

# The potential of libraries in building bridges between cultures



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## Abstract

The subject of immigrants and integration is often a heavily debated topic, with a lot of people voicing concerns on how to handle a growing minority and diversity in a country that used to be almost homogeneous in culture. Such concerns and apprehension against immigrants are much less prevalent among those who have spent more time in education and among the younger generations, and are on the other hand more prevalent among the older generations and those who have not spent much in education beyond primary school. One of the explanations offered by some studies for this being the case, is that the younger generations and those in education for a longer time, experience more exposure to foreign cultures and more often form personal acquaintances with people of different ethnicities. In other words by familiarizing people with different cultures, it may be possible to reduce the apprehension and concern regarding integration.

On the other side of the issue of integration are the immigrants, who despite having experienced improvement regarding employment, education etc. still express that many of them struggle with adapting to living in Denmark and form relations with the local community.

The research in this paper aims to explore whether the public libraries in Denmark could have a great potential in promoting intercultural competence and thereby build bridges between the majority and the minorities. To be more exact, the problem this paper aims to shine a light on is; how can public libraries promote intercultural sensitivity and help ethnic minorities in achieving a sense of belonging in Danish society?

To start with, this paper will research whether there have been earlier projects or studies in this field. Then this study will attempt to evaluate how libraries could help immigrants with adjusting to life in Denmark, how conscious they are of people with limited skills in the Danish language and how they could encourage inclusion in the local community.

This exploration and evaluation will be based in part on a survey of all the websites belonging to the public libraries in Denmark, that are intended to use for the public to find information about their individual library and the facilities, materials and services available. The survey of the websites will focus on whether there is information available in other languages than Danish, whether there are immigrant oriented services or events advertised etc. The methods used in this analysis are cognitive walkthrough, general inductive analysis and quantitative analysis. The other part of the evaluation mentioned earlier, will be based on the analysis using Grounded theory on the answers of a qualitative questionnaire, that was distributed at the main public library in Aalborg and answered by voluntary patrons of the library. This questionnaire will also serve to explore how Danish and immigrant patrons experience the library as a intercultural social space, as well as possibly give an insight into how they would like the library to change in the future, in order to further aid immigrants in gaining a sense of belonging in Danish society.

In conclusion, the public libraries in part already help immigrants in adjusting to living in Denmark, however there is a lot of unexploited potential.

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## Intro

Immigration and integration have been a source of a lot of debate in Denmark, where in recent years the public opinion on the subject of immigrants among Danes has been paradoxical at best. The paradox of public opinion is that on one hand; concerns and apprehension in regards to immigrants and refugees are greater than they have been in decades, however on the other hand; there is plenty of genuine interest in importing a workforce and opening more of the labor market to foreign workers.<sup>1</sup> To make matters worse, most of the time the subject about immigrants is mentioned in the news, the context is prevailantly negative. This is in large part due to the news covering politicians, who more often than not express concerns on how to deal with crimes committed by immigrants or legislative problems with integration.<sup>2</sup> Yet, despite the negative frame of reference being portrayed in the media and the growing concern in public opinion, integration has in many ways been improving.

According to the Ministry of Immigration and Integration, integration in Denmark has improved in six of the nine parameters they monitor and measure annually, including parameters such as employment, education, reduction of immigrants living in “disadvantaged

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<sup>1</sup> Andersen, Torben K. & Reiermann, Jens. (2019) *Danskernes bekymring for indvandring er historisk stor – men færre efterlyser stramninger*. Mandag morgen.

<sup>2</sup> Mezouri, Marwa. (2021) *Undersøgelse afslører udbredte myter om indvandrere*. TV2 Samfund.

neighborhoods”<sup>3</sup> and reduction in criminal behavior committed by immigrants.<sup>4</sup> However, according to the ministry there are two parameters where integration is experiencing regression and those are the parameters concerning how well immigrants in Denmark are developing their language skills in Danish and their growing lack of a sense of belonging in their local communities. This unfortunate regression could in part be caused by the discrimination and prejudice the majority of ethnic minorities seem to experience, as indicated by a study made last year by the Danish Institute for Human Rights.<sup>5</sup> In other words, immigrants face not only the challenge of having to learn and adjust to the Danish language and culture in order to integrate in Danish society, they also have to face a community that is possibly prejudiced against them.

For years public libraries have been considered as safe spaces to ethnic minorities and in many cases they already play a part in aiding them in adjusting to life in Denmark.<sup>6</sup> Aside from providing services to help newly arrived immigrants in navigating public services and responsibilities, some libraries offer assistance with learning Danish and host language cafés that promote intercultural socialization. This could indicate that the public libraries could be a great tool to facilitate integration in the future, both by helping immigrants in developing language skills and possibly by promoting intercultural sensitivity and thereby act as a bridge between the local community and the immigrants.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the potential of building bridges between the ethnic minorities and the native majority in Denmark by using the public libraries and thereby possibly discover how the public libraries could improve their aid to immigrants in their endeavor to achieve a sense of belonging in Denmark. The problem this paper will focus on is therefore:

### **How can public libraries promote intercultural sensitivity and help ethnic minorities in achieving a sense of belonging in Danish society?**

In order to reach a conclusion concerning this problem, this paper will use these three research questions as a point of departure:

Question 1: How substantial have earlier initiatives or projects in the Danish libraries, specifically aimed at integration or intercultural relations, been?

Question 2: How conscious do the Danish public libraries appear to be of the information needs of people with limited or no skills in the Danish language, according to the designs of their websites?

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<sup>3</sup> A term mostly used in Danish politics, in regards to areas with significant numbers of social housing, low employment, low education among inhabitants and above average number of inhabitants earlier convicted of infractions against the law.

<sup>4</sup> Det Nationale Integrationsbarometer. Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet.  
<https://integrationsbarometer.dk/barometer>

<sup>5</sup> Brygger, Rasmus & Holck, Louise.(2023) *Flertal af minoritetsetniske personer oplever diskrimination i Danmark*. The Danish Institute for Human Rights.

<sup>6</sup> Farhendorff, Rasmus & Pedersen, Evander.(2022) *Biblioteker kan være flygtninges vej ind i det danske samfund: "Der er ingen, der dømmer dig ude på biblioteket"*. Kristeligt Dagblad

Question 3: How are immigrants and local people's experiences with language cafés and what other possible activities could the library perform to promote intercultural sensitivity?

To answer the first research question, I will perform a literature review of literature related to integration and public libraries. The second research question will be answered by completing a national survey of all 99 websites representing the public libraries in Denmark. The answer to the third question will be based on an analysis of the answers to a questionnaire, which will be distributed in the main library in Aalborg.

## Literature review

Before delving into reviewing other possible studies or projects that have focused on the subject of this paper, it would be a good idea to do a short exposition on how immigrants are classified and how the discourse concerning integration has developed in Denmark. This will form some background for the literature reviewed, as well for the materials used in connection to the two analyses performed in this paper. This literature review will also do a short summary on the importance of public libraries in a democracy, the purpose they should serve and how people in general view them. At last, there will be a review of the studies on the public libraries and their possible role in integration and an overview of the projects related to integration reported by the Danish Library Association.

## The subject of integration in Denmark

While the debate about immigration and integration has been going on for more than 50 years in public discourse, politics and media, a pivotal change in the discourse concerning the debate happened in 2001 as a result of the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York. The discourse became borderline hostile against all people from the Middle East as the media portrayed acts of terrorism being committed solely in the name of Islamic religion. Shortly after these events took place, the Danish government made legislation that was much more restrictive in allowing immigrants and asylum seekers into the country. These restrictions made it much more difficult to achieve residence permits, citizenship etc. and a lot of these restrictions have not been changed in any significant way since then.

As of now, Denmark is the most difficult country among the Nordic countries for immigrants to integrate in, according to Migrant Integration Policy Index<sup>7</sup>, with a lower MIPEX score, than most other western countries. MIPEX is a measurement based on 58 policy indicators within 8 policy areas; Labour market mobility, Family reunion, Education, Health, Political participation, Permanent residence, Access to nationality and Anti-discrimination<sup>8</sup> This score goes from 0 to 100, where the more favorable a country is with their policies the higher the score is. Denmark scored 49 on their index, while Norway scored 69 and Sweden along with Finland scored respectively 86 and 85.

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<sup>7</sup> Solano, Giacomo & Huddleston, Thomas.(2020) *Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020*.

<sup>8</sup> Solano & Huddleston.(2020) *Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020*.

