LIBER - Re-inventing the Library for the Future by Enabling Open Science, Leading in Changing Scholarship and Shaping Innovative Research

Kristiina Hormia-Poutanen & Ulla Nygren

LIBER is a network of European research libraries. The article describes LIBER as an organization, gives an overview of the Finnish libraries participation in LIBER and describes how the working group for Research and Education works and what kind of benefits it brings to its members.

The Network of LIBER Libraries and Finland

LIBER's network of libraries includes 402 libraries in 41 countries. The network has grown both through numbers of libraries and countries over the years. Forty-five years ago, when it was founded in 1971, LIBER had 86 members in 15 countries.

Finnish university libraries have long been loyal adherents of LIBER, the average number of libraries being ten for a long time. Over the last couple of years, the number has grown further and at the end of 2015, there were 15 Finnish libraries in LIBER: *the National Library of Finland* (NLF), *the Repository Library, University Libraries, the Association of Research Libraries and one Honorary Member*.

It is also interesting to compare the Finnish figures with those of our Nordic neighbours since our countries are more or less the same size. As can be seen (Fig. 1), the number of Nordic libraries in LIBER is within the same range.

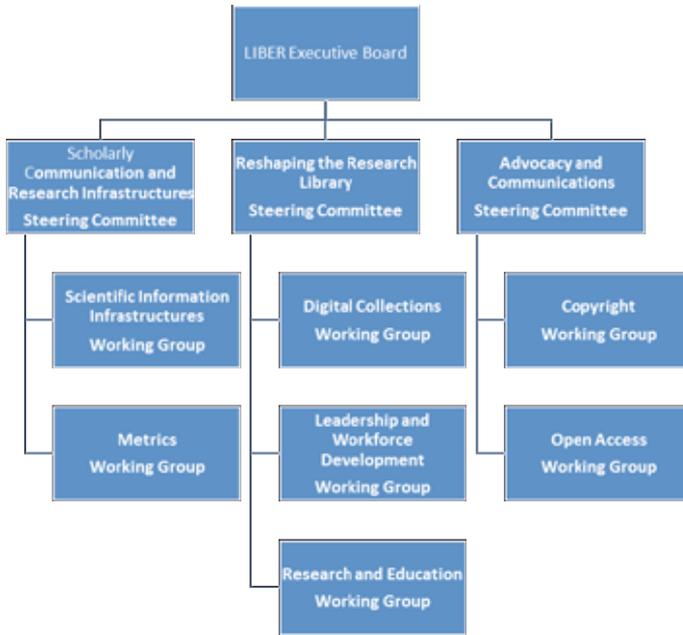## Finnish Libraries Active in LIBER

Finland has twice held the Presidency of LIBER. The first Finnish President was the former National Librarian, *Esko Häkli* (1995-1998); and the second is *Kristina Hormia-Poutanen* (2014-2018), also from the National Library of Finland.

The President can influence the direction and culture of the organisation. In association with the *Executive Board*, my main task as President is to empower the network of European research libraries, make research library services transparent to decision-makers and users, and underline the value of these services for education and research.

In carrying out this task, I believe it is important to identify the current needs of LIBER libraries and to take action to meet these require-

Fig.1. LIBER's network includes 402 participants in 41 countries (figures at 31 December 2015). The map shows the distribution of LIBER libraries across various European countries.

Fig.2. LIBER Steering Committee and Working Group structure LIBER also has an office in the Hague with permanent staff and specialists working in EU-projects. The number of staff at the moment is nine.

ments. A survey of LIBER libraries was carried out in 2015, and the feedback was very positive. An action plan is being prepared to deal with the points raised by the survey, particularly those relating to communication. In future, surveys will be carried out every three years.

There are Finnish representatives on *LIBER's Steering Committees on Scholarly Communication and Research Infrastructures and Reshaping the Research Library*. At Working Group level, there Finnish libraries are involved in those on *Education and Research* (Ulla Nygren is Chair), *Scientific Information Infrastructures, Advocacy and Communication, Open Access and Metrics* (Fig. 2). The *LIBER Executive Board* also plans to create working groups on *Digital Humanities and Citizen Science*.

Leading in Changing Scholarship

The strategic priorities of Liber are promoted by three steering committees and seven working groups linked to them. One of these is the Working Group on Research and Education, which operates under the Steering Committee for Reshaping the Research Library. The aim of the group is to recognize and share successful ways to support research and education and at the same time

find means of making the role libraries have in advancing these activities more visible.

