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**DIGITAL PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC LIBRARIES:
an explorative study of digital participation from the perspective of library
personnel in Sweden**

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Abstract

Digitalisation has had a profound effect on our society. Much of our daily lives revolve around digital errands that, providing we have the appropriate skills, provide us with innumerable conveniences. Unfortunately for those who do not have such competencies, these normal everyday tasks have become unmanageable and as a result of the McDonaldization of society there are very few places to which these citizens can turn for help. As an essential element of a democratic society, Libraries now find themselves at the frontline of the battle to combat digital exclusion. This explorative study considers the responses of 877 library staff from 229 municipalities in Sweden to a questionnaire asking about their experiences working with digital participation. The results indicate that digitalisation is putting increased pressure on libraries and their staff which has a negative impact on both staff and library patrons. Cooperation between libraries and other organisations is required in order to manage this increased pressure as well as increased funding to allow for more time, resources and training to be invested into digital participation. Finally, this study gives voice to the library staff around the country who are calling for guidelines to help structure the support they are able to provide their patrons. If Sweden intends to become the best in the world at taking advantage of all that digitalisation has to offer then it is incumbent upon Sweden to make sure that there are strategies in place to ensure that no one is left behind.

Keywords: McDonaldization, Rationalization, Digitalisation, Digitalization, Democracy, Digital Participation, Digital Exclusion, Library, Libraries, Public Library, Digidel.

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Whilst this thesis is presented in English, I will, for the acknowledgements, switch between the two and speak my preferred language, Svengelska.

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1. Introduction

Society cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that groups of citizens are hindered from developing capabilities to maintain a social life, to access the health sector, to enjoy integrity and independence and cultural recreation – to live a capable life. (Reneland-Forsman 2018, p. 333)

There is no way to deny that digitalisation has had a profound effect on how information is created, organised and stored, shared and communicated (Sundin and Rivano Eckerdal 2014). We can, with the help of computers, tablets and smartphones, and either wifi or mobile data, access information almost anywhere at anytime. According to the latest statistics from The Internet Foundation¹ in Sweden (IIS), 90% of the Swedish population use the internet daily (Internetstiftelsen 2018). Impressive figures for a nation whose goal is to become the best in the world when it comes to taking advantage of all that digital technology has to offer² (Digitaliseringsstrategi 2017; Regeringens skrivelse 2017). Indeed almost everything can be managed online in Sweden, from banking and shopping, to dealing with government agencies for taxation and immigration to name just a few. In fact, in some situations the *only* way to conduct business is online with many banks and other agencies closing local offices in favour of online services (Swedish Bankers Association, 2018). For many of us, the ability to do everything online is simply an efficiency that is taken for granted. Unfortunately, life is not so simple for the remaining 10%, accounting for approximately 1.1 million people, who are effectively locked out of digital society and thus no longer able to independently engage with society (Internetstiftelsen 2018; Reneland-Forsman 2018; Brandt Smedberg, Rasch, and Wilow Sundhand 2019). According to the same statistics, many in this group (47%) have said that they have no interest in computers or anything online. A smaller group (24%) do not participate because of problems with computers or a lack of technical skills (Internetstiftelsen 2018). These same statistics also show that there is a distinct difference in age and class with people over the age of 75 accounting for 60% of those who do not use the internet to access public information. ISS reports that 8 out of 10 people over the age of 75 do not have Bank-ID³ which effectively means that these citizens are unable to verify their identity online and thus unable, even if they would like to, to use many digital services. IIS also reports that those not actively using digital technology are more likely to be of lower socioeconomic status often with a lower level of education (Internetstiftelsen 2018)

¹ Internetstiftelsen

² “Sverige ska vara bäst i världen på att använda digitaliseringens möjligheter”

³ <https://www.bankid.com/en/om-bankid/detta-ar-bankid>

Digital inclusion is a vital part of a democratic society and everyone, regardless of their age, background or personal circumstances, has the right to access information and culture. The Swedish government recognises this and as such it is reflected in several of its laws, one of which is the Swedish Library Act.

1.1 Swedish Library Act

The most recent version of Swedish Library Act (SFS 2013:801) came into effect on the first of January 2014. It is a comprehensive document that outlines the principles and guidelines for the publicly funded library system in Sweden (Kulturdepartementet 2013, p. 7). Of particular relevance to the present study are paragraphs two and seven. Paragraph two, as translated by the National Library Organisation (2015) states:

§2 The libraries in the public library system shall promote the development of a democratic society by contributing to the transfer of knowledge and the free formation of opinions. The libraries in the public library system shall promote the status of literature and an interest in learning, information, education, and research as well as other cultural activities. Library activities shall be available to everyone. (National Library Organisation 2015, p.7)

The promotion of democracy is at the very heart of libraries in Sweden. As a result of digitalisation much of the information paragraphs §2 states that libraries should promote now takes the form of digital information. Thus in order to fully adhere to the law, libraries must put some of its focus on digital participation. It also seems fair to say that libraries have an obligation to help promote digital participation in order for the library's patrons to be able to fully engage with the information resources available and with the cultural activities found online.

This is reinforced in paragraph 7, which, as translated by the National Library Organisation (2015) states the following:

§7 Public libraries shall in particular promote reading and access to literature. Public libraries shall act to increase knowledge about how information technology can be used for the attainment of knowledge, learning, and participation in cultural life. (National Library Organisation 2015, p.17).

The National Library Organisation goes on to state that libraries should be working with those proficient with technology, but who may lack the ability to critically evaluate digital information (National Library Organisation 2017).

The recently published library strategy “Democracy’s Treasure Chest: Proposal for a National Library Strategy” reinforces this position (Fichtelius, Persson & Enarson 2019). This document is the first of its kind in Sweden and seeks to outline a structure for all libraries in Sweden. One of the key points raised in the proposal is that of digitisation and argues that most things should be available in digital form within 10 years. It is not clear if the writers of this policy have given consideration to digital exclusion when making these proposals. What is clear, from all of these public policy documents, is that libraries have a central role to play in a digital society in helping to promote democracy, the transfer of knowledge and the free formation of opinions.

Libraries around the country are already addressing paragraphs §2 and §7 of the Swedish Library Act. They do so through a range of programs and this has been documented by studies that I will discuss in more detail in Chapter three. What is not clear from the existing literature is what other kinds of work libraries are doing in this area and what impact this has on library staff. The present study seeks to contribute to the current literature by exploring this in more detail.

1.2 Significance, Purpose and Research Questions

George Ritzer’s theory of McDonaldization explains the process by which the principles characterizing the fast food industry have pervaded society (Ritzer 1983). As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter two, Ritzer (2018) argues that digitalisation represents the ultimate form of McDonaldization. The term *digitalisation* should not be confused with *digitisation*. Digitisation is the process of converting from analog to digital. Scanning a document is a clear example of digitisation where a piece of paper is converted to binary code stored on a computer. Digitalisation on the other hand refers to the changes that arise through greater reliance on digital services. Examples of digitalisation are everywhere, from the way we access and manage our finances, shopping, healthcare, and education. As not everyone has access to technology, nor the necessary skills to access these digital services, the more digitalised society becomes the greater the consequences for those who are digitally excluded. This makes the promotion of digital participation even more important.

The purpose of this study is to explore digital participation in Sweden from the perspective of library staff in the context of an increasingly McDonaldized society. I am interested in how library staff gauge their IT skills as well as their experiences with patrons who have questions of a digital nature. I am also interested to see where the questions library staff assist with stem from and if library staff feel they are required to provide support to customers of other organisations. I examine this by analysing responses to a short questionnaire that has been sent to all public libraries in Sweden. With the help of the theory of McDonaldization (Ritzer 1983) I hope to illustrate how the library's work with digital participation can be understood in a wider social perspective.

In order to explore how the experiences of library staff can be understood in the light of society's ongoing McDonaldization, particularly with regard to increasing digitalisation, I have formulated three specific sub-questions:

- How do library staff experience their work with patrons who need to be supported in their digital participation in Sweden?
- What is it that library staff are helping with and how are they treated if/when they are unable to answer?
- What is the relationship between the IT skills of library staff and how they experience their work in supporting patrons with digital participation?

By answering these questions it is hoped that this study will lead to a deeper understanding of the of conditions for digital participation.

1.3 Disposition

Chapter 1 introduces the subject of this thesis. The purpose of the study is explained and the research questions outlined. In Chapter 2 the theoretical framework of McDonaldization is presented. Chapter 3 outlines the findings of previous research. Chapter 4 explains the methodological perspective of this thesis and the method used to collect the empirical material and analyze it. The limitations of this study are also discussed. The results of this study are presented in chapter 5. Finally, in Chapter 6 I discuss the results of this study and present my suggestions for future research and my conclusions.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the theory of “McDonaldization” developed by sociologist George Ritzer. He first coined the term in 1983 in an article entitled “The McDonaldization of Society” which was published in the *Journal of American Culture* (Ritzer 1983). Ritzer (2018) subsequently expanded upon this theory in the first edition of his book “The McDonaldization of Society” published in 1992. Here he presented his re-conceptualisation and modernization of Max Weber’s (1864-1920) theory of Rationalization (Quinn 2015, Ritzer 2018). Now in its 9th edition, Ritzer (2018) continues to assert that society has adopted the characteristics of a fast-food restaurant. Ritzer (2018) illustrates how McDonaldization has permeated a wide array of different industries from agriculture to healthcare and even education. The theory of McDonaldization describes four key dimensions of McDonaldization, efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control.

2.1 Efficiency

Efficiency describes the best possible way to do something, with the least waste of resources, for example time or energy. What Ritzer (2018) makes clear is that gains in efficiency always go to those who are pushing for and profiting from rationalization. The drive-through service at McDonalds may seem like the most efficient way to get a meal, yet one tends to forget that McDonalds is now freed from the need to have customers in its restaurants or to have staff available to clean up after them. It is also less likely that customers will complain once they have gotten all the way home with incorrect orders. It quickly becomes clear that the benefits of efficiency are heavily weighted in the favour of McDonalds than its customers.

Another example of efficiency, and one that is more relevant to the present study, is the efficiency of online banking. Online banking can, for example, allow its customers to check their balance in the middle of the night, to pay bills or transfer money with a few simple clicks. However, the benefits afforded the banks is guaranteed to be higher. For example, when their customers all use online banking, the banks themselves no longer need to have as many branches staffed with qualified people. Closing branches and laying off staff means they no longer have to pay those staff or to provide sick leave, maternity pay, holidays, staff training, coffee in the staffroom, paper or ink in the printers or even christmas parties. Most efficient of all is that banks have convinced their customers, now more accurately called ‘prosumers’ (Ritzer, 2018), to complete all of their own transactions, while presenting the facility as a service and convincing their customers to pay for the privilege.

2.2 Calculability

The second aspect of McDonaldization is calculability, referring to the ability to quantify things or to count them. At McDonalds everything is quantified from the time it takes to make a burger and to how long the average customer stays in the restaurant. The concept itself makes sense from a business perspective. Calculability ensures minimal waste of products and resources and thus help to maximize profits. It ensures, for example, that there are enough staff to fill orders though not too many so that they are paying people to do nothing. A focus on calculability however often results in a focus on quantity rather than quality. Customers are also prone to falling into the trap of assuming that more is better (Ritzer, 2018).

Ritzer (2018) provides examples of calculability from a myriad of industries, from academia to health services, but perhaps most relevant to this study is the idea that digitalisation is the “extreme of calculability” (Ritzer, 2018, p142). Here Ritzer (2018) explains how digitalisation has resulted in, and will continue to contribute to unemployment and underemployment as various roles in society are replaced by automated processes.

2.3 Predictability

The third factor of McDonaldization is that of predictability, referring to the ways in which McDonaldized industries remove uncertainty, often by defining a process down to minute details. McDonalds staff are not cooks, they are employees who follow an exact process that covers how long the fries spend in the oil, how many pickles on a burger. They press buttons on machines that fill drinks to an exact amount. No thought or creativity required. Even interactions with customers are scripted to the point that we all recognise “Welcome to McDonalds, may I take your order please?” and the inevitable “Would you like fries with that?”. While the responses are not necessarily scripted, customers also tend to respond in a predictable way.

Even though most of the discussion regarding predictability centers on the limited power afforded to both employees and customers, Ritzer (2018) also discusses how scripts can provide employees with a source of power whereby they are able to “fend off unwanted or extraordinary demands merely by refusing to deviate from the script” (p. 146). Many, particularly Swedes, will recognise “that’s just how it is⁴” as a passive weapon to bring any discussion to an end when dealing with customer service. Frustratingly for the customer the problem has not been solved, yet the representative of the organisation is no longer willing to discuss the issue or to help find a solution.

⁴ “Det är ju så”

2.4 Control

The fourth and final aspect of McDonaldization is control. The focus here is on controlling people because quite simply

...the great source of uncertainty, unpredictability, and inefficiency in any rationalizing system is people- either those who work within it or those served by it (Ritzer 2018, p. 110)

Ritzer (2018) illustrates the concept of control by describing a fast food drive-through where the entire process provides little scope for improvisation. The narrow driveway ensures you can only move forward, the large menu provides you with a limited range of items you might order, and if you take too long the other cars behind you will likely inform you with their horns that you need to get moving. By limiting possible responses, McDonalds controls the process of serving fast-food to customers in a way that suits their own needs and not the needs of the customer.

Perhaps the most effective way to control the relationship between staff and customers is to remove staff completely from roles that involve customer interactions. This forces the consumer into a new role that Ritzer (2018) refers to as “prosumer” as the customer produces and consumes during the same transaction. As mentioned previously, internet banking is a example of a situation in which the consumer is now left “on their own to do much or even all of the work once done by paid employees” (Ritzer 2018, p. 165).

2.5 Irrationality of Rationality

One could argue that McDonaldization has become the norm in our society. The lure of efficiency, predictability, calculability and control is strong and can be justified on many different levels, though most strongly from a financial point of view as McDonaldization helps to maximise profits and/or minimize costs. However, McDonaldization can also have some very serious consequences that can eventually lead to inefficiencies, unpredictability, incalculability and loss of control, or the “Irrationality of Rationality” (Ritzer, 2018, p.167). The most obvious examples are again found in fast food restaurants. Long queues that result in long waits and incorrect orders can hardly be called efficient. Other examples are easy to find such as the inability to contact support when online purchases do not proceed as they should. Another example would be the increased environmental damage caused by online shopping, where increased packaging and fuel for transport becomes an irrationality that will continue to impact society for generations to come (Ritzer 2018).

The increasingly digitalised and McDonaldized society we live in has created many irrationalities, in particular many that result in digital exclusion. The present study explores digital participation in Sweden from the perspective of library staff. As will be explained in the next chapter, libraries and library staff are already working in a variety of ways to promote digital inclusion in the hope of lessening the impact of digital exclusion.

3. Previous Research

In this chapter I present a summary of research relevant to the present study. Relevant literature was found by searching for key terms in both Swedish and English in Lund University's Library catalogue⁵.

