

An underwater scene with numerous tadpoles swimming in clear water. Large green lily pads are visible on the left side, and sunlight filters through the water from the top, creating a bright, shimmering effect. The overall color palette is dominated by greens and blues.

# HELSINKI BIENNIAL

**HAM**

**Impact Assessment: Helsinki Biennial 2025**  
Towards the summer's must-see event

Helsinki

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**This impact assessment presents the key results of Helsinki Biennial 2025, evaluated impacts of the exhibition event, and recommendations for developing the Biennial. The assessment is based on interviews and background materials provided by HAM Helsinki Art Museum.**

Helsinki Biennial 2025 – Impact Assessment

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Authors: Demos Helsinki (Sofia Suomalainen, Salla Kässi, Jenni Kilpi, Victor Wahlroos)

Commissioned by: HAM Helsinki Art Museum



Olafur Eliasson: Viewing machine, 2001/2003, detail. Helsinki Biennial 8.6.–21.9.2025, Vallisaari Island.  
© 2001/2003 Olafur Eliasson. Photo: HAM / Helsinki Biennial / Maija Toivanen

# 1. Helsinki Biennial 2025 in a nutshell

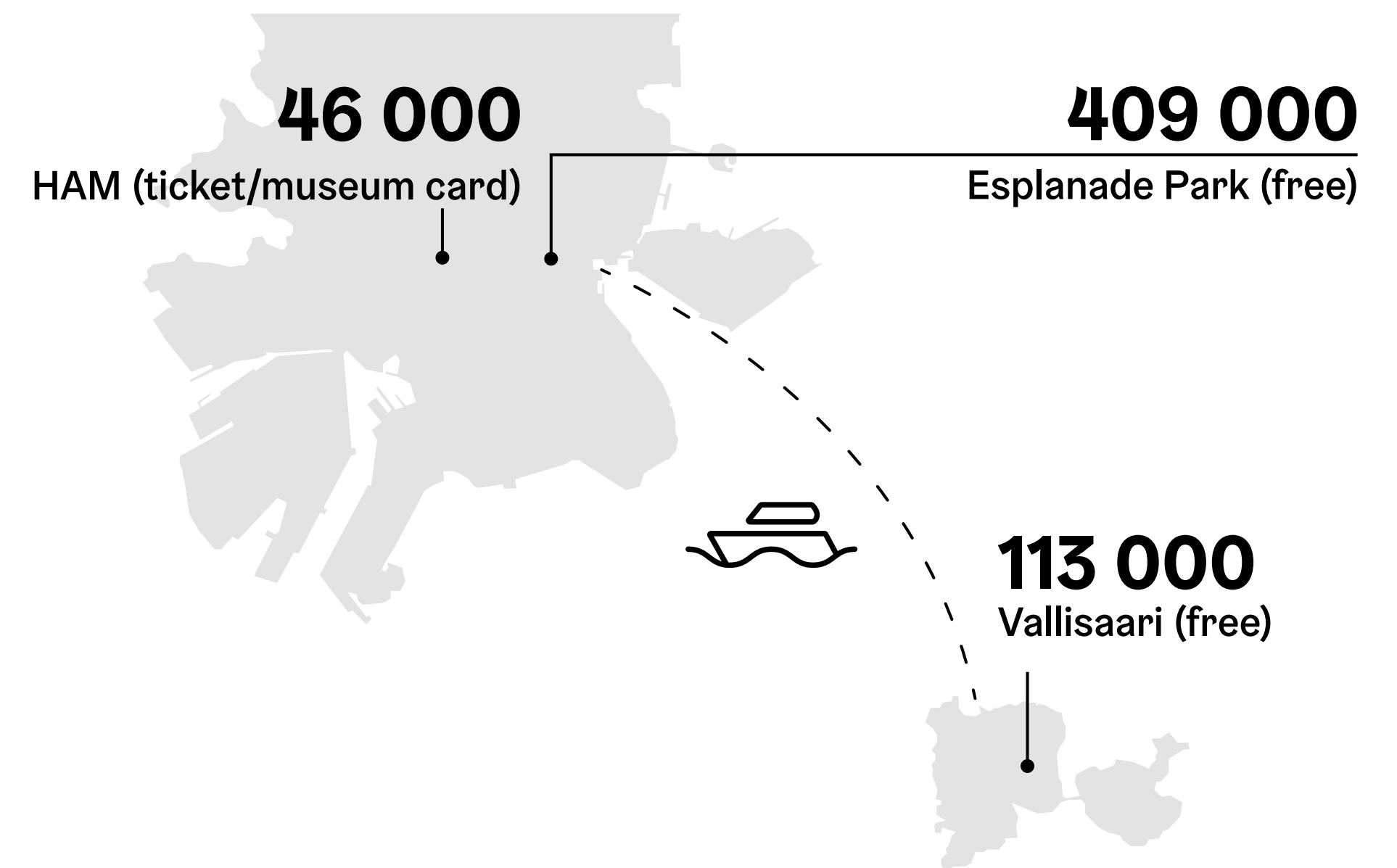
**Helsinki Biennial** is an **international contemporary art event** produced by HAM Helsinki Art Museum. The Biennial was held for the third time from 8 June to 21 September 2025. The 2025 edition explored the fragile coexistence of humans and nature through the theme: *Shelter: Below and Beyond, Becoming and Belonging*.

Over the summer and early autumn, the Biennial reached a total of 568,000 people across three venues: **Vallisaari, Esplanade Park**, and **HAM**. Vallisaari and Esplanade were free of charge. Entry to HAM required a ticket for visitors aged 18+ (EUR 20 / 12 / Museum Card).

In addition, the Biennial's **Preview Days**, targeted at professionals, were delivered on a larger scale than before and reached over 850 contemporary art and museum professionals. The Preview Days were organised for the first time in cooperation with Frame Contemporary Art Finland ry.

The Biennial is produced in close cooperation with the City of Helsinki, the event's main funder. This collaboration supports the City's strategy—particularly the development of maritime Helsinki—as well as its goals for cultural and sustainable urban development. HAM is a subsidiary foundation of the City of Helsinki.

The third Biennial reached **568 000** people and featured **37** artists and art collectives from around the world.



**Helsinki Biennial 2025 presented 57 works or artwork ensembles, half of which premiered at the event. Seven works from the 2025 Biennial will remain permanently in Helsinki and in HAM's collections.**

