

Making the Library the Preferred Place to Study: Rethinking Existing Spaces and Opening the Library to the Users

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MAKING THE LIBRARY THE PREFERRED PLACE TO STUDY: RETHINKING AND REDESIGNING EXISTING LIBRARY SPACE

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Abstract

Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences is Norway's largest university college, situated in the city center of Oslo. The University covers a wide range of professional education from teacher training, nursing and other health educations, arts and engineering. The four libraries supports research and education at their local campuses. The main library, P48, moved into existing premises in 2007. This was previous an office space and not ideal for library use. The university is growing and the need for working space for the students are increasing.

In this paper, we will describe the process of rethinking and redesigning existing library space. As a tool for analyzing the use of the premises, we used "Tracking the Traffic" (TTT), and we will present work with this method as a tool for redesign. The redesign of the library included implementing RFID-technology. With this technology we are able to offer extensive self-service to our users, and extend the opening hours without library staff. Our opening hours are now 06-22 all days throughout the year. This means that our users can use the library also when it is unstaffed. Our experience with extended opening hours will be discussed.

A project on rethinking the library premises was established in 2012, and involved all employees at the library P48. Weeding the collection to create more space was imperative to gain alternative space. New furniture and other equipment were introduced in 2014 and 2015. The visits to the library increased 15,3% from 2014-2015. During spring 2016 we did a new TTT to further investigate the use of the premises and made new plans for our main goal: to make the library the preferred place to study. The visits to the library increased with 25% from 2015-2016. The refurbishing and making a new design manual for the library was all done by the library staff of P48.

Keywords: Academic libraries; Library space; Tracking the traffic; Library redesign

Introduction

Oslo and Akershus College of Applied Sciences (HiOA) is Norway's largest state university college. HiOA has four faculties located at two campuses; Faculty of Health Sciences, Faculty of Education and International Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences and Faculty of Technology, Art and Design. HiOA has a student body of approximately 20 000 students and 2 000 employees. The university covers a wide range of professional education from teacher training, nursing and other health educations, arts and engineering.

The Learning Centre and Library's (LSB) main goal is to disseminate knowledge, encourage research and support students. Four libraries, a Learning Support Centre, an English for Academic Purposes Unit, a Diversity in Pedagogical Practices Unit, a Section for Multimedia and Moochahuset ensure that students and staff is offered a wide range of services.

The main library - The Library P48 (P48) is located at Campus Pilestredet, situated in the city center of Oslo. The library resources covers a broad variety of subjects as health science, archivistics, Library and media studies, Teacher education and international studies. The library's main goal is to support students and staff in their academic work.

The Library P48 moved into existing premises in 2007. This was previous an office space, and not ideal for library use. P48 is located on three different floors The book collection with 80 doublesided bookshelves covered most of the space. The library had one silent reading room, one silent readingroom with computers, one Anatomy room, a 24/7 study room, a few soft seatings and some small round "café-tables" between the bookshelves.

Project: rethinking existing spaces

The university was growing and the need for student working space was increasing. The change in the way students work was a major factor in rethinking the use of the library space. LSB set as one of its main goals to become an attractive place to work on campus and to increase the visitation numbers [Læringscenter og bibliotek, 2014].

In 2012 we started a small project in P48 to facilitate for student workspace. The library received some funds and hired an interior architect to make some new floorplans for the library premises. A draft of the premises was made, but then the money ran out. However, the idea of rethinking the space was made, and the staff started their own project. In the beginning all of the staff was involved. There was no money in the project but the desire to make some changes. Three different groups; SPACE, ACTIVITY and STATISTICS was established. Each group had different tasks. The SPACE group made a map of all rooms used by the library. The ACTIVITY group made a list of all the different services and equipment in the library. The Statistics group performed a Track The Traffic (TTT) survey. The Library staff was able to choose which group to participate in.

