

The impact of public libraries in Denmark: A haven in our community

Conducted by Seismonaut and Roskilde Central Library
February 2021

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Reading instructions

This study consists of six chapters.

In **Chapter 1**, we provide a summary of the main conclusions of the survey.

In **Chapter 2**, we introduce the Impact Compass and present the overall analysis of the significance of Danish public libraries, collectively.

In **Chapter 3**, we go into detailed analyses of the significance of the collection, events, physical facilities, and staff guidance offered by Danish public libraries.

In **Chapter 4**, we take a closer look at the Danish public's relationship to public libraries in general, including their use of library services and their attitudes towards public libraries. We define and distinguish citizens from users and address the misleading concept of a "non-user".

Chapter 5 contains a brief postscript in which we revisit the aim of the study.

In **Chapter 6**, we elaborate on the methodological foundation of the study, and the subsequent **appendices** allow readers to explore the data behind the study.

“To me, it feels like the library is a place with a heart. It’s a place that wants the best for me, and where I’m not a product or customer”

- Man, 39 years

Introduction

On an annual basis, Denmark’s public libraries are frequented by around half of the Danish public, making it Denmark’s most used cultural institution. But what impact does this use of public libraries have on the Danish public?

The public discourse on public libraries typically refers to a handful of established key figures: How many people visit our public libraries, what types of people use the libraries and how many materials do they borrow? This type of data is well-suited for monitoring the development of public libraries and the public’s library habits at an overall level.

The ambition behind this study is to look beyond the foot traffic and lending figures and establish a deeper understanding of the different types of impact public libraries have on their citizens. The central methodological principle in this study revolves around the concrete experiences of citizens with public libraries. We asked people about their use of various library services as well as how those services have had impact on them.

In other words, this survey moves beyond “How much content do libraries lend out?” to “What was the individual impact of borrowing that content?”, and from “How many people participated in the event?” to “What was the individual impact of participating in that event?”. This user experience perspective is essential if our goal is to build

¹ See The Agency for Culture and Palaces, Folkebiblioteker i tal (annual report, translates to: Public libraries in numbers) as well as Biblioteksbarometeret for Folkebiblioteker (annual report, translates to: The Library barometer for public libraries). See also Wilke for The Agency for Culture and Palaces, National bruger- og benchmarkundersøgelse på biblioteksområdet (2016, translates to: National user and benchmark survey on libraries).

About the study

There is very little knowledge on the impact public libraries in Denmark have on the Danish public. We are taking on that challenge with this study, which is the first of its kind to present a nuanced analysis of the impact of public libraries on the Danish public.

This study was initiated by Roskilde Central Library and conducted by Seismonaut in the autumn of 2020.

In addition to this report, a user guide has been produced to detail how the results and methods of the analysis can be used in practice, both to qualify and inform local policy debates on public libraries as well as a framework for developing and evaluating library activities at the operational level.

an empirically grounded knowledge base that can add nuance to the debate on the importance of public libraries and their role in society - today and in the future.

The empirical data in this study is based on a national questionnaire survey conducted among a representative sample of the citizens of Denmark aged 16-90 - in total 1.509 respondents. We have validated and added nuance to the quantitative data by means of qualitative insights collected through user interviews and observations.

The results are intended to be used to add nuance to public discourse on public libraries in Denmark and institute a greater focus on the impact of public libraries on the Danish public among decision-makers and the media as well as to inform the daily development and operation of the libraries.

We hope that the study will be read and received as an invitation to delve deeper than the lending figures and prompt a new and more nuanced discussion on the impact of public libraries to the Danish public - a topic that many people have an opinion on, but which has lacked an empirically validated baseline of knowledge for a long time.

This study is based on an acclaimed British research project

The Cultural Value Project is a comprehensive British research project initiated by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The project, which concluded in 2019, included a wide range of research activities, articles, events as well as literature and methodological studies.

The overarching purpose of the Cultural Value Project was to investigate how culture translates into impact and value, and how to measure that impact and value through empirical and analytical methods.

“What emerges from the Cultural Value Project is the imperative to reposition first-hand, individual experience of arts and culture at the heart of enquiry into cultural value”

- The AHRC Cultural Value Project (2016): *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture*

A key feature of the Cultural Value Project is the imperative to once again position the individual at the centre of the discussion on the value and impact of culture. The British researchers conclude that far too often, we skip this fundamental stepping stone and jump right into the

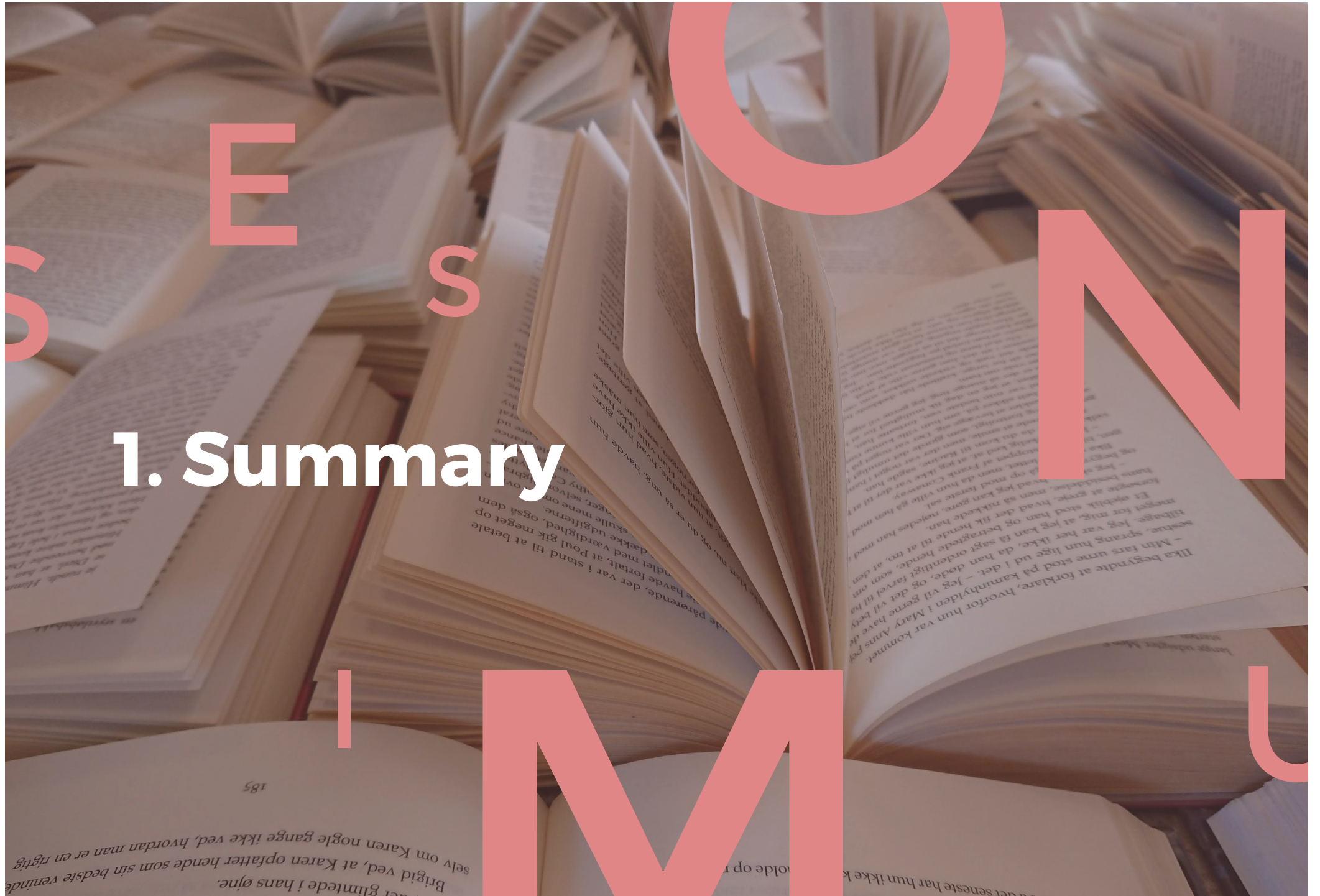
derived impact of the arts, such as in terms of the economy, urban development or health.

The researchers call for bringing the individual human perspective back in focus. Thus, the Cultural Value Project also represents a strong argument for the return of qualitative methods in public discourse.

“It is only once we have started with individual experience that we can then work outwards, and understand the kinds of benefit that culture may have for society, for communities, for democracy, for public health and wellbeing, for urban life and regional growth”

- Ibid.

Read more at <https://culturalvalueproject.wordpress.com/about/> as well as in the report *Understanding the value of arts & culture*, Crossick G, Kaszynska P (2016).



1. Summary

1. Summary

Public library users¹ especially see the library as a haven in which they can immerse themselves and gain perspectives on life through curated knowledge and information. To some users, public libraries also contribute to the development of new communities and skills.

¹ In this study, we distinguish between citizens in general and public library users. However, the results demonstrate that the vast majority of the Danish public makes use of public libraries at some point in their lives (see Chapter 4).

Public libraries have a multifaceted form of impact on their users

Public libraries give citizens access to knowledge and cultural experiences, thereby contributing to general knowledge. But what impact do the users themselves experience from their local public library?

This study reveals that public libraries have a multifaceted form of impact on their users. The study sheds light on four dimensions of impact², all of which manifest themselves in the users' experiences with public libraries:

Haven

Denmark's public libraries are a haven in which users can immerse themselves and experience well-being

Public libraries are highly impactful to users in terms of being a haven that allows them to take a much-needed break - the libraries are a place

² Read more about the four dimensions on p. 13.

where they can take time for themselves and each other and experience well-being, immersion, and emotion. Different groups use this haven in different ways. Some seek out the library for peace and quiet and concentration, while for others, it's about spending time together with one's children, friends, fellow students, other "newspaper readers", etc. The impact of Denmark's public libraries in terms of serving as a haven is the dimension that is most strongly highlighted across the entire study.

Perspective

Danish public libraries give users perspective on life

Denmark's public libraries stimulate reflection, learning, the acquisition of knowledge and critical thinking. This type of impact comes as a close second to the libraries' impact as a haven. In a digital era where the Internet offers a fleeting flow of information and misinformation, the public

library is highly impactful on its users in terms of being a place in which knowledge and information is curated and disseminated, and where you can step outside the echo chambers you encounter on social media. Additionally, the study found that users particularly value the public library's ability to introduce them to materials and content that they would not have come across on their own.

Creativity

Public libraries allow people to develop creatively

Public libraries are a source of inspiration, and help stimulate the imagination of their users. The public library can also help motivate users to try new things and acquire new skills. The public library's contribution to creative growth is the dimension that is most seldom highlighted in the overall study. However, a detailed analysis revealed that while some users do not experience this impact, other users do to a great extent. In other words, it is a type of impact that differs greatly between user groups.

Community

Public libraries help form and maintain communities

Public libraries help form and maintain communities, both directly - by being a place where users meet and experience togetherness with each other - as well indirectly by users regarding public

libraries as communal property. Public libraries are places where you learn to take care of society in a concrete, materialistic sense by taking care of the materials you borrow, the newspapers you read and facilities you use. It is highly impactful on citizens in a broad sense that the library is a free and equal service that places no financial barriers to access and use. In addition, the study found that public library events are considered very impactful in relation to creating a framework for communities.

Public libraries are impactful in multiple ways

Public library services are complementary

Denmark's public libraries have many facets and offer a wide range of services to citizens. In our study, we have differentiated between four types of library services¹. These four types are:

- **The collection:** Everything that can be borrowed from the library - both physical and digital.
- **The events:** Everything people can participate in, e.g. debate events, children's theatre performances, public readings and talks.
- **The physical facilities:** The library's reading areas, newspaper areas, play areas, café, etc.
- **Staff guidance:** The guidance and help a person can obtain from a library employee or through courses and workshops.

The study found that most library users (89%) make use of the collection, while 34% make use of the physical facilities. Roughly one-fifth (21%) make use of staff support, and a similar proportion of users (19%) have participated in events hosted at a public library.

¹ In addition to the library services already mentioned, Denmark's public libraries also offer activities at schools, educational institutions, etc. while also engaging in collaborative projects with many different actors. These activities do not fall within the scope of this study. For further information, see Chapter 6 (Method).



The collection

The collection is the most-used library service and is especially impactful on users as a source of new knowledge and information. In addition, the collection gives users a sense of well-being to a great extent.



The events

Participating in public library events is impactful. Users find that the events are highly impactful across many different parameters. However, the events especially matter in relation to communities, and are rated much higher on this aspect than other library services are.



The physical facilities

The libraries' physical facilities have a varied level of impact on their users. In addition to creating a space for concentration and immersion, the facilities also contribute to the users' well-being, creativity and the ability to reflect. Furthermore, these facilities also create a truly special atmosphere according to the users.



Staff guidance

Interactions with public library staff are highly impactful on library users, and in more ways than one might assume. Staff guidance is impactful in terms of the users' search for information, but it also contributes to well-being, conversations, immersion and new motivation.

The vast majority of citizens use public libraries at some point in their lives

The aim of the study is to delve beyond lending figures and user statistics to determine the impact of Denmark's public libraries on its citizens, focusing in particular on the people who use public libraries, but also those who are not current users.

The study found that 56% of citizens have made use of a public library within the past year, while 44% have not. Interestingly, eight out of ten non-users (82%) have previously made use of a public library. In other words, it is only one in every five non-users who have never used a public library before. This corresponds to roughly 6% of the public as a whole never having used a public library.

