



Evidence Summary

Cataloguing Remains an Important Skill at Public Libraries in the Modern Metadata Landscape of Norway

A Review of:

Preminger, M., Rype, I., Ådland, M.K., Massey, D., & Tallerås, K. (2020). The public library metadata landscape, the case of Norway 2017–2018. *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, 58(2), 127–148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2020.1711836>

Reviewed by:

Jordan Patterson
Cataloging and Metadata Librarian
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada
Email: jpatterson13@mun.ca

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Abstract

Objective – To understand cataloguing practices in Norwegian public libraries through the analysis of a set of MARC records.

Design – Quantitative content analysis.

Setting – 2 central cataloguing agencies and 49 public libraries in Norway.

Subjects – 21,275 cataloguing agency records and 116,029 public library catalogue records.

Methods – The researchers derived a sample set of MARC records from the central

cataloguing agencies and public libraries. Matching records from each agency (i.e., records for the same manifestation catalogued separately at each agency) were compared. Then, MARC records exported from public libraries were compared to matching records from the central agencies.

Main Results – The two central agencies differed in some cataloguing practices while still adhering to the accepted standards. Public libraries made few changes to records imported from central libraries, and among public libraries, larger libraries were more likely to alter agency-derived MARC records.

Conclusion – Current practices indicate that despite the prevalence and efficiency of centralized cataloguing, training in cataloguing remains important in public libraries, particularly in larger libraries.

Commentary

The late age of MARC, when RDA is under constant revision and BIBFRAME is not yet ready for implementation, is the perfect time for cataloguing librarians to cast a critical eye upon their role in libraries. This is especially the case with regard to preparing future cataloguers to enter the complex, shifting world of library metadata. A broad assessment of current practices, such as that undertaken in this study, can provide a better understanding of the cataloguing needs of public libraries and thus inform the training requirements of the next generation of cataloguers and cataloguing librarians.

When assessed with Glynn's critical appraisal tool (2006), this study achieves a standard of validity. Within the boundaries of Norway, the researchers obtained a representative sample of cataloguing work by collecting records from both central cataloguing agencies and a fair cross-section of public libraries of varying sizes. The researchers noted that they had to modify their sample late in the process due to the revelation that not all libraries received full records from the central agency, resulting in a smaller sample size.

The researchers were more confident in their analysis and comparison of records between the two central agencies. In their dataset, they found 5,815 "directly comparable" pairs of records (p. 133). This one-to-one correspondence presented a relatively clear pattern of difference in cataloguing practices between the two agencies as well as a clear idea of the origin of that difference. When the study proceeded to the analysis of public library records, derived from a sample of 49 catalogues, the researchers were clear that they were less confident about the results because of the necessarily smaller-than-intended sample size.

While agency records are, theoretically, original creations conforming to stringent standards and produced in controlled environments, public library records have a larger number of potential sources and, through transmission, sources of interference. Where the researchers detected differences between records from the public library and those of the central agencies, they were limited to stating that differences exist and what those differences were. The motivations for those changes necessarily remain speculative, although the researchers made educated hypotheses. The ambitious scope of the present study and its high altitude did not lend themselves to the kind of detailed scrutiny of complex bibliographic records the researchers aimed to perform. Such a study would require more specific research questions and greater precision in sampling. Future research could address these issues and more properly include a more fine-grained analysis on the exact nature of record modifications.

The complementary nature of the cataloguing work performed by agencies and public libraries is a key insight of the study. Central agencies are not equipped to address the local concerns of every public library, but they can provide clean, objective bibliographic records. Public libraries, conversely, may not have the resources to provide original cataloguing for every item, but they do possess an expert understanding of their own users' needs and can modify subjective elements of the bibliographic record accordingly. Since both central agencies and public libraries perform important cataloguing work, each contributing where the other cannot, cataloguing remains an essential skill in libraries of all sizes.

References

- Glynn, L. (2006). A critical appraisal tool for library and information research. *Library Hi Tech*, 24(3), 387–399. <https://doi.org/10.1108/07378830610692154>