Digital literacy – positioning public libraries through a national programme

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Abstract:

Norway has a strong platform in global terms when it comes to ICT access and use. However, large groups of people do not participate digitally nor are they able to acquire the knowledge needed to become digital participants. In 2015, the government launched Digidel 2017 – A national programme for digital participation. The aim of the two-year programme is to boost the number of citizens participating in the digital society.

For many years the public libraries have contributed in various ways to digital participation. It is vital that they seize the opportunities offered by such a national initiative to further develop their activities.

Digital participation in Norway

Norway is a leading country globally when it comes to access to ICT equipment and use of the internet. According to Statistics Norway's *Norwegian media barometer 2015*[1], altogether 87 per cent of the population between the ages of 9 and 79 used the internet in the course of an average day. Use is highest among those aged between 16 and 44 (95–99 per cent), while 52 per cent in the age group 67–79 say that they use the internet during a typical day. The development shows that many older Norwegians keep up with the everyday digital world and can see the advantages of employing new digital tools.

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[1] https://ssb.no/kultur-og-fritid/statistikker/medie/aar/2016-04-14

Other studies[2] show that many older people in their late 60s upwards are lagging behind in use of the internet while also showing that many older internet users would like to develop their own digital skills. Most of them want to do this by taking courses.

Figures from the *Norwegian media barometer* also reveal a different picture. There are clear differences between women and men regarding use and access, as well as differences between those with lower and higher education. The most vulnerable groups are presumed to be mainly first generation immigrants from non-western countries, elderly people over the age of 80, people with disabilities, particularly the blind/visually impaired, and those who are outside the labour market, including those on welfare benefits and homemakers.[3]

From 2014 onwards, digital communication shall be the main rule for communication between public authorities and citizens. When digital literacy becomes a basic skill that all inhabitants must possess, this may give rise to problems of democracy if many people are still unable to keep pace with the digital world.

The national programme Digidel 2017

Vision and main goal

By establishing the programme *Digidel 2017* the authorities wish to strengthen collaboration and boost efforts for digital literacy and participation that are currently being made by different public enterprises, the ICT industry and non-governmental organizations. A binding partnership has been prepared between key actors who are already engaged in this.

The programme is inspired by similar initiatives in Sweden and Denmark. Sweden has run the *Digidel 2013* campaign, the results of which will be carried forward to some extent by *Digidelnätverket.*[4] For several years, cultural and digitization authorities in Denmark have had a formal cooperation based on the Danish digitization strategy.[5]

The programme also builds on a mapping report by Damvad[6] that showed that a number of actors in Norway are working on digital literacy and participation, but that there is a limited range of services for those who have poor digital skills.

Digidel 2017's vision is that Norway will be one of the leading countries globally in respect of the number of citizens who participate digitally regardless of age, gender, place of residence, education and labour market participation. The main objective is that by the end of 2017, the programme will have contributed to a marked decline in the number of citizens who are weak users or non-users of the internet and digital tools.

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[2] Programme description *National programme for digital participation.*
https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/fd8b274a915c46f2a631cfe03d513f72/programbeskrivelse_digital_deltakelse_2015-2017.pdf
[3] Programme description *National programme for digital participation* (p. 2).
[4]http://digidel.se/
[5]http://slks.dk/biblioteker/fokusomraader/laesning-og-laering/den-digitale-borger/
[6]https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/88b4acf5209b4a15b43580ff557e2ebe/tiltak_digital_deltagelse.pdf

Actors

The Ministry of Local Government and Modernization, which is responsible for ICT policies, is tasked with managing and operating the programme, and a steering group has been appointed in which seven other ministries are represented.

A new programme group has been established with the participation of the Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir)/Delta Centre, the Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi), IKT-Norge, the National Library of Norway, the Norwegian Centre for Information Security (NorSIS), the Norwegian Library Association, Seniornett and the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning (Vox). DNB, Norway's largest bank, Microsoft and Telenor are Digidel 2017's main partners.

Activities

The 2015 programme description sets out six sub-objectives that should be achieved during the two-year programme period:

- Provision will be made for three regional gatherings at which the business sector, public enterprises and non-governmental organizations can meet to exchange experiences and establish specific collaborative projects.
- There will be better coordination and collaboration with and between the municipal libraries regarding their support to weak users and non-users of ICT.
- Information campaigns encouraging more people to use the internet and digital tools will be conducted.
- Learning resources that can be used to boost digital literacy in relevant target groups will be gathered on a separate website.
- The programme will assess relevant training measures and the development of new.
- The programme will assist in the dissemination of learning, initiatives and best practice examples to the ministries, public enterprises, the business sector and non-governmental organizations.

