



Reading — what to purchase, and why?

Ingrid Atlestam

Kultur i Väst Regionbiblioteket Regionens hus
Göteborg, Sweden

E-mail: ingrid.atlestam@vgregion.se

Randi Myhre

Immigrant-institutet
504 51 Borås, Sweden

E-mail: randi.myhre@immi.se

Meeting:

133. Literacy and Reading with Library Services to Multicultural Populations

WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 76TH IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND ASSEMBLY

10-15 August 2010, Gothenburg, Sweden

<http://www.ifla.org/en/ifla76>

Abstract

Reading is not an activity for its own sake, but a means of learning, seeking information and acquiring new experiences. To promote reading the library must offer relevant reading materials, not just a haphazard selection of media in all possible languages.

The needs and preferences of public library services for individuals, who have another mother tongue than the majority population, in our case Swedish, have become more and more evident. In order to reflect on prevailing practices, the Gothenburg City Library initiated a study using 14 focus group discussions (Brunnström 2006). The analysis of the opinions of 154 participating individuals with varied non-Swedish backgrounds, combined with the analysis of borrowing figures, has made it possible to continue to develop services in the multicultural, multilingual society that Gothenburg is today with 21% of the population born outside Sweden (2009).

The Swedish study “More for useful purposes than pleasure” shows that the most important factors behind the demands of reading materials are: 1) why a person has moved to Sweden; 2) for how long she/he has lived in Sweden; and, 3) what future plans the individual has. These factors result in different needs of fiction, non-fiction and digital access. Individuals new in the

country are eager to learn the Swedish language and more about the society. They also demand books on how to manage their day-to-day lives, both in Swedish and their mother tongue. Individuals who have been in Sweden for many years search reading material with which they can maintain their contact with their original culture and language.

In this paper we will share what we have learned about this complex matter; how we can best plan our media purchases and stock our libraries in order to meet the needs of our increasingly diversified societies.

1. Background

An important task of the public library is to promote reading for all users. Restricted library budgets in combination with increased linguistically and ethnically diversified populations entail a great challenge to public libraries in terms of stock development decision making. In order to promote reading the library must offer relevant reading materials, not just a haphazard selection of media in all possible languages. The question that arises is, thus, what to purchase and why in order to satisfy the needs of immigrants and refugees, who, in Sweden, generally use more library services than the majority population, but borrow fewer books.

In Gothenburg 21% of the population was born outside Sweden and thus have another mother tongue than Swedish. In order to improve and develop the library services for this group, a special study targeting immigrants in Gothenburg was initiated by Ann-Christin Brunnström, librarian at Göteborg City Library, who has specialized in the purchase of non-Swedish literature. In 2003-2005 she carried out a study on local immigrant's views on library services in Gothenburg. The title of the report is **Mer nytta än nöje** (2006) (More for useful purposes than pleasure, our translation), which points at the results of the study.

Here we will present a summary of the results of the Brunnström study, highlighting the results that deal with media selection, and her comparisons with the Danish study **Frirum til integration** (2001) and present some suggestions for further development of library services.

2. Problem and methodology

Brunnström combined different methods to try to discover how immigrants view and use the public library. An adapted focus group method was used in combination with statistics on Gothenburg public libraries' stocks and loans in twelve languages.

2.1 Focus groups

Brunnström used a simplified form of focus group aiming at highlighting the participants' priorities. The starting point of the focus groups was the following question written on a whiteboard visible for all participants: "What is important to make the library a good library, for you and your family and friends?"

All suggestions put forward were listed and numbered on the whiteboard. A co-worker took notes on a computer and when no more suggestions were put forward, the list was printed and distributed to the participants who were asked to individually choose one third of the suggestions which they considered most important. The choices were then added up and top lists of priorities were thus created. The suggestions put forward do not only provide information on how the participants value the library services but also reveals their familiarity with what the libraries have to offer. What they knew about the offers naturally affected their choices.

2.2 Stock and borrowing

The common computer system of the public libraries in Gothenburg, Millennium, offers good opportunities to study what media is borrowed. A number of lists of literature in different languages have been used in order to examine how the stocks are used and to reveal trends.

The twelve language stocks examined were divided into the following five categories: 1) fiction for adults; 2) children's literature (both fiction and non-fiction); 3) language learning media and dictionaries; 4) humanities/society; and 5) everyday life handbooks.

The percentage for each category of the total stock in the twelve languages was calculated. The percentage of loans was also calculated, and then the ratio comparing the loans to the stocks. A percentage of loans higher than the percentage of the stock was interpreted as a well used stock. It might need to be extended with more purchases. The opposite proportion with a lower percentage of loans compared to the stock suggested that there was something wrong with the stock. The books might be obsolete and require weeding for example.

Frequently borrowed items were also listed and top lists were made for each language. To some extent who borrowed the books was also examined. However, for reasons of integrity no lists were printed and no results remain in the statistical module. The factors studied were age, gender and if the name indicated non-Swedish background.

Finally, the statistical results were compared to the priorities and views emerging from the focus groups in order to discover if the loans were concordant with the focus group results and shed more light on the emerging usage patterns.

