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**Bridging the digital divide:
libraries providing access for all?**

Digital Divides according to the Public Library

A case study of the discursive conceptualisation of digital divides
within the Swedish public library sphere.

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Abstract

Background

A relatively new phenomenon in Sweden today is library-run projects with the stated aim to reduce the issue of Digital Divides. The extent of the presence of the concept in the public library sphere and how the concept is interpreted within the different projects has however not been examined before.

Methods used

Within the frames of a case study a document study of Swedish public library plan is firstly carried out. Secondly, a discourse analysis is conducted of documents created within two different library projects. The results of the discourse analysis are then projected against a backdrop of previous research focused on the identity of the Swedish public library.

Findings

In the search for the presence and conceptualisation of Digital Divides on a wider national level, the study finds only a third of the examined Swedish public library plans discusses the issue. The vast majority of these do so without mentioning digital information, or without broadening the discussion to encompass the issues of the second-level digital divide.

The study further finds that the interpretations made of the digital divide in the two examined projects both share the same foundation, derived from a national political context. Both projects attempt to establish the library possible contribution to the integration of non-IT users into society. The study however sees that the different strategies for reducing digital divides that are put forward on in the projects, can be linked to different and conflicting discourses regarding the possible identity of the public library in its community.

Importance and interest of the study

The discourse analysis only examines two library projects and, by the qualitative nature of the study, this limits the extent to which the results study can be used for generalization. Here, more and broader studies would prove a valuable complement.

Value of paper

The paper is of interest for any LIS practitioner, student or scholar with an interest in the issues connected with how libraries interpret, or don't interpret, the concept of Digital Divides and how it is related to the library's practice. The study further illuminates how the practice of the public library relates to its self-perceived function in society and is thus of interest for practitioners or scholars interested in this issue.

* * *

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Table of Contents

Introduction	5
The Digital Divide from a Swedish perspective	5
Background for the Case Study	5
Disposition of the Case Study	7
Definition of the case	7
Questions of inquiry	8
Aim of study	8
Limitations, Selection of sources and Information search	8
Previous Research	10
The Digital Divide	10
The identity of the Swedish public library	10
Theoretical and Epistemological Framework	12
Discourse theory	12
Methodology	13
Results and Analysis	14
The Digital Divide in Swedish Library Plans	14
The Digital Divide in two Swedish Library Projects	15
<i>Presentation of the Projects</i>	15
<i>The Nature of the Divide</i>	15
<i>Reducing the Digital Divide for Lifelong Learning</i>	15
<i>Reducing the Digital Divide for the Civic Life</i>	16
<i>The Library's Role</i>	17
<i>Digital Divides separating the World</i>	17
Conclusions and Discussion	18
References	20
Appendix A – Scheme of analysis	22

Introduction

The Digital Divide from a Swedish perspective

The starting point of this case study is the existence of a relatively new form of inequality within the world community. A study concerning the nature or face of the digital divide could cross borders of continents, or it could investigate a much smaller entity, such as a single nation or a local community. Either way, as argued by sociologists Sylvia E. Korupp and Marc Szydlik among many others, the gaps of intersectionality between the world's inhabitants are today firmly established as a factor of power as much in the digital world as in the physical. (Korupp & Szydlik 2005) And further, in the First World as in the Third. Political scientist Pippa Norris makes the recognition that "as the Internet is becoming increasingly central to life [...] it becomes even more important if certain groups and areas are systematically excluded..." (Norris 2001, p. 10)

When Swedish society today is adjusting itself towards the digital sphere, the transition is progressing at great speed. (Svenskarna och internet 2008) People, however, are not always as quickly updated and upgraded as the technology. Sociologist Manuel Castells has founded the distressing concept of the Fourth World. This non socio-political-geographical bloc, *les misérables* of the Information Age is, according to Castells, essentially excluded from the rest of the global society. (Castells 2000, p. 70-165) In the light of this by Castells argued turn of events, the so-called developed countries have a pressing obligation to search for digital divides in their own backyards as well as outside its borders, no matter how cheerful the statistical computer-to-person numbers might look.

Background for the case study

A report initiated by the Swedish government in 2008, examining how to reduce the digital divides in the Swedish society, specifically points out the country's libraries as important actors (Regeringskansliet 2003, p. 30). One library type that potentially could take its work to further limits than the others in regards to this task is the integrated library.

In Sweden the integration of libraries has been proceeding steadily since the 1970's. The library type most often integrated with another form of library is the public library and today the majority of the public libraries exist in an integrated form. Most of these with a school library. (Svensk Biblioteksförening)

A library integration can be initiated by several reasons, including financial, administrative or ideological such. If different library types are to be merged to a higher extent than when the two are simply physically housed under the same roof, one can speak of a Full integration or a Selective such, depending on to what extent the collaboration is taken. (Dornseif 2001, see Hansson 2006, p. 553).

In 2001 The Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs and the Swedish National Council of Education¹ published a text highlighting the particular form of Joint Use library that involves a public library and a school library. (Hasselrot 2001, p. 6) The text emphasises the need of a clear definition on a visionary and ideological level of the very meaning of a

¹ Statens Kulturråd and Skolverket

planned integration. The publication further emphasises that the degree to which the integration of libraries is beforehand planned decides the quality of the new Joint Use library's future practice. (Hasselrot 2001, p. 40)

The conceptual idea of the fully or selectively integrated Joint Use library holds within itself the vision of different library types combining their characteristic strengths in their occupational practise. This idea can be applied also in regards to attempts made by a integrated library to aim to reduce digital divides in its community.

Today the issues connected to digital divides affect the Swedish school and public libraries in their legislated roles as agents for citizen's access to information in a digital format. (Swedish Library Act 1997, unofficial translation) As a result of an integration of the strengths of two organisations, a Joint Use library could potentially have the possibilities to better take on the battle against the multifaceted problem of digital divides than the individual library types on their own. Yet, as we've seen above, before the creation of a Joint Use library aiming to bridge digital divides in its community, a definition of how the involved library types each perceive the concept of digital divides is of high importance.

We can thus here imagine ourselves looking out from within a situation where a public library in a community stands before an upcoming integration with another library type. Also taking into consideration the relevance of the stated forthcoming new Joint Use library's as part of society's work against digital divides, three relevant lines of study can be identified:

- a) The public library sphere's conceptual understanding of the digital divide related to the library's identity as an agent in the society.
- b) The public library sphere's conceptual understanding of the digital divide related to its understanding of and interaction with its users.
- c) The public library sphere's conceptual understanding of the digital divide related to the library's organisation of its tools for intellectual and physical access to information.

