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# Public Library Programming and Events for Overcoming Social Divisions

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**Abstract:** Increasing and persistent social divisions are a global challenge that threaten the stability of our societies and soundness of our democracies. Public libraries can potentially play an ameliorative role in reducing these divisions. Qualitative data analysis of Oslo's public library system's (Deichman) programming and events is used to understand how libraries are addressing social divisions in their communities. The findings suggest that a variety of events organized by Deichman directly contribute to overcoming social divisions, especially those related to economic inequalities, sociocultural factors, and the unequal access to digital technologies. Deichman also appears to contribute to overcoming social divisions indirectly through its programming and events related to more traditional library services. The study concludes that Deichman may be a significant player in addressing social divisions. Lastly, the study provides important insights into the role of libraries as social arenas and their ability to foster community resilience, tolerance, and democracy.

**Keywords:** public libraries; social divisions; programming; events; Norway

## 1 Introduction

Concerns over the decline of democracy are increasingly being expressed, particularly in developed countries. This is partly due to changes and developments in world politics

and also partly because of increasing social fragmentation and persistent social divisions faced by communities (Diamond 2020; Itten 2018; Reich 2012). Economic inequalities are manifesting themselves within the middle classes and the already economically disadvantaged are falling behind (Piketty 2014). People belonging to different socioeconomic strata have increasingly different values and lifestyles, which means that although they are citizens living in the same country, they may have very different views and priorities (Gilleard and Higgs 2020; Marger 2014). Furthermore, ideological polarization is perpetuated and exacerbated because of filter bubbles and echo chambers (Audunson et al. 2019; Kaluža 2021). The widely differing values and perspectives make dialogue and compromise, upon which democracy is based, difficult, thereby contributing to democratic dysfunction. Similar divisions are also occurring in terms of non-economic attributes relating to sociocultural differences and age (Anthias 2020; Bottero 2005; Payne 2006). Economic factors lie behind these divisions as well. For instance, immigrants often work in occupations with lower incomes than the majority population (Amo-Agyei 2020), and young people tend to have relatively lower lifelong incomes today than those of previous generations (Milburn 2019). Ethnicity and age are certainly aspects of social division, with ethnic division being an important factor, as immigration is increasing, especially in developed countries.

The above-mentioned social divisions not only lead to democratic dysfunction, but also to social instability and stagnation. The majority “us” exclude the minority “them” from the community and the excluded “them” are dissatisfied with society; the extremes of their dissatisfaction are crime and terrorism (Igarashi, Koizumi, and Widdersheim 2023). A society in which people belonging to different social groups no longer interact with each other is less likely to develop new solutions and be innovative, thus leading to stagnation (Cowen 2017). The stratification of communities following the widening and fixing of economic disparities, ethnic diversification, and the diffusion of digital technologies has resulted in social divisions. This is not only an ethical problem, but also a major social challenge that needs to be overcome.

To overcome social divisions, it is necessary to reduce economic inequalities through economic reform, education,

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and skill development, as well as by creating opportunities for interaction and engagement between people of different backgrounds to foster greater understanding and tolerance in society (Cowen 2017; Kallis et al. 2020; Piketty 2014; Saez and Zucman 2020). Accordingly, public libraries are institutions that can disseminate knowledge and create opportunities for social interaction (Dalmer et al. 2022).

## 2 Problem Statement

This study explores how public libraries may contribute to overcoming social divisions through programming and events using Deichman, the public library in Oslo, as a case. Deichman was the first public library in Norway, and today has 23 libraries all over Oslo, including the main library (Deichman n.d.). The new main library, Deichman Bjørvika, was opened in June 2020. It was awarded the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) Public Library of the Year 2021 for its architecture and its many functions (IFLA 2021). Furthermore, as will be discussed in the findings, thousands of programs and events are organized every year, with an increasing number of participants (Deichman 2023).

