

Biblioteksdebat 1965-1970

- a library journal for the Danish anti-establishment movement

Pierre Evald

ass.prof. LIS

Aalborg, Denmark

Abstract: The paper discusses the role of the library journal 'Biblioteksdebat' in the socio-cultural upheaval in the Danish library system of the late 1960'es. Biblioteksdebat was the platform for younger radical librarians and the editorial guidelines for the journal was shifting between political left wing positions and more flower-power like editorial standpoints. This development is illustrated with examples from some of the issues, of which a few from 1969/70 stand out due to their creative and artistic design. With this library journal as its starting point, the paper continues to present the radical changes of the Danish library scene around 1970: The association of Young Librarians and the final take over of the trade union The Danish Librarian's Association following the exit of the latter from The Danish Library Association. The library development in the 1970'es is outlined, including the construction of a supplementary educational unit in Aalborg 1973 and the role of the trade union in the systems development of the FAUST library automation system 1973-77. Finally the paper is raising the question to what extent the library spirit and social values of those days have survived in our IT-sexy library environment.

1.0 The context.

It's hard to visualize the modern public library development in Denmark without the foundation laid down in the public library act of 1964. As demands for library services from a rapidly changing welfare society were increasing, the public libraries had to adjust to these new challenges. In this upheaval old structures were weakened and power bases shifted as well.

The youth rebellions of the late 1960'es certainly had their impact on the Danish library scene where traditional managerial values were at stake. And the institution for library education witnessed not only a paramount increase in the intake of students but also a political radicalization and questioning of what was up to now taken as granted.

In this paper the Danish anti-establishment library movement is presented through Biblioteksdebat, the journal that from the very beginning in 1965 evolved as a platform for the system criticism. Following the presentation of the journal the leads of the anti-authoritarian library movement is followed partly in the history of automatization of public libraries in the 1970'es, partly in the changes in educational stuctures at The Royal Danish School of Librarianship.

But to comprehend the library scene of the 1960'es, first we will have to get acquainted with the major players and institutions:

* **The Danish Librarian's Association;** the trade union and professional association of Danish public librarians.

* **Young Librarians;** an independent association, created 1965 outside the Librarian's Association. Platform for librarians with a critical attitude towards the library establishment.

* **Biblioteksdebat;** periodical of the Young Librarians 1965-70.

* **The Danish Library Association;** professional all covering federation of libraries and municipalities and librarian's professional associations. The Danish Librarian's association left this federation from 1.1.1969.

* **The establishment,** in focus for critique from Young Librarians and Biblioteksdebat;
- The State Inspection of Public Libraries.
- The Royal Danish School of Librarianship.
- The Library Bureau.

- The Danish Librarian's Association.
- The Danish Library Association.

In February/March 1965 a small group of library students met at the school to discuss the shortcomings of the library system and the power bases to be attacked. They decided to form Young Librarians and to publish a progressive journal for the system critique.

The major issues to be addressed were:

- * The conservative and stagnant image of the Librarian's Association, dominated by head librarians marketing values from their pioneer days as well as a collaborative attitude which was regarded out of time. In due time, the opposition in 1970 had the power to take over the apparatus of the association.
- * The State Inspection and the School of Librarianship were both targets for a critique of using clandestine operations in their preparations for the 1964-library Act and the new Act on Education for Librarianship from 1966. The need for discussions in a wider forum were not met, rather it was the traditional head librarians shaping the future behind closed doors.
- * The Library Association as an allcovering federation made it difficult to work out a position for librarians emphasizing general topics on the labour's market, in specific the salary situation and matters like compensation for new services, e.g. opening on Sundays. Eventually the opposition made the Librarian's Association leave the Library Association in 1969.
- * On a more general level psychological and social factors had clear implications in the clash of generations. Old-trodden principles for library management were questioned in this revolt among the younger generation, and with a political standpoint to the left of the center it was no wonder that demands for influence on the decision-making processes were raised.

Young Librarians took off on May 25th, 1965 with the aim to discuss these matters and to make a significant difference on the library stage. Concerning the objects of the association the statutes declare that it must

"...create a debate on the part to be played by the libraries in the society of the future and on their forms of activity both externally and internally. The Association can cooperate with all political, professional and cultural organizations".

Unlike its Swedish upcoming alternative forum for library debat, Bibliotek i Samhälle, Young Librarians didn't have an elaborated political program for their activities and as we shall see their platform were to attract attention from political minded librarians as well as the library-hippies of the late 60'es.

Bibliotek i samhälle. Forum för biblioteksarbetare och biblioteksnyttjare (BiSam) was set up on 18.5.1969. With statutes in 16 paragraphs and a program in 10 points.

