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The necessity of working with partnerships

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Abstract:

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, 12000 m2, neoclassical architecture and only 2000 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.

The necessity of working with partnerships

Deichmanske bibliotek – Oslo public library – is currently running about 50 – 60 projects in parallel. Some of them are rather small without any formal project organisation. Approximately 10 projects have substantial external fundings 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 raise fundings. 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 of 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 constrains

Etc.

Who are our partners?

First – and last – the schools, the teachers. Both on central level and local/district level. The educational system is the biggest organized user –group, and the biggest organized formal partner in various projects. Those projects are mostly dealing with reading promoting and various methods of learning. There are some technological projects too. Examples are the “school workshop” – a website with useful resources for learning activities, and the “reading cave” an interactive website with animated trailers of children’s books , including plays .

In some of these projects we include the children as partners in the developing process.

Local, district authorities. “Bydel”. Together with district authorities we are doing various projects in the fields of local information, multicultural integration, programmes about local culture, local identity and local democracy.

Organisations

- for local history
- anti-racism
- anti-drugs
- freedom of expression
- for elderly people
- etc. .

Examples of activities and projects in partnership with organisations are Digital archives of local history and historic pictures. “ARI” – an information center against racism. “College for elderly people”, senior-surf. Oslo as “City of asylum”.

National bodies like the department for social affairs. Example “The accessible library” – library services for disadvantaged persons. The project covers both physical conditions in the libraries, equipment/tools and special adapted materials.

Special institutions like the National institute for film. Here we are working together at the project “Kinotek” – the library as a place for showing digitized movies. In this project the copyright issues is of great concern, and dealt with by the National institute for film. The library is experimenting with promoting film and combining films with other library materials vs. varied user groups.

Institutions for science and research.

Our biggest developing projects are partly financed by the Research council of Norway, through their programme named Høykom, aimed to support broadband based services in public sector. Through this programme we have succeeded in establishing our “Deichman digital workshop”, (DDV). DDV is a physical arena, with tools for multimedia production and presentation, an arena for events with possibilities for simultaneous web casting and storing the products that is created in this arena. Thus we have an excellent possibility for further experimenting with future services and defining new roles for the library staff.

Organisations for intellectual property. This is important partners in projects like “Låtlån” – downloading music by using the library card as user identification.. “The reading cave” – presenting parts and trailers from children’s books on the web, “Kinoteket”, and projects with digital archives like “Reaktor”.

Theatres. Together with one theatre we have regular presentations of some of the coming performances, like presenting the author, the stage manager or other aspect with the performance. For events like that we use our digital workshop that enables us to web cast the event, and to store the event for later use in our digital archive.

Other libraries.

Of course other libraries are useful partners. Both on national level and international.

The National digital reference services, via e-mail, chat and SMS are organised as a cooperation with numerous libraries around the country as partners, and with Deichmanske bibliotek as central organizer.

Individuals

- “Volunteers”

- Artists

-“Technologists”

Etc.

We have experienced several situations where individuals have taken interest in the library development, introducing ideas for services and innovation to the library. If ideas convert into projects, those individuals might join the developing work as either paid or non-paid participants.

These are all examples of partners working together with the library in developing activities . Some partners do participate merely by giving in some resources and taking part in formal meetings.

Other partners can be actively participating in performing the task and/or be member of working groups.

Most partners are identified in the library itself, and many partners are identified on local district/branch-library level. The reason for forming partnership is often ideas about developing services for specific target groups, and for joining forces in a local area....

Bottom up or top down?

There is , however, currently running a top down process concerned with partnership. Both on the national and the municipal level. On national level we have the ABM organisation, where Archives, Bibliotek(Libraries) and Museums are organized in one office.

This is followed in many counties and municipals.

Even here in Oslo this year. From 2005 the library is a part of the administration of culture and sports, including the art-museums and the city archive.

The current projects in the Oslo public library have few partners from the museums and archives.

We may call this a challenge:

The political and administrative efforts in organising the libraries together with the museums and archives must be based on ideas about natural coherence and possible synergies in cooperation between those institutions.

National funding for developing projects in libraries might be more favourable to those who include archives and museums as partners.

Will this direct the development efforts towards libraries as keepers of tradition rather than learning centers and active democratic arenas in the communities?

Our policy

1. The role of a library is to first and foremost awaken curiosity, promote knowledge, culture and learning. Today's culture and knowledge are multifaceted and growingly complex. In order to serve its role, diversity in partnerships, professions, sources and presentation forms is thus not just an enhancement - it is a must in today's cultural landscape. And partnerships provide us with extended capabilities and diversified perspectives and competencies to serve our role in a diverse and knowledgeable society.

2. Modern technology allows cooperation to be conducted not only across institutional borders but also across physical space. Project work in partnerships is thus much easier to achieve with shared electronic resources, shared up-to-date information and synchronized project planning. Institutional culture however does not change as quickly as our technology, and cross organizational cooperation is challenging, yet fruitful as it provokes change and enhances possibilities. This applies also to commercial partnerships, where we still have a long way to go, but where we are gradually crossing borders and are developing new knowledge on marketing, branding and sponsoring.