Norway has a higher proportion of immigrants among its citizens, often regarded as a key demographic segment of the social division, at 15.7 %, which is more than equal to other developed countries (United Nations n.d.). In Oslo, the percentage of immigrants is 25.4 % (Statistisk sentralbyrå n.d.). Recently, social inequalities and divisions have been evidenced in the severe and disproportional effects of the pandemic on some immigrant groups, thus leading national authorities to implement various initiatives related to health and integration (Norwegian Ministries 2022). In addition, the existence of a division between the affluent west and the east, the poorest part of Oslo with a high concentration of immigrants, is demonstrated in Oslo. The east area has lower levels of education, literacy, and life expectancy and higher levels of poverty (Wessel 2016); thus there is considerable evidence of socioeconomic division.

Concerning libraries, the Public Libraries Act, as amended in Norway in 2014, stipulates that libraries are independent meeting places and arenas for discussion and debate, as well as for providing information and education and promoting cultural activities by guaranteeing free access to books and other media (Ministry of Culture 2014). Meeting and dialogue are stipulated in the Library Act to be a factor in overcoming social division. This is not only stipulated in the law, but is also reflected in library strategies and

is recognized in practice (Fagerlid, Andersen, and Dalseide 2021; Kawamoto et al. 2022; Koizumi and Larsen 2023).

The purpose of this study is to investigate, using the Deichman library system, how public libraries respond to and address social divisions in the local community through their programming and events. For this purpose, the following two research questions were posed.

**RQ1:** What are the various types of events and their themes that have been held at public libraries in Oslo in recent years?

**RQ2:** How might the events contribute to reducing social divisions between different groups?

This study can contribute to the development of library events and their evaluation by considering events as a single type or category of service offered by public libraries. Furthermore, it will contribute to the discussion on the contemporary social role and significance of public libraries by focusing on how they respond to and address social divisions, which have been a major challenge faced by communities in recent years.

## 3 Literature Review

### 3.1 Public Libraries as Spaces for Overcoming Social Division

Public libraries have traditionally played a unique role in providing equal access to information and guaranteeing the right to knowledge (Larsen 2018). In recent years, they have expanded on this, providing opportunities to gain skills through experience, for instance through the provision of digital equipment and makerspaces (Gahagan and Calvert 2020). Expanded public library services are seen as an investment in knowledge dissemination and skills. In addition, they are also seen as places where diverse citizens can meet and interact, which creates social capital (Vårheim, Steinmo, and Ide 2008; Wojciechowska 2020). Public libraries, which are open to all on an equal basis, build trust in society and create opportunities for people with different demographics to interact with each other (Audunson 2005). This helps to get to know citizens with different demographics and creates the tolerance towards the other that is so important in a democracy. Public libraries are thus institutions that have the potential to contribute to overcoming social divisions, which is a significant social challenge.

### 3.2 Public Library Events and Programming

Events and programming can take many forms in a library context. Events at libraries are generally defined as unique occurrences that have been planned to achieve an objective for a certain target group (Verhaar and Eshel 2013). Similarly, there are various definitions of what a program is, the most recent being that “a ‘program’ is an intentional service or event in a group setting developed proactively to meet the needs or interests of an anticipated target audience” (Barchas-Lichtenstein et al. 2019). Although they are similar in definition, events tend to be one-off or individual occurrences, such as author talks, workshops, and performances, whereas programs tend to be ongoing activities and initiatives, such as language cafes, classes, story hours, book clubs, and so on. A program might include a special event, for example an annual reading program to support early childhood literacy might end each year with a children’s literature festival.

Demeter and Holmes (2019) define events and programs as a wide range of activities, including presentations, classes, hands-on projects, exhibitions, technology, and multimedia gatherings. Ultimately, it is through libraries’ programming and events that they promote individual learning and encourage individual and community growth (Gorham and Bertot 2018). Furthermore, the provision of programs that contribute to individuals’ and communities’ development and enrichment is central to public libraries (Mathiasson and Jochumsen 2020). This is indicated in the IFLA’s “public library service guidelines,” where programming is listed as one of the core public library services (Koontz and Gubbin 2010).

Research regarding events and programs in public libraries has been conducted in recent years. There have been studies on learning programs to develop information literacy skills, conversation-based events, the use of health information, and social reading, such as reading clubs (Hedemark and Lindberg 2018; Johnston 2018; Luo 2018; Luyt et al. 2011; Rydbeck et al. 2022). These reveal the effectiveness and role of specific events. There has been research on events aimed at specific audiences, such as migrants and children with disabilities (Adkins and Bushman 2015; Johnston 2019). By contrast, studies that consider events and programs as one type of service and analyze them comprehensively are important for service evaluation and development, and for supporting the skills and education of librarians (Barchas-Lichtenstein et al. 2019). However, few such studies have been found.

