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The Remediating Library

Abstract
The ambition of this article is to investigate the consequences of changing the perspective on the public library's services. Through legislations, most public libraries are obliged to make its services available 'for everyone', but at the same time there are often provisions on specific groups which must receive special attention. In this article, the public libraries' services are tentatively considered a kind of remediation provided by public authorities through its cultural institutions. Overarchingly, the market economy still applies but is also regarded as the one major phenomenon distorting people's living conditions in late modern societies. Public libraries remediate this distortion at an interpersonal level by providing institutionalised cultural services. Authorities accept this exception from the market economy because cultural activities are considered valuable ways to continuously reintegrate people into society. The present investigation is based on group interviews and is analysed from Cultural Studies' critical approach to the structure formation of late modernity and the culture political trends currently active in Denmark. Considering the study's limited empirical evidence, the study cautiously concludes that the cultural area's exemption from the market economy provides the area's various stakeholders - citizens, library staff members, and politicians - an alternative platform. But cultural activity is not only beneficial promoting tolerance, involvement, and interpersonal contact. Seemingly, cultural activity may also be used in various stakeholders' efforts to demarcate, stigmatise, and marginalise other stakeholders and their legitimate claims.

Keywords: public library, culture policy, remediation, culture, democracy, re-integration

Introduction

The conception of the public libraries as 'for everyone' is not new. This is how generations of librarians, cultural politicians, information practitioners and most of the populace have been introduced to and have perceived the public libraries for decades (e.g., Dyrbye et al., 2005; Fridrich, 2021; Kann-Rasmussen, 2022; Engström et al., 2024) and this is still a valid interpretation. In slightly different ways, this obligation has been written into all Scandinavian library legislations. In a Danish context, which will be the pivoting point in this article, the wording is as follows: 'The public libraries are at the disposal of everyone for use on the premises and for the loan of materials.' (Lovbekendtgørelse nr. 100, 2013, §5; Act regarding library services, 2001). At the same time the legislation affirms how 'The government strives to ensure that as far as possible the national common library catalogue is made available to everyone by access via Internet.' (Lovbekendtgørelse nr. 100, 2013, §16, stk. 2; Act regarding library services, 2001). 'For everyone' is associated with the public libraries' role as neutral information and culture providers, whose historical origins and legitimacy are closely linked to the rise of the liberal-democratic welfare society (e.g., Hammonds, 2023; Bennett, 2013; Emerek, 2001) and its enlightenment potentials.

However, when studying the continued wording of the Danish library legislation, it quickly becomes obvious how the designation 'for anyone' is relative. The legal text has explicit references to certain socio-cultural groupings to which the public libraries hold special obligations:

> *§3. The municipal council is obliged, possibly in co-operation with other municipal councils, to run a public library with departments for children and adults. (…)*
> *(2) The municipal council must as far as possible 1) establish library service for those children and adults who are unable to visit the library in person.*
> (Lovbekendtgørelse nr. 100, 2013; Act regarding library services, 2001).

Already here, these paragraphs' highlighting of certain priority groups, often equated with children, young people, disabled or senior citizens, entails a need to nuance the cultural policy statement 'for everyone' (see also Jaeger et al., 2013; Fridrich, 2021). Hence, the overall question is whether the statement 'for everyone' is a good starting point for understanding the interrelated relationships between the different stakeholders: citizens, library staff members, and local politicians. Regarding above-mentioned statements several challenges arise.

First, the phrase 'for everyone' signals a form of all-encompassing innocence. The activities of public libraries are an objective service provided all citizens, which may be utilised at will, regarding work, education, personal self-development, recreation, etc. But seen from a socio-historical point of view, late modern society's provision of hitherto unseen levels of freedom and possibilities to pursue individual goals and desires have been entailed by severe challenges for certain disadvantaged groups. Several sociologists (e.g., Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1986) have studied how late modernity co-produces inadequacies in the living conditions for certain groups and threaten the individual's participation in democratic processes, as well as social and cultural cohesion in society. Thus, the market economy's unequal distribution of wealth and resources (e.g., Barbakoff, 2021; Real et al., 2014) is still considered a major issue in late modern societies. These inequality-creating consequences can and should be addressed, as part of the UN's Agenda 2030-ambitions (e.g., Beutelspacher & Meschede, 2020; Fridrich, 2021; Hauke, 2021). However, formulations such as a public library 'for everyone' do not contribute to promoting the public library's services as remediating.

Secondly, the public libraries' culture political obligation to ensure services 'for everyone' is still based on the credo of the Enlightenment (Sapre Aude: have the courage to know!) as formulated by Immanuel Kant (here after Emerek, 2001; see also Bennett, 2013) with its hopes for universal Bildung and the reason of man. In culture institutions, an instrumental application of cultural activities is utilised, the intention of which is to embrace all people but not just as innocent activities citizens may indulge in. Culture activities are also regarded as pragmatic culture political tools intended for continuing reintegration of man into a dynamic and unpredictable society (Bennett, 2013, p. 35). Since this reintegration takes place against the background of the democratic constitution its ambition is to create active participating citizens who can express individual desires and collective wills within the framework of the liberal-democratic welfare society. Furthermore, cultural activities are not created in a social vacuum but arise as a negotiation between a trinity of citizens needs and desires, library staff members objects and obligations, and culture politicians' political ambitions regarding their local public libraries (cf. ELSA, 2020, p. 10).

Thirdly, there exists different possibilities to counter and oppose these reintegration attempts and thus miss out on the remediating effects for citizens. To a certain degree, culture activities may be utilised to remediate late modern society's inequality-creating elements and enable the populace to pursue their individual desires and collective wills hence having the potential to promote communities via increased tolerance towards alternative lifestyles, inclusion, greater community involvement, etc. These effects are often highlighted as an argument for the existence of publicly funded culture institutions like the public library. (cf. Audunson, 2005; Hammonds, 2023; see also ELSA, 2020).

