

It takes a shopping center to raise a child - Library develops at the Service Square

Pudi Kettunen

Library Apple, Espoo City Library, Espoo, Finland
pudi.kettunen(a)espoo.fi

Riikka Pohjola

Library Apple, Espoo City Library, Espoo, Finland
Heidi Risu, Library Apple, Espoo City Library, Espoo, Finland

Marko Forsten

Library Apple, Espoo City Library, Espoo, Finland



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Abstract:

Dynamic partnership is the keyword to the Service Square which opens in 2016 in Espoo, Finland. The Service Square will be located in the expansion of Iso Omena shopping center. Library Apple, with 3000 daily visitors, will move and the number of visitors will grow.

There will be many partners in the Service Square such as citizen services, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, the maternity and child health clinic, health center, youth and mental health services. The library will be situated amongst these different partners. Health and welfare are the main goals for our future library.

The current children's section is already aiming to support parenthood, strengthen interaction and linguistic development, as well as promoting reading and media education and the use of new technology. Enabling encounter and free play will be even more important in the Service Square, where facilities for that will be more advanced. Library Apple aims to offer a safe, activating and non-commercial surrounding for young people. We have asked for teens to share their opinion and suggestions about the new library. We work closely with shopping center staff, youth services and the police.

Several ICT-projects have been launched with Espoo City libraries to figure out the key operation models that could succeed when reproduced at a new library. One aspect of this particular pilot project is the co-operation with local schools and music institutes as the customership of children and teenagers is always essential for the future. New technology like 3D-printing is already especially attractive to our younger customers.

Keywords: youth, partnership, pilot projects, children, well-being.

1. Espoo City Library and the Service Square in Finland

1.1 Matinkylä, an important part of the West Metro growth and development zone

Espoo is the second largest city and municipality in Finland by population of 265 000 (whole country 5.5. million in 2014). The fastest growing area in Espoo is Matinkylä area, where Library Apple is located. Espoo is part of Helsinki Metropolitan Area (approximately 1,2 million inhabitants).

The Iso Omena shopping centre extension will open in summer 2016. Operation of the West Metro service will begin in August 2016, making Matinkylä a significant public transport hub with about 35,000 passengers passing through daily. Matinkylä is developing into a modern urban centre with good and versatile services. The metro station area will become more efficient, and many new jobs will be created in the area.

“Matinkylä is a excellent example of the opportunities that the metro brings with it. The West Metro is Espoo’s largest investment, but it also provides rise to a growth and development zone of new companies, jobs, services and housing, resulting in investments, vitality and well-being in the entire region,” Mayor Jukka Mäkelä says.

1.2 The First Service Square in Finland

The Iso Omena Service Square will facilitate the daily life of residents, giving them the chance to take care of several matters at the same time.

“We want to bring services closer to residents and make them easier and more pleasant to use. You will save time and trouble when you can take care of all your errands during a single visit. The service square is easily accessible by public transport or your own car and the opening hours are longer than usual,” says Mayor.

The Service Square is 6,000 square metres in area – the size of a football field. It will feature the library, citizens’ office, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, youth services, maternity and child health clinic, health centre, mental health and substance abuse services and laboratory and x-ray services. The service square will be the workplace of about 140 employees in various fields.

The Service Square will be a practical application of Espoo’s resident- and customer-oriented approach. The goal is to offer straightforward service together. The premises will be different and versatile for service situations. If necessary, the staff will guide you to the right service.

1.3 HelMet – Helsinki Metropolitan area libraries

Espoo City library is part of the HelMet network (Helsinki Metropolitan area libraries). There are a total of 63 libraries and six bookmobiles in the area of HelMet network. HelMet cooperation guarantees an equal access to information and services over the city limits. There are over 3.4 million items in the system and an expanding collection of e-content with rapid growth in usage. Altogether 900 library and media professionals work in the HelMet-libraries

and serve over a million customers in the area. In 2014 the number of visits to HelMet libraries was 17 million, including 5 million online visits

Espoo City Library consists of 17 libraries from which five are regional libraries located in city centers. Each regional library has a slightly different profile based on the regional needs. Library Apple is the second busiest library in Espoo but it is very likely that with the integration of the Service Square concept it will be the busiest library in the whole Finland.

