

Qualitative research into the provision and impact of ICT in public libraries in Sweden

March 2013



Contents

Executive summary	3
Objectives and research approach	3
ICT provision and usage	3
Users' perceptions and use of ICT in public libraries	3
1. Background and methodology	5
2. The public library landscape and internet provision	7
3. LIBRARY MANAGERS	8
3.1 The librarians' role	8
3.2 The libraries	8
3.3 ICT hardware/software	8
3.4 Increasing ICT use	8
3.4 ICT services	9
3.5 Library staff	9
3.6 Benefits and impact for users	9
3.7 Communication	10
3.8 The future	10
4. LIBRARY USERS	10
4.1 Using ICT in the library	10
4.2 ICT hardware / software in the library	11
4.3 Staff who provide ICT support to users	12
4.4 Awareness of services provided in the library	12
4.5 Experiences and impacts of using ICT in the library	12
4.6 The future	13

Executive summary

Objectives and research approach

TNS, an independent research company with a global presence, was commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation to conduct research across 18 EU countries to identify perceptions and types of use of public libraries. The purpose of the research was to understand the impact that public libraries in the EU have on users' lives.

The research included:

- a workshop among the study stakeholders to discuss the priorities for the research;
- desk research, to collate key data concerning libraries;
- a survey of a representative sample of the population aged 15 and over in each of the 17 countries;
- a survey among library users and public access computer (PAC) users aged 15 and over, in each of the 17 countries, conducted in libraries; and
- qualitative research in 18 countries (the 17 surveyed, and Sweden) among library users and library staff.

This report provides a brief overview of the results for Sweden.

ICT provision and usage

The number of computers and the range of software provided by libraries varied according to the size of the library, with larger libraries providing up to 20 PCs and more advanced software such as Photoshop. Libraries used a variety of means to promote their ICT services, from including information in general communication on library services to, in one case, engaging in a regional publicity campaign. Some also targeted promotions at specific user groups, such as older users. Librarians encouraged the general public to use PACs by providing informal, ad-hoc support in addition to more structured courses on a wide range of ICT subjects. Users generally felt that the staff in the libraries they visited had a good knowledge of ICT services; similarly library managers believed their staff to be well-trained with a high skill set.

Library managers were proud to provide public ICT services, which they believed played an important role in enhancing access to the range of benefits that ICT use offers. They felt that the ICT services and support they provided had allowed users to become more confident and proficient, improving their digital and e-communication skills and increasing civic participation. On the whole, libraries did not focus on the policy areas of e-procurement, e-business, and employment when providing training and support for ICT users. Although staff provided basic advice and showed users how to find relevant online information sources, these were areas that staff felt were too complex for their role and required expert advice from the relevant authorities.

Staff priorities for the future focused on increased funding for staff training and hardware in order to update their current equipment.

Users' perceptions and use of ICT in public libraries

Users, both in semi-rural and urban areas, had positive perceptions of the libraries they visited, and appreciated the access to ICT services they provided. Reasons for visiting libraries included the sense of community, its function as a social meeting place, the access to information in a variety of formats, and the range of ICT services and support and training provided free of charge. Users also appreciated the privacy the library provided when using ICT and the feeling of security they derived from being able to call on staff for help whenever they needed to. Older users in particular felt that advances in ICT skills in society as a whole required them to learn to use ICT in order to keep themselves up to date, and felt they had benefited from the support and training provided by library staff. More generally, users saw library ICT services as playing an important role in ensuring that everyone had access to the same opportunities, so that even those who lacked resources were given the opportunity to use ICT.

Users' views on the availability of computers in their libraries were generally positive, although availability was often thought to be more restricted at peak times. The quality of hardware was also perceived as good, but a

number of users felt that software could be more up-to-date. Broadband speed was generally seen as sufficient and reliable.

Library ICT services were thought to have improved over time, and users were said to have increasing amounts of freedom to use the services autonomously.

