THE COMPETENT CITIZEN

Good advice for the future co-operation between general education and libraries

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROJECT "THE COMPETENT CITIZEN"

Project "The Competent Citizen" is a development project initiated by Citizens' Services and Libraries in Aarhus and Aarhus Adult Education Network. It is focused on innovating co-operation methods between general education and libraries. The project partners, along with other central players, wanted to create a model that could describe how decentralized collaboration compositions can comply with the individual citizen's needs for developing their competencies.

The Project was partly to map out the existing cooperation experiences as well as uncover barriers and development opportunities and partly to gather ideas for future co-operation and test new collaboration compositions. The Project consisted of three tracks: Working with providing input to the policy-level of both areas, research and analysis, and dialogue-based work.

The Project was named *"The Competent Citizen - the Future Co-operation between General Education and Libraries"*, because the main purpose of co-operation between general education and libraries must be to create offers and services that support the citizen in being, and continuing to be, competent. The Project was supported by the Danish Agency for Libraries and Media as a development project of a super structural character. It was realized in co-operation with FO Aarhus, FOF Aarhus, VUC Aarhus, Lærdansk Aarhus, Folkeoplysningssamvirket (The Association for General Education) Aarhus, Fritid & Samfund (Leisure & Community) and Citizens' Services and Libraries in Aarhus.

The Project has concluded that there are possibilities and potential in co-operation between general education and libraries. We can strengthen our organizations, we can expand our offers and services, we can ensure that our citizens have greater opportunities for informal education, and we can become weightier players in the community if the co-operation between the areas is extended.

There are currently some good collaborations going on around the country, but there are also many municipalities where general education and libraries live their lives separately. This could be because the idea of co-operation hasn't occurred, or because each sees the other as unsuitable competitors.

Project "The Competent Citizen – *the Future Co-operation between General Education and Libraries"* hopes that this booklet can provide some motivational reasons for co-operation, but also give advice about how to co-operate. The report *"The Competent Citizen - the Future Co-operation between General Education and Libraries"* has formed the basis of this booklet. The report identifies incentives and barriers for co-operation, gives examples of co-operation, and further explains the advice that can be found in the following.

The report can be downloaded in Danish at: www.denkompetenteborger.dk

Eight Motivational Factors for Co-operation between General Education and Libraries

We can create good offers and services, even if we are pressed financially

Both areas are pressed financially. Even so, the demands for the quality of the services we provide are high. By co-operating, we are able to divide our funds and our human resources, and thereby still be able to offer our citizens high quality services and events, etc.

We can create a wider range of offers and services

By co-operating we are able to coordinate our work, thereby ensuring that we are not offering the same services. Also, we have the opportunity to supplement the services of one another, and there may be an opportunity to create services that each area would not have been able to afford on their own.

We can create better offers and services because we have different strengths and competencies

Each area has its own special competence. Co-operation provides the opportunity to combine skilful educators with information specialists. Evening classes can gain knowledge about material that is available at the library, and the library can draw attention to those offers and services that apply to evening classes in relation to the given material.

We can focus on supporting the competent citizen

Different groups of citizens have different needs. By combining our strengths, we have a greater opportunity of focusing on specific target groups. We are able to create offers and services for more people, and we can create integrated offers; where the citizens know where they need to go to learn more.

Our marketing platform can expand

One of the areas' biggest challenges is that the citizens are not aware of our offers. We are not sufficiently visible and, more often than not, it is only the citizens who look for us that find us.
By co-operating and working together to increase the visibility of each other's offers, we gain the opportunity of being present on more platforms, and thereby the opportunity of greater visibility.

We can make ourselves more visible, i.e. in relation to the political level

Neither general education nor the libraries doubt their impact on the community and the importance of focusing on informal education. But we are small when it comes to asserting our importance

on the societal level. By co-operating, we have a greater opportunity to make ourselves visible locally which, in example, shows that we can support important public debates.

We can strengthen the focus on the importance of adult- and supplementary education and the informal education

In Denmark, there is massive focus on the formal education, and the goal is that 95% of a youth year must complete an education. However, there are many citizens who have trouble going through the formal education system. At the same time, there is a large group of elderly citizens that are exempt from the workforce. All these citizens need education, and the society needs them. If general education and the libraries co-operate with other players in adult and supplementary education, we will be able to create new offers and services, but also increase the visibility of the current offers and services to a larger extent.

We can create new and different learning environments

It can be an advantage to co-operate in order to create new and exciting offers for learning, or learning offers for groups of citizens that we traditionally have not reached. That we have different competencies, different resources and different ways of doing things can cause us to develop processes that result in different offers for learning.

