‘They come all the time and ask for help’: A study on librarians’ perspectives on the problem of digital inclusion in Sweden

Paper to be presented at:

XXVI Nordiska kommunforskarkonferensen i Reykjavík den 1 - 2 december 2017

(Also, a manuscript to be developed to the Journal of Community Informatics)

Mariana S. Gustafsson*, Julia Larsson**, and Elin Wihlborg*

* Unit of Political Science, Department of Management and Engineering, Linköping university, Sweden

** Motala library, Motala Municipality, Sweden

Introduction

Informed and knowledgeable citizens make up a critical base for the municipalities and regions. Never before has the demand for information and knowledge been so stringent. The official statistics show that the digital divide in Sweden is shrinking, but the fact that half a million citizens, most of which over the age of 66 are not internet users (Davidsson & Thoresson, 2017) should be addressed as a democracy problem. Moreover, as we will show in this paper, the digital divide problem is not limited to this group. The increasing volumes of information, the complexity of information technologies and advanced digitalization of public services, raise certain challenges for different citizen groups when interacting with governmental authorities (Bertot, 2016; Bertot, Gorham, Jaeger, Sarin, & Choi, 2014; Molnar, Janssen, & Weerakkody, 2015).

When national public authorities close their service centers in the rural communities, as it is witnessed especially by the daily experience of municipality libraries in Sweden (Norberg, 2017), they create a new and problematic situation for the citizens, leaving certain groups partly or in the worst cases completely outside the advanced digitalized polity. One immediate consequence is that citizens turn to their local authorities, and especially public libraries with their unanswered questions. Municipality libraries are currently developing their organizations and services to meet the new and increasing demands on digital information and e-services. Eight out of ten libraries in Sweden are currently offering services targeting citizens’ needs for digital information and services (Norberg, 2017).

We believe that the digital divide problem is not limited to the group of non-internet users over 66 years old, but it includes far more diverse types of challenges and citizens groups. We need to know more about these digital inclusion challenges, their conditions and the groups that are affected by them. This has
been a focus both in policies and research for long (Norris, 2001; van Dijk & Hacker, 2003; Warschauer, 2003).

Library as institution is fundamental for the lively, engaged, inclusive and rooted democracy (Bertot, 2010; Palfrey, 2013). The public libraries play a central function in the building of a democratic and inclusive society. In the building of the Scandinavian welfare states the libraries, and in particular local public, libraries have played a crucial role for deliberation and democratic inclusion (Hedemark, 2005). Today there is a national Library law in Sweden stipulating that every municipality must have a community library open for every citizen and adapted to the users’ needs (SFS, 2013:801). Through the libraries citizens are supposed to be ensured equal access to information, culture and values – which are preconditions for informed, active and engaged citizens in the public space. Moreover, libraries act as an equalizing institution in a democracy (Palfrey, 2013). By providing access and qualified support to all citizens, the libraries promote equal access to information and knowledge resources for all individuals in society.

To address the increasing need for digital information, all municipalities in Sweden have one or more libraries where citizens in addition to traditional library services also can get access to Internet, use computers, access other e-services and get support to solve their issues. Municipal libraries throughout Sweden are currently implementing various programmes and develop strategies on folk education (folkbildning) on information technologies. Some examples are GetOnline Week, eCitizen’s week (eMedborgarvecka), Digital Services Centers and DigiDel Centers. However, the outcomes of such initiatives differ considerably and the practices are not evenly distributed throughout the country (Norberg, 2017). The initiatives are mostly driven from bottom-up, depending on personal enthusiasm among library staff and access to resources. Importantly, while the role of libraries in the digital society is focused and emphasized in the recent national and regional digitalization strategies, the libraries still need a clearer mission for their work with folk education on digital participation (Norberg, 2017).

### Aim of the paper

Based on their daily practices, openness and proximity to the citizens, libraries contain a rich body of knowledge on digital inclusion challenges. In order to understand the problem of digital inclusion more insightfully, it is necessary to bring libraries’ perspective on it. The paper aims to analyse how municipal libraries and library regional cooperation address challenges of digital inclusion. In this study, we address problems of digital exclusion in practice through a field study of such strategies and practices through the perspectives of the librarians. The paper presents some preliminary results on the problem, using empirical material from field observations and semi-structured interviews with librarians and library managers at a municipality library and the regional library cooperation in Östergötland, Sweden.

### Outline

This paper proceeds in five steps. Firstly, as a background we will set the issue of digital divide, since digital inclusion aims to bridge over digital and social divides in society. Based on that background we will present our research method for the case study that makes up the main part of this version of the paper. Thirdly, as the main part of the paper, we will present the libraries perspectives on digital inclusion problem. The analysis will take off in the national context of digital divides, the regional and institutional framing of digital inclusion activities to subsequently land in the regional and local libraries, focusing in particular on the voices of the librarians and library managers. Finally, we will discuss some concluding remarks of the case study so far.
This outline indicates that we in this version of the paper do not include any explicit theoretical approach since that will be the next step for the analysis after this presentation at NORKOM. Instead we use the research overview and the institutional setting of the work as a reflection ground in the concluding discussion.

Research Method

This paper presents some preliminary results on the problem, using empirical material from field observations and semi-structured interviews with librarians and library managers at a municipality library and the regional library cooperation in Östergötland, Sweden.

