

Deliberative Democracy and Education

From Classroom Discussions to Democratic Participation

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SITRA

What is Sitra?

1. A gift from Parliament to the 50-year-old Finland. Still under the supervision of the Finnish Parliament.
2. Sitra's mission is to accelerate well-being and economic growth for Finland within the limits of nature's carrying capacity.
3. We anticipate the future, drive change and accelerate solutions to major challenges in our society in collaboration with other actors.
4. Sitra's work is funded by the returns from its capital.

Building our future *together, independently, respectfully and responsibly.*



**Economic
growth**



**Sustainability
transition**



Data and AI



**Democracy
and
polarisation**



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Democracy Innovations Program

- We are developing new ways of citizen participation and decision-making processes to strengthen representative democracy
- We focus on scaling and establishing methods at all levels of decision-making
- We are currently working with three projects:
 - Deliberative Citizen Panels
 - Democracy Technologies
 - Digital Government





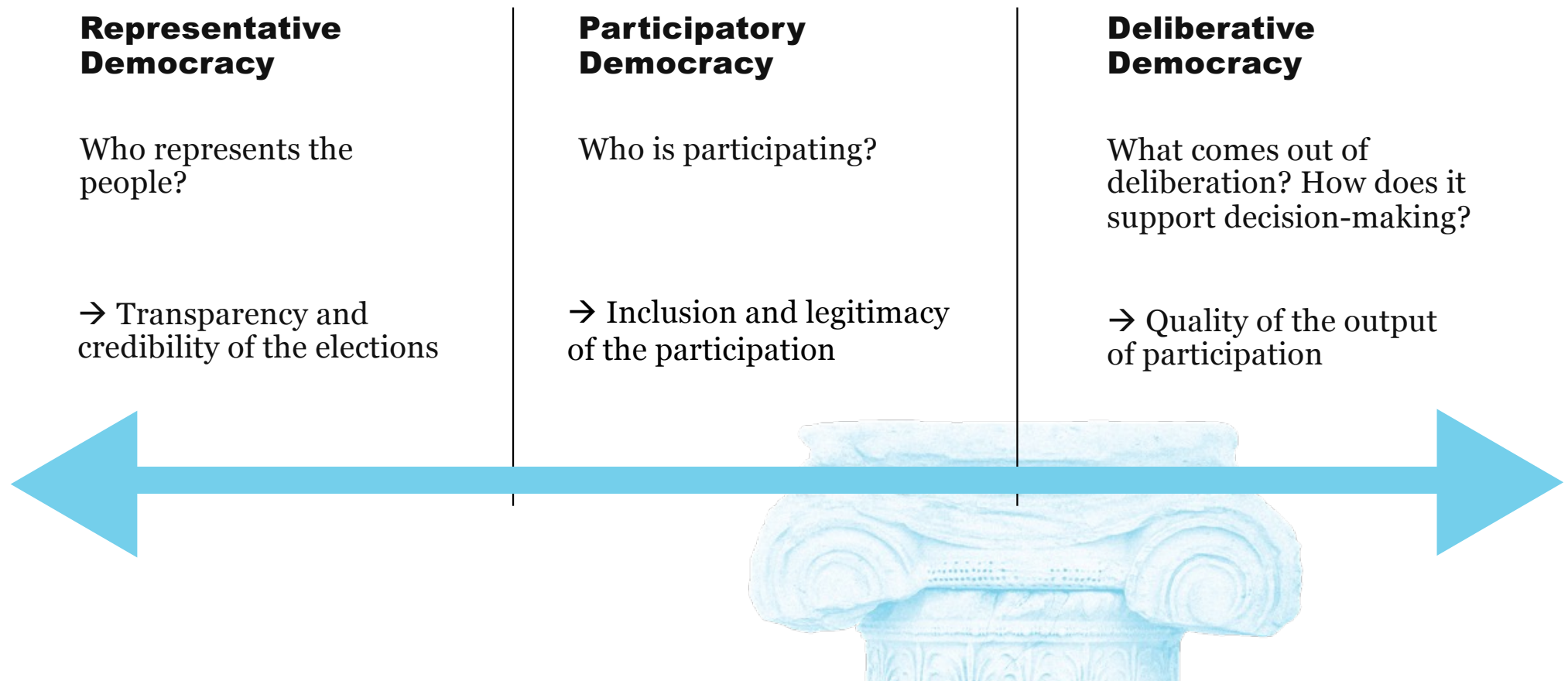
The Finnish participation paradox.

