

Swedish libraries: An increased role in the Education Society while adjusting to harder economics and technology.

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Libraries in Sweden, both public and academic, are facing the same economic hardships as all public sector activities. In this respect the situation in Sweden is similar to most other countries.

Another, not country specific, phenomenon is that an increasing number of citizens are engaged in studies of one kind or another; “life-long learning” is a reality. This, naturally, has an impact on the demand for library services.

The technological developments in telecommunications (Internet) and electronic material (Multimedia, E-journals, E-books, and new genres of material) have been adopted and applied by all kinds of libraries, and is beginning fundamentally to change the nature of library operations.

Economic and technological pressure has led to organizational changes: for public libraries it has meant centralization and concentration (e.g. fewer branch libraries), for university libraries there is a tendency towards decentralization of the traditional library services, which gives more power to the individual faculties of the university, but there is also a trend towards centralized management of electronic material.

A second organizational response is integration and cooperation between the different library sectors: library users are no longer neatly clustered in the “public” or the “academic” sphere so both material flows and service offerings must adjust to this reality.

University and academic libraries.

The number of institutions for higher education (university colleges) has increased significantly during the past decades, and three of them have recently been given university status. Currently Sweden has 11 universities, and four specialized institutions with university status (Chalmers University of Technology, the Royal Institute of Technology, Karolinska Institutet, and Stockholm School of Economics). The number of university colleges and other academic institutions is 18, making a total of 33 academic libraries.

(In the category “research libraries” Sweden also has 33 government funded special libraries, and the Royal Library.)

The number of courses offered, and the number of students have also been rising, which has resulted on increased demand for library services.

Swedish academic libraries are, by legislation, open to the public, and not as in some countries exclusive to the members of the academic community. Academic libraries therefore experience their share of the general increase in demand for library services. The share of “public” usage of an academic library is typically on the order of 20-30% of total usage.

The situation for the libraries is different for, on the one hand, the older (and larger) university libraries, and, on the other hand, for the libraries at the relatively new libraries at the university colleges. The latter have been in a building-up phase, so the financial situation has been better. (Although recently these libraries are also facing cost savings.) But even so the collections at the university colleges are far from comprehensive, especially regarding older material. Public libraries have been used to supplement the holdings, often by ILL requests. The Council for Cultural Affairs estimate the one third of the ILL traffic to public libraries come from students of one kind or another. But mostly it has been the older university libraries which have provided the ILL material. To ameliorate the effects of the imbalance in collections, and the resulting ILL load, the government, through BIBSAM, has financed a compensation scheme for net-lenders. The annual budget for this scheme is SEK 10 million.

Local circulation is still growing in volume. Local loans (the national total) increased by 23% between 1998 and 2000, and the trend seems to continue.

The main factor affecting academic libraries is technology. The digital revolution is well in progress (see more in the section below) and all libraries are involved either as participants, or as beneficiaries, or in some respects as victims.

Whereas previous waves of technology (library automation systems and information retrieval in databases) meant rationalization of work, and often lead to additional funding, the present wave of technology means an increase in work which must be accommodated in existing budgets. The exception is digitization projects which mostly are done with extra funding.

Public libraries.

For public libraries a couple factors, one demographic and one economic, are significant for the current situation. The population is decreasing in many communalities, so the tax paying base has become smaller, and in many places library branches have been closed. The volume of acquisitions has gone down as a consequence of the reduction of funding.

A survey by the National Council for Cultural Affairs showed that during the period 1988-1999 the number of closed branch libraries was 376. (This is the total for all 289 communalities). In 85% of these cases the reason was cost savings. Decreases in population is also a contributing factor in many cases, especially sparsely populated areas.

The total number of public libraries in Sweden's 289 municipalities was 1,472 (counting both main libraries and branches) in 1999. This is 267 less than in 1989 so the decline in number was 15% during that period.

For the same period there has also been a decline in total holdings with 3.5% to 47,527,000. However, the holdings of AV-material have increased from 2 million to 2.8 million. The number of subscriptions to newspapers and journals has gone down from 153,000 to 117,000 (a decrease of 24%).

In spite of the decline in holdings, circulation figures are up: the total number of loans (1998) is about 82 million, of which 11% are AV-material. This is an increase in the total of 12% from the 1989 figure. The proportion of non-fiction in circulation has increased and is now about the same as fiction (30%); the remaining 40% is children's material.

