



ESPOO  
ESBO

*Design guide*  
***Olari health nature trail***



Design guide  
**Olari  
health nature trail**

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**URBACT HEALTH&GREENSPACE**  
– Greener Cities, Healthier Communities



1.

**Health and well-being  
from nature**

What is a health nature trail?

Planning a health nature trail



2.

**Olari health nature trail**

Versatile mix of new  
and old: the route

Facts and feel: information  
board content

Professionalism:  
implementation of  
the information boards



3.

**Health nature trail  
as a joint effort**

Small budget: funding

Fast and efficient: schedule

Resident involvement: workshops

Voluntary upkeep: maintenance



4.

**What would your health  
nature trail be like?**



# 1.

## Health and well-being from nature

*Nature experiences have many proven positive effects on human health and well-being.*

**G**reen environments can relieve stress, combat depression and provide opportunities for relaxation. This revitalising effect can be promoted by emphasising in the planning of green and recreational areas those characteristics of plants and the environment that contribute to human well-being. An environment that promotes well-being increases people's physical activity, mental well-being and social interaction.

The link between nature and perceived health is strongest in groups that have a close connection to their immediate environment. Such groups include, for example, children and elderly people. The health effects of nature and green areas are particularly pronounced in urban environments where residents experience more health problems than non-urban residents.



### **What is a health nature trail?**

*Several health nature trails around Finland focus on the health benefits of nature. They provide the visitors with exercises and information to offer them the opportunity to relax in nature and observe their surroundings. Trail exercises often also draw the visitors' attention to their physical well-being. Positive nature experiences encourage visitors to care for their local environment and contribute to its preservation.*



## OUTDOOR RECREATION

*lowers blood pressure*  
*offers a break from everyday routine*  
*improves resistance to disease*  
*helps to recover from stress*  
*provides aesthetic pleasures*  
*relieves mental fatigue*  
*revitalises*  
*helps to relax*  
*facilitates learning*  
*improves attentiveness*  
*reduces morbidity*  
*helps to build a personal relationship with nature*  
*increases physical activity*  
*facilitates quality time together*  
*enhances cognitive abilities*  
*improves mood*  
*contributes towards the development of a sustainable lifestyle*  
*increases the sense of community*



### A health nature trail is easy to access

*The most important characteristic of a health nature trail is easy accessibility. Located close to populated areas and public transport connections, the health effects of the nature trail can be enjoyed easily and frequently.*

*The experience already begins on the way to the health nature trail. The journey to the start point of the health nature trail provides a transition to a peaceful state of mind. Breaking away from everyday routine is one of the cornerstones to a revitalising nature experience.*

## Planning a health nature trail

*An ideal health nature trail is easy to navigate, suitable in length for the target group and includes a varied environment. A sense of forest is often considered to be the most important feature of a pleasant natural environment.*

**B**esides informing the visitors about the health benefits of nature, the purpose of the nature trail is to introduce visitors to nature. Therefore, the exercises should be planned to suit the natural environment in question.

When planning a health nature trail, the effect of its construction on the landscape and the preservation of more sensitive nature values must be considered. Not all nature sites are suitable for recreational use. Experts from the city can assess different implementation options for the health nature trail and determine how it relates to the rest of the recreational route network.







**Elements of a health nature trail**  
on the Olari health nature trail's  
starting board's guide map

**Arrival**  
gets visitors in the  
right state of mind

**Landscapes**  
enjoyed, for example,  
from viewpoints with  
extensive views of the  
environment

**Sense of forest**  
arises from a variety  
of factors, like the  
density of the forest

**Water elements**  
people like to see  
streams, lakes and  
ponds

**Easy to follow**  
appropriate use of  
clear trail markings and  
terrain features

**Biodiversity**  
expressed by the  
diversity of the  
environment and nature

**Landmarks**  
provide rhythm  
and high points to  
remember along  
the route

**Man-made  
structures**  
introduce signs of  
human presence in  
the environment



# 2.

## OLARI HEALTH NATURE TRAIL

OLARI HEALTH  
NATURE TRAIL

# 3.

At Kokinmetsä area in  
Espoo Central Park

2.5 km long nature trail  
in varying terrain. The  
route is not wheelchair  
accessible.

