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SMART CITY CHALLENGE 2025

City Challenge

Max 3 pages

send to smartcity@taltech.ee by Sept 30, 2025

Challenge Title: **Campuses Fostering the Creative Economy** (max 5 words, no acronyms)

City/county and country: **TalTech campus in Tallinn/Estonia**

Main contact from your city/county: **Riina Uska, Tallinn University of Technology (Taltech; a campus real estate developer), Real Estate Development Director, riina.uska@taltech.ee, +372 56887909, +372 6202009**

1. What is the future urban challenge that would need a solution to?

- Please describe the challenge of your city / county neighboring a city?

Creativity and creative districts drive both cultural and economic development. The question is, which spatial and social strategies allow campuses to become inclusive urban commons that foster encounters, learning and innovation? How do contemporary campuses enable and support the emergence of creative communities, the core of the so-called creative economy? Cities could utilise the information produced by the research in urban development, urban planning and business activities on stronger social ties, improved well-being, accessible cultural programming and better business.

- Which category your challenge is primarily in: safe city, happy city, and climate resilient city?

Happy city. Contributing to the selected Happy Cities sustainability goal to improve the overall quality of life through human-centred urban design, mental well-being, social connections, and better access to nature and culture, campuses improve everyday experiences of students and staff, residents, and visitors through shared spaces, cultural exchange, and accessible green areas. Campuses support stronger social ties, improved well-being, and accessible cultural programming. Campuses train future actors in tech, software, and startup ecosystems, enabling the growth of city-based high-tech enterprises. They enhance economic productivity and cultural vibrancy, which in turn can affect the sense of meaning and happiness.

- Why is it important for your city to solve it? How big priority it is for you and why?

In the 2000s, the Helsinki Metropolitan Area has invested in developing local clusters of innovative actors (including the Aalto University campus, the University of Helsinki city centre and Viikki campuses, the campuses of banks and insurance companies, the entrepreneurship campuses A Grid and Maria 0-1, and the design, arts, software, cultural and media industries' premises in Vallila, Kera and Veromies). Following these precedents, business districts and innovation campuses in Tallinn include most of all Tallinn Science Park Tehnopol (connected to Taltech campus in Mustamäe) and Ülemiste Smart City. The urban renewal planning of Taltech's campus has just started and one urgently needs input from also totally new R&D to this. There should be more research and development on the design strategies of campuses. If this is not carried out, there is a risk that urban development and urban planning will be continued "as before", in which case lacking will be enabling innovative communities of students, staff, residents, and entrepreneurs. The lack of research may also contribute to capital



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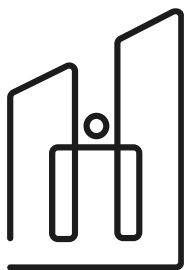


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regions falling behind and being left out of European and global development, where knowledge-intensive and creative sectors could use urban spaces as platforms for research, innovative activities, and testing, and one will lose local experts and innovators elsewhere. Better campus–city integration helps cities attract and keep creative and international talent and avoid brain drain.

- Is this a unique challenge/problem of your city, why or is this by your knowledge a challenge/problem that many cities have – which kind of other cities?

Creativity is the foundation of cultural, innovation and economic development in cities. The creative economy includes research and development, software, communications, media and marketing, hospitality, design and art sectors, as well as education and cultural actors. What kind of physical environments and operating methods support the economy and can certain elements of success be identified? Campuses are where future actors in these sectors are trained and tested as part of the urban economy. What kind of physical environments and operating methods support the creative economy and can certain elements of success be identified? – These are all questions concerning most cities.

2. Innovation.

- How have you solved that issue so far? Why aren't the present solutions good enough? Are there legal obstacles, which ones?