Users reported numerous beneficial impacts of using ICT in the library, including helping them to keep in touch with friends and relatives via email and Skype, and enabling them to carry out tasks such as paying bills online more simply. Recent users felt that introductory courses they had participated in had motivated them to learn further ICT skills in the future.

Like library managers, users believed that investment should be increased in the future, in order to further promote social inclusion and enrich people's lives. Many believed that the key obstacle to accessing library ICT is a lack of awareness of the services available, and they recommended that the promotion of services should be an important area of focus for libraries.

1. Background and methodology

1.1 Context for the research

Public libraries across the European Union (EU) have long played an important role in communities by providing free access to information, guidance from trained librarians, and public meeting space. As meaningful participation in society increasingly requires access to digital information and resources, many public libraries in the EU have expanded their offerings to include access to information and communications technologies (ICTs) like computers and the Internet.

There is a growing body of evidence about the ways public access to ICTs contributes to economic, health, education, and social development¹. For instance, the Global Impact Study on Public Access to ICTs, which covers five developing countries, found that those using Public Access Computers reported positive impact related to communication (79%), education (78%), access to government information (40%) and health (37%). More than 80% of public services in the EU are now fully available online,² but in 2011, just 41% of the EU population used government services electronically.³ Today, some Europeans have their first experiences with computers or the Internet at a public library, and for some individuals this may remain the only place they can access ICTs (or access them without paying unaffordable fees)⁴.

Under the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, the EU has set ambitious objectives in many of the development areas to which access-to-information efforts contribute – specifically employment, innovation, education, and social inclusion. EU Member States are expected to meet targets in these areas by 2020. There is anecdotal evidence that ICT access through public libraries can support the implementation of the specific growth, education, and cohesion policies related to the EU 2020 Strategy, such as digital skills and inclusion milestones described under the Digital Agenda for Europe (one of seven flagship initiatives of the Strategy) or informal and non-formal learning, which is mentioned in three of the seven flagship initiatives. In other policy areas, such as supporting a skilled workforce and connecting people to employment opportunities, public libraries' roles may be less obvious and additional data are needed to demonstrate the contributions of public libraries and help them secure EU support for their work.

This research, which includes EU-wide and country-specific reports, was commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation to illuminate the role of public libraries in supporting social and economic policies under the EU 2020 Strategy.

1.2 Research objectives

The main purpose of the research was to understand the impact that public libraries in the EU have on users' lives.

1.3 Research method

Quantitative and qualitative research was conducted in the following seventeen countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Finland, France, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania and the United Kingdom. Qualitative research only was also conducted in Sweden.

The research involved several phases. First, desk research was carried out to collate existing information showing the public library landscape in the survey countries, using sources such as IFLA, national and local library statistics, local library associations, national statistical offices, Eurostat, Eurobarometer and so on.

¹ See [The Global Impact Study of Public Access to Information & Communication Technology](#) about the scale, character, and impacts of public access to information and communication technologies. Looking at libraries, telecenters, and cybercafes, the study investigates impact in a number of areas, including communication and leisure, culture and language, education, employment and income, governance, and health. Implemented by the University of Washington's [Technology & Social Change Group](#) (TASCHA), the Study is part of a broader research project supported by Canada's [International Development Research Centre](#) (IDRC) and a grant to IDRC from the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#).

² [Eurostat](#), 2010

³ [Eurostat](#), 2011

⁴ Sciadas, G., with Lyons, H., Rothschild, C., & Sey, A. (2012). *Public access to ICTs: Sculpting the profile of users*. Seattle: Technology & Social Change Group, University of Washington Information School. Qualitative research into the provision and impact of ICT in public libraries in Sweden

The research in Sweden involved qualitative work carried out in November and December 2012, and January 2013:

- Five individual face-to-face or telephone interviews with a library manager or a senior library manager, each lasting around 60 minutes.
- Four group discussions/focus groups with eight respondents who had used ICT in a public library, each lasting around 90 minutes. One of the discussion groups comprised recent users who had used the ICT in the library for the first time in the last 6 months.

