



Historical explanations for the success of Finnish public libraries (and Nordic countries in general)

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Abstract:

The paper seeks for historical explanations for the good performance of Finnish public libraries using as springboard D. C. North's "new institutional economics" and analyses of the Finnish PISA success. Finland's closest frame of reference are the Nordic countries, especially Sweden, part of which Finland was until 1809. Protestant Lutheranism, rule of law, individualism, democracy and strong civil society are characteristics of the Nordic countries. The 19th century, when Finland was a Grand Duchy in the Russian Empire, was the constructive period of Finland as nation-state. Popular enlightenment, language-based nationalism, primary school and the social movements formed a basis for the rise of popular libraries. Anglo-American impulses started to influence the library conception before the First World War. In the independent republic (since 1917) the state and library legislation have had a great impact in supporting and controlling municipal libraries. Library Act of 1961 modernized the public libraries. Comprehensive school reform had a positive effect on library use. Finnish reading culture is strong and seems to persist in the digital age.

Introduction

Finland is from my viewpoint a very ordinary country. Some things are as they should be in any country, some things I don't wish any country to have. I am glad that in this article I am allowed to write about things that I am proud about my country. All should be able to enjoy at least as good public libraries as we do in Finland.

Why are Finnish public libraries doing so well? Some aspects, such as the popular use of libraries, are even on the top globally. Analyzing the historical development and present situation of libraries in Finland may help others and Finns themselves to make their libraries better. There are no real secrets or spells behind the relative success of Finnish libraries (even

if in the old sailors' mythology Finns had a fame of being witches, as we can read in some of Jack London's novels or Rudyard Kipling's poems, more about this, see Moyne 1981).

During the last decade Finland has been on or near the top even in the PISA school assessments, which has called forth explanations as well. They are expressions of the same culture of education that permeates progressive countries. Therefore we must have a look on the analysis of the Finnish PISA performance.

It has been an often asked question, how we can explain, why in certain countries public libraries have developed and become a part of everyday life of the citizens and in some countries not. Among researchers who have tried to give answers to these questions we can name Williams (1981) and Torstensson (1993). Since public libraries are statistically usually well monitored, it is possible to try to seek an answer in the socioeconomic qualities of libraries, the municipalities running the libraries and the states that often partly finance and control the libraries. In the Finnish case there has been a couple of noteworthy attempts to use library and general statistics to solve these question in a national context, e.g. Hovi 1984 and Peltonen 2009. Usually the answers are not too convincing. It is hard to find clear statistical correlations, which Torstensson (1993) has noted.

If statistics alone does not offer a solution, we have to turn to other potential approaches. Torstensson (1993) has sketched a framework based on the German historian Reinhart Koselleck's concepts, hopes and expectations, which can be used to explain people's actions. It is the people and their organizations that change the world. Torstensson's approach seems promising, although the methodology is complicated.

Could NIE be of help?

In this article, I use Douglass C. North's "new institutional economics (or economic history)" (NIE) as my theoretical springboard (my principal source of inspiration is North 2005). I have elsewhere (Mäkinen 2008) presented his thoughts and tried to see how they can be used in library and information history. In this article I use North's thoughts to systematize the amoeba-like explanatory material I have at hand.

According to North the development of societies is path dependent, i.e., choices and decisions affect for a long time the way things are going. On the other hand, he believes that the choices and decisions are results of an underlying belief system, which can change the way people (economies, societies) react to new situations. Belief systems can change as a societal learning process. Some decisions are more important and long-term than others. When a society makes fundamental choices, it creates what North calls institutions, that is, both formal norms, such as legislation and political organs, and informal norms, such as transgenerational customs that regulate, i.e., the position of genders or attitudes to reading. The institutions in North's sense are the rules of the (social or economic) game. They make the game possible and create stability and trust, but they are at the same time constraints that limit the actions of individuals and groups. The players consist of individuals and groups of people, families and organizations. Organizations, such as political parties, associations and firms, are the most effective actors that can make changes in the institutional matrix in the short- and medium term, but it is more difficult to change overnight the informal norms, the existence of which we often do not even realize. The belief system and the institutions create the cultural context, where a society develops. (Mäkinen 2008, North 2005)

An inexorable path dependency may cause desperation in some people, because, as a British owner of a perfect lawn once said, "The most important thing is to start 500 years ago", but, on the other hand, the Finnish experience and many other contemporary examples show that it is possible to ameliorate the conditions in a country in a relatively short period of

time, if the right decisions are made and implemented. Path dependency does not mean determinism.

I shall first try to depict the belief system that governs how Finns see the world and their choices to create institutions. This is a long-term perspective that includes a number of informal norms. Then I describe the formal institutions (legislation) that have been created in Finland concerning education and libraries and organizations that have contributed to this development.

Finnish PISA performance

PISA is the acronym of the phrase the Programme for International Student Assessment. It is an international study which began in the year 2000. Its aim is to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students in participating countries/economies. Over 70 countries and economies have participated in PISA since the start of the programme in 2000.

(http://www.pisa.oecd.org/pages/0,3417,en_32252351_32235907_1_1_1_1_1,00.html)

The analysts see a “network of dozens of factors, which include students’ own interests, attitudes, and learning strategies, learning opportunities offered by home and school, and parents’ and schools’ expectations” behind the Finnish performance (Finnish success, 21). This is certainly true even of the use of libraries in Finland. The quality, education and status of teachers are seen as one of the most important explanatory factors in many studies. All Finnish teachers receive a university degree education. The teacher profession is esteemed and relatively well paid. The competition to enter class teacher education is intensive. The Finnish school also is characterized as having a high equity between students: the gap between high and low performers is relatively narrow. (Finnish success, 12, 31) This is certainly a result of the organization of education and pedagogy, but to a degree even dependent on the homogeneity of the Finnish society. The share of immigrants with a foreign language as their home language is not as great as in many other countries (Finnish success, 24). It will be interesting to see how Finnish performance in evaluations of PISA type develops in the coming decades, when the share of immigrants will rise.

