ARTICLE

Novel genre explaining borrowings from the public libraries

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The purpose of the paper is to study the effect of genre on borrowing. A recent study with data from libraries in libraries in the Helsinki region showed that the purchase price, critics in newspapers, hardcover sales and the author's publication history have an impact on borrowing from public libraries impact of genre on borrowing is unclear when other variables affecting borrowing have been controlled. Moreover, the country of birth or the country of residence in some cases of the author is included in the analysis. It is well known that Nordic Noir genre has been rather popular among readers. This study uses conventional regression analysis to combine the effects of various explanatory variables and therefore widen the knowledge on the effect of genre on borrowing. The results indicate that borrowing a novel and purchasing a novel are substitutes since the retail price has a significant positive effect on borrowings, however, the price elasticity is small. Critics reviews in newspapers and weekly magazines and journals are important, so any public knowledge about the book is of great worth. This article studied public library borrowings from libraries in the libraries in the Helsinki region, especially novels for adult citizens. There is a nice list of the 100 most borrowed books each quarter from early 2014 to summer 2021. The total number of quarters is 30 and the total number of observations is 3000 having many novels appearing in more than one top list. The total number of different novels is 727 in the sample. About 60 % of the novels are listed to the top 100 most borrowed list one, two or three quarters. All books have a declining borrowing demand with time, the demand is highest during the launching period. The genre of the novel does not seem to be an important factor in borrowing from public libraries when other determinants have been controlled. Retail price has a positive effect on borrowings, more expensive books seem to be more borrowed and library customers seem to be willing to wait to be able to borrow the novel and they do not purchase the novel. The positive price elasticity is small but still significant.

Keywords: factors affecting quantities, genre, Helmet, library borrowings
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Introduction and Motivation

Finnish citizens can count on the fact that they have the opportunity to borrow an interesting novel from the public library. Fiction, its status, and the work done in libraries on its behalf are often taken for granted. However, these libraries have a binding budget that does not enable them to purchase books for each borrower without delay, so customers must often wait until they are able to read their desired book. The waiting time is an opportunity cost that customers take into account when they consider buying a novel. Finnish citizens are rather omnivorous about literature (Purhonen, Gronow, & Rahkonen, 2010), although the question of buying or borrowing by genre has not been studied using Finnish data. We know that Finns like thrillers, romances, and biographies more than science fiction, modern literature or poetry and plays (Purhonen, Gronow, & Rahkonen, 2010); therefore, genre should have an impact on borrowing demand from public libraries. Are thrillers, romances, etc., borrowed more often when other relevant factors have been considered? What role does genre play when customers make their decisions concerning which novel to borrow?

The paper's purpose is to study genre's effect on borrowing. A recent study with data from libraries in the Helsinki region showed that purchase price, critics in newspapers, hardcover sales and an author's publication history have an impact on borrowing from public libraries (Suominen, 2023) Genre's impact on borrowing is unclear when other variables affecting borrowing have been controlled. Moreover, an author's country of birth or residence is included in the analysis in some cases. It is well known that the Nordic Noir genre (Ruohonen, 2018) has been rather popular among readers, but this genre has not been used in multivariate analysis to explain borrowings from public libraries to this author's knowledge. The knowledge focuses more on book purchases.

This study uses conventional regression analysis to combine the effects of various explanatory variables and, therefore, to widen knowledge of genre's effect on borrowing.

Literature Review

Librarians decide on their library's acquisitions based on their expertise in the field (Tuomi, 2017). Book selection requires sensitivity and discernment, especially when libraries' financial resources are limited. The demand for borrowing is based not only on the readers' preferences but also on the librarians' motivation to select books they consider worth recommending to readers. Too much patronage must be avoided, but the educational side must somehow be

taken into account. They have to balance catering to the library customers' commercial tastes vs. providing educational materials. Librarians must select the best quality reading material for the greatest number of readers at the lowest possible price. The choices are dependent on time, the social and cultural climates and must consider other external factors such as customs, norms, and the value of their own time. In Finland, women are more active readers in terms of volume and omnivorousness (Purhonen, Gronow, & Rahkonen, 2010; Purhonen, Gronow, & Rahkonen, 2011). Omnivorousness is measured based on the composition of different literary genres. Elderly Finnish citizens (aged 55–74) and the highly educated are more often omnivores. Thrillers and whodunits are the most-liked genre (about 30 % like very much) on a Likert 5-scale measure. Biographies are the second most-liked genre in this setting. The following table is from Purhonen (Purhonen, Gronow, & Rahkonen, 2009).

