Breaking down the walls

Co-operation is always worthwhile – but can we afford it?

SIM and BIN - supporting modern media communication flow

SMIL - Scandinavian Medical Information for Laypersons
Scandinavian public libraries have a long tradition of co-operation with other libraries, the most obvious example being the interlibrary loan service. But the public libraries are also very open institutions that enjoy co-operating with other players in the local community, such as schools, cultural institutions, associations and others.

The theme in this issue of SPLQ concentrates on co-operation with partners other than libraries, introducing several new and untraditional partnerships at local as well as national level.

We start off with an article about the Norwegian digital library. Finland then opens the doors to the Rikhardinkatu Library with its large collection of art books and periodicals as well as a unique artist books collection and the country’s biggest artotheque. From Sweden we learn more about supporting modern media communication in the article on SIM and BIN and Denmark puts the focus on consumer information in the public library. These articles are just a selection – there is much more to follow in this issue – so read on!

Jonna Holmgaard Larsen
Editor-in-chief
jhl@bs.dk
Breaking down the walls

Connecting libraries
During recent decades libraries have undergone a process of change. The possibilities offered by the new digital reality are arguably just as revolutionary as those created by Gutenberg's invention in his age. We must therefore ask ourselves how can we steer libraries through this process in a manner to ensure our emerging with greater self-esteem and a stronger position in society? The answer lies perhaps in the slogan of a successful Finnish concern: “Connecting people”. Co-operation must be both the present and future strategy for library development. Modern, electronic reality has extended our boundaries, while at the same time making us more dependent upon co-operation with other libraries.

“Take stock” (“Kolla läget”)
Do libraries make any difference? What is our role in today’s society? Are we necessary? Such questions simply indicate that there are not enough people outside our own professional circle who realise that the library is often the answer when it comes to learning, cultural enlightenment and local democracy. We must develop a greater understanding of the trends and tendencies in society and of the space for manoeuvre available to us as service providers to the public. Alliances between the library sector and the surrounding world will be of vital importance in redefining the library’s role. “Kolla läget” as the Swedes say about the need to look around and take stock of the situation before deciding upon a new strategy.

Collaboration
Against this background inter-library collaboration and co-operation between libraries and other sections of society must represent a step forward. It should be acknowledged that the library sector is relatively small and that it will gain strength and improved status through co-operation with partners who can contribute to making more evident the important social role libraries can play.

Projects and initiatives connecting libraries more directly with the needs of their users represent part of the answer. Another part would be to set about re-defining the goals and interests of libraries by means of a process starting in the libraries themselves. This issue of SPLQ presents different projects which all have one feature in common, namely that they are based either on co-operation between several libraries or between libraries and other institutions and organisations.

Breaking down the walls
The Norwegian Digital Library (NDL) has the following declaration of intent: “NDL is a system that breaks down walls between the separate libraries and makes their collective information resources available to everyone in a simple way.” That the time was ripe for a project of this type was clearly shown by the enthusiastic response and the many volunteers who offered to help. Expectations as to what the programme may develop into are still very high and have now been given concrete form in a project that involves the complete sector, including national, university and public libraries. In Norway we have learned a great deal from our Nordic neighbours. We are able to build on the experience of others and go all out for a digital library, a common resource of contents and services for both public and special libraries. Creating a digital library and making it available to every citizen as a communal benefit is a social initiative that strengthens the individual person’s possibilities for learning and for participating in and influencing society.

Gateways
Arranging for easy use of Internet-based services is one of a library’s important tasks. A large number of institutions, either individually or in co-operation, have established gateways offering their users easy access to required information and documentation. The number of gateways and their maintenance, however, has become a lively topic of discussion. Is it possible or desirable to co-ordinate different solutions and initiatives? This question was the theme of a seminar held in May by NDL.

Looking ahead
There is excellent, close Nordic co-operation with regard to both content and network construction. In this respect the Halmstad conference has played a central role as a Nordic meeting-place for librarians and politicians concerned with cultural affairs. The focus has been on library development and new, likely scenarios for the future. Further confirmation is provided by this year’s international conference in Århus, entitled “Transformation”.

Bridges
To round off this theme of networks and co-operation I should like to quote from a poem about bridges by the Norwegian writer Lars Saabye Christensen. He claims that “whatever we share with others becomes twice as great.”

Translated by Eric Deverill

Leikny Haga Indergaard, head of department
Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority
leikny.haga.inergaard@abm.utvikling.no

SPLOQ2 2004
What is it? What will it be? What will it look like? What will it feel like? This national digital library for all?

These questions are being asked by quite a few library people in Norway these days. And the questions, though not as difficult as the one about the meaning of life, are still not close to a single, ‘once and for all’ answer. But we have started the process of getting there.

The Norwegian digital library was drafted in a report published a year ago. This report describes a number of issues and presents a number of activities that should be initiated in order to create this digital library. The vision is clear, but ambitious and challenging: “The Norwegian Digital Library is a system that breaks down the walls between the separate libraries and makes their collective information resources available to everyone in a simple way.”

The Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority decided to build on this report when they initiated a programme to facilitate the process. This programme will run for 3-5 years. A project co-ordinator was appointed in November 2003 and an organisation for the programme is now also coming into place. There is a programme committee with high-level representation. This committee will outline the policy and strategy for the work ahead.

The digital library
There are several elements that will constitute the digital library:

Content
The digital library will contain all types of documents – text, photos, audio, video, hyperlinks etc. It will also provide access to non-digital objects that can be obtained as a loan or for use on site in a library or another institution. The content will be distributed and maintained by the different participants who ‘own’ the resources and databases, and content that resides with the producers of content will also be made available.

Creating more digital content is part of the programme, and a national digitisation plan is one way of starting such an activity. This will involve not only the library community. Archives and museums are part of the picture as well.

Services
Content without services is not very meaningful or accessible. Services are necessary tools to get to the content and to make use of it. The digital library will provide a set of services for
• searching
• organising content
• support for production of content
• document ordering and supply
• authorisation and access control
• and more.

Technological framework
The framework makes it possible to integrate services, metadata and content from many suppliers. It is therefore important to reach an agreement on a set of standards for this framework. This is the glue that binds the different elements together, invisible but absolutely necessary.

User interfaces
The services of the digital library can only be accessed through some sort of user interface. This is the user’s window to the content of the digital library. The user interface can be single, it can be customised to individuals or groups, or it can be an institutional portal or website providing access to services and content from the digital library. There has to be a user interface, but it can take many forms and shapes. The introduction of yet another universal portal is maybe not what makes people’s hearts beat faster these days. The important issue is easy access to the vast amount of information in our libraries, and this can be done from more than one access point.

There is not much new about all this. What is new, or rather unique, is the planned co-operation and co-ordination across the whole spectrum of the library community. It will encompass the national library, research and academic libraries, public libraries, and special libraries - in short, all kinds of libraries. And then there are content and services from archives and museums too. This may sound like megalomania, but we think it can be done - over some time.

First of all, there must be a shared understanding of what we are trying to do. This includes an understanding of the complexity of the process and the way forward. The vision is something that everyone can agree on as an ideal, but we have to find out how to get there.
Some important issues
I should like to point out some of the issues, which are crucial if we are to succeed:

We must build on what has already been done and what is being done. There will not be a completely new infrastructure. A lot of libraries already have in place systems and services that can be a part of the digital library or developed to become a part.

We need to establish a common set of standards and framework for metadata, exchange of data, cross-searching, document formats and more. A project ‘Establishing the framework of the Norwegian digital library’ has been started and is ongoing, involving a number of people with experience and competence in these areas.

We need to know what is going on around us in the library community at large, but not only there. We live in an age of convergence and change. What happens in other parts of the ‘information business’ and with other players (some of whom we may consider, sometimes wrongly, to be in a totally different field) will have a strong effect on the way we design and present our services. The ‘googlification’ of information retrieval and the rise of the Internet as the number one information resource and service bank in the eyes of the general public are the most obvious examples.

We need to address the copyright issues concerning use of digital material. This
is a complex area, but we need to establish solutions and to build a legal platform and framework for the digital library. We need to develop a solid national competence centre on libraries and copyright in order to meet the many copyright challenges ahead.

We need to form co-operative relationships and alliances both within and outside the library community.

What shall we do in 2004?
The financial framework for the digital library activities in 2004 is limited, but that does not mean we are prevented from going on with projects and starting new activities. This programme has a high priority within the Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority. The programme is also supported in a White paper on Cultural Policy, so there is reason to be optimistic also about future funding.

In 2004 we shall continue the work of establishing consensus on the technological framework of the digital library. We plan to start working groups on
• digitisation
• licensing of digital content
• electronic publishing and open access.

We shall organise seminars and conferences on important digital library issues. The first conference (in May 2004) was on portals with focus on presentday proliferation, how portals can work together, what actually constitutes a portal and more.

