On the public library as publisher - a dialog - Thoughts about a greater engagement than hitherto in library publishing for the common good

Mikael Böök, with the participation of Anders Ericson and Ralph Amissah

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To the reader

This e-booklet spun off of my preparations for a conference of librarians who take a special interest in the role of libraries in publishing, or library publishing, as it is often called. The full name and the date of the conference is ‹*Mid Term Meeting IFLA Special Interest Group On Library Publishing, Oslo 5th and 6th of March*›. [1] The abbreviation, IFLA, stands for The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. A previous meeting on the same subject was held 2019, in Dublin, and I participated there, as I will at the meeting in Oslo, on my own initiative, as a long time admirer of the libraries and the librarians, but also as a concerned citizen and a critic. This time I applied for the possibility to present my views, and the abstract I submitted was accepted. For that I feel greatly honoured and grateful. My abstract was entitled "On the public library as publisher". It read as follows:

> A proactive definition of publishing would imply that publishing is something that *influences* the local and/or general publics and their decision-makers. Social and political responsibilities of the publishing librarian. Does the professional code of ethics provide ethico-political guidelines for library publishing? (For critical points, see e.g. ‹Lankes 2012›. [2]) Does the public library have the necessary autonomy? How will library publishing change the library's relations to the other publishers ? Can librarians afford to engage in publishing when the funds of public libraries are being cut? Can they afford not to engage in publishing?

> *How to be a good influence through library publishing?* – The librarians who engage in library publishing must ‹"take the case"›, [3] that is, passionately take up relevant issues that be-

long to the public sphere. The case of democracy is not controversial, but enlarging the domain of democracy is.

The public library ought to take the disarmament case to the public. – The example of Mayors for Peace. Is IFLA capable of adopting a resolution in support of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons ("tpnw")? The example of Daniel Ellsberg's book *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner* (Dec. 2017). Should the public librarians publicize this book although it is confessions, not science?

The public librarians may need their own cloud. – In order to become a relevant ethico-political competition to Surveillance Capitalism's (cf ‹Zuboff 2019› [4]) giant tech corporations the public libraries need to take control of their own computers. To create an adequate platform for library publishing, we probably need our own independent cloud computing system.

To the best of my knowledge, the 'presenters' of the above mentioned conference are not obliged to submit a paper, but I felt a need to work out my thoughts in writing before speaking about them to an international audience of experts. To get started, I mailed my abstract to a couple of friends for comments. Their response really inspired me. And so it occurred to me that the 'paper' I had thought of composing ought to take the form of a dialog – a text that consists of their comments and questions and my reactions and tentative answers. M.B.

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[1] ‹https://blogg.hioa.no/ifla/program/›

[2] ‹https://davidlankes.org/beyond-the-bullet-points-ifla-code-of-ethics/›

[3] ‹https://bibliotekettarsaka.com/english-version/›

[4] ‹https://shoshanazuboff.com/›

A dialog

Ralph: Mikael this is a very interesting subject to me and I look forward to reading how your thoughts on the subject have developed. For me there are very clear intertwined philosophical & technology (+political) issues. But I have not managed to progress much in my thinking, to have solutions.[5] Even with certain convictions the path does not seem clear. The outline and ideal, which perhaps could be seen as a goal has been consistent, but even the question of whether it is achievable has not been.

Mikael: Let me tell you from the outset that I, too, feel that I have not managed to progress much in my thinking, but let's try to think further, hoping that we will be "clearing the path" and thus getting ready to act.

Ralph: I suspect you will be much focused on policy goals?

Mikael: Yes, I am trying to define and to set up some policy goals.

Ralph: My thoughts and questions are unordered and spark off in many directions on the periphery of what is likely to be your primary interest: how to promote scientific/academic discourse? questions of resources, technical skills, digital infrastructure ... so, kind of off the top of my head, shooting from the hip so to speak, let me ramble, make some noise.

Mikael: Sure, I am happy that you tell me about your thoughts and questions, whether they are on the periphery of my own primary interest or not.

Ralph: Public libraries should find ways to tie up with public universities and open source projects (which ones and why? - another set of questions) and other groups with overlapping interests.

Mikael: It is very OK, in my view, if one public library, or a group of them, carries out some good educational or other projects – including publishing projects – with a university, but I should not like to see the institution of the public library becoming "tied up" to the university.

As for "open source projects", I wholly agree. That's a crucial point, and I do wish that the information technology of all the public libraries were free and open. (By the way, could we call the tech we want "public information technology", in contrast to the corporate technologies?) But they are not; the situation in this regard is not good today. However, while I am writing this reply to you, I sit in the reading hall of the public library of Porvoo (Borgå) which not long ago chose the free and open ‹KOHA software› [6] for its Library Information System (LIS), so there is some light at the end of the tunnel. Add to this, that the technologies of the public libraries and their academic relatives are not that different. To continue my example: ‹in Finland, at least, both types of library already use KOHA.› [7]

Ralph: My early web experience is an example of publishing within a university (of material that could just as well have been published by a library). In 1993 (at a time when there were estimated to be 200 web sites world-wide), I started playing with the potential of web based publishing at the University of Tromsø in Northern Norway with the site *Lex Mercatoria* (originally called *Ananse* and then *The International Trade Law Monitor*). It was primarily focused on private international commercial law, but included some public international law material related to trade.

