



## **Together for the Future- Ritaharju Community Centre**

**Pirkko Lindberg**  
and  
**Tuija Polo-Koret**  
Oulu City Library  
Regional Library  
Oulu, Finland

### **Meeting:**

**118** — *Friends or Foes – public and school libraries a force for change for creating smart communities* — **School Libraries and Resource Centers with Public Libraries**

---

### **Abstract**

*Ritaharju community center in the city of Oulu is a brand new complex of library, school, day care center and youth services under the same roof. 14 professionals from four different administrations are working together on every day basis. This way of working is quite unique in Finland – public library is also a school library and an important part of community center as well. Ritaharju school is one of the twelve schools of the future and has been in Partners in Learning Innovative Schools pilot 2007(Microsoft). In Ritaharju concept the child and child's learning and welfare is in the focus in work for library and all actors of the center.*

---



Kuva: Heikki Rytönen

## City of Oulu

Oulu is a city in northern Finland known for its active development and high-class services. The Oulu Region has over two hundred thousand inhabitants and it is one of the fastest growing regions in Finland. The slogan OULU INSPIRES gives you the idea of our city and the values. It combines Northern hospitality, nature and culture with modern technology.

Oulu is situated in the shore of Bothnian bay and it will have next year 186 000 inhabitants, which means that Oulu is 5. in the group of big cities in Finland after Helsinki, Tampere, Espoo and Vantaa. With university and lots of other education possibilities it is a alert and young city.



Kuva: Heikki Rytönen

## Ritaharju neighborhood

Ritaharju is a fairly new neighborhood in Oulu. It's situated next to the E4 motorway and the sea and the forest. Ritaharju is very young, fast growing community. There are about 4000 inhabitants living in Ritaharju. Ritaharju is popular among young, urban families with children.

## Oulu City library



Kuva: Marjo Väisänen

Oulu City library – Regional library is composed of 23 units, one main library in the center of the city and 22 branch libraries. Also library has two mobile libraries and services are given also to old or disabled customers in their home and in service houses etc. Library gives about 3 million loans per year and libraries have about 1,6 million visitors every year. The lending figure in Oulu is 21/inhabitant/year. In Oulu City library there are 140 permanent employees. Regionally it gives education and guidelines to all libraries in Northern Ostrobothnia.

In Oulu city there are big changes going on – there is a consolidation of municipalities which will come true 1.1.2013, but all the libraries have been under Oulu city library from the beginning of this year. That meant eight libraries more to the city library and lot of work and new ways to communicate and operate. In the final organization there will be 4 district libraries and the rest, smaller branch libraries are locally under them. Ritaharju library is one of the northern area's branch libraries.



Kuva: Raimo Ahonen

## **School libraries in Finland**

The quality of Finnish school libraries varies a lot. The level of school libraries depends on financial situation and head master's attitude to school library. Most schools don't have decent libraries, and it is very rare to have information specialists in school libraries. Public libraries have library law in Finland but school libraries do not have any legitimate standards for them. Public libraries have a big role in promoting children's reading skills and teaching information and media skills. Compared to average school libraries in Finland Ritaharju library is an example of forward-looking and innovate combination of public library and school library. New pedagogical thinking is used to create communality and benefit children's life-long learning and well-being.

## **On the way to Ritaharju**

Oulu region is one of the fastest growing areas in Finland. Young families move to Oulu and need for school and day care services are high. So the need of school and other services in new area was the starting point of Ritaharju Community Centre.

The beginning of Ritaharju is the pedagogical group that was established for planning new schools to be built to Oulu in 2004.

In 2006 the Oulu city government made the decision of Ritaharju community centre. Ritaharju was planned to be a community centre consisting of school, day care center, library and youth services where the level of synergy is high.

An important decision was made in 2007 when Ritaharju was chosen to Microsoft Innovative Schools pilot programme. Before Ritaharju there was a pilot the city level called Smart Schools consisting of 12 innovative schools in Oulu city that got to work on their best innovative practices. Some of it was harvested in Ritaharju.

In 2008 Deputy Mayor of Oulu named a multi professional steering group to plan an operational model and management practice to Ritaharju community centre that allows multi-professional co-

operation. That was a real starting point for our work together for benefit of the children and all people of the Ritaharju area.

Community center was opened in August 2010.

## **Ritaharju community centre**

Ritaharju community centre is a fairly new complex of library, school, day care center and youth services under the same roof. That means that 14 professionals from four different administrations are working together on every day basis.