"When Young Librarians was founded it happened under the inherited political dilettantism of the founders and the absence of objectives was made into an open attitude. Not so in Sweden. With a gründlichkeit likened to make even old hidebounds marxists think of formalism..." (Biblioteksdebat, 1969/70:1,p.22-23).

More than anywhere else, the Danish library debate was these years carried out in the library journal that soon was to become synonymous with the opposition: Biblioteksdebat.

2.0 The Journal.

The committee of Young Librarian were from the start of Biblioteksdebat in 1965 mostly identical with the editors of the journal, and following a later phase with editorial independence from the committee, the library journal finally ended up in 1970 in a total integration with Young Librarians. Over the years only fairly few people were responsible for the paper, but editorial changes can easily be observed from a more compromise seeking editorial attitude in the first volumes, over a brief political radicalisation in 1968/69 and into a final editorial board consisting of the flower children of 1968.

In a programme article of the first issue the editors explained the intention of Biblioteksdebat. Not

having an actual programme the aim of the journal was to qualify the library debate in general and turn the paper into an intermediary agent in

"...an endeavour to incite all instances inside and outside the system to view in common the libraries from a higher vantage point, to define them in time, and to find the place in which each detail belongs". (Biblioteksdebat 1965/66, p.3).

Among the editors were several now well established library key-figures. For reasons due to security none will be mentioned except the noteworthy Danish writer Per Højholt, who from the early 1960'es had been discussing the criteria for book selection in Danish public libraries. When withdrawing from the editorial work, he continued for some time to write a column in every second issue: Højholts Hjørne.

From the start in 1966/67 the tone was harsh and anti-authoritarian, and it soon had to be emphasized that the editorial line was to be found in the leading article of each issue only and in the editorial notes. Besides that the journal was an open forum for an independent debate. The goal was to be an inspiration and catalyst, and being the most quoted and mentioned library journal in the daily Danish press, something must have gone right. Albeit the fact that the journal's un-diplomatic tone in its last days tended to turn the dialogue into a monologue, a common fate of sectarian periodicals.

Illustrations:

- 1965/66. 1.vol. no.1. Frontpage by the Danish painter and sculptor Frithioff Johansen, born 1939.
- 1965/66. 1.vol. no.4, p.67-68. First drawing by H.P.Friis Clausen, 'friis' who is still pinpointing the library scene in Bibliotekspressen.

This was indeed an open platform without a tight guiding program. An issue like the implementation of audio/visual media in public libraries coolly had the thumb pointing downwards, as this expansion of services could not be accepted before the book collection had reached its ultimate perfection. A social responsibility towards library users with more basic needs was in the paper mixed with positions at the same time safeguarding also more elitarian standpoints concerning criteria of quality in the selection of library material. As a true offspring of its time, the dominant point of view in the paper was close to that of attitude relativism, elaborated these very same years by the talented Danish author Hans Jørgen Nielsen. Each genre of library material and each situation in life were to be responded to according to its own set-up and context-dependent criteria and not from a general concept of universal laws and values.

Per Nyeng, the present longtime editor of 'Bibliotekspressen', formerly Bibliotek 70, was attached to Biblioteksdebat in 1967 as permanent editor for Sweden. His pen was sharpened these years, and in 1970 he was ready to take over as editor of Bibliotek 70, the journal of The Librarian's Association. This position has been held now for 31 years, producing a readable journal and having steered his editorial course free from any restriction from the trade union's political interests.

From 135 members of Young Librarians and 287 outside subscribers in 1965 the journal's circulation peaked in 1969 with 2.000 copies - national and international - before a final climb down to 1.000 copies for the last issue in 1970. Also brief summaries in English was included from 1967 as well as bio data of the Danish writers, and drawings as well as articles appeared in English.

- e.g: 1965/66:9 Aspects of Danish librarianship: its purpose and significance as a social institution / H.P. Friis Clausen. International issue with drawings. 'Any similiarity with Danish librarians - departed or alive - is not quite accidental. Red.'

- In its fourth volume (1968/69:1/2) a new layout was introduced and the format enlarged. In the editorial from the new board of editors a somewhat more political sharpened profile was outlined.

The last volume of 1969/70 also witnessed a change in the editorial board, now giving space for a final peak in creativity from the flower children of the library scene. Special issues on labour democracy, comics, children's libraries, library education and popular literature were forecasted. Now the committee of Young Librarians is again similar to the editorial board of Biblioteksdebat, and the aim of the association is now defined as to publish a journal, which among other things was to deal with libraries. scanne bagsiden, med påtryk 1969-70 nr.1

The creativity in layout triggered some response from the readers of the journal. and the editors had to make a statement that "we intend in some cases to emphasize the general impression rather than the readability." (Biblioteksdebat 1969/70:2,p.2). The chief architect behind the

experiments in design was Jens Peder Agger, soon bound to leave the library sector for a more rewarding and challenging position as editor of 'carlsen if', the leading publisher of comic papers in Denmark.

