



# Århus Public Libraries

*Embracing Diversity, Empowering Citizens  
in Denmark*

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Access to Learning Award Recipient 2004

JACK JACKSON

July 2005

Council on Library  
and Information Resources

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#### Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Access to Learning Award Recipients

2004

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China Evergreen Rural Library Service, China

2003

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2002

Biblored, Colombia

2001

Biblioteca del Congreso, Argentina  
Proyecto Bibliotecas Guatemala (Probigua), Guatemala

2000

Helsinki City Library, Finland

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*The main library, Århus Public Libraries.*

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## PREFACE

Since its creation five years ago, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Access to Learning Award has recognized innovation in making information technology freely accessible. The innovation that the award recognizes comes in many forms, but the one constant is using technology as a medium to help people help themselves.

Denmark's Århus Public Libraries exemplifies the pivotal role that public libraries can play in integrating citizens from all walks of life into today's complex, knowledge-based society. "We are core agents for enlightenment and democracy through the never-fading idea of free and equal access to information, knowledge, and learning," said Rolf Hapel, director of Århus Public Libraries, upon accepting the 2004 award.

The Århus libraries have pursued an innovative agenda to reduce the growing gap between skilled information users and individuals who have no access to information. Almost 12 percent of Århus residents are refugees or immigrants, a greater percentage than Denmark's national average. The city's libraries have responded by creating a diverse array of outreach programs and electronic and print resources in immigrants' native languages.

Despite dwindling funds and staff cuts, the Århus libraries have increased productivity by encouraging staff to develop projects, implement ideas, and learn new skills. The library system has a decentralized political structure that allows branch librarians to decide how best to spend limited funds.

When Carol Erickson, senior program officer of the Gates Foundation's library program, visited Århus, the librarians repeatedly apologized for the paltry number of users, explaining that it was vacation time. Yet barely a single computer terminal was vacant, and a diverse crowd of patrons was using the libraries' other resources. This case study shows how Århus has become such a vital part of the community and why it earned the Access to Learning Award.

This is the third year that the Council on Library and Information Resources has managed the Access to Learning award. Each year we have benefited from the opportunity to learn what public libraries abroad are doing to overcome inequities in access to information technology. We are grateful to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for its abiding confidence in our work. 9

ALICE BISHOP  
SPECIAL PROJECTS ASSOCIATE  
CLIR

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## ABOUT ÅRHUS PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The 5.4 million people who live in Denmark enjoy one of the highest standards of living of any nation. This strong welfare state is relatively well off in terms of economic resources. More than four out of five Danes have Internet access from home or work. Many countries regard Denmark as a role model in the development of a modern information- and knowledge-based society.

With a population of 291,000, Århus is Denmark's second-largest city. Nearly 12 percent of Århus residents are refugees or immigrants, against a national average of 7 percent. In some neighborhoods, such as Gellerup and Hasle, the concentration of immigrants is even higher—43 and 27 percent, respectively. Illiteracy and social problems prevail in the parts of the city dominated by the newcomers.

This report focuses on the progress of Århus Public Libraries in reaching out to immigrant and refugee communities with library services based on the latest in information technology (IT). Libraries in Denmark strive to embrace all citizens and to contribute to their social inclusion and development. Århus Public Libraries has taken this a step further, by helping immigrants integrate into Danish society.

Outreach to immigrants is just one of the many services offered by Århus Public Libraries. While supporting traditional services, the libraries also strive to provide a virtual library environment for their users, with more than 50 Internet-based services. 9



### Århus Public Libraries at a Glance, 2004

Number of libraries	19
Number of public access Internet workstations	337
Number of books and other media	1.1 million
Annual visits to physical libraries	2.1 million
Average annual visits to physical libraries, by inhabitant	7.3
Annual circulation of physical media	5.3 million
Annual circulation of physical media, by inhabitant	18.4 items
Hits on Århus Public Libraries' Web domain, 2004	22.4 million
Number of full-time library employees	257
Annual budget (US\$)	\$22 million





*Patrons of Århus Public Libraries: digital citizens in Danish society.*

## INTRODUCTION

Århus Public Libraries offers more than free information technology to underserved refugee and immigrant communities in Århus, Denmark. The libraries help people gain skills they need to use computers and the Internet, thus helping them function and prosper as “digital citizens” in Danish society.

The Århus Public Libraries’ Gellerup and Hasle branches—located in neighborhoods with high concentrations of immigrants—recruit neighborhood volunteers, called IT guides, to teach information technology to their fellow residents. Community members can learn skills such as basic word-processing as well as how to work with electronic forms and do information searches, online shopping, and home banking. Residents can also learn to communicate with family and friends around the globe via e-mail, chat rooms, internet telephony and instant messaging.

The Gellerup and Hasle branch libraries have become so involved in their cultural and social roles in these neighborhoods that they have formed partnerships with health and social service organizations, some of which have even established branches within the physical libraries themselves.

“For a person to be able to exercise his rights and duties in a democratic society, it is crucial that he is able to master the tools and mind-sets that are at the core of the information society,” says Rolf Hapel, director of Århus Public Libraries. “It is among our tasks to assist in the process of teaching the necessary skills for

mastering information technology, search tools, and other means of aid.”

Supplying these communities with multimedia services is a major part of Århus Public Libraries’ commitment to developing library services based on Internet and IT. The libraries offer intensive technology training to staff and free weekly introductions to the Internet to the public. The goal is to supply one Internet workstation for every 1,000 inhabitants, or about 300 workstations.

With their progressive and visionary approach to information technology, Århus Public Libraries has become Denmark’s most successful e-business in the public sector. In addition to a main library and 18 branch libraries, a virtual digital library offers more than 50 electronic services. These services range from Internet-based catalog searches and reservations to online payment of fines, plus several networked services from a collaboration of Danish libraries. One of these networked services is FINFO, a Web site that provides information about social services in Denmark, including information about asylum, housing, work, education, politics and culture, in 13 languages.

A unique Danish cooperating system of public libraries has provided the foundation for Århus Public Libraries’ work. Perhaps even more important, the libraries’ own municipal and internal decentralization and self-management have provided the guiding force to maximize their effectiveness.

This is the story of Århus Public Libraries. 9

# Empowering New Citizens

OF THE 19 LIBRARIES IN ÅRHUS, two branches, Gellerup and Hasle, offer outreach programs specifically intended for the immigrant communities in which they are located.

## Not a Traditional Library

In the Job Corner, a cozy nook of Gellerup Library, three computers and a laser printer have been occupied all afternoon. Signs taped on the monitors declare, “These computers for job searches only.” Two large bulletin boards display employment ads printed from a Danish Internet job portal earlier in the day.

“They should put this in all libraries in Denmark. It’s a huge help,” says Ünzile Gøvele, a young woman wearing large hoop earrings. Gøvele, who is 22, is a Turkish-Dane who grew up in Denmark. She has come to the library almost daily in the past three months. She and her husband Kubilay, a horticulturalist who emigrated from Turkey four years ago, are both looking for work. They do not own a computer.

“We actually live closer to another library, but we like coming here better because of this,” Gøvele says. “It’s free to use the Internet, and you can print out as much as you need,” she adds. Gellerup is the only branch of Århus Public Libraries that offers a service such as the Job Corner. In addition to the dedicated workstations, the library offers counseling services on preparing a résumé and job application as well as introductory courses in how to use the databases of the public employment service and others.