Ritaharju community centre is a building with a modern architecture, flexible structures and spaces, 11 000 square meters in area. It was planned by Architect Office Hannu Jaakkola. Main architect was Kai Rajakaltio and interior architect was Marianne Manninen.

There are 102 adults working in Ritaharju community centre to benefit of 770 children and the whole community around us. Number of our staff and children in school and daycare is growing.

Ritaharju Community Centre is the village of the future where enthusiasm and joy, appreciating others, safety and working together support life-long learning and well-being.

## **Ritaharju library**



Ritaharju library is branch library of Oulu City Library. Library was opened in August 2010.



Library is very bright colored and modern. There are spaces for children and adults to sit in peace and read exciting stories, make homework and study. Library has 335 square meters in area for collection, reading and studying.

Next to the library there is an Information market, space for project work and some books that aren't for loan to public but for class use only. There are also 16 multipoint servers for information search and play. At the information market there is also possible to arrange lectures, internet and computer education, media education and other study groups to public. Unfortunately as the Ritaharju area grows faster than planned, that space is needed for home room of 5<sup>th</sup> graders next year. That was planned together in a Board of Ritaharju and pedagogical aspects were considered. On the 5<sup>th</sup> grade different projects and information search teaching are in big role so co-work with information specialist is easy as main time information specialist works in a library. In future space will be taken back to its original use.

Also other spaces in Ritaharju Community Centre are in use for library as well to all too. There is a big gym, little gym and a huge hall for different happenings in shared use. As well as social facilities, room for resting, meeting room and coffee room. Even a home economics class room for example is available. There has in fact been a cooking evening for librarians last year. And maybe a book-cook club for people in area in future. At the time we are trying to find a good space for a baby storytelling. A student parliaments meeting room near library is in consideration.



Ritaharju library collection has 20 000 items and includes books, magazines and music cd's. About half of that is children's books and cd's. Collection is good both for school and for public as in Ritaharju most of customers are young families with children. There are no e-books in our collection.

Non-fiction books are put out in the shelves in a new way. Adults and children's knowledge books are in same shelves. On top three shelves there are adult's knowledge and on bottom two shelves children's books of the same subject. There are several benefits for this. In children's knowledge books there are many good books that a parent, teacher or other people working with kids can use. On the other hand a 5<sup>th</sup> grader doing a project for example about mammals can use children's

books and adults books of a subject. This way everything is found easily. This also makes work for library workers easier.



In 2011 there was 90 623 loans and about 54 % of them were on children's items. That is probably due to the fact that library is also a school library and also for young families living on area.

During a year 2011 library had 68 213 customers. Loans and customer numbers have been growing.

During public hours library serves whole Ritaharju community. Library is open to public 36 h/week. Public hours are Mon-Tue 11-19, Wed 9-15 and Thu-Fri 11-17. Naturally Monday and Tuesday are the busiest evenings and library is crowded with young families.

Library also offers computers with internet connection and different databases for public to use. There is also a possibility to take copies and prints in library. There are also self service machines for lending and returning. When school children and other customers come to the library, they can return their books by themselves into the machine. That's why staff don't have to do it manually and it leaves more time to other services in the library.



There are 2 library assistants and information specialist working in Ritaharju library on daily basis. As Ritaharju library is part of Oulu City library it's possible that library workers from other libraries work here as well as we work in other libraries.

Information specialist is shared by school and library and her salary comes 50 % from the school's and 50 % from the library's budget. Information specialist is a manager of library profession team. She takes part in multi professional team's work by planning and teaching together with the teachers, specializing in information search and literature.

Information specialist has also a pedagogical formation so co-work with teachers is flexible.

Information specialist takes part of planning school's curriculum. At the time school's curriculum of culture is under work and also an information strategy of Ritaharju School.

Library offers a storytelling hour twice a month for children of the neighborhood. Happenings with other libraries and Ritaharju actors are possible and in plan in future. Last year there was a Branch library week in Oulu City library. On that week there were different happenings in all our branch libraries. In Ritaharju most successful was a music session where a teacher band "Open omenat" from Ritaharju performed. Both students and other customers were welcomed.



Ritaharju library works also as a school library. Most important thing is that library is available when needed and easy to access. To students and teachers library opens at 8.30 am for information searching and for loaning books to classroom. There is always someone in library to help in information search or searching something to read. But nothing is given ready for the student. Children learn how books and knowledge is arranged and located in library every time she or he uses library. We take every opportunity to teach and educate children. Day care children are also often seen in library.

