

Libraries' contribution to social inclusion:
**Supporting migrants to strengthen
their multilingual and ICT skills**

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1. Introduction and background

This paper will discuss the connections between integration policies, language skills, e-exclusion and library services.

With the increasing number of web based community services citizens need good computer skills and knowledge of the Internet. The e-exclusion in today's information society affects immigrants more than other citizens. Language skills are the road into a new society and participative citizenship. It is crucial for gathering information, expressing feelings and opinions. Recent study results suggest that much of the immigrant-native gap in IT usage is attributable to differences in language ability¹. On the other hand keeping the mother tongue is just as important as learning the new language and they nurture and enrich each other².

Consequently there are migrant groups that supposedly have gained much from the changes, since they have the ability to move between worlds and identities and benefits from their multicultural background. Because of good language skills, in more than one language, they know how to communicate over borders, both physical and digital.

There are also migrant groups that, because of limitations of language skills and digital competences - run the risk of becoming, or already are, marginalized. This is what we call double exclusion.

Library services are determined by national and local political strategies. The ambitions of the society how to deal with immigration outline the possibilities for libraries to progress in this area.

Two courses with the title Library Services in Multicultural Communities have been given at Stuttgart Media University during 2009.

One was part of an International Summer school in the spring of 2009. The other one was given this semester and included a study tour to The Netherlands and participation in an international seminar.

During these courses many good examples have been presented of how to provide good library services in the age of intercultural mobility.

This paper and presentation will analyze and reflect on the discussion and results of the course, focusing on trends, best practices and experiences of libraries regarding the connections between language ability, e-inclusion and integration.

2. Double exclusion

Migrants are being excluded in two ways. One way would be language. People who are coming to a new country usually don't speak the language of the new country. This can be very difficult. You need to speak the language to do a lot of things, e.g. to visit the civil service office, get a passport or just go shopping. If you can't speak the language you can't read it either. So you don't know what you are buying (unless there is a big picture of it on the box). Another important thing about that is the ability to read at all. If you can't read in your own mother tongue, it will be even more difficult to learn the new language.

¹ Ono/ Zavodny: Immigrants, English Ability and the Digital Divide, 2007

² Collier/Thomas: The Astounding Effectiveness of Dual Language Education for All (NABE Journal of Research and Practice, 2:1 Winter 2004)

There are not many countries in the world where migrants are offered free language classes to learn the language of the new country. But the migrants need these classes; otherwise they run the risk of being excluded.

One group of migrants for whom it is important to be included in the new country is children. They usually go to school and learn the language of the new country. But if their parents don't speak the new language, it will be harder for the children. They can't be supported with their schoolwork and have no possibility to speak the new language at home.

The other way of exclusion concerns ICT skills. Migrants from countries with low ICT usage, very often don't know how to use a computer. If they move to a country where it is essential to use ICT, they need to learn these skills. So they should have the possibility to go to an ICT class, e.g. in their library. Libraries can arrange classes in which migrants can learn how to use the computer and/or the Internet. Nowadays you need these skills to apply for a job for instance. To arrange such classes, the library will need some important resources; one would be the training staff. This can be a librarian or someone from the adult education sector or school sector (cooperation!). It is also important that staff members have good social, technical and language skills.

Another possibility would be to combine language classes with ICT classes by using computers when learning the new language. This would be a way to deal with the two ways of exclusion in one teaching situation.

Conclusion:

There are two ways of exclusion, that's why it is called "double exclusion". Both have to be worked on to help migrants being integrated in the new country.

3. Criticism about digital divide

Digital divide is defined as the gap between people with an access to the digital world (e.g. internet, email, mobile phones) and people with a very limited or with no access to it at all. This access contains a physical access as well as the skill to use the Internet as an information resource.

But is there really a digital divide? There are two different opinions about that.

Benjamin Compaine, a professor and author, e.g. argues that the digital divide will decrease, because the administration of a computer will become easier. So "*people will not need high-tech skills to access the Internet*". He thinks there won't be a digital divide in a few years³.

