
Library Space and Digital Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The spread of the knowledge society and the growth of digitalization challenge the current configuration of the physical library space. In coming years the library environment will change radically, irrespective of which kind of library we are talking about. This article focuses on the library's evolution, and on the spatial and design changes that lie ahead for the traditional library in both the Danish and general contexts. The article provides a brief description of certain innovative changes in two new Danish public libraries, in Aarhus and Hjørring.

THE LIBRARY IN THE GOOGLE AGE

What's the point of the library when we have Google? This is a question we increasingly hear. But can an Internet search engine actually replace good-quality, locally targeted culture and knowledge communication? Like the book, the library is occasionally declared as good as dead by futurologists. That is not true. In the global information society, the library's best days still lie ahead of it, provided it is allocated the necessary resources and permitted to adapt in an age where a greater proportion of the world's information, knowledge, and cultural services are disseminated digitally. But the library building is undergoing considerable change: a transition from the book- and the shelf-dominated library to a broad cultural and knowledge-bearing *holistic* library, where the focus is on the user's stay in the library and on the user having access to *both* physical and digital resources.

The book still has a central role to play, but it is increasingly appearing in other formats: in audio and online e-books. In addition, there are many other media, tasks, and activities that are offered as part of a modern

library's services. Improving these services is no longer just about providing access to websites and online catalogs; it is also about librarians working with architects to consider carefully which design opportunities are available to accommodate new digital technologies. There may well be opportunities to improve the current manner in which libraries are run. There could be new ways in which the user can utilize the physical library space, which in turn could create brand new library experiences and services. The requirements for the application of intelligent IT and the integration of technological media formats in the physical environment are, indeed, great. Today, of course, these requirements apply to more or less all types of architecture. But in particular they apply to open, public institutions and, not least, to the knowledge and communication-based institutions such as the libraries.

Across the world people are discussing, planning, and designing libraries to meet these new opportunities and challenges. Why? Because the qualities the library has—*eo ipso*—must be described as synonymous with the knowledge society. The question is whether the library is capable of transforming itself from the industrial society's book-library to meet the demands of the knowledge society.

Three conditions exist that make the rethinking of the physical framework and layout absolutely necessary: users' new media habits and changes in behavior; changes in the library's resources and tasks, which are often described as shifting "from collections to connections" and "from transactions to relations"; and the transition from manual to automatic work processes, including the growth in self-service facilities.

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY'S ROLE IN THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

On Wednesday, October 27, 2010, the Danish government's special committee of culture met to debate the future development of Danish public libraries. The background to the meeting was the new report *The Public Libraries in the Knowledge Society*, published in March 2010 by the Danish Agency for Libraries and Media (Styrelsen for Bibliotek og Medier, 2010b), part of the Ministry of Culture. The report investigates the need for follow-up development in the public libraries in accordance with the *Act Regarding Library Services* passed a decade earlier (Danish National Library Authority, 2001). The report points out that, with its 36 million visits in 2009, the public library is without comparison the Danish cultural institution that enjoys the greatest number of users and visits. However, a series of societal changes require a new way of thinking about library space, and in particular the accommodation of the Internet and digital resources. Moreover, account needs to be taken of the fact that library use is changing. While book loans have fallen slightly, Internet usage has risen sharply. The total number of loans in 2009 was 48 million plus renewals. In addition, there was an increasing number of downloads—7.4 million

in total—while there were 26 million visits (homepages and bibliotek.dk). Furthermore, over 10,000 diverse events were held at the public libraries; “citizens’ services” was established at 10% of the public libraries, while even more intended to include this new type of service (Styrelsen for Bibliotek og Medier, 2010a). The physical library is used for more than just the borrowing of materials. Danish surveys from 2004 and 2005 (Kommunernes Landsforening, 2004; Møller, 2005) show that more than 50 percent of citizens visit the library for other reasons. They come to meet, study, and to work, and to take advantage of the many other services offered.

