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### **Experiences of Job Exchange**

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First I would like to thank Andrew Cranefield and Stuart Hamilton for inviting me to talk about my experiences of job exchange. My name is Sidsel Hindal and I work as an advisor in the Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority, in the Department of Strategy and Planning. For practical reasons I will use the authorized Norwegian short-version, ABM-utvikling. I must say I feel very honoured to be one of the speakers in this session. I find it very important to have a forum, which can act as a facilitator in introducing and including new professionals to this huge and complex organisation. I feel that it is a good strategy to have a forum for issues that are specifically relevant for you, and job exchange is a clear choice. And when I learnt who the other speakers were, among them Alex Byrne, the IFLA-President Elect, I became even more honoured, and if I may say so it made me a bit more nervous. However, I am proud to say that I had the pleasure to meet Alex Byrne a few years ago when I participated in a study tour to Singapore and Australia.

My presentation is based on personal experiences from various international activities over the last five years. First, I would like to briefly introduce myself – I have a master in history - a degree, which includes social anthropology and cultural science. Before I joined [ABM-utvikling](#) I worked for the Directorate for Public Libraries (one of the three institutions that merged into ABM-utvikling in 2003) and I have previous experience from the museum domain. Throughout my education and career I have had an international perspective. To me everything is connected to each other, which in this setting means that the archive, library and museum domains - on both local and national level in Norway - are influenced by

international policies and actions. I believe it is of the outmost importance to gather ideas from abroad and build on previous experiences in order to develop services and personal skills of high quality. On a more personal level, I love to travel, and job exchange is a great way of experiencing another country.

My personal experiences are based on the following activities:

- Three months of traineeship at [the Learning and Cultural Heritage Unit](#) of Directorate General of Information Society and Media, the European Commission in Luxembourg (Autumn 2000).
- The previously mentioned study tour to libraries in Singapore and Australia organised by the Nordic Federation of Research Libraries Associations (2002).
- Norwegian co-editor of Scandinavian Public Library Quarterly (since 2002). [SPLQ](#) is a journal published jointly by the Nordic Public Library Authorities in Finland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark.
- Participation in evaluation of EU-proposals (one week, May 2003).
- Involvement in EU-funded projects on libraries', museums' and archives' role in the information society (PULMAN, CULTIVATE and [CALIMERA](#) - Cultural Applications: Local Institutions Mediating Electronic Resource Access). Together with my colleague Elin H. Wyller I have represented ABM-utvikling in CALIMERA – a consortium with almost 50 partners from Europe and Central Asia the last 18 months.
- Six weeks of traineeship at [the Danish National Library Authority](#) (Autumn 2004).

So, why work abroad for a period or participate in international projects or other fora? I have made a list of my personal arguments, which I find relevant:

### **First on my list is *inspiration***

I think most people sometimes experience a lack of inspiration. Our daily life goes along as it always has – routine work and lack of excitement and challenges – and we feel that we are in a rut and feel that some kind of input is needed. If you find yourself in this situation I think it is important to try to find a way to become more motivated. Neither you nor your organisation benefits from having employees that lack motivation. Inspiration can also be interpreted as the need or desire for enhanced knowledge in order to keep abreast of your field and to improve your institution's activities and outcome. In my case, as in most cases I believe, it was a combination of the two kinds of inspiration, which made me apply for the traineeship at the European Commission and the Danish National Library Authority, as well as the study tour. Clearly, the activities I have been or still are involved in, cover quite a broad range of fields of interests and actions. However, a common denominator is that they in various ways are sources for inspiration in my daily work.

### **The second point on my list is *network building***

I think we can all agree that personal contacts are very important. In my opinion our more and more globalized world constantly requires a higher degree of networking and co-operation across domains and countries. At the same time information and communication technology facilitates communication between persons from all parts of the world - if you are among the privileged group that has access to this technology. I find the demand for more networking and co-operation a very positive challenge for the library and information domain. This is because the new technology enables us to access the same information and to share content

from all parts of the world. In that sense the world becomes smaller, but on the other hand, there are still many groups in our society and many areas of the world to which web-based information and knowledge is not easily accessible. How do we meet this challenge? How do we address the problems of finding adequate selection criteria that can ensure us that the stories we tell and the information we select are representative? This is an important reason for international co-operation and job exchange.