This case study focuses on the first of these issues. Important to note is that this limitation results from restrictions in timeframes and practicalities, rather than interest in or relevance of the alternatives. Several other options of proceeding are of course embedded in the aspects above. A comparative study involving more than one library type or would be a potentially fruitful way to proceed. Here differences and similarities could have been pinpointed with an image with broader cover as result. Likewise the study could have been conducted as an ideology analysis where the results would have been less focused on general patterns connecting a socially constructed "library world" to the world "outside" and instead more focused on internal ideological conflicts between the two library types. The study could also have applied different methods and used different empirical material, such as interviews, with a focus on personal interpretations of the three aspects as possible result. Also possible is observations of activities involving public library users, aiming to reduce digital divides. The case could further be examined by implement theories from the sociological field, for example the ideas of Bourdieu, to put the public library's work against digital divides against the library's ideas of its users. Another option would have been to focus on how the two library chooses its media and how it presents these. Analysing the websites and catalogues of public library's working against digital divides, possible combined with interviews with librarian staff would have exposed the nature of the relation between the library's organisation of knowledge and its goal of reducing digital divides. Additional interviews with users or surveys would have shows how the library's attempts fall out.

Disposition of the Case Study

Definition of the case

According to Sharan B. Merriam, a case study can have as its subject both a specific situation in a given location and a more abstract occurrence that expands beyond the boundaries of a demarcated geographical environment (Merriam 1998, p. 40-42).

The case subject for this study² does not focus itself with a specific place or a specific organisation. Instead it grows out of observations of separate phenomenon in the Swedish library world today. These are then merged together within a theoretical framework of social constructionism to create the case.

The first phenomenon observed is the ongoing national development, where public libraries undergo an integration with another distinct library type. Created through this is a new form of library. In Selective or Full integration a new library type emerges. If one believes that this world very seldom sees entirely new beginnings, a new Joint Use library is however always a result by its old parts. This library type will affect the work of a new Joint Use library, created thorough a process involving a public library. Looking through the glasses of discourse theory, the Swedish libraries are, as any other organisations of person, self-constructing in its relation to several different discourses. Through rejecting the ideas and arguments of some discourses and accepting some, either to a higher or lower extent, the different library types form their own identity and consequently strive to affect the other.

As we can see, it is a fruitful approach to apply discourse theory to a case involving a library integration, in this case a public library. Through this application, one specific aspect of the integration process calls for attention: *the necessary revealing of discursive conceptualisation made by the public library* before integration is implemented.

The second phenomenon of interest for this study is the above noted fact that the Swedish government today sees the aim for reduction of digital divides as part of the role of the Swedish public library. A question then rising is to what extent, and how, does the public library sphere acknowledge this matter? This question can be used as a mean to create a focus for the study of the first phenomenon, as articulated above. The question, a question which also constitutes the first part of the case subject for this case study, can then be formulated as: *what discursive conceptualisation of the digital divide is held within the public library sphere today?*

To further broaden the vision and in line with the discourse theory's idea of the subject, the public library's actions can be seen as always determined by the frames of the discourses the library incorporates itself into. By taking this position the case includes a question of *if, and if so how, the discursive conceptualisation of the digital divide made by the public library can be related to the self-identity of the Swedish public library sphere today?*

Through its construction the case raises its eye from an initial grounded focus and attempts to get a broader view of the Swedish library world. As a result, different interests of the grounded library practice and of the academic field of library and information science are merged in the case.

² This theoretical case is generated from case D ("To combine a school- and public library") in the course "Case studies in library and information science" at the Swedish School of Library and Information Science, University of Borås, Sweden, 2009. The case problemizes the process of integration of a public library and a school library in a smaller community.

Questions of inquiry

This case study aims to examine the discursive conceptions of the digital divide, as held by the Swedish public library sphere and manifested in documents from two library projects aiming to bridge digital divides. These conceptions will then be put in relation to the identity of the public library.

The questions to be answered are:

- What presence do the issues of the digital divide have in the Swedish public library sphere today?
- How is the term discursively conceptualised within the Swedish public library sphere?
- How do the conceptualisations manifested relate to the public library sphere's perceived identity as an agent in the Swedish society?

The study will answer these questions in the following way: Firstly it will examine will a number of national public library plans. The aim here is create an indication of the level of presence of the issues of digital divides within the national public library sphere. Secondly, a discursive analysis is conducted on documents from two projects in the national public library sphere aiming to bridge digital divides. This analysis serves to make a deeper exposition the interpretation of the term the digital divide within the public library sphere. Thirdly and lastly, the findings of the two empirical studies above are analysed through the application of a model explaining the frames for the public library's identity today together with previous research on the topic.

Aim of study

A case study can have as its purpose either to describe the chosen phenomenon, to evaluate it, or to aim to generate new theories applicable within its field of interest. (Merriam 1998, p. 40-42) By exposing certain attitudes held within the public library sphere, the knowledge acquired in this study can be seen as an attempt to a contribution to the many ongoing local processes of library integration today. The study also adds to the line of library and information science (LIS) research, as well as being of interest for library practitioners, showing how the work executed within the public library sphere relates to its creation of self-identity. By its interest in how practice is shaped by attitudes, the study also places itself within with field of LIS focusing on the function of use of social constructive theory within the discipline.

Limitations, Selection of sources and Information search

As with any scientific study, factors of reality have meant that limitations have had to be made for this case study.

The main part of the empirical study takes the form of a critical text analysis of project plans for two public library projects. Limitations to the choice of material have been required. Merriam points out how the selection of sources for a qualitative study preferably can be a target oriented such, where the criterias for the selection are decided upon by the researcher her- or himself. Rather than the creation of grand theories aimed for generalisation on a large

scale, Merriam describes this method of selection as being “based on the presumption that one wishes to discover, understand and gain knowledge” of a phenomenon. (Merriam 1994, p. 60-61 - my translation) In my agreement with Merriam’s description of this possible aim for performing a case study, together with my theoretical abode in the field of social constructionism, I have chosen to use empirical material produced within the examined field itself.

This case study examines the Swedish public library sphere. It sets out from a base in the ideas held within discourse of the constructive nature of language and the cultural specificity knowledge theory. I have, in line with this, strived to use literature and models constructed within the Swedish library- and information science context. This has the effect that the cultural specificity of the intellectual tools matches that of the empirical material. I have however extended my searches to the Scandinavian academic context, as it shares many cultural characteristics with the Sweden ditto. An exception is made in the discussion in the following part regarding the digital divide. The scholarly discussion in Scandinavia on this topic has been found too small to suffice, so I have here been forced to go outside of this context.

