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DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN LAMS, AND THEIR PURSUIT OF COMMONS CHALLENGES

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As mentioned in Chapter 1, the conditions for libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs) have changed constantly throughout history in relation to wider societal changes. During the late 1900s and early 2000s, LAMs faced new, quick, and quite similar challenges, often linked to global trends and changes. In some instances, this also created incentives for new LAM collaborations. In this volume, we have discussed this development from different perspectives and highlighted differences and similarities among LAMs, using examples from Scandinavia. Furthermore, we have also discussed some of the important challenges that LAMs are facing today.

The historical section of the book (Chapters 2–4) shows that large national LAM institutions in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden started to form during the seventeenth century. As in other Western countries, the development intensified in the centuries that followed under the influence of the Enlightenment, the development of science, the rise of the bourgeois public sphere, and industrialization, which started in the Scandinavian countries in the late nineteenth century. The modern regional and local LAM institutions also emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. The development of LAMs was closely connected to the modern project and the demand for public enlightenment, as well as to nation building and the construction of national identities. In Scandinavia, the development of LAMs during the twentieth century was also connected to the creation of the modern welfare state, with cultural policies focusing on democratic and equal access to culture and cultural heritage, and on the right of citizens to free and reliable information (see Chapter 5).

The acronym LAM was used from the late 1990s as a collective term for libraries, archives, and museums. However, it also had an ideological dimension, implying that it was partly a common practice field with opportunities for

increased collaboration across institutional borders. As mentioned in Chapter 5, attempts around the turn of the millennium to create national LAM authorities in Scandinavia failed, although a national LAM authority existed in Norway for some years. Often, the collaboration has grown from the bottom up, in various regional and local projects, and through co-localization of different LAM institutions.

Similarities and differences

Perceiving LAMs as a partially common practice field presupposes some overlapping between libraries, archives, and museums. Based on Scandinavian conditions, it can be summarized in the following four points.

1 *LAMs are all engaged in the acquisition, organization, curation, preservation, mediation, and dissemination of material, carrying different types of information.* Although there have been examples, especially in ancient and older history, of true LAM institutions, there are differences in the practices of libraries, archives, and museums, as shown throughout this book. As discussed in Chapters 1–4, throughout history, libraries, archives, and museums have been given diverse societal tasks connected to different user groups and to different types of materials. This required distinct principles and tools, and thereby distinct competences among the professionals. Thus, it resulted in a divergent development of the LAM field, where separate institution-related discourses were constituted – one for libraries, one for archives, and one for museums. This did, however, complicate broader LAM collaborations. Today, separate laws define the missions and aims of libraries, archives, and museums, and no Scandinavian country has a common law for the entire LAM field. Nevertheless, in spite of the divergence, the borders between libraries, archives, and museums have always been blurred. Many archival institutions have libraries and collections of artifacts, many libraries have archives and collections of artifacts, and many museums have libraries and archives. Some materials – for example, image material – have traditionally been handled by all LAMs, but in various ways, depending on the different tools and practices (see Chapter 8; Kjellman 2006).

2 *LAMs are often referred to as our (society's) collective memory or "memory institutions," and their collections form part of what we call our "common cultural heritage"* (Dempsey 1999). However, LAMs handle different types of materials. The archival records and the library documents are relatively uniform – traditionally mostly paperbound and fairly easy to handle. Museum collections, on the other hand, include almost anything from microscopically small insects to large works of art or machines. This material is often fragile or difficult to move from storerooms, which explains why users mostly do not have

access to the collections in museums, like they have in archives and libraries. Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 7, curated exhibitions built on material from the collections are a central activity in museums, something that libraries and archives rarely have. The interpretation of objects in these exhibitions is an important task for the museums, and many large museums also have staff employed to research the collections. Generally, the staff at archives and libraries do not engage in interpreting the contents of the collections.

The focus on cultural heritage is most prominent in museums. Libraries and archives also have other important missions: Public archives provide the juridical system and the public administration with information, and handle the extensive material they continuously produce, while libraries are expected to promote information literacy. But there are also important differences *within* the three LAM sectors. For example, some research libraries, typically national libraries, have an archival function and are expected to save everything that is printed in the country for future generations. The public libraries, on the other hand, provide collections that are considered relevant based on contemporary needs and interests, and materials are withdrawn when they become obsolete or no longer considered relevant. As mentioned in Chapter 6, there are LAMs without collections.

The concept of cultural heritage also has an ideological dimension that is reflected in the building of the collections. Who defines what is considered a cultural heritage? The national discourse has been, and still is, important in that context. LAMs have had a nation-building function since the middle of the nineteenth century, but what that means has changed over time, and LAMs have gradually become more inclusive from a social and ethnic perspective.