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[5] A writing by Ralph that, in his own words, is *"tangentially the closest I got to broaching the subject of publishing"* ‹https://www.jus.uio.no/lm/en/manifest/on.the.net.and.information.22.02.1997.amissah.html› together with writing publishing related software SiSU ‹http://sisudoc.org›

[6] ‹https://koha.org/›

[7] ‹https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/collection/open-source-observatory-osor/news/koha-conquers-finland›

Mikael Böök

20 Twenty-five years on, with all the changes that have taken place and that time to reflect, what is the goal of the library as publisher?

21 **Mikael:** I should like to begin my answer to that question with a comment on academic libraries and public libraries. These two types of library are in principle both public; the academic libraries, because scientific knowledge should be a public good (or a commons, if you like); the public libraries, because democracy means that the public itself has access to widest possible information. Yet the positions and roles of these two types of library in our societies and world, are quite different. The differences are obvious, especially when we discuss policy goals, social responsibility and library publishing.

22 Now to your question. What is the goal of the library as publisher, you ask. My answer is that there must be more than one goal. In the abstract, I mention "publishing for the common good." This leads us back to the question of policy goals, and to the realization that there is a limit: the number of goals must be moderate enough to permit an overview and a classification of the publications, and in order to be realistic. I am inclined to draw a parallel between the number of the for-the-common-good-goals and the number of ministries (or departments) of a modern nation-state, something between, say, ten and thirty. Think of "Health", "Education", "Justice", "Human Rights" etc. Further reflections on this ‹here›. [8] And concerning "Human Rights", specifically: Toni Samek's book *Librarianship and Human Rights. A Twenty-First Century Guide* (2007) contains a wealth of information on what librarians have done, and also published in that area.

23 The goal(s) of the library "as publisher" is an enormous subject, but it may help if we draw a distinction between local goals and world-level goals. People are local, the public libraries, in particular, must serve the peoples in their local communities. R. David Lankes is therefore right to stress that the mission of librarians is to improve society through facilitating knowledge creation in their local communities (this is the theme of his massive *Atlas of new Librarianship*, MIT Press 2011.)

24 But it is also – and always – necessary to set priorities. And mine is a world-level one: the abolition of the nuclear armaments. Because this is the Archimedean point of our time. Moreover, I think that "silence would be treason", to quote the title of ‹a library published book of postal letters from Nigerian activist Ken Saro-Wiwa to the Irish nun Majella McCarron.› [9]

25 For public librarians, not to publish in order to deconstruct and abolish the nuclear Doomsday Machine would be library treason.

26 ‹"Treason' is defined as the betrayal of allegiance toward one's own country".› [10] I think that the allegiance of the librarians should be to their country, the library. Librarians ought to consider the library as being of higher value than the nation. ‹*"For"*, as Cicero wrote, *"there are some acts either so repulsive or so wicked, that a wise man would not commit them, even to save his country."*› [11] And the planning of a nuclear war, not to speak of deploying nuclear weapons in a war between nations, certainly is precisely such an extremely repulsive and wicked act, which, furthermore, does not save any country. So it is my hope that the librarians will take the side of the library in this acute conflict of values.

27 The media are in principle obliged to take this case to the public, but in these days the media just don't do that. Why? Perhaps the media are mental slaves of what veteran whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg

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[8] ‹http://www.kaapeli.fi/book/axes-themes.pdf›

[9] ‹http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/8940/›

[10] ‹https://www.thefreedictionary.com/treason›

[11] ‹http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2007.01.0048%3Abook%3D1%3Asection%3D159›

calls The Doomsday Machine? Anyway, throughout the world, the media silence on the nuclear threat is deafening – a treasonous silence indeed! Daniel Ellsberg:

28 *"We, as a society, are conscious of the risk of the devastating impacts that could come from climate disruption. In contrast to the absence of public discourse around nuclear conflict since the end of the Cold War, climate has been a subject of intense public debate. Although the danger of the nuclear threat remains undiminished, the proposed $1.7 trillion nuclear modernization program in the US is not a matter of serious debate. [...] We cannot afford the wasteful and dangerous development of new nuclear weapons that "modernize" the Doomsday Machine at the same time that we need to apply vast sums to reduce the threat of climate disruption. In the face of imminent climate catastrophe, the $700-plus-billion military budget is both untenable and irresponsible. We must convert the military economy to a climate economy. We cannot have both." (‹link› [12])*

29 Ellsberg here speaks about the United States and their military budget, but the media have shut up in the other nuclear weapons states as well, and everywhere else, too – even in the 126 non-nuclear states who signed the **United Nations Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons** (TPNW) on 7 July 2017 ! (Unfortunately, my country was not among the signatories of the TPNW, and has still not signed, although the prime minister and other members of the present Finnish government mostly are young and smart women of whom I cannot really believe that they will remain subservient to the absurd nuclear patriarchs of this world. So I wonder why the members of the Finnish Library Association do not put pressure on the politicians and our President to sign that treaty.)

30 The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN),

winner of the Nobel Peace prize 2017, is led by another young and smart woman – Swedish peace activist Beatrice Fihn. As far as I know, the IFLA has not yet formed a partnership with the ICAN. Why, I wonder. (‹The list of partners and ICAN's invitation to join is found here.› [13])

31 However, the nuclear threat and nuclear disarmament are issues that can create a feeling of dizziness. It is wise to summarize a couple of necessary first steps towards reducing the threat and building some confidence. Here is a short list, gathered from the final chapter of Daniel Ellsberg's book:

32 *Forgo the doctrine that we must be ready to carry out a massive first strike with nuclear weapons;*

33 *Forgo the delusion that our damages can be limited by a massive first-strike;*

34 *Arrange a public hearing about our nuclear war plans in the light of what we know about the risks of a nuclear winter;*

