Who needs a national bibliography?

1 Introduction

The National Library of Sweden gets its mandate from the Swedish government and the mission is to collect, describe, preserve and make accessible all materials published and distributed in Sweden, e.g. e-materials, books, broadcasts and music (SFS 2008:1421). The National Library of Sweden has one of the oldest legal deposit laws in the world and it first came into force in 1661. Since 2012 there is a legal deposit law for electronic material (SFS 2012:866). Furthermore the National Library of Sweden provides national coordination and support platform for the library sector in the country.

The Swedish government assigns the task of producing the national bibliography to the National Library. The National Library interprets this instruction by defining the national bibliography as the description of Swedish publishing output, in terms of printed books and journals and is based on the material collected under the legal deposit law.

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1 The legal deposit law means that every publisher has to send one legal deposit copy of its material to the National Library (and six university libraries). For more information about legal deposits, see the web pages of the National Library of Sweden.
2 Methods

To investigate the purpose of the Swedish national bibliography a study was performed at the National Library of Sweden in 2015 (Kungliga biblioteket 2016). The study consisted of four parts; an historical background, an international web survey sent to members of the IFLA Bibliography section, visits to and interviews with representatives of the national bibliographic agencies of Denmark, Germany and Norway and finally interviews with a selected number of known stakeholders. The historical background was primarily conducted as a literature review and also through the interviews.

This paper is a theoretical expansion of the result from this study and limited to the results concerning the need for increased knowledge about the use of national bibliographic data. The concept user awareness is introduced as a tool for investigating this beyond user needs, user habits and user experience. The aim is to investigate the need for data transparency for increased user awareness.

The method used in the study will be presented and models for seeking knowledge on the users of national bibliographic data will be discussed with some examples regarding what strategies national bibliographic agencies could undertake in order to keep this knowledge integrated and relevant in their work.

3 Analysis of collected data

The interviews with both the representatives of the national bibliographic agencies and the interviews with selected known stakeholders were conducted as semi-structured interviews. These interviews followed the same structure as the international web-survey and aimed to be a more in-depth conversation.

The interviews and the web-survey were divided in the following sections:

- selection, range and coverage of the national bibliography, e.g. questions about metadata and media type
- organization, e.g. budget, resources, mandate/instructions
- users, more precisely user groups and user needs

A summary of each interview was structured around these themes, so called clustering, in order to compare the results in relation to the Swedish national bibliography.

The selected stakeholders consisted of six respondents familiar with the national bibliography. One is a researcher at the National Library of Sweden, the second is a former researcher at the National Library of Sweden. The third is a former investigator at the National Library of Sweden who has done a similar study on the purpose of the Swedish national bibliography. A PhD student in the field of Sociology of Literature whose research field includes using national bibliographic data for statistical purposes was also interviewed. Furthermore, a representative for the Swedish Publisher’s Association was interviewed regarding in what extent they need a national bibliography. Finally a librarian from a Swedish public library was interviewed about user awareness and user needs concerning the national bibliography.
4 Results

Overall results from the study indicated that there exist two current established purposes of national bibliographies internationally:

a) A national bibliography should function as a mirror of a country’s culture
b) A national bibliography should serve as an overview of a country’s publishing output

A suggestion for a new purpose presented in the study (Kungliga biblioteket 2016) was formulated as follows:

Producing the national bibliography means producing national bibliographic data. The national bibliographic data should be treated as a part of the national library infrastructure.

The National Library of Sweden’s role is to produce and make accessible national bibliographic data for the following purposes: An objective and comprehensive outline of the Swedish publishing output and to function as a metadata source to libraries and other users and stakeholders.²

4.1 Metadata source and outline of the publishing output

The international web survey performed in the study showed that Sweden is unique in not including electronic material, music and sound materials, images and film, radio and television in its national bibliography. The Swedish national bibliography only describes books, maps, sheet music and periodicals. Internationally, national libraries have described other materials than printed since the 1970s. Several of the countries participating in the survey have separate bibliographies within their national bibliography for different purposes. In this case the concept national bibliography rather functions as an umbrella term and is not limited by media type. In the study a similar model is suggested for the Swedish national bibliography. There is a need for a new concept. The consequences of an increased internationalization, digitalization and media convergence have an impact on selection criteria for the purpose of national bibliography. This creates new challenges that affect the production of national bibliographies.

Following the results of the study it is key to ask how the Swedish national bibliography should include more media types in order to be relevant to its purposes. When it comes to cataloguing printed material is traditionally treated differently and with more akribi and granularity than electronic media. Is this motivated when a national bibliography is supposed to cover the publishing output of Sweden that electronic material and audiovisual materials are not included? An increased amount of resources to describe requires the development of methods to coordinate metadata flows between different data producers within and outside the library sector.