Meanwhile 40% of the current non-users believe that it is likely or very likely that they will make use of a public library sometime in the future. Only 11% of non-users responded that they have never used a public library before and find it unlikely that they will in the future. This corresponds to only 3.5% of the Danish public that has never used a public library and also considers it unlikely that they will in the future. In other words, the term 'non-user' should be interpreted in light

of the fact that only a small amount of citizens remain non-users for life. The vast majority of the citizens of Denmark make use of a public library at some point in their lives.

96.5% of citizens have previously been library users, are currently library users or expect to become library users in the future

Public libraries are important to the citizens of Denmark - even in this digital age

It's one thing that over half of the Danish public have used a public library within the past year, and that the majority of citizens use public libraries at some point in their lives. Another matter is whether the Danish public believes that public libraries are important, and if so, why? We have sought answers to those questions among current users as well as current non-users, so as to paint an overall picture of the public's view on public libraries.

The study found that the vast majority of citizens in Denmark believe that public libraries are important because they offer free and equal access to knowledge and culture. 83% of citizens agree with that statement. 75% of citizens also believe that public libraries are important because they benefit their local areas.

Despite the significantly increased range of digital services that give citizens access to literature, music, films, etc. and despite the near-infinite possibilities provided by the Internet to search for all kinds of knowledge and information, it is still important to citizens that public libraries offer access to knowledge and content. Only 28% of citizens believe that digital content services such as Mofibo, Spotify and Netflix have made public libraries less relevant. In other words, the vast majority believes that public libraries are still an important source of knowledge and content for everyone.

In the study, parents with children living at home were asked about their views on public libraries in relation to their children. 75% of parents in the survey believe to a great extent that it is important for their children to have access to public libraries.

8 out of 10 citizens in Denmark find it important that public libraries offer free and equal access to knowledge and culture

A photograph of a woman with blonde hair wearing large black headphones, looking at a computer monitor in what appears to be a library or office environment. The image is overlaid with large, semi-transparent red letters 'S', 'E', 'S', 'O', 'N', 'M', 'U' and a white text overlay.

2. The impact of public libraries on users

2. The impact of public libraries on users

This study includes an introduction of the Impact Compass, which forms the foundation for the study's empirical and analytical starting point. The Impact Compass is utilised to illustrate how different library activities impact users in different ways.

In this chapter, we first go into detail on **the impact of Danish public libraries - overall**. We examine the public libraries' overall impact imprint across all activities and services.

Following that, we delve into four separate analyses within four types of library services: **The collection, the events, the physical facilities and staff guidance**. Detailed definitions can be found on page 21.

What all the five analyses have in common (the overall analysis and analyses of the four library services) is that they all focus on the experienced impact among users, i.e. citizens who have made use of the services in question within the past year. The rest of the population, i.e. current non-users, are not included in the analyses in chapters 2 and 3. They are, however, included in Chapter 4, where we examine more closely how citizens use public libraries and their attitudes towards public libraries, irrespective of whether or not they are users.¹

¹ Further details on the methodology and approach can be found in Chapter 6, Methodology: Behind the impact of public libraries in Denmark.

The five analytical perspectives

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Introduction to the Impact Compass

The Impact Compass is composed of 12 impact parameters distributed across four dimensions: Haven, Perspective, Creativity and Community.

The empirical foundation is based on a national questionnaire survey in which a representative sample of citizens in Denmark between the ages of 16-90 shared what they experience they get out of using public libraries. Their responses were categorised and measured according to the 12 parameters.

The survey participants have assessed their experiences on the basis of response categories ranging from “To a very great extent” to “Not at all”. The responses were subsequently converted into numerical values from 1-5:

To a very great extent	5
To a great extent	4
To some extent	3
To a little extent	2
Not at all	1

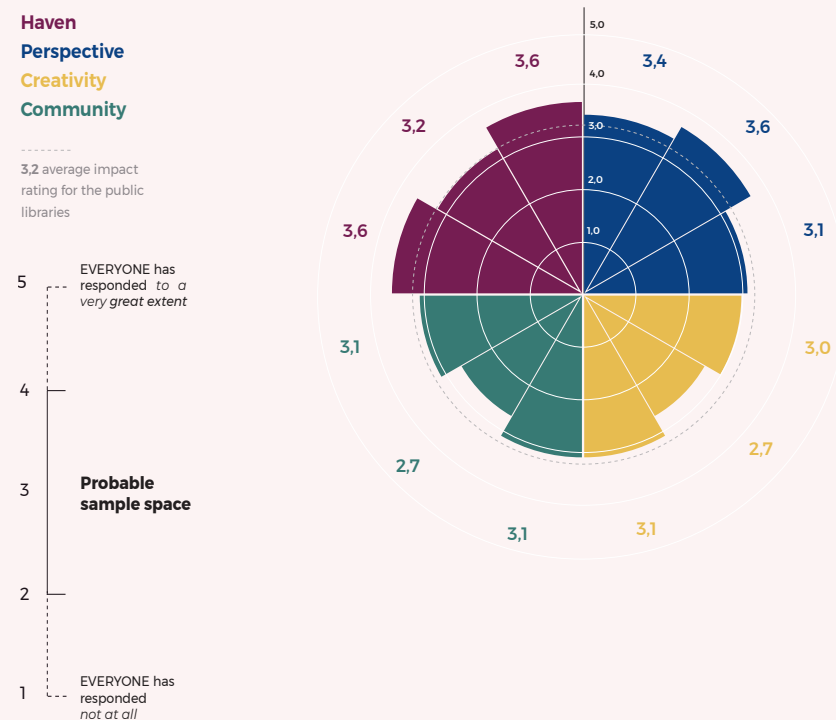
The numerical values in the Impact Compass are an expression of the **average** rating among the

survey respondents. When looking at the average response value among many responses, it's rare to see results in the far ends of the scale. In other words, it would be unexpected to see an average value of 5, as that would require all the survey respondents having answered “To a very high extent”. Similarly, it would be unexpected to see an average value of 1, as that would require all the survey respondents having answered “Not at all”.

The expected range of outcomes is between 2 and 4, and it is in that light the results should be viewed: An average about 4 is the highest value one can expect, while an average about 2 is the lowest.

In order to ensure a common frame of reference across the different Impact Compasses, an average assessment has been calculated. This has been calculated as an average across the 12 parameters and across the four groups of library services, resulting in an average value rating of 3.2. This average has been indicated with a dotted line in all Impact Compasses.

The Impact Compass



Appendix 1 and 2 contain tables with some data behind the analyses.

Public libraries have a multifaceted form of impact on their users

In this first analysis we take a look at the overall impact of the public library - that is across all library services

The results show that users especially experience the impact of public libraries in terms of being havens where they can take a break and immerse themselves. Furthermore public libraries impact users by providing perspective on life through curated knowledge and information.

Danish public libraries come in different sizes and setups, adapting their services to different user groups according to geography, demography and the local political context. This means that no two libraries are exactly alike.

In the first analysis, we review an overall cross-section of responses that users across the country have given on their experiences with public libraries.

Findings on public libraries overall

56% of citizens in Denmark have made use of a public library within the past year. The most-used service is the collection, which nine out of ten (89%) have used, followed by the physical facilities (34%), staff guidance (21%) and events (19%).

The average assessment of the overall impact of public libraries is 3.2, which is indicated by a dotted line in all the Impact Compasses.

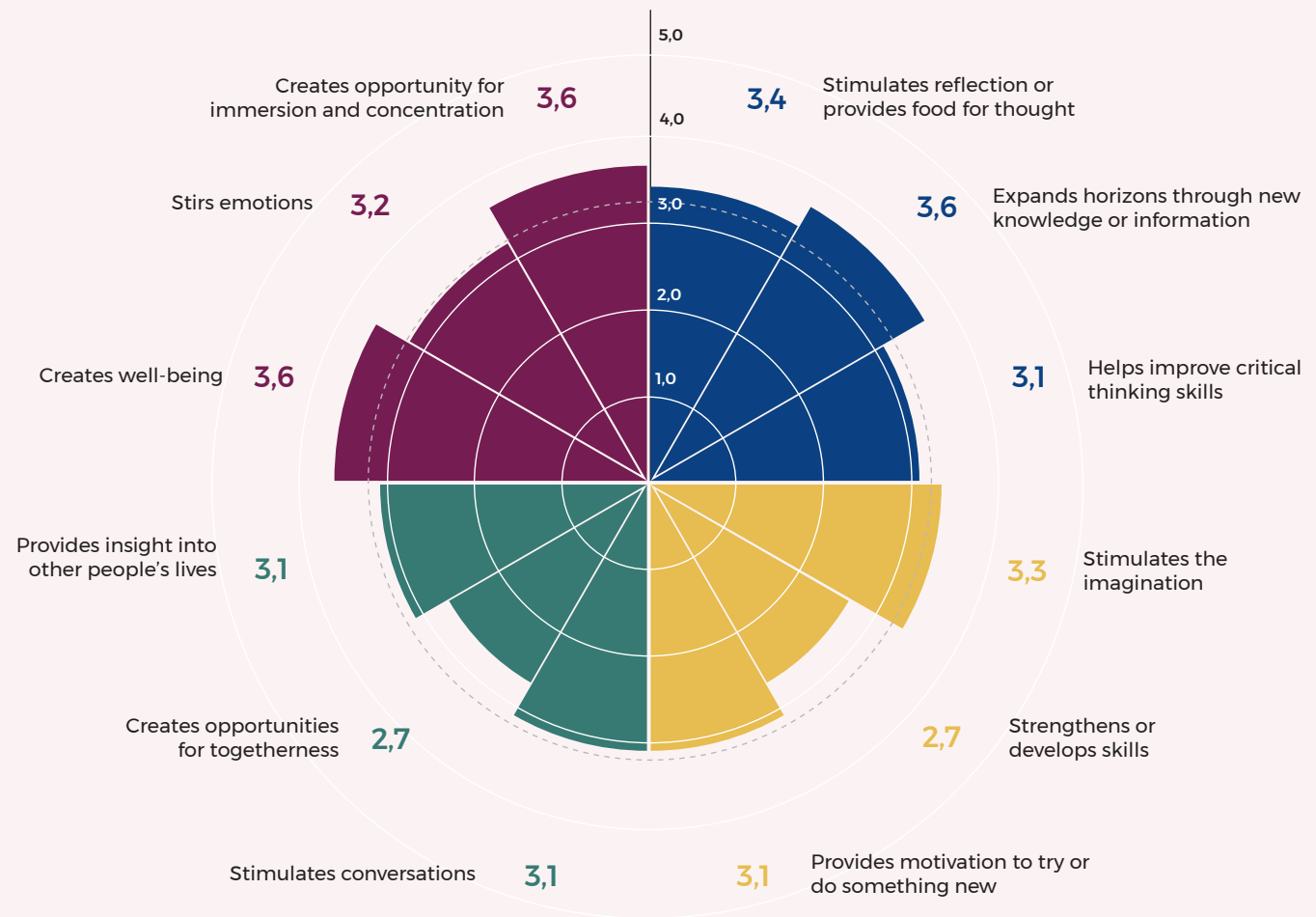
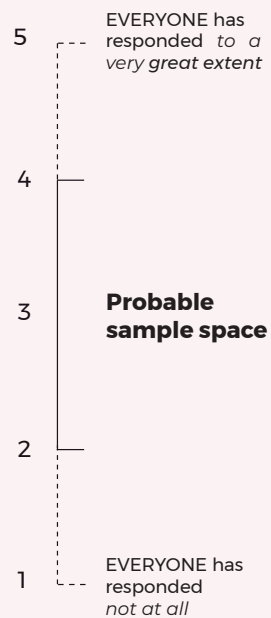
The average assessment of the four dimensions of public libraries as a whole are:

Haven	3.5
Perspective	3.4
Creativity	3.0
Community	3.0

Impact Compass - The overall impact of public libraries

Haven
Perspective
Creativity
Community

 3,2 average impact rating for the public libraries



Denmark's public libraries are a haven in which users can immerse themselves and experience well-being

Public libraries are highly impactful (with an average rating of 3.5 - see fact box on p. 14) in relation to being a **Haven** that allows users to take a much-needed break; a place where they can take time for themselves and each other and experience well-being, immersion and emotional stimulation. Different groups use this haven in different ways; some seek out the library for calm and concentration, while for others, it's about spending time together with one's children, friends, fellow students, other "newspaper readers", etc. Users rated the impact of Denmark's public libraries in terms of being a haven higher than any other type of impact.

"I most often come here with the children. We use it as a place to watch and do things, as well as for borrowing children's books"

- Man, 32 years

"To me, it feels like the library is a service with warmth. It's a service that wants the best for me, and where I'm not a product or customer"

- Man, 39 years

"Some Sundays, when I have the time I might just move about and browse a bit"

- Woman, 43 years



Photo: Willieam Bier, 2014

Danish public libraries give users perspective on life

It is also highly significant to users that public libraries help create **Perspective** on life (rated 3.4 on average - see fact box on p. 14). Public libraries stimulate reflection and impact the users' acquisition of new knowledge and information.

Disseminating knowledge and information to the public has always been part of a Danish public library's purpose. At the same time, it is a library service that is debated among the public in light of technological developments that have made all knowledge and information accessible everywhere, allowing people to access books, magazines, films and music on demand via digital services. Both the quantitative and qualitative data in this study demonstrate that the public values having free and equal access to content via libraries (see Chapter 3), but also that they value the libraries' curation of knowledge and information, introducing users to knowledge and materials that they would not otherwise have come across on their own.