This far the field has been too top-down, too focused on real estate, without enough lived-experience input from users. Workers and executives are the core users in business campuses. Students and staff are key populations in university campuses, alongside the residents and workers of the nearby areas. These are often more international than the remaining city. Research into the development of campus-like places has been incomplete (focused only on the interests of universities) or has focused on only one perspective (either technology companies or art actors). The development of campus-like communities has also been, in part, a waste of resources due to the lack of a broad perspective. Internationally, the theme area lacks an approach that examines the construction of innovation and cultural communities (co-working districts, hybrid learning hubs, communities around infrastructure such as research facilities and maker spaces). What is also missing is a thorough analysis of actor ecosystems by combining insight from many disciplines simultaneously.

- What should be the main features, characteristics of the future solution to be potentially best for that challenge or problem?

There is a need to explore the potential of the traditional campus idea, i.e. a place-bound knowledge hub and network of actors, in future urban development and urban economy. Universities as well as cities in the metropolitan areas need research-based knowledge regarding the development of campus-like urban environments as knowledge hubs. Methods are needed for spatial design, new forms of social interaction, and operational methods for open innovation. One needs better processes and techniques for campus environments supporting the emergence of creative communities and innovation ecosystems, and for how value creation processes (tangible economic vitality, cultural production, and citizen well-being) can be supported. Campuses can no longer be understood as isolated institutional blocks. They are porous urban nodes, functioning as inclusive urban commons that connect students, researchers, entrepreneurs, and residents with city life. That connection to citizens and the wider city should be made explicit by new solutions. Campus-like environments can become inclusive hubs linking education, innovation, and culture with city life, but what is at present lacking is better utilisation of the value (social vitality, cultural energy, or economic return) that arises in the network, the role of actors and space (physical,



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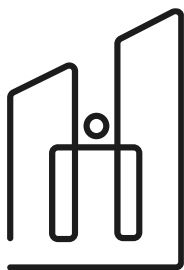


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digital and hybrid space), and the functioning of networks and self-organisation. The creative and knowledge-intensive economy has been studied internationally at the city level, but more research, methods, processes and tools are needed for the campus, place, neighbourhood and building cluster scale and for the functioning of communities. For example, an AI tool could feed into real, physical campus interventions (not only digital modelling), and contribute to concrete outputs, like tested public space pilots.

3. Expected impact of your pilot solution.

- What is the expected impact to your city environment you expect to see if the challenge gets solved?

Graduates and innovators launch ventures that generate jobs, foster cultural exchange, and drive economic vitality. This gives scalable solutions for mid-sized cities while supporting new entrepreneurial initiatives emerging from research and co-creation labs. Campuses can act as generators of technological innovation, design creativity and contributors to the city, embedding high-tech and design ventures into urban economies and helping retain talent locally.

- What is the expected impact to your citizens you expect to see if the challenge gets solved?

The public realm shifts from passive places to vibrant hubs for collaboration, creativity, and well-being. Common infrastructure, open gardens, shared workshops, event centres and multipurpose spaces form networked human-centered ecosystems that strengthen social connections, mental health, and give a venue for the creative expressions of local residents. IoT-enabled smart technology ensures safe public spaces, while integrated green and blue infrastructure mitigates flooding and urban heat islands, boosting climate resilience.

- What is the expected impact to your city governance you expect to see if the challenge gets solved?

The development of campus-like environments and related research has not yet been carried out in cooperation between cities, universities and companies. This involves politicians, officials, students, faculty, neighbours, cultural groups, innovators and local businesses. Insights from campus pilots might help a city department of culture design shared programming between students, workers and local communities, or test shared public realm strategies. Research information also helps dialogue and cooperation between different units in cities: how the opportunities of innovative ecosystems can be considered in, for example, the work of business, cultural services, land use and geospatial services.

4. Piloting

- Why would you be interested to become a piloting partner of a proposed solution to the challenge you are describing here? Describe shortly your capability to participate.

The next step in the campus planning of Taltech is to submit a detailed planning application to the city of Tallin for the new buildings and being a piloting partner in the City Challenge Programme would support this project in an excellent feasible way and elevate its ambition. The real estate unit of Taltech is also working on the Mustamäe campus vision for 2060, taking into account the university's long-term strategy and vision, and the real estate unit of Taltech is happy to become a piloting partner and can put needed working hours to this project that perfectly fits its needs to get visionary support to the campus development.



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