## 2. Key findings at a glance: Towards the summer's must-see event

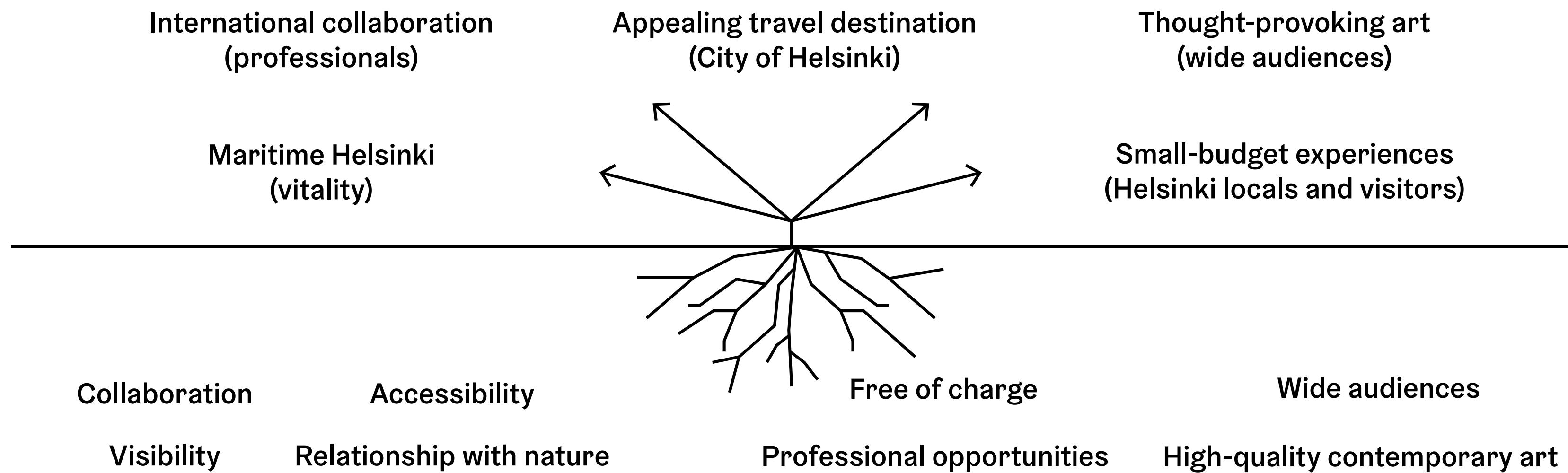
Helsinki Biennial's goal is to establish an internationally recognised, high-quality visual arts event in Helsinki – one that charms both local audiences and visitors. The Biennial is developed with a long-term perspective, with attention to its ecological, cultural, and social impacts.

**The 2025 Biennial succeeded in its objectives of reaching broader and more satisfied audiences than previously. Based on the impact assessment, this success stems from the combined effect of several mutually reinforcing choices and actions.**

Taken together, the results reflect a combination of curatorial decisions, proactive outreach to international professional audiences, and persistent efforts to broaden audiences by improving accessibility, communications, and marketing.

Based on the background data, the Biennial is not quite yet visitors' number-one summer event, and there is still room for improvement. However, the foundation is strong: what makes the Biennial distinctive—**the dialogue between nature and art**—is recognised and appreciated.

# Impacts



## The Biennial charms locals and visitors

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Budget

**€4.2 million**

Vallisaari

Esplanade Park

HAM

Human resources

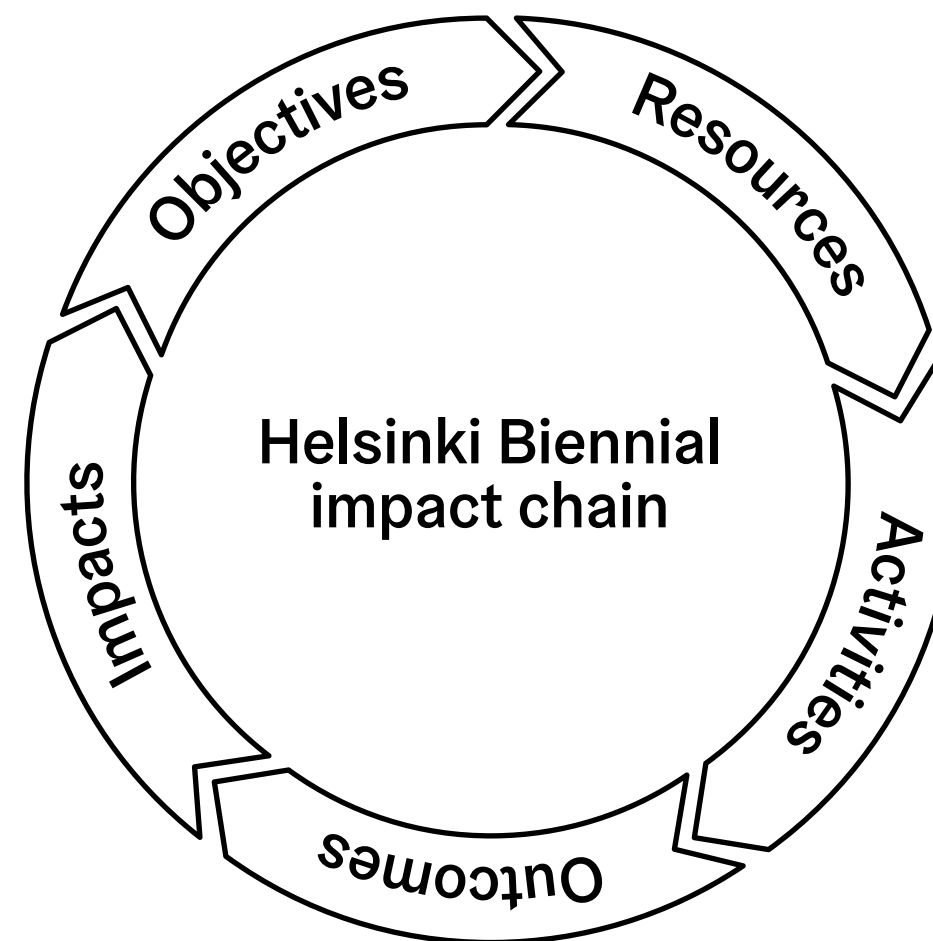
**53 person-years (FTE)**

# 3. Background and methods

The assessment is based on background materials collected by HAM Helsinki Art Museum, such as visitor and artist feedback.\* The findings were further refined through interviews with the event's key partners.

The assessment was carried out by Demos Helsinki and draws on the IOOI framework, which evaluates impacts in relation to resources, objectives, activities, and measures implemented.\*\*

In 2025, the Helsinki Biennial's particular objectives were to broaden audiences and increase the event's visibility, thereby strengthening Helsinki's appeal and vitality. The impact assessment focuses especially on these objectives.



## Guiding questions for the 2025 impact assessment:

What impacts did Helsinki Biennial 2025 have on Helsinki residents and visitors?

How did the event contribute to Helsinki's vitality and the vibrancy of the city centre?

How did the event enhance Helsinki's international recognition as a cultural and contemporary arts city?

What is the broader significance of these impacts in terms of cultural and sustainable urban development overall?

\* The full list of sources is provided at the end.

\*\* IOOI impact chain: inputs–outputs–outcomes–impacts (Sitra, 2018, Vaikuttavuuden askelmerkit, Sitra Studies 130).

# 4. Event resources

In 2025, the event's project budget managed by HAM was EUR 4.2 million, and the staff resources included in the project budget were estimated at around 53 FTE-years.\*

The main funder was the City of Helsinki. Other funding consisted of HAM Helsinki Art Museum's own contribution, support from foundations, and the estimated benefit generated by corporate partnerships.