Nevertheless, the question is whether this is always the case. My limited empirical material indicates how some activities may be used in opposite ways: in attempts to demarcate, stigmatise, and marginalise others. Seemingly, 'for everyone' become a means of preserving hegemonic power some groups engage in in attempts to create antipathy against others.

At best, the statement about the public libraries 'for everyone' may obscure the practical realities and at worst it may be downright misleading. As mentioned initially, the notion of culture policy constituting a kind of remediation and the institutions disseminating culture having an ongoing reintegrating effect on the populace is not new (see e.g., Jaeger et al, 2013; Hammonds, 2023). The new aspect in this article is how the terms 'remediation' and 'reintegration' are tentatively utilised as concepts replacing the all-encompassing and somewhat bland 'for everyone' simultaneously enabling a first step in studying what social and to a certain extent contradictory mechanisms are at play.

Research question

Based on above observations, the public libraries' services 'for everyone' will be put into perspective. The ambition of this, albeit limited, study is cautiously to challenge the concept 'for everyone' and to investigate how the public libraries' services are utilised by different groups to position themselves in relation to each other and the public library. The research question thus reads: *What are the perceptual consequences of considering the public library an institution whose tasks are to remediate the inequality-creating elements of late modern society for certain groups*?

This conceptual clarification is essential because normative formulations such as 'for everyone' tend to obscure analytical attention and blind critical attitudes toward possible biased positions (see also e.g., Leckie et al., 2010). But also, because the wording 'for everyone' seems unable to explain certain peculiarities existing within the public libraries. If the public libraries' services were as equal, open, and accessible as 'for everyone' suggests, there would be no oppositions and no conflicts – but there are! My empirical material indicates how tensions occasional occurred 1) when citizens interact with each other, and 2) when citizens interact with library staff members, but also 3) when librarians and library management interact with their local culture politicians (see figure 1). This conflict potential constitutes the basis for my analysis.

Previous studies

The background to dealing with the public libraries activities as 'for everyone' is the perception of information and culture as societal goods containing positive development potentials for both individuals and communities (Hammonds, 2023, p. 60ff.). From their emergence around the end of the 19. century, this discussion has been characterised by whether public libraries should have a liberating or disciplinary obligation regarding the populace (Emerek, 2001, p. 98ff.). The ideological concept of the public library and its popular legitimacy is based on the ambition of popular enlightenment and Bildung, and the individual's opportunity to participate in society's democratic processes as employee, citizen, and human being respectively. But to enable this, the individual must first acquire the appropriate skills and competencies required to be able to participate in such processes and therein lies a form of discipline (Bennett, 2013, p. 35). It is this field of tension constituting the theoretical background for this article. When utilising the terms 'remediation' and 'reintegration' it is thus to acknowledge the relationship to a historical discussion still current, but also to mark the changes within.

There exists a quite extensive research material on the societal role of public libraries, as these topics have been discussed throughout much of the public libraries' modern history. In what follows, I will present several examples of how this discussion has been put into a new context within the last 15 years. In this regard, Agenda 2030 and the discussion about how librarians may contribute to achieving the UN's sustainable development goals is interesting because this manifest represents an international ambition directly influencing various nation-state policy areas, including cultural and

social policies. With her article: 'When librarians speak up: justifications for and legitimacy implications of librarians' engagement in social movements', Nanna Kann-Rasmussen (2022) contributes to above debate by discussion the librarians' role as neutral civil servants or activists, respectively. Kann-Rasmussens study regards the changes in attitudes and actions deemed necessary to achieve UN's sustainability development goals but, in this paper, it is the articles emphasise on the librarians' potential as 'change agents' which is of interest. The article explicitly describes how librarians may act as good examples, 1) through change in practices, 2) by getting involved in social movements as activist, 3) by focusing on facilitating the socio-cultural trends already present in the local community or 4) in collaborating with other actors within relevant subject areas. Within in these possibilities, however, lies a similar desire as mentioned above: a desire to translate a supranational ideology into (culture) political practice through library activities and thereby influence and change the mindsets and actions of the populace: *'The idea of public libraries is deeply rooted in the European enlightenment project as an instrument to support citizens' possibility to educate themselves, to think and act independently and thereby empowering the people.'* (Kahn-Christensen, 2022, p. 40). As will be shown, the role as 'change agents' is not reserved for librarians.

Similar considerations may be observed in the report 'Towards the Implementation of SDG Indicators in European Libraries' (ELSA, 2020). The report represents an attempt to establish a common pragmatic methodology for assessing the implementation of the UN sustainable development goals by European libraries:

> *Libraries and other cultural institutions operate on the construction of mental beliefs and social habits; therefore, they contribute to shaping, reinforcing and consolidating trends and opinions. A choral, systematic library action may therefore be decisive, provided that the SDG-oriented library policy is well constructed and corroborated by sound indicators* (ELSA, 2020, p. 4).

What is interesting in regard to this paper is how the above-mentioned tension between remediating the unfortunate consequences of late-modern society and reintegration of the populace reappears in practise. Some of the indicators mentioned by the ELSA-report involves individual abilities, competencies, and representations, while other, more collective opportunities concern social inclusion, education, and lifelong learning activities, as well as strengthening democracy (ELSA, 2020, p. 9). The ELSA report thus focuses on the positive aspects of public libraries' dissemination work.
Another study on this topic is conducted by Jennie Devine and Leo Appleton (2023) who aim at examining the effectiveness of environmental education in public libraries, to develop a theoretical and practical framework. The study reveals which educational activities are most likely to entail behavioural change among citizens, but it is the ideological design of the study which is of interest in this paper. Thus, the article states: *'Environmental education seeks not only to inform but to create lasting behavioural change. This type of education can focus on individual behaviours: skills (...) resources (...) or actions...'* (Devine & Appleton, 2023, p. 153). Again, tensions appear between intentions to initiate free opinion formation and more disciplining ambitions.

