Community Hub
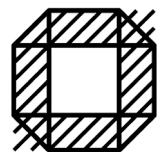
Project Handbook for the Creation of a Community Hub
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Realized at the OpenLab Stockholm in collaboration with Hässelby-Vällingby Kommun
Course "Challenges in Emerging Cities - Multidisciplinary Project Course"

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Community Hub

A concept for a Community Hub enhancing the living experience of female financial aid seekers.

Introduction & Application

To ensure the correct application of this Handbook, its aim, usage and target readers are clarified

This handbook addresses all citizen services and their managers in Sweden struggling with challenges connected to UN-immigrants who still have difficulties in integrating after the two-year-introduction program when arriving in Sweden. The booklet is explicitly not intended as a step-by-step guide on how to set up a Community Hub. Instead it is supposed to inspire and recommend what has worked in other successful organizations developing a Community Hub. It provides inspiration for the design and points out aspects to be considered as well as decision-making requirements. It never claims to be exhaustive and explicitly calls on the employees in the respective citizen services to participate in the development with their knowledge and ideas in the spirit of co-creation.

Enjoy!

Roles & Facilitation

For a smooth facilitation of the Community Hub, its target group as well as the roles and responsibilities of its key stakeholders are defined
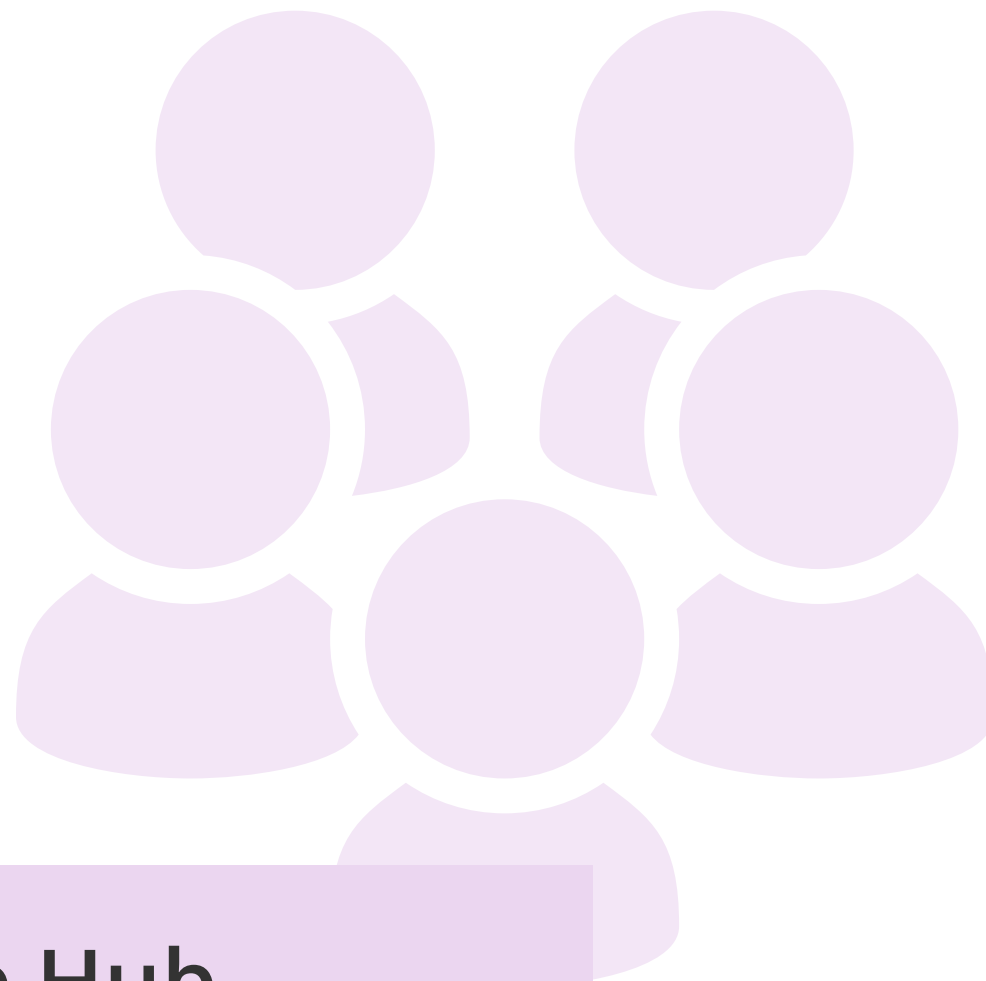
Target Group of the Hub

