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## Public libraries in postindustrial societies: challenges and opportunities

The article's focus is on how public libraries are affected by structural changes in the wake of the transition to the knowledge society. Their attempts to match the knowledge society are illustrated by processes of sensemaking and sensegiving made in public libraries in Canada, the UK and Denmark.

**K e y w o r d s:** transformation, knowledge society, public libraries, co-configuration, concept enlargement.

**T**alking about public libraries is the same as thinking about social change, cultural integration and entertainment. Public libraries are change-agents, a means of cultural cohesion and a source of entertainment. I like to add: at the moment public libraries are in a deep crisis as well. The challenges public libraries have been facing during the last decade are

- of economic character due to the enduring shortage of resources;
- of conceptual character due to increasing social and cultural ambiguity, which was defined by Habermas as New Complexity or New Confusion;
- of legitimitary character due to a fundamentally altered demand structure (new technologies; a growing number of competing cultural offerings; increasing individualism; a center-periphery problem);
- of skills-oriented character due to multiple tasks allocated to a modern public library spanning from digital services to working with socially excluded groups.

Taken all these challenges into consideration, it is hard to say where to start the modernization process and which solutions for future library services are most viable.

Money always helps, but more money would not necessarily eliminate the biggest challenges: the decline of identification among politicians and people on the one hand and, on the other hand, the conceptual ambiguity while the library-idea is being renewed. It can be supposed that more conceptual clarity will create a sustainable basis for identification with the public library.

### Challenges of the public-library-complex

In the following I will mainly focus on one question: How does the *public-library-complex* respond to the challenges, threats and opportunities arising as a result of the accelerating changes and transformations in post-industrial societies? By *public-library-complex* I understand a) the internal structure in the public-library-system, b) the connectivity between the system and their users respectively customers, c) their embeddedness in the political decision-making process and d) the root metaphor used as fundamental ideological viewpoint on public libraries.

To narrow down the main question it is necessary to concentrate on current and future developments and address topics concerning the libraries' role in local, national and global knowledge culture.

Due to the variety of theoretical concepts such as the knowledge society, the risk, internet or experience society, where each concept depicts specific aspects of the post-industrial transformation one could ask: Shall the library concept be broadened, so as not to focus solely on information and knowledge but also on teaching, entertainment, social innovation or urban renewal? Some of the new and relevant library activities within an enlarged concept deal with the local and nationwide organization of knowledge, others highlight cultural activities on a global level and yet others present the production of innovative spaces as beneficial for transnational epistemic communities (Håkanson 2005). Boundaries between functions, spaces and institutions have become more fluid; and the necessity of concept enlargement has become particularly urgent because libraries no longer considered themselves as

institutions that cater to user-needs prevalent in an information society. If public libraries as in the case of Denmark contribute to adventure and entertainment they touch on emotional rather cognitive functions when they meet the needs of users (Schulze 2005).

Another pivotal issue – shared by the knowledge society, the internet-society and the experience society – deals with the replacement of social structures by communication structures. According to Lash (2002), social inequality in post-industrial societies is no longer based on the affiliation to social classes but depends on the access to the global flows of information. It could be asked: should public libraries be thought of as multi-functional units that, in accordance with their functional purpose or geographical location, support cultural change and societal transformation in quite different ways? If so, you will find libraries, which above all provide informational empowerment for social groups that are disconnected from essential communication flows. In contrast, there will be libraries, which serve especially the needs of highly professionalized groups such as researchers or international consultants, which are in the center of communication and information flows.

A third relevant topic deals with different aspects of co-configuration. Co-configuration can be seen as a crucial activity in reflexive modernity where people and institutions are gradually disconnected from prevailing factual constraints, geographical boundaries and institutional restraints (Beck 1986). It can be defined as an organizational and learning frame, in which products and services are created in a way so that they «can learn and adapt... (in) an ongoing relationship between each customer-product pair and the company» (Victor & Boynton 1998; quoted in: Engeström 2004, p. 12). Because co-configuration is an on-going relationship, which comprises public and private organizations as well as users, customers and suppliers, institutional norms, interorganizational activity and individual values and behavior must be transparent across organizations and among participating stakeholders.

Engeström (2004) emphasizes that organizations and individuals are confronted with a twofold learning challenge. They have to learn for co-configuration, which means reorganizing collaborative relations and practices as well as implementing interactive tools and rules. They even have to learn within co-configuration, which means developing awareness within the practices they are a part of and they form via their activity.