Table 1. Books by genre that Finnish like (Purhonen, Gronow, & Rahkonen, 2009).

	Like		**Neither like**	**Dislike**		**Have not**	
Genre	*Very much*	*Somewhat*	*nor dislike*	*Somewhat*	*Very much*	**read**	**Total (N)**
Thrillers & whodunits	29.7	33.8	20.0	2.2	1.0	13.3	100 (1339)
Scifi, fantasy & horror	8.7	17.3	26.2	13.8	10.6	23.5	100 (1329)
Romances	15.6	31.7	27.3	8.0	2.8	14.8	100 (1334)
Biographies	21.0	37.3	21.1	4.7	1.4	14.5	100 (1336)
Modern literature	7.8	20.8	34.4	8.0	3.7	25.3	100 (1334)
Classical literature	13.1	22.4	30.8	6.9	3.6	23.2	100 (1322)
Other nonfiction	15.4	41.2	28.3	2.7	0.9	11.5	100 (1331)
Poetry & plays	5.7	22.3	31.1	9.6	5.7	25.5	100 (1326)
Religious books	4.7	12.4	29.7	12.1	9.8	31.4	100 (1326)
Self-help books	5.5	21.4	30.5	7.9	5.1	29.6	100 (1328)
Leisure/Hobby books	13.5	42.9	25.1	2.3	0.6	15.7	100 (1332)

Several studies have shown that the income elasticity for book demand is higher than one indicating that the demand for books is income sensitive (e.g., Hjorth-Andersen, 2000 or Ringstad & Løyland, 2006). Book demand is also rather price sensitive (Bittlingmayer, 1992), and books and other cultural goods seem to be substitutes. The purchasing demand in an empirical setting is related not only to literary prizes, author recognition, and reviews published in newspapers and magazines but also to a book's purchasing price (Ashworth, Heyndels, & Werck, 2010; Schmidt-Stölting, Blömeke, & Clement, 2011; Ponzo, & Scoppa, 2015; Asai, 2016). We assume that book demand (purchasing) and borrowing demand are substitute behaviors, so the determinants mentioned above should have an impact on borrowing from a public library. The literature review reveals that the genre impact has not been evaluated enough to understand its relevance.

A model, data and estimation results

Suppose that we have a standard demand function for purchasing a novel.

$$(1)\ q_{it} = K(\widehat{a_{it-1}c_i}) - \hat{\beta}_i p_i + \hat{\gamma}_i t$$

where q_{it} the demand for novel i at time t, function K captures the idea of public awareness of a novel's author i and critics c are published in newspapers and magazines. Demand refers here to book sales. Thrillers and biographies receive more publicity in newspapers and from critics, so genre should have an impact on borrowing demand. The variable of critics includes the prizes awarded or being a candidate for a prize. An author's earlier publications have a positive effect on demand. Public awareness and an author's earlier publication record thus might capture genre's impact; however, this is unknown, so we are therefore using a separate dummy variable for each genre. The purchasing price p_i with own price elasticity β_i should have a negative effect on demand. The last variable in the demand function is the waiting time for the alternative of borrowing the novel from the public library with a positive parameter γ_i. It characterizes the idea of the opportunity cost of a long waiting time for being able to borrow a novel from the library. Customers must wait a long time if the novel is a hit and the library does not have enough books to satisfy the immediate borrowing demand. Reviews by critics, an author's previous publications and possible prizes, and a novel's genre should have an impact on waiting time.