Most of the analyses of the Finnish PISA performance concentrate on the school itself and the quality of the teachers as well as on the Finnish education policy (Estola et al 2007, Thje Finnish success 2007, Niemi 2009). A study that goes deeper into the historical context has been published by Hannu Simola (2005). Simola chooses to focus on a few socio-historical factors that according to him have been neglected in the discussion in Finland. He sees it as “essential in understanding Finnish schooling” that the “Finnish culture still incorporates a meaningful element of the authoritarian, obedient and collectivist mentality, with its pros and cons.”

Simola sees the background of the Finnish mentality in the geographical and geopolitical location of Finland as a border country between the west and the east. He also points to the fact that the birth of the Finnish nation state was realized under the Russian Empire during the nineteenth century. Simola speaks of eastern elements in the Finnish society and culture, from administrative traditions to the genetic heredity, which are different from our Nordic neighbours. He doesn’t, however, clearly define, what the “eastern elements” concretely are. He also names the wars in the Finnish history as meaningful, from the Civil War of 1918, which divided the country into two opposite sides, to the Winter War that again unified the nation. The recent agrarian past of the Finns and the late industrialization of the country are also factors that he lifts up. The Finnish society was changed in an extremely rapid structural change, when the country was industrialized and the service sector grew. Simola says that “the Finnish welfare state might be seen as a product of these historical disturbances; on the

one hand industrial and individualist, on the other, agrarian and collectivist.” (Simola 2005, 456-458)

Simola summarizes that “there is something archaic, something authoritarian, possibly even something eastern, in the Finnish culture and mentality. There is also something collective that, in a distinctive way, permeates the Finnish schooling culture.” He also says that the Finnish teachers are pedagogically conservative. (Simola 2005, 460-461)

It is a pity that Simola stops here in his construction of the mental-historical context of the Finnish educational system, because it remains incomplete. We can and we must go further and wider into history to find more constructive elements, informal norms and institutional choices that have been essential in the construction of the Finnish belief system and why the Finnish society and the people have been so positive towards education.

We can also reinterpret some of the factors that Simola names. There certainly may in the foreign eyes be “something archaic, something authoritarian” in the Finnish culture and mentality, but they could also see the same features as rationalism and self-discipline. These are traditional European and Nordic values. We must seek for a basis of the Finnish belief system in our European and Nordic traditions.

The cultural context

Finland is not alone in the world, we belong to many cultures, groups and communities. Nearly all features that I am going to name in this article are visible and working elsewhere as well, and many background factors influence several countries.

Finns are Europeans. Our nearest frame of reference are the other Nordic countries (Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) in the north-western part of Europe. Since these countries are so close to one another culturally, and public libraries are strong in all of them, their similarities and differences may tell us quite a lot of the position of public libraries in Finland as well. Historically Finland is closest to Sweden. Finland was part of Sweden for 600 years until the beginning of the 19th century. We share the same mentality and world view, as well as many political institutions, administrative structures and religious traditions, although the developments of the last two hundred years have brought some superficial differences. It is easier to translate legal, administrative and historical texts from Swedish into Finnish and vice versa than between Finnish and Estonian, which are linguistically near to each other. I shall use the Nordic countries and Sweden, in particular, as comparative elements in my presentation.

Besides the geographical vicinity, there are many features that bind the Nordic countries together, and even in connection with the framework of library history, these features are important to know to understand the similarities and differences between these countries. The three Scandinavian languages, Danish, Norwegian and Swedish are so close to each other that their speakers have no real hindrance to understand each other. Icelandic belongs to the same linguistic group, but is so far away from the rest that it is not understandable for the rest of the Scandinavians without a learning effort (and vice versa). Finnish, on the other hand, belongs to a different language group, the Finno-Ugric languages (with, e.g., Estonian and Hungarian), but there is a Swedish-speaking minority of 6 % in Finland and Swedish is taught as a compulsory subject in the Finnish schools, which enables Finns to take part in the Nordic intercourse. During the last decades, however, the use of the English language has become more and more common in the Nordic communication.

The Nordic people become European

During the Antiquity and early Middle Ages the present day Nordic region was outside the “civilized world”. Its inclusion into the western European cultural sphere was decided, when at the beginning of the second millennium the region became a target of Catholic missionaries. Especially in the Finnish case it could have gone otherwise as well, because the Christian mission came to Finland also from the East, but the Catholic mission was stronger than the Greek Orthodox. The Nordic region was attached rather late into the Western European literary culture.

The Nordic countries have a long political, economic and cultural history together, although there have been deep rivalries and antagonisms between them as well. Historically the strongest countries, the old kingdoms Sweden and Denmark were hereditary enemies for centuries. There was, however, a period, during the late middle ages, when all parts of the Norden were under the same throne during the so called Kalmar Union (1397-1521). After the Union, Swedes and Danes fought many wars. The antagonism ended at the beginning of the 19th century, and during the 20th century the Nordic sense of togetherness was stabilized.

Finland became during the 12th century part of Sweden, but was at the beginning of the 19th century taken by Russia and became a Grand Duchy with an internal autonomy in the Russian empire. This change was a side effect of the Napoleonic wars. During the 19th century a nationalistic awakening took place in Finland and the Finnish language evolved to a full-fledged modern civilized language. Under their internal autonomy Finns were able to develop their country into a modern western society, while similar development in the rest of the Russian Empire was halted. In the aftermath of the First World War and the Russian Revolution Finland became independent in 1917. Norway was until the Middle Ages a kingdom of its own, but since then it fell under the dominion of Denmark and for more than 400 years it had been administratively an undivisible part of Denmark. Again as a result of the Napoleonic wars Norway was taken in 1814 from Denmark and given to Sweden, but it gained internal autonomy. After a century of rapid development in Norway, the dual monarchy was dissolved in 1905 and Norway became a sovereign kingdom. Iceland was for centuries attached to Denmark. It became a fully independent republic in 1944.