Opened  
in 2019

Includes a resting place and  
eight information boards,  
each with three different-  
level exercises for  
visitors of all ages

The information boards  
include texts in Finnish,  
Swedish and English

The route and  
exercises are designed  
to promote health





### **The Espoo Story**

*The activities of the City of Espoo are based on the city's strategy, the Espoo Story. The participation of residents and NGOs in the planning, implementation and maintenance of the health nature trail was in line with the central 2017–2021 council term vision to increase opportunities for participation and involvement in the development of the city.*

*The Olari health nature trail was designed around the idea of connecting the built environment and nature more closely together on a nature trail along which the traveller experiences increased well-being and revitalisation.*

**E**spoo's first health nature trail was established in Espoo Central Park in 2018–2019. The initiative to plan a new kind of nature trail came from the local Olari-seura residents' association, which hoped for a health nature trail near the Olari district. The Olari health nature trail is Espoo's first nature trail focusing on the health benefits of nature and one of the first projects where a nature trail was implemented together with the residents and associations.

The Kokinmetsä forest on the edge of Espoo Central Park was chosen as the location of the health nature trail due to the easy access on foot and by bicycle and public transport. Different from a traditional nature trail, the exercises along the health nature trail focus on emphasising the well-being of the visitors, who embark on the trail with an open mind and are ready to embrace nature.



PHOTO: ANNA HAKALA



*The diverse nature offers a variety of landscapes and environments to enjoy along the health nature trail.*





PHOTO: ANNA HAKALA



PHOTO: ANNA HAKALA

## Versatile mix of new and old: **THE ROUTE**

*The exercises on the information boards are always related to the health benefits that can be obtained from the surroundings of that checkpoint.*












**T**he Olari health nature trail was created to be as diverse as possible, based on the existing path network and different landscapes and forest types. The information board locations were selected with the valuable help of the Olari-seura's local knowledge.

The trail was created on existing paths, with wood chips only added to the dampest depressions. Due to the varied terrain, the route is not wheelchair accessible. There are duckboards laid on the damp areas along the trail and tables at the viewpoint to enjoy a packed lunch. Blue hearts are painted as waymarks along the trail.



**Want to have a closer look?**  
360-degree photographs of the information boards are available at [www.espoo.fi/luontopolut](http://www.espoo.fi/luontopolut)



- |   |                     |   |                    |   |                                |
|---|---------------------|---|--------------------|---|--------------------------------|
|  | health nature trail |  | stairs             |  | buildings and open ground      |
|  | outdoor routes      |  | duckboards         |  | wooded terrain                 |
|  | information board   |  | resting place      |  | rocky or impenetrable terrain  |
|   |                     |  | pond or damp areas |  | field and other low vegetation |



## Facts and feel: INFORMATION BOARD CONTENT

*Different from traditional nature trails, the exercises along the Olari health nature trail are not there just to provide information: the visitors are also encouraged to perceive, feel and experience the surrounding nature.*

**T**he health nature trail aims to provide a wide range of target groups with the opportunity to experience and relax in the forest. Particular emphasis is placed on enabling the visitors to promote their health and well-being.

The Olari health nature trail has eight checkpoints, each of which with three different exercises. The illustrations on the boards were created by members of the Espoo Association of Mental Health.

The exercises are aimed at three different user groups – learners, discoverers and seekers. All exercises are suitable for different age groups to be performed either alone or in a group. The exercises can be performed in any order, so the visitors can start the trail at any point they wish.



