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National Strategies for Public Library Development

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National strategies for public library development:

Danish and Swedish models for project funding

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Abstract

The economic rationale of New Public Management (NPM) is used in both Sweden and Denmark in order to employ the national cultural policies in local development projects. The paper discusses two different organizational models that are used in order for the national level to be able to exercise policies on the local level are discussed. according to the national goals and cultural policies for libraries. This is done in order to point towards a possible relationship between the political means and ends regarding library development. The two models to be discussed are the systems practiced by The Danish Agency for Libraries and Media, and The Swedish Arts Council, who both administer development grants to public libraries. The paper identifies both differences and similarities in both the means to (the political agendas) and the objectives of governmental influence in the libraries.

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Introduction

NPM is an economic rationale that seeks to make the public sector better and more efficient through the means of the market. New Public Management (NPM) has been present in cultural policies for some time now, both regarding the efficiency of cultural organizations (see i.e. Buschman, 2004, Greve, 2002, Kawashima, 1997) and regarding the instrumentalization of culture (see i.e. Belfiore, 2004, Duelund, 2003). Public Libraries in the Nordic countries are no exception to this. This paper discusses NPM-inspired models of library development funding and their perceived effects. More specifically this paper addresses strategies used by national bodies in Denmark and Sweden in order to assert the governmental influence on development in municipal public libraries. Public libraries are funded and driven by municipalities in Denmark and Sweden. Library development projects in the Nordic countries are however often co-funded by central governmental development grants as part of a national cultural policy. This funding system (support via development grants) can be characterized as a model that enables the national government to control the development in the municipal libraries. It can also be described as a system with NPM-characteristics, as the system aims to strengthen competition between libraries (Kann-Christensen, 2006). In Denmark and Sweden the allocation of national development grants take place after application, and libraries compete for grants in order to receive additional funding. Applications for development grants can refer to a number of focus areas such as “Library services for children” or “Access to digital content” (in Denmark) or Reading promotion activities (in Sweden) etc. The allocation in both countries is administered by a government agency whose principal task is to implement national cultural policy determined by the government. Some municipalities also have development grants, but these grants play a minor role in library development discourses (Börninck, 2010).

In this paper, I wish to discuss two different organizational models that are used in order for the national level to be able to exercise policies on the local level. These models are discussed according to the national goals for libraries. This is done in order to discuss the relationship between the political means and ends regarding library development. The two models to be discussed are the system practiced by The Danish Agency for Libraries and Media, which administers national development grants in order to develop the Danish public libraries and The Swedish Arts Council, which administers development grants for promoting reading and development in Swedish public libraries. Governmental influence on public library development is evident in both Denmark and Sweden. However, the paper identifies both differences and similarities in both the goals and the means of governmental influence in the libraries.

Below I shall discuss strategies applied in order to intensify the use of development projects and thus increase governmental influence on library development through projects. I will identify two different organizational models that are used in order for the state to be able to influence policies on the municipal level. These models are compared to the national goals for libraries in the two countries examined here. This is done in order to discuss differences and similarities regarding the relationship between the political objectives (cultural policy) and means (two strategies) regarding library development.

Methodologically the study is carried out through analysis of interviews conducted with central actors in the field of national cultural policies concerned with library development. Two interviews have been conducted in the winter 2009/10. The first interviewee was the consultant who administers development grants from the Agency for Library and Media in Denmark. The statements cited from this interview are marked (DK). The second interviewees were two consultants administering development grants from the Swedish Arts Council. The statements cited from this interview are marked (S). Furthermore, document analysis is performed concerning the political agendas and practices regarding public library funding. Theoretically the study relies on institutional theories on public sector organization (i.e. Greve, 2002, Røvik, 2007), and libraries (i.e. Jochumsen & Hvenegaard Rasmussen, 2006, Kann-Christensen, 2009).

The paper is structured as follows. Firstly, the political agendas for the library sectors in Denmark and Sweden are identified and discussed and the library systems in the two countries are presented. I will also give examples of typical projects that have received development grants. Secondly the practices of distribution of grants are discussed. The differences and similarities of these practices are discussed in relation to the political goals presented in the first section.

