Challenges in transforming libraries

from collection centered to user centered organisations

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Abstract: *The paper present and discuss some of the drivers behind the transformation of the traditional public library, with an outlook to social science and recent research- and development literature in the public library field. The paper present the Danish Model Program for Public Libraries and discuss some of the challenges in implementing a new library concept.*

The global library Challenge

NMC Horizon, an international research forum focusing mainly on New Media (NM) in relation to Education and research, publish annual reports. The reports have a basic structure in common. They present 6 key developments, 6 important challenges and 6 technologies. In 2014 they published a report on academic libraries. The challenges are categorized on three levels as solvable, difficult, wicked. A solvable Challenge is to 'rethink the roles and skills of librarians'. 'A wicked challenge' is 'embracing the need for radical change'. As wicked challenges is characterized challenges that you neither know how to define nor how to address.

I was astonished by the radical position stated by NMC. I was fifteen years before the statement involved in implementing the Danish Electronic Research Library, that has been working successfully since. So solutions exist. But I recognize that the statement mirrors a situation where the high number of challenges for libraries leads to a high degree of confusion and lack of broadly recognized or standard solutions that was state of the art in the traditional analogue library. Furthermore you may argue that the challenges for public libraries are even more complicated, as the target group and scope of academic and research libraries are more narrow than of public libraries, that should be ready to serve the broad public with a wider variety of services.

The core of the worldwide challenge for libraries, particularly public libraries, is of course the change in conditions for access to information in consequence of the internet and digital media. The fact we actually have - as predicted by Bill Gates 25 years ago - information at our fingertips, radically changes the behaviour of citizens in relation to libraries and media. And it is not only a

matter of media use but of how the lives of people are structured in nearly all fields. Libraries have been struck by a fundamental doubt on their future direction and on the role they play, as the traditional goal for them, to give access to information in the digital world has lost its power as a mantra for an institution that used to have a vital economic and cultural role in society. The library has become an information provider in competition with many other platforms and simply lost its status as a kind of monopoly. This has led to a worldwide and still ongoing process of rethinking and redesigning the library as an institution. The question we may ask is if there with the internet is less need for institutions supporting enlightenment and empowerment of citizens? Hardly, but we are in a process of finding new ways to build another kind of institution matching new needs and life forms.

This paper deals shortly with the background, some possible answers to the challenge and in particular with the Danish Modelprogram for Public Libraries.

The Changes in societies

There are historic changes that have a structure in common even if they occurs at different places in the world and at different times. For example the change from agriculture to industry as the dominating way of production. That change leads always to enormous numbers of people moving from the countryside to the cities and with that move change their way of lives completely. Likewise the change from industrial to information or knowledge society that takes place in huge parts of the world right now, has a number of structural changes in common based on the digital development. I can only talk for the northern European world, but it seems as the changes are very similar in other parts of the world as well. And we probably are in very early stages of the digital society. The cultural behaviour changes along with the change in media use. The growth in use of digital media via your mobile devices is enormous. So the individual consumption of digital media from your home, work or travelling is groving. For young Scandinavian men it is close to four hours per day. There is also a strong trend towards globalisation in the content of digital media though the production of information in the broad sense is enormous everywhere. These changes are obviously leading to a dissolution of traditional national and local identities.

These structural changes as part the so called globalisation have been subject to an intensive research in the social sciences where the explosive exchange of goods, services, information and

culture are seen as the frame for change in ways of communicating, working, learning, researching and studying but also in mentality, values and relations between human beings.

My understanding of the changes in society and in the relations of people and our cultural behaviour is very much influenced by a number of researchers. Just to name a few and their findings: The German sociologist Thomas Ziehe was the first to describe a kind of 'cultural liberation' in the younger generations, with the consequence that traditional values, relations and behaviour was left behind and instead a new burden grew, the challenge to create a new identity and new values and relations yourself. Many other researchers have examined deeper into this late modern condition. For instance the British sociologist Anthony Giddens reveals how traditions in many ways are undermined, how powerlessness is growing and how democratic processes tend to be commercialised and a growing uncertainty can be seen. In many ways the most radical among these researchers is the Polish-British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman who develops the term 'fluid modernity' to characterise modern life. His point is that everything is in change. There are no solid traditions, institutions or values left and the modern man constantly is met by new phenomenons, problems , technologies, inventions, terms etc. which leads to permanently fluent change and dissolution. Completely central is also the work of Manuel Castells, who describes some vital changes that take place in the development from industrial to information society. He analyses how the production changes with the fast information networks and how power is concentrated among those who control the information and the threat grows towards those that are not part of the networks to become superfluous.