According to the new report, Danish libraries will in the future function as cultural centers having a distinct digital profile. Increased accessibility together with an increased focus on “inspiration” and learning will transform physical libraries into active cultural and citizen centers; among other things the libraries must systematically work together with workplaces, housing associations, and cultural and learning institutions to develop new services for citizens. The report focuses on how the library can develop in step with citizens and their changing media usage and needs, for instance, developing the right learning opportunities within Internet information searching. In the report the following questions are asked: How do we retain the existing users, while at the same time attracting new ones? Which role is the library to play in the knowledge society, and how do we deal with media development in libraries? Is there a need for new concepts of library service in order to meet the need for enlightenment, education, and local cultural activities? The central recommendations of the report are new content and concepts for the physical library; the Danish Digital Library, a national digital library service *for all* based on individual sign-on-to library web-based services; and partnerships as a means of creating greater outreach in library services and programs. It is of course too early to say how these recommendations will specifically be carried out and what consequences they will have for the physical library and its digital challenges. As Jens Thorhauge (2010), director of the Danish Agency for Libraries and Media, described the report’s background: it is a question of “change or die” (p. 2).

RECONSTRUCT THE LIBRARY!

Another recent Danish publication is *Library Space: Inspiration for Buildings and Design*, published by the Danish Library Association (Niegaard et al., 2009). The idea behind this publication is to inspire new approaches to library building internal design; urge the building of libraries characterized by quality, flexibility, creative courage, and a desire to move in new directions; and help create library buildings, which by their design, layout, and urban location are able to establish the library as a powerful asset in the development of the twenty-first-century knowledge society and in the strengthening of democratic society. The book gives numerous examples

of how it can be done, in a variety of different ways. Moreover, the book includes practical information, tips, and tools for municipalities embarking on the planning of new buildings as well as the renovation or updating of existing premises in order to satisfy new user needs and accommodate new library functions.

Rolf Hapel is the driving force behind one of Denmark's most exciting and future-orientated projects, Urban MediaSpace in Aarhus. Hapel, who is head of administration, Citizen Services and Public Libraries in the municipality of Aarhus, declares in the book that if libraries did not exist then we would need to invent new open, resource-filled institutions:

The Knowledge Society represents both traditional and new challenges, accentuating the need for institutions and services that can ensure cohesion, identity creation, lifelong learning, public service supply of culture and literature experiences, and knowledge and competency development. An open public space with learning facilities and cultural opportunities including contemporary and competent instruction. As we do have libraries, let's reconstruct them. (Niegaard et al., 2009, p. 30)

How this can be expressed in the physical library space is illustrated through various examples given later in the article.

"The new library," its tasks and content, can be characterized in two ways:

- The library's collection and presentation focus has been widened from essentially the printed documents of the Gutenberg "universe" to coverage of multimedia, music, images, and Web-based services.
- The library is used as a local community's interactive meeting, learning, and transformation space, one which is open to all.

As mentioned, Danish surveys point out that half of library users don't come to borrow books but to use the library as a place of sanctuary and a place for information, inspiration, and work. Therefore, the task for all the municipalities now is to rethink the library so it can fulfill its new role in a rapidly developing e-society—a library focused much more on professional face-to-face services and with a stronger and more conscious presentation of the growing amount of digitized resources.

THE LIBRARY UNIVERSE IS GROWING

An important new dimension in relation to the library's special universe is its development toward the "experimentarium." With the help of new media types and communication and computing technology, a completely new space is being created in the physical library. Librarians are working together with architects, designers, and artists in order to create spaces for new interactive experiences related to print culture and other document formats, ultramodern art, and cultural heritage—space and facilities that stimulate personal experience and play with arts, information,

and knowledge as a new means of personal learning and enlightenment. The tendency is toward connecting with society's growing interest in the "experience economy" as well as learning through creativity, reflecting the individualistic nature of modern society. As Dorte Skot-Hansen (2007) has pointed out in *Byen som scene*, "experiences" are increasingly being used as an indication of values, attitudes, and feelings, and help to develop the personal identity of individuals. The question is, what does this mean for the physical library and library buildings? What needs and demands must be taken into consideration when planning for new attractive, efficient, and future-orientated library buildings; buildings that satisfy the demands of existing and new users, and staff?