This paper introduces a case study of digital divide in Sweden, as it emerges in the daily interaction between citizens and librarians. At this stage the study takes an inductivist approach (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009), by starting with the empirical observations in the collection of material. The empirical material will be extended, but in this paper it comprises:

- Two libraries: a municipal library and the regional library
- 5 interviews with librarians and library management involved in activities targeting digital divide and knowledgeable of the problem.
- Document studies: digital strategies, action plans, DigiDel reports, library reports
- Observations during Digidel activities

The analysis of the empirical material is in this paper limited to the organization of the material into themes and categories as they arise from observations in practice, keeping the representations close to their primary source, i.e. our informants. The underlying idea is that their illustrations and the themes that emerge as salient, important and emphasized in practice will guide our subsequent selection of theoretical explanatory tools. At the same time we are aware of the design implications of ‘dataism’ in the inductivist approach (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011), by keeping theory and empirical observation distinctly apart. We still consider this a necessary initial step prior to developing more complex designs in line with abductive processes.

Selection of cases

We chose Östergötland as we have been collaborating with the region and the municipalities on earlier projects. We have followed the work on Regional Digital Agenda and the ‘Digital Media bus’ project, among others. It is through this work that we came close to the libraries in Östergötland, specifically to the regional library collaboration and to some municipality libraries, work and perspectives on digital services. We observed how they lifted questions of digital inclusion and competence, responsibilities of the authorities and organizational challenges during the work with the region digital agenda and its anchoring with the 13 municipalities in the region.

Östergötland is a region reflecting a diversity of outcomes in digitalization in local public administration. Among its 13 municipalities, one finds both those ranking highest and those ranking lowest in the country, in terms of e-services and mobile applications (Gustafsson, 2017). The municipalities differ widely in terms of social-demographic parameters, with Norrköping and Linköping being urban centers mounting up to 150000 inhabitants, and smaller municipalities such as Ydre and Kinda mounting up to only 5000 inhabitants. A large part of inhabitants live in the countryside in Östergötland (statistics?), which means
that their need to contact authorities and use their services -- both nationally and locally -- depends on the availability of broadband infrastructures and e-services.

Five semi-structured interviews were carried on two occasions with library personnel at the municipal library in Motala and at the regional quarter of the regional library cooperation Götabiblioteken. Among the interviewed personnel we talked to the management of the libraries (2, plus 1 who will replace), one municipality librarian and two regional project leaders working with digitalization projects. These were key persons for our study as they have been working specifically with digitalization questions, either in their management roles or on the floor (or both) and were knowledgeable about our questions.

Digital divide as phenomenon and social problem: Previous studies

In this chapter we present a couple of studies focusing on how digital divide is approached and conceptualized and the role of libraries. The underlying aim is to continue to survey the existing research and develop the presentation below into a more comprehensive literature review.

Conceptualization

Digital divide challenges have not decreased with time and effort to address them, but seem to have changed their nature and focus in tact with information technology development and digitalisation. Different and other groups seem to struggle, independently of age, gender and socio-economic conditions (Jaeger, Bertot, Shuler, & McGilvray, 2012). At the same time digital divides remain a core challenge for an inclusive and participatory digital democracy and society (Norris, 2001). Earlier the digital divide was defined as a divide between those who do and those who do not have access to technology (Jaeger, 2012). The concept of digital divides has now developed from a focus on access to digital infrastructure to include digital literacy and competence in many different shapes comprising to classical social divides (van Dijk, 2006).

More recent studies analyze the phenomenon of digital divide in the frame of equal ‘access to opportunities’ - a term principally used in policy sustainability goals (Bertot, 2016). The argument is that equal access to knowledge, social, economic, civic opportunities will ensure sustainable communities. However, evidence worldwide shows large disparities in access to opportunities, posing social pressures for participation, inclusion and equity. The phenomenon is present also in advanced democracies, with U.S. being no exception.

Most broadly digital inclusion has been defined as the ability of individuals to access, use and benefit from ICTs (Bertot, 2016). Based on existing policy frameworks in the EU and internationally, the following components of digital inclusion have been (Bertot, 2016): access to ICTs, the Internet, and broadband technologies, digital skills, ability to use these skills in learning, education, employment, health and civic engagement. By contrast the lack of inclusion can be measured in terms of: lack of access to ICTs, lack of perceived value of digital content and digital services, lack of ability to use of ICTs, concerns over privacy and security.

There are especially three concepts that are discussed in the research about this phenomenon (Jaeger, Bertot, Thompson, Katz, & DeCoste, 2012): digital divide, digital literacy and digital inclusion. Digital divide implies the gap between inhabitants for whom internet access is available and those for whom it is not, independent of age, status and language. Digital literacy focus on the skills and abilities necessary for
access once the technology is available. Digital inclusion aims the bridge digital divide and digital literacy – it is the policy developed to close the digital divide and increase the digital literacy.

The role of libraries

The ambitions to work towards digital inclusion has to be related to discussion on inclusion as of digital divide (Norris, 2001), that today both has political and analytical implications (Park, 2017). Even if more and more humans are part of a digital society and use digital tools in everyday life, digital divides are reproduced in line with other socio-economic parameters as income, education and age (Thompson, Jaeger, Taylor, Subramaniam, & Bertot, 2014). Many studies have focused on the public libraries, as institutions, role as a cultural mediator and work for increased public education to avoid digital divides (Bertot et.al., 2013).