Fieldwork was arranged on a quasi-case study basis, as participants in each discussion group came from the same library as one of the library managers.

1.3 Definitions

Public Library: A library that the general public can access, excluding university libraries and school libraries.

Library Manager: The term library manager may be misleading. The person identified was the most senior librarian at the library.

Senior Library Manager: A librarian with responsibility for more than one library. They might have responsibility for a number of branch libraries within a town or city, or they have responsibility for libraries within an area, region or even nationally.

Users: Users of computers in a public library would have done so within the past 12 months, to ensure adequate recall of the experience.

Recent users: Participants who used the ICT at their library for the first time in the last 6 months.

1.4 This report

This report provides a brief overview of the qualitative findings for Sweden

2. The public library landscape and internet provision

The Swedish library network includes 290 public library systems, about 4 000 school libraries, 100 hospital libraries (mainly dual use medical and patient libraries), one National Library, 38 university and university college libraries, and about 75 special and government agency libraries. 20 county/regional libraries, 3 lending centres and one repository library support the public library system. The National Agency of Accessible Medias (MTM, formerly TPB) provides material for people with reading disabilities.

In 2011 78.6 million items were borrowed from public-, university-, hospital-, and special libraries, of which 69.7 million from public libraries, 9.5 million from university- and special libraries, and 1.1 million from hospital libraries. (Figures from school libraries are inadequate and therefore not reported). In addition to loans of physical objects the university library sector reported 61 million searches and downloads, and also that 80 per cent of the media expenditure related to electronic resources. From the 2011 library statistics it is evident that e-books stand for an increasing number of loans.

In 2011 public libraries reported 651 000 loans, compared to 466 000 the year before.

Public and school libraries are financed by local authorities, regional libraries mainly by county councils and the research library system is financed, directly or indirectly, by the state. Hospital libraries are financed by the health care authorities, usually the counties. The Library Act, introduced in 1997 regulates the assignment and responsibilities for all publicly financed libraries.

Libraries financed by public funding are in principle open to everyone. That means that the general public are able to use the National Library and the university libraries, and libraries serving the general public are also open to students.

As a consequence of technological development, boundaries between various types of libraries have blurred. Due to new search tools library collections have become more visible and accessible. Library users are inclined to use the most convenient or the library that is closest, regardless of financial or administrative borders. So far students have found their way to the public library while the general public has not found its way to academic institutions to the same extent.

3. LIBRARY MANAGERS

3.1 The managers' role

Library Managers' roles included developing the IT department and digital services; organising events, and having overall responsibility for staff and finances. Two respondents were Senior Library Managers and were responsible for a number of library branches as well as the main library in their area. Most participants had been in their position for one to two years, with the exception of one who had worked as a Senior Library Manager for over 8 years.

3.2 The libraries

Each library and the area in which it was located can be described as follows:

Library 1: This small library had three full-time and one part-time members of staff. The library serviced a middle-income area, with old industry and a forestry community with a relatively low education level. Many residents had lived and worked there for many generations and there were few migrants, although there were two refugee shelters for unaccompanied girls nearby.

Library 2: This library was located in an industrial town with many leading companies and a harbour that played an important role in the area. A very small community with few inhabitants during the winter time, the area was visited by a high number of tourists during the summer. The educational level was slightly below average.

Library 3: 15 members of staff worked in this library, which was visited by 7,300 users every year. It serviced a traditional working class area with a large rural population: the main occupation had been industry and agricultural employment; but more recently the area had become a larger municipality thanks to good commuting links to a bigger city nearby.

Library 4: 23 librarians and librarian assistants worked at this library. The area was perceived as relatively affluent with few migrants.

Library 5: This urban library had a number of branches, with 120 staff and 4.5 million visitors per year overall. In 2011 the city had 140,000 people using a library card. The city in which it is located is large but segregated.

