The relationship between the National Library and the metropolitan University Library: the Nordic scene (3. rev.)

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1. Introduction

The development of the European national library systems stretches over centuries. In many cases an important element in this development has been the institutional relationship between the library function at the metropolitan university (i.e. the principal university in the capital city) and the national library function created in connection with the passing of legal deposit laws in the various European countries.

Basically, there are two forms of the institutional relationship between the national library and the metropolitan university library. One form is separation in the sense that the two institutions were always separate or became separated by parliamentary or governmental decree. The other one is integration in the sense that the two were always integrated or became integrated by the same kind of decree.

In Europe today, there are five examples of national library functions being integrated with university library functions: Danmark, Finland, Iceland, Croatia, and Slovenia. Moreover, there are two examples of national library functions being integrated with parliamentary library functions, i.e. Estonia and Lithuania.
The relationship differs greatly from country to country and from period to period, and the question of the institutional relation between the national library and the metropolitan university library is still quite alive as witnessed by recent developments in Denmark and Finland.

The Nordic countries have by now chosen quite different models for this institutional relationship, as the following sketch will show.

2. Integration: the cases of Iceland and Denmark

Two countries have chosen a model of integrating the national library function with the function of metropolitan university library, i.e. Iceland and Denmark.

2.1 Iceland

In Iceland a national library (Landsbókasafn Íslands) was founded by German and Danish benefactors in 1818 with the financial support of local authorities, the chancery and the king. At this time Iceland was under the Danish crown. The library has always been located in Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland. In 1874 it was decided to give the library a yearly grant or official funding. Before that, the collection consisted of donations. Legal deposit was created in 1886 when all printing houses in the country were required to deliver two copies of all printed material.

The University Library was created in 1940 by amalgamating several existing departmental libraries at the University of Iceland. The University Library was also legalised as a depository library in 1941 and received one copy of all Icelandic print.

Already in the 1940s a discussion started to merge the two libraries. The national librarian, Guðmundur Finnbogason, thought it was irrational to maintain two academic libraries in Reykjavík. His aim was the construction of a new building for both libraries on the university campus. The University library should serve as a reference library, but teachers and students should
also have direct access to the collections of the National Library. Also the libraries should avoid the acquisition of double copies, except in special circumstances.

In 1956, the Minister of Education nominated a committee to explore the advantages of combining the functions of the two libraries, partially or in whole. The committee deemed it reasonable to amalgamate the National Library of Iceland and the University Library of Iceland University, and in 1957 parliament (Althingi) resolved to do so, as quickly as possible, with the National Library as the main library and the University Library as a reference and student library. A close collaboration between the two libraries should start immediately with a view to the subsequent integration.

From the outset, an important motive for the decisions was the growing problem of housing as well as a number of practical and economical considerations. Basically, it was felt that the Icelandic nation did not have the resources for maintaining two big research libraries separately. It would be better to merge the two libraries organisationally and financially with a view to obtaining better use of the collections, better use of staff and merging of the offices of the national librarian and the university librarian. A prerequisite for the integration was the building of a new library near the university.

In 1966 the Ministry of Education recommended the implementation of the previous parliamentary decision and that the integrated library should be placed in a new building near the university.

It actually took a whole generation before the new building was finished in 1994 and The National and University Library of Iceland opened as one library institution.

Today, the library provides both national library services to the whole nation and university library services to the University of Iceland. Infrastructural functions and IT/web-services are integrated, but service functions are clearly divided between national library services and university library services. The latter are provided both centrally in the building of The National and University Library and locally in several departmental libraries at the university, which all function under the direct authority of the National Librarian.
Since the opening of the integrated national and university library in 1996 the new building and the new facilities have influenced the operations of the library tremendously. The new library is has plenty of space for guests, staff and collections. The library is much better equipped to lead the library community of Iceland, and it can form and maintain technical and expert teams in many fields.

The university benefits from the National collections, especially the humanities (history, Icelandic etc).

The library has resources to participate in international cooperation

A problem has been how to keep close contact with university departments, and the library clearly has to focus on this relationship.

One of the main objectives is to bring the library and the collections to the user – on the Internet.

Today the National and University Libray has about 900,000 volumes, 15,000 manuscripts and access to 20,000 electronic journals and several databases, and it holds about 2 million pages of digitised material on the Internet. The staff consists of about 100 people (83 FTE).

On July the 1st 2008 the Iceland University of Education and the University of Iceland will merge. The former has a learning center consisting of a library and a computer and media center. The operations will be united gradually and the process has already started.

