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**Library service to Arabic speaking immigrants and refugees
in Denmark.**

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Public libraries in Denmark.

A free of charge access to library service for all citizens is essential for the libraries in Denmark as it is considered a basic principle to a democratic society. The libraries have a long tradition for giving special emphasis on disadvantaged groups which can otherwise easily be marginalised and overlooked in modern society. The prime aim is to provide access to the information and cultural heritage found in books, music, pictures (video) etc. and in the new technologies, i e Internet.

The public libraries give access to all kinds of medias to the general public, including books, newspapers/magazines, music, videos, CD's, books on tape and Internet.

The free and equal access to library service and information through the public libraries is granted the citizens through legislation, of which the latest revision took place this year. A new Act on Library Activities was passed just this spring and came into force from July 1st. (Lov om biblioteksvirksomhed, L 78, 2000).

Background

Since January 1st 1999, an Integration Act has given the framework for the procedure for all newcomers to Denmark for the first three years of their stay in Denmark.

The aim of the Integration Act is to give equal opportunities to all citizens to active participation in the society, education and the labour market. A key to this is to master the Danish language. It is therefore an obligation for all newcomers to participate in courses in Danish during these three years of integration.

Although the importance of learning Danish is stressed it is also accepted and supported - although under constant debate - that citizens with a non-Danish background may want to maintain their first language and that they also often want to pass it on to the children.

Mothertongue training is therefore an offer to the children as a supplement to the Danish school. App. 50% of the bilingual children attend these classes.

This support of the mothertongue is expressed by the Minister of Education, ms Margrethe Vestager in 1998 when a report on bilingual childrens language and learning was launched. She expressed that the knowledge of the mothertongue should not only been seen as a help when learning Danish, but has a value of it's own and is of importance for the identity of the child. The same view was expressed by the mayor of one of the suburbs of Copenhagen when presenting the local school

programme: "It must be stressed that to be bilingual is a strength, not a handicap (Uddannelse, vol. 10, 1999, p. 19).

This is also one of the reasons why the libraries give service to the immigrants in their first language – the mothertongue.

The multilingual population in Denmark – and some figures.

Before going into a closer description of the library service to ethnic minorities let me present some background information and some figures.

The Danish population (app. 5.1 mio inhabitants) has for centuries and right up till recent years been very homogenous as regard to ethnicity, language and religion and this has been a very important part of the Danish self concept. It has, therefore, been and still is considered a major challenge to the Danish society to handle the integration of the different groups of immigrants and refugees who have come to Denmark within the last 25-30 years and who come with very varied backgrounds regarding language, religion, educational level etc.

The immigration started in the late 60'ties when the so called guest workers – as they were called in those days came to work in the industry. They mostly came from the former Yugoslavia, Turkey, Pakistan and Morocco. Later in the 80'ties refugees came to Denmark from various conflict areas around the world – Iran, The Middle East (Iraq, Lebanon, Palestineans), Sri Lanka (Tamils), Vietnam, Polen and in most recent years from Bosnia and Somalia.

Today or as of 1st January, 2000 the total number of persons defined as immigrants, refugees or descendants of these amounts to app. 380.000 persons out of which app. 250.000 persons still hold foreign citizenship. This is app. 7 % of the total Danish population. The largest groups are – in rough figures – from:

Turkey:	49.000
Middle East and North Africa:.....	50.000
Former Yugoslavia (Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia etc.):	40.000
Iran:	13.000
Pakistan:	17.500
Sri Lanka:	9.500
Vietnam:	11.000
Polen:.....	12.300
Somalia:.....	15.000

Arabic speaking countries:

Palestine	app. 15.000
Iraq	app. 15.000
Morocco	app. 8.000
Lebanon.....	app. 5.000
Syria	app. 2.300
Egypt	app. 1.600
Jordan	app. 1.600
Algeria.....	app. 1.150
Tunesia	app. 900

These figures might not seem very high compared with some of our neighbouring countries, Sweden and Germany. But as the immigrants and in particular the refugees have settled scattered all over Denmark from the larger cities to a great number of small provincial towns one of the challenges for the public libraries has been to establish a system giving everybody with a non-Danish background access to materials in his/her preferred language without having to develop small collections in many languages in every single provincial town i Denmark.

