Hakemli Yazılar / *Refereed Papers*

Redefining the Purpose for Public Libraries under Pressure: A Critical Approach Based on Input Drawn from External Theoretical Frameworks*

Halk Kütüphanelerinin Amacını Yeniden Tanımlamak: Dış Teorik Çerçeveden Esinlenen Eleştirel Bir Yaklaşım

Leif Kajberg**

Abstract

There is a wide variety of views on the public library's future. In addition, a large number of books and articles have appeared, which address the future existence of public libraries in the age of Google, social media and electronic books. To identify major themes and viewpoints a review was conducted of selected published sources addressing the legitimacy of public libraries along with the efforts to rethink libraries' future roles and chief tasks. The analysis of selected publications shows that there is a paucity of critical thinking about public libraries, their mission, priorities and external environment. A major focus of the study is the relevance and feasibility of "importing" a specific body of theory from outside the field of Library and Information Science to enrich theoretical discussions within public librarianship. Hence, the paper considers ideas generated from reading German philosopher Axel Honneth's seminal work entitled "Das Recht der Freiheit". An initial discussion is conducted of Honneth's theoretical perspectives and how they can be related to theory building in public librarianship. In considering Honneth's conceptualisations of personal freedom, attention is particularly given to the public library's awareness of the growing democratic deficit in the neo-liberal society.

Keywords: public libraries, purpose, future, transformation, critical theory, Axel Honneth

Öz

Kütüphanecilik mesleğinde, bilgi yönetimi akademik çevrelerinde ve medyada halk kütüphanelerinin geleceğine dair birçok görüş dile getirilmektedir. Bazı profesyoneller, kütüphane müdürleri ve bilgi yönetimi bölümü akademisyenleri halk kütüphanelerinin geleceğini parlak görürken, bazı analist ve yorumcular önümüzdeki 20-30 senelik süreçte halk kütüphanelerine yönelik ihtiyaca daha kötümser bir bakış açısıyla yaklaşmaktadır. Her halükarda, halk kütüphanelerinin amaçlarını ve hedeflerini eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla gözden geçirmeleri ve hizmetlerini yeniden tanımlamayı düşünmeleri gerekmektedir.

Google, sosyal medya ve elektronik kitaplar çağında halk kütüphanelerinin yaşamlarını sürdürmelerinin yolları tartışılırken, kütüphanelerin rolünü güçlendirip genişletecek bazı görüşler ortaya atılmaktadır. Halk kütüphanelerini bir buluşma yeri, bir kamusal söylem alanı, bir demokrasi meydanı veya bir öğrenme yeri olarak inceleme görüşü öne çıkmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, küresel kriz ve belirsizlik zamanlarında halk kütüphanelerinin rolü ve faaliyetlerine yönelik bir çalışmanın kavramsal temeline katkıda bulunulurken, Alman filozof Axel Honneth'in, Hegel'in Haklar Felsefesini derinlemesine inceleyen Das Recht der Freiheit isimli çalışmasından bazı düşünceler ele alınmıştır. Honneht'in analizleri adalet teorisini anlamaya çalışmak ve özgürlük kavramının tüm yönlerini ve çıkarımları ele almak üzerinedir. Honneth'in çalışmasında modern toplumda demokrasi kavramının yanı sıra eşitsizlik, güç ve hakimiyet kavramları çerçevesinde görüşler ve bakış açılarına ağırlık verilmiştir. Halk kütüphanelerinin amacı ve öncelikleri tartışmasında Honneth'in teorik çalışmasının etkileri ilk kez bu çalışmada ele alınmıştır. Honneth'in kişisel özgürlüğü kavramsallaştırması Batılı bir bakış açısı, sosyal düzen ve demokratik yaşam biçiminde düşünülürse, halk kütüphanelerini neo-liberal toplumdaki büyüyen demokrasi açığı konusunda ve toplumları küresel açıdan ilgilendiren çelişkiler, krizler ve zorluklar hususunda farkındalık getiren bir kuruma dönüştürmek konusu da ayrıca öne çıkmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *halk kütüphaneleri, amaç, gelecek, değişim, eleştirel teori, Axel Honneth*