NEW ARCHITECTURE ON ITS WAY

The library and the global information society are a perfect match. As the church did in earlier times, the library today functions as the meeting place for local communities. And just like churches in the past, and later museums, libraries have become prominent in the category of groundbreaking architecture—most famous in this regard is perhaps the Seattle Central Library, inaugurated in 2004.

Library architecture is undergoing a process of transformation; the library has not only to be flexible, accommodating, and energy saving; it must also be seen! However, most of the library buildings in Denmark are not particularly "sculptural." Exceptions are, for example, the Black Diamond (the Royal Library's new building, opened in 1999), and the Middelfart's Culture Island (2005) incorporating a library, cinema, restaurant, tourist office, and marina.

Danish municipalities have not yet seriously dared to use library architecture to create local "lighthouses" of cultural attraction. Libraries are more often than not discreet, straightforward buildings in tile and glass, like Arkitema's new library in Skive. But maybe we are on the point of something new. The internationally known Danish firm of architects BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group), in connection with the Copenhagen Metropol 2007 Zone Hearings at the Scala grounds a few years ago, stuck its neck out and came up with something different on a very large scale (130 meters high).

However, for such projects to be realized, the interest and support of politicians is required—politicians who are able to understand and adapt to a new library era, where the focus is on access and users' needs and on new media resources, rather than on yesterday's collections-centered library. Currently in Copenhagen, politicians and the city council are not supportive of the need for a new main library in the capital. This contrasts with what has happened in Norway's capital, Oslo, where Lund Hagem Architects and Atelier Oslo have won the competition to design an impressive new main library building, called the Diagonale, located on the

harbor front adjacent to the stunning new Oslo Opera House (<http://nye.deichman.no/>).

GOODBYE TO THE SHELVING-DOMINATED LIBRARY SPACE

As stated earlier, the library *is* changing, from the book- and shelf-dominated library to the holistic library, with a wide range of cultural and knowledge opportunities that focus on the user and on access to both physical material and digitized resources. Attention has shifted from collections to access and from preservation to communication. Recent examples of this shift are the OBA, Amsterdam's new main library, designed in 2007 by architects Jo Coenen (<http://www.oba.nl>); and, also in the Netherlands, the Delft Dok Library, a reconstructed 1970s building (<http://www.dok.info>). As mentioned above, users today don't just come to borrow, and so there is an onus on presenting professionally the growing amount of digitized material now available. It is, therefore, very important to transform traditional library spaces. Bookshelves won't disappear; but new layout strategies imply less space and fewer square meters between shelving units. If the library is to maintain and even strengthen its impact in the knowledge society, then there has to be extensive new demands placed on the design and layout of library space. Most citizens have adapted to various new e-media and incorporated them into their everyday lives, not least younger generations and future users; and this familiarity with the digital environment will influence the library of tomorrow.

When it comes to creating an up-to-date physical framework for displaying both digital and physical media, then we have to admit that we are still on the threshold of "the new library," yet to enter it fully. Libraries will need to continue to experiment with new layout arrangements, including the integration of computers, displays, plasma screens, and interactive learning features. In the United States, Cerritos Public Library (California) is well-known internationally for its work with the "new experience" library, which is constituted essentially by an integration, or layering, of physical collections, digital resources, and experience features. One Danish model is the recent Hjørring Public Library, discussed below, which has incorporated digitized resources visually in library space together with traditional library materials.