“It means a lot to me that it provides free access to knowledge. Well, mostly literature, I suppose. That’s what you can find here, after all. I’d never be able to buy all the books I read from here”

- Man, 39 years

“We use the library to expand our horizons and indulge our curiosity. We borrow and read lots of books; it’s something we consider natural”

- Couple, 50 years



Photo: Thit Andersen, 2016

Public libraries allow users the to develop creativity

Public libraries impact users' opportunities to develop **Creativity**, even though this impact is less clear in the overall picture (rated 3.0 on average - see fact box on p. 14). The public libraries' impact on users' creativity is particularly evident in the fact they help stimulate users' imagination, which especially applies to those who borrow materials from the libraries' collections.

Overall, the opportunity for creative development is the lowest rated impact among library users. The creative parameter developing and strengthening skills - is rated relatively low on average across library services. However, this is a form of impact that some users to experience to a very great extend, while others do not at all experience that public libraries and their services have that type of impact¹.

¹Detailed data for the individual impact parameters are presented in tables in appendices 1 and 2.

“I think that physical books are hugely important in terms of developing one’s imagination. Especially for children”

- Man, 70 years

“You can take more chances with books and try a lot of different things”

- Couple, 33 years

“If you feel like learning something new, you can just go borrow a lot of books - and you don’t need to hurry with reading them. In the worst case, you can just return them and borrow them again another time”

- Woman, 50 years



Photo: Sanne Aabjerg Kristiansen, 2017

Public libraries help form and maintain communities

Last but not least, public libraries impact users in terms of being a place that helps form and maintain **Communities** (average rating of 3.0 - see fact box on p. 14). This impact is rated particularly high in regard to library events and staff guidance, which will be elaborated upon further in the coming analyses.

The qualitative dimension of the study shows that libraries help form and maintain communities in two ways: Directly, by being a place where users meet and experience togetherness with each other, as well as indirectly, by users regarding public libraries as communal property. Accordingly, public libraries are places where users feel that they are taking part in society in a concrete, materialistic sense by taking care of the materials they borrow, the newspapers they read and facilities they use. Several parents noted that this is an important aspect of their children's upbringing and education that libraries support.

“I once dropped by because I had nothing to do. But then I realised that they have some good computers here, so I began playing games. There was someone sitting next to me who was gaming as well, and eventually we started saying ‘hi’ to each other when we met at the computers”

- Boy, 12 years

“It’s uplifting to enter a place that’s open to everyone and where we share everything. This isn’t my newspaper, see? And that’s precisely the point”

- Woman, 71 years

“There are lots of different people who share this place. You share books, you share magazines, and so forth. It ties a community together”

- Woman, 18 years



Photo: Thit Andersen, 2016



3. A nuanced look at the impact of public libraries

Four groups of library services

Public libraries provide a wide variety of services and activities. We have categorised these services into four different types for the sake of simplicity.

The four types of library services overlap in many cases and should therefore not be regarded as isolated from one another. Dividing these services

into four types is simply for the sake of establishing an analytical perspective.

Collaborative activities outside the library, e.g. collaborations with schools and educational institutions, do not fall within the scope of this study. Such collaborations do exist but the focus of this

study is on the ordinary citizen's views of public libraries, i.e. the local public library they know and use.

The impact of such collaborative activities has therefore been left to be determined by future studies.



The collection

Use of the collection refers to users having borrowed materials from the library, including books, music, films and the like. This includes both physical loans from the library as well as digital loans from platforms such as Filmstripen or eReolen. Naturally, people are also able to make use of the collection without taking borrowed materials home with them, e.g. by reading books at the library.



The events

Partaking in events refers to users having participated in talks, exhibitions, debates, reading groups, children's theatre performances, concerts and the like at the library. These events can include the library's own events as well as events held by others in collaboration with the library.



The physical facilities

Using the physical facilities refers to people having made use of the physical library space, including the newspaper and periodicals area, reading areas, study areas, computers, workshops, meeting rooms, the café, MakerSpaces and the like - either alone or in self-organised groups such as study groups, parent groups, etc.



Staff guidance

Staff guidance covers all activities where a user has received help from a library employee, e.g. in the form of reading recommendations or help with searching for information. This includes help and guidance received through courses or workshops, such as an IT café or student guidance.



The collection gives users a haven and perspective

The collection is the most-used library service and is especially impactful on users as a source of new knowledge and information. In addition, the collection gives users a sense of well-being to a great extent.

In many ways, the collection is the most classic library service, even though it has undergone significant changes over the past decade. In addition to the physical collection of books (in particular), music and films, today's public library collections have a digital counterpart, allowing users to borrow e-books, audiobooks and e-magazines, which can be borrowed, read and listened to via eReolen, as well as films that can be streamed via Filmstripen. In other words, it is easy to make use of a public library's collection without ever setting foot in the library building.

The qualitative dimension of this study shows that the collection particularly contributes to inspiring users to access knowledge and materials they would not otherwise have come across or taken an interest in. This may indicate that the collections of public libraries play a role in relation to curating and validating knowledge and information as well as inspiring people towards new knowledge horizons that algorithmic echo chambers (via other information channels and online media) prevent them from discovering.

Findings on the Collection

89% of users have borrowed materials from public library collections within the past year - physical or digital.

On average, users give the collection an impact rating of 3.3.

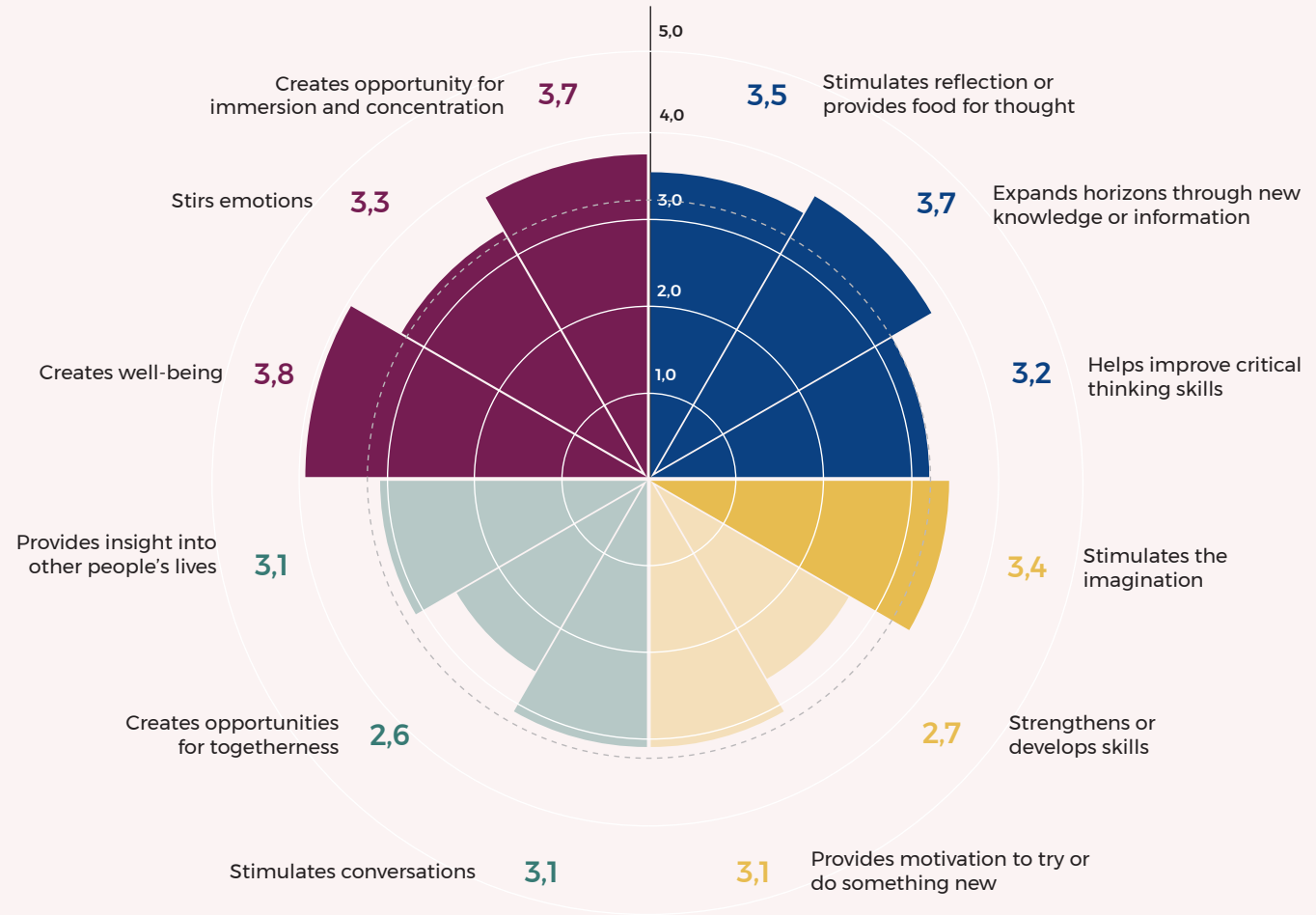
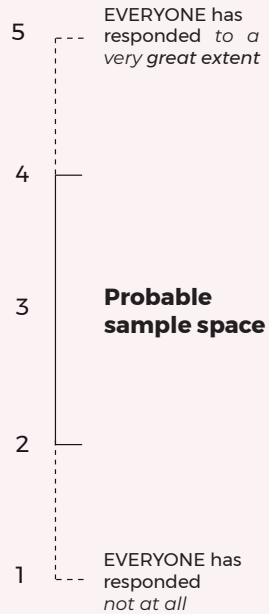
The average rating of the collection across the four dimensions is as follows:

Haven	3.6
Perspective	3.5
Creativity	3.1
Community	2.9

Impact Compass - the impact of The collection

Haven
Perspective
Creativity
Community

 3,2 average impact rating for the public libraries



The experienced impact of the collection is most pronounced in the **Haven** dimension, closely followed by the **Perspective** dimension (see Impact Compass on p. 23). The collection provides a great deal of well-being to its users (3.8). In the qualitative dimension of the study, several users noted that they feel a sense of satisfaction by exploring the collection and satisfying their curiosity and desire to read without having to worry about bringing too much home.

“It would be expensive if you were forced to buy all the books you read. I’ve returned six books today, and I have more at home that I’m not done with”

- Man, 60 years

“I mostly read the back of the books when I’m here. If it’s got a good cover, I’ll take it home with me”

- Boy, 13 years

“I was just going to return a few books today, but then I also found these three books for my sons”

- Woman, 43 years

The collection also provides opportunities for immersion and concentration (3.7) and helps stir emotions (3.3). In addition, users find that the collection helps expand their horizons through new knowledge and information to a great extent (3.7). Further, the collection helps create reflection and food for thought (3.5) as well as honing critical thinking skills (3.2). In other words, the collection appeals to both heart and mind.

“You can find books on all sorts of topics. There’s something for boys and girls as well as parents and grandparents”

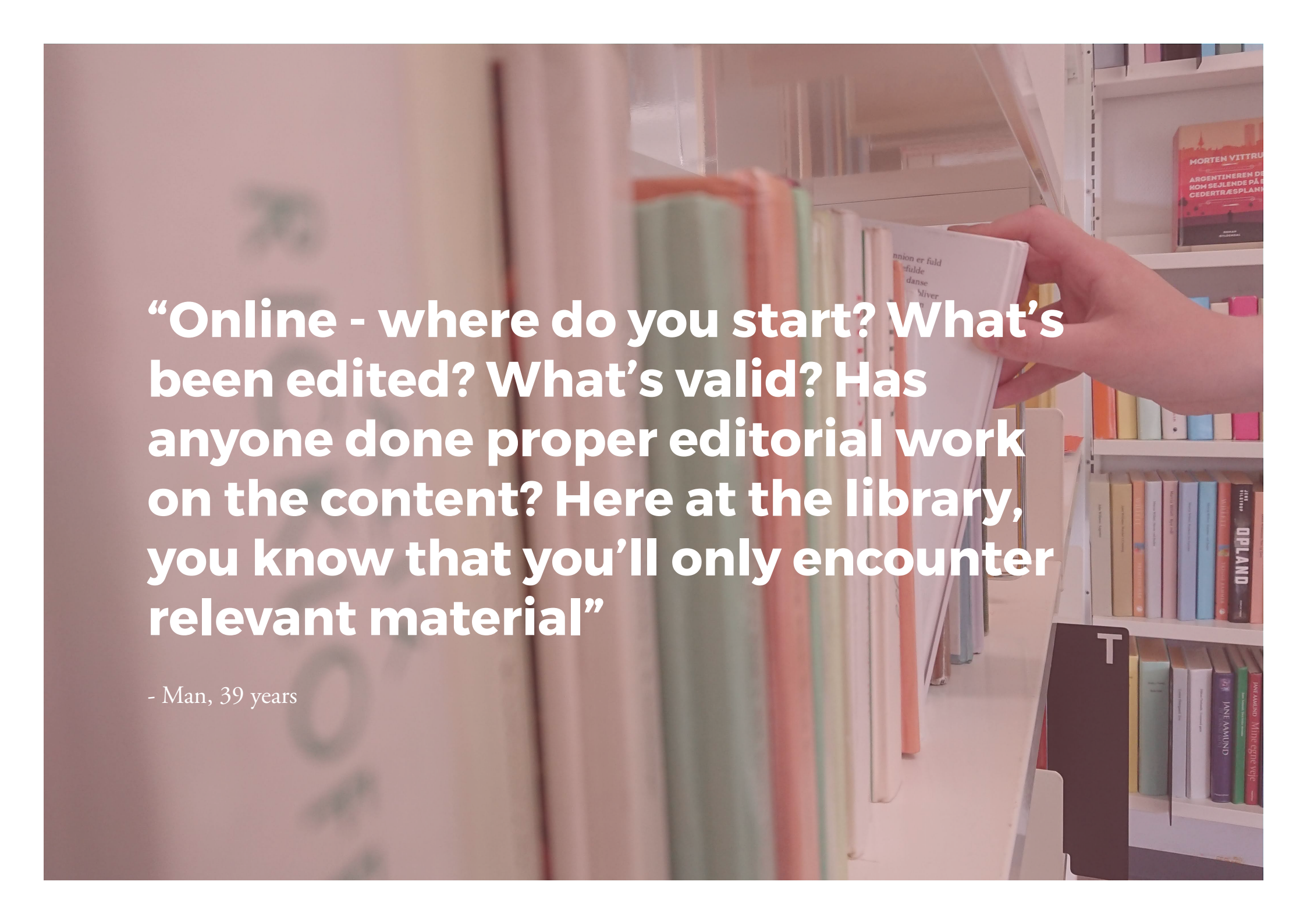
- Boy, 13 years

“You can find everything online, but I like borrowing the physical material. You end up going through the material at a slower, better pace, I think”

- Man, 62 years

“I find it fascinating that you can access all the knowledge in the world from here. I mean, you could also just go online if you wanted to, but this place is built for it!”

