E-books and public libraries in Sweden
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Introduction

I am aware that one person usually has his preferred research topic and direction. But one still belongs to a larger research area governed by the common principles. Thus I was curious to explore if Tatjana Aparac-Jelušić, a leading Croatian library and information science investigator, can be referred to in a text dealing with e-books in Swedish public libraries. Hopefully, we can prove that there are not only “centrifugal”, but also “centripetal” forces operating in our research field (Aparac-Jelušić et al. 2013, 1). Another goal of this paper is to present the initial results of our exploration about the impact of e-book usage conditions on Swedish public libraries and e-book loans. The text is based on the Master’s thesis by Holmstedt and Topelius (2015) and the survey conducted by Wilson and Maceviciute (2012).

Setting the context

Traditional task of public libraries is to serve the users and manage literature required by the served community. In Sweden the format of the cultural of information products does not matter, public libraries should provide access to all formats free of charge (SFS 2013:801, 9§). The law embraces also digitally published literature and makes provision that public libraries should offer a whole range of media (SFS 2013:801, 6§). Thus a library that does not loan digital media breaks the law.

For this reason, public libraries also have to serve their users on the web and work with this challenge continually. The digital space includes not only technical skills but also new ways of meeting the user through other forms, like blogs or social media. They also require enhanced digital competence on the part of the user that may be necessary to take part in, for example digital reading circles.

The new situation raises the issues about the role and tasks of public libraries and their relation to e-books, their producers and distributors.

The most important actor on the Swedish e-book market is Elib – a distributor of e-books, which started this activity in Sweden in 2000. It distributes books also to Finland, Norway and Denmark. Till 2014 the Elib used the well-known price model for e-books. All the books available to public libraries for loans had the same price of 20 crowns. Roughly half of it constituted the distribution fee and the rest belonged to the publisher (Petrén 2014b). This model functioned well till the demand for e-books was very low. But when the demand and loans started growing both libraries and publishers started criticizing it from different positions. In 2012 the Swedish Library Association and the Publishers’ Association tried to find a new model, but could not agree on the main principles and the negotiation failed (Riksdagen 2013). By the autumn of 2014 a new agreement between Elib and libraries was finally achieved. It allows libraries to choose different loan models for different titles. Access model permits unlimited loans through library paying for each loan an agreed sum, that can be much lower than 20 crowns for older titles, but up to 100 crowns for some new ones (Delin 2014). The “item licence” (stycklicens) allows the library to loan a book for a certain number of times for one reader at a time paying an agreed price once. In this case the loan of an item mimics the loan of a physical document. The new contract
allows libraries to control their e-book collections and integrate e-books into the library’s website. Comparison of the prices of e-books show that libraries pay almost the same price per loan of a title as a private person pays for buying it. For example, ten most frequently bought books in May of 2015 cost between 47 and 160 crowns to buy (on the average 108,5 crown) (Adlibris 2015), while public libraries pay 80-100 crowns per each loan. There were big hopes that the new agreement will provide an access to many more books to the users, but the actual e-book collection has grown only by 300 titles and reached 11600 (Petén 2014b).

Each publisher within Elib sets own prices and composes the offered collection. In November 2014 the publisher Natur & Kultur has reached an agreement with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL) and made all its books available as e-books for libraries. They offer and access based model and divide their books in three different price categories. New books cost 30-70 crowns per loan, those older than two years cost 13 crowns per loan and the older ones can cost lower than that (Cederskog 2014).

This model is regarded as benefiting both – publishers and libraries. It is expected that other publishers will join it, though so far there is only two publishers using it. The agreements took away the embargo time for new books; therefore public libraries have access to them directly after release. The price for the loan of the new books is not as high as previously, thus libraries can give access to them immediately. However, libraries choose the limitation of price. E.g. Stockholm City Library has limited the loans to the books that cost not more than 20 crowns. Nothing that costs more can be accessed through library (Petén 2014a).

Swedish media have discussed the e-book conflict between libraries and publishers quite actively. The focus has been mainly on the price setting by publishers for e-book licenses to libraries. Especially, they have noted that many libraries have stopped loans of e-books in 2014 because of growing costs (Delin 2014; Viksten 2014).