*The exercises were designed and produced in workshops by cooperation between the residents, organisations, city employees and consultants.*

*Good signage and clear waymarks ensure that visitors do not stray from the nature health trail and that the trail reaches the desired target groups.*

### Learners

*visit the health nature trail searching for experiences and are curious to learn about the health benefits of nature through experience. Learners are attracted to the trail by their thirst for knowledge.*



### Discoverers

*are mostly unfamiliar with the health benefits of nature. For them, the health nature trail offers an easy way to visit nature nearby and observe their local environment in new ways.*



### Seekers

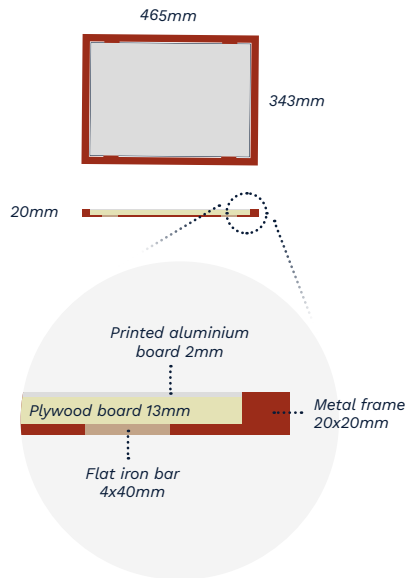
*are already skilled in the art of hiking. They come to the health nature trail to seek peace and opportunities to break away from everyday routine.*



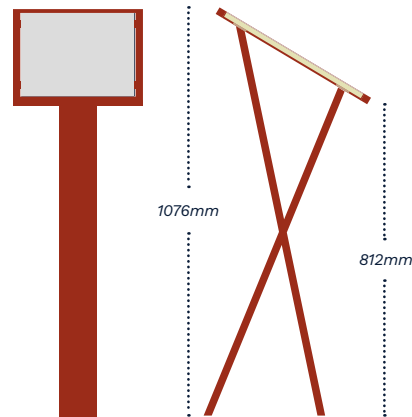
## Professionalism: INFORMATION BOARD DESIGN

There are three kinds of signage along the Olari health nature trail – route signs at the main junctions, 24 information boards and a wood-framed trail map placed at the beginning of the trail.

### INFORMATION BOARD



### BOARD STAND



Ground mounting:  
4x40x100mm flat iron bar  
with two 10mm holes for bolts

The illustrations and texts of the information boards are printed on an aluminium panel that is glued to a plywood board and attached to an iron base. The board is inside a metal frame to prevent vandalism.



PHOTO: ANNA HAKALA

Outdoors, the iron rusts naturally to a beautiful reddish colour. The boards were ordered from a metalworking company.

The technical design of the boards is by the City of Espoo's Environmental Designer.

Some boards are bolted directly to the bedrock, and others are mounted on an iron stand dug into the ground.



PHOTO: ANNA HAKALA



A woman with blonde hair and glasses, wearing a blue jacket and a red scarf, is painting a tree trunk with blue paint using a brush. A man in a grey jacket and red backpack is standing in the background, looking on. The scene is outdoors in a forest.

**3.**

**HEALTH  
NATURE TRAIL  
AS A JOINT  
EFFORT**





*The health nature trail was created in an interactive process where local residents, NGOs and schools participated actively in the planning, implementation and maintenance of the trail.*



**T**he main implementer was the Olari-seura, which first proposed the creation of a health nature trail. The Environmental Design Team of the City of Espoo assisted the planning committee with the necessary permits and in organising the workshops, for example.

Other potential user groups of the health nature trail were also involved in the planning, participating in the project through the workshops. Through participatory planning, the different user groups were committed to the health nature trail to facilitate its use and adoption after completion. The project provided an experience of genuine influence and ownership for all who participated in the planning.