To make matters more challenging, according to a significant portion of politicians and people in the public discourse, it is not enough for immigrants to fulfill the demands of the policies and adjust to Danish society, they must embrace Danish culture and values as well. This frame of mind is particularly aimed at immigrants who are practicing muslims, where their religious beliefs and cultural values are emphasized as being in direct conflict with Danish values. This conflict between values is not only portrayed as a problem for the national cohesion but also a potential threat to the public and Danish society in general, by politicians who say that immigrants need to undergo “mental integration” as well.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately the definitions of Danish values and the prerequisites for becoming “Danish enough” in order to be acknowledged as Danish are often vaguely communicated and seldomly is there any consensus on the matter. Probably as a result of this discourse, many first generation descendants of immigrants struggle to feel national belonging and identify themselves as Danish, even though they were born in Denmark, have Danish citizenship, speak Danish, have attended Danish primary School etc.<sup>10</sup>

The Ministry of Immigration and Integration typically classifies immigrants into three groups; western immigrants, non-western immigrants and descendants. The term western immigrants is designated to people who are born in countries belonging to the EU, USA, Canada, Andorra, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Norway, San Marino, Switzerland, UK, Australia, New Zealand and the Vatican state. The term non-western immigrant is used for people born in any other country than those mentioned earlier and it is this group as well as their descendants that often are the targets of prejudice and media attention in connection to the debate on integration. In other words, the concern and apprehension many Danish citizens harbor against immigrants is mostly, specifically aimed at the non-western immigrants who are, as mentioned earlier, presumed to not share the values that Danes value and whose culture is vastly different from Danish culture. It is this group along with asylum seekers from Africa and the Middle East that often are portrayed in the media as potential threats or economical burdens and often face the demand that they should disregard their heritage and assimilate to Danish culture and values.

A lot of responsibility for the negative public discourse concerning the non-western immigrants seems to fall to the media, who consistently frame news regarding immigrants in a negative way.<sup>11</sup> This becomes even more problematic, since the news are in many cases the only source of information regarding immigrants that a lot of Danes encounter on a regular basis and therefore they are more vulnerable to accepting the prejudice perpetuated by the media. This perspective is supported by the fact that there is significantly less apprehension against non-western immigrants among the younger generations, who often have grown up in a more multicultural environment than the previous generations.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Christiansen, Michael Ø.(2014) *Konservative savner fokus på mental integration*. Jydske Vestkysten

<sup>10</sup> Simonsen, Kristina B.(2017) ”Hvor dansk skal man være for at være dansk?” *Hvordan unge efterkommere af indvandrere fra Mellemøsten oplever mulighederne for at høre til i Danmark*. Politica, 49. årg. nr. 3, 2017. pp. 312-329

<sup>11</sup> Copelji, Dino.(2021) *Den fremmedfjendske framing af flygtninge og indvandrere i medierne*. Pov.International.

<sup>12</sup> Andersen & Reiermann(2019) *Danskernes bekymring for indvandring er historisk stor*.

Another major factor regarding the statistical probability on whether people are apprehensive or not towards immigrants is education, where a clear divide can be observed between those who attended high school and those who have not, according to Christian Albrekt Larsen.<sup>13</sup> It could then stand to reason that by educating Danes in other cultures in a neutral setting and as well as possibly forming personal acquaintances with people of other cultures, apprehension based on prejudice could be reduced greatly. As institutions of learning and culture, the public library could then play a crucial role in preventing and reducing prejudice against non-western immigrants in the future.

## The public libraries purpose

The public library is by many considered one of the cornerstones of democracy, since they empower citizens to make informed decisions when participating politically, by providing free and equal access to information. By law,<sup>14</sup> the purpose and duty of the public libraries is to promote enlightenment, education and culture, by procuring materials such as books, newspapers, movies etc. including internet access and ensuring those materials are available to the public. This law applies to the more than 300 public libraries in Denmark dispersed across the 98 municipalities, which all are connected locally within their municipality. The public libraries are interconnected within their municipalities through their shared website and even the staff is sometimes not hired to work in a single library, but rather work in a collective with all the libraries within the municipality. An example of this is the public libraries in the municipality of Vesthimmerland, where four libraries share the website Vhbib.dk and there is one library manager who manages all four libraries and the staff working in them.<sup>15</sup> Aside from the local interconnectivity, the libraries are also nationally connected to each other through the central libraries and the online collective portal Bibliotek.dk.

In the past decade the public libraries have been going through a lot of changes, especially when it comes to developing digital services and options, in an effort to modernize themselves.<sup>16</sup> While some have questioned whether the libraries had not lost their purpose since most information is freely available on the internet and services such as Mofibo, Google Books, Spotify etc. now offer people easy access to a lot of the same materials as the libraries, others argue that the public libraries are more important than ever. Fortunately for the libraries, it seems like the majority of the public still consider libraries to be important according to a survey performed by Tænketanken Fremtidens Biblioteker in 2023,<sup>17</sup> where 72% of the participants in their survey answered that they agree with the statement that libraries are very important to society.

One of the reasons why the public libraries might be increasingly important for a democratic society is because of the growing amount of misinformation and disinformation

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<sup>13</sup> Professor from Aalborg University mentioned in the article Andersen & Reiermann(2019)

<sup>14</sup> The Ministry of Culture.(2013) *Bekendtgørelse af lov om biblioteksvirksomhed*. LBK nr. 100, 30/01/2013. §1.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.vhbib.dk/biblioteker> , <https://www.vhbib.dk/content/personalet-paa-vesthimmerlands-biblioteker>

<sup>16</sup> Tænketanken Fremtidens Biblioteker (2023) *Biblioteksbrug i dag og i morgen – en målgruppebaseret kortlægning*. KLS Pureprint. ISBN 9788790849047

<sup>17</sup> Tænketanken.(2023) *Biblioteksbrug i dag og i morgen*.

being spread on the internet. In particular there is a lot of concern regarding social media, where false news may spread up to 6 times faster and reach twice the number of people than authentic news.<sup>18</sup> As institutions of learning and enlightenment, the public libraries could be considered to be uniquely equipped to combat misinformation and to ensure that the public can be correctly informed. This could be one of features of the public library that aids integration, in reference to dispelling some of the prejudice against immigrants that is caused by misinformation.

Aside from improving their digital services, the public libraries have in the past decade also been investing in improving their physical environments and trying to change their public image, from simply being places that keep books and information available to the public, into institutions of culture with several different service and activity options. One of the changes the public libraries have been focusing on is to become attractive social spaces for people to socialize, study and engage in cultural activities together. This is not only reflected in the changes of the physical spaces in many public libraries, but also in the rise of the amount of events and activities being arranged and hosted by them. As of 2019, the number of events hosted by the public libraries had gone up 90% since 2011.<sup>19</sup>

While the public libraries have been working on improving themselves in order to accustom to the public's change of needs, they have for a long time been frequently used and been considered a safe space by immigrants and refugees.

## The Danish libraries' role in integration

The idea that the public libraries could build bridges between cultures is not a new one, in the sense that libraries can support immigrants in adjusting to living in Denmark by offering them access to information and help them in improving their language skills. This idea is at least two decades old, as proven by the report "Refuge for Integration" made in 2001 by The State and University Library in Århus in collaboration with the public library of Århus and with the support of the Danish National Library Authority.<sup>20</sup> According to the report the number of ethnic minorities that used the libraries in their case studies is about equivalent to the number Danish people that used them, except many ethnic minority library users would frequent them more often than their Danish counterparts in general. Through that survey they discovered that a significant portion of the ethnic minorities valued the libraries for their support in learning Danish and that many of them viewed the public library as a social space. In other words, to them the library was not only a place to find and borrow physical materials<sup>21</sup>, but a place to congregate and socialize outside of the home. However, most of the focus of the report was on how to improve the user experience for the ethnic minorities in regards to the physical materials available to them. In the conclusion of the

<sup>18</sup> Vosoughi, Soroush; Roy, Deb & Aral, Sinan(2018). *The Spread of True and False News Online*. MIT Initiative on The Digital Economy.

<sup>19</sup> Jessen, Jeppe B.; Jensen, Nina F.; Jensen, Jeppe N. & Starup, Marie.(2019) *Folkebiblioteker i tal 2019*. Slots-og Kulturstyrelsen. ISBN: 978-87-92681-96-6

<sup>20</sup> The State and University Library, Århus public library & Danish National Library Authority.(2001) *Frirum til integration*. The State and University Library. 2. edition, 1. print. ISBN: 87-7507-282-3

<sup>21</sup> A general term for lendable materials such as books, CD's, video, games etc.



report, their recommendations for the public libraries was that they should build up larger stocks of reading materials in foreign languages or facilitate access to the Immigrant Library<sup>22</sup> along with six other suggestions regarding improving the physical materials. It was also suggested that they should put more effort in spreading information about the library by reaching out to the ethnic minorities through other places where they congregate and by translating more information. Another recommendation was that they should make more use of the internet, both in regards to spreading information and in regards to granting users of the library more access to it. At last the report suggested that there was a need for educating the staff in how to handle encounters between cultures.

This report makes observations that many immigrants consider the library as a social space, yet none of the recommendations are centered around that discovery, except for the last one on their list concerning educating the staff. What is unfortunate about the conclusion and their perspective on how to improve the public library as an institution, is that the report more than anything focuses on the library's repository of physical materials and improving that, in order to better satisfy the wants of the ethnic minorities. While I understand that the first priority of the public libraries is to ensure access to literature and other knowledge and/or culturally enriching media<sup>23</sup>, as it is their task and purpose in regards to the role of a traditional public library, I still can't help but think that the report overlooked the potential of their discoveries. Luckily, it did not stay unnoticed.