2.3 Selection and implementation

In order to find a potential pattern in immigrants' perceptions and use of the public library it was important to obtain a well balanced focus group mixture. Important criteria for selection were gender, ethnic background, age, time of residence in Sweden and occupation. A prerequisite was also that some participants, but not necessarily all, had previous experience of Swedish public libraries.

In total, 154 persons took part in 14 focus groups composed of 5 to 20 participants. 56% of the participants were women and 44% were men. 33 different mother tongues were represented among the participants. Most participants also spoke the language of a neighboring country and

some also knew English. Two groups were composed only of women, one group only of men, and eleven groups were mixed. A majority of the participants had resided in Sweden less than 15 years; however some had lived in Sweden much longer. Most were “young adults” or in younger middle age. Some ten seniors participated. Young children were represented by preschool pedagogues. 40 % of all participants were adult students. Six groups consisted of persons from the same cultural background; Somalis, Finns, Russians, Bosnians, Latinos, Arabs. Other groups were mixed groups of students and a group of preschool pedagogues and a group of librarians. Most participants were refugees or relatives of refugees, although single individuals in all the focus groups had come for work or marriage. In the Finnish and Russian focus groups all participants had come for the purpose of work or marriage. The participants came from all continents except Australia and among the secondary school students there were interesting language combinations indicating ethnically mixed families.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Danish comparison

In Denmark a large study of ethnic minorities’ use of the library was made in 2001. The aim of the study was to investigate how ethnic minorities use the public libraries and the importance of the library in the integration process. Several methods were used: questionnaires, focus groups, and statistics of media usage during one day, analysis of the Immigrant library deposits, and interviews with library staff. The title of the study was “Frirum til integration – en brugerundersøgelse af de etniske minoriteters biblioteksanvendelse” (2001). The Brunnström study confirms by and large the findings in the Danish study.

3.2 The catalogue vs. the shelf

In order for the library to encourage reading, easy access to reading materials is a prerequisite. The participants state that they do not use the catalogue. They rather prefer lists of catalogue posts instead that they are particularly interested in. Even if the catalogues exist in their written language, with non Latin writing, there is no interest in this. They are not inclined to order books from other libraries either. What matters is what is on the shelf here and now.

Library staff confirms that library visitors who look for non Swedish literature seldom use the catalogue but prefer searching the shelves. The staff also found that immigrants mostly try to manage on their own and seldom approach the information desk to ask for assistance. Thus, the librarians do not get the opportunity to show how catalogue searches are made. Reluctance to contact the information desks is probably often due to language reasons. It also seems easier for immigrants to approach library staff on the floor. Among the majority population, we find that mainly students use the catalogue.

Little interest in using the catalogue was also found in the Danish study. As an Iranian explained, he wanted to hold the book in his hand in order to judge if he wanted to read it. Ordering books from the Immigrant library was not an interesting option to him, nor was it interesting to others.

A current trend in Swedish library administration is to reduce inter-library deposits and instead increase single inter-library loans on demand. This contradicts the focus group results expressing a need for more resourceful libraries with larger stocks of foreign literature on the library shelves for direct access to visitors with immigrant background.

This trend is also contradicted by the experience of library staff that work actively on the floor. The librarians point out that it is what is accessible on the library shelves when the visitor comes that decides whether immigrants will perceive the stocks as good and relevant or not. The same goes for the majority population's perception, however they benefit from a much larger selection and no language problems in terms of ordering books that they do not find on the shelves. The majority population also has greater opportunities of staying updated in media on new publications in Swedish and to know what it is possible to ask for. Thus, it has to be a priority to establish extensive media stocks in as many languages as possible and to keep the stocks updated.

3.3 Library staff and intercultural competence

Several focus groups highlight the importance of finding immigrants among the library staff. There are several reasons for this. It is not above all a matter of language, even if many would appreciate receiving assistance from a fellow countryman. Staff with minority background is perceived more as a symbol, indicating that it is possible to be employed in a profession that demands higher education for persons with a foreign background. There is also a feeling of greater security meeting people with a similar background. Common frames of reference are another reason for appreciating meeting someone from the same cultural sphere.

According to library staff with minority background themselves, they possess a special competence based on their knowledge of certain target groups, knowledge of publishing in the home country and more easily contacted by immigrant visitors. They may also function as interpreters and be able to assist in purchase and cataloguing of foreign literature in different languages.

The Danish study also found a need of employing staff with foreign background: "They understand foreigners better" as one of the participants stated. It also feels more secure. A participant in the Danish study mentioned that many feel insecure and embarrassed when meeting staff when they have not mastered the language.

Since more persons with other mother tongues than Swedish train to become librarians the need for a more ethnically diverse staff will be met eventually. In the meantime, there are several "social actions" that enables at least temporary admittance to work in library services for persons with minority background. The libraries should make use of this opportunity to a larger extent than what is done today, which is beneficial both to the library and immigrants who thus are offered valuable workplace training.

It is also important that public library staff increase their intercultural competence in order to better understand and meet the needs of globalization. A good practice example in Region Western Sweden is the European Social Fund competence development project “The Interlingual Library – opening up intercultural meetingplaces” (2009-2011) which has offered several courses for librarians and library management, including a course for librarians on infrastructure for multilingualism, traditional media, ICT, social and cultural dimensions and new methods, a cultural pedagogy course for librarians on initiating new methods developed, and a course for library managers and key persons on gender and interculturalism. The project results will be disseminated a.o. at the IFLA Satellite Conference in Copenhagen 2010 and via inspiration days 2010-2011.

