



A guide to the Impact Compass

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

Conducted by Seismonaut and Roskilde Central Library
March 2021

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Dear reader

In this guide, you can find good advice on how to add detail to the conversation about the impact of the public library - with local politicians and the administration, with your colleagues at the library as well as with the media and relevant partners. But also with those without whom there would be no library; the many citizens who use the library services - and who demonstrably experience great impact from it.

In the guide, use of the Impact Compass as a methodical approach is explained and we provide concrete tips on how you can investigate and show the impact your library has on its users.

The guide has been conducted by Seismonaut and Roskilde Central Library.

Happy reading!

Introduction

This guide is for those who work professionally with the public library - for example as a library manager, library employee or in a municipal administration.

The user guide has been developed on the basis of the study 'The impact of public libraries in Denmark: A haven in our community'. The study introduces a new tool, the Impact Compass, which can be used to investigate and communicate the impact of individual public libraries to users, as well as to develop and evaluate activities at the libraries. This guide shows you how to use the Impact Compass in practice.

The guide consists of two perspectives:

- 1. The extended conversation:** You can use the Impact Compass to add detail to the conversation about the public library's impact on users, with politicians, administrations, partners, etc. - for example in connection with library strategies, communication strategies, construction of new library buildings or development of new goals and visions for the local public library's activities and development.
- 2. The daily practice:** The guide can also be useful when developing and evaluating activities at the library. Specifically, the Impact Compass can be used to evaluate

activities, or to start a conversation about the intention of new activities, for example with relevant partners. The Impact Compass is suitable for formulating user-oriented effects in line with existing methods of evaluation.

The Impact Compass is a new tool and only the future will show its full potential. The first use has already shown that the Impact Compass offers details in understanding how different library services have different impacts for users.

Before we dive into the use of the compass, you must first be introduced in greater detail to what the Impact Compass is and how it works.

The study 'The impact of public libraries in Denmark: A haven in our community' can be downloaded here: [https://www.roskildebib.dk/new-study-impact-public-libraries-denmark](https://www roskildebib.dk/new-study-impact-public-libraries-denmark)

Why should we talk about the impact of the public library?

The public debate about public libraries typically refers to some fixed key figures: How many people visit the public libraries, which users are involved and how many materials do they borrow? This type of knowledge is well suited to monitor the overall use of public libraries.

However visitor and lending statistics do not tell the whole story of what users actually get out of using the public library. This guide will help bring the citizen into the centre of the conversation about the value and impact of the public library.

Instead of asking: "How much material did the library loan out?", we ask: "What did it mean for the citizen to borrow the materials?" and instead of: "How many people attended the event?" we ask: "What impact did participating in the event have on the citizen?"

The idea is that by asking some better questions we also get some better answers. Answers that we can use to develop the libraries both locally and in everyday life.

“In the past, only experts have been asked about the impact of culture and not ordinary people. It has always been the expert's understanding of the subject that has dominated. There is a great democratizing potential in turning it around and examining the individual's experience.”

- Tone Roald, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen

1. The Impact Compass - How It Works

The Impact Compass ensures that you get all the way around the citizens' experiences with the public library.

In order to qualify the conversation about the impact of the public library for citizens, it is necessary to have an eye for nuances. The public library does not have one particular impact, but multiple. The Impact Compass is built around four overall dimensions of impact, which makes it possible to get all the way around the users' experiences.

The four dimensions of the compass are:

- Emotional impact
- Intellectual impact
- Creative impact
- Social impact

The four dimensions stem from extensive British studies of various cultural activities (see page 7). On the basis of the British preparatory work, we have adapted the concepts so they support an analysis of the public library in a Danish context. The final Impact Compass for the impact of the Public Library for the citizens of Denmark is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Impact Compass for the impact of the Public Library on the citizens of Denmark



One compass - multiple versions

The Impact Compass basically consists of four dimensions, which in connection with the impact of the library have been translated into: Haven, Perspective, Creativity and Community (see Figure 2). In many cases, the concrete user experiences will move across these dimensions. The four dimensions are therefore not closed boxes; on the contrary, they play together and will often appear at the same time in users' experiences.

