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Cathrine Undhjem Arnhild Tveikra

Article information:

To cite this document:

Cathrine Undhjem Arnhild Tveikra , (2016), "ILL and collection management in Norwegian Public Libraries", Interlending & Document Supply, Vol. 44 Iss 1 pp. 20 - 26

Permanent link to this document:

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ILL and collection management in Norwegian Public Libraries

Cathrine Undhjem

Akershus County Library, Kjeller, Norway, and

Arnhild Tveikra

South-Trøndelag County Library, Trondheim, Norway

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to present and discuss the results from a survey on interlibrary loan (ILL) in Norwegian public libraries. Work processes within ILL have changed significantly in Norway in recent years, and new challenges have emerged. County libraries, public libraries and The Norwegian Library Association's Special Interest Group saw the need for a survey to understand how these changes were affecting ILL-work in the public libraries in Norway. The library community as a whole needed updated information to respond to the present challenges in ILL.

Design/methodology/approach – In March 2014, Sentio Research Norway conducted a survey on ILL among Norwegian public libraries. The survey was commissioned by the county libraries in Norway. In total, 425 questionnaires were sent to all the main libraries. There are 428 main public libraries, but three of them were without staff at the time of the survey. Further, 336 answers provided a response rate of 79 per cent. The survey had 48 questions.

Findings – An interesting result from the survey is that 53 per cent of the public libraries want no restrictions on what to borrow, while 45 per cent believed there should be some restrictions on lending. This shows a difference in the attitudes to lending compared to borrowing library material. However, 58 per cent of the libraries have not implemented restrictions on what to lend on interlibrary loan. One of four had restrictions on lending new literature. The public libraries were, in general, highly interested in better access to curriculum literature from universities and colleges. To some extent, they wanted better access to new literature, e-books and nonfiction (the category was named "special subjects and topics" in the survey). The survey shows that most libraries still prefer to order interlibrary loans for their users rather than encourage users to order themselves.

Originality/value – This study is the first systematic survey of ILL in Norwegian public libraries.

Keywords Collection management, Norway, Borrowing, Interlibrary lending, Lending, Public library

Paper type Case study

Introduction

Norwegian public libraries – key figures: Norway has 686 public libraries, all branches included, of which 428 are main public libraries:

- *Total loans in public libraries in 2014: 23, 214, 631.*
- *Total numbers of visitors to public libraries in 2014: 21, 448, 024.*
- *Population of Norway in 2014: 5, 109, 056 (Table I).*

Norwegian public libraries lend all types of material on interlibrary loan (ILL) – books, audio-books, music CDs, DVDs, games and magazines (not the latest issue).

The county libraries' ILL figures are not included above. These libraries have, to a large degree, changed their priorities in the past decade. There is less focus on operating media-collections, and more focus on managing joint projects and public library development. An increasing number of

county libraries no longer hold media collections. This development has caused a drop in county library lending figures from 195,042 in 2005 to 151,823 in 2014.

In 2003, the Telemark county library was the first to make a regional search available to the public; most of the other county libraries were quick to follow. The regional searches and the introduction of a national library card for library users in 2005 are the main reasons behind the increase in ILL from 2005 to 2009.

For more library statistics published by the national library (www.nb.no/Bibliotekutvikling/Tall-og-fakta/Statistikk-for-norske-bibliotek/Folkebibliotek)

Background to the ILL survey 2014

Cooperation and the willingness to share have always been the backbone of the Norwegian library system. The Norwegian Library Act states:

The task of public libraries is to promote the spread of information, education and other cultural activities through active dissemination and by making books and other media available for the free use of all the inhabitants of Norway. (Translation by The University of Oslo, The Law library.)

