

# The New Cross-Sectorial Agency in Norway for Archives, Libraries and Museums: Plans and Perspectives

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Dear colleagues!

First, I would like to thank for being invited to present the new cross-sectorial agency in Norway for archives, libraries and museums at the LIBER conference!

I will start my presentation by giving you a brief introduction to the Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority with regard to background for the emergence, organization and objectives. Furthermore, I will present some of our main priorities. Although this is a conference, which focuses on library issues, I find it important to mention initiatives for the two other sectors as well, in order to give you a broader picture of the new institution.

## BACKGROUND

On January 1 this year, three organizations were merged into one. The Norwegian Directorate for Public Libraries, the Norwegian Museum Authority and the National Office for Research, Documentation, Academic and Special Libraries officially became the Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority. For practical reasons I will use the authorised Norwegian short-version, ABM-utvikling.

The emergence of ABM-utvikling and our current national strategy on developing the three different sectors is primarily based on the white paper (no. 22,1999-2000) entitled Sources to knowledge and experience. Archives, libraries and museums in a society based on information technology. This white paper advocates not only measures promoting increased co-operation between libraries, archives and museums but also measures promoting the individual development of each sector. I find it important to emphasize this, because one of the main objections from all three sectors towards the emergence of ABM-utvikling has actually been a concern that attention would not be made to the needs and problems specific for each sector.

Why establish a governmental institution such as ABM-utvikling? The answer is partly reflected in the sub title of the white paper - Archives, libraries and museums in a society based on information technology. Technology and the end-users are the key words, and one of the main messages given in the report, is that to the users it is not relevant who owns or manages the information they are interested in, but how they can access it. The library, museum and archive sectors in Norway can all be characterized as relatively small with regard to size. Hopefully, the establishment of one national agency covering all three sectors will stimulate increased focus on these institutions by decision makers.

## ABM-UTVIKLING – A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

We had one year to prepare for the emergence of ABM-utvikling, and it was clear both to the Board and myself that it was essential to establish close contacts with the library, museum, and archive organizations and associations in order to obtain support and exchange ideas. A number of meetings with institutions and organization, such as the National Library, academic and special libraries, public libraries, archives and museums, were organized throughout last year. We have found this very useful, and it is a form of dialogue that constitutes an essential part of ABM-utvikling's work. In the process of developing a new organization, dialogue with the employees in the three previous organizations was as important as external communication. Merging three institutions and cultures plus including the archival sector is a challenging task!

The new ABM-utvikling consists of three departments: one for administration, one for information and one for strategy and planning. The latter department is by far the largest with approximately 30 people, constituting close to half the total staff. The employees in the department of strategy and planning are organized in teams, which are both cross-sectorial and sector-specific. In addition to our "regular" tasks, ABM-utvikling has been given the responsibility for running the web-based Culture Net Norway with its four sector networks for archives, libraries, museums and art. Responsibility for Culture Net Norway is assigned to the Information Department. Furthermore, we currently host two secretariats, the national initiative "the cultural schoolbag" and NORDBOK, the Nordic Literature and Library Committee.

Within ABM-utvikling, priority will be given to development initiatives rather than to supervisory and control functions. In all official documents this perspective is very clear. The overall objective for archives, libraries and museums, laid down in our Board, is as follows:

*Archives, libraries and museums shall contribute to a better society through their functions and services, individually and in co-operation, by giving people opportunities for*

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- *knowledge enhancement and learning*
- *experience and creativity*
- *critical reflection and creative insight*
- *human understanding*
- *dialogue*
- *social and democratic involvement*
- *access to documentation of cultural, managerial and judicial value*

In order for libraries, archives and museums to meet their goals, ABM-utvikling shall act as a co-ordinator for the three sectors and as an intermediary between the government and these institutions.

The main objectives for ABM-utvikling, as approved by the Board, are the following:

1. *The Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority shall contribute to developing, safeguarding and exploiting cultural and knowledge-based capital.*
2. *The Norwegian, Archive, Library and Museum Authority shall provide institutions and sectors with improved means to meet the professional and societal challenges of today and tomorrow.*

We shall accomplish these goals through six main challenges:

- *capacity building within the archive, library and museum sectors*
- *promoting the use of relevant technology resources*
- *supporting and inspiring innovation and change*
- *stimulating and initiating development and co-ordination projects*
- *acting as a strong advocate for and adviser to official authorities at all levels*
- *providing good management of governmental funding.*

Put quite simply: we want libraries, museums and archives to actively participate in the development of society.