Library service to immigrants and refugees – a shared responsibility between the national and local level.

Since 1983 the legislation for public libraries (Act No. 242 of January 8th, 1983) has identified immigrants and refugees as target groups for service by stating that "each local public library is responsible for the service. Immigrants, adults as well as children, should in the library get access to information on practical, social and cultural conditions in Denmark and also to materials which help them to preserve their original language and culture. The great diversity of the groups in Denmark, the multitude of languages and the practical difficulties involved with this work make it impossible for each library to cope with the entire task and a superstructure, a ressource center, is necessary".

This ressource center is the Danish Central Library for Immigrant Literature (DCLIL - in Danish: Indvandrerbiblioteket) which is government funded as a section of the State and University Library in Aarhus (the second largest city in Denmark, situated in Jutland). The DCLIL, however, has its premises in the Greater Copenhagen area. Besides being the library for the university in Aarhus the State and University Library also has special obligations, related to the public libraries as it is the national interlibrary loan center.

As the text from the Library Act of 1983 just quoted states library service to immigrants and refugees is based on two equal principles

- * the library as an important factor in the integration process
- * the library as a support for those who also want to maintain their first language and culture.

Services in the local public libraries

The library service in the local public libraries deals with both aspects.

The libraries provide language courses and easy-to-read materials in Danish (books, magazines and books on tape).

- *Bilal (male, 30, Libanon, comite DK 1986):*
I came to Denmark when I was 15. I have never been to school. Almost all the Danish I know, I have learn in the Library in Hjørring and from my friends. I borrowed these small easy-to-read books for children with tape.... It helped very much.¹⁾

As integration should be interdependent and not just a one-way-move, some libraries are very active in crosscultural activities with the aim to awake multicultural awareness in the Danish population as well as in the ethnic minority groups. It might be in the form of debates between Danes and immigrants about "Expectations from the future" or presentations of folktales and traditional songs from Denmark and Turkey (Avedøre Public Library) or active involvement of youngsters from among Libanon, Kurdistan and Denmark in a theaterplay about Christmas and Ramadan, as organized by Brønderslev Public Library and a local theatergroup, Aasen Theater.

The libraries also provide books and other materials in multiple languages. Most libraries subscribe to newspapers and magazines - among these in Arabic. The most frequent newspapers in Arabic in the libraries are al-Hayat and Asharq al-Awsat. This service is nowadays extended by access to News on the Internet.

Some libraries maintain own collections of books and music and they also provide materials from the national resource center, The Immigrant Literature Library (DCLIL).

Much due to the new Integration Act, mentioned previously, there has been an increasing focus on the first principle - the library as an active partner in the

¹⁾ Preliminary results of user studies to be published by the end of 2000.

integration process – and several initiatives and innovative projects have been initiated to explore new ways to strengthen this effort. To support and give inspiration to this, the Danish National Library Authority (Biblioteksstyrelsen) published last year a booklet "Libraries and Ethnic Minorities" (Biblioteker og etniske minoriteter – Råd og Vink fra Biblioteksstyrelsen, 4, 1999). Another initiative is the Internet project "FINFO, Information to Ethnic Minorities in Denmark" (www.finfo.dk) which I return to later in this paper.

The public libraries and the Central Library for Immigrant Literature.

Right from the first immigrants arrived in Denmark in the late 60'ties the public libraries have taken the responsibility to offer adequate library service to these new inhabitants and the first central service financed by the state to support the local libraries was already established in 1970. But as already mentioned the formal obligation to give library service to immigrants and refugees was included in the legislation for public libraries with the Library Act of 1983.

Accordingly the Central Library for Immigrant Literature (DCLIL) was established in 1984. It is financed by the Ministry of Culture and the main functions are:

- * to be a resource center for the public libraries by providing books and other suitable materials. .
- * to assist the local public libraries in the collection development (selection, acquisition and cataloguing)
- * to keep the libraries informed about the linguistic minorities' cultural and linguistic background
- * to keep the linguistic minorities informed about the services offered to them by the public libraries

As DCLIL is a support library for the local libraries it is not open to the public for general lending activities.

All loans from the library go to the local libraries and they are responsible for the final delivery to their clientele.

