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## The Danish Union of Librarians - a presentation

### Libraries in Denmark

Denmark is quite a small country in terms of population as well as in terms of area; 5 million danes live on 43.000 sq. km. Some say small is beautiful, so maybe that's one of the reasons the danish library system is one of the most up-to-date and well-developed systems in the world. It is estimated that the total library expense in one year per citizen amount to 66 ECU.

Essential to the danish library system is its emphasis on co-operation. An example of this is the common danish library data-network, DANBIB. The Danish National Library Authority, under the ministry of Cultural Affairs, co-ordinates at the national level the co-operation between all categories of libraries: research libraries, public libraries and school libraries.

The research and special libraries - 600 state libraries - are placed under various ministries, the majority belonging to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and the Ministry of Education. Among the major research libraries are The Royal Library (national library), State and University Library, Århus, The Danish National Library of Science and Medicine and The National Technological Library of Denmark.

The public libraries are municipal libraries, organized in each of the 98 local government areas - all in all around 519 branches and 31 mobile libraries. In each county a library is appointed regional central library. The public libraries are governed by the Public Libraries Act and influenced in form and aims by the Anglo-American free public libraries, combined with the ideas of public education and enlightenment formulated by N.F.S. Grundtvig.

The school libraries - a library at every primary school - are equally defined by law and managed by the municipalities. The school libraries are media centers offering a wide range of learning ressources and audiovisual aids.

### The birth of the Union

Untill the late sixties the Danish Library Association, as in many other countries, maintained the interests of enthusiasts, local government and professionals and conveyed them nationwide continually keeping the eternal goal in mind of developing and improving library services. But at the end of the sixties the picture changed and gave way to an entirely different form of organization than that of library associations in Britain and in the United States.

The Danish Library Association organized local politicians, institutions, library staff and other bordering groups. These different groups of members formed their own units within the association - and by the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies these units developed considerably, and opposed the association.

The number of librarians itself was growing rapidly and the young trendsetters were passionately enflamed with the revolutionary ideas that grasped young people all over the world. There was a need to revolt against authority - The Danish Library Assosiation. The librarians did'nt wish to be in the same organisation as their employers - the local politicians. In 1968 they left the LA and formed their own organization. Later the research librarians followed and all librarians united in The Danish Union of Librarians.

### The organization

Thus the librarians had formed an independent trade union, to secure wage and working conditions and to cultivate their profession. Today the Danish Union of Librarians organize approximately 5.500 Danish librarians; 90% of all educated librarians in Denmark. 2.600 are working in the public libraries, 900 in the research and special libraries, 550 in the private sector, and around 600 are without permanent employment.

As other unions in Denmark we are politically and economically independant. Policy is decided by the members, who are not segmented in political categories. We enlist members with conservative as well as social democratic or socialist attitudes.

Today the Union has an annual budget of around 2,4 mio. ECU and employs 25 people at the head office in Frederiksberg, Copenhagen. We organize 15 special interest groups in various areas of library work: childrens libraries, reference work, library management and administration, catalouging, services to immigrants and refugees... We also have special groups concerned with the conditions for librarians working in special libraries and in the private sector.

### Hurtige genveje

Vælg genvej...

Vælg emne...

The Union is represented in a broad range of committees and boards established by other organizations, institutions and authorities. On the international level we cooperate with and have tight connections to organizations in the other Nordic countries and are engaged in the work of IFLA, FiD and naturally EBLIDA.

#### **Goals and activities**

The Danish Union of Librarians has the double purpose - as union and guild in one. The Union act both as ordinary trade unions, negotiating wage rates, employment and working conditions etc. as well as having a guild function. But we also cover the profession as such, taking interest in its development, procuring education and in-service training, unemployment etc.

It is within the union that professional pride thrives and is nurtured. Within The Librarians Union it's considered that the social significance of the trade is reflected in the value of the libraries and vice versa. The Union maintain that wage rates and the prestige of profession are connected.

We are concerned with the training of librarians and are contributing to upgrading graduates to university level, partly by in-service training and partly by supporting the efforts made by The Danish Library School to create vocational training in cooperation with our universities. We support this development through our wage policy, and one of our main tasks is to place the librarians at the same wage level as others with university training.

The Union of Librarians is also the leading light in cultivating new fields of employment for librarians. We run projects to investigate the need for librarian qualifications in private enterprises. We run a librarians job exchange to establish contacts between employers in business and vacant librarians, and plan to extend this job exchange to make international labour exchange more prevalent. The high and worrying rate of unemployment is the reason for giving such high priority to the development of the librarian labour market.

We do our own in-service training, conferences, work-shops, to support all facets of the library profession. The success of the libraries depends on the talent and competence of the librarians. And there exists a latent need for innovation, especially due to the recession we experience these years, which practically prevents young librarians from being employed in the public sector libraries.

We advocate various trade experiments - like users influence on public library-affairs, Sunday opening, reorganizing the libraries etc. We promote new media and technologies in the libraries and follow current culture- and information-policy closely striving to be trendsetters in these fields.

In the short the major aims of the union are to strengthen the future work in the professional field, to enforce the educational work and make a special effort to secure employment of librarians. The double role as guild and trade union gives us a solid platform to perform these tasks.

#### **The Danish national library umbrella**

The Danish Library Association and The Librarians Union are compatible in a positive sense. To some extent both organizations still deal with the same issues, but experience has shown that one is a supplement to the other.

The value of The Danish Library Association, which cannot be substituted nor assimilated within The Librarians Union, is the popular, folklore element which initially was the trade mark of the association. The Danish Library Association has quite a job lobbying for politicians to participate in marketing library issues, as well as ensuring local cultural environment by incorporating other lokal folklore.

In 1990 all of the Danish library organisations agreed on forming an umbrella-body to voice a common policy with more vigour when opposed to official bodies. The growing importance of international communication - for Danish libraries as well as others - we seek to employ this body as a national organization when Danish representation in international affairs is called for. The IFLA-convention in Copenhagen 1997 is an example a joint-venture of between all the organizations.

Besides our Union and the Library Association The umbrella consists of 3 other Danish organizations: The Association of Public Library Managers, The Danish Research Library Association and The Library Committee of The Union of Commercial and Clerical Employees in Denmark. All Non-Governmental-Organisations, with the common aim to forward and strengthen the library profession and its institutions.

Even though Denmark is a small country there are considerable resources allocated in the library field compared to many other countries. And though we have many different organizations operating in this field there is a large degree of cooperation. You might say that in this case small is beautiful - anyway it works!

#### **Further information**

For further information, please contact:

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