

Summary



Does Participation = Participation? / On the Uncertainties of Wider Participation in Libraries (Karsten Schuldt)

(pp. 410 – 412)

Public participation is »in«. In library projects there is an increasing use of methods such as public participation and co-determination, especially in order to widen the involvement of users. The results are mostly presented to the public very positively by the respective initiatives. But this does not always coincide with the impressions of everyone involved, according to this report from Karsten Schuldt.

Especially in Germany's public libraries efforts have been made over a number of years to broaden user participation in the development of programmes or even strategic planning. These processes often draw upon similar methods, such as »design thinking«, a procedure which is considered progressive and follows several basic assumptions:

(1) Users know better than the library what they need from the library, how they view the library and how it should continue to develop.

(2) If one can reach the right individuals and interview them with the right methodology, one could design a library's future course on the basis of those answers.

(3) Relatively short procedures – two-day workshops, survey polls over several afternoons, etc. – are fully adequate.

Can this be right? Shouldn't we take heed when, for example, the highly conservative Principality of Liechtenstein initiates measures of public participation with respect to the country's future development on the occasion of its 300th anniversary, and thereby attempts to practice the very same methods as progressive libraries? Is this not instead an indication that such processes actually lead to little change and are therefore seen by the principality to harbour little danger?

Something's Happening Here / Digital Participation in the Munich Municipal Library. A Workshop Report (Katrin Schuster)

(pp. 413 – 415)

The Munich Municipal Library is meeting the challenges of digitalisation head on with a project titled »Instatour«. The Instagram channel is run in alternation by a number of teams who are playfully gathering experience in social media and digital public relations. A notable effect of this project is the internal impact of this form of public participation, in as much as it is helping the Munich library system to prepare for coming processes of change.

Since the end of 2016 the Instagram channel has been on tour within the library system. Each month a different staff member or team takes on the work of presenting the library online. The initial postings were created by trainees (Auszubildende) at the library in December 2016. Since then the periodic involvement of young adults in this project has been a fixed factor of the Instatour project.

The original idea of portraying individual perspectives of various staff members in all their diversity has faded into the background for pragmatic reasons, among other things. Hardly anyone had realized just how much work is involved in feeding the channel on a daily basis. But, aside from that, the concept of wider participation proved to be the motor for creative team building and transformative processes. Those individuals who can and must make collaborative decisions about digitalized public relations also give more intensive consideration to the questions of responsibility and significance of the public sphere, community and public participation. And those who can and must speak on behalf of their employers automatically identify themselves much more closely with their respective employer.

Libraries need to start with themselves and facilitate the participation not only of their users, but first and foremost of their own staff members. This is the idea of Instatour – no more and no less: to show the institution what it is in for with each further step toward broader participation.

First Module Successfully Completed / The Strategic Development Process of the Neuss City Library (Claudia Büchel)

(pp. 428 – 431)

The City Library of Neuss (North Rhine-Westphalia) has acquired an excellent reputation as the coordinator of a German-Dutch literary festival (»Literarischer Sommer/Littéraire Zomer«) and a well-established guest author series (»Neuss liest ...«). But the city library is not only devoted to promoting literature. As a founding member of the QM network of public libraries in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia, it has maintained its ISO 9000 certification since 2006. Concurrent with a change of directors in 2018, a new initiative for strategic development was begun, and the first module has now been completed.

At present small teams of no more than four persons work together to achieve operational goals which have been established as part of a series of agreements on objectives. It is possible to measure their success because the operational goals have been defined in a measurable way. A summary report of results of this strategic development process will be presented to the city's committee on cultural affairs in July 2019 to be legitimated. Parallel to this, a re-zoning of the public areas of the library is being developed in cooperation with an architectural firm. The overall plan will, in turn, be differentiated into segments, since a complete modernisation is not possible for budgetary reasons. It is planned that both staff and city residents participate in gradually making the new strategic goals visible and perceptible, both optically and substantially.

Translated by Martha Baker