3.3 ICT hardware/software

The number of public-access computers available differed according to the size of the library and the number of users, and ranged from 5 in the smallest library to 20 in the largest branch of the urban library. Some libraries also provided laptops for users on courses and for students; and the larger libraries had e-readers and iPads. Software in all libraries included MS Office, Windows XP, Skype, Google Chrome and Internet Explorer; the larger libraries also provided more specialist software such as Photoshop and InDesign, reading programs (called "Anis") and voice synthesis programs. All libraries had broadband internet connection, although staff in the smaller libraries thought the connection speed was slow. A larger library leased all their computers so they were replaced every 3 years, when software was also updated.

3.4 Increasing ICT use

Library managers saw supporting users with ICT as part of their wider role in providing information to and educating the public. They had recognised a growing public need for more than simple access to a computer, and had responded to this by offering enhancing training and support services. Further, libraries saw themselves as having a role in preventing the alienation of certain sections of the community who could not access ICT.

Managers described a range ways in which they had worked to increase ICT use among their users. At the more ambitious end of the spectrum, a medium-sized library participated in a regional campaign called 'Internet for Everyone' in 2009. Conducted in co-operation with various welfare authorities, the campaign

brought ICT in libraries to the attention of local media and featured a variety of topics for which it could be used, such as health, work and contact with authorities. The campaign continued in 2010 with topics including travel, health and online shopping.

The manager at a smaller library felt it was too small to sponsor publicity campaigns, but he was visible in various political or ICT forums. Another library in a small town had acquired new laptops for use outside the library, and the manager explained that public approval for this scheme had made it easy to attract attention to their other ICT services. All libraries informed their users of their ICT services, and saw this as part of their efforts to promote library services as a whole. Library events, including ICT training courses in some libraries, were publicized.

In order to attract specific groups such as older people, one library had promoted basic ICT functions such as the internet, email, Skype and online directories as being less scary and easier to use than people might believe. Another library had a member of staff whose full-time role was to introduce migrants to library services, including ICT services.

3.4 ICT services

Libraries offered users informal, ad-hoc ICT support service as well as more formal training in ICT skills. All libraries were able to offer drop-in or ad-hoc assistance, and users could book appointments with a librarian to get sufficient time for help with any area of interest. Structured courses were offered on topics including internet for everyday life, apps for smartphones, e-readers, picture editing, social media and internet searches; some of these were targeted to specific user groups such as internet for older people.

The extent of the support and training services offered by libraries depended on their size. The largest library in the sample offered courses on more specific themes such as genealogy, health, banking, and tickets and traveling. Courses on internet banking were sometimes arranged in cooperation with banks. This library also offered help and advice on using technology not provided by the library itself, such as mobile phones and e-books. In contrast, a smaller library did not have sufficient resources to offer structured courses, citing a lack of staff and some resistance among staff to providing ICT courses and support.

3.5 Library staff

On the whole, library managers considered their staff to be well-trained and skilled in ICT. In many libraries staff had attended formal training courses, organised internally or in collaboration with adult education providers, where they had learnt skills such as how to download material and use tablets, Wifi and Skype. Training was ongoing and had increased staff's confidence in helping users with their ICT queries: staff from one library had recently attended a course in social media. One library had IT librarians who were more highly skilled in ICT working in the library for a few hours a week to provide support to users. In another, 60% of the staff had a university degree in information science, and all librarians had received training in how to convey information and provide information services.

3.6 Benefits and impact for users

Library managers felt that they offer users support in the area of **civic participation** through informal assistance and advice on topics such as using government websites, writing a blog, and online banking. This type of support was considered to be particularly useful for users who had recently have moved to Sweden as it helped them learn about Swedish society and civic functions.

Support for digital literacy was provided in the form of training courses in ICT skills, as well as through informal advice and help with carrying out tasks on computers. Training courses were also perceived to support **lifelong learning**.

"The benefits of structured training are that one can train at a deeper level, and the participants have the opportunity to learn things you have not thought of, and can reflect before the next course." (Senior Library Manager, female, urban, Sweden)

The extent to which support with employment was offered varied between libraries and depended on the size of the library. Smaller libraries tended not to provide support in this area and assumed this was something provided by other organisations. In contrast, a larger library provided ad-hoc informal support with writing CVs and submitting job application forms, and had a department that focused on helping users who wanted to start their own business.