Trust in institutions is strong, but belief in one's own ability to influence is not.



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Young people and democratic participation



Fields of facilitation

Variety of perspectives

CO-CREATION

Aiming to generate ideas and solutions

Deepened understanding and many ideas/perspectives

DIALOGUE

Aiming to increase understanding of oneself, others, and the subject matter

Sufficient mutual understanding

DELIBERATION

Aiming to influence decision-making, aiming for a statement, vision, or recommendations

Agreement/recommendations/common outcome

MEDIATION/ RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

Aiming to resolve conflict/tension and change behavior

What's Timeout about?

- An open, free **dialogue method** of constructive societal discussion
- Can be used whenever a deeper understanding of the topic or an equal encounter is required
- The participants speak from their own experience, the **aim is not to make any decisions** during or after the discussion
- Developed in Sitra in 2017, co-ordinated by Timeout Foundation since 2019
- More than 134 000 people have taken part in Timeout dialogues

GROUND RULES OF TIMEOUT DIALOGUE

- **Listen** to the others, do not interrupt or start side discussions.
- **Join** others' talks and use everyday language.
- **Tell** about your own experience.
- **Address** the others directly and ask them about their views.
- **Be present and respect** others and the atmosphere of trust.
- **Search and build.** Work on the emerging conflicts boldly and look for what remains hidden.

