

Public Libraries - Arenas of Debate and Participation

Functions of Knowledge Management in Nordic Public Libraries



In earlier times we as a library wanted to be nice and were afraid of conflict.

Now that we are based in a cultural centre, **we are much better at being an arena of debate.**

We want our visitors to interact with us, we want to be their everyday stage!

Åsa Hedberg Karlsson
Bibliotekschef Borås Stadsbibliotek

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A research project based on the results of my doctoral thesis via face-to-face interviews in cooperation with 29 selected metropolitan city libraries in Northern Europe

Geographical criteria

- Northern Europe (Finland, Norway, Denmark & Sweden)
- Big cities (more than 100,000 inhabitants)

Institutional criteria

- (Metropolitan) public libraries
- Central libraries

Functional criteria

- Higher management, e.g. head of the public library or member of the steering committee

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As a library we are a free place, and **the single citizen is in the centre of our everyday tasks**

Anne Lauridsen | Odense

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The participants

(29 from 36 metropolitan libraries agreed to take part!)

Finland	
1	Helsinki (about 630,000 inhabitants)
2	Vantaa (about 210,000 inhabitants)
3	Espoo (about 270,000 inhabitants)
4	Turku (about 190,000 inhabitants)
5	Tampere (about 220,000 inhabitants)
6	Jyväskylä (about 140,000 inhabitants)
7	Kuopio (about 110,000 inhabitants)
8	Oulu (about 200,000 inhabitants)

Norway	
9	Oslo (about 660,000 inhabitants)
10	Trondheim (about 190,000 inhabitants)
11	Bergen (about 280,000 inhabitants)
12	Stavanger (about 130,000 inhabitants)

Sweden	
13	Umeå (about 120,000 inhabitants)
14	Göteborg (about 550,000 inhabitants)
15	Boras (about 110,000 inhabitants)
16	Norrköping (about 100,000 inhabitants)
17	Örebro (about 220,000 inhabitants)
18	Västerås (about 140,000 inhabitants)
19	Uppsala (about 210,000 inhabitants)
20	Huddinge (about 100,000 inhabitants)
21	Stockholm (about 950,000 inhabitants)
22	Malmö (about 320,000 inhabitants)

Denmark	
23	Fredriksberg (about 105,000 inhabitants)
24	København (about 600,000 inhabitants)
25	Odense (about 200,000 inhabitants)
26	Vejle (about 115,000 inhabitants)
27	Aarhus (about 330,000 inhabitants)
28	Aalborg (about 210,000 inhabitants)
29	Esbjerg (about 120,000 inhabitants)

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Thesis 1 | Knowledge management in general

Knowledge Management is intertwined in everything.

The big questions are:

How can we tap into our staff's hidden skills?

How can we turn the library inside-out?

We are still too introverted and too closed.

Katti Hofli
Stockholm Public Library



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Thesis 1 | Knowledge management in general

However, most of the experts stated that being a bit more aware of the different facets of knowledge management might be helpful in dealing with current and future challenges:



transition from national to international with a lot of legal
states our day-to-day **in making things simpler, more**

Aart de Heer
Library services director
Turku City Library

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Thesis 2 | Individual knowledge management

Our duty is to offer know-how to every citizen, to **give them individual guidance**, and that's the highest step in our Knowledge Management.

And leadership is the way of implementing Knowledge Management [...] !

*Päivi Savinainen
Head of Kuopio Public Library*

Our most important reason is helping the people, encouraging them, not bettering the acceptance of the library – that's only a secondary consequence.



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Thesis 3 | **Systemic Knowledge Management**

Providing democratic competence & Facilitating participation

Libraries are open and free, that is our main task.
And improving citizenship is a very important focus in
our everyday work.

Pirkko Lindberg Tampere | Head of Metso



Prof. Dr. Tom Becker
tom.becker@th-koeln.de

We're influenced by everything that's going on, and freedom of speech is a particularly big topic:
How do we deal with hate speech?
How do we interpret this in our library's activities?
How do we reflect those opinions you don't agree with, since we are a place where everybody should be welcome?

Sarah Bengtsson,
Enhetschef Bibliotek Uppsala

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Thesis 4 | **Systemic Knowledge Management**

Changing roles within the (current) refugee topic

There is a broad consensus in nearly all Nordic public libraries that the topic isn't a really new one – just a (temporarily) increasing one.

We have been working with newcomers and immigrants since 1950 – so what happened last year, didn't really challenge us - it just made it necessary to increase our services.

Karin Ramnerö , Västerås:



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Thesis 4 | **Systemic Knowledge Management**

Changing roles within the (current) refugee topic

However, within the discussion there is also some skepticism noticeable;

We have these populist movements and the better we cooperate with refugees, the more we are hated. [...]

Behind the scene it is an issue. [...]

Whatever you do, you will lose in this atmosphere. If you help refugees, the other people hate you and if you serve them, then you leave a large portion of society out. No win situation.

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Thesis 5 | **External Knowledge Management**

Importance of partnerships

We always have to say YES!

Oili Sivula

District Manager of Library Services, Espoo

In the municipal and non-profit surroundings public libraries can be seen as partners in the individual knowledge management of their clients, providing more a physical than a virtual environment to facilitate the acquisition, generation and exchange of knowledge.



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Thesis 6 | **External Knowledge Management** (New) technology

The level of agreement here is one of the highest and can be summarized in the following statement:

If you want to digitize the whole nation, you need public libraries to do that.

We provide knowledge.

