Innovation through partnerships – Identifying a win-win-situation

Introduction
Over the past year the Library Center for Integration has headed a national library project, Project Newcomers, aiming to equip local libraries to attract and meet the demands of a new user group – newcomers, or expats, as they are often referred to.

Newcomers are - in a Danish library context - a relatively new user group which poses a number of challenges -

- Who are they and how do we find out more about them?
- As many of them are non-users of library services, newcomers must be met where they are. But where is that?
- And is it not an impossible task to expect local libraries to find the resources to go out and find them?

In order to meet these challenges of resources and knowledge, building partnerships with external parties is a central project element and serves both as method and aim in itself. Methodologically we make use of partnerships to learn more about and reach new user groups by proxy. As an end, our project partnerships are essential for securing an awareness of library services outside the library sector when the project period ends.

Who are we and what is the project background?
The main focus of this paper is the benefit of networks - how have we established and made use of partnerships throughout the project? Before we get to that, let us first have a brief look at the project framework and who we, The Library Center for Integration, are.

State and University Library
Project Newcomers is anchored in the State and University Library, which is amongst others a national superstructure to the Danish public libraries and participates in both national and international development projects involving cultural communication, digitization, IT infrastructure, etc. Over the past year, our
multilingual website for ethnic minorities (www.finfo.dk) attracted close to 180,000 users and each year we distribute more than 110,000 materials in mainly Arabic, Bosnian, Turkish, Persian and Urdu to the Danish libraries. This year we launched the first library website in the world for ethnic minorities – www.Bibzoom.dk/World. Our national newcomer project is run by the sub department The Library Center for Integration in cooperation with Greve Library. The project is funded by the Danish Agency for Library and Media and planned to run until the end of December 2011.

**Why newcomers?**

In order to secure future wealth, welfare, and retention of competitive strength in Denmark, there have been still stronger political signals that an effort must be made not only to attract but also to retain a large number of skilled foreign workers – so-called newcomers (Claes Nilas, Ministry of Integration, March 2011). The latest research shows that up to half of all newcomers bring spouses and/or children (Oxford Research, 2010) and that these are the ones most likely to either leave before time or stay for an extended period. One of the most frequently used reasons for leaving before time is lack of social and cultural offers to stimulate and entertain families. And the opposite of course for those who stay longer – the children are learning the language, the family feel part of their local community and have a well functioning social life. In other words, retention of newcomers is highly dependent on the wellbeing of accompanying family.

The need for meeting family and spouse demands is a welcoming opportunity for the libraries to re-position themselves as central cultural institutions and bridges to the local communities. We all know the reality of the continuous challenges to work innovatively to attract new audiences and thus develop tools and services to meet new types of needs. Given their wide selection of cultural and linguistic competencies, Project Newcomers aims to contribute to a general awareness of the Danish local libraries and their potential to play a key role in future retention strategies towards newcomers.

**Aims**

In short, Project Newcomers aims to involve the libraries in contributing to the retention of newcomers and raise awareness of their services to the relevant recipients. Hence the project works in three areas with three aims respectively -

- Equipping local libraries to service newcomers as a new user group
- Marketing the array of library services relevant to newcomers where newcomers are
- Raising awareness of library services among external\(^1\) parties

**How, where, what? – Partner networking**

Following the aims listed above, several key questions arise - How do we 'equip' libraries to service this new user group? How do we know what exactly newcomers’ needs are? Where do we find newcomers ‘where they are’? – and make them come to the library?

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\(^1\) By external we refer to organizations and institutions outside the library sector
**Two types of partnerships**

In meeting these challenges Project Newcomers has chosen to attach weight to building partnerships with external parties. Roughly we are dealing with two types of parties –  

1\textsuperscript{st}, Those that can provide content to new services or take part in arranging events at the library. These are parties such as local tourist agencies, municipal representatives, local sports or cultural associations, womens’ clubs etc..  

and  

2\textsuperscript{nd}, Those parties that in various ways represent or service newcomers and which through this can provide input on what newcomers want and second help market events and products where newcomers are. These are Human Ressource departments at major or local businesses/companies, language schools, national organizations and initiatives for expats etc.

**Levels of partnerships**

More concretely we work with partnerships at two levels – national and local.

Our project group works to build partnerships with organizations and initiatives for expats mainly on a national level. This is aimed at spreading and placing information about library services at the major ‘entry points’ of newcomers. Quite often we are met with the attitude that they would never have thought to contact or work with libraries. Recognizing the relevance of the library sector to support cultural and social demands, we have made them include introductory texts to the Danish libraries in various welcoming materials.

