

“It’s a clever camel that goes to the well.”

Practical experiences from the cooperation between archives, libraries and museums in Eskilstuna, Sweden

Introduction

Almost everybody in Sweden who is talking about ALM means the cooperation on a digital level. There are many projects developing websites presenting different databases under one roof, but not often with a possibility for searching over all databases at the same time. If one looks closer to all what is summarized under ALM in Sweden one can see that many are talking about ALM but there are only a few really do it. And further less who do it on a personal or practical level. Eskilstuna is an exception from that. Here we are working together on all levels: digital and personal. In the following I will describe some of the advantages and difficulties of the project and discuss the effects of this cooperation on knowledge and knowledge management.

Objectives

The cooperation between the ALM institutions in Eskilstuna began in 1999 when the local government advised the administration of the municipality to investigate the possibilities of a cooperation between the ALM institutions to become more effective in the management of the material and to increase access to and communication about Eskilstunas history by cooperating on an strategic, organizational and local level. The investigation thought it possible. The first step towards a more active cooperation was to change a part of the organization. The municipality archives which lay under the Municipal executive committee were moved to the Culture and leisure department in 2002 so that all ALM institutions run by the municipality had the same head and political board. One year later a digitalization project was started to give access to the archives, the objects of the City museum as well as the material of the municipality archives. The project ended in 2006.

When there occurred problems with the storage of the archives and a part of the museum’s collection, an investigation recommended in 2004/2005 to concentrate all archives (including even the non municipal archives resident in Eskilstuna) in one building in the center of the city. Politicians agreed to that idea and the old fire department near the river became in 2009 the new home of the archives – not only for the material but also for the greater part of the staff. The advantage of this building was not only the central location but also the closeness to the library (just round the corner in the next building) and the City Museum (ca 100 meter from the House of Archives) and the Museum of Arts (ca. 200 meters from the House of Archives).

Already from the beginning also non municipal institutions with their archives resident in Eskilstuna were invited to cooperate and develop a shared plan for the archives. These institutions were (and are):

- The Archives of Industry and Commerce in Sörmland county (Företagens arkiv i Sörmland)
- The Popular Movements Archive in Sörmland (Föreningsarkivet i Sörmland)
- The Archive of the Sweden Finns (Ruotsinsuomalaisten arkisto - Sverigefinländarnas arkiv)

Institutions of the municipality which take part in the cooperation are:

- The Swedish Archive of Childrens' Art (Svenkt Barnbild arkiv)
- The Swedish Library of Detective Stories (Svenska deckarbiblioteket)
- Eskilstuna Municipalities Archive of Music (Eskilstuna kommuns musikarkiv).
- Eskilstuna City museum
- Eskilstuna City library and county library Sörmland (Eskilstuna stads- och länsbibliotek)
- Eskilstuna Municipality Archives

Today material of the following archives is located in the House of Archives (arkivhuset):

- Municipality Archives
- The Archives of Industry and Commerce in Sörmland county (Företagens arkiv i Sörmland)
- The Popular Movements Archive in Sörmland (Föreningsarkivet i Sörmland)
- The Swedish Archive of Childrens' Art
- The Archives of the Sweden Finns

- The Archives of the City Museum (including the photographic collections)

The collections of the Art Museum and the object collection of the City Museum are located in another part of the town.

Also the staff of the following institutions is located in the House of Archives:

- The City Museum (with almost the whole of the staff e.g. 9 persons of 14)
- The Municipality Archives (6 persons)
- The Popular Movements Archive in Sörmland (1 person)
- The Archives of the Sweden Finns (1 person)
- The Archives of Industry and Commerce in Sörmland county (3 persons)

The staff of the library is located in the library building which is connected with the House of Archives by a corridor. Here are also the rooms for the members of the digitalizing project (situated under the Municipality Archives, but with customers from all ALM institutions of the municipality)

To give access to the material gathered in the House of Archives, the library and the collections of the museums (City Museum and Art Museum) a website was created as a part of the municipality's website in 2004. Here material is presented from the municipality institutions especially from the archives and the museum. The non municipal institutions present their material on their own homepages. But a register over all archival material (from both municipal and non municipal institutions) is accessible via internet.

Already from the beginning of the ALM cooperation there were plans not only to move together but also to have a shared service to the public. Therefore a shared information center was opened in March 2011 called "Eskilskällan" (Eskilswell) which is located in the library. Here one can search in the databases with the photographic collections from the City Museum and the Municipality Archives, the database for the object collections of the City Museum, the archival registers from the Archives of Industries and Commerce, the Archive of the Popular Movements, the Archive of the Sweden Finns and the Municipality Archives as well as the library catalogue, which also includes a register of articles relevant to the history of Eskilstuna found in different journals and yearbooks. In this part of the library one also finds the so called "local book collection" including literature and journals about Eskilstuna and Sörmland county and a collection of actual and historical maps. Subsequent to this there is a room dedicated to Genealogy, where one can use different online databases (which one normally has to pay for but here gets for free), read the microfilms and fiches with the local newspapers (from the 1840 onward) and the population register for Eskilstuna and Sördermanland county from the 17th century to the 1930s.

