

# HOW TO MAKE LIBRARIES FORUMS OF DEMOCRACY?

Methods for libraries to promote democracy

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Sitra studies 228

## **HOW TO TURN LIBRARIES INTO FORUMS OF DEMOCRACY?**

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ISBN 978-952-347-309-6 (PDF) [www.sitra.fi](http://www.sitra.fi)

ISSN 1796-7112 (PDF) [www.sitra.fi](http://www.sitra.fi)

**SITRA STUDIES** is a publication series which focuses on the outcomes of Sitra's future-oriented work and experiments.

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# Foreword

In late 2017, the speakers of the Finnish Parliament expressed the wish to strengthen the role of libraries as meeting places for politicians and the public. Since then, good experience has been gained with this type of event, such as the government's library tour in 2019, to present the government programme. Sitra's project on libraries as forums of democracy wanted to experiment with how to build a permanent and constantly evolving, physical and virtual meeting place, combining local, regional, national and EU levels, in the context of library services.

The pilot project was also well suited to the spirit of the recently amended Public Libraries Act. The aim was to test different forms of interaction and improve people's opportunities for to influence and participate in social decision-making. The experiments were designed to find workable forms for different models of activity that would make libraries familiar and natural forums of democracy for all Finns. The large-scale introduction of the concepts developed in the experiment in Finnish libraries and their further development would not be a win-win situation but instead a win-win-win one as it could benefit libraries, the public and decision-makers alike.

For libraries, this approach will allow them to carry out and develop their statutory task of promoting active citizenship and democracy. At the same time, the role of the library in the municipality could become stronger and libraries could become pioneers in developing services. The benefits for the public would also be obvious: libraries could become a new forum and "interface" through which people could influence things they find significant. The model could strengthen involvement, participation and interaction and, for its part, build trust in representative democracy on municipal, regional, national and EU levels.

The benefits of the "Libraries as forums of democracy" approach for decision-makers are also important for democracy. The model and the ready-made concepts offer decision-makers the opportunity for secure interaction with citizens, which cannot be taken for granted in today's communications and media environment. At the same time, it gives decision-makers a new forum to explain their political views. At best, the result is a mutual experience of encounter, interaction and participation. between decision-maker and citizen.

The experimental project entity has been part of Sitra's "Updating Democracy" project, which has analysed the state of Finnish democracy and its development needs and supported its capacity for renewal with various experiments. The starting point for the project is the Kansanvallan peruskorjaus (Updating Democracy) working paper written by Senior Advisors **Liisa Hyssälä** and **Jouni Backman** and published by Sitra in February 2018, in which one of the many action proposals was that libraries should be made meeting places for discussing democracy and that a separate budget should be set aside for them.

**Antti Kivelä**

Director

Sitra's Capacity for renewal theme

# Summary

This report in the form of a handbook presents ways that can help all public libraries carry out democracy work; in other words, to build civil dialogue, participation and opportunities for exerting influence. The handbook has several target groups. It offers decision-makers a general understanding of the methods that libraries can use to build encounters and interaction. This will specifically help library employees provide the means to organise different types of events and build co-operation with different groups. In addition, individuals can explore the different ways to participate and be inspired by them.

The tools presented in the handbook are based on the lessons learned from the experiment “Libraries as forums of democracy”. During 2020 and 2021, the pilot project helped public libraries to become a wider part of civil society by providing a venue for dialogue between the general public and various decision-makers. The project involved six libraries (in Imatra, Inari, Mäntyharju, Oulu, Pietarsaari and Turku). The objective was to employ effective operating models and methods for increasing democracy in libraries. The experiments were launched, co-ordinated and funded by Sitra.

The resulting experiments and methods are also well suited to the spirit of the new Library Act, whose objectives are to promote active citizenship, democracy and freedom of expression – the act also states that the tasks of a public library include the promotion of social and cultural dialogue in addition to its other more traditional roles.

This handbook is based on interviews with the experiments’ participants and on the material produced during the experiments. The selection of methods are presented in the handbook in such a manner that any public library in Finland can implement them in their own way, depending on the resources and interest. The aim was for any library to be able find a suitable way among the various options to support citizen participation and build dialogue.

The methods developed help libraries to teach and encourage societal influence, build dialogue and create encounters between individuals and decision-makers, to explain how EU-level decisions affect people’s everyday lives and to learn how to use different creative methods in democracy work.

Practical and specific examples make it easier for libraries to implement the methods and the handbook contains a comprehensive list of tips for implementing them. These include practical lessons and a list of items that the project libraries identified as being useful to know prior to the experiments and which can now be freely used by all Finnish libraries.

# 1. Introduction: Why and how do libraries become forums of democracy?

In early 2020, six Finnish libraries of different sizes and in different parts of the country were selected for the “Libraries as forums of democracy” project. Two large libraries (Oulu, Turku), two medium-sized libraries (Pietarsaari, Imatra) and two small libraries (Inari, Mäntyharju) were selected.

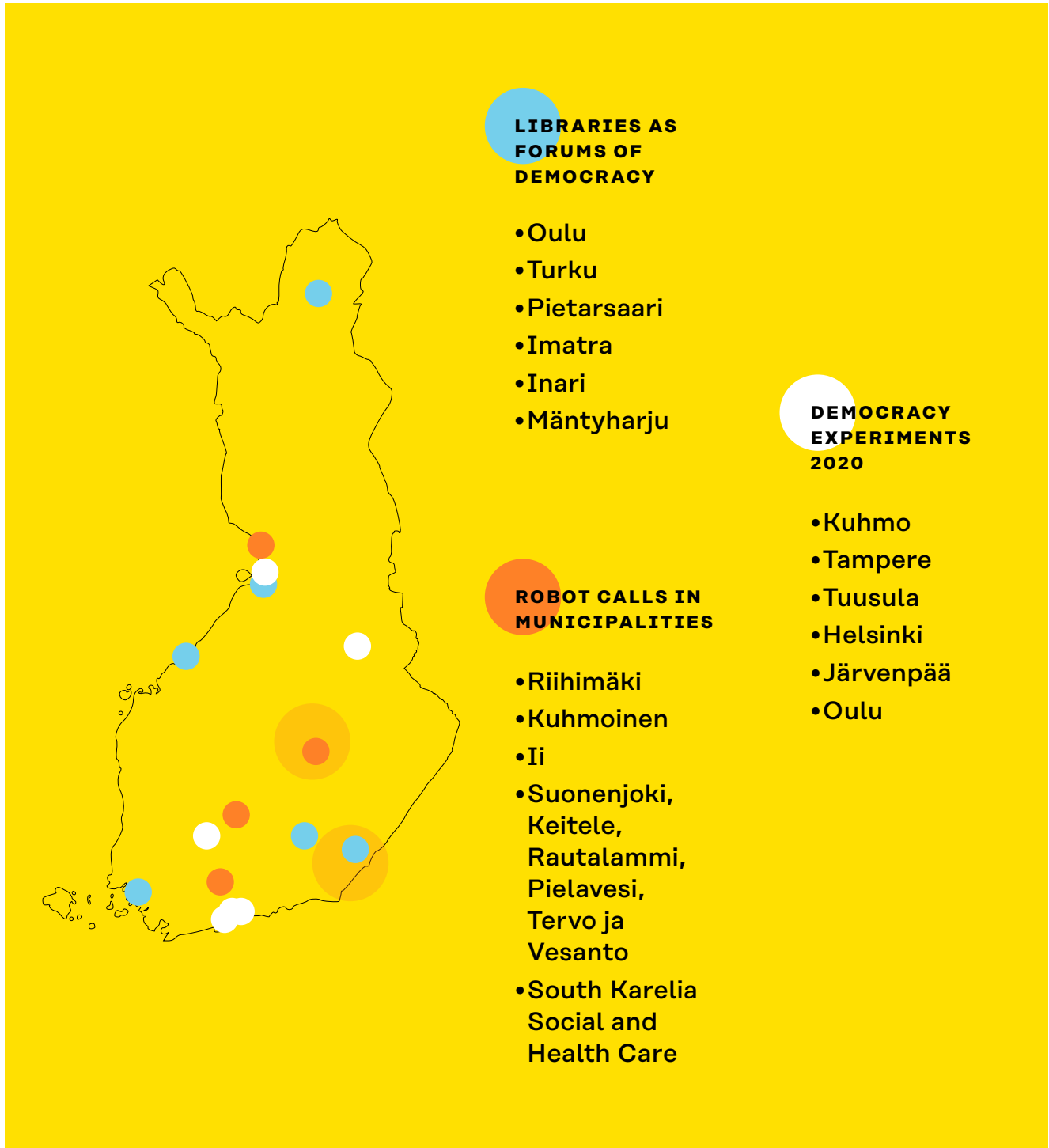
A plan was drawn up with the libraries selected for the experiment, on the content and format of the experiment, the target group and the experimentation method. The aim was not only to find good practices for each individual library to increase dialogue between members of the public and politicians or other democracy promoters but also to work with all six libraries to find lessons that could be shared with all libraries in Finland.

More information about the “Libraries as forums of democracy” project can be found on [Libraries as forums of democracy – Sitra](#).