Espen Eigil Barratt-Due Solum article 'Negotiating neutrality and activism in Norwegian public libraries' (2024) holds a similar theme: the librarians' ability to promote the UN's sustainable development goals. However, Solum focuses on how the concept of political neutrality and activism relates to Norwegian public libraries. Political neutrality is considered a controversial concept today and the starting point for Solum is a discussion of the public libraries' abilities to maintain neutrality by maintaining a space: '… where all views receive equal respect – including those of the majority, the minority, the powerful, and the poor…'. (Solum, 2024, p. 110). With its strong focus on democracy and free opinion formation, Scandinavian public libraries have always been considered political in its core: ensuring democratic participation, social inclusion, and equal access to culture and information through the redistribution of material goods is rooted in political viewpoints.

Another type of study focuses on social capital and how the public library may act as trust-building institutions. In Andreas Vårheim, Sven Steinmo and Eisaku Ide's article: 'Do libraries matter? Public libraries and the creation of social capital.' (2007) the ambition is to identify, the origin of social capital. Social capital is considered important to the cohesiveness of communities, but too little is known about the origin of different levels of social trust and how it is maintained. Public libraries are perceived an organisation generating societal trust 'for everyone' by making themselves accessible. (Vårheim et al., 2007, p. 889), but what is of special interest in this regard is following section:

> *As opposed to universalistic benefits, negative effects for generalized trust created by means-tested benefits include the strong feelings on the part of the recipients of welfare of being humiliated when meeting with their benefactors (…). These encounters confirm and strengthen the feelings of inferior status felt by people on welfare and may remove any potential for inter-group relations (…). The fact that the middle classes (and also the rich) through universal public services receive the same benefits makes it easier for the poor to accept welfare benefits with their dignity still intact. The middle classes, for their part, feel that they get something back from the state for the taxes they pay* (Vårheim et al, 2007, p. 880)

This quote represents a nuancing of the concept of 'for everyone' and offer a reinterpretation of the background of the public library's all-encompassing universalism. 'For everyone' is not essential; it is just how this concept is perceived! This argument is supported by Vårheim et al's empirical findings: predominantly, the public libraries are visited by citizens belonging to the middle classes. Efforts are made to reach disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, but various barriers still exist like ideological resistance, lack of skills, socio-economic conditions, etc.

What these studies do not address is how the use of information, literature and culture in the public library is sometimes utilised negatively; to exclude, marginalise and delegitimise alternative ways of life and to highlight the excellence of the in-group. It is this issue the present study takes the first step towards exploring.

Method

This article is associated with a larger Swedish project 'Public libraries in a changed political landscape: a democratic mission for a new era?' and is based on unused parts of the empirical data from the article: 'An Act of Balance: Exploring the Boundaries of Librarianship in Times of Political Turmoil in Sweden and Denmark' (Engström et al., 2024). The empirical material consists of two group interviews conducted with Danish library staff members from seven different public libraries. Focus group interviews were chosen to align with the main project but also due to a desire to investigate the result of the construction of meaning taking place when different professional practitioners discuss subject-related topics. In focus group interviews, the respondents' individual experiences are downplayed letting the social interactions constitute the source of information (Halkier, 2015). And this is also what I was aiming at in this paper: how do professional library practitioners experience the public library's obligations 'for everyone'? Due to the limited numbers of respondents, the study is strictly qualitative and hence does not claim any form of representativeness or universal validity. But the empirical material nevertheless contains several interesting observations of an idiosyncratic nature which I find intriguing as a point of departure for a deeper understanding of the public libraries' current challenges and simultaneously constituting a base for further studies.

The respondents were selected based on considerations of their individual affiliation to different library institutions. The material in focus consists of respondents' experiences from both larger main public libraries as well as minor or small branch libraires. To prevent a too homogeneous composition (Halkier, 2015), the two group interviews each had four participants representing a sample of library

employees including a children's librarian, a youth librarian, four adult librarians, and a library assistant representing associated functions such as system administrator, team leader, communication officer and work environment representative. Some of the respondents had seniority, while others were relatively newly qualified. Both interviews lasted around 120 minutes and were conducted as semi-structured group interviews. An interview guide containing broader, thematic questions were distributed and utilised as a catalyst for the discussions and the respondents were encouraged to contribute, comment, and engage with each other. The interviews were conducted and recorded via the video conference program Zoom and subsequently transcribed verbatim. All quotes have been translated into English by the author.

The questions asked in each group interviews were aimed at topics regarding (political) pressure and attempts to influence the participating library staff members in their everyday activities from different stakeholders (politicians, opinion makers, and the public). In this endeavour all participants touched on accessibility for everyone and how both politicians and citizens occasionally utilise the public libraries' services to further other agendas, sometimes at the expense of other citizens as well as library staff members. When I choose to carry out this study, it is due to the interesting nature of the empirical material and the new insights it may provide. Although they do not constitute the bulk of the empirical material, they are surprising and interesting. It is especially culture as a potential for conflict in the public library I find intriguing. For above reasons, this study has the character of a pilot study.

Theoretical frame

One of the tasks of Culture analysis is to critically study dominant perceptions of reality in society and how these perceptions create invisible structures affecting people's lives (e.g., Sørensen et al., 2008; Leckie et al., 2010). In the present paper, cultural policy is interesting because culture policy to a certain extent suspends dominant market economic processes (Raber, 2010) and here, the public libraries may constitute an example. The main tasks for public libraries are to act as disseminators of information, literature, culture, etc. Public libraries utilise public fundings to acquire commercially produced media items and, by law, makes these products universally available, free of charges and on equal terms, to anyone within the libraries' jurisdiction. As such, the public libraries disrupt current marked economic structures and transform private commodities into public goods with the public authorities', the producers' and the populaces' consent (see also Fridrich, 2021).

