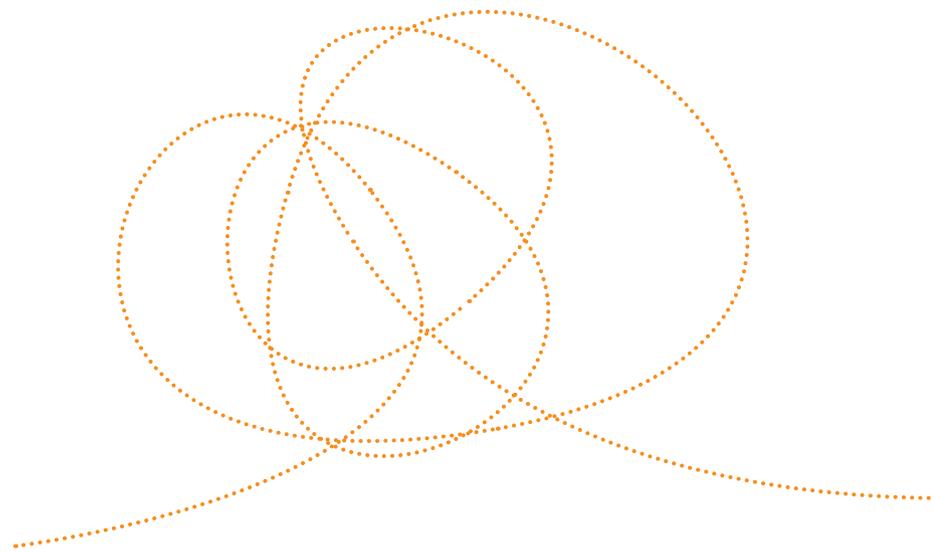


EXPERIENCES  
& REFLECTIONS  
FAMILIES AT  
PLAY IN  
THE LIBRARY



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THE LIBRARY

Families at Play in the Library  
/ Experiences & Reflections

Culture and Citizens' Services,  
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More information om projektet:  
[www.legende-familier.dk](http://www.legende-familier.dk)





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# FOREWORD

Is it OK to play at the library? Is it OK to make noise, to sing, to romp and to experiment? YES! – is the simple and maybe ambitious attitude behind the project *Families at Play in the Library*. In the project we have worked with children, families and play in the library to examine how play and play culture can be integrated into the library. Digital treasure hunts, musical quiz suitcases, an evocative lumber room, and a musical time machine are among the concepts that have been developed and tested in cooperation with families and children.

The purpose has been to create new, shared experiences for both children and adults at the library. And to bring in play as something that is justified by virtue of itself.

## **An interdisciplinary project**

Families at play in the library is developed as an interdisciplinary partnership between three libraries (Randers Public Libraries, Aalborg Public Libraries and Aarhus Public Libraries), Centre for Playware and Interactive Spaces. The interdisciplinary element of the partnership has ensured geographical spreading, different library cultures as well

as the newest research-based knowledge about play, play culture and the everyday life of families.

During the course of the project different concepts have been developed and forms of play have been tested, just like the effects of these have been studied in cooperation with children and adults. An inspiration tour to the U.S. has provided knowledge and inspiration about different play universes and boundary breaking interiors, just like the cooperation with the project *The Librarian as Playmaker* has contributed with new approaches. In this publication you can read about our experiences and our work in relation to play in the public library and in relation to colleagues and the participating families. Enjoy!

- You can find a digital, expanded version of this publication on [www.legende-familer.dk](http://www.legende-familer.dk) (in Danish)
- The project is supported by the Development pool for Public and School Libraries at the Danish Agency for Libraries and Media.

# STRATEGIC SUMMARY

## WHY SHOULD THE LIBRARY CONCERN ITSELF WITH PLAY?

### **Play culture should be a core part of library services and dissemination in relation to children and parents**

It is difficult to avoid children playing in an open cultural institution like the public library. So children's play has always been a part of the public library. It has, however, been kind of a random element in the physical library space until now. Some libraries have worked professionally with the acquisition and dissemination of games and toys, but here play has been viewed as an educational tool. In this project we have based our work on the recommendations of the report *Fremtidens biblioteksbetjening af børn* (Report on future library services to children) which states (in our translation):

*...the committee recommends that libraries work with play as a valuable activity and make play culture a core part of the content and dissemination in relation to children and their parents (Fremtidens biblioteksbetjening af børn, 2008 p. 54).*

The aim is that play should become an independent activity with its own objectives and methods. This way of thinking stands in contrast to the idea that has dominated for many years in the public library, namely that knowledge can be played into children. In this project, play is about play – play that is justified by the virtue of itself.

### **Play is culture**

In the knowledge society, the core task of the library in relation to supporting information, education and cultural activity is more important than ever, because the values of society increasingly builds upon the citizens' abilities to transform information into knowledge and to transform

cultural competencies into innovation. And through this create new values.

Society culture and cultural experiences play an important role for the forming of one's identity today. Viewed in the perspective of the Danish government's globalisation strategy (Progress, Innovation and Cohesion (2006)) libraries play an obvious role as an open developmental space for children's imagination, creativity and innovation skills.

Part of the library's task is to support children in experiencing and unfolding creativity and imagination and to encourage new ways of thinking. When play is seen as part of our cultural life it is only natural that libraries should work with serious and professional advising on play culture along with other forms of cultural expressions that develop and educate children.

### **Current play culture is inspired by media that are disseminated in the library**

Play is one of the most important ways for children to express themselves culturally and form their own cultural identity. Play culture is many things: Cultural heritage, educational games and new role-playing games created by the children of today, often with inspiration from media like books, films, music, TV, cartoons or computer games. An important part of children's culture is neglected if libraries only work with the dissemination of printed and digital media and omit to work with the current play culture that arises from said media. The libraries' approach to play culture must, of course, be based on the same

foundation as other cultural activities in Danish public libraries: Diversity, topicality and quality.

### **Open and free for all social, cultural and ethnic groups,**

There are no other institutions in society where children and families can find information about play culture, independent of commercial interests or educational goals. The library's unique role as society's last non-commercial meeting place, used by a majority of the population, makes it a very valuable platform for the dissemination of play culture across social, cultural and ethnic groups.