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Interlending & Document Supply
44/1 (2016) 20–26
© Emerald Group Publishing Limited [ISSN 0264-1615]
[DOI 10.1108/ILDS-11-2015-0038]

Received 18 November 2015

Revised 9 December 2015

Accepted 11 December 2015

Table I Statistics for ILL in public libraries in Norway 2005-2014

ILL (borrowing) 2005	ILL (borrowing) 2009	ILL (borrowing) 2012	ILL (borrowing) 2013	ILL (borrowing) 2014
276,043	336,815	439,567	467,898	480,266
ILL (lending) 2005	ILL (lending) 2009	ILL (lending) 2012	ILL (lending) 2013	ILL (lending) 2014
66,414	259,068	370,436	382,488	420,104

A key context for ILL in The Library Act is: “[. . .] all the inhabitants of Norway”. And furthermore: “The public libraries are part of a national library system” (The Norwegian Library Act, 1985a, 1985b).

The consultative comments to the Library Act states: “Interlibrary lending is the backbone of a functioning library network”.

The purpose of the Library Act may seem to be obvious, but there is a variety of local interpretations of the Act within public libraries.

Work processes within ILL have changed significantly in Norway in recent years, and new challenges have emerged. County libraries, public libraries and The Norwegian Library Association’s Special Interest Group saw the need for a survey to understand how these changes were affecting ILL work in the public libraries in Norway. The library community as a whole needed updated information to respond to the present challenges in ILL.

The main reasons for the survey are:

- The rapid development of library systems that create vast possibilities for more effective ILL routines.
- There has been a general decrease in public libraries’ media budgets in Norway.
- Several county libraries in Norway have changed their priorities and discontinued their collections and ILL services.
- New limits are set on interlibrary loans from some of the contributing libraries.
- The shift from physical to electronic collections in university and college libraries entails very limited access to these resources for the general public.
- Library transport systems in most counties.
- The library joint services at the national level have challenges and weaknesses.

Other important events regarding ILL and public libraries in Norway have been:

- The introduction of national library numbers for all libraries in 1999.
- The NILL protocol (www.biblev-no/nill) for the exchange of ILL data between library systems was established in 2000.
- A national library card for library borrowers was introduced in 2005.
- User-initiated borrowing in 2009. This enabled library users to order loans directly from the collections of about 2,500 libraries in Norway.

Establishing the work with the survey

Changes and challenges in ILL were discussed at a conference for county libraries in 2012. A working group consisting of six representatives from the county libraries started the development of a questionnaire regarding these issues in 2013.

Sentio Research Norway was appointed early in 2014 to further develop the questionnaire and conduct the survey. The implementation was financed by the county libraries in Norway, and the survey was conducted from March 5 to 25, 2014.

The survey title

“Folkebibliotekene og fjernlån, innlån, samlingsutvikling - i dag og i framtiden, 2014” – “Public libraries, interlibrary lending and collection management – today and in the future, 2014” (Translation by the authors of this article).

Methods for collecting and analyzing data

There were 425 invitations to participate in the survey and 336 responses were received (79 per cent). All the main public libraries were invited. The public libraries received an invitation by email to participate in the survey and all responses were submitted online. The survey had 48 questions which addressed electronic resources, user-driven ILL, ILL procedures, collaboration, transport, lending practices, collection development and access, skills development and guidelines regarding ILL. The survey used mainly linear scales for the answers with scales from 1 to 5, where 1 equals “to a very small degree” and 5 equals “to a very large degree” (and the option to answer “do not know”). The results were divided into relevant subgroups. All county libraries received tables with results for their counties.

The survey resulted in a report of 266 pages, which largely consists of graphs, tables and figures and was presented to the National Library in Norway in 2014, to the 11th Nordic ILL Conference in Oslo in 2014, the conference Sharing is Caring in Stockholm in 2015 and the Norwegian ILL conference in Oslo in 2015. Several county libraries have also presented the findings to public libraries in their own regions.

This article will focus on some of the most interesting findings from the main results.

The main results from the survey

Teaching user-initiated borrowing

Norwegian public libraries are increasingly automated. Self-service for return and lending are common in many public libraries. It is, therefore, interesting to see the results from the survey in regard to the training of patrons on ILL services, in particular user-initiated borrowing (UIB).