I point to this research to argue that the need for information, understanding, lifelong learning, cultural identity, relations and coherent communities are enormous and a new challenge for enlightenment is growing right in front of us.

A main point in this paper is that the institutions in our societies in general are difficult to change and tend to lack behind. New needs are often not addressed properly until they are quite obvious. Just to mention one example: the basic need for digital inclusion is obvious and very important for the enlightenment of citizens. Is it a public task to provide learning conditions or should it be left to private initiative or civic society organizations. Actually today digital competencies are becoming as important as the ability to read, and we do have schools for that purpose, but the learning of the grown up population is lacking behind. I believe we need new types of institutions to solve

that kind of challenges. Public libraries might become able to transform into real learning centers and deal with lifelong learning, community building and human relations in new ways.

Public library research.

The challenge for public libraries have been recognized at least since the breakthrough of the internet nearly 20 years ago. And since then a huge number of articles and books have dealt with the consequences. The most fundamental change is the need for libraries to become digital, not only in the sense that they are run by and communicate on the web as all other professional institutions, but also in the sense that they offer and distribute digital media. As everybody knows this a tremendous task full of legal and economic barriers due to copyright. This is not my topic here, i just State that there is not yet an ideal model for handling copyrighted material for lending purposes, but some models are being tested in a number of countries.   A particular Challenge here is that the competition from commercial services like Netflix and Spotify is severe and a new Challenge to public libraries. But even if a library is in a situation where it cannot afford to offer access to newly edited digital material, there is still a role for the library to promote the many free High quality resources that you may find on the web. In a way google and other search engines have made it far easier to search information, but on the other hand the amount of material is so enormous that there is a need for classical library information sorting.

A lot of library research literature deal with the digital challenge, for example Peter Brophys The Library in the 21st Century. (London 2007) that points to the shift in focus from the traditional collection library to the digital library, analyzing the need for new competencies in the library staff. But if you run through lists of public library literature many titles refer to the library as a learning space. Se for instance Frederic Stielows Reinventing the library for online Education (ALA 2015) where he states that the worlds information no longer fits neatly on library shelves. Or Edwars Brians: Libraries and Learning Resource Centres (London 2007)

An interesting example on an analysis of the public library situation was published in 2008 in the Netherlands. The title was The Public Library Ten Years On, which means close to the present day. The study was done by the Dutch Institute for Social Studies and focused on the social function of the public library and its traditional core tasks. It analyses demographic and socio-cultural structures and the fast changing media landscape. The conclusion of the study is that either must

the public library change or it will wither away. For solutions it point to hybrid collections, learning activities also in the classical field of promoting reading. And it points to the need for leaving the collection focus and look to more customized services. This study is also interesting because it was taken seriously. The Dutch state engaged stronger in public libraries to secure a relevant digital development and a lot of libraries intensified their work with various learning activities.

One of the most productive publishers of books and articles on public library development is the American Library Association (ALA) with titles like Planning our future libraries: Blueprints for 2025 (2014) and Reflecting on the Future of Academic and Public Libraries (2013). In the latter it is suggested that public libraries work with scenarios for planning their future. The idea behind this recommendation is, that there is no longer a standard solution for public libraries. As cultural, social and learning activities tend to grow and the use of the collection is decreasing (which is at least a very clear trend in northern Europe and the US) the library should look closer to local needs and partners in the local community to develop new offers that serve the overall enlightenment purpose of the library. And if you go through some of the articles suggesting new roles and tasks for public libraries, you will find that there are some ideas that are quite common but you will find no clear consensus. This is the reason that working with different scenarios might be a good idea. Among the suggestions for roles you will frequently see the role as an informal learning centre, a meeting place, often linked to the idea of the third place, an open public space between the workplace and the private home, a kind of community living room. Another role is as a provider of cultural activities and even a provider of creative workshops. As an example four illustrating scenarios are discussed. 'The Status Quo Scenario' basically stick to the scope of the traditional library. 'The Community Living Room', where the scope is space for good seating, cafe, lots of activities and reduced collection. 'The Happening Place Library' has similarities to the Community Living Room, but encourages more to social interactions, collaborations, using media. 'The Electronic Library' is focusing on becoming a digital arena with no physical collection. The scenarios should be seen as inspiration to create other unique scenarios, and of course they can be combined in many ways.

