Living room or library?
The roles of physical spaces in public libraries

A case study of library *Idé A*, Drottninghög
in Helsingborg, Sweden

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Abstract

The present study explores the value and role of the physical space of the public library from the perspective of the visitors in the context of digitalization. The qualitative research was based on semi-structured interviews with regular visitors of *Idé A* Drottninghög (Helsingborg, Sweden), *Idé A* library staff members, and collaborative organizations of *Idé A* that make use of the library's physical space. This made it possible to obtain insights into the perspectives of library users as well as the providers of library services. The collected data were analyzed in light of the theories and concepts that conform the theoretical framework. The library as a space was analyzed as social infrastructure, radically inclusive places, third places, and low-intensive meeting places. The results show that visitors prefer using the library services in the physical space of the library and do not engage in digitalization or the library's digital services. The study shows that the physical space of the library is valued and used as a meeting place, a low-intensive meeting place, a third place, an inclusive place, and a social infrastructure. The findings, however, can't be concluded that the library's physical space is a radically inclusive place.

Keywords: *public libraries, library's physical space, meeting places, social infrastructure, third places, radically inclusive places, low-intensive meeting places*.

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List of abbreviations

DH   The district of Drottninghög
HBG   Helsingborg
DrottningH Helsingborg's municipality project of the district of Drottninghög
SFS   Swedish code of statutes (Svensk författningssamling)

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1. Background

From being places to obtain information and knowledge to becoming data centers (Allison, 2013) and socialization hubs (Niegaard, 2011) for all audiences, libraries have changed their roles and functions according to different social contexts and locations (Söderhokm & Nolin, 2015; Aabø et al., 2010 Newman, 2007; Audunson, 2004) making them a complex arena (Evjen & Audunson, 2008). Various authors point out that the library's role as facilitator for citizens to participate in the public sphere as informed citizens by providing them with books and spaces to read. This role was to be a source of information for those who couldn't afford it. Scholars regard this library's role as the *traditional* role (Heseltine, 2018; Söderholm & Nolin, 2015; Allison, 2013). Part of the literature highlights the focus on conserving and organizing books (Ruiu & Ragnedda, 2016; Allison, 2013).

However, changes in society, such as migration waves, changed the demographics of big cities and social classes, leading libraries to provide services for the inclusion of excluded social groups and different social classes (Newman, 2007; Audunson, 2004). Two examples of migration waves are 1) the case of the United Kingdom (UK) in the 70s, when the country experienced the migration of the people from the former British colonies (Newman, 2007) and 2) the case of Sweden when in 2015 the migration of refugees was registered (DrottningH, 2022). In this way, libraries have broadened their functions and role to provide services for the inclusion of visitors from cultural and socio-economic backgrounds (Audunson, 2004; Willis, 2003). Therefore, this role takes a community-oriented approach, with a focus on the users that can be regarded as socially excluded (Newman, 2007). Then, the public library's role includes providing services while being socially inclusive (Hodgetts et al., 2008) towards excluded groups (Newman, 2007). Later, public libraries adapted to digitalization by digitizing their book collection, providing digital catalogs, and providing services to develop digital literacy skills. From this aspect, the increased digitization of library services will generate a focus on the use of the library premises (Vårheim et al., 2020; Söderholm & Nolin, 2015; Audunson, 2004).

The role of libraries as information providers and meeting places, highlighting the later one, became more evident in public policies and research since the end of the 2000's. In the case of public policies, in early 2010 Scandinavian Library Laws understood the library premises as an arena for discussion and not only in their *traditional* role - this is the case of the Swedish Library Act (SKR, 2021; SRF: 2013: 801; Audunson et al., 2019), and Norway (Audunson et al., 2019). By enabling socialization, libraries function as a meeting place where one can get to know different mindsets. It is through the enabling a place for socialization that libraries function as a place for discussion of different mindsets and as a meeting place (Heseltine, 2018; Ruiu & Ragnedda, 2016; Lankes, 2011, 15 in Helestine, 2018; Söderholm & Nolin, 2015; Hodgetts et al., 2008). Part of the democratic role of libraries is enabling the discussion of different perspectives (Habermas, 1991). Ten years after the Breton report (1995) was published, the first literature on libraries' role as meeting places started to be published (Vårheim, 2007; Vårheim et al., 2007; Aabø et al., 2010; Audunson, 2004).

The understanding of the democratic role of libraries as enablers of discourse and meetings has been supported by theory related to spaces for socialization (Audunson et al., 2019; Aabø & Audunson, 2012; Audunson, 2004). On the one hand, citizens can engage in discourse through voluntary participation in informal civil society associations that pursue the same interest (Putnam, 2000), such as participation in the town hall choir and political affiliation. On the other hand, democratic participation in discourse can also be practiced in informal socialization dynamics where people meet and communicate (Klinenberg, 2018; Buschman, 2018ab). However, only some studies have attempted to research the ways in which libraries have a democratic role by enabling a space for meetings and free discussion as a democratic contribution (Audunson et al., 2019; Jaeger et al., 2013).

In the described context, new library formats were implemented to provide a service focusing on users, meeting places, and the neighborhood. Rather than the library's book collection (Newman, 2007). Two examples of this are the case of Idea Store in London (2003), *Idé A Drottninghög* in Helsingborg, Sweden (2010) with the slogan "meeting place for all" (Helsingborg, 2021), and Garaget in Malmö (2008), also in Sweden. These libraries are characterized by being located in areas economically deprived, with a high number of immigrant residents, and a high unemployment rate (Voytenko et al., 2019; Ingefjord, 2009; Willis, 2003; DrottningH, 2022). As a part of the library's main functions they organized activities for visitors

and, at least for *Idé A* and Garaget, visitors are welcome to host and propose activities to take place in the library (Helsingborg, n.d. b; Voytenko et al., 2019; Ingfjord, 2009). In the case of Idea Stores London, their concept is to be a library/meeting place/café/activities. It was successful in accomplishing its aim to attract a "socially excluded population" and a multicultural audience that felt intimidated to visit *traditional* libraries (Willis, 2003; IdeaStores, n.d). This shows that libraries accomplish a social function by providing a place for residents to gather and meet, widening their role to more than facilitating information. Söderholm and Nolin (2015) suggest that libraries focusing on socializing could function as intersection points in a network of local institutions, supporting the argument of the role of public libraries as community-oriented services (Willis, 2003).

The focus on the use of the library for socialization purposes led to the emergence of literature that explored the visitor's use of the library's premises to categorize the way the library's space is used and demonstrate the contributions of the library's role (Audunson et al., 2019; Audunson et al., 2010; Audunson, 2004). Three studies categorize (Audunson et al., 2019; Aabø & Audunson, 2012; Audunson, 2004) the visitor's use of the library to support the argument that the library contributes to diversity and inclusion. Then, Audunson et al., (2010) identified six categories of the use of the library space, such as a main square, a public sphere, and a meeting place with others. No specific pattern was found, except that the library is a space where one can come in contact with people of different backgrounds. Therefore, the study supports the idea of the library as a place that encourages diversity and inclusion (Audunson et al., 2010). Supporting this argument, Audunson (2004), from a theoretical perspective, remarks that libraries are a place to be exposed to *otherness* by joining activities that are not a visitor's first interests. A place that is used this way is called a *low-intensive meeting place* (Audunson, 2004). A meeting is opposed *to high-intensive meetings*, a place people gather around a first interest (Aabø, 2004). Therefore, it contributes to inclusion and the generation of trust among society members (Aabø, 2004).

A variety of studies highlighted the role of libraries as inclusive (Audunson et al., 2019; Audunson, 2004), a characteristic that reveals the way the library's function. An observational study conducted in three libraries in Oslo (Aabø & Audunson, 2012) looked for patterns in visitors' use of the library. The study concluded that some visitors use it for private purposes (work, school, personal procedures), and some use it to go to activities organized by the library. No consistent pattern was found, which shows the library is used for multiple purposes, making

it a complex arena (Aabø & Audunson, 2012). However, the authors argue that the library space enables inclusion and diversity. The study found that visitor's engagement in activities and socializing with visitors from different backgrounds in the library demonstrates inclusion. This shows that the library space contributes to social inclusion by exposing visitors to exchange and socializing with others (Aabø & Audunson, 2012). Supporting Audunson's (2004) concept of *low-intensive meeting place,* a longitudinal study (Appleton & Hall, 2022) conducted between 2015 and 2016 at eight public libraries in the UK showed that regular visitors to the library have an open and positive perception of the library facilitating the space for group meetings that generate a cross-generational and social exchange. This finding adds value to the argument that libraries are used as public spheres for the dialogue between diverse citizens (Audunson et al., 2019).

Studies that explore the use given to the library's space conclude that the contributions and roles of the library are mixed because library activities also depend on the context and location. (Vårheim et al., 2008; Audunson, 2004). In the case of libraries in multicultural environments, theoretical studies point out the need to be exposed to others as a way to encourage tolerance among library's visitors. The library is a place that facilitates this exchange (Audunson, 2004). According to Vårheim et al. (2008) and Audunson, (2004), this encourages tolerance and a sense of community in the visitors. On the one hand, quantitative research from macro-data analysis about the contribution of libraries to the creation of trust among citizens (Vårheim et al., 2008, 878) showed that multicultural places generate less trust among individuals and towards institutions. On the other hand, qualitative research about trust creation by the library in the immigrant population shows the opposite (Vårheim, 2014). One of the latest quantitative researchers about the role of libraries and the use of space concluded that the way the library is used is different than the way that use is ranked as a role of the library (Audunson et al., 2019). Through the conduction of a survey carried out (Audunson et al., 2019) in six European countries - including Sweden - showed that although the participants agree that *meeting people* in the library is one of the most common activities, paradoxically *meeting people* is ranked as one of the lowest roles of the library (Audunson et al., 2019).

Since the rise of digitalization meetings don't need a physical place and can be digital, while ideas can also be exchanged on social media platforms (Castells, 2010) as a digital arena for discussion. Given this, libraries framed in this context are challenged with adapting to

digitalization. In the case of Sweden, the digitalization of public services has been growing in the past decades. The Digital First policy of 2019 (Regerings Kanzlet, 2020; SFS nr. 2018:1937) had an important significance for this increase and it improved the digitalization of public services. This context became more notable in 2020 due to the restrictions imposed to prevent the disruption of Covid-19 (Clemens, 2021) when the physical meetings were forced to switch to an online format. However, since the restrictions were lifted in most European countries, people went back to the libraries. This shows that the library's physical space is still relevant. After the pandemic, people seemed more open to going back to the library premises again (Ruthven et al., 2022).

In the context, there is a need to explore the ways in which the physical space of the library is valued by the visitors. Given the fact that, although many library services can be reached remotely, the library premises are still used. In this way, the present thesis could contribute to having arguments about the way the physical space of the library is useful for visitors.