NPM in library Development

In library development, political agendas are sought met via projects. The project as a developmental objective in relation to library development may be seen as an institutionalized organizational form. Development is necessary both due to, and in spite of recent budget cuts in many municipalities (Kann-Christensen, 2009). Projects focused on library services and communications play an increasingly important role in the library field today. The libraries are currently under pressure due to the increased focus on efficiency in the public sector the challenge posed by (IT) technology and a significant change in usage patterns. The biggest challenge for the public library today then, is to reformulate its *raison d'être* and to rethink the institution in a contemporary perspective. Largely this rethinking takes place within the framework of development projects¹. As such, library development projects shape the agenda for the path libraries should follow now and in the future. The institutionalized norm that libraries should show a constant willingness to change also make the development projects important tools in the struggle for political legitimacy and visibility. According to Røvik (1998, 2007) project management may be seen as an organizational recipe with a huge influence on modern organizations – not only libraries. Projects have several desired characteristics that can be linked to the widespread demand to make public organizations

¹ For instance projects regarding digital promotion of literature, organizational development projects or user driven innovation projects.

more effective and innovative, and can thus be linked to the NPM-rationale (Kann-Christensen & Pors, 2004). The development grants mentioned above, from the governmental agencies shows some intrinsic values or norms, which are communicated to libraries in this way. It seems that governments wish to:

- strengthen the competition between libraries
- strengthen the use of the project form, which is characterised by its ability to be evaluated
- reward libraries that show willingness to develop, and to be measured/evaluated
- reward libraries that successfully adapt to changing demands in society

These values - competition, willingness to change and to be evaluated – are important features in New Public Management. In the recent years, all of the public sector in most western societies has experienced some degree of New Public Management, which seeks efficiency through the means of the market. Thus, libraries experience an institutionalized pressure from politicians and governmental agencies.

The purpose of funding projects after application is strategic. The head of the Agency for Library and Media states that: *The ideal aim of the institution is at any time to ensure the optimal exploitation of resources and the development of the cooperative Danish library service across municipal and governmental sectors* (Thorhauge, 2002).

With the municipal autonomy in mind, one could argue that since public libraries in Denmark are municipal institutions they should get the extra money as block grants (money granted by the national government to a regional government with only general provisions). But the Agency for Library and Media (Denmark) clearly aims at “getting as much out of the money as possible through the means of the market”.

When national authorities allocate funds, and choose not to distribute the funds evenly – in the form of block grants – but choose to distribute them to applicants in competition they reproduce an institutionalized norm, that one can get more benefits from the funding by creating competition between applicants and preference the best. The underlying value that is reflected here can be ties in with the NPM-rationale (Kann-Christensen & Andersen, 2009; Buschman, 2004).

The library systems in Denmark and Sweden

In both Sweden and Denmark the relationship between the national level and the municipal level regarding public libraries can be described in different ways. It can be described as cooperative division of labour or as a competitive power struggle where national and municipal governmental institutions are constantly fighting to shape the library field. The public municipal libraries are run and funded by the municipal level in both countries. But the national and regional levels contribute to a large extent to the development of library services, and thus have an impact on the practice of local libraries. In the following, I wish to focus solely on development of new services or models for library services. This means that I will not discuss the daily operation and management of libraries.

Regarding the continued development of the services in libraries, the largest public libraries in Denmark have established development departments. These development departments are part of the municipal library system and funded as such. Exceptions to this are the so-called county libraries (central libraries). The Danish Act Regarding Library Services states that the Ministry of Culture designates a certain number of public libraries as “county libraries”. These libraries engage in a contract on issues regarding library- and competence development (Thorhauge, 2002). This means there are 6 public libraries that have state-financed development departments. Most public libraries do not have specific departments for development though. In the small and middle-sized libraries, development takes place as small, locally financed projects (Kann-Christensen, 2009; Pors, 2005).

In Sweden a similar –although not identical system - can be identified. According to the Swedish Library Act, the Swedish counties (*län*) are obligated to have a county library. The county libraries operate as complementary media centrals but also have the task of “helping” the municipal libraries with “regional library tasks” (Bibliotekslag, 1996). One of these regional tasks is developmental tasks. The assistance that the regional libraries give to the local libraries may be the undertaking of applications to the Arts Council for additional funding; arranging training courses for librarians and other activities that the local libraries can choose to participate in.