E-procurement was not offered as a formal training subject but support in this area was provided on an ad-hoc, informal basis by library staff if users expressed a need.

According to library managers, key benefits to users of the support provided by library staff were increased confidence in using ICT and the social opportunities provided by online communication.

"The best example is the lady who found a friend she had looked for forever and finally founded him through an American website. Those are the moments we strive for, to get people interested in our services and to show them the opportunity that comes with the internet." (Senior Library Manager, female, semi-rural, Sweden).

3.7 Communication

Most library staff interacted with other libraries between once a month and once or twice a year, and communicated internally with their management team, colleagues and IT unit. They had also communicated their views about the benefit and impact of ICT in public libraries to a wider audience, including local media, the Association (Seniornät), Komvux, the Culture Committee and other relevant partners.

The information communicated had been well received by partners, but library managers felt they had to work hard to explain their role in society and justify the costs of more expensive services such as e-books. In their view, this meant they had to work hard to market themselves and new facilities they obtained.

3.8 The future

The general view on future funding was that it should increase to enable libraries to offer software and hardware that users could not afford to buy for themselves, to provide more support to users, and to train staff in ICT skills. The exception to this view came from one library manager who thought funding levels should remain the same as current levels because some ICT devices quickly become outdated and unpopular.

"The reason that funding should remain the same is that I know from experience that one must be careful about what you invest in. A few years ago, e-readers were popular, but today they are not as interesting." (Library Manager, male, Semi-rural, Sweden).

"It's incredibly important to have more funding. We should be able to ensure software is available to all [even if it is] a bit more expensive. For example, software so one can edit music, pictures and personal creativity is important. If one have economic problems it may be expensive to have the broadband at home." (Senior, Library Manager, female, Sweden).

4. LIBRARY USERS

4.1 Using ICT in the library

Users reported using the library with various frequencies depending on their needs, ranging from every day to once a month. Their use of library ICT services included a number of activities, such as accessing audio and e-books, printing or copying documents, searching for information on library databases, surfing the internet, seeking information on topics of interest, and studying. They also visited the library to attend lectures and structured training courses (particularly recent users), and to receive advice from the staff.

Some more experienced users were accessing library services to renew books or download e-books from their home computer. Recent users came to the library to get help with using services for the first time, such as printing or copying, using WiFi or Google, or using the internet to pay bills.

Qualitative research into the provision and impact of ICT in public libraries in Sweden

Users generally found the library staff to be very friendly, thoughtful and helpful and felt that the library was a place for social activity where they could meet other people.

"The staff are very helpful. I am interested in literature and genealogy, and they pick up material for me that is hard for me [to find]; they are placed in the source. I usually come here on Wednesdays because the genealogical and IT support is very helpful and knowledgeable." (Users, Male, Urban, 42, Sweden)

Recent users, who had learnt to use computers through library courses, had turned to the library as they felt a pressure to learn how to use ICT services in order to be part of society and be included in technological development. They felt secure using library services as they knew that support was available from the staff. The free-of-charge nature of the service was important, but knowing that there were helpful and skilled staff who could guide them if needed was equally significant.

"I think it is perfect. My worries of using a computer ceased and knowing that there is support available makes me feel calm." (Recent user, Female, Semi-rural, 79 years old, Sweden)

Urban users added that having access to all the information they needed in the same place saved time, and also felt the library was a place where they could meet others and socialise.

Users generally described the library environment in positive terms, using words such as calm, well organized, pleasant, bright, and well-located. Likewise, most praised libraries for providing good services, good orientation, helpful staff and being available to everyone. A few users, however, described the library atmosphere as impersonal, institutional, flat, colourless and outdated.