The National Library and the Norwegian Library Association as actors in the programme

The National Library of Norway is part of the programme group because it has a special responsibility for national library development. The National Library's mandate states the following: "Based on the development of its own services and experiences, the National Library of Norway has a special responsibility for contributing to the development and strengthening of libraries in Norway as active and relevant social institutions. In its role as a government development agency for the library sector, the National Library must help to shape and implement a national library policy for both public and research libraries."

As an instrument in the national development of libraries, the National Library has at its disposal project and development funding. Over the years the Library has provided support to a number of projects with the aim of developing the contribution of libraries to digital participation and literacy.

The Norwegian Library Association is an independent non-profit organization. Its main goal is to render libraries visible as important societal actors vis-à-vis decision-makers, citizens and the media. The association has 2100 personal members and 1000 institutional members from all kinds of libraries.

The association takes part in the programme group because it reaches out to both library staff and users through its network.

The contribution of the public libraries to digital participation

Political underpinning nationally

The national authorities have long called attention to libraries as advocates in the digitization of society. When the then Ministry of Government Administration and Reform submitted Report no. 17 (2006-2007) to the Storting *An Information Society for All,[7]* the white paper focused on public libraries as arenas where citizens should be able to develop their digital literacy. Report no. 23 (2008-2009) to the Storting *Libraries – Knowledge Commons, Meeting Place and Cultural Arena in a Digital Age*[8] and Report no. 19 (2008-2009) to the Storting *Ei forvaltning for demokrati og fellesskap*[9] (Administration for democracy and fellowship) emphasized the same aspect. In the white paper 2012-2013 *Digital agenda for Norge*[10] the government stated that public arenas such as libraries are vital for training in the use of digital tools.

When the Digidel 2017 programme was officially initiated in June 2015, it was not surprising that the Ministry of Local Government and Modernization chose Drammen Library as the venue for the event. The Minister of Local Government and Modernization especially highlighted the task of libraries in providing guidance in the digital world. This was followed up by the Ministry of Culture's *National Strategy for Libraries 2015-2018*[11] dealing with the state's tasks and responsibilities in developing public libraries. This document states that the Digidel 2017 programme must strengthen libraries' advisory services for basic digital skills.

The most recent policy document highlighting the public libraries' contribution to digital participation is Report no. 27 (2015-2016) to the Storting *Digital agenda for Norge[12]* of April 2016. This makes it clear that the government will now actively make provision for the public libraries to be given a key role in efforts to give citizens better guidance in basic digital literacy. In conjunction with the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, a draft plan will be prepared for a range of advisory services, and the libraries will be included in this process.

How can the public libraries contribute?

The public library has always been an informal learning arena, and as such the public libraries are important constituents of a national investment in digital participation and literacy.

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[7]https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/25977d684a26494ead8da4106fdd267f/nn-no/pdfs/stm200620070017000dddpdfs.pdf

[8]https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/6a7ad6f5ba584c8aafdc8bfa5cba86b1/nn-no/pdfs/stm200820090023000dddpdfs.pdf

[9]https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/307c7a3832184bbba25b75f4b6c5a40e/no/pdfs/stm200820090019000dddpdfs.pdf

[10]https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/4339bb2154bd4b829f1d147bb2b26da8/no/pdfs/stm201220130023000dddpdfs.pdf

[11]https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/e1dd0466444d4d5d9d02e8d6897d38fb/nasjonal_bibliotekstrategi_2015-2018.pdf

[12]https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/fe3e34b866034b82b9c623c5cec39823/no/pdfs/stm201520160027000dddpdfs.pdf

Pursuant to the Act relating to Public Libraries,[13] section 1 Purpose of the libraries, libraries must promote the spread of information and education through active dissemination. When sources of information and knowledge are no longer paper-based but digital, the public libraries' social mission also entails guiding users to digital sources and helping them to make use of these. The range of services on offer at the individual library must be shaped and dimensioned in relation to staffing, premises, competence and other local circumstances as in the case of all library services.