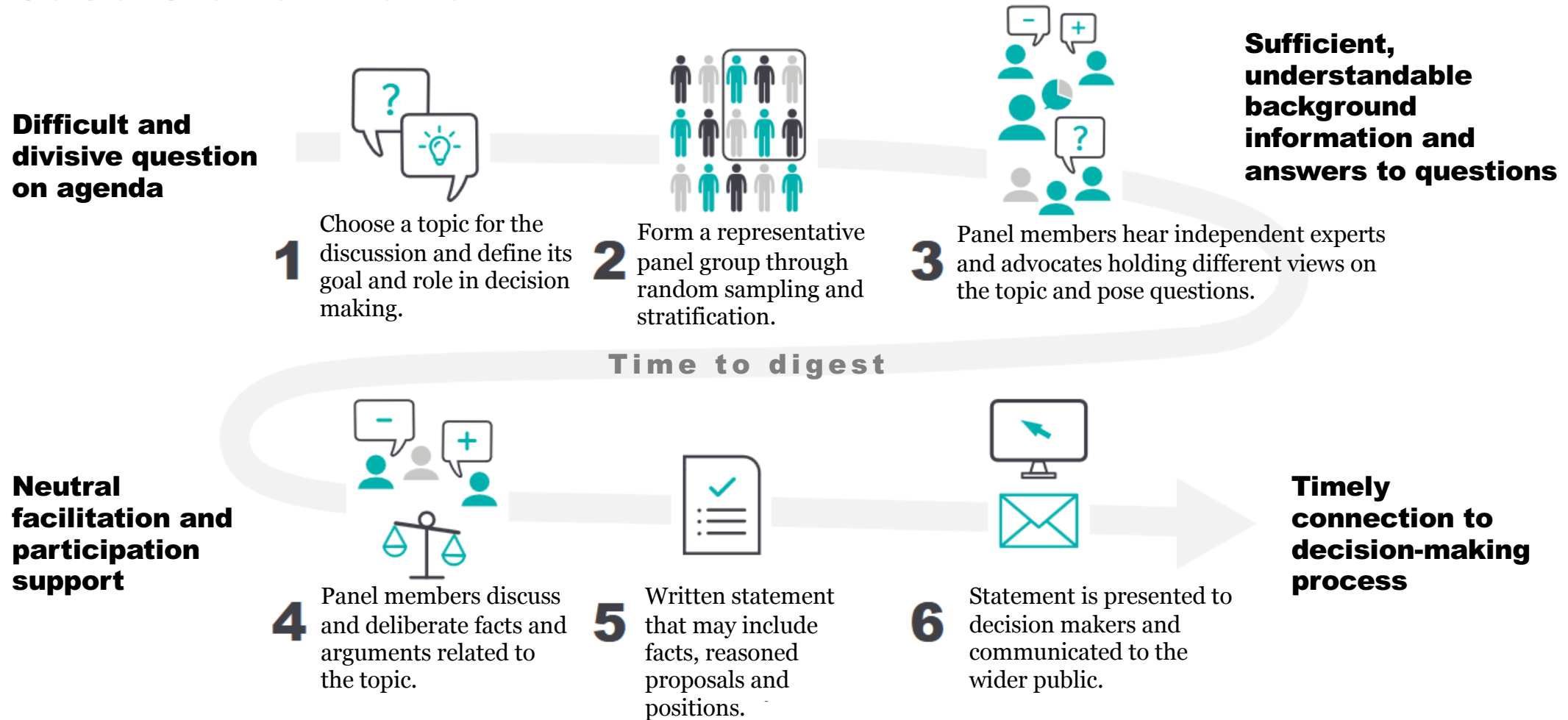
Source: www.timeoutdialogue.fi

Kid dialogue

- based on the Timeout dialogue method, developed in Lahti
- brings children, young people and adults together on an equal footing to build a common understanding through dialogue
- The objective is to to increase understanding, develop emotional and interactive skills, reinforce a sense of solidarity and create an equal way to participate and influence matters

Source: www.lahti.fi

Elements of Deliberative Process: Case Citizen Panel



Source: [University of Turku 2020](#)

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What can we achieve through deliberation?

1. **Epistemic goals:** Increased level of knowledge of individuals, better knowledge base to support decision-making, and higher quality group decision-making
2. **Ethical goals:** better mutual understanding, trust, and respect for others
3. **Democratic goals:** stronger participation (planning, decision-making, evaluation) in meaningful decisions



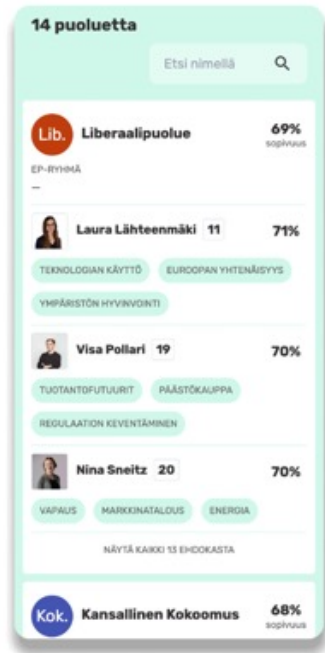
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Examples of deliberative processes

- Children and Young People's Participation in Climate Assemblies in Scotland 2020 and in Ireland 2022-2023
- Deliberative student panel at Queen Mary University in London 2021
 - A randomly selected panel of students heard experts and provided recommendations to the institution on lessons and new practices from the COVID-19 pandemic
- Deliberation in Schools project in Australia 2018–2019
 - A series of deliberative discussions (5 x 2 hours) for 5–11-year-old students in two public schools on the themes 'How can we make the school better?' and 'Is Australia a peaceful nation?'
- Deliberative discussion workshops in Brazil 2019
 - Comparison of deliberative discussion and voting in workshops for 15–18-year-old students in five public schools, on topics such as 'What kind of performance will the class prepare for the school's talent show?'
- Deliberative democracy in a Finnish classroom: Involving third graders in decision-making 2007-2008
- Students' experiences from three citizen juries in Vaasa 2010-2011