The previous research used in the study was mainly identified via searches in LIBRIS, DIVA and BADA, together with searches in scientific databases. Initially the searches was made by combining the Swedish or English terms “folkbibliotek/public library” and “idenitiet/identity” and then generally navigating further via lists of references. The material on the different interpretations of the Digital Divide was retrieved in the same way. Here as problem ha been the difficulty to narrow down the searches and identifying what form of material is needed for the study. The multitude of scientific publications on databases often proved too narrow in its focus, thus the study mainly uses books, since these tend to be wider in its aim and reach.

The library plans, examined in the first part of the analysis chapter, was retrived by using Google and a combination names of the 290 Swedish municipalities together with the term “biblioteksplan” (library plan).

The selection of sources for the discourse analysis has been based on the criteria that the projects chosen should have the stated aim to reduce digital divides. The two projects have been found via a search on library websites, a national e-mail list for librarians and library blogs. One of the projects is still on the planning stage and the project plan is still an unfinished document, which means that the name of the county where it is being produced will not be disclosed. The search of library projects concerning the digital divide proved a difficult such. The two projects found are the only ones that could be retrieved through searches on the county library’s websites or through Internet search engines.

The material for analysis consists of documents describing two library projects, both organised by county libraries and carried out by public libraries. Since the county library could be considered a different library type than the public library the choice could be seen as questionable. I argue, however, in line with the findings of Angela Zetterlund and Catarina Eriksson (2008) that these two library types, as both acting within the public sector of the Swedish library terrain, overlap in aims and interests. The Swedish public libraries are linked to a county library of which there are 21 today. The county libraries serve as administrative co-ordinators for the public libraries with the purpose “to serve [these] with consultancy, information, continuing education and complementing media” (Zetterlund & Eriksson 2008, p. 11).

Previous research

The previous academic research relevant for this study fall within two main fields of interest: Firstly, the discussion regarding the definition of the term and phenomenon digital divides. Secondly, the question of the identity of the Swedish public library today.

The Digital Divide

The last ten years of academic research have lead to an inclusion of more possible aspects into the term the digital divide than the original definition which mainly focused on physical access to the necessary technology. An example of this is the demand made by sociologists DiMaggio & Hargittai (2001, p. 5), for a widening of concept, as they question “both the beginning and the end of the phrase ‘access to the Internet’”. Through their attempt for redefinition, DiMaggio & Hargittai bring social aspects of “access” into the discussion of digital divides. Hargittai develops this further through her launching of the term “Second-Level Digital Divide”, which puts further light on socially constructed gaps in user’s information literacy skills as being a central aspect of the phenomenon of digital divides (Hargittai 2001).

Likewise, a study by Mossberger, Tolbert, and Stansbury (2007) chooses to see the issue of the digital divide as not just one divide but a wider dilemma; “virtual inequality”. They instead propose a categorisation of the phenomenon we call the digital divide into four parts; an access divide, a skills divide, an economic opportunities divide and a democratic divide. The last of these aspects is related to issues regarding the Internet user in relation to her/his identify and role as member of the civic society. This line of thought is manifested in several studies, as that of Pippa Norris (2001), and they all stem from a belief that the digitalised information society will, for good or for bad, dramatically change the conditions for civic and political participation in the world’s societies.

In Sweden one the most cited investigation of the issues of digital divides is a scientific publication, initiated and published by The Swedish Ministry of Justice. The aim of the study is that it shall serve as a foundation for a political strategy to reduce the digital divides.

The study defines³ the divide as “the differences existing between different groups of citizens regarding the opportunities to access and draw use from information via the Internet” (Digitala klyftor 2003, p. 6) Annika Andersson, the author of the report, separates the structure of the digital divide she identifies in the Swedish society today into four variables: Access, Knowledge, Use and Motive. All four variables can constitute a defining obstacle which then needs a certain measure taken to reduce it. The prerequisites needed to create this society are according to the report, general conditions, such as “financial equalisation” and “safety nets”, technical factors, education “in several steps” and access to support structures that are free of charge. Here libraries as possible support structures are particularly highlighted.

The report argues that the reduction of the digital divides can be founded upon the idea that a “democratic society” needs to concern itself with creating “informed and enlightened citizens”. The report concludes that the access to information and the option to participate in the “democratic process” are the main possible gains for those who enter the digital world.

The identity of the Swedish public library

Over the last decade, the identity of the Scandinavia public library has been a subject for much interest by scholarly within the Scandinavian LIS field. Two lines in study can be seen

³ All translation of the report are my own.

extracted from the research relevant for this study. One is the identification of different aspects of the public library's identity, perceived from within or from the outside of the sphere. The other main subject is the change in the identity of the library during the last century, as the Scandinavian society has moved into and out (?) of Modernity.

In a frequently cited study (1994), Danish LIS scholars Marianne Andersson and Dorte Skot-Hansen define the possible roles of the public library as four different centres, each meeting the needs held within one of four sectors in a local community:

<i>Centre</i>	<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Relates to Sector</i>	<i>Library's function in this Sector</i>
Information Centre	Provide information, either general such (as public or tourist information) or specific (on demand from individual users, including companies).	Financial	Add to financial development and growth.
Learning Centre	Contribute to formal and informal education.	Educational	Promote learning and cultivation.
Cultural Centre	Offer artistic and cultural experiences.	Cultural	Experience providing and identity development on individual level.
Civic Centre	Social room as meeting place and “living room”. Offer advising. Outreaching activities	Civic	Contribute to social welfare

The authors argue that the library has the choice to decide to what extent the different centres are highlighted or subdued when then it, as an organisation, constructs its place in the community. In this study Anderson's and Skot-Hansen's model will be used as a tool of analysis through the application of discourse theory on it. This will be developed further in the section of the case study discussing methodology.

The last decade's worth of research concerning the identity if the Scandinavian public library can, a bit crudely, be said to have had “change” as its theme. Swedish LIS scholar Åse Hedemark (2009), and Joakim Hansson (2005), both see a transformation in the identity of the Swedish public library today. Hedemark's conclusion, drawn from the discursive analysis she performs, is that the identity of the public library always “depends on different discourses [in society] that aim to further different wills and interests” (Hedemark 2009, abstract). This statement serves as one a fundament of this study. By using the Anderson and Skot-Hansen model, Hansson identifies an ongoing shift within the public library sphere towards the sectors of Education and Finances. Hansson argues that these sectors have been brought into the sphere in an attempt to position the public library closer to traditionally heavy forces in the society (Hansson 2005, p. 42). Activities within the sector of Education are easier to measure, evaluate and – in extension – justify, than those in the others sectors.