A now highly esteemed library manager Niels Erik Wille - who by the way also was heading the research evaluation of The Royal Danish School of Librarianship in 1999 - happened in an article on popular reading in libraries to raise the question what societal interests were reflected in the school's curriculum plans. My guess is this question is even more adequate today (Biblioteksdebat 1969/70:3,p.10-12).

The journal perspired in 1970 with two special issues in newspaper format on The Danish Librarian's Association and the discharge of a leading member of the editors from a somewhat outdated library organizational culture. The post as editor was now ready to be taken over by almost anyone with the ambition to have the title 'editor' added to his card. But the times they were a'changing, and with Per Nyeng as editor of Bibliotek 70 the platforms and channels for systems criticism had now shifted to be performed not outside but within the associations and journals of the library establishment. The victory in taking over part of the library establishment now made Biblioteksdebat redundant.

- 1969/70: Frontpage, last issue in this layout
- 1969/70. Special issue on The Danish Librarian's Association. Newspaper format.
- 1969/70. Last special issue. Det var på Frederiksberg-overskrift. Frontpage. Status / oh, on backside.

3.0 Library automation

Also early initiatives in library automation were reflected in Biblioteksdebat, later to be polished in the systems criticism of Bibliotek 70 in the early 1970'es: A new book issuing system / H.K.Gordon Bearman, West Sussex County Libraries, England. With introductory note by the editors (Biblioteksdebat 1967/68:5,p.111-12).kopiere

The issue of library automation was on a political as well as on a social/psychological level mated with the struggle for improvement in the traditional organization of labour in libraries. Due to lack of educated professional librarians in the 1960'es the intentions of the 1964 library act were to be fulfilled by changing the composition of staff in public libraries. Clerical staff was enrolled in numbers mainly in the 1970'es, now paralleled with a growing number of graduates from The Royal Danish School of Librarianship. The expectations from these new employees for job satisfaction and democratic communication and decision making were reflected in the discussions in Biblioteksdebat and from 1970 in Bibliotek 70.

A central figure in this process of organizational change was Henning Gimbel, consultant in The State Inspection of Public Libraries and later head librarian of Herning County Library in western Jutland. In the latter position he himself became a much qualified critique of the automation projects, and following his prototyping of the DDE-library automation system his role was decisive in the dismantling of the Biblioteksdata II-concept and the breakthrough of an open market for system vendors from mid-80'es. But long before that he was a much loved target in the 1970'es for the opposition's attack on the organizational structures he implemented in public libraries on a national basis. This debate of the 1970'es was anticipated in an interview with Gimbel in Biblioteksdebat (1969:2,p.22-24).

The State Inspection of Public Libraries and not the least its director, Erik Allerslev Jensen, was the prime mover in the investigations and reporting leading to the first architecture for a centralised automation system for public libraries: FAUST/Biblioteksdata I in 1973. The attacks on the central bodies of the library establishment in the columns of Biblioteksdebat was now continued with more power and a much wider audience in Bibliotek 70. Here the editor Per Nyeng made the journal into a leading platform for the political discussions and attack on the centralized automation concept. And the hardcore writers hammering on the plans for library automation were to a wide extend identical with the former prominent pens of Biblioteksdebat.

The early 1970'es were ripe for political actions and it was clearly exposed that a great number of library employees were not convinced that this project was to the benefit of the library cause. The attitude and tone in which the critique was expressed had a distinctive odour of being anti-technological or even Luddite'ish in nature. IT culminated in 1975 when 1700 back out signatures from library staff nationwide were handed over to the project managers. This mobilization,

combined also with the even more decisive back out of the powerful Municipal Association, was the end of the FAUST project. And observers may notice that the Swedish BUMS-automation project, which in its architecture rested on the same centralized mainframe-concept as the FAUST of the 1970'es, soon was to be implemented in Sweden whereas Denmark happened to jump into a new and more sophisticated technology level of library automation. This exiting story on the development of library technology still has to be told on national as well as on Scandinavian level. We are dealing with the library history of tomorrow, and with the key figures disappearing other information sources as well are rapidly drying out.

4.0 Education

In Biblioteksdebat the new 1966 Act on Education for Librarianship had been under scrutiny and its proposals concerning its trainee period and the future possibility for an integration in a university curriculum had been discussed.

The youth rebellion of 1968 was in the autumn reflected in a significant strike performed by the students from The Royal Danish School of Librarianship. They were practising in libraries away from the school but found the library scene less supporting for their studies than expected. In fact this first year of the new programme for library education they were on salary and performed various tasks in the libraries, a situation soon to be changed as from 1969 they were financial supported in their periods as trainees. An editorial - titled: The first time - held this first youth rebellion in high esteem and praised the awareness among student in using the media in their struggle.

