also includes measures to address young people belonging to marginalised or disadvantaged communities, particularly regarding well-known issues like youth unemployment, mental health problems, and regional inequalities. For example, the Urban Boost programme line addresses the issue of youth unemployment by encouraging young people to take an active stance in planning and building their own future and by supporting their faith in their own opportunities to make an impact, and the Untamed Office project gives young unemployed people the opportunity to develop their skills in the cultural industry. The Voice the Taboo and Mind Blown projects address mental health issues to change attitudes, tackle prejudice, and encourage open discussion on the topic. Regional imbalances are not directly discussed regarding young people, but the confrontation and imbalance between the city of Oulu and other municipalities in the region are addressed in several parts of the bid book.

Marginalisation and disadvantage are mentioned in the outreach plan, which contains a diversity and equality strategy (Oulu2026 2021: 74–79). The strategy contains several participatory measures, for example supporting minority arts and the participation of minority groups in the pricing of events and including e.g., young people, disabled people, and immigrants in the Oulu2026 advisory board. The equality workshops started during the bidding phase are planned to continue regionally. The diversity and equality strategy is acknowledged to be a work in progress; however, the bid book notes that the established Equality Forum seeks to change Oulu’s “diversity climate” in an open and constructive way.

Even though the bid book discusses several matters that arise from the survey data, many gaps can be identified. First, the bid book appears to lack recognition of the diverse causes of young people’s experience of marginalisation/disadvantage. While several issues that young people struggle with are recognised, like mental health challenges, unemployment, and issues related to social and economic position, the challenges of groups such as the LGTBQIA+ community, ethnic, cultural, or religious minorities, or topics such as discrimination or exclusion are not addressed, except for individual mentions in the diversity and equality strategy.

Second, while the barriers to participation that the bid book discusses are in line with those that were most common among all survey respondents, such as long distances, lack of information, and expensive prices, a closer look at the survey responses reveals that significant barriers among marginalised/disadvantaged groups have not been recognised. Such barriers include, for instance, feeling excluded and lack of difference and diversity in programming.

Third, marginalised and disadvantaged groups are addressed in the bid book more as targets of outreach activities and passive participants and less as agents, such as creators or organisers of high-quality artistic programme. Except for the Sámi community, measures to remove barriers to participation for arts and culture professionals from minoritised, marginalised, or disadvantaged groups are not discussed at all. The measures presented in the bid book are in line with the ECoC criteria, but the survey results suggest that they fail to recognise the barriers that exist for marginalised/disadvantaged communities to participate in different roles.

Finally, youth disillusionment (although the term as such is not used) is discussed through notions of youth unemployment, lack of prospects in the region, and mental health issues. However, there are no mentions of the other factors that were identified by the survey responses as causes of disillusionment for young adults in the region, especially for those experiencing (intersectional) marginalisation/disadvantage. Such factors include experiences of discrimination, feeling excluded from society, and lack of recognition or acceptance in society.

## Discussion

As discussed above, respondents experiencing marginalisation and/or disadvantage were more likely to face barriers to cultural participation than other young adults. They were also more likely to experience disillusionment and for more varied reasons than other respondents. The difference was clearest when comparing those young adults who did not experience marginalisation/disadvantage to those who did based on multiple intersecting factors. These are significant insights in the context of the ECoC, which highlights the need to create equal participation opportunities—including in the bidding phase—for a wide range of citizens and to pay special attention to citizens belonging to marginalised and disadvantaged groups. To respond to the participatory expectations of the ECoC beyond the superficial level, bidding and designated cities need to develop a profound understanding of the participation related needs and challenges of their citizens, especially of those experiencing marginalisation/disadvantage. It is thus relevant to examine whether cities bidding for the ECoC title take necessary action to use the bidding phase as an opportunity to identify, understand, and address issues related to cultural participation and citizenship.

In the case of Oulu2026, the bid book and bidding phase actions appear to be in line with the participatory guidelines and criteria of the ECoC. However, despite all the efforts and participatory elements, such as open calls, public discussions, cooperation with schools, meetings with various stakeholders, and equality workshops, a lot of the diverse participatory needs and challenges of young people have been overlooked, especially in the case of young people experiencing marginalisation/disadvantage based on multiple categories of difference. The failure to address the identified issues does not point to a conscious exclusion or ignoring of any groups. Instead, based on the findings, I claim that the core issues lie in the chosen methods and approaches (or lack of them) which have supported the programme planning. For example, besides the Cultural Ambassadors programme, the bidding phase did not include a volunteer programme nor were there any democratic decision-making processes in place, through which the project could have involved a range of young people from diverse backgrounds. The various discussions, meetings, workshops, and open calls aimed to facilitate and encourage the participation of diverse groups and individuals, and participation opportunities were open for everyone. However, the participatory strategies were largely based on the idea that the most active

ones would benefit the most. I argue that such a system of open opportunities that rewards one's own activity without profoundly identifying and addressing the diverse barriers that exist for different groups and individuals will serve to encourage the already active ones with sufficient resources and motivation, while ignoring the needs of marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

While I don't think any groups have been consciously ignored, the lack of mention of different minoritised (except for the Sámi) and marginalised groups and their needs does raise the question of whether potentially controversial topics have been consciously avoided. Perhaps emphasising opportunities that are equally open and available for all instead of discussing the needs of specific groups is a way to mitigate the strong political and social contrasts in the region, which were mentioned in the first version of the bid book (Rantala-Korhonen et al. 2020).

