

# Archives, Libraries and Museums in the Contemporary Society: Perspectives of the Professionals

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate how ALM professionals conceptualise the common role of archives, libraries and museums (ALMs) in the contemporary society. There is only a little earlier empirical research on the topic. This study is based on a quantitative analysis of the results of a web survey of 131 ALM professionals. The analysis shows that the views of the respondents epitomise diverging and contradictory ideas of the role of the institutions. The findings underline the need to discuss and define the future of the ALMs on a profound level of their societal role with a clear emphasis of its theoretical underpinnings. The diverse of opinions and number of mostly practice-oriented visions can be helpful in shaping and reshaping the role of the institutions. At the same time, it is apparent that they do not have the required theoretical depth to function as a common ground for explicating the role of ALMs in the contemporary society.

**Keywords:** archives, libraries, museums, role, professionals

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## 1 Introduction

The past two decades have witnessed an increasing political interest in memory institutions (archives, libraries and museums, ALMs) and their role as shapers of the future society (Trant, 2009). At the same time, some of the proponents of digital information technologies have heralded the Internet age (Usherwood et al., 2005a) as their end. Even if it is probably too hasty to doom the ALMs altogether, also many ALM professionals have acknowledged the impact and convergence of technologies and cultural changes such as the raise of user orientation (Holmberg et al., 2009; Ridolfo et al., 2010; Srinivasan et al., 2009) and a consequent need to change some of the traditional tenets of the institutions. The relative significance of physical collections at the libraries has been recognised to diminish (Baker, 2007). Museums have begun to develop digital presences and breaking out of their traditionally monumental walls (Marstine, 2006), and archives professionals have observed that in the digital age, ‘archiving’ has ceased to be a monopoly of professional archivists (Featherstone, 2006). A review of the earlier literature shows, however, that much of the discussion revolves around the topics of their public function, commerciality and anti-commerciality, cooperation, barriers, technology, marketing, trustworthiness and empowerment. In spite of the scale of the debate, there is only a little empirical research on how the professionals and the public perceive the future prospects of the ALMs. The earlier works consist primarily of opinion pieces, political programmes and theoretical literature (e.g. Anderson, 2007; Barry, 2010). The most of the existing empirical research has been conducted with the visitors or users of the institutions, not with professionals (e.g. Julien & Genuis, 2011; Usherwood et al., 2005a).

The aim of this study is to address this gap in the earlier research and to study how the future role of ALMs is conceptualised by professionals working at the institutions in terms of how they perceive the significance of the predominant views expressed in the earlier studies, theoretical and practice oriented literature. The theoretical underpinnings of the study are based on the socio-constructivist assumption that the future role of the ALM institutions in the society is influenced by how different stakeholder groups conceptualise it. The assumption is premised by a common, although often implicit, postulate of futures studies that representations have a performative potential (Fuller & Loogma, 2009). Even if stakeholder theorising has been justly criticised for assuming that all stakeholders are influencers (Donaldson & Preston, 1995), unlike non-influential stakeholders such as job applicants, the ALM professionals have plenty of opportunities to operationalise their representations of the future as a part of their daily work. Together with earlier research on how other stakeholder groups conceptualise the future of ALMs, this study provides insight and useful knowledge of the professionals' point of view for future research on the societal role of the ALMs. The perceived relevance of the collaboration of ALMs and the introduction of such umbrella concepts as the "memory institution" have captured political, theoretical and professional imagination to a degree that it is easy to argue that the notion of convergence warrants a critical discussion of the future role of these institutions in a single study (Trant, 2009). The findings of this study provide understanding of how ALM professionals conceptualise the role of their institutions and what kinds of assumptions and perspectives steer their daily work. The results function also as a baseline for future qualitative research of the present and future role of specific ALMs and provide a basis for developing strategic planning at the institutions.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Studies on the perceptions of the present and future

The present and future role of librarians, archivists and museum professionals is a popular topic in the professional debate (e.g. Abram, 2007; Bailey, 2006; Norberg et al., 2009). ALM institutions have also captured the imagination of many widely cited theorists (e.g. Ebeling & Günzel, 2009; Foucault, 2002), even if the connotations of these theoretical and often metaphorical conceptions tend to differ from the practical reality of the institutions (Ebe, 2009). Another line of theoretical discussion that has had a more direct impact on the development of the notions of memory institutions and related terms such as ALMs, LAMs (libraries, archives and museums, e.g. VanderBerg, 2012) and GLAMs (galleries, libraries, archives and museums, e.g. Lim & Liew, 2011) stems from the theorising of the similarities in the societal role of archives, libraries and museums. Rayward and Jenkins (2007) articulate a widely shared view that "[t]he collections and services of libraries and related agencies, such as museums and archives, are important components of social and institutional memory". On the level of the function of the holdings of the ALMs, Buckland's discussion of the nature of information (Buckland, 1991) and documents (Buckland, 1997), and the later revival of documentation movement have highlighted the documentary similarities of museum objects, archival records and library materials (Latham, 2012; Lund & Buckland, 2008). According to the documentation theory, the holdings of all three types of institutions can be conceptualised as documents. Bates assumes a different point of view of the nature of their holdings and discusses them as published (libraries), unpublished (archives), embedded (museums) and embodied (museums of natural history) information. In spite of her different perspective to the nature of the collections, she argues that ALMs and their related scholarly disciplines have a common ground in a shared interest of bringing together "objects of social interest for research, learning, and entertainment, and make them available to an audience" and suggests that the scholarly disciplines archival, library and museum studies can be described as "collection disciplines" (Bates, 2006).

