

The Stronghold of Democracy – Democracy work at libraries in practice

Tampere City Library

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Democracy work at libraries?

Public Libraries Act in Finland, Section 2

The objectives of this Act are to promote:

- 1) equal opportunities for everyone to access education and culture
- 2) availability and use of information
- 3) reading culture and versatile literacy skills
- 4) opportunities for lifelong learning and competence development
- 5) **active citizenship, democracy and freedom of expression.**

The implementation of these objectives is based on sense of community, pluralism and cultural diversity.

Democracy work at libraries?

Public Libraries Act in Finland, Section 6

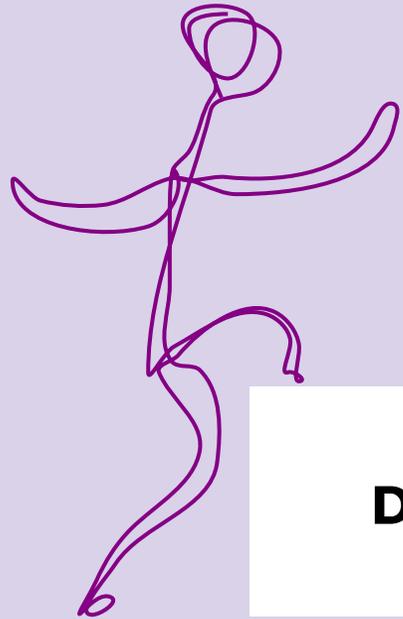
Public libraries are tasked with:

- 1) providing access to materials, information and cultural contents
- 2) maintaining versatile and up-to-date collections
- 3) promoting reading and literature
- 4) providing information services, guidance and support in the acquisition and use of information and in versatile literacy skills
- 5) **providing premises for learning, recreational activities, working, and civic activities**
- 6) **promoting social and cultural dialogue.**

The Democracy Work Model

- Ponder and define: What does democracy mean to us? What is the best and/or worst thing about democracy work? What opportunities do we have to implement this perspective?
- Scanning – what do we do, what could we do?
- Brainstorming – new, old, or borrowed ideas.
 - In collaboration with partners and/or patrons and residents.
- Annual plan
- Plan communication – bring democracy work to life for staff, stakeholders, and residents.

Democracy Steps of Libraries



I am familiar with the library. I know what kind of services it has to offer.

DISCOVERY

A crucial part of democracy work but also PART OF BASIC LIBRARY WORK

Library spaces, services and materials are accessible for me. I feel that library is for me.

SERVICE USE

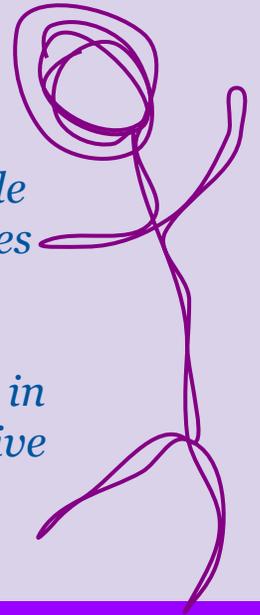
I have knowledge, understanding, confidence and skills to partake in society.

CIVIC SKILLS

SPECIFIC FOR LIBRARY DEMOCRACY WORK

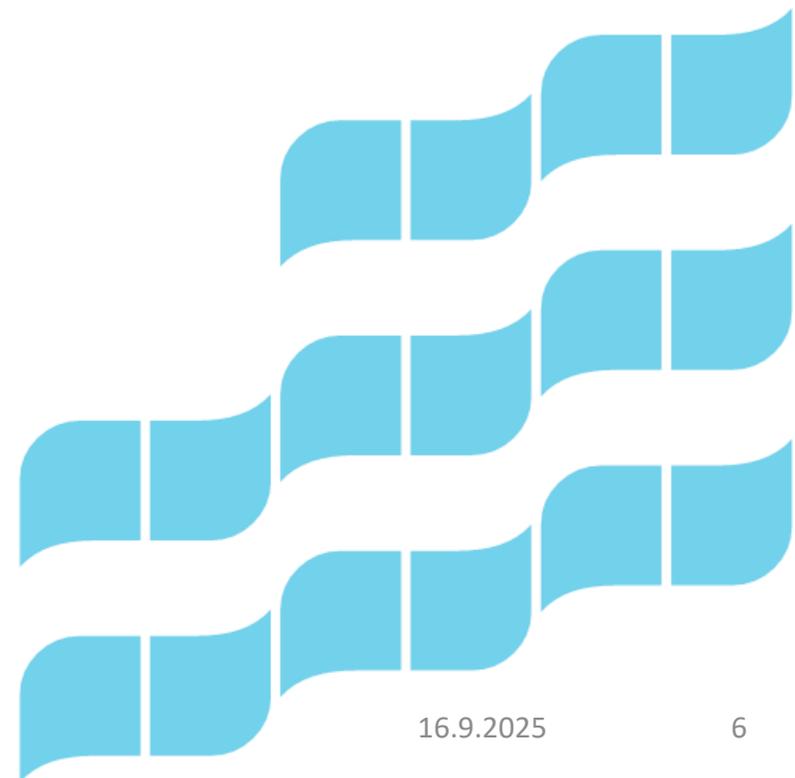
I take an active role in community issues e.g. by voting or standing as a candidate, working in NGOs, or being active in my neighbourhood.

