The four spaces
– A new model for the public library
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Abstract
Purpose – The aim of this paper is to present a model for the public library created by the authors.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is divided into three parts. The first part emphasizes considerations regarding today’s focus on both the virtual and the physical library. The second part describes the four space-model including examples of libraries as illustrations of the different spaces and examples of how the model is being used in the Nordic library-world. The third part pinpoints some critical questions in relation to the model.

Findings – The paper shows how the four space-model has been used in different ways in the Nordic countries since it was presented for the first time in a Danish report on public libraries in 2010.

Practical implications – The four space-model can be an useful tool in relation to developing, building, designing, arranging and rearranging public libraries. Furthermore the model can be a tool for management and communication in connection with library plans and policy and not least a point of departure for the discussion of the public library’s overall role in society.

Originality/value This is the first time that the space-model is presented to the library word outside the Nordic Countries in a way where examples, usability and limitations are included.

Keywords Library development, library building and designing, role of the library, societal changes, the physical and the virtual library, experience, learning, meeting, performance

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction
In the spring of 2010 the Committee on the Public Libraries in the Knowledge Society submitted a report to the Danish minister of culture. The background for establishing the committee was the closure of a large number of public library branches due to a reform of the municipal structure in Denmark in which the number of municipalities was reduced together with a more general cutback in the public expenses. The committee was asked to consider if new concepts for the public library’s role in the knowledge society and the need for lifelong learning were needed. Furthermore the committee was asked to consider if both new concepts for more traditional tasks such as literature dissemination could be developed and whether the need for development of the digital structure existed. Last but not least the committee was especially asked to consider how the libraries could support the Danish globalization strategy (The Danish Government, 2006) which aims at creating continued welfare and progress through the support of innovation and cohesive force in society (Danish Agency for Library and Media, 2010 and Thorhauge, 2010).
In connection with the work of the committee the three authors of this paper were asked to develop a model for the public library. ‘The four space-model’ which is to be presented in this paper takes its point of departure in four different overall goals for the public library and it consists of four different spaces which relate to the content of the library. Since the four space-model was presented to the Danish library professionals, the model has been used for the development of libraries in different ways, ranging from major developmental programs to minor changes in the arrangement of a specific library branch. Seen in this light it is the purpose of the present paper to present the four space-model and the reflections behind to a wider international audience. This will be done in three steps: first we will emphasize some preliminary considerations regarding today’s focus on both the virtual and the physical library. Subsequently we will describe the four space-model, its basis in four goals, its four spaces including some examples of libraries which will serve as illustrations of the different spaces. In continuation of this we will provide examples of how the model is actually being used in the Nordic library-world. Finally we will pinpoint some critical questions in relation to the model.

The physical and the virtual library
The rapid development and distribution of the Internet since the middle of the 1990’s created uncertainty concerning the future of the physical library in the years that followed. Would the new possibility for Internet-access mean that the users now only would use the library from a distance and not attend the physical library anymore? And would ‘the librarian’ be replaced by ‘the cybrarian’ – the internet-librarian – such as predicted in the German paper “Vom bibliothekar zum cybrarian – die zukunft des berufs in der virtuellen bibliothek” (From librarian to cybrarian – the future of the profession in the virtual library) presented at the 61st IFLA conference (Lux, 1995). In other words: would the physical library, as we have known it for centuries, dissolve into cyberspace? As we now know – and in spite of all prophesies of doom – this did not happen. Today the possibilities of the physical library have indeed been replenished by many Internet-founded offers, while the information resources people are able to access from the comfort of their homes, or from anywhere they might wish, are continuously increasing. But at the very same time we are witnessing a renaissance for the physical library (Hvenegaard Rasmussen and Jochumsen, 2009).

Both major and minor cities have in recent years built new – and often headline grabbing – libraries. The iconic public library in Seattle, the aesthetic main library in Amsterdam and the Colosseum-inspired Salt Lake City Public Library are just a few examples. And during the next years the new main library of Birmingham which is supposed to become the largest public library in UK and the Multimedia Space in Aarhus – the second largest city in Denmark – are going to set new international standards for library-buildings. At the same time nothing indicates that people have stopped using the physical library – they just use it in new ways. The physical library and the development of new media platforms and technology are not clashing contrasts. What happens is that the role of the physical library change during these years. As investigations from the Danish union of municipalities’ (Local Government Denmark – LGDK) shows, most of the users nowadays actually leave the library without having borrowed anything (Kommunernes Landsforening, 2004).