Pursuing this common goal has brought together library professionals from different parts of Europe: members of the group come from Denmark. Estonia, Finland, Great Britain, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. I have been the chair since summer 2014.

Guideline for the working group is Liber's strategic priority "Lead in changing scholarship". When defining the objectives for its activity, the group put special emphasis on the word ′"change". There was a strong agreement that our aims and plans must be based on the understanding of the nature of changes taking place in the scientific environment and of the impact those changes are having on the strategic planning, choices and daily work in libraries.

Evaluation as a Means of Improving Service

Every organization wishing not only to survive but to thrive must regularly assess its work and functions. In a rapidly changing operational environment the importance of continuous evaluation of library services is growing.

Do we recognize and supply the kind of service that the scientific community really needs? Do we concentrate on rights issues? Are we using the possibilities that the technical development enables to the full? And perhaps most importantly: do we know how the students, teachers and researchers are working and behaving in the research and education environment of today – and how they will do it in the future? These questions are reflected in the action plan of the group.

To evaluate research and education services in libraries critically and regularly, common criteria is important. With focus on services, evaluation should be based both on customer feedback and self-assessment. The data collected should be user-related measurable and comparable. We should be able to discern from it excellent research and learning support services in university/research libraries for benchmarking. And finally, we should also be able to use the data in proving the value of library services to key stakeholders and funders in the university or research organization.

Tools for Making It

One tool for finding out how we are doing is a customer satisfaction survey. The group decided to propose running a pilot survey to collect comparable customer feedback data from a range of libraries. With the same survey done in all partaking libraries it also would be easier to identify those which have high user-satisfaction e.g. concerning some specific form of service.

We also hoped eventually to get a chance to look into what lies behind: what have these libraries done "right" in producing and marketing their service. Choosing a method which enables recognizing best practices and allows benchmarking between libraries was agreed to be of primary concern.

The Liber board gave its approval to the plans. *LibQUAL+ Lite* was chosen as the customer satisfaction survey to be used in the pilot, mainly because some members of the group had already experience in using it and were familiar with its benefits as well as drawbacks. The group also proposed to ARL some questions measuring research support, specially regarding open science.

These four "Liber specific" questions were agreed to be added to all surveys done within the pilot. There are altogether 16 libraries from different European countries participating in the pilot. Some libraries which have done their survey in 2015 (before the pilot was launched) have consented to have their data added in the common result book. Separate results of individual libraries will not be made public if they do not wish so.

Working Group Outcomes: Sharing and Best Practices

The data from the LibQUAL result reports will be analysed by the working group and the special

Kaisu Kesonen (secretary of the WG, left), Susanne Dalsgaard Krag, Ulla Nygren, Margareta Hemmed and Christopher Skelton-Foord.

Photo: Ulla Nygren

pilot group, which were founded to take care of all the practicalities concerning the survey. The results of the pilot will be presented in a series of workshops in the Annual Conferences starting in Helsinki 2016.

The crux of the workshops, however, is not just telling what the pilot has found out. Rather, we would like to invite the attendants to take part and take the whole thing a bit further by using the pilot results as a means of developing new ideas. The beginning of how this could be done will be seen in Helsinki.

We also plan to make a toolkit of best practices with the libraries which are willing to share their formula for success. The group strongly believes that by sharing experiences and best practices we really can improve existing services and create new types of service. Moreover, sharing and learning from each other makes libraries stronger within their frame organizations.

Fig. 3. LIBER's Strategic Directions 2016-17

How the
Working Group Works

Every working group in Liber has its objectives in realizing the Liber Strategy but there are no special directions about how the practical work should be organized, e.g. how often a working group should meet. Recurring working group meetings are usually scheduled in connection to the Annual Conference. Apart from this, the Research and Education working group has preferred to arrange a couple of meetings a year.

Our members are active and committed to advancing the aims of the group and consider this is best done in face-to-face meetings. Besides, by hosting the meeting in turn, every group member

also offers the others a possibility to get acquainted with how his/her library operates. At its best a working group builds a network of supporting colleagues who share the same vision. Of course much of the work can be conducted via e-mail, file sharing platforms, video meetings and so on.

