

# THE THIRD PLACE

## Scandinavian Libraries Set the Stage for Social Havens

Bringing the “Third Place” to Eureka High School



Inspiration Report   Global Library Trends

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Objective

Executive Summary

Introduction, Pt. 1 & 2

Library Culture

Four Space Model

Community Surveys

Library Value & Impact

Patron-Driven Haven

Shifting Roles

Conclusion

References





## OBJECTIVE

To present the strategies used by Scandinavian and Northern European librarians that create inclusive, patron-oriented services. These services orient the library as a “Third Place,” per Oldenburg’s criteria, and help develop social capital. The high school library is capable of implementing such services and becoming a “Third Place” for our students.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Eureka High School Library is a public school library that serves around 1200 students annually. It is staffed by two librarians - one teacher librarian (K-12) and one library technician. Though the library has made strides in creating community over the past two years, the librarians wish to emulate the services provided by public libraries, particularly public libraries in Scandinavia and Northern Europe. Unlike traditional academic library expectations (quiet, study environment), modern public libraries find innovative ways to incorporate play, activities, community partnerships, participatory services, technology, makerspaces, and more. We look to global trendsetting libraries, like DOKKI in Denmark, to inspire our plans moving forward. The research herein demonstrates that school libraries are capable of being a haven, or “third place,” in our students’ lives.



# INTRODUCTION, PT. 1

## Oldenburg's Third Place

The **“third place”** is a concept established by sociologist Ray Oldenburg, who in 1989 published *The Great Good Place*. His book addresses the three “places” in which we exist - the “first place” is home, the “second place” is work, and the “third place” includes those places where we exist with our community to hang out, converse, and find general merriment. This is **critical to both the individual and the community**, as it is a symbiotic relationship that benefits both (Kuno, 2011). Oldenburg's concept of the third place has been used in many contexts, including libraries. Few studies have explored the third place specifically in school libraries, but Kuno (2011) and Lin, Pang, & Luyt (2015) provide useful context and examples of how the school library can be a third place. Codispoti & Frey (2007) focus on the third place in an academic library setting, but they provide critical information about breaking traditional library patterns and fulfilling community needs during an age when students are overwhelmed with technology. Aside from these student-centric studies, we look *beyond* the U.S. to the **Scandinavian** countries that wholeheartedly employ third place criteria in an effort to cater to their patrons' needs, wants, and dreams.

## Oldenburg's 8 Criteria for a Third Place

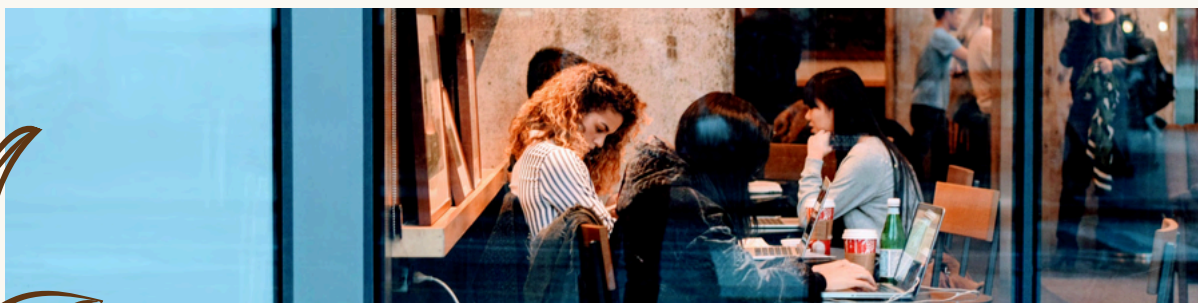
*The following is summarized from Kuno (2011):*

1. Neutral Ground - come & go as they please; comfortable
2. Leveler & Inclusive - no criteria for membership
3. Conversation as the Main Activity
4. Accessible & Accommodating
5. Have regulars and also welcome newcomers
6. Keep a low profile - minimal decor, simple, non-pretentious
7. Playful mood
8. Provide a home away from home

# INTRODUCTION, PT. 2

## Social Capital & Social Infrastructure

There are countless personal benefits to those participating in third places, “and these personal benefits include novelty, perspective, spiritual tonic, and friendship..the sociable and conversational skills, civic virtue, reciprocity, democratic mind, self-confidence and sense of belonging are expected to be fully developed” (Kuno, 2011, p. 111). Additionally, there are societal benefits, since the third place helps establish **community**; “the ‘third place’ may develop social capital as a consequence of many personal and social benefits” (Kuno, 2011, p. 12). In his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Putnam defines **social capital** as the “connections among individuals - social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (as cited in Kuno, 2011, p. 112). Putnam identifies two forms of social capital: **bridging and bonding**. Bridging is an inclusive practice (heterogenous), while bonding is an exclusive practice (homogenous) (Kuno, 2011). Social capital - whether bridging or bonding - is critical to society’s **wellness**. The places that foster social capital - including “third places” - are deemed **social infrastructure**. Libraries are an example of social infrastructure that help us build social capital, meet social and networking needs, and cultivate a much-needed sense of community.