### **Families – significant communities**

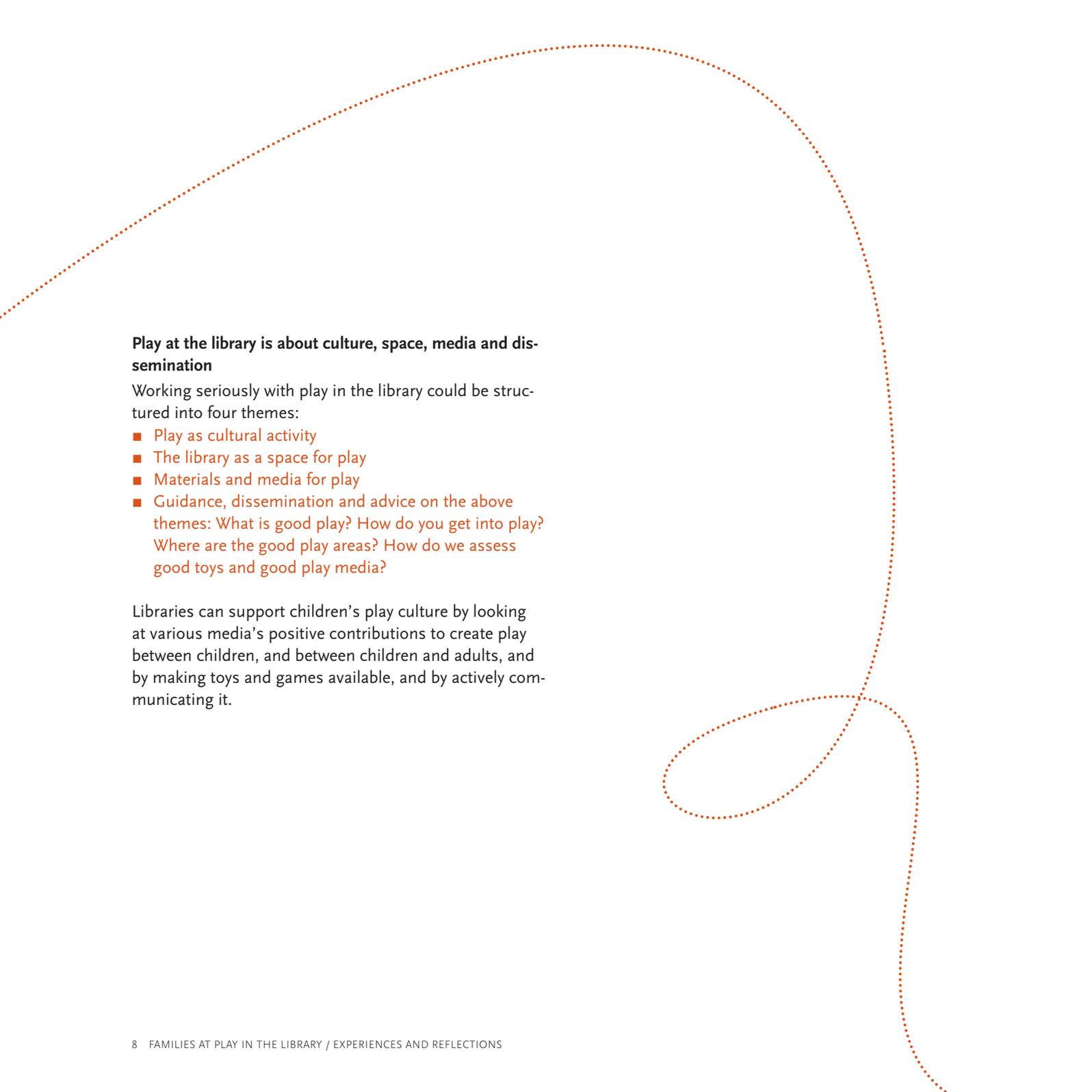
In the project, we have chosen to focus on the family as a whole. Children's families are the most deciding factor for their participation in cultural activities and choice of education (*Danskernes kultur- og fritidsaktiviteter 2004, 2005*). Children are still, to a higher degree, taken to the library by their parents, and parents often ask the librarians for guidance on behalf of their children (Drotner 2006). But how do we develop the library into a space for activity, play and learning considering the family as a whole?

Many libraries are traditionally divided into a department for children and a department for adults with media and activities aimed at either one or the other. One of the answers to the question above could be to develop spaces, activities and media collections aimed at the entire family. In this project, we have worked to create libraries for families to play in, which also support a sense of community and inclusion between families and across generations.

## WHAT IS PLAY?

By *Stine Liv Johansen*

Play is a voluntary, unforced activity. Basically, you play with the sole purpose of getting into play. Play is about getting into a certain mood; to imagine things and putting your body in motion, to get butterflies in the stomach and a tickling down the spine. Play is not just for children; adults play too. When we go to a party and dance, when we take part in a run just for the fun of it, when we go shopping or when we play games. Theoretically, play can be defined as a practise (something we do in a certain way) with a play media (the thing we play with) with the purpose of getting into a playful mood. A play media can be anything from a toy designed with the purpose of a certain game (but not necessarily used for that purpose) to materials, which are not necessarily designed for play (sand, sticks, pets) to computer games and mobile phones. In the everyday life of children, the inspiration to play often comes from media. Play is real time storytelling. Play has a beginning, middle and an end – it has a climax and it has a frame or a scenario in which it is performed, there is an aim, there are helpers and there are opponents. Unlike a book or a film, the play is settled here and now and cannot subsequently be categorised in the library catalogue.



### **Play at the library is about culture, space, media and dissemination**

Working seriously with play in the library could be structured into four themes:

- Play as cultural activity
- The library as a space for play
- Materials and media for play
- Guidance, dissemination and advice on the above themes: What is good play? How do you get into play? Where are the good play areas? How do we assess good toys and good play media?

Libraries can support children's play culture by looking at various media's positive contributions to create play between children, and between children and adults, and by making toys and games available, and by actively communicating it.

# STRATEGIC SUMMARY

## THE PROJECT'S RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Play as a tool for dissemination**

Play, more often than not, originates from some sort of play media. Hereby, play has the potential to be a tool for dissemination of the library's media collections and can work as a facilitator for children to start using more diverse kinds of media. For instance, a pirate universe can disseminate books, music, films and computer games about pirates.

### **Parents are the key factor to children's and families' visits to the public library**

Focus must be put on the parents if we want families to play at the library. Often parents have a predetermined vision (their children's cultural education and the joy of reading) and mission (to find books or other related media) for the family's visit to the library.

To create play at the library is, therefore, just as much about creating stories which can create dialogue and shared experiences for the families as it is the availability of toys. Stories are a powerful tool that can be used to put adults into contact with their inner child mind and their imagination.

### **Events that can change the image of the public library**

Play activities in the library ruptures with the general public perception of the library. Many people still see the library as a place to quietly borrow and return books. Creating events and inspirational interiors is a great way of promoting the constellation of play, families and library.

### **The library as a meeting place for families**

Play can be a catalyst for families to meet and be with other families. Play creates an open and social state of mind that brings people together and given the right circumstances it can inspire dialogue and interaction.

### **Play moves the standards for public libraries**

The library must actively signal that play is allowed. Users do not (yet) connect libraries and play. Therefore, it is important that the library staff sends out the signal that play is allowed.

It may be a good idea to match expectations regarding the amount of noise users may encounter at the library. Families at play make quite a lot of noise, but they may also need some quiet time as do many other library users. If the library offers spacious frames, which clearly signals *do's and don'ts* it helps to clarify the expectations of both families at play and other users as well as the staff.

### **YES. Libraries should work with play**

The experiences of the project have proved that the library holds great potential for creating interesting opportunities to play. The library still has a privileged position among families with children compared to many other cultural institutions in society. This can be better exploited in the future. Among other things, by continuing to work consciously with discussing and conceptualizing what play is and which role play holds for people in modern society.

■ [More specific advice on page 29](#)



# INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

*Families at Play in the Library* has been running from 2008 to 2010. The goal has been to create new, shared experiences for children and adults in connection with the Danish public libraries. And to create new input on how families can use libraries at the same time and be together as well as be occupied with a meaningful activity of their own. The key factor has been the library's awareness of what it is that it offers the family as individuals and as a group.

## Several initiatives and elements have been precursors for the project

- A strategic partnership about dissemination of media, culture, play and learning for children and families. The network was formed on the initiative of Knud Schulz from the Main Library in Aarhus in 2007.
- Inspiration from two external interdisciplinary workshops involving 150 students developing ideas for the concept of *Families at Play in the Library*. One workshop was part of the Solution Camp 2007 and the other workshop was held separately at Peter Sabro (VIA University College, Department of Social Education) also in 2007.
- Inspiration from presentations and discussions in the group that worked under the Danish Agency for Libraries and Media with the report *Fremtidens biblioteksbetjening af børn (Future Library Services for Children)* in 2008. In particular the fourth recommendation of the report about children playing in the library. Here it is recommended that *The library can turn play and play culture into a central area of activity. The library can create space for play, make toys and games available and advise on games.*

Besides providing the physical settings and different kinds of play media to stimulate play in the library, the project has also researched for knowledge about families and play culture in general. What is play? What should play be able to do? Can we identify what good play is? And is it possible for play to involve both adults and children? Is it possible for a public library to facilitate play? And should it be allowed to play in the library at all?

Stine Liv Johansen, who has been part of the project *Families at Play in the Library* as a researcher at the Centre for Playware, describes the relationship between libraries and play like this: *Most people – children as well as adults – have a very clear idea about how to behave and what to expect in a library.*

*The primary activity is finding and borrowing books, maybe some music or a computer game. And then you have to be quiet. There must be peace and quiet to allow users to immerse themselves in the reading of books and newspapers. There may be a small corner with toys in the children's library, maybe even a few computers. Noisy behaviour is not accepted, though.*

*But libraries are not what they used to be. Changes in the media system, and as a result of this the changing expectations of the users, means that libraries must redefine their aim and understanding of themselves.*

The libraries' understanding of themselves has been an important issue and challenge in the project, because play in the library not only challenges the users and their understanding of what a library is and should be, but also the staff. New experiences have been made, which not only demand good librarian skills, but also demand imagination, creativity, interest in and knowledge about play.