*The project participants felt it was important to have designated contact persons at the city organisation. They were involved in the planning and responsible for the progress of the project.*



## **The Olari-seura association**

*Founded in 1971, the Olari-seura is a residents' association with the aim of preserving the special characteristics related to nature of the local area. The Olari-seura justified the need for a health nature trail by arguing that the Kokinmetsä forest provides local residents with a platform to improve their relationship with nature and allows many different groups access to the health benefits of nature.*

## Participants in the planning of the health nature trail



A **planning team** consisting of representatives of the city and Olari-seura and primarily responsible for the implementation of the project



The **Environmental Design Team** of the city, responsible for organising activities from within the city organisation and acting as a liaison between the project team and the various city sectors



Local **associations, organisations and actors** invited to the workshops, who brought up the needs of the different user groups in the planning of the health nature trail



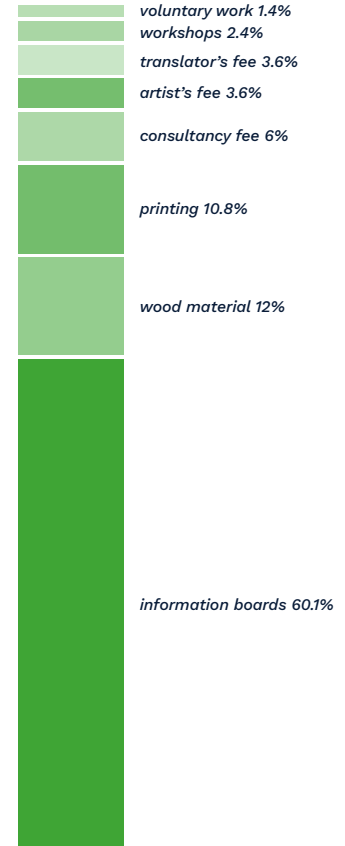
**Consultants** specialised in health nature trails, who helped to turn the ideas and goals generated in the workshops into the information board exercises

## Small budget: **FUNDING**

*The Olari health nature trail was made possible by funding provided by the Healthy Espoo development programme. The aim of the cross-administrative programme for the 2017–2021 council term was to support cooperation between the different city units.*

**C**ombining different themes and actors to increase the opportunities of Espoo residents to promote their health and happiness, the Olari health nature trail was well-suited as a concrete measure within the programme.

Considering the scope, the Olari health nature trail was created with a small budget. The bulk of the expenditure was spent on various fixtures, such as duckboards, outdoor tables and information boards. The health nature trail was mainly built by volunteers, which limited the costs. Professionals from the Public Works Department erected the information boards and took care of the more demanding construction work. Their work input was paid for as an internal transfer by the Technical and Environmental Services.



*Investment budget for the planning and implementation of the health nature trail: €10,000*



## Fast and efficient: **SCHEDULE**

*The Olari health nature trail was completed over a period of about 1.5 years. The biggest chunks of the planning time were spent on applying for funding for the trail and concluding city-internal agreements.*

**A**fter the funding was granted, the actual planning started by assembling a planning team. After the workshops were carried out in early 2019, the exercises for the information boards were finalised in cooperation with consultants specialised in health nature trails. The trail was inaugurated the following summer.

### Preparations

#### January 2018

The Olari-seura proposed the planning of a trail

- applying for funding

### Planning

#### January 2019

assembling the planning team

- planning starts
- concept workshop

#### February

co-planning workshop

- technical design workshop

#### March & April

final information board design

- drawing illustrations for the boards
- comments on the draft plan

### Construction

#### May

manufacture of the information boards

#### June

trail bed work

- installation of the information boards
- opening ceremony of the health nature trail

### Maintenance

#### June >

regular maintenance work



## Resident involvement: **WORKSHOPS**

*Approximately 20 organisations and residents' associations in the area and representatives of local schools, day-care centres and the parish were involved in planning the health nature trail.*

**T**he planning involved three participatory workshops for determining the needs of the residents, associations and schools for a new kind of nature trail. The exercises along the health nature trail were conceived in the workshops in cooperation with the associations and organisations involved in the planning. The workshops were held after office hours in the meeting facilities of the City of Espoo.