# LIBRARY CULTURE

## in Scandinavia & Northern Europe

Libraries in Scandinavia and Northern Europe set an impeccable example of libraries as the “third place” and places of social infrastructure. These libraries are **community-driven**, provide **participatory services**, and focus on a **holistic** approach to cater to their patrons.

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Countries like Finland have a **history of library access** since the 1800s, which has paved the way for creating a culture of library-going. This has allowed the Finnish to become “some of the most **literate** people in the world” (Cord, 2018).

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Libraries in Denmark combine two Danish values: **knowledge for all** and “**functional and beautiful design**” (Zorthian, 2016).

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Northern European countries lean into the concept of “**hygge**” - a Danish word meaning coziness, belonging, sanctuary, togetherness, and a sense of contentment. Hygge finds its way into the libraries, as well, providing a balance of calmness to the typical bustle of our productive work and tech-driven world. (Stephens, 2019).

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Scandinavian libraries **survey** their patrons and provide **community-relevant services** (Stephens, 2019; Vos, 2020; Lauersen, 2021).

# EXAMPLES



## 1 DOKK1 - Denmark

IFLA 2016 Winner

Internationally recognized as an innovative, community space, DOKK 1 is described as the “**living room of the city**” by Marie Ostergaard, the head of community engagement (Morehart, 2016). DOKK1 emphasizes “the importance of **embracing a library’s communal nature**,” and wishes to **share their vision** with libraries across the globe (Morehart, 2016). They offer more services than can be listed here!

## 2 Roskilde - Denmark

Christian Lauersen, director of libraries and citizen services in Roskilde, believes that “**libraries are forces of social good that makes a difference** in peoples [sic] life everyday around the globe” (Lauersen, 2021). In an effort to better understand the impact and value of libraries, Lauersen facilitated a **qualitative study** in his library to measure value - which cannot easily be measured with quantitative data, like circulation.

## 3 Oodi - Finland

IFLA 2019 Winner

Oodi means “ode” in Finnish, and indeed the Oodi is an **ode to its people** (Cord, 2018). At Oodi, they uphold the notion that the advent of the internet and smart devices have fulfilled most folks’ information needs, so libraries must **go beyond the basics** to serve other community needs (and wants). The Oodi’s first and second floors are dedicated to **community spaces**: café, restaurant, cinema, informational desk, a makerspace, and more (Cord, 2018).