Open VAA

The first version of the educational VAA was tested in the EU elections 2024

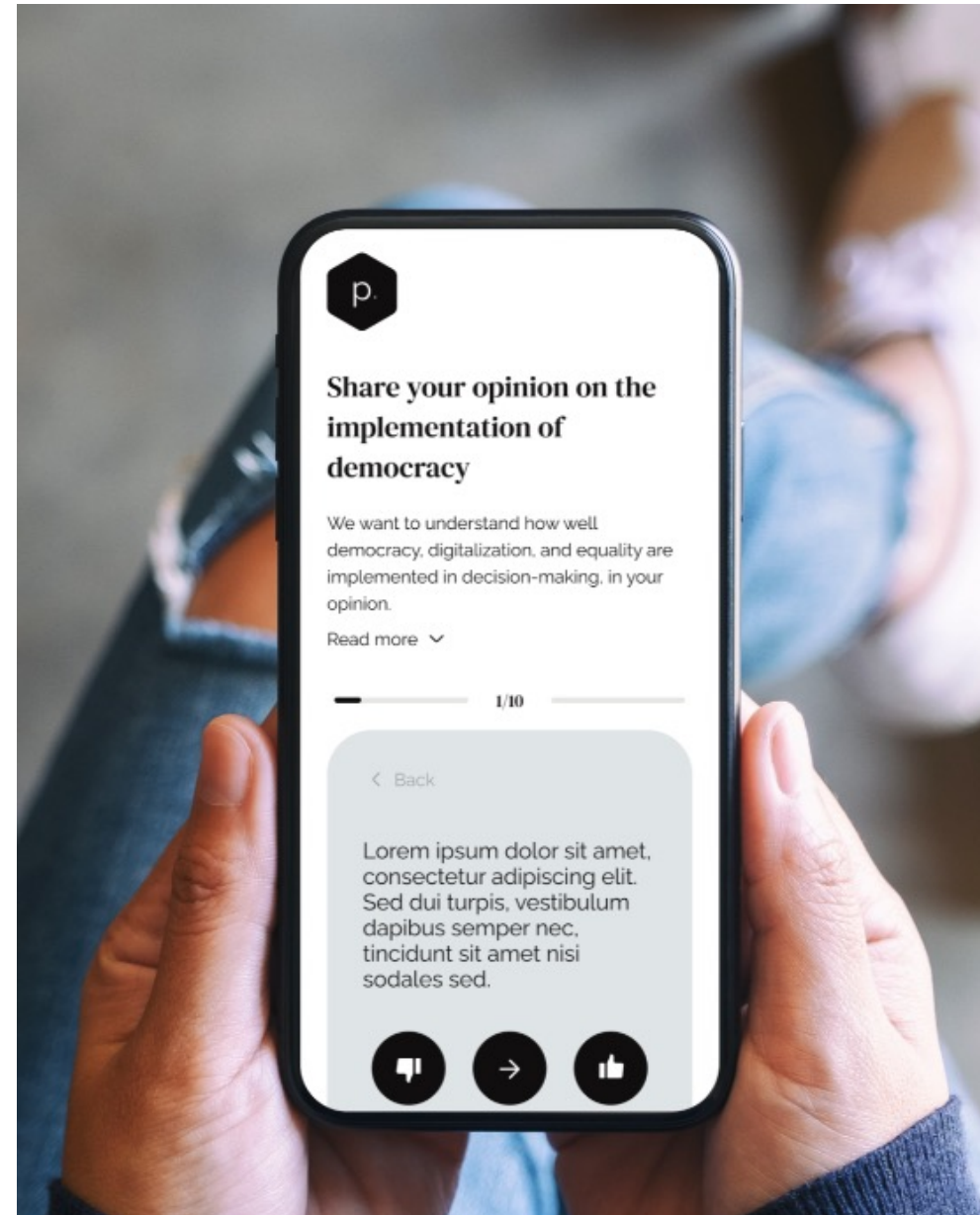


- The educational VAA (voting advice application) was targeted at young voters, with the pilot conducted in cooperation with The Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector
- The voting advice application covered topics of EU decision-making that young people consider important and interesting
- The VAA engaged youth well, and it was accessed over 22 000 times prior to the EU elections.
- A new version of the VAA has been developed for the Finnish regional and municipality elections of spring 2025. **The new VAA includes democracy education features which allows the VAA to be used at schools as an educational tool, as well.**

The Polis platform

Polis is a digital mass participation platform for constructive exchange of opinions.

- Helps to find common ground
- Participants have the power to set the agenda
- Does not allow for online harassment or trolling
- Supports decision-making and policy processes by creating a more nuanced situational picture
- Made GDPR-compatible and accessible (WCAG 2.2) by Sitra
- Open source, transparent development



WHAT DO YOU THINK, FINLAND?

What direction should Finland take? What do others think? Try out a new online platform where everyone can have a voice.

TRY IT OUT!

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?



There are statements on the platform that you can vote on by agreeing or disagreeing, or you can simply skip them.



Add your own statements so that the issues that matter to you are part of the debate.



The platform does not require a login, and participation is anonymous.



See how others have responded and what opinion groups we fall into.

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