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THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES — A DANISH CASE STUDY

This article deals with the question of how public libraries are facing the process of internationalization. In an empirical study, carried out between 2016 and 2018 as part of a government-funded project, the cooperation of small and medium-sized Danish libraries with corresponding foreign institutions was examined. Based on the concept of the path dependency of organizational decisions, the article investigates how strategic and structural measures as well as knowledge sharing and organizational learning support transnational cooperation. Initial results indicate that Danish libraries have taken very different paths to internationalization. The different paths they have taken are above all determined according to the local cultural policy, the institutional environment, the size of the library and the international commitment of staff and management.

Keywords: *Internationalization, path dependency, public libraries, Denmark, transnational cooperation.*

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ІНТЕРНАЦІОНАЛІЗАЦІЯ ПУБЛІЧНИХ БІБЛІОТЕК (НА ПРИКЛАДІ ДАНІЇ)

Актуальність. У нинішню добу глобалізації одним з найважливіших напрямів сучасного бібліотекознавства є теоретичне осмислення проблем та практичного досвіду інтернаціоналізації публічних бібліотек.

Мета статті — на прикладі Данії розглянути специфіку набуття нового досвіду та здійснення інституційних змін у процесі міжнародної співпраці.

Методологія. У статті використано аналітичний, емпіричний та порівняльний методи дослідження.

Результати. Проаналізовано результати емпіричного дослідження, виконаного у 2016–2018 рр. в рамках урядового проекту співпраці малих і середніх бібліотек Данії з відповідними зарубіжними закладами. Зазначено, що вибір того чи іншого шляху співпраці визначається, насамперед, такими факторами, як культурна політика країни, культурне оточення і розмір бібліотеки, а також міжнародними зобов'язаннями співробітників і керівництва. Історично діяльність бібліотек Данії була орієнтована на внутрішнього користувача. Протягом останніх 40 років міжнародна співпраця бібліотек Данії розвивалася переважно новим для країни шляхом участі в міжнародних проектах і залучення мігрантів до користування бібліотеками. Нині зусилля данських бібліотекарів спрямовані на інституціоналізацію проектно-орієнтованої міжнародної співпраці.

Новизна. Уперше здійснено докладний аналіз історичного розвитку, сучасного стану та перспектив розвитку інтернаціоналізації публічних бібліотек Данії.

Практичне значення. Ознайомлення з досвідом інтернаціоналізації бібліотек Данії, безперечно, може бути корисними для бібліотекарів-практиків та бібліотекознавців України під час міжнародної співпраці.

Ключові слова: *інтернаціоналізація, залежність від обраного шляху розвитку, публічні бібліотеки, Данія, міжнародна співпраця.*

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ИНТЕРНАЦИОНАЛИЗАЦИЯ ПУБЛИЧНЫХ БИБЛИОТЕК (НА ПРИМЕРЕ ДАНИИ)

Статья посвящена проблеме интернационализации на примере публичных библиотек. Проанализированы результаты эмпирического исследования, проведенного в 2016–2018 гг. в рамках правительственного проекта сотрудничества малых и средних датских библиотек с соответствующими зарубежными заведениями. Исходя из концепции зависимости организационных решений от избранного пути сотрудничества, автор рассматривает вопрос о том, в какой степени стратегические планы, организационно-структурные мероприятия и распространение знаний способствуют международной кооперации. Выбор того или иного пути сотрудничества определяется, прежде всего, такими факторами как культурная политика страны, культурное окружение и размер библиотеки, а также международные обязательства сотрудников и руководства.

Ключевые слова: *интернационализация, зависимость от выбранного пути розвития, публичные библиотеки, Дания, международное сотрудничество.*

Internationalization — a process of institutional change

The article starts with the question of why public libraries in Denmark show a specific and manifest pattern of collective learning and institutional change in their international activities. On the one hand, Scandinavian libraries have become deeply involved in international library organizations. Moreover, they have vigorously promoted the opening of the library space to ethnic minority groups; both activities are institutionally well embedded and play an important role in self-image of public libraries. However, an older scientific study on the international orientation of Danish library leaders comes to the paradoxical conclusion that annual IFLA congresses are frequented diligently by Danish participants, but mainly for discussing national topics (Pors & Johannsen 2003). The migration of ethnic groups to Western industrialized countries has also contributed to the internationalization of the library sector — a well-documented process of institutional change. Delica (2016) and Delica & Elbeshausen (2013) show that the integration of non-Western groups has led to a strategic reorientation

of public libraries in Denmark. Opening the library space has swallowed up a lot of time and energy.

Apart from that, there is no equally widespread transnational cooperation in other areas, although relatively large funds are available from the European Community or the Nordic Council of Ministers. Mainly larger libraries cooperate internationally — if at all. The library of Aarhus (second largest city in Denmark), for example, founded the development forum "Next Library" and established it worldwide. The library in Copenhagen (capital of Denmark) arranges regular meetings with libraries in the USA to discuss strategic measures to renew the library organization and to develop staff skills. A number of further transnational projects exists, but by no means to an extent comparable to the capacity of the Danish or Scandinavian library system.