The learning challenges can be divided into four

types that on the one hand are defined by the quality of the activities. Exploitation focuses mainly on existing knowledge and is delimited from exploration, which deals with the emergence of new knowledge. On the other hand there is the degree of change that knowledge is linked to and induces. Exploration entails both incremental and radical exploration of new knowledge whereas exploitation means to adjust and to refine proven activities by existing knowledge. If knowledge is transferred from one context to another we face exploitation as cross-appropriation. The question to put forward is: How can processes of co-configuration between public libraries, users and private institutions improve quality in contexts of experimentation and transformation?

### Some remarks on the methodology

The point of departure for this article is the concept of knowledge. Daniel Bell has developed a theory of knowledge proposing that knowledge is the ability to make judgements. Other proponents of the knowledge society as Drucker and Riesman concentrate primarily on scientific knowledge because of its significance for and impact on productivity enhancement in the post-industrial societies.

Since the seventies the concept of knowledge has been gradually enlarged. Stehr for example points to the agentive aspects in the knowledge concept by defining knowledge as the capacity for reasonable action. Engeström (2007) emphasizes the epistemological aspects and differentiates between stabilization knowledge and possibility knowledge. Stabilization knowledge is known and proven knowledge. But possibility knowledge allows for describing meanings in movement and transformation. Due to its destabilizing force possibility knowledge both accentuates the multi-directedness of movements in social fields and visualizes the interacting dimensions in developmental processes.

The Unesco World Report «Towards Knowledge Society» put emphasis on the importance of knowledge for human development. «Knowledge societies are about capabilities to identify, produce, process, transform, disseminate and use information to build and apply knowledge for human development. They require an empowering social vision that encompasses plurality, inclusion, solidarity and participation» (Unesco 2005; p. 27).

This article assumes that the knowledge society is still a new and unknown phenomenon, which even competes with other phenomena like the experience society or the internet society. Scrutinizing the transi-

tion from the industrial society to the knowledge society requires therefore a special responsiveness. According to the German philosopher Waldenfels (1997) it is important to pay attention to the novelty of the phenomenon and be aware of its unknown aspects otherwise it will be seen as something, which is already known. The following cases should be read as the public libraries' attempt of sensemaking and sensegiving.

According to Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991: 442) sensemaking means the joint construction and reconstruction of meaning while sensegiving is about influencing other parties in their sensemaking process. Both processes deal with establishing a framework for understanding the dynamics and the range of intended changes. Sensemaking differs from knowledge sharing. Sensemaking means looking for creative answers, while knowledge sharing is about distributing existing knowledge. Creative answers create sense in the response given. Sensegiving can be seen as an act of co-configuration towards a shared understanding between public libraries and their stakeholders.

### **Three cases of library development in western countries**

By way of introduction it must be emphasized that the point of departure is derived from my interest in the public libraries, which in a Danish context means, – libraries typically situated in municipalities where all citizens of the municipality constitute the target group. That is public libraries are defined as people's libraries. The transition of these libraries in order to match the upcoming knowledge society demands a dynamic agenda, which all types of public libraries are exposed to. The article emphasizes organizational aspects of the transition.

Let me give a few examples to depict the developmental work made in three Western library systems. The first example is a library project in the UK which aimed at empowering people who lived in the so called dead zone in the global information culture. The second example deals with processes of co-configuration launched by four public libraries, which are on the forefront of tackling the multicultural challenges in Canada. The project's aim is to improve the libraries' ability to identify customer need by reorganizing the collaborative relations and exploring new knowledge together with socially excluded as well as middle-class users who had bad experiences with library services. The third initiative is a response to the lasting crisis of public libraries in Denmark. The core of this initiative is to broaden the

library concept in order to release innovative potentials within the libraries.

### **UK: developing the needs-based library**

In UK the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) back in 2003 presented a ten year strategy for public libraries entitled Framework for the future: libraries, learning and information in the next decade. In the report lots of proposals were presented in order «to encourage imaginative innovation and greater operational effectiveness and efficiency, adapted to local need and circumstance» (2003; 5). Better sectoral leadership at national and local level was the means to achieve the goals presented in the strategy. The reason for these strategic initiatives was that the number of libraries was in sharp decline. Since 2003 about 500 libraries have been closed. In 2003 there were 4622 libraries in the UK. In 2015 the number had dropped to 4145.