AN INTERNATIONAL SHOWPIECE

If you like wandering around a library looking for a good book, there's nothing to worry about. Books and reading will still be a core service in the twenty-first-century library. An important example is Seattle's new mammoth library and user magnet. The Seattle Central Library was created as a mega sculpture and was conjured up in glass and steel by the architect Rem Koolhaas from OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture) (Seattle Public Library, n.d.). In spite of the ambitions for a new and

different kind of library concept, the Seattle building is also very much a traditional book institution. It has attracted worldwide attention as an example of a twenty-first-century library. Seattle Central Library is one of several examples of the new trend toward locating libraries, as often in the past, in urban centers. It also represents two other interesting trends. Firstly, in addition to its service and collection concept, this library creates an urban space within the city center, a space with room for everybody. It is a natural cultural and social meeting place for citizens. Secondly, the library is structurally built as a public eye-catcher, a distinctly iconic building that not only provides a setting for a modern urban library service but also gives the city greater architectural character and attraction, over and above the immediate benefit it provides to local library users.

INSPIRATION FROM PARIS AND JAPAN

The Seattle design does not stand alone in what it has tried to achieve; there are forerunners and contemporary equivalents. The library of the future, or “the new library,” is a holistic library where printed, physical, and traditional materials are presented side by side with digitized, virtual services. It is characterized by a wealth of space, teeming with users who don’t only come to borrow materials but also to meet, read, listen, work, and “settle down” in a common meeting place, a pulsating communal cultural and knowledge center on par with Paris’s Centre Pompidou (<http://www.centrepompidou.fr>); or with the fantastic Sendai Médiathèque in Japan (<http://www.smt.city.sendai.jp/>). The Sendai Médiathèque comprises a library, art gallery, cinema, auditorium, and cyber café. It is a transparent cube of light with large amounts of open space and a glass curtain wall, the latter made possible by the use internally of impressive and powerful lacework structural columns. In short, we are witnessing the arrival of buildings that combine the sacred, familiar book hall with the concept of the multimedia, cultural café, and which represent oases of both personal immersion and digital exploration.

INTERACTIVE SPACES

In the future, the computer will not only be used in many different ways in the libraries, it will interact with dynamic RFID tags, which enable communication between a particular computer and an object, thus creating new forms for interactive presentation and so-called intelligent space. Århus Public Libraries are among the few in Denmark that have focused systematically on this option. Via continuous surveys on users’ behavior, and numerous projects where space and technology are melded together, new ways of professional face-to-face mediation and guidance have been tested in the physical library, including both physical and digital materials and media—for instance, by means of *pervasive computing*, with interactive floors and information access provided directly to users’ own mobile devices. Another project is The Interactive Children’s Library, focusing

on learning and interactivity (Drotner, Jørgensen, & Nyboe, 2006), with, for instance, an inspiration browser, or Story Surfer, incorporated in the floor. A library has to be tailored to the people, who use it. Peter Larsen, an industrial designer from Kolding, has with his new shelving and design concept optimized the use of library space and has integrated new technology into the library: the touch screen, for example. Step by step, the library is undergoing a transformation from the traditional book and collection library into a new vibrant place, providing access to information, literature, music, interactive knowledge, and culture facilities, public readings, and debates and allowing users to partake and contribute: in storytelling, for example.

ACTIVITY ZONES

To provide easy access, an overview of services and facilities, flexibility, and a smooth flow of users through a building, the library's public areas can be organized into different activity zones. The most lively and active zone is often near the entrance, bustling and spacious with quick-access to information services, computers, café lounge, exhibitions, new books, and self-service borrowing and returning facilities; even a citizens (city hall) service. Next to this you may find an area offering guidance and professional librarian services in close connection with the physical collection. There is easy access to open book-storage areas, although the shelving units are much closer together than we have been used to. This zone has many computer workstations for literature retrieval and Web-based services. The third zone offers peace and quiet, with study desks; while a fourth zone consists of spaces for various additional activities: rooms for listening to music, rooms for watching films, meeting rooms, and multimedia studios with editing facilities. Wireless access is provided everywhere, except in the quiet-study area.