Based on extensive national survey data they find that U.S. public libraries deliver essential services such as free access to ICTs, digital literacy skills and access to opportunities (Bertot, 2016). By facilitating access to learning, economic, health and civic engagement opportunities - libraries engage in a critical part of digital inclusion services, their argument goes. Surveying on the digital inclusion programmes offered by the public libraries in the U.S., Bertot (2016) finds that the most used services are assistance in applying for jobs (completing online job applications) and navigation of employment databases and other job opportunity digital sources. In e-Government the most used services consisted in assisting individuals to access and use online government forms and e-services. They also find a disparity of 20% between city and rural libraries in terms of available programmes and services.

Another study by Bertot, Jaeger, Gorham, Taylor, and Lincoln (2013), focusing on the U.S. context, looked at public libraries role in delivering e-government services and the partnerships that arise as a result. Such e-government based partnerships are based on shared effort to cope with community needs ranging from health and unemployment services to social assistance and services to homeless. The authors lift forward a central issue that needs attention - namely the extent to which such collaborations can serve to a user-centred-approach to e-government services. This issue is central to the problem of digital inclusion, as user-centeredness and effective coping with different community needs - can be considered as one possible approach to address it. Also from this study as well as from (Bertot et al., 2013) can be learnt that the specific community demographics and the resident users’ needs are essential in the work with digital inclusion programmes.

Importantly, American libraries encountered challenges in their work with guidance and assistance on e-government services. Among the key challenges Bertot et al. (2013) have identified related to resources, staff and infrastructure: ex. too few work stations to meet the demand, time limit at the work station, not allowing enough time for certain groups to fulfil the tasks, connection speed, enough staffing and the necessary expertise among the staff. Studying the libraries an e-government intermediary, the authors observed a paradox. On the one hand the libraries increasingly engage in innovative practices to meet citizens’ needs for access and assistance on e-government services, on the other hand, their role in the e-service delivery chain is commonly ignored, undervalued and underfinanced (Bertot et al., 2013). This paradox is interesting to have in focus and follow up when looking at the Swedish context.

In the Swedish context, a mapping survey of municipality library activities has found that in 2016, 8 out of 10 municipality libraries offered activities targeting digital inclusion and participation (Norberg, 2017). Norberg has found that the most libraries offered activities falling within library’s own services (about 80%): teaching and tutoring on Legimus/talking books, on e-books and teaching on library’s own
The study also shows that a majority of libraries (between about 60%) provided teaching and tutoring on use of mobile phones and tablets, testing of digital technologies and scheduled hours for users questions on digital problems.

Importantly, in Norberg’s study the librarians emphasize questions of user-integrity and responsibility (Norberg, 2017) that emerge when they get access to user’s private information during tutoring and support activities. Such situations arise for example when users ask for help on internet-baking, in insurance issues or in booking trips. While 30 % of the libraries do not take any action in situations involving integrity and responsibility risks, the approach of the majority is to teach and show the navigation sequence in an e-service, but not actively make the decisions for the user. Their motivation behind the decision to support in such cases is the reason that there are no other actors in the local community to help, on the daily basis.

Digital divide in Sweden

Even in a Scandinavia welfare state as Sweden – where the digital development has come far – there are many people who lack skills in digital competence and literacy. This means that they who cannot be a part of today’s digital society risks to be excluded from the society’s different functions. In an annual report called The Swedish and the Internet the statistics shows that there is about a half million citizens in Sweden that are not digital included (Davidsson & Thoresson, 2017). This year’s statistics come from 3,184 telephone interviews based on randomly selected inhabitants that are older than eleven years old. The method for the study is called revolving panel design which means that the interviewed persons will be interviewed for next year’s statistics (Davidsson & Thoresson, 2017). The statistics from their study does not include those who has newly arrived to Sweden or those who are asylum seekers. This means that there are a lot of hidden statistics regarded the number of digital excluded in Sweden so the number of people that are not digital included are probably bigger then we know.

The largest group in Sweden, according to the annual report, are those who are older than 66 years and it is more common that men uses Internet than women. But it is not only the age that affect which groups are digital included or not though the level of education and income also have an important role in the question about digital divide (Davidsson & Thoresson, 2017). Though the number of citizens that are included in today’s digital society is rising, there is no need to settle down in this problem. The technology will always continue to develop and therefore there will always be a different kind of digital skills and literacy that the citizens need to learn to be a part of the digital society.

National policy initiative to increase digital inclusion

In 2009, the regional libraries in Sweden gets monetary funds for a project called IKT-lyftet (regarded information- and communication technology). The reasons why this project started was because the libraries in Sweden had seen an increased amount of questions about how to use computers and internet. The project also aimed to open for a dialogue on a national plan between libraries and other actors who work with questions about education. The dialogue’s purpose was to find a way to work with increased digital inclusion. A goal in the project was to initiate a national campaign with activities and different investments from the Swedish municipalities regarded increased digital inclusion. In December 2010, a manifest regarded cooperation to increase the society’s digital inclusion were signed by 16 different
national organizations and departments and in April 2011 the national campaign *DigiDel2013* started in Sweden.  