(<http://www.bibl.vgregion.se/sv/Regionbibliotek/Konsulenterna/Projekt/Det-mangsprakiga-biblioteket--utveckling-av-interkulturella-motesplatser-/>)

3.4 The media stock of the public libraries in Gothenburg

Traditionally, media purchase in the various languages has targeted the rather well educated middle class. The libraries have mainly been passive receptors of a small number of publishing houses and bookshops specializing in the immigrants’ languages. Naturally, changes take place and the so called popular literature and best sellers are now all the more available on an international and multilingual market. The literature purchased by the libraries has above all been based on what certain publishing houses and bookshops have offered to the libraries, and not based on the visitors’ wishes and needs.

The stocks may also have an ideological bias. For example, a Bosnian library visitor pointed out that the stock in his language contained too much religious literature, while an Iranian visitor thought that the Persian books contained too much socialistic literature. A Russian respondent said that the so called exile literature, much appreciated earlier on, now is found obsolete.

Single sales companies easily come to play a crucial role, when the libraries lack linguistic or cultural competence. There is a prominent need for new methods and increased knowledge. Some guidance for future purchases may be obtained by studying what the library visitors select from the shelves. The method used in the Brunnström study was for this purpose to compare the stocks and actual loans. The literature was divided in larger categories within certain fields and actual loans of the different categories were expected to shed light on the library visitors’ preferences in a broad sense.

Statistics on stocks and loans were, as stated above, divided in the following categories: fiction for adults, children’s literature (both fiction and non-fiction), language learning, humanities and society, and everyday life handbooks.

The stocks in the different languages are of varying size; however the main categories for each language follow a similar pattern. Fiction for adults constitutes the largest category approximately 40 to 60% of the stocks. Children’s literature represents 20 to 30%. Non-fiction is

dominated by humanities/society with 10 to 20%. The smallest category is everyday life handbooks with only a few percent. The share of language learning materials varies but is always under 10 %.

Among those who move to Sweden for purpose of marriage, work or studies, many come from English speaking or German speaking countries. Books in, above all English, but also in German are traditionally bought to a rather large extent by Swedish public libraries. However, most of these purchases target library visitors who have Swedish as their first language. It is high time to rethink and also see these languages as “immigrant languages” and change the purchase principles accordingly. This also counts for French which is a reading language for some, e.g. from Africa, but here the purchases have mainly been made for leisure reading for a Swedish well educated target group.

3.5 Loans

Lists of stocks and loans were developed and compared by using the statistical module of the computer system, enabling a study of the stocks and loans of all the libraries in Gothenburg for each language. The results seem to indicate that the stocks by and large correspond to the visitor’s borrowing preferences. For each group the share of the respective stock to items frequently borrowed was compared.

The languages investigated were Arabic, Bosnian (here Serbo-Croatian written in Latin alphabet), Finnish, Chinese, Kurdish, Persian, Polish, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Thai and Turkish.

The language learning stock comprises above all media for learning Swedish, including dictionaries in the respective languages and Swedish or English. Language learning materials are of great interest. For the languages Arabic, Persian, Somali and Turkish the share of loans is several times higher compared to the stock. For all languages investigated, dictionaries are borrowed to a large extent. Among the most borrowed media in all languages investigated Brunnström found language learning materials, in particular dictionaries. The lists of the most frequently borrowed books suggest that reason for residence in Sweden, and length of residence in Sweden, are of importance for the literature borrowed.

Humanities/society includes literature in the fields of religion, philosophy, modern history, biographies, geography and politics. A large part of these books are oriented towards the country of origin. Items in the category humanities/society are borrowed in several languages to a smaller extent than their share of the stock. However, Arabic speaking visitors at Göteborg City library borrow these books to a much larger extent, comparatively to other groups’ loans in fiction. Religion and in particular modern history is attractive. For Persian and Arabic approximately 40% of the borrowed books belong to this category, for Kurdish more than 50%. The City Library books in humanities/society in Chinese and Russian are also borrowed to a larger extent.

“Everyday life handbooks” constitute a support in daily life in the new country. The category includes books on diseases, pregnancy, childcare, cooking, alternative medicine and driving license. Everyday life handbooks make up a minor share of the stock, only a few percent.

It can be difficult to interpret the low figures. These books are above all borrowed by people from the language groups that have been granted asylum and where new individuals continue coming to a larger extent. Books orientating in everyday life are mainly borrowed at the city district libraries. The share of loans is at least twice as high as its share of the stock. The topics within this category are particularly interesting to women.

Driver’s license media is an exceptional case. There is a great interest in different media, e.g. books, CD-rom and video, that support the acquisition of knowledge and skills required to obtain different types of driver’s licenses.

For all languages investigated, fiction for adults constitutes the major part of the stock. For long-term residents fiction tends to dominate the media being borrowed. According to demographical statistics, immigrants who have arrived more recently and are established through work or marriage show similar reading patterns. For Finnish and Polish, fiction represents over 80% of the loans. In both cases the loans are clearly above the share of the stocks of fiction. For the languages Bosnian, Chinese, Russian, and at some libraries also Persian, fiction represents about 60 to 70% of the loans, also above the stock share.

In Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish fiction is borrowed to a smaller extent compared to what is purchased. In particular fiction in Arabic seems to remain on the book shelves of the city district libraries. It might be that wrong books have been purchased or indicate different reading traditions.

Children’s literature in Swedish constitutes an important part of the media stock at the public libraries. There is a strong tradition of working with children’s reading at the libraries. This explains why children’s books constitute a relatively high share of the media stocks in the various foreign languages, usually around 30 % or more. However, the share of children’s literature loans is considerably lower. The figures are very low for Finnish, Polish and Persian. The share of media being borrowed is particularly low at the City Library, clearly below ten percent for several languages. Most likely it is because most children with immigrant background in Gothenburg live in the Northern and Eastern suburbs where they visit their city district libraries.

Parents borrowing books for their children play an important role, but teachers also have a large impact on children’s reading habits. Communication with librarians at Göteborg City Library informs us that the loans of children’s literature in other languages than Swedish dropped in conjunction with the reorganization of mother tongue training in Swedish compulsory school, where mother tongue training was moved to after school hours, and the number of children attending mother tongue classes decreased. However, Swedish school authorities have started to

reconsider this. Mother tongue training is recommended, as is training in the core school subjects in the mother tongue for small children and children who are newcomers. This may increase the demand for both fiction and non-fiction for children in their first language.

The Danish study was more comprehensive than the Swedish, studying not only how different ethnic groups use library media but also making comparisons with the majority population's use of library media. It turns out that immigrants borrow less in average compared to all users. This may be due to lack of media offered in the foreign languages. When the stock was enhanced with deposits from the Immigrant library, loans increased to the same level as users of the majority population.

3.6 The Swedish language and the mother tongue

Learning the Swedish language is crucial to the participants in the study. Practically all groups appreciate different materials that support language learning. The importance of dictionaries is confirmed by the number of circulations. Newcomers also appreciate easy-to-read literature for language learning purposes. Others highlight the importance of easy books with information on Sweden and Swedish history. Watching Swedish children's films together with children or grandchildren provides a good opportunity for language training that many have experience of. Several city district libraries have therefore chosen to purchase Swedish children's films.

The task of the Swedish Center for Easy-to-Read is to make news and literature available to people who have difficulty in reading or who have little practice in using the Swedish language. To date publishing of Easy-to-Read literature in Sweden is insufficient and mostly poorly adjusted for immigrants, part from the weekly newspaper 8 Sidor (8 Pages).

The students taking part in the focus groups also wished for more pedagogical support from the library for language learning and showed a particular concern for immigrants who are illiterate. A good practice example is the learning environment One step further (VIDARE) available at nine city district libraries in Gothenburg, offering activities such as language cafés for adult language learners, home work support and basic computer courses.

The comparison of stocks and statistics on media being borrowed show that language learning literature, dictionaries in particular, are frequently used by groups who are relatively new in the country, and that there is a large demand for Swedish language courses at all language levels and that the stock is far from sufficient.

Almost half the respondents in the Danish survey stated that the library is important for learning Danish. According to the librarians interviewed at Göteborg City Library newcomers often come to the children's section looking for very simple materials for language learning. A typical situation is a male refugee whose wife just arrived. He knows a little Swedish and his wife needed to learn the language too. Are there books combining words and images? How do you pronounce the Swedish words? They leave the library with a book for small children.

Adult students engaged in upper secondary studies often ask for materials in easy Swedish for their school assignments. Also parents ask for easy non-fiction in order to support their children with their homework.

School books for primary and secondary school in the mother tongue facilitates understanding of concepts and contexts, however Swedish libraries have by tradition focused more on purchase of fiction than non-fiction. It is time to reconsider and purchase more non-fiction and school books, and mostly in subjects such as natural sciences, in as many languages as possible.

3.7 Newspapers and magazines

Newspapers and magazines in different languages are mentioned by several groups but with varying motivations. One group considers mostly elderly persons who have strong bounds to their home country and will perhaps never learn Swedish.

People who have lived in Sweden for many years, like the Finnish speaking group, might not read Finnish dailies on a regular basis. Since current events in Finland are only accounted for in short in Swedish press, many would like to read more comprehensive accounts of the events in magazines and books. Many newcomers, above all refugees, want news from their home countries. This need is all the more met via Internet. Newspapers and magazines in Kurdish are the primary wishes of the Middle Eastern focus group. Sports magazines have been proposed in many of the focus groups and also women's magazines. According to the librarians it is above all men who read newspapers and magazines at the library, whereas women and youngsters seldom visit this part of the library. Thus, there is reason to add magazines that appeal to women and youngsters to the library offers.

None of the participants mentions newspapers on the Internet. However, since the study was carried out a lot has happened, more people now use the Internet and many libraries offer access to the database Library Press Display with newspapers in full text from all over the world. However, too few are aware of the rich resources available on the Internet in terms of press and news services. In this field a lot of information and marketing work remains to be done by the public libraries.

However, for many elderly the paper version is the only thinkable alternative, and elderly are often faithful and active library visitors, although they may not constitute such a large group.

