



Inspiration Report - The Open Library



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Objective

The concept of an “open library” is a library in which there are a combination of staffed hours and unstaffed hours. The staff hours include having professional librarians around helping patrons, while the unstaffed hours are typically self-service. In the context of Denmark, this “open library” concept has actually increased the number of library patrons that use the self-service and come in for help from the librarians. Public libraries are needing to understand their library users and what their users can get from their resources and spaces. (VerKuilen 2023).



Executive Summary

What is the aim?

The “open library” concept aims to give patrons self ownership and responsibility but also be able to enjoy the library as they usually do. Patrons are allowed to use the same services they would while staff is present, such as checking out books, music, games, etc. and meet other people, learn, study, and have a coffee if that is what they would like to do. The library strategy is to actively support learning in a fun and engaging way, create smarter communities, and co create active learning spaces within the library.



Questions Asked



How do you encourage library patrons to respect and take care of the library during unstaffed hours?



How can books be presented with importance in the same way during self-service hours?



How can the library's strategy be aligned when there are no staff during specific hours of the day?



Is it hard to increase usability of the library and make the open library more attractive to patrons?

Questions Answered



Library patrons are given RFID library cards to know who and when they are in the library. Patrons have taken on their own self-responsibility and have shown decreases in unwanted behavior.



Books are still presented with importance by giving patrons information about the kinds of resources they want without having to have physical staff present.



The number of library patrons has increased exponentially and caused an increase in community relations and collaboration, even without library staff present.



The community has been positively impacted by the open library concept and love that they still have a safe and secure space to interact with resources and each other.

Key Decisions for Open Libraries

One of the main reasons for having so many open library concepts, for example in Denmark, was because the alternative was to close down the libraries. Library patrons do not like only self-service libraries because they don't feel a sense of community. "In Denmark 86 out of 97 library systems have open libraries resulting in 260 open libraries" (Holmquist 2016).

Let's Talk Statistics

Between 2017 and 2018 there have been increases in the open library concept, amounting to another 44 libraries now offering this service. Due to the popularity of this concept, the number of hours that a library is open during a single day has increased to 12 hours a day. Staffed hours at the library has decreased by an average of 5% but the unstaffed (self-service) hours have increased by 13%.

Library Patrons Influence

Library patrons are encouraged to help other patrons around them when the staff is not present. This is the concept of 'nudging' that allows for the community to help each other when library staff are not there. Library patrons can also help in presenting good resources or books of the library to others. This concept allows for the growth of community and make others feel as though they would like to come back, whether library staff are present or not.

Influence on Other Cities and Countries

- In December 2014, the Beucherhallen Hamburg became the first German library to adopt the open library concept. The library has increased their available hours by 233% longer.
 - In early 2019, the Bree Public Library was the first Belgium library to adopt the open library concept. The library increased their available hours by 180% longer.
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The Open Library's Future

Libraries have been predicted to be a 24/7 community resource in the future. Such resources such as smart lockers will allow for the community to pick up and return books at general locations such as grocery stores, transit stations, and community centers. “By 2035, the ‘Library of Things’ will be a comprehensive community resource sharing network that makes expensive tools and equipment accessible to everyone” (Frey 2025). Physical library buildings will become the location of distributed network that serves the entire community wherever they may be.

Thank you!

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