

Creating a model-program for the building of future public libraries and their role in culture led redesign of urban spaces

Jens Thorhauge

Thorhauge Consulting, Dragoer, Denmark.

jt@jensthorge.dk



Copyright © 2013 by **Jens Thorhauge**. This work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

Abstract:

The paper will introduce a program with a new concept of the public library that can be used for new buildings, redesign and amendments of public libraries. The programme is being created right now in cooperation between the Danish Agency for Culture and RealDania, a strategic philanthropic association supporting projects in the built environment. The programme aims at identifying roles and functions of the future public library and defining design principles and functional requirements for the buildings and the relations between the building and the city context as a basis for design and redesign of public libraries in a knowledge society context.

Keywords: New public library concept. Model-program.

The basic challenges: The library building and the city

Libraries have been in a period of transition for at least a couple of decades. Particularly after the break through of the internet and web-based services it has become clear that the library as a service, space and building are facing profound challenges. The core of this is that with the growth in digital media, streaming and downloading the worldwide consensus, that the role of the library is to provide access to information and knowledge loses its foundation, as access is more or less everywhere. Still most libraries talk of access and act as if it is still the core business, and likewise most buildings and interior design are collection oriented and see access as the *raison d'être* of public libraries.

Even if there is a clear trend among front running libraries that the *raison d'être* of the public library is no longer to provide access to information, there is no clear consensus on what should replace it. And in spite of the future role of the public library has been probably the most central issue in the professional discussion and the topic of uncountable conferences and seminars, the new concept and role is somewhat blurred. And even if there might occur conferences with a high common understanding of new roles and functions, implementation of the concept is far away in most libraries. Still you can see trends that lifelong learning activities, cultural events, and a more diversified, dialogue based and facilitating service

profile seem to be central in the new concept. The model-program for the future public library is being developed as a help to further a concept suitable for new demands.

The kind of structural changes we face in libraries by the rise of a new digital age is in small scale comparable to the kind of problems cities in all industrialized countries experience: the frames no longer fit the kind of activities that the city houses. The first giant wave of changes deriving from left and empty factories and industrial buildings in cities has been more or less accomplished. The building mass of the industrial society has already to a large degree transformed into institutions that further the development of the information- and knowledge society. You will still find cities haunted with lost ruins and industrial, now dead harbors but in general a transformation into new city spaces have taken place, with Bilbao and Frank Gehry's Guggenheim museum as the admired icon of that wave of transforming the cities of the industrial age.

There is however a second wave, inspired for instance of the ideas of the creative class¹ and the competition among cities to become attractive to this growing class, to appear creative, innovative and attractive to stay, work and live in. The challenge in this second wave is to create cities that are much more responsive to human needs than the industrial age city. In this process frames for development of human meetings, learning, inspiration, and entertainment become crucial, and cultural institutions potentially have a new role to play. Among them is the public library. Hence the question is how can the library as part of a strategically development of cities contribute to the image, attractiveness and identity of cities and neighborhoods?² At the same time fragmentation and mixofobia³ are growing as new social trends in the postmodern city spaces, calling for ways to build bridges over gaps not only of digital but also social character. To recreate cohesion in society new arenas are needed, where you meet, see and understand people different from yourself.

What is a model-program?

Facing challenges and possibilities like this you will look for solutions typically by spotting the successful examples and maybe the failures. You would identify cutting edge development libraries, relevant researchers and other sources for information to learn how to create the library of the knowledge society in the best way. And how to let this library play a central role in the redesign of the urban space it is a vital part of.

The model-program for the future public library, that I am introducing here, is a way of systemizing efforts of that kind. The model-program is meant to collect relevant knowledge, give inspiration and suggest solutions. You may say that the model-program represent the kind of research that ought to be carried out before starting a new building process, but as you can tell from many buildings often are not!

