



JORNADES
BIBLIOTECA PÚBLICA
I LECTURES

Jornades Biblioteca Pública i Lectures
2, 3 i 4 de novembre de 2005
Sala Ovidi Montllor - Institut del Teatre
Pl. Margarida Xirgu, s/n - 08004 Barcelona

INNOVATION IN PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES – EXAMPLE DEICHMANSKE BIBLIOTEK – OSLO PUBLIC LIBRARY

Liv Sæteren

City Librarian,
Oslo Public Library/Deichmanske bibliotek

Some figures and facts

The city of Oslo is the capital of Norway. Approximately 530.000 inhabitants.

Deichmanske bibliotek is the name of the public library in Oslo. The library was founded in 1785, by a donation from Carl Deichman, including his collection of books.

Budget 2005 18,5 mill EUR.

System: Main library 13 branches.

Staff ca 230 staff-equivalents.

The main library is from 1932, 12.000 m², neoclassical architecture and only 2.000 m² accessible for users. A new site for the new main library is chosen, close to the City hall. An architect- competition was arranged in 2001. A new main library is expected to be finished around 2008 -2010.

Library services are organised as a central service for the whole municipality. For several other public services the city of Oslo is divided into 15 districts with local political and administrative functions.

Why innovate?

Let us look at the objectives for the public libraries (in Norway regulated by the act of 20th December 1985 about public libraries):

“The public libraries shall be responsible for promoting knowledge, education and other cultural activities, by providing access to information and by making available books and other suitable material, free of charge, for everyone residing in Norway”.

Key words: knowledge, education, culture, and information. It is evident that dealing with these objectives puts the libraries in an environment that is under extreme changes and developments. Most functions in society of course are exposed to changes in general that arouses new behaviour and new demands from the users, and public services are indeed challenged by changed (reduced) funding. But libraries in particular must face and handle profound changes in their “raw materials” – here referring to the ICT and media development.

To underline the challenges for libraries – the changes of media production, the information technology, the intellectual property regulations, the working methods in the educational system ... and not to mention the challenges of growing illiteracy and the challenge of information literacy in a complex world for our users.

I would express this strongly: libraries should have changing and innovation as an overall strategy, to train the staff/organisation in dealing with changes, and to act with creativity in severe situations.

Who is responsible for innovation in libraries?

From a Norwegian perspective:

At first – the public library in Oslo, and most Norwegian libraries – has very limited funding compared to other Scandinavian countries. Budget pr capita in Helsinki (Finland) and Copenhagen (Denmark) is the double of the budget pr capita in Oslo. The budget per capita for materials in Oslo is below 2 EUR – as more than 25 % of the money goes for housing, energy and so on. But in spite of this, we have in many respects gone further into innovation than many other Scandinavian libraries.

With “no money” you can give in, sit down and cry and hope for a saviour. Or you can fight, use your imagination and creativity and find new solutions.

Waiting for someone else, some other body to identify, develop, decide and implement new methods and solutions for library services? Who should that be? Government? Local politicians? Other professions? Library associations? Let us face it. No other “body” will or can renew libraries. No other agency will act on this field – except for giving statements about the needs for change.

The libraries themselves must carry the major responsibility for library development.

And that is why we feel the responsibility of initiating innovation. It is a responsibility, being the largest public library in Norway, to be an agent in the society, to observe the changes in the environments and the framework of the library, to “tune in” and adjust the library to the ongoing changes – and to look forward and try to see some scenarios of future development and try these out.

Development work in Oslo public library

Some modesty and some simplifying: Development work is what I will present here. But I like to talk about this not in the terms of new services – but in the terms of improvements and developing of methods

Is our digital cinema a new service delivered by the library? – or is it adding an extra effort or dimension to libraries traditional methods in striving to fulfil our objectives: knowledge, education and cultural activities, by providing materials for the general public?

Is providing digital materials and tools to work with digital materials a new service, that differs radically from traditional providing of printed books and working conditions for studying the books?

I would say no, and may be some of you will be disappointed, expecting to hear about radical innovation and introduction of new services....

Another “disclaimer”: this conference is dealing with the impact of information technology on the users needs and the library’s methods.

But the development of libraries must include several dimensions. Literacy, integration, learning environments, varied target groups like the elderly people, the impaired. And the library as a place, for creativity and culture, and the work with cultural heritage, ...not only technology.

Deichmanske bibliotek is currently running about 50 – 60 projects in parallel. Some of them are rather small without any formal project organisation, or any dedicated budget. Approximately 10 projects have substantial external funding and formal organisation.

Despite the fact that the Oslo public library is a rather poor library compared to Scandinavian standards, several years with systematic working with projects in all parts of the organisation has resulted in innovation, progress, capability in dealing with severe budget restrains and several good partners and alliances. Maybe not the most crucial alliances when it comes to rise funding. But very useful, inspiring and precious partners in many aspects of developing libraries and library services, in identifying the needs of the users, and in communicating with the users.

Why projects and partners?