After the Second World War and especially during the Cold War the already lively Nordic cooperation became more and more important. In 1952, when the interparliamentary organ the Nordic Council was founded, a common labour market and free movement across borders without passports for the Nordic countries' citizens was established. Finland, however, could participate in the deepening cooperation only in 1955, after Stalin's death. Since the 1950s a harmonization on many fields has taken place in the Nordic countries, but without a direct political, economic or military union. Inter-parliamentary bodies have been established for a direct communication between the countries. This has enabled the continuing cooperation despite the fact that politically the countries are not united. Denmark (since the 1970s), Finland and Sweden (since 1995) belong to the European Union, but Norway and Iceland are not members. Denmark, Iceland and Norway are members of NATO since 1949, but Finland and Sweden are neutral. During the Cold War Finland had a special relationship with the Soviet Union, which narrowed its freedom of movement.

All Nordic countries have since the Reformation (16th century) been Lutheran Protestant countries, which has had a profound interaction with the culture and mental structure of their inhabitants. Rule of law, representative democracy and a strong civil society are characteristics of the Nordic countries. Since the 19th century, industrialization has been rapid, and especially after the Second World War, the development of the welfare society and prosperity in general has been impressive. (If the reader wishes to know more about public library history in the continental Nordic countries, as well as Iceland and the autonomous

regions (Greenland, Faroe Islands and Åland), he or she is invited to read the recent book "Library Spirit in the Nordic and Baltic Countries. Historical Perspectives" (2009.)

Roots of the Finnish belief system: rule of law, individualism and nationalism

Europe has not always lived up to its own ideals, but some of the important cultural innovations have first come to be generally known in early modern Europe, although they have not necessarily been invented there. Even if printing with moveable types originally was invented in Korea and China, it became a culturally transformative factor in Europe after Johannes Gutenberg's re-invention around 1440. Printing made possible the breakthrough of enlightenment as a social movement, as well as mass education and a popular reading culture based on an individual love of reading (Mäkinen 2012), which are important background features of the rise of public libraries.

The European heritage in a Nordic guise includes rule of law, personal freedom, individual and a number of traditional public rights, low level of corruption, etc. The Lutheran christianity has since the 16th century presupposed knowledge of reading. An important institutional choice for Swedes and Finns was made in the Church Law of 1686, where it was stipulated that both men and women must know how to read the basic religious texts before they could enter into matrimony. The learning was supposed to take place in homes. The clergy controlled annually the knowledge of reading at village meetings. The reading ability concerned printed text (in English this type of literacy is called "black letter literacy"). Ability to write, however, was not required. In Sweden and Finland full literacy comprising both reading and writing became reality for the majority of people first during the 19th century, when mass schooling was introduced.

There has not been serfdom in Sweden and Finland. Peasants have traditionally been free. One of the important institutional choices that has strengthened the tradition of individualism in Sweden and Finland was the general parcelling out of land that begun in the 18th century. As opposed to the open field system, the new practice with fields of each farm in a more or less single whole encouraged private initiative in agriculture, but transformed fundamentally also the mentality of the people. Historians see in this reform one of the routes that brought the modern individualism into Sweden and Finland. The peasant became a free farmer, who also took part in the administration of his parish and was even represented in the Diet. Accompanied with the codification of laws, as well as the integrity of the civil servants and judicial power, this process led to a society, where rule of law replaced the power of clans or of a feudal lord.

Popular enlightenment

A sign of the enlightenment in the Nordic countries during the 18th century were the reading societies that the educated people established for themselves to increase the availability of literature. The ideas of enlightenment, however, also included an obligation for the educated people to spread the fruits of science and knowledge to all people, not just to the privileged and educated. This led to a movement of popular education or popular enlightenment with a number of associations, journals, books, and public lectures. The philanthropic movement was the springboard of public libraries during the 19th century in western Europe. Popular education from above was during the latter part of the century transformed into an ideology of spontaneous self-education, which in Finland got its expression in rural youth associations, temperance societies and labor unions, which all established their local libraries.

Widespread grassroots activity at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century was an important phase in the construction of the civil society in Finland, and the establishing libraries was a tiny part of it. In D. C. North's terminology the belief system was changed to include a belief that people can change their situation by cooperating and together improving their economic and cultural conditions. There was a flood of different kinds of associations, cooperatives, societies and other movements in the country. In Finland this mighty activity had some elements that were different than, e.g., in Sweden. Much of the social activity was connected and inspired with emancipatory goals to lift Finnish, the language of the majority, on equal position with Swedish that until the mid-19th century was the language of administration, school education and culture. Language nationalism was thus mixed with social emancipation.

The language-based nationalism in a small nation, which could not aspire any bigger influence internationally, left a standing sense of emancipation, competition, strife towards self-fulfillment in the people. This feeling can in the worst case mean a feeling of inferiority, in the best case a perpetual need to do things better, to reach for something better. The stress on language and literature as a representation of the nation itself is, of course, prone to make reading and use of libraries more lively than in countries that have other ways to enhance themselves.