OFFICES AND STACKS

Foreign and Danish companies have been busy in recent years establishing open office landscapes with small areas for concentration and quiet conversation in order to stimulate an increased synergy between employees as well as support project innovation and outsourcing; such meeting areas also gain more space. Now libraries are following suit. Examples are the new main libraries at Næstved (opened 2004) and Kolding (opened 2006). In new designs, provision should be made for specific project rooms as well as facilities for production of the growing net-based services. Former closed-stack areas are considered inconvenient today because staff have to run back and forth. In Denmark, where possible, they are converted into open-storage areas with free access for the public. Where larger stacks are required, an efficient solution is to establish one central, staffed storage facility, from which material can be collected by users during opening hours.

ACCESS AROUND THE CLOCK

Opening hours are crucial to providing good service. Today's media formats and IT library services are provided on a 24/7 basis via the library's Web-based online service, or even sometimes in the physical library. In principle, as the new, "premier" central urban space, the physical library should always be open. This requires money, of course. Moreover, there is a rather strong trend in Denmark of converting branch libraries into all-day, open self-service local libraries with limited professional librarian assistance, access by magnetic card, and surveillance of activities via closed-circuit television. This model is sometimes described as a *differentiated library service*. Main libraries, in principle, should be open all day long. Amsterdam's new main library (2007) is open from 10:00 am to 10:00 pm every day, weekends included.

NEW SERVICES

A series of new service functions have to be incorporated. A recent Danish example is the citizens' services, which offers a limited number of city hall services. Local public library branches have longer open hours than most municipal town halls. Functions relating to the growing e-society, lifelong learning, and Internet guidance and training are provided by Danish libraries today. Six out of ten Danes already use the Internet today to communicate with public authorities. In an attempt to encourage the remaining four out of ten Danes to do so, libraries offer courses in, for example, basic Internet skills, and use of *borger.dk*, which is a national public portal.

In the United Kingdom, the Idea Stores in the East End of London combine library and social activities. The Borough of Tower Hamlets established Idea Stores in order to stimulate new ideas for adult education and library use in socially disadvantaged areas whose libraries were outdated. It is a concept that combines the library, local shopping facilities, and the social meeting center. Branded as less bookish and more informal than traditional libraries, the Idea Store concept offers a radical alternative for public library provision, not least in terms of lifelong learning programs. A Danish variant of the Idea Store is the Gellerup Community Center and Library, where a homework café for children and health centers and job centers stimulate and support integration efforts.

A NEW LIBRARY LANDSCAPE

In conjunction with new IT possibilities and new media habits among citizens, the Danish Local Government reform in 2007, which merged around 270 municipalities into just 98, has strengthened the need for a transformation of the well-known library structure by, for example, rethinking existing buildings and planning (Local Government Denmark, n.d.). The *new library* landscape (Niegaard, 2007, pp. 40–44) combines

physical and virtual library resources and services. It offers Internet-based services of local relevance and a number of physical library facilities—with, where possible, a common design and layout. The main components of the new library landscape are as follows:

- *The main library*, the cornerstone of the structure, is almost always located in the largest town of the municipality. Many will have to reuse and rethink existing premises, but a large number also have plans for a new main library. Architecturally a new iconic building will not only help brand the library service, it will also create a new profile and act as a beacon for the municipality. In the new geographically dispersed municipalities, the main library will be supported by different library solutions to ensure an efficient decentralized library service.
- *Local libraries*, branch libraries whose collections are based on a traditionally universal approach. Many of these libraries will be coupled with citizens' services, as often occurs in Denmark.
- *Theme libraries*, with their own service profiles, designed with collections and services for either a target group or a specific purpose, and arranged as local meeting places with the possibility of incorporating a café. Examples of this include Bochum's family library and Dresden's library for young people.
- *A hot-spot library*, is similar to the Internet café and is literally a library without books, an "intelligent" library space with just a few physical media such as journals, newspapers, and comics, or specially requested material. The library is rendered intelligent because of the access it affords to the Internet via wireless; and literature, music, and art experiences are made available via plasma screens. This option could be advantageous if located in connection with other activities and institutions.
- *Combi library*, also called an integrated library. Libraries today are often combined with other activities, such as school libraries, as in the case of the cinema and cultural center at Mosaikken in Kjellerup.
- *Kindergarten libraries*, a relatively new library service, which has been well received because the collections give busy families the chance to "go to the library" and borrow books to read aloud, at the same time as the children are picked up from the nursery.
- Finally, there are, of course, *mobile libraries*; but there are also other forms of mobile, outreach library services for citizens at, for example, festivals and markets.

