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Web portals and internationalisation: a survey of Norwegian Academic, Research and Special Libraries

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Abstract

Norway currently has 362 academic, research and special libraries, most of which have developed web portals to provide a variety of online services to users, including part time and distance education users. While most web portals and most services are provided in Norwegian only, the globalisation forces of the information society are pushing institutions to provide an increasing range of services also in English. Based on an analysis of all 362 libraries and web portals, defined in a broad sense, including three illustrative case studies based on typical case sampling (Patton 2002), the article argues that an increasing amount of information will be made available in English on library web portals, but that the process will stop short of full bilingual provision.

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1. Introduction

Digitisation and electronic media are quickly increasing their impact on Norway's 362 academic, research and special libraries¹, and consequently on Norwegian R&D. In 2003 these libraries held 11,2 million electronic documents, which was an increase of 30% compared with 2002. In 2003, 17 million seeks in the libraries' own catalogue or other databases were registered (Statistics Norway 2005). The journal crisis and spiralling costs of electronic journals have led to initiatives like SPARC, the Open Access and Open Archives Initiative. The electronic self archiving system recently introduced by many Norwegian tertiary education institutions (e.g. the Bergen Open Research Archive at the University of Bergen or DUO at Oslo University), combined with enhanced inter-OA search possibilities like OAIster, are set to increase the reliance on non-proprietary electronic media in the tertiary education sector (Vaagan 2005).

Our definition of web portal is deliberately broad. The institutions are at different stages in the process of internationalisation, and their web portals show considerable variety in content, design and sophistication, ranging from simple hypertexted fact sheets in English to more sophisticated web architectures with multiple hierarchies. Follow-up articles will no doubt use more specific categories and look in greater depth at the various groups.

Bibsys, which is a shared library system currently comprising 110 member libraries, including all Norwegian university libraries, the National Library and a number of college and research libraries, has recently introduced a new reference service (Bibsys Ask) providing Standard Norwegian, New Norwegian, Sami and English.² This trend reflects the processes of globalisation and internationalisation of R&D. Despite not being a member of the EU, Norway is playing a key role in the Bologna process, e.g. in the Bologna Follow-Up Group, and hosted a ministerial convention in May 2005 in Bergen which gathered all 40 members of the Bologna process.

A key issue in the recent Quality Reform in tertiary education, introduced by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2003, has been a new degree structure (BA and MA), closer dialogues with students, improved financing schemes, new exam and evaluation methods, increased internationalisation and also increased use of ICT in tertiary education.

Another important element has been the creation of The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, NOKUT. This independent government body was set up from 1st January 2003. Through evaluation, accreditation and recognition of quality systems,

institutions and course provisions, the purpose of NOKUT is to supervise and help to develop the quality of higher education in Norway. In addition, NOKUT assesses individual applications for general recognition of foreign qualifications.

The Norwegian Parliament has just recently passed a new law on Higher Education in Norway which will be effective from 1st August 2005 (Ministry of Education and Research 2005a). The new law is positive for libraries and is expected to accord the library or learning resource centre a key role as the provider and repository of information and knowledge.

Against this background, we are generally concerned with the extent to which Norwegian academic, research and special libraries are adapting to these developments, especially how their web portals reflect the processes of globalisation and internationalisation.

2. Research Questions and Methodology

In the present paper, we provide a summary of web portals of 362 Norwegian academic, research and special libraries, in order to clarify the degree of internationalisation and involvement in the process of globalisation, including distance learning and online services to non-Norwegian speaking users in and outside Norway. Specifically, we are interested in the following research questions:

- Which type of academic, research and special libraries provide web portals in languages other than Norwegian? Are there systematic variations between library type and the provision of international web portals and content?
- Information in English on types of services (as distinct from services provided in English)
- User education as an indicator of internationalisation. Information in English on bibliographic instruction, courses in information literacy) (as distinct from instruction/courses in English)