The project ended with a workshop where all the groups presented their findings and discussed the library space. A smaller group continued this work. A new plan of the premises was made from the findings. The principles for the refurbishing was; ZONES, FLEXIBILITY and WORK SPACE. The main focus was to cater for a variety of activities and learning styles: group seatings, individual seatings and flexible seatings. It is important to have in mind the need for different workspaces to accommodate for the variety of student needs [Fatt Cheong & Su Nee, 2016].

To create more workspace for the students we had to weed the book collection. All of the library staff was involved. Of a total of 80 bookshelves, 16 were removed, enabling more workspace. The space on the first floor was quite dark and claustrophobic with all the bookshelves blocking the natural light. Opening up and letting the light in was an important task.

In 2016 we got funds for implementing the RFID system. This made it possible to make some greater changes in the entrance area. We replaced a 7 meter long reference desk with two smaller infopods and self-service checking machines. We established a new exhibition area and a social zone with a large sofa in bright colors. Opening up this area made the entrance a more welcoming space.

The implementing of the RFID made it possible to enhance the libraries opening hours. The students are now able to use the library outside the staffed opening hours. They get access to the premises by using their student and staff key-card and a pincode.

By choosing the sofa and furniture for the entrance we also choosed new colors for the library. The library was painted in new, fresh colours. A design manual for the different types of furniture and colours was made, making it easy to plan ahead of future fundings.

Creating workspaces

New group study space with flexible furniture and mobile walls was implemented. The flexible furniture makes it easy to rearrange the room for different purposes, such as group study, lectures or events. The mobile walls makes it possible to divide the room into smaller spaces, creating more privacy and reduce noise. Some of the mobile walls can be used as whiteboards.

We have created several new individual seatings, some with screens creating more privacy for work which requires a high level of concentration. Communal work space, with individual seatings was also implemented.

Social zones are furnished with soft seatings, either sofas or lounge chairs with low tables. Our experience is that these spaces are often used for group study making the library mainly as a

working space more than a social meeting place. Of a total of 476 seatings, 162 new seatings was created and we achieved a much better floor-space ratio.

Removing bookshelves and creating new seatings in the library also created more noise. Measures was taken, and we installed soundproofing panels on the walls in several spaces in the library, in all the group study rooms, and the silent reading room. We are now about to put up signs and stickers around the library to display the different kinds of zones: talking allowed, quiet zone and silent zone.

Students use multiple electronic devices in their studying, and the ability to charge these is important. Creating study space with power outlets is a challenge as many of the work spaces often is positioned in the middle of the floor and not next to a wall where the power outlet is.

In our work with planning for working space in the library we looked at the recommendations of accessibility [Nylund & Knarlag, [2009]], and McDonald's key qualities for good learning space [McDonald, 2006]. According to Norwegian laws we are required to make sure that people with disabilities are able to participate in the society on equal terms with other citizens [Universell, 2014]. We try to make our premises as flexible and accessible as possible: adjustable tables, scanning devices and equipment for the visually impaired. Scanners makes it possible to transform text into speech synthesis.

Tracking the traffic (TTT)

Library activity are measured using statistics and questionnaires. The statistics give us valuable numbers about acquisition and discarding of books and other materials, circulation, interlibrary loans, etc. Questionnaires can tell us about user satisfaction with library services. However, not every activity is measured. What about those who use the library as a working space? They use the library PC's alone or in groups. They find literature on the shelves or online, or they use the library as a social meeting place. Is the premises furnished to meet different kind of learning styles? The librarians know there are a variety of activities in the library, many of which are hard to quantify and does not appear in traditional user surveys. In our experience, TTT can be a valuable supplement to statistics and user surveys. TTT can give useful background information in planning and evaluating the library premises and furniture

The method of tracking the traffic is used in public libraries, focusing on who the users are and what they are doing in the library. In university libraries, we know who the users are and why they use the library. We will therefore focus on whether the space and furniture supports and accommodate a variety of students with different learning styles.