One in five public libraries offers user training on how to perform UIB. Forty-five per cent of these provide training on a monthly basis (for example, when the library is issuing a new library card). However, the survey shows that most libraries prefer to order ILL for their users, as public libraries have little time or staff to offer training in UIB.

A quite remarkable result in the survey is that in libraries with 50,000 inhabitants or more, 93 per cent responded that they do not teach UIB to their patrons.

We asked public libraries if they thought the present ILL systems are good enough to allow users to manage this task. The responses on this topic spread widely from 1 (very small degree) to 5 (very large degree); 19 per cent of the libraries responded “do not know” to this question. There are many comments to this question from the libraries. There is a considerable degree of mistrust in the library systems’ ability to handle UIB as the systems appear today. Other libraries commented that the systems are good enough, and the time gained for other tasks were worth the disadvantage of some incorrect orders from the users. All these factors make it difficult for the county libraries to form a distinct opinion regarding this question.

Thirty-two per cent of the public libraries wanted, to a very large degree (value 5 on the scale), to order interlibrary loans for their patrons. While 2 per cent of the libraries responded that they only to a very small degree want to order for their patrons.

Only 2 per cent of the libraries responded that to a very large degree (value 5 on the scale), they encourage their patrons to order ILL materials themselves. Sixty-four per cent of the libraries gave this question score 1 and 2 (to a very small or small degree).

Some examples

We looked closer at some results from the interlibrary lending statistics.

At 165.1 per 1,000 citizens, Hedmark county has the highest rate of borrowings of all counties in Norway; Oppland county follows at 160.7, Østfold at 141.7 and Akershus at 135.6; Oslo was the lowest with 13.5. Oslo has Norway’s largest public library, and has always been rather self-sufficient. But even they had an increase in their borrowing from 6.5 per 1,000 in 2005.

We believe that this is, to some extent, due to more UIB.

These figures include both borrowing requests ordered by the public libraries and directly by the patrons themselves.

The public libraries in Hedmark county not only have the highest rate of borrowing but also have the highest number of libraries that consider the library systems good enough for the users to order themselves (27 per cent gave score 5, 33 per cent gave score 4). The libraries in Hedmark consider themselves to be competent on this subject. They encourage, to a fairly large extent, users to order themselves (63 per cent gave score 3), but 71 per cent wish, to a large or very large degree, to order for their users. *It is not clear how we should interpret this.*

They do not feel they have enough time to teach their patrons ILL routines (76 per cent have very little or little time for this), and 81 per cent responded that they do not teach this to patrons at all. We also see that the libraries have commented diligently on this topic. Several libraries claim that the library systems are still too complex, with too many shortcomings, and that the national level lacks the necessary coordinating systems.

The county libraries conclude that the public libraries still want to keep a high degree of control over ILL. All public

libraries are not ready to let this very essential part of the librarians’ work be left in the hands of non-professionals.

A challenge for the libraries is that to be proficient in ILL, they must also use the ILL systems. Library employees need to have knowledge of the lending policies of other libraries and excellent knowledge of library databases etc. This is best learned by practical use – to stretch and use the “ILL muscle”. UIB will, for some library staff, be a possible loss of professional domain and skills.

We believe there should be room for both. Many users will still need help, to acquire materials. By offering and teaching user initiated borrowing, many libraries could actually increase their expertise in the field of interlibrary lending. When library staff have to teach patrons, they must necessarily explore, challenge and systematize their own knowledge of UIB, and that could be a shared advantage for staff and patrons.

Interlibrary borrowing

Interlibrary lending has increased considerably in public libraries since 2005. There are several reasons for this and the most important are listed at the beginning of this article. This development gives the public libraries challenges. The increasing demand for interlibrary loans causes some libraries to want to slow down the “flood”.

The survey shows that 53 per cent of the public libraries do not want limitations from other libraries on what they may borrow. One in three libraries would restrict borrowing access to new literature (34 per cent).

When it comes to e-books and movies, 8 per cent of libraries want restrictions on borrowing.