On the basis of the libraries’ experiments, five good methods have been collected in this handbook to help libraries find their own way(s) to strengthen their role as arenas of democracy. For this handbook, the experiments and lessons learnt from them have been analysed and the staff of the libraries involved have been interviewed about the practical implementation and what guidelines they would like to give to all libraries.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought an additional twist to the experiments. In the new and all-encompassing situation, the experiments really were arenas of a new virtual democracy, reaching into people’s homes.

**Figure 1.** Sitra’s participatory experiments in different parts of Finland in 2020–2021. This publication discusses the concepts developed and lessons learnt in the “Libraries as forums of democracy” experiment.



## The library of the future will be built on networks and create experiences of learning and participation

On the basis of the experiments carried out, what can be said of the future of libraries?

The project workers we interviewed believe that **the development of libraries is a natural continuation of what has been done before**. The participating libraries regarded the project as a part of a continuum, which is not so much about changing the role of the library but about supporting and strengthening a long-standing theme.

**The library of the future will be a centre for experience, learning and services**. The library will continue to be part of people's general education as an arena of critical thinking, for creating different

perspectives and debate. In addition to lending books, libraries' role as public living rooms and discussion arenas will become stronger: people will be able to express their views and participate in diverse ways in promoting issues that are important to them.

**The library of the future will be built in partnership with others**. Dialogue and co-operation models will be built increasingly with other municipal cultural and educational bodies, the third sector and NGOs, among others.

**The digital library will create a more accessible future**. The Covid-19 pandemic has taught libraries how they can be accessible in a new way as an arena of democracy and reach out to homes. The work is only just beginning, but the experience of remote and hybrid events is promising and creates new opportunities for civic education and dialogue.

## TIPS

"This is a step into a new future and also associated with the fact that what happens in the library does not stay in the library; instead, co-operation with other municipal educational administration is also needed."

"No library is an island, network and co-operation are needed extensively on different levels, from global to local!"

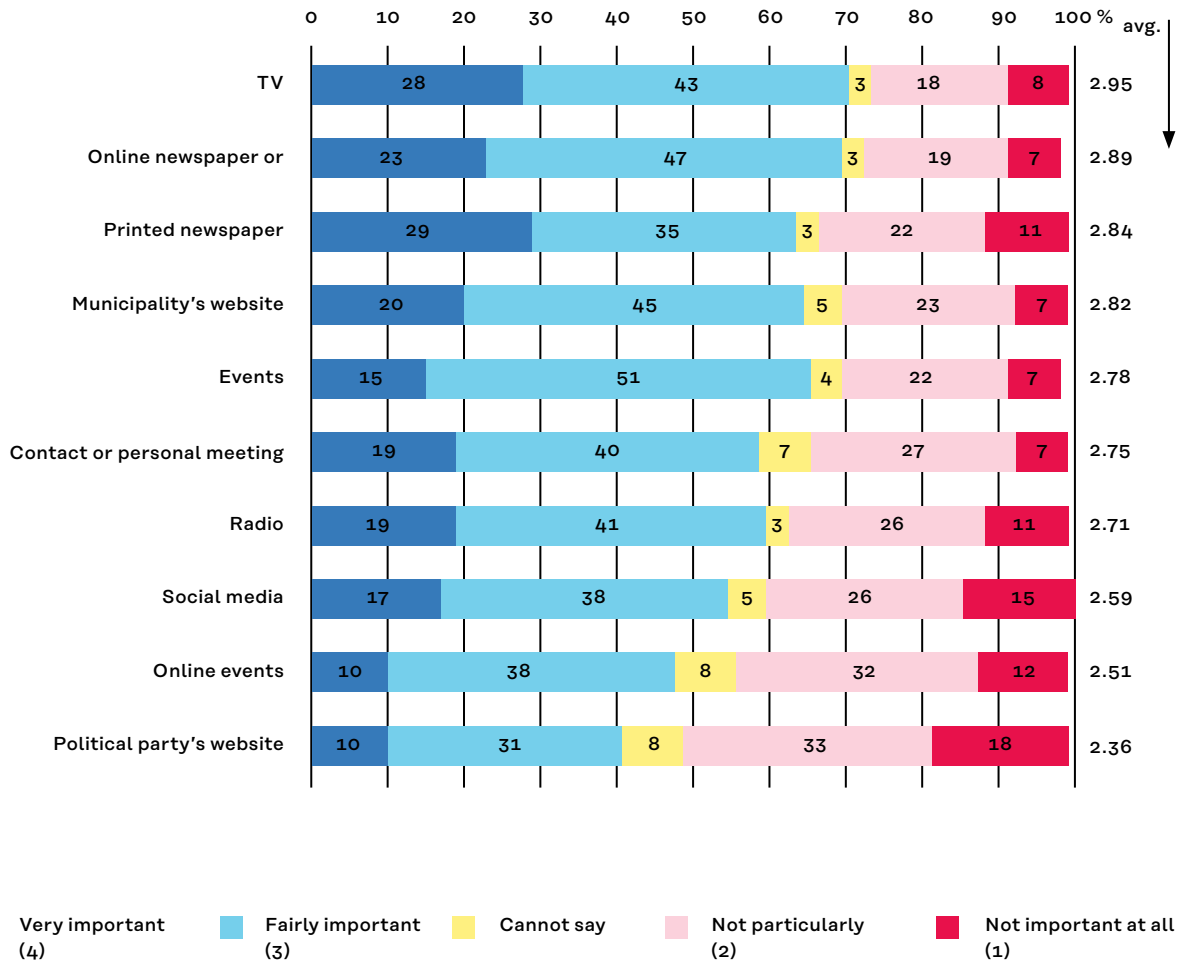
"The tasks of the library also include showing different perspectives and helping people think critically. This can be achieved not only through books but also through discussions."

What do ordinary Finns wish for regarding societal events organised in libraries? To get an idea of how people think, we can look at a survey conducted in November 2020. According to its as yet unpublished results, nearly 60 per cent of the more than 4,500 respondents considered various events to be either very or fairly important ways to

follow and participate in social debate and decision-making. Television and online newspapers or media were identified as the most important ways to follow and participate in social debate. Online events and the websites of political parties were considered as least important. (Joint regional survey 2020, Kantar TNS.)



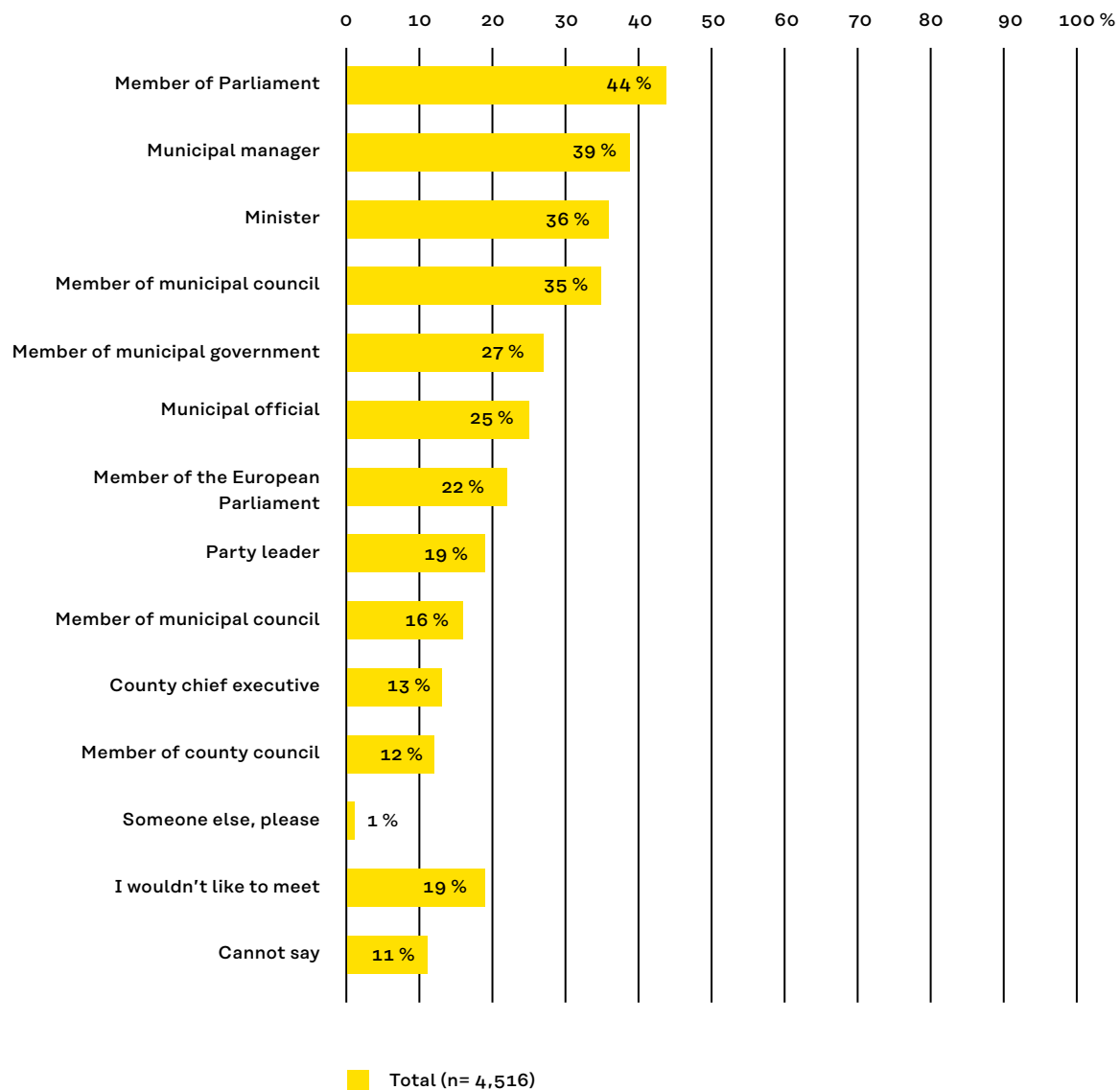
**Figure 2.** How important do you consider the following ways to follow and participate in social debate and decision-making?