A notion made by Hedemark's of a new idea within the public library sphere of “the learning user” (Hedemark 2009, p.146), is subject for the PhD thesis by Bosse Jonsson (2003), a researcher in adult pedagogic. Jonsson explores the “pedagogical discourse” he identifies within the public library sphere, which concerns “views on educational functions of

public libraries (Jonsson, p. 206). Jonsson defines the discourse as the “tension between the passivity of the approach” where the initiator has to inactive and the “activity in its expectations”, which is the creation of active citizens (Jonsson 2003, p. 191). This ideal incorporates an “intentional, but indirect” model of learning (Ibid, p. 193). The roots of the discourse are by Jonsson traced back to theories of liberalism and the discourse of market economy.

In comparison: sociologist Mikael Stigendal has examined the identity of the Swedish public library in relation to the today frequently used terms “inclusion” and “exclusion”. Stigendal links the term “inclusion” (necessary to define “exclusion”) to the political term “integration” and argues that the low “barriers” of “order and “resources” at a public library demonstrates how it manifests an ideal of the traditional “Nordic, social democratic welfare regime”. By embracing this political discourse, as opposite to a liberal version, Stigendal argues, the public library could better support the inclusion of its “excluded” users into the rest of society.

Theoretical and Epistemological Framework

The discourse theory used in this study is developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. The theories within the tradition of discourse analysis all stems from the theoretical field of social constructionism, which rests on four fundamental epistemological postulations. These are, firstly, the belief that reality always and only consists of our own categorisations of the world and, secondly, that these categories are created socially and thus are always congruent and bound to our historical and cultural specificity. Further, it stipulates a relation between knowledge and social interaction, where the former is created within the latter. Lastly, social constructionism sees a relation between knowledge and social action. Different constructions of reality, perceived as knowledge, leads to different social actions, each carrying desired or undesired social implications as result. (Winter Jørgensen & Philips 2005 p. 11-12)

Discourse theory

The main point of discourse theory, in the interpretation of Laclau and Mouffe, lays in its belief in the fundamental importance of language as our point of entrance to reality. It stipulates that “the whole social field is understood as a web of processes in which meaning is created” (Ibid s. 32). Vital is the notion made by Laclau and Mouffe that the social field is unstable in its nature, but yet strives towards a fixation of language and of discourses. These attempts are however futile through the congruent nature of fixations in discourse theory; “it is possible but not necessary” (Ibid s.32).

A discourse, according to Laclau and Mouffe, is a construction of linguistic signs, all arranged in relation to each other within the frames of the discourse. Nodal points, being privileged signs, organise the discourses through the significance given to them by other signs within its frames. Through the exclusion of all other interpretations of the signs the discourse is established. This, according, to Laclau and Mouffe, is however never a finished process, since the discourse exists in a larger discursive field, constantly challenging its fixation. The struggle between discourses for hegemony manifests itself in the floating signifiers; nodal points which several discourses try to construct meaning for. (Ibidp. 47)

Discourse theory also interests itself in relations of power in society. In Michel Foucault’s meaning, the non-passive force of power is defined by both the agents and subjects of power. According to Foucault, our constructed web of power sets the boundaries for how we see and describe reality. (Ibid 2005 p. 20) The web of power in our reality also frames the actions of the subject in discourse theory. The subject than therefore can be seen as any sign, since it always constructs itself through the positions it takes in relation to different discourses. In

discourse theory “identities are always accepted, refused and negotiated. Identity is thus something entirely social”. (Ibid, p. 20) This aspect of discourse theory is perhaps particularly of interest for this study, as it gives the frames for the existence of the public library sphere as a subject with its own, socially constructed identity.

Discourse analysis can both be seen as a theory; the general idea that our use of language constructs our reality and that we can reveal this act of construction⁴, and a method; the conduction of examination in itself. In reality, the two aspects are inseparable; the method requires the theory.

Methodology

Sharan B Merriam point out the value of triangulation in case study research, since the researcher can “take advantage of all the benefits of the methods and still be in control of their weaknesses” (Merriam 1994, p. 85). This case study follows this line of thought through its use several methods; a document study of Swedish library plans and a discourse analysis of two library projects which are then analysed against the backdrop consisting of previous research focused on the identity of the Swedish public library.

Merriam further establishes how the nature of the questions asked in any research leads to the method used to retrieve the answers. Also Winter Jørgensen and Philips Discourse analysis provides the tools for the researcher to expose patterns which create a perceived reality and reveal how these patterns are constructed. As is the purpose of this case study.

This study follows the line of argumentation made by Winter Jørgensen and Philips, that a constructions of reality in a text can be identified by an exposure of the relations between its linguistic signs. This exposure then leads to a revelation of discourses. Discourse theory does not include absolute methodological guidelines. Yet, the theory holds broad possibilities for practical application, and has become a common tool in studies which conduct an analysis of discourse - as shown in discussion of previous research. Winter Jørgensen & Philips argue that the method of discourse theory is best conducted by seeing the different parts of Laclau's and Mouffe's theory as a tool box. Through this the scholar can choose how she or he want to construct the analysis. KÄLLA

The method used for the discourse analysis will be an attempt to identify nodal points and floating signifiers in the articulations of the Swedish public library sphere made in the texts. These can then be combined into so-called chains of equivalents. When these combinations of words are related to a larger context, it is possible to expose what discursive interpretations of the term digital divide which are constructed within the texts.

The creation of the larger context is done through putting the results of the discourse analysis against Anderson's and Skot-Hansen's model. Anderson's and Skot-Hansen's stipulate that the public library, through its own actions, always can relate itself more or less to the different sectors in model. When applying discourse theory to this description it can be argued that the public library is a *subject* in the meaning of discourse theory. Seeing the public library as a subject in this sense carries the consequences that the different options of tasks and functions it relates to can be seen as different ways to talk about, or different *discourses*, each striving to define the purpose of the public library. Interpreted in this way, Anderson's and Skot-Hansen's model will be used as a tool used to examine the results of the discourse analysis in the last part of the case study. Through this adaptation of Anderson's and Skot-Hansen's model, a framework can be created within which it is possible to

⁴ However, social constructionism sees the social field as a non-stable sphere, holding a certain contingency, meaning that in specific situations knowledge is in reality a “closed” phenomenon.

conceptualising of the results of the discourse analysis. Finally this study uses previous research to broaden the analysis.