In both countries, the funding of the daily operation is municipal, but the funding of development is mostly national (in Sweden also regional). This funding system means that there is a national influence on development projects in the municipalities. So in both Sweden and Denmark one can identify a library system where the municipalities are running the libraries autonomously but the nation state has influence on the directions that development takes.

The most important actors in this system are the governmental agencies for cultural policy regarding libraries. In Denmark, this is the Danish Agency for Libraries and Media:

The Danish Agency for Libraries and Media is an agency under the Ministry of Culture and the central government organ for libraries and media. The Agency handles a number of administrative tasks in relation to the libraries, including administration of the Act Regarding Library Services. Likewise, the Agency deals with development tasks in association with the libraries' activities and administrates a number of subsidy schemes within the library area. (Bibliotek & Medier, 2009a)

A portion of the developmental tasks mentioned in the quotation above are carried out through a sum of money allocated as development grants for experimental and development projects each year. This sum of money is called “The development pool”. This development pool is a powerful tool for the Agency for Libraries and Media in order to control the development in the library sector (Kann-Christensen, 2006). The amount of money to be allocated is set annually in the Finance Act. As stated above, these funds are administered in the Agency for Library and Media, and allocation takes place after application. The applications can refer to a fixed number of focus areas which the Agency wishes to strengthen or develop (Bibliotek og medier 2009b). The Agency for Library and Media gave out grants for approx. 2.37 million Euro in 2009.

In Sweden a similar system exists. The Swedish Arts Council:

... supports, develops and initiates interaction between the state, the regions, municipalities and representatives for cultural life in Sweden, e.g. libraries, museums and performing arts centres. The aim is to safeguard and develop Swedish national cultural policy, and to promote cultural diversity and an even geographical diversity in cultural provision. (Kulturrådet, 2010a)

The Swedish Arts Council supports many cultural areas. However, the branch of the Arts Council that deals with library development is comparable with the Danish Agency for Library and Media. Both institutions advice the government concerning libraries and support development projects in the library sector via grants. The Swedish Arts Council does not organize their grants around focus areas; rather they have two different development pools. One pool supports reading promotion activities. These grants aim to develop new forms of cooperation in promoting reading and can be applied for by libraries but also by other actors, such as cultural and social organizations and associations. About 900.000 million SEK is spent annually to promote reading efforts. The Arts Council also distributes money to the development of public libraries. The grant aims at experiments and development of new forms of work in public libraries. Approximately 100.000 Euro annually is spent on that purpose. (Kulturrådet, 2010b)

The 1 million Euros are only a part of the funds, which the Arts Council distributes each year. In addition to the development grants the Arts Council contributes to regional libraries, the media centrals, International library and the Depository Library. The Arts Council also offers purchasing support. The money makes possible the purchase of books by public libraries and school libraries (Kulturrådet, 2010c). The Danish government does not offer purchasing support to the local libraries.

These similarities and differences is one way of characterizing the library systems in Denmark and Sweden. I will continue from here with a discussion of the political focus areas and development pools from which the development grants are organized

Policies regarding the development of libraries in Denmark and Sweden

In this section, I try to identify the dominant political agendas in the library fielding the two countries. In order to do so I discuss the Library Acts as well as documents concerning political goals regarding development of public libraries' services from Denmark and Sweden.

Library legislation - The Library Acts

Regarding the legal frameworks in the two countries one obvious difference is the fact that Denmark has had Library Acts since 1920; Sweden obtained their first Library Act in 1996.

In Denmark, the Library Act has been revised several times. The current act: Act Regarding Library Services, was passed unanimously by the Danish Parliament on 17 May 2000. The Act Regarding Library Services was based on a report from the UBIS committee, (Udvalget om Bibliotekerne i Informationssamfundet) – the committee on libraries in the information society. The main conclusion of this committee was that libraries ought to deal with the world of new electronic media (UBIS 1997) and that libraries should provide information and culture published by both printed and electronic media. This principle has later been named 'media equality'. The objects clause in the Danish Library Act state that "*The objective of the public libraries is to promote information, education and cultural activity by making available books, periodicals, audio books and other suitable material, such as recorded music and electronic information resources, including Internet and multimedia*"(Act Regarding Library Services). This objective is to be achieved by "observing quality, comprehensiveness and topicality in the choice of materials to be made available. *"These criteria alone must be the decisive factors and not any religious, moral or political views which might be expressed in the material"* (Act Regarding Library Services).

