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*Final Report on the
Citizen Participation Policy
Programme*

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The Citizen Participation Policy Programme was a Finnish national democracy project run in accordance with the Government Programme (2003–2007). It promoted active citizenship, the operation of civil society, exercise of influence by ordinary people and the effective functioning of representative democracy. Several projects promoting citizen participation were implemented under this cross-administrative programme by many different ministries and in cooperation with civil society and the research community.</p> <p>The most important achievements of the programme were to do with increased efficiency of civic and democracy education, improved interaction between government and civil society, promotion of municipal democracy and improved functioning of municipal councils as well as evaluations of the need for legislative policies.</p> <p>The Citizen Participation Policy Programme focused particularly on strengthening the knowledge base for democracy and arranging for the permanent collection of related indicator information. The Policy Programme formulated a plan for a democracy policy that will enable the government to promote social participation and influence by citizens as required by the Constitution of Finland.</p> <p>There is no quick fix available for the problems of Finnish democracy. Sustained efforts to reach common goals are needed instead. This calls for permanent cooperation between ministries as well as cooperation with civil society. In future this process will be coordinated by the Democracy Unit which will be established under the Ministry of Justice.</p>		
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1 Objectives of the Citizen Participation Policy Programme

The Finnish Government Programme 2003–2007 specified the Citizen Participation Policy Programme as a national democracy project. It was intended to strengthen citizens' inclusion and participation and improve the functioning of democracy. The Government Programme emphasised several areas in need of development, particularly schools, civil society, equality of influence and the administration of democracy-related matters.

In its annual Strategy Documents, the Government further specified the Programme's objectives. The Government Programme was summarised into objectives related to (1) civic education, (2) civic activity and civil society, (3) interaction between citizens and government and (4) the functioning of representative democracy. These objectives form the basic framework for this report.

In addition to the Government Programme, the content of the Policy Programme was influenced by democracy research and development projects implemented in other Nordic countries, on which a review was commissioned. (Mutanen, 2004) Democracy and active citizenship were also issues activated at the turn of the Millennium within the European Union, the Council of Europe and many member states. Important work was also carried out by the OECD and its Citizens as Partners programme.

The Government Programme laid a special emphasis on increasing voter turnouts. There are two schools of thought regarding this: One thinks voter activity can only be significantly affected by measures taken between elections that strengthen the experience of citizenship with full powers. According to the other viewpoint, elections are a special situation, in the context of which it is possible to arouse interest in society. The Policy Programme followed both of these. The main emphasis was on the development of active citizenship and participatory democracy, but towards the end of the Programme a considerably larger voter activation campaign was tested in connection with the spring 2007 parliamentary election.

1.1 The state of Finnish democracy

Finland is among the first countries in the world to celebrate a centenary of experience as a nation with a universal and equal right to vote and stand as a candidate. Democracy in Finland is stable, and its foundations are sound, including according to international democracy studies. Support for democracy is also high, exceeding 90 percent. People get in touch with politicians and officials more keenly than in many other countries. Nevertheless, there are developments that cause concern in our country.

Citizen participation is decreasing in all industrialised countries, but this trend is faster in Finland than, for example, in the other Nordic countries. Turnouts in national and

municipal elections have been falling, and Finland's voter activity is within the lowest third among the world's established democracies. The voting behaviour of under-40s is further below the national average than is the case in the other Nordic countries. Only a half of the youngest residents entitled to vote use their right.

Social capital is measured using indicators of social participation, societal influence and resulting confidence that are significant to the Programme. An important finding is that people in Finland have confidence in each other. Other positive points are extensive social participation, including lively voluntary activity and peer-to-peer help in our country. Compared with other European countries, Finland also has a reasonable amount of NGO activity, and this is on the increase, while participation in influencing issues and decisions in society has been decreasing for a long time. The majority of people in Finland do not believe that they actually have a say. The unequal distribution of social capital is a growing problem. These disparities can increasingly be explained by differences in the level of education, but also by the increased prevalence of disadvantage.

Detailed descriptions of the state of Finnish democracy can be found in the book on Finnish democracy indicators edited by Adjunct Professor Sami Borg (Borg ed., 2006) and in *Social Capital in Finland – a Statistical Review* (Iisakka, 2006) published by Statistics Finland.

1.2 The nature of the Citizen Participation Policy Programme

The Citizen Participation Policy Programme Office sought to support the projects implemented by various ministries. The cross-administrative nature of the Programme was evident in the way individual projects were part of the overall Programme, with each aware of the others and informing each other of their content and cooperating where necessary. The social capital created through this cooperation was a key element of the Programme's success.

The starting point of democracy is the acknowledgement of people as sovereign citizens with the ability to form their own opinions about issues, take an independent stand on them and to make decisions and act. Citizen participation is ultimately dependent on citizens themselves. In this, knowledge, skills, values and attitudes play a major role.

The government can mainly influence active citizenship by enabling it through regulation of the framework for education and civic activity and by providing encouragement as a partner in citizen/government interaction.