Children can come to library by themselves individually or in small groups to get something to read or information to their school work. If the whole class comes to library, teacher must come along. If some special service is wanted and needed, the visit must be scheduled.

Library offers book talk for children and teachers, storytelling and works as an information service. Information search teaching is done not only for Ritaharju School but also for other schools in area together with Kaijonharju library.



In Oulu City Library offers concept called “Kirjastoreitti” (“Library route”) to ensure a visit to a library, book telling and information search education for all children in schools of Oulu. Kirjastoreitti includes visit to library at the grades 1 and 2. At first visit children get information about library, loaning and maybe book-telling or storytelling session. Children have an opportunity to have an Oulu city library card if parents allow. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade book-telling session is done at the library or at the school. First information search lesson takes place on 5<sup>th</sup> grade and second lesson at the 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

In Ritaharju Kirjastoreitti is also used but with a little own twist. All 1<sup>st</sup> graders visit library on their first fall with a teacher. Pupils get their library card. All children have Oulu city library card. Different school library card is not used. Same rules and fees are in use from the beginning.

Book telling is offered for 3<sup>rd</sup> graders as for all other 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in a city. But if possible for other grades too. Book telling is also offered to youth center. Youth center offers different camps and activities to children after school and on school breaks. Book telling fits nicely to their activities.

Information searching and teaching will be done a bit differently than in Kirjastoreitti. In Ritaharju ICT is in so big role, that it has to be taken in consideration when planning information searching and teaching. A plan for School’s Information Strategy is under work at the time and will be taken in action next fall.

Main goal is to fit information searching and retrieval to subjects that children are learning at the time and suitable for children’s skills in IT and their skills in project work etc. For example teaching library database have to happen in real school projects. That way motivation to listen and learn is good for students and information is really needed.

We have learned that finding good school project subjects for all grades is an important task that had to be done together with teachers and information specialist. Recently our 4<sup>th</sup> And 5<sup>th</sup> graders have been doing projects in music. Fourth graders subject has been World music. It has been a challenging subject because there has been very limited amount of suitable information in books or internet for that age. But then fifth graders subject Famous composer is very good subject to do a project work. There is plenty of suitable information about subject both in books and internet.



Life is not just about learning in Ritaharju. It's also fun and creating. Library offers showroom for children's art crafts, stories and drama. For example on February there was a big happening on Kalevala Day. Children made drama, music and other performances to celebrate our national epic Kalevala. Shows took place in everywhere in Ritaharju community centre. In library 8<sup>th</sup> graders played a drama about Marjatta with puppets. In same happening a reading competitions winner class was announced. Competition took place on fall, from Aleksis Kivi Day celebration to Christmas. During that time kids of Ritaharju school read over 180 000 pages and winner class over 30 000 pages. Children do read still! And after being all day on computer old-fashioned books are good change.

After school library offers nice and safe "living room" for students to make homework, read and just have good time with friends. First busy peak of a day is a time when little school kids finish their school day at midday. Library is full of lively, happy children, little children with their mothers and some elderly people. Youth center is located next to us and children use both during the afternoon. At the youth center children can do handcrafts, play pool and take part in different after school activities. And when they feel like reading or playing board games or just hanging around they come to library. Kids can play internet games safely when adults keep eye on them. There have been some cases where children spend too much time on computers, and then all adults in Ritaharju have to take care of this matter together. There are same rules of behaving for kids in school, library, youth center and kindergarten and in troubles all adults can work together to find a solution.

We have 15 years or more to create a tie with a child and library and guide them to world of stories and knowledge. And bring a whole family along.

## **School**

Ritaharju School is comprehensive school and has grades from 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>. At school year 2011-2012 there was 5 classes of 1<sup>st</sup> graders, 4 classes of 2<sup>nd</sup> graders, 4 classes of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, 2 classes of 4<sup>th</sup> graders, 2 classes of 5<sup>th</sup> graders, 1 class of 6<sup>th</sup> graders, 1 class of 7<sup>th</sup> graders and 1 class of 8<sup>th</sup> graders. There are also 3 small classes with children who need special support. Number of pupils is 520 and most of them are little students.

In Ritaharju there is will to get out of traditional class based schoolwork and use new pedagogical thinking and practices. Teaching happens in pairs or in teams and those teams can include several professions: teachers, kindergarten teachers, special needs assistants, school assistants, youth workers or information specialist.