The campaign started in 2011 and had as goal to make half a million swedes more digitally included. The campaign drove by a network of 100 different kind of actors in Sweden, mostly libraries and adult education associations. The government has continuously invested in the development of e-government and the digitalization of our society, but few resources has been made on the development of digital competence (Digidel, 2013). An increased digital inclusion is necessary for the decrease of vulnerable and low socio-economic groups. The campaign *DigiDel2013* is one of the biggest investments in the questions of digital inclusion and competence in Sweden. After the campaign, the work has been continued by a network called *Digidel*. The network arranges two campaign weeks every year called *eCitizen’s week* and *Get Online Week* which are two campaigns that focus on making internet and public electronic services more available for the inhabitants. *eCitizen’s week* is a national campaign in Sweden and involves actors both on local, regional and national levels. In 2016 the national campaign week reached, along with their 170 participating organizations, over 20 000 inhabitants (Digidel, 2016).

**Institutional set-up for the work on digital inclusion in Sweden**

The fast development of technology and digital tools requires a digital competence today because otherwise it can create an exclusion. An effective and included development of the digitalized society requires that everyone has access to technical infrastructure, like broadband and other digital tools, but also competence in how to use these. In the same time as the public government transform to an e-government, where public service merges to only happens over digital canals, it is even more important that the inhabitants have digital competence (Jaeger & Bertot, 2009).

**Digital strategies as overall policy steering**

There are several policy initiatives on European level to enhance participation in the digital society. A Digital Agenda was agreed upon in the European Parliament in 2010 addressing among several other policy-challenges the digital divides. There is still a heavy focus on access, the “lowest” level of digital inclusion, but since it is lacking in several member states it must be addressed on such a general level. But there are also more practical initiatives to promote digital inclusion, like the European campaign *Get Online Week*, which always is held the same week in the participating countries, has been arranged since 2010 in at least 34 countries and reached over 900 000 Europeans. The main purposes of the campaign are to increase the digital inclusion in EU and its member states.

In 2011, the Swedish government presented a digital agenda for Sweden. The purpose of this agenda was clear, to gather all current activities into a coherent strategy to take advantage of all the opportunities that digitization offers people and businesses. The overall goal is to be best in the world to take advantage of the possibilities offered by digitalization. The national digital agenda focus on digital inclusion and says that the usability of digital public services must increase (Regeringskansliet, 2011). In line with the national digital agenda a commission were created with purpose to fulfil the agendas goals and the Swedish

\[1\] More information about the campaigns can be found here: [http://digidel.se/](http://digidel.se/) and here: file:///C:/Users/margu72.IEI/Downloads/European+Get+Online+Week+2016%20(1).pdf
governments ambitions regarding digitalization. The commission has taken the focus from only technical and digital infrastructure to instead show the social change that digitalization brings.

Conforming to the national digital agenda, several regions have formed a similar agenda for the challenges in their specific region. The Regional Digital Agenda of Östergötland includes five focus areas of which one of them is about digital competence and participation. A specific focus for the period of 2014-2016 has been to increase digital inclusion with particular affirmation of asylum seekers and refugees that have come to the region during this period in a large number (Länsstyrelsen, Regionförbundet Östsm, & Landstinget i Östergötland, 2013).

In May 2017 the Swedish parliament decided about a new strategy about digitalization which has as goal as to use the opportunities that digitalization offers as best as we can to increase the inhabitant’s life quality. The strategy contains five different focus areas which one of them is about digital competence. The overall goal for the focus area about digital competence is as follows: *In Sweden, everyone should be able to develop and use their digital competence.* In the strategy, the libraries are mentioned that they have an important role in the work of an increased digital inclusion in Sweden and that most of the public libraries in Sweden are already working with this question (Government Offices, 2017). The strategy has its background in the national digital agenda which has as goal to be best in the world to take advantage of the possibilities offered by digitalization. The Regional Digital Agenda of Östergötland will now be revised after the national digital strategy and will have the same focus areas as the national strategy.

In line with this strategic steering there was no specific and new national agency formed to manage these issues in Sweden. Instead there has been a national Digitalisation Commission focusing on information and knowledge development.

Conforming to the national digital agenda, several regions have formed a similar agenda for the challenges in their specific region. The region of Östergötland was one of the first to align its digitalization strategy with the national and European digital agendas. The Regional Digital Agenda of Östergötland includes five focus areas of which one of them is about digital competence and participation. Each of the focus areas contains a specific focus and for the period of 2014-2016 the focus has been to increase digital inclusion with particular affirmation of asylum seekers and refugees that have come to the region during this period in a large number (Länsstyrelsen et al., 2013). The Digital Agenda’s priorities are connected to the Regional Development Plan which is a collective strategy for the region’s development. In the Regional Development Plan the digital exclusion is described as a problem because today’s digital development has created many and different opportunities for the society – but there are inhabitants that are still digital excluded. In the plan, the libraries are described as important institutions in the work with an increased digital inclusion, because in the digital society it is necessary that all inhabitants can participate if they want to (Regionförbundet Östsm, 2012).