"Refuge for Integration"<sup>24</sup> is now by some considered to be the conversation starter on the subject of libraries possibly having a role to play in relation to integration and possibly the first paper to articulate that the public library could be regarded as a social space rather than just a repository of information and physical materials for the public. Since that report was published, several projects have been launched with the aim of reaching out to the ethnic minorities and further supporting them in their efforts to integrate into Danish society. Some projects were initiated locally, such as the public libraries in Vollsmose, Gellerup and Nørrebro, which were all located in or close to disadvantaged neighborhoods.<sup>25</sup> While guided by the same idea of supporting integration by diverging from the tasks and image of the traditional library and focusing on being more social institutions, they differed in their approach on how to improve their services for the ethnic minorities.

In Vollsmose, the public library reinvented their image in the local community as "Vollsmose's Living Room", in order to invoke more familiarity and to draw more attention to the library as a social space for the local community.<sup>26</sup> More significantly, they focused on opening a Learning center, which transformed the earlier launched concept of libraries as learning centers in a way that would later inspire other libraries to include more learning in their modernization of the libraries services and duties.<sup>27</sup> In the new Learning center

<sup>22</sup> The State and University Library.(2001) *Frirum til integration*.

<sup>23</sup> Another term for books, newspapers, CD's etc.

<sup>24</sup> The State and University Library.(2001) *Frirum til integration*.

<sup>25</sup> Delica, K. & Elbeshausen, H.(2013). *Socio-cultural innovation through and by public libraries in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Denmark: concepts and practices*. Information Research, 18(3) paper C14.

<sup>26</sup> Delica & Elbeshausen.(2013). *Socio-cultural innovation through and by public libraries...*

<sup>27</sup> Elbeshausen, H.(2005). *Hvad har Hans Hansen og Brug Brugsen tilfælles? Om sproglæring, identitet og biblioteksbetjening af etniske minoriteter.* Dansk Biblioteksforskning, 1(1), 5-17

self-organized study groups were supported by staff that focused equally on their traditional library duties and teaching, all in effort to improve their language skills, knowledge about Danish society and information literacy. In the case of Vollsmose, the public library was in a disadvantaged neighborhood where, unlike in most other places, the immigrants were the majority of the local community, making this kind of project probably even more important.

In Gellerup their approach was to establish a combination of a public library and a community center, where the library acted as the agent that promoted collaboration between representatives from different branches of socially oriented government provided services.<sup>28</sup> In summary; *“It is notable that the creation of CCG<sup>29</sup> and the deliberation taking place regarding the role of a combined library and community centre in the local community focused on the desire to offer residents a 'one stop solution' with regard to their questions and needs.”*<sup>30</sup>

In other words the idea was to take a holistic approach to the community and create a multifunctional service platform where it would be possible to have easy access to all information and guidance the residents might need regarding their social welfare. This project was continuously worked on and improved for years, resulting in it no longer only being a project and it became an integrated part of the community. However, as of today I’m not sure if this community center still is active, since CCG is not listed on the collective website representing all libraries in the municipality of Aarhus.<sup>31</sup>

A third approach was taken into use by the public library in Nørrebro, was to reach out to users where they are, possibly taking inspiration from one of the recommendations from “Refuge for Integration” and taking it to the next level. Many projects were put in motion based on that approach, however the projects that specifically were designed for the library to venture outside their physical building and arrange visits to some of the local community’s residents’ homes were the most notable ones.<sup>32</sup> Later the project *“Open the Door to Language”*<sup>33</sup> would be expanded to other areas in Copenhagen, giving more children in disadvantaged neighborhoods support with language, by a librarian visiting with books from the library. Reading between the lines in *“Socio-cultural innovation through and by public libraries...”* it would seem this approach was probably chosen here due to the area more often being a place of political activism and unrest. Maybe it was also due to the residents of the library’s local community being more diverse in regards to ethnicity, socioeconomics and politically, in comparison to the local communities of the two libraries mentioned earlier. Why these circumstances would be a factor was not explained in detail, but it could give the impression that the library in this community was not considered as a safe social space to ethnic minorities, or at least not to the same degree as in the other public libraries. Additionally, they also attempted to get some input on the users needs and wishes in the library by placing a whiteboard, with the phrase *“What do you want in the library?”*

<sup>28</sup> Delica & Elbeshausen.(2013). *Socio-cultural innovation through and by public libraries...*

<sup>29</sup> Community centre Gellerup.

<sup>30</sup> Delica & Elbeshausen.(2013). *Socio-cultural innovation through and by public libraries...* pp. 8, l. 22-24.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.aakb.dk/libraries-in-aarhus>

<sup>32</sup> Delica & Elbeshausen.(2013). *Socio-cultural innovation through and by public libraries...*

<sup>33</sup> Delica & Elbeshausen.(2013). *Socio-cultural innovation through and by public libraries...*pp. 11.

written on it, at the entrance of the library on a regular basis for a time. The result of this was more than 400 suggestions, whereof some of them were implemented.

At the end of their paper, Delica & Elbeshausen.(2013), concluded that these three libraries mentioned earlier prove the potential that public libraries have as institutions to build relations with their local community and become social spaces, as it was indicated in “Refuge for Integration ”. As these libraries transitioned away from the traditional role of a public library and reshaped their relation to their local community and their users, they also laid the groundwork for other libraries to change in the years to follow. There is however one thing that can seriously slow the progress down and that is the matter of funding.

Vollsmose, Gellerup and Nørrebro are some examples of how public libraries on a local level have taken initiative to aid integration, but there have also been projects launched on a national level such as The Danish Library Centre for Integration<sup>34</sup>. Unfortunately I have not been able to find the evaluation report on that project, however it would seem like that project has been shut down, since the Danish Library Centre for Integration is permanently closed. Another indicator of the project no longer being in effect is that references to that place such as the hyperlink on the official website of civil services Borger.dk, just directs you to the multilingual resources of the Royal Danish Library on their website.

At the end of having completed this literature review, it is evident that despite the limited venture into the public libraries’ potential as social spaces in the report from 2001, it has inspired the Danish public libraries to reconsider the role of the public library in their local communities. Since then, a lot of effort has been put into reinventing the image and role of the public library as they sought to modernize and transition from the traditional repository based library, to a social institution of culture and learning. It is also evident that many public libraries have shown interest in aiding integration by trying to reach out to the ethnic minorities and starting projects that are focused on helping them in adjusting to living in Denmark. Unfortunately it would seem like, that despite the interest from the public libraries in aiding integration and numerous launched projects to improve themselves as institutions of learning and culture with several services and activities focused on helping immigrants in adjusting to life in their local community and Danish society, they are yet not included in the government’s plans when they are devising national initiatives to improve integration.<sup>35</sup>

However, most of these projects have been aimed at increasing immigrants’ language skills in Danish and/or have been focused on attracting more of their local residents of the ethnic minorities to become users of the public library. Often either by increasing the number of services regarding information seeking and improving the variety of physical materials or by making an effort to reach them outside the library through other social spaces. As for the library as a learning center their focus most of the time has been as mentioned earlier on language skills and on assisting them in entering the labor market or educating them in internet usage and other technical skills with relevance to education, work or the legal process of immigration. To my knowledge, almost none of the projects were designed to

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<sup>34</sup> European Commission. The Danish Library Centre for Integration.

[https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/integration-practice/danish-library-centre-integration\\_en](https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/integration-practice/danish-library-centre-integration_en)

<sup>35</sup> Danmarks Biblioteksforening.(2018) *Integrationsindsatser 2018*.

<https://db.dk/nyheder/integrationsindsatser-2018/>

encourage the local Danish citizens to learn about or build relations with the ethnic minorities now living and becoming part of their local community. In other words, even though the report “Refuge for Integration” and some of the other projects claim that the goal is integration and not assimilation, all efforts so far have been aimed at ethnic minorities. If integration truly is the goal, I would argue that there is a need for some initiatives that rather focus on breaking the prejudice and reduce the apprehension against immigrants among the native Danish. As mentioned earlier, the public library is uniquely equipped as an institution of learning and culture to inform and educate the Danish people of their local community and encourage multicultural relation building.

## Methodology

The philosophical approach of this thesis to study the problem of how the public libraries can promote intercultural sensitivity and aid immigrants in gaining a sense of belonging in Danish society, is the interpretivist position of epistemology and the constructivist position of ontology. Since this study aims to gain understanding in how Danes and immigrants view the public libraries and their role as institutions of learning and enlightenment that might have an influence on the social issue of integration, it makes sense to use both perspectives.

Interpretivism puts a great emphasis on the importance of understanding the individual's perspectives on social reality through interpreting their experiences and opinions.<sup>36</sup> According to this school of thought, it is necessary to include the context and interpretation of individuals in order to understand social phenomena, which is in contrast to the perspective of positivism and realism, that are in some ways similar to natural science's school of thought in the sense that they view reality as something that can be observed without a for interpretation.<sup>37</sup> In the case of this study, rather than observing there is a need for interpreting what the patrons communicate on the subject and the possible reasons behind their statements in order to gain an understanding of how patrons view the public library as a social space and the activities they engage in or initiatives they could implement in regards to integration. Therefore I would consider interpretivism to be the most appropriate approach.