Ritaharju School is one of Microsoft's Future School program schools. That means that Ritaharju is a member of Microsoft's Partners of Learning network. It is a worldwide program and members are innovative schools in different ways. Being a part of Microsoft network means sharing good practices, peer-mentoring and training. Actually this year two Ritaharju teachers were very successful in innovative teacher competition.

The usage of ITC is everyday working in Ritaharju. Every student from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade up has his or her own laptop for school use. Laptops have replaces workbooks in many cases. Younger students have multi-point servers in their home areas. This makes information search education and media education very important thing in Ritaharju.



Learning happens everywhere in Ritaharju, not only in classroom. Together we have great opportunity to plan and create day of the child. Library is an important learning environment. Daily schedule in Ritaharju is planned so that there are possibilities to exercise, play and read during the school day. There are activating and motivating sports equipment for kids to use. Older kids can use library during their breaks. This all promotes overall well-being, learning and healthy life style.

## **Kindergarten**



In the kindergarten there are 8 groups of children including about 160 children all together. Children are between ages 1y to 6 y. Pre-school is situated with a school's 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders so pre-school teachers and teachers are working closely together to benefit children.

Kindergarten children are welcomed to library before public hours as well and happy, lively children are often seen reading and loaning books with their teachers. On order library offers also storytelling to Ritaharju kindergarten but also for other kindergartens at the area.

Library offers also books of themes on hand. There is also a book return box in kindergartens premises to busy parents to drop their loans when they are dropping children to day care or picking them up.

## Youth center



Kuva: Petri Koukkari

Youth center is located next to library. Afternoon care offers schoolchildren a safe and stimulating environment before the school day starts and after it has finished. Morning and afternoon care for schoolchildren is meant for pupils in grades one and two and those in grades one to nine in special education whose parents are at work or studying. A monthly fee is charged which includes a daily snack.

In Ritaharju there are 3 afternoon care groups. Afternoon care groups are located in class rooms after school. In library groups are often seen in afternoons and their handcrafts and drawings are welcomed to show in library.

Youth center offers homework help and library helps them also if needed.

At Youth center children aged seven to seventeen can spend their free time in safe environment playing, watching tv, doing handcrafts and just hanging around. The services are free of charge.

## Working together-teams and Board of Ritaharju



Kuva: Heikki Rytkönen

The key elements in Ritaharju are co-operation and communality.

Professionals of four administrations working together is not only a slogan in Ritaharju. There is feeling of community in everyday life and pedagogy in everyday operations.

Ritaharju is organized in teams. We have professional teams and 3 multi professional teams. Team managers of these teams form a Board of Ritaharju. This way every profession can have its impact in things and we can develop our functions together to give a best service to community around us.

Professional teams include library team, teacher team, daycare team, youth work team and special need assistant team. Multi professional teams are formed by school class levels, but they include people from many professions. People from different teams can take part to other teams meetings and planning when it's necessary. For example, information specialist can take part to all multi professional teams meetings or planning sessions if needed. Managers of those teams can invite information specialist or if she can ask to take a subject to meetings subject list. So co-work on daily basis is possible. Team meeting documents are shared to all. Here is picture of team structure of Ritaharju.





Board of Ritaharju is in charge of developing our work together constantly. At the time focus of development work is in our operational model and multiprofessional co-operation in everyday work. Board of Ritaharju also decides a year plan and themes of the next year. This way all our actors can plan their work in a most reasonable way to achieve common goals. For example in the library we can plan our book shows ahead and use information in collection work generally, arrange so that not all classes do their space project at the same time, different happenings can be timed to suit everyone and so on.

Structures and processes are in important role when multi professional work is a goal, but also informal things have their affect. In Ritaharju all professions have shared social facilities- There is not an old-fashioned teacher's room in Ritaharju, but all people who are working in Ritaharju use same coffee room. That way people from different professions get to know each other and co-work is easy. People learn what other professions do and that way learn to appreciate others work. We also have at least once a year a workplace community evening where speech is free.

There have been many of people from all over the world visiting Ritaharju. Many times we are asked for example: "What kind of co-work library and youth center, or school or kindergarten has? Petri Koukkari, a manager of youth work team, said it once well. "We don't do co-work, we work together." That was nicely put. Maybe we are not there yet, but that's our goal and we are on our way to it.

As a community centre we offer important services for well-being, improvement and life-time learning of the Ritaharju people. Our way of doing that is a unique and we are proud to be part of it.