In the municipality of Motala, the municipal committees develop yearly a Planning Conditions document that steers the assignments for the municipal administration. For the year of 2018, one planning condition was digitalization. Therefore, the municipality is currently carrying work with a municipal own digital strategy. Motala’s digital strategy will be based on the national digital strategy and will use the same focus areas, among which digital competence is one of them. The strategy will finally be adopted in municipal council during the turn of the year 2018.
The more distinct policy implementation – steering the libraries into a digital context

The library has earlier been that institution in the society that has embraced changes and a new environment and so it also is with the upcoming changes from an industrial society to a digital one. In many countries, the public libraries have played and plays a key function in making the internet more available and open for all the inhabitants. They try to bridge the digital divides which has occurred in our society. Shortly after the internet had launched, many libraries had free use of connected online-computers (Bertot, McClure, & Jaeger, 2008). The library has always had the role of cultural educator but now, when we have entered a digital era, the library has gotten a new role where they have a responsibility to make information and public service available for all inhabitants. The reason why the libraries points out as an important actor for increased digital inclusion, is not only because they always have been working with folk education, but because they have a legislation which describes that the library should work with digital competence because it is a democratic right to be digital included. The 1st of January 2014 a new Library Act began to apply in Sweden (Bibliotekslag, SFS 2013:801). This new legislation has its focus on the developing of our democratic society and that all our citizens will have an equal competence in our digital society. It is paragraphs 2 and 7 which in particular promote digital literacy:

“§2 The libraries in the public library system shall promote the development of a democratic society by contributing to the transfer of knowledge and the free formation of opinions. The libraries in the public library system shall promote the status of literature and an interest in learning, information, education, and research as well as other cultural activities. Library activities shall be available to everyone.”

/…/

This formulation in the legislation shows that the libraries have a general assignment to:

“§7 Public libraries shall in particular promote reading and access to literature. Public libraries shall act to increase knowledge about how information technology can be used for the attainment of knowledge, learning, and participation in cultural life.”

In this formulation (Swedish Library Association, 2015), the policy makers that have used the legislation to make it even more explicit that there is a need to develop and enhance knowledge and competence on information technologies and their usability.

These quotes are translated by the national library organization and point out that the libraries have a responsibility in their democratic mission to increase the general digital inclusion in the Swedish society. It is clear that the government considers libraries not just as an actor for digital inclusion within their traditional fields of books and information searching, but a larger assignment to all forms of digital public life. According to the Swedish library law, every single municipality shall have a library that is open and available for all citizens and it is the municipalities who are responsibility for the public libraries (Swedish Library Association, 2015). The outcome of the work with digital inclusion thus differ between municipalities, due to the local autonomy, but they all have to address digital inclusion.

In addition to the national legislation, there are regional and local policy documents steering the libraries. In these cases there is a Regional Library Plan focusing on activities and content in all libraries within the
regions, even if they are managed by the municipalities. This plan also point out the importance of integration of new technology and digital development to increase the inhabitant’s digital inclusion. It is a question about democracy (Region Östergötland, 2016). To ensure that all libraries in the region of Östergötland can and will work with questions about our digital society, digital inclusion and media and information knowledge there is a public official working on the Regional Library with these questions. This position is responsible for that the libraries work with these questions and also that the libraries get that knowledge they need for their work with digital inclusion.

Library in work on digital inclusion in the region – introducing the case study

The region of Östergötland is situated in southeastern Sweden and is the home base for about 480 000 inhabitants (RKA, 2017b), making it the fifth largest region in Sweden. It comprises 13 municipalities that vary considerably in size, from about 3,000 inhabitants in the rural areas to about 150,000 in the main urban cores, Linköping and Norrköping. Most of the municipalities have a widespread geographic position (Figure 1), which has important implications on digital infrastructure and access to public services, especially in the municipalities scantily populated or those with so called ‘shrinking’ populations (Erlingsson, Syssner, & Ödalen, 2015; Syssner, 2014). Compared to other regions, Östergötland scores a bit lower than the average in terms of economic and social sustainability, ex. proportion of gainfully employed and total dependency ratio (RKA, 2017a). The region also scores quite a bit higher than the average in terms of households receiving community financial assistance (ca 40% compared with 30% on average as per 2015 (RKA, 2017a).4 In addition, the region is also subject of an aging population that is expected to affect organization of services, both public and private (Erlingsson et al., 2015). This is important to have in mind when we address problems of digital inclusion, as formulated in this study.

Figure 1. Geographic representation of the region and municipalities of Östergötland

---

2 Based on the search in KOLADA - a database run by the Council for Municipal Analyses, with SALAR and the Swedish state as members. The counties/regions and municipalities can be compared on: http://www.kolada.se/index.php?p=index

3 Especially challenging is the situation of the so-called ‘shrinking municipalities’: Kinda, Valdemarsvik, Ydre, Ätvidaberg, and Ödeshög.

4 Although, the same trend has followed during subsequent measurements, we shall keep in mind the developments connected to the immigration crisis from 2015.
Regional Library Cooperation Östergötland

The Regional Library is a part of the Region of Östergötland and has as mission to work for an equal access to media, information and good library service to all the region’s inhabitants. The Regional Library is the regional level in a national infrastructure of library cooperation. The Regional Library is responsible for municipal libraries, university libraries, hospital libraries and other special libraries in the region. The Regional Library shall encourage and support the libraries work with knowledge development, cooperation and quality.

In the action plan of the Regional Library, the digital inclusion is an important and prioritized process. The Regional Library run different development projects which all refers to an increased digital inclusion in the region of Östergötland. Some examples on the development projects are Digital media buses, Crossmedia and Media- and information knowledge. These three projects aim to both increase the region’s inhabitant’s digital inclusion but also to increase the librarians own digital competence and develop different methods for how the library itself can work with digital inclusion in their own municipality.

Digidel Motala

The national goal regarded broadband exploitation is that the year of 2020, 90 percent of the households shall have access to broadband with a capacity of 100 Mbit per second. The municipality of Motala has a long tradition of trouble with the exploitation of broadband and it is because some geographic areas are sparsely populated and situated in rural areas. The latest statistics, from 2015, showed that only 58 percent of the households in the municipality has access to broadband with fiber connection. The service, regarded digital competence and digital tools, to the inhabitants get more important when the broadband access is very low (Motala Municipality, 2017).