Nearby, eight computer workstations get a constant flow of users—by elementary school children just out of school for the day.

In another corner of the library, over the displays of books, CDs, DVDs, and PlayStation games, a wave of laughter erupts, followed by chatter. Several beaming Somali women in colorful robes and headscarves emerge from the

Health Center, their babies in their arms.

It does not take long to realize that this library is not just about books.

## Gellerup’s Citizens

Gellerup Library is located on the ground floor of a water-stained, gray-cement tenement house in the western part of Århus. The spicy smell of Middle Eastern *shawarma* (meat on a skewer) wafts from the Al-Amir kebab hut right outside the building’s entrance. Several tired-looking high-rise tenements surround the building, which is located in a neighborhood where nearly one of two people is an immigrant.

While Århus Public Libraries in general strives to provide a visionary mix of services focused on IT, Gellerup and its sister branch Hasle, located a few kilometers to the north, offer outreach programs aimed specifically at the underserved communities in which they are located. Like Gellerup, Hasle has a very high concentration of immigrants—nearly one in three residents.

“Libraries in Denmark see themselves as places of general education, as houses of knowledge,” says Lone Hedelund, branch librarian manager for both Gellerup and Hasle Libraries. Hedelund is warm and friendly, and so enthusiastic and full of ideas that she can hardly speak fast enough to describe them. “We must make knowledge available for our citizens—I say ‘citizens’ instead of ‘patrons’ because that’s how we view them.

“The Danish Public Library System was founded upon the idea that people must be enlightened,” she continues. “Otherwise, it is not possible to take part in a democratic process. When so many of our citizens are functionally illiterate, however, we must find other methods to enlighten them.”

As an example, take the Gellerup initiative in which a municipal office called *Folkeinformation* (People’s Information) has moved its desks and



*The Internet workstations at Gellerup Library get a constant flow of users.*

staff into the library. “It’s one of our new development projects, where we cooperate with the local department of social services to help connect the municipality with citizens,” says Hedelund.

*Folkeinformation*, staffed with seven bicultural “new Danes”—including a Somali, a Congan, a Lebanese, and a Kurd—helps immigrants who speak little or no Danish communicate with authorities, employers and others. “Maybe somebody needs to understand a letter from the municipality. Maybe they need to go to the doctor, but can’t figure out how to call for an appointment,” Hedelund explains. “Maybe they need to contact their employer, or search for something on the Internet. We invited *Folkeinformation* inside the library, because we have a very large intersection of tasks,” she continues. And since the staffs sit side by side, they can easily refer patrons to each other when necessary. The librarians are more skilled at Internet searches, for instance, while staff of *Folkeinformation* know more about how to put a classified ad in the newspaper.

“Plus, we can also help guide their workers in how to do productive Internet searches, while they can help us increase our knowledge about other cultures and prejudices,” Hedelund adds.

### **Social Culture**

Despite appearances, Gellerup Library is not a social services office. “We are still a cultural institution, but we see it within a social perspective,” Hedelund says. “Our citizen base has a composition that means if we worked in a primarily cultural way, then we would exclude a good portion of them.”

This area of western Århus is rife with unemployment, poor achievement in public schools, and poverty. Many of the Danish residents who have lived in these neighborhoods for generations are moving away, turning the area into a ghetto—at least from the perspective of the very high Danish standard of living.

“It is so important that we go in and support people with the information they need so they can participate in community life,” says Hedelund. “We must be part of breaking the downward spiral of social heritage in this area.”

### **Life on the Net**

Denmark is one of the most advanced countries in the world when it comes to the use of computers and IT in everyday living. More than 83 percent of people in Denmark use the Internet from home, work, or school. The skills necessary to use the Internet are second nature to many, including older citizens: One in two people between the ages of 60 and 74 now corresponds with family members by e-mail (*Danmarks Statistik 2004*).

The Århus Public Libraries puts so much focus on IT for immigrant communities because living and functioning in Denmark are becoming more and more reliant on it. In Århus Municipality, for instance, reserving a spot in a day care center must be done through the Internet. Job seekers are expected, and in some cases required, to place their résumés on the Net.

“We are the linking element in all of this,” says Hedelund. “We can help residents apply

for day care. We can help to raise their skill levels—without being competitors to the social offices. We can offer courses where they can learn simple but basic things—like turning on and off the computer, home banking, or Hotmail, so it's easier for them to communicate with their families in foreign countries. We have the time and the patience to help them put their CV (curriculum vitae) on the Net before they go to the public employment service.”

### **Local History of IT**

Gellerup and its sister library Hasle have a long tradition of offering goal-oriented computer instruction. In 1996, Hasle Library started an IT Technology Center in the adjacent Herredsvang neighborhood association's clubhouse. The center offered free, short courses in IT. “We were targeting the residents with the least experience,” Hedelund says. “We put 150 people through these courses on three machines over one year.”

In 1998, Hasle was a leading force behind the first Web site of a neighborhood association in Denmark. The project was a product of a larger activity, *Life in Herredsvang*, also set in motion with the library's help. Hasle helped put together a steering committee of local citizens, who then went out into the neighborhood to ask residents what they wished for in order to improve the area or their own skills. This information was collated, and the group then created a number of goal-oriented projects to respond to their neighbors' needs.

“This (activity) had a lot to do with general education, human resource development, and empowerment—before the term ‘empowerment’ was used,” says Hedelund. Herredsvang has been a magnet for immigrants and Danes with interest and skills in computers. The *Life in Herredsvang* activity helped the library notice this strength and thus reach out to these skilled IT users. Together, they organized programs that have made it possible for residents themselves to pass on their knowledge to their neighbors.

### **Citizen Patrons**

Hasle, with around 400 visits a day, has 12 computer workstations (not including computers used for catalog searches). Gellerup, with around

700 visits a day, has 13 workstations, of which three are reserved for the Job Corner, one is for searches on the extensive FINFO information portal on Danish society for immigrants and refugees (see *The Digital Library*, page 20), and one for searches on a Danish consumer information Web site portal. The remaining workstations can be reserved for an hour at a time, and they are occupied continuously every day.

On this weekday winter afternoon, a library custodian helps keep order at the eight general-use workstations, which are arranged in two rows of four computers each. He directs patrons to the computers when it is their turn or when an opening unexpectedly appears, sternly hushing anyone who makes too much noise.

The tinny sound of Iraqi music from the 1950s emanates softly from the computer where Mohamed Shreef sits. An Iraqi who fled Kuwait 14 years ago, Shreef visits Gellerup Library nearly every day. “I use the computers to write e-mails, listen to music, use Word, and check up on petrol prices and my soccer club,” he says. A librarian who was shelving some books nearby walks away. Shreef looks over his shoulder, opens the “All Arab” music Web page and says with a sheepish smile, “Great, now I can turn up the volume!”

At the same table, Ali, 12, is dressed like most children here—a down jacket over a hooded sweatshirt and stocking cap pulled low. “I use the Net here a whole lot,” Ali says. “We have a computer at home, but I come here to have my own private time.”

Nearby, Said, 16, spends much of his time frequenting a popular Danish children's chat community called arto.dk. “I don't always want to be at home, so I come here and hang out,” Said says.