- Man, 39 years

A hand is shown holding a book in a library. The book's cover is partially visible, showing the text "nion er fuld", "fulde", "danse", and "siver". The background shows a bookshelf with various books, including one titled "MORTEN VITTRU" and another "OPPLAND".

“Online - where do you start? What’s been edited? What’s valid? Has anyone done proper editorial work on the content? Here at the library, you know that you’ll only encounter relevant material”

- Man, 39 years

Within the **Creativity** dimension, the collection is rated above average on a single impact parameter, namely the ability to stimulate the imagination (3.4 - see Impact Compass on p. 23). This insight is supported by the qualitative dimension of the study, with several users highlighting literature's ability to stimulate the imagination. Physical books and other physical materials are experienced as a source of inspiration by many users, as they allow themselves more time to absorb the material and appreciate it on a cognitive and sensory level.

The collection's ability to **strengthen or develop skills** has not been rated particularly high. This may seem surprising, as users might be expected to improve their reading skills through reading while users reading non-fiction might also be expected to acquire new skills or hone existing ones. If we examine this parameter more closely, however, it becomes clear that behind this average rating lies a divide between two groups of users. A fourth of users (26%) find that the collection has strengthened their skills to a great extent¹, while every fifth user (19%) does not feel that has been the case. Every fourth user (23%) has experienced this impact from a public library, but only to a little extent. The detailed analysis thereby reveals a split between two groups of users, where some find

¹ When referring to the Likert scale, the responses "To a great extent" and "To a very great extent" are combined and referred to as "to a great extent". The full breakdown of each impact parameter can be viewed in detail in Appendix 2.

that the collection is impactful in relation to skill development, while others do not feel that way. See Appendix 2 for detailed data.

Users rated the collection's impact within the **Community** dimension relatively low. All three parameters under Community were rated below average for public libraries' overall perceived impact (3.2). The collection's ability to create opportunities for togetherness was rated particularly low. On average, users rated the parameter 2.6, which is the lowest average rating across the entire study. This could indicate that users do not see any significant link between the collection and opportunities to experience togetherness.

The qualitative dimension of the study can, however, add some nuance to this finding, with several users formulating a view that "the library is something we have in common," citing the books and other materials that can be borrowed as examples. This experience of sharing things and taking care of books precisely because they don't belong to any single individual is noted by many users as something that results in a feeling of citizenship and being part of a community.

If we look more closely at the collection's ability to **create opportunities for togetherness** it is clear that this parameter also divides users into two distinct groups. Approximately one-fifth of borrowers (21%) find that the collection creates opportunities for togetherness to a great extent, while a similar proportion (22%) do not believe that to be the case at all. In other words, there are two different groups of users here that have a very different view of the impact of the collection on this impact parameter. See Appendix 2 for detailed data.

The events have a high impact on nearly every parameter

Participating in public library events is impactful. Users find that the events are highly impactful in relation to 11 out of 12 of the impact parameters. The events especially show impact in relation to communities, and are rated more in this dimension than any other library service.

Public libraries offer a wealth of events across all of Denmark. Libraries host everything from exhibitions, debates and children's theatre performances as well as small reading groups and talks. Most recently, they have also increasingly offered the opportunity to participate in events from home via live streaming.

Participating in events is not the most used library service, however. A fifth of library users have participated in an event at a public library within the past year. Nevertheless, it is the events that have the biggest and widest impact on the users who have participated in them. The impact of events is rated higher than average across 11 of the 12 impact parameters.

Findings on the Events

19% of users have participated in one or several events associated with a public library.

On average, users rate the impact of events at 3.5.

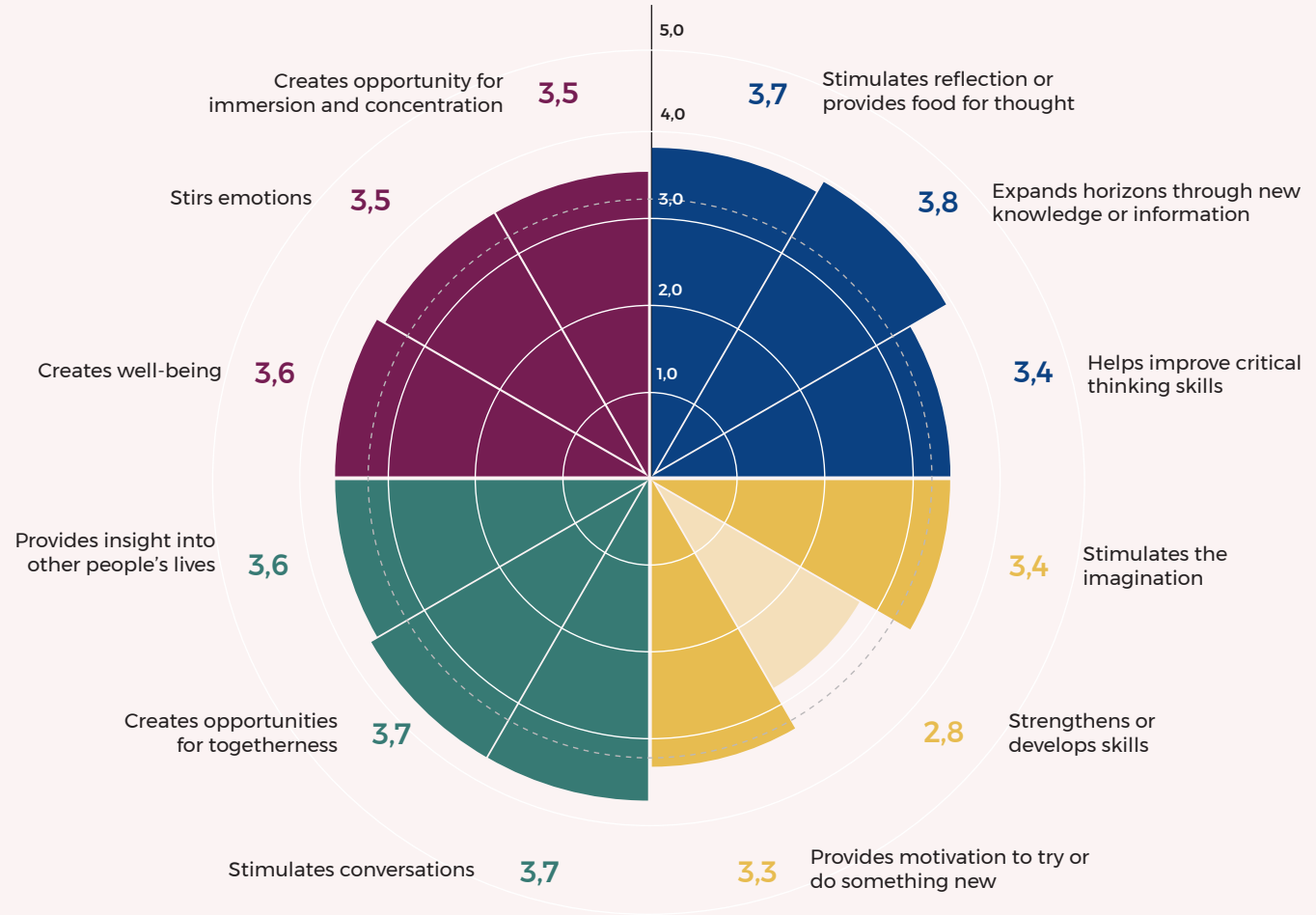
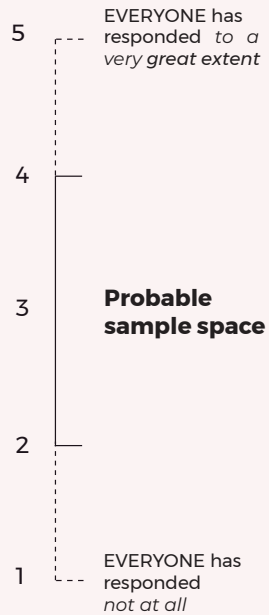
The average rating of the events across the four dimensions is as follows:

Haven	3.5
Perspective	3.6
Creativity	3.2
Community	3.7

Impact Compass - the impact of The events

Haven
Perspective
Creativity
Community

 3,2 average impact rating for the public libraries



Compared to the other categories of library services, public library events particularly support the **Community** dimension. Events give rise to conversations to a great extent (3.7), create opportunities for togetherness (3.7) and give the participants an insight into the lives of other people (3.6 - see Impact Compass on p. 28).

“The library is a cultural service, considering all the events they hold here, not just for children, but also talks and theatrical performances. We’ve attended a lot of those”

- Woman, 39 years

“There are lots of things you can do at the library, such as go to a flea market, play games and draw. Or hold competitions when there’s a festival”

- Girl, 13 years

Events also make a significant difference in supporting the other dimensions: **Perspective, Haven** and **Creativity**. Events have a significantly broader impact impression than the other library services covered in this study.

“The library brings people together in terms of books, events and the services it offers. It makes you feel like you’re part of a whole. That’s a sign of a local community”

- Man, 55 years

Overall, events are the highest rated library service in relation to supporting the participants’ **Perspective**. The events expand the participants’ horizons through new knowledge and information (3.8), create reflection and provide food for thought (3.7) and help hone their critical thinking skills (3.4).

Events are also rated above average on all parameters within the **Haven** dimension. Notably, of the four categories of library services, events are the most impactful in terms of stirring users’ emotions (3.5).

Events also have significant impact within the **Creativity** dimension, receiving above-average ratings in terms of stimulating the imagination (3.4) as well as providing motivation for personal change (3.3). On both these parameters, the impact of events is rated highest compared to

all other library services¹. The only parameter in which events are rated below average is in relation to their function in strengthening and developing skills (2.8).

As mentioned, public libraries can be very different from one another, and the same is true of their events. The fact that they are rated low on average when it comes to **strengthening or developing skills** further supports this notion of a wide range of events which also impact users in different ways. If we examine the results for this parameter more closely, we find that 27% of users who have participated in public library events responded that it strengthened or developed their skills to a great extent, while that was not at all the case for 43% of the respondents. This could indicate that some users have participated in events specifically aimed at strengthening and developing their skills, while other users have attended other types of events.

See Appendix 2 for detailed data.

¹ That is with the exception of the collection, which also achieved a 3.4 rating in terms of its ability to stimulate the imagination.

A photograph of a busy library event. In the foreground, a woman with glasses and a grey jacket is smiling and talking to a woman with long blonde hair. They are holding glasses of wine. In the background, a large crowd of people is gathered, some standing and talking, others sitting at a table. To the left, a display rack is filled with various magazines, including titles like 'CYKLISTER', 'Dataful', 'Check for sale', 'Folketskeren', 'FLIGHT', and 'FLY'. A vertical sign next to the rack reads 'Tidsskrifter'. The setting appears to be a modern library with large windows and a warm, inviting atmosphere.

“The library means everything. It brings people together. It’s a haven. There are theme days and events. It’s a community centre”

- Woman, 26 years



The physical facilities of public libraries create a unique atmosphere

The physical facilities of public libraries have a varied form of impact on their users, who have very different needs. In addition to creating a space for concentration and immersion, the facilities also contribute to the users' well-being, the ability to reflect and creativity. Furthermore, these facilities also create a truly unique atmosphere according to the users.

Public libraries are among the special types of public spaces with indoor facilities that are open and accessible to all citizens. Accordingly, they are also characterised to a great extent by their physical facilities. Some library users take advantage of these facilities without ever coming into contact with the collection, participating in events or asking the staff for help.

A library's physical facilities include the physical spaces people can occupy, e.g. reading areas, study areas, meeting rooms, the café, etc. In addition to that comes the furniture and equipment such as computers, printers, etc. as well as newspapers and periodicals¹ available for reading in the reading area.

¹ While newspapers and periodicals are typically considered part of a library's collection, we have in this study elected to categorise them under physical facilities, which is where they are read.

Findings on the physical facilities

34% of users have made use of a public library's physical facilities within the past year.

Users who have made use of the physical facilities rate their impact at 3.2 on average.