# WHY PLAY IN THE LIBRARY?

BY STINE LIV JOHANSEN, PH.D. AND ASSISTANT PROFESSOR  
AT CENTRE FOR PLAYWARE, DPU, UNIVERSITY OF AARHUS

Children play. They have always done so and they always will. But as society's structures are changing and new technology become available the terms and the frames for children's play also change. Today children depend more on the availability of toys and media in order to get into play than they did a few generations ago. The consequence of this is that we as adults can find it difficult to recognise the activities of children today as play. And it means that not all children have equal access to play and to the social communities that exist around play, since modern play media to a much larger extent have a financial aspect to them.

Play is an unforced, voluntary activity (Jessen (2001), Sutton-Smith (1997)). Basically you play with the sole purpose of getting into play. Not to learn something and not to perfect one's motor function or social skills. These things are, so to speak, spin-offs of play. Play is about getting into a certain mood, about imagining things and often about putting your body in motion to get butterflies in the stomach and a tickling down the spine. In the broad definition of play, it is not an activity reserved for children. We all play when we go to a party to dance, when we take part in a run just for the fun of it, when we go shopping or when we play games or send silly messages to each other on Facebook. Theoretically, play can be defined as a practise (something we do in a certain way) with a play media (the thing we play with) with the purpose of getting into a playful mood. A play media can be anything from a toy designed with the purpose of a certain game (but not necessarily used to that purpose) to materials, which are not necessarily designed for play (sand, sticks, pets) to

computer games and mobile phones. Play media can also be the rules in a game of hide and seek or pop songs that girls in kindergarten mime and perform.

Over the past generations, there have been some notable changes in society that have influenced how and when children play. The main change is the changing gender roles; women's increased entry into the workplace. And as a result of this the increased institutionalisation of children. A couple or three generations ago the streets, gardens or backyards were the primary play areas for children of various ages. Today, kindergarten or school is the place where children meet other children and play takes place. The point to be made is that in these kinds of institutions children mainly meet other children of the same age. The result being that the handover of cultural play competencies from older to younger children does not occur to the same extent as it used to. This means that inspiration to play must come from other places. This way media and toys – and merchandise producers – become the fuel for children's play. Entire universes to play in are built around great media stories like Star Wars, and also traditional games, like dressing up, performing or football are connected to media products today. Play has become mediatized– and thus commercialised.

After school, kindergarten or after-school centres, children's leisure time is to a high degree structured and defined by many leisure time activities, sports, music etc. Here children also meet other children, but again it will be children of the same age. This means that children today have less availability of their own time – less leisure time.

This can be regretted, but it can also be seen and understood as a condition that must be dealt with. Society's norms of what a good childhood is have changed and parents today are active and initiating, but also decisive of their children's daily life. This means children today have less leisure time in which to initiate activities on their own and decide what they want to do. It may seem like children expect adults to orchestrate their play, but the truth is probably that we as adults have accustomed our children to being driven from one organised activity to another and that toys and media are at their constant disposal.

The point is that access to these play media are a necessity in order to get into play. You need to know them and have access to them, in order to be part of the social communities that form the framework for a particular game. This requires the financial possibility e.g. to buy a mobile phone with a camera or Bluetooth connection, or to follow the media that sets the agenda for play in the schoolyard. And not all children have those possibilities, either for economical or cultural reasons. In this connection the library plays an important role in the dissemination of play and play media.

But the library can do more than that. The library is the place where play as a fundamental cultural expression can be taken seriously and where the settings and conditions in order for play to take place can be created. In the same way libraries are obliged to disseminate cultural heritage in the shape of books, music, films and latest new media like computer games, it is also obvious that the library should act as an important setting for play. At the same

time the library is a place that, despite competition from other cultural institutions, and what one might call the experience economy as such, still holds a significant status in the minds of many people, including many children. Therefore the library is a place that gathers many different people, young and old, with different interests. And first and foremost; it is free to use the library.

In the project *Families at Play in the Library* one of the main goals has been to examine what the library can do when it comes to play. This has for instance been examined by challenging the traditional ways of dissemination, through the inclusion of new technologies or by pushing the public understanding of what a library is. At the Main Library in Aarhus a *Lumber Room* was created which consciously challenged the library's aesthetic expression by creating a room that was ugly in a *nice kind of way*, containing things that could not necessarily withstand being used by a lot of people. This turned out to be a challenge, not only for the library personnel, but to a high degree for the users as well – in particular the adults. But through this challenge, new spaces for play, dissemination and being together were created. Also other concepts in the project have consciously worked with the framings of the library as a place of cultural processes. In Randers, among other things, by focusing on music and the exchange of knowledge between generations and in Vejgaard by involving the entire library space in a playful story about life at sea.

The experiences of the project have shown that the library contains great possibilities for creating interesting play. The library still holds a privileged position among

other cultural offers to families, which could be put to better use in the future. Among other things by continuing to work consciously with discussing and conceptualising what play is, and which role play should have for people in a modern society.



## CONCEPTS OF PLAY

It has been central to the project to create experiences for the entire family. Not only to work with play, but also to work with the notion of playing together – where both children and adults surrender themselves to the moment.

In these experiences, different concepts for play in the library have been tested. The concepts have been developed with the inclusion of library users and with input from the project partners.

The professional and methodical input from research on play has been very important for the development of the concepts and in analyzing the experiences made. Stine Liv Johansen emphasizes that children today primarily socialize with children their own age and therefore *Families at Play in the Library* has chosen to develop concepts with the aim of creating environments, where children of all ages can interact and be stimulated to play. This goes for *the Lumber Room*, *the Sensory Room* and *the Pirate Universe* in Aalborg.

Another form of professional and methodical input came from Interactive Spaces and Alexandra Institute when they designed the installation *U.F.O.scope* in close

cooperation with the three public libraries of the partnership. *The U.F.O.scope* invites children and adults to use their different competencies in shared play and it requires both physical coordination and teamwork.

The final two concepts of the project *the Storytelling Machine* and *The Family Treasure Hunt* each try to create a media story, where play and fiction are integrated.

There are many types of play. Play can be structured by more or less established rules or chronology. Play can also spring from the imagination, where participants create the rules, scenarios and content as they go along. *Families at Play in the Library* has created various concepts in order to examine and support different types of play. The concepts, which can be found on the following pages, can be divided into structured and free concepts of play. The library staff has different roles depending on the character of the concept. In the free concepts staff can be on the sideline, observing or acting as an equal participant in the play, while in the structured concepts the staff is actively communicating and instigating play.

# ROCK'N'ROLL AND STORIES FROM RANDERS

The concepts from Randers are different from each other, but both are basically about artistic and cultural expressions. This includes expressions by professionals and by children themselves. Focus is on music and stories, but other expressions could easily be included. Central to the concepts is to support and activate conversation across generations – and hereby to create a sense of community. To let families listen to each other, to each other's stories and laugh together at the changing times, the changing music and the changing culture.

## CONCEPT 1: MUSICAL TIME MACHINE

*The Musical Time Machine* has the possibility to combine music from different decades.

The musical time machine is a so-called structured play concept containing knowledge, music and stories that unites the family across generations in a quiz where everyone can participate.

The machine is *wrapped up* like an mp3 player, about 1,25 metres tall with a touch screen. In the ceiling above the machine, directional speakers are hanging camouflaged as huge LP records.

The game starts by each person choosing an avatar and entering their age on the touch screen. A voice tells you to choose from which generation you want a musical question. Then the track is played and by giving the correct answer you get points and the possibility to choose the next track. Small stories are embedded about important events from the different decades starting from the 40s and up until today. It is optional to listen to these

stories. A voice keeps telling you what the next step in the quiz is. The first player to get 5 points is the musical genius of the family.

### **This idea gathers the family because....**

Overall, this installation gathers the family because it is fun to hear music from the time a child's parents or grandparents were young and music is an important area of interest in the lives of children, especially in the target age (8-11 years old). *The Musical Time Machine* provides the opportunity for a good chat and some laughs across generations. Especially the grandparents can also get an insight into the music their grandchildren listen to today.

### **We think the idea is good because...**

Music is important in the lives of children, especially in the target age (8-11 years)

## THE MOBILE PART OF THE CONCEPT 1: A MUSICAL QUIZ SUITCASE

Conversations across history, generations and time.