Similarly, the borrowing demand for a novel is as follows.

$$(2)\ b_{it} = K(a_{it-1}c_i) + \beta_i p_i - \gamma_i t$$

Borrowing demand refers to novels being borrowed from public libraries within a period of, say, three months. We expect that a well-known author with plenty of previous publications (before the novel in question), prizes awarded and published critical reviews should have a positive impact on borrowing demand. Any critics, positive or negative, should affect demand. Most knowledge about a book is published near the book's release, so the time variable should be negative. Moreover, waiting time is an opportunity cost, so it should be negative. The waiting time is measured with quarters. The quarter's number is one when a novel is first listed in the most-borrowed list. Number two means that the novel was already in the most borrowed-list the previous quarter and is also in the second quarter, and so on. The purchase price should have a positive impact on borrowing, because purchasing a novel and borrowing it from public libraries should be substitute behaviors.

The data cover the most-borrowed novels by quarter in the Helsinki-area public libraries from 1/2014 to 2/2021. The top 100 novels in each quarter are used. The total number of

observations is 3000, but many novels have several appearances on the list, so the total number of different novels is less than 3000. The first novel in the borrowing list has had 1661 borrowings and the last on the list 487 during the last sample period (2/2021). Some quarters had substantially fewer borrowings from the public libraries due to Covid-19 restrictions. The second quarter in 2020 particularly saw the total amount of borrowings for the top 100 novels more than halved in relation to other quarters (Figure 1).

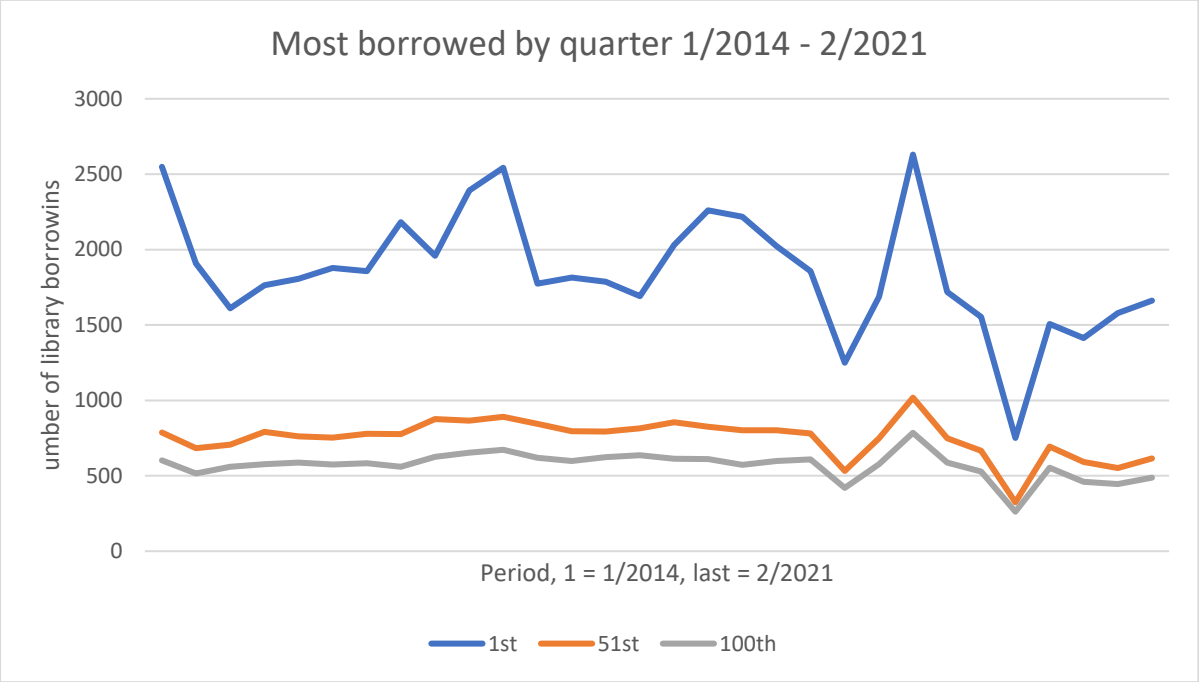

Figure 1. The number of borrowings by quarter (1st on the top 100 list), the median on the top 100 list (51st), and the ultimate on the list (100th).

