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## How to transform the library into a public space. Example of the Stavanger bibliotek og kulturhus in Norway

*(Jak przekształcić bibliotekę w przestrzeń publiczną. Przykład Biblioteki i domu kultury w Stavanger w Norwegii)*

**Słowa kluczowe:** biblioteka w Stavanger, transformacja biblioteki, biblioteka jako przestrzeń społeczna

**Abstrakt:** Sølvsberget to nazwa biblioteki i centrum kulturalnego położonego w samym sercu Stavanger w Norwegii. Aby odnieść sukces, biblioteka musi spełniać dzisiaj wiele różnych ról, co jest związane z synergią takich czynników, jak: dobra lokalizacja, architektura, wydarzenia i działania. Jednym z głównych zadań Biblioteki Sølvsberget jest pełnienie funkcji miejsca spotkań. W osiągnięciu tego celu bibliotekarzom pomogli architekci z agencji KAP Architects. Wspólny wysiłek, oparty na innowacyjnym i odważnym podejściu, pozwolił na przekształcenie parteru biblioteki w dogodną dla użytkowników przestrzeń publiczną. Artykuł opisuje historię transformacji biblioteki oraz efekty wykorzystania nowopowstałej przestrzeni przez użytkowników.

**Keywords:** Stavanger library, transformation of the library, library as a social space

**Abstract:** Sølvsberget is a library and cultural centre situated in the heart of Stavanger. Nowadays to succeed a library must fulfil many different roles. The success depends on a good interaction between location, design, architecture and events/activities. One of Sølvsberget's Library major roles is to function as a meeting place. To achieve this goal the librarians from Stavanger, collaborated with KAP Architects and transformed the ground floor. The aim was to be far-sighted and innovative in creating a new kind of public space. This article describes what we've done, and how the public has made the use of it.

### Stavanger and Sølvsberget

Stavanger is Norway's fourth largest city with 132.000 inhabitants. Sølvsberget Cultural Centre was opened 30 years ago, and is located on a central square in the old medieval city. The centre contains a public library, a cinema, a gallery, arenas for events, cafés and newsstands. The events/activities have been absorbed by the library. This allowed to form a joint organisation with one leader. In 2011, a major transformation process has began. The cinema needed to be expanded, and this opened new opportunities for the library as well. Even though the library lost areas in the basement, we were given new areas on the ground floor which allowed us to redesign the entire floor and make the library more visible.

## How to work after change?

It was external circumstances that initiated the transformation process. Therefore, it was easy to assure employees that this change was necessary. There was as well political will to grant some funds for the investment. It also meant that we had to react quickly. The first thing that we have done was to define a project called *The new Sølvsberget* and allocate resources for it. As things proceeded, we started breaking the project into subprojects and creating clear milestones. At the beginning we worked systematically to prepare the employees for change. In cooperation with Stavanger Business School we ran courses with regards to change management for 50% of the staff, and we had several workshops in which all the employees participated.

Together we brought through a lot of concepts however external advisors ideas were needed in two key areas: management and architecture. We worked with a private company and Norwegian Business School with regards to the project management. Several companies tendered for the décor/architecture, and in the end we chose KAP architects (a local company). The collaboration with KAP was crucial in terms of good results.

## The purpose of the new ground floor

To get some inspiration with regards to the new ground floor, we visited other libraries and organised internal workshops. The main goals were:

- to make the library more visible and appealing. We wanted people to say: “When you’re in the city centre, you just need to visit the library”;
- to redefine the term “library” and transform the ground floor into an urban and public space where people can work, meet others, read and borrow books;
- to create a new library department with exhibitions and displays from all the floors, as well as longer opening hours than the other libraries;
- to get some inspiration from bookstores and other commercial actors on how to push recommendations;
- to attract more visitors, and extend their visits.

## What have we done?

The cultural centre has a “main street” that runs through the building. The cinema is located on the left side, while the library, café and newsstand are located on the right side. We had about 900 m<sup>2</sup> to play with when creating the new library. At the same time, there were plans to open a new café at the ground floor, and we were eager to get a good interaction between the library and the café. Together with the architect, we decided to divide the ground floor into five different zones, of which the library section only occupied 1/3. The rest of the space was dedicated to social zone, self service, pulse and events. The social zone was equipped with a long table in the entrance. At the same time, there was an open space towards the café. This has become the distinguishing feature of the ground floor, and a very popular meeting place. The self-service zone is in fact a combination of the library’s service point, various digital services and information display screens. The idea was to provide

a service point that is easy to find. So far, we've learned that this point is, perhaps, too visible, because very often people ask for help before they' find the solution themselves.

The library zone has been designed to harmonize the architecture of the building with the narrow streets and small wooden houses outside. The architects designed special shelves that serve as both display and seating furniture. That way, the city is also drawn into our house and makes the ground floor sort of a city room. The multifunctional shelves are called "book islands", and both columns and shelves are lighted what creates a nice atmosphere especially in the evenings.

The "book islands" have different themes and are systematically changed. It takes a lot of time and effort to curate these small exhibitions, and to make sure they are always up to date and visually appealing.

The pulse zone is a combination of urban living room, exhibitions and various activities. This space is constantly changing. During big events there are corresponding activities organized in the pulse zone. Examples include parliamentary elections, the World Cup and our own literary festival (*Kapittel*).

We have a separate zone for events on the ground floor, which is our main arena for literary events, both for children and adults. The interaction with the Pulse zone is interesting and it gives us opportunities to entice more people, and to stream the event via screens placed outside if the arena is packed.

## **How the public made use of it**

We opened the new ground floor in January 2014 and the response from the public has been overwhelming. People enjoy the design and atmosphere, as well as the openness and generosity. They're also pleased with the opening hours from 08:00 to 21:00 (Saturday from 10:00 to 21:00 and Sunday from 12:00 to 21:00). Our mayor called it "the super library", and a local newspaper wrote that this area had become the most open and friendly cultural centre ever.

In the first year, the library's visits increased from 740,000 to 1.2 million, and the public used the library in different ways.

## **Where to go from here?**

The major challenge, after opening the ground floor, is to secure the success of the other three floors, without losing all the unique qualities characteristic for a public library. Therefore we have redesigned the other floors, and in November the 4<sup>th</sup> this year we will invite both the mayor and the public for the opening.

**Table 1.** Facts and figures 2016

- Visits: 1,3 mill
- Number of loans: 669.000
- 887 events, 133 for children
- Average time for a library visit: 48 min
- 39% of our visitors borrowed or returned books
- 19% of our visitors didn't use any of the traditional library services. They use the library as a meeting point and public space
- 29% of our visitors have minority background
- 11% of our visitors are young people, from 15–18 years

**Source:** self elaboration.

**Photographs 1–15.** Library and cultural center in Stavanger



















**Source:** [https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipN-lBk1HqsvVbGcJNU\\_AkFJ6Jjf0Qf9EDo1MFXlbnmzUYPxNnQxQXqmIT2U7m1Dg?key=VWpxcnEwcjA4dk45R3MtNlAxUFRZNHNGMjFWT1ZB](https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipN-lBk1HqsvVbGcJNU_AkFJ6Jjf0Qf9EDo1MFXlbnmzUYPxNnQxQXqmIT2U7m1Dg?key=VWpxcnEwcjA4dk45R3MtNlAxUFRZNHNGMjFWT1ZB).

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