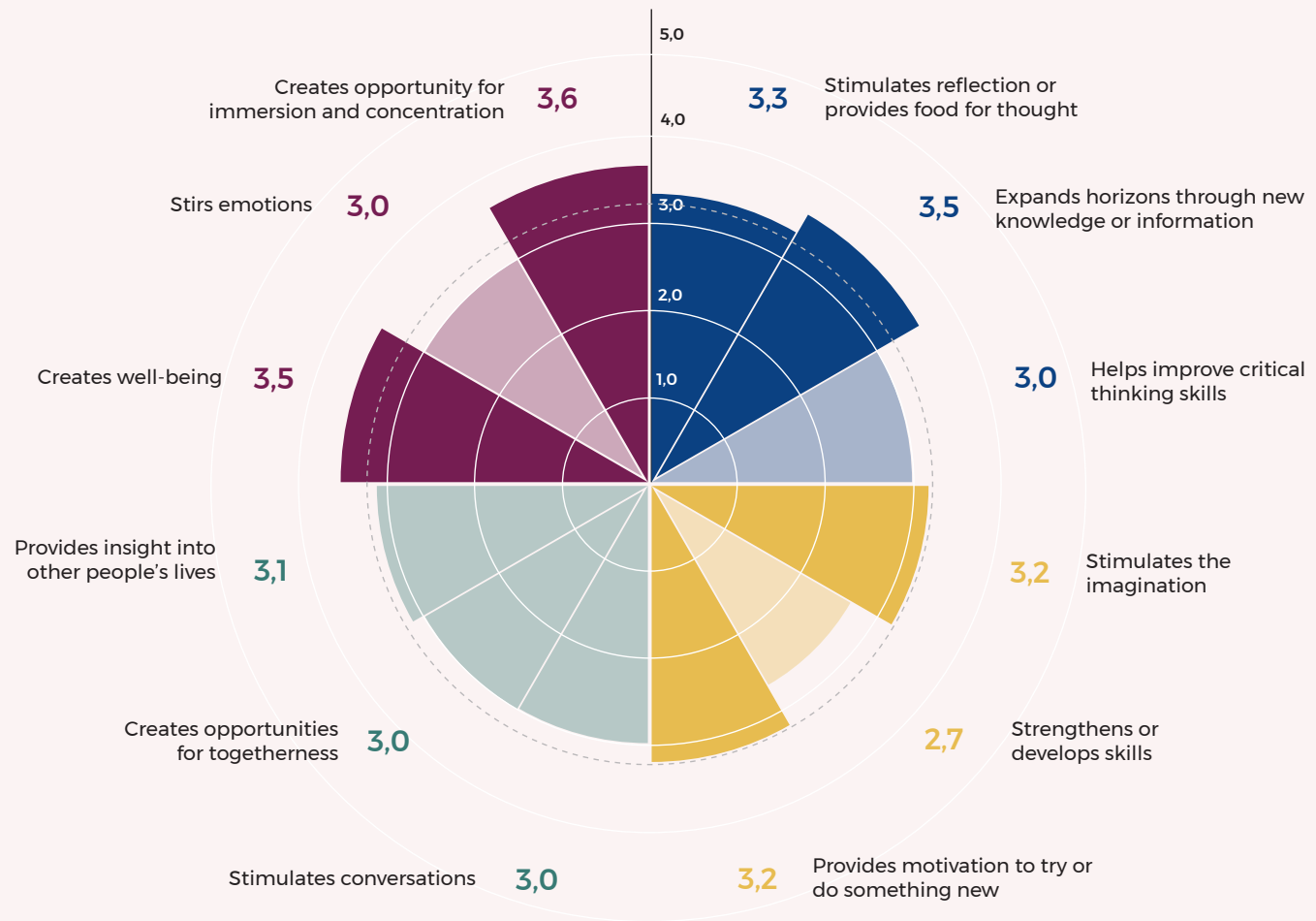
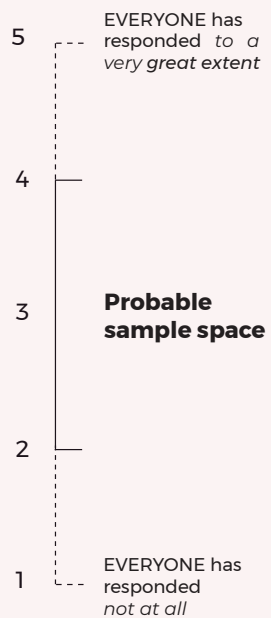
Average rating of the physical facilities across the four dimensions:

Haven	3.3
Perspective	3.3
Creativity	3.0
Community	3.1

Impact Compass - Impact of The physical facilities

Haven
Perspective
Creativity
Community

 3,2 average impact rating for the public libraries



The physical facilities have the greatest impact in terms of making public libraries feel like a **Haven**. The highest rated parameter in that dimension is the experience of immersion and concentration (3.6 - see Impact Compass on p. 32). In addition, users generally agree that the facilities contribute to an experience of well-being (3.5). Only 4% do not experience that impact at all.

“We have a nice time here. We head down to the children’s area and play with the pirate ship, find books and so on. Half the reason we come here is because of the physical setting, and the other half is the books”

- Woman, 32 years

“It’s fun and cosy here. Quiet and calm, without a lot of noise”

- Boy, 13 years

“I’d describe the atmosphere at the library as a unique library atmosphere”

- Man, 62 years

Further, users find that the physical facilities contribute to **Perspective** through new knowledge and information (3.5) as well as by creating reflection and providing food for thought (3.3). The qualitative dimension of the study also reveals a clearly evident interplay between the collection and physical facilities. The collection manifests itself in the physical spaces (i.e. shelves and displays), which helps to a great extent in creating a unique library atmosphere that users value.


“You get into a reading mood when you see all the books you can read”

- Girl, 13 years

Users do not rate the physical facilities highly in relation to the **Community** dimension. Physical facilities are rated lowest compared to the other services in terms of giving rise to conversations. This may seem surprising, as many public libraries contain common areas that are suited for conversation. Conversely, there are many users who do not necessarily use the library for conversation. Many people sit in silence at the library, e.g. while studying or reading periodicals, magazines and newspapers.

“The library’s a place you can visit on your own and feel like you’re part of life and connected to the outside world, in a way. You’re alone, but you’re still around other people. That means a lot to me”

- Man, 39 years

A photograph of a school cafeteria. In the foreground, a boy with a green backpack and a dark jacket walks away from the camera. To the left, a row of lockers is visible. In the background, several students are sitting at tables, some reading or talking. The room has large windows on the right side, letting in natural light. The floor is a light-colored, polished surface.

“I come by here to check whether anyone I know is around. I come here every day instead of going home to an empty house”

- Boy, 13 years

The impact of the physical facilities in terms of immersion and concentration is, as mentioned, their highest rated parameter (3.6 - see Impact Compass, p. 32), surpassed only by the collection. The opportunity for immersion and concentration in solitude while surrounded by other people may be something that many people enjoy about libraries.

The qualitative dimension of the study clearly indicates that users generally value being in a space with others when visiting the library, even when sitting by themselves. Being alone together appears to be a hallmark of the library experience for a large share of the users.

The ability of the facilities to give rise to conversations or interaction with others are both rated below average (3.0). However, there are examples of users who do take advantage of public libraries as meeting places.

“It’s a nice place to hang out. We meet here. There are quite a few of us who come here”

- Man, 69 years

“We meet here to play computer games. We have computers at home, but here you can always find others to play with. We met each other by sitting here”

- Group of boys, 10-12 years

If we examine the three parameters within the **Community** dimension, it is evident that community-related aspects are not entirely absent from the physical facilities of public libraries, even though a below-average rating (below 3.2) on all three parameters may give that impression. Yet the three parameters are particularly highlighted among roughly one-third of users of the physical facilities, while roughly every tenth user feels that they do not at all contribute to togetherness. 37% feel to a great extent that the physical facilities **stimulates conversations**, 36% feel that they create **opportunities for togetherness** and 35% feel that visiting the library **provides insights into other people’s lives**.

See Appendix 2 for detailed data.

Overall, the study reveals that the spaces of public libraries are used for different purposes by different users. While some use the physical facilities to spend time with others, there are other users who use the library space to sit alone, immersed in literature, newspaper articles, work, etc. Naturally, the fact that libraries are a place for social activities and quiet immersion at the same time sets demands for how to structure and organise the library into zones so as to ensure both are possible at the same time.



Staff guidance is the human face of public libraries in Denmark

Interactions with public library staff are highly impactful on the users, and in more ways than one might assume. The staff guidance is impactful in terms of the users' search for information, but it also contributes to well-being, conversations, immersion and new motivation.

The public libraries' staff guidance is its human face. It is here that users meet the library employee who can help them with big and small matters alike, such as new book recommendations, finding information, IT assistance, etc. This includes help and guidance received through courses or workshops, such as an IT café or student guidance.

The study reveals that staff guidance is considered impactful in more ways than one might assume. Both the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of the study show that users find staff guidance impactful across all four impact dimensions.

Findings on staff guidance

21% of library users have asked library staff for help within the past year.

Users who have asked library staff for help rate the impact of this guidance at 3.2.

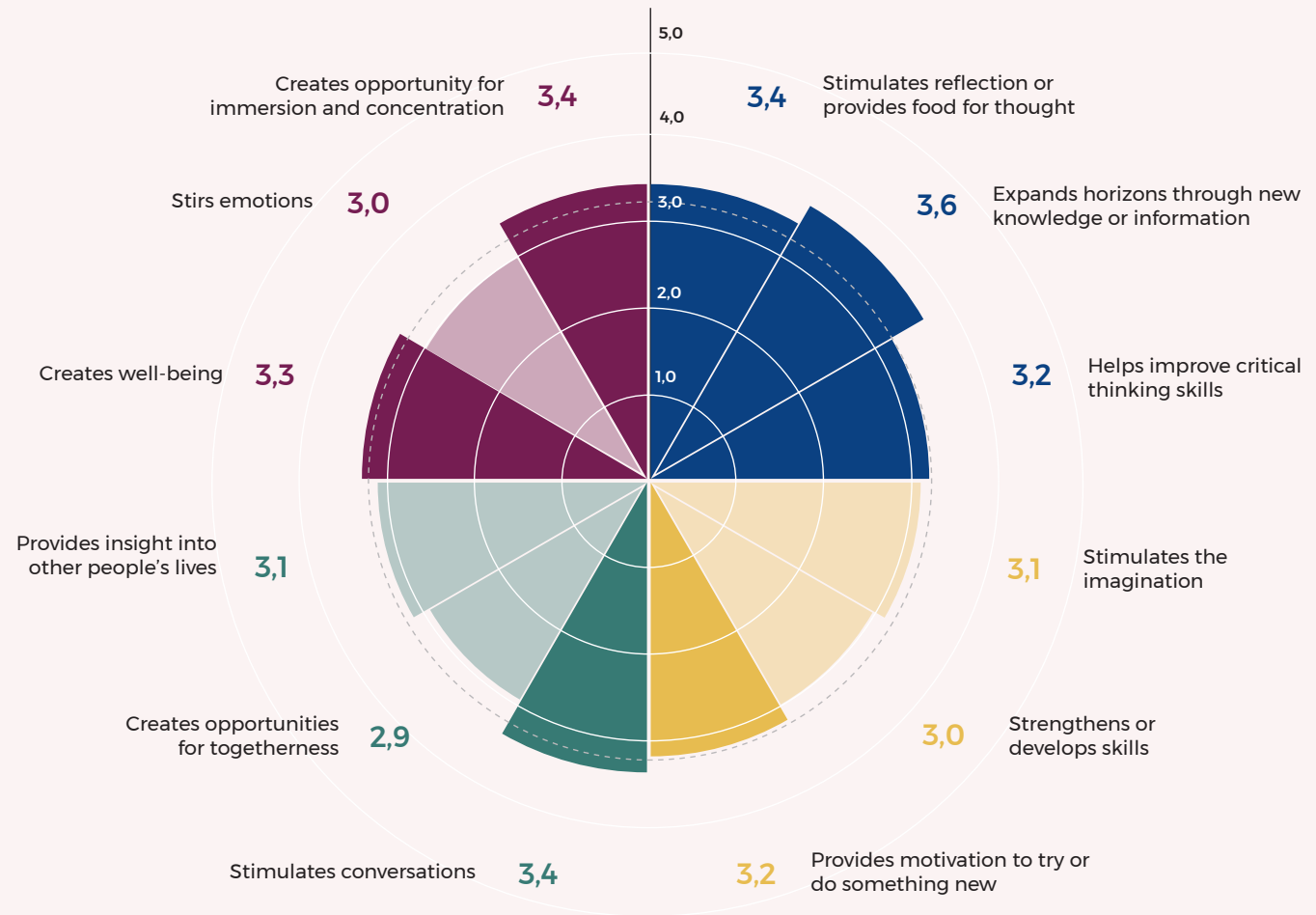
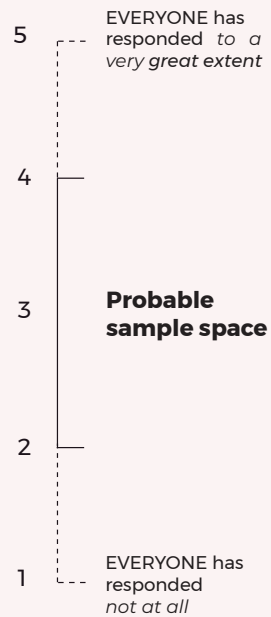
The average rating of staff guidance across the four dimensions is as follows:

Haven	3.2
Perspective	3.4
Creativity	3.1
Community	3.1

Impact Compass - the impact of Staff guidance

Haven
Perspective
Creativity
Community

 3,2 average impact rating for the public libraries



The impact of the guidance is rated highest within the **Perspective** dimension (with an average rating of 3.4 - see fact box on p. 36). Users especially attach importance to how staff guidance can help expand their horizons through new knowledge and information (3.6 - see Impact Compass on p. 37). The impact of this guidance is also rated average or above on the two other parameters within this dimension (3.4 and 3.2).

“It’s great that there’s always someone you can ask. I can just ask if, for instance, I’m struggling to find a book from a series I’m reading”

- Girl, 13 years

Users take advantage of staff guidance in different ways. While parents of children receive help finding children’s literature within certain fields of interest or reading levels, students get help finding and ordering reading materials, sources and scientific literature. Fiction aficionados get reading recommendations, while senior citizens get help using the library printer. In other words, library staff are expected to cater to a wide variety of needs among the users of public libraries.