In other words: the process of internationalization in the public libraries follows a selective pattern; institutional structures and agendas seem to support participation in international library organizations and the integration of ethnic minorities, but limit project-oriented transnational cooperation compared to university and research libraries. This leads us to the following questions:

Which circumstances restrain decisions to take a new development path, to initiate a process of institutional change and finally to institutionalize new rules and patterns of action? These questions are methodologically linked to the theory of historical institutionalism.

A theoretical and methodological outline

The article understands internationalization — similar to structural changes in university and research libraries — as an extension of the institutional context, so that strategies, activities and services of public libraries meet the requirements of a global knowledge society. Becker (2006) calls for an adjustment of the basic orientation so that infrastructure, technology and service activities of the library benefit all user groups equally — i.e. regardless of their national or ethnic origin. As shown in the former paragraph, public libraries in Denmark become strongly involved in international library organizations in the sense that they have included users with foreign cultural backgrounds on an equal footing in their services, but the libraries do not participate just as actively in transnational projects. (Elbeshausen & Delica 2018).

If one is less interested in functional than in historical explanations, a relevant theoretical approach to understanding the selective inter-nationalization pattern is historical institutionalism (Morisse-Schilbach 2006). Hall and Taylor define institutions as "formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in the organizational structure

of the polity or political economy. ... In general, historical institutionalists associate institutions with organizations and the rules or conventions promulgated by formal organization" (1996; p. 938).

Based on this relatively broad understanding of institutions, it is analytically assumed that some norms, conventions and routines rather than others have the capacity to establish themselves as dominant organizational and cognitive patterns. If dominant patterns become even more entrenched over time, organizations will be bound to certain paths of development both in terms of ideas and in terms of behavior. Resistant to internal and external influences, organizations therefore petrify and the creative behavior of their members will stifle. Historical institutionalism describes situations as critical, in which the course is set for the future by imposing a specific set of rules and norms on the organization. Strambach (2008) explains resistance to change by the fact that institutions coin individual and collective learning activities, which decisively influence the adoption of new knowledge and innovative innovations; they either support or limit innovative processes. As far as the intensity of institutional change is concerned, according to North (1990) path dependency only permits gradual and incremental change. In relation to the selective pattern of internationalization in Danish and Scandinavian public libraries, pivotal institutional traits in the library field support for example the engagement in international library organizations, but restrict project-oriented cooperation with foreign libraries, even though such cooperation would be relevant, reasonable and beneficial.

The article's approach to internationalization is concerned with concepts like critical junctures, path dependency, institutional legacy and institutional change. Path dependency and institutional change have been described and discussed in detail elsewhere (North 1990; Pierson 2000). Therefore, only a brief reference to the concept of critical junctures and institutional legacies will be made.

Junctures are classified as critical if they interrupt the flow of historical events, override the legitimacy of existing institutional arrangements, create new robust paths of development, and anchor them so fundamentally in organizational fields that they can hardly be changed in the future (Capoccia, G., & Kelemen, 2007). The large-scale migration between 1970 and 2000 is such a crossroad — both for Scandinavian societies and for libraries.

The concept of institutional legacy deals with the phenomenon that existing institutional orders do not simply disappear when they are out of their time. Existing orders represent organizational experiences, knowledge and skills that have been successful for problem solving in the past. Institutional legacies are latent collective knowledge. They promote or hinder change processes, which depends on how powerful they are (Greve & Rao 2014).

Mahoney & Thelen point out that institutional legacies lead to conflicts at the behavioral level:"While defenders of the status quo may be able to preserve the original rules, they are unable to prevent the introduction of amendments and modifications" (2010 p.17).

Methodologically, research was initiated with the documentation of projects and patterns of international cooperation, since there is no systematic research on this topic. This took place as part of the two-year "Sherpa" project, which was funded by the Agency for Culture and Palaces (Ministry of Culture) and carried out by the central libraries in Roskilde and Odense. The empirical basis for this study consists of seven interviews with decision-makers and project managers in the Danish library system. All the material is summarized in a so-called Green Paper (Odense Biblioteker & Roskilde Biblioteker 2018).

The interviewees were selected because of two considerations; decision-makers were interviewed to explore strategic options and limitations; project makers were asked to provide information on particular challenges in initiating and implementing international projects. In addition to the interviews, there is also a brief overview of existing international projects. The interviews mainly focused on library units that are able to manage international projects in terms of organization and competence and that have international activities of any kind.