The target audience for this community center are middle-aged to older women, who are currently dependent on financial aid from the Hässelby-Vällingby district. The common characteristics amongst these women is their foreign background. Swedish and English are not their first language and proficiency levels are often low in many cases. The languages used most amongst women of this group are Arabic, Tigrinya and Persian. In addition, digital illiteracy and being analphabetic are also challenges some of the target group face.

In the rest of the handbook, the term "users" will refer to this target group as users of the Community Hub.

Ownership

The Community Hub is a platform designed for the target group in order to provide them with elements that are are relevant to represent their needs.

With a foundation of the Neighbourhood Moms and the Hässelby-Vällingby work and welfare office, it will offer a collaborative ownership structure for the direction and drive of the Community Hub. This will form a base on the ethos that focuses on reminding the target group that financial independence is possible, and that the municipality has the tools to provide it. Thus, it will provide both the social and human capital needed in the Community Hub.

A platform for the creation Community Hub is a team composed of users, employees from the work and welfare office (social workers) as well as from the citizens office and Neighbourhood Moms. This means Neighbourhood Moms take the lead role in identifying the needs of the target group as former users. The Hässelby-Vällingby work and welfare office provides the resources and guidance on the operation of the space. The citizens office serves as a go between for understanding the administrative and practical role of supporting this particular demographic in their district.

This format of ownership enables the community center to have a multidisciplinary team to foster an environment of 'ownership' thereby encouraging the target group to be more active. Taking ownership of their self-improvement and a sense of inclusion throughout the process driven by Neighbourhood Moms involvement as a connection to understanding their situation.

"Roles refer to one's position on a team. Responsibilities refer to the tasks and duties of their particular role or job description."[1]

Roles & Responsibilities

Therefore, the roles at the community center will be expected to be those already previously established by the Hässelby-Vällingby district office. However, the responsibilities will change. This is different due to the environment that is to be created in the "community center" so as to build trust, motivation, inspiration, and an environment that caters to a fruitful learning environment for the target group.

The roles being:

- **Neighbourhood Mom:** to facilitate and administer the learning of the target group.

- **Citizen Office Worker:** to provide administrative and communication support to the target group in support of the Neighbourhood Moms.

- **Social Worker:** to provide support when needed to the Neighbourhood Moms in facilitating and administering the support and learning of the target group.

Guiding Principles

To create the highest possible impact, the Community Hub is guided by five underlying principles: Inclusion, Mentorship, Co-creation, Sustainable Growth and Habit Formation

Mentorship

Vital for the Community Hub is the community itself. For this reason, the individual users take responsibility for each other - as far as they are able - especially in the onboarding of new users. In the course of this, each new user is assigned a mentor who assists with integration into the community and serves as a contact person for open questions. The role of a mentor could be fulfilled by either a Neighbourhood Mom or an experienced user of the Hub. For the latter, specific criteria regarding the duration of membership or degree of integration need to be defined. Providing an onboarding buddy not only leads to better integration into the social construct "Community Hub" and increased satisfaction of the mentees, but also gives the mentors space to grow and develop their interpersonal skillset.[2]

In addition to mentorship in the onboarding process, the mentoring idea is also taken up in the context of other offers of the Community Hub, where "experts" in their field share their knowledge with other users and are available to answer further questions.

Inclusion

The Community Hub is a place for the target group regardless of nationality, religion or political opinion. It accepts everyone's individuality and offers possibilities for participation. However, inclusion must not only be understood as an offer and privilege, but also as a call for the users to keep political, religious and ideological discussions out of the Hub.