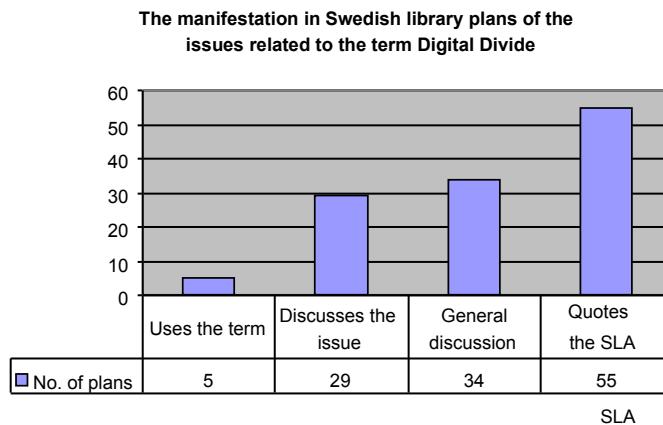
Results and Analysis

The part of the case study will firstly focus on establishing the presence of a discussion of the issues of digital divide in a number of Swedish library plans. This will then be followed by a discourse analysis of the conceptualisations of the digital divide in two library projects aiming to reduce digital divides. Finally it attempts to position the results against a discussion concerning the identity of the Swedish public library today.

The Digital Divide in Swedish Library Plans

In 2007, 41 percent of the 290 Swedish municipals, or 119, had constructed and approved a development plan for the libraries falling under the administration of the municipality, as requested of them by law (Biblioteksplaner 2007). The library plan is the document where the municipality states its views on the roles held by the libraries within its administration. In these texts, what is stated and what is silent is of equal importance.

Today, in 2009, an Internet search shows that there has been an addition of 24 library plans to that number, making it 143 in total. 28 of these are not available on the municipalities' websites. An examination of the remaining 115 official documents gives the following result:



Just over 5 percent of the public library plans use the phrase "digitala klyftan(or)" (digital divide(s)). About a third mentions the issues behind the term, either in regards to inequities in physical access to digital information or to the second level digital divide. They however do this without using the term "digitala klyftan(or)". The vast majority of the library plans only discusses the public library as a provider of information in general words, but never specifically goes into any issues related to the phenomenon of digital divides in the society⁵ or settles for citing the second paragraph in the Swedish Library Act (SLA) assigning the public libraries to "ensure that data-based information is made available to all citizens" (Swedish Library Act 1996, unofficial translation).

It is possible to merge the categories further in order to clarify the picture even more. The first two bar graphs visualise library plans which put attention to the issues of the digital

⁵ Here it must be mentioned that a large number of the library plans does bring a question of "equal access", however here only referring to the problems related to the access to information by disabled.

divide.. The other two visualises library plans that only establishes the library as a provider of information in general, without mentioning digital information or not problemising the issue. The result of this is that only 34 percent, or a third, of the examined Swedish public library plans discusses the issues of digital divide.

The Digital Divide in two Swedish Library Projects

I have, as discussed above, chosen to analyse documents from two projects from the Swedish public library sphere, both aiming to reduce digital divides in the local community. The plans have been (or will be) a part of the county libraries' applications to the Swedish state and/or to regional actors for financial grants to fund the projects.

Presentation of the projects

The ongoing project, carried out in the county of Östergötland, a medium sized mid-Swedish county, started in 2007 and is to be continued throughout 2010. Named "The libraries as learning environments"⁶ it has as its main purpose to "develop the possibilities for libraries to support the lifelong learning" of the county's inhabitants. This main project is constructed by several sub-projects; all of these customised and carried out by the different public libraries in the county. One of these sub-projects is specifically aimed for "the reduction of digital divides". (Östergötlands länsbibliotek)

The plan for the project still on the planning stage, aiming to be commenced in 2010, is titled "Libraries as part of the digital infrastructure". It states as its purpose a construction of "an infrastructure for digital access with the libraries as service points". This Planned Project has a wider geographical reach than the ongoing project, as it is planned as a co-operation between county and public libraries in Sweden and a bordering Scandinavian county.

The Nature of the Digital Divide

The project currently ongoing in the county of Östergötland describes the digital divide as a dual problem of "access and usage" meaning that for those "on the outside", "the Internet is not part of the every-day life". The digital divides in the local county are described as depending on several factors. Likewise the planned projects defines the divide through how several different forms of "digital thresholds" such as "geography, age, education, income, civic status", affect citizens' opportunities to "use today's technology". This keeps some groups in society from developing "digital competence". Both projects form this similar theoretical conceptualisation of the digital divide on a citation of or referral to the report published by Swedish Ministry of Justice, discussed previously in the case study⁷.

The two projects plans both also share their starting point - a contextualisation describing how Sweden today is in the midst of the process of becoming a digitalised society where "digital competence" is a new vital "proficiency skill" as increasingly more information is digitalised.

Reducing the Digital Divide for Lifelong Learning

The Östergötland Project puts the term the digital divide against certain possible desired activities of the library visitors, such as "knowledge seeking" and "computer usage" and further relate these activities to the term "digital competence". These terms are in the texts

⁶ All translations from Swedish are my own. The original terms can be found in the scheme of analysis in Appendix A attached to the case study.

⁷ "Digitala klyftor – förr, nu och i framtiden", 2003.

connected to a line of argument, where a reduction of digital divides also will reduce “social and mental” distances to “studies”. The project stresses how the digitalised society had lead to “raised demands for competence and knowledge” today are put on its citizens. As an extent to this, the project defines a link between the function of the public library in its local community and the growing need for “learning environments”, both on a local and national level. As a mean for “flexible learning” the establishing of learning environments are described as necessary both for the benefits of “society”, as well as of the smaller “local community” and its members “östgötarna”.

This discussion puts focus on a need of education and adult education in the digital society as it describes a digital divide which creates “social and mental” distances to IT and through this, to the “flexible” “studies” which are seen as necessary within the idea of “the lifelong learning”.

The “learning environments” are presented as a way for the public library to contribute to a “broadened recruitment” to “education” within the frames of the “lifelong learning”. Through using this term, the project establishes the public library as a possible collaborator to both the formal education system, as well as to the adult education organisations. This can be seen as an attempt made by the public library as a discursive subject to form an identity by relating itself to the discourse that exists within the Educational sector in Anderson’s and Skot-Hansen’s model. With this discourse it is perceived that the purpose to the identity of the public library is to support education on all levels in society. The library is in this discourse an institution for both formal and adult education, which has the function to support other educational actors in the community in the shared aim to raise the levels of “competence and learning” in society.