In two studies, Mathiasson and Jochumsen (2019, 2020) analyzed event data that Danish public libraries posted on Facebook, which is one of the leading platforms on which public libraries in Denmark disseminate information about their activities and services. The studies were based on a

broad sampling of libraries located throughout Denmark and, accordingly, the analysis offered important insights into the widespread library trends and activities going on in the country. However, in addition to these broader studies, the analysis of Facebook posts from one particular library or library system is also needed, as is done in this study, because individual studies allow for an in-depth analysis of the findings in relation to the local context.

Igarashi et al. (2023) conducted a comprehensive analysis of events held at the Helsinki Central Library Oodi in Finland, however, their analysis did not include how the events might address existing social divisions within the local community, which is the primary interest of this study. Events are one of the main services of public libraries today; therefore, because a wide variety of activities can be organized and adapted to the local context, it can be reasonably assumed that some of the events offered by a library will be designed to help overcome social divisions.

## 4 Methodology

This study is a comprehensive data analysis of the events organized by Deichman, which includes the main library and 22 branch libraries. Event notices posted on the Deichman webpage were collected from September 1, 2019 to January 31, 2022. Eight days in the period were not collected because of technical errors, however this should not affect the overall quality of the data or introduce any significant bias in the findings. A total of 8457 posts were collected from Deichman’s webpage (excluding events with the same title, the total number of events was 3183).

The data collected include title, date, branch library (event location), participation fee, registration requirements, organizer, and description. Regarding event organizers, there are activities and programs, such as language cafes, that are organized or co-organized by volunteers or community groups. These types of programs are chosen by the library in response to community need or interest. In coordination with the library, the individual or group selected to organize the program may assume all or partial responsibility for the content or running of each gathering. Thus, these cooperative efforts are considered library events that involve volunteers or other forms of community participation.

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Schreier 2012). A bottom-up coding process was performed that included event type, participants, topic, and media. This method of analysis was adopted from previous studies on Danish libraries (Mathiasson and Jochumsen 2020). Lastly, similar event types were grouped into

categories through continuous discussions until all of the authors agreed.

A more in-depth analysis of the events held at selected branches was also conducted. The branch libraries included were Deichman Bjørvika, which is the relatively newly built main library, and the following branch libraries: Biblo Tøyen, Holmlia, Furuset, and Stovner. These branches were selected based on the demographic composition of the communities they serve. Biblo Tøyen is located in the district with the second highest percentage of residents with immigrant backgrounds in Oslo and is open only to youth who are between 10 and 15 years of age. This particular branch was nominated as a candidate for the Public Library of the Year award in 2018 and has been recognized for its initiatives aimed at youth in the local community (IFLA 2018). The Tøyen branch neighboring Biblo Tøyen is open to people of all ages, however only Deichman Biblo Tøyen is included in the analyzed branches since the Tøyen branch has similar events with other branch libraries. The Holmlia branch is located in the area where the Pakistani immigrants originally settled, one of the first large immigrant groups in Norway, and is also home to more recent immigrants from diverse countries of origin. The Furuset branch is located in one of the neighborhoods that has the highest percentage of residents with immigrant backgrounds in Oslo and the lowest average income. The branch serves as a community center and youth center as well as offering many social clubs. The Stovner branch is also in a neighborhood with one of the highest percentages of residents with immigrant backgrounds, yet has the lowest average income. The analysis of the data will be considered in relation to the general sociodemographic profiles of the communities the branch libraries serve.

In previous studies, aspects of social divisions that public libraries can contribute to overcoming have been outlined. With those aspects in mind, a discussion of how Deichman's events and programming contribute to overcoming social divisions is carried out.

## 5 Results

Table 1 details the 14 categories of events that were determined through the analysis. Examples of event types are given for each category as well as the number of events held. There were 73 events excluded from the analysis because of a lack of information about their content and, in some cases, events contained elements relating to more than one category. Therefore, the total number of events differs from the total number of data collected.