Co-creation

The concept of co-creation takes user participation in communities to the next level: it is a shift from the Hub's administration as a definer of value to a collaborative process where (at least some) users and administration together create value and develop meaning.[3] The users provide input and play a central role in the Hub's development. They participate in decisions regarding the Hub's furniture, offerings and rules. After decision, the changes will be implemented in cooperation of users and staff. Later, all users can experience the change and express their feedback, which is incorporated into future iterations and decisions as validated learnings.[4]

For doing so, the Hub acts as a platform for fulfilling the user's needs and wishes regarding atmosphere, offerings and rules. Such a setting also requires a different self-perception from the employees: away from the role of a supervisor, towards a facilitating and moderating role.

Sustainable Growth

In order for a community to develop in the Hub, a slow and sustainable growth of users is aimed for. Especially the few first users have a big influence on the development of the Hub and the quality of the offerings. In order to participate in the sense of co-creation, an increased degree of initiative is required, which cannot be expected from every user. For this reason, users are initially only invited via Neighbourhood Moms, and later via existing users. The staff of the Citizen Office should not recommend their clients in the formal consultation process to visit the Hub at first, in order not to overload the developing structures of the community.

Habit Formation

The ultimate goal is that the users outgrow the Community Hub. The personal growth and growth mindset required for this cannot come from a single life decision, in fact it is the compound interest of many small habits.[5] To build these habits, a system is needed that promotes the development of positive habits: the Community Hub.

Therefore, in order to fulfil this function, the Hub is designed around the following four requirements:

1. **Make it obvious:** The offer and opening hours must be clearly recognisable for the users of the Hub.

2. **Make it attractive:** The Hub combines the pleasant, such as social contacts, with the useful, such as language acquisition and integration.

3. **Make it easy:** Friction is reduced. The Hub is easily accessible and its spatial design motivates people to become active.

4. **Make it satisfying:** users leave the Hub with a sense of self-efficacy.[6]
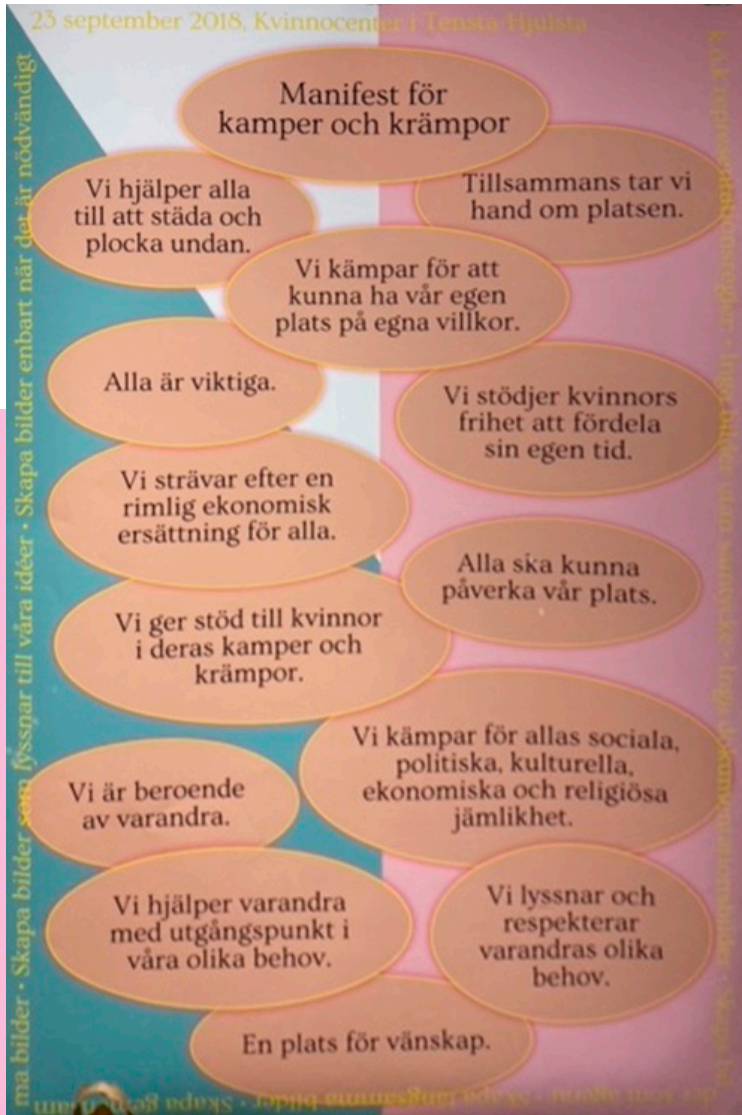
Rules & Mindsets