Such a breach of the all-encompassing market economy principle must be firmly regulated, and this is done by utilising different culture political doctrines. The ambition to 'Democratise culture' was the dominant doctrine in Denmark from the beginning of the 20th century until the end of the 1960s (cf. Duelund, 2003; Skot-Hansen, 1999; see also Kann-Rasmussen, 2022, p. 40–41). This doctrine's primary objective was the ongoing reintegration of the populace into the national community with special emphasis on postwar democracy-building and building trust in the emerging welfare states institutions (see also Hammonds, 2023, p. 33ff.) and were enabled through the conveying of the majority's (read: bourgeois') conceptions of 'Danish culture' to everyone. The discussions of what constitutes Danish culture and what distinguish Danish culture from other types of culture was left open to debate.

During the late 1960s and the early 1970s different periods of popular unrest arose entailing an alternative culture political doctrine to emerge. Based on various forms of popular anti-elitist movements, the then Minister of Culture K. Helveg Petersen sets a new culture political course (Ministeriet for kulturelle anliggender, 1969; see also Duelund, 2003). A new doctrine, 'Cultural democracy', introducing a more pluralistic concept of culture was established contained a principal recognition of the existence of different (socio)cultures in Denmark (e.g. workers' culture or women's culture). Cultural democracy wanted to reintegrate the populace to society through the possibility to identify with and join different socio-cultural communities and their different life practises. In decades

after 1969, the most important culture policy task thus became to support the cultural expressions produced by different socio-cultural groups engaged in various folk-cultural activities and hereby igniting a new debate; this time about which subgroups to support and which to dismiss.

Underneath these two cultural policy doctrines, however, lies an administrative principle which both doctrines accepted and obeyed. During the postwar period and in line with other Western societies, Denmark developed an arm's length principle guiding national cultural policy efforts (Duelund, 2003). The arm's length principle is thus an administrative principle inherently independent of prevailing cultural policy doctrines and holding the separation of powers as its ontological background (Chartrand & McCaughey, 1989). Regardless of culture political doctrine and administrative principle, state-funded cultural dissemination institutions like public libraries always must assist and perform the current cultural policy's remediation in practice - and this happens through the reintegration created by culture activities in practice.

Analytical approach

Initially, Cultural democracy was established and functioned as an antithesis to the ambition to Democratise culture why these two doctrines basically are incommensurable, but this does not cause activities aimed at democratising culture to disappear - on the contrary. In the current culture political environment, there exist cultural activities aiming at reintegrating people into the national community, for instance regarding language or trust in society's democratic institutions (see also Kulturministeriet, 2006; Kulturministeriet, 2016) - while simultaneously other activities allow people to continuously reintegrate into socio-cultural communities, for instance regarding choice of lifestyle and life practises. In this study, however, these two doctrines will be utilised as analytical tools to further the understanding of culture activities as remediation and entailing challenges currently unfolding in the field of public libraries (see also Thomsen, 1991 and Williams, 1965 - here after Sørensen et al, 2008, p. 63).

Based on the empirical material as well as the theoretical framework, it is now possible to establish an analytical approach, here visualised as a matrix. On the Y-axis is a concentration of the conflicting relationships figuring in the empirical material. It is about the conflicts arising 1) when citizens interact with each other, 2) when citizens interact with library staff members, and 3) when librarians and library management interact with politicians. On the X-axis figures the two cultural policy doctrines of today: 1) Democratisation of the culture and 2) Cultural democracy:

		Culture political concepts	
		Democratisation of the culture	Cultural democracy
Empirical observations	Citizens interactions with each other	How does (re-)integration into the national community take place?	How does (re-)integration into sociocultural groupings take place?
	Citizens interactions with library staff members		
	The library's interactions with local politicians		

Figure 1: Analytical approach

The analysis will be carried out against the background of these categories.

Analysis

Citizens' interactions

Not surprisingly, several respondents unprompted spoke about the public libraries' various offers as 'for everyone'. Respondent K expressed it like this: *'... everyone is welcome here, period!'* (8 February 2023), a statement generally agreed on. Other respondents utilised slightly varying formulations such as, the public libraries are *'… open to all…' or '… accessible for all…'* but essentially these statements covered the same perception. However, it soon became clear how this idealistic approach contained some pragmatic limitations, for instance, regarding certain behavioural patterns. Respondent C stated how: *'... everyone is welcome, but we must not be so inclusive that one group begins to exclude others!'* (9 February 2023). This statement constituted the starting point for a discussion in focus group 2 about citizens occasionally showing problematic attitudes, and here especially two groups stood out: 1) young people ignorant about the effects of their behaviours and 2) senior citizens, predominately male newspaper readers, who occasionally behaved verbally inappropriate. The biggest issue for the respondents was the insistent presence of representatives from both these groups and the occasional enforcement of their rights to use the public library on their terms without regard for fellow visitors.

Ad 1) In the case of young people, especially their loud presence occasionally caused challenges: *'Groups of youngsters (...) have behaved in ways bordering on what was thought to be pleasant for the other library visitors...'* was respondent M's tentative description of the phenomenon (8 February 2023). Sometimes, such behaviours would be met with reprimands and warnings, but it was not only in relation to noise levels problems could arise:

> *[Can] we act as law enforcement regarding what they are talking about (...)? We have had youngsters who have had some very interesting conversations close to the children's area (...) It is fine if they want to talk about these matters, but [they must] realise the fact that there are small children right next to them...* (C, 9 February 2023).

The referred conversations concerned explicit and picturesque descriptions of sexual activities conducted in the children's library department.

Ad 2) The male newspaper readers were described by several respondents as one of the most 'powerful' groups. The newspaper readers took up considerable space in the library, but in a different manner compared to young people (C, 9 February 2023). Generally, they were considered extremely loyal library visitors and often had daily or weekly routines. They were also described as occasionally having strong, prejudiced opinions, which they did not shy away to express loudly even if the subjects of their discomfort (often non-native men, women, or children) were within proximity and therefore involuntarily got exposed to these negative sentiments (K, 8 February 2023). The challenges for the respondents were to accommodate these people in appropriate manners: '*And they must be allowed to visit [the library], of course they must, but they cannot be allowed to dictate how a library should be run…*' (C, 9 February 2023).

