

Libraries as Forums of Democracy

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Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra

- A gift from Parliament to the 50-year-old Finland. Founded in 1967.
- **An independent future fund** under the supervision of the Finnish parliament
- Sitra's work is funded by the returns from its capital.
- **Roles as a societal actor:** Foresight analysis, innovation & funding partner

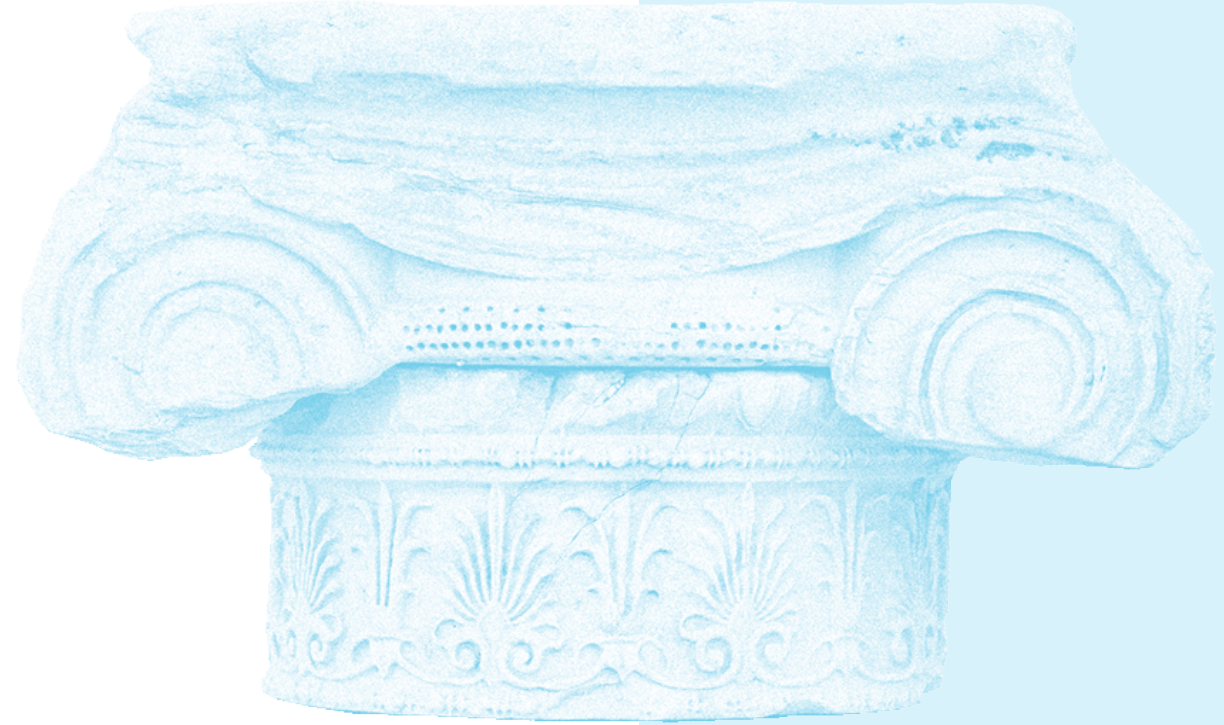


The ability of
democracies to engage
in constructive dialogue
and responsible
decision-making is
under pressure.



Official role of libraries in Finland

- In 2025, there were 308 municipalities in Finland, and about 700 libraries.
- The Public Libraries Act was updated in 2017.
 - The objective of the Act is to promote 5) active citizenship, democracy, and freedom of expression
 - The duties of public libraries include 6) promoting societal and cultural dialogue





What was it about?

- Sitra's *The Libraries as Forums of Democracy* project aimed to
 - support libraries in their democratic role
 - strengthen dialogue between citizens and decision-makers
 - provide a forum for public discussion
 - scale and disseminate a model based on the experiments at a national level.

Why?

- Enhancing democracy is written into the Finnish Library Law (2017)
- In 2019, the leaders of the Finnish Parliament expressed a wish that the library's legal role as a forum of democracy would be emphasised.
- Sitra wants to help to strengthen Finland's position as a model democratic country with a capacity for renewal

Which libraries took part in the pilot?