Musical quiz suitcases have been created in continuation of *The Musical Time Machine*. They aim to create more in depth conversation about history and changing times through pictures, music and quiz. The family gets an insight into each other's history: both personal and shared.

The musical quiz suitcases fit the description of a structured concept containing suitcases from each decade from the 40s up until today. Each suitcase contains a treasure hunt and different tasks that must be solved around the



library. The tasks consist of a rebus and a musical question. Together you find photos on a photo collage from the decade that your suitcase represents. Each suitcase also contains a photo from a children's tv-show, a photo from a local venue and a photo of an important event (e.g. the moon landing or the coronation of the Queen).

All these photos invite stories and narratives to be shared between generations and there are meaningful challenges for everyone in the family regardless of age. Each suitcase also contains a game from the chosen decade, which the family can play.

#### **This idea gathers the family because...**

There are meaningful challenges for everyone in the family, and because music and quizzing make children and adults talk, listen and play together.

#### **We think the idea is good because...**

The installation has demonstrated that all generations play and that generations in a playful setting can learn more about contemporary music and musical history and at the same time get to know each other in new ways.

#### **CONCEPT 2: THE STORYTELLING MACHINE**

Snip, snap, snout, this tale's told out! *The Storytelling Machine* plays with children's ability to combine stories with pictures.

The focus in this concept has been moved to a younger target group: the three to six years olds and their adults. *The Storytelling Machine* is based on the fact that stories

play an important role for children, particularly at this age. *The Storytelling Machine* contains 12 stories (made especially for this installation). The children start the game by choosing a story on the touch screen. Throughout the story drawings, which they should remember, pop up. At some point the story stops and different pictures are shown on the screen instead. In order to get the ending of the story the children and their adults must help each other choose the pictures that belong to their particular story.

**This idea gathers the family because...**

Adults and children listen to the story together and help each other find the figures (illustrations) that means you get the end of the story.

**We think the idea is good because...**

*The Storytelling Machine* encourages children and adults to continue to tell each other stories – even after they leave the library.



# CAPTAIN HOOK, PIRACY AND IMMERSION AT VEJGAARD LIBRARY

In Vejgaard, the first concept works with a pirate theme as a way to bring play, costumes, battle and joy into the library. The second concept is about a more reflective and poetical universe, where a sensory room offers concentration, conversation and wonder. Together the two concepts span the extremes: the outward, playful and wild opposite the reflective, searching and trying. Both concepts exhibit a more unstructured approach to play, where there are no instructions or right way to behave.

## CONCEPT 1: PIRATE UNIVERSE

A fantasy universe, which challenges children's motor system and stimulates their creativity and imagination.

An area of the children's library is changed into a pirate universe with a pirate ship and different activities that encourage children of all ages and their parents to engage in physical activity. The pirate universe contains treasure chests, pirate clothes, parrots, treasure maps and a pirate tower with steps inside and out, peep holes, an observation post with two rudders, and of course, a big pirate flag. From the tower it is possible to do target shooting with small sand bags at cannonballs (small loudspeakers decorated like cannonballs) that trigger different sounds.

One wall is decorated with a meter tall frieze with different pirate motives. A touchscreen with icons resembling parts of the frieze stands close by. If activated the icons trigger various sounds – a talking wall, so to speak.

The other wall is decorated floor to ceiling with underwater motives like mermaids, whales, fish, sea horses, a

treasure chest with pearls, shipwrecks, squids, crayfish and seaweed.

In front of the pirate universe is an *island for parents*. This island consists of tables and chairs with a good view of the pirate ship. The island for parents also offers a lime green Fatboy hammock, placed between two columns – from floor to ceiling. The two columns are decorated like palms with artificial palm leaves, coconuts, parrots and monkeys. Different media about pirates have been bought and are frequently used when playtime flows into more calm activities and further contemplation.

### **This idea gathers the family because...**

The pirate theme in itself invokes play across generations and inspires to playful experiments. Everyone can join and act in this familiar universe. No introduction is required and the possibility of play is wide and varied at all levels. No pirate, treasure hunt or battle is more correct than another.

### **We think the idea is good because...**

The pirate theme in itself invites to play and the ship invites to testing, exploration and physical movement for all ages. And of course the universe also works as a tool of dissemination of media. There are plenty of books, films and music about pirates that can be used at the library or taken home.

## CONCEPT 2: THE SENSORY ROOM

A sensory room for perception, imagination and interactivity. The sensory room is 24m<sup>2</sup> and the walls and ceiling



are painted midnight-blue. The windows are covered by blackout curtains and the room appears dark. However, it is lit by different coloured lights. These lights hit the silver coloured cave, while bats hang from the ceiling. The lights also hit the ultra violet paintings on several of the walls, while the distortion mirrors, lava lamps and turning lights create a different kind of world. Low new-age music supports the special atmosphere.

There are sensory boxes where you can put your hands in without knowing what kind of exciting, beautiful, or disgusting things are in there. 12 drawers offer different *sensory effects* like rubber balls with pink mice and rats, different smells (chocolate, flowers, and fruits), musical instruments, magnifying glasses, slime, artificial snow, yoyos with light and sound, and torches which are especially suitable for the cave, where different creeps can be found. The room appeals to all senses – ready to be explored by children and adults of all ages.

### **This idea gathers the family because...**

The children visiting the room are amazed and fascinated by the atmosphere and the many effects. The room has some sort of *wow effect* that naturally inspires families to test things on their own.

### **We think the idea is good because...**

It is an amazement room, which can give a *wow effect* and naturally inspires families to test things on their own.



# NOSTALGIA, RETRO MEMORIES AND INTERACTIVE TREASURE HUNT IN AARHUS

These concepts give possibilities for different types of play. The first concept, *the Lumber Room* is designed for unstructured play. There are no rules or pre-decided ways to play. However, the second concept, the *Family Treasure Hunt*, is a so-called structured game. If the treasure hunt is to be completed there is only one correct way of doing it. There are rules to be followed.

## CONCEPT 1: THE LUMBERROOM

*I am back in a basement in the middle of the 1980s. It's great. It was just like that.* Kirstine, Hannah's mother (Our translation from the guestbook in the Lumber Room)

Often the best playground is not really a playground, but a place where it is fun to play and where the imagination is triggered, like an attic or a boxroom full of interesting old stuff. There it is possible to build hiding places, study old photo albums or dress up. *The Lumber Room* is a 30m<sup>2</sup> room that simulates an attic or a boxroom. It is furnished with old garden-chairs, old clothes, second-hand things from the 1970s and 1980s, patchwork carpets, cassette recorders, paintings, books, games, and a Commodore 64. The things automatically spark conversations between children and adults because they have the *character of remembering and recognition*. Parents remember how it was to play as children. Everything can be touched and played with. It is not an exhibition, but an unfinished room that can work as inspiration for play and dialogue between adults and children and between families and the project *Families at Play in the Library*.

The idea behind the concept is that exploration is fun – for adults as well. It is a meaningful and cosy activity for the entire family. Cosiness is important because it stimulates the families in being together. It creates exciting and creative frames without defining what activities or kind of play that should take place. And it is both easy and cheap to copy on a smaller or bigger scale.

For the duration of *the Lumber Room* user observations were made by both researchers and staff. The results show that the signals library staff sends out through their behaviour are determining for the play that unfolds within the room. In short if staff is tidying up while users are in the room it is very restricting for the expressions of play. If staff fails to tidy up on a regular basis the possibilities of the room are less appreciated and more than usual is broken. Families play best when staff encourages and supports the play, and only tidy up remedies that are not used by users at the same time.

### **This idea gathers the family because...**

Exploring is fun. Also for adults. Adults can show and tell children how it was when they were children. It is a meaningful and nice activity for all in the family. The factor of niceness is important: being together is nice.

### **We think the idea is good because...**

The concept creates exciting and creative frames without defining what activities or play that should take place. And it is easy to copy on a smaller or bigger scale.