35 *Eliminate our intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs);*

36 *Otherwise dismantle the Doomsday Machine.*

37 Librarians can start by making sure that Daniel Ellsberg's book *The Doomsday Machine. Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner* (2017) is available in their library as a printed book and as an e-book. Moreover, librarians can contribute to fill the void in the public consciousness of the nuclear threat that the media have left open by way of *publicizing* this book. Depending on copyrights, they can also *re-publish* it, or curate translations, and thus become 'original publishers' of this important work in languages other than English. (Nowadays it should not be very difficult to organize a translator-crowd with the help of email, Google documents, and similar; in

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[12] ‹https://greattransition.org/publication/truth-pentagon-papers-doomsday-machine›

[13] ‹https://www.icanw.org/partners›

this way ‹*Hind Swaraj* by M.K. Gandhi,› was translated from English into Finnish by some 40 Finnish citizens, and then published; (‹link›. [14])

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[14]‹https://researchportal.helsinki.fi/en/publications/suomennoksen-esipuhe›

[15]Oodi Library, Helsinki (image from Wikipedia) - "Finns are among the world's most enthusiastic users of public libraries; the population of 5.5 million people borrows close to 68 million books a year. Indeed, Finland was named the world's most literate nation by the UN in 2016.
Not only will we open a new-world class central library this year [2018], we have also renewed our commitment to open knowledge, culture and the arts through our new city strategy. Our vision for Helsinki is to be a global leader in providing the tools for open and participatory democracy - the right to knowledge, the right to education and the right to public space regardless of one's age, gender, race or social standing," says Jan Vapaavuori, Mayor of Helsinki."
‹https://www.newkerala.com/news/read/6022/helsinkis-new-central-library-is-a-modern-and-globally-relevant-monument-to-knowledge-and-openness.html›

Ralph: Re. nuclear warfare, you realize there are other threats that are potentially just as "treasonous"; bio-warfare (rumored experiments to combine smallpox with other killers; whether or not someone has the vaccine or cure) and other near future technologies involving AI. This video on drones and AI makes the point (you may have seen) this sci-fi short warning film (on drone weaponry - lethal autonomous weapons, a form of killer robot) ‹*"Slaughterbots"*.› [16] In August 2019, 116 technology leaders (including Elon Musk[17] and Mustafa Suleyman[18]) ‹signed an open letter calling on the United Nations to ban the development and use of artificially intelligent "lethal autonomous weapon systems".› [19]

Mikael: I do realize that there are other weapons of mass destruction than the nukes, but only people are capable of treason.

Ralph: Point taken, though vaguely reminiscent of a defense of the gun lobby, together with manufacturers, distributors and pro-politicians in the U.S. in discussions on the legalized sale to civilians of military grade automatic weapons (claimed to be part of a Constitutional right here), that "guns don't kill (murder) people, people do". A possibility of targeted mass killing without harm to infrastructure, is in many ways even more terrifying than with such damage. However, I understand that with limited resources it is necessary to focus on particular themes, but perhaps this should be at the more abstract level of where it would be treasonous not to speak out?

Anders: My first thought is that publishing by public libraries will require collaboration between libraries. Publishing, both in print and electronically, will require expertise and other relatively rare or

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[16]‹https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-2tpwW0kmU› Prof. Stuart Russell gives a warning at the end of the video (Professor of Computer Science, Artificial Intelligence, University of California, Berkeley).

[17]founder of SpaceX, OpenAI and Tesla

[18]founder and head of applied AI at Google's Deepmind

[19]‹https://futureoflife.org/autonomous-weapons-open-letter-2017/›

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scarce resources in a public library of today. I think I agree with you, Mikael, that public libraries now should try to define on their own what publishing can be, addressing their own users. And even non-users; this might open eyes to public libraries that have been closed since college days. Eyes, that is.

43 I see that global issues such as the fight against nuclear weapons and climate change are crucial issues that libraries should participate in. Publishing the book by Ellsberg and translating it into multiple languages would be a measure that will attract national and international attention. Really a good thing to start with.

44 **Ralph:** I agree climate change is another obvious topic with very wide ranging implications local and global, that public libraries should be well suited to work on.

45 Is the library the original publisher? I had thought more of the university as original publisher, which sets the objective as being academic discourse; would the library overlap, it has much more diverse goals, from news to ...?

46 **Mikael:** Publishing 'the news' is, and remains, I think, the task of the journalists rather than a task for the librarians; the task of the librarians is to facilitate the public's access to a really broad selection of news sources. And many public libraries (in the global North, at least) are trying to do that.

47 However, dear Ralph, thanks for bringing up the question of *the original publisher*! Strictly speaking, the original publisher is the one who speaks to the world, and who must take the responsibility for doing so; the *author*, if you like. But these words, author and publisher, only came into wide use with printing. And in the world of print, a division of labor between the *original author* and his or her publisher is firmly established. What, then, is an original publisher? That is a good question! My answer would be that the publisher, *qua* publisher, has his or her originality only through the orig-

inality and the responsibility of the author. So, for instance, when *Juhannustanssit* (Midsummer Dance), a book by Finnish author Hannu Salama was published (1964), the author was convicted for blasphemy and sentenced to three month's probation. However, Salama's publisher Kari Reenpää, too, was convicted (although sentenced only to pay 2,000 mark in fines). Actually Reenpää, as the head of a for-profit publishing company, had only disseminated Salama's blasphemic writing to the public. So why was the publisher convicted? Because in order to break the law, the blasphemy had to be *published*.

48 It may be objected that a publisher, or at least an original (or first) publisher is also responsible *for the edition* (including the possibility of moderation) of the final print version of the original text of the author. And yes, this should probably also be considered a part of his or her originality.

