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Plastic policies: Contemporary opportunities and challenges in public libraries' enactment of cultural policy

Abstract

This study explores how democracy—often understood as an abstract concept or a location-transcending, intangible phenomenon—is produced, shaped and continuously reshaped through local library practices in certain places and under local conditions at a specific point in time. To better understand potential conflicts and/or tensions that might arise between the three levels of Swedish library policy at a time when values enshrined in the Swedish democratic model are being challenged by radical right-wing parties, we explored the potential influence on and enactment of policy documents in public libraries day-to-day practice. We did so by conducting an ethnographic study of five municipalities in Sweden's Skåne County. Our study was theoretically informed by practice theory and the view of democracy as an ongoing process and a plurality. Our findings showed that policy documents are often internalized by library staff. The influence of the democratic mission established in the Swedish Library Act, in particular, was evident in the way library staff carried out their work. One tension created by the “democratic paradox” (i.e., the requirement that a democracy allow opponents of the democratic form of rule a voice) was evident in library policy enactments, inasmuch as librarians adopted different stances towards the neutrality norm. Thus, in practice, what appear to be rigid, inflexible policy documents are in fact plastic and mouldable. This plasticity allows room for librarians to legitimately promote democracy. Although public librarians spend much time engaging with various policy documents, they consider it time well spent and value the result. Public libraries appear as locations where different levels of cultural policy interconnect. In their role as public institutions, they also have a mission to fulfil in honoring the democratic paradox via a praxis that includes support for democracy as one of their goals.

Keywords: Public library; Cultural policy document; Migration; Ethnographic study; Democracy

Introduction

This article discusses a study concerning how three levels of policy documents (the *national Library Act*, the regional cultural policy, and the local library plan) translate from theory to practice in the context of Swedish public libraries. The rationale behind the study is that more knowledge is needed about the role of policy documents in day-to-day library practice. In acknowledgement of the public library's position as an important institution in the democratic form of rule, we first investigated if, and then how, policy statements (here viewed as an expression and enactment of this form of rule) are present in library performance. We argue that this knowledge is important in the present age of political turbulence, when liberal democracy and its institutions, including libraries, are being called into question.

The *Swedish Library Act* embraces a representative, liberal understanding of democracy, in keeping with the way democracy is commonly construed in the Western world today. However, support for the liberal democratic form of rule is currently declining, especially among younger generations in the Western world (Foa & Mounk, 2017). Instead, democracy is gradually eroding in a third wave of autocratization (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019), and illiberal and radical right-wing movements are now gaining ground (Lindberg & Steenekamp, 2017; Elgenius & Rydgren, 2019). The narrow definition of "the people" that such movements tend to adopt, which often has nationalistic and ethnic overtones (Lindsköld, 2015; Elgenius & Rydgren, 2019), and their critique of multiculturalism and globalization are in stark conflict with the Swedish library system's mission to reach everyone (SFS 2013:801, §2).

Another pillar of radical right-wing rhetoric is critique of the establishment, targeting institutions that together constitute the representative form of rule: government, political elections, the judicial system, and the free press (Elgenius & Rydgren, 2019). Cultural institutions, including libraries, are not spared from criticism. The understanding of democracy as open to manifold voices is contrary to this ethno-nationalist critical view of plurality. Indeed, ethno-nationalism's narrow definition of the populace and its critique of plurality have thrust public libraries into the centre of present ideological conflicts concerning culture institutions and cultural policy.

A note on the Swedish public library system

Sweden has three levels of government: a national level and a two-tier local government system consisting of 21 counties (*regioner*) and 290 municipalities (*kommuner*). The first *Swedish Library Act* (1996) mandated that all municipalities should have a public library. Consequently, public libraries now exist all over Sweden. However, just how public libraries are organized and operate is open to interpretation at the municipal level. The new *Swedish Library Act* (SFS 2013:801) that came into force in 2014 includes the following preamble:

Aims, §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.¹

¹ Translation by the Swedish Library Association. *Promoting the development of a democratic society The Swedish Library Act according to the legislator*. <https://www.culturaydeporte.gob.es/dam/jcr:4f1456a3-b670-4b32-bcda-bd50247a9086/swedish%20library%20act.pdf>

The *Library Act*'s focus on collaboration prompted the Swedish government in 2015 to instruct the National Library of Sweden to draft a strategy for promoting the development of, and cooperation within, the Swedish public library system (Government Offices of Sweden, 2016). This strategy was intended to provide solutions to current problems, one of which was a lack of clear roles and responsibilities among the system's national, regional and municipal stakeholders. Ultimately, a proposed national library strategy was presented to the government in 2019 (Fichtelius, Persson & Enarsson, 2019). It should be noted that our empirical material was produced before the proposed library strategy was presented.

Concerning public libraries, the lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities within the system is perhaps most obvious in connection with the various policy documents issued by different levels of government that govern their operations. Apart from establishing an overarching operational framework, the *Swedish Library Act* requires that plans be drafted at the regional level that suggest public libraries' priorities and direction. It is also mandatory for each municipality to have its own library plan. The local-level policy documents required by the new *Library Act* should not be viewed as simply a result of the increased focus on bureaucracy caused by New Public Management trends in the public sector. In fact, they represent a change welcomed by the library sector (Hedemark & Börjesson, 2014, p. 103). Nevertheless, the change requires public library staff to orient themselves in relation to policy documents issued on three different levels, in both strategic and everyday public library practices. The study presented here investigates how libraries manage the interrelationships between these levels of governance, giving special consideration to how tensions and conflicts might arise between them.

We are especially interested in determining the effect that the ascendancy of radical right-wing parties in Swedish politics might have on coordinating the three levels of policy in public library practice and on potential conflicts and tensions arising among these levels. According to Gabriella Elgenius and Jens Rydgren (2019, p. 584) radical right-wing parties are united by putting "emphasis on ethno-nationalism rooted in myths about a shared history and cultural homogeneity. Their programs are directed towards strengthening the nation by making it more ethnically homogeneous and – for most radical right-wing parties and movements – by returning to traditional values. The radical right also tends to accuse elites of putting internationalism and their own self-interests ahead of the nation and the people". In Sweden's 2014 general election, the radical right-wing party *Sverigedemokraterna* (SD) (cf. Elgenius & Rydgren, 2018; Lindsköld 2015), acquired the balance of power in both the Swedish Parliament and several local government councils. The party then further strengthened its position in the 2018 general election. SD's ideology calls into question values found in the Swedish democratic model that were previously taken for granted, such as free and equal access to information, literature and culture for all. SD's increased political influence has thus sparked ideological conflicts concerning cultural institutions and cultural policy; an area of Swedish politics that was formerly characterized by broad consensus. Libraries are not excluded from this ideological debate. One manifestation of these shifting political winds is seen in a bill submitted to the Swedish Parliament in which four SD parliamentarians suggested changes to the *Library Act* that would mean it only applied to Swedish citizens and would no longer prioritize languages other than Swedish and national minority languages (Emilsson et al., 2019).