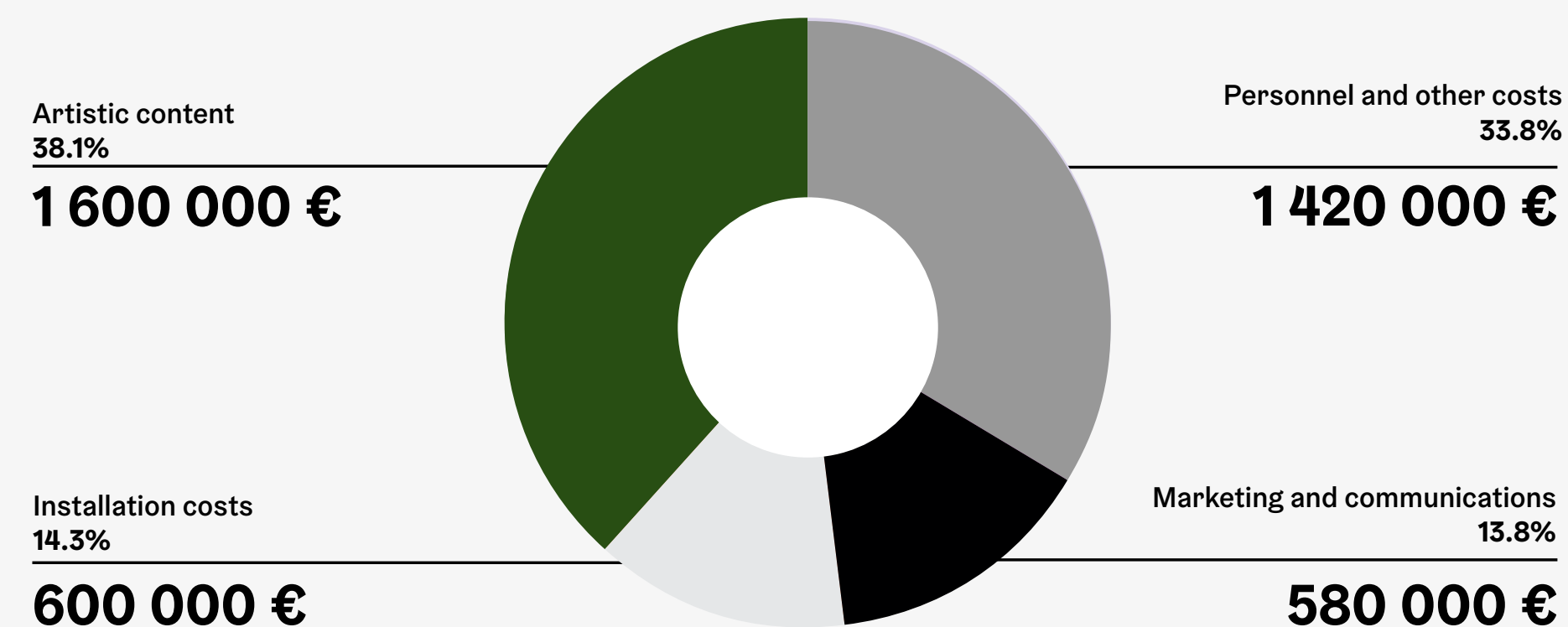
HAM's transition to a foundation model in 2023 has enabled multi-year budgeting and more flexible external fundraising. In 2025, combined support from domestic foundations totalled EUR 780,400, and support from foreign embassies and foundations totalled EUR 60,360.

Foundation funding and corporate partnerships play a significant role in delivering the event as a whole. Without them, production and marketing communications could not be carried out at the current scale, and the event's impacts would be smaller.

## Partners and collaborators in 2025 included:

*City of Helsinki; Jane and Aatos Erkko Foundation; Tiftö Foundation; Saastamoinen Foundation; John Nurminen Foundation; Finnish Heritage Agency and the Finnish Cultural Foundation; Metsähallitus; Helsingin Sanomat; S Group hotels; and a number of international foundations and embassies. The Preview Days were implemented in cooperation with Frame Contemporary Art Finland and contemporary arts organisations in the Helsinki region.*

## Biennial cost structure



**Project budget 2024-2025: EUR 4.2 million**

(excluding HAM's fixed premises costs)

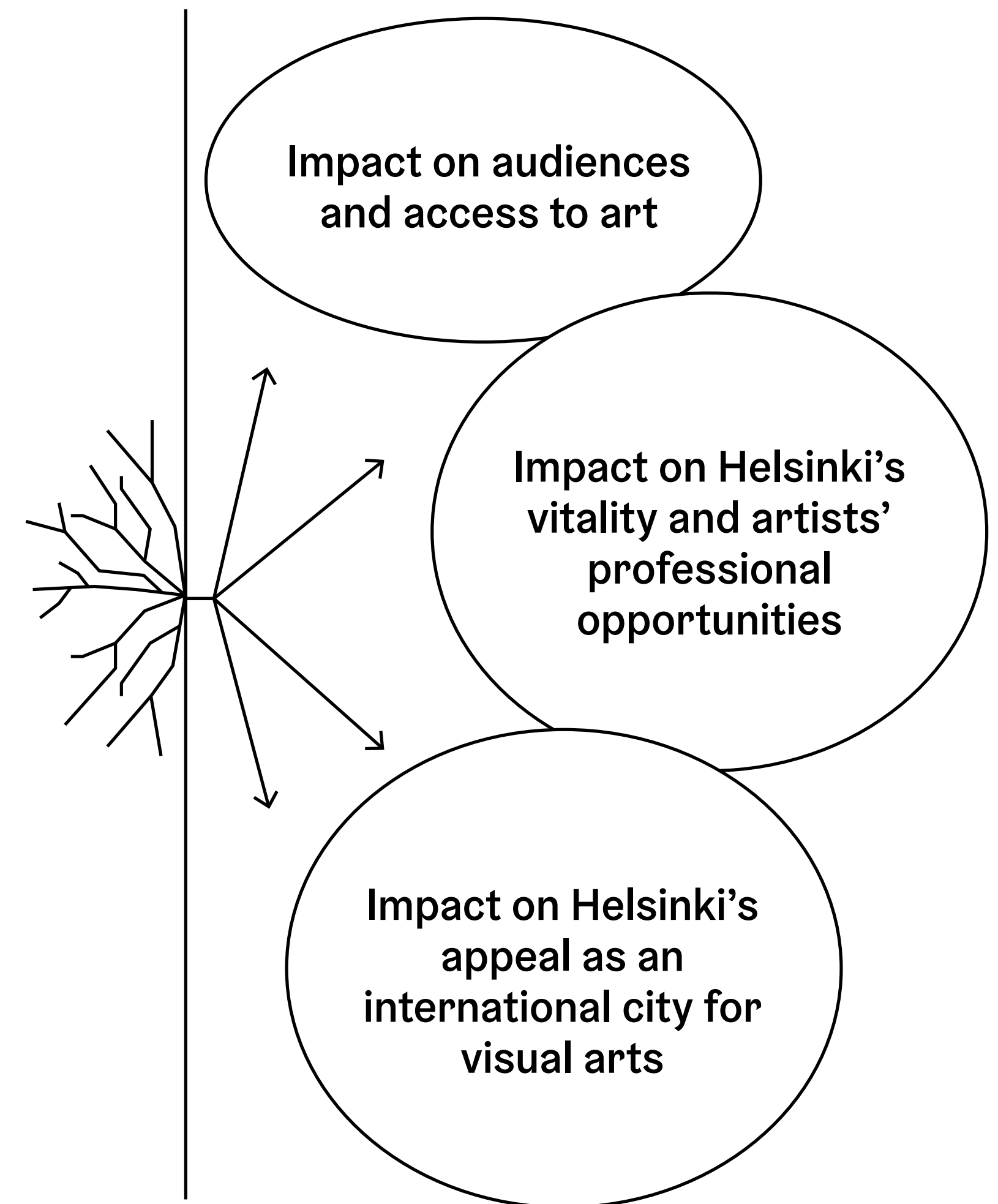
\* In addition, a significant number of staff from partner organisations and HAM contribute to the Biennial; their salary costs are not included in the Biennial project budget.