In regard to enhancing social inclusion and mobilizing social capital in local communities the most encouraging framework is the needs based library service, developed by John Pateman, Head of Libraries in Lincolnshire. Pateman has since 2000 worked on the concept of a need-based library service. «From each according to their ability (staff), to each according to their needs (users)» was the underlying motto when he started to reconfigure the existing library services in Lincolnshire. It was argued, that libraries should meet community needs through community development and not by focusing on books and buildings. In order to achieve these goals public libraries had to change their strategy, structure, systems, and organizational culture. Otherwise it was unable to identify, prioritize and meet the needs of users as well as non-users.

Distinguishing the cultural library from the social library allows for strategies which support social inclusion and provide social capital. Accordingly, Pateman in 2008 strengthened his struggle against the so-called read-library. He wanted libraries to work for and with unreachable groups or non-users and started to develop a concept for a NEETs based library service. NEET stands for Not in Employment, Education and Training. By means of empowerment non-users should be re-integrated into the flow of information and communication at the community level. One of the greatest challenges to Pateman turned out to be that the library staff in the UK was unable to provide services for excluded groups. Staff was trained to traditional provider-driven services rather than to proactive, community-driven services.

To create a sustainable organizational culture measures like service action planning, performance management and workforce development have to be applied. The interplay of staff structure and organizational culture can be illustrated by job descriptions and the division of labor in the needs-based library. There will be three different teams in that library working with NEETs. An access-team made the first contacts with NEETs for example at bus stops; an engagement team tried to identify activities of interest; and the front line team in the library made sure that the library actually will meet the needs of the NEETs.

In a wider perspective the concept of the needs-based library is a contribution to social innovation as an element in «Integrated Area Development» – a concept which was put forward by the Belgian professor Frank Moulaert.

«Social innovation occurs when the mobilization of social and institutional forces succeeds in bringing about the satisfaction of previously alienated human needs, the relative empowerment of previously silent and excluded social groups through the creation of new capabilities, and, ultimately, changes in the existing social – and power – relations towards a more inclusive and democratic governance system» (Gonzales et al. 2010).

Pateman's needs-based library concept can be considered as a tool applicable to improve the social and informational conditions for people at the bottom of the society by adjusting institutions to the local area's needs. An appropriate root-metaphor for the needs-based library could be: public libraries as a window towards future possibilities by exploring the needs of the socially excluded.

### **Canada: configuring the community-led approach**

Canada's library system is considered to play a key role in securing democracy, developing literacy, supporting life-long learning and incorporating socially marginalized citizens. Since 1994 public libraries among others have supported the changing demographics caused by the country's far-reaching politics of multiculturalism. In the last decade public libraries have developed and implemented «a community-led approach to identify and eliminate barriers so that services are more accessible to the socially excluded and to determine what new and existing customers want from their libraries» (Lukasik, 2013: 11). These activities resulted in «The Community-Led Libraries Toolkit», where differences between traditional planning and the community-led planning were depicted.

Producing the toolkit was an example of co-configuration.

Viewed from a learning perspective co-configuration starts in the case of Canada with a simple but seminal fact. When the participating library systems were trying to change themselves they quickly experienced that their transformation strategy could not be based on existing and proven knowledge. Social systems remain in a state of inertia because systemic knowledge is mostly self-generated knowledge – at least if systems are considered to be closed and self-maintaining (Luhmann 1984). As shown by the following quote, existing knowledge had to be set aside in order to develop a new and inclusive library strategy. In other words: learning started as unlearning.

Many librarians were hesitant to discuss social inclusion issues with us because they believed that the library already was inclusive. Some librarians cited long open hours, appropriate physical access, and creative programming as evidence of inclusiveness. ... The dilemma for the Project was to have discussions about inclusion that went past personal definitions and further than asset-focused examples (Community-Led toolkit; 2008 p. 54).

The way to change existing institutional practices started with transcending conceptual definitions. Instead of concentrating on concepts the very first step in the co-configurational process was the critical assessment of existing practices. This resulted in a deeper understanding of the barriers that keep people from using libraries as cultural institutions serving their costumers information needs. The next step was to establish the Community Development Librarian outside the library. The skills required for working outside the library were developed in collaboration and partnership with different communities in the municipality. Systemic barriers to inclusive library practices had to be removed, which was done by meeting costumers not as a representative of cultural institution but as a community equal.