We shall support and follow up projects initiated by others that contribute to the development of a digital library. One such project is the development of a national register of library users, making it possible for one user to have only one library card that can be used in all participating libraries.

We shall carry out surveys and analyses on stakeholders and other players in the field.

We shall of course take an active part in discussions and debates.

It is still early days, but hopefully in a year or two we shall have something more concrete to show for our efforts. Something that can be seen and used and that will actually make a difference to libraries and their users.

www.norskdigitalbibliotek.no is the programme’s website. Unfortunately in Norwegian only.

The Rikhardinkatu Library, the former main library of the city of Helsinki, is currently one of the largest branch libraries. It is a beautiful building over one hundred years old, which provides both book and art lovers with adventure and food for thought. The area of concentration of the library’s collection is art books and periodicals. In addition to these, the selection of art publications includes a unique artist book collection and Finland’s biggest artotheque.

Kristine Abelsnes, project co-ordinator
Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority
kristine.abelsnes@abm-utvikling
Seven small ‘galleries’
A diversity of exhibitions thrive in the seven small ‘galleries’ of the library. The library does not have a separate exhibition room, but there are exhibition areas in different places in the several-storey building. We hope our patrons will be pleasantly surprised to find the unexpected and perhaps will receive some inspiration themselves! This arrangement has proven very functional and our guest books have been filled with many interesting comments. From these, it can be seen that the works have often affected people, awakened feelings, memories and thoughts, while the library atmosphere also allows more freedom to express opinions about art than that of a formal art gallery.

Upon entering the library from Rikhardinkatu, the visitor will encounter the first exhibition area. During last year’s renovations, new exhibition partitions were added in the first floor lobby of the library, where photography and paintings are mainly on display. There are also glass display cabinets in the children’s section on the same floor. There are three decorative glass display cabinets which can be placed in different areas of the upper floors of the old building. These cabinets have contained such items as jewelry, decorative Easter eggs, porcelain objects, artist books and many small installations and the last display in the cabinets before last year’s renovations was a collection of burned candles.

The light well in the middle of the several-storey ‘book tower’ is called the ‘tower gallery’. This space is suited for different hanging sculptures or installation art. The installation artwork ‘Lukusali pinnan alla’ (‘reading hall beneath the surface’) on display a couple of years ago by two artists was a magnificent exhibit, in which an old iron bed was placed underneath giant lily pads which looked as if they were growing from the bottom of a lake. One library visitor wrote in the guest book “Thank you for this wonderful artwork! This really helped me, as I was here thinking what is ART really.”

Hyllygalleria Hyvinpieni
Our library may have the smallest gallery in Finland, Hyllygalleria Hyvinpieni. The idea of a small gallery came about in autumn 1993, when the shelving originally made for music cassettes and CDs became too small and a decision was made to take it down. This never happened, however. The shelves began being used to display different types of miniature exhibits. Those contributing to the Hyllygalleria Hyvinpieni displays have primarily been private persons, artists and collectors. However, the Bibliophile Society has also put ceramic book markers and bookcover paper from its members on display.

So far, the 80 different displays have featured many kinds of exhibits. Over the years, the shelf has been graced with jewelry made by artists, graphics,
glass works, miniature sculptures, aquarelles and artist books. Latvian ceramics, miniature decorative pillows, tin soldiers, gingerbread sculptures, Japanese boxes and old postcards have also been on display. One of the most amusing displays may have been the ‘Taskujen arteet’ (‘Pocket treasures’) display, in which all of Hyllygalleria was filled with the ‘treasures’ one mother had found in the trouser pockets of her two young sons.

Many artists have taken advantage of the shape of the gallery by making different installation artworks particularly suited to it. ‘Outoja kohtamisia’ (‘Odd encounters’) was a display by the artist Olof Kangas, in which collections of small domestic objects were arranged on the shelves in surprising small scenes or encounters.

Hyllygalleria Hyvinpieni has been popular and it is generally reserved a year in advance. Future displays include a collection of small velvet books, natural stones with painted icons and jewelry made from recycled material.

Henna Paunu has written this about Hyllygalleria: “The size and nature of the exhibition space require that the displays be small. A miniature world can be built into the shelf with perfection as the goal. From the point of view of the spectator, the display is a peep into another reality, in which unusual, unique or everyday objects acquire a new meaning. Hyllygalleria has an intimate feel to it and it speaks to the spectator on a very personal level. The exhibitors also often reveal their personal thoughts, interests, memories and passions.”

RikArt—collection of artist books
RikArt is the name of our library’s artist book collection. Artist books are bookworks made by artists. In these works, visuality, the artist’s effort, is more essential than the text or the pictures. The artist book can be printed, but it is also a unique work of art. It does not have to be a book at all; it could be, for example, a box or a package. The artist book as a concept has been practically unknown in Fin-
land for some time, and it is a great pleasure to make this interesting form of art known! Collection of the works began four years ago. At present, there are 150 works in the collection. It is probably the only public collection in Finland. For the acquisitions, we have received a small sum of money every year. The works are indexed in the library’s HelMet database. It is our intention to bring the collection to the Internet where the making of the Rik-Art net gallery has just been started. Pictures and information about the works, information about the artists and other related topics will be added to the net gallery.

On the second floor of the library there is space in the so-called Taiteilijakirjakaappi ('artist book cabinet') especially for collection exhibits and artist book displays. So far over 20 different kinds of exhibits have been displayed there.

Kurkistuskortisto (card index artworks)
The most amusing display is perhaps the Kurkistuskortisto, which was made for the old card index box. The contents of each of the 36 card index boxes is its own little piece of artwork, the name of the work always being the index card of some real book. The materials used are small objects, cards, pictures, trash etc. gathered and found at home by the artists. This card index has time and time again surprised and amused both adults and children alike!

Artotheque
A greatly popular artotheque, or art rental system, was opened in the library in 1995 in co-operation with Helsingin Taiteilijaseura (Helsinki Artists’ Society). The artotheque operates on the basement floor of the library. The artworks in the artotheque can be rented out, and by paying a certain monthly payment, the piece can be purchased. The selection includes paintings, graphics, drawings and sculptures and more than 1,000 works by about 250 artists are included. Currently about 800 works are ‘on loan’. During these nine years, over 3,000 works have been sold. Both the customers and the artists have been very pleased. There is a small ‘hall gallery’ in the artotheque, where monthly changing displays present the works of the members of the art society.

The Rikhardinkatu Library aspires to fulfil the task of public libraries as defined in Finland’s library laws, according to which the library’s purpose includes the promotion of opportunities for the population to partake in literature and art.

Emmi Martin, librarian
Rikhardinkatu Library
emmi.martin@hel.fi

Jorma Mäkinen, chief librarian
Rikhardinkatu Library
jorma.mahonen@hel.fi

Translated by Turun Täyskäännös OY
Portraits and illustrations by Chris Gurney
Co-operation is always – but can we afford

Schools, day-care centres, farming advisers, associations for the unemployed, consumer organisations, pensioners' societies, immigrants, small business entrepreneurs, societies of artists, amateur writer groups - what do all of these, and many more, have in common? The answer is of course libraries. Besides being municipal residents and target groups for library services, all of the above are also library cooperation partners.

According to a report carried out at the turn of the year by the Ministry of Education, about 80% of Finland's public libraries co-operate with one another; sharing a library system, joint database and in some cases patrons' register; materials are being transferred across municipal borders by joint agreements. The switch over to a shared database brings clear benefits to participating libraries: more effective flow of materials, improved customer service and savings in developing a system. The initial investment and running costs work out cheaper together than separately. There are also savings in terms of personnel training and sharing professional skills and expertise within the partnership network offers great benefits. On the other hand, if the use of the library stock in the region is to be made more effective, much is required of the logistical systems and this is not free. The harmonising of many different wills, procedures and methods also requires time - ten or fifteen libraries will have to agree on practical guidelines or a strategy. However, of Southwest Finland’s 56 municipalities, for example, only four have remained outside of the regional networks.

According to the library act, the objective of library services is to promote equal opportunities among citizens for education, literary and cultural pursuits, for continuous development of knowledge, personal skills and civic skills, for internationalisation, and for lifelong learning. Furthermore, the library act states that public libraries should operate in co-operation with other public libraries, with research libraries and with libraries in educational establishments. Co-operation between libraries is thus even advised in a legal text.

