

Library leadership as an issue in Norwegian Library and Information Science education

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Abstract

In this review of library leadership education given by the two main library schools in Norway, the Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA) and University of Tromsø (UiT), the focus is on the perspective from the library school: Is library leadership something special, or is it similar to other kinds of leadership of public organisations. To what extent is it possible to infer something about the perspective from the course descriptions and the required reading lists?

KEYWORDS

- ▶ *library leadership*
- ▶ *LIS education*
- ▶ *Norway*

Introduction

The research questions in this review are simply: What do the two main Norwegian library schools think about library leadership? Is it an important subject for them to teach their students? Do they see it as a special field of leadership, or is it just ordinary public leadership?

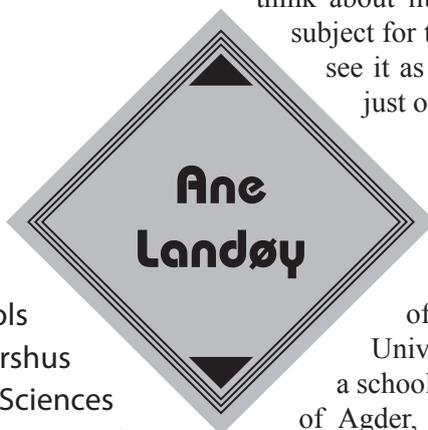
Library and Information Science (LIS) education in Norway is mainly found in two higher education institutions; the Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA) and University of Tromsø (UiT). There is also a school librarian education at the University of Agder, which mainly is an addition to a teacher education, for teachers who have school librarianship as part of their ordinary teacher job. In this review, I will look at library leadership as an issue in the educations, and the school librarian program will not be investigated further.

The two LIS-educations, at HiOA and UiT have different histories and backgrounds, and also different educational platforms and goals. In the following, I will first give some background information about the two schools, and then look at the modules they are offering in leadership-related issues.

Both HiOA and UiT follow the Bologna process setup with the three cycles.

Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA)

Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences is Norway's largest state university college, with a student body of 16 000 students and 1 850





employees. In its present form it is the result of a merger from August 2011, when the two former University colleges of Oslo and Akershus joined. They, in their turn, were the results of mergers in 1994, where single education colleges, like teacher colleges, nursing colleges and engineering colleges from the region merged (1).

The HiOA considers itself unique in a national context, with their many professional programs, the closeness to the fields of practices, and the possibilities to deeper studies at master and Ph.D-level (2).

The library school, today called “Department for archive, library and information science” has 700 students and 40 employees. They offer studies in archive, library and information subjects, among them bachelor and master studies in librarianship, with a traditional orientation similar to most European library schools (3).

University of Tromsø (UiT)

The University of Tromsø, The Arctic University of Norway, is the third largest university in Norway, with 15.500 students and 3.500 employees. UiT has been going through several mergers in the latest years, incorporating university colleges from all over the northern part of Norway. The library education has been part of the university proper since its start-up. It has, however, a slightly more “media and documentalst” perspective (4).

Methodological reflections

In the following, I will be looking at the two different library studies in Norway, and what kind of library leadership issues they cover in the education. The facts and data I investigate are their self-presentations on the official website of the institutions, including the reading lists for the

students, where possible. When searching for library leadership education, I will go beyond items discussed in “library and society” to subjects concerned with traditional leadership studies.

The library education at bachelor level, HiOA and UiT - are there leadership modules?

At HiOA, the library education, like most study programs, consists of three options: A year-study, a bachelor program and a master program. There is also a PhD-program, but it will not be considered here.

The year-study can be taken as a full-time or a part-time study, and the modules can also be taken from a distance, but then as further education/adult education and with a fee. The year study can also function as the first year of the bachelor program. Modules in the year study encompass “Knowledge organisation and retrieval”, “Library and society” and “Literature and culture communication”. There is a large amount of ICT-related issues like database search, net publishing, XML, database theory and data exchange (5).

Within the “Library and society”-part of the HiOA module, there is nothing about library leadership.

In the bachelor program at HiOA, there are two modules that are somewhat relevant to “library leadership” – one is called “Library development” and the other “Change management in libraries”. “Change management in libraries” is an elective course, where the student can choose this among three others (6).

The course description reads: “The course focuses on the leadership function with particular emphasis on change management versus value-based management. The special challenges a leader has in knowledge organizations and in very small organizations will also be emphasized. Examples of specific leadership tools are presented and evaluated. The course discusses the library leader’s many competing roles, as a leader,



professional practitioners, bureaucrats and corporate citizen. Long-term promotion of the library is treated here” (7).