In contrast to the lively theoretical discussion, there is, only relatively little empirical research on the self-perception of the future role of ALM professionals and their institutions. Macevičiūtė and Wilson (2009) conducted a Delphi study on the research needs in Swedish librarianship among professional librarians in the country. The findings have an obvious indicative value of the anticipated future challenges in the field. The vague consensus of opinions underlined the diversity of expressed priorities among the informants.

Librarians tend to be more anxious to emphasise change than the users and non-users of libraries (Wagman, 2011; Sinikara, 2007), and the difference of opinions can be a considerable source of tension between the priorities of conservative users and more progressive professionals (Sinikara, 2007). Comparative studies have highlighted certain rather obvious differences between the different ALM professions. Kearns and Rinehart (2011) compared the information responsibilities of archivists and librarians. Both groups considered access (to information) to be their first priority. Archivists took more responsibility for preserving, processing, collecting and management whereas librarians were more inclined to emphasise evaluation and research as significant aspects of librarianship together with the somewhat controversial task of teaching (Julien & Genuis, 2011).

In addition to the relatively few empirical studies of the views of the professionals, there is a small corpus of literature on popular perceptions of the ALMs. Usherwood et al. (2005a) conducted a large nationwide survey in the UK that was used in the development of the questionnaire for the present study. The researchers concluded that the public perceives ALMs as relevant repositories of public knowledge. The institutions are considered to be relevant and trusted even if they are not used by everyone all the time. Evjen and Audunson (2009) found in a study of the Norwegian users and non-users of libraries that the traditional public library values were firmly established but at the same time, in general, the informants were open for change and new services.

## 2.2 Professional perspectives

In comparison to the relative small number of empirical studies on the anticipated future role of the ALM institutions, there is a large corpus of professional and theoretical literature focusing on the current strengths, and expected and endorsed future priorities and relevance of the institutions. Many ALM related authors tend to emphasise the continuing value of the institutions and their fundamental principles (e.g. Rosa et al., 2011; Duranti, 2010; Gilliland-Swetland, 2000), but only a few are inclined to see their future without any major discontinuities. The emphasis of enduring values tends to be related to a perception that the principal challenge of the institutions is to market their existing services and competences in new operational contexts (Duranti, 2010; Gilliland-Swetland, 2000). For instance, the major proponents of the recently popular notion of Library 2.0, Casey and Savastinuk (2007) perceive their primary task to be to get more people into the libraries. Similar priorities are dominating in a large part of the marketing and outreach-oriented ALM literature (e.g., Ambrose & Paine, 2006; Cerquetti, 2010; Nesta & Mi, 2011; Singh, 2009; Smith, 2003).

In contrast to the preservationist tendencies of many authors, others have been eager to emphasise discontinuities. Phenomena like the Library 2.0 (Holmberg et al., 2009), participatory archives (Huvila, 2008) and participatory librarianship (Lankes et al., 2007) have called attention to the inevitable change. Calls for developing new research agendas and infrastructures for archival science (e.g. Gilliland & Mckemmish, 2004; McLeod, 2008), and for the reappraisal of the role of museums in the society (Genoways, 2006a) represent explicit attempts to enthrall the future. The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) published in 2009 a discussion guide, which describes a series of discussions between library and museum professionals on the future prospects of the institutions (Pastore, 2009). The discussed themes included the changing role of museums and libraries, shifts in the power and authority, the notion of 'third place', technology and policies, changing practices of learning and information use, collaboration of libraries

and museums, sustainability, evaluation and the future employees of the institutions. The list is not exhaustive, but represents some of the principal gravitations of the professional discussion in the literature (e.g. Kelly et al., 2009).

The discussion on the changing role of ALMs tends to frame the institutions from two perspectives. The first is empathetically utilitarian. ALM institutions are perceived to share a mission of preserving and providing access to knowledge, they support learning and promote identity and understanding (e.g. Bowitz & Ibenholt, 2009; Cerquetti, 2010; Gilliland-Swetland, 2000) either explicitly or implicitly. They are also suggested to play a role as an economic resource and as a provider of direct and indirect quantifiable return of investment (Wavell et al., 2002). The institutions are seen as a societal resource and have a role as informal educational institutions that contribute to the success and prosperity of societies (Dempsey, 2000; Manžuch, 2009; Torstensson, 2002).

The second perspective puts emphasis on abstract societal and cultural values and rights. In parallel to a broader cultural political debate, ALM professionals and academics have discussed the civic role of the ALM institutions in the light of classical and contemporary social theory (e.g. in Costantino, 2012; Genoways, 2006a; Gränström, 2002; Hickerson, 2001; Jimerson, 2004; Leckie et al., 2010). Access to the assets hosted and represented by the institutions is perceived as a new civic right (Dempsey, 2000) independent of the cultural background of the citizens. An overall line of argument of the discussion is that the traditional colloquial ideas of the role of the ALMs are out-dated in the context of the currently dominant paradigm of socially oriented archives, libraries and museums. The critique has stemmed both from the continental critical theory (e.g. Henning, 2006; Leckie et al., 2010) and postmodernism (e.g. Cook, 2001). Researchers have been keen to expose traditional hierarchies, sub-textual ideologies and the predominantly Western cultural underpinnings of the ALM institutions that do not make sense in all cultural contexts, globally (Duncker, 2002) or locally (Shilton & Srinivasan, 2008). Subsequently, the critics have urged the necessity to redefine the role of the ALMs from the perspectives of broader inclusiveness and global representativeness (e.g. McKemmish et al., 2005).