2.2 Denmark

The university library of Copenhagen is considered to date from 1482, i.e. three years after the opening of the University of Copenhagen, when one of the professors of the university donated a collection of books to the university. In 1657 it moved to its first proper library premises (in rooms over the new university church, Trinity Church). At this time it contained about 10,000 volumes.
About the same time, c. 1648, king Frederick III established his own Royal Library, mostly on the basis of collections bought from nobles. In 1673, the library moved into a new building constructed after the pattern of Cardinal Mazarin’s library in Paris.

Subsequent kings had no great interest in the library, and when the university library lost most of its collections during the great fire in Copenhagen in 1728, the Royal Library quite naturally and for some generations served as the academic library in Copenhagen. Since then there were two important academic libraries existing side by side in that comparatively small city, the university’s own library and the Royal Library. Increasingly, however, the Royal Library focused on the humanities, theology, law and later the social sciences, and it more or less duplicated the functions of the university library in these areas, whereas natural sciences and medicine were mostly covered by the university library alone.

In 1697 the Royal Library acquired legal deposit and in 1793 it was opened to the public. These two measures form the basis of its development to its present day status as the national library. It should be added that the State Library in Aarhus, which was founded in 1902, besides its functions as university library for the University of Aarhus (since 1928) also has legal deposit and some national library functions.

In the middle of the 19th century it was for the first time proposed to merge the Royal Library and the University Library.

In 1938 the University library split into two parts, the UL1 for the humanities, social sciences, law and theology and UL2 for the natural sciences and medicine, and the UL2 moved to a separate building on the new science campus of the University of Copenhagen.

From 1930 the University Library became institutionally and financially separated from the University of Copenhagen, and in 1943 it came under the newly established office of the national librarian, who was also the director of the Royal Library.

During the 20th century, quite a number of libraries grew up at the various departments of the university, being quite independent of both the University Library and the Royal Library so that library services were now provided by
three parties, the Royal Library, The University Library and the libraries of the university departments themselves.

In 1989 the Ministry of Culture decided to merge the Royal Library with UL1, since the subject areas and service functions in relation to the university of these two libraries were by now completely overlapping. Three years earlier, in 1986, the UL2 was given its institutional independence and became the Danish national research library for Natural and Health Sciences.

The motivation for merging the UL1 and the Royal Library were to integrate the two separately functioning but duplicated library services in the fields of theology, the humanities, law and social sciences. A major factor in the decision process was undoubtedly the insistence of the new Royal Librarian, who made it a condition for his staying in the job.

In 2005, the Minister of Culture made another important step in the direction of integrating the library institutions serving the university by merging The Royal Library with the former UL2, at that time the Danish national research library for Natural and Health Sciences. The background for this decision was a general movement towards consolidating the cultural institutions under the ministry. Specifically, the reasons for this merger were given as:

Firstly, to strengthen library services to the University of Copenhagen by merging the resources of the two libraries.

Secondly, to create a new organisation with an extensive resource base for innovative development and quality improvement.

The ministry expressly stated that the motivation was not to save money.

The University of Copenhagen agreed to the merger on the condition that the Copenhagen University Library should be reconstituted as a distinct organisational unit within the overall institutional framework of the Royal Library.

So, by 2005 the century long process of integrating the two major academic libraries serving the university, i.e. The Royal Library with its university functions, and the University Library, was complete.

However, the process did not stop there.
Firstly, all the departmental libraries with their own small branch libraries were still functioning – and functioning independently of the University Library under the Royal Library, and independently of each other. Secondly the University of Copenhagen in 2007 merged with the Danish University of Agricultural and Veterinary Sciences and with the Danish University of Pharmaceutical Sciences, both located in Copenhagen and both having their own university library.

The 2005-merger between the Royal Library and the Danish National Library for Science and Medicine had seemingly created a strong impetus towards further consolidation. After intensive analysis and a protracted period of negotiation it was at the end of 2007 decided to create a joint library organisation between the University of Copenhagen and the Royal Library, comprising the University Library under the Royal Library and all the c. 50 libraries still directly under the university. As the structure of the university is based on eight faculties (humanities, law, medicine etc.) it was decided that the joint library organisation should comprise a library for each faculty (the ones for natural sciences and health sciences to be managed jointly). The deputy director general of the Royal Library in charge of its university library unit was appointed director of the joint library organisation, CULIS, with the title of University Librarian.

The formal motivation for the establishment of CULIS was to create an appropriate organisational framework for the development of the library functions at the University of Copenhagen over the next decades and to ensure the optimal use of the total resources spent on these library functions.