49 I hope this brief reflection on "the original publisher" helps to clarify a key point, namely, that for the Public Library as Publisher the question of social responsibility is inevitable, and inevitably more so than for the academic library. Because the academic library usually sets the objective as being "academic discourse", as you say, while the public library cannot avoid being – best as it can – a publisher for the common, or public, good. This said, it must of course be added that the academic and public spheres are not separated by watertight bulkheads.

50 *Silence is Treason* by Saro-Wiwa, which I already mentioned, is a nice example of a book that was *originally published*, not by a for-profit company, but by a library. An example which goes to show how librarians might become original publishers for the common good (this time without getting sued.) Incidentally, The Saro-Wiwa book was edited and published by university librarians, at Maynooth University in Ireland, but I don't see why that good job could not also have been done by librarians at a city library. If the

book is a *scholarly* publication, then so much better, but the essential goodness of this book is *political* rather than academic.

[51] Nowadays, university libraries are, increasingly, becoming huge publishers – actually "original publishers", if you like – of scientific and scholarly articles and books. They already manage the publishing of thousands of scientific and scholarly journals, and they also curate the publishing of many monographs. In other words, many academic libraries are also becoming publishing houses.

[52] The same can not be said about the public libraries, at least not yet. The Wikipedia still defines library publishing – the growing trend we discuss here – as a purely academic activity: *"Library publishing, also known as campus-based publishing, is the practice of an academic library providing publishing services."* (Wikipedia, January 2020)

[53] Having quoted Wikipedia's definition of "library publishing" in a posting to the "libpub" mailing list of the IFLA (‹link› [20]) I received a (private) reply from an Irishman who asked if I could give him some examples of "the public library as publisher" in Finland. And indeed I was able to give him examples. This was my hasty response (slightly amended here):

[54] … Local history and the local cultural heritage is, naturally, one big area of interest. Just one example out of many: the not unimpressive website for ‹"Northern Bothnian cultural heritage"›, [21] maintained at the city library of Oulu.

[55] In line with the keen interest in the general digitization of information, a "digi-project" (Finnish: ‹*digihanke*› [22]) was launched last December, also in Northern Finland. The project

announcement actually has named one of its educational packages "The Library as Publisher" (*kirjasto julkaisijana*); the aim of this being to help the public to become publishers, and to use the public library to that end.

[56] I would also count in ‹The Library Channel (*Kirjastokaista*),› [23] which describes itself as "videos about books, writers, reading and libraries", adding that "Library Channel is also an Education Channel."

[57] Let me also mention two library-related publication projects in which I was personally involved.

[58] The first was "Zagrebin päiväkirja" (*A Zagreb Diary*) by Croatian peace activist and email pioneer Wam Kat (1993). This book contains a collection of Wam Kat's emails from the year 1993, during the Yugoslav Wars, translated into Finnish. The book appeared in print from the press of "Library Service" (*Kirjastopalvelu*), a book supplier founded by the libraries. However, the "original publisher" of this book was the "Information cooperative Katto-Meny" (*Informaatio-osuuskunta Katto-Meny*) of which I was the executive officer. The office of that enterprise (a cooperative) was located at the pioneering "Cable Book" branch of Helsinki City Library in the years 1993-1996. The linux-based internet-server of the cooperative, called "The Knot at the Cable", was the first internet-server of a municipal library in Finland and, presumably, in the world. (‹link› [24])

[59] Publishing of local history and local stories and traditions, yes, indeed! but shouldn't there be more library publishing on the present issues, too, and on the challenges of the future as well? Sven Lindqvist (1932-2019), the Swedish author of *Exterminate All the*

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[20] ‹https://mail.iflalists.org/wws/arc/libpub/2020-01/msg00002.html›

[21] ‹http://www.kirjastovirma.fi/›

[22] ‹https://kirjastossatavataan.fi/blog/digihanke-lahtenyt-kayntiin/›

[23] ‹https://www.kirjastokaista.fi/en/›

[24] ‹http://www.kaapeli.fi/book/vineart.html›

Brutes and A History of Bombing plus 30 or so other books, including the classic Gräv där står! [Dig where you stand!] on local history, wrote the following in an article, published in Scandinavian Public Library Quarterly 3/1989:

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> *"Libraries should become popular research centres which not only supply sources of information, but also produce the basic data one needs to express one's opinions on different issues. As we know, political power in a society like ours largely depends on who controls the investigation processes. Today only the state, local authorities, enterprises and large organizations have these resources at their disposal. … municipal libraries should be given the resources to help environmental groups and other pressure groups, local associations, village communities and trade union branches to obtain the information they need, in about the same ways as the parliamentary information service helps the parliamentary parties with investigations in various questions."*

61 If these words sound ambitious, consider that they were written before the web, the blogs and the ebooks, and all the digital tools at hand today for public libraries to become popular research centers and publishers of the results of their researches. True, resources are needed, but existing resources may also be re-allocated. Should it not be easier, in the 2020s than in the 1980s, for a public library to become a "popular research center"?