The above refer to challenges in the citizens' interrelated connections and the respondents' reflections on these behavioural patterns, especially when considered problematic to other citizens. Other types of challenges arose when library staff members were attempted involved as partners in discussions.

Citizens' interaction with library staff members

Several respondents reported on how some citizens would attempt to involve them as discussion partners. Respondent H put it this way: *'It's not always [citizens] come to ask about something. [They are] more [interested in] sharing their opinions…'* (9 February 2023). The more acceptable attempts regarded discussions about the content of literature, events or various administrative procedures.

Basically, this was not regarded a problem. Respondent C recounted an event where the author Yahya Hassan[1] had been engaged as a lecturer:

> *[This promoted] some quite interesting conversations, both with citizens from the local housing estates, but also with all the young people of other ethnic origin (...). They were challenged because they had an opinion about what he was like and it made for some [good] conversations...* (C, 9 February 2023).

Thus, the aim was not to avoid discussion at all costs: *'[M]y role as a librarian is [also] to ensure (…) conversations which may break the echo chambers we are increasingly experiencing…'* (LI, 9 February 2023). But occasionally situations arose where a citizen required an entirely different type of participation. Respondent H recounted such an event. The discussion took place at the Online inquiry service and concerned a children's book challenging binary gender identification. The event had had the following course:

> *But it was precisely this book the patron wanted to discuss. And he (...) asked some tough questions to one of the colleagues assigned to the Online inquiry service, who then replied with [reference to the] the 'Act regarding library services.' (...) The next day [the discussion] continued. He [the patron] simply insisted on discussing this book no matter what and he became very personal...* (H, 9 February 2023)

The personal aspect was due to the citizen, afterward, blaming the answers of the staff members involved for being determined by their gender (both staff members were women) and not their professionalism. Subsequently, accusations of indoctrination of children via literature in a female-dominated workplace, the suppression of the male perspective, and a pronounced concern about what gender problems would arise for children exposure to this book in the future, were expressed (C, 9 February 2023). Although rare, similar discussions had taken place in relation to the temporary closure of public libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic and the requirements for vaccination, vaccine passports, and masking (LI, 9 February 2023).

From these incidents, a discussion emerged about how library staff members could or should manage unpleasant situations:

> *[If the conversion] is very agitating and very long-lasting, then I usually [ask] if there is something specific, they are looking for, some information or some books about [the topic] perhaps (...) because otherwise we need to move on…* (H, 9 February 2023)

One way to deal with these more confrontational citizens was, as H indicated, by means of bureaucratic correctness, but other strategies were utilised. In certain cases, the respondents could rely on temporary institutional procedures, for instance, zero tolerance regarding noise (P, 8 February 2023), but often the respondents referred to each other (M, 8 February 2023) or had to fend for themselves based on their personal experiences. Although the verbal rejection was relatively prominent, so was the uncertainty: *'... I have experienced this dilemma of when to break off [the conversation] (...). When should you say: 'Now you have to move on...''* (K, 8 February 2023).

When it came to personal strategies for handling above situations, 3 strategies seemed to make up the basic structure: 1) temporary exclusion from the library, 2) verbal reprimands or rejections, or 3) resignation.

[1] A controversial Danish Syrian now deceased poet.

Ad 1) Temporary exclusion is a somewhat controversial topic and was previously a major subject of discussion in public libraries but is currently used as a consequence-pedagogical measure, especially regarding young people's repeated violations of regulations, and indifference towards reprimands. (see also Lovbekendtgørelse nr. 100, 2013; Act regarding library services, 2001). Respondent LO explained how a young man had been excluded *'... because he had dragged a couch from the first to the second floor...'* (8 February 2023). The sanction consisted in put the inventory back in order and a time-limited exclusion. However, such sanctions were negotiable.

Ad 2) The verbal rejection existed in different versions: *If they really say something very private (...) then [I say] like this: 'Yes, but I don't agree! You must move on!' (...) and end [the conversation]* (LI, 9 February 2023). Additionally, respondent LI reported an interesting phenomenon. LI had no problems reprimanding young people who spoke badly to each other or behaved inappropriate, but she did not do the same to adults acting in similar ways (LI, 9 February 2023).

Ad 3) A third strategy, which was utilised by several respondents, was resignation: *'... so it is especially (...) the older gentlemen at the newspaper shelves who make statements where I simply walk away...'* (LI, 9 February 2023). Respondents applying this technique knew their actions did not solve any problems but rather was intended to enable them to sustain their role as civil servant.

The interactions between citizens and library staff members occasionally contained various forms of conflict potential needed to be dealt with. However, this conflict potential reached new levels when local politicians became interested in how public library management ran their businesses.

Local politicians' interactions with library staff members

In general, the relationships between the public libraries (management and staff) and the local politicians in charge were deemed excellent. Public libraries are politically led organisations and respondents with experience from several workplaces reported how libraries could appear more or less political determined (e.g. LI, 9 February 2023). In general, however, the relations were described as excellent and when rare occasions of discrepancy appeared, it often based on misunderstandings. Respondent LO explained how politicians at the municipal level are expected to embrace an array of different, often broad subject areas and therefore cannot be experts in every topic they are responsible for (LO, 8 February 2023). And although the ambition is to engage people knowledgeable about their specific subject area, this is not always an option:

> *[We] got an inquiry from a politician, and he was asked to follow the proper way through the entire municipal system. He was a bit new to the city council and has many excellent ideas, but he just had to learn which way to go...* (P, 8 February 2023).

The reason for the good relationships between culture politicians and the local public libraries were described by several respondents as having its starting point in a close collaboration between library managements and city councils or their culture departments. In certain cases, the collaboration was the subject of formalised procedures, where politicians, library management and citizens occasionally meet, in library council-like bodies (P, 8 February 2023; see also Hammonds, 2023, p. 31). In addition, managements were also deemed good at predicting how politicians would react to various measures.

Nevertheless, during the interviews it became obvious how several respondents had experienced individual episodes with politicians exerting different attempts to influence. These experiences were rare, but when they surfaced, they fell into two categories: 1) ideologically based dissatisfaction with local policy practices and 2) various attempts to micromanagement.