1.1 Research Problematization

The library's space and its contributions has been regarded in both qualitative and quantitative research (Ruthven et al., 2022; Audunson et al., 2019; Söderholm & Nolin, 2015; Aabø & Audunson, 2012; Aabø et al. 2010; Appleton et al., 2020; Vårheim et al., 2008; Audunson, 2004), but local libraries haven't been taken as an object of study. Research about the use of the library space can provide valuable insights in the way local policies about the library's role work (Vakkari et al., 2016). To this day, only one quantitative study has aimed to explore the way the library's premises contribute to the visitors as democratic institutions (Audunson et al., 2019). Thus, further qualitative research is needed to analyze the visitor's perception of the contributions of the library's space, which can reveal new dimensions of the contributions of libraries at a local level. Considering that Swedish library policies that focused on libraries as meeting places have been enforced for ten years (SKR, 2021; SRF: 2013: 801; Audunson et al., 2019), researching this aspect at a local level could show more insights. For example, to identify whether there is a change in visitor's perspectives on the role of libraries as meeting places, that can support or differ from Audunson et al. (2019) study.

Thus, getting to know the way the physical space of the public library is used and its contributions to visitors can shed light on new dimensions of the role and functions of the public library. Currently, there is a gap in research about the social role in libraries that present themselves as meeting places or have different functions, such as *Idé A*. The existing research about the social role of libraries that function under an innovative format - like *Idé A*, Idea Store London or Garaget in Malmö - is scarce. Added to this, in a digitalized context meetings and exchange of ideas are possible to conduct online. But, libraries are still accomplishing a function for visitors to socialize between each other and getting to know people from different backgrounds. This suggests that there are functions of the public library that can not be extrapolated digitally to the fullest. Researching these aspects would be valuable to find new dimensions on the role of local libraries, closing the gap of information about the contributions of public libraries at a local level, and be useful for the providers of library services.

1.2 Aim and research question

This thesis aims to explore the role of *Idé A*, a library created to be a place for socialization by organizing and providing activities that gather visitors. The object of study is the physical space of the public library. The provision of library services includes not only the library, but relies on the participation of the users and of the other collaborative organizations that use the library's space. Therefore, the perspective of visitors of the library, staff members and collaborative associations of the library will be collected through semi-structured interviews. An emphasis is given to explore the use of the space in a digitalized context to know the reasons people go to the library. The data collected from the interview will be analyzed with the theoretical characterization about the role of the physical space of the library. Then, the thesis could potentially contribute to the existing literature by exploring the overlooked dimensions of how users understand the value of the physical space of the library. To do so, the thesis will address the following research question:

RQ: How do the active users of the Idé A Drottninghög value the role of physical space of the local library?

1.3. Thesis outline

The thesis is structured in six sections. In the first chapter, an introduction to the roles of the library's physical space through time and previous research is given. This is followed by the problemation of the library's physical space and the presentation of the study's aim and research question. The second chapter presents the contextual background of the library *Idé A,* library chosen for the case study. The third chapter presents the theoretical framework, where theories and concepts on the ways the public library physical space is used and its functions are presented. The fourth chapter presents the theoretical framework and the research method chosen to conduct the research. The fifth chapter presents the key findings and analysis of them. Finally, the sixth chapter concludes by discussing the practical and theoretical implications of the thesis.

2. Case selection

2.1 About Drottninghög district, Helsingborg

The city of Helsingborg, located in the region of Skåne in the south of Sweden, has approximately 150 000 inhabitants. It is one of the 9th fastest-growing cities in Sweden and the second in the region of Scania (SCB, 2022). Due to the growth in the number of inhabitants, the city has started to build new residential areas (DrottningH, 2022). Two of the 31 districts that are part of Helsingborg concentrate the most on new residential complex projects (DrottningH, 2022). The new district, Ocean Hamnen, is near the city center, and the Drottninghög district is 2.5 kilometers from the city center (DrottninghH, 2022).

The district of Drottninghög (DH) was part of the Swedish Miljöprojekt that created housing developments to tackle a lack of living facilities in Sweden in the 70s. Much has changed since then. In 2011 a plan named DrottningH was enforced to change the landscape (DrottningH, 2022). The changes included the renovation of the buildings of the Miljöprojekt and the construction of new projects. Also, the offices of Helsingborgshem and the Swedish clothing shop Stenstrom moved from the city center to Drottninghög. Currently, DH has around 77% of its inhabitants from a foreign background (DrottningH, 2022; Helsingborg's Statistic database, n.d.), making Drottninghög a multicultural neighborhood. The migration process started in 2015 (DrottningH, 2022) and changed the district's landscape. One of the challenges the district has had is the high rate of unemployment, in comparison to the unemployment rate of the city of Helsingborg (DrottningH, 2021). During 2011 and 2019, the unemployment rate was 19%. This number turned worst during the pandemic (22%). To reduce the unemployment rate in Drottnighög, the project Rekrytera was implemented in 2017 in the neighborhood. It consists of a public work agency that provides talks and counseling sessions for residents to enter the labor market in Sweden. The DrottningH project is ongoing until 2035. In regards to the education level of the residents of DH after 2020, only 22% of the residents have had an education after

high school. This number seems low compared to after-school education in the city of Helsingborg, which is 55%. The ongoing project DrottningH has been monitoring these numbers and looking for ways to improve the district.

2.2 About Helsingborg's public libraries

The public libraries of Helsingborg depend on the municipality's administration (SFS: 2013:801). Public libraries in Sweden have always been under local management since they were implemented (Frenander, 2012). The branch libraries are part of *Familjen Helsingborg*, which are under Helsingborg's municipality jurisdiction. There are nine libraries targeted to audiences of all ages in the city of Helsingborg, and the library also provides library services to other municipalities close to Helsingborg (Familjen Helsingborg, n.d.). Such is the case for Ängelholm, Borås, Ekeby, and Landskrona, among other municipalities (Familjen Helsingborg, n.d.).

According to the Helsingborgs City Library Plan (2020-2023), there are four priority areas: (a) free opinion formation and free access to information, (b) libraries for all – public libraries as a meeting place, (c) narrative and reading promotion, and (d) digital participation and digitalization. Additionally, the Swedish Library Act (SFS:2013:801) establishes that libraries must provide activities for everyone. The same document mentions that the target audience of library services are the following groups: children and young people, non-native Swedish speakers, national minorities, and people with disabilities. The library policies are implemented in all branch libraries. Nevertheless, the library may focus on a determined target audience depending on the type of library, the location, and the local audience. For example, the Rosengården Library of Helsingborg is located right next to the Nanny Palmkvist school, which specializes in children's literature with a schedule adjusted to the school schedule. Also, all the branch libraries that are part of Familjen Helsingborg are managed by the Cultural Administration, except the library *Idé A* Drottninghög. Currently, the Helsingborg Library is going through a process of modernizing the library services, including the renovation of its website, renovations of the main library building, and the change of location for the *Idé A* Drtotnighöh library (Helsingborg, n.d. e).

2.3 About *Idé A*

The library selected for the case study is *Idé A*, located in the district of Drottnighög in Helsingborg, Sweden. The library is almost 4 kilometers from the city center. *Idé A* was part of the library plan of 2007 and came into place in 2010 (HBG, n.d.b). To come up with the concept they had as an inspiration Idea Stores London (Idea Stores, n.d.). However, for the creation of the concept, a project group was formed, not only with library representatives but also with other departments of the city of Helsingborg, such as The Drottninghög School or the Urban Planning Administration (HBG, n.d. b).

The library's target audience is the visitors of the districts of Drottninghög (DH), Dalhelm, Fredriksdal area, and Vasatorp; including children and young adults, national minorities, and people who are not native Swedish speakers (HBG Bibliotek, 2021). The library is located close to the Drottninghög School for Children, the Church of the Swedish Church (Svenska Kyrka), Drottninghög Marknad (a local market project of IKEA inaugurated in 2022), a new office and residential building called Spira (Fastighetsbyrån, n.d.), among other centric buildings in the district. The library was inaugurated under the name of *Idé A* in 2010 (Helsingborg, 2010) with the aim of being a library but also a meeting place, where visitors and civil society associations can suggest or organize activities in the space of *Idé A*. Thus can be noted from *Idé A*'s mission: "contribute to the positive development of surrounding neighborhoods and is an inclusive, unifying and dynamic meeting place where people grow as individuals and participate in democratic society" (Helsingborg, n.d. b). Unlike the other branch libraries of the municipality of Helsingborg, *Idé A* is under the administration of the following five different departments: the Care Administration (*Omsorgsförvaltningen*), the Labor Market Administration, the School and Leisure Administration, and the Culture Administration in the City of Helsingborg.

Various civil society associations collaborate with *Idé A* by organizing their activities in the library for visitors, for example, workshops, presentations, etc. Most associations conduct their activities in the neighborhoods of Drottninghög, Fredriksdal, and Dalhelm. They are called "collaborative friend organizations of *Idé A* " (HBG city, 2022). The organizations have in common to work for the neighborhood of Drottninghög or Dalhelm or for residents that live in these neighborhoods (HBG, n.d. b). As an example, I can mention Café Vällkommen, which works in different parts of the city organizing activities for the integration of immigrant women

into Swedish society, or *Vorta Drom* Helsingborg (Vorta drom, n.d.) that helps the Roma community in the city providing afternoon school classes for Roma children. The organizations have in common that they organize and do activities that encourage socialization and inclusion of different groups of the population (immigrants, immigrant women, minorities, etc.). As part of the aim of *Idé A,* different organizations can borrow the library's premises to conduct activities or to use one of their rooms as an office. Thus, there is an active communication and exchange between the representatives of the described associations and the library administration.

According to library staff members, *Idé A* is characterized by having many visitors throughout all hours of the day. Comparing the number of visitors in 2021 with the numbers in 2022, it is noteworthy that the number of visitors increased by 40% (Helsingborgs stadsbibliotek, 2023). Also, library staff members mentioned that the majority of their visitors are from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and many children and retired people also make use of the library.

Among the activities the library offers for the elderly is the Knitting café, which has been ongoing for the last ten years. Everyone is invited to this activity, and the majority of the audience that knits are retired women. Another particularity of the local library *Idé A* is that it is the only branch library that has a space dedicated to Digidel, a service to help citizens develop their digital literacy skills (Digidel, n.d.). Digidel provides help to users to navigate the digital world and the use of technical devices with the help of a librarian. Altogether, these characteristics make *Idé A* an ideal empirical case study for the present research.

3. Theoretical framework

Studies on the role of public libraries have been able to show a variety of characteristics for the use of the physical space of the public. This Chapter will present the theory and concepts that categorized the library's physical space. They correspond to the social role of public libraries. These concepts serve as a support to clarify the role of libraries. The theories of social infrastructure, third places, radically inclusive places and the concepts of low-intensive and high-intensive meeting places will be provided. The concepts exposed are helpful to clarify the empirical data obtained from the interviews.