3. Overview of Norwegian Academic, Research and Special Libraries and Web Portals

According to the Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority, there were in 2003 a total of 362 registered academic and research libraries, including special libraries.³ A complete alphabetical list of the 362 libraries is maintained by The Norwegian Archive Library and Museum Authority on its website.⁴ The number includes branches, faculties and other subunits of the same mother institution. These, in turn, may have only one web portal, which means that the number of total web portals is actually less than 362.

| Academic, research and special libraries | Units | Web portals | | | | |
|---|------------|--------------------|-----------|------------|----------|----------|
| | | With | Without | English | Sami | Other |
| National library and university libraries | 67 | 61 | 6 | 48 | 0 | 0 |
| University college libraries (public and private) | 116 | 115 | 1 | 60 | 1 | 6 |
| Scientific libraries (public and private) | 13 | 13 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 0 |
| Libraries in health institutions (public and private) | 30 | 20 | 10 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Ministerial and parliamentary libraries | 11 | 2 | 9 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Museum libraries (public and private) | 21 | 14 | 7 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| Archives with libraries (public and private) | 7 | 7 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Other public special libraries | 61 | 44 | 17 | 20 | 1 | 0 |
| Other private special libraries | 27 | 18 | 9 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 353 | 294 | 59 | 154 | 5 | 7 |

Table 1. Norwegian academic, research and special libraries and language of web portals

An examination of the 362 libraries revealed that 3 units were rejected (they had ceased to exist) and of the remaining 353 units, a total of 294 had web portals, whereas 59 did not. Out of the 294 web portals, half of them (154) provided information in English (ranging from websites only in English to websites with only some basic facts in English). Very few provided information in Sami or a third language (German, French, Spanish)

The vast majority of national libraries, university libraries, university college libraries and scientific libraries have web portals. Libraries at health institutions do not follow this pattern. Only 1/3 of these libraries have web portals and only two of these provide information in English.

The majority of national libraries and university libraries provide information in English on their web portals. Around ½ of the university college libraries provide information in English. The following pattern emerges from the data: larger university college libraries (with a number of branch libraries) tend to provide information in English, whereas smaller university college libraries might not have any English information at all. Likewise, around 1/2 of the scientific libraries provide information in English.

Surprisingly, few ministerial and parliamentary libraries have web portals. A majority of museum libraries have web portals, but relatively few provide information in English. Archives with libraries all have web portals, though only a few provide information in English. A clear majority of other public special libraries have web portals, but of these only 1/2 provide information in English. Many private special libraries have web portals, but only 1/3 of these provide information in English.

4. Range of Web Portal Services in English

Table 2 describes the main kinds of information in English that the library web portals provide about their services.

| Academic, research and special libraries | No. of libraries | Collections | Online database access ⁵ | ILL/DDS | Reference services | User education ⁶ | |
|---|------------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| | | | | | | Bibliographic instruction | Information literacy courses |
| National library and university libraries | 67 | 41 | 49 | 31 | 18 | 12 | 1 |
| University college libraries (public and private) | 116 | 49 | 55 | 24 | 41 | 19 | 12 |
| Scientific libraries (public and private) | 13 | 8 | 8 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 2 |
| Libraries in health institutions (public and private) | 30 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Ministerial and parliamentary libraries | 11 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Museum libraries (public and private) | 21 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Archives with libraries (public and private) | 7 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other public special libraries | 61 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Other private special libraries | 27 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 353 | 117 | 123 | 70 | 67 | 38 | 16 |

Table 2. Type of Norwegian library and web information in English on services

A first look at the data shows that the English web portals provide different amounts of information when compared to their Norwegian counterparts. Whereas some libraries virtually provide the same information on their English and Norwegian web portals, some others provide considerably less information on the English web portal. Amongst the latter, some have written the links in English, but when one clicks on them, one comes to a Norwegian site. In such cases, the user may be warned by phrases such as “only Norwegian”, ”in Norwegian” and “N”, written next to the link.

Of the 353 libraries examined, information in English is provided by 33% (117) on collections, by 35% (123) on online database access, by 19,8% (70) on ILL/DDS, by 19% (67) on reference services, by 10,8% (38) on BI and 4,5% (16) on IL courses. The National library and university libraries followed by university colleges are clearly ahead in providing the selected range services in English.