It needs to be a guarantee that certain mindsets are implemented in the Community Hub. This is to make sure an inclusive and openhearted community exists. The rules are to help everyone know what is expected of everyone and why so. Possible (overall) rules are:

1. Mobile sounds off when inside
2. Always speak Swedish with each other
3. Greet everyone with a smile
4. No religious, political or cultural differences exist here
5. Listen and help each other

They can be extended by additional rules during sessions and classes such as:

1. Make sure to be on time
2. Call [...] when late or not coming
3. Turn off mobile during class
4. Always speak Swedish
5. Raise your hand when you have a question

Exemplary rules and mindsets from the Kvinnocentret in Tensta

These rules are applied to everyone that attends the Community Hub to counteract friction. The Community Hub has a diplomatic view regarding courses and gatherings suggested by the visitors. This is to meet the users' needs and interests. Furthermore, there need to be clear instructions on when lessons are provided. An example is a board on a wall close to the entrance at the Community Hub.

This is to prevent miscommunication when classes start. A good way of engaging the visitors is to every now and then work on the values of the Community Hub based on the ground rules. Providing workshops for visitors to understand why the ground rules and values exist at the Community Hub. As an example, Kvinnocentret in Tensta has developed a well working environment. They have a few rules to keep a structure, but focus on inclusion and a high tolerance of learning difficulties. It takes longer for some than for others to learn and that is ok as long as they try and keep working.

Business Case

To motivate the realization of the Community Hub, its anticipated advantages and impact is illustrated

Public authorities – like the district Hässelby-Vällingby – have to follow the principles of economy and efficiency. Thus, the Community Hub must also stand up to financial considerations. Since it is impossible to calculate exact numbers for the direct and indirect effects caused by the Hub, this section indicates the financial implications for the implementation, operation and broader social-economic effects.

Cost Structure

Implementation

The exact costs for setting up the Community Hub are difficult to estimate in advance; in particular, the area and the distinction between whether the Hub is realised in a new or existing building have a considerable influence on the cost structure. Comparable international spatial structures can be realised for SEK 2,038.90 per square metre[7] in an existing building[8] and SEK 16,479.12 per square metre[9] as a new building[10], whereby the furnishing costs in particular can be further reduced by using existing and second-hand furniture as well as services provided by municipal companies.

Besides direct state funding, fundraising campaigns or donations in kind can also be solicited for the facility. An example of such fundraising is Community Hub Australia, an Australian concept for social activation Hubs, which raises two dollars in private donations and grants for every dollar of public funding.[11]

Operation

The main cost factors for running the Community Hub are the building costs and the staff. Both are dependent on the exact design of the building, as described above. Building costs include rent, water, energy, telecommunications, cleaning and maintenance.

The staffing needs of the Community Hub depend on three factors in particular: The size of the Hub, the intensity of supervision provided, and the staffing structure itself.[12] The latter can be significantly optimized, especially through the partial use of marginal and/or subsidised employees such as Neighbourhood Moms and Extra Tjänst.

Another rather low-cost item is consumables such as stationery, cleaning materials, drinks and snacks.

Cost-Benefit Considerations

Operational efficiency of Hässelby-Vällingby Citizen Office

According to internal estimations, the Citizen Office of the Hässelby-Vällingby district spend about 30% of their working time on the recurring support of the target group in applying for financial aid. In this context, it should be noted that applying for financial aid is only one of the tasks involved in supporting clients and that the target group only accounts for 20% of the total number of clients of the Social Service. The services offered by the Community Hub are designed to enable clients to submit their own applications and to support each other in the sense of mentoring as well through the Neighbourhood Moms who are active there. For the social secretaries, this leads to reduced support for the target group, free capacities for other tasks and increased job satisfaction due to less repetitive and time-consuming work tasks.

Overall socio-economical effects

In addition to the short-term successful application, the Community Hub follows the goal of integrating the target group into society. At best, people are put in a position to apply for jobs on the primary labour market and thus to leave the social security system on their own and be able to provide for themselves.