The main goals of public library co-operation are improved customer service and making the execution of basic tasks more efficient. Co-operation with other partners often has to do with auxiliary functions, supplementary services and services directed towards target groups. These too, in fact, generally promote the interest in literature and art and lifelong learning mentioned in the act. In the tight economic situation, however, it is necessary to consider the benefits and costs of this kind of co-operation. One argument to be made for co-operation, for example, with a local society of artists, might be that show rooms in the libraries could im-

Paivi Jokitalo
Paivi Jokitalo has been administrative officer with the State Provincial Office of Western Finland in Åbo since 2000. From 1996-2000 she developed the nation-wide libraries.fin networking services in Helsinki, and four years prior to this she worked as a librarian in Jyväskylä, at the county library for Pohjois-Karjala. The libraries in Jyväskylä, Nokia and Åänekoski provided an interesting background for her present job. They were libraries of different sizes and in different locations in the country and the work in the various departments (adult and children's departments, music library, accession and cataloguing departments) revealed the great diversity of library services. Her expertise and sound knowledge of networking services in Finnish libraries have taken her abroad frequently as a lecturer both in Europe and as far away as Shanghai and Guadalajara.
worthwhile it?

prove the position of cultural entrepre-

ners in small communities and thus

to support business policy. The same is true for information retri-
eval courses for farming advisers. In

addition to serving the common good

of municipal residents, co-operation

can also function as a means of marke-
ting the library to both decision-mak-
ers and patrons; co-operation often

brings visibility, extended networks

possibly bring new patrons. This could
help libraries to improve their negotia-
ting position when discussing resour-
ces. On the other hand, it is this kind
of co-operation that also requires stra-
tegic balance. If all goes well, the exten-
sion of services to new target groups,
increase in patronage and the necessity
for an established service which has
been proven to be good and irrepla-
ceable, can all be provided as bases for
the need of additional resources. How-
ever, if the balance sways in the wrong
direction, decision-makers will claim
that the library seems to manage well
enough with the existing resources.
Finding the right balance is a skill, and
a difficult one at that.

The concepts of co-operation, the

necessity of it and even its definition
differ, depending on local principles
and resources – and on previous expe-
riences of co-operation. When the Mi-

nistry of Education informed libraries
(together with day-care centres, the
school system and civil organisations)
the possibility to obtain state grants

for organising morning and afternoon
children's activities, one person consi-
dered it a ruthless exploitation of libra-
ries and an infliction of even more new
tasks on libraries, while another library
director saw it as an interesting oppor-
tunity to extend services, cultivate new,
enthusiastic library patrons and obtain
resources for things which fit into the
library's tasks. Some libraries have
people skilled in organising workshops
in creative writing for children, while
other libraries have personnel who are
excellent 'book advisers'. Once teachers
discover the skills and enthusiasm in
the library, schools will gladly accept
the service. However, libraries cannot
bear the main responsibility for such
functions; the distribution of work and
resourcing must be agreed upon be-
tween the partners. This has been done
in small Southwest Finland municipali-
ties such as Aura, where the salary of
the municipal book adviser is paid for
by the library and the schools in Aura,
but also by schools in neighbouring
municipalities which are visited by the
book adviser according to an agreed
schedule. When the costs are divided
according to the number of students,
between several municipalities, schools
and libraries, nobody's share is too big,
but everyone still gets their part of the
service.

Working together requires flexibility,
close contact and making compromi-

ses, but the benefits exceed the poten-
tial difficulties. At my work in provincial
government, collaborating partners in
organising further education have
guaranteed a broader network, through
which new skilled speakers and educa-
tors have been found. Responsibility
for practical arrangements has been
distributed, the number of participants
may possibly have been bigger, infor-
mation extended farther and costs divi-
ded among the organisers. The result is
often greater effectiveness, savings for
each organisation, and an extended
personal expert network – and often
also much new information. Last, but
not least, is the euphoria which follows
when arrangements run smoothly.

From my own experience, and having
observed partnerships between librari-
es, I would maintain that there is
always and unquestionably power in
co-operation provided that the rules,
roles and responsibilities, including
operational resourcing, are agreed
upon from the very beginning. The
question in the title should thus read:
"There is power in partnership – can
we afford to be without it?"
Co-operation is the key to strength. The phrase may seem dated, but the projects are immensely innovative.

SIM in the south of Sweden with modern simultaneous search functions and BIN in the north with a well thought out and structured media plan. And yes, the two do meet but how these two co-operative ventures will shake the very foundation of the Swedish library sector — remains to be seen.

At present there are two major library projects concerned with media communication flow. The SIM-project includes the county libraries in the south east (Blekinge and Kronoberg), Kalmar, Jönköping, Västra Götaland, Halland, Skåne and the Central Lending Depository in Malmö. All in all 3.8 million people are affected. The BIN-project is the SIM-project’s geographical opposite, affiliating the county libraries in Västnorland, Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland, Gävleborg and the Lending Depository in Umeå. Fewer inhabitants, but spread across a substantially larger part of the country than its southern counterpart.

Nevertheless, the projects aim at the same goals — to organise the media communication flow for its inhabitants. However, their priorities at the initial stages differ. Briefly, the difference is that the SIM-project lends focus to the advanced technique needed for simultaneous searches among different media, whilst BIN put their efforts into teaching about media planning. Two, equally important sides to the same coin, exchanging experiences, making collaboration conducive to both parties.

SIM
The SIM-project’s abbreviation stands for ‘Ny struktur för informations- och medieförsörjning i södra Sverige’ (‘New structure for information and media communication in the south of Sweden’). They explain the chosen direction as: “The purpose of the SIM-project is to improve and simplify the information and media flow in the south of Sweden and enable the municipal and school libraries to achieve a more efficient and faster service from the county libraries and the lending depositories.

The gateway SESIM has received much attention. An advanced search engine, which not only accommodates library catalogues but also integrates databases, websites and other internet services. You can either read full text or pursue a reference and find out where the nearest place is to acquire the medium. The gateway programmes Metalib and SFX are being used for the first time in the public library sector, but have been available for much longer among the research library community around the world. How come such an advanced system was chosen?

- We were in Denmark for the purpose of studying and shared tutorials with the staff from the University College Library in Blekinge, says Solveig Einarsdottir, librarian at the South-East...
County Library, and were informed about different systems. It would not be possible for each county library to have its own system. Instead, we have to share such resources. We are fortunate to have Malmö in on this as they have a computer systems department from which we purchase certain services.

A reminder of Internet services

There is quite a bit of effort required in adapting a system to the needs of a public library and producing a user-friendly interface. Of course the aim is, as in Denmark, to enable the users to do most of the work themselves and order different media to their local library, regardless of where the media are. But before we reach that stage there are a number of hurdles to clear, both those of a technical kind and municipal decisions. One decision that has been arrived at refers to collections of two regional text-book pools, which are now made available to the entire project area.

This collection has been made available through public funding via the county libraries. If we intend to proceed with a free flow of the municipality’s books, political decisions on a local level need to be taken. We have also begun looking into transportation, but with the possibility of performing simultaneous searches we hope for an increase in the Internet services, and not in the use of interlibrary loans. The first stage will see librarians using the gateway and for this an intense period of teaching needs to take place.

Solveig goes on to say that they intend to reach every municipality, every person who works behind an information desk.

When you see the system at work you understand the possibilities that are to be gained. The libraries are filled with different media, but it is difficult acquiring an overview of these at the information desk. Tools are needed. This is like going back to the source of information work – to extract that which is useful to the user and evaluate its sources.

Assisted by the system one can also offer continuous subject watch, where listings are e-mailed to the user. One sets up a search string, decides at what intervals it should run and for how long, and the result will automatically be sent to the user. An efficient approach when assisting politicians and civil servants who require a basis of facts when making global evaluations.

Decisions and not only discussions

One must not believe that the gateway is the entire project. It should rather be seen as a tool to be used in the daily work, but what else is new about media venture?

- Discussions have become more intense and structured and we are now deciding on measures to be taken. There is a special committee for this and we make mutual applications for funds which we then pool, says Solveig. Passing on the information about how the project was proceeding to all those involved proved more difficult than we thought initially. At first there was only one project manager assigned to the development of the gateway, but now we have someone responsible for establishing and integrating searches of the KULDA databases in the gateway.

KULDA Sweden (License consortium for databases and Internet services) is an initiative which has taken the path from project to a co-operative venture on a regular basis. Through mutual purchases the Swedish county libraries are able to offer the municipal libraries interesting databases at a more favourable rate than if they had made the purchase straight from the commercial suppliers of databases.
BIN
The acronym BIN reads ‘Bibliotekssamverkan i Norrland’ (‘Library co-operation in Norrland’). Is there a difference now that it is a project instead of, as previously, a media co-operation?

- This project places media communication flow in a wider context, says Roland Tiger, county librarian in Västernorrland. The customer should be at the centre and receive the fastest possible service. And the fastest way can be achieved in the municipality where the people live, where the media collection should reflect the population and the local needs.

- A beneficial purchase policy lessens the need for interlibrary loans, says Roland. The KULDA databases are included in this. Even the smallest of public libraries must aim to become hybrid libraries, equipped with databases and net services. Or else, there is a risk that they will fall behind despite the fact that the technique can afford all libraries better service.

Media planning courses
So far the BIN-project has given two 5-point courses, (One point is equivalent to one week of full-time study, including lectures, etc. One academic year normally consists of 40 such points. One point is thus equivalent to 1.5 ECTS credits.) attended by sixty participants. Later this autumn the course will be given in a more compact form, consisting of three days with independent studies.

