

Library of Parliament of Finland
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Bringing the Finnish law-drafting process closer to the citizens via information packages on the web

Background

Finland has a long tradition in openness and transparency. Steps to offer online information on legislation and decision-making proactively to citizens took place already in the mid-1990s when the legislative database Finlex (<http://www.finlex.fi/en/>) and parliamentary documents became freely available online.

Methods to ensure transparency have evolved and today there are multiple sources of information on law and law drafting easily available for anyone on the web. Law drafting documents from ministries are available in a public database provided by the Finnish Government. There are various websites providing information on civic engagement. Furthermore, the website of the Finnish Parliament provides information on the parliamentary process as well as access to the actual parliamentary documents. Meanwhile, also the Finlex database has expanded and evolved into a comprehensive legal database publicly available on the web.

To get an in-depth understanding of any proposed legislation one needs to have access to information from different phases and stages of the whole law-drafting process. In addition, there is often need for other explanatory background materials, such as legal literature and comparative materials. The challenge is, that even though information *as such* is relatively well available, it is scattered into different information sources on the Internet. For an unexperienced knowledge seeker it can be challenging to gather and evaluate all the relevant information to obtain an adequate and realistic picture of the proposed legislation and its impact. It is also worth noting that not all the information sources are freely available online. Some of the key background materials, such as legal commentaries, are usually available at libraries, even if they are not freely accessible online.

The Launch of the information package service

At the Library of Parliament of Finland, we recognized the need for a service that would in a systematic manner gather and combine materials from the different stages of the law drafting process and help the customers and citizens in general to understand the context, content and background of proposed legislation.

In November 2011, we launched a web-based service introducing information packages of uniform structure and logic, covering selected, topical Finnish legislation initiatives.¹ Each covered subject matter is chosen with a view to ensure coverage of legislation initiatives that are considered to be of particular interest to our client groups. Completed information packages cover issues like the reform of the legislation on alcohol legislation, the trial on basic income, the reform of the money laundering legislation and the initiative of legalizing euthanasia.

The information packages contain official materials, such as reports and memoranda from the ministries, as well as parliamentary documents, but also other background materials such as literature references, comparative law materials and web sites for civic engagement. We update the information packages with new materials as the legislative project proceeds. When the law has entered into force, or alternatively in rare occasions lapsed, the updating of that package ceases. The completed information packages remain available on the website even though not updated anymore.

The main target group for the information package service was originally an ordinary citizen that does not normally proactively seek information about proposed legislation. We have, however, discovered that also professionals regularly use our information package service.

¹ Lakihaasteiden tietopaketti LATI:

https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/tietoeduskunnasta/kirjasto/aineistot/kotimainen_oikeus/LATI/Sivut/default.aspx The service is available only in the Finnish language.

The service has been well received, with many references to it for example in ministries and authorities' webpages and in Finnish legal news services.

Customer orientation and customer feedback in development of the service

The starting point of the service was an identified customer need to get more structured information on proposals of new legislation. The uniform structure of the packages makes it easy for the user to grasp what materials are included in each package.

In year 2015, the Finnish Parliament website was renewed and the information packages obtained a new visual layout.

The information package service contains interactive elements. Clients may suggest new subjects for information packages to our professionals. They can also suggest inclusion of new materials to the existing packages.

We collect feedback about the service in the Library's user surveys and in client workshops. The Finnish Parliament is in the process of selecting a web analytic tool that would enable better understanding the use of the Parliament website. When such analytic tool is in use, we will be able to have valuable data on the use of the information packages.

Extending the information package concept

The information packages on legislative projects have received good feedback both from the users at the parliament and external customers. Therefore, we extended the concept of the information packages to cover also historical and societal subjects. Historical packages provide information and documents on subjects such as the Finnish Independence process and Women's suffrage 110 Years². Examples of societal subjects covered are Legislative steps towards same-sex marriages and the Brexit.

Whilst the information packages on law proposals focus on providing the relevant background materials in the form of links and references, the historical packages are more descriptive. The historical information packages focus on the role of the Finnish Parliament in the described historical event and links to the actual parliamentary documents.

In conclusion

The Finnish Library of Parliament has been open to the public for over 100 years. Openness is our core value and it is our task to bring information about the parliament, the law and the society closer to the citizens. The web-based information packages are one mean to promote openness and democracy by bringing information about law drafting and parliamentary process closer to the citizens.

² Päivi Erkkilä & Joni Krekola, May 2016: The womens' suffrage 110 years. Information package on the Library of Parliament webpage: <https://www.eduskunta.fi/EN/tietoeduskunnasta/kirjasto/aineistot/yhteiskunta/womens-suffrage-110-years/Pages/default.aspx> The package is available in Finnish, Swedish and English.