Realistically, this will be impossible for a large part of the target group, even with a deeper knowledge of Sweden and Swedish taught in the Hub. However, even in this case, the Community Hub has an overall economic benefit: The reduction of various social costs triggered by a lack of integration.

Loneliness and a lack of social integration have a similar effect as regular smoking on human mortality.[13] They significantly increase the risk of cardiovascular disease and strokes.[14] Lonely people are more likely to rely on health and social care services and thus make greater demands on the health system.[15] The effects of non-integrated sub-societies lead to difficulties for future generations from these groups. Long-term effects can lead to poor education and in the long-run unemployment and worst case criminality.[16, 17]

From a macro-perspective, the Community Hub is part of an active integration policy. Studies have shown that such an active integration approach, while initially costly, can generate an annual GDP effect of 0.2%-1.6% over the baseline growth in the medium to long term.[18]

Offers & Services

The Community Hub lives from the services and activities that are customized for and offered to its users

Access & Opening Hours

The exact opening hours of the Community Hub are both meeting and accommodating the user needs and schedules. Neighbourhood Moms are usually available during mornings and afternoons on weekdays. They can decide together with their users when they would like to spend time and have access to the Hub. It is recommended that structured courses are scheduled in the mornings and that users can cook and/or socialize together afterwards. The afternoons can then be used for socializing and networking as well as engaging in unscheduled activities such as self-studying, group-studying, filling out forms, exercising or simply enjoying a fika.

Digital Communication Groups

Besides the opening hours of the Community Hub, the users can either alone, or together with Neighbourhood Moms and mentors, create digital communication groups to ask questions, share information or simply interact. Platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Facebook Messenger, etc. can be used to stay and feel connected even when the physical space is closed. It is thereby recommended to ensure the GDPR compliance of such a communication group as well as assign a moderator. The role of such a moderator can be taken on by either a neighbourhood mom, or a user who has all necessary skills and motivation to do it.

Information about & Connection to Existing Services

There already exist a high number of great offers from the kommun and the city, but sometimes users just do not know about them. The Hub is a place where they can find all this information in multiple languages and therefore learn about existing offers that can help and support the needs of the users. Information about swedish courses, computer courses, local clubs and associations, assistance with mental and physical health issues and many more is made available for the users. This can be in the form of booklets or posters or Neighbourhood Moms that share it with users that ask for it. Representatives of existing offers can also be invited to the Community Hub to present their services, answer questions and sign-up interested users.

Learning in the Community Hub

The Community Hub is a place where learning and personal growth are in the center of attention. It offers different activities, which all have the purpose to help and support the user in their learning and integration journey.

Weekly Schedule

The Community Hub is built around weekly schedules that contain a number of courses, activities, workshops, events, etc. who contribute to the learning and growth of the users. These happenings take place at specific times in certain time intervals (e.g. twice a week, every week, every other week, once a month) and give users the opportunity to both create a routine and also plan their presence depending on their interests in upcoming events. It is very important to establish the weekly schedules together with the users. Scheduled courses, activities and events are planned depending on the needs, wishes and availability of the users.

Swedish Culture & Society

Although newcomers receive a basic education about how the swedish society works, they often still have many questions and areas where they lack knowledge. Courses focusing on conveying the basic values and principles of both the swedish culture and society help users to orient themselves in their new home. Furthermore, they will get a better overview of how the societal systems work and where they can contact the right people or ask for help regarding certain issues they are facing. Such courses also focus on creating the right mindset for users, a growth mindset. They are taught all the necessary things to understand why it is important and valuable for them to develop themselves further and what advantages they will get from doing so. It is recommended that users go through this course and get the right understanding and mindset first, before participating in any other offered classes.

Computer Skills

The Community Hub is a place where users learn how to use and interact with digital devices like computers, laptops, tablets and smartphones. Scheduled courses are offered for which users can register voluntarily in order to enhance their digital skills. These courses are focusing on rather basic, introductory skills to make users more confident in the basic interaction with different digital devices. Examples for topics taught in such courses could be: What is a browser? How do I open a webpage? How do I navigate through a webpage? For more advanced or specific knowledge, the users are forwarded to already existing external computer courses that are offered by other parties such as Arbedsförmedlingen. Computer courses are led by either Neighbourhood Moms, volunteers (e.g. from Voluntärbyrån) or the users themselves, depending on the skill level of the interested participants. If needed and if interest is shown, there can also be courses with different skill levels run at the same time.

