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New ways to reach and meet the public

Ms Nina Sjöberg and Ms Cecilia Stadius, Parliamentary Library of Sweden

(Picture 1)

N: This is our workplace: the library of the Swedish riksdag.

At our Library we have two main tasks: serving internal users, that is MPs and parliamentary officials, and serving external users. Our library is open to the public. Our external tasks include issuing books and helping users with our electronic resources, but also spreading knowledge about the parliament and its work.

(Picture 2)

C: Last year, our library had 47,000 visitors.

Many people have found us, but we want to be more visible, and this means that it isn't enough to have a physical library combined with a website. We want to go out and meet the public in other contexts too!

We will now tell you about some of the different methods we use to reach the public and meet them where they are.

C: Nina, I have some questions for you: First of all, your work is not everyday library work. Can you say something about what you do?

(Picture 3)

N: Yes, we're working on publishing the handwritten parliamentary record from the 18th century.

C: Why are we bothering to publish these *old* records?

N: It's about making the parliament's history available to the public. They're valuable as a part of our national heritage, but they're also a good source for historians and other researchers. **(Picture 4)**

They include discussions of many issues, you can read about the country's economy and alcohol legislation but also about individuals – even a love story! These records are extremely useful in our outreach activities.

C: That leads us nicely on to the subject of outreach activities. We're on Facebook?

(Picture 5)

N: Yes, who isn't on Facebook today? We have been on Facebook for a couple of years now. We prepared thoroughly and drew up guidelines in order to examine various problems. The aim is marketing, to reach users where they are. And they're already out there on Facebook, so now they can see when we make an update while they comment on their friends' party pictures.

C: What has it given us?

N: We have only 612 followers. But it's a good and *simple* way of reaching out. It doesn't cost anything and doesn't take much time to maintain.

C: Apart from this we have many activities involving real-life meetings with the public. Can you give some examples?

(Picture 6)

N: Yes, one of the major events is the Gothenburg Book Fair, the biggest book fair in Sweden, with one hundred thousand visitors and more than nine hundred exhibitors. The Library participates together with other parts of the Riksdag.

(Picture 7)

C: Tell me about this picture?

N: This is our stand, with librarians, information officers, MPs and a school class discussing with the head of the left party. During the first two days, the fair is only open to those in the trade, which includes librarians, teachers, journalists — virtually anyone at all who works with information or books. Many of them discover us for the first time and realise how we can be of use to them. After that, the fair is open to the public for a further two days, and this is when absolutely everyone turns up!

C: At the book fair we reach out to the public, and also to a great many librarians. Back home, we use librarians in order to reach the public?

(Picture 8)

N: Yes, we arrange special courses for librarians from all over the country. It covers our core subjects, with a focus on parliamentary documents. After this, the librarians return to their own libraries and can help their users to find their way among our parliamentary documents.

C: That was books and librarians, but we also make use of the historical records. Can you give us an example of this?

(Picture 9)

N: We attend the genealogy days, which is an annual fair for genealogists. That is people looking for their ancestors. Genealogy is incredibly popular in Sweden.

C: But what can we do for these researchers?

N: All genealogists have an MP among their ancestors! No, not everyone of course, but many people actually do, as the peasantry has been represented in the Riksdag since the 16th century. Just like the book fair, it's fun because everyone is so cheerful and positive.

(Picture 10)

C: Is it expensive?

N: Well, I will not talk about the cost in money, but time and effort, especially for the book fair, which is an enormous project as we have a large parliamentary stand. The genealogy days aren't as demanding - there we hire a table and chairs and bring with us some rollups, books, brochures etc. But the book fair is resource-intensive!

C: You sound positive when you talk about visiting various events. But we also have our own events at the parliament. Can you say something about them too?

(Picture 11)

N: Yes, every other year the Riksdag organises an Open Day. We invite the public to guided tours of parliament on a much larger scale than the regular tours. We also offer a variety of activities; the entire Riksdag is represented, including the MPs. The Library is a part of this, and we show what we have to offer.

(Picture 12)

C: Tell me, what are you doing here?

N: This was during an Open Day when we had a Speaker who was an Associate Professor in Political Science with a special interest in 18th century parliaments. He and I both delivered lectures, and in order to add a bit of fun I wore an 18th century costume and he wore a necktie with his suit. We aren't afraid to put on a show! It must be ok to have fun at a parliament!

(Picture 13)

C: A couple of months ago, we took part in another exciting happening. Can you tell us about the Stockholm Culture Night?

N: It's an event that's organised by The City of Stockholm. 90 different institutions, primarily museums, but also other cultural insitutions, were open on a Saturday between 6. p.m. and midnight, offering special events.

(Picture 14)

C: And what did we have to offer?

N: We had an extensive programme with various lectures on themes connected with the Riksdag Library. There were, for example, MPs who talked about cultural policy, one talked about a book he had written. The architect who designed our beautiful library came and talked about this and an artist who draws political sketches (Picture 15) made a huge success with a summary of the past year in a (Picture 16) series of ruthless and very funny political sketches.

We also showed an exhibition of newly-acquired political sketches, (Picture 17) we presented our publication of historical parliamentary records, we had a quiz - we offered lots of activities, in addition to answering regular questions about the library and its collections.

C: Was it very demanding? And was it worth it?

(Picture 18)

N: Yes, to both questions! A small group of staff worked intensively with the preparations. However, it didn't cost much in terms of money, apart from wage costs – on a Saturday night. But it was incredibly positive. All our visitors were happy and satisfied. Above all there were many people who said they were there for the first time and hadn't known that we are open to the public, and it was exactly these people we wanted to reach. We succeeded in attracting new people, and they were satisfied with what they found.

C: Nina, what would you like to say in conclusion?

(Picture 19)

N: There are many of us who find special assignments with events and other activities very interesting, so there is of course a risk that we go too far. We want to do everything! Here we have to keep a check on ourselves. The parliamentary connection must always be in focus! But in conclusion I would still like to say that our external activities are well worth the time effort and money. We recommend that you all try new ways of using your resources.

(Picture 20)

C: This picture is produced for an exhibition we named “whiskers in politics”. With these cute gentlemen we thank you for listening.