3.1 The McDonaldization of libraries

There would appear to be a gap in the literature concerning the McDonaldization of public libraries. The only study found was a bachelor's thesis written by Alexander Edkvist and Malin Norling (2017). Their paper "Between handcraft and outsourcing: challenges with purchasing of literature in other languages than Swedish and English in Swedish public libraries⁶" (my translation) explored how two key aspects of McDonaldization, effectivity and control impacted the process of purchasing literature in languages other than Swedish and English. They argue that efficiency, through outsourcing, and control, via purchasing contracts, has the potential to have a negative impact on libraries by homogenizing holdings across libraries and limiting the input the librarians have deciding which titles should be purchased. At the same time, the authors state that effectivity and control has potential for positive outcomes as it may solve the problem of not knowing which media to purchase when the librarian has no knowledge of the language they are working with. The authors also suggest that it is perhaps better for smaller libraries to have a standard holding that suits a majority of patrons rather than an eclectic one that may only serve a few.

Edkvist and Norling (2017) findings are in keeping with the work of Brian Quinn in his article "The McDonaldization of Academic Libraries?". Here, Quinn (2015) argues that academic libraries have been McDonaldized and this has resulted in the standardization of library services and homogenization of holdings across institutions. Furthermore, Quinn (2015) argues that this has resulted in irrationalities for both staff and users of academic libraries and states that academic librarians have been excluded from decision making to the point that they become "disaffected individuals incapable of initiative and vision" (Quinn 2015, p. 345).

While I find it hard to accept Quinn's bleak view of the library profession, it is impossible to deny that elements of McDonaldization are evident in public libraries in Sweden and no doubt around the world. For example, in terms of efficiencies, Quinn (2015) refers to the concept of prosumers, where the customer is also responsible for carrying out some of the work and gives the example of academic library users who must take "self-guided library tours", conduct their own searches and check out their own media (Quinn 2015, p, 342). These features are also evident in public libraries where patrons can, and are encouraged to, do their

⁵ <https://www.lub.lu.se/>

⁶ Mellan Handverk och Outsourcing : Utmaningar vid inköp av litteratur på andra språk än svenska och engelska vid svenska folkbibliotek.

own searches, make online reservations and find their own way (based on signage rather than tours) as well as checking in and out their own media.

Calculability is evidenced in academic libraries through the detailed statistics that are collected. These statistics are then used in budget allocations and applications. Again, all of this is evident in public libraries, where statistics are generated for the number of visits, how many loans, participation in library programs as well as staff training. Similarly, according to Quinn (2015) the concept of control is evident in academic libraries in the form of “bureaucratic accountability” (p. 344) such as performance reviews and departmental goals. While it would be difficult to find an industry not engaging in performance reviews, it is nevertheless a form of control that is also present in public libraries. Quinn (2015) presents additional ways in which academic libraries control their users, such as signage that limits how long the user can use a library computer and for what purpose. Again, this is no different in public libraries. Finally, Quinn (2015) describes how academic libraries have become more predictable as staff receive standardized training and orientation and thus respond to library patrons in predictable ways. He goes further to state that academic libraries provide a similarly predictable culture and ambiance through “art in the library programs...that often bear more similarities than differences to one another” (Quinn 2015, p.344). Again, such predictability seems to be evident in public libraries, in particular with regard to the programs on offer.

3.2 Digidel

While the focus of this paper is on public libraries and library staff, it is important to acknowledge that they are not the only organisations promoting digital inclusion. Another key player is Digidel, a government initiative that has the sole purpose of promoting digital participation in Sweden. The Digidel network⁷ states that:

Through cooperation and shared knowledge The Digidel Network works to increase digital participation and access to digital services in Sweden. The Digidel Network is a non-hierarchical, unbound, democratic network (Digidel 2018, my translation).

The network was formed at the conclusion of a three year long national campaign for increased digital participation “Digidel 2013” which acknowledged that digital participation is a requirement for a well functioning democracy (Digidel 2013, p7). The report “Digidel 2013 increased digital participation: suggestions from Digidel 2013⁸” outlined how much of an impact digital participation can have on individuals and society. Social media for example can provide new opportunities for social interaction and participation in society, both in private and work situations, for those with disabilities or people who live far away from each other.

⁷ Digidel: <https://digidel.se/om-oss/>

⁸ Ökad digital delaktighet: förslag från Digidel 2013

The report also discusses digital participation in the context of daily life, the ability to pay bills, shop for food or clothes are all easily done online now. They go on to mention the gradually disappearing physical conditions, for example stores and offices, because the services are now available online. However, that is only if you have the ability to access them. Similarly the report describes the internet as the new playground for “suppliers”, such as companies and other organisations, where “everything is easier, costs less, and reaches so many”⁹ (Digidel 2013, p24). The report clarifies that the campaign found that many people, particularly seniors, experience poorer quality of service. This is particularly evident in situations where previously accessible physical locations have been converted to online services. Digidel argues that while this is frustrating for citizens, it is a “concrete incentive to learn” (p. 24) how to access digital services.

Digidel often works with libraries to promote digital inclusion and in particular helps to coordinate two focus weeks each year. The european initiative, All DIGITAL week¹⁰, and e-citizens week¹¹ which is a national event. In addition to these two events there are now Digidel centers opening in municipalities around Sweden. There are already three established centers, one in Sundsvall, Motala and Helsingborg. A further 15 centers are opening around the country during 2019 including, Båstad, Gällivare, Götene, Hylte, Jokkmokk, Kramfors, Krokoms, Luleå, Mönsterås, Norrköping, Rättviks, Säter, Sövsjö, Torsby och Vingåkers municipalities. These centers will be fine-tuned to cater for the specific needs of their communities, but in broad terms will follow the “Motala-model”, which is based on the original Digidel center in Motala municipality. The Motala Digidel center provides daily opening hours where citizens can get help with technical questions as well as workshops and study circles. Like libraries, at Digidel centers services are provided free of charge and directed towards all age groups and backgrounds.

3.3 Library programs for digital participation.

Libraries play a key role in many countries in making the internet accessible to everyone (Wihlborg & Engstrom 2017). There are 1109 public libraries in Sweden (Kungliga Biblioteket 2019). Most of these libraries provide free access to computers and the internet to citizens. Yet this is merely the first step and digital inclusion requires more than simply providing access to computers and the internet. Information, training and support are vital in ensuring that users can effectively access and participate online (Reneland-Forsman 2018; Brandt Smedberg, Rasch and Wilow Sundhand 2019). Much of the previous research concerning the digital divide relates to ways in which libraries encourage digital participation and increase digital competencies within their communities (Norberg 2017).

⁹ “Där allt är lättare , kostar mindre och når så många”

¹⁰ <https://digidel.se/all-digital-week/>

¹¹ Emedborgarveckan: <https://digidel.se/emedborgarveckan/>

Perhaps the most comprehensive study to date is the report compiled by Ida Norberg (2017) on behalf of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions¹² (SKL), the Digidel network and Sweden's National Library, Kungliga Biblioteket¹³ (KB). The report, entitled "Initiatives for digital competence in public libraries: a study of the work of the public libraries in digital participation¹⁴" provides an overview of the initiatives for digital competence on offer at public libraries in Sweden. The study was based on the findings from a questionnaire as well as in-depth interviews. Like the present study, all 290 municipalities in Sweden were offered the opportunity to participate in the study via survey. The study received responses from 91% of municipalities and the results indicated that 80% of those libraries offer programs to increase the digital competencies of their patrons. The programs included activities that taught basic technical skills. They also taught patrons how to use the library's own digital services such as borrowing ebooks and services such as Legimus¹⁵, a service for people who have difficulty reading printed text because of a disability. Other programs include those for programming and creating online, such as working with pictures or searching your family tree, or activities for children in programming or simple robotics. Such programs encourage patrons to become more active online by engaging them in activities they find interesting or relatable.

Many of the programs aimed at increasing digital participation take place during the previously mentioned campaign weeks that are coordinated by Digidel. Norberg (2017) found while some libraries held programs on a weekly or monthly basis, the clear majority of activities were conducted during these campaign weeks, illustrating just how important it is for libraries to be supported by such national and international strategies.

Norberg (2017) explains that the element missing in her study was a question that asked how the library supports its patrons outside planned programs. This was the main inspiration for the present study. As Norberg (2017) states on several occasions, there is a great need for digital help and support and this is a challenge that most library staff face on a daily basis. As one of the respondents to the Norberg (2017) report states:

Several times, activities that promote digital participation take place spontaneously on the visitor's request. For example, search help, webmail problems, printing, bank errands, declarations, booking tickets¹⁶ (Norberg 2017, p.25).

¹² Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting: <https://skl.se/tjanster/Englishpages.411.html>

¹³ Kungliga Biblioteket: <https://www.kb.se/kb-in-English.html>

¹⁴ Insatser för digital kompetens på folkbiblioteken: en studie om folkbibliotekens arbete med digital delaktighet

¹⁵ <https://www.legimus.se/102610/engelska-English>

¹⁶ "Ett flertal gånger sker aktiviteter som gynnar digitala delaktighet spontant på besökarens förfrågan. T. ex sökhjälp, webmailproblem, utskrifter, bankärenden, deklARATIONER, boka biljetter."

Norberg (2017) also looked at situations where libraries decide they should not provide support, particularly concerning situations when personal information is concerned. The specific question asked in the survey was

Question 6: Has the municipality's public library taken a position to not offer guidance when it comes to using banking services, other public authorities or similar, for reasons of privacy?¹⁷ (Norberg 2017, p. 54)

Only 30% of municipalities answered yes, with a further 62% responding no and 8% stating that they didn't know. During the interviews it became clear that this is a highly relevant question that is often raised by library staff yet is largely an unsolved issue. Two of the library managers interviewed stated that they felt that it was better that library staff provided help, even if it involved private information, than be faced with a situation where a patron does not receive any help at all. Another interviewee stated that they did not see any problem with helping a patron log into their bank account. What was highlighted was a legal problem, whereby if library staff were to help with bank errands or the purchase of travel tickets for example, and something was to go wrong. Here the library is put in a potentially tricky legal situation and one that requires a policy (Norberg 2017, p. 34).

Finally, Norberg (2017) looked at the influence of library staff's digital competencies on the programs offered by the library. Here she found that out of the 20% of libraries who did not offer activities to promote digital participation, 13% cited a lack of the required IT-competencies as the reason why they did not offer such programs.

Norberg (2017) concludes the report by calling for clear and specific guidelines for how libraries should work with digital participation. She also states that better cooperation within municipalities, in particular IT-development departments and above all, that libraries play an active role in increasing digital participation in their communities.

Another study looking at programs to encourage digital participation was carried out by Elin Wihlborg and Julia Engstrom (2017). In their article they present the findings of the project "Digital media bus in Östergötland" and its work in promoting digital participation. Buses were equipped with computers with various programming software, 3D printers and virtual reality glasses and taken out into the community to engage with citizens. They found that they were most able to reach children with activities such as programming and using the various equipment however it was more difficult to reach adults. However, they were better able to reach adults willing to participate by changing their focus to providing practical support, for example "searching the web, connecting to their electronic medical patient records"

¹⁷ Fråga 6: Har kommunens folkbibliotek aktivt tagit ställning för att *inte* erbjuda handledning när det gäller att använda banktjänster, andra offentliga myndighetstjänster eller liknande, på grund av integritetsskäl?

(Wihlborg & Engstrom 2017, p. 9). The authors argue that “if libraries are going to be the core in solving the issues about the digital divide, they have to both seek cooperation and be brave about working with some new areas” (p. 9). One example of such cooperation they provide is the potential for working with banks and the media buses and going out to help citizens with their banking.

3.4 Working in a library can be stressful!

Stress and librarianship are not usually presented together. The popular conception of a library is that of peace and quiet (Stenbäck, 2018) and it is not so much of a stretch to assume that working in a library would therefore be a peaceful and quiet job. Researchers seeking to demonstrate a relationship between cortisol levels measured in hair strands and perceived stress made that exact assumption (Faresjö, Jullander, M. Götmalm & Theodorsson 2014). They sought out two groups of middle aged women, one group of nurses and one group of librarians, assuming that the nurses would be more stressed than the librarians. These researchers measured hair cortisol levels and asked participants to complete a self-report questionnaire measuring stress, health and other relevant factors. The researchers found a significant relationship between high cortisol levels measured in hair strands and high self-reported stress levels, lower perceived health and symptoms of depressiveness. What the study failed to find was significant differences between health indicators of nurses and librarians. In fact the two outliers mentioned in the report were both librarians. One of which reported an intense period of stress directly related to her role in the library. During interviews the researchers asserted that perhaps nurses had more understanding of stress and thus better coping mechanisms, but agreed that another contributing factor was the pressure that the public sector is under nowadays (Johansson 2017).

Librarians around the country reacted strongly to the findings of Faresjö et al (2014). Several newspaper articles were printed in which Librarians explained the wide range of services that they provide. These articles explained that libraries are arguably the last public space citizens can access for help with a wide range of problems (Lindberg & Salmaso, 2017). Indeed, when there isn't anywhere else to get help, citizens often turn to the library for support (Hellström 2018; Norberg 2017). This places pressure on library staff to help in situations where they may not have the required knowledge or appropriate skills and even puts them in situations where they may be intruding on personal privacies or placing themselves in precarious legal situations.

3.4 Student librarians on their education

Students enrolled in library and information science degrees in Sweden were interviewed by the Swedish Union for culture, advertising and communication¹⁸ and the Swedish Library Association¹⁹. The students interviewed acknowledged that libraries are no longer simply rooms full of books, but described in terms of meeting places, activity and information centers and digital labs. Libraries are now more likely to be defined as a collections of physical and digital resources (DIK och Svensk biblioteksförening 2018).

When asked about how well they felt the degree prepared them for future roles within libraries many students expressed a desire for more practical customer service and teaching skills as well as a stronger focus on digitalisation. Many students understand that digital competencies are a key element of future librarianship.

Another issue raised by this study was the need for libraries to learn to differentiate between profession and competence. While it is clear that librarians and their unique competencies are vital to libraries, as society evolves, so too do the needs of the library. It may be necessary to complement the skill set that librarians hold with those from other professions, for example IT support.

All of this previous research illustrates just how important digital participation is and the key role that libraries and library staff play in this area. It is also clear that there are some gaps in the literature, such as the additional work libraries are doing outside of programs, to promote participation, and the stress this causes. Inspired by these studies, both conceptually and methodologically, the present study seeks to fill in some of these gaps in the literature.

3.5 Digital participation in Jönköping

Finally, a very recent study has been published by Jönköpings county and municipality. In their report Brandt Smedberg, Rasch, and Wilow Sundhand, (2019) provide a comprehensive overview of the support for digital participation currently available in Jönköping and found that 96% of the respondents met those who are digitally excluded. The reasons for this digital exclusion were also assessed, the results of which are presented in figure 1.

