

Internship at Södertörn University Library, Sweden in June 2015



Fig. 1: View of Södertörns Högskola from the library's terrace [Haderup]

Background

During my traineeship at the Thüringer Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Jena (ThULB), I learnt about the proceedings and functions of an academic library, in this case catering to about 19.000 university students. Due to the ThULB also operating as the state library of Thuringia, I came to know the tasks that come along with that role, such as maintaining the state bibliography and being the copyright library for Thuringia. Therefore, I was looking for something quite different for my internship. I made a short list of requirements I wanted to be met by the receiving library. Firstly, the library should be situated abroad in a country where I would be able to communicate easily using my knowledge of English or Spanish. Secondly, the library should be smaller than the ThULB with its about 170 employees. And thirdly, I was looking for a library that would be used to foreign students or staff. Södertörn University Library (Södertörns högskolebibliotek) provided all those requirements and more.

My stay at Södertörn from 1st June until 5th June 2015 provided me with insight into the Swedish library system as well as Södertörn University Library's special environment. At the same time, I was able to form a connection that my colleagues may be able to profit

from in the future. My internship was supported by BI-International with their generous scholarship for which I am very thankful.

The following account will provide general information on the history of Södertörn University as well as insights into the library's significance in the university's set up. Furthermore, this report will introduce the different library units that had been chosen beforehand to serve as fields of specialisation, along with their tasks. The differences found in comparison to the German library system will be addressed in the course of the text.

Södertörns högskola

Södertörn University is a very young university, established in 1996. The university is situated in Flemingsberg in Stockholm County, about 15 km south of the city of Stockholm. It is easily reachable from the capital by commuter train in about 20 minutes. The campus contains not only Södertörn University, but also the Karolinska Institutet (medicine), the School of Technology and Health of the Royal Institute of Technology, and the police academy (since 2015). The campus is continually expanding and will house the Swedish Red Cross University College (from 2016) including their small library, which will be incorporated into Södertörn University Library. The second library on the Flemingsberg campus is situated in the Karolinska Institutet and caters only to their students and staff. Södertörn University was established on the basis of a political decision counteracting unemployment and segregation problems in the southern parts of Stockholm County. [1] It was determined from the beginning that Södertörn University would be independent from Stockholm University, as the latter did not want to expand its capacity.

The Swedish higher education system is divided into three levels which build up on each other: basic level (three years), advanced level (one to two years), and research level (two to four years) with the degrees Bachelor, Master, and PhD respectively. At Södertörns, those levels are represented in 70 programmes and distributed throughout its four academic schools: Historical and Contemporary Studies, Culture and Education, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences, and Technology and Environmental Studies. [2] In July 2010, the university was granted the right to award degrees on the PhD level for selected programmes. [1] And in 2014 Södertörn counted around 11.000 students and 828 members of staff, 37 of those pertaining to the library. [3]

The main research area of Södertörn University is the Baltic Sea region and Eastern Europe: „The university has great expertise at illuminating, explaining and actively

participating in analyses of current change in the region, from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives.“ [4] Research findings are published in the university’s own English-language journal, *Baltic Worlds* [5], which is attached to the *Centre for Baltic and Eastern European Studies* (CBEES). Linked to those research areas is *The Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies*, which finances a mayor part of the research done in this area at Södertörn.

Internationalisation at Södertörns högskola

Working mainly in the research areas of the Baltic Sea and East Europe, Södertörn University puts a focus on exchanges of researchers as well as PhD students. „Research is not a national concern; instead by nature it is international and focused outwards.“ [6] The university’s *Internationalisation Policy* however not only talks about making researcher exchange possible, it also considers students and members of staff: „Internationalisation shall define the entire university’s activities. The international perspective shall also be a priority for all employees and students at Södertörn University.“ [7] In June 2015, two of the 37 staff members, had just spent a week abroad with the Erasmus+ programme, one went to Hamburg, Germany, and the other to Manchester, England.

In the academic year 2014/2015 the university states that it has 120 partner universities worldwide, 176 incoming students, 100 outgoing students, and 20 members of staff who went abroad using Erasmus+. [3] Furthermore, there are eight master programmes across all four academic schools taught completely in English.

The university’s website reflects this international attitude by being quite deeply translated into English. The university library is even more thorough in its attempt to reach out to each and every student on campus, Swedish or foreign. This is very impressive in comparison to many German universities. All librarians at Södertörns speak English perfectly and some even are fluent in one or two Baltic languages, helping out with communication in the Baltic research area when needed.