Reducing the Digital Divide for the Civic Life

The digitalised society is within the Östergötland project defined as a result of a “technological development” which has lead to a current “large supply of the Internet [sic], web-based services and digital media”. This new form of society is within the project documents described as having the potential to be “more open and accessible” and, in relation to this elevates its potential to “simplify the every-day life” of its members. “Important” “civic information” and the “services of public usefulness” that can be reached and taken benefits from in digital world are key elements in this discussion.

This discussion, a side aspect in the Östergötland Project, is the point of interest on which the Planned Project puts its main focus. This project stresses a development in the digital society defined in the terms that the “digitalisation changes character from a technical towards a social process”. This latter process, made possible through the first one, involves phenomena such as “Facebook”, “blogs” and “computer playing”. In the project plan, the social process in the digital world is conceived as a powerful mean which both can be used in the private life of the “citizens” - for example “to make money” or in aspects of the “every-day life” such as “online banking” or “downloading”, as well as in “critical thinking” and “coverage of current affairs”. The project plan defines a risk for “digital illiteracy” among those who have problems to “find and understand public information”.

But the Planned project also stresses the opportunities made possible through the “social process” for every citizen “to make ones voice heard” in society. Voiced within the Planned Project is thus a digital divide which keeps citizens from using existing opportunities to engage in the “democratic process”. The result is that digital divides, the difference between “strong users” and “weak” such, both affect “the growth and development” in society as well as “the democracy” since not all citizens can partake in its processes. The divide further hinders their opportunities to take advantage of the possibilities offered by technology in the context of the “every-day life”. These activities among library users, desired by the library in

the text, can be related to the Civic sector and the Information sector in Anderson's and Skot-Hansen's model. A library discourse stating the passive providing of information to its community as the main purpose is embedded in the later sector. Here the library becomes an actor which delivers "services" to its "clients" with the aim that these services shall in extension lead to a development and financial growth in the society. The library identity discourse within the Civic sector is of a different nature as it circles around the idea of the public library's role in the every-day lives of the members of a community.

The Library's Role

The Planned Project emphasises how the public library today "ought to ensure" citizens access to the Internet" through taking the form of a "technological recourse centre" in the local community. The "infrastructure", or "library network" that is envisioned in the project is described as having the possibilities to "reach uncertain [IT-]users" at a "basic level". The projects plan described the public library's possibilities to "tutor" the "adult beginners" can here get "support" based on their individual needs. Likewise, in order to reduce the digital divides, the Östergötland Project highlights how the public library can offer both the "IT-technology" necessary as well as provide the "flexibility" and "required by its users.

In the Planned Project this way to describe the relation between individual library users and the library can be linked to its emphasising of the already existing role of the public library's as a "service point" in the local society. Within Östergötland Project a link can be seen between the historical role of the public library through its traditional "deep-rooted" position in the local community and the hopes held within the project to develop the IT-skills among those in going through an education or interest in order to meet the "new needs" in the society. Likewise, the Planned Project uses the library's historical "experience in raising the competence among the public" to motivate its opportunities today to contribute to a "knowledge society".

The pedagogical discourse discussed by Bosse Jonsson is here easily identified. The pedagogical discourse perceives an autonomous and rational user and a library which should refrain from taking on a role as authority in the process, as its hope is that "visitors should be able to bring about and take responsibility" for their own developments as members of a society (Jonsson 2003, p. 211). The projects consistently describe the members of the different groups of users or potential future users as all being in an individual "situation", meaning that they are in need of "flexibility". They know themselves their needs and the library should meet these. Through this the projects hope for the targeted individuals to incorporate the library's passive wishes for personal development into becoming their own desires. The ambiguity in the discourse, between the active hope and the necessary passive attitude from the library's side can be seen in the texts where the public library's aim with their projects- to reduce digital divides for the higher benefits of its users and the society in general - collide with their communicated idea of the autonomous user.

Digital Divides separating the World

The Östergötland Project highlights the possibilities in the digitalised society for anyone to "dial-up and connect" with "the world". Interesting here is how a difference can be distinguished in text's definition of "world". The project draws up a distinction between a local, smaller sphere; "the county" "Östergötland", and a larger world. The project plan further distinguishes between two different versions of this larger world; the physical, situated outside the borders of the county as in extent the country, and a digital world. Within the digital world, the physical worlds are connected. This is manifested in the project plan by a description of how the "immigrants" in Östergötland can be in contact with a "homeland"

through access to the digital world, access supplied by the local public library through its function as part in a national “network of public environments”.

In the Östergötland Project the public library is defined as having the possibility to offer “inclusion” to the users “on the outside” of the digital world. Comparatively, the exclusion from the digital “Internet society” is in the Planned Project linked to a potential exclusion also from the physical society. This exclusion has affects both on a more grounded level, for the individual “citizen” as well as, on a higher level, the “democracy” in the two countries involved. As can be seen here, both projects make an underlying claim that, through the reduction of digital divides and the following inclusion of more citizens into the digital world, the public library can contribute to a contemporary political project, struggling for the inclusion of all citizens into the physical Swedish world, or society.

Conclusions and Discussion

The observation which can be drawn from the study of the library plans, is that the issues connected to the term digital divide is, at this level and in this form, only to a certain extent recognised and/or prioritised in the official documents. Only a third of the examined library plans mention the phenomenon and argue that the public library has a given role to play in society’s work against digital divides.

An interesting conclusion of the discourse analysis of the documents from the two library projects, is that there is never really a collision between the texts’ interpretations of the very phenomenon digital divides. The projects agree on how divides (in plural) are formed: through differences (again in plural) in “access” to and “knowledge” of the digital world. They also agree on the fundamental nature of the divide: the difference between “those who use the Internet and those who don’t” and divide the divide into several different variables. This is in line with the international scholarly discussions on the topic of the nature if the digital divide, as well as in line with the government report. Finally, they also both argue that the public library has a unique potential to reduce digital divides.

The context for the production of these documents is here worth remembering. They are applications for financial funds for the libraries’ operation. Thus they aim to offer a complete conception of a perceived reality, aimed for the persuasion of an external subject in power over the desired financial resources. In the analysed documents, the term and phenomenon digital divides is non-ambiguous, in the sense that the two projects create their technical definition through using the same source; the governmental report. The aimed recipient of the project plans is thus situated within the same sphere as the initiator of the cited report.

These circumstances, however, makes it possible to interpret the term digital divides as a floating signifier in the discursive field where the discursive forming of the identity of the public library takes place. The linguistic sign “the digital divide” is in this function referred to in several different library discourses, all struggling for hegemony regarding the deeper purpose of the public library. Through their attempt to fixate their interpretation of the term, the rivalling library discourses acknowledge and position themselves to the different consequences of the interpretation of the sign.