The library was compared favourably to other sites where ICT could be used. Benefits in comparison with using computers at home included easier access to help and support, more reliable equipment (such as printers), access to equipment for a wider range of tasks (scanning, printing, copying, etc), and the opportunity to mix with others (especially for those who were socially isolated).

"There is a social component. Having been on medical disability for a long time it feels good to be surrounded by a lot of people." (Users, Female, Urban, 37, Sweden)

"There are different tools under one roof. You can both print, copy and scan in one place. You may have one of those machines at home, like a printer, but no copy machine or a scanner. You can do everything at the same time." (Users, Female, Urban, 37, Sweden)

Compared with a friend or relative's house, or the workplace, libraries were said to provide privacy in which to carry out tasks that users might not want others to know about, such as banking or job applications. However, although the Wi-Fi service was used, there were some concerns about it and potential hackers.

"You do not want to show people what you are doing. It can be job applications or financial matters that I don't want everyone to see." (Users, Female, Urban, 56, Sweden)

"I felt really insecure using the library's open network. I was not sure who could see what so I stopped using it. I was not sure if someone could use the library's network to access my computer as well as the library is the hub." (User, Female, Urban, 37, Sweden)

Finally, in comparison to internet cafés, libraries offered cheaper (or free) services.

4.2 ICT hardware / software in the library

Users generally did not know exactly how many computers were available for use in their library. Nevertheless, views on the availability of computers were generally positive, although availability was thought to be more restricted at peak times.

"I think it has worked fine, but I have been there during the day, around 12 to 1pm and there usually aren't a lot of people then. It probably varies." (User, Female, Urban, 37, Sweden)

The quality of library hardware was generally thought to be good, but a number of users felt that the software could be more up-to-date. A few who were familiar with Macs reported finding it difficult to work with PCs, which was the only type of computer available in libraries.

"Usually only PCs are available and I am used to working in a Mac environment. It is just weird." (User, Female, urban, 47, Sweden)

Broadband speed was generally said to be sufficient and reliable.

4.3 Staff who provide ICT support to users

Users in every library were aware that staff were available to offer informal advice and training in ICT use, and were able to name a wide variety of ICT courses offered by their library, including courses in computers for beginners, genealogy, art history, social media, Skype and email. Users had also received informal assistance with a variety of tasks, including using e-books, online banking, printing, scanning and using their own privately-owned devices. In a library in a semi-rural area a few participants had received support at home.

"I was shown how to print out using both sides of the paper, it isn't set to do that. If that help had not been available it would have cost twice as much, also it is unnecessary to waste paper when considering the environment." (User, Female, urban, 47, Sweden)

The overall perception of staff was that they were helpful, friendly and competent and this was highly valued.

"I was planning a bus trip to another city and as the time-schedule is only available online, I went to the library and received help from the IT support. They were so kind and helped print out the time-schedule." (Recent user, Male, Semi-rural, 63, Sweden)

Nevertheless, a few participants questioned why some services could not be better-supported by written text instead of their only option being to seek advice from the staff.

"It feels as if there is a big secret. Here is a printer and here is a scanner, but if you want to use them you need to talk to the staff so that they get some feedback. If there was an information sheet on how to scan the result would be the same." (User, Male, Urban, 70, Sweden)

4.4 Awareness of services provided in the library

Users' awareness of courses provided by their library was high, with the exception of 'structured education on social media' and 'source criticism and review' (neither of these subjects were perceived as being of great value or interest to users). Awareness of activities provided by their library such as lectures, clothes swap days, homework support and introductory courses to all that the library offered was also high. That said, the main obstacle to using ICT services in libraries was perceived to be a lack of awareness among others that the services existed, which prompted users to emphasise the importance of promotion of the library services.

4.5 Experiences and impacts of using ICT in the library

ICT services had become more easily accessible over time: they can now be used without the presence of a staff member, users are now able to pre-book computers, and PCs have become more available. Further increasing the accessibility of ICT, staff and users themselves were better-informed about ICT services than they had been in the past.