Ad 1) In 2007, the public administration in Denmark was reformed. The ambition was to decentralise political and administrative powers and to leave more responsibility to local city councils. However, this exercise was followed by a major reorganisation of the municipalities' administrative structures, forcing smaller hitherto autonomous municipal units to merged into fewer, but larger, more efficient, and economically powerful administrative units - something certain especially anti-establishment orientated politicians objected as centralisation (See e.g., Økonomi- og Indenrigsministeriet, 2013; Vrangbæk, 2010). Some of the animosities entailing in the wakes of this reform were not forgotten even though 18 years had passed. Both respondent C and respondent LO recounted how some politicians still questioned the distribution of resources based on centre-periphery discussions and alleged pre-distributions at the disadvantages of their local areas (C, 9 February 2023; LO, 8 February 2023). These questionings also regarded public library services.

Ad 2). Respondent C's parent institution had been the subject of several budget reductions within the last few years. Subsequently, library management had been asked to propose alternative ways to solve their obligations within the new financial reality. But when these proposals returned from city council, they were changed to fit the actions already decided, without regard to management and staff members' professional opinions (C, 9 February 2023). Respondent C did not oppose the politicians' right to determine about financial matters; such interventions are a fundamental condition in political led institutions. The stumbling block was the pseudo-democratic legitimation process which the parent institution felt, they involuntarily become part of.

A similar situation had unfolded at respondent M's parent institution. The public library had gone through several budget reductions within the last few years but had now been required to find space for photo machines at the library. The reason was one citizen's inquiry to a local politician about the absence of a photo opportunity in connection with passport renewal (a task for the Citizen service, located at the main public library). The politician had taken up the inquiry in relevant forums, and it was now decided that all 3 branches should acquire photo machines. Again, respondent M did not question the political right to administer, but the way scares public finances were spent (M, 8 February 2023).

The most direct example of micromanagement, however, came from respondents M and LO, and regarded an event for children where cream puffs were involved (8 February 2023). The cream puffs were a small gimmick, as a part of a larger literary arrangement aimed at small children. A local politician found this completely inappropriate, and the event had to be counselled.

Discussion

One of the ambitions of Culture analytical studies is to critically study dominant perceptions of reality in society and how these perceptions create invisible structures affecting people in different ways (Sørensen et al., 2008). Through such a perspective and by replacing the phrase 'for everyone' with a more focused concept such as 'remediation', it becomes possible to tentatively study some of the structural mechanisms at work in Danish public libraries. Public libraries are part of a historical tradition where information, literature, and cultural services are articulated as societal goods supporting the ongoing reintegration of the populace into the liberal-democratic welfare society through their alleged equality (e.g., Solum, 2024; ELSA, 2020), but at the same time tend to hide how this freedom to pursue individual or collective goals come with a price (cf. Bennett, 2010, Emerek, 2001). Hence, the provision of public libraries is not just a question of philanthropy established by public authority, but of a quid pro quo: the public library's services may be utilised to remediate the most inappropriate consequences of late modernity, but, simultaneously, the citizen will have to accept the reintegration into middleclass values entailed by this use. Adhering to this tradition, the public library direct some of its services towards prioritised groups appearing in the legislation (Lovbekendtgørelse nr. 100, 2013; Act regarding library services, 2001): children, young people and senior citizens (See also Vårheim et al, 2007). Since these groups are the most difficult for public

libraries to reach, it is important to note that the empirical material deals with respondents' experiences with representatives from these groups who, de facto, defy custom and utilise their local public library.

Citizens' interrelated interactions

The young people, referred to in the study, used the public library (see also e.g., Blomgren et al, 2020) because the absence of private-economic demands made it attractive for this group as a space to meet fellow youngsters. The respondents facilitated these opportunities by acting as change agents (cf. Kahn-Christensen, 2022), by creating environments for low-intensive encounters (cf. Audunson, 2005) and by engaging in dialogue with these young people, but also through guidance and sanctions when certain (semi-)tacit norms and standards were exceeded (e.g., M, 8. February 2023; C, 9. February 2023).

From a culture political perspective, the young people's transgressive actions may be interpreted as ignorance or lack of introduction to the prevailing norms of behaviour, and the respondents' reprimands may be regarded as a contribution to the young people's reintegration (see also Devine & Appleton, 2023). However, with the critical potential of cultural analytic theory in mind, it is also possible to interpret the young people's actions as an ongoing challenge of the structural conditions they are encountering. In this regard the public libraries serve as symbols of society and as training grounds. In their encounters with library staff members, the use of cultural services provided the young people the opportunity to test boundaries, get a (semi-)public voice and be heard locally, but also to rehearse the democratic participation awaiting them when they become 'real adults.' In this regard, the public library seemingly had a remediating function for young people who visited (cf. Raber, 2010; See also Hastrup, 2005).

For senior newspaper readers, the situation differed. This group also used public libraries as a place to socialise and relax, regardless of their personal financial circumstances, but the senior newspaper readers were also described as a self-conscious and powerful group, with a stronger sense of unity, a significant presence, and a routine-based use pattern. The most striking element in the respondents' stories, however, were how the representatives of this group were notorious for their attitudes towards other vulnerable groups: non-native children, young people, women, etc. (C, 9 February 2023; K, 8 February 2023). Here too, their mere presence may be seen as a culture political remediation of the inappropriate living conditions a vulnerable group endures during late modernity and as an opportunity to identify with like-minded fellow citizens in a cultural democracy in practice (cf. Vårheim et al, 2007). But in contrast to young people, senior newspaper readers occasionally acted as advocates for a particular cultural perception. Harbouring no intentions to engage in low-intensive encounters (Audunson, 2005), these newspaper readers utilized cultural activities to communicate their negative sentiments. This lack of consideration cannot be interpreted as an expression of ignorance as was the case with young people: the senior newspaper readers referred to in the study were too seasoned and routinised library users. Their actions therefore need to be interpretated as another type of challenge to the structural conditions in the libraries. The struggle, these senior newspaper readers engaged in may be seen as having its base in a traditional image of a national popular community (see e.g. Hylland Eriksen, 2000). In this paper, newspaper readers became self-appointed protagonists (cf. Raber, 2010), who took on a self-chosen function as their own change agents towards other groups present in the public library and in contrast to Kann-Rasmussen's activist librarians (2022). The senior newspaper readers challenge the parent institution's implementation of the prevailing cultural understandings by promoting their own (in above cases more national conservative) values. For the senior newspaper readers, the public library thus became a cultural arena where they could struggle, locally, about what form of reintegration should take place. Furthermore, and in contrast to the young people, the indiscretions of these citizens were only occasionally sanctioned by library staff members (LI, 9 February 2023).