The category "Experiences and creativity" has the highest number of events. It includes events that provide hands-on experience with creative activities, such as activities using machines (e.g., 3-D printer, vinyl cutter, sewing machine, etc.) and other expensive equipment. Coding practices using Scratch are also taught. Not only digital, but also cartoon making and painting were practiced. Other events include sewing workshops conducted by volunteers. During Christmas and Halloween, related decorations are sewn. Many events in this category specify that children and youth are the main targets of the event. These events provide participants with opportunities to acquire new knowledge in a hands-on way and can be seen as a way the library provides equal access to knowledge.

Job and skill support is the category that ranks second and includes events that support finding and obtaining a job

**Table 1:** Categories, event types, and the number of events.

Category	Example of event types	Number
Experiences and creativity	Workshops, borrowing machines, cooking	1939
Job and skills support	ICT support, job seeking, language cafés, language support	1330
Cultural activities	Movies, theatrical, music, concert	1158
Interactive learning	Discussions, talks	884
Learning	Homework help, demonstrations, exhibitions	831
Reading	Reading circles, storytelling, summer reading	778
Games and play	Board games, video games, quiz, play with toys from around the world	729
Meeting local residents	Morning coffee, language friends, volunteer opportunities	291
Exercise	Exercise, outdoor recreation	147
Informational	Library guides, opening hours	126
Sustainability	Clothing exchange, bazaar, bicycle workshop, toy exchange	75
Foreign language	French courses, Spanish courses, Chinese courses	63
Festival	Festivals	54
Support with practical information	Legal advice, financial advice, start-up support	48

and as well as those needed for navigating daily life, for example, language instruction and assistance as well as language cafés for developing conversational fluency. Job related assistance generally centers around the provision of job information, writing of curriculum vitae/resumes, and interview preparation. Other events are held to instruct participants in the use of ICT equipment.

The cultural activities category ranks third and includes events in which cultural activities such as movies, music, and theatrical performances are performed or watched. Taking movies as an example, along with films made in Norway, there are also films made worldwide. For instance, “ManIslam” contributes to the understanding of the Islamic world by focusing on the role of men in it. *What Happens to a Displaced Ant*, inspired by the experience of a nurse who worked for the Medecins Sans Frontiers and served as a cultural mediator for refugees, was screened. Another well-known film, *Rafiki*, was also screened. This film was produced in Kenya and was the country’s first film to be shown at the Cannes International Film Festival, but it was banned in Kenya because of its same-sex theme.

The Interactive learning category ranks fourth and includes events in which discussions and debates are held. Authors’ talks on topics related to their own works are also included in this category. Discussions are held on topics related to social issues such as climate change and COVID-19.

Following the top four categories, the learning and reading categories are more moderately ranked. The learning category, which ranks fifth, includes homework assistance and experiments. The reading category, which relates to the public library’s traditional role of reading and literacy promotion, ranks sixth. For instance, storytelling and social reading are included.

Table 2 shows the number of events by category and by branch. It should be noted that Deichman Bjørvika opened on June 18, 2020, which resulted in a shorter data collection period compared with the other branches. However, as the main library, Deichman Bjørvika regularly holds events and offers programs and, most importantly, the data collection includes its most recent activities.

At Deichman Bjørvika events in the “cultural activities” category ranked the highest and events in the “interactive learning” category ranked second highest. These were also the highest ranking scores across all the branches for these categories. The “experience and learning” category ranked the highest at the Biblio Tøyen and Holmlia branches, which both have a strong focus on youth. The Stovner branch, located in the most economically challenged neighborhood, had the highest number of events in the “job and skills support” category. The Holmlia branch also had a high number of cases in this category.

## 6 Discussion: Overcoming Social Division from Three Categories

Igarashi, Koizumi, and Widdersheim (2023) identify three aspects of the contribution of public libraries to overcoming social divisions: digital, economic, and demographic. These will be discussed in turn and related to the findings from Deichman.