Malalai, 19, is writing a letter with Word. She came from Afghanistan two years ago, and she learned how to use a computer here in the library (see facing page: *A Place of Refuge*).

### **Job Corner**

Lone Hedelund coordinates the Job Corner. It is a joint project of the public employment service, the department of employment in Århus Municipality, a social office in west Århus, and Gellerup Library. While the three dedicated computers are

## A Place of Refuge For Minority Girls

A 2001 collaboration among the Danish state and university libraries, Odense Central Library, and Århus Public Libraries studied how ethnic minorities use the libraries. The report found, among other things, that libraries had become a place of refuge for minority girls.

“In many homes, the girls’ scope of activities is relatively limited,” according to the study. “The libraries have become an alternative, a legitimate place where the girls can go with the parents’ permission to borrow materials, go on the Internet or meet friends of both sexes” (Århus Public Libraries 2001).

The authors made several observations and conducted focus interviews among different ethnic groups. In one interview, three 17- to-18-year-old

Iraqi immigrant girls in Århus supported the idea of the library as a place of refuge.

One girl says, “Every time we sit down to talk with our parents, they just want to talk about problems. Never anything but problems! The Internet at the library is the best that has happened for me.”

Her friend says that in addition to chat and e-mail, the girls use the library’s Internet to listen to Arabic music and to help them write papers for school.

“Don’t you have Internet at home?” asks the interviewer.

“Yes,” replies one. “But at home, we’re not free to use the computer (as we wish). Therefore we prefer to work here at the library.”

*Ethnic minority girls take advantage of open access to the computer workstations at the library.*



available all day for job searches, a librarian staffs the site for a few hours every afternoon. Her help is greatly prized.

“See, here it is, 4 p.m., and I’m scheduled to leave, but it’s difficult to break away,” says Inger Olesen, a librarian who can be found here on many afternoons. Olesen has spent the last half-hour looking over the shoulder of one patron, helping her compose a job application with proper Danish syntax and grammar.

“We try not to advise too much,” she says. “It’s their job application, their résumé—not mine. It’s about supporting people’s own resources with respect and guidance. We don’t do casework. We are not social case managers. People can come in anonymously and seek information, and I can help show how they can do certain things, or help with their Danish.”

Hedelund stresses that the Job Corner is a service within the scope of the Danish Public Library Act. “It’s compassionate help between our



**Lone Hedelund, Branch Librarian Manager, Gellerup and Hasle libraries:** “It is so important for us to maintain the public libraries’ core value that there is free access for all.”

staff and a patron,” she says. “It’s free to use, and people can come in and get help without being a number in the system. We can also help get people prepared before they visit their job counselor, so they can cut to the chase and go after exactly what they want.”

Hedelund and Olesen say that most patrons who ask for help need assistance with their written Danish.

“And if people see a job opening they want to explore, we let them call from our telephone for free,” says Hedelund. “If they need to practice the conversation first, we’re glad to help.”

“We also make it clear that if a person is unhappy with the treatment they receive at the public employment service, it’s not our business,” she adds. “We don’t offer any advice in how to deal with that.”

## Health Center

Located within Gellerup Library, the Health Center consists of three units: health care specialists, dental therapists, and midwives (in Denmark, all birth consultations are handled by physicians and midwives in tandem).

The Health Center began as a two-year project. It was so popular—after a one-year extension—that it was made permanent in 2005. It began when a dental therapist was looking for an office location in the neighborhood. “She was afraid if she set up in the *Bazaar’en* (a large, local ethnic market), then many women would not be allowed to come,” says Lone Hedelund.

Gellerup Library had space available, and the service expanded. The primary users are young women, most of whom are new to Denmark, says nurse Lisbeth Bruun, the Health Center’s manager.

“The idea is to get the local people more active in their own health and to (help them) learn about the resources we have here,” says Bruun. The center holds an open house most afternoons, where individuals or groups can drop by without an appointment with their questions or concerns. Otherwise, courses are scheduled for parents, groups, and individuals on topics such as contraception, heart disease, high blood pressure, childhood illnesses, and good nutrition for adults and



*Immigrant women define their IT needs and the library sets up a tailor-made course. This gives the library a new user group.*

children. Sometimes, the center and library plan events in tandem, such as the annual health week or certain other programs or exhibitions.

### **IT the Common Thread**

The Health Center's purpose, like that of most projects and programs in Gellerup Library, is to help immigrants and refugees adapt to Denmark. Empowerment through information and communication technology ties everything together, says Hedelund.

It works like this. A group of women that visit the Health Center have a common need that can be fulfilled via IT. "We say, 'Try to get five or six others together, and then talk to the library staff,'" says Bruun. The library then puts together a tailor-made course for them.

"It could be something like getting an e-mail address," says Hedelund. "Or learning to do an Internet search for something related to women's health. Or they just might need to learn how to order discount airline tickets to London over the Internet.

"This is how we use empowerment. These women say, 'We have an IT need.' They define the type of instruction they need to get there. Then we go in and teach them. Afterward, they also have the possibility to use the library, too.

They give us a user group that we otherwise would not have had," says Hedelund.

### **No Hard Data—On Purpose**

The Health Center does not keep track of the women who take an IT course, just as the library does not know how many people get called to interviews or are offered jobs as a result of assistance they received at the Job Corner. While such data would undoubtedly be useful for knowing whether the service is effective, collecting such information goes against the principle of the library's offerings.

"The whole philosophy behind Job Corner is based on anonymity—that patrons are not registered in any way," says Hedelund. "We have absolutely no idea how many jobs have resulted from it. A few people have come back and told us some success stories, but other than that, we don't know. It is so important for us to maintain the public libraries' core value that there is free access for all—that users can come in and utilize our services without being registered or tracked or seen as a social security number."

The library does know that at least 20 people use the Job Corner every day, with seven to nine of those visitors coming during the hours where a librarian staffs the station. 9

# IT Competence Boost

**THE GELLERUP AND HASLE** Libraries launched an 18-month project called “IT Competence Boost” to help immigrants learn basic IT skills. Volunteer IT guides from the immigrants’ own neighborhoods taught these sessions.

## First E-Mail

“I’ve just sent my first e-mail! It was to my two girlfriends. They will be so surprised!”

Reinaneh Afshar, a 31-year-old woman from Iran who has lived in Denmark for four years, is beaming. It’s December 2004 in Gellerup Library. Afshar navigates her way around an Iranian cookbook she found on the Internet.

“When I came here the first time, I was completely blank,” Afshar says. Before taking the free introductory IT course, she recalls, “I knew nothing about computers—absolutely nothing. This is my third time here, and I can already write letters, send e-mail, and find my way around the Internet” (Dybdal 2004).

## EU Empowerment Project

Afshar’s lessons were one result of the IT Competence Boost project, which was designed by Århus Public Libraries for Gellerup and Hasle. The project was part of Århus city’s Urban II application for European Union (EU) urban development funding in 2000. While the undertaking encompassed several organizations and activities, the Gellerup and Hasle Libraries conceived projects aimed at empowering residents in western Århus who did not have computers at home. The libraries focused particularly on ethnic minority women and other groups who neither had time nor resources to obtain fundamental IT skills (Århus Public Libraries 2004).