The work we do for Liber is voluntary. For the most part we are doing it, I think, because it gives us something: it adds value to the everyday business in our own libraries. Every individual member of the course has to make the decision how much time and other resources he/she can give to common activities like this. As a chair one has to accept that it can vary and that it also depends on the situations in individual libraries.

I have on some occasions received the question why a busy library director devotes her time to chairing a working group of volunteers when there seems to be quite a lot of work to do and the reward is mainly a "good feeling". The answer has been that it describes exactly what I get –

but there is a bit more, too. Being involved in the work of Liber gives me a positive "return on investment". It comes in the form of fruitful discussions on current topics, new views on old problems, a fine network of enthusiastic and supportive colleagues and the satisfaction of working for goals I believe are valuable and worth supporting.

Participating in a working group also widens your views; you learn much that can be of use in your own library. But I'm not going to make it sound merely fun: there is no denying that being an active member also means over-tight timetables and never-ending to-do-lists, at least occasionally. Still, as long as the balance is on the pos-

itive side, it is worthwhile carrying on.

Why not come along!

What Are the Benefits of Joining LIBER?

Ulla Nygren describes the benefits of being an active working group member in the text above. On a more general level perhaps the main benefit of joining LIBER is that you become a member of a large network of experts and will be able to share expertise with them.

The benefits can be described in more detail as:

- **Attending** the *LIBER Annual Conference* at a 50% discount, or one of LIBER's workshops and seminars at a 25-50% discount
- **Ensuring** that your voice is heard at a European level through the advocacy that LIBER undertakes with the Commission and the Member States on your behalf
- **Participating** in our *Leadership Development Programme* and preparing to guide your library through changing times. This Programme is exclusively available to LIBER libraries
- **Joining** one of our 12 *Steering Committees, Working Groups and Fora* to share knowledge and connect with your peers on topics of interest (e.g. research infrastructures, advocacy, copyright, digital collections)
- **Becoming** one of the more than 50 LIBER libraries which have enjoyed EU funding via projects. LIBER regularly takes part in *EU-funded projects* and involves its libraries
- **Contributing** to lobbying activities that LIBER runs at a European level, such as work in the areas of Copyright and Text and Data Mining
- **Publishing** metadata records and the full-text content of your research theses on the Open Access *DART-Europe* portal
- **Promoting** events and share innovative work on the LIBER website.
- **Receiving** a 10% discount on *ARL publications* (mention your member number when ordering)

Open Science on the Agendas of LIBER and Finnish Research Libraries

Enabling Open Science is one of *LIBER's Strategic Directions* for 2016-17. Our Strategic Directions can be summarised as 'Research Libraries for Innovative Research, Open Science and Scholarship'.

Enable Open Science

LIBER will provide a forum for libraries to build capacity and best practice in this area; supporting the development of skills in RDM, collaborating with other research stakeholders, sharing information and developments in areas such as digital humanities, and developing best practice in the use of metrics.

Lead in Changing Scholarship

LIBER will work to equip future and current library leaders with the skills to be able to take the lead and position the library as being at the heart of innovative and open research environments.

Engage in Shaping Innovative Research

LIBER will develop and promote positions on topics relevant to libraries supporting innovative research, such as open access, open science, research data management, copyright and TDM, and provide LIBER libraries with the tools to engage stakeholders on these issues.

Working for the same aim both at national and European level is very motivating. Open Science is very much on the agenda of Finnish research libraries.

Finland began its *Open Science and Research Initiative* in 2014, with the goal of becoming one of the leading countries for openness in science and research by 2017 and enabling Finnish society to harness extensively the opportunities that open science affords. This goal took shape in the *Open Science and Research Roadmap 2014-2017* (http://openscience.fi/open-science-

and-research-roadmap-2014-2017).

As the principal network for research libraries in Europe, LIBER is in a strong position to leverage its network of experts from all over Europe via its working groups and in association with established partnerships. It has the potential to identify the issues to be addressed at policy level as well as to make recommendations, review best practices, participate in the drawing together of policy guidelines and drive the implementation of activity. 📖

About the Authors

Kristiina Hormia-Poutanen, President of LIBER National Library of Finland E-mail: kristiina.hormia-poutanen@helsinki.fi

Ulla Nygren, Director, Turku University Library, Chair for Research and Education WG E-mail: ulla.nygren@utu.fi