If libraries offered the opportunity to meet decision-makers, respondents would be most interested in meeting members of parliament, mayors, ministers and municipal

councillors. On the basis of the survey, provincial representatives were perceived as more distant, at least at present.

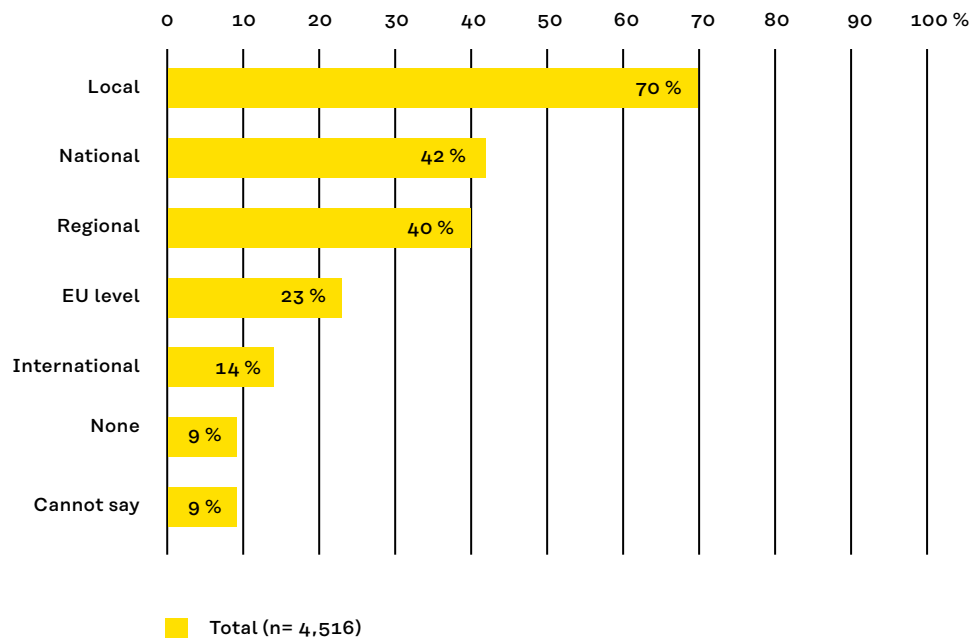
**Figure 3 .** If your municipality's library organises open events to listen to and meet decision-makers, who would you like to meet? You can choose multiple options.



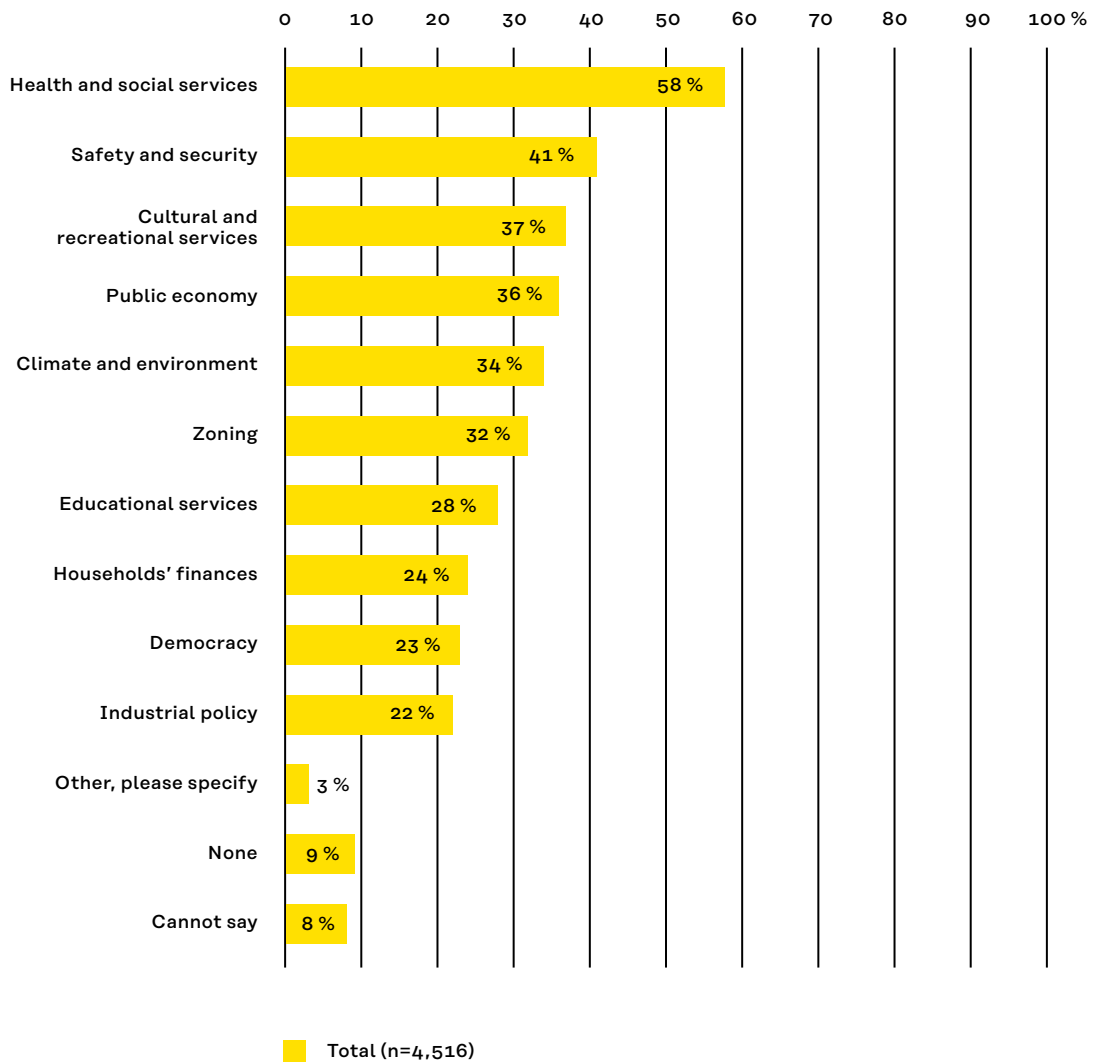
The survey showed that people were especially interested in hearing about local topics (79 per cent of the respondents) in library events. About two-fifths of respondents also felt that national and regional issues were of interest. EU and other international issues were clearly of less interest. On more specific

social issues, the survey showed that people were interested most in fairly usual political topics that are close to everyday life. The three most interesting topics were 1) health and social services, 2) safety and security and 3) cultural and leisure services.

**Figure 4.** Which of the following areas would you like to hear about and discuss at open events held in municipal libraries? You can choose from several options.



**Figure 5.** Which issues would you like to hear more about and discuss with decision-makers in open events held in municipal libraries? You can choose multiple options.



## 2. Ways for libraries to promote democracy

### The key is to find a new role and way of working, rather than single experiments

During the project, the libraries involved in the experiment have learnt a lot about how to support the growth of libraries as forums of democracy. They have learnt through practice what works and what doesn't seem to work, at least not immediately. This section summarises libraries' lessons learned into concrete measures. Public libraries can use them on their journey toward broader public. The key is to find a new kind of role and way of working, rather than single experiments.

From the libraries' perspective, the key elements of success, regardless of method, are the following:

- 1. Integrate the new activities into basic library tasks whenever possible.** It is essential to consider how libraries can create a form of activity that suits them and is easily replicable.
- 2. Invest in building a network of cooperation and partnerships.** These will make it easier to link the activities with regional activities and wider mission.

*In the examples, the aim is to take into account different libraries and available resources. Some of the methods used need a dedicated project employee if carried out on a larger scale while others can be carried out without extra resources as part of everyday life of libraries.*

## TIPS

"Libraries seem to be somewhat at a loss with this democracy thing.

**They experiment with this and that but cannot integrate the experiments into a basic structure.** This really requires a lot of energy.

Right from the start, we have integrated the experiments into the basic structure of the target group to **achieve a repeatable model.**"

"Libraries also admired our **partnership network**. In it, we are linked as one organisation with the bigger picture."

