

From iBook container to community centre



- lessons from **Community Centre Gellerup**



Community Centre Gellerup (CCG) is a project under Aarhus Public Libraries. The project was initiated by a local library branch in the disadvantaged neighbourhood of Gellerup with the aim of developing a new type of institution, a community centre uniting library services, health promotion, counselling service for ethnic minorities and voluntary social work.



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Vejledning i Jobhjørnet. Foto: CCG.

CCG is interesting for a variety of reasons.

First of all as an example of user-driven innovation, where employees, volunteers and ordinary citizens have set themselves the task of developing the quality of not only a better public service, but also the democratic inclusion of citizens and voluntary organisations.

Secondly, as a contribution to the development of integration and empowerment strategies in relation to vulnerable urban areas.



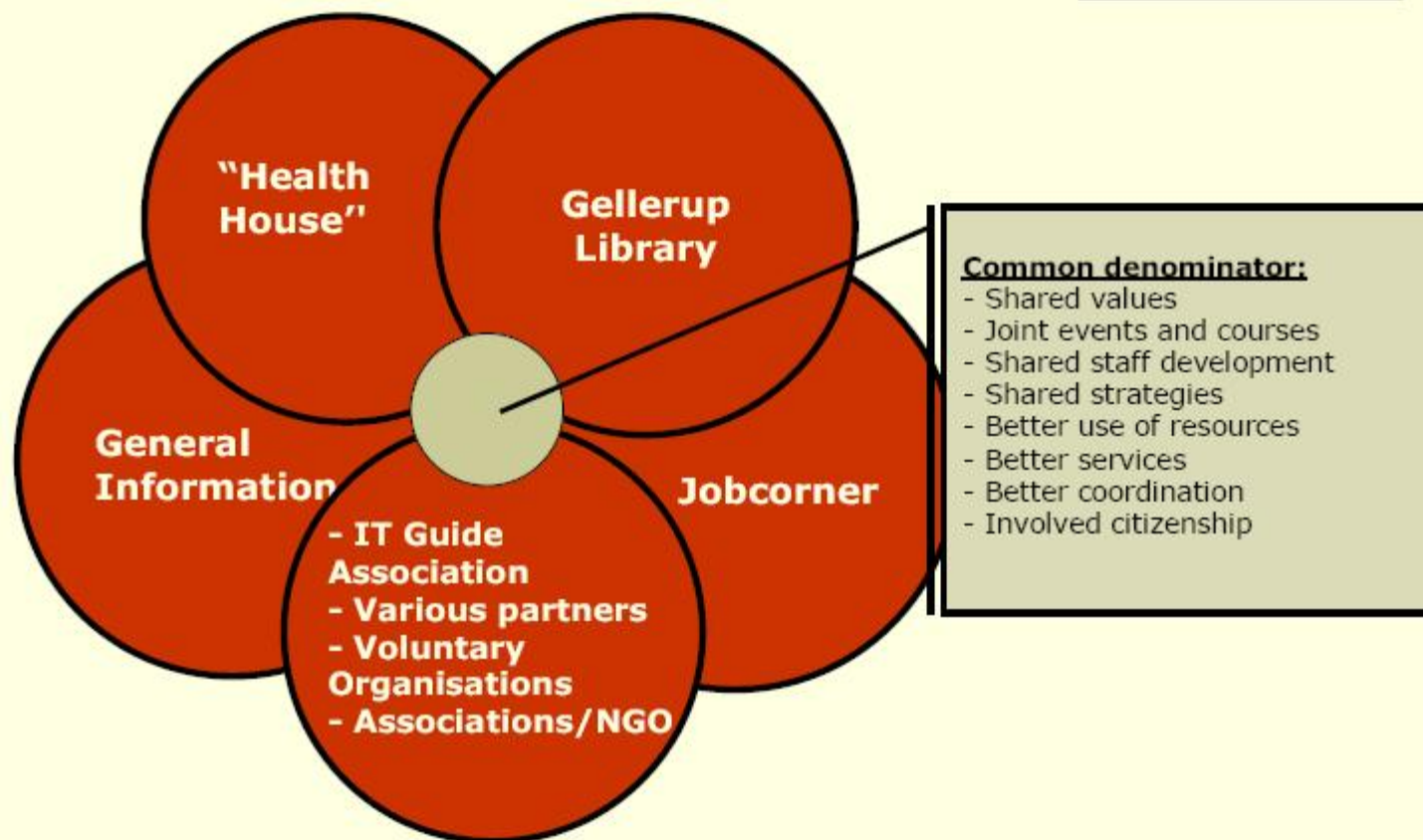
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Empowerment and local community development

The philosophy behind empowerment strategy is that the combination of systemic orientation, civic inclusion and a longer time perspective are seen as the most effective principles for a permanent change of the situation in deprived local areas.