### **Voluntary work**

*A large part of the construction work on the Olari health nature trail was carried out by volunteers over the course of a few work parties. The work included painting the waymarks on the trees, cleaning up the surroundings of the trail and building the duckboards and stairs along the route. The volunteers included representatives of the Olari-seura and the Suurpelto-seura, the local association of the neighbouring district.*



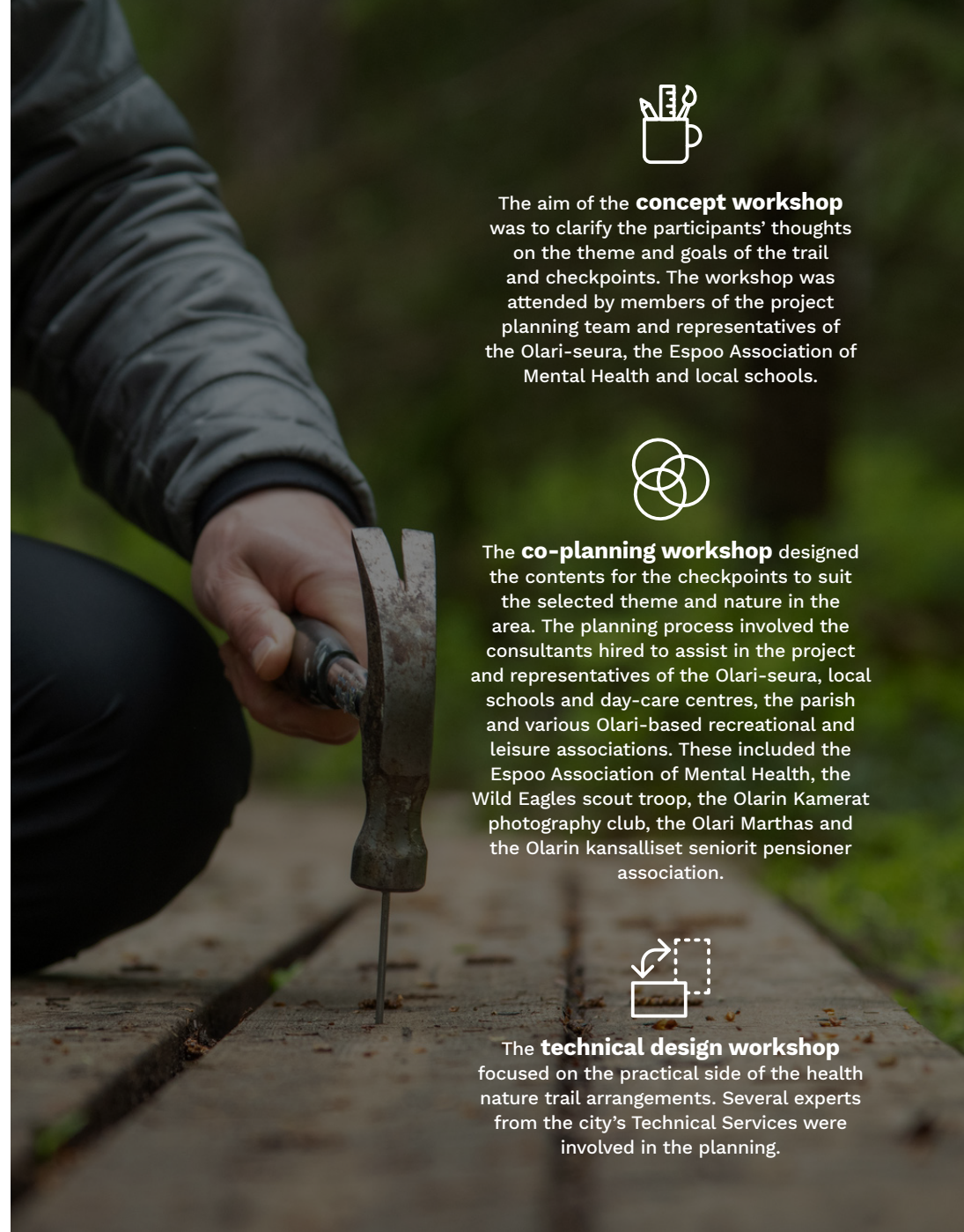
The aim of the **concept workshop** was to clarify the participants' thoughts on the theme and goals of the trail and checkpoints. The workshop was attended by members of the project planning team and representatives of the Olari-seura, the Espoo Association of Mental Health and local schools.