At the local level, the outcome of the two recent general elections and SD's increased influence continue to cause political turbulence in many municipalities. SD's questioning of free and equal access to information, literature and culture, as has also been expressed in local government councils, directly contradicts the *Library Act's* preamble, which establishes a democratic mission for all libraries

within the Swedish library system. Conflicts and tensions may thus potentially arise for public library staff who strive to realize this mission, but who are also closely linked, formally and informally, to local government and administration. One example of just such a development was seen in Sölvesborg Municipality, which is governed by a political coalition with SD in power. In 2019, the municipal library manager was forced to resign her position due to her refusal to adapt the public library's activities to match the local political agenda. She argued that her foremost obligation was to follow the national *Library Act* (Clemens, 2019). In light of this example, SD's political agenda arguably presents new challenges in harmonizing the three levels of policy regulating Sweden's public library system as well as for staff in attempting to navigate among the directives. It is therefore of interest to examine how public library staff experience these challenges and the role cultural policy documents play in public library practice at this time.

Purpose, aim, and objective

The purpose of this study is to explore how democracy—often understood as an abstract concept or a location-transcending, intangible phenomenon—is produced, shaped, and continuously reshaped through local library practices in certain places and under local conditions at a specific point in time. Our aim is to gain research-based insight into potential conflicts and/or tensions between the three levels of Swedish public library policy at a time when values enshrined in the Swedish democratic model are being challenged by radical right-wing movements and parties. To achieve this aim, our objective is to explore if, and then how, policy documents influence day-to-day public library practice, including how instantiations of democracy within them are interpreted and enacted. In pursuing our objective, we conducted an ethnographic study in five municipalities in Sweden's Skåne County. This study was undertaken during 2016 and 2017, and a report on its findings has been published in Swedish. Preliminary findings from the study were also presented at the Nordic Conference on Cultural Policy Research conference, this paper being a further development of that presentation and the aforementioned Swedish report.

Previous Research

Our study is primarily based on research from two fields within library and information studies (LIS): 1) *public libraries, cultural policy, and policy documents* and 2) *public libraries and democracy*. By studying cultural policy in public library contexts, this study helps tie these fields more closely together. In the sections to follow, we present both important findings and arguments in support of how this study relates and contributes to these research fields.

Public libraries, cultural policy, and policy documents

How policy documents are understood and enacted at Swedish public libraries is a relatively unexplored topic within LIS. One important exception is Åse Hedemark's and Lisa Börjesson's (2014) study of the design, use, and evaluation of municipal library plans. Their study shows that the requirement to implement a library plan can be interpreted differently, leading to varied practical consequences in different parts of a library's administration (Hedemark & Börjesson, 2014, p. 110). They emphasize the importance of further investigating interrelationships and possible tensions between library plans and other documents governing public libraries.

The influence of local conditions on strategy formulation for public library activities and the performance of these strategies has been studied by Hanna Carlsson (2013). In her study of Malmö City Library's development from 2009 to 2011, she shows how the public library's strategies and visions are incorporated into Malmö City's transformation efforts and place marketing strategies. She focuses on the activities of one public library, in this case a large city library in an expansive region.

Like the aforementioned study by Hedemark and Börjesson, Carlsson combines document studies with a case study of a single public library. Our study further builds on their results. By conducting our study in five municipalities within one region, we explore how local circumstances influence the interpretation and application of policy documents in not one but five public libraries.

Jenny Johannisson (2012) highlighted the division of responsibility and tensions between different cultural policy levels in relation to public libraries in her analysis and discussion of the Cultural Collaboration Model's implementation and its implications for public library management and operations in Sweden. Johannisson views the Cultural Collaboration Model's introduction as a "structural change that could potentially have major consequences for the division of responsibility between different political levels as well as public libraries' practical activities" (Johannisson, 2012: 293. *Translation ours.*). Our study was conducted while this model was being implemented, and therefore provides knowledge about the impact this structural change on the activities and practices of five public libraries in one geographic region.

Regional administrative body Region Skåne applied the Cultural Collaboration Model early on. In 2012, its cultural affairs administration, Kultur Skåne, initiated a project financed by the Swedish Arts Council supporting public libraries' development into culture centres (Kulturnämnden, 2012). A study analyzing this initiative found that the goals set for three local projects were consistent with the desired direction indicated in the regional project, which was also supported nationally (Rivano Eckerdal, 2013). Furthermore, the importance of the project form in realizing development was also revealed, since it enables staff to translate policy document formulations into concrete, joint measures applied in day-to-day library practices.

A second study investigated how experiences from the projects had a lasting impact on public libraries' activities (Rivano Eckerdal, 2016). Its analysis revealed that library employees viewed change differently depending on their position in the organization. It became clear that libraries are influenced by current political agendas, with librarians implementing policy on behalf of municipal politicians. For a library's staff to perform their work in the best possible way, they need both support and an explicit mission from politicians.

In light of this fact, one aspect considered in our study is the relationship between public libraries, public library managers, and local politicians. These relationships have been explored from varying perspectives and with different emphases in previous studies. (See, for example, Pors, 2005; Gazo, 2011; Sveum & Tveter, 2012; Evjen, 2015; Michnik, 2014, 2015.) Topics discussed in these studies include local politicians' lack of knowledge about public libraries (Gazo, 2011; Sveum & Tveter, 2012) and public library managers' and local politicians' attitudes towards and understanding of the public library (Pors, 2005; Michnik, 2014, 2015). Among other findings, Katarina Michnik (2015) points out that library plans can increase the attention that politicians pay to public libraries; a relationship we investigate further in this study.