Århus won the grant. In July 2000, the EU designated the combined Gellerup, Hasle, and Herredsvang neighborhoods as an Urban II area

for the period 2002—2007 (Municipality of Århus 2002).

The Gellerup and Hasle Libraries serve nearly the whole population in this area. The European Regional Development Fund supplied about half of the total funding for this 12 million euros (US\$15 million) program; Århus Municipality matched the other half.

The idea behind Urban II is to help revitalize inner-city areas with a history of complex social, economic, and physical problems: high unemployment, rampant crime, below-average health, and decaying buildings and environment. Self-help, empowerment, new forms of citizen involvement, and ethnic diversity must be major parts of the solution (Århus Municipality 2002).

Århus Public Libraries’ Urban II project, IT Competence Boost, has been primarily intended for immigrant and refugee women. The libraries used empowerment from the earliest stages, says Birgit Lind, chief librarian for local libraries in Århus.

“Before we wrote the application, we organized people to hear what kinds of programs they wanted,” Lind says. “What were their needs? We worked together with many organizations—ethnic, women’s, international, Somali, and others.” The processes of outreach and writing the IT Competence Boost part of the application took 10 months.

## Courses for Patrons and Personnel

The project aimed to disseminate knowledge of IT and to increase citizen involvement in the urban area through free, measurable, and concrete IT activities over the 18-month grant period. Four main activities resulted: PC training courses, Internet introduction classes, IT guide instruction, and a course for library personnel in digital administration (see Table 1).

**Table 1: IT Competence Boost Courses, Content and Participants**

COURSE	CONTENT
PC Training 19 classes with total of 165 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a What a computer is and what it can be used for</li> <li>a Word processing</li> <li>a Multimedia</li> <li>a Internet and its possibilities</li> </ul>
Internet Introduction 124 courses with total of 290 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a Basic knowledge of Internet</li> <li>a Information searches</li> <li>a E-mail</li> <li>a Online shopping and home banking</li> <li>a Electronic forms and digital signature</li> <li>a Security</li> </ul>
IT Guides 2 courses with total of 31 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a Background in Urban II program and IT Competence Boost project</li> <li>a Pedagogy and instruction: How to pass on one's knowledge</li> <li>a Review of content topics for the target group</li> <li>a Preparation of digital instruction materials</li> <li>a Creation of networks and coordination of volunteer work in the target neighborhoods</li> </ul>
Digital Management for Library Personnel 1 course with total of 11 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a The library's role</li> <li>a Digital signature and encryption in theory and practice</li> <li>a IT security</li> <li>a Information searching in non-Latin languages (Arabic, Persian, Vietnamese, etc.)</li> <li>a The library's target group and digital self-service solutions</li> <li>a FINFO search guidance<sup>1</sup></li> <li>a Implementation of digital self-service solutions in an open-learning environment</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> FINFO ([www.finfo.dk](http://www.finfo.dk)) is a portal for refugees and immigrants that gives access to information on living in Denmark. It is available in 13 languages. Note: Courses have continued after the 18-month project ended. As of January 2005, there were 46 people on the waiting list for the PC training or Internet introduction courses. In addition, 10 earlier participants had asked for an additional class.

Source: Århus Public Libraries 2004

The project attracted the attention of local newspapers and television channels. The libraries marketed the courses with brochures and posters bearing the message “Free IT for All” and held a number of informative meetings that proved to be wildly popular.

The press was in force at one of these IT Culture Days in 2003. Here, an IT workshop was accompanied by samples of folklore, music, dance, and food from the immigrants’ native countries. Some 650 people attended. Sonja Mikkelsen, the

head of Urban II’s secretariat and a former minister of the Danish parliament, was overwhelmed by the response.

“There is so much drive in this community, and there are many people who want to be part of the various projects,” Mikkelsen told a local newspaper (*Mette Østergaard* 2003). “We hope we can give everyone an IT-competence boost, which they can use in the job market. If employers would only open their eyes, they’d see a huge potential here.”

The project leader, Kambiz Kalantar Hormoozi,



*Århus Public Libraries' Urban II project, IT Competence Boost, has been intended primarily for immigrant and refugee women.*

who was later hired as a full-time integration consultant to Gellerup and Hasle Libraries, says, “We try to get hold of some of the women and organizations in the area that can communicate their knowledge onward. In that way, we hope to spread IT awareness to many more people.”

Four ethnic women’s organizations in Århus West—Somali, Iranian, Turkish, and Kurdish—reacted very positively to the formation of a computer club, for instance. They say that many of the organization’s members want to learn more about IT. In addition, they believe that such a club would make some strong role models for the women, since the IT guides would be from their own ranks.

### **Neutral Territory in IT**

Denmark’s integration policy needs some rethinking, says Hormoozi, who came to Denmark from Iran 17 years ago. Many immigrants are unemployed. The kind of social help that they need is

not currently available. To him, the library is an obvious place to start.

“Many people in the area use the library. We can play a big role in passing along important information,” he says. “Everything is free. Clubs are great, but a membership might cost 200 Danish kroner (DKK) (about US\$35). That might not sound like much, but when you’re on public support, it’s a lot.”

IT is a neutral subject—not charged by culture or nationality. “It makes the meeting of cultures a lot easier,” he says. And information technology is a very visual medium that can help with language barriers. “You can show how things work,” he says. “For example, you can have a cola can and a wastebasket on the screen. You just have to show how to drag the can into the trash—which can be practiced—and in this way, you are teaching how to use the mouse.”

Another important factor is that people come to the library’s IT instruction courses of their own

# How to Empower Your Underserved Citizens

**Urban II project leader Kámbiz Hormoozi offers this advice for any library that plans to take an active role in empowering underserved residents with IT skills**

- ª Base your activities and projects on the wishes and needs of residents, clubs, and organizations in your area. Do not plan anything before asking people what they want. This helps create a feeling of ownership and awareness for the various projects.
  - ª Organize activities to build understanding of IT, IT competence, and IT's significance in the job market and in everyday life.
  - ª Take advantage of existing skills and experience in your area.
  - ª Involve key people in the neighborhood when setting new projects in motion, and make sure that they feel that their contribution is valued and appreciated.
  - ª Look for possibilities for multidisciplinary cooperation with local organizations, institutions, and businesses. This will not only help create an interaction among these groups and residents but also increase the chance that the project will eventually become independent.
  - ª Be open to sharing knowledge, networks, contacts, facilities, and new ideas with authorities and established local resources.
  - ª Reach out to relevant clubs and organizations, offering short presentations on your project and arranging for discussions with any interested participants.
  - ª Use the phone! Call organizations and individuals in the area.
  - ª Target your marketing to the right channels. Contact and visit media players in the area (immigrant radio and TV, local newspapers, residential houses, etc.), and make sure that everything is visible from Web pages connected with the project.
  - ª Involve the media, elected officials, and administration to market new initiatives in a positive way and to change the image of the underserved residents' neighborhoods.
  - ª Be flexible with meeting times; the best times might be evenings or weekends.
  - ª Use diversity as a strength. Tap into local initiatives that encourage cooperation across different ethnicities.
  - ª Provide cross-cultural meeting places with a focus on activities that take into consideration all neighborhood residents.
  - ª Focus on simplicity, visual materials, and innovative thinking to overcome misunderstandings and barriers in culture and language.
  - ª Be flexible in your work plans, remembering each individual's needs and wishes.
  - ª Don't set too many things in motion at the same time. Otherwise, you will lose interest from local residents, who cannot keep up.
- Source: Århus Public Libraries 2004. IT-Kompetence Løft i Urbanområdet.

free will and try hard not to miss any of the classes. “They want to be here,” Hormoozi says. “We don’t tell them they have to be here, or threaten to take away their bus pass or welfare check if they don’t come. We don’t have to take the role of a public authority,” he adds.

