

American Ideas in the Development of Public Libraries in Norway

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Background

The nineteenth century was of fundamental importance in building a Norwegian nation, forming the central institutions of a modern society. In 1814 Norway got her Constitution and her Parliament *Storting*. The king was shared through a personal union with Sweden lasting until 1905, when Norway got her independence and her own monarchy.

The nineteenth century saw associations and voluntary organisations developing and the religious monopoly of the Lutheran State Church dissolved allowing dissenter churches to be established. It was also a century where radical political ideas were introduced and organisations founded that fought for these ideas.

Many of the ideas came from abroad, most of them from Britain and North America. There had through generations been much contact with the countries around the North Sea basin, and Norway's south west coast had long been exposed to interaction and influence from abroad, and most of the new ideas and movements first got their strongholds along this coast.

The links to America were partly due to the great emigration from Norway to the United States in the nineteenth cen-

tury, and the influence that communication with the emigrants and the many returning migrants made.

What part did the Norwegian emigrants play in the cultural development of Norway?

Ideas travelled back to Norway, by letters, by news, by visits to the home country and by people returning to Norway – return emigrants. The phenomena of return emigrants and especially their influence on the cultural development was increasing from the middle toward the end of the nineteenth century. Ideas that travelled inside people who returned in flesh were the most powerful as they often were transferred with much enthusiasm and skill.

One example is the Methodist church in Norway. It was established in September 1856 by Ole Peter Petersen who was a returned emigrant, and later to a large extent governed from USA (Furseth 1999, Hassing 1980, 1991). Other examples are connected to the role return emigrants played in popular movements as the temperance movement and the peace movement (Fuglum 1972, Nag 1985). It is interesting to compare Norway and Sweden in the case of the temperance movement. While the bulk of influences in Norway came from

Britain, Henricson and Lindblad in their book on the returning emigrants that changed Sweden, tells that it was ideas from the United States of America which were instrumental in the development of the temperance movement in Sweden (1995 p. 171-177).

This paper will, however, focus on the most conspicuous example of impact of return emigration in Norwegian cultural development: the story of the three return emigrants who brought ideas from America which revolutionized the public library system in Norway.

The Library revolution

The founding of the first public libraries in Norway is connected to the ideas of the Enlightenment and is mainly an initiative of idealistic persons and organisations. We may mention the names of bishop Fredrik Julius Bech (1758-1822), Sivert Aarflot (1759-1817), Carl Deichman (ca. 1705-1780), and Bishop Peder Hansen (1746-1810). We may also mention *Det danske landhusholdningselskab* (The Royal Danish Agricultural Society, founded 1769) and *Det Kongelige selskab for Norges Vel* (The Royal Norwegian Society for Development, founded 1809). The main activity of/in establishing libraries by these individuals and institutions took place in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Later we find persons as bishop Jacob Neuman (1772-1848), the poet Henrik Wergeland (1808-1845) and the sociologist Eilert Sundt (1817-1875) engaged in the library cause.

In the 1830s and 1840s the state came into the picture. The idea was that public libraries were not only a private matter,

it was the responsibility of the whole society. This meant that the Storting granted money for libraries, but even so the development of libraries to a large extent was dependent on the initiative of individual persons.

It was not before the end of the century that the library development gained in strength both as part of the cultural policy and in practical terms, and that was mainly due to returning emigrants from the USA.

The American influence on the development of the modern Norwegian public library and library ideology is, however, overwhelming. Geir Vestheim writes in his book on Norwegian library policy that: "In Norway in the 1890s much propaganda was made to reshape the Norwegian library system after an American model/pattern" (1997 p. 169, translated). The important persons in this connection were Hans Tambs Lyche (1857-98), Haakon Nyhuus (1866-1913) and Arne Kildal (1885-72). All of them were returned emigrants from the US.

What did the American library revolution consist in?

The library system in the US went through a revolution in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The main reason for this was a growing acknowledgement of the decisive role of enlightenment and education in a modern democratic society.

The main task of the libraries was to meet the demand for better public education and in that way be instrumental in shaping the individual citizen enabling him/her to take part in the

democratic process. American authorities considered it a duty to provide books for all of the people and to engage in a national effort to make books freely available to all classes.