The responsibility for enhancing the general public's digital skills and literacy is shared among several actors.[14] The municipalities are responsible for primary and lower secondary education while the county authorities are in charge of upper secondary education. Employers provide their own training and also utilize private and public course arrangements. The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) has initiatives for those who need better qualifications to compete in the labour market. Nevertheless, a number of people are not covered by such schemes, see the Digidel programme's target groups (p. 2, *Vision and main goal*). As an institution, the public libraries are particularly well equipped to contribute in this connection:

- They are found in all municipalities.
- They already have a social mission linked to information and education.
- They are open to everyone, and their services are free.
- It is a policy goal to develop them as local meeting places.
- They are already used by the Digidel programme's target groups in other connections, and synergy effects can thus be achieved.

Development work

The National Library and the Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority, which had responsibility for national library development in the period 2003-2010, have supported several local projects with the aim of developing the libraries' input to digital participation and literacy. The table below provides an overview of some of them. Even though they have the same overarching objectives, there has been considerable variation in their approach and extent.

Title	Responsible	Period	Content
DIGIKOMBI – Digital capacity building in the library	Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority	2008-2010	Trying out digital capacity-building programmes in four public libraries to investigate what elements should be incorporated in library services. Testing of the collaboration between libraries and other actors in the field.
A taste of the web	Østfold County Library	2009-2010	Online course for the general public in Web 2.0, carried out by public libraries in Østfold.
Room for self-formation	The Norwegian Association for Adult Learning	2010-2012	Nordic collaboration between library and adult education actors to document good examples of cooperation, including digital capacity building.

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[13] https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/1985-12-20-108
[14]https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/fe3e34b866034b82b9c623c5cec39823/no/pdfs/stm20152016002 7000dddpdfs.pdf

The digital citizen	Larvik Library	2010-2012	Development and implementation of computer training at the library for citizens in Larvik municipality.
Love of reading, language and ICT	City libraries /Kristiansand Public Library	2011-2014	Computer training etc. at five city libraries. Monitored by Vox and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in order to identify unique aspects of the libraries' contribution to computer training.
Senior gamer	Drammen Library	2011-2015	The library as an arena for computer games for senior citizens. Cooperation with the health service.
New skills for new fellow citizens	Asker Library	2012	Computer training at Asker Library with immigrants as the main target group.
eCitizenship in Vestfold	Vestfold County Library	2013-2014	Course package in basic digital skills for all Vestfold municipalities via the public libraries. Boosting the libraries' competence in digital guidance and cooperation between the public libraries and other actors that provide courses.
The digital citizen and the library	Østfold County Library	2013-2014	Adapted learning in digital skills through cooperation between libraries in Østfold, the municipal services desk and the non-governmental sector.
Digital arena	Bergen Public Library	2014-2016	Development of the library as an arena for courses and guidance linked to new media, digital culture and technology.
Æ e E-trønder (I'm an e-Trønder)	Trondheim Public Library	2014-2016	Implementation of courses using learning resources developed in Digidel 2017.

Table 1. Development projects in the public library linked to digital participation and digital literacy supported by government grants

In this connection, mention should be made of the project *Lær data på biblioteket* (Learn ICT in the library) initiated by the county library and supported by Vox,[15] which was held in the libraries in Oppland county between 2006 and 2008.

In 2011, the National Library granted funding to the county libraries to allow them to help to bolster the digital advisory services offered by the libraries. The results are summarized in *Bibliotheca Nova 1-2015* (p. 94-95).[16]

Existing services provision in libraries

National library statistics show that approximately 75 per cent of the municipalities provide organized guidance in internet use through the library. This figure conceals considerable differences.

[15]http://www.oppland.no/fagomrader/fylkesbiblioteket/fylkesbiblioteket-nyheter/tidligere-nyheter-fylkesbiblioteket/lar-data-i-biblioteket-rapportering.30073.aspx
[16]http://www.nb.no/content/download/11282/106397/file/NB-Bbibliotecha%20Nova_%2001-15.pdf

The range of services in all likelihood varies from an annual SeniorSurf day[17] to an ongoing range of courses.

In 2016, the Norwegian Library Association carried out a questionnaire survey[18] among the public libraries in Norway on their contribution to digital participation. Altogether 129 libraries answered the survey. The table below shows the distribution of responses to the question "To what degree would you say that your library has a range of services that contributes to increased digital literacy and participation?"