1.4 The Making of Service Square

The process of making the Service Square started at the end of the year 2012. The theme “Care and well-being” were the keywords from the start. Children and young people were the topical issues. The guidelines for this First Finnish Service Square were created together by all the partners. The personnel were part of the planning process from the beginning, especially in the library.

The common space aims to bring knowledge, art and experiences everywhere with the use of digital technology. The vision is also to make different kind of spaces like the harmony of the nature in one corner and spaces where customers can play with interactive walls in another corner.

There have been several experimental projects which were part of the Service Square planning. Interactive walls with 3D-holograms (Multi touch – technology) were tested in order to make library’s e-materials more visible. Library purchased 3D-printers and other technical supplies like Leonardo 3D-modeling for customers to use. Library has attached QR-codes onto materials and the code opened a book talk video. Library bought smart devices like a watch (e.g. Galaxy Gear, Sony Smart Watch 2), a scale (e.g. FitBitArea WiFi) and glasses (e.g. Recon Jet, Epson BT-200) for customers to test.

The Real Care Babies and PARO Therapeutic Robot were in experimental use, but only PARO, the seal, was a success. The seal is cuddly, listens to humans voice and reacts back. It also soothes children - especially with special needs. The goal was to increase customer welfare.

The students of Laurea (University of Applied Sciences) made a project of inclusion of future service market customers and users. They interviewed library customers and analyzed the results. Library tried different kind of indoor navigating processes (IndoorAtlas, Walkbase, Hemytec) but none of them were suitable for the library. Hopefully the situation changes in near future.

Accessibility has also been an important issue. One of the projects has been testing the different kind of spaces and equipments for disabled people and library has been consulting experience specialist. Also there has been cultural popup service points at mental health services and with senior citizens.

In April 2015 a new project was started to investigate the need of digital services in Service Square. The aim is to be as customer-oriented as possible. The partner in the project is a Finnish telecommunications, ICT and online service company Elisa.

1.5 Library Apple expanding

The premises and service selection at the library will expand at the Service Square. The library will take up half of the new premises. Customers will be welcomed to follow various events in a large stage. There will be a music studio and a larger makerspace for practical activities. The library provides extensive selection of newspapers and magazines will be available to the customers of the service square area.

2 Service Square for children and families

2.1 Health care, well-being and library

One of our most important partners in Service Square will be the maternity and child health clinic. Finnish maternity and child health clinics have been in place for almost 100 years. The network covers the whole country and 99.6% of the children born in Finland are attending the clinic services. Mothers and families visit the clinic more than ten times during the pregnancy and children have approximately 15 checkups by nurse or doctor by the age of seven. The clinic services are free of charge – a very important principal shared also by the library.

At the Service Square the doors and corridors of the local maternity and child health clinic will open up to the library's children's department. This means that practically every child of the Matinkylä area will visit library and all the families expecting a baby will see what the library can offer. For us this is a unique possibility to reach families that wouldn't otherwise come to the library. It is also exciting that our new co-workers in the children's department will be nurses, midwives, doctors and speech and family therapists.

2.2 Partnership in practice: Cultural clinics

One of the ongoing partnership pilots is the cultural clinic pop-up-library, organized once a month in a maternity and child health clinic. The cultural clinic is a project launched by Espoo City cultural services. The aim of the project has been to tell parents that culture plays a vital role in the child's well-being, and to bring culture to the waiting rooms of the clinics. Once a month library workers visit the local clinic with bags full of books, papers, crayons and other materials. They talk about books, read stories to children, tell about library services and upcoming events and do little arts and crafts with the children. At the same time they update a small library book collection that stays in the waiting room and discuss with the clinic's personnel.

The cooperation between Library Apple and the local clinic started in 2013. Starting the cooperation early has given us time to learn and understand each other better and to see and show to each other what we do, how we do it and what do the library's and clinic's everyday life looks like. Attending the cultural clinic program offered a clear, continuous and pre-existing way for working together and getting to know each other. As a library we are used to being flexible and open to new ideas whereas the health services is a highly organized, efficient and structured institution and therefore the differences in the work cultures are obvious. But since the cooperation started well in time and in a very simple and practical way, the partnership has been successful despite of the differences.

2.3 Supporting families, working for a child

The children's section in Library Apple is aiming to support parenthood and strengthen the interaction between children and their parents. In practice this means baby and toddler poetry sessions, story hours in many languages and family days with different themes and cultural programs. Promoting reading and media education is also done in cooperation with local family clubs, day care and schools. The Service Square will provide even more space for meetings, performances, group visits and workshops.