Introduction

Overall, and this applies to most countries, the public library's service environment exhibits an increasing degree of complexity and unpredictability. Public libraries are operating in a macro-level climate of aggravated competition, recession-affected economies and financial constraints and budget reductions. Add to this shifts in the library users' preferences, expectations and behavioural patterns along with the manifestation and impact of new media, platforms, formats and gadgets. The e-book is coming and, as usual, growth trends in this area in the USA are spreading to other parts of the world. Further, portable devices including smartphone, iPhone, iPad and tablets and a range of playware products create new media opportunities. Broadly, public libraries seem to be aware of developments in digitization of information and the increasing growth of electronic networks. And they are, with greater or lesser success, seizing the opportunities of the social media for providing information resources and services for their clients and for enhancing their web visibility. However, a more fundamental problem for public libraries is the fact that, in many countries, libraries experience severe cuts in expenditure with staff being dismissed and branches closed (Woodsworth, 2011, p. xi). Also, some opinion leaders, politicians and members of the general public have started questioning or debating the mere rationale of libraries. In these times, libraries cannot just lean back feeling complacent with their role as smooth information centres and cultural experiences providers in a consumerist society. This sort of cross-pressure makes it necessary for libraries to rethink their purpose and adjust their community role in the light of contemporary developments in society and on a global scale. Similarly, library theorists and researchers have a role to play in this process by re-examining the values and theoretical basis of public librarianship. In this respect, in revisiting existing conceptual frameworks in the public library field, critical ideas and theoretical perspectives drawn from other academic disciplines seem obvious.

Methodology

The study described here intends discussing the situation and challenges of the public library along with the need for new theoretical ideas in the discussion of the library's future. A review is conducted of selected published sources addressing the legitimacy of public libraries along with the efforts to rethink their future roles and chief tasks. The selected pieces analysed cover public library environments in Scandinavia, primarily Denmark, United Kingdom and the USA. Consequently, the developments, issues and dilemmas identified for discussion in this article are seen from a predominantly North European/Anglo-American perspective. An alter-

native approach would be to broaden the cultural and geographic perspective so as to allow the issues and priorities relating to the situation and challenges of public libraries to be dealt with from other perspectives. We have to be aware of differing cultural contexts here and it must not be overlooked that views of current public library roles and problems in e.g. the Arab World, in Latin American countries or in South Africa might differ from those articulated in North Europe and the USA. On the other hand, this language-related, cultural and academic "bias" - the illustrative emphasis put on European and American conditions - can be justified referring to the state of fairly advanced public library redefinition efforts in these countries. In Germany, Scandinavia and in the Anglo-American library world, a range of books and report have been published that take an innovative and explorative approach to discussing the profile, identity, purpose and priorities of the public library. There are several routes to exploring problems and challenges facing public libraries in the first half of the 21st century. Some ideas, clues and views on future public library roles can be found in the published literature. Other perspectives are offered by projects, analytical work and scenarios in progress or recently completed.

However, the major issue examined in this study is the feasibility of including a specific body of theory from outside the field of Library and Information Science to enrich theoretical discussions within public librarianship. Identifying applicable ideas and conceptual perspectives developed by external theorists and transferring these to the realm of public librarianship is not necessarily an easy exercise. But as the present author sees it, valuable elements of theory and perspectives could be drawn from seminal theoretical ideas and constructs as found in a recent major work by prominent German contemporary philosopher and critical social theorist Axel Honneth. Hence, what is presented here is the result of a tentative and, admittedly, slightly sketchy effort to relate specific observations and ideas derived from Honneth's theoretical work *Das Recht der Freiheit* (Honneth, 2011) to the current debate on the survival of the public library as an essential service in the 21th century. In this way, it is hoped, an illustration can be provided of how theoretical approaches and frameworks from outside the LIS domain could bring a wider perspective to the discussion on the future roles of the public library. In this sense, the present paper emphasises a critical, conceptual and even "speculative" approach more than a pragmatic and evidence-based one.