# 5. Development activities implemented in 2025

The assessment examines the Biennial's impacts across three impact areas, based on the objectives set for the Helsinki Biennial 2025 and the development activities implemented. These are: impacts on audiences and the accessibility of art; impacts on Helsinki's appeal as an international contemporary arts city; and impacts on Helsinki's vitality and artists' professional opportunities.

## Key development activities implemented to enhance the Biennial's impacts in 2025:

- Developing the visitor journey to improve visitor satisfaction and experience
- Improving artwork placement, signage, artwork texts, and information provision
- Emphasising visuality and a strong visitor experience in curatorial work
- Reducing the ferry ticket price by 50% to EUR 10
- Expanding the delivery of the Preview Days in cooperation with contemporary arts partners
- Investing in marketing and communications, including hiring a social media lead and developing media relations to increase domestic and international visibility
- Preparing a sustainability plan and updating the EcoCompass system
- Concentrating works previously dispersed around the city to Esplanade Park
- Streamlining production and marketing communications workflows and investing in tools and documentation



# 6. Helsinki Biennial 2025: results and impacts

The 2025 results tell of a successful major public event that reached broader and more satisfied audiences than before. The visitor target was achieved, and compared to the 2023 Biennial, the visitor experience improved significantly.

As many as 94% of visitors said the Biennial either exceeded expectations (58%) or met expectations (36%). Based on the reviewed materials, the Biennial's recognition increased among both international and domestic audiences, and the selection of artworks in the Esplanade Park reached a large new audience.



Photo: N2 Albiino

# 84%

of visitors say they will return

(2023: 68%)

# 800+

media hits

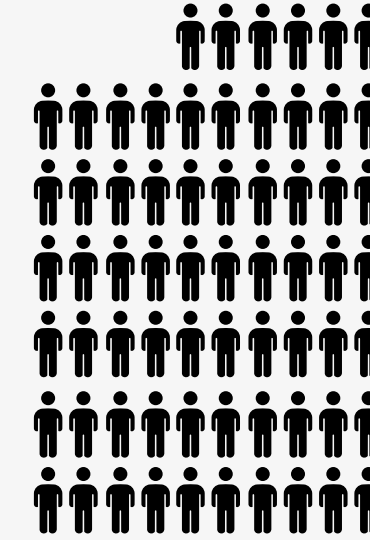
(domestic and international visibility)

# +50

Net Promoter Score

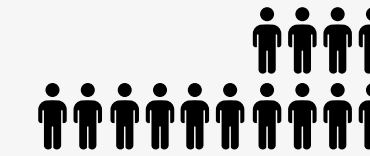
(2023: NPS -1)

## Helsinki Biennial 2025 visitor structure



### 66%

Employed



### 14%

Students



### 12%

Retired



### 8%

Outside the workforce

### 21%

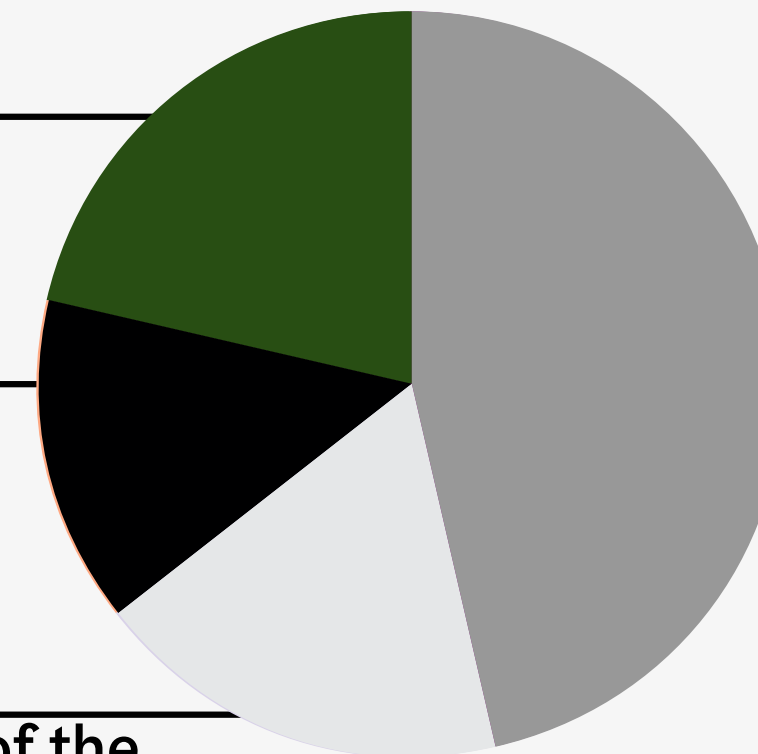
From abroad

### 14%

From other parts of Finland

### 18%

From other parts of the Helsinki metropolitan area



### 46%

Local residents

# 6.1 Impacts on audiences and the accessibility of art: lingering passers-by and first-time visitors

**Audiences broadened, visitor targets were reached, and the Esplanade installations brought art into the city's vibrant centre**