Citizens' interaction with library staff members

Occasionally, respondents experienced how certain citizens deliberately addressed library staff members directly. The role as sparring partners for these citizens' expressed ambitions to increase their individual level of knowledge, was described by all respondents as a common occurrence and considered welcome (e.g., H, 9 February 2023; LI, 9 February 2023). But in some cases, citizens sought out library staff members to express their opinions without this ambition. In such cases, library staff members were involuntarily engaged in various attempts by citizens to find allies who would confirm various prejudiced interpretations of political or ideological issues. Frequently, these inquiries have only a peripheral connection with library professional work and thus also with the various cultural-political doctrines.

Again, these inquiries may be seen as ways citizens occasionally attempt to challenge library staff members as change agents (cf. Kann-Rasmussen, 2022) and to define or redefine the framework for what reintegration should take place, but now in a perspective exceeding the public library as a cultural dissemination institution requiring an extension of the hitherto applied theoretical framework. The citizens' inquiries may be explained based on a concept identified by Norbert Elias and John L. Scotson as an attempt to 'close ranks.' For Elias and Scotson, the notion of 'closing ranks' refers to the sociological mechanism by which different groups attempt to reject unwelcome influences and changes (1994, p. xxiii). Closing ranks is thus a strategy protecting an individual's in-group against unwelcome challenges from outside the group and, simultaneously, ensures the maintenance of previous values and worldviews while legitimising current actions and attitudes. In this perspective, the citizens' interest in the respondents were probably only approached partly due to their position as employees: by approaching the respondents as library staff members, these citizens sought alliance within a strong cultural institution to win them over regarding the citizen's interpretation of what the public library's remediation should contain. By approaching the respondents as individuals, these citizens simultaneously tried to identify allies who were willing to close ranks and thus ensure support for their perceptions. Probably, the ability to close ranks was what made for instance the senior newspaper readers such a powerful group.

A related type of inquiry arose when citizens perceived library staff members as representatives of 'the system' as when citizens questioned administrative procedures or the content of planned events (H, 9 February 2023) or questioned the ethical or professional standards of library staff members (H, 9 February 2023; LI, 9 February 2023; K, 8 February 2023). On these occasions, respondents were directly confronted with these citizens' perceptions of public libraries as political organisations used as leverage for the agendas of various cultural policy doctrines. Like above, these inquiries often had only rudimentary connections to professional library work.

This type of approach may also be understood with reference to another sociological mechanism described by Elias and Scotson. Pars pro toto means 'part over whole' and describes the value attribution people make to individuals belonging to opposition groups. When individuals, who belong to outside groups perform what is regarded as negative acts, these acts are considered as a part of the moral habitus of the entire group, while acts regarded as respectable are interpreted as exceptions confirming the rule. The opposite is the case regarding the in-group: when an individual from the in-group performs acts regarded as negative, these are considered as exceptions confirming the rule, while acts regarded as respectable are interpreted a part of the moral habitus of the entire in-group (Elias & Scotson, 1994, p. xix). Thus, when a citizen accused a respondent of promoting feminist, non-binary-promoting gender agendas, a distinction was made, where the library staff member were considered belonging to an opposing outside-group and its (false) values appearing by virtue of her institutional affiliation. The respondent's actions and attitudes were considered to be representative for the negative actions of an oppressing system, in itself justifying the citizen's criticism - and no good arguments about the reintegrating or remediating functions of the public library would change this perception: by virtue, all public libraries and their staff members became a part of an opposing and

oppressing system (see also Solum, 2024; Devine & Appleton, 2023). In above case, the conflict over public libraries services seemingly became a conflict by proxy for much more complicated political issues in society.

This may also explain why the respondents had such difficulties handling these requests and occasional became unsure of their options. Some of these uncertainties originated from the lack of insight into why certain citizens had this propensity to oppose, while others were due to a lack of strategies. Explicit guidelines for handling these situations were scares why library staff members were referred to rely on each other or fend for themselves (M, 8 February 2023; K, 8 February 2023). Therefore, several respondents had developed their own, individual strategies: expressed disagreement, interruption of the conversation, or resignation. In more insistent cases, the citizens would refer to management (H, 9 February 2023).

Local politicians' interactions with library staff members

The public libraries' interaction with local politicians had a different character. Generally, respondents described the relationship between public libraries and authorities as excellent. Respondents acknowledged their parent institutions as politically led organisation with the city council as the highest granting authority (LI, 9 February 2023) and the culture committee as the highest culture political authority. Subsequently, the municipal authorities acknowledged the public libraries' management and staff members as authorities regarding the municipal's library professional obligations locally. What the respondents here outlined, albeit implicitly, was the arm's length principle in practise (Duelund, 2003; Chartrand & McCaughey, 1989). When disputes arose, it was often due to misunderstandings or ambiguities between the culture political and the library professional systems (LO, 8 February 2023; P, 8 February 2023; C, 9 February 2023). Upon closer reflection, several respondents were able to report on rare cases where local politicians 1) had utilised the parent institution to promote (personal) political ambitions or 2) had exercised various forms of micromanagement.