Some library managers declare that publishers’ prices and embargo periods are the biggest barriers to e-book loans. Mikael Petén working in Stockholms City Library comments the new agreement pointing out that high price for new books works as an embargo period as in practise libraries cannot afford to loan these books. He criticises item licensing model too, as in this case the library has to pay high price for lending a book for so many times without actually knowing the demand for it (Petén 2014b).

At the same time Elib’s leader Johan Greiff states: "libraries are extremely important for book publishers" (Cederskog 2014). Some publishers have pointed out that high VAT levels (25%) in comparison with the VAT for printed books (6%) pose a big problem for the development of e-books. The authors and publishers have launched a campaign against the decision of the European Union Court against the application of lower VAT for electronic services, such as e-books (Haggren 2015).

In March of 2015 IT company Axiell Group has bought 70% of Elib from Swedish book publishers (Axiell 2015). It remains to be seen how this will affect the relations between libraries and Elib and e-book distribution in Sweden.

**E-books and copyright protection**

It would be also useful to make a difference between the e-books using copyright protection means and other e-books. Technology used by publishers and producers to limit, manage and control market for digital materials and protect copyright (DRM – digital rights management) is not unique to the e-books though they may look differently for different media, e.g. CCS for DVDs (OECD 2012).
E-books have several types of the DRM protection from different producers. Amazon, Apple and Barnes & Noble use encryption that prevents dissemination of e-books. It even locks the files into their own reading equipment (OECD 2012). Adobe has its own encryption that is used for many Elib’s books loaned to the users (Elib s.d.). Therefore, readers have to download some programme, such as Adobe Digital Editions (Pe/Mac), Bluefire Reader (iOS) or Aldiko (Android) to get access to the book. Elib also protects many commercial books by using watermarking instead of encryption. The item is marked by the buyer’s code and the buyer is responsible for the book. The illegal spread can be detected back to the initial source. This protection actually means that the user is not buying an e-book, but renting or borrowing it according to special contract with a seller. Different sellers have different contracts. Another consequence is that consumers are sort of chained to one bookseller and can use only certain products. It also can mean that there will be different contracts in different countries (even with the same bookseller) and certain material can be inaccessible in different places, even when it is available on the computer network (OECD, 2012). As the e-books are licensed to libraries, the DRM systems do not allow them the same management of their collections as with physical books. Jenkins (2014) writes about the situation when all materials are licensed and nothing is owned. It may be something very alien to those who grew up with the right to own books and music. The ownership allows us to share and loan our books without being observed. Lack of ownership threatens the library collection that can be changed over several minutes. It has already happened that books have disappeared from Kindles because the seller had no proper rights to license them. “Imagine cultural usage entirely dependent on the person writing the license” (Jenkins 2014: 75). In this case libraries and users lose their independence to decide what is important to keep and how to use the material.

**E-books in Swedish cultural policy**

The main factors shaping the functioning of libraries in modern society (be they academic or public) are the changes in the systems, in which they function, “development of information technology and the processes in overall social and political environment” (Petrak and Aparac-Jelušić 2005: 13). The cultural political structure of Sweden influences the e-book situation on the Swedish market to a great extent, especially the e-book loans through public libraries. In 2011 the responsibility for the libraries in municipalities and regions was transferred to the National Library. This includes the organization and development of digital services in public libraries (Almerud 2014). This change required new structures and responsibilities for different groups and structures in the National Library. However, the responsibility for e-books in public libraries is not yet clarified. The National Library has conducted a pilot study of this area and this has laid the foundation for the idea about the common platform for e-literature that is free of copyright. The Ministry of Culture (Kulturdepartamentet) has given the task to the National Library to report on the potential of promoting non-copyright material in cooperation between Libris (the union catalogue of Swedish libraries), Litteraturbanken, Stockholms University library and the National Library. The final report was produced in 2015 (Stjernvall 2015). The prototype of the platform has been tested by public libraries in Gothenburg, Malmo, Mjolby, Norkoping, Stockholm and Umea and received positive evaluation. This system will be developed in the nearest future.
The responsibility for the work with e-books in public libraries also rests with the Swedish Union of municipalities and regions. They are negotiating the e-books agreement with publishers and distributors for public libraries (Kungliga biblioteket 2013).