62 Sven Lindqvist's article was re-published in Anders' (and to a smaller extent mine) hardy blog at BiblioteketTarSaka.Com. (‹link› [25]) The Norwegian name and motto of the blog, *Biblioteket tar saka*, translates to The Library Takes up the Case, a concept that relates closely to Lindqvist's idea of the public library as a popular research center, and to library publishing. According

[25]‹https://bibliotekettarsaka.com/2015/07/15/the-public-library-the-research-centre-of-the-people/›

to this concept, the librarians ought to select one, or several "cases", issues of vital interest for the people who live in their neighbourhood and who use the library, and build a growing online repository of documents and background information on those cases. Again, priorities need to be set, but these are – mostly – local and pre-publicized because the local people, including the librarians, journalists etc. are usually not indifferent about what happens in their own backyard. By the way, when Anders presented his ideas at ALA Annual, Chicago 24th June 2017 one of his starting points was this: *"Library campaigns against fake news – a paradox. When did public libraries last really prioritize information, facts and news? Not since people – and libraries – let Google take over ..."* (‹link to the whole presentation.› [26])

Anders: In my work with this concept [The Library Takes up the 63 Case], I have been in contact with some more than the few [librarians at public libraries in Norway and other countries] who have actually realized anything. Anyway, the common attitude has been to prioritize local contentious issues.

This may be because today's librarians in public libraries are mostly 64 generalists and not specialists. Most people, and librarians, will easily master local questions that everyone discusses at the dinner table and at work breaks. But a few hundred librarians in a network of libraries will have expertise even in the global big issues.

The public libraries I have talked to about such things see programs 65 in close connection with publication. They see the kind of knowledge portals I promote, with links to web resources as well as to bibliographic posts in the Opac, as useful resources for both debate participants and the public before and/or after the open meetings. I have to admit, though, that most of those talks with librarians have been hypothetical.

[26]‹https://slideplayer.com/slide/13638578/›

66 When I have created knowledge portals, they have mostly contained already published documents or links to such documents. But those documents have often been hard to locate and widely spread on web sites, in archives and in libraries. So the library added value has been the concentration of such documents in one place.

67 Can we imagine publishing in a wider sense than a "plain" book or a "plain" knowledge portal?

68 I wish that a large public library or network of libraries could already try to publish article collections, i.e. anthologies, on relevant topics. They should approach authors, newspaper and magazine editors and others to get permissions to collect articles and texts or parts of texts, of books, for this purpose. And even ask for the opportunity to make podcasts based on them. It must be argued here that such anthologies will seldom create much competition with the original publications. Authors must be convinced that re-publishing of this kind will be a way of getting more readers.

69 At least in small and even medium size languages publishing is very far from complementary. There are big black holes or white spots. And translation and popularization often depends on considerable governmental support or private funding. In these days I'm reading a book on the introduction of post-modernism in philosophy and literature in Norway in the 1970-ies and -80-ies. In general the mainly French articles and books were much later translated to Norwegian than Swedish and especially Danish. Not that the public libraries in my county should prioritize French philosophy, but you take my point?

70 **Ralph:** I like the aesthetic and sophistication of your blog, Anders.

71 **Mikael:** And I take your points. I think they are good points. Anyway, when you speak about linking to web resources as well as to bibliographic posts in the Opac [the online library catalog], I feel dizzy – but this dizziness is created by the danger of information overload. I suppose you know about *FlipBoard*, one of the so called "news aggregators" on the Web. Well, FlipBoard is said to maintain 28 million news magazines! I stumbled on it the other day when I took a look at ‹"Bootprint", the new publication of the Transnational Foundation› [27] which focuses on Militarism & Environment.

72 **Anders:** 28 million news magazines! Sure, that'll make even the best librarian jump out of her or his skin. This makes me return to what I said about prioritizing local issues. The knowledge portals on my mind were local and thus manageable by most librarians. E.g. on a controversial city plan or a road project. While a global issue like militarism and environment requires an editorial staff of a network of libraries or a concerted effort between public and university libraries and even university staff and researchers.

73 Here I find it relevant to mention a Danish library service: `faktalink.dk`. This is a digital service to public and school libraries not by libraries themselves but by the major library supplier DBC, a publicly owned limited company. I translate from their self presentation: «Faktalink is a collection of articles on socially relevant and historical topics of wide interest. Here you will find articles on everything from sports, culture, history, politics, IT, trends and media and much more. The collection comprises approx. 600 articles and themes that are constantly updated and increased, as well as thousands of links and references».

74 As far as I can see it's a high quality service following both library and press principles and standards.

75 **Mikael** I also want to add something on a more positive note. There seems to be a (hopefully growing) trend of cooperation be-

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[27] ‹https://flipboard.com/@janoberg/bootprint---militarism-environment-tk0qmnrsz›

tween public librarians and Wikipedians. One sign of this is ‹the yearly international contest, which is encouraged by IFLA.› [28]

76 The contest is between librarians on the maintenance of Wikipedia pages in their own languages, and the amendment of the references on those pages.

77 Another positive sign is that Wikipedia and the great Internet Archive have started a promising cooperation on the linking of e-books from ‹Archive.org› [29] to articles in the Wikipedia. Brewster Kahle at Archive.org sees this as ‹*weaving books into the web — starting with Wikipedia.*› [30]

78 **Anders:** Wikipedia is of course an important platform where all kinds of libraries have much to contribute. An important side-effect of libraries contributing to Wikipedia is the much increased number of downloads and increased use of a library's digital documents through this channel, e.g. when a library edits a Wikipedia article on a local topic and adds links to relevant digitized photos in the library photo collections.

79 **Ralph:** Once goals are established a lot comes under the heading "future proofing", as libraries have a long term archival and research purpose, and this covers multiple aspects related to control, management of resources (and if/when of value data migration).

80 **Mikael:** Right, but *are* goals established? I'm afraid I must be very boring. I repeat myself and answer my own question: I do not think the goals of the library publishing have been established. Instead, some unavoidable goals are constantly being avoided; the goal of nuclear disarmament, in particular. Is a majority of us in

favor of keeping up and "modernizing" the so called nuclear deterrence, and, by consequence, the global nuclear threat? Or is this only the goal of a tiny minority of grotesquely powerful people and wannabe *"experts" on everything and its future*, who in reality are only defending their own wealth and positions of power?