We also view that facilitating free play and enabling encounter of parents and families are important tasks also for the new library. By creating easily accessible space to spend time safely and comfortably with children, we can help families to cope with their everyday life. The area for small children in the Service Square with space and good facilities for playing with toys, reading books, breastfeeding, eating, doing crafts etc. has been planned according to these principles.

Gaming, coding and the use of new technology is already present in the everyday life of our library. Robotic and coding clubs meet every week and the workers in the children's department try to encourage children to create and experiment in the library's makerspace. Many children and families come to the library to play computer, console and board games. Raising awareness and having a positive and interested attitude towards gaming and teaching children media skills is important part of the work done now as well as in the future.

“Every child needs curiosity, imagination and multi-literacy. The talent for sharing one's own and understanding each other's stories is developed at the library.”
(The motto of Espoo City Library children's services 2015)

3. Youth in transformation

3.1 Young people in a shopping center library

Young people all over the world are drawn to shopping centers but also to places where you don't have to buy anything. Our library aims to offer non-commercial, safe and activating surroundings where there are always adults to guide, discuss and spend time with young customers. Three years ago we formed a separate youth space, which turned out to be just what these children and young adults needed.

The library follows the shopping center opening hours and we have open doors even at weekends, including Sundays, until the shopping center closes. Long opening hours, good connections, good facilities for gaming, computing and meeting friends and the familiar staff seem to attract young people. We have an average of 250 teens visiting in a day, while the community youth center have less than 50.

3.2 Partnership needed

Our partnerships include other youth services around Espoo, sports and recreation facilities, shopping center security, local police and child protective services. For the Service Square we will keep searching new partnerships.

In Finland school and library have a long history together. If we meet a child or a teenager in the library during school hours, we have to figure out if there is a more serious reason for skipping school, like bullying. By talking, listening and working together we try to help these young people to solve their possible problems. Many of them return to tell us that they are grateful and have felt well taken care of. With many different partners we create the feeling of safe and secure surroundings to grow up also for those who don't have a stable and secure family background.

3.3 Cultural encounters

The amount of immigrants in Espoo's is growing fast. In 2030 it is estimated that 21 percent of the population in Espoo will be immigrants. This is already seen in our youth population in the library, where young people with different backgrounds and ages gather together. It has been a pleasure to notice that these children and youngsters have a habit to look after each other. No matter what background or color or language a child speaks, others guide them, show them affection and basically just ask, "how is it going?".

Since our customers come from different socioeconomic backgrounds, we try to create equality by offering activities like cultural trips, movies, sports, traditional book talks, library lessons, educational activities like games and coding workshops.

At the moment 14 percent of the students have a different mother tongue than Finnish or Swedish. In the future English takes more and more dominance. At the Service Square we are prepared to enlarge our English collection. At the library we also have easy reading and plain language books in different languages.

Our library personnel consists of different nationalities and backgrounds. We have first and second generation immigrants working for us. This makes communication with customers, especially children, easier.

3.4 Our young ones working in the library

We offer two week work placements for young adult customers and they can also apply for summer jobs at the library. We interview a lot of young customers and even when we can't offer everybody jobs, they get a lot of confidence.

We have also had a successful companionship with young adults teaching senior citizens. We hired our young customers to teach senior citizens how to use tablet computers. The feedback from both age groups was 100% positive. Older people loved the idea of their own teacher and young adults also felt proud to be able to guide and help the elders. Both age groups said in the feedback that they were happily surprised how easy it was to get along and how they talked about so many other topics than just the tablets.

In Finland there are tens of thousands young people in risk of social exclusion so our work really never ends. At our library we want to provide the place and the people to help young people to find and accept their inner self and love it. It is always heartwarming to see our former difficult customer in the library studying or just looking sharp on the bus and to see that they have chosen the better road.

4. Music for young people

Some major benefits of a new library are a modern soundproof semi-professional music studio and a band rehearsal room. We will offer space, equipment, support and guidance in musical training.

Several pilot projects have been launched with Espoo City libraries. One pilot project is the co-operation with local schools and music institutes as the customership of children and teenagers is always essential for the future.

As a part of this project Tapiola Sinfonietta (a symphony orchestra in Espoo) visited libraries to perform a children's musical fairytale "The Cat Emperor and the Orange Moon". The programme was aimed at children three years and up. The tour included four different libraries in Espoo and reached hundreds of children in just two days. This is a fine example of a reproduction that serves both the partner and the library.