Democracy and citizen participation cannot be set the same performance objectives as some other policy sectors. Processes of change are slow, and a Cabinet's term in office is a short period within that. Therefore an essential objective was to create a conceptual and organisational basis for sustained democracy policy in the Programme's focal areas. Efforts towards democracy and citizen participation must be constant.

1.3 Joint measures taken under the Citizen Participation Policy Programme

The key task and the most important Policy Programme steering tool of the Citizen Participation Policy Programme Office was to draft the Government Strategy Document and compile the annual impact evaluations included in it. In addition to the meetings of the Ministerial Group, Programme cohesion was created through meetings of responsible public servants operating in the ministries as well as meetings between persons implementing the projects.

In addition to its own budget, the Programme was able to allocate funding to participating ministries in 2005 and 2006. Most additional funding was granted for the development of participatory culture and communality in schools. Others supported included the process to develop civic activity research and education, the creation of municipal democracy audits, think-tank experiments, media education and provision of election information. The Programme also supported the creation of the Democracy.fi portal and the reform of the public online discussion forum provided by the government (otakantaa.fi).

The Programme cooperated with the Youth Inclusion Project coordinated by the National Board of Education, particularly in issues related to the attachment to civil society of youth in danger of exclusion.

Programme coordination focused mainly on the generation of long-neglected research data and background studies. This, it was hoped, would create a sound basis for the overall evaluation of democracy and citizen participation while also providing background to key projects of the Programme. This also created a foundation for a permanent solution for the administration of democracy-related matters. In addition to general coordination and administration, the Programme Office implemented the following measures.

Measures

- The Programme commissioned a Gender Mainstreaming Review (Genuine Network, 2004) and a related follow-up study. (Saari, 2005)
- The Programme co-funded the Elections and Democracy in Finland research project (Paloheimo, 2005). Long-term cooperation in the development of the knowledge base for citizen participation and democracy indicators took place with the Finnish Social Science Data Archive and relevant researchers. The results were condensed into a book on democracy indicators (Borg, ed. 2006) and the research group's proposal on the follow-up on the indicators.
- Research into citizen participation was also otherwise increased through contract research and by influencing the Power research programme of the Academy of Finland.
- A study on the relationship of media and democracy generated ideas including that of basic communications rights. (Nieminen, Aslama and Pantti, 2005)

- A report on think-tanks operating in different countries was commissioned (Turunen, 2005), an experiment was organised with eight civil society organisations in the field of education, and an evaluation report on the experiment was published. (Kervinen, 2006)
- In cooperation with the Ministry of Finance, the Programme organised in autumn 2006 a series of roundtable discussions on relations between citizens, non-governmental organisations, government and political decision-makers. There was a particular focus the opportunities for participation among "disengaged" citizens. (Publications of the Ministry of Justice 1/2007)
- The Programme commissioned an assessment of the opportunities of study centres and adult education centres to support the attachment to civil society of those who have lower levels of education and are in danger of exclusion. The study was completed at the end of 2006. (Törrönen & Kirstinä, 2007)
- The Programme supported the anniversary seminar *The Connection between Democracy and Legislative Policies* organised by the Ministry of Justice with the Finnish Parliament on 2 October 2006 by funding seminar preparations and reporting. The event's planning sought to take equality into consideration in relation to the seminar themes as well as the speakers invited. (Paasilehto, ed., 2007)
- The Programme supported the production of a 10-episode TV series by Finnish national broadcaster YLE's education television in 2005. Aimed at immigrants, the purpose of the series was to increase their understanding about the responsibilities, obligations and opportunities to influence towards a better society brought by Finnish citizenship.
- The Programme participated in the preparation of the EU's Europe for Citizens Programme and its Finnish implementation.
- A Democracy Unit was created within the organisation of the Ministry of Justice and became operational in spring 2007.
- January 2007 saw the launch of the Democracy.fi website, a repository for basic information about democracy that supports participation and influence. The reformed public online discussion forum provided by the government (otakantaa.fi) was also opened at the same time as a first step towards more extensive development of citizen/government interaction. The websites were transferred to the new Democracy Unit in spring 2007.
- The Programme has published dozens of publications, reviews and reports in the serials of the Ministry of Justice. In addition, the Programme projects produced and the Programme co-funded numerous other publications.

1.4 The organisation of the Citizen Participation Policy Programme

1.4.1 Ministerial, public servants' and support groups

Participating in the Citizen Participation Policy Programme were the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Finance and the Prime Minister's Office. A ministerial group chaired by the Minister of Justice was in charge of the political direction of the Programme. In the ministries, projects were administered by designated responsible public servants. General Programme coordination

was performed by the Programme Director's Office operating under the Ministry of Justice. The Programme Director and his assistant worked at the office throughout the Programme period, with several other persons employed over shorter periods as experts and assistants.

The key task and at the most important Policy Programme steering tool of the Programme Office was to draft the Government Strategy Document and compile the annual impact evaluations included in it. In addition to the meetings of the Ministerial Group, Programme cohesion was created through meetings of responsible officials as well as occasional meetings of project personnel.