Public libraries and democracy

Previous research points to cultural policy as being connected with the welfare model, which emphasizes such values as *bildung*, equality, and democracy (Blomgren & Johannisson, 2016; Johannisson, 2006). Research also shows that both the welfare model itself and its values are being increasingly challenged (Svensson & Tomson, 2016), particularly by radical right-wing parties (Lindsköld, 2015). LIS research has shed light on the democratic role of public libraries (Buschman, 2018), which includes ongoing support for popular education and equal access to information and

culture. The latter aspect is often conceptualized in terms of the public library's role in supporting (media and) information literacy (Sundin & Rivano Eckerdal, 2014) and in bridging the digital divide by providing opportunities for digital participation (Thompson, 2014; Carlsson, 2012, 2013; Olsson Dahlqvist, 2019).

Another line of research focuses on the democratic potential of the public library as a meeting place in the local community (e.g. Fisher et al., 2007; Hvenegaard Rasmussen, Jochumsen & Skot-Hansen, 2011; Rivano Eckerdal, 2013), particularly during periods of migration (Audunsson, Essmat & Aabø, 2011; Johnston, 2019) and digitizing (Audunson, 2005; Olsson Dahlqvist, 2019). The arguments presented in many meeting-place studies are based on views of democracy that emphasize the accessibility of shared public spaces in fostering a thriving civil society and, thereby, also a vital democracy. Notable, here, is the deliberative norm, (applied in LIS by Buschman, 2003, and others), and varying opinions on the importance of social capital for sustaining a strong democracy (applied in LIS by Vårheim, 2007, 2009, 2011; Gong, Japzon & Chen, 2008; Vårheim, Steinmo & Ide, 2008; Fergusson, 2012; Johnson, 2010, 2012; Johnston & Audunson, 2019, and others). These theoretical conceptions of democracy share a common notion of conversation, debate, and meetings between people of diverse backgrounds as prerequisites for civic participation and a functioning democracy (Johnston & Audunson, 2019; Johnston 2016, 2019). They also criticize the lack of venues and opportunities for such public conversation in contemporary society. Research focusing on the public library as a meeting place takes into consideration the low barriers to access and openness of public library space, proposing the institution as a stakeholder that can actively contribute to the revitalization of democratic society (Stigendal, 2008; Audunson, 2005; Audunson, Essmat & Aabø, 2011; Engström, 2019).

Despite continuous emphasis on the democratic role of libraries, as is also expressed in international policies such as the Public Library Manifesto (IFLA/UNESCO, 1994), and the Alexandria Proclamation (IFLA/UNESCO, 2006), these studies remain rare examples of attempts to theorize and define democracy within LIS. Most build on theories that follow the liberal consensus model and on the associated neutrality norm that characterizes libraries and librarianship (c.f. Lewis, 2008; Hansson, 2010, 2019); a model challenged by this study. The lack of empirical research exploring how democracy is actually realized in public libraries has also been highlighted (Audunson et al., 2019). Our study seeks to expand the theoretical landscape and fill empirical gaps. It thereby contributes to this evolving research field, focusing on how the interplay between policies and practices in public libraries relates to democracy as an ongoing process, and considering theories of democracy as a plurality (Olsson Dahlqvist, 2019; Rivano Eckerdal, 2017, 2018). Public libraries are here understood to be among those social institutions critical to upholding democracy (Hansson, 2010; cf. Mouffe, 2013). Our study contributes research-based knowledge regarding if and how public libraries might offer spaces that help foster resistance to threats to liberal representative rule such as those we observe today.

Whereas the research mentioned thus far focuses on the democratic potential of public libraries in contemporary society, several other studies investigate how this potential might be challenged by New Public Management's implementation (Buschman, 2003, 2007; Kann-Christensen & Andersen, 2009) or downplayed when cultural policy (Johannisson, 2006, 2012) and public library strategies are conflated with economic growth objectives in urban development plans and place marketing schemes (Carlsson, 2013; cf. Hvenegaard Rasmussen, Jochumsen & Skot-Hansen, 2011). These changes challenge both traditional conceptions of public libraries and the professional role of librarians requiring them to develop new skills, approaches, and expertise in performing today's public library

(Carlsson, 2013; Rivano Eckerdal, 2013, 2016; Schwarz, 2016). Past studies have scrutinized these changes and suggested ways to resist neoliberal tendencies in library development (*The Progressive Librarian*; Gregory & Higgins, 2013; Hansson, 2019; Whitworth, 2014; Quinn & Bates, 2017; Rivano Eckerdal, 2017, 2018).

Methodology

Central to this study's design is our elucidation of how the intangible and the tangible and the location-transcending and the situated are simultaneously present when democracy is enacted. We argue that to achieve a more coherent, and yet still multifaceted understanding, of how democracy is done at public libraries, equal priority must be given to these different dimensions, which should also be considered as a whole rather than as separate entities (Mol, 2002, p. 55).

We view democracy as an ongoing process and a plurality (Mouffe, 2013) that can be done in multiple ways—that is to say, as *democracies* (Mol, 2002). This conception requires a theoretical approach that captures democracy as being part of, and as being continuously done in, practice. Practice theory is therefore particularly useful in this investigation. We have chosen practice as our unit of analysis, and practice theory as the study's theoretical lens. We will focus on public library practice, here conceptualized as a complex of elements including activities, routines, artefacts, and knowledge (cf. Reckwitz, 2002; Cox, 2012) that can be assembled and enacted (Mol, 2002) in different ways according to local conditions. Annemarie Mol develops praxiography in order to understand how knowledge—in her case, knowledge of a disease—is produced:

This, then, may be a way out of the dichotomy between the knowing subject and the objects-that-are-known: to spread the activity of knowing widely. To spread it out over tables, knives, records, microscopes, buildings, and other things or habits in which it is embedded. Instead of talking about subjects knowing objects we may then, as a next step, come to talk about enacting reality in practice. (Mol 2002, p. 50)

Cultural policy documents lie at the heart of this study: we explore the different meanings stakeholders ascribe to them, their textual content, how this content is translated into activities and material arrangements in public library practice (Rivano Eckerdal, 2012, 2018), and how something is always either added or lost in this process (cf. Callon, 1986; Carlsson, 2013). With regard to analysis, we will approach these policy documents as texts, as material elements that form part of library practice, and as actors in their own right that shape, and are themselves reshaped, in this same practice (cf. Barad, 2003; Latour, 2005). This sociomaterial approach, which recognizes the performativity of texts and further emphasizes the attention paid to materiality in practice theory, ensures an analytical focus on policy documents that enables us to fulfil the study's purpose.