### Volunteer Teachers

IT guides are volunteers from Gellerup, Hasle, and Herredsvang who are skilled in working with information technology. It is they who teach introductory PC and Internet skills. Most guides are immigrants who bring advanced educational degrees and experience with them to Denmark—engineers in IT, electronics, chemicals—but who have difficulty finding work in their new country.

The guides formed an association that aimed to be independent and take off on its own by the end of the project, says Lone Hedelund. This break-off did not happen, however, because the IT guides need more training in how to pass along their knowledge to others.

“They might be very proficient with IT, but they need competence for teaching adults and kids,” says Hormoozi. A series of intensive, 12- and 24-hour courses has been designed to teach the guides basic teaching skills, including how to make instructional materials, and how to navigate in Denmark’s civil society.

### Trilingual Help

One of the volunteer IT guides at Gellerup, Abdi Omar Abdi, 39, sought asylum in Denmark in 1995. He had worked as a quality control engineer on a fish farm in his native Somalia. His fluency in three languages—Somali, Arabic, and Danish—has been a valuable asset to his volunteer work.

“Generally, we teach in Danish, but most of the people taking our classes don’t understand Danish so well,” says Abdi. “If they ask a Dane about something and get the answer in Danish, they will still be confused. So, it helps that we can speak several languages among us.”

Hormoozi says, “Most of our participants are women. In the beginning, many of them are scared to even get close to the computer. They cross their arms and push the chair way back,

afraid to touch the wrong button or something. By the end, they are so happy.

“At our first PC course graduation ceremony, the city’s mayor was there handing out diplomas in front of a lot of TV reporters and journalists,” remembers Hormoozi. “One woman volunteered to be interviewed on TV. ‘I love computers!’ she said.”

### Children’s Workshop

A recent offshoot of the IT guides’ activity is an effort to develop a workshop that teaches children how to do simple cartoon animation on a PC. The initiative, [www.tegnefilm.net](http://www.tegnefilm.net), came from the IT Guide Association’s chairman, Rahman Rezazadeh, who is also one of the instructors. The association meets on weekends in the Herredsvang Community Center, adjacent to the Hasle Library.

While the concept is still under development, the children learn basic skills in drawing and in using the computer in an interactive and creative



*Urban II’s Kámbiz Hormoozi tells Århus Lord Mayor Louise Gade about the IT Guides project at the first PC course graduation ceremony.*

## Survey:

### Århus Youth Choose Library Most

A number of surveys from the past decade indicate that young people in Århus—immigrants and refugees included—repeatedly rank the library as a main recreational center. A 2003 survey (which did not distinguish ethnicity among the fourth- through ninth-grade students) ranked the library as the most popular leisure activity, apart from going to the movie theater (Århus Municipality 2003).

This survey of 10-to-18-year-olds from six local neighborhoods with a high percentage of refugees and immigrants—Braband/Gellerup, Hasle, Viby, Tilst, Trige, and Christiansbjerg—reflects a similar result.

Activity	Bicultural Users	Total Users
Extracurricular youth schools (3)	318	420
Recreational clubs (2)	146	200
Educational playground	75	75
After-school centers (4)	28	79
Adventure playground	5	39
Municipal leisure clubs (2)	88	182
Total	660	995
Gellerup Library	708	1,415

*Source: Report on Municipal Recreational Offers to Children and Young Refugees/Immigrants. Århus Municipality, 1998.*

way. The workshop is also intended to strengthen the children's social and group-work skills and to give them a taste of recreational activities.

On one winter Saturday, six children between the ages of 9 and 12—five girls and one boy—work at computers stationed around the room. They spend several minutes experimenting with software such as Adobe Image Ready and Photoshop. But then attention spans wane, signaled by a few unexpected sounds emanating from some of the computers.

"No chat!" commands a cheerful Peter Fajmer, an IT guide-in-training. A part-time artist, Fajmer—a native Dane from the area who wears a leather skullcap and silver earring—thought it would be fun to try working with children on something creative. He's joined by Anwar Suddik, the father of two of the girls. A Sri Lankan Brit who has been in Denmark four years, Suddik is an unemployed artist and sculptor. He takes a break from his own animation project to tell one of the children to turn off an Internet game and get back to work on her cartoon project.

Twelve-year-old Nanna makes a simple animation with Fajmer's help. She draws a boy and girl on a piece of paper, then cuts them out and brings the pieces under a digital camera. She

takes 26 pictures, moving the pieces slightly between each click. Then, Fajmer shows her how to upload the images to her computer and make a "flip book" cartoon with them. "Cool," she says, watching her animation several times. Nearby, 10-year-old Lunaina makes her own animation by drawing a short series of flower pictures on her computer and then connecting them into a simple cartoon.

"How long did that take you?" Fajmer asks Lunaina.

"About five minutes," she says with a sly smile.

Meanwhile, beeps, explosion sounds, and funky music are coming from the other computers, where the other children have digressed into game mode. Fajmer decides it's time to break for lunch.

"I really think it's great to be part of this," he says, always upbeat. "All the kids love cartoons and animation, and they're really set on learning how to connect pictures in different ways to make it work. They're also good at helping each other."

Fajmer also looks forward to an upcoming course for IT guides on teaching children, where, among other skills, he will learn how to help kids stay focused on their projects. 9

# Visionaries in Resource Management

**MOST OF THE DEVELOPMENT** activities that make it possible for all the branch libraries to deliver cutting-edge services are generated in the city's main library and its digital library. Thus, to better appreciate Gellerup and Hasle Libraries' IT outreach programs for immigrants, one must understand both the unique foundation of Danish libraries in general and the particular approach of Århus Public Libraries.

## Unique Cooperating System

One of the most important concepts in Danish library terminology is the cooperating library system, according to Rolf Hapel, library director, Århus Public Libraries. The concept—which refers to equal partners sharing resources—represents a unique construction in international terms and is based on historical aspects of Danish culture and the tradition of public enlightenment and democracy.

Denmark's cooperating library system comprises three levels: local (public and school libraries), regional (county libraries and county centers), and national (the National Library Authority, state and university libraries, the Royal (National) Library, and other public research libraries). The pivotal points of cooperation are the supplying of materials and information among libraries, the sharing of experiences, and the continuing professional development for staff (Hapel 2005).

"The very idea of a cooperating library system is closely related to the Danish public library conception of free and equal access to information and knowledge, an intensified awareness of our cultural heritage, and the strengthening of the individual's creative talents and ability to read," says Hapel. "In the past, this idea was based on the rather obvious advantages of sharing and exploiting information in a society that was short on that commodity. But it now seems as if the

underlying concept of caring is the one being sustained in a time very much affected by an information surplus—or flood."