The increase in use is primarily due to the fact that more people are engaged in some kind of studying. Students from all levels use the public libraries either because of a lack of an adequate school library, or as a complement to the school or university college library. The Adult Education Initiative (in Swedish: Kunskapslyftet) is the largest adult education investment initiative ever undertaken in Sweden. All the municipalities in Sweden are taking part in the project which began on 1 July 1997 and is set to continue up to and including 2002. Its aim is to raise educational levels and to reduce unemployment.

The Initiative is relying very much on the public libraries for supporting their activities, but the libraries have not (with few exceptions) been given funding to meet the increase in demand. The consequence has been that other library activities, for example the services to children and to the elderly, have been reduced.

In both the primary and secondary schools new educational methods are being introduced. Problem based learning and other ways with more active student participation lead to an increased use of the public libraries. In general, the school libraries do not have sufficient resources to meet this demand. Only 16% of the primary schools (up to the 9th grade) have a library that is staffed more than one hour per day. The National Agency for Education has been given a special task by the government to strengthen the role of the school libraries in the educational process.

In attempting to make the local government administration more cost-effective local governments have during the last decade to an increasing degree changed the organization so that libraries are put together with other, mostly larger, activities. The result has been that library issues have received less attention from the political decision makers with increased difficulties with funding as a consequence.

State initiatives for the development of public libraries are in the form of grants to public libraries; these are managed by the National Council for Cultural Affairs, and are for the purpose of

- ”- increasing the public libraries' possibilities of reaching new groups, ·
- developing new methods and forms of activity,
- maintaining an even standard.”

The Web pages of the Council contain the following summary of the subsidies:
“The subsidies to regional public library activities (subsidy units) for 2001 amount to SEK 36,6 million (including SEK 11,3 million in grants to loan centres and deposit libraries). SEK 2.8 million is earmarked for developing regional library activities and may be applied for by county libraries. Government subsidies for developing public library activities may be applied for by municipalities (public libraries). The

following areas are given priority: new information technology, promotion of reading and outreach activity and establishment of workplace libraries. The grants are allocated on a continuous basis during the year. Government subsidies for purchasing literature for public and school libraries may be applied for by municipalities. The intention of the grant is to increase the availability of literature for children and young people at public and school libraries. It is also meant to stimulate children's and young people's interest in reading books. The grant should be used for purchasing literature for children and young people. Applications must be submitted by 2 April. The grant totals SEK 25 million.

Government grants for activities that promote reading, mainly for children and young people, may be applied for by schools, libraries, booksellers, societies and other associations. The appropriation is SEK 5 million.

From 1999 there is an appropriation of SEK 500 000 for grants to municipal libraries for subscriptions to arts' periodicals.”

The digital revolution.

Perhaps the most visible change at the academic libraries is the increase in the number of electronic journals that are available. Almost all academic libraries offer the same packages, due to national consortium buying, so they all provide access to some 4,500 titles. In some cases these are supplemented by individual electronic titles or smaller packages.

The growth has happened during the last few years: in 1998 the national total of electronic journal subscriptions at academic libraries was 44,000, in 1999 it was 90,000, and in 2000 it was 128,000. The number is still going up.

The effect of this increase in e-journals has been that a “critical mass” of material has been reached which is a prerequisite for stimulating use. And usage statistics are, indeed, high. With increased use we can also see a change in attitude towards preferring electronic access instead of print.

Electronic books are only recently being introduced. Goteborg University library has pioneered this extension of electronic offerings by buying (access) to 500+ titles from NetLibrary, which also contains some 4,000 freely accessible works (with no copyright). A consortium is in the process of being formed for further purchases. The service is still too new to draw conclusions for future developments. There are still many issues unresolved, and the future role for libraries regarding e-books is not entirely clear (see the article by Lynch, 2001).

The acquisition of (access to) e-journals have mostly been done in consortia; the largest on the national level (e.g. Springer, Academic Press, and Elsevier). In spite of the fact that the consortium consisted of practically all academic libraries in Sweden it was not possible to obtain price discounts; the commercial publishers could not be made to bend from their position “the same money as before with a little increase”. So the cost for the libraries has been based on what they have bought in the past. The positive side of this deal is that all participating libraries get access to the combined holdings of the consortium (in the Elsevier case some 1,100 titles).

The national consortium deals for e-journals have been bargains for the libraries at the university colleges which had very few subscriptions, and consequently gained access to a large number of titles for very little money. For the large university libraries the effect has been that they are locked at a very high spending level which is increasing at a rate of five times the inflation rate. Obviously this situation is not stable when funds for acquisitions are not increasing.

Commercial publishers are still avoiding meeting their real consumers (“end users”) in a market situation; for them a more profitable strategy is to collect money via libraries. Examples of point purchases directly by users are probably growing, but as long as the “pay-per-view” model is not widely applied the bulk of the traffic will go via libraries.