Our practice theoretical approach leads us to focus on how policies are enacted in practices, and assumes a view of policies as both produced and reproduced. We thereby gain an understanding of how cultural policy travels between—and also translates between—documents and practices. In other words, how policy statements are as much produced in everyday and local practices as they are enacted.

As a means of typifying the three policy levels relevant to Swedish public libraries, we included the most important regulatory document produced by each level at the given time. At the national level, this was the *Library Act* (SFS 2013:801). At the regional level, it was the Regional Culture Plan for

Region Skåne, 2016- 2019 (Region Skåne), and at the local level, the library plan for each municipality included in the study (i.e., Lund, Osby, Skurup, Tomelilla, and Örkelljunga).

Methodologically, we have adopted an ethnographic approach, which is particularly suitable for a study that focuses on capturing location-transcending phenomena through mundane activities. This approach also makes a methodological contribution to policy research. In order to pinpoint how varying local conditions might influence public library practices, we conducted fieldwork in five municipalities in Sweden's Skåne County. These were chosen based on demographic and geographic differences as well as differing political representations so as to produce empirical material that recognizes possible variations in each public library's circumstances. Region Skåne consists of 33 municipalities organized into clusters of adjacent municipalities that cooperate regarding public libraries and other matters. The following criteria guided our selection: 1) The municipality should not be a major regional municipality, 2) it should not recently have attracted much media attention, 3) its cultural budget should be about average for Region Skåne, and 4) several of the clusters should be included in the final selection. Furthermore, based on the assumption that such a situation would necessitate frequent communication between the stakeholders, the municipality should be governed by a minority following the outcome of the 2014 public election. The selected municipalities are therefore Lund, Osby, Skurup, Tomelilla and Örkelljunga.

The included municipalities are presented along with some basic statistical data regarding their public libraries. Table 1 summarizes the situation when the study commenced in 2016. The statistics available at the time portrayed the situation as it was in 2014. Later statistics from 2017 are also included, depicting the situation during the second year of the study. We wish to emphasize that we are interested in how the policy documents are understood and enacted, which makes the situation at the time of the interview or observation that which is most relevant for our purposes. The fact that some information is now out of date is therefore unproblematic, since it still contributes to the overall picture.

Table 1
The Included Municipalities

Basic descriptors	Year	Lund	Osby	Skurup	Tomelilla	Örkelljunga
Population	2014	115,968	12,828	15,167	12,914	9,733
	2017	121,274	13,182	15,642	13,416	10,047
Tax index	2014	102	85	89	83	83
Staffed library service-points	2014	11	3	4	4	3
	2017	10	3	4	4	3
Annual work units	2014	67.5	5.8	7.4	6.4	5.2
	2017	83	6.8	7.8	7.2	5.1
Media expenses per inhabitant (SEK)	2014	53.4	46	55	54.6	56
	2017	53.4	40.4	52.2	50.1	55.2*
Operational expenses per inhabitant (SEK)	2014	578	468.3	422.1	415.3	650.5
	2017	570.6	414.3	481.5	507.3	471.8

* Figure for 2016.

Note.

The population data were taken from Statistics Sweden's statistical database and reflect the situation as at December 31 2014 and December 31, 2017, respectively. By way of comparison Sweden had 9,747,000 residents on December 31 2014, and 1,288,908 of these resided in Skåne County. As of December 31, 2017, Sweden had 10,120,242 inhabitants, and 1,344,689 of these resided in Skåne County (<http://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se>).

Information about tax indices was collected from each municipality's website. This figure refers to the tax base in each municipality in 2014, and is relative to the situation for Sweden as a whole, as assigned an index score of 100.

Information concerning libraries was collected from the National Library of Sweden's statistical reports available online (<http://bibstat.kb.se/reports>).

"Staffed library service points" refers to physical places with an address that offers library services ("Bemannade serviceställen" in Swedish).

"Annual work units" refers to the equivalent of one person working full time during one year. For example, two people working half time during one year equals 1 annual work unit ("Årsarbetskraft" in Swedish).

Ethnography allows for the combining of multiple methods. Hence, this study was conducted in two stages during 2016 and 2017. In 2016, we interviewed the library manager, the local politician, and the local official responsible for library-related matters in each municipality. They were identified as important stakeholders in public library issues at the municipal level. We first e-mailed the library manager. If they agreed to participate, we then contacted the local politician and the local official. They were informed both about the study and that their interview would be recorded. Each interviewee signed a consent form prior to their interview.

The interviews were semi-structured, with a question scheme developed separately for each category. We posed a battery of questions about three specific policy documents: the *Library Act*, the regional culture plan (specifically the section concerning regional libraries) and the municipal library plan. All were published and accessible online. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, with some editing to make them more intelligible. Each interviewee was given the opportunity to read their interview transcript.

In 2017, we performed observations that focused on the library and its staff to learn about their everyday work and their experiences working with the policy documents. We wanted to know if, and also how, directives in these documents became part of the library's day-to-day practices. Before beginning these observations, we attempted to inform the staff about the study in person at a staff meeting, for example. Where this proved impractical, however, we e-mailed the staff beforehand to ensure that they were informed of our presence. We also announced our presence during the observations using a sign, and invited visitors to come and talk with us.

Over the course of 4–5 days, we visited the main library in all five municipalities and one branch library each in two municipalities (Tomelilla and Skurup). We used shadowing, an observation method developed by Barbara Czarniawska in which the researcher follows people at work, including engaging in conversations with them (Czarniawska, 2007). While library staff are also important stakeholders in our context, we chose not to conduct regular interviews with them. This is because the topic was deemed potentially sensitive in their case, since, to some extent, the policy documents and their implementation have a bearing on library staff's relationship with management. Instead, we chose to pursue informal conversations with staff that were not recorded. Fieldnotes were taken during our observations. These focused on what did (or did not) happen in the library as well as on what came up in conversations with staff concerning policy documents' role in their work.

We also used "seating sweeps"; a kind of structured observation method previously used in studying public libraries (Given & Leckie, 2003; Ögländ, 2014). This method involves developing a protocol to determine how a specific place is used by noting activities occurring there and who and what are involved. The method is useful, since it identifies variations in use. In our case, it proved useful as a means of coordinating our observations, since we were two researchers conducting the study but only one was present at each library. We used these sweeps as a means to create on-the-spot accounts that were more structured than our fieldnotes. As such, the sweep protocols complement our fieldnotes and we have analyzed the two together.