The information desk at Eskilskällan is served 5 days a week 4 hours a day alternating by staff from all archives (with the exceptions of the Archive of Swedish Children's Arts), the collections specialists of the City Museum and the librarians responsible for the local book collection (17 persons altogether). Additionally there are 2 hours in the late afternoon on Mondays, 4 hours once a month on Saturdays and services for genealogist by the Eskilstuna-Strängnäs association of genealogists (Eskilstuna-Strängnäs släktforskarförening) 3 hours every week. Otherwise Eskilskällan is open to the public at the same times as the library (10-19 weekdays, 10-14 Saturdays and from October until March even on Sundays 13-16).

This information center is complemented by a journal (also named Eskilskällan) which comes out twice a year and special programs and events round the archival material plus regularly guided tours in the archives for the public.

To get more material to present on the website and to increase accessibility to the collections once again a digitalization project has been started in March 2011 as a part of the work with Eskilskällan. 6 persons "employed" in a state work creation scheme and a project leader (employed by the municipality) are scanning and cataloguing parts of the photographic collections from the City Museum and the Municipality Archives in a

database. This database is accessible for the public in the rooms of Eskilställan information center (as described above). An internet version will be available in the beginning of the next year.

Analysis

What consequences does all that have for our user/customer and for the staff?

I will concentrate on the last question because from that we have most experiences. Since the information center opened in the end of March this year (and summer holidays in Sweden are from June to August) there is not enough evidence or statistics for concrete conclusions. The staff of the institutions moved to the House of archives in the end of 2009 and beginning of 2010. So here we have already experience from more than one year of working together.

Unfortunately no member of the library staff is resident in the House of Archives. That would have been better for the cooperation with the library. Just now it seems that the library is not as much involved in the cooperation and exchange of knowledge between the members of the staff (belonging to the geographical placement: e.g. in the library building and not in the House of Archives). Even if they are resident in the building close by it is a way of about 2-3 minutes to go and that is too long.

Advantages

The staff resident in the House of Archives is sitting in an open-plan office. Even if there are the usual difficulties with noisy surroundings, this type of office leads to an easier way of cooperation. For example if a member of the municipality archives get a question by phone which he or she cannot answer directly or only partly the person goes directly to the specialist in the same room reaching the telephone (we are working with mobile phones) to the person in question and by that the user/customer get a more complete answer to the problem and is spared to do another call. Likewise it is now normal for all the staff located in the House of Archives to control with the colleagues from all institutions if they have material in their collections which could be relevant for the case/question they are dealing with. That had not happened before. Then it was up to the user/customer to contact the institutions. Now the institution contacts the customer. This results in a better service to the public

Another effect is that now everybody working in the House of Archives knows more about the conditions, terms and way of working of each other. That even the City museum had a great archive with material relevant to question normally asked to the Archive of Industry and commerce wasn't known before (at least not in detail what can be found there) or that the museum had objects in its collection which can complete the answer to a question directed to the municipality archives. Through this cooperation the knowledge of what kind of material is stored in the other archives has grown by all members of the staff working in the House of Archives. By that the service to the public has become better at all institutions.

Another advantage is that we - especially thanks to the digitalization project - now have common rules and routines. That belongs for example to how to treat the material and to behave in the magazine (all have taken the same crash course in working conditions) and how to handle the photographic material in the climate archive. The Municipality Archives now also have a routine what to do with photographic material when they get new deliveries of material which is based on the routines of the City museum.

The importance of the coffee break

Even if the advantages described above are a good thing and not unimportant there is one thing that is more important than all other kinds of working together: The coffee break (the most holy time at Swedish working places!). This informal way of talking often about things happening in the own work, is a great source of inspiration which may not to be underestimated. Many ideas for future projects, better cooperation and at least information of what's going on at the other institutions has been borne or produced at a coffee break. Almost everybody working in the House of archives takes care of the coffee times to take a break and have some inspirational conversation with the colleagues. The advantage is that there are only 20 people working at this place and that everybody is willing to share his or her ideas and knowledge.

Difficulties

Besides all this positive effects there are even certain difficulties. One problem lies in the very strict regulations of the municipality's IT-policy. The non municipal institutions do not have access to the municipality's internal network (intranet). That causes problems for example when access to the databases of the other institutions is needed (these databases are just now not available on the internet or the bases at the internet lack information for example placements of material).

Another problem is the risk that the non municipal institutions loose somewhat of their profile. The Archive of Popular Movement, the Archives of Industry and Commerce and the Archive of the Sweden Finns are organized as associations and financed by others than the municipality. They have certain costs for example rents for the storage place and the office. Therefore they must profile themselves and make clear to their customers the differences between them and the municipality institutions (otherwise they won't get the money they need).

