



Presenting the Deichmanske Bibliotek, Oslo, Norway

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Date : 08/09/2006

Meeting:	104 Metropolitan Libraries
Simultaneous Interpretation:	-
WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 72ND IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL 20-24 August 2006, Seoul, Korea http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla72/index.htm	

Some figures and facts.

The city of Oslo is the capital of Norway. Approximately 540.000 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 2006 19 mill EUR/24 mill USD.
 System: Main library 13 branches.
 Staff ca 230 staff-equivalents.*

The main library is from 1933, 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, 9, 10... 11??

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.

Innovation in public library services - example Deichmanske bibliotek – Oslo public library.

Why innovate?

Key words for libraries: knowledge, education, culture, information.

This underline the challenges for libraries: - changes in media production, information technology, intellectual property regulations, work 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 change and innovation as an overall strategy, to train the staff/organisation in dealing with change, and to act with creativity in severe situations.

Who is responsible for innovation in libraries?

Our libraries are facing limited fundings – like libraries all over the world.

With “no money” you can give in, sit down and cry and hope for a saviour. A “grand plan from above...”

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's face it. No other “body” will or can renew libraries. No other agency will act in this field – except for making 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 for initiating innovation.

It is a responsibility, being the largest public library in Norway, to be an agent in society, to observe changes in the environment and the framework of the library, to “tune in” and adjust the library to ongoing changes – and to look forward and try to see some scenarios for future development and try these out. Metropolitan libraries in general have usually the advantage of more varied competence in staff, more varied user needs and more assets in form of partners than smaller libraries.

Development work in Oslo public library – what kind of innovation

Innovation is the theme. This covers both brand new services and improvement and development of methods.

What's new?

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 fulfill 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 provision of printed books and working conditions for studying the books?

Nowadays library conferences have much concern about the impact of new technology.

But the development of libraries must include several dimensions. Literacy, integration, learning environments, varied target groups such as elderly people, or the impaired. The

library as a place for creativity and culture, and the work with cultural heritage are also as important issues. The library as a place...for the community.

This is why Deichmanske bibliotek is currently running about 50 – 60 parallel projects. 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 of systematic work on 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 fundraising. 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?this is another paper but in brief:

By using the method of team/project organisation, even for running daily 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.

Together with our partners we get a better understanding in how the libraries are perceived by “society”, and librarians acquire 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.

Innovation is the library’s responsibility – but with no chance of success if carried out by the library alone. Partners and allies is a MUST. A monoculture in an institution is dangerous.

Examples of development work

The big issue in Oslo is breaking down the old typology of library buildings and creating a new one according to the changes in library services and methods. But let me instead take you

for a walk around the existing main library, the archetype of a library, where the innovation work has to be done...

Back to the old typology, showing pictures (slide-show) 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 internet terminals that can be used only 15 minutes, or wait for your longtime use of multimedia machines in the pilot area. You may also 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, or other forms of multimedia productions. As an administrative side-effect we can administer and support computers by distance from this studio.

The studio can be rearranged as an eventroom for an audience of about 70 people, 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 on our website for publishing multimedia documents, called Reaktor.

I had hoped to be able to tell you about this media-lab as location for the general public in producing multimediapresentations for "open channel" television. But this is still only on the initial discussion phase. Anyway – user-generated multimedia content is the main focus.

Depending on which intellectual property right we can obtain from the artists and other creators – 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 runs the project "låtlån" – that means digital music lending – by giving authorized users of the library access by streaming to digitized (Norwegian) music, using their library card as the key.

An interesting difference: The digitized movies and film material can be accessed only within the library's premises. The digitized 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 has run the project of the "reading cave" project – an interactive web-based presentation of childrens books with animation and games. This project did include children in the project-team – giving important input about what works 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 with information search on the same physical level.

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 organising the national digital reference service, where everyone, from all over the world, can ask their questions by email, SMS or by chat – and get answers, by email, SMS or chat. Now about 40 libraries in Norway are cooperating to deliver the service, mostly public libraries but also a few special libraries.

Deichman started the email reference service already in 1997.

By 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 controlled links. The target group for this portal is initially the educational system, middle and higher level, but very useful for most people.

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 center. The “boat” – an interior construction in the very monumental traditional library building,

is part of the development of the library as a learning center. In the boat we have designed space for group studies,

and the collection is in many ways designed in accordance with the curriculum 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 the internet.

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

I will use some minutes to the biggest and most comprehensive project – exploring and developing a new typology for the library building.

Showing a serie 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 the focus will be on conditions for good learning environments, good environments for human relations and interaction, and good environments for "pushing" (promoting) 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 organize 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.

And where are we now in this project?? The master plan was decided upon the 21th of June this year(2006), and that should be the final go for the detailed planning process.

And then back to the current development work.

Some of the branch libraries too are equipped with tools that enable them to act as partners in the digital projects i just described, 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 Seoul - if that might interest – 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 local historical societies – with digitized archives for local historic pictures – and in some libraries they go even further with more comprehensive multimedia presentations of the local history.

The Grünerløkka branch is bit special, though.
In May this year we launched "Cinema-in-the-Park".

It's a portable open-air cinema, complete with a 50 m²/540 sq. feet inflatable projection-screen, and state-of-the-art projection and sound.