Patterns of cooperation in international library projects

If one examines the empirical material and searches for clear patterns or seeks out specific development paths or learning curves, one quickly comes to the conclusion that no highway but many different paths lead to international project-oriented cooperation. For example, expectations expressed in relation to the Sherpa project mentioned above, namely that special incentives would stimulate the interest of libraries to apply for funding from the European Union (EU) or the Nordic Council of Ministers, were not met. As far as funding is concerned, it can at least be said that such library units, which already have a clear international profile and strategic orientation, make targeted use of the funds provided, for example, by the EU. This means that the use of subsidies is the result of an existing international profile, but not the cause of further internationalization. In this context, it should be noted that an internationally oriented library policy in Denmark is currently not specifically promoted at the national level.

Since around 2010, international project cooperation in the library sector has increased slightly. Whether this trend is a critical juncture in the sense of Capoccia and Kelemen needs to be examined more closely. Three examples may illustrate the different paths taken by the libraries participating in the study to be prepared to cooperate in international projects. They point at least to an increasing awareness of the challenges of internationalization.

1. In the first example, cooperation with the local university is seen as an opportunity to participate in EU-funded projects; the university has great expertise to raise funds, which makes it easier for the library itself to receive money to international projects. In the interview, one can also discover a different and more sophisticated strategy. The technology-based cooperation with the university creates and supports a specific development path for the library and gives its international activities a certain direction in the future: library as part of the smart city concept.

The cooperation with [the university] is not only strategic in order to gain access to EU funds. Cooperation also has synergy effects. Our interest in user-friendly library systems makes this cooperation particularly attractive for us. We are curious about their research results, which they have partly tested in our library. (Head of a central library in a university town)

The university is internationally recognized in robot technology. For the collaborating library, knowledge transfer and innovation is crucial for the smart-city-concept; international project cooperation seems to be a desired side effect, which results rather accidentally from the cooperation.

2. In the second example, the private international network of a librarian initiates international collaboration. In the beginning, internationalization is merely about supporting a library project in India; some librarians get together and start a crowdfunding campaign. As soon as the first project has been completed successfully, a new international project was developed based on the gained experiences. When the second project was launched, it was met with a very positive response both nationally and internationally. The positive start-up lead to the following summary:

My point is this: sometimes you should just get involved in an international project, not too much paperwork and not too much thinking about project management and final reports. The road to international cooperation does not have to be difficult. (Project developer in a provincial town)

In this case, international cooperation does not arise from a strategic calculation, but from the commitment and interest of an individual. With regard to the library, deep institutional change will be made possible when former experiences are anchored in the library's formal and informal rules. If institutional cooperation proves successful, one can speak of a critical juncture where the selective pattern of internationalization for this library has changed.

3. In the third example, an external steering group arranges an international literature festival and invites the library to become more international. In the interview, the project organizer of the festival makes it clear that the library would have continued to hold back in its commitment if it had not been urged to participate by the steering group.

Now the library is meeting its own international standards. Above all the young people have taken on this task. (Project developer of a central library in a university town)

These examples make two things clear. On the one hand, internationalization and especially international project cooperation is still a constant challenge for libraries. In the second example, a certain shyness with regard to too much bureaucracy keeps libraries away from international projects; in the third example, it is the lack of courage to innovate and the lack of experience that complicate cooperation on international projects.

It seems that in all three examples external impulses urge public libraries to become more international. Their environment expects greater international involvement; libraries must adapt their strategies, skills and services to meet the changing expectations of their audiences if they are not to lose their legitimacy. Even more important than the changing public expectations, however, seems to be the fact that libraries have dealt with the challenges of international cooperation in very different ways. Strategic aspects can be contrasted with spontaneous interests; time-limited cooperation is just as possible as long-term commitments. The transfer of technical knowledge about funding and learning a way of thinking international is another contradiction. All these different paths, experiments and experiences confirm that public libraries are at a critical juncture in terms of international project cooperation.

We are facing a so-called critical juncture for the entire library sector. This assessment seems plausible because internal conflicts in libraries have arisen over the scope, content and reason for international cooperation. Institutional layering, however, solves conflicts of that kind by placing old routines and skills next to new ones, because none of the institutionalized practices has the strength to prevail. Whether institutional layering can be conceived as a fruitful give and take, where opposites strive for new solutions, or whether we are dealing with a rotten compromise that paralyses any initiative and further development – this needs to be examined more closely concerning internationalization.

Concluding remarks

Public libraries, like many other cultural institutions, are forced by globalization, cross-sectoral knowledge transfer, migration, and international cooperation to make comprehensive institutional changes. Over the past 40 years, a selective pattern has emerged concerning international activities in libraries: Collaboration in international organizations, opening the library space to migrants and transnational cooperation in international projects. The third aspect is the most recent and least institutionalized. The public libraries were internationally oriented in internal matters,

as it is part of their historical legacy to provide access to information to all users resident in Denmark. However, direct temporary transnational cooperation was not part of their legacy. The article uses selected examples to illustrate the attempts made by libraries in Denmark to institutionalize project-oriented international cooperation. The manifold experiences with internationalization obviously represent a critical juncture at which a new development path emerges.

Further analyses must show which path-dependent developments result from cooperation in international projects and how international project cooperation influences institutional change in public libraries in the long term.

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