The fact that staff guidance contributes to knowledge and information retrieval is to be expected. Being able to guide users in relation to obtaining information and recommended reading should, all other things being equal, be considered the core competence of a library employee providing service for the users.

“I read something in the newspaper about crime statistics and wondered whether that’s really true. So I asked the librarian. Two days later, she walked up to me and said, I’ve got the answer to your question now!”

- Man, 39 years

However, library staff guidance also has another type of impact on users. This guidance helps create well-being (3.3 - see Impact Compass on p. 37) - an insight that may appear surprising at first glance. The qualitative dimension of the study may provide a possible explanation, however. Several users noted that they have built up relationships with the library staff and had good conversations with them, in some cases over many years. The relationship is not necessarily on a deeply personal level, but solely the fact that there is a person at the library who is always available, ready to listen to the user's needs and help out with problems both big and small is impactful in terms of the user's sense of well-being at the library.

“We've been coming here since the children were small, and we've gotten to know everyone here by now - some of them have been working here since then”

- Couple, 50 and 52 years

This impact is also revealed in the quantitative data, where staff guidance is rated highly in relation to giving rise to conversations (3.4) under the **Community** dimension as well as in relation to giving users the motivation for personal change (3.2) under the **Creativity** dimension.

If we take a closer look into the extent to which staff guidance can provide users with **motivation to try or do something new**, we see that 38% experience that impact to a great extent. 36% find to some extent that staff guidance provides motivation for personal change, while 26% either find that to be the case to a little extent or not at all.

The figures also show that the majority of respondents believe to a great extent or some extent that the staff guidance is a contributing factor to feeling motivated to try new things.

Similarly, we can see that while the average user finds that staff guidance does not significantly **strengthen or develop skills** (3.0), approximately one-third of users (34%) experience that impact to a great extent.

See Appendix 2 for detailed data.

“I often talk to the people working here. They'll help you with all sorts of things, and we often end up having a little chat. I've been coming here for many years, and it's something I value”

- Woman, 71 years



**4. Background:
The relationship between
the citizens of Denmark
and their public libraries**

Background: The relationship between the citizens of Denmark and their public libraries

While the Impact Compass provides a new perspective on the impact of public libraries on the Danish public, the study also includes a more classic aspect with questions on the demographics of the citizens, their use of public libraries and frequency thereof as well as their general attitudes towards public libraries.

In this chapter, we examine how the Danish public uses their local public library, discuss the classic user/non-user distinction and ask the public whether the existence of public libraries is even important to them.

In spite of the fact that the Covid-19 epidemic and the associated lockdowns continue to impact Danish society at the time of writing, over half of the Danish public have used public libraries between October 2019 to October 2020 (see Table 1).

On average, 56% of the Danish public have used a public library. Women are generally a little more likely to use public libraries (62%), while men use public libraries a little less (50%). Younger citizens are also more likely to use public libraries on average. 63% of respondents aged 16-25 have used a public library within the past year. The proportion is even higher among students, where 67% have taken advantage of a library's activities and services.

Half of the people who have used a public library do so at least once a month, while the other half typically use public libraries every couple months or a few times a year.

Table 1. Proportion of respondents who have used a public library within the past year

Have you used a public library within the past year?	Yes	No
Total (n = 1,509)	56%	44%
Women	62%	38%
Men	50%	50%
Young people	63%	27%
Students	67%	33%

Table 2. Frequency of use of public libraries among users (n = 842)

How often do you use a public library?	Proportion of users
Weekly	14%
Monthly	36%
Every other month	19%
A couple of times a year	29%
Less often	3%

The Danish public enjoys using multiple library services, but especially the collection is popular

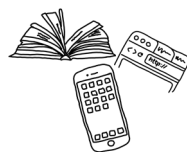
Danish public libraries have a varied range of activities and services. This study has presented four overarching groups of library services, all of which are aimed at accommodating how the Danish public uses public libraries.

The four groups of library services are: The Collection, the Events, the Physical Facilities and Staff guidance. For a detailed explanation of the four library services, see page 21.

The study shows that users especially take advantage of the collection. Nine out of ten users (89%) made use of the collection in public libraries within the past year. 34% of users have used the physical facilities¹ of public libraries, while 21% have received guidance and 19% have participated in one or several events.

It is worth noting that use of the physical facilities in the present study does not include the passive use that occurs when, for instance, people visit a library's facilities in connection with picking up/returning borrowed materials, receiving guidance

¹ The fact that 'only' 34% use the physical facilities may appear as a small share of users, but it should be noted that use of the physical facilities in the present study does not include the passive use that occurs when, for instance, people visit a library's facilities in connection with picking up/returning borrowed materials or participating in an event.



89%

of users have made use of **the collection**



19%

of users have participated in **events**



34%

of users have made use of **the physical facilities**



21%

of users have received **staff guidance**

or participating in an event. In other words, those 34% constitute a share of users actively making use of the physical facilities.

The study also found that public libraries to a great extent are characterised by their collections, but also to a significant degree as a library space where

users enjoy spending time - alone or with others. The events are treasured by the smallest proportion of users, but as the impact analysis of the events demonstrates, the events are very impactful on the users who frequent them.

Once a non-user, always a non-user?

Public library users are defined as people who have made use of one or several library services within the past year. 56% of the respondents in this survey are defined as users, while the remaining 44% fall under the category of non-users according to the classic definition. However, the picture is more nuanced than that.

Being a non-user is not a static term. A non-user may have used a public library in the past and/or expect to use one in the future.

The study found that 82% of present non-users have previously made use of the library. In other words, only 18% of non-users indicated that they have never used a public library before. This corresponds to roughly 6% of the Danish public having never used a public library.

Meanwhile 40% of the current non-users believe that it is likely or very likely that they will make use of a public library sometime in the future.

A further examination of “non-users” reveals that only 11% responded that they have never used a public library before and find it unlikely that they will in the future. This corresponds to a mere 3.5% of the Danish public that has never used a public library and also considers it unlikely that they will in the future.

Taking this nuance into account, the study has retained the collective term “non-users” for those 44% of respondents who have not used a public li-

brary in the past year, even though the term covers people who have previously been users and/or expect to be users of a public library in the future.

The term “non-user” should, however, be interpreted in light of the fact that only 3.5% of the Danish public can be defined as absolute non-users. We can therefore safely conclude that the vast majority of the Danish public are users of public libraries at some point in their lives.

96.5% of the Danish public has either used a public library in the past, is currently actively making use of public libraries or expects to do so in the future!

Public libraries are important to the Danish public

The market for content and media is in the midst of a rapid digital development, where music and film streaming are replacing physical media, entire book collections can fit into a pocket, information on anything is accessible from anywhere and where consumers are increasingly co-producers of the content they consume.

Denmark's public libraries are impacted by these changes, both from within and without. It is in that light that we have examined the attitudes of the public on whether public libraries are still important in a digital era.

The study found that the vast majority of citizens in Denmark believe that public libraries are important because they offer free and equal access to knowledge and culture. This applies to 88% of users and 77% of current non-users.

A majority of citizens also believe that public libraries are important because they benefit their local areas. This applies to 82% of users and 66% of current non-users.

But what about the public library collections of books, music and films? Is it still important to the public that libraries offer literature, films, music and knowledge when you can buy access to all kinds of content through Mofibo, Spotify, Netflix and other digital services at the click of a few

buttons? The answer to that question is a resounding yes; citizens still find public libraries relevant in a digital world. Only 21% of users believe that digital content services have made public libraries less relevant.

4 out of 5 users believe that public libraries still have relevance today despite the rise of digital services such as Mofibo, Spotify and Netflix

The latter is supported by the fact that lending numbers for books are actually rising¹. The qualitative interviews in the study support this insight, as a significant proportion of interviewees mention how public libraries can point them in the direction of materials they would not otherwise have found or taken an interest in without the library's curation. Among current non-users, the picture is slightly more blurred. 38% believe that public libraries have become less relevant with the emergence of digital content services, while 37% disagree and 24% are undecided.

¹ See <https://slks.dk/omraader/kulturinstitutioner/biblioteker/biblioteksstatistik/folkebiblioteker-i-tal/> for further details.

The impact of public libraries on children and their parents

Among the 1,509 citizens who participated in the study, just under one-fifth (18%) had children living at home. According to the parents, 65% of the children living at home had used public libraries within the past year. The study found a clear connection between parents' and children's use of public libraries. 81% of children whose own parents use public libraries have themselves used a public library within the past year. Meanwhile, the same is only true of 32% of children whose own parents do not use public libraries.

75% of parents in the survey (both users and non-users) believe to a great extent that it is important for their children to have access to public libraries. Among parents who are users, 84% believe to a great extent that it is important, while only 1% believe it is unimportant.

If we examine parents categorised as non-users, the picture looks somewhat different. 58% of parents who are non-users believe to a great extent that it is important for their children to have access to public libraries, while 12% find it unimportant.



5. Postscript

5. Postscript

What do public libraries mean to the Danish public? There is not a single answer to that question, but many. Our study has demonstrated that a visit to the library is far more than the foot traffic often measured.

Public libraries have many different types of impact on individual citizens; it can be a quiet haven to retreat to after a busy day, a place you can find trustworthy information and knowledge or a gathering point where you can take part in established or new communities. Our aim has not been to uncover the ultimate truth about the value and impact of public libraries, but rather to position the citizen at the centre of the debate on the value and impact of public libraries, venturing beyond foot traffic and lending statistics and seeking to nuance and qualify the public debate about public libraries, now and in the future.

In addition to this report, we have prepared a user guide that details how the Impact Compass and results of the study can be used in practice, both to qualify and add nuance to local policy discussions on the impact/value of public libraries as well as a framework for developing and evaluating library interventions at the operational level.

It is our hope that this first study can serve as a starting point for future studies, both national and local.

The conversation about the impact of public libraries starts here!

Acknowledgements

We want to thank everyone who contributed to the study! Thank you to the library employees and managers who provided valuable input in the preliminary research phase as well as subsequent execution and qualification of the project. Thank you to the experts who took the time to be interviewed and provide feedback on the theoretical foundation. Last but not least, thank you to the hundreds of citizens and users who responded to our questionnaire, allowed us to interview them and shared their experiences on the impact of public libraries in Denmark.

The conversation continues!

If you are interested in continuing the conversation on the impact of public libraries to the public, contact the Roskilde Central Library or Seismonaut.

Christian Lauersen is the Director of Library and Citizen Services in Roskilde Municipality and Director of Roskilde Central Library. Christian is the initiator of the study and a passionate advocate of a thorough revision of the language about the impact of public libraries - going beyond lending figures and foot traffic.

The consulting firm Seismonaut carried out the study and created the methodological foundation for it, including the Impact Compass. In addition, Seismonaut prepared the accompanying user guide, which details how the analytical framework can be utilised. If you would like to learn more about the study or want to start a project aimed at revealing the impact of the library on your users, contact Chief Advisor and Partner Andreas Linnet Jessen or Senior Advisor Nicklas Hilding Andersen.

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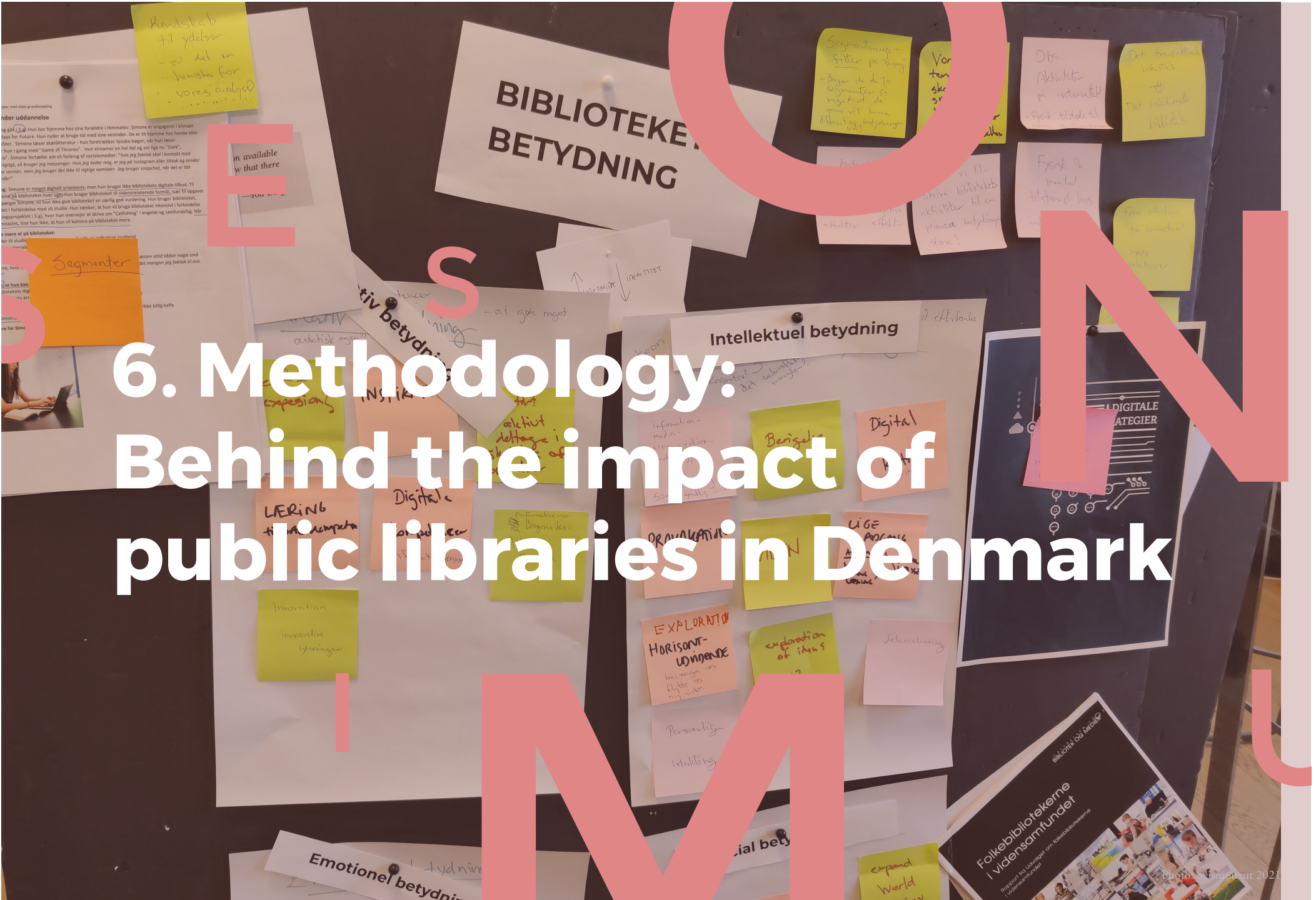
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6. Methodology: Behind the impact of public libraries in Denmark



6. Methodology: Behind the impact of public libraries in Denmark

This analysis of the impact of public libraries on the Danish public is the first of its kind. It is based on a methodological foundation created by Seismonaut with inspiration from the Cultural Value Project. In this chapter, we elaborate on the methodological foundation for the study.