Even if the critique of the established ideas of ALM institutions is often directed against the traditional credo within the ALMs, the idea of an inevitable societal and cultural change can be linked to broader ideological project. Sahlén (2005) describes this adaptation to the subtext of the dominating contemporary ideologies as “modernisation”. The earlier idea of ALMs was based on the assumptions of stability (Martinon, 2006), existence of an intrinsic value of the institutions, positivist ideas of their impartiality and reliance on established unarticulated hierarchies of control and valorisation (Cook, 1997; Henning, 2006).

In spite of the frequent emphases of the similarities of the ALMs, there are also fundamental differences in how the three types of institutions and their role is conceptualised in the literature. Museums underline the role of experiences, authorship and exploration (Genoways, 2006a; Gilliland-Swetland, 2000). Library literature and practice have traditionally focused on access, community building and lately more and more on learning and information literacy (e.g. Gilliland-Swetland, 2000; O’Connor, 2009). In archival field, there are several competing perspectives that conceptualise archives as information institutions (e.g. Buckland, 1991; Gilliland-Swetland, 2000) or cultural heritage institutions (Manžuch, 2009), or that emphasise their distinctiveness by highlighting the non-informational and non-cultural nature of archival records as pieces of authentic evidence (e.g. Duranti, 1999). Also, even if some authors (e.g. Bates, 2006) perceive all ALMs as collection institutions, the collection focus tends to be stronger in museums and archives (e.g. Gilliland-Swetland, 2000), whereas libraries are portrayed more frequently as information providers (Hill, 1999, 106-107, 191, 204).

### 3 Material and methods

The aim of this study is to map the future role of ALMs as it is conceptualised by ALM professionals. In order to control the effect of contextual variables the population was limited to professionals working in archives, libraries and museums in Sweden. The data were collected using a survey questionnaire. The survey was conducted online using Lime Survey 1.90+ open source survey software. The data were analysed using correlation (`rcorr` and `cor.test`) analysis and descriptive statistics (`psych.describe`) on R 2.12.2. The perceptions of ALM professionals were measured using a set of 22 statements presented on a 10-point Likert scale about the future role and priorities of ALM institutions. The questionnaire was developed by four researchers on the basis of an in-depth review of the earlier literature on the anticipated future of archives, libraries and museums (principal sources Gilliland-Swetland, 2000; Merritt, 2008; Pastore, 2009; Usherwood et al., 2005b). The statements are listed in the Table 1. The rationale of the construction of the survey instrument was to select issues that have been identified as significant in the literature (including Gilliland-Swetland, 2000; Merritt, 2008; Pastore, 2009) and in the earlier studies of the attitudes of non-professionals (Usherwood et al., 2005b) and to test whether and to what extent the professionals consider that the same issues will have a significant influence in the shaping of the future role of their institutions. According to the theoretical premises of the study, it was assumed that if professionals put a lot of emphasis on, for instance, the role of technology, this idea is likely to have an impact on their actions and consequently, on the future of the ALMs.

The respondents were recruited by posting invitations to major ALM related mailing lists and social media sites in Sweden including `ark-forum`, `arkivet.ning.com` (archives), `biblist` and `biblfeed.ning.com` (libraries), `nck-list` (museum pedagogy) and `sverigesmuseer.se` (museums), and promoted further by using the personal contacts of the author and his colleagues, and social networking services including Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and personal blogs.

The convenience sample consists of 131 Swedish ALM professionals with 80/131 (61%) females and 44/131 (34%) males (7/131, 5% with no answer). 87% (114/131) of the respondents were 31-64 years old and 35% (46/131) between 51 and 64 years. 55% or 72/131 had an undergraduate degree and 38% (50/131) a master's degree. Only three (2%) had acquired a doctoral degree and one had no formal education. 42% (54/131) identified themselves primarily as librarians or library professionals, 8% (10/131) as information specialists, 29% (38/131) as archivists and 11% (14/131) as museum professionals. The 14 (11%) respondents who did not identify themselves in the four groups worked in archives, libraries and museums related governmental, administration, education, development and consulting duties. 16% (21/131) of the respondents were employed by museums and heritage centres, 29% (38/131) by archive institutions, 42% (56/131) by libraries and 12% (16/131) by other institutions.

According to the official statistics, in 2009, 56% of the Swedish museum professionals had an undergraduate degree or higher education. Males performed 47% of the person-years. The total amount of person-years was 4199 (Statens kulturråd, 2010b). The same year, Swedish libraries employed 8528 individuals working for 7160 person-years (Statens kulturråd, 2010a). In 2010, 55% of the staff in public libraries, 70% in research libraries had a library education. 83% of the staff of public libraries were women. In research libraries the percentage of men was slightly higher, 27% (Kungliga biblioteket, 2011). In summary, there is an unknown bias in the sample that has to be taken into account when interpreting the results even if the variety and distribution of the respondents may be seen as satisfactory for the purposes of this study.