There are 727 separate books in the sample that appear only once in the sample without any tail; 574 novels are listed twice in the top 100 sample (figure 2), and 479 are listed three times. One novel that belongs to 26 quarters (6½ years) is on the top 100 list. About 60 % of the books in the sample are listed a maximum of three times in the top 100.

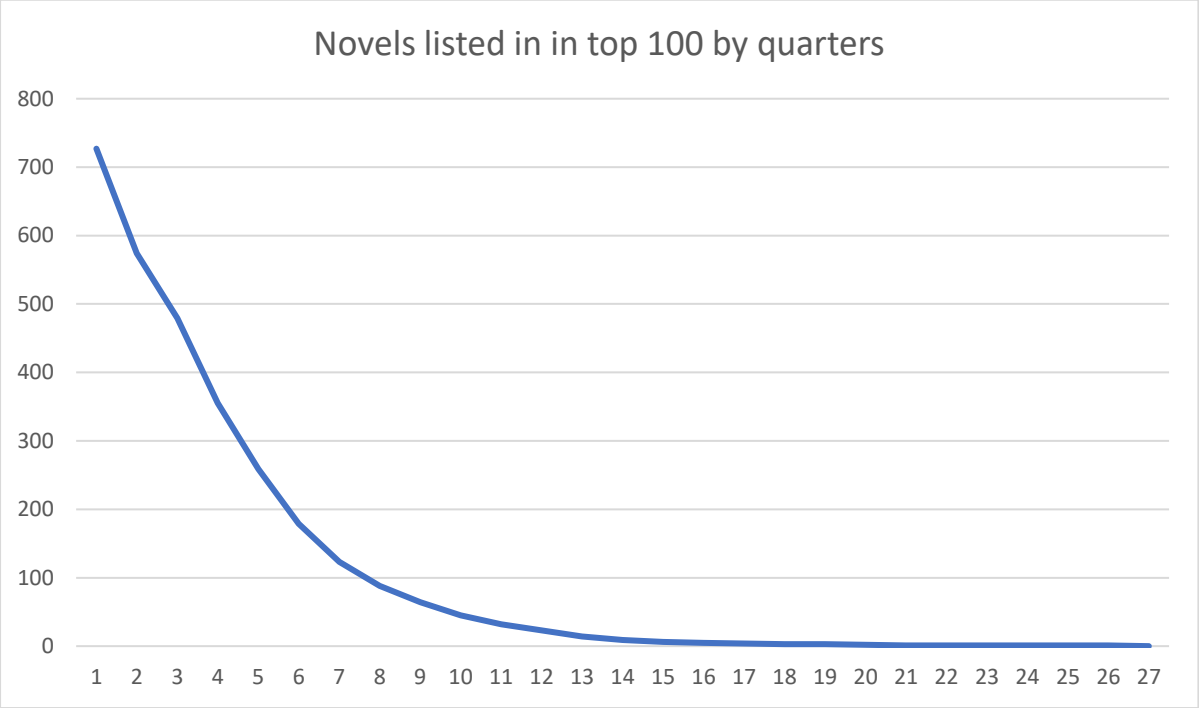

Figure 1. Novels listed in top 100 by quarters.

The price variable used is the purchasing price of the novel from a well-known retailer that has a website and two bookstores in the Helsinki region. The price is the website price. The average price of the top 100 novels begins to increase from less than 28 euros to about 30 euros during the Covid-19 pandemic time. However, it is possible that more recently published books are more expensive and the webshop price declines with time.

Figure 3. Average price of the top 100 novels from 2014/1 to 2021/2.

The published-critics variable has three parts: A leading newspaper in the Helsinki region, “Helsingin Sanomat”, a weekly magazine with a high standard, “Suomen Kuvalehti”, and a leading literature magazine, “Parnasso”, with only six issues per year, all regularly publish book critics.