However, since the subject of the problem of this study is not only oriented around individuals' experiences with the public libraries, but also how the libraries act as institutions in regards to social issues, it would be appropriate to apply constructivism as well. The reason why I argue that constructivism would be a relevant philosophical perspective in this study, is that I would argue that the public libraries as institutions are socially constructed. Just as the public libraries can influence the behavior of those who visit the library, changes in public discourse can have an impact on how the public libraries conduct their services and regulations. Therefore constructivism, which considers organizations as social constructs,

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<sup>36</sup> Bryman, Alan.(2016) *Social Research Methods*. Oxford University Press. 5Th. edition. ISBN: 978-0-19-968945-3. Ch.2, pp. 16- 37.

<sup>37</sup> Bryman.(2016) *Social Research Methods*.

where the continued interactions between individuals and the organization construct and reshape each other in an ongoing process,<sup>38</sup> is relevant in regards to this study.

## Research design

As mentioned earlier in the introduction, in order to be able to explore the potential of the public libraries in regards to aiding with integration, three research questions are used as a point of departure in this study. The first one was answered earlier in the literature review, however the other two are to be answered through two different analyses.

## Survey of library websites

The data for the analysis 1, will be collected through a survey of 99 websites that are retained by the public libraries in Denmark. The approach of the analysis will mainly be a general inductive approach, in order to answer the second question;

Question 2: *How conscious do the Danish public libraries appear to be of the information needs of people with limited or no skills in the Danish language, according to the designs of their websites?*

This survey will have elements of a quantitative analysis, though that is not the point of interest, but rather another set of data on which I will use to interpret the possible reasons and meaning behind the results. The reason for this line of inquiry is that language can be a huge barrier that could discourage many from familiarizing themselves with the public libraries and the services they offer. The survey of the library websites will be performed by me, as a researcher, doing a cognitive walkthrough of the website, by which one can evaluate the usability of a website.<sup>39</sup> A cognitive walkthrough is the simplest way of evaluating and spotting if there are any missing topics/functions on the website that could hinder a user in achieving their initial goal that drove them to enter the website. Before the evaluation can begin some preparation must be done in the form of creating an imaginative user, based on the target group one would expect to use the website.<sup>40</sup> By accurately defining the target group the evaluation can gain more validity, as explained in Huart, Kolski & Sagar(2004);

*“The analysis concentrates on 2 points : firstly, the ease with which a user can perform a task with a minimum of knowledge of the system; secondly, the ease of learning through exploration of the interface. During a preliminary stage of preparation, the evaluator chooses the human tasks to be analysed; each task must be described and associated to a sequence of actions. The targeted population group must be identified by associating it to basic characteristics which could influence the evaluation validity considerably. The initial goals of the user are described. The evaluation can then begin.”*<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Bryman.(2016) *Social Research Methods*. Ch.2, pp. 16- 37

<sup>39</sup> Poll, Roswitha.(2007) *Evaluating the library website: Statistics and quality measures*. IFLA.

<sup>40</sup> Huart, Julia; Kolski, Cristophe & Sagar, Mouldi.(2004) *Evaluation of multimedia applications using inspection methods: The Cognitive Walkthrough case*. *Interacting with Computers*, 16, 183-215, 2004.

<sup>41</sup> Huart, Kolski & Sagar.(2004) *Evaluation of multimedia applications using inspection methods*. pp. 6, l. 25-30.

In the case of this study, the target group of interest are immigrants with no language skills in Danish, so the imaginative user here would only be able to understand English and possibly other languages. Next step in the preparation is to compile a list of tasks to be performed on the website based on an imagined objective that users of the target group might have in using the website. In this survey, the goal of the user would be to find information about the library; basic information such as opening hours and rules, more extensive information about the services and activities the library might have to offer for immigrants and information about physical materials available in languages other than Danish. The list of tasks would then be to:

1. Locate where the website offers English as a language option.
2. Read through the information in English offered at first and attempt to find additional information in English.
3. Find out if there are any other language options.
4. Find out if there services or activities specifically intended for immigrants.
5. Find if there are any physical materials in languages in other languages than Danish accessible at the library presented on the website.

With this task list prepared, I will assume the role of the earlier described imaginative user and simulate the cognitive behavior in trying to fulfill the tasks. As I am doing so, I will answer a questionnaire on my findings during this cognitive walkthrough of the website:

- Do they have any basic information about the library available in English?
- Do they have more extensive information in English about the library that includes information about their services, activities and upcoming events in the library?
- Is it easy or difficult to find information in English?
- Is there any information available in other languages than Danish and English?
- Are there any services, activities, events or materials announced on the website that are specifically designed for immigrants?

At the end of this cognitive walkthrough, I can evaluate how usable the website is to a user that has no skills in reading Danish. However, that is not the end in the case of this study, since the intention with this survey is to evaluate all the websites that are retained by the public libraries in Denmark, therefore this is just a part of the data collection for the analysis. In other words, this method will be performed on the 97 websites representing the public libraries listed according to their municipalities and the website of The Danish Royal Library and the collective online portal Bibliotek.dk.

The cognitive walkthrough is a method typically only designed for evaluation of the individual website, therefore another method must be used on the data collected from performing it on multiple websites. The method chosen in this study is a general inductive approach, in the sense that as I'm performing the walkthroughs and answering the questionnaire that was described earlier, the easiest way of handling that data is by using a qualitative analysis. As the last step of the cognitive walkthrough is to answer a questionnaire and this is a process that will be repeated 99 times, it would seem appropriate to use an

approach that is designed to simplify data and doesn't demand any assumptions about how the data will look before collecting it. In other words;

*“The primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies. Key themes are often obscured, reframed or left invisible because of the preconceptions in the data collection and data analysis procedures imposed by deductive data analysis such as those used in experimental and hypothesis testing research. The following are some of the purposes underlying the development of the general inductive approach. These purposes are similar to other qualitative analysis approaches.*

- 1. To condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary format.*
- 2. To establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data and to ensure these links are both transparent (able to be demonstrated to others) and defensible (justifiable given the objectives of the research).*
- 3. To develop of model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes which are evident in the text (raw data).”<sup>42</sup>*

In the case of this survey, the answers collected from the questionnaire used in the cognitive walkthrough will be condensed to a summary format, by sorting them into categories. These categories can't be determined beforehand, as it is only through the analysis they can be identified since this is an explorative survey based on the inspection of the public libraries' websites usability. At the end of the inductive analysis there should be between 3-8 categories that represent the key aspects of this survey's results.<sup>43</sup>

Once all the library websites have been sorted into categories, I will then conduct a statistical analysis and organize the data into pie and bar charts, in order to get a clear overview of the results. I will also use a secondary data set, from Danmarks Statistik Bank, that shows the percentage of immigrants and their descendants among the population of the different municipalities. This secondary dataset will be used to see if there is a trend in the categories that the public libraries get sorted into that corresponds with the number of immigrants living in their municipalities. At last I will interpret and hypothesize how conscious the public libraries appear to be of the information needs that immigrants might have.

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas, David R.(2003) *A general inductive approach for qualitative data analysis*. Auckland, New Zealand: University of Auckland. pp. 2, l. 25-34.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas.(2003) *A general inductive approach for qualitative data analysis*.

## Qualitative questionnaire

The data for the analysis 2 will be collected through a qualitative questionnaire in order to answer the last question:

Question 3: *How are immigrants and local people's experiences with language cafés and what other possible activities could the library perform to promote intercultural sensitivity?*

Analysis 2 is a case study, in the sense that I have chosen the public library of Aalborg and their patrons as a sample case for how the local community and immigrants experience their library. As the methodology chosen for this analysis is Grounded theory, the answers I collect from the patrons of the library with my questionnaire will be the theoretical sample upon which the analysis will be based on.<sup>44</sup>

After contacting one of the staff members at the main public library in Aalborg, I was given permission to place paper questionnaires and a box to place the filled out responses in. In collaboration with the librarian, the place chosen in the library was the one deemed to be the optimal for the questionnaire to be noticed, particularly by immigrants, which was close to the place where the Language café is typically held in the library. To make the questionnaires more visible, the box next to them was decorated and “thank you” was written on it in both Danish and English with big letters. The agreement made with the staff of the main public library was that the questionnaires and the box could be stationed, as explained earlier close by where their Language café takes place in the library, for 8 days, at which point I would return and collect the box with responses and remove the remaining unanswered questionnaires.

The reason why I chose paper questionnaires as a method is because that was the most efficient way of distributing questionnaires to people who are patrons of the library, by placing them inside the public library in Aalborg. Alternative ways of distributing questionnaires such as sending them online would be challenging without the email addresses of people that frequent the library, and sending out emails to the general public in Aalborg would at best result in having to sort out around 50% of the respondents, since 50-60% is roughly the number of library users in general.<sup>45</sup> This method would also demand a lot of ethical thoughts and consideration in regards to online privacy and data storage security. Another possible way of distributing it could have been to create an online survey by using a program such as SurveyXact, then displaying the link to it somewhere in the library. However, that method might have discouraged people who are not comfortable with entering unknown websites, because of fear of phishing or lack of internet literacy. After reflecting on these methods of distributions, I decided to use paper questionnaires that are easy for the patrons of the library to pick up while they are at the library and fill out at some point during their use of the library.