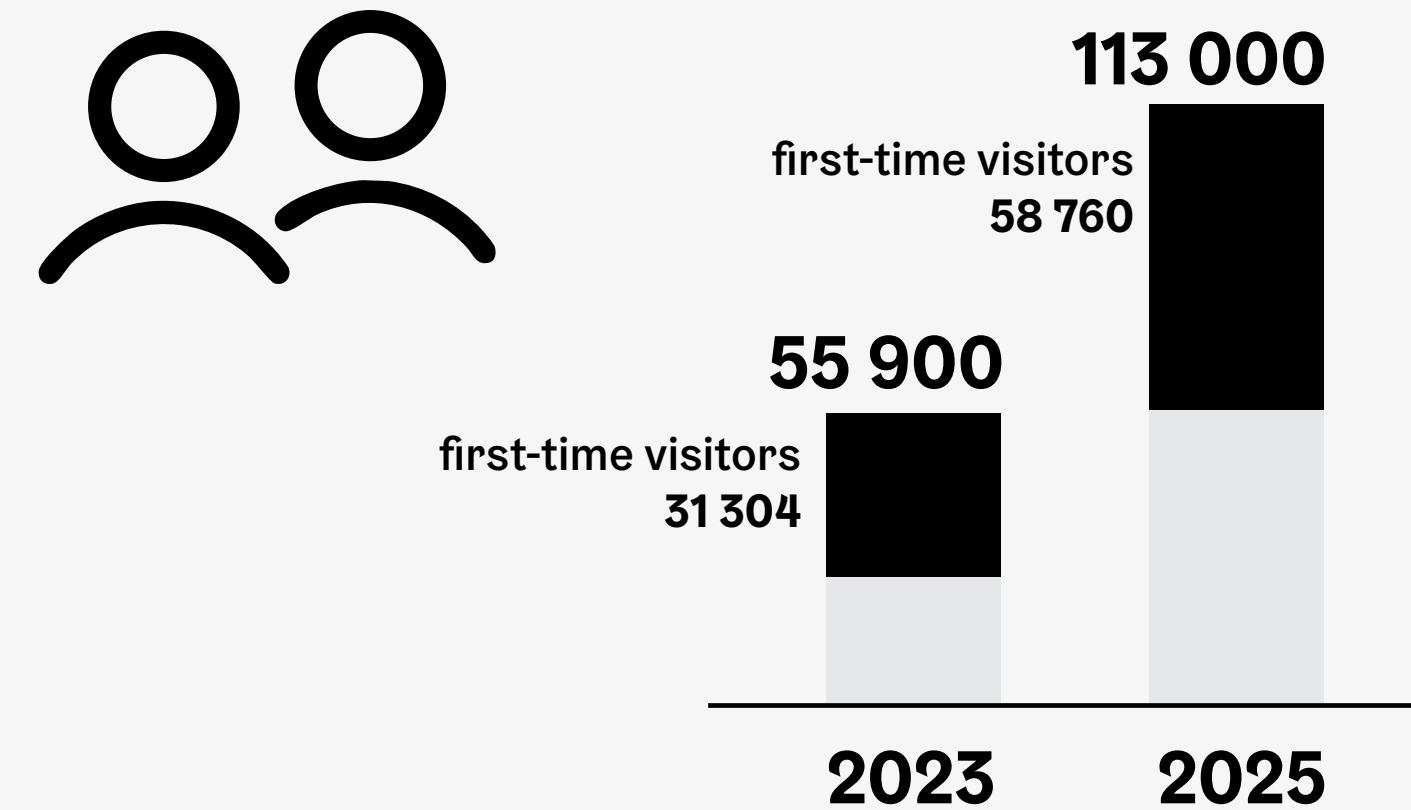
Over 113,000 visitors visited Vallisaari, and nearly 46,000 visited HAM Helsinki Art Museum. The Esplanade installations, in turn, brought art into the heart of the city—along the routes of passers-by, into the rhythm of summer days, and easily accessible to tourists. An estimated 409,000 people experienced art at Esplanade park during the summer.\*

\* The Esplanade Park visitor estimate is based on Telia Crowd Insights data, tourism data from the City of Helsinki's Economic Development Division, and data from the Port of Helsinki and Statistics Finland.

The visitor profile (age, educational background, employment status) remained similar to 2021 and 2023. Of respondents, 52% visited the Biennial for the first time, and Vallisaari’s visitor numbers returned close to the 2021 level. The number of first-time visitors to Vallisaari increased by 27,456 (+88%) compared to 2023.

The results indicate successful content choices and marketing communications, improved reach, and positive media visibility. For example, the reduction in the ferry ticket price was noted in the media.

## The number of first-time visitors to Vallisaari increased by 88% compared with 2023



Biennial visitor numbers in Vallisaari

## Expectations were exceeded and satisfaction increased significantly—Helsinki Biennial’s Net Promoter Score rose to +50

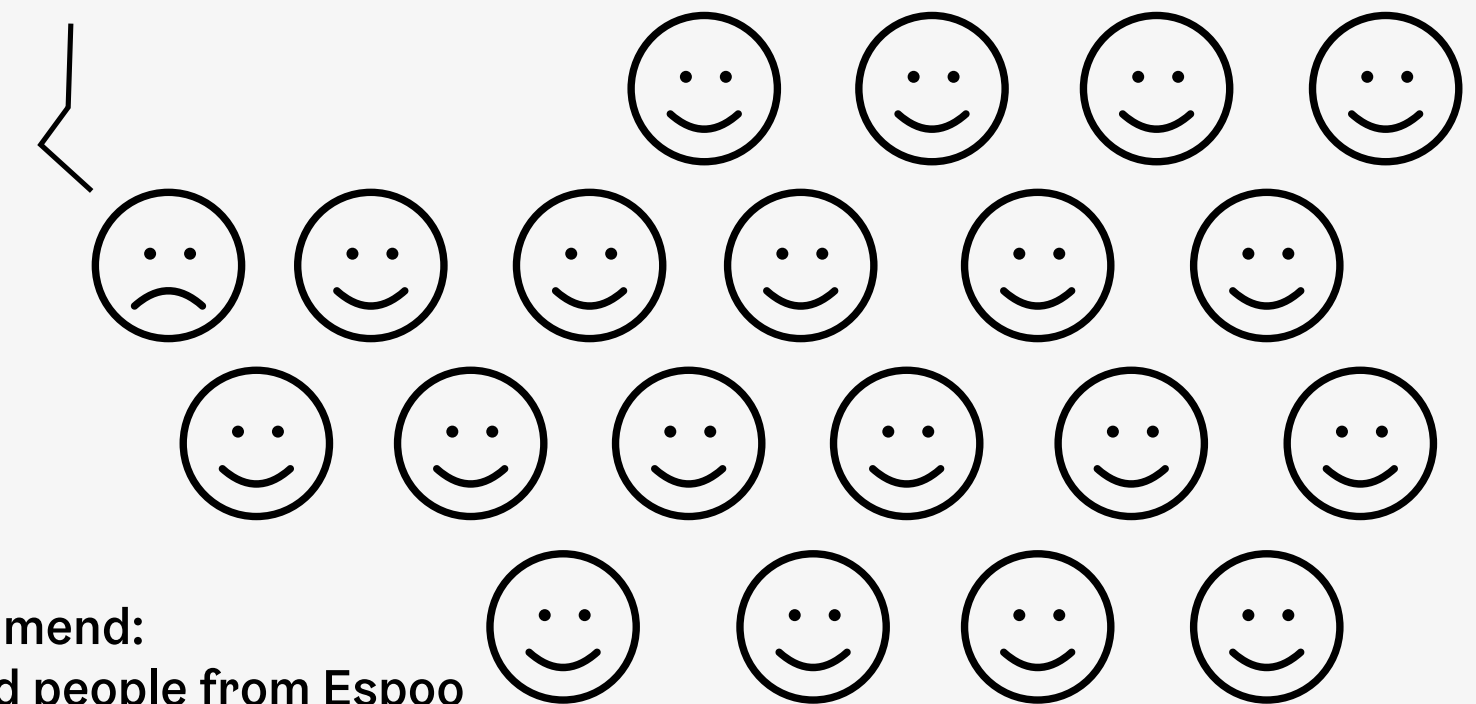
The visitor experience improved markedly compared to 2023. The event’s NPS—reflecting visitors’ willingness to recommend the event—rose from -1 to +50. In addition, 58% felt the event exceeded expectations (2023: 30%). This increase in satisfaction reflects multiple factors: successful artwork selections, improvements to the visitor journey, and smoother ferry operations.

## Partnerships supported audience expansion—more long-term collaboration would increase impact

In addition to the Biennial’s own actions, audience expansion was supported by three free-entry days enabled by the City of Helsinki and school visits involving approximately 8,000 pupils from across Helsinki. These were targeted but meaningful measures that made tangible the promise of a contemporary arts event shared by all city residents. Partnerships with both the City of Helsinki and Helsingin Sanomat also played a significant role in increasing marketing visibility and reaching wider audiences.