Locally we have worked to build up a network of interested libraries around the country. These are supported by three so-called anchor libraries situated in three of the most newcomer dense regions of Denmark. The anchor libraries can be seen as an extension of the project group to ensure sensitivity to regional variations and local contacts. The local libraries in the newcomer network are encouraged to identify and contact local parties to support their activities and help advertise them in ‘newcomer circles’. This could for instance be the local language school, a recruitment representative in a local branch of a company with international employees, a municipal business consultant etc. Even at municipal level, we have been surprised by the lack of knowledge of library services which demands investment in outreach activities. Where this has been done however, the response has been very positive.

At both levels, national and regional, networking and partner contact contributes to our aim of raising awareness outside the library sector. Spreading the message that libraries exist and that they are free to use is an important first step. First of all, as mentioned, the organizations can refer their ‘customers’, employees etc to the libraries. Second, and not the least important, at regional level, partnerships help identify which newcomers we are talking about. For instance, working with the municipality of Horsens provided us with the information that in Horsens the meat factory Danish Crown employs several Polish newcomers and in the
city of Vejle, Siemens employs an array of different nationalities of newcomers with higher education. In this way, we make use of the local partners as local experts.

How do we build partnerships?

Joining the party by selling a service that is free

Starting up partnerships naturally relies on an overview of which initiatives already exist. And the question of can we invite ourselves to join the party? As briefly mentioned, to many organizations working with newcomers, libraries were not obvious partners. We believe they are steadily becoming so now. Through the simple methods of “Google & Phone” and networking at conferences the project group made an effort to put the libraries on the map.

As mentioned libraries have a lot of free and relevant services to offer newcomers. All they need are users. We have identified 25 of these services in a flyer called “25 things you (probably) didn’t know about libraries” highlighting the social, lingual and cultural services such as children’s summer programs, reading groups, film nights, multilingual children’s books, language course packages and online access to newspapers in 40 different languages. In other words, the services that are relevant for newcomers but which are often over looked. Especially Library Press Display, which most libraries subscribe to already, has proven to be of great interest to the national initiative Work in Denmark as well as Expat in Denmark, an organization under the Danish Chamber of Commerce.

Examples of where local and regional cooperation came together – Expat Dinners

Expat Dinners at the library was one of our most successful initiatives. The event sprung out of a concept laid out by Expat in Denmark – having Danes invite expats home for an informal meal. The problem was to get Danes involved as Expat in Denmark’s main stakeholders were expats. Quite naturally we came up with the idea to include the local libraries in the event as the ones to provide a neutral space to meet and invite ‘their’ local Danes to join. Hence Project Newcomers, Expat in Denmark and the Association New Danes decided on a common date and joined forces in engaging host libraries, producing PR materials for the libraries to use and handling registrations and press contacts on a national level. The product was a national pot luck dinner involving 17 libraries and close to 500 Danes and Expats each bringing a national dish for an international buffet. As it was up to the host libraries to plan information and entertainment we ended up with 17 very different Expat Dinners at the libraries. Some had arranged Danish music, some invited international consultants from the municipality, others demonstrated their children’s services and others again presented an English book club concept.

As announced in the title of this presentation – good partnerships depend on the ability to define a win–win – situation. As for the concept of Expat Dinners, Expat in Denmark managed to finally get Danes to meet with Expats and the libraries were given a great opportunity to meet a new audience which they would otherwise not have the time to ‘find’ and marketing towards.
In most of our other initiatives on a national level we are benefitting from being in the grateful situation of selling a service that is free. We are currently working on a general folder about the services of Danish libraries in English. Several parties such as International Citizen Service and Work in Denmark have shown a great interest in distributing this to their ‘customers’/clients.

Our ambition for the future is that the Danish library sector will be a natural partner in the coming retention strategies – both at national and local level. Throughout Project Newcomers we have sought to re-brand libraries by promoting them as having a commercial relevance to parties outside the library sector. The re-branding does not however, lay a whole new set of tasks on the libraries, as the branding takes its very point of departure in the libraries’ unique status as key cultural, neutral and intellectual institutions.

**Conclusion**

Summing up, although the focus of your library is not necessarily on newcomers, I hope this presentation has served as an inspiration on how to reach new audiences by thinking creatively about partnerships outside the library sector. As several organizations to start out with were strikingly unaware of the benefits and services of the library sector there is already a significant pay off in raising awareness.

In order to secure that the participating libraries will continue to try out activities for newcomers it is important with as much knowledge sharing as possible while the project is still running. Throughout the project we are building up a website with information, inspiration and PR-texts ready for copy/paste – [www.newcomers.dk](http://www.newcomers.dk).

As most libraries are taking a new chance in adjusting their services to newcomers, Project Newcomers also invites the newcomer library network to common meetings three to four times a year to share experiences and receive input and inspiration from each other. When possible, we have invited external parties to join and the libraries are continuously encouraged to seek out external parties to help organize events or market library events to their newcomer ‘stake holders’.

If we have time, I would like to open op for a discussion of which kind of services within the library sector could be useful in the ‘trade’ for new or alternative partnerships.