Only 1 per cent of the libraries want restrictions on the possibilities of borrowing language courses and audio books. The major challenge in terms of borrowing seems to be that 34 per cent want to put restrictions on new literature.

A number of libraries reported problems with patrons who have very large numbers of loans from other libraries. Thirteen per cent of the public libraries want limitations on the number of concurrent interlibrary loans a patron can have. Some libraries in Norway have introduced such loan regulations already. It is unfortunate that some libraries feel they are forced to make regulations for all patrons based on the overuse of a few (Figure 1).

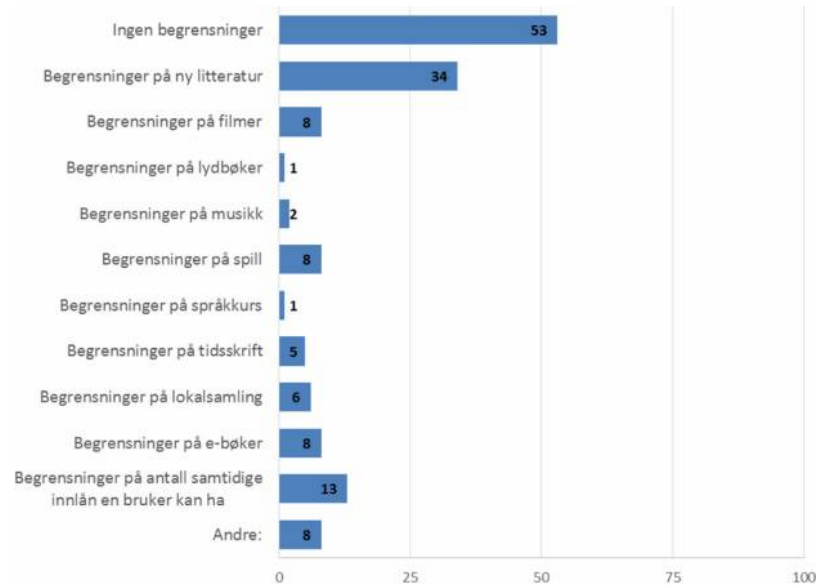
Interlibrary lending

The survey shows that 45 per cent of the public libraries think there should be restrictions on what they lend other libraries. Forty-two per cent believe there should be restrictions on the new literature they send to other libraries.

An interesting notion is that 53 per cent do not want restrictions on what they can borrow, while 45 per cent believe there should be restrictions on lending, i.e. a difference of 8 per cent. Obviously some libraries want better access to materials than they are willing to lend to other libraries!

How do libraries that feel the need for restrictions consider their role in the library network? When the larger libraries introduce restrictions it may have a negative effect on the willingness of the smaller libraries to share their collections. If we look in closer detail at the statistics of borrowing and lending, it is not always the libraries with the overall best resources that are lending the most to other libraries (judged

Figure 1 Does your library think there SHOULD be limitations on what it can *borrow from* other libraries? Several answers are possible – per cent



Notes: Ingen begrensninger = No restrictions; Begrensninger på ny litteratur = Restrictions on new literature; Begrensninger på filmer = Restrictions on films; Begrensninger på lydbøker = Restrictions on audio books; Begrensninger på musikk = Restrictions on music-CDs; Begrensninger på spill = Restrictions on games; Begrensninger på språkkurs = Restrictions on language courses; Begrensninger på tidsskrift = Restrictions on magazines; Begrensninger på lokalsamling = Restrictions on local collections; Begrensninger på e-bøker = Restrictions on e-books; Begrensninger på samtidige innlån en bruker kan ha = Restrictions on the number of concurrent ILL loans a patron can have

by staff, media, budget, opening hours, lending statistics etc.) (Figure 2).

Seventy-four per cent of the public libraries in Oppland county want limits on new literature they lend compared to only 8 per cent in Vestfold. Why are the differences so large between some counties? Vestfold is a small compact county with several city libraries, while Oppland is a large county with a more challenging geography and with many more small public libraries.