The minister responsible for the Programme and chair of the Ministerial Group was Minister of Justice, Leena Luhtanen, (until 22 September 2005 Johannes Koskinen). Other ministerial group members were Minister of Education, Antti Kalliomäki (until 22 September 2005 Tuula Haatainen), Minister of Regional and Municipal Affairs, Hannes Manninen, Minister of Culture, Tanja Saarela, and Coordinate Minister for Finance, Ulla-Maj Wideroos. When dealing with issues related to the Civil Society Capacities Working Group, the Group was extended and in 2006 and 2007 meetings also included Minister of Social Affairs and Health, Tuula Haatainen, and Minister of Trade and Industry, Mauri Pekkarinen. Seppo Niemelä, Programme Director of the Citizen Participation Policy Programme, acted as secretary of the Ministerial Group. The Group had 15 meetings during the Cabinet's term in office, four of which were meetings of the "extended" ministerial group.

Matters were prepared for the Ministerial Group by a working group consisting of public servants from the responsible ministries chaired by Seppo Niemelä, Programme Director of the Citizen Participation Policy Programme. Members of the Public Servants' Working Group representing the Ministry of Education were Kimmo Aaltonen, Counsellor for Cultural Affairs, Tuomas Kurttila, Secretary General (from 15 June 2006), Anita Lehtikainen, Counsellor for Higher Education (Jorma Palola, Counsellor, until 13 July 2005), and Leena Nousiainen, Head of Development (from 1 January 2005). Responsible officials at the Ministry of Justice were Arto Jääskeläinen, Director, Electoral Administration (Matti Niemivuo, Director of Legislation, until 30 November 2004), and Pirkko Kauppinen, Head of Media and Communications Unit. Members of the group with the Ministry of the Interior were Mika Rossi, Project Manager (until 30 September 2006) and Inga Nyholm, Project Manager (1 October 2006 to 31 December 2006). The Ministry of Finance was represented by Katju Holkeri, Counsellor. The Prime Minister's Office was represented by Riitta Kirjavainen, Counsellor, and Auni-Marja Vilavaara, Director of Administration. Maria Wakeham, Senior Inspector, Ministry of Justice, acted as secretary of the Working Group. The Group had 12 meetings during the Cabinet's term in office.

The initial stages of Programme implementation were assisted by a Support Group appointed at the Ministry of Justice. It was chaired by Seppo Niemelä, Programme Director of the Citizen Participation Policy Programme, and other members were Eero J. Aarnio, Counsellor of Legislation, Arto Jääskeläinen, Director, Electoral Administration,

Pirkko Kauppinen, Head of Media and Communications Unit, Matti Niemivuo, Director of Legislation, Laura Nordenstreng, Secretary of Legislation, Johanna Ojala-Niemelä, Special Adviser, and Kaisa Sistonen, Senior Expert. Maria Wakeham, Senior Inspector, acted as secretary of the Support Group. The Group had two meetings in 2003 and 2004.

1.4.2 Projects, events and information provision

The projects launched and publications produced by the Citizen Participation Policy Programme can be found in the Government Project Register (under OM016:00/2003). Several projects have also been implemented by public servants as part of their regular duties.

The Government's term in office saw three citizen participation project meetings. The Programme also organised the opening and closing events and several themed seminars. It also supported dialogue at educational institutions, organisations and administration through lectures, seminars and articles.

The Programme maintained a website informing about its activities (<http://www.im.fi/Etusivu/Ajankohtaista/Arkistoidutsisallot/Kansalaisvaikuttamisenpolitikkajaohjelma>) as well as a section on the Government intranet. Furthermore, in January 2007 it opened the Democracy.fi website and reformed the public online discussion forum provided by central government (otakantaa.fi).

The Programme also published a bulletin about activities and projects (in 2004, 2005 and 2007), a Programme brochure (2006) and a brochure in plain Finnish about democracy in Finland (2006).

2 Implementation of the Citizen Participation Policy Programme by the ministries

The following presents the implementation of the Citizen Participation Policy Programme by each aim set. Primary responsibility for the aims was divided by ministry in a manner whereby the Ministry of Education was responsible for Aims 1 and 2, the Ministry of Finance for Aim 3, and the Ministry of the Interior for Aim 4 regarding municipal democracy and the Ministry of Justice regarding representative democracy. Whenever necessary, the ministries cooperated with each other and with the Programme Office. For practical reasons, the Programme Office was responsible for some of the measures under Aim 2, especially the clarification of the status of non-profit organisations. The Programme was mainly implemented through projects and, particularly for Aim 1, as part of regular ministerial duties.

2.1 Civic and democracy education

Aim 1: Schools and other educational institutions will promote growth into active and democratic citizenship in accordance with the principle of lifelong learning. Alongside Finnish citizenship, EU and world citizenship should also be taken into consideration in education.