3.1. The social role of public libraries as meeting places

3.1.1 Public libraries as creators of social value

Public libraries accomplish an essential role in the people's building of their perspectives and ideas, which is rooted in Habermas's (1991) theory on the public sphere. According to it, it is through taking part in critical-rational debates in the public sphere that an individual can participate in social and public life as a citizen (Habermas, 1991). Thus, the public sphere is taken as an arena for discussing public matters, independent from religion, state, or market (Audunson, 2004; Habermas, 1991). It is in this arena that people participate as citizens, through a free discussion. The concept is elaborated further as a representation of "a mediating space between the state and private existence (...) rooted in collective self-reflection and discourse [and] under conditions free of domination" (Giroux, 1983, p. 236). Like this, the concept of meeting places in public libraries has its roots in the Habermasian understanding of the public sphere, taking the public library as an arena for open discussion and participation in civil society (Aabø & Audunson, 2012; Audunson, 2004; Habermas, 1991). Therefore, the public library is a

place that enables the meeting of individuals, in an attempt to enable the exchange of perspectives. Nonetheless, the described concept also includes the concept of civil society.

In this regard, the literature on meeting places has leaned for Putnam's concept of civil society (Aabø & Audunson, 2012; Audunson, 2004; Byrne, 2018; Putnam, 2001). Putnam (2001) bases the concept of civil society on the voluntary and informal formation of civil society groups, which he calls *community groups* (2001, p. 23). Groups such as religious congregations, political affiliations, and charity leagues, create networks of individuals from various backgrounds. They are characterized as having members that belong to different social classes and meet face-to-face to pursue their interests as a group. For Putnam (2001), the engagement of individuals in these groups makes them participate in civic life, follow a common aim and have something in common with individuals of different backgrounds (Putnam, 2001). By doing so, the network of spontaneously formed civil society groups learns to develop empathy and integrate with individuals outside their social circle. Thus, Audunson (2004) takes Putnam's (2001) concept of civil society as a backdrop to sustain the role of public libraries as a meeting place where individuals from different social groups can establish contact. Through this action, public libraries contribute to the prevention of fragmentation of society (Audunson, 2004, p.435).

Added to this, the concept of social capital is developed. According to Putnam (2000), the social networks in which people related to each other or as community groups have a value in the way that: "social capital refers to connections among individuals-social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (...) 'social capital' calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations" (p. 19). Creating social bonds creates valuable networks. But, it also generates bonds of trust among people engaged in them. With this line of thought, for Putnam (2000), the concept of social value is created from the engagement in social activities or with organizations created by civil society members, like activities, and political organizations.

The social activities also include informal socialization and association from which trust is generated (Audunson, 2004; Vårheim et al., 2007). Thus, public libraries can contribute to the creation of social value by enabling a meeting place open for the visitor's socialization from across social, ethnic, and generational boundaries (Aabø & Audunson, 2004; Vårheim et al., 2007). In a deeper analysis of the relationship between networks and the building of social capital, Aabø and Audunson (2012) classify that social interaction could be rooted in the trust

from two different types of interaction: "bonding social capital in the form of networks and thick confidence (particularized trust) between members of a tight and highly-integrated group; and bridging social capital in the form of networks and thin confidence (generalized trust) across primary belongings" (Aabø & Audunson, 2012, p.141). It can be said that the bonding and the bridging of social networks can be useful to categorize other types of meetings.

3.1.2 Public libraries as a social infrastructure

The concept of social infrastructure was developed (Klinenberg, 2018) to emphasize the activities that infrastructure enables can impact society members. To Klinenberg (2018), there is *sociality in the social infrastructure*. Lathan & Layton (2019) have related this concept to infrastructure, where services are provided, and through doing so, they enable socialization. However, Klinenberg (2018) highlights that the socialization that takes place in the infrastructure can affect the neighborhood too. To Klinenberg (2018), the library's space function is to: "...invite people to the public realm (...) a physical place where people can assemble, as do regularly scheduled markets for food, furniture, clothing, art, and other consumer goods." (p. 17). Thus, social infrastructure is the place that enables social interaction between people. This setting of interaction can be varied. But, the bonds created in those spaces affect the neighborhood (Klinenberg, 2018). Latham & Layton (2019) attempt to clarify the concept adding that it is a space where people can develop social affordances: "In short, social infrastructure refers to the networks of spaces, facilities, institutions and groups that create affordances for social connections" (2018, p. 3). In this scenario, the enabling of interaction becomes a source for establishing contact among neighbors, collaboration between people, and support. To Klinenberg (2018), this is the way people create bonds when people interact with one another, doing something they enjoy. According to Klinenberg (2018): "when social infrastructure is robust, it fosters contact, mutual support, and collaboration among friends and neighbors; when degraded, it inhibits social activity, leaving families and individuals to fend for themselves" (p. 12).

In the view of Klinenberg (2018), it is the infrastructure environment independent of the action of voluntary associations or cultural similarities that can work as a source for people's interaction. From this perspective, for social infrastructure theory (Klinenberg, 2018). The

association between people emerges from people's participation in voluntary organizations. However, the concept of social infrastructure considers socialization, in a broad sense, and it doesn't limit it to people belonging to an organization to assemble. Another understanding of people's participation in public life is provided by Buscshman (2018ab). For Buschman (2018ab), informal meetings can also be a way of assembly and participation socialization. The reason behind that argument is that people develop discussions and bonds from informal meetings.

The concept of social infrastructure highlights the capacity of spaces to enable meetings and life in common, which is rooted in Putnam's (2000) perspective on the importance of meeting places for the creation of social value. This way, the argument of the library as a public space for meetings is supported not only in theory about the meetings themselves but on the infrastructure where the meetings take place. Thus, the bridge between the social infrastructure of the library and the meetings between people is the service itself provided in the library's space (Latham & Layton, 2019). In this way, actions such as enabling a place for meeting others, organizing activities on the library premises, and lending books facilitate socialization in the social infrastructure.

3.1.3 Public libraries as third places

Related to the concept of social value creation of Putnam (2000), relying on the socialization of individuals is the concept of libraries as third places (Oldenburg, 1999). The concept was developed by Oldenburg (1998), mentioning that the home is a first place, school or work is a second place, and the third place is between them both. Third places are used by visitors to inform themselves. Through these actions, visitors can develop a relationship with their community. Third places have the characteristic of being welcoming places that make people feel comfortable. For Oldenburg (1999), this means that there is no requirement to join the place, as well as there is no need to belong to a determined social class to join the place. In this way, a third place is a welcoming place that doesn't feel intimidating to the visitor. Another characteristic of third places is that the conversation needs to be enabled by the place (Oldenburg, 1999) in a way that it feels natural for the visitors to start a conversation. The author (Oldenburg, 1999) adds that third places have the presence of regular visitors, which is one of the

factors that could make the third place feel like a second home. Former research has regarded libraries as third places functioning as meeting places (Aabø & Audunson, 2010), but further research is needed.

Scholars (Oldenburg, 1999; Purnell, 2015) argue the effect in a neighborhood of visiting a third place is that people develop bonds, get to know each other, and encourage neighbors to collaborate. When visitors of a third place engage in these activities, it can be said that the third place is robust (Oldenburg, 1999).

3.1.4 Public libraries as radically inclusive places

The concept of *radical inclusivity* develops from the inclusive role of libraries. Public libraries, to accomplish their democratic role should be accessible to everyone (Byrne, 2018; Huzar, 2014). Huzar (2014) further develops this characteristic by adding that, libraries can accomplish their inclusive function if they adapt to the visitor's needs. In this way, the library services become unlimited because libraries are radically democratic and engaged in the following action "The library opens up vast possibilities for the patron and yet refuses to demand a purpose of their visit" (Huzar, 2014, p. 5). In that line of ideas, libraries are open to receiving recommendations or adapting to the visitor's needs. Nevertheless, libraries should facilitate unconditional access to the library premises because visitors don't need a specific reason to go there (Byrne, 2018; Huzar, 2014). Also, for Huzar (2014) being inclusive is understood as including those who are excluded. However, when public libraries target all audiences, they include everyone excluded or not. It is in this way, public libraries are *radically inclusive*.

From the author's perspective (Huzar, 2014), regarding libraries this way contributes to the library's staff members remaining impartial towards the audience. This argument is complemented by Audunson's (2004) understanding of the inclusive role of public libraries in a multicultural society. According to Audunson (2004), for libraries to be inclusive, they don't need to create activities targeted exclusively toward excluded groups. Instead of that, there is the need for "cross-cultural" activities with a way to expose people to "otherness" (Aabø & Audunson, 2012; Aabø, Audunson & Vårhiem, 2010). To summarize, the concept of *radically inclusive* libraries means that, libraries need to provide services that respond to the visitors'

needs, including unconditional access to the library premises and services and activities that aim to include the excluded groups.

3.2 Two dimensions of public libraries as meeting places

3.2.1 Low-intensive and high-intensive meeting places

The concept of low-intensive and high-intensive meeting places was developed by Audunson (2004) and later developed as part of a Norwegian research project under the name of Public Libraries Arenas for Citizenship (PLACE) (Aabø & Audunson, 2012). A high-intensive meeting place describes the place where a person experiences a primary interest, a principal interest such as religion, political affiliation, interest to study to pass a thesis examination, etc. Thus, if a person meets in a place with others around a first interest, the location where they meet would be a *high-intensive meeting place*. For example, if people are lgtbq+ activists and gather in the library to attend a forum specifically to address lgtbq+ rights protection. Then, the library would be a high-intensive meeting place for them. Different from it, a *low-intensive meeting* place describes a place where people gather around something that is not their first interest but around someone else's interest. In the same example, if the lgtbq+ activists go to the library to attend their forum and when going to the library, they come across a book presentation about modern painting that is taking place in the library, this would be a *low-intensive meeting place*. Visitors in a low-intensive meeting place come in contact with activities or ideas different from their first interests. In this way, the visitor is exposed to other people's interests, implying that it is an arena where people's ideas can be confronted or one can be introduced to new ones (Audunson, 2004).

It is noteworthy to mention that the dimension of low-intensive meeting places in libraries implies tolerance, participation in democratic speech, and avoiding the risk of fragmentation in society. Low-intensive meeting places are used for socializing for different than our main interests. In this scenario, one is exposed to other ways of thinking, new postures, or confronting ideas. Thus, from one perspective, low-intensive meetings can imply tolerance among society members (Audunson, 2004). From another perspective, low-intensive meetings can also be understood as informal meetings, spontaneous and not planned. In this case, low-intensive

meetings can enable discussions. From Buschman's (2018a,b) perspective, these meetings would accomplish a role as democratic arenas for people's discourse.

Therefore, the function of low-intensive meeting places is also related to the creation of arenas for tolerance among visitors. According to Audunson (2004), in multicultural societies it is crucial to exchange perspectives, by doing so, people recognize that others have "legitimate interests" (Audunson, 2004, 437), which allows a democratic form of discourse. Also, a low-intensive meeting place gives the chance for visitors to build a shared identity independently of their cultural background (Audunson, 2004). Finally, low-intensive meeting places avoid the generation of a fragmented society because it implies the congregation of people around a non-first interest.