EIGHT ADVICE ABOUT CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE AREAS

Get to know each other

When you know each other's areas and each other's leaders and colleagues it is easier to realize how you can use one another for mutual benefit. Lack of knowledge and experience with co-operation is usually what causes prejudice. I.e. it is often parties, who do not co-operate, that claim the existence of financial barriers is the reason for not co-operating between the areas.

Coordinate activity plans

In the recent year, requests have been made for areas to coordinate their activity plans. This can ensure that the areas do not repeat each other's offers, but supplement the offers of one another instead. In example, it could be an idea that the libraries create intro-courses or appetizer-events and that the Adult Education Associations create in-depth courses and lectures.

Thus, the library will no longer be seen as a competitor, but as a way of gradually absorbing citizens into general education.

Identify common areas and your own areas

There is a long list of common areas between our fields. Let that be the incentive for co-operation and coordination of our efforts. Also, the libraries and associations have different core areas. Let that be the incentive for developing synergies between the offers and services and for creating offers that could not have been offered without the help of the other.

Use each other's resources and competencies

Libraries are public spaces. Libraries often have good rooms, good communication channels, and more often than not, because of the close contact they have with a lot of citizens, they have knowledge about what is "in" at the moment. The associations have a corps of excellent teachers, they have good communication channels, and they are professionals when it comes to planning programmes for events. Combining these elements can create new dimensions.

Identify your common goals

In co-operation, it is important that all parts agree what the common goal is. Therefore, it is vital to talk about what each area want to achieve by co-operating and how the co-operation can fulfil the vision of the individual institution. For example, it can be suitable to clarify the purpose of the co-operation; is it an attempt to expand operations, or is it something extra – this makes a difference in

determining *how much* there is to lose, and whether or not there are opportunities for working to-gether in the long run.

Be attentive to each other's yearly plans

Everyone has periods with peak hours. If the areas have peak hours at the same time, a co-operation should not be planned to take place at that time. If the peak hours happen at differ-
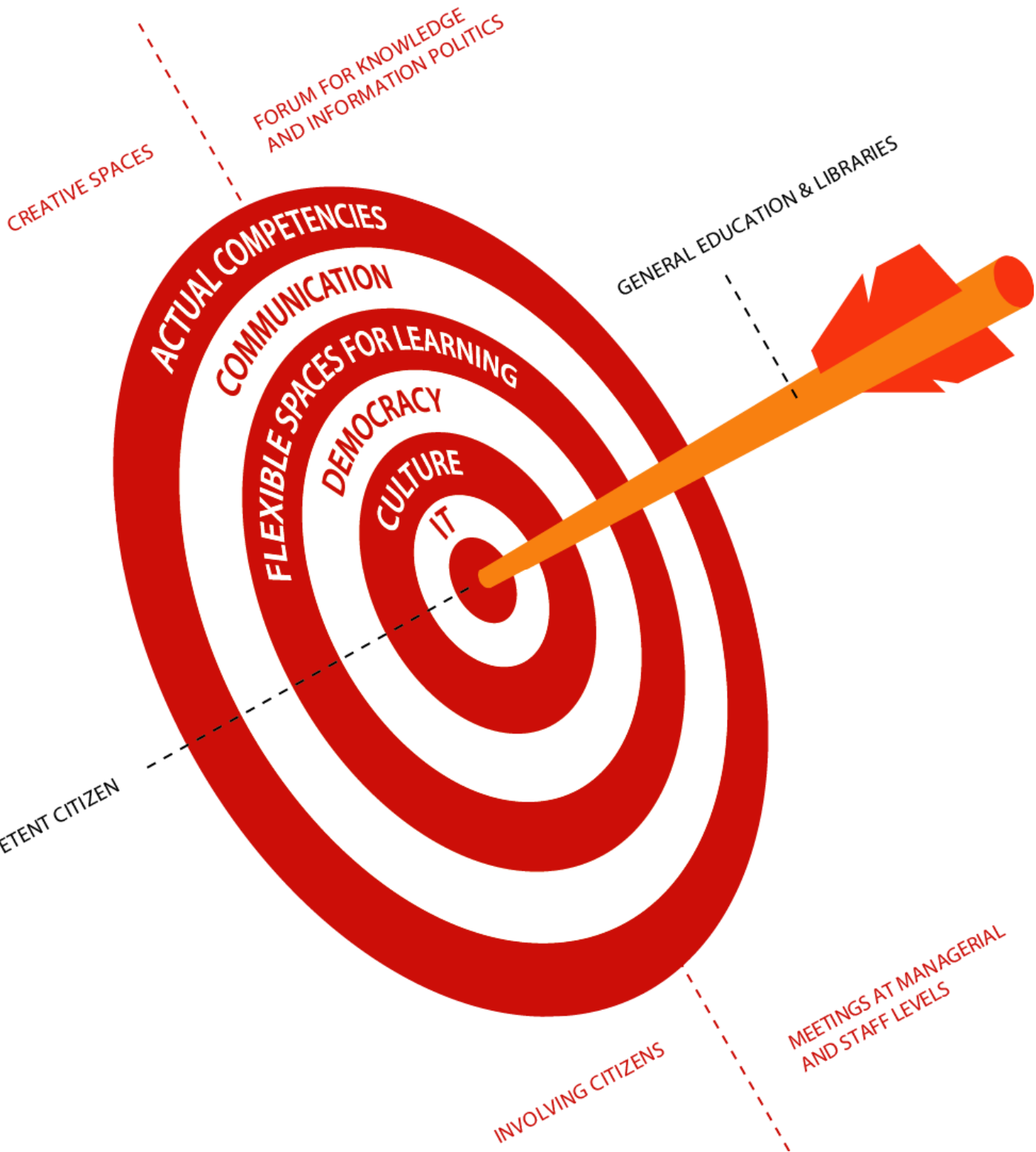
The Competent Citizen / Good Advice, 9