These differences may be related to differences in the counties' delivery transport systems. The number of copies of new titles in circulation in the counties may also be part of the explanation.

With regard to all other material types, the public libraries have very few wishes or demands for limitations when it comes to borrowing or lending. The challenge is that new literature is the most sought after and in demand by our patrons.

Practices in the public libraries *lending* policies when the survey was conducted

Fifty-eight per cent of the libraries have no limitation on what they lend on ILL. One in four libraries has restrictions on lending new literature.

Libraries with the most opening-hours, most personnel and most work hours spent on interlibrary loans are those with most restrictions regarding interlibrary lending.

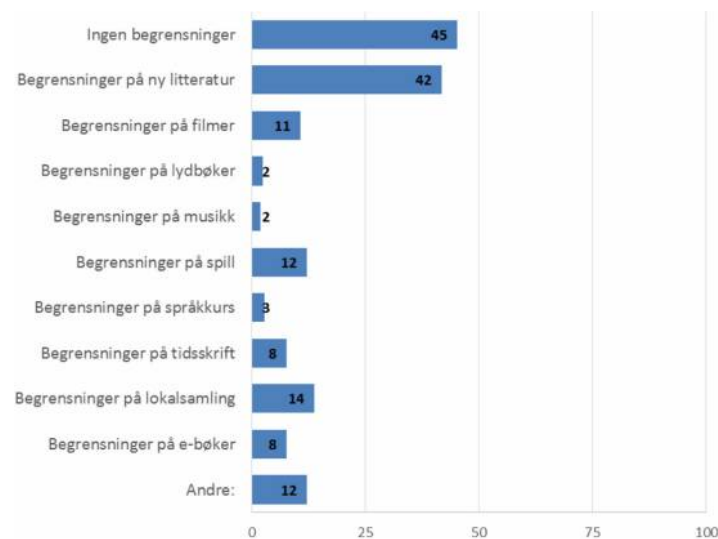
Ideally, everyone understands that small libraries need access to more ILL than large libraries. The larger libraries should be able to accomplish a higher level of self-sufficiency.

There seems to be a need for a better common understanding in the library community in Norway regarding the different needs for ILL. In the foreseeable future, there are no plans to compensate for provider-libraries in relation to receiver-libraries. This problem has been discussed for years in Norway but with no solution or funding being suggested.

The county libraries interpret the above challenges as a need for even better mutual acceptance in the public libraries for ILL as a common democratic benefit for all inhabitants of Norway. We believe that this is best achieved with good seamless library services and a high degree of collaboration by all parties.

The 25 per cent of libraries that practice restrictions on new titles operate with waiting periods before lending the material to other libraries from one week to several months. The different practices leave library patrons sometimes very confused who find it difficult to navigate in the jungle of different regulations.

When we study the comments in the survey regarding this topic, it may seem in vain to even attempt to avoid limitations on interlibrary loans in public libraries. The increase in ILL numbers in the past 10 years in the public libraries, have largely contributed to this demand for restrictions, especially

Figure 2 Does your library think there SHOULD be limitations on what it lends other libraries? Several answers possible – per cent

Notes: Ingen begrensninger = No restrictions; Begrensninger på ny litteratur = Restrictions on new literature; Begrensninger på filmer = Restrictions on films; Begrensninger på lydbøker = Restrictions on audio books; Begrensninger på musikk = Restrictions on music-CDs; Begrensninger på spill = Restrictions on games; Begrensninger på språkkurs = Restrictions on language courses; Begrensninger på tidsskrift = Restrictions on magazines; Begrensninger på lokalsamling = Restrictions on local collections; Begrensninger på e-bøker = Restrictions on e-books; Begrensninger på samtidige innlån bruker kan ha = Restrictions on the number of concurrent ILL loans a patron can have

on new literature from some libraries. There is discontent between libraries wanting no restrictions on ILL and those that want limitations.