Thus, the physical library is by no means dead. Actually the recent development suggests that the physical library is more alive than ever. As the British expert in library-architecture Brian Edwards states it: “IT does not destroy the library but liberates it into providing new kinds of public services attracting a potential new audience” (Edwards, 2009, p. xiii). In other words: we see a transformation from a more or less passive collection of books and other media to an active space
for experience and inspiration and a local meeting point. To use a catchphrase one could speak about a transformation from ‘collection to connection’ or even from ‘collection to creation’ as proposed by the American Library Association in its new strategic visions (Levien, 2011, p. 5) rather than the predicted transformation from ‘bricks to clicks’. But as the British library-researcher Anne Goulding emphasizes, the technological development and its impact on the public library does provoke a new debate about public library space focusing on what it should be used for, how it could be developed and how it could fulfill a range of local and national government policy priorities (Goulding, 2009, p. 1). This statement counts for both the physical and the virtual library. The four space-model which will be presented below can be seen as an attempt to participate in this debate by proposing and formulating some overriding goals of the public library as well as outlining four spaces which support these goals.

**The four space-model**

In the mid-1990s a Danish survey of the position of the local library described a model for the library’s profile. The model reflected the ongoing debate about the library’s role as cultural centre, knowledge centre, social centre and information centre, i.e. centres that relate somewhat statically to specific sectors in (local) society (Skot-Hansen, 1996a and 1996b). The model was to be regarded both as an analysis model in relation to the library’s actual activity, but also as a tool for prioritization on behalf of the local library. ‘Profiling’ was in the mid-nineties a buzzword in library development, and the idea was that library should sharpen its individual profile. With the information society as the new paradigm for the development of society it was, however, particularly the debate about the cultural-centre profile vis-a-vis the information-centre profile that characterized the debate in the library world in connection to the growing fear of a digitally divided society.

During the last 10-15 years the societal context and thereby also the libraries’ societal legitimacy has changed in a crucial manner. Tendencies towards globalization, de-traditionalization, cultural liberation and a development toward an increasingly multi-cultural society are now significant. Leading sociologists such as Zygmund Bauman (e.g. 1998) and Anthony Giddens (e.g. 1991) have evolved concepts like ‘post-modern’ or ‘late-modern’ society indicating that we have gone through a radical change or at least: that certain tendencies such as the disappearing of traditions, the demand for both personal and institutional reflection or the lack of social cohesion have been radicalized (Hvenegaard Rasmussen and Jochumsen, 2007). This mean that more than ever we need to know who we are, that we open up in relation to other people and to society as a whole, that we believe in our own strength and value, and that we are able to relate to – and ourselves initiate – change. This is the case not only for the library-users or citizens in general but also for the library as an institution, and this is actually the substance behind a catchphrase like ‘from collection to connection’. Seen in the light of this development a new library model is needed that takes into account the challenges the societal development poses in relation to the library, and which at the same time highlights the potentials of the library of the future.

On the basis of this development we propose the below shown model as both a framework for the discussion of the values of the public library in the beginning of the new millennium and as a more concrete tool for designing, developing, and (re)arranging the library.
The four spaces of the public library

According to the model the library’s overall objective is to support the following four goals:

- Experience
- Involvement
- Empowerment
- Innovation

Where the first two goals especially concern individual’s perception, experience and involvement in her or his quest for meaning and identity in a complex society, the other two objectives to a greater degree underpin societal goals: Empowerment concern development of strong and independent citizens who are able to solve everyday problems, while innovation has to do with finding new answers to practical problems or developing completely new concepts, methods or artistic expressions. Both are vital if we as nations are to survive in the global competition. In relation to this it is particularly interesting to examine how the libraries can inspire to and strengthen creativity and innovation as a competition parameter.