Finland's reformed education legislation and national core curricula work well from a citizen participation perspective. According to studies, as is the case in many subjects, pupils' level of knowledge in this field is high in Finland by international comparisons. Problem areas include attitudes and capacities related to civic activity, with Finnish results being poor in international studies. Civic education is an important component in the process of inspiring active citizenship and perhaps the most important way to strengthen equality in citizenship. This leads our attention to teacher training, participatory school culture and student councils.

These are areas where the tradition of civic and democracy education has deteriorated and in many parts broken. In adult education, civic and NGO education is scarce and teaching of politics and political sciences non-existent. The following is a report on the measures taken in teacher training, civic education at schools and adult education, especially liberal adult education.

2.1.1 Teacher training

A prerequisite for civic education is that teacher training provides future teachers with the capacities to guide their pupils and students towards citizen participation. A project titled Citizen Participation in Teacher Training aimed to promote and increase content relevant to citizen participation in teacher training by means including research, provision of continuing education for teacher trainers and production of material for teacher training.

Measures

- The Citizen Participation in Teacher Training project built competence in citizen participation and strengthened its status in the teacher qualification reform. Coordinated by the University of Helsinki, this joint project of universities providing teacher training was – in addition to their departments of teacher education – also taken part in by schools offering placements for teacher trainees. The Ministry of Education supported the project in 2004–2006. The Citizen Participation in Teacher Training project has also produced several articles in teacher training publications as well as the project's own publications, and these provide material for basic and continuing teacher training. The provision of continuing education was organised geographically into four groups. Starting in autumn 2004, the groups held regional seminars and afternoons for teacher trainers and placement supervisors. Themes included curriculum-related issues, participatory and inclusive school culture, young people's civic activity, development of student

democracy and formulation of regional action plans. Examples of good practices were brought together in seminar workshops.

- In addition, the Ministry of Education funded two studies (by Jyväskylä and Tampere Universities) on citizen participation and teacher training.
- Representatives of schools offering trainee placements participated in a joint training programme on student council activity and capacities for student participation in 2005 and 2006. The programme was co-funded by the Ministry of Education.
- University departments of teacher education launched local training and research projects in cooperation with local government. The Teacher Student Union of Finland (SOOL) has organised national citizen participation training events for its members. Several master's theses and a few doctoral dissertations have and will be completed on citizen participation. A review of final project work on citizen participation was published in 2006. (Hansen, 2006)

2.1.2 Civic education at schools

By international comparison, Finnish youth regard their opportunities to exert influence at school as poor. The level of young people's participation in the activities of student councils and other organs of school administration is considerably lower than that of their Nordic peers. Finnish young people have a lot of knowledge and skills, but assessments show that they have adopted the attitude of the excluded with regard to civic activity and influence. Societally-oriented groups operating at schools provide young people with the opportunity to reflect and discuss their experiences. This also has an impact on the development of classroom and school atmosphere and on helping others more widely in society.

Measures

- In February 2005 the Ministry of Education launched a project entitled Participating Pupil – Communal School to develop student council activity and organise national and regional training and continuing employee training, build action and cooperation networks, develop cooperation with the government, support the development of different participation systems for children and young people in municipalities and produce support material.
- The Participating Pupil – Communal School project resulted in trainer training which was participated in by 100 municipalities from all of Finland's provinces and all teacher training schools of university departments of teacher education – a total of 300 teachers, principals, youth workers and government representatives. Participating municipalities have introduced student councils to the first six years of comprehensive education (pupils aged 7 to 12), and student council activity in the final three years of comprehensive schooling and in secondary education has been developed.
- In 2005 the National Board of Education reviewed student council activity in basic education.
- A Government proposal (215/2006) for an amendment to the Basic Education Act to include a provision on student councils was issued on 19 October 2006.

- The National Board of Education has coordinated the Youth Inclusion Project aimed at developing permanent practices for the prevention of youth exclusion and promoting inclusion through 28 projects in 70 municipalities, with a particular focus on young people with difficulties in entering further education or employment. This also involves the establishment of youth councils and parliaments. The project will continue until the end of 2007.
- An action programme was launched to develop media skills and competences as part of civic and social skills. It focused on media education in pre-school and basic education, general upper secondary schools and vocational education. The need to develop basic and continuing training of teachers working in these sectors was also to be taken into consideration. The action programme was completed in January 2007.
- Issues related to citizen participation are also emphasised in the national core curricula, especially under the cross-curricular theme "Participatory citizenship and entrepreneurship". In general upper secondary schools this cross-curricular theme is called "Active citizenship and entrepreneurship".

2.1.3 Liberal adult education

In liberal adult education, study and training provision related to civic and NGO activity is not very extensive. Folk high schools, adult education centres, study centres and other liberal adult education institutions have established many levels of cooperation with civil society and its organisations. They could help bring about attachment to civil society among those who have lower levels of education and are danger of exclusion, and build their general capacities to participate in civic and NGO activity. A general objective is to increase the participation of groups that are underrepresented in education and consequently promote social cohesion.