Practices on the public libraries borrowing policies when the survey was conducted

In the survey, 87 per cent of the public libraries claimed that study literature at university and college level is most in demand via ILL. This is followed by fiction at 64 per cent and general non-fiction at 62 per cent (Several choices were possible for this question).

Nine per cent of the libraries would order a new book (published in the last six months) from another library when they have a waiting list for the item in their own library. Half of the libraries do this occasionally, while 40 per cent never do.

When a library has new books, DVDs, etc. available (released in the last six months), 61 per cent of the libraries will lend that material to another library with a waiting list. Only 4 per cent of the libraries responded that they would not send new material on ILL when others have a waiting list and 31 per cent will do it occasionally.

Most libraries borrow daily or weekly from the National Repository Library (77 per cent), and also from public libraries in their own county (76 per cent). They also borrow daily or weekly from the county libraries that still have collections (63 per cent) and from college libraries (63 per cent).

Despite some disagreements within the library community regarding ILL policies, there is a common understanding and willingness to serve each other.

As one librarian in a small public library stated in the survey, “We have only two readers of Murakami in our municipality, so obviously we send the book when a neighboring municipality has 20 people on their waiting list”. This positive attitude is what we strive to achieve with an effective and seamless interlibrary lending service.

Collaboration and transport of material

Eighty-four per cent of the libraries replied that their county or region has transport cooperation for sending material between libraries.

The firm, Norsk Bibliotek Transport AS (“Norwegian Library Transport”) was established in 2002. Over the past decade, they have, to a large degree, monopolized the transportation of library materials in Norway (except in the north). Their method for material transportation is very basic, and is based on the libraries’ national library numbers and no packaging. These features make it very easy for the libraries to use this service.

Three out of four public libraries reported that transport cooperation has led to more borrowing from neighboring libraries and from other public libraries in the county.

Sixty-three per cent of the libraries reported that they borrow more from other libraries with a functioning transport

system. Seventy per cent of the libraries reported that they lend more due to the transport system.

Eighty-one per cent of the libraries stated in the survey that the transport system has a high or very high importance for their willingness to lend material to other libraries.

Most county libraries support the transport systems in their counties financially. However the geography of Norway makes it very expensive for the counties to maintain this transport system.

The results from the survey show the importance of giving the transport system high priority.

Media and collection management

Nearly all public libraries in Norway receive Norwegian literature free of charge from The Arts Council Norway on behalf of the Norwegian state. There are categories of literature for children, adults and also for translated literature. Libraries may also receive packages of other media.

Several public libraries also subscribe to media packages from Biblioteksentralen (bookshop for libraries). One challenge regarding media package subscriptions is the local perspective in the library collections; another challenge is the diversity of material requested.

The media budgets are not increasing in Norway, and there is a fear that the collections in many public libraries are becoming too similar to each other. If the public libraries become increasingly alike, there will necessarily be further pressure on borrowing from libraries with more diverse collections.

Buying or borrowing?

Sixty-three per cent of the libraries responded that they often or always consider purchasing before borrowing from another library. About three out of four libraries responded that they purchase when they anticipate reuse of a title. Half of the public libraries respond that media budgets do not always allow them to purchase everything the users demand (48 per cent).

The greatest impact for choosing between borrowing and purchasing is the anticipated re-use of a title. The most common reasons for buying are waiting lists (43 per cent). The wish for an active collection development in the library (40 per cent) is another reason. Limited space is also a factor when choosing between buying or borrowing.

Better access to materials in other libraries

University and college library collections are changing from physical to electronic, and there is very limited access to the latter resources for the public. This is because college and university libraries spend an increasing amount of their budgets on e-media tied to consortia with strict and limited possibilities for ILL. Paradoxically, the rapid technical changes in libraries today facilitate better and faster sharing of media which contrasts with the restrictions and copyright rules which constrain access for the public library user to these vast electronic collections.

Priorities for better access

Libraries were asked what types of media or subject groups to which they wanted easier or better access. The libraries could choose from 14 subjects, with the opportunity to make several choices. The results, were ranked from 0 to 100, where 0 =

“to a very small degree” and 100 = “to a very large degree”. The “do not know” category was removed (Table II).