¹ Richard Ford: *The Creative Class* (2002) created a rush in the inspiration as how to develop frames to attract the so called creative class in cities

² This question is posed in recent Danish research. See Casper Hvenegaard, Henrik Jochumsen, Dorte Skot-Hansen (2010) *Biblioteket i byudviklingen*. København: Danmarks Biblioteksforening. (p 16)

³ Zygmunt Bauman uses the terms 'fragmentation' and 'mixofobia' to describe trends in the postmodern space in several publications, one example being 'Modernity and Ambivalence' (1991)

The concept of model-program is in Denmark developed in the frames of Realdania, a strategic philanthropic association supporting projects in the built environment within three focus areas: cities, buildings and built heritage. RealDania is a strong funder of projects and the organization already has good experience with model-programs developed in other fields such as schools, hospices, housing for elderly people. The idea of a model-program is that it should create a new basis and understanding of needs for building and redesigning buildings, in this case: public libraries. A model-program is sensible in fields where many buildings are working and where changes in conditions and user patterns challenge well established ideas and old school concepts. The model-program thus should become a source of inspiration for architects, politicians, building owners, professionals in the institutions. For building new buildings, redesigning buildings, extensions.

The model-program for public libraries.

In the case of public libraries the idea of creating a model-program originated from a dialogue between the author of this paper and the director of RealDania association on two very clear new trends in Danish public libraries. One is that new libraries and library redesign tend to create buildings and spaces that differ substantially from the traditional library, particularly in an interior design leaving much more space for people and less for books. The other trend – which so far apparently is a specific Danish trend-, is an extremely rapid growth in the number of a new open self-served library concept, where the library is open from early morning till late in night, without staff in the majority of the opening hours. Within a few years some 175 of Denmark's approximately 500 public libraries are open, self-served libraries, where citizens get access by the bare code of their public health security card and a pincode. This concept leaves libraries with a challenge to develop a self-explaining interior design. Those two trends let us to consider whether new experience and knowledge on how the concepts would become successful could be shared widely. Hence the idea of a model-program.

The work started in the autumn 2011 co-funded by RealDania and the Danish Agency for Libraries and Media⁴. The project is still in progress, planned to be completed over the summer 2013. The project is led by a steering committee and run by the company Signal Architects with support by two ad hoc attached library consults.⁵ The project was planned in three phases, the first being a desk research phase, the second field studies with visits at cutting edge libraries, the third describing design principles.

Desk research.

The research and development publications in the field are considerable in number. The aim of the desk research was to identify inspiring analyses of new trends and experience with new kind of services, organization, management and new patterns in user behavior and user needs. So in the selection of interesting works we mainly went for future-oriented studies, strategic

⁴ The agency was merged on January 1, 2012 with two other agencies to Danish Agency for Culture

⁵ Dorte Skot-Hansen from the Royal School of Library and Information science and the author of this paper, Jens Thorhauge, former CEO at the Danish Agency for Libraries and Media.

publications and also strategies of cutting edge libraries. In the field of city development the literature is even greater. We scanned many titles to find those dealing also with libraries.

In the first place we build on the newest Danish government publications on library development, and recent Danish library research finding recommendations for the future library services and then comparing with international research to confirm or invalidate our assumptions.

In almost all the literature the digital challenge is a central topic. And a first conclusion for the desk research was that it is essential to develop digital services further, and let the digital services be clearly reflected in the physical library, creating intelligent library spaces. But obviously our basic challenge was related to buildings and physical space in a broader meaning.

The Danish government publications were mainly two, *Folkebibliotekerne i vidensamfundet* (Public libraries in the knowledge society, 2010)⁶ and *Fremtidens biblioteksbetjening af børn* (Future library services to children, 2008). The first one builds on research by sociologist like Castells, Bauman, and Giddens identifying the changed conditions for life in society in the postmodern era. It identifies needs for new kinds of enlightenment and finds the public library a relevant actor in that field. It also reveals what seems to be the major trend internationally in transformation of libraries, that the general development from industrial product orientation to user or customer orientation is also essential in libraries, and that the challenge to define user needs and create services to meet them replaces the role of collection building and maintenance. The three types of recommendations in the government report are: create Denmark's Digital Library as a cross municipal and national service. Secondly: create open libraries, which mean libraries created to meet a wide variety of needs from a broader audience than in the traditional analogue library and create a library space that is attractive to a broader audience than today. Thirdly: build the organization on strategic partnerships to meet the need of the partners and to make sure that user-orientation will be true. Likewise the report introduced the 'four space model' for public libraries, that we found essential also to the model-program.

