

Youth and Environmental Emotions project – Public libraries supporting youth to treat and express their emotions and views concerning environmental issues

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Abstract:

In the Youth and Environmental Emotions project, we wanted to test and develop the environmental and climate activities of the library using a method, in which young people themselves can choose the topics, ways of action and forms of work that interest them. The aim was to try out new and fresh ways of engaging young people. Our primary target group was 13- to 20-year-olds. The project was a national development project (2021–2022) managed by the Helsinki City Library and funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Project partners were Oulu City Library, Turku City Library, Mikkeli Regional Library and City of Mikkeli Youth Services, Youth Work as a Builder of Climate hope project.

We primarily asked young people's opinions through a survey that we shared via different routes and platforms. Based on the survey and discussions with young people, the young people were most interested in doing something concrete and getting information, especially on topics close to them. It was clear that young people get most of their information on environmental and climate matters at school and through social media, so we started from them and also organised events in libraries and youth centres.

Based on the project, the best way for public libraries to support youth to treat and express their emotions and views concerning environmental issues is by providing information on eco-topics, organizing events, and going to places where the young people are. Libraries should work together with schools, experts, social media content creators, organizations, and youth centres to support young people's environmental emotions and environmental activities. A practical guide to the events and activities carried out in the course of the project will be compiled to support future work. The idea is that not everyone needs to start again from the beginning.

Keywords: climate change, environmental emotions, youth, public libraries

Introduction

Climate change is one of the factors creating uncertainty – today and in the future. It's confirmed through different studies that young people experience significant amount of climate anxiety [1, 2, 3], but how to help young people? What are the best ways to connect with young people? What kind of events and actions do they want from libraries? We set out to figure that out in the Youth and Environmental Emotions project.

The Youth and Environmental Emotions project was a national development project (2021–2022) managed by the Helsinki City Library and funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture [4]. The project aimed to test and develop the environmental and climate activities of the library using a method, in which young people themselves could choose the topics, ways of action and forms of work that interest them. The aim was to try out new and fresh ways of engaging young people and to create an operating model, which could be implemented in different libraries. Project partners were Oulu City Library, Turku City Library, Mikkeli Regional Library and City of Mikkeli Youth Services, Youth Work as a Builder of Climate hope project. The partners' task was to participate in the planning and implementation of the project, to organise regional events, test develop and implement new practices and ways of working as well as deploy them in libraries. The main target group of the project was young people aged 13–20.

The project picked up from the Bringing environmental awareness of public libraries to the 2020s project [5]. In the past, there has not been a place or suitable ways of working to deal with young people's environmental emotions. Environmental emotions are closely related to information on the environment and climate change, so libraries are both suitable organisers and places to organise environmental emotion events together with young people. The environmental work to be done together with young people in libraries is only just starting. The project aimed to collect information on the types of practices and channels, through which environmental activities can be carried out with young people. The project also aimed to pilot and establish suitable ways for libraries.

Implementation

We primarily asked young people's opinions through a survey. Through the survey, young people could tell which topics they were interested in and what kind of activities they wanted. The survey was distributed via e-mail to youth councils, organisations and associations in Helsinki, Oulu, Mikkeli and Turku. Participants were also asked to participate in the survey at the Oulu Youth Forum. Information on the project and the survey has also been distributed through brochures to libraries, youth centres and schools. The survey has also been advertised on social media channels.

We carried out activities mainly based on the survey, but also outside of it by experimenting with different ways to reach young people. Based on the survey, young people were most interested in documentary presentations, events on clothing and fast fashion, recycling events such as rubbish collection, future workshops as well as climate and media. Young people wanted information, action in practice, to make a difference and discussions, in which different views and voices would be heard. Young people could not necessarily name the people they wanted to be involved in the project events, but they could name the themes and topics that interest them. It was surprising that the workshops on climate reading circles and managing environmental emotions were not particularly popular in the survey, even though they would

have been in a pivotal role in this project according to the initial idea. Of course, our survey is not exhaustive due to the small number of respondents, but it provided guidelines for this project. Young people said that they get most of their information on environmental and climate matters at school and through social media, so we started from them along organising events in libraries and youth centres.