- Two large

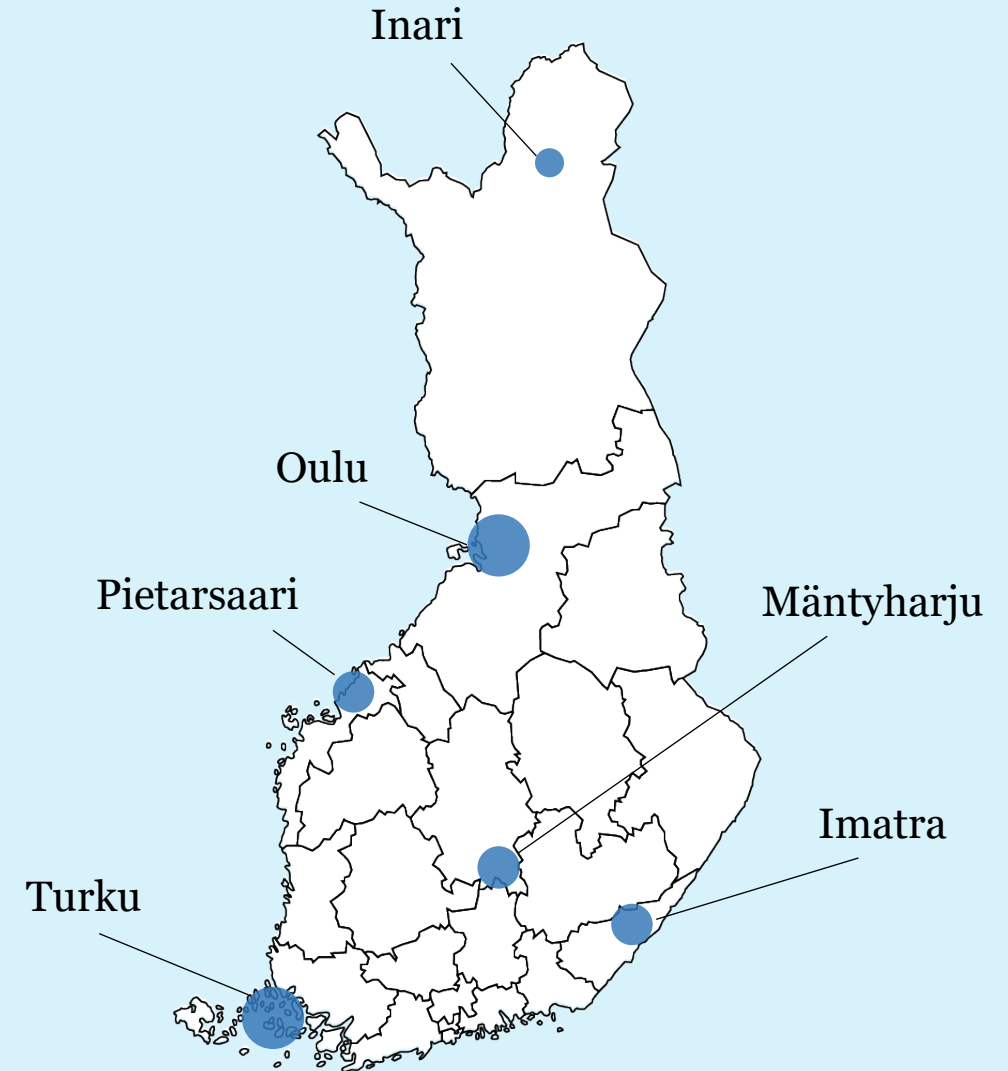
- Oulu (population 200,000)
- Turku (population 200,000, bilingual)

- Two medium-sized

- Pietarsaari (population 19,000, bilingual)
- Imatra (population 26,000)

- Two small

- Inari (population 7,000, quadrilingual)
- Mäntyharju (population 6,000)





Examples of methods

1. Global to Local – online events

- Online discussions facilitated by a speaker and a moderator, exploring EU-related topics from a local perspective – how does the EU show up in my everyday life?

2. Remote meetings between young people and decision-makers

- The library organised genuine encounters and discussions between young people and decision-makers.

3. WhatsApp messages to decision-makers

- The library set up a WhatsApp number through which young people especially could send voice messages to decision-makers.

4. Outreach experiments

- Bringing discussions on democracy and politics to places they do not usually reach, using accessible, arts-based methods. Examples include political pub quizzes and a graffiti workshop.

Press highlights

Sinä siellä, olet vaikuttaja!

Turun pääkirjaston Miten maailmaa? -paneelikeskustelussa pohditaan aktivismin keinoja ja kansalaisvaikuttamista nyky-yhteiskunnassa. Keskustelujohtajana toimii somevaikuttaja Elin Moderoiva, joka muistuttaa, että meillä on voimaa vaikuttaa.

The newspaper Turun Sanomat published a story on 11 May 2021 regarding a panel discussion on the theme "How to Change the World?"



The library project was also covered on local TV news in Lapland on 19 May 2021.



Taide ja politiikka käsi kädessä

Kirjastoista kansanvallan foorumeita -sarjassa pohditaan tulevana torstaina taiteen muutosvoimaa ja poliittisuutta. Keskustelun moderoijana toimii somevaikuttaja Elin Moderoiva ja kirjaston johtaja Anni Renaz.

The newspaper Turun Sanomat published a story on 3 May 2021 about a panel discussion on the theme "Art's political role and its power to drive change."

Ways for libraries to promote democracy

- The guidebook
 - presents methods to help public libraries carry out their statutory democracy work.
 - provides libraries with ways to organise different types of events and to build collaboration with various stakeholders.
 - includes a comprehensive list of tips for implementing these methods.
- Language versions: Finnish, Swedish and English
- The guidebook is available for everyone and can be found on Sitra's website:
<https://www.sitra.fi/en/publication/how-to-make-libraries-forums-of-democracy/>



Results and scale-up

Democracy grant from the Regional State Administrative Agency in Finland

- The Finnish Parliament allocated one million euros to help libraries implement these new tools and strengthen their democracy work.
- With this funding, the Regional State Administrative Agency in Finland awarded grants to libraries to enhance their democracy work from 2021 to 2023.
- A total of 57 applications were submitted from across Finland.