The digital divide is conceived as hinder in the texts. But the texts differ in what context they chose to focus on the divide. These contexts are relating to different possible activities of the public library in the local community. These can, in their turn, be related to the model constructed by Anderson and Skot-Hansen describing the public library’s identity as a construction of how it chooses to relate to the needs of the society it is situated within.

Using the terminology of discourse theory the public library sphere as a subject uses the floating signifier “the digital divide” to relate itself to different rivalling discourses concerning the identity of the library. These incorporate different interpretations of the library’s function, for example as a support for its user’s need of education, for example as a learning centre or, alternatively, as a supplier of information to society, for example public such in a digital form to users with either individual or general needs.

Andersen and Skot-Hansen note how the core of the library’s identity can shift between the sectors in their model. Joakim Hansson as we’ve seen previously, argue that the identity of the public library is shifting towards a closer integration with the Educational sector in the Anderson and Skot-Hansen model. The Östergötland Project sees the digital divide primarily as a hinder for education of citizens on all levels. The library argues for its opportunities to counteract this by establishing the public library as a “learning environment. In contrast: the Planned Project can instead be seen as incorporating a political discourse that sees positively on the new opportunities for civic engagement in the digital society. Through this the projects sets its focus on the library as a provider of public information and as “service point” in the community member’s every-day lives.

Underlying in both projects is the inmate struggle located within the pedagogical discourse they both encompass. The projects both intends to assist society in its call for reduced digital divides, but they must at the same time adjust their ambitions and aims to the personal interest and motivation of the targeted groups and the individuals in these. This is, as argued by Jonsson, founded in a liberal view on the public library’s identity as non-authority in relation to its users. In the texts, this discourse with its imbedded conflict fusion with all of the different identity discourses focused on the library as educator, the conceptualising of digital divides in the texts to a very little extends sees the divides as a hinder in the discourse where the public library relates to a role as provider of culture.

Both projects stress a belief that participation in the digital world, achieved by the reduction of digital divides, leads to an inclusion in both the small and large physical world. The further establish the importance of the public library in this process. Both projects thus use the term the digital divide in relation to their creation of a model of the society and world which they locate themselves within. Regardless of he projects’ focus, the public library is in the texts continuously emphasised as a fundamental necessity in the local community and an organisation full of possibilities. Both texts further make use of the term “inclusion” and “exclusion” in relation to the idea of the digital world as linked to the physical. The emerging discourse is one that sees the identity of the public library as a positive mean for social and civic integration. This is interesting to relate to the line of though in Stigendal where the library, according to him, needs to stay closely linked to the Nordic idea of the welfare society in order o achieve this. This ideological model could possible be seen to collide with the liberal ideas behind the idea of the autonomous user and the passive libraray.

The public library is a complex phenomenon as it is an arena for conflict between different discourses in society, all with its own purposes and wills. Through its aims and ambitions it incorporates ideas with different ideological foundations. This is a limited study. It only examines two library projects. The revealed results should be considered with this consideration in mind. However, it attempts to bring light to how the issues of digital divide, still not given much attention in the Swedish society, are finding their way into the public library sphere and how this sphere incorporates these political issues into their own formation of identity. The results could thus lead the way for further investigations on the subject as well as it constitute a small pieces in the research puzzle currently being laid within the

Scandinavian library and information science in its attempts to understand the complex identity and nature if the public library.

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	Project A (ongoing)	Project B (on the planning stage)
Target groups	<p>”Östgötarna”, ”deltar i någon form av studier”, ”arbetssökande”, ”intresserade av att börja studera”, ”De som ”inte har tillgång till Internet i hemmet och ”som ställs utanför”, ”utomeuropeiska invandrare”</p>	<p>”Land A och land B”, De ”som har problem med att finna och förstå offentlig information”, ”äldre”, ”mångkulturell bakgrund”, ”inte använder dator på jobbet”, ”kvinnor”, ”de som står utanför arbetsmarknaden”, ”vuxna nybörjare”</p>
On the library users	<p>”behov av flexibilitet” ”sociala och mentala avstånd” till studier ”datoranvändare” ”individen” ”den enskilda” ”biblioteksanvändare”</p>	<p>”osäkra” ”svaga” ”deltagare” ”slutanvändare” ”besökare” ”icke-besökare” ”medborgare” framtida önskvärda ”””deltagare i den demokratiska processen” ”i just den situation de befinner sig i”</p>
On the info. society.	<p>”höjda krav på kompetens och kunskaper”, ”digital samhällsinfo” & ”samhällsnyttiga tjänster”. ”Den tekniska utvecklingen” ”koppla upp sig mot världen” ”viktig information” ”öppnare och tillgängligare samhälle”. ”datorer” ”invandrare: nyheter, kontakt med hemlandet...” Här finns de nya ”läromiljöerna” ”tjänster”</p>	<p>”allt mer av den offentliga informationen digitaliseras” Där pågår ”den demokratiska processen” ”alla samhällsområden berörs” ”digitaliseringen ändrar karaktär från en teknisk till en social process” ”bredbanden är snabba” ”datorspelande ”bloggar” ”Facebook” ”tjäna pengar” ”göra sin röst hörd” Kräver ”digital kompetens”. Handlar om ”vardagen” ”utanförskap” (reg.rapport)</p>
On the face of the digital divide	<p>”tillgång” ”& användning” ”står utanför” ”Internet är inte vardag” ”inte behärskar tekniken” ”inte tillgång till Internet i hemmet” ”vissa grupper som saknar förutsättningar och kunskap utesluts” ”arbete, skola, bredband” geografisk klyfta” ”dålig ekonomi: invandrare” ”utanför Internet-världen” OBS! länk mellan digital ”delaktighet” och social dito och även integrering!!</p>	<p>”de som använder Internet och inte gör det” ””söka på Internet” (= ”Digital kompetens”) & ”tillgång till bredband” ”vardagsanvändning accentuerar ” Leder till ”digital analfabetism”. ”Starka användare” vs ”svaga”. DK påverkar ”tillväxt” och utveckling” i samhället. ”Demokratin” påverkas när inte alla kan vara med i ”processen”. ”vardagen” ”Orsaker = geografi, ålder, utbildning, inkomst, civilstånd”. ”digitala trösklar”</p>