Constructing the nation with libraries

The activity in establishing new popular libraries in Finland during the 19th century is related to the nation-building process. When Finland was attached to the Russian empire as a Grand Duchy in 1809, the Finnish state was established with its administrative organs, but there was no Finnish nation in the modern sense. The European movement of nationalism with inspiration from Herder was introduced into Finland during the 1830s and 1840s especially by the poet Johan Ludvig Runeberg, who told to the Swedish-speaking educated elite that Finland (and not Sweden or Russia) was their fatherland and that they were part of the Finnish nation, and by the folk poetry compiler Elias Lönnrot, who showed that Finns had an ancient literature of their own. The ideological and political formulation of Finnish nationalism was constructed by the Hegel-inspired philosopher, journalist and statesman Johan Wilhelm Snellman, who told how the concrete nation-building was to be done and the importance of the emancipation of the Finnish language. In the realm of education Snellman's chief goal was the establishment of a primary school system. He himself wrote not so much about popular libraries, but the inspiration that he spread among university students and other progressive people was extremely favorable for the promotion of popular libraries.

Snellman's followers adopted the popular library as one of their principal tools in promoting the Finnish language and literature. The existence of the Swedish-speaking common people, then under 10% of the whole population, was ignored for many decades, until towards the end of the century the Swedish-speaking elite "found" it in the same spirit of language-based nationalism that the Finnish common people had been found earlier. The existence of two national languages in Finland has been a source of controversy, because the situation did not fit well into the one-language-one-nation ideology of Finnish nationalists.

The relationship between the two languages was complicated by the fact that the elite was Swedish-speaking, which made the language question also a class issue. Snellman urged the Swedish-speaking educated people to choose Finnish as their language, but he did not demand that the Swedish-speaking common people should give up their mother-tongue. One might expect that the present situation, where Finnish clearly is the dominating language but the rights of the Swedish-speakers are legally protected, would appeal to Snellman. In any

case, both language groups were both targets and subjects of non-governmental library promotion during the 19th century.

Models for popular libraries were got from Sweden, Germany and Britain. Funds for the acquisition of books were obtained by philanthropy, either by donations from the well-to-do or collections among the larger population. During the latter part of the 19th century even lotteries, theatre performances and other recreational activities were used to gather money for libraries. The state did not materially support the popular libraries. Instead there were two important voluntary associations that promoted popular education, *Kansanvalistusseura* (Society for the promotion of popular enlightenment, est. 1874) and *Svenska Folkskolans Vänner* (Friends of the Swedish primary school, est. 1882). Both did important work for popular libraries before the independence of Finland.

Popular libraries were in the beginning dependent on the philanthropy of the well-to-do people and under their control. Towards the end of the century, when the national movement became stronger and the wider layers of people were activated, libraries spread to all corners of the country. Municipal autonomy got more importance, especially since the religious parish and the worldly municipality were separated in the decree on municipal administration in 1865. The municipal autonomy and social movements, such as temperance, youth club and workers' movement, that started to establish libraries of their own made in the long run even the maintenance and administration of libraries more democratic.

That libraries were a part of the nation-building process became especially evident towards the end of the 19th century, when the Russian Empire started to turn its attention to Finland that until then had been more or less left to mind its own business and develop at its own pace, which was much more advanced than the rest of the Empire. For strategic reasons the Russians wanted to take a firmer grip of the border areas, such as Finland. This process included bringing Finland administratively and politically nearer to the Empire and even raising the status of the Russian language in Finland. The situation began to aggravate during the 1890s and the climax was at the turn of the century. Library activity was at its height during the same years. The Finnish resistance was for the most part peaceful, something that libraries represent, but some individuals resorted to violence.

The years of Russification were at the same time the first golden period of the Finnish culture, in music, art and literature. The importance of the newspapers grew enormously. The Finnish-language literature as a modern phenomenon was born during that time. Popular libraries, whose growing number made it possible to distribute the new books to the people, were seen as activators of the love of reading and satisfiers of the thirst for knowledge. There were at the turn of the century over 2000 popular libraries in the country.

In 1912, when a relatively reliable statistics was made of popular libraries, about a fifth were maintained by social movements. Many of the village libraries were also established by people near some social movement, most often rural youth clubs and workers' movement. The time before the First World War was the heyday of the grassroot librarianship in Finland.

Libraries in 1912

Town	47
Rural municipality	452
Village	1404
Youth club	419
Voluntary fire brigade	13
Firm	33
Worker's union	112
Temperance association	40
Other	85
Total	2605

In the statistics were accepted only libraries, which were more or less open to the general public and not just to the members of a closed association. That is why the number of libraries maintained by workers' unions is so small. Many workers' unions did not want any support or influence from "bourgeois" organizations, such as the Society for the Promotion of Popular Enlightenment. According to the statistics of the Finnish Social Democratic party, there were more than 1000 workers' libraries in Finland in 1907 and more than 1500 ten years later. (Kosonen 1985) Most of them consisted only of a few tens of books. If we add 1000 workers' libraries to the total number of libraries in 1912, it means that in a country of 3 million people, there was a library for less than a thousand persons.

However, the social and political tensions grew. When Finland became independent during the turmoil of the Russian revolution in 1917, the country was politically divided. There was an attempted revolution and a bloody civil war in the winter and spring of 1918. The civil war between the Reds (socialists) and Whites (government) in 1918 was an important dividing line concerning libraries. After the war Parliament did not want to support libraries of the workers' movement, but it was not possible to write the paragraphs so that only libraries of the workers' movement were left out. Thus all non-municipal libraries ended up in an unfavorable position, although private initiative was not prohibited.

Finnish and Swedish libraries going their own way

One may ask, when did library histories in Finland and Sweden countries separate? It did not happen in 1809, when Sweden lost Finland to Russia, because even after that the progress was rather similar, although Finland was always a little late. The 19th century was, in general, a peaceful era of progress for Finland, as it was even more so for Sweden. To be a Grand Duchy attached to Russia meant obstacles and extra constraints for Finland, but Finland was also a favored part of the Russian empire, with its own legislation, economy, currency (since the 1860s) and administration. Finland was able to retain its legislative and administrative heritage from the Swedish era, in D. C. North's terminology, much of the belief system and institutions that had accumulated during the Swedish era. It also developed into a modern European democracy by the beginning of the 20th century, which did not happen in Russia in general.