As you can see from our objectives, we have many needs to fulfil and in order to start the process we have set some priorities, which I will focus on. Some of them are common for all three sectors; others are more specifically addressed towards one sector.

## SOME PRIORITIES FOR ALL SECTORS

*Use of electronic technology*

Access to sources of knowledge and experience is fundamental in a democratic society. This, together with increasingly more diverse, knowledgeable and demanding user-groups, requires a conscious effort to identify different needs. In ABM-utvikling's effort to promote the use of relevant technology we can identify four main phases:

1. Enhancing the use of relevant technology.  
The level of integration of technology varies within and between each sector, from no use at all in very small and local archives and museums to very advanced systems. Currently, a working committee within ABM-utvikling is undertaking a project called "A Digital Roadmap for ABM-utvikling". Their objective is twofold: 1) map relevant technologies for our sectors today and in the near future; 2) conduct a small-scale survey in order to analyse the situation in the three sectors with regard to use of technology. The outcome of the surveys will serve both as a platform for communication with our sectors and other important contributors, and constitute the basis for ABM-utvikling's objectives and strategies for digitisation and use of digitised material.
2. Developing common standards and finding technical and organizational solutions for long-term preservation of digital material.
3. Selecting content.  
To a certain extent the content reflects diversity with regard to gender, age, ethnicity and thematic areas. However, we have to admit that we have not paid enough attention to the history of indigenous people, national minorities and immigrants. As an answer to this situation the white paper, which I keep referring to, has selected these groups in order to give them special priority with regard to documentation of their history.
4. Disseminating and presenting content to and communication with the users.  
The rapidly developing technologies gives us new and exciting options on how to develop solutions for presenting content from various sources and services. Aiming at services of high quality to all the users requires a considerable effort from the professionals in archives, libraries and museums. New skills and tools need to be developed. ABM-utvikling is looking forward to a cross sectorial co-operation within this field of action and will encourage and support such a collaboration.

An example of the integration of digital culture in our national strategies is the web site Culture Net Norway, our national gateway to Norwegian culture. Culture Net Norway is the central co-ordinating net, which serves four other sector nets, Museum Net, Archive Net, Library Net and Art Net, with special applications and services. At present, Culture Net Norway is undergoing radical changes by integrating the different parts in such a way that the users can access information not only from libraries, museums and archives by a single search, but all cultural activities that are on the Internet.

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*Capacity building within the archive, library and museum sectors*

All the three former institutions offered their sectors different courses, seminars, conferences etc. as a means to increase the professionals' competencies. ABM-utvikling considers this a main objective. High-quality services depend on competent employees. We need to develop practical courses ourselves, but we will also map educational needs within the sector and keep educational institutions informed.

*A national research programme*

ABM-utvikling will, however, present The Research Council of Norway with our interest to establish a programme for all three sectors. Such a programme must address topics specific for each sector as well as cross-sectorial issues. In addition, the research undertaken should also focus on how archives, libraries and museums carry out their roles in society.

NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR THE REORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF LIBRARIES, ARCHIVES & MUSEUMS

Due to the rather fragmentary co-ordination within in each sector, the white paper recommends three major reorganizations, one for each sector. This is necessary in order to accomplish better exploitation of their resource material. The reform processes will also strengthen the professional base in each sector, which will result in improved services to the users and a stronger foundation for co-operation necessary for the development of for example digital culture.

*The museum sector*

Although Norway has a very small and scattered population (4,5 million), we have had a tendency to establish new museums at a relatively fast rate. In a survey conducted a few years ago, the total number was 750 spread over approximately 650 administrative units. In the white paper, an initiative was proposed in order to strengthen the museum sector and in 2002 a national museum reform was initiated. The goal is to establish stronger units professionally, economically and administratively and to establish national networks of museums.

*The archive sector*

Compared to the museum and library sector, we have not yet established a permanent channel for dialogue with archival institutions. This is mainly due to the fact that the archival sector has not had a similar governmental organization as the museum and

library sectors. In response to this situation we will focus on establishing a permanent and vital dialogue with contact points in all counties. An other important task is to analyse the collections of private and local archival material and make a plan to outline long-term strategies for preservation and dissemination policies.

