



Action for Inclusion in Europe City Working Groups

Cohesion and Belonging

Promoting Immigrant
Involvement and Electronic
Participation in Helsinki

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Context

Helsinki has a population of 624,000, within a metropolitan area of 1.4 million. Foreign citizens make up 8.0% of the population, while foreign born make up 11.1% (up to 20% in some neighbourhoods), and speakers of languages other than Finnish or Swedish make up 12.2%. The city has several interesting practices to share, especially in face to face participatory democracy (ten Experiment for Local Democracy pilots) and online platforms for engaging citizens (e.g. Open Ahjo). It is also beginning to develop work to address issues in neighbourhoods where migrants and minorities (including Muslims) are concentrated, including neighbourhood mediation and migrant participation in mainstream democracy. The recruitment of local young people as foreign fighters in Syria has brought into focus the need to strengthen a sense of belonging among younger Muslim residents. This is all in the context of an equality plan which the city is developing that will encompass all diversity strands.

Brief Description of Action Plan

The plan is about getting migrants who are relatively digitally excluded into the mainstream e-Participation platforms developed by the city, in the context of the imminent switch-off of many services now being delivered non-digitally. The plan is to intensify a new partnership with a local non-migrant citizen-based NGO at the different service points of the city, so that they can offer guidance to digital services in the future to migrants, with delivery beginning before the end of May 2016. An innovative dimension of the project is working to bring together two communities – migrants and older people – which have members at risk from digital exclusion, thus building cohesion at the same time as civic participation.

In accordance with the Strategy Programme, the City of Helsinki wants to further the digital participation of immigrants and other vulnerable groups. Digitalisation has been extended both to the development of the services of the city and to the decision-making. Using different digital applications, it is, for example, possible to:

- Follow the decision-making of the city, provide feedback and take initiatives
- Participate in different kinds of user and customer panels, to help improve the services of the city
- Promote electronic services by replacing traditional application forms with services based on electronic authorisation (e.g. income support and housing, day-care and school applications).

Moreover, the trend in digital services design is that mobile services are prioritised as, according to studies, people use internet more on their smart phones than on, for example, terminals. The City of Helsinki has received a lot of international acclaim for its open wireless network, which enables the use of digital services. Helsinki also has a comprehensive library network, where computers can be used free of charge.

Many citizens have modern devices and access to the internet. The challenge is how we can activate the use of e-services among immigrants.

Objectives

The core objective is to improve the immigrants' digital abilities in order to improve the use of the city's e-services and make them better known. At the same time, this generates experiences concerning the promotion of digital participation from the perspective of other vulnerable groups.

The project will have been successful if

- The city has many services points, which are also used by immigrants; libraries, schools that may host club activities, dedicated service centres for elderly persons, as well as different kinds of resident spaces. These service points have personnel that can provide advice and guidance, and in city premises there are also different kinds of voluntary organisations, which provide digital services help. The city benefits from the experiment, as the use of e-services and self-service reduces the number of customer service contacts.

Key examples of evidence of success would be if:

- The city's different service points are utilised
- The city's own counselling services in cooperation with the voluntary organisations
- The know-how of the city's personnel increases in the digital services help
- The immigrants' participation in the city's different participatory projects increases
- New registered users to the e-services

Essential difference compared to the previous situation

The city has not had any essential measures to increase participation among immigrants. The multilingual website Infopankki.fi gives a short resume in 12 languages about what "decision-making and public engagement" is in Helsinki, but the different parts about the City Council, feedback and public engagement are available only in Finnish, Swedish and English. Likewise, the e-services site is only available in these three languages. There is not specific information about this for immigrant organisations.

Timing

Event/action	Date
Distribute educational material about the use of e-services (services and public engagement) to the service points of the city	
Increase the production of videos, which illustrate how to use digital services and look into the possibility of making them multilingual	
Pilot a participatory project in a way that maximises the number of immigrant users	
The trainings and information material for	

the personnel of the city's service points are produced by the unit.

Negotiate a purchased services contract with a provider, which has the possibility to coordinate the prevention of digital marginalisation.

Consultation

Achievements and experiences

The project faced the following challenges. An essential risk was the availability of e-services in only three languages. We wanted to see if we were able to reach out to new users. We had to assess if there were good enough support services, such as instructions, for the e-services, which, for example, make it possible to fill in application forms on the internet without help. A central question was whether migrants had a good enough perception of Finnish society; could they see the different kinds of participatory projects as part of the way we can influence society?

The project began by initiating a small pilot in one library – starting on 1 June 2016, with money for one year (€85,000). It had two people working on it, from a specialist NGO that works to train people to use technology. Funding was put in place from the Finnish slot machine federation, which is very rigorous in its funding monitoring. The project will train staff members at libraries to widen the network after the first year. A budget was secured for this within the municipality.

In summer 2016, the project was in the currently in planning stage, facing the challenges of designing the best way of reaching out.

Challenges and modifications

Further plans

Update: March 2017

The City board gave an supplementary budget for the year 2017. With that we are able to buy digital communication advice for immigrants. Advice is given in different locations in the suburbs, like in resident's houses and in libraries. The service is intended for those who are not able to independently conducting transactions online.

We also had a pilot on open WLAN network that is used in library and elderly peoples servicepoin. Based on the positive feedback from pilots wlan-project has been extended and it is now also used in several more new service points. The city also educates its personnel on how to give digital advice.