5. User Education on the Web Portals: Bibliographic Instruction and Information Literacy

This section is concerned with user education at academic, scientific and special libraries. More specifically, it considers (1) the extent to which international users have access to information on user education and (2) the approach to user education reflected on the libraries' English web portals.

As Sundin (2005) points out, libraries have gradually moved away from a resource-centred to a more user-centred approach to user education. Institutions worldwide are in the process of developing user education programmes with the ultimate goal of improving their users' information literacy (IL). IL can be defined as '[...] knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner' (CILIP 2005).

The United States, Australia and the United Kingdom have worked on their own definition of information literacy and have developed a set of standards for information literacy. IL is regarded as an essential literacy for lifelong independent learning in our current knowledge-based society, as reflected in [UNESCO's Information Literacy Programme "Information for All" \(2005-2006\)](#) and the ["Prague Declaration on Information Literacy"](#). IL is further seen as a powerful tool to fight the digital divide. IFLA has also acknowledged the key role libraries can play in developing their users' IL.⁷

The question to be addressed here is whether these international impulses have had any effect on the Norwegian library web portals. A look at the totality of Norwegian academic, scientific and special libraries in Table 2 shows that very few of them provide information in English about their user education. This minority mainly consists of academic and scientific libraries.

That user education is more present in academic library web portals may be related to the fact that academic libraries look upon themselves as an integrating part of the higher education (hereafter HE) learning arena (Sætre 2002, Arnesen et al. 2004). The Norwegian Reform of HE (<http://odin.dep.no/ufd/norsk/dok/regpubl/stmeld/014001-040004/dok-bn.html>) encourages problem-based learning and a task-based approach to teaching. As a consequence, students are expected to write assignments and projects earlier and more often than they used to do. Students, as independent learners, need to be able to navigate in the information sea, which includes an ever increasing number of electronic resources. For this reason, academic libraries have acknowledged that their goal is not only to make electronic resources available for students, but also to assist them in the learning process so that they can access the information they need and use it critically, creatively and ethically. The latter goal is explicitly mentioned in a number of academic libraries' strategic plans.

The information available on the English web portals consists of the course programme arranged by the library and/or online tutorials and learning objects. It shows a resource-centred approach to user education: 38 libraries provide information related to bibliographical instruction, whereas only 16 provide information related to IL aspects other than the search and location of information (e.g. ethical evaluation of sources, referencing).

It is important to note that the library's approach to user education cannot be defined on the basis of the contents of its English web portal. In many cases, the Norwegian web portal and its English counterpart do not provide the same information. The English web portal is often a

short version of the Norwegian one and the hypertext may often link to Norwegian pages. For example, the Norwegian web portals of Trondheim University Library, Bergen University Library and the University College Libraries in Stord/Haugesund and Telemark have online information literacy tutorials. These tutorials are available only in Norwegian. These institutions are currently working on a user education programme for information literacy and have plans to translate the tutorials into English in the near future (personal communication). However, this work is not reflected on their English web portals as yet.

The mismatch between the Norwegian and English versions raises a web quality issue. The quality of the web portals is impoverished by the fact that home and international students are not given access to the same user education information and materials. The Norwegian Reform of HE, which came into force in 2003, has been regarded as a key factor in the internationalisation of Norwegian HE. The reform adopts the European HE degree system (i.e. BA, MA). As a consequence, Norwegian HE institutions are expected to have an increasing number of international students. These students, who do not necessarily have any command of Norwegian when they arrive in the country, are often entirely dependent on the use of English as an academic lingua franca. English is widely used in the Norwegian academic context (see Simonsen (ed.) 2004). The current scarcity of information in English could be interpreted as a slow response on the part of the libraries to the increasing internationalisation of the Norwegian HE.