### 6.1 Digital

The simplest event to address the unequal access to and knowledge of digital technologies, generally referred to as

**Table 2:** The number of events by category and by branch.

Category	Bjørvika	Biblio Tøyen	Holmlia	Furuset	Stovner	Other branches
Experience and creativity	71	232	210	108	84	1234
Job and skills support	51	0	167	17	188	907
Cultural activities	141	135	87	73	53	669
Interactive learning	138	1	52	30	34	629
Learning	40	199	139	35	58	360
Reading	55	16	45	10	24	628
Game	22	81	33	10	83	500
Meeting citizens	3	36	57	7	21	167
Exercise	1	1	66	35	9	35
Informational	3	1	49	0	0	73
Sustainability	3	2	41	8	0	21
Foreign language	0	0	0	0	0	63
Festival	7	0	7	0	4	36
Support with practical information	0	0	0	0	11	37

the digital divide, is the provision of ICT support. Deichman's events are mainly aimed at seniors and provides them with opportunities to ask questions about basic operations of smartphones, tablets, and PCs. By learning how to operate digital devices, seniors will be able to use them independently and obtain various information electronically, such as information related to civic and health related matters.

A more advanced approach to addressing the unequal access to and knowledge of digital technologies is the provision of learning experiences related to creative activities, such as video and programming. Deichman usually offers such opportunities in the form of workshops. Video production using digital equipment requires high specification terminals and expensive software. It is especially difficult for children and young people to obtain and manage such equipment on their own. The library provides the opportunity for everyone to gain basic experience with video production; it both sets up the equipment and makes it available for everyone to use as well as offers instruction on how to use the equipment. Visitors who are interested in pursuing video production further are encouraged to continue to more advanced activities with use of the equipment and library space.

The activities related to reducing the digital divide are not often considered events. This is because the first step in addressing the digital divide in public libraries is to improve user access to electronic resources, which is not considered an event per se and more of a broader initiative. Public libraries generally provide many services to bridge the digital divide and have done so for many years. Subsequently, local communities have come to recognize that libraries are access points to digital technologies where they can obtain assistance using them from staff; therefore, library users are likely to use them even if they are not held as an event. Examining each branch library, a similar number of events to bridge the digital divide are held in all branches. It is important to address the digital divide regardless of the region.

## 6.2 Economic

It is not possible to eliminate economic inequalities through library activities alone. Public libraries attempt to eliminate the disparities in experience caused by economic disparities. For instance, a person who enjoyed building and constructing things in their childhood may be inspired by this experience to become an engineer. In particular, low-income households may not be able to afford such formative experiences, which may limit their future options. The library seemingly seeks to address such inequalities. Typical events from this

perspective are workshops. They provide users with a diverse experience by using a variety of equipment possessed by public libraries or by providing them with tools in cooperation with external organizations. Children and young people are more likely to be affected by economic inequalities in the household. Accordingly, many of the events in the workshop were targeted at children and young people. For example, at Deichman Biblo Tøyen, the youth-only library, the most frequent category of events is "experiences and creativity." As well as creating something, providing opportunities to experience cultural activities, such as watching films, listening to music or watching performances, are also important events. Several events involving experts are organized by Deichman Furuset, another branch with a strong focus on children and youth. For instance, library users learn, create, and demonstrate contemporary dance with dancers, learn drawing techniques and paint workshops with artists, and experience mixing with DJs. Similar events involving experts are also held at the central library, Bjørvika. These branches involve experts and offer a wide variety of activities for community members on a professional level, many of whom are disadvantaged or have not experienced such opportunities previously. These events provide participants with opportunities to acquire new knowledge hands-on and can be seen as a way the library provides equal access to knowledge.

More directly, some events seek to reduce economic inequalities by empowering library users. For instance, language cafés support language acquisition, which is for many newcomers the first step towards social and economic inclusion. Language is one of the biggest barriers for newcomers to Norway and helping them to acquire the language facilitates social participation. In addition, some events were organized to support job seeking by providing guidance on writing CVs and preparing for interviews. Homework assistance is another event of a similar nature. Families with limited financial resources may not be able to afford to support their children's learning and various interests. This can lead to differences in learning opportunities, which in turn can lead to differences in economic status when the child becomes an adult. Homework assistance in libraries, while open to all children no matter their family's economic background, has the potential to reduce the gap in learning opportunities, which, in turn, can potentially help break the cycle of poverty. In this way, support for those who are currently facing financial challenges is also provided. Many of these events take place in Holmlia, one of Oslo's neighborhoods with the highest number of low-income households. The libraries appear to adapt the events they organize to the local situation.

