

Beyond the Library Collections

Proceedings of the 2022 Erasmus Staff Training Week at ULiège Library

François Renaville and Fabienne Prosmans (Eds.)

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Collection management collaborations in Sweden

Karin Byström

Abstract

This paper will describe the background and progress on two collection management projects—the digitization of Swedish print materials and a collaboration on shared print. The author has many years' experience of working on both projects, and the paper gives a detailed picture of the ambitions, work and results. It concludes with some potential long-term effects of the projects that go beyond the initial scope, like the need for a shift from a local to a national and global perspective and for shared infrastructure.

Keywords

Collection management; Library collaboration; Digitization; Shared print; Academic libraries; Sweden

Article

Introduction

This paper will present two ongoing collection management projects in Sweden—the digitization of Swedish print material and a national collaboration on shared print.

They might seem different at first, but they have a common goal—to provide easier access to material for users—today and in the future. Libraries work together to achieve the goal by increasing digital access and securing print copies in libraries.

Digitization of Swedish print material

A digitization collaboration started between the National Library and the five largest university libraries (Lund, Uppsala, Stockholm, Göteborg and Umeå) in 2020. The goal was

to make all Swedish print content easily accessible and freely available for research and to the public.

The libraries signed a “letter of intent” with the ambition to digitize and make all Swedish print available ([Grönvall et al., 2020](#)). It was a bold statement and the purpose was to draw attention to the fact that so little of this material is available in digital format.

The letter of intent stated that libraries would work on increasing the speed of digitization, and would develop better systems for access and tools to use the material. They would work for joint standards and strategies to work together in the same direction. They also committed to flagging the need for additional funding since it is not possible for libraries to achieve this within their current budgets.

The goal was a long-term national solution for funding and shared infrastructure for access and use, where libraries work together instead of from a local perspective. The collaboration based on the letter of intent was called DST—Digitization of Swedish Print ([Samverkansgrupper: Digitalisering, 2021](#)).

Start of the collaboration

In February 2021 Karin Byström became project manager and set up five working groups. The working groups focused on:

- scanning and technical standards,
- access, metadata and copyright,
- collections and library collaboration,
- external collaboration and communications,
- financing.

In total, over 25 people from the six libraries were part of different working groups. The groups use a Confluence Wiki for collaboration. The head librarians of all university libraries and the deputy National librarian make up the steering committee. The project manager makes the yearly plan, reports on progress and raises strategic discussions with the steering committee.

During the first year, focus was to build a foundation for collaboration. One important task was to define “Swedish print” as material printed in Sweden (but also from areas that at some point in history used to be Sweden, i.e. Finland). The libraries also decided on a technical standard for scanning, based on international standards like FADGI.

All libraries also agreed on a joint selection priority. If there was room for some extra, internally funded digitization libraries should prioritize:

- journals 1850–1900,
- dissertations from their university,
- the oldest material from 1400–1500.

To increase the findability of digitized material in Libris (the Swedish national catalogue), the libraries worked together with the National library to set up a specific search for Swedish digitized print material. This makes the material easier to find on a metadata level.¹

During the first year there was also a lot of external communication about the collaboration—a public webpage ([Informationssidor för digitaliseringen, 2021](#)), a newspaper article ([Burman et al., 2022b](#)), a radio interview and a webinar. There was also a seminar at the Gothenburg Book fair in September 2022, where representatives from the DST collaboration discussed researchers' needs for digitized material with Nina Tahmasebi, Associate Professor in Natural Language Processing at Gothenburg University ([Burman et al., 2022a](#)).

No shared infrastructure

All of the libraries in the DST collaboration have their own digitization studios, established workflows and competent staff. Libraries work with digitizing collections as a way of making them more visible and usable. Digitization also reduces the need to handle and read the original material, so it is also a way to protect fragile material.

The libraries usually collaborate with researchers in funding specific digitization projects. Researchers can include funding for digitization in their research grants if they need digitized material. However, the libraries also fund digitization of selected collections, like dissertations from the university or special collections.