Extended Literature Review

There are quite a few contributions, which consider the profile, identity and major tasks of the future public library along with the challenges facing the library in the years to come. In his imposing and magnificent work on Danish library buildings in a historic and architectural perspective, Dahlkild (2011, p. 320) observes that a library should be viewed and experienced as an extension of urban space. In this sense, the library is as an institution that does not confine its sphere of activities to specific functional and service spaces but also forms part of urban life. Two years ago the National Library of Sweden issued a small compact anthology entitled "Does the library exist in 20 years' time?" Included in the booklet are twelve brief estimates and predictions about public library futures and a summary of a panel discussion. In discussing the future profile of the public library, Rydell (2011) feels convinced that there will be a consolidated and thriving public library, even in 2030, and she adheres to the view that the library will act as a "knowledge broker" whereas, a bit surprisingly maybe, the function of the library as a physical meeting place will be less important. Another contributor, Svensson (2011), a cultural journalist and critic, is much more pessimistic about the public library's survival opportunities in his crystal ball gazing. Most libraries have disappeared and those still existing have degenerated into book monasteries for a few nerds and pathetic book lovers. Coffman (2012) shares the pessimistic tone in a very thought-provoking piece on disappointed expectations for a much more visible and preponderant role for libraries in the digital revolution. In noting a disquieting number of failed plans and initiatives and abandoned projects in the library field, he expresses sincere uncertainty about future roles for libraries. As Coffmann sees it, in the long run new technologies and gadgets tend to outdistance libraries. The gloomy prospects for libraries in the

years to come are balanced by Fiels' (2011) optimistic and myth-exploding view of the viability of libraries.

In a published study of the public library in urban development, three Danish public library researchers Casper Hvenegaard Rasmussen, Henrik Jochumsen and Dorte Skot-Hansen (Hvenegaard Rasmussen et al., 2011, p. 215-216) offer their view of future challenges to the library. Even though it may seem to be going well within the library's four walls at the moment, there is a risk that the library in its classic form will be overtaken by the many new virtual and tangible cultural offerings. Competition is fierce in a cultural and media environment that is constantly changing, and in an urban policy context in which global competition requires visibility and success. According to the three authors, the library should not be anything, and it should not abandon its unique capabilities for organizing and disseminating information, knowledge and culture. But these assets and competences must be put into play in new ways and in new contexts, if the library is to retain its support from a new generation of digital natives.

Some library theoreticians and commentators see a future for public libraries as centres for specialised services or advise libraries to define and give priority to a major area of activity. Thus, O'Beirne (2010) strongly argues that libraries should upgrade the educational part of their mission, dust off and revive the forgotten concept of learning and concentrate their energy on learning activities in the library environment, not least informal learning. In Sweden, public libraries have historically had a high profile in responding to general education needs. The educational emphasis has been continued during the last few decades with individual public libraries serving as support centres for adult education and providing services to various categories of higher education students. In framing library policy in this area, there has been an increasing awareness of such keywords as lifelong education and the knowledge society (Hansson, 2012, pp. 57-61).

Other contributors to the debate about the public library's future role and emphases, including some politicians, come into the open and frankly call for entrepreneurship, business-mindedness, customization, more demand-orientation, public-private sector synergies and fee-based services. Thus, John Huber - author of *Lean Library Management* (2011) - received some attention within the library community (e.g. in Denmark and UK) upon his introduction and promotion of eleven strategies capable of making public library services efficient and competitive. According to Huber's recipe, libraries should learn from their commercial competitors; they should compare and measure their performance against for instance Google and Amazon. Similarly, McMenemy (2009) discusses whether public libraries could learn lessons from the retail sector. He also calls for more debate and discussion within the library profession so as to clarify to what extent the private sector can actually influence public libraries in a constructive and helpful manner. However, McMenemy states that "public library users *must* be seen by the profession as citizens and not consumers" (McMenemy, 2009, p. 202). Greene and McMenemy (2012) offer an intriguing analysis of how neoliberal ideology, managerialism and consumerism have pervaded thinking about public libraries and librarianship in the UK during a specific period. The study provides insights into the degree to which neoliberal theories have impacted on public librarianship through the transformation of professional language. To determine this influence on professional jargon and vocabulary an examination was conducted of a corpus of public library documents using content and discourse analysis. It is demonstrated that language is a powerful persuasive tool that can be used rhetorically to present policies that at first sight may appear to benefit the service but in the long term perspective could lead to the erosion of public space as a democratic arena. Kann-Christensen and Andersen (2009) provide a critical analysis of the neoliberal way of thinking and the way New Public Management is finding its way into Danish public library policy.

The human rights perspective is brought in by Kathleen de la Peña McCook and Katharine J. Phenix (de la Peña McCook and Phenix, 2011, pp. 339-360) in their chapter entitled "The Future of Public Libraries in the Twenty-First Century: Human Rights and Human Capabilities". McCook and Phenix predict that library professionals in the USA in the 21st Century will start developing conceptual frameworks and service models relying on a vocabulary reflecting

universal human rights values.