Our empirical material includes transcriptions of 15 interviews, policy documents (three per municipality), and field notes and seating sweep protocols from our ethnographic study of libraries in the five municipalities. We primarily used the policy documents to provide background and context for our interviews and observations. The policy documents were not analyzed separately.

Due to research ethical considerations, we have chosen to refer to the municipalities by name only rarely. We have sought to create opportunities for candid conversations, and cannot risk our report disadvantaging the study's participants in any way. Similarly, no personal names are used in the report. The interviewees were informed that it might be possible to identify them, since their professional roles are specified. We consider this justifiable since they hold leadership positions. We refer to ourselves as "we" in our paper, except when using extracts from a fieldnote concerning an observation that only one of us conducted. In such cases, we use the pronoun "I", whereas we use "we" in analyzing that observation.

One noteworthy feature of the interviews conducted during 2016 was the importance the majority of interviewees ascribed to the *Library Act's* preamble and to its democratic mission, in particular. This finding made our understanding of democracy as a potentially conflictual process (Mouffe 2013) an important starting point for our analysis. In her theory of agonistic pluralism, Chantal Mouffe considers the social as being invariably shaped by conflicts without rational solution, that is, by antagonism. Democracy is therefore understood as a process that requires solving conflicts by nonviolent means. Democratic institutions play an important role as places where antagonism is transformed into agonism; a struggle between adversaries (Mouffe, 2005, p. 20). Accordingly, we understand democracy as doings and practices that are shaped by the local to varying degrees. Consequently, during 2017 we paid close attention to if and how the democratic mission was enacted in the libraries' daily operations. Given our sociomaterial perspective on practices, we included activities, routines, artifacts, and knowledge expressed in doings or sayings. The material we collected includes stakeholders' experiences and views as expressed during interviews and conversations, and our descriptions of activities in the libraries and the libraries' designs.

Our analysis of the material was continuous, with the findings from 2016 shaping our focus during 2017. We performed a content analysis of our interview transcripts and fieldnotes, first identifying and then thematizing the answers to the research questions. The central theoretical tools used in analyzing our empirical material are *enactments* (Mol, 2002): how the policy becomes part of library practice; *intra-actions* (Barad, 2003): how the strategic document becomes materialized in specific material practices at certain points; and *translations* (Callon, 1986): how something is always either added or lost in this process. In the second stage of our analysis, we used these analytical tools as sensitizing concepts (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2014, p. 14).

Results

We will now move on to present the results of our analysis. First, we describe how the policy documents became part of the library practice in a way that often was not apparent to the library staff themselves, what we call internalized enactments of the policy documents. Second, we depict ways in which the democratic mission of the *Library Act* was translated in the library practice. Our results show that these translations varied in relation to the notion of neutrality. Third, we zoom in on instances when the strategic documents became materialized in specific socio-material practices, intra-actions, that called for the library staff to balance and prioritize between different target groups.

Internalized enactments of policy documents

During our fieldwork we held conversations with library staff and observed different activities and the library space. When asked about the policy documents, staff often replied that these played no role in their everyday work. One example of this occurred in a conversation during a staff lunch break. Six people were present, including me, the observer:

One of the librarians note that many of the Library Act's requirements are obvious, including that libraries must be open to everyone and free of charge. We begin discussing differences between the former and current acts, and after a while I mention that the current preamble states that the library system must promote democracy by allowing people to form free opinions. Many present react to this statement, claiming that this idea is a given. One person reflects that the idea has become more or less ingrained since their childhood years, while another person remarks that perhaps the idea isn't quite as incontrovertible anymore as it used to be. (fieldnote)

This fieldnote exemplifies how goals and priorities included in policy documents may shape librarians' actions even when their influence is not consciously understood by those involved, they have become internalized. One librarian at another library commented that they did not take the policy documents into consideration at all. Later in the conversation, however, this same librarian stressed the importance of access—a key concept found in policy documents at all tree levels (fieldnote). Many library staff explained that they keep the policy documents in the back of their minds, considering them when deciding the number and content of library activities, for example, and in their efforts to reach minority groups. One librarian explained that they do not consider the policy documents in their everyday work practice, but that these anyway inform how they understand their task.

They become an important consideration in certain situations when library staff carry out planning and suchlike, but s/he doesn't think about the policy documents during their everyday work. It's more a question of how to understand their professional role. I comment that sometimes it's difficult to know which comes first—the chicken or the egg. I ask if s/he feels that the policy documents are useful and s/he answers that they are, but says that what they propose is obvious in many ways; it's nothing remarkable, nothing in them make her/him do anything differently. Nevertheless, they are helpful to refer to when engaging with politicians and others who don't know much about libraries. In that instance, they are useful. (fieldnote)

The above fieldnote exemplifies how staff bear the policy documents' principles in mind when performing their work. The principles in the policies are experienced as part of how the library practice is enacted (Mol, 2002). This is particularly true of the requirements concerning prioritized target groups, free access for all, and that libraries must be a meeting place free of charge.

This internalization of policy document principles was observed at all the libraries. Still, it should be noted that interpretations of and attitudes towards the policy documents vary, as is often acknowledged by library staff. One librarian commented that while they personally consider the policy documents to be crucial, this view is not shared by everyone. One library manager noted that librarians view goals, visions, change, and professionalism differently depending on whether they are veterans of the profession or have only recently finished their training (fieldnote). Nonetheless, while some librarians included in the study began their careers before the first *Swedish Library Act* was even in place, they still agree with its spirit. In their case, policy document wording and the understanding of the professional role have been shaped reciprocally.

We observed different activities that reinforced librarians' involvement with the policy documents. One example being staff participating in preparing and writing their library plan, drafting action plans based on this library plan, and providing input and feedback concerning the regional culture plan. We interpret this active, collaborative participation in producing policy documents as promoting library staff's familiarity with the material. The discussions that arose in the group were supportive in nature and provided a guide for the librarians in performing their work. They also created opportunities to

connect statements in the policy documents with the library's activities and everyday operations. Although time-consuming, such discussions are a worthwhile investment in the long run, since they bolster confidence in how to enact the library. Engaging in conversations about different ways to apply policy documents in everyday library practice is thus an important facet of the profession. Such conversations are a means of becoming aware of, and being reminded of, what librarianship is about. In keeping with our view of democracy as an unending process (Mouffe, 2013:132), we view such conversations as enactments of democracy. Together, library staff figure out how to connect their daily practices to policy document stipulations, and how these can be framed as fulfilling policy objectives or not.