TWO DANISH EXAMPLES

Hjørring Public Library

Denmark's most attractive public library at present is a veritable experience library, created to focus on user needs and preferences, rather than

focusing on material collections and expanses of shelving. The library is situated in Hjørring, one of the most northerly municipalities in Denmark, with 67,000 inhabitants (fig. 1). In 2008 the municipality opened its new main library located on the first floor of a new shopping center named Metropolen, which also houses forty shops and a fitness center. Danes, foreigners, and architects alike flock to this new 5,000 square meter library, not because of its exterior architecture, but rather to view its unique interior design and layout. It attracts an average of 1,000 visitors a day.

Børge Søndergaard, head of development at Hjørring, predicts that “soon every form of information will be available in digitized forms—right at this moment the e-book is penetrating the market at an enormous pace. Some predict that in 10 years . . . there will be no use of the traditional book, CD, DVD and other materials in hardback, as everything is accessible on-line.” Thus, when embarking on his work at *Hjørring*, Søndergaard and his colleagues naturally asked themselves the question: “So why use a public library?” In fact he and his colleagues continue to ask themselves that question. They cannot supply the answer, but the fact is, they note, “that people keep coming in enormous numbers to our libraries” (Søndergaard, 2010, p. 1).

A modern library like that in Hjørring emphasizes two central psychological concepts: the third place and the human urban space. Ray Oldenburg, the urban sociologist from Florida, conceptualized the third place in his book *The Great Good Place* (1999), in which he discussed the importance of informal public meeting places—such as coffee bars and other “hangout” locations, as opposed to home and work, which constitute the first and second places—in terms of the development of local communities and democracy. Also influential in library planning has been the work of the urban planner Jan Gehl and his ideas on how to create human urban space with meeting places that are comfortable to be in (2003; Gehl & Gemzøe, 1996).

The experience and arena library in Hjørring was created by designers and artists Bosh & Fjord, who have utilized a sculptural “red thread” throughout this colorful library, producing a unique and diverse library environment, which is indeed the town’s cultural meeting place. A one-room library with plenty of “spaces in the space” and numerous discretely located IT facilities, it was designed and constructed according to three core areas: culture and experience, lifelong learning, and the individual’s stay at the library, whether the individual comes to borrow materials; find information, literature, or music; meet with friends; or just relax by oneself (Hjørring Kommune, n.d.).

Urban Mediaspace, Aarhus

The public library of the future is to be built in Aarhus, Denmark’s second largest city with a population of 310,000. In 2003–2004, the Aarhus city coun-



Figure 1. Hjoerring Public Library—the Danish Experience Library. Source: Hellen Niegaard.

cil agreed to the new landmark construction for culture and knowledge, in Danish to be known as *Multimediehuset* (Multimedia Center; Aarhus Kommune, n.d.). (See figs. 2 and 3.) It will be Denmark's largest public library, built on protruding land close to the town's harbor area. The people of Aarhus will, via this initiative, have access to the latest media and information technology inside a completely new main library. It will be an open, educative environment, where the focus is on the citizen. Library construction is a vital element in the municipality's strategy for branding Aarhus as a knowledge-based city. *Multimediehuset* will replace the existing main library in *Mølleparken*. Built in 1935, the current library has, over many years, persisted with too little space in relation to the services, activities, and media on offer.