Only 1 in 20 visitors felt that the Biennial did not meet their expectations

More likely to recommend: retirees and travellers



(Visitor Survey Helsinki Biennial 2025)

## Lower ferry ticket prices improved accessibility — yet the low-threshold image still remains fragile

In 2025, the ferry ticket price was negotiated to 50% lower than in 2023, bringing the round-trip fare down to EUR 10. The City's support and involvement had a significant impact in negotiations with Metsähallitus. Open-ended visitor responses show that the lower ticket price was noticed and influenced the decision to visit the island. Still, according to the visitor survey, the ferry ticket price continues to negatively affect the visitor experience. This is not necessarily only about the price, but also about perceptions: the idea of a cultural event accessible to everyone is undermined by the need to pay for the ticket.

## Accessibility assessments vary by venue—HAM performs consistently, while Vallisaari and Esplanade have areas for development

HAM's accessibility, artwork placement, and services were rated very highly, consistent with previous years. Visitors found Esplanade easy to reach due to its central location, but improving the visibility of the art and the placement of works in the park is recommended. For Vallisaari, the usability and smoothness of the ferry connection improved clearly from 2023, but the clarity of the exhibition route, signage, and information about island services still require attention.

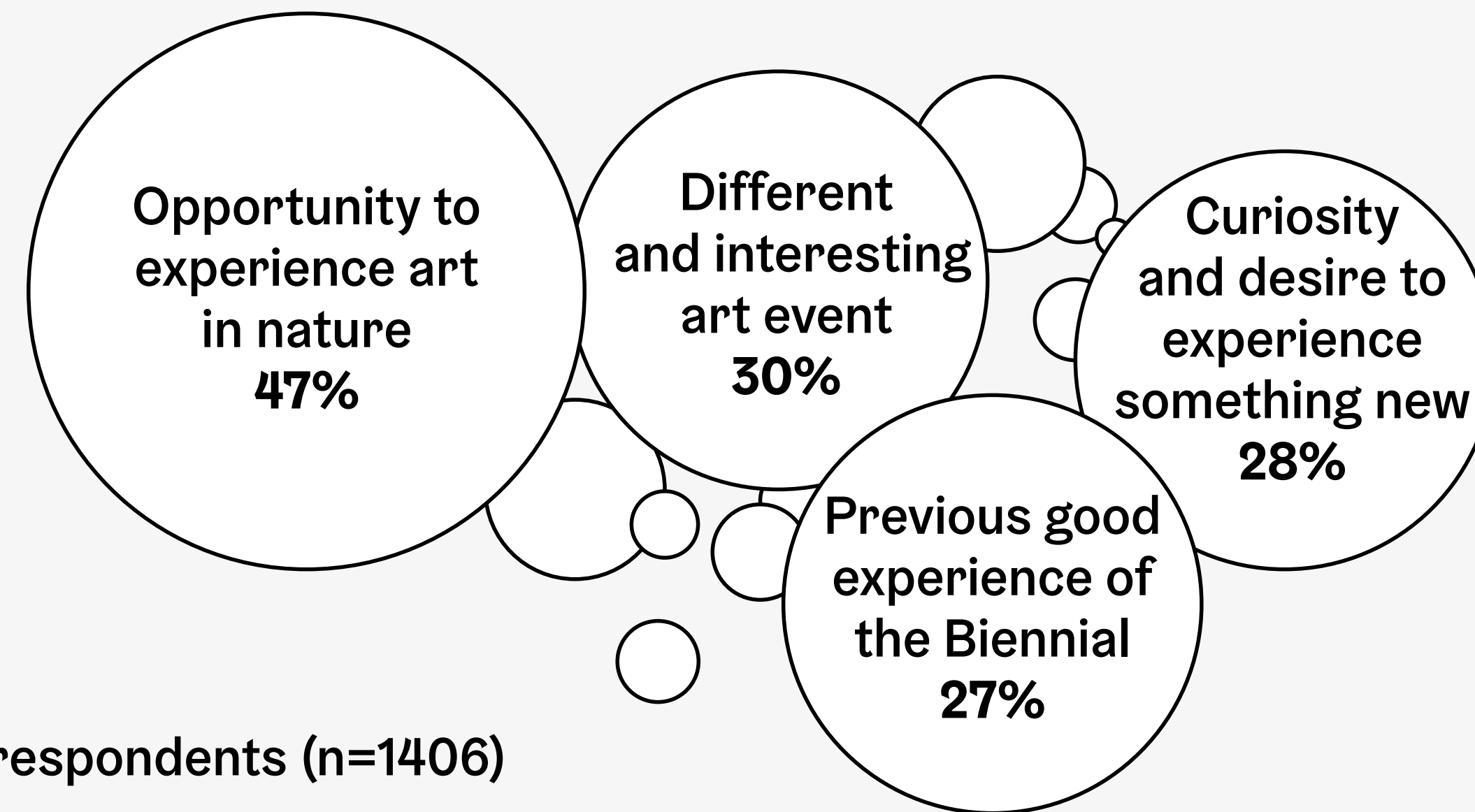
**“Because of the ferry ticket prices, I didn't go two years ago.”**

**“Great works, cheaper ferry.”**

(Visitor Survey Helsinki Biennial 2025)

## 6.2 Impacts on Helsinki's appeal: recognition as an international city of contemporary arts

Top 4 motivating factors for visiting the Helsinki Biennial:



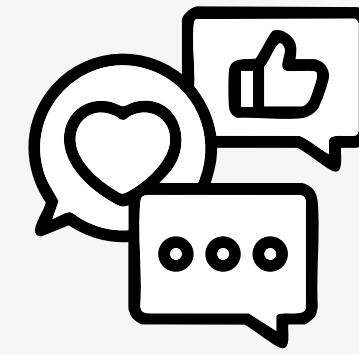
All respondents (n=1406)

## Communications and marketing supported Helsinki's appeal as a tourism and contemporary arts destination—visibility for maritime Helsinki

Development work in marketing communications is visible in the results. Among partners, 80% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that Helsinki's recognition as an international contemporary arts city increased as a result of the event.

A campaign implemented with N2 generated a total of over 71 million impressions, reach, or listens across channels. It generated over 120,000 clicks (excluding organic clicks), approximately double compared to 2023. Of visitors arriving from elsewhere in Finland, one in five said the advertisement sparked interest in visiting Helsinki Biennial.

Increased investment in the professional programme and marketing (+9%) and hiring a person responsible for social media also showed in follower growth: Instagram followers increased from around 15,000 to just over 22,000, and subscriptions to English-language newsletters increased by +1,038 (current total 3,297).



**800+**

**Media hits**

National and international visibility

**120 000**

**Clicks from ads**

Roughly 2× more than in 2023

**71M**

**Impressions / reach / listens**

Campaign across multiple channels

Helsinki Biennial reached around 170 journalists in total; 90 visited the venues in person and 80 participated in other events. Artists play a central role in media visibility; this year, Olafur Eliasson's participation attracted particular media interest. However, artist feedback emphasized the desire for all artists to receive as equal attention as possible.