On the carrying out of the project	<p>”studiecirklar”, skapa ”delaktighet”, ”stödstrukturer” för ”vuxna lärande””, ”externt och internt” ”stödja livslånga lärandet”, utnyttja ”folkbibliotekets breda förankring”, ”nya former för informationsförsörjning” ”e-kampanj”, ”utbildning av bibl.personal”, ”bibl. som läromiljö och lokal mötesplats”, ”samarbete”, ”kartlägga behov och förutsättningar”, ”studieplatser”, ”ändamålsenlig teknik”, ”enlighet med lokala behov”, ”biblioteksnätverk”, ”kontaktytor”, ””lokal samverkan”, ”öka bibliotekets kunskaper om teknik”, ”fysisk miljö”, ”tillgänglighet”, ”information om lärande”, ”marknadsföra biblioteket”, ”kompetensutveckling”</p>	<p><i>skapa ”arena” för att ”utveckla digital kompetens”, ”skapa en infrastruktur för dig. tillgänglighet”, ”biblioteket som servicepunkt”, gränsöverskridande samarbete”, tekniskt resurscentrum”, ”stöd och motivation” verka för kunskapsamhälle” för ”alla”, ”garantera tillgång till Internet”, ”nå osäkra användare” på ”basnivå”, ”bibl. är en neutral plats”, ””plats i samhället för de utanför arbetsmarknaden” ”bibl. utspridda”, ”har redan viss erfarenhet” ”seniorsurf”, ”bra infotekniska lösningar i lokalerna”, ”informellt lärande”, ”handledning”, ”stödperson”, ”gratis schemalagd undervisning”, ”grundläggande”, bibl. egen personal och andra aktörer i samhället”, ”teman: kritiskt tänkande, e-post, google, info-källor, nedladdning, bank & amf etc, bildhantering”, ”omvärldsbevakning”, ”fortlöpande uppdatering”, ”marknadsföring: slutanvändare, samverkanspartners, företag” ”föreläsningar”, ”dokumentation”</i></p>
Co-operation	<p>”bibliotek och studieförbund samverkar”, Medborgarskolan, ”föreningar” ”folkbildning”, ”biblioteksnätverk”, ”samverkanspartners”, lokal samverkan”, ”utbildningssamordnare”, ”lärare”, ”biblioteksanvändare”, ÖBF (?), BILDA, ”flyktingssamordnare”, ”vuxenutbildning”, ”kommunens vägledningsfunktion”</p>	<p>Land A och B, ”biblioteksnätverk”, ”samordna”, ”folkbildning”, ”offentliga aktörer”, ”banker”, ”arbetsmarknaden” ”företag”.</p>

Discourses found using Andersons & Skot-Hansen		
ICT/ techno logical discou rse	<p>”förutsättningarna … förändrats radikalt” ”den teknikiska utvecklingen” Idag finns ”stort utbud av Internet, nätjänster och dig. medier” ”ändamålsenlig teknik”. Finns de utan ”eget datorinnehav”.</p> <p>”Webbkonferenser” inom biblioteket. ”IT-resurser (datorer, anpassning av utrustning, programvaror.) Hur speciellt utrusta för ”studiedatorer”?</p>	<p>”tillgång till PC” ”bredband” ”från teknik till socialt” ”använda dagens teknik” ”tillgång till bredband” ”tekniskt resurscentrum” ”tillgång till Internet” ”tillgång till dataurtustning” ”informationstekniska lösningar” ”bredbandsuppkoppling” trådlöst nätverk” ”bärbara datorer” ”scanners” ”webbkameror” ”program som möjliggör” ”CD-brännare” ”program för nedladdning” ”för bildhantering” ”mp3” ”telefoner” ”spelare” ”använda video-chatt” ”bearbeta” ”bränna” ”söka information” ”IT-kunskaper” hos personalen viktig.</p>
Education al discourse	<p>en förutsättning för och del av en ”lärmiljö” är att jobba mot DK. ”stödja livslångs lärandet”, ”studiecirklar”, ”studieplatser”, ”flexibelt lärande”, ”höjda krav på kompetens och kunskaper”, ”distansstudenter”, ”närhetsprincip”, ”kanske just i glesbygd som behovet av offentliga läromiljöer är som störst”, ”kunskap om Internet”, ”breddad rekrytering till studier”, ”folkbildning”, ”studieförbund”, ”biblioteksnätverk för läromiljöer”, ”ämnesanpassade resurser för studiecirkelledare”, ”kan bibliotekets funktioner användas mer riktat mot folkbildning?”, ”utbilda personal”</p>	<p>”dig. kompetens är en basfördighet”, ”verka för ett kunskapsamhälle där alla kan delta”, ”kunskapsökande”, ”gratis schemalagd undervisning”, ”introduktion”, ”bibl. som arena för vuxnas digitala lärande”, ”informationsträffar”</p>
Cultural discourse	<p>”digitala medier”, ”ämnesanpassade resurser för studiecirkelledare”,</p>	<p>”digitala medier”, ”CD-brännare”, ”bränna CD-skivor”, ”nedladdning av mp3-filer”, ”nedladdning av talböcker”,</p>

Civil discourse	<p>””samhällsinformation”, ”samhällsnyttiga tjänster”, ”förenklar vardagen”, ”lokal mötesplats”, ”integration”, ”delaktighet”, ”närhetsprincip, tillgänglighet och samordning av kommunala resurser”, bibliotek är ett vitt förgrenat nät av offentliga miljöer”, ”koppla upp sig mot världen”, ”offentligt rum”, ”information från myndigheter”, ”öppnare och tillgängligare samhälle””social inkludering”, ”folkbildning”, ”studieförbund” (?), ”lokala studiecirklar”, ”organisationer”, ”kan biblioteket vägleda?”, ”samarbete”, ”kommunens vägledningsfunktion”</p>	<p>”befolkningen”, ”vardagsanvändare”, ”offentliga informationen digitaliseras”, ”social process”, ”den demonkartiska processen”, ”regeringarna i land A &B lägger vikt vid digital kompetens”, ”alla samhällsområden”, ”utanförskap”, ”Internetsamhället”, ”biblioteket för de som inte har tillgång till datautrustning och Internet i sin vardagsmiljö”, ”folkbibl. bör garantera medborgare tillgång till Internet”, ”möjlighet till deltagande i den demokratiska processen”, ”servicepunkt”, ”neutral plats”, ”ingen avslöjar sitt ärende genom besöket”, plats i samhället”, ”har redan viss erfarenhet av att höja befolkningens kompetens”, ”informellt lärande”, ”ge stöd i just den situation de befinner sig i”, ”söka information”, ”gratis”, ”stöd”, ”bank, ams, f-k”, ”offentliga föreläsningar” ”information till besökare och icke-besökare”</p>
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