

Olli Jakonen (2015): Kokeileva ja kehittyvä kirjasto? Yleisten kirjastojen kehittämis- ja kokeiluhankkeiden valtionavustustoiminnan vaikuttavuus. (Developing public libraries. Effectiveness of subsidized development projects in public libraries.) Cupore webpublications 32.

ENGLISH SUMMARY

Finland is known for a comprehensive library network, high user and borrowing rates and use of ICT in libraries. In Finland the guiding principle of public libraries is to offer free access to cultural and informational sources for all, irrespective of their place of residence and financial standing. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture, the library and information services promote: 1) equal access to education and culture; 2) reading and art appreciation; 3) constant development of knowledge; 4) skills and citizenship skills; 5) internationalization; and 6) lifelong learning.¹

There is a public library in every Finnish municipality, and most of them also have branch libraries and bookmobiles. The public libraries are run by the municipalities, who also determine the extent of services and allocate funds at their discretion. The municipalities receive statutory state subsidies for operating library services. The Ministry of Education and Culture also distributes discretionary subsidies for innovative and experimental development projects carried out by libraries.

The Ministry has regularly granted public libraries subsidies for projects of experiment and development since the 1990s. In the same decade, the Ministry also began funding the libraries.fi² service and other centrally produced services.

By means of the subsidies the Ministry has executed national library policy goals³, conducted the municipal library services and encouraged libraries to develop new practices and innovations. Since 2012 the process of granting development project subsidies has been carried out by the Regional State Administrative Agencies.⁴ The Regional State Administrative Agencies (AVIs) are responsible for the regional tasks of the Ministry of Education and Culture in the field of library services. Although the operational subsidy tasks have been delegated to the regional level, the development project subsidies are distributed on the basis of policy goals and emphases defined mutually by the Ministry and AVIs every year.

In 2015, the Ministry commissioned the Finnish Foundation for Cultural Policy Research CUPORE to conduct a survey of library development project subsidies. This survey focused on two aspects: the development projects of Finnish public libraries funded by state subsidies and their correspondence to the Ministry's library policy. In this report the process of library development projects was analyzed as a whole from the viewpoints of effectiveness and national strategic goals. The main research question can be framed as follows: How strategic, clear and apt is the subsidy process of public library development projects in relation to the library policy objectives of the Ministry of Education and Culture?

The Ministry's program "The Finnish Public Library Policy" states that the government funding will be directed to experimentation and development activities according to the objectives of the program.⁵

¹ http://okm.fi/OPM/Kirjastot/linjaukset_ja_hankkeet/?lang=en

² Finnish Library Services: <http://www.libraries.fi/>

³ The aims of national library policy: http://okm.fi/OPM/Kirjastot/linjaukset_ja_hankkeet/?lang=en

⁴ <https://www.avi.fi/en/web/avi-en/opetus-ja-kulttuuri#.VlwHy7832ZM>

⁵ The Finnish Public Library Policy, page 21.

<http://okm.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2009/liitteet/opm31.pdf?lang=en>

The survey focused on the Finnish Public Library Policy Program⁶ and on the development projects documented in the Finnish public library project register⁷. The register is funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Out of the over 200 subsidized development projects in 2012, 34 were analyzed⁸, six of them in detailed close-up analysis. The research material consisted of documentation available in the project register, policy documents and interviews of library specialists and library staff associated with development projects.

During 2010–2015 over 1300 state subsidized development projects have been executed within Finnish public libraries all over the country. The combined amount of subsidies distributed to these projects was nearly 17 million euros. The average size of a development subsidy was approximately 13 000 euros. A significant variation occurred in the value of individual subsidies, ranging between 400 and 230 000 euros. Thematically⁹, the highest amounts of subsidies were directed to the general improvement of library services, promoting reading and interest in literature and developing the online services and information systems of public libraries. A significant amount of subsidies were distributed also for media literacy projects, equipment acquisitions and enhancing learning environments and communality. In addition, for example library space planning and employee know-how were developed with some of the project subsidies.

According to the survey the development projects of public libraries seem to be efficient. The actions and outputs of the analyzed development activities correlated with the broad aims and areas of focus set and defined in the Finnish Public Library Policy Program. However, the development project activity as a whole doesn't appear particularly strategic to an external observer. It is more about developing individual services and functions within public libraries as set out in the emphases and definition of the policy every year.¹⁰ Some libraries seem to have used the development subsidies in a more strategic and continuous manner than others.

The project subsidies have been important tools of development, innovation and experiment for the Finnish public libraries. Without subsidies it would have been difficult to do similar operations at the same scale. The subsidies are an instrument for libraries to react to ongoing and upcoming changes in the society. In the survey the relation between development projects and the basic tasks and functions of public libraries was also discussed. It is important to take notice that the innovations and experiments arising from individual libraries can also be strategically important for national library policy. Thus, it is essential that at least part of the development subsidies are given to freely innovative initiatives also in the future.

The strategic effectiveness of experiment and development activities carried out in public libraries is difficult to evaluate. From the viewpoint of analyzing effectiveness, the relevant and explicit policy goals for development project activities haven't been specified clearly enough in the Ministry's Public Library Policy Program. That is to say that the relationship of the subsidies and policy goals remains somewhat undefined. The policy program sets broad national strategic areas of focus and visions for library development. Also the goals and results of individual development projects have occasionally been documented in a nonspecific way. In addition, many relevant impacts of development activities appear only in the course of time and are

⁶ Version in English available at http://okm.fi/OPM/Julkaisut/2009/kirjasto_ohjelma.html?lang=en

⁷ The Finnish public library project register is an online service for presenting public library development projects and good practices: <http://hankkeet.kirjastot.fi/ohjeita/finnish-public-library-project>

⁸ The development projects that received subsidy of at least 20 000 euros or more.

⁹ This was during the period of 2012–2015. The specific themes of the projects were available for this study only starting from 2012. The themes are outlined in the project register visualization: <http://visualisointi.kirjastot.fi/hankkeet/vis-en.html>

¹⁰ Experiment and development actions in public libraries 2015 (in Finnish only):

http://okm.fi/OPM/Kirjastot/avustukset/Valtionavustukset_yleisten_kirjastojen_kokeilutoimintaan?lang=fi

complicated to analyze. Contrary to inputs and outputs, different impacts are usually directed to the world outside the libraries. One relevant field of further analysis would be the outcomes of development projects and their impact on library users and staff.

In the end of the survey several recommendations are given to improve the strategic effectiveness of the overall subsidy process of public library development projects: 1) to sharpen the strategic political aims on national level for library development projects; 2) to improve the strategicness of the annual emphases for development subsidies; 3) to consider the relation between experiments, innovativeness and basic functions of libraries: what are the subsidies distributed for?; 4) to divide the subsidies into larger (strategic) and smaller ones (individual services and functions); and 5) to develop and improve the evaluation of individual projects and the evidence for the effectiveness of subsidies.

Link to the report (in Finnish only): http://www.cupore.fi/verkkojulkaisut_32.php