All Finnish municipal libraries use a general public library classification system except for the Helsinki City Library, which uses its own classification system. The municipal libraries in the sample – Espoo, Vantaa and Kauniainen – use the general system. Class 8 in the general system is separated into ten subclasses, in which 84, 'fiction', is too broad for this study’s purposes. However, the library displays several keywords for each novel, such as population, cities, neighbours, districts, life management, public conversation, social media, violent crimes, parks, summer day, Helsinki, one-day novels, satires, novels and fiction. Based on such a list, the novels in the sample are classified into the following literary genres: crime and mystery, romance, biograph, autofiction, psychological, and nonfiction. Autofiction combines autobiography and fiction in which an author recounts the life of the protagonist or the lives of persons in the third person and may modify details and characters using fictive subplots and imagined scenarios with real-life characters.

Covid-19 emerged in Spring 2020, and most libraries were closed from 18.3.2020. The full closure ended 5 May 2020, but there have been minor closures and other restrictions since Spring 2020. Figure 2 below shows the decline in printed book borrowings throughout Finland and an increase in electronic book borrowing, clearly showing the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.

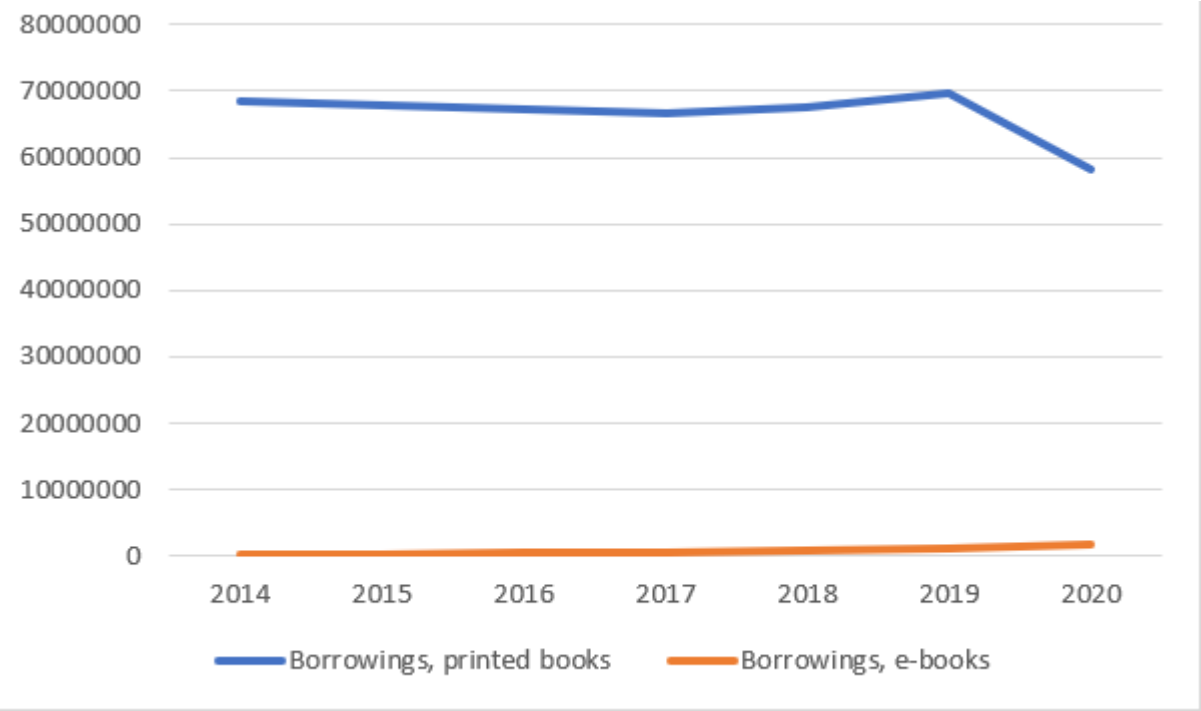

Figure 4. Printed book and electronic book borrowings from public libraries in Finland, years 2014–2020.