People expect us to know everything about new technology, so they are coming to us with so many questions – and **we are solving these problems together with them**, we give them the opportunity to try things.

And if we won't do this, people go somewhere else!



Finn Petersen, København

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Thesis 7 | External Knowledge Management

1. The idea of sharing

Libraries can be seen as pioneers of the sharing economy – esp. the lending process is seen as a centuries-old sharing element.

Some libraries are building co-working places, some arrange space for food circles, others are promoting sustainability in the context of their community, linked to the idea of the “green library”. Despite a lack of money and other resources, most of the libraries are willingly sharing their space – and some are even planning to install a resource management database, which provides an easy possibility for users to reserve library space.

Other libraries work together with SME, giving them the possibility to introduce and showcase their inventions to interested customers.

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Thesis 7 | External Knowledge Management

1. The idea of sharing

Libraries can be seen as pioneers of the sharing economy – esp. the lending process is seen as a centuries-old sharing element.

We have a long history in promoting development through participation - we need other people to learn things and to learn how to innovate and re-invent ourselves!

Our library is a stage and we are all actors, coping with the constant fear of failure.

Malmö | Andreas Ingefjord



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Thesis 7 | External Knowledge Management

2.The maker movement

The creation of different kinds of maker spaces or maker areas is very common in Norway, Denmark and Sweden, but there are also first initiatives in Finland:

At the moment we are planning maker spaces. We have a maker space project but this is quite new in our country.



In it's past, the library focused mainly on culture and reading – nowadays we are working with partners in technology, music, science and entrepreneurship. **We used to ask for partnerships – today they are coming to us!**

Rita Helland
Avdelingsleiar Loddefjord Bibliotek, Bergen

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3.The client as co-producer

In general, every library aims at enabling users to co-produce something: Some library clients add material to the web library, in some institutions citizens are participating in budgeting, and of course everyone can take part in the “ask a librarian” service on the web.

In former time we gave answers to our customers, but **today it's more about discussions and support, about how to enlarge their knowledge and their skills.**

Our library is a place where you can learn about Danish society, about sharing, waiting, learning and collaborating, about cultural habits and about how to participate best.

Vibeke Munch Kofoed | Frederiksberg



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Thesis 7 | External Knowledge Management

Intermediate results

All three topics – sharing, making and letting clients act as co-producers – are realized as well with contracted as with non-contracted ad hoc partners.

High flexibility and deep compassion are necessary in working successfully in that field.

Well, well, well, it's not that easy ...

... is one of the quotes given to me in that context.

Mainly it's not a problem with space or with the willingness of the team members in the different (branch) libraries – it's more about clear responsibilities concerning certain settings and the decision-making process:

We have to consider how much we can involve citizens. Who is responsible in certain settings? With active citizens it's sometimes who is shouting louder gets the decision. And that's not correct.

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Thesis 7 | External Knowledge Management

The core idea of the library as an idea of sharing experiences and services. So we must think about the people's democratic needs first, we can take of the other tasks later!

Päivi Rasinkangas

District Manager of Library Services, Oulu

We are moving from system centered towards human centered service, and doing so we are bringing the collection to life with new features, new content and with new partners to create experiences and adventures for customers to share.

Jouni Pääkkölä Director of Library Services, Oulu



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Thesis 8 | Internal Knowledge Management

What is unique with the idea of a library, what is unique with us – the answer to that question is what we use to build and change our library on all levels.

And **we dare to take all the chances we get!**

Marit Egaas

Leiterin der Stadtbibliothek Stavanger und des Solvberget Kulturhauses



We continuously have to redesign **WHY** we have to have a public library!

Our nowadays task are more in the fields of technology and idea-development, in the context of being a smart city and working with open data, in offering courses in programming and show our customers how flying drowns work.

We have to act in a very flexible way, and **to use the last minutes in decision making** instead of to long processes.

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Thesis 9 | Internal Knowledge Management

As a library we are staying on two legs – the cultural one and the knowledge one. And we are dealing with crossing target groups – and every different group needs their fitting activities. **We are using a matrix to deal with that increasing complexity.**

Esbjerg | Annette Brochner-Lindgaard



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Thesis 9 | **Internal Knowledge Management** Autonomy



It's easier for new employees in new positions to be more autonomously, and **it's harder so to say ,to teach old dogs new tricks'** – sometimes culture hinders evolving, and sometimes people feel be threatend by autonomy. So enlarge autonomy is quite a challenge.

Kendra McDonnell, Umeå – Väven Library

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Final conclusion



Successful knowledge management depends on atmosphere and discussion culture.

Incorporating the staff's skills, continued monitoring and quick reaction times are therefore essential.

And **we still have lessons to learn.**

Tuula Haavisto Library Director, Helsinki

Marja-Liisa Komulainen Head of Development Unit, Helsinki



‘Stay awake!’ is the slogan of Deichmanske, and that means being aware about what’s going on in society and in your own life.

It’s about ‘hack reality’, about improving critical thinking and curiosity – about us as a library empowering the people to get out the best version of themselves.

Kristin Danielsen

(ehemalige) Leiterin der Osloer Stadtbibliothek und jetzige Direktorin des Norwegian Arts Council

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We are open-minded, looking outside our door to capture the needs of our citizens.

And there is a need for a physical space – for people to meet and share their opinions!

And that's us.

Ola Gustafsson,
1st librarian, Norrköping Stadsbibliotek

We as a library are always trying to be fun!

Mikko Viano Director of Library Services, City of Vantaa



Prof. Dr. Tom Becker
tom.becker@th-koeln.de