Response	Numerical value	Number	Per cent
To little or no degree	1	28	21.7
	2	33	25.6
	3	39	30.2
	4	23	17.8
To a great degree	5	6	4.7

Table 2. Response to the question "To what degree would you say that your library has a range of services that contribute to increased digital literacy and participation?" (Source: Norwegian Library Association)

The responses indicate that many libraries believe that they contribute in a very marginal way to digital literacy and participation. Those that answered '*To little or no degree*' draw attention to some of the main reasons for a poor range of services. A total of 39 of the respondents point to a lack of resources as the main reason. This is due to the financial situation, lack of floor space, unsuitable premises and lack of staff. Eleven respondents also single out lack of equipment such as PCs and tablet computers. Altogether 15 respondents indicate a lack of competence among the staff as being an important reason, while ten respondents state that other actors such as volunteer centres already offer training in digital skills. Three respondents also cite poor response from local inhabitants as the reason for the library not offering such services.

Many municipalities will face a challenge in developing a range of digital advisory services at the public library. On the other hand, more than half the libraries show numerical values from 3–5, and this tells us something about attitudes, potential for improvement and access to good examples.

The thinking about such a range of services at the library may potentially be too restricted and instrumental. The libraries can promote digital participation in a number of different ways. Many of these measures have been discussed in the *Prat, les, klikk!*[19] (Chat, read, click) report published by the city libraries network in the wake of the *Leselyst, språk og IKT* (Love of reading, language and ICT) report (see table 1):

• Introductory course: The library arranges general or thematic computer courses for small groups.
• Individual guidance: The library offers training in the form of one-to-one guidance.

[17]The SeniorSurf day is arranged by Seniornett every year, and includes local events at libraries. It is designed as a low threshold programme for seniors, with options for an introduction to various topics.
[18]The survey has not been published.
[19]https://samforsk.no/Publikasjoner/Prat_les_klikk.pdf

- Facilitating volunteer groups: The library offers the use of its premises for other actors' training programmes, for example Seniornett.
- IT cafés: The library offers social encounters where the public can get help and answers to their questions, either from the library staff or from volunteers.

In addition, it is possible to provide other facilities that are more indirectly linked to digital participation, for example language cafés. An article in the journal *Bok og bibliotek* no. 3, 2015, entitled *Språkkafeer – et nytt bibliotektilbud*[20] (Language cafés – a new library service) argues that the work to ensure digital participation should be seen in connetion with the libraries' language training programmes. Computer games or workshops could also be provided as part of the library's general digital learning services.

Digidel 2017 – the results so far

Digidel 2017 is in its second and final year. The programme has conducted or initiated a number of the planned measures and activities:

- The *Digidel.no*[21] website has been established. Training and guidance material is published there for the use of those who want to offer courses or guidance to selected target groups. The material is currently being tested countrywide. Training resources developed as part of Digidel 2017 will be maintained and administered such that they are also available following the conclusion of the programme in 2017.
- *Three collaborative regional gatherings* primarily targeting those responsible for courses and training have been held.
- The Ministry of Local Government and Modernization has announced a *grant of NOK 2 million* for training in basic digital skills in those parts of Norway where there is a limited range of services at present. The announcement resulted in 45 applications with a total amount of requested funding of almost NOK 6 million.
- The programme is in the process of completing a *magazine* with older people as the target group, with the aim of inspiring more older people to be part of the digital society.

During the remainder of the programme period, priority will be given to initiatives that develop the communication skills of the staff who guide users in various ways, for example in service administration in the library or municipality. Reliable indicators will also be developed that can better map citizens' digital participation and literacy so that initiatives can be tailored to geographical regions and relevant population groups going forward.

Digidel 2017 – opportunities for and impacts on libraries

Digidel 2017 is a time-limited initiative to increase the number of people who participate in the digital society. Since the programme is ongoing, it is too early to evaluate goal achievement as a whole, and in any case, others will have the main responsibility for the final evaluation of the programme.

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[20] http://bokogbibliotek.no/sprakkafe-et-nytt-bibliotektilbud
[21] www.digidel.no

However, libraries may find it of interest to reflect on how a national programme can promote the development of their own activities. What opportunities arise when attention is directed for a time towards an area in which libraries are considered actors? As the programme enters its final six months, some positive impacts for the libraries can be highlighted.

Profiling

To a lesser or greater degree a national programme promotes increased attention to its theme throughout its duration – by means of activities or events and information initiatives. This allows actors who are already active in the programme area to showcase their own activities. The Digidel programme has made the contribution of the libraries to digital participation more visible to the responsible authorities and perhaps also to the general public.

The willingness of libraries to contribute has been revealed in regional collaborative arrangements where there has been good participation by the libraries, and in applications for training grants. More than half the applications have involved libraries.