A further question regarding the increased published material in all formats as a consequence of digitalization is if it is possible to have the same methods and goals for achieving equal quality of national bibliographic data to meet the needs of the users’ changing habits (Parent

In order to answer these questions it is important to be fully aware of what the purposes of the national bibliography aims to fulfil. Who needs a national bibliography? This is important to clarify, both for internal work with creating and curating national bibliographic data and for making national bibliographic data accessible to the users.

### 4.2 User awareness – data transparency

The purposes of national bibliographies need to be adapted in the light of today’s constantly and rapidly changing media landscape which includes both new user habits and a more complicated approach to selection criteria.

Historically the user groups of a national bibliography were the book trade, libraries and researchers. The results from the international comparison in the study confirmed that the main users of the national bibliography and national bibliographic data are other libraries and researchers. Today an additional user group are software developers who want to use the raw data (Kett, Manecke, Beyer 2012a).

Another conclusion of the study was that the focus on users is important but we should shift from the focus on user habits and needs to raising user awareness. All three parts of the study, 1) interviews of a selected group of users, stakeholders and experts, 2) an international web survey directed to national bibliographic agencies and 3) case studies at three different national libraries, showed that there is a lack of user awareness, which means for example that users are not often aware of the characteristics of national bibliographic data and its usability. It is not always clear for the users what dataset they are searching within, how the data is produced or what quality the data has.

All interviewed stakeholders described both dissatisfaction as well as satisfaction with the national bibliography. The interviewed stakeholders emphasized that the quality of the data is the most crucial factor for the usability of the data. In principle all conversations appear grounded in unawareness in combination with a lack of knowledge. Today’s challenge is to increase data transparency as a mode to increase user awareness. Data transparency is central for achieving user awareness and is closely connected to reliability, i.e. knowledge about where the data originates, how it is produced and how to use it (Kett, Manecke, Beyer 2012a). Reliability of data, which means persistence, standards and quality assurance are central characteristics of national bibliographic data which have to be communicated (Kett, Manecke, Beyer 2012a).

A further way to increase the user awareness is to make users aware of what they can expect of national bibliographic data and to inform users how they can use the data. This is currently a neglected aspect of making the national bibliography relevant, when the previous focus has been on investigating user needs and adjusting services accordingly.

### 5 Conclusion

One answer to the question what a national bibliography is would be to describe the history of the Swedish national bibliography. Why does the national bibliography exist from the

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beginning and what does the Swedish national bibliography include? Who uses the Swedish national bibliography? It is important to focus on what functions and roles national bibliographies have today and could or should have in the future. The title of this paper Who needs a national bibliography? is an essential starting point when discussing this issue.

National bibliographies have traditionally been regarded as sort of “ready-made” product for subject overviews. Today the focus is on metadata, however whilst focusing on metadata something is lost in the core functions of a bibliography as a curated collection or cluster of data.

Are there any user needs today that require the specific qualities of bibliographies instead of digital free text searches when looking for information? A bibliography is a description, an index or data set of a certain collection, traditionally books, often limited and defined under specific subjects. Bibliography literally means book writing or to write about books. The collection and the process of collecting in relation to the users have been discussed lively in the library discourse but also in museums and other governmental agencies dealing with cultural heritage in recent years. In the National Library of Sweden the situation is different and rather there is a need for the two to coexist – or the two merging together into a joint focus on collective memory and to ensure this is secured for both today’s user whilst having future generations in mind.

What would happen if we stop producing a Swedish national bibliography and only produce metadata for the Swedish output? The metadata would probably still be produced anyway, by the publishers, other libraries, the creators/authors, distributors and the trade and be available in the cloud. This is already the case today. It is common that the data is initially created somewhere else when it reaches the cataloguer’s eyes at the national bibliography agency. What does the National Library of Sweden add when producing a national bibliography that can’t be offered elsewhere? In the study Parent’s (2008) description is followed:

Among the characteristics of a national bibliography are that it provides a current, timely, comprehensive and authoritative list of all titles published in a country, it provides a record of their existence, and it identifies them unambiguously.

In addition to this it is also a key argument today that the data should be open and open linked data is crucial for opening up future collaborations between national libraries and other agencies working with cultural heritage. The users will benefit from national bibliographic data that is linked into the semantic web (Niggemann 2012).

In Sweden the national bibliography and Swedish authority data is published under open license since 2011. Kett, Eimer, Manecke, Jahns, Svensson (2012b) refer to Parent’s four criteria above, but add a fifth criterion for what characterizes national bibliographic data. In addition to that it should be current, timely, comprehensive and authoritative they add: “a national bibliography needs to integrate itself into the World Wide Web, since this is where information exchange takes place today” (Kett et. al. 2012b). They also address that with this addition follows a need for a discussion regarding how these criteria are affected in terms of quality by the increasing flow of electronic material.

The most central argument in this paper is to highlight the need for increased user awareness concerning national bibliographic data. First of all, it is crucial that this awareness is articulated and made clear by the National Library of Sweden itself. This study was one method used for moving towards this point.
**Litteraturförteckning**