This section has examined the extent to which the English web portals of academic, research and special libraries include information and materials on user education. Our study shows that only a minority of libraries include user education on their English web portals. These are mainly academic and scientific libraries. The current scarcity of English information on the library web portals shows a weak response to the increasing internationalisation of Norwegian HE. However, a better understanding of this issue could be gained if library web portals were looked at in relation to the portal of their mother institution. In other words, further research should consider to which extent the mother institution web portal is sensitive to internationalisation. In terms of user education, further research should examine in more detail the kind of information and materials that the English web portal contains as compared with its Norwegian counterpart. This would provide us with more insights into how libraries understand their role in user education and how this is conveyed in an ever increasingly popular meeting point with their users, namely the virtual library.

6. The issue of web quality

A discussion of web quality raises the wider issue of the concept of quality in librarianship and in library and information science. Although a host of techniques exist to assess web quality, for instance the Danish Web quality test *Bedst på Net*, the criteria used e.g. by the Norwegian state consultancy Statkonsult involve 21 parameters which exclude information in languages other than Norwegian (Statkonsult 2004). Web quality has not yet become an issue e.g. in the performance and quality indicators advocated by The Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority (which are derived from ISO standards and also influenced by e.g. the Association of American Research Libraries' LibQUAL project).

7. Some typical cases

Below three illustrative case studies, based on typical case sampling (Patton 2002), are briefly discussed.

7a. Web portals in English only (3):

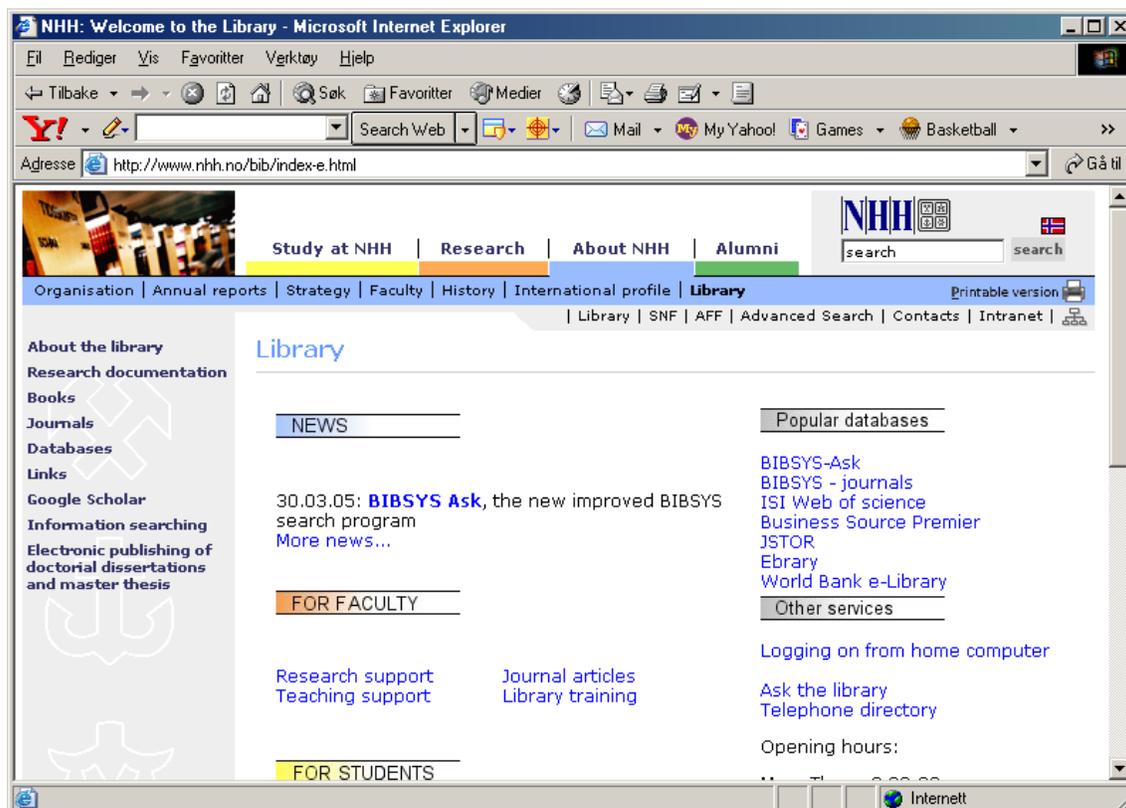
- Christian Michelsens Institute, Bergen <http://www.cmi.no/>
- The library <http://www.cmi.no/library/index.cfm>