Finland followed keenly the Swedish development in all walks of life. This is true even of libraries and library ideology during the 19th century. First modest popular libraries were started following examples from Sweden. The Swedish elementary school decree of 1842 included a recommendation to establish libraries in schools. This was imitated 20 years after in the Finnish corresponding decree. The delay in establishing an elementary school system

in Finland was due both to the reactionary Russian politics during the 1840s and 1850s and to a domestic conservatism.

The advance of Sweden still grew greater during the latter part of the 19th century, not least economically, but Finland followed in the same path. Some times Finland even surpassed its ancient mother country, e.g. in 1907, when an ultramodern election system based on universal suffrage was adopted. The paths were divided at the beginning of the 20th century, especially during the last phases of the first World War, when growing tensions and the influence from the Russian revolution made Finland boil over in a drastically different way than Sweden.

Since the first decades of the 20th century, Finnish and Swedish libraries have developed in a rather different style, even if they for a foreign eye may seem similar. There were differences in the political situation during the 19th century. People in Sweden had a wide freedom of speech, whereas in Finland during the most part of the century a strict censorship was applied. What furthermore separates Finland and Sweden was the Finnish language-based nationalism. Popular libraries were seen as tools of linguistic emancipation and they were at the forefront of the national movement, but in Sweden popular libraries did not have a distinct nationalist character, and social emancipation as well as individual self-education were primary.

Anglo-American library influences were important for both countries, but they were more thoroughly implemented in Finland, where in a couple of decades the social movements were excluded from public library scene, whereas in Sweden they remained strong initiators and pioneers of public libraries long into the 20th century. Especially study circle libraries were typical for Sweden. In 1938 there were over 5500 study circle libraries in Sweden. The study circles were organized and supported by temperance movement, rural youth clubs, free church movement and workers' movement. (Torstensson 1994)

Civil society and libraries

Libraries of social movements are not as effective as modern professionally run public libraries should be, but they were "the library movement initiated by the people by themselves", said Valfrid Palmgren, a Swedish public library pioneer (Torstensson 1994).

In Finland the municipal form of public library was adopted thoroughly under the guidance of the state library authorities during the interwar years. The development of public libraries in the independent Finland has been charted by library laws. The Library Law of 1928 spread municipal libraries all over the country and secured a minimum state support for public libraries. A new library law in 1961 gave good resources for public libraries and enabled the great public library boom during the latter part of the century. There have been more library laws in 1986 and 1998, although they were not so epoch-making. But in Sweden no library law was considered necessary until the 1990s, when economically stringent times seemed to require some basic requirements set by the state.

The reason for this difference may be found in the earlier development in Sweden of a strong civil society and a welfare state. There was no strict state control and inspection of libraries as was the case in Finland. But it seems that the Swedish strong dominant beliefs, the educational ethos inherited from the social movements, strengthened the obligation to maintain and develop libraries. What also was special in Sweden were the high quality demands for selection of books, which stemmed from the ideologies of the labor, temperance and free church movements. Growing lending numbers were not a goal in themselves. Libraries existed for self-education, not for idle reading.

In Finland the financing of public libraries was from the start (in the 1920s) divided between the state and the municipalities. The state support was coupled with the control by

state library inspectors. Book selection was even in Finland rather strictly quality-based until the early 1970s, but after that a liberalization of book selection took place.

A new more democratic conception of library was emerging that put the user into the center of activities. The library user was no more an object of an educative action but a subject that made his or her own choices regarding what to read. During the 1970s the Finnish public library became a more or less neutral channel. This was a natural result of the growing level of general education in the population.

The librarians become academics

The education of librarians was renewed in Finland, which had an impact on library activities. There has never been a separate library school or college in Finland, as it has been the case in Denmark and Sweden. Since 1945 the education of public librarians was organized as semi-academic diploma courses on college level, in the College for Social Sciences in Helsinki, the capital. At the beginning of the 1960s the College was moved from Helsinki to Tampere, where it soon was transformed into a university. In 1971 a chair in Library and Information Science was established at the University of Tampere as the first in the Nordic countries. A successful research activity was also started under the new chair (Mäkinen 2007).

The requirements for the persons filling the librarians' positions were made more stringent. A university degree with a sufficient amount of information studies is today required of the leading librarian in a municipality. The Finnish good performance in the PISA evaluations has been to a great deal explained by the high level of education of the teachers. The good library performance may also be partly explained by the high level of education of the librarians.

In Finland the teacher's profession has been seen as one of the most important professions of society, and a lot of resources have consequently been invested in teacher education. All Finnish teachers have to complete a master's degree either in education or in one or two teaching subjects. Only 10% of the interested are admitted in the class teacher educational programs. (Finnish success, 48; Simola 2005, 459-460) A long-term feature since the 19th century among the Finnish teachers has been a persistent striving towards professionalism through high-class teachers' education. (Simola 2005, 460-461)

The competition of positions in the library education is not so fierce as concerning the teachers' education and the status and salary of librarians cannot compete with those of the teachers, but still there is something similar in the quality of the librarians compared to teachers. The share of librarians with a university or polytechnics education among the work force in the Finnish public libraries was in 2011 38%.

The paradox of the 1950's

After the Second World War a state committee proposed a modern library law, that would raise Finnish libraries on the same level as our western neighbours Sweden and Denmark, as well as Great Britain that was, besides the USA, an important source of inspiration.