Each dimension consists of some supporting parameters. These parameters can be changed to suit the context you work within. If, for example, you need to develop an activity

targeted at senior citizens, the dimension "Creativity" may have a different character than in the case of primary school students. To meet this difference, one must adjust the individual parameters under each dimension of impact according to the situation.

The basic structure of the Impact Compass - the four dimensions - should in turn be retained in all the contexts in which you use the compass. It will contribute to the gradual development of a common language on the impact of the public library. At the same time, the four dimensions are rooted in research, which gives the tool a strong methodological foundation.

Figure 2. Impact Compass versioned for a quantitative questionnaire survey



Tip!

In the study 'The impact of public libraries in Denmark: A haven in our community', we selected three parameters under each dimension. Our consideration was in this context that we should find some parameters that were relevant to all library users across age, gender, library use, etc. Meanwhile, it was a consideration that our questionnaire should not be too long - so we could not examine a very wide range of parameters. Based on these total considerations, we selected 12 parameters - three in each dimension that in their breadth were adequate for what we wanted to examine (see Figure 2). If you want to do a questionnaire survey, you can take shortcuts using the same parameters that we used.

Inspired by the Cultural Value Project

The four dimensions are taken from 'The Cultural Value Project', which is a comprehensive British research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in England. 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'

According to British researchers, all too often we skip this basic stepping stone and jump straight to the culture-derived effects on, for example, the economy, urban development and health.

"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.

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.



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

Carry out local surveys on the impact of your library

The Impact Compass can be used as a starting point for developing local studies of the impact of the public library - quantitative as well as qualitative. Such studies produce concrete empirical insights that can inform the local political conversation with detailed and substantiated knowledge.

To perform a local survey based on the the Impact Compass, you can follow these three steps:

- 1. Preparation:** The Impact Compass is used when preparing the study. The task is to ensure that you get all the way around the users' experiences and test the four dimensions of the compass - no matter what you examine. It does not matter if you want to evaluate a special effort, or if you want to examine users' experiences across the entire library. The four dimensions are relevant in all contexts.
- 2. Data collection:** Afterwards it is a matter of finding out how and to what extent users experience the different impacts. It can be done qualitatively and/or quantitatively - often a combination is the best solution. The Impact Compass can form the basis for both types of data collection.
- 3. Analysis and dissemination:** Once you have collected data and subsequently analysed it, you can use the Impact Compass again. Now the compass can be used to convey your results - that is, as a linguistic and visual scaffolding for your analysis and dissemination.

In the study 'The impact of public libraries in Denmark: A haven in our community', we showed how a larger quantitative and qualitative study can create concrete empirical insights. We conducted a nationally representative questionnaire survey, supplemented by qualitative interviews and observations. Central to both methods was a sharp focus on users' experiences of specific library services. It was the users' perspectives that were the focal point rather than lending figures and other typical statistics.

The Impact Compass and the basic interest in the users' perspective can be used regardless of whether you want to conduct a broad questionnaire survey or some in-depth interviews and focus groups. The Impact Compass can be adjusted and used as a starting point for both quantitative and qualitative studies.

Case 1.

A qualitative focus on the library's most classic service

In the autumn of 2020, Helsingør Municipality's Libraries conducted a user study focusing on uncovering the impact of the physical book collection for their library users.

Based on the four dimensions of impact, library users at Kulturværftet and Espergærde library were asked about their experiences of the physical book collection. The study showed that the physical book collection has a diverse impact on the users. For example, the presence of books has an impact on students, even though they themselves are not necessarily active patrons.