But creativity and innovation are important for other and less prosaic reasons too. In the future we need not only something to sustain us, but also something to live for. Here the library can make a contribution by making space for learning, experience, engaging meetings and possibilities for
expressing oneself in a creative way. These things cannot be considered in isolation and individually, but must be seen as overlapping functions that interact in the library space both physically and virtually. The model indicates the possibilities for experiencing, discovering, participating and creating the new library must offer the users. In this way the four space-model is not just a model for analyzing, but it also contains a vision for the library that consists of four different overlapping 'spaces:

- Inspiration space
- Learning space
- Meeting space
- Performative space.

The four spaces are not to be seen as concrete ‘rooms’ in a physical sense, but rather as possibilities that can be fulfilled both in the physical library and in cyberspace. In an ideal library these four spaces will support each other, and thereby support the library’s objectives. The overall task is to make all four spaces interact by incorporating them in the library’s architecture, design, services, programs and choice of partnerships. Let us take a closer look upon the four different spaces:

**Inspiration space**

This is the space for meaningful experiences, i.e. experiences that transforms our perception. This can happen through story-telling and other artistic expressions within all media, culture patterns and genres. The inspiration space should make you want to move beyond your familiar choices, and therefore the space must also open up for the irrational, emotional and chaotic by mediating a multitude of aesthetic experiences. It goes without saying that the public library always has been a space for inspiration whether this has been connected to education, enlightenment and social mobility or connected to leisure activities, the user’s needs for entertainment and interests in general. But during the last two decades the need for a rethinking of the library as an space for inspiration has become obvious due to the rise of the so-called experience society.

The experience society refers to the basic concept that the experience dimension is increasingly taking up more space in our everyday lives (Schulze 1992). Thus, experiences and the quest for experiences have become a very important component in many people’s lives, in their development of identity and not least in their consumption of culture. This can be connected with the concept of experience economy which describes how any business wanting to survive on a market where the competition for the attention of the customers is tough, and the possibilities for consumption endless, can no longer succeed by just offering goods and services. Instead the individual firm must be actively engineering new experiences, and each product must be able to tell a story which will leave distinct emotional tracks (Pine and Gilmore 1999). Also the public library finds itself in an intensified competitive situation. The distance between the library’s offers and the new bookshop with a smart café, comfortable armchairs and the opportunity to read the latest books and periodicals on the spot, has narrowed. Why not chose the bookshop if it offers an altogether more cool experience (Hvenegaard Rasmussen, Jochumsen and Skot-Hansen, 2008)?

As a consequence of this development ‘experience’, ‘storytelling’ and ‘expressive dissemination’ have become marked in cultural institutions and hereby also in the everyday life of public libraries. It is the reason why the main library in the Swedish city Malmö recently has changed its image from a more traditional library to “The Darling Library in the World – your life, your dreams, your
library”. The Darling library in the World is an overall strategy in which the library seeks to increase the number of users and visitors by a focus on the development of new forms of dissemination, a tremendous amount of programs and activities, new partnerships and a new open and flexible design of the library. Other examples of libraries where the acknowledgement of experience society is evident is the main library in Cerittos near Los Angeles which boosts itself as the ‘The Experience Library’ and focuses on themed spaces and staged designs. Or the nearly world famous library in the Danish city Hjørring known for its scenarios in vivid colors planed to encourage playfulness, surprises and serendipity – all connected through a long red ribbon that runs through the entire library. In correlation with the four overall goals in the four space model the inspiration space underpins particularly innovation and experience.

Learning space
The learning space particularly underpins experience and empowerment. This is the space were children, youngsters and adults can discover and explore the world and thereby increase their competences and possibilities through free and unrestricted access to information and knowledge. Learning in the library is always an offer. It happens through play, artistic activities, courses and many other activities. The strength of library is that learning is seen as a dialogue-oriented process that takes its point of departure in the users’ own experiences and their wish to define their own learning needs, and not least: that it takes place in an informal environment. But the library of today is also challenged by particularly young people’s needs of a more experience-oriented learning through playful, interactive and social learning patterns. Apart from access to information and knowledge in analogue as well as digital media learning is strengthened for example via homework cafés, study places and open courses.