Despite the librarians ardent hopes the proposal was not introduced to Parliament during the 1950s. The 1950s was called "the decade of wait", a frustrating limbo for librarians. During the 1950s the real value of the support given by the Library Act of 1928 was sunk low because of the galloping inflation. (Järvelin 2001) But the baby boom generation of the late 1940s grew up and demanded schools and libraries and the municipalities tried to satisfy the demand. That is why the 1950s after all was a dynamic library period in Finland. During the decade the municipalities had to show true library spirit to develop their libraries. Amazingly

they did and the decade is the best “library decade” in Finland. There have been three decades, when the circulation in the Finnish public libraries has more than doubled, and in the 1950s the rate of increase was strongest, the 1970s and the 1960s come second and third.

The 1950’s also showed that a more systematic and authoritative work of the state library inspectors could enhance library activities. The competency requirements of the inspectors had been sharpened in a revision of the library law. In the long run this strengthened the position of the inspectors, who in practice were library propagators in the countryside. (Järvelin 2001)

Library Act of 1961 and the welfare society

The most important individual factor explaining the success of the Finnish public libraries is the Library Act of 1961. The Library Act was a profound institutional choice that constructed strong incentives for the municipalities to invest in their libraries. But why was the legislation passed in the first place?

The Library Act of 1961 is best understood in the context of the Finnish welfare state. During the last 50 years, public libraries have become a favorite, high-quality service of the middle class, not just a minimum service for the poor people.

During the earlier decades Parliament had been rather reluctant to direct resources to the libraries, but this time it was even more open-handed than the government that formally introduced the proposition. Partly this can be explained by the bad conscience of the politicians: for such a long time they had let the libraries down. In the parliamentary debate it was said that it was time to “pay the debt” to the libraries.

The consensus concerning the library legislation also indicates that the Finnish political parties were beginning to be receptive to the construction of the welfare state, i.e. spending more money for the well-being of the people.

During the parliamentary debate in 1961 a politician said about the new library legislation that it was “an important part of the cultural reconstruction” that one and a half decades after the war was finally set in motion. He even anticipated that “we have to be prepared in the coming years to spend on cultural matters year after year an ever increasing amount of our total expenditures. If this doesn’t happen, if we cannot allocate enough money to cultural goals, then we shall without mercy be left behind in the tough competition that is going on everywhere in the world among free nations.” Even if he used the phrase “among free nations”, there also was an allusion to the Communist ideology. The launching of Sputnik in 1957 had made western societies afraid that they were losing ground on the cultural and educational front. (Mäkinen 2001) In Finland these ideological trends were mixed with the old cultural nationalism that presupposed a broad involvement of the population in social and cultural life.

The Library Act of 1961 can be seen as anticipating the wave of social reforms that started a new phase in the construction of the Finnish welfare state following the Nordic model. After the library law there came a number of important social political and educational reforms.

There were fears that the welfare state policies would leave the cultural values in the shadow of economic activity. Therefore, a conscious building of a popular audience for theater, music, art and literature was the theme of many committee reports and cultural reforms during the 1960s and 1970s. Libraries and reading were part of this cultural universalism, the other side of the universalism of the welfare state ideology.

The funds used for public libraries increased manyfold, libraries became professionally managed, new library buildings rose all over the country, bookmobiles started to serve both

the countryside and the rapidly growing urban suburbs. The growth of public libraries and their use constituted a peaceful cultural revolution. (Mäkinen 2001)

Finnish public libraries reach the top

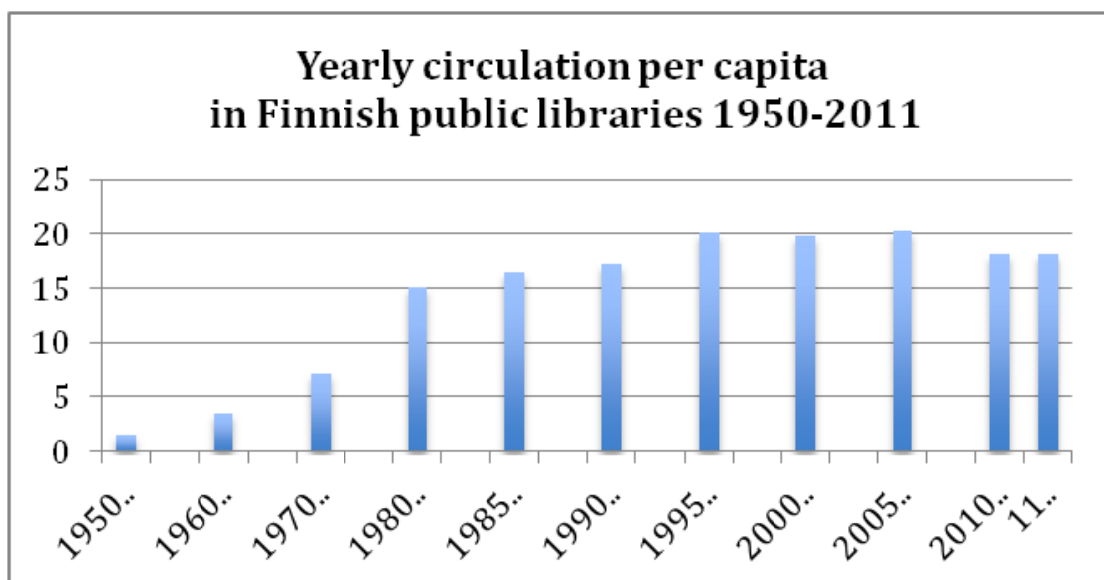
Concerning school libraries there was a situation of choice, which has been approached differently in Finland and other Nordic countries. In Finland among the library people the priority was given to the public library already during the 1950s, because the school authorities seemed not interested enough to organize a good network of school libraries. The committee report on public libraries published in 1950 was the formal turning point. During the 1960s the role of public libraries serving school children as well was consolidated.