As information becomes less dependent on analog media such as books, some aspects of the cooperating library system are becoming somewhat of an anachronism, notes Hapel. New ideas are emerging. The national online service enables library patrons to request that a holding from any library in the system be delivered to a library near him or her (see *The Digital Library*). It also means that free information services and resources are created, validated and distributed through the Internet. Many networked Danish public library services are on the Web, and all were developed and are operated by the network of Danish public libraries with partial funding from the Danish National Library Authority.

## Decentralization

Within this superstructure, Århus Public Libraries owes much of its progress to a high degree of decentralization and self-management, guided by politically accepted aims and goals, says Hapel.

In 1991, all libraries in the system began a process of internal decentralization. This broke the tradition under which each branch library got a fixed percentage of the total budget each year and forced the libraries to take a more active role in local services and outreach. Budgets were now to be based on how many loans and visitors each branch library had. "That was a motor to create a little more internal competition," says Hapel. "Before that, it didn't matter if they did anything, they just got the same amount of money they always got. Now, there was a connection between their results and their budget. That idea has really worked."

Political decentralization began in 1996. "Before then, each time we wanted to move some-



**Rolf Hapel:** *“We’ve been good at taking advantage of IT to increase efficiency in our daily operation.”*

thing from one area of the budget to another, we had to go to the city council. It was hopeless,” says Hapel. “We couldn’t change staff numbers during the year—it was all predetermined in the budget. If we wanted new computers, we had to go to the city council.”

Since 1996, the municipality has allowed each library to handle its own budget. To qualify for funds, each library must meet a series of general aims and goals, which are reviewed annually. These goals cover such areas as numbers of visits, circulation, hours of service, and percentage of budget used for purchasing media. One of the pivotal goals requires the library to take an active role in integration of immigrants.

“The libraries must support refugees and immigrants in their efforts to acquire the Danish language,” states the municipality’s integration policy. According to the policy, “the target group, ‘citizens of foreign ancestry,’ must make up the

same proportionate share of the number of registered library users as in the general population” (Århus Municipality 2003).

“So if we have 12 percent refugees and immigrants here in Århus, they should also be at least 12 percent of our total user group,” says Hapel. “We are very close to that. That’s one way of assessing whether goals and aims are fulfilled.”

### **A Step Further**

Århus Public Libraries took self-management further in 2001, when Hapel began making annual contracts with the individual libraries. “We drill deeper into the goals and aims, and each library makes a work plan. Gellerup and Hasle Libraries have a contract with some activities that none of the other libraries have, since they have this special population of refugees and immigrants,” he says.

“The decentralization has been incredibly

important for us,” says Gellerup and Hasle branch libraries’ manager Lone Hedelund. “I can decide myself—as leader of my own department—how my budget should be divvied up. If I think we need to buy more computers, then I do so.”

Hapel adds, “All of this decentralization has also proven to be a prerequisite for idea generation. We’re giving people the responsibility to develop, and we’re giving them the resources in hand and competence to make business decisions. If it doesn’t work, they don’t get the money.”

### Head Start in Web Services Offer

Rolf Hapel—who became director of Århus Public Libraries in 1994—is warm, friendly, full of energy, organized and efficient, and well versed in the cutting edge of many sectors: societal trends, management, IT, and the convergence of new media technologies, to name a few. When he says, “We’ve been good at taking advantage of IT to increase efficiency in our daily operation,” all one has to do is walk into the main library in Århus—or log on to the library’s Web site—to see what he means.

In 1989-1990, the library was the first public institution to have its own in-house UNIX system, which was developed to automate the library. “That really gave us a head start in developing multimedia services,” says Lisbeth Christensen, director of the Digital Library at Århus Public Libraries.

In 1993-1994, a Library of the Future project worked with text-based Internet. “Århus Public Libraries built services onto the library’s catalog, where users could reserve and search from home, all via the Web,” says Christensen. “From that time onward, we developed a number of products that had nothing to do with the catalog” (see *The Digital Library*, page 20).

The libraries were among the first public-sector organizations in Denmark to offer Web services to users, but not without some “wheeling and dealing” first. “Before 1996, our problem was that the city would not allow us to have our own Web server,” Hapel says. “They had their own IT department, and we had to go through them. So instead, we made a deal with the State

and University Library just up the street. They had their own IT department and agreed to host our Web complex through a FTP (file transfer protocol) line. That gave us a one-and-a-half-to-two-year head start among what I would call knowledge-based institutions. We could see we were far ahead of other municipal departments. We have really exploited that opportunity,” he adds.

### Skilled in Securing Funding

In the midst of this progress, Århus City Council was cutting back on municipal funding and the library was the worst hit of all cultural institutions. Between 1991 and 2003, the library’s municipal funding fell 30% per resident (Århus Municipality 2005).

Despite the dwindling funds, however, Århus Public Libraries increased its circulation 27 percent in the same period. In addition, the institution acquired more than 500 PC workstations—337 of which are for library users—without getting an extra cent from the municipality (Århus Public Libraries 2004). How did they do it?

Decentralization—allowing the libraries to manage their own budgets—has been part of the solution. Another factor has been the libraries’ skill in getting external funding through grants, development funds, and other sources.

“One must be good at writing applications,” says Knud Schultz, chief librarian for the main library in Århus. About half-a-million DKK from the libraries’ internal funds over the past several years has generated more than 10 times that much—DKK 5-6 million (about US\$1 million).

“We’ve also become skilled at managing projects,” adds Hapel. In the past 10 years, the libraries have launched nearly 100 projects designed to develop library products and services. These include several IT developments as well as competence building in the staff.

“And we’ve also become competent in external multidisciplinary cooperation,” he says. “This is an important factor: Good partners and good relations bring in more funding.”

In Gellerup, for instance, the libraries have worked on several projects with business and in-



*The public computer workstation areas at the main library in Århus are usually fully booked during opening hours.*

dustry. Some 30 firms in the nearby Brabrand Industrial Park participate actively in Gellerup's Job Corner and IT Competence Boost activities.

### **Thinking of Solutions, not Products**

Another important factor in the libraries' ability to boost their IT activities with less municipal funding has been the libraries' own interpretation of the city's goals and aims.

"Our whole purpose boils down to enlightenment and the information society—for free and equal access to information," says Hapel. "We are an information center. Some library people say, 'But libraries are for books.'"

And herein lies the biggest internal obstacle that Århus Public Libraries has encountered since Hapel took the helm in 1994: convincing employees that the future of libraries does not lie in books alone. He gives an anecdote:

"There is a factory that makes curtains, and the company's director thinks of it as a curtain factory. When people stop buying curtains and want venetian blinds instead, the factory goes out of business. Meanwhile, that factory's competitor thinks of itself as a provider of light-suppression solutions. It makes the shift to venetian blinds easily, because it is not stuck into thinking of a specific product but instead the solution.

"Libraries must be able to shift media fluidly," Hapel concludes. "We have done a lot of things that are really time demanding—such as our initiatives for refugees and immigrants. You don't really need a whole lot of technology to suc-

ceed. The most important factor is to rethink the way you do things, to move from the idea that librarians should only be cataloging books."

Knud Schultz says, "That barrier persists. Our libraries are still filled with books."