Table 2's estimation results show that purchasing (retail) price is positively related to public library borrowings (models 3 and 4). Models 1 to 4 have a different number of explaining variables. The first model is most limited by the number of explaining variables; the fourth is a full model with all variables. The positive price elasticity is about 0.07. A debut author receives less attention (Pub1) and fewer borrowings than an author who has published more than 20 but fewer than 30 books (Pub21_30). The highest borrowing demand occurs just after the novel's launch because demand weakens over time (log quarters). Critics' reviews in any of the three magazines (SK, Parnasso, HS) have a positive impact on borrowings. A bestseller (TOP13, …, TOP20) has more borrowings; however, belonging to the bestseller list during the last year of the sample (TOP21) has no impact on borrowings because the sample includes only last year's first and second quarters and the bestseller list

includes the whole year's sales. It seems that most bestselling novels are launched during the two last quarters.

Being a candidate for the most important literary prize (CanFPrize12, … CanFPrize20) does not necessarily increase the borrowings. Similarly, receiving the Finlandia Prize (FPrize12, …, FPrize20) does not always increase borrowings. The prize given to science books (TietoFPrize) does not increase borrowings; to the contrary, science books have fewer borrowings than novels. The impact of these <prizes?> is already captured in sales figures (TOP13, …, TOP20). Books by authors from distant countries seem to be less borrowed (e.g., British, American, Canadian, Australian, Japanese, Swiss, Israeli, India) than Finnish books. There is a sign that Swedish, Norwegian, or Danish authors who often publish crime and thriller novels receive more borrowings than novels by Finnish authors. There is some sign of the Nordic Noir effect when other factors have been controlled, because distant authors seem to attract fewer borrowings than Nordic (Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish). The genre effect is not significant. Covid-19 (COVID-19 in Table 1) restrictions on people visiting the public libraries had a significant negative effect on borrowings.

The results indicate that borrowing a novel and purchasing a novel are substitutes because the retail price has a significant positive effect on borrowings; however, the price elasticity is small. Critics' reviews in newspapers and weekly magazines and journals are important, so any public knowledge about the book is of great worth. The R2 statistics in each model are roughly 0.3 indicating that the actual borrowings and fitted value calculated by the models are highly correlated with approximately 0,55 correlation.

Table 1. Estimation results, y = logarithmic borrowings of each novel per quarter, n = 3000, 1/2014 – 2/2021, only the most.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Log Price	-0.0296 (0.0240)	0.0243 (0.0222)	0.0750** (0.0242)	0.0733** (0.0241)
Pub1	-0.0848*** (0.0229)	-0.0855*** (0.0211)	-0.0698** (0.0214)	-0.0705*** (0.0214)
Pub2-5	-0.0309$^{(*)}$ (0.0183)	-0.0295$^{(*)}$ (0.0169)	-0.0279 (0.0173)	-0.0301$^{(*)}$ (0.0173)
Pub6-10	-0.0493* (0.0202)	-0.0348$^{(*)}$ (0.0187)	-0.0256 (0.0188)	-0.0240 (0.0188)