The purpose of the questionnaire is to gain insight into whether language cafés are helping people in acquiring greater skills in Danish and in connecting the immigrants with the local community. The questionnaire is also intended to explore how people would feel about

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<sup>44</sup> Bryman, Alan.(2016) *Social Research Methods*. Ch. 24.

<sup>45</sup> Jessen, Jensen, Jensen & Starup.(2019) *Folkebiblioteker i tal 2019*.



other cultures being more represented in the public library and what changes they would like to see in the library. There is also an aspect of whether the website of the library having information in Danish and English is a factor in their information seeking experience.

In consideration to ethics, an introduction of me, the researcher, as a student from CCG and the purpose of the questionnaire as well as a quick summary of the study, in which the results of the questionnaire is to be used in, was included at the top of the questionnaire paper. Since the topic might potentially be of a sensitive nature, the questionnaire is made to allow participants to stay anonymous. The reason why I argue that this topic might be of sensitive nature is that, as mentioned earlier in the literature review, a majority of non-western immigrants seem to have experienced some level of discrimination and immigrants as a subject is often framed in the media in a negative way. In other words, the questionnaire offers anonymity to encourage honest answers in regards to the issue of cultural representation in the library and the experiences they have in the library, without risking their names being attached to any eventual critique they might have. At last the survey informs participants that by submitting their answers they consent to their answers being used in the survey. The introduction at the top of the questionnaires was structured by using the example for introductions in McGuirk & O'Neill(2016)<sup>46</sup> as a model;

*“Hi, I’m Katrin, a student at Aalborg University where I study Culture, Communication and Globalization. As a part of my research for my thesis about public libraries and their potential capability to build bridges between cultures, I wish to explore how the library’s facilities and services can help immigrants in adjusting to living in Denmark and encourage the local community to support them. This questionnaire is centered around the experiences of the patrons in the library and their opinions on how the library might improve accessibility to people with limited skills in Danish and how the library could promote intercultural exchange and sensitivity between the local community and minority groups. The questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes to complete and completion is voluntary. You can answer the questionnaire anonymously and there are no right or wrong answers. Once you are done answering, please put the completed questionnaire in the box on the table next to where you found this questionnaire. Return of the questionnaire will be considered as your consent to participate in the survey. Thank you kindly in advance for your participation and have a lovely day.”*

This introduction and the questions were written in both Danish and English on their separate paper in order to raise the chances of getting responses from both Danish and immigrant participants. In simple terms, a stack of questionnaires in English and a stack of questionnaires in Danish were placed by the box in the library, giving people the choice of filling out the paper questionnaire in the language they were most comfortable with. Since the questionnaire is to be qualitative and designed to survey the participants' experiences and

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<sup>46</sup> McGuirk, Pauline M. & O'Neill, Phillip.(2016) *Using questionnaires in qualitative human geography*. In I. Hay (Eds.), *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography* (pp. 246-273). Don Mills, Canada: Oxford University Press.

opinions, the questions are a mix of closed ended and open ended to allow participants free range to express themselves on the matter.<sup>47</sup> As it is much more time consuming to write a full sentence or more, in comparison to checking yes and no boxes, this questionnaire consists of just five questions in English and six questions in Danish;

- (Only on the Danish questionnaire) Are you Danish, New-Danish<sup>48</sup>, or recently arrived?
- What have your experiences been with finding information about the library and the services available in the library?
- Should there be more language options than Danish and English on the website of the library?
- Have you participated in the Language café and how was your experience of participating in it?
- The public libraries in Denmark often decorate according to Danish holidays, such as Christmas and display literature related to the traditions of said holiday. Should the libraries do something similar with holidays of other cultures? (e.g. display literature in connection with Ramadan, have a section dedicated to Hanukkah in December, decorations on Diwali etc.)
- What changes would you like to see in the library?

Once the agreed upon time of distribution ended, I collected the box with responses and thereby collected the data that will be used in analysis 2 in order to answer the last question of this study. The method of analyzing the answers of the qualitative questionnaire is as mentioned earlier Grounded theory.

Grounded theory is a methodology that is closely related or synonymous with an inductive approach, as it is typically used to analyze a theoretical sample of qualitative data in order to first discover categories and then hypothesize and construct a theory based on the analysis. It is a commonly used methodology that has been used in a lot of different research, yet it often sparks debate among experienced researchers and confuses novice researchers.<sup>49</sup> Even when the methodology was conceptualized by the two original authors, they disagreed on the specifics in regards to procedures, objectives and principles of Grounded theory, resulting in two initial versions of this methodology. Since then, many researchers have revisioned elements of the Grounded theory in order to modify its methods to their needs and new versions of this methodology have gained some recognition.<sup>50</sup>

In this study, I have chosen the Charmaz approach to Grounded theory to analyze the questionnaire participants answer and use Initial coding, Focused Coding and Theoretical

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<sup>47</sup> McGuirk & O'Neill(2016) *Using questionnaires in qualitative human geography*.

<sup>48</sup> "Nydansker", a relatively neutral term occasionally used for immigrants who have gained citizenship and their descendants.

<sup>49</sup> Evans, Gary L.(2013) *A Novice Researcher 's First Walk Through the Maze of Grounded Theory: Rationalization for Classical Grounded Theory*. The Grounded Theory Review (2013), Volume 12, Issue 1. pp 37-55

<sup>50</sup> Evans.(2013) *A Novice Researcher 's First Walk Through the Maze of Grounded Theory*.

coding as methods.<sup>51</sup> One of the reasons I chose this approach is because Charmaz' approach is sometimes called the Constructivist Grounded theory, making it appropriate for this study.<sup>52</sup>

*“Reality, society and the self are socially constructed, and sense is made through the social interaction with others is known as social constructivism (Gardner et al., 2010; Charmaz, 2020). CGT aims to develop a detailed understanding of the underlying social or psychological processes within a certain context by exploring in more detail social interactions and social structures (Charmaz, 2000, 2006)”*<sup>53</sup>

Another reason is that since the answers written on the paper questionnaire often are just one or two sentences, I would argue it makes sense to use the very detail oriented Initial coding, which allows me to be open-minded and generate as many codes necessary to capture the data that can be extracted from the participants' responses. After completing the initial coding of all the filled out questionnaires and having created categories, the next step will be Focused coding, where I will identify the codes that are the most common among the codes and those of greater meaning to this study. At this stage new categories might be created, by combining some of the codes from the first round of coding. Once the Focused coding is finished, Theoretical coding will then be used to bring the categories together to form a theoretical coherence that could provide an understanding of how the categories relate to each other and how the results possibly relate to already existing ideas and theory in previous literature.<sup>54</sup>

## Analysis 1

The objective of this analysis is to answer this paper's second research question; *How conscious do the Danish public libraries appear to be of the information needs of people with limited or no skills in the Danish language, according to the designs of their websites?* In order to do so, I completed a survey as described earlier in the methodology section on all 97 websites representing the public libraries in Denmark that are administered separately across 98 municipalities, except for 2 municipalities that share one website.<sup>55</sup> This survey also included the website belonging to the Danish Royal Library, since they are the biggest repository in Denmark of materials in foreign languages. Additionally I performed the cognitive walkthrough on Bibliotek.dk as well, since it is the collective online portal to all libraries in Denmark and their lendable materials. Before performing the analysis by using the general inductive approach mentioned earlier in the methodology section, I will use the website of the public libraries in the municipality of Odense as a concrete example of how the cognitive walkthrough was performed on these websites.

As mentioned earlier in the methodology section, an imaginative user that shares the characteristic with the target group of the website in question needs to be created as preparation for the cognitive walkthrough. In the case of this study, the target group of

<sup>51</sup> Bryman, Alan.(2016) *Social Research Methods*. Ch. 24.

<sup>52</sup> Mohajan, Devajit & Mohajan, Haradhan.(2022) *Constructivist grounded theory: a new research approach in social science*. MPRA Paper No. 114970.

<sup>53</sup> Mohajan & Mohajan.(2022) *Constructivist grounded theory*.pp. 15.

<sup>54</sup> Bryman, Alan.(2016) *Social Research Methods*. Ch. 24.

<sup>55</sup> The public libraries in the municipalities of Esbjerg and Fanø share a website.

interest are immigrants and refugees who have no language skills in Danish and are seeking information regarding the library's opening hours, rules, service etc. on the library's website. While simulating the cognitive behavior of the imaginative user, I had the objective and the list of 5 tasks as described earlier in the methodology section.

1. Locate where the website offers English as a language option.
2. Read through the information in English offered at first and attempt to find additional information in English.
3. Find out if there are any other language options.
4. Find out if there services or activities specifically intended for immigrants.
5. Find if there are any physical materials in languages in other languages than Danish accessible at the library presented on the website.

With this task list and the imaginative user prepared, I entered the website of the public libraries in the municipality of Odense; <https://www.odensebib.dk/>, and started the cognitive walkthrough while filling out the questionnaire described earlier in the methodology section.

- *Do they have any basic information about the library available in English?*

Yes, there was information regarding the rules and regulations and contact information on the library's administration.<sup>56</sup> However the information regarding opening hours were located in a different place on the website and are mostly in Danish, but by the assumption that the little image of an analog clock is easily interpreted to be a reference to opening hours, a non Danish speaker should be able to find it.