81 How can the future of the library be protected if the nuclear threat is permitted to continue?

82 I understand that the goals that you, Ralph, have in mind relate to a different kind of problem; in short, you would like to move on to questions regarding the management and *the preservation* of the libraries and, in particular, I suppose, to the problems that have come, or will arise in the future, with the digitization of their content. Let me come back to that in a while because I feel that I must still say a bit more about setting the goal of abolishing nuclear weapons, and how I think this relates to this subject we are discussing, of the public library as publisher.

83 Let me ask, for a change: Is the library compatible with nuclear weapons? Some people would probably say What do you mean by 'compatible'? Or they would perhaps invent some other way to dismiss the question. But most would agree with the easy answer: No, it is not.

84 The easy answer is not good enough and that is a big problem. It is necessary to add a proof, or at least a convincing explanation for the "No." Consider, for instance, the following statement:

85 *"The library was born according to a design that has remained obscure throughout all centuries," says the Benedictine Abbot in , The Name of the Rose.. "The book is a fragile creature," the abbot adds, "it suffers from the use of time." So in Eco's mind the library must defend the fragile book. It must defend itself, unfathomable, like the truth it hosts. The fourteenth century Abbot calls his Benedictine Order a "reserve of knowledge that*

[28]‹https://www.ifla.org/node/92696›

[29]‹http://archive.org›

[30]‹https://blog.archive.org/2019/10/29/weaving-books-into-the-web-starting-with-wikipedia/›

threatens to disappear in fires, sackings and earthquakes." (‹link› [31])

86 Will this do? I am afraid it won't. Literary critics might say that Eco's novel was not good enough; Umberto Eco himself said it was his "worst novel" (‹ibidem› [32]). That would be *their* standard way to avoid the question. (By the way, is 'literature' compatible with nuclear weapons? Is 'writing'? Is 'civilization'?)

87 Statesmen, for their part, would be prone to ask - What has our national defense to do with the libraries? Or vice versa: What have the libraries to do with our national defense? So how to answer *that*? Is it enough to insist that libraries will disappear in the atomic blasts, although parts will perhaps be preserved during the ensuing nuclear winter–would a colder climate help to preserve the books, musical notes and the read only computer memory (ROM), etc? (To what purpose, one ought to add, because no readers will remain to enjoy the music or share the truths the libraries hosted, if there ever were any; but that's another question.) No, that argument will not penetrate into the head of the nuclear patriarch. Can you see one single head of a nuclear state who would say: You are right, of course our nuclear defense system is incompatible with libraries, therefore, let's stop building and maintaining those defense systems? No. Without exception *they will all consider the fate of libraries to be a minor problem*, and will remain determined to strengthen their systems of "national defense", which certainly means "modernizing", if not strengthening, their nuclear arsenals.

88 President Macron, for instance on February 7, 2020, confirmed that France will invest 33 billion euros during the next seven years in the "security" and "autonomy" of "Europe" by means of keeping the 300 or so French nuclear warheads and delivery systems fresh and ready to strike. (‹link› [33]). I quote this example because this example concerns me too. It concerns me all the more directly, as I am a citizen of "Europe." But is the nuclear weapons policy of France a matter of concern for the "European" librarians? Do the librarians of "Europe" consider *their* policy to be compatible with France's nuclear weapons policy?

89 There was a time when this last question would have been immediately recognised by millions of people to be one of common sense. (‹link› [34]) I refer to the 1980s, when it was normal to find Teachers against the Bomb, Bishops against the Bomb, Dog lovers against the Bomb, and even Generals Against the Bomb (‹the German General Gert Bastian, for instance;› [35]). And, of course, Librarians against the Bomb as well. In the USA, at that time, a group of librarians published a rather sophisticated newsletter called *Librarians for Nuclear Arms Control Almanac* (‹see the essay by Kathryn R. Garcia and Brett Spencer› [36])

90 Anyway, that was then. *Then* the opposition of the peoples to the nuclear madness of their rulers was a good bit closer to *hegemony* than it seems to be *this year*.

91 The opposition may achieve hegemony (ἡγεμονία), but only on the condition that *their* good judgment prevails and becomes the common sense of the times. For this to happen, it is necessary to reach critical will. This is a practical goal; it requires *action*. The answer is that something has to be done; for librarians this would then mean taking the case of nuclear disarmament to the public by making

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[31] ‹https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/02/07/the-man-who-loved-books-interview-with-umberto-eco/›

[32] ‹https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/02/07/the-man-who-loved-books-interview-with-umberto-eco/›

[33] ‹https://www.francetvinfo.fr/economie/emploi/metiers/armee-et-securite/armee-emmanuel-macron-plaide-pour-une-defense-europeenne-forte_3816833.html›

[34] ‹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Nuclear_Disarmament›

[35] ‹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petra_Kelly›

[36] ‹http://progressivelibrariansguild.org/PL_Jnl/contents44.shtml›

the library a publisher on this case. Needless to say, it is a political decision; publishing for the common good is, inevitably, a political activity. And a proactive activity, at that.