By using the method of team/project organising for even running activities, we achieve better focus on the tasks; we get focus on improving services, not repeating what has always been done before. And above all, we gain the profit of cooperation between different professions – within the library itself, and/or from the community outside – from other institutions or individuals.

Librarians are better together with other professions. Other professions are better together with librarians.

We get a better understanding in how the libraries are perceived by “the society”, and librarians get better knowledge about themselves when they work together with other professions and institutions.

We gain competence and resources from other institutions in developing and providing services to our users. We get new users, because our partners in these projects might have another network of users.

We learn.

The synergy gives new ideas, enhances creativity – which again improves services.

Our partners may transform into allies when the library is under political and economical constraints. Etc.

Innovation the library’s responsibility – but with no chance for success by the library alone. Partners and allies are a MUST.

Examples

Start with the biggest and most comprehensive project – exploring and develop a new typology for the library building.

Showing a series of pictures showing how the library interior preserves the library institution as a book lending institution.

It is a major problem for innovation that the visual language of library buildings all over the world has remained constant for the last 100 years. Even today libraries are built with bookshelves as the structuring element, lending as the primary service, and public work spaces separated both from books and from technology. Thus the design of library premises contributes to strengthen the myths about libraries, and work against their modernisation. The archetypes refer to the past, to the traditional functions and working methods of libraries. I will put it strongly: the library buildings and interiors are one of the most important factors to prevent development in the library and to enhance myths about libraries. Visual communication and physical structures are telling you that the library is a place where you shall walk along the shelves, pick up your book, go to the counter and activate the librarian to register your loan, and then leave the building

We see the need for a shift of focus:

In planning the new library there will be a focus on conditions for good learning environments, and good environments for human relations and interaction, and good environments for ”pushing” literature and reading.

New typology:

- A shift from collection orientation to user behaviour orientation. Parameters for planning are facilities for inspiration, production, teamwork, social interaction and support. The collection is in this term, support.

New visual communication:

- The library as an attraction and sensation, with visual aids to guide the user around in the library. Key words are landscapes, atmospheres, scenography, sound, light, design.

New efficiency and rationalisation:

- Intelligent and thorough use of new technology. Self service, self-instructive, self-describing and self-evident interiors combined with a simple and elegant interface to computer services.

New functions and services:

- The library will facilitate and organise varied new forms of services, support and promote learning, support working and meeting activities concerned with printed, digital and multimedia materials. 24 hour services, cafés and shops as part of the library concept.

New organisation:

- Rapid changes in methods, functions and services, according to future changes in media production, ICT, etc, and the integration of functions such as cafés, museums and shops demands flexibility in the building and new organisational structures within the library.

We know that the transition of the library organisation living in a neoclassical library building with closed stacks, designed for book lending and serious and silent studying, to this future library, digitalized, self-serviced, with a learning centre, multimedia based production and presentation etc. - is impossible to handle if the staff is not taking part in the development, and if they are not taking part in their own transition.

Our approach has been to not only work theoretically with descriptions of future demands on the building – but to experiment, to pilot some of the functions we believe will be smaller or bigger elements in the new library, to find out what physical conditions this functions will demand in a building, or how they will effect the organisation, what competence is necessary to deliver services, what kind of user behaviour will we meet and how shall we control or regulate or... or...

We even have been so ambitious to create a few new services and functions, and have enabled this by getting funding from the Norwegian Research Foundation and the National Library Authority...

Digital services. A walk around in the main library.

Back to the old typology showing pictures in a walk through the library showing the newest digital services.

We enter a monumental building, climbing stairs, several stairs, and finally enter modernity within an old frame. A modern reception, where the receptionists, initially employed as guards, now are trained in assisting users working with digital media and tools. From the sofa you can watch the open digital cinema, while you wait for your turn at the fast 15 minutes use of Internet, or wait for your longtime use of multimedia machines in the pilot area. May be use the small cabinets that can be used as small offices for rent.

Let us look at the digital studio. This room can be borrowed for making digital projects, films, digital art, digital storytelling, multimediareports.

The studio can be rearranged as an event-room for an audience about 70 persons, where authors, screenplay writers, actors and other people with a message can perform or debate, in this studio with facilities to webcast the performance – and we can tape the event and store it for later use in our website for publishing multimedia documents, Reaktor. Depending on which intellectual property right we can obtain from the artists – these documents can later be used by the general public for school reports or other purposes.

We can move into the separate room for digital movies, then passing the music department that is running the project “låtlån” – that means digital music lending – by giving access to digitised (Norwegian) music downloaded, to authorized users of the library, using their library card as the key.

An interesting difference: The digitised movies and film material can be accessed only within the library’s premises. The digitised music can be accessed from any Internet pc, at home, everywhere, if you have the library card. This is all due to the different agreements that have been possible to work out in cooperation with organisations for intellectual property.

Then we continue into the children’s library. This department runs the project of the “reading cave” – that is an interactive web-based presentation of children’s books with animation and games. This project has included children in the project-team – giving important input about what’s working for this target group.

