

SPARCS, Action E23-2 Espoo: The City as an Environment for New Business Development Version 1.1

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Angela Bartel, Mia Kaurila, Joni Mäkinen, Jani Tartia & Elina Wanne¹

¹ City of Espoo



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About SPARCS

Sustainable energy Positive & zero cARbon CommunitieS demonstrates and validates technically and socioeconomically viable and replicable, innovative solutions for rolling out smart, integrated positive energy systems for the transition to a citizen centred zero carbon & resource efficient economy. SPARCS facilitates the participation of buildings to the energy market enabling new services and a virtual power plant concept, creating VirtualPositiveEnergy communities as energy democratic playground (positive energy districts can exchange energy with energy entities located outside the district). Seven cities will demonstrate 100+ actions turning buildings, blocks, and districts into energy prosumers. Impacts span economic growth, improved quality of life, and environmental benefits towards the EC policy framework for climate and energy, the SET plan and UN Sustainable Development goals. SPARCS co-creation brings together citizens, companies, research organizations, city planning and decision making entities, transforming cities to carbon-free inclusive communities. Lighthouse cities Espoo (FI) and Leipzig (DE) implement large demonstrations. Fellow cities Reykjavik (IS), Maia (PT), Lviv (UA), Kifissia (EL) and Kladno (CZ) prepare replication with hands-on feasibility studies. SPARCS identifies bankable actions to accelerate market uptake, pioneers innovative, exploitable governance and business models boosting the transformation processes, joint procurement procedures and citizen engaging mechanisms in an overarching city planning instrument toward the bold City Vision 2050. SPARCS engages 30 partners from 8 EU Member States (FI, DE, PT, CY, EL, BE, CZ, IT) and 2 non-EU countries (UA, IS), representing key stakeholders within the value chain of urban challenges and smart, sustainable cities bringing together three distinct but also overlapping knowledge areas: (i) City Energy Systems, (ii) ICT and Interoperability, (iii) Business Innovation and Market Knowledge.



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SUMMARY

In SPARCS project, the City of Espoo examines possibilities that can support new business development in relation to the project demonstrations and smart city development in general. This paper presents the City of Espoo's current modes and processes of supporting and attracting new business development in the city. The paper briefly presents the general aims for business development support from the city's strategy 2017-2021 (called the 'Espoo Story') and the 'city as a platform' approach utilized in the city's service design and development; the results from annual surveys about Espoo as an operational environment for businesses from the enterprises' viewpoints; the Business Espoo service network for companies and entrepreneurs in Espoo, formed of multiple organizations, that support business development in the city; the cooperation through externally funded sustainable development projects that aim to tackle the city ambitious carbon neutrality targets and other facets of sustainable development; and the business development process that takes place through the city's strategic cooperation with different organizations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cities today act as global nodes for social, financial, and cultural flows. SPARCS (Sustainable energy Positive & zero cARbon CommunitieS, 2019–2024) project develops new innovative smart city solutions in the energy and electric mobility fields in the context of positive energy districts and urban areas, or PEDs, and the development work is done together with various stakeholders, including companies and citizens. As part of SPARCS, new business possibilities and models are examined, in specific in the growing PED and Smart City sectors. As part of one of the work packages of the project – *WP3 Espoo demonstrations* – the City of Espoo examines the role of the city in future smart city development, and how new business can be supported by linking project activities with national and international actors.

In this paper, some key aspects of business development in Espoo are examined from the city organization's perspective. The paper briefly presents the general aims for business development support from the city's strategy 2017-2021 (called the 'Espoo Story') and the 'city as a platform' approach utilized in the city's service design and development; the results from annual surveys about Espoo as an operational environment for businesses from the enterprises' viewpoints; the Business Espoo service network for companies and entrepreneurs in Espoo, formed of multiple organizations, that support business development projects that aim to provide solutions that support the city's ambitious carbon neutrality targets and other facets of sustainable development; and the business development process that take place through the city's strategic cooperation with different organizations.

This report is part of SPARCS's Work Package 3 'Espoo demonstrations', Task 3.8 'Smart business models', Subtask 3.8.3 'Smart business', Action E23-2.