The fact that there are shelves filled with books means something for the function of the room as a study area and for the atmosphere in general. The physical books also have an educational and formative impact for the families with children, as children and young people are faced with the fact that the books are something we share and must cherish when lending them.

Through observations and in-depth user interviews, knowledge of the users' interaction with and experiences of the physical collection was collected in Helsingør Municipality. Knowledge that can be used in further work with the municipality's library strategy, where one of the focus areas is to make it easy to actively choose reading in a busy everyday life. The strategy expresses a shift from passively making the materials available to actively focusing on the interaction between the users and the collection at the physical library.

If you are interested in further information about the work of uncovering the impact of the physical book collection, you can contact:

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3. The Impact Compass and daily practice

Use the Impact Compass as a tool to develop and evaluate activities at the library. It can give rise to new conversations about when the activities are successful and nurture new ideas.

The Impact Compass can be used as a tool to talk about the impact that users experience in their encounter with the library's various activities and services. It can help challenge the idea of when something is actually successful, and it can spawn ideas for new activities.

For example, the compass can shift focus from "how many participated in the activity?" to "what did they get out of participating in the activity?" An event with 15 participants, where one had expected 50, might look like a failure if one only looks at the number of participants. But if the event turns out to have had great impact on the 15 participants, it puts the conclusion in a different perspective. Maybe it was a success anyway? The take away might instead be about how to get even more people to experience something similar. Can we find out the essence of what was particularly impactful for the 15 participants and use it as fuel to develop activities for even more citizens?

The Impact Compass as a tool for developing activities

You can use the Impact Compass as a tool to develop and plan activities. Here, the compass can create a framework for the conversation with your colleagues about what intentions you have with the activity and how you assume the activity to impact the users.

For example, if you have an idea for an activity targeted at young students, you can ask yourself the following questions - guided by the compass:

- **Intention:** What is your overall intention with the activity? What do you want the young people to get out of participating?
- **Dimension:** Which dimension (or dimensions) in the compass do you thereby expect the activity to primarily apply to? Haven? Perspective? Creativity? Community?

- **Parametre:** How exactly do you expect young people to experience impact within these dimensions? Will they experience getting excited? Will they experience togetherness? Will they experience a sharpening of their critical senses? Or something else?
- **Collection:** How can you investigate whether your assumptions are in line with the young people's experiences? Do you need to observe, evaluate, do spontaneous interviews, collect answers in a mini-survey - or a fifth option?

By navigating through the compass in this way, a picture can be drawn of how the activity in question is expected to have impact on the users. You are already well on your way then. You have put the users' experience of impact at the centre of the conversation.

Use the Impact Compass as a development tool

'Worksheet 1' presented on page 16 is a blank Impact Compass. You can use it as a worksheet both before, during and after you develop or plan an activity.

Insert the parameters in the compass that are relevant in your specific context. Here you can freely choose from the 16 parameters we have developed in advance (see figure 1), in the 12 we used in our questionnaire survey (see figure 2), or you can develop new parameters within the four dimensions.

For example, if you are planning a children's theatre event, it may be a relevant parameter that the children laugh and have fun (ie. the dimension "Haven"). It may also be relevant that they experience cohesion (ie. the dimension "Community"). If, on the other hand, you are planning an IT course for senior citizens, you will probably need to put other parameters in play.

We strongly encourage you to let yourself be surprised and go out and explore. It may turn out that an activity creates completely different impacts from what you expect!

We experienced this when we carried out the study 'The impact of public libraries in Denmark: A haven in our community'. We had some initial assumptions which turned out to be wrong.

For example, we thought that the guidance that users can receive at the library would have a very low impact in the emotional dimension "Haven". It turned out, however, that we were thinking of guidance too narrowly. We thought of it only as professional guidance - e.g. for literature search - and overlooked the human dimension. It turned out that many users experience a close contact and relationship with the staff at the library, and that the interaction with the staff through guidance gives them a sense of well-being. Guidance turned out to have a relatively high emotional impact, which was a blind spot when we started the study.