One pilot focused on supporting the customers' musical interests in different ways. We encouraged the customers of all ages to try out different instruments with a series of events: guitar, keyboards and drums. Each event included a brief introduction, presentations on different genres and a free playing session for customers. These were organized together with the local music stores and musicians.

Music workshops were also organized for children and young adults in the summer months. They were given a chance to pick an instrument to play and get guidance on the basics. We also brought in iPads which were very useful in raising interest in music. The smallest children could have fun playing music games while young adults were making music on Garageband. These sessions lasted for two hours at a time and staff with musical skills encouraged children to creativity out of the box.

The traditional music library work may be changing with the growth of music streaming services and the expanding collection of free materials available on the internet. It's crucial for libraries to search for new service models to keep up with the customers' needs and keep them coming to the library. The library is a public living room where people of all ages can do things together. After all, one shopping center can change the future for one child.

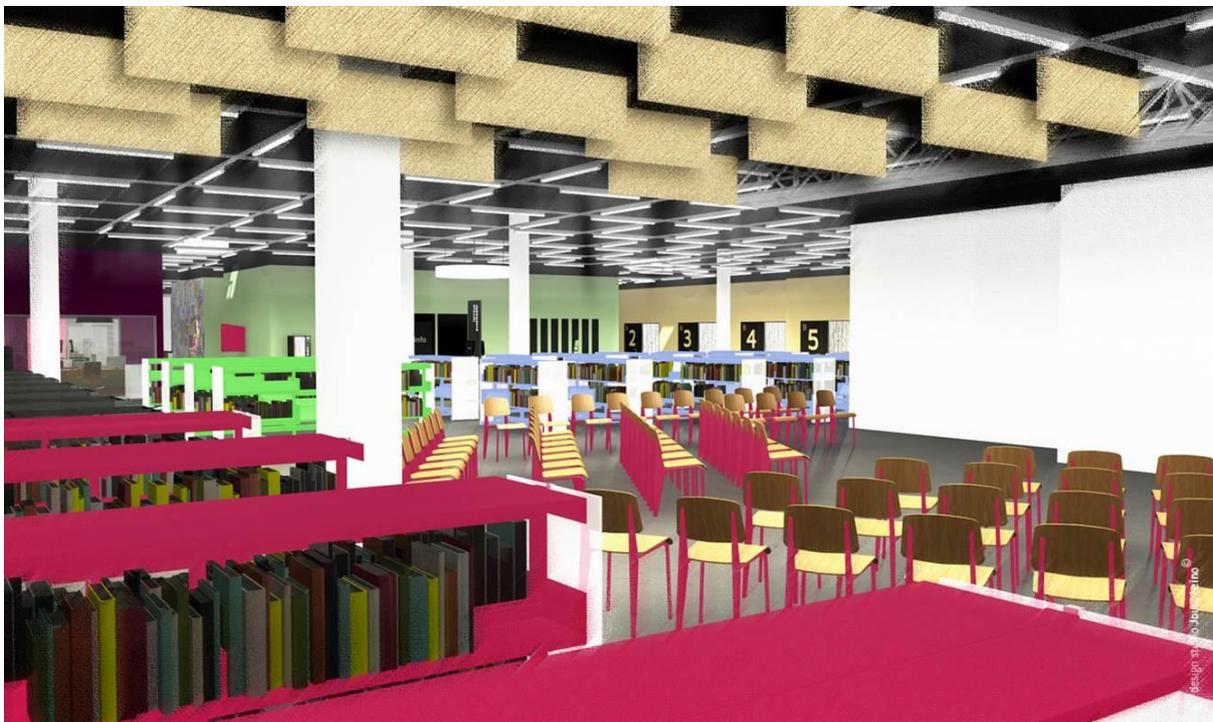
Practical recommendations

- When planning a new library, ICT piloting projects can be useful and cost-effective: Aiming high, being free to fail.
- Involving and empowering library workers both in planning of the new library and building partnerships should be done in the beginning of the project.
- Investing in youth department in a shopping center library requires cooperation with various organizations and can benefit all parties.
- Working with small children means working with whole the family. Common interests are easily find when all the partnership organisations aims at the well-being of a child.

Pictures of the Iso Omena Service Square



Picture: Design Studio Jouni Leino



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