## CONCEPT 2: THE FAMILY TREASURE HUNT

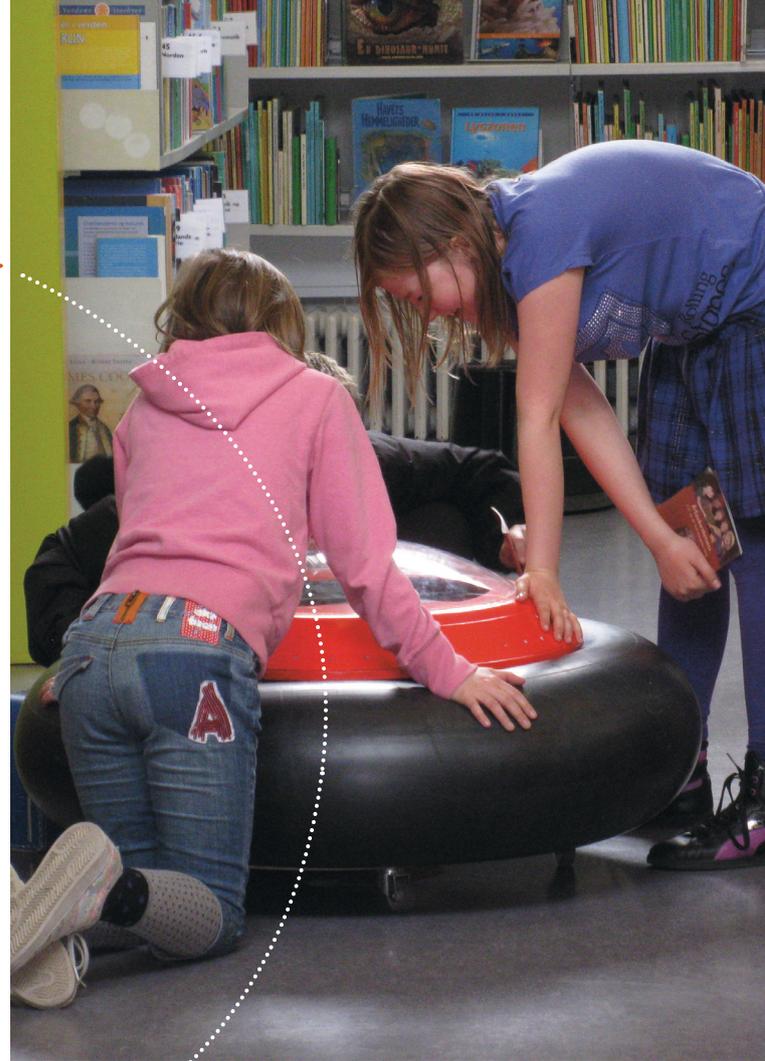
Interactive treasure hunt with local historical narratives and music.

*The Family Treasure Hunt* is a so-called structured play concept. Families are introduced to the treasure hunt via an interactive table. The table contains various background information and clues and from there families are sent on four different trails in the physical library. If they solve all of the riddles on the four trails they get the secret password. The narrative framing the treasure hunt is Aarhus at the time of the Vikings and revolves around the friendship of five boys and the treasure they buried together. The treasure was buried under a rune stone, which later was recovered when the Main Library was being build. Today the actual rune stone from the story is to be seen at the local Museum Moesgaard. The treasure hunt is *faction*, in other words, it is a few facts and lots of fiction. The concept is much like a computer game where sound, picture and film create a scenario which, in this case, is played out in the real world.

The narrative frame of the *Family Treasure Hunt* was rewritten into a story, which was published. The treasure hunt opened in a big family event fall 2008 with Viking music, storytelling, soup and a rune workshop.

### **This idea gathers the family because...**

In this installation mysteries, riddles and elements of competition work as motivation for play across age and generations. The main idea of *The Family Treasure Hunt* was to create a game where the riddles can only be solved when children and adults work and play together.



### **We think the idea is good because...**

You have to enter into the story and the universe in order to solve the mystery. It is a treasure hunt that combines storytelling, play, physical activity, creative thinking and also demands involvement and commitment by all players. *The Family Treasure Hunt* is a complete media story that uses puzzles and teamwork to create a playful experience for the family. It works as a dissemination tool in relation to other media in the library

# THE U.F.O.SCOPE – INTERACTIVE PLAY ACROSS MEDIA AND SPACE

Interactive Spaces and Alexandra Institute has examined how an interactive design installation can support families at play in the library.

The result is the *U.F.O.scope* which simulates a U.F.O. with a Martian on board. The installation is basically a large tire tube on wheels, containing a laptop computer with a RFID reader and a screen, protected by a plastic top.

The *U.F.O.scope* invites to physical activity and play. Children and adults can push or drive the *U.F.O.scope* around the library. When it goes across carefully placed RFID tags on the floors, the *U.F.O.scope* shows pictures, text bites or movie clips representing our planet: animals, people and machines. This way the *U.F.O.scope* is an explorer both in relation to the knowledge users can obtain from interacting with it and in relation to the services of the library, because it takes children and their families physically around the library. The intention is that by playing with the *U.F.O.scope* they see places in the library they never knew existed. And in these locations they get new knowledge from the *U.F.O.scope*.

- See more about the development of the *U.F.O.scope* on page 26

## This idea gathers the family because...

The *U.F.O.scope* works best when small children and their parents take it on a roundtrip. The *U.F.O.scope* is best moved by small children because of its design. The small children need the help of their accompanying adults to navigate and read information.

## We think the idea is good because...

The *U.F.O.scope* is an installation which appeals to the curiosity of children and adults and stimulates physical activity. It supports a playful approach to the library and gives opportunity to find without seeking. The *U.F.O.scope* works as a dissemination tool in relation to the media collections of the library.



# U.F.O.SCOPE! – FAMILIES PLAYING TOGETHER AT THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

EVA ERIKSSON, CHALMERS UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY,  
GOTHENBURG, SWEDEN

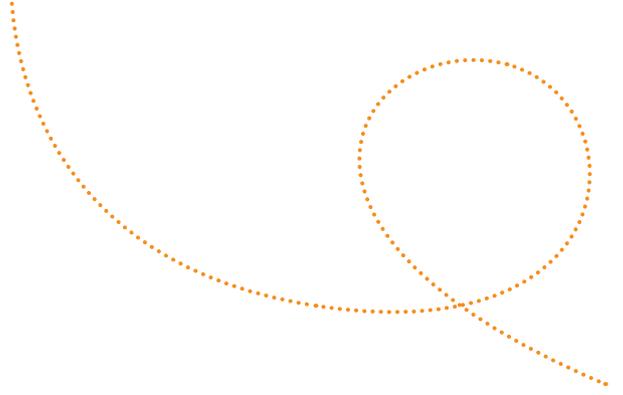
The presence of the physical public libraries has an important role in society, and its digital resources are growing rapidly. Still, little has been done in trying to make the physical space and artifacts in the library the interface for digital material, and shifting the desktop computer to pervasive computing systems. In the project *Families at play in the library*, the Alexandra Institute and Interactive Spaces have investigated how an interaction design installation can support families playing together in the context of public libraries, going beyond existing interaction modalities for computer appliances, engaging several senses and the whole body when experiencing and exploring information, and at the same time acknowledging the social needs of the children and their families.

The *U.F.O.scope* is an interactive installation aiming to evoke curiosity and engagement, both for the installation and its content, but especially for the physical library and its many resources. It has been developed through several workshops with all partners of the project, by physical try-outs and bodystorming with the installation at the library. The *U.F.O.scope* is basically a large horizontal tire tube on wheels filled with technology, protected by an acrylic and wooden top. It contains a laptop computer, RFID reader, accelerometer, speakers and a screen. By pushing and kicking the wheel you can discover the library and its content through play. When the *U.F.O.scope* is dragged across an RFID-tag, the information connected to that tag will be displayed on the screen. The information is presented in the four media categories that the library offers; text, film, sound and pictures, in order to contextualize the content

stronger to the library and evoke curiosity for its different types of resources. The round shape supports collective play with no given control seat or switch, so that several persons can be in control of navigation and exploration.

