

"What should a public library actually offer?
What skills do we need? - The Malmö example"

Around 200 people work at Malmö City Library. Many of them began their employment when the mission was aimed at the collections, lending out, buying in, weeding, etc. Today, the mission is completely different, which places new demands on staff competencies.

What greatly affects how the Nordic libraries look today, how the premises are designed, which activities are pursued and which target groups are prioritised, are the national library laws. Sweden's most recent is from 2013

In the opening paragraph, it states:

"Libraries in the public library system shall work for the development of democratic society by contributing to knowledge sharing and freedom of opinion."

Library staff should therefore work towards citizens, the residents of Malmö in my case, being given good opportunities to exercise their democratic rights and obligations. To evaluate texts on the internet, vote, write an article, appeal against a decision of the building committee, look for information, etc.

In the second paragraph of the library law, it is stated that libraries should be available for everyone. Then the priority groups are named:

- People with functional variations
- The national minorities, which in Sweden are Jews, Roma, the Sami people, who are also an indigenous people, Swedish Finns and Tornedalers.
- People with a mother tongue other than Swedish

Library management and staff should therefore work to ensure that their premises, media, treatment given to people, etc., are adapted to all the citizens of Malmö, and the priority groups in particular. It also means that the library's management must strive for representativeness in the make up of the staff, for example that the number of Arabic-speaking employees is in reasonable proportion to the number of Malmö residents who have Arabic as their mother tongue. This is difficult because of the multi-skills required, for example literary instruction and language skills in one and the same person is rare in Malmö and in Sweden.

In a recent (2017) survey by the Swedish School of Library and Information Science in Borås (SSLIS) using interviews to find out what library managers thought about newly graduated librarians, it was found that the library managers are dissatisfied with the new librarians' social skills.

A quote from the survey:

“They generally seem to have little awareness of what the job of librarian really involves, that it is a service job where you work with, and for, people. Have met too many graduates who would rather work on cataloguing than help lenders”

The survey underlines the difficulty in finding the right skills for modern public libraries, though it is positive that SSLIS has created an awareness of this and that they want to change their teaching to better meet the needs.

In Sweden, municipal activities are regulated by the Municipality Act. The goals set by the municipalities for their libraries also place requirements on library competencies. In Malmö, goals revolve around social sustainability and equal opportunities for all residents of Malmö to education, a good economy, rich leisure time, in short the right to a meaningful life.

In the municipal target documents in Malmö, there are also so-called approaches and methodologies which the library has to take account of. Here is an example:



One way that libraries in Malmö have chosen for creating equal treatment in the whole library organisation is to LGBT certify the library, i.e. to create competence in the staff in the LGBT area. Here we have invited two drag queens to read stories in the library's story room.



More competencies that are needed and that meet both the Library Services Act and the municipal goals in Malmö are:

Knowledge of children and child development and knowledge of user dialogue. Here Kanini is seen, which is the City Library's new children's section that has been developed in dialogue with children, parents and teachers.



Language skills are needed. **"Maktabat al atfal"** – **The Children's Library on Facebook.** We give recommendations in Arabic and Swedish about resources and events for children being offered by the libraries in Malmö



IT and technology skills are needed. This is the **"Balagan"** section for children aged 9 to 13. We offer homework support, among other things. There is a sound lab with musical instruments, an image lab and a badge machine. We arrange Hackerspace – to test and develop interest in technology



Co-creation skills are needed. This is "KRUT" - an ongoing project and a youth section under development. This is where young people's voices, stories and creativity meet.



Pedagogic skills, digital skills and IT skills are needed. This is the **Learning Centre** and its staff. At the learning centre, you can get help with reading and writing. Get knowledge about computers and the digital world. Practice Swedish, get tips on starting and running a company. Work on digital creative projects



Event skills and multicultural competencies are needed. Here is a picture from the SFI fair. (SFI = School in Swedish for Immigrants) A full day event coordinated by the City Library. Different themes every year – with stories, food, music, workshops, language cafés. 2,000 visitors.



International project skills are needed. Here is an illustration from **"A Million Stories"**. The project features accounts from recently arrived people about their flight to Europe. Four European libraries are participating in the project – Malmö, Roskilde, Athens and Cologne. Each library will collect 160 accounts. Video, audio recordings or images



And, finally: Outreach skills are needed and target group competencies. Here is **The Library Bus**. Used for summer activities, festivals and outdoor events.



In conclusion, all these competencies and more, wholly or partly new competencies meet the wording in the Library Services Act and in the municipal goals for Malmö.

And the answer to the question: What should a public library actually offer? What skills do we need? I do not have the answer, other than that we should do that which best corresponds to the steering documents, and never forget that we are doing it for the residents of Malmö.

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