Thus the Danish Library Act is concerned with formal aspects of library services (which types of media) as well as quality criteria and is strongly influenced by NPM. The fact that all public libraries in Denmark is obliged to practice the principle of media equality was (and is) expensive. The NPM characteristics in Act Regarding Library Services become visible in the way the libraries had to contribute to the funding of this principle, as the libraries were to earn the money by selling their services on the market (Kann-Christensen, 2009, Johannsen, 2003). However the focus on ensuring accessibility to culture is a part of the classical wish for the democratization of culture. (Duelund, 2003).

The Swedish Library Act was passed by the Social Democratic government (without the votes of the opposition parties). Before this date, public libraries were funded and regulated by local/regional government with some additional state funding. According to Thomas (2009) the purpose of the Swedish Library Act was to secure the principle of lending free of charge, as well as to guarantee a national library network. A political wish to emphasize the municipal responsibility in order to ensure adequate library services for children and young citizens was another reason for the passage of the law. Three distinct user groups are mentioned in the Swedish act: children, the disabled and ethnic minorities. The Swedish act explicitly stresses cooperation between the local libraries and between local libraries and county libraries.

The Swedish Library Act is not clear on quality criteria or what materials the libraries should offer. However, the objects clause states that libraries should promote reading and literature. In addition, lending

materials are designated as “literature”. This suggests a classic enlightenment rationale. Books and reading should support reflection in the population (Skot Hansen, 2005) . As mentioned above the Swedish legislation also emphasizes the service of underprivileged target groups, thus an implicit political agenda can be identified, i.e. that the libraries have a social obligation to support these groups. No NPM features can be identified in the Swedish Library Act.

The Danish and Swedish regulative frameworks have both similarities and differences. The objectives of public libraries are very similar, perhaps also due to the history of the public libraries in the two countries (Thomas, 2009, Dyrbye 2009). The main objectives of the legal framework are similar however. Libraries should promote education, information and cultural activity.

The Swedish act has a more explicit focus on reading and literature. In Denmark, reading and literature are not mentioned explicitly in the Danish act, whereas it has a very prominent place in the Swedish act. This might be because the governmental agency for handling library questions has been the Swedish Arts Council since 1974. Library issues were handled together with issues concerning support and funding of fiction. According to Thomas (2009), this has privileged literature in library policies, which has been organisationally connected to literary policies. Thomas even argues that libraries have become a platform for literature policies.

Focus areas for library development

Libraries can apply for project funding through development grants within certain focus areas selected by the national agencies described above. In the following, I will present and discuss the focus areas of support for library development projects in Denmark and Sweden within the last year. This is done, following the assumption that political goals can be identified through an analysis of these focus areas. Subsequently two typical projects from Denmark and Sweden respectively are presented and discussed in order to illustrate how cultural policy objectives is carried out through the selective funding of projects.

Denmark

In Denmark the focus areas change annually. Practically some can be applied for over a number of years, others just for one year. It is the Agency for Library and Media who defines the focus areas. Focus areas are determined after advice from Local Government Denmark (The interest group and member authority of Danish municipalities), The Danish Library Association and The Ministry for education. The focus areas for 2010 are:

- Accessing digital content
- Libraries across the country
- Library services to the children
- Library services to the youth
- The cooperating library system
- New measurement and analysis methods
- School library and "Common goals in 2009"
- Support for the Danish Knowledge Strategy (Bibliotek & Medier 2010c)

Besides these focus areas there is a sum of money to be given as grants outside the focus areas: These funds are given as “*a possibility to the library that has some brilliant idea which cannot be placed within the strategic focus areas* (DK). These focus areas represent different political goals.

