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Cultural heritage – the Art Library cuts across borders in Sweden

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Abstract

A presentation is made of recent developments in Sweden in which Vitterhetsakademiens bibliotek (The Library of the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities) at the Swedish National Heritage Board is a partner in the development of services both physically on the library premises and digitally on the internet. In September 2007 an agreement was signed by the four partners the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, the National Historical Museums (the Museum of National Antiquities and the Royal Coin Cabinet), Stockholm University and the Swedish National Heritage Board, with the purpose of strengthening and developing the library's services to the research community. In 2005 a network was formed by seven libraries in Stockholm, with the specific aim to improve the quality of library services to research in the humanities. In 2007 a new search service was opened on the internet which enables cross searching of major databases covering various aspects of the Swedish cultural heritage. Two databases hosted by the Library form part of this service. The process of cutting across institutional and sectorial borders is facilitated by modern technology.

Background – Setting the Scene

A country's national heritage covers a broad range of materials, including both the physical heritage, in the form of ancient monuments and sites, the urban and the rural landscape, the built heritage, the fine and decorative arts, written documents in print and in manuscript etc, and the intangible heritage in the form of folk customs and traditions, narratives and stories, language, names and so on. Efforts are underway to make it possible to cross search these various forms of cultural heritage material.

The Swedish National Heritage Board, which serves as Sweden's central administrative agency in the area of heritage and the historic environment, is under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture. The Board operates together with a number of partners, including archives, libraries, museums and non-profit agents, within the cultural heritage field. The Heritage Board has overall responsibility for promoting the objectives of Sweden's heritage

policy. Among the activities are various initiatives to protect the historic environment. These include the accumulation and dissemination of information.

The Museum of National Antiquities and the Royal Coin Cabinet are two national museums which historically have worked together with the National Heritage Board under the auspices of the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities. Our joint history goes back to 1786. Since then organizational structure has developed and changed, but work has continued uninterrupted. During this entire period of over 220 years, Vitterhetsakademiens bibliotek, the Library of the Royal Swedish Academy of History, Letters and Antiquities (in the following called the Library) has supported and served the activities of these bodies.

The Library has the dual role to provide library service to both the mother institutions and research and development in Sweden. It thus functions as institutional library, museum library, university library and as a library to the general public, with a strong focus on being a subject-specialized library. Over the years it has built up very strong collections in the areas of archaeology, Medieval art, numismatics and the preservation and protection of the cultural heritage. In the past few decades emphasis has gradually shifted to providing access to relevant information in these areas, rather than possessing the information within our own library walls.

Networking – an age-old tradition

The Library has been part of the network of Swedish research libraries since 1876 when the first union catalogue was published. This union catalogue is now the LIBRIS digital catalogue (www.kb.se/libris) which our library contributes to. Cooperation among what sometimes is referred to as 'the Swedish joint library holdings' is also strong in other areas, such as interlibrary loan and electronic resources.

Networking in new forms

With modern technology, cooperation and networking has entered a new phase. From being local, regional and national, networking now via the world wide web becomes global. Access on the internet makes information available to everyone, locally and globally alike. It also puts cooperation between libraries, archives and museums within reach. A special program has been set up, an 'ABM-centrum' (ALM-center), to promote cooperation between archives, libraries and museums in Sweden.

Extra funding has been given by the government for the fiscal years 2006 and 2007 for increased accessibility to the cultural heritage. The aim was to enable museums, libraries and archives to register a substantial amount of material, which otherwise would have remained inaccessible. An important objective was to give access to collections, archives and artefacts, either on the internet or by presenting them publicly in exhibitions.

It has always been obvious in the museum environment that relevant information exists in different types and formats. It includes archival materials, documentation on artefacts, photographs, manuscripts, unpublished papers and ephemera. And in the case of the National Heritage Board, we have to add databases of recorded data concerning monuments and sites, buildings, the urban and rural landscape etc. In comparison to libraries, which have had an

agreed upon format for cataloguing online since about 40 years in the MARC-format, museums still have a wealth of different database structures and formats, with individual ways of recording the data. Consequently, it is still something of a challenge to search more than one database at a time.

The European Digital Library

In August 2006 the European Commission issued recommendations to the member countries on *Digitization and Online Accessibility of Cultural Material and Digital Preservation*. The member states' deadline for submitting reports on the implementation of the recommendations was February 29, 2008. The aim is to define common standards and to avoid duplication of digitization efforts. The report by Sweden contains an up-to-date description of activities which either have been implemented or are in the process of being so. http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/commission_recommendation/reports/index_en.htm. Of special interest to the topic of my paper is the plan to set up a cross search interface for museum databases. I will come back to this later on.