The basic of the service is the constant circulation of stock around the libraries. Each library is provided with a collection of books, music etc. in all genres according to local needs (size of population, level of use etc.) and varies from 50-200 items pr. collection. The loan period is 3 or 6 months. Annually some 1400 deposit collections are sent to the libraries, of which app. 250 are in Arabic.

As a supplement to the deposit collections specific titles, requested by the users, can also be ordered directly by the libraries as traditional inter library loan.

The collections.

The DCLIL maintains collections in more than sixty languages including collections to the large ethnic groups mentioned previously. But collections for minor linguistic groups are also maintained as it is considered just as important to these minor groups to have the possibility to maintain their language and culture. These minor linguistic groups include i.e. Albanians, Macedonians, Kurds, Indic people, Thai and Philipinos, just to mention a few.

The total stock comes to app. 145.000 items. The largest collections are:

Albanian:	6.000 items
Arabic:	22.000 items
Kurdish (kurmandji & sorani):	3.400 items
Persian:	12.700 items
Polish.....	3.100 items
Serbocroatian (Bosnian/ Croatian/ Serbian):	19.100 items
Tamil:	6.100 items
Turkish:	23.000 items
Urdu:.....	14.400 items
Vietnamese:.....	6.600 items

Included in these collections are books for adults as well as for children, music and for some languages also books on tape and videos, this last media depending on availability and legal access as certain restrictions due to the copyright law, put some limits to public lending of this media.

The selection of the materials reflects the overall aim of this service – to maintain contact to the language and culture of origin:

- * national literature, modern and classical
- * books which reflect the current trends in the society and culture of origin
- * special emphasize is on materials for children to stimulate language ability and strengthen the knowledge of the culture of origin.

Selection is also made according to the overall criteria for public library services in general as stated in the Library Act:

- * quality
- * comprehensiveness

* topicality.

The Library Act also states that religious, moral and political views expressed in the material must not be decisive factors when selecting. This means that all views have equal right to be presented. The library is obliged to present a broad specter of views. This can be a challenge to some of our users coming from countries with little or none democratic traditions but it is in general accepted when explained.

These are the criterias for the selection. Very important in the collection development is of course also to respond to the users needs as much as possible. Demands are constantly reviewed and aquisition is to a far extend based on the results of these reviews registered through loan requests and through direct contact by the staff to the users.

The selection is done either by staffmembers with the appropriate linguistic background or with the assistance of language consultants who will generally have a broad contact to the communities in question and the aim is that the collections should reflect each specific group, taking into account varied religious, social and educational background etc.

Regarding the Arabic collection DCLIL is so fortunate to have a librarian with Arab background

The Arabic Collection

The Arabic collection of DCLIL comprises app. 11.000 books for adults, 7.000 books for children and 450 books on tape. We have app. 3.000 CD's and tapes with Arab music and 375 videos for adults and children.

We have just now started a small collection of CD-rom, up till now just app. 10 titles for children (interactive stories, English-Arabic dictionary and grammar, encyclopedias and plays.

CD-roms for adults cover Islamic history, Arab poetry and the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

Books for adults

The intention is to cover a broad aspect of subjects of interest to the Arab communities in Denmark and users expressed wishes to keep contact to their language, culture, history and the Arabic literature.

- *The interviewer: Does it mean anything to you that the library provides materials in Arabic (books, music etc.)*

Khaled (male, 26, Libanon, Palestinian, came to Denmark 1986): Yes, it does. It is very important also for the new refugees and those who come through the family reunification programme. When our children grow up they can read in their own language. ...When you grow up you want to learn to read and write in Arabic. I am happy for your service in Arabic.

Maarouf (male, 37, Libanon, came to Denmark in 1986): The more you extend the service the better. The more and better books you have, the more users will come to the library.

The interviewer: "How do you use the library".

Karim (male, 37, Iran, 1989):

"I use the library in many different ways. Both Danish, Persian and Azeri collection, CD's and tapes".

Mehrdad (male, 38, Iran, 1985): " I also use the library in different ways. If I look for non-fiction, ...I use the Danish materials, but if it is novels and poetry I look in the Persian collection."

We have a wide range of non-fiction books on society, politics, Islam, traditions and festivals and the arts. We also have books on more every-day-topics such as cookery books, health, childcare, computers and dictionaries and language courses.