## The methods are divided into those to be carried out with partners and those to be carried out by libraries themselves

### **DONE WITH PARTNERS**

1. **Teach influencing:** To teach concretely how to influence and have a dialogue with decision-makers.
2. **Build dialogue:** To help people engage in constructive dialogue with decision-makers.
3. **Encourage influencing:** Build people-driven dialogue.
4. **Show the bigger picture:** Showcase the actual impacts of EU-level political decisions on people's daily lives.
5. **Try different perspectives:** Apply different creative methods for influencing.

### **DONE INDEPENDENTLY**

1. Soft toy elections
2. A small political reading challenge



## 2.1. Carry out with partners

# Influencing training

## WHAT?

### What is done?

Influencing training can take the form of one-off sessions or longer courses focusing on different aspects of influencing. The point is to teach the target group influencing and dialogue skills. The aim is also to lower the threshold for participants to approach decision-makers, for example.

Influencing training is organised and planned in co-operation with, for example, an educational institution or another partner. You can hire an external expert as a trainer. Libraries have a natural role in providing facilities for influencing training and their providers as well as helping them recruit training participants. Training can be carried out on site or online.

## HOW?

### Preparations

- First, **identify partners** and contact them
- Choose the training **target group** together with the partners and determine **what it is interested in and what is its starting level with regard to influencing**
- Prepare the **training module** content and plan its duration
- Hire a **coach**, if necessary

### What is needed?

- Core group with partner(s) and library representative: joint planning meetings, progression that suits both parties and a clear **co-operation model and division of tasks**
- Enough time for marketing, scheduling and meetings
- Space and remote connectivity and technical support, for example if streaming is needed

### Lighter version

Lighter versions of organising influencing training include, for example, short video clips on different themes or a single-session training event for a chosen target group.

### Larger version

Influencing training can also be planned as more extensive modules in connection with a course at a general upper secondary school, an adult education centre or even as a course in itself.

Participants can be motivated to get involved by being rewarded with study credits or a certificate on completing the course.

## E.G.

### Examples corner

**The library of Mäntyharju** organised a training module that supported **youth participation**. This was done in co-operation with comprehensive schools, general upper secondary schools and youth services. It was included as part of teaching, which contributed to young people's commitment and made participation more meaningful. As part of training, young people could also discuss directly with decision-makers via video. The goal was to encourage young people to participate and give them support and tools for promoting issues that interest them and being in dialogue with decision-makers.

Organisations specialising in participation, such as Osallisuuden Osaamiskeskus (Centre of expertise in participation) operating under the Union of Local Youth Councils in Finland, and municipal youth services were also valuable partners. Young people were reached by visiting schools and using outreach youth work methods.

## TIPS

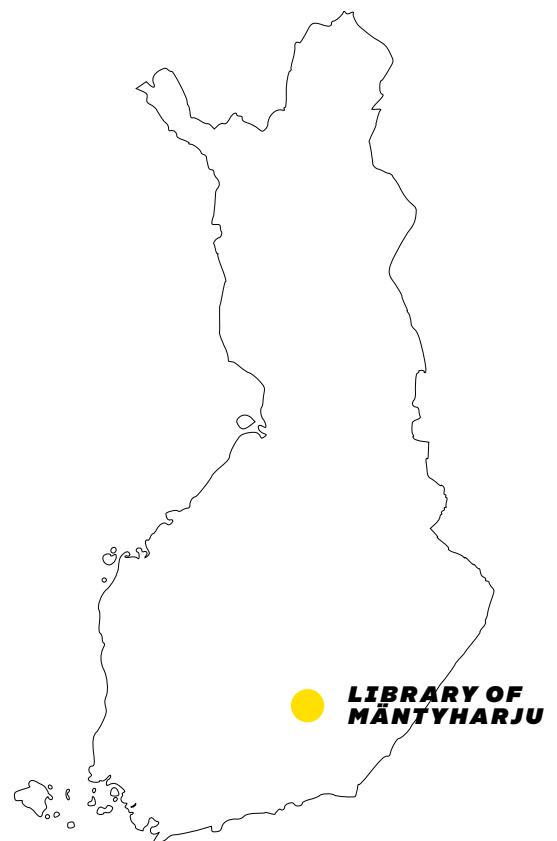
### Libraries' tips and experiences

"This should be started in lower grades, in fifth grade or so. We have visited a lesson on lower grades – talking to sixth-graders about online democracy services. It did seem to interest them."

"At first we thought that we will make prepare co-operation between politicians and general upper secondary school students more thoroughly but we have given up patting people on the head. We now focus more on training people to encounter and contact politicians themselves."

"New partners require broad-mindedness. Even if we follow the project plan to the letter, we always try to learn new things and think about new developments and new forms of co-operation."

"We have to compete for young people's time and emphasise the benefits of training. It has helped that this gives general upper secondary school credits and that the adult education centre grants an excellent certificate of participation. That's a great addition to your portfolio."



To find out more about the event and its details, contact:

- Library of Mäntyharju, **Jonna Juhola**  
jonna.juhola@mantyharju.fi



## Discussion events on a chosen theme

### WHAT

#### What is done?

A library can act as a catalyst for a new kind of dialogue by offering facilities for events where topical themes in the municipality are discussed. These can be held remotely and on site or as a combination of both. They last approximately 1.5 hours and are facilitated discussions on a chosen theme.

They should be organised in co-operation with different partners (such as organisations and political parties). Set aside enough time to identify partners and build co-operation. It is up to the library to define its own role – whether, say, to provide facilities and a facilitator, or to help in choosing the themes and marketing the event. Events can be organised around panel discussion participants/main speakers or as more equal debates among all participants. The event does not need to be held close to an election.

### HOW?

#### Preparations

- Think about what is currently topical in your municipality – what do people discuss about?
- Identify and approach potential **partners**
- **Clearly agree on roles and tasks** with the chosen partners
  - **Select the event's target group** together with the partners
  - Determine **the structure of the discussion and its practicalities**
  - **Plan the facilitation of the event** – will you hire an outside facilitator?
  - Prepare a **marketing plan and invitations**
  - Prepare a **feedback collection form** for the event
  - Agree on the division of expenses, if any

#### What is needed?

- A co-ordinator to identify partners and promote events
- Agreement on the roles and division of responsibilities with the partners
- Suitable venue if organised (even partly) on site
- Technology and support for technical arrangements (online event: streaming and video, on-site event: PA, lights, etc.)
- Possible catering
- Perseverance and courage for learning new kinds of co-operation
- Flexibility in the face of changing situations
- Ensuring the continuity and structure of co-operation:
  - How can different parties approach libraries on their own initiative in the future?

#### If you opt for the smaller version

Plan a precise concept for the discussion event among the library staff, setting out clearly what the library will offer, what preparations for the event will be needed and what organisation alternatives there are. For example: the library will provide space and technology for organising a hybrid event, the partner will choose the theme, invite the participants and organise facilitation for the event.

#### Larger version

Organise several events with different partners and tailor the events and the division of tasks with each of them individually.



**Picture 1.** Newspaper Turun Sanomat published a story regarding a panel discussion on the theme How to Change the World?

## E.G.

### Examples corner

**Pietarsaari Library** organised panel discussions under the general theme **“Hoppsan, jag är en påverkare”** (Oops, I’m an influencer). The panel discussions had different themes, such as sustainable development. The events were streamed so that the panel discussion participants were in the library and others participated online.

**Oulu City Library** organised discussion events called **“Kansanvallen kahvit”** (Democracy coffee) on topical themes. Subjects included peat production and young people’s chances to influence matters locally, among other things. Identifying the partners, contemplating the themes and building co-operation took a lot of time but the events were considered successful and discussion was active. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the events were held online.

Also, **Turku City Library** organised a panel discussion on the theme **How to Change the World?**

## TIPS

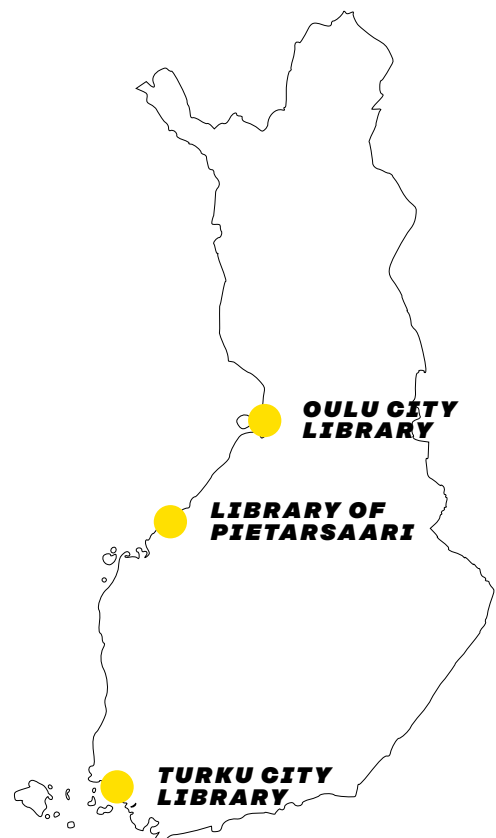
### Libraries’ tips and experiences

“For us, the most difficult thing was coming up with themes. And whether the themes came from us or from partners. You should communicate very clearly what the library provides.”

“You have to come up with a communications plan to implement this in practice and keep it in the foreground. And also to maintain the partnerships that have now been started.”

