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"Knowledge and Information for Parliaments - a premise for democracy"

Motto: Delaktighet är nyckeln till demokratins hjärta.

Participation is the key to the heart of democracy.

(MP Eva Flyborg, Sweden)

SUCCESS OR UN-SUCCESS STORY

Cooperation between the Nordic parliamentary libraries since 1922

Tuula H. Laaksovirta, Finland

1. Every story has a beginning or two

This story has at least two beginnings.

The first beginning of the co-operation of the Nordic parliamentary libraries can be said to be the Christiansborg fire in 1884.

** Picture 1 : Christiansborg fire in 1884*

In October, the night between the 3rd and 4th, Christiansborg, where the Danish parliamentary library and archives are situated, is burning. "The night sky is in flames, like a purple storm racing through a black night", describes a Danish journalist H. Bangs the great fire. This is the second time that Christiansborg is burning. The first fire was a hundred years before (1794). On both occasions the cause of the fire was the careless use of tiled stoves. Christiansborg burned to the ground; two thirds of the library archives were, however, saved. It will take 20 years before the library is able to move to the new building in 1918.

In the year 1912, Victor Elberling is named the head of the Danish parliamentary library. To him we can give the credit for starting the co-operation between the Nordic parliamentary libraries. In the year 1917 he has an idea: he shall leave on a study trip to Sweden to get an inspiration for the use and decoration of the new Christiansborg library facilities. He is warmly received by a colleague, Vilh. Gödel. They do very well together. Inspired by that Elberling arrives at a conclusion that the co-operation should be widened to other Nordic countries. The gentlemen took for granted that the co-operation meant a meeting between the directors. Any co-operation needs a push, and at least one partner.

The second beginning is Europe's happy 1920s.

** Picture 2: The happy 20s*

European interaction is lively and the economy is roaring. A Nordic co-operation is in fashion. Libraries everywhere benefit from a favourable economic situation, and from a free international atmosphere. The Nordic co-operation of public libraries is made official in 1926. There is influence also on international level. The director of the Swedish national library Isak Collijn was the first president of Ifla (in 1927-1931). Titles "rise" as well. The title of the director of the Swedish parliamentary library changed to senior librarian others followed.

Elberling and Gödel would only have been able to meet with each other. They probably would have had a lot to talk about. However, Elberling decides to set on a Nordic journey in 1920 to see if the co-operation could be made even wider. There are a lot of points that should be considered together; cataloguing, classification as well as professional skills. All of the Nordic parliamentary libraries are rising fast. In the summer of 1920 Elberling visits Oslo, Stockholm and Helsinki.

The political circumstances are favourable. The Nordic co-operation flourishes within the politics of all four countries. Due to the changes in the state map of the Nordic countries the spirit of the time is creating and developing national institutions. Iceland has detached itself from Denmark on December 1st, 1918. Finland got independence 1917. Nationalism was strong in all Nordic countries.

The second beginning of the parliamentary libraries in the Nordic countries could be called "economical and socio-political beginning". This is especially true for the years 1920-1929. To begin any co-operation, a favourable socio-political situation is required.

2. before and after the beginning

** Picture 3: Every story has a beginning or two*

1. *The reason and at least one partner*
2. *Favourable socio-political situation*
3. *Positive experience of neighbourly help already existed*

Before Victor Elberling brought the idea to his colleagues that the parliament libraries of the North ought to have formally agreed forms of co-operation, there was experience of co-operation. The libraries had already been in touch with one another over a long period of time. All of the libraries had been founded at the end of the previous century: Sweden in 1851, Denmark in 1850, Norway in 1871, Finland in 1872 and Iceland in 1847. From the beginning there was co-operation within the use of the parliamentary documents and other official printed material of the respective countries. This had created a positive background for the idea of working together.

A need or will for a more comprehensive co-operation was demonstrated by the results of Erberling's suggestion. Everyone accepted his idea of formally defined co-operation. To quote his own words: "I was received everywhere with the greatest consideration and in my report to the Prime Minister on my return, I could declare with authority: the suggestion with regard to co-operation met with unanimous approval."