Regarding high-intensive meetings (Aabø, 2004) are characterized by meetings between people pursuing the same aim. A type of high-intensive meeting has been categorized as a "joint meeting". Joint meetings indicate that the members pursuing them have interests in common, but it is not the most appreciated interest, but they use the space as an extension of their workplace, house, and school (Aabø & Audunson, 2012). But, according to Aabø (2004), high-intensive meetings can have the risk of fragmenting society and the meetings with those with whom we share main interests. In high-intensive meetings, a person can benefit from networking or working for an aim with a group, but he/she can also not be in contact with people who think differently. Therefore, low-intensive meetings are needed to avoid this risk and for the building of a tolerant society (Audunson, 2004).

Also, as it was mentioned earlier, the enabling of meetings can contribute to the creation of social capital and trust among society members (Audunson et al., 2019; Aabø & Audunson, 2012; Putnam, 2000). Therefore, meetings can contribute to the creation of a social trust, particularly in the way of generalized trust among society: "bridging social capital in the form of networks and thin confidence (generalized trust) across primary belongings" (Aabø & Audunson, 2012, p. 141). Thus, low-intensive meetings imply interaction. For this reason, the concept would fit as a type of meeting that can create "generalized trust" in the terms of Aabø & Audunson (2012).

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Research design

The present research is a case study that uses *Idé A* as an empirical case for investigation. This choice of a case study is because it enables the deep analysis of a particular case due to its characteristics (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). *Idé A* has been chosen to conduct a case study for the characteristics expressed in Chapter 2. Through a case study, research design facilitated me to get the perspectives of three different actors that interact directly with the library space, such as users, organizations that have used the library, and the staff members of the library. The attention is centered on *Idé A*, a library thought of not only as a library but also as a meeting place. The chosen library has the elements to deepen into exploring interactions, which not all libraries have with their users. As we have seen, *Idé A* allows civil society members to organize events or activities in their space, differentiating it from other libraries. In the context of digitization of services, taking *Idé A* as a case study allows me to deepen into why and how people make use of the services and the space of the library, regardless of the digitalized services available to them. I have used two qualitative research methods: document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Thus, qualitative research is characterized as being useful in order to understand in a deeper degree an object of study, and there is no particular method that stands out for this aim (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Further detail on the chosen methods will be clarified in the following subchapters.

Nevertheless, for a better understanding of the role of a local library, it is necessary to collect the perspectives of different participants that make use of the library's physical space. In this way, their perspectives will provide valuable insight into the role of libraries. Thus, although qualitative research characterizes an inductive approach, we have used abductive reasoning. Therefore, the collected interviews will be analyzed with the theoretical framework related to the

physical role of public libraries. I consider this research approach suitable because the "perspectives of the subject studied is the empirical point of departure" (Bryman, 2016, p. 401). Therefore, abductive reasoning allows me to have a deeper understanding of the role of libraries and the participants' perceptions of them.

4.2 Case study

The case study explores a particular phenomenon adjusted to a determined context. According to Ying (2014), context and phenomenon are sometimes complex to differentiate from each other or to separate them. Also, a case study has distinguishable characteristics that set it apart from other contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this reason, a case study focuses on exploring the choice of an object of study because of certain particularities instead of focusing on the methodological framework selected by the researcher. In this regard, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) highlight that: "A case study is an in-depth description of and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 37).

Therefore, I argue that this thesis focuses on the in-depth analysis of a local library *Idé A* as a unit of study to explore the functions and use of the space for the visitors. The reason to choose *Idé A* as a case study is due to a concurrence of factors that characterize the library and its context. First, *Idé A* is located in a multicultural district that can be rich to analyze cultural diversity and inclusion. Second, the library is the only one of all the branch libraries in Helsingborg to be managed by five different departments of the organization. Third, as a branch library is the only one that has the project Digidel, the only other library to do so is the main library. Fourth, *Idé A* is the only library in Helsingborg that emphasizes being a meeting place and accepts residents to host an event or activity on the library premises. Other branch libraries of Familjen Helsingborg do not have such emphasis on highlighting the meeting places. For these reasons, the choice of taking *Idé A* as a case study would fit with Siggelkows's (2007) description to choose a case study: "to gain certain insights that other organizations would not be able to provide" (2007, 20). Thus, the combination of the reasons stated above and the characteristics of *Idé A* is an element that makes it interesting to take it as a case study. Finally, taking *Idé A* as a case study can allow researchers insights into the dimensions of the way the library premises is used. Also, the research in *Idé A* could provide professionals in the public

library field to get insights on the way the library is valuable for the users which can help them in the providing of library services and use of the library's space.

4.3 Semi-structured interviews

The chosen research method is semi-structured interviews because it is useful to collect information about the role of libraries. In this way, participants can expand their answers about the library. The interviews have been conducted with the three different types of users of the space of *Idé A*: visitors, library workforce, and non-profit organizations. The choice of semi-structured interviews is because it is useful to have a similar set of questions for each interviewee to be able to compare their answers. The reason to use this method is to triangulate their answers to get a sense of their perspective on the value of the role of the physical space of the library. Thus, through semi-structured interviews patterns, similarities, and disagreements can be identified between the interviewees' answers. The interviewees are familiar with the space of *Idé A,* which makes them the appropriate target group to interview for this research. The interviews constitute our first-hand approach to the participant's experience with the place, and they represent the main data for the analysis of this thesis.

4.3.1. Elaboration of the interview questions

There was a set of three questionnaires created to conduct the interviews. One questionnaire was for the users. While another questionnaire for the collaborative organizations of *Idé A* and staff members of the library. Every questionnaire is directed for the participant to give information about three aspects of the library: the library as a space and the reasons that motivate them to be there, which services they use, and which services are related to the digital library services they use. These aspects allow me to explore the motivations and values the visitors attribute to the use of the physical library's space, their experiences with the library services in that space, and their perception of the digital services. From these questions, we can analyze what the users consider that the library contributes to them and in which ways this can not happen only through the use of digital services. The interview guide and questions for every type of interviewee are available in Appendix A, B, and C.

4.4 Data selection and data collection

To understand the role of libraries, the perception of the described participants will be collected. For this reason, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the actors that interact with the library. Being a local library, the actors involved are users of the library's space (visitors), collaborative organizations of *Idé* A, and the staff members of *Idé A*. The participation of the interviewees was selected through the process of snowball (Wagner & Gillespie, 2019). I have interviewed eight visitors, four staff members, and four organization representatives that make use of the physical space of *Idé A*, making a total of 16 interviewees. Their participation was possible due to the implementation of a snowball process where one person introduced me to one or two interviewees, and the others did the same. However, the process will be described in detail in the following paragraphs.

The interviews with the staff members were conducted in English, while the interviews with the organization's representatives and visitors were in English and Swedish. Some interviewees asked specifically for the interview to be conducted in Swedish rather than English. Although Swedish is not my first language and I am still learning it, I decided to try to do it in Swedish as a trial in one interview. From this experience, I realized that I could understand the interviewee, so I decided to conduct interviews in Swedish when the interviewee requested it. The audio of the interviews was recorded in .mp3 format from my phone, having prior verbal consent of the interviewee to be recorded (Flick, 2018; Silverman, 2013). The audio was later stored under pseudonyms and codes in another device to eliminate the audio stored in the phone. To transcribe the interviews, I have used two online transcription software "otter.ai" for the interviews in English and "Transkriptor" for the interviews in Swedish. Unlike Transkriptor, otter.ai also provides keywords for the transcribed material. I have intentionally avoided the keywords shown by otter.ai with the aim of not being influenced by them while coding the interviews.

I have reviewed all the transcribed material by the software and corrected the transcriptions to ensure that the transcriptions contain the same statements of the interviewees. The citations that answer the research questions have been translated into English. To recruit interviewees that are workers of the library, I reached out to an institutional email to the municipality of Helsingborg, which was later forwarded to a project leader in *Idé A*. The workers in *Idé A* between staff that

work in the library and staff that work remotely are nine people. This contact with a worker from *Idé A* helped me by communicating internally with their staff members *for interviews*. As a result, I got to interview a total of 4 staff members, their information can be seen in the following table:

Table 1
Demographic table of the quantitative study - staff members of Idé A

Name	Occupation	Time working at *Idé A*
Staff 1	Library staff - FLE	1+ year
Staff 2	Library staff - FLE	1+ year
Staff 3	Project leader	1+ year
Staff 4	Coordinator	1+ year

Previous to determining the scope of research of this thesis, I had a meeting with two workers of the municipality that worked in *Idé A*, *in situ* and remotely, to ask about different aspects of the library services to decide which approach to take. In this meeting, the representatives said that *Idé A* provides library services and organizes activities for different age groups. However, the audience that spends the most time in the library facilities are children, their parents, and retired people. This information is similar to the population demographics in Drottninghög, which has children between 0 and 12 years old who represent the 21% and adults older than 66 years old (Helsingborg's Statistic database, n.d.). And when I asked about the digital library services and the services to improve digital literacy, they expressed that many of the visitors of *Idé A* come to borrow the computers. According to the representatives of *Idé A*, it is uncommon to see visitors bringing their laptops, tablets, or iPads. They added that many visitors who acquired technical devices for the first time go to the library to get help installing or using them.

Considering the information given by the staff of *Idé A*, I decided to go to *Idé A* to approach the visitors directly, talk to them about my research and ask them if they were willing to be interviewed. Hence, I attended *Idé A* between the 21st and the 31st of March, staying in the library for between 2 to 3 hours. To approach the visitors, first I presented myself, then explained broadly about the research that I am doing and, finally, asked them if they had questions about the research and if they were willing to be interviewed. As a result, eight interviews with visitors

to the library were conducted. For the sake of research integrity, age, sex, and district of residency of the interviewees won't be specified. Instead, an overall description of the overall sample will be provided. First, male visitors are underrepresented because only one male visitor agreed to be interviewed. However, during the process of recruiting interviewees, I approached five male visitors who were not able to be interviewed. Second, the district of residence of 6 of them reflects the residency of the library's target audience (Drottninghög, Dalhelm, and Fredriksdal). While the other two live in another district of Helsingborg. The countries of origin of the interviews reflect the demographics of Drottninghög. In regards to gender, In the following table, the characterization of the interviewed visitors can be seen:

Table 2
Demographic table of the quantitative study - visitors of Idé A

Name	Occupation
Visitor 1	Retired and volunteer
Visitor 2	Teacher assistant
Visitor 3	On maternity leave
Visitor 4	Personal trainer
Visitor 5	Mother of two
Visitor 6	Studying to be a nurse
Visitor 7	Nurse
Visitor 8	Ph. D. student in sciences

The selection to interview the organizations that worked with *Idé A* took place in the following way. I held preliminary interviews with staff members of *Idé A*, who commented that they organize activities in *Idé A* with private and public organizations and made reference to three organizations that are considered active. These organizations are called "collaborative friends" (*samarbetsvänner*) by *Idé A* and the credits to them are given in the library program (Helsingborg, 2023; Helsingborg 2022). The *collaborative friend* list from 2022 and 2023 contained the same 39 organizations. From reviewing the calendar of activities of *Idé A* in 2022

and 2023, it is evident that the collaborative organizations have different degrees and ways of participation in *Idé A*'s activities.