The **co-planning workshop** designed the contents for the checkpoints to suit the selected theme and nature in the area. The planning process involved the consultants hired to assist in the project and representatives of the Olari-seura, local schools and day-care centres, the parish and various Olari-based recreational and leisure associations. These included the Espoo Association of Mental Health, the Wild Eagles scout troop, the Olarin Kamerat photography club, the Olari Marthas and the Olarin kansalliset seniorit pensioner association.



The **technical design workshop** focused on the practical side of the health nature trail arrangements. Several experts from the city's Technical Services were involved in the planning.





## Voluntary upkeep: **MAINTENANCE**

*A condition for constructing the new nature trail in Espoo was that the Olari-seura, which proposed the project, would take on the maintenance of the trail without any additional costs or special responsibilities incurred by the city.*

**A**ccording to the Our Park management agreement, the Olari-seura is responsible for the maintenance of the health nature trail, including, for example, keeping the trail free of litter, repainting the trail markings and minor clearing work. In case of major maintenance work due to, for example, landslides, the Olari-seura will notify the respective city department, which will then carry out the necessary measures. A written management agreement is always concluded on the maintenance of Our Park sites.



### **Our Park maintenance agreement**

#### **RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE OLARI-SEURA**

- to keep the trail tidy by collecting any litter and notifying the city's green area maintenance of any larger piles of waste or hazardous waste.
- to maintain the trail markings and boards to the best of their ability.
- to market the trail to the best of their ability and encourage local residents and operators in using the trail.

#### **RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GREEN AREA MAINTENANCE UNIT**

- to make a management plan for the area.
- to inform of any action taken on the trail at least one week in advance.
- to help, for example, with the replacement and manufacture of signage as needed.

#### **Renewal and termination of the agreement**

The management agreement is renewed every five years. The basis for the agreement is reviewed at this time. The agreement can also be terminated during the agreement period if the landowner needs the area for other purposes or the Olari-seura is no longer willing to maintain the health nature trail.





A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of a tree trunk. The trunk is the central focus, showing detailed bark texture. The background is a soft-focus canopy of green leaves and brown branches against a bright sky.

4.

WHAT WOULD YOUR HEALTH  
NATURE TRAIL BE LIKE?



*As a representative of a residents' association, an employee of a city or an individual resident, you can also propose establishing a health nature trail in your city so that as many people as possible get to enjoy the health-promoting effects of nature.*



**T**he Olari health nature trail has already established itself as part of the nature trail offering in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. As the population of the City of Espoo increases, a growing number of enthusiastic visitors will find the trail to learn, marvel and be surprised by nature. Based on the good experiences of the health nature trail planning process, the City of Espoo is prepared to implement similar projects in other places suitable for a nature trail.



*Proud of its health nature trail, the Olari-seura organises several guided walks on the trail every year.*

## *Three* steps in planning a health nature trail

**1.**

**Explore** the nature trails in your area and locate places suitable for a health nature trail

**2.**

**Resourcing**  
– secure funding and engage key stakeholders

**3.**

**Involve** residents and associations in the area in the planning of the health nature trail



## **Communication and marketing**

Reserve enough time and resources for communicating about the health nature trail. In Espoo, the Olari health nature trail is promoted on the City of Espoo website together with other nature trails:

[www.espoo.fi/luontopolut](http://www.espoo.fi/luontopolut)





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