“Especially if you started organising these as online events with entirely new partners, it requires quite a lot of work and time!”

“We didn’t understand the different nuances – we thought that all themes could be discussed. However, the issue of peat production was quite a sensitive.”



To find out more about the event and its details contact:

- Oulu City Library: **Maija Karvosenoja**, maija.karvosenoja@ouka.fi
- Library of Pietarsaari: **Leif Storbjörk**, leif.storbjork@jakobstad.fi

## Election panel discussions for certain target group

### WHAT

#### What is done?

Election panel discussions are a way to invite members of the public to engage in dialogue with politicians and to bring politicians closer to local residents when politics is a particularly hot topic at local level. Local or other politicians are invited to these events to discuss themes that are topical and important to local residents. There is a host/moderator/facilitator, the panellists, technical facilitators and, of course, an audience.

The panel discussions may be theme-based or tailored according to the target group. They can be completely online, on-site at the library or as a hybrid combining both forms. The duration of the event should be limited to approximately 1.5 hours.

Before the election panel, you should contact the target group to find out what questions they have in mind regarding the development of the municipality or the topic to be discussed.

### HOW?

#### Preparations

- Choose the **target group** and think about how to reach people representing it.
- Identify **partners**
- Find out **what the target group is interested in** (surveys, interviews)
- Invite the **panel discussion participant and other key people** (e.g. a live illustrator, a facilitator, a host)
- Determine the **structure of the discussion and its practicalities**
- Prepare a **marketing plan and invitations**
- Prepare a **feedback collection form** for the event

#### What is needed?

- A co-ordinator who has every week time dedicated specifically to the promotion of the event
- Agree on the roles and division of tasks with the partners
- Collection of questions online/on paper depending on the target group
- Suitable space if organised (even partly) on-site
- Technology and support for technical arrangements (online event: streaming and video, on-site event: PA, lights, etc.)
- Possible catering

#### Lighter version

An election panel discussion can be organised as a lighter version if facilitation is taken care of by the library personnel without a hired host or facilitator.

You can also invite a small group of participants remotely, for instance using Zoom or Teams, without streaming.

#### Larger version

If you have the resources, you can invite speakers from all political parties on the local council, arrange for the candidates to meet in the same space, stream the event and have a live illustrator and even live music.

For larger events, it is worthwhile having a professional facilitator and an online facilitator.

You can also arrange a series of events around the city to lower the participation threshold.

## E.G.

### Examples corner

**Imatra** organised an event called **“Kuntavaaliareena senioreille”** (Municipal election arena for senior citizens). Before the event, questions and issues that interested the target group were collected to serve as a basis for the discussion. The aim was to encourage senior citizens to vote and ensure that the discussion covers the topics they are interested in.

**Oulu** organised events under the theme **“Nyt saa sanoa”** (Now it's OK to say), in which young politicians could have their voices heard. The goal was to encourage young people to vote and to highlight young politicians.

## TIPS

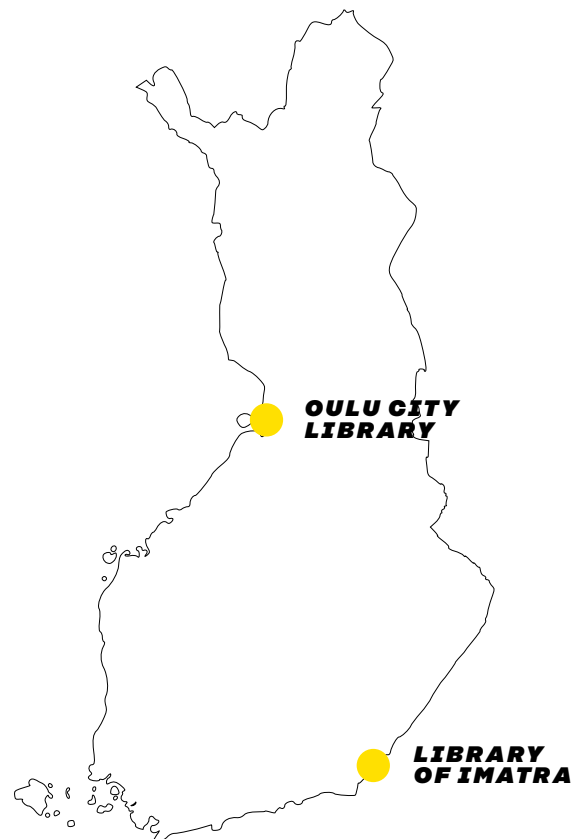
### Libraries' tips and experiences

**“Networking takes time** and the planning of the first event took about 19 hours. Meeting with partners, communicating with the candidates, adjusting the structure of the event. The next events were ‘easier’, taking about 4 hours.”

“Teams has little tricks: audience participation can be encouraged by having the chat open for questions. A technical check for the participants before the event is important, as is creating a relaxed atmosphere. The live illustrator created nice interaction and atmosphere.”

“It’s very important to plan the structure and timing of the event carefully in advance!”

“Our (Oulu’s) ‘Nyt saa sanoa’ event concept was the nicest and the most functional! It was easy to get young candidates to participate and there was nice energy in the air. In the end, we had to organise four events as we got so many inquiries.”



To find out more about the event and its details contact:

- Library of Imatra, **Ari Saeslahti**, ari.saeslahti@imatra.fi
- Oulu City Library, **Maija Karvosenoja**, maija.karvosenoja@ouka.fi

## How does the EU affect us?

### WHAT?

#### What is done?

Along with globalisation, world politics and the EU are now closer to the individual citizen than ever before. That is why broadening understanding and perspectives beyond national borders is particularly important in our era.

The purpose of EU-themed events is to highlight the impact the EU has on different Finnish municipalities and their residents' everyday lives and to raise people's awareness of EU-level decision-making. Under the "How does the EU affect us?" theme, libraries can organise discussions, training, small-scale information campaigns, EU-themed quizzes, more extensive lecture series or (online) library visits by Members of the European Parliament, for example. For many, the EU seems very remote, so it is particularly important to understand the theme related needs and wishes of the target group and suitable partners.

### HOW?

#### Preparations

- Choose a **target group and a theme**, which could interest this target group
- Identify **partners and experts** related to the EU-level decision-making
- Determine in more detail **what the target group is interested in this theme by contacting members of the target group**
- Contact potential decision-makers or their contact persons well in advance
- Plan the **content and structure** of the event and hire a facilitator, if necessary
- **Make a communications and marketing plan** and reserve time and resources for diverse marketing activities

#### What is needed?

- A co-ordinator who has time every week dedicated specifically to turning the theme into concrete actions and topics and finding partners
- Experts who can direct you to the right partners
- Regular meetings and preparation with partners
- Finding the right marketing venue for the target group
- Suitable space and technology
- Enough time for planning and execution
- A facilitator for the discussion and good planning for the progress of the event

#### Lighter version

The library can provide information about the EU in a compact form as a small physical or virtual exhibition. The library can compile a short introduction into the impact of the EU on the area in question and the everyday life of its residents. The library can also organise a small-scale information campaign and an EU-themed quiz in connection with it.

Another fairly light option is to organise an expert lecture that is open to everyone or intended at a specific target group, complemented by residents' questions collected in advance from the target group.

#### Larger version

A broader way to increase awareness of the EU is to engage the chosen target group in event planning, decision-maker interviews or panel discussions. Based on the target group insights gained, events and methods used can be tailored according to the target group.

It is also very warmly recommended to use creative methods for EU-level events.

#### ORGANISING AN EU-THEMED EVENT

In Finland, information about the EU's operations is provided by the European Parliament Information Office Finland, the Representation of the European Commission in Finland and Europe Information of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The "Libraries as forums of democracy" project offers these – and other parties communicating about the European Union – the chance to communicate their message nationwide through libraries and participate in debate about EU membership. All these are natural partners to work with in the planning and implementation of programmes and to explore opportunities for cooperation.

#### Contact details of EU communications personnel:

The Representation of the European Commission in Finland can be contacted by sending email to [comm-rep-hel@ec.europa.eu](mailto:comm-rep-hel@ec.europa.eu). On the Representation's website [Home | Finland \(europa.eu\)](#) (in Finnish), you can also find the contact details for the Europe Direct centres [Meet us \(europa.eu\)](#).

The European Parliament Information Office Finland also assists in inviting the Members of the European Parliament to library events. You can send inquiries to [ephelsinki@ep.europa.eu](mailto:ephelsinki@ep.europa.eu). The website of the European Parliament Information Office Finland: [Pääsivu | home | Euroopan parlamentti Suomen-toimisto \(europa.eu\)](#), (in Finnish).

## E.G.

### Examples corner

**Oulu City Library** organised two **“Gloabalista lokaaliin”** (From global to local) online discussions on the implementation of the Green Deal locally in Oulu and career paths in the EU. The partners were Oulu University Library and the Council of Oulu Region. In the online discussions, the selected panellists introduced the topic and the public participated via chat.

**Pietarsaari Library** also organised an EU-themed event called **“EU arjessa”** (The EU in daily life). The event combined a discussion event with a related mini fair. The fair was organised in the library and showcased various projects and operators closely linked with the EU.