Citizens of the knowledge society have a need for lifelong learning and as such place great demands and expectations on library construction. The multimedia center should no longer simply lend materials, but should in addition support: (a) the interactive communication of information; (b) learning; (c) experiences, for example of a cultural character related to film or music; and (d) the needs of children. We are talking about a place where, firstly, there is plenty of room for personal development; and, secondly, where people can meet in a variety of different ways. The new library building will not only be a platform for dialogue and learning but also one for information access, democratic development,



Figure 2. Urban Mediaspace, the public library of the future will open in Aarhus, Denmark by the end of 2014. Reproduced courtesy of: Aarhus Public Libraries.

the generation of ideas, and inspiration for personal development and recreation, a unique place for people's self-expression and collaboration. The 20,000-square-meter building will, in addition, include citizen services, private IT companies, and a large underground car park. The firm of Schmidt, Hammer, Lassen Architects and the Municipality of Aarhus are currently well on the way to making a reality of the plan, with building due to begin in 2011. Multimediehuset is due to open in late 2014.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

What does it take to produce a design that delivers the concept of the "new library"? What is required is ample space for the users and their activities at the library; a tighter collection layout and allocation of shelving; room for comfortable, spacious lounge facilities; a café; learning areas; exhibition areas; meeting rooms; and room for individual concentration, and access to books and other forms of media. There should be plentiful search and Internet facilities for those users who don't bring their own laptops, and wireless Internet access for those who do, as well as space for Internet instruction. Also supplied should be individual guidance and professional assistance in finding the appropriate materials, accessing relevant knowledge, and knowing how to manage the vast quantities of digitalized information. Self-service borrowing and return facilities are



Figure 3. Interactive information floor—Aarhus Main Library, Denmark has been testing a number of interactive library features during the last five years. Reproduced courtesy of: Aarhus Public Libraries.

essential. Spatial arrangement needs to be made for the presentation of cultural heritage (e.g., an interactive art, music, and learning room), and for reading aloud to children—and adults!

THE LIBRARY AS A NETWORK OF SERVICES

As a way of acknowledging the significant challenges that confront future library development, the libraries in the municipalities of Åarhus, Kolding, Vejle, and Copenhagen published *Digital Trendspotting* in 2010 (<http://www.digitaltrendspotting.dk>). The publication is an attempt to come a step closer to the integration of digital services. There are a series of innovative initiatives split into four categories: digital services in a physical framework; digital services in a virtual world; libraries and social media; and libraries as a means to knowledge. Emphasis is placed on the fact that traditional libraries will continue to play a major role in satisfying the user demands; printed media is by no means doomed and will supplement other forms of media. The library must therefore embrace the new digital possibilities and use them constructively in the library space itself, through, for example, intelligent touch-sensitive information screens and via connection to mobile devices.

CONCLUSION

Will the physical library play a role in citizens' and students' universe in the future? For me personally there is no doubt that the answer is "yes." Some might think or fear that the library's days as a physical place are numbered, as day-by-day loans turn into "downloads." Some argue that users can just as well meet and study in a variety of places, not just the library. The library has always been a place for the dissemination of knowledge and culture. In the premodern age, library access was for the few. But with the establishment of public libraries in the nineteenth century, the library has since become a place for the masses, not just the privileged—a democratic place of accessible knowledge and culture where one will meet and interact with one's peers. Whether that knowledge is physical and in printed format or digital and Web-based is for me the same thing. What the users come for is the unique library ambience and quality of experience; and they will no doubt keep coming. But this will only happen if library staff and managers, and parent bodies (city councils and universities) understand the need for the continual updating of media formats and sources, competencies, services, and of course the physical premises. If there is this understanding, then the library—not just the public library but other libraries too—will remain a hub of knowledge and an important meeting place for people to gain new experiences.

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