The focus on the library as a space for learning has increased during the last decade. This is emphasized with national strategies such as the Norwegian white paper on libraries (Norwegian Ministry of Culture, 2009) and the Danish report on libraries in the knowledge Society (Danish Agency for Library and Media, 2010). As mentioned in the introduction one of the most important reasons to submit the Danish report was to initiate considerations about how the library can support the Danish globalization strategy that aims at continued welfare and progress through innovation and cohesive force in society. The idea behind this is that the security of the future welfare and progress depends on a population which is able to act in a globalised and post-industrial society by turning information into knowledge and knowledge into creativity and – not least – into innovation. Thus, the library is seen as an important actor in this strive.

A good example of libraries in which learning plays a vital role are the so-called ‘Idea Stores’ in Tower Hamlets borough in the Eastern part of London. Tower Hamlets is one of the most diverse boroughs in London with especially a very large group of Bangladeshi residents. It is also one of the most deprived boroughs in the city with a high level of unemployment, overcrowding and a lack of educational qualifications significantly higher than the national average. The over-all concept behind Idea Stores was both to rethink and rebrand the library so it could play a more active role in addressing the huge social and economic challenges of the borough. Thus, the Idea Stores were designed to deliver in a way that captured the best traditions of both the library movement and the education sector but presented them in a new and exciting way. As well as traditional library service, the Idea Stores today offer a wide range of adult education classes along with other career support and learning labs.
A way to support young people’s needs of a more experience-oriented learning through playful, interactive and social learning patterns could be a project like ‘The children’s library as experimentarium’ from North Jutland in Denmark from 2005. In ‘The children’s library as experimentarium’ the aims were to create a visually exciting library which would provide the children with new experiences. The idea was partly to give them a more sensuous and physical approach to the library services, and partly it was a question of mediating the library’s materials, especially the book, more actively. The children library in the Experience Library in Cerritos is thought in very much the same way – as an experimentarium in which learning and playing comes together. A brand new example would be a department for 9-12 year olds in the main library in Malmoe called ‘the Balangan’ (a Hebrew word for chaos). This is a new concept for a transmedial ‘storyexploratarium’ that transcends the limits of the physical room. Through different workshops for e.g. filmmaking, writing and webb-mediation it is the aim to create innovative, experimental and playful activities for the ‘tweens’.

Meeting space
The meeting space is an open, public space and a place between work and home where the citizens can meet other people, who are both like them and differ from them. In a segmented society you need platforms where you come across people with different interests and values from your own and encounter opinions that challenge you through discussion and debate. The meeting space provides the frames for non-committal, accidental meetings in both small intimate spaces as well as in lounge areas with newspapers and café facilities and as in more organized meetings, where topics and problems can be analyzed and discussed. Meetings can happen live as well as on the net through chat groups, blogs or other social technologies. The meeting space particularly underpins empowerment and involvement.

Whenever the library’s potential as a meeting place is discussed the concept of ‘third places’ is often heard. A third place can be defined as a place in which people can meet crosswise of generations, cultures and ethnical background. The concept can be traced back to the American sociologist Ray Oldenburg and his book *The Great Good Place* (1999) in which he studies the different public places where people can gather and put aside the concerns of home and work. Oldenburg sees these places as the heart of a community’s social vitality and the grassroots of democracy. In the same way the Norwegian library researcher Ragnar Audunson argues for the need for what he calls ‘low-intensive meeting places’, arenas where we meet people with other interests and values than our own. These places can be seen as an alternative to the high-intensive meeting places, which rather create borderlines and differences. As he states: ”A viable local community needs arenas that can provide a minimum community in values, meeting places where people can meet, communicate and be active together across generations and social and ethnic belongings as well as arenas for debate and discussion on social and political issues” (2005: p. 435-6).

A good example of a library which provides space for meetings is the main library in Seattle. This library serves as a tremendous living room for both visitors and inhabitants in the city where you can meet, socialize or just relax. Another good example of a library which functions as an urban meeting-point is the new main library in Amsterdam – The OBA which has an overall lounge concept with more than 1500 seating-places spread all over the library together with a café and a trendy restaurant on the top floor. The space for debate and discussion we find in the newly
redesigned main library of Copenhagen in which not at single week passes by without the staging of a debate of general public interest.