"The first time I used a computer in a library it was in a locked, special room. You had to have someone next to you and that is completely different today. People are much more confident with the technology." (Users, Female, 37, Sweden)

"There is one difference. It used to be a lot more complicated when you used the system the first time with rules and regulations three steps before any programme. You also needed someone next to you, it was so complicated. That is not the case today. The technology is a lot

more user friendly. You just load a card or whatever. The simplicity is a big difference." (Users Male, urban, 62, Sweden)

"I remember that you couldn't book and there was one computer so you had to queue. There was a limited usage time of 30 minutes so you had to wait for two hours to use the computer for half an hour. Now there is always a computer available." (Users, Female, Urban, 47, Sweden)

Users reported numerous beneficial impacts of using ICT in the library, including helping them to keep in touch with friends and relatives through the use of email and Skype, and enabling them to carry out tasks more simply, such as paying bills online. Recent users felt that introductory courses they had participated in had motivated them to learn further ICT skills in the future.

Many reported achievements that they were particularly proud of, including becoming more knowledgeable and independent in ICT use. Other impacts included finding unknown relatives, securing a rental contract for an apartment, and learning how to carry out more effective internet searches.

"I was satisfied when I understood searching for articles and using the databases. You don't have to ask for help and things are a lot faster." (Users, Female, Urban, 37, Sweden)

"Learning how to use a search word, that was really useful. We learnt that from the librarian in school. Since you have access to such a huge volume of information you need to throw out a net that can select so you get the right answers. The way you ask determines the answers you get. So now you don't need to spend as much time searching, it is more effective." (Users, Female, Urban, 56, Sweden)

"I had that type of situation with genealogy. A librarian helped us find a whole branch of the family that had been lost. A huge will issue was changed because of this. It affected several people." (Users, Male, Urban, 62, Sweden)

"I have received help to fax from the library. It was a while ago now but it allowed me to get an apartment contract in Stockholm – which is impossible. So I was helped and this truly saved me, thanks to ICT. I only had an hour." (Users, Female, 37, Sweden)

More generally, users placed a high value on ICT services and support from libraries, as free access to the internet and support was thought to promote social inclusion, particularly for groups that might otherwise have been excluded from ICT use such as older people or those on low incomes. Users felt it would have a significant and detrimental impact if library ICT services were no longer available, as those who could not otherwise access ICT would be disadvantaged.

"It makes me sad think about the fact that there may be people who want to learn for example how to use a computer, but do not have the opportunity as they lack means or somebody to turn to." (User, Male, Urban, 47, Sweden)

"Yes, it is so important to know how to use the internet today. There are many services that are routed through the Internet, for example, it is next to impossible to perform banking services if you do not have internet or access to e-mail. It is only getting harder and more difficult to cope with the society without knowing how to use this system." (User, Male, Urban, 42, Sweden)

4.6 The future

All participants planned to use library ICT services in the future, and recent users were particularly keen to develop their skills further by attending courses. More experienced users wanted to learn more advanced skills such as downloading e-books, using Photoshop and learning more about the library's database. It was recommended that libraries should continue to evolve as a meeting point for people to access free services, and that funding should be available to upgrade hardware and software.

Users' priorities for future developments included the provision of more support staff, upgrading of hardware and software and training of staff to increase their ICT knowledge and skill base. In semi-rural areas users felt that such improvements would promote social inclusion and involve more users in community development,

allowing them to benefit from ICT use without having to travel to urban areas. Urban users also thought library ICT services would promote social inclusion, particularly of groups on low incomes. Other suggestions included that libraries should provide more photo editing software and separate rooms for users who required privacy for carrying out tasks such as writing job applications.

"Licences for image editing programs and similar software so people don't need to have it at home. You can just go to the library to use Photoshop since it is an expensive program that a lot of people want to use but can't afford." (User, Female, 37, Sweden)

"New computers. I live in Biskopsgård and the library fills a need for those who cannot afford to have a computer at home. Then the children can hang out with their friends which in turn will lead to less segregation." (User, Female, Urban, 37, Sweden)