The findings of this study suggest, that while Oulu2026 has developed several participatory and ADEI measures that respond to existing challenges when looking at the overall group of young adults, the focus on averages has concealed the needs and circumstances of marginalised and disadvantaged groups—especially of those experiencing intersectional marginalisation or disadvantage. Such a well-intentioned approach might, in the worst-case scenario, work to enhance inequalities instead of doing the opposite. Supported by this notion, I make two proposals. First, I suggest that an intersectional approach can be an effective tool for Oulu2026 to better understand and respond to the various factors inhibiting cultural participation and citizenship among marginalised and disadvantaged young adults, and especially to recognise the circumstances of those who experience marginalisation/disadvantage based on multiple grounds. Such a change in approach would require consciously developing intersectional awareness across the different areas of activity. Rather than a superficial fix, this would demand a self-critical, profound process that would help look under the surface and address inequality creating systems, structures, symbolic representations, and operational models that hinder diversity and belonging at different levels. For example, the equality workshops are a concrete step towards learning about, understanding, and responding to the needs of various groups—including marginalised and disadvantaged communities. However, without an intersectional lens, they may help to understand the specific needs of a single group while still concealing the circumstances of those experiencing discrimination based on multiple factors.

Second, I propose that the main limitations of the participatory and ADEI approaches of Oulu2026 are not just about the concrete measures but rather about more profound issues limiting full cultural citizenship among young adults. Based on the findings and supported by the notions of Beaman (2016), I suggest that addressing the limitations in the realisation of full cultural citizenship among young adults and responding to the issue of youth disillusionment requires first and foremost addressing and challenging the stigmatisation and marginalisation of different communities. As Beaman argues, the framework of citizenship needs to be applied to different localities and contexts to understand how different marginalised populations view their citizenship status and identities. In the case of Oulu2026, this would mean, for example, identifying the circumstances and ideas of citizenship of the different municipalities, neighbourhoods, groups, and communities. Such an approach, however, should be accompanied by an awareness of the internal plurality and diversity of each locality or community to avoid exclusive notions (see Bloomfield and Bianchini 2001). Importantly, marginalised and minority groups must not be seen targets of activities but, as Bloomfield and Bianchini (2001) note, be accorded the dignity and agency which cultural citizenship presumes. One concrete measure would be to enhance the presence of young

adults from diverse backgrounds and groups in decision-making and evaluation processes (see Janovich and Stevenson 2020).

Furthermore, the findings must be considered in terms of the official ECoC action and its principles. While the importance of promoting diversity and encouraging the participation of a wide range of citizens is clearly expressed in the official criteria, guidelines, and objectives, they leave plenty of room for interpretation. A lack of guidelines or frameworks for addressing the needs of marginalised, disadvantaged, or underrepresented groups may lead to a situation in which the needs of some groups are addressed, while those of others remain ignored. I suggest that integrating an intersectional approach in the official ECoC criteria should be evaluated. I also propose that different minority, marginalised, and disadvantaged groups should not only be part of the Outreach section of the ECoC criteria but included across its different areas—especially Cultural and artistic content, Management, and Capacity to deliver. The official guidelines and criteria work as guiding principles for all ECoC cities and candidates and are thus an efficient way to support the cities in addressing and promoting ADEI matters beyond averages and assumptions in their own specific contexts.

Given the relatively small amount of data and especially of qualitative material, the findings have some limitations and can be considered suggestive. It is also likely that the survey responses do not totally represent the diversity of young adults in the region, especially acknowledging that the volunteer sampling method tends to be most effective in reaching those who already have a tendency to participate. Despite the limitations, the study provides relevant insights about young people's cultural participation and citizenship in the Oulu2026 region. The findings also generate new understanding of youth disillusionment and its causes and provide an example of integrating intersectionality as a theoretical lens and a method in a mixed-methods study. More qualitative research is needed to better understand the relationship between youth disillusionment and cultural participation and citizenship, as well as about the participatory opportunities and challenges among young people in the bidding phase of ECoCs. I also hope that the possibilities of adapting an intersectional lens into cultural citizenship and Capital of Culture studies will be further explored in future research.

## Conclusions

This paper has examined young adults' cultural participation and the issue of youth disillusionment in the Oulu2026 region through an intersectional lens. As my research question, I asked how the participatory and ADEI strategies of Oulu2026 respond to the identified needs and challenges related to youth disillusionment and cultural participation among young adults experiencing marginalisation/disadvantage, and what insights an intersectional approach may provide. I also asked how the guidelines and criteria of the ECoC action support bidding cities in ensuring the widest possible participation and equal inclusion of diverse groups.