Fig. 2: Entryway to Södertörns högskolebibliotek [Haderup]

Södertörns högskolebibliotek

The Södertörn University Library (Södertörns högskolebibliotek) was established in 1996 as part of the university complex in Flemingsberg. The first notable difference is that coats and bags are allowed in the library; as are coffee, tea, sweets, and fruit. The building also is not quiet as people do not talk in hushed voices. There are designated silent work areas: the silent reading room and an area on the 6th floor. But everywhere else, talking at normal volume is allowed. The building designed by Christer Malmström and recipient of the Kasper Salin-prize, one of Sweden's most prestigious prizes for architecture, absorbs the noise well. [1] It was built in 2004 and contains some modern artwork. [8] The structure is not that easily accessible, which, according to the staff, has certainly been the architect's endeavour: the user should sometimes get lost in the library to discover new and unknown literature by chance. It is questionable if this is the right approach for an academic library; the Customer Services Unit is already working on an improved guidance system and is thus far very well supported by an interactive floor map. [9] Also noticeable are the many round tables scattered throughout the library used by small groups of students. For bigger group work there are ten group study rooms, which can be booked daily and mostly contain whiteboards, tables, and chairs. Some are also equipped with computer screens for presentations.



Fig. 3: Entrance hall with view of the reading room [Haderup]

The library does not have closed stacks and only buys recommended literature. Recommendations are accepted from students, researchers, teachers, and staff alike. The policy states that the books bought should be used at least once. Archiving is not their main priority as both Stockholm University Library and Uppsala University Library are active in this area. So there is no problem at all with culling books which are not used anymore or are out of date. This is beneficial when space is needed to incorporate a small library, for example for the Swedish Red Cross University College. In 2013, the library owned about 110.000 printed books whereof 24.000 were course literature. Additionally, the e-book collection contained about 51.000 media. [10] All those media are accessible via the library's discovery system *SöderScholar* (Primo by ExLibris), which is constantly evaluated and adjusted to the library users' needs. The latest usability test aims to make the library's website as well as its discovery system equally accessible for people with visual impairments. The library's goal is to achieve an online-experience for visually impaired library users on the same level as for users without impairments.

The three Units of Södertörns högskolebibliotek

The 37 staff members at Södertörn University Library each belong to one or more of the three main units – The Media and Web Unit, The Learning and Research Support Unit, and The Customer Services Unit – depending on their tasks. Figure 4 shows the organisational structure of the library with its units. The Learning and Research Unit provides educational and technical support for teachers of web based courses. It also offers support for creating learning materials such as instructional videos and other digital teaching materials, using the information and communication technology (ICT)-tools offered in the library's ICT-studio.

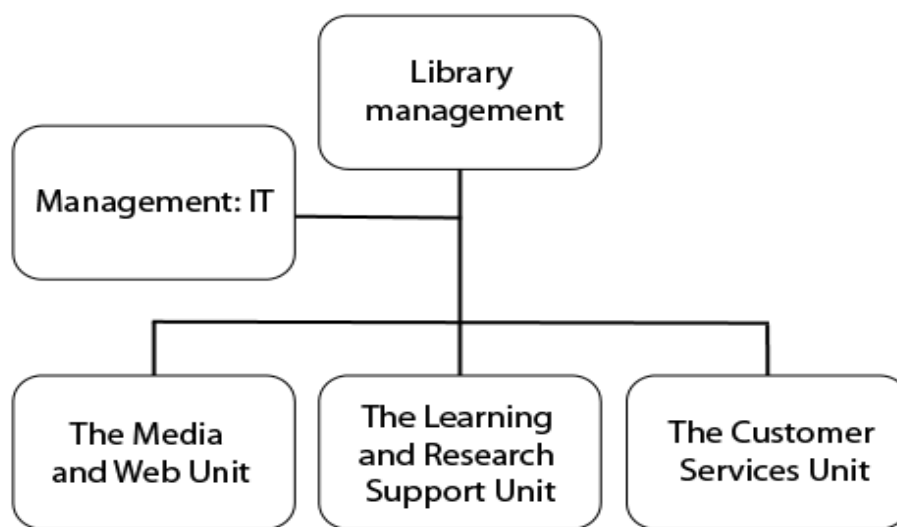


Fig. 4: Organisational Structure - Södertörns högskolebibliotek [13]

It also provides support for researchers and doctoral students concerning information searches, referencing systems, and publishing at the university. The Media and Web Unit is responsible for the purchase and accessibility of printed and electronic materials as well as interlibrary loans and donations. It maintains the library website, and manages and develops the library's web services. The Customer Services Unit is the first point of contact for library users as it runs the information desk as well as the access to the library via e-mail, chat, and telephone. There users can book tutorials in information search and evaluation related to academic writing. Furthermore, provisioning a stimulating study environment also falls to the Customer Services Unit.