Although communication through Internet and by telephone is very efficient, it can never replace the value of meeting people face to face. There is so much you can communicate by body language alone and often the context is crucial to understand the message. Moreover, when you have met a person, it is so much easier to pick up the phone or send an e-mail to ask questions, exchange information etc. Personally, I have very good experience with this way of working. People I have met in Luxembourg, Brussels, in Denmark, at conferences, through projects etc. are an important part of my network. And I have experienced that one meeting or action often leads to another. For example, previous experience from one project can be an asset to another, which is often the case for EU-funded projects. Networks are also important as a source for inviting people as speakers to workshops and conferences or as contributors to a journal. Moreover, such networks can offer new channels for spreading information. Here, I would like to mention a Nordic workshop, which is planned to take place next year - an action which follows directly from the CALIMERA project as a means to disseminate results and experiences from CALIMERA. This workshop will also be a meeting point for representatives from the alm-domain and technology providers. It is a result of a common interest among the Nordic partners within this large European consortium – an interest in sharing knowledge in order to strengthen our libraries, archives and museums.

Earlier this year ABM-utvikling in co-operation with Arts Council Norway, and the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage launched a humorous animation film on how to obtain funding from EU aimed at inspiring people who are interested in starting a European project. Thanks to our expanded network we are able to promote the film *The Hunt for Golden Euros* “worldwide” by posting it on the CALIMERA website. I just learn that it was recently presented at a workshop in Estonia.

### **My third argument is *knowledge sharing***

I feel that knowledge sharing across domains and countries is crucial if we want to avoid double work and widen our horizons. By sharing knowledge and experiences we are able to learn from others’ “mistakes” and build on an existing foundation. Therefore, various fora, especially international ones are important settings for information exchange and discussions if we are to further develop our institutions’ services. When, I have been abroad I have gathered quite a lot of information on various topics, also information on where to find more information or who to contact. At my work I disseminate this information to colleagues in different ways; through reports, discussions, e-mails etc. I will use the following examples to illustrate this. Currently, we have two major ongoing initiatives co-ordinated by ABM-utvikling; an assessment report on important issues and challenges within the library domain and the Norwegian digital library programme. In order to succeed both these initiatives need a wide perspective and this requires an international orientation. Based on things I learned during my stay at the Danish National Library Authority and during my participation in CALIMERA I try to provide my colleagues who write the report with information on for instance strategy development in other countries. As for the Norwegian digital library, my colleague, Elin H. Wyller and I act as a kind of information intermediators by giving the core team information on relevant European initiatives. I cannot say I am an expert on strategy development within the alm-domain or digitisation, but again, the important thing, is to know

where to find information and to use your network. An important part of this network is the editors of the journal SPLQ. All four editors meet twice a year. Besides planning the next editions of the journal, these meetings are important as a forum for exchanging news on recent developments in the different countries.

### **My fourth personal argument for job exchange is *capacity-building***

To me this is a broad term, which includes both specific knowledge about a topic and tacit knowledge. The latter is often almost or sometimes more important than the first. Successful international co-operation builds on mutual understanding of the existence of different values, solutions, cultures etc. Job exchange is an important means of increasing this kind of understanding. By working and living in another country you need to adapt to their working environment, culture and way of living. This is valuable knowledge you need while you staying abroad, and at the same time, your achieved insight into another culture may result in a slightly different view of your own organisation, domain, culture and country, something I think is positive. At the same time – as an “outsider” in an organisation you are able to view their organisation from another perspective, which puts you in a situation where you can provide constructive criticism. However, this criticism needs to be stated very carefully and with respect. The last thing you would like to do is to offend your hosts.

An important element in communication is humour – and it is a difficult one. Humour consists of several layers and is often very deeply rooted in the culture. However, sometimes humour could be very simple – often contextual – and in my opinion it is such a good feeling to be able to have a good laugh with people from different countries. It gives you a feeling of relief – I experienced that several times during my stays abroad. During my stay in Brussels two years ago when I participated in the evaluation of proposals to the European Commission – humour was a necessary tool for survival. This is a slight exaggeration, but still it was very important in a situation where 900 people from all over the world were stuck together in a large building, with piles of papers, lack of rooms, chairs, coffee etc. Never the less, this is a very memorable and useful experience when I advise people on how to write EU-proposals.