The Christian Michelsen Institute (CMI) is a private foundation located in Bergen on the West coast of Norway. It is a research institute specialising in development issues with a staff of around 60. It has a very international profile, and has developed an English-only web site, which includes the library. This is quite unusual and only three of the 353 libraries examined have reached this level of internationalisation. Library services include information on collections, online database access, ILL/DDS and reference services. User education includes bibliographic instruction but not information literacy courses.

7b. Web portals partly in English (116):

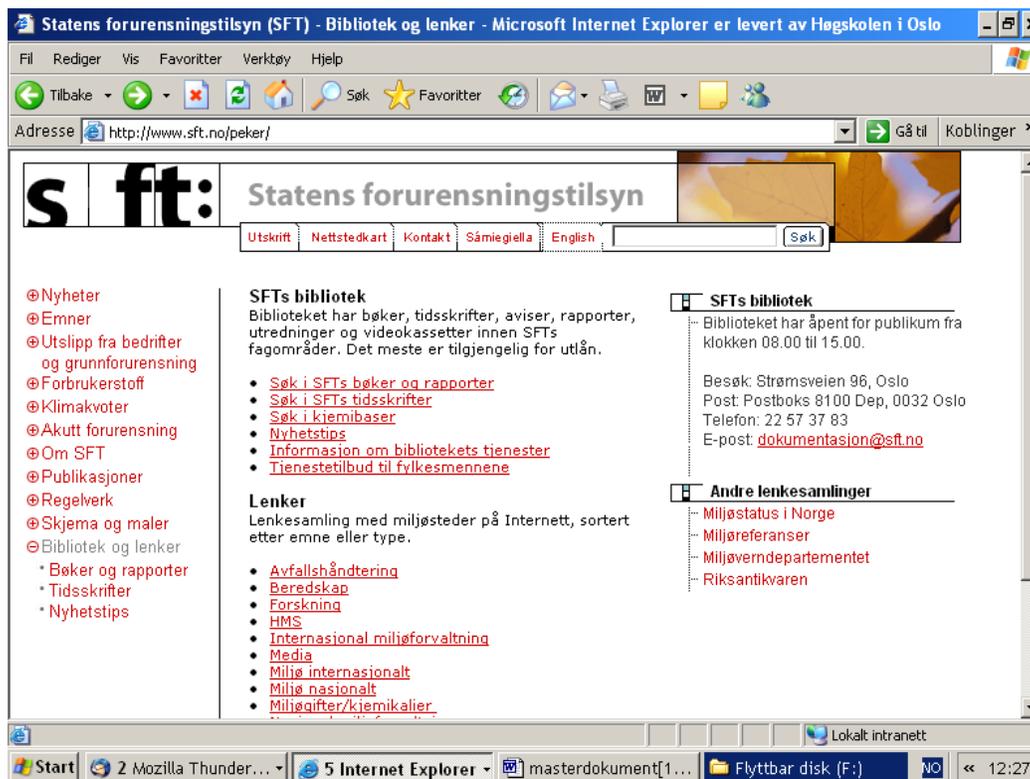
- Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration <http://www.nhh.no/bib/index-e.html>
- The library <http://www.nhh.no/bib/index-e.html>



The Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration (NHH) is located in Bergen, it is state-owned and has an enrolment of 2700 students and a staff of 270. Similar to many other higher education institutions in this very competitive field, NHH has formulated an ambitious marketing strategy, claiming on its website that it is part of “the largest, concentrated centre for research and study in the fields of economics and business administration in Norway. NHH strives to be amongst the foremost in Europe in its fields, and EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System) accreditation reinforces a strongly held belief that excellence in research is a prerequisite for excellence in teaching”. This ambitious strategy also involves the library which – and this is an exception in this group of 116 libraries - has parallel pages in Norwegian and English, including user education. Many other libraries in this group only provide rudimentary information and services in English. At NHH, library services (in Norwegian and English) include information on collections, online database access, ILL/DDS, reference services. User education (also in Norwegian and English) includes bibliographic instruction and courses in information literacy, which is also an exception.