¹⁸ DIK - Facket för kultur, reklam och kommunikation: <https://dik.se/om-dik/vart-uppdrag/det-har-ar-dik/>

¹⁹ Svensk biblioteksföreningen: <https://www.biblioteksforeningen.se/om-oss/>

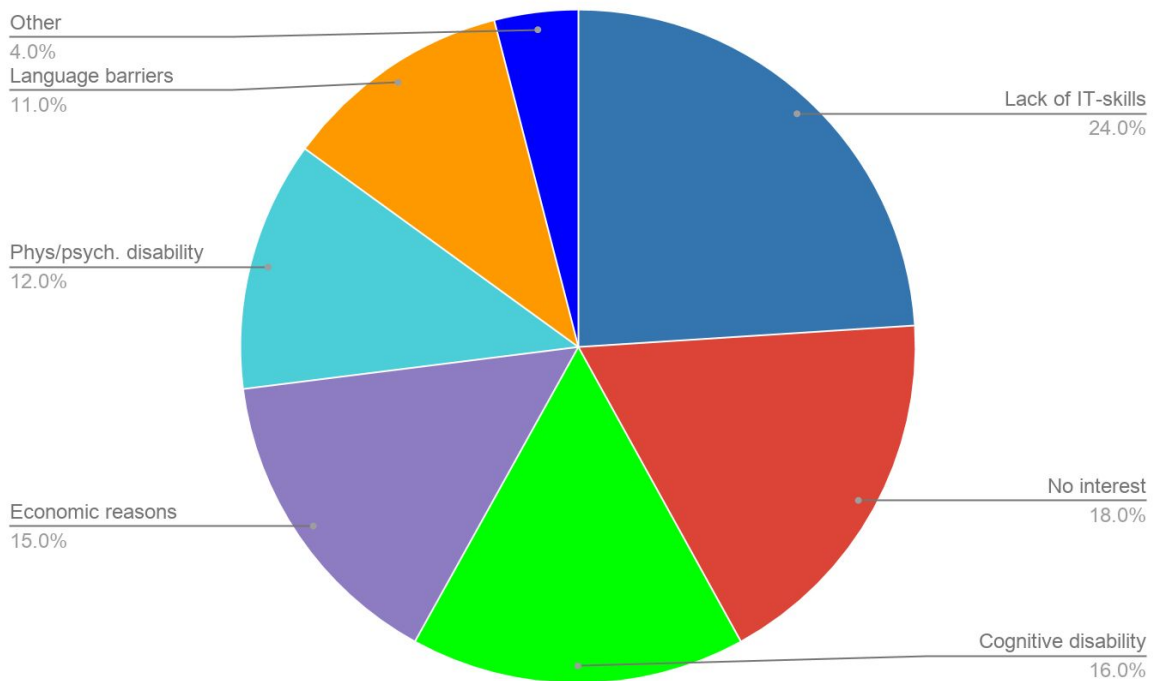


Figure 1. Reasons for digital exclusion. Translated and reproduced with permission from “*Datasamhället är ett jäsra bök*”: Inventering av stöd för digital delaktighet - en förstudie” by Brandt Smedberg, Rasch, and Wilow Sundhand, (2019)

Brandt Smedberg, Rasch, and Wilow Sundhand (2019) also reported on the different types of support available to citizens in Jönköping as well as the difficulties encountered in providing this support. The report states that while libraries provided access to computers, printers and scanners and had staff who wanted to help, they were often restricted in their ability to do so because of a lack of time and resources. Library staff also reported that they felt uncomfortable helping with certain digital tasks, and raised the question of “what happens if it goes wrong?” (p. 17). In keeping with the findings of Norberg (2017), library staff stated that they felt that the library was lacking an official mandate and clear boundaries concerning how much support should be provided (Brandt Smedberg, Rasch, and Wilow Sundhand 2019). Personnel from social services, for example aged care facilities, also provided support on behalf of municipal agencies and expressed concern that providing support had the potential to result in the user relying on the staff member and failing to learn how to carry out these tasks by themselves.

Brandt Smedberg, Rasch, and Wilow Sundhand (2019) then looked at the help available from civil society, such as pensioners associations, churches and student organisations. These organisations held courses teaching IT skills to promote digital participation and in some

situations passed on donations of computers or other technology to those in need. Difficulties included finding volunteers to hold courses and at times a resistance from users to learn new things.

Banks were also given the opportunity to describe the support they provide to their members, with two banks replying to the questionnaire. The study found that bank staff were more than happy to help their customers with bank services, but referred the customer elsewhere for answers to questions they felt were not related to banking.

The report cites paragraphs §2 and §7 of the Library Act (SFS 2013) and explains, as I and many others have done, that the library has a responsibility to promote digital participation, particularly for the libraries prioritised groups. However, Brandt Smedberg, Rasch, and Wilow Sundhand, (2019) make it clear that libraries should not have to carry this burden alone. They explain that the Social Service Act (SFS 2001:453) requires that social services promotes active participation in society. Which, in our digital society requires at least some digital participation.

Brandt Smedberg, Rasch, and Wilow Sundhand, (2019) drew three main conclusions from their study. The first was that digital participation is not promoted exclusively by providing access to technology. Furthermore, if Sweden is determined to become the best in the world when it comes to taking advantage of all that digitalisation has to offer, then Sweden should also aim to be the best in the world at providing support from the individual's perspective. Failure to do so completely undermines the goal of strengthening democracy through digital participation.

The second conclusion drawn in this study was that the solution to the problem of digital exclusions lies in parallel actions. The authors argue that investments should be made to improve the IT competencies for citizens and the staff members of various institutions who provide support to citizens. Investments are also required in the technology available and personal support for those struggling with digital exclusion. Finally the authors argue that the responsibility for digital participation must permeate the municipal administration (Brandt Smedberg, Rasch, and Wilow Sundhand 2019). Again, libraries cannot be left to manage this burden alone, but must be able to act in unison with other actors within the municipality to ensure the best outcomes for their patrons.

4. Method and Material

In this section I explain the method used in this study.

4.1 Measures

The questionnaire was developed to gain insight into library staff's experience with digital participation. The questionnaire was originally written in Swedish (Attachment I). A direct translation to English is also attached (Attachment II). Both the Swedish version and the English translation were created solely by the author. The questionnaire contained two questions concerning the participant, their role in the library and the municipality where they work. One yes or no question related to library policy and six questions asked library staff about their experiences with digital participation and library patrons.

In order to gain a greater insight into the thoughts and feelings of the participants, the design of this questionnaire sought to mimic an interview as much as is possible while using a questionnaire format. Participants were offered the opportunity to clarify their response or provide additional information for each question. The only exception was question 3 as this was deemed to be a simple yes or no question. The final question offered participants the opportunity to provide any additional information they deemed to be relevant to the discussion of digital participation from the perspective of library staff.

In order to attempt to eliminate any innate bias that may have been implied by the order in which the response list was created the order in which alternatives were presented were randomised for questions three, five, six and seven.

The data was not manipulated in any way. The descriptive statistics provided in the Chapter five of this report contain all of the data collected. No responses have been excluded.

4.2 Ethical approval

No ethical approval was required as the survey was designed to be anonymous and no personal information was collected (Görman 2017). Participants were informed of their anonymity in the email sent to request their participation, as well as in the questionnaire itself. Participation was voluntary and questions could be skipped if the participant did not feel comfortable answering.

4.3 Data collection

Once designed the questionnaire was converted to an online survey using the web-based survey tool, Survey Monkey²⁰. Survey Monkey was chosen as it is one of the largest online survey tools in the world, its ease of use in survey creation, and the ability to create the survey in Swedish. The questionnaire was then distributed via social media and email. Every effort was made to contact all local libraries in Sweden by accessing each of the 290 municipalities in Sweden via their websites and accessing contact information for each local library. In some cases the only way to contact the library was via the municipality or via webform in which case the same text (Attachment III) was sent. A total of 702 emails and 15 web-forms were sent.

4.4 Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis was restricted to the chi-squared test for independence and performed using the SPSS software package available for free to students at Lund University. The Chi-squared test for independence is a non-parametric test that allows for statistical analysis of categorical data such as that which has been obtained in this study, in particular frequency of responses. The null hypothesis states that there is no relationship between the variables. If a significant result is obtained it supports the alternative hypothesis, which is that there is a relationship between the variables. In the event of a statistically significant result, the effect size has been interpreted according to Cohen's guidelines as outlined on page 628 of *Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences* by Gravetter and Wallnau (2009). This test does not make assumptions about the population however there are two assumptions that must be met in order for the analysis to be valid. In this study, the assumption of independence of observations has not been violated as each of the responses were from individual participants. Nor was the size of expected frequencies assumption violated in any of the calculations (see attachment V)

4.5 Limitations

This is an explorative study with a sample of convenience. The participants were not randomly selected and no data for quantitative statistics was gathered. As such no cause and effect conclusions can be drawn (Gravetter & Wallnau 2009).

Furthermore, the survey was intended to be used as a short anonymous interview, where participants were provided with the opportunity to provide clarification and or feedback on each of the questions. As such, statistical analysis is limited to descriptive statistics and simple analysis of relationships between concepts.

²⁰ <https://www.surveymonkey.com>

Finally, this study was limited by the format of the survey, future research would likely benefit from a reformatting of certain questions, in particular measures of stress as well as IT-skills to scaled variables in order to allow for more complex statistical analysis. It may also prove wise to rephrase certain questions to remove ambiguity, in particular question three concerning clear directives to specifically state “clear directives from management or municipality”. One respondent indicated that they work under “clear directives” that they had created for themselves. As this was the only question that did not give the opportunity to provide further clarification it is unclear how many participants reacted in this way. This was not detected in the small pilot study that was conducted prior to the main study. A more comprehensive pilot study may have proved beneficial in that it may have detected this ambiguity and allowed for it to be corrected.

5. Results and Analysis

In this chapter I present the results of this study. As previously mentioned, The data was not manipulated in any way and no data has been excluded. Several direct citations have been provided from the sample. For each of these I have personally translated from Swedish to English and provided the original Swedish citation as a footnote for reference. These footnotes have not been edited in any way.

5.1 Participants

877 library staff from at least 229 municipalities in Sweden voluntarily took part in the study by completing an online questionnaire. 18 participants chose not to provide the name of the municipality in which they worked, two of whom explained that this would remove their anonymity. Sweden has a total of 290 municipalities, thus the sample of respondents in this study represents a total of 78.96% of all municipalities in Sweden.

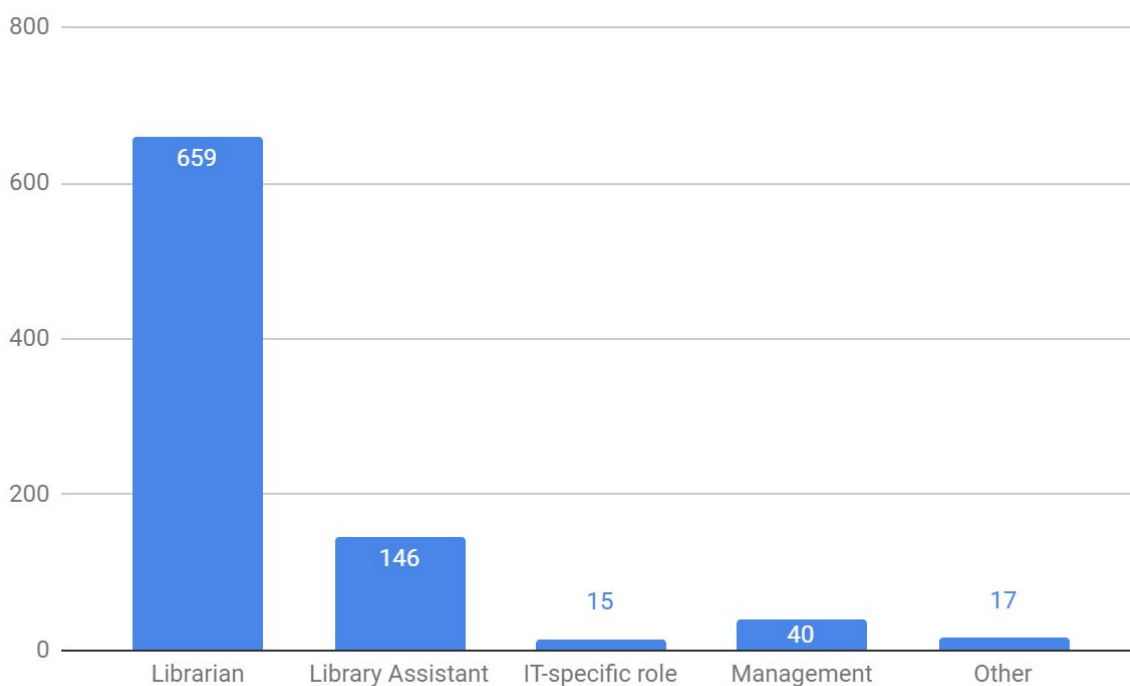


Figure 2. Roles held by participants at public libraries in Sweden

The majority of the respondents in this study are employed as Librarians (75.14%) and another 16.65% as Library Assistants. 1.71% had IT specific roles and 4.56% hold managerial positions. 1.94% hold other positions including pedagogical, administrative and janitorial roles.

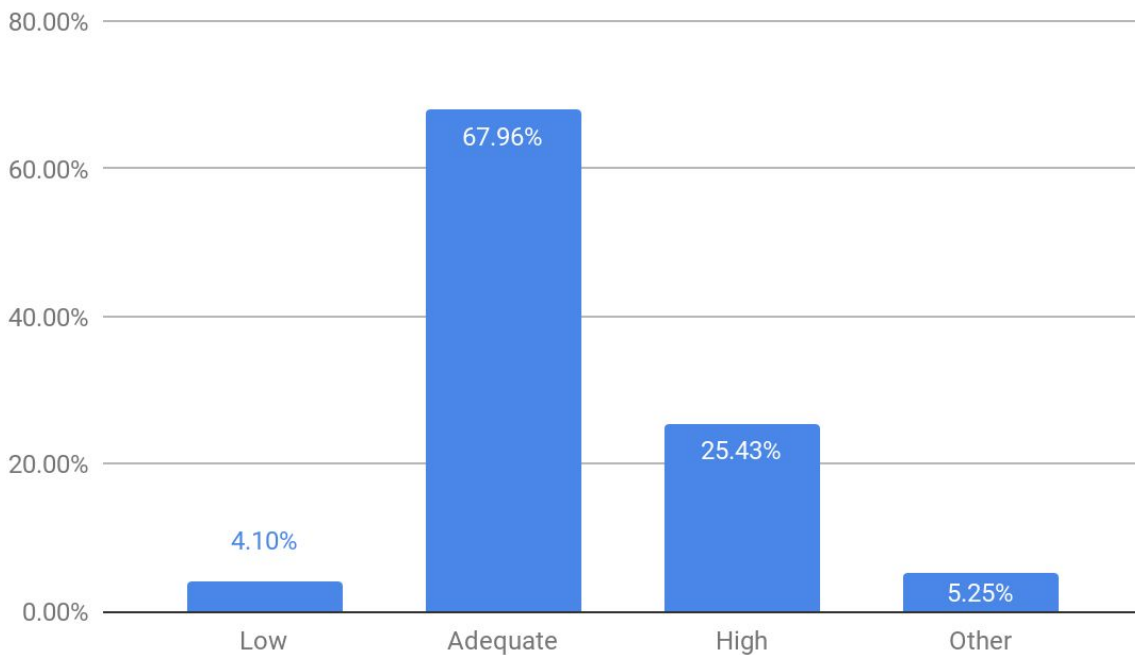


Figure 3. Self-reported IT competencies of library staff in Swedish public libraries.