## 4 Deichman Bjørvika - Norway

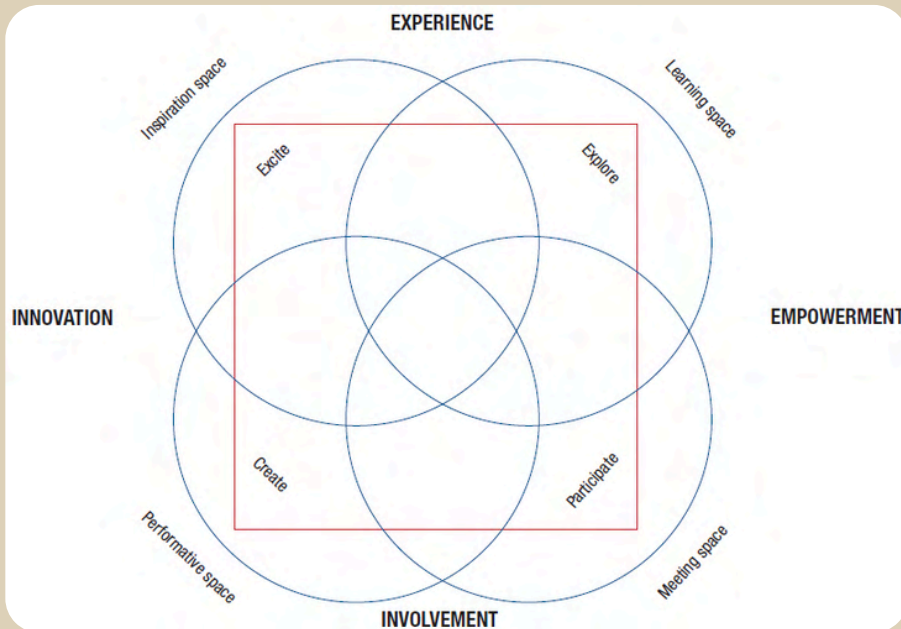
IFLA 2021 Winner

Oslo’s primary library is also community-centered, providing an entire floor for children (including play structures), a restaurant, cinema, auditorium, and ample makerspaces - “including 3D printers, sewing machines, and music and sound studios” (Croissant, 2021). Deichman Bjørvika is “a **free cultural hub and a gathering space for all**” (Croissant, 2021).

## 5 Huis van Eemnes - Netherlands

Huis van Eemnes provides a unique combination of a library and a sports & cultural center (Vos, 2020)! They unite profit and non-profit in one space and attribute the cohesion to “**emphasizing togetherness while carefully listening to the needs and wishes of residents**” (Vos, 2020). Thus, Huis van Eemnes is truly a community center that transcends a traditional library space.

# FOUR SPACE MODEL



01

Inspirational  
*Excite*

02

Learning  
*Explore*

03

Meeting  
*Participate*

04

Performative  
*Create*

The Four Space model diagram by Dorte Skot-Hansen, Henrik Jochumsen and Casper Hvenegaard Hansen, as cited in Guillois Laerkes (2016).

Innovative institutions like DOKKI in Aarhus, Denmark are “based on the **Four Space model** developed by professors at the Danish Royal School of Library and Information Science: inspirational, learning, meeting, and performative spaces that overlap and intersect” (Stephens, 2019, p. 61). The four spaces are associated with the action words: excite, explore, participate, and create. This model goes **beyond the traditional library perception** of “book warehouses” and ventures into a new, exciting community-driven space. The design of the Four Space model is created to promote both **openness** (literally and figuratively), as well as **open dialogue** and **community partnerships** (Stephens, 2019). With this model, the library space focuses more on participatory community spaces and less on collection development.





# COMMUNITY SURVEYS



Prior to implementing community-driven services, it is important to first know what drives **your** community. To do this, you need to **survey** your community (both library users and non-users) so you can **curate** **“participatory, user-driven services”** (Casey & Savastinuk, 2007, p. 5) and **engage in the “continual process of reviewing and updating services”** (p. 13). Librarianship and libraries cannot be stagnant; we must use feedback to inform our collection and services.



## DOKK1 RESPONDS TO COMMUNITY NEEDS

By **responding to assessed community wants and needs**, DOKK1 in Aarhus, Denmark **witnessed the following changes** in their library:

- Attendance in “unprecedented numbers”
- Visitors stay for longer
- Over half of the programs include a community partner
- People want to create and perform!
- Unexpected rates of usage
- Open, “un-programmed” spaces were “essential”
- Changes will be made over time with patron feedback



Overall, DOKK1 found that they “answered a community need” (Oestergaard, 2017). Per Ni Riain & Engberg (2019), “DOKK1 makes shame of all stereotypes of libraries being either dusty or boring!”

# LIBRARY VALUE & IMPACT

## Qualitative Feedback

A qualitative study completed at Roskilde Central Library sheds light on the ability of qualitative research to triumph over quantitative research (i.e. circulation data), shifting the impact of libraries from “How much?” and “How many?” to “What did it mean?” and “Why does it matter?”

Seismonaut & Roskilde Central Library (2021) adapted their study from the British Cultural Value Project in an effort to better understand the **impact and value of public libraries, which can only be measured with qualitative data**. Using the “**Impact Compass**” - a four dimension chart rooted in emotional, intellectual, and creative impact - they assessed common trends experienced by library patrons (Seismonaut & Roskilde Central Library, 2021; Lauersen, 2021).

Figure 1. Impact Compass for the impact of the Public Library on the citizens of Denmark



# The Impact & Value of Public Libraries in Denmark

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*These were their findings, provided by Lauersen (2021):*

## 01 HAVEN

Overwhelmingly, library users view the library as a “haven” that “allows them to take a much needed break” and “experience well-being, immersion, and emotion.”