Events and activities in upper secondary schools

In Helsinki, we contacted the secretaries of the city's upper secondary schools. We briefly presented the project and asked what kind of cooperation the upper secondary schools would like to engage in, or what would be desired from the library. Most of the schools did not respond at all. One school wanted book talks, a second one an author visit and a third one guidance on information retrieval and evaluating information reliability.

As part of the Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035 study module, information reliability and information retrieval from an environmental perspective were discussed in mother tongue lessons. The source criticism and information retrieval lessons were carried out by the special librarian and pedagogical information specialist of the Helsinki City Library. Also, the author visits to upper secondary schools were organised as part of the Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035 study module. During the visits, students themselves got to pose questions to the authors. Due to the corona pandemic, the book talk to upper secondary schools was implemented in a video format. The librarian of the Helsinki City Library made an eco-book talk video, which was distributed to upper secondary schools.

Social media

Social media is an important channel for reaching young people. For the project we made accounts for TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. Facebook was quickly considered an unnecessary channel for reaching young people. Best channel was TikTok. We published information, thoughts and event tips related to the environment and climate on social media with a low threshold and in a light-hearted way. In addition to basic publications, two campaigns were carried out on social media.

In the survey, young people asked practical and interesting questions about the environment and climate. We noticed that there are answers to some of the questions posed by the young people, so we started looking for experts in the field to answer them. We wanted to respond in a way that reaches the young people, i.e. via social media. We compiled collage videos of the responses to the project's YouTube channel, as well as question-specific videos for TikTok and Instagram [6, 7]. A total of eight experts in their respective fields participated in the videos.

In February 2022, the project carried out a TikTok campaign in cooperation with social media content producers. The campaign aimed to raise environmental emotions through people known to young people, link these to library services and thereby activate young people to come to libraries. The campaign also aimed to partly create peer support for dealing with climate anxiety, which can be facilitated with information and services found in libraries. The campaign videos received nearly 100,000 views, collected thousands of likes and hundreds of comments.

Events and activities in libraries

We organized a variety of events in the libraries including nature tent, documentary presentations, clothes recycling rack, clothing workshop, future game day, rubbish collection event, Youth and Biodiversity event and planting workshop. We also participated in a street festival and Climate Talks tour.

The nature tent concept was tested as part of the Helsinki Oodi library's climate event. The idea of the tent was to activate people to think about their own connection to nature, but also to point out that a sanctuary from environmental and climate anxiety can be built in a library. Inside the tent, one could either simply relax and listen to the sounds of the water and forest or also reflect on one's personal environmental emotions and write them down on a piece of paper. The purpose was to create a place for relaxing in the midst of everyday commotion, a surprising and slightly absurd place for relaxation, a connection between nature and the built environment.

In the survey, documentary presentations became the most popular response. Young people also wanted to meet familiar faces from social media, so we decided to combine these in the documentary presentations. This was a success, as environmental documentary series have been made in Finland, in which social media personalities have been involved. We invited a social media personality involved in the documentary to the presentations, to whom the young people themselves could pose questions related to the topics of the documentary and making it. Documentary presentations were organised in each city in a slightly different way. In Oulu and Turku, certain school classes were invited to the presentations. In Mikkeli, certain school classes were informed, but the event was also open to everyone. In Helsinki, the event was open to everyone. The highest number of participants was obtained through cooperation with schools.

A clothes recycling racks and clothing repair and tuning workshops were held in Turku City Library and Mikkeli Regional Library in April 2022. The clothing repair and tuning workshops were run by professionals. In Turku the theme of the workshop was patching. In the workshop, places were painted that could be attached to clothes or bags. In Mikkeli, you could bring clothes to the workshop for a small on-site repair or modification or make them yourself. The facilitators had different fabrics and designs included. A sewing machine and an overlocker were also included. The idea for the clothing rack was that you can bring clothes that are left over to the clothes recycling rack and take new clothes away with you. The clothes recycling rack was made by a young person as a thesis project for the youth department of the Turku City Library. The clothes rack will remain a permanent part of the youth department of the Turku City Library. In Mikkeli Regional library, the clothing recycling rack was up for three days. The Mikkeli Regional library cooperated with a local school. At first, the clothes rack was in the library, but from there it was moved along with the clothes to the local school.