The collection of fiction covers novels, short stories and poetry by modern authors from most of the Arab countries, just to mention a few Najib Mahfuz, Sun Allah Ibrahim, Adonis, Nizar Qabbani, Nazik al-Mala'ikah, Sa'di Yusuf, Mahmud Darwish, Edwar Kharrat, Emily Nasr Allah, Abd la-Rahman Munif, Haydar Haydar and classical works by Hafiz Ibrahim, Gibran Khalil Gibran, Ahmad Shawqi and older classical works such as al-Khansa', al-Jahiz, Ibn Khaldun. Light fiction such as lovestories, crime, science-fiction and translations from other languages are included in the collection as well.

DCLIL also consider special target groups such as the Palestinians in regard to the selection and we have authors such as Ghassan Kanafani, Samih Qasim, Emile Habibi, Fadwa Tuqan, Sahar Khalifah, Yihiya Yakhlif, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Liyana Badr, Ibrahim Nasrallah represented in the collections.

The same considerations have been taken in regard to non-fiction, particularly with emphasize on the latest political developments where authors such as Edward Said, Lutfi al-Khuli, Fawzi al-Asmar, Nur al-Din Masalhah, Walid al-Khalidi og Nayif Hawatmeh are represented.

The Holy Quran is represented both on tape, CD and video.

Books for children

The Arab collection of non-fiction for children covers folktales from the Arab countries, books about Islam and the Holy Prophet Muhammad, geography, history, computers, cookery books, sports. The fiction covers all agegroups and represents Arab authors as well as European writers, and stories and picture books and cartoons (i.e. Tin Tin, Asterix and Lucky Luke). Special attention is given to easy-to-read books as many of the children having spent perhaps all their life or several years in Denmark may not be so familiar with the Arabic written language.

For the Palestinian children we have among others the books from the publishing house Dar al-Fata al 'Arabi which publishes good children books with the aim to make the children be consious of their Palestinian background through folktales and stories telling about a life in exile or under foreign occupation.

Music

For several reasons DCLIL has within recent years strengthened the orientation towards other media than books, especially music and this is also the case in the Arab collection.

Music is an excellent media in a cross cultural aspect, the use is not restricted to a narrow defined language groupe. Another reason is that the music is essential for those not interested in reading and literature or not so familiar with the written language but still deeply rooted in the culture of origin. This is particulary the case with the young ones – often 2. generation in Denmark. The libraries have experienced a renewed interest among the young Palestinians and Libanese to come to the library, wherever Arab music is provided.

The Arab collection of music includes folkmusic from the different Arab countries, classical music, religious music and modern entertainment and new music, influenced by jazz and rock.

Within the classical area and the folk music it is particularly Fayruz and Wadi al-Safi from Lebanon who are well known but we have also works from less well known singers and from regions such as the berber music from Morocco and Tunesia and folk music from Egypt and Sudan.

Classical names such as Umm Kulthum, Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahab, Farid al-Atrash og 'Abdel al-Halim Hafiz are strongly represented in the collection.

Pop-music is represented by "stars" such as Julia, Madonna, Claudia al-Shamali, Mustafa Qamar, Assi al-Hallani just to mention a few.

The Raï music from North Africa covers names such as Cheb Khaled, Cheb Hasni and other popular artists who are also very popular among the young Palestinians. We haven't many specific Palestinian music productions except for music by Sabrin and the group al-Funun and Palestinian wedding songs.

New experimental music is covered by names such as Paul Salem, Marcel Khalifi and the group Sharkiat.

Religious music is represented by Fayruz singing Christian songs and the Sufi music from various Arab countries.

There are only very few specific productions for children. We have some tapes from Egypt and a few new productions on CD from Lebanon.

Video

The collection particularly comprises films from Egypt several of which are based on works by well known Egyptian writers such as Najib Mahfuz and Ihsan 'Abd al-Qaddus. There are also films with well known singers such as Umm Kulthum, 'Abd al-Halim, Layla Murad og Farid al-Atrash.

For children we have cartoons and animated films with Arabic speech (Sindibad, Asterix, Lucky Luke, Buji, Tam Tam).

Information about the library and the collections.

All items are registered in printed bilingual catalogues available in all Danish public libraries and in the Danish national union database DANBIB (from autumn 2000: www.bibliotek.dk) from which on-line orders can be placed directly in DCLIL mail.