This meant a fundamental change in the concept of the role and function of the library from a little-used storehouse, to a free, pervasive and diversified service for all citizens. Modern theories of public access to books, of cataloguing, and of travelling libraries were set forth and new ways of organizing the library services had to be found, and a new role for the librarian shaped/created/formed. The ideal librarian should be an educator and cultural missionary as well as a technical specialist.

Important features in the American library revolution were:

- State and municipal library legislation.
- The concept of open shelves and free access.
- The development of modern classification schemes. The first edition of Dewey's decimal classification was published in 1876.
- Modern charging systems, the Newark system in 1876.
- Development of card catalogues.
- Development of cataloguing codes: Cutter's Rules for a printed Dictionary Catalogue of 1876.
- The founding of the American Library Association in 1876.
- Publishing the Library Journal from 1876.
- Founding of the first library school in 1887.
- The development of library work with children in the 1870s and 1880s.
- Programs of library extension (e.g. travelling libraries) in the 1890s.
- Building of new libraries. Andrew Carnegie's donations for building of public libraries and libraries in institutions of higher education from 1890 were instrumental in this.

These features together give a clear

picture of building an important institution in society, with its legal basis, bureaucratic structure, practical procedures, buildings, adjacent associations, and journals and educational tools.

It was an overwhelming picture of a modern and democratic institution that met young persons arriving in the US from abroad, including our three young men from Norway.

Hans Tambs Lyche: The ideologist

Hans Tambs Lyche came to the USA in 1880, and worked at first as railroad engineer, later he became a Unitarian pastor in Janesville, Wisconsin and Warwick, Massachusetts. In 1892 he was back in Norway and started a periodical called *Kringsjå* (Panorama) in February 1893. It contained several articles about American libraries and the role of the library in society and also about more technical library questions. It soon became an influential and widely read publication among the Norwegian intelligentsia and covered a wide variety of subjects.

The first article on American librarianship was published in August 1894: "The public Library Movement in the United States", and was followed by articles on "The American Free Libraries" and "A Modern Library" in 1895.

In 1896 three more articles appeared: "Library Methods: Arrangement and Classification of Book Collections" "A public library in a small town" and "Library Methods: The Card Catalogue". This was the first presentation of the decimal classification system in Norway. Commenting on the article on the small town library, Lyche urged Norwegians

to try out the ideas presented in the article.

Several of the articles were written by well known library reformers and translated to Norwegian by Tambs Lyche who added his own editorial comments.

In one of these articles "The Public Library" (1897) John Cotton Dana states that the library is the people's library and the property of the people. W.B. Shaw in an article about "The travelling library" (1898) underlined how important this kind of library service was in thinly populated countries. In this way both ideological and practical advice was given.

A consequence of Lyche's engagement was that Norwegian newspapers started to write about the library cause and the issue became part of the political agenda.

To sum up: Lyche gives a very positive and persuasive description of the pioneering developments of American libraries. He strongly recommended the United States as an example to be followed in library matters. And his ideas gained support among intellectuals and politicians in Norway.

In 1896 a proposal was put forth by Hans Tambs Lyche, Jens Braage Halvorsen and Karl Fischer for the complete reorganization of the main public library in Oslo, Deichmanske bibliotek, the Deichman library. This proposal reflects most of the ideas that Lyche had been propagating in Kringsjå.

Haakon Nyhuus: The practitioner

It was Haakon Nyhuus who should realise the American library ideas in Norway. He emigrated to the US in 1890. Accidentally he got a job in 1891 at Newberry

Library in Chicago and later (1893) became leader of the Catalogue Department at Chicago Public Library. This meant that Nyhuus got a thorough knowledge of the newest trends in American library development, and came in contact with some of the most outstanding librarians of the time. In March 1897 he returned to Norway with the intention to reform the main public library in Oslo, the Deichman Library. Plans were, as we mentioned, already made in 1896 by Tambs Lyche, Fisher and Halvorsen. In 1898 the new plans were approved by the local municipalities, and Haakon Nyhuus was appointed chief librarian at the Deichman Library.