### 4 Analysis

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Statements (1 = Strongly disagree, 10 = Strongly agree)							
Museums, libraries and archives play an important role in shaping civic and urban identity	.83	7	.15	0	0.75	0.41	.19
Museums, libraries and archives should increase their role in shaping civic and urban identity.	.2	8	.01	0	1.06	.28	.18
In the twenty-first century, museums, libraries and archives are public services rather than urban commodities.	.31	8	.88	0	1.07	0.4	.17
Museums, libraries and archives need to reassert their public function.	.62	8	.92	.5	0	1.66	.17
The fact that ALMs have been perceived to be important in the past is enough to justify why they are needed in the future.	.22	5	.04	0	.13	1.25	.27
Expectations of leisure time, pressure to increase productivity at work, and demands of family have a negative effect on information seeking and cultural participation (i.e. there is not enough time to seek enough information and participate in cultural activities)?	.81	6	.59	.5	0	0.77	.23
Museums, libraries and archives should adjust to these lifestyle demands?	.75	6	.35	0	0.66	0.21	.21
Apathy in information seeking and participation in cultural activities (people do not care to seek information or culture) is dangerous for society?	.29	8	.06	0	1.55	.65	.19
Apathy in information seeking and participation in cultural activities causes apathy in voting behaviour?	.33	7	.71	0	0.91	0.14	.25
The proper business of archives, libraries and museums is with the serious user	.76	5	.58	0	0.3	0.8	.28
Archives, libraries and museums should seek to counter commercialism	.09	6	.66	0	0.29	0.79	.24
Commercial activity supports the core activities of ALMs	.39	4	.5	0	.37	0.81	.23
By collecting and presenting popular culture, archives, libraries and museums can provide complementary non-commercial perspectives to that type of culture	.3	7	.43	0	0.9	.19	.22
Archives, libraries, and museums lose their special status and identity by embracing popular culture	.37	3	.67	0	.1	.22	.24
Archives, libraries, and museums can help people to develop a critical capacity and a sense of discrimination	.72	8	.69	0	0	1.28	.06

Archives, libraries, and museums should provide services which prioritise high intellectual standards and, at the same time, promote equity and social inclusion?	.07	7 .57	0	0.48	0.77	.2 4
A specific emphasis of the following aspects of museums, libraries and archives is vital for the success of ALM institutions in the future (1 = Strongly disagree, 10 = Strongly agree)?						
Collections	.22	8 .06	0	1.17	.84	.1 9
Learned professional skills (in formal education)	.02	8 .74	0	0.72	0.05	.1 6
Personal qualities	.06	8 .77	0	0.88	.42	.1 6
Conversation skills	.97	7 .85	0	1.02	.74	.1 7
Personal knowledge creation	.07	8 .99	0	1.39		.1 8
Production of materials	.5	7	0	0.54	0.5	.1 8
Co-creation together with users	.08	8 .32	0	1.47	.65	.2 1
Archives, libraries and museums would benefit of co-operation on following issues (1 = Strongly disagree, 10= Strongly agree)						
Collection management	.21	7 .87	0	0.8	0.53	.2 6
Information and reference service	.18	8 .32	0	1.44	.53	.2 1
Outreach	.43	7 .61	0	1	.09	.2 4
Knowledge organisation	.23	8 .16	0	1.41	.71	.2
Pedagogy	.13	8 .23	0	1.4	.55	.2
Internet search portals (like Europeana)	.66	8 .86	0	1.86	.76	.1 7
International cooperation	.11	8 .01	0	1.11	.93	.1 8
Do you think that fewer people will work in archives, libraries and museums in the future?	.44	5 .76	0	0.11	1.04	.2 5

What do you see as the potential barriers to using ALMs? (1=Completely disagree, 10=Completely agree)							
Lack of convenience	.15	5	.76	0	.11	1.17	.26
People get what they want easier from other places	.52	5	.73	0	0.16	1	.25
Lack of sense of community-ownership (ALMs are not for me)	.06	7	.44	0	0.83	0.15	.22
Lack of knowledge of what and how to find things in ALMs	.62	8	.53	0	1.72	.92	.14
ALMs are not for all	.39	5	.13	0	.01	1.37	.29
The following factors are important in getting more users to ALMs (1 = Strongly disagree, 10 = Strongly agree)							
Busy lifestyle	.9	6	.49	0	0.7	0.27	.23
Museums, libraries and archives are important even if they are not used	.75	6	.76	0	0.54	0.75	.25
New technology	.5	8	.66	0	0.96	.29	.15
User education and training	.31	7	.18	0	0.55	0.36	.2
Personalised coaching and service of individual users	.18	8	.98	0	1.25	.1	.18
Closer cooperation with schools	.28	8	.89	0	1.13	.89	.17
Marketing	.49	8	.81	0	1.36	.93	.16
ALMs should commit themselves more to societal issues	.78	7	.31	0	1.02	.41	.21
Better service quality	.11	8	.18	0	1.36	.35	.2
Cooperation with commercial actors	.86	5	.78	0	0.24	0.96	.25
The use of museums, libraries and archives is strongly dependent on (1 = Strongly disagree, 10 = Strongly agree)							
Gender	.99	4	.89	0	0.04	1.24	.26

Age	.69	.35	0	0.84	.15	.21
Level of education	.54	.09	0	0.96	.56	.19
Social class	.13	.35	0	0.92	.19	.21
Income	.79	.56	0	0.32	0.82	.23
Ethnicity	.99	.59	0	0.49	0.79	.23

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the statements on a 10-point Likert scale.