- *Do they have more extensive information in English about the library that includes information about their services, activities and upcoming events in the library?*

Yes, there is a short summary of the different services and materials, and by clicking on the link by cultural activities one is redirected to the calendar of events.<sup>57</sup>

- *Is it easy or difficult to find information in English?*

Yes, first on the homepage of the website it was a little difficult to spot the English option, because it was just a link option among more than 50 other link options on the bottom of the homepage, secondly the information in the calendar where all in Danish and only by "guessing" was it possible to locate language training first in Danish and then click on the "view this page in English".<sup>58</sup>

- *Is there any information available in other languages than Danish and English?*

No, although the site, with basic information in English, offered a "translate" option that should allow you to use google translate to translate the entire website into various languages, that option was not visible at the bottom of the website like it claimed.

- *Are there any services, activities, events or materials announced on the website that are specifically designed for immigrants?*

<sup>56</sup> See figure 3. in Appendix 1.1. *Screen captures of the cognitive walkthrough of www.odensebib.*

<sup>57</sup> See figure 4. and 5. in Appendix 1.1.

<sup>58</sup> See figures 6 -9. in Appendix 1.1.

Yes, there are Language caf  es, individual language training and online services that can support language learning. There is also a reference and a link to the International Community Odense.

This was the process by which I conducted an inspection of all 99 websites and based on the answers to my questionnaire, created categories along the way to simplify and condense the data collected. After completing the cognitive walkthroughs and condensing the results of them, I ended up at first with 10 categories that captured the key elements in terms of evaluating the 99 public libraries' websites usability for immigrants and refugees who do not have any skills in the Danish language. Since the goal was 3-8 categories as explained in the methodology section of this paper I then refined the categories and ended up with these 8 categories;

- No information in other languages than Danish.
- Basic practical info in english.
- Extensive introduction to the library and their services.
- English option easy to spot.
- English option difficult to spot.
- Services and activities provided specifically for immigrants and fugitives.
- Info available in other languages.
- Accessibility to materials in other languages presented

One of the categories that were eliminated was the category "English option very difficult to spot" since only one library<sup>59</sup> was listed in that category, which was then absorbed into the "English option difficult to spot" category. In the case of the earlier exemplified cognitive walkthrough of the website belonging to the public libraries in the municipality of Odense, the categories their website was sorted into were:

- Basic practical info in English.
- Extensive introduction to the library and their services.
- English option difficult to spot.
- Services and activities provided specifically for immigrants and fugitives.
- Accessibility to materials in other languages presented.

During the cognitive walkthroughs of the websites, I discovered that some websites had services, other language options, materials in other languages etc. all specifically intended as offers for immigrants and refugees, yet there was no or only basic information in English. I decided to include these examples in the categorization process, despite the fact that my imaginative user should not have been able to identify this information listed in Danish. The reason why I nonetheless choose to include them, is because I would argue that these examples highlight an issue in the websites' usability, in that they have information specifically intended for a target group that is less likely to be skilled enough in Danish to

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<sup>59</sup> The website of the public libraries in the municipality of Hvidovre was initially listed in a separate category due to the option for information in English was impossible to find unless you could read Danish, as the link option was "P   andre sprog", meaning "In other languages".

navigate their websites. There were 3 websites<sup>60</sup> that had no information in other languages than Danish, yet they could be sorted into the category “Services and events provided specifically for immigrants and fugitives”.

After all the 99 websites were sorted into their respective categories according to their results from the survey, the distribution across the categories looked like this;<sup>61</sup>

No information in other languages than Danish = 54

Basic practical info in English = 45

Extensive introduction to the library and their services = 12

English option easy to spot = 16

English option difficult to spot = 29

Services and activities provided specifically for immigrants and fugitives = 21

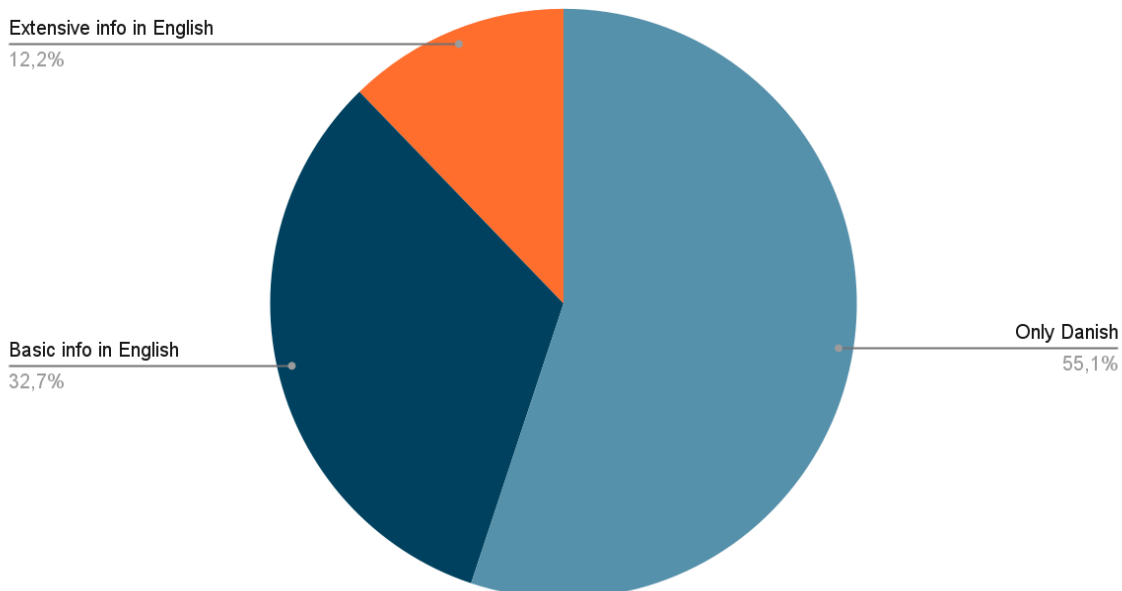
Info available in other languages = 9

Accessibility to materials in other languages presented = 22

To gain a better overview of how the categories compare to each other, categories that are comparable, in other words the first 3 categories regarding the Danish and English language options on the websites and the 2 categories regarding the difficulty level of finding information in English, were entered into a pie chart.

Figure 1.

### Language options on the library websites



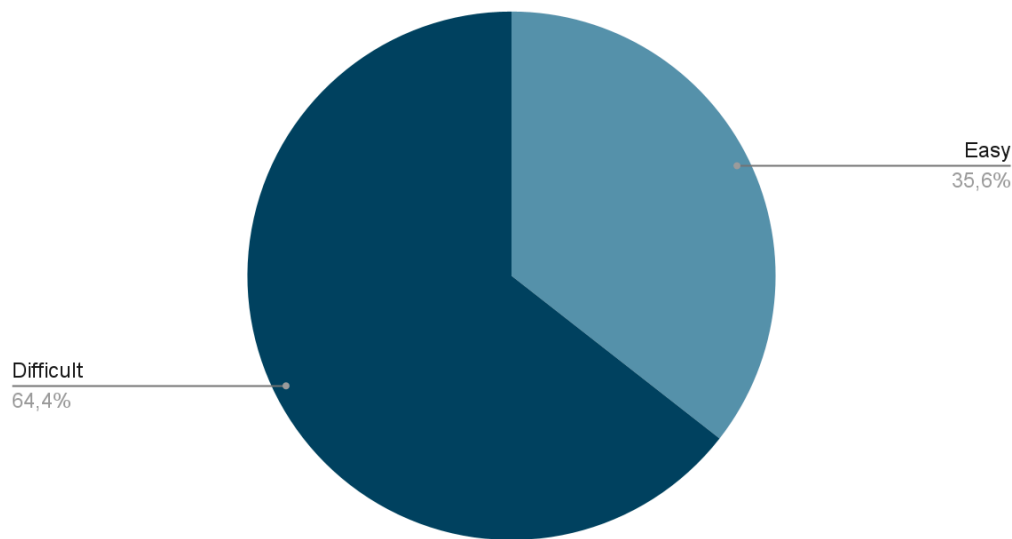
<sup>60</sup> The websites that belong to the public libraries in the municipalities of Egedal, Norddjurs and Høje Taastrup.

<sup>61</sup> See Appendix 1.2 *Libraries websites listed by the name of their municipalities in the different categories*. to see which website was sorted into which category.

Here on the first pie chart, figure 1, it is easy to see that more than 50% of the websites belonging to the Danish public libraries only have information in Danish, while less than 13% of them have basic and extensive information about their library's services in English, as it was the case with Odensebib.dk<sup>62</sup>

Figure 2.

### Difficulty level of locating information in English



The second pie chart, figure 2, shows that of the websites that have information in English available, the majority of them are difficult to navigate and find an English option for those who have no skills in the Danish language.