3. Separation: the cases of Norway and Sweden

Two other Nordic countries, Sweden and Norway, have chosen the opposite model: instead of integration they have preferred to separate the functions of the national library and the metropolitan university library.

3.1 Sweden
In Sweden, the old universities are those of Uppsala (1477) and Lund (1666). In Stockholm, a university college, Stockholm Högskola, was founded in 1878 and was granted university status as late as 1960.

The national library goes back to the book collections of the Vasa kings in the 16th century. The first Royal Librarian was appointed in 1611 and legal deposit to the Royal library was decreed in 1661, thus creating the basis of its functions as a national library which was formally established in 1877. As in Denmark, the Royal Library over the years grew into a major research library open to the public and eventually focusing on the humanities.

Contrary to Denmark, the Royal Library by far antedates the University of the capital city, Stockholm, and the relationship between the national library and the university library in Stockholm could not become an issue before the creation of the University and the University Library in the middle of the 20th century.

The library of Stockholm University goes back to the founding of the Stockholm Högskola in 1877. Over the years the Högskola developed a number of departmental libraries, e.g. for social sciences, law, humanities and slavonic literature. After the Högskola became a university and moved to new buildings in Frescati, these libraries moved to the new campus. Today the university library consists of the main library and 13 branch libraries.

Relationships between the libraries at the Stockholm Högskola, later the Stockholm University, and the national library were formerly close in the sense that the university’s libraries were for a 25-year period administered by the Royal Library: In 1953 a formal agreement between the Royal Library and the then Stockholm Högskola stipulated that the Royal Library should be the university library for the humanities and the social sciences. Academics and students in the sciences and the arts used other libraries in Stockholm. Over the years, however, staff at the university increasingly felt the need for a clear division of responsibilities between the Royal Library and the library function at the university. In 1977, the Royal Library gave up its function as Stockholm university library, and Stockholm University library was established as a separate organisation, independent of the Royal Library. It is now an integral part of Stockholm University and the main library is placed in a separate library building which opened in 1983.
The Royal Library, today the National Library, still acquires foreign literature in the humanities, and is heavily used by academics from the university, but as a matter of principle it serves the University of Stockholm in its capacity as the national library and on the same level as all the other Swedish libraries.

Today, there are no special relations between the National library and Stockholm University Library. There is some coordination of acquisitions in the humanities, but this coordination is carried out in a broader framework for coordination between a number of libraries in Stockholm called HIS, and not especially between the National Library and the University Library.

It deserves to be mentioned that both the present and the former director general of the Royal Library were previously directors of Stockholm University Library.

3.2 Norway

From 1380 to the end of the Napoleonic wars (1814), the crown of Norway was united with crown of Denmark. Obviously, the Danish-Norwegian king, who resided in Copenhagen, only needed one Royal Library, so there was never a Royal Library in Oslo which could develop into a national library.

The University of Oslo was established by royal decree in 1811 and came into being in 1813, the year before the Danish king lost Norway to Sweden as part of the peace in Vienna, where Denmark was on the losers’ side.

The university library was established at the same time as the university and has for almost 200 years been the dominant academic library in the Norwegian capital.

Very soon after its foundation, in 1815, it was given the function of national library and in subsequent generations national library functions which had formerly been performed by the Royal Library in Copenhagen were taken over by the University Library in Oslo. Since then, the library has held the double function of university library for the University of Oslo and of national library.
In the second half of the 20th century it became increasingly evident that this arrangement had ceased to be advantageous.

Firstly, economic pressures on the library led to a permanent competition for funds between the national and the university function of the library, a competition which the national function consistently lost, with the result that the it became seriously underdeveloped.

Secondly, the original situation with one major academic library in Norway had over the years given way to a situation with more than 400 academic libraries scattered over all of Norway. The rationale for one major library in Norway had by this time evaporated completely.

Thirdly, the importance of the national library function had developed to such an extent that it could easily justify its own separate institution, as was the case in most other European countries.

On the basis of recommendations from two separate commissions, Parliament in 1984 decided to divide the university library in Oslo and to establish a separate national library.

Over the next years, the matter moved somewhat slowly, but it 1988 it suddenly gained momentum due to one of those coincidences which sometime move important causes for not quite the right reasons.