In the Danish study a lack of sports magazines and women's magazines was also observed. One of the participants in the Danish study suggested a popular magazine with the motivation: "Women want the women's magazines in Arabic." The fact that some of the Arabic speaking women are illiterate makes it all the more important to offer easy to read materials with many photos.

3.8 The mother tongue and the home country

Many respondents feel respected and confirmed by finding literature in their mother tongue at the library and the mother tongue inspires a sense of joy and pride.

Taking pride in the culture of origin was particularly predominant in the Somali focus group. Story telling for children agrees well with the oral tradition of this country which did not receive its written language until the 70s. But, there is still a considerable lack of printed materials in Somali. Foreign literature from many different countries translated into Swedish should be available at the libraries, says one elderly Somali man. An immigrant librarian agrees, and considers it as a way of promoting understanding of different cultures. However, it is more difficult to realize since most of the literature translated into Swedish is from the Anglo-Saxon part of the world. Only a very small amount of books are translated into Swedish from the first languages of immigrants residing in Sweden, and most translations are published by small ambitious editing companies who volunteer to take on this cultural political mission without profit. However, the libraries must survey this publishing and prioritize these purchases over much of the Anglo-Saxon best sellers. It is probable that the share of translations into other languages than English will gradually increase as more people obtain bilingual competence and engage in translation and publishing.

In this connection we should not forget publishing of above all Persian, Kurdish and Somali literature in Sweden by small publishing firms or the author in person. The library should pay attention to this publishing in Sweden and other countries of immigration and exile.

Several groups consider important that children maintain and develop their mother tongue and learn about their family's country of origin. Informing about the home country is a frequent school assignment, where pupils turn to the library in order to find reading materials in both Swedish and their first language. The loan statistics also show that immigrants are interested in borrowing books that are on their countries and cultures of origin. Immigrants from the Middle East often borrow books on the modern history of their home country. This is not surprising given that many have migrated for political reasons.

Children maintaining their mother tongue and learning about their home country was considered important by several groups in the Danish study too.

3.9 Children

Children are considered very important to many of the focus group participants, whether they have their own children or not. Children's literature in the first language is the most important library service for the natural science student focus group and the Latin American group who has lived in Sweden for over thirty years. Primers in the mother tongue for children learning how to read and write e.g. the Arabic alphabet is mentioned in several focus groups, along with stories and fairy tales in their first language and factual study books on the country of origin. Many wish for recorded stories in their mother tongue enabling children to listen to their own language.

Several libraries in Sweden have initiated recordings of such materials, sometimes in cooperation with local preschools. However, a lot of work remains to be done in this field.

The children's relation to their mother tongue is a central issue for many. Children quickly learn Swedish and many prefer using their new language to their mother tongue. Parents who address their children in their mother tongue may well receive an answer in Swedish. The youngsters often lack the ability to read in their mother tongue and many parents find it difficult to enable the children to keep and develop their knowledge of the family language. This is an issue that troubles many and many wish that the library could support children's mother tongue development. Story-telling and other cultural programs in the children's mother tongue are considered important. Some libraries have tried to meet this demand, however much remains to be done in this area. Good practice examples are for example Parents Library Collections, targeted library introductions to parents, discussions between preschool teachers, parents, librarians and specialists in language development, multilingual story telling dramatizations and reading aloud events, offered at several public libraries in the European Lifelong Learning Project Libraries for All – ESME (www.librariesforall.eu).

Despite the importance accorded to children maintaining their mother tongue, parents do not seem to borrow children's literature to a large extent. At the city library only about ten percent of the total borrowings consist of children's literature, except in Thai for which it constitutes one fourth of the borrowings. This may be due to a lack of strong children's literature traditions in some language areas or that parents obtain children's literature elsewhere.

The Danish study observed that children borrow very little in their mother tongue by themselves, and this is also the experience of Swedish libraries. Recorded books in the mother tongue were requested in Denmark too. In the Danish study books for primers for children learning the Arabic alphabet were suggested, among the Arabic speakers in the focus groups in Gothenburg. At Göteborg City Library there is a demand for primers in many different languages.

3.10 Non-fiction

Non-fiction in the field of humanities/society is demanded and borrowed to a larger extent than their share both in Persian and Arabic, and also other groups wish for more non-fiction. In general, the libraries have been better at providing fiction, while underestimating and misjudging the need for non-fiction. The Danish study also noted that non-fiction was borrowed to a larger extent than expected. The most frequently borrowed books are from their own cultural sphere and thus cannot be replaced by translations of books published in other countries. In order to find "the right" books the libraries need adequate cultural and linguistic competence, which is mostly not the case today.

3.11 Everyday life handbooks

Everyday life handbooks became a popular library word in Gothenburg in the 70s. Medical literature and books on pregnancy, psychology, cookery, everyday economy, child-rearing, driver's license, basic computer books etc are gathered under this heading. This kind of literature

is considered very important in several of the focus groups, and as the most important type of literature in one group. A comment to the need of medical literature was: “We are beginning to grow old.” Librarians’ experience confirms that medical literature is increasingly requested, literature on age-related diseases in particular.

The need of handbooks can be understood in the light of the fact that many immigrants have lost their usual networks and ways to everyday knowledge. Titles in these fields show high circulation figures, in particular at the city district libraries, where the number of loans was at least twice as high as their share of the stock. This is the case for Arabic, Bosnian, Persian, Turkish and Kurdish, but not for Finnish, Spanish, Chinese, Polish, Russian and Thai.