Due to the short duration of the internship placement, only the Learning and Research Support Unit and the Media and Web Unit could be visited. The main focus was placed on learning how the library handles public relations and social media, as well as observing the international angle of the library's daily work.

The Media and Web Unit

As mentioned above, this unit is responsible both for purchase and accessibility of media as well as for the library's online presence and services. Part of the unit's tasks is the web presence. In 2011, a big project was concerned with the relaunch of the library website [11], which is integrated into the university's website and shares the design and structure with the Södertörn University page: www.sh.se. Another task is to constantly improve *SöderScholar*, the library's discovery system. The Primo system is very much individualised for Södertörn and is now being adapted for users with visual impairments. This is due to the strict discrimination legislation in Sweden, which also applies to digital information and user experience. Usability studies are conducted to help improve the discovery system as well as the website. In addition, the university's student intranet is also undergoing improvements in a university-wide project called *Nya Studiewebben*, led by the library. The student intranet, containing communication and news functions for students, and the learning management system, where the virtual classrooms are situated, are going to be combined and given a general makeover. As the library will own the new system, it will take a leading role in this project.

Social media is also part of the unit's tasks. The responsibility for the information and communication on Facebook, the intranet news for students as well as the news on the library page lies with a designated team called *Redaktionen*. Using a communication plan, a handbook on online-communication, and maintaining a schedule in form of a shared Google-spreadsheet, the team members each contribute different subjects and ideas. Those can be pictures, news, information on library projects and many other things. The Google-spreadsheet used for plotting the coming activities is a good idea, as everybody in the team can make entries and see the current work status. The regular team meetings help with enhancing creativity.

The Learning and Research Unit

This unit encompasses bibliometrics as well as workshops for doctoral students and researchers. It furthermore cooperates with the Study Workshop, which will be explained separately later on. Services for this target group are: tutoring in searching scientific information, consultation on open access or parallel publishing in the publication database DiVA. This repository is the *Digital Scientific Archive* for Swedish publications and was originally created for student theses. 37 universities across the country participate in DiVA. Research funding depends on the publication output of the individual

researchers and librarians help with registering scientific publications of their university in the database. If possible, the publication should be open access. The librarian's role in this publication process is to check the quality of the data and verify if for example a peer-reviewed article really has been peer-reviewed. As the main research area at Södertörn is the Baltic Sea region, those librarians with language skills in a special research area are also more likely to be consulted for research questions or even help with communication or information retrieval concerning that area.

Another service for researchers as well as students is to book a librarian for consultation. The former will likely have questions on information resources, databases, and research projects whereas the latter will have to write a paper or hold a presentation. Both can consult the librarian privately in a one hour session on a predetermined subject. In Germany, these tasks would fall to the subject librarian, but Södertörn does not have those. Rather the librarian is employed for his or her skill in a certain field and may or may not be part of the teaching and tutorial team.

Working with university teachers: The Study Workshop

The Study Workshop (Studieverkstan) is situated on the library premises, but operated by university teachers. Another phrase for study workshop would be „study skills support centre“. Main subjects here are the methods and techniques for academic writing and oral presentations in English and Swedish for Södertörn University students of all subjects and for all levels of study. There are regular courses and lectures given as part of the Study Workshop on writing, presentations, but also on dealing with stress. The teachers can be booked for individual tutoring as well. Furthermore, there are weekly drop-in sessions, where students can just come in and receive individual or group tutoring. This seems to be a very useful and well-received service idea, which, even as it is not led by librarians, is situated in the library and therefore at the exact right place for these subjects. Moreover, the Study Workshop's credo is what (subject) librarians in general are trying to teach in their information literacy courses: „From help to self-help: The objective of the Study Workshop is for you to be able to help yourself. We will not do your work for you, but we will point you in the right direction enabling you to work towards the solution yourself.“ [12]

Summary and thanks

During my week long stay at Södertörn University Library, I gained a lot of insights into the library's inner workings. I was positively surprised by the kinds of services the small staff at Södertörn makes possible. The atmosphere was amicable and even if we all communicated in a foreign language, I felt right at home and welcome in the library. I am very thankful for all the interesting talks, the presentations, and above all for all the patiently answered questions during my stay. Furthermore, I was happy to explain some German peculiarities to the Swedish colleagues and hope to equally have contributed to the library during my stay.

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