Other activities that take place more frequently in Holmlia and Furuset include events that take local children

outside the library to play on nature trails, slack line and rope trekking as well as visits to the park. This is another event category that provides children with a variety of experiences.

### 6.3 Demographic

Overcoming demographic division is achieved by encouraging local residents to meet and interact with each other, thereby promoting their understanding of each other. Events that can create new opportunities for local residents to meet each other are entertainment-related events such as chess, quiz, and video games. Gathering local residents with similar interests creates encounters between people who would not have the opportunity to interact with each other in their everyday lives. Furthermore, by organizing entertainment-related events, the library attracts local residents who would not usually use the library, making it a place where a more diverse group of people can get together. The aforementioned events in Furuset and Holmlia that take children outside also allow for local children to meet and interact. These areas have a significant immigrant population and provide opportunities for interaction with a diverse group of children.

The creation of meetings can also be a side effect of other events. For instance, the language cafés are primarily aimed at helping immigrants to learn languages. At the same time, the conversations between immigrants or between immigrants and volunteers help them to learn about each other's histories and values. Similarly, workshops and reading circles have another primary purpose, yet they can also bring together people who are interested in the topic of the event, which can lead to exchanges among them. The libraries hold many events that are used to promote interaction between library users, which can benefit them in similar ways.

A typical event for creating dialogue is a discussion. A discussion is an event where experts on a subject are invited to discuss it. In many cases, questions from members of the public in the audience are also addressed. Discussions focus on social issues such as climate change, women's participation in society, and racism. Through participation in these events, library users are exposed to a diversity of ideas and can reflect on these topics themselves. Social divisions can lead to conflicts; however, discussions and meaningful engagement can contribute to overcoming social divisions by eliminating conflicts and fostering greater understanding and tolerance. One of the discussion events was organized during an election and candidates were invited to discuss the issues. By supporting elections and raising interest through events, libraries can be seen to support elections as an

expression of democracy, thus, facilitating democratic processes and decision making. In Norway, a new amendment to the Library Act in 2014 stipulated that libraries function as places for meetings and discussions (Kawamoto et al. 2022; Ministry of Culture 2014). The law may have influenced the number of events related to discussion and debate.

In the district of Holmlia, a racism-motivated murder occurred in 2001. This was a tragic incident that was felt throughout Norway. In Deichman Holmlia, a dialogue was organized on the theme of multicultural society, dealing with this incident; the district of Holmlia still has a large immigrant population and an understanding of multicultural society is important. By dealing with an event that had a significant impact on the area, dialogue can raise public awareness of the social issues that still remain in the area today.

#### 6.3.1 Indirect Contribution: Reading

One of the core activities of public libraries is reading. Reading-based activities may not contribute directly to overcoming social divisions but may do so indirectly. One of the efforts to overcome social divisions is to become acquainted with and increase mutual understanding, which reading can support. Through empathizing with the characters, readers can learn about other people's ways of thinking. Furthermore, it has long been indicated that reading fosters literacy and imagination (Crichter Lyons 2016; Krashen 2004; Pennington and Waxler 2018). Literacy is important for expressing one's own ideas and understanding communicated ideas, and its development is the basis for conversation. Imagining others' circumstances can develop into tolerance for others.

Shared reading also provides an opportunity for participants to get to know each other by sharing their impressions of what they have read, or co-constructing the meaning of art (Hvenegaard Rasmussen 2016). Shared reading also takes place on the theme of books written in basic Norwegian. The easier-to-read text makes it more accessible to immigrants and provides an opportunity for people of all cultural backgrounds to participate. In addition to direct conversations such as discussions, interaction also takes place through reading. Reading is a service traditionally provided by public libraries and is still one of their most important services today. Furthermore, the current Norwegian Library Strategy states that one of the library's goals is to promote literature and reading (The Norwegian Ministry of Culture 2019). More than 700 events such as storytelling, reading circle and shared reading, have been held in the data of this study, and it is quite possible that this will expand as the strategy is affected. Accordingly, many book-

related events are organized and can be seen to indirectly contribute to overcoming social divisions.