2. ESPOO CITY

Espoo, with an area of 528km² (of which 312km² is land area), is currently the home for 290.000 residents, and the city's population increases by 4.500 residents a year. Espoo is part of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area in the southern Uusimaa region that consists of Finland's capital city Helsinki (630.000 residents), Espoo, Vantaa (220.000 residents) and Kauniainen (10.000 residents). Espoo has grown significantly since the 1950s and gained official 'city' status in 1972 (the city will celebrate the 50th anniversary of this event in 2022). In 2020, 75,1% of Espoo's population was Finnish-speaking, 6.9% Swedish-speaking (the second official national language in Finland), and 18% spoke other languages as their first language. The city is also the home of Aalto University and hosts campuses of two polytechnical institutions – together there are over 19.000 students in Espoo.¹ One key aim of the city regarding business development in the city is to connect skilled labor with companies requiring highly educated workers² and to foster innovation.

¹ Pocket Statistics 2020. City of Espoo. https://www.espoo.fi/fi FI/Espoon_kaupunki/Tietoa_Espoosta /Tilastot_ja_tutkimukset/Muut_teemat/Taskutilasto(5168)

² https://www.espoo.fi/fi-FI/Tyo_ja_yrittaminen/Elinkeino_ja_kaupunkikehitys/Kasvua_kansainvalisista _osaajista

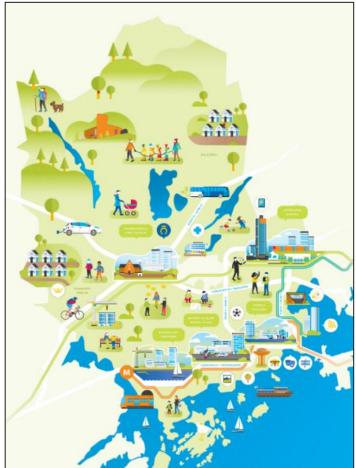
Espoo Story³, the city's strategy for the term 2017-2021, sets a target for Espoo to be a place for cooperation between different stakeholders, including the city, companies, organizations, and citizens. The city wants to develop, for example, municipal services with different stakeholders and service providers, the 'city as a service' model, and to be a responsible pioneer in general. City service development is done, for example, through the *Make With Espoo* digital environment that works as a platform for cooperation to develop learning and education practices and processes as well as other city services⁴. The Make With Espoo 'product family' also includes for manuals co-design in learning environments, descriptions of theoretical frameworks, and a databank of practical solutions and cases.⁵

Figure 1. Espoo, as depicted in the city's strategy Espoo Story 2017-2021. Source: City of Espoo.

3. ESPOO AND NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Espoo as an operational environment

In 2020, Espoo was the home of roughly 14.000 companies – or 19.000, if also calculating agricultural and housing companies. Together, the companies provided over 109.000 jobs, of which roughly 60 % were in the service sector, 20 % in retail and tourism, and 20 % in industry and construction. The level of self-sufficiency in jobs in Espoo was 91,7 % in 2020. In 2018, the highest number of jobs were found in retail, software and





³ https://www.espoo.fi/en-US/City_of_Espoo/Decisionmaking/The_Espoo_Story

⁴ https://makewithespoo.espoo.fi/en

⁵ https://www.espoo.fi/en-US/City_of Espoo/Information_about_Espoo/Publications/Make_with_Espoo _product_family(173689)

consultancy, education, and social care.⁶ The employment rate in Espoo was 75% in 2020, and the rate of unemployment $7,5\%^7$.

The city collects annual data about the attitudes and experiences of enterprises about Espoo as an operational environment for business operation. The Survey on the operational environment of enterprises 2020 ⁸highlighted key positive and negative characteristics of Espoo from the respondents' viewpoint. As the main positive aspects of Espoo in the survey, the respondents had highlighted (1) that Espoo is a generally good place for operating a business, a place where things 'work'; (2) the city's infrastructure and transportation connections; the city's positive attitude towards businesses; (3) the city's location close to Helsinki, as part of the capital metropolitan region; and (4) the availability of premises for businesses. In contrast, the main negative or hampering issues for the enterprises' operations highlighted in the survey were that (1) there are difficulties in getting a lot for the enterprise, and the planning and zoning processes were regarded slow; (2) permit processes take too much time and are bureaucratic in nature; (3) public transportation is inadequate, and bus connections are limited; (4) there are not enough suitable premises for businesses; (5) there are difficulties in finding suitable workers with desired education; (6) the public procurements need more clarity, transparency and better informing and information; and (7) there are inadequate business counselling processes available.

