

Kaupunginjohtajan puhe Mikkelin yliopistokeskuksen 20-vuotisjuhlassa 21.3.2024 Teatteriravintola Ilossa

Good afternoon

During its twenty year history, Mikkel University Consortium has greatly contributed to the status of Mikkel as a student city. My warm congratulations on this milestone, you are doing a great job!

Mikkeli may not be traditionally considered as a university town, but the significance of Mikkel as a center for higher education, research, and academic life should not be underestimated. On the contrary, we must always praise all this greatness that we have accomplished through years.

Today, Mikkel University Consortium is offering studying opportunities from three Finnish universities and together with the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences, it forms an important student community.

Here in Mikkel, it is possible to progress through the entire educational path up to a university degree. This is crucial because Mikkel is a regional center and a primus motor for South Savo.

One of the themes in Mikkel's growth program is the collaboration between educational institutions and businesses. However, all the themes in the growth program can be related in one way or another to educational institutions and students — as well as to the professionals within the institutions, who play such an important role.

Skills for the future are important. The world around us is changing rapidly: our security environment has changed, there is much talk about security of supply, technology and artificial

intelligence which create many opportunities, and there is of course always concern about the climate change.

One response to these changes and needs is seen, for example, the master's program in water technology at LUT; the English language master's program also includes international students who can utilize the Blue Economy Mikkeli facilities at the Metsä-Sairila wastewater treatment plant. A large and expensive facility does continues to innovate and improve its work.

The city of Mikkeli aims to increasingly consider universities and students in various forms, such as through joint events. Last winter, we had a great and successful evening event at concert hall Mikaeli, where students came together to have fun and get to know opportunities even better. Such authentic encounters have been sought after the years of Covid-19.

Mikkeli aims to be an attractive student city; in this work, cooperation between the city organization, universities, and the business community is crucial to keep graduated students in Mikkeli. We, as a medium-sized Finnish town, are facing the same challenges as our counterparts: our population is aging, so new initiatives and ideas are needed.

One remedy is a fairer, bolder, and more constructive approach to internationalization. Currently there much talk in the media about the necessity of fluency in the Finnish language in the workplace. However, the truth is that we have many jobs where fluency in Finnish may not necessarily be required, so these artificial barriers to people's employment should be ready to be reduced. We cannot afford to lose our highly educated professionals elsewhere — professionals whom we have invested heavily in teaching.

It would also be beneficial for the businesses in our region to have a better understanding of the types of professionals being trained and what opportunities the educational institu-

tions have to offer through potential collaborations and projects. I believe that with deeper collaboration, becoming familiar with each other, and having a common strategy, we can improve things and continue the successful story of the University Consortium.

I would like to thank you once again for the invitation to this event and wish you all the best for the future!