It came about in collaboration with the local municipality, who wanted the branch to be the "home-base" for a local community offering.
Even though it is an extension of our existing digital film-service, it can show digital material from other sources as well.

It was a huge success at launch, the park being packed with people long into the night.

But, as you may know, Norway is the home of the Midnight Sun, so now we're waiting for the evenings to once more get dark enough for outside-projections :-)

In the events of special jubilees, and years of celebration for authors of importance, dramatists or other culturally significant artists, the library oftentimes creates specialized exhibitions.
Promoting moments in our cultural heritage - giving it different kinds of specialized wrapping - will at the same time have an important marketing effect of the library.

The current year was the official year of Ibsen, in the centennial marking of the death of the playwright. In this event we created two exhibitons which are representative examples of our way of creating "specialized wrapping".

The webpage "exploreIbsen.com" is a web-based audiovisual journey through the works of Ibsen, placed in a virtual environment of central Oslo. The site holds a rich documentation of historical theatrical productions, and radio-plays, as well as custom-made video-extracts from the world of Ibsen characters - given a contemporary setting in the city-scape of Oslo.
It is highly ambient, being closer to the imagery of computer-games, and it is based on visual navigation and has no flat text or menus - I highly recommend a visit....

To boot we have also made a physical exhibition in the honour of our National playwright - A transportable media-rich exhibition. Our former book-mobile is transformed to a semi trailer packed with audiovisual material, books, web-terminals, photographs and video-installation. The exhibition is being transferred between summer festivals, and placed in conjunction with events and institutions both within and outside the city.

In these examples from the Ibsen celebration the library is crossing the border to other cultural institutions, for instance performing art and editorial work, and creative work with multimedia. But still the process is based on the libraries premises, equipment, content and competence. Isn't it then a library function?

Is our development work consistent?

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.
- And....curiosity, exploring what's going on...

There are possibilities and needs for improvement 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 work, some innovation work during a year.

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

The accessible library – planning and implementing special design for impaired people, including the design of a manual for library buildings, specially designed PCs - and working conditions for visual and other physical dysfunctions, special books for reading difficulties and so on. Hiring visually and/or physically impaired people as staff to get the best results within these objectives is part of the project.

“University” for elderly people, lectures, discussions, study groups and of course senior –surf. By 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 – ended some years ago – is the “reminiscence” project, using ordinary storytelling, as a tool for preventing dementia. This project gave birth to an institute for reminiscence work.

Another beautiful story is how a group of young boys/men, heavy 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 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 the 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 baby crying is no offence during the presentation and discussion.

On the second floor in the same branch library there might be cartoon-artists giving education to young people in how to make cartoons and express themselves with both language and pictures. Finally the cartoons will be published on the web.

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

In one library you might have the opportunity to "borrow your local politician" for an hour as part of the local democracy project, while in another branch you can be introduced to the "library of living books": borrow an immigrant, a blind person, a person with HIV.... There are many stories to be told, not always wrapped in a book.

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

This year we will summarize our efforts in development – in a big discussion about the future needs for competence and new professions in the library. How will new methods and services effect the organization in terms of recruitment , Shall the percentage of librarians increase – or decrease - do we need teachers, designers, storytellers, actors, philosophers, artist and technologists?

Strong signals from the organisation confirms that the library need a much more varied competence than we get from the traditional library school only. As earlier mentioned – monocultures are dangerous for institutions.

I will end this presentation by going back to digital services.

The digital services give great variety, are easy to use, give 24 hour service, and indeed represent improvement in many ways. But they are 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 Media Archive**

This project is still in its infancy, so I will only outline our plans here, and where we stand today.

The goal of this project is to establish a framework for handling and distributing digital media in the library, We don't want to limit ourselves to any particular media-base, file-format or supplier, but want to be able to grow as media becomes available.

One of this project's biggest challenges is, of course, rights-management and licensing. Even though libraries have a special status when it comes to licensing, it will be a major challenge to handle different demands from different rights-holders in one, single package.

For this reason, we want to keep the service web-based. For all its limitations, the web is where most interesting development takes place at the moment, and where most work has gone into making different standards and services work together.

But - in the current "rights-climate" for this kind of content, web-based cannot mean actually on the Internet - at least not completely.

The license-costs would be enormous, and many rights-holders would deny such use anyway.

Because of this, we want to build our framework on web-standards, but limit distribution to within "the 4 walls" of the library.

We have But as important as expanding the world of resources for the benefit of our users is the need to work out a better interface.

New knowledge is growing - outside the libraries. There is developing competence about usability:

“The effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction with which specified users achieve specified goals in particular environments.”

Or – knowledge of how people are using an interface - what works and what doesn't work – and methods of making it work.

This must be crucial for further development in libraries. One natural approach is to improve the accessibility of our web with synthetic speech. We started this process, but we have a short stop trying to persuade the city as a whole to use this tools.

We also discuss to explore more associative searching tools, to dive into semantic web, visual thesauri ...and in this project establish contact with advanced technological environments in the country. Here we are taking part in web-communities, just to explore the web-society and keep in touch with development. We have not created a library web-community yet, but are considering.

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 innovation is great fun.

Liv Sæteren.