RFID-tags are attached to the floor covered with big red dots, spread out in the library, with no visible clue of what is hidden below. The graphical Martian on the screen is triggered by the accelerometer, standing still as the *U.F.O.scope* stands still and moving when the *U.F.O.scope* moves. There are attention calls from the Martian when not in use, and content material appear randomly so that every journey with the *U.F.O.scope* is unique. The Martian changes appearance for every type of content, for instance when reading text, he wears a pair of glasses, or watching a movie clip he eats popcorn. The content is divided into three different categories representing planet earth; humans, animals and machines, and the mission is to help the Martian to get around in the library, since the *U.F.O.scope* engine broke down and he wants to discover this planet.

The *U.F.O.scope* has been under evaluation several times, at the main municipality library in Aarhus, Aalborg and Randers. There were a lot of children, school classes, kindergartens and families trying out the *U.F.O.scope*, and we experienced many different types of use. Almost all children and families with children entering the library got curious about the installation, and tried it out in one way or the other. Most often the children got attracted by the shape and just started moving it, while the parents first read stickers with explanation of what it was before getting



devoted to playing along. The children pushed around with the *U.F.O.scope*, the parents walked beside or helped pushing and were curious about the content and helped interpret and read the text for the younger children. In families with several children the children usually play with the *U.F.O.scope* while the parents walk beside, but in cases of only one child there is more teamwork between adult and child. Children often got inspired and played along together, even though they did not know each other. Very often they inspired each other, so that one family watched another family and tried it out when they were done. Typically the girls were more eager to discover all the red dots, to *complete the task*, while boys were more fascinated over riding and pushing the UFO and also to investigate the number of possible functions.

Choosing a Martian turned out to be a successful design decision. The UFO is unfamiliar to the users; the Martian makes it more personalized and helps users enter a kind of role play. As the Martian asks for help, it is now entitled to openly explain and discuss the content and the settings. Mars is a symbol for something unfamiliar and unknown, something that evokes curiosity. The Mars theme is playful and motivating for both children, parents, librarians and designers, it creates a shared narrative space where it is possible to play, talk and move beyond your usual manner. Parents often load the children off in the children's department and let them play on their own, while doing other activities. This pattern changed while the families played with the *U.F.O.scope*, the installation acts as a trigger for

social interaction, promoting and provoking interaction among visitors in physically exploring digital material. The *U.F.O.scope* moved around in the library, both following the red dots and elsewhere. This made the children visit places where they usually do not go within the library, and they sometimes discovered materials found there. It was important to create something that made the families move beyond their usual path at the library, discovering the physical place, but also be inspired to new types of media. Children find the adult department boring, so parents leave their children behind in the children's department when going to the adult department searching for books. Here lies a great potential for the *U.F.O.scope*, as it makes it possible for any department to be fun and mysterious, and children have something to do when discovering the content and the setting in other departments. The shape immediately attracts children in different ages. The children prefer riding and pushing it around in the library, while the parents, especially men, are interested in finding out what is hiding under the dots. So the *U.F.O.scope* is attractive for both age groups within the family, which is one of the many challenges within this project. Traditionally, the children are used to be in control of the toys, while parents often hesitate to devote themselves into the play. The parents are used to be in control of the library functions, the physical and digital searching for materials and contact to the librarian, while the children follow along. With the *U.F.O.scope*, both age groups have equal control, which is different to their usual library visit. The content succeeds in connecting to the different

media types existing in the library, and the content and interaction form also support the three themes that have been investigated in this project; nostalgia, competition and physical movement.

Finally, we claim it important that future development for the libraries focus not only on pure digital resources or pure physical resources, but join them in order to create a bond and trigger curiosity for them both. We suggest intertwining fun technological play-ware with the physical and digital resources and services found in the physical place. We also claim that interaction design installations can help bringing people together at the library, both within families as well as opening up for new meetings, as an unfamiliar common ground makes people co-operate and talk across the classical social borders.

- [See references in the list of literature](#)

# GOOD ADVICE – COLLECTED FROM ALL CONCEPTS

## **Create informal settings with a playful atmosphere**

Too staged or rigorous environments may discourage families from playing. Nice, appealing and deliberately messy playrooms seem appealing and inspiring for play.

## **Offer unstructured play**

The best experiences have been made by offering an environment with many opportunities to play that also appeals to both the senses and to physical activities. Families play by themselves and they need no introduction or help. The librarian may be present but more as an equal participant, not as an instigator.

## **Create activities that can start immediately and play media that are readily available**

Preferably, families should not wait to get started. If families can start to play immediately, they are much easier to get involved.

The project also tested concepts, which required formal introductions, technical accessories, or help along the way. If you have staff available to handle these kinds of installations on a daily basis, they work great. But it is a very personnel-intensive effort – even if instructions on print and film can help.

## **Play is also about the parents**

Working with play in the library is not only about the children, but about the parents as well. Parents often go to the library with the family in order to give the children the same experience they themselves had as children in the li-

brary – like reading cartoons in the pillow-room and spend hours looking for books. In the eyes of many parents that is the value of the library. That children play seems less important. Therefore, the project has also actively worked on information to parents about the importance of play and the role the public library could have in this regard.

## **Special rules for playgrounds – also in the library**

There are special regulations concerning playground safety in Denmark – outdoors and indoors. Find out about the national regulations before you start planning installations or redecorations. (more about Playgrounds and playground equipment [www.dti.dk/specialists/23541](http://www.dti.dk/specialists/23541))

## **Will you say yes to noise and clutter?**

To say yes to play is to say yes to noise and clutter. It is important that everyone in the library (users, employees and management) accept that play will create more noise and clutter.

## **New roles**

Play in the library challenges the image users and staffs have of the library. To put focus on families, on experience, play and imagination is to say yes to new roles as staff, for instance to be the custodian in a *Lumber room* or to be the quizmaster in a musical game. It is also about securing the necessary support: To involve colleagues, management and users and to have the courage of your convictions, so the library can be a place of experiences and not just a repository for the modern family.



# METHODOLOGY

## User observations

In connection with the *Lumber Room*, researcher at Center for Playware Stine Liv Johansen and library staff made user observations. Staff observations were done with four different parameters; personnel visibility, monitoring, user contact and various degrees of tidiness. Observations in the *Lumber Room* showed, for example, very clearly that too much tidiness destroyed the playful atmosphere. People simply withdrew. On the other hand too much disorder and chaos also scared people away and increased the amount of broken toys and artifacts.

- See examples of instructions for observation in the online-edition of the Inspiration Catalogue.

## User-centered design

The basic idea of user involvement is that we as developers of a project cannot know or guess the needs of the users. However we can get very valuable information by engaging users as they can guide us, tell us what they need, their likes and dislikes.

Therefore users are not only engaged as test persons, but are already engaged in the development phase as co-designers. Thus in *Families at Play in the Library* users were not only involved in order to test already existing products but rather in order to develop new library concepts for families with children.

User engagement has happened in various ways and at different times in the process. Input coming from user en-

gagement has continuously helped redefine and develop models and concepts

## Cultural Probes

Cultural Probes provide the possibility to see the world through the eyes of the users. Through photos and diaries users tell their own stories in the context defined by the probe.

- The method is good for investigating the values and feelings of the users.
- The method provides unique insight into the world of the users.
- The method can provide rich material with valuable insights.
- The method primarily requires resources in the preparation and interpretation phase. In the interim phase, the users do the work.

Cultural probes can give the library a unique perspective on itself or its surroundings. This perspective is based on users' personal experiences and puts focus on the values and feelings that characterise the world of the users. The method is very open in the sense that it leaves it up to the participants to create the content and decide what is significant.

Thus, the role of the library is to set the overall frames for the activities of the participants and afterwards to interpret the material.