"But just the same," says Hapel, "there's an internal development fund that was originally intended for books acquisition. In the late 1980s, a city councilman decided we could use that fund for IT development work instead. That has meant so much for Århus Public Libraries," he says.

### **Importance of Technical Infrastructure**

Hapel tells of an IT technician from a library in Germany who was visiting Århus. "He was so envious of our technical infrastructure," he says. "One of their biggest problems was to distribute content on the Net for the public—they had such a small bandwidth. Nobody would think that this could happen in a big, progressive German city, of all places!"

Århus Public Libraries is not only part of a municipal administrative intranet—connected by broadband—but it also has a very large bandwidth for public Internet access.

"It's very important for library directors to be aware of the importance of technical infrastructure," says Hapel. "We saw what was coming in mid-1990s." That was when some public institutions in Denmark realized the benefits of having part of their network open, so that institutions with a high degree of public interaction could al-

low people to access them via their PCs at home. The libraries in Århus convinced the municipal IT department to allow them to be part of the open network.

“Two years ago, when we heard there was going to be fiber-optic broadband in this county—gigabyte bandwidth—we said, ‘We need to be on that.’ Why? Not just to make our Internet work faster, but to develop new types of library services on broadband. Film, streamed video—those are based on broadband connectivity,” Hapel says. “Suddenly, a new succession of possibilities opens up.”

Currently, this possibility has manifested itself in Bibcast, a digital library-based Web site that allows patrons to watch Danish short films and documentaries from library computers as well as from some high schools and institutions in Århus County.

### **Futuristic Library of Today**

The library’s main efforts target the integration of all sorts of digital media into the library ser-



*The automated check-in station in Århus Public Library’s main library saves many man-hours.*

vice. Among other services from the library’s home page, patrons can search the catalog, reserve materials, renew loans, and even pay fees. More than 650,000 loans per year are the result of reservations or requisitions placed in the library system via the Web by users themselves. In 2004, the total activity on the web domain included 4.9 million visits and more than 22 million hits. This places Århus Public Libraries as the most successful public e-business service on the Internet in Denmark, according to Hapel.

The main library has several wireless hot spots, which give patrons the ability to access the library system, databases, and other internal resources free of charge through their own laptops. A few study rooms—also free for all to use—are wired to provide video screen Internet projection for patrons.

### **Automation**

Other physical automation in the main library, and in the branches to some extent, shows how far Århus Public Libraries has come in the past decade.

Consider this: A patron sits at home and browses the library’s catalog—or even a database that contains all the materials in all Denmark’s libraries—via the Internet. She reserves an item. She gets an e-mail when the item is ready to be picked up at the main library in Århus. She can then go to the library to pick it up in the reserved-materials room, where her item is shelved along with other reservations, organized by final pick-up date. She finds her item and then takes it to an automated checkout unit, inserts her library card, punches in her PIN code, and swipes the item over the scanner. The machine issues a receipt, and she leaves the library.

If this patron wants to renew the item, she can do so via the library’s home page. When she returns the item, she does so at an automated check-in station that looks like an airport luggage-sorting device built by Dr. Seuss, its conveyors and cranks and wheels all displayed behind a huge picture window. Voilà! If all goes as it is meant to, this patron never once needs to rely on a librarian for help. ☺

## Further Education and International Involvement

Århus Public Libraries has a long tradition of project and development management, personal development of professional skills, and networking. As a result, more than 150 employees have been actively involved in various projects, says Library Director Rolf Hapel.

The institution also spends on average at least five days per employee every year on training and competence development. "The tradition of using and expanding our own 'brain ware' and the constant challenges might also explain why the turnover in staff is very modest," Hapel says.

A range of courses is offered, including, team training, IT training, searching the Internet, teaching patrons to search the Internet, using public Internet Web sites, health on the Internet, and IT pedagogy. Some courses are run by external lecturers and others are inservice training.

Århus Public Libraries introduced distance-learning courses on Internet use for Danish librarians in 1997. This became a huge success on a national level. These courses have been further developed for use in an EU project for Baltic countries called Distance Education for Librarians: Creating an Infor-

mation-Competent Society. Germany's Bertelsmann Foundation's library division based its version of distance learning on the Århus model.

Between 2001 and 2003, Århus Public Libraries was represented in the management board of Public Libraries Mobilizing Advanced Networks (PULMAN). In this capacity, it was responsible for the training and exchange of librarians from less-developed library communities in south and central Europe. Århus Public Libraries was a member of the Bertelsmann Foundation International Network of Public Libraries from 1999 to 2004, and since 2004 has been represented in the CALIMERA project, a successor of PULMAN.

Currently, Århus Public Libraries is engaged in the EU project Public Libraries in the Learning Society, which aims to promote lifelong learning among European citizens using libraries as tools. The project runs from 2004 to 2006.

*The main library in Århus has its own classrooms for hands-on IT courses.*



# The Digital Library

“THE LIBRARY TODAY IS MORE THAN METER-UPON-METER OF BOOKSHELVES.”

So begins an informational video presentation of Århus Public Libraries on the English section of its home page. This statement could not be truer in Århus, where the city’s libraries provide the public with what is deemed the most comprehensive program of digital Internet-based services in Scandinavia. In fact, Rolf Hapel asserts that based on the many contacts with other European libraries, Århus’ IT services are probably the most far-reaching in all of Europe.

## Virtual Cooperation

The Digital Library, or *Netbibliotekerne*, already offers 50 special services free of charge, and the number is growing. More than 140,000 patrons have a PIN that enables them to access the library’s self-service automats and Internet requisition and reservation program. More than 57,000 users receive e-mail notification on reserved books, library-produced e-zines, new books, news, and other media.

The Digital Library exists in a virtual location, which has had a great impact on the cooperating library system in Denmark. It began with a simple service recommending good Internet links for patrons in Århus.

“We found the best spots on the Web—legal links, cooking, travel, music and so on,” says Hapel. “Most of the other libraries were doing the same thing, and so then it occurred to us that we’re all public service suppliers. Why not use the beauty of the Net and cooperate? So, we formed the first Web-based network among public libraries in Denmark.”

From what became the public libraries’ Net-guide, it was only a leap of imagination to launch other virtual services in the Digital Library. Several libraries take turns staffing an online question-

and-answer service (Biblioteksvagten), where patrons can e-mail questions or even chat with a librarian during business hours. The patron fills out a form online including the question, name, and e-mail address, and a time frame (between two hours and seven days) within which the answer is needed.

## For Refugees and Immigrants

One of the library’s most noteworthy cooperative services, FINFO, which is praised in European library circles, was started by Århus Public Libraries. FINFO is an information system for refugees and immigrants, giving access to valuable information on society in 13 languages and Web links to information from 45 home countries.

More than 70 Danish municipalities are working together to produce this service under the auspices of the state library. Librarians may take courses in how to help patrons use FINFO.