So far, based on analysis 1 there seems to be a general problem with the level of usability of the websites that are retained by the public libraries in Denmark, when it concerns users that have no skills in the Danish language. With the majority of the libraries having no information in English and the information in English being difficult to spot among the majority of the libraries that do give you an option for seeking information in English, it would seem like that the public libraries in Denmark are not particularly conscious of the information needs of immigrants and refugees. To be able to further speculate if there is a connection between the usability of a public library's website and the level of consciousness regarding the challenges immigrants and refugees might face when searching for information about the library, it would be interesting to see if there is a correlation between the number of immigrants living in a municipality and the usability of the public library's website.

In order to compare the usability of the websites according to the number of immigrants living in each municipality, I had to find a secondary dataset regarding the population of immigrants and where they live in Denmark. By using the website of Statistic Denmark, which is the central authority in Denmark regarding Danish statistics, I managed to

<sup>62</sup> The website of the public library of Odense municipality, which was used earlier as an example.

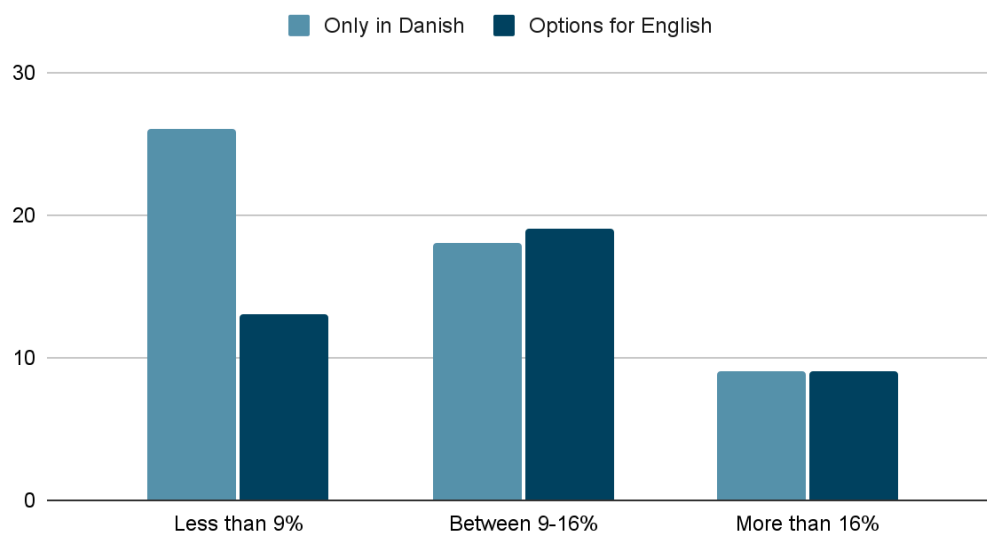
find an analysis that focused on immigrants and their descendants in Denmark.<sup>63</sup> In this analysis they do not separate western and non-western immigrants and the term descendants, refers to the 1. generation of children born in Denmark by immigrant parents. Asylum seekers are not included in that paper, since they are not registered in the Danish social security system.

The source for the secondary dataset to be used here in this study is a map of Denmark, which was marked with the areas of all the different municipalities and color coded according to the size of the percentage of the population of each municipality who were immigrants and descendants.<sup>64</sup> The color code uses a blue color that in four stages goes from light to dark as the percentage of the population that are immigrants and descendants goes up, starting at less than 9% and ending at more than 16%. To simplify the comparison, I chose to unite the two middle color codes, so I would end up with 3 categories of municipalities; municipalities with less than 9% of the population being immigrants and descendants, municipalities where 9-16% are immigrants and descendants and municipalities with more than 16% of the population belonging to that group.

After sorting all 98 municipalities into these three categories,<sup>65</sup> I then used the earlier mentioned categories “No information in other languages than Danish” and “Basic practical info in English” along these three categories to create a bar chart. The bar chart will be designed to show two bars at each category regarding the population of immigrants and descendants, where one bar marks the number of libraries with information in only Danish and the other bar marks the libraries with options for information in English.

Figure 3.

Language options of library websites in reference to the percentage of immigrants in the population of their area.



<sup>63</sup> Andersen, Anne K. & Harbo, Lisbeth G.(2021) *Hvor i Danmark bor personer med udenlandsk oprindelse?* DST Analyse. Danmarks Statistik. ISSN 2446-0354

<sup>64</sup> Andersen & Harbo.(2021) *Hvor i Danmark bor personer med udenlandsk oprindelse?* pp. 5.

<sup>65</sup> See in the Appendix 1.3. *Municipalities in Denmark, sorted according to the percentage of immigrants and descendants in their population.*



When looking at this bar chart, it seems that there is no clear correlation between the number of immigrants and descendants living in a municipality and whether the website of the public library would have any information available in English. However the fact that the libraries with only Danish are twice as many than the libraries with options for English in the municipalities where the population of immigrants and descendants are less than 9%, could be interpreted as there is a slight correlation in the sense that the lower the number of immigrants there are in a local community, the less chances there are for the public library to be conscious of their needs.

## Analysis 2

As mentioned earlier in the methodology section, this analysis will be performed on the answers obtained through qualitative questionnaires, which were distributed in paper at the main public library in Aalborg. The aim of performing this analysis is to answer the question; *How are immigrants and local people's experiences with language cafés and what other possible activities could the library perform to promote intercultural sensitivity?*

At the end of the time allotted to distribution, 16 participants had submitted a filled out questionnaire where of; 7 were Danish, 3 were New-Danish, 2 were newly arrived and 4 were either non disclosed or did not fit any of the earlier mentioned categories. Before venturing into an analysis with Charmaz' approach to Grounded theory,<sup>66</sup> there is an interesting observation that should be noted in regards to the questionnaires that were filled out, since 14 out of 16 participants chose to fill out the Danish questionnaire, rather than the English version. All responses have been transcribed into a single document and the responses in Danish have been translated.<sup>67</sup>

The first step of Charmaz' method is to perform Initial coding on the participants' answers to the questions in questionnaires that are considered to be the theoretical sample in this analysis.

I will use Participant 1 as an example of the process of Initial coding, where the participants answer is colored blue and the code is marked with IC and is colored green to make it easier to distinguish between the answers and the code.

Participant 1:

- Are you Danish, New-Danish or newly arrived?

Newly arrived. IC: Immigrant

- What have your experiences been with finding information about the library and the services available in the library?

I heard about the library from volunteers at Ansgar church. IC: Information through connection outside the library.

- Should there be more language options than Danish and English on the website of the library?

No, it's fine. IC: More language options unnecessary.

<sup>66</sup> Bryman, Alan.(2016) *Social Research Methods*. Ch. 24.

<sup>67</sup> See Appendix 2.1 *Answers to the questionnaires*.

- Have you participated in the Language café and how was your experience of participating in it?

Yes, I have participated in the language café for almost 6 months and it has helped me with improving my pronunciation and made me better at speaking Danish. IC: Language café improves language skills.

- The public libraries in Denmark often decorate according to Danish holidays, such as Christmas and display literature related to the traditions of said holiday. Should the libraries do something similar with holidays of other cultures? (e.g. display literature in connection with Ramadan, have a section dedicated to Hanukkah in December, decorations on Diwali etc.)

It's important for me to learn about Danish culture. IC: Disinterest in multicultural representation, Interest in Danish culture.

- What changes would you like to see in the library?

I would like to get more days with the language café in the libraries, perhaps on fridays. IC: Wish for more Language cafes.

All answers to the questionnaires have been coded<sup>68</sup> and now these codes will be used in the next step of this analysis, where I will identify recurring categories and create new categories by using Focused coding. As a result many initial codes will either be merged with each other or sorted out and kept out of the ongoing analysis. An example of an initial code that will be removed is the code “IC: Wish for alternative activities.” that was assigned to Participant 14's answer to question 6, which will not be included in the Focused coding since it is the only answer coded as such.

In the process of Focused coding I first identified the common categories within the answers to each question, thereby found these categories in the participants responses;

1. 2 categories, Immigrant. Native.
2. 4 categories, Information through connection outside the library. Staff is helpful with information. Website is a source for information. Information is easy to find.
3. 2 categories, More language options unnecessary. More language options are pertinent.
4. 3 categories, Language café improves language skills. Language café is a positive experience. No experience with the Language café.
5. 4 categories, Disinterest in multicultural representation. Interest in Danish culture. Interest in multicultural representation, Natives should be educated in other cultures.
6. 3 categories, Wish for more Language cafes. Wish for relation building activities between Natives and Immigrants. Wish for improvements to the physical library.

While identifying these categories and comparing the answers from the participants, I discovered that some of these categories could be combined to create even more focused categories in regards to the subject of this paper. The categories that I ended up with after performing Focused coding in the sense of merging certain categories and keeping some unaltered are;

- Immigrants learn about the library through connections.

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<sup>68</sup> See Appendix 2.2 *Initial codes*.

- Staff is helpful with information.
- Website is a source for information.
- Information is easy to find.
- Immigrants in general deem more language options on the website unnecessary.
- Natives in general deem more language options on the website to be pertinent.
- Immigrants enjoy and learn in the Language café.
- Natives have no experience with the Language café.
- Immigrants are disinterested in multicultural representation and place importance on Danish culture.
- Natives are interested in multicultural representation and education.
- Immigrants wish for more language cafes.
- Wish for improvements to the physical library
- Wish for relation building activities between Natives and Immigrants.