In the survey, young people wanted rubbish collection events. By collecting rubbish, young people feel that they are positively impacting the environment in practice. Rubbish collection events were organised in Turku City Library, Mikkeli Regional Library, and Arabianranta Library in Helsinki. Rubbish collection events were organised in each city in a slightly different way. The Helsinki City Library participated in a street festival organised in the area. As part of the library tent, the project gave eco-book tips and handed out rubbish tongs. The Turku City Library held a two-hour rubbish collection event. For the event, there was a point outside where you could borrow the equipment for collecting the rubbish. When people returned with the supplies, they were rewarded with treats. In Mikkeli, a small group of people went for a walk to the surrounding area and collected rubbish along the way. After the walk, snacks were eaten in the library yard and the catch was filmed and published on social media. Rubbish collection

event requires at least rubbish tongs and plastic bags, but the participants can also be provided with gloves and a small snack reward, if necessary. Rubbish tongs were already available in all the libraries mentioned above.

The Turku City Library organized planting workshop for a school class. Students were allowed to choose the seeds to be planted from lettuce, sunflower or sugar pea seeds. Students were able to visit the library to water the plants for two weeks. After two weeks, students were able to pick up the plants for themselves.

A future game day was held at the Mikkeli Regional Library. During the day, online and printable games about the future and the environment were played and the ideas they aroused were discussed. The game day responded to young people's wishes for future workshops.

In cooperation with WWF Youth Finland, an event was organised in the Helsinki Central Library Oodi. In the event the participants could hear about current biodiversity matters and learn about and discuss biodiversity from different perspectives. The event was carried out in such a way that the young people themselves could make the decisions on the content of the event and the people to be invited. As the project, we provided the premises and contacted the people whom the young people wanted to participate. In this way, we made it possible for the young people to have an event that they liked and one that responded to their needs.

During spring 2022, the Climate Talks tour was organised in the Helmet libraries of the Finnish capital region [8]. The tour invited some twenty authors, writers, and activists to the Helmet libraries in February–May 2022 to discuss climate change and biodiversity loss with the help of literature. The tour started from the library employee's own activity and was also a great opportunity for the project to cooperate with the existing operating model of the library. The project coordinator participated in three visits as a secondary interviewer and raised young people's views and thoughts in the discussions. The topics of the visits involved journalism and the media, environmental emotions as well as clothing and the clothing industry.

Event at the youth centre

The project participated in Finland's Great Nature Dialogue Day on 9 March 2022 by organising two nature dialogues in the Helsinki Youth Environment Space. The dialogue responded to young people's wishes for discussion and making an impact on the future. The summaries of the dialogues will be used to support the Nature-wise Finland 2035 vision. At the end of the event, a book suggestion list was handed out to the participants as a library bonus, which they can use to continue reading on the topic in books, if they so wish.

What about the future?

A practical guide to the events and activities carried out in the course of the project will be compiled to support future work. The idea is that not everyone needs to start again from the beginning. The practical guide will be published in Finnish, Swedish and English. The publications will be found on the Green Library page ([Vihreä kirjasto | Kirjastot.fi](#)).

Conclusion

Based on the project, the best way for public libraries to support youth to treat and express their emotions and views concerning environmental issues is by providing information on

eco-topics, organizing events, and going to places where the young people are. Libraries should work together with schools, experts, social media content creators, organizations, and youth centres to support young people's environmental emotions and environmental activities. Social media is an important channel for reaching young people and should not be underestimated. In the future, libraries should make more use of social media applications, such as TikTok, which is especially popular with young people. Regarding events, it is good to remember that libraries and youth centres are places for young people to spend their leisure time, while participation in school activities is mandatory. In order to reach a larger number of young people, it is worth working with schools. By organizing events in libraries, you can reach those who are already interested in the topic.

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