

Services and library space designed for various learner groups: Case Kaisa House at the University of Helsinki

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In our paper we describe examples of how our new university library supports learning by providing new services in a new building. The examples can be applied in other contexts and in existing libraries.

The main entrance to the library. Photo: Tuomas Uusiheimo

Background

Kaisa House, the Main Library of the University of Helsinki, opened in September 2012. Before that the library had lots of different units around the city centre (Sinikara, 2013a). Now for the first time these library collections are in one spot, which has provided us with both challenges and possibilities. The Main Library is a large multidisciplinary library which serves students, teachers, and researchers in five faculties in the fields of humanities and social sciences. In addition, the library is open for everyone: students and staff from other faculties and other universities, and also the general public. Anyone over the age of 15 who lives in Finland can get a library card. The Main Library hosts 5000-7000 visitors per day during the semester.



The information desk at peak hour. Photo: Unknown

Planning Process

The planning process of the new library entailed not only the planning of the building and the design of its interior but also the design of the services for the users. During the planning process both library clients and staff were involved in various ways. A Service Design concept was applied in the process. In the project, a group of service design experts developed new service concepts for the student services of the library. Student services were chosen as a target group because the library has already had other projects for researcher services. Therefore, this project focused on students who are the main clientele group of the new campus library in the Kaisa House (Sinikara, 2013b).

Student client profiling

The clientele profiling of students yielded valuable information on how different library users used library space and services (Koivisto, 2012). Four central customer profiles were discovered:

The *Visitor* prefers quick visits to the library or is satisfied with the remote use of library services. The services intended for the visitors include self-service for borrowing and returns, signs and online guides, and search options.

The *Lingerer* spends a lot of time in the library, either working or socializing. Services that are suited to the lingerers are different places to study, quiet areas, conference rooms for group work, different kinds of chairs, coffee nooks, and a book café.

The *Patron* is the client who needs the most attention from the staff on duty. Services which help the patrons are the information desks, name tags, telephone, and email services.

The *Investigators* focus on information seeking. They benefit from the courses in information seeking at different levels, personal instruction, and online material.



A reading area. Photo: Veikko Sommerpur



These reclining chairs, designed by Yrjö Kukkapuro ("Carousel"), won a competition of the best chair in the library. Photo: Veikko Sommerpuro



These chairs, designed by Mikko Paakkanen, are called "Snowdrift". They are also quite popular. Photo: Mika Huisman

The space as such is designed to cater to various learner groups with diverse needs. Space includes e.g. open learning spaces, different areas for talking, for semi-silence and for silence, computer labs for teaching classes in information seeking and for the use of the students, an allergy room, mobile storage units for thesis writers and group facilities. The library space is divided into different sound zones: green areas where talking is allowed, orange areas where some noise, such as whispering and keyboard tapping is allowed and red areas where no noise is allowed (no talking, no electronic devices).



An example of a red zone sign - a silent reading room. Photo: Helena Hiltunen



An example of a green area - a conference room Photo: Helena Hiltunen

New services: Study Circle

Although the Main Library and other campus libraries offer numerous group facilities, the mere space is not enough: students also need assistance how to study effectively in groups. The Service Design project developed instructions for the learners how they could study more effectively in the new conference rooms. There are study circle card boxes, which can be borrowed at the desk, and a wiki space which contains instructions. Students and teachers can also order their own wiki space which both contains the instructions and allows the users to save their own tasks and materials. The site is available in Finnish and in English (<https://wiki.helsinki.fi/display/Study>).

During the first year we found out that students did not use the study circle services as eagerly as we had hoped even though those who did use them said that the tips on effective group sessions were useful. This raises the question whether the library should cooperate more closely with other units, such as the university pedagogical units and lecturers.

How do we collect and react to feedback

In March 2013 the National Library of Finland carried out a user survey for Finnish libraries. Feedback is also received in daily customer service contacts both online and face-to-face.

Both the user survey and our daily contacts tell the same stories: there are satisfied customers and unsatisfied customers. Satisfied customers value the large collections and beautiful environment. The lively atmosphere inspires them. Unsatisfied customers suffer from the noise in the large open building where people are buzzing around all the time and it can be hard to find a place to sit – the library is very popular.



Studious students. Photo: Mika Huisman

The noise was not a surprise and was taken into account when the building and services were designed. Somewhat surprisingly the students demand more quiet areas, even though there was a demand from the university departments that we should provide more space for spontaneous interaction. This could be a reflection of the prevalent teaching methods on campus. There are many faculties, such as the Faculty of Law and Faculty of Arts, where the predominant evaluation method is an exam with an extensive amount of course literature. On the basis of concurrent feedback, we have to re-examine the sound zones and the use of various spaces, and readjust how space is allocated for different functions, e.g. a conference room could be turned into a reading room. Quiet reading rooms and noisier conference rooms could be located on different floors. This is fairly easy to do as the allocation is done with pictograms.

In the Kaisa House we are pleased to work with plenty of happy customers but we have noticed that we need to reach out better. We have services that people do not find. We need to listen to the users actively and also convey the message to the users that we try our best to be flexible and adjust the services and the building to their needs. The key words to describe our new library are after all adjustability, flexibility and openness.

References

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