

Say hello to your new librarian

There is a silent revolution going on in our libraries. Not long ago, libraries were independent. Free to choose, buy and recommend literature and factual books from amongst all the books that were in print. Then came eBooks...



What did these mean for libraries?

The same content, fantastic new format. Now reading and knowledge could be spread to many more people! Through computers, tablets and smart phones, new readers would be found, even among those who might never have made it through an entire book printed on paper.

And for major publishers?

Threats and opportunities. E-books are potential cash cows - provided that the threat of libraries' independent choices and purchases are eliminated.

The results, when the big publishers' requirements are up against the mission of libraries, have been disappointing. Today, through their monopoly distributor Elib, major publishers - not libraries - control which eBooks are available for lending, and when they will be released to the libraries. In practice, this means that anyone who wants to borrow an eBook has to wait patiently for several months until the title has dropped from the top of the best-selling charts. If the book succeeds at all in qualifying from the publishers' point of view, that is.

Your new librarian likes money more than books and owns a large publishing company. Is this how we want it to be? What do our politicians think?

The standpoint of the Swedish Library Association

For the Swedish Library Association, the eBook issue means standing up for the fundamental mission of libraries. The public library service is aimed at everyone's freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of national borders. It is enshrined in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and further developed in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The right of free access to information is essential to be able to use an individual's right of freedom of opinion and expression. Libraries have therefore ultimately a democratic mandate when they make information and knowledge available to all.

E-books and public libraries

An eBook is one of several formats that public libraries buy to supply to their borrowers. E-reading is still in its infancy in Sweden. Here one has access to around 5,000 titles while in the U.S., for example, perhaps the most advanced country in the e-reading world, has access to 1 million titles. E-books have the potential to spread reading to more people and new groups of readers that libraries would otherwise find hard to reach. Access to eBooks in libraries is thus not only a question of freedom for users to choose their preferred format, but also affects the libraries' core mission: to encourage the reading process and provide citizens free access to information.

In terms of the authors' and publishers' interests, libraries also work as storefronts and as introducers of individual authors and their works. The lending of eBooks will help libraries to both increase the availability of new and popular books, and introduce new technology to new groups. This will be useful to the publishers in the long run.

The current compensation model

Today's compensation model has passed its' sell-by date. Today, libraries pay a fee of about 20 SEK per loan. Libraries are often forced to ration their purchases and lending of eBooks. The limitations of eBook lending inhibit a library's core mission - to enhance the reading matter format and facilitate citizens' right to free access to information.

Payment per loan treats all eBooks in the same way. This is an unreasonable approach because the vast majority of eBooks are only borrowed a very limited number of times or never. Libraries have the task of building collections. These include books, regardless of format, that are not on the best-selling charts. Existing statistics show that eBooks spend a very short time on such charts. Thereafter interest drops quickly. Local examples show, however, that the interest to borrow individual titles may be affected by the activities of libraries.

A new compensation model

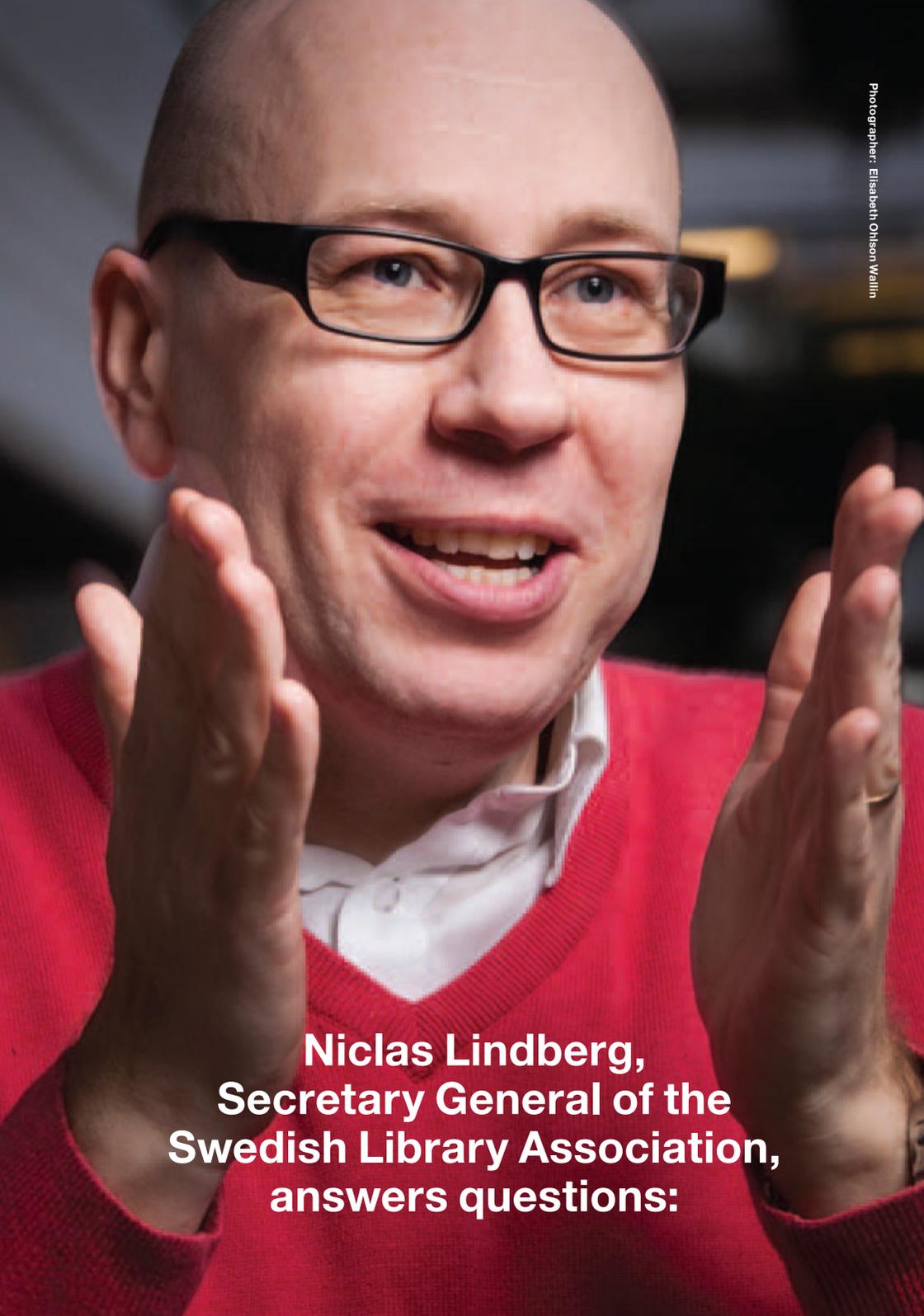
The Swedish Library Association wants a model with payments for eBooks that change over time. Higher fees during the first few weeks when a book is new, and then lower fees, the older the book is. The reason is that libraries make available all eBooks, even those that do not have a commercial market. In 2011, about 1,500 eBook titles were never loaned from public libraries, and about 100 titles accounted for half of all eBook lending. Libraries will continue to pay publishers and authors for the materials purchased. Libraries want to continue to pay their way, while giving their users access to the full potential of eBooks.