The importance of the Library Act, and its translations into practice

One of our study's primary results concerns the importance assigned to the *Library Act* and to its explicit focus on democracy. Its importance is chiefly stressed by librarians and library managers, who also believe that the *Act's* preamble can be used to legitimize public library activities and priorities. These findings are unsurprising, since previous research has concluded that a democratic pathos is a driving force and motivator for many librarians (Ohlsson Dahlquist, 2019). The library room is also one of the few open social spaces where people are not required to consume (Given & Leckie, 2002) and where they can remain without needing to identify themselves or state their business. Such ideals likely contributed to the decision made by public library staff in many Swedish municipalities to assume key roles in receiving the unusually large number of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants who entered Sweden in the fall of 2015. In a situation where other municipal institutions were unable to fully meet the needs of this human influx, the public library assumed a leading position in welcoming these people to Swedish society. The events of 2015 and those that followed revealed the unique role that public libraries and their staff plays in times of dismantled welfare. In fact, the special position adopted by public libraries and librarians' actions in connection with this situation have been framed as sanctuary practices (Lundberg & Ohlsson Dahlquist, 2018).

Their responses can also be viewed as translations into practice of the democratic mission established in the *Library Act*. The *Library Act* stipulates in the Preamble that libraries within the public library system shall promote the development of a democratic society. However, how that is enacted in practice is not clarified. Therefore, the responses are examples of such realisations—translations (Callon, 1986)—of the strategic formulations into library practice. Our findings also make it clear that the events of 2015 reveal how this democratic mission can be translated into practice in different ways according to local circumstances. For example, one library chose to actively position itself as a welcomer for the newly arrived by emphasizing the public library's role as an inclusive institution. Its staff mounted stickers reading "Refugees Welcome" by its entrance. The library also made a language café part of its regular program. This event was held weekly in the main library room, amongst the bookshelves, and was also included in the local library plan.

Another library provided a very successful service called "information cafés", to help new arrivals navigate different aspects of Swedish society. These weekly meetings attracted so many attendees that they eventually disrupted other library activities. Following negotiations with local politicians, services for the newly arrived were relocated outside the library. The library manager argued that these meetings were a joint undertaking with the municipality—one supported by the library but for which it did not bear sole responsibility. Ultimately, the library created a new position with a focus on the information café meetings and linguistic diversity in general.

A service similar to the information café was provided at the largest public library included in our study. However, in this case it was offered via a project in which professionals worked as volunteers providing guidance about different aspects of Swedish society (for example) to people newly arrived in Sweden. This was a weekly service supported by one librarian who ensured that volunteers had access to a private space suitable for any sensitive discussions that might unfold, such as those regarding legal or financial difficulties, and to secure computers, connected to printers.

Another finding concerning how the *Library Act's* democratic mission can be translated in different ways pertains to how librarians we met relate differently to the neutrality norm, which inevitably impacts how they perform their work. One example is how librarians react to racist or discriminatory opinions expressed inside the library. We met librarians who argued that they could not remain silent in such situations and still uphold the library's democratic mission. They viewed discussion or dialog with persons expressing antidemocratic opinions as falling within the scope of their professional role. We also met librarians who believe that fulfilling their professional role in keeping libraries open to all requires them to remain neutral, and often silent, in such instances. These divergent views cannot be attributed to circumstances in their respective communities. Rather, applying the typology of library neutrality developed by Nora Schmidt (2020, p. 274-284), the outcome of these translations is instead influenced by whether neutrality is conceptualized as an active, passive, or "culturally humble" concept. The latter implies a role for the library to, as a response to a recognized imbalance of power relations, work "towards balancing the observed bias, hence furthering social justice" (Schmidt, 2020, p. 282).

In agreement with Mouffe's theory on democracy, we recognize the plurality that characterizes contemporary society. There are many groups with diverse interests that clash from time to time, leading to potential conflicts. According to Mouffe, democratic institutions are crucial in offering spaces where such conflicts can be handled (Mouffe, 2013, p. xii). Conflict management is a process wherein people change their view about one another from "enemies" to "adversaries" (Mouffe, 2005, p. 20). From their founding, public libraries have been governed politically and held up as key institutions in supporting and promoting democracy and the welfare society (Buschman, 2003; Hansson, 2010). How democracy is enacted in public library practice is therefore highly relevant. We are unable to gauge whether the emphasis placed on the public library's democratic mission has increased in the five municipalities included in our study. What we do know is that the democratic mission took on a key role from the fall of 2015.

Balancing and prioritizing

One recurring observation concerned the lack of space in the libraries under study regardless of their size. It is clear that libraries were originally designed with a greater focus on their collections than is necessary today. Overall, neither is the *Library Act's* prioritization of children and youths mirrored in libraries' design, which focuses largely on accommodating adults. These imbalances between libraries' physical space and the activities taking place within bring the needs of target user groups into conflict. Consequently, in planning daily activities, librarians are forced to decide who will have access to the different rooms. For example, they must decide whether to prioritize activities for children or the newly arrived, or for people in need of IT support or children. Librarians also need to make ad hoc judgements concerning people's needs and access to the physical space. They make such decisions in their everyday practice, with policy documents serving as important guides in such matters. While library staff do apply policy document guidelines in these instances, when they are required to strike a balance between different missions and prioritized groups, decisions about access become difficult to make. We view these decisions as intra-actions between prioritized groups. Intra-

action – not interaction – is a neo-logism coined by Karen Barad to point out how the world is in a constant becoming, and how various material phenomena meet in the process of constant becoming. In each meeting – or intra-action – a specific relation is enacted, a relation that creates or stabilizes a border that potentially can be changed in another intra-action (Barad, 2003, p. 815-817). Viewing the decisions made by library staff as enactments in relation to intra-actions in the library practice then is helpful as it demonstrates that they are temporary decisions that may be contested in future intra-actions, and also how fundamentally important they are by being part of the constant becoming or the library.