In Norway, the first issue of the 2011 volume of *Bok og Bibliotek*, the chief library journal, featured the theme of libraries and the future. In exploring the value basis of the public library, a variety of Norwegian views of the public library's future roles and areas of activity are articulated. One of the contributors notes that slowly but surely the library is losing ground in the municipalities and he calls for self-criticism on the part of library professionals, LIS educators and LIS researchers. The library's meeting place function was explored in a milestone-type empirical study reported by Aabø, Audunson and Vårheim (2010); this Norwegian study also sought to clarify the types of people using the libraries as meeting places. Based on the analysis of survey data, six categories of places were identified:

- the library viewed as a "square"
- as a place for meeting and interacting with people with varying backgrounds
- as a public sphere/space
- as a place for joint activities with friends and colleagues
- as a meta meeting place
- as a place for virtual meetings.

The survey concentrated on representative samples of the population in three townships in Oslo, Norway, each with a markedly different demographic profile (labeled the gentrified community, the multicultural community, and the middle-class community). The results of the study are essential in that they also shed light upon the role of the public library in a multicultural context.

Kranich (2001) explains how libraries help reduce the digitalklyftan, ökar tillgången till myndighetsinformation och kämpar mot både divide, increase access to government information and how they are fighting against bothcensur och privata intressen för att säkra en så fri tillgång till information som censorship and private interests to ensure that access to information is as free asmöjligt. possible. The lBiblioteket som "medborgarrum" (civic space) skapar möjligheter föribrary as civic space creates opportunities forgemenskap och dialog, vilket hon tycker är en mycket viktig demokratisk community and dialogue, which she thinks is a very important democraticfunktion vid sidan av den informerande och bildande uppgiften. function as a supplement to information-related and education-centred tasks.

Trust is an essential asset in the relations between the public library and its users. In the United States, public libraries have, as documented by Jaeger and Fleischmann (2007), achieved a consolidated and trusted position when it comes to providing its citizens with government information and ensuring access to e-government services. Not least confidence in the library is highlighted. Public libraries appear in the public as the trusted provider of e-government access. Public library service in these areas is rooted in the fundamental library-related values as defined by Gorman (2005) and expressed in the American Library Association's (ALA) Library Bill of Rights.

The Variety of Views on the Public Library's Future

It appears from the above review of relevant public library sources that the library can be viewed as an extension of urban place. We are - in a metaphorical sense - seeing trends towards removing or eliminating the walls between the library as a physical entity and the community in which the library functions. In other words, the library is considered an integral part of urban life. Thus, in the age of social networking, the library could serve as a space for learning, communication, leisure and cultural activities and act as a meeting place (civic spaces). Digitisation seems unavoidable as a key feature in the ongoing and upcoming transformation process facing public libraries at large and some LIS authors and theorists see a bright future for updated and redesigned reference services in the digital era. Significant too, according to some researchers and practitioners, is the multicultural dimension of public librarianship. Also, there is considerable emphasis on how public libraries could sharpen their profile in fostering information