Financial Aid Application

All users that already have basic computer skills, or went through one or more computer courses at the Community Hub, can participate in digital financial aid application classes. These classes specifically focus on learning how to fill out the forms as well as access all the necessary documents for applying for financial aid. The exact format of the class and the most valuable person teaching it is dependent on the skill level of the course participants and the other users in the Community Hub. This offer can also go beyond the focus on financial aid application and make users familiar with the handling of other platforms that are crucial in their daily lives.

Learning Goals

The aim of all the learning activities in the Community Hub is to support users in creating the right mindset towards acquiring new information and knowledge. It is all about understanding the advantages that new skills can have and how they can make everyday life of users easier. Thus, there are no formal standards set by the kommun or other stakeholders that the users are expected to fulfill.

On top of this, it is important to consider the previous knowledge and the background of users when defining the offered courses and activities. Users, for instance, who struggle with speaking and communicating or reading in Swedish do not yet need computer classes. Their focus should lie on feeling comfortable in a new environment, opening up to new people and learning the language. Users who already feel confident in all of this, can then focus on developing new skills such as computer skills or filling out forms.

The goal is to be able to offer all courses in swedish. Depending on the language level of users, this might not directly be possible. Then either translators can help, or the courses can be held in another language.

Matchmaking

Matchmaking is the possibility to match users based on needs and interests. One user becomes a guide or teacher for others and shares previous knowledge, experience and skills. In an ideal case the learning user in this context has expertise in something else that the teaching user lacks so that they can engage in a mutual knowledge exchange. An example can be: One user is good at cooking and the other would like to learn that cooking style. In return this user teaches swedish to the user who is good at cooking. This mutual learning process is important to help users realize that they actually are good at something and can bring value to the society and not only depend on help from others.

Matches among users can be found in different ways. They might talk with and get to know each other and find out that they have similar or opposing interests and decide to learn together. Besides this, there is the possibility to have a notice board, or a simple paper, where users write down their interests or skills and others can see if they match. Of course, the matchmaking process can also be facilitated by Neighbourhood Moms and/or mentors by talking to and encouraging users to learn together with certain other matching users.

Programmes & Activities

Besides the activities specifically directed towards learning and growth, the Community Hub also provides other programmes and activities for users.

Inspirational Talks

Special guests can be invited to the Community Hub in regular time intervals (e.g. every other week or once a month) to share their stories and experiences with interested users. Such guests can be former financial aid applicants that successfully managed to become independent as well as refugees or other people with a different background that have accomplished to be partly or fully integrated into the Swedish society. By hearing their journeys, the users can create an understanding that there is a way for them to go and opportunities waiting. They can ask questions and communicate with the guests to learn more about their lives and get advice on personal struggles and fears. Important is here to keep in mind that the guests holding inspirational talks need to be relatable and approachable for the users. If they are not, the talks might have the exact opposite effect and scare users even more.

Special Events

Special events like a scheduled drop-in time for questions to a Social Worker or staff of the Citizen Office or planned "ask a lawyer" or "ask a therapist" can also be facilitated in the Community Hub. This allows users to ask personal questions to people with a specific knowledge background, without having to look for and schedule appointments with them themselves. The answers to frequently asked questions can be summarized and made available for the users in the desired languages and formats.

Collective Cooking & Eating

Nothing is more powerful in bringing people together than food and drinks. Users cook together, introduce each other to traditions from their countries of origin as well as teach and learn new recipes. In that way users engage in a fun activity which simultaneously allows them to share stories and learn more about each other.

Collective Exercising & Health Support

The Community Hub facilitates regular exercise sessions (e.g. running or walking, pilates, yoga, stretching) in which the users can disconnect from all their other responsibilities and focus on moving their bodies together with others. Moreover, meditation and mindfulness sessions are offered to give users a guided way to let go of stress and unwind. Depending on the group size and the skill level, these exercise and mindfulness sessions can either be led by users or facilitated through youtube videos or similar digital platforms and offers.