The difference between loan statistics between Finland and the rest of the Nordic countries would be much less striking, if also the loans made in school libraries were counted, but it may not explain all the difference. Transition from school library to public library is a threshold for the young people: it may be a step that one does not take automatically. In this sense, if we hope that people stay as users of public libraries even as adult, it may be better to lead them early to the public library. On the other hand the intensity of use may be stronger with those who have learned to use a good school library.

Until the 1960s Finland was behind Denmark and Sweden in the use of libraries, but in the 1970s the use of the Finnish public libraries reached the level of the other two and since then Finland has been on the top.

	Items borrowed per capita				
	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
1970	9	7	7	3	6
1980	15	15	...	4	9
1990	15	17	7	5	8
2000	14	20	8	4	8
2005	14	20	...	4	7
2008	13	19	...	5	8

(Source: Yearbook of Nordic Statistics)



The use of public libraries has diminished since the 1980s in Sweden, since the 1990s in Denmark, whereas in Finland it has stayed on a high level. The circulation numbers have been sliding slowly downwards since 2005, but the year 2011 seems to turn the tide again. The share of books in the total circulation statistics is ca. 80%. (Finnish Public Libraries Statistics Database, <http://tilastot.kirjastot.fi/en-GB/>)

During the early years of the 1990s a deep economic recession struck Finland. The whole country was for a time on the brink of bankruptcy. The cuts in the state and municipal expenditures were deep and public libraries were not spared either. The number of people working in the libraries was during the decade cut by a tenth, funds for acquiring materials by a fifth and the number of new book titles by a fourth. But the Finnish people showed that they loved their libraries even in the turmoil of the recession. There were impressive popular campaigns in defence of public libraries. The top of these campaigns were the petitions on behalf of libraries in 1991 with 300 000 names and in 1994 with 570 000 names, i.e., more than 10% of the population signed the last petition.

The people also streamed into the libraries. There were queues behind the library doors in the mornings. It was an observation already during the recession of the 1930s that library use increases during economically bad times, but during the recession of the 1990s the rise was stronger and it lasted even over the recession. The period 1990-2010 can be called “the Indian summer” of the Finnish reading culture. Even the sale of books and the circulation of newspapers stayed on a high level. The Finnish reading culture is still strong.

Love of reading still is the most important factor in public library use. The greatest benefits that Finns obtain from the public library are attached to reading fiction. This became plain in a recent extensive survey by Sami Serola and Pertti Vakkari (Serola & Vakkari 2011).

The reading nation

The active use of public libraries is both a question of supply and demand. The library system and the quality of librarians explain part of the mystery in the same spirit as the Finnish PISA success is explained by the good education and high status of teachers as well as the organization of the comprehensive school. But schools and libraries are different things after all. All children attend the school and all are exposed to the educational effort. The use of public libraries is voluntary. People read and acquire information of their own free will.

A serious aspiration to make the Finnish people a reading nation was embedded in the nationalist educational ideology already in J. W. Snellman’s writings. His goal was both to create a high class national literature and a popular literature that anybody could read regardless of one’s educational level. The task of the elementary school was to inspire a love of reading that would last the rest of life. The importance of reading remained a central element in the nationalist movement. The construction of the national literature in Finnish covering all branches of scholarship and all genres of fiction was on the agenda since the latter part of the 19th century.

Nevertheless, much of this remained foreign for the common man, because the general educational level was low. To remedy this problem, popularized science books in cheap editions were published, first by the Society for Popular Enlightenment, later also by commercial publishers.

High-class fictional literature did not always find its way into the larger population. There was a gap between the aspirations of the educators, librarians included, and the real situation among the majority of the population. However, there were certain elements in the Finnish

literature that anticipated the appearance of a more democratic reading culture. Because of the novelty of the Finnish-language literature, a close relationship with the language spoken by the common people was natural. Already during the 19th century a number of writers from the ranks of the people without formal education became known and read by the larger audience, even if not so much appreciated by the critics (e.g., Pietari Päivärinta). During the decades between the world wars some so-called worker-writers emerged and gained esteem even among the critics (Toivo Pekkanen, Pentti Haanpää). Still they were not so much read by the people themselves.

During the 1920s and the 1930s Finnish public libraries spread all over the country, even if their quality in the countryside was not high. Only approximately 10% of the population used public libraries, but still many talented persons without academic education could benefit from these libraries. Star examples are later famous writers, such as Toivo Pekkanen, Väinö Linna and Kalle Päätalo. Toivo Pekkanen lived his youth in a medium-sized city, and thus had a good possibility to use a rather well equipped city library, but Väinö Linna and Kalle Päätalo spent their childhood in the countryside. They progressed from the modest primary school library to the municipal library, and after moving to one of the largest cities in Finland, Tampere, they found a heaven in the city library. These men were extraordinary in their love of reading, but there were thousands of similar stories of people, who were able to educate themselves into useful citizens and enjoy reading using the public libraries of the time. Libraries could help in the social advancement. Still, from the present day viewpoint, the libraries and the whole educational system were far from democratic.

Library authorities tried to maintain a high standard in the libraries' book acquisition, but too strict principles were not always compatible with the real situation and aspirations of the people. In a way, readers were compelled (often with the help of local librarians) to "smuggle" themselves the joy of reading against the well-meaning regulations of the library establishment. (Eskola 2004)

Reading in wartime

The Second World War seems to have been a turning point regarding the Finnish reading culture. It was, of course, in many ways a difficult time for Finland with loss of life and land area, but, paradoxically, it was also a period of democratization. Reading before the war was to a great extent an activity of the well-to-do, educated people who could buy the books they wanted and thus were able to choose freely. They had more time and better circumstances to read than the majority of the people who lived in the countryside in houses often without electricity, with no book shops in the vicinity, and with libraries, if they were available, that were small and contained mostly books that ordinary working men and women did not wish to read. For many people reading was a waste of time.