Several of these focus areas point toward a governmental NPM agenda concerning effective libraries. When the Agency for Library and Media wishes to support projects concerning *Accessing digital content*, *The cooperating library system* or *New measurement and analysis methods*, it points towards an institutionalized NPM - rationale. The focus areas mentioned are supposed to strengthen effective methods. The focus area

“Accessing Digital content” covers a comprehensive ambition to create a national gateway to all public libraries' digital material. New measurement techniques are an important feature in this gateway and may be seen as a direct extension of an NPM mindset based on measurement as a control instrument in the public sector. But it is also closely associated with the changing user pattern. The tendency is that people do not borrow physical material so much any longer, but instead use the library as a meeting place. Thus, the traditional measurement methods such as counting loans are not adequate. Some areas are related to special user-groups the youth and the children. This is coherent with to the objectives of the Swedish Library Act. Others can be directly linked to policies from the government. I.e. Support for the *Danish Knowledge Strategy* and *Libraries across the country*. The focus area “Libraries across the country” can be linked directly to the minister for culture’s agenda called “Culture for everybody” (Kulturministeriet, 2009). The objective of this agenda was to secure access to culture all over the country – even to people in sparsely populated areas.

Project example from Denmark: Self service libraries

Below I will present a short example of a successful project that has been supported through a development grant from the Agency for Library and Media. It is successful from the viewpoint of NPM inspired agenda of The Agency for Library and Media because:

- it has been highly visible in the Danish media,
- it has given the minister for culture a political “success”,
- it has been integrated in the daily operation of the Silkeborg Libraries
- it has become a model for many other libraries.

All these are important success criteria for a culture-political development project according to the consultant who administers the development grants

The municipality of Silkeborg has developed a “self-service stand-alone model” for access and information services through self-service in the Library. This means the library can be accessed by the citizens without the assistance of librarians or other service personnel. In the project a special a RFID borrower’s card, which also acts as admittance card to the library, was developed. The card allows a machine by the entrance to recognize the user via the chip. The user is welcomed, by name on a small display outside the entrance, and upon keying in a pin code one can enter the library. If the user needs any guidance during the visit to the self-service library he or she can have guidance from the main library, which can be contacted from an info stand, and through webcams a librarian at the main library, can offer guidance. (Larsen, 2007)

This project can be viewed from (at least) two angles. Firstly When the library describes the project they emphasize the project’s potential to “*augment the accessibility to the library by creating easy and swift access*”. The other argument for the self service library is of another kind, “*The local library cannot – rationally speaking – be maintained as traditional library branch with the kind of stock and content that tend to be a reflection of the large main library’s way of operating.*” (Larsen, 2007)

The two arguments reflect both an access perspective, that suits a democratization of culture rationale and a more efficiency perspective that suits the NPM-rationale. This project is an example of how the use of technology can enable a more efficient dissemination of information and culture. In the case from Silkeborg the alternative to the technical solution described was to shut down the library because it was not “rational” (efficient).

Sweden

The Swedish Arts Council organizes the development grants through two different development pools. One pool supports reading promotion activities in general. Practically this pool mostly supports projects in libraries for children. The other pool supports development projects in libraries. The library development pool mainly supports projects that targets library services for adults. Except from these two pools the

Swedish Arts Council do not organize their grants through focus areas. Rather they have some general criteria for support.

Arts Council grants aim to promote diversity, equality and quality. Culture for children and youth, and multicultural issues is seen as particularly important areas. The Art Council as responsible authority has a special obligation to make culture accessible to disabled people and to ensure that there is a vibrant cultural life outside the big cities.(Kulturrådet 2010a)

These criteria are a part of the national cultural policies. They are decided upon by the Swedish Ministry of Culture. They are characterized by the consultants who administer the development grants as overarching political goals. Besides these political goals, other criteria are used. These criteria have different origin. An example is a document where 4 areas are emphasized regarding reading promotion activities. These four areas have been identified in cooperation with the Swedish county libraries. The document state that these four areas should “*guide and form the basis of priorities*” (Kulturrådet & SLB, 2009). The four areas are:

- Competence (i.e. work towards identification, clarification and development of the necessary skills in the library, i.e. knowledge of media, audiences and literary agency, both for children and young adults)
- Literature as an art form (i.e. strive to emphasize literature as an art form among other art forms that public libraries promote)
- Networking and collaboration (i.e. Identify strategic collaboration partners in the community, locally, regionally and nationally and with them build strong and sustainable networks. To develop a consensus on culture in its own right.)
- Library Plans (Working towards the municipal plans for promoting reading becomes a natural part of the library plan.)