The category everyday life handbooks include subjects related to home and family and attract above all women, predominantly from “asylum countries”. Considering that this category constitutes a very small amount of the library stock, it is safe to say that the previous purchase policy has disfavored women.

Medical literature was also demanded by Bosnians in the Danish study. In several of the Danish focus groups it was pointed out that non-fiction that is interesting to women is found in the field of everyday life handbooks. “There is not much for women”, a respondent stated. Borrowing figures indicate that literature on Western child-rearing translated into different languages is popular, as is literature on subjects such as psychology, cookery, beauty care, alternative medicine, and sexual guidance.

3.12 School books

Many immigrants engage in adult education in Sweden. This has entailed a high demand on adequate Swedish literature in the various subjects studied, such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and health care. Adults may ask for books at primary and secondary school level because of problems understanding the Swedish language.

School books in these subjects in the mother tongue is therefore considered important by many, both well established immigrants who have previous experience of this dilemma and newcomers who are in the midst of it. A Kurdish respondent explains that a subject such as chemistry demands terminology in the mother tongue in order to understand and retain the knowledge. Thus it is language difficulties that entail that study literature quickly emerges among the suggestions in the focus groups. Many chose to study subjects such as mathematics, physics or medicine probably because of the global work market for these particular fields of study. Technical terms and notions have to be contextualized in order for us to understand, and a dictionary is often not enough, but textbooks in the own language is also required. Especially the Somali group was keen on schoolbooks in their own language, but the problem is that few such books are available for purchase.

3.13 Civic information

Information on Swedish society in the first language is of course most important to newcomers. Easy-to-read books on Swedish society are demanded by all groups.

One third of Danish questionnaire respondents stated that the library contributed a lot to their knowledge about the Danish society.

Unfortunately very little information about the Swedish society is published in other languages than Swedish and there seems to be little ambition in changing this. All are supposed to access the information through so called Easy Swedish (LL Lätt Läst svenska). In this respect the Danish website www.finfo.dk is a best practice example, however to date nothing of the kind has been initiated by Swedish authorities.

Another solution to the problem is to show the translation tools available on the Internet, which at least may give the reader a gist of the contents of a digital text, although the results sometimes can be quite erroneous.

3.14 Learning English

People who migrate to Sweden often also need to learn English, a world language useful for tourism and in most cases a prerequisite for higher studies in Sweden. English has become increasingly necessary even in the Swedish society. Some newcomers are more motivated to learn the international language of English than Swedish which is spoken only by 9 million in a tiny part of the world, and some also intend to move on to an English-speaking country later on.

In recent years, the public libraries in Gothenburg have purchased a large number of English language courses based on e.g. Arabic, Persian, Spanish, Finnish, and Chinese for those who want to learn English without taking a detour via the Swedish language.

Moreover, English language training media are traditionally purchased by Swedish libraries and when studying the loan history on English media we see that they are borrowed by immigrants to a large extent.

3.15 Old books and new

Evidently people want new publications from their home countries. In the Danish study it was repeatedly stated that the library's books were too old. They called for new books, and there are few new publications offered. Sell the old books, some suggested. This is not as explicit in the Brunnström study because of the method used. What is important to you at the library? That you throw away or sell books is hardly a viable response. The Danish focus groups comprised fewer participants and the conversations made it easier to put forward views such as these.

Of course, the library must make more effort to find and also purchase the latest publications in the languages spoken in the country and keep track of stocks so that unwanted books are sorted out in order to meet the demand. This can be done with great advantage in dialogue with interested library users, as long as the library's selection principles are clearly communicated.

Otherwise, the stock in a particular language risks being characterized by a single persons' taste and preferences, according to our experience it then becomes too specialized and narrow.

3.16 Leisure reading and cultural programs

The focus group participants do not talk much about leisure reading. Most of the respondents interviewed have been granted residence in Sweden for reasons of asylum. Therefore they are likely to have more tangible needs than leisure reading, at least initially.

People who are well established with a long period of residence in Sweden or who have come to Sweden for work or marriage mostly borrow fiction, the literature category best represented in the library stock.

According to the library loan statistics, Russians are the greatest fiction readers. This is confirmed by the Russian focus group for which books in Russian for different ages are on their top priority list.

The staff at Göteborg City Library estimates that those who borrow books in Arabic, Persian and Kurdish are predominantly men. According to Brunnström's statistical calculations, they seem to choose humanities/society as leisure reading, in particular modern history and religion. This is confirmed by the staff's observations. In Persian 60% of the most borrowed examples have been borrowed by men and three quarters of the books in Arabic have male borrowers.

The focus groups were asked what they themselves considered as important and were in most cases not presented with suggestions or choices. Very few focus group participants suggested film or music as an important aspect of the library. When the focus group leaders finally suggested film or music the participants did not show much interest in the subject.

On the other hand, activities and cultural events are very much appreciated, e.g. author visits, storytelling, book circles and other cultural events for the different language groups, preferably in cooperation with their own associations. The libraries may meet the need of showing cultural pride by paying attention to festivals, authors' jubilees and other events.