Reading increased during the war in Finland in general, as was the case also in other countries, because of lack of other forms of entertainment. There was a shortage of most of the daily products, but books were free of rationing. Book production increased and book prices remained reasonable.

Books were printed and bought in great quantities and there seemed to be no limit to the demand. Even people, such as men from rural areas who had not read a book since the elementary school, started to read. Boxes of books provided by the army recreation unit circulated in the trenches and the wounded behind the lines were served by volunteer librarians. The Second World War introduced the habit of reading fiction among a large part of the Finnish population that before had not read much. In general, libraries were not able to respond to this demand, although locally, especially in the cities, libraries increased circulation. The opening hours were too minimal, the stocks were outdated and the

acquisition policies were too restrictive. The war made it clear that the public libraries, especially in the countryside, could not respond to the circumstances of a critical time as they should have done. (Mäkinen 2007)

After the Second World War the consumption of literature was more democratic than before, but also the character of the literature changed. The worker-writers, i.e., writers without academic education and often starting as factory workers, became a movement. Some of the most important Finnish writers, such as Väinö Linna and Lauri Viita, belong to this group. They also gained a wide audience outside the usual middle-class reading public. But also traditional educated writers, such as Mika Waltari (with his *Sinuhe, the Egyptian*, 1945), found a much larger audience than before the war. Even some poetry books were sold in tens of thousands of copies.

It is commonly believed that the increase in the level of education increases also library use. I have tried to show the positive correlation between the comprehensive school reform of the 1970s and public library use in Finland (Mäkinen 2010). Part of the growth from year to year during the 1970s may be attributed to the comprehensive school reform that brought new groups of children to high quality education in the least developed areas of the country. The comprehensive school reform was a challenge to libraries, because the policy was that public libraries would serve even school children. There was no intention to develop a separate school library network.

There are certain aspects in the PISA assessments and the data that was gathered together with the student tests, which have a direct relevance concerning libraries and the contemporary reading culture in Finland. In an analysis of Finnish PISA 2000 and 2003 data by Finnish educational researchers, it is pointed out that reading for pleasure outside school had the strongest explanatory power in reading performance. The researchers conclude that “engagement in reading can even compensate for a low socio-economic and cultural background of students’ home.”

According to the survey newspapers were the most popular reading material outside school. 59% of 15-year-olds read a newspaper several times a week and additionally 26% several times a month. Reading newspapers still surpassed in the early years of the new millennium by a narrow margin e-mail and online publications. (Finnish success, 27-28) It is probable that the newspapers were read at home, because Finns still are eager subscribers of newspapers. Magazines and cartoons were read several times a week by one third and fiction by 14 per cent, but non-fiction books only by four per cent of students. (Finnish success, 27-28)

The researchers divided Finnish youngsters into sub-groups mainly on the basis of reading fiction and using Internet. Reading newspapers, magazines and comics was so common that students did not divide into distinct groups according to them.

The clusters that included children frequently reading books represent half of the Finnish pupils, but it is interesting that reading fiction is typical for girls and reading non-fiction typical for boys. Girls read more outside school, and it is no wonder that they also outperform boys in reading literacy. Active use of Internet is typical for those who read a lot. (Finnish success, 14, 29)

It seems that the researchers did not ask, where the students got their books, magazines and comics. It is probable that a large share of them were obtained from libraries.

Finally, it may be mentioned that reading bedtime stories is still an institution in Finland.

Conclusion

As it was predicted in the beginning of this paper, the intensive use of the Finnish public libraries is a result of many factors. The society must find it worth while to maintain public

libraries, and people must find it worth while to use them. These things must be embedded in the belief system of the society.

The prerequisites of an intensive use of libraries are of different kinds. Some elements are almost immemorial. Finland belongs to a certain culture that has developed in the course of centuries. When we look backwards, we can see a path that has been followed, although there has not been any predetermination for the things to happen as they did. New modes of behaviour or informal norms accumulate through time. But on the other hand, they have to be initiated by somebody at some point of time. Reading can become a widespread habit, of course, on the condition that there are books available and time to read. Dysfunctional norms can be changed, when their negative effects are perceived.

However, there are institutional choices that are used intentionally to develop the society in the frame of years, decades or a lifetime. People have goals, some rational, some more irrational, how they want to change their life. They can start a reading society or a lending library, if the legislation allows it, which again is an institutional choice. The ideologies that lead the fates of the nations are more or less rational constructions. The ideology of the Finnish nationalists constructed by the Hegelian J. W. Snellman was rather progressive with its stress on linguistic emancipation and literature, although it had its dead ends as well. Both the grassroot library activity of the late 19th century and the later municipal- and state-centered library system of the 20th century may be attributed to it, but also a positive attitude towards self-education in general belonged to it.

Ideologies lead to formal institutions. In the Finnish case the library legislation has been decisive in the diffusion and consolidation of the library network. The Library Act of 1961 corrected the flaws in the previous legislation and gave a real boost to library funding. It led to a professionalisation of the library work. There was a massive breakthrough of public libraries during the 1960s and the 1970s. The general modernization and liberalization of the country, urbanization and the comprehensive school reform were effective as well in making reading and libraries part of the life in the welfare society. Reading and library use are voluntary, but they happen in a context that either supports this kind of behaviour or erodes it.

During a period, when library use started to fall in many other countries, the 1990s, there was a deep economic recession in Finland. Under the dark times of depression libraries won the hearts of the people. The curves showing library funding and library use criss-crossed. That was the time, when the libraries got much of the goodwill that they still enjoy among the Finns.

The importance of reading is still felt in the Finnish society, not just among the librarians, teachers and middle-class high-brows, but among ordinary people. Mothers and fathers read bedtime stories to their babies. Parents think it is important to take their children to the library and soon majority of girls and boys go there on their own. Libraries are part of the everyday life.

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