

Newcomers – new challenges and new audiences

Presentation at IFLA Satellite Meeting, Copenhagen

17. August 2010

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Abstract –

In order to secure future wealth, welfare, and retention of competitive strength in Denmark, an effort must be made not only to attract but also to retain a large number of skilled foreign workers – so-called newcomers. At the same time, Danish libraries, as many other libraries represented by IFLA, are forced to work innovatively to attract new users and thus develop tools and services to meet new types of needs. With their wide selection of cultural and linguistic competencies, the Danish library sector has ample opportunity to seize the chance to play a key role in future retention strategies towards newcomers.

On this background, the Danish State and University Library - with the financial support of the Danish Agency for Libraries and Media - is spearheading a national project designed to ensure better library services for newcomers. The State and University Library is a national superstructure to the Danish public libraries and participates in both national and international development projects involving cultural communication, digitisation, IT infrastructure, etc. Our national newcomer project is run by the sub department The Library Center for Integration in cooperation with Greve Library and the Danish National Research Centre for Social Research. Furthermore, the project is implemented in cooperation with three regional anchor libraries and a number of local libraries.

A central project method is to inspire and encourage cooperation between local libraries and relevant network partners outside the library sector. The overall aim of the project is to raise the profile of libraries, and position them as central cultural institutions, both for newcomers and for receiving parties (municipal agents or businesses).

1. Introduction – what's the situation?

Imagine you are moving abroad to live and work with your family. It is not necessarily only a move to develop your career but as much to challenge yourself in a new cultural and social setting. Upon settling, you receive a pamphlet introducing you to, among other things, what Democracy is....

Instead, what you really wanted to know was how you can get engaged in your local community and what goes on around there. How your children can learn a new language or get involved with sports and hobbies.

What your or your spouse's colleagues do in their spare time and why people in the super market think you are stupid for not putting down the little plastic bar that divides your groceries from those of the other customers... In other words, when most practicalities are sorted - where do you go to find the information that everyone takes for granted to be socially and intellectually active?

This is a situation presented by one of the many newcomers to Denmark. Working with IBM. Her experience identifies the frustrations arising from being met and introduced to Danish society through the optic of being a weak refugee or cultural outsider.

For years Danish policies have been aimed at integrating the weakest group of refugees targeting the needs at the lowest common denominator. What we are slowly starting to see now, however, is a differentiation in the integration strategy towards foreigners in Denmark – be it newcomers, immigrants or refugees. In recognition of the need not only to attract but also to keep foreign workers as a resource, several introductory initiatives have sprung up around the country in both the private and public sector. Strikingly, however, one of the sectors that would be most obvious in such an integration and guiding process is lacking behind. This is the library sector.

Several initiatives have been taken to involve counsels and municipalities, but only a handful of projects have been initiated and implemented by libraries. Immigrants in Denmark have different needs and demands. They have different lingual and educational backgrounds. And they have very different reasons for being here. For years libraries have been working innovatively with integration projects for refugees and immigrants. However, it is time that this group is being differentiated and newcomers are given special attention. This leaves ample opportunity for the libraries attract new audiences. This is the realisation upon which the State and University Library builds its national newcomer project.

→ This presentation will focus on some of the new challenges posed by newcomers, and will elaborate on and discuss the project against the backdrop of its network-based approach: connecting the Danish library sector with external agents such as Danish businesses and expat associations.

2. Project background: Why newcomers and who are they?

In order know more about the target group we are, as mentioned, partnering with the *Danish National Research Centre for Social Research*. In September, they will provide us with a comprised report on the most up to date research on newcomers in Denmark. Furthermore they will produce a short list of personas, 5 archetypes of your 'average' newcomer, outlining their personal motivation for being here, their marital status and spare time habits. This concretization of our target group will help us understand the newcomers we want to attract to the libraries.

Denmark, like many other countries, needs specialists and migrant workers to strengthen our labour force. Investment in foreign labour has been and will again become a high priority – politically and in Danish

business life. This has been expressed by politicians as well as research institutes, Danish industries and businesses. In order to achieve this, however, Denmark must not only focus on attracting but also on retaining migrant workers – and their families. Much political attention has been given to attraction and recruiting. But what happens when newcomers come? In order to provide the right services, we need to uncover what makes them stay – and what makes them leave?