But this thesis isn't documented through studies.

For example in a study from 2005, the European Commission states: "*Despite increasing levels of ICT usage in all sections of society, the divide is not being bridged*". So there will still be people who are being excluded because they have low ICT skills. The gap between people like this and people who are comfortable working with ICT will continue to exist as long as there are no or little possibilities for them to learn how to work with ICT⁴.

³ Compaine, Benjamin M.: The digital divide: facing a crisis or creating a myth? Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press; 2001, p. 357

⁴ http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-NP-05-038/EN/KS-NP-05-038-EN.PDF

4. Trends and analysis

What possibilities do libraries have to contribute to bridge the gap for migrants and to become an important part of their lives? We have recognized the following trends how libraries can develop and what they can do to reach these goals.

4.1 Library as a “Third place”

Libraries should become the “third place” next to the user’s home and the working place (job). The customer can use the library as a living room, a working place or a place to study. In a third place there is no pressure to consume or to be productive. The customers should feel comfortable and invited to use the library. The library loses its present position as primarily a lending library and adds a new position. You can see this trend in the Openbare Bibliotheek, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, where the main library is described as an adventure library.⁵ For a library to serve as a third place a lot of space is needed, to satisfy both types of users, those who need the library to function as a living room and those who need a working place.

Positive aspects:

- New target groups (e.g. young men in Amsterdam)
- “Low barrier” to visit the library

Negative aspects:

- criteria to measure success are changing from loans to visitors → hard to explain to the funders who only see success of a library in the number of loans and items

4.2 Modern architecture and technique

As well as the third place, the architecture and a good interior create a better atmosphere in libraries. Customers appreciate modern architecture and technique. You can see this trend all over the world. For example the Idea Stores in London, UK⁶, and the Black Diamond (Royal Library) in Copenhagen, Denmark.⁷

Positive aspects:

- A new library building shows the high position of the library in the community and is a prestige project for the funders
- New and old target groups will join the library
- New registrations are increasing the number of loans

Negative aspects:

⁵ <http://www.oba.nl/index.cfm?vid=BC638BCA-3FFA-497D-9CA1C74A819C832A>

⁶ <http://www.ideastore.co.uk/>

⁷ <http://www.kb.dk/en/dia>

- Architects don't adapt to the needs of librarians and users of the library
→ some things in libraries are hard to use or make no sense (e.g. glass towers of the Bibliotheque Francois Mitterand, Paris, France⁸)
- Expensive, you can't always build new libraries and buy new technical equipment
- Consistent use of new equipment and software can make customers feel insecure

4.3 The library is coming to the user

To lower the barrier for people to use the library, a library should not only be a lending library but also go out in the community and offer special programs and products for users with special needs. As well as offering the usual book mobile library service, the library could offer a mobile learning centre. The best practice example is the Netti Nysse project of the Tampere Public Library in Finland.⁹ Netti Nysse is a bus with technical equipment and a trained staff. People can take computer classes in this bus which comes to the customers' neighbourhood. The project is very successful and won many prizes, too.

Positive aspects:

- New target groups can be reached and gained as new users for the library
- Low barrier, high usability, less stress and energy for users to get access to library services
- Users that usually don't come to the library will profit from the information competence and the ICT skills they learn at the courses in their neighbourhood
- The radius of the people a library reaches is being expanded

Negative aspects:

- Expensive service (need a lot of money and staff to realize such a program)
→ many mobile libraries are closed by the communities to save money
(Solution: sponsoring by local companies? → that's what they did in Tampere)
- The program could fail if the community doesn't accept the service

4.4 Staff with different backgrounds (diversity management)

Another trend is to reflect the diversity of the community by employing a diverse staff with different backgrounds like nationality, language, age, gender and professions. Such a policy would make customers feel more welcome and appreciated. For many people it is easier to talk to someone with the same background. Examples would be the library hosts in Malmo Public Library and Gothenburg Public Library, Sweden¹⁰ or the staff at Library10 in Helsinki, Finland¹¹ where the staff consists of people with different backgrounds like gender, age and profession.