Question three asked respondents about their IT Skills. As can be seen in figure 3, the majority of library staff (67.96%) felt they had adequate IT skills but that further training would be helpful. A further 25.43% of library staff felt they had strong IT skills and rarely encountered questions from patrons that they couldn't answer. Only 4.10% of library staff surveyed felt they had low IT skills and found it stressful when asked by patrons for help with digital related questions.

5.25% of respondents selected "other" and provided their own description of their IT skills. Here, all but one stated that they were able to help patrons with the majority of questions of a digital nature. There were those who explained that they had very high levels of IT skills and thus did not need any further training, and those that despite strong IT skills felt that additional training would be helpful. There were also those who had low IT skills, but wanted to specify that they did not feel stressed and some who stated that they trusted their ability to find the necessary information rather than worrying about their lack of IT skills.

Some participants stated they had strong IT skills, yet still felt that helping with such questions can be stressful, sometimes due to a lack of time, sometimes due to the way patrons responded if the the library staff member couldn't help. At other times this was due to the nature of the question, either containing sensitive personal information or complicated hardware or software specific questions. One participant suggested that they would rather undertake further training in pedagogy as this would be helpful in terms of providing IT support to library patrons²¹.

There were a small number of respondents who specifically stated that they had little interest in IT and little or no desire to develop such skills. One participant specifically stated that they did not feel that this was part of their role.²²

Question five asked participants about their shifts at the information desk in the library when there were many queries related to digital errands. As illustrated in figure 4. over half of all respondents (50.29%) felt that helping with IT questions is a normal part of their role and one in which they give their best. 23.49% think it's fun to help patrons with digital participation. In total almost 30% of participants reported that they find it stressful, of which 8.89% stated that they felt that further training would help to alleviate the stress. The other 20.07% stated that the stress is related to a lack of time and/or resources.

²¹ “Jag har starka IT-kompetenser men det räcker ibland inte hela vägen eftersom det finns så många olika variabler. Vissa saker kan man inte heller påverka på samma sätt som att man skulle sitta hemma med sin egen dator. Jag skulle även snarare vilja utveckla min pedagogiska kompetens när det gäller att handleda digitalt”.

²² “Kan hjälpa till, men känner ingen vilja att utveckla. Jag anser det inte vara mitt jobb, utan blir en distraktion.”

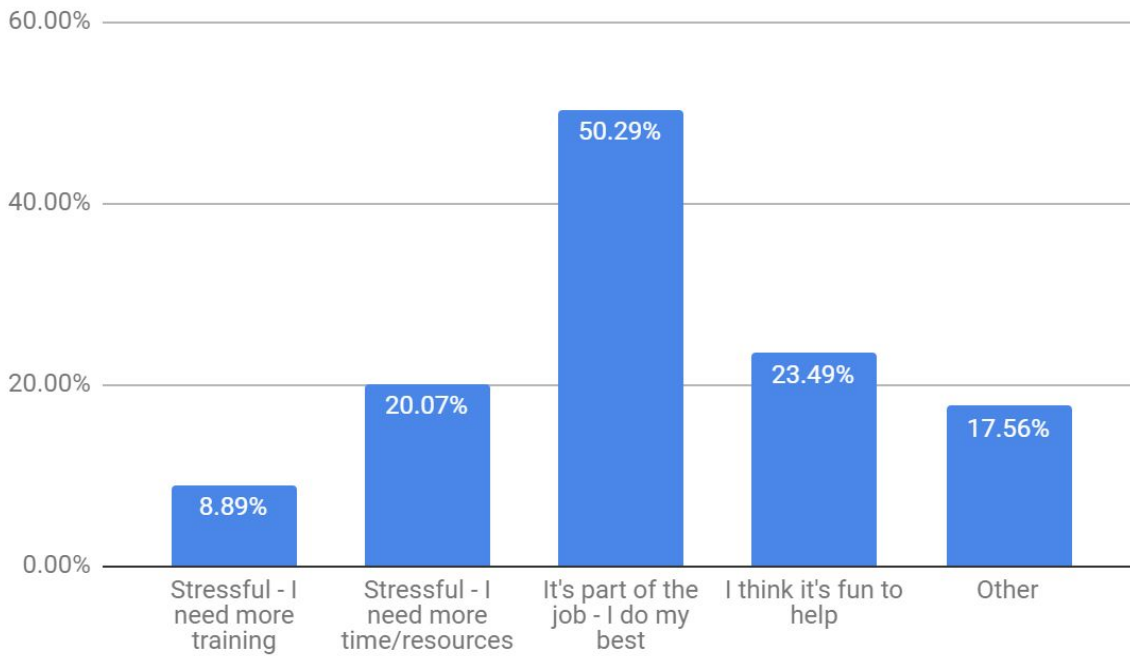


Figure 4. Experiences of Library staff during shifts at the information desk

17.56% of participants chose to provide further explanation or stated that they had another experience than the options in the questionnaire provided. The 17.56% was comprised of 154 participants, 8 of which explained that they did not work on the library floor.

A further 29 explained that they managed digital questions by referring to IT specific services. The majority of these were programs offered at least weekly, but sometimes as often as daily. Others stated that they had the option to refer patrons to a colleague who held an IT specific role and one respondent reported that their library had temporarily employed a person to focus on these questions as it had become overwhelming for library staff. Two respondents mentioned a Digidel center that they were able to refer patrons to for help.

A common theme was that of patrons who have very low or no IT skills and how it was often not possible to help these patrons as much as was necessary as such patrons require detailed support that library staff simply do not have sufficient time to provide.

Several respondents referred to language barriers as an additional stress factor involved in helping, with many of the patrons requiring help having newly come to Sweden. The desire to help in these situations was often impeded by an inability to communicate effectively.

Many of the respondents explained that they felt that too much was expected of library staff, stating that they were asked to help with all manner of unreasonable requests, including bank account transactions, private email account details and mobile phones programmed in other languages. Some respondents expressed concern that they would be held responsible for errors made while providing support, for example booking expensive holidays or transferring money. This is in contrast to other library staff who stated that they had established routines for such requests and another other who simply stated that they were good at saying “no”. Two respondents explained that they never carried out any of the tasks that patrons requested help with, they simply provided help so that the patron could solve the problem themselves.

The most common theme in the comments for this question was that other actors within society were not taking on their fair share of the workload. Respondents stated specifically that they felt that banks, the Swedish Taxation Office, the Immigration and Employment agencies to name but a few were failing to provide adequate support for their users/customers. These respondents felt that that libraries, without additional funding, were expected to shoulder the responsibility of helping everyone who found themselves unable to complete digital errands. One respondent stated that helping with these types of questions often interrupted their work with children in a reading promotion capacity, stating specifically:

It takes time from everything else I am expected to do during a shift. Not least of which, it steals time from the reading promotion work I do, for example discussing books with children who want book tips. Everytime I am interrupted by someone who is very stressed and must print out something NOW and demands help immediately²³.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between having staff IT skills and stress experienced by library staff. The relationship between these variables was weak, but significant, χ^2 (2df, $N = 862$) = 22.492, $p < .05$. Staff with high IT-skills are less likely to experience stress when working with patrons and their digital issues.

²³ Det tar tid från allt annat jag förväntas göra under ett pass. Inte minst stjälar det tid från allt läsfrämjande jobb jag gör t ex att bokprata med barn som vill ha boktips. Varenda gång blir jag avbruten av någon som är väldigt stressad och måste skriva ut något NU och kräver hjälp på en gång.

5.2 What *can* library staff help with?

As shown in figure 5, just over half of all participants surveyed stated that they did not have clear directives concerning what they can and cannot help with. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between having clear directives and stress experienced by library staff. The relationship between these variables was weak, but significant, χ^2 (1df, $N = 869$) = 7.882, $p < .05$. Staff are less likely to report stress when they are working under clear directives.

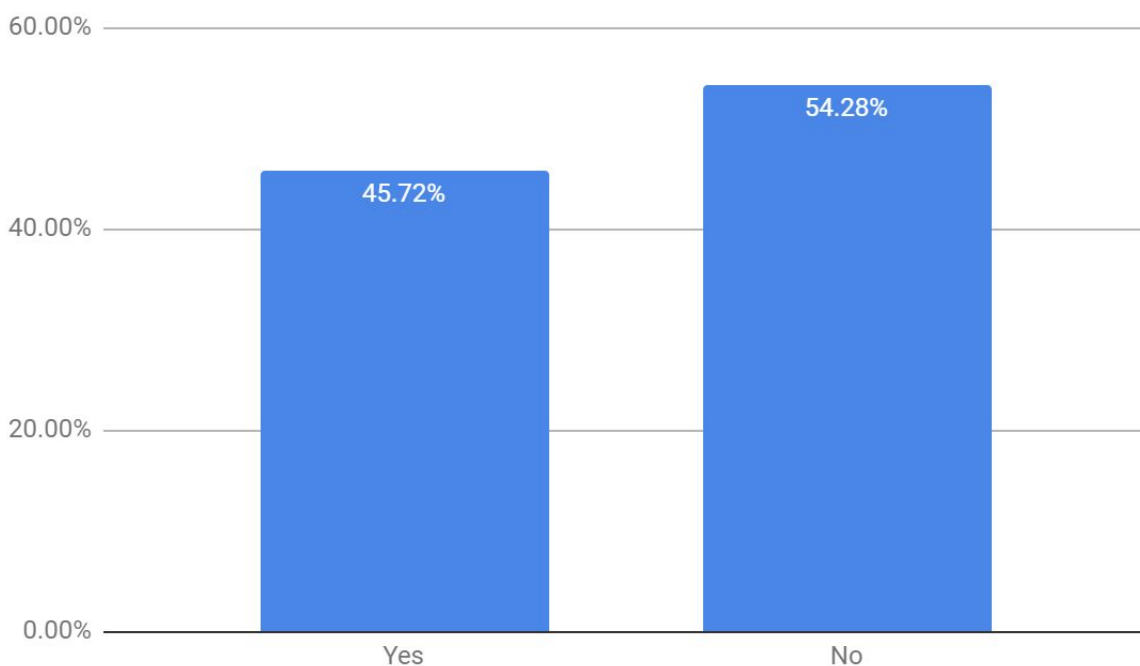


Figure 5. Distribution of participants responses to question three “Do you have clear directives concerning what you can help with (or what you can not help with)?”

It was expected that most of the respondents from the same municipality would have the same response for this question, however this was not supported by the data. Of the 229 municipalities who participated in this study 82 were represented by only 1 staff member. As illustrated in figure 6, of the remaining 147 municipalities nine agreed that they had clear directives, a further 25 agreed that they did not have clear directives. The remaining 113 municipalities, 76.87% of the all municipalities represented by more than one staff member, disagreed as to whether or not they have clear directives. This lack of agreement suggests that if guidelines exist for these municipalities, not all staff are aware of them and thus they cannot be deemed to be “clear directives”.

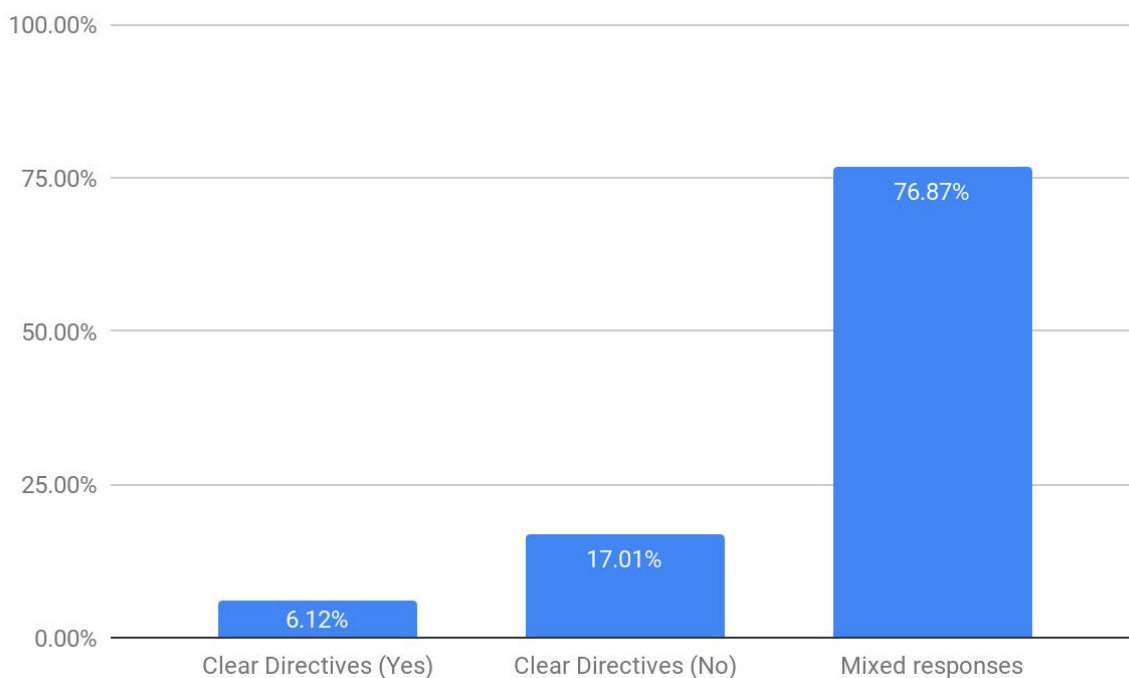


Figure 6. Consistency of responses to question three by municipalities represented by more than one respondent.

As mentioned previously, it is possible that this question was misinterpreted. It was assumed that this was a simple yes or no question, and as such participants were not provided with the option to provide further comments. However this may have been an inappropriate assumption as one participant used the comment section in question four to provide further information. This participant stated that they had clear directives, but that they had not received these clear directives from Library Management. The participant had decided to create their own directives based on their own experience and weighing of consequences. It is impossible to assess if others have interpreted this question in the same way. If they have, it would explain some of the disagreement within municipalities on this question.

5.3 What *do* library staff help with?

Figure 7 illustrates the categories of digital issues that patrons have. This question allowed for respondents to choose as many options as was relevant, with many participants selecting all of the options. The most common question patrons have was how to use devices such as mobile telephones and tablets (76.36%). Help with how to create or use email was also a frequent query from library patrons (71.28%).