Then we go up the stairs to the main reference and lending department, where the information desk is removed and the users and the librarians work together on the same physical level with the information seeking.

If by any chance, no users are asking for help and there is some “free time”, the librarians can use the PCs for answering questions in the digital reference service – our library is administering the national digital reference service, where everyone, from all over the world, can ask their questions on email, SMS or by chat – and get their answers, by email, SMS or chat. Now about 40 libraries in Norway are cooperating in delivering the service, mostly public libraries but also a few special libraries.

Deichman started the email reference service already in 1998.

In doing the reference service we identify and evaluate many digital information sources, and this gives input to our general subject based net portal Detector, with catalogued and quality-checked links. The target group for this portal is initially the educational system, middle and higher level, but very useful for most people. There is a chance that this portal will be given status as a national portal and hopefully get some extra funding.

Detector is not for children in particular – for the lower grade pupils the library has other websites – both for learning activities and for book promoting.

But let us have an extra stop with the library as a learning centre. The “boat” – an interior construction in the very monumental traditional library building, is part of the development of the library as a learning centre. In the boat we have designed space for group studies, and the collection is in many ways designed in accordance to the curricula in the school system.

We can walk up to the top level of the library – a beautiful plateau with the view over the library hall and to the fresco paintings. Here we have the “use your own laptop” facilities, and of course the library offers wireless access to Internet.

By this walking tour in the main library – you have been introduced to the main results of our digital developing work.

Some of the branch libraries too are equipped with tools that enables them to act as partners in the digital projects I just told about, like the cinematheque, the digital studio. Some branch libraries have lighter equipment – like hand held videocameras – and are engaged in “digital storytelling activities” Where either young people can publish their digital diaries on our website, or a group of seniors can work with a similar group in Tokyo – or Barcelona – if that is interesting – communicating with their digital stories. Local history from various parts of the city of Oslo is an important issue for many library users, and several branch libraries are working together with organisations for local history – with digitised archives for local historic pictures – and in some libraries they go even further with more comprehensive multimedia presentations of the local history.

I will return to some aspects of digital services, but first say some words about other elements in our work with developing our methods.

We can describe our 50 -60 projects in various terms.

- public information/local service offices
- democracy and participation in democracy, local identity
- meeting place, integration
- learning arena/cooperation with schools
- reading promoting, working with literacy

- specific target groups like seniors, impaired
- digital library
- new building
- rationalisation and efficiency projects – administrative projects.

There are possibilities and needs for improving in all these fields, and as I mentioned earlier, innovation must be a competence in itself in a library. That is why every branch and department in our library shall have some project working, some innovation work during a year.

I can shortly describe activities with examples from two or three branch libraries:

The accessible library – planning and implementing special design for impaired people, including manual for library buildings, special designed PC – and working conditions for visually and other physically dysfunctions, special books for reading difficulties and so on. Hiring as employees visually and or physically impaired people to get the best results within these objectives.

“University” for elderly people, lectures, discussions, study groups and of course senior –surf. Using new tools some of these “universities” have produced exhibitions, books, screenplays and cooperation with schools in intermediating local history for the young people. The ultimate project – now ended – is the “reminiscence” project, using ordinary storytelling, as tool for preventing demens.

Another beautiful story is how a group of young boys/men, heavily users of the computer facilities, at first disliked the seniors competing with them to access the library’s not too many computers. But this ended up as with the youngsters “adopting” the seniors, teaching them more advanced computer-use than the library staff could ever have time to do.

Integration project – a group of teenage immigrant girls – using literature as tool to handle their own development and a better understanding of society, writing, discussing, even overnight staying under open sky in the Norwegian woods.

The “Book and baby” events – well known authors present their books for parents with their babies – mostly mothers, breast-feeding and babies crying is no offence during the presentation and discussion.

In the second floor there might be cartoon-artists giving education to young people in how to make cartoons and express themselves with both language and pictures.

While the children’s librarian might spend the day in the neighbour school, working with the project “Children are bathing in books” – where the ordinary curriculum books are thrown away, and the teaching methods depends on literature – fiction books, many books – for almost any subjects – in close cooperation with the library.

These are only a few examples – but as important as many digital services.

Back to digital services

The digital services give a great variety, are easy to use, give 24 hour service, and represent indeed improvement in many ways. But not easy to find. When you see a picture of our home page, with all the entries to our services: the online catalogue, Detektor, Reaktor, Bazar, the city blog, the reading cave... How intuitive is this??

How to “google” our services?

Our last project is “The digital archive”. We have not started working with the project yet, but have got funding from the Norwegian research foundation office. One of the aims is to access more multimedia material – one example is digital art. But as important as expanding the world of resources for the benefit of our users, is the need to work out a better interface. We plan to explore more associative searching tools, to dive into semantic web, and in this project establish contact with advanced technological environments in the country.

Hopefully this will give results. If we don’t succeed – we will learn something that probably can be used for other improvements. And of course – we will have fun. Working with improvement is great fun.

LS