- The best results have come when libraries have sent more than one participant, says Roland, as it is very much a project about attitudes. It takes training to realise the importance in offering library users access to databases and electronic publications. Roland implies that many libraries still hold on to old-fashioned ways of thinking.

They rely too much on the services supplied by Bibliotekstjänst and let their ‘instincts’ rule instead of looking at the facts that make up a municipality. There is still a prevailing sense of scepticism against new forms of media, such as databases. They are viewed as something extra, something one needs special funding for. Instead they should be making allowances for it in their regular budgets. They also feel that databases with English text might be too advanced for the local population.

Norrsök and method project
BIN has chosen a basic simultaneous search function in its initial stage. We felt it was a priority to get off to a quick start, to have simultaneous searches done by counties and a shared simultaneous search facility, such as Norrsök, for the county’s host library and lending centre.

- It’s cheap, but it only works as long as they do not want the remaining Internet resources, says Roland. He also feels that it is a good thing that SIM is developing a more advanced gateway, seeing that maybe this is the way that BIN will eventually go. Within the context of BIN there are three parallel method projects being pursued. Fifteen municipalities get to share in the county library’s funds in order to purchase complementary media collections. Instead of using the interlibrary lending system, they buy the books for their own municipality. Another part-time project looks to the co-use of media collections among neighbouring municipalities. Some of them work together in pairs and on request send each other parts of their media collections. Ten municipalities are currently testing a system whereby different media are sent to the user’s home address.
closure of a number of library branches in the Norrland region often makes a local library seem very far away, says Roland. Not everyone gets to benefit from the library buses, and even if they do it might take a long time before the next visit. Receiving a parcel through the post might be a viable alternative. As long as this remains a project and the county libraries inject much needed funding, there need not be a collision between the libraries and municipal autonomy. On the other hand, if the chosen option is a model of free flow and user-directed interlibrary loans, then political decisions will have to be taken throughout the municipalities.

- If you have a regional federation, then it is their strategy that prevails even among the municipalities. On an organisational level many of the libraries are part of the county council and one cannot take for granted that the municipalities take the same view on co-operative ventures across municipal borders. Several of the county libraries in the BIN-project invest a lot of effort in supplying a strong basis for decision-making through interlibrary loan surveys and a regional plan for cassette books.

What about the rest? What about the so-called ‘waist of Sweden’, does not mid-Sweden have any co-operative ventures?

Aside from the usual everyday co-operative interlibrary loan, a new gateway has been initiated: Katalogsök Mellan-Sverige. This includes the county libraries of Dalarna, Gotland, Stockholm, Södermanland, Uppsala, Värmland, Västmanland, Örebro and Östergötland and the Central Loans Depository in Stockholm.

The similarities between them and the gateways of SIM and BIN consist in the fact that they only have the host library’s collection and not those of the other libraries in the region. This is how local initiatives evolve into co-operative ventures on a national scale, just as the Internet service Fråga biblioteket has developed. This began when a few public libraries needed to try out a service whereby users could e-mail questions and receive answers from an ‘on duty’ library. This has now become a national service resource endorsed by the Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs, and the number of libraries who wish to affiliate themselves is growing steadily. Both large and small libraries are welcome to participate. As Roland Tiger points out, the smallest libraries have equally great possibilities for providing good service to their users.
The Danish National Library Authority and the National Consumer Agency join forces
In the summer 2000 the Danish National Library Authority (DNLA) and the National Consumer Agency of Denmark (NCAD) launched a joint development project on mediation of consumer information via the public libraries. A working group was appointed with a view to develop a concept for public, decentralised, local consumer information via the libraries which would support public consumer information on the Internet as well as consumer information in general.

The group consisted of representatives from DNLA, the NCAD and the public libraries.

The vision was to provide Danish consumers with sound and effective advice/information that would reach every citizen in the country – also those who traditionally are difficult to reach – via a fine-meshed net of mediation throughout the country with user-friendly opening hours.

The concept were to be based on a voluntary system as the Danish public libraries are municipal institutions and as such cannot usually be required to provide a specific service.

Background
As the information society develops it becomes increasingly important for public authorities to be able to optimise consumer information.
The EU-commission has for example introduced eEurope - a political initiative to ensure that for several generations to come the EU will gain the full benefit of the changes brought about by the information society. One of ten focus areas is Det offentlige på nettet (The public on the net) which is intended to make public information more easily accessible by extending and simplifying access via Internet. The Danish government has made this initiative a priority.

The NCAD sets great store by the Internet as the future source of consumer information. But there is a danger that this form of mediation will not have sufficient impact. For quite some time to come many consumers will not be able fully to exploit net-based information and advice – partly because of not having access to the net, partly due to lack of skills in actually handling information. This is where local assistance and advice prove very valuable, offering personal service and information.

The public need local opportunities for advice on consumer issues. A study prepared by the National Association of Local Authorities in June 1999 shows that the public expect their local authority - due to its close proximity - to be the obvious place to approach in order to get service and information.

The libraries provide a natural network for mediation and the librarians a natural resource, particularly for information-weak citizens who in the libraries can get access to the net as well as help in handling information. Add to this the fact that the libraries are open when people are not at work.

DNLA and the NCAD are therefore concentrating on a common strategy where the NCAD is exposed and promoted locally and the libraries develop a new service where they become frontrunners in terms of value-added, qualified public consumer information.

The public libraries in Denmark have for several years been obliged to mediate municipal and government information about social conditions in general. A formalised co-operation on mediation of public consumer information will therefore make it possible to extend the libraries' role as mediators of public information. The aim is to facilitate citizens' access to government information and casework.

The concept consists of the following elements:

- A co-operation contract between the NCAD and the individual library. The contract will guarantee the necessary quality of the local advising by setting out guidelines for further education, support functions, responsibility and feedback.

- An obligatory basic course lasting two days + 1 day for a follow-up about two months after the library has opened its ConsumerINFOpoint. On the first day of the course the prospective members of staff in ConsumerINFOpoint will be given an introduction to public consumer information in Denmark with the main emphasis on three selected subject areas: Guidance before purchase of goods, elementary consumer law and advice on how to make a complaint. The follow-up session is used questions of consumerism, namely to refer to or find the information required. It must also be possible for the consumer to get an expert assessment of this information and advice in concrete cases.

Libraries that register with ConsumerINFOpoint are obliged to put up a stand in the library's public space, indicated by signposting and carrying the relevant logo which the consumers can then easily identify. A public PC must also be made available.

The concept presupposes the establishment of a local ConsumerINFOpoint - in a number of libraries spread over the country. Each library takes the initiative to establish a ConsumerINFOpoint and each library is responsible for the advisory service.

If a library is registered with ConsumerINFOpoint, it is not sufficient to provide the service which is available today in most libraries concerning
primarily for dealing with issues related to consumer law.

• An annual meeting that provides further education as well as a contact forum.

• An electronic conference room attached to the NCAD's homepage. Here the staff are currently being updated and can draw on the Agency's databases and advice. Via the conference room, the staff in ConsumerINFOpoint can get quick answers to difficult consumer questions and pass on ideas of activities to other libraries that have joined the system. Only the participating libraries and the NCAD have access to the conference room.

• Electronic statistics, where the individual ConsumerINFOpoints register how many inquiries they have had.

• Common marketing material, including common logo as quality assurance, are also handed out when the basic course has been completed. The marketing materials consist of 1 signboard (40 x 40 cm) with the logo, to be placed above the ConsumerINFOpoint and stickers with the logo to be placed in relevant places. Furthermore, posters to be put up in the local community, a folder that describes the service which the consumer can expect and bookmarks to be handed out to the library's patrons.

• All ConsumerINFOpoints get a subscription to the NCAD's newsletters and other published material.

Content of the libraries' consumer advice Libraries registered with ConsumerINFOpoint must as a minimum offer a service containing the following elements:

• Access to Internet and help with information search
• Guidance prior to purchase, i.e. advice on purchase and providing test results by way of official or other reliable sources
• Advice on and answers to elementary questions concerning consumer law
• Information on how to make complaints and help in connection with reclamations
• Help with filling in forms of complaint.

Apart from this all libraries can extend their services with for example the following elements:

• Promote sale of non-gratis materials from the NCAD and the Consumer Council
• Arrange exhibitions on relevant consumer-related subjects
• Arrange lectures and other activities related to public enlightenment.

ConsumerINFOpoint – a great success
The concept was tested in 11 public libraries in spring 2002. Following a test period of six months, an evaluation was carried out which showed that both consumers who had used ConsumerINFOpoint and the test libraries were happy about the scheme and wished to carry on.

In January 2004 yet another basic course was completed with the participation of 16 new libraries. When they open their ConsumerINFOpoints during the spring, it will mean 100 libraries all over Denmark have now got ConsumerINFOpoints. The success continues, and the NCAD intends to go on arranging their basic courses.

