

IFLA Satellite Meeting

[From refugee to citizen-integration: Policies and actions of cultural Institutions](#)

Date: 16-17 August 2017

Location: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin / State Library Berlin, Berlin (Germany)

Welcome to Skåne: a holistic and health promoting integration platform including libraries

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Abstract:

Since August 2016 Partnership Skåne, a regional platform for integration, is extended with an ongoing pilot study where also libraries and museums are included in the reception of newcomers.

The pilot study is called Welcome to Skåne and is built on the idea that libraries together with museums are important social arenas that facilitate inclusion and health. As a part of the mandatory introduction course to society for everyone with a new residence permit visits to museums and libraries have been added. Groups of newly arrived people spend half a day each at the library and at the museum guided both by communicators speaking their native language and by library and museum staff.

The pilot study Welcome to Skåne has so far led to an earlier introduction of newcomers to the library and a deeper understanding of what a public library in Sweden can offer and what role it plays in society. For the public libraries it is a big advantage to connect to a functioning structure of reception and integration and to meet so many persons from a prioritized target group and establish a relationship at an early stage.

Keywords: Libraries, Museums, Inclusion, Integration, Refugees

Forced migration increases the risk of bad health. Besides experiences during and before the flight, the reception in the new country also affects the refugee's health. Still the health perspective often is missing in the integration process.¹

The regional platform Partnership Skåne is an agent collecting all the positive forces in Skåne in order to provide a comprehensive and inclusive reception of newly arrived immigrants to Sweden.² Run by the regional County Administrative Board of Skåne in close collaboration with 50 diverse organisations, the platform, due to its recognized achievements, has also come to operate on a national level.

Partnership Skåne combines knowledge-based and practical implementation strategies to create a holistic model for the reception of new immigrants, incorporating universal human rights such as those of health and equal opportunities. Current projects include the Community and Health Advisors - a project conveying dialogue based information about society and health issues in languages of those newly arrived.

The goal is to shorten the distance until the newcomer can get a job and increase their social capital, sense of coherence, self reliance and ability to access and understand information in the new country.

Because of the escalating situation in Syria as many as 5000 adult refugees settled in Skåne in 2015. The large number of refugees put a spotlight on the need to improve and develop the reception. Since August 2016 Partnership Skåne is extended with an ongoing project where also libraries and museums are included in the reception of newcomers. The project is called Welcome to Skåne and the aim is to open up important social arenas that facilitate inclusion and health to immigrants. In this project museums, libraries, the business sector and civil society work together with the community and health advisors. Together they inform new immigrants about possibilities for positive experiences.

As a part of the mandatory community and health introduction course for everyone with a new residence permit (84 % in the first group got their permit less than a year ago) visits to museums and libraries have been added. Groups of newly arrived people spend half a day each at the library and at the museum guided both by communicators speaking their native language and by library and museum staff.

The Swedish library law from 2013³ points out people with other native tongues than Swedish as a priority target group and many municipalities has also laid responsibility on libraries to contribute to inclusion and integration for immigrants. The important role of libraries in integration has been even more acknowledged since the autumn of 2015 when libraries' ability to respond rapidly and flexibly to the changing needs of community became visible to many. By connecting libraries to the regional reception platform an introduction to library services and opportunities is guaranteed to each and every person with a new residence permit and library staff are certain that they will reach this important target group.

¹ Carlzén, Katarina and Zdravkovic, Slobodan: Promoting refugees' right to health and social inclusion: a systematic approach <https://www.mah.se/upload/Forskningscentrum/MIM/WHO%20Panorama%205-Promoting-refugees-right.pdf>

² <http://www.lansstyrelsen.se/skane/En/manniska-och-samhalle/integration/partnership-skane/Pages/default.aspx>

³ http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/bibliotekslag-2013801_sfs-2013-801 (In Swedish)