The action plan of Motala library for 2015-2018 says that the library has the responsibility to develop the inhabitants linguistic and digital competence and continuously work with an increased digital inclusion to support the society’s democracy and an active citizenship (Motala Municipality, 2015). The action plan is
a political document, so the library has a mission from the municipal politicians to work with digital inclusion. This is shown by the library offers digital help and tutorial for visitors who needs help with their digital tools. In 2016 the library started a project called *IT-guide* which is a project that aims to integrate newly arrived youths with mostly elderly people. This is done by the youths arranging internet café on Saturdays were the elderly people can come with all kind of questions about their digital and technical tools. But the library of Motala wanted to develop their work with digital inclusion therefore, in line with the action plan, the library of Motala decided to applicate for money to build and develop a digital service center which has focus on digital activities to increase the digital inclusion in the municipality. The idea of a digital service center came from a project in a nearby municipality named Mjölby where they investigated the opportunities for the library to work as a digital service center. It is the experience of the project in Mjölby and with support from the Regional Digital Agenda that Motala decided to applicate for money to start a digital service center.

The purpose with the digital service center, called *DigidelCenter*, is to strengthen democracy by providing the conditions for an active citizenship in today’s digital society. The goal is to make more inhabitants feel that they are digitally included so that they can use internet for the benefit and enjoyment of their daily lives and feel that they can participate in today’s digital community. Currently, DigidelCenter is organizing the following activities:

- Three different study circles with focus on basic learning about computers, internet, smart phones and iPads
- A study circle about economy and the internet bank for newly arrived in Sweden
- Programming workshops for children
- Other workshops for children with focus on creation and digitalization

Motala library has 24 permanent employees, one project employment and five development employments (ex. Arbetsträning, OSA-tjänst, utvecklingstjänst etc). The library consists of one main library in Motala city, two smaller libraries in adjacent cities in the municipality and also one library bus. The main library has about 170 000 visitors per year and has open 46 hours per week.

**Librarians’ perspectives on the problem of digital inclusion**

*Presentation of interview & document results*

In order to understand the perspective of the libraries in relation to problems of digital divide it is important to understand how the role and the nature of libraries’ work on digital literacy have changed while society advances its digitalization efforts. It is clear that the libraries’ practices have changed following the media technologies development. The changes follow the developments in the e-government, in terms of digitalization of government services. In this section we present some preliminary results from our empirical material.

**Organisation challenges in practice**

The way libraries work and their services have fundamentally changed following information technology developments. More media channels and more information has meant more access to information for more groups. It has also meant more knowledge about their users with special needs (ex. users with dyslexia, cognitive disabilities or sight impairment) and how they can be enabled by technology. For the
citizens, it has meant more accessibility and opportunities to be informed and participate in the society. For the libraries, it has meant more and diverse users of their services, different and more diversity in service needs, different technology solutions and different questions related to technology to attend to. The library manager in Motala explained:

‘The library’s modus operandi has changed fundamentally. We manage currently a much wider range of media formats - both analog and digital. We have the complete range of users and issues. It has become more complex, you have to think much more. We are in essence working with much more information today. And we provide more help for self-help in accessing and navigating information through digital tools. The library has become a pedagogic workshop – where you not solely provide the information to the user, but you help them use the different tools to navigate the media and more recently, the service landscapes. In every step we undertake, we need to consider all the media channels, both analog and digital, in order to meet the needs of the entire range of users. It’s our mission’ (Birgitta, Library manager, Motala).

One of the central challenge for the libraries is to keep up the pace of information technology development and its enabling affordances to the wider and more diverse groups of users and their needs. Accessibility to information and knowledge acquires complexity as it is mediated by more technologies. Libraries need to keep up with knowledge about the new digital media landscapes. The following to citations illustrate this challenge:

‘The modern public library must respond to completely different needs, in order to feel relevant and important to the people. The great challenge for today’s library is to open the doors to the digital world, and help people navigate the digital information jungle. The library is a digital knowledge disseminator, which helps bridge the knowledge gap in our society when it comes to using digital media. It is about democracy and education in our times’ (Motala bibliotek, 16/BN0103).

‘Library services shall be accessible for all. We shall serve people with different disabilities: visual impairment, physical disabilities, mental and communication disabilities, of different languages and different ages. We need to be updated about the different media and technologies that make information available for these groups. We need to know how these work in order to help them in the best way... The libraries should be at the forefront’ (Kerstin, Manager, Regionbiblioteket).