If you dig further into the enormous literature on the future of public libraries you may at first glance find that the variety of suggestions for new concepts is high, and conclude that we still lack the solution on the concept of the public library in the 21st century. However my hypothesis is that at a closer look the variety of models and propositions *is* the point and the red thread. The

new concept is, that there is no standard solution. That each and every library has to build its own vision and strategy based on local conditions, needs, partners, competencies. The main line in the r&d literature is that the traditional library is under strong pressure because the library lost its unique position as a monopoly platform for access to information. The internet and the change in the patterns of behaviour of the citizens leaves the library as one among many platforms. The clear and stable decreasing of lending combined with the shift from use of printed reference collections to digital resources at your fingertips undermines the role of the collection. At the same time different new services such as learning activities, cultural offers to families with children, reading circles, senior clubs, maker-spaces, fab-labs etc. are contributing to a new business-model with quite another role for the collection and a stronger focus on activities related to the needs of users and even userdriven. The conclusion is that the basic challenge is more or less the same but the right answers are differing from place to place according to local needs and conditions.

Modelprogram for Public Libraries

The Danish report Public Libraries in the Knowledge Society (2010) is based on international literature and national experience in developing new concepts. The report recommends to create more open libraries offering new services, building a national digital public library and building future activities on partnerships with other organisations and with citizens. The report introduces a new concept for the public library aiming at supporting empowerment, innovation experience engagement for citizens. As a kind of concept tool a new four space model was presented. The model immediately was adapted by a number of libraries. The positive response led to the idea to develop a modelprogram for public libraries that was launched in 2013 with the four space model as the turning point (http://modelprogrammer.kulturstyrelsen.dk/)

In the development process desk research as well as study tours confirmed the project that the 'four space model' was the best structural tool for describing the role of the new public library concept. The model was developed by three researchers at The Royal School of Library- and Information Science in dialog with the Committee on the Public Libraries in the Knowledge Society that published its report including the model in 2010.[1]

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[1] The resarchers are Casper Hvenegaard Rasmussen, Henrik Jochumsen og Dorte Skot-Hansen. The Royal School is today merged with Copenhagen University. The committe submitted its report to the Danish minister of culture in 2010. The committe was chaired by the auhor of this paper.
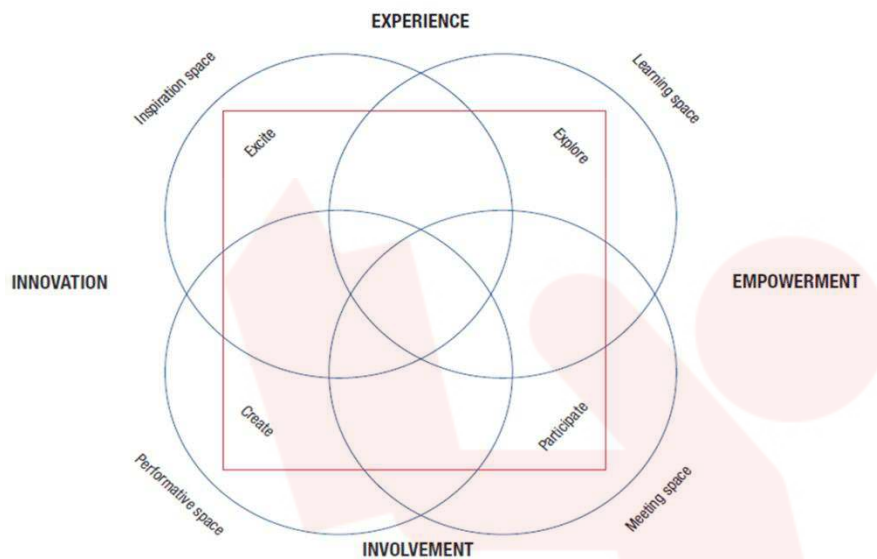
So the model-program describes and suggests design principles for the four spaces.