## The dialogue between nature and art is a differentiating factor and a source of international recognition—balancing the two requires sensitivity


Across 800+ domestic and international media hits about Helsinki Biennial, emphasis was placed on the distinctive combination of nature and art, the event's visible work to advance environmental responsibility in Vallisaari, and its connection to the City of Helsinki.

The importance of environmental issues is also conveyed through feedback from professional audiences reached via international PR cooperation and from Preview Days partners. All artists who responded agreed or strongly agreed that ecological responsibility should remain a priority in the future as well. The completion of a new sustainability plan at the end of 2025 and an update of the EcoCompass system support this work going forward.

A connection with nature also features strongly in visitors' motivations: nearly half of all visitors (47%) cited the opportunity to experience art close to nature as a reason for attending, rising to over 60% among visitors to Vallisaari. Visitors most often described their experience as “thought-

**“Beautiful setting, captivating art.”**

**“Nature, sounds and the works—as well as maritime Helsinki.”**



Tension in the  
visitor journey

**“I thought there would be more art, and that art would dominate almost the entire area.”**

(Visitor Survey Helsinki Biennial 2025)

provoking”, “immersive”, and “interesting”. At the same time, some visitors felt that artistic content was overshadowed by the nature experience; criticism focused particularly on works sometimes being inconspicuous in relation to the environment or not challenging visitors enough.

## Professional Preview Days strengthen Helsinki's image as an interesting contemporary arts city—logistics and networking support are areas for development

In 2025, Preview Days—organised for the first time in cooperation with Frame and contemporary arts partners in the Helsinki region—reached a larger-than-expected group of contemporary arts professionals and practitioners (850 participants, about 1,100 accredited). About half of those accredited came from outside Finland. Participants included museum professionals, producers, curators, collectors, and artists.

Bringing international guests to Helsinki through the Preview Days was seen as a key success. Preview Days partners and interviewees assessed that the event increased Helsinki's recognition as an international city of contemporary arts.

Biennial artists and partners were mostly very satisfied with the Preview Days collaboration, but improving logistics and clarifying partners' roles were identified as development needs. The strong presence of artists was mentioned as a positive differentiator from other biennials, but some artists wanted more support for networking.



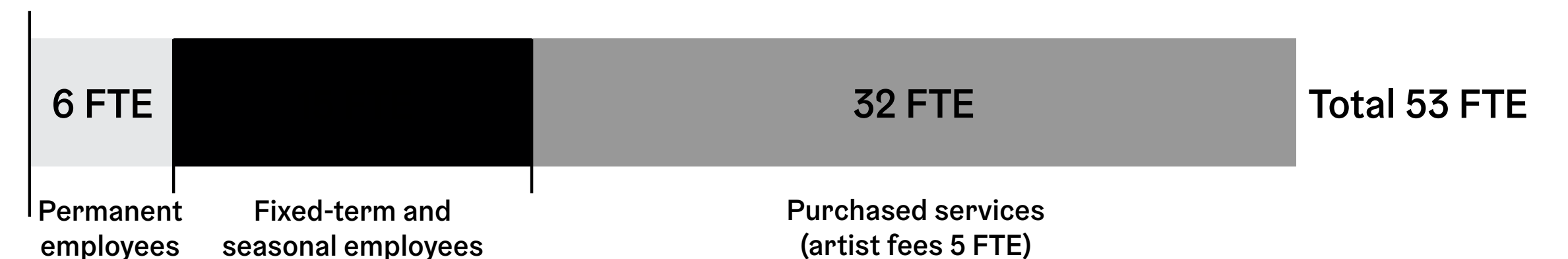
## 6.3 Impacts on Helsinki's vitality: employment and professional opportunities

The Biennial supports employment and drives service consumption – impacts are particularly visible in the cultural, tourism, and hospitality sectors

The Biennial's impacts on vitality arise both from organising the event and from visitor spending. The employment impact of organising the event totalled approximately 53 FTE-years, making the Biennial a significant employer in the cultural sector. Of this employment impact, around 40% was generated through direct employment by the event and 60% through outsourced and procured services. The estimate includes the person-years covered by the event's project budget for 2024–2025; in practice, the Biennial's overall employment impacts are broader than this.

Assessment of Helsinki Biennial's impact on employment in person-years (FTE)

Person-years (FTE)



(Employment impacts included in the event's 2024–2025 project budget, comprising both direct employment and employment generated through purchased services.)

Vitality impacts are also visible in the private sector through visitor consumption. Based on the visitor survey, visitors spent an average of approximately EUR 72 in connection with their Helsinki Biennial visit. Spending was directed to accommodation, shopping, restaurant and café services, and local transportation.

A quarter of visitors (26%) reported spending money on accommodation. Among those visitors—who visited Vallisaari and/or HAM—their combined spending on accommodation, restaurant, and café services in connection with the Biennial visit is estimated at approximately EUR 3.2 million.\* On Vallisaari, additional consumption generated by the event increased the VAT-excluding turnover of local service providers by approximately EUR 614,000 compared to 2024. Ferry transport revenue is not included in this figure.

With the exception of Vallisaari, the monetary estimates presented above are indicative, as the assessment did not include a comprehensive evaluation of the event's economic impacts or their geographic distribution. Going forward, it is recommended that the approach to assessing economic impacts be aligned with that used for other events in Helsinki, and that the visitor survey be further developed to allow for more precise estimates.

\* Estimate based on the average spending of visitors who reported expenditure on accommodation and restaurant/café services. The estimate assumes that 75% of HAM visitors also visited Vallisaari. It does not include visitors who experienced the Biennial only at Esplanade.



Helsinki Biennial 8.6.–21.9.2025, Vallisaari Island.  
Photo: ©HAM/Helsinki Biennial/Henni Hyvärinen

## The Biennial strengthens artists' professional opportunities—and serves as a gateway to international networks

More than 80% of respondents to the Helsinki Biennial artist survey assessed that participation creates new opportunities and has a positive effect on international career development. However, the impacts are uncertain. The direct employment effect of artist commissions and fees is estimated at five person-years.

Follow-up commissions from the Biennial have not been measured, but for individual artists the impact can be significant: “I took part in the Matsu Biennial thanks to the Helsinki Biennial.” (Artist Survey Helsinki Biennial 2025)

Survey and interview data also suggest that further developing the Preview programme and strengthening cooperation with Frame and other visual arts actors would further improve the prospects for building important international contacts.