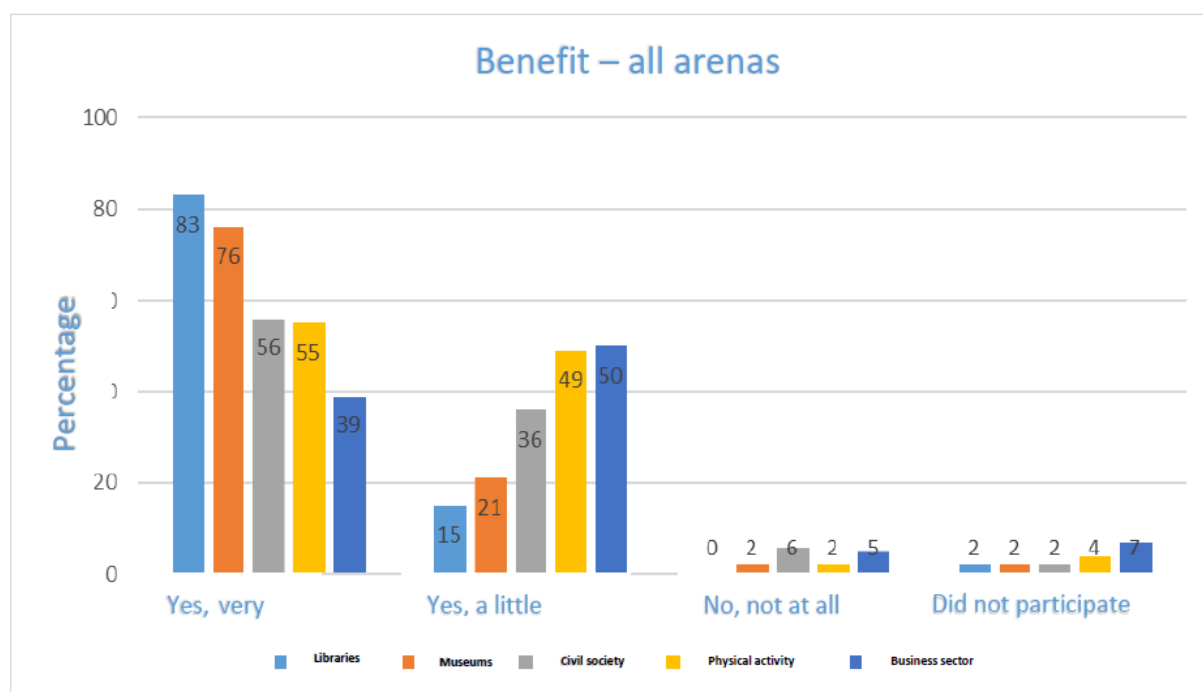
At the libraries refugees get information about events for children and grown-ups, Swedish language training and the possibility to borrow books and read newspapers in many languages. They also experience children story time and get an introduction to the digital language learning tools at the library. Inclusion, well-being and health is the focus regardless of the activities taking place.

Welcome to Skåne has so far led to an earlier introduction of newcomers to the library and a deeper understanding of what a public library in Sweden can offer and what role it plays in society. For the public libraries it is a big advantage to connect to a functioning structure of reception and integration and to meet so many persons from a prioritized target group and establish a relationship at an early stage. For library staff it has been valuable to strengthen ties with other cultural institutions as well and get inspiration to new activities for the newcomers.

To this point libraries and museums in two cities, Landskrona and Malmö, have taken part in the project and this autumn three more cities in Skåne will follow.

An evaluation⁴ has been made with the participants in Malmö and Landskrona who attended the community and health introduction course where visits to the different social arenas was included. 38% respond that their health has improved after the introduction course. None responded that their health decreased.

The evaluation results show that libraries and museum visits are considered to give the most benefit by the participants. For libraries 83% of the participants respond that they had very large benefit from the visits. For museums the number is 76%. When being asked if they plan to visit any of the arenas by themselves or with family 93% responded that they will return to the library and 77% that they will visit the museum again.



⁴ http://www.lansstyrelsen.se/skane/Sv/manniska-och-samhalle/integration/partnerskap-skane/Documents/Utv%C3%A4rdering%20av%20pilotfasen_april%202017.pdf

The results strongly supports the idea that introduction to social arenas have positive health effects. By the end of the project in 2019 a final evaluation will be made.

In conclusion we want to share two significant quotes from participants about library visits:

"I borrowed a book when we were there. Before I said: Tomorrow I will go to the library, tomorrow. But now I've got the strength to do it. And to go to language café on Tuesdays"

"In our Arabic countries the library has a certain role. The library is for academics. Our libraries are specialized for those who like reading - authors and that type of persons. But here it feels like the library includes everyone. Like a state or a country of it's own"