Another important issue is the new legal deposit law related to e-documents that came into force on the 31st of December, 2014. It complements the earlier legal deposit law and includes e-books into e-legal deposit. Everything that is digitally published within professional publishing organizations should reach the National Library within three months from the date of publishing. Basically, it included only the material that “concerns Swedish conditions”. The main goal is to preserve digital cultural heritage for research, but it is not yet clear how the material will be made accessible to the users (Larsson, 2015). As Aparac- Jelušić has observed in relation to digitised heritage, the issues of the usage of any cultural heritage preserved in digital formats depend on copyright laws in many countries (Aparac- Jelušić 2000: 118-119).

**Survey of public libraries in 2012**

To establish the position of e-books, we have conducted a survey in October, 2012 of all public libraries in Sweden. A total of 291 questionnaires were sent out and 185 have fully completed it, an effective response rate, after three follow-up messages, of 63.6%. The percentages reported below are the percentage of people responding to a specific question.

Ninety-five per cent of libraries indicated that they offered an e-book service to their users; however, only 19 or 9.6% of those answering the question (i.e., 197) claimed to have a formally document policy underpinning the e-book service. Seventy percent (14) of those who did have a policy declared that it was publicly available and nine respondents indicated a Website address as the location of the policy while one sent a document file to the investigators. In most cases, however, the *policy* was simply a statement of the availability of e-books and the rules governing their lending.

When asked what factors determined the decision to offer e-books, the respondents commented on the demand from readers, the need to develop services appropriate in the twenty first century, the fact that an e-book is simply another medium and should be offered just as print books are offered, and, importantly for some, the opportunity was offered to participate in county-wide collaborations in the provision of e-books. A number also commented that the service was a way of attracting new readers to the library. A typical response was:

> The library will of course provide all kinds of media formats; Complement to the printed book, allowing more borrowers to read the book at the same time, no queues; Meet borrowers’ requirements that we offer new technology, new media formats; Give borrowers the opportunity to test new ways of reading.

The librarians have felt very strongly that this mode of provision does not enable them to perform their normal professional responsibilities for the selection of material for their readers: they can only accept what Elib chooses to make available. Furthermore, popular titles may not be made available in e-book form until months after the initial release, if at all, and titles may be withdrawn from the catalogue without notice. The librarians made comments such as:

> We cannot decide what we want to buy, what literature we want to promote and offer to borrowers. It feels awful to be dependent on the vendor.
Librarians have expressed the great dissatisfaction with the present pricing model for e-books. Almost 86% of respondents said that there was a need for a library consortium to be created to supply e-books. Sixty-nine per cent of respondents felt that the means for the supply of e-books in Swedish was less than satisfactory and when asked what should be done to improve things, said, in effect, that ways should be found to overcome the limitations of the current system. Suggestions included:

- National agreement on different pricing model, state aid.
- A wider range from the publishers' side, digitization of older titles, no waiting period for new titles...
- Abolish the waiting period for new books in Swedish. Get an agreement that enables even translated titles to be offered.

However, no one suggested stopping the e-book loans in libraries, though the budget constraints often demand that some libraries use this measure, especially at the end of the year.

Despite mutual dissatisfaction experienced by librarians and publishers, there seems to be a need to find a compromise on both sides. The best results can be achieved in cooperation, while one has to admit that as in many other cases “the cooperation and even effective communication between these professions is possible only if they know, understand and respect each other differences” (Tanacković and Aparac-Jelušić 2010:202).

**Case study of a public library in 2015**

The in-depth study of one public library in Sweden three years later has shown a similar picture from the point of view of librarians despite changes in the conditions of agreements between public libraries and Elib (Holmstedt and Topelius). The library under investigation has a contract with Elib and has chosen an item license model, but also buys e-books without limitation to the number of loans and has access to the whole collection that Elib offers. The e-books can be downloaded in EPUB format by users who have a library card from this particular library. Though library card is only issued during personal visit to the library, later the users can borrow books using the e-service on the web. The library card is offered for anyone (regardless where they live) for three years and has to be renewed after this period.