literacy and in supporting lifelong learning. In enhancing the communication and meeting place functions, libraries can encourage and facilitate public discourse and exchange of views on current social, political, cultural, etc. issues (offering democratic agoras). In sum, numerous ideas about and visions for the roles and central tasks of the future public library have been circulated within the library world, the LIS academic community and within the political sphere. Considerable creative energy is devoted to illustrating how existing public library resources and services could be restructured and reoriented to meet the needs of new times and developments. There are descriptions of how the public library can implement innovation initiatives and gear itself to meet the needs of new user groups (young people and citizens in a multicultural society, etc.), new formats and media and new technologies. Suggestions and ideas are offered for innovative public library roles based on analysis of community developments, socio-demographic trends and more fundamental societal changes. Fed into these processes of gearing the public library to develop innovative responses to user needs and expectations are observations on anticipated changes in the needs, preferences and behavioural patterns of population groups. But what often seem to be missing in the deliberations and reflections on the public libraries' future and new roles is articulated ideology critique. There has been less effort to examine the public library's future and possible roles on the basis of a fundamental critical analysis of developments in contemporary society and on a global scale. Today, the public library's wider external environment is characterised by financial hardship along with social, economic, environmental and climate crisis. Add to this the widening gap between haves and haves-not (recently a new book appeared in Denmark, which deals with class society and shows how the distance between the upper class and the lower classes, between the top and the bottom in the Danish society has increased in recent years). In many countries, public libraries are, and will be operating in a socio-economic context reflecting characterised by debt reduction policies, the persistence of neoliberalism and New Public Management (NPM) regimes, cuts in social welfare systems, increased unemployment, exclusion from the labour market and the prospects of a possible loss of youth generations because of employment. Also faced is the democratic deficit, which is a reality in many nation states, globally and within the EU. Thus, public libraries and democracy remains an vital issue, but among LIS theoreticians the analytical interest in the public library as a democratic agent seems declining. Also characterising the library's macro environment are the concentrations within the media sector and the formation of media monopolies and conglomerates that make political bias more widespread, produce more infotainment and make it harder to disseminate views and information that go against the mainstream and question the traditional political power structures and paradigm dominance. Studies of library aims and roles, scenario analysis, and projections, etc. tend to mirror conventional and mainstream ideas and visions of society including its social, economic, cultural, etc. conditions and socio-demographic factors. One gets the impression that presentations and studies sort of evade critical issues in the library's external environment and macro-sphere characterized as it is by increased turbulence, fragmentation and segregation. In a historical perspective, however, there are several examples of library criticism and alternative public library thinking.

On the other hand, over the years quite a few LIS scholars and public library theoreticians have added to the literature on public library objectives and priorities and the changing emphases characterising these. One example is Vestheim (1999) who has given some attention to the legitimacy of the public library. He analysed public library discourse and identified efforts to reconsider and adjust the mission of the public library in times of declining resources.

Outstanding contributions have been made by John Budd and John Buschman, two American LIS researchers. Budd (2008, pp. 147-223) explores iBibliotekens egna hemsidorssues in and requirements for theory building in civic librarianship. He takes a fresh look at (public) library purpose and sets the scene for a fundamental re-examination of the social foundations of librarianship. Budd offers an intriguing in-depth analysis of the interrelatedness and interplay between the vital concepts of social responsibility and intellectual freedom. Based on extensive reading of academic texts in disciplines such as philosophy, political science, public sphere theory and democracy research new light is shed on basic ideals and tenets in library service

provision including, for instance, value neutrality controversial as this is. Concepts are critically examined and typically given a philosophical twist that facilitates identifying new and unorthodox facets and perspectives. In exploring the place and role of (public) libraries in a democracy society, Budd starts right from the beginning and embarks on a conceptual analysis to come to grips with democracy as an entity. In carrying on with this mapping exercise, Budd focuses special attention on the notion of deliberative democracy, which has a parallel on Danish ground in that Danish theologian, professor and folk high school principal Hal Koch can be said to be the founding father of a conception of democracy termed *samtaledemokrati* (deliberative democracy). According to Koch the essence of democracy is conversation and dialogue and not just a form of governance. Budd thoroughly explores how deliberative democracy relates to libraries and librarianship and the extent to which it is actually relied on in specific library-related contexts. Fairly detailed coverage is given to the phenomenon of neoliberalism and the way this ideology has tinted current library policy-making and rhetoric. Budd's approach and his painstaking analysis of the democracy-sustenance and supporting role of librarianship is very refreshing and stimulating and is matched by very few contributions in our latitudes. In the USA, the journal *Progressive Librarian* provides a forum for identifying and discussing progressive perspectives on librarianship and information issues. Discussed in the journal's articles are such topics as libraries and social and cultural rights, economics of information, the concept of progressive librarianship, public versus private, public libraries in a globalised capitalist world and critical theory for LIS.

John Buschman, cited by Budd, strongly disputes one-sided economic logic, customisation-centeredness, marketplace thinking and value-for-money regimes in (public) librarianship. Reservations about the risky elements of this rhetoric strategy are voiced as follows: "The democratic public sphere roles of libraries as disseminators of rational, reasoned, and organized discourse, as a source of verifying or disputing claims, and as a space for the inclusion of alternative views of society and reality have no place in the vision of the library as the instant-satisfaction, fast-food equivalent of information" (Buschman, 2003, p. 120-121).