Community empowerment strategies are deliberate strategies for the strengthening of citizens involvement and positive affiliations to the local area. The most important methods are *appreciative inquiry* and *empowerment* (Fetterman and Wandersman, 2005).



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The empowerment concept

Empowerments can be defined as processes of mobilisation and change, that improve underprivileged individuals and social groups ability to create and handle mental, material, social, cultural and symbolic relevant resources (Andersen et al. 2003: 7).

Mobilisation processes in social groups and local communities can be described as *horizontal empowerment*.

Vertical empowerment has to do with developing the impact upwards and outwardly in relation to important decision-making centres outside the local community.



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Bryd Fasten – borgerstyret aktivitet efteråret 2006. Foto: CCG.



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The lessons from Chicago

The public libraries in Chicago have over the past decade turned an ominous development into a success story. The secret behind the success was the exploitation of the library's potential as catalyst for social networks in the local community.

A study from the Asset Based Community Development Institute also pointed to the fact that libraries can contribute with a wealth of resources: a free meeting place, the most recent information technology, knowledge, a feeling of ownership among local citizens as well as a relationship of trust between people.



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The lessons from Community Centre Gellerup

CCG is a partnership building on a vision of - through a holistic approach .
facilitating empowerment of the citizen.

CCG endeavours to break down institutional barriers and works towards the fulfilment of user needs.

CCG started as a development project in 2005. During the past two years, employees have been focusing on common organisation- and staff development, which has resulted in the adoption of a common vision, set of values and collaboration models.

In the project period we have been working on competence-, role-, and method development, where all employees have participated in joint courses (on AI, empowerment, conflict handling and learning) and in i.a. study tours to other local communities. Public service and recruiting volunteers have also been on the agenda, as well as the role of facilitator.



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The lessons from Community Centre Gellerup (2)

In organisational terms CCG is a collaboration project between Gellerup Library, Health Centre and Public Information. These three institutions work closely together with voluntary organisations, associations and community activists.

CCG has entered into permanent partnership with:

The IT-guide association, a multi-ethnic association with a dual purpose: to bring together everyone with an interest in IT, and to make the members' knowledge available to citizens without IT-literacy by way of free courses.

Homework Help Association – Tusindfryd under the Danish Refugee Council, which consists of young people offering help with homework free-of-charge.

The Voluntary Centre, the purpose of which is to establish contact between voluntary social associations and people who wish to do voluntary work.

Local-historical Archive, which collects pictures, association documents, maps, memoirs etc.

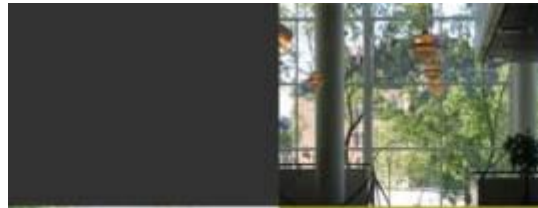


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it-guideforeningen

Folke*i*nformation



Lektiehjælpen
TUSINDFRYD



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The evaluation report concluded that in order to secure the dynamics in such development work it is important:

“To work on organisation development that prioritizes the social wellbeing and collectivity of the staff and joint competency development.

“To encourage relevant further education of the staff that supports the development of a **Community Centre professionalism** where the keywords are knowledge of the local community, civic inclusion and the interdisciplinary aspect.

“To develop a strategy for staff recruitment in the form of clarifying which professional competences support CCG targets.

“To ensure creative frames for dialogue between voluntary work and CCG

“To develop simple evaluation and user-satisfaction tools that can be used internally in the organisation as well as meeting the decision-makers demands for documentation of **value for money**



Dagligdag i Community Center Gellerup. Foto: CCG.



Community Centres and user driven innovation

CCG can be taken as an example of *user driven service design* (Parker and Heapy: 2005) and *user driven innovation*, which were launched in connection with the government's quality reform.

The CCG concept is therefore interesting in relation to the discussion on routes towards democratisation, better mobilization of resources, and quality development of the public sector in a close interplay with the civic community. One of the challenges is that public institution budgeting and administrative processes are not always geared to supporting such cross-sectorial and civic-community-inclusive innovations. There still remain some hurdles to surmount in order for a user driven innovation to become part of a realistic, sustainable development trajectory.

Perhaps the quality reform will pave the way for cross-sectorial organisations like CCG no longer being regarded as exceptions, but as forms of organisation that set a new standard for holistic and user-inclusive managing and innovation of public activities.



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