The effects for the museums staff not concerned with the collections (such as curators, exhibition specialists, educators etc.) were not as positive as for the others. They have lost the contact to their originally working place. The 100 meters between the House of Archives and the City Museum are too long to do the work effectively. The space allocated every desk in the House of Archives is often too little to do creative work. And because of the open-plan office construction it is nearly impossible to concentrate for research, reading or writing texts (for example for exhibitions or catalogues). But even these persons are positive about the shorter ways of communications to the other archives and value the inspiring atmosphere of the coffee breaks.

Would all that have been achieved if we only had worked together on a digital level?

I think not. The opportunity to meet other specialist every day of the week even by chance (for example when working in the magazine) and have the opportunity of spontaneous meetings, questions etc. is very important. Had everybody stayed in his own building (as it was before 2009) one had not known so much about the others. The archives had already good contacts and a good understanding of each other. Especially the City Museum has profited from moving to the House of Archives. All staff belonging to the different archives I interviewed say that they now know much more about museum work in general and the collections of the City Museum in detail and by that now have better understanding for the other institution. By that they can give better service to their customers for example by such simple things that they now exactly know who is responsible for what (at least concerning to the different collections and archives at the City Museum). To have a name connected to a person one had met and talked with makes it much more easier to many of the staff to go further with a question, take the initiative to contact the specialist at the other institution and by that give broader service to the user.

Conclusion

From the presentation and analysis above I draw the following conclusion:

It is good to deal with the digital cooperation, which makes it easier for us to access information and to share it. Digitalization can also be the reason for further cooperation which can lead to shared routines for different institutions (as shown above for the City Museum and the Municipality Archives in Eskilstuna).

But access to information is only one part of the process to create and increase knowledge. Creating knowledge assumes an individual process of thinking. First when information is proofed, thought about and discussed, knowledge will be created. For the public we provide the opportunity of doing this together in the personal meeting (and if so wanted under the guidance of an expert) at the service desk in the information center. Communication in a personal meeting is not only reduced to words. The message is more complex, depending on gesture, modulation, atmosphere and environment/surrounding. This is what our users get when meeting an expert at the information desk at Eskilskällan – and vice versa. The staff working at the information desk get new input by the questions or information they get from our visitors and by that also can increase their information and knowledge (especially when shared with the other colleagues in ALM).

So in my opinion we must not forget the personal level. By meetings and cooperation between experts of different types and from different intuitions we create knowledge and we can provide better while personal and

individualized service to our customers. As I see it we even in the future need both forms the digital/virtual and real/personal to meet the needs and wishes of our users in the best way.

Sources

Interviews with the staff of the institutions made between May and August 2011.

Statistics about questions income via desk at Eskilskällan (March - August 2011).

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Literature

Gram, Magdalena (red.): ABM: samverkan mellan arkiv, bibliotek och museer. En lägesrapport på uppdrag av regeringen från Kungl. biblioteket, Riksarkivet, Statens kulturråd och Riksantikvarieämbetet, Stockholm, 2002.

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Nickel, Susanne: ABM, Access und freier Eintritt. Ein Blick auf schwedische Museumsprojekte. In: Museumskunde 73 (2008) H.1, p.101-103

Links

Eskilstuna Municipality

www.eskilstuna.se

Eskilstuna Municipality Archives

<http://www.eskilstuna.se/sv/Uppleva-och-gora/Eskilskallan---lokalhistoriskt-kallmaterial-2/Arkiv/Stadsarkivet/>

Eskilstuna Library

<http://www.eskilstuna.se/sv/Uppleva-och-gora/Bibliotek/>

Eskilstuna Municipality Archive of Music

<http://www.eskilstuna.se/sv/Uppleva-och-gora/Eskilskallan---lokalhistoriskt-kallmaterial-2/Arkiv/Eskilstuna-kommuns-musikarkiv/>

Eskilstuna City Museum

<http://www.eskilstuna.se/sv/Uppleva-och-gora/Museer-2/Eskilstuna-stadsmuseum-2/>

Eskilstuna Museum of Art

<http://www.eskilstuna.se/sv/Uppleva-och-gora/Museer-2/Eskilstuna-konstmuseum/>

The Swedish Archive of Children's Art

<http://www.eskilstuna.se/sv/Uppleva-och-gora/Museer-2/Eskilstuna-konstmuseum/Svenskt-Barnbildarkiv/>

The Swedish Library of Detective Stories

<http://www.eskilstuna.se/sv/Uppleva-och-gora/Bibliotek/Vara-bibliotek/Deckarbiblioteket/>

The Archives of Industry and Commerce in Sörmland

<http://www.foretagensarkiv-sormland.com/>

The Popular Movements Archive in Sörmland

<http://www.fa-s.se/>

The archive of the Sweden Finns

<http://www.arkisto.org/>

Eskilskällan website

<http://www.eskilstuna.se/sv/Uppleva-och-gora/Eskilskallan---lokalhistoriskt-kallmaterial-2/>

Online register for the archives of Eskilstuna

<http://gymnasieskolor.eskilstuna.se/varkiv/>

Online catalogue about Swedish ALM websites

http://80.78.212.10/jocke/09_sodrasmaland/lank_abm.asp

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