After completing the process of merging some of the categories the list of categories was narrowed further down from 18 categories to 13. These categories will now be subjected to Theoretical coding, where I will reflect on how the categories relate to each other and hypothesize on their relation then look at how the categories and their relations relate to the literature reviewed earlier in this study.

While looking at the categories it becomes apparent that these interrelate to each other in three ways, namely there are the categories that concern the experiences and opinions of those categorized as **Immigrant**, there are the categories that concern experiences and opinion of those categorized as **Natives** and categories that are not limited to one of these two groups, but generally cover the shared experiences and wants of the participants.

Based on the categories from the Focused coding, it would seem that immigrants, both newly arrived and New-Danish, learn about the library through connections they have outside of the library and mostly find information through the staff working at the library. This group expresses disinterest in having other cultures, including their own, represented in the library, deem more language options to be unnecessary in regards to the website and they emphasize the importance of learning Danish and about Danish culture. This could be interpreted as an indicator that the immigrants view the library not as a multicultural institution, but rather as an institution of learning, through which they can ease their efforts in integrating.

On the other hand, **Natives** or Danes express that more languages should be optional on the website and that the library should make room for other cultures to be represented in the library, which could be interpreted as their view on the library is that it should be a multicultural institution as well as an institution of learning.

When looking at the categories that cover the shared experiences and opinions of a number of participants with no particular division between the **Immigrants**, **Natives** and **Unknown**, it would seem that no one experiences any significant challenges when seeking information, largely thanks to the staff and in part thanks to the library's website. At last when looking at the last three categories on the list, the common wish of improvements of the physical library, the common wish for multicultural relation building activities and the wish

for more language cafes from the immigrants, it seems there is a consensus among the participants on the library being a social space.

That there is seemingly a consensus among the participants on the library being a social space could be interpreted as the efforts of the public libraries in Denmark in modernizing and reinvent themselves as social institutions, since the “Refuge for Integration” was published, has been successful, at least in the public library of Aalborg.

Seeing how the majority of the immigrant participants reported positive experiences with the Language café and expressed a wish for more time allotted to this activity in the library, it would seem that is one of most successful initiatives that the public libraries have taken to aid immigrants with integrating. Unfortunately, none of the Danish participants reported having any experience with the Language café, even those who expressed interest in learning about other cultures and wished for multicultural relation building activities. That could be interpreted as the public library have only focused on promoting the Language café to immigrants and since it is an activity described as service provided by volunteers,<sup>69</sup> it probably would not be considered by Danish library patrons as an activity they could participate in.

When looking at the categories regarding the immigrants' disinterest in multicultural representation in the library and their expressed interest in learning Danish and about Danish culture, in the context of the literature reviewed earlier in this thesis, it raises a couple of questions regarding what could be the reason behind their answers. As explained earlier in the literature review regarding the subject of integration in Denmark, there is a lot of pressure on the immigrants as there is demand from the politicians and the media that they learn about Danish culture and values in order to be accepted in Danish society, otherwise some of them could be viewed as potential threats or economic burdens.<sup>70</sup> Maybe this pressure on immigrants to integrate by embracing Danish culture is the reason why the immigrant participants emphasized the importance of learning about Danish culture when asked if they would be interested in the library celebrating other cultures. Another possible explanation for their answer could be that they feel that there is a lack of options to learn about Danish culture in the library, since as mentioned at the end of the literature review, most projects regarding educating immigrants have been focused on the practical aspects of integration, such as language skills, job seeking, internet literacy etc.

In regards to the categories that concern the Danish participants' interest in multicultural representation, their view on more language options on the website being pertinent and their wish for activities with multicultural relation building activities, most of them argued that the public library is a multicultural institution and that Danish people should learn about other countries and cultures. This reflects that the library is a place frequently used by both Danish users and users from the ethnic minorities, and that the presence of ethnic minorities are a natural part of the environment in the library. It could also be interpreted to be speaking to the problem with prejudice mentioned earlier in the literature

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<sup>69</sup> Aalborg Bibliotekerne. *Language Café*. <https://www.aalborgbibliotekerne.dk/english/language-cafe>

<sup>70</sup> Christiansen.(2014) *Konservative savner fokus på mental integration*.

review,<sup>71</sup> and how libraries could aid in combating prejudice and possibly lessen the apprehension against immigrants.

## Discussion

This study used a combination of methods in order to approach the problem of this research and answer the questions that could lead to a possibly convincing conclusion. As the subject of this thesis concerns a complex social issue both on the national scale and on the locale scale, I chose methods that would allow me to study the matter on both of these scales.

On the national scale, I decided to do a survey of all the public libraries' websites by performing a cognitive walkthrough of every website individually and then use a general inductive approach to sort these websites into categories, which I then did a simple quantitative analysis to compare these categories to each other and in correlation with a secondary dataset. Since the cognitive walkthrough is considered an effective tool for an expert to perform a simple evaluation of a website usability in terms of identifying possible shortfalls regarding the website design, I would argue that this method is replicable as long as no revisions have been conducted on the websites. As for the general inductive analysis, it could be difficult to argue for it being reliable since the categories created by condensing the data from the cognitive walkthroughs was based on my subjective interpretation of the data. I would however argue that this method has some inferential validity, in regard to my subjective interpretation on e.g. the level of difficulty in finding an option for information in English, is shaped by my experience in searching for it. At last I would argue that the quantitative analysis can be ascribed a high level of reliability and validity, since the analysis includes all the websites retained by the public libraries in Denmark.

On the local scale, I decided to do an analysis using CGT<sup>72</sup>, with the participants of a qualitative questionnaire placed in the main public library of Aalborg as a theoretical sample. In the case of CGT it can be difficult to argue for many of the measures of validity and reliability, since there is a big risk of the results not being replicable and the sample size not being big enough to legitimately generalize a theory. However, advocates of Grounded theory claim nonetheless there is a level of validity, in the sense that this methodology is not designed to achieve statistical results, but rather to generate theoretical understanding and then achieve theoretical saturation by going between samples and documentation through theoretical reflections.<sup>73</sup>

Unfortunately, it is quite difficult to compare this study with other studies regarding the subject of public libraries' role in integration in a sense, since there aren't many earlier studies researching. Except for the "Refuge for Integration"<sup>74</sup> report, most of the literature that could be located and reviewed were reports on general library usage, short dissertations on projects launched in the past and news articles. In many cases it seems that projects have been discontinued and evaluations reports are inaccessible. Hopefully, this thesis could

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<sup>71</sup> Andersen & Reiermann.(2019) *Danskernes bekymring for indvandring er historisk stor...*

<sup>72</sup> Constructivist Grounded Theory.

<sup>73</sup> Bryman, Alan.(2016) *Social Research Methods*. Ch. 17

<sup>74</sup> The State and University Library.(2001) *Frirum til integration*.

maybe inspire more extensive research into this subject, specifically the aspect of not only focusing on educating the ethnic minorities in Danish culture, but also focuses on how to promote true integration, rather than perpetuate assimilation.

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to explore and evaluate the potential of the public libraries to build bridges between cultures, specifically between ethnic minorities and the Danish majority. To do that, the problem of this study was phrased as; how can public libraries promote intercultural sensitivity and help ethnic minorities in achieving a sense of belonging in Danish society?

In order to attempt to answer that question, I used three research questions as a point of departure to guide me in conducting a literature review, then a combination of analyses to get different perspectives on this complicated subject.

The public libraries have gone through a lot of changes for more than two decades, not only in having to adjust to the digital age but also in reinventing themselves as institutions. One of the greater catalysts in turning the libraries into institutions that invests in being social spaces was the report “Refuge for Integration”, which also directed the attention of the libraries to the ethnic minorities and presented the idea that libraries could have a role in integration. Since then a lot of projects with the motivation of aiding integration have been launched by a number of local public libraries and some on a national scale, however many of these have been discontinued. Thankfully, some libraries still offer certain services that support immigrants in learning the language, adjust to the legal paperwork of the Danish bureaucracy, guide them in job seeking etc. However, according to this paper’s analysis 1, the libraries that seem conscious of and actively support the ethnic minorities in adjusting to living in Danish society, are themselves a minority group among all the other public libraries in Denmark. I consider this to be quite unfortunate since the literature review and analysis 2, both indicate that the libraries aspire to be and are viewed as multicultural institutions, that can not only support immigrants with the practical aspects on integration, but can also be social institutions that have the potential of positively influence relations between people of different cultures.

In general it was difficult to find any new initiatives regarding integration, as the latest documentation on this subject I could find was 2018. Whether COVID19, lack of funds, lack of results or a reduction of the number of immigrants entering the country annually is the cause for a scarcity of documentation of new projects is difficult to estimate, but it seems like innovation in this area has grown stagnant.

All in all, the public libraries to various degrees already help ethnic minorities in adjusting practically to Danish society, but they seem to have even a greater potential of fostering relations between the majority and the minorities in their local community. There seems to be rationale in researching ways that libraries could promote intercultural sensitivity, such as if they made some efforts to inspire their local Danish residents to learn about other cultures, either through relation building activities or by making room in the physical library for other cultures to be represented.

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