This study of the impact of Danish public libraries on the Danish public rests on three overarching methodological approaches:

- Developing an analytical framework for the impact of public libraries
- Carrying out a quantitative questionnaire survey
- Conducting qualitative interviews and observations at selected libraries

In the following, we elaborate on the three methodological approaches in the order above.

An analytical framework for the impact of public libraries

The analytical framework is inspired by the British Cultural Value Project, launched by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in 2019. The research project seeks to determine how best to examine the value of culture and concludes that one needs to position the individual citizen back at the centre of any analysis if one wishes to determine the overall value of culture.

The overarching purpose of the Cultural Value Project was to investigate how culture translates into impact and value, and how to measure that impact and value through empirical and analytical methods.

“What emerges from the Cultural Value Project is the imperative to reposition first-hand, individual experience of arts and culture at the heart of enquiry into cultural value”

-The AHRC Cultural Value Project (2016):
Understanding the value of arts & culture

A crucial feature of the Cultural Value Project is the need for putting human beings at the heart of the debate on the value of culture. The British researchers conclude that far too often, we skip this fundamental stepping stone and jump right into the derived impact of the arts, such as in terms of the economy, urban development, health, etc.

The researchers call for bringing the individual human perspective back in focus. Thus, the Cultural Value Project also represents a strong argument for the return of qualitative data in public discourse.

“It is only once we have started with individual experience that we can then work outwards, and understand the kinds of benefit that culture may have for society, for communities, for democracy, for public health and wellbeing, for urban life and regional growth”

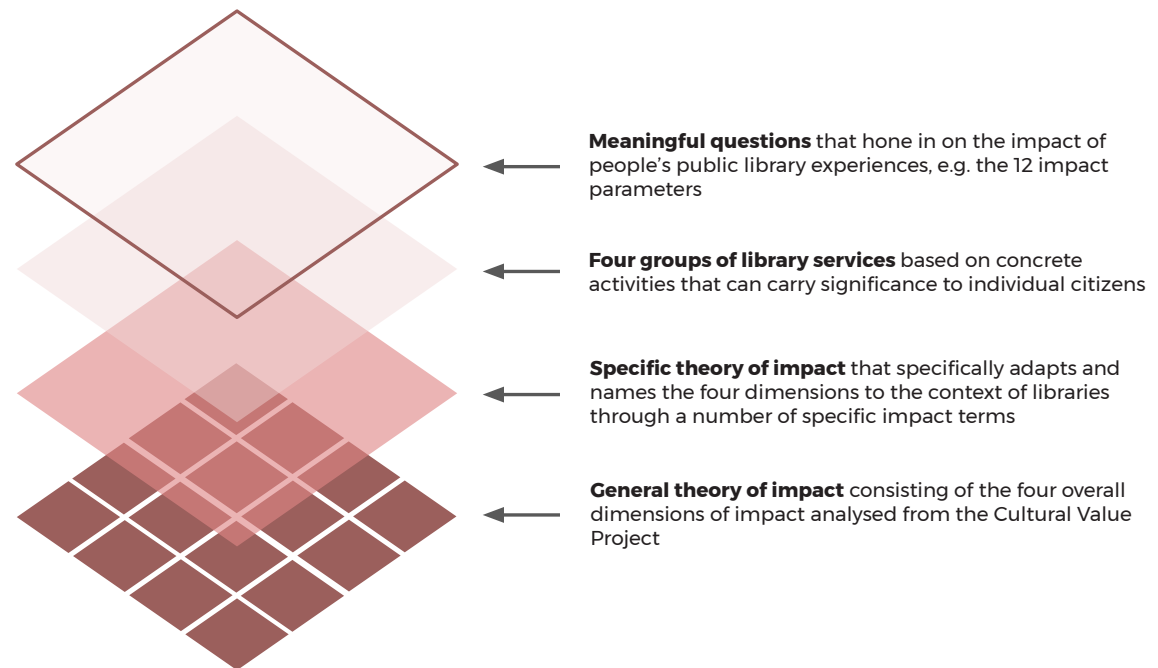
- Ibid.

Inspired by the British research project, Seismonaut has undertaken a move from theory to empiricism with a view to examining the impact of public libraries on the general public.

Based on the Cultural Value Project, we have identified four dimensions of cultural impact; emotional impact, intellectual impact, creative impact and social impact, all of which combined amount to the general theory of impact.

These types of impact have been translated into the context of libraries, resulting in a specific theory of the impact of libraries. We have formulated these impacts as **Haven, Perspective, Creativity** and **Community**. The above efforts are the result of extensive desk research of various analyses, reports

and political documents related to the value or impact of public libraries, complemented by a participatory process with library managers and employees. The participatory process allowed us to identify the specific impact terms that subsequently became the 12 parameters of the Impact Compass.



In the same process, we developed a system for talking about the services that citizens can access in their interactions with public libraries. This has resulted in four groups of library services:

The Collection

Use of the collection refers to users having borrowed materials from the library, including books, music, films and the like. By borrowed is meant both physical loans from the library as well as digital loans from platforms such as Filmstripen or eReolen. Naturally, people are also able to make use of the collection without taking borrowed materials home with them, e.g. by reading books at the library.

The Events

Partaking in events refers to users having participated in talks, exhibitions, debates, reading groups, children's theatre performances, concerts and the like at the library. These events can include the library's own events as well as events held by others in collaboration with the library.

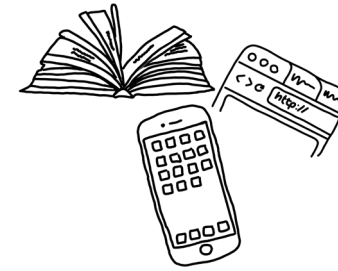
The Physical Facilities

Using the physical facilities refers to people having made use of the physical library space, including the newspaper and magazine area, reading areas, study areas, computers, workshops, meeting rooms, the café, MakerSpaces and the like. This can be in connection with the collection, events or just using the facilities themselves.

Staff guidance

Staff guidance covers all activities where a user has received help from a library employee, e.g. in the form of reading recommendations or help with searching for information. This includes help and guidance received through courses or workshops, such as an IT café or student guidance.

Based on the specific theory of impact for libraries, linked to the four library services, meaningful questions were formulated for a questionnaire survey and qualitative data collection. The analytical framework has thus formed the basis for the development of the quantitative questionnaire survey as well as the qualitative interviews and observations.



In addition to the library services already mentioned, Danish public libraries also have a number of other activities, e.g. collaborations with public schools or other educational institutions as well as collaborative projects with a variety of other actors. These activities do not fall within the scope of this study, as our focus is on the experiences citizens have had with public library services, i.e. services that ordinary citizens will be familiar with and able to answer questions about. The methodological approach and analytical framework could, however, be used for studies of other library services in a similar fashion.

Questionnaire survey

The quantitative empirical data is based on a national questionnaire survey. A total of 1,509 citizens responded to the questionnaire. The group was composed to be a representative sample of the Danish public between the ages of 16-90.

The form consists of a number of background questions, followed by questions concerning the citizen's general attitudes towards and use of public libraries. This is followed by a set of questions on their use of activities and services and finally, the users' experiences related to that use, which is the primary focus of the study.

The report refers to different groups of the total population of 1,509 citizens who responded to the questionnaire. When mentioning "the users", we are referring to the share of citizens who indicated that they have used a public library (at least one library service) within the past year. Only the users have been asked about their concrete experiences related to the impact of public libraries.

Those citizens who had not used public libraries within the past year are categorised as non-users. In Chapter 4, however, we elaborate upon how this subset of citizens should not be strictly defined as absolute non-users, as the group also consists of previous users and potential future users. Only a very limited share of the Danish public are absolute non-users, i.e. people who have never

used a public library nor expect to do so in the future. In other words, most of the Danish public are library users at some point in their lives.

Central to the analysis of the users' experiences are the 12 impact parameters; three for each of the dimensions in the Impact Compass; Haven, Perspective, Creativity and Community. The survey participants first answered questions relating to the library services they had used within the past year. Next, they answered 12 questions relating to impact on a Likert scale of "To a very great extent" to "Not at all" for each of the library services they used.

It was also possible to answer "Not applicable/Don't know" to these questions. This option was included as the individual impact parameters would not necessarily be perceived as applicable/relevant to everyone in relation to all library services¹.

The responses in the Likert scale were subsequently converted to numerical values from 5-1 with the aim of creating an overview and possibility for comparison.

¹ Respondents who indicated "Not applicable/Don't know" were not included in average calculations, as that would distort the results. The tables in Appendix 2 indicate how large a share of the respondents who chose that answer.

To a very great extent	5
To a great extent	4
To some extent	3
To a little extent	2
Not at all	1
Not applicable	-

The numerical values that form the basis for the visualisation of the data in the Impact Compasses thus represent the average result among the participants in the study. When looking at the average response value among many responses, it's rare to see results in the far ends of the scale. In other words, it would be unexpected to see an average value of 5, as that would require all the survey respondents having answered "To a very high extent". Similarly, it would be unexpected to see an average value of 1, as that would require all the survey respondents having answered "Not at all".

The expected range of outcomes is accordingly between 2 and 4, and it is in that light the results should be viewed: An average of 4 will be near the top of what we could expect, while an average of 2 would indicate a very low rating (for a visual explanation, see Introduction to the Impact Compass on p. 13).

Appendices 1 and 2 contain the total calculated assessments and total unprocessed responses (on a Likert scale) presented in a number of tables. These have been added to provide transparency on the methodology as well as the opportunity to delve into each individual impact parameter and thus deeper into the analysis.

Table 3 shows the calculated statistical uncertainty in the study for response rates ranging from 1% to 90%. These have been calculated on the basis of our random sample of 1,509 citizens in Denmark aged 16-90. In Q4 2020, where the survey took place, there were a total of 4,783,631 citizens in Denmark aged 16-90, which corresponds to our total population. With a confidence level of 95%, the following values for statistical uncertainty have been calculated:

Table 3. Statistical uncertainty calculated for response rates of 1% to 90%.

Proportion who responded	1%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%
Statistical uncertainty	+/- 0.5%	+/- 1.1%	+/- 1.5%	+/- 2.2%	+/- 2.5%	+/- 2.2%	+/- 1.5%

Qualitative interviews with the users and observations at selected libraries

As a supplement to the quantitative questionnaire survey, the research team carried out observations and qualitative interviews with library users at two public libraries (one large and one small) as well as at a book bus at two different locations.

There was a dual purpose behind the qualitative data collection. The aim was for the data to support and exemplify the analyses of the quantitative data while also adding nuance to the four dimensions as well as the 12 impact parameters using the citizens' own words.

The qualitative data collection was a supplementary activity, and it was not a goal to achieve representativeness. However, in our interview subject recruitment, we focused on ensuring a spread in age, gender and activity-related behaviour. The team conducted 30 qualitative interviews, all of which were performed as informal, semi-structured interviews where the citizens had the opportunity to express in their own words why they use public libraries, what experiences they associate with using them and the impact those experiences have had on them.