Being received as an equal, increased my chances of engaging community agencies and members in discussions that critically assessed library services and revealed people's needs and wants (Community-Led toolkit; 2008 p. 54).

As one can see from this quote there is heavy emphasis on boundary crossing in order to be able to operate in a multi-faceted environment. Networks have been created and new social spaces have been disclosed. Engeström describes the boundary crossing activities carried out by community librarians as «the horizontal aspect of learning in co-configuration» (2004

p. 16) by which he means the dialogical exchange of views, values and interests.

The outcome of horizontal learning in co-configuration was among other things a new planning model. While traditional library planning according to the toolkit is based on data sources such as collection use statistics, user surveys, and demographics the community-led planning concentrates on collaboration and dialogue. To increase understanding and support of the needs of socially excluded community members and to make sure that they are represented in library planning community assessment and needs identification happens in networks between costumers, communities, services, and libraries.

The main difference is ideological: in traditional planning the staff and the institution are active; in the community-led model local communities are in the center of activity. Services ideas are the community's ideas and Public Libraries are designed to build relationships and facilitate learning. Being led by communities enables libraries to bridge cultural and social gaps – this could function as a root-metaphor for co-configurational library development.

Community-Led Service Planning: Key Differences			
COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT & NEEDS IDENTIFICATION		SERVICE PLANNING AND DELIVERY	
COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT	NEEDS IDENTIFICATION	SERVICE PLANNING	DELIVERY
<b>TRADITIONAL PLANNING</b> Staff review: - Demographic data, - Library use statistics, - Comment cards, and - Community survey results.	Staff identify service gaps or under-served communities.	Staff review literature. Staff consult with other staff and service providers. Staff develop service response.	Staff deliver service: - develop the collection, - hold the program, or - design facilities.
<b>COMMUNITY-LED PLANNING</b> Staff review all of the above and ... - Staff spend time in community developing relationships with community members. - Staff hear from community about what is important to them.	Staff discuss with community members and hear from the community what their priorities are.	Service ideas are the community's ideas. Community is engaged in the planning of the service. Staff act as partners and facilitators rather than as creators and teachers.	Community members and staff work together to deliver the service: Community members involved in selecting collection materials. Community members active in hosting the program. Community members working collaboratively with the library to develop policy recommendations.

Despite considerable efforts made by public libraries and the great advantages in including communities in library planning an expert panel of the Royal Society of Canada has recently (Beaudry et al. 2014) stated that both a national digitization program, greater institutional cooperation, larger library units, and solid improvements of especially rural library systems

are needed in order to ensure that public libraries and archives serve the public good in the 21th century. Nonetheless, recent budget cuts have led to the closing of a considerable number of libraries. Furthermore, these cutbacks are supposed to weaken the functionality of the whole system (See: Protect Canada's Public Libraries).

**Denmark: broadening the public library concept**

Public libraries in Denmark are challenged too. The financial resources in the municipalities are shrinking. Therefore, a number of libraries have already been closed – a topic so important that it has been discussed in Parliament. The demand for library products and services also decrease. Especially the demand for books has seen a sharp decline. In addition, nowadays users do not spend as much time in libraries and their reading rooms as they did earlier. However, this depends mainly on which user-groups we look at. Ethnic minorities still use public libraries to a great extent. Finally, a comprehensive municipal reform in 2007 had a decisive impact on the library structure. The concentration process was accelerated and intensified, and the outcome is fewer but larger libraries.

Facing the background of the crisis, the National Authority of Libraries and Media – an advisory board to the Ministry of Culture – set up an expert group to prepare a pioneering concept for public libraries. Results and recommendations were presented in 2010 in a report titled «Public Libraries in the Knowledge Society». Exchange of information, the acquisition of knowledge and the promotion of cultural activities is still supposed to be of crucial importance for value creation in the knowledge society. It was concluded that library still play a key role in this process.