On the one hand, some organizations have actively used the physical space of the library to do events or activities participating as a host or co-organizer of the events. On the other hand, some organizations have collaborated with *Idé A* by promoting a library's event without being involved in the organization of the event or using the space. Thus, given the fact that the research is about the use of *Idé A* as a space in the district of Drottninghög, the criteria chosen to select the organizations to be interviewed was to choose among the organizations that have organized as hosts or co-organizers events or activities in *Idé A*. I selected ten organizations that showed to be the most active according to the information from *the Idé A* events calendar from 2022 and 2023, the publications in social media about past events of *Idé A,* and the statements of the *Idé A* staff members. The ten organizations were reached out through email and social media if they had it. As a result, I conducted a total of four interviews, two organizations answered by email agreeing to have the interview via Zoom, and two organizations agreed to be interviewed once they were reached out during their office attention hours.

Table 3
Demographic table of the quantitative study - representatives of associations that have worked with Idé A

Name	Role in the organization	Years of the organization's activity	Years working with *Idé A*
Collaborator 1	Board member	20+	10
Collaborator 2	Founder	10+	10+
Collaborator 3	Representative	2	2
Collaborator 4	Representative	7	7

4.5 Data analysis

In qualitative research, the concurrence of various perspectives that the researcher analyzes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This process is done by going back and forth multiple times through the empirical material (Tracy, 2019; Flick, 2018). This process is evident during the coding of

the transcription of the interviews. To analyze the data first, I transcribed it with the help of two transcription software. Then I review these transcriptions for them to be accurate to the audio recordings. Second, I read every interview and added comments to summarize the answers, highlighted phrases that could show a pattern, were interesting, or were related to the theory in former research, and added a code or keyword to identify the key answers. The collected data will be contrasted with the characteristics of libraries given the literature to find patterns that can identify which type of activities are the ones that take place the most. As exposed in the theoretical framework, every activity taking place in the library is also related to the type of physical role of the library. The coding will be done to identify the terms of the theoretical framework. The theoretical concepts that identify the physical space of the library will be analyzedd in the collected data. This is following the abductive approach of research. Therefore, the analysis of the present thesis has an abductive approach, where the data collected will be contrasted to the theory developed.

As a third step, I coded three interviews of one type of interviewee (visitor, library staff, and organization representative). Then the codes are compared to identify a pattern. Through this, I could narrow down the patterns that the interviews show (Saldana, 2016; Bryman, 2012). I repeated this process with groups of three transcripted interviews until all 15 interviews were coded. Then, I made a matrix with the codes that show a pattern. While coding the transcription of the interviews, I followed Saldana's (2016) classification of coding, including emotion coding, and *in vivo* coding. The fourth step was to create categories and subcategories of the codes.

4.6 Critical reflections

4.6.1 Ethical considerations

To protect the confidentiality of the interviews and to maintain the ethics in research, I followed the Swedish Law on confidentiality. As stated in Chapter 24, section 8 of the Swedish Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act from 2009, every participant was informed of the aim of the information recollected that it would be only for research purposes. Then, every participant was asked for their voluntary participation and consent for using the information. For

the confidentiality of the interviewees' identities (Flick, 2018; Silverman, 2013), a pseudonym was assigned to them. At the beginning of the interview, every participant was reminded that they could take the time necessary to answer a question and that they could also stop the interview at any time they wanted it. At the end of every interview, the participant was asked if they wanted to change something in their statement, add information or go back to clarify any point.

4.5.2 Limitations and reflection of the chosen methodology

The recruiting of participants

The snowball sampling technique and approaching the visitors of the library for interviews resulted in a gender bias of one male participant compared to seven female participants. Even if an equitable amount of gender representation in the participants can be difficult to predict, it does have an impact on not having male representation in the material gathered. Another limitation was limiting the age of the interviewees to adults. The decision to omit interviewing children was based on time availability and to avoid the procedures of asking for consent from their parents. Nevertheless, *Idé A* has many visitors that are children younger than 12 years old, and there are many activities aimed at them.

Visitors intentionally excluded from the selection process

While conducting the interviews, a few interviewees mentioned that they were parents that visit *Idé A* mainly for their children. Regardless of the lack of representation of male participants among the visitors and children, the validity of my results is not necessarily affected. The method of approaching visitors to ask them for an interview while in *Idé A* resulted in shorter interviews than the ones in which the interviewee asked to be interviewed on another occasion and place. Although the length of the interviews doesn't affect the validity of the results, longer interviews could have provided more insights into the interviewee's perspective.

Language

Being able to conduct the interviews in English and Swedish represented the advantage of having more participants willing to be interviewed. This experience also made me feel more

pressure while doing interviews in Swedish because it is a language that I am still learning. Although I am not fluent in Swedish, I wanted to try doing the interviews in Swedish to avoid the risk of having fewer interviewees. After the first interview in Swedish, I realized I could understand the interviewee and make follow-up questions. For this reason, I continued conducting interviews in Swedish.

Unintentional participant observation

As stated in the "Data selection and data collection" subchapter, I recruited the visitors to be participants to be interviewed by going to *Idé A* during working hours for around more than 10 hours in the timelapse of two weeks in March of 2023. By doing this, I got the opportunity to observe the way in which the physical space of the library is used, the variety of visitors depending on the day and activities of the library, and the way the staff provided services, among other aspects.

Although participant observation provided valuable information about *Idé A* as a space, I realized that my experience as an unintentional observer could influence my perception when analyzing the interviews. For this reason, I checked the coding of the interviews multiple times to highlight what the interviewees said instead of highlighting something just because I was also a witness to it.

5. Analysis of Findings

This chapter presents the relevant findings from the collected data to address the research question: *RQ: How do the active users of the Idé A Drottninghög value the role of the physical space of the local library?* To do so, the perspectives of the visitors (service users), staff library members, and collaborative organizations of *Idé A* were collected.

To better understand the findings regarding the value of the physical space, an essential mention related to the shifting role of the library's space in the context of digitalization needs to be further explained. Interviews showed that, when asked about the usage of digital services, the users showed disinterest. A general pattern among the visitor's interviews was that they prefer using the library services in the physical space of the library. Then, the analysis showed that the library is used as a low-intensive meeting place, which is inclusive, and that the exchange between visitors from different cultures is perceived as positive. From the analysis of the interviews four main themes were identified: (a) the role of the library as a low-intensive meeting place; (b) the library as social infrastructure; (c) third places; (d) safe places; and (e) radically inclusive place.

5.1. Role of *Idé A* in the context of digitalization

As mentioned, a common finding is that the participants expressed some degree of digital skills and digital literacy. Among the activities they are familiar with the digital library services the following are mentioned: looking for books in the digital library catalog, ordering books from the public library, using the internet, using computers, and cell phones, being familiar with social media, and familiar with attending meetings online. However, the findings show that the participants prefer going to the library's physical space for different reasons. Another finding shows that the visitors consider the library's physical space can not be replaced by online services because of the importance of the place to meet. But, the type of meetings mentioned by

the participants variates. For example, one of the participants says that the meetings valued are informal and casual:

> Visitor 1, when asked why the preference for meeting physically instead of online: "precisely so that people can know each other and have people meet and greet with a little 'hello!'"

The findings show that the visitors value meeting in the library's physical space, instead of meeting online. The visitors mentioned that physical meetings enable conversation, meeting with their neighbors, and exchanges, which they don't feel comfortable doing online. As one participant answers to the reasons for disliking online meetings or gathering that can be done with the library, like an online event, the participant points out:

> Visitor 2: "We are human beings, we are born to socialize. We weren't born to look at each other on a screen, it doesn't feel real".

The types of meetings and socializing manners mentioned by the participants are of different kinds. For that reason, the answers have been analyzed categorizing them with the help of the theory that characterizes the library's physical space as places to meet others. In the following subchapters, the analysis is exposed.

5.2. *Idé A* as a low-intensive meeting place

A common finding was that the participants find value in the use of the library's physical space when it is used as a low-intensive meeting place by attending events and activities on the library premises. The activities mentioned by the participants are cultural activities, like the Culture Night that took place in March 2023 and the Tuesday lectures. Other participants mentioned the Cultural Night, an upcoming event held every summer that is organized by *Idé A*. In these activities a variety of voluntary organizations that belong to different nationalities talk about their culture, perform dances and share meals from their country. The interviewees mentioned that the experience is positive to get to know about other cultures or get to know people from other cultures. One of the participants stated about this experience:

Visitor 5: "They [*Idé A*] had a cultural meeting. So it was a Cultural Festival, which we [the Visitor " and his/her children] do quite often a couple times a year (...) The invitation is free. And they [*Idé A*] have dances from different countries. So that's really, really nice to be and it's in the evening. So everyone can enjoy the dance until it's close. All people, family, kids. It's really nice to see dancers and culture from other countries."

A recurrent theme mentioned by the visitors was that for them attending the *Idé A*'s Cultural Night was a valuable experience. It is important to clarify that the visitors are not members of the performing cultural organization's nationality, which means that the activity is not related to their first interests. Therefore, for attendance to this activity, the library is not a high-intensive meeting place. The mentioned activity, following the theory (Audunson, 2004), is, therefore, a secondary interest. This means that it is an interest of others, not a principal interest, where the visitors can learn and know about people from other cultures and nationalities. This way, when visitors engage in this activity, the library would be taken as a low-intensive meeting place. The visitors by being part of the Cultural Night are exposed to people that otherwise wouldn't have met in other arenas. This characteristic is also related to the functioning of low-intensive meeting places (Audunson, 2004). In the Cultural Activity referenced by the participants, they experience a cross-cultural exchange. Therefore, *Idé A* can be understood as a low-intensive meeting place in that context. The visitor's interview findings are also supported by the interviews conducted with collaborative organizations of *Idé A*. In this regard, a participant said:

Collaborator 1: It [*Idé A*] is a natural meeting place for these people who might have not met otherwise if it wasn't for *Idé A* and that of course has created many more effects (...).

Collaborator 1: They made food [the cultural organizations involved in the Cultural event] and people from the neighborhood come due to *Idé A* being a natural meeting place (...), and then you have these 16, 18, 20 year old young people who are dancing together with our old man or our old lady, and then we [the organization that Collaborator 1 represents] see our members cooperating despite ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Collaborator 1 supports the visitors' statements about using the space of *Idé A* for cross-cultural exchange. Another statement is supported by Collaborator 1 when it is mentioned the use of the library's physical space to get to know others that otherwise wouldn't have come in contact with each other. Thus, supporting the arguments of *Idé A* as a low-intensive meeting place. Added to this, the reference mentioned a cross-generational exchange as a result of the Cultural Night with a positive reaction to it. This stance is also supported by the interview findings of the rest of interviewed collaborators. Now, from the statement, it can also be seen that the visitors are exposed to *otherness* in the library premises when Collaborator 2 says: "We see our members cooperating despite ethnic and religious backgrounds". In the quotation, the participant highlights there is cooperation despite differences and shows that the members involved in the event are engaged in working together while having cultural and religious differences. The described findings show a positive reaction toward attending a multicultural event and working together independently of cultural and religious differences. Thus, it becomes clear that in the mentioned activities in *Idé* tolerance is implied. Precisely as Audunson (2004) mentions, multicultural societies need low-intensive meeting places, and through these arenas, tolerance is encouraged in accepting or getting to know others. In the present case, the fact that both collaborators and visitors regard multicultural events as positive shows some degree of tolerance.