With the inauguration of the new location in north Jutland for library education in Aalborg 1973 the total number of student now was 360 on a yearly basis, of these 60 were heading for positions in academic libraries.

The political radicalisation concerning the societal role of public libraries had been paramount in Biblioteksdebat and Bibliotek 70. Now with the new unit for library education in Aalborg a young body of teachers with a political standpoint to the left of the centre were enrolled right from the universities where they had studied in the late 1960'es and the early 1970'es. Needless to say this constellation of leftists with a Marxist theory on dialectical materialism had quite some consequences for the approach and focus areas in the curriculum for library education in Aalborg. Useroriented projects were carried out closely connected with the surrounding society, and the theoretical schooling of the graduates may in these years have been as high as ever in Denmark. But it has to be mentioned too that basic public library ideology issues were at stake, and words like objectivism, pluralism, and comprehensiveness I can tell were not placed in a very prominent position on the menu these years.

Yet it was the Copenhagen location of the school that witnessed the foundation of 'Biblioteksfronten', a forum for left wing library students. From November 1975 they were publishing a newsletter 'BFR-Internt' in which they tried to strengthen the theoretical and political clarification of the library students. The general desire to encourage a self-awareness among librarians they continued and shared with Biblioteksdebat. Their flagship was the publication 'Bibliotek, bibliotekar og klassesamfund' in 1975, a Danish history of libraries based on a dialectical materialistic point of view and accordingly stressing the interdependency between society's economic/political basic conditions and public library development.

The teaching environment in Aalborg was adding some theoretical reflections to the discussions in library journals on the role of libraries in a changing society. The journal Biblioteksarbejde - edited by teachers from the school in Aalborg - was from 1979 launched as a channel for articles on a somewhat higher theoretical and methodological level compared to what was possible - also in terms of number of pages of an article - in the mainstream library journals. The editorial line was in it's early days a true Marxist offspring, but soon it was to be centered in a position more in tune with the library world. Still it's level has kept the reputation of being too theoretical for the potential readers staffing the libraries. Over the years Biblioteksarbejde was to be supplemented with Nordic kin-library journals; in Sweden with Svensk Biblioteksforskning [Swedish Library Research] from 1988 and in Norway with Norsk Tidsskrift for Biblioteksforskning from 1996.

5.0 Concluding remarks

This paper has presented Biblioteksdebat as a prime mover for the democratisation and radicalisation of the Danish library debate with quite some impact over the years following the final

issues of the journal in 1970. For a young library student and member of The Students' Association at The Royal Danish School of Librarianship in the late 1960'es it was evident that something was happened. But with my limited insight in the library structures and corridors it took me quite some time to find out exactly what. Now in the hindsight of illumination it's obvious that what took place in these years was to shake the library establishment and open up for a more democratic culture for discussion and participation.

The reaction of the neo-liberal 1980'es to this culture will not be discussed here. But it has to be emphasized that from mid-80'es the forum for debate changed remarkably. Now sophisticated technological issues was on the agenda sucking time and resources from all participants. And henceforward at a national level the library debate tended to be framed within groups of libraries relying on the same library systems vendors.

Nowadays I do have my difficulty in getting in touch with the library debate in Denmark. Some might argue that it is non-existing and others may add that library managers have lost the ability of writing and debating in a wider forum. Still others may add that it is all due to a simultaneous lack of courage and weakened self esteem due to uncertainty on the present and future role of libraries. As you may know from the Library Act of 2000, like in Sweden now library managers in Denmark don't need to be professional librarians, a situation forecasted in Denmark since 1990 at the least. Managerial qualifications have in the 1990'es been put under heavy pressure from a combined mix of technological, organizational and economic challenges.

This is now happening long time after The Royal Danish School of Librarianship during the 1980'es gave up on the challenge to educate librarians with managerial skills, an explanation to be seen in context with the new Act on Education for Librarianship from 1985. The Act provided a common structure for the education of librarians for public, as well as for academic libraries, and while stressing the need for strengthening the management at the school itself, it surrendered the library managers in a dead-end without much needed skills to steer the library organizations through the rolling waters of technological and organizational change.

The understanding of the public library as a system driven information center definitely has its impact on what is to be discussed and what not. Some of us may miss library discussions including more social as well as cultural issues. Issues of top priority in the journals and among library staff of the 1960'es and 1970'es, the period this seminar is dealing with. In my opinion the present integration process for ethnic minorities may turn out to be a prime mover in reminding libraries on some less sexy roles, long time emphasized in countries like the US and UK in their endeavour to put the library institution in a key role for a successful ethnic integration. This may succeed by means of pc's, but not solely that. A solid fact to be deeply regretted by hardware vendors and IT-focused library managers as well.

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