In addition to the event, the library of Pietarsaari created **an EU information application, which made it possible to learn more about the topic under three different sections:** information about EU, a quiz and a stream of various EU-related Twitter accounts (‘‘EU gossip’’). **The information section** provided information about the EU’s decision-making process, Member States, structure, benefits and future plans. The EU quiz had 20 questions, allowing a nice and easy way for participants to test their knowledge of the EU and what they learnt from the previous section. **“EU gossip”** took the reader to a page with a stream of the official Twitter accounts of Finnish EU politicians and EU institutions. The reader saw the latest EU news and had direct access to information distributed through different channels. Visitors to the library were able to explore the application through touchscreen devices.

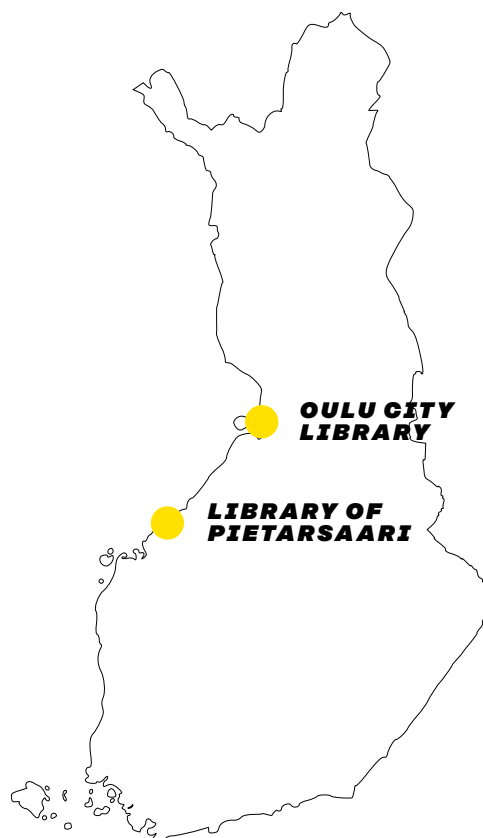
## TIPS

### Libraries’ tips and experiences

“The topic is maybe too remote for local residents – choosing an interesting subject from among the EU themes is challenging. There certainly are topics that are easier to approach but you have to do some scouting to find interesting themes, for example, from students.”

To find out more about the event and its details contact:

- Oulu City Library, **Maija Karvosenoja**,  
maija.karvosenoja@ouka.fi
- Library of Pietarsaari: **Leif Storbjörk**,  
leif.storbjork@jakobstad.fi







## Creative ways of influencing

### WHAT?

#### What is done?

Creative ways of influencing refer to using different art forms in influencing. The aim is to inspire the residents of the municipality to see influencing from new perspectives and encourage them to express their opinions and finding their own way of influencing. Anything goes when it comes to creative methods! For example, libraries can organise workshops to look at photos or graffiti from a political perspective, or organise a music quiz on political songs at a local pub. It's definitely worthwhile to work with partners from different creative fields of the creative and art workshop professionals. Creative methods are especially well suited for supporting young people's participation and the practical execution could well be a longer or shorter course organised in co-operation with a general upper secondary school or a vocational education institution.

### HOW?

#### Preparations

- **Organise a brainstorming session** among the library personnel and also invite potential partners, who might have good ideas
- Identify **partners and art workshop professionals**
- **Agree on the division of roles and tasks precisely** with the chosen partners
- Choose the **form and target group of the creative method** in close co-operation with the partners
- Plan the **implementation and marketing methods**

#### What is needed?

- Bold imagining and some more hours for brainstorming and finding suitable partners
- Highly committed partners and regular planning meetings
- Immersion in the world of the target group: What would work for the intended target group? What is important to them right now? How could you involve influencing in that?

#### Lighter version

Make it possible for people to voice their opinions in the library by organising an art corner or a political drawing competition in co-operation with schools, retirement homes or the third sector.

#### Larger version

Organise a bigger workshop in co-operation with a local education institution, with participants being given different kinds of homework to be done during the course. You can also design a project-like entity with the partners, where participants work on a single work of art, performance or music throughout the course or workshop series.



## E.G.

### Examples corner

**Turku City Library** organised several **civic engagement workshops** during the spring using various artistic means, such as photography. They were used as a means to practise discussing societal topics and expressing opinions. The workshops were led by arts and workshop professionals and carried out in co-operation students of Turku Vocational Institute, among others.

Turku City Library also organised an online discussion event called **“Vaikuttava taide” (Influencing through art)**. Four artists took part in the discussion: cartoon artist Warda Ahmed, musician Noah Kin, researcher/critic Sini Mononen and visual artist, with extensive experience in graffiti, Juho Toiskallio. The discussion was moderated by Renaz Ebrahimi and could be followed live on Facebook. At the end, there was a chance for the audience to ask questions.

With these events, Turku City Library wanted to reach out to people or groups that, for one reason or another, had been marginalised in political decision-making or social debate.

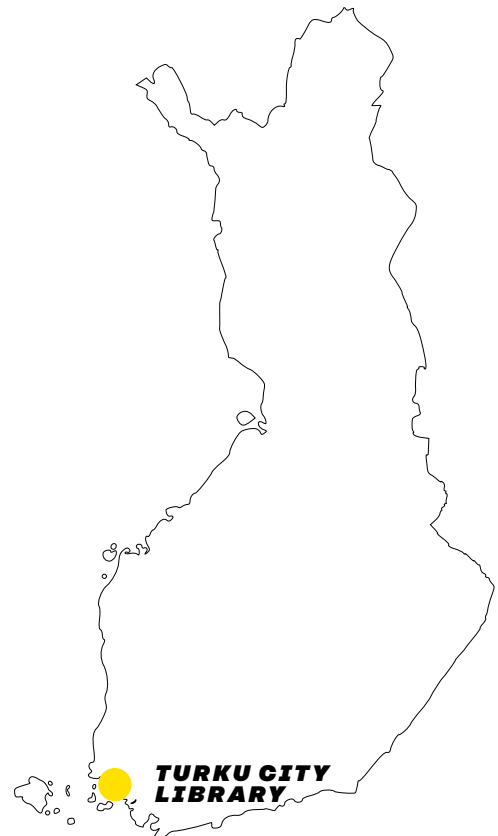
## TIPS

### Libraries' tips and experiences

“You have to contact your partners earlier, because we suddenly realised that it was an exam week at the high schools and it wasn't so easy to find participants – luckily one teacher and class were enthusiastic and participated.”

To find out more about the event and its details contact:

- Turku City Library: **Ville Sirkkiä**, ville.sirkkia@turku.fi



# CARRY OUT INDEPENDENTLY

24

SITRA STUDIES 228 – HOW TO MAKE LIBRARIES FORUMS OF DEMOCRACY?

## 2.2. Carry out independently

### A small political reading challenge

#### WHAT?

##### What is done?

The aim of the small political reading challenge is to inspire ideas, broaden people's view of social issues and highlight the different political dimensions of everyday life. The target group is anyone who likes reading. The library lists different categories related to politics and society and encourages people to read books in these categories. The library may compile examples of books or podcasts in each category and publish them weekly. The library invites people to share posts about the books they have read on social media, for example, or to send a completed reading list to the library by certain date. You can also add an incentive to the reading challenge, such as having a small book prize to be drawn among all participants.

#### HOW?

##### Preparations

- Come up with ideas for **reading challenge categories and book tips**
- Plan how to **participate and the duration of the challenge**
- Plan and obtain a possible **prize**
- Determine the **publication channels** and make a **communications plan**
- Make a **category form and challenge advertisements**
- Pre-print forms and make a **feedback box** for the library

##### What is needed?

- An employee to plan and carry out the challenge (working time depends on how big you want to make the challenge)
- Weekly information and promotion, such as weekly book tips
- Even if there are no partners involved, you should target challenge-related marketing to high schools and adult education centres, for example

##### Lighter version

If you want to carry out a light version of the challenge, use Turku City Library's form templates (see the appendices). Display the challenge and the book tips on social media but do not invest efforts in getting a physical space.

##### Larger version

If you have more time and resources, work out challenges tailored for your municipality and its residents. Make an effort to arrange a physical space and keep the tipped books visible both in the space and in the online library. Explore opportunities for cooperation with a local high school's social philosophy course, or agree to work with political leaders.



Picture 2. Turku City library's invitation to take part of a small political reading challenge.

## E.G.

### Examples corner

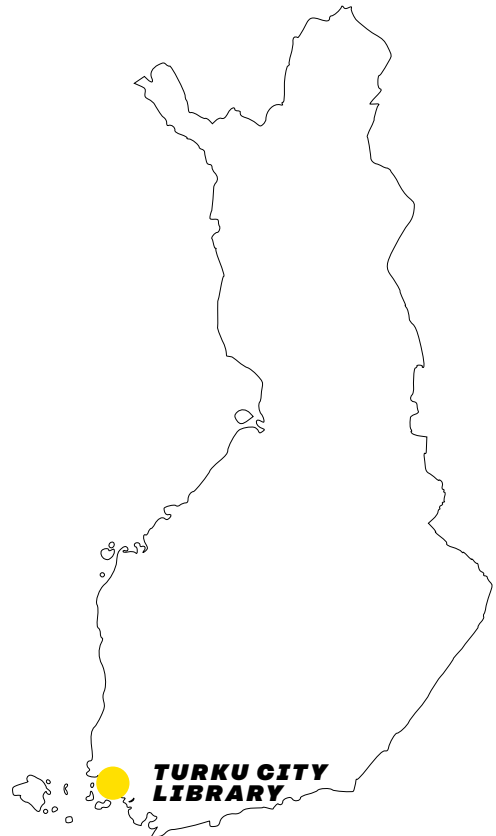
**Turku City Library** carried out a small political reading challenge and prepared comprehensive materials for it. The link to the Turku reading challenge can be found in the handbook's link list.