A major industry closed in the small city of Mo in Rana in the Northern part of Norway, very far from Oslo, and economic disaster was threatening the region. Then, an inventive mind somewhere imagined the solution to use the premises for housing essential functions of the future national library, i.e.-legal deposit and digitisation processes. An attractive feature of this solution was that it would be paid for by the comparatively wealthy Ministry of Business, and not by the poor Ministry of Culture and Education!

The Oslo elite and librarians were in uproar, of course, but the politicians carried the matter through, and a National Library Section was established in that very remote city of Mo in Rana. The National Library was not yet established, so it was not quite evident what the Rana Section was a section of, but such things do not worry politicians and broad minds!
The further process consisted in three steps:

In 1994 The Oslo University Library (UBO) was divided into two parts, one of which was established as the new Oslo branch of the National Library. From now on, The National Library of Norway has existed in two locations: Oslo and Mo i Rana.

In 1999, the University Library functions were separated from the National Library in Oslo and later physically moved to the university campus at Blindern.

And finally in 2005 The National Library opened in a restored and new national library building. The extraordinary and exuberant development of the National Library after its establishment has proven the justification of the decision to “free” it from the university library and to develop it as a major national cultural institution.

The university library, too, has benefited from the separation in the sense that it could now focus more clearly on its service functions to the university and on how to reorganise them in the context of the 21st century.

4. Integration and separation: the case of Finland

From the 13th century Finland was under Swedish rule. In 1809 it was ceded to the Russian empire, from which it became independent in 1917.

Just as the union of Norway with Denmark precluded the establishment of a Royal Library in Norway, in the same way the union of Finland with the Swedish and later the Russian crown precluded the creation of a Royal Library in Finland.

The University of Helsinki was founded as the Royal Academy of Turku (Åbo) in 1640 and placed in the city of Turku. In 1828, during the Russian period, it was moved to Helsinki and named the Imperial Alexander University in Helsinki. It first received the name of Helsinki University in 1919 after the independence from Russia. Today, it comprises 11 faculties
and 18 independent institutes, and it has about 39,000 degree students and 3,784 academic staff.

The library situation at the Helsinki university is rather complex.

The university library was established in 1640 together with the university. It acquired legal deposit rights in 1707 thus forming the basis of its de facto function as the national library of Finland. Beginning in 1820, Russian printing presses also began to send legal deposit copies to the Turku Academy’s Library. In 1828, the library moved to Helsinki together with the university after the Great Fire of Turku, and since then it has been the major academic library in the capital of Helsinki, maintaining the double functions as university library and national library.

Over the years, a great number of separate libraries grew up at the various departments of the university. About 15 years ago they had attained the impressive number of 160 and the number of library staff about 250. They coexisted with the university/national library in a very loosely coupled system of libraries serving the Helsinki University, all as part of the university.

In 2006, a major reform of the library system at the University of Helsinki was put into effect.

The university library was redefined and renamed as the national library of Finland with a national librarian as its director. It maintained its functions, its buildings owned by the University and its embeddedness in the institutional structure of the Helsinki University, but its service scope was redefined to include the entire national library field. At the same time, it was freed of its formal status as university library, even though it will continue to service the university on the basis of its collections in the humanities and the arts (largely owned by the University).

All the other libraries at the university were joined in a common library structure called the University of Helsinki Libraries. A rigorous process of consolidation was set in motion about 10 years ago, which will in some years result in only four campus libraries with new library buildings, each placed in one of the four partially new subject-specific campuses of the university. The activities of the University of Helsinki Libraries are
coordinated by a special library Coordination Office, which was created after an extensive international library evaluation in 2002.

A new arrangement for collaboration between the National Library – which is still under the university – and the University of Helsinki Libraries is under development.

Among the motives for the reform were the growing need for a national approach to the provision of services to the whole Finnish library network, which developed greatly during the 1990’s. Finland’s library network is extremely efficient; the four main library sectors (university and polytechnic libraries, special libraries and public libraries) have organised their activities and have mostly joint infrastructure (Voyager-consortia, FinELib-consortia, Metalib portal/SFX). The National library’s network services for all these sectors can be grouped into three categories: developing access to high quality information; developing the digital working environment and developing impact assessment. Most of the funding is allocated by the Ministry of Education.

On the other hand, the university needs a tight integration of the library services with research and teaching processes and wishes to control the growing need for funding the library services. The University leadership has been actively involved in the strategic library development since the 1990’s: during that time many of the libraries have been merged to larger and fewer library units with new buildings, active staff planning and training and growing e-library services.

The decisions concerning the National library were made by the Ministry of Education in the University Act in 1.8.2006.