3 *LAMs produce different kinds of documents and meta-information connected to the organizing, searching, and retrieving of information.* All three LAM sectors have knowledge-organizing systems (KO systems). As discussed in Chapter 8, both archives and libraries attach great importance to having public catalogs of their collections and fonds. Museums, on the other hand, rarely have public catalogs covering their complete collections. The difference is partly explained by the varying degrees of standardization. It has the greatest significance in the library sector, as the same publications are usually found in many different libraries. There has thus been a lot to gain from collaborating across the institutions and in creating common solutions, which can be illustrated by the fact that the Dewey Decimal Classification system is a national standard in many countries across the world. Standardization saves time and effort. Sometimes the archives developed standardized solutions too, albeit on a national basis. However, the diversity of materials in the museum collections may help explain why standardization is less common in the museum sector. It is difficult to build comprehensive KO systems

covering all kinds of material in museums. Yet, museums have an extensive production of printed exhibition catalogs, especially the art museums.

Even before the turn of the millennium, there were ideas of creating comprehensive KO systems for LAMs – digital catalogs that would enable users to simultaneously search for materials, such as photos or letters, in different LAM institutions. In general, the user perspective was often emphasized in the arguments for increased collaboration – the use of digital technology should enable new solutions for the benefit of users. As pointed out in Chapter 8, digitalization fundamentally changed the routines for KO. In the past few years, however, the focus has mainly been on full text digitization of material from the collections, which is especially important for museums in their effort to make the collections accessible to users.

4 *LAMs are considered important for an open and democratic society, and their work is largely determined by cultural and educational policy decisions.* There is great public support for LAMs in the Scandinavian countries. As stated in Chapter 5, most LAM organizations have been publicly funded for a long time, either because they are owned by the state or a municipality, or because they receive public support for their activities. LAMs are important components of a cultural policy that aims to offer equal access to culture. This unites Denmark, Norway, and Sweden and contributes to what can be considered a Scandinavian model for LAMs.

However, there are many policy decisions that affect LAMs in various ways. One example previously mentioned is the Public Lending Right, which has existed since the middle of the twentieth century in all three countries. This is a financial compensation given to domestic authors – writing both in the majority languages and in languages spoken by different minority groups – for their books being lent at public libraries. All the languages in Scandinavia are spoken by a small number of people, which makes the book markets small and book production costly. It is difficult for authors to make a living from their writing if their readers borrow the books from libraries instead of purchasing them. The purpose of the Public Lending Right is to promote domestic literary production, but it also contributes to the public library's nation-building function by supporting domestic literature.

Traditionally, public archives and libraries are free to visit and use, while museums have entrance fees. However, in some countries – including the Scandinavian ones – some publicly owned museums are obliged to be admission free, due to political decisions. Just over a third of the Swedish museums were completely free of entrance fees by 2020, according to official statistics (Myndigheten for kulturanalys 2021, 19).

The notion of what LAMs should contribute to society has changed over time. Recently, both libraries and museums have broadened their work and become cultural institutions offering different activities, focusing on community

building and user participation. Archives have not been affected in the same way, although they are now also expected to focus on mediation and on becoming user oriented. As discussed in Chapter 11, education policy affects LAMs – especially libraries – in relation to the promotion of reading, information literacy, and lifelong learning.

Challenges

The impact of digitalization

Digitalization has fundamentally changed the whole of society and is still a central issue for LAMs in various ways (Chapter 9). The change has meant both opportunities and challenges for organizations, staff, and users, but much of the utopian attitude that prevailed a decade or two ago has today been replaced by a somewhat more dystopian attitude when faced with difficulties connected to digitalization.

All LAMs use online platforms for communication. As discussed in Chapter 10, different kinds of platforms present different challenges. Internal platforms are expensive and require competence to maintain, which is not always available at small LAM institutions. Many users, or potential users, are active on social media, but global commercial companies with their own agendas run the social media platforms, and external platforms can be difficult to adapt to the missions and work of LAMs. Cross-institutional platforms maintained by many collaborating LAMs are a solution, but there still seem to be problems in communicating with users.

The technical development is very fast and it is important to ensure that today's solutions for digital storage will also work in the future. This poses a challenge, not least for archives, where more and more of the material is born and saved digitally. Today, LAMs have to recruit competences outside the traditional LAM professions to deal with issues related to digitalization. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the archivist profession was almost split into two different professions because of digitalization – one focusing on digital archives and the other on traditional paperbound archives.