Positive aspects:

- Customers easier identify with the library
- Low barrier to get in touch with the library and the library staff

⁸ http://www.bnf.fr/en/tools/lsp.site_map.html

⁹ <http://www.tampere.fi/kirjasto/nettinysse/english.htm>

¹⁰ <http://www.malmo.stadsbibliotek.org/search/> and <http://www.ci.gothenburg.ne.us/library.htm>

¹¹ <http://www.lib.hel.fi/en-GB/kirjasto10/>

Negative aspects:

- Limited opportunities for employers to employ individuals with different background.
- Difficulties to manage a group of employees with a very diverse background and very different experiences

4.5 Co-operations

A lot of libraries co-operate with other institutions. One example where this is realized are the Idea Stores where libraries and adult learning centres form a new institution.

Positive aspects:

- With a cooperation partner the library can save resources like time, money and staff
- Library can gain new users
- Combination of different professions and competences can produce synergy effects

Negative aspects:

- Sometimes a co-operation costs more time, staff and resources than it should save
- Sometimes it is difficult to find a partner to cooperate with

4.6 Focus on language

Libraries in some countries offer courses and items in the mother tongue of the migrant users. In other countries the trend is to focus on the dominant language of the country. Both ways have positive and negative effects. For example, the Netherlands are focusing on their migrants to learn Dutch. Since 2007 there is a new integration law that states that all migrants have to take a language test. All Dutch libraries have joined this position. That is why all courses are only in Dutch. They started a program called “lees en schrijf” which also offers a learning platform on the internet.¹²

Positive aspects – supporting the dominant language:

- Learning the dominant language quickly makes the adaption and orientation in the country you live in a lot easier
- Libraries can find a new position in field of adult learning or integration work with migrants

Negative aspects – supporting the dominant language:

- Users might feel repressed by dominant culture and possibly can't identify with their roots
- Customers with no knowledge of the dominant language can't take part in many activities of the library, because they are only given in the dominant language

¹² <http://www.leesenschrijf.nl/>

On the other side the Queens Public Library, USA, offers a lot of material, websites and courses in the mother tongues of the customers as well as bilingual material.¹³

Positive aspects – supporting the mother tongue:

- Especially young migrants of the “second generation” can discover and identify with their roots
- By speaking the mother tongue well, the customers will be able to learn the dominant language easily → courses in mother tongue or in both languages can strengthen this

Negative aspects – supporting the mother tongue:

- Some people won’t feel the need to learn the dominant language and this way can’t integrate in the society
- Critics may say the library neglects the culture of its country because of too much intercultural library work

5. Conclusion: Double inclusion

Libraries need to adapt to the needs of their users. There are trends that show how the libraries and the library work will change. These trends have their positive and negative aspects but if the library wants to keep up its position in the community, it has to listen to the people’s wishes. This is hard to accomplish because there are many different opinions of what the library should be. It is important to not forget what the library stands for, but also combine this with the new needs of the users. We think libraries should support the language of the country on the one side, but also offer bilingual items and services for their users.

To be able to use a computer you need both language and literacy skills. So libraries should also offer language and literacy courses in combination with computer courses and provide opportunities for users to study with a computer on their own. In this way libraries contribute to strengthen e-literacy as well as literacy.

One good example of how a library could work with double inclusion is a project run by Gallus Bibliothek in Frankfurt, Germany. The main target group of this project is migrants with low German language skills and low literacy, a hidden target group, difficult to reach.¹⁴

To sum this all up you can say that positive effects for libraries working in new ways are the benefit of cooperation, better integration and education. It will also strengthen the libraries position in cultural and educational environment.

6. References

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¹³ <http://www.queenslibrary.org/>

¹⁴ [http://www.frankfurt.de/sixcms/detail.php?id=2962&_ffmpar\[_id_inhalt\]=102300](http://www.frankfurt.de/sixcms/detail.php?id=2962&_ffmpar[_id_inhalt]=102300) (in German)

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