The lesson is therefore that one can gain a lot from taking an exploratory approach rather than narrowing one's field of vision on the basis of initial assumptions.

NOTE!

The Impact Compass as a tool for evaluating activities

The Impact Compass can be reintroduced when it is time to evaluate your activities. Here, the compass forms the framework for the conversation about how the user has experienced the activities. By then it is obvious that you need to ask the users to relate to the different dimensions of the compass. You can do this qualitatively or quantitatively, depending on the set-up in question.

If you want to evaluate quantitatively, you can do so via a questionnaire survey, where you ask about one or more impact parameters on a scale. For example: "To what extent did you find that the activity gave you new knowledge?"

If you want to evaluate qualitatively, you can use the note sheet, which is explained on the following page and which can be found as 'Worksheet 2A' at the end of this guide (see page 17), or you can prepare something similar yourself. The exciting thing is, of course, to find out if the impact you had expected to have on the users resonates with what they have actually experienced.

It may turn out that the users experience completely different dimensions of impact than you had expected, or perhaps your assumptions are correct, but to a greater or lesser degree than you had expected. It should not be seen as a goal in itself that the perceived impact is in full accordance with the 'planned' impact. It can be as instructive to be surprised. The most important thing is, as I said, that you use the Impact Compass to bring the users' experiences right into the core of the conversation about your activities.

The compass can be used as a framework to structure your assumptions about the impact of the activities, just as it can be used to collect and document the user-oriented effects in the form of the participants' perceived impact.

Case 2:

Example from the world of film: Assumptions versus experiences

When the graduating producer students from the Danish Film School's had to produce their graduation films, they wanted to focus on what impact their films would have on the audience. The goal was not just to evaluate the finished film, but rather to gain a measure while the film was underway, a mid-term evaluation if you will.

Prior to a screening, the production team behind the film had asked themselves what impact they expected their audience to experience. They assessed this within eight parameters divided into the four dimensions of the Impact Compass.

After watching the film, the audience was asked questions about their experiences based on the eight parameters. The questions were asked in a short digital survey while the audience was still sitting in the cinema hall. The responses from this, linked to the production team's expectations, were subsequently used in an open evaluation interview with the audience, where the focus was on what had worked particularly well and what had surprised the production team.

Worksheet for the Impact Compass as a development tool

'Worksheet 2A' here in the guide (page 17) is a sheet of notes that can be used to perform qualitative on-site evaluations. If a participant expresses that “it was a good experience”, try to delve further into what made the experience good. Was the experience good because he/she was well entertained (emotional impact)? Or was it because he/she shared the experience with others (social impact)? It can be rewarding to inquire into all four dimensions of the Impact Compass. Even if you do not expect in advance that users will experience impact across all four dimensions. The exploratory approach can be a source of educational aha experiences.

In addition, it is a good idea to be open about the absence of impact that you would otherwise have expected to see. It is not about "getting it right", because nothing is right or wrong. The exercise is all about getting closer to the essence of the users' experiences.

On page 18, you will find 'Worksheet 2B', which is a completed note sheet with help text and question format, intended to help your thoughts get started and guide you on the trail of the four impact dimensions.

Figure 3. Note sheets for completion and help text with question format

Dimension	Keywords/parameters	Questions for open evaluation interview
HAVEN Emotional impact		
PERSPECTIVE Intellectual impact		
CREATIVITY Creative impact		
COMMUNITY Social impact		