Marie Hummeluhr, departmental adviser
National Consumer Agency
mhu@fi.dk

Translated by Vibeke Cranfield

Photo by Nils Lund Pedersen
Can I complain about a telephone I bought in Poland? Can I make a complaint about the veterinary fee concerning a lame horse? I have received an invoice for sluicing my cesspool but they haven’t been there at all... am I obliged to pay for their ‘bungling’? Where do I find tests on gas cookers? How do I remove the vomit stain from a leather sofa? This is just a small sample of some of the inquiries we get at ConsumerINFOpoint at Copenhagen Central Library.

When we got the chance to act as test library, we at Copenhagen Central Library immediately seized the opportunity. We very much wanted to improve our service within the consumer area. We also felt it was an exciting project in terms of trying out a new role as librarian that involved advising and not just making material available to the public.

At our library, ConsumerINFOpoint was established in a co-operation between two departments: Department of Technology and Science and the Reading Room, which together cover the different aspects of the consumer area. Two librarians are in charge of ConsumerINFOpoint and this has proved to be an advantage.

Our ConsumerINFOpoint is placed in immediate proximity to the reference desk in the Department of Technology and Science. The INFOpoint consists of four shelving sections and a brochure stand containing books, periodicals and brochures dealing with consumer issues, as well as a PC and table and chairs. The materials we use here are more or less materials we already had. We have just extracted them from the existing collections. Previously our consumer periodicals were for example spread out among several hundred alphabetically arranged periodicals. The American Consumer Report was a long way away from the Danish consumer journal Tænk + Test (Think and Test). Placing all the consumer periodicals together has made them more visible and much more popular.

At our library we give advice within three main areas: What to buy, consumer rights and How to make a complaint.

You can contact ConsumerINFOpoint in three different ways: personal approach, by telephone or by mail to our mailbox. Most of the telephone inquiries have not come from our regular borrowers, but have been passed on. The inquiries via ConsumerINFOpoint’s mailbox have been few and far between, perhaps because the mailbox is placed on the library’s homepage to-
The questions received here have on the other hand often come from other parts of the country.

More or less all aspects of consumer rights have found their way to us, questions such as: purchase, agreements and services. The complaints have been diverse: faulty goods, people receiving invoices for goods or services that were never requested, inquiries as to whether it is possible to cancel a purchase etc. We have had many telephone complaints. Some complain that the instrument does not work, invoices arrive for services one thinks were paid for several years ago or for services never requested in the first place. We have assisted in interpreting invoices and helped people to understand why in their particular case it is not possible to make a complaint. That you have in fact got what you are entitled to. The inquiries have also been of a preventive character: “How do I make sure, if I wish to......”. We have had inquiries, too, from traders who want to know specifically what rights the consumer has.

The new librarian role

Consumer information in the library also entails offering actual advice. As libraries we have always made a virtue out of making materials available, whereas an actual interpretation of the information, we tended to leave to other professional groups.

We were – and of course still are – afraid of giving the wrong advice. When we first started, it was rather easier than we had imagined. We feel that with the National Consumer Agency’s courses we are well-equipped to tackle the issues. We are quite humble towards our role as consumer advisers. We have a distinct perception of our limitations, and which queries we can answer. If we are just the least uncertain, we contact the Consumer Agency’s hotline which is very efficient. We get an expert answer the following day at the latest. When we haven’t been able to give the borrower an answer on the spot, it has not seemed as if he/she regretted not having approached the Consumer Agency directly.

The borrowers have felt that we provided a good service by acting on their behalf. And as we have been able to get the expert answer in such a short time, we have preserved our credibility in relation to the borrowers. They have felt that we did something extra for them. It seems that the libraries’ image as a neutral body quite clearly contributes to the fact that the borrowers feel they can safely approach us with consumer questions.

We have always received consumer questions here at Copenhagen Central Library. We have always found tests for the borrowers, and we have always referred the borrowers to the complaints authorities. As to complaints we go one step further – we help the borrowers with the actual formulation of the complaint.

As a librarian it has been satisfying to move into another sphere. One thing is to find the information, another to be able to advise. We have given the borrowers copies of rules and decisions, and that has often produced the desired effect and made the traders change their practice. In this way we have got some happy borrowers who often come back on their own accord to tell us about the outcome of the case, and once the librarian even received a bouquet of flowers!

Margit J anken, librarian
Copenhagen Central Library
hblaem@bibliotek.kk.dk

Translated by Vibeke Cranfield
January this year marked the opening of the Internet gateway SMIL, containing a carefully monitored selection of websites dealing with illnesses and their treatment. All these sites are in one or other of the Scandinavian languages: Norwegian, Swedish or Danish.

SMIL's target group consists of patients, their relatives and all interested members of the general public. It also represents a useful tool for librarians and for others engaged in distributing information to these groups.

Background to the project
Considerable efforts are being made, not only in the Nordic countries but also internationally, to strengthen the position of the patient within the health services. Much of this work consists of finding new ways to increase patients' knowledge of health and disease. New technology has simplified access to information, making it generally available in ways not possible before. The Internet is a fast and effective channel for the distribution of information on health and disease. Nowadays the websites of patient organisations, consumer associations, government bodies, hospitals and other institutions offer the public a wide range of information, as do also many commercial enterprises and private persons, although the quality of information may vary considerably. The English-speaking world has come a long way in utilising the Internet for these purposes and information in English can be useful in many situations. Our experience, however, shows that in the Nordic countries most people prefer the information to be available in their own or in one of the other Scandinavian languages.

What is SMIL meant to be - and for whom?
The primary aim of the work with SMIL has been to collate the patient information available on the Internet, quality being the starting point. The advantage is that we avoid duplication of work, while at the same time making the information easily accessible. A multilingual system of subject headings makes possible the retrieval of information in all the Scandinavian languages, the idea being that if the original search language offers no information on the subject concerned, it may well be available in one of the other languages.

SMIL’s target group consists first and foremost of patients, their families and any interested members of the general public. It goes without saying, however, that health personnel, librarians and others working in the field of information constitute another important target group.

History and co-operation
The project was initiated by Eva Alopaeus, who at that time sat on the board of the Swedish Library Association's Committee for Medical and Health Information Libraries, and Elisabeth Husem, head of the Norwegian Library Association's Special Committee for Medicine and Health Sciences. In the summer of the year 2000 Eva Alopaeus formulated a project plan and sought financial support from a number of organisations. The Swedish Library Association made an initial contribution of SEK 50,000 and in the summer of 2001 a project group was established consisting of librarians and nurses from Sweden and Norway. A further contribution of EUR 3,280 was later received from NORDINFO. In
2002 the group was joined by a representative from Finland.

During the first year the project group held two meetings to discuss quality criteria, content and the technical standards required. The task of collecting information and assessing quality was soon under way but it took some time before a satisfactory technical solution was found. The programme finally chosen was produced by Lincom A/S and has proved to be both flexible and user-friendly. Registration in itself is a simple process. What really takes time is the evaluation and indexing of the websites to be registered.

The funds granted to the project have allowed SMIL participants to meet once or twice each year for discussion, training and not least in order to establish new personal contacts. Co-operation otherwise has mainly been conducted by e-mail and to a lesser extent the telephone. The project has two co-ordinators; one for Norway and one for Sweden/Finland. They are not involved in the SMIL registration process, being solely responsible for administration and work co-ordination. The other project participants in each country have divided between themselves responsibility for the various categories of illness. A summary of these divisions of responsibility has been posted on a website, making it easy to see who should be contacted in order to discuss any specific subject. Lines of co-operation have thus been established not only within each individual country but also across borders. In order to ensure the most uniform use of headings possible, one member of staff has responsibility for indexing and all new registrations must be approved by this person before they can be made available to the public.

Interdisciplinary co-operation has been a source of strength for the project. The three participating nurses (Swedish), who all work directly with patient information, have provided the project with valuable experience, particularly with regard to quality assessment and criteria. Librarian expertise has played its part in building up a uniform and consistent database.

What does SMIL contain?

Very early in the project it was decided that the gateway should contain information about illnesses and their treatment, functional handicaps, medical examinations and patient rights. Documents dealing with preventive medicine and health information of a more general nature may be included, but the focus is on illness and disease. The gateway also contains links to the websites of consumer organisations and patient associations.

An important principle of SMIL is that the user should be offered immediate access to the relevant information. We therefore register web documents to a greater degree than websites. Approximately 85% of the links in SMIL go directly to documents, and the remaining 15% to gateways for health-related subjects, periodicals, consumer organisations and institutions.

Of the 3,000 or more registrations in SMIL at the present time about 2,000 are from Norway, some 1,000 from Sweden, about 150 from Finland (presented in Swedish) and just a few from Denmark. The reason for the small number of Danish registrations is that so far Denmark has not found it possible to participate in the project.

The suppliers of information to SMIL consist of idealistic and humanitarian associations and organisations, public bodies and commercial companies in the health sector. Information from non-profit organisations is to be preferred but in many areas the commercial gateways provide a useful supplement.