Three aspects of how public libraries respond to and address social divisions, which have also been shown in previous studies, are the digital, economic and demographic. In addition to regular services, events may contribute more strongly, as they allow for flexible activities. Traditional activities of libraries related to reading may also contribute to overcoming social divisions.

### 6.3.2 Cultural Awareness

Cultural understanding is also important in overcoming social divisions. Cross-cultural understanding is needed to achieve cultural integration and overcome the divisions caused by cultural backgrounds. Therefore, there must be opportunities for immigrants to become acquainted with the majority culture, in this case Norwegian culture, and for individuals from the majority, in this case, ethnic Norwegians, to become acquainted with immigrant cultures. Both appear to be taking place in public libraries. This is also promoted through events in public libraries. Immigrants can learn about Norwegian culture by watching the many Norwegian films, music, and performances shown in libraries. The analysis of events per branch shows that the most significant number of events in the “cultural activities” category were held at Deichman Bjørvika. The main library is a meeting place for a diverse range of people and where many opinions can be gathered. Events focusing on such themes as immigration and poverty are organized, thereby contributing to promoting an understanding of the factors behind social divisions. Cultural awareness is also evoked through reading, a traditional service of public libraries. Reading promotion events, such as author talks and storytelling, are still being conducted. Through reading, the reader can learn about Norwegian culture from the characters’ behavior and the settings. Shared reading is not only about reading itself, but also about the opportunity to come into contact with other values in the real world by sharing one’s impressions of the reading with others. By contrast, members of the majority may also get to know other cultures. This is likewise accomplished through cultural activities. Promoting culture has been a traditional activity of public libraries and still is today.

Besides cultural activities, it has been shown that cultural exchanges also take place in language cafés. These events are meant to be attended by both members of the majority, generally ethnic Norwegians, and immigrants. During the event, both sides interact and talk about their experiences with each other. This allows for intercultural exchange and knowledge sharing. Similarly, lectures and

discussions may also have a multicultural theme, for instance, on African culture or the lives of migrant children.

## 7 Conclusions

Social division is a major challenge in modern society and public libraries are expected to contribute to overcoming it. This study focuses on events, which are now one of the central aspects of public libraries and identifies how and in what ways public libraries are responding to and addressing social divisions. As directly as the aspects of contribution identified in previous studies, public libraries appear to contribute to overcoming social divisions through events, in terms of digital, economic, and demographic aspects. Furthermore, they also contribute indirectly through reading and learning. By offering a variety of experiences, including the use of digital devices, which have become important in both everyday life and work, libraries prevent capacity gaps and conflicts of values due to differences in experience. Public libraries are institutions that have supported their communities by providing knowledge and information equally. The library’s philosophy of providing equal access to knowledge has not changed, as it can be regarded as providing knowledge in the form of experiences through its programming and events.

Their function as meeting places appears to be key in their ability to contribute to overcoming social divisions, along with their inclusive role in bridging gaps. Libraries, which are visited by people of diverse backgrounds, provide a place where people can meet and communicate with other people they would not usually meet or who may have different values from their own. These interactions can foster tolerance, which is necessary for overcoming social divisions. Through activities, such as workshops or games, libraries facilitate meetings and engagement, and by discussing themed social issues, libraries provide an arena for people to come into contact with a diversity of values. This is also important in terms of substantiating democracy. It also contributes to the promotion of cultural integration, as differences in cultural backgrounds are a factor in social division. This is done by providing opportunities for cultural activities and meetings.

This study is the first to analyze the ways public libraries are responding to and addressing social divisions, an important issue in contemporary society, from the perspective of their main activity in events. In today’s world of widening inequalities and increasing multiculturalism, social divisions are expected to become more and more pronounced. Thus, events will likely become increasingly important in libraries. This study contributes to the



development and research of events held in public libraries. It also shows that public libraries are active in responding to social divisions in local communities and clarifies the role of libraries in the community.

This study contributes to the discourse on overcoming social divisions by elucidating the potential influence of events and programming on citizens through an in-depth discussion on events notices posted on the Deichman webpage. However, to reveal the effects of events and programming on overcoming social divisions more explicitly and directly, further research could be conducted. Such research could include interviews with librarians to clarify what experiences and interactions are generated in public libraries, and observations of and interviews with event participants to determine what experiences citizens have had regarding overcoming social divisions.

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