**Performative space**
The performative space particularly underpins involvement and innovation. In the performative space the users, in an interaction with others, can be inspired to create new artistic expressions in the meeting with art and culture. Here they have access to tools that support their creative activities through interactive games, writing-, sound- and video, and they can get support for their creative activities through workshops with professional artists, designers, multimedia developers etc. Finally, the performative space can act as a platform for mediation by publishing and distributing the users’ work and products and providing stages for their activities.

In its new strategic vision *Confronting The Future* (Levien, 2011) the American Library Association is speaking about different dimensions, each consisting of a continuum that lies between to extremes. Each library must place itself in that continuum to create a vision of how it best will be able to serve its patrons and its community. One the dimensions – ‘collection’ and ‘creation’ – are a continuum between two extremes of which the latter are very much on a par with our concept of ‘the performative space’. Thus, the creation library is described as a library which has extended its role and become a place where media conveying information, knowledge, art and entertainment are created. It is a library that houses a range of equipment and facilities to help, authors, editors, performers and other creators to prepare new work, alone or in groups, in new or old media, for personal use or widespread distribution (Levien, 2011, p. 5).

The pinpointing of the users abilities is especially relevant when speaking about the new generations of so-called digital natives. The concept of digital natives describes the generations which are born after the late 1960s e.g. after the general introduction of digital technology (Palfrey and Gasser, 2008). These generations are used to not only consume but also to produce culture. Therefore they have new demands to cultural institutions concerning possibilities for user involvement and user-driven innovation. If the library wants to be relevant for these generations too, it has to provide performative spaces in which creation and co-creation are possible.

A way to create a performative space is traditionally providing different stages for events within the library or by having exhibition areas on different levels. But the library really adds something to its identity when keywords such as doing, making, publishing, working, and experiences become central. These keywords can serve as headlines for the new libraries “Meetingpoint” and “Library 10” in Helsinki in Finland. Both of these libraries are oriented towards the young creative entrepreneurs. In Library 10 the users can practice, produce and edit music and videos and at the same time there is a scene where they can perform and the library helps to distribute the products. The library is constantly changing its activities and facilities in cooperation with the users and in this way it is always up to date in a constantly changing media world. In Copenhagen the so-called ‘Demotek’ has been implemented in several libraries. The Demotek is marketed as an ‘underground-library’ and like Library 10 the Demotek is a place where creative youngster can produce and disseminate cultural products with the help of the libraries involved. Together with the youngsters the libraries organizes concerts, events, exhibitions and workshops and in doing so the libraries are not only supporting creativity but are also positioning themselves as attractive partners for a target group which has always been difficult to reach.
The use and impact of the four space-model

The four space-model has been used in many different ways in the Nordic library world during the two years which has passed since the report of the committee was submitted. As space is limited we will only provide a few but illustrative examples. As mentioned it was our hope that the model could serve as a space for reflection as well as a possibility for prioritizing and focusing the library. To be more specific it was our intention that the model could be used as a framework for the discussion of the library’s overall purpose and legitimacy internally in relation to its employees, but also externally in relation to politicians, users and partners. Also we would be satisfied if the libraries were able to use the model as an instrument when developing and designing their physical space, their services and their communication as well. But would there be consensus on the four major goals, what did they exactly mean, and were they comprehensive and sufficient for a description of the library in the new millennium and of its political legitimacy? And would also a small library be able to mirror itself in all the four spaces listed, or would it seems too ambitious and unrealistic in relation to size and resources?

Looking at the actual use of the four space-model we see a picture of various and comprehensive application. In several places the model has been used as a very concrete instrument for re-arranging or redesigning an existing library. This has for example been the case in the main library of the city of Trondheim in Norway. At the same time the model has been used in connection with the realization of new libraries such as new main library in Oslo which will open in 2016. The four space-model also plays a significant in different developing-programs such as a project supported by the Danish Agency for Culture named “Out of the box”. This project focuses on the need for new partnerships between libraries and the public sector, the market and civic society. Among other things the projects has produced a guide for working with partnerships in which the four space-model is being introduced as a framework for selecting and prioritizing possible partnerships. A more overall approach to this way of using the model we find in a project launched by the Danish Enterprise and Construction Authority in which the model is being used as the point of departure for a project concerning the physical library for the future. This is part of a project called “Institutions for The Future”, which is going to present the most recent knowledge of the user’s needs for physical surroundings and knowledge of architecture and construction in terms of energy, construction material and economy. The presumptuous aim is to contribute with an overall model for the physical library of.