Looking for research to consolidate these assumptions particularly the Dutch study, *The Future of the Dutch public library ten years on*⁷, appeared crucial. This study is carried out by the Netherland Institute for Social Research as an in depth analysis of the societal factors influencing the development of libraries. The focus is on the social function of the library and its core functions, on demographic and socio-cultural changes, changes in the media landscape. As the Netherlands is one of the countries that Denmark compares with, the analysis became extra relevant. A crucial conclusion of the report is that the public library either will wither away or have to carry out the enlightenment tasks in new ways. Some of the trends described, very clearly support the findings in the Danish government report, such as

⁶ English summary at :

http://www.kulturstyrelsen.dk/fileadmin/publikationer/publikationer_engelske/Reports/The_public_libraries_in_the_knowledge_society_Summary.pdf

⁷ Huysmans, Frank and Carlien Hillebrink(2008): *The future of the Dutch public libraries ten years on*. The Hague: The Netherlands Institute for Social Research.

the changes deriving from the shift from analogue to digital media landscape, the growth in customized services, the shift from collection orientation to consultation and dialogue. The Dutch study end up with a number of recommendations such as wider differentiation of services, support to improvement of ICT-literacy, hybrid collections etc.

But also in many more traditional monographs you will find very clear support and parallels. A good example among many is Brian Edwards: *Libraries and Learning Resource Centres*⁸. The main point in the analysis of the future development of libraries is that they become 'learning resource centres' and that libraries develop new roles in the postmodern era, that are very far from the tradition with the clue that people and not books are in focus. Also his points on 'high tech access to learning', and 'community focuses' are essential to the new concept, while his point on a library role for 'issue for cultural tourism' is a good example of the diversity the explorers of new public library roles can muster.

A central part of the literature to examine is the explicit library strategies that you will find on many levels, from national strategies to single library strategies. A good example here is the ALA publication: *Confronting the future: strategic visions for the 21st Century Public Library*⁹, that is a good tool for local strategic work because it does not further one strategy, but eight various scenarios. And it presents four dimensions that every library should work with and find its place in. The four dimensions are between the traditional, still working role and the new challenges: between physical or virtual library, between individual or community aiming library, between portal or archive, collection or creativity. The model is good as a tool for local libraries, that can place the cursor where local conditions point to, but the model appeared too broad and general and with little emphasis on the interactive and included user for the Danish purpose.

Desk research on the library in the city-planning

Turning to the other dimension in the desk research task, the city planning, we find a quite rich literature in Danish presenting both the city design and –planning field in general but also a research more focused in the role of the library in the city planning. A central monograph is 'Biblioteket i byplanlægningen'¹⁰, that is referring to researchers as Mercer, Klosterman, Pløger. A central statement is that the change of city planning is closely linked up to the change of the use of the city space from industrial to postmodern conditions. The city is no longer planned to provide conditions for a high industrial productivity but rather frames for human creativity and innovation, as these forces are drivers in the new economic development. And in the new economy 'value' is much more than value in the classical economic sense: 'a lot of energy is devoted to producing not only material commodities, but also atmosphere, symbols, images, icons, auras experiences and events. In this process cultural technologies of ritualization, narration, Imagineering and aestheticization are put to work' (Löfgren & Willim, quoted after 'Biblioteket i byudviklingen').

⁸ Edwards, Brian (2009) *Libraries and Learning Ressource Centres*. Amsterdam: Elsevier. The Architectural Press.

⁹ Levien, Roger E. (2011). *Confronting the future. Strategic visions for the 21st century public library*. ALA Office for Information Technology Policy. Policy Brief No.4, June 2011.

¹⁰ See note 2

According to these references the change in city planning and –development is basically connected with the change from an industrial to a postmodern use of the city space, as already mentioned above. One of the driving forces behind this development is of course economic. A new economy based on creativity and innovation creates a new competition between cities.