For Audunson (2004), the concept of low-intensive meeting places avoids the risk of fragmentation of society's groups by enabling the meeting of people from different backgrounds. Regarding this aspect, the interview data of the collaborators suggest that the library could contribute to avoiding fragmentation in society members by allowing the exchange and socialization between people that don't have the same primary interest. Another way to avoid fragmentation is by allowing interaction between groups or associations. In this case, the participants mentioned that the library's space is used by different members of the voluntary civil society cultural associations to collaborate or showcase themselves in *Idé A* for the library's visitors. These groups by engaging with other groups to later do a presentation in *Idé A* maintain contact with groups of other primary interests. From this exchange, the associations are exposed to others too. Therefore, the findings show that the library space of *Idé A* as a low-intensive meeting place enables visitors and organizations to use the library's space to avoid fragmentation in society. Regarding the library as a low-intensive meeting place in a digital environment, a

common finding was that participants prefer meeting in physical spaces to attend activities organized by the library, such as the Cultural Night.

5.3 *Idé A* as social infrastructure

The interview findings showed that *Idé A*'s physical space is valued by the visitors for its function as a social infrastructure. This finding is supported by the statements of the library visitors and collaborative organizations of *Idé A*. The enabling of *Idé A* for people's assembly is remarked on by the participants. One of the participants underlines:

> Staff 4: "So, wherever you come you always have something to do, you can always ask us (...) And if you need to do something, it's like you have the idea then it [*Idé A*] is the open stage. And they say, for example 'Yeah, sir, I would like to have a concert. I'm playing piano'. I can make it happen here".
>
> Staff 4: "They only come here and we [the staff members of *Idé A*] arrange the material. So they gather each other and they come and sit here and paint together. So yes, we are collaborating with them".

The first quotation shows that the physical space of *Idé A* is available for the visitors to do presentations or organize activities for visitors. Therefore, the library's space is not limited to reading books. Also, the Staff members of the interview mentioned that the invitation for visitors to do activities in the library's premises of *Idé A* is always open, and in their schedule, there is a day for visitors to go to the library and make suggestions for activities. It is noteworthy that the library not only offers space for visitors but has ways to communicate and encourage visitors to take initiative about the activities organized in the library's physical space of *Idé A*. The second quotation reinforces the previous one because it shows the proactiveness of the staff members of *Idé A* to enable the use of the space, which is notable. The third quote shows that once the visitors of the *Idé A* library want to use the library's space for an activity they are supported with materials to do the activity and materials that are provided by *Idé A*. Added to this, it is good to have in mind that *Idé A* provides a public service, which includes the provision of physical spaces for socialization. In this line of ideas, the *Idé A*'s as a space for socialization as a public service is supported by Latham & Layton's (2019) stance that libraries as public spaces have a

greater chance of functioning as a social infrastructure. Thus, from this analysis, *Idé A* library's space is a place that enables the assembly and meeting of people.

Another common finding was that the library's activities held in their facilities invite people to participate in the public realm. The interviews confirmed this characteristic in the physical space of the library and especially for the activities open to the public to join. This is supported by the following statements recollected in the interviews:

> Collaborator 3: They have a plan and a program where they arrange every Wednesday evening. They arrange almost like a lecture where they invite different speakers to the neighborhood and an open invitation to residents, employees or everyone. We have collaborated also in those activities.

> Staff 4: I'm trying my best to do this [organizing events for all audiences]. And creating a commitment, a connection.

> Visitor 2: By then they had already started some small activities [in the first years of functioning of *Idé A*] and I thought it was a bit nice to come along. Meet people at the same time as you. Had activities that you might not have been able to afford if you didn't work when you were new to Sweden… But maybe if one feels left out, but now through *Idé A*'s activities one feels a bit part of the society.

The characteristic of the physical space of the library as a place for visitors to be part of the public realm has been stated by the interviewees. To develop in the description of finding it the statement of Collaborator 3 supports the use of the library space as a facilitator of entering the public realm for all audiences. In the quote, Collaborator 3 mentioned that there are regular activities to offer lectures with an open invitation to a broad audience and that organizations are invited too. The providing of lectures is one of *Idé A*'s activities displayed in their program (Helsingborg, 2023). The staff members also agree on this point. Staff 4 mentioned that the events are offered to create a connection between the attendants. This implies the participation of the visitors and exchange among them, which is welcomed by the library staff members. Finally, Visitor 2 mentioned that being part of the activities held in the library is perceived as positive,

and it gives the feeling of *being part of society*. Thus, the library's physical space used to enable the participation of the visitors facilitates, at the same time, implies establishing contact between the visitors and a sense of being part of the public realm. Visitor's 2 statement is also reinforced by Visitor's 1. When asked about which is the best experience of going to *Idé A* premises, they answered that it gives *a feeling of a shared life*.

These statements show that the library's physical space is a way to have contact with others, mostly with their neighbors, and enjoy doing activities together on library premises. According to Klinenberg (2018), these characteristics suggest that the library space is a social infrastructure. Now, as was stated in Chapter 3 about the social infrastructure, the link between the infrastructure and the meeting is the services provided in the infrastructure which enables the meeting. Authors like Latham & Layton (2019) considered that when it comes to the library, the service that serves as a bridge that facilitates meetings is the library service of providing books, the traditional function of public libraries. For the scholars (Latham & Layton, 2019), library visitors go to borrow books and then engage in socialization between them or with the library staff. However, in the case of *Idé A*, the findings show that the participants go to the library to join the activities in the library's physical space. It is necessary to precise that, on the one hand, library visitors mention they go to the library premises to borrow books, but they do it briefly. On the other hand, library visitors deepen extensively in their description of visiting the library to join lectures and in activities (like knitting, painting, etc.). This shows that the library *Idé A* for the visitors has an emphasis on enabling socializing in the library's physical space.

Finally, both Klinenberg (2018) and Latham & Layton (2019) considered that social infrastructures can be beneficial in the long run for a neighborhood in the way that people develop social affordances such as mutual support, the creation of bonds, and collaboration between neighbors. Although the present research doesn't aim to explore this aspect, the data collected from the interviews suggest that participants consider having found support and develop friendships because of visiting the library premises.

5.4 *Idé A* as an inclusive place

A common finding related to the library was that the participants consider the library to be an inclusive place on various levels, generational, cultural, and others. The visitor participants have

underlined that they value using the library space to join activities where they get to know about other cultures, such as joining the Cultural Night. This version is supported by the staff members and representatives of the collaborative organizations of *Idé A*, as it was described in the previous subchapter. Additionally, the interviews confirmed that visitors value the use of the library space as a friendly place for cross-generational exchange. This perspective is supported by *Idé A*'s staff members in the collected interviews. In regards to the library as an inclusive place for children, the participants expressed that they not only come across children every time they visit the library, but they consider it positive. Added to this a common finding was that participants find the place to be noisy because of the children playing on the library premises. However, this is tolerated by visitors and staff members, as can be seen in the following statements:

> Visitor 5: "They don't have so much. Strict rules to be quiet, or patient have a lot of patience [with the children]"

> Visitor 6, when asked about what they like about the place: "It just feels friendly and open. And it's not quiet [children were playing in the library during the interview]".

> Staff 2 when asked about the library services: "All for the children, they always come. So, anything for children works".

Another common finding was that the visitors value the library as a friendly and welcoming space for activities for elderly audiences. Some participants belong to the group of elderly and consider it positive. But, participants outside this target group of *elderly* also see it as a positive way of using the library space. About this Visitor 6 answers when asked about what feeling they get out of visiting *Idé A,* answered:

"I really love it. Older people are here too [Visitor 6 was making reference at the Knitting group that gathers in *Idé A*] and they do anything. I just want to join them and talk with them and I want to hear life stories. Teaching me how to knit it's very nice!"

The visitors' statement is supported by the staff members, who highlighted that the audience that spends much time in the physical space of *Idé A* are children and elderly.

5.5 *Idé A* as a radically inclusive place

The interview findings conclude that the visitors value the library's physical space to be an inclusive place. Also, the findings show that *Idé A* by providing activities for cross-cultural collaboration enables the participants to be exposed to diversity, which is highly valued by the visitors. However, from the interview findings can't be concluded that the public library is a radically inclusive place. The reason for this is in the interview data the elements that characterize a radically inclusive place are not mentioned. The elements that characterized a radically inclusive place based on Huzar's (2014) and Byrne's (2018) research are unrestricted access to the library premises, flexibility in adapting to the user's needs for the providing of services, the providing of activities and services targeting all audiences and providing services that target excluded groups. In this subchapter, the analysis of every described element of a radically inclusive place will be provided, and the findings that show that the library is an inclusive place will be exposed. But first, it will be to analyze the reasoning of the visitors to consider that the physical space of *Idé A* enables inclusion.

5.5.1 Analyzing the unrestricted access to *Idé A*

Addressing the characteristic of *Idé A* as a place of unrestricted access to the library premises, the collected data is not sufficient to make conclusions about this aspect. The interviewed visitors have mentioned to a minor extent the access to the library premises. Only two participants (Visitors 1 and 2) highlighted the accessibility to use the library premises, reflecting on the fact that there is no need to pay an entrance fee to use the library's space. In opposition to this, the interview findings of staff members and collaborative organizations of *Idé A* describe the easy accessibility to the place. According to the findings, the library premises are not only available for all visitors, but also *Idé A* can borrow their space from organizations that want to use it to do an activity or a presentation for the visitors.

Nevertheless, one interview gave valuable information about the open access to the library's space. The library does welcome all audiences and, as Huzar (2014) mentioned, visitors don't need to express a reason to go to the library, nor is this controlled by the *Idé A*. However, Staff 1 underlined that because the library has open access to all audiences, there is the chance that excluded groups that can represent a challenge enter the library. The excluded groups mentioned by Staff 1 were visitors under the effects of substances, and homeless that don't visit the library necessarily to use the library services or join an activity. According to Staff 1, these excluded groups haven't been seen in *Idé A*, but they do visit other libraries in Helsingborg. This is a very particular case, but it shows that public libraries can admit in their physical space excluded groups that can represent different challenges for the library staff.