Geir Vestheim gives this account of Nyhuus' work and the library revolution:

"In a period of fifteen years /.../ Nyhuus turned upside down the public library in the capital (Oslo) and made a lot of fuss in the Norwegian library system – most of it because of American ideas (Ringdal 1985). Nyhuus was the one who realised the ideas that others were pregnant with. Common for all the people who eagerly wished a reform, was that they were influenced by the new ideas from the USA: revision of the catalogues and the classification system (Dewey), "open shelves" and freer access for the public, building of reading rooms and branches, ambulatory library services, just to mention a few. These were ideas that Nyhuus was spokesman for, and which he managed to carry through in short time in Kristiania (Oslo)." (1997 p. 170-171 translated).

Arne Kildal: The strategist

Arne Kildal may be seen as the most important person in the long perspective as regards implementing and developing the American library ideas, first as a librarian and president of the Norwegian Library Association (1913-16, 1929-33), later as library consultant and assistant secretary (*byråsjef*) in the ministry of Church and Education (1937-49 except war years), and finally director for Norwegian Directorate for Public Libraries (1949-56). He was also the brain behind the library laws of 1935, 1947 and 1955.

Arne Kildal became early acquainted with Nyhuus who strongly advocated that future librarians should get their library education in the US. Kildal listened to his advice and travelled twenty years old in 1905 to America to attend Library School in Albany, New York. The principal of the school was Melvin Dewey and he was also leader of New York State Library situated in the same building. Melvin Dewey was the originator of the Decimal classification system, he founded the first library school in the world, the first library periodical and was also cofounder of The American Library Association (1876). Dewey was a gründer and self made man in the library world. He was practical and vigorous man and unconventional in his approach.

After his graduation in 1907, Kildal worked in the catalogue department at Yale University, New Haven in Connecticut, later at Library of Congress, the World's largest library, in Washington. Here he encountered the newest in library technique and organisation.

In 1909 he was offered the job as head

of the library in Superior, Wisconsin and, at the same time, he was asked to be head of the public library in Bergen, Norway. After a difficult decision, he chose to return to Norway. He used his knowledge and expertise to reorganise and eventually build a modern public library in Bergen. The new library building was finished in 1917. Arne Kildal was also struggling for a Norwegian library association after pattern of the American library association, and succeeded in 1913 when Norsk Bibliotekforening (Norwegian Library Association) was founded. As we have seen he later became the main policymaker in/of Norwegian library policy.

The further implementation of the American library revolution in Norway

Tambs Lyche, Nyhuus and Kildal were followed by others who maintained/kept up the close ties between America and Norway, and who were instrumental in transferring and realising the American ideas in Norway.

Many Norwegian librarians, especially young women got their library education in the USA. Norwegians formed the largest group amongst the foreigners taking library education at American library schools (Ringdal 1985, 139-141). In the period 1887-1926 a total of 206 foreign students graduated from American library schools. Sixty five of them or 31% were Norwegians. Some stayed and became "real" emigrants like Katrine Hvidt and Torstein Knutson Jahr (Library of Congress). Others went back to Norway after finished training like Martha Emily Larsen (later Mrs Jahr), who became the first librarian at

the newly founded Trondheim public library, and Bolette Sontum who was in charge of one of the new branches of the Deichman Library. Most of the “America-librarians” got important positions in Norway.

Joseph Periam Danton has written a treatise on United States Influence on Norwegian Librarianship 1890-1940 (Danton 1957). His main conclusion is in agreement with the view expressed in this article: “The library developments in Norway are ascribable to the writing and professional activity of a small group of Norwegians who, beginning in the 1880’s, travelled, studied and worked in the United States, and who were directly influenced by American library ideas.” (Danton 1957 p. 75).

J. Periam Danton uses strong words when elaborating his point. He says that the influence on the development of library theory and practice in Norway from 1890-1940 “...provides a towering example of international cultural influence”. Further: “The American Library revolution was ...almost bodily transplanted across the Atlantic”.

And the transplantation was nearly literally. Not only the new philosophy of librarianship and library service and new procedures was transferred, but also practical devices such as American catalogue card, metal shelves and special typewriters were imported. Library buildings were almost copies of American counterparts: Deichman Grünerløkka, 1914, Bergen 1917, Kildal’s library, “on the basis of American impulses”. Kristiansund 1915, Haugesund 1917, Ålesund og Kristiansund 1919, Larvik 1921, Rjukan 1924, Levanger og Hamar 1925, Fred-

rikstad 1926, Moss 1927, Oslo 1933. A program for travelling library was implemented in 1906, and the Dewey classification system was introduced at Deichman Library i 1898. It is also interesting that the American trend, contrary to the European tradition, of librarianship as a female vocation, was followed up by the Norwegian library system.