The decisions about the Helsinki University Libraries were made by the University Senate 16.8.2006 and 17.10.2007 after active planning together with the academic community.

5. Conclusions
Two questions may be asked concerning the development of the relationship between the national library and the metropolitan university library in the Nordic countries: is there a common pattern to this development, and does it have some recognisable rationality.

5.1 The pattern of development

From the above sketch of the development it is difficult to see a common pattern of development.

The two Royal Libraries, in Stockholm and Copenhagen, both eventually developed into national libraries but one has became separated from the metropolitan university library and the other has become integrated with it.

As for the two university libraries in Oslo and Helsinki, both over the years acquired the function as national library, but the one in Oslo eventually lost it, and the one in Helsinki recently was redefined as national library but remained within the institutional framework of the university in a loosely coupled library organisation.

The case of Reykjavik is special because of the smallness of the country and of the institutions involved.

So, the conclusion which imposes itself is that the history of the different countries and the individual institutions has very greatly influenced the present day relationship between the national library and the metropolitan university library and that there is no discernible common pattern.

5.2 The rationality of the present situation

But even if there is no common pattern of development, there is presumably still some underlying rationality in the present day situation in the various countries. What might this rationality be?

One rational element is size. In Iceland it is evidently felt that one joint national and university library institution fits the need of the country. The other Nordic countries – though they are still comparatively small on an
international scale – are sufficiently big to each have a number of universities, and the larger ones need library institutions which would become quite big if they were institutionally integrated with the national library. Thus size in Iceland may easily point to a joint national/university organisation and to separate libraries in the other Nordic countries.

A second rational element is **geography or location**. It is well-known that academic library patrons do not want to move very far to be able to use their library. The greater the distance, the less the library is used. The validity of this rationale is probably lessening these years, since patrons more and more use the library through electronic interfaces, even to order books. It is still a valid factor, though, and it definitely was a generation ago when a number of the decisions mentioned above were made, including the decision that the University of Stockholm should have its own library on its own campus at Frescati and not be served by the Royal Library in the center of the city.

A third rational element, **organisational complexity**, is connected with size. The larger the organisation, the more complex it becomes, and the greater the need for differentiation and specialisation between the parts of the structure. If the organisational aims of the various parts of the structure become divergent a lack of focus and of clear strategy easily ensues. The Norwegian decision to have a clearcut separation between the national library and the university library has given both units a much clearer identity and focus, and the amazing subsequent development of the national library as a national institution of culture underlines the importance of this element.

On the other hand, the recent decision in Copenhagen to move towards further integration between the Royal Library as the national library and all the university library units has its own rationality, too. Part of it consists in the local situation where certain collections at the Royal Library are both national and universitarian in nature and can only with great difficulty be separated.

More importantly, new factors have come into play which modify the situation and create other rational fundamentals than those of just 20 years ago.

Firstly, the move towards digital knowledge formats (e-periodicals and e-books) and the development of electronically based catalog and ordering systems are weakening the traditional perception of the library as a building
housing a print collection which supports the identity of the university as a place of scholarship and learning. Just think of those American libraries, disguised as enormous Greek temples, which are designed to enhance and reinforce the academic image of the university - just like the new Royal libraries of the 15th through the 17th century aimed at imaging the power and glory of the absolutist monarchy. At the opening of the new library building at Roskilde University in Denmark some years ago the president of the university proudly and reverently proclaimed the library as a temple of books. As the trend moves away from the printed book and periodical housed in special buildings, the need of the university for having its own imposing book temple to polster its academic credentials lessens.

Secondly, the trend towards consolidation of universities and of university infrastructure and the same tendency towards consolidating libraries and library systems and to provide library access through regional and national systems significantly lessen the general perception of libraries as physical institutions. The national librarian of Norway, Mrs. Vigdis Moe Skarstein, puts it this way: “In the digital age, the library is perceived less as an organisation and more as a function.”

In this context, the age-old question of the relationship between the metropolitan university library and the national library is changing fundamentally, and solutions which were unimaginable just twenty years ago become possible. Recent developments in Helsinki and Copenhagen clearly go against the tendency towards separation of the university library and the national library as decided in Stockholm and Oslo not so many years ago. Undoubtedly, the Helsinki and Copenhagen solutions are messier organisationally than those in Stockholm and Oslo. Local and historical factors partly explain this situation. But also the importance of the library as a physical institution is diminishing rapidly under the joint pressure of digitisation and consolidation. In consequence, the institutional question is loosing importance and the scope for organisational creativeness is increasing.

One size must not fit all.