Critical Analysis of Public Library Purpose: the Paucity of Approaches
As can be seen from the literature analyzed above, recent years have witnessed a growth of public library research, which has resulted in a significant number of published public library studies, doctoral dissertations and anthologies containing articles on public libraries' mission, challenges, changing tasks and their conditions now and in the future. But the growing body of research seems to include relatively few attempts at in-depth critical analysis of prevailing paradigms in the public library field in the light of changes and trends in the libraries' external environment.

Theory Building in Public Librarianship: Contributions from Other Disciplines
Quite a few academic publications in LIS reflect the application of theories, models and theoretical constructs imported from other disciplines such as hermeneutics, public sphere theory, social capital theory (Vårheim, 2008) and discourse analysis. In their chapter on "Philosophies and paradigms in Information Science", Bawden and Robinson (2013, pp. 47-49) provides a compact tabulated overview of philosophies and philosophers that have been drawn upon by theorist and researchers in LIS. The table lists examples of published LIS studies that have "imported" ideas and theories developed by influential thinkers (philosophy, linguistics, social sciences, etc.). A collective volume edited by Gloria J. Leckie, Lisa M. Given and John E. Buschman provides a selection of contributions on critical theorists of relevance to critical inquiry and theory building in LIS. In his review of the book, Hjørland (2010) dwells on the problem of defining critical theory in a LIS context and raises some questions about the critical theorists singled out for presentation in the anthology, i.e. the justification of theorists and theories that have been included. A glance at the accompanying list compiled by Hjørland and forming part of his review reveals that three German theorists have been selected for the volume: Habermas, Heidegger and Marcuse. However, other German sociologists and social philosophers of repute

might have been considered in this respect. Thus, to tentatively address this challenge, an initial effort is made here to briefly introduce Axel Honneth, a prominent German left-wing thinker.

Axel Honneth: a Brief Presentation

As the leading figure within critical theory and belonging to the so-called Frankfurt School, Honneth (2011) can be said to follow in the footsteps of excellent, internationally renowned thinkers such as Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Fromm and Habermas.

A brief overview of the content structure of *Das Recht der Freiheit* would be helpful here: In the introduction, key concepts and problem are areas addressed under the heading "Theory of justice as social analysis". In this context, Honneth refers to the Hegelian "Philosophy of Right", and sets out to discuss the central thoughts and principles in Hegel's work so as to determine its present relevance and the potential it offers for a more detailed conceptual analysis, which, so to speak, takes the form of a "diagnosis of the present". Also included is "morality" in the Hegelian sense. In popular terms one could say that Honneth aims at a "Hegel Revival" - an effort to "update" and clarify Hegel's intentions. Honneth provides an in-depth study of three models of Freedom: negative, reflexive and *social freedom*. Social freedom constitutes the core concept of the whole analytical project and pervades the reflections of the work. Honneth provides an in-depth treatment of the concept of social freedom, its meanings and characteristics along with the realisation and development of social freedom within the sphere of friendship and family and within intimate relationships. The analysis moves on to consider the spheres of the market, consumers and consumption and employment. Very detailed coverage is provided of the developments and problems of the democratic public sphere and the democratic constitutional state. The summary of the book is entitled "Political culture - outlook and prospects".

The interesting thing about the book is the attempt to make norms or habits as they are termed within Hegel's conceptual universe, assume a stronger position than that of legal regulation, which is currently the most widely used political tool. As an alternative, Honneth seeks to identify what kind of norms are conducive to making democratic principles potent in everyday life. The focus is on how to develop tangible norms to ensure respect and recognition. Once these standards are described and become active, it would also be possible to spell out the trends of development in society, social life, in the market sphere, etc. that can be considered erroneous or unjust. Overall, Honneth spends considerable intellectual effort in illustrating and explicating what he characterises as failures, as developments that have failed (*Fehlentwicklungen*). A recurring concept in Honneth's scholarly work is democratic morality (*Sittlichkeit*). Honneth sees the neoliberal development as a defect development. It is a derailed development where economic arbitrariness and casino capitalism can be said to eliminate democratic principles and other forms of legitimacy. Honneth's recent work *Das Recht der Freiheit* can be read as a counterpart to Habermas' democratic theory, as it is formulated in *Faktizität und Geltung*. To Honneth the really interesting thing about Hegel's social analysis is the great attention the latter focuses on the social pathologies that arise because of the atomizing and individualizing tendencies that characterize the capitalist form of organization of modern societies (Willig, 2011).