### *The library sector*

A significant change in the library sector, spurred by the establishment of ABM-utvikling, is the consolidation of the public and academic and special library sectors into one. However, I want to emphasize that they usually have been regarded as two very separate sectors. The white paper, introduced a new term and an important objective: the seamless library services. The intention is to provide the user with the same service regardless of which library she or he visits, thus combining access to actual and virtual collections and services. In order to obtain this ambitious objective we need to overcome some fundamental barriers.

## THE DIGITAL LIBRARY OF NORWAY

A major step in developing the seamless library services is the Digital Library of Norway (DLN).

In October 2002, ABM-utvikling appointed a committee from the library sector to evaluate the potential of developing the Digital Library. They were selected from all types of libraries and even library systems suppliers. They delivered their report with recommendations in February this year it and has been very well received within the entire library sector. The working committee's assignment was to:

- find out what the main challenges are for developing and co-ordinating resources within a digital library
- suggest how further organization of the DLN should proceed
- define the term "digital library" and other terms used in the report

The working committee has defined the term "digital library" as follows:

An organized collection of services and content allowing users to access information in digital form transmitted via a computer network.

The committee has also created the following vision for a Digital Library of Norway: A library system that opens the confines of each individual library and enables the public and society at large to have digital information resources and services at their disposal conveniently and efficiently.

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The committee has recommended that the DLN should be a 5-year programme. Furthermore, as the programme proceeds, the services that are established shall be offered as content in a permanent organization. The committee has also focused on the importance of recognizing the challenges the Norwegian library sector is facing. This is especially relevant with regard to co-operation and co-ordination between the different libraries, suppliers and others, to achieve better use of the resources as a whole and offer improved services to all users through a national digital library. An overall objective is to ensure integration of material from archives and museums in the DLN. Although this is a long-term perspective, it is essential, at an early stage, to discuss which technological solutions and standards are necessary to ensure this integration.

The working committee has a long list of additional recommendations in their report. The list includes:

- establish research programmes
- offer project funding to support projects aimed towards establishing permanent content and/or services within the DLN, for example the making of national authority registers
- establish national competence centres at the National Library with tasks such as copyright, metadata and digitisation
- develop joint patron registers and common library cards
- make research documentation available through library catalogues

The report is welcomed as the first visible sign of collaboration within the "new" library sector. The DLN has become the main library project for us this year and we have high hopes of seeing the content of the report set into action. Currently, we are in the process of employing a project manager.

#### *Consortia agreements*

One part of DLN will be electronic journals. At present, we have agreements with 12 national and international suppliers. Approximately 200 institutions in the academic world participate in one or several agreements. ABM-utvikling is pleased to notice an increased interest from public libraries and we are currently working to expand our services to them. In order to offer the best possible services to our university libraries, ABM-utvikling has signed an intentional agreement together with the four Norwegian university libraries, and BIBSYS, the library system supplier within the academic sector. The main objective is to establish cost-efficient solutions and good consortia agreements for the university libraries, which ensures their users easy access to a best possible selection of relevant electronic scientific resources within their various thematic areas. We are aiming at expanding the agreement to other libraries. ABM-utvikling acts as the secretariat for this work and takes part in negotiations with the suppliers.

*Library Act for a new millennium?*

The need for new library legislation has been a hot issue for some time in Norway, and the Ministry of Cultural and Church Affairs has indicated that a major report needs to be undertaken. This report should describe the needs for and the consequence of entirely new library legislation, covering both public libraries and academic libraries run by public means. Most likely the task of writing a report will be assigned ABM-utvikling. If we get a library act covering both library sectors, this will be a very important means to achieve seamless library services in Norway. The Norwegian Directorate for Public Libraries had a minor report made on this issue last year. Professor Ragnar Audunsson at Oslo University College stated in this report that a joint law would

- tear down the barriers between different libraries
- achieve better services for students, lifelong learners
- make a necessary impact on the people managing and administering the libraries - the librarians themselves

