

Making without a makerspace

Abstract

Making and makerculture is one of the new flourishing trends in the World. How do Libraries support their patrons' desire to make, learn and change the world globally and locally?

The libraries in Roskilde and Aarhus has through the project People's lab tried to experiment with makerculture as a part of their library service, but with the restriction that we didn't have a physical room for a Makerspace with expensive equipment. Instead we tried to make creative rooms and ecosystems with ideas from the makerculture, with focus on sharing, participating, and learning. This resulted in 6 very different events/rooms where citizens got involved along with the library and its staff.

Making without a makerspace

It is hard not to be mesmerized the first time you see a 3d printer in action. Unlike watching paint dry or a laundry machine, new things actually happen for each layer of plastic that is melted onto the surface. That's why our first thought was: We need to get one of those as quickly as possible in our library. But then once the euphoria settled, we had a second to think about it, the questions came in: where should we put it? Do we even know how to operate this thing? And what purpose does it fill in a library filled with other more useful technology?

So instead of buying a fairly expensive machine, which we didn't really know how to use, we got hold of someone who actually knew about 3d printing. The local Makerspace had lots of experts and they were happy to share their knowledge. This resulted in inviting the Makerspace into the library to make a temporary pop-up Makerspace. Here you could meet the expert and Geeks who thrived in world of 3d printing and library staff who could bridge and facilitate the meeting with the new technology. 3d printing is still in a fairly primitive stage of evolution, and we were really focused on people printing something new and innovative. But you don't start out printing a new prosthetic for your handicapped child, you start out printing a cube, a cat or an iphone cover. Libraries shouldn't be afraid to be showrooms for new technology, as we are already a showroom for new literature. Once people see the new technology and become accustomed to it, perhaps in the future they will use it for something useful.

Lessons we learned

The three main words and practices we picked up from the makerworld were: sharing, creating and participating. In the library world we have a strong tradition for sharing. But perhaps we are lacking the last two.

Roskilde is a city filled with music, but people tend to stay in the small circles of their own particular music genre. As an experiment we made an evening where we invited some of the key people within the different genres and asked them to bring a friend along. At this evening there were people from all of the different music genres, metal, rock, rap, folk and electronic music. Here we brainstormed on how to make Roskilde the best city for bands and artist. Along with coming up with great ideas on how to build an inspiring environment for music people also shared their experiences with new people on how to get by as a band, and advice

on how to get gigs and what equipment to bring. We did this to test the Libraries as Drivers of an Ecosystem. An area where the library serves as the “glue” that holds, and gets the different networks and people together. Doing this is hard work, and doesn’t draw headlines and the politicians’ attention, but no one else is doing this, and the library gets a wide and grateful network that can come in handy in other occasions.

Getting people together is also a task for the library; hundreds of people go to the library each day, to study, to check out books or to use computer and printing facilities. But when they do, they do it in their own small group or by themselves. To try and get people to meet other people we set up an exhibition with old music media, called “magnetic groove memories”. It consisted of old music media players, vinyl, cassette, reels and old shellac player that you had to wind yourself. People were encouraged to try and interact with the machines. When staffs weren’t around people would ask other patrons on how to operate the machines and especially seniors were glad to instruct and tell stories to younger people on how listen to music in the old days also was a social thing and not just something you stream of the internet in tiny headphones while you commute. Along with the exhibition we also had really nerdy workshops with cutting your own vinyl, where all the geeks came out of their hiding and got together with others who shared their passion, people with an age span of 18-65 years of age talked vinyl and recording techniques, what other place than a library could something like this happen?

Within the library working with makerculture, and the shift from our patrons not just attending the library to participating and interacting with the library, has set some new standards for how you work as a librarian. The shift from communicating books and other media to facilitating meetings between people is not an easy job. There is no hiding behind a desk and you have to get involved yourself, when doing an activity. This also set new standards for how you are trained as a librarian, not only do you need to be an expert, but you also have to be a motivator and able to inspire and engage people.

People’s Lab

People’s Lab is a two year development project that will examine how libraries in collaboration with their various partners can create open innovation environments

The project is inspired by Makerspaces or Hacker Spaces, and when creating People’s Lab we will transfer and translate thoughts and experiences from Makerspaces to a library context. If that’s possible, how should they be planned and organized. Makerspaces or Hackerspaces are physical locations where people with common interests meet to share, collaborate and create projects. Often Makerspaces focus is on the development of new technological products and the Makerspaces provide expensive tools.

Why Maker Spaces and Makerculture in libraries?

The library can and should play an important role in promoting citizens’ desire and ability to innovate. The library is the organization that can facilitate meetings between people, knowledge areas, media, communication forms, etc. This is the reason why the library has a clear potential in becoming the place where citizen-made ideas can be developed and carried out.

The project vision

The project creates specific concepts and strategies on how libraries can support innovation

processes in the community. The core elements are knowledge and culture and the ability to blend knowledge domains, which would not normally be blended. Research and partnerships are used actively in the project design.

Organisation

The project is created in collaboration between the Main Library Aarhus, Roskilde Libraries, University of Aarhus and Roskilde University. The project is supported by the Danish Agency for Culture.

Appendix

Recommandations:

When working with Makerculture it is important that:

- You create together with your community not for it. Get the citizens involved from the beginning, ownership is a process; don't reduce your community to just guests
- "Do it yourself" is important, but "Do it together" is more important. It is in the community, the network, where you create and share your ideas.
- The Clout of maker culture is determined by its community.
- Create opportunities for engagement at different levels, no one starts out as an expert
- Focus on learning as something also done with your hands; skills are created by making, touching and participating.
- Have different thresholds for your activities; make some for novices, and some for the experts.
- Build a frame around the space, the activities and processes you want to facilitate so the citizens can easily see what's going on. But be willing to change and expand the frame so ideas aren't limited.
- Don't clean up all the time. Creativity and new ideas come from chaos and mess.
- People are more important than technology and machines
- Put yourself in the game. Lead by example and don't be afraid to make mistakes. Use your own personal skills and creativity.

Remember: You don't need a Makerspace to work with makerculture.

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