Social Freedom and Public Libraries

In examining the implications of social freedom for the discussion of the theoretical basis of the public library, the first step will be to identify issues, forces, "spheres of interest" and fields of activity within the broad realm of public libraries that exhibit features, phenomena and mechanisms, which could be studied from the perspective of social freedom and democratic principles as they apply to everyday life. In the sense of social freedom such public library-oriented issues and concerns would have connotations of distribution of essentially immaterial goods and resources in society (reading materials, media products broadly, knowledge, culture and arts related assets and experiences, entertainment etc.). This approach includes an individual and (in some cases) a collective rights' perspective. This perspective specifically considers the aspects of access, viz. the access to various categories of information, media and reading materials along with the possibility of enjoying a variety of cultural goods. Relevant too are the regula-

tion aspects and the existence of restrictions and barriers hampering access to goods and resources including the reasons, desirability, arguments and efforts to eliminate barriers between individuals (groups) and resources and goods and smooth away regulations. Also included here are the differing or conflicting interests in terms of access. Essential too from an individual as well as a group or collective perspective is the equality-inequality dichotomy. When delving further into the basic problems of availability and access to information, media, culture, etc., as seen from the library perspective, an array of additional topics, issues and challenges can be identified encompassing such problem areas as information ethics, freedom of information, intellectual freedom, information-rich versus information-poor and the way in which various kinds of power regimes produce and strategically use information resources for a variety of purposes. In this context some attention should also be given to the notion of "soft power", which broadly includes such factors as knowledge and information, culture, ideas and systems. Based on this indicative listing, it is seems natural to point to the following key issues and areas of concern to public libraries and the study of public librarianship:

- the book market
- the provision and distribution of books
- the market for non-print media such as e-books and music in digitized versions (e.g. available via streaming services)
- culture and mediation of culture
- information and communication, access to information, information channels, information resources, globally, nationally and locally, information quality as well as information ethics

In the broad information-related context, and sticking to the social freedom perspective, attention must be directed towards phenomena such as monopolization trends in terms of information, inequality of information access, pricing structures (e-books) and fees on the use of libraries and their services, freedom of information, curtailment of freedom of information, censorship and the unfortunate and undesirable effects to the increasing pressures of commercialization, marketization and privatization exercises affecting libraries in many Western societies. Common to these matters and issues, as they are enumerated here, is that they have a tinge of conflict, rivalry and clashes of interest. They signal controversies, paradoxes, contradictions, different and opposed interests and systemic failures.

A Community Library Model
In the light of the principal discussion on the profile and orientation of the public library, it could be argued that the conception of the public library as a drop-in centre or informal social space constitutes a contrast to the customized library. The view of the library as a modern "village hall" or community centre - which has become increasingly common in the Nordic countries - in many ways offer an illustration of the tangible implementation and management of social freedom in an institutional context. In Denmark, for instance, fewer people borrow books, but in spite of this trend an increasing number of visits to the library is recorded. By defining itself as a village hall and community centre, the library offers citizens a social and cultural space where people can express themselves freely, unstructured, unconstrained. Kindergarten children eat their lunches in the library where toys are available, some boys are playing chess with giant pieces, quite noisy, some people are reading newspapers, other visitors are using computers, older people learn about using computers, Internet, email, etc. The idea is that the library should host activities and the library atmosphere should radiate "life". Children's theatre performances, lectures and courses are among the offerings. Today, emphasis has shifted away from books towards the library's space. The library provides a room for experience and new impressions, but knowledge acquisition is still a key feature. Thus, a space is made available where it is possible to "nurse", stimulate and further develop the informal symbolic processes and activities falling under the concept of social freedom.

This type of activities and processes which involve citizens and library users in many contexts and situations (dialogue, group-based communication, articulation of opinion, exchange of views, cross-cultural meetings, interaction between different population segments and members of different communities, etc.) are dealt with in a variety of contexts throughout Honneth's work. So what is seen here are the outlines of a library conceived as an open and more transparent and dynamic institution in the community, which has the potential to become an even more important institution than the library was in the old days. But of course there is always the question of the extent to which the unstructured processes and activities in the library should be balanced against other library-related goals and priorities. Overall, however, it may seem important to be vigilant about the library as a sort of refuge, as a social and cultural space with unique qualities, a space that is free from interference, control, behavioural regulation, pressures from the market and commercialization and commoditisation efforts. Or, to put it briefly, a library conceived as a non-profit cultural institution anchored in democratic values. Accordingly, this conception of the library could be viewed as a contrast to the more streamlined cultural institution influenced by neoliberal ideology as discussed by Green and McMenemy (2012) in their chapter on trends in public library policy developments in the UK.