Measures

- Information guidance by the Ministry of Education has steered liberal adult education institutions towards the promotion of the participation of underrepresented groups in education and an increase in education that increases civic skills and builds capacities for participation in civil society. Development funding has also been allocated to these purposes.
- Study centres have launched a joint study club development project. Subsidies granted for educational organisations maintaining study centres have been targeted at activity related to citizen participation. There is a particular focus on the development of study clubs and training provision for club instructors.
- The Finnish Adult Education Association has launched a project to transfer the civic education study package online and provide training in online study instruction.

2.2 Civil society

Aim 2: The legal and administrative framework within which the civil society functions must be propitious for citizen participation and suit the times. The third sector must have adequate research, training and development services at its disposal.

The Government Programme underlined the reinforcement of the position of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This task gained even more significance during the programming period because the worsening of the conditions of NGOs and non-profit activity in particular became a subject of debate. Changes in our society have resulted in many problems in the relationship between NGOs and the government. This began to narrow down the prerequisites for voluntary work and peer-to-peer help at a time when society was undergoing rapid transformation. The perspectives of civic activity and influence were emphasised in youth policies. Teaching of civic and NGO activity is less common in Finland than in other Nordic countries and mainly takes place at study centres. The same applies to the proportion of studies in politics and political sciences in adult education. NGO research and university courses in civic activity have been scattered.

Measures

- The Civil Society 2006 committee obtained an overall view of the significance of civil society. (Publications of the Ministry of Education 2005:14). Published in February 2006, the report presented 25 proposals. After opinions had been obtained, 12 themes were selected for promotion and forwarded by the Programme to the ministries for implementation.
- The Programme launched a review of the definition of non-profitability in the NGO context and of the impacts of the Public Procurement Act and taxation on NGO activity (Publications of the Ministry of Justice 2006:14). The Ministry of Justice appointed a rapporteur to prepare the Government decision in principle proposed by the Civil Society Capacities Working Group. The decision in principle was issued on 8 March 2007.
- A Government decree on an advisory board on civil society policies was prepared on the basis of proposals by the Civil Society 2006 Working Group. The decree was adopted by the Government on 15 March 2007.
- Youth work and Finland's new Youth Act (72/2006, in force since 1 March 2006) emphasise young people's active citizenship and opportunities to take part in the handling of matters concerning local and regional youth work and youth policy. The Act also provides that young people must be heard in matters concerning them and includes the objective of generational, gender and regional equality.
- The University of Jyväskylä started a master's programme in expertise in civic activity and a postgraduate programme in civic activity in 2007 following an extensive review of university courses and research in civic activity in Finland (Ruuskanen, 2006). The year 2007 will also see preparations for a civic activity research and development network.
- A report on the status of adult education centres in polytechnics and universities of applied science will be completed in 2007; these institutions will adopt part of the responsibility for developing civic activity.

- Provision of training in civic and NGO activity has been increased in cooperation with NGOs and liberal adult education institutions, with facilitation of succession to the next generation that is needed within NGOs as one of the objectives.
- .
- Projects developing new models for civic activity in a changing urban environment have also been supported during the Programme period.
- In 2006 the Ministry of Education launched a three-phase project developing young people's media and participation skills.

2.3 Citizen participation

Aim 3: Traditional and new channels for citizen participation will be developed so that they support the full participation of citizens in the activities of communities and society. The administration must have the tools and attitude it needs for interaction with citizens.

Work towards the improvement of the opportunities of citizens and NGOs to participate and influence began in Finland's central government around the turn of the Millennium. This work was supported by a similar process underway in OECD (Citizens as Partners). In Finland this work comprised projects under the Hear the Citizens – Draft Wisely theme, which aimed to improve people's opportunities to be heard in the drafting of decisions, and the otakantaa.fi experiment on the central government's public online discussion forum, which aimed to create a concrete tool to allow individual people to be heard. The Policy Programme provided a framework for this work to continue, and the Ministry of Finance launched the third Hear the Citizens project with the special objective of achieving commitment among management and officials to promote consultation with citizens. During the Programme period it was acknowledged that the relationship between the government and citizens is one of the key development areas in democracy and calls for sustained efforts. Guidelines for this work as well as further efforts to be taken in cooperation with the OECD were explored at roundtable discussions on citizen participation towards the end of the Programme period.

Measures

- In 2005 the permanent secretaries of the ministries signed a declaration on general government principles regarding citizen consultation. The achievement of its objectives is monitored by the Ministry of Finance. The declaration was also signed by the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities and municipal representatives.
- A guidebook on citizen consultation was published for government officials and employees. (Ministry of Finance, 2005)
- A report on consultation and participation in information networks was completed. (Working Group Memoranda of the Ministry of Finance 2/2005)
- All ministries were to draw up NGO strategies by the end of 2006 and report on them in 2007.