'According to the model the library's overall objective is to support the following four goals: Experience, involvement, empowerment and innovation. Where the first two goals especially concern individual's perception, experience and involvement in her or his quest for meaning and identity in a complex society, the other two objectives to a greater degree underpin societal goals. Empowerment concerns the development of strong and independent citizens who are able to solve everyday problems, while innovation has to do with finding new answers to practical problems or developing completely new concepts, methods or artistic expressions.' [2]

'The four spaces are not to be seen as concrete 'rooms' in a physical sense but rather as possibilities that can be fulfilled both in the physical library and in cyberspace' (Ibid. p 590).

The learning space is where you can explore and discover the world. Learning happens through play, maybe artistic activities, courses, reading and use of media and other activities. Here you may find informal learning activities, e-learning, lectures and presentations, access of course to knowledge resources, ask-a-librarian services, 'book a librarian' etc.

The inspiration space is where you meet exciting experience. It happens by mediating a multitude of aesthetic expressions, but of course 'learning' can also be inspirational. Here you will find literature, film, music, art. Performances, games, plays, meet-the artist etc.

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[2] Jochumsen,Henrik and Casper Hvenegaard Rasmussen and Dorte Skot-Hansen: The four spaces- a new model for the public library. In New Library World Vol. 113 no 11/12, 2012 pp 586-597.

The meeting space is an open public space, aiming at making the citizen participate in local community activities or debates. It is a 'third place', but also a space for as well informal spontaneous meeting as well as organized events. The good library should offer a variety of meeting spaces ranging from the intimate, nearly private space to the square-like hall and the space for public debate of many kinds.

The performative space is aiming at user's performance, involvement, participation and creativity. This space is closely linked to the idea of supporting innovation in the library. Here you will find frames for performing in various ways: writing workshops, film workshops, photo shop, activities with house artists, or even practical workshops, crafts etc.

The design principles for these four spaces focus on mainly three areas: physical space, interior design, furniture and other facilities, as well as activities and behavioral patterns.

The design principles in the model-program are under constant development. The way of thinking can be illustrated by an example related to for instance the inspiration space. Here it is a challenge to guide or lead the user to new experience, to unexpected discoveries, to new inspiration. Three examples on design principles were identified in desk research or on study tours: in Hjørring library in Northern Denmark a red ribbon made of wood winds through the library. By following it you will discover the various landscapes and spaces in the library and meet some of the offers. The path will lead you from the classical book library with tall shelves and chesterfield armchairs, through the classical 'Royal Library reading room' through the ICT-lab, the children's playing room, and workshops for performative activities and much more.

A second example is found at the new local library in Copenhagen Northwest where signposting in the floor and on the walls are combined with remarkably different design principles in the various spaces: colors, lightning, and style in furniture, atmosphere, and activities. These design elements underpin the variety of the offers and possibilities in the library.

A third example is found in the library in Ørestad in Copenhagen, a brand new quarter build on bare ground, where the digital dissemination is extended. On all presentations of library media you will find film clips, hear a spoken presentation, and see some photos. In all shelves interactive screens are installed displaying the content of the shelves. Everywhere there are Ipads with suggestions to further investigation to the topic that you face. Here the design principle is linked to a philosophy that all activities in the library should be reflected and presented on the web.

A general trend pointing to a new library concept, that you find in Denmark is what we call 'open libraries'. The concept is that the library space is open to users for self-service outside normal opening hours, giving access to citizens from early morning to late in night. Access demands a barcode which all citizens have and a pin-code from the library. A majority of Danish public libraries offer this service, letting users be completely on their own in the library without any problems. This is an example of building a new more civic society like institution. The library belongs to citizens, not to librarians.

Challenges in the implementation of new concepts

It is a central point for me, that the classical book library is deeply linked to its historical origin in the industrial society and its heritage from the early American free public libraries. The library concept was developed and strengthened to nearly perfection during last century. But the concept is being undermined by the new media-paradigm and the change in cultural behaviour among citizens as discussed above. In one sentence as stated by Frederic Stielow: the world's knowledge no longer fits neatly on library shelves.