Concluding Observations

Today public libraries are faced with major problems and challenges, but in responding to current problems and new challenges, there is a lot to be said for the argument that the library should to redefine or reinvent itself by opening up to the surrounding world in new ways and by establishing new alliances and partnerships. Some professionals, scholars and library columnists and commentators see a role for the public library as a catalyst and mediator of alternative information and as a facilitator of public discourse. But it is not without problems to imagine the viability of a "platform" for the library emphasizing this sort of "activist" or political orientation. Some authors speak in favour of a contrasting library model of a very customised and demand-oriented nature emphasizing fees and revenue generation. This is a library where the connotations of "Business models", "Choice", "Differentiation", "Citizen-consumers" and other terms from the neoliberal vocabulary do not sound odd.

A critical and reflective reading of Axel Honneth's principal views and conceptualisations on social freedom as systematically explored in his work *Das Recht der Freiheit* could generate innovative ideas for theorizing about public libraries, their situation and mission in the age of late modernity. An effort has been made here to substantiate that the concept of social freedom with its various facets is capable of renewing the theoretical discussion of the fundamental values and principles underlying public library services in turbulent and rapidly changing environments. The analytic review of selected readings on the public library of the future, coupled with an initial exploratory approach to Axel Honneth's work *Das Recht der Freiheit* has generated some ideas and clues. These might be of relevance to and be fed into the continued discussion on the development of the theoretical basis of public librarianship. To shed light on this issue more explorative efforts are needed.

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Summary

Basically the argument is made that libraries need to re-examine their role in society and to reconsider their tasks, responsibilities and priorities. Overall, and this applies to most countries, the public library's service environment exhibits an increasing degree of complexity and unpredictability: shifts in the library users' preferences, expectations and behavioral patterns along with the manifestation and impact of new media, platforms, formats and gadgets. Add to this that in some countries, profiled columnists, politicians, technologists and ordinary citizens have started questioning or debating the mere rationale of libraries. Some simply dismiss libraries as obsolete and no longer socially relevant. In searching for an updated identity and in defining new roles and responsibilities, libraries are required to rethink their purpose and adjust their community role in the light of contemporary developments in society and on a global scale. Similarly, library theorists and researchers have a role to play in this process by re-examining and renewing the theoretical basis of public librarianship. In revisiting and enriching existing conceptual frameworks in the public library field, critical assessment and application of theoretical ideas and perspectives developed in other areas of inquiry seem worthwhile. Before embarking on the discussion about the "import" of theories for public libraries and their services in an age of transition, an analytical review is provided of selected published sources addressing the reorientation and rethinking of public libraries along with their future priorities and major tasks. The publications selected for analysis cover public libraries and library service environments in Scandinavia, primarily Denmark, United Kingdom and the USA. It appears from the literature review that a variety of approaches have been taken to deal with the problems, issues and opportunities facing public libraries in the first half of the 21st century. Thus, a range of ideas, clues and suggestions have been in identified in the body of literature under consideration here. However, to widen the perspective and to harvest innovative ideas for public library theory, the attention should be turned towards other areas of study and scholarship. Hence, it is argued that valuable elements of theory and perspectives can be drawn from seminal theoretical ideas and constructs as found in a recent major work by prominent German contemporary philosopher and critical social theorist Axel Honneth. Not least Honneth's thoughts on the concept of social freedom seems relevant in this context. From the standpoint of public libraries and library theory and research, an intriguing challenge lies in identifying Honneth-inspired theoretical perspectives that can be applied to defining, or redefining, the mission of the public library in a late-modern digital world. No doubt, exploring in greater depth the implications of Honneth's thinking on social freedom in all its facets can turn out to be a pretty tough task for public library analysts and theoreticians. However, according to the present author, the effort to flesh out Honneth's theoretical views of social freedom with a view to determining the public library's present and future position in the political sphere, within the market and with respect to employer-employees relations, etc. seems a desirable and feasible venture.