The summary of the descriptive statistics of the sample is presented in Table 1. The fact that ALMs have been perceived to be important in the past was not considered to be enough to justify that they would be needed in the future (mean 5.22, sd 3.04, median 5). The difference was significant with Wilcoxon  $W=4088$ , sig.  $1.123e-11$  and up. In spite of the general tendency to reject the significance of historical justification, not all respondents agreed with the idea (max 10). There was also a moderate significant correlation between the intrinsic value and historical relevance of the institutions (Table 2). Interestingly enough, only a few (as discussed below) significant statistical correlations could be observed with the statements and background variables of age, gender, education, employer (type of ALM institution) or the self-identification of the informants as librarians, information specialists, archivists or museum professionals.

When it comes to means of achieving the goals, the respondents valued almost equally the different assets of the ALM institutions. The production of materials scored lower than the rest of the factors. The difference was significant ( $W = 8437$ , p-value = 0.04972), but low. Cooperation was valued in general (median 9 for all cooperation related questions) although somewhat less in the context of collection management and outreach (median 8). The differences were insignificant.

The respondents considered that the lack of knowledge about what and how to find things in ALMs is the most significant reason ( $W = 4621.5$ , p-value =  $2.011e-08$ ) of non-use while the lack of convenience was ranked lowest, although not significantly below the argument that ALMs are not for all. The ranking order of the means gives an impression that the principal issues of non-use were perceived to relate to the lack of knowledge and commitment from the side of the users instead of being dependent on the services and offerings of the ALM institutions.

According to the respondents, the best methods of attracting more users to the ALMs are new technology (mean 8,5, sd 1,66, median 9) and marketing (mean 8,49, sd 1,81, median 9). In contrast, the respondents did not believe in the positive effects of cooperating with commercial actors (mean 5,86, sd 2,78, median 6, significant difference to other methods with  $W = 9837$ , p-value =  $4.014e-05$ ). These doubts were confirmed by the low scores for the statement that commercial activity supports the core activities of the ALMs (mean 4,39, sd 2,5, median 4). A closer look at the standard deviations and minimum and maximum values shows, however, the controversiality of the topic.

The respondents believed that the use of the ALMs depends on the level of education, social class and age more than on ethnicity, income or gender ( $W = 6600$ , p-value = 0.04081). On the basis of a raw ranking of the highest median scores of prominent issues (9.5-10, see Table 1), it seems that the professionals

considered that ALMs could help to develop critical capacity and a sense of discrimination, but that they need to reassert their public function.

There were some differences between different groups within the sample. Male respondents were less inclined (mean 7.02 vs. 8.23,  $p=0.003233$ ) to believe that ALMs play an important role in the shaping of the civic role and identity, that the role should increase (7.37 vs. 8.66,  $p=0.0004916$ ), and the ALMs need to reassert their public function (7.74 vs. 9.09,  $p=0.0002082$ ). Females were more inclined to believe in the significance of conversation skills (8.24 vs. 7.46, 0.03843), personal knowledge creation (8.51 vs. 7.25, 0.001280) and the production of materials (7.78 vs. 6.98, 0.04335). They also valued higher the significance of outreach (7.93 vs. 6.79,  $p=0.02081$ ) and pedagogy (8.47 vs. 7.58,  $p=0.03919$ ) than males. Further, the female respondents believed that user education and training (7.74 vs. 6.62,  $p=0.007245$ ), personalised coaching (8.57 vs. 7.57,  $p=0.008506$ ) and cooperation with schools (8.55 vs. 7.81,  $p=0.04130$ ) is important. Males were less inclined to believe that the lack of community ownership is an important contributing factor to the non-use of the ALMs (6.40 vs. 7.47,  $p=0.02238$ ). Female respondents trusted more on public libraries as a source of information than males (8.05 vs. 7.42,  $p=0.04541$ ). Females were also more positive towards the inclusion of popular culture in the ALMs (7.66 vs. 6.57,  $p=0.02278$ ) and the prioritisation of high intellectual standards (7.65 vs. 6.08,  $p=0.002348$ ).

The respondents with higher education were less inclined to believe in the significance of material production as a success factor ( $p=0.007596$ ), less inclined to believe in the significance of the collaboration on Internet search portals ( $p=0.02744$ ) and the power of marketing ( $p=0.02519$ ). The analysis gave also indicative evidence that the respondents who worked in museums were more positive toward the significance of outreach and co-creation together with users, cooperating with schools and in seeing a link between cultural and societal engagement, whereas library employees tended to be least positive in the same issues. Museum professionals were also more positive towards the capability of the ALMs to develop critical capacity and a sense of discrimination, and more inclined to consider that age and ethnicity are significant factors that determine the use of the ALMs than their colleagues in libraries or archives.

Correlation analysis of (rcorr and spearman.test in pspearman) the responses revealed generally relatively low correlations. The highest correlation coefficients are summarised in Table 2.