Quality before quantity

SMIL does not aim to gather together all possible information on the Internet concerning illness. On the contrary, our objective is to select the best websites dealing with each specific subject. There is no upper limit to the number of registrations under any particular heading, but there will be constant evaluation as to whether or not a new registration supplements already existing information. It is desirable to have...
several registrations under each heading in order to give the user a basis for comparison. If, however, too many websites contain the same information, the removal of some will have to be considered.

Quality assessment

SMIL staff evaluate the quality of websites solely in relation to ‘external’ criteria. We do not judge the professional content. Many organisations have established reliable criteria for this type of quality assessment of health-related information on the Internet and the project group therefore decided at an early stage that there was no need to ‘re-invent the wheel’. A comparison of several sets of quality criteria also revealed considerable similarity with regard to which factors are evaluated. In SMIL we have chosen to take EU’s quality criteria in this area as the basis for our assessment. This does not mean that the websites registered in SMIL necessarily meet these criteria, merely that the latter provide a starting point for our evaluation. This does not mean that the websites registered in SMIL necessarily meet these criteria, merely that the latter provide a starting point for our evaluation. Whether or not a website is taken into SMIL depends upon a total appraisement, involving a check on the existence of other information on the subject in question. Quality criteria include an assessment of the website’s openness with regard to producers, financing and target group, also the names and qualifications of suppliers, updating procedures and accessibility. SMIL includes the websites of consumer associations, regardless of quality.

Search and retrieval

The search interface exists in all three languages and it is possible to switch from one language to another at all levels.

The aim of retrieval is to be simple, while at the same time providing as much relevant information as possible. In SMIL searching in free text offers a general broad retrieval, while a subject heading system meets the need to sort out the websites which are most relevant. The subject heading system consists of parallel words in all the three Scandinavian languages, thereby making it possible to find websites in all three languages regardless of which language is used in the initial search. The gateway’s front page contains a row of letters from which one can click into the subject headings. When searching in free text, the subject headings will also be retrieved and displayed in a separate window above the list of hits made.

As an illustration, anybody seeking information on leukaemia will find this as a separate subject but could also search via the main headings ‘Diseases of the blood’ and ‘Cancer’. Those who initially search far too generally will therefore still be able to find their way. In addition there is a reference aid, so that a search for ‘Cancer of the blood’ will give the same result. Several search words, such as ‘leukaemia’ and ‘children’, can be combined, thus ensuring the greatest possible accuracy in the search.

The way ahead

SMIL was officially opened in January with a presentation at the Norwegian National Hospital in Oslo and is now generally available for use. Nevertheless, SMIL is not a finished product. There are doubtless subjects still lacking and the information already registered must be continually evaluated. The majority of those who worked on the project will continue with SMIL as one of their current tasks. The Library for Medicine and Health Sciences at the University of Oslo Library is the host for the project and will meet the expenses incurred.

Our hopes for the future include welcoming our Danish colleagues as participants in SMIL. So far they have been unable to see their way to join us but without the Danes Scandinavian cooperation is incomplete.
Interest in medical information and heavy use of medical encyclopaedias in public libraries is the case in several countries, for instance in the Netherlands.

In order to meet the requirements of a society in which costs for medicine and health care increase for various reasons, it is important to keep a balance between reasonable health care for all and cost effective measures. In the Netherlands the question was raised as to which role libraries can play in relation to health care and informed citizens and patients?

As a response to the fact that at least 55% of people with questions on health and self-help visited the public library and hoped to find answers there, several public libraries set up Health Information Points. In 1998 a national pilot project was initiated with ten public libraries pioneering various forms of information services. The shift of focus within the medical sector from excessive regulation of services to a more patient-driven and demand-based health care had given patients a stronger position in medical treatment and decision-making. Part of this new paradigm is to inform people about their rights as patients and their right to information about their health, diagnosis and proposed treatment. Patients have become more empowered and require better information services. Citizens in general need to have access to social and community information in order to orientate themselves in relation to health questions. Public libraries can provide such basic information and support specialised health services.

In a health information point all information and materials, which are available in the library, are concentrated physically and presented in an attractive way. The collection includes traditional materials such as encyclopaedia, books, magazines and brochures.

Furthermore new media like cd-roms and selected digital sources on the Internet are included. People can sit and study anonymously. They can also ask for help: to find information, to find answers or to find a reliable address for advice. The librarians in the front office have had training in health databases searching; they know medical jargon and the health care network. Innovative and important is the cooperation with the local/regional health institutions. In order to inform various groups of the general public about old and new health-related topics, the libraries have set up series of lectures and structured regular exhibitions. In the Dutch system, organisations are willing to pay to reach their target groups through the library facilities, they can for example book time to give a lecture, keep office hours or arrange exhibitions in the library.

At national level, the Netherlands Public Library Association have contacted the national players within the field of health care and arranged training and study of various health information systems. Furthermore they have published a handbook on setting up health information services in libraries and a cd with all necessary addresses of health care institutions and patient organisations. And finally the public library portal www.bibliotheek.nl will be extended with health information and make use of the various local and regional projects as described above.

This text is based on an article by Marian Koren, Netherlands Public Library Association. The whole article can be found at http://www.debibliotheken.nl.

Sidsel Hindal, adviser Sidsel.Hindal@abm-utvikling.no
Finnish libraries were confronted with an altogether new networking culture when using the Internet became more popular in the 1990s, and nearly all library material was at the tips of the fingers of customers who had access to the Internet. The dream of having a library that could be used any time and anywhere was beginning to take shape. Although digital material has increased in the network, the customer is still seldom able to obtain the entire material for use from the Internet. The services libraries offer in the network still consist primarily of references and the actual material must be picked up or ordered from each library. Patrons of research libraries have much more access to various types of digital material, which usually require a fee. On the other hand, almost all of Finland’s provincial libraries have set up databases which include digital material as well, such as articles, pictures, maps, and audio-visual material. Provincial libraries, as well as other libraries in the provinces, museums, and even archives maintain regional databases. There are several access services and regional databases, but often they are dispersed and finding them may be difficult.

Northern Finland’s libraries and the tradition of working together

The Northern Finland, Oulu, Kainuu and Lapland area has three provincial libraries located in Oulu, Kajaani and Rovaniemi. All three provincial libraries have the same library system, but there are large differences in the libraries’ operations. One factor that separates them is, for example, that the Regional Library of Lapland is part of a joint municipal library system with fourteen other libraries; Oulu and Kajaani, along with the libraries of their area, do not belong to this system. Another separating factor of the Regional Library of Lapland is the library’s special task of gathering and maintaining a collection in the Sami language.

There are four polytechnic libraries which operate in Oulu, Kajaani, Kemi and Rovaniemi. Earlier, some of these polytechnic libraries belonged to the same joint system as the public libraries, but last year they changed over to the same system as the libraries in universities. There are two university libraries in Northern Finland, one in Oulu and one in Rovaniemi.

The provincial libraries of Oulu, Kainuu and Lapland all have their own regional database, and all three provincial library areas have, in addition, several regional databases maintained by other libraries. Each regional database is different and contains different types of material. Each of them has been made using a different technique and their maintenance is extremely varied. The Lapponica database, in the Regional Library of Lapland, differs most from Northern Finland’s regional databases – it includes pictorial material from Lapland’s museums. The Kainuu Elec-tronic Library of Eastern Finland (ELEF) project, for example, has been trying to find a uniform solution for the dispersed regional databases.

Although the joint field of activities of the libraries in the Oulu, Kainuu and Lapland regions is indeed broad, half of Finland’s area, the libraries in this area have long-standing traditions of close co-operation, which traverses regional and administrational borders. The evaluation and development project PARKKI provided important information and a basis for more extensive co-operation. The project involved libraries in the north, and research conducted in the project examined the clientele of the regions’ different library types. It was found that several of the same customers visited all of the different types of libraries and therefore a joint regional portal would significantly facilitate information access for these customers.

The directors of the Oulu and Lapland provincial libraries gathered together in September 2002 and decided that a ‘one-window service’ must be established to combine the services of Northern Finland’s libraries. Soon the university and polytechnic libraries of
Oulu and Lapland became involved in the planning as well, and in the spring of 2003 the libraries in the Kainuu region announced that they too were interested in the joint portal project. Some time later it became known that the National Library of Finland had chosen ExLibris’ MetaLib program as the portal program for the national electronic library that was to be established. According to the plan, this Nelli portal was to be introduced in all the university libraries during 2003. The National Library of Finland had also negotiated the options for the MetaLib program for both public libraries and polytechnic libraries.

Pohjanportti’s goals and realisation Northern Finland’s libraries decided to incorporate their material into a joint portal and its name became Pohjanportti (‘gateway of the north’). Because it was already known that the portal program for the university libraries would in any case be MetaLib, it seemed most sensible to use it in Pohjanportti as well to avoid possible overlapping in work.