Resources: personnel, knowledge and update, time

Through the interviews all informants made clear that most of the issues on digital inclusion have to be addressed outside the scheduled programmes (i.e workshops, courses etc). Instead visitors are asking for support on a drop-in basis, daily, to the information desks. Their questions are diverse and most of them require solving of specific problems. For the staff it also becomes a question of time and prioritizations, since some issues take time to solve. Time is also an issue when support is given in form of teaching, or help-for-self-help (and not just solving the problem instead of the user), so that the user can solve the problem himself next time. One of our interviewees explained:

‘It is a problem of personnel. As for example yesterday afternoon, when I worked at the information desk, we had a lot to do. We had many issues coming and some of these took much longer time. We had to push ahead. These issues require know how, especially the teaching part. And it is difficult to manage in terms of time. Most often they come with a problem that they need to solve on the spot. It is difficult to tell them to come later. ’ (Johanna, Librarian, Motala)
Another example of time-consuming, know-how requiring questions, but also a situation when the question needed to be solved on the spot:

‘A woman with visual impairment approached me for assistance with Legimus (ed. programme for people with reading and writing difficulties). She asked for help with transferring digital talking books from the library computer to her own DAISY player. The process itself is difficult to manage if you have that kind of visual impairment. It did not work either when we would do it together. It needed troubleshooting and better understanding of the problem. I could not help her then because I had not enough time.’ (Johanna, Librarian, Motala)

Another example of how a library service have changed and the importance of proper knowledge:

‘Today we need to register all users who qualify for the talking book service. We need to care for the accessibility of the users to this media. We have to care about showing how the service works so that he or she can stay at home and access by herself the national database for the talking books. To be a librarian responsible for this service - you need special competence and continuous update. In the past they were lending the talking books in their huge boxes. We had instruction brochures that we had to read for them. Today we work on registering the recipients. We need to be knowledgeable of the technicalities, both software and hardware, surrounding this service. (Birgitta, Library manager, Motala).

The practice also shows that the users are increasingly coming with questions in connection with other authorities and banks e-services. Helping with such questions requires more knowledge about how the respective authority services work and the technologies connected to them. Helping the user in such cases (ex. logging in on the personal pages and following a service procedure) involves following a service procedure correctly and sending relevant information:

‘The other day, a man in his forties approached me for help. I believe he was either starting new studies or he was returning to studies. He needed to apply for an additional CSN (ed. The Swedish Board of Student Finance) loan. At CSN they advised him to apply online, through their webpage. The man came to us. Here we have a knowledge issue. I as a librarian have not enough knowledge about CSN loan application system. It was a long time since I had to deal with them or their services. I’m not updated at all on this stuff. But at the same time who else could help this man?’ (Johanna, Librarian, Motala)

In situations like this, when the user opens up his personal profile for others to make decisions pursuing a service or trouble-shooting for a technical problem, issues of personal integrity and responsibility become central. This was emphasized by two of the librarians we interviewed. They both had experienced such ethical challenging situations when for example helping users with access to their private internet bank account and Facebook Messenger (Observations during eCitizen week, 2017-10-12).

‘It is becoming an issue now, where to draw a line, how long shall we go with helping them?’ (Susanne, Librarian, Motala).

Such a development is currently generating a certain discontent internally at the libraries and the staff is divided about who should take responsibility for such questions.

‘The others (ed. authorities) are sending their customers to the library: the insurance agency, the bank, the employment agency (ed. to help them with their issues). There are different meanings about this, there is a certain irritation (ed. among the libraries) – shall we be a municipal office? Some sees the possibilities that this situation opens for the library, but at the same time one realizes that it is a bit problematic when other public authorities are sending their users to us to solve their problems. The other authorities should also help. They are also responsible for this’ (Birgitta, Library manager, Motala).
Collaboration with the different authorities has been one prioritized solution to this challenge. DigidelCenter is one example:

‘The idea with DigidelCenter is really to collaborate with these actors. They shall allocate resources to show up at the library and meet these citizens and show them their services, how these are to be used and answer their questions. We have started a collaboration with our municipal administration, called Bryggan (the Bridge) who is working with refugees. They send one of their staff to DigidelCenter who is tutoring about municipal services in several languages. This doesn’t cost us anything. Sometimes the banks are coming, 2, 3 times a year. But we see that their customers need their help more often in the daily life’ (Birgitta, Library manager, Motala).

Besides the knowledge and know-how, the main challenge concerns library’s updated technology. The interviewed library manager emphasized that it is still problematic for the library to finance change of old computers or acquiring the entire media range of existing and new books:

‘The most important challenge is to keep up our librarians updated and knowledgeable of the technological developments in media and communication. We need to have updated technology. When we need to change it, it costs more. Even the books - in their different formats: cds, e-books, paper, talking books – in order to be available for all users of different needs – they are more expensive now. Our media allocations have not increased since 2013, but we have more inhabitants in the municipality. To keep the same pace with developments in the media landscape, we need to be properly equipped, both in terms of knowledge and in terms of technology’ (Birgitta, Library manager, Motala).

To conclude there is a need for resources to enhance and support digital inclusions. The libraries lack such resources in spite of the general and often clearly set policy ambitions on digital inclusions. There is a need for resources in many aspects, not just time and staff, there is also a need for more competences, support to the librarians, technology and not at least guidelines on privacy and ethical issues.

Perceptions of digital inclusion divide problems
The librarians have an ambition, as part of their profession, to support the users and support their learning. But the growing numbers of questions on digital problems and practical issues the librarians receive on the daily basis makes new tensions in their daily work and capacity make, what they see as, a good job. They are without doubt witnessing that there exists a problem of digital literacy in the Swedish society today. These problems are present in all population groups, there are no single socio-economic factor defining who is asking for this help at the library today.

But it is clear, as showed already more than ten years ago in studies on digital inclusion (Norris, 2001, Warschauer, 2004) that those already in socially vulnerable situations, such as those suffering from disabilities, with a long sick-leave or being long-term unemployed are lagging even more as services are digitalized. According to our informants, current national measurements of internet usage and literacy do not reach all the groups and do not measure citizens’ abilities to solve problems of digital character on the daily basis.