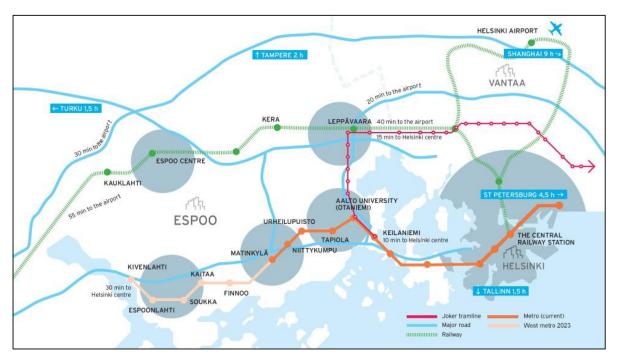


Figure 2. Main transportation connections in Espoo. Source: City of Espoo.

⁶ *Toimintaympäristön tila Espoossa 2021: Yritykset, työpaikat, työllisyys* (2021). Espoon kaupunki, Konsernihallinto, Tutkimus ja tilastot.

⁷ Pocket Statistics 2020. City of Espoo. https://www.espoo.fi/fi-FI/Espoon_kaupunki/Tietoa_Espoosta /Tilastot_ja_tutkimukset/Muut_teemat/Taskutilasto(5168)

⁸ Espoo yritysten toimintaympäristönä 2020. Espoon kaupunki. Taloustutkimus Oy.



Espoo, as a built environment, is characterized by five smaller urban centers that – as a network-kind of an urban structure – act as the focal points of housing and works place locations in the city. The five city centers are connected by road, bike path and rail connections. The rail connections have been identified as key development corridors in the city's strategy⁹. The first part of the city's metro line, with eight stations, was opened in 2017 – the line is a direct continuation to the already existing metro line in Helsinki (built in the 1980s). A further extension to the line is expected to be finished in 2023, which will cover the south-westerns parts of the municipality with five new stations, creating new mobility hubs and local urban centers.¹⁰ Workplaces have been steadily increasing alongside the metro line development corridor that connects Espoo with Helsinki, especially around the eastern station areas, such as Aalto University, Keilaniemi and Tapiola stations. Kera, a new urban district that will be developed on a brownfield area during the next few decades with construction planned to begin in 2022, is also one example of rail-based development, as the site is already covered by a commuter train connection. Kera will have 14.000 residents and 10.000 workplaces.¹¹ The new urban district of Finnoo is another example, developed on the metro line with 17.000 residents.¹² However, it seems that the global Covid-19 pandemic has had a negative effect on the general development of workplaces since 2020, which has had an effect also on the workplaces developing alongside the metro line.¹³ Also, the public transportation services outside the rail coverage in the middle and northern parts of the municipality require additional further development.

3.2 Business Espoo network

Business Espoo is a service network for companies and entrepreneurs in Espoo and the surrounding municipalities, formed by seven organizations. The goal is to increase the number of jobs and vitality in Espoo by producing customer-oriented, cost-effective, and high-quality services for companies and entrepreneurs.

It also important that the customer finds all the services from the same place and gets the support needed. Business Espoo provides advice at any step of a company's lifecycle, starting and developing a business, finding competent workers, international recruitment, internationalization, and growth. The goal is also to strengthen expertise within companies through training and help companies and investors to find the right contacts. Business Espoo also offers companies and entrepreneurs numerous networking opportunities through its training and other events.

⁹ https://www.espoo.fi/en-US/City_of_Espoo/Decisionmaking/The_Espoo_Story.

¹⁰ https://www.lansimetro.fi/en/home/

¹¹ https://www.espoo.fi/fi-FI/Asuminen_ja_ymparisto/Kaupunginosat/Kera

¹² https://www.espoo.fi/finnoo

¹³ Eetvartti 1/2021: https://www.espoo.fi/fi FI/Espoon_kaupunki/Tietoa_Espoosta/Tilastot_ja_ tutkimukset/Muut_teemat/Eetvarttineljannesvuosijulkaisu(563)



Figure 3. Frontpages of Business Espoo and Enter Espoo webpages. Sources: https://www.businessespoo.com/en-US, https://www.enterespoo.fi/.