Appendices and data

Appendix 1 - Total ratings on a 1-5 scale, intersected by gender and age

Appendix 1.1: Overall rating of the four dimensions for public libraries, collectively and by each of the four groups of library services

Library service	Dimension	Assessment	16-25 years	26-49 years	50-99 years	Women	Men
The public library (across all library services)	Haven	3,5	3,5	3,5	3,5	3,6	3,3
	Perspective	3,4	3,5	3,4	3,4	3,4	3,3
	Creativity	3,0	3,1	3,0	3,0	3,0	3,0
	Community	3,0	3,0	3,0	2,9	3,1	2,9
The collection	Haven	3,6	3,7	3,6	3,6	3,7	3,4
	Perspective	3,5	3,6	3,5	3,4	3,6	3,4
	Creativity	3,1	3,3	3,1	3,0	3,1	3,1
	Community	2,9	2,9	3,0	2,9	3,0	2,8
The events	Haven	3,5	3,4	3,6	3,5	3,6	3,5
	Perspective	3,6	3,7	3,7	3,5	3,6	3,6
	Creativity	3,2	3,1	3,3	3,1	3,2	3,1
	Community	3,7	3,9	3,7	3,6	3,7	3,6
The physical facilities	Haven	3,4	3,7	3,3	3,3	3,5	3,2
	Perspective	3,3	3,4	3,2	3,3	3,3	3,3
	Creativity	3,0	3,1	3,0	3,1	3,0	3,0
	Community	3,1	3,3	3,0	3,1	3,1	3,1
Staff guidance	Haven	3,2	3,1	3,2	3,3	3,3	3,2
	Perspective	3,4	3,4	3,3	3,5	3,4	3,4
	Creativity	3,1	3,0	3,1	3,3	3,1	3,2
	Community	3,1	3,2	3,1	3,1	3,1	3,1

Appendix 1.2: Rating of the 12 impact parameters for public libraries, overall

Library service	Dimension	Assessment	The 12 parameters of impact	Assessment	16-25 years	26-49 years	50-99 years	Women	Men
The public library (across all library services)	Haven	3,5	Creates well-being	3,6	3,6	3,6	3,6	3,7	3,5
			Stirs emotions	3,2	3,2	3,2	3,2	3,4	3,0
			Creates opportunity for immersion and concentration	3,6	3,8	3,6	3,6	3,7	3,5
	Perspective	3,4	Stimulates reflection or provides food for thought	3,4	3,5	3,4	3,4	3,5	3,3
			Expands horizons through new knowledge or information	3,6	3,7	3,6	3,6	3,7	3,6
			Helps improve critical thinking skills	3,1	3,1	3,1	3,1	3,1	3,0
	Creativity	3,0	Stimulates the imagination	3,3	3,2	3,2	3,3	3,3	3,2
			Strengthens or develops skills	2,7	3,0	2,7	2,6	2,6	2,8
			Provides motivation to try or do something new	3,1	3,1	3,1	3,0	3,1	3,0
	Community	3,0	Stimulates conversations	3,1	3,2	3,1	3,0	3,2	3,0
			Creates opportunities for togetherness	2,7	2,9	2,9	2,6	2,8	2,7
			Provides insight into other people's lives	3,1	3,0	3,0	3,1	3,2	2,9

Appendix 1.3: Rating of the 12 impact parameters for the Collection and the Events

Library service	Dimension	Assessment	The 12 parameters of impact	Assessment	16-25 years	26-49 years	50-99 years	Women	Men
The collection	Haven	3,6	Creates well-being	3,8	3,7	3,8	3,7	3,9	3,6
			Stirs emotions	3,3	3,3	3,3	3,3	3,5	3,1
			Creates opportunity for immersion and concentration	3,7	3,9	3,7	3,7	3,9	3,6
	Perspective	3,5	Stimulates reflection or provides food for thought	3,5	3,6	3,6	3,5	3,7	3,4
			Expands horizons through new knowledge or information	3,7	3,9	3,7	3,7	3,8	3,6
			Helps improve critical thinking skills	3,2	3,3	3,2	3,1	3,2	3,1
	Creativity	3,1	Stimulates the imagination	3,4	3,4	3,4	3,4	3,4	3,4
			Strengthens or develops skills	2,7	3,2	2,8	2,6	2,7	2,8
			Provides motivation to try or do something new	3,1	3,3	3,2	3,0	3,2	3,1
	Community	2,9	Stimulates conversations	3,1	3,3	3,2	3,0	3,2	2,9
			Creates opportunities for togetherness	2,6	2,6	2,8	2,4	2,6	2,5
			Provides insight into other people's lives	3,1	2,9	3,1	3,2	3,3	2,9
The events	Haven	3,5	Creates well-being	3,6	3,5	3,8	3,5	3,7	3,5
			Stirs emotions	3,5	3,6	3,6	3,5	3,6	3,5
			Creates opportunity for immersion and concentration	3,5	3,4	3,5	3,5	3,5	3,5
	Perspective	3,6	Stimulates reflection or provides food for thought	3,7	3,8	3,8	3,5	3,7	3,6
			Expands horizons through new knowledge or information	3,8	3,9	3,8	3,7	3,8	3,7
			Helps improve critical thinking skills	3,4	3,4	3,5	3,3	3,3	3,4
	Creativity	3,2	Stimulates the imagination	3,4	3,3	3,5	3,4	3,4	3,4
			Strengthens or develops skills	2,8	2,3	2,9	2,7	2,7	2,8
			Provides motivation to try or do something new	3,3	3,4	3,5	3,1	3,3	3,2
	Community	3,7	Stimulates conversations	3,7	3,8	3,6	3,7	3,7	3,6
			Creates opportunities for togetherness	3,7	3,9	3,9	3,6	3,8	3,6
			Provides insight into other people's lives	3,6	3,9	3,6	3,5	3,7	3,5

Appendix 1.4: Rating of the 12 impact parameters for the Physical facilities and Staff guidance

Library service	Dimension	Assessment	The 12 parameters of impact	Assessment	16-25 years	26-49 years	50-99 years	Women	Men
The physical facilities	Haven	3,4	Creates well-being	3,5	3,6	3,5	3,5	3,6	3,4
			Stirs emotions	3,0	3,0	3,0	2,9	3,1	2,8
			Creates opportunity for immersion and concentration	3,6	4,1	3,4	3,4	3,6	3,5
	Perspective	3,3	Stimulates reflection or provides food for thought	3,3	3,5	3,2	3,4	3,3	3,3
			Expands horizons through new knowledge or information	3,5	3,5	3,5	3,5	3,5	3,5
			Helps improve critical thinking skills	3,0	3,1	2,9	3,0	2,9	3,0
	Creativity	3,0	Stimulates the imagination	3,2	3,2	3,1	3,2	3,2	3,1
			Strengthens or develops skills	2,7	2,9	2,6	2,8	2,7	2,7
			Provides motivation to try or do something new	3,2	3,2	3,1	3,2	3,2	3,1
	Community	3,1	Stimulates conversations	3,0	3,3	2,9	3,0	3,0	3,0
			Creates opportunities for togetherness	3,0	3,3	2,9	3,0	3,1	3,0
			Provides insight into other people's lives	3,1	3,2	3,0	3,1	3,1	3,1
Staff guidance	Haven	3,2	Creates well-being	3,3	3,0	3,3	3,4	3,3	3,3
			Stirs emotions	3,0	2,9	3,0	3,2	3,0	3,0
			Creates opportunity for immersion and concentration	3,4	3,3	3,3	3,5	3,4	3,3
	Perspective	3,4	Stimulates reflection or provides food for thought	3,4	3,3	3,4	3,5	3,4	3,4
			Expands horizons through new knowledge or information	3,6	3,5	3,5	3,8	3,6	3,6
			Helps improve critical thinking skills	3,2	3,3	3,1	3,4	3,2	3,3
	Creativity	3,1	Stimulates the imagination	3,1	2,8	3,2	3,2	3,1	3,3
			Strengthens or develops skills	3,0	3,0	2,9	3,3	3,0	3,2
			Provides motivation to try or do something new	3,2	3,0	3,1	3,4	3,2	3,1
	Community	3,1	Stimulates conversations	3,4	3,3	3,3	3,5	3,4	3,2
			Creates opportunities for togetherness	2,9	3,3	2,9	2,7	2,9	2,9
			Provides insight into other people's lives	3,1	3,2	3,0	3,1	3,1	3,1

Appendix 2: List of detailed answers for the four dimensions

Four tables are presented in the following, one for each of the four library services. The tables contain the detailed responses before they were converted to a 1-5 scale. This allows readers to explore the data within the tables and find explanations for what lies behind an average - and perhaps slightly arbitrary - rating of 3.2, for example. Because the overall impact of public libraries has been calcu-

lated as an average of the four groups of library services, there is no table for that perspective of this analysis.

The calculated ratings are solely based on responses from those individuals who have found a given parameter applicable and thereby indicated a response within the scale. The proportion of respondents who have answered “Not applicable/

Don't know” under the various library services and impact parameters are, however, interesting in their own way, as they provide indications on which areas of individual library services are not expected by users to have an impact - or where some users, at least, do not find it meaningful to relate a given service to a specific impact parameter. For further information, see Chapter 6.

Appendix 2.1: Detailed responses behind the calculation of the impact of the Collection

The collection

Dimension	Assessment	The 12 parameters of impact	Assessment	Not applicable/ Don't know	Population (after “not applicable”)	Response breakdown (proportion of population)				
						To a very great extent	To a great extent	To some extent	To a little extent	Not at all
Haven	3,6	Creates well-being	3,8	6%	698	27%	37%	27%	6%	4%
		Stirs emotions	3,3	8%	683	16%	31%	31%	12%	9%
		Creates opportunity for immersion and concentration	3,7	5%	706	25%	38%	28%	6%	4%
Perspective	3,5	Stimulates reflection or provides food for thought	3,5	6%	701	20%	34%	33%	8%	5%
		Expands horizons through new knowledge or information	3,7	4%	716	23%	38%	32%	5%	3%
		Helps improve critical thinking skills	3,2	11%	663	11%	27%	38%	15%	8%
Creativity	3,1	Stimulates the imagination	3,4	8%	689	15%	32%	37%	9%	7%
		Strengthens or develops skills	2,7	15%	635	8%	18%	32%	23%	19%
		Provides motivation to try or do something new	3,1	10%	668	12%	26%	37%	16%	10%
Community	2,9	Stimulates conversations	3,1	7%	697	10%	26%	36%	17%	10%
		Creates opportunities for togetherness	2,6	14%	642	7%	13%	30%	27%	22%
		Provides insight into other people's lives	3,1	11%	661	14%	26%	32%	16%	13%

The events

Dimension	Assessment	The 12 parameters of impact	Assessment	Not applicable/ Don't know	Population (after "not applicable")	Response breakdown (proportion of population)				
						To a very great extent	To a great extent	To some extent	To a little extent	Not at all
Haven	3,5	Creates well-being	3,6	5%	154	18%	36%	36%	8%	1%
		Stirs emotions	3,5	4%	155	16%	33%	41%	8%	2%
		Creates opportunity for immersion and concentration	3,5	10%	146	18%	32%	36%	12%	3%
Perspective	3,6	Stimulates reflection or provides food for thought	3,7	7%	151	20%	36%	38%	5%	1%
		Expands horizons through new knowledge or information	3,8	4%	155	24%	35%	34%	6%	1%
		Helps improve critical thinking skills	3,4	11%	144	15%	26%	44%	11%	3%
Creativity	3,2	Stimulates the imagination	3,4	5%	154	14%	33%	36%	12%	5%
		Strengthens or develops skills	2,8	18%	133	11%	17%	31%	23%	20%
		Provides motivation to try or do something new	3,3	10%	145	12%	32%	38%	10%	8%
Community	3,7	Stimulates conversations	3,7	3%	157	20%	37%	35%	5%	3%
		Creates opportunities for togetherness	3,7	2%	159	19%	43%	33%	4%	1%
		Provides insight into other people's lives	3,6	7%	151	21%	35%	30%	12%	2%

The physical facilities

Dimension	Assessment	The 12 parameters of impact	Assessment	Not applicable/ Don't know	Population (after "not applicable")	Response breakdown (proportion of population)				
						To a very great extent	To a great extent	To some extent	To a little extent	Not at all
Haven	3,4	Creates well-being	3,5	4%	273	17%	34%	38%	6%	4%
		Stirs emotions	3,0	11%	252	9%	23%	35%	21%	12%
		Creates opportunity for immersion and concentration	3,6	6%	266	21%	33%	32%	10%	4%
Perspective	3,3	Stimulates reflection or provides food for thought	3,3	11%	251	12%	31%	39%	10%	7%
		Expands horizons through new knowledge or information	3,5	7%	262	16%	36%	37%	5%	6%
		Helps improve critical thinking skills	3,0	14%	244	9%	24%	36%	22%	10%
Creativity	3,0	Stimulates the imagination	3,2	8%	259	11%	29%	39%	12%	10%
		Strengthens or develops skills	2,7	16%	239	9%	17%	30%	23%	21%
		Provides motivation to try or do something new	3,2	10%	256	11%	27%	41%	12%	10%
Community	3,1	Stimulates conversations	3,0	8%	261	10%	26%	30%	22%	11%
		Creates opportunities for togetherness	3,0	5%	268	12%	25%	31%	22%	11%
		Provides insight into other people's lives	3,1	12%	248	11%	25%	37%	18%	10%

Staff guidance

Dimension	Assessment	The 12 parameters of impact	Assessment	Not applicable/ Don't know	Population (after "not applicable")	Response breakdown (proportion of population)				
						To a very great extent	To a great extent	To some extent	To a little extent	Not at all
Haven	3,2	Creates well-being	3,3	17%	146	13%	32%	35%	12%	8%
		Stirs emotions	3,0	23%	135	7%	28%	36%	19%	10%
		Creates opportunity for immersion and concentration	3,4	17%	145	9%	37%	38%	12%	4%
Perspective	3,4	Stimulates reflection or provides food for thought	3,4	15%	148	14%	28%	47%	7%	5%
		Expands horizons through new knowledge or information	3,6	8%	161	16%	36%	41%	5%	2%
		Helps improve critical thinking skills	3,2	22%	136	10%	27%	46%	12%	6%
Creativity	3,1	Stimulates the imagination	3,1	19%	142	11%	27%	38%	14%	11%
		Strengthens or develops skills	3,0	21%	139	12%	22%	37%	18%	12%
		Provides motivation to try or do something new	3,2	17%	146	15%	23%	36%	14%	12%
Community	3,1	Stimulates conversations	3,4	16%	147	12%	33%	38%	13%	4%
		Creates opportunities for togetherness	2,9	25%	132	10%	17%	42%	18%	13%
		Provides insight into other people's lives	3,1	19%	141	10%	25%	40%	14%	11%