92 "Reaching Critical Will" is the name of the disarmament programme of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) – one of ICAN's partners, and the oldest women's peace organization in the world.(‹link› [37]) I shall not mention that women tend to be supporters of nuclear disarmament and that support for the same case probably is widespread among professions dominated by women, although too often passive and silent. I looked in `libris.kb.se` , the catalog of he libraries of Sweden, and "Reaching Critical Will" – the excellent newsletter of WILPF was not catalogued there; not at `finna.fi` either. But no panic, `worldcat.org` ‹has it!› [38]

93 Another ICAN partner, ‹Mayors for Peace, has 7,863 member cities in 163 countries.› [39] The cities, like the libraries, exist somewhere in between the states and the civil societies. And both cities and libraries enjoy certain degrees of political autonomy, or should I say, degrees of freedom to have and to express their own opinion on, at the very least, what is, and what is not compatible with their very existence. Isn't it interesting that so many cities have done so, through their Mayors while so few, if any, library associations have so far expressed themselves on the issue through their leaders?

94 Next question – for the public library – is: *How to* take the case of nuclear disarmament to the public? Well, for those who care there are many more ways than one person, or at least myself, is capable of inventing. Firstly, do not underestimate the *power* of ‹ICAN

and its many national and international partners.› [40] Understand, that the support for nuclear disarmament is widely spread in many quarters. Pope Francis has made the cause of opposing nuclear weapons one of the top diplomatic priorities of the papacy (see ‹here› [41] and ‹here› [42]), and that the Russian Orthodox Church seems to be changing position (see ‹here› [43] for 2019, but see ‹here› [44] for 2020!) By the way, is Islam compatible with Nuclear Weapons? ‹I don't think so›. [45]

95 And do not underestimate *our* power, or say that the IFLA will never join the partners of ICAN. The ICAN and the IFLA would both become more powerful if the IFLA did join.

96 The public library is in great need of this goal, the abolition of the nuclear arsenals. It would give a new meaning to all the other goals that the public library is there for and strives to achieve. It would give the public libraries, one of the important universal institutions of the human species, which a corporate-driven internet has by now almost overtaken, a general direction. But the public libraries have not set themselves this goal, yet.

97 Greta Thunberg is right, the powers that be, the crowd that meets at Davos, or at the climate summits, the hegemons of this world, *they do not deliver*. And even if they would declare that they, too, want nuclear disarmament, and pretend that they do everything in their power to make it happen, we should respond like Greta: *how*

[37] ‹http://www.kaapeli.fi/book/vineart.html›

[38] ‹https://www.worldcat.org/title/reaching-critical-will/oclc/753917609&referer=brief_results›

[39] ‹http://www.mayorsforpeace.org/english/›

[40] ‹https://www.icanw.org/partners›

[41] ‹https://time.com/3817021/pope-francis-nuclear-disarmament/›

[42] ‹https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2017/12/10/pope-francis-calls-abolition-nuclear-arms-ican-formally-receives-nobel›

[43] ‹https://thebulletin.org/2019/06/blessing-the-holy-icbms-the-russian-orthodox-church-and-putin/#›

[44] ‹https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-church/russian-priests-should-stop-blessing-nukes-church-proposal-idUSKBN1ZY2H6?il=0›

[45] ‹https://wagingpeacetoday.blogspot.com/2012/07/is-islam-compatible-with-nuclear-weapons.html›

Mikael Böök

dare you! – If Greta Thunberg does not speak about the nuclear threat (it seems to me that she doesn't, yet), it is probably because of her youth; she has not had the time to realise that the situation is even worse than she thinks. Because, in addition to the ecological and climate crisis, there is the acute nuclear threat. ‹*"Closer than ever: It is 100 seconds to midnight"*› [46]

98 **Ralph:** Turning back to the more technical and mundane but I think relevant to the subject of public library publishing: what of the long term archival and research purpose of the libraries and the control, management of their resources? I copy here a few questions that sprung to mind on hearing the topic of your presentation:

99 - on library publishing, perhaps a detail, but an important one, under what licenses, which of the e.g. creative commons licenses are favored and why?

100 - how important is technology selection? I would say of vital importance and an absolute minefield

101 - are proprietary solutions ok? how can public libraries use any companies proprietary cloud? what of the long term?

102 - what of changes in company policy? (future closure of company projects; bankruptcies; mergers & acquisitions)

103 - what of technology lockin? (where the effort put in ties you to a particular technology).

104 - what new/novel technologies are of interest and why, what is your position on blockchain publishing?

105 - how would that be kept sustainable?

106 - there are no coins to keep growing the chain

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46 ‹https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/›

107 - is this an inter-library distributed but closed chain, else how do you combat 51% takeover by a well resourced hostile organization

108 - there are open source alternatives e.g. for mass storage like ceph, but from where do you find the expertise / funds to run these things

109 - how important is control over library resources? essential

110 - how do best future proof?

111 - in the longer term it is difficult to suggest much

112 - even in the shorter term, technology changes, some storage data formats permit easier migration, retaining what was considered important within them than others

113 - how important are open standards? i would say essential

114 - is the future of document representation paper bound?

115 - paper has served well historically, and has proved a fairly reliable backup archival form, so there should be paper copy; but if more and more is to be done digitally and on computers with the potential for alternative representations, should future representations focus on a fixed paper form? (e.g. pictures of pages or technically more interesting Adobe Acrobat or older TeX and LaTeX; or should we be imagining alternative representations of documents that are more malleable, that retain as far as possible what is most important in negotiating text (for me, sisu and its rewrite have been a limited effort in this direction))

116 **Mikael:** As far as I know, *some* of your questions (e.g. creative commons licenses; open standards) are already hotly debated at least by *some* librarians; others, I guess are not (e.g. blockchain

vs. publishing). You also have questions about which I do not have an inkling.