The main goal of the Pohjanportti project is to better the customer services of libraries by offering customers an integrated service, a user interface for the materials of Northern Finland’s libraries. The user interface includes all the information access services and materials, regardless of their saving format, which are offered and maintained by the region’s libraries. Developers of Pohjanportti decided to make it a guiding tool that takes different users and their needs into consideration.

Pohjanportti’s realisation has been divided into three phases. The first phase of the project will be finished in the beginning of 2005. The collections of the Oulu, Kainuu, and Lapland provincial libraries, polytechnic libraries, and university libraries are included in the portal in the initial phase of Pohjanportti. In its first stage, simultaneously searching for material and finding its location is possible with the Z39.50 standard of libraries involved in the project. Pohjanportti’s resources can be grouped regionally and according to library type in this initial stage of the project. The portal is open to everyone, but if the customer would like material from some library, e.g. licensed e-material from a university library, then he/she must be a customer of the library in question.

According to the plans, Pohjanportti will be linked to regional databases, which may also include digital material, in the second stage of the project at the end of the year 2005. At this point, other public libraries in the area may join Pohjanportti in addition to the provincial libraries. In 2006, during the third phase of the Pohjanportti project, a method for electronically identifying customers will be developed, and a centralised, automated interlibrary loan system will be created.

Pohjanportti, Tiedonhaun portti and Nelli At the same time as plans for Pohjanportti got off to a good start, the Nelli portal of the National Library of Finland is just about ready and, on the national level, a concentrated network service, Tiedonhaun portti, is being designed. The idea is for Tiedonhaun portti to function as a channel for the material databases, different information access services, and electronic services of libraries. One part of the Tiedonhaun portti will most likely be a multi-search service, carried out through the MetaLib program.

Working together and uniting the collections of different libraries to be used effectively by all, is no doubt unique and a benefit to everyone in the library world. Skill and expertise are in this way effectively available for all libraries and an advantage for customers. Pohjanportti may perhaps become the first information access portal in Finland that comprises all types of libraries. However, when a tool that links the interfaces of different libraries is available for all libraries, then surely other regional portals will soon be developed.

Ritva Nurminoro, project manager Lapland library project Ritva.Nurminoro@rovaniemi.fi

Translated by Turun Täyskäännöss OY

Pohjanportti may perhaps become the first information access portal in Finland that comprises all types of libraries.
In 1991 a conference in Halmstad set in motion a wide-ranging discussion on the subject of the future of libraries. Discussing the future never seems to go out of fashion, and the conference has with an unfailing keen sense always nailed those issues which have felt to be the most relevant. Technique, by all means, but more specifically to what use that technique can be put. Knud Schultz’s, by now familiar, quote from the conference of 1998: “The future is a constant unassailable factor, but we decide on its development”, still rings true. This year’s conference takes place in Knud’s home-town, Århus, Denmark.

The fact that libraries are part of society’s mainstream and therefore need to keep a discerning eye on where social and technical progress is heading, is today an established fact. In 1991 this fact was not so obvious. The main national instigators, who should have been busy initiating the library sector’s contemporary world view and creative debating, were stuck in a rut of short-term reasoning.

The Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs carried on as if nothing had happened and the then SAB (The Swedish Library Association) was paralysed by never-ending quibbles over organisational issues. In the meantime, Kerstin Wedin reminisces, the county libraries wanted a dialogue about how changes in society affected the library sector and its role. At the time Kerstin was county librarian in the county of Halland and together with her colleague Roland Eliasson initiated the Halmstad Conference. Not even the commercial sector was at the forefront of technical innovations.

– Despite the fact that computerisation had made some headway, there was still a great deal of dissatisfaction with the library systems, says Kerstin Wedin. The first Halmstad Conference in 1991 bore the heading ‘A Future for Libraries’. This became the underlying theme for the following annual conferences. Prior to the first Halmstad Conference a number of county library conferences had focused on the turbulence of certain developmental issues. The opportunities offered by the new information technology had just become apparent and at the same time major cutbacks were affecting the library sector. These conferences were a starting point, but as the Halmstad Conference got off the ground, discussions became more diverse.

An expanded range of thoughts
To achieve an increased span of impulses, lecturers were invited who did not necessarily have any formal connections to the library sector as such.

– I remember we had an architect at the first conference and quite a few raised the question if this was appropriate and what it had to do with libraries, says Kerstin. With hindsight and considering the magnificent library buildings in Malmö and Copenhagen there was quite obviously a connection. Experiences from the other Nordic countries were highlighted, not only out of neighbourly respect, but as a serious exchange of ideas. A number of unknown speakers from the Nordic countries delighted the audiences and after a while even the Swedish audience adapted to the Danish language. Logically enough the 2001 conference was held in Århus in Denmark, though the conference boundaries were stretched and the conference heading read: ‘Scandinavia Meets the World’. This year’s conference will also be held in Århus. From the start the conference made a point of inviting politicians. Not for the purpose of hearing them deliver ‘feel sorry for’ or ‘look how clever we are’ speeches, but for interesting predictions about the future. And the politicians did turn up. A few to start with, but the numbers grew as enthusiastic participants attracted new participants to the next conference. Disposing of any false modesty, Kerstin Wedin states that “politicians choose to come because it is the most interesting conference within the library sector.” Today, every third to fourth visitor is a politician and there is a special ‘Politicians Forum’ on the programme.

Well begun is half done
How does one even dare to start such a venture? Co-operation is the answer. The risk takers were not only the municipality and the county library, but also other libraries who were involved as organisers.
We reckoned that we needed at least 70 participants just to break even, says Kerstin. If more turned up we could lower the price allowing for more participants from each municipality. It was necessary that the municipalities sent more than one participant each, so as to make reporting back an easier task. That is why we used different kinds of discounts. These discounts could either allow civil servants to bring politicians along at a reduced price or vice versa.

One is easily led to believe that initiatives of this kind evolve from long and carefully planned strategies, where authorities with a national responsibility merely commission such ventures. Truth is that much is found in a sense of general discontent combined with a will to show how much better it can be done. Kerstine Wedin was new to her position as chief librarian and thought it would be fun to place Halmstad on the map, so to speak, combined with solid collaborative relationships and a desire to blast away the old agendas. Much in the vein of the 1998 Halmstad Conference's urgent incitement to "CTRL ALT DELETE – Reload. Downloading. Connect the world."

A new centre in Sweden? Have developments caught up with us? Is the Halmstad Conference yesterday's news? No doubt, the choice of interesting conferences has increased. National instigators have moved their positions forward reclaiming initiative, but the flag of the Halmstad Conference is still flying high and the present county librarian of Halland, Kerstin Grum intends to keep it that way.

We need to be able to attend interesting conferences without necessarily having to go all the way to Stockholm. The south of Sweden has a large population and also a number of progressive libraries. Is it mere coincidence that one of the most exciting media projects, SIM, began its existence in the south western counties? (Read more about the SIM-project on page 12). Or is it perhaps the mere thought of a Sweden Centre with the Öresund Bridge accessing the continent? The Bridge will be put to good use when this year's conference takes place in Århus 13.-15. June. The conference heading reads 'Transformations – the Library in Progress. A conference on the physical library – architecture, community values and knowledge mediation.' More about the issues on the programme is presented on Århus municipal library's website www.aakb.dk/sw17213.asp

Serious, but room for laughter Last year's conference was called 'Melting Pot' and the introduction went as follows: "The media landscape is thickening around us. Messages, ideas and experiences are constantly being channelled through to us at an ever increasing speed. The individual might find this process difficult to assimilate in order to gain an overview where details are discernible. The prerequisites for democracy are changing. How does this affect the libraries?"

Exciting isn't it? Those of you who could not make it to the conference can read the conference papers at the County Library of Halland's website www.lansbibliotek.halland.net/lb/

The idea is that the conference should circulate, but for now we take one year at a time. Soon we'll be planning next year's conference, says Kerstin Grum. The County Library of Halland assumes a large part in the planning. Region Halland, which the county library is now part of, wants the conference to survive and the municipality of Halmstad does its share by organising a reception for the participants. Local politicians often take part in the conference proceedings.

As for attracting politicians, the Halmstad Conference is unique and that is an aspect we wish to nurture, says Kerstin Grum. Library staff needs to widen their perspectives. A factor more important today perhaps than when we started the discussions about the role of libraries in society.

www.aakb.dk/transformation

Mona Quick, consultant
Spiralum Kommunikation
info@spiralum.se

Translated by Jonathan Pearman
Since the end of 2000 bibliotek.dk has acted as a common gateway to the stocks of Danish libraries for searching and requesting books, articles, music. Users not able to read Danish, can use library.dk with the same content and same books etc., but with an English user interface. Right from the beginning one of the possibilities was to present a ‘you can also buy it’ button.