It is very hard to identify any form of NPM in these areas, which serve as relevance criteria. They are substantive. Unlike the Danish focus areas that are very concerned with efficiency these areas aim to strengthen the library’s role in the municipality through Library plans, and they aim to strengthen librarians competences and the literatures position in society. All focus areas that can secure the access to culture of a high quality, classic goals according to the enlightenment rationale (Skot Hansen, 2005)

Project example Sweden: Bedtime stories from the inside

The Swedish consultant who administers the grants regarding reading promotion points out the project Bedtime stories from the inside as a successful project (the favourite project). This project is perceived as successful because it has been crated in collaboration with another public institution (the Swedish Prison and Probation Service), it is an important societal task that has been taken care of, it was followed by researchers and had had extensive media coverage.

This is a project that enabled fathers in prison (on the inside) to record bedtime stories for their children (on the outside) on CD’s. The objective of this project was to enable parents to participate in family life on the outside and thus strengthen the social ties between children and parents. Furthermore it would give the children of detained parents a more positive image of its parent in the duration of his absence. Also the inmates learned about recording techniques and last but not least it would enable parents who are detained to help their children's reading development. (Malmö Stad, 2010).

This project supports the goals of reading promotion and strengthening children’s interest in reading and literature. It is also coherent with the objective of the Swedish cultural policy of strengthening equality, as it targets an underprivileged group in society. The example shows the Arts Council’s priorities towards cultural and social goals – and its lack of focus on efficiency.

Policy level comparison

The Danish and Swedish cultural policy in the library field has both similarities and differences. Both countries are core examples of the Scandinavian welfare state and the cultural policies in both countries display the traditional social democratic values of equality and cultural democracy (Duelund, 2003). This is evident in the principle of lending free of charge, which is a strong value in both countries. Both countries explicitly focus on children and their right to library services. Likewise, both countries underpin the library's role in cultural activity.

The differences are not very distinct on the regulative level. However, one importance difference can be identified. In Denmark, all media have an equal status, in Sweden the book, reading and literature has a privileged status.

Moving on to the focus areas the privileged book can be identified here as well. Efforts in order to strengthen reading and literature as an art form have a prominent status in the Swedish Arts Councils grants for libraries. In Denmark, it is another political goal that steps out. The focus areas show a distinct emphasis on efficient libraries. Efficient dissemination of information and knowledge through technical solutions is a clear priority in Denmark. These two special priorities, reading and literature in Sweden and efficient dissemination of information and knowledge in Denmark were illustrated above via two examples of projects: *The Self-service library* and *Bedtime Stories for the inside*.

I have presented the library systems and how the national level seeks to influence the local public libraries through incentives to apply for development grants that reflect the political agendas regarding libraries. From here, I will go on to discuss the strategic practices or organizational models that the two countries use in order to achieve influence and affect local libraries in a direction that fits the national cultural policy.

Strategic practices in Denmark and Sweden

This section addresses the strategies the national agencies use in order to influence the local libraries. In order to analyze this I will discuss the criteria used to determine which projects should receive the development grants. While the previous section of the paper addresses the criteria linked to the cultural policies (the ends), this section addresses the strategies used in order to meet the agendas (the means).

Gaining impact

Denmark and Sweden both have institutions at the national level, which allocate funds to the regional and local levels. Above I have shown that by doing so the national level gains influence on the local level. It is important for the success of the national cultural policy that the development grants are secured as high an impact as possible.

The biggest challenge [...] it is to ensure we get enough out of the funds. That the knowledge created will be shared as much as it is relevant.(DK)

The Arts Council is not mandated to conduct the national library policies. We have no authority. We have the development funds and we have been given the task of driving the development forward. We must act on the applications and in this work we try to make the nation act nationally. (S)

The libraries want to make good projects. But what we want is to make them change or improve the way things are done. To influence the whole country. That is our goal. (S)

The three statements show that in both Sweden and Denmark the national / governmental agencies see their tasks as national tasks to be effectuated by influencing the regional and local levels. They need to make the local level act in a certain way – for the national good. This means that the development funds not are

intended for use in individual local public libraries. The national level wants to develop the whole public library sector with their funds but by means of nationally funded projects making possible experiences gained at the local level. Both agencies point towards this task a challenge. In the following, I will illustrate the different strategies to develop the library sector employed in Sweden and Denmark