117 I should like to single out one of your questions: *how can public libraries use any companies proprietary cloud?* because I hinted to that question in my abstract for the conference, and it strikes me as uniquely important. The so called *cloud computing* that took off with Amazon Web Services (2006-), and is today monopolized by a handful of US and Chinese corporations, is already considered to be of greater importance than the internet itself, at least for businesses and the tech economy:

118 > *The internet is no longer the essential enabler of the tech economy. That title now belongs to the cloud. But the infrastructure of the internet, at least, was publicly financed and subsidized. The government can set rules about how companies have to interact with their customers. Whether and how it sets and enforces those rules isn't the point, for now. It can.*

119 > *That's not the case with the cloud. This infrastructure is solely owned by a handful of companies with hardly any oversight. The potential for abuse is huge, whether it's through trade-secret snooping or the outright blocking, slowing, or hampering of transmission. No one seems to be thinking about what could happen if these behemoths decide it's against their interests to have all these barnacles on their flanks. They should be.*

120 Thus writes Molly Wood in Wired (February 10, 2020, ‹link› [47]). Let me also quote the *Digital Justice Manifesto* of the Just Net Coalition:

121 > Digital 'intelligencification' was preceded and enabled by the spread of networked software as the space, means and logic of our social, economic, political and cultural interactions and relationships. The Internet was its first prototype. As the Internet's core model was based on intelligence at the edges and on open, public protocols, it spawned a technical and social evolution that many believed would favour greater end-user control and decentralisation. Cloud computing – currently the dominant networked software model – has inverted this paradigm: intelligence is now monopolised by a few global centres, based on corporate control of data and private standards. (‹link› [48])

122 Wired and the Manifesto of the JNC both put the emphasis on the highly political issue of private vs. public clouds; both also stress that a few private corporations have monopolized the field and thoroughly marginalised the governments.

123 It seems to me that your question opens for a different approach. Because, if the library would not use *any* companies proprietary cloud, would it then not be preferable to create a separate, public *library cloud* – a cloud of and for all the world's libraries (of the academic as well as of the public type)?

124 In my opinion, it would. How many libraries are there in the world? I don't know the number, but IFLA must have the statistics. Anyway, the library, with its tens of thousands of branches all over the world certainly is one of the best chances the peoples still may have to *decentralize the internet*, and to *take back the internet* from the corporate behemoths.

125 A keyword in this discussion, is infrastructure. The clouds belong to the infrastructure of the internet, and, therefore of the globalized society we happen to live in and which is already unthinkable without its internet. Does the library also belong to the infrastructure? I would say it does. (And I cannot imagine a society without public

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[47] ‹https://www.wired.com/story/we-need-to-talk-about-cloud-neutrality/›

[48] ‹https://justnetcoalition.org/›

libraries; if that's were we are heading, then fortunately I am probably old enough to leave it before it comes into existence.)

126   The other day, I read that the European Union has "an ambitious cloud project", called *Gaia-X* that *"intends to become the 'European Cloud,' as a European alternative to the U.S. and Asian hyperscalers such as AWS, GCP, Azure, Alibaba Cloud and Tencent Cloud."* The piece of news ends with an open question: *"will Gaia X really become THE public cloud for the European market?"* (‹link› [49]) I would predict that it won't. And I think the question smells of market-fundamentalism, just like the Commission of the EU itself. I would prefer a slightly different formulation: *"will Gaia X really become THE public cloud for the European peoples?"* And I would not say that such a thing is impossible and will never happen. Here, too, the library needs to become a strong player and partner.

127   **Ralph:**   Your cloud discussion and conclusions of avoiding proprietary platforms are good... the principle should be extended to non-open source proprietary software... policy in place for open formats and open source (better *libre*) software.

128   If preservation in the face of the possibility of nuclear disaster is an issue, then for digital works, some form of distributed storage practices, in corporation with distant libraries or library storage centers... after all, it was with not dissimilar concerns of disruption (though then confined to communications) that the Internet was initially developed.

129   **Anders:**   I think the time is right for the public library and publishing. You mentioned Lankes and his slogan that the libraries must serve their communities. In a short time, this has become mainstream in many library environments in the West. I saw yesterday that otherwise pragmatic OCLC [Online Computer Library Center]

has this on the agenda. And today I read that the most important Italian Library Conference is dedicated to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals. How serving the community can be done seriously without any kind of publishing from the library is almost hard to imagine.

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[49] ‹https://www.whtop.com/es/news/ 26303-will-gaia-x-become-the-public-cloud-for-the-european-market›

About the author (and participants)

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Mikael Böök[50] (72), academic education in philosophy and history, was on the payroll of the Helsinki City Library and worked in its "Cable Book" branch in 1993-5 when we run the first webserver there; author: Biblioteksaktivisten – essäer om makt och bibliotek i informationssamhället [The library activist – essays on power and the library in the information society] (2013; 2018); co-blogger with Anders Ericson at BiblioteketTarSaka.com. Mikael lives in Lovisa (Loviisa), Finland. Contact: book at kaapeli.fi

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Anders Ericson[51] (68), freelance journalist, blogger and former librarian from Moss in Southern Norway. Former journalist at the Norwegian Library Association. As a blogger focusing on the public library as an independent promoter of democracy and public participation.

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[50]‹http://www.kaapeli.fi/book/›

[51]‹https://bibliotekettarsaka.com›

Ralph Amissah[52] (58) early work on use of the web starting 1993 (with one of the earliest law related web sites Ananse aka The International Trade Law Monitor and Lex Mercatoria, 1993 till circa. 2005); developer of SiSU software currently in late stages of a rewrite in D (the existing offering being in Ruby)

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[52] ‹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SiSU› ‹http://www.sisudoc.org›