Norway was the first of the Scandinavian countries to carry through a library revolution based on American principles, and became in many ways a showcase for Scandinavia, to some extent also for the rest of Europe.

How did the Norwegian library revolution relate to the general Norwegian emigration?

According to Danton the Norwegian library revolution is only vaguely, if at all, connected to general emigration from Norway to the US. He says:

“However, we should accept with considerable caution Norwegian emigration as a factor affecting librarians. The fact that three states, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, which have had large concentrations of Norwegians, attracted, respectively, none, three, and eight Norwegian library school students indicates that general immigration to the United States, or the presence in this country of an Uncle Peder, may not have been a very important influence on librarians”. (Danton 1957).

Why then did so many librarians go to the United States to get their library education?

Danton thinks that personal influence from the people who had been already there and got their education

may have been a major cause. The reputation American library education had for being of high quality may have been another factor. In the beginning Hans Tambs Lyche's articles in *Kringsjå* might have had some influence, but the actual development of Deichmanske library in Oslo and the role of Haakon Nyhuus in this as well as Nyhuus personal advice might have been decisive for many.

According to Danton, the presence of relatives and friends in different states is not important. It does not explain that young people go to America to get their library education, and the library education has minimal attraction on already arrived immigrants.

I do partly disagree with Danton. Seen in a broader perspective the Norwegian mass emigration played a role in the library revolution. It was easier for a Norwegian to travel to the US because so many had already gone to America, and the New World was part of the common mind in Norway. There was a considerable amount of contact in this period. People travelled to and from the US and the American society had a great influence on many parts of life in Norway. The same was not generally true of contact with other European countries.

Even if Danton does not think that the extensive Norwegian emigration to the United States played a great role in recruiting students to American library schools, one should not underestimate the significance of the close relationship and the knowledge many Norwegians had of America as a factor that could ease the decision to cross the Atlantic for education.

In which way is our migrating librar-

ians part of the general emigration picture? They depart from the usual picture: they are often well off, there are many women, they are seeking education, many of them plan to return. Even so they are part of the migration picture.

Danton's concept of emigration is too narrow. He seems to reckon only those to be emigrants who travel to the US to stay, hoping for a better life. This may have been typical for Norwegians and Scandinavians in certain periods, but it does not include/comprise all the different types of migration accounted for in modern migration theory, for example periodic migration, work migration, migration connected to education etc, and last but not least the importance and dimension of return migration. Taking this into account, our returning librarians fit well into the general pattern of migration. I would see this as an example of returning emigrants, of individuals going to another country, acquiring ideas, skills, training, knowledge and taking it back to the home country and implementing it there.

The phenomena of return migration is, however, still an area of research in which conceptual framework and theories are developing.

There is another point in Danton's conclusions about the Norwegian library revolution that needs a critical look. He maintains that the American library revolution was almost bodily transplanted across the Atlantic, that there was an adoption of American library philosophy in Norway, that the American library revolution was later paralleled in Norway.

Was the Norwegian library revolution

only a copying of the American system – as Danton suggests – or was it being adapted to the conditions of the Norwegian society? At first it was fairly closely copied, but that it soon started to be transformed and adapted to Norwegian conditions. In the longer perspective Arne Kildal was the person who had the knowledge, experience and courage to complete this transformation and make a Norwegian national library system.

Conclusion

Returned emigrants contributed greatly both to the general cultural development and the development of the library institution in Norway – especially in the latest part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. In the first place the library ideas were brought to Norway by genuine return emigrants, Tambs Lyche, Nyhuus and Kildal. In the second place, this was followed up by a continuing stream of librarians having got their education in America, and together with their colleagues they not only transferred, but also transformed the American library ideas and practices to suit the demands and needs of the Norwegian society.

In this article we have described one of the most conspicuous examples of return migration impact in Norway – but there are many others – and it may be that the more hidden influences turn out to be the most interesting.

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