Strategies in Denmark and Sweden

In brief, the Danish strategy may be described as a competitive strategy aiming to support spearhead libraries:

...In contrast to Norway for example, who has an allocation policy that all villages should be allocated funds [...] we have decided that our funds should be used to develop “upwards” not sideways. So we give the grants to the best. We give them to the best projects, to the spearheads in the hope that they will spread out to the rest. When we do not allocate the funds evenly, [...giving it out as block grants...] [it is because we] would not get the same out of the money. (DK)

The statement underpins the previous discussion regarding the use of market strategies (NPM) in Denmark. Giving the grants to “the best” emphasize the notion that through competition the libraries which invest resources to further development projects will have the best chance of winning development grants. This will secure the most efficient use of national money. This strategy has worked very well for Denmark in the recent years from the viewpoint of the Agency for Library and Media. Many of the national services the public libraries in Denmark offers, have started as projects supported by a development grant from Agency for Library and Media (Balling & Kann-Christensen, 2010).

The strategy of privileging the spearheads also means that if the development grants should have an impact nationally something must be done in order to diffuse the knowledge. The Agency for Library and Media clearly aims at playing a part in this work. Some projects are perceived as diffusing automatically “*the good projects diffuse automatically*” (DK) whilst others need help:

We have the obligation [...] to provide an overview – and we do this through the project bank, which we have created. Earlier we put it on our website. But it was not very manageable. But now we have managed to make a project bank and it has potential to grow, because the libraries also submit content themselves. Because they are required to submit final reports, but also to report what happens on the way ... and they can advertise if they host conferences and workshops...I see it as our task to provide an overview of everything that is going on regarding development and to arrange it in relation to the strategic priorities we have.(DK)

The project bank is a new service that Agency for Library and Media has offered the libraries. At this time, (May 2010) the project bank does not hold as much content as intended. Whether this is because it is new, or the libraries are unwilling to use it lies beyond the scope of this paper to analyse. The point is, that the strong reliance on individual competition in Denmark gives the Agency for Library and Media an important role in spreading the knowledge from the projects for the benefit of other libraries – a central criterion of the success of the national cultural policy.

In contrast to this, the Swedish strategy relies on cooperation and the regional level.

Our projects have had impact in recent years. In particular, web development. It has had an impact that we have invested in web development in recent years. Earlier, we did not have many projects where several counties cooperated. But in the last 4-5 years we have encouraged counties to cooperate more. This means larger projects and hence a greater impact. (S)

Not surprisingly the Swedish Arts Council also uses impact as a success criterion in the above statement. But the Swedish strategy to gain this national impact is characterized by county library cooperation. The Swedish county libraries are “*stakeholders in the local library development*” (S).

As illustrated here, The Swedish Arts Council explicitly uses cooperation as a criterion when they distribute grants. The more libraries they can persuade to cooperate, the better. The county libraries are typically the ones, who apply for the grants, but to have a chance of winning the competition they should document cooperation with other county libraries, and also they should try to “*sell the project idea to the local level*”(S). When the Swedish strategy works, it means that the projects are very big. Accordingly the issue of spreading the knowledge has a different status in Sweden. The Swedes acknowledge the importance of knowledge sharing, but feel they have not yet done anything serious about it.

Regarding the question of who has the responsibility for spreading the knowledge – we have a bit of a bad conscience there. We are not very good at it. We are good at distributing the grants, but bad at spreading the results. (S)

Knowledge sharing is an institutionalized norm in the western societies. It is not appropriate to regard knowledge sharing as something one need not take into account (Suchman, 1995, Røvik, 2007). Therefore it is understandable that one will display a “bad conscience” when asked the question on knowledge sharing in the field. However, it might also be explained by the fact that the Swedes do not experience the same need to spread knowledge. If one third of the country’s county libraries cooperate on a project, it is already disseminated in large parts of the local libraries. In this manner, it is reasonable to argue that the knowledge dissemination is inherent in the cooperation strategy.