The case was selected because the library under the investigation has received funds from the municipality (500 000 crowns) to abolish the limit to the price of e-book loans. This means that the library has allowed its users to borrow any e-book regardless of what it costs for the library, while earlier only the books costing not more than 20 crowns could be borrowed. The limit of borrowing not more than two e-books per week stayed in place. The possibility was widely advertised by the library, including the web-site, local press, and library premises.

The cost of e-book loans for different price ranges (lower than 20 crowns per loan, 20 crowns per loan, over 20 crowns per loan) was investigated. Another issue related to the titles that were loaned most often comparing the situation in December 2014 (when the limitation was in power) and March 2015 (when it was taken down). This was done grouping e-books into the following genres: fiction for adults, detective stories for adults, non-fiction for adults, and fiction for children.

From December 2014 the e-book loans grew over 300% and the costs increased at the same rate (see Table 1).
Table 1. Number of loans and costs of e-books and e-audio books from Elib from December 2014 to March 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Total loans</th>
<th>Total costs (by full crown)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>13 093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>1574</td>
<td>40 303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>1670</td>
<td>48 109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>2102</td>
<td>55 799</td>
</tr>
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Among the 20 most frequently borrowed e-books adults’ fiction and detectives are the genres that were the most popular (Fig. 1). But children’s literature is also a relatively large part of the loans (over one third). Some titles of children’s books were borrowed between 40-50 times, many more than any adult title.

Fig. 1. The 20 most borrowed e-books and e-audio books from December 2014 till March 2015 according to genres.

These numbers pertain only to the titles that were borrowed most frequently, but the majority of e-book loans consist of the titles that were borrowed only a couple or several times per month. The non-fiction is only a fraction of the books that are borrowed most often, but there may be many more non-fiction e-books that are borrowed not so often. The library keeps the summary with links to e-books divided by subject headings. These numbers cannot be exact as some books may be indexed by more than one subject, and some may not have a subject indicated at all. But these data show that there is not a big difference in the borrowed books in relation to subjects. The users have borrowed approximately 3300 e-books with fiction subject headings and 3600 e-books with subject headings for non-fiction (only adult literature). As there are fewer books available for children, only 1300 borrowed e-books are indexed with children’s and young adults’ subject headings. It is clear from this that there is a gap between the availability of adult and children’s e-books, despite high demand for children’s e-books.
Table 2. Number of loans and total costs for e-books between December 2014 and March 2015 (price intervals: 0-20 crowns, 20 crowns, 20-77 crowns)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Price interval (Swedish crowns)</th>
<th>Number of loans</th>
<th>Total cost (Swedish crowns)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-19</td>
<td>1523</td>
<td>22 060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>2925</td>
<td>28 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-77</td>
<td>1436</td>
<td>77 961</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The usual price for a loan in the library was 20 crowns, but over 1400 loans cost more than that (Table 2). So limiting the choice of the users to a lower price diminishes the loans almost by one fourth. But in addition, a slightly higher amount of loans fall on the books that cost less than 20 crowns (older literature, niche publications or books from smaller publishers).

![Fig. Percentage of loans in different price range (0-19 SEK, 20 SEK, 21-77 SEK). Note: In December the books in the price range 21-77 were only requested by readers, who actually got access to them in January.](image)

In conclusion

The main motive of Swedish public librarians to provide the e-books is not only following the law or the development of technology. They are willing to attract and reach new readers who could benefit from library services. Together with the initiatives of the government it addresses the need to provide equal access to
information and culture in the remotest parts of the country, which is a universal right and need of all people (Aparac-Jelušić 2004). The legal and economic models of selling e-books and using them through libraries are just starting to develop and raise many questions in the countries where the reading public is limited by small numbers of language speakers. Nevertheless, e-books are definitely finding their readers and libraries can exploit potential of access to new as well as old titles for the benefit of their communities. The discontent with existing models drives search for new opportunities. This is important as seemingly, the freedom of choice and access drives up usage of all books, not only of the most popular new ones.

As for my other aim in writing this text, I have tried to use the quotes from Tatjana’s writings sparingly. Despite the language and topic barrier, I found the quotes that fit comfortably into the context. But I felt even more affinity with Tatjana’s writings while reading. We are clearly guided by similar professional values and principles wherever we live and whatever we research.

References
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