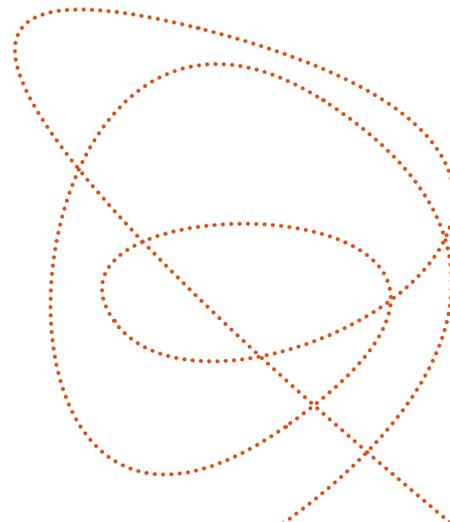
- More at [http://issuu.com/aakb/docs/slip\\_brugerne\\_loes\\_kogebog\\_epaper](http://issuu.com/aakb/docs/slip_brugerne_loes_kogebog_epaper) (In Danish)

### Mobile Probes

*Mobile Probes* is a different project that has developed a digital version of the anthropological method cultural probes by the use of mobile phones. In this way it is easier to have a continuous dialogue with the users, easier to collect data, and possible to involve users *on the spot*. In a co-operation between *Mobile Probes* and *Families at Play in the Library*, three sequences with mobile probes have been carried out. The first mobile probe was carried out over three days in the spring of 2009, where the theme was the daily life and common activities of families with children. The second probe was started during an annual cultural event in Aarhus called *Kulturnatten* in October 2009, and continued for the two following days. The theme was cultural activities of families in general. Neither of the two probes was statistically valid because of a limited amount of participants, but both processes yielded important information about families' lives,

wishes and needs for libraries and cultural life in general. The probes also resulted in input for the *Family Treasure Hunt*, e.g. that there should be a prize as motivation for completing the quests, but that the size was not as important. In the third probe, 20 children in the ages 12-13 from a local primary school participated. The themes were the children's everyday lives and their relations to family and friends. This probe also gave important information to *Families at Play in the Library*, for example that 12-13 years olds still need to have cultural experiences and play with their families.

- More at [www.mobileprobes.dk](http://www.mobileprobes.dk)



# PARTICIPANTS, SOURCES OF INSPIRATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

## PARTICIPANTS AND CONTACTS

### MANAGEMENT GROUP

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**Mette Kirkegaard Jensen**, project manager February 2010 – December 2010, [mkj@aarhus.dk](mailto:mkj@aarhus.dk)

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**Jane Kunze** (September 2008 – January 2010), [jku@aarhus.dk](mailto:jku@aarhus.dk)

**Sif Lüscher Rauff** (February – October 2009) Intern from department of Aesthetics and Culture, Aarhus University

**Center for Playware** the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Stine Liv Johansen, [imvslj@hum.au.dk](mailto:imvslj@hum.au.dk)

## Interactive Spaces, Alexandre Instituttet

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**Liselott Stenfeldt**, [liselott@interactivespaces.net](mailto:liselott@interactivespaces.net)

**Kaj Grønbaek**, [kgronbak@interactivespaces.net](mailto:kgronbak@interactivespaces.net)

## SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

Families at play in the library has found inspiration and shared knowledge both nationally and internationally. This has been through partnerships, inspirational tours, conferences, workshops and through research and dialogue with other similar projects.

Among the specific projects and places are Children's Culture Aarhus, Alexandra Institute, Centre for Playware, projects from the three participating libraries and from Silkeborg Museum's think tank. Furthermore, the report *Fremtidens biblioteksbetjening af børn* (Future Library Services for Children) (2008), has been important. Throughout

the project, inspiration has been found at local cultural institutions like Moesgaard Museum and the Childhood Exhibition at the Women's Museum in Aarhus.

#### PARTNERSHIPS

Along the way, *Families at Play in the Library* partnered up with the similar library project *The Children's Librarian as Playmaker*. The focus here was on the librarian as active facilitator of play and the project examined how play can be integrated into the physical library. This was done through model tests at Danish children's libraries in 2009-2010. The Aarhus subproject of *Families at play in the library* has cooperated with the project Mobile Probes on user engagement.

#### OTHER PARTNERS

**Freya Hvaste**, mytologist: [www.mytolog.dk](http://www.mytolog.dk) (Danish)

**Cordura**: [www.cordura.dk](http://www.cordura.dk)

**Figuramus**: [www.figuramus.com](http://www.figuramus.com) (Danish)

**Fuls Fæller** (musik): [www.levendemusikhistorie.dk/fuls](http://www.levendemusikhistorie.dk/fuls). (Danish)

**Moesgaard Museum**: [www.moesmus.dk](http://www.moesmus.dk)

**Lisbeth Nielsen** storyteller: [www.lisbethn.dk](http://www.lisbethn.dk) (Danish)

**AV Natura**: [www.avnatura.dk](http://www.avnatura.dk) (Danish)

#### INSPIRATIONAL LINKS AND CONTACTS

**Aalborg Søfarts- og Marinemuseum**:

[www.aalborgmarinemuseum.dk](http://www.aalborgmarinemuseum.dk)

**Alexandra Instituttet**:

[www.alexandra.dk](http://www.alexandra.dk)

**User engagement**: [www.brugbrugerne.dk](http://www.brugbrugerne.dk) (Danish) and [http://issuu.com/aakb/docs/slip\\_brugerne\\_loes\\_kogebog\\_epaper](http://issuu.com/aakb/docs/slip_brugerne_loes_kogebog_epaper) (Danish)

**City Detectives of Aarhus**: [www.sporiaarhus.dk](http://www.sporiaarhus.dk) (danish)

**Capella Legeland**:

[www.sjovforborn.dk/detail.asp?l=Legelande](http://www.sjovforborn.dk/detail.asp?l=Legelande) (Danish)

**Cordura** (Softwarehouse): [www.cordura.dk](http://www.cordura.dk)

**Discover, London**: [www.discover.org.uk](http://www.discover.org.uk)

**Frederikshavn Bibliotek**: [www.bibl.frederikshavn.dk](http://www.bibl.frederikshavn.dk) (danish)

**Next library innovation camp in Helsinki 2008**:

[www.nextlibrarycamp.wikispaces.com](http://www.nextlibrarycamp.wikispaces.com)

**Nordic Camps – Network of Nordic Public Libraries Camp**

**Iceland 2010**: **Fabreries**: [www.nordiccamps.ning.com](http://www.nordiccamps.ning.com)

**Solution camp 2007 at Aalborg University and Idea Nord** (Solution camp 2007):

[www.idea-nord.dk/index.php?id=502](http://www.idea-nord.dk/index.php?id=502) og

[www.krealab.aau.dk](http://www.krealab.aau.dk)

**Playgrounds and playground equipment**:

[www.dti.dk/specialists/23541](http://www.dti.dk/specialists/23541) (Danish)

**Peter Sabro Seminarier/VIA University Collega**,

**VIA University College**:

Eddy Thomsen and Thomas Kruuse.

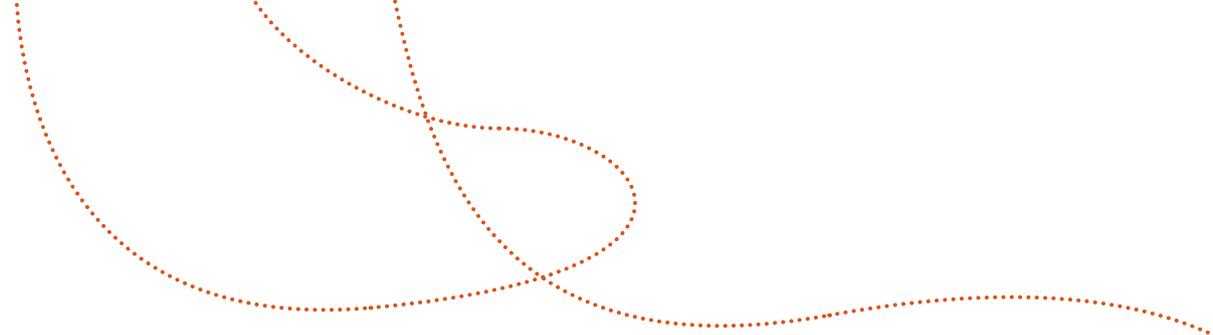
(Idea workshop fall 2007)

**Youtube time machine**: <http://yttm.tv/y/1977>

#### DISSEMINATION OF THE PROJECT

**Conference Presentations**:

**Jane Kunze**, Spain (februar 2009): El ciudadano demanda, la biblioteca responde, Bilbao.



**Jane Kunze**, Spain (may 2009): Lecturas en la red y redes en torno a la lectura, Salamanca.

**Mette Kirkegaard Jensen**, Portugal (may 2010): Encontro Oeiras a Ler, Oeiras.

**Lotte Duwe Nielsen**, Tromsø (june 2008), Fylkesmøde in Troms County Library and staff meeting in Tromsø Library and the city archive.