Addressing the analysis of the library as a place that adapts to the user's needs. This characteristic refers to the provision of the service, but it doesn't rely necessarily or exclusively on the way the space is used. It is necessary to remind the reader that the analysis of the present research is about exploring the way the visitors valued the library space. For this reason, the analysis of the characteristic of adaptability of the user's needs will be taken as an analysis of the way visitors value the adaptability of the service provided in the space of the library to fulfill the user's needs. An analysis of the service that doesn't include the library premises would be outside of the scope of analysis of the present research. With this in mind, from the analysis of the interviews with staff members and collaborative organizations of *Idé A* the finding was that they recognize the library's space as a place that adapts to the visitor's needs. However, the interviews with the visitors show to a minor degree that they value the adaptation of the library to their needs. Also, the participants that mentioned the adaptation of the library space to fulfill needs were not necessarily positive. Two examples will be provided. On the one hand, Visitor 1 considers the adaptability of the library spaces to have taken too many functions. On the other hand, Visitor 7 highlights that it is nice that the library staff helps her warm up the visitor's milk to feed their child.

> Visitor 1: "I think that here [in *Idé A*] is really more like an all-purpose center it is, I can sometimes miss this opportunity to sit in a reading room"

Visitor 7: "So that [when the visitor's children play in *Idé A* and the visitor holds the baby] helps me to feed my baby anytime when I want to feed my younger one. And they also helped me some time with warming the milk inside".

5.5.2 Analyzing *Idé A* inclusive to everyone and to excluded groups

The interview data shows that the visitors valued that there are activities taking place in *Idé A* targeted at all audiences. The visitors mentioned being part of and valuing the activities aimed at a general audience. Unlike the assistance to activities that target a specific audience (only women, only foreigners) are rarely mentioned. But, activities organized in *Idé A* premises can be aimed at a general audience and, through that activity, excluded groups integrate into the library activities feeling included. For this reason, it is hard to arrive at a conclusion about the value of the library space for the visitors in the conducting of events targeted to excluded groups. One example of the complexity to analyze this aspect is in the following participant statements:

Visitor 2: "when I was new in Sweden (...) I thought 'who do I know? No one!'. When I think about it, it makes me sad because I had such a hard time. But I am happy now that I know many people (...) You feel at home when you have met so many people."

Visitor 2: "And in *Idé A* it was a great place to break isolation, meet new friends and just be yourself. We had lectures, both Swedish and immigrants".

In the first statement, Visitor 2 expressed their experience as an immigrant in Sweden. Just like the majority of the residents in Drottninghög (DrottningH, 2022), Visitor 2 has a foreign background. The first quote shows that the participant felt excluded in their first years in Sweden. Then, Visitor 2 emphasizes that by attending the library and going to lectures Visitor 2 meets people. In this way, the participant expressed that through meeting people in the library premises visitor 2 describes a sense of feeling included. Supporting Visitor's 2 statements, the common finding from the interviews of collaborators of *Idé A* was that they are aware that the library works to break isolation. Furthermore, the Collaborators' interviews show that they consider that the activities done in *Idé A* have contributed to residents that are non-Swedish to

find a social network. However, the visitors haven't expressed a feeling of being excluded. Consequently, they haven't mentioned feeling as being part of a group that needs to feel included.

For the reasons explained above, the interviews confirmed that the space of *Idé A* organizes and displays activities directed to a broad audience, targeted to everyone. Also, the described activities are valued by the visitors. However, from the data, it is not possible to know if the visitors value that *Idé A* organizes activities targeting excluded groups or if those activities are valued by the visitors. Finally, from the analysis of *Idé A* as a radically inclusive place, from the available data, it can't be confirmed that *Idé A's* physical space is considered or valued as a radically inclusive place in Huzar's (2014) and Byrne's (2018) terms. The data collected from the interviews show that the space of *Idé A* is used as an inclusive place that is valued by the visitors, but it is not possible to make further conclusions about the inclusion of excluded groups.

5.6 *Idé A* as a third place

5.6.1 *Idé A* as a welcoming space - a home away from home

The welcoming characteristic of third places is rooted in the lack of importance of belonging to a determined social status to join the place, the lack of an obligation to be in that place, and the sense of home (Oldenburg, 1989). Therefore, for Oldenburg (1989) the lack of identifying the visitors with a social class has a sense of social equality, a lack of being intimidated by visiting the place which makes the place comfortable for the visitor.

The interview findings revealed that the visitors of the space of *Idé A* were welcoming and non-intimidating. This is a characteristic much appreciated by the visitors interviewed. Furthermore, the interviews with the library staff members show that the activities are open to anyone who wants to join them. In this way, asking about the visitor's social class to be part of an activity is out of the question. In addition, the interview data confirms the visitor's value visiting *Idé A* because it gives them a sense of being at home, not intimidating and welcoming. As an example, two participants relate the space of *Idé A* with a home in the following statements:

Visitor 1: "It can sound dumb, you know, but, one talks about the library as if it was a living room, but that is what it is."

Visitor 2: "You can come here [in *Idé A*] and completely let go. So relaxing. You feel at home".

As part of being welcoming places, third places are characterized as not being pretentious or intimidating for the visitors. The findings show that the visitors feel welcomed and comfortable using the library premises. A visitor underlined that the main city library gives an intimidating feeling, especially because the staff members don't provide help. Adding to that comparison, for the visitor *Idé A* represents the opposite, a sense of being welcomed by the physical space and by Staff members. It is understood that the visitor doesn't feel intimidated in *Idé A* to ask questions, use the space, and talk to the staff, among other things. Addressing this aspect a staff member described the physical space of *Idé A* in a similar direction while explaining that the library space is not intimidating for the visitors, Staff 4 elaborated on this explanation:

Staff 4: "We have no pretension. We are not a pretentious place at all. You know? There is a place where you go inside? And you feel no I can't feel home. And there's other places you think Yeah! [smiles] I can be here like 'I can sit here!'. *Idé A* it's like that, like a warm place. Cozy, in a way".

Thus, the findings show that the visitors value the physical space of *Idé A* for being a comfortable place, comparing it to a home where they don't feel intimidated. Therefore, the findings show that the interviewed visitors value *Idé A* for being a welcoming place. In this way, visitors of the library find value in the connection they have developed with visiting the library and the comfort of comparing it to their homes. It can be said that visitors develop a sense of belonging, by comparing this public library's space with home.

5.6.2 *Idé A* as an enabler of conversation and a place for regular visitors

The interview findings reveal that *Idé A* is used by the visitors as a place to engage in conversations. The nature of the conversations is varied, some are a product of informal

encounters to greet the neighbors, and sometimes the visitors actively go to the library to meet neighbors and acquaintances. An example of this is Visitor 5's answer when asked if the visitor meets people in the library:

> Visitor 5: "Yes, yes. A lot. Many of them are our neighbors that we [the visitor and their spouse] used to meet here. And my friends, because I have friends with kids. So we usually meet here to spend time with the kids. Yeah, I meet new people also".

Supporting the findings conducted with the visitors, the data collected from the interviews with staff members support the visitor's statements. Staff 1 mentioned that in comparison to the main city library, they have witnessed many spontaneous meetings in *Idé A*. Another participant highlighted that the conversations they engaged facilitates the building of relationships with people in the neighborhood:

> Visitor 2: "I meet with people on *Idé A* (...) to build relationships, to build, meet people and things like that".

To a minor degree, the interview findings show that some Staff members and Visitors feel that by engaging in conversations they have developed a stronger bond. This can be appreciated from the statement of Visitor 5:

> Visitor 5: "The staff are really, really kind. Friendly. We have known them for two years now. And they are like family".

Staff members recognize that through the exchange of conversations they also develop a bond with the visitors. However, the development of this bond couldn't be possible if it wasn't for the frequency of visitors to the library. Addressing the interview data confirmed that *Idé A* has many regular visitors. Staff member 3 mentioned that visitors recognize staff members because *Idé A* has frequent visitors. In this line of thought, Staff 1 member considers that there is a lack of anonymity when working in the physical space of *Idé A* and a lack of distance from the visitors. From the reasons exposed above, the interview findings confirmed that *Idé A*'s physical space enables visitors to engage in conversations, engages visitors to establish conversations with Staff

members, and it is a place that has regular visitors.

One participant describes as a representative of a collaborative organization of *Idé A* that the goal of the organization is to enable dialogue between residents of Drottninghög and that *Idé A* has been an enabler to achieve dialogue between different audiences. The participant stresses that through the organization of activities such as the Cultural Night or similar, they have witnessed an exchange between residents with positive effects. The participant answers regarding the activities that take place on the premises of *Idé A*:

> Collaborator 1: "We see our members cooperating despite ethnic and religious backgrounds. So I think that that's the best experience I had (...) that is what we can accomplish together as a community, not seeing the religion of another person, the ethnicity or the culture of another person, but actually working together for the people of the city.

The interview data of the Collaborators goes in line with the former statement. Thus, the findings of the interviews of the collaborative organizations of *Idé A* show that the activities of the library enable communication between visitors of the library. For Oldenburg (1999), this is a way of setting the foundations for the members of a community to bond.

6. Discussion and conclusions

In this chapter key findings of the conducted research will be presented, relating them to the research question explored in the study. The most relevant practical and theoretical implications will be discussed in relation to previous studies on the physical space of the library. Finally, suggestions for future research will be presented.

The chosen case study aims to problematize the way the public library's physical space is used and valued by visitors. The research question the thesis intended to answer is: "*How do the active users of the Idé A Drottninghög value the role of physical space of the local library?*". For this reason, the perspective of the visitors of the local library *Idé A Drottninghög* about the values they get out of the library's physical space was explored. The theories and concepts used characterize libraries as a social infrastructure, a radically inclusive place, a third place, and a low-intensive meeting place. The chosen research method was semi-structured interviews to take the perspectives of the library visitors, library staff members, and collaborative organizations of *Idé A*.

6.1 Theoretical implications

The essential finding was that interviewed visitors of *Idé A* are hesitant to engage in digitalization. Accordingly, they stated to be frequent library visitors and that they value the physical meetings. This finding is in line with the predictions of the Breton Report (1996), which stated that with the rise of digitalization, greater attention will be given to physical spaces. Furthermore, the analysis shows that the visitors value the library's physical space as a meeting place, especially for low-intensive meeting encounters with other visitors. From the findings it can be concluded that the physical space of the library can be characterized as a *social infrastructure* and a *third place*. However, it cannot be concluded that the library's physical space

identifies with being a *radically inclusive place*, in Huzar's (2014) terms. However, the public library can not be restricted to the characterizations of being *social infrastructure* or *third place*. The findings also show that visitors attribute a value to holding meetings in the library premises, as a way to have spontaneous meetings, meet the neighbors, and join activities. This shows an emphasis on using the library premises for socializing instead of using it for its traditional purposes as it is borrowing and reading books (Heseltine, 2018; Söderholm & Nolin, 2015; Allison, 2013).

The public library is, thus, appreciated as a place to meet others in an informal setting. In the case of public libraries as *social infrastructure*, one aspect differs from how it is described in the theory. For Latham and Layton (2019), the link between the infrastructure and the action of the meeting is the service provided in the infrastructure. In the case of libraries, the service would be lending books. However, the findings show that borrowing books is not the main activity visitors do in the library's physical space, nor is it the most valued activity. Thus, Latham and Layton's (2019) notion of the library as a *social infrastructure* is meant to make sense of the library as a socialization place thinking of a *traditional library.* In this research, the service that links the infrastructure and the meeting of people is the provision of activities that gathers the audience in the library.