Theory

Tracking the traffic gives us other sides of the library activities than traditional statistics. The users themselves and how they use the premises are in focus. Methods from ethnography and geography are used to describe user behavior. In the article "Sweeping the library" Given and Leckie [2003] adopts methods developed for mapping the use of public places and shopping centers to also describe the use of library spaces. Tord Høivik [2014] developed this method to an easy and adaptable way of analyzing the use of libraries. He introduced the "15 activities" as a tool for standardizing the observations and to facilitate comparisons between different libraries. The method has been used in both Norwegian public and academic libraries as well as a great number of libraries abroad.

Systematic observation is a central part of the TTT. The observers are passive participants in the environment. The observers are not taking part in the activities they observe, but are simply looking in from the outside. Neither are they assessing what the students are reading or doing, simply that they read, and what sort of media they use (PC's and other electronic devices, or printed books).

We anticipated the entire staff to take part in the TTT walkthrough. We arranged preparatory meetings where the emphasis was on the role of the observers. We discussed the differences between observation and assessment or interpretation. We also did a preliminary walkthrough to test the schemes and the role of the observers. Because the observations are made by different persons, they are less consistent. However, we gain a sense of community, a fresh look at the library and ownership to the data obtained.

The ethical aspects of the observations were taken care of by information boards in and outside the library. Information was given on when the walkthroughs were taking place and the role of the observers and the purpose of the project.

Method

We used Tord Høivik's methodology for tracking the traffic as described in his blog "Practical statistics" [Høivik]. We did a TTT in 2012 and wanted to do an additional study in 2016, to catch changes.

We started with making a floor plan of the public areas of the library and divided it into zones: circulation area, book collection, group study areas, recreational areas, reading rooms etc. Each zone should be described as to the purpose of the area, number of seating, number of stationary PCs etc. Then we had to decide on a time plan, with dates and times for all walkthroughs, how many rounds per day and how many days. The walkthroughs should be done over a period to gather information about a typical day in the library. We chose two different weeks – one in February and one in April 2016. We did the walkthroughs every hour in the mornings (09, 11 and 13) on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and in the afternoon (15, 17, 19) on Tuesday and Thursday. On Saturday we only did one walkthrough at one o'clock as the library is only staffed between 10:30 and 14.

A list of activities to be observed is crucial, and Høivik strongly recommends his standard list of activities. Using the standard list will enable benchmarking with other, similar libraries.

In 2012 the 15 activities were expanded with a 16th activity: group contact with staff:

Individual activities

1. ALUP = Walks or stands alone. Covers standing or walking around without browsing and without relating to library staff or other users.
2. ALBR = Browses alone. Covers browsing or scanning of items on shelves while standing or walking around. Includes watching exhibitions.
3. ALSI = Sits alone. Sits alone without relating to media, to library staff or to other users.
4. ALMD = Sits alone reading (or writing). Sits and reads by her/himself. Includes individual work - reading and or writing - without using data equipment. Includes listening to music, watching videos and using other media - but not the use of computers.
5. ALLT = Sits alone with laptop. Sits alone with active mobile or tablet computer (active screen)
6. ALPC = Sits alone with stationary computer. Sits alone with stationary active computer (active screen).
7. ALSF = Individual contact with staff. Covers all direct contact with staff. Here we want to register activities where staff spends time with an individual user, whether it involves speaking, writing, demonstrating or walking around.

Group activities

1. GRUP = Walks or stands in company. Participates in a group of two or more persons that stands or walks around without browsing and without relating to library staff.
2. GRBR = Browses in company. Participates in a group of two or more persons that browse or scan items on shelves together while standing or walking around.
3. GRSI = Sits in a group without media. Participates in a group of two or more persons that does not relate to books or other media or to library staff.
4. GRMD = Sits in a group with media. Participates in a group without active computer, where at least one person relates to books or other media. [Use GRLT or GRPC for groups with active use of data].
5. GRLT = Sits in a group with laptop(s). Participates in a group where at least one person is using a mobile PC (active screen).
6. GRPC = Sits in a group with stationary computer(s). Participates in a group of two or more persons that is using one or more stationary PCs (active screen).