However, the remarks in the report dealing with the library concept and the ideological foundation of public libraries are of particular interest for this article. One can say that the report is based on a model resting on four specific assumptions:

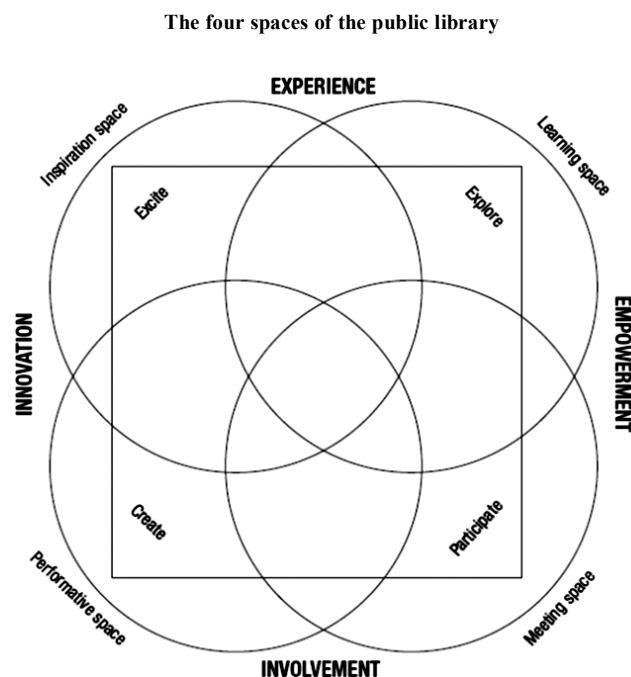
- libraries are not any longer viewed to be only repositories and distributors of information and knowledge;
- libraries are regarded as social spaces, in which various activities take place; different activities will shape different spaces in the libraries;
- activities within the spaces are steered by specific services and lead to certain results;
- libraries are regarded as change agents at the community level because of their widened field of activity.

The model, created by the Center for Cultural Policy Studies at the Royal School of Library and Information Science, is based on four different spaces and activity profiles in the library: a space to learn, a space to meet, a space to become inspired, and a performative space. The four spaces correspond, by and large, to different functions in late-modern society. Public libraries contribute to economic growth, social cohesion, cultural education, entertainment, and societal innovation. The four spaces co-exist at the same time, and the activities within them are not related to one but to several of the library's societal functions. For example the space to become inspired comprises activities such as excitement on the one hand and cultural, social and economic innovation, and creation on the other hand. Learning entails both exploration of new knowledge and social interaction and commitment (Jochumsen et al. 2012).

The model reflects the humanistic as well as the instrumental perspectives of public libraries as they are creating economic, social and cultural value. It has a number of obvious advantages. Following the model enables public libraries to meet the needs of their users, costumers and local citizens in a competent, gratifying and differentiated manner. Awareness of the library's functional multiplicity provides greater clarity for strategic measures – could be a convincing roto-metaphor for broadening the library concept.

For reasons of space, I refrain from going further into others features. An example can illustrate what is meant by concept enlarging. Ten years ago public libraries started to establish learning centers as a kind of extra-service in areas with a high concentration of ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups. Learning centers are an important link between minority groups and social and cultural institutions in the Danish society. By purposeful activities, the users are tied into the local, national and transnational flow of information. As shown in the figure above, learning centers facilitate insight and knowledge; they strengthen social and cultural skills by empowerment activities and encourage identity work and social inclusion of their users. Libraries offer and become spaces for learning. Traditional services like information procurement and book-lending are cut down. Learning spaces are defined as activities based on discovering and learning new things. Normally the space to learn comprises informal learning courses, e-learning facilities, lectures, access to knowledge resources and inquiry services.

A look at the library branch in Vollsmose, a multiethnic suburb in Odense (third largest city in Denmark),



confirms how the integration of learning activities in traditional services is changing the image of a library. The space to learn is well equipped and almost as big as the rest of the library. Learning activities determine the profile of the library and the skills of employees. Nowadays the inhabitants of Vollsmose can still make use of the library's learning facilities, of language teaching and literacy-programs. But apart from that they can also apply for a new identity card or a driving license at their local library. Many libraries have also become «citizen services centers». Whether this is a development for the better remains to be seen.

But also in Denmark the same sad story can be heard: Public libraries are still in trouble. The number of borrowed items has been decreased by almost 20 % since 2010. The number of libraries without librarians has increased significantly. At the same time the concept «libraries as community centers» has been promoted by Danish Agency of Culture, which public libraries now are affiliated to, and implemented nationwide.

### Challenges and answers

As shown above, not only public libraries in Denmark are in trouble and facing major challenges at the moment – conceptual, institutional as well financial. In the context of uncertainty new ideas and solutions have been discussed and implemented. To conclude, I will outline three key challenges and some proposed solutions:

- from collection to connection – the relational library;

- from closed to open networks – co-configuration and strategic partnerships;
- from attended to unattended libraries – the open library concept.