The library in the city space

The authors of ‘Biblioteket i byudviklingen’ defend the point of view that libraries can contribute in a substantial way to the strategically development of the city space. The monograph analyses three different roles the library can play in this context. One is related to ‘place’, one to the ‘space’ and one to the ‘relations’ of the library. The place role has three main manifestations: the library as an icon in the city, as a place maker and as a catalyst for change of a neighborhood or a city. The role as space can be an open-minded meeting place, a public domain and a space for experience. Relations are mainly of three kinds: partnerships and creative relations, hybrid cultural arenas, creative circles. These manifestations are presented in cutting edge libraries in Europe, USA and Canada in a very convincing analysis.

Another substantial Danish monograph is Nan Dahlkild: Biblioteket i tid og rum¹¹, a very comprehensive study on the development of public library buildings in the twentieth century in Denmark. But in the last chapter the author sums up the perspectives and principles that he recommends for the future public library, based on the lessons from the changes in the last century: The library must have: Identity, functionality, flexibility, sustainability, diversity, public space and serendipity.

Outcome of cutting edge library study tour

The desk research was being completed by a visiting program to some cutting edge libraries in Europe or conference presentations, focusing on libraries like OBA in Amsterdam, DOK in Delft, The new Birmingham Library, Urban Media Space in Aarhus, Library 10 in Helsinki, Malmö City Library and several others. All examples of libraries that are key strategically players in developing new urban spaces, new relations and cultural patterns between people, new library roles and functions.

The desk research had as its goal to provide input to a new concept sketch. In the first place the four-space model was chosen as the core of the redefinition of the public library concept. The model was created in the context of a Danish government working party that submitted the report on the role of public libraries in the knowledge society (2010). The four spaces are: inspiration space, learning space, meeting space, performative space. The four spaces must be designed to invite to and support activities fulfilling the goals of the public library in the knowledge society: experience, involvement, empowerment and innovation. The desk research examined to what extend the model could be confirmed or challenged by research and experience from other countries, comparable to Denmark. Likewise the field studies were

¹¹ Dahlkild, Nan(2011) Biblioteket i tid og rum. Arkitektur, indretning og formidling. København: Danmarks Biblioteksforening. (The labrere in time and Space, architecture, design and communication, with a Summary in English)

for inspiration, but also served as tests: would we meet libraries that could not be covered and described within the frames of the four-space model?

For practical (and economic) reasons the study tours were limited to Denmark, Malmö in Sweden, Helsinki in Finland and a number of cities in the Netherlands.

As to the dimension 'the role of libraries in the culture led redesign of urban spaces' we could mainly identify three trends.

The first trend is connected to the effort to create centers and identity in new urban spaces. This trend was very clear in the Netherlands, where the background is the fast growth of strong cities. We visited among other cities Nieuwegein, a suburb to Utrecht, Spijkenisse, a suburb to Rotterdam and Harlemmermeer, a suburb to Amsterdam. These three municipalities had in common that they within a few decades had grown from being villages to suburbs for expanding cities with a very clear perspective of continued growth. For instance Nieuwegein has grown from 8.000 inhabitants some 30 years ago to 62.000 today. This growth is a challenge to social and cultural development, particularly as these cities have a character of dormitory towns. Hence there is a challenge to create an identity of their own, especially as they are suburbs to very old, clear and strong profiled cities. In all three examples the city planner's task was to create a city-center with facilities and activities to attract citizens and create a lively space. In all places it has been done by building new libraries, and doing so connecting with other facilities that attract people, such as town hall, sport-facilities, college, and other cultural institutions. The buildings all aim to have an iconographic character, and the setting is open, green squares with inviting outdoor spaces, preferably connected to water, a lake or a canal.

The idea of the iconographic building having the expression completely of its own is probably the most overall trend in new public library building. In practically all 15 case-libraries in the project, this is the case if the library is not part of a building whose main purpose is something else. In a Scandinavian context this is actually remarkable, as there was for instance in Sweden in the eighties a trend to let the public library look like the housing in the neighborhood, due to a wish to be the living room of the local community, and doing so by avoiding being elitarian and have a special expression. Examples of libraries of very high standards following these ideas are the public libraries in Uppsala and Umea in Sweden.