However, there is no shared infrastructure or user interface for digitized material, instead there are many different publishing platforms used by the libraries. Different platforms are used for different types of materials, so users need to search in many locations:

- Alvin—digitized cultural heritage, journals and monographs (Uppsala, Lund, Göteborg)²
- Diva—scholarly material (Uppsala, Lund, Umeå, Stockholm)³
- Gupea—scholarly material (Göteborg)⁴
- Digital collections platform (Nainuwa)—digitized cultural heritage (Umeå)⁵
- Open Journals (OJS)—digitized journals (Lund)⁶

1. <https://libris.kb.se/deldatabas.jsp>

2. <https://www.alvin-portal.org>

3. <http://www.diva-portal.org>

4. <https://gupea.ub.gu.se>

5. <https://digital.ub.umu.se>

6. <https://journals.lub.lu.se>

This means that it is not possible to search all digitized material in one platform.

Not much digitized material

There have been some larger digitization projects, like the digitization of Swedish novels by Litteraturbanken,⁷ Swedish newspapers by the National library⁸ and dissertations done by many of the university libraries. However, only about 5–10% of the copyright-free, Swedish print is digitized, and a rough calculation showed that it might take up to 300 years to complete digitization if it continues at the current pace.

Many other countries have digitized much more or have even completed the process. One important explanation is that there is no government funding for digitization on a large scale. This lack of digitized Swedish material means that it is difficult to conduct research on Swedish conditions (Burman et al., 2022b). Digitization is an important part of making the print heritage visible and encouraging researchers and the public to use old sources. In this way, it functions as a support for a democratic society.

Improving visibility and use of digitized material

One of the goals of the collaboration was to improve visibility and usability of digitized materials. It is important for libraries to be able to meet the new user needs coming from the research world.

The working group for Access, metadata and copyright conducted a small workshop to identify these user behaviors (Fig. 1) and user needs (Fig. 2). They visualized the broad spectrum of needs on the scale from doing a manual analysis to an automatic analysis, and working from a specific interest to doing an open exploration.

The result showed a very diverse and broad set of users and user behaviors—and it became clear that there is not *one* way of using digitized material. A researcher in digital methods needs large data sets that are easy to download, and a genealogist wants to search for a specific name or place in materials from many different sources, while a private person is looking for a famous quote or an old recipe.