In Denmark they also found a large amount of loans in fiction in the East Asian languages. Also in the Danish study men from Middle Eastern countries focused on subjects such as religion and modern history.

Of course, an important variable related to leisure reading, especially reading of fiction, is the variety in reading traditions. Russians and Finns are known to be great readers, while many non-European linguistic areas have other literary traditions. To some extent this is changing with the international bestseller culture that has spread more throughout the world.

3.17 The library premises

In order for the library to promote reading it is important that the library premises are found attractive, that it is a place people like to visit. Access to libraries in the vicinity is found

important in two groups and is a high priority among newcomers who have just started learning Swedish. Opening hours extended to evenings and weekends are important for the participating students.

Many wish for a quieter and calmer library with more study places. Brochures with codes of conduct for parents to read or more male staff are suggested in cases where the library is visited by noisy children. Youngsters wish above all for comfortable and pleasant seating areas with comfortable sofas, peace and quiet and a friendly staff. Not always quite compatible requirements for a small library!

Many want more computers. Librarians fully agree with this, they believe that access to computers for information retrieval, e-mail, chat and newspaper reading is a high priority. The lack of adequate IT resources is perceived as frustrating for both staff and visitors. Students often need more advanced IT equipment than many libraries are able to offer to date.

Other studies and experience show that persons with a mother tongue other than Swedish are "overrepresented" among library visitors, and especially in the use of library computers, copiers, scanners, faxes, etc. In this field the libraries provide an important, necessary, service, albeit insufficient, not so easily available elsewhere in Swedish society.

Signs, instructions, brochures and reading lists in various languages are needed in libraries according to several of the groups including those who are more established. To wander around the library not daring to ask for advice is considered an unpleasant experience. Some have visited the library for years without contacting the information desk, and thus without always finding what was requested. Signs in their own language, as well as lists of what belongs on the various shelves were also asked for in the Danish study.

Interviews with staff from city district libraries, which serves many borrowers with non-Swedish background, reveals that contact between staff and borrowers, are better in small libraries. As a visitor put it, "It is easier to find your way around in smaller libraries." The atmosphere in smaller libraries is more relax. It is also easy to find someone nearby that can serve as an interpreter.

4. Conclusions and suggestions

4.1 More for useful purposes than pleasure

The majority of the participants in Brunnström's focus groups have come to Sweden as refugees. The library has been used, by these individuals, as a means of integration into the country. It turns out that there are great similarities between the different focus groups and the individuals. Male or female, young or old, from Bosnia, Somalia or Kurdistan - the situation is the same. You have to learn Swedish, obtain education and work, and cope with everyday life and children and so on. The overall impression is that they above need public libraries for useful purposes.

The results of the focus groups suggest that gender, origin, age and employment are not so important to the choices made. The statistical processing partly provides a different picture. An examination of the Arabic and Persian loans shows that men are more mobile and visit the City Library. The number of female borrowers at the City Library is higher for the Persian language than Arabic.

Library usage seems to change over time, so that leisure reading in the mother tongue comes to dominate after a long period of residence. Leisure reading dominates also among some groups of newcomers. According to Brunnström, the deciding factor for how people view the libraries and how they use them seem to be their degree of establishment in Sweden.

Survey participants had experienced using the library while establishing themselves in Sweden. What emerges very clearly in most groups is the need for learning Swedish, and at a level that allows for studies and work. Demand for study literature in their own language can be seen as a need for language assistance. Everyday life handbooks are a category of books that one needs when the usual routes to everyday knowledge are no longer available.

The examination of the book stocks and usage statistics provides evidence that what people need, in order to facilitate establishment in the new country, is not available at the libraries to the extent needed. Literature supporting language learning is insufficient. School books in other languages than Swedish are lacking almost completely.

Children are very important for many participants. Usually children learn Swedish quickly. Several groups highlight the importance of supporting children in order to keep their mother tongue and learn about both old and new conditions in the home country.

Children and parents have different views of the Swedish language. Those who migrate in early age are often eager to learn Swedish - and do it quickly. But since language is related to one's identity and belonging, adults are eager that their children uphold their mother tongue.

The analysis of the statistics on stocks and loans do not provide a basis for the idea that there are real deficiencies in the children's book stocks in different languages. The fact that children often "become Swedes" faster than their parents do, is not really a library issue but must be seen as a more general dilemma. One way to satisfy both children and parents is by organizing multilingual storytelling and other activities for children in different languages, something which several libraries regularly offer.

Many feel a strong desire to preserve their cultural heritage, including those who have lived in Sweden for many years. Many want to stay updated with what happens in their home country. Thus, newspapers and magazines are interesting to many, as are books on religion, politics and modern history, and fiction from their own cultural sphere. The libraries' media stocks seem to correspond fairly well to these needs.

4.2 More for pleasure than useful purposes

In examining the library's stock in different languages and the statistics on loans another pattern emerges for languages like Russian, Thai and Chinese. Borrowing figures in these languages are high. They borrow mainly fiction, especially from their own country. According to Brunnström, these groups probably have a more solid base in Sweden for reasons of work, studies, marriage or a long time of residence in the country and use libraries more for cultivation and entertainment purposes.

Later investigations have shown that women are more interested in reading novels about personal relationships, while men prefer books oriented towards society. The collections have not been adequate in the first respect. Paying attention to women's need of leisure reading has really proved successful, especially since more modern books are now available in many different countries.