Marjetica Potrč: The Living World Deliberates the Challenge of Our Time, 2025, detail.  
Helsinki Biennial 8.6.–21.9.2025, HAM Helsinki Art Museum. Photo: HAM / Helsinki Biennial / Sonja Hyttiäinen

## **The Biennial supports the vitality of the city centre and helps lay the foundation for economic activity in Vallisaari—bringing more movement and life**

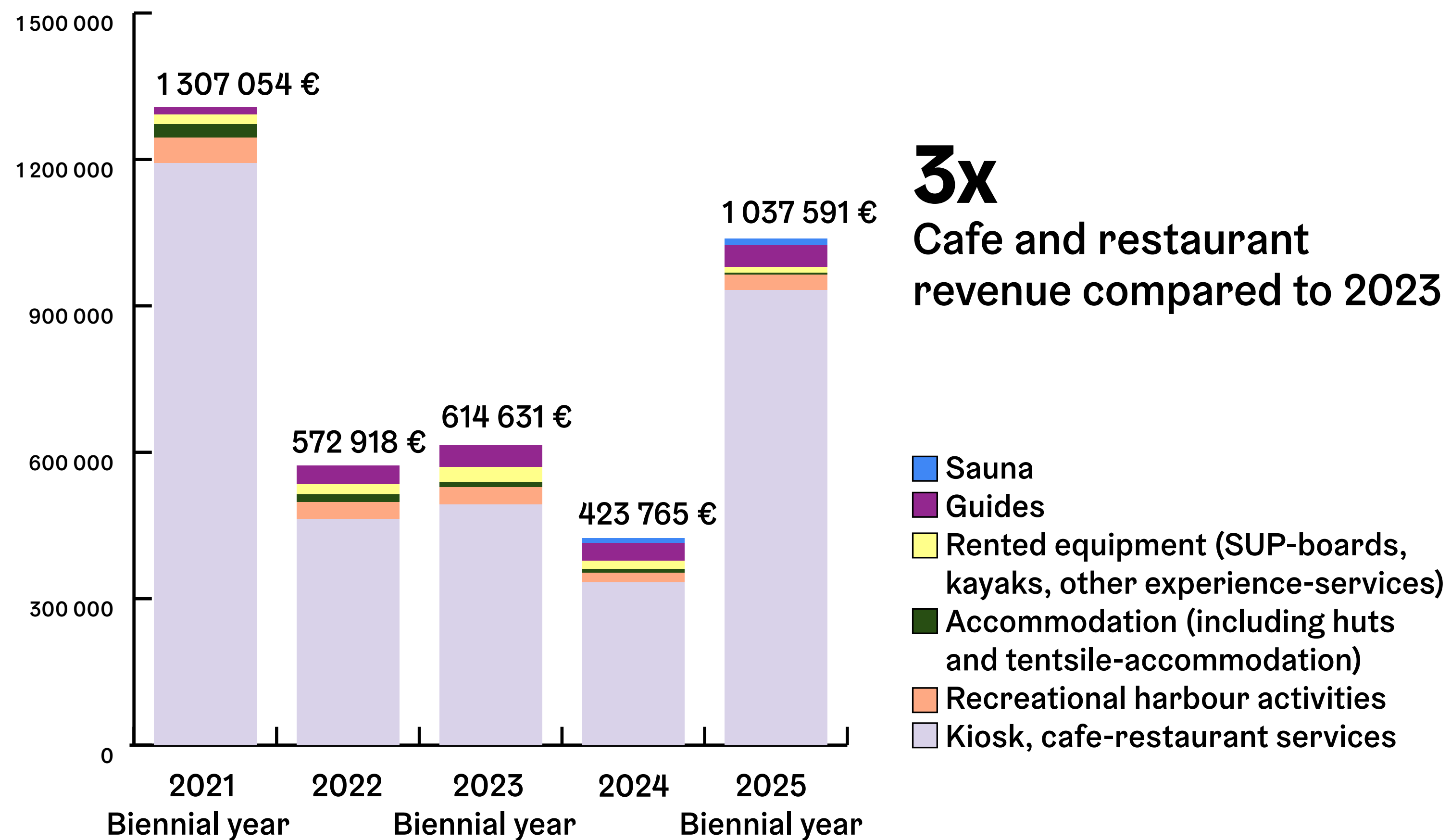
Interviews and other data suggest that the Esplanade installations strengthened the city centre's vibrancy by bringing art to the heart of the city centre. The park was also seen as an important link between HAM and Vallisaari in shaping the overall visitor experience.

Vallisaari, in turn, supports the objective of enlivening quieter destinations: Biennial summers bring many people to the island who would not otherwise visit. On Vallisaari, the Biennial acts as an economic engine, supporting the Maritime Helsinki strategy's aim of creating the conditions for livelihoods and business activity in the archipelago.

Biennial years create clear peaks in visitor flows to Vallisaari, which is directly reflected in the turnover of local businesses. The Biennial summers of 2021 and 2025 show as distinct spikes in sales, while the lower visitor numbers in 2023 underline the importance of successful delivery of the Helsinki Biennial for Vallisaari's business operators as well.

When successful, the Helsinki Biennial significantly increases visitor volumes, generates demand for services, and strengthens the profitability of the island's businesses. Interviews also highlighted a long-term ambition to increase visitor numbers to enhance vitality impacts, while carefully considering the island's ecological carrying capacity and the capacity of local services.

# Vallisaari Sales 2021-2025



(Turnover development of service providers in Vallisaari, excluding value added tax)

# 7. Summary of results

Based on the impact assessment findings, Helsinki Biennial 2025's success emerged from the combined effect of several mutually reinforcing choices and measures.

The Biennial's promise—to present high-quality, engaging visual art responsibly in inspiring natural and urban settings—is reflected in how visitors, artists, and professionals perceive the event. Site-specific works and the distinctive character of the venues are a significant part of the audience experience both on Vallisaari and at Esplanade Park. Among visual arts professionals, the Biennial is recognised as strengthening Helsinki's international profile as a city of contemporary arts.

The impacts of the successful Biennial are also visible in Helsinki's vitality and appeal as a tourist destination. The increase in visitor numbers since 2023 is clearly reflected in the revenues of service providers operating on Vallisaari. The new Esplanade venue, in turn, brought artistic content into the heart of the city and reached large numbers of people—making art easily accessible even to those who stop only briefly to take a look.



# 8. Development recommendations for future Biennials

Based on the impact assessment, Helsinki Biennial 2025 was highly successful overall. At the same time, it has not yet fully achieved its ambition of becoming the standout event of the summer, and over the longer term there is an intention to raise the audience target. The background material identifies three clusters of development actions:

## 1. Visibility of art in Vallisaari and Esplanade

- Develop artwork placement and route dramaturgy; create clear moments for discovery and stopping for different audiences.
- Continue to prioritise visually striking works and works that are easy and versatile to approach when selecting artworks.
- Further develop guidance, signage, the map, and digital services.
- Elevate artists more strongly as the spearhead of communications and develop media and communications support offered to artists.

## 2. Further development of the visitor journey

- Further develop Vallisaari signage and pre-visit information (e.g., services, toilets, restaurants, timetables, route duration, and accessibility information).
- Harmonise service communications by strengthening cooperation with Vallisaari service providers and Helsinki tourism services.
- Develop tourism-focused marketing and service paths in cooperation with other Finnish summer contemporary arts events.

# 8. Development recommendations for future Biennials

## 3. Stakeholder collaboration and responsibility

- Plan joint communications measures well in advance and implement them systematically.
- If Vallisaari were to transfer to City management, this could provide an opportunity to find a solution for lowering ferry ticket prices. Alternatively, introduce a “pay what you can” ferry ticket for unemployed people and students through partnerships.
- Develop Preview Days delivery: clarify logistics and facilitate networking. For example: a designated host role; targeted meetings between artists and curators; and a clear division of the programme into small curated-group VIP meetings and broader networking events.
- Reassess Vallisaari’s ecological carrying capacity if the Vallisaari visitor target is increased significantly.



Kristiina Koskentola: Murder of Crows, 2021, detail. Helsinki Biennial 8.6.–21.9.2025, Vallisaari Island.  
Photo: HAM / Helsinki Biennial / Sonja Hyytiäinen

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