7. <https://litteraturbanken.se>

8. <https://tidningar.kb.se>

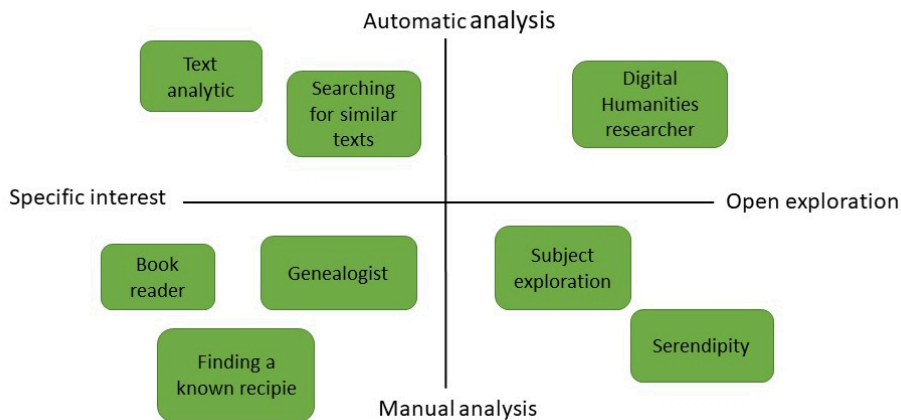


Figure 1: User behaviors in using digitized material

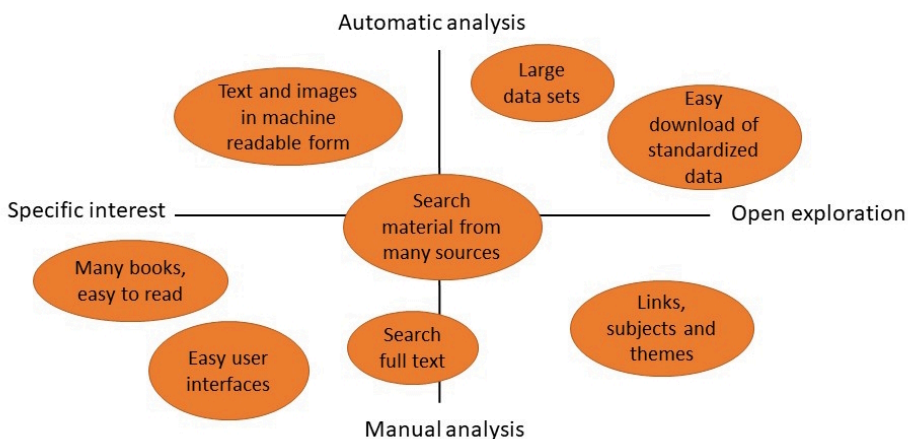


Figure 2: User needs in using digitized materials

While continuing to meet the traditional user needs, libraries must also support the new research methods that uses text as data, like digital analysis and text mining, which use machine-learning algorithms to analyze huge amounts of text. For this type of research, the original text itself almost loses its interest, and the focus is on language development and how trends and changes in society are reflected in texts. To meet these research needs, data must be open and connected with other digital collections and datasets. This requires standards for metadata and data files, use of open linked data and APIs for automatic transfer of data between systems and to users.

The Access working group listed the most high-priority user needs:

- to have a single user interface for digitized material from all libraries;
- to be able to do a full text search of digitized material;
- to have options for automatic download and analysis.

After the workshop and analysis, it became clear that the participating libraries do not meet these needs today, despite all their good work and well-developed platforms. The problem is not only the lack of specific functionality, like APIs and full text search, but also the fact that there are so many platforms, which means that users can't get an overview of existing digitized material, let alone combine and use material from different platforms effectively.

The steering committee decided to investigate ways to gather all digital objects so that they are accessible regardless of the owning library or institution. The Access working group looked at different solutions, and found a possible solution in a new data platform developed by the National library, *data.kb.se*. During the spring of 2022, the group and project manager conducted an investigation regarding the possibility of all libraries using that platform. The focus was on the technical, economical and legal consequences for both the National library and the university libraries, as well as future collaboration and workflows.

The recommendation was to set up *data.kb.se* as a shared infrastructure based on the “minimal viable product” concept, where the first product is usable, but does not have all the desired functionality. This is a way to get the work started and to be able to develop and expand over time. The solution would build on the existing infrastructure for digital preservation and access used by the National Library, but be expanded to host digitized Swedish material from the other libraries too ([Byström, 2022](#)).

Continued work

The steering committee reacted positively to the suggestions in the report, but there are many remaining challenges in setting up a new shared infrastructure. The questions of funding and collaboration for short- and long-term system development and maintenance must be further investigated, especially by the National library, who would be host of a new system. This will continue during 2023.

The working group for Scanning and technical standards are investigating options for outsourcing the scanning process and increasing the level of automation in metadata creation and file delivery. One example is to create automated bibliographic records for the digital version from the record of the print material. These changes in the workflow would mean that the libraries would spend less time on cataloguing and be able to scale up production.

In parallel to these activities, the working group for Collections and library collaboration is planning extended collaboration for sharing knowledge and experiences between the libraries. The DST collaboration will also establish contact with the research community for expert reference groups.

In a report from 2022, the Swedish Library Association highlights the need for digitization at scale and points to government funding, a clear commission to the National library and stronger library collaboration as important parts of the solution ([Sjöström, 2022](#)). The DST collaboration attempts to raise awareness of the digitization situation and to increase the dialog with university leadership, research funders and politicians. It is clear that libraries need additional funding for the work—both for the digitization itself and for system development. Even if the collaboration has not received any additional funding yet, the question of digitization is on the table and is discussed more than ever before in the library sector.

Shared print

Another ongoing Swedish project is a national collaboration on shared print and joint weeding and preservation. It has not progressed as far to date, but has the potential to have a big impact on the long-term work with print collections.

Background

Collection building at Swedish research libraries was investigated in a report from 2018 ([Kungliga biblioteket, 2018](#)). The report made it clear that many research libraries did not consider themselves as collection-building libraries—at least not for print collections. The report also showed that there was extensive weeding of print collections from research libraries. Statistics show that the print collections at university libraries decreased by 18% between 2015 and 2017. Much of the material that is weeded is the “half-old” material from the 1960s and 70s, that is not of high interest right now, and libraries make short-term weeding decisions based only on local needs and today’s immediate requirements. As a collective, Swedish libraries are losing both breadth and depth in the collection.