## A FLOATING BOOK COLLECTION

As an other project focusing on the seamless library services I would like to mention an interesting project in the county of Østfold. This is a project initiated and run by the Østfold county library. The main goal is to create a best possible united library service for the inhabitants of Østfold county. This library services will be based on mutual values, attitudes, guidelines, and on best possible qualifications and co-ordination of resources. The project, which has received funding both from Østfold county and ABM-utvikling, has committed partners from public-, school- and academic libraries. By profiling their services, co-ordinating their capacity building and joining their net-based resources, they are aiming to establish seamless library services in their region. They are also testing out a new logistics system, by actual transportation of books and other media between all library branches twice a week. The long-term aim is to implement the concept of a floating book collection, whereby books lent by inter-library loan are not returned to the “owning” library, but placed in any library to which the loaner returns it – that is, until someone new requests it. The library system will keep track of where any item is at any time.

## INTERNATIONAL PROFILE

In addition to national co-operation, international participation is required in order to enhance the quality of the functions and services offered in these sectors and increase

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their visibility. Information and communication technology, the Internet and digitisation have an enormous impact on society in promoting social equality of knowledge. This process is characterized by enabling people from different parts of the world to access the same information. The process also makes it easier to define knowledge and culture as common values and improves our ability to share these values. We wish to promote international co-operation and activities within archives, libraries and museums as a means to strengthen their role as influential participants in all areas of societal development.

### *Participation in international organisations and European networks*

Participation in forums like LIBER, IFLA, ICA, ICOM, UNESCO, ISO and others, is a great opportunity for ABM-utvikling to both follow and discuss international strategies influencing the direction of our own national policies. However, it is also important for professionals from libraries, museums and archives to participate in international forums relevant to their line of work. This will secure direct transmission of knowledge to and from the sectors and increase the quality of their work.

With regard to the Internet, the world is borderless as long as you have access. In the last decade, Norway has participated in some important European initiatives. These projects have aimed at improving the infrastructure for giving access to content in our libraries and discussing the changing role of libraries in a society based on technology. Some examples are the three EU-funded projects, TEL (The European Library), which aims at developing a pan-European distributed digital library with integrated multi-lingual access, PubliCA (A Concerted Action for Public Libraries) and PULMAN (Public Libraries Mobilising Advanced Networks).

### *Nordic co-operation*

Nordic forums play an important role for the Norwegian library sector. At the Nordic level there is a close relationship between the countries and they are quite similar with regard to population, political systems etc. In this respect, it is fairly easy to implement ideas from our neighbours.

### *Interlibrary loans*

Speaking of international co-operation, I would like to point out that a solid interlibrary lending system is one of the pillars in a modern library structure.

### *Development co-operation*

We seek to focus on the capacity and resources of developing countries as another measure to increase the quality of the work and competence in museums, libraries and

archives. The focus is therefore on how developing countries can contribute to the advancement of our sectors and society rather than on our capacity to assist them. ABM-utvikling is currently engaged in a development project with the National Museums Board of Zambia. In the future we wish to expand our co-operative efforts covering all three sectors and with a stronger emphasis on digital culture.

I would also like to mention that we are interested in developing an international exchange programme for the sectors in co-operation with organizations in other countries. In my opinion, working together with professionals from other countries is one of the best ways to learn and improve the quality of our work. I see this as a long-term strategy.

## CONCLUSIONS

ABM-utvikling faces many interesting and exciting challenges. We are still in a phase of transition and reorganization, and I would like to emphasize the fact that turning ABM-utvikling into a smoothly run organization will take at least a year.

Thank you for your attention!

I welcome you all to Oslo at the IFLA conference in 2005, an opportunity to learn more about the Norwegian library sector and to continue the important discussion on how to develop libraries.

## REFERENCES

Sources to knowledge and experience. Archives, libraries and museums in a society based on information technology. White paper, no.22, 1999-2000.

## WEB SITES REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

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ICA - International Council on Archives. <http://www.ica.org/>

ICOM - International Council of Museums. <http://icom.museum/>

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*IFLA – International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions.*  
<http://www.ifla.org/>

*ISO - International Organization for Standardization.*  
<http://www.iso.ch/iso/en/ISOOnline.openerpage>

*LIBER - Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche.* <http://www.kb.dk/liber/>

*Nordbok - Nordic Literature and Library Committee.*  
<http://www.nordbok.org/english.html>

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