It is hardly reasonable - given the amount of languages, nor desirable - given the different needs, reading habits and range of offers, to develop "complete" libraries in every language represented in the country. However, the library should be responsible for leisure reading such as fiction, biographies and history in the various languages on request by the local residents. The current labor and student migration includes, to a large extent, persons who speak English, and a greater focus on English literature, including different types of everyday life handbooks, is therefore appropriate.

Many of the temporary settlers often lack access to literature and cultural events in their native language other than provided via the Internet and the library. On the other hand, they can also easily buy books in their native language via the Internet.

Migration across national borders is expected to increase. Thus, it is important to stay updated as to demographical changes and language groups represented among newcomers, both permanent and temporary settlers. Changes often occur rapidly, for example, during the past year, many thousands have come from China, India, Iran, Pakistan, and Ukraine to study or work in Sweden.

4.3 Digital services

The method used in the study to find information on immigrant residents views on the library services in Gothenburg build fully on the participants spontaneous suggestions. They are thus based on the participants' own experience of using the library. The libraries' digital service was not discussed in the focus groups. In order to use the digital services offered by the libraries technical skills are required, preferably also knowledge of the Swedish and English language.

However, to the library staff it is obvious that a lot of visitors with a foreign background are well aware of the demands and opportunities of the digital society. Some attend basic computer courses offered by many libraries and many borrow advanced computer literature in both Swedish and English. It is easy to notice with the naked eye that the public computers at many libraries today are mostly used by persons with roots outside Sweden.

But there are still many, among immigrants as well as the majority population, who are unfamiliar with the IT community and find it increasingly difficult to cope with daily situations that request digital skills. Bridging the digital gap is therefore a major challenge for public libraries and it is important that libraries spend more time and effort to this challenge.

4.4 Dialogue with users and some suggestions

One of the objectives of the Brunnström study was to create dialogue with library users with foreign background. One of the expectations was that library users would appreciate being asked for their views and opinions on the library services. The objective was met to a large extent. The focus group meetings themselves were found to be valuable. They show that it is important that all libraries invest in creating networks and a dialogue with local residents, regardless of their country of origin and mother tongue, in order to create a library service that corresponds to the residents' needs and requests. A good practice example in this respect is the installment of local multicultural advisory boards where librarians and selected local residents meet in order to discuss and develop library offers and activities (www.librariesforall.eu).

In the results of the study, Brunnström points out two different patterns of library usage. People who have a longer period of residence, come for work or come for family are more firmly settled in Sweden and use the library more as a cultural institution. They borrow above all fiction from their home countries. In the focus group interviews they also show a great interest in the library's cultural program for both children and adults.

For refugees, who are not yet as firmly settled in Sweden, the library serves as a resource for integration into the new country. Their most crucial need is to learn Swedish at a level that allows for study and work. Non-fiction such as everyday life handbooks and study literature in the native language facilitates their daily life and studies. For them it is also important that the children retain their native language and have knowledge of the country of origin. Newspapers and magazines in their native language offers an opportunity to stay updated on the home country. Library staff with foreign background is also considered important both for language and psychological support but also has a symbolic value.

The libraries should prioritize the latter group, that is, newcomers, primarily refugees and their families, who need support in creating a new life in this country. Knowledge of Swedish is important. All possible support in terms of language learning materials that libraries are capable of offering must therefore be obvious purchases, and more Swedish courses and dictionaries have to be prioritized. An important pedagogical task is also to show the resources available online, such as dictionaries, language courses and translation tools. More computers are needed for this. It would also be desirable to create combined materials of ordinary Swedish novels along with audio versions or film versions in order to obtain Swedish language training materials appropriate for adults. Easy-to-read books in different fields of study are also a prerequisite, particularly in health care and social care, where many of the students have a foreign background. It is desirable to purchase recorded educational materials for adult learners at the

primary and secondary school level and also study literature in their own mother tongue. Today it is common to purchase audio books in several languages. A problem, however, is that the production of audio books is very poor in languages needed for groups with a high degree of illiteracy.

There is also a great need to both expand and improve the marketing of other educational activities offered at the libraries, such as basic computer courses, homework support, language support and conversational groups, often organized in collaboration with volunteers from different NGOs.

Libraries should also continuously examine in more detail how the various stocks in different languages are used for evidence-based decision making for new media purchases in relation to the changing demographic situation in the area. It is also necessary, although not part of this study, to strive to find reliable sources for purchase and channels for all the relevant languages. This work should be organized at the national or Nordic level in order to obtain sufficiently competent and effective management. It is not reasonable that all local libraries should have to acquire the skills and networks required for a good library service in all the languages now spoken in the country. Meanwhile, the Internet offers new and more diversified possibilities for any library to buy books in many languages on the web, an opportunity poorly exploited to date.

Analyses of stocks, circulations and loans should be more frequently used as a method of assessment and planning of stocks and purchases. Focus groups and user satisfaction surveys should also be used more frequently for fine tuning evaluation and planning of the library services. Today most surveys do not target library users with non-Swedish background. Survey question schemes have to be adapted so that they target immigrants and refugees in order to discover what persons with another mother tongue than Swedish expect, need and wish of the library.

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