- A report on digital TV as a channel for citizen participation was published in 2005. (ArviD Publications of the Ministry of Transport and Communications 5/2005)
- Further development of e-consultation in central government is under preparation.
- The SAG cooperation group of Swedish-speaking NGOs and the ministries promotes the consultation of NGOs at the different stages of drafting processes. Particular attention will be paid to consultation opportunities at the initiative and other initial stages of the process. The group began work in January 2006 and its term will end in September 2008.
- Criteria for the assessment of central government communications were formulated in a project of the Prime Minister's Office. One of the new criteria is the monitoring of public opinion. (Publications of the Prime Minister's Office 3/2005; 4/2005)
- The Programme supported an inquiry into citizen consultation in the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive in Finland. (Laurinolli, 2007)

2.4 Representative democracy

Aim 4: The structures and practices of representative democracy must work well on all levels and reflect the changes that are taking place in everything from the information society to globalisation.

The report on this aim is divided into two areas: the development of municipal democracy, for which the Ministry of the Interior had primary responsibility, and the development of general representative democracy, for which the Ministry of Justice held the primary responsibility.

2.4.1 Municipal democracy

Increased municipal market orientation and networking are examples of changes in the local government operating environment that have an impact on municipal democracy. One of the objectives of the Government Programme was to develop municipal self-government by ensuring citizen participation in situations resulting from regionalisation, incorporation and other new types of service provision. Improving the status of holders of a municipal elective office and the work of elected organisations was also stated as an objective. A Government report (3/2002) given on the basis of the results of the Inclusion Project stated that there is insufficient dialogue between citizens, elected officials and public servants and that there is an obvious need for the development of representative democracy.

The Ministry of the Interior project for developing local democracy focused on exploring opportunities for the reconciliation of representative democracy and municipal market orientation and networking. From the perspective of representative democracy, several problems have been caused by the trend towards networking and market orientation. The project examined these problems and created prerequisites for the strengthening of democratic governance in municipalities. It sought to legitimate and increase the acceptability of new municipal policies and methods.

Measures

- The problems of market orientation and networking from the perspective of municipal democracy were examined and reported in the Green Paper on Municipal Democracy. (Publications of the Ministry of the Interior 2/2005)
- A detailed review of the problems from a local perspective was given in the second interim report of the project. (Publications of the Ministry of the Interior 2/2006) Several studies related to the project themes were also commissioned and published.
- Amendments to the Local Government Act improved the capacities of municipal elected officials: The Act on Amendments to the Local Government Act (578/2006) entered into force on 1 August 2006. It enables the use of the “mayor model” and provides municipal elected officials with the right to take unpaid leaves of absence from their work to attend to their duties as an elected official. This allows municipalities to support the activities of groups represented in the council. The Act also includes an extension to the right provided under Section 51 of the Local Government Act to place matters before a board of directors and a restriction on the same right regarding joint organs with a view to removing obstacles to municipal collaboration.
- Amendments to the Local Government Act were made to strengthen municipal corporate governance and increase transparency in local government.
- A Government proposal (263/2006) for an amendment to the Local Government Act was issued on 17 November 2006. It contains proposals regarding municipal enterprises and the municipal enterprise group. Its aims include improving the capacities of municipal councils to govern the municipal enterprise group and clarifying the market status of municipal enterprises.
- An assessment was made to clarify the interfaces between municipal collaboration and procurement legislation. The assessment was completed as part of the memorandum of the municipal enterprise group and municipal enterprise working group (Working Group Reports of the Ministry of the Interior 9/2006)
- Good practices and solutions to identified problems were developed in cooperation with five partner municipalities. These included group management practices aimed at strengthening political governance, a strategic governance model for the municipal enterprise group, and political governance models for situations where services are outsourced. Local measures to improve the status of elected officials were also taken.
- Research activity under the project sought to study the relationship between democracy and performance efficiency in intermunicipal organs.
- Factors in local life in the municipality of Imatra that support or erode residents’ participation and influence were studied. In this context ways to increase participation by different resident groups and strengthen their capacity for influence were also explored. Groups included were young people, the ageing, immigrants, the unemployed and municipal decision-makers. The study also examined how gender affects participation. (Publications of the Ministry of the Interior 30/2005)
- Municipal democracy has been developed by the Municipal Democracy Audit project coordinated by the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities. The Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice are project partners as part of the Citizen Participation Policy Programme. Implemented in 2004–2008, the project will create a model for self-assessment, benchmarking and measurement of the state of municipal

democracy for municipalities. Project themes take equality (gender equality, regional and social representativeness and opportunities for participation and influence of special groups) into consideration.

- A more extensive presentation of the municipal democracy development project was included in the final report, *The White Paper on Municipal Democracy*, published in December 2006. (Publications of the Ministry of the Interior 56/2006)

2.4.2 Representative democracy

The state of representative democracy in Finland can generally be regarded as good. The election system functions reliably, voting is easy and election results are obtained quickly. Provision of election-related information is balanced and of high quality. Parties represented in Parliament can be supported by central government funding to a reasonable extent. The duties of the key central government bodies are in harmony with each other, and the central government system is capable of efficient decision-making.

Problems identified are to do with a need to develop the election system, a drop in Parliamentary election voter turnout from more than 80 percent to less than 70 percent, and the issue of increasing direct democracy. So far, however, Finland has pursued a policy whereby decision-making is based on representative democracy, and tools such as consultative referendums are used with care and moderation. According to the Government Programme, the Citizen Participation Policy Programme was to examine the functioning of representative democracy particularly in parliamentary and municipal elections.