What we already know, is that one of the most significant differences between newcomers and ‘regular’ immigrant groups is that *newcomers are very mobile*. If they are not happy, they have the means to leave. And quite strikingly the most common reason given for leaving the country before time is not dissatisfaction with their jobs. Instead, family concerns is the top reason for premature returns or relocation to another country. This constitutes a second significant recognition: If libraries are to service newcomers for the purpose of retention, *we need to develop new services on the basis of a holistic view of the newcomer group*. More concretely this means including products and services for children and accompanying spouses such as reading groups, career coaching or cultural events. Quite often in fact, the spouse with the job will receive an introduction program through his or her new business resulting in a very differentiated welcoming and retention approach to the family as a whole.

It is important to stress here, that I am not saying we should do more for newcomers in the sense that they are more important than other migrant groups. What I am trying to point out is that much is being done for migrants in general - and perhaps too often by meeting the lowest common denominator. Instead a more differentiated approach to this group is needed – acknowledging the subgroups within the group. This may also add to a heightened awareness of immigrants as a *resource*, that there are many people who want to be *engaged* and live life actively just like in the country they came from.

In short – newcomers are different and we need to recognize that difference. Whether we look at this situation as businessmen or altruists there is no doubt that there is much to gain if the libraries seize the opportunity to see newcomers as a new user group and direct their services to meet their needs. Although people who come to Denmark to work are supposedly groups of independent people with rich economic and social capital – it is important to see that they are equally groups that set other standards for social and intellectual recognition and engagement. With these needs they are evident new audiences at the public libraries.

The State and University Library national newcomer project for Danish public libraries intends to address this situation. The project aims at developing and profiling relevant library services for newcomers as well as encouraging newcomers to make use of their local library as a gateway to their local community and an important guide to knowledge on Denmark in general. The relevance of such a project rests on three principle assumptions –

1. Given the competition among information providers of today, libraries must think innovatively to identify and attract new audiences
2. Several sources say there is a demand among newcomers for knowledge, guidance and networking which they are not getting through traditional integration information
3. Libraries already cover a wide range of services that are relevant to newcomers as new user group. What needs to be done is on the one side to *adjust* these services to a newcomer audience and on the other to make these services *known* to newcomers.
→ *In other words – both libraries and newcomers must be made aware of each other's existence!*

3. Vision and project strategy

Our vision is to:

1. *Profile libraries as natural gateways to access culture, knowledge and guidance for new user groups.* In order to fulfill this vision – the project will seek to raise awareness of how much the Danish public libraries sector can offer to relevant institutions outside the library sector.
2. *To position Danish libraries as central to future retention strategies.* As Denmark will need more newcomers in the workforce in the future, now is the time for the Danish libraries to gain knowledge and experience in order to position themselves as a key agents in the national welcoming outreach and retention strategies.

Our project strategy is to develop and market newcomer library services through the use of innovative partnerships. There are two dimensions to this network/partnership approach

1. *One is to establish a national network of newcomer libraries* in order to share knowledge and develop relevant services. We need to clarify which services are already available for newcomers – and which are needed to fill a gap? In order to answer the latter, we have to be in touch with 'the real world' – therefore the newcomer project is also in the process of
2. *Establishing partnerships between our national network of newcomer libraries and relevant partners outside the library sector.* This will secure
 - a user orientated approach to product innovation
 - access to marketing of relevant newcomer services directly to the target audience
 - profiling of libraries outside the library sector

The project strategy is built on the view that upgrading library services is of no value if it is without input from stakeholders & target group and if no-one knows the services are available. Again - *Newcomers and libraries need to know of each other's existence.* As much as libraries are focusing on newcomer services, libraries need to be marketed as relevant newcomer institutions outside the library sector. In other words, we must make ourselves known to the public institutions working with newcomers and to companies with international employees.