Statements	Correlating statements	Spearman's rho	p
Museums, libraries and archives play an important role in shaping civic and urban identity.	Apathy in information seeking and participation in cultural activities causes apathy in voting behaviour?	0.41	<0.001
	Archives, libraries, and museums should provide services, which prioritise high intellectual standards and, at the same time, promote equity and social inclusion?	0.43	<0.001
The fact that ALMs have been perceived to be important in the past is enough to justify why they are needed in the future.	Museums, libraries and archives are important even if they are not used	0.41	<0.001
Cooperation with commercial actors as an important factor in getting more users to ALMs	Commercial activity supports the core activities of ALMs	0.62	<0.001

Archives, libraries and museums would benefit of co-operation on outreach	Closer cooperation with schools as an important factor in getting more users to ALMs	0.52	00.001
	“ALMs should commit themselves more to societal issues” as an important factor in getting more users to ALMs	0.45	<0.001
Archives, libraries and museums would benefit of co-operation on pedagogy	Closer cooperation with schools as an important factor in getting more users to ALMs	0.50	<0.001
Archives, libraries and museums would benefit of co-operation on Internet search portals	New technology as an important factor in getting more users to ALMs	0.46	<0.001
	User education and training as important factors in getting more users to ALMs	0.43	<0.001
Lack of knowledge of what and how to find things in ALMs as a potential barrier to using an ALM	Archives, libraries, and museums can help people to develop a critical capacity and a sense of discrimination	0.44	<0.001
New technology as an important factor in getting more users to ALMs	Better service quality as an important factor in getting more users to ALMs	0.41	<0.001

Table 2: Summary of the correlation analysis (rcorr and spearman.test in pspearman) of the statements.

The clustering of the statements was tested using factor analysis (factanal, varimax-rotation) with three to six factors. The analyses revealed no significant correlation patterns between the groups and individual variables. A combined analysis of the correlations and descriptive statistics provides, however, indicative evidence of the relevance of certain thematic areas of interest that pertain to the future role and strategies of the institutions.

## 5 Discussion

The general trend of the responses was rather unsurprisingly that the ALMs have a significant societal role to play even in the future. The major finding of this study is, however, that the respondents lacked consensus about the essence of the future role of the ALMs and especially about the means to maintain, increase and reassert it. There were differences between the opinions of the respondents with a museum background especially in comparison to library professionals (archivists were mostly positioned in the middle group between the extremes), but in general, the differences between the groups were small similarly to the influence of background factors. The findings are largely consistent with the earlier literature (e.g. Gilliland-Swetland, 2000; Rosa et al., 2011; Sundqvist, 2007), including the results of the study of the attitudes of the British general population by Usherwood et al. (2005a) used as a premiss for formulating the survey instrument of the present study. In contrast to the (British) public, the (Swedish) professionals tended to be more sceptical about the intrinsic value of the ALMs.

The study has some evident limitations. The similarity of the attitudes of the respondents and the opinions presented in the literature is not surprising considering the fact that the respondents are undoubtedly aware of the general lines of the public and professional debate. The high representation of library professionals (especially in contrast to museum professionals) in the sample is a likely source of bias

that has to be taken into account when interpreting the results. An additional source of bias is the nature of the present study and its focus on the investigation of a selection of dominant themes found in an extensive review of the earlier literature that does not account for the possible significance of other factors. As a whole, the studied material represents a convenience sample, but it is assumed that the dropout is likely to be higher among those professionals with a less explicit vision or agenda for the future, and lower among those who are more likely to make a major difference for the future of the institutions. Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that the material can provide a useful insight into the major themes of how the ALM professionals conceptualise the future of their institutions. There is an unknown bias in the material that makes it impossible to generalise the results as is and special care has to be taken when discussing the conclusions of the study outside its empirical context.

The analysis shows that the respondents had a discernible tendency to *externalise* (Theme 1) the principal challenges that face their institutions, and to see ALMs as intrinsically stable establishments. The professionals esteem and trust their employers as sources of information, consider that the ALMs are important and have a prominent role in the future society. Instead of seeing any major shortcomings in their offerings, the respondents considered that a major challenge of the ALMs is an insufficient engagement of the professionals in the interaction with the public (e.g. Casey & Savastinuk, 2007; Genoways, 2006b; Gilliland-Swetland, 2000). The lack of convenience and ownership were considered to be significantly less important factors. The respondents did not seem to share an opinion that the challenges are alarming. The lack of knowledge about the existing services among the general public shared opinions. The preference of perceiving marketing as a meaningful method of getting more users to the ALMs, and the perceived need to reassert the public function of the ALMs scored high but divided opinions (Table 1). In spite of the presence of some critical voices, marketing (e.g. Ambrose & Paine (2006, pp. 23–36); Cerquetti, 2010; Mi & Nesta, 2006; Smith, 2003) and the urges to focus on attracting the general public to use the existing services (e.g. Casey & Savastinuk, 2007) are prevalent in the professional ALM literature.

Many of the respondents seemed to be empathetic about the significance of technology and were inclined to see a link between *service quality and the use of technology* (Theme 2). The correlation of statements “New technology is an important factor in getting more users to the ALMs” and “Better service quality is an important factor in getting more users to the ALMs” give indication of a belief of the interdependence of technology adoption and good service. New technology was seen as an important factor of attracting more users. The beneficiality of the cooperation in Internet search portals scored also high even if it divided opinions somewhat more than technology adoption. A propensity to perceive the role of technology as a decisive factor has been documented in the earlier studies in all individual ALM fields (e.g. Carrozzino & Bergamasco, 2010; Casey & Savastinuk, 2007; Flinn, 2010; Jimerson, 2004; Kelly et al., 2009; Srinivasan et al., 2009). The tendency is especially typical in the ALM literature (e.g. Nesta & Mi, 2011; Pastore, 2009). Earlier comparisons of the priorities of the librarians and library users have showed in several instances that the professionals tend to place a significantly greater emphasis on the necessity and beneficiality of the new technology whereas library users tend to emphasise books as the major asset of libraries (Rosa et al., 2011; Sinikara, 2007; Wagman, 2011).