### **My final argument on the list is *personal development***

Whether it is a long-term traineeship, a shorter stay or even a few days project meeting, you will find yourself in situations where you face systems, codes, ways of organising work etc, which you are not familiar with. This is interesting, challenging and sometimes frustrating. I think the phrase “learning by doing” expresses my situation in the EU Commission. Day 1 I had a meeting with Head of unit, who told me that I was responsible for organising a workshop with representatives from all the member states. The meeting was to be held in a month. And he added that I also had to write a background paper on co-ordinating mechanisms for national digitisation activities. I felt rather ill at ease after that meeting where about half of the conversation was difficult to understand due to the extensive use of abbreviations. However, the workshop was postponed a month, all member states participated (if I remember correctly) and it was the start of a network – MINERVA (Ministerial Network for Valorising Activities in digitisation), – which still exists. In order to complete this assignment I really had to use many parts of myself, and I had to deal with many stressful situations, but when the mission was completed I had a good feeling of accomplishing something which I could be proud of. During my stay I really felt I was working in a team – and in my opinion the feeling of being included is a key to a successful traineeship, both for the trainee and for the host organisation. I have been lucky since I have experienced a feeling

of being included both at the EU Commission and in the Danish National Library Authority. An open and flexible attitude from both parts is a prerequisite. Working your way through various unknown systems, both at work and in the society as a whole is on one hand often very frustrating but on the other hand valuable and helpful in knowing how to tackle other assignments. I believe that this kind of personal development as a result of job exchange should be included in the term capacity-building.

### ***Possibilities***

Very often funding is the key needed in order to stay abroad, but it is not the only one. The first thing is to get an overview of which possibilities exist and when I was preparing my paper, I learnt that several opportunities and funding sources for international visits and exchanges for librarians exist. However, I see the need for more exchange programmes. And I am very pleased that the Norwegian Agency for Development and Kopinor (the Reproduction Rights Organisation of Norway) have contributed to the IFLA 2005 Oslo Travel Grant as a measure to increase participation from third world countries. In total 76 persons were selected for grants and priority was given to younger professionals. I believe several of you are among the selected candidates.

In my organisation we have discussed the need for increased funding possibilities for job exchange. ABM-utvikling has an ongoing co-operation agreement with the State Authority on Museums in Latvia, which allows representatives from Latvian museums internships in Norwegian museums for shorter periods. Their experiences are all positive. As for the library sector several librarians from public and research libraries in the Baltic countries have had the chance to get internships in Nordic libraries. I would also like to mention a successful Nordic co-operation between five public libraries, among them Stavanger Public library in Norway, which exchanged staff twice a year. The involved persons worked four weeks at a library in one of the other countries and their experiences are all very positive. The staff expressed interest in continuing and extending the exchange programme to English speaking countries. Unfortunately, due to the lack of funding after the project period the exchange came to an end. This confirms the need for increased funding.

Based on discussions with representatives from archives, libraries and museums we have noted an interest in setting up an exchange programme for all three domains. Personally, I hope we can develop an international programme in the future in co-operation with organisations in other countries. ABM-utvikling is interested both in attending activities, which may strengthen our national domains, but also in contributing to the development of less developed regions of the world. We consider the latter an important challenge - as a minor contribution to promoting knowledge and culture as a basis for democratization processes. However, I want to stress that this form of development is not and should not be limited to the traditional development assistance programs. We wish to take advantage of a unique opportunity to develop our domains through the special competencies of relevant institutions in developing countries. Currently, we are engaged in a development project with the National Museums Board of Zambia. However, this does not include job exchange.

So, one thing is to be aware of the possibilities, the next step is to use them. Here, I believe the New Professionals Discussion Group acts as an important forum for exchanging ideas, discussing common issues, building networks etc. These things can result in job exchange and involvement in other international actions. In order to develop the library and information domain I find it important that IFLA and all organisations and institutions pay attention to

young professionals' opinions. Your perspectives and experiences are crucial in developing services for the future.

I wish you all an interesting conference, a pleasant stay in Oslo and a successful career. Use this opportunity to build networks and have a lot of fun! The most important thing is to talk to people. And remember, you regret the challenges you did not pursue, not the things you actually chose to do.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. My e-mail address is [sidse.hindal@abm-utvikling.no](mailto:sidse.hindal@abm-utvikling.no)

Thank you very much for your attention.