4. How do we work – Library networks and cooperation with external partners

The project combines and builds on existing experience gained at local level from Greve Library and Herning Libraries which together with Århus Municipal Libraries are close to the only libraries in Denmark who have initiated projects for newcomers.

Library networks – compiling best practice and new ideas

The project conducted by Greve Library managed to communicate directly with selected newcomers and draw up an idea catalogue around their responses. In this project, we wish to build on this concept and collect experiences from a variety of libraries around Denmark as well as our network partners and produce an idea catalogue that includes suggestions for network partnerships, newcomer products and library events that can be nationally applicable. The catalogue version 1 will be introduced in September and as the project unfolds and library projects and services are being developed and tested – the catalogue will be revised accordingly. A final version will be introduced at a national conference in December 2011. The launch of the catalogue will mark the end of the project and kick-off for future mainstreamed newcomer services.

The library networking has been initiated by selecting three anchor libraries that will be responsible for the implementation of the newcomer project in four regions. Each library covers a region (one covers two) in Denmark and serves as 'regional expert' on network libraries and relevant newcomer partners. Furthermore, our anchor libraries will ensure attention towards demographic variations in the process of national implementation.

Cooperation with external partners – new ideas, more manpower and direct link to target group

From Herning and Århus we are inspired by their network based approach to reach new user groups and partners for cooperation. Like Herning, this project emphasizes the synergy that comes from engaging local libraries in partnerships with newcomer agents outside the library sector such as private companies, municipal job centres, expat networks, NGOs etc. Through such networks and partnerships

1. We gain knowledge of the user group – what are their needs and how can we best adjust our services to meet these needs? Instead of spending time locating newcomers themselves we can get a lot of information from interacting with the organizations representing them in one way or the other.
2. We take some of the innovative burden and workload off the shoulders of the local libraries. By inviting external partners to take part in events and programs for newcomers at the libraries or with involvement of the libraries, they do not have to do it all themselves. In fact some partners in our project have already expressed an interest in tying some of their newcomer events to the local libraries. In some cases, all libraries need to do is provide a room.
3. Through partnerships we create awareness of libraries as an important institution outside the library sector and finally –
4. Through partnerships with actors outside the library sector we have an essential link to marketing our products to the right target audience.

5. What do we produce?

As the project is only in its initial stage, we need to gather much more information in order to know what newcomers want from their libraries. And as important – what libraries want from our project in order to get a better sense of newcomers as new audiences. However, below are a few examples of what we wish to develop further throughout the project -

- Promotion of the library as a place where you can receive free and individual guidance on a range of things such as classical library services, upcoming events but also what goes on in the local community
- Promotion of music, literature and films in newcomer mother tongue, English and Danish (for those who wish to stay for a longer period of time)
- Promotion of Danish language course materials
- Establishment of childrens books reading groups in Danish or English
- Promotion of homework assistance (which some libraries are already offering – an outcome of a former State and University Library project. Currently a new web based homework support project has been launched, which you will hear more about from Anne Vest later today)
- Guidance to knowledge on job training, career planning
- Development of seminars for librarians on the newcomer groups – potentially in cooperation with relevant external partners
- Cultural events including music and lectures – again potentially as a joint cooperation between libraries and external partners
- Production of relevant web services for newcomers with long working hours or who would for other reasons not be able to use the physical library

6. Future perspectives

We hope that the State and University Library project for newcomers will help build the capacity of Danish libraries to understand, attract and meet the needs of a new user group. One may ask why – we have financial crisis going on?

Well, first of all, at times like these, there is actually time to try new ideas out and build relevant experience. We can focus on a smaller target group and prepare ourselves for future changes of conjecture. However, before we take it too easy, here are some interesting facts that our forthcoming report from the National Centre for Social Research will show: Although we are currently in phase of financial crisis, it is only the number of newcomers from the new EU-countries that has gone down significantly from 2008 to 2009. In fact, the influx of most other national groups has remained steady while the number of newcomers from Asian countries is on a constant rise. Hence – there is no time to waste if we want to position the library sector politically as a key agent of servicing and retaining foreign workers in Denmark. It may return to the political agenda before we know it!