The popularity of the idea of perceiving the *ALMs as a public good* (Theme 3) is supported by the high levels of agreement with the statements about the societal role of the ALMs and the correlation of the statement “Museums, libraries and archives play an important role in shaping civic and urban identity” with the statements “Apathy in information seeking and participation in cultural activities causes apathy in voting behaviour?” and “Archives, libraries, and museums should provide services which prioritise high intellectual standards and, at the same time, promote equity and social inclusion”. Also the correlation of claim that the ALMs play a role in developing critical capacity and that the principal barriers of using ALMs are related to the lack of knowledge, suggests of a view that the ALMs should take a more active societal role. In contrast to the earlier collection centric paradigm of the ALM institutions, the respondents

agreed with the opinions expressed in the literature about the need to operationalise the relevance of the ALMs in accordance with the expectations of the contemporary society (e.g. Dempsey, 2000; Genoways, 2006b; Hickerson, 2001) with a particular emphasis of their relevance in the local societies and in providing services for the general public in order to prevent social exclusion (e.g. Brown & Davis-Brown, 1998; Gilliland-Swetland, 2000; McKemmish et al., 2005; Torstensson, 2002; Usherwood et al., 2005a). The idea of the ALMs as a public good is further emphasised by the preference of the majority of the respondents to keep the ALMs separate from any commercialist tendencies. The idea of the beneficiality of commercial cooperation scored poorly, and even the statement about the complementary role of the ALMs in the context of the popular culture scored lower than several other related statements. At the same time, however, a minority of the respondents were strongly in favour of cooperating with commercial actors and inclined to appreciate the emerging benefits of such collaborations (Correlation in Table 2). The potential conflict of commercial ideologies, and the predominantly non-commercial image of the ALMs have been documented in the literature. The benefits of commercial cooperation and commercialist tenets have been acknowledged in the literature (e.g. Evjen & Audunson, 2009; Griffin, 2008). Such tendencies are apparent, even if somewhat implicitly, in the ALM related outreach, marketing and management literature (e.g. Ambrose & Paine, 2006, 23–36; Casey & Savastinuk, 2007; Cerquetti, 2010; Galani & Chalmers, 2010; Mi & Nesta, 2006; Smith, 2003;). A possible reason for the emphasis of this particular question in the results can be that the present survey was run at the time when the Swedish library community was engaged in debating the decision of the municipal council of the municipality of Nacka to submit a request for tender for its public library services (Rennemark, 2011). Related proposals were discussed at the time also elsewhere, most notably in Britain (Downey et al., 2010; Woolley, 2011).

According to the distribution of the scores on the questions relating to the significance of *the intrinsic value of the ALMs* (Theme 4), it seems that a part of the respondents were relatively consistent about their perceptions of an inherent relevance of the ALMs. Similarly conservative tendencies are discernible also in the literature. A part of the users of the ALMs have been reported to consider the historical judgment and an intrinsic value of the existence of the ALM institutions as a significant reason for their continuing relevance (Usherwood et al., 2005a). A part of the idea can be traced back to nostalgia, but at the same time, it may be taken as an indication of the persistence of certain ALM specific values. In the archival literature, Gilliland (2000) and Duranti (1999) have emphasised the significance of the enduring values of archival theory and practice. In the context of museum education, Spock (2006) has discussed the continuing relevance of the fundamental notions of curiosity and collecting. In the library literature, the results of many user studies have reminded reformists of the existence of a large group of faithful library users who are in favour of highly traditional library services (Rosa et al., 2011; Wagman, 2011) even if the conservative voices tend to be in the minority in the public library debate, which is often dominated by reformist ideals.

The correlation of the preference for outreach, the increased cooperation with schools and the engagement in societal issues seems to indicate that some of the respondents see an *active outreach* (Theme 5) to the schools and the society as a relevant strategy for their institutions. The idea of a closer engagement with users is not absent from the literature. For instance, the 2.0 phenomenon (e.g. Casey & Savastinuk, 2007; Flinn, 2010) and the general suggestions of the significance of user orientation and better service encounter (Singh, 2009) have emphasised the need to be more active in engaging both existing and potential users. Eryaman (2010) discusses a more radical approach to the active engagement with the users on the basis of the concept of “border pedagogy” of Giroux. The central underpinning of the urges to put more focus on outreach activities seems to be a determination to take the initiative and to actively reassert the function of the ALM institutions in the contemporary society. The point of view is in a direct contrast with the traditional ideals of neutrality, objectivity and impartiality of the ALM professionals (e.g. Cook, 2001;

Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Stover, 2004). Therefore it is not surprising that the idea of an active engagement is perceived as controversial and is not shared by all respondents (cf. the spread of the responses).