‘It is obvious that we have digitally excluded today. These people can be found in all population groups. Svenskarna och internet (ed. national survey measuring Swedish citizens’ use of technologies) are calling the different groups, but they don’t reach to everybody. There are many who are outside and are difficult to reach. And some of these turn to us, at the library. Also, there are those people who are excluded in
other areas too. It is difficult for them to get on the labor market if one has a disability, is unemployed, is sitting at home, does not have access to computers and information, cannot choose among options, and cannot understand how to proceed with an application. We have so many who come to us’ (Kerstin, Manager Regionbibliotek).

The common picture that digital literacy increases as the citizens get more accustomed to information technologies and internet is not quite correct. The problem persists in practice, although there is interest and motivation with many of the users to learn:

‘We see that people are much more unaccustomed with technologies than the prevailing picture likes to show. The impression is that we have used computers and internet for ages. But we see that many are not used (ed. to technologies). We see the whole scale: from those who are afraid and unused, those who are ashamed of their limited knowledge or abilities, to those who have given up, with “this is not for me”-attitude. But we see that people are curious. There are those who have got a tablet as a Christmas present and they come to us to get started. People are not so used (ed. to technology) as we think. It’s unbelievable how many come to us, and these are not necessarily elderly or immigrants’ (Birgitta, Library manager Motala).

As the public as well as market based e-services develop and the digital solutions change, the information volumes increase and the websites are difficult to navigate. The ‘classic’ groups: elderly, immigrants with little knowledge of Swedish and those who refuse using technology are those primarily seeking contacts with the library personnel:

‘Elderly people adapt with difficulties to the new and growing number of digital systems. The more digital the society becomes, the fewer the physical meetings and persons to talk to. You may not really understand what to do, what to fill in (ed. the application forms). Like for example the man and his CSN-loan issue. There is so much information on the websites - it’s becoming difficult to navigate. Also, the language - there are those who don’t understand the language. They are the newly arrived immigrants or those with lower education background. Also, those who are not used to use technologies and those who refuse to use machines. They don’t even want to use our automatic book borrowing devices. They seek contact with the librarian’ (Johanna, Motala).

But the user-groups have increased as technology opens new opportunities to access information. For example digital software such as Legimus and increasing digitization of literature stocked in the national library database made possible for more groups to use talking books-services. This is welcomed by the libraries as more groups gain access to books they have previously had difficulties or was impossible to read. With this came also a new array of specific needs and questions that the library received and was expected to address:

‘Also there are many more users of this service today. Before there were just those with visual impairment who lended talking books. Today we have many more, including people with dyslexia, or related speech and writing difficulties. This means more and different types of questions that we get to address. But this is good because digitalization helps making these books available for more users in need. This means we can reach and provide access and literacy to more groups’ (Birgitta, Library manager, Motala).

The librarians also witness that the questions at the helpdesk have changed. Many of the users bring their own devices and are asking for help with programs and services connected to the library’s own services:
‘The questions are different, many bring with them their own tablets or smartphones and want to get help with various features, download apps, get started with different programmes, transfer pictures, book tickets, manage files, using the internet bank, lend e-books, download talking books, etc. Both Drop in and the booked tutorial (ed. library services) are very appreciated’ (Motala bibliotek, 16/BN0103).

‘The questions at the helpdesk have changed. Self-lending of books has freed up time. Now we get so many more questions on civic engagement, on technology, on computer use. How are going to manage all this? What resources do we have to manage this? Up to some point we have resources, but we need to use them smartly. The self-lending frees up time for more tutoring’ (Birgitta, Library manager, Motala).

Taken together this shows that the libraries become a general catch up point for all types of digital problems that people in general are facing. They neither have any ambitions to pick the type of issues that relates to the core of the library services. There is a broad, open and democratic approach to help out and improve digital inclusion in general. Thus, we concluded that the librarians have a very broad and open-minded perception of what they see as digital inclusions and thereby also for potential solutions to the problems of digital divides.
Conclusions and implications

This study is so far based on an open bottom-up field study of librarians’ perceptions of how they can address digital inclusion in practice. In this final section, we will first summarise some key points from the field study and discuss how we will develop further this research paper.

The overall impression is that the librarians lack competences and resources to manage the new demands to guide and support digital inclusion. Even if there are specific programmes and projects, the main tasks are to support visitors on ever-changing and indeed different issues they experience in their daily use of digital technologies in relation to private and public services. The users are turning to the library for support also of services far away from the libraries, like private Facebook accounts, banking services and use of e-services for health services like digital prescriptions of medicines. There is a great need for support and personal coaching of the visitor’s problems. This is even greater for persons with a weaker socio-economic situation. The librarians need more competences and models to address these issues and challenges.

The librarians also point out that the needs for digital support is much greater in these groups than what surveys as “Svenskarna och Internet” point out. There are also more diverse needs and a need to help out with the visitors own devices. Due to the rapid development of new applications and improvement of online services there is also a need for continued upgrading and diversification of the support. There is a need for librarians to have the competences and resources to address these complex and diverse needs.

Based on this palette of impressions from the field of digital inclusion at public libraries we have identified three primarily focuses for further research. Firstly, what policies and implementation strategies municipalities have to improve digital inclusion in a more diverse society. Secondly, to focus on the competences and resources for librarians. Finally, to uncover the more qualitative aspects of what makes people feel digitally excluded and in need of support to participate and take part of digital services.
References