## TIPS

### Libraries' tips and experiences

"You should try to come up with as many marketing channels as possible. Send out weekly 'reminders of the challenge. It takes about 10 minutes to prepare a list of weekly tips with the existing template."

"You can put in more or less working time into planning depending on how big you want the challenge. If you use our form template and book tips, you need time and resources only for communications, getting the prizes and collecting the returned forms."



To find out more about the event and its details contact:

- Turku City Library, **Ville Sirkiä**, ville.sirkia@turku.fi

# CARRY OUT INDEPENDENTLY

26

SITRA STUDIES 228 – HOW TO MAKE LIBRARIES FORUMS OF DEMOCRACY?

## Soft toy elections

### WHAT?

#### What is done?

Soft toy elections refer to elections organised by the library, in which children can vote for soft toy candidates to form a “library council” for the next term of office. The aim of soft toy elections is to teach election procedures in a way that is easy for children to understand. When children learn more about the candidates, their parents are also reminded of election practices and current elections. It may be a good idea to organise soft toy elections at the same time as municipal or parliamentary elections. The target group for the elections is especially daycare-aged children and first and second-graders. The library can arrange soft toy elections itself or collect candidates from nearby daycare groups. Although it is possible to organise the elections virtually on the library’s website, the best option from children’s point of view is physically in the library.

### HOW?

#### Preparations

- Get **enough soft toys**. Use your own networks, flea markets or recycling centres or engage the children at nearby daycare centres in finding candidates
- Write **candidate descriptions and election promises**
- Arrange a **space for candidate presentation and voting, voting instructions, a voting booth and ballot papers**
- Plan communications and marketing channels and prepare advertisements
- Plan the **duration of the election and how the votes are counted and the results are declared**

#### What is needed?

- An election co-ordinator that has, for a couple of weeks, about 0.25–0.5 days for planning, preparations and practical arrangements. The help of a co-worker and other library staff can be used in finding ideas for the execution and creating the candidate descriptions.
- Cardboard, pens and pencils, a ballot box, a space for candidate presentation and voting
- Election posters to be taken or sent to daycare centres and schools

#### Lighter version

You can do a light version of soft toy elections by having a couple of candidates, using the library’s own premises and dedicating only a little effort to marketing to nearby daycare centres and schools. Voting can take place independently, without election officials and over a longer period of time.

#### Larger version

If you have more time and resources, plan the election together with nearby daycare centres. For example, each daycare centre can provide one candidate and the daycare centre can organise primary elections for their own candidates.

## E.G.

### Examples corner and tips

The library of Pietarsaari held a soft toy election in May 2021. The candidates were six staff soft toys. Each was given a name, a number, a slogan and a description of the things that were the most important to them. Each candidate had its own advertisement made with the Canva programme. Information about the elections were shared on the library's social media channels and distributed to schools and daycare centres.

Physically, the elections took place in the children and young people's section of the library, where there was also a voting booth. Everyone under the age of 18 was welcome to vote. The voting methods were similar to real elections: the votes were cast on a ballot paper, which was stamped and dropped into the ballot box.

To find out more about the event and its details contact:

- Library of Pietarsaari: **Leif Storbjörk**, leif.storbjork@jakobstad.fi



**Picture 3.** Examples of soft toy elections' advertisement materials.

## 3. Tips and keys to success for libraries

The libraries participating in the trial project experimented with various methods of promoting democracy and learnt a great deal from doing so. In this section, we have compiled the key lessons that the libraries want to highlight as tips for other libraries – things that they would have liked to hear before starting on the experiment.

### THE TIPS ARE DIVIDED UNDER THE FOLLOWING THEMES:

- **Where to start?** What methods to choose and how when there is so much you can do?
- **Create a framework for co-operation.** New kinds of activities require bold co-operation with new partners and this co-operation should be facilitated right from the start.
- **Have a low threshold for participation.** Tips for determining and reaching the target group.
- **Make it visible.** How to ensure that the event will be noticed?
- **Prepare for surprising situations.** Things do not always go as planned – how to keep your mind flexible when circumstances change?
- **You don't always have to succeed!**

### 3.1. Where to start?

#### **Start in the library**

Start planning by organising a **brainstorming session among the library staff**. At the meeting, go through the methods described in this handbook. Think about what would suit you, how much time you have, who could start advancing the project and who you could ask to participate.

#### **Focus, limits and the division of tasks**

**At first, focus on promoting one or two issues.** This will keep the workload manageable and avoid overloading the new way of working. **If you carry out the project independently with the library staff,** work

out the division of tasks from the onset. **If you have hired a separate project worker** to promote the methods of democracy, it is still a good idea to agree on the division of tasks and additional help, if needed. With a project worker, you can plan larger-scale projects.

#### **Set ground rules**

Among the library staff, think about how you will respond to anyone interested if they ask about your help: how you will help, how you allocate resources and if you have any preconditions (such as how many events per political party the library will help organise). Also think about how you will justify to potential enquirers why the library participates in or facilitates political debate.

## TIPS

“Well, we did start off a bit too ambitiously. At first, we planned to have just election panel discussions and then we ended up doing all kinds of different things. We recommend that you focus on one or two events or methods so that it doesn't take too much time away from other work.”

### 3.2. Create a framework for co-operation

#### **Come up with ideas for different kinds of partners** and contact them

When it comes to partners, it is worthwhile to think boldly “outside the box”. Think what partners would be key considering the theme you have chosen. Here are some examples of different partners that the libraries worked with in their experiments. You should reserve enough time for identifying and contacting partners and agreeing on co-operation. Municipal committees and councils are also good places for finding partners and raising awareness.

#### **Facilitation of co-operation and division of tasks**

Involving partners at an early stage helps focus and plan the event. Facilitate co-operation clearly right from the start. What is the library’s responsibility and what is expected of partners? How are potential costs divided? The fewer resources the library has, the more precise the rules of co-operation should be.

Organise regular planning meetings with the partners, for example weekly or every two weeks. This will help people to get to know each other and co-operation will become more natural. Do not hesitate to share responsibilities with the partners: the library does not need to do everything alone!

#### **THE LIBRARIES CARRIED OUT EXPERIMENTS WITH THE FOLLOWING PARTNERS, FOR EXAMPLE**

- Libraries in nearby municipalities
- Other municipal operators (incl. communications, cultural administration, city executive office, decision-makers)
- Associations operating actively in the municipality
- Finnish Museum of Photography
- Nearby schools and vocational education institutions
- Local pub
- Turku Vocational Institute
- Council of Oulu Region
- Union of Local Youth Councils in Finland & Osallisuuden Osaamiskeskus (Centre of Expertise in Participation)
- Nuorten politiikkakoulu (School of Politics for Young People) project
- Union of Upper Secondary School Students
- Inarin viestintäpaja (Inari communications workshop)
- Social media influencer Emmi Nuorgam
- Imatran Palveluyhdistys ry (Imatra service association)



### 3.3. Lower the participation threshold

Reaching out to local residents is key to promoting democratic means.

#### Choosing the target group

Who would you like to activate? Is there a target group in your municipality that has been neglected lately? Discuss the target group first with your partners. For example, teachers and young people themselves can tell you more about their group and what kind of approach might work for them.

## TIPS

"You should think big – be bold and go where people are – get out of the library more often."

### 3.4. Make it visible

All the libraries participating in experiments were surprised by the workload caused by marketing.

#### Marketing and communications plan

Make a comprehensive marketing and communications plan. Think about the key places in your municipality and where the members of your target group hang out. Can you make your project visible in these places? How are you going to use the networks of your partners and social media? Could you involve an influencer that interests your target group, to convey the mes-

## TIPS

"You have to find out the local characteristics and modes co-operation: where people move and where you can actually reach them."

#### Understanding the needs of the target group and outreach library work

What interests your target? Go where the target group is in your municipality (as with outreach youth work). Conduct interviews or surveys to find out what issues they are currently interested in and what challenges there seems to be in municipal influencing. You can also propose different ideas for events and ask if they would be interested in participating and why/why not.

#### Tailoring events to the needs of the target group

Plan the ways to promote democracy on the basis of the insight you have gained. If possible, involve representatives of the target group in the planning of the event! Having the event in a location other than the library may also be a good option. Online events can also lower the threshold for participation, and there is no need to pay for streaming programmes.

sage? How could you make the local newspapers interested or join as partners? Who will do the advertisements, who will handle more official media releases?

#### Using different channels

Boldly try different channels for different target groups! The surest way to reach senior citizens is posting advertisements on noticeboards in their housing units or in supermarkets whereas young people spend time with social media, such as Instagram or TikTok.