The programme may claim to have given public libraries a greater recognition of their role as key institutions in the digitization project. The clearest indication of this is the indication given in the white paper on digitization that the government will reach agreement with the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities on establishing a municipal advisory service for citizens who need assistance in using digital services, and that it will enable public libraries to assume a key role in the work on providing advisory services.

Developing perspectives

When an area is the object of a national initiative, this also provides an opportunity to debate and discuss it in a wider context, and perhaps contribute to a broader perspective on the main issues. The connection between language training and digital participation is an example of this.[22]

Often a national initiative means that actors in different parts of society must relate to new issues. As mentioned previously, an inter-ministerial steering group has been appointed for the Digidel-programme with representatives from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Children and Equality, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries, and the Ministry of Transport and Communication. Cases that are discussed from the perspectives of different ministries and that affect several areas of society can thereby achieve greater importance. The public libraries' contribution to digital participation for adult immigrants will not only involve the Ministry of Culture but also the ministries with responsibility for inclusion and adult education. The programme can make visible libraries' significance to a number of areas of society.

Since the public libraries are regarded as key institutions in the digitization of society, it is natural that they should be able to offer digital content, for example eBooks. The motivation to use digital services and content is strongly linked to personal interests and needs. The library strategy underlines that the National Library of Norway wishes to make more digital content available via the public libraries – based on what options copyright and other agreements permit. In this perspective,

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[22] http://bokogbibliotek.no/sprakkafe-et-nytt-bibliotektilbud

the digital content of public libraries no longer appears as only a source of knowledge and experiences, but also as a driver of digital participation.

Developing services

Within the libraries' own specialist environment, a national programme provides an opening for consolidation and professional development. The programme can help to advance robust environments and to present good examples as well as forming a platform for further work and development after the conclusion of the programme.

Specific instruments in the programme also help to lay a foundation for activities going forward. Many examples in the Digidel programme show this. Through the collaborative gatherings, development funding and skills enhancement, the libraries have been given the opportunity to reinforce a platform for relevant services in the future. The Digidel.no website now provides freely available training resources suitable for courses and guidance, and these resources will also be accessible in the future. The libraries can exploit these in their own activities, thus avoiding the need to develop their own learning resources. Provision has also been made for sharing future learning resources online.

Capacity building

Grant schemes under the auspices of the Ministry of Local Government and Modernization, earlier national grant schemes and local development projects contribute in different ways to bolstering the libraries' capacity to provide advisory services in digital skills and services. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that many library employees feel the need to enhance their own skills in order to be able to help others actively.

Therefore, as a result of the programme, the Buskerud county library is developing an eLearning course *23 offentlige ting* [23] (23 public things) backed by government development grants. This is based on the methodology of the eLearning course *23 things – Learning 2.0.*[24] For nine weeks, course participants will learn about and explore the most central public digital services in Norway. The course combines online studies and actual gatherings. In order to increase the library staff's advisory skills, part of the course will deal with adult pedagogy and how adults can be motivated to learn.

A pilot course will be conducted in three counties in autumn 2016. In the long term, it is hoped to offer the course in all counties. Since it is net-based, anyone can study the course content on their own – both library staff and others.

Cooperation and structural development

As mentioned, one of the six original sub-objectives in the programme was "better coordination and collaboration among and between the public libraries regarding efforts to achieve digital participation". Several of the programme measures have already contributed to the achievement of this objective. Libraries have had the opportunity to exchange knowledge and experiences with each other and with other actors at the three regional collaborative gatherings. They have also heard about the work of the city libraries in this field and how county libraries are incorporating it in their strategy plans. The programme has also been put on the agenda in other regional and national

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[23] http://23offentligeting.no/
[24] http://plcmclearning.blogspot.no/

arenas such as the 75th Norwegian library conference, at which almost 100 library employees attended a seminar on Digidel. The digidel.no website has paved the way for collaboration on training and advisory resources, also going forward.

Just as national actors must exploit the programme nationally, so too the libraries must use opportunities locally. Several of them have achieved this through applications for funding for training programmes in cooperation with a number of different actors such as volunteer centres, senior internet clubs, other municipal agencies, study associations, schools etc.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity provided by a national initiative lies in building future partnership structures. When the government report on municipal advisory services shall be completed and followed up, collaborative thinking will be of great interest. The libraries will have the opportunity to influence partnership structures by participating in the preparation of a draft plan for municipal advisory services.