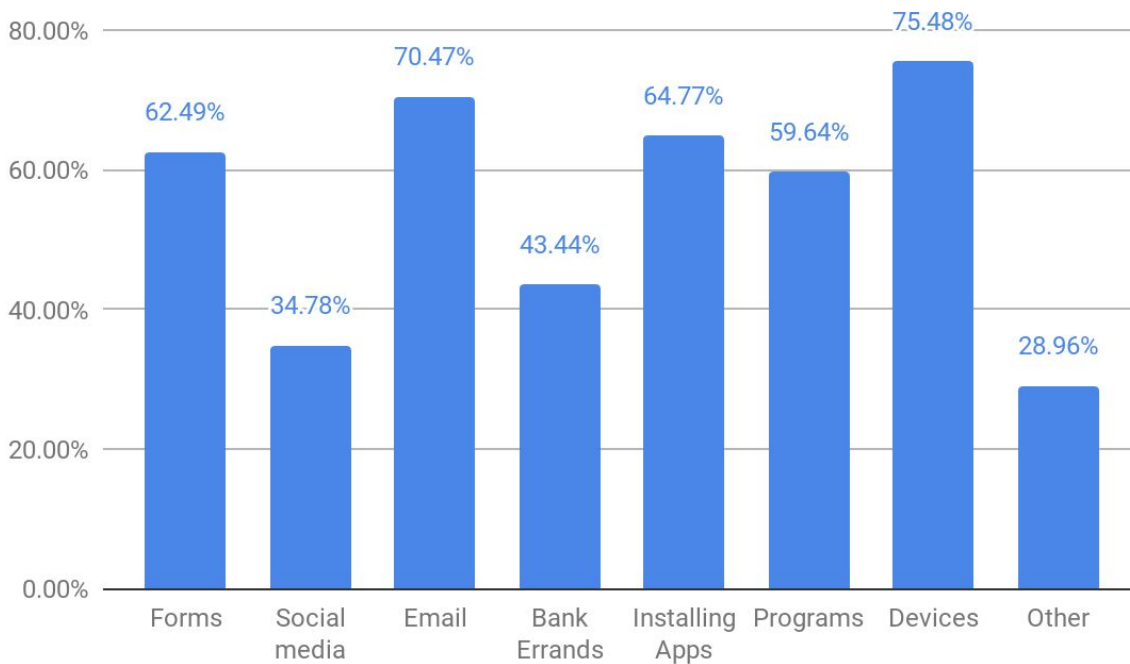


Figure 7. Categories of digital issues that library staff help patrons with.

29.65% of respondents chose to provide additional categories or clarify responses. Many of whom took the opportunity to clarify that they were specifically not permitted to help with bank errands or other questions that involved sensitive personal information. Some of these respondents explained that they had other services that they could refer patrons to for help. However some respondents stated that they often felt the need to disregard directives not to help with bank errands and other queries involving personal information as there was no one else who would help these people.

The additional categories participants provided included purchasing of bus, train and flight tickets as well as help accessing those tickets and printing them out. The taxation, immigration and employment offices were mentioned frequently in terms of help with not only finding forms on various websites but also filling them in; with patrons asking for help deciding what information to include in these forms and how to submit them. Respondents also reported helping with finding and applying for housing, employment and higher education. Student loan services were mentioned as well as embassies, education, as well as queries concerning what one should consider when buying a new computer or if antivirus software is worth the money. Library staff are also asked to translate information from a wide variety of sources and to proof-read documentation.

Several respondents reported that they help with anything and everything digital, with one respondent exclaiming that they help with whatever isn't working. One participant pointed out that this question was formulated as “what types of questions do I help with” and stated that had the question asked “what questions do patrons want help with“ they would have responded with “all of the above”²⁴. Ten participants chose not to answer this question.

5.4 Which institutions refer their clients to the library?

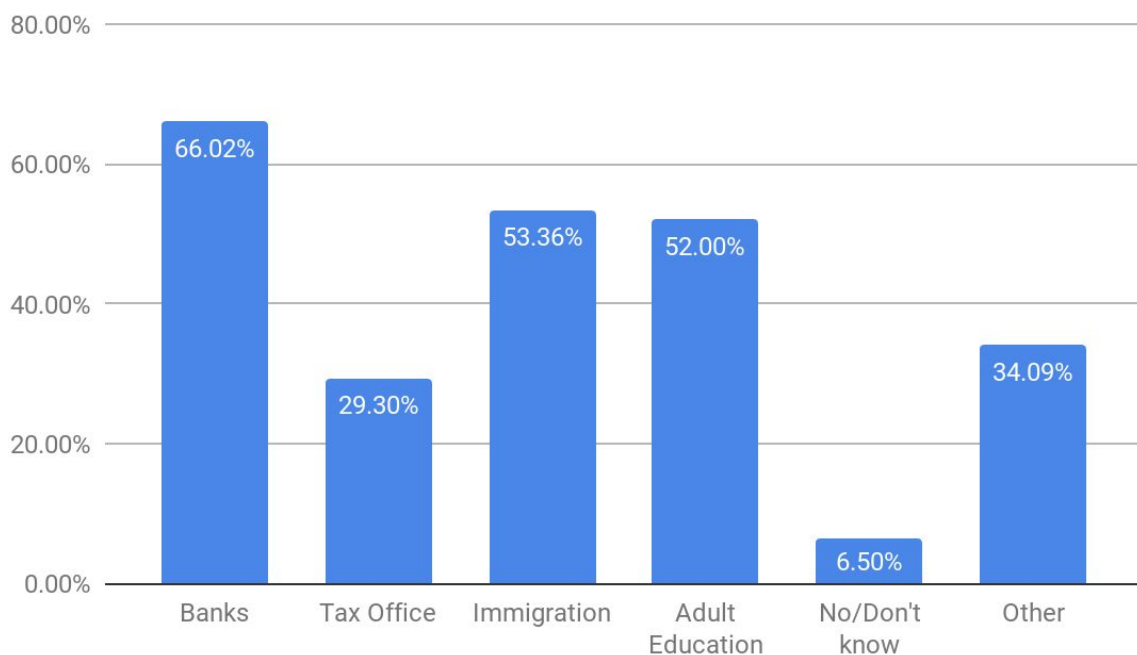


Figure 8. Institutions that refer clients to the library for help with digital errands

²⁴ “Frågan är ju ställd vilka tjänster jag hjälper till med, skulle det vara frågor de vill att man hjälper till med skulle jag kryssa i alla”.

As illustrated in figure 8, banks account for a significant proportion of the support provided by library staff. Many respondents took the opportunity to point out that Banks charge service fees and expressed frustration at the volume of support bank customers required from library staff. As one participant put it:

It is pretty frustrating when paying bank customers are referred to the library (from the same bank) for those errands that the bank should handle themselves. It is after all their own systems and customers, that they treat badly.²⁵

Another stated:

Our users are constantly referred to the library by a large bank. It. Is. Very. Frustrating.²⁶

Similar frustration was directed at the Swedish Immigration Department and other government agencies, including the Employment Agency, Social Services and the Health Department. Here library staff indicated that they felt that they did not have the appropriate training to provide such support as it was often specific and included private information such as medical records or personal financial information. One participant clearly stated their frustration:

Terribly annoying for us! We don't have the personnel, resources or time to provide support for all the other institutions at the same time as we should run the library²⁷

²⁵ “Det är ganska frustrerande när betalande kunder vid banker hänvisas till biblioteket (från samma bank) för de ärenden som banken ska sköta själva, det är trots allt deras egna system och kunder, som de behandlar dåligt.”

²⁶ “Våra användare blir konstant hänvisade till biblioteket av en storbank. Det. Är. Mycket. Frustrerande.”

²⁷ “Fruktansvärt irriterande för oss! Vi har inte personal, resurser eller tid att agera dagisverksamhet åt alla andra institutioner samtidigt som vi ska sköta biblioteket”

Another participant explained that:

Those mentioned have actively referred their customers to us on one or more occasion. Then one can very well say that many companies/authorities passively refer to us by placing such high requirements on the customers digital competencies which inevitably leads them to the library. We have printers, computers, scanners as well as personnel in place. They get the best help at the library, for better or worse.²⁸

57 respondents (6.5%) stated that they did not know if patrons had been referred to the library by other organisation or specifically stated that it had not happened. An additional 35 participants chose not to answer this question. These two figures combined account for 10.49% of all respondents in this study. One participant explained:

I don't know if they have been referred but there are people who need help with errands from the three bottom choices (Immigration Department, Banks and the Taxation Department). I think it is about availability, it is easier to get help at the library.²⁹

Yet another participant stated:

It is rare that they are specifically referred to the library, but most authorities today and banks assume that their users have access to computers and a certain level of IT-knowledge. That isn't the case. When a bank or authority changes its routines to more digital and where one has to fix things themselves we notice it immediately. For example, when the police changed their routines for passports, from drop-in to bookings via their homepage.³⁰

²⁸ “De ovan har aktivt hänvisat till oss vid ett eller flera tillfällen. Sedan kan man väl säga att många företag/myndigheter passivt hänvisar till oss genom att ställa höga krav på kundens digitala förmåga vilket oundvikligen leder dem till biblioteket. Vi har skrivare, dator, skanner samt personal på plats. De får bäst hjälp på biblioteket på gott och ont.”

²⁹ “Jag vet inte om de blivit hänvisade men det kommer personer som behöver hjälp med ärenden från de tre nedre valen (Migrationsverket, Banker och Skatteverket). Tror det mer handlar om tillgänglighet, det är lättare att få hjälp på biblioteket.”

³⁰ “Det är sällan de blir specifikt hänvisade till biblioteket, men de flesta myndigheter idag och banker förutsätter att användarna har tillgång till dator och en viss IT-kunskap. Så är inte fallet. När en bank eller myndighet ändrar sina rutiner till mer digital och där man måste lösa det på egen hand märker vi det direkt. Ex. när polisen ändrar rutin för pass - från drop-in till bokning via deras hemsida.”

5.6 How are staff/patron interactions characterized?

Two questions asked respondents how they were treated by patrons who they had been unable to help with digital queries for two different reasons. Question 8 asked if staff felt they had been treated rudely by patrons who they were unable to help because they either did not know the answer, or did not have the time or resources to answer the question. As illustrated in figure 9, the majority of staff did not feel they were treated rudely. However there were still a significant number of staff who experienced negative interactions with patrons.

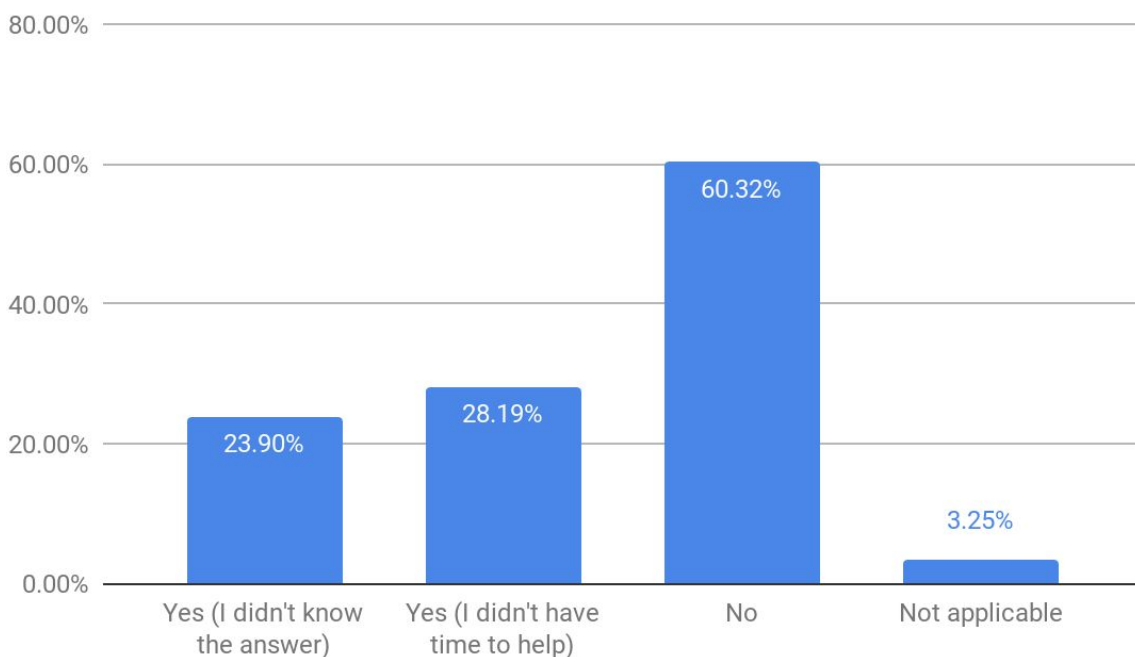


Figure 9. Participants responses to question 8 “Have you ever had a patron be rude to you because you were unable to answer a question?”

As one respondent explained, most patrons have a great deal of respect for library staff and understand when certain questions are outside the staff member’s skill or scope. Many respondents took the opportunity to clarify that they did not consider expressions of frustration from patrons as rudeness. Rather than feeling insulted staff reported that they felt

sympathy for those patrons, who were unable to find the help they needed. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between stress experienced by library staff and reported experiences of rudeness when the staff member was unable to help. The relationship between these variables was a significant small to medium effect, χ^2 (2df, N = 866) = 35.98, $p < .05$. Staff who experienced rudeness were more likely to report that they find working with digital participation is stressful.

The other condition was when library staff chose not to help. This is not to imply that library staff simply did not want to help, instead referring to situations where the staff member was working under explicit directives or professional decisions not to help with banking errands or other situations involving with personal information. The data shows, as illustrated in figure 10, that the majority of staff did not experience rudeness from patrons who they could not help. A further 25.69% of respondents reported that they did not encounter situations where they had chosen not to help. Again, many respondents took the opportunity to explain that while there was often frustration expressed by patrons this was not considered rudeness.

Respondents once more expressed their frustration at being faced with so many requests for help with bank errands, again citing that these are paying customers who are forced to turn to libraries for help as they are not being supported by the banks.