The second trend is related to revitalizing urban spaces in cities or neighborhoods that lost their traditional function. There are numerous examples all over the world. A new Danish example is The Culture Yard in Elsinore, which during the whole industrial age was a huge yard and the dominant industry in the town. It is now a library and a culture house and naval museum. And with its location next to the Castle of Kronborg, a UNESCO cultural heritage site, it is a brilliant example of revitalizing an urban space in a small town and still preserving an identity creating icon of the past.

OBA in Amsterdam was the main changing actor in revitalizing the Oosterdock Insel and a coming example is the building of the Urban Media Space in Aarhus, Denmark, that will create a new neighborhood in the old harbor. In all examples the library becomes the main

driving force due to the huge number of visitors. For instance the OBA has 1,8 mo. visitors annually.

The third trend is less clear and more complex than the two previous trends. It is related to updating or qualifying and innovating urban spaces that are already recognized.

Birmingham's new giga library is the most recent and shining example. It is placed at one of the most trafficked squares in Birmingham, it is absolutely iconographic and the functions and services have been redesigned, so the library is a milestone in the transition of Birmingham to a knowledge city, and 4 mo. visitors are expected to come annually.

Another exciting example is the new city library of Helsinki. The library 10 in the center of Helsinki already for years served as a role model for other libraries as its ability to develop the library as a place maker was really remarkable. By creating services that met the interest of for instance young people, the library succeeded in short time to change the old post office (!) into one of the most popular event sites in the city. The library is small with only 800 m², but it is profiled with focus on music, ICT and news and is a tremendous success. It is supporting the digital services and has become a good example on support to the users' performing activities, dance in the lunch break being just one illustrious example. Now the new main library is preparing scaling up based on the lessons learned on this small library, probably with the same impact on a larger scale.

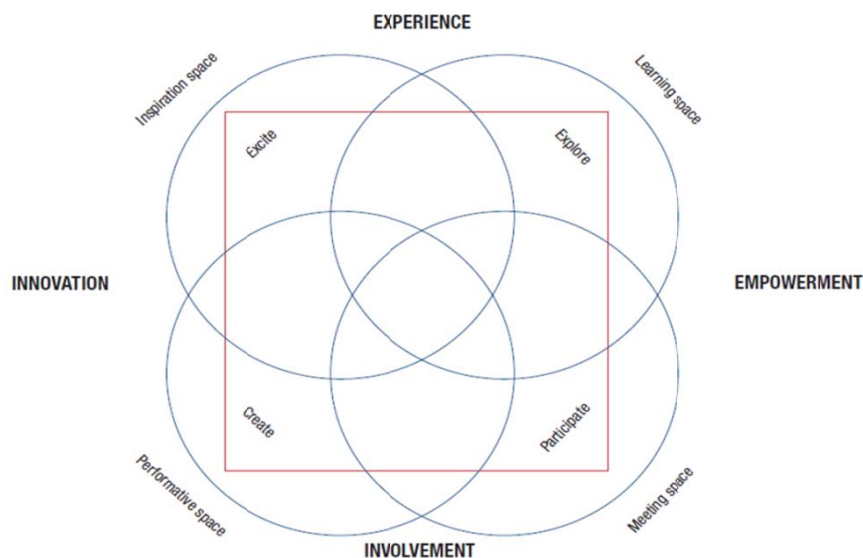
The DOK library in Delft is a third example on revitalizing and updating a central city library with a great success. The new library was called 'Library Concept Center' to underline, that it is leaving the traditional book library concept to create something new. The most radical change in concept, I believe, is the consequence in which the library invites the visitors to participate, choose, and contribute. The interactive relation is certainly one of the most central changes in the transition from product orientation to user-orientation in libraries. At the same time I must state, that it is my impression, that this interactive relation is the most difficult for libraries to implement, probably due to the power of the traditional collection focused library concept.

The user orientation in consequence also leads to a diversity in libraries that mirrors the diversity in the population. The standardization of the industrial age continues on an even more solid base in the digital environment, but when it comes to the relations and services in the physical space, there is a much wider variety to count on in the future, because the relations among people are in focus, and not transactions with books.