7c. Web portals in Norwegian only (196):

- Norwegian Pollution Control Authority Library, Oslo <http://www.sft.no/>
- The Library <http://www.sft.no/peker/>



The Norwegian Pollution Control Authority (SFT) is located in the capital Oslo, with a branch in Skien, south of the capital. SFT has a total staff of 270. It is a state-owned directorate under the Ministry of the Environment, and its main goal is to promote sustainable development. SFT has developed web pages in English with brief factual information but the library has web pages only in Norwegian. This is the most typical situation in Norway and characterises no less than 196 of the 353 libraries examined in the present study. This is surprising since Norway maintains a high and visible profile internationally on pollution control and environmental issues. This applies also to our neighbour Russia and the threat of toxic and atomic contaminants in the rich fishing grounds of the Barents Sea in the north. Library services (in Norwegian) include information on collections, online database access, ILL/DDS, reference services. User education includes bibliographic instruction but not information literacy courses.

8. Conclusion

Norway's academic, research and special libraries are adapting to the forces of globalisation and internationalisation, and 154 out of a total of 353 have developed web pages with information in English. Only 3 have become so international that all information is in English, 116 have partial solutions with Norwegian and some information in English. 196 still have no information available in English. Depending on library type, the scope and type of information varies with respect to services such as collections, online database access, ILL/DDS, reference services, user education (bibliographic instruction and information literacy courses).

In terms of user education, only a minority of libraries provide information in English. These are mainly academic and scientific libraries. The information available on the English web

portals consists of the course programme arranged by the library and/or online tutorials and learning objects. The English web portals show a resource-centred approach to user education: 38 libraries provide information related to bibliographical instruction, whereas only 16 provide information related to information literacy components other than the search and location of information. However, in order to be able to assess fully how international impulses on the information literacy front are affecting library web portals, a thorough comparison of the Norwegian and English sites is needed. At this point, most libraries show a mismatch between the user education information provided on their Norwegian and English portals. The English ones provide less information, which raises a quality problem for these web portals.

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Notes:

¹ The Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority lists 362 academic, research and special libraries, but due to lacks in statistical reporting from libraries, there are unfortunately conflicting figures regarding the total number of libraries.

² Norway has 3 official languages, namely Standard Norwegian, New Norwegian and Sami. Many libraries therefore provide information in one or both of the minority languages.

³ ABM-utvikling 2005, p.45-55. ABM-utvikling states that they received statistics from 336 libraries out of a total of 362 libraries they approached. The tables presented, however, amount to 353 units as shown.

⁴ The Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority
<http://www.abm-utvikling.no/prosjekter/Interne/Bibliotek/handbok/Www-adr.htm> [retrieved 06.06.05]

⁵ The category 'online database access' includes both libraries which give a fully-fledged English description of their databases and those which simply link to the English version of Bibsys.

⁶ 'User education' is split up into two subcategories: bibliographic instruction and information literacy courses.

- By "bibliographical instruction", it is meant information in English about library courses which focus on traditional bibliographical instruction, that is, on a presentation of library resources and on how to use them for information search and retrieval (e.g. what Bibsys is and how to use the different fields of the database).
- By "information literacy courses", it is meant information in English about library courses which focus on one or several components of information literacy (see Section 5 for a definition) other than decontextualised teaching of information search and retrieval. In other words, these are courses whose goal is to help students to formulate their information need, to prepare their information search based on it, to critically evaluate the information found, and to use this information in a creative and ethical way in their academic production.

⁷ This organisation has had its own IL Section since 2002. The section existed previously as the User Education Roundtable, but due to increasing interest in information literacy activities worldwide, the roundtable became Information Literacy Section in 2002.