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP



Civic Skills – How do we do democracy?

- Literacy including media literacy
- Dialogues – understanding, communication and knowledge.
- Futures thinking – Futures literacy
- Events
- Exhibitions and content picks
- Patrons – Democratic encounters and participation



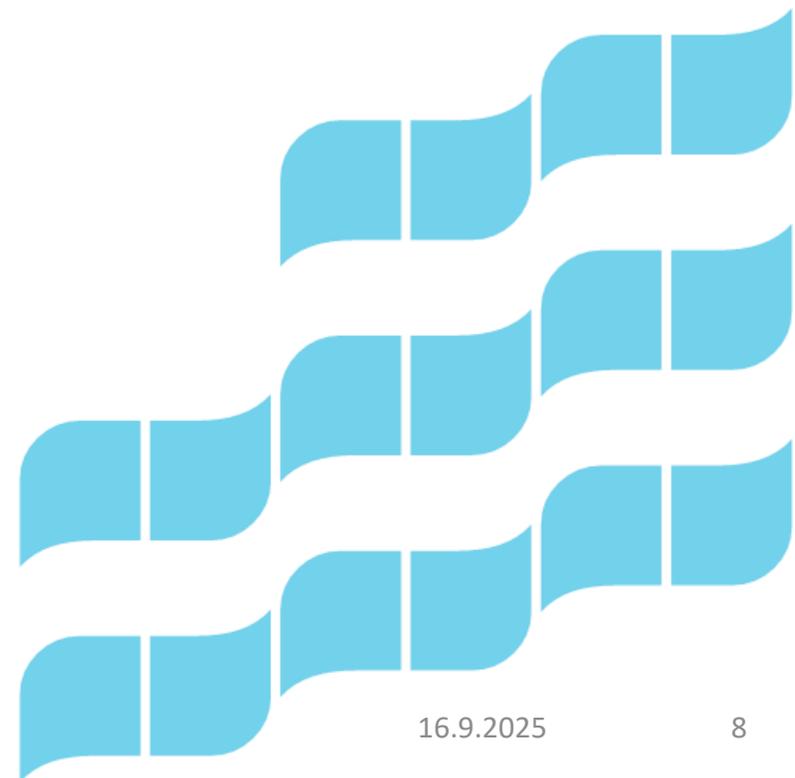
Events as a means of information and participation

- Metso FAKTA: What can we learn about democracy from the Moomins? With author Emmi Itäranta, literature scholars Maria Laakso ja Esko Suoranta. (in the picture)
- Tekoja! (Actions!) 1.10.2025
 - At the event, we celebrated Miina Sillanpää and civic engagement.
 - Workshops with a hint of placemaking, like Timemachine



Active Citizenship – Why do we do democracy?

- Libraries have superpowers:
 - Collections
 - Public, non-commercial and democratic space
 - Facilities like makerspaces
 - The community: NGOs, volunteers and cooperation with preschools and schools, city's Community and Development Services and Youth Services, also with Tampere University Democracy Research Network and [Imagine, democracy! -project](#)
- Inclusion
 - "Inclusion means a place in the world." How a library can be a safe haven, a place of encounter, a place of agency, a place of belonging, a place to imagine, hope and plan for the future?



Coming: Vinyl Nights – Inclusion and Community

- The citizens' survey called for "date nights" to support community and inclusion, i.e. events and gatherings where you could meet new people and have conversations.



"Democracy can never be secured - because it is not a system just to be implemented, but a way of life to be pursued."

–Hal Koch: What is Democracy?

Links

- Sitra: [How to make Libraries Forums of Democracy](#)
- Sitra: [Futures Frequency](#)
- [The Handbook of Democratic Encounters](#)
- The Stronghold of Democracy –project (in Finnish): [Kansanvallan uljas linnake - Tiedossa on demokratiaa –käsikirja](#)
- Dialogues:
 - [Demos – Democracy Dialogues](#)
 - [National Dialogues](#)
 - [Timeout Dialogue](#)
- Placemaking example from Reykjavik City Library: [Picnics at the Library](#)
- [Democracy Fitness](#)

Thank you!

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