7. GRSF = Group contact with staff. Covers all direct contact with staff. Here we want to register activities where staff spends time with a group of several users, whether it involves speaking, writing, demonstrating or walking around.

Other

1. QUE = Queuing. Covers all visible waiting for service or facilities, whether in a proper line or not: waiting for staff, waiting for access to equipment, toilet queues, also.

ETC = Other activities. Activities not covered by the other categories.

Floor plans of the of the library floors with defined zones

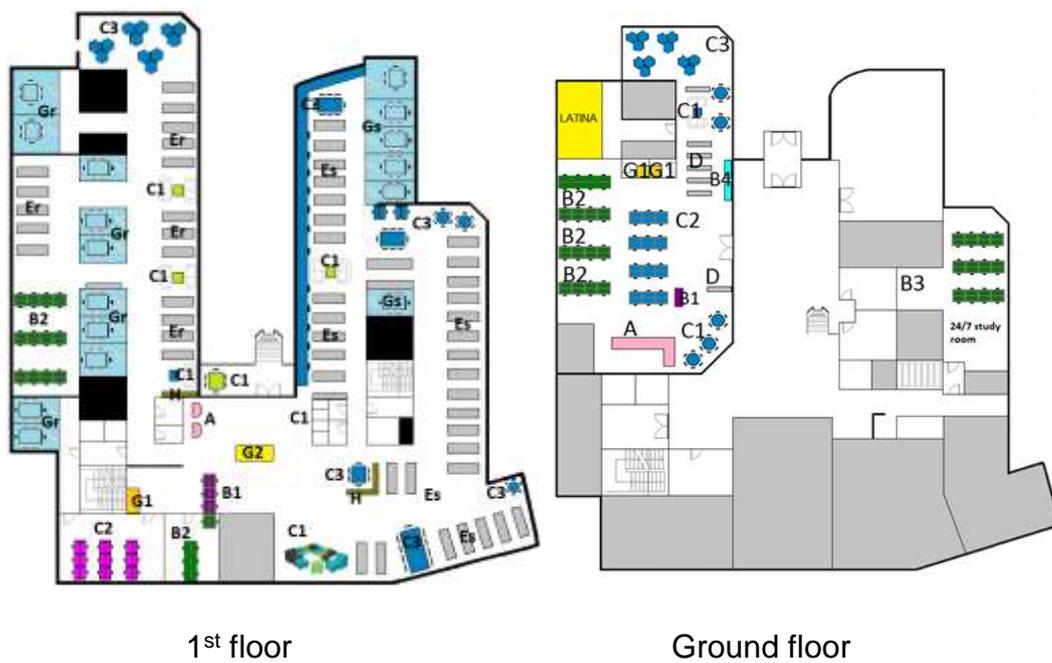


Figure 1: Floor plan

P48 – ZONES TTT

A	Circulation area
B1	Public Pc's
B2	PC workplaces
B3	PC workplaces, 24/7 study room
B4	IPad project
C1	Entrance area on ground and first floor, group tables and , sofas
C2	Quiet reading rooms
C3	Reading space/group tables
C4	Anatomy room
C5	Learning lab
D	Media: journals and newspapers
Er	Media: R-wing (fiction)
Es	Media: S-wing (nonfiction)
Fr	Group study rooms – R-wing
Fs	Group study rooms – S-wing
G1	Copy machine
G2	Self service check in/out
H	Meda: Music, films, student assignments

The activities and the zones are put in a spreadsheet (Excel) enabling us to find the distribution of users by hours, zones and activities. From this we can explore a number of bivariate distributions, like what zones are most used during the day, what activities are the most popular, what activities takes place in different zones. Hence the results are given in percentage of the people present in the library.