Business Espoo is physically located in the heart of Otaniemi area – where Aalto University is also located – in an innovation hub building called 'A Grid'. With all the services available under one roof, the companies and entrepreneurs in Espoo and the rest of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area will be able to handle their affairs more easily and quickly.

- Enter Espoo¹⁴

Enter Espoo combines Innovation ecosystem and travel ecosystem Visit Espoo. Enter Espoo helps companies, investors, visitors, and travel professionals to access business opportunities and exciting adventures. Their aim is to find the right services, startups, and technologies to support companies' business goals and also support finding reliable partners and locations – so basically to land company to Espoo and make sure that everything is working out and also to provide support in every step of the way.

Travelers and visitors are important for Espoo and Enter Espoo offers services in that regard. Visit Espoo offers services, information, guidance, and opportunities for local and international visitors to provide the best visitor experience in Espoo.

- Espoon Yrittäjät

Espoon Yrittäjät is a local part of national Suomen Yrittäjät, the largest and most influential business federation in Finland. Their membership currently consists of more than 115.000 businesses of all sizes, from all corners of the country, and includes the entire range of businesses and entrepreneurs. The membership structure reflects Finnish business life as a whole.

Espoon Yrittäjät plays an active role in ensuring political decision-makers act to improve small and medium-sized enterprises' operating environment. They also provide information to the public to help influence opinions and raise awareness of entrepreneurship.

¹⁴ https://www.enterespoo.fi/



- The Helsinki Region Chamber

The Chamber of Commerce promotes the success of companies in the Helsinki region. The Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce is one of the largest chambers of commerce based on voluntary membership in Europe. The Chamber of Commerce supplies high-standard services to its members, represents the business community and lobbies for its interests. Free advisory services are a benefit of HRCC membership. The Chamber also provides a wide variety of training courses on topics of current interest. The Chamber of Commerce brings its extensive selection of services and training to A Grid premises as well as its network of 7.000 established companies for the benefit of start-ups.

Omnia¹⁵

Omnia is promoting inclusion, skills and well-being of citizens and boosting the vitality of municipalities, communities, and enterprises of the region. Omnia is a large and modern provider of education that offers a wide range of services with a focus on supporting lifelong learning. Their actions are guided by the changing needs of the future. Omnia offers vocational and general upper secondary education, youth workshops, professional Diplomas and liberal adult educations as well as corporate training and professional courses and recruitment support.

Uudenmaan TE-toimisto

TE-toimisto helps Helsinki region-based people with recruiting, finding a suitable career prospects and companies to find employees. They also coordinate training, offers information and guidance, and takes care of benefits of unemployed. Its goal is also to support and develop job applicants' education and build capacity.

There are 15 regional TE-centers in Finland. Since 2013 Helsinki region-based office has also been part of Employment and Economic Development centre and a part of the Business Espoo ecosystem.

- YritysEspoo¹⁶

YritysEspoo supports businesses and entrepreneurs through the whole lifecycle of the company. They aim to guide and help entrepreneurs with challenges they might face through personal appointments and service. They also provide events, articles, and trainings.

¹⁵ https://www.omnia.fi/internationalomnia

¹⁶ https://www.yritysespoo.fi/en/

3.3 Cooperation and business opportunities through sustainable development projects

Sustainable development projects can not only create connections between the city and new businesses, but also provides a platform to develop new business models. Cooperation with businesses in the projects has included close partnerships, shared projects, co-creation, and agile piloting on new innovative services.