Pub21-30	0.0274 (0.0233)	0.0342 (0.0215)	0.06212** (0.0218)	0.0707** (0.0219)
Pub31-40	-0.0884** (0.0233)	-0.0473 (0.0313)	-0.0298 (0.0313)	-0.0259 (0.0311)
Pub41-50	-0.0240 (0.0396)	-0.0120 (0.0365)	0.0016 (0.0364)	0.0068 (0.0363)
Log Quarters	-0.0894*** (0.0081)	-0.0580*** (0.0076)	-0.0604*** (0.0076)	-0.0617*** (0.0076)
SK	0.0310$^{(*)}$ (0.0159)	0.0281$^{(*)}$ (0.0146)	0.0265$^{(*)}$ (0.0147)	0.0256$^{(*)}$ (0.0147)
Parnasso	0.0387$^{(*)}$ (0.0201)	0.0620*** (0.0186)	0.0605** (0.0190)	0.0524** (0.0196)
HS	0.0339* (0.0138)	0.0402** (0.0127)	0.0419** (0.0127)	0.0423*** (0.0126)
Top13	0.0888*** (0.0240)	0.0479* (0.0222)	0.0507* (0.0225)	0.0556* (0.0228)
Top14	0.0881*** (0.0208)	0.0452* (0.0193)	0.0425* (0.0197)	0.0336$^{(*)}$ (0.0200)
Top15	0.1923*** (0.0200)	0.1438*** (0.0186)	0.1380*** (0.0193)	0.1458*** (0.0196)
Top16	0.1340*** (0.0190)	0.0916*** (0.0176)	0.0924*** (0.0180)	0.0788*** (0.0184)
Top17	0.1576*** (0.0194)	0.1201*** (0.0189)	0.1156*** (0.0183)	0.1217*** (0.0183)
Top18	0.1094*** (0.0204)	0.0709*** (0.0189)	0.0861*** (0.0191)	0.0730*** (0.0196)
Top19	-0.0894 (0.0210)	0.0331$^{(*)}$ (0.0195)	0.0185 (0.0197)	0.0283 (0.0196)
Top20	0.0612* (0.0291)	0.2071*** (0.0275)	0.2076*** (0.0277)	0.1828*** (0.0280)
Top21	-0.1532***	0.0241	0.0218	0.0355

	(0.0442)	(0.0415)	(0.0414)	(0.0414)
TietoFPrize	-0.1311(*) (0.0705)	-0.1658* (0.0650)	-0.1541* (0.0647)	-0.1583* (0.0644)
CanFPrize12				-0.2416 (0.1991)
CanFPrize13				0.0409 (0.0756)
CanFPrize14				0.1496** (0.0547)
CanFPrize15				-0.0400 (0.1101)
CanFPrize16				0.1325* (0.0611)
CanFPrize17				-0.2533* (0.1262)
CanFPrize18				0.1982* (0.0785)
CanFPrize19				-0.1548* (0.0719)
CanFPrize20				0.5413*** (0.1444)
FPrize12			0.3325*** (0.0863)	0.5859** (0.2160)
FPrize13			0.1334 (0.1193)	0.0934 (0.1387)
FPrize14			0.1284 (0.0791)	0.0051 (0.0929)
FPrize15			0.0426 (0.0854)	0.0994 (0.1349)
FPrize16			0.1435 (0.0987)	0.0358 (0.1122)

FPrize17			0.1453$^{(*)}$ (0.0862)	0.4058** (0.1521)
FPrize18			-0.3124** (0.0991)	-0.4970*** (0.1226)
FPrize19			0.4351*** (0.1068)	0.5924*** (0.1256)
FPrize20			0.1063 (0.1666)	-0.3917$^{(*)}$ (0.2145)
Swedish	-0.0414* (0.0212)	-0.0343$^{(*)}$ (0.0195)	-0.0222 (0.0195)	-0.0167 (0.0195)
Norwegian	0.0192 (0.0350)	0.0365 (0.0323)	0.0435 (0.0321)	0.0530$^{(*)}$ (0.0320)
Danish	-0.0819 (0.0559)	-0.0828 (0.0515)	-0.0753 (0.0512)	-0.0721 (0.0510)
German	-0.1310 (0.0911)	-0.1338 (0.0840)	-0.1284 (0.0834)	-0.1260 (0.0830)
France	-0.1508* (0.0709)	-0.0058 (0.0657)	0.0179 (0.0654)	0.0289 (0.0652)
Italian	-0.1101** (0.0411)	-0.0193 (0.0381)	-0.0048 (0.0380)	0.1661 (0.0380)
Spanish	-0.1929 (0.3087)	-0.2088 (0.2846)	-0.1972 (0.2827)	-0.1920 (0.2811)
British	-0.1146*** (0.0251)	-0.0998*** (0.0231)	-0.0883*** (0.0231)	-0.0829*** (0.0230)
Irish	-0.3774** (0.1286)	-0.1855 (0.1188)	-0.1768 (0.1181)	-0.1726 (0.1175)
American (USA)	-0.1043*** (0.0207)	-0.0877*** (0.0191)	-0.0837*** (0.0191)	-0.0769*** (0.0191)
Canadian	-0.2504*** (0.0711)	-0.1719** (0.0656)	-0.1536* (0.0653)	-0.1515* (0.0649)
Australian	-0.2104**	-0.1871**	-0.1676**	-0.1568**