As it has been described in the introduction, public libraries have had different roles throughout the time. Added to this, from the concept of libraries as radical inclusive places, Huzar (2014) mentioned that the democratic role of libraries of adapting to the user's needs puts in challenges the service providing because the service would adapt constantly. For this reason, although the findings show that *Idé A* is used in the library's physical space for socialization, this depends on the context and time. Therefore, the scope of the library services can vary depending on the democratic role they play in adapting to the user or community and this aspect could be considered when analyzing the library as a third place.

Regarding the library as *a radically inclusive place*, the findings show that the library couldn't be identified as such. The reason for this is that *radically inclusive places* (Huzar, 2014) by being characterizing for an unrestricted admission implies the admission not only to excluded groups, but also to excluded groups that can represent a danger to others. As was mentioned in the analysis, the category of the excluded population can include people under substance effects or homeless people. This implies that when analyzing libraries as unrestrictedly accessible, this

means including in sample excluded groups. In order to use the concept of *radical inclusiveness* in research, a strong emphasis should be placed on analyzing the excluded population.

The visitors were seen to find the physical space of the library useful for holding meetings, but they also expressed the connections they built from those meetings. This is concerning the library being identified as both a *third place* and a *social infrastructure*, although the theoretical descriptions of both are not entirely the same. For example, the concept of *social infrastructure* is broader than the concept of *third places*. However, both of them described that a public library identified as either of them has the effect of creating bonds between the visitors. Although the creation of bonds can not be confirmed from this research, some of the participant visitors did mention having developed friendships or building connections with neighbors as a result of attending the library's activities. The building of connection as an effect of *third places* or *social infrastructure* places is closely related to the understanding of the library as an arena for reunion proposed by Habermas (1991), with the difference that the discussions can arise from informal meetings. Although, not in the way as an arena for a formal discussion, but instead as an arena to meet and from that meeting start a conversation or exchange with others, an action typical of *third places* and *social infrastructures*. Unlike previous quantitative research (Aabø et al., 2010), the findings of the present research show that the library's physical space is used as *third place.* In this way, the used qualitative research method has provided detailed information about the contribution and usefulness of the physical space of the library to visitors.

The interview findings show that the visitors consider the physical space of the library to be useful to meet people. Participants stressed the importance of meeting in the library, while the activity of going to the library to read or pick up books is not frequently mentioned. A former research study (Audunson et al., 2019) about public libraries as public spheres showed that visitors ranked the activity of using the library as one of the least important activities, although all the visitors mentioned that they engage in meetings while using the library. The findings of the present thesis showed that although the visitors were not asked to rank the activities they do in the physical space of the library, they anyway concluded that meetings are important activities for the visitors.

Lastly, the findings indicated that library visitors find it useful to have *low-intensive meetings* in the library's physical space. Through the meetings, visitors have been in contact with visitors from other cultural and religious backgrounds. This last finding complements Vårheim (2014)

because it not only shows that visitors have a positive perspective towards the library when they engage in a long-term program organized by the library. The visitors have a positive perspective towards the library even if they join informal activities, such as attending a lecture or being part of the Cultural Night.

6.2 Practical implications

The present thesis can bring insights for practitioners working in the field of public libraries, especially in Sweden. The main categories of practitioners impacted are: 1. Librarians, 2. Managers of libraries, 3. Municipalities that offer budgets and work with libraries, 4. Collaborative organizations. First, librarians and staff members working in *Idé A* will know how to encourage diversity and inclusiveness by using the library's physical space for events targeted to a broad audience. As the study shows, the activities conducted in the library premises that are targeted towards a broad audience are perceived as positive. In addition to this, these types of events and activities have shown to be welcoming and a place where people can develop bonds from meetings. A valuable finding is that visitors have developed a feeling of belonging towards the library as a home away from home. Nevertheless, it is essential to consider that the present research has been conducted in the library's premises during March and April of 2023, and by summer of 2023 the library premises of *Idé A* will change locations during the Summer of 2023. Another category of practitioners impacted by the present study can be found in the Helsingborg municipality. They can take insights for improving *Idé A*, or other libraries in the city of Helsingborg that have a similar target audience. The case study can be helpful for practitioners that want to encourage inclusiveness and diversity in a public venue.

6.3 Future research

The studies on the different characterizations of the physical space of libraries can deepen the way the interactions take place. There is a need for further research about the social dynamics that take place in the physical space of the library, between visitors and visitors and librarians. Further research is also needed to identify the reasons visitors qualify the library as a place

similar to home and explore to which extent this is related to the infrastructure, the service provided, or the social dynamics in the library premises. For this participatory observation is suggested to be combined with interviews in an attempt to explore the actions and reasons for the use of the physical space of the library by visitors.

Research about the library as a third place shows that the visitors of *Idé A* use the physical space as a *third place*. However, one of the characteristics of a third place that is 'being a welcoming place' established by the literature could be related to the interaction between visitors and staff members. A common finding is that visitors consider *Idé A* as a second home or living room. However, the reasons that make visitors identify the library as welcoming could be related to the social dynamics between not only visitors but also visitors and librarians. Concerning the library as a physical space that can be used to create a developed bond rooted in the concepts of *third place* and *social infrastructure* further research is needed in local libraries that could provide valuable information about this aspect.

According to Audunson's (2004) argument that low-intensive meeting places is a type of meeting needed in multicultural settings to encourage tolerance and avoid fragmentation in society members. The findings about Idé A support this argument. Being the present case study research, further research is needed to determine if the characteristics of a library as a low-intensive meeting place is a general characteristic of local libraries in multicultural settings.

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Appendix A

Interview guide for users of the library

I am a student in the Service Management Master Program, I study at Campus Helsingborg, and idé A became familiar to me last summer during the H22 city expo. I got to know the space and the community. For this reason, I chose idé A as a case study for my thesis research. The purpose of the interview is to gather information about idé A's location, space, and library services. As for the interview, I promise the anonymity of your personal information. Please remember that you can take the time you need to answer the questions, and if you need it, stop the interview at any time you feel like it.

The data provided is confidential and it will be treated following Chapter 24, Section 8 of the Swedish Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act from 2009. Also, the information leading to the identification of interviewees will be changed during the research and later eliminated upon completion of this thesis.

1. What's your age?
2. What's your gender?
3. What's your origin?
4. How long have they been in Sweden?
5. Do you come here often? Why do you come to idé A?
6. Can you describe what you do on a regular visit to idé A?
7. Can you describe the best experience you have had here in idé A? Why was it the best experience?
8. Can you describe the worst experience you had here in idé A? Why was it a bad experience?
9. Which aspects of the space of idé A do you like the most? Why?
10. Can you describe what idé A as a space allows you to do and experience?
11. How would you describe idé A in your own words? What makes idé A special for you?
12. What specifically do you get from coming to idé A?

13. Have you received assistance from idé A to borrow technical equipment (like a computer, tablet, etc.), use technical equipment (cell phone, tablet), or use a software program? How would you describe this experience? Why?

14. Have you gone to idé A to learn how to navigate online, access websites, use apps, programming robots, among other services? Can you describe this experience?

15. Did you get something out of this experience?

16. The library offers services like Teknikhjälp, and DigiDax, which can lend technical devices, among other services related to digitalization. Have you used any of these services? If so, how would you describe your experience?

17. Have you used the library's online/remote digital services, such as searching in their catalog, requesting books online, and accessing e-books, among others? How would you describe this experience in comparison to going to idé A?

18. Do you think "idé A" would accomplish the same role if it were only a digital library? Why?

19. What do you get out of coming to idé A?

Appendix B

Interview guide for representatives of collaborative organizations

I am a student in the Service Management Master Program, I study at Campus Helsingborg, and idé A became familiar to me last summer during the H22 city expo. I got to know the space and the community. For this reason, I chose idé A as a case study for my thesis research. The purpose of the interview is to gather information about idé A's location, space, and library services. As for the interview, I promise the anonymity of your personal information and about your organization's information. Please remember that you can take the time you need to answer the questions, and if you need it, stop the interview at any time you feel like it.

The data provided is confidential and it will be treated following Chapter 24, Section 8 of the Swedish Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act from 2009. Also, the information leading to the identification of interviewees will be changed during the research and later eliminated upon completion of this thesis.

1. Can you tell me about your organization?
2. Which is your role in the organization? And how long have you worked there?
3. How would you describe the relationship between your organization and the neighborhood of Drottninhög?
4. How long has your organization worked with idé A?
5. As an organization, which is your relationship with idé A?
6. Roughly how many activities have you organized in idé A?
7. Which type of activities or collaboration have you done in collaboration with idé A?
8. [If the organization has only worked in a few activities with idé A] How was your experience doing an activity in idé A? Why was it like that?
9. Can you describe your best experience(s) in organizing events in idé A? Why was it the best?
10. Can you describe your most challenging experience(s) of organizing events in idé A? Why was it that way?
11. Why did you choose to do it in the physical space of idé A?

12. Why did you choose to be a collaborator of idé A?

13. Can you describe what idé A as a space allows you to do as an organization?

14. What does idé A as a space represent for your organization? Why is this important for your organization?

15. Do you think "idé A" would accomplish the same role for your organization if it was a digital library? Why?

16. Have you organized or collaborated with a digital activity held with idé A? Why have you or haven't you?

Appendix C

Interview guide for library staff members of idé A

As a student in the Lund University's Service Management Master Program at Campus Helsingborg, and my interest in the city, I came to know idé A last summer during the H22 city expo. The location and community are interesting to me. For this reason, I chose idé A as a case study for my thesis research. The purpose of the interview is to gather information about idé A's location, space, and library services. As for the interview, I promise the anonymity of your personal information. Please remember that you can take the time you need to answer the questions, and if you need it, stop the interview at any time you feel like it.

1. Which is your role in idé A? How long have you been in that role?
2. How would you describe Idé A? How would you describe it as a space?
3. How does idé A differ from other libraries?
4. Which services does the library offer? Which physical, digital, and hybrid services are offered?
5. In your role, do you have the opportunity of suggesting activities to do in the library? If so, can you describe the elements considered to organize activities in Idé A?
6. There are activities organized in "idé A" that are not done in other libraries (for example, the Demokratisk soppa). If so, then what is the reason for that?
7. Can you give an example of an activity in particular that users have found important to do in idé A?
8. In which way do you think idé A as a space contributes to the visitors?
9. What do you think is the reason visitors come here?
10. About the services provided in the idé A related to digitalization such as Digidel, TeknikGuide, and DigiDax, in which way do you think these services contribute to the visitors?
11. About the library services provided online, do you think they accomplish the same labor as what the idé A plays as a space? Why?
12. Can you describe the elements and contributions of Idé A that you consider are important to maintaining in the new idé A building? Why?