Since it was the Nordic countries, a written set of rules was first defined for the co-operation, to which everyone made a commitment. The rules, accepted in December 1920, had three parts: the rules concerning the exchange of material; providing professional assistance; and the meeting of directors, which was to take place every three years. Only after the rules were accepted the first meeting of the directors was arranged in Stockholm in 1922. In the first meeting it was required that the meeting would in the future have an agenda. The possibility of the group's widening to the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland was also contemplated. Finland (Bergholm) objected to the proposition and the subject was passed over. In the next meeting in 1925 in Copenhagen, a secretary was elected. The gentlemen: Gödel, Elberling, Fischer and Bergholm created a culture of Nordic co-operation, which is in force until the war in 1939.

3. The time of gentlemen

This first time period 1922-1939 may well be called the time of the gentlemen.

** Picture 4, 5: The Time of the Gentleman 1922- 1939*

- *Polite and hearty letters from one colleague to another, concerning the exchange and sending of material*
- *The chief librarians travel to the meetings by ships and trains, with a tuxedo, cigars and a pen in their suitcases*

- *The ladies of these gentlemen join the travels, and a specific lady program is arranged for them*
- *The conference dinner is held at the home of the host of the host country*
- *Small speeches are given. Both gentlemen and ladies make friends with each other*
- *The atmosphere is optimistic*
- *Meetings focus on a specific themes*
- *Meeting can last up to four days*

**Picture 6: The Time of the Gentleman 1922- 1939. Topics of the meetings:*

- Cataloguing,
- Acquiring material for parliamentary libraries
- The role of the library board
- A bibliography of the official national publications
- For whom is the parliamentary library meant for?

4. The interruption by the war

** Picture 7: The interruption by the war 1939-1946*

Everything gets dark.

The co-operation breaks down

The life in the parliamentary libraries is connected with the nation and its politics. The Second World War brings, literally, a darkness to Helsinki, as well as to Oslo and Copenhagen. Libraries are evacuated from the way of the bombs.

All Nordic countries have different war histories, a different history from different fronts and different politics. Each library has its own different circumstances and problems.

** Picture 8: Elsa Bruun responsible for the war children*

However, even during the war the previous co-operation is useful. When Sweden received 80 000 children from Finland during the war, they were escorted to safety in extremely difficult conditions by the director of Finland's parliamentary library Elsa Bruun. Let it be mentioned that not one child was lost. The registers were reliable.

When the meetings went on after the war (1946, 1949) the theme was the effects of war in each of the countries.

5. Planning and rationalising, no sign of hippies

During the last few years, the 1960s have been very much in fashion, even to the extent that it has affected the ship traffic between Finland and Sweden. You all are probably familiar with the great ships that travel between these two countries. Young Swedes come to Finland to shop for 60s stuff. Helsinki is the retro capital. I warmly recommend a nostalgia trip to Helsinki. However, in the co-operation of the Nordic libraries in the 60s and 70s, there is no sign of the hippie movement or of Marimekko. In fact, it is quite the opposite.

** Picture 9: Planning and rationalising. No sign of hippies*

- Planning, publications and visits (1961-1991)
- The change of generation - new directors at the beginning of 1960`s
- Skandia plan (1967-1978)
- Participation of the staff
- The rules of co-operation are specified
- The joint presentation of each library is published (1979, 1988, and 2001)

Socialistic countries have described their own history as being a history of endless planning. But the situation was exactly the same in capitalist countries. We all had a five-year-plan and a ten-year-plan. The parliamentary libraries joined a Skandia plan, which lasted from 1961 until 1979. One can look for comparison in the USA in Farmingtonplane and in West Germany in Sondersammelgebieten. The essence of the Skandia plan was to arrange the distribution of work in the acquiring of material. In 1967, parliamentary libraries form their own special committee to realise the Skandia plan. After many meetings, plans and exchange of letters the result was a simple distribution of work: each parliamentary library would acquire parliamentary documents according to the following agenda: Finland from Asia and the Balkans, Sweden from Latin America, and Norway and Denmark from Africa, Australia and New-Zealand. The Skandia plan is an example of planning for the sake of planning. In 1967, Finland's chief librarian Schauman writes of the operations during 10 years: "Among librarians, and elsewhere as well, one begins slightly to wonder how the plan will work. A lot has been talked about it, but practical results seem to be somewhat small. Will the plan remain a plan and never become a reality?"