Measures

- The Ministry of Justice drew up an evaluation memorandum on the improvement of the proportionality of parliamentary elections, and the development of European Parliamentary elections and national referendums as well as the citizens' initiative for use in negotiations towards forming the new Cabinet.

- The simplification of the technical performance of elections was continued. E-voting will be piloted in the 2008 municipal elections at polling stations in Karkkila, Kauniainen and Vihti.

- Provision of election information and activation of voters was coordinated and developed in connection with the 2004 European Parliamentary and municipal elections. Activation measures were targeted particularly at young people and other groups with low turnout rates. Following recommendations given in the memorandum of the election information working group (Publications of the Ministry of Justice 2004:13) and opinions received on it (Publications of the Ministry of Justice 2005:9), a decision was made to continue active information provision in connection with the 2007 centenary elections and through a voter activity campaign by the Ministry of Justice.

- The need to develop the national referendum institution was evaluated. (Nordenstreng, 2004)

- The Finnish democracy knowledge base was reviewed (Borg, ed., 2004; Borg 2005). A proposal was given for the Finnish democracy indicators and their monitoring. (Borg, ed., 2006) Equality issues were given an independent section in the indicators. In addition to this, most topics can be examined from a gender equality perspective.
- The coordination of the administration of democracy issues was prepared by the Ministry of Justice, and a basis was created for a national democracy policy.
- As recommended by a memorandum of the Democracy 2007 committee, (Publications of the Ministry of Justice 2005:1) support to ideologically-based think-tanks was launched to benefit social research and related Finnish and international networking. (Turunen, 2005; Kervinen, 2006)
- A study on the status of the activities of political organisations was commissioned. (Ruostetsaari, 2005)

3 Evaluation of the Citizen Participation Policy Programme and further measures

3.1 National democracy project

The key result of the Citizen Participation Policy Programme is the overall view of the measures through which the government can strengthen democracy that was obtained during the Programme. Although the realisation of democracy ultimately depends on citizens' own activity, the government can – and under the Constitution of Finland must – promote participation and influence. This view has been strengthened further by project evaluations.

Entitled *Democracy and Citizen Participation* (Ministry of Justice, 2006), the concluding document of the Policy Programme provides guidelines for future development. It presents the foundations of democracy policy and specifies issues that need special attention. Together with increasingly specific indicator data, the document offers an overall view of the measures necessary, although responsibilities for their implementation are decentralised to several ministries.

A policy programme provides a suitable concept for action related to themes that are regarded as important but have for a long time received little attention and require a large number of measures in many administrative branches. The Citizen Participation Policy Programme as a national democracy project is a good example of this. According to international democracy comparisons, Finland is an exemplary democracy. A total of 90 percent of Finns regard our system as better than other systems. According to a Finnish study, democracy perspectives have been taken appropriately into consideration in Finnish legislation. (Nordenstreng, 2004)

Problems with democracy in Finland are related to a lessening of participation and influence and increased disparities in these. In part these problems are shared with other

established democracies, but they are more pronounced in Finland than in the other Nordic countries. Finland is becoming a nation divided into increasingly active and increasingly passive citizens.

The development towards a meritocratic society is leading to the majority of people not regarding themselves as citizens with full powers. Young people and those with a low level of education in particular need more opportunities for participation that can socialise them into civic activity and citizen participation. Solving these problems will require sustained and extensive efforts.

The problems are due to a failure over the past decades to monitor the development of democracy and its prerequisites and to implement democracy policies to the extent that has taken place in other countries, especially our Nordic peers. The Citizen Participation Policy Programme sought to address this backwardness by strengthening the knowledge base needed for democracy policy, launching development projects to reach the key aims, and making proposals for administrative development to enable permanent development of democracy.

3.1.1 Aim 1: Civic and democracy education

Several civic education development processes were launched and research into civic education was strengthened during the Policy Programme period. Citizen participation in teacher training was strengthened in terms of content and in new degree requirements. Major efforts have been made to develop a participatory school culture and cooperation between schools, municipalities and NGOs in this field. A proposal has also been made to include a mention of student councils in the Basic Education Act. Liberal adult education development funds were directed to support active citizenship and civil society activity.

An essential question is whether civic education will become a focal point in the development work carried out by the educational administration as a whole. These activities must be continued and also directed at shadow areas such as civic education in vocational education and issues related to civic learning and political literacy in adult education. A particular challenge of educational policies is citizens' disparities as participants and influencers. A long-term challenge is to develop an identity of citizenship in which the dimensions of local, national, European Union and world citizenship are intertwined.

3.1.3 Aim 2: Civil society

The Citizen Participation Policy Programme developed an overall view on the status, significance and development needs of the various sectors of civil society and NGO activity in particular. In part this aim overlaps with the issues discussed above: a Master's programme in civic activity expertise, a postgraduate programme on the topic, and interest among polytechnics and universities of applied science in teaching civic activity

are important steps forward. The planned development centre for civic activity would strengthen the cooperation required in this field. Future actions will also increase the efficiency of studies within NGOs, which is considerably poorer in Finland than in other Nordic Countries.