A sister site, Kvinde FINFO, has also evolved. Designed for immigrant women, it provides information from a Danish standpoint on issues of health, children, education, marriage, childbirth, and the meeting of cultures. This service is currently offered only in Danish. □



## Other Digital Services

Århus Public Libraries is a driving force in the development of other national networked library services in Denmark, such as the following:

- A joint national children's library net service, *DotBot*, which includes link collections, advice for homework and writing school reports, and book and music reviews (written by children), among others.
- A Danish literature portal, *Literatursiden*, presenting contemporary Danish fiction authors to the public. A literary e-zine is published every two weeks and has more than 1,800 subscribers. Each issue is announced to users by e-mail with hyperlink headlines to the articles.
- A legal digital music service, *NetMusik*, where patrons can browse online through nearly 8,000 albums and 100,000 songs (with a high emphasis on Danish releases) and "borrow" them. Patrons download MP3 files, which delete themselves within one to seven days. The libraries' Net Music service is a broad collaboration among Danish libraries and the Danish music industry, evolving from earlier initiatives in this alliance.
- Århus Public Libraries has initiated an umbrella association of networking public libraries with six other libraries that are active in the production of Internet-based products—the so-called "Net Libraries" like *FINFO*, the Q&A service, the public libraries' *Netguide*, and others. The association takes care of member libraries' interests regarding the relations to the state and the ministry of culture, copyright owners of relevant content, and to non-member libraries, among others. The association also develops training courses for staff involved in the production of Net-based services.

The full digital library, with its complete services, is accessible from [www.aakb.dk](http://www.aakb.dk).

# Conclusion

**THE NEXT FIVE YEARS** will include a number of new activities connected to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Access to Learning Award. In addition, Århus will construct a new multimedia building for the main library.

## Award Plans

Århus Public Libraries plans to use the Access to Learning Award funds for several activities that continue in the spirit of the Gellerup and Hasle branches as well as the Digital Library.

“The award will be a major contribution to the visibility and marketing of the public libraries as institutions securing free and equal access to information in a modern, networked, knowledge-based society,” says Rolf Hapel (Århus Public Libraries 2004).

The award will help the development of library services based on Internet, wireless, and broadband connectivity, thus expanding the library functionality from one primarily based on text to that of true multimedia.

In the five-year budget for the award, the library has set aside one-fifth of the funds to support local development and ideas, including computer clubs for children in areas dominated by underserved populations. The clubs will build on the experiences of the IT guides and the children’s computer animation group in Hasle. An American concept, computer clubs aim to help less-fortunate young people work with computers, thus gaining confidence and self-esteem.

In another project, the libraries will strengthen facilities for IT-supported learning in Åby, another area of the city with a high percentage of immigrants. The idea is to create various prototypes for nonscheduled training, a kind of “instant learning” for patrons when they drop by and are inspired to seek knowledge on

topics that have their immediate interest.

“The need for combining learning facilities with public libraries is becoming more and more obvious,” says Hapel. “The need to invent new institutions for the knowledge society, combined with the need for libraries to focus less on their role as book-lending factories of the industrial era and more on their role as open-learning centers in the knowledge society, has given us the idea of merging learning and lending activities.”

Other Access To Learning Award activities include the following:

- <sup>a</sup> New library information kiosks
- <sup>a</sup> Library workstations in multiactivity centers
- <sup>a</sup> Equipment and training for IT guides
- <sup>a</sup> Development of video-on-demand stations
- <sup>a</sup> Marketing activities
- <sup>a</sup> IT initiatives for women from underserved populations.

## Future Multimedia House

Much thought and long-term planning are also under way for the Multimedia House, which will be the new headquarters for the main library in Århus. The DKK402 million (US\$71 million), 226,000-square-foot building is planned to open in 2012.

Considering how IT has progressed in the last few years alone, 2012 is a long way off. “We’re being careful not to make decisions too early,” Hapel says.

He relates enthusiastically some of the knowledge transferred at an international conference organized by Århus Public Libraries in 2004. The topic was “Transformations: the Library in Progress,” and it focused on the physical library—architecture, community values, and knowledge mediation. Some of the sessions covered the ideas and philosophy behind the



***As a spin-off of the work on the main library's future Multimedia House, developers built an interactive floor that connects with users by their cell phones. It won the prestigious Danish Design Award 2004.***

new libraries in Seattle and Vienna, the future of small libraries, interactive library buildings, and Singapore's do-it-yourself library, which has no onsite staff.

Currently, Århus Public Libraries is working with the IT faculty of Århus University and other partners to explore the concept of an intelligent library building. One of the projects explores the development of a playful and experimental interactive children's library. Another is the hybrid learning environment, where the room itself facilitates different learning processes and strategies. As a spin-off of this work, developers built an interactive floor that connects with users by their cell phones. It won the prestigious Danish Design Award 2004.

### **The Quiet Integrators**

In the meantime, Århus Public Libraries plans to continue to work for social integration of immigrants and refugees in Danish society. In the current political climate, where integration is on everybody's agenda, politicians have a difficult time noticing the positive work of the public libraries. Hapel likes to think of the libraries as the "quiet integrators," a term he invented when speaking at a conference of Danish municipalities.

"The theme was integration of refugees and immigrants, and there was a lot of talk of inventing activities, projects, and organizations with the purpose of integrating the new Danes," he remembers. "A lot of these activities were based mostly on hot air and bragging, and few if any of

the politicians knew what was actually happening in the libraries.

"Therefore I pointed out subtly—with documentation from a survey conducted in Århus among young people in areas with a high concentration of refugees and immigrants—that the libraries were actually used more than youth clubs, associations, sports activities, and special activities targeting the young in question (see survey page 13).

"By comparing our user registration with the population in general and from user surveys, we can see that refugees and immigrants are just as frequent users of the libraries as the 'native' Danish population. This, combined with the fact that other integrating activities—such as public schools—are compulsory, makes the libraries uniquely attractive to people from everywhere," he continues.

"The reason is probably a combination of our ability to create an appealing and useful offer in terms of media and services, and the neutrality and hospitality that is a crucial part of the libraries' basic values of free and equal access to information—the democratic element, if you will," Hapel concludes.

Århus residents—new and old—can look forward to the continued work of the libraries as pioneers in delivering free information and communication technologies. These services can not only enrich their lives but also empower them with new skills and knowledge to navigate in Danish society. □

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## Advice from Rolf Hapel

—Form a Web-based network among libraries in your area or country. Share the workload—do not repeat tasks.

—Think of new library services and products. Use development in IT as a vehicle to think of new products and services from the library. If cell phones and text messaging are common among young people, what kinds of services can the library offer? Some examples might be text messages on overdue books, on new Playstation games, or on programs of special interest for young people.

—Involve patrons when developing library services. Use several communication tools to decode user needs. Examples include user surveys, focus groups, usability tests, polling via the Web, and soliciting feedback through e-mail, verbal complaints, and suggestion boxes. Use the results and suggestions in the concrete library planning.

—Be aware of any municipal activities concerning IT infrastructure, and grab on to them. If the municipality decides to support broadband connectivity, persuade decision makers to include libraries in the initiative—maybe even letting the libraries be the first institutions with broadband networks. Or, if the municipality decides to support e-government development, make sure that the library manager is active in pointing out areas where the libraries will be natural centers for e-government training activities for users or for internal training for municipal staff. The libraries could also manage various Internet-based e-government activities such as municipal self-service activities and home page development.

—When communicating with elected officials or the public, tell the good tale of the library as early adaptor and innovator whenever possible—even if you have only bought access to a simple database.

Source: Rolf Hapel, Director Århus Public Libraries, 2005.

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