The co-operation of the parliamentary libraries changes, with time but also because the participants change. A change of generation takes place in the Nordic parliamentary libraries. At the change of the 1960s every library has a new director. In the meeting in Oslo in 1964, the following gentlemen were present: Frykholm, Sörnsen, Torp and Schauman. As earlier the Finnish representative is Swedish-speaking and thinks well of the Swedes, so there is no language barrier. In the year 1973, the meeting is held for the first time in Iceland. From the year 1982 Iceland is a permanent member.

** Picture 10: The Swedish ferry, beautiful archipelago, and Marimekko*

In the year 1964 the participation of the staff in the co-operation and its organising is included in the agenda, in accordance with the spirit of the time. This co-operation begins with a professional course held in Oslo. The topic is, naturally, parliamentary documents. In 1967 the rules are slightly specified. This may be due mostly to the change of directors. It was necessary to bring the rules back to mind.

In the year 1979 a publication entitled "Libraries of the Nordic Parliaments. A short outline" was published. When new generations of leaders emerge, the presentation of the co-operation is renewed. Each time period provides its own interpretation of this co-operation. The publication's name changes somewhat with each decade. This also reveals the change of the libraries. First the libraries stabilise and then their context of mediating information alters.

** Picture 11: The joint presentation of each library*

1979 LIBRARIES OF THE NORDIC PARLIAMENTS. A SHORT OUTLINE
 1988 THE PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARIES OF THE NORDIC COUNTRIES
 2000 THE PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARIES OF THE NORDIC COUNTRIES
 AND OTHER INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION SERVICES IN
 THE NORDIC PARLIAMENTS

6. The female dominion and high technology

In the North, the library branch is women's branch. In the North, the technical level of libraries is the highest in the world. Does this lead to the conclusion that in the North women have created the technical level of libraries? No. That conclusion cannot be made. When the automation of parliamentary libraries and all other libraries was begun in the 1980s, gender had no part in it.

** Picture 12: The female domination and high technology*

*The development of the Library is a part of the development of the entire nation
 When the technological level of a country is high, so is the level of the parliamentary library
 When women are equal to men in a society, they are equal in working life as well*
 Gender as such is not an obstacle to directing. Neither is it an obstacle to learning about technology and mathematics. Obstacles are related to culture. They are built inside the heads of individuals, through circle of life and gradually through social interaction. The position of men and women is a contract of society. The position of a Nordic woman at the labour market is symbolised by the year 1991 in parliamentary libraries. In that year, all of the directors of parliamentary libraries are women. Perhaps even more significant than the gender is that over a half of these directors were recruited from business life.

** Picture 13: The female domination and high technology. Subjects of meetings*

- the introduction of internet*
- emphasizing customership in work*
- the internationalisation of all work*
- ongoing technical regeneration*
- the automation of traditional library functions or their extinction*
- the strong rise in the level of education of the staff and client*
- the integration and networking of information work*
- strategies*
- leadership*

7. Success or un-success story

Picture 14: Success or un-success story. Democracy is = Nordic cooperation is

- a) expensive*
- b) slow*
- c) it allows differences*
- d) it means learning from others*
- e) togetherness*
- f) experimenting: making efforts and mistakes*
- g) making friends*
- h) respecting other people's way of doing things*
- i) joining forces as, for example, in Ifla*
- j) pleading different causes, such as the EU, the Baltic countries*
- k) helping one another*

To answer to the question if the cooperation between Nordic countries has been successful or un-successful, we have to come to our theme for this meeting: ""Knowledge and Information for Parliaments - a premise for democracy".

**Picture 15: Colleagues at my home to be entertained by my music after the meeting before the dinner*

Has our cooperation been helping democracy in North? Is the co-operation between parliamentary libraries been a success or a failure? Human interaction is always a set of successes and failures so has also been our cooperation. It should be both also in the future. An interaction is a value in itself. It increases democracy. The Nordic co-operation is a study of democracy. Our co-operation has lasted for 83 years. It has gone uphill and downhill. No-one wishes for it to end. We will go on.