Libraries reported less demand for better access to computer games, comics and magazines.

A National Library Strategy

A National Library Strategy for the period from 2015 to 2018 was presented by the Norwegian minister of culture in August 2015 (www.nb.no/Bibliotekutvikling/Utviklingsmidler/Nasjonalt-bibliotekstrategi, www.nb.no/English/About-us/Strategy). The strategy describes The National Library's priorities and work with and for the public libraries. In the strategy, it is stated that the need for access to digital academic and research literature is limited in the public libraries; the county libraries are questioning this assessment.

The county libraries will focus on these challenges in further discussions with The National Library's Strategic Council. The issue should be addressed to the ministries of education and culture.

Paper versus e-books

Fifty-nine per cent of the libraries believed that the availability of e-books to some extent would be able to replace borrowing of paper books; 28 per cent believed to a small or no degree that this will actually happen. Only 6 per cent of the libraries said they believed this would happen to a large degree.

As in many countries, there are difficulties regarding e-books and libraries in Norway. There are e-book consortia in the counties for the public libraries, but there are challenges regarding agreements with publishers which affect what we are able to buy and further offer to the library patrons.

Concluding remarks

To some extent, there is an impression among the public libraries that the cooperation and good sharing culture that has been the backbone of the Norwegian library system is threatened.

Interlibrary lending and borrowing have increased rapidly over the past decade. The public libraries have been able to handle this challenge so far, assisted by new transport systems. The cost of transport systems is a challenge for continuous consideration.

The main issue with regard to physical media seems to be new literature, and the need in some libraries to restrict access via ILL. This and the strain on the media budgets indicate that

Table II The categories to which public libraries want better access

Subject group	Ranked at
Curriculum literature (university and college literature)	74
New non-fiction	65
E-books	65
Special subjects and topics (non-fiction)	63
Audio-books	57
Films	54
Other digital resources	53
Books in foreign languages	52

there simply are not enough new books in the system to meet the demands of the public for fast and “fresh goods”. These challenges will have to be addressed urgently.

The National Library will launch a new version of Biblioteksøk (The library search) late this year. The library search will allow all inhabitants in Norway access to all library collections in one search. Are the libraries of Norway ready for the challenge of allowing UIB access to all library collections through one database? When this happened in Denmark, the UIB exploded.

Public libraries are operating with different rules, restrictions, policies for borrowing, etc., and this is confusing and difficult to grasp for our patrons.

What does it imply for the public libraries when academic library statistics show a 50 per cent increase in download files from licensed bases, while they experience a decrease in ILL of physical media? It is a significant weakening of public access compared to when physical materials were dominant in academic and research libraries.

The survey shows that curriculum literature (university and college literature) is in high demand by the public libraries, but access to it is blocked due to copyright and economic barriers. To add to the complexity, there are currently two operating systems for Norwegian e-books in public libraries.

If the cost of participating in consortia offering journals and e-books at college and university levels is too high for the public libraries, then ILL possibilities must be available, and agreements regarding this should be negotiated at a national level.

The county libraries will be studying this closely and will maintain focus on this challenge.

Is the right of equal access to information for all people in Norway threatened with the increase in transition from

physical to electronic collections, especially in college and university libraries? This is a concern for members of the library community in Norway today.

There is a need in public libraries for more knowledge on laws and policies that apply in ILL and copyright, but also better knowledge of the tools that we use, and of the opportunities that exist despite various barriers.

The county libraries must continue to discuss collection development, and campaign for access to literature that is difficult to obtain and access.

The county libraries have, through this survey, acquired a vast amount of data regarding ILL and related topics. They need now to work on how to meet the challenges we have seen in the results. These challenges may differ slightly between the counties, and local conditions must be taken into account. The main goal for the county libraries is the democratic right to universal access to knowledge resources as this is an essential part of lifelong learning.

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Corresponding author

Cathrine Undhjem can be contacted at: cathrine.undhjem@afk.no