When the Swedish Royal Library presented a proposal for a national library strategy in 2019, it emphasized the importance of making cultural heritage accessible to a broader public through digitization (Fichtelius, Persson, and Enarson 2019). This suggestion was partly a consequence of discussions about copyright and copyright costs, which is another challenge LAMs have to face in connection to digitization. There is still a lot of ambiguity about how the legislation should be applied to digitized material, which sometimes means difficulties for LAMs in making digitized material accessible. Paradoxically, digitization sometimes results in a situation where material is more difficult to access for users, as it is now hidden behind licenses with high fees. One example is the digitized twentieth-century Swedish news press. Difficulties may also arise for

LAMs attempting to arrange social activities, such as lectures, discussions, and public readings, in digital media if copyrighted material is to be used. However, in 2019, the European Union adopted the *Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market*, which aims to update and harmonize copyright law in the member states, in order to better meet the challenges of digitalization and the Internet. *The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)*, which came into force in 2016 with the aim of protecting people's personal privacy and preventing personal data from misuse, also affects LAMs' digitization of materials.

LAMs' acquisition of digitally published material is more complicated than the acquisition of paperbound material. Ebooks and audiobooks are accessed through license agreements, where fees are mostly linked to the number of downloads. This has resulted in difficulties for public libraries in predicting their costs for digital material, costs that have often become very high. In order to handle the situation, limitations are introduced at many libraries for the number of ebooks a user can download during a certain period – a new and uncomfortable situation for an institution whose basic mission is to increase the reading of literature in society. The situation became especially problematic during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021, when LAMs were forced to switch from physical to digital activities. In some Swedish municipalities, there was a dramatic increase in the number of downloads, leading to a complete stop in lending of ebooks due to runaway costs (SOU 2021:77).

Despite digitalization, the ever-growing amount of material to be documented is difficult and expensive for LAMs to handle and store. This is especially noticeable for archives. As mentioned in Chapter 3, decisions have been made to use different kinds of sampling in order to keep the volumes down. Since the new Swedish Museums Act was introduced in 2017, museums have been able to withdraw objects from their collections, something that was not common practice previously. The large and old research libraries used to save nearly all the printed material they received through the Legal Deposit Act, but today they continually withdraw items and create collection strategies. Swap agreements between research libraries used to be important, but they hardly exist anymore. How to curate the collections in a sustainable way for both contemporary and future users is a difficult challenge, as discussed in Chapter 7.

Legitimacy and democracy

As pointed out in Chapters 13 and 16, there is an increasing external demand on LAMs to show relevance and to legitimize their work. This is partly a consequence of digitalization, but also a result of the efforts by the state and the municipalities to coordinate resources in a cost-effective and sustainable way. The competition for public resources among different societal institutions is increasing. This has sometimes affected LAMs negatively. For example, there has been a considerable decrease in the number of libraries in the Scandinavian countries

in recent decades, as the municipalities have tried to reduce their library costs by closing local public library branches.

Consequently, LAMs put a lot of energy into explaining the value of, and need for, what they do, and into adapting to changing needs, expectations, and opportunities. The way in which LAMs support democracy has been important, and traditionally they have supported democracy by giving access. However, LAMs seek to broaden the understanding of what democracy means (Kranich 2020). For instance, their social and community-building roles have been strongly emphasized in recent years, which is described by researchers as "the social turn" (Söderholm and Nolin 2015). As discussed in Chapters 6, 14 and 16, LAMs' opportunities to fulfill their democratic role lie today largely in how well they succeed in community involvement at different levels, i.e., national, regional, and local, and vis-à-vis different social, ethnic, and age groups. This is also an important challenge, and inclusion and diversity play a central role. LAMs serve as meeting places and arenas for public debate, and offer a wide spectrum of activities and programs, both on-site and digitally (Audunson et al. 2020). User participation is part of the community involvement. User participation, as pointed out in Chapter 12, has developed in various forms in LAMs during the past few decades, something that is illustrated by the concept of "the participatory turn," reflecting a changed view of the user. The importance of LAMs for both informal and formal learning has also increased. As discussed in Chapter 11, literacy could be a concept connecting local everyday practices with social significance for LAM institutions.

LAMs and activism

As pointed out in Chapter 15, activism has not been as prominent in Scandinavian LAMs as in some other countries. This is due to the fact that the politicizing of LAM institutions and LAM professions has not been as strong here, which, in turn, is explained by the countries' educational and cultural policies. Legislation is important in ensuring LAMs' independence, and the so-called "arm's length principle" determines the relation between politicians and LAM professionals, both at the municipal and state levels. It means that politicians set the frames through cultural policy and public grants but leave it to LAM professionals to transform this into concrete activities. This principle is central to the Nordic cultural model (Duelund 2003, 505) and has thus served as a counterweight to the politicizing of LAMs that is observed in other parts of the world (Koizumi and Larsen 2022).