The ambition of the Danish Modelprogram for public libraries is to contribute to a new concept where the relations to the users are much more open and interactive, where the space is more flexible and dynamic and the classical twentieth century bureaucratic and hierarchial institution is deconstructed and a new much more civic society like organization developed. The new library service must match the needs of citizens living in a fluid modernity to use the term of Zygmunt Baumann. But the Nature of the two different kind of institutions are really different. Where the classical library was more or less a subject to international standards, and where you could find the right solutions in the literature, the nature of the new civic library is, that it should be rooted in the local community and create services in partnership with and related to other local community forces and be dynamic in its relation to meet new needs in the served community.

The implementation of such a new kind of institution must be experimental and is of course challenged by not having clear experience to build on. Still I experience in the context where I work a true intention to create new library services, also such services, that appeal to groups that are not users in the classic book library. But the implementation can very often be troublesome and stressing. The best situation to create new activities and new procedures is if a library starts

from the bottom or if it moves to a new building or just changes premises, because in that situation staff are likely to be in a motivated mood of change. A new leader may also set a new agenda, but it is not difficult to find examples on new agendas that was not implemented when it came to actually doing something new, and not doing, what usually was done.

The transformation process is full of problems related to actually developing a new vision for the library , for sharing it with the full staff, as a common vision, for building a strategy for implementing the vision and along with that to enable new competencies needed for creating new services, and for communicating and testing it. The most common barrier is related to the fact that the process always starts in an organization that was not built for transforming itself. An often heard excuse for not reaching the goals in a project or actually implementing a new service is lack of time. The project is in practice seen as something extraordinary and first priority goes to daily business. A lesson here is that you may change the organization along with the steps taken towards another concept. The organization is in most cases collection-focused with departments and a hierarchial structure. Or you may take a giant step into another kind of organization, giving lower priority to traditional tasks and more to new activities. In theory it is simple, in practice difficult. Particularly if you have a staff that are deeply rooted in the old library. Which points to another challenge, the mindset of the staff. In the traditional hierarchial structure strategic questions are on the directors desk, but it is evident that strategies developed top-down are doomed to fail if they are controversial to old staff. So a basic experience is that to build a new sustainable organization the process should be bottom-up. And even that may be difficult to do, because a huge part of the staff may be in opposition to change, and even if they seem to accept the necessity of change they may unconsciously object to it. There are many reasons and emotions in this position, from defending a service of quality, they believe in, to fear of changes they are not qualified for, fear of losing their jobs, becoming superfluos.

The staff attitude in a traditional library will often be negative towards deeper changes because their daily life is full of practical problems and tasks, that they master and the new concept is full of uncertainties. The professional tradition can be another challenge. You may argue that the change from a collection oriented library to a user oriented is a shift of paradigm. And in a classic library you will have staff that are highly qualified in classical disciplines like classification, cataloguing, reference-work. They often tend to stick to their core competencies.

In practice there is also a challenge related to the existent users. A recent Danish user study shows that 77% of the users have printed books as there first priority, when you ask them. But the majority of the library users in most Danish libraries actually use the library facilities without lending. They come for a variety of other reasons, some related to the collection, some to the facilities for working or meeting, or joining a class or presentation. And groups that used to be frequent users tend to disappear, schoolchildren and young people in particular. So the staff may find themselves in a situation, where there daily duties are related to traditional service as pathfinders in the collection. But a flower examination of the users tell they get older and children and young persons tend to stop using the library if there are not up to date digital services or other activities designed for them.

There are also pitfalls for the strategy. There has in many organizations been a trend for quite concrete and often detailed strategies running for a period for three or four years. In recent years it has become obvious that this kind of strategy runs a risk to become obsolete after a year, and a strategy that fails is worse than no strategy. So the lesson is that a strategy today preferable may describe the direction, define milestones and illustrate the field of strategic awareness. The strategy should be accompanied with action plans running for up to a year.

Coming to the action-plans, very good results have been achieved in Danish libraries by splitting up in projects and organize more or less all activities as projects, even daily running operations.

But no model is ultimate, the key to success lies in true local involvement and in keeping on trying.