	(0.0660)	(0.0608)	(0.0605)	(0.0603)
Japanese	-0.1675*** (0.0442)	-0.1535*** (0.0407)	-0.1405*** (0.0406)	-0.1243** (0.0407)
Korean	-0.0093 0(0.1109)	-0.0852 (0.1022)	-0.0738 (0.1016)	-0.0542 (0.1012)
Chinese	-0.2331 (0.2614)	-0.1758 (0.2409)	-0.1820 (0.2394)	-0.1762 (0.2381)
Russian	-0.0293 (0.2613)	0.0121 (0.2408)	0.0115 (0.2393)	0.0247 (0.2381)
Swiss	-0.2142** (0.0781)	-0.1499* (0.0720)	-0.1447* (0.0716)	-0.1272(*) (0.0713)
Israeli	-0.2834** (0.1021)	-0.4263*** (0.0944)	-0.4040*** (0.0941)	-0.3756*** (0.0938)
India	-0.2462 (0.1789)	-0.3076(*) (0.1650)	-0.2980(*) (0.1639)	-0.2822(*) (0.1631)
Brazil	-0.3087(*) (0.1803)	-0.3129(*) (0.1662)	-0.2872(*) (0.1653)	-0.2662 (0.1631)
Nobel-Prize	-0.0247 (0.1422)	-0.1138 (0.1311)	-0.1122 (0.1303)	-0.1150 (0.1296)
Crime/detective	0.0460(*) (0.0274)	0.0428(*) (0.0252)	0.0295 (0.0252)	0.0339 (0.2519)
Romance	0.0103 (0.0401)	0.0075 (0.0369)	-0.0398 (0.0367)	0.0067 (0.0367)
Biograph	-0.0621(*) (0.0351)	-0.0502 (0.0323)	-0.0630(*) (0.0323)	-0.0487 (0.0324)
Autofiction	0.0388 (0.0296)	0.0313 (0.0272)	0.0132 (0.0275)	0.0196 (0.0276)
Psychological	0.0445 (0.0289)	0.0548* (0.0266)	0.0365 (0.0268)	0.0322 (0.0268)
Non-fiction	-0.0573 (0.0558)	-0.0451 (0.0514)	-0.0632 (0.0512)	-0.0535 (0.0511)

COVID-19		-0.3779*** (0.0165)	-0.3787*** (0.0165)	-0.3734*** (0.0166)
Constant	6.7796*** (0.0819)	6.6170*** (0.0759)	6.4485*** (0.0825)	6.4466*** (0.0821)
R^2	0.1657	0.2911	0.3003	0.3082
F	13.41***	26.14***	23.20***	20.94***

Conclusions

This article studied borrowings from public libraries in the Helsinki region, especially novels for adult citizens. A nice list exists of the 100 most-borrowed books each quarter from early 2014 to summer 2021. The total number of quarters is 30 and the total number of observations is 3000, with many novels appearing in more than one top list. The sample's total number of different novels is 727. About 60 % of the novels are listed on the top 100 most-borrowed list for two or three quarters. All books have a declining borrowing demand with time, with demand highest during the launch period. The novel's genre does not seem to be an important factor in borrowing from public libraries when other determinants have been controlled. Retail price has a positive effect on borrowings: The more expensive books seem to be borrowed more, library customers seem to be willing to wait to be able to borrow a novel, and they do not purchase the novel. The positive price elasticity is small but still significant.

Books by authors from distant countries seem to attract less borrowing demand. Finnish and other Nordic books seem to have a similar demand when the other determinants of borrowing demand have been controlled.

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