The report also highlighted the insecure situation for special libraries. They are often part of an institute or government agency, and when the parent organization has financial problems, the library risks budget cuts. There have been some closures of special libraries (the library of Statistics Sweden in 2019).

Sweden has a legal deposit law that regulates that two preservation copies should be kept at the National Library and Lund University. However, these copies are also for use,

both in special reading rooms and for interlibrary loans, so they might be lost or torn. This means that there are no secured copies for the future, even for Swedish material. The new national Library strategy raises the need for a better strategy for handling and preserving physical collections ([Regeringskansliet, 2022](#)). At the moment there is no format for collaboration on collection building or guidelines for weeding.

With this background, the National Library started a project in 2019 to look at the possibility of creating a “National framework for weeding and preservation”. Karin Byström was the leader of that project and there were project members from both the national library, university libraries, special libraries and the library deposit.

The group organized many workshops with libraries to understand their wishes and demands regarding a shared print solution. The group also looked at shared print solutions in other countries like the UK, USA and Norway to understand if there were any suitable options for Sweden.

A vision for a national collaboration was created: “research libraries collaborate in the long term and take joint responsibility for saving, preserving and making available material for the needs of today and the future for all their target groups”. In order to achieve that vision there needs to be common principles for collaboration, preservation and access. A survey showed that almost 100% of higher education and special libraries would be interested in a collaboration based on the vision and that there was extensive interest from libraries in terms of working together more closely.

The final report was called “Everything for everyone, always”—a bit over the top, but it also symbolizes the ultimate vision—that libraries can give users what they want, now and in the future ([Berglind et al., 2020](#)).

Start of collaboration

After the project, the National library organized round-table discussions with libraries to confirm the interest, and then set up the beginning of the collaboration in the spring of 2021 with a steering committee and a working group ([Samverkansgrupper: Nationellt, 2022](#)).

A letter of intent was developed to set a solid base for the collaboration. It states that print preservation and joint weeding are areas where libraries need to work together more closely ([Avsiktsförklaring, 2022](#)). The first libraries to sign were the nine libraries from the steering committee, and after a call to action, many more libraries signed. In August 2022, about thirty libraries had signed.

The purpose of the collaboration is clarified in the text: “With this letter of intent, libraries want to clarify their shared responsibility and the need for national coordination to ensure the long-term supply of information in the form of print material.”

National collection analysis

The first concrete step for the working group will be to carry out a national collection analysis using metadata in the national catalogue Libris. The aim is to perform an analysis similar to one in the UK, called Strength in numbers ([Malpas & Lavoie, 2016](#)). That study found that only a few copies were held of a relatively large number of books, and that scarcity is common.

A national collection analysis will give a general overview of the national holdings of print monographs and journals and a better understanding of the possibilities and challenges. Interesting questions are how many records have few (or only one) holdings and records with many holdings. It will also be interesting to see how the collection is distributed between library types and regions in Sweden. From the collection analysis, the working group hopes to identify areas of collaboration on preservation and weeding. The first preliminary results and metadata problems are described in a recent article in *Library Management* ([Byström et al., 2022](#)).

Conclusion

Both projects show new ways for libraries to work together with collections in Sweden. They are both large and demand united resources—no one library can do it alone. Libraries do this by resource sharing and by sharing the burden. By sharing collections, competencies and staff as well as systems and standards, libraries can create something beyond the reach of a single library.

In the future, there will be great opportunities for synergy effects between the projects. Digitization could be a solution to increase access to last copies. Additionally, duplicate copies of journals could be used for quick and cheap digitization.

There are also some positive long-term effects of the collaboration that go beyond the scope of shared print or digitization. Both projects show the need for a shift from a local focus to national collaboration and the need for shared infrastructure for collection management and resource sharing.

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Karin Byström (1973) is a librarian at Uppsala University Library in Sweden where she works as a coordinator at the Media division. She has extensive experience of working with many parts of collection development – cataloguing and acquisition, e-resources and open access, digitization and shared print. Karin has an interest in library collaboration and she has been involved in many Swedish library collaboration projects. She is currently the project manager of the collaboration for Digitization of Swedish print and part of the working group for the Swedish shared print initiative. Since 2019 Karin has been a member of the standing committee of the IFLA Acquisition and Collection Development section, where she currently holds the position as secretary.