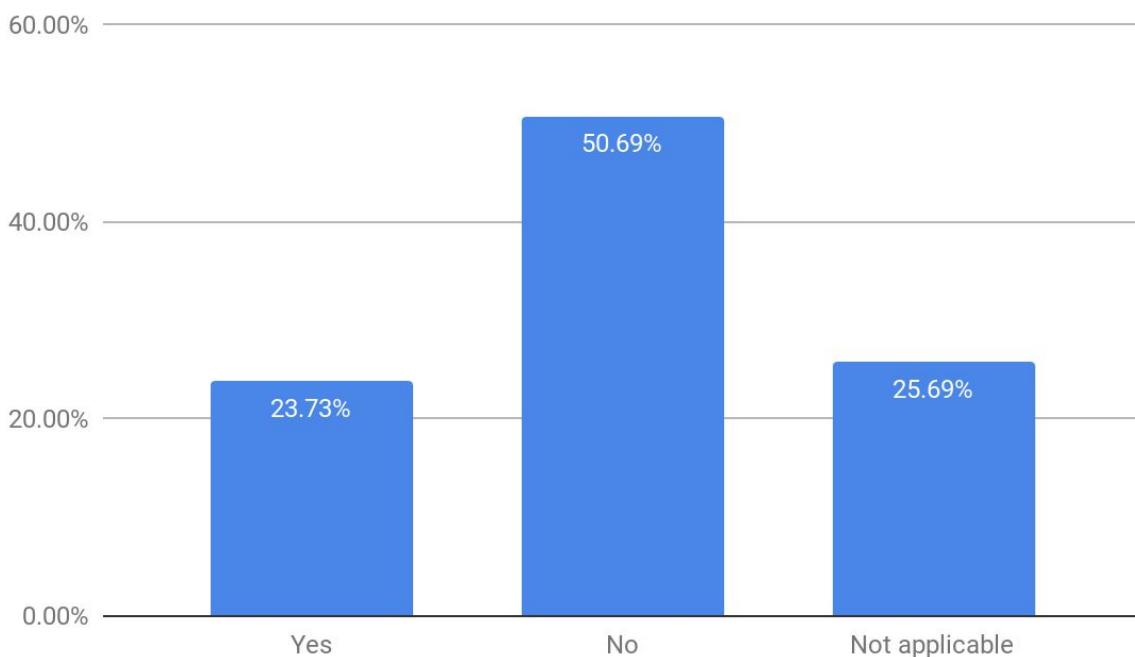


Figure 10. Participants responses to question 9, “Have you ever had a patron be rude to you because you did not want to answer a question?”

A final chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between perceived rudeness from patrons that staff chose not to help and the stress reported by library staff. The relationship between these variables was small, but significant, χ^2 (2df, $N = 867$) = 22.65, $p < .05$. Staff who experienced rudeness in such situations were again more likely to report that they find working with digital participation is stressful.

5.7 What else do Library staff have to say about digital participation?

The final question asked participants if they had anything else they would like to share in relation to the library and the support that is provided to patrons. 252 participants took the time to contribute further information. Unfortunately, despite how important and valuable each comment is, it is not possible to document each of the responses here word for word. Instead I have grouped the responses into seven core themes. The most common of which was the need for other actors in society to take more responsibility for their clients and digital participation as a whole.

The library should be a place where everyone can get help. That's how it is. It is important - an open space for everyone must exist. But why should the employment agency, banks, and the social insurance office etc. "get away" with disappearing from the people they are for as well as their social responsibility - I find that difficult to understand.³¹

As another participant explained:

Other businesses have drawn in their personal services and now refer to their digital tools without taking into account their customers/visitors' digital skills or knowledge at all. They have made it easy for themselves and put it on us. I personally am annoyed by this ignorance/resentment for the people most affected by this, those who do not have digital skills.³²

³¹ "Biblioteket ska vara en plats där alla kan få hjälp. Så är det. Det är viktigt - en öppen plats för alla måste få finnas. Men varför arbetsförmedlingen, banker, försäkringskassan osv ska kunna "komma undan" med att försvinna från de människor de är till för och sitt samhällsansvar - det har jag svårt att förstå."

³² "Andra verksamheter har dragit in på sina personliga tjänster och hänvisar till de digitala verktyg utan att över huvud taget ta hänsyn till deras kunders/besökarens digitala vana och kunskap. De har gjort det enkelt för sig och skjuter över det på oss. Jag personligen är irriterad över denna okunskap/fulhet kring de personer som berörs allra mest av detta, de som inte har digitala vana."

Many participants expressed their frustrations at this and the need for libraries to take on the responsibility of providing customer service for other organisations because those organisations had overestimated, or failed to consider their customers digital skills. With one participant adding:

... I have met patrons at libraries who do not even know what e-mail is and I do not have time to help those people write a CV in a satisfactory manner during a work session. It also doesn't feel good to help with banking matters and then see that the patron only has 3.48[kr] left in their account a week before the payments come.³³

It is vital that other organisations take more responsibility as the problem is often much more complex than digital participation. Many of the patrons who require assistance with digital errands need help not only with the technology or the digital aspect, but also the content of the errand.

It is not so much about digital, but about what it is for service. I can show how to log on to the internet bank, or show how to add recipients etc., but where is the limit, because it is I who pays the bills? I can show you how to create an email address, but if you have no computer experience before and cannot try on your own, how much time is it reasonable for one to put on a regular shift when working in the information desk? More and more social institutions are being digitized, and service offices are removed so the only thing left is the libraries, and where we stand with the responsibility but without the resources we need. Nevertheless, the digital I think we can handle, and the digital participation we work with. The problem is what happens digitally but that is not about digital knowledge, but where the content is the problem (for example the Migration Board's form, or the Tax Agency's declaration) where people need someone to ask about the content, not if the way the information is to be collected or sent. One would need to clarify what it is that is meant by digital participation and what it means that the libraries should be able to help with. As it is now, it is the wild west and you do the best you can, but society fails and the libraries bears the burden.³⁴

³³ Jag har mött låntagare på biblioteken som inte ens vet vad e-post är och de hinner jag inte hjälpa att skriva ett CV på ett tillfredsställande sätt under ett arbetspass. Det känns inte heller bra att hjälpa till med bankärenden och då få se att låntagaren bara har 3,48 kvar på kontot en vecka innan bidragen kommer.

³⁴ Det handlar inte så mycket om det digitala, utan om vad det är för tjänst. Jag kan visa hur man loggar in på internetbanken, visa hur man lägger till mottagare etc., men vart går gränsen för att det är jag som betalar räkningar? Jag kan visa hur man skapar en mailadress, men om man absolut inte har någon datorvana sedan tidigare och inte kan pröva sig fram på egen hand, hur mycket tid är det rimligt att man ska lägga ned på ett vanligt pass när man jobbar i infodisken? Fler och fler samhällsinstitutioner digitaliseras, och servicekontor tas bort så det enda som återstår är biblioteken, och där står vi med det ansvaret men utan de resurser vi behöver. Det digitala tycker jag ändå att vi klarar av, och den digitala delaktigheten jobbar vi med. Problemet är det som sker digitalt men som inte handlar om digital kunskap, utan där innehållet är problemet (exempelvis

Such experiences provide concrete examples of why libraries need clear boundaries for their work within digital participation. The call for guidelines was the next most common theme in answer to question 10.

The situation for librarians regarding computers is unsustainable. Social institutions should assume their responsibilities (especially banks); otherwise we need more citizen offices/digital help.³⁵

The need for clear guidelines is closely related to the need for other actors to take a more active role in digital participation as it centers upon what libraries can and cannot provide in terms of support. Many participants called for national guidelines as this would help to ensure consistent level of support for everyone. Such national guidelines would also help to structure degree programs and ongoing professional development as well as helping to guide library management in terms of the competencies to look for when hiring staff and would help to ensure adequate resourcing.

We need clear directives and guidelines from politicians and managers regarding the extent to which we should take over the work of civic centers. The reason I ask for it is that it has to be recognised as work that takes time to be performed. This is not something we can do in passing, but something that should be prioritized. It takes time from other work - and it must be seen!³⁶

migrationsverkets formulär, eller skatteverkets deklARATION) där människor behöver ha någon att fråga om innehållet, inte om sättet informationen ska insamlas eller skickas. Man skulle behöva tydliggöra vad det är man avser med digital delaktighet och vad man menar att biblioteken ska kunna hjälpa till med. Som det är nu är det vilda Västern och man gör så gott man kan, men samhället sviker och biblioteken får bära bördan.

³⁵ situationen för bibliotekarier gällande datorer är ohållbar. samhällets instanser bör ta sitt ansvar (särskilt banker), allt behövs fler medborgarkontor/datorhjälp på annat sätt.

³⁶ Vi behöver tydliga direktiv och riktlinjer från politiker och chefer angående i vilken mån vi ska ta över medborgarkontorens arbete. Anledningen till att jag efterfrågar det är att det måste synas att det är arbetsuppgifter som tar tid att utföra. Det är inget vi kan göra i förbifarten, utan det krävs prioriteringar för att vi ska hinna göra det. Det tar tid från annat - och det måste synas!

Clear guidelines also ensure library staff are focusing their efforts in the right places. As explained by one participant:

It is important to clearly delineate what is the library's mission and become really good at that assignment. A broad and unclear assignment often leads to not being particularly competent in anything.³⁷

In asking for clear guidelines participants also mentioned a need for information as to where they can refer their patrons for help, library staff do not want to turn their patrons away and leave them with nowhere to go for help.

The role of the libraries is constantly evolving and I absolutely think that we should help with digital participation in society. I find it fun to work digitally. But I would appreciate clear directives on what the libraries should help with and not and where we can refer our users.³⁸

Just as many participants stated that they felt that the role of the library needed to be strengthened. In doing so the role of the library should be made more clear to the public and perhaps most importantly politicians and policy makers. Many felt that that there were very few outside the profession who understood the vital role that the library plays in areas such as digital participation:

Libraries are very important in Sweden right now. When companies are slimming down to increase profits and society tries to slim down to save money, the library becomes the last outpost. In general, there is a lack of a united voice from the libraries to the companies and institutions. We see that it is not possible to buy travel tickets for a new arrival with LMA cards³⁹. [We see] how difficult it becomes for older people when they are forced into using digital services. It is a bit like the needs of the customer/taxpayer comes last and that there is a lot of ignorance about their actual needs, which the libraries have very practical knowledge about.⁴⁰

³⁷ Viktigt att tydligt avgränsa vad som är bibliotekets uppdrag och bli riktigt bra på det uppdraget. Ett brett och otydligt uppdrag leder ofta till att man inte blir speciellt kompetent på någonting.

³⁸ Bibliotekens roll utvecklas ständigt och jag tycker absolut att vi ska hjälpa till med digitala delaktighet i samhället. Jag tycker att det är roligt att arbeta digitalt. Men jag skulle uppskatta tydliga direktiv kring vad biblioteken ska hjälpa till med och inte och var vi kan hänvisa våra användare.

³⁹ A LMA card is a plastic card with a photo that shows that the holder is an asylum seeker and has the right to stay in Sweden while the application is processed.

⁴⁰ Biblioteken är väldigt viktiga i Sverige just nu. När företagen slimmar för att öka vinsten och samhället slimmar för att spara pengar blir biblioteket den sista utposten. Saknar i det stora hela en enad röst från biblioteken till företag och institutioner. Vi ser att det inte går att köpa resebiljetter för en nyanländ med

Another common theme was the need for more training for library staff:

In some magic way it is expected that we should be able to help with everything that goes wrong with mobile phones, apps, tablets and computers etc without having had any training. Those staff members who can solve problems are those who have a personal interest and invest much of their freetime to learn.⁴¹

Similarly, participants called for more resources for work in this area, as it is currently taking time and resources from the other vital work that libraries do:

It is of course important to work to counteract digital exclusion, but this should not be at the expense of our reading-promoting work.⁴²

Another participant explained:

Our role is increasingly (for good and bad) in the direction of being a kind of civic centre - in addition to taking care of more traditional library chores. This is our mission, but it also requires increased resources.⁴³

Just as other organisations in society are required to slim down as it were, it seems that libraries are also faced with this pressure. As one participant explained:

More is required of libraries without us receiving resources for it. Instead, the [budget] allocations are reduced despite us having to do more.⁴⁴

LMA-kort. Hur svårt det blir för äldre när de tvingas in i digitala tjänster. Det är lite som att kunden/skattebetalaren kommer i sista hand och att det finns mycket okunskap om deras faktiska behov, vilket biblioteken har mycket praktisk kunskap om.

⁴¹ På något magiskt sätt förväntas vi kunna hjälpa till med allt som krånglar när det gäller mobiler, appar, plattor, datorer mm, utan att ha fått någon utbildning alls. De i personalen som kan lösa problem är de som har ett personligt intresse och lägger ner mycket tid på fritiden för att lära sig.

⁴² Det är naturligtvis viktigt att jobba för att motverka digitalt utanförskap men det bör inte ske på bekostnad av vårt läsfrämjande arbete.

⁴³ Vår verksamhet går alltmer (på gott och ont) i riktning mot att vara ett slags medborgarkontor - utöver att ta hand om mer traditionella bibliotekssysslor. Detta är vårt uppdrag, men det kräver också ökade resurser.

⁴⁴ Mera krävs av biblioteken utan att vi får resurser för det. Anslagen minskar istället trots att vi ska göra mer.

Many called for increased resources or dedicated centers to help citizens with their digital errands.

The need for digital service centers or something similar is enormous, and if the public library is to (continue) be that place, resources must be added nationally and locally. Not a question for the libraries alone!⁴⁵

Digidel centers were mentioned frequently as were civic centers. The main argument here was that:

There is really no place where people can come and get help with technology and data issues and social services - for example, questions related to forms from the Migration Board, the Employment Service, the Swedish Tax Agency, and the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, etc. And where you can get help with languages, write texts and translations. The public libraries do not have the time and knowledge to provide all the help that is needed. Nor does it belong to our mission.⁴⁶

Others explained that their patrons already had access to such services:

What people need help with is our services and the technology. One has bought a new unit and wants help with it. Krokoms municipality has established a Digidel center at all libraries, where they get help with their questions. It is well visited and much appreciated.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Behovet av digitala servicecenter el likn är enormt, och om folkbiblioteket ska (fortsätta) vara den platsen måste resurser tillsättas nationellt och kommunövergripande. Ej en fråga för enbart biblioteken!

⁴⁶ Det saknas verkligen en plats dit människor kan komma och få hjälp med teknik- och datafråga och samhällsservice - tex frågor som rör blanketter från Migrationsverket, Arbetsförmedlingen, Skatteverket, Försäkringskassan osv. Och där man kan få hjälp med språk, skriva texter och översättningar. Folkbiblioteken har inte tid och kunskap att bidra med all hjälp som behövs. Det hör inte heller till vårt uppdrag.

⁴⁷ Det som människor behöver hjälp med är våra tjänster samt tekniken. Man har köpt en ny enhet och vill ha hjälp med den. Krokoms kommun har upprättat Digidel center på samtliga bibliotek, där de får hjälp med sina frågor. Välbesökt och mycket uppskattat.

Finally, participants referred to democracy as a vital element. This was a concept present in almost all of the responses. Many participants clearly stated the need to provide support to all those who find themselves unable to participate in our digital society. In particular the elderly and newcomers to Sweden. One participant explained their personal experience in working with digital participation:

I lead technology groups and handle personal 1-on-1 meetings with users who want help with or to learn about technology (phones, tablets, drones, GPSs, computers etc). These meetings are INCREDIBLY important to our borrowers and have been acclaimed countless times for these meetings, especially from the elderly. It takes patience, time, resources and staff who are willing to sit long and often. It is time consuming and requires lots of focus and understanding from our side, but these technology meetings are very valuable opportunities for, among other things, seniors. The digital is taking over our society and they are left behind if they do not get help to keep up, so to speak. It can be something as simple as sending an SMS or something more complicated than managing mobile banks. But it IS really important that everyone is included in the Digital Society - that is what we live in and you can have so much benefit from the technology.⁴⁸

As this participant explains, we cannot continue to develop a digital society without putting into place safeguards to ensure that no one is left behind.