A major difference between Denmark and Sweden is the geographical characteristics of the two countries. Denmark has 98 municipalities. Sweden has 290. In addition, the density of population varies enormously in Sweden compared to Denmark. The north of Sweden is very sparsely populated. This might be part of the explanation that the Swedish library system has far more county libraries than Denmark, who has only six. (Svensk Biblioteksforening, 2009, Danmarks Biblioteksforening, 2010). This difference might contribute to the difference in strategies. A more homogenous country like Denmark might be more likely to develop projects that can be of interest to all municipalities whereas a project relevant in a big city like Malmö in the south may only be of little interest for the sparsely populated areas in the north.

Hierarchy vs. cooperation

Two distinct strategies for influencing the municipal (local) libraries can be identified in Denmark and Sweden. Both countries make use of development grants that can be won only after application in competition with other libraries. This means that both countries uses an NPM oriented strategy in order to gain national influence at the municipal level. Both countries use impact as a major success criterion. However, the strategies used in order to obtain this national impact (spreading the project results) are different.

Denmark uses a strategy that privileges the “best” libraries. In turn, this means that the biggest, most experienced application writers are most likely to be rewarded with funding in form of a development grant. This strategy tend to reward the largest libraries, the libraries that prioritize development projects and often have specific units specialized in writing grant applications. It also means that a hierarchy between local libraries is created (some are spearheads others are not). Likewise these spearhead libraries might be able to influence other libraries, if they are good at making projects, this can happen if the Agency for Library and Media will contribute to the project, by funding it, and by spreading the model developed afterwards.

Sweden rewards cooperation. The strategy used by the Swedish Arts Council creates a pressure for libraries to coordinate their efforts. In turn it gives the county libraries the task to find partners and to persuade the local libraries to take part in the project they have formulated. This strategy makes it difficult for individual local libraries to shape the direction of the Swedish Library development.

Concluding discussion: Possible links between political agendas and strategic approaches.

This paper has pointed to important differences between the national cultural policies regarding the funding of development projects in public libraries as well as to differences between the organizational models used to implement these policies. A possible link between cultural policies, the cultural content each country wants to promote (the goals) and the organizational models, the strategies that are used in order to do so (the means) can be identified.

First of all the paper has shown that both countries are make use of an NPM-inspired funding policy regarding the development of public libraries. Development grants that can be given in competition is the overall basis of funding development. Development projects can be viewed as an appropriate form of organization in a society characterized by change because it “shields” the library from a turbulent outside world. Projects take care of exceptions that cannot be handled by the operating organization. The funding of such projects through development grants is an example of how the public sector uses NPM in order to optimize quality and efficiency. There is no difference between Sweden and Denmark at this level.

At the regulative level, the two countries display more similarities than differences. The notion of the public library is much the same. However, the paper has pointed to a difference regarding the media that the public library focuses on. Denmark practices the media equality principle whereas reading, literature and the traditional printed book has retained a privileged status in Sweden. Likewise, the Danish focus areas for development points to a focus on effective information dissemination, and a confidence in technological solutions in order to achieve this. Sweden, however, is more oriented towards dissemination of high culture, an enlightenment rationale. The Swedish focus on literature is reproduced in the development pools. Likewise the Danish focus areas emphasize a wish for development of technical solutions in order for libraries to be efficient distributors of information and culture. These are the differences. But naturally the Swedish libraries are also interested in i.e. web-solutions as well as the Danish libraries promote culture.

At the level of actual strategic practice (the means to implement the policies)two different strategies have been identified. In Denmark the NPM oriented models are reproduced at the strategic level. The competition between libraries are accentuated. The Danish strategy create a hierarchy between libraries. Some are designated as “the best”. And these are rewarded with development grants. After the projects have been developed, the task of spreading the knowledge to more local libraries than the developing library arises. The Agency for Library and Media acknowledges a responsibility for this task, and has recently developed a “project bank”. In Sweden the diffusion of knowledge is inherent in the projects, as large cooperation projects with many libraries are rewarded.

So what is the link between the political goals and the means, the strategies to pursue the goals?

The Danish strategy of rewarding the spearhead libraries and disseminating the models afterwards is a strategy quite fit for the objectives of efficient library services favouring a strong focus on technological development. Likewise the Swedish cooperation strategy is fit for projects concerning literature promotion and interlibrary cooperation.

Thus one may put forward the hypothesis that NPM does not determine the cultural policy pursued but rather that – even within a NPM framework culture can be supported with quite different results and used to promote quite different policy objectives.

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