During one of our visits, a librarian was threatened by a non-student user who was denied access to a computer reserved for students. Another kind of collision is enacted in incidents such as this, where users threaten library staff, demanding access to specific library resources. We view such incidents as an intra-action related to the principle that library activities must be available to all. That is to say, the fact that library activities must be open to all does not mean that libraries must accommodate each individual user's wishes. Users may use library resources as long as they do not do so at another user's expense. Since library resources are limited, decisions about access are under constant review. Still, in balancing different users' needs, one comes to realize that the concept of a "library for all" does not require libraries to meet all the needs of any one user.

The above example also relates to access to digital resources and tools. Several libraries offer specific activities to support learning about digital tools and resources. This is one means to satisfy Paragraph 7 of the *Library Act*, which requires public libraries to work to increase knowledge about information technology. Formal measures aside, users' need for support in connection with digital resources comes to the fore in many other situations where they interact with library staff:

I ask how they handle users' requests for help—do they impose a time limit? The answer is no, as long as there is no line. They can, however, ask to get back to the user if they have a colleague with some specific expertise that is needed, for example. I clarify by saying that I was referring to cases where the user need help with their internet bank account or mobile ID app or suchlike. One of the librarians says that they simply use common sense. Another librarian explains that they have decided not to provide help. While this is not official policy, an internal decision has been made. They do not help users to buy tickets or any such thing, since such activities involve assuming a certain responsibility, which they are not authorized to do. I ask if it ever happens that they stand behind a user [and provide guidance], for example, if the user doesn't understand some instructions, and they reply that they do so. They can explain instructions in simpler language. The first librarian mentions that the Swedish Migration Agency has a digital service where you can respond to decisions. The librarian can then explain what it says, for example that the Agency requires a photocopy of the person's passport, but they will not do it themselves only tell what is needed. I remark that boundaries that were once easy to draw are blurred nowadays due to the many different digital services available. For example, librarians must not give users advice concerning medical, legal, or financial matters. These days, however, such matters are intertwined with questions about how to use specific digital tools. The other librarian comments that they feel sorry for those that don't have anyone else to ask; it's a question of accessibility. (fieldnote)

Digitalizing only increases the need for physical libraries and their in-person services. Libraries are crucial means of allowing everyone access to vital digital resources, without which civic participation becomes impossible. A number of important institutions' physical customer service offices, including those of the Swedish postal service, Sweden's Social Insurance Agency, and the Swedish Migration

Agency, as well as central societal functions such as banks, have been dismantled. These public service institutions are no longer physically present in every municipality, offering digital access to their services instead. Consequently, public libraries have become venues from which to access these institutions for those without digital tools and an internet connection. The *Library Act* stipulates that public libraries shall increase knowledge about information technology “for the attainment of knowledge, learning, and participation in cultural life” (SFS 2013:801, §7). To support and develop users’ skills related to information technology is therefore part of public libraries mission. However, the recent shift has precipitated new questions among library users concerning the need to learn to use digital services and tools and the content of these services: How do I start my smartphone? How do I pay my bills using my online banking services? How do I reply to messages from the Swedish Migration Agency? The increased demand for support in using these technological tools forces library staff to balance and prioritize in their library practice.

Discussion

We will now return to the objective and aim of our study and discuss them in relation to our results, followed by a discussion of the challenges to democracy, understood as a process fraught with conflicts, that radical right-wing movements and parties are posing.

Policy documents’ influence on public libraries’ day-to-day practice

When Swedish library managers were asked about their views on library plans in a previous study, they answered that these are of only limited importance (Hansson & Aldstedt, 2017, p. 46). Our assumptions about policy documents being a burden to library staff were unfounded, as was confirmed by our observations. The people we met with were primarily positive towards the policy documents. Though it might be that staff with negative views chose not to engage with us during our observations, we did speak with many library staff members, and most of them consider both the documents and their involvement with them as being positive overall. In our interviews, in which we explicitly asked about both advantages and disadvantages, policy documents were usually considered beneficial. While much time is spent engaging with them, the effort is considered worthwhile and the result is valued. The work of drafting, evaluating, and updating library plans also plays a role in internal communication processes. Since staff are obliged to follow the plan, effort is required on their part to implement policy document directives in library practice. At some libraries we studied, all library staff are involved in drafting action plans that reflect the library plan. This work and the discussions it involves are an effective means of realizing the library plan’s visions in library activities.

Our practice theoretical perspective entails a focus on the enactment of the policy documents in library practice; a practice that these documents both contribute to moulding and are themselves moulded by. This perspective provides a means of acquiring knowledge about how cultural policy travels and is translated (Calloun, 1986) from document to practice. Or in other words, how policy documents are both shaped and enacted in local library practice (Mol, 2002). For example, we have observed that library plans can be used to clearly define the limits of a library’s duties. In two of the municipalities included in our study such demarcations were made in relation to local schools, since municipal libraries are not responsible for supplementing inadequate school library service unless special arrangements including financing, are in place. This is yet another example of policy documents being used in different ways according to the situation, indicating that their application is adapted and reshaped when enacted in library practice.

As shown in the results section, such adaptation was also evident with regard to the *Library Act*. It became clear from the onset that those we interviewed ascribed great importance to this document

and to its explicit focus on democracy, in particular. Notwithstanding, the library staff we spoke with during our observations often said that they did not apply policy documents in their everyday practice. Despite this, we observed that the democratic mission was manifest in the ways that staff enacted their work, especially in their efforts to provide good resources for children and youths and opportunities for people who have recently arrived in Sweden to engage with information, culture, and literature in Swedish and other languages.

We conducted our study at a time when the current *Library Act* had recently entered into force. Despite its newness, library staff considered the *Act's* directives to be self-evident. In our analysis, we describe policy documents as having been internalized by many of the librarians we met during our observations. The fact that several of them described policy document guidelines—including those in quite recent documents—as being obvious or like “second nature” reveals how these documents are continuously reshaped – intra-acted (Barad, 2003) – when enacted in library practice.

Potential conflicts and/or tensions among the three levels of Swedish library policy

We now wish to address the aim of this paper by discussing any tensions and/or conflicts that may arise at the strategic or everyday levels of library management in the five municipalities due to incongruence among the three policy levels. We began by assuming that following several levels of policy documents must be wearisome for library staff. However, our results show that this situation yields a largely positive income instead.