Our experience from several TTT is that some of the activities are difficult to track, as the students now are using a multiple of devices and materials simultaneously. This makes it often difficult to pin it down to one specific activity. This makes the observations even more reliable on the observers' interpretations.

Results from the 2016 sweeps

Activities:

The first floor is the main library floor, with the library circulation desks, the library collections, group study rooms, quiet reading rooms and furniture for both group activities as well as individual work. Nearly 60% of the observed activities takes place on the first floor.

55% is group activities and 45% of the groups use one or more laptops – in the group study rooms and in the library space in general.

Only 10% use printed books without any digital equipment.

The ground floor contains area for individual study, with 24 library PC's and reading tables for 24 persons. There is also a flexible space used for presentations and group work. The ground floor area also hosts the IT help desk staffed with IT students.

36% of the overall activities takes part on the ground floor. 43% use the library PCs alone while 38% bring their own laptops. 85% sits alone and only 15% works in groups on the ground floor.

On the ground floor we also have the 24/7 study room with direct access from the street. This contains library PC's and individual reading tables. This room is not widely known. The average per day use is 35, which is 5.5% of the total library visits.

Zones:

Top three zones are: group study rooms and spaces for group work, quiet reading rooms and spaces with sofas and soft furniture. We also observed that although the spaces for group activities can be quite noisy, many students prefer to sit here alone. Sitting alone together, in a

place to see and be seen, is an activity described by Gayton [2008] :” as a communal activity “ What they come for and value is the “communal” experience of seeing and being seen by others, quietly engaged in the same serious, studious activity.”[Gayton, 2008, p. 61]

One of the findings from the 2012 study was the relatively high number – 13%, of people “strolling”, walking around with no obvious aim than to find a place to sit or people to meet. In the 2016 study this was reduced to a minimum. The number of seatings has been increased by 162, and the gate counts shows an increase of 25% on the main library floor. This tells us that weeding the collection and replacing bookshelves with study spaces is the right thing to do.

It is important to remember that the library sweeps gives a short glimpse of the use of the library premises at a given period of time. For the library employees it can be disappointing to see that the users are in contact with the staff only 3% of the time. Counting the reference questions gives quite another picture.

This also goes for the self-service checking machines. Since the time spent in front of these machines are very limited, they hardly make an impact on the sweeps. However, our library statistics tells us that more than half of the loans and returns of books are made with the self-checking machines.

Extended opening hours:

RFID technology is installed in all the printed materials, in the gates and the self-checking machines. The technology opens up to a wider use of self-service, and from December 2016 we have opened the library from 06 in the morning to 22 in the evening all days throughout the year. This has been implemented without reducing the staffed opening hours, but is offered as an additional service. This has turned out to be highly popular. During the weekends the visits to the library has increased considerably. The users can borrow and check out printed materials and reserved books. But first and foremost, the library is used as a working space.

The library is situated in the center of Oslo and we did worry about how the library might be used during weekends and holidays. However, we already had experience with a 24/7 study room which did not give us any worries. This room is equipped with stationary PC's and study facilities, but no soft furniture. Access to the library premises after 4 o'clock in the afternoon and before 8 o'clock in the mornings in the staffed opening hours is regulated by the use of student or staff key-cards. Video surveillance at the entrance door makes it possible to track any severe incidents, should it occur. All buildings on campus closes at 22 in the evening, and security personnel see to that all buildings are empty during the night. Access is restricted to the university's staff and students. Others might enter together with someone with an access card, but this has so far not been a problem. The biggest change is more tidying up and emptying of rubbish bins on Monday mornings. We also feared that the library would be used as a cheap overnight stop, but so far this has not happened.

Further plans

“Space and service are inseparable, and it can be argued that the provision of space is a service in its own right” [Watson, 2013, p. xvii]. We will continue to create more learning spaces with suitable furniture. A new service, providing a Learning Lab in the library, will demand new space and new services. This will be our main goal for next year.

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