Development measures brought up by the basic review of the civil society have been launched. Of these the most important – and at the same time most difficult – is the issue of the status of non-profit activity in a rapidly changing service production environment. Particularly problematic are services which consist of equal proportions of voluntary work and peer-to-peer help and are ill-suited for enterprise-like productisation, competitive tendering and taxation. Development work in issues related to civic activity and civil society should continue past the completion of the Policy Programme period.

3.1.3 Aim 3: Citizen participation

Measures to improve interaction between citizens and government were continued. Particular attention was paid to intensifying the measures that the government uses to consult with citizens and NGOs. Government commitment to this aim and ministry-specific NGO strategies both play a key role in this. The challenge is twofold: Citizens and NGOs who wish to have their say but feel they do not have the necessary means to do it must be provided with considerably wider access to the content-related decision-making process. Another challenge is to develop ways in which the voice of those who have lost faith in their opportunities to influence will be heard.

The development of ministerial NGO strategies and new information, consultation and initiative methods must be continued. Particular attention must be paid to the differences between citizens' opportunities to participate and influence. Therefore the sustained, target group-sensitive planning of communications is vital. Information networks provide plenty of new opportunities for this, with the government's public discussion forum (otakantaa.fi) a good starting point. Finland should remain one of the leading countries in terms of the information society. Development work must ensure that new methods will not further reduce the opportunities of low-participating and special groups to experience full citizenship. Material for further work is offered by a series of roundtable discussions analysing the interrelations of citizens, NGOs, government and political decision-makers. Contacts with international development work also will be beneficial in the future.

3.1.4 Aim 4: Representative democracy

The project for the development of local democracy sought to improve the municipal council's power of governance in a changing operating environment, and several legislative amendments were made as a result. Structural change and differences in voter turnout at municipal elections and other forms of participation will call for further examination from the democracy perspective into the future. Changes taking place

emphasise the need to improve the work methods and capacities to attend to their duties available to elected officials.

A study of the state of representative democracy (Publications of the Ministry of Justice 2005:1) brought up several development targets, which are partly included in the above aims. Issues problematic to legislation include differences in the hidden electoral threshold between electoral districts, and the issue of a more extensive use of citizens' initiatives and referendums. Preparedness to solve these problems was not found during the Policy Programme, but preparation continued. Ideology-based social debate on objectives can be strengthened as experiences gained from the think-tank experiment were positive. The intensified election activation approach will also be continued.

3.2 Democracy policy administration

3.2.1 Need for democracy policy

Item by item, experiences gained during the Citizen Participation Policy Programme emphasise the need for democracy policy. A Nordic study required by the Government Programme (Mutanen, 2004) revealed that democracy administration features both centralised and decentralised solutions. Networked cooperation – a combination of these two – is well-suited to Finland. In this model, responsibility for the development of democracy and citizen participation lies with several ministries in their respective administrative branches while interministerial cooperation manages the whole. This requires a clear allocation of responsibilities and resources for democracy and citizen participation issues for each ministry. Although not large in amount, the funds required are important.

There are several prerequisites for network cooperation, with clear management responsibilities and a common idea or vision of the network's task the most important aspects. The Democracy Unit to be established under the Ministry of Justice will play a key role in interministerial cooperation. Its task will be to maintain cooperation, build a comprehensive democracy knowledge base and disseminate information about it. Open communication is also essential due to the sensitive nature of democracy issues. A common view can be developed through the periodical production of a democracy policy document, with the "testament" of the Policy Programme – *Democracy and Citizen Participation* – providing one model for this.

3.2.2 Interministerial cooperation

The ministries participating in the Citizen Participation Policy Programme will play a well-justified role in the democracy network as developers: the Ministry of Justice developing representative democracy, the Ministry of the Interior municipal democracy, the Ministry of Education civic education and civic activity, and the Ministry of Finance

administration. Other ministries should also become involved. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has expertise in social disparities and holds responsibility for the activities of social welfare and health organisations important in civil society. Democracy perspectives must also be taken into consideration in communications policies. Communications and citizens' basic communications rights are important for the realisation of democracy. In addition to its responsibilities related to NGOs, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs plays a special role in democracy-related human rights issues while the Ministry of the Environment has solid experience in citizen consultation.

3.2.3 Advisory board on civil society policies

There are problems related to many of the aims of the Policy Programme in terms of relations between non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the government. NGOs usually enjoy good cooperation with ministries whose administrative branch is close to them. The problem is a lack of an overall view regarding civil society. Coordination is needed in three types of tasks so that an overall view is obtained on (1) the state of and developments taking place in civil society, (2) research, training and development targeted at or taking place within NGOs, and (3) development of legislation and regulations that affect NGOs. NGOs feel they need information about projects that affect their status or that they wish to influence in Finland or the EU at a stage earlier than is currently the case. An advisory board on civil society policies might be the platform for such issues.

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