Dimension	Explanation of dimension	Help questions for filling out the Note sheet
HAVEN Emotional impact	"The Public Library is a free space where users experience well-being and immersion", <i>The impact of public libraries in Denmark: A haven in our community</i> (2021) p. 16. That the library functions as a free space for the citizens is experienced as something the citizens feel and experienced as the feeling of immersing oneself, being able to concentrate, taking a break from everyday life or simply being entertained.	<p>What are the expectations for the event/activity to create free space?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are citizens expected to experience to get a break? • Will the citizens go away having been entertained? <p>How do we ask for that in the open evaluation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was it like to participate, did you feel immersed in the topic? • Did you experience getting the emotions into play? - was moved; surprised, horrified, nostalgic etc.?
PERSPECTIVE Intellectual impact	"The Public Library gives users a perspective on life", <i>The impact of public libraries in Denmark: A haven in our community</i> (2021) p. 17. The library has always aimed to give citizens a perspective on the cultivation of interests and the opportunity to acquire new knowledge, but also in connection with reflection, critical sense and problem solving. Significance in the form of perspective is thereby connected with the library's intellectual significance.	<p>What are the expectations for the event/activity to provide perspective?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should citizens gain some new knowledge? • For example, should they develop their critical understanding of and approach to social media? <p>How do we ask for that in the open evaluation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you learned anything new from participating today? Did you get any new perspectives? • What does this mean for your views on social media? • Do you feel better equipped to tackle social media now?
CREATIVITY Creative impact	"The Public Library gives users the opportunity to develop creatively", <i>The impact of public libraries in Denmark: A haven in our community</i> (2021) p. 18. The library helps to stimulate users' imagination. Many of the activities and offers the library offers motivate citizens to try new things and/or support the citizens' self-expression. Within the creative significance is therefore also the acquisition of new skills and the development of existing ones.	<p>What expectations are there that the event/activity will promote creativity?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should the citizens' imagination be put into play? Should they try something new? • Is it a goal for citizens to acquire new skills, such as seeking information? <p>How do we ask for that in the open evaluation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you challenged your imagination? Have you experienced trying something new? • Do you feel better equipped to search for information now?
COMMUNITY Social impact	"The Public Library promotes communities", <i>The impact of public libraries in Denmark: A haven in our community</i> (2021) p. 19. The library supports communities in two ways. Firstly in the direct sense by the citizens meeting and experiencing togetherness with others at the library, and partly in the indirect sense by the users experiencing the public library as a common property. Through the social significance of community, citizenship, empathy and social relations with fellow citizens and thereby the local community are supported.	<p>What expectations are there that the event/activity will promote communities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should citizens meet other citizens and feel that they belong to the local community? • Will citizens experience being in someone else's place? <p>How do we ask for that in the open evaluation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you talked to someone you did not know before? What does it mean for you to be able to have such experiences at your local library? • What did it mean to you to hear his/her story?

Enjoy!

... the Impact Compass as well as the other methodological tools we have presented in this guide.

We hope the guide will contribute to more nuanced conversations about the impact of the public library and to the development of new concrete activities with the users at the centre.

Contacts

If you want to know more about the project *The impact of public libraries in Denmark: A haven in our community*, you can contact Roskilde Central Library or Seismonaut.



Christian Lauersen is 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. Isabella Gothen is a Process and Development Consultant at Roskilde Central Library. She has been a key figure in the study behind this guide, as well as in the actual development of it.

The consulting company Seismonaut has carried out the study and created the methodological basis, including the Impact Compass. In addition, Seismonaut has conducted the accompanying guide, which describes how the analytical framework can be applied. If you want to know more about the study, or if you are in the process of uncovering your library's impact on your users, you can contact chief adviser and partner Andreas Linnet Jessen or senior adviser Nicklas Hilding Andersen.