Although the library managers, in particular, spend much time and effort considering policy documents, they do not view this task as problematic, but rather as an opportunity for progress and development. While their work with policy documents mainly concerns the municipal library plan, they do not describe their obligation to consider and refer to regional and national policy documents as burdensome. Rather, they see it as an advantage in their dealings with politicians and library users, since they can justify library activities by referring to the requirements in these policy documents. In doing so, they show municipal policy's alignment with regional and national directives. Our results show examples of some of the major consequences for library activities that Johannisson (2012) foresaw as a consequence of the implementation of the Cultural Collaboration Model, somewhat surprisingly they turned out to be to a large extent welcomed by library staff.

Our findings also show that public librarians navigate between the national and the local in their work for democracy often with the support of politicians and officials. While library-related issues have been uncontroversial in the five municipalities during the time of our study, in some of these municipalities, general political tensions have been observed at the municipal level. Although these tensions have arisen between individual politicians, they are also manifestations of general political divisions within the municipality. For example, measures supporting new arrivals in Sweden have been challenged, and anything with an international connection is immediately considered controversial. Such problematizing and critique is evident among both politicians and library users. In such situations, library staff have referred to the policy documents arguing that they support such activities. Michnik previously has pointed out that library plans may be a way to increase the attention politicians pay to public libraries (2015). What we found is that the documents that library staff and library managers refer to when they are criticized varies but it is the *Library Act* that is most commonly referred to in defending a library's position. This finding harmonizes with the results of a study conducted in another Swedish region (Pilerot & Hultgren, 2017, p. 33).

Hence, our analysis shows that being subject to policy documents issued by three different levels of government is not a major problem for the Swedish public libraries included in our study. The tension between different strategic documents governing public libraries that Hedemark and Börjesson have pointed out (2014) did turn up in our study. The tensions we identified arose among library management, politicians, and users—that is to say, horizontally—and not vertically, as we had assumed. And, in fact, having three levels of policy documents has proven advantageous when such tensions arise, since the different levels and various documents involved provide a solid basis for negotiations. But, this solid basis is enacted in different ways depending on the circumstances. Our results thus confirm the importance the local context has for how strategic library documents are performed (Carlsson, 2013) and it does so in as much as five municipalities.

As a consequence, these seemingly rigid, inflexible policy documents appear to be both plastic and mouldable when they are enacted in the day-to-day public library practice. We therefore consider public libraries to be locations where different levels of cultural policy are interconnected. Accordingly, we argue that a contemporary Swedish librarian's skill set includes acting as a translator between different political levels. The principles from policy documents from different levels of government are enacted in the library practice. This can be a more or less strenuous task depending on the circumstances surrounding the library's day-to-day practice. This circumstance elicits questions about how changes influence the expectations placed on professional librarians and the content and organization of their work.

Challenges to democracy by radical right-wing movements and parties

The work undertaken by the librarians we encountered is subject to the tension created by a paradox in the democratic form of rule; the principle that a democracy must allow opponents of the democratic form of rule a voice. Through the examples referred to, we have shown that librarians are forced to set limits and priorities in their everyday practice. To satisfy *Library Act* stipulations, they must provide resources and opportunities for library users to form free opinions, which necessitates both impartiality and rejecting censorship. On the other hand, honoring their mission to provide services to all and to promote democracy requires librarians to work to preserve the democratic form of rule (Hirschfeldt, 2017). The very nature of libraries is that they are political (Jaeger & Sarin, 2016), and not neutral (Jaeger et al, 2013). Consequently, the library has a mission to fulfil in its role as an institution where the mentioned democratic paradox is upheld via enactments that have support for democracy as one of their goals. As we have shown, librarians' interpretations of policy documents vary. Thus a running conversation that includes scrutinizing how neutrality is understood is important in realizing libraries' democratic mission in the best possible way. Given our view of democracy as a conflict-prone process these enactments form part of the "doing" of democracy. We wish to stress that we consider this to be a valuable and important role for libraries to fulfil, and that librarians are needed to mediate balance. It is part and parcel of their professional role.

Our results show how public libraries' democratic role is enacted in an era when liberal democracy is under fire (Foa & Mounk 2017) and when radical right-wing movements and parties are causing political turbulence in Sweden and many other Western countries. We have shown how this role is performed on the local, everyday level by focusing on how the democratic mission, as established in the Sweden's *Library Act*, is either supported or impeded by locally situated library plans and everyday practices at Sweden's public libraries.

Conclusion

This study contributes knowledge about how the public library—an important social institution cherished by the public and politicians alike (Evjen, 2015)—has a role to play in preparing its users to be citizens (Budd, 2015; Hansson, 2010). Moreover, library staff are in a position to act during times when liberal democratic values are challenged by radical right-wing movements and parties, and when socioeconomic differences between social groups are on the increase. Sweden currently faces a number of challenges related to growing social divides, such as those between urban and rural areas and between long-time and newly arrived residents. Swedish society urgently requires greater knowledge about how to handle these challenges, not only in a formal political sense, but also concerning how various social institutions and their staff should interact with users in their daily operations. By exploring if—and how—public librarians enact the library’s democratic mission, we have learned how social institutions can strengthen trust in liberal democracy in a local setting and what obstacles they may encounter.

Our analysis of how democracy, viewed as a process, is enacted in library practice comprises a rare empirical contribution to understanding democratic rule and the role libraries have in it (Audunson et al., 2019). Via our theoretical starting points, we have addressed the two aspects of democracy relevant to this study: how democracy is abstract and location-transcending, yet also concrete and contingent on local conditions. We have gained insight into how the location-transcending democratic mission of public libraries established in different policy documents is translated and enacted in everyday activities at a specific point in time in five Swedish municipalities.

This study contributes research-based knowledge on how staff at Swedish public libraries act to address social challenges in their daily practice. Furthermore, the ethnographic approach adopted provides a rare methodological contribution to policy research. Viewed collectively, we consider our results as revealing different ways that democracy is done in local practices at Swedish public libraries today. The plasticity that occurs when the seemingly fixed and solid policy documents are enacted allows room for librarians’ democracy-promoting efforts. Furthermore, as cultural institutions, libraries provide opportunities for negotiations between different levels of cultural policy—an important contribution to society during challenging times. In adopting an agonistic view of democracy (Mouffe, 2013), we question whether it is possible for public libraries to be both neutral and democratic (Jaeger et al., 2013). In our view, favoring democracy can never be construed as a neutral stance. On the contrary, we consider democracy to be highly normative, and the idea that it is possible to support democracy in a neutral manner is therefore untenable.

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