One example of the sustainable development projects in Espoo is the recently started Ratkaisupolku Kestävän Kasvun *Ekosysteemeihin* (RAKKE) project 'Pathway (Finnish for to Sustainable Ecosystems'), 2021-2023. The aim of the RAKKE project is to strengthen the collaboration between the public and private sector in the overall development of innovations and entrepreneurship of low-carbon transportation, energy, circular economy as well as smart urban solutions. RAKKE aims to create a foundation for even more effective project and development activities, in which Espoo and Uusimaa region will act as forerunners in achieving carbon neutrality bv revitalisation and by developing competitiveness. RAKKE strives



Figure 4. UN Sustainable Development Goals play key role in the City of Espoo's sustainable development targets. Source: City of Espoo.

to build impressive ecosystems for the key growth areas of the green and digital transformation together with a network of 100 companies and developers.¹⁷

The development project will also serve as an important steppingstone for future development projects. Espoo's development operations are focused on four programmes, one of which is the Sustainable Espoo programme. The aim of Sustainable Espoo is to create and enhance a safe, healthy, and functioning everyday life in a carbon neutral and economically sustainable city.¹⁸ To reach the goal of carbon neutrality by 2030 and the UN sustainable development goals by 2025, the city is extensively working together with partners and citizens. Espoo is actively seeking for new opportunities to bring together companies, researchers, and other actors and developers to create a sustainable city and at the same time create new and profitable business opportunities for companies and entrepreneurs. For the city of Espoo, it is important to include different actors in development processes. The cooperation brings forward new perspectives and different

¹⁷https://www.espoo.fi/en-US/Housing_and_environment/Sustainable_development/Looking _for_hundred_partners_to_promote_(193172)

¹⁸ For more information see https://www.espoo.fi/sustainableespoo



views and experiences. Beside noble network-based cooperation also partnership models are used to establish long-term commitments between the city and its partners.

3.4 Business through strategic collaboration

The City of Espoo is working in collaboration with different organizations within the field of sustainable development, including several organizations that have entered into strategic agreements with the city. The emergence of new business within Espoo is a key objective in these strategic agreements, and all the collaborating organizations invest heavily in accelerating the creation of new business and encouraging entrepreneurship. This section will look into the different business services on an organization-byorganization basis.

3.4.1 VTT

The City of Espoo signed a strategic partnership agreement up to 2025 with VTT (Technical Research Centre of Finland Ltd.) in 2020¹⁹. A key vision in this agreement is to build Espoo to be a forerunner in sustainable development by supporting and strengthening the creation of new innovations and investments. The agreement aims to focus developing Espoo's strategic competencies in four sectors:

- City as a service
- The city as an environment for innovation
- Building a carbon-neutral future
- Strengthening Espoo's appeal for national and international expertise

VTT has several different services for creating new business from innovation, with the VTT Launchpad²⁰ and deep tech fund Voima Ventures²¹ being two examples. Both of these examples focus heavily on the commercialization of VTT-made research projects. VTT Launchpad is an incubator program focusing on commercializing VTT-owned research for a more competitive local and national economy. Beginning in 2019, the program has already caught interest within its target audience, and multiple start-up companies have begun their journey through this program, leading them to gain funding to further enhance their business ideas for a more sustainable future.

3.4.2 Aalto University

The City of Espoo has had a strategic partnership agreement with local technical, business and arts university Aalto since 2021, with a continuation of the agreement agreed upon on 16.6.2020²². Similarly to the partnership agreement with VTT, this agreement focuses on building compelling environments for living, working, research and education while encouraging local entrepreneurship and business.

Aalto has a wealth of services for creating and growing new business, such as entrepreneurial societies for students (Aaltoes²³), business incubators/accelerators

¹⁹ https://www.espoo.fi/en-US/City_of_Espoo/Espoo_and_VTT_agree_on_strategic_coopera(186608)

²⁰ https://www.vttresearch.com/en/vtt-launchpad

²¹ https://voimaventures.com/

²² https://www.aalto.fi/fi/uutiset/espoo-ja-aalto-syventavat-strategista-kumppanuuttaan (in Finnish)

²³ https://www.aaltoes.com/

(Aalto Startup Center²⁴), workspaces (A Grid²⁵, Design Factory²⁶) and events (FallUP²⁷, Junction²⁸ and Dash²⁹ hackathons). Aalto also collaborates with other ecosystems focusing on growing sustainable business, such as Smart Otaniemi, which is closely connected to the SPARCS project, and Urban Mill. More on these ecosystems will be explained in the next section.