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Worksheet 1. Create a customised Impact Compass

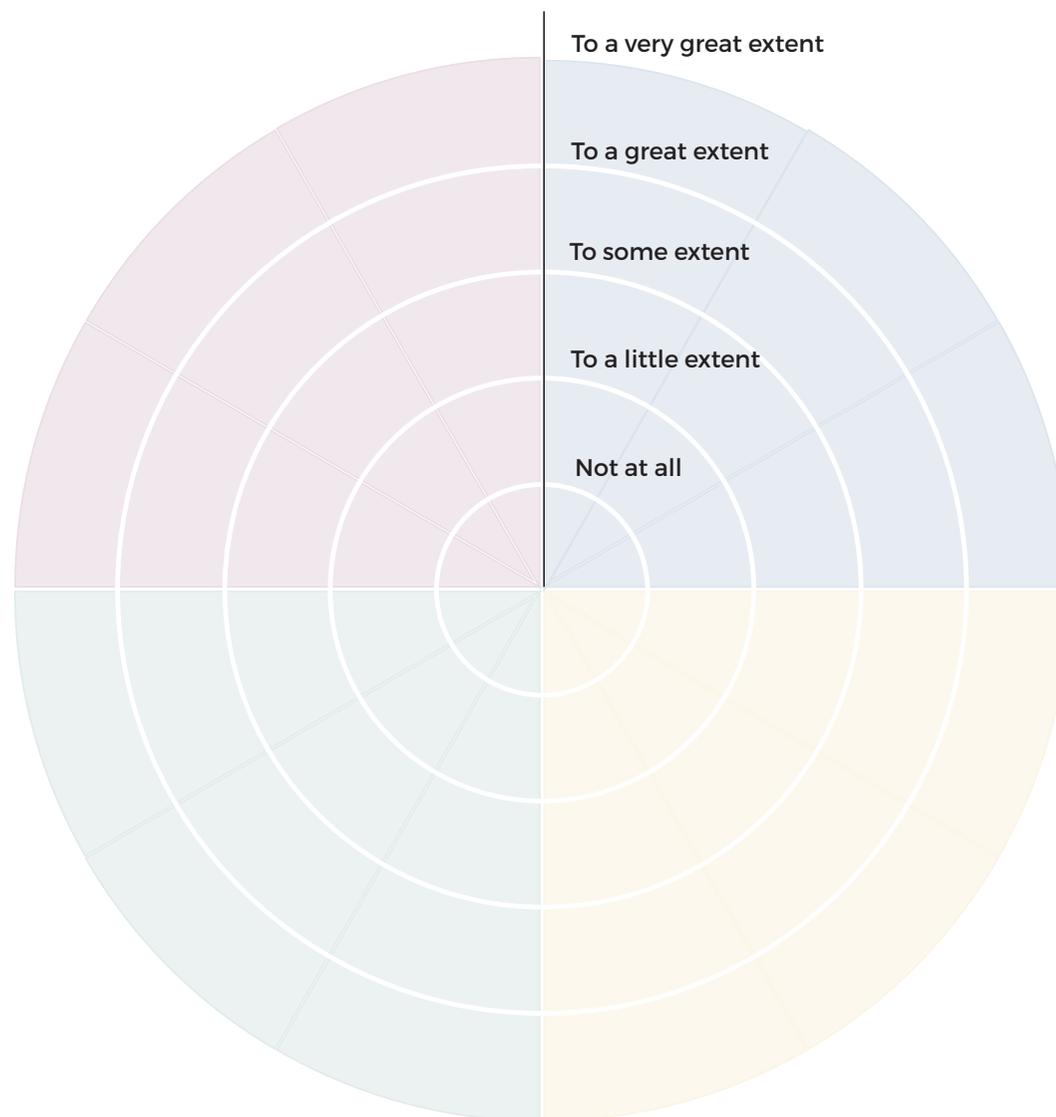
The blank compass allows you to adapt a study to the specific context you are working with (this is described and exemplified in A guide to the Impact Compass, page 6).

You can complete the sheet with the 16 parameters we used in the study 'The impact of public libraries in Denmark: A haven in our community' (see figure 1 in the guide), or you can take the four dimensions as a starting point and develop some other parameters that match the specific activity or study even better.