#### Physical space

Make the democracy promotion methods visible in the library by reserving a specific place for this, offering information about the project and future events. The space can also serve as an arena where events can be organised. Get out of the library occasionally and promote your project or event where people hang out.

### 3.5. Prepare for unexpected situations

**When doing something new, not everything always goes like clockwork!**

Schedules get stretched, elections are postponed, partners cancel or do not reply to emails, the target group doesn't show interest, the Covid-19 pandemic puts all events online or project employees fall ill. But don't be discouraged! Unexpected twists and turns are part of every project and you can handle them.

**When faced with surprising situations, remember this:**

- Be prepared to think about alternative approaches
- Ask your colleagues for help and advice
- Be flexible and creative
- Don't get discouraged, and remember that the work is not wasted – lessons have been learnt
- Sometimes there is resistance to new things but once done, many folk are very satisfied with what was achieved!

## TIPS

"I was a bit pushy in the way I persisted in looking for partners and putting my foot in the door. But it paid off."

### 3.6. You don't need to always succeed!

**Example of a well-learnt experiment**

**Turku City Library** boldly experimented with sharing the book tips of the mayoral candidates on its social media channels. In the end, the implementation was too rigid and did not attract the followers of the City of Turku's social media channels. But the library gained valuable lessons for the future.

Key lessons:

- The communications style was slightly too heavy-handed and too policy-focused. In the future, a more appealing angle for the municipality's residents should be found for introducing the mayoral candidates. Next time, background information could be collected from the target group to support the planning.
- The images should be better suited to the style of the channel chosen, a little more relaxed than they were now.

**The experiment is a good example how we can and should learn from each experiment we do – and failures are not a bad thing when learning something new!**

## TIPS

"It became a bit pompous and stiff and didn't really take off on social media. We would have liked some discussion and feedback, but it didn't generate any discussion at all."

## 4. Afterword: Ideas and inspiration for libraries' democracy work

The experiments carried out in the libraries in 2020–2021 and the encounter concepts developed in them showed in practice that there is need for new forms of participation and discussion, both from the point of view of the public and decision-makers. For library professionals, the concepts give new ideas and models for carrying out the libraries' statutory role of promoting active citizenship and democracy.

Sitra's [Kansanvallan peruskorjaus \(Updating Democracy\) working paper](#) (in Finnish), published in 2018, proposed that libraries would be turned into meeting places for debating democracy and that a separate budget should be set aside for this purpose. The working paper saw libraries as natural places for promoting encounters and highlighting the significance of libraries as exponents of democracy in Finnish society. Also of interest in the working paper was how the different ways of having social debate can be conducted in libraries. Since then, good experiences have been gained from this type of event, such as the 2019 Government Programme Library Tour.

This is why the “Libraries as forums of democracy” project wanted to experiment with how a physical and virtual meeting place, bringing together local, regional, national and EU levels, could be built in connection with library services and how decision-making could be brought closer to the public.

The experiments of the project were also well suited to the spirit of the recently amended Public Libraries Act. The aims of the Act include the promotion of active citizenship, democracy and freedom of expression. It also tasks public libraries with the promotion of social and cultural dia-

logue, among their other tasks. The libraries participating in the experiments were the libraries of Oulu, Turku, Pietarsaari, Imatra, Inari and Mäntyharju. The goal of the experiments was to make libraries familiar and natural forums of democracy for all Finns.

### **Aiming to multiply the democracy work done by libraries**

The library division of the Regional State Administrative Agency continues to disseminate and develop the outcomes of the “Libraries as forums of democracy” project. The agency is also responsible for awarding an additional discretionary government grant, which will be made available as a continuation to the project, to libraries' democracy work. This new form of grant will deepen the democracy work already carried out by libraries under the Public Libraries Act and will enable new perspectives to be presented. In December 2020, Parliament decided on a budgetary appropriation of one million euros for the promotion of libraries' democracy work in 2021.

One of the key tasks of the library division of the Regional State Administrative Agency is to disburse discretionary government grants and the grant-related practices have been developed in recent years. The application round organised in autumn 2021 will be the first time that so-called accelerator events are tested. In them, the applicants can develop and refine ideas for grant applications. The Regional State Administrative Agency aims to multiply the democracy promotion activities in libraries.

This report can be freely used by all libraries and library professionals. In the handbook, you can find, for example,

guidance for organising an EU-themed discussion event in co-operation with EU operators. The handbook also encourages co-operation with local and regional partners when organising physical or virtual events.

In addition to this handbook and the application process for the additional discretionary government grant, a solid basis for libraries' democracy work has already been laid by the Council for Public Libraries, the Finnish Library Association and other parties supporting libraries. The project has given library-sector students in universities of applied sciences and universities the opportunity to reflect on libraries' democracy work.

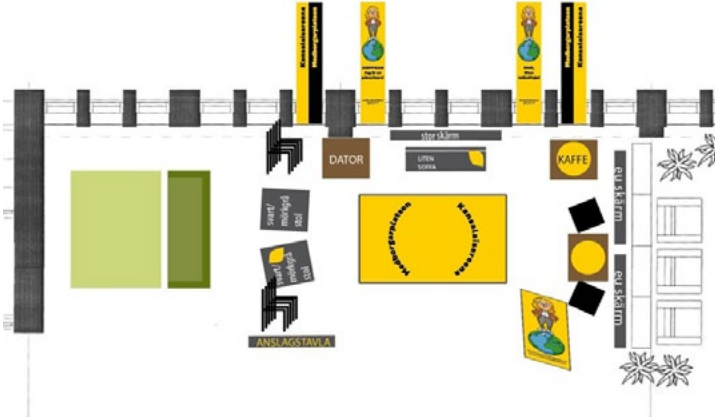
The active training provided by the library division of the Regional State

Administrative Agency has made it possible to consider libraries' role in promoting social and cultural dialogue.

International perspectives have been sought especially in co-operation with Nordic libraries, led by the Regional State Administrative Agencies. These will all be strengthened further as Finland's position as a model democratic country with a capacity for renewal is promoted. The Ministry of Education and Culture also considers it important that the project implemented by Sitra and the additional funding it provides to libraries will make their democracy work more diverse and more concrete for the public. The ministry therefore encourages all libraries to actively test and adopt the tools best suited to their own operating environment and to further develop them as necessary.



## Appendix 1. Medborgarsplatsen – People's arena – of Pietarsaari library.



*Example: The library of Pietarsaari created a physical meeting point for the project, called “Medborgarsplatsen”, or people’s arena, which served as a way to attract visitors to the library, a marketing channel for different events and an arena for organising events.*



## **Appendix 2. Ethical rules for meetings between young people and decision-makers, drawn up by Mäntyharju library.**

**Background:** According to the Youth Barometer (2019), 79% of young people vote, 77% exert influence through their purchasing decisions and only 37% exert an influence by discussing politics. Belief in the power of influencing through purchasing decisions has increased. Participation in demonstrations and political debate on social media has also increased among young people interested in politics.

The “Eteläsavolaisista kirjastoista kansanvallan areenoita” (South Savo’s libraries as arenas of democracy) project is part of the development work launched by the Speaker and Deputy Speakers of the Finnish Parliament, and aims at strengthening libraries’ role in the encounters and interaction between the general public and politicians/influencers.

The development work is led by Sitra, which has selected six Finnish libraries to innovate new practices. The library of Mäntyharju is developing the use of remote access and social media in meetings between young people and politicians. Other participating libraries are located in Oulu, Turku, Imatra, Pietarsaari and Inari.

**Goals:** The aim of the project is to experiment with concrete online negotiation encounters and social media dialogue between Mäntyharju’s youth and politicians. In practice, young people are coached before the encounters to identify significant things that they should try to influence on. The politicians/influencers in question are informed in advance of the themes to be discussed.

**Rules:** The purpose of the meetings is not to persuade young people to support a particular political party but to encourage them to make a difference, to activate them to take part in political debate and encourage them to use a wide range of different channels of influencing.

### **We coach young people to use the ground rules for a constructive discussion (Sitra 2017) in encounters.**

- 1.** Listen to others, do not interrupt or start side discussions.
- 2.** Participate in the common discussion and use respectful language.
- 3.** Share your story, experience and ideas.
- 4.** Discuss one thing at a time. Ask questions if you don’t understand something.
- 5.** Be present and respect others and the confidentiality of the discussion.
- 6.** Take your time to think and bring matters together. Leave room for unfinished business.

### **In the encounters, politicians have special responsibilities.**

- 7.** Young people appreciate it when politicians try to find out what young people think and consider important.
- 8.** The concrete dialogue-type discussion about a topic raised by young people increases the value of the encounter.
- 9.** Young people are interested in politicians’ own stories, which they can relate to and where they can reflect on their own situation.
- 10.** To take the discussion a step further, you could suggest a book that has made a big impression on young people.
- 11.** At the end of the debate, it is a good idea to summarise the discussion: What did we learn from the discussion? What kinds of insights did we gain?

**SITRA**

**SITRA STUDIES 188**

Sitra studies is a publication series which focuses on the outcomes of Sitra's future-oriented work and experiments.

ISBN 978-952-347-309-6 (PDF)

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