The generally high scores in pedagogy related statements and the positive correlation of “Archives, libraries and museums would benefit of co-operation on pedagogy” and “Closer cooperation with schools as an important factor in getting more users to ALMs” can be interpreted to suggest of a preference to an additional approach of interacting with the public, that of *pedagogy* (**Theme 6**). On the basis of the correlation, it is conceivable that a group of respondents frame the mission of the ALM institutions in pedagogical terms. The data is consistent with the literature in that a part of the ALM professionals perceive that a closer cooperation with schools is a useful approach for attracting more visitors to the ALMs and for positively engaging the institutions with the society. The two paradoxes of the approach are that the ALM professionals often lack an in-depth pedagogical education (e.g. Höij, 2005), and that their pedagogical role is not necessarily acknowledged by educators (Still, 1998). The fact that the respondents were not entirely unanimous about their pedagogical role shows the controversiality of the standpoint that has documented also in the literature (Julien & Genuis, 2011).

Finally, the respondents expressed positive views of the significance of *training* (Theme 7). The correlation of “Archives, libraries and museums would benefit of co-operation on Internet search portals” with “New technology as an important factor in getting more users to ALMs” and “User education and training as important factors in getting more users to ALMs” may be interpreted to be related to a tools oriented view that puts emphasis on an assumed uncontroversial utility of the institutions and the consequent need to training their users. The role of the professionals is seen in terms of mentorship and facilitation rather than as direct expertise. The ALMs function primarily as resources and tools. The point of view is common in policy documents (e.g. European Commission, 2006; DB2, 2009), but has gained popularity also in the professional library literature (Stover, 2004; Harris, 2009, pp. 174-176), and in similarly instrumental terms, in archives (e.g. Alain & Foggett, 2007) and museums (Galani & Chalmers, 2010), in the form of a discourse of empowerment.

A closer look at the seven themes elaborate the general picture of the lack of consensus about the essence of the future role of the ALMs and especially about the means to maintain, increase and reassert it. It would be tempting to suggest that the diversity stems from the differences between the opinions of archives, library and museum professional, but the findings show that, in spite of some institution specific variation, the themes are common in the entire sample of respondents. Similarly, because of the analysed material, it would be intriguing to see the thematic variation as a Swedish phenomenon. A comparison of the present findings and the international literature shows, however, that the identified themes are not predominantly national.

The plurality of ideas can be simultaneously an asset and a problem. The positive views of the significance of the context of the ALMs, of technology, outreach, pedagogy, training, the intrinsic value of the institutions and their role as a public good provide useful starting points for formulating future strategies, but it is apparent that such a diversity can also be a weakness. Even if the contemporary management practices tend to favour continuous innovation and learning instead of paradigmatic orthodoxies (Gregg, 2011; Sadler, 2003; Wenger, 1999), the plurality of the themes emerging from the data analysis and the similar diversity of their theoretical and political underpinnings seem to suggest of a lack of a clear focus rather than the presence of a productive melange. In spite of some overlap, the themes represent parallel rather than complementary approaches to explain the present and plan for the future. On a principal level, the ALM professionals seem to have embraced the criticism of the proponents of postmodernism (e.g. Cook, 2001) and critical theory (e.g. Henning, 2006; Leckie et al., 2010) in that the ALMs need to become more pluralistic, inclusive and globally representative. At the same time, the diversity of the emphases in the present findings shows that there is no apparent master vision of how this adaptation to the subtext of the dominating contemporary ideologies, or “modernisation” (Sahlén, 2005), should be

operationalised. The externalisation of the challenges of the ALMs is an example of a group-serving (or here, perhaps rather institution-serving) bias (Shepperd et al., 2008), the classical human propensity to attribute failures to external factors. The conceptualisations of the main drivers of change in terms of training (of the 'users'), pedagogy or technology are similar, albeit less direct forms of a similar mindset. Emphasising the significance of instrumental, and as such essentially external factors rather than strategic priorities can be counter-productive. It is apparent that the results of the present type of a survey study do not give direct answers to the question of how the mission of the ALMs should be formulated in the future. It is to be determined whether it should be common to all ALMs, include some common elements, or to be specific to the particular types of ALM institutions. What is clear, however, is that such a formulation would be highly helpful for individual institutions and the ALM sector as a whole to guide and direct their strategic planning.

## 6 Conclusions

The findings of the present study show that there are several competing ideas of the future role of the institutions and of the strategies for reaching a diversity of explicit and implicit goals that seem to be largely unrelated to institutional background of the ALM professionals. A central implication of the apparent lack of a consensus is that there is a need to discuss and define the future of the ALMs on a profound level of their societal role. The diversity of opinions and such primarily practice-oriented visions of the future as the 2.0 phenomenon in the last decade or the comparable movements for promoting participation and (unspecific) openness can be helpful in shaping and reshaping the future of the institutions. At the same time, it is apparent that they do not have the required theoretical depth to function as a positive 'orthodoxy' (as expressed by Lappin, 2010) for providing a common ground for the discussion. Implicit balancing between the maintenance of the role of being a public good with an outward bound mission of educating people, endorsing an image of a post-modern space of empowerment and implementing a neo-liberalistic agenda of measuring the relevance of the ALMs in terms of monetary benefits is not sustainable. Even if these disparate approaches may subscribe to the relevance of certain abstract ideals, they have fundamental differences. It would be probably too hasty to deny the possibility of finding synergies between the approaches altogether, but in order to succeed, the central tenets of the individual institutions and the collective role of the ALMs in the society need to be articulated in explicit enough terms to form a common ground for the work in the ALM institutions. ALMs need to choose whether they are institutions of enlightenment, postmodern spaces of empowerment, result-orientated financial units, or perhaps, seats of something that is yet to be invented.

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