In several libraries the four space-model has been used as a basis for inspiration and prioritizing in relation to the development of new library-plans and -politics. This has been the case in the Norwegian county Buskerud and Arendal and also in the Danish municipality Roskilde. The latter serves as a good example of the potential of the model as a management and communication tool. When the libraries in Roskilde were going to develop a new library policy the model was used as an overall framework for the process. The four main objectives – experience, involvement, empowerment and innovation were discussed and related to the local context. Subsequently, the four spaces were set in relation to local conditions and four new areas were identified: the musical library (the inspiration space), the digital library (the learning space) the library as a meeting place (meeting rooms) and the dynamic library (the performative space). The whole staff participated in a mapping-process where all the libraries existing offers and services were outlined. Hereby an overview of the libraries strengths and weaknesses could be compared to the emerging policy. Today the model operates as a tool for how the library staff, management, politicians and partners are working with – and talking about – the priorities of the libraries.
Last but not least we would like to emphasize a project called “From model to effect”. In this project 15 libraries from the region of Copenhagen are developing concepts to maintain and improve libraries as institutions that contribute significant to welfare society. As it has emerged the four space-model indicates a connection between the different spaces of the model and the creation and strengthening of i.e. empowerment and innovation. Thus, the model reaches across the narrow connection between citizen and library by supporting the citizen’s ability to take active part in the democratic development of society as such. It is the intention of the project to try out and document these assumptions because they are vital important for the articulation of the library as a democratic hub and as a platform for the formation and exchange of public opinions.

To summarize the four space-model has so far been used as:

- An instrument for arranging, rearranging, designing and building libraries.
- An instrument to develop libraries e.g. through partnerships.
- A management and communication tool in connection with the development of library plans and policy.
- A part of the development of a model-library for the future.
- As a point of departure for the discussion of the public library’s role in the continued development of a democratic society.

**Concluding remarks**

As we have seen the four space-model has until now been used as an instrument for arranging or rearranging libraries as well as a tool in plans for building new libraries. At the same time the model has been in used in connection to the development of library-plans and politics. Last but not least the model is used as a basis for the development and articulation of the public libraries role in a democratic society. One could a bit immodest claim that the four space model has gone from strength to strength, which in itself is a very good reason to look at the model through critical glasses. In this perspective questions of particular interest are: why has the model been adopted so quickly and widely among Nordic libraries? And is it a risk that the extensive use of the four space-model limits rather than extents the creative thinking of the public library.

In connection with the first question one could assume that the success of the model partly is due to the fact that goals such as empowerment and involvement draw a direct line back to the founding values of the public library such as enlightenment and social mobility (Hvenegaard Rasmussen and Jochumsen, 2007) while goals such as innovation and experience points towards the knowledge- and experience society. In other words: When using the four space model one foot is on safe ground while the other treads on more virgin land. Is the four space-model maybe too conservative in its point of departure and would it be more interesting to develop a model which really turned the traditional public library upside down. This is a possibility which has to be discussed without prejudice and it automatically leads to the next question: are we by pressing one model on all public libraries supporting a homogeneity that libraries actually are moving away from during these years? This might be an actual danger but it has never been our intention to counteract diversity. On the contrary the model is supposed to evoke as multiple a discussion of the library as possible.

However there is no doubt, that we, by proposing the four space model as a tool for arranging, designing and developing the public library, at the same time advocate certain values for the public libraries. Some of these may be rooted in the traditional values of the public library while other may
be pointing in new directions. What is important is that library professionals, politicians and library
users can use the model to discuss and decide which values the public library should be build on.
The antitype is a library based on quantitative lending figures and a rationale of supply and demand.
For that reason we hope the four-space model can serve as a platform for inspiration and discussion
– now even outside the Nordic countries.

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