The 2007 local government reform in Denmark (Økonomi- og Indenrigsministeriet, 2013; Vrangbæk, 2010) still motivated discussion about resource distribution between centre and periphery (C, 9 February 2023; LO, 8 February 2023; See also Hammonds, 2023, p. 69) and in the organisational resource allocation for culture institutions, some local politicians found an opportunity to resume the discussion about how cities are favoured at the expense of rural areas. The respondents did not necessarily oppose the content of this viewpoint - demonstrably, most resources accrue public libraries in urban areas - but from a library professional aspect, this is acceptable: cities accommodate the largest audience why the most efficient distribution of limited public resources is to carry out controlled pre-dispositions. In addition, resource allocation was considered under local, culture political control. In the current case, where certain local politicians questioned the resource allocation, the respondents, however, felt reduced to pawns in a political game drawing threads to national political discussions in which they had neither interest nor influence (C, 9 February 2023). Thus, these discussions are probably not reserved for specific geographical areas in Denmark, but rather part of a major political movement, a movement also containing elements of anti-establishment, anti-globalism and anti-elitism. But the transformation of these national political subjects to local settings seemingly disrupted the intended remediating and reintegration activities of the parent institutions.

The same was true of the sporadic attempts at micromanagement reported by some respondents (C, 9 February 2023; M, 8 February 2023). On one hand, respondents acknowledged the local politicians' right to administer and prioritise resources in relation to strategy, ambitions, etc. On the other hand, some frustration was expressed about what was considered untimely interference in the parent institution's library professional practices, especially if these interferences linked to ill-conceived handling of limited public resources (M, 8 February 2023; LO, 8 February 2023).

It would probably be possible to interpret both the current discussion about centre and periphery, and the examples of micromanagement within the framework of either the attempt to 'Democratise culture' or 'Cultural democracy', but to the respondents the challenge was not the simultaneous presence of these two different and occasional opposing culture policy doctrines. The respondents indicated how it was the arms-length principle as the fundamental premise for conducting culture policy in Denmark, the long-standing right of public libraries to self-management, as well as the inherent principles of the primacy of expertise and the separation of powers, which was at stake.

Conclusion

When considering culture politics as remediating and the services of public libraries as reintegrative, the outlines of various intriguing conclusions occur. Because culture activities are considered valuable tools to compensate the inequality-creating elements of late modern society, the authorities have decided to maintain several culture institutions, including the public libraries, to provide access to a selection of information and culture programme activities for everyone. The market economic organisation of society contributes to the creation of unequal living conditions for vulnerable groups, why this principle is suspended within parts of the culture sphere and an arm's length principle is applied. Currently, the culture political endeavours contain elements from both earlier attempts to democratise culture and more recent attempts on culture democracy. This arrangement still conducts public libraries in their attempt to reintegrate people into society, but it also invites to continued discussion about the scope and the framework of the culture political ambitions (like who are entitled to what kind of compensation?) and thus inadvertently contains its own antithesis.

Culture activities may promote dialogue, democratic participation, etc. as the basis for reintegration activities and is often expressed as the public library's function as a third space intentionally initiating low-intensity encounters. But culture activities may also be utilised opposite, to initiate demarcation, stigmatisation, and marginalisation, with the same references to freedom of expression and opinion building, which is indicated in this albeit limited study. This happens, even within the framework of the very institutions, the public libraries, working incessantly to reinforce democratic values and norms. What is decisive for an outcome in democracy's favour, seems to depend on the inherited attitude of the participating political parties. In an anthropological saying: Cultures do not meet, only people do! This leaves information, literature, and culture as yet another focal point among several others, people may gather around and discuss but also utilise as demarcating marks in their ongoing social identifications.

The public libraries in the current study do not convey just any culture, but the ones somehow consistent with the ideologies of the public authorities on which they rely. When regarding the conflict potential existing between citizens or between citizens and librarians in above cases, it was often the discussion about 1) the nature of the reintegration taking place and 2) the right to remediating measures the respondents highlighted. For young people, it was the expectations of what the library space may or should be used for which occasionally collided with library staff members and other citizens' expectations, while for senior newspaper readers and other mature citizens it was the nature of the reintegrating activities which is of essence. Remarkably, it was also in the latter cases librarians were approached as in-group allies. And when they did not comply, new conflict potentials arose establishing library staff members as an opposition group only understandable when expanding the theoretical framework.

The potential for conflict between public libraries and politicians was different. In general, the relations toward the local public authorities were described as excellent, but in the few cases where conflict arose, it related to the pursuit of other political goals or attempts at micromanagement and thus the circumventing of the arm's length principle. Also here, the right to reintegrating activities and their nature triggered disagreement, but contrary to the prior opponents, the local authorities have a granting authority, placing the public library in a more vulnerable position. For the same reason, library

management was described as skilled at navigating the political field, even though this occasionally entails various forms of self-censorship.

How widespread these phenomena are, however, is difficult to determine based on this study with its limited empirical capacity. The results indicate the existence of negative utilisation of public library services by several different groups, but more studies are needed to determine the extent of this phenomenon. Nevertheless, the use of the notion 'for everyone' either hide or obscure utilisation, while the phrase 'the remediating library' allow for the study of them - leaves several new research questions to appear. The above-mentioned pilot study cannot answer how access to and use of information, literature and culture are used to exclude certain groups in society. As indicated, different groups utilise the public library's services in similar undertaking, but the scope of the study is too small to draw firm conclusions. The study also does not answer where the boundaries are for the involvement of library staff members. Library staff members are semi-public figures and represent both local, cultural and administrative authorities: thus, it is not only the library staff member as an individual you communicate with when communicating with a library staff member, but also part of the societal system. But where are the boundaries between the library staff member as a public and private person? This is not a new discussion either, but it becomes increasingly relevant when questions are raised about the autonomy and legitimacy of the public library. This too should be explored more closely. A third question is: how should library staff handle transgressive behaviours? This question is thematised in the current pilot study without it being possible to give concrete answers to how such forms of behaviours are currently handled or what measures are necessary.

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