A TRIAL TO INTRODUCE THE THEME OF LIBRARY DIRECTORS' CONTRIBUTION TO THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

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The word "library" is usually associated with a public institution and its associated premises, collections and staff. This meaning is in line with the definition given by the Swedish National Encyclopedia (2013). It is also my baseline understanding. Ever since the 1970s and 1980s, professional librarians have been talking about and developing various IT-based solutions to problems related to information access, nowadays through so-called digital libraries. This article introduces the theme of my dissertation – the contribution of library directors to the information society, initially considered from a Nordic perspective.

The image of the library has been the topic of debate and of various types of interventions. One example of this is the debate book Bilden av biblioteket (1982) ("The image of the library"), in which a commissioned government study on public libraries wanted to reproduce various people's understanding of what a library is. In the introduction, the roles and social functions of the public libraries are described, by Bengt Holmström, as social library operations aimed at underserved groups, as information hubs for the entire community, and as cultural centers. He makes the following evocative conclusion:

> So today, the image of the library is one of the permanence of the cloud shadow – a projection of uncertainties, a reflection of benevolent dreams. The image of the library should not be allowed to become as vague as that. (Holmström 1982, p. 16)

A follow-up question to that, in 2013, is: "What then is the image of the library, and what ought it to be; how have libraries positioned themselves in the information society; what are their current roles? IT development has doubtless affected these roles, as it was observed over 20 years ago. Today, we refer to our society as "the information society," "the postindustrial society," or "the network society." These labels are intended to describe a societal transformation, in much of the Western world in any case. The development of technology may sharpen the extremes between different functions – between different parts of the world and between those who have access to information and those who do not. Such a development is sometimes referred to as "polarizing."

Twenty-five years have passed since the above-mentioned debate book, conceived within the framework of the government study on public libraries in Sweden in the 1980s, was written. The general roles that at the beginning of the twenty-first century were assigned to libraries are both to make information available to consumers with varying needs and to function as a space, a meeting-place, and a place where patrons can obtain personal advice, etc. (Höglund, 2003, p. 310). Marianne Andersson and Dorte Skot-Hansen designed a model for analyzing the image of Denmark's local public libraries. This analysis model deals with four aspects: the library as a center of knowledge, as a cultural center, as a social hub and as an information center (Andersson & Skot-Hansen, 2000, p. 18). These aspects concur with Holmström's definition from the 1980s, with one exception: The Swedish experience mentioned nothing about knowledge centers, which could indicate that the role has developed alongside the society's clearer emphasis on retraining and further education as part of "lifelong learning." The take-away is that the libraries' various functions in society give rise to different types of perspectives.

Libraries are still associated with a physical place, often the municipal public library (Höglund, 2003, p. 310), but libraries are not a homogeneous concept (Höglund, 2004, p. 165). Höglund describes how the breakthrough of digital libraries begins to appear in Swedish statistics on borrowed material (2003, p. 310). But what might the breakthrough of digital libraries mean for the libraries' operations and functions? Are conceptions of libraries updated at a pace with IT development? It can reasonably be assumed that such conceptions affect resource allocation or the

organization of libraries' operations in different countries. What strategies and tactics have been created? How do today's library directors manage libraries in 2013? A library can be understood in many different ways – for example, as either a digital or a traditional, institutional library.

These conceptions reflect the differing images of libraries borne by different representatives. It is significant for the professional, for research on the profession, and for society's ability to make correct decisions, that awareness of these distinguishing aspects increases. So far, however, empirical research on how library directors deal with this development is scant. Operations development and management are of course time-consuming and pragmatically-oriented processes, and library directors' responsibilities do not allow them time to conduct research on their operations. Research is needed to develop models of good leadership and to obtain new knowledge. That is the purpose of this dissertation project.

The general question posed in this study to deal with the problem situation is as follows:

"What roles and functions are described by and for acting library managers in different societies? What similarities and differences can be found?"

The work is by nature cross-sectional. I adopt an introductory perspective based on the idea that that is where the direction of change, and changes in themselves, is noticed and translated into direction and practical action. Library directors' experience with and knowledge of management is valuable to the development of models of good leadership.

The geographic framework is expanded to include other countries. Globalisation brings interrelationships between countries. Audunson (1996) and Aabø (2005) wrote earlier dissertations touching on the same theme. The present study is to include Romania, Germany, and Finland/Sweden. The selection was made so as to include a diversity of societies of varying historical backgrounds, as well as for practical reasons.

Key concepts in this article:

- Digital libraries

"Digital libraries" was mentioned above. In this study, they are included in the category of "institutional libraries." They are considered a subset of libraries. There are several discussions on digital libraries. Below are a few examples of how the concept has been analyzed, which are subsequently used to determine the definition in this study.