⁴⁸ Jag leder teknikgrupper och hanterar personliga 1-on-1 möten med användare som vill ha hjälp med eller lära sig om teknik (telefoner, surfplattor, drönare, GPS:er, datorer etc). Dessa möten är OTROLIGT viktiga för våra låntagare och har otaliga gånger blivit hyllad för dessa möten och då särskilt från äldre. Det krävs tålamod, tid, resurser och personal som är villig att sitta länge och ofta. Det är tidskrävande och kräver mängder med fokus och förståelse från vår sida men dessa teknikköten är väldigt värdefulla tillfällen för bland annat seniorer. Det digitala tar över vårt samhälle och de lämnas kvar bakom om de inte får hjälp att hänga med, så att säga. Det kan vara något så simpelt som att skicka ett SMS eller något mer komplicerat som att hantera mobilbanker. Men det ÄR jätte vitkigt att alla inkluderas id et Digitala Samhället - det är det vi lever i och man kan ha så mycket nytta av tekniken.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The present study sought to explore digital participation in Sweden from the perspective of library staff in the context of an increasingly McDonaldized society, particularly with regard to increasing digitalisation. To address this, I formulated three specific sub-questions:

- How do library staff experience their work with patrons who need to be supported in their digital participation in Sweden?
- What is it that library staff are helping with and how are they treated if/when they are unable to answer?
- What is the relationship between the IT skills of library staff and how they experience their work in supporting patrons with digital participation?

I will now answer these questions based upon the results of the survey completed by 877 library staff representing 229 municipalities around Sweden. I will then go on to discuss these findings in the light of the ongoing McDonaldization of society, all while proposing solutions to the problems that arise and providing suggestions for future research.

6.1 The experiences of library staff

So how do library staff experience their work with patrons who need to be supported in their digital participation in Sweden? It is clear from the responses to this survey that library staff are helping with a wide range of digital issues. In particular issues that stem from interactions with other agencies, with the most common being help with banking errands followed closely by other government and municipal agencies. Overall, the present study found that library staff have a positive experience of helping patrons with regard to digital participation. It is considered to be a normal part of the role and one that many feel is fun. Unfortunately, for many it is also a source of stress, some of which would be alleviated with additional training, with respondents reporting that additional time and resources would help more. These findings are in keeping with those of Norberg (2017) and those of Brandt Smedberg, Rasch, and Wilow Sundhand (2019).

Despite not being the majority, there were still a relatively large proportion of library staff who reported being treated badly when they were unable to help, either because they did not have the required IT skills, sufficient time or resources, or had chosen not to help for various reasons. Such encounters may contribute to the stress levels reported by library staff in the study by Faresjö et al. (2014). Further research is necessary to determine how these negative interactions can be effectively avoided and how the stress levels of staff can be reduced or at least managed. This would benefit not only libraries and their staff, but also the patrons who

are digitally excluded. Based upon the responses to this study it would seem that the solution may lie in having access to IT specific services, such as Digidel centers, or other specific support services with generous opening hours to which library staff can refer their patrons for support. Again, these findings echo those of Norberg (2017), Brandt Smedberg, Rasch and Wilow Sundhand (2019) as well as Digidels own reports (Digidel 2013). Another solution may also be found by making changes to the education of library staff. Library and Information Science students have already expressed a desire for more focus on practical customer service and teaching skills as well as a stronger focus on digital competencies (DIK och Svensk biblioteksforening 2018). As these same students suggested, another solution may lie in the employment of library staff with competencies in areas that complement those of held by Librarians such as IT support.

The survey data from the present study also revealed a relationship between the IT skills of library staff and how they experience their work in supporting patrons with digital participation. Staff with higher self-reported IT-skills are less likely to experience stress in situations where patrons require support with digital errands. This again, provides support for the argument that adequate training is required both in degrees as well as being an important element of professional development for library staff.

6.2 Society's ongoing McDonaldization and its impact on library staff.

McDonaldization can be considered one of the driving forces behind the increased digitalisation of our society. Digitalisation provides businesses and organisations almost unlimited opportunity to make their daily operations more efficient, calculatable, predictable and controlled (Ritzer 2018). Sadly however, the gains for organisations often have a negative impact on consumers. It would appear from the results of this explorative study that the McDonaldization of society in Sweden is putting in increased pressure on libraries and their staff. Banks and other commercial entities seem to be focused on becoming more efficient, being able to predict and control their interactions with customers and to calculate and control their expenses and maximise their profits for shareholders. They have turned their customers into prosumers by having them complete their own errands online rather than coming into an office staffed by expensive employees. Unfortunately, based on the findings of this and other research there is a significant proportion of citizens who are unable to manage these new digital technologies effectively (Norberg 2017; Brandt Smedberg, Rasch and Wilow Sundhand 2019). These citizens are often left with no other options and must turn to public libraries and their staff for help.

Another unfortunate situation arises when library staff are for some reason unable to help. This can be due to a lack of time and resources or a lack of sufficient digital competence. At some libraries, staff are working under guidelines that prevent them from helping with certain errands. For example banking errands that involve private personal and financial information. Other examples include the purchasing of travel tickets, completion of immigration forms or tax declarations. Each of these examples involve tasks that place the staff member in a situation where they may be held accountable for mistakes. As a result, whatever the reason, in some situations patrons are left with no way to receive the help they need. This can result in frustrations and anger, which in turn can have a negative impact on library staff. This is not to mention the negative impact it has on the individuals who are now left excluded from our digital society. One of the respondents in this study summarized the problem in the following way:

I see it as a problem in society, that social functions are increasingly digitalised, without taking into account the increasingly weaker groups in society, those who cannot participate, either in terms of their rights or responsibilities due to their digital exclusion. There also seems to be a "referral function" in the digitized social functions, that the individual must turn to the library is not reasonable. Library resources have not been strengthened to the same extent as needs have increased. Although the state has invested millions of funds in the strengthened library, we at the libraries cannot replace the competence that exist at Employment Services, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the banks, etc. The boundaries between helping with the technology in itself and interpreting the content are unclear and our managers within the library have not given clear directives where the boundary goes. Moreover, the weak groups in society are prioritized groups [for the library], so drawing limits on where my professional responsibility goes is not always that easy⁴⁹.

⁴⁹ Jag ser det som ett samhällsproblem att samhällsfunktioner digitaliseras allt mer, utan att det tas hänsyn till de allt svagare grupperna i samhället, som inte kan vara delaktiga och ta del av sina rätt- och skyldigheter på en digital utmaning. Att det dessutom verkar finnas en "hänvisningsfunktion" hos de digitaliserade samhällsfunktionerna, att den enskilde kan vända sig till biblioteket är inte rimligt. Bibliotekens resurser har inte förstärkts i samma utsträckning som behoven ökar. Visserligen har staten satsat miljonbelopp på Stärkta bibliotek, men vi på biblioteken kan ju inte ersätta den sakkompetens i frågorna som finns hos Arbetsförmedlingen, Försäkringskassan, bankerna mm. Gränsdragningarna mellan att hjälpa till med tekniken i sig och att tolka innehållet är otydliga och våra chefer inom biblioteket har inte heller gett tydliga direktiv var gränsdragningen går. Dessutom är ju de svaga grupperna i samhället prioriterade grupper hos oss, så att dra en gräns för var mitt yrkesansvar går, är inte alltid så lätt.

This is a clear example of the irrationality of rationality that Ritzer (2018) describes. The inefficiencies that organisations have solved by converting their services to online services have not been solved at all. They have simply been moved elsewhere. From the results of this study it would appear that in many cases it is public libraries and their staff who are left to try to patch together a solution for citizens no longer able to manage such tasks for themselves. It is a question of democracy, in particular as the statistics show that particular groups, including the those from rural areas, immigrants, the elderly, those with lower socioeconomic status and/or lower levels of education are most at risk of being digitally excluded (Internetstiftelsen 2018). Echoing the suggestions made in the report from Digidel 2013, it is clear that more research is needed to ascertain just how many find themselves unable to carry out everyday errands due to digitalisation. The results of the present study indicate that it may be prudent to carry out such future research in collaboration with libraries as it would appear that many who find themselves unable to effectively manage such errands alone turn to public libraries for support.

Through this study library staff from all around Sweden have taken the opportunity to clearly express their own frustrations, and that of their patrons, at the lack of support currently being offered by other organisations. Libraries play a central role in the promotion of digital participation through their digital participation programs as well as their daily work helping patrons with digital errands. This is a normal part of work in a public library and one that staff enjoy. However, it would seem that library staff are increasingly forced into a different role in terms of digital participation, one that focuses on individual tasks that are more “customer service orientated” than educational.

McDonaldization offers very few drawbacks from the company or organisation's perspective. It is rather the customer and society that shoulders them. Furthermore, there seems little chance that business practices will change and that the tide of digitalisation will be reversed. Thus the question becomes how to solve the problem that they cause. One such solution may lie in cooperation between organisations. For example, future research could consider the viability of a service similar to the current “Advokatjour⁵⁰” Many libraries around Sweden currently offer a regular program where patrons are able to make an appointment to meet with a lawyer for 15 minutes. This is a free service provided by volunteers. Similarly, some libraries have begun hosting staff from banks at the library to provide support for their customers and to explain services such as Online banking and BankID. Such cooperation may also be possible between other agencies, with professionals from organisations such as the taxation department or immigration department for example, regularly attending the library to provide support for those who require more assistance than library staff are qualified to provide. Future research could potentially follow the implementation of such a project and assess the outcomes in terms of digital participation for library patrons.

⁵⁰ <https://www.advokatsamfundet.se/Behover-du-advokat/Advokatjouren/>

Perhaps the most actionable finding from this study concerns the call for clear directives. Previous research indicated that 30% of municipalities had official policies not to help with certain digital errands that could compromise integrity (Norberg 2017). The findings of the present study suggest that upwards of 46% have implemented such policies. Unfortunately, the present study also indicates that there is some confusion concerning these directives as there was very little agreement within municipalities concerning guidelines. As already explained, this may be a result of misinterpretation of the the survey question which should be corrected in any future research. Alternatively this finding may be a result of unclear communication and as such it may be appropriate for those library managers who believe their staff are currently working under clear guidelines to confirm that all staff are aware of them.

The finding that library staff are less likely to report that they are stressed when working under clear directives indicates that library managers who have not yet implemented such a policy may be able to improve staff working conditions by creating guidelines concerning where they believe the boundaries lie with regard to matters of integrity in digital participation. Another solution would be for national guidelines to be created and applied to all libraries in Sweden. This would allow not only staff to understand what they were able to provide support for, but would also provide universities offering programs in library and information science a foundations for what IT-skills their students will require. Furthermore, professional development could be tailored to improve specific skills.

The present study also indicates that there is an uneven level of service provided by libraries around the country. Patrons are currently able to receive help for some errands at some libraries but not at others, or indeed from some library staff and not from others. From the patrons perspective, clear guidelines concerning what library staff can and cannot help with, applicable to all libraries in Sweden, would go a long way to ensuring that the same level of service is available for all. Library staff around the country support the implementation of guidelines in terms of what support libraries can and cannot provide their patrons, with many calling for these guidelines to be implemented at the national level. At the same time, it is important to be careful when implementing such guidelines as efforts to control the interactions of library staff and their patrons can go too far and end up contributing to the McDonaldization of public libraries. As explained in chapter two, control is a key element of McDonaldization (Ritzer 2018), therefore any directives provided to libraries should be guidelines rather than scripted dialogues that attempt to control the interactions between library staff and their patrons. As many respondents have suggested, clear guidelines for what libraries can help with must also include information on where the patron can be referred to get the help that libraries cannot provide.

Digitalisation has become the norm in Sweden, and the Swedish government has stated that they intend for Sweden to become the best in the world when it comes to taking advantage of all that digital technology has to offer (Digitaliseringsstrategi 2017; Regeringens skrivelse 2017). With that goal comes the responsibility of ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to actively participate in the digital society that is being created. To that end it is incumbent upon the government to ensure they have strategies in place to ensure that everyone is included. That private organisations and government entities, including libraries, have a clear understanding of the expectations placed upon them and their role in ensuring that everyone can participate. It is also vital that sufficient funding and resources are available to libraries and the organisations such as Digidel who are at the frontlines of this fight. Society cannot continue to turn a blind eye to the fact that there are citizens who are prevented from actively participating in our digital society.

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Attachments

I. Enkät: Biblioteket och digitala frågor. Original Swedish text.

Hej kollegor,

Jag är en bibliotekarie som läser på Masterprogrammet i ABM med inriktning Biblioteks- och informationsvetenskap på Lunds universitet.

Min uppsats handlar om digital delaktighet och jag är tacksam för alla som delar med sig av sin erfarenhet av att hjälpa användarna med digitala frågor på folkbibliotek runt om i Sverige. Enkäten bör ta ungefär tre till fem minuter att genomföra. Det samlas inte in någon konfidentiell information eller personliga uppgifter.

Uppsatsen kommer att finnas på <https://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/search/>

1. Vilken roll har du på biblioteket?

- Bibliotekarie
- Biblioteksassistent
- Annan (var god ange)

2. Vilken kommun jobbar du i?

3. Vilken nivå av IT-vana och IT-kompetenser anser du dig ha?

- Jag kan inte så mycket om datorer - jag blir stressad när användarna fråga mig om hur de ska göra
- Jag har starka IT kompetenser och har sällan fått frågor från användarna som jag kan inte svara
- Jag kan hjälpa till med det mesta, men skulle gärna utveckla mina kompetenser
- Annan (var god ange)

4. Har du klara direktiv om vad du får hjälpa till med (eller inte får hjälpa till med)?

- Nej
- Ja

5. Hur upplever du pass i disken där användarna kräver mycket hjälp med frågor om det digitala.

- Det är en vanligt del av passet, jag hjälper till så gott jag kan och det får räcka
- Jag tycker det är kul att hjälpa till.
- Det är en stressmoment för mig - jag skulle gärna får specialutbildning så att jag klarar mig bättre
- Det är en stressmoment för mig - jag har kunskapen men inte tid/resurser
- Annat eller vill du förklara mer?

6. Utöver frågor om utskrifter och bibliotekets egna e-tjänster, vilka tjänster hjälper du till med?

- bankärende
- skapa/använda e-post
- skapa/använda sociala medier
- hur man använder office-paket och andra program
- fylla i formulär
- installera appar (på mobiler/paddor)
- hur man använder mobiler/paddor
- Annan (var god ange)

7. Utöver frågor om utskrifter och bibliotekets egna e-tjänster, har användarna blivit hänvisat till biblioteket från andra institutioner?