The primary objective of bibliotek.dk is to present the library service to the public, but this should by no means be seen as a straitjacket. There are several areas where the information in bibliotek.dk can be used as a basis for the development of a further number of services. It does not really matter whether the libraries are the suppliers - the all-important thing is that members of the public are given a better service and access to the information they want - whether the medium be book, CD or CD-ROM.

Central in this context is the so-called ‘Available for sale’ button. It is up to the user to decide whether he wants to order a title from the library or whether he would prefer to buy it. It would, for example, seem sensible to choose purchase instead of ordering if he can see that the local library is not able to produce a copy for him within the next six months, because there is a long waiting list already. Or the book may not have been purchased by the libraries yet and therefore will not be ready for several weeks. When the user has indicated that he wants a certain title, he is offered the choice between ordering or buying it if there are booksellers who have the title in stock. If the user wants to buy it, he is shown a list of possible suppliers with prices and terms of delivery. He then chooses the relevant supplier and is transferred to the appropriate website exactly at the required title in the bookseller’s system.

What happens after the user is transferred to the bookseller, is a question between the user and the bookseller. Library.dk has nothing to do with the in-
Interaction between the customer and the vendor.
The suppliers deliver files with data of the titles available from each supplier. It is a simple file format with ISBN, price and terms of delivery.

Since the summer of 2003 it has been possible to buy books, and other types of material will follow later. There are preliminary negotiations with vendors of music CDs and with the Danish Antiquarian Booksellers Association. The association has established a common database with the other Nordic Antiquarian Booksellers Associations. At this website the user can locate and request old books from all over Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway. The most pressing problem is the fact that many old books do not contain an ISBN, and technicians are therefore working on other ways to connect registrations in the two databases. Actually library.dk contains links to four booksellers with links for between 4000 and nearly half a million titles.

Nearly all Danish books available in common bookstores are also available through one of these booksellers. Another bookseller offers many titles in English. The two vendors with only a few thousand titles offer books for universities and the others offer maps.

If several booksellers offer the same title, the users can choose a vendor based on price and availability of material.

It is too early to evaluate the use of these facilities. The criterion for success is not heavy use, but that users looking for a title to borrow, have an alternative if the waiting time is too long. In 2003 the number of users transferred from library.dk to a bookseller’s website involved nearly 10,000 titles. That may not look like many titles, but the number of users is still growing. In February 2004 nearly 2,500 users were transferred from library.dk to a bookseller’s website.
A Danish example of co-operation also including physical frames: Library/Haraldslund Swimming Baths in Aalborg.
Photo by Nils Lund Pedersen.
A change in chairmanship of the Nordic Council of Ministers

New signals

Icelandic chairmanship

Nordbok is a committee acting under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers which lays down the overall guidelines for Nordbok’s work. Chairmanship of the Council changes each year, the country taking over the chair presenting a programme proposing a variety of initiatives. These affect the work not only of the Council itself but also of its subordinate agencies. In 2004 it is Iceland’s turn to assume the chairmanship and the Icelandic programme is entitled Nordic resources: Democracy – Culture – Nature. The programme is available in Icelandic, Danish and English on the Council of Ministers’ Internet page www.norden.org.

Nordic creative energy

The introduction to the chapter on culture states, “Nordic culture contains the creative energy which provides the foundation for Nordic co-operation”. The chapter goes on to point out that globalisation with its consequent movement of peoples, the increased dialogue between different cultural regions and the constantly changing nature of collaboration between the European countries represent a serious challenge to Nordic cultural co-operation.

Iceland is of the opinion that the Nordic countries together possess unexploited powers inherent in their common cultural heritage, values and human resources. Many things suggest that they can exert greater influence, strengthen their mutual co-operation and consolidate their status internationally.

Strategy for Nordic cultural co-operation

The starting point for Nordic cultural co-operation in recent years has been the 1998 programme of initiatives proposed by the ministers of culture: Nordic cultural co-operation at the turn of the century – a strategy. This programme will now be revised and at the conference which the Council of Ministers arranges annually for the heads of all the Council’s committees and institutions, this year held in February, the question of revision was a central item on the agenda.

The proposals set out by the Icelandic executive committee describe the aim of this revision as one of adjusting Nordic cultural co-operation in response to the new signals coming from the Council of Ministers. Co-operation should also be more manifest and purposeful. The intention is to carry out a thorough survey of the various programmes of action among the different committees and bodies co-operating in the cultural field. The organisation of their activities will also be examined.

The revision will stress the need to make maximum use of the funds granted towards cultural co-operation, to raise public awareness of the value of Nordic co-operation in this area, to offer the public easier access to the results of this co-operation and to ensure that programmes of cultural support are more purposeful and their costs reduced. At the same time, however, it is reasserted that important contacts with ‘grassroot’ work should not be broken and that beneficial aspects of the present-day system should not be lost.

Given a changed view of the world and greater international co-operation, Iceland feels that it is not enough to improve Nordic cultural collaboration internally. It is also important to strengthen Nordic cultural initiatives outside the Nordic region and to try to integrate them into other presentations organised by the Council of Ministers in foreign forums.

Nordic countries have already established wide co-operation with their eastern neighbours, including the Baltic countries and Northwest Russia. These contacts will be maintained and developed, while at the same time looking in other directions. Of particular interest in this respect is closer co-operation with our North Atlantic neighbours. Co-operation of this nature was dealt with in a special report published in 2003 concerning the West-Nordic regions. This report considered improved co-operation in many areas, one of which was culture.

Nordic ancient literature on the Net

In the course of 2004 the Icelandic executive committee will carry out a number of initiatives, including conferences. One of the tasks already mentioned would appear to be of particular interest to the library sector. Iceland will take the initiative in setting up a digital website concerned with Nordic ancient literature. The site will contain material about mediaeval culture, both academic and also accessible to the general public, and it will be available in the Nordic languages and in English. Consideration will also be given to the possibility of connecting the relevant databases of all the Nordic countries.

Asbjørn Langeland, director Nordbok
asbjørn.langeland@abm-utvikling.no

Translated by Eric Deverill
Download of e-books
Download of e-books looks like being a popular service in Danish public libraries. Danish Resource Center for e-books (DRC) was established at Randers Public Library in 2001, and in 2004 DRC became superstructure for e-books in Danish public libraries, see www.ebogscenter.dk (in Danish).

From focusing on e-book hardware, the e-book service now concentrates on content. You can read more about that in a follow-up project: Project Downlaan of e-books, www.downlaan.dk (in Danish, abstract in English). In this project, Copenhagen, Århus and Randers have offered 1,200 of their borrowers the possibility of downloading e-books on IT and comparative literary history, mainly using Adobes pdf, but also experimenting with the xml-format.

Apart from the three libraries, also the Danish National Library for the Blind, Danish Library Centre A/S and DBC Media participate in the project with Gyldendal, the publishers, as observers. The project has received funding from the Danish National Library Authority.

844 users of Interlibrary Loan Requests
Since October 2000 Danish citizens have been able to use library.dk for searching the national union catalogue. They can also send requests to their local library for any book, cd etc. belonging to a Danish library. With funding from the Development Pool, two big public libraries and two university libraries in Copenhagen have conducted a questionnaire to 844 users who collected a book or other material loaned from another library. Most of these users are students and about 70% said that they used library.dk to request the materials. About 20% said that they sometimes send a request to their public library and to their institution library for the same title. The report recommended further investigations into any easy access for the user to information about status of the requested materials.

Leif Andresen
Danish National Library Authority
lea@bs.dk

Tanja Hesselager Olesen
Danish National Library Authority
tho@bs.dk
Norway

Ethics and the libraries
In his article “Ethics – our inner compass” Chris Erichsen asks why libraries – unlike museums and archives – have not agreed on a set of ethical guidelines: “The libraries are at the core of the so-called information society. And at the very centre of the local community. Every day they have to consider questions that have ethical implications.”

In the article “A question of choice”, Robert Vaagan is interviewed by Signy Irene Karlsen. Robert Vaagan does research into the libraries’ role in society and in this interview he touches upon many aspects of the concept of ethics. “Ethics should help us in many difficult situations, and that is its very essence”, says Robert Vaagan.

In a subsequent article, “Norwegians suffer from a magnificence syndrome”, Robert Vaagan suggests that common ethical guidelines would bring about a professionalisation of the librarian’s job and encourage co-operation across the different library types.

Switzerland

Hospital libraries hard hit
It seems ironic that just when two major library reports are being published, many hospital libraries are being shut down or are under threat. The theme in the present issue of Biblioteksbladet is the threatened hospital libraries in Alingsås, Nyköbing, Kalmar and Ersta Sjukhus in Stockholm.

Since the 1970s, hospital libraries have been taken for granted and experienced an expansive development. One popular slogan went like this: “Books are the best medicine” and providing patients with books was an obvious service. But now things are changing. Focus seems to have moved to servicing hospital staff and producing patient information. The librarian only visits the patient, if the patient himself requests this.

Biblioteksbladet 2/2004