Ian Rowlands and David Baden (1999a, 1999b) discuss digital libraries, first as a concept and undertaking and then in the light of a theoretical framework. Their conclusion, based on a literature review, is that there is little agreement on the basic assumptions about the digital library as a concept (1999a). A three-part model is presented by Rowlands and Bawden (1999 b, p. 193). The model focuses on day-to-day library operations and highlights parts of documents, work and technology (Rowlands & Bawden, 1999b). These three aspects are key to the understanding of traditional and digital libraries. They stand for a social domain (work), an information domain (documents), and a systems` domain (technology). These domains reflect an internal view on libraries' operations and functions (cf. Andersson & Skot-Hansen, 2000). It is interesting to note that Bawden & Rowlands define a traditional library in the following way:

> ...*traditional library* refers to a predigital library, i.e., one based on a physical, largely printed, collection. This term is preferred to "real library," also sometimes used in the library, as the latter conveys the implication that the digital library is in some sense an inferior, or incomplete, version. (Bawden & Rowlands, 1999a, p. 182)

Jean-Claude Guédon (1999) takes as his basic premise the idea that the name "digital library" is perhaps an oxymoron – that is, that it contains two apparently incompatible elements. He also claims that "digital" and "virtual" are used as synonyms, as indeed they are. "Digital" refers to a new form of document encoding, whereas "virtual" refers to a process and an evolution. As I understand it, his point is that the digital library entails a reorganization and development of an already existing library theme, namely, the encoding of documents, whereas the virtual library stands for both the process and for an evolution, a further development of an already existing theme. Guédon considers that virtual combined with virtual library implies a different order of inquiry than that in digitization. He is concerned that the libraries do not understand their role in a

strategic manner in the transition. I quote:

> (…) in other words, rather than envisioning themselves as knowledge bankers sitting on treasure vaults of knowledge, they should see themselves as the "hearts" of dynamiting human communities. They should also see themselves as an essential part of these communities, and not as external repositories of knowledge. (Guédon 1999, p. 9)

Christine L. Borgman (1999) mentions various definitions of "the digital library:" Generally, researchers view it as content collected on behalf of library users, whereas practising librarians consider the digital library as institutions, or as services, she contends. According to Borgman, there is tension between the two groups with regard to their view of what a library is. Borgman notes that there is tautology in definitions according to which a digital library is an institution that provides digital libraries. (Borgman 1999, p. 228)

The name *the traditional library* stands for a common understanding of the library as an institution. The fact that we often associate the institutional library with something traditional can be seen in a study by Deborah J. Grimes (1998). She begins by using the metaphor of *the heart of university* for the library, but subsequently distances herself from it on the basis of her study. Grimes finds herself in a discussion of the academic library as a *crossroads*. The heart metaphor is also used by Guédon, above. The core functions of a library are, according to Grimes, to provide services and access opportunities, in association with tradition. Grimes presents a theory whereby service, access and tradition lead to user success (Grimes, 1998, p. 112).

Grimes views tradition as an empirical sign of the central position of the academic library (*centrality)*. According to her, tradition consists in measures such as financial support, the library's reputation or prestige, its symbolic role, the university's quality or reputation, the size and quality of the collections, and the views of the students and the faculties. In her view, the academic library tradition is shaped by accumulated experience (abstract, symbolic or concrete), but that such experience has shaped the library's current circumstances (Grimes, 1998, p. 108–109).

Tradition is viewed as a special characteristic of libraries. But what is it that shapes tradition? The libraries' current status and form can be seen as social agreements that are based on prior agreements. A social agreement is negotiable. It is relevant to study this in various contexts, to see differences and similarities in terms of leadership and value creation.

- Multi/cross-disciplinary-oriented management research

Anders Granberg (1976) describes a general understanding of cross-disciplinary studies as something that is missing from science and should be more prevalent. Granberg claims that when something "goes against the grain" or cuts across two or more sciences, it can then be considered cross-disciplinary. In order for something – x – to be designated as cross-disciplinary in some respect, it is necessary that x in at least some respect constitute a relationship between at least two disciplines. Arising out of this is a need for knowledge that does not follow prior classifications, according to Granberg.

Sometimes, different scientific thought patterns are referred to as "paradigms" (Kuhn, 1997). Moreover, scientific development is based upon or even contravenes such thought patterns, to create new patterns. The multi/cross-disciplinary approach initiates a desire to integrate existing knowledge across various boundaries. The argument causes me to seek knowledge where it may be found, and my choice is then between breadth and depth in the broad approach to the study.

The study encompasses library directors in various countries. One country may be considered a case – however, even library directors themselves are a case. This methodological issue must be resolved and answered in this study. Charles C. Ragin (1992, in translation: 2000, p. 1–19) points out that every study is, at a minimum, a case study in its ability to serve as an analysis of a social phenomenon in time and space. Stake (2000, p. 448) emphasizes the case-study method as one of refining theories, proposing complex questions for ongoing research, and trying to establish the limits of generalizability. Increased knowledge about the limits of generalizability as regards library directors in different countries involves a value increase in terms of comparing results.

To learn what activities take place, it would seem relevant to look at the content of what management might be about in practice. It is also helpful to focus the search on theories.

According to Hamel (2008, in Bruzelius & Skärvard, p. 18), management is essentially about:

- formulating and planning the realization of goals;
- arguing for and coordinating efforts; coordinating and steering activities;
- nurturing and hiring talent;
- accumulating and applying knowledge;
- acquiring and distributing resources;
- establishing and fostering relationships;
- balancing and satisfying demands from investors.

These aspects can serve as core activity designations for the further development of this study.

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