3.4.3 Smart Otaniemi and Urban Mill

Smart Otaniemi is an innovation platform connecting experts on smart and sustainable solutions for the urban environment. The aim is to provide a city platform to research, develop and innovate, in order to provide commercially successful solutions on an international scale³⁰. The SPARCS project collaborates with Smart Otaniemi through subtask 3.8.2 and action E23-1. Within the grant agreement of the project, subtask 3.8.2 is explained as follows:

'Smart Otaniemi innovation ecosystem as facilitator of developing bankable smart city solutions for worldwide replication. Focus areas: efficient use of energy, intelligent use of data, and creating solutions for real customers.'

Achieving the aims of this subtask has focused on networking activities arranged by the Smart Otaniemi ecosystem, with an aim of exchanging knowledge and enabling further replication and innovation of smart city solutions worldwide. By September 2020, the Smart Otaniemi ecosystem had already arranged several events, such as open clinics, virtual events, workshops and seminars³¹.

The city of Espoo is also strategic partner of the Urban Mill ecosystem situated in Otaniemi. Urban Mill is an ecosystem that connects people to create new innovations for a better urban life³². They offer spaces for events, entrepreneurship, and development. In addition, they offer networking for urban development, and practical challenges for experts to develop their solutions. Urban Mill was developed as a solution on providing means to collaborate within city planning and development, which had been on the agenda of both Aalto University and the City of Espoo, as can be seen, for example, from their strategic agreement signed on 13.1.2012. Since its inception in 2013 until 2017, the ecosystem had already connected 100 000 event participants and 1000 organizations in 3000 events. In addition, the ecosystem had developed over 50 start-up enterprises in this same timeframe.

²⁴ https://startupcenter.aalto.fi/

²⁵ https://agrid.fi/

²⁶ https://designfactory.aalto.fi/

²⁷ https://www.fallup.fi/

²⁸ https://www.hackjunction.com/

²⁹ https://www.dash.design/

³⁰ https://smartotaniemi.fi/

 $^{^{\}rm 31}$ D3.1 Detailed plan of the Espoo smart city lighthouse demonstrations

³² https://urbanmill.org/



3.4.4 Other agreements and collaboration

In addition to the agreements mentioned before, Espoo has also signed partnership agreements with companies with a similar strategic mindset, such as Fortum³³ and Caruna³⁴. The aim of these two agreements is to build a sustainable and competitive energy system within Espoo by creating carbon-neutral and smart energy solutions. The Espoo-Fortum agreement especially focuses on:

- Espoo Clean Heat 100% Carbon-neutral district heating by 2029.
- Advancing demand side management and ecoheating services.
- Sustainable energy solutions in rapidly growing districts

The Espoo-Caruna agreement on strategic cooperation focuses on building a resilient and modern electricity network that can support the future energy solutions to meet the needs of a transition towards carbon-neutrality. With this agreement the city also aims to promote important themes for a sustainable and smart energy system, such as energy storage, electric mobility and renewable energy solutions. Both of these strategic agreements also aim to incorporate additional partners to develop new solutions via cooperation. In addition, Espoo also collaborates with other local educational organizations, such as universities of applied sciences Laurea and Metropolia. As an example, with Metropolia Espoo collaborated in the project Duunipolku³⁵, which focused on aiding young immigrants in entrepreneurship.

4. CONCLUSION

This report has presented the current status of new business development in Espoo, including some of the key strategic approaches, organizations, and practical tools that the city organization uses to foster new business possibilities.

A new city council was selected for Espoo in the municipal elections of summer 2021, which means that a new strategy for the city, for the term 2021-2025, is currently being produced. Whether there will changes in how business development in the city is approached remains to be seen.

³³https://www.espoo.fi/en-US/City_of_Espoo/Decisionmaking/The_Espoo_Story/Sustainable _Espoo/Fortum_and_the_City_of_Espoo_carry_out_c(101773)

³⁴ https://www.espoo.fi/en-US/A_carbonneutral_future_is_the_common_goa(192551)

³⁵ https://www.metropolia.fi/fi/opiskelu-metropoliassa/maahanmuuttajille/duunipolkuyrittajyysopinnot.

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https://www.omnia.fi/internationalomnia

https://smartotaniemi.fi/

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https://startupcenter.aalto.fi/ https://urbanmill.org/ https://voimaventures.com/ https://www.vttresearch.com/en/vtt-launchpad https://www.yritysespoo.fi/en/