Public libraries can be defined as multi-functional units meeting different – social, cultural, political, pedagogical – requirements. Strategic alliances, open concepts and relational and community-led services are symbolic and practical tools which could prepare the ground for future action and development. However, one could also argue that the reason for today's conceptual ambiguity is that public libraries are still looking for a convincing identity, new roles and a unique field of responsibility.

Therefore my tentative conclusion: how public libraries will be structured and function in a knowledge society, we do not know yet. To avoid being accused of intellectual laziness I will point out four issues that public libraries in the knowledge society should take care of.

In accordance with the accelerating social and geographic mobility public libraries should contribute to accomplish societal inclusion through cultural activities and civic dialogue. Their civic foundation, democratic commitment and cultural expertise make libraries particularly suitable for enhancing intercultural understanding as well as societal inclusion. The case of Denmark shows that expanding the library concept allows for a more precise organization of activities, events and services for the benefit of the users. This will increase the legitimacy of the public-library-complex as a whole.

In accordance with issues of increasing social inequality public libraries could respond to fundamental demographic and socioeconomic transformations by instigating new institutional designs for social inclusion. Libraries could bring together and merge already existing, but hitherto isolated, institutional knowledge and competencies. The social library acts here as an ideal personification of local resources. The case of Canada shows how learning in co-configuration environments results in more sustainable relationships between cultural institutions and their communities.

In accordance with growing center-periphery disparities in the global knowledge society public libraries could respond to the informational inequality gap by elaborating user adapted literacy-programs. Here the aim is to transform the «dead zones» in the global informational culture into live zones. The case of the UK shows how public libraries fight patterns of social inequality by means of informational empowerment.

The three cases have made an additional challenge clear: What kind of organization will have the capacity to respond adequately to the challenges posed by the transformation of libraries from the industrial society to the knowledge society? Sarasvathy (2008 p. 70) puts it as follows: in a situation of uncertainty it is impossible to

- calculate the probabilities for future consequences,
- have a clear understanding of the elements in the environment which should be paid attention to and which can be ignored,
- define precisely what goals should be pursued, when the preferences are not well ordered.

Her advice: replace the logic of causation with the logic of effectuation. By effectuation she means: instead of starting with goals one better begins with taking into account the means available and allows the goals to emergence over time (Sarasvathy 2008, p. 73). The logic of effectuation had become most clear in the Canadian case.

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### Summary:

The article assumes that the knowledge society is still a new but pivotal phenomenon for public libraries. To pay attention to its novelty requires a special responsiveness. The joint construction of meaning is illustrated by processes of sensemaking and sensegiving in the library systems of Canada, the UK, and Denmark. The overall conclusion is: a widened library concept allows for better attuned activities in the libraries. Learning in co-configuration results in more sustainable relationships between libraries and their environment. New strategic initiatives need to be followed up by adjusted communication processes and decision-making structures. The logic of effectuation is suggested as an organizational approach in order to tackle current challenges faced by public libraries.

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**ПУБЛІЧНІ БІБЛІОТЕКИ В ПОСТІНДУСТРІАЛЬНИХ СУСПІЛЬСТВАХ: ВИКЛИКИ ТА МОЖЛИВОСТІ**

Автор статті розглядає співробітництво публічних бібліотек Канади, Великої Британії, Данії в умовах суспільства знань, їх нові стратегічні ініціативи щодо поглиблення співпраці, усунення інформаційної нерівності, оцифрування фондів, надання гібридних послуг.

К л ю ч о в і с л о в а: суспільство знань, публічні бібліотеки Данії, міжнародна бібліотечна кооперація, поліфункціональність сучасних бібліотек, оцифрування фондів, гібридні послуги.

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**ПУБЛИЧНЫЕ БИБЛИОТЕКИ В ПОСТИНДУСТРИАЛЬНЫХ ОБЩЕСТВАХ: ВЫЗОВЫ И ВОЗМОЖНОСТИ**

Автор статьи анализирует сотрудничество публичных библиотек Канады, Великобритании, Дании в условиях общества знаний, рассматривает их новые стратегические инициативы относительно углубления международной библиотечной кооперации, ликвидации информационного неравенства, оцифрования фондов, предоставления гибридных услуг.

К л ю ч е в ы е с л о в а: общество знаний, публичные библиотеки Дании, международная библиотечная кооперация, полифункциональность современных библиотек, оцифрование фондов, гибридные услуги.