The goal of building an impact compass for a given activity or effort is to lead the conversation towards impact on the users. On the compass on the right, parameters within the four dimensions should be added. The compass can then be used as a conversational tool to assess the extent to which the dimensions and parameters are expected to be effective.

If you are planning a quantitative study, the compass will be able to support the development of specific questions for this. If, on the other hand, you are planning a series of qualitative conversations with participants for an event, the impact compass can in the same way be used to assess which dimensions or parameters you expect the participants to experience as impactful.

Haven
Perspective
Creativity
Community



Tip!

Feel free to use Worksheets 2A and 2B when working on an adapted Impact Compass.

Worksheet 2A. Note sheet for qualitative evaluation

Identify the most important parameters and create some general research questions.

Dimension	Keywords/parameters	Questions for open evaluation interview
HAVEN Emotional impact		
PERSPECTIVE Intellectual impact		
CREATIVITY Creative impact		
COMMUNITY Social impact		

Worksheet 2B. Help text and question format

Dimension	Explanation of dimension	Help questions for completing Worksheet 1A
HAVEN Emotional impact	<p>"Denmark's public libraries are a haven in which users can immerse themselves and experience well-being", 'The impact of public libraries in Denmark: A haven in our community' (2021) p. 16. That the library functions as a haven for the citizens is expressed as something the citizens feel and therefore covers the emotional impact dimension. Haven can be experienced as the feeling of immersing oneself, being able to concentrate, taking a break from everyday life or simply being entertained.</p>	<p>What are the expectations for the event/activity to create a haven?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are users expected to experience getting a break? • Will users leave the event having been entertained? <p>How do we ask for that in the open evaluation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How was it to participate, did you feel immersed in the topic? • Did you experience getting your emotions stirred? - were you moved; surprised, horrified, nostalgic etc.?
PERSPECTIVE Intellectual impact	<p>"Danish public libraries give users perspective on life", 'The impact of public libraries in Denmark: A haven in our community' (2021) p. 17. The library has always aimed to provide citizens with perspective on the world. Impact in the form of perspective arises both through the cultivation of interests and the opportunity to acquire new knowledge, but also in connection with reflection, critical sense and problem solving. Impact in the form of perspective is thereby connected with the library's intellectual impact.</p>	<p>What are the expectations for the event/activity to provide perspective?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should users acquire some new knowledge? • For example, should they develop their critical understanding of and approach to social media? <p>How do we ask for that in the open evaluation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you learn anything new from participating today? Did you get any new perspectives? • What does this mean for your view on social media? • Do you feel better equipped to tackle social media now?
CREATIVITY Creative impact	<p>"Public libraries allow users the to develop creativity", 'The impact of public libraries in Denmark: A haven in our community' (2021) p. 18. The library helps to stimulate users' imagination. Many of the activities and offers the library offers motivate citizens to try new things and/or support the citizen's self-expression. Within the creative impact is therefore also the acquisition of new skills and the development of existing ones.</p>	<p>What expectations are there that the event/activity will support creativity?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should the users' imagination be put into play? Should they try something new? • Is it a goal for users to acquire new skills, such as seeking information? <p>How do we ask for that in the open evaluation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you challenged your imagination? Have you experienced trying something new? • Do you feel better equipped to search for information now?
COMMUNITY Social impact	<p>"Public libraries help form and maintain communities", 'The impact of public libraries in Denmark: A haven in our community' (2021) p. 19. The library supports communities in two ways: Partly in the direct sense by the users meeting and experiencing togetherness with others at the library, partly in the indirect sense by the users experiencing the public library as a common property. Citizenship, empathy and social relations with fellow citizens and thereby the local community are supported through social impact.</p>	<p>What expectations are there that the event/activity will promote communities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should users meet other citizens and feel that they belong in their local community? • Will users experience seeing things from someone else's standpoint? <p>How do we ask for that in the open evaluation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you talked to someone you did not know before? What does it mean for you to have such an experience at your local library? • What did it mean for you to hear his/her story?