ent times, however, yearly plans can help to clarify who is able to act at what time (I.e. see the yearly plan of the Main Library in the Toolbox at www.denkompetenteborger.dk).

Talk about barriers when co-operating

There can be barriers that prevent proper co-operation and, while you should not always focus on problems, it can be healthy for the co-operation that you know where those barriers and problems are. You will experience progress faster if you are aware of problems regarding competition, cultural differences, agendas, goals, starting points, preconditions and terms.

Create equality in co-operation

To foster good co-operation that works over time, it is important that the co-operation is entered into on equal terms. The implicated parties need to experience that they are all contributing in some way. For example, it is suitable that there are clear agreements about who does what at what time, and that everyone takes part in the work.

CREATIVE SPACES

FORUM FOR KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION POLITICS

GENERAL EDUCATION & LIBRARIES

ACTUAL COMPETENCIES

COMMUNICATION

FLEXIBLE SPACES FOR LEARNING

DEMOCRACY

CULTURE

IT

THE COMPETENT CITIZEN

INVOLVING CITIZENS

MEETINGS AT MANAGERIAL AND STAFF LEVELS

FOUR SUGGESTIONS FOR CO-OPERATION METHODS

Create meetings at managerial and staff levels

It is important for the collaboration process that there is good contact and communication at the managerial level. However, it is rarely managers and leaders who have to carry out the actual co-operation in practice. At the same time, it is often the staff and co-workers who get ideas, as they are immersed in practical work. Therefore, it is important that the co-workers and staff know each other well enough that they know how to use one another, and where to call if they have an idea. Hence, it can be beneficial to work systematically to ensure that both leaders and managers, but also staff and co-workers, from the different areas meet.

Create a forum for knowledge and information politics

To ensure coordination between the areas and a political focus on adult- and supplementary education, it may be beneficiary to create a forum that brings the problems to the surface. This could be a forum for knowledge and information politics, which focuses on adult education, the development of competencies for citizens without higher education, citizens with special needs, and the group of elderly citizens outside the workforce.

A forum for knowledge and information politics can serve as a meeting point for players in adult- and supplementary education and the political level. It could be an idea forum and can ensure the flow of information between the relevant players – but at the same time, it can work purposively with bringing adult- and supplementary education on the political agenda, i.e. via a knowledge and information policy.

Create creative spaces with people who think differently

Leaders and co-workers from general education and libraries often think very much alike. This can become a problem, if the job is getting new ideas and thinking in alternatives. Therefore, we could create creative spaces, where parties with different competencies meet and create common goals, allowing new thoughts and development to happen. For general education and libraries, it may be suitable to involve a 3rd party in the creative spaces. The 3rd party may be able to see other perspectives and could relate the areas to their respective worlds. Creative spaces can serve as a space for service and competence development, as method for sharing knowledge between the areas, and as means to raise the competencies of our citizens.

Make the citizens competent and committed by involving them

Involving the citizens is valuable to organizations when they have to develop services, but also when they need to provide the citizens with a particular story about the organization. However, the proc-

esses of involving citizens can be effective at motivating the citizen into becoming actively involved. By creating spaces that ensure that the citizens are heard and involved in specific processes, the citizens are trained in their ability to speak their mind – and we send the signal that we need their competencies. Processes for citizen involvement can be made in relation to all types of citizens in numerous ways. In relation to the citizens, it is important to create respectful processes that could serve as alternative learning spaces.