Essential Principles for libraries

The Swedish Library Association's overall mission is to ensure everyone's right to free access to information, culture and knowledge through public libraries.

Some principles are guidelines for us when we are trying to achieve a new sustainable business model for eBook lending:

- E-books should, like printed books, be made available in public libraries for libraries to fulfil their basic mission (to contribute to well-informed citizens who through free and unfettered access to knowledge, thought, culture and information to make independent decisions and participate in the development of democracy).
- Library users should have access to all kinds of literature in all published formats, while the authors have the right to compensation for their work.
- The eBook format's ability to be accessed and used should be embraced instead of being restricted in comparison with printed books.
- The conditions for a broader range of eBooks should be created.
- Libraries should also, when it comes to eBooks, be able to offer their borrowers current material - So-called withholding periods should not occur.
- Borrowers must be able to borrow and consume media in the media channels of their choice, including digital.
- Lending of eBooks be covered by the government's flat-compensation: Libraries compensation.
- Competition in the distribution of eBooks should be sought.



Photographer: Elisabeth Ohlson Wallin

**Niclas Lindberg,
Secretary General of the
Swedish Library Association,
answers questions:**

Why has the Swedish Library Association started a campaign about eBooks?

– We will fight for everyone's right to information and knowledge!

The libraries' ability to fulfil their assignment for democracy and freedom of information becomes more difficult when commercial operators, through withholding periods and limitations of what libraries may purchase, hinder the libraries' access to eBooks. We want to show how serious and troubling this situation is for libraries' independence and freedom to acquire and lend eBooks.

What do you want to achieve?

– We want libraries to continue to be free and independent to purchase and lend the titles they want regardless of their publication format. It is basically a question of the libraries' mission for democracy and freedom of information.

Why did talks with the Swedish Publishers' Association break down?

– The Swedish Library Association's mission is to ensure everyone's right to free access to information, culture and knowledge through public libraries. We fought for a model that both ensures that library users have access to all kinds of literature in all published formats, as well as ensuring an author's right to compensation for their work. The Publishers Association locked themselves in a model that we could not support and said that they couldn't see opportunities for going along with our point of view.

The Swedish Library Association suggested that the majority of eBook titles should be subject to a form of subscription model for a fixed price. This would favour the range of titles libraries would possess, helping the libraries' mission to make available, and highlight, literature beyond the best seller charts and would give libraries clarity and control over their eBook budget. Main publishers during our conversations introduced additional withholding periods which did not bring the issue forward.

Why do you think eBooks are so important?

– E-books are in libraries to stay and we think they are a great opportunity for more people to get access to information and knowledge. Libraries have always responded to changes in the medium through which information is conveyed. With all changes in technology, libraries have adapted their operations to fit new media. Libraries will guide and introduce new users and support the introduction of new technology. In practice, libraries market the library eBook titles for publishers and also pay for those efforts.

Now we are once again facing a major technology leap. University and college libraries, as well as research libraries, have come a long way in adapting to eBooks, while public libraries are still at the beginning of the trend.

What do you want to happen now?

– We want accountable politicians to take a stand on the issue and give their support to libraries. The Government has determined that Sweden will be the best in the world at using digitization opportunities. This also requires concrete initiatives from the government and parliament to eliminate barriers to library eBook lending.

At the same time all libraries, The National Library, The Repository Library / The Loan Centre and the Swedish Library Association must, in other ways, continue working with our public libraries to broaden libraries' access to eBooks. There are books without copyright that can be digitized and made available as eBooks. There are books where the authors themselves have rights to their eBook, but lack opportunities for digitization. And there are local materials in libraries that could become eBooks. Here there must be more initiatives and a national technical infrastructure that supports making such materials available to all.



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