Moreover, the Community Hub also supports users in their eating habits in the form of nutrition guidance. Simple, quick and healthy recipes are cooked together and different foods and their nutritional values are explained to the users. This allows them to develop a better understanding for swedish food products and a healthier lifestyle for themselves and their families.

Other Activities

Based on the principle of co-creation, users can decide themselves which other activities they are interested in and want to pursue in the Community Hub. Such activities can be connected to learning (e.g. filling out forms together, looking for schools together, speaking swedish together) or simple fun things that the users enjoy engaging in (e.g. playing card games, dancing, playing an instrument, sewing). Depending on the type of activity, it is possible for the users to self-organize it, or might need the assistance of Neighbourhood Moms or mentors to be implemented.

Design of the Physical Place

To give guidance of how to set up a suitable physical space, a number of recommendations are discussed

Spatial Arrangement

Diverse Areas

The Community Hub is divided into several areas, which can be separate rooms or preferable simply marked out zones within one bigger room. These specific areas are dedicated to and designed for different purposes and activities. It is recommended to have at least one area for comfortably sitting together and talking, one that serves as a kitchen and one with the function of a learning environment. Moreover, there could be a designated area for exercising, engaging with digital devices or other activities.

Atmosphere & Lighting

The atmosphere as well as the lighting in the diverse areas is matching the purpose of the area and supports the user in performing certain activities. A space designated for communicating with each other should be rather soothing and relaxing, while a learning area should be more structured, clean and bright. This means that the atmosphere may vary within the Community Center.

Proximity

The Community Hub is located at a place that is close to and easy accessible for its users.

Modularity

Modular furniture and other movable and adjustable elements allow a constant redesign of the space for various different purposes. This allows the easy facilitation of activities with different group sizes and social situations. Furthermore, modular furnishing allows using certain areas for different purposes. A big lunch table can, for example, be transformed into smaller group tables for learning or hosting a language café.

Wi-Fi & Digital Devices

The Community Hub offers fast, stable and free internet connection to all users. Furthermore, digital devices such as computers are available in the space and can be used at all times. This can be during scheduled computer classes, but also in the free time to fill out application forms, assess documents, call family or a friend or just learn how to interact with digital devices generally.

Food & Drinks

There exists a possibility for users to bring, prepare, store and consume food and drinks. This area can range from a fully functional kitchen to a simple coffee machine and water cooker, depending on the users' wishes and needs. Nevertheless, coffee and tea should always be available for the users free of charge. The availability of such an environment supports the social aspect that comes with cooking and eating; it is an activity the users engage in together.

Next Steps

To support an easy realization of the Community Hub, a guide explaining the next steps is presented

1 **Read this handbook and the corresponding report carefully to fully understand its aim and application.**

2 Assign a skilled person or team with representatives of different stakeholders to the responsibility of continuing this project in order to realize the Community Hub. Make sure they read and understand this handbook and the corresponding report before taking any action.

3 Decide together with Neighbourhood Moms on a group of users (ca. 5) with which the Community Hub will be created and tested.

4 The Neighbourhood moms determine together with the group of test users their needs and wishes for the Community Hub. This includes desired location, opening hours, offerings, services, courses as well as interior.

5 The Neighbourhood moms then present those needs to the assigned person or team at the welfare office to negotiate the possibilities for realization.

6 Locate a physical space suitable for the needs of the users and let them design its interior themselves, guided by the Neighbourhood Moms.

7 Find suitable individuals that can lead courses, guide activities and host special events. Talk to the Neighbourhood moms to receive feedback whether the selected services and individuals are approved by the users.

8 Let the Community Hub run for a while to test its effect on the users. Ensure that Neighbourhood Moms regularly talk to users to get their opinion and host constant feedback sessions between the Neighbourhood Moms and the project group of the welfare office to adjust and improve the Hub.

9 As soon as a satisfying Community Hub has been established, enlarge the test group with a suitable number of users and iterate the process starting from step 4.

Next Steps

Let's create the future together.

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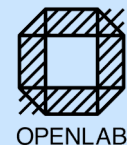
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