The presented findings demonstrate some gaps between the participatory and ADEI strategies of Oulu2026 and the cultural participation and disillusionment related challenges and needs of young adults in the region. Despite the bottom-up strategies and will to involve a wide range of citizens, the research outcomes suggest that the approach of Oulu2026 has been too narrow to acknowledge the cultural participation and citizenship related needs of young people facing disadvantage or marginalisation. Especially the needs of those young adults experiencing marginalisation/disadvantage based on multiple catego-

ries of difference have remained unrecognised. I have thus suggested that an intersectional approach integrated at different levels and phases would help Oulu2026 to better address existing inequalities, barriers to participation, and the issue of youth disillusionment. I have also proposed that instead of just looking at concrete measures to enhance participation, Oulu2026, and all bidding and designated ECoC cities, should aim at a profound understanding of issues limiting full cultural citizenship.

The case of Oulu2026 demonstrates that cultivating such understanding is necessary to respond to the participatory goals of the ECoC. The bidding phase should thus be used as an opportunity to develop an awareness of cultural participation and citizenship related barriers and opportunities and to build measures to respond to them. To better guide and support bidding cities in ensuring the participation and inclusion of diverse groups, I have suggested that the ECoC should evaluate the need to integrate an intersectional approach in the official guidelines and criteria and to address minority, marginalised, and disadvantaged groups across the different sections of the selection criteria.

The findings of this study suggest that participatory and ADEI strategies without intersectional understanding and conscious efforts to dig deeper run the risk of overlooking the needs, struggles, and aspirations of citizens who experience marginalisation or disadvantage based on multiple factors. I therefore propose that contemporary cultural citizenship debates in academia and in policy should be accompanied by intersectional awareness to maintain their relevance in today's societies. As a tool or a lens in research or policymaking, intersectionality can help us better address questions of equal rights to belonging, participation, and being different in plural societies—all essential preconditions for cultural citizenship.

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## Appendix 1. One-way ANOVA tables

**TABLE 2** One-way ANOVA and Post Hoc Tukey-Kramer Test to Assess the Impact of Marginalisation/Disadvantage on Disillusionment on a General Level

question #	F-statistic	F critical	df	p-value	significant difference
1	7,375015	3,046433	between groups: 2, within groups: 179	<0.001	between groups 1 and 2 & 1 and 3
2	7,660798	3,046721	between groups: 2, within groups: 178	<0.001	between groups 1 and 2 & 1 and 3
3	0,073384	3,046433	between groups: 2, within groups: 179	0.93	no
4	11,56472	3,064234	between groups: 2, within groups: 133	<0.001	between groups 1 and 2 & 1 and 3
5	6,442095	3,064234	between groups: 2, within groups: 133	0.002	between groups 1 and 2 & 1 and 3
6	6,490143	3,054771	between groups: 2, within groups: 154	0.002	between groups 1 and 2 & 1 and 3
7	7,666826	3,047012	between groups: 2, within groups: 177	<0.001	between groups 1 and 2 & 1 and 3
8	11,58181	3,047012	between groups: 2, within groups: 177	<0.001	between groups 1 and 2 & 1 and 3
9	0,002387	3,04852	between groups: 2, within groups: 172	1	no
10	0,86112	3,048833	between groups: 2, within groups: 171	0.42	no

**TABLE 3** One-way ANOVA and Post Hoc Tukey-Kramer Test to Assess the Impact of Marginalisation/Disadvantage on Disillusionment on a Personal Level

question #	F-statistic	F critical	df	p-value	significant difference
1	0,812242	3,045588	between groups: 2, within groups: 182	0.45	no
2	2,559725	3,054771	between groups: 2, within groups: 154	0.08	no
3	10,76771	3,046721	between groups: 2, within groups: 178	<0.001	between groups 1 and 2 & 1 and 3
4	4,453036	3,047307	between groups: 2, within groups: 176	0.01	between groups 1 and 3
5	7,636599	3,047012	between groups: 2, within groups: 177	<0.001	between groups 1 and 2 & 1 and 3
6	3,481182	3,047605	between groups: 2, within groups: 175	0.03	no
7	1,425149	3,046721	between groups: 2, within groups: 178	0.24	no
8	2,146887	3,049792	between groups: 2, within groups: 168	0.12	no
9	1,175216	3,047012	between groups: 2, within groups: 177	0.31	no
10	8,247000	3,04852	between groups: 2, within groups: 172	<0.001	between groups 1 and 2 & 1 and 3
11	18,37824	3,050451	between groups: 2, within groups: 166	<0.001	between groups 1 and 2 & 1 and 3
12	16,48921	3,051471	between groups: 2, within groups: 163	<0.001	between groups 1 and 2 & 1 and 3
13	30,72037	3,051471	between groups: 2, within groups: 163	<0.001	between groups 1 and 2 & 1 and 3