New partnerships for Vitterhetsakademiens bibliotek

In September 2007 an agreement was signed by the Swedish National Heritage Board, the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, the National Historical Museums (the Museum of National Antiquities and the Royal Coin Cabinet) and Stockholm University. The purpose of the agreement is to maintain and to further develop the Library's collections and services to the four partners in the long term, crossing borders to broaden the perspective and to ensure quality. A Library Board was created to oversee that the agreement is implemented. It is of particular importance to ensure that the status of the Library as a strong research library is maintained.

Another recent development is that the Library is part of an alliance formed by seven Stockholm libraries with strong collections in the humanities. Under the acronym of HISS (Humaniora i Stockholm i Samverkan), the partners the Music Library of Sweden, the Swedish Academy Nobel Library, the Royal Library – the National Library of Sweden, the Stockholm City Library, the Stockholm University Library, and the Södertörn College Library have joined together to improve library services to research in the humanities. Task groups are looking into issues such as acquisition and collection management, and the creation of a common web page. Plans are being made on how to make the resources to students and researchers in the humanities more visible and easier to find and get access to.

Library Search Services

The main Library catalogue is called VITALIS. It can be accessed on the internet. URL: <http://vitalis.raa.se/E>. VITALIS contains all literature acquired by the Library since 1975, and a large part of the old collections. Books, journals, articles, reports, dissertations and essays are searchable in the online catalogue. Catalogue –1974 is the Library's old sheet catalogue and the main catalogue for publications printed before 1975. It has been digitized and is accessible on the internet. URL: <http://katalog1974.raa.se>.

Fornvännen – Journal of Swedish Antiquarian Research is the leading journal for antiquarian research in Sweden. It is also the oldest – started publication in 1906 – and largest journal, and has the most voluminous review section in the subject field in Scandinavia. The foremost Scandinavian experts in archaeology and Medieval studies are published in *Fornvännen*. Articles are written mainly in Swedish, but also in Danish, Norwegian, English, French and German. There are abstracts and picture captions in English.

In November 2007 the entire run of the 100 years 1906-2005 were digitized and published on the internet. URL: <http://fornvannen.se>. The journal can be searched chronologically issue by issue, or by word search in the full text, free of charge. The digitization project was managed by the Library.

National Heritage Board Search Services

The National Heritage Board produces as part of its mission documentation and records of ancient monuments and sites. The database Ancient Monument Search (Fornsök) contains information about ancient burial-grounds, settlements, runic stones, rock-carvings, mines, and crofts. The time span covered is from the Old Stone Age (Palaeolithic) to the 20th century. Swedish buildings are documented in the Buildings Register. Picture documentation of the national heritage is found in the image database Kulturmiljöbild. There are also databases of materials used in the work on preserving and restoring the built heritage, a database on the use of natural stone in Swedish buildings, drawings of buildings and ancient sites. All of these are available at the Board website. URL: www.raa.se.

Cross Search

In 2007 a new cross search service was made available, K-sök (Kulturmiljösök). URL: http://www.kms.raa.se/cocoon/kulturmiljosok/enkel_sok.html. This interface makes it possible to search the majority of the databases hosted by the National Heritage Board, among them the ones mentioned above. The Library's main catalogue VITALIS and the Digital Fornvännen full text are included in the cross search. Unfortunately, there is no English translation available for this cross search, nor for most of the other databases, with the exception of the ones hosted by the Library.

An example of a search for 'Gripsholm', one of the Swedish royal castles, yields hits in the Library catalogue, the image database, the journal *Fornvännen*, ancient monuments, buildings, drawings, etc.

At the moment this cross search is primarily for searching the National Heritage Board databases. But at the bottom of the screen you find hits in three other databases. The plan is to extend the coverage to more databases with information of relevance to the Swedish cultural heritage. Just to mention one initiative that has started in the spring of 2008. Under the auspices of the Coordinator for the Museum Sector an integrated online catalogue service for Swedish museums, K-Samsök, will be developed. The project will use the platform already in existence at the National Heritage Board, K-Sök, and develop the extended cross search from there. In a further step the aim is to connect to the joint national catalogue project for archives, libraries and the audiovisual sectors. For more information on the study made by the Coordinator for the Museum Sector see <http://www.sou.gov.se/museikoordinat/index.htm>.

Conclusion

The process of cutting across borders is being facilitated by modern technology. And here we are just at the start of a development that will lead us to new possibilities and new encounters across institutional and sectorial borders. However, Vitterhetsakademiens bibliotek is building on its past and its experiences gained over many years when it embarks on new agreements and new partnerships in new forms. The aim is much the same as it has been, i.e. to support and service the research community. The challenge for us is to do this in such a way that new generations of students and researchers can find and access our information.