Design principles.

The desk research as well as the study tours left the project confirmed that the 'four space model' was the best structural tool for describing the role of the new public library concept. The model was developed by three researchers at The Royal School of Library- and

Information Science in dialog with the Committee on the Public Libraries in the Knowledge Society that published its report including the model in 2010.¹²



So the model-program will describe and suggest design principles for the four spaces.

‘According to the model the library’s overall objective is to support the following four goals: Experience, involvement, empowerment and innovation. Where the first two goals especially concern individual’s perception, experience and involvement in her or his quest for meaning and identity in a complex society, the other two objectives to a greater degree underpin societal goals. Empowerment concerns the development of strong and independent citizens who are able to solve everyday problems, while innovation has to do with finding new answers to practical problems or developing completely new concepts, methods or artistic expressions.’¹³

‘The four spaces are not to be seen as concrete ‘rooms’ in a physical sense but rather as possibilities that can be fulfilled both in the physical library and in cyberspace’ (Ibid. p 590).

The learning space is where you can explore and discover the world. Learning happens through play, maybe artistic activities, courses, reading and use of media and other activities. Here you may find informal learning activities, e-learning, lectures and presentations, access of course to knowledge resources, ask-a-librarian services etc.

The inspiration space is where you meet exciting experience. It happens by mediating a multitude of aesthetic expressions, but of course ‘learning’ can also be inspirational. Here you will find literature, film, music, art. Performances, games, plays, meet-the artist etc.

¹² The researchers are Casper Hvenegaard Rasmussen, Henrik Jochumsen og Dorte Skot-Hansen. The Royal School is today merged with Copenhagen University. The committee submitted its report to the Danish minister of culture in 2010. The committee was chaired by the author of this paper.

¹³ Jochumsen, Henrik and Casper Hvenegaard Rasmussen and Dorte Skot-Hansen: The four spaces- a new model for the public library. In *New Library World* Vol. 113 no 11/12, 2012 pp 586-597.

The meeting space is an open public space, aiming at making the citizen participate in local community activities or debates. It is a 'third place', but also a space for as well informal spontaneous meeting as well as organized events. The good library should offer a variety of meeting spaces ranging from the intimate, nearly private space to the square-like hall and the space for public debate of many kinds.

The performative space is aiming at user's performance, involvement, participation and creativity. This space is closely linked to the idea of supporting innovation in the library. Here you will find frames for performing in various ways: writing workshops, film workshops, photo shop, activities with house artists, or even practical workshops, crafts etc.

The design principles for these four spaces will focus on mainly three areas: physical space, interior design, furniture and other facilities, as well as activities and behavioral patterns.

The design principles in the model-program are still to be developed, but the way of thinking can be illustrated by an example related to for instance the inspiration space. Here it is a challenge to guide or lead the user to new experience, to unexpected discoveries, to new inspiration. Three examples on design principles were identified in desk research or on study tours: in Hjørring library in Northern Denmark a red ribbon made of wood winds through the library. By following it you will discover the various landscapes and spaces in the library and meet some of the offers. The path will lead you from the classical book library with tall shelves and chesterfield armchairs, through the classical 'Royal Library reading room' through the ICT-lab, the children's playing room, and workshops for performative activities and much more.

A second example is found at the new local library in Copenhagen Northwest where signposting in the floor and on the walls are combined with remarkably different design principles in the various spaces: colors, lighting, and style in furniture, atmosphere, and activities. These design elements underpin the variety of the offers and possibilities in the library.

A third example is found in the library in Ørestad in Copenhagen, a brand new quarter build on bare ground, where the digital dissemination is extended. On all presentations of library media you will find film clips, hear a spoken presentation, and see some photos. In all shelves interactive screens are installed displaying the content of the shelves. Everywhere there are Ipads with suggestions to further investigation to the topic that you face. Here the design principle is linked to a philosophy that all activities in the library should be reflected and presented on the web.

The design principles will be developed over the summer 2013 and the program finished with a conference in September 2013.