And before the end of this year we expect to be able to give web-access to our own database.

General information about the library and the services we offer is given in our homepage (www.indvandrerbiblioteket.dk). Presently the information is only in Danish but we are just now preparing special pages presenting the library and the different language collections in the main languages: Arabic, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Persian, Tamil, Turkish, Urdu and Vietnamese. This new information will be available in October this year.

The public libraries as information centres.

The service to the ethnic minorities does not only include traditional library materials (books, music, video etc.).

Internet is now an important part of the service in all libraries. With the new Act on Library Activities it has become mandatory to give access to Internet. Apart from the Internet services available for the general Danish public a special service for the ethnic minorities is just being developed – FINFO. Information to Ethnic Minorities in Denmark (www.finfo.dk). It is a joint network project between Aarhus Public Library, DCLIL/State and University Library and the central libraries.

The service is built on two "pillars":

- a netguide to public and other information in Denmark and EU of relevance to the ethnic minorities – on a national, regional and local level.
- a netguide with links on and to the countries of origin from which the ethnic minorities come.

The aim of the service is to support the general policy of integration, mentioned previously, as information is considered essential for active participation in the society.

To support users not yet fully familiar with the Danish language all information in the netguide (headings, introductions and keywords) will be translated into 13 languages, i.e. Arabic, using the latest developed facilities in Windows, Word 2000 and Explorer 5.x.

The netguide for the Arab users includes pages on specific countries (i.e. Libanon, Jordan, Iraq) and general Arab pages. These cover websites from all over the world to meet the aim of comprehensiveness – giving room for all political, religious and cultural views, either national or in exile.

Via this website the Arab user can link to a vast number of Arab newssites (more than 150 newspapers) and radio, read Arab poetry and get political information from a variety of political parties and organisations.

This facility is very well received by the Arab users, especially the possibility to read a much broader variety of Arab newspapers and magazines than the libraries can provide in traditional print form.

The Internet services are in general highly appreciated by the Arab users, especially the young ones and not only the young men are keen users but also many Arab teenage girls using the library as a free and open room to spend the sparetime.

- *Danna (female, 18, Iraq, 1997):*
"In the start we came to borrow Arabic books. We saw the computers but we didn't come close to them, because we didn't know how to use them".
Samara (female, 18, Iraq, 1983):
"We learnt about the Internet when we attended the School for Young Adults Afterwards we started to use the Internet in the library. Since then we come almost every day for the last two years.
(About chat with other Arabs): Samara: We have learnt to chat Arabic with Latin letter. ...We are used to it.¹⁾

Taking into consideration that this is a new service with no broad promotion yet made we consider a number of visitors of a little less than 400 pr. day an excellent first result which proves that the intentions have been correct.

The public library includes many dimensions in its profil. Access to information, reading and listening for recreation and pleasure are just some. To be a public place to meet and to be in has become even more essential with the ethnic minorities use of the library.

The newspapers, the PC's and the Internet access are especially attractive so much that it in several libraries has created so heavy problems with general disturbance and noise that different actions have had to be taken (i.e. move the PC's to special rooms, close the chat etc.)

But this should in no way shadow for the success the libraries obviously are with the ethnic minorities.

A user survey conducted by Aarhus Public Library showed that the proportion of ethnic minorities holding borrowers card was at the same level as for the Danish population – these figures do not cover those "just" visiting the library but not using the service of borrowing.

- *Nisrin (female, 22, Libanon (Palestinian), 1987):*
"We have used the library since we came to Denmark. We were 9-10 years old when we came to Sønderborg. It was an incredible good library with many activities."¹⁾

Closing remarks

And how do we know about the user reaction to the service appart from the direct observations made by the staff?

Different user studies have been conducted within recent years.

I will just finish this paper with referring to the latest study not yet finalized. The quotations presented in this paper are taken from one part of this study – a series of

focus interviews with different ethnic groups with each their linguistic background in Aarhus and Odense. This study which is conducted by Aarhus Public Library and DCLIL/The State Library and which is subdivided also includes a part which examines the actual use of DCLIL deposit collections when placed in the local libraries.

The report presenting the results of these studies will be published by the end of this year and will be used by the libraries and DCLIL when determining how to improve the services.