The uncertainty regarding the long term economics has contributed to continued renewal of print subscriptions (in addition to the electronic). Some university libraries have a policy of cancelling print subscriptions for e-titles, but many do this very selectively. In 2000 the national total for print subscriptions was 150,000 which actually is an increase from the year before (135,000).

To an increasing extent material produced at the universities, such as dissertations and reports are being distributed as web resources, mostly on the library’s pages. Concerns over copyright issues have made the transition to electronic full texts slower than what technology permits. The experience at Lund University library, however, shows that it can be relatively easy to secure permission to re-issue previously printed articles as part of the dissertations database (for dissertations that contain such material). Some researchers are still hesitant to “go electronic only” since they are worried about the merit value of electronic publications.

Digitization of historical material is another activity that is becoming a part of the digital library. A number of projects are in progress, or have been completed, at the Royal Library and at academic libraries. A couple of examples will illustrate this. At Göteborg University library the subject for digitization are the archives of the Swedish East India Company (in operation 1731 – 1813); see <http://www.ub.gu.se/samlingar/handskrift/ostindie/> and at Lund University Library there is a project for digitizing the medieval manuscripts; see <http://www.lub.lu.se/ub/handskrift/index.html>

For public libraries it is also true that the “virtual library” is a reality: many of the service offerings of the library can be delivered on the Web, such as identifying interesting works, order items, renew loans etc. A case in point is the Stockholm Public Library which has about 18,000 visits to its web-site per week, with is about the same as the number of physical visits.

A couple of public libraries (Nacka and Stockholm) have started a service to circulate electronic books.

And perhaps most important: public libraries are providing Internet access to groups that otherwise would not have that possibility.

Cooperation and integration of library sectors.

In the Library Law (of 1997) the government gave all libraries in Sweden the task of being the backbone for a national infrastructure for information, knowledge and for making our cultural heritage available. All libraries must make their collections available free of charge to any and all category of users. Furthermore it is stated that “county libraries, loan centers, academic and government funded research libraries shall cooperate with public and school libraries to give patrons a high quality library service”

The present library scene in Sweden gives several examples of cooperation and coordination between different library sectors, and these all contribute to bringing the different library sectors closer to each other.

Just recently we saw the origin of a common professional organisation for libraries and librarians: the Swedish Library Association (Svensk biblioteksförening) is a merger of the professional society for university and research librarians (SBF) and the association for public libraries and librarians (SAB).

The education of librarians is no longer oriented towards specific library sectors; all educational programs (at Borås, Lund, Umeå, and Uppsala) give a broad academic education leading to a M.Sc. degree. Graduates are prepared for work in all library sectors, as well as other types of information work.

Integration of school libraries with public libraries is common and the phenomenon is increasing. Unfortunately the motive has often been to save costs, so the potential for cross fertilization has not been fulfilled.

In some places the libraries of university colleges are merged with the public library, for example on Gotland and in Härnösand. In Karlstad and Norrtälje there are also cooperative programs between academic and public libraries. On the regional level here are a number of cooperative projects to make pooled resources available on the Web, for example Kunskapsporten (The Knowledge Gate) in Skåne, and Kunskapsnät (Knowledge Network) Sörmland.

On the national level probably the most important project is the joining of the two national union catalogs into a common search interface. It is LIBRIS, the union catalog for research libraries, and BURK, the union catalog for public libraries which will be made available for simultaneous searching. The service will open during the fall of this year at www.bibliotek.se.

Another cross-sectorial activity which deserves mention is the ALM Group (in Swedish ABM), a forum for joint consultation between archives, libraries, and museums. “It was initiated by BIBSAM in 1991 with the aim of identifying and promoting cooperation between institutions in the three sectors covered by the Group. The main focus was, and is, on simplifying cross-sectoral information provision, on the basis of the new and expanded possibilities offered by modern information technology.

One of the most important projects resulting from the Group's work deals with the creation of a common national authority file for corporate names, topographic names, and names of persons. However, it is important to point out that the Group itself neither funds nor administers any projects. Its role is in the conception, delivery, and supervision of projects.” [from BIBSAM’s web-site]

Furthermore there is a project in progress on “Image Databases and Digitisation – platform for ALM collaboration”. This is a Joint Project between The Royal Library, Nationalmuseum, the National Heritage Board, and the National Archives of Sweden. An English version of the web pages is announced to be available at http://www.kb.se/ABM_plattform/Default_Projektet.htm

With a continuous convergence in the form and technology for library, archive, and museum material initiatives such as these will become even more important in the future.

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