- Migrationsverket
- Skatteverket
- Banker
- Vuxenutbildning
- Annan (var god ange)

8. Har du någonsin blivit illa bemött på grund av att du inte **kunnat** svara på en fråga?

- Ja (jag kunde inte svara pga kunskapsbrist)
- Ja (jag kunde inte svara pga tidsbrist)
- Nej, jag har inte blivit illa bemött på grund av det
- Ej relevant (jag har kunnat svara på alla frågor)
- Vill du berätta mera?

9. Har du någonsin blivit illa bemött på grund av att du inte **velat** svara på en fråga?

- Ja
- Nej, jag har inte blivit illa bemött på grund av det
- Ej relevant, jag har aldrig valt att inte svara
- Vill du berätta mera?

10. Är det något mer du skulle vilja dela med dig av i samband med biblioteket och stödet som ges till användarna

Tack för din tid!

II. Questionnaire: The Library and digital questions. Translated text.

Hello colleagues,

I am a librarian who is studying the Masters program in ABM with focus on library and information science at Lund university.

My thesis concerns digital participation and I am grateful for all who share their experience in helping patrons with digital questions at community libraries around Sweden. The questionnaire should take between three to five minutes to complete. No confidential or personal information is collected.

The thesis will be available at <https://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/search/>

1. What role do you have in the library?

- Librarian
- Library Assistant
- Other (please specify)

2. Which municipality do you work in?

3. What level of IT-familiarity and IT-competencies do you feel you have?

- I'm not that good with computers - I get stressed when patrons ask me for help
- I have strong IT skills and have rarely had questions I can't answer
- I can help with most questions but would happily learn more
- Other (please specify)

4. Do you have clear directives concerning what you can help with (or what you can not help with)?

- Yes
- No

5. How do you experience shifts at the information desk where patrons require a lot of assistance with digital questions.

- It is a normal part of the shift, I help as much as I can and that has to be enough
- I think it's fun to help
- It is stressful for me. I would prefer to have some special training so I can deal with it better.
- It is stressful for me. I have the skills but not the time/resources
- Other or would you like to explain more?

6. Over and above questions concerning printing and the libraries own digital services, which services do you help with?

- Bank errands
- create/use email
- create/use social media accounts
- How to use office packets and other programs
- Completing forms
- Installing apps (on mobile phones/tablets
- How to use mobile phones /tablets
- Other (please specify)

7. Over and above questions concerning printing and the libraries own digital services, have patrons been referred to the library from other institutions?

- Immigration office
- Tax office
- Banks
- Adult education institutions
- Other (please specify)

8. Have you ever had a patron be rude to you because you were **unable** to answer a question?

- Yes (I couldn't help because I didn't know the answer)
- Yes (I couldn't answer because I had no time)
- No, I have not had a patron be rude to me because of that
- Not relevant (I have been able to answer all questions)
- Would you like to say more?

9. Have you ever had a patron be rude to you because you did not want to answer a question?

- Yes
- No, I have not had a patron be rude to me because of that
- Not relevant, I have never chosen not to answer
- Would you like to say more?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share in relation to the library and the support that is provided to patrons?

Thank you for your time!

III. Email sent to all municipalities in Sweden: Original Swedish text.

Subject: Studie om digital delaktighet

Text: Hej!

Mitt namn är Rebecca Sjövoud och jag arbetar som bibliotekarie på Bergshamra bibliotek i Solna. Jag håller även på att skriva min masteruppsats vid Lunds universitet. Uppsatsen kommer att publiceras på Lund University Publications Student Papers, men först behöver jag er hjälp.

Min uppsats handlar om digital delaktighet och jag skulle därför vara tacksam för alla som, via enkäten jag har skapat, kan dela med sig av sina erfarenhet av att hjälpa användarna med digitala frågor på folkbibliotek runt om i Sverige. Enkäten bör ta ungefär tre till fem minuter att genomföra. Det samlas inte in någon konfidentiell information eller personliga uppgifter och är således anonym.

Länk till enkäten: <https://sv.surveymonkey.com/r/NXWY6MM>

Jag skulle vara tacksam om ni kan dela detta mejl med era kollegor så jag kan få så stort underlag som möjligt.

Om ni har några frågor angående detta får ni gärna kontakta mig.

Tack på förhand.

Rebecca Sjövoud

IV. Email sent to all municipalities in Sweden: Translated text.

Subject: Study of digital participation

Text: Hi!

My name is Rebecca Sjövoid and I work as a librarian at Bergshamra Library in Solna. I am also writing my masters thesis at Lund University. The thesis will be published by Lund University Publications Student Papers, but first I need your help.

My thesis is about digital participation and therefore I would be grateful for all who, via the survey I have created, can share with me their experiences of helping library patrons with digital questions at public libraries around Sweden. The survey should take approximately three to five minutes to complete. No confidential information is collected or personal information and is thus anonymous.

Link to the survey: <https://sv.surveymonkey.com/r/NXWY6MM>

I would be grateful if you could share this email with your colleagues so that I can gather as many responses as possible.

If you have any questions please contact me.

Thank you in advance.

Rebecca Sjövoid

V. SPSS Output: Chi-squared analysis

```

CROSSTABS
  /TABLES=Stressful BY IT_skills Clear_Directives Rude_timeorability Rude_choo
  /FORMAT=AVALUE TABLES
  /STATISTICS=CHISQ PHI
  /CELLS=COUNT EXPECTED RESID
  /COUNT ROUND CELL
  /BARCHART.

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Crosstabs

Case Processing Summary

| | Cases | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------|---------|---------|---------|-------|---------|
| | Valid | | Missing | | Total | |
| | N | Percent | N | Percent | N | Percent |
| Stressful * IT_skills | 862 | 98.3% | 15 | 1.7% | 877 | 100.0% |
| Stressful * Clear_Directives | 869 | 99.1% | 8 | 0.9% | 877 | 100.0% |
| Stressful * Rude_timeorability | 866 | 98.7% | 11 | 1.3% | 877 | 100.0% |
| Stressful * Rude_choose | 867 | 98.9% | 10 | 1.1% | 877 | 100.0% |

Stressful * IT_skills

Crosstab

| | | | IT_skills | | | Total |
|-----------|----------------|----------------|-----------|--------|-------|-------|
| | | | Low | Medium | High | |
| Stressful | Yes | Count | 22 | 177 | 54 | 253 |
| | | Expected Count | 10.3 | 175.8 | 66.9 | 253.0 |
| | | Residual | 11.7 | 1.2 | -12.9 | |
| Stressful | No | Count | 13 | 422 | 174 | 609 |
| | | Expected Count | 24.7 | 423.2 | 161.1 | 609.0 |
| | | Residual | -11.7 | -1.2 | 12.9 | |
| Total | Count | 35 | 599 | 228 | 862 | |
| | Expected Count | 35.0 | 599.0 | 228.0 | 862.0 | |

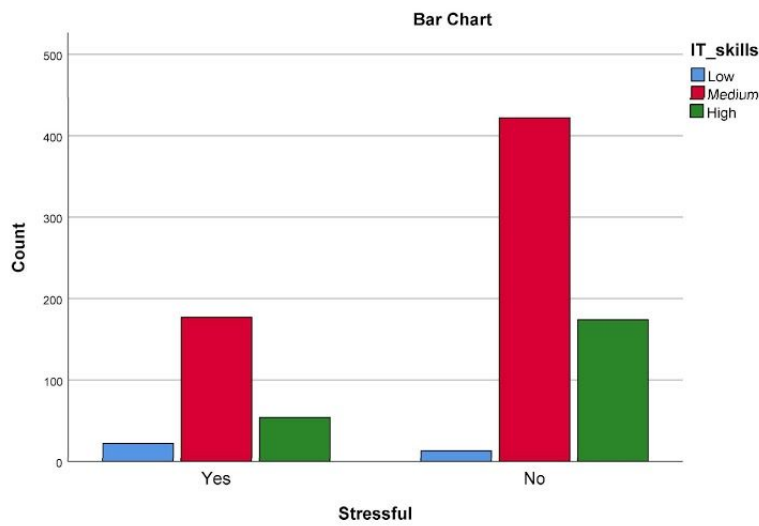
Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|----|---|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 22.492 ^a | 2 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 20.485 | 2 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 13.313 | 1 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | 862 | | |

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10.27.

Symmetric Measures

| | Value | Approximate Significance |
|---------------------------|-------|-----------------------------|
| Nominal by Nominal Phi | .162 | .000 |
| Cramer's V | .162 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | 862 | |



Stressful * Clear_Directives

Crosstab

| | | | Clear_Directives | | |
|-----------|-----|----------------|------------------|-------|-------|
| | | | Yes | No | Total |
| Stressful | Yes | Count | 97 | 157 | 254 |
| | | Expected Count | 115.7 | 138.3 | 254.0 |
| | | Residual | -18.7 | 18.7 | |
| | No | Count | 299 | 316 | 615 |
| | | Expected Count | 280.3 | 334.7 | 615.0 |
| | | Residual | 18.7 | -18.7 | |
| Total | | Count | 396 | 473 | 869 |
| | | Expected Count | 396.0 | 473.0 | 869.0 |

Chi-Square Tests

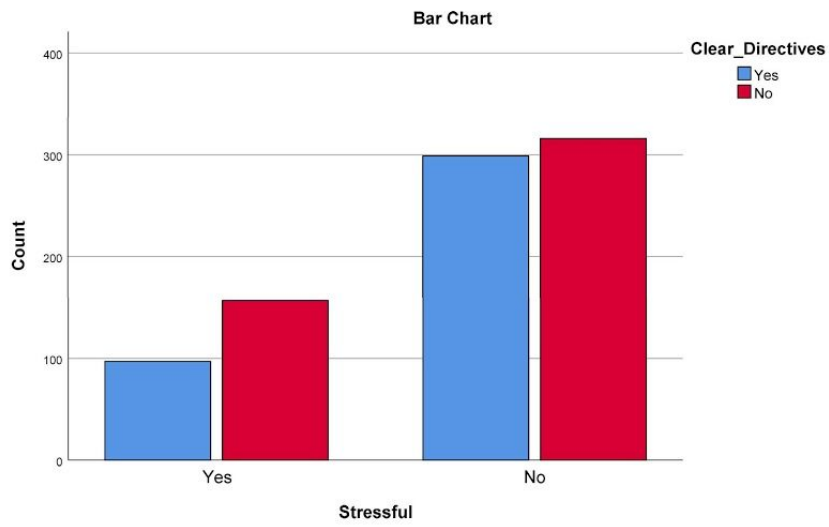
| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (1-sided) |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|----|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 7.882 ^a | 1 | .005 | | |
| Continuity Correction ^b | 7.467 | 1 | .006 | | |
| Likelihood Ratio | 7.946 | 1 | .005 | | |
| Fisher's Exact Test | | | | .006 | .003 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 7.873 | 1 | .005 | | |
| N of Valid Cases | 869 | | | | |

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 115.75.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Symmetric Measures

| | | Value | Approximate Significance |
|--------------------|------------|-------|-----------------------------|
| Nominal by Nominal | Phi | -.095 | .005 |
| | Cramer's V | .095 | .005 |
| N of Valid Cases | | 869 | |



Stressful * Rude_timeorability

Crosstab

| | | | Rude_timeorability | | | |
|-----------|-----|----------------|--------------------|-------|----------------|-------|
| | | | Yes | No | Not applicable | Total |
| Stressful | Yes | Count | 136 | 114 | 4 | 254 |
| | | Expected Count | 97.1 | 150.2 | 6.7 | 254.0 |
| | | Residual | 38.9 | -36.2 | -2.7 | |
| No | No | Count | 195 | 398 | 19 | 612 |
| | | Expected Count | 233.9 | 361.8 | 16.3 | 612.0 |
| | | Residual | -38.9 | 36.2 | 2.7 | |
| Total | | Count | 331 | 512 | 23 | 866 |
| | | Expected Count | 331.0 | 512.0 | 23.0 | 866.0 |

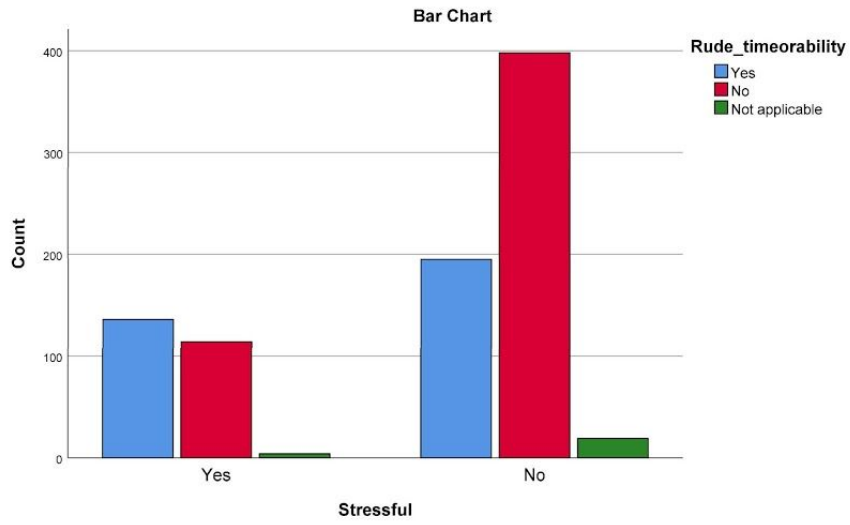
Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 35.985 ^a | 2 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 35.483 | 2 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 34.217 | 1 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | 866 | | |

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.75.

Symmetric Measures

| | Value | Approximate Significance |
|------------------------|-------|--------------------------|
| Nominal by Nominal Phi | .204 | .000 |
| Cramer's V | .204 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | 866 | |



Stressful * Rude_choose

Crosstab

| | | Rude_choose | | | Total | |
|-----------|----------------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|-------|
| | | Yes | No | Not applicable | | |
| Stressful | Yes | Count | 89 | 103 | 62 | 254 |
| | | Expected Count | 62.4 | 127.1 | 64.5 | 254.0 |
| | | Residual | 26.6 | -24.1 | -2.5 | |
| No | Count | 124 | 331 | 158 | 613 | |
| | Expected Count | 150.6 | 306.9 | 155.5 | 613.0 | |
| | Residual | -26.6 | 24.1 | 2.5 | | |
| Total | Count | 213 | 434 | 220 | 867 | |
| | Expected Count | 213.0 | 434.0 | 220.0 | 867.0 | |

Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|----|---|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 22.653 ^a | 2 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 21.895 | 2 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 9.400 | 1 | .002 |
| N of Valid Cases | 867 | | |

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 62.40.

Symmetric Measures

| | | Value | Approximate Significance |
|--------------------|------------|-------|-----------------------------|
| Nominal by Nominal | Phi | .162 | .000 |
| | Cramer's V | .162 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | | 867 | |