**Preliminary seminar *Let's Play 2008***

Oplæg på startseminar (2008):

**Presentations:**

**Anna Enemark:** Play in the Library,

**Jacob Nielsen:** Playware technologies,

**Lotte Duwe Nielsen:** Families at play in the Library and The Inspiration Group,

**Carsten Jessen:** Children, play and libraries (see the program and presentations at: [www.legende-familier.dk](http://www.legende-familier.dk). Presentations in Danish)

**Inspirational tour to the U.S. 2009:**

Visiting such places as ImaginOn, Charlotte. Storyville, Baltimore. Please Touch Museum, Philadelphia and City Museum, St. Louis.

The destinations were recommended through a network of library directors in the U.S. (via Ginnie Cooper, the District of Columbia Public Library and the Urban Libraries Council).

The U.S. tour resulted in working more actively with the staff's active and proactive role in relation to users among other things: [www.studietur.wikispaces.com](http://www.studietur.wikispaces.com) (Danish and English)

**Conference *Playing in the Library:***

Aarhus and Roskilde the 17 and 19 of may 2010.

Presentations:

**Mette Kirkegaard Jensen and Rikke Skuldbøl Jacobsen:**

Families at play in the Library and The librarian as Playmaker.

**Stine Liv Johansen:**

Why play in the Library?

**Rick Erwin, City Museum, St. Louis, USA:**

Where We Came From, Where We are Going, and How We Get Away With It. (See the program and presentations at [www.legende-familier.dk](http://www.legende-familier.dk). Presentations in Danish. Rick Erwin's presentation in English)

**Learn to play:**

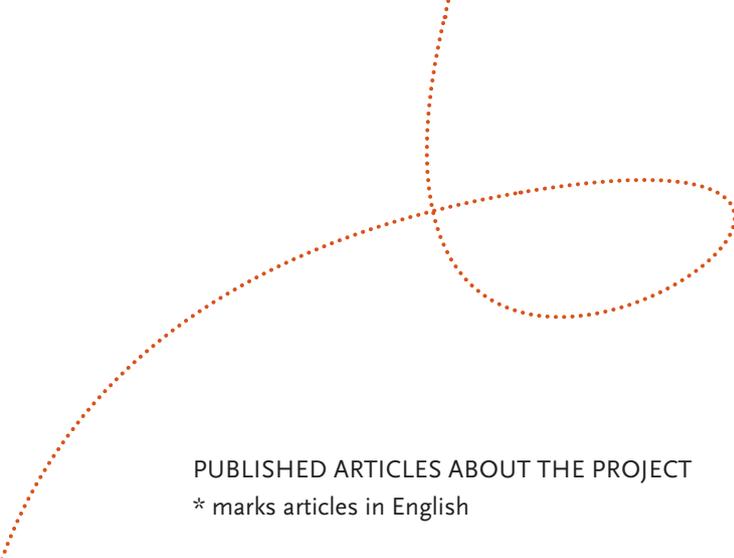
Competence development for librarians, the 14 of September 2010. Pictures and program at: [www.legende-familier.dk](http://www.legende-familier.dk) (Danish). Workshop for librarians to develop their playing skills and be inspired.

**Workshop i Veria Central Public Library, Greece (2008):**

Lotte Duwe-Nielsen and Anne Stæger presented the project ideas and participated in a creative workshop on play in the library, for libraries and school libraries

**Workshop *Playtime in the library:***

At the international un-Conference Next Library 16th June 2009. <http://nextlibrary.crowdvine.com/talks/4140>



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*Legende familier på biblioteket*, Bibliotekspressen 2010/2:  
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\* **Kunze, Jane** (2010): *Playtime – The role of play for the public children's library*, vol. 43, no. 1:  
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**Stine Liv Johansen** (2009): *De gode gamle dage...*  
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**Danskernes kultur- og fritidsaktiviteter 2004** (2005): med udviklingslinier tilbage til 1964, Kulturvaneundersøgelsen 2004, AKF forlaget, 2005

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\* **Dindler, C., Krogh, P., Bech, S., Stenfheldt, L., Nielsen, K., Grønbaek, K** (2007): Peephole Experiences – Field Experiments with mixed reality Hydrosopes in a Marine Center, In Proceedings of DUX Chicago, ACM.

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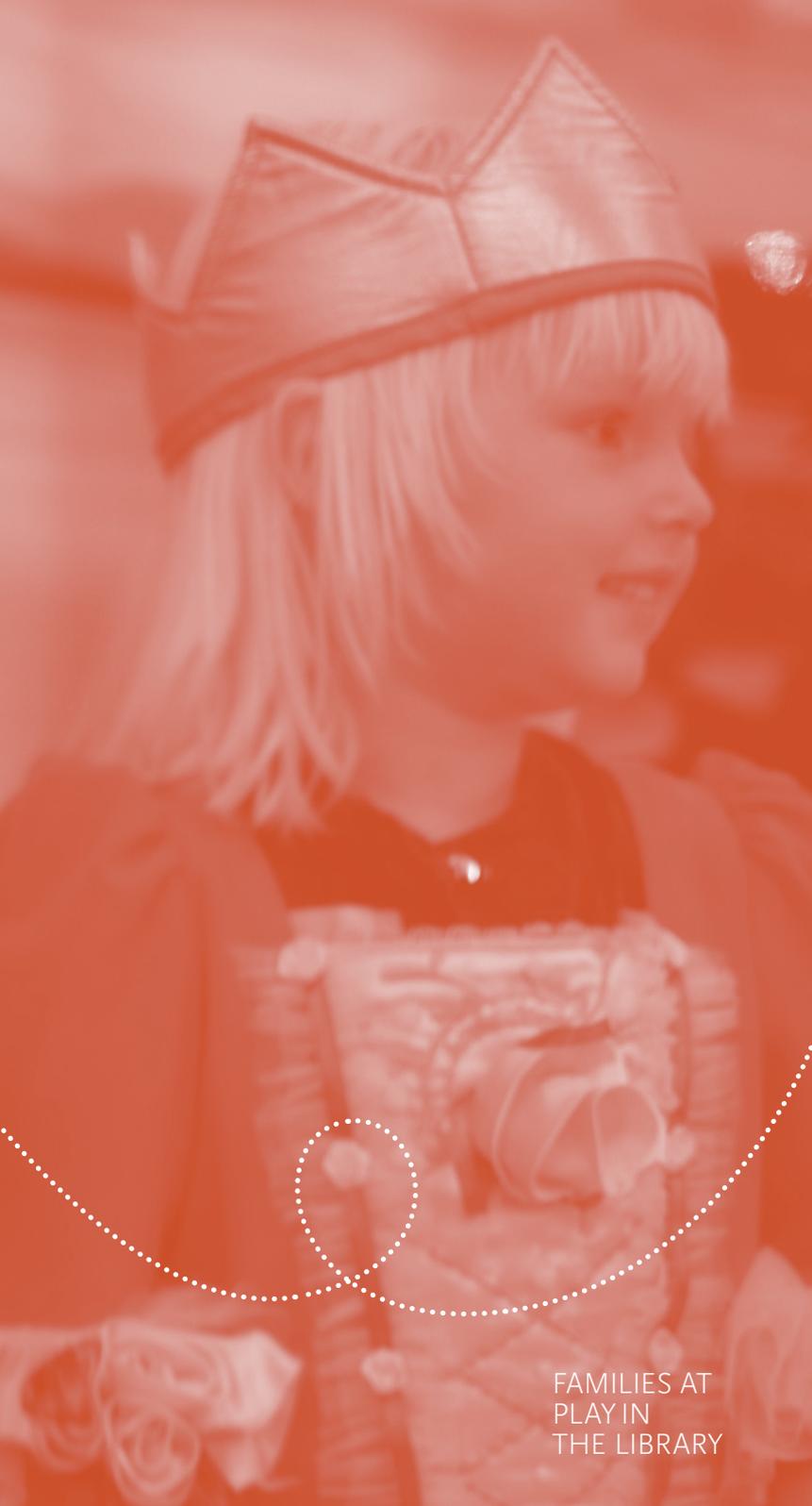
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FAMILIES AT  
PLAY IN  
THE LIBRARY