## 02 PERSPECTIVE

Patrons reported that the library helped “stimulate reflection, learning, the acquisition of knowledge, and critical thinking.” Moreover, the library helped patrons “step outside the echo chambers you encounter on social media,” echoing that the library needs to transcend digital media and provide in-person connections.

## 03 CREATIVITY

The library sparks joy and exploration, providing a “source of inspiration” that helps “stimulate the imagination of their users.”

## 04 COMMUNITY

The library creates both direct and indirect community connections. Direct connections include gatherings, events, and programs. Indirect connections include the shared use of communal property, and taking care of those shared goods for the benefit of each other.

## 05 STAFF

Library users reported that staff also helped build connections, and they provided a friendly face who made them feel like more than just a customer in line. Book recommendations and conversations are important to library users.

## 06 TRUST

The library plays a meaningful role “in the time of misinformation.” The library curates quality information both physically and online, and information is vetted by the librarians - who are considered trusted resources.





## CREATING A PATRON-DRIVEN HAVEN

When imagining a holistic library, it is critical to look to the examples of Scandinavian and Northern European libraries, as well as their practices in collecting qualitative library survey data to create patron-driven services. Collecting survey information from patrons (and non-patrons) helps with “bringing the **individual human perspective** back into focus” (Seismonaut & Roskilde Central Library, 2021, p. 7). Our programs, collections, and services must cater to those we serve. This will help us ensure that the library is a haven to the community and provides a “third place” that is necessary for both individual and societal well-being.

While the examples examined herein focus on public libraries, it is possible to **extend the holistic, patron-driven third place approach to high school and academic libraries**, as well. Lin, Pang, & Luyt (2015) found that a regional library with a teen section in Singapore met 3 of 8 of Oldenburg’s criteria: the library served as neutral ground, a leveler (inclusive), and was accessible and accommodating. Kuno (2011) found that Ikuno High School Library met 7 of 8 criteria, including the three aforementioned - plus: being conversation-centered, having regular patrons, the building/decor were low profile, and it provided a home away from home. Codispoti & Frey (2007) found that a university library provided a “haven” to its student patrons, which meets most of Oldenburg’s criteria. This was especially true after redesigning the library to provide large, open communal spaces, selling food & drink (cozy, basic needs), adding student artwork, and encouraging casual community activities, like gaming (Codispoti & Frey, 2007). **Breaking down traditional academic barriers** only seems to increase the use of the library by students, despite previously held perceptions of the library as a quiet study place (Kuno, 2011). Recognizing the **nuance** is important because a library can be both.

Perhaps a revolutionary library can be *everything*.

# SHIFTING ROLES

## CHANGING THE SPACE

As envisioned by the research herein, a library that serves as a third space...

- Focuses on community spaces more than collections
- Provides basic needs - food, drink, warmth, togetherness
- Provides wants - makerspaces, hobbies, collections, technology
- Embraces fun and playfulness
- Facilitates different types of learning opportunities for all ages
- Balances quiet and conversation
- Emphasizes inclusion, equity, and access
- Promotes community connection and partnerships

## CHANGING THE PROFESSION

For libraries to change, so too must library professionals. Gone are the days of “shushing” the children and mandating a “no food or drink” policy. Codispoti & Frey (2007) explain that viewing the library as a third space helps “break through traditional thinking patterns and assist[s] librarians and administrators in developing innovative environments for learning.” The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) (2018) recognized this need in their Global Vision Report Summary, stating that “libraries must adapt continuously” and embrace change.

# CONCLUSION

After researching the global library trends in Scandinavia and Northern Europe, Oldenburg's Third Place, and the role of libraries in fostering social capital, it seems imperative that school libraries must also adapt to provide patron-oriented services. The studies conducted by Kuno (2011) and Lin, Pang, & Luyt (2015), and even Codispoti & Frey (2007) provide relevant examples of the role of the third place in school or academic settings. Moreover, resources like the Impact Compass used by Lauersen (2021), Seismonaut & Roskilde Central Library (2021) impart both knowledge and resources for conducting a qualitative community survey that would inform patron-driven services. At this time, we already have some third place practices in action: our tea station, lunch/break in the library, a large community space that seats nearly 100 students, a genre-fied collection and dynamic shelving (to improve access), technology, both digital and print collections, and crafting supplies. That said, we could do much more to include student voice in our displays and programming, as well as reach out to community partners to develop opportunities and resources for our students. As we continue to develop library initiatives, we will look to the trends in Scandinavia and Northern Europe to better understand how to make our high school library a community-oriented third place.



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