EVIDENT INTERFACES BETWEEN THE AREAS

IT Education

General education and libraries both have tradition of offering IT education. At the same time, the expectation for the libraries' participation in the improvement of the Danes' general IT competencies is increasing. The *"Lær mere om IT"* (Learn more about Information Technology) initiative from the National IT and Telecom Agency is an example of this. There is a large basis for creating many and diverse offers for IT education – this is emphasized by rapid technological advances and an IT-barometer from 2009, which shows that 40% of the population barely (or not at all) know how to use computers. The report *"The Public Library in the Knowledge Society"* also requests co-operation between the areas in relation to IT education. Traditional intro-courses and education offers could be made. Another option is making more informal offers for learning, where the libraries' open and available character can be used actively, or citizen involvement - where citizens teach citizens.

Cultural meeting place

In general education and at libraries, cultural events are often lectures. In relation to lectures, co-operation between the areas could consist of coordinating lectures, joint advertising, joint planning and holding of events. However, by co-operating and using each other's competencies and re-sources, the cultural meeting place can be imagined in a broader context – this can be done with exhibitions, interactive meetings or workshops. The setting could be the library, an urban space or a cultural institution. It is all about creating cultural meeting places, where the areas use each other's strengths and different approaches to the citizen.

Democratic meeting place

Because of the objects clauses of the areas, it is obvious to co-operate in creating joint democratic meeting places. Evening courses, for instance, are bound to earmark 10% of their funds for activities that promote debate and discussion. Broad imagining is in order when creating a democratic meet-ing place. Joint campaigns in the city, events, competitions or publications are some of the methods that could be used. New opportunities for ways of hosting debates can arise by co-operating in cre-

ating democratic meeting places. At the same time, there is an opportunity to reach a broader audience, become part of the urban setting and possibly for profiling oneself as an important player in the community in relation to the political level.

Joint communication platform

The libraries and general education alike have a challenge in communicating their offers and services. The amount of information is so massive that there are only two ways being seen: Differing from the rest, or count on people to know what they are looking for. Alternatively, one could try to be visible in as many places as possible.

Joint communication can be worked with in many levels and to variable extents. This could be by the use of joint campaigns and websites or coordination between websites, or it could be joint advertising for events or joint information screens set up around the library, at the adult education sites and in the urban setting.

Actual competencies

Actual competencies have been marked as focus area by the Danish Adult Education Association. They are working on how general education can contribute to making the citizens describe the competencies that they gain by entering into informal contexts such as family, the sports club, and in the schools and association of general education. The point being that we all are able to do much more than what we are formally educated in, but also that it is valuable to be able to put words on ones own competencies, and that others can recognize them.

A lot of citizens do not know about the option of receiving an Actual Competence Certificate. Co-operation between the areas can contribute to increasing the knowledge of this. The joint work with creative spaces and citizen involvement processes can be combined with the fact that the implicated citizens receive help to putting words on the competencies that they have received by participating.

Learning environments in the libraries

The libraries view themselves as learning environments. There can be several reasons why it could be interesting for general education to view the libraries as learning environments: A lot of different citizen groups come to the library, the open character of the library gives the opportunity to create alternative education offers, and the library can contribute with their key competence: Information competence.

Co-operation could be entered into regarding education in classes, but individual guidance and supervision and education in lending could be the starting point for co-operation, insofar as the library as a learning space can be seen as the opportunity to put the classes of general education into perspective. It could become the extension of general education.

MORE USEFUL MATERIAL FROM THE COMPETENT CITIZEN

The report *"The Competent Citizen - the Future Co-operation between General Education and Libraries"* has formed the basis of this booklet. Elaboration of all elements mentioned in this booklet can be found, in Danish, in the report, along with examples of existing co-operation efforts. Download the report from www.denkompetenteborger.dk

The film *"The Lab Experiment – a Creative Meeting Place between General Education, Libraries and Seekers of Education"* describes the prototype for a creative space that was made in the production of *"The Competent Citizen"*. The film kan be seen on Youtub.com and www.denkompetenteborger.dk

The Toolbox is a gathering of tools that can be used for starting or continuing co-operation between general education and libraries. The Toolbox consists, among other things, of examples of co-operation agreements, yearly plans, etc. The Toolbox is found at http://www.denkompetenteborger.dk

LITERATURE & LINKS

http://www.denkompetenteborger.dk/page/litteratur-og-links-1