On the list of required reading one can find books and articles about organisations and organisational theory, and about change management. There are no traditional “what is leadership?” texts. One part of the exam is a presentation from the topic “change management” (8).

The course content in the module “Library development” is “related to the libraries’ new role in society, which formal framework exists for libraries, how the role of libraries can be realized, as well as evaluation of library activities.” In the required reading list the main focus is evaluation and development of library services and not on library leadership as such (9).

At UiT, the module “Library, society and management” is common for both the year-study and the bachelor program.

This is the description: “The course provides a broad introduction to organizational, political and societal issues related to public and academic libraries activities. Based on theoretical perspectives on organization, management and information policy, efforts focus on library organization and diverse society arena - interacting with the environment. We study the relationship between libraries, users and society, and how this change and develop locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. The emphasis is on examining how the library and librarian role changed in the light of technological / digital and societal change, and what implications it provides for the development, organization and management of a library” (10).

The required reading list is not available. There are however so many different issues being studied here, that it is probable that library leadership is not among the main focus of the module.

The bachelor degree in “Media and documentation science” has two program options: “Media” and

“Media and document administration”. The ones that take the “Media and document administration” option, and also have library practice are eligible for working in a library. The “Library, society and management”-module is the only one with any mention of library leadership (11).

Leadership modules at master level at HiOA and UiT?

The ordinary master program at the library education at UiT is mainly concerned with how to do the research work that is involved in writing the master thesis. There are some elective modules, but none of them are related to library leadership or libraries in society (12).

At HiOA, however, there are two different master programs. One is the traditional “Master in library and information science” with nothing particular on library leadership among the elective modules. The second master program is called “Library, management and leadership”, and is intended for students that have been working in the library field and are ready for a leader job or more education. The program contains modules on “Informational and cultural communicative institutions”, “Knowledge management” and “Philosophy of science and methods”. In addition there are elective modules. The elective modules are all from the master program “Public management”, another program from the Faculty of social science at HiOA. They are called “Strategic management in the public sector” and “Organisation and change in the public sector”. The students can also choose between “Labour law in change processes” and “Economy-, budget- and performance management in public sector” (13).

In their required reading lists all the elective modules have a good mix of solid international research publications, and also papers or book (chapters) that are especially relevant for the



Norwegian public sector. There is, however, no particular literature on leadership of libraries. In some of the modules the students are required to write smaller essays, and there they are also required to find their own supportive literature in addition to the required reading lists (14).

Summary and closing remarks

In the two main library educations in Norway, library leadership is not regarded as an important issue. Focus is on the professional librarianship – knowledge organisation, literature communication and library in the society at large, at least when looking at course descriptions and required reading lists. The master program at HiOA library education “Library, management and leadership”, which mainly is intended for part time students who at the same time work, has most of its modules on leadership and management from the master program “Public management” from another department at the HiOA (15).

Library leadership in Norway has some distinct features. The libraries are quite small, measured in members of staff, and the leader in the public libraries must also, according to law, have a library education (16).

At the same time, there is anecdotic evidence from libraries in both public and academic sectors that it can be difficult to find librarians who want to become leaders and take on this responsibility.

NOTES

1. **OSLO AND AKERSHUS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF APPLIED SCIENCES.** *Arkiv-, bibliotek-, og informasjonsfag.* <http://www.hioa.no/Studier-og-kurs/Fagomraade-arkiv-bibliotek-og-informasjonsfag/Arkiv-bibliotek-og-informasjonsfag#Bachelor> [accessed 13.03.2016].
2. *Ibidem.*
3. *Ibidem.*
4. **UNIVERSITY OF TROMSØ.** *Studiekatalogen.* <https://uit.no/utdanning> [accessed 13.03.2016].
5. **OSLO AND AKERSHUS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF APPLIED SCIENCES.** *Op. cit.*
6. *Ibidem.*
7. *Ibidem.*
8. *Ibidem.*
9. *Ibidem.*
10. **UNIVERSITY OF TROMSØ.** *Op. cit.*
11. *Ibidem.*
12. *Ibidem.*
13. **OSLO AND AKERSHUS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF APPLIED SCIENCES.** *Op. cit.*
14. *Ibidem.*
15. *Ibidem.*
16. **LANDØY, Ane; ZETTERLUND, Angela.** Similarities and dissimilarities among Scandinavian library leaders and managers. In: P. Herson, N. O. Pors (red.), *Library leadership in the United States and Europe: A comparative study of academic and public libraries.* Santa Barbara, Calif.: Libraries Unlimited, 2013, p. 93–108.





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3. **UNIVERSITY OF TROMSØ.** *Studiekatalogen*. <https://uit.no/utdanning> [accessed 13.03.2016].

