

## Urban Knowledge Hubs – Transformative Societal Spaces for Hybrid Libraries in the Baltic Sea Region

### Pilot Evaluation Report

#### Royal Danish Library (*Det Kgl. Bibliotek*) Copenhagen University Library

#### Background for the Copenhagen project

The Faculty Library for Social Sciences (City Campus Library) at the University of Copenhagen has, as a primary mission, to enable the higher education of students at the university. We accomplish this goal by providing access to ample study spaces for university students and the public alike, access to relevant materials both physical and digital, and teaching information literacy. This last aim has up until now taken place by way of both embedded teaching and open voluntary courses. Embedded teaching involves a brief thirty to forty minute session within a course, where the lecturer makes time for the library's teaching within the course setting. This means that all students at the faculty are taught information searching and literacy at least once within the span of their education, but unfortunately this relies solely on the teachers willingness to give up time from the course plan, and occasionally we see students not getting these basic introductions to library skill sets as part of their curriculum. Students have of course the chance to deepen these competencies through voluntary courses and contact with the library, but this will have to be initiated by the student - and in a tight schedule not all students choose to prioritize this, or simply do not understand the importance of nurturing these skills.

Our part for the UKH Baltic stems from a hunch that our teaching and services were not reaching students who were having troubles in their studies. While some sat through their teaching, we suspected that there were some that could not attend or were perhaps tuned out and practised later on what Elfreda Chatman and others call "information avoidance." This may be due to a blend of psychological blocks in their own lives, which is beyond the scope of the library, but may further be compounded by library anxiety. Through our cooperation with the pedagogical center and the student counselors, we have learned that the information and library field is not the only place seeing this tendency: Copenhagen University conducted a large-scale survey of student wellbeing in 2023, and 36 percent of respondents answered affirmative to the question "I hold back from asking questions and participating, to avoid coming across as stupid in my classes".

#### Methods for input

We worked closely with a number of University-run offices that are designed to support students both psychologically and academically to get a general portrait of the students we were trying to help. The

pedagogical centre, which helps students organise themselves, write at an appropriate level, as well as general issues of confusion, painted a picture of struggling students as burnt out. This was echoed when we spoke to the psychological support staff. We took these inputs into consideration when putting together our new bundle of services. Specifically, we elected to create a choose-your-own adventure game, which was short and could be played in a browser, and styled, short, and informal teaching. These services can be said to be co-created, insofar as they are a blend of the professional insight of those that work with the psychological profile we were seeking to reach and we could create learning objects and teaching materials that would enable access to the library that matched that profile.

We took these materials on to a study group of students, BA as Masters-level, from various institutes at Copenhagen University for a series of interview-based questions and test of the game.

The interview was based not only on paths to information and the skills and tools used to find it, but also both for formal and non-academic information. Through the questions, we got an insight into the thoughts and actions from the students when dealing with finding and sorting information and literature, and our interview guide led us to answers displaying the thought process behind the actions they took in the way through the information landscape.

Though anonymized, we saw clear patterns throughout the respondees. Despite all having been introduced to information search skills and tools early on in their academic life, they all opted for lower hanging fruits such as Google or fellow students as sources of materials if their initial (and perhaps flawed) library search did not yield satisfactory results. When interviewed about skills specifically, the response was clear; classroom sessions were good, but if the amount of information was too large or too irrelevant, and not enough hands-on exercises were employed, they resorted to what they knew beforehand.

These results, combined with the input from interviewing students counselors, gave us valuable input into content and format for the library short talks. They should be short, non-committing, spring from the students' most basic needs, and provide inspiration for implementation into the students' daily practices rather than inspire for major concentrated systematic search procedures.

The second half of this study group involved a playtest of a Twine game. Twine is an open source software that can be used to develop choose-your-own-adventure type games that publishes into an .html file and works via a series of links. A project member learned this software as part of an earlier course, but the cookbook and forums are excellent sources for troubleshooting and complicating the game experience. The game features the player taking the role of a detective who must solve a murder by way of collecting evidence and using Boolean Operators to match the evidence to a suspect in a database. This is meant to mimic the search process.

The study group was asked to play through the game a couple of times; once as someone who wanted to play the game carefully, being sure to read and click on things intentionally, and once as someone who is playing through quickly and somewhat carelessly. This was meant to capture different approaches that a student might bring to the game. Afterwards we asked about their experience, bugs that they encountered, and for any other comments. This blend of co-evaluation and co-design (some comments had a general design as their aim rather than feedback) helped to form a better version of the game.

## Tips and takeaways

### *A matrix-based approach to your target group*

In formulating who your service or space is meant to serve, try to approach them from a series of different angles. Our talks with both the pedagogical centre and psychological supporters gave a picture of our target group, but from a thoroughly institutional perspective. Thus, our playtest and informational interview with students gave us another perspective to approach our target group.

### *Less is more - and “kill your darlings”*

Through the interview, it was clear that especially students struggling with feelings of being ‘left behind’ and ‘burned out’ would not benefit from the typical longer sessions of classroom-based information skill training. Information should be presented in small, defined sections, and combined with exercises or in the case of the game, a storyline. We at the library have a tendency to want to teach as much as we can in the time allocated, but in the case of the target group of this project, the different format would prove better suited.

### *Testing your concept*

A crucial part of our project was the co-creative and co-evaluative meeting we had with our students. The information provided in this playtest and interview proved invaluable in the development of our short talks and Twine game. Opening up evaluation to your target group (or, at least, target-adjacent) allows for a more honest conversation.

### *Respecting institutional laneways*

At the beginning of the project, we had hoped to have a more involved connection with our associated organization, where the teaching and Twine game could be deployed alongside the services of the pedagogical centre where appropriate. Here we met resistance, with our partners pointing out that many of the students they meet are not necessarily there because of issues they experienced in information searching. While their portrait of our target group proved invaluable, the hope was that the library could contribute outside of our own institutional laneway.

## Deliverable

The Twine game is currently in the final stages and should be ready to deploy as an Open Educational Resource in the spring of 2025. The pilots for the teaching are booked for the same time period. Evaluation will continue afterwards by way of a standard teaching evaluation that we send out.

## Reflections

The effect of library anxiety has proven a larger hurdle for a growing part of the student body, and while the library cannot solve all the underlying issues, we can focus a part of our efforts to address the shortcomings. Rather than always filling up the available time (or allocated time by ourselves), the short-format talks and alternative media (game) version of our courses can fill a gap for the students in question.

However, as the project evolves from the pilot and initial versions, involving the associated organisations organs for student support will be crucial, to continue to address the relevant issues and narrow focus as best possible.

**Copenhagen, January 31, 2025**