However, although internal activism is not very prominent, discussions and opinions in society sometimes lead to activist demands and actions, putting external pressure on staff, collections, and activities at LAMs. A current Scandinavian example concerns the photos of Sámi people in a photo collection created by the State Institute for Racial Biology that existed in Sweden between 1922 and 1958 (Kjellman and Eld 2019). The archive from the institute is held

in the university library in Uppsala, but in recent years there have been demands from the Sámi minority to take over the responsibility for the Sámi photos. The library, on the other hand, claims, based on the provenance principle prescribed by the Archival Act, that the photos must not be viewed out of context (SVT Nyheter/Sápmi 2022a, 2022b). The question is whether material collected for research almost 100 years ago, in a way that today appears ethically indefensible, should still be publicly accessible as documentation of a dark part of history. Or, if the integrity of the depicted individuals is more important, and justifies a relocation of the material to the minority they were a part of. Is it up to them to decide what should happen to it?

Many LAMs face similar challenging discussions today. The discussions cover all types of material, from human remains, and art and cultural artifacts, to documents and photos, but also printed books that are regarded as controversial, for example due to minority offensive language. "Banned books" are nothing new, but today the discussion about this phenomenon has broadened and includes new groups that question the content of collections and fonds in new ways. Power is important from the postcolonial perspective: Who owns the cultural heritage, and whose interests are reflected in legislation? This is important for the community-building work and understanding of democracy at LAMs, especially in relation to the ongoing digitization of old artifacts and documents, making this material publicly accessible to a completely new extent.

LAMs and societal crises

Crises related to natural disasters such as fires, hurricanes, and floods are potential threats to the collections and premises of LAMs. At the same time, institutions like public libraries can take on important roles in rebuilding communities after such a crisis (Dickerson 2008; Jaeger et al. 2008). In Scandinavia, the COVID-19 pandemic also drew attention to the importance of LAMs mediating public information and cultural experiences digitally, as local public meeting places had to be closed due to infectious disease restrictions.

LAMs have been destroyed in war many times throughout history. The Swedish army looted libraries in central Europe during the Thirty Years' War in the seventeenth century and brought the books home as booty. The Nazis engaged in systematic looting of LAMs, both in Germany and in occupied territories (Pettegree and der Weduwen 2021, 173–174, 323–349; Rydell 2014). As mentioned in Chapter 2, about 50 libraries were destroyed in Norway during the German occupation. Often looters had economic motives, but the lootings were also expressions of *identicide* – a deliberate, systematic, and targeted destruction of artifacts, books, and other symbols and property representing the cultural heritage and identity of a people (Meharg 2011). Identicide occurred in the Balkan wars during the 1990s and in the Middle East when ISIS destroyed cultural

heritage – for example, when a museum and several libraries were looted and destroyed in Mosul, Iraq, in 2015 (Turku 2017, 42). With the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Europe is facing a new war, and all Ukrainian LAMs are trying to protect their collections from bombing and looting – sometimes with support from LAMs in other countries. Simultaneously, they are working to maintain a digital service to provide residents with official information about the current situation, and helping refugees. This, of course, is extremely challenging work, and it emphasizes both nation building and an activist role for contemporary LAMs in times of war.

Final remarks

In this book, we have described the development of LAMs throughout history as a diverging process. However, the various rapid and global changes in recent decades have presented LAMs with new and common challenges, which must be addressed, and where LAM collaborations sometimes have been the solution, a converging development. There is still much that differentiates LAMs in terms of missions, traditions, and working methods. But for LAMs as a whole, the changes from the past few decades have meant a changed view of the collections, of digitization, and of participants in LAM activities.

We have discussed the development and challenges of LAMs based on the situation in the three Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Our conclusion is that a Scandinavian model for LAMs can be distinguished, based primarily on the perception of publicly funded LAMs as an important part of the welfare state. In the Nordic region, both culture (Duelund 2003) and media (Syvertsen et al. 2014) policy is seen as an extension of the welfare state, with free and democratic access to culture and information as important values. As demonstrated throughout this book, LAMs play important parts in supporting open and democratic societies. Legislation and the arm's length principle provide independence to LAMs, while simultaneously protecting them from a politization of their activities.

"Legitimation," "sustainability," and "democracy" are keywords when defining contemporary challenges for LAMs. In order to preserve the trust LAMs have gained from politicians and the general public, LAMs must be able to explain and defend the worth of what they do, and they must adapt to the sustainability agenda – not only in relation to cultural heritage and climate, but also in relation to a sustainable social and economic development. The nation-building function has become more inclusive from a social and ethnic perspective and has taken a somewhat new direction, in that LAMs are considered important in different types of societal crisis. Their role in emergency management and civil defense has been emphasized during the COVID-19 pandemic and is being brought up again with the invasion of Ukraine.

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